

The religious landscape amidst warfare in Ukraine: Assessing the situation



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Abstract The purpose of the academic paper is to provide a general description of the milestone events in the religious and church life of Ukraine in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, with an emphasis on tendencies after the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. Given that the war is ongoing, we focused on issues related to the receipt of the Tomos by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the religious component of the “Russkiy mir” policy. Sociological indicators from monitoring the religious situation in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion demonstrate the following trends: war, especially a full-scale invasion, has impacted all spheres of life but religion continues to remain a significant factor in socio-humanitarian life; religious diversity is maintained with the predominance of Orthodox communities; regional differences on the religious map of Ukraine persist; after the full-scale invasion, there has been a slight increase in the number of people identifying as religious, and the number of citizens seeking communication with clergy has increased, primarily for psycho-emotional relief and support. The importance of religion and the Church in humanitarian missions, balancing society’s spiritual condition, and helping people in need of material and other support, such as volunteer labor or a refugee shelter, is becoming increasingly clear. The war has significantly forced many believers and spiritual leaders of denominations to reconsider their attitude to the war and civic engagement in the war. These tendencies are especially noticeable in the Protestant environment. In the territories occupied by Russia, believers of different communities and denominations continue to be harassed, religious freedom is violated, and a deliberate policy of incorporating religious space into the mainstream of Russian religious and church policy within the framework of the ideology of the “Russkiy mir” and the Russian Orthodox Church is being pursued.

Keywords: “Russkiy mir”, war, Muslims, Protestants, OCU, Tomos

1. Introduction

The religious situation in Ukraine is a dynamic and multi-vector process. This became especially true with the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014. We will focus on the milestone events in the religious sphere after 2014, and, more closely, after the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2024.

Despite the full-scale invasion, the religious sphere of Ukrainian society remains a significant factor in the socio-humanitarian space. At the beginning of 2023, 36 594 religious organizations were officially registered in Ukraine (these data do not include statistics from the occupied territories) (Zdioruk & Tokman, 2023: 6). According to the state (military) administrations, as of January 1, 2023, the network of religious organizations in Ukraine numbered 36 657 units. These include:

- 92 – religious centers;
- 306 – administrations;
- 35040 – communities (13904 of them have the status of a legal entity);
- 547 – monasteries (241 of them are female, 274 – male);
- 86 – fraternities;
- 382 – missions;
- 204 – religious educational institutions (66 - secondary, 138 - higher).

16 religious organizations with the status of legal entities have officially ceased their activities (Report on the Network of Religious Organizations in Ukraine, 2023).

The confessional map of Ukraine shows a wide variety of religious confessions and denominations: different strands of Christianity, Muslims, new religious movements, Buddhism, etc. Religious organizations, ranging from ordinary believers to religious leaders, are part of the resistance to Russia’s armed aggression. The work is conducted in several directions: providing shelter, food, clothing, and other necessary items to those affected by the war; multifaceted support for Ukraine’s Security and Defense Forces; logistical and communication support for medical aid and assistance; international informational and



educational activities aimed at supporting Ukrainian refugees and shaping an accurate understanding of Russia's goals and intentions towards Ukraine and its citizens among the international community.

2. Methods

In the course of the research, we were guided by the principles of religious and ideological pluralism, tolerance, faith tolerance and respect for holders of different religious views, atheists and agnostics. The cultural and anthropological principles allowed us to examine the religious situation in Ukraine during the war in terms of its impact on the psycho-emotional state of people; the role and place of clergy for both civilians and the military; the issue of the destruction of sacred architecture by war through the prism of cultural heritage.

The comparative-historical method enabled us to examine the role and place of the "Russkiy mir" ideology in the Russian-Ukrainian war, the confessional component of which is a significant factor in the information-propaganda influence on events both in Ukraine and abroad.

The methods of sociology and source analysis have contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the specificity of the religious situation in Ukraine during the specified period and the identification of its causes and preconditions. In particular, understanding the role of the institutionalization of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and the receipt of the Tomos as components of the overall socio-political progress of our country towards becoming a civilized democratic state, breaking away from the detrimental influence of Russia, is crucial. The study of interviews, appeals, and blogs of religious and other figures made it possible to look at religious and church issues from the perspective of holders of different religious identities.

Content analysis facilitated the processing of a significant amount of material from websites of religious communities, informational websites specializing in religious and church themes. This allowed for forming a comprehensive picture of the religious situation in the country, identifying the most notable trends, and understanding the specifics in the conditions of war. This was also facilitated by the use of the descriptive method. The use of the case study method made it possible to demonstrate the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the religious sphere of society and individual citizens using specific examples.

3. Literature Review

When studying the religious situation in Ukraine, one should consider studies that take a more global view of the issue. Such books include "Anthropology of Religion: Comparative Studies from the Carpathian Region to the Caucasus", a research project led by Katherine Wanner and Yuliia Buislykh. The scholars examined the complex network of the religious situation in the outlined geographical and mental boundaries through the prism of the influence of geopolitical changes (the collapse of communist regimes in the countries of the region), ideological changes in societies, the use of religion to form/revive national identity, legitimize new political elites, and incorporate religion into the political, economic, and public spheres of life. The diversity of forms and practices of religious life, as well as its eclecticism, has become the focus of attention (Anthropology of Religion, 2019). Catherine Wanner, who has spent many years studying everyday religiosity and the relationship between religion and politics in Ukraine, drawing on numerous interviews and her own field ethnographic research, presented her work in the form of a monograph. The researcher analyzes the historical-cultural and political context through which religion, religious institutions, and religious leaders have become integrated into the system of political and geopolitical perturbations (Wanner, 2022). Viktor Yelensky and Katherine Wanner collaborated to study the role and place of religion in the cultural geography of Ukraine. Particular attention was focused on the stereotypical assertion that Ukraine is divided into a Catholic West and an Orthodox East. Obviously, the events after 2014 have demonstrated the artificiality of this division and its inconsistency with reality (Wanner & Yelensky, 2019). J. Eugene Clay studies Christianity as a religious scholar. He considered Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 as a war between two Orthodox countries. The professor elaborated on the reaction of Orthodox leaders in different countries to Russia's invasion. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew condemned the invasion while the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Kirill (Gundyaev), justifies the war in every possible way, which, in his opinion, protects the civilized world from the "sin of gay pride parades" (A Terrible Sermon, 2022). J. Eugene Clay has studied religion in Russia for several decades. Therefore, his view of the history of Orthodoxy in Ukraine is presumably biased (Clay, 2022). However, this in no way diminishes the significance of his scholarly work. On the contrary, it allows us to consider the topic of our research from the perspective of various scientific approaches, even if they are radically different. Aidan Houston and Peter Mandaville expressed their view on the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 as one of the results of centuries-long struggle for Ukraine's spiritual independence. According to the researchers, one of the reasons for the full-scale war is precisely the religious factor. In their conclusions, they relied on the preaching of Patriarch Kirill (Gundayev), which he delivered on March 6, 2022, emphasizing the metaphysical foundations of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Despite condemnation of the Russian aggression by other spiritual leaders worldwide, Kirill (Gundayev) stands in solidarity with the Russian dictator and justifies the cruelty and violence. In our opinion, Aidan Houston and Peter Mandaville lacked a more comprehensive understanding of Ukrainian history and the perspective on Ukrainian history, particularly its religious specificity, without the influence of Russian narratives (Houston & Mandaville, 2022). Therefore, like the aforementioned publication by J. Eugene Clay, this academic paper

contains important information for understanding external perspectives on the religious situation in Ukraine but requires careful consideration by the authors of this situation. The Russian invasion of Ukraine was dubbed by Lucian N. Leustean as the “religious war of the XXI century”. According to the researcher, the following facts support this standpoint: firstly, Putin’s rhetoric, particularly in his 2021 article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”, emphasizing a shared spiritual and historical space, and the portrayal of Kyiv in Russian propaganda as an exclusively significant sacred city for Russian religious identity; secondly, the strong influence of religious institutions in the post-Soviet space; thirdly, the international reaction of Orthodox institutions to Russian aggression against Ukraine, including proposals to revoke recognition of the Russian Orthodox Church’s autocephaly (Leustean, 2022). It is obvious that Putin and Gundyayev, as well as a number of Russian propagandists, have repeatedly spoken about their “spiritual bonds”, but the roots of Russia’s war, its genocidal intentions towards Ukraine and Ukrainians, have much deeper and more extensive manifestations than religious aspects.

Studying various aspects of the religious situation in Ukraine in the context of war by Ukrainian scholars is an important direction in socio-humanitarian research. It encompasses the scientific theoretical and practical achievements of religious studies, sociologists, historians, political scientists, and jurists. Its specificity lies in describing processes happening here and now, along the lines of high emotional tension, often with the direct participation of the researchers. On the one hand, this gives the written scientific works an incredible emotional coloration due to the experienced war; on the other hand, it requires a careful approach to interpreting the obtained results. Tetiana Kalenychenko and Denis Brylov have prepared a comprehensive study on the activities of various Ukrainian religious organizations in the context of a full-scale invasion (Kalenychenko & Brylov, 2022a). They have also conducted an analytical study of the response of various religious denominations in Ukraine to a full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 and made proposals on the possibilities of religious organizations in peace-building (Kalenychenko & Brylov, 2022b). The connection between religion and society, the influence of religious leaders on the course of events and processes, especially after 2022, has become the subject of another study of this issue – “Mapping the Religious Landscape of Ukraine” (Brylov, Kalenychenko & Kryshtal, 2023). The impact of Russian aggression on the religious sphere, the international community’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and the forms of spiritual and material support provided by religious communities in times of war have been the subject of study in the publication by Mykola Palinchak and Viktoriya Bokoch. Historians have identified the following trends: firstly, religious organizations have overwhelmingly condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; secondly, there is the active provision of various forms of assistance by religious organizations to those in need, regardless of their religious beliefs or atheistic views; thirdly, foreign religious institutions actively support Ukraine in its struggle; fourthly, deteriorating relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the UOC (Ukrainian Orthodox Church) are noted; fifthly, after the full-scale invasion, there has been even more activity in the process of transferring jurisdiction of Orthodox communities in favor of the UOC (Palinchak & Bokoch, 2023). Andriy Bokoch’s research analyzes the situation of denominations in the occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The political scientist emphasized the strengthening of the Moscow Patriarchate’s positions and the harassment and persecution of representatives of other religious denominations (Bokoch, 2017). Volodymyr Hurzhi studied the religious and socio-political consequences of implementing the “Russkiy mir” doctrine in the eastern regions of Ukraine. The researcher paid particular attention to the origins of the practical implementation of the “Russkiy mir” in Ukraine and its media influence on the population, the religious component of this concept, and comparative analysis with other ideological constructs (Gurzhi, 2015; Zborovska, 2022; Fomenko, 2018). The functionality of religion in times of war was studied by I. Rusnak: satisfaction of spiritual needs, communication, religious factors of war, war, religion and politics (Rusnak, 2022). I. Horokholinska also considered the social functions of religion in wartime, in particular, the impact on national, cultural, and civic identification (Horokholinska, 2023).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The religious component of the “Russkiy mir”

The religious factor plays an essential role in the Russian-Ukrainian war. According to Kathryn Wanner, a professor of history, anthropology and religious studies, religion is a powerful, though not visible at first glance, current in the war of Russia (RF) against Ukraine. It goes far beyond the borders of countries since it is an important key to understanding the ideological justifications for the war by the Russian Federation, a significant lever for promoting the political narratives of the aggressor country (Religion and Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine, 2022). In this context, it is necessary to emphasize the religious component of the “Russkiy mir” project. In fact, since the beginning of the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) have been aimed at creating and cementing the “three fraternal republics” and the “Slavic unity” of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Patriarch Kirill (Gundyayev) redirected the “Russkiy mir” project into a confessional channel. In one of his speeches in 2009, he also included Moldova in the “Russkiy mir”, and his claims of “Russomirskost” also applied to Kazakhstan in 2010. Thus, it is clear that the orbit of Orthodoxy in its Russian version also included countries where the majority of the population professed other religions. The influence also extended to the non-Christian peoples of the Russian Federation. For example, in his sermon on May 6, 2022, Kirill (Gundyayev) glorified Muslims who have been fighting as part of the Russian aggressor’s army against Ukraine. The religious content of the “Russkiy mir” coincided in time with the aggressive foreign policy of the Russian Federation, with the strengthening of its expansion. In the context of our academic paper, it is worth mentioning

that a number of communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) were re-registered in accordance with the occupation requirements after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, with the removal of even the mention of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. As for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), according to statistics, at the beginning of 2014, the UOC-KP had about 50 religious organizations in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. As of December 2018, at the time of the proclamation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), there were less than 5. In 2019, the central cathedral of the OCU was closed in Simferopol. By the time of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Kirill (Gundyaev) had somewhat stepped aside as the main spokesperson for the "Russkiy mir". Meanwhile, Putin in his speeches called the oppression of the UOC (MP) one of the reasons for the full-scale attack on Ukraine. At the same time, Metropolitan Onufriy, the head of the UOC (MP), in his address on February 24, 2022, called on the people of Ukraine to unite in the fight against the enemy and defend their homeland. As for Putin, Onufriy publicly addressed him with a demand to immediately stop the "fratricidal war" and not to repeat the "sin of Cain" (Address of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy of Kyiv and All Ukraine to the Faithful and Citizens of Ukraine, 2022). Thus, the concept of the "Russkiy mir" mixed into one eclectic whole aspiration to restore the Soviet space on the basis of quasi-Orthodox ideology (Khalikov, 2022: 160-169).

In general, according to a sociological survey conducted by the Razumkov Center (November 2023), when answering the question "In your opinion, what is the role of the Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia during the Russian-Ukrainian war?", respondents expressed the following opinions:

"The Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow encourage and support Russia's aggression against Ukraine" – 64,8% of respondents;

"The Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow are in favor of peace and against war" – 4,0%;

"The Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow do not have a clear position on the war in Ukraine" – 7,8%;

"I do not know, it is difficult to answer" – 23,4% (Level of Religiosity, Trust in the Church, Confessional Distribution and Interchurch Relations in Ukrainian Society, 2023).

According to the interim results of the project "Religion on Fire" (Religion in Fire), as of February 24, 2023, 415 religious buildings were recorded as damaged or completely destroyed during the hostilities (Basauri Zyuzina et al., 2023: 7). Religious buildings usually contain the following signs of war crimes:

- use for military purposes (placement of the headquarters of the armed forces of the Russian occupiers in the premises of a religious building, placement of a combat position in a church, use of bell towers as a location for a sniper or a combat spotter, transformation of a building into an ammunition depot, etc);
- robbery of churches and other religious buildings;
- damage or destruction as a result of shelling, arson, looting (Basauri Zyuzina et al., 2023: 21-24).

Table 1 Damaged and Destroyed Religious Sites in Ukraine (according to the project "Religion on Fire").

Confession	Number of damaged religious sites
Orthodox (UOC-MP)	284
Orthodox (OCU)	54
Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic	15
Protestant	166
Muslim	7
Jewish	15
Theological educational institutions	9
Religious buildings of other religious denominations and associations	8
TOTAL	558

Source: (Religion in Fire, 2024).

It can be observed from the above facts that the goal of the "Russkiy mir" is a brutal expansion, seasoned with quasi-religious rhetoric and pseudo-historical claims to reformat the "matrix" of historical memory, national culture, and existing universally recognized borders.

4.2. Specifics of the Religious Situation in Ukraine: Diversity of Viewpoints

For a better understanding of the specifics of the religious situation in Ukraine, it is worth paying attention to the analysis of Professor Jose Casanova. The standpoints of the professor of sociology and theology are also significant since his vision is a person's view from the outside, from a different angle of comprehension. According to Professor Casanova,

- Ukraine is characterized by an incredibly pluralistic process of religious development. As an example, he cites the Lviv region, where the Moscow Patriarchate, the Kyiv Patriarchate, and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) coexisted for various historical reasons (Tyshchenko, 2019);

- despite the fact that the majority of the population in Ukraine declares themselves Orthodox, Ukraine is not an Orthodox country. None of the existing denominations is dominant; this model of religious and church content resembles the American model;
- the level of religiosity of Ukrainians is one of the highest in the world;
- the OCU is unique in terms of its democracy and closeness to the people, not to the authorities, which is inherent in Orthodox institutions in the world;
- residents of the western regions of Ukraine are more church-going than those in the atheistic east; the level of church attendance is higher among Greek Catholics and Protestants than among Orthodox Christians;
- religiosity of Ukrainians has rather blurred boundaries: an Orthodox can pray in a Catholic church;
- modernization in Ukraine is quite coexistent with modernization, unlike in most European countries, where modernization is often accompanied by secularization processes; this is due to the history of Ukraine's political culture;
- The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (an advisory body to the President of Ukraine, which has been operating since 1996 – author's remark) is a unique example of interfaith dialogue that has no analogues in the world (All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations);
- religious pluralism is both at the level of citizens and elites. Despite confrontation, especially in the Orthodox environment, there is always room for dialogue and compromise;
- integration of Ukrainian religious communities into the global religious context. For example, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is both predominantly regional in Ukraine and its geography covers almost all countries where the Ukrainian diaspora resides (Revisiting Religious Pluralism in Ukraine, 2021).

A study was commissioned by the Dutch peacekeeping organization PAX, which has been monitoring the situation in Ukraine since 2013 in accordance with its mission statement (peacekeeping activities aimed at protecting human dignity and security in conflict situations) (PAX). Its goal was to clarify the religious situation in Ukraine in order to prevent conflicts on religious grounds and develop religious pluralism. The chronological framework of the research covers the period from the events after Euromaidan, the occupation and annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Russian armed aggression in eastern Ukraine until the beginning of 2019. The long-term and persistent use of the UOC-MP by the Russian Federation as a lever of influence on Ukraine's domestic policy has turned religious issues into a political one. In practice, this meant that the issue of the national church was perceived in Ukrainian political circles as one of the pillars of national security: "For decades after the regaining of Ukraine's state independence, the Ukrainian people were forced to assert their ethno-religious identity not through world structures (the Vatican, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, etc.), but through Russian Orthodox fundamentalism, obscurantism, and sometimes primitive ritualism" (Analytical Report to the Annual Address of the President of Ukraine to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine "On the Internal and External Situation of Ukraine in 2018", 446). Russian military aggression and the occupation of part of Ukraine's territories accelerated, among other things, the understanding of the need to have our own autocephalous Orthodox Church, which is in no way subordinate to the Orthodox structures of the aggressor country, Russia. As Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko) of Kyiv mentioned in one of his interviews, as early as during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich in 2010, Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev) was trying in every way to subordinate the Ukrainian church to Moscow. People's resistance forced the government to retreat from such intentions. However, subsequent events further aggravated the situation in the Orthodox community in Ukraine. According to Filaret, "If we had had one Ukrainian Orthodox Church, there would have been no annexation of Crimea and no war in Donbas. The church would have educated its flock in a patriotic spirit. Where the Kyiv Patriarchate is strong, there are no separatist sentiments. Where it is weak, there are such separatist sentiments" (Horbach & Zavitii, 2014). Patriarch Filaret's words have a rational point. However, one would not exaggerate the role of religion in the formation of national identity in the post-Soviet space, particularly in Ukraine. If we are talking about the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, the level of religiosity is traditionally many times lower than in the rest of the country. Consequently, Russian television and other media, which had been engaged in anti-Ukrainian propaganda for years, had a greater influence there, which ultimately bore negative fruit. We will not dwell on Russian propaganda's influence on the events in Ukraine in this paper. For more information, it is recommended to refer to the materials of the Center for Countering Disinformation at the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (About Center for Countering Disinformation).

Regarding the viewpoints outlined in the PAX study (Bryliov, 2019), it emphasizes the secularization of Orthodoxy. That is, in this case, we are talking about the use of religion (in particular, Orthodoxy) for political purposes (Bryliov, 2019: 5). In particular, it refers to the prohibition of the UOC-MP clergy to serve as chaplains in the armed forces of Ukraine (Bryliov, 2019: 6). In general, the study emphasized such dangers as a decrease in the level of pluralism and the growth of conservative sentiments in the religious environment. However, as subsequent events have shown, such fears in 2019 were premature. The dangers were in completely different areas.

4.3. *The Impact of a Full-Scale Invasion on the Religious Life of Ukraine*

For the purpose of tracking tendencies in the religious situation, analyzing the vectors of development, dynamics or stagnation of certain religious processes, etc., the Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies named after Oleksandr Razumkov (Center) has been conducting comprehensive monitoring of the religious situation in Ukraine since 2000 (History). Given the high professional level of expertise of the Center's studies, we propose to refer to the Center's analytical materials in the context of our research. We are primarily interested in the materials of 2022-2023 related to the religious situation in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine's territory. To begin with, I would like to draw attention to the fact that, according to sociological studies, the level of religiosity of the Ukrainian population has indeed remained very high over the years of research, as also pointed out by Jose Casanova. Thus, in 2000, 58% of respondents considered themselves believers, while in 2010, the number was 71%; in 2014 – 76%. It was 2014, the year of the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war; that year was extremely stressful for Ukrainian citizens. Researchers explain this jump in the level of religiosity as a result of the socio-political upheaval when the desire to rely on worldview values is one of the options for adaptation. Over the next few years, the level of religiosity declined slightly. However, “with the beginning of the full-scale Russian aggression, it increased to 74% (from 84% of residents of the West of the country to 63% of residents of the East and 61% of residents of the South)” (Yakymenko, Bychenko, Mischenko & Shangina, 2022: 4).

When it comes to the nature of the religiosity of the Ukrainian population after the full-scale invasion, the following factors should be taken into account:

- regional differences in the religious and confessional life of the population continue to exist; however, while the level of religiosity of the population of the western regions has remained almost unchanged for 20 years, the central and eastern regions are characterized by an increase in the declaration of their religious affiliation;
- there is still a noticeable difference in the level of religiosity, depending on age, gender, and level of education; usually, older people demonstrate a higher level of religiosity, while among people aged 18-25, the level of religiosity is only 55%; women demonstrate a higher level of religiosity compared to men – 78% and 62% respectively; the level of religiosity among people with higher education has increased;
- belonging to a particular religious organization can be determined by religious identification, as well as ethnic or cultural identification; this is especially noticeable among the Orthodox population;
- there have been no significant confessional changes: most respondents identify themselves as Orthodox (61% in 2023), with a significant number of Greek Catholic followers (11%) and simply “Christians” (11%). There are also Protestants, Roman Catholics, Muslims, Jews, etc.
- in 2021, the highest share of people, who did not consider themselves religious or adherents of any worldview or religious views, was recorded for all years of studies (19%); however, after the full-scale invasion, 12% of such people were recorded, in 2023 – 13%;
- significant changes are observed in the Orthodox environment of Ukraine. They are driven primarily by legal changes in Orthodox denominations and the role of Russian Orthodoxy in Russia's aggressive expansion. After the full-scale invasion, the number of believers of the UOC-MP decreased from 13% in 2021 to 6% in 2023;
- there are no significant changes in church attendance after the full-scale invasion; except that among respondents over 60 years of age, the number of those who attend church more often has increased; however, the number of those who have started communicating with clergymen more often has increased, especially among young people (60%);
- the number of people who believe that religious communities and religious leaders should direct their activities towards psychological support for people and conducting religious services in their native language, simplifying rituals and reducing the duration of religious procedures, is growing;
- there is a high level of trust in the Church as an institution; it is recognized as a moral authority; the highest level of trust in their Church is recorded among Greek Catholics (81%);
- since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, there has been a decrease in the level of recognition of the positive role of the Church in society; this tendency is especially characteristic of the eastern regions of Ukraine; an important nuance is that it does not refer to the negative role of the Church, but rather notes that it has no influence on the course of events; more and more citizens express support for the activities of religious organizations in state and public rituals (blessings during the military oath, consecration of buildings, etc.);
- the majority of respondents note the level of religious harmony and tolerance in their region or locality as high, with no noticeable excesses or misunderstandings on religious grounds;
- more than 30% of respondents believe it is necessary to ban the UOC-MP in Ukraine; their arguments are related to the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russian-Ukrainian war;
- the transition of the OCU and the UGCC to the New Julian calendar was positively perceived by 50% of respondents, negatively – by 15%, indifferently – by 14%; the rest either do not know what it is about or do not have an answer to this question (Yakymenko, Bychenko & Mischenko, 2023: 4-23).

The religious situation in the occupied territories remains extremely complicated. For obvious reasons, we do not have access to the full picture in order to make informed and reasoned studies and conclusions. However, even under such circumstances, we can provide the following facts and considerations based on previous studies and reports:

- active propaganda against the OCU as a schismatic religious structure associated with the “Kyiv junta” and “Nazis” is being conducted in the occupied territories;
- banning the activities of the Mejlis and harassment of Crimean Tatars, accusations of belonging to extremist Islamic groups;
- Baptists and Jehovah’s Witnesses were declared terrorist groups with all the consequences for the adherents of these denominations;
- there were no Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic clergymen left under occupation;
- the Jewish community has significantly decreased;
- a program “to assist religious organizations in integrating into the Russian socio-cultural space” has been developed and is being implemented, generously funded by the occupation regime (Zdiouruk & Tokman, 2023: 29-31).

The war has dramatically changed the lives of all people in Ukraine, regardless of nationality or religious beliefs. The format of the paper limits our ability to cover the entire religious palette of Ukraine to demonstrate these changes. Therefore, having reviewed some sociological indicators of the religious situation in the country, we offer our readers examples from the lives of Protestants and Muslims in Ukraine. Our choice is based on the following considerations. Firstly, Protestants have traditionally adhered to pacifist beliefs in their religious convictions. In particular, Ukraine provides for alternative (non-military) service on the basis of religious beliefs at the legislative level (Law of Ukraine on Alternative (Non-Military) Service, 1992). The list of religious organizations whose adherents have the right to this option of service (in peacetime) includes most Protestant religious communities (Barsukova, 2022). Secondly, the majority of Muslims in Ukraine has lived and continues to live in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, which have been the site of hostilities since 2014.

After the full-scale invasion, representatives of the Protestant community also joined the ranks of Ukraine’s defenders: as soldiers, volunteers, medical and social workers, and chaplains. Traditionally, Protestants see their role in humanitarian service during wars. However, on September 20, 2014, in Irpin, Kyiv region, the missionary center of the Spiritual Revival Association in its resolution, taking into account the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, declared the need to revise outdated pacifist views, since the realities of the time require more decisive and radical actions to defend their values, the right to live in their own country and on their own terms: “The war challenges the theology, position, and mission of the evangelical churches, forcing them to repent and reassess. Until recently, Ukrainian Protestants stood out for their pacifism and apolitical nature. <...> In the twenty-three years of Ukrainian independence, this topic has never been discussed; however, the events of the Maidan, the subsequent annexation of Crimea, and the war in Donbas have become an unprecedented challenge for the church and its social position. References to the past are outdated, and “wise” silence does not help. It is time for the Church to re-formulate its attitude to war and peace, the state, society, and civic responsibility” (Cherenkov, 2014). Three key theses were formulated in the document to demonstrate the attitude to current realities:

- the Christian view of war should be based on civic participation, not detachment;
- church ministers should be everywhere where their help is needed, including on the front lines; one should not condemn those who defend their homeland with arms;
- in the face of lies and propaganda, the church should convey the truth; in contrast to anger, mercy; in contrast to betrayal and despair, loyalty and hope; in contrast to indifference, compassion and support (Cherenkov, 2014).

Many Protestant organizations in Ukraine have an extensive network of structures abroad, including in Russia and Belarus. Therefore, Denis Gorenkov, the executive director of “Mission Eurasia”, emphasized that since co-religionists in these countries have a poor attitude toward Ukraine, and Ukrainian Protestants themselves do not accept the idea of the “Russkii mir”, it seems impossible to communicate with them. However, some Protestant communities in Ukraine only made their official position on the war public a year later. The rejection of pacifism has not become widespread for Protestants yet; however, the replacement of the phrase “for peace” with “for the victory of Ukraine” and “for the Armed Forces” in prayers is evidence of a slow but still serious worldview shift (Pavlenko, 2024).

About two million Muslims reside in Ukraine, primarily Crimean Tatars (Qirimli). Therefore, the occupation and annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 2014 was very painful for the Muslim population of Ukraine in the occupied territories. About two million Muslims reside in Ukraine, primarily Crimean Tatars (Qirimli). Therefore, the occupation and annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 2014 was very painful for the Muslim population of Ukraine in the occupied territories. As the Mufti of Crimea, Ayder Rustemov, noted about the attitude of Ukrainian Muslims to the Russian-Ukrainian war, “They (*Russian occupiers – author’s remark*) came as invaders to another territory. Especially in the context when a particular mufti in Russia called the war against Ukraine jihad <...> You know this is complete nonsense, a lie” (Khutsanu, 2023). Mufti Murat Suleymanov of the Religious Administration of Muslims of Ukraine “Ummah” during a press conference on March 1, 2023, reported on the volunteer activities of Muslims (assistance in evacuation, making camouflage nets and trench

candles, information struggle). Many Muslims, like other citizens of Ukraine, were forced to leave their homes, especially in cities such as Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Kharkiv (Muslims of Ukraine. Year of War, 2023). The former Mufti of the Religious Administration of Muslims of Ukraine “Ummah”, a paramedic of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Said Ismagilov, was forced to leave his native Donetsk in 2014 because he was being “hunted” by separatists. A Protestant pastor who had survived Russian captivity and torture warned him of the danger. Said Ismagilov managed to leave for Mariupol. From there, at the request of Christian chaplains, he went to the front as a Muslim chaplain. But later, after undergoing training, he retrained as a rifleman and paramedic to be able to evacuate the wounded from the battlefield. According to Said Ismagilov, “This war is already ontological in nature. The Russians simply want to destroy us. We have to fight to the end” (Levchenko, 2022).

On 28 April - 3 May 2023, the Razumkov Centre conducted a sociological survey at the request of the Dzerkalo Tyzhnia media outlet (2020 respondents aged 18 and over; theoretical margin of error is no more than 2.3%). The study focused on the changes that the war has brought to the attitudes and relationships of Ukrainians with God and the Church. Among other things, there was a question: "What would you ask God for?". It is noteworthy that more than a third of the answers concerned help in supporting Ukraine and its defenders (Figure 1).

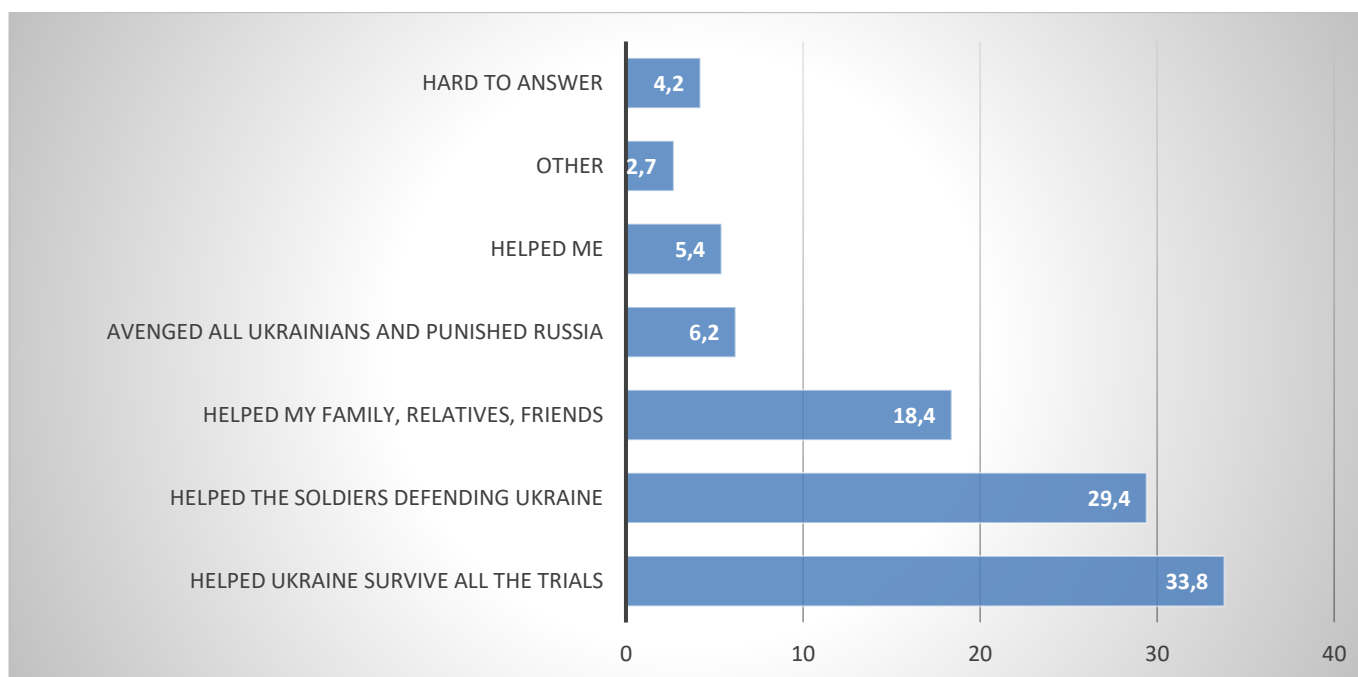


Figure 1 If Ukrainians could ask God for something, they would ask Him. Source: (Shchotkina, 2023).

An important component of the Russian-Ukrainian war is its information dimension. The world perceives the events in Ukraine differently. That is precisely why it is very important for Ukraine to have the maximum support of the international community, in particular, Arab-Muslim countries. In this sense, a clear and effective information policy should be developed at the state level, as emphasized by representatives of the Muslim community in Ukraine. Unfortunately, personal contacts with brothers in faith or the activities of Muslim civic activists are not enough to break the powerful influence of Russian propaganda in these countries.

5. Conclusions

The religious factor plays an essential role in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Religion is often used as an ideological weapon by the Russian propaganda machine and the Russian occupiers. This is exemplified by the ideology of the “Russkiy mir” and its promotion over the years both in Ukraine through religious structures (ROC, UOC PM) and at the level of international diplomacy and media. The military aggression has also been repeatedly justified by the adherents of the “Russkiy mir” as the need to protect “Orthodox brothers” and “primordially Orthodox territories”. The effective response of Ukraine and the world Orthodox community was the Unification Council and the institutionalization of the OCU on December 15, 2018, and the next step is to obtain the Tomos. These actions are a significant component of Ukraine’s national security. However, the situation in the Orthodox environment of Ukraine remains quite complex and difficult to predict, requiring constant monitoring and response to challenges.

The confessional map of Ukraine shows a wide range of religious confessions and denominations. The full-scale invasion outlined the following important tendencies in the religious and church sphere:

- religious organizations have joined humanitarian activities on a large scale (providing their premises for sheltering refugees, providing food, hygiene products, clothing, etc.);



- support of defense and protection forces to the best of their ability;
- information and education activities;
- work of military chaplains;
- international cooperation in Ukraine's struggle against Russian aggression;
- rethinking the humanistic views and the role and function of the religious community in times of war;
- increasing the role of clergymen as those who can provide psycho-emotional support in times of stress and uncertainty;
- dynamization of the process of changing the legal subordination of Orthodox communities in favor of the OCU.

Unfortunately, religious harassment and violations of religious freedom rights are still ongoing in the occupied territories, with a parallel policy of homogenization of the religious space under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

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