Religious institutions in the transformation processes of Ukrainian identity in wartime conditions

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The article analyses the transformation of religiosity in Ukrainian society in the context of a full-scale war caused by the russian invasion. Against the backdrop of general European secularisation, the Ukrainian case demonstrates not a decline but, on the contrary, a revitalisation of the religious factor as a source of moral mobilisation, social support, and collective solidarity. The author demonstrates how war transforms the role of religion, extending its functions beyond ritual and institutional life into the realms of practical service, spiritual and psychological care, and humanitarian activity. Based on sociological data, the article examines the dynamics of public trust in the Church, regional and confessional characteristics of religious behaviour, as well as citizens' expectations regarding the role of religious institutions. Examples of institutional adaptation and social service by the UGCC and the OCU are considered. The author emphasises that religiosity in wartime takes on an inclusive public dimension, contributing to healing, restoration and strengthening of national identity. The Ukrainian experience is seen as a potentially universal model of religion's response to existential challenges, relevant also to other contexts of global instability.

The author analyses religious transformations in Ukrainian society against the backdrop of a full-scale war with russia, focusing on changing attitudes towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) as a religious structure affiliated with the aggressor state. The author considers the patterns of rejection of pro-russian church institutions as part of a broader trend towards the affirmation of Ukrainian identity, the strengthening of national unity, and the pursuit of spiritual and political sovereignty. Considerable attention is paid to the analysis of draft law No. 8371, the reaction of international religious leaders, in particular Pope Francis, as well as the position of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which demonstrates an example of moral autonomy and responsible theological discourse. The text critically examines the concept of *political orthodoxy* as a form of quasi-religious thinking that legitimises the imperial ideology of the *russian world* through religious structures. The author uses the analytical category of *sect* to describe the activities of the UOC (MP), arguing that it is characterised by closedness, authoritarianism, ideological pressure and manipulative influence. The article highlights the need for a delicate balance between protecting national security and guaranteeing religious freedom, emphasising the socially significant role of the Church as a source of solidarity, ethical guidance and hope in times of war.

Introduction

The topicality of the study is determined by the aggravation of the religious and political dimension in the context of the Russian Federation's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, which highlights the need to rethink the role of religious institutions in the processes of nation-building and the establishment of state consciousness. In the new security environment, it is particularly important to identify sources of religious influence that could potentially contribute to the destabilisation of society, the spread of the aggressor's ideology and the undermining of democratic foundations. Thus, the outlined research objective corresponds to the current challenges and needs of modern Ukrainian society, particularly in the context of ensuring religious and information security.

In the process of researching the transformation of religiosity in Ukrainian society during full-scale war, a number of sources were analysed, covering academic, journalistic and theological discourse. A significant analytical contribution to the study of religious security in Ukraine was made by L. O. Fylypovych and A. M. Kolodnyi in their joint work *The Concept of Religious Security: Methodological Approaches in Academic Religious Studies*, published in the journal *Sofia* (*2020*). The authors propose a theoretical model of religious security as a system of institutional

counteraction to religiously motivated challenges, particularly from structures affiliated with russian centres of influence.

V. Tytarenko and L. Fylypovych, in their article *Public Policy and Public Religion in the Paradigm of Religious Freedom*, explore the relationship between public policy and public religion in the context of religious freedom. The authors analyse how the presence of religion in the public sphere affects democratic processes in Ukraine, particularly after the *Revolution of Dignity*. Using José Casanova's approach, they highlight both the positive and problematic aspects of public religious influence, emphasising the role of religious organisations in public dialogue, interfaith understanding and political development.

Substantial empirical material is presented in L.Fylypovych's article *Contemporary Challenges for Ukraine in the Field of Religious Security* (2024). The author analyses the activities of the UOC (MP) from the perspective of the security paradigm, pointing to systemic signs of loyalty to the aggressor country as a factor destabilising the internal religious environment.

The issue of religious security in a broader context is being studied by a school of religious scholars at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv under the leadership of Prof. Ye. A. Kharkovshchenko. The article *Religious Faith as a Factor of Religious Security/Insecurity in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian War* (2024) analyses how the ideologies of the *Russian world*, *Holy Rus*, and the *triune people* are used to legitimise russian aggression against Ukraine. The authors reveal the mechanisms of the sacralisation of war, manipulation of religious faith, and threats to religious security. The necessity of counteracting destructive religious and political narratives while preserving freedom of religion as a feature of a democratic society is justified.

It is also worth noting the journalistic and expert commentary by L. Fylypovych in a number of media interviews. In particular, in an interview for Hromadske Radio (*September 3, 2023*), the religious studies scholar emphasized the methods of religious propaganda used by the UOC (MP), pointing to its ties with russian political and intelligence structures. She expressed a similar position in a comment for ICTV (02.12.2022), noting that the UOC (MP) is gradually losing its moral legitimacy in Ukrainian society due to its opaque position on the war and its tacit approval of the aggression.

The empirical basis of the study consists of sociological and analytical sources, primarily information materials from the Razumkov Centre (*2024*), which provide detailed coverage of the religious situation, changes in the level of trust in churches, the dynamics of confessional identity, and public attitudes towards the UOC (MP). These data are supplemented by academic research, in particular the work of Opanasiuk and Panchuk (*2024*), which traces the transformation of religious identity over the last decade, as well as the collective monograph by Kulakhina-Stadnichenko and Nedavna (*2024*), which comprehensively analyses the relationship between religion and war in the contemporary Ukrainian context.

As examples of the practical embodiment of faith in the context of war, official publications of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (*2024a*) are examined, particularly regarding the activities of the Patriarchal Foundation *Mudra Sprava*, including an interview with Fr. Lubomyr Yavorskyi, as well as the strategic document *Pastoral Plan until 2030*, which outlines the UGCC's vision as a Church that serves human dignity in times of crisis. In this context, the activities of the OCU through the charitable initiatives of Eleos Ukraine are important examples of social service in the frontline regions (*Eleos Ukraine, 2025*). The publications of the resource *Spiritual Front of Ukraine* (2023–2024) illustrate the continuous work of OCU priests in helping those in need and resisting pro-russian influence in parishes.

Thus, the sources cited provide a multidimensional analysis of the transformations of religiosity in Ukraine during the war – from empirical data and theological reflections to specific examples of ministry and political debates, which allows us to place the Ukrainian experience in the context of universal models of religious responses to existential challenges.

Problem statement. In wartime, when issues of national unity, information security and public trust are of critical importance, the continued operation of a religious structure that maintains canonical and symbolic ties with the centre in the aggressor country becomes the subject of heated public and political debate. At the same time, the role of the Church as a moral authority capable of supporting the people in times of crisis should not be overlooked by researchers.

The ***aim of the study*** is to comprehensively understand the transformation of the role of religious institutions in the process of forming Ukrainian national identity and state consciousness in the context of armed aggression by the russian federation, as well as to identify potential threats emanating from religious organisations associated with the aggressor state.

Research objectives:

- To identify the role of the largest traditional Christian churches in supporting the moral unity of society and their institutional adaptation to the consequences of military action, using specific initiatives as examples.

- To investigate the destabilising and destructive functioning of the UOC (MP) in Ukraine from the perspective of its institutional structure and methods of influencing believers.

- To assess the reaction of religious communities and international leaders to legislative initiatives to ban religious structures associated with the aggressor state and outline the consequences of these initiatives in Ukrainian society.

Research methods

The study used several methods:

- Comparative analysis – to compare the religious models of the OCU, the UOC (MP) and the UGCC.

- Content analysis – to study public statements made by religious and political figures.

- The historical-genetic method – to trace the connection between the UOC (MP) and the Russian Orthodox Church.

- Critical discursive analysis – to identify elements of the imperial ideology of the "russian world" in the church narrative.

- Sociological analysis of secondary data – to assess changes in the religious self-identification of Ukrainians.

- Empirical generalisation – to conclude the religious factor in public resistance to war.

Results and Discussion

According to the objective view of sociologists and religious scholars, modern European society is already far from Christian. Even Pope Francis, predecessor to Pope

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Leo XIV, expressed a similar opinion in his speech to the Roman Curia:

> "Today, we (i.e. the Church, the clergy – author) are no longer the only ones who shape culture, nor are we the first, nor are we the ones who are listened to the most. We no longer live in a Christian society". This, according to the Pope, means that the Church needs a change of mentality in pastoral ministry, but this change must not be in the direction of relativism (*Tornielli, 2019*).

Despite the general European trend towards secularisation and the decline of Christianity in the public sphere, religious life in Ukraine is not disappearing in the context of war, but rather transforming. War creates specific conditions in which Christian religiosity is not simply preserved, but is forced to take on new forms and functions. It is against the backdrop of widespread social trauma and the struggle for national survival that the need for a deeper understanding of the role of religion as a factor in moral mobilisation, identity and resistance becomes apparent. In terms of the local religious situation in Ukraine, a wide range of changes can be observed following russia's full-scale invasion. This process reveals a characteristic feature of the Ukrainian context: the functions of religion go beyond the predominantly formal institutional level into the realm of social service, existential needs and spiritual and psychological support, and, most importantly, create the potential for the restoration of religious and institutional identity for at least some of Ukraine's citizens, who for decades were captive to the imposition of Muscovite imperialist quasi-messianic narratives.

Despite the general crisis of institutional trust in Ukrainian society, traditional Christian churches remain among the most trusted public institutions. In 2024, 62.5% of citizens expressed trust in the Church, although this was slightly less than in 2010 (72.5%). The highest level of trust is recorded in the Western region (78%), while in the Eastern region, it is only 47%. In the Southern and Central regions, trust fluctuates around the average level (62% and 61%, respectively). At the same time, the level of recognition of the Church as a moral authority is lower than the level of trust and tends to fluctuate. After a decline in 2010-2020 (from 56% to 44.5%), there was a temporary increase in 2021-2022, but by 2023-2024, the figures had returned to the 2020 level (43-44%). At the same time, regional and religious differences are noticeable: for 64% of residents in the west, the Church is a moral authority, while in the centre this figure is only 39%, and in the east and south less than a third. The Church remains a moral authority mainly for believers of the UGCC (83%), the UOC (MP) (73%) and the OCU (52%), but only for 6% of respondents who do not identify themselves with any religion (*Razumkov centre, 2024: 59-60*).

In general, the positive social role of the Church is recognised by the relative majority of citizens. In 2024, 52% of respondents indicated the positive influence of the Church in society, which, although lower than the record 59% in 2022 (against the backdrop of a full-scale invasion), is significantly higher than in 2020 (40%). At the same time, only 5% of respondents assess the role of the Church as negative, and 28% believe that it does not play a significant role. There are significant regional differences: in the West, 73% of respondents recognise the positive role, while in other regions, this figure is around 45%. Young people traditionally show lower levels of support – only 37% among the age group under 25. It is important to note that most believers of the main denominations highly value the role of the Church: 85% among the faithful of the UGCC, 76% among the faithful of the UOC (MP), and 65.5% among the faithful of the OCU. However, among "just Orthodox Christians" (43%) and "just Christians" (33%), the level of such assessment is significantly lower. The almost complete absence of negative assessments indicates that the institution's positive image has been generally preserved.

Sociological data show that religious communities in Ukraine have become significantly more active in the field of social service during the full-scale war. The respondents' answers are dominated by expectations regarding the provision of psychological assistance (54%), support for the Armed Forces of Ukraine (53%) and the resolution of social and material problems of the population. Respondents report assistance from the army, shelter for refugees, participation in the distribution of humanitarian aid, and support for medical facilities by their religious communities. There are also significant regional differences: residents of western Ukraine demonstrate greater awareness of the activities of churches in the humanitarian sphere, which may indicate greater mobilisation of civil and religious circles in this region. At the same time, the results of the study reveal certain risks. Although small, a noticeable portion of respondents (up to 7%) are aware of instances in which certain religious communities have supported russia's actions, as well as cases of misappropriation of humanitarian aid. This highlights the need for regulatory and public oversight of religious activities during wartime. In general, religious organisations in Ukraine not only maintain legitimacy and public trust but also become an effective instrument of solidarity, resistance and stabilisation in times of extraordinary social crisis (*Razumkov centre, 2024: 14*).

As for the expectations society places on the Church, respondents most frequently see its primary mission in the spiritual realm: honouring God and collective prayer (51%), as well as providing spiritual support in times of crisis (50.5%). About a quarter of respondents expect the Church to engage in the social sphere: assisting the vulnerable (26.5%), contributing to the moral renewal of society (26%), and defending traditional values (26%). Less important in the eyes of respondents are the education of young people (13%), the promotion of peace and tolerance (14%), the expansion of influence (6%), or participation in the formation of state policy (3%). These expectations correlate quite clearly with how respondents view the activities of their religious communities. Most believers note that their church fulfils the expected functions (*Razumkov centre, 2024: 67-69*).

In practical terms, these expectations are often realised through specific initiatives by religious institutions, which, in wartime conditions, expand their field of activity – not only in the spiritual sphere but also in the social and humanitarian spheres. One example of the changing role of religious institutions in wartime is the work of the Patriarchal Foundation *Mudra Sprava*, established by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) in response to the humanitarian challenges posed by russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. An interview with Father Lubomyr Yavorsky, Patriarchal Treasurer of the UGCC, reveals an important trend: the war has become a catalyst for rethinking the mission of the Church and its institutions not only as a spiritual guide but also as one of the key factors in social transformation (*Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, 2024a*).

Initially, the foundation's activities focused on providing immediate assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs), including evacuation, and meeting basic needs (such as food, hygiene, and temporary shelter). However,

over the past two years, this assistance has evolved into systematic work focused on restoring human capital through educational programmes, psychological rehabilitation, spiritual support, and the development of civic responsibility. Thus, the UGCC not only responds to the crisis but also develops strategies for post-war recovery, in which the religious community becomes a centre of social cohesion.

A key aspect is the emergence of value-oriented networks within communities that bring together people from different professions – educators, medical professionals, entrepreneurs, chaplains, and volunteers. Instead of direct "rebuilding," the Church offers a different vision – the creation of a community core capable of self-organising around the ideas of mutual responsibility and hope. At the same time, the religious mission – preaching the risen Christ – manifests itself not only in worship, but also in service as such: in providing psychological support, being present in hospitals, teaching, and mobilising human potential.

An important feature of the foundation's activities is its integration into **the UGCC's general church strategy, *Strategy 2030,*** which identifies seven areas of focus, including "healing the wounds of war," missionary work, and pastoral conversion. Thanks to the clearly defined functions of its institutions (Caritas, UCU, Health Commission, Department of Military Chaplaincy, etc.), the UGCC strives to implement a coordinated, multi-pronged response to the challenges of war.

> "We do not leave people alone with their troubles. We were and are with them – we fed them, supported them, evacuated them. Through all these projects we have done, we have left the temples and come to them. But then something interesting, and I would say asymmetrical, happened: the Church left the temples, and now they are asking for a temple (i.e. for the construction of a temple in the eastern regions of Ukraine – author's note)," says Father Lubomyr Yavorskyi (*Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, 2022*).

As for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), despite its relatively recent autocephalous status, it has shown a high degree of adaptability to new challenges and has re-oriented part of its activities towards social service, humanitarian support and spiritual and psychological care for vulnerable groups of the population. Such activities illustrate the launch of a particular process of bringing religion into the public sphere, in which the sacred acquires a social dimension.

One of the central instruments of this activity is the Synodal Department for Social Ministry of the OCU, Eleos-Ukraine, which coordinates the provision of humanitarian aid, the evacuation of civilians from combat zones, and psychological support for IDPs and military personnel (*Eleos Ukraine, 2025*). Local initiatives at the parish level are particularly important, such as the *Serving from the Heart* (Sluzhinnia vid Sertsia) programme in Dnipro, which has been providing regular meals to low-income families and internally displaced persons for five years in a row. Such activity is perceived as a spiritual practice embodied through social actions, blurring the line between two spheres that are considered incompatible in the stereotypical interpretation of Christianity, namely, religious worship and social significance (*Spiritual front of Ukraine, 2024*).

Religiousness in such projects appears not as a theological doctrine separated from the material world, but as a practical response to the existential challenges of war. By engaging volunteers and cooperating with the Red Cross, international humanitarian missions and civil society, the OCU is shaping the image of the Church as a social entity capable of transforming the traumatic experience of the people into an experience of solidarity, support and healing. These local transformations in religious activity indicate a shift in the paradigm of the Church's presence in Ukrainian society: from cultic-liturgical exclusivity to inclusive public responsibility. This approach not only increases trust in the Church in wartime but also sets a precedent for religious institutions in other countries where religion must adapt to crisis without losing its spiritual authenticity.

War exacerbates and brings to the surface social problems that Ukrainians could continue to live with and avoid addressing in peacetime (*Opanasyuk, Panchuk, 2024:56*). It also becomes a powerful catalyst for change in the national identity of Ukrainians, especially in the linguistic and religious spheres. A significant part of the russian-speaking population, seeking to distance themselves from the aggressor state, consciously switched to Ukrainian in everyday life. This is reflected in the statistics: in 2021, 64% of citizens communicated in Ukrainian regularly, and by 2022, this figure had risen to 71%. This trend shows not only that the official language is getting stronger, but also that people are rethinking their cultural identity and values. This distancing can also be seen in the religious context, with Ukrainians increasingly gravitating towards the Orthodox Church, which has not been compromised by ties with russia and is not associated with the ideology of the *Russian world*. The rejection of pro-russian church structures is another manifestation of a broader trend – the affirmation of national unity and the desire for complete independence from the cultural influence of the Russian Federation. Thus, language and the church became not only symbols of resistance but also instruments of internal cohesion for Ukrainian society (*Kulahina-Stadnichenko & Nedavna, 2024: 32*).

As a result of the military conflict, daily shelling of civilian infrastructure, and round-the-clock information tension, not only military personnel but also civilians are becoming irritable and sensitive to various types of manipulative actions by the enemy, in particular through russia's cynical use of religious organisations, namely the UOC (MP), to spread its imperial ideological narratives.

A radical shift in the country's foreign policy identity has nevertheless taken place, and with each new military attack on civilian infrastructure, the pro-russian vector is rapidly losing support, while the orientation towards Europe and the transatlantic direction has gained unprecedented support from the majority of the population. More than 75% of Ukrainians are in favour of a complete break in relations with russia, which is also reflected in the religious sphere – in particular, in the growth of support for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and a sharply negative attitude towards the Moscow Patriarchate, whose ban is supported by 68% of respondents (*Razumkov centre, 2024:115*). These trends indicate that Ukrainian society is gradually overcoming the crisis and divided identity of the past, but at the same time point to the risk of new internal divisions caused by potential resistance from structures linked to russia. This requires a proactive policy to prevent identity conflicts in post-war society.

The russian invasion of Ukraine led to a more objective assessment of the activities of the UOC (MP) by the Ukrainian authorities, as a result of which, on 20 August, the Verkhovna Rada voted for draft law No. 8371 on regulating the activities of religious organisations with their governing centre in russia.

> "The bill provides that the ROC should be banned as a religious organisation; the activities of all religious organisations

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affiliated with it will be terminated according to a clear procedure, which will include investigation, a prescription to comply with the law, and a court ban; the ROC and its affiliated structures will not be able to use state and municipal property; the transition of communities to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will be simplified." (*Chervonenko, 2024*)

The reaction of the then pontiff, Pope Francis, who expressed concern about the new Ukrainian law prohibiting the activities of religious organisations associated with russia, was striking, in the negative sense of the word, for Ukrainian society. He emphasised the importance of freedom of religion and called for people not to be prevented from worshipping in their chosen churches. The Pope noted:

> "I am concerned about the freedom of those who pray, because those who pray sincerely always pray for everyone. A person does not do evil solely because of prayer. If someone does evil against his people, he will be guilty of it, but not because he prayed." (Crux, 2024).

The Ukrainian authorities responded to Pope Francis's statements; in particular, the Embassy of Ukraine to the Holy See stated that the Pope's concerns were unfounded, as the new law does not restrict freedom of worship but is aimed at protecting national security and preventing the use of religious organizations as instruments of aggression (*Catholic Standard, 2024*). During a meeting with Ms Lisa Heike, Head of the Cultural Department of the German Embassy, the Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, noted that this law is aimed at protecting against the ideology of the "russian world" and the use of religion as an instrument of war: "The law applies to all religious organisations with headquarters in countries recognised by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine as aggressors. Russia has used the Orthodoxy under its control as an instrument of militarization, turning it into a form of neurotropic weaponry," noted the Primate. Another aspect of the new law, according to His Beatitude Sviatoslav, is protection from the ideology of the "russian world." According to him, the law provides for a response to the ideology of the "russian world" in the same way that European countries respond to the ideology of religious extremist groups such as the Islamic State (*Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, 2024b*).

The term *political Orthodoxy*, which is increasingly appearing in analytical works by religious scholars and theologians – and one of its key popularizers being theologian K. Hovorun – helps to shed light on why the ideology of the "russian world" is not merely a political project but a form of quasi-religion that replaces theology with ideological slogans (*Hovorun, 2019*). Such a fusion of religion and politics not only distorts the essence of faith but also uses religious authority to legitimise state violence, expansion or totalitarian control. By taking the sacred outside the church and projecting it onto political reality, *political orthodoxies* break down the line between the sacred and the secular, which in times of war or crisis opens the door to manipulating public opinion under the guise of a *sacred mission*. In this context, a telling example is the infamous temple of the Russian Armed Forces in Kubinka, which "with its military iconography, architectural and numerical symbolism, and decoration, resembles a temple to Mars rather than Christ." (*Istorychna Pravda, 2022*). This poses a challenge not only to theology but also to democracy since religion in this case ceases to be a space of freedom of conscience and becomes an instrument of mobilisation and ideological pressure.

If we conduct an objective analysis of the religious activities of the UOC (MP) in Ukraine, not only during the period of active and overt russian aggression, but from its very inception, we can draw parallels with the main characteristics of a religious entity such as a *sect*. In this study, we will consider this concept not as a term of condemnation or simply in a pejorative connotation, but as an analytical category denoting a religious organisation with characteristics of closedness, authoritarian management, ideological exclusivity and opacity. When applying this approach to analysing the activities of the UOC (MP) in Ukraine, several **characteristics** typical of sectarian organisations can be identified.

Firstly, there is a **clear fusion of the religious and the political**, which is a key feature of so-called "political Orthodoxies" that, according to K. Hovorun, function as ideologies disguised as theology. In this context, the UOC (MP) performs not only a religious but also an ideological function of legitimising the concept of the *Russian world*, transforming sacred discourse into an instrument of political influence. *Secondly*, **an authoritarian model of governance is characteristic**, in which the spiritual hierarchy is subordinate to the decisions of the Moscow Patriarchate as the sole centre of truth. Such centralism does not allow for internal criticism or alternative approaches, which indicates features of religious monopolism. Within such a system, any dissent is perceived as a threat to unity or fidelity to tradition, a tendency toward schism, and is therefore actively suppressed. This approach contrasts sharply with the practice of open theological dialogue, which is characteristic, for example, of the leadership of the UGCC. A symptomatic example was the rhetoric of the Head of the UGCC, His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, in response to the ambiguous statements of Pope Francis, which, according to many Ukrainians, contained elements of Russophilia, consonant with the concepts of the *Russian world* or equating the aggressor and the victim (*Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, 2024c*). Unlike the unconditional obedience characteristic of the structures of the Moscow Patriarchate, His Beatitude Sviatoslav allowed himself to openly, albeit respectfully, criticise the Holy Father's positions in public, emphasising the need for justice, protection of war victims and a truthful assessment of the aggression: "We all in Ukraine feel that today the Pope does not fully understand the pain of Ukraine, and Ukraine does not understand the Pope," said the Primate of the UGCC (*Credo, 2023*). Thus, the position of the UGCC demonstrates the possibility of combining church unity with elements of critical thinking, responsibility to the people, and moral autonomy, which fundamentally distinguishes it from the authoritarian model of religious obedience characteristic of the UOC (MP). Thirdly, the UOC (MP) displays a high degree of isolationism towards other Ukrainian Christian religious entities, in particular the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which it consistently refuses to recognise. This is accompanied by rhetoric about *persecution* and *betrayal of the true faith*, which is a typical defensive narrative used by sectarian groups to mobilise believers and isolate them from the outside world. Finally, the exploitation of the theme of the sacredness of russia's state identity, as well as the demonisation of "enemies of the faith" in the preaching practice of the clergy of the UOC (MP), especially in wartime, demonstrates the mechanisms of information control and religious influence inherent in destructive religious formations. Of course, one could cite dozens of pages of objective evidence of the subversive and openly anti-state role of this religious organisation in Ukraine, but

the most cynical thing is its clergy's justification of the recent genocide of the Ukrainian people with statements glorifying russian invaders and murderers.

It is reasonable to ask whether appealing to the common sense of the adherents of this religious denomination is effective enough and whether the Ukrainian authorities' ban on their activities does not provoke them to assert their righteousness, as well as create a favourable ground for the agent clergy to sow manipulation, based on a distortion of Christ's own words: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). Therefore, the UOC (MP) continues to have its supporters (perhaps not as numerous, but sufficiently destructive) even after russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. There is no secret about the fact that believers from nearby towns and villages are transported to the gathering sites by free buses and minibuses. That would be fine, but this tactic has not only pastoral and organisational implications but also clear political overtones, especially in the context of resistance to communities transferring to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) or protests against state policy regarding the UOC (MP). In June 2023, in the town of Myronivka (Kyiv region), representatives of the OCU reported that the UOC (MP) had organized the transportation of supporters to the church to block the parish meeting, including through the misuse of registration documents (*Spiritual front of Ukraine, 2023*). A similar case was recorded in Kamianets-Podilskyi in 2025, where groups of believers brought in by bus took part in protests against changes to the religious affiliation of a church (*Otamanchuk, 2023*). Such actions indicate the existence of a ramified mobilisation mechanism within the structure of the UOC (MP), which is provided through diocesan centres, parish clergy and related transport resources. Considering the context of the spread of the ideology of the *Russian world*, such practices reinforce the argument that the UOC (MP) functions not only as a religious structure but also as a potential **social instrument of influence** with elements of political orthodoxy.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian experience of war demonstrates that in times of crisis, threats to physical survival (both for the Ukrainian people as a whole and for individuals), and socio-economic instability, Christian churches have not only maintained but significantly strengthened their position in society. They were able to adapt to the new realities, in particular by expanding their pastoral, social and humanitarian activities, aimed not only at their believers but also at a wider circle of people in need, including those who seek help in specific situations.

Three years of Ukraine's heroic resistance to the russian invader have led to a change in society's perception of Christian churches as recipients of financial donations from the faithful. Instead, believers, and even those who do not share a Christian worldview, have experienced that these religious communities can distribute various scarce goods and respond to citizens' requests.

Three years of Ukraine's heroic resistance to russian aggression have led to a transformation in public perception of Christian churches. From their traditional role as recipients of financial donations from believers, they are increasingly emerging as active participants in social service. In this new dimension, religious communities have demonstrated their ability not only to meet spiritual needs but also to respond quickly to the practical needs of citizens, in particular by providing humanitarian aid, scarce resources and competent spiritual and psychological support in crises. Such activities must involve not only those involved in church life, but also those who do not share the Christian worldview, yet recognise the value of social activism by churches in times of war.

The restoration of the significant role of religious institutions in the process of forming Ukrainian national identity and state consciousness has led to increased interest on the part of state structures, the political elite and the majority of Ukrainian society in the activities of religious organisations in the social, nation-building and restoration spheres. In this context, the contribution of Christian churches can be both constructive and regenerative, promoting national consolidation and social reconstruction, or destructive and collaborative, as demonstrated by the example of the UOC (MP). One way or another, even in a postmodern technocratic world, religion retains its social significance, acting as a factor of solidarity, identity and moral support in times of national trials. In this context, religiosity goes beyond private choice, transforming into a form of collective action and a source of social hope. This dimension of religion takes on global significance as a model of solidarity and ethical leadership in the face of existential challenges.

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Релігійні інституції у трансформаційних процесах української ідентичності в умовах війни

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У статті аналізується трансформація релігійності в українському суспільстві в умовах повномасштабної війни, спричиненої російським вторгненням. На тлі загальноєвропейської секуляризації український випадок демонструє не занепад, а навпаки – актуалізацію релігійного фактору як джерела моральної мобілізації, соціальної підтримки та колективної солідарності. Автор показує, як війна змінює функції релігії, виводячи її за межі обрядовості та інституційного життя у площину практичного служіння, духовно-психологічної опіки та гуманітарної діяльності. Спираючись на соціологічні дані, автор досліджує динаміку суспільної довіри до Церкви, регіональні та конфесійні особливості релігійної поведінки, а також очікування громадян щодо ролі релігійних інституцій. Розглянуто приклади інституційної адаптації та соціального служіння з боку УГКЦ (зокрема діяльність фундації «Мудра справа») та ПЦУ (через ініціативи «Eleos-Ukraine»). Автор підкреслює, що релігійність у воєнний час набуває інклюзивного публічного виміру, сприяючи зціленню, відновленню та посиленню національної ідентичності. Український досвід розглядається як потенційно універсальна модель відповіді релігії на екзистенційні виклики, релевантна й для інших контекстів глобальної нестабільності.

Автор аналізує релігійні трансформації в українському суспільстві на тлі повномасштабної війни з Росією, зосереджуючи увагу на зміні ставлення до Української Православної Церкви (Московського патріархату) як релігійної структури, афілійованої з державою-агресором. Автор розглядає закономірності відмови від проросійських церковних інституцій як частину ширшої тенденції утвердження української ідентичності, посилення національної єдності та прагнення до духовної й політичної суверенності. Значну увагу приділено аналізу законопроєкту №8371, реакції міжнародних релігійних діячів, зокрема папи Франциска, а також позиції Української Греко-Католицької Церкви, яка демонструє приклад моральної автономії та відповідального богословського дискурсу. У тексті критично осмислюється поняття «політичної ортодоксії» як форми квазірелігійного мислення, що легітимує імперську ідеологію «русского міра» через релігійні структури. Автор застосовує аналітичну категорію «секта» для опису діяльності УПЦ (МП), аргументуючи її ознаками замкненості, авторитарності, ідеологічного тиску та маніпулятивного впливу. Стаття підкреслює потребу в делікатному балансі між захистом національної безпеки та гарантіями релігійної свободи, акцентуючи на суспільно значущій ролі Церкви як джерела солідарності, етичного орієнтиру та надії в умовах війни.

Ключові слова: соціальне служіння, гуманітарна місія Церкви, національна ідентичність, глобальні релігійні виклики, релігійна безпека, «русский мір», політична ортодоксія, релігійна свобода.