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# RELIGION AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REALITIES OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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**Abstract** The article is devoted to the peculiarities of the relationship between religion and human rights in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It is noted that Russia's expansion results in a decrease in religious freedom in the temporarily occupied lands, a narrowing of the scope of this fundamental norm. At the same time, the author emphasizes not only the violations of the rights and freedoms of believers in the temporarily occupied territories of the country caused by external factors, but also some internal problems of the socio-religious life of modern Ukraine. The article analyzes the actions of the Ukrainian authorities to ensure the rights of believers and religious organizations to freedom of conscience in difficult conditions of war, when, on the one hand, it is urgent to guarantee national security and the safety of citizens, and on the other hand, to ensure the rights of believers, regardless of their religious affiliation.

**Keywords:** religion, human rights, religious freedom, religious pluralism, Russian-Ukrainian war, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Russian Orthodox Church.

## Introduction

The problem of the relationship of religious values and human rights acquires special importance due to the fact that religion actively positions itself in the public sphere, penetrates into the realm of global politics and international relations. Moreover, in the struggle for global human rights, it can be both an obstacle and a kind of locomotive of relevant shifts. The growth of religious fundamentalism and radicalism in its various confessional forms, the strengthening of religious intolerance, attempts by representatives of some religions to limit the rights and freedoms of other believers or non-believers and to place their religions and their religious freedom above the system of established universal moral and legal priorities are associated with the slogans of religious seclusion and exclusivity, the exclusive right to a monopoly on religious truth. The policy of governments of some states, which seek to establish a high level of regulation of religious freedom issues and introduce the practice of restricting it for representatives of certain religious groups and religious minorities, thus depriving people of the

right to worldview and value self-determination, to defend their own beliefs in accordance with their conscience, also causes concern.

The issues of ensuring human rights, as well as their violations, in particular restrictions on religious freedom, become particularly acute in times of war. An example is Ukraine, which, as A. Kolodnyi and L. Fylypovych note, has traditionally belonged to countries “where there were no global and systematic problems in the field of religious freedom... But the war, especially the current large-scale Russian invasion, has provoked a number of new challenges in the field of freedom of conscience.”<sup>1</sup> The Russian aggressor in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian lands violates fundamental human rights, in particular the right to freedom of religion or belief, when churches are seized, closed, and destroyed, and some religious organizations are persecuted by the occupying authorities, and their followers and leaders are subjected to detention, repression, and physical violence, and sometimes even destruction. The war also acted as a kind of catalyst for a number of state-church and interfaith problems in modern Ukraine, giving particular urgency to issues of ensuring religious freedom, which require thorough study and solution.

### **Russian Aggression as a Threat to Religious Pluralism and Religious Freedom in Ukraine**

The representatives of most religious communities in Ukraine recognize that country is a space of religious freedom, and in general, “Ukrainian society considers religious freedom important, agrees that in Ukraine such freedom is real, not declarative, and reacts sensitively enough to its oppression.”<sup>2</sup> Here there is the equality of churches before the law, which is not the case in many countries of the world; there is no probationary period for religious organizations to acquire the status of a legal entity. There is also no single main church in Ukraine, recognized and unrecognized churches, and according to the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,” which is based on the fundamental principles of international legal documents on religious freedom and which has legally enshrined the religious plurality of Ukrainian society, all religious organizations are equal, and the state does

<sup>1</sup> А. Колодний, Л. Филипович. “Свобода релігії в Україні: виклики в часи російсько-української війни” [Freedom of religion in Ukraine: Challenges During the Russian-Ukrainian War]. *Філософська думка*. 2023, № 1, 115.

<sup>2</sup> В. Єленський. “Релігійна свобода і безпека у воюючій країні: випадок України” [Religious Freedom and Security in a Warring State: The Case of Ukraine]. *Наукові записки Інституту політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень Ф. Кураса НАН України*. 2019, Вип. 3-4 (99-100), 401.

not interfere in their activities. Religious pluralism exists in Ukraine, and our country, according to José Casanova, is “very religiously pluralistic.”<sup>3</sup>

V. Yelenskyi emphasizes that in Ukraine such a type of religious culture has been formed that “reveals itself through genuine religious pluralism, which is expressed in the regime of equality of religious communities before the law and includes the absence of state-established Churches with a special status and related privileges.”<sup>4</sup> An important and necessary condition for the existence of religious pluralism is the observance of democratic principles of relations between the state and the church, the absence of a monopoly in the sphere of the spiritual life of society in the form of a state religion or church. The subjects of plural religious life are both individual believers and religious communities. Religious pluralism as a colorful world of religious traditions is, on the one hand, the initial prerequisite of religious freedom, and on the other, a kind of realization and confirmation of this fundamental right of the human individual and the human community. After all, freedom of religion presupposes real religious pluralism, the opportunity to freely make one’s religious choice and follow the chosen system of values. Important for religious pluralism is “the presence of tolerance in interfaith relations, the ability of confessions to mutually discuss mutually unacceptable problems, find ways of mutual understanding and make mutually satisfactory decisions.”<sup>5</sup>

A vivid illustration of the affirmation of the principles of freedom of religion or belief, the actual emergence of religious pluralism on Ukrainian territory as a result of the operation of the law and the corresponding state policy in this area, is the fact that more than a hundred different religious movements and confessional communities are registered in Ukraine, and more than 30 thousand religious communities operate, the vast majority of which coexist peacefully and tolerantly, interact with the authorities, and perform the tasks and functions set forth in their statutory documents.

It is worth noting that since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has been among the countries without serious religious freedom concerns. It has not been listed as a violator of religious freedom or belief in the annual reports of the US State Department. But the war, especially its acute phase, significantly (and in the temporarily occupied lands-radically)

<sup>3</sup>Хосе Казанова. “Українську демократію врятує релігійний плюралізм” [Jose Casanova: Religious pluralism will save Ukrainian democracy]. *Еспресо*. 10.03.2019. [https://espresso.tv/article/2019/03/09/shon\\_keysi\\_khosa\\_kazanova](https://espresso.tv/article/2019/03/09/shon_keysi_khosa_kazanova)

<sup>4</sup> *The Churches and the War: Religion, Religious Diplomacy, and Russia’s Aggression Against Ukraine*. Lviv: Ukrainian Catholic University Press, 2024, 234.

<sup>5</sup> *Георелігійні процеси і конфесійні трансформації в Україні* [Georeligious Processes and Confessional Transformations in Ukraine]. Київ: Світ Знань, 2023, 47.

changed the realities of religious life, “destroyed the established way of life of millions of Ukrainians, the established relations between the state and the church, between confessions, between religion and society.”<sup>6</sup>

Russia’s open and large-scale aggression and Russian expansion in Ukraine have resulted in a decrease of religious freedom in the temporarily occupied lands, a narrowing of the scope of this fundamental norm. In fact, religious freedom is being replaced here by religious non-freedom. “The freedom that gave the right to profess any religion and which Ukrainian believers were accustomed to use, has ceased to be guaranteed. The rights of a person, and often of an entire religious community, are being grossly violated. Ukraine, from a country where the state of religious freedom did not cause concern, and its scope only grew, is turning into a territory where being a believer becomes dangerous.”<sup>7</sup> Religious communities that are persecuted in Russia itself, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Scientologists, some Muslim movements and Protestant churches, as well as pro-Ukrainian religious movements, among which the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church pose a particular threat to the occupiers, are restricted in their rights or banned. The occupation authorities have approved in the areas under their control “a copy of the Russian model of state-church relations. In this model, the limits of religious freedom are determined by the degree of readiness of religious communities to cooperate with the Russian occupation regime and/or public demonstration of their loyalty to it.”<sup>8</sup> Describing the situation with the right to religious freedom in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian lands, A. Kolodnyi and L. Fylypovych note that there “temple, prayer houses, mosques and other religious buildings are being destroyed, believers are dying-military and civilians. There are cases of priests being killed and held captive. Religious minorities (Muslims, Jews, some Protestant denominations, representatives of new religious movements) are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of war.”<sup>9</sup> President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyy, in his Easter address on April 20, 2025, called the Russian army one of the greatest threats to churches and believers and noted that during the period of the full-scale

<sup>6</sup> *Релігія і війна: сучасний український контекст* [Religion and War: The Modern Ukrainian Context]. Київ: Інститут філософії імені Г. С. Сковороди НАН України, 2024, 7.

<sup>7</sup> С. Здіорук, В. Токман. *Державно-церковні та суспільно-релігійні відносини в умовах війни Росії проти України: аналітична доповідь* [S. Zdioruk, V. Tokman. State-Church and Socio-Religious Relations in the Conditions of Russia’s War Against Ukraine: Analytical Report]. Київ: НІСД, 2023, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>9</sup> А. Колодний, Л. Филипович. “Релігійний плюралізм як феномен: українські реалії в умовах російсько-української війни” [Religious pluralism as a phenomenon: Ukrainian realities in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war]. *Вісник Житомирського державного університету імені Івана Франка. Філософські науки*. 2024, Вип. 2(96), 24.

war, the aggressor's troops damaged or destroyed more than 600 Ukrainian churches, houses of prayer and places of worship, killed or tortured 67 priests, pastors, and monks. In July 2024 "Russian de facto authorities reportedly demolished the last remaining OCU church in Russian-occupied Crimea."<sup>10</sup> The Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom highlights that "Russian forces involved in the ongoing invasion and occupation of Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, committed gross violations of religious freedom against Ukrainians by banning religious groups, criminalizing religious materials, and raiding houses of worship."<sup>11</sup> In general, strong ideological pressure is exerted on the inhabitants of the temporarily occupied territories, believers of various confessions, "values of the Russian world" are imposed, an imperialist policy of the aggressor country based on them is carried out, and the thesis about Russia as the savior of the world from the vices of the decaying West, fascism, etc. is asserted. At the same time, Russia stifles any freedom. "Believers are forced to pray privately or meet secretly. Religious freedom has been destroyed."<sup>12</sup>

### **Violations of Religious Freedoms in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine in the Focus of International and Domestic Expert and Public Institutions**

The Ukrainian authorities constantly draw the attention of the international community to the illegal activities of the occupiers to restrict the activities of religious organizations, the gross violation of the rights of believers guaranteed by international law and the basic principles of freedom of conscience in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian lands. As a result, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights informed the international community about cases of arbitrary detention by the Russian occupation authorities in Ukraine of individuals in connection with their legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief. Such actions have been the basis for a number of judgments against Russia by the European Court of Human Rights. "The ECHR ruled that Russia had committed multiple human rights violations in its decade-long occupation of Crimea, including unlawful harassment and intimidation of non-Russian Orthodox religious leaders, arbitrary raids of places of worship, confiscation of religious property, and imprisonment of Crimean Tatar Muslims for alleged HT affiliation."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> D. Chandler." Russia Escalates Religious Persecution, Targets Pastors And Churches." *Religion Unplugged*, July 1, 2025. URL: <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2025/7/1/russia-escalates-religious-persecution-targets-pastors-and-churches>

<sup>11</sup> Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. March 2025, 34.

<sup>12</sup> L. Fylypovych. "UKRAINE: Religious freedom in Ukraine under Moscow's rule and Kyiv's rule." *RISU*, 13.01.2025. URL: [https://risu.ua/en/ukraine-religious-freedom-in-ukraine-under-moscows-rule-and-kyivs-rule\\_n153529](https://risu.ua/en/ukraine-religious-freedom-in-ukraine-under-moscows-rule-and-kyivs-rule_n153529)

<sup>13</sup> Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, op. cit., 35.

The 2025 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom also indicates that throughout the year, the U.S. Congress raised the issue of Russia's violations of religious freedom in Ukraine during visits by Congressional delegations, meetings, and hearings. The Speaker of the House of Representatives M. Johnson discussed Russia's invasion of Ukraine in a meeting with Ukrainian Protestant religious leaders. In July 2024, the Helsinki Commission held hearings on Russia's persecution of Ukrainian Christians, and in September the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held hearings on Russia's actions to destroy Ukrainian culture and identity, including through the destruction of Ukrainian religious sites. In December, the Russian government declared the Helsinki Commission and the International Alliance for Religious Freedom or Belief "undesirable."<sup>14</sup>

Monitoring of the state of religious freedom carried out by various international, state, public, and religious organizations indicates the persecution of people on religious grounds in the temporarily occupied territories, the persecution of certain religious associations and, in general, the systematic violation of the rights of Ukrainian citizens. A significant part of Ukrainian believers "are denied the right to have their confessional beliefs, to establish communities, to pray in the usual way, to perform divine services. The existence of entire denominations is prohibited, which are consistently being forced out of the temporarily occupied territories by force due to the creation of impossible conditions for the implementation of the spiritual mission."<sup>15</sup> A convincing illustration of the repressive policy of the occupiers is, in particular, the Kyiv Independent investigative documentary "There Will Be No God but Theirs," in which clergymen representing various faiths talk about repression and persecution. The story of one of them, American pastor Dmitry Bodyu, who lived and preached in Melitopol, is an example of the systematic oppression of religious communities by the Russian occupation authorities. He was accused of organizing protests, supporting partisan groups, and transferring funds to the Ukrainian military, and only the aid of the US State Department saved him from further imprisonment, or worse. What happened to the American pastor is clear evidence and confirmation of the occupiers' policy of persecuting and banning independent churches and ousting Western-oriented religious organizations from public life.

As already noted, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom makes a significant contribution to monitoring compliance with religious freedom requirements in various countries around the world, including in warring countries such as Russia and Ukraine.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Релігія і війна: сучасний український контекст [Religion and War: The Modern Ukrainian Context], op. cit., 7-8.



At the same time, it should be noted that in addition to this Commission, the situation with freedom of religion or belief in the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war is the subject of monitoring carried out by other international institutions as well as domestic state and public organizations. For example, these issues, in conjunction with the analysis of the general situation with respect for human rights in Ukrainian territories, are the subject of constant, systematic interest by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. Such authoritative in the fight against all forms of religious discrimination and the protection of religious freedom or beliefs international organization as Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) in its bulletins reports on violations in this area in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine and does a lot to defend freedom of religion in Ukrainian lands. And the information is quite disappointing, as it indicates “the constant violation of the rights of Ukrainian citizens, the persecution of people here on religious grounds, and the persecution of certain religious organizations. Local authorities strictly control those churches and denominations that, under Russian legislation, which has been in effect in Crimea in recent years, and under the legislation of the so-called DPR-LPR, which is copied from Russian, are denied the right to exist, have their own beliefs, establish communities, and carry out religious activities.”<sup>16</sup>

Comprehensive analytical studies conducted by the National Institute for Strategic Studies,<sup>17</sup> Razumkov Center,<sup>18</sup> as well as thorough monographic works of Ukrainian scientists<sup>19</sup> are very important for understanding the specifics of the confessional and church environment in Ukraine during the war, the attitude of the country’s citizens towards the leading religious movements and churches, the assessment of the authorities’ actions in this difficult but extremely important for national security area, and the scale and forms of violations of religious freedom in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories. Ukrainian human rights organizations and think tanks are constantly reporting violations of religious freedom in the temporarily occupied territories, supporting their statements with relevant facts. In particular, the Institute for Religious Freedom makes a significant contribution to the cause of upholding

<sup>16</sup> А. Колодний, Л. Филипович. “Свобода релігії в Україні: виклики в часи російсько-української війни” [Freedom of religion in Ukraine: Challenges During the Russian-Ukrainian War], *op. cit.*, 112.

<sup>17</sup> С. Здіорук, В. Токман [S. Zdioruk, V. Tokman], *op. cit.*, 36 с.

<sup>18</sup> *Ukrainian society, state and church during the war. Church and religious situation in Ukraine-2024* (Information materials). Kyiv: Razumkov Centre, 2024. 115 p.

<sup>19</sup> Георелігійні процеси і конфесійні трансформації в Україні [Georeligious Processes and Confessional Transformations in Ukraine], *op. cit.*, 318 с.; *Релігійна безпека в Україні в умовах коронавірусної пандемії* [Religious Security in Ukraine During the Coronavirus Pandemic]. Вінниця: ФОП Кушнір Ю. В., 2021. 204 с.; *Релігія і війна: сучасний український контекст* [Religion and War: The Modern Ukrainian Context], *op. cit.*, 94 с.; *The Churches and the War: Religion, Religious Diplomacy, and Russia’s Aggression Against Ukraine*, *op. cit.*, 328 p.



freedom of religion or belief. Its reports, projects, and analytical materials are well-argued and convincing: “Religious Freedom at Sight: Russian Terror in the Occupied Territories,” “Russian Offensive on Religious Freedom in Ukraine,” “Monitoring Religious Freedom,” “Closed Faith,” etc. The Youth Association of Religious Scholars (the “Religion in Fire” project, which, in particular, records the real losses of religious organizations as a result of the war), and the Crimean Human Rights Group for Monitoring and Documenting Human Rights Violations and War Crimes in Crimea are also involved in the cause of protecting religious freedom. The materials collected and processed by the aforementioned organizations, supplemented by eyewitness testimonies, prove large-scale violations of religious freedom by the occupiers: persecution and kidnapping of religious figures and their torture and murder, attacks on religious buildings and their destruction, cessation of the activities of most religious communities, except for the Moscow Patriarchate, etc. The occupation administrations seek to take control of all religious activity, force religious communities to “justify Russian aggression and submit to Russian religious centers,” and persuade pro-Ukrainian religious figures to collaborate, “using threats and torture against them.”<sup>20</sup> All of the above indicates the destructive impact of Russian aggression on the life of religious communities in Ukraine, when the right to freedom of religion or belief is limited, or even denied to both individual believers and communities of fellow believers. Moreover, it is not only about power over Ukrainian lands or over relevant religious institutions, but also about control over ideas, beliefs, and values. The aggressor state not only seeks to occupy new territories, but also to seize the mental and spiritual space of Ukrainians.

It should be emphasized that Russia has turned religion into a tool for implementing its political and military goals and is actively expanding the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, in particular through the creation of religious centers, which are an instrument of the Kremlin’s aggressive policy of conquest. One of its important components is the affirmation in the temporarily occupied regions of the monopoly of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is the leader and inspirer of the imperial, expansionist, and genocidal policy of the Russian authorities. The criminal activities of the ROC, which openly sanctifies atrocities against the Ukrainian people, “blesses the Russian army and its “liberation” of Ukraine from “Nazis,” labeling the invaders as “liberators,” thereby allowing

<sup>20</sup> А. Колодний, Л. Филипович. “Свобода релігії в Україні: виклики в часи російсько-української війни” [Freedom of religion in Ukraine: Challenges During the Russian-Ukrainian War], *op. cit.*, 114.

them to indulge in all sorts of imaginable and unimaginable crimes,”<sup>21</sup> is aimed at replacing or completely destroying Ukrainian culture, identity, and statehood in general. The Moscow Patriarchate is actively involved in inciting and justifying the war in Ukraine as part of a kind of “metaphysical confrontation with the West,” a war that the current Pope Leo XIV called “a real imperialist invasion” accompanied by crimes against humanity. The ROC, using the political theology of the “Russian world”, which is not Christian theology, but, according to J. Casanova, a heresy that serves to sacralize violence, declares “the war against Ukraine and the “satanic” West as a “holy war of all Russians,” urging Orthodox believers to sacrifice themselves for their country.”<sup>22</sup> The messianic theme of Russia saving the fallen world is being actualized. And in order to save everyone, they, the “Russian saviors,” “arranged genocide and a criminal war... The ROC says that genocide against the Ukrainian people is a sacred process, that they “must” do it in order to, just as they once did, save the planet from the terrible plague of fascism.”<sup>23</sup> Obviously, the Russian Orthodox Church is an accomplice in the genocidal war against Ukrainians and fully shares the blame for Russia's crimes in Ukraine.

### **Ukraine’s Policy Towards the Russian Orthodox Church and Religious Organizations Affiliated with Russian Centers. The Issue of the Status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church**

As the ROC is an ideological instrument of the regime of the aggressor state and an accomplice in war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on behalf of the Russian Federation, the ban on the activities of this anti-Ukrainian organization became quite logical and justified. This decision was enshrined in the Law of Ukraine “On the Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Field of Activities of Religious Organizations” of August 20, 2024. The main provisions of this law, primarily on preventing Russian influence on Ukrainian religious organizations, banning the activities of any religious organizations in Ukraine with centers of influence in the Russian Federation, were supported by such an authoritative interfaith organization as the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations even at the stage of preparation and preliminary hearings. According to this law, religious

<sup>21</sup> The Churches and the War, op. cit., 103.

<sup>22</sup> Alexei Navalny’s death and the need to counter Vladimir Putin’s totalitarian regime and its war on democracy. *The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Resolution 2540*. 17.04.2024. URL: <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33511/html>

<sup>23</sup> М. Ульяновська. “Російська церква має визнати свою співучасть у розв’язанні геноцидної війни проти українців–Хосе Казанова. Інтерв’ю” [M. Ulianovska. The Russian Church must admit its complicity in unleashing a genocidal war against Ukrainians – Jose Casanova. Interview]. *Голос Америки*. 08.01.2023. URL: <https://www.holosameryky.com/a/jose-casanova-on-ukraine-russia-church/6907940.html>

organizations that are part of the Russian Orthodox Church or other religious entities located in Russia must withdraw from them in accordance with the procedure to be provided by the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience.

And there are already similar precedents in Ukraine. For example, the Old Believers from Bila Krynytsia in 2022, without waiting for the adoption of the relevant law, reacting to the act of Russian aggression against Ukraine, severed ties with their Moscow center, reregistered the charter of their religious organization and changed its name to the Ancient Orthodox Church. Another church in Ukraine, the True Orthodox Church, also severed its ties with the center in Russia and re-registered.<sup>24</sup> As a result, these religious associations did not suffer any losses; they preserved their faith, habitual way of life, traditional norms and values, and gained independence and the opportunity to independently organize their activities, without looking back at Moscow.

At the same time, although we are talking about a number of religious communities in Ukraine affiliated with the relevant Russian centers, the most acute situation is related to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. It is this religious association that is not unreasonably associated in Ukrainian society with the Russian Orthodox Church. And since there is another powerful Orthodox entity in Ukraine—the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which clearly and consistently defends a pro-Ukrainian position in various spheres of its activity, the war exacerbated the intra-Orthodox conflict that existed even before its beginning, “polarizing Orthodox believers in their orientations either towards the Moscow Patriarchate, the church of the aggressor country, or towards the patriotic autocephalous local Orthodox Church of Ukraine.”<sup>25</sup> The leadership and believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church faced, in essence, a twofold, political-ecclesiastical question: “Are you on the side of the independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, or do you support its dependent (colonial) state as part of the Russian federation (empire)... are you defending your autonomous (autocephalous) status, and therefore severing all ties with the ROC, or are you defending your affiliation with the Moscow Patriarchate?”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Р. Романюк. Єленський: У Московського патріархату вимоги, як путінські “виведіть війська з Запоріжжя” [R. Romaniuk. Yelenskyi: The Moscow Patriarchate has demands like Putin’s “withdraw troops from Zaporizhia.”]. *Українська правда*. 10.09.2024. URL: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2024/09/10/7474244/>

<sup>25</sup> А. Колодний, Л. Филипович. “Релігійний плюралізм як феномен” [Religious pluralism as a phenomenon], *op. cit.*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Л. Филипович, О. Горкуша. “Українське православ’я перед безпековими викликами в часі російсько-української війни” [Ukrainian Orthodoxy facing security challenges during the Russian-Ukrainian war]. *Релігія, релігійна ідентичність та релігійні конфлікти у сучасному світі: зб. наук. праць*. Житомир: Видавничий центр ЖДУ імені Івана Франка, 2025, 109-110.

It was the continued uncertainty of the UOC regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war and its status and the nature of relations with the ROC, the facts of collaboration with the occupation authorities by some of the clergy added to the acuteness of the situation. The Church continued to “...form the image of a “persecuted church,” to oppose the recognition of Ukrainian autocephaly by local Orthodox Churches; to challenge the thousand-year-old church canons, etc.”<sup>27</sup> The hostile attitude towards the OCU by the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church led to the exacerbation of inter-confessional confrontations, in particular among the Orthodox believers of Ukraine. However, under the pressure of circumstances, due to the condemnation of the Church’s position by the general public, including a significant part of its parishioners, and also due to the desire to maintain its influence in society, the Church had to move in the direction of independence from the Moscow Patriarchate. So, by the decision of the Council on May 27, 2022, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church declared itself independent from the Russian Orthodox Church. However, if we look closely at the content of the adopted documents and consider the further steps of the UOC, the decision taken looks unconvincing and leaves open the fundamental issues discussed above. Although the Council “removed references to Moscow from the Church’s statutes, the hierarchs did not condemn collaborators within their ranks... Neither did they condemn Patriarch Kirill, who in his blessing of murder violated both the Gospel and basic morality, nor bishops who participated in so called ‘annexations of new territories.’”<sup>28</sup> It is also worth emphasizing that since the adoption of the council decisions,

eucharistic communion with the Church of Constantinople has not been restored, dialogue with the OCU has not been initiated, official changes to the statutory documents have not been published, public unrest and anti-Ukrainian provocations during clashes over temples, which are organized by the clerics of the UOC-MP, continue...<sup>29</sup>

An indirect, but quite telling confirmation of the uncertainty and ambiguity of the church's position is the reaction (or rather, the lack of an adequate reaction, and even more so, condemnation) of the UOC to the process of subordination by the Russian Orthodox Church during the war of a number of its dioceses in the temporarily occupied territories – in Crimea, in the east and south of Ukraine.

The seriousness of the issue is also added by the fact that the UOC-MP remains one of the most numerous religious movements in Ukrainian territory, with about 8 thousand communities in the territory under its control, that is, almost the same number as the OCU. Under these conditions, the state cannot allow the existence of such a powerful church

<sup>27</sup> С. Здіорук, В. Токман [S. Zdioruk, V. Tokman], op. cit., 8.

<sup>28</sup> The Churches and the War, op. cit., 238-239.

<sup>29</sup> С. Здіорук, В. Токман [S. Zdioruk, V. Tokman], op. cit., 13.

institution, which, in the realities of Russian aggression against Ukraine, can probably play the role of a kind of fifth column. Therefore, it is quite understandable that Ukrainian society expects steps from the church towards its self-definition as a pro-Ukrainian organization that takes care of the needs and interests of Ukrainian believers and advocates for the victory of our state in the war unleashed by Russia, as well as a clear signal of refusal to submit to the ROC. The position of some Ukrainian researchers on this issue is quite categorical and telling:

until the UOC clearly declares its pro-Ukrainian, not pro-Russian, orientation, declares its condemnation, not just its separation from the “Russian world,” and avoids clear answers to the acute issues of today’s politics, the UOC appears in Ukraine as one of the most organized and structured communities with clear opposition to the establishment of Ukrainian independence...”<sup>30</sup>

Experts from the National Institute for Strategic Studies also express their concern about this matter. In their opinion, the activities of the UOC-MP should be considered as a threat to the national security of Ukraine for many reasons. In particular, the following actions of this church pose threats:

spreading and entrenching the ideology of the “Russian world” in Ukraine; splitting Ukrainian society on a worldview and ideological basis; discrediting Ukrainian authorities at all levels, including the President of Ukraine; collaboration with the occupation authorities, as a result of which thousands of Ukrainian citizens died; direct participation of the clergy of the UOC-MP in combat operations not only as adjusters of missile strikes or artillery shelling of the Ukrainian Defense Forces, peaceful cities and villages, but even with weapons in their hands as part of Russian terrorist formations; escalation of tension and hostility in the religious environment.<sup>31</sup>

### **Guaranteeing National Security and Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Believers: Finding a Difficult Solution**

The question arises, what steps should the authorities take under these circumstances? It should be emphasized once again that Ukraine is a democratic state and all decisions made by the authorities must be implemented within the existing legal framework and in accordance with the norms of international law and the international obligations of our country, guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of citizens, including believers of different confessions. Our country has always been noted for its achievements in the field of religious freedom, and even in the face of Russian aggression and the ongoing brutal war, religious freedom in Ukraine is respected and guaranteed. However, “The Russian invasion, of which the ROC is an active accomplice, forced our country to defend itself from abuses and the use of religion as a weapon

<sup>30</sup> Л. Филипович, А. Колодний. Вплив російсько-української війни на трансформації релігійного життя України [The Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian War on the Transformation of Religious Life in Ukraine]. *Буковинський богословський вісник*. 2024, № 3, 89-90.

<sup>31</sup> С. Здіорук, В. Токман [S. Zdioruk, V. Tokman], op. cit., 11.

by the aggressor state”<sup>32</sup> and sometimes apply means that are understandable and adequate in the realities of war and that provide for the possibility of certain restrictions by law on the right to freedom of conscience, religion and association in religious organizations “in the interests of national or public security, the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”<sup>33</sup> Although, as stated in the law, such restrictions are generally consistent with the European Convention on Human Rights (Articles 9, 11), they may nevertheless cause concern both in Ukraine and abroad, and pose a serious challenge to the pluralism of religious life.

It should be noted that to some extent, it seems paradoxical that part of the world community and some foreign experts are concerned not so much with the actions of the aggressor, the consequences of which are serious restrictions on religious freedom, but with the measures taken by the state bodies of Ukraine aimed at legally regulating the status of some religious organizations, the centers of which are located in the aggressor country. The alarming moods of representatives of the Western community are associated, in particular, with

the emergence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), its receipt of the *Tomos* on autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarch, the change in the canonical status of the OCU and the UOC, the growth of the popularity of the OCU and the simultaneous decline in the authority of the UOC, and the fact of “favoritism” of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the authorities.<sup>34</sup>

In this regard, foreign defenders of religious freedom believe (although they do not have sufficient grounds for this) that the current status of the OCU, which, in their opinion, may seek special treatment from state institutions, is a potential threat to religious pluralism and may lead to restrictions on the rights of other religious associations.

Of course, such considerations are beneficial to the aggressor country and the Russian Orthodox Church, which are increasingly accusing Ukraine of allegedly violating constitutional norms that ensure freedom of religion for all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. In this regard, it should be emphasized that Ukraine does not abandon the fundamental principles of state-confessional relations, enshrined in the Constitution and relevant legislative acts. However, the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war “require some clarifications, which are implemented in legislative initiatives of both individual deputies and state authorities.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> L. Fylypovych. Security Challenges for Ukrainian Orthodoxy During the Russian-Ukrainian War. *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Catholica Latina*. 2024, Vol. 69, No. 2, 70.

<sup>33</sup> Закон України “Про захист конституційного ладу у сфері діяльності релігійних організацій” [Law of Ukraine “On Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Activities of Religious Organizations”]. 20.08.2024. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3894-20#Text>

<sup>34</sup> А. Колодний, Л. Филипович. Свобода релігії в Україні: виклики в часи російсько-української війни [Freedom of religion in Ukraine: Challenges During the Russian-Ukrainian War], op. cit., 115.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., op. cit., 117.



The Report of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Ukraine, published on December 31, 2024, was devoted to issues related to the above. It states that the justification for the ban on the activities of religious organizations affiliated with the Russian Federation is insufficient, since national security cannot be a sufficient basis for restricting religious freedom under international treaties, and that changes to Ukrainian legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organizations (in particular, the adoption of the Law of Ukraine “On the Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Activities of Religious Organizations”) “established disproportionate restrictions on the freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief.”<sup>36</sup>

It should be noted that the concern about the state of freedom of conscience in Ukraine expressed in the Report is generally expected, but still, as L. Fylypovych notes, that “experts do not always see the full picture. Their assessments of the state of religious freedom in Ukraine are still out of context,”<sup>37</sup> do not take into account the entire complex of circumstances that determine the corresponding actions of the state, society or church, the fact that Ukraine is in a state of war, martial law has been introduced in the country, and religion and the church are used by the aggressor quite often for other than their intended purpose—not to satisfy the religious needs of believers and exercise their rights and freedoms in this area, but as a weapon in a hybrid war against Ukraine. It is Russia, that through its aggression commits numerous crimes against religious freedoms, and it and the Russian Orthodox Church under its control are the greatest threat to them. Under these conditions, the Ukrainian state is obliged to protect its citizens from the destructive influence of the aggressor state, which is carried out, in particular, using religious institutions “as an instrument of global expansion and armed invasion to destroy Ukraine as a state and nation,” when Russian religious centers, primarily the centers of the Russian Orthodox Church “cannot be considered as religious structures but as political or government structures.”<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, the state cannot fail to react to the activities of religious organizations in Ukraine that maintain ties with their centers on the territory of the aggressor country, activities that may pose a threat to national security. In view of this, representatives of official state institutions of Ukraine, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, did not

<sup>36</sup> Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine. *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*. 31.12.2024. URL: <https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/2024-12-31%20HCHR%2041st%20periodic%20report%20on%20Ukraine.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> L. Fylypovych. “UKRAINE: Religious freedom in Ukraine under Moscow’s rule and Kyiv’s rule,” op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> M. Vasin. “Religion as a Key Front of Russian Aggression Against Ukraine,” in *War in Ukraine. Theological, Ethical and Historical Reflections*. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 2025, 121.



agree with the assessments expressed in the Report as such, as they generally do not correspond to the real state of affairs. The UN's allegations of Ukraine's alleged restriction of religious freedoms were rejected, as the aforementioned law has a completely legitimate purpose and provides for a democratic procedure in which the decision is left to the court. And despite the existence of some problems in the field of religious freedom in Ukraine, such as ensuring the right to alternative service during martial law, the fundamental rights and freedoms of believers and religious communities are guaranteed and properly ensured. In general, "the state's efforts are not aimed at restricting the right of Ukrainian citizens to freedom of conscience and religion, but at breaking the subordination of religious organizations to religious centers in an aggressor state."<sup>39</sup>

And the Law of Ukraine "On Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Activities of Religious Organizations" does not provide for the banning of any existing church in Ukraine, although it does not allow the subordination of religious organizations located in our country to leading centers abroad, primarily in Russia, whose activities are openly anti-Ukrainian in nature and are aimed at the destruction of Ukrainian statehood and the erasure of Ukrainian identity. The state does not seek to destroy the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, but it requires it to sever ties with the Russian Orthodox Church so that the church is free from any external influence, especially influence from a hostile state. If the UOC (as well as other religious organizations affiliated with Russian centers) does not follow the law and, in the event of proving its affiliation with the ROC and providing the relevant order of the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, does not fulfill the requirements specified therein, then the state institution has the right to raise the issue of terminating the church's activities in Ukraine in court. Perhaps the requirement seems somewhat harsh, but it is justified in conditions of war and open confrontation with the aggressor, and there are also good reasons for such actions by the authorities. Such reasons, according to the Head of the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience V. Yelenskyi, are, firstly, the presence of a legitimate goal, which in this case is to limit the subversive activities of the Russian Orthodox Church on Ukrainian territory. It is also important that decisions are made in a manner acceptable to a democratic society. And according to the Law of Ukraine "On Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Activities of Religious Organizations", the most democratic procedure is provided for, when the court and only the court has the right to make the final decision. The law should also not be discriminatory in nature, when different

<sup>39</sup> The Churches and the War, op. cit., 241.

legal requirements and criteria are established for different confessions. The legislative requirements here are the same for all religious organizations, which are likely to have connections with the relevant centers in the aggressor country. Finally, it is fundamentally important that the law does not burden a person's conscience, does not require them to renounce their religious beliefs or change their faith. And the state does not impose any such conditions that would burden the conscience of believers. The only, in fact, requirement for the UOC is to break ties with the instigator of Russian aggression on Ukrainian lands, the Russian Orthodox Church. And subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate is not part of the Orthodox faith, and having broken with it, a believer does not cease to be Orthodox.<sup>40</sup> Thus, this law is aimed at putting an end to the activities of the ROC in Ukraine, and not at banning the UOC. At the same time, the state does not require the UOC and its supporters to renounce Orthodoxy, change the language of the liturgy or the calendar. All that is required is to sever ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, which, according to a resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, is "an ideological extension of Vladimir Putin's regime complicit in war crimes and crimes against humanity conducted in the name of the Russian Federation and the *Russkiy Mir* ideology."<sup>41</sup> And if the Ukrainian Orthodox Church affiliated with the ROC withdraws from its membership, makes a corresponding statement and provides the necessary documents, then the current law, regarding the termination of the activities of a religious organization, will not apply to it. At the same time, the withdrawal from subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate will not mean the loss of legitimacy by the church, but, on the contrary, will allow it to function as an independent religious organization and in the future may contribute to the emergence of a single local Orthodox Church in Ukraine. The people of Ukraine are interested in this, and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is also ready for dialogue and unity. But the path to this is, of course, very difficult.

Currently, despite public declarations of independence, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church maintains formal and canonical ties with the Russian Orthodox Church. Back in 2023, the fact of such affiliation, the UOC's entry into the Russian Orthodox Church, was confirmed in the Conclusion of a religious expertise conducted by religious scholars. At that time, church representatives refused to participate in the work of the expert group and to explain their position on the issues under study. The experts established that the UOC continues to be in a relationship of subordination to the ROC as a part to the whole; the adoption of a new version

<sup>40</sup> Р. РОМАНЮК [R. Romaniuk], op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Alexei Navalny's death and the need to counter Vladimir Putin's totalitarian regime and its war on democracy, op. cit.

of the Statute on Governance of the UOC and the Resolution of the UOC Council did not lead to a break in the church-canonical connection of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the Russian Orthodox Church; the hierarchs of the UOC remain participants in the Local and Bishops' Councils of the ROC; no documents or actions that would indicate the transformation of the UOC into an independent religious organization in relation to the ROC were discovered by the members of the expert group.<sup>42</sup> Later, already on the basis of the Law of Ukraine "On Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Activities of Religious Organizations," the issue was thoroughly studied during May-July 2025 by experts as part of the study initiated by the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, which confirmed the above-mentioned status, namely the subordination of the UOC to the ROC. And, as a result, based on the results of the study on the presence of signs of affiliation of the Kyiv Metropolis of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with a foreign religious organization, the activities of which are prohibited on the territory of Ukraine, the Kyiv Metropolis of the UOC was issued an Order on the elimination of violations of the legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organizations. According to it, in order to fulfill the requirements of the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, the leadership of the UOC MP was to provide by August 18, 2025, decisions of the highest church authorities regarding the withdrawal of the UOC from the structure of the ROC, the loss of validity for the UOC of all provisions of the ROC statute, the withdrawal of clergy, monks, and nuns of the UOC from the composition of the ROC Synod, the Bishops' and Local Councils of the ROC, the Inter-Council Presence of the ROC, synodal departments, and other governing and church-canonical bodies of the ROC, as well as canonical subdivisions of the ROC, the recognition as invalid of the decisions adopted by the ROC on the annexation of the UOC dioceses and the appointment of the ROC heads of the diocesan departments of the UOC. And the head of the UOC, Metropolitan Onufriy, was obliged to publicly declare orally or in writing his disagreement with the appointment to the statutory governing bodies of the ROC and to prepare a corresponding statement to terminate his powers and sever ties with the ROC.<sup>43</sup> In this way, the state clearly defined its position regarding the activity/inactivity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, its demands towards it, and

<sup>42</sup> "Висновок релігієзнавчої експертизи Статуту про управління Української Православної Церкви на наявність церковно-канонічного зв'язку з Московським патріархатом" [Conclusion of the religious expert examination of the Statute on Governance of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the presence of a church-canonical connection with the Moscow Patriarchate]. 27.01.2023. URL: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v8\\_11699-23#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v8_11699-23#Text)

<sup>43</sup> "Припис про усунення порушень законодавства про свободу совісті та релігійні організації" [Order on the elimination of violations of the legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organizations]. 17.07.2025. URL: [https://dess.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Prypys\\_KM-UPTS-12.pdf](https://dess.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Prypys_KM-UPTS-12.pdf)

expected it to take real steps towards leaving the ROC, severing canonical and other ties with the church of the aggressor country. In addition, such actions by the church could serve as confirmation of its acquisition of final independence from the Moscow Patriarchate, which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church had repeatedly declared. In the event of the church's failure to comply with the requirements of the Order, the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience had the right to go to court.

Unfortunately, in his response letter, the Primate of the UOC, Metropolitan Onufriy, confirmed the church's refusal to comply with the requirements of the order. As a result, due to the lack of grounds for concluding that the violations were eliminated or that the order was erroneous, the State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, by its decision of August 27, 2025, recognized the Kyiv Metropolis of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as affiliated with a foreign religious organization, namely the ROC, the activities of which in Ukraine are prohibited in accordance with Article 3 of the Law of Ukraine "On Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Activities of Religious Organizations." This decision was officially notified to the Kyiv Metropolis and those religious organizations that are part of it or are associated with it. The State Service of Ukraine on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience also filed a lawsuit with the court to terminate the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). And now it is the court, as it should be in a democratic society, that will make a decision on this issue. It should be noted that if the court terminates the activities of the Kyiv Metropolis of the UOC, this will not mean that all parishes and communities in Ukraine belonging to this church will be closed or forced to move to some other church. The Kyiv Metropolis of the UOC will indeed be deprived of the status of a legal entity and will lose its legal personality; accordingly, the parishes of this church will not have a center, but the parishes themselves can remain independent and act autonomously, and their members "can continue to practice their faith freely and hold worship services without the status of a legal entity."<sup>44</sup>

The actions and initiatives of state institutions under these conditions should not be considered as manifestations of an attack on a certain religion, persecution for faith, because "the state does not examine the religion, criticizing its position, and not even the political views and ideological priorities of the bearers of a certain religious doctrine, but their actions caused

<sup>44</sup> Vasin. op. cit., 120.

by such views.”<sup>45</sup> This is a situation where the state, in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, relying on the norms of Ukrainian legislation, which in particular relate to issues of ensuring national security, has the right and grounds to “suspend the activities of such organizations and their members, without violating freedom of religion, the right to perform rituals and membership in the organization.”<sup>46</sup> By creating conditions for the realization of the right of every person to religious freedom and to profess the value system of his or her choice, the state and society must also “take care of the consequences of the division of Orthodoxy in Ukraine,” which appears as a serious factor of danger.<sup>47</sup>

In this regard, it is worth noting that the Ukrainian state, as a consistent supporter of human rights and freedoms, is not interested in destroying the architecture of religious life that has been formed over the years, in restricting freedom of religion or belief, and in aggravating state-church relations. At the same time, it “cannot allow the presence on its territory of agents of the “Russian world”—those who fight against an independent and sovereign state, especially in wartime.”<sup>48</sup>

The cessation of the church’s activities is not the best option for resolving the issue of state-church relations and, of course, it is better for both sides that it does not come to this. But in the realities of war, there must be a guarantee that “the church has no financial, political, or economic contact with the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Russia,”<sup>49</sup>—here we can completely agree with J. Casanova. On the other hand, under these conditions it is important to respect the rights and freedoms of believers and religious communities, because their membership in the UOC-MP is not an automatic and unconditional evidence that they are not patriots of Ukraine and see themselves on the side of the aggressor. Believers of this church as citizens of Ukraine have equal rights with other citizens of our country. And the state must stand guard over the religious rights and freedoms of all citizens of Ukraine, regardless of their religious affiliation. But the state must also guarantee national security and cannot ignore the activities of institutions that may pose a potential threat to this security. If the UOC (MP) is ready to prove the opposite, if its leaders “want to be respected, then they should clearly state that everything that Kirill says is anathema and heresy, not Christianity... those churches that want to operate on the territory of Ukraine must adopt all laws and rules of coexistence for the

<sup>45</sup> Колодний, Филипович. “Свобода релігії в Україні: виклики в часи російсько-української війни” [Freedom of religion in Ukraine: Challenges During the Russian-Ukrainian War], op. cit., 121.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Fylypovych. Security Challenges for Ukrainian Orthodoxy During the Russian-Ukrainian War, op. cit., 75.

<sup>48</sup> Fylypovych. UKRAINE: Religious freedom in Ukraine under Moscow’s rule and Kyiv’s rule, op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Ульяновська [M. Ulianovska], op. cit.

security of the state in the context of war and must very clearly show themselves as patriots of Ukraine, not Russia.”<sup>50</sup>

The task facing the authorities is not easy and extremely responsible. It is very important not to make a mistake in this situation, to take into account the interests of all stakeholders—the state, Ukrainian society, believers, the Church (if it is ready to cooperate with the state authorities in fulfilling the requirements of current legislation). At the same time, it is necessary to approach the adoption of the necessary decisions very carefully so that they comply not only with Ukrainian legislation, but also with the fundamental principles of authoritative international documents on issues of religious freedom or belief.

## Conclusions

In summary, we can state significant differences in the state of affairs with religious rights and freedoms in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian lands and territories under the control of the Ukrainian state. The occupation authorities continue to restrict, and often prohibit, the activities of religious organizations that have an independent position or support the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The aggressor, with the active support and blessing of the Russian Orthodox Church, grossly violates the rights of believers and the basic principles of freedom of conscience guaranteed by international law, and in order to intimidate and exert influence and control over the local population, persecutes, tortures, and even deprives the lives of clergymen, destroys religious buildings, etc.

On the other hand, despite the war realities, Ukraine continues to make every effort to protect and promote religious freedom and strictly adheres to the norms of international law governing freedom of religion or belief and seeks to provide the necessary legal framework for religious pluralism in Ukrainian territory. An important issue that the authorities are actively concerned with is the status of religious organizations in Ukraine that are affiliated with foreign, primarily Russian, centers. In times of war, there must be certainty in their status, position, and activities. Given that the ROC is an instrument of war, the ideological inspirer of the imperialist policy of the Russian authorities, based on the “values of the Russian world,” it is impossible and unacceptable for churches in Ukraine to have any connection with this religious organization of the aggressor country. When taking appropriate steps to resolve this urgent issue, it is extremely important for the Ukrainian authorities to adhere to the norms of Ukrainian legislation and relevant international documents on freedom of religion or belief, to find a

<sup>50</sup> УЛЬЯНОВСЬКА [M. Ulianova], op. cit.



balance between the needs of national security and ensuring the religious rights and freedoms of believers.

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