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## FEATURES OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

*The article explores the functioning of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It highlights the unique position of the UOC, which finds itself at the intersection of various political centers' interests and faces pressure both from the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian government. The article presents the process of current internal changes within the UOC and their consequences, such as complete separation from the Russian Orthodox Church and extensive humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians affected by armed conflicts. The dynamics of the relationship between the UOC and the Ukrainian government are discussed, as well as the current state of these relations.*

*The article discusses the reasons why the church seeks independence and thoroughly analyzes the new Statute of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The new statute reflects the need for a more flexible structure, enabling the UOC to make its own decisions without external influence. This step has caused dissatisfaction within the Russian Orthodox Church, which considers the UOC as its canonical territory. The informal pressure on the UOC from the Russian Orthodox Church is also described and analyzed in the article. Additionally, the article thoroughly examines the complex relationship between the UOC and the Ukrainian government, often characterized by tension. In some cases, the Ukrainian authorities resort to unlawful methods of pressuring the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, drawing criticism from believers, foreign journalists, and politicians.*

*One of the key parts of the article is the analysis of legislative initiatives concerning the UOC. In the current political climate in Ukraine, there have been initiatives aimed at limiting the role of the UOC or even excluding it from society. The article examines the content of these bills and their potential consequences for religious freedom.*

*Overall, the article provides a comprehensive study of the current situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church amidst the Russian-Ukrainian war. It emphasizes the need to understand the intricate relationships between the UOC, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Ukrainian government to present readers with an objective picture of events and their implications for believers and society as a whole.*

**Keywords:** Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian government, religion and politics, Russian-Ukrainian war.

For over a year and a half, Ukraine has been in a state of war. This circumstance affects all areas of Ukrainian life to a greater or lesser extent. Even the religious sphere has not been spared from changes. The religious landscape of Ukraine, already quite unsettled, has practically exploded. Questions of self-identification, national/religious ideology, and political orientation have resulted in numerous conflicts, where the stakes are movable and immovable property, people's minds, and the very existence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). That is why any research regarding the current religious situation in Ukraine is incredibly relevant.

The purpose of this article is to comprehensively describe the situation in which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church found itself and to highlight the reasons behind this state.

This article will focus on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the largest religious organization in Ukraine, which finds itself at the center of the struggle between various factions. Hostile interests, concepts of the future, and paradigms of thinking clash around the UOC and within the church itself. Here are just a few levels that can be distinguished within this complex and multi-layered situation:

1. Geopolitical: the struggle between the conditional West and the conditional East represented by the United States and Russia. In this context, the UOC is viewed by both sides as an instrument of Russia's political and ideological influence. Whether the UOC considers itself part of the conditional "Russian camp" is a separate question, which will be addressed in this article.

2. Political: the struggle between Ukraine and Russia, which has now escalated into a full-scale war. Here, too, the UOC is viewed by both sides as an instrument of Russia's political and ideological influence.

3. Internal political: the struggle between internal political forces in Ukraine, which may exploit the UOC for their own purposes.

4. Ideological: As a member of the global Orthodoxy, the UOC proclaims a set of values and offers a specific paradigm of thinking to its followers. This paradigm includes general Christian principles (the Ten Commandments, preaching and living according to the Gospel, etc.) as well as characteristics that have developed within the UOC in response to interaction with Ukrainian society and authorities. Today, given the strained relations between various political centers, the most important features of the UOC's ideological paradigm are its involvement in other ideological schemes (pan-Slavism, Ukrainian nationalism, traditionalism, neo-Marxist left-wing ideologies, etc.).

5. International-Orthodox: Ukrainian Christian religious organizations have found themselves at the center of a discussion sparked by the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The formation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), the conflict over the ownership of Ukrainian dioceses between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the so-called "new ecclesiology" of the Phanar, the potential union of Rome and Constantinople, the seizures of UOC temples by representatives of the OCU, inter-church conflicts over disputed territories – this complex of Orthodox problems has materialized precisely on the Ukrainian religious field. It may be worth talking about a crisis in world Orthodoxy, with the UOC at its epicenter.

6. Intra-Orthodox: The internal religious life of Ukraine has been and continues to be tense since the Independence. The revival of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the establishment of the UOC-KP and the UAOC, their conflicts over property with the UOC and among themselves, and so on. Sometimes the tension subsided, sometimes it rose again. Currently, against the backdrop of war, the tension has reached an incredibly high level, and once again, the UOC is directly involved in dramatic events.

Certainly, the above-mentioned levels of the major conflict should be further elaborated as they are much deeper and more complex than the brief description provided. However, it is impossible to do so in the format of an article, and each point should be expanded upon in a scholarly monograph. Let us proceed directly to the main content of this research.

To understand the peculiarities of the functioning of Ukrainian Orthodox Church during the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is necessary to first clarify the status of this organization. Is the UOC an independent church or does it have a certain form of dependence on the Moscow Patriarchate? To answer this question, we need to examine the official documents of the UOC. As such, let's consider the Charter (Tomos) on the establishment of the UOC and its Statute.

"The Charter of Alexius II, by God's mercy, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, to Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine, Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church" – this document is declarative. It states that such a structure as the UOC is being created, and two things are said about its status: "...to be henceforth an independent and self-governing Ukrainian Orthodox Church" and "The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, united through our Russian Orthodox Church with the United Holy Sobor and Apostolic Church..." [1]. Thus, the UOC seems to be independent and self-governing, but at the same time, it is not a separate local Church. There is an obvious contradiction.

If we consider this document from the perspective of an Orthodox theologian-canonist, several questions arise. The main question is: what is meant by an "independent and self-governing" church? In canonical law, there is a specific term that denotes an independent and self-governing church in the diptychs of all Orthodox churches – "autocephaly." However, this term is not used in the Charter. Perhaps the specific rights and privileges that the UOC has obtained will clarify the situation. But the Charter does not mention anything about them, whereas another official document – the Statute – does. We will discuss this below, but for now, let's note that there is room for interpretation of the UOC's status in the Charter.

Speaking of the Statute, it is worth noting that such a document is a new phenomenon for Orthodox churches. Ancient churches were governed differently, and the introduction of a Statute for a local church is a response to the requirements of modern-day political institutions. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) adopted its first Statute in 1988. The UOC approved its version of this document in 1990 at its own Sobor (Council), and no one (specifically, the Moscow Patriarchate or Patriarch Alexius II) additionally approved this Statute.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church made amendments to its own Statute three times: in 1992, 2007, and 2022. These cases are important for understanding the UOC's status because if the reform of such an important document requires approval from another decision-making center, it indicates dependence.

The amendment of the UOC Statute in 1992 was associated with the personality of Filaret Denisenko. He could not become the Patriarch of Moscow because at the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in June 1990, Alexy II was elected as the Patriarch, so he decided to create another religious structure, which is referred to as a "church schism" in theological language. The old version of the Statute did not allow for the removal of the current head, who, in the eyes of the UOC, had committed a canonical offense. Therefore, the bishops changed it at the

Kharkiv Council which took place in May 1992. After that, Metropolitan Vladimir Sabodan was elected as the Primate, and Patriarch Alexius II sent him a so-called blessed letter, recognizing his new status. However, there were no requirements for the Moscow Patriarchate to verify the changes to the Statute. From this event, it can be concluded that Patriarch Alexius, by recognizing the decisions of the Kharkiv Council and the primacy of Metropolitan Vladimir, implicitly acknowledged the right of the UOC to independently change its own Statute.

At the UOC Hierarchical Council in 2007, amendments were also made to its Statute. The fact of unauthorized changes to the Statute is important because in the ROC Statute, Chapter 8, Clause 17 explicitly states that such actions must be approved by the Patriarch of Moscow. However, the UOC Synod did not submit any request to the Moscow Patriarchate and simply adopted these amendments, which resulted in a misunderstanding between the leadership of the UOC and the ROC. Nevertheless, it had no noticeable influence on the situation, and everyone remained as they were.

Finally, the last update of the UOC Statute occurred at the Theophany Council in 2022. If we compare the Statute before the 2022 Council and after, the following picture emerges. All references to the ROC and the Moscow Patriarch have been removed from the document except in Chapter 1, Clause 1 [2], which mentions the Charter on the independence of the UOC issued by Patriarch Alexius II. The paragraph stating that the UOC is a self-governing part of the ROC has been removed. Now, the decisions of the ROC Councils and its Statute have no power over the UOC. The Metropolitan of Kyiv left the ROC Synod. Mentioning of the name of the ROC Patriarch during services is no longer obligatory.

In other words, based on the UOC Statute, this church is no longer related to the Moscow Patriarchate. However, the ROC Statute contains numerous provisions that regulate the life and activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: in Chapters 1, 8, 10, and others.

According to the updated Statute, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has the following attributes of autocephaly:

1. Independent election of its own Primate and diocesan bishops.
2. The right to establish its own parishes and dioceses abroad.
3. An independent highest church court.
4. The right to autonomously address any internal issues and maintain church-diplomatic relations with other local Orthodox Churches.
5. Independent canonization of saints.
6. The administration of its own sacred myhr.

In addition to the above, it should be noted that after the 2022 Council, the Primate of the UOC commemorates all Orthodox hierarchs in the diptych during the Divine Liturgy as the head of an independent Church. When these attributes are combined, it can be concluded that the UOC is autocephalous in everything except for its name.

The Russian Orthodox Church, which considers Ukraine its canonical territory and the UOC its autonomous part, is dissatisfied with this situation. However, there has been no official decision from the Synod of the ROC that would assess the actions of the UOC. The reason for this is the impossibility of constructive dialogue in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Nevertheless, the Moscow Patriarchate has taken a series of actions indicating its intention to keep the UOC in a subordinate position. This is

signaled by public media, officially or unofficially affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate (social media pages on Facebook and VK, YouTube channels, or groups on the Telegram app). The actions concerning the dioceses of the UOC, specifically the incorporation of the Rovenkovsk and Berdyansk dioceses, as well as the dioceses of Crimea, which were previously under the jurisdiction of the UOC, also indicate this. The acts of incorporation of the Rovenkovsk diocese and the dioceses of Crimea can be conditionally considered canonical. According to paragraph 7 of the Resolution of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 2022 [3], due to the war, diocesan bishops can make decisions within the competence of the Episcopal Council or the Primate of the Church. The bishops of the aforementioned dioceses themselves transferred to the ROC. The voluntariness of this step may raise doubts. Proximity to the hostilities, civil unrest, and pressure from Russian security services are just a partial list of reasons that may have compelled the bishops of the aforementioned dioceses to join the ROC. However, the transfer occurred officially voluntarily. This cannot be said about the Berdyansk diocese, whose hierarch was against joining the Moscow Patriarchate. Thus, the transfer of this diocese happened contrary to the canons, even considering the realities of the war.

Summing up the above, one can understand the tense nature of the relationship between the UOC and the ROC. The UOC is currently trying to consolidate its proclaimed independence and autonomy, which is strongly opposed by the ROC. ROC is attempting to prevent this, so far using unofficial methods such as re-subordination of dioceses, which is considered a hostile action.

Despite this, in the eyes of the Ukrainian government, the UOC is considered as part of the ROC, an instrument of influence by the enemy and the promotion of enemy ideology. Therefore, the Ukrainian government treats the UOC accordingly and publicly declares its goal to eliminate this organization. The administration of the President, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, and representatives of local authorities continue the process of fighting against the UOC.

Several methods can be highlighted through which the Ukrainian government is fighting against the UOC. The two main methods are the creation of discriminatory laws that contradict the Constitution and raiding the seizure of UOC's immovable property, in which the Ukrainian authorities may be directly or indirectly involved.

Currently, there are eleven draft laws registered in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine aimed at restricting or prohibiting the activities of the UOC. The most notable among them are draft law No. 2662 (known as the "renaming draft law") [5], draft law No. 8262 [6], and draft law No. 8371. The first of these draft laws is crucial for the UOC, as it concerns the name "Ukrainian Orthodox Church." According to this draft law, if a religious organization has a decision-making center in an aggressor country, it should be reflected in the official name of that organization. Thus, according to draft law 2662, the UOC should be renamed to ROCU – Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. The change of the official name would require amending the state registration of the UOC and re-registering all lavras, monasteries, parishes, and all legal entities affiliated with the UOC. The Kyiv Metropolis strongly disagreed with draft law 2662 since the decision-making center of this Church is located in Kyiv.

As of today, the question of renaming the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is still in court. By the court decision dated April 22, 2019, in case No. 640/4748/19, the petition

of the Kyiv Metropolis for securing an administrative claim was satisfied, which prohibited making changes to the registry and renaming religious organizations of the UOC. Thus, according to this court decision, there is a ban on any registration actions regarding the information contained in the Unified State Register of Legal Entities, Individual Entrepreneurs, and Public Formations regarding the religious organizations of the UOC. This means that the UOC cannot register new parishes, monasteries, and so on. On May 4, 2023, due to the liquidation of the District Administrative Court of Kyiv, the case was transferred to the Kyiv City District Administrative Court, which decided to reconsider it. As a result of the court's work, a decision was made to rename the UOC. However, the Kyiv Metropolis disagreed with this decision and pointed out a number of legal violations that were made during the consideration of this court case [11]. The UOC filed an appeal, which took place on June 14, 2023. As a result of the session of the Sixth Administrative Court of Appeals, the demands of the UOC were fully satisfied [12]. Thus, the court decision to recognize the Ministry of Culture's order dated January 25, 2019, which obliges to display the connection with the Russian Orthodox Church in the names of the UOC religious organizations, was declared invalid. For now, the name of the UOC will not be changed, but it is likely that the saga of renaming the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will continue in the near future.

The next bill that significantly affects the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is numbered 8262. It establishes a procedure through which a religious community can change its membership in a religious organization. The process is as follows: the religious community gathers for a meeting, a vote takes place, and if two-thirds of the community members express a desire to switch to another religious structure, a protocol is drawn up and sent to local authorities. The parish (the religious building, auxiliary buildings, land, other structures, and all movable property) changes its jurisdiction. In theory, this mechanism of transition is considered quite democratic. However, practice shows that in the presence of administrative resources, this mechanism can be easily abused. This occurs quite simply: instead of collecting the religious community's opinions, the territorial community is gathered, which includes the land where the monastery or parish of the UOC is located. It is particularly easy to manipulate this process with those UOC communities that do not keep official membership lists.

There have been few voluntary transitions, but a significant number of illegal ones have taken place using the above-described mechanism of substituting the religious community with the territorial one. Almost all transitions in the villages of Western Ukraine happened this way. However, such unlawful transitions are impossible without the deliberate support of local authorities since the fraud can be easily detected. Therefore, the UOC is forced to take legal action, and quite often, these cases are won in court. On the other hand, the OCU (Orthodox Church of Ukraine), which carries out the transfers of churches, almost always enjoys informal support from local authorities and often simply does not comply with court decisions. This is sometimes acknowledged by the representatives of local authorities themselves [15].

Special attention should be given to Bill № 8371, dated January 19, 2023, "On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Activities of Religious Organizations in Ukraine," which proposes a complete ban on the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Ukrainian government presented Bill № 8371 to the Verkhovna Rada, which introduces certain changes to the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations." In other words, it partially restricts the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church based on its affiliation with a religious center in an aggressor state. The Main Scientific and Expert Administration of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine presented its opinion [7] on this bill with comments spanning five pages.

In this document, experts express their concerns regarding the fact that Bill No. 8371 makes the legal status of a religious organization operating in Ukraine dependent on the content of the charter of a foreign religious organization outside of Ukraine in a state that has carried out armed aggression against Ukraine. Moreover, the legal consequences fall on the subject located in Ukraine. Therefore, it is absurd to judge the Ukrainian Orthodox Church based on how it is described in the charter of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Main Scientific and Expert Administration of the Verkhovna Rada explicitly emphasizes this.

Alongside the adoption of convenient laws, Ukrainian authorities, especially regional ones, continue the process of seizing religious buildings, including temples, churches, and monasteries. According to statistics, in 2023, 63 churches transitioned from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the number reaches 214. Most of them were taken over [8]. However, these figures are not impressive. The UOC has over 12500 registered parishes, and such losses are not significant.

Nevertheless, in recent months, the situation surrounding the temples has significantly escalated. Provocations occur during the seizures, and false news spreads through the media. Another method of seizure that has emerged recently is the capture of the land plot under a religious building. Such cases are becoming more common. For example, the Rivne City Council acted in this manner [9], as did many other local self-government bodies.

According to Ukrainian legislation, such actions are unlawful. A local council's decision to terminate the right to permanent use of a land plot by a religious organization without any legal basis exceeds their authority and contains elements of a crime under Article 364 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine – abuse of power or official position. Legally, such action can only be taken in three cases: the liquidation of a religious community, non-targeted use of land, or voluntary refusal to use the territory.

Thus, the UOC finds itself caught between flame and fire. On one hand, the UOC has completely separated from the ROC, and the Moscow Patriarchate wants to bring this church back under its patronage. On the other hand, Ukrainian authorities consider the actions of the UOC insufficient or even fake and continue to view the UOC as an instrument of enemy propaganda.

It should be noted that the actions of the Ukrainian authorities towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are receiving corresponding assessments in intellectual and political circles in the West. For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published reports on the discrimination against the UOC in Ukraine on March 24, 2023 [10] and April 30, 2023 [16], which shed a negative light on the Ukrainian authorities. In Russia, videos depicting beatings of clergy, seizure of churches, and other incidents serve as another argument to justify their military aggression. For instance, Russia initiated

a meeting of the United Nations Security Council dedicated to the persecution of the UOC by the Ukrainian authorities [14], which provoked a strong reaction from official representatives of Ukraine at the UN and other officials.

Despite the precarious situation, the UOC has publicly stated multiple times where it stands in the armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Metropolitan Onuphrius, the head of the UOC, blessed everyone to defend Ukraine on the first day of the war [13]. Decisions of the UOC Synods and Councils on February 28, 2022, May 12, 2022, May 27, 2022, and other sessions consistently declare support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and call for the defense of the state. Bishops, priests, and laypeople of the UOC have publicly expressed the same sentiments multiple times. The UOC, through its members and parishes, aids the army and people in difficult circumstances due to the war through various means: humanitarian assistance, financial aid, delivery of military equipment, blood donations, and much more. Numerous posts on the official page of the UOC and its dioceses highlight the amount, location, and timing of humanitarian aid deliveries. Faithful members of the UOC join the Armed Forces of Ukraine and give their lives in defense of their country. This creates an interesting contradiction: these individuals die for a country that unjustly accuses them and their Church of betrayal. Clearly, such circumstances negatively affect the morale of soldiers.

Summing up the activities and official position of the UOC, it becomes evident that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is currently on the side of Ukraine and is making significant efforts to assist Ukrainians. Despite the publicly expressed distrust, the Ukrainian government has confirmed the UOC's position several times. For example, the Security Service of Ukraine recently conducted searches at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra [4] and other monasteries, churches, as well as homes and apartments where representatives of the clergy and bishops of the UOC reside. However, no weapons, militants, ammunition, or other evidence of assistance from the UOC or its individual representatives to the Russian army were found.

In conclusion, the following picture emerges. On one hand, the UOC has distanced itself from the ROC, and the Moscow Patriarchate is prepared to use force to regain control over the "rebellious province." The Ukrainian authorities clearly consider the UOC as an enemy element and employ various methods, both legal and illegal, to combat it. Meanwhile, the UOC publicly and practically declares its allegiance to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. Within the UOC itself, the same process is taking place as within Ukrainian society – the strengthening of national self-identification and overall unity.

What is meant here is that before the war within the UOC (primarily the top leadership, while ordinary laypeople viewed it more simply), three main currents could be distinguished. The pro-Western one, mainly of a liberal nature. Its representatives oriented themselves towards the West, supported the ideas of ecumenism, and so on. The pro-Eastern one, mainly traditionalist. Its representatives oriented themselves towards the East, towards the connection with the ROC and Russia as a political center. The centrist one, whose representatives advocated the idea of an independent UOC, detached from both the West and the East. However, the majority of hierarchs, clergy, and laity of the UOC could be classified as the gray mass – people who paid little attention to such global issues and focused on their immediate tasks. This internal division emerged within the UOC almost immediately under the

pressure of external circumstances, namely the creation of the UOC KP by Filaret Denisenko, followed by a wave of seizures and conflicts with this structure, unfriendly relations with the national-oriented government, and so on. The coming to power of Petro Poroshenko, the creation of the OCU, and the new wave of conflicts and seizures of temples only reinforced this division into three currents within the UOC. However, with the start of the war, the situation began to change. The factor of armed aggression by the Russian Federation was too significant, and it influenced everything, including the self-consciousness of the UOC's hierarchs, clergy, and laity. All residents of Ukraine, regardless of the region they lived in, felt themselves as part of the country that was attacked by an external enemy. Action engendered reaction – the strengthening of national self-identification among Ukrainians, regardless of their previous political views. The same thing happened with the Church, as a structure deeply rooted in Ukrainian society. Representatives of all three currents described above, as well as the "gray mass" of those undecided in the face of war, were forced to make a choice. Some bishops of the UOC, namely Metropolitan of Simferopol and Crimea Lazar Schwets, Bishop of Yalta Nestor Donenko, Bishop of Bakhchisaray Kallinik Chernyshev, and Archbishop of Rovenky and Sverdlovsk Arkadiy Taranov, made their choice in favor of Russia and left the UOC, transferring their own dioceses to the Moscow Patriarchate. A certain percentage of laity and clergy who still maintain affiliation with Russia remained within the UOC, but they are deeply marginalized and not represented in the media field or the top governing bodies of the UOC. Another, much larger part, took a position of Ukrainian patriotism and independence from the Russian Orthodox Church. It is these people who currently constitute the absolute majority within the UOC, and the result of their activities was the Council in Theophany in 2022, which declared full independence from the ROC.

So, the three new trends within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church can be described as follows. The Moscow-aligned trend, which has almost disappeared, consists of ultra-conservatives who, for various reasons, consider the connection with the Moscow Patriarchate more important than anything else. None of the bishops of the UOC officially support this position. The conditional "gray mass" refers to people who prefer to focus on their own issues and do not have a clearly defined opinion. Similar groups exist within any large organization. Finally, the third trend consists of autocephalists, who advocate for the independence of the UOC from the Moscow Patriarchate. Currently, this is the largest trend, and the policy of complete independence is officially adopted by the UOC. Metropolitan Onufriy Berezovsky, Bishop Sylvestr Stoychev, Bishop Kliment Vecheria, and other official representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church adhere to this position. However, within this trend, individual members have different views on the future of the UOC. For example, some support active dialogue or even merging with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, while others reject this possibility. There are also undecided individuals who await the end of the war to elevate the Ukrainian issue to the international-Orthodox level, and so on.

It is essential to pay close attention to this process of internal transformation. As mentioned earlier, it encompasses the entire Ukrainian society – modern Ukrainians, regardless of their ethnicity or region of residence, now consider themselves as part of something greater, important, and even sacred. It would seem that the

same is happening with the UOC, and there is nothing surprising about it. However, that is not the case. Russia, as one side of the conflict, sees the UOC as a rebellious part of the Russian Orthodox Church that needs to be put in its place. Ukraine, as the other side of the conflict, perceives the UOC as an ideological tool of the enemy and has declared war on this Church. Support for the seizure of churches, the adoption of discriminatory laws, and the dissemination of distorted or false information about the UOC through state media resources – these are just a few instruments used by the Ukrainian government in this conflict. Under such circumstances, the UOC should have either succumbed to power and accepted the demands of Ukrainian officials or at least covertly aligned with the Russian side. However, this is not happening, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, despite enormous external pressure, both in words and deeds, demonstrates that it is the Church of its people.

In conclusion, the functioning of the UOC under the current conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war can be summarized as follows. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church finds itself caught between a rock and a hard place, in the very center of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. On one hand, the ROC considers the UOC its rebellious part. Although the Moscow Patriarchate does not officially recognize this, unofficial pressure is exerted on the UOC by employing PR techniques that emphasize its connection to the ROC in the media space, thus creating new precedents for pressuring the UOC in Ukraine. Additionally, the UOC's eparchies located in the occupied territories are being taken away. On the other hand, the Ukrainian government perceives the UOC solely as an ideological tool of the enemy and fights against this religious structure, often using unlawful methods. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, through words and actions, shows that it stands with its people. This is evidenced by the extensive assistance the Church has provided to the army and citizens of Ukraine. Significant internal changes are taking place within the UOC, with the overwhelming majority of laypeople, clergy, and the episcopate leaning toward complete independence from Moscow under external pressures. This was manifested in the 2022 Council in Kyiv, which removed all mentions of the Moscow Patriarchate from the UOC's statute and effectively proclaimed the UOC's independence from the ROC. However, this is not enough for the Ukrainian authorities, and internal tension continues to grow within Ukrainian society. Instead of utilizing the UOC for the benefit of the country, senior Ukrainian officials are fighting against it [17], as indicated by President Volodymyr Zelensky's recent statement and the proposed bill. [18]

In general, the current situation with the UOC is detrimental to Ukrainian society. Creating internal conflicts amidst external military aggression is an unwise decision. However, war dictates its own rules, and the UOC has become a hostage to a complex political situation. It is difficult to predict how this "war" phase will end for the Ukrainian Church, as war is inherently unpredictable. Nevertheless, all the prerequisites for a peaceful resolution of the internal Ukrainian conflict on religious grounds are present. Let us hope that these prerequisites will be seized upon.

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## ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ФУНКЦІОНУВАННЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЇ ЦЕРКВИ В УМОВАХ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

*Досліджено функціонування Української Православної Церкви (УПЦ) на тлі Російсько-Української війни. Вона висвітлює унікальне становище УПЦ, яка перебуває на перетині інтересів різних політичних центрів та зазнає тиску як із боку Руської Православної Церкви, так і від українського уряду. Описано процес поточних внутрішніх змін в УПЦ та їх наслідки, такі як поена відокремленість від Руської Православної Церкви та розширена гуманітарна допомога українцям, постраждалим від збройного конфлікту. Описується динаміка взаємин між УПЦ та українським урядом, а також поточний стан цих відносин.*

*Розглянуто причини, чому Церква прагне незалежності, та детально проаналізовано новий Статут Української Православної Церкви, який відображає потребу в більш гнучкій структурі, що дозволить УПЦ приймати власні рішення без зовнішнього впливу. Цей крок спричинив незадоволення Руської Православної Церкви, яка розглядає УПЦ як свою канонічну територію. Також описано та проаналізовано неофіційний тиск на УПЦ з боку Руської Православної Церкви. Крім того, детально досліджено складні взаємини між УПЦ та українським урядом, які часто характеризуються напруженням. У деяких випадках українська влада вдається до неправомірних методів тиску на Українську Православну Церкву, що викликає критику з боку вірян, закордонних журналістів та політиків.*

*Одним із ключових елементів статті є аналіз законодавчих ініціатив, що стосуються УПЦ. У нинішньому політичному кліматі в Україні існують ініціативи, спрямовані на обмеження ролі УПЦ або навіть виключення її з громадянської. Досліджено зміст цих законопроектів та їх потенційні наслідки для релігійної свободи.*

*Здійснено всебічне дослідження поточної ситуації Української Православної Церкви в контексті Російсько-Української війни. Воно акцентує увагу на складних взаємовідносинах між УПЦ, Руською Православною Церквою та українським урядом для того, щоб представити читачам об'єктивну картину подій та їх наслідки для вірян та суспільства загалом.*

**Ключові слова:** Українська Православна Церква, Православна Церква України, Руська Православна Церква, Український уряд, релігія і політика, Російсько-Українська війна.

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