

Ukrainian Orthodoxy after the Start of Russia's Great War against Ukraine

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The conservative yet diverse religious landscape of Ukraine has been evolving rapidly since February 2022. These developments include the formal renunciation by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) of its connection with the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the establishing by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) of its monastery in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. The number of communities changing their affiliation from UOC MP to OCU has also increased dramatically during this period. The onset of the conflict marked a transformative shift, elevating the role of the church from an internal matter for those directly involved to a significant factor in state policy and security.

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Religious life in Ukraine is characterized by a wide array of religious beliefs and practices in a generally conservative cultural context. This religious environment has undergone major transformations since February 2022. Primary among these has been the decision by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate to renounce its ties with the Russian Orthodox Church.

The key event precipitating this change was the unification council held in Kyiv on December 15, 2018, which established the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.¹ On that day, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate dissolved themselves and became the basis of the OCU. Representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate were also invited to participate in the council, but only two of the anticipated ten bishops showed up: Metropolitan

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¹ Deutsche Welle, "Ukrainian Orthodox church splits from Russia", <https://www.dw.com/en/ukrainian-orthodox-leaders-seal-divorce-from-russian-church/a-46755901>, accessed December 15, 2023.

Oleksandr of Pereyaslav and Vishnevsky and Metropolitan Simeon of Vinnytsia and Bar.

Following the unification council, communities from the Moscow Patriarchate began to join the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, although it was a gradual process. From early 2019 to early 2022, about 600 parishes made the transition.² In order for such a change to place, the majority of a community must vote in support of it a general meeting.

The number of “transitions” increased dramatically following the Russian invasion of February 2022, despite some obstructionist measures by the state authorities. As of June 2023, the OCU has over 8,000 parishes, exceeding the number remaining under the UOC MP.³ These are approximate figures, since exact statistics are not kept during the war. In addition, many communities of the UOC MP exist only on paper, and some remain in the occupied territories.

Before Russia first invaded Ukraine in 2014, the UOC MP was the largest religious organization in the country and boasted about 12,000 parishes.⁴ After the occupation of Crimea and Ukraine’s temporary loss of a part of Donbas, just over 10,000 parishes remained.⁵ In 2023, the numerical advantage has shifted in favor of the OCU as this process continues.

Since late 2018, the UOC MP has maintained a hostile stance towards the OCU. Representatives of the former have referred to the creation of the latter as illegal, illegitimate, and non-canonical.⁶ In 2018, in

² Tetiana Yavorska, “Karta perekhodiv hromad z moskovskoho patriarkhatu stanom na hruden 2023 roku” [“The map of transitions of communities from the Moscow Patriarchate as of December 2023”], <https://espreso.tv/skilki-gromad-uzhe-pokinulo-moskovskiy-patriarkhat-v-ukraini-karta-po-regionakh>, accessed December 25, 2023.

³ Sonya Koshkina, “Church revolution: 2022 version. To be continued”, https://en.lb.ua/news/2022/12/30/18664_church_revolution_2022_version.html, accessed December 25, 2023.

⁴ Rostyslav Hotyn, “Moskovskomu Patriarkhatu mistisia v Ukraini pislia viyny vzhe nemaie - relihiieznavets Yelenskyi” [“There is no place for the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine after the war” - religious scholar Yelenskyi], <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/rpts-tserkva-patriarkh-kyrylo-viyna-rosiyya-ukrayina-upts/31756265.html>, accessed March 16, 2023.

⁵ Koshkina, “Since February 24, about 600 communities have transferred from the UOC MP to the OCU, - Epiphany”, https://en.lb.ua/news/2022/12/30/18664_church_revolution_2022_version.html, accessed December 5, 2023.

⁶ Religious Information Service of Ukraine, “V UPC MP nazyvaiut PCU ‘narodnym lykhom’, a sebe - ‘yedyno pravylnoiu Tserkvoiu’” [“The UOC-MP calls the OCU a ‘people’s misfortune’, and itself ‘the only right Church’], <https://risu.ua/ru/v-upc-mp->

the wake of the unification council, the Russian Orthodox Church announced a break in communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This decision was supported by its “daughter” church, the UOC MP in 2018.⁷ At the Council of the UOC MP on May 27, 2022, at which the church announced that it was in fact severing ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, this decision was nonetheless confirmed.⁸

How did Ukrainian Orthodoxy React to the Great Invasion in February 2022?

On February 24, 2022, the head of the UOC MP, Metropolitan Onufriy, rushed back to Kyiv from a visit to his native Bukovyna. He immediately issued a statement that was unusually sharp for him, where he spoke out against Russia’s war on Ukraine and the “sin of fratricide.”⁹ Soon after, though, he stopped referring to the war as such and no longer named its perpetrator, instead preferring more abstract wording. The head of the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, Viktor Yelenskyi, testified to that:

It was such a shocking statement... Obviously, he considered the Russians brothers, obviously he had some signals that there would be no invasion. Many speakers of this church spoke about this [i.e., that Russia would not invade Ukraine]. Of course, he could not help but react to the despair of those priests who were under fire... All this happened in the first days of the war. But it seems to me that the clergy of this church gradually recovered, and in their rhetoric the main

nazyvayut-pcu-narodnoj-bedoj-a-sebya--edinstvenno-pravilnoj-cerkovy_u_n132220, September 14, 2023.

⁷ Sviatoslav Homenko and Anastasiia Holubeva, “RPC rozirvala stosunky z Konstantynopolem, shcho tse oznachaie” [“The Russian Orthodox Church broke off relations with Constantinople: what does this mean”], <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-russian-45874274>, accessed October 16, 2023.

⁸ Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP), “Resolutions of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of May 27, 2022”, <https://news.church.ua/2022/05/28/resolutions-council-ukrainian-orthodox-church-may-27-2022/?lang=en#2024-02-14>, accessed May 28, 2023.

⁹ Lb.ua, “Ochilnyk UPC MP zaklykav molytysya za ukrainske viisko” [“The head of the UOC MP called to pray for the Ukrainian army”], https://lb.ua/society/2022/02/24/506688_ochilnik_upts_mp_zaklikav_molitisya.html, accessed February 2, 2023.

enemy again became the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and Patriarch Bartholomew.¹⁰

In contrast, the head of the OCU, Metropolitan Epiphany, maintained a consistently pro-Ukrainian position. He reportedly did not leave Kyiv after the start of the war despite being a target for capture and execution by Russian forces, a situation faced by a host of other political, spiritual, and public figures, as well as volunteers, activists, and journalists.

St. Michael's Gold-Dome Cathedral, the residence of Metropolitan Epiphany in the center of Kyiv, was attacked several times by the so-called DRG, subversive intelligence groups that were sent into the city on the eve of the invasion. The Cathedral comprises a complex of monastic buildings founded in the 12th century,¹¹ mostly destroyed by Soviets in the 1930s (after several attempts), and rebuilt in its entirety at the beginning of the 21st century. The monastery played an important role during the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-14. On the night of November 30 to December 1, 2013, when special security forces called "Berkut" beat peaceful student protesters in the Maidan, the monastery rang its bells to wake the residents of Kyiv. On the morning of December 1st, the students who had been beaten sought refuge in Michael's, and a crowd gathered in the square in front of the monastery. A hospital was also opened inside the main church during this period.¹²

Russian forces planned to destroy another important shrine: the ancient Cathedral of St. Sophia of Kyiv, located opposite St. Michael's Golden Dome at a distance of roughly 600 meters. A relevant statement was made on March 8, 2022, by the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches.¹³

¹⁰ Sonya Koshkina, "Viktor Yelensky: «There should be no structures of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. This is public demand», https://en.lb.ua/news/2022/12/23/18676_viktor_yelensky_there_should.html, accessed December 23, 2023.

¹¹ Lb.ua, "U Mykhailivskomu sobori v Kyievi zneshkodyly dyversantiv, na terytorii znayshly vorozhi mitky" ["In St. Michael's Cathedral in Kyiv, saboteurs were neutralized, enemy markings were found on the territory"], https://lb.ua/society/2022/02/28/507351_mihaylivskomu_sobori_kiievi.html, accessed February 28, 2023.

¹² "Mykhaylivskyy sobor peretvoryly na shpytal" ["St. Michael's Cathedral was turned into a hospital"], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wglUkT42hg>, accessed December 20, 2023..

¹³ Tetiana Matiash, "Rada tserkov zaklykala zakryty nebo nad Ukrainoiu ta nadaty ZSU suchasnu tekhniku PPO" ["The Council of Churches called to close the sky over Ukraine and provide the Armed Forces with modern air defense equipment"], <https://>

The Impact of the Russian Invasion on the UOC MP

The crisis in the UOC MP preceded the Russian invasion. Certainly, a considerable number of the church's upper clergy has always held pro-Russian views,¹⁴ many having studied and worked in Russia and subsequently maintaining contact with their peers in the Russian Orthodox Church. Some even have Russian passports, a practice expressly prohibited by Ukrainian legislation.¹⁵

At the same time, many ordinary priests of the UOC MP have demonstrated a commitment to Ukrainian patriotism. After February 24, many refused to participate in the commemoration in liturgy of the Patriarch Kirill,¹⁶ who explicitly blessed Russian generals for killing Ukrainians.¹⁷ Among these priests, Andrii Pinchuk, the rector of a village church in the Dnipropetrovsk region in the east of Ukraine, became a representative voice. Pinchuk initiated the collection of signatures from fellow priests for an open letter addressed to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.¹⁸ The letter called for the convening of the "Court of the Pentarchy" to examine the actions of Patriarch Kirill (Gundjaev). The appeal found a receptive audience, because discussion about a possible "trial of the Pentarchy" for Kirill had already been underway at the

lb.ua/world/2022/03/08/508596_rada_tserkov_zaklikala_zakriti_nebo.html, accessed March 3, 2023.

¹⁴ Valentyna Mereshchuk, "Mytropolyt Onufrii zaminyv mytropolyta-vtikacha z Iziuma na yepyskopa z susidnyoi yeparkhii" ["Metropolitan Onufriy replaced the fugitive metropolitan from Izyum with a bishop from a neighboring diocese"], https://lb.ua/society/2022/09/29/531027_mitropolit_onufriy_zaminiv.html, accessed September 29, 2023.

¹⁵ Sonya Koshkina, "Prezydent Ukrainy pryzupyniv hromadianstvo 13 sviashchenykyv UPC MP - dzherela" ["The President of Ukraine suspended the citizenship of 13 priests of the UOC MP, - sources"], https://lb.ua/society/2023/01/07/541773_prezydent_ukraini_prizupiniv.html, January 07, 2023.

¹⁶ Idem, "Andriy Pinchuk: «UOC has been and will forever remain a structural unit of the Moscow Patriarchate»", https://en.lb.ua/news/2022/12/09/18687_andriy_pinchuk_uoc_has_been.html, accessed December 9, 2023.

¹⁷ Anna Pavlova, "Voiny blagoslovil. Kak tserkovnie ierarkhi otreagirovali na rech Patriarcha Kirilla, podderzhavshogo vtorzhenie Rossii v Ukrainu" ["Bless the war. How Church Hierarchs Reacted to Patriarch Kirill's Speech Supporting Russia's Invasion of Ukraine"], <https://zona.media/article/2022/03/22/patriarch>, accessed March 22, 2022.

¹⁸ Yurii Korohodskyi, "Sviashchennyky" UPC MP vymahaiut viddaty Patriarkha Kyryla pid tserkovnyi trybunal" ["Priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP) demand to hand over Patriarch Kirill to the church tribunal"], https://lb.ua/society/2022/04/11/513022_svyashchenniki_upts_mp_vimagayut_viddati.html, accessed April 11, 2023.

end of 2021. These deliberations were prompted by concerns about the Russian Orthodox Church's activities on the canonical territory of the Alexandrian Patriarchate.¹⁹ Overall, dissatisfaction within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the Russian Orthodox Church was increasing, a trend which led to the convening of a council of the UOC-MP on May 27, 2023 that would be prove to be historic.

The council was held not in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, as usual, but in the residence of Metropolitan Onufriy in the Feofania complex near Kyiv. The actions taken by the council were announced in a statement written personally by Onufriy, who did not allow his closest associate, Metropolitan Antony (Pakanich), to participate in the decision-making process. The council edited the UOC MP's statute to remove all references to the Russian Orthodox Church, and announced that UOC MP would henceforth be an "independent church."²⁰ As a justification for this decision, church representatives referred to the Decree of 1990, which Patriarch Aleksii II had issued to the then head of the Kyiv church Filaret (Denysenko).²¹ While the decree had indeed granted the Kyiv church broad rights in matters of management and administration, it did not necessarily provide for its independence. In fact, the term "independent church" does not exist in Orthodox canon law, which only refers to autocephalous and autonomous churches.

After the May 27th council, the UOC MP no longer commemorated Patriarch Kirill. At the same time, Metropolitan Onufriy continues to be a part of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, even though he does not go to Moscow anymore. One may conclude that one of the main objectives of the council was to provide an outlet for discontent. The decisions of the council did not utter a word about Russia's attack on

¹⁹ Dmytro Horevoy, "PVK RPC: Moskovskiy Patriarkhat vidkryvaie novi parafii v Afrytsi. Tse pomsta za vyznannia PCU" ["PWC 'ROC': Moscow Patriarchate opens parishes in Africa. This is revenge for the recognition of OCU"], https://lb.ua/society/2021/12/30/502133_pvk_rpts_moskovskiy_patriarhat.html, accessed December 25, 2023.

²⁰ Idem, "Resolutions of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of May 27, 2022", <https://news.church.ua/2022/05/28/resolutions-council-ukrainian-orthodox-c-hurch-may-27-2022/?lang=en#2023-06-10>, accessed May 28, 2023.

²¹ Idem "Hramotu pro samostiynyi status UPC MP vydavaly Filaretu i nazyvaly Tomosom - ekspert." ["The certificate of the «independent» status of the UOC MP was issued to Filaret and called «Tomos » – expert"], <https://religionpravda.com.ua/?p=68166>, accessed May 07, 2023.

Ukraine, instead only condemning war in the most abstract terms.²² This was accompanied by a call “to the authorities of Ukraine and the Russian Federation to continue the negotiation process.”

The decisions of the council triggered tensions within the UOC MP. Subsequently, all Crimean parishes affiliated with the UOC MP expressed their disagreement with the council’s resolutions and sought to be placed under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow.²³ The Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on June 7 approved this request, leading to the establishment of the Crimean Metropolis of the Russian Orthodox Church on the occupied peninsula. The UOC MP did not issue any formal response to these events, and there was no explicit condemnation of the Crimean Metropolitan Lazar for these actions. Metropolitan Onufriy has adopted a similar policy for other pro-Russian defectors from the ranks of the UOC MP.

The Security Service of Ukraine and the UOC MP

In the meantime, those communities that decided to leave the UOC MP and join the OCU faced important obstacles, especially in the Kyiv region. In September 2022, the website Lb.ua published a letter in which the then deputy head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in the Kyiv region, Yuriy Palahniuk, ordered his subordinates to block the transition of parishes from the UOC MP to the OCU in the capital region.²⁴ He also instructed them to provide him with information about “rebellious priests.” A scandal subsequently broke out, and Palahniuk was dismissed from his position less than a day after the publication. After others filled the position for a time, Palahniuk was eventually replaced by Vasyl Malyuk, who became the permanent head of the SBU in February 2023 after proving his effectiveness at the job.

²² Idem, “Resolutions of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of May 27, 2022”, <https://news.church.ua/2022/05/28/resolutions-council-ukrainian-orthodox-church-may-27-2022/?lang=en#2023-06-10>, accessed May 28, 2023.

²³ Tetiana Matiash, “Krymska yeparkhiia UPC MP zayavyla, shcho zalyshayetsia u pidporiadkuvanni Moskvyy” [“The Crimean Diocese of the UOC-MP declared that it remains subordinate to Moscow”], https://lb.ua/society/2022/05/29/518302_krymska_ieparhiya_upts_mp_zayavila_shcho.html, accessed May 29, 2023.

²⁴ Lb.ua, “Security Service sees parish transfer from UOC to OCU as «national security threat»”, https://en.lb.ua/news/2022/09/15/16933_security_service_sees_parish.html, accessed September 15, 2023.

Following these events, the SBU initiated a campaign against church figures perceived to be collaborators. Nationwide searches and inspections were launched at key facilities of the UOC MP. Anti-Ukrainian propaganda literature, symbols of Russia, and references to the so-called “Novorossiya” were found in many locations. An analysis of the sermons, which are still often delivered in Russian in the UOC MP, revealed numerous pro-Russian messages. For example, a charge of inciting inter-religious enmity was brought against the abbot of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Pavlo (Lebed).²⁵ Russian passports were found in the offices of some metropolitans, including that of Meletiy (Egorenko) from Chernivtsi, who is the head of the department of external church relations for the UOC MP.²⁶ Some individuals were exposed for actively collaborating with Russia, such as Metropolitan Elisey of Kup’yansk and Izyum, who provided assistance to the so-called “head” of the temporary “occupational administration” in the Kharkiv region, Roman Ganichev. When Kharkiv Oblast was liberated, Elisey fled to Russia with Ganichev.²⁷

Other church figures were later discovered to be aligned with Russian interests. A week before the war began, Bishop Seraphim (Zaliznytskyi) packed his things and left the Ivano-Frankivsk diocese for Russia, where he was later seen serving in a monastery.²⁸ As is now clear, Seraphim was warned about the invasion. The Rovenky diocese of the Luhansk region and the Romny diocese of the Sumy region also asked to be

²⁵ Iryna Hamalii, “Domashnii aresht mytropolyta Pavla prodovzhyly do 1 lypnia” [“Metropolitan Pavel’s house arrest was extended until July 1”], https://lb.ua/society/2023/05/29/557689_domashniy_aresht_mitropolita_pavla.html, accessed May 29, 2023.

²⁶ Koshkina, “Prezydent Ukrainy pryzupynyv hromadyanstvo 13 predstavnykiv z 6 yeparkhiy UPC MP (povnyy spysok)” [“The president suspended the citizenship of 13 representatives of six dioceses of the UOC MP (full list), - sources”], https://lb.ua/society/2023/01/07/541775_prezydent_prizupiniv_gromadyanstvo.html, accessed January 07, 2023.

²⁷ Aliona Riazantseva and Sofia Tsvetkova, “UPC usunula Iziumskoho mytropolyta Yelyseia, yakyipryimav okupantiv i vtik do RF” [“The Ukrainian Orthodox Church deposed Metropolitan Elisey of Izyum, who received the occupiers and fled to the Russian Federation”], <https://suspihne.media/286994-upc-usunula-izumskogo-mitropolita-elisea-akij-prijmav-okupantiv-i-vtik-do-rf/>, accessed September 29, 2023.

²⁸ Vikna.if.ua, “Mytropolyt z Ivano-Frankivska poikhav pid Moskvu na molytvu iz Kyrylom” [“The Metropolitan from Ivano-Frankivsk went to Moscow to pray with Kirill”], <https://vikna.if.ua/news/category/all/2022/07/23/135331/view>, accessed January 07, 2023. .

received directly into the Russian Orthodox Church.²⁹ Their leaders, Iosyf (Maslennikov) and Arkady (Taranov), fled to Russia as well.³⁰

On September 30, 2022, a solemn ceremony took place in the Moscow Kremlin, when the so-called “new territories” - that is, Ukrainian lands seized by Russian forces - were incorporated into Russia.³¹ In addition to key figures from the Russian political establishment, also present were the governors of the Kherson region, some of those of the Zaporizhia region, the leaders of the Donetsk Peoples Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk Peoples Republic (LPR), as well as three representatives of the UOC MP. One of them was the metropolitan of Luhansk Panteleimon (Povoroznyuk).³² The abbot of the central cathedral in Kherson and the abbot of the monastery in Melitopol (Zaporizhia region) were also spotted at the ceremony. He had offered the premises of his monastery as a site for the illegal “referendum” held by the occupying army.³³

The UOC MP did not issue any official response to these developments. Later, those who had fled to Russia were granted retirement without any explanation from the church. Those who participated in the ceremony in the Kremlin or were suspected by the SBU of treason did not face any consequences. On the contrary, the UOC MP began speaking about the alleged “persecution of the Church.”³⁴

²⁹ Tetiana Matiash, “Rovenkivska yeparkhiia UPC MP pishla v rozkol z Onufriiem” [“The Rovenkiv Diocese of the UOC MP split with Onufry”], https://lb.ua/society/2022/05/31/518547_rovenkivska_ieparhiya_upts_mp_pishla.html, accessed January 07, 2023.

³⁰ Lb.ua, “Mytropolyt Onufriy zaminy shche odnoho yepyskopa-vtikacha - tsyoho razu z Romenskoii yeparkhii” [“Mitropolitan Onufriy replaced another fugitive bishop - this time from the Romny diocese”], https://lb.ua/society/2022/10/19/533154_mitropolit_onufriy_zaminiv_shche.html, accessed October 19, 2023.

³¹ Iryna Lysohor, “Putin oholosyv nezakonnu aneksiiu chotyryokh oblastei Ukrainy” [“Putin announced the illegal annexation of four regions of Ukraine”], https://lb.ua/society/2022/09/30/531104_putin_ogolosiv_nezakonnun_aneksiyu.html, accessed February 01, 2023..

³² Koshkina, “Mytropolyt Luhanskyi z UPC ta nastoiatel cholovichoho monastyria z Melitopolia vzyaly uchast u proholoshenni nezakonnoi aneksii” [“The Metropolitan of Luhansk of the UOC and the abbot of the Men’s Monastery from Melitopol took part in the declaration of illegal annexation”], https://lb.ua/society/2022/09/30/531123_mitropolit_luganskiy_upts.html, accessed September 30, 2023.

³³ Bishop Fotiy (Davydenko), [videoplothttps://www.facebook.com/100002402201990/videos/432288485553923](https://www.facebook.com/100002402201990/videos/432288485553923), accessed September 20, 2023.

³⁴ Kateryna Shchotkina, “Honinnia’ ta viina Moskovskoho Patriarkhatu v Ukraini” [“Chase and the war of the Moscow patriarchate in Ukraine”], <https://zn.ua/ukr/>

Sanctions Against Collaborators and Deprivation of Citizenship

By the end of 2022, two sanctions list against the representatives of the UOC MP were prepared and made public by National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine.³⁵ Sanctions included the blocking personal accounts and assets, and were applied to the main donor of the UOC MP, oligarch Vadym Novinsky, the abbot of the Lavra Pavlo (Lebed), Antony (Pakanich), Luka of Zaporizhzhia, and others. In addition, UOC MP figures who were found to possess Russian passports were stripped of their Ukrainian citizenship. This measure posed a significant challenge for Meletii (Yegorenko), the head of the department of external relations of the UOC MP, who needed to be able to travel around the world to fulfill his duties. He is currently unable to cross the state border, as he would be unable to return without a Ukrainian passport.

Several priests of the UOC MP were arrested, convicted, and later exchanged with Russia due to their alleged collaboration in aiding the enemy in occupied territories. Notable among them was Fr. Andrii Pavlenko from Severodonetsk, a city in Luhansk region that was completely destroyed during the invasion. Fr. Andrii assisted the Russian forces with artillery repair, and was personally received at the Russian border by the owner of the Private Military Company “Wagner”, Evgeny Prigozhin.

The Future of Lavras

2023 had a historic beginning for Ukraine. On the 7th of January, the day of Orthodox Christmas, Metropolitan Epiphany presided over a solemn service in the Lavra's Assumption cathedral.³⁶ The event drew a significant crowd, both within the church and its courtyard, with attendees spanning beyond the affiliated church community.

church/honinnja-ta-vijna-moskovskoho-patriarkhatu-v-ukrajini.html, accessed December 25, 2023.

³⁵ Rayon.in.ua, “Sanktsii proty predstavnykiv UPC MP: vse shcho vidomo” [“Sanctions against representatives of the UOC MP: everything that is known”], <https://rayon.in.ua/news/557371-sanktsii-proti-predstavnikiv-upts-mp-use-shcho-vidomo#subscribe>, accessed February 01, 2023.

³⁶ Yaroslav Pryshchepa and Karina Buhaichenko, “Bez ukrainskoi tserkvy derzhavy ne bude’: u Lavri vidbulosia pershe bohosluzhinnia PCU. Fotoreportazh” [“«Without the Ukrainian Church, there will be no state»: the first service of the OCU was held in the Lavra. Photo report”], <https://suspilne.media/354128-u-lavri-rozpocalos-perse-bogosluzinna-pcu>, accessed January 01, 2023.

At the end of 2022, the state terminated the indefinite and free lease contract for the Upper Lavra with the UOC. It had been signed in 2013, during the time of President Viktor Yanukovych and Prime Minister Mykola Azarov.³⁷ Having been a political decision in the first place, and thus characterized by legal imperfections, only political will was necessary to dissolve it.

The representatives of the UOC MP had until March 29th to vacate the territory of the Upper Lavra, where the monastery is located.³⁸ In 2022, the OCU had decided to create its own men's community for the Assumption Monastery in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.³⁹ The registration process for the monastery lasted for six months from May to December, when the formalities were finally completed.

States authorities emphasized that by March 29, the monks of the UOC-MP should vacate the premises in the Lower Lavra, but that they will not be forcibly removed.⁴⁰ On that day, monks were brought to the Lavra by bus from UOC MP monasteries in various regions. Their task was to create a scene for television cameras. However, except for minor verbal skirmishes, there were no conflicts between the police and parishioners of the OCU. On April 1, the abbot of the Lavra, Metropolitan Pavlo (Lebed), received two months of 24-hour house arrest (this period was later extended) for inciting inter-religious hatred and denying Russian aggression.

At present, an OCU monastic community is being established in the Lavra, temporary headed by Archimandrite Avraamy, who himself

³⁷ Ukrinform, "Kyievo-Pecherska Lavra rozryvaie uhodu pro orendu z monastyrem UPC MP" ["The National Reserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra' terminates the lease agreement with the UOC MP"], <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3680840-kievopecerska-lavra-rozryvae-dogovir-z-upc-mp-pro-orendu.html>, accessed February 01, 2023.

³⁸ Serhii Nuzhnenko, "29 bereznia - ostannii den, koly tserkovnyky UPC MP mozhut zhyty u Kyievo-Pecherskii Lavri" ["March 29 is the last day when members of the UOC MP can live in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra"], <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/lavra-upts-mp-kyiv/32340455.html>, accessed March 29, 2023.

³⁹ Radio Svoboda, "PCU stvoryla svii monastyr u Svyato-Uspenskii Kyievo-Pecherskii Lavri" ["The OCU founded its monastery in the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra"], <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-ptsu-kyievo-pecherska-lavra-/31865057.html>, accessed May 29, 2023.

⁴⁰ Focus.ua, "Za borodu tiahnuty ne budemo': Danilov pro vyselennia UPC MPz Kyievo-Pecherskoi Lavry" ["«We will not pull by the beard»: Danilov on the eviction of the UOC-MP from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (video)"], <https://focus.ua/uk/ukraine/559270-za-borodu-vytyagivat-ne-budem-danilov-o-vyselenii-upc-mp-iz-kievo-pecherskoy-lavry-video>, accessed May 29, 2023.

switched from the UOC MP to OCU. The State Commission is in the process of taking an inventory of the Lower Lavra, which is owned by the Ministry of Culture.

In addition to Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, the largest in Ukraine, there are two more Lavras in the country: Pochaivska in the west and Sviatohirska in the east, both currently under the control of the UOC MP. The contract for Pochaivska is valid until 2052, while Sviatohirska's contract is indefinite, although both can potentially be terminated. Ukrainian Greek Catholics assert their right to serve in the Pochaiv Lavra. Sviatohirska, a recent monastery in Donetsk region, recobtained Lavra status in 2004 owing to the support of Viktor Yanukovych. In 2014, before the Russian occupation of eastern Ukraine, militants under Igor Girkin sought refuge in Sviatohirska and stockpiled weapons there. In 2022, the Lavra suffered serious damage at the hands of the Russians.

Conclusions

Since the onset of the war, church life in Ukraine has become an increasingly significant factor in state policy and security. This trend continues today, as President Zelenskyi has recently issued instructions for the Cabinet of Ministers to develop a draft law that will hinder the operational activities of the UOC MP. The document, currently under consideration by the parliament, is commonly known as “the law on the prohibition of the Moscow church,” but this name is not entirely accurate. Ukraine is constitutionally a secular state, and while amending the constitution is already a difficult process, it is forbidden during martial law. Therefore, it is not feasible by law to simply prohibit the church, especially as it is not a legal entity. Furthermore, no religious organization has been banned in Ukraine since the country's independence.

At the same time, certain restrictions have been placed on the economic activities of the church. This stems from the fact that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church maintains canonical and personal ties with the aggressor state, as indicated by the findings of an independent expert group established by the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience.⁴¹ This is the document relied upon by the Cabinet of Ministers relies when drafting legislation.

⁴¹ Derzhavna sluzhba Ukrainy z etnopolityky ta svobody sovisti, “Vysnovok relihiieznavchoi ekspertyzy pro upravlinnia Ukrainiskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvy na naiavnist kanonichnoho zviazku z Moskovskym Patriarkhatom” [“The conclusion of the religious

At the end of 2018, a law was passed that obliged all organizations operating on the territory of Ukraine but managed from the territory of Russia to indicate this fact in their name.⁴² The UOC MP falls directly under this definition and sought to challenge the law in the Supreme Court of Ukraine to avoid changing its name. In early 2023, the Supreme Court delivered its final verdict, affirming that the law should be applied in its originally adopted form, and that the UOC MP should therefore be renamed.⁴³

examination of the Statute on the Administration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the existence of a church-canonical connection with the Moscow Patriarchate”], <https://dessa.gov.ua/vysnovok-relihiieznachoi-ekspertyzy-statutu-pro-upravlinnia-ukrainskoi-pravoslavnoi-tserkvy/>, accessed February 01, 2023.

⁴² Zakon Ukrainy pro vnesennya zmin do statyi 12 Zakonu Ukrainy «Pro svobodu sovisti ta relihiyni orhanizatsiyi» shchodo nazvy relihiynykh orhanizatsiy (obyednan), yaki vkhodyat do struktury (ye chastynoyu) relihiynoyi orhanizatsiyi (obyednannya), kerivnyy tsentr (upravlinnya) yakoyi znakhodytsya za mezhamy Ukrainy, v derzhavi, yaka zakonom vyznana takoyu, sho zdiysnyla viyskovu ahressiyu proty Ukrainy ta/abo tymchasovo okupuvala chastynu teritorii Ukrainy” [“The Law of Ukraine On amending Article 12 of the Law of Ukraine ‘On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations’ regarding the name of religious organizations (associations) that are part of the structure of a religious organization (association), whose management center (management) is located outside of Ukraine in a state recognized by law as having carried out military aggression against Ukraine and/or temporarily occupied a part of the territory of Ukraine”], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2662-19#Text>, accessed February 01, 2023.

⁴³ Serhiy Albul, “KSU vyznav pravomirnym pereymenuvannya UPC MP” [“The Constitutional Court recognized the legal renaming of the UOC MP”], https://lb.ua/society/2022/12/27/540539_ksu_viznav_pravomirnim.html, accessed December 27, 2023.