

Heta Hurskainen and Teuvo Laitila (eds.), *Churches in Contact and Collision. Multiple Ways of Ukrainian and Russian Churches, East West Ecumenism – Ost West Ökumene*, Vol. 2, Paderborn: Brill 2024, 190 p., ISBN: 978–3–506–79385–0

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Edited by Heta Hurskainen and Teuvo Laitila and published by Brill, *Churches in Contact and Collision* is a timely and interesting work that opens up the multidimensional field of historical, political, and religious narratives in Ukraine to readers.

The war between Russia and Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated in February 2022, makes research on the history of the countries and the history of the church highly topical. The war in Ukraine should not be interpreted as a religious war, as its primary motives lie elsewhere. On the other hand, knowledge of historical and religious narratives is essential for understanding the war and its background. However, the significance of books dealing with Ukraine is not limited to the war. Ukraine is a large country with a long and colorful history and a diverse religious landscape. Knowledge of this should be part of European general education, especially if Ukraine joins the European Union in the future.

Churches in Contact and Collision originated from a scientific conference held in the fall of 2021, but according to the editors of the book, it should not be considered a conference publication, as the original presentations have been supplemented and expanded into articles. This is undoubtedly true. However, the book has the same strengths and weaknesses that are typical of conference publications. Collections of articles rarely offer a coherent reading experience, let alone provide a clear and analytical overview of the phenomenon they address. This is, of course, possible if the book as a whole and its individual parts have been planned in advance and constructed in a coordinated manner. This is not usually the case with conference publications. Conference presentations tend to arise from researchers' different backgrounds and interests, which means that the connections between them are more or less tenuous. Books based on conference papers are usually fragmented, even though individual articles may be scientifically valuable. This is also the case with this book.

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The book is divided into three main chapters, but it is difficult to discern the common thread running through the chapters or the differences between them. The overarching theme connecting the entire book is narratives: different stories or interpretative horizons through which attempts have been made to explain Ukraine, its history, and its religious landscape. Some of the narratives originated within Ukraine, while others examine Ukraine from an outside perspective.

In their articles, Sebastian Rimestad (p. 3–20) and Regina Elsner (p. 39–56) describe how Roman Catholic, Russian (Orthodox), and Greek (Orthodox) understandings of Ukraine differ from one another, and, on the other hand, how Russian and Ukrainian interpretations of Ukrainian church history quickly diverged after Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea. Rimestad considers it problematic that all the narratives identified in his article have been external attempts to resolve problems related to Ukraine without giving Ukrainians the opportunity to resolve them themselves. Elsner, on the other hand, considers the concept of “Kievan churches” that emerged in Ukraine to be precisely an attempt by Ukrainians to take their own (church) history into their own hands and at the same time distance themselves from the imperialist concept of the “Russian world”. These articles, together with Heta Hurskainen’s article, form the core of the book for readers who want to better understand the struggle between Russia and Ukraine over the interpretation of history and identity.

The articles by Mikko Ketola (p. 115–35) and Maija Penttilä (p. 137–58) examine the experiences of individual denominations during the war, specifically the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) and the Pentecostal Word of Life churches. The articles are interesting because the religious landscape of Ukraine is often examined only through the lens of the Orthodox churches and the tensions between them, even though there are in fact several other significant denominations in Ukraine. The largest of these, the UGCC, which follows Orthodox tradition and liturgy but recognises the Pope as its supreme leader, is a strongly nationalist and pro-Western church. In his article, Ketola describes, on the one hand, the UGCC’s active contribution to Ukraine’s war efforts and support for Ukrainian identity and, on the other hand, the frustration that Pope Francis’ cautious statements on the war have caused within the UGCC. Penttilä’s article is a good reminder that the conflicts caused by the war between the Ukrainian and Russian churches do not only concern the Orthodox churches, but equally, for example, the Pentecostal churches,

which are also loyal to their own societies and political leadership in both countries.

Two articles focus on developments outside Ukraine. Heta Hurskainen (p. 159–82) explains to readers the impact that the fragmentation of Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the tensions associated with it have had on the ecumenical movement. Pekka Metso and Petteri Lalu (p. 83–111) examine how the Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) reacted to the large-scale offensive that began in February 2022 and to the statements made by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) regarding the war. In her article, Hurskainen examines the relationship between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the ELCF on the one hand, and the Orthodox Churches of Russia and Ukraine on the other, and assesses how these relationships changed as the war intensified. She excellently highlights how, in defending its own interests in Ukraine, the ROC used various arguments with different discussion partners over the decades: with the Catholic Church, it appealed to the fact that Ukraine belonged to the canonical territory of the ROC, while with the ecumenical movement, it used human rights language. However, the conclusions of the article become shaky when Hurskainen begins to assess the reactions of the WCC and the ELCF to Russia's large-scale offensive launched in February 2022. She describes well how the WCC avoided taking a position on the disputes between the Orthodox churches in Ukraine and the resulting tensions, because it respected arguments by the ROC that the situation in Ukraine was an internal matter for the Orthodox churches. However, Hurskainen's interpretations of the WCC's change of policy at the 2022 Assembly in relation to the ROC and the new Orthodox Church in Ukraine (OCU) are overly optimistic. The WCC leadership still sees the ROC as having a potential role as a mediator in disputes and is very cautious about criticizing Russia or, in particular, the ROC. Some of the stronger statements by WCC bodies have only come about as a result of active lobbying by member churches. The Finnish churches have been at the forefront of this. Hurskainen is right in saying that the ELCF avoided taking a strong stance on the fighting in Ukraine from 2014 until the major offensive in February 2022. However, it is incorrect to claim that the ELCF and the ROC have not discussed peace for decades or that the ELCF has been indifferent to the ecclesiastical situation in Ukraine. The situation in Ukraine has been actively monitored and discussed both domestically and abroad, including with the ROC. However, it is true that until 2022,

the tone was cautious. Even more problematic is Hurskainen's claim that the ELCF severed ties with Ukrainian churches and did not seek to build relationships with Ukrainian Orthodox Christians. Building relationships takes time. Hurskainen's article was apparently written at the end of 2022, when the results of the work were not yet visible in the media. The historic first visit to Finland by the head of the OCU, Metropolitan Epifaniy, and Bishop Pavlo Shvarts of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (GELCU) took place in December 2023, which was a visible sign that long-term groundwork had been laid for building relations. A similar challenge related to time limits is also evident in the article by Metso and Lalu, which states that the statements of the ELCF and the OCF on the war in Ukraine had faded by the fall of 2022. This is true if we look only at the year 2022 and focus mainly on media coverage in Finland. The churches' official position was clearly stated in the first few months, after which the Finnish media were no longer interested in asking about it. Instead, both churches continued to actively engage in international discussions and lobbying on the subject, including at the WCC General Assembly in September 2022 and the Central Committee meeting in June 2023. The debate on the religious situation in Ukraine and Russia continued in Finland during 2023, at times quite heatedly, but not necessarily primarily among church leaders.

The articles by Evgeny Ageev (p. 21–37) and Teuvo Laitila (p. 59–82) differ from the other articles in the book in that they focus on individual historical events, such as the Ukrainian Church Council of 1918, or individuals, such as Father Vasili Romanjuk, a human rights activist who was imprisoned during the Soviet era and later became Patriarch Volodymyr of Kiev. The articles are interesting, even when viewed from the perspective of the current situation. However, their subject matter and nature are so different from most of the other articles that they inevitably seem somewhat disconnected from the rest of the book. Vasili Romanjuk's experiences, which are discussed at length in Laitila's article but also touched upon in Hurskainen's article, are moving. They remind us how Ukrainians have suffered throughout history from the West's caution and desire to please Russia. Romanjuk warned Western countries about the deceitfulness and immorality of the Soviet Union and tried in vain to appeal to Western concepts of human rights. However, he was not heard because he was not important enough and because the West naively believed that it had already reached an agreement with the Soviet Union on the issues at stake. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Romanjuk, who had become Patriarch of Kiev, wanted to invite representatives from

Finland and other Nordic countries to Ukraine and build relations with the ELCF, because he had received so many encouraging letters from the Nordic countries while he was in captivity. However, this olive branch was not taken up so as not to irritate the ROC.

All in all, *Churches in Contact and Collision* is a high-quality collection of academic articles that will be of particular interest to professionals in the fields of religion and history who wish to deepen their understanding of the churches in Ukraine and Russia and the challenging relations between them. However, it may not necessarily serve readers who lack background knowledge of church history or who want an overview of the situation. This shortcoming could have been remedied with a comprehensive and analytical foreword or summary that would not only have summarized the key points of the various articles but also placed them in a broader context. There would have been room for this, as the book is fairly short. It is also unfortunate, though entirely understandable, that the Ukrainian researchers who participated in the conference were unable to contribute their articles to this work due to the outbreak of war. The articles in the book were completed so soon after Russia's large-scale invasion that it is understandable and even inevitable that not all assessments of the war's impact will necessarily stand the test of time. The situation is constantly evolving. Despite all this, the authors and editors of the book have done valuable work in bringing new perspectives to an important and timely topic through high-quality articles.