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Eugene PILETSKY, PhD (Philos.), Assoc. Prof.

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8820-757X

e-mail: djenkins22@gmail.com

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

Mariia NESTEROVA, PhD

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5784-4704

e-mail: mnesterova@knu.ua

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

PECULIARITIES OF INTERFAITH RELATIONS IN UKRAINE IN THE (PRE)WAR PERIOD: ON THE WAY TO DIALOGUE

Background. *The article examines religious conflicts in independent Ukraine, focusing on their roots, current dynamics and impact on society. Ukrainians' religiosity has always had a significant impact on their worldview and social behaviour, but in recent years it has become a platform for manipulation and political ambitions.*

Methods. *By analysing religious conflicts, the authors seek to understand the mechanisms of interaction between different socio-cultural groups in a post-conflict society and to develop strategies for interreligious dialogue and peacemaking. It is revealed that before Russia's invasion, the level of fear of interethnic and interreligious conflicts among Ukrainians had significantly decreased, as evidenced by survey data. However, conflicts between believers of different churches still occurred, mainly due to political motives, the struggle for property and the church hierarchy's desire for power. The main conflict potential was the interaction between the UOC and the OCU, reflecting the deep crisis in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.*

The article presents data from sociological surveys on the causes of conflicts between believers of different religions in Ukraine. While the percentage of respondents who believe that conflicts are caused by hierarchical power seeking fluctuates, it has increased again in recent years (2023), although the number of respondents who believe that the national issue is the essence of conflicts is increasing, with a particularly marked increase after 2019. Respondents note that the role of the media in increasing religious intolerance is significant, but this indicator does not show a clear upward or downward trend.

Results. *It is proved that the COVID-19 pandemic has also brought changes to interreligious dialogue, forcing religious communities to adapt to new conditions while maintaining spirituality and support for believers. The quarantine measures have contributed to the development of virtual communities and new forms of communication between believers of different religions.*

Conclusions. *It is substantiated that after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, interreligious dialogue in Ukraine has acquired new important aspects. Religious organizations united to support the Ukrainian people by providing humanitarian aid, moral support and psychological assistance to war-affected people. They actively condemned aggression and hate speech, contributing to the formation of an objective public opinion about the war.*

Keywords: *Interreligious dialogue, religious conflicts, Ukrainian orthodox, political motives COVID-19, humanitarian aid, religious security.*

Background

The relevance of the study of religious conflicts in independent Ukraine goes beyond the simple analysis of international interactions and socio-cultural dynamics. It fits into the context of contemporary political, ethnic and identity tensions that arise in the context of a transforming society. The religiosity of the Ukrainian people has traditionally had a significant impact on their worldview, subconscious and social behaviour, but in the context of recent years it has become a frequently used platform for manipulation and political ambitions. The analysis of religious conflicts helps to understand the underlying mechanisms of interaction between different socio-cultural groups in a post-conflict society and contributes to the development of strategies for interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding. Taking into account historical perspectives and current realities, such research is important for ensuring stability, interfaith harmony and the development of civil society in Ukraine.

Scholars from a variety of fields – V. Averyanov (Averyanov, 2017), Y. Kharkovchenko (Kharkovshchenko et al., 2024), G. Hrystokin (Khrystokin, & Lozovytskyi, 2024), O. Predko (Kharkovshchenko et al., 2021, pp. 391–409), N. Sobolieva (Sobolieva, 2021), V. Turenko (Turenko, 2023), S. Zdioruk (Zdioruk, & Tokman, 2023) including sociology, political science, religious studies and history, have been involved in the study of religious conflicts in independent Ukraine. Aspects of the research can range from analysing the historical roots of the conflicts to studying contemporary social dynamics and political

processes that affect the religious situation in the country. Some studies may focus on the interaction between different religious communities, while others may analyse the impact of religious factors on the political landscape and public culture. Scholars can also explore strategies for reconciliation and interreligious dialogue as ways to resolve conflicts and maintain social peace in Ukraine.

Methods

One of the principal methods employed in our research is the administration of sociological surveys, the objective of which is to analyse public opinion on matters pertaining to religious conflicts, interethnic and interreligious relations. This enables us to ascertain the extent of fear within society, the underlying causes of conflict between adherents of different religious communities, and the role of religious organisations in maintaining social stability. Notable examples of such studies include surveys conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the Razumkov Centre. In order to gain an understanding of the underlying causes of religious conflicts, it is essential to examine their historical roots. The historical method enables the analysis of the evolution of religious communities, the conflicts that have emerged over time, and their impact on contemporary socio-religious processes. The utilisation of historical materials facilitates the identification of patterns in the evolution of religious conflicts. Media analysis enables the examination of the role of the media in the coverage of religious conflicts, their influence on public opinion and the growth of religious intolerance. In light of the pivotal role of

the media in the contemporary era, this method is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of conflicts.

Results

Specifics of interreligious relations before Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. According to a monitoring survey of public opinion conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2021, before the full-scale invasion by Russia, the level of fears among the population has significantly changed compared to previous years of Ukraine's independence. The primary fears of Ukrainians remain socio-economic, including the fear of rising prices (70,4 %), unemployment (61,5 %), and non-payment of salaries, pensions, etc. (53,3 %). However, in the past two years, there has been a significant (almost doubled) decrease in the fear of inter-ethnic conflicts, from 22,9 % in 2020 to 11,6 % in 2021. In 2014, this fear was at its highest level in the past decade, at 35,0 %. Similarly, the fear of interreligious conflicts has also significantly decreased, from 13,8 % in 2020 to just 7,9 % in 2021, with the highest level recorded in 2018 at 14,7 % (Soboljeva, 2021, p. 386).

The Razumkov Centre's research aligns with this sociological data. According to their 2021 survey, the domestic religious landscape in Ukraine exhibits a low level of conflict. Despite some Ukrainian citizens holding certain prejudices against specific religions, denominations, and churches, the majority of respondents reported that relations between believers of different churches and religions in their areas are calm (58,0 %) and even friendly (11,2 %). Only 2,6 % of respondents indicated conflicts, and 4,8 % noted tensions. Conflict or tension in relations between believers is most commonly reported by residents of the central region of the country (10,6 %), "just Christians" (10,4 %), and believers of the UOC-MP (9,8 %) and the OCU (9,6 %) (Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination..., 2021, p. 124).

First of all, it should be noted that during the years of independence of our country, there have been changes in citizens' attitudes towards the factors of interfaith and interchurch conflicts. Since 2000 (19,9 %), the importance of the political factor has steadily increased, and it now ranks among the top, with 39,6 % of respondents believing that conflicts between churches are purely political. In 2021, compared to 2020, respondents were somewhat more likely to attribute conflicts to 'property' motives (39,7 % and 34,8 %, respectively) and the desire of church hierarchs for power (34,3 % and 28,9 %, respectively). Additionally, the proportion of respondents who see the cause of conflicts as 'the true church needing to prove its superiority over others' has also increased to some extent (10,3 % and 7,8 %, respectively) (Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination..., 2021, p. 122).

At the same time, we can follow the trends regarding the reasons for the emergence of religious conflicts over the last 25 years (Ukrainian society, state and church during the war, 2023).

This study shows that before the war, the vast majority of respondents believed that the political factor was the basis of any religious conflicts, followed by the struggle for property and buildings, and the lust for power of the higher church clergy. In our opinion, this is not accidental. This implicitly indicates that the main religious conflict potential in Ukraine lies in the context of inter-Orthodox relations.

The crisis of Ukrainian Orthodoxy is a conflict with distinct linguistic and symbolic dimensions. To analyze the conflict between Orthodox actors, it is advisable to use a critical-reflexive methodology that examines both the

theological language and the tools that shape it. This analysis has revealed that the Orthodox crisis in Ukraine stems from a conflict between the religious narratives and practices of the UOC and the OCU. The root cause is an internal crisis within the evangelical community's narratives and those of the denomination, where the church's governing structures present self-preservation goals as the ideals of the Church of Christ. The lack of productive dialogue between the UOC and the OCU is due to differing assessments of history and current events, as well as divergent political and corporate interests.

In the case of the UOC, there is a strong conservative corporate identity based on sympathy for the ideas of the "Russian world", reinforced by the fear of losing symbolic power, an unwillingness to engage in dialogue with the OCU, and a reluctance to modernize. After receiving the Tomos, the OCU dismantled the UOC's monopoly on symbolic power and established its canonical equality in the Ecumenical Church. The OCU is attempting to compel the UOC to engage in equal public dialogue, officially severing ties with the ROC, and thereby weaken its legitimacy.

The main issue for the UOC is its loss of a vital connection with the rapidly changing political and cultural context of society. A conflict has developed between the canonical and political narratives of the jurisdictions, which the denominations cannot resolve on their own. While resolving the issue of unification at the level of church leadership of both denominations is impossible, Ukrainian Orthodoxy is capable of productive dialogue at the level of laity, priests, and theologians. Unification efforts should focus on harmonizing narratives and employ a methodology that critiques the negative narratives of both sides. Civil society serves as an important social base around whose values Orthodoxy should unite. The symbolic space of civil society is also essential for social peace and productive interaction between the church and the state (Khrystokin, & Lozovytskyi, 2024).

At the same time, it is worth noting the specifics of interreligious dialogue in Ukraine in the context of COVID-19, which was just before the full-scale invasion began. It should be noted here that interreligious relations during this period are a complex and at the same time important aspect of public life. The quarantine measures imposed due to the pandemic have significantly changed the way religious communities function and interact with each other and the state.

At the beginning of the pandemic, religious associations such as churches, synagogues, mosques and temples were among the first to stop mass gatherings, responding to government calls and taking into account public health recommendations. This led to changes in the conduct of services, which were temporarily suspended or moved online. Such measures marked the beginning of a new stage for interreligious dialogue, where the main issues were the preservation of spirituality and support for believers under restrictions.

On the one hand, the authorities tried to ensure an equal approach to all religious communities by introducing common rules and guidelines for all faiths. On the other hand, various religious leaders cooperated with each other and with the state to ensure health and safety during worship and religious ceremonies.

Interfaith dialogue has been key to coordinating measures to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection among believers. Leaders of different faiths exchanged ideas and best practices, promoting mutual consideration

of cultural and religious sensitivities in the introduction of restrictions and security measures.

Another important aspect was the preservation of social contact and spiritual support for believers, despite the physical distance. This contributed to the development of virtual communities and new forms of communication between believers of different religions.

On the other hand, the pandemic and quarantine have drawn attention to the social and economic problems faced by religious communities, which has contributed to strengthening interfaith cooperation in the areas of charity, assistance to medical personnel and those in need.

Thus, interreligious dialogue in Ukraine during COVID-19 proved to be an important mechanism for managing crisis situations and strengthening social solidarity. It has allowed religious communities to respond to the challenges of the pandemic together, preserving traditions and values, adapting to new conditions and changing approaches to interaction with the government and society.

Peculiarities of interreligious relations in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion. As V. Averyanov rightly notes, 'Any war has either direct or indirect religious roots. That is, even if it is not a religious conflict, those who want to change the world order are trying to turn it into a religious one. We have gathered today to call on humanity to prevent and condemn the use of religion in these conflicts. We also understand that religion has thousands of years of experience in conflict resolution, and we want to appeal to religious leaders in Ukraine and the world to use their authority, the experience of their churches and their religions to resolve these conflicts (Averyanov, 2017).

Therefore, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, inter-religious conflicts have become a potential threat to the country's stability and unity. While most religious communities in Ukraine demonstrate solidarity and support for national interests, there are serious threats that could destabilise interreligious relations and exacerbate conflicts.

One of the main threats is the political manipulation of religion. Russian propaganda actively uses religious issues to split Ukrainian society by spreading disinformation and speculating on religious differences. This could lead to increased tensions between different religious groups, especially in regions where religious conflicts have historically existed.

Among other things, it is worth noting the threat of an internal split in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Internal contradictions, struggle for power and influence, as well as different approaches to church policy may lead to increased tension within the church. This, in turn, could affect the overall atmosphere of interreligious dialogue in the country.

Another serious threat is the radicalisation of certain religious groups. In a time of war, some religious communities may become radicalised, leading to extremist actions and violence. This applies to both certain Christian groups and Muslim communities. Radicalisation can lead to acts of terrorism, hostility and interfaith clashes.

The socio-economic problems caused by the war also affect inter-religious relations. The loss of jobs, housing and other means of livelihood creates the ground for growing discontent and aggression, which can be redirected towards religious "others". In such circumstances, there is a growing risk that socio-economic conflicts will take on a religious colour.

The threat of external influence also remains relevant. Russian and other foreign agencies may try to influence religious communities, using them to achieve political

goals. This could lead to increased inter-religious tensions and conflicts aimed at destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

Another important aspect is the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons. A large number of people who have been forced to leave their homes need spiritual and social support. In the context of limited resources, competition between religious communities for influence and opportunities to provide assistance may arise, which can also become a source of conflict.

Finally, the threat of a decline in tolerance and mutual respect between religious communities is a significant challenge. War and related stresses often lead to increased ethnocentrism and religious fanaticism, which complicates interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Thus, inter-religious conflicts in Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion pose a serious threat to national unity and stability. Political manipulation, internal church schisms, radicalisation, socio-economic hardship, external influence, refugee issues and declining tolerance – all these factors can lead to an escalation of interreligious tensions and conflicts, which requires a careful and comprehensive approach to resolve.

In this context, it will be appropriate to consider the dynamics of understanding the emergence of religious conflicts in inter-Orthodox relations in Ukraine (Ukrainian society, state and church during the war, 2023).

This study shows the results of a sociological survey on the causes of conflicts between believers of different churches in Ukraine. The data reflects the responses of respondents in different years: 2000, 2010, 2013, 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

In the first answer, there is a tendency to increase the number of respondents who believe that conflicts arise because one church wants to prove its superiority over others. At the same time, it can be seen that the number of respondents who indicated other reasons for conflicts has significantly decreased from 2000 to 2023. The number of respondents who could not give a clear answer to this question also fluctuated. The highest rate was observed in 2010 (22,8 %) and the lowest in 2023 (9,9 %). In general, we can identify the following trends:

1) growth of religious ambitions: the number of respondents who believe that conflicts arise because one church wants to prove its superiority has been steadily increasing since 2000, which may indicate an increase in religious ambitions and interfaith tensions;

2) decreased role of other causes: the percentage of respondents who cite other causes of conflict has significantly decreased, which may indicate a focus on the main conflict points related to religious superiority;

3) reduction of uncertainty: The number of those who found it difficult to answer is generally decreasing, which may indicate that respondents are becoming more aware of the causes of conflict or have a clearer understanding of their own views on the topic.

These data provide valuable insights into the evolution of interfaith relations in Ukraine and help to understand changes in public attitudes towards religious conflict.

Ukrainian scholars S. Zdioryuk and V. Tokman rightly emphasise that the Russia's full-scale military invasion has led to several important trends in Ukraine's religious environment. Firstly, religious organisations have become active participants in the humanitarian front. Together with the authorities, international charitable associations, and volunteer movements, churches and denominations have

joined in addressing urgent problems related to the restoration of society. Ukrainian denominations work in various areas. The key ones are:

- support for the Armed Forces of Ukraine (purchase/manufacture and supply of military equipment, tactical equipment, ammunition, vehicles to the relevant combat units);
- providing the population affected by the war with the most necessary things (food, clothing, hygiene products, etc.);
- logistical support in the healthcare sector (delivery of medical equipment, machinery, special equipment, vital medicines from abroad);
- information and communication activities (maintaining the moral stability of society, mobile response in difficult humanitarian situations, strengthening international partnership in the context of confronting Russian invaders, forming a true picture of Ukraine among the world community);
- providing shelter for internally displaced persons (accommodation at their own locations, assistance in finding housing, participation in the construction of temporary housing) (Zdioruk, & Tokman, 2023, p.18).

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, interreligious dialogue has acquired new important aspects that have significantly affected religious and social life in the country. In our opinion, the main aspects of interreligious dialogue in Ukraine since then are:

I. Consolidation in the face of a common threat – in the context of war, religious organisations of different denominations united to support the Ukrainian people and provide humanitarian aid. This created a unique platform for cooperation and interaction between representatives of different religions. Churches, mosques and synagogues organised joint prayers for peace, provided refugees with shelter and provided the victims with the most basic necessities.

II. Strengthening national identity – religious leaders of different faiths actively support the idea of national unity and sovereignty of Ukraine. Religious organisations have become one of the key actors in shaping the patriotic spirit and national identity, which includes a spiritual dimension.

III. Moral support and psychological assistance – faith-based communities play an important role in providing moral and psychological support to war-affected people. Clergymen, imams and rabbis provide spiritual support to the military, their families, refugees and all those who have experienced traumatic events caused by war.

IV. Condemnation of aggression and hate speech – Ukrainian religious leaders strongly condemned Russian aggression and the hate propaganda that accompanied the military actions. This was an important step in countering disinformation and shaping an objective public opinion about the causes and consequences of the war.

V. Maintaining international contacts – in the context of war, interreligious dialogue in Ukraine is reaching the international level. Ukrainian religious leaders actively cooperate with colleagues from other countries, organising international prayer initiatives and humanitarian projects. This helps to raise awareness of the situation in Ukraine among the international community and attract international support.

VI. Recovery and rehabilitation: Religious organisations are actively involved in the restoration of destroyed churches, mosques, synagogues and other religious buildings, as well as in the rehabilitation of communities affected by the hostilities. This includes rebuilding not only

the physical but also the spiritual infrastructure necessary for the normalisation of citizens' lives.

VII. Environmental and social responsibility – since the full-scale invasion, religious organisations have been actively engaged in environmental and social justice issues. They call for careful use of natural resources and support for the most vulnerable groups of the population, especially those affected by the war.

Thus, interreligious dialogue in Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion has become an important tool in maintaining national unity, providing humanitarian aid, resisting aggression and rebuilding the country. It helps to strengthen interfaith relations, increase social responsibility and create a positive image of Ukraine in the international arena.

Discussion and conclusions

The study showed that religious conflicts in Ukraine are deeply rooted, dynamic and have a significant impact on society. Although the religiosity of Ukrainians has always influenced their worldview and social behaviour, it has recently become a platform for manipulation and political ambitions. The conflict analysis allowed the authors to understand the mechanisms of interaction between different socio-cultural groups in a post-conflict society and to develop strategies for interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding.

It is proved that before Russia's invasion, the level of fear of interethnic and interreligious conflicts among Ukrainians had significantly decreased. However, conflicts between believers of different churches, mainly due to political motives, struggle for property and power in the church hierarchy, continued. The main conflict potential was between the UOC and the OCU, reflecting the deep crisis in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

The author reveals that sociological surveys show that the causes of conflicts between believers of different religions in Ukraine are centered around property issues and buildings, although there was a slight decrease in 2022. The percentage of respondents who believe that conflicts are caused by the struggle for hierarchical power has fluctuated, but has been increasing again in recent years. Since 2019, the number of respondents who believe that the national issue is the essence of conflicts has also been increasing. Respondents note the significant role of the media in increasing religious intolerance, although this indicator does not show a clear upward or downward trend.

It is substantiated that after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, interreligious dialogue in Ukraine has acquired new important aspects. Religious organisations united to support the Ukrainian people, providing humanitarian aid, moral support and psychological assistance to those affected by the war. They actively condemned aggression and hate speech, contributing to the formation of an objective public opinion about the war.

Authors' contribution: Eugene Piletsky – developing recommendations for interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding, emphasizing the importance of cooperation between religious organisations in crisis situations; Mariia Nesterova – analysis of the mechanisms of religious conflicts in Ukraine, identification of their causes, and socio-cultural impact, analysis of sources and design of research results.

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Євген ПІЛЕЦЬКИЙ, канд. філос наук, доц.

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8820-757X

e-mail: djenkins22@gmail.com

Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, Київ, Україна

Марія НЕСТЕРОВА, д-р філософії

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5784-4704

e-mail: mnesterova@knu.ua

Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, Київ, Україна

ОСОБЛИВОСТІ МІЖКОНФЕСІЙНИХ ВІДНОСИН В УКРАЇНІ У (ПЕРЕД)ВОЄННИЙ ПЕРІОД: НА ШЛЯХУ ДО ДІАЛОГУ

Вступ. Розглянуто релігійні конфлікти в незалежній Україні, увагу акцентовано на їхньому корінні, сучасній динаміці та впливі на суспільство. Наголошено, що релігійність українців завжди мала значний вплив на їхній світогляд та соціальну поведінку, але в останні роки вона стала платформою для маніпуляцій та політичних амбіцій.

Методи. Проаналізовано релігійні конфлікти, щоб зрозуміти механізми взаємодії різних соціокультурних груп у постконфліктному суспільстві та розробити стратегії міжрелігійного діалогу і миротворчості. Виявлено, що до вторгнення Росії рівень страху перед міжетнічними та міжрелігійними конфліктами серед українців значно знизився, про що свідчать дані соціологічних опитувань. Однак конфлікти між віруючими різних церков все ж траплялися, переважно через політичні мотиви, боротьбу за майно та прагнення церковної ієрархії до влади. Розкрито, що основний конфліктний потенціал мала взаємодія між УПЦ та ПЦУ, що відображало глибоку кризу українського православ'я.

Наведено дані соціологічних опитувань щодо причин конфліктів між віруючими різних релігій в Україні. Хоча відсоток респондентів, які вважають, що причиною конфліктів є ієрархічна боротьба за владу, коливається, в останні роки він знову зріс (2023 рік), проте кількість респондентів, які вважають, що суть конфліктів полягає в національному питанні, зростає, причому особливо помітно після 2019 року. Респонденти відзначають, що роль ЗМІ у зростанні релігійної нетерпимості є значною, але цей показник не демонструє чіткої тенденції до зростання чи зниження.

Результати. Доведено, що пандемія COVID-19 внесла зміни і в міжрелігійний діалог, змусивши релігійні громади адаптуватися до нових умов, зберігаючи духовність і підтримку віруючих. Карантинні заходи сприяли розвитку віртуальних спільнот та нових форм комунікації між віруючими різних релігій.

Висновки. Обґрунтовано, що після повномасштабного вторгнення Росії у 2022 році міжрелігійний діалог в Україні набув нових важливих аспектів. Релігійні організації об'єдналися для підтримки українського народу, надаючи гуманітарну допомогу, моральну підтримку та психологічну допомогу постраждалим від війни. Вони активно засуджували агресію та мову ворожнечі, сприяючи формуванню об'єктивної громадської думки про війну.

Ключові слова: міжрелігійний діалог, релігійні конфлікти, українське православ'я, політичні мотиви, COVID-19, гуманітарна допомога, релігійна безпека.

Автори заявляють про відсутність конфлікту інтересів. Спонсори не брали участі в розробленні дослідження; у зборі, аналізі чи інтерпретації даних; у написанні рукопису; в рішенні про публікацію результатів.

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