

7-2020

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### Recommended Citation

Fylypovych, Liudmyla and Horkusha, Oksana (2020) "Interdenominational Dialogue in Contemporary Ukraine: Correction in War and Pandemic Conditions," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 40 : Iss. 5 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss5/4>

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**INTERDENOMINATIONAL DIALOGUE IN CONTEMPORARY  
UKRAINE:  
CORRECTION IN WAR AND PANDEMIC CONDITIONS**

**By Liudmyla Fylypovych and Oksana Horkusha**

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**Abstract**

The article analyzes the current state of interreligious communication in Ukraine and proves the need to correct interfaith dialogue during the war in Eastern Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors identify objective and subjective reasons for dialogue and recognize relevant issues (the lack of a joint denominational position on the need for dialogue), and new threats (the war and the pandemic) for establishing tolerant relations between religious organizations in Ukraine. Natural and socio-political catastrophes only expose problems that were not solved in peacetime. Preserving past achievements in interfaith communication is extremely important for creating new dialogue platforms. The existing dialogue platforms have been created spontaneously over a long time, and they have started to grow into a certain network only in recent decades. The authors summarize the real experience of interreligious dialogue and identify five types of dialogue platforms; and they formulate a conceptual framework for dialogue that includes attention to its purpose, topics, language, methodological approaches, criteria for the rules of its conduct, and the subjects invited to the dialogue. They make recommendations to ensure the success of interreligious dialogue in Ukraine under the current circumstances of the war and the pandemic.

**Key words:** interfaith, interdenominational dialogue, dialogue platforms, hybrid war, COVID-19, pandemic, Ukraine.

## **Introduction**

Dialogue as a communication tool is a natural state of human interaction that allows people to understand each other better. Among the various forms of dialogue (interstate, intercultural, international, etc.), interreligious dialogue,<sup>1</sup> which is generated by objective necessity, is well known and seeks to realize the following conditions:

1. coexist in one cultural space of different denominations
2. affirm their own unique religious identity
3. legitimize their activities through state guarantees of freedom of conscience
4. achieve recognition by other religious movements and institutions
5. inform society about the existence of different religious communities
6. know and get to know each other
7. spread their collective influence on public life.

Satisfying their existential, identical, cognitive, and educational needs, religious organizations (for all their interreligious solidarity) strive finally to create more comfortable conditions for their activities.

Tolerant social and political background in society promotes understanding of believers of different denominations in order to be patient with each other, cultivating friendliness and openness. However, the usual format of interreligious relations changes under *force majeure* circumstances, such as war, conflict, or pandemic. During times of such challenges, there is a need to protect one's community from natural or social disasters in the first place. Each religious movement directs its efforts to maintain its internal order, to focus on assistance primarily to its members. The natural desire to communicate is replaced by the instinct of self-preservation, which

<sup>1</sup> There are various basic concepts in this article: dialogue, communication, interaction, as well as interreligious, interfaith, interdenominational, interconfessional. Understanding the specifics of each of these concepts, the authors took into account the context of their application and features of use in a particular language tradition. The concept of interconfessional dialogue is actively used in the Ukrainian language. Here the confession is interpreted not so much as a religion or as a religious direction/a religious movement, but as a religious organizational structure. Variety of basic concepts is not an evidence of terminological incomprehensibility (chaos), but an attempt to fully convey the meaning of the phenomenon. The concept of interdenominational dialogue is most often used, because it refers to the subject of communication, namely, a specific religious institution.

may be experienced as hostile to the world around us. Sociopolitical tensions and conflict require other forms of communication that are suitable in a war situation: negotiations, peace treaties, and mutual agreements if destruction is to be avoided.

The illegal annexation of Crimea, the Russian-Ukrainian war in Eastern Ukraine, and other cataclysms of political and social life significantly affected interreligious dialogue. These events divided denominations both externally (between those who condemned the Russian aggression and those who did not, and even cooperated with the aggressor) and internally (within some denominations or churches, there were supporters of the “brotherhood of two nations”). The war revealed unresolved problems in peacetime with relations between society and the churches, between the state and religious organizations, between some denominations, and exacerbated the problems within many of them. Thus, it became clear 1) that there is a need to maintain a dialogue within the Orthodox movement to heal the internal Orthodox schism which is still relevant; 2) that understanding is needed between Roman and Greek Catholics regarding the recognition of the Greek Catholic Patriarchate as an institutionalization of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) law as the Church of the Eastern Rite; 3) that consensus be sought among Protestants on the entry of Ukrainian communities into post-Soviet denominational structures, overcoming internal confrontation in Islamic and Jewish currents of Ukraine, etc.

It is imperative to keep the “religious front” of intra-denominational and inter-denominational confrontation within the sphere of tolerance, in order to prevent the involvement of religion in war, and to prevent the escalation of various conflicts against the background of the catastrophic challenges of the war and the pandemic. Moreover, the peacekeeping potential of churches must be used to end the war, to heal the wounds inflicted by the war and long-term quarantine, and to create new dialogue platforms and public discussion spaces.

There are many **controversial questions**:

- Is the interfaith dialogue possible during the war and physical distancing due to the quarantine?
- What should this dialogue be in terms of its purpose, methods, and ways of implementation?
- Where is the line of compromise between the parties who are in dialogue, and what can they give up for the common good?
- Therefore, **the purposes** of this article are:

- to analyze the existing situation in Ukrainian society in respect to *interfaith* and *intrafaith* dialogue;
- to identify and classify dialogue platforms<sup>2</sup> while determining the effectiveness of their work;
- to formulate the conceptual foundations of dialogue;
- to make recommendations for all subjects of dialogue (the state, religious organizations, and civil society) to intensify interfaith communication.

### **The Attitude of Ukrainian Society Regarding the Possibility of Dialogue**

Before the Russian military aggression and the pandemic in Ukraine, a large number of various interfaith meetings took place on various topics (from theological to socially significant, from theoretical to every day). For a long time, the interfaith dialogue was conducted spontaneously, with narrow confessional goals, or even for a specific political purpose. There was minimal system, purpose, and/or strategy. The shortcomings of this approach became especially noticeable in the new situation regarding the occupation of Ukrainian territory, the Russian aggression, and the imposed quarantine due to the novel COVID-19 pandemic. The alternatives available were:

1) *An anti-dialogue position* that is based on the belief in the impossibility of any dialogue during the war or quarantine. There are two trends: the first is an *active* anti-dialogue position that appeals to the unreality of any negotiations with enemies because the war requires other military means of solving problems. The second trend is a *passive* anti-dialogue position based on the fact that the Church did not start the war, is not involved in it, and will not end it. Therefore, in times of turmoil, crisis, and distress, the church must fulfill its traditional mission to save people's souls.

2) *A neutral position* that is focused on maintaining the status quo, established in peacetime, before the quarantine. The proponents of such an expectant strategy hope that inertia will lead to a gradual extinction of the conflict. The crisis will resolve itself or will be resolved by a package with economic, military, political, and other measures.

<sup>2</sup> Difficulties arose in the use of the concept of dialogovi maidanchyky (dialogue platforms), so or subject common in the Ukrainian language, but which do not have a translation equivalent in English. Therefore, several options are offered: dialogue platforms, dialogue venues or sites or dialogue topics, or themes, or positions created by the churches themselves for dialogue.

3) *An active pro-dialogic position* that is based on the fact that the dialogue should be intensified to engage in consistent peace building. Moscow's aggressive destabilization plans for Ukraine can be overcome only through the unity of believers and nonbelievers. All of this requires the restoration of dialogue formats and platforms that existed before 2014, the invitation of experienced negotiators, and the involvement of as many dialogue participants as possible—from ordinary citizens to political, religious, and public figures.

4) *The expert position* takes into account the whole set of available circumstances. Based on new forms of warfare (for example, hybrid) and online communication, experts see the dangers of these new formats. "Dialogue for reconciliation" without any safeguards can be used as a means of forcing the legitimization of the occupation. A critical approach to dialogue involves finding out not only the positions but also the worldviews and hidden motives of the dialogue participants.

### **What Did the New Situation in the Field of Interreligious Dialogue Show in General?**

It turns out that the state, religious institutions, interfaith associations, and public organizations do not have strategies, and even lack short-term programs or plans for dialogue. Most of the dialogue participants declare that dialogue should be conducted because "it is better to talk than to fight." However, there are no details regarding the topic and purpose of the dialogue, its participants, their powers, means, and forms. Therefore the available dialogues are usually situational and reactive.

In general, at the level of declarations, all denominations seek social peace and the peaceful coexistence of different religions. There are a vast number of church documents from the modern era that calls for dialogue, appealing to states, political and religious leaders, and international organizations. Do the state and religious leaders read these documents? How do they implement these documents in reality if most of them do not contain any recommendations or specific instructions on what to do, when there is a specific conflict or war, when political, ethnic, or religious communities are hostile, when there is a threat of a large-scale destabilization of society? Some responsible parts of the international community have been thinking about how to cooperate, what sanctions to apply if millions of people are under physical destruction, and when negative stereotypes about others are formed in the context of growing radicalization of society. We are increasingly talking about the *securitization of religion* and the need for special concepts of national security, including the topic of spiritual security of the nation, which would clearly state

what the government should do in a dangerous confrontation between religions, nations, and individual citizens. The recently prepared OSCE document partly covers the need for an international community strategy for Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights (ODIHR), “Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Guiding Principles.”<sup>3</sup>

It is time for Ukraine itself to develop a strategy for interfaith dialogue. Relying on international documents, taking into account the actual Ukrainian historical and contemporary experience, experts such as the Institute for Strategic Studies and academic institutions of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU), and in particular, the Department of Religious Studies (DRS) of the Institute of Philosophy, have long worked in this field. They successfully act as mediators of interfaith dialogue, formulate optimal conditions for this dialogue, and develop some components for strategy and tactics of its implementation.

But do these strategies take into account the interests of Ukrainian citizens and believers of all denominations and their leaders? Does interfaith dialogue in a war situation help resolve a military conflict? And in a pandemic situation, will it help to protect people from COVID-19? Are the opinions of Ukrainian spiritual leaders, churches, authorities, analysts, specialists, experts, and scientists authoritative in formulating such strategies and programs?

Despite all the difficulties of communication, interfaith dialogue in modern Ukraine has gradually begun to move from the stage of spontaneous (occasional or particular meetings to solve an urgent problem) to the stage of networking with each other. The online stage of interfaith dialogue assumes that under the influence of situational opportunities and needs of several subjects, whose interests coincide in a specific branch or sphere, the interfaith dialogue begins. These platforms are occasionally intertwined in situational groups by everyday context or relatedness of the topic. Potentially a mobile structural network is being created. The organizers of such dialogue platforms usually set the purpose of dialogue, subject matter, language (used system of identifiers of meaning), methodological approaches, criteria for rules of conduct, and subjects invited to dialogue according to their autonomous expectations of the outcome, driven by their corporate and institutional interest.

According to the criterion of the involved subjects, it is possible to identify the following dialogue platforms in Ukraine:

<sup>3</sup> *Релігійна свобода*, 2019. №22-23: 67-71; *Релігійна свобода*, 2020. № 24: 74-99.  
<https://uars.info/index.php/rs>

## 1) Interdenominational - Collegial Platforms

Several denominations created a collegial council to formulate a consensus position and subsequent proclamation and approval in Ukraine. They are:

- *All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (VRCiRO)* represents 18 denominational members<sup>4</sup> which, by exploring and seeking to reconcile church positions, attempt to formulate a common point of view to protect the interests of the believers of these denominations. This council has adopted many essential documents to improve the activities of religious organizations in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> However, this interdenominational platform has been limited to the number of members accepted in 1996, becoming a closed and selective club of representatives of the religions of the Abrahamic tradition.
- *The All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations (VRRO)*<sup>6</sup> was formed in 2017 by the efforts of those denominations and churches whose representatives were not included in the VRCiRO. Ignoring their point of view in the communication of the VRCiRO with state bodies led to the need to create the VRRO as an interfaith dialogue organization to develop and articulate a joint position of representatives of different, not only Abrahamic religions.

The VRCiRO perceives the VRRO as its competitor, as an alternative, although the latter has never positioned itself that way. These two councils are difficult to compare. They both have a large number of members and organizations. The VRCiRO unites 90% of the religious communities registered in Ukraine, and therefore its influence and resourcefulness is greater than any competitors. The VRRO is an interfaith minority on the religious map of Ukraine, which should be perceived as a complementary, rather than competing element of interfaith understanding. When the members of the VRRO are admitted to the VRCiRO as an all-Ukrainian council, the need for the VRRO may cease to exist.

<sup>4</sup> Список членів ВРЦіРО. <http://www.vrciro.org.ua/ua/council/members>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>5</sup> Звернення ВРЦіРО. <https://www.vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>6</sup> Офіційна сторінка ВРРО. <http://vrrro.org.ua/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.



- *The Ukrainian Bible Society (UBT)*,<sup>7</sup> having the specific task of the publication and distribution of the Bible in Ukraine, eventually began to play the role of an interfaith environment, whose functions went beyond the statutory. The UBT has become a platform for regular communication between representatives of Christian denominations on a wide range of issues: educational, informational, publishing, media, diplomatic, and social (for example, the project of creating a handwritten Bible,<sup>8</sup> distribution of the Bible to soldiers at the front, in hospitals, seriously ill children, cultural measures, and so on). In 2019, the UBT initiated a meeting with the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko.<sup>9</sup>

## 2) Denominational-Interdenominational Platforms

A particular denomination initiates them in order to organize interfaith dialogue within a particular denominational discourse. The methodology is determined with a view toward the expected results of the particular dialogue. In particular, we find several initiatives from the Christian churches that have been supported by other denominations.

The most active in this respect are **Catholics**, who regularly, from year to year, hold traditional events:

- The prayer for Christian unity which is initiated annually by the Commission on Interfaith and Interreligious Relations of the UGCC in the Cathedral of St. Basil the Great in Kyiv. On Sunday, January 26, 2020, various churches participated in a prayer service. The Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) Oleksandr Drabynko<sup>10</sup> delivered the sermon.
- The Ecumenical Social Week (ECT) is a forum launched within the Roman Catholic Church's ecumenical outreach. The Institute of Ecumenical Studies of the Ukrainian Catholic University of the UGCC is the initiator and organizer of the ECT. The main parameters of the conversation are set by the Catholic tradition of

<sup>7</sup> Офіційна сторінка УБТ. <https://ukrbs.org/index.php>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>8</sup> Завершення створення Рукописної Біблії. <https://ukrbs.org/index.php/novyny-ubt/164-zavershennya-stvorennya-rukopisnoji-bibliji>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>9</sup> Сьогодні Президент України Петро Порошенко відвідав Дім Біблії. <https://ukrbs.org/index.php/novyny-ubt/135-prezident-ukrajini>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>10</sup> 26.01.2020 Молитва за єдність християн. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJyIGBBdkuc>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

conducting the intellectual, theological discussions, which are contextualized in Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

- The initiatives of the Center for Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue “Libertas” of the Institute of Religion and Society of Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) of the UGCC.<sup>12</sup> This Center constantly convenes interfaith symposia on various topical issues, inviting representatives of different traditions from both Ukraine and abroad. Today, “Libertas” widely uses modern technologies to organize international and national webinars on the dialogue of religions.<sup>13</sup>
- The work of the UGCC Commission “Justice and Peace” on concretizing the most acute social problems of modern Ukrainian reality and finding their solution: establishing peace and justice in Ukrainian society and in the world in the light of the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church. The working group prepares and analyzes existing barriers and prepares recommendations for the state and civil society organizations.<sup>14</sup>
- Meetings of “Prospora with the Patriarch” with the head of the UGCC during the Christmas holidays has become popular. Introduced by Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, these meetings now bring Ukrainian religious and political leaders together to communicate in a festive and informal setting with and among Greek Catholics. Many urgent problems are solved at such meetings.
- The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the community of St. Egidia organize interfaith prayers for peace. On February 12, 2020, Jews and the Apostolic Orthodox Church were present at such a “prayer for peace.”

The UGCC has launched several dialogue platforms (potentially its network), in which the discourse of finding unifying principles for understanding within the Ukrainian context, taking

<sup>11</sup> Див.: *Гідність, служіння, солідарність – ключові месиджі X Екуменічного соціального тижня*. <http://uanews.lviv.ua/society/2017/10/03/131733.html>. Accessed 15.05.2020; *Єдність християн України – новий формат*. <http://velychlviv.com/u-lvivskij-miskij-radi-vidbulas-pres-konferentsiya-z-nagody-vidkryttya-h-ekumenichnogo-sotsialnogo-tyzhnya/>; <http://credo.pro/2017/10/191033>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>12</sup> *Офіційна сторінка Libertas*. <http://www.libertas.infolviv.eu/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>13</sup> *Міжрелігійний діалог в світі. Історичний екскурс і сучасний стан* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwUoOD01Fe0&feature=youtu.be>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>14</sup> *До миру – всупереч війні: огляд перешкод становлення стійкої демократії (Аналітичне дослідження) // Матеріали аналіт. дослідження Робочої групи...за період березня-червня 2017р. – Київ – 2017 – С.5*

into account the needs of the so-called Ukrainian world, is constituted around various issues ranging from theological to social. The moderator of the round tables on the genesis and perspectives of the idea of the United Local Church in Ukraine, named Sophiahood, as a key feature of the Kyiv Christian paradigm, is a special Commission on interfaith and interreligious relations.<sup>15</sup>

All the proposed dialogue platforms are focused on finding models of understanding in Ukrainian society, torn and exhausted by the war with Russia. The UGCC is a church that is Ukrainian in spirit, but at the same time institutionally, because of its cooperation with the Vatican, has a global dimension, while attending to searching for understanding in the specific conditions of modern Ukraine.

Dialogues are difficult because some confessional spokespersons are not willing to give up their own corporate group goals or institutional interests, and they speak out in order to warn against autonomous expectations from the dialogue. These speakers often try to prove the importance of their point of view, the priority of a particular institutional position, the adequacy of their terminology, and the expediency of one's leading discourse.

**Orthodox communities**, as the denominations of the dominant majority of Ukraine's population, also have serious experience with inter-Christian communication, which takes many forms. The most successful can be considered the traditional scientific and practical conferences: "Uspenski Chytannya" (Assumption Readings) in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (UOC Moscow Patriarchy) and "Orthodoxy in Ukraine" (until 2020 Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP), now OCU). Despite the allegedly narrowly confessional topics, representatives of other Christian communities are involved in the discussion.

The OCU as a successor to the UOC KP, which united the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the pro-Ukrainian and pro-European part of the UOC MP, is the initiator of new interfaith platforms. This Church, using the connection with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, from which the *Tomos* was received in 2019, can create a network

<sup>15</sup> Положення про Комісію УГКЦ з міжконфесійних та міжрелігійних відносин. [http://ugcc.ua/official/official-documents/instruktsiya/polozhennya\\_pro\\_kom%D1%96s%D1%96yu\\_ugkts\\_z\\_m%D1%96zhko\\_nfes%D1%96ynih\\_ta\\_m%D1%96zhrel%D1%96g%D1%96ynih\\_v%D1%96dnosin\\_82423.html](http://ugcc.ua/official/official-documents/instruktsiya/polozhennya_pro_kom%D1%96s%D1%96yu_ugkts_z_m%D1%96zhko_nfes%D1%96ynih_ta_m%D1%96zhrel%D1%96g%D1%96ynih_v%D1%96dnosin_82423.html). Accessed 15.05.2020.

of Orthodox dialogue initiatives on international interfaith cooperation. Such activity could be recognized by autocephalous Churches from the Orthodox diptych.

- Organizing large-scale social projects initiated by the OCU unites other Christian churches. The most famous are activities of the Orthodox center “ELEOS-Ukraine.”<sup>16</sup> Its projects page contains up to 50 different initiatives in Kyiv and other cities, educational, medical, volunteer, publishing, artistic, creative, and charitable.<sup>17</sup>
- Joining the OCU, the organizers of Open Orthodox University (OOU)<sup>18</sup> with the support of the publishing house Spirit and Letter,<sup>19</sup> conduct compelling educational and research projects aimed at supporting inter-Orthodox dialogue. Thus, the OOU initiated the celebration of the so-called Catholic Christmas on December 25, talking about the various traditions of essentially united Christians. The OOU publishes much modern Orthodox literature, translated and original. It helps to deepen the knowledge of its tradition to fit Ukrainians into the Orthodox world space. The books include “Open Protestantism” (2017) by Mikhail Cherenkov, “Ukrainian Public Theology” (2017) by Archimandrite Kirill (Govorun), “Is it possible to reform Orthodoxy?” (2017) by Antoine Arzhakovsky and Deacon Mykola Denisenko, “Church Scaffolding: Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology” (2019) by Archimandrite Kirill (Govorun).
- The joint project of the TV channel 1+1 and the Open Orthodox University of St. Sophia-Wisdom “The Secret Code of Faith”<sup>20</sup> is a series of documentary, scientific, and educational films.
- The OOU promptly responds to all new intellectual movements. In particular, it joined the discussion of a new document of the Ecumenical Patriarchate “For the Life of the World,” which will promote intra-Orthodox dialogue.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Офіційна сторінка ELEOS. <http://eleos.com.ua/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>17</sup> Наші проекти. <http://eleos.com.ua/pro-nas/nashi-proekti/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>18</sup> Офіційна сторінка Відкритого Православного університету. <http://oou.org.ua/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>19</sup> Офіційна сторінка Дух і Літера. <https://duh-i-litera.com/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>20</sup> Таємний код віри. <http://oou.org.ua/mystery-code-of-faith/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>21</sup> <https://bit.ly/2LULsOH>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

- The OCU is just beginning to create confessional-interfaith dialogue platforms that will become practical factors in shaping a new religious reality. This happened before, in 2018-2019, when the Orthodox dialogue movement “Ten Theses for the OCU”<sup>22</sup> accompanied the confessional transformation by the unification of the three Orthodox denominations into a single, local Orthodox Church of Ukraine. It also set for itself the goal of effectively influencing the development of a standard thesaurus for the entire the OCU (conceptual and semantic field) for the formulation of who is an integral (genuine) Orthodox. The movement of “Ten Theses for the OCU” was formed by believers of the united local autocephalous OCU, who had previously been in various Orthodox churches. In the context of spiritual existential-metaphysical discourse, therefore, “Ten Theses for the OCU” set themselves the goal of actualizing Orthodoxy as a living spiritual discourse in the modern Ukrainian context.

**Protestant communities** have successfully used the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to establish interfaith dialogue in Ukraine. However, the dialogue platforms created by Protestants have not attracted members of non-Reformation denominations. Nevertheless, they became effective and intensive platforms for communication between the various Protestant churches. The inter-Protestant dialogue concerned the historical roots of Protestantism and the theme of public service. It is worth mentioning the All-Ukrainian Day of Thanksgiving, which gathered on September 17, 2017, in the center of Kyiv several hundred thousand Christians of various Protestant churches, who demonstrated their openness to dialogue with each other and with all segments of Ukrainian society. Also, the Protestant interfaith dialogue network pays great attention to Christian education, initiates a dialogue (in particular through the Ukrainian Bible Society, the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine) on the introduction or protection of Christian values in a modern secularized society.

Interreligious dialogue platforms have also been formed on the initiative of **non-Christian organizations**, including the Muslim and Jewish religious centers. Other religions (Buddhists, Hindus, native believers) are only participants in the proposed interfaith initiatives, as their resources for such independent activities are limited. There is cooperation with civil society to

<sup>22</sup> Десять Тез для ПЦУ. <https://www.facebook.com/desyat.tez/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

improve the conditions of social coexistence in specific terrestrial locations, as in modern Ukraine, to achieve interreligious understanding.

**3) Civil-Interreligious platforms** are initiated by public organizations and movements to understand and solve specific, pressing social problems with the involvement of religious representatives for this purpose. They include:

- Public movement “*Vsi razom!*” (All together). This movement is a “national campaign for the development of leaders and managers for social and state transformation based on Christian values.” To this aim, they hold a series of interfaith events in various cities of Ukraine, “theoretical forums,” “training sessions,” and “practical offices.” This dialogue platform goes beyond a broader topic and attracts more religious representatives to discuss it. One of the topics is the “protection of the institution of the family and spiritual values, which are the foundation of Ukrainian identity.”<sup>23</sup> It has planned to adopt proposals to improve the legislative initiative for further communication with members of the Ukrainian Parliament, called *Verkhovna Rada*. The movement effectively joins the articulation of a coherent Christian position on urgent contextual issues in modern Ukraine.

- Local interfaith dialogue platforms in different cities of Ukraine are initiated by scientists, teachers, journalists, businesspeople, and public figures with the support of a particular religious community (such as a series of round tables on tolerance in Zaporizhia, interfaith events “Stairs” in Dnipro). In addition, communication platforms are being developed for the implementation of specific strategic programs of public initiatives such as the European Christian Congress,<sup>24</sup> which is concerned with finding strategies for understanding between Christians in Ukraine for the peaceful future of humanity.
- Various activities of the NGO “Ukrainian Association of Researchers of Religion,” which, through the efforts of its local branches, organize interfaith communication

<sup>23</sup> Офіційна сторінка *Vsi razom*. <https://vsirazom.ua/news/u-kmda-vidbuvsya-kruglij-stil-simya-ta-diti-ki%d1%97vska-strategiya-2020>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/groups/1601397093445246/?multi\\_permaLinks=1937686293149656&notif\\_id=1507494249584465&notif\\_t=group\\_activity](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1601397093445246/?multi_permaLinks=1937686293149656&notif_id=1507494249584465&notif_t=group_activity). Accessed 15.05.2020.

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on current topics by holding round tables, press conferences, and specialized teaching courses.

- “Bottom” initiatives, at which participants feel a lack of interfaith understanding and want to know “the Other,” present their tradition in direct cooperation to address specific contextual social issues. For example, the Informal Group of Interreligious Peace<sup>25</sup> focuses on interreligious communication at a personal level. In order to operate this dialogue platform, the participants identify their goals as the “acquaintance of believers of different traditions with each other's philosophies and cultures; search for understanding of other religions; breaking stereotypes about religious people and interreligious dialogue; the development of love between believers; strengthening relations based on common principles; consolidation of society (overcoming distances between people); development of spiritual qualities (virtues) in the younger generation; proving by practical actions that religion has a positive effect on cultural change.”

**4) Intellectual and educational-interreligious dialogue platforms** created by educational institutions and intellectual and educational groups deserve special attention. In these cases, a particular research problem or educational initiative formulated by a group of experts becomes the basis for dialogue.

- The Resource and Research Center of the Euro-Asian Accreditation Association is active in holding conferences, regular seminars, publishing relevant literature on inter-Christian topics, and in particular, the *Theological Reflections Journal* (2020 #24).
- The Experience of National University Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, where the course “Practical Religious Studies” has been taught for over 25 years, allows students to have direct communication with representatives of different denominations. Such communication is accompanied by professional theoretical and methodological moderation of Ukrainian researchers of religion. Currently, similar courses are being introduced in other universities in Kyiv, Ternopil, and Chernivtsi. During the

<sup>25</sup> <https://bit.ly/3bXENjd>. Accessed 15.05.2020.



classes, students gain not only some knowledge about specific religious communities present in Ukraine but also skills of communication, conducting interreligious dialogue aimed at understanding.

- Teaching “Religious Studies” in religious/spiritual high schools, in particular in the UGCC Kyiv Three Saints Theological Seminary. Its students are systematically acquainted with theoretical religious knowledge and gain communication skills in meetings with representatives of different denominations. A similar experience is being implemented in Chernivtsi, Ternopil, Odesa, Rivne, and Khmelnytsky.
- The activity of the Open Orthodox University of Holy Sophia-Wisdom<sup>26</sup> has been mentioned above. Orthodox and secular intellectuals founded this public university. The OOU constantly initiates a dialogue between religions, between the Church and society, focusing not only on the current state and prospects for the development of Orthodox theology but also Christian theology in general. Here the conversation is conducted on a theoretical level, but with a view to a wider range of interested listeners and has an educational purpose. Lectures on open Orthodoxy, open Protestantism, open Catholicism, religion, and information technology have been positive influences for fruitful dialogue.
- Scientific and educational activities of academic institutions, in particular the Department of Religious Studies of the Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, which theoretically substantiated the need to develop a scientific-confessional dialogue network aimed at coordinating and sometimes moderating this area of public relations. Scientific and practical conferences, round tables, and press conferences with the involvement of representatives of various denominations in Ukraine have been taking place under the DRS since 1991—and more systematically and thematically since 1996. For more than 25 years these events have focused on religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, state-church relations in the world, and Ukraine. Representatives of various denominations are actively involved in the discussion of these important topics and the development of common positions, because they trust the experts

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/openorthodoxuniversity/?fref=mentions&pnref=story>. Accessed 15.05.2020.



from the DRS. As a result of regular conferences on “Religious Freedom,” a certain intellectual environment has been formed, which has been able to produce new ideas, make relevant laws, and comment on events and implement international documents into Ukrainian reality. This expert community has developed a robust algorithmic and methodological basis for establishing an interfaith dialogue to facilitate discourse in a clearly defined thematic, cultural, and historical context.

A recent productive and successful dialogue project was the Week of Interfaith Harmony (February 1-7, 2020).<sup>27</sup> The purpose of this event was to update an effective strategy and method of establishing interreligious understanding. The co-organizers were the DRS of Institute of Philosophy, which provided theoretical and methodological support for the project, the Department of Religions and Nationalities of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Association of Researchers of Religion, and the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Organizations. Such events demonstrate that the dialogue, organized on the basis of academic methodology and criteria, is welcomed by speakers from different groups:

- Religious representatives from different denominations, who seek to reveal the missionary features of their denominational position;
- Officials interested in effective methods and establishing interfaith understanding and stabilizing public life in Ukraine;
- Humanitarians who are interested in an in-depth analysis of the religious situation in Ukraine to clarify the network of confessional discourses and harmonization methods for the common good;
- Public figures that practically affirm and make practical religious values.

This ensured the integrity of the extended position on the dialogue. The adopted final Memorandum,<sup>28</sup> as noted by the project participants, may become a basis for developing a joint strategy of the church, the state, and society for interfaith dialogue.

The Memorandum, in particular, identifies those “epicenters of reality,” which needs to be addressed in a consolidated manner during interfaith dialogue: a) *the war* that brought to life the

<sup>27</sup>Релігійна свобода, 2020. №24: 108-126. <https://uars.info/index.php/rs/article/view/2106>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>28</sup>[http://vrro.org.ua/about/official-documents/103memorandum-aboutinterfaithcooperation.html?fbclid=IwAR28NCRQyWcMdmfHvSCsgkOQZ\\_b-i2GJoIiwBa-D3aaNvq8DtR8Bz\\_58W8A](http://vrro.org.ua/about/official-documents/103memorandum-aboutinterfaithcooperation.html?fbclid=IwAR28NCRQyWcMdmfHvSCsgkOQZ_b-i2GJoIiwBa-D3aaNvq8DtR8Bz_58W8A) Accessed 15.05.2020.

need for chaplaincy; b) *marginal life situations* (poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, unwanted pregnancies, fatal diseases, including novel coronavirus) which require palliative care; charity for the terminally ill, service for the disabled, assistance to the homeless, drug addicts, the unemployed; c) the upbringing and education of children which, in a situation of domination of the dictatorship of secularism and vulgar utilitarianism, are alarmed about the return of sacred values as dominant in the life of a modern human.

The document warns against “the desire to impose on others one's top point of view, one's unique interpretation of reality, one's true position, one's exclusive canonicity, truthfulness, correctness, or righteousness.” It leads to a confrontation in the multi-religious community. Religious organizations opposed to the whole of Ukrainian society, excluded themselves from the interfaith communication network and the creation of the future of Ukraine. For such institutions, narrow church interests and church policy are a priority, which contradicts the general interest of denomination, country, world, and humanity.

#### **5) The externally inspired-interreligious dialogue platforms.**

As a modern multid denominational state, Ukraine is included in the global world. So the Ukrainian internal religious situation is the subject of interest and concern to the European and world communities. In the event of further escalation of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine with the use of the religious factor and the incitement of hostility in interfaith relations, local Ukrainian problems may become problems of global security. Therefore, international organizations are intensifying educational and analytical activities in Ukraine, focused on familiarizing the Ukrainian religious community with models of interfaith understanding in other countries, and on acquainting the world community with the state of these relations in Ukraine. But there are different cases.

The International Commission for Truth, Justice, and the Restoration of Peace between Russia and Ukraine, together with the European Union, has been working for four years, involving Ukrainian, Russian, and European theologians and writers, public and church leaders. The result of the commission's work was a fascinating document that was recently presented in Ukraine. *Developed Peace Plan* for the cessation of the war is consistent with the so-called Minsk Peace Accords, according to which the Ukrainian-Russian military conflict will be resolved at the

expense of Ukraine. Peace between Russia and Ukraine is discussed in the paradigm of reconciliation between the victim (the Ukrainian side) and the aggressor (the Russian side).

Calling for such reconciliation, these “peacebuilders” do not understand the specific situation, wanting to achieve some abstract peace without delving into the special conditions of Ukrainian existence. Do the organizers and participants of the dialogue, including religious figures, realize that the strategic interests of Ukraine and Russia are conflicting? Ukraine seeks to defend its independence from the Russian Empire and protects its territories from Russian troops and Russian-armed and Russian-funded sub-Russian militants. Instead, Russia’s strategic interest is the restoration of an imperial formation centered in Moscow, which must include a subordinate Ukraine as a historically funded and raw material component. The Kremlin is expansively imposing on the world the chauvinistic imperial ideology of “*Russkii Mir*” (Russian World), denying Ukraine's integrity and the identity of Ukrainians as a nation state. At the same time, Ukraine is considered a springboard for further political and economic expansion. Russia imposes on the world its plan of world order and rules of the game, which are based not on democratic values, but on aggressive totalitarian-authoritarian voluntarism, involving Christians and authoritative religious thinkers of Ukraine in its policy.

There is another example. Among the existing international interreligious dialogue platforms initiated and conducted with the support of foreign centers and communities are the Academy of Freedom of Religion and Belief and the Center for the Study of Religion and Law at Brigham Young University (Provo, Utah, USA). Religious freedom has become the thematic core for a series of Kyiv’s symposia based on the DRS. During this time period (22 years), more than 100 reports by international and domestic experts on the protection of religious rights and freedoms were published in the yearbook *Religious Freedom*. Thanks to this positive initiative, which was suspended due to the war and COVID-19; hundreds of Ukrainians, religious leaders, theologians, scholars, civil servants, journalists, and public figures joined the world experience of interfaith communication, quality analysis of the religious situation in Ukraine, and in the world. Participants of these conferences on dialogue formed a highly qualified expert environment in the field of state-church and interfaith communication.

Several international interfaith movements that have good experience in interfaith communication and are looking for partners for dialogue may come to Ukraine. For example, the

Parliament of the World's Religions<sup>29</sup> is interested in Ukraine through Ukrainian scholars and some religious leaders who participated in its international events (congresses and conferences). They look for opportunities for joint projects in the field of interfaith communication on a global scale. This year, Ukraine has become an active participant in the legislative initiative to celebrate the World Week of Interfaith Harmony (WIHW).<sup>30</sup> At the initiative of the VRRO, Ukrainian Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hare Krishnas, Bahai, and others took part in the World Week events—when all interfaith groups can show the world how powerful they are. Thousands of events organized by these groups often go unnoticed, not only by the general public but also by other groups. This week will provide an opportunity for these groups to get to know each other, strengthen their movement by making connections, and avoid duplication of efforts. It is to be hoped that this initiative will be a starting point from which all people of goodwill realize that the common values they adhere to far outweigh the differences they have, which will demonstrate the level of peace and harmony in their communities. Each year, a special commission determines the winners of the WIHW Award. The World Interfaith Harmony Week initiative has announced the official winners of the 2020 H.M. King Abdullah II World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize. The WIHW Prize recognizes the three events organized during the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, which best promoted the goals of the World Interfaith Harmony Week. Among the winners was Ukraine, which took third place.<sup>31</sup>

The intergovernmental organization KAICIID<sup>32</sup> is interested in cooperation with Ukraine, thanks to the active position of the Ukrainian interdenominational organization “Libertas” led by T. Dzyubanskiy. This center is designed to promote dialogue at the global level between people of different faiths and cultures. It prevents and resolves conflicts to improve mutual understanding and cooperation, eliminates hostility, reduces fear, and instills mutual respect. In partnership with UNESCO, the EU, UNDP, the Alliance of Civilizations of the United Nations, the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacekeepers, the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), Religion for Peace, KAICIID increases its influence on dialogue as one of the effective mechanisms of peacemaking.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.parliamentofreligions.org/membership>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>30</sup> <https://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

<sup>31</sup> <https://parliamentofreligions.org/blog/2020-05-22-0932/world-interfaith-harmony-week-2020-prize-winners-announced>. Accessed 21.05.2020.

<sup>32</sup> *King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue*. <https://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are>. Accessed 15.05.2020.

The peacekeeping organization is the international non-governmental organization HWPL (Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light), which was created to promote global peace. Having held a peace summit in Kyiv in September 2019, this organization is actively involving representatives of religious organizations that sign the “Declaration of Peace and the Cessation of Wars.”<sup>33</sup>

For all the value of international experience in establishing interfaith dialogue, it is crucial to contextualize this experience to understand for what purpose and in whose interests certain international dialogue platforms are introduced. They must work effectively for peace, the assertion of human and religious rights and freedoms, for believers and nonbelievers, and for civic and religious communities.

### **Recommendations for Interfaith Dialogue**

Long-term observations and personal involvement in the practice of interreligious dialogues provide an opportunity to formulate some recommendations on the conditions of its conduct. Successful dialogue can be productive if the actors:

- are in common existential circumstances;
- share a common perception of reality—real and open, and not artificially mythological-ideological;
- focus on specific problems of citizens in relation to which they carry out their activities;
- agree on the specific purpose of the dialogue;
- seek to understand each other;
- apply various religious and secular, interreligious and special academic dialogue platforms, based on their implementation on rationally verified methods, regulate their statements and the dialogue itself by conventionally defined parameters;
- monitor and encourage partners in dialogue to work toward common interests rather than the narrow interest of a separate church;

<sup>33</sup>[https://www.prostir.ua/wpcontent/uploads/2017/02/%D0%94%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F\\_%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80.pdf](https://www.prostir.ua/wpcontent/uploads/2017/02/%D0%94%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F_%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80.pdf). Accessed 15.05.2020.

- adhere to the ethics of interreligious and interfaith communication at all levels: condemnation and categorical rejection of hate speech, the use of concepts that have acquired a negative meaning such as “sectarianism,” “apostasy,” “schismatics,” etc., as destructive for the interaction of religious communities in Ukrainian society;
- condemn any manifestations of intolerance, prejudice, false information of society (which have the consequences of conflicts, especially under religious slogans), as a crime contrary to the legal principles of the Ukrainian Constitution;
- call on members of interfaith communities belonging to different religions and religious organizations to dialogue on the general principles of complementarity and the desire to cooperate with all stakeholders in issues of interreligious relations in Ukraine and the world.

Having considered the vast majority of existing dialogue platforms in Ukraine, the activities of its subjects (religious organizations, government officials and civil society), one can propose the **following steps** for the development of interreligious dialogue in Ukraine:

- Introduction of active explanatory activity, and the printing of scholarly and practical materials to inform society impartially and objectively about the state and prospects of interreligious relations and the religions represented in Ukraine;
- Conducting annual specialized conferences (for example, “Religious Freedom” and “Harmonization of Interfaith and Interreligious Relations: Strategy and Prospects”) in order to update the discussion of effective methods of establishing interfaith and interreligious understanding;
- Monitoring of state policy in establishing interfaith understanding in multi-denominational Ukraine and state compliance with the Constitution and the Law of Ukraine “Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” and international documents;
- Formulation of strategies for understanding and further development of effective and successful programs of interreligious communication, and the use of positive experience of religious organizations in the field of charity, volunteering, and chaplaincy;

- Establishing cooperation with state institutions to find effective methodologies for establishing interfaith understanding and stabilizing public life in Ukraine in the fields of culture and education;
- Review of educational priorities based on spiritual values;
- The support of permanent dialogue platforms for regular interfaith communication within the existing ones, and the creation of conditions for the emergence of new interfaith structures and space.

## Conclusions

Having analyzed the existing approaches to interreligious and intrafaith dialogue in Ukraine, it is necessary to recognize the lack of a unified position in society about the need and prospects of such dialogue.

Among the *religious organizations* are:

- organizations that deliberately ignore interfaith communication (the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), now the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine and Jehovah's Witnesses);
- those who are very interested in such dialogue; usually, they are religious minorities who want recognition from the religious majority;
- organizations that, due to objective circumstances and, in particular, due to their meager resources, cannot take an active part in the dialogue (Buddhists, Bahais, etc.);
- those who initiate and conduct dialogue, going beyond purely theological topics, set the direction of socially significant discussions, and take an active constructive social position.

Among *public organizations*, mass media, educators, and scholars, the vast majority are in favor of expanding and strengthening the dialogue between religions and society.

There is also no unity among the *authorities*. In general, the state is interested in peaceful relations between religions. There is a state policy of supporting dialogue at the level of central authorities. But depending on the region, the local government usually takes the local religious majority's position; which dictates the format, purpose, means, and participants in the dialogue.

In peaceful conditions, the dialogue developed slowly but surely, and there were positive signs of its advancement in Ukraine. In the pre-war period, the state of interreligious communication in Ukraine can be assessed as satisfactory, which meets world standards. Only the intra-Orthodox dialogue caused serious fears, which resulted in repeated divisions and unification of different parts of Orthodoxy in Ukraine.

The vast majority of currently known dialogue platforms were created in the pre-war period. There are five types of such sites:

- Interdenominational-Collegial
- Denominational-Interdenominational
- Civil-Interreligious
- Intellectual and educational-Interreligious
- Externally inspired-Interreligious

The most widespread are mixed types, in which representatives of different religions, the state, and civil society take part. Numerous examples show the formation of a network of interdenominational communication in Ukraine.

There was a visible polarization in the religious environment during the war. It has no prospects of being overcome until the end of the war. The novel coronavirus aggravated the situation by driving all law-abiding religious organizations into isolation, objectively reducing real interfaith communication to zero.

Adverse circumstances have given rise to new forms of communication, via the Internet, which can lead to both positive and negative consequences (in particular, the ambiguous Statement of the VRCiRO on the inadmissibility of incitement to hostility in society in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, the joint prayer online against the coronavirus is perceived by Ukrainian society as unequivocally positive).

Under the new conditions of the war and the pandemic, where quick and transparent decisions have to be made, there is a growing need to adjust the experience of interfaith dialogue. Less and less time is spent on discussions; dialogue is focused on concrete cooperative action, and real joint projects become popular.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.irs.in.ua/ua/2020-04-irf-statement-on-covid-19-quarantine>. Accessed 15.05.2020.



The formulated **recommendations** are aimed at helping the state, religious organizations, and civil society

1. to preserve past developments in the field of interreligious dialogue;
2. to form a strategy of interdenominational and interreligious relations and clearly define the purpose, means, subjects;
3. to develop concrete steps for its implementation, like the ways to intensify interfaith communication.

The understanding in contemporary Ukraine largely depends not only on the common reality, in which there are representatives of different religions, but also on the awareness of common problems and the desire to solve them together. There is both a willingness to conduct this dialogue and to be effective in it, and an availability of favorable dialogue platforms and moderators. This can set the rhythm and algorithm of dialogue, as well as establish reasonable criteria and regulatory mechanisms, and place constructive accents.

The current socio-political situation in Ukraine requires a new format of communication between its subjects; between religious organizations, civil society, government, experts, etc. Such a format should be characterized by openness and transparency, becoming a platform for interaction and the development of public interests which acquire significance in the formulation of common goals and objectives.