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Christopher Garbowski

*Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland.*

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# THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY IN POLAND

By Christopher Garbowski

**Christopher Garbowski** is an associate Professor at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. He is primarily interested in values and religion in literature and popular culture and is the author and co-editor of a number of books, among them *Religious Life in Poland: History, Diversity and Modern Issues* (2014). His latest book is *Truth, Beauty and the Common Good: The Search for Meaning through Culture, Community and Life* (2021). He is an Advisory Editor of OPREE and has previously contributed articles to this publication.

In the broadest of terms, political theology can be defined as “the analysis of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological, social, and economic aspects) from the perspective of God’s ways with the world.”<sup>1</sup> Since the world changes, as do the politics accompanying them, political theology is of necessity a dynamic branch of the theological enterprise. The editors to the second edition of *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* note a number of such changes that justify the expanded second edition of their handbook, including—what is most pertinent for understanding political theology at present in Poland—“the discourse on religion and violence, and new modalities of war.”<sup>2</sup> A substantive chapter in this vein, by Emmanuel Katongole, starts with a news item concerning civil war in Ivory Coast in 2011. The author follows this sample news stressing the problems of “power struggle, corruption, sham elections, and civil war that characterize politics of much of sub-Saharan Africa.”<sup>3</sup> Political theology is not new to Poland, but obviously the full-scale invasion by Russia of the neighboring Ukraine on February 24, 2022, together with the accompanying atrocities has had a similar impact in the field in the country to that of a number of the authors in the handbook. This article will provide an introductory view of a significant part of this ongoing response in the country.

<sup>1</sup> William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott (Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cavanaugh and Scott, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” 1.

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, “Political Theologies of Africa,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, 346.

First of all, what is the current socio-political situation in Poland? As is quite well known internationally the initial outpouring of support in Poland for Ukrainians under attack was tremendous and also evoked a response at the symbolic level. Many institutions, for instance universities, hung Polish and Ukrainian flags together in a gesture of solidarity. Nevertheless, the greatest sign of solidarity at the grassroots level of Poles with Ukraine was and remains the acceptance of the flood of refugees from the attacked country. According to information given by the Polish Border Guard agency, over four and a half million refugees fleeing the Russian invasion crossed the border from Ukraine into Poland by Friday, July 9, 2022.<sup>4</sup> And millions more have followed. In a report published by the Polish Institute of Economics (PIE), the stages of the involvement for the first three months after the war are succinctly described: “At the start, spontaneous help dominated: grassroots initiatives by the Polish public, a massive and rapid social effort of an unprecedented nature, supported by local government bodies and the central authorities. During the next stage, adaptation, the role of the state increased, and the role of civil society decreased.”<sup>5</sup> In the month following the outbreak of war, in March, the Polish government enacted a measure offering wide-ranging support to Ukrainian refugees. A significant number of these Ukrainians left for other countries and most of the men returned to their country to participate in the resistance to the invaders. From relatively early on, Ukrainian men needed special permission to leave their country. Another matter is how the refugees felt about their stay in Poland. For instance, a woman might have intended to eventually return to Ukraine but learned that her husband died at the front and her whole life changed. Overall, well over a million of these refugees have stayed in the country.

This influx was met with a highly supportive response on the part of Poles, even taking in over half a million refugees into their own homes. According to the authors of the PIE report it was estimated three quarters of the Polish society was involved in some form of direct support of the refugees, whether in fund raising, helping find places to stay, in dealing with administrative questions, etc.<sup>6</sup> Many organizations participated, naturally including church organizations. Unsurprisingly a large number of refugees, especially children, needed

<sup>4</sup> “Poland welcomes 4.62 million refugees from Ukraine: officials,” *PolskieRadio.pl*, July 8, 2022, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7784/Artykul/2996236,Poland-welcomes-462-million-refugees-from-Ukraine-officials>.

<sup>5</sup> See Łukasz Baszczak, Aneta Kiełczewska, Paula Kukołowicz, Agnieszka Wincewicz, Radosław Zyzik, *How Polish Society Has Been Helping Refugees from Ukraine* (Warsaw: Polish Economic Institute, 2022), p.6, <https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Pomoc-pol-spol-UKR-ENG-22.07.2022-C.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See Baszczak, et.al., *How Polish Society Has Been Helping Refugees from Ukraine*, p.6, passim.

help dealing with trauma.<sup>7</sup> Taking into account their number, the corresponding response of Ukrainians who were already working or studying in the country was comparatively even greater. Significantly, because of this combined response there have been very few refugee camps. Jan Rulewski, an activist during the original Solidarity movement of the 1980s, claims the welcome was a natural Polish response: “Poles have empathized with those who were attacked, which is why the underhandedness and barbarity of the Russians moved us so much. It is our *non possumus* for treacherous Russia.”<sup>8</sup>

Among the more obvious lessons of the current war itself is that, at present soft power is not enough. The overreliance on this kind of force, together with mere economic leverage in the evidently naïve belief that Russia would become democratized, is among the factors that led to a security crisis in Europe. The closer a country is to the Ukrainian border — not to mention the Russian border, as is the case with the Baltic states and Scandinavian countries — the more intensely it is felt, reminding us that rearmament is one of the key solutions. Naturally Poland has increased its spending on defense tremendously.<sup>9</sup>

The above is only a partial background to the factors of the war with an undoubted potential for influencing the current practice of political theology in the country. But before this matter is explored more specifically, the question of how the subject previously stood in Poland needs to be reviewed.

Early in this century two philosophers, Marek Cichocki and Dariusz Karłowicz, established the Political Theology think tank, as what eventually resulted can be described, which initially published a yearbook and also translations of pertinent classics such as the works of Jacques Maritain, Eric Voegelin, and Carl Schmitt. Through these and further activities a milieu was created which attracted intellectuals, scholars, journalists to contribute to their publications and various events. Eventually they also established a rich website and numerous other projects. In their first yearbook, published in 2003, they stated their intent to “look at political matters from the perspective of last things.” On their webpage they explain

<sup>7</sup> For information on how one NGO responded to the needs of traumatized children and their families, see “Kompleksowe wsparcie dla dzieci uchodźczych z Ukrainy oraz członków ich rodzin,” *Fundacja Ocalenia*, April 20, 2022, <https://ocalenie.org.pl/projekty/kompleksowe-wsparcie-dla-dzieci-uchodzczych-z-ukrainy-oraz-czlonkow-ich-rodzin>.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Rulewski, “Warto mieć takiego sąsiada,” interview conducted by Eliza Olczyk, *Plus Minus Rzeczpospolita*, March 26-27, 2022, 7.

<sup>9</sup> The results of this are discussed in: Matthew Karnitschinig and Wojciech Kość, “Meet Europe’s Coming Military Superpower: Poland,” *Politico*, November 21, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-military-superpower-poland-army/>.

their intent to “view social matters from a religious perspective because we are interested in the person as being both *homo politicus* and *homo religious*—one and the same person in the most fundamental dimensions, experiences, and needs. The integral nature of both fields is derived from the premise of the integral nature of the person.”<sup>10</sup> This approach is quite evident in the introduction to the ninth number of their yearbook that celebrated the 1050<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Poland’s first ruler accepting baptism, a foundational moment for the Polish national community. The founders of Political Theology stated, “Catholicism is the source of the constant impulse for the universalization of Polishness, making it impossible for a descent into political and cultural particularism.”<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the authors add, this leads to a sacramentally augmented feature of Polish politics: its inclusive nature. They claim the fact that since from the Catholic perspective faith stems from grace, freedom of religion is crucial to a sound political system. Cichocki and Karłowicz provocatively stress:

If in today’s debates we return to the image of Jagiellonian diversity [i.e. more or less of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth—C.G] with its multi-ethnic, multi religious and multicultural nature, then we must remember that Roman Catholicism facilitated rather than created barriers for it. From the Polish perspective a theocracy means an attempt at appropriating divine competence—it expresses the conviction that politics can impose faith. No state can be the ruler of the consciences of its citizens, otherwise it destroys the relationship of politics to the transcendent.<sup>12</sup>

Pertinently, Dariusz Karłowicz, who had some background in business, established the St. Nicholas foundation that funds the journal with all its publications and website. The foundation is also engaged in charitable activities. A few years before the war broke out it also supported a day care center in Mariupol, Ukraine, which had to be abandoned when the city was taken over by the Russians.<sup>13</sup>

Marek Cichocki is the author of a number of books richly treating political philosophy and theology. For instance, in his *North and South: Texts about Polish Culture and History* of 2018 raises the question of the source of Polish and European culture.<sup>14</sup> Cichocki starts the

<sup>10</sup> Marek A. Cichocki and Dariusz Karłowicz, “Czym jest Teologia polityczna,” *Teologia Polityczna*, nd., <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/czym-jest-teologia-polityczna>.

<sup>11</sup> Marek Cichocki and Dariusz Karłowicz, “Galeria Polaków,” *Teologia Polityczna*, no. 9 (2016), 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Kateryna Suchomłynowa, “Ucieczka z Mariupola. Relacja kierowniczkki Świetlicy Świętego Mikołaja,” *Teologia Polityczna*, March 29, 2022, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/ucieczka-z-mariupola-relacja-kierowniczkki-swietlicy-swietego-mikolaja>.

<sup>14</sup> Marek Cichocki, *Północ i Południe: Teksty o polskiej kulturze i historii* (Warsaw: Teologia Polityczna, 2018).

introductory essay with the observation that so many Poles are placing their hopes in a unified Europe, which is not a problem in itself, but can nevertheless be an excuse for not examining themselves at a profounder level. Moreover, he is critical of the manner of Europe's unification which in his view is a rather shallow process. Europe in its deepest sense has what he calls a north south vector which was largely lost in the Enlightenment. He explains this symbolic orientation in that the origins of its civilization go back to the creative encounter of the barbarian peoples, i.e. the north, with Roman civilization—the south. This led to the conversion of the barbarian peoples which transformed their destructive force into a creative form. The key here is “conversion.” Obviously, there is the Christian dimension, but what was particularly meaningful was the impetus Augustine gave this conversion through overcoming the destructive force of Manichaeism. The influential Manicheans believed in the reality of evil as a semi-divine force, while for Augustine evil is nothingness. Cichocki contends overcoming the nothingness of evil was a seminal factor in turning destructive forces toward the good. On account of their conversion and self examination each of the barbarian peoples including the Poles discovered their own version of the good, which resulted in the variety of the good in Europe.

From the above it is evident Cichocki is interested in the broad view of political philosophy and theology, and with a strong historical consciousness. This is even strengthened by the war in Ukraine. His most recent book *The Struggle for the World*,<sup>15</sup> written in August 2022, he confronts the world after the Russian invasion. Similar to Frank Furedi in his *The Road to Ukraine*, Cichocki does not look at the invasion as a return to the Cold War as have many pundits in Poland and abroad. Furedi claims a better analogy would be the multipolar situation of the world before the First World War. “If anything,” Furedi writes, “the situation is even more complicated than in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>16</sup> Cichocki does not give this specific analogy, but the emergence of a number of civilizational states with their competitive yet self-enclosed nature is apparently leading to the end of the largely unipolar world that emerged at the end of the Cold War, with its American leadership. Among these civilizational states are the United States, China and India, perhaps even Israel—size is not essential—which are part of the struggle the world is undergoing. I will look more specifically at Europe and Poland in this context, which is where the political theology becomes more evident in his argument.

<sup>15</sup> Marek Cichocki, *Walka o Świat* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Frank Furedi, *The Road to Ukraine: How the West Lost Its Way* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 19.

The question Cichocki asks at the onset of his penetrating look at Europe is whether the continent can still be called a civilization, or more specifically in what condition is it in terms of a civilization. And he admits it is a difficult question, without a clear answer. For centuries the Judeo-Christian religious tradition gave it a direction with a linear sense of time, and with a salvific telos. When this Christian sense was cast aside in the Enlightenment, this linear sense of time was absorbed by various modern ideologies possessing a temporal vector of a secular progressive turn. Among others this is what connected liberalism, socialism, communism, etc., in their separate efforts to reach a universal civilization. Eventually from this a certain paradox ensued.

In order to become post-historical, Europe had to cast aside its rich tradition. As a result, it is hardly surprising the EU is in some ways an anti-civilization. This even suggests to some of its contemporaries that Europeans are actually hiding behind this allegedly neutral post-historical guise. It is simply a clever alternative means to gain domination over others. Moreover, this neutrality is gained at the expense of American protection.

The American civilization is built on its dream, whereas the Europeans have no dream. Any dream they had, such as was partially evident in the nineteenth century, was largely destroyed by the world wars, which among other things deprived Europe of its warrior ethos.<sup>17</sup> Cichocki notes that,

It seems that the fact that without great resistance, with the exception of only Poland and Great Britain, Europe submitted to the act of violence and terror on the part of Hitler, explains a lot in terms of the current spirit of Europeans and their response to each other as well as to the new dangers in the world. Behind the current project of the European Union and its civilizational neutrality can be detected the long dark shadow not only of nationalisms, imperialisms and colonialisms, but also the shameful fall of the interwar world and shameful defeats at the beginning of the second Great War [i.e. World War I —C.G.]<sup>18</sup>

On account of the above it is increasingly evident that a revision of contemporary Europe's attitude to its own civilization is an absolute necessity. The attempts at building a post-historical neutral world civilization, it has led to a world of new rivalries and conflicts: "We have been left in this one world locked up together, without hope, without

<sup>17</sup> Similarly Furedi, notes the general lack of willingness of European to fight for their countries, even in Britain the army is guilty of losing historically significant ideas that made it possible to defend the state in the past: see Furedi, *The Road to Ukraine*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 61-62.

transcendence, without progress; encouraged by evermore fantastic technological innovations that our dreams of a better world and dismal remains of our former spirituality be achieved in virtual reality.”<sup>19</sup>

The above is not how Poland as well as other countries of East Central Europe perceived the West they struggled to join and whose doorways swung open for them after 1989. Nor are the problems an abstraction. What seems at stake are human rights, individual freedom, the right of nations to their sovereignty, the autonomous value of traditions and cultures for their various identities as well as the spiritual dimension of human existence.<sup>20</sup> These are under threat by Western ideologies, which among other things are supported by cancel culture and its ilk: liberal political culture is increasingly illiberal. For some Poles this is not a problem, and they submit themselves to it, though it relegates their society to a lower category. Witnessing to the above historic values involves a good deal of struggle. Why is this the case?

In his discussion of civilizational states, among other scholars Cichocki draws on Christopher Coker. The latter insists Europe is a post-Christian civilization.<sup>21</sup> But Coker notes that part of Europe still draws on its Christian heritage and poses the question of whether it is not the case that these usually less liberal countries, as he puts it, of Central Europe, do so on account of their experience of communism. For Cichocki the answer to this question is obvious. Through their more than half century experience of the challenge of communism, Christianity was a beacon of sense to these populations. The experience of truth that accompanied the Christian revelation meant that “[a] person’s freedom and truth of his/her life can never be the product of some ideology or even one political or economic project.”<sup>22</sup> And this is the lesson concerning truth and freedom that the conflict with communism imparted that was never experienced by western societies. Through their postwar experience in which they never had to confront the communist lie the latter came up with their own conception of trust which was skeptical of any universal truth. And so, “The European Union with its technocratic management and judicial pronouncements is currently the obvious expression of this western, dominant ‘truth’ in Europe as well as its concrete practices affecting the shape of our lives.”<sup>23</sup> Three decades after the end of the Cold War when all this

<sup>19</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 65.

<sup>20</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 145.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Coker, *The Rise of the Civilizational State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 31-38.

<sup>22</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 160.

<sup>23</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 164-65.



has hit home it is a source of disappointment and even anger to many from Central Europe: “how forcefully Europe, conducting its procedural authorities, practical moralities and wisdom, which is supposed to decide what is good, right and useful, looked upon them from on high, ignoring their Christian experience of truth and freedom, without even wanting to hear of them or simply disregarding them as harmful superstitions.”<sup>24</sup>

The fact that awareness of sacrum is a prerequisite to a full historical understanding of the human condition goes back to Augustine. But a return to such an awareness is not simply an intellectual matter. The natural question that arises: is it possible? Despite the crises and calamities of the last century, Europeans are still in the dark on the matter. Moreover, the full success of a post-Christian civilization in Europe appears to be just a matter of time, even in Central Europe. However, as Cichocki puts it:

An awareness of the possibility that the world might be inexorably dragged back into a time of struggle, chaos, and violence, and that we merely attempt to put aside the inevitable from ourselves in time, became much more forceful on account of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and has started to demand a language adequate to the situation.<sup>25</sup>

Among the reasons Cichocki claims Christians should not simply give up is their awareness of the stakes involved. For one matter, in a post-Christian civilization the personal becomes political partly at the cost of the individual’s freedom. In the Christian perspective the human is an autonomous being who attends to political matters not out of necessity but from his or her own convictions. Contemporary spokesmen for post-Christian European civilization are prone to cast aside Christian truths and freedoms, since they are convinced today’s societies are capable in developing on the basis of neutral authorities and practical morality that they do not question. They do not recognize that in the face of the return of struggles, chaos, and violence they are in an exposed position in terms of the rest of the world. They are essentially on the same footing as other contemporary civilizations that are not heading in any unified direction and are thus an arena of constant struggle. And so we move on to an un-Christian world where the need for power triumphs over the freedom of the person and the hope of salvation. The Western attempt to escape the struggle for the world through a system of management comfortable for itself is a failure; there are hardly any good perspectives, conversely a barren catastrophic sense is certainly no solution. Thus, Cichocki concludes, “all the beneficiaries of the last several decades after the end of the Cold War, and

<sup>24</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 165-66.

<sup>25</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 175.

this includes Poland, will need to face up to this unavoidable return to the dramatic historical drama and adapt to it their normal, completely unrealistic, as it turns out, manner of life.”<sup>26</sup>

In a discussion that Political Theology conducted shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, one of the panel speakers stressed that radical evil was loosed on their neighbors.<sup>27</sup> Leszek Kołakowski saw the problem of evil as fundamentally theological, and it is clear that the panel understood it in the same manner.<sup>28</sup> Indeed in his book that followed Cichocki refers to the philosopher’s related understanding of the sacred.<sup>29</sup> Political Theology also posted their weekly online magazine devoted entirely to the war at that time. Among those interviewed was journalist Filip Memches, who insisted Putin would stop at nothing, arguing that Russia wanted to regain what the USSR lost after losing the Cold War.<sup>30</sup> The expert also had a good understanding of the theological aspect of the evil of the war, which he would explicate at a later period that year.

A little over a decade earlier Memches was the author of a book of interviews with members of the Russian elite, both dissidents and supporters of Putin.<sup>31</sup> More or less half a year after the onset of the war, he was asked in an interview for the religious journal *Forty and Four* to provide more information on the Alexander Dugin interviews. Dugin, considered by pundits as Putin’s adviser, in Memches view is rather a useful propagandist for the dictator. But he was the only interlocutor in the book who predicted the war, claiming it would be a war of revenge. Dugin claimed the situation Russia found itself in at the end of the Cold War was similar to that of the Germans after WWI: they had lost but felt the situation was unjust and this led to the rise of the Nazis.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 182.

<sup>27</sup> See Marek Cichocki, Dariusz Gawin, and Dariusz Karłowicz, “Ukraina. Wojna o kształt globalnej rzeczywistości,” *Teologia Polityczna*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OShsc4HXRkE>.

<sup>28</sup> See C. John Sommerville, *The Decline of the Secular University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 34.

<sup>29</sup> Cichocki, *Walka o Świat*, 174.

<sup>30</sup> Filip Memches, “Rosja chce odzyskać to, co stracił Związek Sowiecki w wyniku przegranej w zimnej wojnie,” *Teologia Polityczna co Tydzień*, February 25, 2022, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/filip-memches>.

<sup>31</sup> Filip Memches, *Słudzy i wrogowie imperium. Rosyjskie rozmowy o końcu historii* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Arcana, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Michał Łuczewski, “Polityczna teologia przemocy. O Rosji, wojnie, i Chrześcijaństwie,” interview with Filip Memches. *Czterdzieści i Cztery. Magazyn Apokaliptyczny* 13 (2022): 135, *passim*.

Memches goes on to reiterate that the great myth of the Russians to this day is the Great Patriotic War in which they defeated the Nazis.<sup>33</sup> The Nazis represented evil. And so identifying the Ukrainians with Nazis justified the war against them. This is to no small degree related to the political theology of the Russians, which the author informed his interlocutor was never articulated, but he felt was implicit in their actions.

According to Memches Russian political theology is greatly distorted by Gnosticism, through the Manichaeism present in Russian Orthodoxy:

What I mean is the conviction that the world is really evil, and violence and war serve a manner of purification, a turning point. The ruler is permitted to use violence, because it serves the purpose of purifying the world, which is at any rate evil. All that Patriarch Cyril does, fits in with this theology. Violence is sanctified.<sup>34</sup>

Memches notes this fits in with the long history of Caesaropapism that has afflicted the Orthodox church in Russia. Considering this servile stance the state expects from the church and its priests, the unexplained violent death of Alexander Men in 1990, an independent minded priest, is hardly surprising. The state is essentially above confessional religion, and fascism is evil. And since Ukraine is identified with fascism, it is evil. Memches sums up this line of interpretation: “Fascism is like an icon of evil, and it is Russia which fights with it, that is Russian political theology.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, similarly to Cichocki Memches sees Russia as a civilization that is cutting itself off from the West. Both authors also stress the importance of Poles giving a Christian witness in Europe. Memches additionally briefly discusses the question of non-religious Poles offering military assistance to Ukrainians.<sup>36</sup> Here he makes a distinction between the just war of natural law, which such assistance represents, and the religious view from the perspective of political theology. One of the difficulties currently in the secular view is the disavowal of sentiments like patriotism, i.e. the importance of the national community.

Memches was among the founders of the journal *Forty and Four*, with the significant subtitle “An Apocalyptic Magazine.” Among other matters the journal is interested in a

<sup>33</sup> Of course in this sense the Russians identify themselves with the Soviets. And from the Polish perspective what is omitted in the myth is the fact that the Soviets were initially allied with the “evil” Nazis.

<sup>34</sup> Memches in Łuczewski, “Polityczna teologia przemocy,” 144.

<sup>35</sup> Memches in Łuczewski, “Polityczna teologia przemocy,” 145.

<sup>36</sup> Pertinently, among the funds raised by a left-leaning Polish NGO to support Ukrainians, one was directed at buying a Turkish drone for the Ukrainian combat efforts, which is referred to in the interview.

Catholic interpretation of history. Memches' interlocutor in the interview is Michał Łuczewski, a sociologist who is also interested in the religious thought of René Girard. The issue in which the interview was published was devoted specifically to political theology, particularly in relation to the war in Ukraine. A number of Ukrainian scholars published their perspectives on the subject. Even one of Patriarch Cyril's appalling homilies in support of the war of aggression is included. A particularly touching essay, "Death and Eternal Life in Times of War," is by Mykhailo Dymyd, a scholar and priest of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, whose son was killed in the war. At the conclusion of his theological reflections, he addresses Christians everywhere, insisting they ask themselves: "what is my personal struggle? What is my personal victory over evil? (. . .) Whatever our current situation, each of us is called upon to 'proceed to our own front with Christian courage, to confront evil, and not simply wait somewhere behind the lines.'"<sup>37</sup>

We started this study by looking at political theology practiced in the world to learn something about the field. What are some the views on the war in Ukraine in non-Western parts of the world? An essay by Mathew Otieno, a Kenyan who often writes articles for the *Mercatornet* web journal, gives some idea about the African response. In one piece, shortly after its outbreak, he wrote about the apathy of Africans for the war in Ukraine. "What is distinct about this invasion," he begins, explaining why Africans feel Europeans are so shocked by the war, "is that the invaded country is European, and Europe is supposed to be above the banality of war."<sup>38</sup> While he grants Europeans might have been naïve to consider themselves above war, he argues Africans need to overcome their apathy and look at the crisis from a broader perspective. He cogently argues, "It is our reminder to the world that, though we might lose sight of it, for extended periods even, we cannot erase human nature, and we shouldn't be shocked when it rears its ugly underbelly, wherever that may be." Otieno concludes:

In the final analysis, for as long as we remain human, we retain an endless capacity for great evil. (. . .) Apathy is not the answer. We are not above the humility of condemning evil. We are not above the burden of standing with suffering people

<sup>37</sup> Michajło Dymyd, "Śmierć i życie wieczne w czasach wojny," *Czterdzieści i Cztery. Magazyn Apokaliptyczny* 13 (2022): 67. The author was the first president of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv. In the main text I use the English transcription of the author's name.

<sup>38</sup> Mathew Otieno, "An African take on the Ukrainian crisis," *Mercatornet*, March 3, 2022, <https://mercatornet.com/african-take-ukraine-crisis/77892/>.

everywhere in the world. We are not too broken to commiserate with the poor people of Ukraine. Слава Україні! *Slava Ukraini!* Glory to Ukraine!<sup>39</sup>

The war has been the source of many shocks and surprises for Ukrainians, Poles, and Europeans. As Otiena observes the war also gives some idea about how human we all are, both for better and worse. This is part of the difficult lesson for everyone in Central Europe no matter how the war ends. The religious subtext is obvious. And those exploring political theology will have much to reflect upon for some time in this part of the world from a perspective that many would wish to have not arisen. And perhaps it will also help more Europeans to look at the wars that constantly occur in other parts of the world as something that also affects them more closely than before.

<sup>39</sup> Otieno, “An African take on the Ukrainian crisis.”

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