



Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe

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Introduction by the Guest Editor

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INTRODUCTION BY THE GUEST EDITOR

We bring to your attention a special issue dedicated to Christian denominations on the territory of Ukraine. The issue is dedicated to the most difficult periods in the history of Ukraine, namely three wars, two of which were in the 20th century, and the third of which began in 2014 and has been in an active phase since 2022.

Due to its special territorial location, Ukraine has for centuries combined religious traditions based on the culture of Eastern Europe, but which are being constantly transformed under the influence of Western Europe and America. This feature of the connection and border area between the eastern and the western is deeply reflected in political and religious processes. In the beginning of the 21st century, this difference became especially visible. On the one hand, Ukrainian Christianity has always sought to protect traditional Eastern European values, and, on the other hand, it has constantly sought to integrate with Western trends, especially democracy and freedom in the matter of religion.

Moreover, territories of what is now Ukraine were in past historical times incorporated in various state structures which are reflected in the cultural and religious diversity of the Ukrainian people. Although some people point to the historical roots of the Orthodox Church in many territories that were perceived to be Russian when the Russian empire spread in many directions, the fact remains that there were many parts of Ukraine that were more closely incorporated into what today may be regarded Western's European cultural sphere. Having lived over 1,000 years under different empires, religious spheres, and socio-economic circumstances, it is not surprising that Ukrainians contain a diversity of characteristics while at the same time displaying an uncommon unity in desiring to be masters of their own destiny in freedom, justice, and peace.

Wars on the territory of Ukraine have always revealed acute social and religious issues, such as ethnic, linguistic, territorial, cultural, and religious issues. During the First and Second World Wars, Ukrainians resisted the medieval ambitions of the Western invaders, the interests of the great powers, and the clashing of the three ideologies, fascism, communism, and democracy.

Then in the last war, which began with an all-out open attack on February 22, 2022, it was religion that became the cornerstone. An unwritten rule created by Russian propaganda proclaimed that the "holy" East is against the "sinful" West. This paradox deeply affected the

religious situation in Ukraine and finally turned the Ukrainians' interest away from the forms of traditional Eastern Christianity towards Western values.

This August issue of OPREE is divided into two parts. The first part contains articles devoted to the period from 1900 to 1945. During this period, the authors from different denominational backgrounds analyze the state of Christian denominations and the challenges they faced in the first part of the 20th century. The second part covers the post-WWII period, and deals with the rapid changes that took place in Ukrainian Christianity after the military attack by the “brother” of the Russian Orthodox Church, which broke out in 2014, pretending at first to be of local significance. Those articles capture the events that are taking place now, giving us and future generations the opportunity to assess the impact of geopolitical processes on Christian denominations in a war.

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