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## **ORTHODOX MEDIA AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE: COMPETING RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES OF PEACE AND JUSTICE**

The Russian-Ukrainian war has become not only a military-political, but also a value-based challenge for Ukrainian society and religious institutions. In this context, the representation of the war in the Orthodox media is significant, as it shapes the public perception of events, defines the boundaries of moral discourse, and reflects deep theological guidelines. The article analyses two main narratives in the official communications of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The UOC (MP) is characterised by a rhetoric of peace and reconciliation, based on the ideals of all-forgiveness and “supranational unity” of believers. Still, this position is often accompanied by a failure to address the issue of justice and responsibility of the aggressor. Instead, the OCU has built a value-based discourse centred on just defence, a combination of patriotism with evangelical love of neighbour, and an emphasis on truth as a condition for true peace. The article traces how these two axiological paradigms shape public resonance, influence church trust, and correlate with broader European humanistic principles. The theoretical framework combines approaches from the philosophy of religion and political theology and materials from official statements, church media publications, and journalistic sources. The study demonstrates that Orthodox media in Ukraine have become a space for the struggle of two alternative models of theological legitimization of war: pacifist, which emphasises peace at any cost, and patriotic-theological, which treats defence as morally justified and sanctified by truth. The Ukrainian case demonstrates that war becomes a catalyst for the renewal of Orthodox social thought and a factor that outlines the prospects for Ukraine’s European integration by affirming the principles of dignity, freedom, and justice.

**Key words:** Orthodoxy, media discourse, religious values, just war, UOC (MP), OCU, Russian-Ukrainian war, political theology, theology of peace, European integration.

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## **ПРАВОСЛАВНІ МЕДІА І ВІЙНА В УКРАЇНІ: КОНКУРУЮЧІ РЕЛІГІЙНІ НАРАТИВИ МИРУ ТА СПРАВЕДЛИВОСТІ**

Російсько-українська війна стала не лише воєнно-політичним, а й ціннісним викликом для українського суспільства та релігійних інституцій. У цьому контексті особливого значення набуває репрезентація війни у православних медіа, яка формує суспільне сприйняття подій, визначає межі морального дискурсу та відображає глибинні богословські орієнтири. У статті проаналізовано два основні наративи, представлені в офіційних комунікаціях Української православної церкви (Московського патріархату) та Православної церкви України. Для Української православної церкви (Московського патріархату) характерною є риторика миру та примирення, що ґрунтується на ідеалах всепрощення і «наднаціональної єдності» віруючих, однак ця позиція часто супроводжується замовчуванням питання справедливості та відповідальності агресора. Натомість

Православна церква України вибудувала ціннісний дискурс, у центрі якого – концепт справедливої оборони, поєднання патріотизму з євангельською любов'ю до ближнього й акцент на правді як умові справжнього миру. У статті простежено, як ці дві аксіологічні парадигми формують суспільний резонанс, впливають на довіру до церков і корелюють із ширшими європейськими гуманістичними принципами. Теоретичною рамкою виступає поєднання підходів філософії релігії та політичної теології; використано матеріали офіційних заяв, публікацій церковних медіа та журналістських джерел. Дослідження демонструє, що православні медіа в Україні стали простором боротьби двох альтернативних моделей богословської легітимації війни: пацифістської, яка наголошує на мирі за будь-яку ціну, та патріотично-богословської, що трактує оборону як морально виправдану й освячену правдою. Український випадок засвідчує, що війна стає каталізатором оновлення православної соціальної думки, а також чинником, який окреслює перспективи європейської інтеграції України через утвердження принципів гідності, свободи й справедливості.

**Ключові слова:** православ'я, медіадискурс, релігійні цінності, справедлива війна, УПЦ (МП), ПЦУ, російсько-українська війна, політична теологія, богослов'я миру, євроінтеграція.

The Russian-Ukrainian war, which has been ongoing since 2014 and has become particularly acute after the full-scale invasion in 2022, has become a test not only for Ukrainian society and the state but also for religious institutions. The Orthodox churches of Ukraine – primarily the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) – have found themselves in a situation where their public statements about the war take special significance. The value basis of the representation of the war in the Orthodox media encompasses those moral and ethical categories and theological arguments through which the churches make sense of the war: peace and justice, love of neighbour and love of the Fatherland, forgiveness and just retribution, sacrifice and patriotism. Since 2014, the rhetoric of the Orthodox media in Ukraine has reflected different axiological accents depending on confessional affiliation. The official channels and information resources of the UOC-MP and the OCU have formed two distinct narratives about the war, consistent with their spiritual values and political orientations (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024).

For the UOC (MP), the war was a challenge that posed a dilemma for the church between condemning the aggression and maintaining ties with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). From the beginning of the conflict in 2014, the official statements of the then-leadership of the UOC MP were distinguished by their moderation and avoidance of direct assessments of Russia's actions. Metropolitan Onufriy, the head of the UOC (MP) since 2014, consistently took a restrained, neutral public position on the war. His rhetoric practically did not contain the words “aggression” or recognition of the presence of Russian troops – instead,

euphemisms such as “armed conflict in eastern Ukraine”, “bloodshed on Ukrainian soil”, “confrontation” and even formulas about “people standing on both sides of the military conflict” were used. Such vocabulary reflected the UOC (MP)'s emphasis on peace and reconciliation between “fraternal peoples” and its reluctance to name a specific aggressor. As researchers note, before the full-scale invasion, the UOC MP leadership never directly mentioned the annexation of Crimea or the very fact of the Russian-Ukrainian war, limiting itself to general appeals for peace. The Church positioned itself as a neutral spiritual force that “always called for and effectively contributed to the cause of peace and reconciliation” (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024).

The turning point was the beginning of the large-scale aggression on February 24, 2022. On that day, Metropolitan Onufry for the first time unequivocally declared the Russian attack, calling the events a “trouble” and stating that Russia had begun military action against Ukraine (Onufry, 2022). In an address published by the UOC information department, he called on believers to be courageous, united, and pray for Ukraine and its army, and also expressed “special love and support” for Ukrainian soldiers who “protect and defend our land and our people”, blessing them for their military exploits (LB.ua, 2022). This was an unprecedented support for the Armed Forces by the head of the UOC (MP), which meant recognition of the moral rightness of defending the Fatherland. At the same time, Onufry also appealed to the Russian President to immediately stop the bloodshed, characterising the war as “fratricidal” and drawing a biblical parallel with the sin of Cain, who killed his brother Abel. “The war between these peoples (Ukrainians and Russians) is a repetition of Cain's sin, who

out of envy killed his own brother. Such a war has no justification either in God or in people” (LB. ua, 2022). Metropolitan Onufry’s statement simultaneously included calls for peace and forgiveness and rhetoric about “fratricidal” that effectively reproduced the Kremlin’s narratives about “one nation”; however, support for the right of Ukrainians to defend their own state was also expressed for the first time.

However, the UOC (MP) remained cautious about further public communication. After Onufry’s brief address in February 2022, the church leadership no longer made harsh statements against the Russian Federation or Patriarch Kirill. Already in March 2022, the rhetoric returned to a more detached tone: in the address of March 10, the metropolitan only noted the difficult trials associated with the attack by the Russian troops, sympathised with the numerous victims among the civilian population, and called for the creation of humanitarian corridors for the evacuation of civilians (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). There were no direct words of condemnation of the Russian occupiers or mention of their crimes. Even while making pastoral gestures, the UOC leadership emphasised reconciliation: a well-known case was when Metropolitan Onufry met with captured Russian soldiers and appeared in the media as a peacemaker praying for soldiers on both sides, so that God would preserve all people on the battlefield (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). This position is consistent with the general attitude of the UOC (MP) towards mercy and forgiveness. However, simultaneously, it provoked criticism from the patriotically minded community for excessive leniency towards the aggressor.

It is worth noting that after February 24, 2022, some of the clergy and believers of the UOC (MP) became more critical of the Moscow Patriarchate. A group of priests emerged within the UOC who openly condemned Russian aggression and demanded to break subordination to Moscow. Under pressure from circumstances, the UOC (MP) Council in May 2022 even adopted amendments to the Statute on “independence” from the ROC. However, this independence was rather declarative: the Moscow Patriarchate did not recognise it and continued to consider the UOC part of it. In the information space, representatives of the UOC (MP) continued to distance themselves from accusations of collaborationism. In particular, Abbess

Seraphim (Shevchyk) in her “Open Letter” to international organisations insisted on the innocence of the UOC, stating that the church categorically rejects all accusations of pro-Russian sentiments and has never supported the anti-Christian doctrine of the “Russian world” (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). At the same time, this letter paints an image of the UOC as persecuted by the state for its faith, repeating the rhetoric of the ROC: allegedly the adoption of the law “On the Protection of the Constitutional Order in the Sphere of Activities of Religious Organizations” № 3894–IX will lead to “repressions against the Church on a scale that humanity has not seen for almost a century” (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). Such martyrological rhetoric demonstrates the value of suffering for faith in the identity of the UOC (MP) – the church prefers to present itself as a victim who carries its cross, defending “canonical Orthodoxy”. Instead, such texts are silent about the specific causes of the crisis (collaboration of individual clerics with the occupiers, unwillingness to distance itself from Kirill, etc.). Thus, the media strategy of the UOC (MP) regarding the war is based on the axiology of peace and unity, but often at the expense of silencing the issue of justice and responsibility of the aggressor. The call to “simply stop the bloodshed” without outlining the moral assessments of the parties to the conflict is inherent in the church media of the UOC (MP). As a group of Orthodox theologians emphasised in their 2022 declaration, such abstract talk of a “fratricidal war” and calls for peace lose their meaning without acknowledging the criminal intent and guilt of the aggressor party, turning a prayer for peace into an excuse for inaction (Lozova, 2022). This remark addresses the approaches and narratives followed in the rhetoric of the UOC (MP) and the ROC.

The Christian ethics of the UOC (MP) regarding war gravitate towards the ideal of non-interference in “earthly conflicts” and all-forgiveness. The lack of a developed concept of “just” is evident in the theological dimension. War: war is considered evil, a sin, although it is a “tragic reality” of the world, from which all peoples suffer. The Church offers a prayer for peace and mercy for all, recalling the commandment “Do not kill” and to love enemies. In the context of Ukraine’s defensive war, this approach looks pacifist. However, it is complemented by moderate patriotism:

even Metropolitan Onufry, despite his caution, at a crucial moment called for love for the Motherland and support for the defenders (LB.ua, 2022), recognising the moral right to defend himself. This duality – a call for peace and the Motherland's defence – determines the value discourse of the UOC (MP) in the war. On the one hand, the church proclaims the ideal of peace, unity of all Orthodox Christians (including Ukrainians and Russians), and forgiveness of enemies; on the other hand, it is forced to recognise the valour of the self-sacrifice of Ukrainian soldiers who “stood guard” of their native land (LB.ua, 2022). However, the lack of an unequivocal condemnation of the aggressor and the dependence of some narratives on the Moscow ideology of the “Russian world” led to a crisis of trust: in society, the UOC (MP) is widely perceived as a bearer of pro-Russian values (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). Thus, back in 2015, there was a high-profile incident when Metropolitan Onufry and several bishops did not stand up in parliament to honour the memory of the fallen heroes of the ATO. This gesture was regarded as unwilling to recognise Ukrainian soldiers as heroes (Kralyuk, 2022). Similar incidents have cemented for the UOC (MP) the image of a church dependent on the “Russian world” and alienated from patriotic values. Until 2022, this denomination was effectively “captive to the Russian world” and only under the pressure of the war began to emerge from it (Kralyuk, 2022), partially. This approach corresponds to the general trend described by R. Elsner: Orthodox institutions often replace theological analysis of the conflict with general ethical slogans, avoiding a clear position on justice and responsibility (Elsner, 2019).

At the opposite pole of the information space, a narrative of the OCU and related Orthodox media has been formed, characterised as “Christian patriotism” and the theology of just resistance. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which emerged in late 2018 – early 2019 (by uniting the UOC of the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church), has taken a clear pro-Ukrainian position from the beginning of the full-scale war. Official addresses by the Primate of the OCU, Metropolitan Epiphany, condemned the Russian aggression immediately and unequivocally. Already on February 24, 2022, Metropolitan Epiphany stated: “Those who have started and are waging an aggressive war against

Ukraine should know that according to God's law and human laws, they are murderers and criminals. Moreover, for their crime, they will speak before God and before humanity, without escaping condemnation and punishment” (Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 2022). Thus, from the first hours of the invasion, the OCU defined the moral framework of the conflict: there is a grave sin of aggression, for which the aggressor will answer before God, and opposing it is a righteous cause.

The rhetoric of the OCU is permeated with the ideas of just defence, love for the Motherland, and sacrifice in the name of one's neighbour. Metropolitan Epiphany and church spokesmen not only state the fact of aggression, but also give it a spiritual meaning – Ukraine's struggle against the Russian attack is interpreted as a struggle between good and evil. In a later sermon (November 2023), Metropolitan Epiphany consistently emphasises the inextricable link between freedom, truth, and the victory of Ukraine. For him, the defence of the state is not only a political right, but also a spiritual duty, and the struggle itself, even until the end of the war, already constitutes a moral victory, because it is based on truth and God's justice (Ukrinform, 2023). Here, the theological legitimation of the defensive war is clearly heard – the defence of the “God-given land” is not only a civic duty, but also a Christian vocation. The concept of “moral victory” indicates the confidence that God and truth are on the side of those who defend themselves from evil. Metropolitan Epiphany interprets Russian aggression as part of the long-term historical policy of the empire aimed at the destruction of the Ukrainian nation and the Church. In his vision, the current war is not an isolated conflict, but another stage in the centuries-old struggle to preserve Ukrainian identity (Ukrinform, 2023). In this way, a narrative of national martyrdom and revival is formed: Ukraine suffered from foreigners for centuries for its faith and freedom, but preserved its language, culture, and even restored the local Orthodox Church (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). Accordingly, the current war is understood as a just continuation of the liberation struggle, sanctified by the righteousness of ancestors and the blessing of Divine truth.

The central value of OCU media broadcasts is patriotism combined with Christian love. In contrast to narrow nationalism, patriotism in the theology



of the OCU is understood as a manifestation of love for one's neighbours – for one's people, who need protection. "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" – Ukrainian soldiers embody this Gospel maxim, and the Church recognises their self-sacrifice as morally justified. Metropolitan Epiphany interprets Ukraine's defensive war as ethically justified and just, emphasising that using force against the aggressor is not a sin, since it aims to protect the innocent and establish the truth. In fact, the OCU formulates an Orthodox analogue of the doctrine of a "just war", recognising the use of force as morally permissible to stop a greater evil. This marks a significant shift from the traditionally pacifist tone of Orthodox ethics: war remains an evil and a tragedy, but the sin lies not with those who defend, but with those who attack. This interpretation also finds support in the documents of the Ecumenical Patriarchate: in particular, the social doctrine "For the Life of the World" emphasises that Orthodox can participate in war only because of the inevitable, tragic reality of having to choose between allowing violence to continue or using force to stop it (Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2021). The OCU, in its statements, actually applies this principle to the situation of the Russian attack.

In addition to patriotism and justice, the values of truth and freedom are fundamental in the discourse of the OCU. Metropolitan Epiphany often speaks of the historical truth on the side of Ukraine and contrasts it with the lies in Russian propaganda. In the appeals of the OCU, the war is depicted as a struggle of truth against lies, light against darkness. This interestingly resonates with the rhetoric of the Moscow Patriarch Kirill, who also calls to "stand on the side of the light". However, if for Kirill "light" is identified with the interests of Russia (Khrystokin, & Lozovitsky, 2024), then for the Ukrainian Church "light" is the freedom and dignity of Ukraine. Thus, we are dealing with a mirror sacralization of war in two Orthodox centres: the ROC sanctifies aggression as a "battle for Holy Rus", while the OCU interprets a defensive war as a struggle for God's truth and justice. Metropolitan Epiphany emphasises that a Christian is called to defend the freedom of Ukraine and defeat evil. His rhetoric is based on a clear opposition of "good-evil", "Ukraine – the aggressor". Despite the emotionality and military colouring of such a discourse, from a moral point of view, it

corresponds to the realities of unprovoked aggression. Epiphany consciously opposes himself to Patriarch Kirill: as analysts note, in terms of style and content, the sermon of the head of the OCU is "the antithesis of the discourse of Patriarch Kirill" (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). Both operate with the categories of sacred struggle, but if Kirill justifies imperial encroachments, then Epiphany justifies national liberation.

Orthodox media associated with the OCU (official websites, spiritual and patriotic resources, blogs of theologians, for example, "Spiritual Front") systematically emphasise the heroism of Ukrainian defenders and bless the people for resisting the aggressor. Numerous news items are published about military chaplaincy, prayers for soldiers, and awarding volunteer priests. Biblical images are actively used in Orthodox discourse: the defenders of Ukraine are compared to David, who stands against Goliath, symbolically identified with Russia (Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 2022). Such rhetoric expresses faith in God's help in the liberation struggle and emphasises the moral correctness of resistance. At the same time, the media space emphasises sacrifice and unity: the fallen soldiers are called heroes who gave their lives for their neighbours, which is likened to Christ's love. This contributes to forming the image of modern martyrs for the people, continuing the ancient Ukrainian religious tradition of honouring defenders.

An interesting aspect is the interpretation of the commandment about love for enemies. If the UOC (MP) is inclined to apply it literally (to pray for Russian enemies, "that God may have mercy on them"), then other accents are heard in the OCU environment. Thus, several OCU theologians note that true forgiveness is possible only after the aggressor repents, and a Christian's love for an enemy does not mean giving up protecting the innocent. In March 2022, more than 300 Orthodox intellectuals (including representatives of the OCU) signed a declaration that declared the ideology of the "Russian world" a heresy and emphasised that talk about forgiveness and reconciliation without the aggressor's repentance is empty (Declaration, 2022). It directly states that calls to "simply stop the fratricidal war" lose their moral meaning when the fact of the crime of one side is ignored. Thus, love for the enemy in the context of ongoing crime is understood as a desire for enlightenment and change, not as condoning his

sin. In practice, this means that the OCU prays for the conversion of Russia, but supports armed resistance as the only way to establish a just peace.

Indeed, the concept of a just peace is key in the value discourse of the OCU. Metropolitan Epiphany clearly stated: “Without victory, a just peace will never reign in Ukraine. It will only come when we finally expel from our Ukrainian land the occupier, the aggressor, who came to enslave and destroy us” (Ukrinform, 2023). That is, peace is understood not as simply the absence of hostilities, but as the restoration of justice and freedom. Any truce at the cost of capitulation or occupation is unacceptable, because it would be an “unjust peace”. This corresponds to the Christian idea that true peace includes truth: “Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Ps. 85:10). Thus, the Orthodox media of the OCU broadcast the idea that the desire for peace does not contradict the continuation of the struggle – on the contrary, the battle for a righteous cause is the path to true peace.

In the information dimension, the OCU also constantly supports the state’s efforts in the war. Church speakers, such as Metropolitan Evstratiy (Zorya), not only stigmatise Russian aggression but also criticise the UOC (MP) for its ambivalent position. Metropolitan Evstratiy directly stated that the leadership of the UOC (MP) lulled Ukrainians’ vigilance before the war, teaching believers for decades to love the “Russian world” and not to resist: “For three decades, the leaders of the MPvU did everything to make Ukraine submit to the “Russian world”, so that people here love Moscow as the “Third Rome”, so that they believe in the fictions of “indivisible Holy Russia”, so that they do not resist the occupiers. But they resist. They fight. The guns are not silent” (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). Such words reflect the value of national resistance as a moral duty. Metropolitan Evstratiy Zorya noted that during the meeting with the prisoners, Metropolitan Onufry refrained from condemning Russian aggression or calling for repentance, limiting himself only to wishing them God’s protection (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024). For the OCU, such behaviour is unacceptable because it contradicts the principle of justice: evil must be spiritually resisted, sin must be called sin. It is this ethical attitude – to call things by their proper names (the Russian war is evil, the invasion is a sinful crime, and defence is a sacred duty) – that

underlies the representation of the war in the media associated with the OCU.

Thus, the OCU and its information resources offer society an image of war as a forced but sacred struggle for God’s truth. Religious and patriotic values are intertwined here: the defence of the Fatherland is interpreted as an expression of love for one’s neighbours, patriotism as part of Christian virtue, and the desire for victory as a desire to establish justice. At the same time, the church also emphasises mercy: there are constant calls to help the victims of war, to pray for the wounded, to show Christian love for refugees, orphans, and families of the dead. Thus, the ethos of the OCU in wartime is a combination of mercy for the suffering with unwavering determination to resist the aggressor.

It is worth mentioning that within the OCU, there is also an internal discourse of self-criticism. Some theologians and priests (for example, the authors of “10 Theses for the OCU” or individual publicists) call on the church to avoid excessive politicisation and triumphalism. They remind us of the need to preserve evangelical principles even in patriotic exaltation – in particular, not to turn religion into a political ideology, but to remember the general Christian values of peace, unity, and forgiveness (after victory). However, these voices do not deny the very justice of defence, but only warn against spiritual temptations that come during the people’s struggle. In general, the internal tone in the OCU still boils down to supporting the Ukrainian people and cleansing the church from the remnants of imperial influences. In fact, this is also a component of the value dimension of this war.

The analysis demonstrates that the Orthodox media in Ukraine represent the war through the prism of two different axiological paradigms, determined by belonging to the UOC (MP) or the OCU. The UOC (MP) consistently emphasised the values of peace, reconciliation, and unity of “fraternal peoples”, trying to maintain neutrality and distance from political assessments. Its rhetoric is based on the Christian ideal of all-forgiveness and love even for enemies, which resulted in the use of the concept of “fratricidal war” and calls to “pray for everyone”. At the same time, under the pressure of reality, the UOC (MP) partially recognised the moral right of Ukrainians to defend the Fatherland, as evidenced by the words of support for the soldiers from Metropolitan Onufry.

However, in general, the UOC (MP) never dared to clearly articulate that evil had come to the Ukrainian land, which must be actively cut off. The conflict of values between the idea of peace at any cost and the sense of patriotic duty remained unresolved in its discourse. This led to an internal crisis and the exodus of a part of the congregation, which sought more unambiguous spiritual support in times of war.

Instead, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine has built a straightforward narrative in which the war is understood through the prism of the moral dualism of good and evil. For the OCU, Russian aggression is the embodiment of evil, injustice and the spiritual illness of the “Russian world”, while the defence of Ukraine is a God-pleasing cause, a struggle for truth and freedom. Its media discourse is full of patriotic rhetoric, biblical analogies of a just war, and calls for resilience. The Church emphasises the value of sacrificial love for one’s neighbour, seeing it in the feat of Ukrainian defenders, and proclaims that a faithful Christian is called to love their people and defend the freedom granted by God. At the same time, love and mercy are not rejected – they are manifested in helping the victims of war and in prayers for the conversion of enemies, but they do not replace the principle of justice. The OCU, in essence, forms the Orthodox theology of a “just war”, placing defence against an aggressor within the framework of what is morally permissible, as well as honour and valour.

Narratives with different value bases have collided in the Orthodox media space of Ukraine. This collision has both a theological and socio-political dimension. On the one hand, the conventionally pacifist approach of the UOC (MP) emphasises the church’s peacemaking and the brotherhood of peoples. However, risks appear to be consonant with the narratives of the aggressor (due to the lack of condemnation of evil). On the other hand, there is the conventionally “military” patriotic approach of the OCU, which emphasises the right of nations to self-defence and relies on national-democratic values in symphony with evangelical values. In the conditions of a full-scale war, Ukrainian society largely supported the second approach as more adequate to reality: this is confirmed by the growth of the authority of the OCU and the mass transitions of communities from the UOC (MP) to the OCU

after 2022. At the same time, this situation also challenges the OCU to fight against external evil, prevent the temptation of hatred, and remain faithful to the spirit of Christ’s love.

From the point of view of academic analysis, the axiological basis of the representation of war in Orthodox media reflects more profound questions: about the limits of Christian pacifism, the justification of armed defence of the innocent, and the national identity of the church. The Ukrainian war of 2014–2025 has shown that Orthodox thought is not monolithic – it allows for different interpretations of the ethical imperative in times of war. After all, both the UOC (MP) and the OCU strive for peace, but understand it differently: for the former, peace is closer to the absence of conflict and preserving the status Quo. For the second, to the triumph of justice and freedom. These differences in value accents not only determine the two churches’ media narratives but also affect the religious situation in Ukraine, becoming a factor of conflict or understanding between the Orthodox communities themselves (Khrystokin, & Lozovytsky, 2024).

The representation of the war by the Orthodox media in Ukraine is based on different axiological principles. The UOC (MP) broadcasts the ideals of peace, forgiveness and supranational unity of believers, often at the cost of silencing issues of justice and responsibility. The OCU, on the other hand, relies on the values of patriotism, freedom, and resistance to evil, fitting the war into the moral paradigm of “good against evil”. Both churches appeal to the Gospel, but emphasise its different aspects: mercy and peace-lovingness, the other truth and the readiness to “lay down one’s soul for one’s friends”. In the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the narrative that combined Christian love with patriotic devotion turned out to be more viable – after all, he gave moral support to the people fighting for their right to exist. This does not mean abandoning the ethics of forgiveness: instead, it demands reconciliation through repentance and the victory of truth. The Ukrainian experience can become a precedent for the renewal of Orthodox social thought, showing that the church can be both a spiritual peacemaker and an inspirer of a just peace, impossible without countering aggression.

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