

# Interreligious Dialogue as a Power of Ukrainian Civil Society

*Michael Fetko*

## *1. Religions in Public Discourse*

In the 18th century, in his play “Nathan the Wise” Gotthold Ephraim Lessing demonstrated not only the first ideological drama (“Ideendrama”) but also a valuable message of religious tolerance among three monotheistic religions. He has developed an idea that all three monotheistic religions are of same importance and they are really the religions of equal value. Their significance is measured by their contribution to social cohesion. Yet there is no real religion which has control over the truth, and every argumentative claim to absoluteness is doomed to failure. Probably in a thousand years it will be possible to say which religion has the truth but until that point in time a religion should be helping people kindly and demonstrate its persuasiveness in practical humaneness. Lessing’s description clearly characterizes ethical dimension and attitude. Though, it does not mean that religions neither have their own face nor their own identity. Lessing focuses on preserving the traditions and identity of each religion. His motto is: A person is a human being first of all, and then a Christian, Jew or Muslim.<sup>1</sup>

Later, Soviet atheism encouraged many to fight against religion and attempted to reduce the scope of religion to private homes or even forced many to say goodbye to religion in general. (“Religion is the opium of the people” — Karl Marx; “We must combat religion — that is the ABC of all materialism, and consequently of Marxism” — Vladimir Lenin; “There is no God” — Yuri Gagarin).<sup>2</sup> Today, the so-called “new atheism” (Richard Dawkins) strongly criticizes religion in the same way and also encourages to renounce their faith. In his monograph “The God Delusion” (2007) Dawkins is very critical especially about the three Abrahamic world religions. He believes that faith in God in all its forms is irrational, and

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1 Cf. Lessing 2004: 20ff.

2 Beljakova/Bremer 2016: 55f.

religion is antiprogressive, violent, destructive and usually has serious negative impact on society, and is the root of all evil.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, Germany's most famous contemporary philosopher Jürgen Habermas presented his interpretation of European intellectual history in his new two-volume "History of Philosophy" (2019). He pays tribute to the "unpaid semantic content" of religion, which can be found in worship, sacraments, rites and symbols. Religious experience remains "a thorn that sticks in the flesh of the modern era, which surrenders to the desire for untranscendental existence."<sup>4</sup> According to Jürgen Habermas, religious teachings have "a chance for survival" in the modern era only if these religious teachings are "practiced in the worship rites of the community, which means that they will also be assimilated in the existential sense".<sup>5</sup> When Habermas talks about the importance of worship, rites and symbols, he probably means other religions besides Christianity. It is important for him that a lively practice of faith should exist in these places, and thus there will be a meeting and experience of and specific reference to transcendence. A ritual is, so to speak, the main symbolic place for visualizing and experiencing transcendence in a community. Liturgy stands in the center because people come together for this transcendent experience. Rituals are not only motivating or regulatory actions, they also have potential for giving hope and comfort.<sup>6</sup>

Although Habermas calls himself "religiously unmusical" and the theme of religion stands out in his philosophical works, he has never ignored the issues of religious tradition, and starting with his early works, "Theory of Communicative Action" (1981) and "Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy" (1992), he has demonstrated his "cautious interest" in religious matters. However, after September 11, 2001 the theme of religion becomes central

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3 Dawkins 2010: 389 ff. For detailed scientific analysis of critical reactions/responses to the book by Dawkins from English-speaking authors (eg. Lennox, John: *Gods undertaner. Has science buried God?* 2007; McGrath E. Alister: *The Dawkins Delusion?: Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, 2007; Ward, Keith: *Why there almost certainly is a God: doubting Dawkins*. 2008; Robertson, David: *The Dawkins Letters: Challenging Atheist Myths.*) and from German-speaking authors (Schröder, Richard: *Abschaffung der Religion? Wissenschaftlicher Fanatismus und die Folgen*. 2008; Lohfink, Gerhard: *Welche Argumente hat der neue Atheismus?* 2008; Körtner, H. J. Ulrich: *Evolution, Ethik und Religion*. 2010; and others) see: Swarat 2017: 97–131.

4 Habermas 2019: 807.

5 Habermas 2019: 669.

6 Cf. Küng 2010: 138–140.

not only in scientific but also in public discourse. Islamism as the root of these terrorist attacks has raised many questions, fear, scepticism, and even denial of religion, as the attacks have shown the “dark side” of religion, what it is capable of, and its destructive potential. Shortly after this terrorist attack Habermas held a lecture entitled “Faith and Knowledge” in Frankfurt am Main (on the occasion of accepting the Peace Prize of the German Book Trader Union, 2001) and later in 2004 he had a discussion on this topic with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) in the Catholic Academy of Bavaria in Munich. In his publications and discussions of that time and in recent ones Habermas promoted the “translation” of religious semantic potentials in a secular context. Such attempts of translation are necessary to prevent the danger of losing sense that is constantly menacing modern societies. While considering the theme of religion, he searches for the resources needed to cement the society in the face of social disintegration, moral deficit and crisis of democracy in the political community. New alliances between secular rationale and faith are needed. Habermas believes that religion has a lot to say and offer to our world and our time, and we must rediscover this potential (the impulses coming from it) using a mutual process of translation.<sup>7</sup>

Besides, he warns that if religions fail to find “modus vivendi” with secular society, there will be a danger of fundamentalist narrowing, which – in extreme cases – can even lead to terrorist attacks similar to 9/11. On the other hand, the idea of Samuel Huntington about “The Clash of Civilizations” did not come true, but it did not become outdated as well. His analysis of Turkey or rather its return to Muslim civilization<sup>8</sup> is especially relevant today after the decision of the Turkish court and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to turn the “Hagia Sophia” in Istanbul from a museum back into a mosque.<sup>9</sup> The competition of Arab-centric and Turkish religious ideologies, cultures and identities which is observed in the countries of Central Asia is becoming more and more relevant for Western Europe, especially for Germany after the European migrant crisis of 2015, because Turkish Islam dominated in Germany before 2015,

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7 Cf. Habermas 2002: 23; see also: Habermas 2005: 32.

8 Cf. Huntington 1997: 169. Turkey is often called a “bridge” which is partially located on the European continent, but at the same time differs from Western Europe because it is shaped by Islam. In Huntington’s work Turkey is not a part of Western Europe.

9 Cf. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/tuerkisches-gericht-erlaubt-nutzung-von-hagia-sophia-als-moschee-16855254.html> (last access: 08–25–2020).

and after 2015 Arab and other religious movements became more prominent which will definitely result in the diversification of German Islam. But it can also lead to possible misunderstandings and confrontations.<sup>10</sup> However, in Germany and Europe thanks to the research of Islamic theologians like Mouhanad Khorchide and his current publication “God's false lawyers. The betrayal of Islam” (2020) there is a movement for the reform of manipulated Islam, against its instrumentalization and for a return to the “original” state of Islam as a religion that sees a person not as an object but as a subject, and that views God as loving, compassionate and neither punitive nor restrictive.<sup>11</sup>

These and other events are the recent examples of religions regaining popularity in our post-secular age. These events pose new challenges not only to Muslims but also to Christians and thus to interreligious and inter-faith dialogue. In order to avoid the realization of Huntington's idea and putting the commonwealth at danger, all societal groups must learn to live together. We need successful examples of new dialogue between culture, religion and faith. After all, religion as a social institution can both play a destructive (disintegrative) role leading to intercultural and interreligious conflicts and perform a constructive (consolidating, integrative) function promoting unity, freedom, stability and peaceful coexistence in society. Dialogue and tolerance in the field of religion can ensure peace, harmony and social stability in the countries where there is religious pluralism. The example of Ukraine makes it clear that religious plurality means an opportunity and enrichment on the one hand because now, three decades after the end of communism, around 70 % of Ukrainians declared themselves religious in 2019. All religions and denominations are developing well and enjoying a high level of trust in society.<sup>12</sup> But on the other hand, religious diversity has been a conflict factor in Ukraine for many years and since 2013 there has not only been an identity conflict between the so-called “Russian world” and the “Ukrainian world”, but the religious factor plays a very important role here.<sup>13</sup> That's why Hans Küng's thesis is more relevant today than ever before, especially in the view of Ukraine: “No world peace without religious peace! No religious peace without dialogue

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10 Cf. [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/debatte-um-deutschen-islam-zwischen-koran-und-grundgesetz.724.de.html?dram:article\\_id=467685](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/debatte-um-deutschen-islam-zwischen-koran-und-grundgesetz.724.de.html?dram:article_id=467685) (last access: 08–25–2020).

11 Cf. Khorchide 2020: 9.

12 Cf. Boeckh 2019: 246.

13 Cf. Mykhaleyko 2015: 78 f. See also: Zabirko 2018: 63–77.

between religions! No dialogue between the religions without knowledge of their own traditions!”<sup>14</sup>

## 2. *Religious Affiliations in Ukraine*

Famous contemporary sociologist of religion José Casanova characterizes the Ukrainian religious landscape as “the most pluralistic religious market in Eastern Europe.”<sup>15</sup> Ukraine is one of three areas (the Middle East, i.e. the area of Palestine, the Balkans and Ukraine) in which Christians, Muslims and Jews have lived side by side for more than a millennium. Great religions have met there and each of them has its roots in that same soil, that is, they are rooted in the history and culture of that country.<sup>16</sup> This religious pluralism and a high competition in Ukraine are the key to a better understanding of the current cultural, social and political processes. It is interesting that no church or religion is predominant in Ukraine, unlike it is the case in other Central and Eastern European countries. A high level of freedom of faith and religion helps avoiding discrimination of religious minorities.<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact that Orthodox Christians make up the largest religious community in Ukraine, they do not represent one cooperative unity, and until 2018 they were divided into three large jurisdictions, namely 1) the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, 2) the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate and 3) the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. At the unification council in Kyiv which was held in late 2018, two jurisdictions (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church) merged into one structure called “The Orthodox Church of Ukraine.” So, currently two large Orthodox churches exist in Ukraine: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. There is also a small group left of those who affiliate with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, which had agreed to unite first, and then announced that it did not recognize the decision of the unification council.<sup>18</sup> But Christians were not the only that

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14 Küng 2008: 13.

15 Casanova 1996: 9; Casanova knows Ukraine very well because his wife is Ukrainian. Therefore, he visits Ukraine very often and speaks the Ukrainian language perfectly.

16 Cf. <http://www.nrcu.gov.ua/news.html?newsID=87289> (last access: 08-25-2020).

17 Cf. Jelensky 2015: 214.

18 Cf. Bremer 2019: 252f.

underwent great shifts due to the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia and the outbreak of warfare in Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk, Luhansk) in 2014, but also Jews were affected – as well as Muslims who due to the fact that Crimean Tatars practice Islam live up to now in communities on the Crimean Peninsula.. Of course, most of them stayed on the Crimean Peninsula, but some (approx. 10 %) moved and settled in Kyiv and other regions as internal refugees. The same thing happened to Jews who had lived in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> Many students from Africa, India and other countries, who studied in Donetsk, Luhansk, and other cities of Eastern Ukraine, also moved to Western Ukraine after 2014 and continued their education at universities there.<sup>20</sup>

In accordance with the sociological survey carried out in October 2019:<sup>21</sup>

- 66 % of Ukrainians consider themselves “believers” (compared to 57.8 % in 2000; 71.4 % in 2010; 76.6 % in 2014)
- 12 % swing between “belief and non-belief” (respectively: 22.5 %, 11.5 %, and 7.9 %)

a total of 97 religious institutions are registered in Ukraine (in addition to traditional churches, new evangelical and neo-pagan communities).

Confessional affiliation among religious people in Ukraine	2000	2010	2014	2019
Orthodox	66.0	68.1	70.0	64.9
Greek-Catholic	7.6	7.6	7.8	9.5
Roman Catholic	0.5	0.4	1.0	1.6
Protestant	2.0	1.9	1.0	1.8
Jewish	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1

19 Cf. Moroz 2015: 12f.

20 For example, since 2016 Uzhhorod National University has a medical faculty No. 2 where foreign students are taught in English only. Currently, there are about 2000 students from Africa (mostly Christians and Muslims) and India (mostly Hindus).

21 Center Razumkova (2019), Релігія і Церква в українському суспільстві: соціологічне дослідження-2019. [Religion and the Church in Ukrainian society: sociological study-2019], [http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019\\_Religiya.pdf](http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019_Religiya.pdf) (last access: 08–25–2020), p. 12.

<b>Confessional affiliation among religious people in Ukraine</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2019</b>
Muslim	0.7	0.9	0.2	0.1
Buddhist	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0
Just Christians	6.9	7.2	6.3	8.0
do not belong to any religious community	15.3	13.2	12.5	12.8
other	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.3
not answered	-	0.3	0.5	0.1

### *3. Interreligious Dialogue as a Power of Ukrainian Civil Society*

After the political change in 1989 and declaration of independence of Ukraine in 1991, the religious and social situation transformed dramatically. Ukraine's "religious renaissance" started with the adoption of the law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations"<sup>22</sup> (1990) after years of persecution and displacement of religion from public space in the USSR by the Soviet authorities. Nevertheless, as noted by Ukrainian religious studies scholar Viktor Jelensky, even in Soviet times Ukraine was not a "religious desert" because people's religiosity and activity of underground churches were not completely eradicated.<sup>23</sup> The new political system and new legislation on freedom of religion opened the way for religious organizations to register their communities and supported their transformation into strong civil society institutions. After all, religious organizations or churches enjoy a high level of trust and credibility among Ukrainian society and belong to the most important public institutions,<sup>24</sup> which along with other components of civil society directly affect the course of social and political processes and harmonization of the social system. But two clarifications should be provided here.

From the point of view of sociology, religions or churches are perceived as a part of civil society, which certainly contributes to a better understanding of their social mission. In fact, the status of religion or church should

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22 Cf. Vasin 2020: 7.

23 Cf. Jelensky 2015: 221.

24 Cf. Boeckh/Turij 2015: 6.

not be reduced to the sphere of civil society only because their potential and essence as a community of faith and moral values transcend the immanent civil society. From the Catholic point of view, the essence of church as God's people is supported by its transcendental nature, unique and divine basis. So, the sociological concept of religion or church is necessary as an auxiliary concept, but religion or church as reality is difficult to comprehend from a sociological perspective. Therefore, they should not be reduced to a purely secular dimension.<sup>25</sup>

What is civil society? There is still no consensus in the scientific literature on the definition of "civil society", so neither on what it means and what functions it performs or ideally should perform. Civil society has become a central concept for preserving and developing democracy. Since the format of this article does not allow comprehensive study of the content, essence and different philosophical traditions of the civil society concept, we will limit ourselves to a general definition of civil society given by Merkel and Lath: "Civil society exists in a pre-state or non-state sphere of activity and consists of numerous pluralist [...], voluntarily established organizations and associations [...], which articulate their specific material and normative interests and are autonomously organized. Civil society occupies the space between the private sphere and state. Its articulated objectives concern always the *res publica*. Thus, actors in the civil society are involved in politics, yet without assuming state posts. Correspondingly, groups that exclusively pursue private goals (families, enterprises, etc.) are as little a part of civil society as political parties, parliaments and state administrations are. [...] [Civil society] is not a homogeneous "actor". Rather, it is heterogeneously structured to the extent that it displays a pluralistic melting pot of vastly different actors, who do, however, share a certain minimal normative consensus. This is based principally on the recognition of others (tolerance) and on the principle of fairness. [...] Together with an alignment with public affairs and an orientation towards communicative action, the civil consensus creates the genuine nucleus of civil society that can also be found at the individual level in the formation of a civic spirit."<sup>26</sup>

This understanding of civil society (civil society institutions cannot be limited to a list of organizations formally recognized by the state) provides grounds for the participation of religious organizations, religious communities or churches in civil society and its formation. Religion has a great

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25 Cf. Marx 2015: 19f.; Palaver 2009: 64.

26 Merkel/Lauth: 22–23.

potential in uniting people to defend human values, rights and freedoms of the country's citizens and to affect social and political processes (development of democracy and ideas of freedom) because religion is also a communicative community in a specific sense.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the fact that the origin of Western civilization is closely connected with Christianity or, more precisely, with monotheism ("In the beginning there was faith: faith in the *one* God. The rise of the Western World required more than just monotheism, but without it the Western World could hardly be explained.")<sup>28</sup> religions or churches were not involved in the development of civil society in most of the European countries, and sometimes the civil society even developed in spite of resistance from their part. In this context Ukraine has become an exception. There religions and churches supported the civil society and protests at first during the Orange Revolution (2004/2005) and then even more actively during Euromaidan (2013/2014), and thus they committed themselves in the process of developing and strengthening the civil society. The role played by churches and religions "in the protests was not marginal, but central. This in fact would have been more characteristic of the pre-modern era than of a secular one. [...] This is an extraordinary example of the constructive role played by religion in transforming a post-totalitarian society into a democracy."<sup>29</sup> In the course of the Euromaidan events, religions and churches took the part of Ukrainian society. Priests came between the parties to the conflict during violent confrontation and called for reconciliation and appealed to the troops not to use weapons against civilians. Monasteries and churches were not only a place of prayer but also houses of solidarity and a shelter, where medical care and food were provided.<sup>30</sup>

Since 1996 the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO) has been an important platform for interfaith and interreligious dialogue but also for the dialogue with the state and civil society.<sup>31</sup> This Council plays a very important role as there is probably no

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27 Cf. Jelensky 2015: 213ff.

28 Winkler 2015: 25.

29 Hovorun 2014, 394; 400.

30 Cf. Hovorun 2014: 394f.

31 The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO) was established in December 1996 as an interfaith institution, aiming to unite the efforts of various denominations to focus on the spiritual revival of Ukraine, coordination of interfaith dialogue in Ukraine and abroad, participation in a legislative process on church-state issues, and the implementation of comprehensive charitable actions. The (UCCRO) operates on the basis of equality and equal rights of its members, respect for internal guidelines and traditions of all present

such Council in any country of the world that unites not only different churches but also different religions. One can say that the ground for consent and successful work of UCCRO are the principles of the social teaching of the Catholic Church, namely human dignity, subsidiarity, solidarity and the common good. During a meeting between Pope John Paul II and the representatives of UCCRO at the occasion of a papal visit to Ukraine in 2001, Pope John Paul II noted that the responsibility of UCCRO is very high because “Ukraine is a laboratory of ecumenism.”<sup>32</sup> UCCRO made a great effort to achieve a consent during Euromaidan events and then during the illegal annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine. UCCRO’s constructive positions promoted the observance of constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens, effective dialogue between the government, the civil society, and the opposition in search for non-violent ways out of the crisis. This handling, in fact, guarded the basic principles of democracy. UCCRO representatives have become the voice of the Ukrainian people in the international arena during their joint visits to the European Parliament, USA, Israel and other countries. Religious and church leaders had numerous interviews with foreign journalists and met with many ambassadors from different countries and with representatives of the diplomatic corps to tell the truth about the events in Ukraine.<sup>33</sup> Their active role, their solidarity and particular

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religious organizations in Ukraine, which operating within the Constitution of Ukraine. The UCCRO is independent of the government of Ukraine, political parties and other non-governmental organizations. As of November 2016 the UCCRO includes 16 churches and religious organizations and 1 interchurch organization; including Orthodox, Greek and Roman Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical churches as well as Jewish and Muslim religious unions. Consequently, the Council of Churches represents more than 90 % of the all religious organizations in Ukraine. According to the UCCRO’s Statute, council members preside at meetings in turn, that helps distribute work between those responsible for the organization of the Council’s Secretariat and coordinate ongoing joint activities occurring between meetings, <https://vrciro.org.ua/en/council/info> (last access: 08–25–2020).

32 Cf. <https://ostkirchen.info/die-ukraine-ist-ein-oekumenisches-laboratorium/> (last access: 08–25–2020).

33 Cf. Звернення Всеукраїнської Ради Церков і релігійних організацій з нагоди Дня Соборності та Свободи України. [Address of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations on the occasion of the Day of Unity and Freedom of Ukraine]. January 22, 2014, [https://old.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1330%3A1&catid=50%3Azv&Itemid=78&lang=uk](https://old.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1330%3A1&catid=50%3Azv&Itemid=78&lang=uk) (last access: 08–25–2020).

practical charitable/humanitarian aid have proven that religion deserves to be highly trusted by all citizens and that it contributes to the consolidation of Ukrainian society. “Ukraine has demonstrated that religion and the Church should not be an obstacle in the process of formation of the civil society, but it should be its catalyst instead. So, a civil society grounded on religious values is possible.”<sup>34</sup>

“Libertas Center for interreligious dialogue” which was opened on May 7, 2013 in Lviv is also worth mentioning here. Libertas Center is a non-profit organization which aims at promoting interconfessional and interreligious dialogue and understanding in Ukraine and abroad. By applying scholarly research and innovative thinking to interfaith issues, the Center aims at the objective of protecting the right to and the exercise of religious freedom, establishing connections among confessions and religions in the area of academic learning, respect, and cooperation in social projects. Libertas Center is actively cooperating with the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, KAICIID Dialogue Center, The Russell Berrie Foundation, The Institute of Ecumenical Studies of the Ukrainian Catholic University, Sant'Egidio and numerous other centers and projects for training of future leaders of interfaith and interreligious dialogue.<sup>35</sup> Collegium Orientale (CO<sub>r</sub>) in Eichstätt/Germany where many students from Ukraine have studied and are currently studying also makes an important contribution to the training of leaders of interfaith and interreligious dialogue for the Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches. CO<sub>r</sub> is the only one in the world internationally and interdenominationally oriented, ecumenically open seminar, which is aimed at all Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches. One focus of the CO<sub>r</sub> is the ecumenical service for the unity of the separated churches.<sup>36</sup> Not least should be mentioned the Open Orthodox University of St. Sophia the Holy Wisdom, which opened in 2016 in Kyiv. This institution makes a very important contribution to the development of interreligious, interdenominational dialogue as well as dialogue with civil society. Open Orthodox University is not a classic university and not a religious organization, but is a non-governmental organization made up of representatives of different religions and denominations as well as non-religious persons who deal with educational activities. It is a platform

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34 Melnyk 2016: 116.

35 Cf. Dzyubanskyi 2020: 70f.

36 <https://www.collegium-orientale.de/startseite/> (last access: 08–25–20).

for the dialogue between different people, scientists, philosophers and theologians on the problems of the present and the common future.<sup>37</sup>

Ukrainian society is “post-genocide” one.<sup>38</sup> It is a kind of product of the mass violence of 1914–1945, socialism, Holodomor, Holocaust, Nazism, Communism and later the Chernobyl disaster. That means hunger, wars, fear and ecological problems. Family of almost every Ukrainian has faced a severe trauma in its history and this causes problems in their family, alcoholism, violence, apathy, and lack of initiative. These traumas are integrated to the DNA of the Ukrainian society. Nevertheless, when Ukrainians find themselves in a different context, they take care of themselves very well.<sup>39</sup> That is why many religions and churches put much effort into giving hope and life purpose to break this “vicious circle” and establish a “virtuous circle” together with civil society and the state. This is manifested primarily in the work of churches with children, youth and laity. They are encouraged not only to work actively in the church community, but also to participate in civil society and political life. Responsibility, solidarity, dignity, and leadership are the main subjects to work on with young people and laymen.<sup>40</sup>

After 2014 the theme of interreligious dialogue, especially between Christians and Muslims, has gained relevance. Indeed, the situation differs from that of Western Europe because Ukrainian Muslims are not migrants, and have long been integrated into Ukrainian society. On the other hand, there are no radical Muslim groups in Ukraine.<sup>41</sup> The Mufti of the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Ukraine Said Ismagilov has an optimistic view on the development of the dialogue between Muslims and Christians: “The Revolution of Dignity and subsequent tragic events in the Crimea and Donbas pushed Ukrainians to discover the Muslim community of our country. The Muslim community of our country did not sell our Homeland. First it stood up to protect the dignity, freedom and its rights, and since March – to protect Ukraine. I believe these tragic times initiated the shaping of not declarative, but real relationship between Muslims and Christians. [...] One can say that the dialogue was not on the agenda

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37 <http://oou.org.ua/about/> (last access: 08–25–2020).

38 Cf. Mace 2003.

39 Cf. Zincenko 2018.

40 The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is the most active in these matters. See: Комісія УГКЦ Справедливість і Мир 2014 [Kommission der UGKK für Gerechtigkeit und Frieden 2014]: 7f.; see also: Синод Єпископів УГКЦ 2018 [Bischofssynode Der UGKK 2018].

41 Cf. Rohdewald 2015: 402ff.

before that moment. For all 23 years each religion has been busy with its own affairs and reviving its religious life after the times of aggressive atheism. They have been “observing” each other. Maidan and war have accelerated the uniting of all Ukrainian society and actualized the necessity of interreligious dialogue. So it is now more relevant than ever before. And appropriate. It is necessary to start a dialogue and joint projects to the benefit of Ukrainian society.”<sup>42</sup> The Jewish-Christian dialogue in Ukraine has also improved considerably in recent years. For example, the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine Moshe Reuven Asman sent a personal letter to “Yad Vashem” in January of this year, asking that Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church Andrej Sheptytsky (1865–1944) be recognized as the Righteous Among the Nations.<sup>43</sup> When it was reported in Russian media at the end of 2019 that in Ukraine there would be the largest anti-Semite group in Europe, Moshe Reuven Asman contradicted this information and said that the level of anti-Semitism in Ukraine is lower than in Western Europe, and pointed out that an overwhelming majority of Ukrainians even voted for a Jewish president Volodymyr Zelenskyj. Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman was also Jewish.<sup>44</sup>

For sure, in times of crisis and war not only the dialogue between Muslims and Christians but also interfaith dialogue improved, as it was observed on Euromaidan when representatives of all confessions and religions held speeches and prayed together on the stage on Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kiev. However, there remains a very long way in order to establish an honest and deep dialogue, and the dialogue on the Maidan should not be idealized too much. Dialogue is often called a common road to peace, harmony and justice. Christoph Böttigheimer believes that “Dialogue between religions should represent more than just communication and coexistence based on partnership. Theological and philosophical dialogues make sense only if the problems of the Truth are not excluded, and the dialogue is deemed to be and used as a tool for joint search of the Truth.”<sup>45</sup> In another case he expresses his opinion from the Christian point of view: “Only that persons are worth of dialogue who take their own religion seriously and join the appropriate meetings with people of

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42 Moroz 2015: 12, 14.

43 <https://synod.ugcc.ua/data/golovnyy-rabyn-ukrayny-prosyt-yad-vashem-vyznaty-mytropolitya-andreya-sheptytskogo-pravednykom-narodiv-svitu-2293/> (last access: 08–25–2020).

44 Cf. <https://www.stopfake.org/de/manipulativ-ukraine-sind-die-grosten-anti-semiten-in-europa/> (last access: 08–25–2020).

45 Böttigheimer 2009: 515f.

another religion with full understanding of own faith. Honest dialogue means that information about the central content of the Gospel and Christian testimony of the Truth is not hidden by others.”<sup>46</sup>

The impulses and initiatives coming from Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew, Patriarch Kirill and Ahmad Mohammad Al-Tayyeb can be very useful on the way to not only true interfaith and interreligious dialogue, but also true dialogue with civil society. The Catholic Church has many years of experience, many developed tools and practices of interreligious and interdenominational dialogue. “*Nostra Aetate*” (1965) and “*Unitatis Redintegratio*” (1964) are two important documents that are considered to be the basis for dialogue from a Catholic perspective. For Pope Francis is dialogue very important, just as it is for his two great predecessors St. Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI Pope Francis writes in “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (2013)<sup>47</sup> and his famous social encyclical “*Laudato si*” (2015) about a dialogue between religions, politics, science and economy. He invited all people from different religious traditions to a dialogue.<sup>48</sup> Pope Francis quotes not only the Bible, official documents of the Catholic Church, regional and national bishops' conferences, but also the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew and the Islamic Sufi Ali Al-Khawwas.<sup>49</sup> In the apostolic constitution “*Veritatis Gaudium*” on the church universities and faculties (2017), Pope promotes dialogue as a central method of theology.<sup>50</sup> Remains unforgettable a historic first meeting of Pope Francis with Patriarch Kirill, the head of Russian Orthodox Church and signing the joint declaration in Cuba on February 12, 2016.<sup>51</sup> But also the historic meeting of Pope Francis and the Grand Imam

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46 Böttigheimer 2009: 485.

47 Cf. EG 162–258.

48 LS 163–201.

49 Cf. Fetko 2018: 82f.

50 VG 5 (p. 26f.); See also about dialogue as a method of theology: Francis (2019): Speech at the conference “Theology after *Veritatis Gaudium* in the context of the Mediterranean”, Place for the Papal Theological Faculty of the Southern Italy (Naples), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190621\\_tologia-napoli.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190621_tologia-napoli.html) (last access: 08–25–2020).

51 Cf. Joint Declaration published under the unofficial title ‘We are bishops and brothers’, *L’Osservatore Romano* 7 (Friday, 19 February 2016), The full text in the official English translation can be accessed URL online at [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160212\\_dichiarazione-comune-kirill.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160212_dichiarazione-comune-kirill.html) (last access: 08–25–2020).

of Al-Alzar, Ahmed Al-Tayyeb, in Abu Dhabi, when both signed in February 2019 a joint document on “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.”<sup>52</sup>

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, is very active in the interreligious and interdenominational dialogue compared to other numerous Orthodox churches in the world. His encounters with St. Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, with Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and representatives of other religions and denominations did a lot for the development of the ecumenical movement. Even now, there are often mutual visits by Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew and their representatives in the Vatican and Istanbul. In his speech at the University of Fribourg/Switzerland in 2017 Patriarch Bartholomew said that “true dialogue is a gift from God. According to St. John Chrysostom, God is always in personal dialogue with people. God always speaks: through the prophets and the apostles, through the saints. [...] Dialogue is a means of communication and the key to today's theology. Today theology is called not to shut itself off, but to open itself up to other university sciences in an interdisciplinary approach in order to bring in the ever-current message of the renewal of persons and creation in Christ. We have tried to illustrate this by turning, on the basis of our experience in the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to inter-Christian dialogue, inter-religious dialogue and the dialogue with society and the sciences of today.”<sup>53</sup>

Also the Patriarch of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Svyatoslav Shevchuk, tries not only to build bridges in interreligious and interdenominational dialogue in Ukraine, but also between three countries Poland, Russia and Ukraine. In his book “Dialogue Heals Wounds” he talks about the current difficult period of Ukrainian-Polish and Ukrainian-Russian relations. This book should work as a promoter of dialogue, because we know too little about each other, and this is a paradox of the modern information world. “Unfortunately, we do not know how to dialogue today,

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52 Cf. A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together (2019), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190204\\_documento-fratellanza-umana.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html) (last access 08–25–2020).

53 Bartholomaios: The Dialogue as the key to today's theology. Lecture by His Holiness Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch, at the University of Fribourg/Switzerland on April 24, 2017, [https://www3.unifr.ch/iso/de/assets/public/files/Dokumentation/Memoria/Memoria%202017/Tagungen/Vortrag\\_Bartholomaios\\_D.pdf](https://www3.unifr.ch/iso/de/assets/public/files/Dokumentation/Memoria/Memoria%202017/Tagungen/Vortrag_Bartholomaios_D.pdf) (last access: 08–25–2020), p. 1;10.

we live in a world of monologues, we do not know how to hear another person, even when he thinks differently than I do. I am convinced that dialogue is a very important element of universal culture that we must find in itself. We do not need to be afraid of dialogues, in particular we do not need to be afraid of dialogues with God and with our neighbor, even when he is different from me and thinks differently. Dialogue heals. Dialogue is wound therapy. And this can be confirmed by modern psychologists. We sometimes need to express our pain, our doubts, but so often we lack someone to listen to us. Let this be our effort, it is a ministry for the healing of wounds both Ukraine and Europe will be blessed by our Lord God. Because he is the one who heals, and we want to be a good tool for him.”<sup>54</sup>

Interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism are with no doubt a great chance for further democratization of the state. In one of his interviews with Ukrainian media already mentioned one of the world's top scholars in the sociology of religion Casanova said that “we need many churches to build a really sustainable democracy.”<sup>55</sup> Interreligious dialogue is a power of Ukrainian civil society as it was illustrated particularly by the example of Euromaidan and in recent years. On Maidan all groups managed to find a common language with each other, no one engaged into conflicts. Later, all religions and churches together with the civil society and volunteers were united in the effort to assist internally displaced persons (about 2 million) and to help soldiers and population of Eastern Ukraine. Even Pope Francis called for a special donation campaign across Europe (in all Catholic churches in Europe) in 2016, and the money was collected for the needy population in eastern Ukraine. This special donation campaign was unique in European history.<sup>56</sup> Also the Patriarch Kirill, the head of Russian Orthodox Church, appealed in a personal conversation to Russian President Vladimir Putin with a request to support the proposal and help in the exchange of prisoners in Donbass. “We discussed all these topics with you, I know that you take the fate of people close to your heart [...] The role of the Church in such conflicts is, of course, primarily humanitarian. People are suffering, are the victims of this difficult conflict, which really leads to the suffering of so many. [...] Therefore, for my part, I would like to ask you to also support this idea. Together, perhaps we could

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54 Cf. Shevchuk/Tomasik 2018: 78.

55 <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29946986.html> (last access: 08–25–2020).

56 [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_regina-coeli\\_20160403.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2016/documents/papa-francesco_regina-coeli_20160403.html) (last access: 08–25–2020).

all carry out such a wonderful action.”<sup>57</sup> A few weeks later, a successful exchange of prisoners took place.

By defending freedom, human dignity, tolerance and mercy for the needy and poor, religions and churches of Ukraine have proven their understanding of the “signs of time” and have given hope to all those who suffer from hatred, violence, intolerance, injustice and war what they will continue to do so. They have become a compass of tolerance in the transformation processes of Ukrainian society. An interesting fact is, that if we compare interreligious dialogue and interfaith dialogue in Ukraine, it has to be said that interreligious dialogue in Ukraine is at a very good level and relations between religions can be a good example of interfaith dialogue, where unfortunately there are still a lot of problems.<sup>58</sup> The ecumenical dialogue in the world between churches and world religions shows that there are good prospects for dialogue especially on an ethical level.<sup>59</sup> Experience from the recent history of Ukraine gives hope that good cooperation between the churches, religions and the civil society is possible, especially on social-ethical, charitable and diaconal issues. Ukraine as the most pluralistic religious country in Eastern Europe has many opportunities not only to create stability in the country, but also to become a model of religious peace in Europe. In Lessing's “Nathan” the main characters finally discover that they are members of a family. Jews, Christians and Muslims are united in a family. That is Lessing's dream of a religiously reconciled humanity. Scientific Exchange with Ukraine on tolerance, peace, solidarity and democracy can make an important contribution to this goal.

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57 <https://www.pravmir.ru/patriarh-kirill-poprosil-prezidenta-podderzhat-predlozhenie-ob-obmene-plennyimi-v-donbasse/> (last access: 08–25–2020).

58 Cf. Fylypovych/Horkusha 2020: 29ff.

59 Cf. Fetko 2018: 91f.

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