

# The Church Conflict in Ukraine – a fight for Ukrainian souls

*A qualitative study of motivation behind church  
belonging*

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Master Thesis

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Languages (ILOS)  
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Supervisor: Pål Kolstø

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## Abstract

Up until recently there were as many as three competing Orthodox Churches in Ukraine; the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). Only the UOC-MP was recognized by the Orthodox world. In December 2018, however, the UOC-KP, UAOC and parts of the UOC-MP decided to unite into one Church jurisdiction, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). The OCU received a Tomos of Autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (EPC) in January 2019. There are therefore now two Orthodox jurisdictions which compete for the Ukrainian souls, the UOC-MP and the OCU. This thesis seeks to understand what the major disagreements between these two churches are, and more importantly how the schism is perceived by ordinary churchgoers in Ukraine. If they all share a single faith, then what is it that divides the Orthodox in Ukraine? Through interviewees with 18 churchgoers and priest from both the UOC-MP and the OCU this thesis asks what motivations lie behind church belonging. The thesis gives an overview of the church conflict in Ukraine on a national and international level and argues that the Ukrainian crisis accelerated the desire for a recognized church with ecclesiastical independence from Russia.



## Preface

There are many people who have supported me throughout the writing process. My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Pål Kolstø, for his guidance and insightful comments. I would also like to thank the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages (ILOS), the University of Oslo, for granting me a scholarship which made the fieldwork in Ukraine possible.

I am also grateful for my patient and supportive family and friends. Thank you for bearing with me. A special thank goes to Oda May Rånes and Erik Parker for your close friendship and moral support, and my American family, Gale and Richard Reeve, for excellent proof reading.

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without my interviewees and their stories and worldviews. I am truly grateful for your time and hospitality. Thank you.

# Transliteration

## Romanization system from Russian

When transliterating from Russian I have used the BGN/PCGN 1947 System (Ministry of Defence, 2019).

Russian alphabet	Latin Alphabet
А а	a
Б б	b
В в	v
Г г	g
Д д	d
Е е	ye (in initial position, after the vowel characters а, е, ё, и, о, у, ы, э, ю, and я, and after й, ь, and ъ) e (in all other instances)
Ё ё	yë (whether displayed in the source document with or without dieresis, should be romanized yë initially, after the vowels а, е, ё, и, о, у, ы, э, ю, and я, and after й, ь, and ъ) ë (in other positions)
Ж ж	zh
З з	z
И и	i
Й й	y
К к	k
Л л	l
М м	m
Н н	n
О о	o
П п	p
Р р	r
С с	s
Т т	t
У у	u
Ф ф	f
Х х	kh
Ц ц	ts

Ч ч	ch
Ш ш	sh
Щ щ	shch
Ъ ъ	“
Ы ы	y
Ь ь	‘
Э э	e
Ю ю	yu
Я я	ya

### **Romanization system from Ukrainian**

When transliterating from Ukrainian I have used The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine’s resolution of January 27, 2010 No 55 “On Normalization of Transliteration of the Ukrainian Alphabet by Means of the Latin Alphabet” (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2010).

Аа	a
Бб	b
Вв	v
Гг	h
Ґґ	g
Дд	d
Ее	e
Єє	ye (initial position) ie (in other positions)
Жж	zh
Зз	z
Ии	y
Іі	i
ix	

Її	yi (initial position) i (in other position)
Йй	y (initial position) i (in other position)
Кк	k
Лл	l
Мм	m
Нн	n
Оо	o
Пп	p
Рр	r
Сс	s
Тт	t
Уу	u
Фф	f
Хх	kh
Цц	ts
Чч	ch
Шш	sh
Щщ	shch
Юю	yu (initial position) iu (in other positions)
Яя	ya (initial position) ia (in other positions)

Soft sign and the apostrophe are not reproduced in Latin.





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## Abbreviations

UOC-MP	Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate
UOC-KP	Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate
OCU	Orthodox Church of Ukraine
MP	Moscow Patriarchate
KP	Kyiv Patriarchate
UGCC	Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
EPC	Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
CG	Churchgoer
P	Priest
Q	Question

# 1. Introduction and research question

One of the main problems confronting Orthodoxy in the twentieth century – a problem that will certainly continue to trouble us in the twenty-first century – has been the lack of inter-Orthodox unity and co-operation, not on the level of doctrine and worship (here there are no major disagreements), but in the domain of church administration and jurisdiction. We Orthodox share a single faith; we use the same forms of liturgical prayer; and in principle we are all in full communion with one another. But in practice the outward expression of our inward and spiritual unity is sadly defective. When inter-church conflicts arise, often many decades pass before they are resolved; we seem to have no clear and effective procedures for resolving our disagreements. (Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, 2011, p. xiii)

What Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia describes here makes out the basis of this study, namely inter-church conflicts, more specifically the serious inter-Orthodox conflict which is now taking place in Ukraine. This conflict has caused violent struggles between parishioners and involved local and national authorities. The church conflict in Ukraine is therefore something which touches a great many Ukrainians.

Compared to the other successor states of the Soviet Union, Ukraine is maybe the country with the most complicated and difficult religious situation (Bremer, 2016, p. 3). Up until recently there were as many as three competing Orthodox Churches; the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). In December 2018, however, the UOC-KP, UAOC and parts of the UOC-MP decided to unite into one church jurisdiction, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). The OCU received a Tomos of Autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (EPC) in January 2019.<sup>1</sup> Therefore there are now two Orthodox jurisdictions which compete for the Ukrainian souls, the UOC-MP and the OCU. In this study I seek to understand what the major disagreements between these two churches are and how the schism is perceived by ordinary churchgoers in Ukraine. Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia noted in the quote above: “We Orthodox share a single faith.” So then, what is it that divides the Orthodox in Ukraine?

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<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned, however, that not long after the OCU was established and received a Tomos of autocephaly, previous patriarch of the UOC-KP, Filaret, claimed that he had been forced to join the OCU (RISU, 2019, 1 August). A day earlier the Ministry of Culture had confirmed the liquidation of the UOC-MP, arguing that by joining the OCU the UOC-KP ceased all its activities (RISU, 2019, 31 July). One of the interviewees in this study (16, OCU/KP, priest, B), still identifies with the UOC-KP, although his parish now belongs to the OCU. There has, in other words, developed a tension between the OCU and parts of the UOC-KP.

Therefore, the research question can be formulated: **what are the motivations for church belonging in Ukraine?** I will make an attempt to answer this by telling the story of those directly involved in the conflict; the churchgoers and priests. Searching for this answer other topics will also be elucidated:

- The consequences of the church conflict – the interviewee’s experiences.
- The role of the Ukrainian political crisis and what it meant for the churches.
- How the interviewees from the two church jurisdictions differ from each other.
- Identify two diverging narratives.

These questions are important to ask because the church is a big part in many Ukrainians’ life. Approximately 70 percent of Christian Ukrainians identify with the Orthodox religion (Razumkov Center 2018). Understanding the movements behind this conflict will also contribute to the bigger picture of what kind of society Ukraine is.

I have made use of Monteserrat Guibernau’s theories of Belonging (2013), Peter L. Berger’s theories of choice and worldviews (1979), and Jenkin’s thoughts about identification (2008), with the intention to see the interviewees’ stories through a theoretical framework.

As in every research project, something has to be left out. In this study I have left out a great deal and chosen to focus on the stories told by my interviewees. Moreover, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), for instance, has also been involved in the ecclesiastical conflict and is also part of the larger narrative. This church was created in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century when parts of Ukraine was under Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth rule. It has a Byzantine tradition and liturgy, but recognizes papal authority (Wanner, 2014, p. 432). Despite the UGCC’s interesting history and strong position in Western Ukraine, I have decided to leave this church out of the research, focusing only on the Orthodox churches. The in-depth interviews are the most important source in this study. Therefore, relevant topics such as the conflict between the patriarchates in Moscow and Constantinople, the problem of how and by whom to grant autocephaly according to Orthodox canonical law, and the church-state relation, are included, but mainly to present the complicated and extensive religious situation the interviewees are living in.

Because the fieldwork was conducted in the end of August 2019, I have not included news on the church situation after this. The church situation is constantly developing, and some of the findings and claims in this research might therefore no longer be valid by the end of this study (May, 2020).

## 1.1 Overview of chapters

This first chapter, in addition to introduce the research question, will explain a few terms which are relevant for this thesis. In the second chapter I present the methodology of this thesis, including selection of interviewees and source selection.

Chapter three looks at belonging and choice from a theoretical perspective. It gives an attempt to understand why different worldviews matter when belonging to a community, and which processes that preserve or destroy these worldviews.

Together chapter four and five explore the context in which the interviewees live. Chapter four gives a thorough presentation of the religious landscape in Ukraine according to statistical surveys, before giving an account of previous attempts to establish an independent Orthodox church in Ukraine. The last section presents the churches' role and responses during the Ukrainian crisis. In addition, the concept and impact of the "Russian world" is introduced. Chapter five continues with the political developments in Ukraine after 2014 and the establishment of the OCU and the motives behind it are discussed. Finally, I look at the church conflict on an international level. Here, the relationship between Moscow and Constantinople is central.

Chapter six is the core of this study. Here, the empirical data from 18 interviewees, churchgoers and priests, are presented and analyzed. A summary of their main differences and motivations for church belonging are presented in the last subchapter.

Finally, chapter seven present the main findings of this thesis.

## 1.2 Terminology

**The Orthodox church** does not have one leader at the top, as is the case in the Catholic church with the Pope. Instead it is organized in many different church jurisdictions. There are seventeen autocephalous (independent) churches and seven autonomous churches. The patriarchate of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria are the four original patriarchates. Most of the autocephalous churches are located in twelve different countries. They are, in other words, nationally defined, for instance the Serbian Orthodox church, the Orthodox church in Albania, in Poland and so on. The Moscow patriarchate on the other hand includes many countries under its ecclesiastical jurisdiction (Thorbjørnsrud & Kværne, no date).

**The Patriarch of Constantinople** has a special status as “first among equals” (primus inter pares). However, there are disagreements among the Orthodox how to interpret this. Is it simply an honorary title, or does it give him certain authorities? (Thorbjørnsrud & Kværne, no date)

**An Autocephalous church** enjoys full canonical and administrative independence, yet it remains in full communion with the hierarchy to which it used to belong, and with all the other autocephalous churches (Brusanowski, 2016, p. 49). An autocephalous church elects its own primates and bishops, and its head is usually a patriarch, but also metropolitans (which is the case of the OCU) and archbishops can have this role. There is no hierarch above an autocephalous church (Haraldsø, 1997, p. 275).

**Autonomous churches** on the other hand cannot ordain their primates (Thorbjørnsrud, no date). The head of an autonomous church is either a bishop, archbishop or a metropolitan. These churches, although self-governing, are subjugated to an autocephalous church (Haraldsø, 1997, p. 275).

**The Ukrainian Crisis** includes, for this thesis, the protests on Maidan (starting in 2013), the annexation of Crimea, and the war in Eastern Ukraine

## 2. Methodology – semi-structured interviews

For the purpose of gaining a more in-depth understanding of the situation on the local level, a big part of this study focuses on how it has been *experienced* by those involved e.g. the grassroots. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 19) put it: “If you want to know how people perceive the world and their life, why not ask them?” Qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews have therefore been an essential part of this study.

One can gather both detailed and interesting information in a variety of ways, but what really fascinates me personally are people’s stories. I believe that talking to others can bring forward meanings and important insights otherwise overlooked. In contrast to quantitative research, which express aspects of the social world through numbers, percentages, probability values etc. (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 7), qualitative research is focused on descriptions of the interviewee’s lifeworld, not through numbers but words. The goal is not quantification, but qualification and it is “the precision in the description and the stringencies in the interpretation of meaning in qualitative interviews that corresponds to the accuracy of quantitative measurements” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010, p. 49). Moreover, the power and value of the knowledge produced is what determines the quality of the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann 2010, p. 36). Even with only a few high-quality interviews, where structural and social conditions are experienced in a similar way by the interviewees, their stories can be very powerful (Seidman, 2006, p. 55). However, Seidman (2006, p. 55), if he were to err, he would rather err on the side of more participants than fewer. This study,<sup>2</sup> I would argue, has both powerful stories and a good sample, both in numbers and diversity.

### 2.1 Selection of interviewees

According to King and Horrocks (2010) diversity is the criterion most commonly proposed in qualitative studies. The researcher has to consider which aspects to base the sample on so that the participants can “throw light on meaningful differences in experience” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 29). For this study, I have therefore selected the interviewees on the basis of them being either churchgoers or priests, belonging to either UOC-MP or OCU (for an overview of

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<sup>2</sup> The study has been approved by the Norwegian center for research data (NSD), project code n. 117608

all participants see the appendices). My focus has not been on interviewing elites, but the grassroots, as has been explained earlier. Although planned but not decided before the fieldwork, I am very pleased to have gathered what I consider a good representation of those involved. In addition to the aspects mentioned above (priests, churchgoers and church affiliation), the sample also represents a wide geographical area in Ukraine and different levels of education and career.

- **The level of education:** Highly educated and less educated representatives of OCU and UOC-MP have been collected for the research. This also includes key persons in the development of OCU. In most cases, I have not indicated the interviewees' profession, this to secure their anonymity. But I have indicated their level of education: low, medium or high. For the priests I have added "high education" only for those with education and experience above the regular requirements for a priest.
- **Geographic aspect:** Priests and churchgoers in the capital Kyiv, regional centers, and villages have been interviewed. I have not indicated the names of villages visited, only the region. This is again in order to preserve the participants' anonymity in the study. (See also the section '*Geographical scope*' below)

### 2.1.1 Collecting interview objects

Finding interviewees proved much more difficult than expected. I wanted to have as many contacts as possible (at least 10-20) *before* arriving in Ukraine, but this turned out to be too ambitious. After searching the web for church conflict "hotspots" and people relevant to my research, I contacted them through text messages, Facebook, Viber, phone-calls and e-mails, as well as asking friends and acquaintances in Norway and abroad. The latter turned out to be the most successful approach. One acquaintance visiting Ukraine contacted possible participants, but the response she got was a bit disappointing; the choice of church affiliation and the conflict itself was a very personal matter to them, and they were unwilling to discuss this matter with a foreigner.

Despite this, I was able to get in touch with two possible participants, who also assured me that they would assist me in finding other relevant interviewees once I arrived in Ukraine.

Two participants grew to 18 during my fieldwork. Thirteen of these interviewees were recruited through “snowball sampling”<sup>3</sup>. This may give the sample a certain bias (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 34); one might think that the interviewee recommends only those with similar opinions or even having beforehand told them what to say. However, many interviewees tended to recommend people whom they strongly disagreed with – simply because they thought it would be helpful for my study.

Due to time constraints the snowball sampling was an effective way to get in touch with potential participants. But, in the case of Odesa, where I did not have any previous connections, the three interviews conducted there, were randomly collected. The fact that I walked right into their church without any such connections seemed not to be the best of first impressions. It was rather the feeling of me being yet *another* journalist.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, all three priests agreed to be interviewed. The situation was different for the churchgoers, of whom no one agreed to be interviewed. Although they definitely had a lot to say about the situation when I was talking with them, they were not interested in being interviewed or recorded. There were also a few cases in Odesa where I did not feel welcome, and my questions were immediately interpreted as an attack on the UOC-MP. This was a small shock for me, since I had been taken such good care of in the previous interview-situations. But, as I have already noted, I came to their church without an invitation.

Finally, I will claim that although my sample might be biased in a few cases, I still have succeeded in collecting a representative and diverse group relevant for my study. This said, of course, one can hardly ever say that a sample is perfect, and this sample is no exception. I experienced, something that I believe to be a common experience during and especially after conducting fieldwork, that I could have asked other questions. But this is much because the topic in question was very new to me, and I in retrospect therefore encountered more questions once I started analyzing the interviews and reading more on the church situation.

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<sup>3</sup> This is a way of gathering interviewees through the initial few participants (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 34) I asked the two first participants if they could recommend other potential participants and so on and so on – like a snowball rolling down the hill.

<sup>4</sup> Many potential participants viewed me as a journalist although I insisted this was not the case. There has already been huge interest from many local, national and foreign media to cover the church conflict in Ukraine.

### 2.1.2 Geographical scope

The reason why I chose to conduct interviews in such a wide geographical area, was that I wanted to get as good as possible picture of how the church conflict is perceived throughout Ukraine. However, I do admit that it might have been a bit too wide a scope, and one could most certainly write a master thesis by focusing on one city or village only. This is also the reason why I haven't explicitly compared cities and villages with each other, but rather focused on the comparison between supporters of the OCU and UOC-MP.

The selection of cities and villages is both a product of whom I contacted before the fieldwork, and my intention was to search for participants in areas where there has been serious conflict between supporters of OCU and UOC-MP. This includes the Rivne region and Zhytomyr region. I was intrigued to conduct interviews in Odesa, known for its large Russian-speaking population and pro-Russian tendencies, as well to see if there were any major differences there compared to, for example, the Rivne region. Also, according to the map by the Religious Information Service of Ukraine (RISU)<sup>5</sup>, only one church had changed church affiliation from UOC-MP to OCU in Odesa before the fieldwork in August 2019.

## 2.2 Doing interviews, transcription and analysis

### 2.2.1 Interview guide

I made an interview guide before the fieldtrip and followed this for practically all the interviewees except for some modifications. Sometimes I changed the order of the questions and asked follow-up questions when I felt it necessary to do so or if I needed to clarify something. The interviewee guide can be found in the appendices.

Looking back at the experience of conducting interviews, the interview guide was a little too detailed, and this might have led to, as King and Horrocks (2010, p 36) make the researcher aware of, “a danger that you do not allow sufficient opportunity for the participants to bring up perspectives that may be unanticipated but actually of real interest to your research.”

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<sup>5</sup>[https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1XQR0sfHFFiiXyGiVYql1mNylJ9fFPdnh&ll=50.66633706413929%2C25.49966502200982&z=7&fbclid=IwAR0tZD7PJmR8Fz4pQJG\\_EZtiz1E\\_md2nc6dOanWsURfdlejblCH5I2LJu-o](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1XQR0sfHFFiiXyGiVYql1mNylJ9fFPdnh&ll=50.66633706413929%2C25.49966502200982&z=7&fbclid=IwAR0tZD7PJmR8Fz4pQJG_EZtiz1E_md2nc6dOanWsURfdlejblCH5I2LJu-o) (accessed multiple times)

Should the interview guide be too minimalistic this may, on the other hand, lead to an interview less focused on the research topic, allowing the interviewee to “lead you into lengthy digressions” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p 36). Even so, I wanted to be open-minded, and it was also an interest of mine to let the interviewee speak freely.

### 2.2.2 The interviews

The interviewees were asked which language they preferred during the interview – English or Russian. All eighteen interviews were conducted in Russian. I was therefore surprised when some interviewees unexpectedly switched to English on a few occasions. The majority of the participants spoke Russian fluently with the exceptions of three participants, who were less confident and struggled with finding the right words.

Six interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ homes, and one interviewee was invited over to another interviewee’s home. Seven were conducted in the church, two in cafes and two at the interviewee’s workplace.

During the interviews conducted in the church, one was conducted in the main church room (interviewee 18, UOC-MP, priest). I felt a bit uncomfortable because anyone who walked in and out of the church could listen, something which might have decreased the value of the interview.

During five of the interviews, the initial interviewee (“snowball”) also joined the interview with the person they had recommended, and on some occasions interrupted with their own comments or “helped” the interviewee finding words to explain his or her thoughts. This was sometimes uncomfortable for me; I felt it was harder to ask critical questions, and it was my impression that the interviewee was more cautious in answering my questions. As an inexperienced researcher, however, I decided not to react to this extra interference.

As a general note, I got the impression that many were afraid to speak openly about the situation and the agenda of the church. The answers as to what motivated them to choose one church or the other, seemed very similar and “memorized,” although it is hard to tell if they chose (or were told by others) to mention or not to mention certain things. Some of the participants claimed that many supporters of the UOC-MP had been or were being

investigated by the Ukrainian Security Service (USB), and interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) even asked me to turn off the recorder before answering certain questions due to the fear of being investigated later on. Moreover, during the five years this conflict has been going on, the interviewees had experienced pressure from journalists both to interview and to write about the conflict, and this might have played a role in what the interviewees *felt* or *thought* was the “right” thing to say.

### *Ethical considerations*

Before the interview started, I informed the possible interviewee about the project and what his or her contribution would be used for. I let the interviewee read through a form of consent (in Russian and English) where their anonymity was guaranteed. This ensured that the interviewee was taking part voluntarily (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.88). All the interviewees were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any time.

I used a recorder during the interviews and coded the files so that the location and interviewee was not identifiable. The recorder, files and overview of interviewees were all stored separately, and all recorded files will be deleted by the end of this research.

### 2.2.3 Transcription

I transcribed the interviews verbatim, although excluding what I did not considered relevant for the study. The whole process of transcription was extremely time consuming. All in all, I had sixteen hours of interviews, the shortest interview was twenty minutes and the longest one hour and thirty minutes. I translated the quotes only when I had decided which parts I wanted to use. I have also indicated when the interviewee dramatically changed his demeanor from enthusiasm or reluctance to answer, or was laughing or crying. This was not exclusively for dramatical effect, but to give the reader a better understanding of the manner of how things were said, and how the interviewees were feeling towards certain subjects. According to King and Horrocks (2010, p. 143) such detailed information “helps to convey meaning in the spoken word.” To organize the interviewees in different themes, I used the program NVivo12.

### 2.3 Source selection

The main part of this research is based on empirical data from interviewees. The background and context chapters are intended to give an overview of the religious situation and developments in Ukraine, in addition to present some of the factors which the interviewees refer to in their stories. I have therefore used a wide range of sources in this part of the research: books, articles and research papers, statistical surveys, news articles and law data from the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy.

#### *Some comments on the sources*

For official statements from the ROC I have mainly used *mospat.ru* and *patriarchia.ru*, for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (EPC) – *patriarchate.org*. For news on the church situation, I have primarily given my trust in the Religious Information Services in Ukraine (RISU). RISU covers news of all religions in Ukraine and are always updated with the latest news. Additionally, it has an extensive archive. Therefore, I have found it very helpful when looking into the present religious situation and the developments leading up to it.

Unfortunately, I do not speak Ukrainian, I have therefore made use of sources written in English, Russian and Norwegian and only a few in Ukrainian. This, of course is a weakness in my research.

### 2.4 The analysis – a short comment

I have strived to let every participant be represented more than once in the analysis. However, some interviews were very successful, and others not so much. Some interviewees talked a lot, while others were more sparse with their words. As the reader will discover, this will be visible in the analysis through an overrepresentation of some interviewees. I have also done my best to include as much information as possible in my analysis, for the purpose of giving a deeper understanding of the research question. In those cases where I got the impression that the interviewees deliberately avoided my questions, I have pointed this out, in order to better understand the situation which this study is based on - what is *not* said during an interview can also be very important (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2006, p. 49).

### 3. Theoretical framework

The purpose of this study is to identify churchgoers' and priests' motives and motivations for church belonging in a situation of intense rivalry between the denominations. The analysis, put together of empirical data from fieldwork, are presented in chapter 6 and include various stories illustrated by a large number of quotes from the interviewees. In the theory presented below, I will look at what a sense of *belonging* entails and why we tend to have a need to belong in a group or community. To do so, I use Montserrat Guibernau's theories in her book *Belonging* (2013). Other key concepts which will be explained are "fiction of original thought," "reality experts," and "anonymous authorities" and how this is related to worldviews. In addition, I also discuss "choice" as a feature of modern societies, which for the most part is inspired by Peter L. Berger's *The Heretical Imperative* (1979). I will further examine the idea of "us" vs. "them," because this has been an important finding in the fieldwork where the interviewees tended to talk about just that: us and them, and how they differed from each other.

#### 3.1 Belonging

Ask yourself why you belong to a specific community, be it religious, political or social. Why do you belong there, and not somewhere else? Can you pick out certain factors and arguments that support your choice? What role do emotions play, or your idea of identity? Or maybe tradition has been decisive for your choice? And is it really your *own* personal and independent decision? When you have thought about this, then ask; why do I after all have a *need* to belong in a group?

##### 3.1.1 The need to belong

###### *Characteristics of groups and communities and motivation to join them*

The fear of alienation and loneliness is the most obvious motivation to belong to a group or community. Members share common interests, goals, ideas and norms. (Guibernau, 2013 p. 65). However, when choosing to belong, the individual also gives up freedom, because he or she is now expected to follow, obey and to serve. Nevertheless, when belonging somewhere, as long as the individual follows the rules and norms of the group in question, they can expect

to receive something they perceive as valuable in return, this may include protection and support whenever it is needed (Guibernau, 2013 p. 30-34), or a home – physical, virtual or imagined, where these common interests, values and principles are shared (Guibernau, 2013, p. 29). This can also be applied to the church which;

accompanies individuals through the most important moments of their life cycle: birth, becoming an adult, marriage, illness and death. In return, churches demand obedience to their norms and doctrines, respect towards their hierarchy and a willingness to sacrifice for their faith. Both church and nation heavily rely on the power of symbols, rituals and ceremonies to foster and strengthen a sense of community among their members. (Guibernau, 2013, p. 32)

Another characteristic often linked to belonging is the connection to a distinct landscape. For example, a nation will usually be attached to a homeland, although there are exceptions. I argue that, for the purpose of this study, belonging (or the believers' feeling of belonging) can be linked to a church building, or a wider geographical area which encompasses the "Orthodox world" and "Holy Rus".

### 3.1.2 The rituals and symbols of belonging

Belonging is expressed through symbolism which provides entities - such as the nation or a faith - "with distinct attributes destined to highlight their unique character" (Guibernau, 2013, p. 92). The fact that symbols and rituals are essential building blocks in a faith is no surprise. Jenkins (2008), in the quote below, elegantly points out one of the key roles that symbols play in the identification or the feeling of belonging with a group or community: "what matters is not that people see or understand things the same way, or that they see and understand things differently from other communities, but that their shared symbols allow them to believe that they do" (p. 136). Moreover, symbols stand for ideas, values and worldviews, which can be extremely important for the individual to preserve, even to the point where one is willing to sacrifice one's life for it. Where there are strong emotions of belonging one is also more inclined to take part in social action, including political mobilization (Guibernau, 2013, p. 92). We also tend to be "carried away" by our emotions, and this can make us be less aware of other issues, and weaken our rational and critical thinking (Guibernau, 2013, p. 103-104).

### *Identifying with a community*

In a similar manner, Jenkins argues that words like “us,” “we,” “community,” and “solidarity” are deeply political. These notions are imagined, or “symbolic constructs” (A. Cohen (1985) cited in Jenkins, 2008, p. 23), and despite them being imagined, they are “anything but imaginary” because they have the ability to make people act, and to generate and promote nationalism and communitarianism.

Individuals identify and feel that they belong together with others who share their worldviews and values, even though they may never have met them. In my view, this is also true for religion. Therefore, I argue, although Benedict Anderson’s idea of *imagined* communities is originally applied for the understanding of nations, it can also be applied to the study of religion. Anderson (2006, p. 6) argues that “(the nation) is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Yet, there is a difference between a large Church organization and a local church community. For some of my interviewees being part of a large community was very important, while for others the local church was more important. In the latter, one may very well know many or most of the other churchgoers.

## 3.2 Choice

### *Why change belonging*

What happens when a person is dissatisfied with the values and expectations put upon him through membership in a community and starts doubting the value of belonging to it? Guibernau (2013, p. 28) argues that “[t]he perceived equilibrium between the rewards and the constraints of belonging plays a key part in the subjective appraisal of group membership”. This illustrates one problem of belonging. When belonging to a group or community, or let us say a church, there are expectations both from the members and from the group or community in question. The individual has a need to satisfy the most urgent needs, and if this is not possible, and if the member does not see any positive or rewarding experiences related to membership, he or she will start looking for other sources of belonging (Guibernau, p. 28).

However, there can be uncomfortable consequences for an individual who chooses to leave the group or community, such as being portrayed as a traitor or being condemned and persecuted (Guibernau, p. 34). Some interviewees who had left the UOC-MP, were criticized by previous fellow parishioners for making the decision to leave or stay, something which had in some cases even caused splits within one family.

The consequences of choosing one option always involves dropping the other options. A person does not necessarily choose the best option, sometimes rather the easiest, because it gives the individual immediate and sufficient rewards with little or moderate effort. Consequently, according to Guibernau (2013, p.62), the choice we make mirrors the effort we are prepared to invest in it to achieve benefits. Furthermore, she claims that others, in contrast to those who choose the “easiest option”

are likely to select more challenging options involving a high degree of risk and effort, options where failure is a real possibility. They do so attracted by the possibility of success and the higher material or non-material benefits associated with it. Among the latter are: recognition, influence, power and prestige, wealth, increased self-esteem and the moral high ground.

As the analysis chapter will show, many who chose to leave the UOC-MP did so, not because it was an easy option, but because they felt that the Christian ethics were no longer followed by the UOC-MP. One could therefore argue that they chose the option of OCU in search for what they considered to be the moral high ground.

### 3.2.1 From fate to choice

#### *A plurality of worldviews*

Worldviews are important aspects of belonging. People who belong in the same group or community (faith) are expected to have the same values and worldviews. In the modern world, Peter L. Berger (1979, p. 15) argues, the individual has multiple ways of thinking about the world. Moreover, he distinguishes between different beliefs about reality.

According to him, an individual who has a toothache, does not need to be convinced that he has a toothache. On the other hand, social support for his moral beliefs is needed so that they become and remain plausible to the individual (Berger, 1979, p. 16). Whenever an individual is within an institutional context – as an example Berger draws parallels to a military institution, where values, such as honor, courage and loyalty, are to the individual

“unquestioned and taken-for-granted” - the values of this institutional context will start to be questioned once the individual is placed in a different context: “Conversely, it is very difficult to be a soldier in a social situation where this makes little or no sense to everyone else.” (Berger, 1979, p. 17). In my view the worldviews are relevant for my interviews because, from my perspective, the interviewees of the different church jurisdictions live within different worldviews. The Ukrainian political crisis placed some of the interviewees in a difficult context, and they started to question their “old” worldview.

### *From fate to choice.*

In Berger’s view, a jet traveler is an image of modernity. The jet traveler moves “with breathtaking speed; [while the traditional human] move in the slow rhythms set long ago by tradition...”<sup>6</sup> (Berger, 1979, p. 2), He then asks what is the main difference between them and concludes that the jet traveler has “so *many more choices*”. Whom one marries, how many children one wants to have, what kind of job etc. are all important choices that people have to make throughout their lives. Other choices, or “life-style” choices the way Berger puts it, “deeply touch the inner world of individuals.” These are choices of moral and ideological character, in addition to, of course, religious choices. It is this transition from traditional to modern man which is “*a movement from fate to choice*” (Berger, 1979, p. 10). This is one thing that characterizes the modern man and the modern consciousness. Moreover;

He must choose in innumerable situations of everyday life, but this necessity of choosing reaches into the areas of beliefs, values, and worldviews. To decide, however, means to reflect. The modern individual must stop and pause where premodern men could act in unreflective spontaneity. Quite simply, the modern individual must engage in more deliberate thinking – *not* because he is more intelligent, *not* because he is on some sort of higher level of consciousness, *but* because his social situation forces him to this. He encounters the necessity to choose, and ipso facto the necessity of pausing to reflect before choosing, on various levels of life. (Berger, 1979, p. 18)

There is, in other words, not just an *opportunity* to make a choice for the modern man, it has become a *necessity* (Berger, 1979, p. 28). To put this in the context of the church situation in Ukraine, it would seem that “modernity” in the sense of the imperative to choose became very

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<sup>6</sup> Berger explains the characteristic traditional society vs. the modern societies as “the typical situation in which the individual finds himself in a traditional society is one where there are highly reliable plausibility structures. Conversely, modern societies are characterized by unstable, incohesive, unreliable plausibility structures. Put differently, in the modern situation certainty is hard to come by.” (Berger, 1979, p. 17)

acute when the OCU was granted the Tomos. On the scene were also “fiction of original thought” and competing “reality experts,” as will be explained below.

### 3.3 “Fiction of original thought” and the “reality experts”

To have an opinion, a meaning, arguing why one should stay in one church or leave and go to another, are we then entirely making an independent choice, based on our independent opinion? Or are our ideas and meanings a product of others’ views? Individuals like to think of their thoughts and meanings as “theirs,” but according to Erich Fromm (cited in Guibernau, 2013, p. 59), only a few of us have “acquired the ability to think originally”. This is what Guibernau (2013) refers to as the “fiction of original thought”: “the belief that one is ‘speaking one’s mind’ while only repeating the views that have been instilled in one by public opinion and the media” (p. 59). The goal of the media, public opinion, and common sense (or what she calls “anonymous authorities”) is to “promote the internalization of a set of norms, values and feelings – instilled from the outside and subjectively perceived as one’s own – to be invoked at particular times” (Guibernau, 2013, p. 62). We are, in other words, being convinced that our views are a consequence of our own rational thinking, although it is the “anonymous authorities” that have influenced them. But what are the aim of these “anonymous authorities” and the internalization of a set of norms, values and feelings? Guibernau (2013, p. 62) argues that it is

to foster a degree of conformity among an otherwise diverse population. As such, it involves an effort to make social behavior predictable to that fairly accurate expectations about how individuals may react in specific circumstances can be known and, if deemed necessary, controlled and changed.

A somewhat similar observation is made by Berger (1979). Although his perspective is focusing on how the *individual’s* beliefs are being confirmed by people around him. the “reality experts,” not on “anonymous authorities” who are imposing a worldview *on* the individual. According to Berger it is that, which the individual experiences that is the most convincing evidence of reality for him or her, because “man is an empirical animal” (p. 30):

The individual, say, believes in X. As long as all people around him, including the “reality experts” of his society, ongoingly affirm the same X, his belief is carried easily, spontaneously, by this social consensus. This is no longer possible when the consensus begins to disintegrate, when competing “reality experts” appear on the scene. Sooner or later, then, the individual will have to ask himself, “But

do I *really* believe in X? Or could it be that X has been an illusion all along?” And then will come the other question: “Just what has been *my own experience* of X?”

I will not here discuss experience (Berger does this thoroughly in his book), but I will argue that the idea of competing “reality experts” can be applied to my research question: In Ukraine, there was a sudden need to make a choice of church belonging. This situation became urgent first with the Crimean annexation, and then when the formation of the new Church jurisdiction, the OCU, was approved and received autocephaly from Constantinople. Immediately new groups of “reality experts” appeared on the religious scene in Ukraine, which had existed for some time already, and made the adherents of the UOC-MP ask themselves: “But do I really believe in the UOC-MP’s worldview?”.

### 3.4 The construction and meaning of identity

According to Richard Jenkins, identity can be perceived as “our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 18). While there is a distinction between individual identity and collective identity, this study will not focus on this distinction, but rather on the idea of “us” vs. “them” as a means to understand who “we” are. This is relevant for this study because the research looks into two different Church communities, with different understandings of who “they” are and who “we” are.

#### 3.4.1 Us and them

When we belong to a group or a community, we make a distinction between ourselves as the members and the others as aliens or strangers (Guibernau, 2013, p. 33). This important observation has also been described by Richard Jenkins (2008, p. 102-103):

one of the things that we have in common is our difference from *others*. In the face of their difference our similarity often comes into focus. Defining “us” involves defining a range of “thems” also. When we say something about others we are often saying something about ourselves. In the human world, similarity and difference are always functions of a point of view: our similarity is their difference and *vice versa*. Similarity and difference reflect each other across a shared boundary. At the boundary, we discover what we are in what we are not, and *vice versa*.

Nevertheless, solely stating what “we” are not, is not enough to know who “we” are. However, looking at differences and similarities to understand who “we” are, and to recognize the differences, or what we are *not*, is actually one thing that the members of a group or community have in common (Jenkins, 2008, p 23). Another way of illustrating the importance of the distinction “us” vs. “them”, is to look at how members in a group perceive each other and their behavior. If “our” group or community or some of its members break the law, commit crimes, or do something wrong, we tend not to be so judgmental. The opposite is the case with the faults of “the others” or the “outsiders”, which are judged much harsher by “us” (Guibernau, 2013, p. 145). Guibernau (2013, p. 65) calls this view of seeing “our” group as better and more superior than other groups “group narcissism”, which nurtures the feeling that our group is worth sacrificing for.

### 3.5 Summary

In the theory discussion I have tried to answer what belonging means, what makes us choose, and what is “identity”. I have found that when choosing to belong one has to give up freedom, but in return the individual gets something which is perceived as valuable. Having a strong sense of belonging, moreover, means that strong emotions are involved, and one is therefore more capable of acting on behalf of the group, for example for political mobilization. Moreover, when the distinction between “us” and “them” arise, “group narcissism” prevails - seeing “our” church (jurisdiction), for instance, as better and superior to other churches and not be as judgmental towards group members that do something wrong. At the same time, this distinction leads to the “others” being judged much harsher by “us”.

I have furthermore found that there exist different worldviews, in which “reality experts” and “anonymous authorities” are important parts in the preservation and destruction of these. Thoughts, values and feelings that seem to be one’s own, might as well be what “anonymous authorities” have taught us. Guibernau (2013) calls this “the fiction of original thought.” Sometimes our worldview and the reality experts are tested by “competing reality experts” who pose a different way to look at this worldview. We are then faced with an option to choose. Berger (1979) argues that choice for the modern man has become a necessity. To put this in the context of the church situation in Ukraine, it would seem that the “modernity” in

the sense of the imperative to choose became very acute when the OCU was granted the Tomos of autocephaly.

Not only competing reality experts can make one question one's belonging. If the individual starts being dissatisfied with the values and expectations put upon him or her through membership in a community, the individual will start doubting the value of belonging there and begin to look for other possibilities.

With this in mind, I will argue that together, these factors – emotions related to the sense of belonging, group narcissism, competing reality experts and worldviews, and expectations within the group – make up a foundation of what motivates us to belong somewhere, or to choose to belong somewhere else.

## 4. Background and Context

There are many aspects related to the church conflict in Ukraine. This thesis aims to present the interviewees' viewpoints. The following chapter, therefore, is designed to substantiate the interviewees' statements, and the context in which they live. In addition to give the reader an impression of how complicated the situation really is for many of my interviewees. As background material for this chapter I have chosen to include a statistical overview of the religious landscape in Ukraine,<sup>7</sup> present a brief history of earlier attempts to establish an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, discuss the response of the Orthodox churches to the events in the Ukrainian crisis starting in 2013 on Maidan and, finally give an account of the concept of the "Russian world" (*Russkii mir*).

### 4.1 The religious landscape in Ukraine

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, fifteen different states were left with different ideas on how to handle religion. John Anderson (1994, p. 189) argues that after the collapse of the Soviet Union religious communities faced a new set of problems. They had to come to terms with their past, "with political and social pluralism, and with the challenges of operation in a free environment." In some communities, nation-state problems developed, but there were also, as in Ukraine, a growing number of inter-religious conflicts (Anderson, p. 189).

Catherine Wanner (2007, p. 132) argues that Ukraine is a model of religious pluralism and de facto religious freedom, because there is not a strong majority who adheres to a single denomination. In a similar manner, Elliott (2014, p. 7), argues that the different churches in Ukraine, in addition to strong Eastern-Rite Catholic and Protestant churches, laid the bases for religious tolerance and freedom of conscience. Both Wanner (2007) and Elliott (2014) wrote this before the OCU was established. One might ask now, after the establishment of the OCU whether the church-state relationship has changed, and to what degree the level of religious freedom and conscience has been weakened, if it has at all.

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<sup>7</sup> I have not succeeded in finding statistics that was conducted after the establishment of the OCU, this section is therefore based on surveys prior to the establishment of the OCU.

### *Religion in numbers*

This section explores statistical data in an effort to give a general picture of the religious landscape in Ukraine. Although the statistics do not include the OCU I will argue that the data given on the UOC-KP is a good indication of what the OCU adherents might mean as well; the majority of the OCU are in fact previous adherents of the UOC-KP as a consequence of the unification council in 2018. And naturally, their parishes were transferred to the OCU.<sup>8</sup>

I have found it quite hard to decide whether the UOC-MP or the UOC-KP (prior to the establishment of the OCU in 2018) had the most followers. I had expected that the number of members of the UOC-MP would be much higher than that of the UOC-KP, because until 2018 the UOC-MP was the only canonical church in Ukraine. Moreover, the number of parishes of the UOC-MP more than twice exceeds the parishes of the UOC-KP (Table 1) and the number of UOC-MP clergy exceeded over three times the number of UOC-KP clergy (10,419 and 3,737 persons respectively) (RISU, 17 April). One should keep in mind though, that the number of parishes does not necessarily correspond to the number of churchgoers. I have therefore turned to surveys on religious self-identification, which suggest that the UOC-KP has been much more popular among Orthodox believers in Ukraine than has the UOC-MP. There are, however, some precautions to keep in mind, as I will point out below. Surveys do not tell the whole truth, in my opinion, they do, however, give us some idea as to which church jurisdiction the Ukrainians *think* or *feel* that they belong to.

	1997	2002	2007	2011	2018
UOC-MP	7,018	9,515	11,085	12,043	12,437
UOC-KP	1,591	3,050	3,882	4,401	5,363
UAOC	1,184	1,055	1,155	1,193	1,171
UGCC	3,176	3,336	3,480	3,647	3,470

**Table 1:** *Number of Orthodox Parishes in Ukraine, 1997-2011, and 2018*

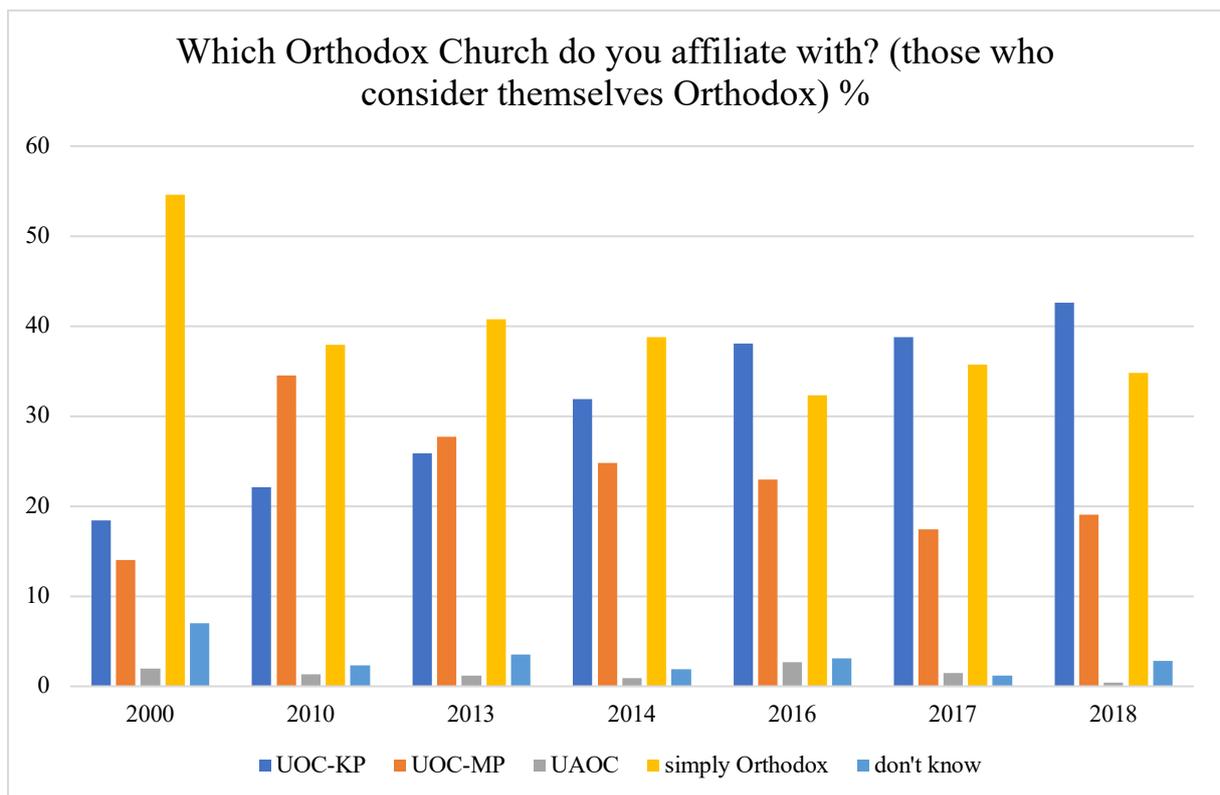
These figures include both registered and unregistered parishes. Numbers are copied from Katja Richters (2013, p. 97) The numbers from 2018 are found at (RISU, 2019, 17 April).

The number of religious people in Ukraine is high. According to Pew Research Center (2017), 12 percent of Orthodox and 43 percent of Catholics in Ukraine attend church weekly. In Russia this number is 6 percent. Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS by Olena

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<sup>8</sup> See also chapter 5

Bogdan, 2016) found that 80 percent of respondents said they belonged to Christianity. Of these, 88 percent reported being Orthodox. The Razumkov center (2018) found that 67.3 percent of their respondents considered themselves Orthodox. The percentage of those who affiliate with Orthodoxy also varies somewhat in the different parts of Ukraine. The West has the lowest percentage of Orthodox (45.6 percent)<sup>9</sup>, in the Center this number is 78.7 percent, in the South 61.1 percent and in the East 72.6 percent (Razumkov Center, 2018). The UOC-MP is unpopular in Galicia, Rivne oblast and Kyiv due to its association with Russia. Nevertheless, most of its parishes are located in these areas because the population is more religious there (Richters, 2013 p. 97). Not an insignificant number of respondents (34.1 percent) also considered themselves “simply Orthodox” (Razumkov Center 2018). This is quite high when considering that “only” 19.1 percent regarded themselves as members of the UOC-MP and 42.6 percent as members of the UOC-KP (see figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Church affiliation in Ukraine 2000-2018. Source: Razumkov center, 2018.

For these numbers the UOC-KP was most popular in the West (64,1%), the Center (48,2%), the South (36,0%) and the East (24,3%). The UOC-MP was most popular in the East (25.3%), the Center (17.7%), the West

<sup>9</sup> There are, however, a high number of Ukrainian Greek Catholics (39.7 percent), this number is very low in the other regions of Ukraine (0.0 – 0.2 percent) (Razumkov center, 2018)

(15.2%) and the South (14.7%). Most people in the East see themselves as “simply orthodox” (45.2%), South (46.0%), Center (31.8%) and west (16.6%)

### *Language preferences, identity and attitudes towards Russia*

Among the respondents in the KIIS report (Bogdan, 2016), the majority preferred Ukrainian as their language of communication: 64 percent of UOC-KP adherents and 59 percent of UOC-MP adherents. Regarding national identity, the majority considered themselves “simply Ukrainian”<sup>10</sup>: 90 percent of adherents of the UOC-KP and 76 percent of the UOC-MP. This is consistent with what I discovered during fieldwork too (see chapter 6). What was more interesting was their attitudes towards Ukraine’s foreign policy concerning Russia: most UOC-KP adherents said that “Ukraine’s relations with Russia should be the same as with other countries” (54 percent), while most UOC-MP adherents chose the statement “Ukraine and Russia should be independent but friendly states” (59 percent). Only 5.6 percent of the UOC-MP respondents and 2.2 percent of the UOC-KP respondents agreed with the statement “Ukraine and Russia should unite in one state.” Ukraine’s joining the European Union was supported by the majority of the UOC-KP adherents (58 percent) and by one third of the UOC-MP adherents (33 percent) (Bogdan, 2016).

There was a tendency that the trust towards the Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill, dropped in the years 2013-2016 and stayed low, while those who did not trust the patriarch increased sharply over the same years (figure 2). This illustrates a sharp shift in attitudes due to the political situation in Ukraine 2013-2014. According to the Razumkov center (2018) this is because of the Patriarch and the MP’s open support of the actions by Russia against Ukraine. However, the decrease in trust was most strongly felt in the West (-54 percent) and in the Center of Ukraine (-29 percent). In the South and East these numbers were -16 percent and -14 percent, respectively. Among the UOC-MP members, 48 percent of respondents trusted the Russian patriarch.<sup>11</sup> Among the UOC-KP respondents the level of trust dropped -40 percent and among the UGCC -80 percent.

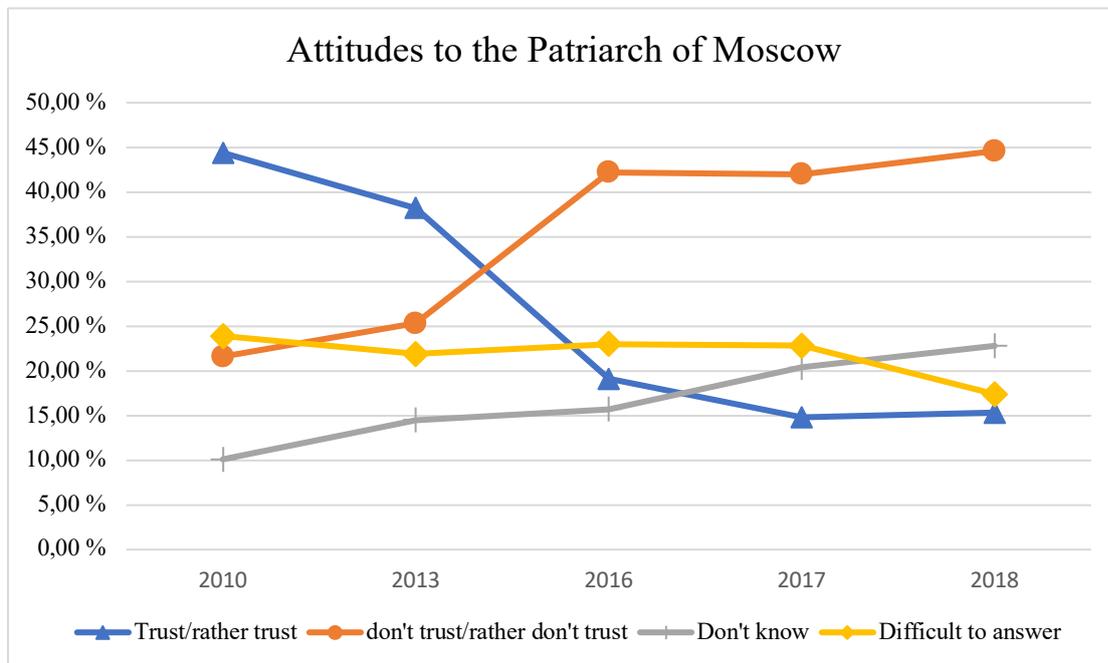
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<sup>10</sup> Other options were “both Ukrainian and Russian but mainly Ukrainian,” “equally Ukrainian and Russian,” “both Russian and Ukrainian but mainly Russian,” “only Russian,” and “other”.

<sup>11</sup> 24% distrust him, and 29% stated either that they did not know Patriarch Kirill or did not express an attitude towards him.

### *Can the numbers be trusted?*

RISU (in Richters, 2013, p. 98) discovered something interesting in the surveys of church affiliation. It needs to be stressed that these surveys were conducted when Aleksii II, Patriarch Kirill's predecessor, was patriarch. The majority of respondents stated that they belonged to the UOC-KP, but when they were asked "who is the head of your church?" or "which patriarch does your church remember in its services: Filaret or Aleksei II?" Aleksei II got the highest score. It seems like many Orthodox were not aware of which jurisdiction their church belongs to, and according to Krindatch (in Richters, 2013, p. 98), the jurisdictional affiliation is not mentioned in the name of the church in many rural Orthodox parishes, at least they were not in 2013.



**Figure 2:** *Attitudes to the Patriarch of Moscow.* source: Razumkov center 2018, p. 8

### *Summary*

What does this tell us? Well, there are apparently a large amount of Orthodox who do not want to be involved in this ecclesiastical conflict, or they simply do not care to which jurisdiction they belong.<sup>12</sup> Krindatch (in Richters, 2013, p. 98) also found that many of the country's Orthodox believers do not remain loyal to one particular church organization. They see it as more important to be simply Orthodox, instead of Greek-Catholic or Protestant. That

<sup>12</sup> This was definitely the case during the fieldtrip, when I asked Ukrainians I met in taxis or at hostels who did not participate in the in-depth interviews. Their answers were either "the closest church (from where I live)" or "the most important thing, is to have God in your heart."

common worshippers distinguish little between the different Orthodox Churches is a phenomenon of post-communist Ukrainian religiosity (Richters, 2013, p. 98). One should think that the faithful would have become more aware of their affiliation since Richters' book was published in 2013, the Ukrainian crisis has made it very clear that there exists more than one church jurisdiction and what the difference is between these two. According to the Razumkov center (2018), the UOC-KP has had an increase in believers over the past years, while the UOC-MP has experienced a decrease. According to Kochan (2016, p. 117) one of the reasons for this might be that the UOC-MP is losing touch with society, "and it is already feeling this estrangement in a very concrete way: insiders point out that parish collections have gotten smaller and smaller."

#### 4.2 Previous attempts to establish an autocephalous church in Ukraine

There have been repeated efforts to receive autocephaly for a Ukrainian Orthodox church throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century. These efforts have been criticized of being politicized and to exploit national sentiments among believers (Senyk, 2011, p. 331-332.). This section briefly explores the establishment of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP).

##### *The UAOC*

In 1921 a self-proclaimed Autocephalous Church was established in Ukraine – the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). Three years earlier, Ukraine declared independence from Bolshevik Russia. However, this independence lasted only three years (Yekelchuk, 2007, p. 67). Still, the growing national sentiments, and the desire for national self-expression clearly had an impact upon the church (Subtenly, 1988, p. 400).

The UAOC was established at a council 21 October 1921. Vasyl Lypkivskyi was elected metropolitan, and he consecrated an archbishop and four bishops, who in turn, anointed several hundred priests and deacons. This was done disregarding canonical law (Subtenly, 1988, p. 400). The UAOC introduced the use of the Ukrainian language instead of Church Slavonic in church services. It also accepted married bishops and rejected the authoritarianism of the patriarchal system. These reforms were intended to involve the faithful in its church activities, something which explains the church's early success. Nevertheless, it started out

with several weaknesses related to the economy and inexperienced priests and bishops. Moreover, the church was accused of Ukrainian nationalism (Subtenly, 1989, p. 400-401), not unlike what the OCU is experiencing today from its opponents. Following its establishment was the Great Terror in the 1930s, when the UAOC's metropolitan, bishops and priest were sent to labor camps<sup>13</sup> (Subtenly, 1989, p. 417), and the Second World War, when the church had a short revival, before officially ceasing to exist in 1944. It did, however, survive outside the borders of the USSR among the Ukrainian diaspora (Wasyliw, 2010, p. 156). In 1989 (two years before the collapse of the Soviet Union) the UAOC was revived within Ukraine (Anderson, 1994, p. 190), and would, for a short period of time unite with the newly formed Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate. It should be stressed that in the Soviet Union, the ROC was the only legal church in Ukraine (Bremer, 2016, p. 10).

#### *Patriarch Filaret and the UOC-KP*

The UOC-MP had been granted administrative independence in 1990 (before this the church had been an exarchate of the ROC), but following Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union on 1 December 1991, just as in the 1920s, a movement that wanted autocephaly grew, although with different motives than the last time. In the front seat of this movement was Filaret, at the time Metropolitan of Kyiv. He had long hoped to become the next Patriarch of the MP, but to his disappointment Aleksii, the predecessor of the current Patriarch Kirill, was elected instead (Wasyliw, 2010, p. 164). Then, in 1992, the issue of full canonical independence was on the agenda in the Moscow Synod. The Ukrainian bishops were divided in this issue, and finally it was decided that the UOC-MP should be granted financial independence (autonomy), but not autocephaly (Anderson, 1994, p. 189-190).

When the UOC-MP did not receive autocephaly, Filaret resigned as head of the UOC-MP, but he later renounced his decision “and suggested that it had been made under pressure from the Russian episcopate” (Anderson, 1994, p.190). Because of his resistance, the ROC defrocked him, this was confirmed by Constantinople in June 1992 (Bremer, 2016, p. 12).

Together with the bishops who supported him and his desire for autocephaly, Filaret decided to form a new church structure uniting his church – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) – with the UAOC. This union, however, did not last long due to

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<sup>13</sup> They were accused of collaborating with the secret nationalist organization, the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (Spilka Vyzvolennia Ukrainy – SVU).

disagreements between the adherents of the UAOC and the UOC-KP and in 1993 they split again. Later, in 1995, Filaret was elected patriarch of the UOC-KP.

Moscow and the UOC-MP view Filaret's choice to switch from canonical Orthodoxy to an unrecognized church as an effort to pursue his own career – to become patriarch. Filaret, as well as Ukrainian government representatives, tried to obtain canonical recognition from the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople (EPC) but did not succeed in this. (Bremer, 2016, p. 12-13)

The UOC-KP was supported by the Ukrainian president at the time Leonid Kravchuk, who thought that a united Orthodox Church would strengthen the homogeneity of the country (Bremer, 2016, p.12). He argued that “an independent state should have an independent church” (Anderson, 1994, p. 191) and the Ukrainian parliament suggested that the creation of a new church “would prevent religious war in Ukraine” (Anderson, 1994, p. 191). Still, conflict did develop, and adherents of rival churches attempted to take control over disputed properties (Anderson, 1994, p. 191).

It should be noted that in 1992, the same year as the UOC-MP was granted autonomy by the ROC it was revealed that Filaret had been mentioned in KGB reports as an agent working for that service, his code name being “Antonov”. At the same time, information about his private life was uncovered, among other things that he, being committed to celibacy, had kept a family (Anderson, 1994 p. 189). In 1997 he was excommunicated by the ROC. Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) was elected Metropolitan of Kyiv (Bremer, 2016, p. 12), and, after his death in 2014 he was followed by Metropolitan Onufriy.

The pursuit for autocephaly for an Orthodox church in Ukraine is thus not something new. Apart from being said to be nationalistic, these self-proclaimed autocephalous Orthodox churches promoted the use of the Ukrainian language during church service and sermon. But most importantly they wanted to cut its connection with the MP.

#### 4.3 Escalation of the desire for an independent church – the impact of the protests on Maidan and the response from the churches

In late 2013 Ukrainians gathered on the central square in Kyiv Maidan (the protests have later been called “Euromaidan” and “the Revolution of Dignity”) to express their disagreement with President Victor Yanukovich’s decision not to sign the EU Association Agreement (on November 21, 2013). This uprising left a hundred protesters dead (“the heavenly hundred”) and resulted in Yanukovich fleeing to Russia (Wanner, 2014, p. 427). In March 2014, the Crimean Peninsula was annexed by Russia, and pro-Russian activists clashed with Ukrainian forces in Donbas (Wanner, 2014, p.428). The Russian-Ukrainian war is still ongoing by the conclusion of my thesis (May, 2020).

According to Wanner (2015, p.8), in Eastern Europe, Orthodoxy is organized on a nation-state model. The churches serve a particular nation – the Greek Orthodox church, the Serbian Orthodox church and so on. Naturally many Ukrainians envisioned an independent Ukrainian church for their independent state. When the UOC-MP’s response during the Maidan protests, the annexation of Crimea and the war were interpreted as anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian, the need to establish an independent recognized Orthodox church became urgent for parts of the Orthodox population. What I want to present below, is the role the church, especially the UOC-MP, played during these events. The aim is not to present the reason for the protests on Maidan, many others have already written about this.<sup>14</sup> Hierarchy of all the Orthodox churches were present at Maidan, yet they responded differently during these events. Below, I will look at the responses from the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP during the Ukrainian crisis

#### *UOC-KP*

Filaret (UOC-KP) himself enthusiastically supported the pro-European protesters (Sakwa, 2015, p. 14) and said that: “Our church is together with the people. ... It supports Ukraine entering the European Union. We pray to God that He will help us enter the European Union in order to keep our statehood, to keep peace and to improve the life of the people” (Patriarch Filaret in Hudson, 2018, p, 1370). During the protests Filaret opened the doors to a monastery in which anti-Yanukovich activists could take shelter; it also worked as a temporary hospital. And when Russia annexed Crimea, Filaret condemned these actions (Elliott, 2014, p. 8). He also accused the MP and Patriarch Kirill for supporting a totalitarian ideology and Putin’s

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Andrew Wilson’s *Ukrainian Crisis and what it means for the West*, Richard Sakwa’s *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, and *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis*, edited by Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer

attempt to reconstruct an empire (Lunkin, 2014, p. 2), clearly referring to the idea of the Russian world (see section 4.3.1 below).

### *UOC-MP*

The UOC-MP, on the other hand, strove to keep a neutral position. Being a church in which its adherents are found on both sides of the conflict, a strong criticism of one side would have been difficult (Elsner, 2019, p10). According to Lunkin (2014, p. 2) there were some pro-Yanukovich statements made by individuals of the UOC-MP, but others did not approve of this. Many UOC-MP priests, in an effort to prevent bloodshed during the Maidan protests, stood in prayer between protestors and police, (Lunkin, 2014, p. 2) and some did take active part in the protests (Wanner, 2014, p. 433; Hovorun, 2015, p. 10). On 15 December the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations,<sup>15</sup> of which the UOC-MP is a member, issued a joint statement conveying four main points: “that the government needed to listen to the people; violence was unacceptable; Ukraine was an indivisible state; and dialogue was the only legitimate path” (Hudson, 2018, p. 1369).

There are many conflicting reports on how the UOC-MP acted during the Ukrainian crisis. Elliott (2014, p. 7), writes that the UOC-MP has stated on its webpage that several Dioceses have “acted jointly to give spiritual support to the border troops of Ukraine,” while, on the other hand there are reports of UOC-MP priests allegedly offering support and blessings to Russian separatists in the east in Donetsk and the Lugansk Regions (Elliott, 2014, p. 7). According to Cyril Hovorun<sup>16</sup>, “the church leadership, however, either kept silent or occasionally supported Yanukovich” (Hovorun, 2015, p. 9). In the spring of 2014, Metropolitan Onufriy of Kyiv and all Ukraine (UOC-MP) held a pro-Ukrainian position. He supported the idea of autocephaly for the UOC-MP and asked Patriarch Kirill to persuade Putin to withdraw Russian military forces from Crimea (Suslov, 2016, p. 137). However, later on, he changed his policy and entered a more pro-Moscow position. In an interview 5 July 2015 the Metropolitan stated that the war in Eastern Ukraine is a civil war (*eto voyna – grazhdanskaya*) and a fratricidal war (*bratoubiystvennaya voyna*) (Pravoslavie, 2015). According to the same article, Metropolitan Onufriy does not want to take sides in the

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<sup>15</sup> An interreligious assembly of all the major religious communities in Ukraine. Initiated by the state and established in 1996 (Bremer, 2016, p. 10-11). In 2013 this council was chaired by the UOC-MP Metropolitan Volodymyr, Metropolitan Onufriy’s predecessor.

<sup>16</sup> Former chairman of the Department of External relations of the UOC-MP, and he was first deputy chairman of the Educational Committee of the MP, he is now a leading member of OCU.

conflict, neither the side of the Ukrainian army, nor “the other side” (as he calls it). Moreover, during the 2015 Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, where anti-terrorist operation (ATO) soldiers were awarded the title of Hero of Ukraine (some posthumously), the Metropolitan Onufriy, together with three other representatives of the UOC-MP, did not stand up to honor them, but remained seated. Although this was perceived by many Ukrainians to be a statement that the UOC-MP did not support the Ukrainian soldiers, it was stressed by the UOC-MP that it was to demonstrate that the war should end immediately (Pravda, 2015, 9 May).

Mitrokhin (2015, p. 12-13) found that there were established different views concerning the future of the UOC-MP among the priests and bishops of the church. Some were in favor of working towards autocephaly and full independence from the ROC, others were in favor of the current situation where the UOC-MP enjoyed wide autonomy<sup>17</sup>. Others wanted to depose of the autonomy and become fully dependent on ROC. Hudson (2018) argued that there were two main groups within the UOC-MP, the pro-Kyiv wing and the pro-Moscow wing. Having different ambitions and views within one and the same church, in my view, might have caused the church’s ambivalent approach during the Ukrainian crisis. Mitrokhin’s and Hudson’s observations were done before the Tomos and the establishment of the OCU. It would therefore be interesting to see if these factions still exist today or if they have changed at all. One should think that some of the clergy who left the UOC-MP and joined the OCU were part of the autocephalous movement or the pro-Kyiv wing.

### *Kirill and Putin*

Patriarch Kirill also had to respond to the events playing out in his “Borderlands”. He would have to do this while pleasing the Kremlin<sup>18</sup> and without alienating the UOC-MP (Elliot,

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<sup>17</sup> The UOC-MP was the one church after the collapse of the Soviet Union that managed to negotiate the broadest power of autonomy of the local churches affiliated with the MP (Hudson, 2018, p. 1361). According to the official webpage of the ROC the UOC-MP is a self-governing church “with the status of broad autonomy” and it maintains canonical unity with the ROC, through which it is in unity with all other Local Orthodox Churches (ROC, (no date) *Ukrainskaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov’*). The UOC-MP have control over its own administrative and financial affairs, it also has the right to appoint diocesan and lower-level vicar bishops without the approval of Moscow. Moreover, the metropolitan of Kyiv is appointed by Ukrainian bishops (Hudson, 2018, p. 1361).

<sup>18</sup> A number of academics have tried to understand the relationship between the ROC and the Russian state. Alicja Curanovic (2014) argues that the ROC is being used as an instrument by the state. This is done through “religious diplomacy” which allows the state “to use aspects of religion, such as ideas, slogans, symbols and even religious organisations in international affairs.” There are also many who argue that there are a “symphonia” or a harmonic relationship, between the Church and the state, a symphonia which emerged in the Byzantine Empire. This places the church on an equal footing with the state (Knox, 2003, p.575-576). While Köllner (2019) introduced the concept of “entangled authorities”. This concept “stresses the close cooperation without neglecting the competition, disputes, quarrels or even conflicts between both spheres.”

2014, p.8). In an appeal from Patriarch Kirill to the then locum tenens Metropolitan Onufriy on 2 March 2014 he stated that “[t]he church does not take one side or the other in the political struggle. But the Church’s duty is to grieve for those who are abused, who need protection, whose lives are in danger” (ROC, 2014, 2 March). In April the same year at a meeting of the Supreme Church Council 30 April Kirill stressed that the Church’s role is not to involve itself in political matters: “our Church does not succumb to any political temptations and refuses to serve any political positions. Our fundamental point of view is that the Church should be above any battle.” The role of the Church, he declared, is to maintain its peacekeeping potential, and that it should provide support “exclusively within the framework of its Divine mandate – That which the Lord has entrusted to the Church. We must carry out pastoral and clerical work, we must perform prayer, we must reconcile people, but we must in no way serve certain political views, positions, concepts, (...)” (ROC, 2014, 30 April).

Yet, Patriarch Kirill did publicly support Putin’s reelection in 2012 and in general supports Kremlin political positions openly. However, what he has *not* done is also important. For example, he did not attend the signing ceremony when Crimea was incorporated into the Russian Federation in March 2014 (Elliott, 2014, p. 8-9).

#### 4.3.1 The ideology of the Russian world (Russkii mir) and what it meant for the Ukrainian crisis and the UOC-MP

This concept has many meanings. It can simply mean an imagined community of people who consider themselves as bearer of Russian culture and who lives outside the borders of the Russian Federation (Hudson, 2018, p. 1357). This understanding is similar to Piotr Shchedrovitskiy’s definition of the Russian world as “a network of large and small communities who think and speak Russian” (Hovorun, 2016, p. 163-164). Shchedrovitskiy, together with two other “political technologists,” Sergey Gradirovskiy and Efim Ostrovskiy constructed this concept as a way of addressing the reality of the disintegrating post-Soviet milieu in the 1990s (Hovorun, 2016, p. 163-164). For this thesis however, and in the context of the church conflict, I will focus on the religious aspect of the concept, and how it characterized the war in Ukraine and the perception of the UOC-MP by its opponents.

The term Russian world is closely linked to the concept of *Holy Rus*’, a community which core is Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, according to Patriarch Kirill (2010, p. 29), and where

people are united by one common Orthodox faith, regardless of native language or ethnicity (Hudson, 2018, p. 1358). Although Petro (2015) argues that the concept of the Russian world means something different for the Russian state than it does for the ROC, the two have many things in common. For example, one of the tasks of the Russian World Foundation<sup>19</sup> is to interact “with the Russian Orthodox Church and other faiths in the promotion of the Russian language and Russian culture” (Russian World Foundation, no date). So, is the Russian world an instrument for political influence by the Russian Federation? Patriarch Kirill (2010, p. 32) reassures that this is not the case and stresses that “the fear that support for Russian culture can destroy the local national culture is an empty fear.” This view is not shared with my interviewees from the OCU (especially group D, see chapter 6). In their eyes the Russian world has threatened Ukraine’s independence. Although the Russian world and Holy Rus’ were not one and the same in the start, they seem to go through an evolution where the Russian world absorbed the religious aspect of Holy Rus’. Suslov (2016, p. 141), who has analyzed the use of these two concepts in Russian media, found that in 2012 the use of Holy Rus’ and Russian world became interrelated, when one of them increased so did the other. In 2014, however the use of Holy Rus’ dropped and the use of Russian world skyrocket. But how is this ideology connected to the Ukrainian crisis? Cyril Hovorun (Euromaidan press, 2018, 18 May) explains that:

The Russian aggression against Ukraine was also expressed, articulated and moved by religiously charged rhetoric. The ideology of the “Russian world” is religious as such, it’s not a secular ideology. Its religious rhetoric rides on the counterposition of the east and west, of the presumably holy, religious, spiritual East, and godless West. It renders the conflict in Ukraine in the terms of the counterposition of the Orthodox civilization and the opposite civilization, like Catholic, Protestant or atheist civilizations.

He further comments that many who fight against Ukraine on the Russian side are motivated by this rhetoric of the Russian world. This is also the view of interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D) who says that the only way Russia and Ukraine could start killing each other was if they were motivated by the most holy idea – God. Because of the Ukrainian crisis and the UOC-MP’s response, many of my interviewees could no longer stay with the UOC-MP (this will be discussed in more depth in chapter 6). This church, with its connection to the ROC, has often been seen as a source of Russian cultural influence in Ukraine (Hudson, 2018, p. 1358). Many

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<sup>19</sup> Established in 2007 with the support from President Putin.

of the interviewees have therefore seen the Russian world as a threat to their worldview, and consequently the UOC-MP becomes a threat too because it helps promote these ideas.

#### 4.4 Summary

A desire for an independent Ukrainian Orthodox church has existed since the 1920s, and previous self-proclaimed autocephalous churches have tried to obtain recognition, turning to the patriarch of Constantinople for assistance. Common for these churches – the UAOC and the UOC-KP – is their desire to cut the spiritual ties to the ROC, and because of their timing: the UAOC was established during a period of independence and nation building, and the UOC-KP was established after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Ukraine again became independent. Albeit not canonical nor recognized, the UOC-KP was quite popular among Ukrainians, according to surveys. Yet, as we have seen, statistical data cannot always be trusted.

Orthodoxy is organized on a nation-state model, and therefore many Ukrainians envisioned an independent Ukrainian church for their independent state. This need became urgent after the Ukrainian crisis, where the UOC-MP's response was interpreted as anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian, inspired by the rhetoric of the Russian world and the Orthodox civilization. In the following chapter I will give a short introduction to the steps towards the establishment of an independent Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

## 5. The Church Conflict and The Orthodox Church of Ukraine

Different Ukrainian presidents have favored certain churches during their presidency.

Therefore, churches have been influenced by political developments and by the president and his political agenda (Bremer, 2016, p. 10). Presidents such as Leonid Kuchma and Victor Yanukovich supported the UOC-MP, they both came from the eastern region. While Victor Yushchenko promoted a united Ukrainian Church and supported the UOC-KP.

Ukrainian presidents have on several occasions traveled to the Patriarch of Constantinople in Istanbul advocating Ukrainian church autocephaly (Bremer, 2016, p. 10). Until Petro Poroshenko's success in 2018 these attempts had been futile. Next, I will present some of the political developments which affected the churches after 2014 and discuss the establishment of the OCU and reactions from the ROC.

### 5.4 Political developments after 2014

After 2014 local church conflicts erupted in Ukraine when parishioners disagreed on whether they should stay with the UOC-MP or transfer to the UOC-KP. The parliament also presented a number of draft laws which clearly were aimed at undermining the position of the UOC-MP. This instigated protests by the UOC-MP adherents and priests.

#### *Draft laws*

In 2016, several draft laws were presented to the Ukrainian parliament. One of these was draft law no. 4128 which amended the Ukrainian Law, "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2016, 23 February). A revised version of this draft law, bill no. 4128-D was signed 28 January 2019 by Poroshenko (RISU, 2019, 28 January). This law should clarify procedures regarding change of church affiliation. The decision to change church affiliation is to be decided by two thirds of the members of the religious community, and those who do not agree "have the right to form a new community and enter into an agreement on the procedure for using the cult building and property with their owners" (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2019, 16 January), see also Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2016, 23 February). There is, however, no explanation how to decide who is a member of a parish, this is a decision left to each parish to decide.

In April and October 2016, draft law no. 4511 and no. 5309 were introduced, respectively. These were also amendments to the Ukrainian law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” concerning religious organizations “whose governing center is located outside the borders of Ukraine in a country which has carried out military aggression against Ukraine or are temporarily occupying part of the Ukrainian territory” (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2016, 26 October). The amendments also restricted access of clerics belonging to such organizations to the armed forces and other military organizations (IRFR, 2018). Although it was not stated explicitly, these draft laws were clearly targeting the UOC-MP which recognizes Patriarch Kirill of the MP as its Primate (Shestopalets, 2019, p.58). The first of these draft laws, no. 4511, would have made such religious communities, as defined above, sign a treaty in which the religious community in question would have to declare its respect “for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and laws of Ukraine.” This bill, however, was repealed 28 August 2019 (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2016, 22 April).

Draft law no. 5309 required the religious communities to change their name to indicate their affiliation, forcing the UOC-MP to change its name to “Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine” (RISU, 2018, 22 December). According the Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy (2016, 26 October), the law was designed “to ensure national security and sovereignty of Ukraine, as well as to provide the public with complete and reliable information.” The law was passed by the Ukrainian Parliament in December 2018, and later that month signed by Poroshenko who stated that: “It is easier to make a choice when all things are called by their names, when there is enough information to make this choice voluntarily. The implementation of the law will give the citizens full information” (RISU, 2018, 22 December).<sup>20</sup> The Union of Orthodox Journalists (2018, 1 December), which exclusively writes articles in support for the UOC-MP and criticizes the OCU, posted responses from UOC-MP adherents claiming that “according to the people, the idea of forcible renaming of the Church can only lead to heightened tensions.” Spokespersons of the UOC-MP criticized the bill as governmental interference in religious life (URFR Ukraine, 2018).

When bill no. 4128 and 4511 were to be voted on in May 2017, the UOC-MP managed to mobilize faithful parishioners and clergy outside the Parliament, holding posters which said

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<sup>20</sup> UNIAN reported in December 2019 (after the interviews for this study were conducted) that the Supreme court had ruled in favor of the UOC-MP. The church, therefore, does not have to change its name.

“Bills 4511 and 4128 are persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the state” (RISU, 2017, May 18). The UOC-MP themselves claimed that they managed to gather ten thousand protesters, while reporters counted around three thousand (RISU, 2017b, 18 May).

### *Transfer of Church property*

While the UOC-MP adherents (and especially priests) have been accused of supporting the Donbas separatists and holding pro-Russian views, the UOC-KP has been accused of taking over churches belonging to the UOC-MP by force, and doing this with the help of local governments (URFR, 2014 and 2018). The URFR (2014 and 2018) have reported several occasions when violence between UOC-MP and UOC-KP adherents have occurred over the past five years (2014-2018). Such struggles have taken place both in cities and villages. The village of Ptycha painfully illustrated how violent the struggles became when adherents of the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP fought over the right to use the only church in the village. Several videos exist of this event.<sup>21</sup>

Filaret has claimed that these transfers have been carried out voluntarily, and he encouraged all adherents of UOC-KP to refrain from violence. There are also media reports stating that the Russian government has sought to spread false rumors about pressure on the UOC-MP (URFR 2014 and 2018).

## 5.5 The Orthodox Church of Ukraine – establishment and motives.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) was established 15 December 2018. Before this, there had, as previously explained, been three main ecclesiastical Orthodox structures in Ukraine; the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP); the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGyWBUCWoYs> The Union of Orthodox journalists report about the church conflict in Ptyche uploaded 20 december 2015. In 2015 there were struggles between UOC-KP and UOC-MP in Ptitche. As the film shows these struggles were periodically violent. (I cannot identify who the people are and what church jurisdiction they belong to (either UOC-KP or UOC-MP) or who are on the outside and inside of the fence). Alina Dubovska (a journalist from Dubno in Rivne district), posted this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQvYoS7cn88> . For two years members of the UOC-MP had been occupying (or as they themselves probably would call it – protecting) the only church in the village of Ptycha, when the UOC-KP community got permission from the court to enter the church – which was theirs. According to the video, they found “Russian propaganda” in the church, without specifying what kind. Others have also reported on the violent events in this small village [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lp3Eao\\_LvU8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lp3Eao_LvU8) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcs4ICZGbTw>

Church (UAOC). When it became clear that the Patriarch of Constantinople would proceed towards granting a Tomos of autocephaly, the two latter churches decided to merge. A “unification council” took place 15 December 2018 where the UOC-KP and the UAOC became one unified church structure – the OCU. Only two bishops from the UOC-MP participated at the meeting (Tymczuk, 2019, 5 January). Due to the impending granting of a Tomos of autocephaly to the OCU, the ROC on a meeting the 15 October 2018, decided to break communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople as a response of what they called an “anti-canonical” decision (ROC, 2018, 15 October).

It deserves to be noted that the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, earlier had received a joint appeal from the Ukrainian government and bishops from the UOC-KP and UAOC and some UOC-MP bishops on April 20 on the granting of autocephaly (URFR, 2018, p. 8). Filaret was asked by Patriarch Bartholomew not to pursue the position as head of OCU. Instead, Epifaniy (Dumenko) was elected head of the unified church for the rank of Metropolitan. On 5 January 2019 Patriarch Bartholomew signed the Tomos of autocephaly (Pravda, 2019a, 6 January).

During the Christmas liturgy in St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, where the Tomos of autocephaly of the Orthodox church of Ukraine was shown to the public, Poroshenko said that

The creation of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine is the pledge of our independence. This is the foundation of our spiritual freedom. We’ve severed the last ties that connected us with Moscow and its fantasies about Ukraine as the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. This is not and won’t be anymore.” (UNIAN, 2019, 7 January)

He also declared that the new church would be “without Putin, without Kirill”, but “with God and with Ukraine” (Cazabonne, 2018).

It can hardly be denied that Poroshenko used the OCU as part of his political campaign for his presidential election. Hovorun (Euromaidan press, 2018, 18 May), however, argues that this was not the only reason. He believes that this initiative was actually an expression of a wish of many Ukrainian Orthodox Christians. Poroshenko simply articulated the concern of those not feeling that they belonged with the UOC-MP, nor with the schismatic UOC-KP and UAC. Hovorun elaborates:

On the one hand, they want to go to a canonical church, to be in communion with the rest of the Orthodox Christians worldwide. The only outlet for this communion is the church of the MP; at the same time, they disagree with the rhetoric, the statements, and sometimes, with the absence of statements which sometimes is more telling. Like in war: while the other Churches are outspoken on war and aggression, the UOC MP has never condemned the war. It has never even named the war by its proper name, as war. This creates obstacles for people who go to that Church. So, this is a major concern for many, including people from the political establishment who go to it. I cannot read thoughts, but I think that Poroshenko himself as a person and a Christian has problems of this sort.

Poroshenko was present during many events leading up to the Tomos. When the Tomos was granted, he joined the delegation to Istanbul where it was handed over to the OCU. Elsner (2019, p. 12) criticizes Poroshenko's presence at these events and argues that it links the church with an "outspoken political agenda." Referring to Poroshenko's speeches in Kyiv and Istanbul, where he stated that autocephaly for the OCU meant "a church without Putin, without Russian poison, without prayers for the Russian army," Elsner argues that no theological or ethical issue appears to be crucial in the establishment of the OCU. The mixture of politics and religion is highly questionable, and the fact that that the OCU was part of Poroshenko's political agenda will be a harmful legacy for the new church, according to Elsner (2019, p. 12).

The UOC-MP stressed their neutrality in the Ukrainian conflict and tried to support both sides. Yet, reports that its churches did not want to bury soldiers, were published (RISU, 2018, 20 April). This, in addition to the church's affiliation with the ROC – and therefore also Kirill and the Kremlin – added fuel to the fire regarding the UOC-MP being a way for Russia to influence Ukrainians, and accordingly a danger to national security. Interestingly, despite his effort and success in establishing the OCU, Poroshenko lost the presidential election.

### *The road ahead*

On 28 July 2019, the head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan Epifaniy, stated at a briefing that already, over the last six months 500 parishes from the UOC-MP had changed affiliation to join the OCU. According to the metropolitan, this process had slowed down a bit, but he hoped that more would join the OCU (RISU, 2019, 28 July). It is hard to find any trustworthy sources on the number of transfers. As already mentioned, RISU set up an interactive map where one can follow parishes that have changed to OCU (RISU, 2018, 28

December), but these churches also seem to include those who went from the UOC-KP to OCU. From what I understood during my fieldwork, most churches changed church affiliation from the UOC-MP to UOC-KP before the OCU was established.

The Tomos of autocephaly has led to strong reactions from the ROC and UOC-MP, and the dispute between ROC and EPC has become even deeper. In a letter which he sent to the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches “concerning ‘unification’ pseudo-council held in Kiev.” Patriarch Kirill of the MP stated that

That so-called unification was, in fact, a merger between two schismatic organizations which formed one. Taking part in the “council” were false bishops of the schismatic “Kievan patriarchate” and another uncanonical structure – “Ukrainian autocephalous orthodox church” (ROC, 2018, 20 December).

And he added that “[t]he gathering that took place in Kiev only confirmed the fact of the government’s open interference in church life.” President Putin has also commented on the event in Ukraine, claiming that the main goal of the church structure is “to divide the people of Russia and Ukraine, to spread not only national but religious conflict” (Kremlin, 2019, 16 January). The religious situation in Ukraine was also on the agenda during a national security meeting in Russia October 2018 (Kremlin, 2018, 12 October). Below, I will discuss in somewhat more depth why Ukraine is so important for the ROC.

One may ask, but is this conflict all bad? A competition between the two canonical Orthodox jurisdictions UOC-MP and the OCU is now appearing on the religious scene in Ukraine and each “are sick with their own illnesses,” according to Hovorun (Euromaidan press, 2019, 6 July). The UOC-KP inherited some of the diseases from the Soviet times and these have survived in the OCU. While the UOC-MP see a “growth of fundamentalism and even some deviations from the Orthodox doctrine and understanding of what the Church is.” Nevertheless, he argues that this situation also has a positive side: “Under the conditions of the same competition, these new structures have the opportunity – not a guarantee, but opportunity – to get rid of certain birth defects” (Hovorun, in the Eudomaidan press, 2019, 6 July).

## 5.6 Ukraine in-between Moscow and Constantinople

With one-third of the parishes of the entire MP being in Ukraine (Hudson, 2018, p. 1377), should the ROC grant autocephaly to the UOC-MP, the former would then lose its status as the largest Orthodox church in the world (Suslov, 2016, p. 135). Naturally the establishment of the OCU and its blessing from the EPC has threatened ROC's position.

The ROC sees its beginning in Kyiv with the Christening of Kyiv Rus in 988. This event marked the beginning of Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe and Kyiv is thus seen as the cradle of Eastern European Christianity "and the mother of all Russian cities" (Richters, 2013, p. 99) and the "cradle of Russia and Russian Christianity" (Brüning, 2016, p. 81). Ukraine is also, as discussed earlier, a crucial part of the Holy Rus' notion. In other words, this Christening is not only perceived as the first chapter of the church history, but also Russian history (Brüning, 2016, p. 81).

Therefore, the church situation in Ukraine, is not only a national and local matter but touches upon the international sphere too. This has caused Ukraine to be dragged in between two competing Orthodox Churches – the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople.

At the heart of their dispute is the question of who has the right to grant autocephaly. Constantinople argues that it has the right to grant autocephaly to a new Local Orthodox Church (Brusanowski, 2016, p. 53), while from the point of view of the ROC, this decision should be a pan-Orthodox process "in which all autocephalous Churches would participate" (Brusanowski, (2016, p. 54), statement from Metropolitan Hilarion in 2014). Moreover, both Moscow and Constantinople claim that Ukraine is part of their canonical territory<sup>22</sup>, something the latter announced already in 2000 (Tymczuk, 2002, p.59). In short, the two patriarchates interpret the "Act" of 1686 differently. This act, in form of a letter from the EPC, gave the Patriarch of Moscow permission to ordain the Metropolitan of Kyiv. This has been interpreted by the MP as a subjugation of the Kyiv Metropolis to the MP, which Moscow refers to as "the Russian Church's unification in 1686" (ROC, 2018, 15 October), and the "reunification of the Kiev Metropolis with the Russian church" (ROC, 2018, 14 September). The EPC, however, argues that "the meaning of the 'subjection' of the Metropolis of Kyiv to the Patriarch of Moscow essentially lay only in the *permission* to

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<sup>22</sup> On crucial moments in Ukraine's history, for instance the Pereiaslav agreement in 1645, which incorporated a large part of Ukraine into Moscovy, see Subtelny (1989).

ordain the Metropolitan of Kyiv” (Ecumenical document, 2018, p. 9). In other words, they do not see it as a transfer of the Kyiv Metropolis to the MP.

The MP accuses Patriarch Bartholomew of being motivated by ”senseless and political decisions”, which cause “an even larger division and aggravate the suffering of the canonical Orthodox Church of Ukraine” (ROC, 15.10.2018). The ROC describes the actions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a direct support of the Ukrainian schism and blames the EPC for giving “to its daughter a stone instead of bread and a serpent instead of a fish”<sup>23</sup> (ROC, 14.09.2018).

Finally, as a consequence of the EPC granting the OCU autocephaly, the ROC ceased to commemorate the ecumenical Patriarch in its services (ROC, 2018, 15 October).

## 5.7 Summary

During the Ukrainian crisis starting in 2013, the UOC-KP unwaveringly supported the protesters and wholeheartedly condemned Russia’s aggression. The UOC-MP took a more careful role, stressing its neutrality in the conflict while declaring that church and politics should not be mixed. There were also reports of UOC-MP clergy not wanting to bury Ukrainian soldiers and who supported the pro-Russian activists in Eastern Ukraine. Nevertheless, several UOC-MP clergy too did stand with the protesters, and in its official statements the church stated that it wanted the war to end immediately (Pravda, 2015, 9 May).

There have been and are strong voices in Ukraine that condemn the UOC-MP and accuse it of being controlled by Russia because of its ties to the ROC. Therefore, several draft laws were introduced in 2016, designed to undermine the UOC-MP’s position. The UOC-MP, however, demonstrated its ability to mobilize its adherents, and organized a protest outside the Parliament when these laws were to be voted on. In the end, the only law which has had a concrete impact is bill no. 4128-D regarding the process of church transfer.

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<sup>23</sup> (cf. Lk. 11:11) The Statement was adopted at an extraordinary session of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on 14 September 2018 (Minutes No. 69).

There have also been violent struggles between adherents of the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP fighting over church property. The churches' role during the Maidan protests and Russia's aggression towards Ukraine, in my view, caused the president and the Ukrainian state to take strong security measures, and the UOC-MP was one of its targets.

The UOC-KP and UAOC, both regarded by the UOC-MP and by most of the Orthodox world as schismatics, formed a new church structure during the unification council in December 2018. Now, "independent Ukraine" had "an independent church" as Petro Poroshenko put it.

There have been several movements within Ukraine since the 1920s who have opted for an independent Orthodox church, with no ties to the ROC. The UAOC and the UOC-KP were both established disregarding canonical law. Both of these churches turned to the EPC for autocephaly, but these efforts were at the time not successful. Why Patriarch Bartholomew chose to grant autocephaly to the OCU now, and not earlier when other Ukrainian churches turned to EPC for recognition, is a question that needs to be answered in the future.

Ukraine is a country in which a high level of the population considers themselves as religious. The many Orthodox churches have caused inter-religious conflict but also religious pluralism.

In the following chapter I will examine the motivations for church belonging among priests and churchgoers from the UOC-MP and the OCU. This will give us a clearer picture of while some choose to leave the UOC-MP others choose to stay.

## 6. Analysis – findings from fieldwork

*P: One should not go to [the OCU] - it is forbidden. To take part in their church services is forbidden, find oneself on their perimeter is forbidden, it is a great misfortune (beda) that a church schism is happening in Ukraine.*

*Q: but why is it not allowed, they are also Orthodox people, they too believe in God.*

*P: but here it is no longer politics that decides, and not research. What decides is a thing called the grace of the Holy Spirit.” (interviewee 17, UOC-MP, priest)*

### 6.1 Introduction

In the following analysis I will present my findings from the fieldwork in Ukraine August 2019. As presented in my research question I was interested in understanding and learning about the motivation behind church belonging. I have organized my analysis in four main themes. The first theme explores motivations for church belonging, while the second discusses the interviewees’ political preferences in the form of their view on Russia and the recent events in Ukraine, such as the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. Theme 3 presents the interviewees’ views on the consequences of the church conflict; has it been all bad? And finally, theme 4 discusses what the interviewees consider to be the most important task for the church. Together these themes will cover not only the above-mentioned topics, but also the interviewees views on politics, Russia, Crimea and the war, and how the interviewees on both sides of the conflict perceive each other. In general terms, it is easier to say what we are not than what we are, and why we did not choose *that* side based on our views of those we disagree on. Many times, the interviewees did exactly this. Jenkins (2008, p 102) says that “[w]hen we say something about others we are often saying something about ourselves.” These factors all played a natural part in the interviewees’ choice of church belonging.

Moreover, although I have organized the analysis into different themes, they cannot be entirely separated from each other, and the reader might therefore find the analysis somewhat repetitive in parts. All in all, I will argue that taken together, the different themes give a good assessment on how the church situation has been experienced by the eighteen interviewees, and what was decisive when choosing church belonging. I would also argue that it gives an impression on what we might call “the two main narratives” or two worldviews of the

Ukrainian identity (through the eyes of the Orthodox) expressed in the choice of church belonging.

I would like to remind the reader that the interviewees all consider themselves as active members of the Orthodox Church. An active member I regard as a person who at a minimum attends church once every week. Many of the interviewees in this study also joined other activities organized by their church, such as choir and preparations for festivities. I expected that they were aware of which church jurisdiction they belonged to, be it either the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP) or the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. I have taken it for granted that they were all personally religious (*veruiushchie*). Of course, the priests interviewed obviously take part in church service, and thus it is superfluous to identify them as active members. As is the case in most countries, there are also many people in Ukraine who consider themselves Orthodox but do not go to church on a regular basis, only on special occasions.<sup>24</sup>

The interviewees from UOC-MP pointed out that recognition and being part of global Orthodoxy was relevant for their choice of church belonging. Overall, all the interviewees from UOC-MP see the OCU as schismatics and nationalists. The OCU interviewees on the other hand, argued that the UOC-MP and the ROC have violated Christian ethics in the way they behaved during the demonstrations in Maidan and the following Crimean annexation and war. They see the UOC-MP as “opponents of Ukraine.”

Through in-depth interviews with churchgoers and priests, my goal is to show the grassroots’ points of view of the church conflict. However, it is very likely and natural that many of my interviewees have to a large degree “copied” the views of their church hierarchs. Whether this is conscious or not, I cannot tell, although probably a little bit of both. I would argue that although the interviewees might regard their views as unique and original, there is a possibility that they have just been reproducing “the views that have been installed in [them] by public opinion and the media” (Guibernau, 2013, p. 3) and that “this emphasizes that belonging depends upon the willingness to conform to values, norms, dress codes and other conditions imposed by the group that people wish to join,” (Guibernau, p 3-4).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> As we have seen earlier, and 12 percent of Ukrainian orthodox attend church every week (Pew Research Center, 2017)

<sup>25</sup> See chapter on theory.

I have attempted to make the analysis as clear and comprehensible as possible. However, I want to stress that this is a complex and ongoing situation, and this analysis is therefore only a small contribution to getting a better insight on the topic of the ecclesiastical situation in Ukraine. There are still many more topics and factors to explore.

### 6.1.1 Different “starting points”

As the following analysis of the interviewees shows, there is a tendency that those belonging to the UOC-MP share a similar narrative to explain their choice to stay, and their views on the OCU. The same is the case for the adherents of the OCU. However, there are some variations within the OCU, and this, I will argue, lies in the fact that the churchgoers and priests of the OCU have different “starting points.” This is quite important to keep in mind. Some interviewees changed from UOC-MP to UOC-KP as early as right after the events starting in late 2013, others waited until the OCU was established.<sup>26</sup> Interviewee 16 (OCU/KP, priest) has been a member of the UOC-KP since its establishment in the 1990s. He does not recognize the transfer of his parish to the OCU. Interviewee 5 (OCU, priest) was ordained in the UOC-KP. He has, in other words, never been a member of the UOC-MP, a church he considers to be a Russian church, exclusively.

Interviewee 14 (OCU, CG) and interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG) previously identified themselves as Protestants. Interviewee 4 has been attending the UOC-MP church since she was 18 years old. Before that she could not decide which church to belong to; “for some time I belonged to the Protestant religion, other times to the UOC-KP, and when I turned eighteen, I chose this denomination where I am still this day.” She had been searching for a long time. It was during the time when she stayed with the UOC-KP that she was invited to join a church service with the UOC-MP. They did not have their own church, “because it had been taken by the UOC-KP, through a raid in the 90s”. She describes her first impression with the UOC-MP:

And I then understood that in this church it is not like the other churches. I was struck by the silence and the lights, it was something I had never seen anywhere before (...) and I started to read a lot of literature, I found many books, the teacher from the school helped me. And thanks to the literature, thanks to good people, I decided for myself to stay only here. Even though it was very difficult; I had

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<sup>26</sup> See also the appendices with an overview of the interviewees and additional information

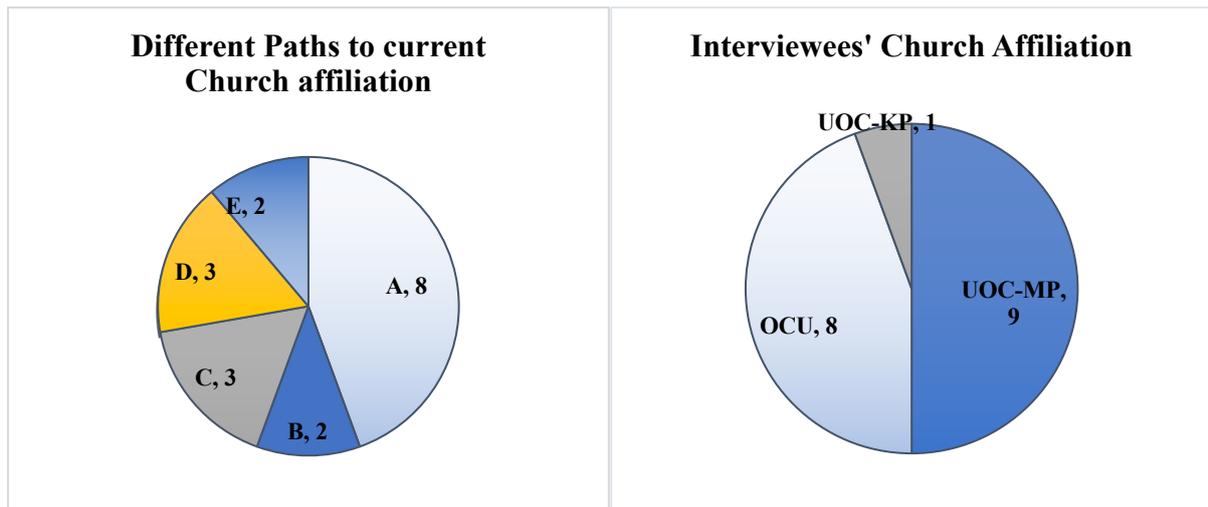
many friends who condemned me, and the church of the MP was very persecuted and people just hated this church, and those [people] who went there [to MP]. (interviewee 4, UOC-MP, CG)

I will discuss motivation for church belonging in more depth later. Yet, I think the above quote is very interesting, as it illustrates the interviewee's own, personal motivation to belong with the UOC-MP. She does not argue she at *that* time chose the UOC-MP because of its status as a canonical church, but simply because of the atmosphere or a feeling that this place was right for her. We shall see below, however, that the matter of canonicity is now crucial for her choice of church belonging.

Returning to the sample of interviewees, I would argue that it matches the complex religious situation in Ukraine. In the section "Summary and discussion" I will present to what degree I have found any systematic differences in the interviewees' attitudes.

There are many ways to classify the interviewees and their "path" to the church which they now belong to, especially the group from the OCU. I have, to simplify it, decided to present the interviewees as two main groups: the UOC-MP and the OCU, which in turn are attributed with one of these letter:

- A:** Always stayed with the UOC-MP (also after the establishment of the OCU)
- B:** Stayed with the UOC-KP since its establishment in the 90s, and as a natural consequence of the religious development, now officially belong to the OCU
- C:** Changed from UOC-MP to UOC-KP to OCU
- D:** Changed directly from UOC-MP to OCU
- E:** Belonged to different Christian denominations before ending up either with the UOC-MP or the OCU.



**Figure 3:** Different Paths to current Church affiliation. **Figure 4:** interviewees' Church affiliation

Because every interviewee from the UOC-MP (except interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG) indicated with the letter “E”) have only belonged to this church, I have not added the “A” for these in their description throughout the analysis.

#### 6.1.2 Activity level in church and other remarks

During the interviews, I noticed that when I asked priests of the UOC-MP where they worked, some of them felt a need to stress the official name of the church. Interview 10 (UOC-MP, priest), 18 (UOC-MP, priest) and 2 (UOC-MP, CG) all stressed that the name of their church was The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, *without the MP*<sup>27</sup>. As an example, interviewee 18 stated that “I serve in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, *period*.” Despite this, I have still chosen to include the “MP” because it makes it easier to separate the UOC-KP, OCU and UOC-MP from each other.

#### *Activity level in Church*

Interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) is active in church activities such as the choir in addition to going to church with her family every Sunday and during holidays. Some have been loyal churchgoers for many years. Interviewee 7 (UOC-MP, CG) has been going to the same church for around 25-30 years, and she has always attended UOC-MP. Several churchgoers frequently answered that they attend church whenever there is a church service, e.g. every

<sup>27</sup> The official name of UOC-MP is UOC.

week (interviewees 4 (UOC-MP, CG), 6 (UOC-MP, CG) 7 (UOC-MP, CG)). They also attend other activities organized by the church, in addition to church holidays.

While visiting one of the villages, I joined a few churchgoers on their way to their church, where they were preparing for a church feast taking place the following days. On the way to the church the interviewee (7, UOC-MP, CG) stopped by some neighbors and asked for flowers for decoration. It seemed like many of the villagers actively contributed to and took part in the preparations. The same interviewee told me that: “I don’t miss a single service, I come half an hour early, and go home after everyone else”.

The churchgoers from OCU are very similar. Some, like interviewee 9 (OCU, CG, C) simply said: “I always attend service”. Interviewee 8 (OCU, CG, C) had a more in-depth answer to how often he attends church and compared the situation now with the one earlier when he attended UOC-MP:

CG: [I attend church] regularly, I do not skip any services. Sometimes, only if I have a good reason, I don’t show up in church. But over the last five years<sup>28</sup> I have only missed maybe 2-3 services.

Q: earlier you attended the UOC-MP?

CG: yes, but then I did not attend church on a regular basis because it was not interesting for me there, because the service was conducted in Old Slavonic. (*his wife is commenting in the background: “in Russian”*), but now, the service<sup>29</sup> is conducted in Ukrainian. This is my mother tongue, I understand everything, and now, it is interesting for me. (interviewee 8, OCU, CG, C)

Interviewee 15 (OCU, CG, E) told me that: “well, practically every week I try to attend church”. Moreover, some do not attend church as often as they would like to:

1-2 times a week. Earlier I went very often. There was a period in my life, when I went every day. But I was not married then and did not have any children. But now, well, I have a child, elderly parents, and I have become older myself, I don’t have that much spare time. (interviewee 12, OCU, CG, D)

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<sup>28</sup> Five years ago, half of the village changed church belonging from UOC-MP to UOC-KP. Now their church has been transferred to the OCU.

<sup>29</sup> The OCU use both Church Slavonic, Russian, Ukrainian or any other language which is preferred among the parishioners. In Interviewee 8’s church, Ukrainian is being used both in the sermon and the service.

### 6.1.3 Issues of terminology during interviews – Church Slavonic vs. Old Slavonic, UOC-MP vs. ROC

Before continuing with the analysis, I should clarify some of the terminology used by the interviewees. These include the *Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate*, the *Russian Orthodox Church*, *Church Slavonic* and *Old Slavonic*. I registered that some interviewees used the term Church Slavonic (*tserkovno-slavyanskiy*) while others used Old Slavonic (*staroslavynskiy*) when talking about the “church language” that is used during church service (*bogosluzheniye*). Using the expression “Old Slavonic” was not typical for one group only, interviewees from OCU as well as UOC-MP used this term. On the other hand, the priests from both sides were consistent in using only the term Church Slavonic. It was my understanding that everyone talked about the same language (Church Slavonic), despite them using different terms. Even so, I have decided not to translate both terms as Church Slavonic in English but to keep the term Old Slavonic in the translation too.

Unfortunately, I, at the time, did not consider asking them why they used one or the other term, but I would still argue that there might be many reasons for this. The level of education is probably the most significant, but also, as I argue in the subsequent analysis, some interviewees of the OCU did not perceive the Church Slavonic as the real Church Slavonic. In their opinion, it has for a long time already been closer to Russian.

Even though I used the phrase “Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate” when interviewing the adherents of OCU, some of the interviewees from the OCU still used the name of the Russian church – the Russian Orthodox Church – ROC, for the simple reason that they did not see (or refused to see) any difference between the UOC-MP and the ROC. In the transcribed interviews, I have not changed “ROC” to “UOC-MP”, because this would not do justice towards the UOC-MP, who insist that they are a Ukrainian church with wide autonomy, separate from the ROC (see ROC, (no date), *Ukrainskaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov'*). Yet, those using the term ROC did not hide their anger towards the MP, and obviously saw the UOC-MP as being for all practical purposes identical with the ROC. Not interpreting the UOC-MP as a Ukrainian church is the rule rather than the exception for the interviewees of the OCU to whom I spoke.

#### 6.1.4 Identity - language, ethnicity and identification

All interviewees were ethnic Ukrainians except interviewee 12 (OCU, CG, D) and 15 (OCU, CG, E) who were half Russian half other, and half Russian and half Ukrainian, respectively. Interviewee 18 (UOC-MP, priest) stated that he was a mix of everything. Interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) was the only one who claimed Russian both as his ethnicity and his language. Interviewee 12 (OCU, CG, D), 15 (OCU, CG, E), 17 (UOC-MP, priest) and 18 (UOC-MP, priest, A) use Russian in their daily life. The rest told me they used Ukrainian. There were in other words no striking differences or similarities between the interviewees from the different churches in this study regarding language and ethnicity.

The OCU and its adherents have been said to be political, and I therefore wanted to ask the interviewees whether they identified as first and foremost as Orthodox or as Ukrainians. I should mention that I did not have this question as a part of my initial interview guide, and I therefore did not ask the first interviewees about it. The ones I asked were either “Orthodox Ukrainian” or “Ukrainian orthodox” (interviewee 6 (UOC-MP, CG, 9 (OCU, CG, C), 8 (OCU, CG, C), 10 (UOC-MP, priest) and 13 (OCU, priest, C). The latter explains his answer like this:

Listen, one cannot ask the question that way, in my opinion. One can put it like this: Am I the image of God or Ukrainian, yes? It's clear that the image of God is in the first place is. So, where I was born decides my nationality. Meaning that nothing is in the way of being Orthodox Ukrainian. (interviewee 13, OCU, priest)

While some answered that they first and foremost were Orthodox (interviewee 5 (OCU, priest, B), 11 (UOC-MP, priest, A), 12 (OCU, CG, D), 14 (OCU, CG, D) 18 (UOC-MP, priest, A), interviewee 4 (UOCU-MP, CG, E) identifies as Orthodox precisely because she is Ukrainian:

For me, of course, its most important to be Orthodox, because I'm Orthodox in Ukraine, precisely in the Ukrainian orthodox church. I can even say that I'm a patriot of my church because I profess this Church. (...) UOC means that I'm Ukrainian. Well, that is patriotism for me, for me patriotism is to love the faith of one's fathers. Meaning the faith of saints, who lived on the Ukrainian land, and became saints precisely here.

Interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D) does not hesitate – she is definitely Orthodox first and foremost:

Because, and our church, when the name was discussed, we like activists took part in this process, and we recommended that the name of the church should be OCU and not UOC in revenge of this heretical Russian world, the Russian church, which is sick, meaning that the Russian church is very hurt by Russianness (*russkost*). The national question and language, which they there have been protecting and are still protecting around the whole world.

She blames the ROC of being a solely ethnic church which puts *Russianness* in first place, arguing that the ROC is damaged by this *Russianness*. She calls it the ethnic heresy.

for them the *Russianness* is very important. For us, Ukraine is important in the way that we are one people, the people of Ukraine, but in this is not only ethnic Ukrainians, but also Russians and others. Meaning that we don't consider the national question a priority or the main question. (...) We cannot put the national question above God. That is a mistake, and therefore OCU is first and foremost an *Orthodox church, in Ukraine.*" (interviewee 14, OCU, CG, D)

## 6.1 Theme 1: Motivation for church belonging – *in search of the true faith*

### 6.1.1 UOC-MP: Why *not* change church belonging?

*"Because the Church is illegitimate"*

I found it interesting to ask the adherents of the UOC-MP why they did *not* want to change church belonging after the establishment of the OCU, since they argue so strongly for the importance of recognition and canonicity, something the OCU *did* receive from the EPC (although not from all the orthodox churches)<sup>30</sup>. It turned out that the interviewees did not recognize the EPC's decision to grant autocephaly to OCU as valid. This all epitomizes to the disagreement between the ROC and the EPC regarding how and by whom autocephaly is to be granted. The following is a presentation of the interviewees' personal views.

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<sup>30</sup> Recognized by the EPC.

### *The importance of canonicity and recognition*

Whether a Church is canonical or not was one of the most important arguments for staying with the UOC-MP. Everyone I interviewed from the UOC-MP claimed that OCU was not canonical. Interviewee 10 (UOC-MP, priest) argues that the OCU is not canonical because the Church is a union between the UOC-KP and the UAOC, “and they both were in schism. They were not [real] priests, and nobody recognized them”. He blames the government at the time for using the Church as a means to win the election. However, this project failed and after the new government of Volodymyr Zelenskyi came to power, “everything calmed down”.

Moreover, interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) was asked what was most important when choosing a church. He said it was “to be in a church, which is canonical, which is blessed, which has connection with the Orthodox world, something that UOC-MP does.” Similarly, interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) had decided to stay with the UOC-MP due to the fact that the OCU was not recognized by the Orthodox world. However, when I asked if she had ever thought about joining the OCU, she answered that:

If I were to be completely honest, I have to admit that I did think about it, earlier, before the Tomos was granted. Actually, my husband and I often return to this topic, and don't think that this topic isn't discussed by the priests of the UOC-MP. They are widely talking about this, constantly. Because no one wants this conflict.

This illustrates that some of the interviewees including interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) have gone through and spent time reflecting over what choice to make. Despite this, the great majority of the interviewees from UOC-MP did not even hesitate when making the choice to stay:

Q: It was your own choice to stay with the UOC-MP?

CG: I didn't even doubt where to go. Even if there had only been three people left, I would have stayed, I always pray to God that I will stay put only in UOC-MP (Interviewee 7, UOC-MP, CG)

The OCU, as I have already mentioned, see their church as canonical, so why do the UOC-MP interviewees perceive the OCU as illegal and uncanonical? As discussed in previous chapters, it is a serious dispute between UOC-MP and OCU on the topic of canonicity and on being recognized, which is rooted in the disagreement between EPC and ROC. In short, the supporters of OCU *do* see their newly formed Church as canonical because of the Tomos they were granted from the EPC (15<sup>th</sup> of January 2019). On the other hand, the UOC-MP does not

recognize Patriarch Bartholomeus's decision as valid and argue that he violated the canonical territory of the MP. The interviewees from UOC-MP tended to explain this by arguing that the unification council in 2018 was not valid, and consequently the Tomos is not valid. Moreover, there is also the problem of Patriarch Filaret. According to interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E) Metropolitan Epiphany of the OCU is just a "normal" person because he was ordained (by apostolic succession) by Filaret who was excommunicated by ROC in 1997, (although this anathema was annulled in 2018 by the EPC (Shestopalets, 2019, p. 57)). Consequently, in her view, every priest and bishop who was ordained within the UOC-KP was not ordained canonically, because the ordination by apostolic succession was broken by Filaret's anathema. And these priests are now part of the OCU. "If one looks at this in depth, [the OCU] are pretenders (*samozvantsev*)", interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E) concludes.

I asked interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) what he thought the difference between the OCU and the UOC-MP was, since both churches insist that they are canonical Orthodox Churches, and he gave me somewhat the same explanation as interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E):

Look, from the outside, there's no difference: People are walking in the streets, among them there's a man. I lead this man to the church and dress him in a sticharion. From the outer clothing there won't be any difference. I'm a male, and he is a male. Right? And I'm wearing a sticharion and he is wearing a sticharion. The difference between us will be on the inside. On me there is the grace of the Holy Spirit because I'm ordained in the canonical Church UOC-MP. But he will not have this grace. But this difference isn't visible for the eye. (*talks loud and fast*). Therefore, (...) a researcher, sociologist, will say this; "Yes, they are the same! He is like that and he is like that!" So, when you look at their appearances, they are identical. However, one of them has the grace, and the other doesn't have the grace. With me the church sacraments are fulfilled, such as baptism, and the most important sacrament when bread becomes the body of the Lord and the wine His blood. The others aren't canonical, bread is only bread, and wine is only wine. A child isn't baptized and so on. The difference between us is only on the spiritual level. I have the gift of grace, and he's just a schismatic. (interviewee 17, UOC-MP, priest)

The majority of the interviewees of the UOC-MP (interviewee 2 (CG), 3 (priest), 4 (CG, E), 17 (priest), 18 (priest)) all called the OCU for *raskolniki* – schismatics. Moreover, one interviewee, when asked why she didn't want to change church belonging, went further than just calling them schismatics, she felt that changing church belonging would have been like changing faith:

CG: There's a kind of saying: for him God is not the father, for him the church is not the mother. Well, how can one change church, change faith? How? I was born into this faith. I cannot imagine how someone can change their faith, how? I cannot imagine that.

Q: Changing church belonging to the OCU would have been like changing your faith?

CG: Like betrayal! Yes, it would have been like changing faith! To give up your faith and go to a kind of *political organization* (my emphasis). Never in my life would I do something like that. How can one change faith, how can one... faith, it's like your biological mother, how can one betray one's mother, how can one change her?! For me it's like a tragedy. (interviewee 7, UOC-MP, CG)

I want to point out two important things in the quote above: the first is that she says she was born into this faith. The sense of belonging with UOC-MP is therefore obviously something she identifies strongly with, for her, the political environment, with the war and the annexation of Crimea, does not affect her choice whatsoever. In my view tradition and habit are much more essential factors for her choice, secondly, she calls the OCU for “a kind of political organization”. During the interview she also uses the phrases “political church,” twice and “the Poroshenko Church (of Ukraine)” (without any apparent sense of humor) twice. Interestingly, this view of the OCU as a political church, or a church based on a political (not religious) structure, is common among the UOC-MP adherents. During my fieldwork, I got to chat with one of the priests in a small village. He declined the invitation to be interviewed, but before I left, he too called the OCU a political organization. Interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest) asked me this rhetorical question on the topic: “How can I change church belonging and go over to a political organization with the name of OCU? you tell me, no way.” The impression of all the interviewees from UOC-MP, was that the president at the time, Petro Poroshenko, promoted a unified Orthodox Church as a means to win the election. The interesting thing here, however, something I have pointed out in the previous chapters, is that *despite* succeeding in establishing an independent Ukrainian church, Poroshenko lost the election. I will let interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest) illustrate the point of OCU as a political project:

Q: Why, in your opinion, was OCU established?

P: It was an attempt to legalize the UOC-KP schism. The base of this church is political: if politics [had not been involved], this church would not have existed.

Q: But who needed the OCU?

P: Well, the previous president and his circles.

Q: But why did the president need this conflict, do you think.

P: They just wanted more voters and then win the elections. That's all. (...) why, well see, when Poroshenko had been in power for one, two, three years, he did not talk about this and started talking about the church only in his fourth year, to win the election. But it went the other way: 70 percent voted against Poroshenko – those are our [the UOC-MP] people.

Interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) followed the same “logic” as interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest), arguing, that “well, [the government] just wants us to keep busy with our stuff so they can adopt laws or other things without us paying attention.” When I asked why the state would benefit from a conflict between the orthodox in Ukraine.

It is quite interesting that they view the OCU solely as a political project. The UOC-MP do themselves have preferences with regard to Ukrainian presidents who are more inclined to their values. Yes, the church conflict does have a political aspect, a quite big one. Still, the UOC-MP finds it hard to relate to the wish of many orthodox Ukrainians had to actually get an independent church. It was often an impression that the establishment of the OCU was not done according to the canons, and with the dispute over church properties, the relationship between the UOC-MP and OCU did not get an easy start.

I briefly mentioned to interviewee 13 (OCU, priest, D) that the UOC-MP interviewees had named the OCU a political church and a project of Poroshenko, and his response clearly illustrates his point of view on the topic:

Our church, that we opened<sup>31</sup> was built thanks to people's sacrifices. The state (*scoffs*) did not support us at all. Who said it was a project of Poroshenko? It cannot be his Church, we built this church ourselves. I don't have my own apartment, no car, no salary, I survive on what people give as offerings here in the church. Poroshenko did not give me anything. (interviewee 13, OCU, priest, D)

### *Emotions versus critical thinking*

Interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) added that being supportive of those remaining within the UOC-MP was also a highly prioritized motive to stay. (The Church is not only a place for prayer and communion, but also for socializing.) According to interviewee 2, the motivation to stay had become stronger due to the resistance from parts of the public (including local and national officials) against UOC-MP. My impression when conducting interviews in the

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<sup>31</sup> Interviewee 13 had built and opened a small church in Kyiv right after OCU was granted Tomos.

villages was that the interviewees from the UOC-MP saw themselves as the only victims in this conflict. This is not really surprising if one takes into account that many of them had experienced violent and, according to them, illegal transfer of their church building to the UOC-KP. For them, the conflict between neighbors has strengthened the emotional ties to their church (community), which in turn has strengthened the feeling of belonging and to a stronger identification with the other members of their group. Interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) on why she chose to stay with the UOC-MP:

Regarding the OCU, first of all, it was created by force, secondly, it still isn't recognized, and third, already third, for me those people, who have stayed faithful to the UOC-MP are important, and they are many. And it's important that I'm with them, I'm ready to support them, because they (...), now, people just want to humiliate them, they want to... well, to say that they don't exist, like that. (interviewee 2, UOC-MP, CG)

Where there are strong emotions it is also easier to promote social action, precisely due to the emotion's ability to impact upon beliefs (Guibernau, 2013, p 103). But what is also a consequence of being emotionally aroused, is how receptive one is to include other issues, one's focus is becoming restricted and one tends to "neglect rational analysis and critical thinking" (Guibernau, 2013, p. 103-104). During the time this church conflict has been going on there has certainly been strong emotions, and still are, on both sides of the conflict. I cannot say to what degree the process of choosing sides for the various interviewees is based on rational analysis, but although the interviewees pointed to many reasons to stay, one cannot rule out the importance of emotions.

#### *Language preferences in the church*

Overall, the adherents of UOC-MP supported the use of Church Slavonic and argued that this is the language meant for God, the language one should use "to converse with God" (interviewee 17, UOC-MP, priest). They did not see any problem learning or using Church Slavonic during church service, they rather felt it was pleasant to listen to. All churchgoers from the UOC-MP were ethnic Ukrainians (when I asked what their nationality was), and they also spoke Ukrainian in their daily life, and some tended to struggle with Russian during the interview. I can therefore not conclude that being a Ukrainian national who speaks Ukrainian is a characteristic only for those of the OCU. The exception was a priest, interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest), who identified himself as Russian, speaking only Russian.

I asked interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) if praying in Ukrainian during Church service was important for her:

No, it's not important<sup>32</sup>. See, it turns out that I have attended church since my childhood. My grandmother and I went to church together. She walked seven kilometers carrying me with her. And I kind of got used to it (..), for me there is no difference, although for me, Church service in Church Slavonic is very beautiful. It is pleasing to the soul. I can sing, I know everything by heart, I become one with the church service, that's all I can say. Generally, the tradition of Church Slavonic is very pleasing to me. When I conducted a social project, and I had to visit different confessions, protestant denomination, if (...) *I have not seen such a beautiful church service such as the one we have, anywhere.* (my emphasis) (interviewee 2, UOC-MP, CG)

I put parts of the quote in italics, because it demonstrate that there is much more to the choice of church belonging than the imposed political preferences that is so defining for the church conflict, with the UOC-MP as politically and ideologically pro-Russian and the OCU as anti-Russian or nationalistic. The *feeling* and the *atmosphere* that the churchgoers and clergy experience during the service, is for many essential for church belonging. I will present more examples of this later, also from the OCU.

Interviewee 18 (UOC-MP, priest) stated that Church Slavonic is an important part of the church service and interviewee 10 (UOC-MP, priest) argued that in addition to using Ukrainian during the sermon and regular talk, there are no “curse words [in Church Slavonic], but most importantly; for God, everything has to be special. We build a church, not a normal house. And also, when Church Slavonic is translated into Ukrainian, some of the meaning is lost. There are some words that you cannot find in Ukrainian.” Church Slavonic should therefore be used during a church service.

For interviewee 18 (UOC-MP, priest) the use of Russian during the sermon is normal because in his city, Odesa, the majority speaks Russian. Wherever the majority has Ukrainian as their mother tongue the UOC-MP priests supports the use of Ukrainian during the sermon.

Interviewee 11 (UOC-MP, priest) also uses Church Slavonic during church service, but he states that during prayer at home and “individual prayers with the parishioners, we use

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<sup>32</sup> She later comments that the translations (from Church Slavonic to Ukrainian) are “awful” and sometimes when she hears the translated version “my hair stands on end.”

Church Slavonic, Russian, as well as Ukrainian” (interviewee 11, UOC-MP, priest). He further argues that “if a person wishes to earn good money, he will study English, Chinese, Japanese, but if a person wishes to earn salvation, then why can’t he understand the Church Slavonic?” A similar view is shared by interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG) who states that:

We were arguing with this woman, she says that ‘Church Slavonic is not understandable, and that the service is not understandable’. But there came a family to the parish, and in this family, there was a five-year-old girl. This girl stood with us and sang in the choir, she knew the whole service by heart. And I tell [this woman] ... in a bit ruder way (*laughs*)... well “don’t you understand how young this girl is? She’s five and you are thirty-five.” This means that if a person of five years old can do this, then what’s most important is that there should be a desire to learn. There are people who don’t have this desire ... Church Slavonic isn’t difficult. (interviewee 4, UOC-MP, CG)

To sum up, the use of Church Slavonic is obviously not an issue for those belonging to UOC-MP. It is rather another argument for staying.

#### *Tradition and moral obligation*

There are certain expectations when one belongs in a group. Interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest) and 11 (UOC-MP, priest) stated that the oath that they took to become a priest had provided them motivation for staying in the UOC-MP.

There is a very good example [why I didn’t change church affiliation]: when a soldier gives his oath, can he then change this oath? When a priest shall ... when one is ordained as a priest, one also gives a kind of oath, that he won’t change God, Church, and not change the current bishop, who laid his hand on him<sup>33</sup>, who consecrated him as a priest. For me, there was never even a question. How can one abandon one’s mother, who gave birth to you? (interview 11, UOC-MP, priest)

This can be linked to the choice to belonging, when one is accepted into a community, one is also expected to follow, obey and to serve (Guibernau, 2013). Taking an oath is a symbol or ritual for belonging, and for these interviewees it has put on them a moral obligation to stay. This moral obligation that an oath represents is just one of many motivations for staying with the UOC-MP. However, other things also play an important role. One priest gave me an answer, that from my perspective, is the least, if I may say, “politically” influenced answer of

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<sup>33</sup> Ordained by apostolic succession.

them all. For him, tradition, and the *feeling* of belonging was the most prominent motivation. He had been serving in the church for 13 years. I asked him if he had thought about whether he wanted to change church belonging.

No, I didn't think about that. (...) I was baptized in this church in my childhood, my great-great grandparents were in this church, and for me it has always been always comfortable here. (interviewee 10, UOC-MP, priest)

Berger (1979) argues that in modern times, tradition does not play such a big role any longer, it has been substituted by choice. However, he also notes that not everyone is “willing to give up their tradition so readily”. Reasons for this can be sentimental attachment or habit (Berger, 1979, p 91-92). One can argue that for interviewee 10 (UOC-MP, priest) above, there was never really a choice of where to belong. In his worldview, habit and tradition are more prominent, or even unreflective inertia. Moreover, I want to add that interviewee 10 (UOC-MP, priest) did not live in a village where there had been serious conflicts between the villagers. He even stated that “no, everything has been going on quietly and calmly.” This, I would argue, has most likely played a role in what motives he has for belonging. For him, there was never an urgent need to take a side, to choose to belong in the church matter, as opposed to the situation interviewees 6 (UOC-MP, CG), and 7 (UOC-MP, CG) found themselves in – one church building, and two competing church jurisdictions.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, tradition and habit are not irrelevant with those interviewees who experienced serious conflicts in their village. Interviewee 6 (UOC-MP, CG)<sup>35</sup>, who, although she had indicated earlier that canonicity is significant, expressed that tradition also played a big part in her choice of Church belonging:

We are Ukrainians, we belong to UOC [MP] - our grandfathers' and parents' Church. And we go there, we stayed faithful to our Orthodox church, where we were baptized, where we got married. Still, to this day we stay in this Church, and we have the right to go wherever we want. (interviewee 6, UOC-MP, CG)

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<sup>34</sup> The previous UOC-MP church in their village now belongs to the OCU (first to the UOC-KP). Interviewee 7 (UOC-MP, CG) showed me their 'new' Church – situated in the UOC priest's garage.

<sup>35</sup> As indicated in the overview of interviewees, this interview was conducted together with other churchgoers, however, one of them was the most outspoken, unfortunately half of the recording from this interview disappeared.

This quote also indicates that interviewee 6 (UOC-MP, CG) has felt her freedom of religion threatened by the church conflict.

#### 6.1.2 OCU: Why change to OCU?

*“When we have our Ukrainian state, then why do I have to go to a different church? The Church in Ukraine should be Ukrainian.” (interviewee 9, OCU, CG)*

Generally, for the interviewees from OCU, promotion of the Ukrainian language, independence and the break from Russia on the religious level, were important motives for church belonging. As I have argued earlier, it seems like canonicity is important to many Orthodox in Ukraine. Did many Orthodox stay with the UOC-MP, because it was the only canonical alternative, although they did not support the policies and rhetoric of the UOC-MP and the ROC? Cyril Hovorun (Euromaidan press, 2018, 18 May) argues that Petro Poroshenko’s initiative to improve the ecclesial situation in Ukraine by requesting Constantinople to grant autocephaly, although part of his electoral campaign in 2018, was actually an expression of a wish of many Ukrainian Orthodox Christians. He simply articulated the concern of those not feeling like they belonged with the UOC-MP, nor with the schismatic UOC-KP and UAOC. So how important has recognition by the ecumenical patriarch been for the churchgoers and priests in their choice to join the OCU (among those who only changed church belonging after the establishment of the OCU?)

Although it is those who went directly from the UOC-MP to OCU (12 (OCU, CG, D), 13 (OCU, priest, D) and 14 (OCU, CG, D)) that are most interesting in this context, I have still included comments from group C as well.

Q: Did you change from UOC-MP to OCU only after the OCU was granted Tomos?

CG: you have to understand, next to my house there is [a church belonging to] the Kyiv Patriarchate, I just started attending that church. But when you belong, if you go to communion (...) and I could only go to communion with the MP - I went to UOC-KP in the meantime but received communion with the UOC-MP until the Tomos. (...) I walked out [of MP] with bishops, with priests. I did not leave MP alone.

Q: so [receiving] the Tomos of autocephaly was important?

CG: It was important, but still, even if it hadn't been given, I would still have left. I already by then couldn't stay any longer, the way they behaved was not like a Christian, I could never have returned to them. (Interviewee 12, OCU, CG, D)

The Tomos is hence important but other aspects, like Christian values (I will look at this below) are much more significant.

It does not seem like the Tomos made a big difference to interviewee 15 (OCU, CG, E) either, who compares the Tomos with women's status; whether she is married or unmarried, she is still a woman "but with absolutely different, roughly speaking, social statuses. When the Church received Tomos, it became as a fact a part of ... it became recognized in the Ecumenical Orthodoxy." Interviewee 9 (OCU, CG, C) tells me that the Tomos was of course important but adds that "I would've gone to OCU even without the Tomos. We cannot turn back now." Interviewee 9 did, however, change from UOC-MP to UOC-KP in 2015, and as a natural consequence of the union between UOC-KP and UAOC in 2018 became a member of the OCU. I can therefore hardly say that the Tomos was a decisive factor for her decision.

In light of this, there certainly must be other things that weigh heavier than that of belonging to a canonical church. Although Tomos is important for interviewee 9 (OCU, CG, C), it is the idea of having a *Ukrainian* church (as opposed to a church affiliated with Russia) that is truly crucial for her motivation for church belonging. She argues that "when we have our Ukrainian state, then why do I have to go to another Church? The Church in Ukraine should be Ukrainian." When I remarked that those who are in UOC-MP *do* see their church as Ukrainian, she did not answer, only smiled and laughed quietly for a little bit. I interpreted this as if she did not at all agree with my statement.

Interviewee 13 (OCU, priest, D) gave a bit more in-depth reply to the same comment:

Yes, but [that church] is only Ukrainian in name, and you correctly marked "MP", this is where the people needed a Church that's independent, that unifies the people, that hasn't been (*pause*), well, that is not subordinate to either Moscow, or Constantinople. And look, we got an independent Church.

There are, in other words, disagreements between the OCU and UOC-MP as to what degree the latter is independent from the ROC. And this affiliation might be one of the biggest concerns for interviewees choosing to belong to OCU, and even those who changed church

belonging earlier to the UOC-KP. The UOC-MP members do see their church as Ukrainian, and as we have seen, they do also enjoy broad autonomy from the ROC, albeit they accept Patriarch Kirill of Moscow as their primate.

The same priest as quoted above (interviewee 13, OCU, priest, D) argued further that he did not want to be a part of the MP because “the borders of the Church should follow the borders of the state.” As we have seen, creating a local Church, independent from Moscow has been a desire and something many Ukrainian Orthodox have attempted to achieve for a long time.

Interviewee 1 (OCU, CG, C) claims that:

A Church that supported its people and their wish to be independent was needed. Independence for Ukrainians is very important, freedom is very important for Ukrainians. It is essential that they can govern themselves, that they are not controlled by anybody else somewhere over there.

For many of the churchgoers from OCU the realization of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, recognized by Patriarch Bartholomeus of Constantinople, was a long-awaited victory. Interviewee 9 (OCU, CG, C) tells me that “[a]lso, my dad and my mom wanted to [have an independent church], at the moment when the Ukrainian state was formed in the 90s. Right away they wanted to have a Ukrainian church, my parents wanted this, but they did not live to see it.”

### *Christian values*

As touched upon above, the preservation of Christian values, such as the interviewees called it, is one of the motivations to change church belonging. This even seems to be a more important motive than the Tomos of autocephaly. According to interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D), and similar to interviewee 12 (OCU, CG, D) above, UOC-MP no longer upholds what she sees as vital principles to a Christian, and she therefore saw no other way than to leave this church and go to OCU,:

The first reason is about the preservation of real Orthodoxy. Because, the way I see it, the Russian Church has stepped away from the Orthodox faith. [The Church] has moved away from the dogmas of faith, it did not go to the *sobor* in 2016<sup>36</sup> of the Ecumenical Orthodoxy, with this they violated (...) thereby breaking the “symbols of faith”, in which I believe. Because in the symbols of faith it is said

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<sup>36</sup> The ecumenical Council organized by Constantinople on the island of Crete, where the Russian church first agreed to come and then retracted (because of the presence of the Estonian orthodox church)

that, among other things; “I believe in one, catholic and apostolic Church”. Therefore, the Russian Church has moved away from the rules, let’s say it like this, moved away from the dogmas of its faith. And the fact that we now have formed the OCU, gives us a chance to preserve a pure, Orthodox faith as it is in the gospel.

Interviewee 14 sees the connection between ROC and UOC-MP as strong, which means that if one of them is stepping away from the Orthodox faith, so does the other. Similarly, interviewee 15 (OCU, CG, E) argues that the Christian ethics are preserved only in the OCU:

It’s important that which is called Christian ethics. It’s not a political party, where one meets because of some kind of economic, political interests. For a Christian it’s very important that there’s as little as possible sin, lies, and fraud in the Church. Personally, for me, the reason why I keep a distance from the MP, is because it’s less Church, less faith there. Even though they say that they are the only ones that preserve the ties to God, yes. But that’s only words. Life’s completely different, life shows something completely different and, for me it’s important to hold back, be further away from what I consider as illegal; violation of Christian principles. In the Russian Church I see these violations. Maybe there’re *some* individuals who one can consider Christians [in the ROC]. Therefore, I consider my choice, as absolutely moral and ethical for my faith.

### *Language*

In the section of “Why *not* change church belonging?” I mentioned the problem of language as a motivation for church belonging. I will here present some of the responses from the interviewees from the OCU on their view on language.

Beforehand, I had expected that language would be a motive for church belonging. Although both Russian and Ukrainian are spoken by the majority of people in Ukraine, my impression has been that Russian language has become less popular after the Maidan revolution.

However, the real language conflict related to the church was the use of Church Slavonic.

Interviewee 1 (OCU, CG, C) argued that Church Slavonic was too difficult for the younger generation:

Also, when it comes to the language, many people who (...) the younger, not the older but the younger, they don’t understand the priest when he prays, well, let’s say when he talks Church Slavonic, they don’t understand. For example (...) the younger ones don’t understand this, and they asked the priest to talk Ukrainian but the priest refuses. However there exists some decrees, yes, through the Russian Orthodox Church, that if two thirds of the parishioners ask the priest to pray in Ukrainian, he cannot

refuse this. (...) The priest of the Moscow Patriarchate refused to do this, so they violate even their own canons, when they refuse to pray in Ukrainian.

Interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D) considers the language in the church not to play a big part in her decision. However, it is more comfortable for her, even necessary, to pray in that language that is easiest at the present time:

therefore, in their time, Kirill and Methodius translated into Slavonic, and not into Latin and so on, so that the Slavs could understand the catechism and the prayers etc. Not only knowledgeable people have the right to pray. Therefore, the language should be comfortable. For us, Ukrainian is our native language, and therefore we are pleased if there is an opportunity to pray in that language.

She continues to talk about when she earlier attended service with the UOC-MP:

My mother tongue is Ukrainian, but I also speak Russian very well. But if we talk about prayer and about me personally, I was obedient to Church laws. Yes, I belonged to the UOC-MP, that prayed only in Church Slavonic, and this Church Slavonic has been for a long time already, similar to Russian. It's not that language that was used before, it has undergone a russification, but we prayed in that language, and it was always uncomfortable. For me personally, let's say it this way, the church demanded that we should use only Church Slavonic during church service, or during the reading of the canons, prayer. Of course, the church did not forbid that one prayed with one's own words to God. (interview 14, OCU, CG, D)

Again, I interpret this as there is nothing wrong with using Church Slavonic, except that it has gone through a russification and thus is not really the old Church language anymore, but a language closer to Russian and Russia. Maybe this is where the problem lies? Interviewee 6 (UOC-MP, CG) on the other hand, explicitly stated that, it is *not* Russian, although, in her view "many people think it is".

Nevertheless, I want to draw attention to the feeling of discomfort related to language. This feeling is common for many interviewees from the OCU. This is true both for interviewees 8 and 9 (both OCU, CG, C), who changed church belonging from UOC-MP to UOC-KP in 2015, and interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D) who went directly from UOC-MP to OCU in 2018.

Before, when the UOC-KP was not yet in [our] village, there was only a church of the UOC-MP, and the priest there [of UOC-MP] said something, and I stood there not understanding anything, I could feel

my vertebra aching, and I'm standing there, feeling bad, and I had to sit down on a bench, just hoping for the service to finish faster, so that the pain could stop. But now, when I listen, I understand every word, and for some reason, the service is going on unnoticed, because I'm there, listening to the priest, to what the choir is singing. Our choir sings like they do in some Cathedrals. (interviewee 8, OCU, CG, C)

On the other hand, interviewee 5 (OCU, priest, B) states that: "I, for example, conduct church service both in Church Slavonic and in Ukrainian." Which illustrates the variation between the use of language in churches of the OCU.<sup>37</sup> But he still has something negative to say about the UOC-MP:

They don't recognize the Ukrainian language, they say that God doesn't understand Ukrainian. They don't recognize the Ukrainian culture, they don't pray for the Ukrainian government. Well, it is more a political conflict. (interviewee 5, OCU, priest, B)

### 6.1.3 How is the choice of changing church belonging to OCU perceived with the UOC-MP?

After all the disagreements, I would have expected that the interviewees from UOC-MP had stronger and more specific answers to the question about how they perceived the choice of others to change church belonging. However, as I will shortly present below, they do not want to judge another person's choice. Overall, the priests from UOC-MP showed few strong emotions during the interviews, compared to the churchgoers. They were, in other words, more "professional" in their behavior, with the exception of interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) and 18 (UOC-MP, priest), who showed more aggression towards the OCU, and towards me as a researcher. With one exception, the following quotes are all from priests.

Most of the interviewees from UOC-MP claimed to not have any problem with the other's decision to change to OCU: "It is a personal decision. Here, everyone has the right to choose. (...) One cannot go to a person and offend him due to his choice; it's not acceptable" (interviewee 10, UOC-MP, priest). However, he reminded me that what we *can* quarrel about is the issue regarding which Church is canonical and which one is not. Interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) perceived other's choice with pain rather than anger:

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<sup>37</sup> The OCU supports both Church Slavonic, Ukrainian or any other language which the parishioners have gotten used to. (Pravda, 2019b, 8 January)

With pain in my soul, because we are not playing with toys here, right. It's the question of salvation for the soul that is in focus. And a person, who goes to a political organization from a canonical Church, this person is by his own choice distancing himself from the salvation of the soul in the eternal life. That's why I perceive this thing with pain. (interviewee 17, UOC-MP, priest)

I should point out that he is talking about OCU when referring to a “political organization,” as mentioned earlier. In general, the interviewees do not seem to be angry at the adherents of OCU (at least not openly). This is a noticeable characteristic for the priests – they tend to be less emotionally affected, and to weigh their choice of words more carefully (interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) is in many cases the exception that proves the rule). Similar to interviewee 10 (UOC-MP, priest), interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, Priest) also states that “it is their decision”. Although he adds that:

if they choose to go to the other Church, then at least don't take *our* church [building] with you. Well, how can I explain this to you, those who want to go, let them go to whatever church they want. Only it's not necessary to take the church, don't hit the priest, or kick him out of his home. Go and pray, be my guest. And build [a church], we can even help. We can build the church together. You will go there, and we will go here, that's all. I don't see anything bad with this. The most essential is that there is love, do you understand, if there shall be love, then there will not be division, there will not be this schism, but without love there *will* be this division and this schism.

One of the churchgoers has a different way of considering others' choice to change church belonging and explains that:

I never give anyone advice, but naturally I have my point of view; I don't understand those people [who changed church belonging], because they don't read, they are not interested in [the canons]. Honestly, I haven't met that kind of people [people who changed belonging to the OCU], and I don't have such people in my circle of friends. Generally, I will say it this way: the people who change church belonging are nationalists. I don't see myself as a nationalist, I see myself as a patriot, meaning that I love my country, but not to such a degree that I will lose my soul. (interviewee 4, UOC-MP, CG)

She is solely surrounded with people who support her views and affirm her views on the church matter, in the words of Berger (1979) – the “reality experts”.

In general, it does *not* seem to be a considerable amount of anger towards the *people* who changed Church belonging, rather more worry related to their lost souls. This stands in sharp

contrast to the anger towards the OCU as a whole, and the way it was established with the help of the president.

## 6.2 Theme 2: Political preferences and choice of church belonging

*“who is to blame? Moscow. Who is the guilty one? Putin”*

*(interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG) imitating an adherent from the OCU)*

The church conflict is highly influenced by politics, also Russian politics and interests. Political preferences, I believe, are one of the sources of why people chose the way they do. Much because of the clearly divided positions taken by the Orthodox hierarchy of the UOC-MP and UOC-KP/OCU during the events starting in late 2013. Unfortunately, I did not inquire what the specific political preferences of the interviewees were e.g. which president they supported in the election, I did however, ask them about what they thought of Russia, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine.

On a general note, there is a big difference between the interviewees from UOC-MP and the OCU when it comes to their wish to *talk* about politics. The reader will find that although some interviewees do not want to talk about politics, the choice of Church belonging is to some degree (if not to a great degree) politically motivated. On the other hand, especially those from the UOC-MP stress that there is and should be a clear line between politics and religion, even stating that their church is unpolitical. Nevertheless, as I have pointed out in the background chapters, the UOC-MP has on several occasions supported pro-Russian presidents. And the Church’s claims of being neutral during the Ukrainian crisis has been perceived as anti-Ukrainian. The UOC-KP, on the other hand, clearly expressed its political preferences to the public.

I therefore see it as natural to include some of the interviewees’ attitudes towards these political “hotspots,” to better understand their motives for Church belonging.

### 6.2.1 UOC-MP churchgoers and priest views on politics

For some interviewees from the UOC-MP, me asking questions about these topics were interpreted as a provocation, When asked about the annexation of Crimea, interviewee 18

(UOC-MP, priest) answered that “this is also a question, that most often is perceived as provocative”, hinting at my previous question about what he thought about Russia. After stating that he sees the annexation of Crimea as a tragedy, he adds that “the Ukrainian government didn’t act in the right way. They made people [in Crimea] so upset, that they wanted to return [to Russia]”. Similarly, this is also the opinion of interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E) who states that “it’s very sad that the people, who live in Crimea and in Donbas, don’t have a common language with us, and that’s for sure, they are embittered on the Ukrainian government.” Interviewee 14 from the OCU (CG, D) also argued that the government should have done more to strengthen the feeling of belonging towards Ukraine both in eastern Ukraine and on Crimea. Others answered calmly without any special emotions involved, as illustrated with interviewee 10 (UOC-MP, priest) when asked about what he thought of Russia: “People there, like us, are normal, they wish to live in peace, to develop. What I think about the country? ... I don’t meddle in politics.” Not wanting to talk about politics was shared by interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E), 6 (UOC-MP, CG), and 7 (UOC-MP, CG) who did not want to give any comment to questions about the war and Crimea.: “I don’t interfere with politics. I won’t go there. I was asked [to talk] about Church matters” (interviewee 7, UOC-MP, CG). Interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG) except for her statement of the estrangement felt by Ukrainians in Crimea and Donbas, did not take any interest in politics, and did not even watch TV, although she watched news on the Internet. Interviewee 11 (UOC-MP, priest) holds a negative attitude towards the Russian state apparatus, but not towards the country itself or towards Russians: “If we talk about the fact that people are God’s creation, then we should treat them that way.” He then refers to church father Tertullian from the second century who, as quoted from interviewee 11, wrote “if you meet a Christian, then he is almost the image of Christ. But if you meet a pagan, he is almost the image of God. Because man is the image and likeness of God.” When asked if he had any thoughts about the political situation in Ukraine he simply answered: “Annexation is an annexation. War is war.” In general, the interviewees from the UOC-MP tend to be very diplomatic in their answers. What they say about Russia can hardly be interpreted in a negative (or a positive) way. Such as interviewee 6 (UOC-MP, CG):

CG: I don’t have any opinions about Russia. People everywhere are the same, there are good people in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Russia. There are bad people in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and in Russia.

And regarding the political level ... *(pause)*

Q: you don’t want to say anything?

CG: No

And interviewee 18 (UOC-MP, priest) states that:

My opinion is that Russia is our neighbor, with whom we share a common culture, a neighbor who *doesn't* try to unite us [unite Ukraine with Russia (and Belarus)],<sup>38</sup> with whom we have a friendly connection. (...) I'm a patriot, but not a nationalist, I've tried to be apolitical my whole life. I love Ukraine, but that doesn't mean that I have to hate Belarus, Russia or America.

He also stresses that he is not a nationalist, something the adherents of the OCU and the UOC-KP have been criticized for being.

Interviewee (17, UOC-MP, priest) when asked what he thought of Russia, simply said: "turn off the recorder." The same response followed after questions such as "the OCU adherents argue that the UOC-MP is a means for Russia to influence Ukraine, what do you think about that?" and "Could you please tell me something about the Russian world?"

Interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E) says that in Ukraine, especially those who belong to the UOC-KP and the OCU, blame Moscow and Putin for everything bad that happens in Ukraine: "even though they don't have anything to do with it, whatsoever."

Only with one exception everyone from the UOC-MP, both priests and churchgoers, stressed their support for an "undivided Ukraine" which included Crimea and the East.

Interviewees from the OCU mentioned that Russia is influencing Ukrainian politics through the UOC-MP, and that this church situation therefore is also a matter of national security, something the then president Poroshenko also claimed in his speech during the celebration of the 1030<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kyiv Rus' (YouTube, 2018, July 28). However, interviewee 18 (UOC-MP, priest) claimed that this is not the case; "in my opinion, no (...) we aren't praying for the victory of the Russian army, we're praying for the Ukrainian government, meaning

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<sup>38</sup> I would like to draw the attention to his manner of speech "a neighbor who *doesn't* try to unite us" Throughout the fieldwork I stressed my neutrality in the church conflict and tried to express only that I was interested in hearing the grassroots' views on the situation, from both sides. Interviewee 18 (UOC-MP, priest) however, had a strong need to defend his church and his choice from the very start of the interview.

that we do not offend anyone.” On the other hand, interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) believes that Russia *does want* to control Ukraine and continues;

Why take Crimea when they have such a huge country? How did we lose Crimea? How is it possible in modern times, to take a land without war?! How?! (*expresses resentment*) For me this is a dilemma. I’ll tell you, there’s a kind of assumption, and I think, that Crimea was sold to Russia. That’s my guess.  
(interviewee 2, UOC-MP, CG)

I do not know how widely spread this conspiracy theory is among churchgoers in Ukraine, but this interviewee was rather convinced about it. With regards to the war, she stresses that, as opposed to Metropolitan Onufriy’s statement from 2015, she does not think of the war as a “war between brothers.” This is her personal view on the topic, and she confirms that her acquaintances also support this, although she cannot speak for everyone: “UOC-MP is also divided into people who don’t think the way I do.”

Interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest), like the rest, wants peace. However, he thinks that politics are to be blamed for the war between Ukraine and Russia. “Church and politics – it’s two different things. We [the Church] are engaged in the salvation of human souls”. The adherents of the UOC-MP often see both sides of the conflict. They have compassion with the Ukrainian and the Russian families who have and are losing loved ones. They see it as a political game, one that the Church should not be mixed up in. They pray at home and in church for the sovereignty of Ukraine, for peace, argues interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest).

Finally, I want to conclude this section with a quote from interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E), where she talks about a trip she made to Donbas right before the outbreak of the war:

People are not religious in Donbas. And here is another point: when I was in Donbas, this was right before the war broke out, and I found myself in a monastery for women, and it is today completely destroyed, there was no spirituality there, only a business center. Over the entrance of the church there was a sign: ‘we sell monasterial milk, cheese, sour cream’. I just saw this, and I was shocked. A voice told me that soon this monastery will be closed. Right after the war started, bombs fell on the church, and it was just wiped off the face of the earth.

### 6.1.1 The OCU interviewees' views on politics

The time and events following Maidan caused a greater awareness to what church jurisdiction one belonged to. As statistical surveys show, presented in chapter 4, the majority of the Orthodox in Ukraine used to identify themselves as members of the UOC-KP, although when asked who the priest commemorates in his preaching, the majority answered the patriarch of Moscow (Richters, 2013, p. 98). It seems that churchgoers in general were not so familiar with the church structure and hierarchy. Interviewee 8 (OCU, CG, C) argues that the war made people think about which Church jurisdiction they belonged to:

When everything in Ukraine was quiet, when there was no war, people did not think about it, about where their Church belonged, where the leadership comes from, from Kyiv or Moscow? Somehow people did not care about that. But when the war started, when people understood, why the war was unleashed, and by whom - it was clear that this war was unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

Moreover, and maybe more importantly, was the way the hierarchy of the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP reacted in the Maidan, Crimea and the war, or - as has been pointed out earlier - how the UOC-MP did *not* react. This caused some orthodox in Ukraine to want an independent church, not subordinated to the ROC, and it also created a conflict within the UOC-MP. How the interviewees from OCU view political events is therefore an important factor for choice of church belonging.

Interviewee 13 (OCU, priest, D) decided to support the people demonstrating in Maidan. He explains that the leadership from the UOC-MP did not approve of this. I asked him if he could elaborate:

Well, it can be explained by the fact that many try to brainwash people through the Church. They try to explain that ... through church there is this idea that the West is bad, that everything in the West is bad, that the real Orthodoxy is only in Russia, we can only be saved if we are together with Russia. Those values exist solely in Russian Orthodoxy. "So, look at the West, there the Orthodox churches are decreasing, because there are gay marriages" and so on"

Moreover, as the following statement illustrates, the UOC-MP allegedly collected signatures against autocephaly for the OCU. Interviewee 13 (OCU, priest, D) the only priest among my

interviewees who went directly from UOC-MP to OCU, had a detailed story of why he in the end chose to leave the UOC-MP. His story illustrates well the significance of Maidan, Russian world and the war concerning the choice of Church belonging:

For me it was important that (...) let's put it this way, what influenced my choice. It's a long story, that starts with my life in Eastern Ukraine. Because earlier, I was a supporter, we can say, of the Russian World. I used to help in Donbas, handing out these brochures promoting Russia; "there's only salvation in Russia." Then, when I went to study in the seminary and academy, I already at that point started to understand that there is something wrong with this. When I so got my philosophical education and got to see Orthodoxy from abroad, I understood that [Orthodoxy] is not quite as what these political brochures suggest. After that, I saw how it was on Maidan, and the Church started to support the side of Yanukovich. Well, for me it became one more argument that something here is not the way it should be. When the war broke out, I said; "yes, we have to be with our soldiers, after all, we live in Ukraine!", "What are you thinking?! This is a war of the Uniates, and Catholics against the Orthodox." [Imagined response from the UOC-MP]. Thus, [the war] was presented in a completely different light.

(...)

The last drop was when, in the church where I used to serve, I saw everything, how they collected these signatures against autocephaly. (...) I decided that I had to take a firm stand with this Church. I saw how transparent and legal and in the right way the ecumenical patriarch was granting the Tomos, and I saw the illegal way [UOC-MP] were fighting against the Tomos. I understood that the right God is here, where everything is done openly and transparently, and I chose this. (interview 13, OCU, priest, A)

Moreover, interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D) argues that during the war it became apparent that the Russian Church did not protect them, and therefore left them with only the choice of leaving the UOC-MP because "we cannot agree on the ideological and religious level" (interview 14, OCU, CG, D). Thus the "ideological war" between the Russian Federation and Ukraine during Maidan, the war and the annexation of Crimea, did deeply involve the religious structures in Ukraine, which at the time were the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP (Shestopalets, 2019, p. 43). It is still one of the main differences between UOC-MP and OCU, although, as illustrated in the interviewees with the UOC-MP, it seems like their views on the war and annexation of Crimea are much the same.

Interviewee 1 (OCU, CG, C) claims that after the war broke out in the East many people changed from UOC-MP to UOC-KP because the priests did not pray for their soldiers, or

even bury them: “But the priests refused this, and said that it was a war between brothers”<sup>39</sup> (interviewee 1, OCU, CG).

According to interviewee 8 (OCU, CG, C) Patriarch Kirill has said that “if Putin cannot get Ukraine back with the help of politics, he will take Ukraine through the Church.”<sup>40</sup> He seemed convinced that this was the case, and thus I will argue that for him this was a motivation to leave the UOC-MP. He does not approve of the USSR, or what he calls the Russian Empire - “you cannot call it anything else” and seems to bear a lot of resentment towards the previous and current Russian governments. Interviewee 8 (OCU, CG) returns to history many times during the interview, and is more interested in talking about Holodomor, the Second World War and all the injustices the Ukrainians have been exposed to by the Russians. He seemed to bear deep resentment towards Ukraine’s great neighbor. The negative aspects of the history shared by Russia and Ukraine was all-consuming during the interview. I therefore got the impression that he sees the ROC and the UOC-MP as a means for Russia to extend its influence into Ukraine. And he again sees Russia violating Ukrainian territory and sovereignty, this time through the church. This is not an unexpected point of view; many in Ukraine see the UOC-MP as fully controlled by the ROC (Shestopalets, 2019, p. 44). Yet, interviewee 8 (OCU, CG, C) was to such a great degree absorbed in the history, that to him the Church conflict apparently took second place. When I asked him why it was important for him to belong to a Church not subjected to Moscow he answered:

Because [the Russian] leaders are in such a manner teaching that one should neglect one’s belonging to the country. To Ukraine. They are saying that Ukraine is a bad country, and Russia is a great country. (interviewee 8, CG, OCU)

When this is how he feels about Russia’s relations with Ukraine, it is clearly not whether his church is recognized or not that is important, but rather that there are no traces of Russia there.

The ideology of the Russian world and the relationship between politics and religion were important issues for interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D) when choosing to leave the UOC-MP. She sees the UOC-MP as infected by the Russian world although she stresses that Russia and

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<sup>39</sup> This has been reported by RISU (2018, April 20)

<sup>40</sup> I cannot confirm that Kirill has said this with these exact words.

Orthodoxy in Russia has not always been the same. In her view, patriarch Kirill should condemn Putin's totalitarian regime, a regime that "annexes territories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (...) and the whole world is seeing this and keeping quiet, but most importantly - patriarch Kirill is silent." As argued earlier, many interviewees from the OCU decided to change church belonging because they no longer see the UOC-MP as a protector of Christian values. Interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D) argues further that this silence led to the war between Ukraine and Russia. I have already clarified that I will not discuss the reasons for the conflict in Eastern Ukraine nor the Maidan, however, these events have been a motivation for choice of church belonging. Therefore, I want to include the following quote from interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D) because it illustrates the role of the war, and the connection between religion and politics in this church conflict:

The war, to create a conflict between Russians and Ukrainians it was necessary to have a very strong motivation. (...) If we take for example Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, yes, we are different, we differ, but we are related (...) and to make Russians and Ukrainians raise their hands against each other, and go off to war and kill each other, the motivation would have to be very strong. Only the most holy idea could motivate them – God. And this enormous responsibility is carried by the ROC, that (*pause*) we can compare it to the responsibility of those churches that supported Hitler. Due to this, many people left the church for good, the Catholic as well as the Protestant Churches, and now people are leaving the Orthodox Church. We are still here, for us the OCU is a chance to stay within Orthodoxy. If we didn't have this Church it would've turned out like this: to go to UOC-MP is impossible, because the faith there is infected, it leads to murder, and they pray for the victories of Putin and so on. The other churches weren't canonical, which means that it was necessary to create a schism.

Interviewee 14 (COU, CG, D) argues further that the ideology of the Russian world characterized Russia's war against Ukraine, that this was a motivation to go to war.

That is why we could no longer pray, or even be a part of the Russian Church. Patriarch Kirill didn't do anything to stop the bloodshed, to stop the incorrect understanding of the Christian faith, so that brother does not kill brother.

Interviewee (15, OCU, CG, E) was particularly hostile towards the ROC, and sees the UOC-MP's affiliation with the ROC as highly problematic. She argued that the ROC had taken part in the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. I asked her why she did not approve of UOC-MP being a part of ROC:

Why? Look, before the war, before 2014, there was, from the side of Patriarch Kirill, they tried to impose on us the theory of the Russian world: “we are all one and the same space (*prostranstvo*). We are one people, and hence we should be one state.”

She continues:

The Moscow Patriarchate is constantly trying to tell Europe that there is a violation of religious rights [in Ukraine] going on. But actually, this is not true (*pause*). The presence of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine, it is already a question of national security. [The Moscow patriarchate], it is not simply a religious organization, that prays in the churches, preaches in the churches. It is an organization, which is established with the goal to destroy Ukraine as an independent state. I want you to understand this, it is not simply a religious conflict. Religion is actually the smallest part of the conflict. (*laughs but seems resigned*) (interviewee 15, OCU, CG, E)

Just as Poroshenko announced in his speech during the 1030<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the baptism of Kyiv-Rus, she too views the presence of the MP as a matter of national security. This is quite a standard way of looking at the church conflict in Ukraine, among the interviewees belonging to the OCU. Ironically the UOC-MP interviewees argue that they are *not* a political church, but that the OCU *is*. Interviewee 15 (OCU, CG, E) seems to look at it the other way around. She also differs from the UOC-MP interviewees about her view on Russia. She does not mention the people there, but simply states that:

CG: I have relatives [in Russia], but besides that I don't have any emotional ties [to Russia]. That state has died. The Russia I used to know, died. Crimea, Donbas, it's all bad! It's a catastrophe. And I don't think Crimea will return in the nearest future, unless Russia collapses.

Q: do you think that will happen?

CG: Yes, I do. We'll have to wait ten years, and then see what happens. (Interviewee 15, OCU, CG, E)

Although all the interviewees from OCU express a negative attitude towards the UOC-MP, ROC, and Russia, only interviewee 15 (OCU, CG, E) and interviewee 1 (OCU, CG, C) argue that the UOC-MP poses a danger to the national security. Interviewee 12 (OCU, CG, D) and 14 (OCU, CG, D) are more focused on belonging to a church, in which they feel that the Christian values are preserved and argues that patriarch Kirill and Putin's regime are destroying Orthodoxy. Interviewee 12 (OCU, CG, D) seems tired of everything that has to do with Russia: “(*sighs heavily*) (*pause*). What can I think, I have buried friends [because of the war]. Let them gather their troops, let them find their identity. And let us be in peace.” She

also tells me that the ROC had been visiting many of the local churches in May 2018 to convince them not to recognize the new church structure, to build resistance. And she calls it “a terrifying Russian geopolitics, that is more powerful than a nuclear war, believe me”

Regarding Crimea, she had some insightful statements:

Well, of course, it is an annexation, of course Crimea is occupied, another thing is that Ukraine has its blame in that that we, maybe with our elite, I blame (...) was not conscious enough, we paid little attention on the Ukrainian education of Crimea. Maybe there were reasons for (*pause*) (...). But Crimea was pro-Russian (*pause*). Crimea is Ukraine, of course (interviewee 12, OCU, CG).

Interviewee 16 (OCU/KP, priest, B) when asked what he thought about Russia, he had a very different view than the other interviewees, both from UOC-MP and OCU. I do not know exactly what to make of this, although he was very clear on the matter of the Russian state:

Everyone on this earth has to like Russia, because there are a lot of ecological potential there. One can find a great amount of fresh water – Baikal – forest, resources (...) but the government; thirsty [for power], envious and hateful.

He also argues that Russia stole Crimea and that the war in Donbas is a political invention of Moscow.

The priests whom I interviewed of the OCU (interviewee 5, 13 and 16) first of all, had different starting points, as I have discussed above, secondly, they all gave me different answers about Russia. Interviewee 16 (OCU/KP, priest, B), as we have seen above, does not really have anything positive to say about that state, but does not elaborate about the people there. Interviewee 5 (OCU, priest, B) and 13 (OCU, priest, D) joined the group of priests with highly diplomatic answers: (just as their colleagues from UOC-MP.) They were very calm, and did not really look for words, did not show any specific emotions.

Russia is a big state. There are a whole lot of good people who live there, it is a people with whom we share common roots, a common history. Russia is also experiencing not so easy times at the moment. But the conflict, which arise today, the war that is ongoing, is really not ok. It's dividing our people. But I think that everything will be ok. (interviewee 5, OCU, priest, B)

He perceives Crimea as a part of Ukraine, and further argues that although he sees it as a part of Ukraine, he also thinks that it is the land of the Crimean Tatars. (interviewee 5, OCU, priest) Interviewee 13 (OCU, priest) answered that:

You know, one needs to pay attention to one's own country and not someone else's. If not, there will not be order. When [Russia] recognizes that which God has given them, Russia, which they have at the moment, those borders, that it is completely enough. There is no need to annex other states' territories. So, when [Russia] realizes that one needs to love one's own people, and not others [implying Ukraine], I think that everything will get better for them. There are good people there. I see only a conflict with the Putin regime. (interviewee 13, OCU, priest)

At the end of the interview, I asked interviewee 5 (OCU, priest, E) if he wanted to add anything. He tells me that:

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church or the OCU has only started its existence in a new status. We emerged, so that everyone understood, not 15 December or 6 January, but already a long time ago, 1031 years ago Rus' was baptized, Kyiv Rus, when we all accepted the faith. And the Ukrainian people wanted to have its own local church ... well, today we already have a big beautiful state, and we now have a local church, we have our representatives, and today our next task is to develop this church.

### 5.5.2 Different views on the authority on the EPC between the UOC-MP adherents and the OCU.

When it became evident that the two Ukrainian Orthodox Churches and parts of the UOC-MP, with support from the government, were succeeding in forming a new Church structure - the OCU - recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch, the UOC-MP started a campaign against this. For interviewees 12 (OCU, CG, A), 13 (OCU, priest, A) and 14 (OCU, CG, A), UOC-MP's strong and open resistance against the granting of the Tomos for OCU, was an important motivation, and maybe also the "final drop" to change church belonging – in interviewee 13's words. The same interviewee asked his friends from the ROC in Moscow why they were against autocephaly for Ukraine.

I asked "why?" because I have friends in Moscow, and I know the current *establishment* (his English word) of the MP, so, "what bases are there for you being against? Are there any canonical bases?". Well, the church laws. "No", they answered. Then I asked, "are there any dogmatic basis for this resistance?" Again they answered "no". Then they tried to avoid the question. I asked straight forward;

“then on what basis?”. And they started to excuse themselves by saying; “but we are one nation - Ukraine, Russia, Belarus. We are the historical nation of Kyiv, so why do we have to split? If you separate, Europe will destroy our unity. The Europeans will destroy Orthodoxy. There will be total homosexuality here, European traditions that are not traditional.” So, people started to fear the wild west, literally. (interviewee 13, OCU, priest, A)

The same interviewee adds that Russia is against autocephaly because “in Russia and in the Russian church they understand that if the Ukrainian Church is granted autocephaly, then [the Church] can develop independently and be a spiritual protection for its state.” He is also very clear on his understanding of autocephaly:

Autocephaly it is not an icon, it is not (...) a kind of salvation, it is only a means that helps the Church to better fulfill the Christian mission for its people on the territory of its state. [Autocephaly] helps the state to detach itself from whatever political influence. Therefore, it is very important to have, well (...) it is only in an administrative way, but the Church, it is unified with all the Local Churches. (interviewee 13, OCU, priest, D)

A priest from the UOC-MP argues that they are not against autocephaly, but they do not consider the process through which the OCU was given it as canonical (interviewee 11, UOC-MP, priest). Interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) stresses that Ukraine is the canonical territory of the MP, not EPC. In my view, it seems like the interviewees from the UOC-MP, especially the priests, have an uneasy relationship with Constantinople. I will illustrate this with a quote from interviewee 18 (UOC-MP, priest):

P: Constantinople, it's not the Pope in Rome, it is not the Pope in the East.

Q: But he's the *Ecumenical* Patriarch?

P: He's only called Ecumenical. It is the *sobor* that decides, not the Patriarch. It wasn't the Ecumenical *sobor* that decided to grant Tomos, it was the *sobor* of Constantinople, and the other churches were not even asked. Now, [the patriarchate of] Constantinople is just a few blocks [in Istanbul], it's no longer the Byzantine empire, right? When you go out into the street, do you see the Byzantine empire? You don't, right? Constantinople has already for a long time *not* been Constantinople, but Istanbul.

The relationship with and (lack of) respect for the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, (or at least the view of him as “first among equals”) might be one of the main differences between the interviewees from UOC-MP and OCU. At least between the priests. This is also not very surprising, considering the official disputes between the hierarchs of the ROC and

EPC regarding how and by whom autocephaly is to be granted. As a contrast to interviewee 18 (UOC-MP, priest), interviewee 13 (UOC-OCU, priest, D) stated that:

I had to choose; to stay and support the Moscow Patriarchate in its ideological confrontation with Constantinople, and not support autocephaly for the Church and the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarch. Or to listen to the voice of the Mother Church<sup>41</sup> of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and hence follow the historical decision. All the same, I have chosen what, from my point of view, and I think from the Church's point of view, according to the Holy scripture and tradition, how I felt this, as a priest, that I should listen to the voice of the Mother Church, the voice of the Ecumenical Patriarch, who is the first Patriarch, who is the historical Mother Church for our Kyiv Metropolitan, for Ukrainian Orthodoxy, and hence I decided to support it. Well, because of this a certain internal conflict [within the UOC-MP] began, and I was forced to leave the Church [UOC-MP].

It is clear that there is both an ideological and a historical split between the UOC-MP and OCU. The way they understand the ecclesiastical history, and accordingly whom they want to be loyal– Moscow or Constantinople, is to a large degree defining the diverging views in the Church conflict, in addition to the worsening relationship between Russia and Ukraine on the political level.

## **6.2 Theme 3: Consequences of the conflict between UOC-MP and OCU**

### *Threats and conflict between neighbors and family*

It is obvious that this conflict has been very difficult for many of those involved. During the recent years many events, which have formed and will form the Ukrainian society in the future, have taken place. The church has taken part in this, too, and although there had existed factions within the UOC-MP also earlier, these became much more visible. Because of Russia's aggression towards Ukraine, a tendency that everything that could be connected to Russia is perceived a threat to national security. This accelerated the church conflict within Ukraine and fed the media on both sides. Law drafts, that clearly would have damaged the position of the UOC-MP, were presented (in 2016), albeit not all were adopted. These factors, among other things, have, from my point of view, contributed to the divisions among the religious people in Ukraine. It has built a barrier between the adherents' of the UOC-MP and

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<sup>41</sup> Interviewee 13 (OCU, priest, D) sees the EPC as his mother church, while some interviewees from the UOC-MP naturally see the ROC as their mother church.

the OCU, which is made of disagreements on the religious level, ideological level and political level. How has this conflict been experienced by the interviewees?

Some interviewees have and are receiving threats; others have experienced conflicts with their neighbors. I have included the quotes below because they illustrate the seriousness of the conflict on a personal and local level. Even within families there can be painful disputes, as the next quote illustrates:

We, my close friend, she goes to the local church [OCU], because she couldn't; she felt that she left an Egyptian slavery. She said that her mother called, (*sobs, emotionally touched*), her mother belongs to the UOC-MP, and she said: "is your child sick?" and she answers; "a little bit", "it is because you attend the local church, there they don't have real communion." And legends like that, stories like that, you find these falsifications... every step you take. (interviewee 12, OCU, CG, D)

Interviewee (14, OCU, CG, D) even told me that a young couple she knew hadn't told their parents that they had changed church belonging from UOC-MP to OCU, because they wanted to continue meeting with them and be together as a family. Interviewee 2 (CG) belonging to UOC-MP tells this story about her experience:

You have to understand, that the confrontations in the villages, it's creating an unhealthy atmosphere. When you, well, in the village there's a schism going on, right, they went to OCU, and the others to UOC-MP, you walk out and half of the village is not on greeting terms with you anymore (...) I will now tell a story, when I moved to this place, I have lived here for half a year, I did not know anyone here, because I did not live in this district at all, never lived here. I went for a walk with my child here in the narrow street and from a balcony, there on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor a dog was constantly barking. And my little son he loves animals, and he waved his hand and the old lady [sitting on the balcony] waved back. So, the old lady always waved her hand, and my little son waved at her, and we kind of became friends, although we did not know each other's names. We went out to walk and there the dog is barking. Then one day we go out on the street and the old lady with the dog is walking, she had gotten better, she had for some reason been sick, and could not go out, and then she got better and she came down, she says: "I know that you are a mother," and I say that "yes, I am a mother" "and of which Patriarchate?" and I say "is that important?" "yes, it is important". I say: "well then the Moscow Patriarchate" "Oh, you Moscow-bitch (*suka moskovska*)". She had only seen me from the balcony. And I tell the old lady: "thank you, but tell me please, when were you last time in the church?" (*interviewee is almost screaming*) "I don't attend church, but you are dividing the Ukrainian society, you will answer in hell for it." So, this means, the old lady while not knowing me, called me a bitch. And I forgave her. Well, so that you understand, social media had done its work. It has to such a degree, people even, when they sit at home and not attend church, [the media] has brainwashed them. If the Moscow church is evil, and

every person evil, but I'm still here, walking on this land, I live here, I work, I pay taxes, I have never left. I speak bad Russian, I don't associate with Russia at all. I love every people. For me Russians are still our neighbors, yes. Yes, maybe I don't love those people, who are killing our soldiers, there in the East of Ukraine, why they went to war, why people at all fight against each other, why there is war at all. But I love people of every nation. (interviewee 2, UOC-MP, CG)

This is a long quote, but I will argue that it gives good insight into the situation that has prevailed in Ukraine in 2013-2019. Apparently, within the Orthodox population (at least among my interviewees), they are identifying each other by which patriarchate they belong to. This supports the idea that the choice of church belonging is also accompanied with political preferences. One expects adherents of the UOC-MP to be pro-Russian and not to support Poroshenko. As I have mentioned earlier, one interviewee (3, UOC-MP, priest) even stated that the 70 percent who voted against Poroshenko were all "our people" (UOC-MP). And through interviewee 2's (UOC-MP, CG) choice of belonging to the UOC-MP, she is being labeled as someone who supports the war, Russia, and suppresses Ukrainian values, politics and sovereignty.

As mentioned, in some villages there have been violent struggles between UOC-MP and OCU over church property. Obviously, this leaves an open wound between the neighbors of the various affiliations. However, it was not only the interviewees from the UOC-MP in the villages who showed strong emotions when talking about losing their church. The interviewees from the OCU in the larger cities too were emotionally affected by having to leave their church (they could, on the other hand, just choose a different church in the same city). As pointed out earlier, they felt they could no longer stay due to what they considered to be violations of Christian values and ethics. Interviewee 12 (OCU, CG, D) sobs when pointing out that "if you think that it was easy to leave the parish which I had attended many years..."

What was especially prominent when I talked to the adherents of the UOC-MP, was their anger towards the OCU for taking over their churches. They use words like "take", "seize" and "occupy", even "robbery" was mentioned (interviewee 2, UOC-MP, CG). Interviewee 10 (UOC-MP, priest) comments that:

Imagine that people say that “we are religious people, we want our church”. And then, they are taking instruments like crowbars with them, and seizing the church. Throwing people out, throwing out grandmothers and beating the priest. We [the UOC-MP] are not taking anything.

He is not blaming the OCU for this, not explicitly. According to him, these are people who are hired by the far-right movement *Pravy Sektor* (Right Sector)<sup>42</sup> and others who never attend church.

Interviewee 7 (UOC-MP, CG) states that before 2014 their village was very friendly. But now, this “Poroshenko church of Ukraine” and the local authorities who began to support the “schismatics”, divided the village and the people. Still, they are greeting each other when they meet because, as she says, “we have to love people.” Interviewee 1 (OCU, CG, C) on the other hand, demonstrating her dislike towards the UOC-MP, threw her cigarette butt over the hedge and into the garden of a UOC-MP member.

Interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG), when asked if she wanted to add anything at the end of the interview, stressed that she is in pain: “I don’t know if you have noticed or not, but I’m in pain. If the Lord is in your heart, there will not be any conflict, and people will respect each other. Before the conflict I did not have any hate in me, but I do now, against some people.” Similarly, interviewee 3 (UOC- MP, priest) when asked how he felt after the conflict, answered that:

I think more anxiety has appeared in my life. I’m a priest, I worry about people, about what is going on in our country today. Once more, there cannot be love, when people who used to be friends in one village, raise their hands against each other because of which church to go in, then accordingly, happiness will not come, right. I do worry.

Interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E) says that in her village, things are calm. They have two churches, so there is no need to fight over the right of one church building. However, there is uncertainty regarding whether they can keep their church or not as illustrated by the following story:

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<sup>42</sup> Right Sector came into being in November 2013 and was present on the Maidan. (Shekhovtsov and Umland, 2014, p. 59)

For example, yesterday, in the church where my husband works, an official from the district called, “hand over the church documents”, the documents that confirm that the church belongs to the parish. (...) We were not informed about what they are going to do with the documents. But we know certain facts, cases (...) it was suggested that we don’t give the documents, but write an official refusal, so that they will have to go through the court. (...) It turns out that we have to go to conflict with people, although it shouldn’t be like that. But they force us to do it, because if we don’t go to conflict, we’ll lose our church. They took the church in the neighboring village, which the priest (*batyushka*) had built. They just came and seized it, and now [UOC-MP] are meeting in the priest’s house.

Due to the fact that there have been such serious conflicts between the UOC-MP and OCU, I asked whether the interviewees had received any threats. Interviewee 12 (OCU, CG, D), works as a journalist and has written about the church situation in Ukraine:

It wasn’t threats, but scandals. They told me that I was an enemy of the Church, they wrote to me and called me “moscovsky”. It was for me in the beginning very painful because I have always loved the church (*cries*). When I wrote that we had an “initiative group” – we are for a local church – people started to call me. They said I was this and that and “you don’t know how to pray”. (...) (*cries*) therefore, there haven’t been any threats, but morally it hasn’t been easy sometimes. (interviewee 12, OCU, CG, D)

Also, interviewee 7 (UOC-MP, CG) says that she has been called a “Moscow prostitute” on the internet. A priest from UOC-MP did receive threatening messages during the time when many churches were taken over by the OCU. However, he is sparse with information, but later adds that “one time someone tore my jacket” (interviewee 3, UOC-MP, priest). He also states that there have been fist fights and sometimes people had to be picked up by ambulance.

#### *Positive consequences for the UOC-MP*

One might get an impression that the UOC-MP has experienced a harder time in this conflict than has the OCU, which after all received the Tomos of autocephaly and enjoys the favor of the President. Yet, there seem to be some positive consequences from the conflict, at least in the view of the interviewees from the UOC-MP. Interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG), 3 (UOC-MP, priest) and 10 (UOC-MP, priest) all mentioned that their church had become better after the conflict. “Our church was limping” interviewee 2 tells me. And continues:

My church has become better. Precisely because of this conflict. I will tell you what I see. Firstly, there is the parable in the Bible, about the Lord sifting grain. Everything that is not valuable falls through, and everything that is good stays. Well, I think that this has happened in the church society. Because I only meet really good Orthodox people, truly faithful, who are united, who support the priest, who are ready to fight and stay in their place no matter what.

In addition, interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest) told me that he was happy to experience this situation, as illustrated below.

Well, I think that the situation that we have now, I'm even happy that I live in this situation, in this time. Why? Because the Lord today, our God, is testing us; whether we love him or not. Whether we are good Christians or not. So if we can prove that we have love, if we can do so that OCU understand, that they have done a mistake the whole time, and that they came back to us, then the lord will make our land Ukraine the best land, and that then when you visit us, you will say what a good country this is. You will be sad, that you are not living here! (*smiles*)

### **6.3 Theme 4: What are the most important tasks for the church?**

Obviously the two churches do not agree on several points. Looking back at the churches' role during the Ukrainian crisis it is clear that they expressed different viewpoints. Both churches were present on the Maidan, and they both called for peace. Yet, as we have seen, their views on to what degree the church should involve itself in political matters differ. So, what do the interviewees consider to be the most important task for the church? Can we find any differences between the adherents of the UOC-MP and the OCU?

#### **6.3.1 Answers from the UOC-MP**

Asking the UOC-MP interviewees about what they see as the most important task of the church, all the priests answered that it was the salvation of souls in the eternal life (interviewee 3, 11, 17, 18). Interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest) also adds that:

Plus, how shall I explain this to you, I, for example think that generally God should be in the first place, not nationalism. I believe in God first and foremost, and after that in Ukraine and all the rest. But in the first place there has to be God, in my opinion. In our Church, God should be in the first place. (*he repeats this many times. It seems to be very important to him*) (interviewee 3, UOC-MP, priest)

The churchgoers from UOC-MP have more thorough answers, albeit they too focus on the salvation of souls. Interviewee 7 (UOC-MP, CG) answers without hesitation:

CG: Love. Compassion, love for God. The first and the most important commandment for me is to love your neighbor as yourself. For me the church is love. When I'm feeling good, I go to church, when I feel bad, I go to church. I cannot imagine my life without the church.

Q: is the place you pray important to you?

CG: No. Important is that you have God in your heart. And the Church is a house, when we left this house [referring to the church building they lost to the OCU] the grace also left. There is no grace with the OCU. (interviewee 7, UOC-MP, CG)

Interviewee 4 (UOC-MP, CG, E) and 6 (UOC-MP, CG) argues that salvation is a crucial task for the church, and to do so means that everything has to be done in the canonical way. She also thinks that the church should be a peacemaker. "This is the most important. Salvation and peace among people."

Interviewee 2 (UOC-MP, CG) argues that the church should take more responsibility in society. That the priests should preach not only in church but in the daily life of Ukrainians. She tells me that her husband visits people who struggle with drugs and alcohol. She would like to see more such visits. She too stresses the importance of love and forgiveness.

### 6.3.2 Answers from the OCU

The interviewees from the OCU had much longer answers and elaborated a great deal on their views on the church's main tasks. Although their main message was the same as the priests from the UOC-MP, there were some differences. Priest (5, OCU, B), for instance, in addition to mention salvation, like the priests from the UOC-MP, added that the task is also "to teach them to love their people, to love their country." Only two priests among my interviewees stated their affiliation with the OCU (5, B and 13, D), while interviewee 16 (OCU/KP, priest, B) still identified with the UOC-KP. The latter's views on the church's tasks are nevertheless included in this section. Interviewee 13 (OCU, priest, D) stressed that the Church should be Christ, however, he also focused on learning to love what is around us, also the country in which we live in:

My opinion is that the Church must be itself, it should be Christ, not a Church of the Russian world, Greek world or some kind of Ukrainian world, the church should be Christ. The task of the Church is this; carry out its mission here, tell people about God, lead people to salvation, make them morally better, morally cleaner, instill in people what God had instilled in us. (...) the task of the Church is to teach people to love each other, love God and love each other. Learn to love the land in which we live. Because, if we cannot learn to love what God has given us here, this land, the water, this nature, this beauty, these people who surround us, this state, which we have – how can we then love what will be there in heaven? What we yet haven't seen? Therefore, the task for the Church is to teach people love, for God, teach people compassion, love for what God gave you here. On your land. (...) there is even a poem that describes this; Soviet poets wrote that in life one can chose everything, but one cannot choose one's homeland and one's mother – this is given to us upon birth. Therefore, the task of the Church is to educate people, in a way so that we can become good citizens of the state, and as a result, good citizens of heaven.

Among the churchgoers the answers were quite interesting, and with a great variety among the interviewees. None of them explicitly stated that “salvation” or “love” was one of the tasks. Although the task of “fulfilling the Holy scripture and the Christian values” was crucial for interviewee 14 (OCU, CG, D). The interviewees from the OCU tended to focus on other things, and some did not answer directly on the “task of the Church” but rather what the church should be or have. Interviewee 12, (OCU, CG, D) commenting on what the Church *should* be and what it should *not* have:

In our Church there should not be spies, our church should not be so that we have to worry, that we are afraid of the bishops (*tearful*). Our Church should be (*unclear*), it should have some kind of voice. (...)

She refers to “spies” in the church. This illustrates her impression (or maybe fear) that the UOC-MP is used by the ROC as a way to gather information about Ukraine, and to spread pro-Russian sentiments. She continues:

The church should most of all not love any government, but Christ, of course. Christ is the most important, not Kirill, not even Bartholomew. Christ is the head not Epiphany. That's the first, and second, [the Church] has to see anyone who visits the church. (...) and third, it should not be close to the authorities (*vlast*). (interviewee 12, OCU, CG)

Finally, interviewee 16, officially a priest of the OCU, although he himself still identifies with the UOC-KP, sees the church's most important tasks as being a link between the government and the people

And this link, always has to be closer to the people. If the government, God forbid, passes some laws against the people and weaken their freedom of speech, their freedom of movement, and keep people in a kind of slavery, then the church has to firstly oppose this government. If the people greatly act against the law, for example get drunk and neglect the rule of law, then the church has to tell the people that "you are not behaving correctly". The church has to keep the balance between the rich and the poor, between the strong and the weak, between the authorities and ordinary people. That is, in my belief, the task of the church. (interviewee 16, OCU/KP, priest, B)

It seems to be a greater variance among the OCU interviewees' answers regarding the church's tasks, than among the interviewees from the UOC-MP. Still they focus on that the church should be Christ, and that it should keep a distance from the government. At the same time, it should teach people to love what they have and the land in which they are born.

So what will the future of the OCU be? I will end this discussion with a quote from interviewee 3 (UOC-MP, priest). It both illustrates what he sees as the strength of his own church, the UOC-MP, and why it will survive the church conflict. It also explains why, in his opinion, the OCU will not survive. And it highlights what he sees as vital for a church, and therefore may be even the core of why he chose to stay with the UOC-MP:

Without a good fundament the house will not stand. And accordingly, our church stands on a good basis on good fundament, our church is, was and will be. Their church [the OCU] look at its base, their house, their church is bad, there is no fundament beneath it. There are no people there, no faith (*vera*), because in a schism there cannot be faith. On the first place in a schism there is either nationalism, which is our case in Ukraine, or some kind of ideal, but not Christ, that's all.

## 6.4 Summary and discussion

I will here give a summary of the main findings of the analysis, in addition to a systematic comparison of similarities and differences which I found. The analysis was put together with four main themes, which together shed light on the differences between the interviewees from the UOC-MP and OCU, and their motivations to stay or to leave. The overall conclusion

following this section will put the findings together with the theoretical framework and the church conflict in Ukraine.

For the interviewees from the UOC-MP the overall reason for them not wanting to change church belonging to the OCU was the problem of canonicity. In their view the OCU is *not* a canonically established church. Therefore, they cannot go to this church. The self-proclaimed autocephalous churches - the UOC-KP and the UAOC, were both created in a schism, and thus the OCU, which is made up of these two churches, cannot be canonical, in their view.

Regarding the establishment of the OCU the interviewees from the UOC-MP saw the political factor as the greatest issue. In their view, the OCU is a political church. This motivation or explanation is the same as the official statements from the ROC and UOC-MP hierarchs. I think that part of the reason why they so strongly dislike the OCU, is the pain many experienced during the disputed and violent church transfers. This has made them dislike the local and national governments – and Poroshenko, who strongly and openly supported the establishment of the OCU and pointed to the UOC-MP as a threat to national security.

The interviewees from OCU focused more on ecclesiastical independence from Russia. They stressed that the UOC-MP's lack of a clear voice during the Ukrainian crisis affected their choice. In addition, being affiliated with the MP and therefore with Russia, the aggressor state, the UOC-MP is claimed to be a channel through which Russia can influence Ukraine. This was especially prominent during the Ukrainian crisis and the rhetoric of the Russian world. This does not seem to be a concern for the adherents of the UOC-MP who see their church as fully independent from Moscow and the war as a result of a political game. They are simply connected to the rest of the Orthodox world through the ROC.

In connection with the UOC-MP's response during the Ukrainian crisis, most importantly the UOC-MP's failure to condemn the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine, interviewees from group D argued that the UOC-MP no longer protects the Christian values. For this group this was probably the most crucial motivation to leave the UOC-MP, or the ROC as they occasionally preferred to say. The events starting in 2013 have therefore been a trigger factor behind their decision. Those who changed church affiliation before the OCU was established (group C) also focused on these events and on the UOC-MP's connection to Russia through the MP and patriarch Kirill. These people, however, did not mention Christian

values, but were more concerned with having a *Ukrainian* church, with no connection Russia whatsoever. Thus, it would be logical to say that for group D, the Tomos was very important, since they waited until the OCU was established before changing church belonging. Yet, many of them stressed that they would still have changed church even if they were not granted a Tomos. Was Filaret one of the problems here, maybe?

In addition to the problem of canonicity, ecclesiastical independence, and Christian values, the use of Church Slavonic in church service was mentioned by some interviewees. The UOC-MP argues that Church Slavonic is the language meant for the church service, and one should learn it to be closer to God. The churchgoers also feel that it affects the atmosphere in their church. If this is solely thanks to the church Slavonic I don't know. The opposite is true for the interviewees from the OCU, who feel more comfortable now that the whole sermon and service is conducted in Ukrainian. It seems like their problem with the use of Church Slavonic is linked to their perception of it as being Russian, or that it has become *russified*. I interpret this as the main problem with the use of Church Slavonic – its association to Russia.

Another difference between the interviewees from the UOC-MP and the OCU is the way they relate to politics, as I have briefly touched upon above. I mainly discussed their view on Russia, the annexation of Crimea, and the war in Eastern Ukraine. While the UOC-MP interviewees either stated that they do not meddle with politics, or they did not say anything which could be interpreted in either a positive or negative way, the OCU members spoke openly about politics. Nevertheless, all interviewees, – with one exception, stressed that they supported Ukrainian sovereignty and did want Eastern Ukraine and Crimea back.

The relationship with and respect or lack of respect for the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, (or at least the view of him as “first among equals”) is another difference between the interviewees from UOC-MP and OCU. At least among the priests. This is not very surprising, considering the official disputes between the hierarchs of the ROC and EPC regarding how and by whom autocephaly is to be granted.

Among the UOC-MP members, in general, it does *not* seem to be a considerable amount of anger towards the *persons* who changed Church belonging, rather more worry related to their lost souls. This stands in sharp contrast to the anger towards the OCU as a whole, and the way it was established with the help of the president.

A few similarities between the interviewees were discovered. These were similarities regarding their manner of speech, such as defining the “other” to explain “us”. This is, however, common for groups and communities, and as Jenkins (2008) pointed out. Both groups also expressed a mixture of anger and sadness when telling their stories and experiences of the church conflict. I think many felt a loss related to church building disputes and disappointment that their church did not live up to their expectations. Group D did not leave because they wanted to, the way they understood it, they left because they had to.

With these many differences I would argue that the diverging views of the interviewees from the UOC-MP and the OCU on choice of church belonging, also paint a larger picture of what Ukraine is, and the various identities one can find there. This is of course based only on 18 interviews, yet, I think that the two worldviews, expressed by the choice of church belonging, could help to better understand Ukrainian society and politics.

## Conclusion

This thesis started out on a journey in the hope to learn more about the motivations for church belonging in Ukraine. Orthodox believers all share a single faith, so I asked what it was that divides the Orthodox in Ukraine, why did some change church belonging while others chose to stay? I have based my findings on interviews conducted in various regions in Ukraine, with the aim to draw the church conflict down to a local level, to the grassroots, to those who are affected immediately by the conflict.

Through 18 interviews with churchgoers and priests, both from the UOC-MP and the OCU, I have found that there are many “starting points” for church belonging. I have identified five groups: A; those who always had belonged to the UOC-MP, B; those who belonged to the UOC-KP since its establishment in the 1990s, C; those who belonged to UOC-MP, then changed to the UOC-KP, and then finally, as a natural consequence of the union between the latter and UAOC, became members of the OCU, D; those who changed directly from the UOC-MP to OCU, and finally, group E who previously belonged to other denominations than Orthodoxy, and then found their place either with the UOC-MP or the OCU. This situation has made the study more complicated. Yet, in my view, it reflects well the religious situation in Ukraine, one which is diverse and pluralistic.

Moreover, I would argue, based on the 18 interviews, that the religious situation as well as the political one, is much more complex than dividing Ukraine into a pro-Russian East and South, and an anti-Russian West. There are or has been at least before the establishment of the OCU, factions within the UOC-MP. This means that its mission, so to speak, could vary between parishes and regions in Ukraine. Showing anything from pro-Russian sentiments to strong pro-Ukrainian sentiments. I believe this is also true for my interviewees, with interviewee 17 (UOC-MP, priest) representing the more pro-Russian faction.

Looking at the recent political developments in Ukraine, with the Ukrainian crisis in focus, I have isolated some reasons which have been crucial for many of my interviewees in their choice of church belonging. These events were of course political, but still, they had a religious dimension too. The religious dimension was expressed through the concept of the Russian world, or the Orthodox civilization as opposed to the “godless West,” as it is

understood by the adherents of the UOC-MP. Although all the Orthodox churches were present in Maidan, their responses differed. The UOC-MP sought a neutral stand while the UOC-KP quickly supported the protesters on Maidan and condemned Russia's aggression towards Ukraine. Because of this, the Orthodox were suddenly forced to choose sides, although this implied also choosing sides politically. They could not be just "Orthodox" – although a large percentage of those asked in surveys do see themselves as precisely this – they had to be either with the UOC-MP or the OCU.

Thus, the Ukrainian crisis accelerated the church conflict within Ukraine and fed the media on both sides, further strengthening each of the two worldviews. Draft laws, that clearly would have damaged the position of the UOC-MP, were presented in 2016, albeit not all were adopted. These factors, among other things, have, from my point of view, contributed to the division between the religious people in Ukraine. It has built a barrier between the adherents of the UOC-MP and the OCU, which is made of disagreements on the religious level, ideological level, and political level. The situation also established new "reality experts" who made some interviewees question whether belonging to the UOC-MP was right for them, or whether other factors than "a canonical church" became more crucial for their sense of belonging. Group D risked fierce criticism from the UOC-MP, conflicts within family, and a break with the church community in which they had been members their whole life. All this in order to belong to a church which could give them what they needed – a church which, as they felt, protected Christian values.

Moreover, history has showed us that the desire for an independent Orthodox church has been on the agenda in Ukraine more than once. The UOC-KP and the UAOC both tried to obtain canonical recognition from Constantinople, but it was not until the OCU was established that this wish became a reality. The UOC-MP and the ROC have strongly opposed the establishment of this church, arguing that politics has become intertwined with religion. A common view among the interviewees from the UOC-MP is that the OCU was simply a PR-stunt and part of Poroshenko's political campaign. Yes, Poroshenko did greatly help with the establishment of the OCU, but there was still a market for this church in Ukraine. Not all interviewees from the OCU in my study wanted to belong to the UOC-KP, this church was also in their eyes a schismatic church. But they did not want to belong to UOC-MP either because it did no longer correspond with their worldview, as I have stated above.

In addition, the church conflict in Ukraine is not simply restricted within Ukraine's borders. The ROC was strongly affected by what was happening in Ukraine. Losing its Orthodox in Ukraine would also mean losing Kyiv, the cradle of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Nevertheless, this thesis has discovered that the church conflict has not only had negative consequences for the UOC-MP nor the OCU. Interviewees from the UOC-MP argued that their church had become stronger and cleaner and that God was testing their love for Him. Because of the establishment of the OCU the UOC-MP has been presented with a competitor which threatens to take its faithful away from it. On the other hand, the OCU has inherited some "birth defects" from the UOC-KP, and to receive recognition from other Orthodox churches than the EPC has not been as easy as they might have hoped for. From the bottom line, these challenges that both the UOC-MP and the OCU are facing have made the churches strive to become better, and to prove their right to live.

To return to my research question, the interviewees from the UOC-MP and the OCU share a single faith, but that is probably the only thing they share so to speak. Although they identify as Orthodox, they have taken a choice to stay or to leave based on different criteria. For the OCU ecclesiastical independence from Russia and the preservation of Christian ethics, as they understand them, were crucial, while for the interviewees from UOC-MP a canonical church was the most important.

This thesis has focused on the motivation for church belonging among 18 interviewees, which make out a part of an iceberg of which I have only seen the top. Nevertheless, their thoughts and stories have given a better insight in how they think and feel, their experiences of the church conflict, the role of the Ukrainian crisis and their diverging worldviews

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## Appendices

### Attachment 1 – overview of interviewees

Interview	priest/ churchgoer	city/region	church belonging	group	gender	other information	date
1	CG	Rivne	OCU	C	F	High education	11.08.19
2	CG	Rivne	UOC-MP	A	F	Medium education	12.08.19
3	Priest	Rivne	UOC-MP	A	M		12.08.19
4	CG	Rivne	UOC-MP	E	F	Low education	12.08.19
5	Priest	Rivne	OCU	B	M		13.08.19
6	CGs	Rivne	UOC-MP	A	F	“group interview”, although one of the women took the most initiative Low education	13.08.19
7	CG	Rivne	UOC-MP	A	F	Low education	13.08.19
8	CG	Rivne	OCU	C	M	Low education	13.08.19
9	CG	Rivne	OCU	C	F	Low education	13.08.19
10	Priest	Zhytomyr	UOC-MP	A	M		14.08.19
11	Priest	Kyiv	UOC-MP	A	M		15.08.19
12	CG	Kyiv	OCU	D	F	High education	16.08.19

13	Priest	Kyiv	OCU	D	M	Priest with additional education	16.08.19
14	CG	Kyiv	OCU	D	F	High education	17.08.19
15	CG	Kyiv	OCU	E	F	High education	19.08.19
16	Priest	Odesa	OCU/UOC-KP	B	M	Officially part of the OCU, but he still identifies with the UOC-KP	20.08.19
17	Priest	Odesa	UOC-MP	A	M		21.08.19
18	Priest	Odesa	UOC-MP	A	M		21.08.19

## Attachment 2 – interview guide

Russian version:

### Общие вопросы 1

- В какую церковь Вы ходите/служите?

#### должность в церкви – священники

- Какая у Вас должность в церкви?
- Сколько времени Вы имели эту должность?

#### **Если Вы поменяли место**

- Если Вы раньше служили в другом месте, где?
- и почему поменяли место? (Только те, кто поменяли место)

### **Если не поменяли принадлежность**

- Почему Вы не поменяли принадлежность?

### Посещение церкви – верующие

- Как часто Вы посещаете богослужение?
- До какой степени Вы участвуете в событиях организованных церковью?
- Давно Вы ходите в эту церковь?
- Ходили Вы раньше в другую церковь? (куда Вы ходили раньше – почему? Почему Вы поменяли принадлежность/не поменяли?)

### **Церковная ситуация**

- Что Вы знаете о церковной ситуации в Украине (сейчас)? Вы сможете мне рассказать ваше впечатление/мнение о церковной ситуации в Украине?
- По-Вашему, почему учреждали новую православную церковь Украины?

#### **Вопрос тому, который поменяли место**

- Как Вы воспринимаете переход от Московского патриархата к Православной церкви Украины

#### **Вопрос тому, который ходит в УПЦ-МП**

- Как Вы оцениваете решение другими перейти в новую церковь/другую церковь?

### **Мотивация**

- По-Вашему мнению, какие самые важные качества/задачи должна иметь церковь?
- Что для Вас самое важное при выборе церкви?
- Был ли выбор «перейти в эту церковь»/«остаться в этой церкви» Вашим собственным выбором?
- Есть ли какая-то разница между ПЦУ и УПЦ-МП?

### **Заключительные вопросы**

- На Ваш взгляд, есть ли «правильная» церковь в Украине? Какая?
- Есть ли в Украине «неправильные» церкви?

## Общие вопросы 2

- Кто Вы по национальности?
- Какой Ваш родной язык?
- На каком языке Вы говорите в повседневной жизни?
- Что Вы думаете о России?
- Как Вы воспринимаете аннексию/присоединение Крыма и войну в Донбассе?
- Сколько Вам лет?

English version:

## Interview guide

### Background questions:

- which church do you belong to? (UOC-KP, UOC-MP or the OCoU?)

### Position in the church – priests only

- What position do you have in the church?
- How long have you had this position?

#### **If they have changed from UOC-MP to OCoU or UOC-KP:**

- Where were you before?
- Why did you change?

#### **If they did not change**

- Why did you choose to stay?

### church attendance – church goers only

- How often do you attend services?
- To what degree do you partake in various activities organized by the church?
- How long have you been going to this church? (where did you go before – why? Why did you change?)

### **Church situation**

- What do you know about the church situation in Ukraine now?
- Why was the Orthodox church of Ukraine established, do you think?
- (Who made the decision to change/not change church belonging?)  
**Those who have changed from UOC-MP to OCoU or UOC-KP**
- How have you experienced the switch from MP to UOC/UOC-KP?  
**Those who belong to the MP**
- How do you evaluate this move that others have taken?

### **Motivation:**

- What do you personally consider to be the most important qualities/tasks that a church should have?
- What is the most important for you when you consider what church to belong to?
- Was the choice to change church affiliation your own choice?  
**For those belonging to MP**
- Was the choice not to change church affiliation your own choice?

### **Final questions**

- Which church in Ukraine, in your view, is the “right” church and why?
- Are there any “wrong” churches in Ukraine?

## Background questions 2

- What is your nationality?
- which language do you use in your daily life?
- What do you think about Russia?
- How do you see the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass? (anna ord for annexation?)
- How old are you? (optional)

