

Material and Spiritual Aid from the Catholic Church of Poland to Ukraine in the Face of Russian Aggression that Began in 2014

Ajuda Material e Espiritual da Igreja Católica da Polónia à Ucrânia Face à Agressão Russa que Começou em 2014

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Abstract

This article presents the attitude of the Polish Catholic Church, also known as the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, towards Russian aggression against Ukraine and the forms of support it has given to the victims of the war. The Russian invasion, which began in 2014 through a hybrid war that resulted in the occupation of Crimea and began military actions in the Donbass, unleashed a wave of refugees that in 2022 became an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of European countries. After the conflict entered a phase of open warfare between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022, Ukraine's neighbouring countries received a large number of refugees. A year later, Poland, which had become the main destination for refugees, received the largest group - more than 10 million people, among whom were predominantly Orthodox.¹ Significant help was given to them by the Catholic Church, strongly influenced by the teachings of Polish Pope John Paul II, who died in 2005. Support for the victims of the war in Ukraine is carried out by Polish Catholics on the territory of the Republic of Poland, as well as through aid sent by them to the war-affected areas on Ukrainian territory.

Keywords: Migration crisis, War in Ukraine, Polish Catholic Church, John Paul II, War refugees.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta a atitude da Igreja Católica da Polónia, também conhecida como a Igreja Católica Romana da Polónia, face à agressão russa contra a Ucrânia e as formas de apoio que tem dado às vítimas da guerra. A invasão russa, iniciada em 2014 através de uma guerra híbrida que resultou na ocupação da Crimeia e deu início a ações militares no Donbass, desencadeou uma vaga de refugiados que em 2022 se tornou um fenómeno sem precedentes na história dos países europeus. Depois do conflito entrar numa fase de guerra aberta entre a Rússia e a Ucrânia, em fevereiro de 2022, os países vizinhos da Ucrânia receberam um grande número de refugiados. Um

1. Gosc.pl. (2023). *Kościół w Polsce pomaga Ukrainie* [The Church in Poland helps Ukraine]. <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/8097153.Kosciol-w-Polsce-pomaga-Ukrainie-roczny-bilans-wsparcia>

ano depois, a Polónia que se tinha tornado o destino principal dos refugiados, recebeu o maior grupo – mais de 10 milhões de pessoas, entre os quais predominavam ortodoxos.² Uma ajuda significativa foi lhes prestada pela Igreja Católica, fortemente influenciada pelos ensinamentos do Papa polaco João Paulo II, falecido em 2005. O apoio às vítimas da guerra na Ucrânia é realizado por católicos polacos no território da República da Polónia, bem como através de ajuda enviada por eles às zonas afetadas pela guerra no território ucraniano.

Palavras-chave: Crise migratória, Guerra na Ucrânia, Igreja Católica da Polónia, João Paulo II, Refugiados de guerra.

Introduction

The Catholic Church in Poland, where Catholics make up almost 87 per cent of the population³ was decisive for the political, social and economic changes of the 20th century, which resulted in the emergence of an internal democratic opposition and brought about the collapse of the communist regime in power since the end of the Second World War. The communists, who preached atheism, came to and remained in power from the second half of the 1940s and for more than four decades, thanks to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which exercised indirect but decisive power in Poland. This influence was weakened by the social movements formed shortly after the election in 1978 of Polish cardinal Karol Wojtyła to the papal throne, where he served under the name John Paul II until his death in 2005. With the creation of the Solidarity trade union shortly after his first papal visit in 1979, the new Pope's teachings intensified the unrest in Polish society and led a decade later to dialogue between the opposition and the Polish communist regime. The talks, supported by the Catholic Church, eventually gave Poland its first partially free elections in 1989. Soon after, they brought about the democratisation of Poland and also began the process of gradually dismantling the Eastern Bloc, which concluded in 1991 with the collapse of the USSR. In the following years, the Catholic Church led by John Paul II supported the democratisation processes in the countries of the former USSR and their satellites in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as their efforts to integrate into the structures and organisations of Western Europe, especially the European Union. Meanwhile, in Russia, from the late 1990s onwards, the forces that sought to halt the democratisation processes and supported the idea of restoring the USSR began to come to power. These efforts were promoted by Vladimir Putin, a former Soviet intelligence officer, who began heading the Russian government in 1999 and won the presidential elections a few months later in 2000. The second Chechen war from 1999 to 2009, which was conducted under his direction, was the first sign that the new head of the Kremlin was interested in rebuilding Moscow's power as a superpower. Russia's subsequent aggressions, the 2008 war in Georgia and the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, proved that Putin has no intention of abandoning a policy aimed at restoring the USSR's former influence in the world.

This article deals with one of the most important international events since February 2022 - the large-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine. It presents the reaction of a religious community such as the Catholic Church in Poland, a country dominated by Catholics, to the pheno-

2. Gosc.pl. (2023). *Kościół w Polsce pomaga Ukrainie* [The Church in Poland helps Ukraine]. <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/8097153.Kosciol-w-Polsce-pomaga-Ukrainie-roczny-bilans-wsparcia>

3. CBOS. (2022). *Polski pejzaż religijny - z dalekiego planu. Badanie CBOS*. [Polish religious landscape - from a distant perspective. CBOS study]. Warsaw: Fundacja CBOS. p. 4.

menon of mass migration as a result of the armed conflict of war refugees from the neighbouring state, Ukraine, inhabited mostly by communities of a different confession - the Orthodox, whose percentage in Ukraine is over 60 percent of the population.⁴ This article is the result of a reflection on emerging claims that the Catholic Church in Poland is too passive or does too little to help the refugees. The help given by Polish Catholics to Ukrainian refugees after the Russian aggression of 2014 was, until the invasion of 24 February 2022, little known and omitted from studies on migration. Also within the political debate and among some commentators, Polish Catholics have been criticised in recent years for their indifference or even hostility towards the victims of war.⁵ There have also been voices of criticism regarding the supposed lack of help from the Catholic Church in Poland in the face of a huge wave of immigrants and war fugitives who have been coming from Ukraine to Polish territory since the end of February 2022.⁶

This publication analytically and synthetically investigates the events that took place following the outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine and the attitude of the Catholic Church in Poland towards the conflict between the two neighbouring countries of the Republic of Poland. The starting point for analysing the issue is the role of the Catholic Church in Poland in the second half of the 20th century and the involvement of Pope John Paul II, originally from that country, in the weakening and collapse of the Soviet Union. This process resulted in the emergence of new states such as Russia and Ukraine. Both countries, particularly Ukraine, became an area of missionary service for Polish priests and friars, as well as for social and humanitarian organisations linked to the Polish Catholic Church. In the text, the author presents the degree of involvement of Catholic institutions in Poland and Catholics from that country in the two phases of the Ukrainian conflict: the partial occupation of Crimea and Donbass since 2014, and then the Russian invasion of the entire territory of Ukraine, which took place on 24 February 2022, resulting in a phenomenon of migration of war refugees never before recorded in the history of Europe.⁷

1. John Paul II's spiritual and moral support for Ukraine

The Catholic Church in Poland has been strongly influenced by the teachings of Polish Pope John Paul II since 1978, as has the majority of Polish society where Catholics predominate. One of the cornerstones of the Catholic Church leader's teaching during his pontificate of almost 25 years was the freedom of nations that had remained under Soviet rule since the end of the Second World War. John Paul II's trip to Poland a few months after his election to the papal throne, during which in Warsaw the Pontiff asked in his famous prayer to God to "change the face" of the Polish land, resulted in excitement in society and actions to create a democratic political opposition, based on an informal alliance of workers and the Catholic Church. The Solidarity trade union (*Solidarność*), based on an extensive social programme and at the same time on the

4. Yakymenko, Y., Bychenko, A., Mishchenko, M. & Shangina, L. (2022). *Religion and Church in Ukrainian Society: 2000-2022. Sociological Study*. Kiev: Razumkov Centre. p. 4-6.

5. Neto M. (2021) *Auschwitz-Birkenau shouts: "Don't forget your past!"*. <https://agencia.ecclesia.pt/portal/auschwitz-birkenau-grita-nao-se-esquecam-do-vosso-passado/>

6. *Wąsik ostro odpowiedział Ochojskiej: Mi się Pani kojarzy z Putinem* [Wasik replied harshly to Ochojska: You remind me of Putin]. (2022). <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/10654603/wasik-ostro-odpowiedzial-ochojkskiej-mi-sie-pani-kojarzy-z-putinem.html>

7. Zatyka, M. (2022). *The broken border on the Bug River*. *Diário de Notícias*. 21.11.2022. p. 18-19.

Church's Social Doctrine, led Poland out of communism and onto the path of systemic transformation, which was closely followed and supported by Pope John Paul II, who in the early years of post-communist Poland visited his country six times. His presence and support was evident not only in relation to his native Poland, which was emerging from undemocratic rule, but also in relation to other former Eastern Bloc countries, including the former Soviet republics, to which the leader of the Catholic Church began making frequent pilgrimages in the 1990s. One of his most important visits was the apostolic trip to Ukraine in 2001, which many analysts⁸ and politicians believe strengthened the foundations of Ukrainian national identity.⁹ At the time, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma himself commented on the importance of this apostolic trip as an event that served to popularise the Ukrainian cause around the world.¹⁰ The Ukrainian head of state emphasised that the Polish Pope's pilgrimage was the most important event in the ten years of independence of this young country, inhabited by a majority of Orthodox believers. The testimonies of the Ukrainian faithful published during John Paul II's pilgrimage and even the opinions expressed by representatives of Ukraine's Orthodox hierarchy proved that the Pope's apostolic journey had erased the division between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West in the minds of Ukrainians. It turned out that only the Orthodox hierarchs loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate protested against the papal visit to Ukraine, while representatives of the other two Orthodox Churches - the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Kyiv Patriarchate - welcomed the Polish Pope with joy. Both, four years after the Russian aggression against Crimea and Donbass during the unification council held on 15 December 2018, joined together to create the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which on 5 January 2019 received the decree of ecclesial independence from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The initiative was supported by just two Ukrainian Orthodox Church hierarchs obedient to the Moscow Patriarchate.¹¹

The same division - for or against Moscow rather than for or against the Vatican - was repeated later during Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, when a wave of public protests erupted in the country following fraudulent elections. In the end, the pro-European candidate of the so-called Orange Coalition, Viktor Yushchenko, emerged as the victor of the elections, beating the pro-Russian politician Viktor Yanukovich. According to some authors, there are similarities between the effect of John Paul II's trip to Ukraine in 2001 on the Orange Revolution and the effect his papal visit in 1979 had on Poland, where he triggered the formation of a democratic opposition based on the Solidarity trade union.¹²

The papal pilgrimage to Ukraine valorised its people, becoming a major boost for Ukrainians' self-identification. It strengthened their national identity and pride and increased their self-confidence. It also strengthened the position of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, a

8. Przebinda, G. (2001). *Większa Europa. Papież wobec Rosji i Ukrainy* [Greater Europe. The Pope vis-à-vis Russia and Ukraine]. Kraków: Znak. p. 255-256.

9. Kowal, P. (2017). *The Last Jagiellonian: John Paul II and the Jagiellonian Idea*. *Politeja*. Vol. 14, nr 51, s. 117-140.

10. Dziurdzińska, N. (2021). *Były prezydent Kuczma: goszczenie Jana Pawła II było dla nas zaszczytem*. [Former president Kuchma: Receiving John Paul II was an honour for us]. *Dzieje.pl*. <https://dzieje.pl/dziedzictwo-kulturowe/b-prezydent-kuczma-goszczenie-jana-pawla-ii-bylo-dla-nas-zaszczytem>

11. Szewczuk, S., Tomasiak, K. (2023). *Bóg nie opuścił Ukrainy* [God has not abandoned Ukraine], Kraków: WAM. p. 20-55.

12. Potocki, R., Stec, A. & Kucz, L. (2008). *Lekcja Majdanu* [Lesson from Maidan]. Częstochowa: Instytut Geopolityki. p. 107.

Church in full communion with the Supreme Pontiff, of Byzantine rite, which has almost 5 million faithful in Ukraine. During his visit to Lviv, he strengthened the memory of this Church persecuted by the Kremlin, which was banned from functioning between 1946 and 1987. On the last day of his visit, he celebrated Mass during which, in the presence of 1.5 million faithful, he beatified 28 members of this Church, almost all of whom had been martyred or persecuted by the Soviet regime.¹³

During his visit, the Polish Pope was the first head of state to speak to the Ukrainian people in their mother tongue. In addition, in his homilies to the Ukrainians, he presented a different view of Ukrainian history and tradition from that of the USSR, with Moscow ceasing to be a “big brother” and becoming a “little sister”. The Pope recalled that the Christianisation of Rus began in 988 in Kiev, i.e. at a time when there were only forests on the site of present-day Moscow. The Pope traced the ancestry of modern Ukrainians back to the mighty Rus of Kiev. Not only did he state that Kiev was the cradle of Christianity in Eastern Slavonia, but he also compared the city to Jerusalem and the Dniepre River to the Jordan River. He also pointed out that the spiritual roots of Kiev Rus come from European civilisation. In Kiev, the leader of the Catholic Church said that Ukraine’s special vocation was to be “a border and a gateway between East and West”, “a privileged crossroads of different cultures, a meeting point between the cultural riches of East and West”.¹⁴ From the outset, the Orange Revolution was guided by the same logic of the fusion of East and West, as the Pope pointed out earlier, as opposed to the logic of the clash between East and West, which the circle of Ukrainian oligarchs and pro-Russian politicians believed in.¹⁵

John Paul II’s trip to Ukraine brought a large number of compatriots of the Pope, who died in 2005, especially young people, as well as Polish clergy to this neighbouring Polish country. The Pope was also accompanied on this pilgrimage by a large number of Polish priests who had already worked in Ukraine at the time. In the following years the phenomenon would deepen with the continuous influx of Polish priests and nuns into Ukrainian missions. In the early years of independence, members of the Polish Church provided an important bridge between the two societies in the neighbouring countries. Before the Russian invasion of 2014, there were more than 600 Polish priests and nuns living in Ukraine, in territory undergoing a strong process of secularisation, where within the borders of the USSR state atheism was promoted for seven decades.

The first Polish priests began arriving in Ukraine in larger groups with the dynamisation of the Catholic Church and the renewal of the structure of the Catholic hierarchy in Ukraine by Pope John Paul II in January 1991, and the appointment of bishops for Lviv, Kamianets-Podilskyi and Jitomir. A year later, on 8 February 1992, Ukraine established diplomatic relations with the Holy See. The following years brought further development of ecclesiastical structures in Ukraine: in 1993 the Pope established an apostolic administration for the Latin rite faithful of Transcarpathia, and three years later the Diocese of Lutsk resumed its activities. In 2002, the dioceses

13. Gronek M. (2022). Gronek M. (2022). *Papież Jan Paweł II w 2001 r.: Światłością Ukrainy bądź ty, Kijowie*. [Pope John Paul II in 2001: May the light of Ukraine be you, Kiev], Dzieje.pl. <https://dzieje.pl/dziedzictwo-kulturowe/papiez-jan-pawel-ii-w-2001-r-swiatloscia-ukrainy-badz-ty-kijowie>

14. John Paul II (2001). *Papal homilies during his visit to Ukraine*. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010624_ucraina.html

15. Górny, G. (2005). *Papież i pomarańczowa rewolucja* [Pope and the orange revolution]. Przewodnik Katolicki. 3/2005. <https://www.przewodnik-katolicki.pl/Archiwum/2005/Przewodnik-Katolicki-3-2005/Spoleczenstwo/Papiez-i-pomaraneczowa-rewolucja>

of Mukachevo, Kharkiv-Zaporijia and Odessa-Simferopol were created.¹⁶

Mutual relations between the two nations have also intensified as a result of the increased influx of Ukrainian citizens to Poland over the last two decades, mainly in search of work. A number of Ukrainians have found employment in church structures, both in parishes and in Catholic organisations and companies linked to the Catholic Church, such as publishing houses. In some Polish cities, such as Warsaw or Wrocław, with a significant increase in the number of Ukrainians, the Church established pastoral services for the people of the East. After the 2014 invasion, groups of refugees began arriving in Poland from areas occupied by the Russian armed forces in Crimea and Donbass. This meant that the number of Ukrainian citizens in Poland before the Russian invasion in February 2022 already exceeded one and a half million people. According to the Polish authorities, between February 2014, when the Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine began, and January 2016, around 1 million Ukrainian citizens moved to Poland.¹⁷

2. The support of the Catholic Church in Poland for Ukrainian citizens after the 2014 Russian invasion

With the invasion of Ukraine launched by Russia in 2014, based on its hybrid form of warfare, there was an increased interest on the part of Polish society in helping its eastern neighbour and its people. Poland's support flowed to the occupied regions of Crimea and Donbass in various ways, mainly through transports of food and medicine, as well as through financial support after collections were delivered to those affected by the armed conflict. Important aid was channelled through Polish clergy who continued to work in the territories occupied by Russian forces and pro-Russian separatists. Several Polish missionary priests began to be responsible for organising humanitarian aid actions. Even before the end of 2014, Polish Caritas had already launched regular aid to Ukraine attacked by Moscow's forces. The support initially focussed on helping refugee families from Donetsk and Crimea, as well as medical and social assistance.¹⁸ This form of aid continued in the following years, with the value of the money fluctuating around 100,000 zloty (PLN).¹⁹ As part of this support, Polish Caritas helped set up medical and social centres and supported educational initiatives such as the running of crèches and kindergartens.²⁰

Catholics from Poland also provided direct assistance to parishes where Polish priests were working in Russian-occupied Crimea. It helped that one of the people responsible for this type of activity was Polish Bishop Jacek Pyl, auxiliary bishop of the local diocese of Odessa-Symferopol. The priests he led focused mainly on distributing aid from Poland via Caritas structures to the Caritas SPES organisation, which operates in Crimea. The fact that this organisation is also led by a Pole, Father Piotr Rosochacki, helped in the agile distribution of the support provided in Poland, based on donations. Support became more complicated after the internationally un-

16. Niedziela (2021). *Przed 30 laty św. Jan Paweł II wskrzesił łacińską hierarchię katolicką na Ukrainie* [30 years ago St John Paul II revived the Latin Catholic hierarchy in Ukraine]. <https://www.niedziela.pl/artykul/63747/Przed-30-laty-sw-Jan-Pawel-II-wskrzesil>

17. Zatyka, M. (2018). *Poland wants to change EU migration quota*. *Folha de S. Paulo*. 22.09.2018. p. 22.

18. Rudnicka, I. (2014). *Kościół katolicki na Krymie w obliczu okupacji rosyjskiej* [The Catholic Church in Crimea in the face of Russian occupation]. *Słowo Polskie*. no. 10 (27). p. 13.

19. Caritas Polska. (2022). *Gotowi na pomoc dla Ukrainy* [Ready to help Ukraine]. <https://caritas.pl/blog/2022/02/23/gotowi-na-pomoc-dla-ukrainy/>

20. Caritas Polska. (2015). *Ukraina: Transport Caritas Polska z pomocą humanitarną dotarł do Zaporozża* [Ukraine: Caritas Poland's humanitarian aid transport has reached Zaporizhzhia]. <https://caritas.pl/blog/2015/06/17/ukraina-transport-caritas-polska-z-pomoca-humanitarna-dotarl-zaporoza/>

recognised referendum organised by Moscow on the peninsula on 16 March 2014. One of the consequences of the referendum were new rules from the Russian authorities, which discriminated against religious communities to the detriment of the Moscow Patriarchate. Under these, all religious communities had to re-register under Russian law.

The problem, however, was that the Russian administration imposed too many formal requirements that made the registration process difficult. The new regulations invalidated the previous documents issued by the Ukrainian authorities that allowed foreign priests, friars and nuns, mostly Polish, to remain in Crimea. Some of them had to leave the territories occupied by the Russian army because they didn't have the appropriate visa.²¹

A similar situation prevailed in the areas of the Donbass occupied by pro-Russian separatists in 2014, where Polish priests were also working. It was largely through them that even before the occupation of this part of Ukraine, aid was realised through the Eastern Church Aid Team set up within the framework of the Polish Bishops' Conference. It was inaugurated in 1989 on the initiative of the then Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp. This institution, which directed its assistance to the former republics of the USSR, including Ukraine, initially focused its tasks on activities through religious centres. From the 1990s onwards, the forms of assistance expanded and diversified: from sending literature, spiritual support and renovating churches, to providing material aid. In just the first six months after the start of the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, the Polish Catholic Church through the Eastern Church Aid Team distributed several tonnes of food in the occupied region, due to growing shortages in the shops. Similar aid was also distributed to the Donbass, where the situation had become chaotic and dangerous with the military interventions of pro-Russian separatists.²²

In 2014, a campaign called "Polish Hospitality" began in the Ukrainian regions occupied by Kremlin-backed forces. The initiative was launched by the Polish Catholic Church in the first months after the start of the Russian invasion and was based on temporary invitations to Poland for Ukrainian families from the areas affected by the military aggression. This initiative, as well as others carried out within the framework of the Eastern Church Aid Team, were based on collections made among Polish Catholics. After the Russian invasion of 2014, each subsequent year more than half of this budget, estimated at around PLN 2.5 million, was sent to Ukraine. Most of this support was humanitarian in nature and served mainly to help set up canteens, support orphanages and people in need, as well as fund educational campaigns, youth retreats and children's holiday camps.²³

3. Actions of the Polish Catholic Church after Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022

Although, according to some opinions, the Polish authorities and the country's Catholic Church institutions have an allegedly negative attitude towards receiving refugees²⁴, between the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict in 2014 and the end of 2015, more than 500,000 Ukrainians

21. Grajewski, A. (2015). *Kościół na Krymie wraca do działalności w podziemiu* [The Church in Crimea returns to clandestine activities]. *Słowo Polskie*. <https://slowopolskie.org/kocio-na-krymie-wraca-do-podziemia/>

22. *Gazeta Prawna* (2014). *150 ton darów. Organizacje pomocowe w konwoju na Ukrainę* [150 tonnes of donations. Humanitarian aid organisations on a transport to Ukraine]. <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/842536,150-ton-darow-organizacje-pomocowe-w-konwoju-na-ukraine.html>

23. Caritas.pl. (2014). *Pomoc katolikom na Wschodzie* [Aid to Catholics in the East]. <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/2272701.Pomoc-katolikom-na-Wschodzie>

24. Neto M. (2021) *Auschwitz-Birkenau shouts: "Don't forget your past!"*. <https://agencia.ecclesia.pt/portal/auschwitz-birkenau-grita-nao-se-esquecam-do-vosso-passado/>

were received in Poland.²⁵ Both the Polish state and Polish communities and organisations, including the Catholic Church, became even more involved after the Russian aggression against the whole of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Aid was organised both in Poland and in the Ukraine occupied by the invader. This attitude of Polish Catholics, according to Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, president of the Polish Bishops' Conference, has overturned a myth in the world press that the Catholic Church in Poland is closed to refugees.²⁶

The Catholic Church in Poland was one of the first institutions to respond to the Russian military attack on Ukraine on 24 December 2022.²⁷ On the same day, the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Gądecki, condemned the actions of Russia and its President Vladimir Putin in a statement declaring them responsible for an unacceptable and shameful act of barbarism directed against the sovereignty and independence of an independent state. The Polish bishops had already warned the authorities of the Russian Orthodox Church before the invasion began, calling for action to stop the escalation of the conflict and avert war. On 14 February 2022, they received a response to their firm appeal from the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Cyril I. In a document addressed to the Polish church authorities, the Russian spiritual leader demanded that the Polish bishops dissuade Polish politicians from making aggressive statements about Russia and the war.²⁸

A second letter, sent on 2 March by the bishops of the Polish Catholic Church to the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, remained unanswered. In the document, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki explicitly called on Patriarch Cyril I to appeal to Vladimir Putin to withdraw the Russian armed forces from Ukraine. The President of the Polish Bishops' Conference also called on the Orthodox leader to influence Russian soldiers not to take part in an unjust war and to refuse to follow orders that result in numerous war crimes. The document received a broad wave of support from church representatives in European countries. Following Cyril I's silence, the Polish Archbishop in April publicly described the Patriarch's attitude towards the war as eminently anti-evangelical. He pointed out that his actions could not be justified by the Gospel. Both Gądecki and other Polish bishops compare the Russian invasion of Ukraine to the biblical battle between David and Goliath, calling on their faithful to take the side of the weakest in this conflict - that is, the Ukrainians.²⁹

The Polish Catholic Church's forms of moral support for Ukraine included not only numerous prayers and appeals to the Russian Orthodox Church, but also diplomatic actions. One of them was the trip on 17 May 2022 of three Polish archbishops to Ukraine: Stanisław Gądecki, Stanisław Budzik and Wojciech Polak. The visit was intended to show that the Roman Catholic Church in Poland stands in solidarity with Ukraine and aims to outline a common future and shape the development of relations between the ecclesiastical structures of Poland and Ukraine in

25. Dobroczek, G., Puzyrkiewicz, J. & Chmielewska, I. (2016). *Nowa fala migracji obywateli Ukrainy do Polski* [New wave of migration of Ukrainian citizens to Poland]. *Obserwator Finansowy*. <https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/tematyka/makroekonomia/trendy-gospodarcze/nowa-fala-migracji-obywateli-ukrainy-do-polski/>

26. Polskie Radio 24 (2022). *Runął mit o ksenofobii Polaków* [The myth of Polish xenophobia has fallen apart]. <https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/artykul/3093816,runal-mit-o-ksenofobii-polakow-abp-stanislaw-gadecki-o-przyjeciu-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy>

27. Zatyka, M. (2022). *Poland: a non-indifferent neighbour of Ukraine*. *Diário de Notícias*. 6.11.2022.p.18-19.

28. Gosc.pl. (2022). *Abp Gądecki dostał odpowiedź od patriarchy Cyryla I, który popiera atak Putina na Ukrainę* [Archbishop Gądecki received a response from Patriarch Cyril I, who supports Putin's attack on Ukraine]. <https://misyjne.pl/abp-gadecki-dostal-odpowiedz-od-patriarchy-cyryla-i-ktory-popiera-atak-putina-na-ukraine/>

29. KAI. (2022). *Abp Gądecki: Wojna w Ukrainie to nie tylko jej sprawa* [Archbishop Gądecki: The war in Ukraine is not just your business]. <https://www.ekai.pl/abp-gadecki-wojna-w-ukrainie-to-nie-tylko-jej-sprawa-ale-i-polski-a-takze-calej-europy/>

various fields: religious, spiritual and humanitarian.³⁰ After their return on 21 May, the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Gądecki, called on Catholics to show their support for the Ukrainian people suffering from the war. The Polish bishops' trip was the first visit by such a high-level foreign religious delegation to war-torn Ukraine.³¹

The main form of aid given to the attacked Ukraine and its citizens by the Polish Catholic Church was charitable actions, especially support for the victims of the war. These initiatives included aid to people fleeing Ukraine, as well as Ukrainian citizens who remained in the country. According to communiqués from the Polish Bishops' Conference, the first large convoys of food and hygiene products were sent to the main cities in eastern Ukraine a few days after the attacks began, including Donetsk and Mariupol. The aid operations there were carried out in co-operation with the Polish Bishops' Team for Aid to the Church in the East. From late February to July 2022, this institution organised several dozen initiatives for the victims of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These included not only sending material aid to that country, but also campaigns to organise temporary residence for Ukrainian war refugees in Poland or holidays for Ukrainian children.³²

The Catholic Church in Poland was one of the first institutions to organise large-scale aid for Ukrainian refugees. It also called on its faithful to support the victims of war through concrete acts. In March 2022, the Migration, Tourism and Pilgrimage Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference thanked Polish society for its "authentic witness of a truly humanitarian and Christian attitude". It suggested that further efforts should be made to prevent the collective accommodation of immigrants. A suggestion was made for each Ukrainian family to be "adopted" within the framework of aid by several Polish families.³³

War refugees from Ukraine were also given the right support and welcome in Polish parishes and convents, monasteries and retreat houses, as well as indirectly through Polish missionaries operating in Ukraine, who provided shelter for migrants inside the country attacked by Russia. Their parishes were also reception and distribution points for material aid delivered by Polish Catholics. In just four weeks since the start of the Russian invasion, the Polish Catholic Church has handed over 100,000 euros to Ukrainian charities and sent 147 lorries and 180 minibuses to Ukraine, mainly with food.³⁴

For the first time, the scale and complexity of the Polish Catholic Church's aid to Ukraine was presented in a report published in April 2022 by the Statistical Institute of the Catholic Church (ISKK) in Warsaw.³⁵ The document showed that Polish parishes and religious orders donated a total of PLN 242.3 million to help the refugees. Between 24 February and 31 March, Catholic Church institutions in Poland provided accommodation for 319,000 people fleeing Ukraine because of the war. The authors of the document indicated that 145,400 Ukrainian children received care during this period. According to ISKK, on average a Polish parish supported Ukrainians

30. Archidiecezja Gnieźnieńska (2022). *Biskupi pojechali na Ukrainę* [The bishops travelled to Ukraine]. <https://archidiecezja.pl/biskupi-pojechali-na-ukraine/>

31. Epoznan.pl. (2022). *Biskupi wrócili z Ukrainy* [Bishops returned from Ukraine]. <https://epoznan.pl/news-news-129151-biskupi-wrocili-z-ukrainy-od-wygranej-lub-przegranej-ukrainy-zalezy-takze-nasz-los>

32. Jusupowa, W. (2022). *Marsz Ukraińców w podzięce dla Polski* [The march of Ukrainians in gratitude to Poland]. *Słowo Polskie*. no. 6 (119). p. 8.

33. Komunikat Rady Konferencji Episkopatu Polski ds. Migracji, Turystyki i Pielgrzymek ws. pomocy uchodźcom z Ukrainy [Communiqué of the Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference on Migration, Tourism and Pilgrimages on assistance to refugees from Ukraine]. 14.03.2022. Warsaw.

34. Gosc.pl. (2022). *Dyrektor Caritas Polska: Pomagamy w Ukrainie i Polsce, na bieżąco i długoterminowo* [Director of Caritas Poland: We are helping in Ukraine and Poland, continuously and in the long term]. <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/7407835.Dyrektor-Caritas-Polska-Pomagamy-w-Ukrainie-i-w-Polsce-na>

35. ISKK (2022). *Pomoc uchodźcom z Ukrainy przez katolickie parafie i zakony w Polsce. Aid to refugees from Ukraine by parishes and convents in Poland*. Warsaw: Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego.

financially with approximately PLN 10,000.³⁶

The Polish Church's assistance to refugees increased in the following months, mainly thanks to the structures of Caritas Poland, which since the end of February 2022 has provided regular support to people affected by the hostilities of the war in Ukraine. These actions were mainly based on the creation of aid points at the border where help continues to be provided to refugees who enter the territory of the Republic of Poland on a daily basis. Statistics and surveys confirm that aid has been provided since the beginning of the conflict. According to data from the Polish Institute of Economics published in July 2022, more than 77 per cent of the Polish population had declared that they would help Ukrainian war victims. In total, Poles had spent almost PLN 10 billion for this purpose, twice as much as on all charitable actions in 2021. For its part, the Polish state donated PLN 15.9 billion, or 3.3 billion euros, to help Ukrainian victims of the Russian invasion.³⁷

After a year of Russia's invasion of the entire territory of Ukraine, Polish Catholics provided multifaceted assistance to Ukrainian war refugees: they gave financial and material aid like never before, organised transport to Ukraine, provided reception posts, medical care and guaranteed access to Polish public schools for the children of Ukrainian refugees. The scale of the financial assistance is not easy to estimate, as it was widespread, often grassroots in nature and based on the co-operation of many institutions, communities and individuals. According to the estimates of the Polish Bishops' Conference, in the first year of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Church in Poland, through Caritas Poland and diocesan Caritas, provided support in various forms to more than 2 million refugees. The value of aid in the form of shelter, meals, food parcels and other goods, and integration assistance totalled around PLN 337 million, or the equivalent of 73.6 million euros. From the first days of the war, the Polish Catholic Church through Caritas Polska also helped Ukrainians who remained in their country, sending transports of humanitarian aid to Ukraine worth around PLN 260 million. This support would have been more difficult without the Polish clergy who remained in war-torn Ukraine: 257 Polish priests, 22 friars and 126 nuns working in Ukraine, involved in helping their parishioners and the residents of the centres they run, such as homes for the elderly, reception centres for single mothers, orphaned children or the homeless. Polish clergy also continue to help local internally displaced migrants in Ukraine, who have found refuge in almost every parish, centre or monastery where Polish clergy work. It is estimated that during the first year of the war, a record number of over 1,000 lorries were sent to Ukraine on the initiative of the Polish Catholic Church. The lorries contained mainly food, medical supplies, clothing and electricity generators.³⁸

The implementation of aid by the Polish Catholic Church to Ukrainian refugees was accompanied by Russian propaganda. Media outlets subordinate to the Kremlin since the beginning of the war were involved in spreading false information or messages that served to create divisions between Poles and Ukrainians.³⁹ Russian propagandists tried to downplay the amount of aid provided by Polish social organisations, including the Catholic Church, suggesting that many Ukrainian refugees remained on Polish territory in difficult conditions, living in collective housing and desperately seeking other countries of refuge. In addition, the Kremlin also released information about alleged poor Polish-Ukrainian relations and frequently recalled the antagonism

36. Ibid

37. PIE. (2022). *Pomoc polskiego społeczeństwa dla uchodźców z Ukrainy* [Polish society's assistance to refugees from Ukraine]. Warsaw: Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, p. 3-20.

38. Gosc.pl. (2023). *Kościół w Polsce pomaga Ukrainie* [The Church in Poland helps Ukraine]. <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/8097153.Kosciol-w-Polsce-pomaga-Ukrainie-roczny-bilans-wsparcia>

39. Bryjka, F. (2022). *Rosyjska dezinformacja na temat ataku na Ukrainę* [Russian disinformation about the attack on Ukraine]. Komentarz PISM. no. 15/2022. p.1-2.

that existed over the massacres committed in the 1940s by Ukrainian nationalists, who killed tens of thousands of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia during ethnic cleansing. Among the victims of these massacres were also representatives of the Polish Catholic Church.⁴⁰

The strong commitment of Poles to help Ukraine and welcome several million refugees from that country has been repeatedly affirmed by Pope Francis since March 2022. On 13 April 2022, marking the mass reception in Poland of war refugees from Ukraine, he said that “Poles have become a family” for Ukrainian refugees by opening their homes to them. On 28 December 2022, during an end-of-year general audience, he thanked “the Polish people for all the help they are giving to the Ukrainian people”.⁴¹ Two days later, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Archbishop Svyatoslav Shevchuk, also addressed the Polish Bishops’ Conference to thank Polish Catholics for the help offered to Ukrainian refugees. He emphasised that it was Polish Catholics who were behind the support for invaded Ukraine and its people. In an interview with the Catholic Information Agency (KAI), Archbishop Shevchuk said that he would like to thank the Catholic Church in Poland in a special way. - The spontaneous help shown to Ukraine is nothing less than a proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ. We are fully aware that the Poles are helping us in the name of the Lord. This is the testimony of a truly believing nation,” said the leader of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.⁴²

Conclusion

This article aims to present the attitude of the Catholic Church in Poland towards the ongoing war in Ukraine and its effects, especially with regard to the mass migration of Ukrainian citizens. Poland is the destination most often chosen by these refugees. In the first year of the war, the country received more than 10 million Ukrainian refugees. The author of the text, analysing the situation since 2014, when the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of part of eastern Ukraine by the army of the Russian Federation took place, followed by the Russian invasion of all Ukrainian territory, which began on 24 February 2022, presents the commitment of the Catholic Church in Poland to spiritual and material aid to Ukraine. This issue seems to be ignored in the world media, despite the fact that this support is large and provided in various forms. Although the Polish Catholic Church doesn’t make a big deal of its actions, looking at the scale of the aid given to Ukrainian war refugees, it is very effective.

Analysing the Catholic Church’s spiritual and moral support for Ukraine, which became independent in 1991 following the collapse of the USSR, the author starts from the pontificate of Polish-born Pope John Paul II, who contributed to the end of the Soviet empire and through his pilgrimage to Ukraine in 2001, gave spiritual and moral support to this young state. In recent years, this work has been continued by the Catholic Church in Poland, a neighbouring country to Ukraine. During the first phase of the conflict in 2014, Polish priests, friars and nuns remained in the occupied territory. Nor did they abandon it after the large-scale Russian invasion in 2022. Meanwhile, Catholic Church entities in Poland, such as parishes, institutions linked to men’s and women’s religious orders, were significantly and intensively involved in organising and coordinating support for refugees, both at national and local level. In addition to material support, psychological, medical and educational assistance was also provided, as well as preparation for independent life in Poland. Equally important was the activity of the Catholic Church through initiatives of a diplomatic na-

40. Al Jazeera (2022). *Poland marks World War II-era massacre by Ukrainian nationalists*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/11/poland-marks-wwii-era-massacre-by-ukrainian-nationalists>

41. Tygodnik Idziemy (2023), *Ze świata* [From the world]. no. 1/2023. p. 6-9.

42. Szewczuk, S. (2022). *Za pomoc Ukrainie szczególnie chciałbym podziękować Kościołowi w Polsce* [For helping Ukraine, I would especially like to thank the Church in Poland]. <https://kair.ekai.pl/depesza/628391/show?q=%C5%9Awiatos%C5%82aw>