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## **TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOTERIOLOGICAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR**

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*The article analyzes the transformation of the soteriological teaching of the dogmatic theology of Christian churches in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It was established that the full-scale invasion of the Russian army into Ukraine affected most of the life and social processes. Church teaching is also at the stage of transformation, in particular, soteriological views on human life, its value and purpose. It has been proven that the key feature of the Russian-Ukrainian war is its religious colouring and justification. Traditional church dogmatic teaching unequivocally condemns war as a manifestation of the mortal sin of murder. It has been established that the modern circumstances of social uncertainty and existential challenges are changing the doctrine of salvation. Today there is a revaluation of social values and human existence. The new document of the Russian All-People's Council "Order" and its provisions on "holy war" testify to radical changes in the soteriological teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church in the world. The situation of Ukrainian citizens in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, who found themselves in a state of social uncertainty and existential threat, is analyzed. A significant number of the population was forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in the countries of Western Europe. The events in Ukraine proved the search for a new paradigm for the existence of Christians in the world. This contributes to the latest reassessment of the meanings and values of human life. It is proved that classical Christian soteriology is not a universal paradigm in the conditions of war and secularization processes. It has been established that the theory of protecting the native land in the name of one's own church tradition is gaining new relevance. After the start of the full-scale invasion, the problem of martyrdom took on new contours. It is claimed that scientists and theologians of all Christian denominations should unite and develop their own vision and understanding of human life and salvation in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war.*

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**Key words:** social existence, social uncertainty, soteriology, salvation, military aggression, European dimension, existential challenges.

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## ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ СОТЕРІОЛОГІЧНОГО ВЧЕННЯ ХРИСТІЯНСЬКИХ ЦЕРКОВ В УМОВАХ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

А. Р. Кобетяк

У статті проаналізовано трансформацію сотеріологічного вчення догматичного богослов'я християнських церков в умовах російсько-української війни. Встановлено, що повномасштабне вторгнення російської армії в Україну вплинуло на більшість життєвих і соціальних процесів. На стадії трансформації перебуває і церковне вчення, зокрема сотеріологічні погляди на людське життя, його цінність і призначення. Доведено, що характерною особливістю російсько-української війни є її релігійне забарвлення та виправдання. Традиційне церковно-догматичне вчення однозначно засуджує війну, як прояв смертного гріха – вбивства. Встановлено, що сучасні обставини соціальної невизначеності та екзистенційних викликів змінюють вчення про спасіння. Сьогодні відбувається переоцінка соціальних цінностей і буття людини. Новий документ Російського всенародного собору "Наказ" та його положення про "священну війну" свідчать про кардинальні зміни у сотеріологічному вченні Російської православної церкви у світі. Проаналізовано становище українських громадян в умовах російсько-української війни, які опинилися у стані соціальної невизначеності та екзистенційної загрози. Значна кількість населення вимушено покинули власні домівки та шукати притулку в країнах Західної Європи. Події в Україні засвідчили пошук нової парадигми існування християн у світі. Це сприяє новітній переоцінці сенсів і цінностей життя людини. Доведено, що класична християнська сотеріологія не є універсальною парадигмою в умовах війни та секуляризаційних процесах. Встановлено, що нової актуалізації набуває теорія захисту рідної землі в ім'я власної церковної традиції. Після початку повномасштабного вторгнення проблема мучеництва набула нових обрисів. Стверджується, що вчені і теологи всіх християнських конфесій повинні об'єднатися і напрацювати власне бачення і розуміння життя і порятунку людини в умовах російсько-української війни.

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**Ключові слова:** соціальне буття, соціальна невизначеність, сотеріологія, спасіння, військова агресія, європейський вимір, екзистенційні виклики.

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**Formulation of the problem.** The Russian-Ukrainian situation gave impetus to the civilizational choice of Ukrainian Christian denominations. Since 2014, the ideological and military aggression of the Russian Federation has become a catalyst for the social life of Christian denominations in Ukraine. The events after February 24, 2022 confirmed the polarization of positions regarding national and religious self-identification and the future civilizational choice of the state. The relevance of the chosen topic is related to the understanding of the "eternal" problem of war, its consequences and the Christian reflection of this process, because millions of Ukrainian citizens found themselves in a state of social uncertainty and existential threat. The philosophy of life and death is a red thread running through the history of human existence. Military-philosophical thought, religious theology and justification of war are components of

culture, a product of social progress and at the same time factors of its creation. In the conditions of such social uncertainty and existential challenges, a new paradigm of soteriological understanding of the mission and purpose of human life in the world is being created by Christian denominations.

With the beginning of the military invasion of Ukrainian lands in 2014, the intensity of existential meanings in the military reality caused a new deep and valuable meaning of the very phenomenon of human life. Open war in the 21st century sharpened fears and awareness of death, directed the individual to understand the value of life and realize it as the highest gift.

Religious organizations represented in Ukraine cannot remain aloof from military processes. Often, in difficult life circumstances, which war is undoubtedly, a person looks for salvation and peace of

mind precisely in faith. Thousands of families were separated, many women and children left abroad, tens of thousands of women, mothers and children are waiting for their soldiers-protectors alive at home. All these experiences caused a certain religious surge. Out of hopelessness, people turn to God with hope. Another important aspect is the religious understanding of war and the sin of murder. Soteriological aspects acquire a new meaning in this vein. Killing is a sin, and protecting the Fatherland is a holy God-pleasing cause, and the evidence of this is the large number of soldiers who are included among the saints. In addition, to die in the pain of battle defending the Motherland means fulfilling the greatest commandment: "Greater love hath no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 13:15). The research is one of the first scientific explorations of the new soteriological understanding of the value of life and human salvation, which is being shaped by the civilized Christian world as a response to the distorted political religious-political teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is one of the largest Christian organizations in Europe.

**Analysis of scientific research and publications.** The problem of overestimating human existence is not new at all, but it appears every time in peak, critical situations. Today, such a challenge is Russia's war against Ukraine and the entire peaceful world. Millions of Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes, a large part of them sought refuge in the countries of Western Europe. The vast majority of Ukrainians are Orthodox, and Europeans are Catholics or Protestants. Therefore, in Europe, our citizens encountered not only difficulties related to moving, finding housing, work, social adaptation, but also another religious dimension. The new messianic and soteriological teaching characteristic of Europeans is somewhat different from that which the Orthodox faced. This poses new challenges for our citizens, who today are scattered across different countries. In this context, the work of S. Robek, who offers a new methodology for restoring

ecumenical aspirations, is valuable. In difficult times caused by a military invasion, it is the Christians who should be the examples of support, unification for the sake of repelling the common enemy. The new work of the American scholar Samuel Parkinson, "One Baptism for the Remission of Sins: A Study of the Harmony Between Christian Platonism, Reformation, Soteriology, and Credo-Baptism," is important, in which the modern transformation of the soteriological understanding of man's place in the era of the threat of global and possibly nuclear war is highlighted. Another modern scientist who studies the issue of soteriology in the challenges of the new social existence of man is the Dutch theologian and sociologist Stefan Paas. Two of his new articles were used in the work "Ministers on Salvation: Soteriological Views of Pioneers and Pastors in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands" and "Soteriology in Evangelical Practice: A View from the Street", which are fundamental developments of a new understanding of the mission and salvation of man in the era of global transformations. The basis of classical research in the direction of soteriology and confessional existence is traditionally the works of A. Baumeister, I. Bogachevska, V. Bondarenko, K. Govorun, V. Dokash, A. Kolodny, V. Lyubashchenko, Yu. Reshetnikov, S. Sannikov, L. Filipovych, Yu. Chornomorets. Turning to the works of the mentioned authors contributed to the analysis of the transformations of the modern life of believers in the conditions of war and the formation of a new theological concept of human existence.

**The purpose of the article** is to study transformational processes in doctrinal church teaching, in particular soteriology, of Christian denominations in the European space in the conditions of open Russian aggression.

**Research methods.** In the proposed scientific investigation, the author relied on critical-analytical methodology, which contributes to the emphasis on praxeological teaching. It is the value of life, including the spiritual life, that is

especially acute in the critical conditions of existential challenges to the Ukrainian being. The hermeneutic method is valuable because soteriology is always connected to the Holy Scriptures, the church tradition and the teaching that is reflected in various texts. In general, the methodological approach proposed in the article has heuristic potential, because it describes the events of today, which do not currently have a perfect form, accordingly, the problems of rethinking human life and its values in the spiritual aspect will only arise, even after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war. At the same time, as for any scientific investigation, the traditional methods of comparative analysis are valuable for us, as we compare the soteriological approaches of the main Christian confessions, analysis, synthesis, historicism and others.

**Discussion and results.** For more than 10 years, a deadly war has been going on in the center of Europe, which has affected the fate of millions of Ukrainian citizens, and at the same time, the entire civilized world. In justifying the bloody dictatorial regime, the Russian Church offers its own "theology of peace", calling the war of aggression sacred, and the inhabitants of Europe – the "forces of world evil". Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants of the civilized world must develop their own approaches to renewing the doctrine of the purpose and purpose of human life and the possibility of soul salvation in the conditions of the genocide of the multi-million Ukrainian nation. The ecclesiastical and political teaching of the Russian Federation about the salvation of invading warriors is trying to fundamentally change the age-old perception of good and evil in the soteriological aspect.

The critical conditions of existence of Ukrainian citizens caused a reassessment of life and social values and landmarks. New soteriological approaches are being formed in the doctrine of the salvation of the human soul. During the 10 years of the Russian invasion, the situation only worsened significantly. Each of the residents of Ukraine stopped feeling safe. Inter-confessional and state-church

confrontations only exacerbate the spiritual crisis of our fellow citizens. The classical understanding of the meaning and goals of human life needs to be re-evaluated. Despite the fundamentality, conservatism and immutability of soteriology in all Christian denominations, today we increasingly find scientific research on the need to update social concepts, soteriological views and messianic attitudes.

Modern long-range military means force not only every citizen of Ukraine, but also the population of the world as a whole, to experience existential challenges caused by global wars. Today, they are directly related to the threat to the existence of Ukrainians and Ukrainian identity. This problem has created a state of suffering and social uncertainty for the whole people as an important component in experiencing crisis situations. At that time, suffering is a valuable existential experience with a soteriological context, which emphasizes the very fact of the existence of a person and the Ukrainian nation.

The key point of our research is one of the fundamental foundations of Christian teaching – soteriology. From the Greek – the doctrine of salvation (salvation of the soul). This is a section of theological science about the atonement and salvation of man (spiritually), which is part of the general dogmatic theology. Missiology (theological science that studies the preaching activity of the church, and also examines the methods the church uses to achieve evangelization) [8: 182] was always inspired by soteriology, that is, Christian views on salvation and the very purpose of human life. However, little is known about the true soteriological beliefs of people in emigration who face hardships and wanderings; people whose loved ones are at the front; the military themselves.

The basis of the soteriological teaching of all Christian denominations is the statement about the existence of eternal life after death. The body dies, but the soul is always alive. Accordingly, after the physical death of the body, the soul must have a certain place of its permanent residence. Fundamental at this point is

the division of human life into 2 periods: earthly and afterlife [3, p. 206]. The afterlife can proceed in different ways (heaven, hell, purgatory), depending on the teachings of different Christian branches. However, the culmination of the afterlife is the opportunity to be among the chosen, special righteous, saints. To determine one's own fate in the afterlife, every person is given earthly life as a certain exam, an exam period. And the heavenly (or underground) life is a consequence of the earthly exam. The righteous go to heaven, the sinners go to hell.

Such a traditional teaching, common to all Christians, is not new at all. Moreover, it is characteristic of most beliefs and religious traditions of the world. However, in the study, we propose to pay attention to the new paradigm of the existence of Christians in the world. Islamic extremism, terrible events in Syria, Yugoslavia, anti-Christian terrorist attacks in Europe and bloody war in Ukraine. New conditions and way of life of Christians in the postmodern era, new social and religious existence. Today, there is a reassessment of social values and human existence as a whole. We note that the church is currently also going through a difficult period. Secularization processes, even in the pre-war period, contributed to a decrease in the general level of religiosity and trust in church institutions, and, accordingly, to the devaluation of Christian values and fundamental doctrines [4: 203]. Church organizations were never able to unite to develop a new theology of peace, a new social and soteriological concept of human existence in a period of crisis. Hierarchs and theologians are making the first attempts to offer a new vision of the purpose and value of human life in the modern world. This significantly actualizes the chosen topic, because it is one of the first scientific investigations of the transformation of the soteriological teaching of Christian churches in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The normative soteriological narrative sketched above faces difficulties in today's secularized world. The main reason for this is that classical Christian soteriology

is not the universal paradigm that it is considered to be [14: 116]. Like any theology, it is rather rooted in certain historical socio-cultural circumstances that may no longer exist in most cultural conglomerates in the West. It originated and developed in certain missionary practices that are now often considered somewhat outdated and authoritarian. The manifestation of one's own religiosity is rather a tradition, observance of parental rites and customs, but not a way of life. In other words, the understanding of man's goals and salvation has changed significantly. In the face of global wars, Christian missionaries must confront the question of whether the existing theology of life and peace (of war) still resonates with a normative soteriological discourse that arose from long-ago and legitimized practices and doctrines.

The "Order" of the XXV World Russian People's Council, adopted in March, indicates radical changes in the soteriological teaching of the largest Orthodox Church in the world - the Russian Church. It is obvious that such decisions are dictated by the criminal political regime of the aggressor country. However, such documents are officially accepted at the church level, ratified and announced personally by Patriarch Kirill [5]. The key point of the document is the statement that a "holy war" is going on in Ukraine (on the lands of South-Western Russia) with the collective West and the criminal Kyiv regime. "Holy war" is positioned as a "saint" war, a confrontation for something true, good, bright. The name itself justifies everyone who participates in it. However, the classical soteriological teaching of Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox testifies otherwise. War is a mortal sin because it involves bloodshed. Murder is a mortal sin. Thus, in order to justify the bloody invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church changes the soteriological and missionary perception of war on a foreign land, justifying its actions by fighting "world evil".

Another important element of transformational processes in the modern understanding of human salvation and the

Christian mission as a whole is the secularized way of life of people in the postmodern era. Various studies illustrate that a certain "loss" of the world is felt in the soteriological aspect. Historically, there is a close relationship between views of salvation (soteriology) and missionary activity, not only in the sense that the overall strength of our soteriological beliefs influences missionary (preaching) activity and zeal, but also in the sense that salvation is considered to be the defining type of missionary activity [13: 67]. Preaching is a part of salvation, because it is one of the main commandments: therefore, go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep everything that I have commanded you... (Mt. 28:19,20). The issue of missionary work has become much more complicated in the conditions of modern confessional life and social uncertainty. Door-to-door preaching no longer works, even in active Protestant churches. Also, practicing Christians who come from devout, pious families are often perceived as old-fashioned. Believers today struggle with an "us and them" mentality in the narrative of their inherited tradition. In the context of the uncertain social existence of Ukrainians in emigration, these problems only become more complicated. Europeans, with their inherent values of the modern secularized world and a secondary attitude to religion, often perceive the religious beliefs of our fellow citizens with surprise. Believers, especially of the conservative Orthodox Church, face the feeling of subcultural isolation, the perception of an almost insurmountable "gap" between them and "believers of the European model" [3: 201].

Phenomena uncharacteristic for Ukraine in the church life of Europeans (official same-sex marriages, euthanasia, gay parades, women's priesthood) give rise to the dualism and triviality of the new confessional existence in the countries of Western Europe. Today's believers in a secular environment feel culturally isolated, even if they participate to a large extent in civil life. This causes a soteriological collapse. How can one save a

soul when there are only sinners around, because: "with the righteous you will be righteous and with the perfect man you will be perfect, with the chosen you will be chosen and with the corrupt you will be corrupt (2 Sam. 22:27,28). A logical question arises: is salvation possible in a secularized society, and even in the conditions of a terrible war. Thus, in missionary (preaching) practice, it can be very difficult to balance a soteriology based on the "lostness" of the world with a humble witness to Jesus and the Gospel. The Christian humility of the West faced the aggressive preaching of war from the Russian Orthodox Church [10: 206]. One Christian tradition, one understanding of the salvation of the soul, one soteriological approach, but such a different understanding of war and murder. After all, such a spiritual world will very soon become confrontational. Russia, through many years of insinuation and propaganda, justifies the "holy war", and through its mediation convinces of the salvation of the souls of soldiers who shed the blood of "sinners of the Western world and the Kyiv criminal regime" [5]. That is, Russian soldiers are equated with holy martyrs who give their lives for the fight against world evil. Thus, for them, war is a good and God-pleasing thing. On the other hand, Ukraine and Western partners, who from a religious point of view fulfil their own sacred duty - protect the Motherland and their own families. So, a soteriological conflict of interests arises. Within one Orthodox tradition, two cardinal approaches to salvation and the goals of human life are formed. We should note that both Catholic and Protestant soteriological concepts are consistent with the teachings of Ukrainian believers of traditional Christian churches. That is why Western partners are close to Ukraine not only in terms of military aid, but also in the spiritual understanding of war and the soteriological concept.

In addition to the above-mentioned approach of the sacred protection of the land and the Motherland, European (Protestant and Catholic) theologians today actively discuss the doctrine of analogia entis (analogy of being). It is a doctrine that

insists that in all created life there is a vital cause – God. Every living being (human first of all) contains something divine. Therefore, murder, even a military one, is a mortal sin. A popular American theologian who studies the problems of modern soteriology, Matthew Levering, claims that "all finite beings theophanically reveal the pure, primordial. This pure, incomprehensible source in man is God [9: 138]. His soteriology is close to Christian Neoplatonism. Currently, the question of the presence of fundamental elements of "soteriology" in the philosophy of the Neoplatonist's, in particular in their doctrine of the immortality of the soul, is an important element that is deeply rooted in Christian teaching, for example, in the theology of Augustine the Blessed. A Christian's life on earth is a reflection of eternal, divine life. Therefore, modern transformations of the soteriological understanding of the meaning of human existence are impossible. Life is an eternal gift, therefore murder is an eternal sin [2: 182].

Another important component of the dynamic turbulence of a person's social existence is the possibility of salvation through martyrdom, first of all, this concerns the defense of faith and the Motherland. Martyrs are unequivocally holy; this is a general soteriological position of all Christian denominations. Today, in Europe, no religious organizations openly fight against representatives (except for isolated terrorist attacks). However, there is a war on the conquest of foreign territories and populations. Therefore, the theory of protecting the native land in the name of one's own church tradition is gaining new relevance [10: 192].

After the start of the full-scale invasion, the problem of martyrdom took on new contours. This is evidenced by scientific and public interest in this issue. For example, Pope Francis, reflecting on martyrdom, emphasized that we can give our lives for others. And if, for example, a military man deliberately goes to his death in order to save others, this can be considered a martyr's feat [1]. In modern conditions, the very understanding of martyrdom is

somewhat transformed. We understand that the derived terms are patience, suffering, and ultimately death in this regard. There is a clear description of martyrs in the Old Testament, in particular in the Second Book of Maccabees, the martyrdom of seven brothers and their mother is described (see 2 Maccabees 7, 1-41).

There are martyrs even today in the civilized 21st century. In a religious sense, they are constantly in the news, whether from Africa or Latin America. In the literal sense of the word martyrs are those who suffered for God and faith. "Martyrdom in a broader sense - for good, for truth, for the Motherland, for principles, for friends, for one's family, for justice, etc., although it does not contain criteria such as faith on the one hand and hatred of faith on the other on the other hand, love of God on the one hand and forgiveness of enemies on the other, but it can at least partially be covered with Christian understanding, as Thomas Aquinas already said about it, analyzing the death of the defenders of his country" [1]. Thus, Ukrainian soldiers, migrants, children left without parents, people who are now homeless are martyrs, and this problem today requires a new soteriological approach. The uncertain social existence of a person in the 21st century at first glance is surprising in the modern civilized world, but the practice of being, the aggressive ecclesiastical and political activity of the aggressor led to the wandering of millions of people. Therefore, the above facts indicate the need to develop a new soteriological understanding of human life (earthly and afterlife), as well as the formation of a new paradigm of interfaith interaction in the Christian world.

**Conclusions.** Considering the insufficiently researched nature of this topic and its tendency to misinterpretation and ambiguity, due to the poly-confessional nature of the problem, it is necessary to develop a new methodological base for such scientific investigations. This will contribute to an understanding of the various

soteriological views and shades of meaning present among scholars, theologians, and the hierarchy. In time, this may allow subsequent quantitative studies of these soteriological positions to be as unambiguous and unified in their conclusions as possible.

The Russian-Ukrainian war is the horror of the 21st century in the center of Europe. We note that the main feature of this war is its religious colouring and justification, which greatly complicates its perception, in particular among the Russian population. Decades of propaganda and indoctrination have led to a "natural" perception of war on foreign soil. The Russian Church, which will be one of the most powerful

Christian organizations in Europe, adopted an official document at the All-Russian Council - the "Order", which talks about the "holy war" and the blessed afterlife of all invading soldiers. Scientists and theologians of the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant faiths should unite and develop their own vision and understanding of human life and salvation in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Currently, little is known about the true soteriological beliefs of people in emigration who face difficulties and wanderings; people whose loved ones are at the front; the military themselves. Therefore, the question of such scientific investigations takes place in the near future.

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