

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Jerusalem prayer for Ukraine

News special

Faith and Ukraine in the media

Archbishop appeals for humanitarian corridors

Independent Catholic News

The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (the largest Eastern-rite Catholic Church), Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchu of Kyiv-Halych, on Saturday appealed to the international community to help create humanitarian corridors, so innocent civilians can move to safer places and humanitarian aid can reach those bearing the brunt of Russia's "horrific and bloody war."

He said: "The enemy is blocking and besieging large cities and is not giving the residents an opportunity to leave the city, does not give an opportunity to deliver food, and from above fly enemy bombs that sow death."

United Nations sources said on Saturday at least 351 civilians have been killed in Ukraine and another 707 wounded.

A humanitarian corridor is a type of temporary demilitarized zone intended to provide safe passage for victims of conflict and for humanitarian agencies to reach those hit by the crisis.



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"I would like to particularly address the international community. Let us not remain silent. Let us do everything possible so that at least humanitarian convoys might make their way to those cities that are in the paws of the unfortunate enemy," the Major Archbishop wrote in an appeal.

"When the enemy bombs cities, many buildings turn very quickly into cold traps without heat, without light, without water. We must help them in some way, but the enemy does not let our help make its way to those in need."

The Archbishop drew attention to the situation in cities and towns in the north, east, and south of Ukraine where they are facing the onslaught of the Russian invasion, that began on the night of February 24.

He said that on Friday night Kharkiv, the country's second largest city faced air raids and shelling amid a 20 cm of snowfall. He also drew attention to the desperate situation in Sumy, Mariupol, and Volnovakha.

"May humanitarian corridors be created!" Archbishop Shevchuk said. "May there be green corridors of life so that the peaceful population might pass to safe places and humanitarian convoys might bring those people food, warmth, and human solidarity."

He pointed out that while Ukrainians were defending their land, they were also praying and serving others.

Archbishop Shevchu particularly thanked thank volunteers and various community organizations for reaching out to those in need. Each of the parishes in the centre, east and south of the country, he said, is turning into "a centre of social service for our volunteers."

Once more, appealing to the international community he said: "Let us do everything possible to stop this war!"

On Sunday peace campaigners in more than 80 countries held a Global Day of Action for Peace in Ukraine.

People gather in Belfast to condemn Russian action in Ukraine

Belfast Telegraph

Clerics from both sides of a Belfast community interface came together to urge peace in Ukraine at an anti-war rally in the city.

Colin Duncan, from Shankill Methodist Church, and Fr Martin Magill, from St John's Parish church on the Falls Road, were among those who addressed the event at Custom House Square on Saturday afternoon.

Ukrainians living in Northern Ireland also gave emotional testimony at the demonstration.

After the event, protesters marched through the city to gather for a vigil outside City Hall. More at -

[[] <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/people-gather-in-belfast-to-condemn-russian-action-in-ukraine-41415429.html>]

House of Hope offers prayer and shelter as tanks roll on Kharkiv

Independent.ie

Almost every day a stream of videos, photographs and WhatsApp chats charged through the Russian tanks surrounding the city of Kharkiv to suburban Newtownards.



The communications were from a family of Christian evangelists to their sponsor Donald Fleming, the founder of Faith in Action, to let him know they had survived another night of bombardment and to show him the horrors of war.

Pastor Pavel and his daughters run the House of Hope, a care home for older people and people with disability on the outskirts of Kharviv that was built by Mr Fleming's charity Faith in Action.

Another Christian organisation runs a school next door.

When the night-time shelling stopped, Pastor Pavel and his team ventured into the city centre in daylight to join other volunteer groups in administering food at designated shelters and providing shelter for elderly and infirm people.

Mr Fleming said the videos they sent him of their journey into the centre of Kharkiv were too upsetting to share, of

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bombed out buildings and “bodies lying on the road that hadn’t been picked up”. More at -
[[<https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/news/house-of-hope-offers-prayer-and-shelter-as-tanks-roll-on-kharkiv-41415722.html>]

European peace seems as fragile as ever

BBC News

By Kevin Connolly

There are moments when the tectonic plates of history shift beneath our feet and Europe is violently remade. It is time to recognise that we are at such a moment. Time too, to stop saying that it is somehow unbelievable that this can be happening in 2022.

It is no more unbelievable now than it was in 1914 or 1939 - nothing predetermined that they would be years when darkness would descend. That's not to say, of course, that we are on the edge of a war that will suck in the rest of Europe or even the world.

The point is that peace is always fragile - and that what happens even in the most distant corners of Europe will always affect all of us.

Drawing the right lessons from those big moments when everything changes is not easy.

The French military commander Ferdinand Foch called the end of World War One a "20-year" ceasefire - because he



felt the victorious allies had overplayed their hand in dealing with the defeated German Empire. He was about a year out.

The question for our generation is whether or not we made a similar miscalculation over how to handle Russia when the Soviet Union collapsed. We rejoiced as Poland, the Baltic States and others took their place among the free nations of the world.

Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic - once occupied by Soviets - joined Nato in 1999. The Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia followed five years later.

But the dark energy that drives Vladimir Putin is the other side of that coin. He saw Russia diminished, humiliated and stripped of what he saw as its right to a buffer zone of subordinate states.

More at -

[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-60622772>

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Tug of War: Putin, NATO and Ukraine

RTE News

By Tony Connelly, Europe Editor

In the space of a bewildering few weeks, Russian President Vladimir Putin's assault on Ukraine has violently upended Europe's geopolitics. Ukrainian leaders already talk of World War III, and Mr Putin has cocked the nuclear gun.

"Putin has articulated an idea of there being a 'Russky Mir' or a 'Russian World,'" Fiona Hill, the former US official specialising in Russia, told Politico this week.

"This idea of a Russian World means re-gathering all the Russian-speakers in different places that belonged at some point to the Russian tsardom."

While the invasion of Crimea in 2014 was denied and then cloaked in Kremlin double-speak, these days the Russian president is viscerally upfront about what he thinks about Ukraine - ie, that it doesn't deserve to exist.

"[Ukraine] is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space," Mr Putin told state television days before the invasion.

"Since time immemorial, the people living in the south-west of what has historically been Russian land have called themselves Russians and Orthodox Christians."

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The TV address blamed everyone for the crisis, except Mr Putin's Russia.

More at -

[] <https://www.rte.ie/news/analysis-and-comment/2022/0305/1284394-tug-of-war-russia-ukraine/>

[]

Irish priest who threw paint at Russian embassy calls for war protests to continue

Irish Examiner

A priest who threw red paint over the Russian embassy in Dublin has urged people in Ireland to continue to protest against the war in Ukraine.

Fr Fergal MacDonagh was among speakers who addressed a rally in Dublin city centre that was attended by several thousand protesters on Saturday.

Fr MacDonagh, from Dolphin's Barn parish in south-west Dublin, threw the paint over the gates of the Russian embassy on Friday in protest at the invasion.

Organisers thanked him for the act on Saturday and invited him to address the rally.

The cleric explained what motivated him to vandalise the property.

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“Yesterday morning when I woke up I heard on the radio that a maternity hospital had been bombed in Ukraine during the night,” he said.

“It’s appalling and horrific and it’s the work of evil what is happening in Ukraine, it’s a war crime and Putin will face justice in this world or in the next.”

[<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40822497.html>]

Russian bomb strikes Catholic headquarters in Ukrainian city of Kharkiv

Catholic Herald

[[] <https://catholicherald.co.uk/russian-bomb-strikes-catholic-headquarters-in-ukrainian-city-of-kharkiv/>]

WCC urges Patriarch of Moscow to raise his voice against war

In a letter to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow yesterday, World Council of Churches acting general secretary Rev Prof Dr Ioan Sauca asked the patriarch to mediate so that the war between Russian and Ukraine can be stopped.

De Sauca wrote:

Your Holiness, It is with great pain and with a breaking heart that I am writing to Your Holiness. The tragic situation of the war in Ukraine has brought tremendous suffering and loss of lives. Many of our brothers and sisters had to leave their

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homes-including the elderly, women, and children-to save their lives.

The whole world is looking with concern and expects to see a sign of hope for a peaceful solution. I receive letters every day from different parts of the world, from church leaders and the faithful of our WCC constituency asking to approach Your Holiness to mediate so that the war can be stopped and the great suffering ended. In these times of hopelessness, many look at you as the one who could bring a sign of hope for a peaceful solution.

I write to Your Holiness as acting general secretary of the WCC but also as an Orthodox priest. Please, raise up your voice and speak on behalf of the suffering brothers and sisters, most of whom are also faithful members of our Orthodox Church.

Perspective 1

Next year in Kyiv? asks Diana Butler Bass

When it comes to Russian Orthodoxy, Kyiv is essentially Jerusalem, and this is a conflict over who will have control of Orthodoxy — Moscow or Constantinople.

While the secular media tries to guess Vladimir Putin's motives in Ukraine, one important aspect of the current situation has gone largely ignored: religion.

I'm no expert in Eastern European history, but my training in church history offers a lens into the events in Ukraine. In effect, the world is witnessing a new version of an old tale — the quest to re-create an imperial Christian state, a neo-medieval “Holy Roman Empire” — uniting political, economic and spiritual power into an entity to control the earthly and heavenly destiny of European peoples.

The dream gripping some quarters of the West is for a coalition to unify religious conservatives into a kind of supra-national neo-Christendom. The theory is to create a partnership between American evangelicals, traditionalist Catholics in Western countries and Orthodox peoples under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church in a common front against three enemies — decadent secularism, a rising China and Islam — for a glorious rebirth of moral purity and Christian culture.

In the United States, Trumpist-religion is most often framed as “Christian nationalism.” It is, indeed, that. But it is also more — it is the American partner of this larger quest for Christian internationalism. No one has articulated this more clearly than Steve Bannon, who, despite his legal troubles, remains a significant force as a kind of philosophical apostle in right-wing Christian circles for a neo-Christendom.

There have been a few bumps on the way to this Humpty Dumpty hope of reassembling a Christian Roman Empire, however. Interestingly enough (and I'll leave this to future historians to sort out), American evangelicals bought into this neo-medieval project wholesale, having been prepared for far right nationalism by their fondness for racial and gender hierarchies. The most democratic form of

Protestantism will evidently sell its soul to keep Black people and women in their “place.”

The hardest partner to recruit to neo-Christendom has been the Catholic Church. The election of Pope Francis in 2013 proved a major stumbling block for the emergence of a right-wing global political order. The new pope eschewed all such schemes in favor of opening up the church to the poor, outcasts and the marginalized with a social vision that questions capitalism and the destruction of the Earth. Neo-medieval Catholics — often referred to as “trad Caths” — haven’t taken this well and have mounted a decade of resistance to Francis that may well culminate in something like the Avignon schism of the 14th century. So far, however, Pope Francis remains in charge.

Until recently, it appeared Vladimir Putin had successfully co-opted Orthodoxy into this globalist triumvirate, making for a surprising love fest between American evangelicals and the Russian strongman. Just this week, former Secretary of State and stalwart evangelical Mike Pompeo praised Putin. Outside observers might think Putin was firmly in control of the future of Orthodoxy vis-a-vis neo-Christendom.

Except he wasn’t. The Ukrainian Orthodox had other ideas.

And that’s a real problem. Because when it comes to Russian Orthodoxy, Kyiv is essentially Jerusalem.

More than a thousand years ago, in the 980s, the pagan Prince Vladimir of Kyiv consolidated the Rus people of modern-day Belarus, Russia and Ukraine into a single realm. When his emissaries reported back to him on the

glories of Christian Constantinople, Vladimir converted to their religion, brought his people into the Byzantine church through a mass baptism and married a Christian imperial princess. Under his rule, Kyiv became a prosperous and peaceful city at the heart of a new Christian empire, complete with churches, courts, monasteries and schools, as well as civic programs to care for the poor. Known as Vladimir the Great, he was eventually canonized as St. Vladimir and his memory is celebrated by Eastern Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Anglicans and some Lutherans.

In the 1200s, however, Kyiv suffered a number of assaults from rival Rus princes and Mongol invaders. Many Rus people moved north and east to the newer cities of Vladimir and Moscow where, under the czars, the Russian church eventually grew to be one of the richest, most powerful churches in the Orthodox world. With the shift, an Orthodox tradition founded under the auspices of Constantinople became a church under the authority of a patriarch in Moscow.

This has created tension between Ukraine and Russia for centuries, in some ways brought to a head in the Soviet period, with rival forms of Orthodoxy either choosing to resist communism or cooperate with Moscow. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine had several different Orthodox churches, only one of which was in close relationship to Moscow.

In 2018, two of those Ukrainian churches and some of the Moscow-leaning Orthodox parishes joined in a union and created a newly unified Orthodox Church of Ukraine, a fully independent national ecclesial body under no control from

Moscow, with its head in the ancient seat of Orthodoxy in Kyiv.

Putin and the Moscow Russian Orthodox church authorities protested. They've been claiming the 1,000 years of Kyiv Christianity as its own — basically appropriating Ukraine's church history — to the point of erecting a gigantic (and controversial) statue of St. Vladimir outside of the Kremlin. Putin wants the weight of tradition on his side and St. Vladimir validates both his religious and political aspirations. There should be no doubt that Putin sees himself as a kind of Vladimir the Great II, a candidate for sainthood who is restoring the soul of Holy Mother Russia. The Ukrainians, on the other hand, would like to remind the Russians that they were the birthplace of both Orthodoxy and political unity in Eastern Europe.

Further infuriating Putin is the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople recognized the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as an independent body. While this fight between Moscow and Kyiv is internally significant for Russians and Ukrainians historically, it also has larger global ramifications for the future. Katherine Kelaidis at Religion Dispatches explains:

“On one side of the conflict is the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the culturally and linguistically Greek cleric, who has historically claimed leadership of Orthodoxy. For the better part of a century, the Patriarch of Constantinople has moved toward the West and arguably many of its values. Today's incumbent on the Apostolic Throne of St. Andrew speaks the language of human rights, religious freedom, and trust in science. This position arises in no

small part from the Patriarchate's own precarious role as a representative of minority religion in Turkey.

“At the same time, the Patriarch of Moscow, having reclaimed much of his post's former political influence in a post-Soviet Russia, has taken to spearheading not only the traditionalist Orthodox cause, but acting as support and symbol to religious conservatives around the world.”

The conflict in Ukraine is all about religion and what _kind_ of Orthodoxy will shape Eastern Europe and other Orthodox communities around the world (especially in Africa). Religion. This is a crusade, recapturing the Holy Land of Russian Orthodoxy, and defeating the Westernized (and decadent) heretics who do not bend the knee to Moscow's spiritual authority.

If you don't get that, you don't get it. Who is going to control the geographical home, the “Jerusalem,” of the Russian church? Moscow? Or Constantinople? And, what does claiming that territory mean for Orthodoxy around the world? Will global Orthodoxy lean toward a more pluralistic and open future, or will it be part of the authoritarian neo-Christendom triumvirate?

We don't know how this is going to unfold. But — here's the key point — economic sanctions are unlikely to work if you believe your side is divinely sanctioned. That's what Putin thinks he's got: the approval of God.

You just know he wants to celebrate Easter — this one or next — in Kyiv.

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Diana Butler Bass is an award-winning author of 11 books, including her most recent, “Freeing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence.” This article was originally published at her substack “The Cottage.”

Perspective 2

Tread carefully to avoid this catastrophe turning into another world war by Bob Seely MP

Having under-acted before, the great danger is that the West will now over-compensate

I lived in Kyiv from 1990 to 1994 and my home was near the golden domes of St Sophia’s that millions now see nightly as the backdrop for TV broadcasts. It breaks my heart to see Russians and Ukrainians killing each other. It chills me to the bone to see an authoritarian Russian state evolve into something even darker.

The Kremlin’s near daily threats of nuclear war are despicable. But they also need to be treated seriously as a symbol of a desperate regime.

So, what can we say? In the last Cold War, experts closely studied the Soviets. The resulting insights gave birth to a subject known as Strategic Culture. It argued that Russian decision-making, as with everywhere else, is shaped by culture, outlook and behaviour.

Calling Putin “mad” prevents us from understanding him. Instead we must accept that Putin’s strategic culture is shaped by fear of invasion, protection of Russia’s authoritarian state and a desire for status. Ukraine represents the nexus of these fears. A democracy in Kyiv, however imperfect, threatens Moscow’s autocracy. Russia without Ukraine becomes a country, not an empire. A Ukraine outside Kremlin control feeds Russian insecurity. Yes, this mindset belongs to another era but, like it or not, it animates the Kremlin.

Putin has misjudged Ukraine. But mass Moscow uprisings are unlikely, unless the war kills many thousands more Russians. An outbreak of sudden humanity in the Kremlin is also improbable, as is a palace coup. Those around Putin are flatterers or share his embittered world view. A potential exception may be Valery Gerasimov, the gruff Russian army chief of staff, who may not wish to see the elan of his rebuilt army shattered murdering fellow Slavs in Kyiv and Kharkiv.

Right now, the best outcome may be a stalemate with a negotiated outcome that gives Putin face to withdraw while claiming victory; but even this may be wishful thinking. Let’s remember, the siege of Aleppo lasted four years. It ended only after a dozen days of chemical weapons use.

The great danger is that, because the West under-acted before, we will over-compensate now and this dreadful conflict will spiral into something even worse. Yes, we should continue to supply arms, training and intelligence to Kyiv, to isolate Russia in all peaceful ways and to use our diplomatic power to forge a global alliance. But we also must keep communicating with Moscow. Every time they

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talk of nuclear force, we need to remind them that they are not truly under threat. The anti-Western hysteria of Russia's security elite must be quietly but firmly challenged. Let's talk to them in a reasoned language, unless we want verbal escalation that plays into the hands of the doomsday extremists.

Specifically, the US, the UK and France need to re-establish deeper dialogue with Russia on nuclear weapons. The greatest risk remains their accidental use. Next, the UK, Nato and the US must intensely "wargame" scenarios. Those scenarios must range from least bad outcomes to plotting how to step back from a full nuclear exchange, so that we can identify all the potential decision points and triggers to dissuade the Kremlin from destructive courses of action. More generally, the UK spends its time reacting to events rather than shaping them. This has to stop. A National Strategy Council is the answer.

Leaders across the Western world now need to be able to say that, having failed to act consistently over the last 15 years, having failed – frankly – to inform our peoples fully about a darkening world, we did all we could to prevent a disaster turning into a catastrophe. Previous world wars were stumbled into by politicians who were too blind to the dangers or too scared to act until it was too late.

The images that will come from Kyiv in the coming days will get worse. The stakes are getting higher. Every step now needs to be resolute – but they must also be carefully considered.

Bob Seely MP is a member of the foreign affairs committee

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site.

Church News Ireland

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