
THE IMAGE OF THE PATRIARCH KIRILL IN THE POLISH MEDIA IN THE FIRST MONTH OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

During the first month of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (from 24.02.2022 to 24.03.2022), 2192 publications referring to Patriarch Kirill were registered in the Polish media. The authors of this article aimed to answer the following research questions: How did the media in Poland portray Patriarch Kirill's statements, how did they judge them? Was the media portrayal of the patriarch's actions varied, or was it unequivocally critical? Were the publications on Kirill purely of a news nature, duplicating agency services, or were they in-depth and exploring a broader aspect of the patriarch's behaviour? What was the distribution of publications on Kirill over time and what was the reason for the fluctuation in the number of publications? It is worth noting as a surprise the almost complete lack of worldview polarization towards the topic of Kirill. Topics related to religion, the throne-altar alliance, the right-wing narrative or homophobia, would otherwise likely be used for the politically-charged attacks characteristic of the polarized Polish media. Monochromaticity, however, should not be confused with a shallowing of the message. Kirill's position is portrayed as properly prepared, coherent and multi-faceted. It is a logical continuation of previous teaching, policies and actions both internally and externally. The article touches upon issues related to scientific disciplines such as communication and media studies and religion and culture studies.

Keywords: image, communication, studies, press, analysis

1. Introduction

The war that is taking place just across the Polish border has become the basis for extensive discussions not only in terms of support, aid, the very actions taken by Ukraine and its allies, but also in terms of the attitudes of individuals and institutions. The war thus became a verifier of people's attitudes, decisions,

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activities and beliefs. The subject area of this article is set in the broad context of the war across Poland's eastern border, more specifically, the invasion of Russian troops on Ukrainian territory launched on 24.02.2022. This fact has become one of the leading topics in the media, as well as in the space of everyday conversation among ordinary people not only in Ukraine, but also throughout Europe and even the world. Information about this armed conflict was widely covered by broadcasters such as those in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and even the Arabic-language version of the Al Jazeera channel. The topic of military actions in Ukraine has also dominated the Polish media. They sent their correspondents to the war zones. Thanks to numerous war reports, television stations achieved record high market shares [1]. On the other hand, the media showed tens of thousands of refugees sheltering from the war in neighbouring countries, especially Poland.

Among the publications on the war, there were also those that in different ways showed the broad context of the aggression. These include media analyses and reports on the behaviour and statements of Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, who has involved his authority quite heavily in the conflict. During the initial phase of the invasion, there arose a demand from the Polish public for explanations of the Kremlin's motives and, above all, factors that could pressure Putin and hasten the end of the conflict. One of such factors may be the attitude of Moscow Patriarch Kirill. Indeed, if we adopt the carbon copy of what is expected of the Catholic Church hierarchy, we would expect a call to stop fighting, condemn the crime or at least neutrality. After all, before the war, followers of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC) made up a significant percentage of the Ukrainian faithful, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was also theoretically subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate. These expectations were quickly verified by reality. However, many people may have been surprised that the religious authority of the Orthodox Patriarch was not used to call for peace and a cessation of military actions. On the contrary, Kirill made it clear and explicit that he supports the actions of Putin and the Russian army. This attitude was a consistent continuation of his beliefs and previous actions.

The authors of this article aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the media in Poland portray Patriarch Kirill's statements, how did they judge them? Was the media portrayal of the patriarch's actions varied, or was it unequivocally critical?
2. Were the publications on Kirill purely of a news nature, duplicating agency services, or were they in-depth and exploring a broader aspect of the patriarch's behaviour?

What was the distribution of publications on Kirill over time and what was the reason for the fluctuation in the number of publications?

The article's authors also posed the following hypotheses:

1. Polish society, public opinion and the political class, and consequently the Polish media, unambiguously and almost monochromatically presented the events and their interpretation, siding with the Ukrainians and against Putin.
2. Besides duplicating agency material, the media presented in-depth expert content.
3. Even assuming positive verification of hypothesis 2, the number of publications on Kirill on any given day is largely driven by his actions - statements and gestures. This is due to the fact that the media are often guided not so much by the actual genre weight of events, but rather by their iconicity and potential to become symbolic images that move the emotions of the audience [2].

The authors of the article examine the media image of the patriarch in the media of a specific country - Poland. We define image as a picture created with the help of available communication and marketing tools, built in the minds of representatives of target groups. It is the feelings, views and thoughts that arise in the minds of stakeholders in relation to the subject to which they relate [3]. The image is also made up of all the experiences associated with an entity and coincides with the perceptions created in the consciousness of those around it. Its dissimilarity can sometimes be influenced by even a single determining feature [4]. The media image gives an idea of how a particular person or institution is portrayed by the media. However, it may differ significantly from the so-called 'real image' - that is, the public's actual views of that person or institution. A uniform media discourse can affect the real image, but mainly for neutral audiences with no broader knowledge of the subject, treating a given media message with a high degree of credibility.

There is a close correlation between the media image and the real image. The media image influences the actual perception of a phenomenon, person, thing or other research subject. Media image includes the entirety of evaluations that are exposed in the media by journalists, experts and commentators [5]. The real image is a broader concept, as it is influenced not only by the media image, which is, however, an important part of it.

2. Background and literature review

The Russian Orthodox Church is today the largest religious community that is active in the Russian Federation and most of the former Soviet Union. It considers the territory of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to be its 'canonical territory', a cultural, historical and linguistic area permanently linked to the Moscow Patriarchate. In the tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church, the head of this religious community is the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. Since 2009, this position is held by Patriarch Kirill [6].

The history of the relationship between Russian statehood and the Orthodox religion is long and tumultuous. There were also different ideas among those wielding the highest power in Russia about the form of Orthodoxy's

existence in the state. Marko Veković suggests a division of historical Church-State relations in Russia into three phases:

1. render unto Tzar phase: from the Reform of Peter the Great to the February Revolution;
2. communist phase: from the February Revolution to the fall of communism;
3. post-communist phase: from the fall of communism up until today [7].

In the 18th century, Peter the Great and Catherine undertook a series of reforms, hitting the Orthodox Church. They practically subjected it to the control of secular officials, restricted missionary activities and introduced the suppression of monasteries. On the other hand, the 19th century in the Russian Empire is characterized by a return to Orthodoxy, that is, a gradual departure from various religious deviations and a renewal of the spiritual life of the faithful [8]. Before the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution, under the tsars, the Russian Orthodox Church was in fact at the service of the state, for which it enjoyed great privileges compared to the Churches of other confessions. The Tsar was the supreme defender and depositary of the ruling faith, the guardian of the Orthodox faithfulness and of all the sacred decency belonging to the Orthodox Church [9]. The Orthodox Church had a political function in the state: it was supposed to legitimize the secular power and be, as it were, a guarantor of the permanence of its rule: it anointed the monarch to the throne, gave him quasi-sacred legitimacy, and fostered among the faithful content in line with the interests of those in power, which boiled down to the command to obey “God’s anointed one on Earth”. Among the important points of this preaching were also: emphasizing the historical continuity of the Russian state, the immutability of its conservative values and its very essence and the relation between authority and society [10].

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Orthodox religion, like other religions, was persecuted, and the Orthodox Church’s influence on society was gradually reduced. This was due to worldview assumptions, according to which religion was an obstacle to building a communist state. Despite attempts by the Orthodox Church to make some concessions, as expressed in the decisions of Patriarch Sergius (he declared an act of loyalty to Soviet power), repression continued. Despite attempts by the Orthodox Church to make some concessions, as expressed in the decisions of Patriarch Sergius (he declared an act of loyalty to Soviet power), repression continued. Clergymen and dignitaries were imprisoned, sent to gulags, tortured, killed, and Orthodox churches were demolished or turned into stables, warehouses and concert halls. The situation changed after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1942. At that time, an agreement was reached that ensured the survival of the Orthodox Church [A. Szostkiewicz, *Jak rosyjska cerkiew przetrwała stalinizm?*, Histmag.org, 20.06.2015, <https://histmag.org/Jak-rosyjska-cerkiew-przetrwala-stalinizm-11294>, access on 20.04.2023]. Some of the clergy did not recognize Sergius’ decision, and as a result, separate structures of the so-called Catacomb Orthodox Church were created. Its importance declined only after the fall of communism,

at which time the dominant role in Russia was taken over by the Moscow Patriarchate Church [11].

The 1970s was a rather quiet period for the Russian Orthodox Church. The state adopted a policy of total control towards it and tried to prevent the Orthodox Church from expanding its influence. However, it has abandoned the massive persecution of clergy and laity and the noisy anti-religious campaigns. Church-state relations improved dramatically after the so-called Local Council in Zagorsk in 1988 [12]. The law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations was adopted in October 1990. The 1993 Russian Constitution endorsed these extensive freedoms [13]. Theoretically and legally, the Orthodox Church (and every other religion) is in Russia separate from the state, and no ideology can be imposed on citizens. This is stated in the Constitution of the Russian Federation in Article 13-14. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations of September 19, 1997 reaffirms the religious regulations contained in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, and also defines the legal status of religious communities. Nevertheless, Orthodoxy in Russia has a special position - it is a state-forming factor - it helps Russian society to distinguish itself from other religious and cultural communities, in the face of belonging to one national and civilizational community [6]. At the same time, many elements of the public functioning of the Russian Orthodox Church testify to its importance to state authorities. We can talk about the political utility of the Church, which is a tool for the implementation of the goals of state social policy, and in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war it unequivocally supports the war effort and repeats the content of state propaganda [14]. This militaristic approach to national pride naturally leads the Moscow Patriarchate and Kyrill to emphasise the victories that the Russian army has won while neglecting its defeats [15].

Nowadays, although Russians declare an Orthodox faith in large numbers, for most of them religion has no influence on their lives. As a rule, they do not know dogma, do not participate in practices, do not follow moral principles. Although approx. 73% of Russia's population declares itself Orthodox, a 2009 survey found that only about 3% regularly attend church and partake of the sacraments. According to 2013 data from Russia's Interior Ministry, less than 4% of the population took part in Easter celebrations. In addition, Russia has the highest divorce rate in the world (about 600,000 divorces in 2013) [16]. Russia is also leading the way in terms of abortions performed. Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church faithful are passive, but their attachment to ROC plays an important role in the process of state and cultural self-identification. The ROC has a large social and symbolic asset, a centuries-old tradition linked to the continuity of Russian statehood, and thus enjoys great authority, which is used for political purposes [17].

President Putin refers to the traditions of the Russian Empire and presents Orthodoxy as a state-building element. Elements of the Orthodox religion are used instrumentally by the Kremlin to emphasize Russia's historical continuity and the immutability of its state model. He also uses Orthodoxy as an

ideological foundation for the thesis of Russia's eternal and fundamental difference from Western civilization, to create a counterweight to liberalism and to confront Russia with the 'degenerate' West [16, p. 5]. The Orthodox Church plays a subservient role in the Kremlin's efforts to legitimize its geopolitical ambitions and claims to the role of hegemon over regions historically recognized by Russia as its sphere of influence - including the Eastern European area, primarily Ukraine and Belarus. This was clear in the context of the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass. The Moscow Patriarchate also actively opposed the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's acquisition of autocephaly, which harmed both the interests and position of the Moscow Patriarchate and the interests of Russia as a state seeking to maintain its role as hegemon over Ukraine [16, p. 19].

Being deeply statist, Orthodox fundamentalism urges Orthodox society to play an active role in political life. Political concepts are borrowed and woven into the fabric of the fundamentalist worldview [18]. However, desecularization in Russia takes place only at the verbal level. It is in its essence facade and hides the deep secularization of religious institutions and organizations, understood as their complete subordination to the state policy, and thus they become elements of the state structure [14]. The Orthodox Church works closely with the state in many fields, as evidenced by a number of bilateral agreements. There is talk of the so-called out-of-confessional social ministry of the Orthodox Church [19]. Kirill's teaching (and that of his predecessor Alexei) in terms of the role of the Orthodox Church in society and its relationship to society is consistent - centred around the concept of *sobornost'*. Analyse of 36 speeches by Patriarch Kirill and Patriarch Alexy delivered from 1993 to 2022 at the World Russian People's Council shows that themes that are repeated and have not changed substantially over the years (although they are discussed more extensively during some councils and by some speakers) are 'unity', 'solidary society', 'true historical path', 'Orthodox values' and 'nation' [20].

The public perception of Patriarch Kirill will naturally place him in the role of a quasi-government official responsible for spiritual issues. The analysis in the article and the papers cited within it are confirmed by the monitoring results in the following days.

3. Methodology of the study

During the first month of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (from 24.02.2022 to 24.03.2022), 2192 publications referring to Patriarch Kirill were registered in the Polish media, through the tool of the PSMM company (Press-Service Monitoring Mediów). The largest number, 1,713, is web content, 267 are social media, 123 are radio broadcasts, and 75 are articles in the print press. Adopted assumptions referred to the analysis of texts in the printed press and on websites. In the course of analysis, 954 publications from the days of 16-17.03.2023, duplicated on different domains, belonging to one publisher, were excluded. Their job was to aggregate links to Twitter. They significantly

distorted the actual number of materials, while not being articles themselves. In the end, 759 articles were analyzed (Figure 1).

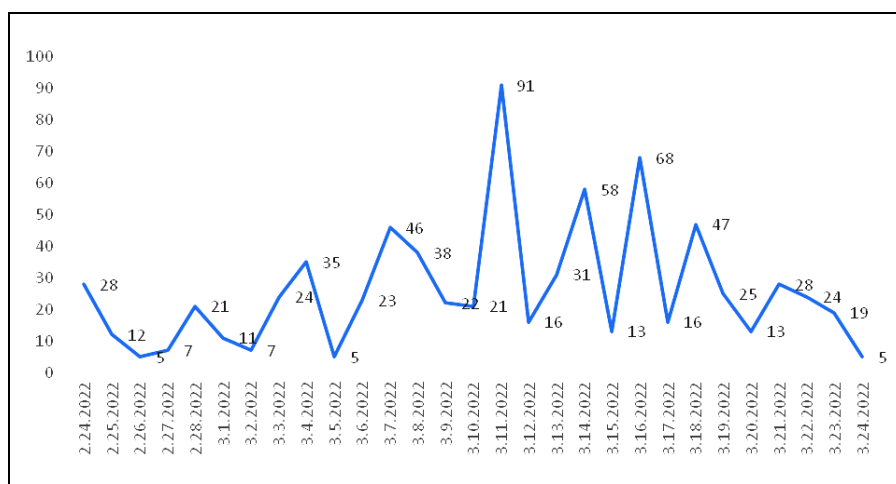


Figure 1. Number of materials relating to Patriarch Kirill on 24.02-24.03.2022, N = 759.

Source: own study based on PSMM Monitoring

The characterization of Patriarch Kirill described in this article will be, by definition, his media image, created through opinion-forming publications that appeared in the Polish language during the period under study.

4. The results of monitoring

Within the scope of monitoring, it is possible to distinguish specific moments where Kirill's position was presented. These include, most notably, the launch of a full-scale war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. On that day, 28 articles containing the phrase {Kirill} appeared in the printed press and online portals. This is significant in that among the very large number of media reports related to the beginning of the full-scale invasion, there was also a space indicating public demand relating to the thread of religious leadership in Russia.

The article of the day, with one of the highest reach rates (35 thousand contacts) and at the same time the highest AVE (12 thousand zlotys), was the material found on ksiązki.wp.pl, titled 'Holy War. How the Orthodox Church has supported Putin's actions for years'. It extensively describes relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Kremlin [S. Łupak, 'Święta wojna'. *Jak Cerkiew od lat wspiera działania Putina*, <https://ksiązki.wp.pl/swieta-wojna-jak-cerkiew-od-lat-wspiera-dzialania-putina-6740762188114912a>, accessed on 05.03.2023]. In addition to the historical outline and presented within it the path of revival of Orthodoxy after the collapse of the USSR, the author notes that the defence of Christian values was included in the Kremlin's demands. "The Orthodox Church and the Kremlin began to speak with one

voice: about patriotism, traditional, values, love of country and the need to fight homosexuality, which turned out to be an obsession of both Putin and the patriarchs. Putin in 2013 said: - We see how many European countries have denied their Christian roots. They are pursuing policies that put large families and same-sex relationships, faith in God and Satan on an equal footing.” [<https://ksiazki.wp.pl/swieta-wojna-jak-cerkiew-od-lat-wspiera-dzialania-putina-6740762188114912a>]. According to the author of the article citing, among others, the study ‘Alliance of the Altar and the Throne. The Russian Orthodox Church and Power in Russia’ by Katarzyna Chawryło of the Centre for Eastern Studies [17], in the narrative of the Moscow Orthodox Church, issues related to values are combined with nationalist-imperialist ideology, or more precisely, the concept of the *Russian world* (*Russian: русский мир*). The axis of this narrative is the unification of the Eastern Slavs under the Moscow Patriarchate [17, p. 21]. Under this idea, Kiev and Crimea, or more broadly Ukraine and Belarus, are to be united under the *Holy Russia*.

In the context of the entire studied period, we can also speak of an increase in information about the abandonment by the faithful and some clergy of the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate as a result of Kirill’s attitude. An in-depth analysis of the aetiology of this process is contained in the text by Sergei Czapnin on February 28, 2022, cited by the Polish Catholic Information Agency (followed by editorial boards such as onet.pl and Więź). Initially, it describes the alliance between throne and altar and Kirill’s hypocrisy in the face of the war, not only its new iteration of February 24, 2022, but also ignored by the Moscow hierarch since the seizure of Crimea and the hybrid invasion in Donbass. At the same time, as a contrast he points to the attitude of Metropolitan Onufri of Kiev, who was the only “Church hierarch from the Moscow Patriarchate who dared to call a spade a spade (...). He uses the biblical image of Cain: The Ukrainian and Russian peoples came out of the Transnistrian baptismal font, and the war between these nations is a repetition of the sin of Cain, who killed his own brother out of envy. This war is not justified either by God or by people. Recognizing the kinship of the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, Onufry gives a merciless assessment of Russia’s actions, comparing it to Cain and thus raising the question of moral responsibility for the acts committed.” [Sergiej Czapnin, *Patriarcha Cyryl wobec wojny Putina (analiza)*, Catholic News Agency, <https://kair.ekai.pl/depesza/613981/show>, accessed on 02.04. 2023]. Kirill, on the other hand, consistently uses the rhetoric of ‘holy war’ aimed at legitimizing and even sacralising aggression [21]. This split between Kirill and Onufry can be seen as a prelude to the escalation of problems for the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine, and consequently in other countries as well.

Another moment in the first month of the full-scale war, in which the Polish media presented Kirill’s position with great intensity, was the coverage of the homily he delivered on the occasion of Forgiveness Sunday on March 6, 2022. Most of the material published in Poland, from that day and the next, was built on the message of the Polish Catholic Information Agency. The main

theme that repeated in the media was the LGBT issue. Out of 69 publications containing the phrase {Kirill} on March 6 and 7, 50 (72%) contained the phrases {gay, LGBT}. In particular, they cited a stand in which the Patriarch of Moscow acknowledged that gay parades are a test for countries seeking to enter the ranks of the pseudo-happy world of overconsumption. In order to enter the ranks of these countries, one must agree to hold such parades. Kirill at this stage introduces forceful solutions into his narrative, accusing Western governments of suppressing with violence the resistance of those who do not agree to the parades. In this way, the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church justifies, as he calls it, the special military operation in Ukraine and the aggression that followed it. In the course of the coverage of this speech in the Polish media, the question of values, about which Kirill spoke in a rather general way in his homily, was somewhat relegated to the background. The phrase [metaphysical], which testifies to the spiritual dimension of the argument, appeared in 37 (57%) articles from those days. The values he speaks of concern God's law, love and justice, and the test for them is the approval of the parades discussed above. The homily of March 6 is important in the context of the first month of the formation of the narrative about Kirill. In publications from the entire period analysed, there are frequent references to the topics covered in this homily. The phrases [gay], [LGBT] appear in 156 articles (20%) and the phrase [metaphysical] 140 times (18%).

The increased number of publications in the period under review also occurs on March 10 and 11, with the most material relating to Kirill's response to an appeal made in early March by professor Ioan Saucă of the Orthodox clergy, general secretary of the World Council of Churches. In response, the Moscow Patriarch expands on the metaphysical theme mentioned earlier, pointing the blame for the conflict beyond the Russian nations. He outright accuses Western and NATO countries of causing the conflict. A distinctive phrase appearing in Kirill's statements, which is included in 46 of the 112 articles (41%) from these two days, is [Russophobia] coming from a direct quote: "Russophobia is spreading in the Western world at an unprecedented rate" [Patriarcha Cyryl, *To nie Rosja i Ukraina rozpoczęły ten konflikt. To NATO*, <https://www.rp.pl/konflikty-zbrojne/art35846071-patriarcha-cyryl-to-nie-rosja-i-ukraina-rozpoczely-ten-konflikt-to-nato>, accessed on 02.04.2023], and which is the quintessential genesis of the conflict as pointed out by the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Within the analysed period, a clear increase in publications occurs on Monday, March 14, the third most published day of the entire period under review (58 materials). Two main topics can be distinguished on this day. The first refers to the Amsterdam Russian Orthodox Church's break with Moscow and its transition under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, seen as a rival to the Moscow Patriarchate [B. Kwiatkowska, *Cerkiew w Holandii zrywa z Moskwą. Przełamała się czara goryczy*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/rosyjska-cerkiew-prawo-slawnaw-amsterdamie-oglasza-rozlam-z-moskwa-6747178820504192a>, accessed on 02.04.2023] (19 publications containing the phrase {Amsterdam}). The

immediate reason for this decision was the intervention of Russian Orthodox Bishop Elisey. On March 6, (the day of Kirill's homily on the occasion of Forgiveness Sunday) he was to demand from the clergy of the Amsterdam parish that the name of Patriarch Kirill would be mentioned in the liturgy. The bishop also spoke of 'great interest' in the Amsterdam parish from the Russian Foreign Ministry [L. Lemaniak, *Bunt w rosyjskim Kościele w Amsterdamie. Duchowni odchodzą po groźbach biskupa*, <https://i.pl/bunt-w-rosyjskim-kosciele-w-amsterdamie-duchowni-odchodza-po-grozbach-biskupa/ar/c1-16098441>, accessed on 02.04.2023], which was perceived as a threat.

The second topic in terms of the number of materials (14 publications) relates to Kirill's symbolic gesture to the commander of the Rosguard - General Viktor Zolotov. Kirill gave him the Augustov Icon of the Mother of God, written in 1915 to commemorate the collective revelation experienced by Russian soldiers during the First World War. The Mother of God, depicted in the icon, is credited with saving the witnesses of the revelation and their subsequent great victory of the 1914 battle against the German army at the Masurian lakes [*Wojna na Ukrainie. Ważny rosyjski generał przyznał, że inwazja ma opóźnienia. Otrzymał ikonę od patriarchy*, Wprost.pl, <https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/10654393/wojna-na-ukrainie-wazny-rosyjski-general-przyznał-ze-inwazja-ma-opoznienie-otrzymał-ikone-od-patriarchy.html>, accessed on 02.04.2023]. This gesture is not accidental, it is a logical continuation of the attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church, which consistently plays a subservient role in the Kremlin's projects to strengthen 'state-centred patriotism' and the fighting spirit, often in cooperation with the Russian army or special services. Orthodox Church hierarchs consecrate military facilities, soldiers participating in war operations and exercises, armaments and combat assets, and even weapons. The history of the glory of Russian weaponry is highlighted by the construction of the temple complex of Saint Peter. Resurrection of the Lord in Kubinka, near Moscow. The monumental temple opened in 2020. Its interiors are decorated with frescoes and mosaics depicting key battles from throughout Russian history. It was also initially decorated with images of, among others, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Putin, Defence Minister Sergei Shoygu and other contemporary leaders of Russia's power and state structures - but their images were removed after the scandal [10, p. 68-69].

The symbolic gesture of handing over the icon has been read in the Polish media in two dimensions. First and foremost is the apparent internal use, where the goal is to give an instant boost to the morale of those fighting and supporting the struggle of the Russians. It can be read as an expansion of the metaphysical theme, which moves from the realm of words to that of symbolic gestures. The previously mentioned Russophobia of the West, which lies at the heart of the conflict, results in a reference to the miraculous rescue of the soldiers with the use of the August Icon of the Mother of God to defend those currently fighting. On the other hand, in an article relating to the icon with the highest reach (123,000 contacts), the situation where Kirill harnesses a holy symbol to support soldiers is juxtaposed with Pope Francis' statement about profanation: "God is

only a God of peace, not a God of war, and those who support violence profane His name” [R. Mrozowski, *General wojsk Putina przemawiał w cerkwi. Przyznał, że nie wszystko idzie zgodnie z planem*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/general-wojsk-putina-przemawial-w-cerkwi-zaprosil-go-patriarcha-cyryl-6747201481665184a>, accessed on 02.04.2023] and a quote from the weekly Sunday, which describes Kirill as a schismatic: “since Russia’s attack on Ukraine, the Russian hierarch is seen by an increasing number of Orthodox clergy and hierarchs - including those from the Moscow Patriarchate under his authority - as a schismatic” [<https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/general-wojsk-putina-przemawial-w-cerkwi-zaprosil-go-patriarcha-cyryl-6747201481665184a>, accessed on 02.04.2023]. At this point, it is worth noting that this date of 14.03.2022 falls on a Monday, which is the day when part of the weeklies are published, as well as a summary of the previous week, with frequent cross-references. Also on this day comes the article from Angora with the highest reach rate in the entire period under study (322,000 contacts), which is a reprint and one of the more extensive translations of Kirill’s March 6, 2022 homily present in the Polish media. In addition to the above, four more articles from 14 March contain a reference to this statement, their content, however, does not go beyond the findings already contained in this article. It seems, however, that the Polish media lacked a publication that would take into account the broader context of the Orthodox Church’s attitude and its role in supporting the Kremlin’s military initiatives when interpreting this gesture.

The last clear caesura in the period studied is marked by March 16, 2022, when Pope Francis held an online conversation with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Exactly half of the 68 materials from that day referring to Patriarch Kirill contained the phrases [Pope] or [Francis] (34 publications). The articles of the day, including the publication with the highest reach rates (265,000 contacts), which addressed the topic, indicated that, according to the Holy See, the hierarchs agreed that the Church should use the language of Jesus and not politics, and that united efforts were needed to promote peace and help the suffering. It also emphasized the consensus in recognizing the importance of the negotiation process. The report gives a quote from the Pope: “The bill for the war is paid by the people, it is the Russian soldiers, it is the people who are bombed and die” [*Watykan potwierdza. Papież Franciszek rozmawiał z patriarchą Cyrylem*, Catholic News Agency, <https://www.onet.pl/informacje/kai/watykan-potwierdza-papiez-franciszek-rozmawial-z-patriarcha-cyrylem/vt9094s,30bc1058>, accessed on 02.04.2023]. The statement is significant in that, as some commentators point out, sympathy was shown only to Russian soldiers with the exclusion of Ukrainian ones [T. Terlikowski, *Niezrozumiałe zachowanie papieża. Terlikowski dla ‘Wprost’: zaczadzeni ‘ruskim mirem’*, <https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/10658995/terlikowski-dla-wprost-zaczadzeni-ruski-m-mirem.html>, accessed on 02.04.2023]. In addition, two days later, on the occasion of the Congress of the Pontifical Foundation Gravissimum Educationis under the slogan ‘Education for Democracy in a Divided World’ in a similar form, the Pope expressed sympathy for the Russian soldiers by calling them

‘poor’, which was noted and criticized in Poland by both the ultra-conservative environment [T. Terlikowski, *Dwója na sprawdzianie z Ewangelii. Watykan skompromitowany*, <http://nowakonfederacja.pl/dwoja-na-sprawdzianie-z-ewangelii-watykan-skompromitowany/>, accessed on 02.04.2023], as well as publications considered liberal [B. Hlebowicz, *Papież potępia wojnę, ale nie nazywa rzeczy po imieniu. Dlaczego?*, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,28239952,papiez-potepia-wojne-ale-nie-nazywa-rzeczy-po-imieniu-dlaczego.html?disableRedirects=true>, accessed on 02.04.2023]. This means that in the Polish media, the unambiguous portrayal of Kirill as ideologically subservient to the Kremlin results in pressure and even criticism of the head of the Catholic Church for the lack of an unambiguous and strong position pointing to those responsible for the aggression. However, it is important to keep in mind the difference between the perception of the authority of the leader of a particular Church in Catholics and in the Orthodox. The role of the Moscow Patriarch and his words have a different impact on Russians than the voice of Pope Francis on Catholics. The former will naturally address national issues and appeal to the entire collective, and highlight national pride and threats to the community. The latter, by virtue of its more cosmopolitan and multinational audience will focus on individual believers. A detachment from national issues will be apparent, and appeals will relate to individual consciences and experiences. For Catholics, the Pope is an authority on matters closely related to the faith, but this does not necessarily include his teaching in areas related to practical life choices. The Pope’s statements are differentiated by their importance, manner of announcement, etc. Only statements of a fundamental nature, concerning matters of faith and morals, given and announced in a solemn manner, have, according to Catholic theology, the value of infallibility. In practice, this is limited to the most important truths of the faith (dogmas). Most of the Pope’s ordinary daily statements are treated as an advisory voice for doubters, statements of a pastoral nature [22].

5. Discussion and conclusion

Media monitoring analysis usually refers to what is presented in the media. In the case of the Polish media space, it is worth noting as a surprise the almost complete lack of worldview polarization towards the topic of Kirill. Topics related to religion, the throne-altar alliance, the right-wing narrative or homophobia, would otherwise likely be used for the politically-charged attacks characteristic of the polarized Polish media. Meanwhile, during the analysis of the collected material, only 12 articles mentioning the name of the ruling party (Law and Justice) were noted, and only 3 of them pointed out the similarities in the narrative of Kirill and Law and Justice [R. Kwiatkowska, *Szymon Hołownia nazwał rosyjskiego patriarchę antychrystem! ‘Mówię to jako człowiek kochający prawosławie’*, <https://www.pomponik.pl/plotki/news-szymon-holownia-nazwal-rosyjskiego-patriarche-antychrystem-m,nId,5894342>, accessed on 02.04.2023; I. Rakowski-Kłós, *Atak Putina na Ukrainę to cios dla polskiego konserwatyzmu*, <https://wyborcza.pl/alehistoria/7,121681,28199703,atak-putina-na-ukraine-to-ci>

os-dla-polskiego-konserwatyizmu.html, accessed on 02.04.2023]. This means that worldview issues related to the views of the Orthodox Church and Putin were practically not used for the worldview battle in the Polish media.

Throughout the studied period, the narrative around Kirill is characterized by a kind of monochrome with an unequivocal indication that the right is on the side of the Ukrainians and that Putin's regime is responsible for the attack. In the course of the analysis, not a single material was encountered that portrayed Russians and Ukrainians in a different light and included any justification for the invasion by Kremlin troops. Patriarch Kirill has adopted optics that are in line with predictions, yet at the same time inconsistent with the expectations that should befit a major religious hierarch regardless of religion. In this media portrayal, Kirill is careless of his own losses and weakening status among the faithful outside Russia.

Monochromaticity, however, should not be confused with a shallowing of the message. Kirill's position is portrayed as properly prepared, coherent and multifaceted. It is a logical continuation of previous teaching, policies and actions both internally and externally. Adequate preparation is indicated by the reports, findings and retrospectives cited in the publications, which, in a way, fill the public eye. A theme related to morality and the LGBT threat is evident. A metaphysical theme clearly stands out in the messages, considering issues of the unity of the Eastern Slavs, the reaffirming aggression in NATO's actions, or the Russophobia of the West. The metaphysical thread is also expressed in symbolic gestures, where the sacred in the form of an image of the Virgin Mary is used utilitarianly to raise the morale of Russian soldiers. Both Kirill's gestures and statements are characterized by high media coverage. His opinions on LGBT, the West's Russophobia, or the use of the icon of the Virgin Mary for political purposes would in all likelihood have been 'picked up' by the Polish media in peacetime. It should, therefore, be presumed that these actions were not only calculated for internal use in Russia, but also for external impact.

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