

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Ukraine's Church Under Fire: Washington Conference Highlights Russia's Persecution of Christians in Ukraine: from the tsarist era to the Soviet regime and into present-day

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Washington, D.C., March 30, 2026 — The Center of Ukrainian Church Studies, in partnership with the Ukrainian Catholic University and the St. Gabriel Institute in Washington, hosted a [conference](#) “The 1946 Pseudo-Sobor: 80 Years Later — The Persecution Continues.” The conference marked the somber 80th anniversary of the 1946 Lviv Pseudo-Sobor, during which the Soviet authorities—through their security services and in cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church—sought to eliminate the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. This event stands as a stark example of the use of state violence to forcibly convert believers to a church already controlled by the regime. The campaign targeted a significant portion of the faithful in Western Ukraine for several reasons.

First, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was deeply rooted in Ukrainian identity and closely connected to its people. Second, as a Catholic Church, it maintained global ties—something perceived as a threat by the Soviet system. Most importantly, it functioned as a genuine community of believers rather than as an extension of the state apparatus.

As Dr. Oleh Turiy, Vice-Rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University and a historian of the Church, emphasized, the 1946 Pseudo-Sobor reflects a broader continuity of Russian imperial policy—from the tsarist era to the Soviet regime and into present-day Russia. He noted that in every period, authorities have sought to destroy religious institutions that did not conform to state control, particularly in territories under occupation.

“This event encapsulates both the earlier imperial policies of tsarist Russia—where anything that did not fit the system was systematically destroyed—and the later policies of Soviet and now Putin’s Russia. In occupied territories, the state immediately attempts to eliminate any church that does not align with its totalitarian model.

It is important to understand, however, that the Church cannot be destroyed. For believers, the Church is not merely an institution or a structure—it lives in their hearts, in their consciousness, in their culture, and in the very meaning of their existence. This is something neither the imperial authorities nor the Soviet system could fully comprehend.

As a result, this state-organized attempt to forcibly bring believers under control ultimately failed. The Church survived underground, preserving what mattered most to people. Later, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church played a crucial role in national and religious revival, contributing to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Today, similar attempts by the Putin regime to use the Church to justify war and violence are short-lived. Such efforts cannot remain effective for long—they will inevitably end in failure.”, said **Dr. Oleh Turiy, Vice-Rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University.**

The event explored one of the most consequential and painful chapters in modern Church history—the 1946 forced “reunion” of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) with the Russian Orthodox Church under Stalin—and how similar patterns of repression are reemerging in the context of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine. As of the end of 2025, 737 places of worship have been damaged or destroyed in Ukraine by Russian aggression. 67 clergy members across denominations have been killed. At least 2,881 attacks on healthcare have been documented, including strikes on hospitals, ambulances, and medical warehouses. 4,048 schools have been damaged and 408 destroyed, affecting millions of children. And it continues.

As recently as March 24, a Russian drone attack struck five meters from a UNESCO-listed 17th-century church in Lviv.

In addition to physical destruction, places of worship have been deliberately looted by Russian troops, shut down, or repurposed by occupation authorities into administrative buildings. The highest levels of destruction were recorded in the Donetsk region (at least 146 sites), Luhansk region (at least 83), and Kherson region (at least 78). Significant damage was also documented in the Kyiv region (73), where Russian forces attempted to seize the capital in the early weeks of the invasion. As hostilities continue, the number of destroyed religious sites is steadily increasing in Kharkiv (at least 62), Zaporizhzhia (at least 51), and Mykolaiv (at least 41) regions.

Russia's war against Ukraine demonstrates characteristics of genocide. Both the Kremlin's rhetoric and the actions of the Russian military point to an intent to destroy Ukrainians as a sovereign nation and as an ethnic group. Under international humanitarian law, such intent is evidenced not only by the widespread killing of civilians and systematic attacks on critical infrastructure, but also by the deliberate destruction of cultural and spiritual heritage. Russian forces have targeted museums, libraries, Ukrainian-language books, historical monuments, cultural landmarks, and religious institutions—key symbols of Ukrainian identity and nationhood.

Very Rev. Mitred Archpriest Dr. Mark M. Morozowich underscored that the issue is not only historical, but deeply relevant today:

"In today's world, religious freedom is being suppressed by Russia in the occupied territories of Ukraine. People in Washington—and across America—need to understand that. They need to see that their Protestant brothers and sisters are being persecuted, that churches are being seized and, in some cases, turned into other facilities. While serving youth is important, these buildings were created as places of faith.

Freedom of religion is a cornerstone of American identity. Yet it is denied in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine and even within Russia itself. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church cannot be properly registered and is treated as something illegitimate, not allowed to exist.

Human freedom, and especially freedom of religion, is fundamental. It is what defines us as human beings. And anyone who suppresses these freedoms is, in essence, degrading the very temple of God.", **Very Rev. Mitred Archpriest Dr. Mark M. Morozowich** said.

Archbishop Borys Gudziak, Metropolitan-Archbishop of Philadelphia and President of Ukrainian Catholic University, pointed to the enduring strength of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the urgency of speaking truth about Russia's war against Ukraine:

"This conference not only recalled but deepened our understanding of the attempt to liquidate the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in March 1946, eighty years ago. It also highlighted the clear failure of that attempt—because the Church is alive today. At the beginning of the 20th century, we had three eparchies; today, there are thirty-six eparchies and exarchates. Where there were two bishops, today there are fifty-five. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church holds strong moral authority in Ukraine.

Looking at this history, we see the roots of today's tragedy, today's falsehoods, and today's national policy, ideology, and actions. It is crucial to call things by their proper names and to find ways to communicate the truth about what is happening in Ukraine—the truth about the 'Russian world' ideology and Russian aggression. The wider world, which has its own challenges that we may not always fully understand, must not forget Ukraine. It must take a clear position and support those who are fighting for God's truth, for human dignity, for freedom

of conscience, and for the right to live justly in this world.” said **Archbishop Borys Gudziak, Metropolitan-Archbishop of Philadelphia and President of Ukrainian Catholic University.**

During the conference, the Blessed Omelyan Kovch International Award—presented for outstanding contributions to interethnic and ecumenical dialogue—was awarded to George Weigel, Catholic theologian and Senior Vatican Analyst. Reflecting on the significance of the event, Weigel emphasized the importance of greater awareness in the United States about both the war in Ukraine and the role of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church:

“I think it’s very important for everyone in the United States to understand exactly what is at stake in Ukraine’s victory in this war against Russian aggression. Secondly, it’s important for Americans to recognize the extraordinary role played by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church—both in Ukraine and here in the United States. That has been clearly highlighted over these two days.

Most Catholics in the United States know little or nothing about the Eastern Catholic Churches, and specifically about the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which is one of the great martyr Churches of our time. Its example should be an inspiration to all of us—Eastern Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Latin Rite Catholic alike.

When we speak about the persecution of Christians today, and how history is repeating itself, it is essential to bring attention to this issue. The voices of the martyrs are vital in the life of the Church. As Tertullian said 1,800 years ago, ‘the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.’ That remains true. But the witness of martyrs is also a source of encouragement for Christians around the world. To understand the reality of modern martyrdom—to recognize that we have been living through the greatest era of martyrdom in 2,000 years of Christian history—is something most American Catholics are simply unaware of. And if they were aware, it would inspire and strengthen their faith.” said **George Weigel, Catholic theologian and Senior Vatican Analyst.**

Special Exhibit during the Days of conference: “Marian Icons on Ammo Boxes” by Sonya Atlantova, Oleksandr Klymenko & Herman Klymenko. A powerful exhibition featuring icons painted on ammunition boxes recovered from the front lines in Ukraine. The project highlights the human cost of the war, with a particular focus on Ukrainian children held in Russian captivity and ongoing efforts to bring them home.