

# The Mission of the Church as a Unifying or Divisive Factor in Ecumenical Relations: The Case of Ukrainian Baptists and Greek-Catholics in the Lviv Region

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**Abstract:** This article examines ecumenical relations between two socially active churches: the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC) and the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists, through the lens of their understanding of Christian mission in the context of the full-scale Russian invasion. Combining systematic theological and empirical methods, the study explores how each church defines mission, drawing on broad and narrow conceptualizations and applying an adapted version of Emanuel Katongole's model of three types of mission: spiritual (evangelization), pastoral (practical service), and prophetic (structural change). Findings reveal notable differences: Baptists adopt a narrower focus on evangelization, while Greek-Catholics articulate a broader vision of a church being an instrument of salvation. Although both churches prioritize spiritual and pastoral missions over the prophetic, they differ in the relationship and hierarchy between the first two. Catholics view social ministry as a distinct and equally important task, whereas Baptists often link it instrumentally to evangelization. These divergences can challenge ecumenical cooperation, including joint social outreach. Nevertheless, shared values and common goals, particularly in responding to the needs generated by war, create opportunities for collaborative engagement. Recognizing and responding to these differences is essential for strengthening ecumenical relations and enhancing the churches' collective witness in society.

**Key words:** ecumenism, mission of the church, Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Ukrainian Baptist Church, social service, spiritual mission, pastoral mission, prophetic mission, ecumenical cooperation.

## Introduction

In May 2025, the Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary in Lviv hosted the “Leadership Initiative of Ukraine” round table. This event regularly brings together leaders from various Protestant churches for networking and discussion. Myroslav Marynovych—a renowned Ukrainian educator, human rights activist, and Soviet dissident affiliated with the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church—delivered a speech titled “We are in need of each other.”<sup>1</sup> His message centered on the theme of church unity in Ukraine. He pointed out that, over the past 30 years, churches of different traditions “have gained important and positive experiences of peaceful coexistence.”<sup>2</sup> Still, after discussing the “traps” that churches continue to face in their shared ‘prophetic gift’ against evil, Myroslav concluded with these words:

Today, we must strive not for the triumphant victory of any one Church or faith, but for the unification of efforts in increasing the cumulative effect of goodness and love, which alone can envelop and neutralize evil. And here again it is obvious that we are in need of each other.<sup>3</sup>

Since the aggression of Russia in 2014 and then the full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine as a state has faced a lot of ‘evil.’ The war, with its devastating consequences, has led to significant mobilization within civil society, with churches playing an active role. Ukraine, a country where all three major branches of Christianity coexist, nonetheless lacks an official ecumenical dialogue among its principal Christian traditions.<sup>4</sup> Practical cooperation is also mostly lacking. While some Christian congregations have initiated cooperation on joint social projects during the war, the majority still continue to operate independently in their social outreach efforts.

This paper draws on a master’s thesis that investigates the ecumenical and social relations between two growing and socially active churches in Ukraine: the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in the Lviv region.<sup>5</sup> Employing a systematic theological method, combined with in-depth interviews with clergy from both churches, the study aims to identify key barriers and opportunities for ecumenical cooperation. This article specifically examines how differing understandings and practices of mission may shape ecumenical engagement between these two churches.

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1 Myroslav Marynovych, “My potrebni odni odnym [We are in Need of Each Other],” *Zbruc*, June 11, 2025, <https://zbruc.eu/node/121649>, [in Ukrainian]. This and all the following translations from Ukrainian to English were done by Yuliia Kozak.

2 Marynovych, “My potrebni odni odnym.”

3 Marynovych, “My potrebni odni odnym.”

4 Synod i@pyskopiv UHKTs, “Hlava UHKTs pro ekumenichnyi dialoh [Head of UGCC about Ecumenical Dialogue],” October 29, 2019, <https://synod.ugcc.ua/data/glava-ugkts-pro-ekumenichnyy-dialog-v-ukrayni-shche-ne-osyagnuly-vsih-svitovyh-ekumenichnyh-zdobutkiv-1784>, [in Ukrainian].

5 Yuliia Kozak, “Ecumenical Relations between Ukrainian Greek-Catholic and Baptist Churches in the Lviv Region and Their Relation to the Joint Christian Mission in Society” (master’s thesis, Tilburg University, 2024).

Grounded in the conviction that mission is central to the life of the Christian church and that mission and Christian unity are deeply interconnected,<sup>6</sup> this research posits that Ukrainian churches are called to respond together to the devastating consequences of war. The paper argues that differing approaches to mission may present significant obstacles to long-term ecumenical cooperation, including one in the social sphere. It further suggests that acknowledging and addressing these differences is essential for fostering deeper, more sustainable collaboration between the churches, who are in “need of each other” for the effective and fruitful missionary work.

To explore this issue, I will begin with the brief literature review on ecumenism in the global and local Ukrainian context and continue with defining the key concepts of ecumenism and mission with outlining their interconnection. I will then introduce a model that distinguishes three dimensions of Christian mission—spiritual (evangelization), pastoral (social service), and prophetic (structural change)—which will serve as the analytical framework for empirical findings. After that, I will examine how the Ukrainian Baptist Church (UBC) and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC) understand social mission in light of existing scholarship. Building on this foundation, I will analyze how these perspectives are expressed in the practices and priorities of Baptist and Greek-Catholic communities in Lviv, drawing on qualitative interview data. Finally, I will reflect on how these differing approaches shape the potential for ecumenical cooperation and propose ways to advance joint missional efforts, particularly in the context of war.

## Literature Review

Ecumenism has received considerable attention in recent international theology, for example, in the works of David Nelson and Charles Raith<sup>7</sup>, Anthony Burgess<sup>8</sup>, Erin Brigham<sup>9</sup>, Steven Harmon<sup>10</sup>, and Antonia Pizzey<sup>11</sup>. Regarding this topic in Ukraine, relatively few scholarly works have been written on the ecumenical movement in the country as a whole and in the Lviv region in particular. Most existing research has focused on questions of reconciliation between the historically traditional Orthodox and Greek-Catholic communities in Ukraine. This is reflected in the academic

6 World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Commission, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TTCV)* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>.

7 R. D. Nelson and I. C. Raith, *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017).

8 Anthony Burgess, *Advancing Christian Unity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019).

9 Erin Brigham, *Sustaining the Hope for Unity: Ecumenical Dialogue in a Postmodern World* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012).

10 Steven Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

11 Antonia Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Renewal of the Ecumenical Movement: The Path of Ecclesial Conversion* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

articles of Ukrainian scholars: Lesia Bilovus and Oksana Homotiuk<sup>12</sup> who focus on the ecumenical vision of UGCC Patriarch Joseph Slipyi, whereas Myroslav Marynovych<sup>13</sup> addresses Orthodox–Catholic relations in a broader context, together with other scholars.

The Revolution of Dignity in 2014, as a specific manifestation of ‘practical’ ecumenism among all denominations in Ukraine, has been discussed in the scholarly works of Oksana Gorkusha and Liudmyla Fylypovych;<sup>14</sup> Cyril Hovorun<sup>15</sup> and others. Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a new theme related to ecumenism and Ukraine has emerged, primarily in international academia. It concerns the issue of ecumenism in times of war, particularly in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church, which openly supports and even praises Russian aggression, while at the same time maintaining its membership in the World Council of Churches and participating in the worldwide ecumenical dialogue. Both Ukrainian and foreign authors, such as Hovorun,<sup>16</sup> Clements,<sup>17</sup> Jørgensen and others,<sup>18</sup> have brought this topic to the forefront of theological scholarship.

At the same time, there is a clear theoretical gap in the literature researching the relationship between the Greek-Catholic and Evangelical denominations in Ukraine, including the Baptist churches. Mykhailo Cherenkov<sup>19</sup> and Roman Shvets<sup>20</sup> are of the few, whose article and thesis on the topic is available and relevant, as it discusses the possibility of ecumenical relations between the two. Moreover, looking at the ecumenical relations from the perspective of the joint engagement within civil society and Christian mission, and conducting an empirical study is quite a new approach. That is why the current study will contribute to the academic literature and will be able to provide a link between the missionary activities and ecumenical relations of the selected regional congregations.

12 Lesia Bilovus and Oksana Homotiuk, “Patriarch Iosyf Slipyi ta Ekumenizm [Patriarch Joseph Slipyi and Ecumenism],” *Humanitarni studii: istoriia ta pedahohika* 4 (2022): 26, <https://doi.org/10.35774/gsip2022.02.026>, [in Ukrainian].

13 Myroslav Marynovych, *Ukraïns'ka ideia ta khrystyianstvo abo koly hartsiuut' kol'orovi koni apokalipsysu [Ukrainian Idea and Christianity, or When the Colored Horses of the Apocalypse Prance]* (Lviv: Dukh i litera, 2003), [in Ukrainian].

14 Oksana Gorkusha and Liudmyla Fylypovych, “Revolution of Dignity as a Uniting Factor of the Ukrainian Denominations and Specific Manifestation of Ecumenism,” *Ukrainian Religious Studies*, no. 73 (2015): 43–51, <https://doi.org/10.32420/2015.73.457>.

15 Cyril Hovorun, “Christians in Ukraine: Ecumenism in the Trenches,” *Catholic World Report*, March 4, 2014, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2014/03/04/christians-in-ukraine-ecumenism-in-the-trenches/>.

16 Cyril Hovorun, “Can ‘Ecumenism as Usual’ Be Possible in the Wake of the War in Ukraine,” *Ecumenical Ends* 52 (2023): 25–31.

17 Keith Clements, “Dialogue or Confession? Ecumenical Responsibility and the War in Ukraine,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 21, no. 2 (2023): 246–59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355323000451>.

18 Jonas Adelin Jørgensen, Vera La Mela, and Jakob Wirén, “Editorial: Ecumenism in Times of Conflict and War,” *Exchange* 53, no. 1 (2024): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543x-bja10059>.

19 Mykhailo Cherenkov, “Protestants and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: In Search of Inclusive Solutions,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 38, no. 2 (2018): 40–54, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol38/iss2/3>.

20 Roman Shvets, “The Ecumenical Position of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and Its Relevance for Baptist Churches in Ukraine” (M.Th. thesis, International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation, 2011), ProQuest (1501995).

## Interconnection of Ecumenism and Mission

To explore how differing approaches to mission influence long-term ecumenical cooperation between the churches, it is first essential to define the concepts of ecumenism and mission and explore their connection.

Church traditions and theologians emphasize different aspects of ecumenism, a diversity that is also reflected in the two churches examined in this study. For example, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church defines ecumenism as the process aimed at the “restoration of the full unity of all Christians.”<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Baptists do not adhere to a single, universally recognized position on ecumenism. However, Baptist theologian Steven R. Harmon suggests that the model of receptive ecumenism aligns well with Baptist ecclesiology, allowing churches to remain rooted in their own traditions while being open to learning from the gifts and insights of others.<sup>22</sup>

Although the differences in the understanding of ecumenism are not the primary focus of this paper, empirical findings from the research conducted for the author’s master’s thesis indicate that these differences present a subtle yet real barrier to building ecumenical relationships between Baptists and Greek-Catholics in the Lviv region.<sup>23</sup>

For the purposes of this study, ecumenism is defined according to Nelson and Raith, who offer a comprehensive and widely applicable understanding of ecumenism. They define it as:

The full range of activities and efforts into which Christians and the Christian churches, at every level of membership and participation, invest time and energy for the sake of unity between them, a unity that, according to the Christian confession, is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and manifests itself in common faith and practice.<sup>24</sup>

Mission is an integral part of the nature and life of the Christian church, as Christian faith is “intrinsically missionary.”<sup>25</sup> However, the understanding of the term mission has undergone significant transformation and remains ambiguous depending on the ecclesiastical context.

The debate over the church’s mission and its role in the world has been ongoing since the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910.<sup>26</sup> Originally, mission was understood primarily as the proclamation of the Gospel to the non-Christian world, with the ecumenical movement emphasizing global evangelization. This

21 Komisiia Epyskopiv UHKTS, “Ekumenichna kontseptsiia Ukrain’s’koï Hreko-Katolyts’koï Tserkvy” [Ecumenical Conception of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church], 2015, para. 26, <https://docs.ugcc.ua/1539/>, [in Ukrainian].

22 Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 152.

23 Kozak, *Ecumenical Relations*, 22.

24 Nelson and Raith, *Ecumenism*, 11.

25 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 28.

26 Tom F. Stransky, “Missio Dei,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Lossky et al., 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 780.

model, referred to as *missio ecclesiae*, positioned the church as the center of saving activity.<sup>27</sup> The Edinburgh conference called for worldwide church unity to achieve global conversion, thereby directly linking ecumenism to mission in the meaning of evangelisation.<sup>28</sup>

By the mid-20th century, church leaders and theologians shifted focus to *missio Dei*, expanding the mission to include all of God's saving activities in the world—encompassing areas such as social justice, the environment, and gender issues.<sup>29</sup> Bosch further emphasized this shift, asserting that mission and evangelism are linked but do not have identical meanings, defining mission as “wider than evangelism.”<sup>30</sup>

The Lausanne Movement recently reinforced this understanding in the evangelical world, advocating for integral mission, which includes both evangelism and Christian social action. It proposes adopting the missional *koinonia* framework, which emphasizes the holistic transformation of God's creation through partnership with God and one another.<sup>31</sup>

For the purposes of this article the definition of mission made by Walter Kasper was used who offers a clear distinction between two scopes of mission that are often conflated. He presents both broader and narrower understandings of mission, which serve as the theoretical framework for comparing empirical data gathered through interviews with clergy from both churches:

In a broad sense, mission means the fundamental vocation of the church to be the universal sacrament of salvation; in a narrower sense, it means the preaching of the Gospel and the establishment of new communities among human beings who have not belonged to the church.<sup>32</sup>

Theologically and practically, the pursuit of mission often necessitates ecumenical collaboration. As Lesslie Newbigin argued, the Church's missionary calling is compromised by internal divisions, making unity essential for a credible witness.<sup>33</sup> According to Bosch (1991), the unity of the Church in mission transcends internal concerns, functioning to serve humanity and to manifest the cosmic rule of Christ through the Church.<sup>34</sup> These perspectives underscore that mission and ecumenism are not separate endeavors but are intrinsically linked, with the level of ecumenical relations directly impacting the churches' missional service to society. Given the current war in Ukraine and the many challenges facing its population, joint missional work among Christian communities has never been more urgent.

27 Stransky, “Missio Dei,” 782.

28 E. Castro, “Evangelism,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Lossky et al., 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 445–446.

29 Stransky, “Missio Dei,” 782.

30 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 351.

31 Everton Jackson, “Affirming Our Common Calling: Interdependence for Polycentric Mission,” *Lausanne Global Analysis*, July 2024, <https://lausanne.org/global-analysis/affirming-our-common-calling>.

32 Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 292–293.

33 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (New York: Friendship Press, 1953).

34 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 395.

In his paper “Role of the Churches in Establishing a Just Peace in Ukraine”<sup>35</sup> Greek-Catholic archpriest and theologian Yuriy Shchurko underscores that ecumenical unity is indispensable for achieving a just peace in a country wounded by prolonged Russian aggression. He argues that the search for Christian unity—expressed through preaching the Gospel, sharing Christian values, and joint service in the public sphere—is a precondition for building such peace. Addressing the churches in Ukraine, Shchurko insists that a society yearning for peace “needs and wants to see in us a deep desire for unity, authentic love, examples of humility and mutual respect, genuine fraternal solidarity in various spheres of social life, and all this, in turn, will contribute to the establishment of a just peace.”<sup>36</sup>

In terms of mission, Shchurko highlights the need for a “new evangelization” that not only communicates Gospel values but also offers hope to those wounded and exhausted by war. This task requires the churches to proclaim Christ rather than emphasize denominational differences, and to pursue repentance, renewal, and mutual encounter in an ecumenical spirit.<sup>37</sup>

Yuriy Shchurko also stresses that Ukrainian churches must bring the issue of just peace into the international arena. He urges Ukrainian Christian intellectuals to expose “the numerous blind spots in the social teachings of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches” and to confront the false narratives of Russian propaganda, which, in his view, manipulates Christian rhetoric for political ends.<sup>38</sup>

Although Greek-Catholic and Baptist churches may differ in their understanding of the ultimate goal and form of ecumenism, there remains a direct connection between ecclesial unity—or conversely, division—and the effectiveness of the Christian mission in society. Division is not merely an internal weakness of the Church but a manifestation of sin that diminishes its capacity to serve the common good. In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, unity and cooperation among the churches are essential: to provide spiritual healing for the nation, to promote Gospel-based values as the foundation for rebuilding society, to respond to physical and social needs, and to advocate for a just peace while countering the false narratives of Russian propaganda.

## Theoretical Framework: Types of Mission

The question of the mission of the church has been addressed in a variety of ways by theologians and church leaders. In this study, a specific model developed by an African theologian Emmanuel Katongole was adapted and applied, which

35 Yuriy Shchurko, “Rol’ TŠerkov u vstanovlenni spravedlyvoho myru v Ukraïni [Role of the Churches in Establishing a Just Peace in Ukraine],” in *U Misiï TŠerkvy v pisliãvoïenniï perspektyvi Ukraïny*, ed. Prot. V. Vakin (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2024), [in Ukrainian].

36 Shchurko, “Rol’ TŠerkov u vstanovlenni spravedlyvoho myru,” 117.

37 Shchurko, “Rol’ TŠerkov u vstanovlenni spravedlyvoho myru,” 121, 122.

38 Shchurko, “Rol’ TŠerkov u vstanovlenni spravedlyvoho myru,” 120.

distinguishes three different visions of mission and its relationship with the state: spiritual, pastoral, and prophetic.<sup>39</sup>

**Spiritual Mission:** This approach focuses primarily on the spiritual well-being of church members. It assumes that a strong moral motivation from individuals within the church will enable them to respond effectively to external social challenges. This vision of mission is often linked to evangelization, in which the church's goal is to preach the Gospel, leading individuals to spiritual renewal. In this model, church members are seen as part of a moral elite, whose spiritual transformation can have a positive impact on society<sup>40</sup>.

**Pastoral Mission:** This type of mission emphasizes practical service to society, embodying the church's role as "the healer and servant of the poor."<sup>41</sup> It entails a ministry of quiet service that attends to the immediate needs of individuals, such as providing food, shelter, and care for marginalized groups. While pastoral mission is rooted in love and charity, it is not typically focused on challenging or changing the broader societal systems that contribute to injustice and inequality. This vision aligns closely with social action projects undertaken by churches, such as caring for the homeless, refugees, orphans, and other vulnerable populations.

**Prophetic Mission:** This model, which is the most radical of the three, centers on the church's role in advocating for structural change in society. It is committed to advancing the coming reign of God and actively bringing about its realization in the present world. A prophetic church is prepared to take risks by speaking out against systemic injustice, engaging in civil society movements, and calling for reforms to corrupt state institutions and social structures. According to Katongole prophetic mission goes beyond individual evangelism or social service to become a force for deep social and political transformation.<sup>42</sup>

The author applies the distinction between the three models to the current social situation in Africa and its connection to the vision of Christian mission that local churches exercise. It resonates well with the current socio-political situation in Ukraine and the positions taken by the different churches there. Therefore, the model of Katongole will be used to identify, what is the view on church mission in society and how Greek-Catholic and Baptist churches in the Lviv region differ in their views.

## Understanding Social Mission: Baptists and Greek-Catholics

Before presenting the empirical findings—drawn from in-depth interviews with priests and pastors from selected churches in the Lviv region—I will briefly review the theoretical perspectives on the church's mission among Ukrainian Baptists and

39 Emmanuel M. Katongole, "The Church within African Theological Imagination," *Missionalia* 30, no. 2 (2002): 207, [https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/AJA02569507\\_1019](https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/AJA02569507_1019)

40 Katongole, "The Church within African Theological Imagination," 207.

41 Katongole, "The Church within African Theological Imagination," 208.

42 Katongole, "The Church within African Theological Imagination," 208.



Greek-Catholics as described in academic literature. Rather than addressing the mission in its broadest sense, I will focus on its social embodiment as practiced by both denominations. This focus is crucial for the article's central question: how differing understandings and practices of mission may shape ecumenical engagement between these two churches, and why most churches continue to conduct social outreach actions separately rather than collaboratively. A distinctive emphasis will be placed on understanding the relationship between the three types of mission: spiritual (evangelization); pastoral (social work); prophetic (structural change).

The overview here will be based on distinct sources for each denomination. For the Greek-Catholic church, I will refer specifically to the document "Serve One Another with Love: A Manual for Organizing Social Service in Parishes,"<sup>43</sup> published by the international charitable foundation Caritas of Ukraine.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, due to the different ecclesial structure, Ukrainian Baptists do not have comparable officially published documents or guidelines for missionary activities, including social services. Therefore, my analysis for the Baptists will primarily use the recently published doctoral dissertation by Jason Kumar Gupta, which addresses the "Role of the Social Ministry in the Mission of Ukrainian Baptist Church."<sup>45</sup> In the text below, I use the term *Ukrainian Baptist Church* (UBC) following Jason Gupta to denote the *All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists*. While the Union does not constitute a single church in the ecclesiological sense, the term is used here as a convenient shorthand for the Baptist community in Ukraine represented by the Union.

## Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

According to the *Manual for Social Service Ministry*, the foundation and driving force of social service in the UGCC is faith, which reveals the Church's diaconal nature. The diaconal mission is one of the Church's threefold tasks: proclaiming the Good News (Kerygma), sanctifying (Liturgy), and serving (Diakonia)<sup>46</sup>. The manual defines *social service* as:

...an activity aimed at solving social problems and ensuring social justice. It covers the entire spectrum of social activity and includes the provision of volunteer assistance, charity and organized forms of providing social services to individuals and groups in need in order to ensure their holistic development.<sup>47</sup>

43 MBF Caritas Ukraïny. *Liūbov'iū sluzhīt' odyń odnomu. Posibnyk z orhanizatśii sotśial'noho sluzhīnniā u hromadakh* [Serve One Another in Love: A Manual for Organizing Social Ministry in Communities] (Lviv: Lohos, 2024), [in Ukrainian].

44 *Kompendium sotśial'noi doktryny tśerkvy* [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church] (Kyiv: Kairos, 2008).

45 Jason Kumar Gupta, "The Role of Social Ministry in the Mission of the Ukrainian Baptist Church" (PhD diss., Biola University, School of Intercultural Studies, 2022), <https://www.proquest.com/openview/3fdbd0bb47f3501264155d82b3da7e59/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

46 MBF Caritas Ukraïny, *Liūbov'iū sluzhīt' odyń odnomu*, 5.

47 MBF Caritas Ukraïny, *Liūbov'iū sluzhīt' odyń odnomu*, 5.

Although the manual does not explicitly distinguish between the pastoral and prophetic missions of the Church, this definition of *Diakonia* implicitly encompasses both. On the one hand, it includes practical service to society (pastoral mission) through volunteer and charitable activities; on the other, it reflects a prophetic dimension by seeking to address social problems and promote social justice.

At the same time, the mission of proclaiming the Good News (spiritual) is presented as a distinct task, equally important alongside sanctifying and serving. The absence of hierarchy among the three aspects of the Church's triune mission in UGCC is also emphasized in Moroz's article, where he describes their relationship in the following way:

The evangelizing mission of the Church is to teach and spread the Gospel, where the witness of Christ the Savior is accompanied by the need for daily work and the struggle for justice. The Church emphasizes that this is not a secondary matter, but the heart of its ministry [...].<sup>48</sup>

This vision underscores the theological conviction of the UGCC that evangelization and social ministry form an integrated whole, in which the pastoral and prophetic dimensions naturally converge.

### The All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists

In his doctoral thesis on the social ministry of Ukrainian Baptists, researcher Jason Kumar Gupta examines how the role of social ministry is understood within the mission of the UBC and how it is rooted in their broader theology of mission—a perspective that, according to him, had not been studied before.<sup>49</sup> In his study, the author clarifies that the notion of social ministry encompasses both *social service* and *social action*. He defines them as follows:

*Social service* refers to the forms of social ministry that focus on relieving human need, emphasizing philanthropic activity that seeks to minister to individuals and families with works of mercy.<sup>50</sup>

*Social action* refers to the forms of social ministry that focus on removing the causes of human need, emphasizing political and economic activity that seeks to transform the structures of society in a quest for justice.<sup>51</sup>

48 Volodymyr Moroz, "Tserkva ta i zavdannia u sviti: Do pytanniā pro potentsial suspil'noho vchennia UHKTS [A Church and Its Task in the World: On the Potential of Public Studies of UGCC]," *Naukovi zapysky Natsional noho universytetu 'Ostroz ka akademiia.'* Seriia 'Istorychne relihiieznavstvo,' no. 2 (2010): 121, accessed September 12, 2025, 121, [http://www.irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis\\_nbuv/cgiirbis\\_64.exe?C21COM=2&I21DBN=UJRN&P21DBN=UJRN&IMAGE\\_FILE\\_DOWNLOAD=1&Image\\_file\\_name=PDF/NznuoairD2009\\_2010\\_2\\_15.pdf](http://www.irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis_nbuv/cgiirbis_64.exe?C21COM=2&I21DBN=UJRN&P21DBN=UJRN&IMAGE_FILE_DOWNLOAD=1&Image_file_name=PDF/NznuoairD2009_2010_2_15.pdf)

49 Gupta, "The Role of the Social Ministry," 3.

50 Gupta, "The Role of the Social Ministry," 7.

51 Gupta, "The Role of the Social Ministry," 7.

These categories align closely with the pastoral (social service) and prophetic (social action) dimensions of mission, as described in Katongole's model. However, unlike Katongole, who clearly distinguishes between them, Kumar Gupta identifies both as integral parts of the broader social ministry mission of the Baptist Church in Ukraine. When this framework is compared with the UGCC's definition of social service, it becomes evident that the two perspectives are largely compatible.

One of Gupta's main objectives is to examine the relationship between evangelism and social ministry, specifically in the context of Ukrainian Baptists. To this end, he introduces a conceptual framework for analyzing empirical findings, identifying three primary possibilities: 1) *social mission as a consequence of evangelism*; 2) *social mission as a bridge to evangelism*; 3) *social mission as a partner to evangelism*.<sup>52</sup> The latter category in the scheme consists of 2 more subcategories, with social mission being a *junior* or *integral* partner with evangelism. Gupta argues for the need to adopt a holistic approach to mission as transformation, where social ministry and evangelism are treated as integral and equal partners without prioritizing one over the other.<sup>53</sup> Based on his empirical data, he draws the following conclusions about the perception of mission among Ukrainian Baptists.

First, he observes that although Ukrainian Baptists have shifted from a traditionally isolationist and inward-looking stance toward greater openness and a willingness to serve their neighbors, they still lack theological foundations that would enable a truly holistic approach<sup>54</sup>. Second, he concludes that the relationship between evangelism and social mission among Ukrainian Baptists often "includes the roles of consequence, bridge, and, for some, junior partner [...] the UBC is clearly still in process as it continues to discover and grow in its understanding of its mission."<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, it can be concluded that, from the perspective of Ukrainian Baptists, evangelism (spiritual mission) and social ministry (pastoral and prophetic) are viewed as distinct endeavors, with evangelism generally taking precedence to varying degrees. In contrast, the UGCC envisions the sharing of the Gospel and social ministry as inseparable and equally prioritized, highlighting a theological approach that differs from that of the Baptists.

## Empirical Findings

Building on the theoretical framework presented above, the empirical data were analyzed to assess how their respective understandings of mission influence their actions in society and their potential for ecumenical cooperation.

The interviews were examined through the lens of Walter Kasper's distinction between the broader and narrower understandings of mission. Additionally, Emmanuel Katongole's three-dimensional model—spiritual, pastoral, and prophetic—was

52 For the detailed explanation of each category, see Gupta, "The Role of the Social Ministry," 22, 24, 26.

53 Gupta, "The Role of the Social Ministry," 27–31.

54 Gupta, "The Role of the Social Ministry," 243.

55 Gupta, "The Role of the Social Ministry," 245.

used as a framework for understanding how the clergy from both traditions view the mission of the church in relation to the war and the social challenges posed by it.

Finally, the comparison between the theoretical and empirical findings on the views of the social mission in UGCC and UBC will be added.

## Definition of Mission

The analysis reveals two distinct patterns in the definitions of mission provided by the clergy of the two churches. Greek-Catholic priests tended to define mission in the broader sense, viewing the church as an instrument of salvation for the world. For example, one priest described the mission as “bringing the Kingdom of God,” which involves “applying God’s principles or biblical teachings to the way we live our social lives.”<sup>56</sup> At the same time, both priests also emphasized the importance of evangelization, aligning with the narrower definition of mission.

By contrast, the Baptist pastors consistently focused on the narrower definition of mission, emphasizing the preaching of the Gospel and the making of disciples. One pastor defined the missionary aim as: “to make disciples, that is, to witness to Christ and convert people to God,”<sup>57</sup> while another emphasized the Great Commission, where the church’s primary task is to preach and make disciples of others.

These findings highlight that while both traditions value evangelization, the Greek-Catholic approach integrates it with broader social and spiritual responsibilities, whereas the Baptist focus remains primarily on the proclamation of the Gospel.

## Type of Mission

While reflecting on the empirical data analyzed through the importance and practice of the three types of mission during the war: spiritual (evangelization), pastoral (social work), and prophetic (advocacy for structural change) the following observations were made.

Greek-Catholic priests were predominantly focused on pastoral mission, seeing social service as a key expression of the church’s role in society, in particular during the war. They also viewed spiritual mission as essential, emphasizing preaching and administering the sacraments.

Baptist pastors, on the other hand, prioritized the spiritual mission of preaching the Gospel. They acknowledged the necessity of social work, particularly in times of war, but remained firmly rooted in the belief that evangelism is the core mission of the church. One pastor explained that “social service loses all meaning without evangelism, and evangelism without social practical help is weak.”<sup>58</sup> This highlights the Baptists’ view that social work should always be closely linked to the proclamation of the Gospel.

<sup>56</sup> Kozak, “Ecumenical Relations,” 24.

<sup>57</sup> Kozak, “Ecumenical Relations,” 24.

<sup>58</sup> Kozak, “Ecumenical Relations,” 25.

While both churches recognized the prophetic mission, it was ranked as a lower priority. Clergymen from both churches questioned the priority of the prophetic voice during wartime, suggesting that social mission followed by spiritual healing holds greater importance. However, some notable examples were given of prophetic action at the level of church leadership. For instance, the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO)<sup>59</sup> has facilitated joint actions, such as public statements condemning the war and calling for international support. This collaboration is a clear example of how churches can come together to make a unified stand on issues of critical importance, even when their overall approach to mission may differ.

One possible explanation for why interviewees ranked the prophetic mission relatively low is that both churches do not treat it as a distinct category, but rather integrate it within their social ministry. This suggests that charitable activities and addressing the immediate consequences of social injustice through the practical help to those in need (pastoral mission) are given higher priority than efforts aimed at structural change to tackle the root causes of injustice. Although I might question this prioritization, it highlights a potential opportunity for future research.

### *Views on Spiritual and Pastoral Mission*

Interviews revealed contrasting ways in which Greek-Catholics and Baptists conceptualize the relationship between evangelization and social ministry. Greek-Catholics tend to treat the two as distinct processes, often describing social work as a “silent mission.” Baptists, by contrast, consistently view social ministry as subordinate to evangelization, with pastors describing it as a tool to support preaching: “One of the tools of evangelism [...] is social work.”<sup>60</sup>

These findings align with the UGCC’s official teaching, which presents diakonia as an equally important component of the Church’s threefold mission alongside kerygma and liturgy. They also confirm Jason Kumar Gupta’s observation that Ukrainian Baptists generally subordinate social ministry to evangelization, treating it as a consequence, a bridge or junior rather than an equal partner. Although caution is needed in generalizing across entire denominations, the consistency of the responses indicates a discernible pattern.

This divergence has direct implications for ecumenical collaboration. Differing understandings of how spiritual and social missions relate may complicate efforts to establish common goals for cooperation, a challenge compounded by existing stereotypes and limited awareness of each other’s theological frameworks. As one Baptist pastor admitted, reflecting this lack of clarity: “I don’t know what their [Catholic] mission is, or what it sounds like.”<sup>61</sup>

59 UCCRO (Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations) – an interdenominational institution that operates as an NGO and represents 90% of all religious organizations in Ukraine with an equal membership status. URL: <https://vrciro.org.ua/en/council/info>.

60 Kozak, “Ecumenical Relations,” 25.

61 Kozak, “Ecumenical Relations,” 26.

Another important dimension concerns how mission is articulated and communicated within church hierarchies. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC) possesses a formalized and officially documented approach to missionary activity, including social service, reflecting both its communion with the Roman Catholic Church and its reliance on Catholic social teaching. Baptist churches, by contrast, do not operate with a single, officially codified missionary strategy (similar to their undefined stance on ecumenism). Nevertheless, as Kumar Gupta's empirical findings confirm, a broadly shared vision of mission exists across Baptist communities. The terminology employed also differs: the UGCC frames mission in terms of *kerygma* (proclamation), *leitourgia* (liturgy/sanctification), and *diakonia* (service), whereas Baptist churches employ different categories, which, when explained in context, often prove broadly compatible in meaning.

## Opportunities

One of the key ways to better understand and seek unity between denominations is to create common platforms for dialogue, prayer, and social action. A common goal, especially evident in times of war, has already become a unifying factor for churches of different traditions. In practice, this process manifests itself in interdenominational communication and the search for common ground, which is especially intensive in the field of academic theology, as was confirmed by some of the respondents. At the same time, the idea of unity needs to be concretized in the form of practical actions – in particular, establishing contacts and cooperation between communities at the local level. It is also important to explore and eliminate the factors of division that hinder deeper unity. One such factor is the different understanding of the mission of the church. Overcoming this conceptual difference can be a significant step towards both practical and spiritual unity.

Addressing the empirical findings, clergy from both traditions agreed that cooperation is possible, particularly in the areas of pastoral mission and evangelization, provided it avoids proselytism and emphasizes a shared commitment to serving Ukrainian society. They also acknowledged the positive potential of joint social action projects with ecumenical partners, aimed at addressing both practical and spiritual needs within society. At the same time, they stressed that such collaboration requires a clear and unified understanding of the missional goal, as well as mutual recognition and respect: "Before we can do something for people, for society, for a community, a city, a village, we must build relationships based on respect and mutual understanding. Then we can do something for people. If there is no such basis, there is no cooperation."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Kozak, "Ecumenical Relations," 28.

## Conclusions

This article examined ecumenical relations and cooperation between two Christian denominations in the Lviv region of Ukraine, namely the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic and Ukrainian Baptist churches. The analysis was grounded in the understanding that mission is an integral aspect of the Christian church and that ecumenism and mission are intrinsically interconnected. In the context of the devastating consequences of the full-scale war in Ukraine, the united missional calling of the Christian church is more urgent than ever. However, churches in Ukraine continue to carry out their missionary activities, including social ministry to those affected by the war, largely independently. This study asked how mission is understood in the studied churches and whether differing approaches may constitute a barrier to sustained ecumenical cooperation, including collaborative efforts in the social sphere.

Based on an analysis of academic literature and empirical research involving interviews with clergy from both churches, interpreted through the model of three dimensions of mission, several conclusions emerge.

First, in their definitions of mission, a distinctive pattern is observed: representatives of the UGCC articulated a broader approach, viewing the church as an instrument of salvation, while Baptists emphasized a narrower focus on preaching the Gospel.

Second, both churches recognized the three dimensions of mission—spiritual (evangelization), pastoral (social work), and prophetic (structural change)—but consistently ranked the prophetic dimension as the lowest priority in times of war. Theoretical analysis of UGCC social ministry documents and doctoral research on Ukrainian Baptists indicates that both traditions tend to merge pastoral and prophetic dimensions under the concept of social ministry. This may partly explain why structural transformation aimed at social justice was perceived as less important. Charitable activities and addressing immediate social needs (pastoral mission) were prioritized over efforts to tackle root causes of injustice. This topic warrants further in-depth investigation.

Finally, while both churches place high importance on spiritual and pastoral missions, the relationship and hierarchy between the two differ. Catholics tend to view social ministry as a separate but equally important component of mission, whereas Baptists prioritize the proclamation of the Gospel and often link social ministry to evangelization, instrumentalizing it as a means to promote spiritual renewal. These differences are subtle, rooted in longstanding convictions and institutional patterns, and therefore pose a potential challenge to ecumenical unity.

Recognizing these differences while focusing on shared mission and clearly communicating mutual goals is essential for strengthening relationships between the churches and building long-term partnerships. Existing platforms for cooperation and joint social action projects offer opportunities to deepen collaboration, particularly when centered on a common purpose: serving people affected by war through a united Christian witness that integrates spiritual, pastoral, and prophetic dimensions of mission, mindful that “we are in need of each other.”

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## Місія Церкви як чинник єдності чи поділу в екуменічних відносинах: Досвід українських баптистів і греко-католиків у Львівській області

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Анотація: У цій статті розглянуто екуменічні відносини між двома соціально активними церквами: Українською Греко-Католицькою Церквою (УГКЦ) та Всеукраїнським Союзом Церков Євангельських Християн-Баптистів через призму їхнього розуміння християнської місії в контексті повномасштабного вторгнення Росії. Поеднуючи систематико-богословський та емпіричний методи, дослідження аналізує, як кожна з церков розуміє місію, ґрунтуючись на концептуалізації ширшого та вузкого бачення місії церкви, а також застосовуючи адаптовану версію моделі Емануеля Катонголе, яка виокремлює три типи місії: духовну (євангелізація), пастирську (практичне служіння) та пророчу (структурні зміни). Результати дослідження виявляють помітні відмінності: баптисти зосереджуються на євангелізації, тоді як греко-католики висловлюють ширше бачення церкви як інструменту спасіння. Хоча обидві церкви надають пріоритет духовній та пастирській місії над пророчою, вони відрізняються у відносинах та ієрархії між першими двома. Католики розглядають соціальне служіння як окреме і не менш важливе завдання, тоді як баптисти часто тісно пов'язують та інструменталізують соціальне служіння задля євангелізації. Ці розбіжності можуть становити виклик для екуменічної співпраці, включаючи спільну соціальну діяльність. Проте спільні цінності та цілі, особливо у відповіді на потреби, породжені війною, створюють можливості для співпраці. Визнання цих відмінностей та реагування на них є важливим для зміцнення екуменічних відносин та посилення колективного свідчення церков у суспільстві.

Ключові слова: екуменізм, місія Церкви, Українська Греко-Католицька Церква, Українська Баптиська Церква, соціальне служіння, духовна місія, пастирська місія, пророча місія, екуменічна співпраця.

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