

# Churches, Dignity, Gender: the Istanbul Convention as a Matter of Public Theology in Ukraine

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## Abstract

This article is based on a case-study of the public debate in Ukraine on the so-called Istanbul Convention 'on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence'. The debate polarizes churches and more liberal parts of society. The author seeks for the roots of the churches' position not to address the structural causes of domestic violence as gender-based violence. How does this relate to embracing dignity of the human being as a core principle of the Maidan revolution and of Christian anthropology? Influential documents on moral theology play a detrimental role. The author makes suggestions to address more adequately domestic violence in public theology in Ukrainian context. The coordinates of the proposal are the need for a gender-critical dignity discourse, the need for reimagining the sacramental theology of marriage, and insights for the methodology of a public theology that wants to be both deeply engaged and truly academic.

## Keywords

Orthodoxy – dignity – gender – traditional values – domestic violence – Maidan revolution

## 1 Introduction

As many Ukrainian scholars, among them Mykhailo Dymyd,<sup>1</sup> Cyril Hovorun,<sup>2</sup> Tetiana Kalenychenko,<sup>3</sup> and Mykhailo Cherenkov,<sup>4</sup> contend, the Revolution of Dignity 2013–2014 marked a seismic shift in the churches' public engagement with civil society. For many Ukrainian Christians, on Maidan the Church 'went public'. The people's uprising against the authoritarian, corrupt Yanukovych regime, and for European integration and a 'better Ukraine', gave an impetus to theological reflection on the calling and responsibilities of the church. The focus was not primarily on the relation to the state, as often is the first inclination of Orthodox churches in post-Soviet space, but on the relation to civil society and engaging with contemporary issues in the public sphere. Joshua Searle in his introductory article to this issue describes as one of the main social roles of the church 'to become a humanizing force in post-Soviet society, infusing the civil society with the Christian values of dignity and compassion'.<sup>5</sup> Public theology, in his view, is a transformative undertaking. The aim of public theology is the well-being of society as a whole. The church is a part of that civil society, and is called to transform it from the inside by transfiguring the post-Soviet vices with Christian values. Searle reflects in particular on the emergence of a public theology in the evangelical communities in Ukraine which, until recently in a non-worldly piety, tended to turn away from the political and economic realities. From the discourse generated by public theology, he

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- 1 Mykhailo Dymyd, *Kaminnya Maydanu* [Stones of Maidan], (Lviv: Svichado, 2014); Mykhailo Dymyd, *Bogoslovia Svobody: Ukrainska Versiya* [Theology of liberation: Ukrainian version], (Lviv: Ukrainskiy Katolyckiy Universytet, 2020).
  - 2 Cyril Hovorun, 'Churches in the Ukrainian Public Square', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 31:1 (2015), 3–14; Cyril Hovorun, 'Foundations of Political Theology in Ukrainian Context', in Rob van der Laarse, Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, Vitaliy V. Proshak and Tetiana Mykhalchuk, eds, *Religion, State, Society and Identity in Transition: Ukraine*, (Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2015), 281–298; Cyril Hovorun, *Ukrainska Publichna Teologia*. (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2017).
  - 3 Tetiana Kalenychenko, 'Öffentliche Religion auf dem Kiewer Majdan'. *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 46:3 (2018): 10–13; Tetiana Kalenychenko, *Religijna skladova suspil'no-političnogo konfliktu kincja 2013–2017 rr. v Ukraini*. [Religious component of the socio-political conflict from the end of 2013–2017 in Ukraine], (PhD diss. Dragomanov National Pedagogical University, Kyiv, 2018).
  - 4 Mykhailo Cherenkov, 'The Church's social activism in post-Maidan Ukraine', 17 April, 2018, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/04/17/church-without-walls-churchs-social-activism-post-maidan-ukraine/> [accessed 18 August, 2020].
  - 5 Joshua T. Searle, 'Theology After Maidan: New Points of Departure for Public Theology in the Post-Soviet Space', in this issue, 265.

expects nourishment for the church and the civil society 'in their common quest to humanize the public arena.'<sup>6</sup>

I agree with Searle's view of the need for and scope of public theology in the post-Soviet space. His diagnosis of a 'spiritual nihilism',<sup>7</sup> a 'crisis of compassion'<sup>8</sup> underlying social problems makes sense. However, the proposed response to this crisis by turning to the values of the Kingdom of God—which he identifies as freedom, compassion, creativity, and presented in an attractive and prophetically appealing way—could be strengthened, in my view, by including an in-depth critical analysis of power structures and power dynamics. Such an analysis calls attention to the questions: Who discursively proclaims and shapes these spiritual values in the current context? Which people are included in its social expression and realization, and who are not? What protects these values from rhetorical abuse by powerful institutions or social agents?

I have become sensitive to power structures and power dynamics at play in religious discourses on values. Too often they have led to politics and practices of morality that are detrimental to women and other less powerful groups in society. Far from saying that this will be the necessary outcome of Searle's approach, let alone that it would be his intention, I suggest that his proposal is rather blind to potential abuse. It would benefit from a stronger inclusion of a theological analysis that dealt with the social realities of power and conflict. This can be linked with the need for a stronger interdisciplinary interaction and dialogue.<sup>9</sup>

I want to argue for a public-political theology in a feminist key, which addresses power structures in institutions, discourses and practices.<sup>10</sup> Such a public-political theology calls for a hermeneutical attitude that acknowledges that social interactions of Christians are part of a struggle. As Julio Tavares Zabatiere contends: 'The privileged place of theology today is the public square; the place of the struggle for justice; the place of struggle for the humanity of human beings; the place of struggle for the ecological citizenship of

6 Ibid., 266.

7 Ibid., 267.

8 Ibid., 267.

9 Ibid., 258.

10 In theological circles in Ukraine, I notice a certain fear of using the frame of power structures. As a young theologian explained to me, power analysis is still very much associated with the Marxist concept of 'class struggle' which ideologically dominated the political and scientific field in the USSR. This negative connotation may also play a part in the rejection of gender analysis as a 'totalitarian ideology' by church leaders (see note 54). In view of this, it is important to really differentiate between various concepts and theories of power.

all beings living on planet earth [...].<sup>11</sup> Public theologians engage in concrete social and political struggles. They often do so with a feminist, a postcolonial, a black, or a queer commitment.

Feminist theology has always had a public character. From the outset, it has questioned and destabilized the division of private and public (remember the slogan ‘the personal is political’), as well as the division of religious and secular, and scrutinized the way discursive constructions of femininity and (homo)sexuality are employed to mark the boundaries.<sup>12</sup> It has always dealt with ‘privatized’ matters of gender and sexuality as matters of public concern and interest, disclosing how they shape, consolidate or challenge authority structures in society and receive central meaning for the common good.

It is my intention to demonstrate the necessity of adding a gender analysis to the models of public theology, as proposed among others by Hovorun, Cherenkov and Searle. I will do so by conducting a case study of the debates around the Istanbul Convention in and between churches, politics, and civil society in Ukraine, 2016–2019. The ‘Istanbul Convention’ is the common designator for the ‘Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence’, signed by forty-four member-states of the Council of Europe in 2011 in Istanbul. Since then, national parliaments have been in the process of ratifying it. The Istanbul Convention has become in Ukraine the focal point of discussion about the concept of gender. The case of the Istanbul Convention in Ukraine is a typical example of a postsecular conflict. Postsecular conflicts are defined as conflicts over values in modern pluralistic societies.<sup>13</sup> Characteristically they revolve around the definition of explicit and implicit norms, they have no clear solutions, are transnational, and evolve along the conservative-liberal fault line. I take the Ukrainian debate

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11 Julio Tavares Zabatiero, ‘From the Sacristy to the Public Square: The Public Character of Theology’, *International Journal of Public Theology* 6 (2002), 56–69, cited by Ted Peters, ‘Public Theology: Its Pastoral, Apologetic, Scientific, Political and Prophetic Tasks’, *International Journal of Public Theology* 12:2 (2018), 153–177, at 157.

12 Anne-Marie Korte, ‘Pussy Riot’s *Punk Prayer* as a Case of/for Feminist Public Theology’, in Ulrike Auga, Sigridur Gudmarsdottir, Stefanie Knauss, and Sivia Martínez Cano, eds, *Resistance and Visions—Postcolonial, Post-secular and Queer Contributions to Theology and the Study of Religions*, Journal of the ESWTR, 22 (Peeters: Leuven/Paris/Walpole, 2014), 31–54.

13 Kristina Stoeckl, ‘Introduction: What Are Postsecular Conflicts?’ in Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner, eds, *Postsecular Conflicts: Debating Tradition in Russia and the United States*, (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2020), 7–22. See for the case of the Istanbul Convention as a postsecular conflict in Ukraine, also Heleen Zorgdrager, ‘Ukrainian Churches in Defence of “Traditional Values”: Two Casestudies and Some Methodological Considerations’, *Religion, State and Society* 48:2-3 (2020), 90-106.

on the public issue of gender-based violence as a case study and will present an analysis of the case from a public-theological perspective that includes the socio-political dimension.

In order to do so I will first describe the debate, the different actors, what ideas and intellectual genealogies are at play in this debate, and how this conflict over values leads to polarization in Ukrainian society. I will then address the term 'dignity' as catchword of the Maidan Revolution: it is its 'primary orienting symbol'<sup>14</sup> as well as a core principle of Christian theological anthropology. How are dignity and gender discursively configured in contemporary documents of (Roman- and Greek-) Catholic and Orthodox anthropology? How is the notion (not) applied to women who suffer from gender-based violence in their homes and marriages? Finally, I will suggest how gender-based domestic violence could be more properly addressed in a public theology in Ukrainian context. The coordinates of my proposal are the need for a gender-critical dignity discourse, the need for reimagining the sacramental theology of marriage, and some concluding remarks on the methodology of a public theology which aims to include as many subdued voices as possible and wants to be both deeply engaged and truly academic.

## 2 Gender and (Homo)Sexuality as *shibboleths*

There is a curious thing about the public issues of gender and (homo) sexuality. Given the attention Ukrainian churches devote to these issues, one would expect that they would be high on the agenda of public theology. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCIRO) has made statements in the last years about elections, attacks of religious hatred, the release of Ukrainian prisoners of war, the autonomy of religious organizations, but most of the statements were on family, anti-genderism,<sup>15</sup> and the impermissibility of same-sex unions. However, when in a panel discussion during the conference on 'The Church and Public: Love in Action'<sup>16</sup> the participants (six men, theologians and philosophers from different churches) were asked about the most challenging issues for public theology in Ukraine, no one mentioned gender or sexuality, and not even traditional family. Among the

14 Catherine Wanner, 'The Political Valence of Dignity and the Maidan Protests', *Euxeinos* 24 (2017), 3–9, at 3.

15 Agnieszka Graff, 'Towards An Illiberal Future: Anti-Genderism and Anti-Globalization', *Global Dialogue* 9:2 (2019), <http://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/towards-an-illiberal-future-anti-genderism-and-anti-globalization/> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

16 Conference held at the Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, 2–4 May, 2019.

prioritized topics were clericalism, chauvinism, new epiphanies of dignity, corruption and stealing from the banking system, and fake news and the media. Only one participant mentioned traditional values, referring to the National Forum of the Family, March 2019, and the March for the Family during the gay pride, June 2019,<sup>17</sup> in Kyiv, but he did so in an ironic way, questioning the motives behind the neo-conservative pro-family movement.<sup>18</sup>

So either public theology is done by progressive theologians who do not support the AUCCIRO statements, although not all participants of the Round Table would identify as such. Another explanation might be that for churches the issues of gender, (homo)sexuality, traditional values are not of a terribly interest as such, but are more of an emblem, a signboard, a *shibboleth* that is easily utilized to construct a collective identity as Christians, Orthodox, Ukrainians, religious believers, or whatsoever.

In our late-modern times and in our globalizing world, the combination of religion, gender and sexuality has become a highly sensitive, complicated and explosive one.<sup>19</sup> Looking at World Christianity, the topics of sexuality and gender have risen to the top of contentious and divisive issues between church and liberal society, and between and within churches. Positions with regard to sexual diversity and gender have become the emblems of fiery cultural battles. Those in defence of traditional values or family values oppose those who campaign for the human rights of LGBTI, for the values of personal freedom in matters of sexuality, and for advancing women's rights. Moral positions with regard to sexuality and gender have been transformed into nothing less than religious and cultural identity markers. They have become the shibboleths of what is deemed to be the right faith, whether it be religious or secular. This is the case in the Netherlands,<sup>20</sup> as much as in Ukraine.

17 'Khrystyiany ta patritotychni orhanizatsiyi provely molytovnu aktsiyu na marshruti "Marchu Rivnosti" u Kyievi' ['Christians and patriotic organizations conduct prayer action at the "March of Equality" in Kyiv'], 23 June, 2019, [https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all\\_news/community/religion\\_and\\_society/76246/](https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/religion_and_society/76246/) [accessed 18 August, 2020].

18 Father Georgy Kovalenko asked 'Is this "lobbying by the church" for me or my family? Rather I see that it is *against* many things. I see ecclesial hierarchs and high-rank politicians side by side who usually come together "to divide the budget"'

19 Linda Martín Alcoff and John D. Caputo, eds, *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 1–9; Dmitry Uzlaner, 'Epilogue: Reflections on Globalizing Culture Wars', in Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner, eds, *Postsecular Conflicts: Debating Tradition in Russia and the United States*, (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2020), 139–150.

20 There was great turmoil in the Netherlands at the beginning of 2019: the so-called Nashville Statement (<https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>), originating from the Southern Baptist Convention in the USA 2017, was imported by conservative Reformed

### 3 The Case of the Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention is an instrument for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Domestic violence is a serious problem in Ukraine. According to the estimations of OSCE and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) violence towards women is widespread in Ukraine. It has increased because of the ongoing armed conflict in the eastern provinces. While in 2016 174 women died as direct result of the conflict in Donbass, 601 (three times more) were killed as a result of non-conflict-related gender-based violence.<sup>21</sup> A study conducted in 2017, collecting data in twelve communities across Ukraine, shows that 81 percent of women reported experiencing at least one case of psychological violence, 58 percent were physically assaulted, 34 percent experienced sexual coercion, and 44 percent reported injuries related to intimate partnership violence during past year.<sup>22</sup> Recorded data on domestic violence also demonstrate that the observed value is just a minor fraction of a real figure due to a combined influence of traditions and personal shame.

Ukraine is still in the process of ratifying the Istanbul Convention. Ratification would urge the country to adopt appropriate legislation and develop educational programs that address the structural causes of gender-based violence. For the churches, the latter was the reason to campaign against the Istanbul Convention. In March 2017, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations called upon the Parliament not to ratify the Convention. AUCCIRO objected to the concept of gender used by the Istanbul Convention.

In the Convention the term gender is used to underline that women become victims of such (gender-based) violence because they are women. In Article 14 the Convention calls upon states and other parties to take ‘the necessary steps

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and Evangelical pastors into the Netherlands. A conservative Christian member of parliament also signed the Statement. It was widely criticized by most Dutch religious leaders, politicians and human rights organizations, and led to a demonstrative flag response by liberal-minded churches and public institutions.

21 Elise Ketelaars, ‘When “European Values” do not count: Anti-gender ideology and the failure to comprehensively address GBV in Ukraine.’ LSE, website Department of Genderstudies, 26 September, 2018, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2018/09/26/when-european-values-do-not-count-anti-gender-ideology-and-the-failure-to-comprehensively-address-gbv-in-ukraine/> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

22 Viktor Burlaka, Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, Olena Savchuk, and Sandra Graham-Bermann, ‘The Relationship Between Family, Parent, and Child Characteristics and Intimate-Partner Violence (IPV) among Ukrainian Mothers’, *Psychology of Violence* 7:3 (2017), 469–477.



to include teaching material on issues such as the equality between women and men, non-stereotypical gender-roles (...) in formal curricula and at all levels of education'<sup>23</sup> in order to address the structural causes of domestic violence. For AUCCIRO this article is the stumbling block. It claims in an appeal to the government:<sup>24</sup>

Such a flawed approach can make the Istanbul Convention a political and legal tool for popularizing new 'genders' beyond biological sex and same-sex relationships in Ukrainian schools and universities—but this would be a disastrous way for Ukraine. This concern is because the Convention explicitly provides for the obligation of signatory states to educate their students in 'non-stereotyped gender roles'.

For AUCCIRO 'such a twisted approach can make the Convention an instrument for popularizing new "gender roles" and same-sex relations in Ukrainian schools and universities which would be a disastrous way for Ukraine.'<sup>25</sup> The fear here is that gender equality programs designed to address the structural causes of gender-based violence will affect traditional moral values and be reduced to the promotion of same-sex relations.

The beginnings of the Council's battle in defence of those traditional values can be traced back to as early as 2006–07. AUCCIRO then issued two statements directed towards the Parliament and Ukrainian society at large. In those statements it expressed its categorical opposition to the legal recognition of same-sex unions.<sup>26</sup> Since then, on many occasions, the churches have made known their concerns about topics to do with gender and sexuality. They have

23 Council of Europe, Treaty series No. 210, 'Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence', Istanbul, 11 May, 2011, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e>.

24 'Council of Churches stands for the European integration of Ukraine without the gender ideology', *Institute for Religious Freedom*, Kyiv, 8 January, 2019, [https://www.irf.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=461:1&catid=34:ua&Itemid=61](https://www.irf.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=461:1&catid=34:ua&Itemid=61) [accessed 18 August, 2020].

25 AUCCIRO, 'No to gender: Council of Churches speaks out against ratification of Istanbul Convention', *Union of Orthodox Journalists*, 7 March, 2017, <http://spzh.news/en/news/40019-no-to-gender-council-of-churches-speaks-out-against-ratification-of-istanbul-convention> [accessed 18 August, 2018].

26 Andrii Krawchuk, 'Constructing Interreligious Consensus in the Post-Soviet Space: The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations', in Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer, eds, *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness. Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 273–302, at 286.



sought to influence the political and legislative processes. In post-Maidan Ukraine these discussions have intensified as a consequence of the required amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine and other legal Codes as set by the Association Agreement with the European Union of 2015.

The origins of the worldwide discourse to do with traditional values go back to the 1970s and 1980s. During those decades particular groups of evangelical Protestants in the United States were seeking to make a response to a number of challenges to their reading of a good society. (These challenges included the fear of communism, the civil rights movement, the second wave of feminism, and the sexual revolution). They determined upon the need to strengthen the American family.<sup>27</sup> It was understood to comprise a breadwinning father, a stay-at-home mother and well-tended children who enjoy a lengthy and protected childhood. The family was considered to be key to national survival. The concept of family values / traditional values resists easy definition: it is very malleable which means that it can be very appealing to a broader constituency beyond its immediate evangelical origins. It possesses the capacity to become a global flow. It is no surprise then that this discourse has become increasingly politicized. That is true of Putin's Russia, in several Central European countries, and in Bolsonaro's Brazil.<sup>28</sup>

Two primary beliefs lie at the core of the traditional values rhetoric:

1. The belief that manhood and womanhood are naturally given, provide essential identity and should stand at the centre of social organization.
2. Lines of authority matter and must be observed in order for society to function well. The focus is on male headship in families and churches. The traditional family becomes the exemplar of all structures of authority in society because of its gendered hierarchical order. Traditional values are always patriarchal values.

In December 2017 the Ukrainian Parliament approved legislation to criminalize domestic violence. In the same session they voted against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Two separate bills were adopted to criminalize domestic violence (Bill No. 4952) and to prevent and combat domestic violence

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27 Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 11–12; Silas Morgan, 'American Masculinity, Feminism, and the Politics of Fatherhood', in Maria Behrens, Marianne Heimbach-Steins and Linda E. Hennig, eds, *Gender—Nation—Religion. Ein internationaler Vergleich von Akteursstrategien und Diskursverflechtungen* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2019), 101–123, 106.

28 On the transnational dimensions and dynamics of today's culture wars, see Stoeckl, 'Introduction', 13–14, en Uzlaner, 'Epilogue', 139–150, in Stoeckl and Uzlaner, *Postsecular Conflicts*.

(Bill No. 5294): there was no mention of gender. Ratification would have obliged Ukraine to adopt a far more comprehensive strategy to address violence against women in all its dimensions. The introduction of such transformative legislation was thus prevented through the campaign led by AUCCIRO and conservative, pro-family, non-governmental organizations that were alarmed by the Convention's use of the term gender.<sup>29</sup>

The allies of the Council are faith-based non-governmental organizations that focus on conservative social and religious values. They include pro-life and pro-family organizations. In Ukraine they operate under the names *VsiRazom* (All Together), the Civic Alliance 'Ukraine for the Family', the charitable foundation *Symia* (Family), *Emmanuel* and the newly established civic association *VseUkrayinskyi Sobor* (All-Ukrainian Council).<sup>30</sup> This All-Ukrainian Council is not to be confused with the interconfessional council AUCCIRO. The All-Ukrainian Council is initiated by Evangelical churches and known religious and public persons, and defined politically by one single issue, namely, in the words of its elected coordinator (the high-ranking politician, Baptist preacher, and Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council from 2014 to 2019, Oleksandr Turchynov), 'the protection of the traditional family as a matter of national security'.<sup>31</sup>

On March 1, 2019, the Association initiated a major event—the National Forum of the Family. It was held in the Ukrainian House in Kyiv, with the aim of developing a 'strategy to resist urgent threats to the Ukrainian family'. Those threats were identified as attempts by the Ukrainian parliament to ratify the Istanbul Convention, gay parades and other 'anti-family legislation'.<sup>32</sup> The forum was organized with the support of AUCCIRO and an interparty parliamentary group 'For Spirituality, Morality and Health'. The latter organizes annual prayer breakfasts in Ukraine. It has increasingly attracted representatives from the country's political elite. Metropolitan Epiphanius, Head of the newly created Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), also attended the Forum.

29 See Ketelaars, 'When "European Values" do not count' (no pages).

30 'Evangelical Churches found civil association All-Ukrainian Council', RISU, 23 January, 2019, [https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/protestants/74431/](https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/protestants/74431/) [accessed 18 August, 2020]; 'Min'yustzareyestruvavhromads'kuspilku "Vseukrayins'kyysobor", koordynatoromy yakohostav Turchynov', 22 January, 2019, <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/560566.html> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

31 Oleksandr Turchynov, 'Mitsna sim'ya staye klyuchovym faktorom natsional'noyi bezpeky Ukrainy', 1 March, 2019, <http://turchynov.com/videos/details/o-turchynov-micna-simya-staye-klyuchovim-faktorom-nacionalnoyi-bezpeki-ukrayini> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

32 Thomas Rowley, 'Ahead of Presidential Elections, "Gender Ideology" Comes to Ukraine', 21 March, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ahead-of-presidential-elections-gender-ideology-comes-to-ukraine/> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

After this National Forum of the Family, the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches appealed in war-like rhetoric to the general public to defend the traditional values in the upcoming presidential elections:

The presidential election is an important event in the life of each nation. But the current presidential elections in Ukraine are particularly responsible and fatal. They are held in difficult conditions of external military-political aggression, which is accompanied by a rigorous confrontation between the values inherent in our people and those that are artificially introduced from the outside.<sup>33</sup>

The pro-family non-governmental organizations lobby and campaign to influence the decision-making bodies. They target the domestic authorities at different levels; they address the European authorities in transnational campaigns. In March 2018 more than 300 non-governmental organizations from the member states of the Council of Europe (among them 16 non-governmental organizations from Ukraine) initiated amendments to the Istanbul Convention in order to eliminate the gender ideology.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of the Istanbul Convention, the churches and their pro-family allies found the former President to be not on their side. In December 2018, President Poroshenko called on the Parliament to ratify finally the Istanbul Convention. In his address to the Second Ukrainian Women's Congress in Kyiv on International Women's Day, 8 March 2018, he expressed his regret 'that there are still certain manipulations about this topic in our society, including with regard to the understanding of the term gender'.<sup>35</sup> On the same day, women

33 'Heads of Protestant churches appeal to Ukrainians in the run up to presidential elections', 22 March, 2019, an appeal signed by Mykhailo Panochko, Chairman of the Council, Senior Bishop of the Ukrainian Church of the Faithful Christians of the Evangelical Church, and eleven other heads of evangelical churches, [https://risu.ua/en/heads-of-protestant-churches-appeal-to-ukrainians-in-the-run-up-to-presidenatial-elections\\_n97097](https://risu.ua/en/heads-of-protestant-churches-appeal-to-ukrainians-in-the-run-up-to-presidenatial-elections_n97097) [accessed 18 March, 2020].

34 '333 NGOs from 9 member states of the Council of Europe ask about amendments to the Istanbul Convention', IRF, 20 March, 2018, [https://www.irf.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=455:1&catid=35:worldwide&Itemid=62](https://www.irf.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=455:1&catid=35:worldwide&Itemid=62) [accessed 18 August, 2020].

35 'Poroshenko calls on Rada to ratify the Istanbul Convention at its nearest plenary session', *Kyiv Post*, 7 December, 2018, <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/poroshenko-calls-on-rada-to-ratify-istanbul-convention-at-its-nearest-plenary-session.html> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

held marches in several large Ukrainian cities to protest against sexual and domestic violence and to urge the authorities to ratify the Istanbul Convention.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4 Polarization in Ukrainian Society

It is possible to identify the main actors in the conflict over traditional values, gender and sexual identity. At one end of the spectrum are the churches, faith-based non-governmental organizations and parliamentarians as well as regional and local politicians with whom churches have close ties. At the other end are secular non-governmental organizations, feminist and LGBTI activists, and liberal-minded people both outside and inside the churches. (It is not clear how many they are in the churches as there is no open discussion within the churches and no clear view of ideological differences within hierarchical ranks). Last but not least there were President Poroshenko and the government officials who acquired their political legitimacy from Euromaidan and felt committed to 'taking the country to Europe'.

The picture is that of a society divided between traditional values and the prospects of political modernization that are connected to aligning legislation with the ethos and provisions of the European Union. Many young Ukrainians want to apply the values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, individual responsibility and equality also to the fields of gender relations and sexual orientation. In sociological terms we can speak about a paradox of Ukrainian churches in a modernizing society.

Traditionalism itself can be treated as a profoundly modern phenomenon. Following Shmuel Eisenstadt there are 'multiple modernities'.<sup>37</sup> The traditionalist movement is characteristically focused on gender, sexuality and the nation; it might present itself as being anti-Western and anti-modern but actually it attempts to appropriate modernity on its own terms. Traditionalism builds on 'invented traditions',<sup>38</sup> often creating a collective identity promoting national and ecclesiastical unity. Even the sharp distinction between tradition and

36 Veronika Melkozerova, 'Women's March participants attacked in Ukraine', *Kyiv Post*, 8 March, 2018, <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/womens-march-participants-attacked-ukraine.html> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

37 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', in Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations & Multiple Modernities II*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 535–560.

38 Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

modernity is itself often invented. The traditionalist movement in Ukraine, led by the churches, is likewise a sign of modernization. The churches benefit from the apparent rhetorical conflict with the European Union on issues of sexuality and gender. The conflict serves as a force that unites them against a common enemy (for example, secularism, liberalism) and constructs the formation of a collective Ukrainian-Christian identity. Secondly, it reinforces the churches' claim to relevance that they certainly gained in the wake of their role in the Maidan protests. This state of affairs is one of the paradoxes of the Ukrainian churches in the modernizing society, however. While their social (and political) capital continues to draw on their support for the Euromaidan's modernizing thrust for democracy and citizenship, the churches are trying to reinforce that capital by claiming the role of the guardians of traditional morality.

The results so far in the Ukrainian political arena are limited. It would be a mistake though not to notice how powerful transnational alliances are being built around traditional values. The present has been described in terms of the 'ecumenism of the trenches' or 'ecumenism 2.0'.<sup>39</sup> The Ukrainian churches will increasingly play their part: they will do especially now since the newly established Orthodox Church of Ukraine will have formal access to ecumenical and international bodies, which its predecessors were denied because of their non-canonical status.

## 5 The Construction of Dignity and Gender in Church Documents

Dignity has come to symbolize the aspiration of Ukrainians for change.<sup>40</sup> It became the primary orienting symbol for political reform in the Maidan protests. Ever since the time of Kant, the concept of dignity has referred to what makes the human capacity for moral action possible and what gives human beings their intrinsic worth. Human beings cannot be treated as a means to an end. Although in modern times, the term 'human dignity' is widely acknowledged in its function as the basis and starting point for modern concepts of human rights, it has remained a controversial and contested notion. Everyone seems to know what human dignity is, and at the same time no one can conclusively

39 Thematic issue 'Ökumene 2.0—zwischen Ökumene und Anti-Ökumene', *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 37:10 (2018). The term 'Ecumenism 2.0' for conservative Christian alliances is coined by Andrey Shiskov, 'Two Ecumenisms: Conservative Christian Alliances as a New Form of Ecumenical Cooperation', *State, Religion and Church* 4:2 (2017), 58–87; 'Wege zu einem neuen ökumenischen Paradigma', *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 37:10 (2018), 7–10.

40 Wanner, 'The Political Valence of Dignity', 3.

define what it is.<sup>41</sup> Despite the discouraging plurality of definitions that borders on arbitrariness, there is the continuous supposition that ‘human dignity’ nonetheless really exists. Given this conceptual problem, some authors proposed to begin from a negative perspective, namely studying practices and situations in which we understand human beings to be violated in their dignity, and from these acts of dehumanization pointing to the values that are thereby shown in danger.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, in the twentieth century the assertion of a recognition of human dignity and a global mandate to protect it became the first universal ideology accepted by states and transnational governing structures. The political history of the concept and its religious foundations in theological anthropology (the human being created in the image and likeness of God) motivated and morally empowered also the Maidan protesters in their demands for political reform. Catherine Wanner observed that it was the deep roots of dignity in the social teaching of the Catholic church which had significant influence on clergy and believers of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: they were among the most active and committed participants in the Maidan protests.<sup>43</sup>

There is a problem, however. Catholic theology and, in general, the moral theologies of the Ukrainian churches tend to display a deep ambivalence towards an emphatic affirmation of human dignity as a universal core principle for social and political life. It is applied rather differently from its conceptual intention when it comes to gender. This comes especially to the fore in theologies of marriage. I will provide some examples to illustrate the effects of this ambivalent dealing with the core value of human dignity. In the context of marriage it induces a moral blindness for the evil of gender-based violence in partner relationships, covers up harmful power relations between husband and wife, and conveys to women a moral inadmissibility to act against domestic violence, for example, to sue the husband or to file for divorce. None of the documents below mention domestic violence as a threat to Christian marriage. Gender-based violence in whatever form is absent as a moral theme in the catechisms. To give an example, taken from the Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, rape is not a theme itself; it is only mentioned and

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41 Alfons Brüning, ‘Can Theosis, Save “Human Dignity”?’: Chapters in Theological Anthropology East and West’, *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 71:3/4 (2019), 177–248, at 193.

42 Paulus Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhäuser and Elaine Webster, eds, *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated* (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/London/New York: Springer, 2010), 1–20.

43 Wanner, ‘The Political Valence of Dignity’, 8.

subordinated under the higher theme of 'The Sin of Abortion'.<sup>44</sup> The authoritative documents under discussion come from the Roman Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and the Holy and Great Orthodox Council (Crete, 2016).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) states about dignity, equality and gender:<sup>45</sup>

In creating 'male' and 'female', God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity. Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God.

They possess this gift of dignity, however, in different ways.

Man and woman are equal; they are also different. It is this difference that points marvelously toward their complementarity. Man and woman, in their sexual difference, are made for each other. This complementarity draws them together in a mutually loving union that should always be open to the procreation of children.<sup>46</sup>

This statement leads to an essentialist gender conception of the mutual complementarity of man and woman. This essentialist approach of mutual complementary natures is fully elaborated in a theology of women's dignity to be found in the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988). The Virgin Mary, Mother of God, who served as God's 'handmaid' in the salvific event of the incarnation, is the 'essential horizon of reflection on the dignity and the vocation of women.'<sup>47</sup> The Pope further reflects on the 'unity of the two' in relation to the biblical word 'he shall rule over you' (Gen 3:16). Opposition against male dominion must not lead to the 'masculinization' of women. Dignity and vocation result from 'the specific diversity and personal originality

44 Synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, *Christ—Our Pascha: Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church*, (Kyiv/Edmonton, 2016, second edition 2018), Part Three, Ch. III B.3a, # 884, 278.

45 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992, second edition 2012), Part Three, Section Two, Ch. 2, Art. 6. 1, # 2334, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a7.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a7.htm) [accessed 18 August, 2020].

46 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part Two, Section Two, Ch. 3, Art. 7. 1, # 1602–1605, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a7.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a7.htm) [accessed 18 August, 2020].

47 *Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the dignity and vocation of women on the occasion of the Marian year*, 15 August, 1988, Part II, #5, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19880815\\_mulieris-dignitatem.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html) [accessed 18 August, 2020].



of man and woman'. The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity; they are merely 'different'.<sup>48</sup> Women find their fulfilment in drawing on their own given resources. For them there are two particular dimensions of the fulfilment of the female personality, namely virginity and motherhood.<sup>49</sup> This is her 'genius'; this is her mission in today's world, that God, in the order of love, has entrusted to her the human being in a special way.<sup>50</sup> It is a struggle with evil and the Evil One which is marked by the 'woman' in the Bible from the beginning to the end. The Pope writes:

It is also a struggle for man, for his true good, for his salvation. A woman is strong because of her awareness of this entrusting, strong because of the fact that God "entrusts the human being to her", always and in every way, even in the situations of social discrimination in which she may find herself. This awareness and this fundamental vocation speak to women of the dignity which they receive from God himself, and this makes them "strong" and strengthens their vocation.<sup>51</sup>

According to this teaching a woman's dignity actualizes itself in her strength to struggle always for the salvation of the ones entrusted to her. That may include the husband who may be abusive. Even in such a situation of social discrimination, as a consequence of this argument, she must find her strength and dignity in enduring love and accepting suffering.

In 2019 a document was published by the Congregation on Catholic Education which deals extensively with 'gender ideology'. It is defined as 'an ideology that is given the general name of "gender theory", [which] denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family'.<sup>52</sup> The problem, according to this document, lies in the 'radical separation of sex from gender' which is 'at the root of the distinctions proposed between various "sexual orientations" (such as homosexuality) which are no longer defined by the sexual difference between male and female'.<sup>53</sup> The norms for sexual identity and gender identity should be strictly defined by the person's biological sex.

48 Ibid., Part IV, # 10.

49 Ibid., Part VI, # 17.

50 Ibid., Part VIII, # 30.

51 Ibid.

52 The Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), *Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*, (Vatican City, 2019), # 2, 3.

53 Ibid., # 11, 8.

In postmodern gender theories, the document states, ‘there is agreement that one’s gender ends up being viewed as more important than being of male or female sex’.<sup>54</sup> And, citing Pope Francis, it continues that ‘the utopia of the “neuter” eliminates both human dignity in sexual distinctiveness and the personal nature of the generation of new life’.<sup>55</sup> Spiritual and moral dignity, in other words, appears in these documents as a gendered concept, in its fulfilment bound to biological sex.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) acknowledges the authority of the Vatican documents. It also has the right to emphasize elements from its own Eastern tradition and ritual life found in its own catechism. The UGCC catechism, *Christ—Our Pascha* (adopted in 2011), declares that ‘in order for the procreation of new life a man and woman complete one another in their gender differentiation, creating an indissoluble union of one body’.<sup>56</sup> According to the Eastern tradition, marriage is not only marital love and the shared experience of living together: it is also an occasion of sanctification (deification). A man and a woman are united into one body and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, they create a ‘domestic church—that is, a Christian family as a new sacramental reality of divine grace.’ The teaching of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church upholds the view of a binary order of male and female based on biological sex. In an Encyclical of 2016, the bishops of Kyiv-Halych warn against the ‘danger of gender ideology’ because it would destroy Christian faith and morality and universal values: further, it manipulates the concept of human dignity:

In particular, gender theories are a significant threat today, attempting to destroy the perception of human sexuality as a gift from God that is naturally linked to the biological differences between man and woman, as well as introducing a dangerous disorder to human relationships and attacking the foundations of interpersonal communication. The concepts of human dignity and freedom are undergoing extensive manipulation and the true meaning of these essential moral categories is being displaced and distorted.<sup>57</sup>

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54 Ibid., # 20, 11.

55 Ibid., # 21, 11–12.

56 Synod of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, *Christ—Our Pascha*, Part Two, Ch. III, C. 3a, # 472, 160, <http://catechism.royaldoors.net/catechism/> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

57 ‘Encyclical of the Synod of Bishops of the Major Archbishopric of Kyiv-Halych of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church regarding the danger of gender ideology’, 1 December, 2016, # 2, <https://ugcc.fr/publications/official-documents-ugcc/encyclical-of-the-synod-of-bishops-of-the-major-archbishopric-of-kyiv-halych-of-the-ukrainian-greek-catholic-church-concerning-the-danger-of-gender-ideology/> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

The worldview behind gender theories would begin to acquire ‘characteristics of totalitarian ideology’ similar to utopian atheistic ideologies of the twentieth century like communism and fascism. In a similar way it is ‘aggressively imposed on public opinion’ and ‘gradually introduced’ in legislation and education. The Encyclical reflects on the appeal to dignity (*hidnist*) which gender theories make to which post-Maidan Ukrainians have become sensitive:

As a result, Ukrainian society—sensitive to asserting its dignity and freedom—is in danger of thoughtlessly accepting as truth questionable atheistic theories founded in attempts to affirm human dignity, to achieve equality among people, to defend the human right to freedom, and so on.<sup>58</sup>

The Encyclical emphasizes that dignity in Christian understanding is built upon the acceptance of the God-given distinct nature of man and woman:

Christians are called to bring to today’s world the truth about the dignity of the human being created in the image and likeness of God, about the dignity of marriage as a union of love between a man and a woman, and about the dignity of man and woman as they complement each other.<sup>59</sup>

Recent Orthodox documents on human dignity are *The Mission of the Church in Today’s World*, the final document of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church on Crete (June 19–26, 2016), and the *Russian Orthodox Church’s Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights* (2008). The document of the Holy and Great Council clearly affirms ‘the human person’s unique dignity, which stems from being created in the image and likeness of God and from our role in God’s plan for humanity and the world.’<sup>60</sup> Orthodox teaching connects the protection of human dignity with the goal of deification. Different confessions and religions can cooperate in the common acceptance of this highest value of the human person.<sup>61</sup> The moral consequence is respect for the human rights of every human being on the basis of everyone’s unconditional

58 Ibid., # 2.

59 Ibid., # 26.

60 Official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World*, Section A 1, Crete, April 2016, <https://www.holy-council.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

61 Ibid., Section A 3.

dignity. This position differs from the Russian Orthodox Church's teaching which makes dignity a moral category, to be attained by those who live according to the divine law. The document of the Holy and Great Council reads:

The Orthodox Church confesses that every human being, regardless of skin color, religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and language, is created in the image and likeness of God, and enjoys equal rights in society. Consistent with this belief, the Orthodox Church rejects discrimination for any of the aforementioned reasons since these presuppose a difference in dignity between people.<sup>62</sup>

The Holy and Great Council is firm on the rejection of discrimination on the basis of sex. There is a subtle disclaimer, however. These principles need to be balanced with the Church's teaching on the sacraments, the family and 'the both genders'.

The Church, in the spirit of respecting human rights and equal treatment of all, values the application of these principles in the light of her teaching on the sacraments, the family, the role of both genders in the Church, and the overall principles of Church tradition. The Church has the right to proclaim and witness to her teaching in the public sphere.<sup>63</sup>

What the relation to the 'overall principles of Church teaching' implies for the sacrament of marriage is explained in the document *The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments*. 'The Orthodox Church maintains, as her fundamental and indisputable teaching, that marriage is sacred. The freely entered union of man and woman is an indispensable precondition for marriage.'<sup>64</sup> The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church affirms the sacredness of marriage as much as the Catholic documents. However, the Orthodox document does not undergird the sacredness of marriage with explicit statements on essential difference and complementarity of the sexes. In the official documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church the traditionalist mode of anti-genderism is absent. Silence in ecclesial documents is often more meaningful than what is written. Notwithstanding that fact, Orthodox

62 Ibid., Section E 2.

63 Ibid., Section E 3.

64 Official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, *The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments*, Crete, April 2016, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/marriage> [accessed 18 August, 2020].

churches do display an ambivalent position towards applying human rights. Ekaterini Tsalampouni demonstrates how in Orthodox moral teaching every creature is of God and has the goal of *theosis*; in the field of practical application, however, problems arise as to what extent this recognition of fundamental equality and dignity applies to the national or religious other—and what does it mean with regards to gender and sexual orientation?<sup>65</sup> According to Tsalampouni the practical understanding of the otherwise theologically affirmed respect for human dignity is still a great challenge. Orthodox churches keep silent on domestic and other forms of gender-based violence. In church documents there is no clear statement on the sacredness of women's bodies.

## 6 Reimagining Theologies of Marriage

For public theology to address domestic violence adequately there is need to reconsider and reimagine dominant theologies of marriage. At the heart of domestic violence is a dynamic of unequal power and control. Rachel Starr has shown in her groundbreaking gender-analysis of theology in the context of domestic violence that dominant models of Christian thinking on marriage can have a potentially negative impact.<sup>66</sup>

The covenantal models of relationship in the Protestant tradition have inherited an intrinsic violence of biblical metaphorical language and legitimate inequality between husband and wife. That is a risk factor for domestic violence.<sup>67</sup> The sacramental models, notably within the Catholic tradition, discourage divorce because of the unbreakable bond of the marital union.

The sacrament focuses very strongly on the formation of the union, on the wedding ceremony and consummation. Because of that emphasis church traditions have generally failed to attend sufficiently to the living out of that commitment and what it might mean for everyday life to be part of a saving union.<sup>68</sup>

65 Ekaterini Tsalampouni, 'Women Theologians as Advocates of Human Rights: Potential and Limitations', paper presented at the *International Theological Conference: The Church and Public: Love in Action*, Lviv, 2–4 May, 2019.

66 Rachel Starr, *Reimagining Theologies of Marriage in Contexts of Domestic Violence: When Salvation is Survival*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). For other excellent treatments of domestic violence as a matter of public theology, I refer to Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, 'A Public Theology Response to Domestic Violence in Samoa', in *International Journal of Public Theology* 10:1 (2016), 54–67; Christina Landman, 'A Public Theology for Intimate Spaces', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 5:1 (2011), 63–77.

67 Starr, *Reimagining Theologies of Marriage*, 72–90.

68 *Ibid.*, 102–111.

How is marriage to be reimagined then so that it becomes a place of grace for women at risk? Starr proposes that theologies of marriage must affirm the revelatory, sacred nature of all bodies, male and female, and those who resist such classifications, with their everyday needs and desires. The same is true for any relevant public theology. These theologies must be concerned with sacramental grace (or the lack thereof) and broaden the location of sacramental celebration from church liturgy to everyday living.<sup>69</sup> Theology has a task of eschatologically reimagining marriage as a sign of a more just, equal and loving way of relating of both the couple and the wider society, by challenging and transforming unequal, unjust gender relations.<sup>70</sup>

Mystification of redemptive suffering of women, as we found as a feature in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, must be put to an end. Starr contends that ‘in contexts of domestic violence, church teaching and pastoral care must challenge the perception that suffering has the power to save.’<sup>71</sup> A theological gender-analysis is indispensable to deconstruct such beliefs. Traditionalist church teaching that is marked by vehement ‘anti-genderism’, and that refuses to address gender as a factor in social evil and plays down the abuse of women to a ‘private matter’, becomes complicit in the institutional and communal sin as collaboration and collusion with domestic violence.<sup>72</sup> In this perspective, the campaign of Ukrainian churches against the Istanbul Convention because of its use of the concept of gender, is theologically and morally dangerous and reprehensible.

## 7 Some Methodological Implications for a Public Theology

For a public theology in the context of Ukraine more capable of addressing domestic violence, there are some methodological issues arising. Searle has rightly argued that public theology involves a ‘creative dialogue with different academic disciplines, including politics, economics, law and security studies, cultural studies, religion, spirituality, the natural science and the social sciences and the study of globalization’. Such interdisciplinary engagement of theology is still exceptional yet highly desirable in Ukraine.

For integrating an interdisciplinary approach into the theological project the so-called Four Voices model, developed by the Action Research: Church

69 Starr refers to Pope Francis: in his teaching on the family in *Amoris Laetitia*, paragraph 212, Francis encourages a shift beyond the church ceremony to the ‘life-long calling’ of marriage. Starr, *Reimagining Theologies of Marriage*, 118.

70 *Ibid.*, 112–123.

71 *Ibid.*, 125–148.

72 The description of sin as institutional and communal comes from Starr, drawing on Lori Heise’s framework of risk factors in domestic violence, *ibid.*, 151–153.

and Society team (ARCS), is helpful.<sup>73</sup> Through this lens the social practice is a place where God can be revealed. The Four Voices approach distinguishes between four levels or voices of theology that should be brought into the conversation.

At the level of an operant theology the researcher asks how practices are a bearer of theology or how practices might relate to theology. The question here is: what do religious people actually do? How do religious women, who suffer from domestic violence, navigate their faith in God with their everyday reality? At this level, the input of theories and methods of social science (for instance, ethnography) is as vital as the recognition that the Spirit is at work in women's everyday struggles and joys.

The second level is that of an espoused theology. It concerns itself with what people say about what they do. It refers to the claims religious people make about their practices in context. Usually, their espoused theology conforms to the popular church teaching practiced in catechetical books, premarital courses, and sermons. Tensions and differences may appear between an operant theology and that which is espoused. In the service of an espoused theology the reflective practitioner will be enriched by research methodologies of social sciences.

The third level is that of a normative theology. It embraces what might be described as the official, authoritative church teaching, expressed in documents, pastoral letters, encyclicals, moral doctrines/catechisms and the institutional practices that support it like confession and catechesis. It represents and mediates the whole 'politics of morality'; in so doing, it includes the power structures and factual authority that aim to discipline the faithful in their personal and communal behaviour. Specific interdisciplinary methods and tools are needed here, such as critical discourse analysis. In the ecclesial culture of Eastern Europe, due to lack of academic development under communist regime, the level of normative theology is very strong. It is often mistakenly considered as academic theology.

The fourth level is a formal or academic theology. It is the task of academic theologians to understand and reinterpret the tradition in changing contexts. If a formal theology sees its role predominantly in supporting and undergirding the politics of morality at the level of normative theology, the fourth voice

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73 Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, and Clara Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 2010); Helen Cameron, John Reader, Victoria Slater and Chris Rowland, *Theological Reflection for Human Flourishing: Public Theology and Pastoral Practice*, (London: SCM Press, 2012); Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion*, (London: SCM Press, 2013). See also Zorgdrager, 'Ukrainian Churches in Defence of "Traditional Values"', 102–103.



has lost its critical potential. That is the risk that can be observed in Ukrainian seminaries. The task of academic theological research is to bring the four voices into conscious conversation, with a sharp eye on mechanisms of power, silencing, and exclusion, so that in the end all voices will be enriched. The normative role of academic theology is not legitimized by external authority but by reflection.

For theology in the Ukrainian context the challenge is to acknowledge social practices and dynamics of ordinary women and men as *locus theologicus*. New tendencies in church attitude and self-identification usually do not arise from internal processes or from a deliberate strategy of the church leadership, but from the lived experience of the lay members of the wider society.<sup>74</sup> Giving weight to the operant theologies of the people will bring about insights into Christian faith that so far have been obscured. Giving weight to proper academic theology will deconstruct traditionalist biases and help to understand and communicate tradition in changing contexts.

The ecumenical theologian Paul D. Murray writes

[t]he authentic Spirit-led vitality of Christian life and tradition consists not in steadfast identical repetition but in the preparedness to return to our core calling and to ask what fresh performances of this, with dynamic integrity, are appropriate to the specific challenges and opportunities of our times and contexts.<sup>75</sup>

The task of interpreting the authentic vitality of Christian life and tradition is continual and always provisional. Ukrainians have experienced the Spirit-led, inclusive, and future-oriented vitality during the Maidan Revolution. This event remains a moral and spiritual compass for Ukrainians and for all others who were touched by the grace of that vital sense of community. It will encourage post-Maidan faith communities to face new challenges and to affirm human dignity in yet unexplored ways.

74 Natalia Kochan, 'Shaping Ukrainian Identity: The Churches in the Socio-Political Crisis', in Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer, eds, *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016); 105–121, at 115.

75 Paul Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism as a Catholic Calling: Catholic Teaching on Ecumenism from Blessed Pope John Paul II to His Holiness Pope Francis', presented at the Catholic School of Theology in Vienna, 19 November, 2014. [https://iti.ac.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/user\\_upload/News-Events/pdfs/Dr-Paul-Murray-Vienna-Receptive-Ecumenism-Lecture.pdf](https://iti.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/user_upload/News-Events/pdfs/Dr-Paul-Murray-Vienna-Receptive-Ecumenism-Lecture.pdf), [accessed 18 August, 2020].