

2025

# The Catholic Church and Ukraine



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## 1. Introduction

**The Catholic Church has always played a role** in every single conflict that has rocked the world even before it was adopted as the official creed of the Roman Empire in 380 A.C.

Pope Francis has made efforts to mediate in the conflict, since its onset. It cannot be forgotten that **the Pope is a global influencer, as he is the spiritual leader of over 1.000 million believers**. Those believers are spread all over the five continents.

## 2. Analysis

**Pope Francis despises war**, of course. Since the inception of the invasion in Ukraine by Russia, the Pontiff sought **ways to get involved** in the solution of the conflict.

He had been working for years with a critic of the Russian Orthodox Church for its subservience to the Kremlin, **Leonid Sevastianov**, and his wife, an opera singer. They had been appointed ambassadors for peace years ago by the Vatican.

**Sevastianov leads an organization within the Orthodox Church, the World Union of Old Believers**, which dislikes the submission of the church to the state. That's what he defends from his organization. He, like the Pope, **promotes peace**, speaks out against the war, and criticizes the Russian Orthodox Church for being so adamant defending Putin's war effort.



Leonid Sevastianov and his wife, Svetlana Kasyan, with the Pope

He is also a successful businessman, involved in the media and telecommunications arena. Although **heavily criticized by the media in Russia**, he is well positioned among some oligarchs who doesn't regard the invasion of Ukraine as something beneficial for Russia.

However, choosing Sevastianov as the link to get to Russia **doesn't seem to be the best option for the Vatican**.

The other option taken by the Vatican has to do with the Orthodox Church itself. Both churches have had long standing relations over the years. The closest relationship has always been between **Pope Francis and the Metropolitan Hilarion**.

## 2.1 Metropolitan Hilarion

Hilarion used to be the 'number two' or Patriarch Kirill (leader of the Russian Orthodox Church). He used to oversee the foreign relations of his church. Therefore, he has held several meetings with Pope Francis and his representatives. They have always enjoyed good relations.

**Hilarion used to be taken as the heir of Patriarch Kirill.** But when Putin invaded Ukraine, he was critical and always defended peace. He didn't follow the directives given by Patriarch Kirill. **It didn't go well for Hilarion, and he was fired from his position and sent to Hungary**, where the Orthodox Church only counts on a very small presence. Four months after the war broke out, **he was stripped of his influence and sent abroad**.

## 2.2 Pope Francis and Metropolitan Hilarion

Despite this obvious bad path for mediation, **Pope Francis met Metropolitan Hilarion while his visit to Hungary in 2024**. The Vatican and the Pope himself showed his support to Hilarion. It meant that the Vatican had given up his role as mediator in the conflict. **It was a clear papal rebuke of Putin**.



The Pope and Metropolitan Hilarion in Hungary

But this encounter didn't go neither unnoticed nor unpunished by Moscow. Metropolitan Hilarion was then accused of sexual harassment and embezzlement. Patriarch Kirill sent him to Karlovy Vary in Czechia. **Just like another dissident his fate was doomed, sentenced to silence and ostracism.**

Diving deeper into details, we have found out that **Leonid Sevastianov worked closely with Metropolitan Hilarion**, when Sevastianov headed the Orthodox Church Saint Gregory Foundation. This organization worked for the department of foreign relations led by Metropolitan Hilarion. It is in 2018 when problems rose among Constantinople, Ukraine and Moscow (related to the Orthodox Church). **Sevastianov then founded the World Union of Old Believers**. They both know each other well and enjoyed a fairly good relationship.

Considering these facts, we can conclude that Sevastianov and Hilarion belong to the same path to Moscow. **A path which was doomed from its inception**, given that both ways of approach were **not well regarded and sufficiently supported in Moscow**.

### 2.3 The American path

Another approach to the conflict that the Vatican has scouted, has to do with Trump's entourage. Some members of Trump's team in his first mandate are devout catholic. One of them is Mick Mulvany.

**Mulvany is a relevant figure** as he served as a member of the Congress (R). He served as the head of the Office of Management and Budget during Trump's first term.

**He was acting White House chief of staff** from January 2019 until March 2020. Interestingly, during this period the White House withheld military aid to Ukraine over unsubstantiated allegations that it had been Ukraine, not Russia, the hacking force behind the attack against the Democratic party in 2016.

The Clementy foundation, **whose co-chair is Mulvany**, invited (July 2024) Tulsi Gabbard (she is the current Director of National intelligence with Trump) and others to attend meetings at the Vatican to talk **how to promote peace in Ukraine**.

Obviously after Trump's victory this path has fully been taken by the current US administration.

## 3. Conclusions

The initiatives taken by the Vatican to mediate in the Ukrainian conflict have been, to say the least, wrongly chosen from their inception. **The path through Sevastianov and Metropolitan Hilarion could not really work due to incompatibilities with Moscow.**

**The intent through Trump's entourage was useless** once Trump won the elections. There is still a chance that the Vatican be used as a location for future negotiations if everything else goes wrong. But Trump is not going to willingly give

others the chance to get any credit after the efforts he is conducting to get a peace deal done.

**The Catholic Church has helped organize some of the exchanges of prisoners and corpses between the warring parties** and other humanitarian related efforts and that's relevant and valuable.

In our assessment, **with the Pope convalescent and ongoing peace talks at the highest level, it is very unlikely that the Vatican finds room to intervene** in any possible way. If the peace deal is finally unsigned, there will be eventually another round of approaches where the Pontiff may find his place.