

International Conference

RELIGION AND WAR IN UKRAINE

The Political,
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Session: Religious Organizations and
Peacemaking, Part II

3:00PM MST, March 16, 2024

The Holy See between neutrality and moral high ground: The conundrum of the war in Ukraine

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Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Pope Francis and other Vatican officials have expressed closeness to both Ukraine and Russia, and provoked criticism from both belligerent parties. My paper interprets the Holy See's position on the war in the context of its traditional neutrality and impartiality, as expressed in Article 24 of the Lateran Treaty of 1929. I argue that Francis articulates the Vatican's neutrality differently than did his European predecessors: the Pope is de-centering the West and promoting a vision of a multi-polar world, where countries such as China and Russia are seen as a counterbalance to NATO and the West. I conclude by outlining what effects such an understanding of neutrality can have for the prospects of Vatican mediation.

Pavlo Smytsnyuk is the Mary Seeger O'Boyle Associate Research Scholar at the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies and the Department of Religion at Princeton University since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He specializes in political theology and religious nationalism in Orthodox Christianity and has written extensively on the politicization of religion in the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. He is currently writing a book on explicating the category of religion as an instrument of anti-colonial struggle. Prior to the invasion, he was the Director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies and a Senior Lecturer at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine. He is a specialist on the intersection of theology, politics and ethics and has spearheaded several international-collaborative projects on Eastern Christian identity, religion, war, and peacebuilding.