

*International Conference*

# RELIGION AND WAR IN UKRAINE

The Political,  
the Public, and  
the Possible

March 14th-16th, 2024

Telus 134 - Telus International Centre  
University of Alberta  
11104 87 Ave NW - Edmonton

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Session: The Orthodox Impasse, Part II

11:00AM MST, March 15, 2024

## **Theological (im)possibilities for reconciliation in Ukraine**

Regina Elsner, Professor of Eastern Churches and Ecumenical Theology at the University of Münster, Germany

Orthodoxy has been widely analyzed as a soft power actor in Russia's war against Ukraine in particular and against the West in general. Political instrumentalization of religion is for sure a crucial topic in order to understand the role Orthodoxy played and plays in these conflicts. However, it can be assumed that there are theological paradigms enabling or restraining political instrumentalization for the purpose of war. The paper analyzes which theological concepts in Orthodoxy limit an active role of the churches in societal reconciliation and why the bold idea of Christianity as a peaceful religion should be assessed carefully.

Regina Elsner is a Catholic theologian and, as of April 2023, professor of Eastern Churches and Ecumenical Theology at the University of Münster, Germany. Previously, she utilized her expertise in Orthodoxy and the politics of religion in Russia and Ukraine as a researcher at the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS). Most importantly, she came to the academy after having gained extensive experience in the provision by faith-based organizations of humanitarian and other forms of aid as a project coordinator for Caritas Russia in St Petersburg. She is widely regarded as one of the world's foremost experts on Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe, Orthodox social ethics and questions of peace ethics, and gender justice. To date she has carried out research in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia.