Mass Media, Religion, and Politics in Ukraine:  
The Story of the “Bloody Pastor

by Michael Cherenkov

Abstract
Oleksandr Turchynov has become one of the symbols of post-Maidan Ukraine. He is known in the media as the “bloody pastor.” Two phenomena of present-day Ukraine are combined here: first, the religious diversity which allows members of religious minorities to hold political power (the “pastor” became an acting president), and second, strong religious patriotism that is common even among those who were until recently called “sectarians” (it was the “pastor” who gave an order to start the anti-terrorist operation in the east of the country). The “bloody pastor” may well fit into the post-secular scenario of the social crisis as a compelling example of the possible role of a religiously-motivated leader and a possible outline of religious-political restructuring. Both Ukrainian and Russian media see him as a spokesman for Protestantism, westernization, globalization, and modernization. They see in him a serious challenge to both the traditionalist forms of religiosity and traditional approaches to post-Soviet politics. In this sense, the image of the “bloody pastor” is the key to understanding several phenomena related to Russo-Ukrainian relations: the Russian-Ukrainian political-military conflict; the social and religious diversity of the two countries; the local versions of post-secularism; and to defining Ukrainian Protestantism as a distinct social category.

Key words: Ukraine, Russia, Maidan revolution, Protestant Church, pastor, religion, media, society.

Religion in Ukraine is becoming predominantly public, both by its nature and in terms of its public perception. The two Ukrainian Maidans (2004 and 2013-2014) had a truly revolutionary impact on the relationship between religion and society. Religion was one of the main factors shaping events and at the same time religion itself was transformed by them. While previously Ukrainian religious scholars used western publications to study post-secularism, in recent years they have accumulated sufficient material of their own, the analysis of which provides interesting insights into the nature of Ukrainian religiosity in relation to socio-political processes. The media has played a key role in transforming attitudes towards religion and its political influence.

It is noteworthy that Cardinal Lubomyr Husar of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Patriarch Filaret of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, and Baptist “Pastor” Oleksandr Turchynov have emerged in the post-Maidan period as both religious and political leaders. Each one personifies public religiosity as being shaped by a particular confessional context. Turchynov held the highest government post of the three and is widely – and inaccurately – believed to be a member of the Baptist clergy thanks to the way he has been portrayed in the media. Because of his visibility, notoriety and the pivotal role he played in the “Revolution of Dignity,” the creation of Turchynov’s image deserves careful attention.

Oleksandr Turchynov is a well-known Ukrainian politician, who followed an interesting path from Komsomol activist to president, from atheist propagandist to Baptist lay preacher. He entered politics in the opposition as the first deputy chairman of the Batkivshchyna (“Fatherland”) political party and right-hand man of party leader Yulia Tymoshenko. Turchynov also served as acting
Prime Minister in 2010 and Chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament in 2014. He currently serves as Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine.

Turchynov clearly blends his religious and political views. He is very active in promoting a place for religion in governance and in promoting the idea that politicians should be believers. This is what makes Turchynov’s political career significant. His confident self-identification with the Baptist Church brings him a fair share of problems. However, at the same time it creates popularity, and makes him stand out from other politicians. Turchynov’s faith is not only part of his political image, but something much more – the foundation of his identity.

In the USSR and in the post-Soviet sphere Baptists were seen as a type of sect, dangerous to both the dominant Orthodox faith and to government order. What made them dangerous was their otherness, nothing else. What set Soviet and post-Soviet Baptists apart was their pious spirituality and their aloofness from politics. Not even Soviet propaganda would have called a Baptist pastor “bloody.” The phrase “bloody pastor” is an example of how propaganda creates enemies by combining the incompatible and how freely and carelessly it treats facts. It is no less interesting how the media turned him into a propaganda machine for a sect – first as a “pastor” and then as a “bloody pastor” - when in reality he was just an average believer participating in his faith community as a lay preacher.

Oleksandr Turchynov has involuntarily become the image of Ukrainian Protestantism in its public mode. The mass media, both Ukrainian and Russian, is largely responsible for this. Whereas Turchynov remains a reticent and rather closed politician and preacher, his media image has taken on a life of its own—a very active virtual life.

It is worth recalling that it was the Ukrainian media that started calling Turchynov a “pastor,” when he was really a lay preacher, and it was they who created the mysterious, yet respectable image of him as a Baptist politician. But it was the Russian media who made him a “bloody” pastor. For the Ukrainian media a “pastor” is somewhat exotic, an unusual yet wholly acceptable religious and political phenomenon, whereas for the Russians the Baptist faith is definitely an evil product of sectarianism and a threat to Orthodoxy and the “Russian world.” As analysts noted in 2014, “If you type Turchynov’s name in a Google search, ‘Pastor Turchynov’ will appear; if you type it in Yandex, then the search suggestions will be ‘Turchynov the Baptist’ and ‘Turchynov the sectarian.’”1 In other words, Turchynov has become emblematic of the Russian media’s portrayal of threatening figures emerging in Ukraine.

It is worth to note the difference between Turchynov’s portrait in Russian and Ukrainian media. A summary of both interpretations could point to the following points: the Ukrainian media sees the combination of patriotism and the Baptist faith as interesting (you could even say exotic) and promising, while the Russian media sees it as impermissible and dangerous.

The journalists of Focus magazine specifically point this out: “Turchynov is a Baptist. Being a Protestant in an Orthodox country is like being a Jew—there is no discrimination as such, but it is not the thing for politicians. It’s ridiculous to accuse

1 Oleksandr Turchynov: V ozhidaniy Apokalipsis. 15.11.14 http://www.dsnews.ua/politics/aleksandr-tur-chinov-v-oshchushcheni-apokalipsis-13112014141000
Turchynov of opportunism as if the former Komsomol functionary changed allegiance for personal gain. There is not much logic in this accusation. If this were his motivation, it would make more sense for him to switch to Orthodoxy." The attitude toward Turchynov is tied to more fundamental issues - how religious and political diversity are viewed as well as diverse relationships between the religious and the political spheres. While this pluralism is flourishing in Ukraine, in Russia it is drowned out by heavy media involvement.

The media's image of Turchynov reflects a wider framework of societal and media perceptions of religion in the post-Soviet political sphere. The history of the "bloody pastor" reveals not only the religiosity of Ukrainians and Russians but also the evolution of political-religious relationships. I intend to show that the hidden settings of social conscience on both sides were at work in the discussions of the "bloody pastor," and examine the changes in political-religious relationships that the evolution of this image demonstrated. In other words, if we agree that the "bloody pastor" became a symbol for the media on both sides of the conflict, we need to try to answer the question, "How can a political leader be turned into a religious preacher?" In other words, how was the media effective in using religion to create a (frightening) cultural icon and internet meme out of a politician who openly used his faith to pursue his country's interests? How did religion become a political tool for Turchynov and for the media? Why was it so easy to demonize someone for being a Baptist? What does the media have to say about that?

The evolution of his media image is grounded in a real biography. Oleksandr Turchynov went from being a Komsomol member to a preacher, then from a modest preacher to a "pastor" and then from a political party's behind-the-scenes leader (for the Batkivshchyna party) to acting president of Ukraine; and finally, from Yulia Tymoshenko's assistant to an independent leader on a national level. Although Turchynov's rise to power is rather remarkable, it came about thanks to two pivotal events, which coincide with the two Ukrainian Maidans.

**The First Coming: A Baptist Reveals Himself**

Oleksandr Turchynov first attracted media attention during the Orange Revolution in 2004. After the success of the revolution, he was appointed head of the Security Service of Ukraine. He was already referred to as a sectarian back then, but was not yet "bloody." Ukrainian media were persistent in their interest in his Baptist worldview and its possible influence on politics. He was stigmatized as a sectarian, but was not considered dangerous. Russian and pro-Russian media considered him not just interesting but dangerous. "Anti-Orange" websites called him a "Chekist Baptist," a secret representative of the "Orange sect" yearning for world domination. "Not only have the Baptists brought the USA under their control, but they also have a strong position in Europe. For example, in the UK there is the Baptist Keston Institute, dedicated ‘to the study of religion in the former communist bloc,’ although in reality the organization lobbies for Baptist interests under the guise of fighting for the rights of believers. It is setting up, so to speak, a ‘new world order,’ which

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2 Fionik D., Samsonova IU. Kak Aleksandr Turchinov ispolnil prezidentskie obiazannosti. Zhurnal Fokus. 21.06.14 https://focus.ua/country/308310/
will, of course, be a Baptist one.”

“Anti-Orange” journalists expressed concern that the head of the Security Service was a major threat to the very security of Ukraine. “I wonder in what capacity Baptist pastor O. Turchynov—a carrier of state secrets—talked to his foreign equivalents. Who can guarantee one hundred percent that Oleksandr Valentyevych did not give away Ukrainian secrets to foreign spies who often disguise themselves as preachers?”

Meanwhile, the authors of the article about the insidious Chekist Baptist elaborated on this terrible image using contradictory elements. “When Turchynov preaches from the pulpit, his legs shake with emotion (by the way, he does not hesitate to kneel in prayer in front of others).” Thus, the media crafted an image of someone who was simultaneously ‘a God-fearing fanatic,’ ‘a humble sectarian,’ and ‘a holy Chekist.’

In an interview for the newspaper Ukrayinska Pravda, Turchynov emphasized his modest role in the church, “I am not a pastor. It’s a nickname that has stuck to me. I do preach in the church, but being a pastor is a more serious responsibility.”

Turchynov’s sermons were monitored, not only by Ukrainian evangelicals (as he was a new religious phenomenon for the stigmatized and marginalized (post) Soviet Protestant community), but also by journalists (as he was a new political phenomenon). The newspaper Gazeta Po-Ukrainsky described his approachable image: “the right hand of Yulia Tymoshenko preached ... in jeans, a shirt and tie, and a sports jacket. He started quietly, but suddenly he raises his voice: ‘Brothers and sisters, the winds are subject to Him. The elements are subject to Him. He fed thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and some fish. These days, just as it was then, people also demand miracles and free food.’ He reminds them that Jesus came not to fill stomachs but to save souls. Everyone longs for the understandable, nobody wants to go to the cross.”

As a preacher, Turchynov fits in well with the local Baptist homiletic tradition. His preaching style can be called humble, yet emotional. Sermons are built around simple ideas, with an emphasis on practical application to personal life. As a preacher, he does not attract attention to himself through his clothing or rhetoric. However, he is not afraid to speak openly about his faith. He does not hide his worries, and does not adapt his speech to the audience. This all makes him not only a church preacher, but also a media figure, a true media missionary.

Turchynov was not intimidated when he was called a sectarian not only in print or online, but also on live television. He gladly invited others to listen to his sermons. The newspaper Livyi Bereg recounted one of these episodes: “Responding to the presenter’s question about the importance of religion in his life Turchynov said, ‘I am a preacher. I preach in a Baptist church.’ ‘May I come listen to you preach?’ asked the presenter. ‘Absolutely. Michurin Street. Do come; we will be glad to see you there. Everyone is welcome,’ Turchynov responded. Then the presenter asked whether Turchynov feared that belonging to the Protestant Church would...

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3 Chekist-baptist Aleksandr Turchynov 19.08.05 http://anti-orange.com.ua/article/resident/68/27569
4 Chekist-baptist Aleksandr Turchynov 19.09.05 http://anti-orange.com.ua/article/resident/68/27569
5 Chekist-baptist Aleksandr Turchynov 19.09.05 http://anti-orange.com.ua/article/resident/68/27569
6 Oleksandr Turchynov: Protli Poroshenka u SBU dav svidchennia odin iz deputativ „Nashoi Ukraini” 01.11.05 http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2005/11/1/3015079/
work against the Batkyvshchyna party since the majority of Ukrainian citizens are either Orthodox or Greek-Catholics. “I didn’t join the Baptist church for political benefit. And the fact is that during the Soviet era, Protestants were very harshly persecuted. But the world is changing. And Ukraine is a multi-religious country,” Turchynov said. “I have the utmost respect for all believers regardless of their denomination. The main thing is for people to believe because faith makes us human. Without faith a person turns into a beast that rapes, kills, and believes that everyone should work for him. And by the way, one of the main hardships this regime imposes on Ukraine is the destruction of the moral code.”

Thus, Turchynov helped to increase religious tolerance in Ukraine, and normalize perceptions of the Baptist faith and Protestants in general. He became the first Baptist preacher to attract sustained media attention. Journalists kept track of his every word. Each public sermon was followed by a media response. It is perhaps the only example of open mission work in the public political sphere. But from a political perspective, a simple preacher was of little interest so they were determined to make Turchynov a “pastor.” It both gave him authority and at the same time discredited him. And he became a “pastor,” at least in the media and in the public’s perception of him, which was shaped by the media.

**THE SECOND COMING: THE PASSIVIST BECOMES AN ACTIVIST**

Turchynov’s second coming coincided with the “Revolution of Dignity” (2013-2014) and the subsequent war. He was one of the most prominent and daring leaders of the Maidan Revolution, and then served as acting president during the most difficult days of Ukrainian statehood since its independence in 1991.

Evaluating Turchynov’s role in those events, journalists link the nature of his politics with his religious beliefs. For them, “Oleksandr Turchynov’s political intuition is intertwined with Christian eschatology,” because he took action when other politicians were at a loss and was guided not only by common sense or political expediency, but also by his faith and morals. Hence evaluations of him are mixed: “It is very easy to assess Turchynov’s role in Euromaidan since it is positive. He has proven himself as a negotiator and as a tribune of the people. He was slightly wounded. During the most critical moments of the Maidan, he was on the stage or somewhere nearby. But as acting president, the verdict on his leadership is divided. Turchynov retained power legitimately (and perhaps insured Ukrainian statehood itself), but he lost the Crimea.”

Despite the fact that he gave an order launching the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), he is accused of indecisiveness. Despite the fact that he did not allow bloodshed in Crimea, he is called “bloody.” This suggests, at the very least, that he is far from in favor of conformism and opportunism, and from making choices for the sake of pleasing others.

A recently disclosed transcript of a meeting of the National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) of Ukraine held on February 28, 2014 revealed that Turchynov was the only person who advocated declaring a state of emergency. Yulia Tymoshenko commented

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8 Turchynov priglasil na svoiu tservkovnuu propagu http://ib.ua/news/2012/03/16/141483_turchynov.html


10 Ibid.
that such a decision would cause panic among the civilian population, to which he replied, “There will be more panic when Russian tanks are on Khreshchatyk. We must do everything possible to prepare to defend ourselves, even if we don’t receive any military aid from the West and must do so on our own. We have to act. Therefore, I am putting to vote the NSDC resolution to declare a state of emergency. Who is in favor? … Very well. Only Turchynov. The resolution doesn’t pass.”

In June 2014 Turchynov handed over the presidency to Petro Poroshenko but he remained Speaker of Parliament. At this time he was the one who became known as “bloody,” not the newly elected president. The “pastor” ceased to be the acting president, but remained “the leader of the Kyiv junta,” according to Russian media. In reality, “pastor” is an easier target for criticism than businessman president.

By the summer of 2014 the “bloody pastor” had become an internet meme. According to internet headlines, the “Bloody Pastor…” “Gives Harsh Feedback to the Kremlin,” “Compares Putin to Hitler,” “Personally Inspects the Lines of Defense,” “Inspects the ATO Zone,” “Announces an Attack on Mariupol” and “Threatens Terrorists with an Assault Rifle” although he “Has Nothing to Do with the Collapse of the Ruble.” The name “Bloody Pastor” was even given to a heavily armored National Guard car and a brand of beer. (The beer is a joke: “Turchynov registered a brand of beer called ‘bloody pastor.’ It’s now being advertised on Russian TV for free”). The jokes reflect the growing demand for everything “pastor” related. The newspaper 2,000 devoted a liberal amount of space to describing in great detail the café “Karatel” (The Chastener) that opened in the burned out building of the House of Trade Unions and offers visitors a signature cocktail called “Bloody Pastor.” Thus, ‘bloody pastor’ became a brand, and marketing image that would sell products. “Bloody Pastor” is also an online game in which Turchynov attacks the “vatnik” with a knife and breaks into Putin’s office. The game was devised by Kyiv programmers.

Meanwhile, the “pastor” has accomplished quite a bit; among other things, he has written three novels: Illusion of Fear, The Last Supper and The Advent. Journalists point out that, “Turchynov’s personal traits can easily be found in the heroes of his book who are occupied with saving the planet: the pastor of a Protestant church and his mentor.” Turchynov does not hide his apocalyptic views and mysticism in his novels. For example, he reports that “while writing of The Advent… ‘I received so many signs that the storyline had to change’.” Most of all, the author is on the guard against the Antichrist system of total control, globalism, computer networks, the invasion of gay culture, etc. That alone means he can hardly be called a pro-Western politician. Nonetheless, it was his independence, reticence, and calm confidence, which are grounded in his religious beliefs that made him invaluable during critical moments in Ukrainian history.

After the parliamentary elections

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12 Piro krovavyi pastor. 31 ianvaria 2015 http://censor.net.ua/jokes/64638
14 Aleksandr Turchynov: V ozhidani Apokalipsy. 15.11.14 http://www.dnnews.ua/politics/aleksandr-turchynov-v-oshchushchenii-apokalipsy-15112014141000
15 Ibid.
of 2014 the hashtag #StayPastor appeared and immediately became popular (it was combined with phrases such as, “Come, pastor, and bring order,” “We beg you on our knees,” “We can’t survive without your sermons,” “It’s the first time the internet community has become parishioners,” “What other speaker would literally force MPs to vote?”) Internet users used these tactics to ask authorities to keep Turchynov as Speaker in the new convocation of the Verkhovna Rada.

The internet welcomed Turchynov’s return as secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine with the hashtag #BloodyPastorReturned. The day after his appointment on December 17, 2014, Turchynov was in a good mood and when asked whether he knew about his nickname “bloody pastor,” he smiled reservedly. RIA Novosti interpreted the episode as an acknowledgement of the name. At the same time, Komsomolskaya Pravda in Ukraine noted that Turchynov treated his nickname very lightly but took his faith seriously. Despite the ominous nickname, the “bloody pastor” has a very successful branding and large social network following. Komsomolskaya Pravda added that it was the Russian media that called him “bloody” for his uncompromising stance and harsh statements against Russia. The “pastor” came about because he preached in the Baptist church. After having been recognized by the newspapers, the “pastor” became known on TV. “The ‘bloody pastor’ has conquered the internet,” said ICTV.

Turchynov did not become the “bloody pastor” merely on the internet. On February 4, 2015 at a PACE (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) session, Deputy Yulia Lyovochkina accused the Ukrainian government of adopting the policies of the party of war, which is how the NSDC Secretary received his nickname. Russian-controlled English-language media spread the incident immediately.

The website Novorossia.Vision dedicated a collection of materials to the “bloody pastor.” They claimed that Turchynov was involved with Scientology and even Satanism, as well as, obviously, behind-the-scenes manipulators, the “Western designers of the Ukrainian revolution,” whose goal is to “physically reduce the population of Ukraine and turn the rest into heartless and merciless murderers or their silent accomplices.”

Zvezda Broadcasting Company eagerly reported how the “bloody pastor” Turchynov inspires Ukrainian siloviki and how this has given rise to a new epic “about a bloody pastor and the knights of Azov.” And here the Orthodox Russia information agency worriedly stated that the “insane ‘bloody pastor’ Turchynov referred to the Kuban as Ukrainian territory and is preparing to

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20 Ukrainskii deputy from the Opposition bloc calls Turchynov „the bloody pastor” at PACE. 4.02.2015 http://www.forntbuss.com/2015/02/ukrainian-deputy-from-opposition-bloc.html
22 Krovayyi pastor Turchinov wooduihelieta ukraiinskkh silovikov Telsradokompania „Zvezda“ 3 marta 2015 http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstreche_i_mire/ content/20150303052-pcxt.htm
advances on Moscow.”

The Ukrainian news channel reported that the pastor has not forgotten his foreign brothers in faith, stating, “Oleksandr Turchynov, the ‘bloody pastor,’ meets with foreign chaplains.”24 “Pastor” Turchynov preached a sermon to NATO chaplains,” stated Depo.ua. “Turchynov, who is a pastor himself, talked about the importance of faith in times of war: ‘The only ray of light in war is a deep and genuine faith that gives you strength, cleanses your soul, and heals it. Those who have seen the horrors of war usually become peacemakers.’”25 The “pastor” also frequently speaks at Protestant church conferences.

Russia is especially concerned with these ties and the “pastor’s” spiritual influence: “Journalists and priests are complaining about the expansion of overseas sects. They have managed to pull off a political coup in a neighboring country with the help of these sectarian leaders.”26 Many Russian Protestants concur with this “Orthodox” concern. There is a selection of texts on the Ruskii Baptist website about how the “bloody pastor” Turchynov discredits Ukrainian Baptists: “This odious figure, Oleksandr Turchynov, is first and foremost a Komsomol member and a Ukrainian Chekist, and only then a Baptist. The media and the people have called him the ‘bloody pastor’... He is a monster with a barbaric facial expression who fanatically

loves the military and dishes out orders to kill right and left... No doubt, Turchynov represents politicized extremist sectarianism. As soon as Turchynov handed power over to Petro Poroshenko... he went to his ‘church’ right away and preached a sermon. The day Turchynov was soliloquizing about spirituality, his soldiers killed a five-year-old girl in Slavyansk.”27

As if Ukraine were not enough, News of Novorossia warned that “the ‘bloody pastor’ Turchynov is urging Turkey to join in the fight for the Crimea” and also exposed him as a “longtime agent of pro-American sects.”28 A “people’s correspondent” clearly sees how the “bloody pastor Turchynov is once again demonstrating his bloodthirsty nature” while “demanding lethal weapons from the West to drown the Donbas in blood. It was on Turchynov’s orders that artillery and missiles destroyed residential areas of Slavyansk, Kramatorsk, Yenakiyevo, Horlivka, Luhansk and Donetsk. It was on Turchynov’s orders that old men, women and children were killed. The dozens of people who were burned alive in the Odessa House of Trade Unions and Mariupol police headquarters are on his conscience.”29

Despite the hysteria on the internet, it looks like the “pastor” feels he is in the right place heading the NSDC and will not exchange his position for a quieter job in the Cabinet of Ministers. As his political colleagues state, “he personally said that he doesn’t want to be the 27 Erofeev K. Krovavyy pastor Turchynov diskreditiruet ukrainskii baptizm. 22 iunia 2015 http://rusbaptist.livejournal.com/138713.html
prime minister because he knows that he is in the right place.”

The “pastor” takes on himself the thankless role of calling a spade a spade, “to the delight of social network users.” Some bloggers exclaim, “Thanks again, pastor!” and “The bloody pastor is leading us on a crusade.”

The Russian media frequently repeat his phrases in the form of news. For example, under the heading, “The ‘Bloody Pastor’ Called the Russian Prime Minister Inadequate” we find “pastoral” statements quoted openly: “I would like to remind these inadequate Kremlin dreamers that Ukrainians had a state with Kyiv as capital long before the Golden Horde settled in Moscow. Ukraine will continue to exist even after the rancor, aggression, and internal contradictions that are always part of a totalitarian regime tear apart the remains of the Soviet empire that bears the name of Russia.”

In 2016 the “pastor” has become seriously interested in missiles. This is reflected in such eloquent headlines as, “The ‘Bloody Pastor’ Invited NATO to Shoot Down Putin’s Bold Planes,” or, “The Pastor Approves! Ukraine has Successfully Tested its New Missile.”

From the mysterious “Baptist preacher” to “Come back, pastor!”; “Thank you, pastor;” and “The pastor approves” – such has been Turchynov’s path in the Ukrainian media sphere. To those within the borders of the “Russian world” Turchynov remains an insidious sectarian in politics, covered in blood that he will never be able to fully wash off. This not only makes him “bad,” it makes him terrible, i.e. powerful, strong, and dangerous. Not only do people hate the “pastor,” they also fear him. For many Russians, to fear means to respect.

**The Confession of a Non-Pastor**

Despite Turchynov’s occasional attempts to at least somehow adjust his media image to bring it closer to reality as he understands it, the distance between the virtual and the real only increases. Indeed, in the context of stereotypical images of the “pastor,” few journalists are interested in what the “real” Turchynov thinks of himself and how he wants to present himself to society. Only in rare cases when the opportunity arises for Turchynov to talk on a confessional level, is he willing to share what he believes to be true without getting into debates.

His most frank interview about his life journey was published in 2001 in a Protestant magazine, *Faith and Life*, which is relatively unknown to secular audiences. He acknowledges that he had been an “ambitious social climber” since Komsomol times and was very surprised when educated and promising people left the Komsomol to join the Baptists. His story about his first contact with the Baptists has mystical aspects: “I decided to sneak into this ‘den’ to see it for myself and understand why young people leave ‘us’ to join ‘them.’ I took public transportation,
incognito, with a tough friend. We asked a neatly dressed woman at a bus stop for directions to the outskirts of the city where all the Baptists were banished during Soviet times. She responded, ‘Praise God! I’ve been waiting here for you for quite a while. You’re going to the house of prayer, aren’t you?’ Seeing our bewilderment she explained, ‘I had a dream last night that two lost souls would come up to me and I would show them the way to salvation...’ This testimony demonstrates not only Turchynov’s mystic bent, but also his confidence that he was chosen to fulfill a big role.

In the 1990s he was baptized on profession of faith. “When I was baptized that second time by full immersion, I recognized the profound meaning of what was happening and knew that it was the best decision of my life.” In doing so, he joined the Baptist community. What was it that drew him there? “Talking to the Baptists I became convinced that their faith wasn’t excessive or superficial. I had known the senior pastor, Vladimir Yakovlevich Kunets, for a few years. I saw in him a simple, approachable person who wasn’t showing off. He didn’t come to God when it became generally accepted but at a time when it was dangerous and people had to sacrifice a great deal, if not everything, for their faith.”

Imitating his spiritual mentor, Turchynov learned to live and serve everywhere “as if for God.” “Until recently my social status meant a great deal to me. Today I see the vanity of it all clearly, and I am happy that I am free from it. Something else has replaced it: you have to honestly do (as unto the Lord) whatever you have been entrusted with... I would be lying if I said that working in politics while following the laws of God’s love is as easy as, say, operating a machine in a factory. But I am happy that the Lord – and He alone – kept me from falling into the abyss of getting pleasure from power and satisfaction from stopping at nothing to reach a goal.”

He points to another temptation, which is to use Christian churches for political purposes, when he says, “The authorities seek support from any major social player, one of which - and this is no secret - is evangelical Christians.” According to Turchynov, not only the authorities are guilty of this, but also the churches themselves that seek support and political influence.

What Turchynov is suggesting is not a division between religion and politics or church and state. On the contrary, he advocates for their integration, but suggests a hierarchy of authority and values in which God takes first place over state authorities and secular laws: “We don’t have to curry favor with the authorities; they aren’t worthy of it. The church is above politics or any authorities and it must demand from the authorities that they act in accordance with Scripture. Of course, that doesn’t mean giving them directions. The solution to the dilemma between ‘Christians and the authorities’ or ‘Christians and politics’ is that even in this particular sphere of human activity believers should behave in a way that is pleasing to God.”

The principles that Turchynov described in 2001 are evident in his life, in both of his appearances in major politics. He worked in a party organization, in the parliament, in the Ukrainian security service, in the government, in the NSDC, and as acting president. And no
matter where he worked, it was clear that what really mattered to him was not his position but his calling. His life is a perfect expression of the “Protestant ethic.”

In his book Testimony, he writes that while his faith cost him the respect of society, it has helped him from within by giving him the integrity and strength to fight the temptations of being in power. Describing his “ministry” in the state security unit, he said: “No sooner had the ink dried on the decree of my appointment than my opponents started screaming that this Baptist would destroy the secret service... They tried to use my religion as compromising material. For me compromising material is evidence that a person doesn’t believe in God and therefore nothing restrains them.”

Turchynov sees power as a temptation and only the one who can overcome it will discover its positive possibilities. “Only the person who has a spiritual core is able to resist the unseen temptations of power.”

That is why “God’s servant who is chosen to be in power should understand whose task he is fulfilling, whom he is serving, and who has put him in his high position. No force can withstand you if you do God’s will.”

So personal religious conviction qualifies a political leader and makes him more trustworthy.

Power must be connected to faith, otherwise power turns into illusion and deceives the one who “possesses” it. As Turchynov confesses, “Any position and any rank is simply an illusion of power. Any war that is won, any triumph over enemies, and any defeat of opponents is just an illusion of victory. There is only one true power and that is the power over personal flaws and fears.

There is one true victory and that is the victory over sin. And only true faith can give us true power and true victory.”

Faith, in turn, should be linked to truth and so should freedom. “A person who doesn’t understand what freedom is cannot defend it. Freedom is the daughter of truth. And truth is God.” Therefore the truths of faith are the foundation of his political activities. He states that he starts and ends each day with prayer. On Sunday mornings he prepares a sermon and studies the Bible.

His “Protestant” schedule does not ever allow for virtual reality. Turchynov regards the media as the Antichrist’s system of the propaganda of sin, part of a system of unlimited control over society, “the one and undivided world order,” “the human-machine syndicate,” and “the ruthless e-government machine.”

The main threat for him is not so much the “sovok,” or the neo-Soviet empire, as it is the world government that will place a mark on people’s hands and foreheads. He writes about this in each of his books. “Then there will be the real danger of losing the free will given by God; all forms of religion as attempts to know God will be dangerous to the system and therefore forbidden.”

Again, in this regard Turchynov does not fit the stereotypical image of a pro-Western agent of globalization and Protestantism.

Turchynov’s book Testimonies, which is narrated in the first person, drastically alters the image of him that has been created. He sees himself as God’s servant in politics yet does not cling to his position in “the system.”

42 Ibid., p. 131.
47 Ibid., p.264.
48 Ibid., p.262.
49 Ibid., p. 268.
Likewise, he does not aspire to a special place in the church and is happy to preach an occasional Sunday sermon. His model of faith, in which everything is “simple” and “nothing excessive,” which always has room for “sacrifice” and “service,” in which there must be “limitations” in order to “please God,” correlates with Protestant archetypes and clearly does not correspond to the stereotype of the “bloody pastor.”

“Stay, Bloody Pastor”: Lessons from History

The “bloody pastor” is a noteworthy media phenomenon during a post-secular period of reconstruction of society and its relationship with religion. It is a media object, developed partially from the biography of the “real” Oleksandr Turchynov and partially from public expectations and political provocations. In the post-Soviet world where, according to Peter Pomerantsev, “Nothing is true and everything is possible,” the image of the “bloody pastor” cannot be called entirely fake. At the same time it cannot be called real.

In spite of all of its contradictions, this image remains in demand. The hashtag #PastorStay (#ПасторЗалипайся) represents an endorsement of a sectarian in politics. The media image of Turchynov expresses societal demand for leaders who are people of faith, which gives them motivation and a foundation, and where people are prepared to serve and not manipulate, where they work to please God rather than man.

Ukrainians are not overly surprised by the rise and power of Turchynov in the political arena since he is an example of the growing religious diversity that permeates the political sphere. However, the same meme (even without the “bloody”) is an indicator for Russians of something “foreign,” because if a person who just recently was a Komsomol member suddenly converts to any religion but Orthodoxy, he or she has undoubtedly been bought by the Americans (or at least is vulnerable to charges that they have been bought by the Americans). There is a line dividing the Baptists from the Orthodox, much like there is a line dividing the West from “us.” Although a Baptist found himself in the presidential palace in Ukraine, this is difficult to imagine in Russia, because in Russia the rule is simple and strict: to be Russian is to be Orthodox.

The story of the “bloody pastor” is not so much one of religion and politics, so much as their images, which are created through propaganda; and the differences which are visible between Russian and Ukrainian society and their relationship to propaganda. The pro-Kremlin media does not see propaganda as a professional and socio-political problem; they are not so much inclined to reject it as to justify it as “alternative facts.” One way or another, if facts are presented as uniquely alternative, it reveals the propaganda character of informational politics. Ukrainian media do not idealize Turchynov, but leave space for various images and interpretations. Pluralism is on the side of reality, schematics on the side of propaganda.

Behind the image of the “pastor” there is a complex backdrop of tangled relationships between religion and politics, in particular the devaluation of politics because few people remember the party affiliation and political views of the “pastor.” Most interest is shown in his religious identity, which, in turn, explains his political identity. But the influences work both ways. Most Protestants approve of Turchynov because he is “one of us,” i.e., they trust him without understanding politics and despite their traditional suspicion.
of the state and state officials. Thus, electoral politics are divided more and more according to denominations and that is also a distinct phenomenon of post-secular times. The “pastor” himself does not want everyone to like him and does not rush to be identified with a specific party or crowd, or as ‘the voice of the people’. As he stated at a prayer meeting with Protestant leaders (Irpen, January 15, 2016), “I made a very important decision to never think about what others will say or think of me. I just do my job and don’t want everyone to like me.”

“To be liked” by some political audience implies “to belong to” them. The “pastor” wishes to remain free and extends that freedom to others—the freedom to think anything you want about him without any obligations. Therefore, when Russian Baptists ask their Ukrainian friends, “Why didn’t you excommunicate Turchynov for starting a war?” They reply that he acted as a politician and that he was free to do what he did. That is why the Baptists of the occupied Donbas, when interrogated by separatists about their relationship with the “pastor” reply, “He is not one of us; he is on his own.” The long and the short of it is that Turchynov is not locked behind church walls and is not limited to them; yet he occupies a special public space between religion and politics that is still difficult to define.

Thus, Turchynov as a media object has gone through a complex evolution. He started as a humble preacher, that is, an insider in politics and part of a stigmatized religious minority community, and then became the “pastor,” that is, a public religious and political figure. He embodies the obvious fact that religion cannot remain a private matter in a time of post-secular transformations; from time to time it emerges from the shadows and becomes public. Even if politicians refrain from drawing attention to their religion, the mass media brings it to light and makes it an object of discussion first (especially when it is a minority faith), and then an influencing factor. hus, under the influence of the media, public space is widened in such a way that religion and politics can sort out their relationship in the open, inviting the public to participate.

In Ukraine, 2017 is a year of celebrating the Reformation. And few will see it as a coincidence that the politician and preacher Turchynov is one of the initiators and keynote speakers of the large-scale R500 project celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The project’s motto, “From Personal Reformation to National Reformation” fully reflects the “pastor’s” views. And the personal and media story fully fit into the paradigm of the Reformation. Here the two Maidans find their spiritual justification and continuation. Here political calling and Christian faith find their reconciliation and application. The pastor and politician in one person are not only a new symbol of Ukrainian Protestantism, but a real challenge to the post-Soviet church and post-Soviet society.

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