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THE TRUTH IN THE SHADOW OF WAR: AN AUTHORITATIVE VOICE IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINE

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Review of the book «In the Shadow of War in Ukraine» (“W cieniu wojny w Ukrainie”) by Polish Rev. Professor Andrzej Zwoliński. Published in 2024, the book makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the Russian war against Ukraine, as well as its impact on cultural and religious processes both within Ukraine and globally. The author analyzes the history of Russian imperialism and the history of Ukraine, upon which he comments on the ideological and geopolitical foundations of the conflict. The distinguished and authoritative voice of Rev. Professor Zwoliński in support of the Ukrainian people in the current situation explains to the world why Russia’s war against Ukraine is a brutal crime that has been centuries in the making. The book also provides an opportunity for every Ukrainian to uncover the missing pieces necessary to fully comprehend the depth of the war between Russia and Ukraine as a clash of civilizations.

Keywords: war, imperialism, “ruskiy mir”, rashism, propaganda.

The war in Ukraine has been ongoing since 2014, although, within the context of contemporary geopolitics, it was considered a prolonged conflict until Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It was only since 2022 that international politics shifted from a state of concern to an understanding that Ukraine is facing a brutal and treacherous assault. Moreover, Ukraine is not merely fighting for its survival but is also holding the front line on its own territory, thereby protecting Europe from the war. However, for some countries, this became evident only when “bombs began to explode at Europe’s borders, the number of casualties surpassed tens and hundreds of thousands, and stories of raped women and children flooded the internet—the shadow of war grew ever darker.” This is emphasized in the book «In the Shadow of War in Ukraine» by Rev. Professor Andrzej Zwoliński, who was among the few analysts who recognized the threat of war long before its outbreak. He was directly involved in humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees in both Poland and Ukraine.

Rev. Professor Andrzej Zwoliński, a renowned Polish priest, theologian, and scholar in the fields of moral theology, social ethics, sociology, economics, politics, and media, is the author of over 300 published books. He served as the long-time head of the Catholic Social Teaching Department at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow. Perhaps the only scholar to address the multifaceted aspects of the war in Ukraine in such depth in his book.

Emphasizing that the beginning of the war in Ukraine can be traced to the turning point of 2013-2014, when mass protests erupted during the so-called Euromaidan, the respected author introduces a profound historical analysis, religious-philosophical reflections, and socio-political considerations into Polish and broader European discourse.

The author introduces the reader to the topic of war in Ukraine by starting with sociological studies and an analysis of philosophical thought concerning the theory of war, concluding that human beings do not possess a natural inclination toward war, but that there is a persistent conflict of civilizations in the world, and war is the result of human destruction. Providing a clear chronology of the war between Russia and Ukraine in the introduction, Rev. Professor Zwoliński traces the events that led to the conflict, analyzing the stages of escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea, the armed conflict in Donbas, and subsequent international diplomatic efforts for a peaceful resolution. The author focuses on the importance of historical memory and the role that symbols and rituals play in consolidating Ukrainian society during the war, offering a detailed history of Russian imperialism, particularly as it relates to Russian Orthodoxy, which has deep roots in the traditions of Tsarist power.

Russian cultural identity is constructed in a manner that reflects a Byzantine ideal, and the fall of Byzantium following the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453 nurtured the concept of the “Third Rome.” Moscow, as the alleged true guardian of the Orthodox faith, according to its narrative, asserts superiority over Catholic Rome, which claimed to have betrayed the true faith. However, the author also highlights a less evident fact from the formation of Moscow, which could serve as the real foundation of Russian imperialism. The “steppe messianism” of the Mongol leader Genghis Khan, which involved the subjugation of other peoples and the exhibition of cruelty toward them as the highest virtue of the conqueror, provides an insightful lens for understanding the origins of Russian aggression. An attentive reader will recognize the echoes of this ideology in the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, dating back to 1206.

From the very first chapter, in addition to listing important historical facts, the author consistently supports Ukraine’s struggle against Russia’s imperial ambitions and Putin’s associated arrogance. In portraying Putin’s self-image as an emperor, the author explains how Russia’s leader persistently interprets reality as the fulfillment of a special mission for the “ryskiy mir” (“Russian world.”) The author also discusses the long-term use of propaganda to prepare the Russian public for supporting the invasion of Ukraine through the conceptualization of the «Russian world».

Rev. Professor Zwoliński argues that, just as Russian identity would lose its meaning without the imperial component, so too can a Russian not be regarded as a patriot without it. He explains this as a revival of old imperial ideas and the readiness of Russians to accept any form of aggression. The author further explores the media’s ideological role, revealing that the key to their manipulation lies not in the creation of a new language of lies but in appealing to pre-existing, deeply cultivated beliefs. The aspirations of Russian imperialism,

the revival of the great Church, and the fulfillment of a historical mission are sufficient to justify crimes, rapes, aggression, and hatred.

A critical role is attributed by the author to the cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Kirill, and the government, which is a product of centuries of church-state relations in which the state was sacralized and became the “Holy Rus.” This issue’s significance is emphasized, especially in light of Russia’s attempts to present the situation of Russian Orthodoxy in Ukraine as religious persecution to the international community. Therefore, it is unsurprising that two entire chapters of the book are dedicated to the history of Russian Orthodoxy and its contemporary activities, a brief but incisive discussion given the scale of the war propaganda orchestrated by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The shocking religious context in which the Moscow Church forgives murderers and thieves while declaring a “holy war” supports the government’s claim that Ukraine is not a state but merely a territory without the right to freedom. Rev. Professor Zwoliński argues that the absence of a historical name does not equate to the non-existence of a people who founded Kyivan Rus and have been part of the Golden Horde, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Crimean Khanate, the Grand Duchy of Moscow, the Polish Kingdom, the Commonwealth, Austro-Hungary, Soviet Russia, and more. He provides a coherent history of Ukraine while also drawing attention to the attributes and state symbols, a section referred to as “Putin’s Dilemmas.” By listing all the efforts of “Russian world” theorists and Russian chauvinists to negate the existence of Ukraine, the author highlights the groundlessness and manipulateness of these claims.

Simultaneously, Rev. Professor Zwoliński observes that the war has further solidified Ukrainian identity. The active “decolonization” of street names in cities stands as evidence of growing anti-Russian sentiment. The war has also revealed the active Russian propaganda against Poland as Ukraine’s supposed enemy. Without delving deeply into Ukrainian-Polish relations, Rev. Professor Zwoliński demonstrates that Poland’s acceptance of millions of Ukrainian refugees is more telling than any propaganda. To further reinforce this point, the author recalls the visit of Pope John Paul II to Ukraine from June 23 to 27, 2001, during which the Holy Father quoted Shevchenko and expressed concern for Ukrainians not only as a spiritual leader but also as a Pole.

In the second part of the book, Andrzej Zwoliński focuses on the internal context of Ukraine, particularly how the horrors of war are reshaping the national consciousness and cultural orientations of Ukrainians. The author notes that Russia’s aggression has caused not only a military challenge but also an ideological one for Ukraine, particularly through Russia’s efforts to destroy Ukrainian identity via propaganda and cultural genocide. Zwoliński not only describes the devastating economic and social consequences of the war for the civilian population but also analyzes the role of media in Ukraine during the war, especially how they have become essential tools for national mobilization and combating Russian propaganda. He also highlights the psychological trauma Ukrainians are experiencing, adding an emotional dimension to the book that complements the intellectual analysis.

Throughout the book, there is a palpable sense of pastoral care and sympathy for the suffering of Ukrainians. Although the author does not explicitly mention his personal involvement in humanitarian and spiritual assistance to Ukraine and maintains an academic tone, his references to the suffering of the Ukrainian people draw upon facts and activities

that can only be understood through direct participation or close communication with those engaged in such efforts. This is confirmed by the stories of Ukrainian refugees included in the book.

It should be noted that Rev. Professor Zwoliński has long been a lecturer at the Theological Institute of Joseph Bilchevsky in Lviv, a branch of the Pontifical Catholic University of Lublin. Therefore, despite the scholarly nature and precision of his writing, the second half of the book clearly reflects that for him, Ukraine is not merely a subject of study but a real entity. The clergy, students, and teachers he knew long before the war, parishioners whom he had served with his retreats and sermons, and a broad audience of readers of his works translated into Ukrainian.

The author expresses deep concern for the preservation of national identity and cultural revival amidst global crises. Professor Zwoliński sees hope for this revival in the resilience and solidarity of Ukrainians, who managed to self-organize despite being unprepared for wartime. He enumerates the daily feats of ordinary people in Ukraine and the efforts of Poles in both Poland and Ukraine who, although not initially prepared for volunteer aid, performed extraordinary acts of solidarity due to their sympathy for Ukrainians.

A series of social transformations experienced by Ukraine during the war and by Poland after the arrival of Ukrainian refugees are presented as both achievements and challenges. However, despite the reader's natural expectations as the book nears its conclusion, the author does not dedicate a separate chapter to conclusions or predictions for the future. In the spirit of a teacher who has already provided ample information and explained complex historical events and social processes, the author leaves the reader with confidence that they are now equipped to draw their own conclusions and make predictions.

Despite the book's uniqueness in deeply and consistently uncovering the main causes of the war and advocating for Ukraine's undeniable right to defend itself and prevail—a perspective I, as a researcher of “rashism,” greatly appreciated – the distinctive style of Professor Zwoliński also deserves note. In constructing the narrative, the author plays the roles of scholar, documentarian, and master of journalistic reportage. His academic style is accessible to a wide audience while maintaining scholarly rigor and depth, balancing intellectual analysis with the human dimension of war. This allows the reader, who may be outside the context, to understand that war is not just a matter of facts and statistics but of human lives.

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ПРАВДА В ТІНІ ВІЙНИ: АВТОРИТЕТНИЙ ГОЛОС НА ПІДТРИМКУ УКРАЇНИ

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Книга Анджея Зволінського «В тіні війни в Україні» («W cieniu wojny w Ukrainie»), видана у 2024 році, робить значний внесок у розуміння сучасної фази російської агресії проти України. Професор Зволінський, відомий дослідник політичних і культурних процесів, коментує ідеологічні та геополітичні основи цієї війни. Автор пропонує глибокий аналіз ідеологічних коренів війни, спираючись на концепції російського імперіалізму, культурної агресії та пропаганди, які лягли в основу російського нарративу в рамках гібридної війни. Він розуміє, наскільки глибоко вкорінена імперська ідея в російське суспільство та як вона взаємодіє з сучасними механізмами маніпуляції, пропаганди та інформаційної війни. Книга чітко демонструє, як ця ідеологія розвивається в самій Росії і як транслюється за її межі. Це дає можливість читачеві зрозуміти, чому Росія досі активно використовує методи психолінгвістичного впливу через медіа, маніпулюючи емоціями, національно-релігійними стереотипами.

«W cieniu wojny w Ukrainie» – це важливе інтелектуальне дослідження, яке дає цілісну картину військової та ідеологічної війни, яку Росія веде проти України.

Автор виступає в ролі вченого, документаліста та майстра журналістського репортажу. Його академічний стиль доступний широкій аудиторії, але водночас йому притаманні наукова строгість і глибина. Автор балансує між інтелектуальним аналізом і людським виміром війни. Це дає змогу читачеві, який може перебувати поза контекстом, зрозуміти, що війна – це не лише факти та статистика, а й людські життя.

Ключові слова: війна, імперіалізм, «русский мір», рашизм, пропаганда.