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Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations, is seen

Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations, is seen in the sanctuary during an ecumenical prayer service for peace in Ukraine at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City Feb. 18, 2023. (OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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The church is called to pray, preach the Gospel and be attentive to God's word in all circumstances, but even more so in the time of war, explained both the Vatican's ambassador to the United Nations and the U.S. archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

"Peace is really a divine thing. It's the life of the Trinity. And war is the work of the devil. War is the violation of every single Commandment. It is the violation of God's

will," said Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia.

Gudziak and Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations, spoke Feb. 19 at New York Encounter about the church's teaching on peace and its applicability to the current situation in Ukraine. Both were panelists at the annual three-day event in Manhattan, which drew an estimated 12,000 people, and was organized by Communion and Liberation, a Catholic lay ecclesial movement.

Caccia said the church's teaching is based on the Easter message of the risen Christ to his disciples, "Peace be with you." That message was given after the tremendous injustice of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and the events that preceded it, he said.

Caccia said St. John XXIII wrote the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth") in response to the worldwide nuclear threat posed by the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Subsequent documents of the Second Vatican Council, including *Gaudium et Spes* ("Joy and Hope"), stressed that peace can never be separated from justice. A vision of harmony embodies "peace with God, peace with the other, peace with the environment, our common home and peace within ourselves," he said.

The World Day of Peace was established by St. Paul VI and first celebrated Jan. 1, 1968, Caccia said. Typically, the reigning pope marks the annual event with a message to people of goodwill and sends a hand-signed copy of his remarks to heads of state to remind them of the humanitarian dimensions of their political decisions, he said.

Each year, the message's theme addresses a contemporary-but-timeless truth, such as "Migrants and refugees: men and women in search of peace" (2018) and "No peace without justice; no justice without forgiveness" (2002).

Gudziak put Ukraine's quest for peace in the context of its actions over the past three decades. "Maybe it was naive or very idealistic, but independent Ukraine in its first years made an unprecedented step to peace," he said.

In 1994, Ukraine had the world's third largest nuclear arsenal, behind the United States and Russia. It had more nuclear weapons than China, the United Kingdom and France combined.

"Like the Lamb of God, Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons with, of course, a great hope for peace," he said.

Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia

Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia speaks with wounded Ukrainian soldiers following an ecumenical prayer service for peace in Ukraine at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City Feb. 18, 2023. (OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Ukraine's nuclear disarmament was a condition of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum it signed with the U.S. and Russia in exchange for security assurances, including Russia's guarantee to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence. Ukraine also reduced its army from 780,000 soldiers in 1991, when it became independent with the collapse of the Soviet Union, to 150,000 in 2014, when Russia seized Crimea and ignited a separatist conflict in Ukraine's Donbas region. Of Ukraine's standing army in 2014, only 15,000 were battle-ready, Gudziak said.

"We know what happened: Russia invaded and everyone else told 100 rich Russians you can't shop at Harrod's in London or go to the casinos in Monte Carlo," he said.

Gudziak said from 1914 to 1950, 15 million people in Ukraine were killed or died an unnatural death. "That's an average of more than 1,000 people a day for 35 or 36 years," he said.

The church and the people of Ukraine want peace, he added, but peace is not merely a lack of violence, there also must be justice, freedom, dignity and truth.

"The challenge of peace is that we are sinners," Gudziak said. God is a giver who invited the first humans to live the life of the gift but not grab the fruit that would lead to death, he said.

"This war is a big grab. It's the violation of every commandment, a violation of God's will and a violation of our own identity as the sons and daughters of God," he said.

He said the church in Ukraine is with the people. Christians can be in solidarity with them through prayer, listening to the word of God, sharing the truth of who Christians are called to be, explaining virtue, valor and sin, and then helping practically.

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Gudziak said 90% of the Catholics in Ukraine are Eastern Catholics. They have benefited from a 20th-century history of clear pastoral teaching on the tenets of Catholic social doctrine, including understanding of God-given human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity and the common good. The teaching continued during periods in which the church was persecuted, but did not compromise its witness to the Gospel.

"In the last 30 years, that witness has led to the fact that minority churches have contributed to a social consciousness that is now mesmerizing the world," he said.

The practical result is during the current war, when 14 million Ukrainians have become refugees or internally displaced, people are not living on the streets. "They've all been received somewhere, and not in big camps," he said.

The people of Ukraine were way ahead of their president in solidarity and subsidiarity, he said.

"President Zelensky, whether he knows it or not, has been a student in the school of Catholic social doctrine. When the church prays and when it speaks the truth, especially when push comes to shove, that voice begins to be heard," Gudziak said.

Gudziak said the church in the world, and especially in the U.S., has shown its solidarity with Ukraine. He asked for continued prayers, aid and awareness of the clear moral issues at hand.

"We cannot always stop a tsunami, but we can witness and do what the Lord did. In the face of evil, we can give; live the life of the gift and reject the grab," he said.

"Sooner or later, God's trust will prevail."