



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on March 24, 2023

Clergy, Laity at Ukraine's Iconic Lavra Monastery Protest Zelensky's Takeover

On Wednesday, the leader of the 11th-century Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, Ukraine's most iconic Orthodox monastery, declared that the monastery's monks facing eviction from the Zelensky government due to their church's ties to Russia will not leave.

"We do not plan to leave, and we will not," Metropolitan Pavlo, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) abbot in charge of the Lavra, said.

"We can't do this, whatever the pretext. We call today on our people.... It is your duty to defend this holy place with us," he added.

The eviction was "worse" than the Soviet repressions against the clergy, he posited.

"This is proof that there are no human rights, only violence, the devil has arrived. We won't throw stones, we'll just pray. But I can't guarantee safety because provocateurs will come."

Echoing the clergyman, other church members started to claim that they have begun restoring and reconstructing the Lavra, which they had been renting from the state since 1988.

These members asserted that Zelensky's government had tried to "intimidate them extensively, persuade them into some kind of 'compromise' and, in the end, simply destroy them."

"I think that the people don't support this decision because it means to take away God from the people, to take away their faith and change it for something else, according to how someone on the very top made it up," worshiper Natalia Lytovchenko said at a recent service at the monastery.

A group of monks currently live in the golden-domed religious complex overlooking the Dnipro River. Until recently, these monks were under Moscow's jurisdiction.

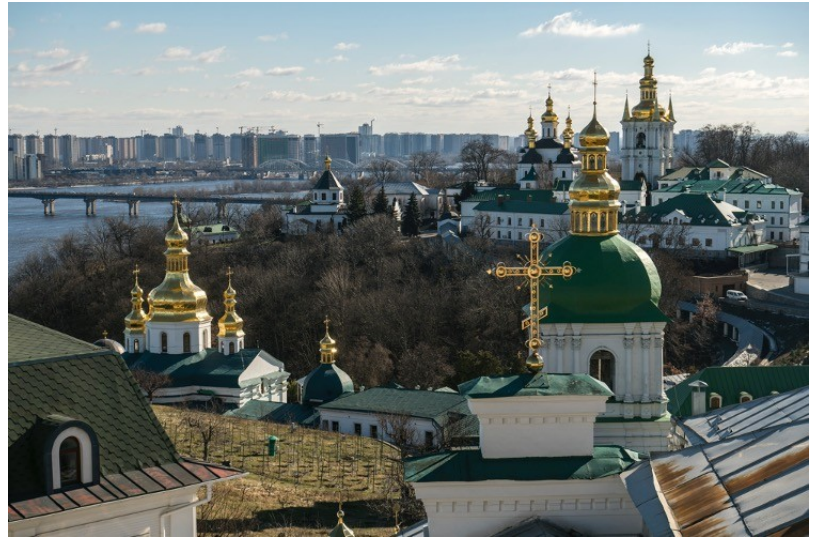
This branch of the UOC stated it had cut ties with the Russian Orthodox Church after its leader Patriarch Kirill supported Russian actions in Ukraine last year.

However, Zelensky's globalist regime demanded on March 10 this year that the UOC leave its longstanding seat — a vast 980-year-old monastery complex in the hills above central Kyiv. The government announced it was ending the lease that allowed the monks to occupy part of the monastery for free, giving the monks until March 29 to leave.

Moreover, the government accused the UOC, Ukraine's second-largest church, of maintaining relations with the Russian Orthodox Church amid the backdrop of Ukraine's conflict with Russia.

In response, the UOC's governing synod appealed to Zelensky in a message to shield the UOC from "unjust practices," including its impending eviction from the monastery.

"Our Church, to which many millions of fellow-citizens belong, has always educated its flock to love



AP Images
Kyiv Pechersk Lavra



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their motherland, be worthy state citizens, and fulfill their civic duties with dignity,” the synod said. “When the Russian Federation invaded, it was the first to condemn this military aggression strongly and call on its believers to defend their native land. We respectfully appeal to you, as the head of state and guarantor of compliance with Ukraine’s constitutional norms, to ensure the right to freedom of conscience and religion for our faithful, and to prevent the adoption of anti-constitutional laws against the Church.”

The synod added that the 11th-century monastery had been “literally raised from ruins” by UOC monks after reopening in the late 1980s, before stating that its clergy were presently being targeted with “baseless accusations,” evoking “a great wave of indignation” among UOC members.

Also, the UOC leaders pledged that “no reason will be able to break our firm will to defend holy Orthodoxy.”

“Large-scale pressure on the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is increasing, and today we turn to all of you, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, with a word of living love and a call to firm and unshakable faith,” they declared.

Meanwhile, Russia’s Orthodox leader Patriarch Kirill slammed the eviction as “monstrous.” Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church also called for “respect” for holy places in Ukraine, mentioning the targeted Lavra monastery, in response to a request made by the Moscow Patriarch to intervene.

Previously, Ukrainian Culture Minister Oleskandr Tkachenko claimed that the monastery’s alleged breaches of the tenancy agreement with the state included building new structures on the complex, and insisted that the state had the right to take the site back.

Tkachenko justified his stance by claiming that Kyiv wanted the entire monastery site and the cultural treasures that are housed inside. Based on Reuters reports, cars leaving the monastery were searched by police, a move Tkachenko said was to ensure valuable artifacts were not smuggled out.

“If a state commission finds that something is missing in the Lavra, the UOC clergy will be prosecuted by law,” Tkachenko threatened.

In turn, UOC spokesperson Metropolitan Klyment said the government had not given the Church any documents proving breaches of the tenancy agreement at the monastery or justifying the need to leave.

In a recent interview, Metropolitan Pavlo stated, “Unfortunately, we don’t have a Minister of Culture, but a Minister of Lack-of-Culture.... What is happening now has nothing to do with culture.”

The abbot continued, “These are the grandchildren of the ‘great leaders’: Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Khrushchev. We will stand to the last, but if we are thrown out, let the whole world watch. We will talk every day about what is happening around the monastery,” he continued.

Likewise, in a post published by *Sputnik News*, Viktor Medvedchuk, a former Ukrainian opposition leader, lambasted Zelensky’s authoritarian regime:

We remember from history that even during the Nazi occupation, the parishes of the canonical Orthodox Church were not closed by the Nazis. But today, their ideological heirs are taking away from the people of Ukraine that which gives them their spiritual core, strengthens them in trying times, consoles them in their grief and unites them in the joy of Easter. The Ukrainian people have been robbed of their tongue, both Russian and Ukrainian. Russian, native to millions of Ukrainians, was declared the language of invaders



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and traitors. Ukrainian has been perverted to such an extent that it has lost its roots, musicality and meaning. Today, the people are being robbed of the last thing they've got — their faith. Orthodoxy is the basis of the culture and spiritual life of the Ukrainian people. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has called the people to peace, unity and conscientiousness. But peaceful, God-fearing and conscientious people have been declared enemies by the Zelensky government.



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