

## RELIGIOUS LIFE IN UKRAINE: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE\*

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### The Main Participants in the Religious Scene

In order to understand the current situation of religious life in Ukraine, it is important to distinguish clearly the various traditional denominations that currently comprise the majority of organized religion. This discussion of the current situation of churches and of church-state questions in Ukraine focuses primarily on the four denominations that trace their roots in the millennial tradition of Kievan Christianity. Three of the four traditional churches--which trace their origins to tenth-century Kievan Rus'--are Orthodox and will be considered first.

1. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) is headed by Metropolitan Vladimir (Sabodan). Numerically the largest of the four traditional denominations, the UOC-MP is the only one of three Orthodox Churches in Ukraine that is recognized as canonical by the Orthodox world. Granted broad autonomy in 1991, the Church is still very closely tied to the Patriarchate in Moscow. Because of that continued association, it has been roundly criticized by the other Orthodox Churches in Ukraine. For its part, the UOC-MP has repeatedly affirmed its independence from Moscow and has even suggested that steps are being taken toward autocephaly. It is noteworthy that Patriarch Alexei himself is on record as supporting the increased autonomy of this sibling church in Ukraine, and there have been indications that a substantive measure of independence in financial affairs has already been granted.

In early 1994, the Church comprised 5,998 registered communities, 4,854 priests, forty-eight monasteries with 1,507 religious, and eight theological schools with 1,870 students.<sup>1</sup> (See the table at the end of this section.)

2. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievan Patriarchate (UOC-KP) was led by Patriarch Volodymyr (Romaniuk) until his death in 1995, when he was succeeded by his second in command, the controversial Metropolitan Filaret (Denisenko).<sup>2</sup> In the eastern regions of Ukraine, the UOC-KP is the second largest of the traditional Christian denominations. Staunchly patriotic in its use of the Ukrainian language in liturgical worship as well as in its unequivocal support for independent Ukrainian statehood, this Church benefitted from a relatively protectionist policy during the presidency of Leonid Kravchuk. According to the eminent analyst of the Soviet religious and political scene, Professor Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, this Church constituted a "quasi-state Church."<sup>3</sup> From its patriotic moral high ground, the UOC-KP levelled criticism at the UOC-MP. At the same time, it has been haunted by its own unresolved internal issues, perhaps the most pressing of which has been the question of its canonicity. There seems to be little doubt that this controversial matter, rather than the extremely popular idea of a patriotic church, was what drove five bishops (including two archbishops) to part company with the Kievan Patriarchate in December, 1993, and to join the canonical church subsumed under Moscow.

The UOC-KP's official organ, Kyivs'kyi Patriarkhat (The Kievan Patriarchate), is published monthly. In addition, the Church publishes Dukhovna Akademiia (The Theological Academy) and the popular journal Pravoslavnyi Visnyk (The Orthodox Herald). Plans are underway to renew the scholarly theological journal Trudy Kievskoi Dukhovnoi Akademii (Annals of the Kievan Theological Academy), now presumably as a Ukrainian-language publication, as opposed to its Russian-language, nineteenth-century predecessor.

Statistics currently available for this Church across the country indicate that at the beginning of 1994 it had 1,932 congregations served by 1,080 priests, fourteen monasteries with thirty-seven religious, and seven theological schools with 774 students. Among the Kievan Patriarchate's theological schools is one in the capital city under the rectorate of the young and very energetic Bishop Danyil of Vyshhorod. The theological component of the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology at the State University in Chernivtsi is also financed by the UOC-KP and forms part of its educational program.

3. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), under the leadership of Patriarch Dymytrii (Yarema), is an ethnic church concentrated mostly in Western Ukraine. The establishment of the UOC-KP in 1992 signalled the formal liquidation of the UAOC and, by late 1994, the Church was still not formally registered as a religious community within the law. Nevertheless, in August, 1994, the Church had five bishops, some 220 priests, 550 parishes, and a theological seminary in the Western Ukrainian city of L'viv with an eastern affiliate in Kharkiv.<sup>4</sup> Associated with this Church are the Stauropegion lay brotherhood in L'viv and the Kiev-based newspaper Nasha Vira (Our Faith), which is edited by the ecumenically sensitive literary critic, Yevhen Sverstiuk.

4. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), whose faithful were driven into an underground existence after a KGB-staged "Sobor" in 1946, severed its ties with Rome and reunited with Moscow. The UGCC today is concentrated mostly in Western Ukraine under the leadership of its Major Archbishop, Myroslav Ivan Cardinal Lubachivsky. Nationally sensitive (branded "bourgeois nationalist" in the Soviet period) and committed perhaps more than ever before to its ties with Rome, at the beginning of 1994 the Church comprised 2,932 parishes served by 1,691 priests; thirty-nine monasteries had 1,217 religious; and its six theological schools had 1,670 students. Various activities have been planned to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Union of Brest (1595-96), among them a series of scholarly conferences whose chief aim is to reassess that event in its historical context.

Beyond the psychological and sometimes deeply personal tensions--between the formerly underground, or "catacomb," clergy and Russian Orthodox Church-trained priests returning to Greco-Catholicism, and between the indigenous parish clergy and the Western clerics who have effectively taken over administrative control of the Archeparchy of L'viv--two other pressing internal issues facing the UGCC have been the questions of the formal recognition of the Church's patriarchal status and its territorial jurisdiction in Ukraine. So far, the Vatican has continued to hold off on recognizing a patriarchate and on approving the creation of new eparchies and episcopal appointments for the eastern regions of Ukraine, even as Polish Roman Catholic Church growth in the eastern territories continues unabated. Orthodox critics have not neglected to note these shortcomings.

Outside of this core group of traditional denominations, which trace their origins to the tenth-century beginnings of Christianity in Kievan Rus', nontraditional denominations have begun to assert their presence in great numbers. There are, roughly speaking, two groups of Christian and non-Christian religious communities in Ukraine. First, there are the denominations that have some historical roots in the country, including some that appeared here only in the twentieth century but prior to 1985. This group would include the Polish Roman Catholic Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church,<sup>5</sup> Baptists, Lutherans, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others. Second, there are the religious groups that have only recently registered their communities for the first time in Ukraine, availing themselves of the religious-freedom provisions of the current democratically inspired legislation. They include smaller Orthodox communities (two distinct "Old Believer" churches, a Ruthenian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Free Orthodox Church), as well as Eastern-based religious orientations, such as Krishna Consciousness, Transcendental Meditation, and the so-called Agni Yoga "Living Ethic" of the followers of the Hindu-inspired teachings of the Russian thinker Nicolai Rerich. New arrivals from the West include the so-called Native Ukrainian National Faith, various charismatic groups, and the Mormons.

Overall, there were sixty-seven officially registered religious denominations in Ukraine at the beginning of 1994. By the end of the year, the number had grown to 150.<sup>6</sup>

**Selected Religious Groups in Ukraine, January 1, 1994**

	Registered Communities	Ministers	Monasteries	Religious	Religious Schools	Students
UOC-MP	5,998	4,854	48	1,507	8	1,870
UOC-KP	1,932	1,080	14	37	7	1,080
UAOC	289	571				
UGCC	2,932	1,691	39	1,217	6	1,670
RC	588	256	16	86	3	199
Baptists	1,364	1,970			11	440
Pente-costals	798	1,000			3	130
Jehovah's Witnesses	458	485				
Seventh-day Adventists	380	518				
Jews	66	29				
Lutherans	13	8				
Armenian Orthodox	9	7				

## Freedom of Conscience and Religious Toleration

For the most part, the post-Soviet political order has exercised tolerance, in keeping with its own declared commitment to democratic pluralism. This is evident at the local level in the allocation of space for the celebration of religious liturgical and prayer services. An exception to this trend has been the arrest and conviction of key figures of the White Brotherhood. However, considering the group's inclinations to violence and vandalism, no one appears to have questioned the state's right to intervene in this particular case or to suggest that this in any way curtails religious freedom. It remains to be seen whether similar measures will be implemented in the case of other religious or pseudo-religious cults, such as Satanic cults, cults that employ mind-control techniques for recruitment and indoctrination, or cults that reject civil authority as such.

The traditional churches have generally been critical of the extension of the official policy of toleration (in particular, the provisions of the law on freedom of conscience) to virtually all religious denominations. Typically, they have emphasized their own purported patriotism--appealing to the state's evident desire to achieve political consolidation and stability and implying that many of the newcomers on the religious scene have little, if anything, to offer in this area. To some degree, such a perspective is shared in government circles, but the operative consensus appears to be that the state would be hard put to prohibit or abolish any of the estimated 150 registered denominations without compromising its commitment to democratization before the world.

Between the extremes of unrestricted toleration and the state's legitimate protection of the social order, we may venture a tentative generalization. Both in the eyes of Ukrainian society at large and from the point of view of the state, the soft-sell, grassroots witness of a Baptist woman sitting on a park bench in L'viv lends itself to a very different perception of proselytizing than does the hard sell of the one-night-only preacher who is parachuted in to address a mass audience, often through an interpreter who delivers the message in the Soviet lingua franca, rather than in the mother tongue of independent Ukraine.

From the perspective of the more patriotically minded Christian denominations in Ukraine, both types of proselytizing could be perceived as threats to unity under a banner of millennial Kievan Christianity, but I would argue that the two approaches are fundamentally different from an ethical standpoint. A grassroots Christian witness, even if it does not make appeals to patriotic sentiment, is at the very least open to listening and to empathy--that is, to an encounter between the scriptural Word and the specific, contextual questions and problems to which it is attempting to bring an answer. However, the aggressive, mass audience, hard-sell approach is widely perceived as a brash quest for adherents, carried out by well-financed organizations whose commitment to the resolution of complex human and social problems is either vague or altogether absent.

Evangelization or catechization carried out by churches among their existing members--that is, the deepening of the faith through the dissemination of scriptural and other religious education--is an imperative to which all the traditional denominations feel strongly bound. The successful restoration in the long term of virtually every sector of church life--be it theological seminaries and academies, the publication of scholarly and popular religious literature, or the overall development of a healthy spiritual life as a basis for a Christian social alternative to the communist past--depends on the development of strong programs of religious education for people of all ages. Particularly among the churches that were persecuted, the raising of Christian consciousness among their own is seen as a sine qua non for guiding their flocks out of the marginalized, underground experience and into the twentieth century (before it is over), integrating them as equals into the social life of the country.

The challenge of internal revival is therefore immense, and the traditional churches, which in precommunist times were not, as a rule, active missionaries across the Austro-Russian border, now instinctively are driven by a historical nostalgia to recover something of their former identity. The primary focus, therefore, is on healing. Now, however, the same process of change that has given them a new lease on life has also plunged them into a situation of unprecedented religious competition. For them, freedom of conscience has proved to be a double-edged sword, for, even as they seek after sources of inner healing, sociological surveys indicate that as much as one-third of the population of Ukraine is either without religious faith or uncertain in the matter. At the same time, they inevitably perceive the proselytizing of newcomers as a real threat to their own membership.

## Ecumenism or Coexistence

The question of Christian unity or of interconfessional harmony in Ukraine also merits a reflection that is sensitive to the perspective of those indigenous churches that trace their origins to Kievan Rus'. The pain of ecclesiastical divisions that occurred historically on Ukrainian soil represents qualitatively different questions and problems than the lack of unity today between, say, a Ukrainian Orthodox and a Mormon. The former understanding of religious disunity is existential--having to do with historical rootedness, an ethnoreligious identification with the land, and a shared, collective self-awareness in the past and the present. It necessarily encompasses the patriotic factor--a patriotism embedded within and emanating from Christian love. In such a perspective, the reality of divided Christians is in disturbing dissonance with both the historical memory of a politically and religiously unified Rus' ethnos and with the Christian imperative to seek and achieve unity, "that all may be one." As for ecumenism within the new, pluralistic context--specifically, the matter of bridge-building with religious groups that have no historical track-record in the land--for most of the traditional churches the question either does not yet exist, or it is vehemently denied. This may be attributed to their widespread perception of the newcomers as a threat to their constituency and to their cuius regio, eius religio claims of jurisdictional exclusivity. Such an attitude, anachronistic and encouraging new retreats into the illusory security of the old-style church-state allegiance, may ultimately prove to be self-defeating. For the moment, however, its capacity to fuse the powerful symbols and ideas of collective ethnic and religious identity into a patriotic ethic may well account for much of its enduring popular appeal.

Patriotism, however, is also a double-edged sword--not only the shared and potentially unifying element of the collective identity but also a centrifugal force and a potential obstacle to unity. Among the three Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, one of the most common items on the agenda of mutual criticism has been to question each other's patriotism. Whether it is a matter of one church's commitment to the use of the national language or of its dependence upon "outside" forces or again of its commitment to state-building and political consolidation, the "patriotic" argument can always be counted on to bring damage to the opponent and, at the same time, to enhance the popular image of the accuser.

Of the four Ukrainian Churches to which we refer here as traditional, the UOC-MP and the UGCC have been the most vulnerable to this criticism--the former for its ties with the Patriarchate of Moscow and the latter for its links with and dependence upon Rome. Although the old Soviet polemical label of "bourgeois nationalism" was shared more or less equally by the UGCC and the UAOC, there can be little doubt that, in the current situation, the UOC-KP far surpasses all the other churches in its staunch commitment to national values.

So strongly felt is this commitment that Patriarch Volodymyr (Romaniuk) early in 1994 lamented the absence of a "consolidating state ideology"<sup>8</sup> and on a later occasion voiced unequivocal support for the establishment of a single recognized state church.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Church's support for state-building and its concern for a unifying ideology are bound up with its aspirations for official, and therefore favored, status in the country. Along very similar lines, while he was still Patriarch Volodymyr's second-in-command, Metropolitan Filaret echoed these sentiments when he called on the state to tolerate other religions but at the same time to exercise a preferential option ("rezhym naibil'shoho spryiannia") toward the one traditional Church of Ukraine, that is, the Kievan Patriarchate, within which the Metropolitan currently serves.

As for the UGCC, whose presence in the eastern provinces is limited to individual parishes and as yet has no bishops there, no such proposals for a favored status have been issued from its chancery office in L'viv. One isolated and unofficial statement does stand out, however. It came from the Rev. Theodosius Yankiv, a Ukrainian Catholic Basilian monk formerly associated with that monastic community in Warsaw. In a published interview, he not only called for state support for one favored church but also suggested that some non-Christian sects should be restricted or even abolished by law.<sup>10</sup> However, such a prospect seems unlikely, and the prevailing legal and political mood instead appears to favor continued toleration and a gradual decrease in some of the more glaring instances of state interference in church affairs.

As compared with other churches, the UGCC has taken a moderately passive interest in the efforts to achieve unity. Instead, it has focused primary attention on internal matters--various levels of religious and theological education, as well as a range of administrative and institutional initiatives that are aimed at restoring church life in all sectors. It is true that the Church has sent delegates to various interconfessional consultations and conferences, but the repeated offers in the past two years of at least two highly placed Orthodox figures in the L'viv area in Western Ukraine to enter into its fold have, at best, been on the slow track. As it is, the Church already has its hands quite full in dealing with incoming Orthodox, a process that has continued since its legalization.

The issue is perhaps most visible at the level of the clergy, the majority of priests currently serving the UGCC having returned from Orthodoxy after receiving their education in the seminaries and academies of Moscow, Leningrad, and Odessa. By virtue of their personal journey, which in many cases was likely to have been a decision of conscience, and perhaps because of the need to win the support and trust of congregations whose experience of Soviet reality was very different (persecution, life in the underground), the tendency among many of these Orthodox-trained priests is to view their transition as a fundamental break with Orthodoxy. The irony is that, despite their thoroughly Orthodox training, which has given them an intimate knowledge of the Eastern liturgical tradition, they are just as prone to adopt militantly "unecumenical" positions as are some of their Westernizing colleagues who came out of the underground. The reasoning may be very different in each case, but the effect is largely the same.

### Church-State Relations: The Challenge of Separation and the Enduring Appeal of a State Church

The Council of Religious Affairs, which was the chief mechanism of Soviet state control over religious life, was finally dissolved in Ukraine in 1994. Essentially, its employees and mandate have now been subsumed under a new Ministry that is to oversee a broad range of issues pertaining to nationalities, migration, and religious denominations. A measure of continued state participation or intervention in religious affairs has received at least moderate support from the adherents of various denominations.

Apart from some of the more extreme views of what form such intervention should take (we have cited instances of favoritism and abolitionism), a key reason why the state continues to have a largely uncontested role in interconfessional disputes is that church buildings remain the property of the state. In fact, most places of worship still bear a plaque on their facade, indicating that they are designated as "national monuments of architecture," and that they are protected by state law through the Ministry of Culture. Thus, whenever interdenominational disputes arise over who will have the right to use a given place of worship, representatives of the state inevitably step in. Insofar as such third-party intervention provides a constructive forum and an authoritative presence for conflict resolution, it will likely continue to play a role into the foreseeable future. So, too, with the registration of religious communities: It is a procedure that provides the state, and through it the public at large, with information about religious groups, their practices and beliefs, their leadership, and their schools and locations.

In November, 1994, after the UOC-KP had applied all the domestic and international pressure that it could muster, a meeting took place between the Head of the Ukrainian Parliament, O. Moroz, and the then-Patriarch Volodymyr (Romaniuk).<sup>11</sup> While press coverage of the meeting and its outcome was relatively tight-lipped, its stated purpose was to address "the problems of the unity of the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, and of their role in promoting harmony and stability in society." Thus, a new initiative was afoot, comprised of two phases: first, the consolidation of Orthodoxy under a common banner and, second, the cooperation of a single, dominant church in Ukraine with the state in a common effort to secure social unity and peace. Although only time will tell what concrete steps will be taken in these matters by the two sides<sup>12</sup> and what changes will come as a result of this meeting, the effort is indicative of some of the key existential priorities of the UOC-KP.

A direct intervention by the state in the internal affairs of churches, such as that which took place in 1992, when the Parliament declared a Sobor of the UOC uncanonical, null, and void (it was at that Sobor that Metropolitan Filaret was ousted from the Kievan see and replaced by Metropolitan Volodymyr Sabodan), seems unlikely to be repeated in the foreseeable future. Regardless of his views about the desirability of a single, official church that could serve the process of state-building and social consolidation, President Kuchma does not appear inclined to offer the same support to the Kievan Patriarchate, which had sided with his opponent in the 1994 elections, the incumbent Leonid Kravchuk. Nor is he likely to take the politically risky step of choosing another church for favored status. Nevertheless, the overarching political concern for consolidation and stabilization remains the operative priority determining the shape of church-state relations in Ukraine. Bohdan Bociurkiw has noted an instrumental view of religion and the churches among Ukraine's democratically elected politicians. At the level of mere lip service on the part of the government, there is no shortage of expressions of support for an accommodation to the current socioreligious reality as a whole and to religious pluralism in particular. However, at the level of practical, political decision-making, the subordination of religious matters to public policy and the perceived national interest seem to be the order of the day.

The basic question facing the churches in Ukraine today (primarily the traditional ones, which have a historic affinity toward the self-determination of the people) in their relations with the state is whether they will manage to carve out a credible record of social commitment and a role that proceeds from their own beliefs and their attendant concerns, or whether they will merely submit to a social and political agenda formulated by the state in its

pursuit of democratic reforms and political stabilization. The fundamental option that is chosen in response to that question will no doubt be a crucial factor in determining whether the old model of state paternalism and a state church will continue to be the ideal, operative norm and goal or whether it will finally and decisively be set aside in favor of a new framework of church-state relations, more in tune with democratic pluralism.

## ENDNOTES

\*The principal source of information has been a detailed, monthly survey of press coverage of religious affairs in Ukraine for 1994, which was compiled in Kiev by Natalia Kochan. Its publication is forthcoming as "Relihiino-tserkovne zhyttia v Ukraini v otsinkakh presy, 1994" (A Survey of Press Coverage in Ukraine of Religious and Church Life in 1994), in Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies, vol. 35, nos. 1-4 (1994), pp. 519-581. Following this source, our references to items published in Ukraine give only title and date.

1. These official government figures correspond roughly to a situation report made by Metropolitan Sabodan. In his estimation, the UOC-MP comprised twenty-nine eparchies, seventeen theological schools and seminaries, forty monasteries, and 6,000 parishes throughout the country. See Robitnycha Hazeta Ukrainy, April 7, 1994.

2. Even prior to the revelation, in 1992, of his KGB code-name ("Antonov") and his living arrangements with his housekeeper, Filaret was widely viewed by Ukrainian patriots as a traitor. Western analysts have no doubt about his collaboration with the regime, and the only speculation appears to be about whether he was an ideological collaborator (a true believer) or a pragmatic collaborator (an opportunist, or "koniunkturshchik"). See Alexander F. C. Webster, The Price of Prophecy: Orthodox Churches on Peace, Freedom, and Security (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1993), p. 44.

3. Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, "Politics and Religion in Ukraine: The Orthodox and the Greek Catholics," in Michael Bourdeaux, ed., The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), p. 150.

4. These estimates were included in an interview with Patriarch Dymytrii, which was published in the newspaper Vechernii Kyiv, August 2, 1994. As a direct consequence of its continued "unofficial" status, the UAOC had not been listed in any of the official statistics prior to 1994. The official figures for early 1994 are considerably higher for the number of priests and lower for the number of registered communities. They indicate that the Church's 289 registered communities (unregistered but operating parishes would likely account for the difference) were actually served by 571 priests. "Relihiini orhanizatsii Ukrainy," Liudyna i Svit, vol. 10 (1994), p. 10.

5. Prior to World War II, there had been a Catholic Archeparchy in L'viv for the Armenians of Western Ukraine.

6. Vseukraïnskiie Vedomosti, December 21, 1994.

7. From "Relihiini orhanizatsii Ukrainy," pp. 10-11. "Religious" here refers to monastics and other people living or preparing for a consecrated life, that is, with or without temporary or perpetual vows. "Religious schools" refers to institutions offering all levels of religious training, including theological seminaries and academies. Given its difficulties with registration, the official figures for the UAOC are tentative and incomplete.

8. Nash Chas, March 25, 1994.

9. "I am for [the establishment of] a state Church . . . it is essential to nationbuilding. There needs to be a foundation, and in Ukraine [that foundation] should be Orthodoxy" (Vechernii Kyiv, May 17, 1994).

10. Za Vil'nu Ukrainu, March 17, 1994.

11. Romaniuk was accompanied by Filaret, while the government was represented, in addition to Moroz, by the Head of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Interethnic Relations, Volodymyr Butkevych, and by the Minister of Nationalities, Migration, and Religious Cults, Mykola Shul'ha. Holos Ukrainy, November 29, 1994.

12. The matter of Orthodox unity in Ukraine gained some momentum in November, 1994, when the UOC-KP created a ways and means committee on the issue. This was in response to a suggestion coming from the UAOC, which had established its own such committee in August. But, by the end of the year, the unification effort was still obstructed by a number of difficulties, not the least among which were the hesitation of the UOC-MP to call its own committee into being and the apparent inflexibility of the UAOC on the absolute need to remove Filaret from the picture.