

## CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHURCHES OF UKRAINE

İLBER ORTAYLI

*Professor İlber Ortaylı is a member of faculty of the Ankara University School of Political Science. This article was published in the fall 1996 issue of the journal "Avrasya Dosyası" published by the Turkish International Co-operation Agency.*

The history of the Ukraine and Russia is that of two distinct peoples who share much in common, above all their religion. What we call the Orthodox faith was bequeathed to a portion of the earth by Byzantium. It is true that owing to reforms instituted in the seventeenth century by the Moscow Patriarch Nikon, the church of the eastern Slavs is today much closer to Greek Orthodox practice than it once was, in terms of belief, ritual and liturgy. Nevertheless this church, that is to say Russia, since the fifteenth century has been autocephalous, which implies not only administrative and fiscal autonomy, but also a separate language and ordering of society. At the present moment, the Ukraine wishes to split off from the Moscow-centred Russian Church, or rather such a division is advocated not by all Ukrainians, but by an important segment of them, the exact numbers of which are unknown. In approaching the subject, it would be well to recall that while the Ukraine greatly resembles Russia it is not Russia, nor are the Ukrainians Russian. A significant part of the population, residing in Galicia (historically under Austrian and Polish rule), joined the Soviet Union prior to German occupation (the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact); which is to say that the Ukraine only became united during the Soviet era, with the proviso that within this union Galicia, thoroughly Catholic, has what is known as uniat or Greek-Catholic status. In other words, it is among those peoples who were once Greek Orthodox but have subsequently mingled with that sea called the Roman Church. Thus the Ukrainian Catholics, like the Syriac-, Coptic- and Armenian-Catholics before them, and the Bulgarian-Catholics after 1870, while following the creed and liturgy of Rome are administratively and fiscally autonomous, and employ their national language in the course of worship. (Since the 1960s, of course, this latter practice has been true of all Catholics around the globe.) From 1837-52 General Dimitri Bibikov, the chauvinist governor of the Ukraine (the provinces of Kiev and Podolia-Volinia) exerted considerable pressure in an effort to convert Catholics there to Orthodoxy, and was partially successful. So that Ukrainian Catholicism survived principally in Galicia, then under Austrian control.

During the reign of Vladimir I, Velikii Knjaz of Kiev, Russia opted for the faith of Byzantium and in 988 he was baptized by the latter. Popular tradition has it that when forced to choose between Christianity and Islam, Vladimir preferred the religion which did not reject alcohol and pork. In fact, the choice was prompted by the fact that Byzantium, guardian of the paths to India, held the key to relations with the south. No one knows how devout a Christian Vladimir actually was, and certainly his subjects would not easily have renounced their former beliefs. But the new way was enforced through violent penalties, while the forms of many beloved pagan beliefs were retained and adapted to the new faith. No longer was there human sacrifice, but on holidays effigies were now cast in the river, and the old gods were insinuated into the church as new saints (the god Perun, for example, becoming St. Ilya). Indeed, the priests who had arrived from Byzantium well knew how to preserve Nomakanon in the guise of Zakon, and in general to skilfully and flexibly adapt a wide range of such myths. That day the Orthodox sect acquired what was eventually to become its largest national flock. It might have been foreseen that sooner or later this populous ethnic group would take up the leadership and protection of the Orthodox faith, and in fact events helped bring this about, although it took about a thousand years. Russia is an example of patience in history, and the Russian Church suffered numerous shocks, some of which-for instance the rule of the Golden Horde-it turned to its own advantage.

The rule of the Golden Horde (commencing in 1237, the time of Genghis Khan's grandson Batu Khan) held sway over the Kiev state, but nevertheless this period should not be considered one of loss or regression for Slavic Christianity and the Slav Church. On the contrary, the khans and begs of the Golden Horde, owing allegiance to no one religion of the Book and having converted to Islam during the time of this reign (though not observing all its practices), left Christianity unmolested-as they did all religions-and even granted it certain tax exemptions and freedom of activity. During the time of Kievan Russia the capital's metropolitan, as well as nearly all the other bishops, came from

Byzantium, with the result that Hellenic was the language of the upper clergy; but in the era of the Golden Horde khanate the church took on a more Slavic cast.

Certainly with the end of the Golden Horde period the Russian church became centred on Moscow, whose metropolitan in the mid-fifteenth century began to be appointed by the government of Moscow itself (especially when, in accordance with the Council of Florence-Ferrara, Orthodox Byzantium strove to unite with the Catholic Church of Rome and the West), thus being elected by the Russian clergy (and so the Russian church actively broke off from Byzantium).

What, meanwhile, was the situation of the Ukraine, which practically speaking was not a part of the new Russia? Until the two countries united in 1654 (or rather until the Cossack Hetman Bogdan Hmelnitzky came under the protectorate of Moscow), in its Orthodox faith the Ukraine maintained allegiance to Byzantium and ultimately, in Ottoman times, to the Phanar patriarchs, and thus the Ukraine's interest in and ties to Russia were tenuous during this period. Despite their shared autocephalous status and the fact that the languages of worship in the two countries were simply two variants of Old Slavonic, despite the identity of spirit in the two churches, their administrative hierarchies, geographical terrain and fiscal structures were distinct. The Ukrainian clergy had their own monasteries where they managed their own lands, and their relationships with the peasantry were conducted accordingly. In the Ukraine of this era the highest divine was the metropolitan of Kiev, who resided in that city and, although his title made him 'the metropolitan of Kiev, Galicia and all Russia', he did not in fact hold sway in all Russia, his true influence being confined to Kiev alone. The most famous such metropolitan of the era was Petro Mohyla (1632-47), founder of the Kiev Academy. After the two countries united, the Moscow church government and the Moscow patriarch intervened in the election of the Ukraine metropolitan, in 1657 and 1665, but in neither year were they able to impose their own candidate.<sup>1</sup> In 1684, however, they succeeded thanks to pressure brought to bear by the Moscow representatives and by the puppet Hetman Samilovich. But this Muscovite intrigue met with violent opposition in the Ukrainian St. Synod, and clashes were only avoided when the Moscow patriarch made certain concessions to the Ukraine metropolitan and granted him special status; the metropolitan was henceforward to be elected by the local Ukrainian clergy, and Moscow would merely approve and bless this choice, while within the territories of the Ukraine the canonic system, embracing the church's law, governance and finances, were entrusted to the metropolitan, whose title was changed to 'Metropolitan of Kiev, Galicia and all lesser Russia, (ie. the Ukraine). The title remains unchanged to this day, and applies to the Metropolitan Vladimir (Sodovan). In 1686 the Ukraine broke off relations with the Phanar to ally itself with Moscow, an act which the country's historians and circles close to the church have characterized as falsehood and corruption, one which has not yet been finally settled, for today there are Orthodox churches that wish to break off from Moscow and once again bind themselves to the Phanar. When in 1688 Lazar Baranovich, Bishop of Chemigov, petitioned the tsar and the patriarch of Moscow to have his spiritual jurisdiction separated from Kiev and joined to Moscow, this being followed by similar petitions from other bishops, it unfortunately reduced the administrative sway of the 'Metropolitan of Kiev, Galicia and all lesser Russia' practically speaking to Kiev alone.<sup>2</sup> It emerges that the dependency of the Ukrainian church was not, as the country's historians assert, purely an outcome of Russian despotism, but that her own clergy played a role in bringing it about. Thus it was only after 1917 that the Ukrainian national church split off from its Russian counterpart to form the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; which, however, with the advent of communism and Stalinist repression took refuge abroad in 1930. Because this historical (or in point of fact not so historical) Orthodox church has refugee status, like all expatriate organizations it is forced to do battle and compete with a parallel organization (here another Orthodox church) based in the homeland. Thus today there are two rival separatist Orthodox Ukrainian churches, both striving to break away from Russia and achieve independence.

The present-day Ukrainian population is essentially divided into two groups; a) some 10-15 million adherents to Greek Catholicism (Uniat), and b) some 35 million members of the Orthodox Church. Religious minorities are the Muslims and Jews, in the Crimea and Galicia.

The pastoral leader of the Ukrainian Catholics is Cardinal Lubasevich, who resides in Lvov, while since independence the Orthodox have split into two camps; those who advocate breaking off from Russia (these comprise two churches and two groups), and those who continue to be allied with Moscow. The failure of the current government to pursue an active policy in this matter guarantees

continuation of strife. The first two groups are endeavouring to gain recognition from the Phanar Ecumenical patriarchate, which although it seems at the moment to be turning a deaf ear to the matter will, as Moscow increasingly exhibits animosity towards it, inevitably adopt a more possessive attitude toward these churches. With the coming of independence the independent-minded Ukrainian Orthodox Church had, after the death of its patriarch Vladimir, certain difficulties electing a new patriarch to replace him. The St. Synod, followed by the council of bishops, ultimately elected the metropolitan Filaret as Kiev Patriarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (KPUOK), 160 out of 174 delegates casting in favour, while nine abstained and four voted against.

Filaret has asserted the impossibility of completely separating church from state, and declared that he is hopeful the younger generation will live to see a united Ukrainian church. Speaking after his election he said that he was prepared to meet with the Russian Orthodox patriarch Alexel provided the latter gave permission for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to separate from the Russian patriarchate.

During this election Andriy, bishop of Lvov, also expressed the view that "it is necessary to free ourselves from the remnants of that chauvinistic Russian empire which dictated the separation of church and state"; and he called upon the president and parliament to order church-state relations along the lines seen in democratic nations. Nevertheless, this sobranie (session) was vivid proof of the division that persists among the adherents of a Ukrainian national church. Four KPUOK bishops, including the metropolitan of the Ivano Frankivsk region and Metropolitan Andriy (Filaret's chief rival in the patriarchal election) left the KPUOK to declare that they were joining the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOK), a body which had just returned from exile. Nor did these four bishops vote in the patriarchal election, with the result that the pro-independent church nationalists split into two equal, and rival, groups.

Dimitri, patriarch of the UAOK, together with these four bishops who had resigned from the KPUOK and with lower-ranking priests and archimandrites from the church hierarchy, signed a document calling for the unification of KPUOK and UAOK, but which nevertheless stipulates, or rather proposes, that until such time as the unification assembly should convene officially the united churches would act in accordance with the laws of the UAOK, and further that the leader of the united body for this interim would be the UAOK patriarch, Dimitri. But it is precisely these proposals which are unacceptable to the KPUOK, which emerged after 1989 and is headed by Filaret.

Patriarch Dimitri has maintained that it is unsupportable to have in the Ukraine two patriarchs and three churches holding the same view (he is referring to the Russian-aligned metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia), insisting that there must be a single patriarch and a single church. Meanwhile the parliamentary deputy Khrykhorovich, who is also a member of the Parliament Church Union, has indicated to the Russian Patriarch Alexel that the latter will be petitioned to recognize the autonomy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (something to which Russia is of course firmly opposed).

The press has carried reports that Filaret once served in the Russian Orthodox Church as Kiev-Galicia metropolitan (an indeed, that he governed all Russia as Patriarch-vicar), adding that in 1991 he was accused of having ties to the KGB, but that after the Ukraine achieved independence he adopted an anti-Russian stance. It is this last point that pragmatic Ukrainian nationalists emphasize, urging their cohorts to forget the past and rally around a man whose personality and aims, they say, are suited to the cause.

Readers may recall that in 1990 the assembly of the Russian Orthodox Church gave to its Ukrainian branch the name 'Ukrainian Orthodox Church', terminating Filaret's leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and his status as metropolitan of Kiev. He was replaced in these capacities by Vladimir Sobodan, of whom the press has said that he is recognized by the Russian Patriarch Alexel and also by the 'Patriarchate of Constantinople'. But Sobodan's adversary status has not sufficed to rally the Ukrainian Orthodox around him.

Having parted company with the Moscow-affiliated Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Filaret, powerfully backed by members of parliament and then head of state Krachuk, proceeded in 1992 to found the

KPUOK, seeking but not obtaining from the Russian patriarchate autonomy for this body. There is no doubt that the same request was put to the Phanar, and although the latter currently refuses to accept Filaret's church, such rejection will not necessarily be permanent.

Meanwhile, the crowd which gathered to witness the burial of the recently deceased former metropolitan in Kiev's St. Sophie Church was dispersed by the police, an incident of street violence which surpassed anything that had been seen even in the days preceding independence. Kiev's ancient cathedral having been designated a museum, the Kuchma government views askance any revival of the custom which buried patriarchs there. This government has suffered less from the revival of Marxist laicism than from the conflict generated by a church divided in three and prefers to remain an onlooker while containing the activity and power of the factions.

The Moscow-allied Ukrainian metropolitan Sobodan and his circle have made the historical Kievsko Pecherska Lavra (the Kiev Cave Monastery, a famous complex including churches as well as a monastery) into a Dukhovnaya Akademiya (Clerical Academy) where they are currently providing instruction. For this reason church and academy officials have no intention of sending students to the seminary the opening of which is planned on the island of Heybeli in the Marmara Sea. Indeed, although theirs is the only Ukrainian church recognized by the Istanbul Patriarch, their attitude toward the authority of the Phanar is rather disdainful. This church stresses Ukraine's ties to Russia, that a legal separation can only come about with the approval and sanction of the Moscow Patriarch, and that the Phanar has no authority in the matter. Included in their statements is a criticism of the rival patriarchs Filaret and Dimitri, especially of the efforts these two have made to establish contact with the Phanar Patriarchate and to gain recognition from it. The fact, however, that the Russian Church is drifting ever further from the Phanar, as witnessed by recent events in Estonia, will serve to make the Phanar seek allies among the Ukrainian nationalists. The Pecherska Lavra has one historical church loyal to Filaret, whereas Patriarch Dimitri has won over not a single church in that complex. The clash between the three churches has plunged the organs of state, and its bureaucrats, into a wary silence, as they keep out of the broil, refusing to give back to anyone the church buildings which were seized in the previous era; for they are anxious not to exacerbate the conflict.

Note that the souls which inhabit the Moscow-affiliated Ukrainian see are not necessarily Russophiles, any more than the hierarchy which serve the metropolitan; indeed to all appearances there are Ukrainian nationalists among the clergy of this church. But they feel that the Slav cause must separate from Hellenism, that only thus can their religion be free of Catholic and Protestant influences from the West. For indeed, American, British and German Protestant propaganda is highly effective in both Russia and the Ukraine. Meanwhile, the other two Orthodox churches have a beady eye on the Phanar, which they term the 'Ecumenical Vselenski'; and the problem is not resolved by thinking of the Phanar, which can attract between 15 and 25 million Christians, as an institution within the jurisdiction of the Fatih kaymakamlık (county). No one knows how much of the population is loyal to the three churches, as is admitted by the government officials charged with religious affairs. But it would seem that of 6152 parishes, 1753 belong to Filaret, ie. the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate); 1,200 to the Orthodox Ukrainian Autocephalous Church of Patriarch Dimitri; and of course the majority to the church of Metropolitan Vladimir (Sobodan), as yet still allied to Moscow. This tie can be seen in the services and ceremonies of the church, for although Sobodan is a highly respected church leader, with independent nationalist Ukrainian tendencies, he considers that the church, and the Slavic fraternity, hold precedence. However, the more than 10 million Catholics in Western Ukraine feel close to the West (Western Europe) and foreign to the larger Slavic community, for they are imbued with an intense hatred of Catholic Poland.

In pursuing a policy of separatism, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church uses against Moscow an argument having a historical base:

"Prior to its unification with Russia in 1653, the Ukraine was allied to the Phanar. And while it is true that the two states merged in 1653, Hetman Bogdan Hmelnitzky issued no proclamation decreeing that the churches were united. Subsequently this supposed union took place in the time of the tsars, and was enforced through violent measures. This union of the churches took place in 1686, but the political separation of the Ukraine from Russia and the consequent emergence of an

independent state, applies also to our church, which should henceforward be affiliated, as of old, with the Phanar, while remaining autocephalous."<sup>3</sup>

The problem is that there are two churches, and two flocks, making this same claim. It should be noted that nearly all the churches are impecunious. Indeed, these straitened circumstances are at the root of the conflict among them; and as with eaglets in their eyrie, the crisis seems doomed to last until one of the churches gains considerably in strength.<sup>4</sup> In essence, the Ukrainian people, as Catholics and Orthodox, owed allegiance to the churches of Rome and Byzantium; and as indicated above, Catholicism is widespread in Galicia and the western Ukraine. This church is one which among Roman Catholics enjoyed autonomy, always employed its own language and ritual and was known by the rubric of Uniat (converts from Orthodoxy to Catholicism). The Orthodox Church, on the other hand, in the past was tied to the Phanar, and since the time of the great knjaz of Kiev practically speaking had had nothing to do with Moscow, until after the unification of the Ukraine and Russia in 1653, and a fait accompli in 1681 that joined this church to the autocephalous Moscow patriarchate.

This situation, which all during the nineteenth century was anathema to Ukrainian nationalists, after the revolution became the subject of an energetic solution. In 1917 the church left Russia, and in 1919 was founded the UAPZ or Ukraynska Autokefalnaya Provoslavnaja Zerkva (Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church). In 1930, as a consequence of persecution by Stalin, this church too took refuge abroad, re-emerging at home in 1941 during the German occupation (an unfortunate re-emergence which created antipathy in certain circles) only to leave the country again in 1944, surviving particularly in the diaspora of Canada and the United States, with Patriarch Mstislav residing in New Jersey. In 1989, during the Gorbachov reform era, they returned to the homeland once again. Currently the church is engaged in efforts to unite with the Moscow-aligned church of Metropolitan Vladimir, whose forces do not, however, accept the condition of splitting away from Moscow. Filaret they consider a relic of the old regime, and as long as he is still alive there will be no possibility of their joining to his flock. There is a constant exchange of divines and worshippers between the churches of Patriarch Dimitri and Patriarch Filaret, the latter (who is now the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOK), Kiev patriarch) under the old regime having been Vicar Patriarch in Moscow. As a refined prince and administrator of the church he succeeds in collecting followers. Upon the birth of an independent Ukraine he collaborated with President Kravchuk and assumed the reins in the independent Ukrainian Church. When Kravchuk's successor Kuchma stated his determination not to "meddle in church affairs" (and he has kept his word), this particular church was left without state support. Filaret has his residence in the heart of Kiev, and while Patriarch Dimitri and his followers are known for their hatred of communists, and for having kept completely aloof from that world in the past, Filaret and his followers are seen as the divines, and worshippers, who once collaborated. Patriarch Dimitri lives in modest workers' housing in the suburbs, without a servant or even a car, and is known as a reclusive, unassuming divine who is at the same time an art historian and zograf, a painter of icons. But the most highly respected divine, the one who amassed the most credit in the past, is the Moscow-allied Metropolitan Vladimir. For an important number of the Ukrainian Church faithful are less inclined to separatism than the politicians and intellectuals; the Slavs seem less disturbed by Russian-Ukrainian union in the religious sphere than by that same union in the realm of politics and the economy.

Meanwhile, the nation's youth are evincing an interest in religion and in seminaries. In addition to the Moscow-affiliated Pecherska Lavra-a seminary now called Duhovnaya Akademiya (and this is one which has drawn the most students)-an academy for clerics has been opened (by taking over the former Naval College) allied to Filaret's Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate) and named the Peter Mohyla Clerical Academy. This has been the occasion for several years of controversy in the Ukraine over which is needed most by the country, naval officers or priests. The church of Patriarch Dimitri also has a seminary, albeit on a more modest scale than the others, and with a smaller student body. It is rather evident that the young people of this region will not go rushing to attend any school which may be opened on the island of Heybeli.

The government bureaucracy remains on the sidelines of the tri-church conflict, maintaining that "questions of canonical law do not concern us." The secular bureaucratic body which is the equivalent of Turkey's Ministry of Religious Affairs would appear to be a mere onlooker, for at the

moment the process of returning formerly seized church buildings to their communities has been suspended-and indeed, the government would hardly know who to give them back to.

As the Soviet empire was breaking up, congregations filled the churches and after a while tensions, and dissension, set in. With the further passage of time, it may seem that the original resurgence of religion has tapered off, but that is deceptive. The propaganda of Western Protestants has led many Ukrainians to join Protestant groups, and both the Ukraine and Russian are in cultural upheaval. Contrary to one prevalent view, the Phanar Patriarchate is in no position to fill the gap, although it is an important institution. The missionary capabilities of Orthodoxy have at any rate been minimal throughout history, and it was only in the ninth and tenth centuries that Byzantium managed to fulfil this role. Today the poor and elderly (and the circumstances of the latter are even more wretched than those of the poor) are seeking refuge in the church, and for this reason innumerable Protestant groups are at work in the country seeking converts among the younger generations. Indeed, in the heart of Russia one finds increasing numbers of Muslim missionaries beginning to make their impact.

In the Slavic world of the future, however, it is the Protestant mentality that appears destined to play the greater role; and this will create tensions and pressures no less significant than those which have been generated by Orthodoxy.

---

1 Kohul, Zenon E. (1988), *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy*, Harvard, pp. 39, 55-7.

2 Hitovich, I (1882-84), *Ocherki istorii zapadno-russkoi iseerkvi*, v.2 St. Petersburg .

3 Histovich, I (1882-84), *Ocharkii istopii zapadno-russkoi zevkvi*, v.2, St. Petersburg.

4 When one member of an eagle's brood becomes strong enough to take food from the others, only it will survive.