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‘Rome is not our Father, but neither is Moscow our Mother’: Will there be a Local Ukrainian Orthodox Church?*

GERALDINE FAGAN & ALEKSANDR SHCHIPKOV

Ukraine has all the outward attributes essential to an independent state: it has its own president, armed forces, customs posts, national currency, national anthem, flag and Olympic team. The only element lacking is a national church, which in the eyes of the rest of the Christian world would be a powerful symbol of national unity and would serve to distinguish Ukraine from its ‘older brother’, Russia, which has its own national symbol in the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC–MP).

Where there are Two Ukrainians, there are Three Hetmans

With the exception of Russia, where cosmopolitan democrats built the new state system, all the former republics of the Soviet Union gained independent statehood by exploiting nationalist ideas. Ukraine was no exception. The struggle for liberation united the Ukrainian nationalists, who, once they had voted Leonid Kravchuk into power, demanded the restoration of the ‘prewar’ religious traditions as a matter of historical justice. However, the changes in the religious situation wrought by historical circumstance had made it impossible simply to resurrect the past. The years 1991–94 were an intense period when the various religious zones of influence were defined and reapportioned. Parishes belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the canonical authority of the Moscow Patriarchate were divided amongst nationalistically inclined Ukrainians, Poles and western Ukrainians (Galicians). Meanwhile, the Ukrainians created two churches, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate (UOC–KP); the Poles established Roman Catholic parishes, and the Western Ukrainians the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

Leonid Kuchma, who came to power in 1994, inherited from his predecessor Kravchuk a seething mass of interchurch conflicts, which were fast turning into a general national disaster. Over a thousand parishes were engaged in desperate

*The material for this article was collected by the authors on a visit to Ukraine in September 2000. It was first published as ‘Rim nam – ne otets, no i Moskva – ne mat’, in *NG-Religii*, the religion supplement to the Russian national daily newspaper *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, on 25 October 2000.

conflict, involving violent clashes, the besieging of churches and sometimes whole villages, and attacks on clergy residences. Bitter disputes were raging between the Greek Catholics and the autocephalists, between the Kiev and the Moscow Patriarchates and between the Greek Catholics and the Roman Catholics. As a result the Greek Catholics took more than 3000 parishes belonging to the UOC–MP as well as most of the Polish Roman Catholic churches in Galicia. The UAOC and the UOC–KP respectively occupied 600 and 2000 parishes belonging to the UOC–MP. The UOC–MP held on to around 8000 parishes in the south and east of the country. Today the Roman Catholics have 800 parishes in the central *oblasti* – in Khmel’nyts’kyi, Vinnytsa and Zhytomir.

During the election campaign Kuchma maintained a positive stance towards Moscow, counting on political support from the russified regions of eastern Ukraine, his own native area. He understood that nationalist ideas had outplayed their role and from now on could only present a danger to the government in Kiev. In any case, the progress of future economic development depended primarily not on rural Galicia, the heartland of Ukrainian nationalism, but on the industrially developed eastern region.

Interchurch feuds were fuelling internal political instability and the president’s need to eradicate them was fast becoming more urgent. In five years no peacemaking effort had been successful. As the folk saying has it, ‘Where there are two Ukrainians, there are three hetmans’. The ambitions of the church leaders had made it impossible to achieve anything even approaching interchurch dialogue. By the middle of 2000 it had become obvious that the Kiev government had practically lost control of the religio-political situation in the country. The claims to spiritual authority being made by men parading as archbishops of churches whose canonicity was not recognised by Moscow, Constantinople or Rome were beginning to look as ridiculous as the claims of the ‘prophet’ Mariya Devi Khristos. Ukraine was beginning to acquire a negative international image, which was an offence to the dignity of the secular authorities. Since in historical terms the majority of Ukrainians are Orthodox, and Uniatism, despite its considerable influence, remains a specifically Galician religion, the authorities took a decision: the jubilee year 2000 would see the forced creation of a single Ukrainian Local Orthodox Church.

An Independent State Needs an Independent Church

The material out of which Kiev was intending to create a single national Orthodox Church was extremely diverse in national, political and canonical terms. Of the three Ukrainian churches, two, the UAOC and the UOC–KP, do not have canonical status. The UOC–MP, the only one with canonical status, still has the firm image of being the church of Moscow, despite the fact that sermons are usually preached in Ukrainian, the Ukrainian liturgy has been legalised and services in Slavonic are conducted ‘with a Galician accent’.

The Greek Catholics, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Moscow Patriarchate and the Vatican are all trying to exert an influence over the process of unification. The Crimean Tatar Muslim organisations and the huge Ukrainian Protestant movement, which makes up 26.5 per cent of the total number of registered religious organisations, may also have an indirect influence. Each of the players has its own interests, which Kuchma’s main adviser on religious and political affairs, chairman of the State Committee for Religious Affairs Viktor Bondarenko, will have to take into account. He believes that the people are tired of schism and that they are longing

for the unification of the churches – a dream which is being thwarted only by the obstinacy and ambition of the archbishops, who are blocking the process because of their own political and selfish interests. However, the results of a survey conducted in 2000 showed that while 39.9 per cent of respondents stated their support for the establishment of a single national church, 42.8 per cent stated they were against.¹ On the basis of these figures it can be assumed that the authorities will be unable to achieve the result they want, at least at first. It is quite probable, however, that they will be able to create two Orthodox churches instead of the present three, both with canonical status. The process of unification could then be continued. Which then of the three existing Orthodox churches might be chosen to form this foundation?

The Church of Moscow

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is an obvious contender. It is the only canonically recognised church in Ukraine; 70 per cent of Orthodox parishes belong to it; and it has far more political influence in Ukraine than the Russian Orthodox Church does in Russia. In the event of any conflict, the UOC–MP as a political force might be capable of calling large numbers of people to disobedience. On the other hand the positive political capital of the UOC–MP is quite considerable, as Leonid Kuchma well knows from his experience during the election campaign when the church openly supported his candidacy.

The main disadvantage of the UOC–MP is its close ties with the Moscow Patriarchate. It is perceived as ‘the hand of Moscow’, encroaching on the independent sovereign territory of Ukraine. In August 2000 Kuchma took the desperate step of requesting autonomy for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church: there is no doubt that he intended the creation of an independent autocephalous church. His request fell on deaf ears. The Council issued a special decree expressing hope for the ‘establishment of unity among all Orthodox believers in Ukraine in the bosom of one church’, by which it obviously meant the UOC–MP. The Moscow Patriarchate has stressed several times that this unity can be achieved only on a strictly canonical basis; in other words, through the repentance of the UAOC and the UOC–KP and their reunification with the Mother Church.

Why did the Moscow Patriarchate not take advantage of Kuchma’s proposal and try to agree a union with him? The answer is clear. As soon as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church becomes autocephalous it will automatically lose its political support from Moscow as well as its close ties with the Moscow Patriarchate: Patriarch Aleksii II will have ceded his base without a fight to Patriarch Bartholomaios. For this reason it is much more advantageous for the UOC–MP to bide its time and engage in a complex game of compromise, which may produce certain dividends in the intervening period. The most powerful trump card in the hands of the UOC–MP is the book of apostolic rules. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, whose interest in Ukraine is clear, may try to receive both the UAOC and the UOC–KP under its jurisdiction. The uncanonical status of the UOC–KP is not in any doubt. The canonical status of the UAOC may be ambiguous if it can be shown that its roots are in the UAOC of 1921; if, however, it can be demonstrated that the church originates from the ‘Pinsk Sobor’ of 1942 some grounds for canonicity may be found.

Archbishop Mitrofan (Yurchuk), chancellor of the Kiev Metropolitanate, admits that ‘two years ago we were holding negotiations with the UAOC’, and that today

'there is no enmity between us'. The UAOC is also scrupulously correct in its public pronouncements about the UOC–MP. In principle Moscow might give tacit approval to the legitimisation of the UAOC and cede the church to the jurisdiction of Constantinople. In return the Moscow Patriarchate might well ask for the removal of Patriarch Filaret (Denisenko) from his position as head of the UOC–KP and for the return of the St Vladimir and St Michael Cathedrals in Kiev, thus restoring its primacy in the capital and preserving its influence over the president. Moreover, the Moscow Patriarchate may also be counting on a possible future conflict between the UAOC and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church over parishes in Galicia which have still not been fully allocated, which would weaken both the churches. Both rely on the support of radical nationalists who are passionate and combative. Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) cannot enter into an open dialogue with the UAOC and the UOC–KP because the lower echelons of the church, both clergy and laypeople, have for the past few years been engaged in a much fiercer struggle against the autocephalists and the '*kapisty*' (the UOC–KP) than against the Greek Catholics; for several years both Moscow and the Vatican have been keeping quiet about this. If a tacit understanding has been reached with the Greek Catholics, then, as one (Ukrainian) Ternopil' UOC–MP priest expressed it, 'we will never accept any recognition of the UAOC by Bartholomaios, and we will not request autocephaly ourselves – we have not fought against them and defended our churches for this.'

Filaret's Church

The second-largest church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate (UOC–KP), has more than 2000 parishes. Its chief weakness is the lack of church discipline and a low level of clergy morale. Clerics of the UOC–KP tend to be typical of a certain class of weak-willed 'Soviet' clergy, concerned above all about their earnings. The '*kapisty*' clergy often secretly have their own children baptised into the (canonical) UOC–MP, as well as having prayers said for their dead and so on. In half the parishes belonging to the Kiev Patriarchate Filaret's name as head of the church is not even mentioned in the liturgy, and yet the strength of the church resides in the person of its patriarch.

Filaret, who has been stripped of his holy orders, has a sharp intellect, a huge network of personal contacts and considerable means at his disposal. He realises that the UOC–KP should not count on the direct support of Constantinople, whose gaze is fixed on the UAOC. He is apparently aiming to outwit both the UAOC and Constantinople by facilitating the process of legitimisation of the UAOC under the jurisdiction of Constantinople in return for his then becoming its leader. It would be virtually impossible for him to achieve this, however, because it would be hard to imagine a situation in which Patriarch Bartholomaios would be willing to enter into communion with a priest who had been defrocked by Patriarch Aleksii himself: this would signify that Constantinople was prepared to countenance a total breakdown in relations with the Russian Orthodox Church. Filaret can only really hope for the powerful support of the state, which could use political or economic means to exert some influence over Constantinople. At the same time, it is clear that Filaret's relationship with Kuchma is by no means a straightforward one. Filaret is forced to keep playing on the president's fears of a repetition of the bloody events set in train by Filaret at the St Sophia Cathedral during the funeral of his predecessor Volodymyr Romaniuk in 1995. Kuchma also knows that Filaret could call for support from the Ukrainian National Assembly and its paramilitary arm the Ukrainian National Self-

Defence Organisation (*Ukrains'ka natsional'na samooborona* (UNSO)). Meanwhile during the election campaign there were large quantities of leaflets supporting Kuchma in Filaret's St Vladimir Cathedral.

On 24 August 2000, the most sacred day for all Ukrainians (the day of Ukrainian Independence) – so sacred in fact that the Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops have decreed that the fast for the Feast of the Assumption be suspended for the day – Filaret ordered his supporters to picket the Kiev Monastery of the Caves where Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) was conducting a service of consecration attended by the head of state at the Cathedral of the Assumption. The patriarch of the UOC–KP behaved like a spurned lover: he called a press conference at which he stated repeatedly that Kuchma had 'become dependent on the church of Moscow'.

The Autocephalous Church

In view of his difficult relationship with the UOC–KP, and having received a metaphorical slap in the face from the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, President Kuchma turned to the smallest church of all, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Kiev decided to attempt to work with the autocephalists, especially as a future united local church would at first be the 'minority church' at any rate, particularly in terms of the number of its parishes compared to the UOC–MP.

For the last couple of years, thanks to Archbishop Ihor (Isichenko), senior lecturer at the University of Kharkiv, former adviser to the deceased Patriarch Dmytrii (Yarema) and now head of the church administration, the UAOC has conducted a wise policy and has made some subtle tactical moves. First, it has demonstrated the necessary loyalty to the state. It has also forged links with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA and Canada and thereby managed to establish links with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. After the Moscow Patriarchate had been forced to return 3000 parishes to the Uniates, the UAOC, which had itself taken 600 parishes from the UOC–MP, astutely played the role of the saviour of Orthodoxy in Galicia. The church has been careful to express any criticism of the UOC–MP in the appropriate language, and has at times even called upon its flock to 'show understanding' of the 'anti-Ukrainian decisions' of the Bishops' Council dictated by the complex political situation in Russia. The church has translated and published a Ukrainian-language version of Metropolitan Anthony Bloom's *School for Prayer*, which is a call for tolerance. In other words the UAOC has sought to demonstrate in all possible ways its desire to bring about the unity of the disparate Orthodox parishes in such a way as not to antagonise the Moscow Patriarchate. The UAOC has even announced that it will suspend episcopal consecrations until the canonical obstacles have been overcome. The UAOC has offered to cooperate with the authorities and its voice has been heard.

Viktor Bondarenko, head of the Ukrainian State Committee for Religious Affairs (*Derzhavnyi komitet u spravakh relihii*), visited Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios and invited him to play a more active role in the creation of a single local Ukrainian church. Patriarch Bartholomaios declined to make any hasty decisions, but supported the idea itself. At the request of the UAOC he gave his blessing to the head of the Ukrainian dioceses of the Constantinople Patriarchate in the diaspora, Metropolitan Konstantin (Buggan) of Irinupolis, to preside over a Local Council of the UAOC, held on 14–15 September 2000, and, most importantly, to concelebrate with the bishops of the UAOC. The UAOC was received into communion with Con-

stantinople 'as a precedent', before formal recognition of canonicity had been made. The Kiev authorities, for their part, did all in their power to ensure that the Council passed off successfully. They partly financed the event and made a hall and the Church of St Andrew available for meetings and services. This church will be handed over to the UAOC at some future date.

Since Metropolitan Konstantin has so far declined the position of patriarch proposed to him, the Council decided to elect a temporary representative, Metropolitan Mefodi (Kudryakov) of Ternopil'. Now the UAOC is proposing to set up a *podvor'ye* of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the government of Ukraine (it would not have been possible to do so under the auspices of any of the churches), in order to maintain a permanent dialogue with Constantinople. For Constantinople, the first condition for the legal recognition of the church in Ukraine would be the unification of the UAOC and the UOC–KP, also favoured by the Kiev authorities.

The Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch

It may be right, then, to anticipate the formal unification of the UAOC and the UOC–KP, following which the ecumenical patriarch would establish their canonical relationship with the rest of the Orthodox world. Negotiations between the UAOC and the UOC–KP are being conducted behind closed doors. We have learned that a letter was sent to the ecumenical patriarch on 18 September 2000 asking that he establish a permanent commission in Kiev to promote discussions and negotiate agreements amongst all interested parties, including the UAOC, the UOC–KP, the UOC–MP and representatives of President Kuchma, Patriarch Bartholomaios and Patriarch Aleksii of Moscow. The letter was signed by all the bishops of the UOC–KP and the UOAC. Vicepremier of the Cabinet of Ministers Nikola Zhulins'kyi, chairman of the State Committee for Religious Affairs Viktor Bondarenko and Patriarch Filaret were eventually obliged to admit with great reluctance that such was the content of the letter. Bishops of the UAOC have refused to comment.

A letter of this kind, signed by the episcopate of both churches, must surely be regarded as a statement of intent, or as an agreement on future spheres of influence and division of responsibilities. However, it is simply impossible to entertain the idea that the two parties are seriously ready to declare 'Christ is among us!' with any degree of sincerity. The mutual antipathy is too great and is barely concealed even in front of journalists.

The big unanswered question is this: who would head a united church? The future success or failure of Kuchma's religious policy more or less hangs on this one issue.

Viktor Bondarenko sees two possibilities. First, that the church will be headed by an expatriate from the UOC in the USA and Canada. The autocephalists favour this option. The second possibility is, as Bondarenko puts it, 'leadership by weight': the church would be headed by a 'figure of authority' who would have not only the support of numerous parishes, but also that of state structures, entrepreneurs and leading politicians. Filaret (Denisenko) is the person who is most interested in this possibility: he called himself the only 'authoritative leader' eight times during the course of our interview in September 2000. As far as the state is concerned both Konstantin (Buggan) and Filaret are uncomfortable choices. The first speaks Ukrainian poorly and is a citizen of a NATO country; the second is a politician who is inclined more towards aggression than compromise. Filaret stated on 28 September 2000 that he would retire only when there were no UOC–MP parishes left in Ukraine.

It is rumoured that Kiev is now looking for an alternative to Filaret. This person ought to be a bishop of the larger and better-resourced UOC–KP, consecrated during the Soviet era when the church was still united, possibly banned but not defrocked by the Moscow Patriarchate and, from the point of view of the presidential administration, reasonably compliant. The only man who fits these requirements would appear to be Metropolitan Andrii (Horak) of L'viv.

Metropolitan Andrii is a Ukrainian, a graduate of the Leningrad Academy, ordained by Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov). As a bishop of the ROC–MP he headed the L'viv faculty. He was one of the first bishops to support Filaret. He voluntarily handed over the keys of St George's Cathedral in L'viv to the Greek Catholics and in so doing earned the support of the local authorities. The autocephalists are rather afraid of Horak and call him the 'éminence grise' behind Filaret. It was Metropolitan Andrii who on 25 September 2000 informed the authors of this article of the existence of the joint letter to Patriarch Bartholomaios. Accompanying us to the door, he remarked, 'Very soon you will know everything, President Kuchma will have his say.' Despite his versatility, his readiness for power and his ability to conduct intrigue, however, Horak probably lacks the charismatic qualities needed to overcome the internal contradictions which will inevitably arise in an artificially-created church.

The Catholic Church

What is the reaction of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to the attempt by the Ukrainian Orthodox to create a local autocephalous Orthodox church? Vicepremier Nikola Zhulins'kyi believes that the UGCC 'is very interested in unity, because it is a patriotic, sovereign church'. Bishop Yulian Gbur, secretary to the Synod of the UGCC, also states that the Greek Catholics welcome moves towards unity. The UGCC and the UAOC are similar in two respects – nationalism and sovereignty. Even their liturgy is almost identical, although there are differences in doctrine and political interests.

Greek Catholics see themselves as an independent autocephalous church. On the one hand Rome acts as a protective shield; on the other hand Eastern-rite Catholics feel like outsiders in the huge Latin world. They also harbour some long-held grievances against the Vatican. The rank-and-file clergy believe that in 1946 the Vatican left them to their fate and did not protect them from Orthodox expansionism. They call their union with the Vatican 'purely symbolic'. Some do not even mention the Polish pope in their liturgy because years of conflict with Poland have coloured the relationship between Greek-rite and Latin-rite Catholics in Galicia. The Greek Catholics see themselves as the genuine Ukrainian church, a church which has a universal mission to bring about unity. They are jealously watching the process of unification of the Orthodox churches and certainly do not see themselves as outside observers. Ihor Ozhievs'kyi, head of the Department for External Relations at the UGCC, believes that the process should be much wider, that a united Ukrainian Christian church should be created in neither an Orthodox nor a Catholic mould, but in the spirit of the era 'before the Schism'. The Greek Catholics, who have no formal connection with the moves towards consolidation among Orthodox Ukrainians, feel acutely that they have been excluded from the process.

There is no real possibility of unity between the UGCC and the united Orthodox churches, however. The most that would happen would be that a very small number of Greek Catholic parishes would go over to a national Orthodox church. Metro-

politan Andrii (Horak) does not intend to proselytise among Greek Catholics. He has declared his intention to root out the Catholic tradition of venerating the Sacred Heart of Jesus which under the influence of the Greek Catholics has become part of Ukrainian Orthodox practice. When one considers the conflicts between the UGCC, the UAOC and the UOC–KP it is difficult to understand what Nikola Zhulins'kyi had in mind when he spoke of 'the possible integration of Greek Catholics into the Orthodox Church' in an interview with the authors. The vicepremier is distant from the church and probably does not understand either the theological complexities or the issues of jurisdiction which would be raised if he were to express a wish to 'integrate' the UGCC into Ukrainian Orthodoxy as a distinct autocephalous entity.

In formal terms the UGCC cannot even enter into a relationship with the UAOC or the UOC–KP. Bishop Gbur explained that the Vatican will allow the Greek Catholics to establish formal relations only with the UOC–MP as the only canonically recognised church in Ukraine. The Vatican, like Moscow, emphasises that it recognises neither Filaret nor Mefodi. This is a most unusual coincidence of views, which must concern analysts at the State Committee for Religious Affairs. The Vatican may give moral support to Patriarch Bartholomaios and his efforts to create a new church, but it may also seek to express its own viewpoint. The Vatican and Constantinople are known to be in contact with each other. Once a relationship exists, there are ways of exerting influence. For the State Committee for Religious Affairs the opinion of the Vatican on the establishment of unity amongst the Orthodox is far more important than that of the UGCC. We should also note that during the presidential elections the UGCC did not take part in any political activity and did not support Leonid Kuchma as the Orthodox churches did.

In September 2000 Viktor Bondarenko stated in response to our questions that today the Roman Catholic Church is the fastest-growing church in Ukraine. He had recently had meetings at the Roman Catholic seminary at Briukhovychi and emphasised that the Roman Catholics were not actively engaged in proselytism. The 800 parishes in the Khmel'nyts'kyi, Zhytomir and Vinnytsa *oblasti* served ethnic Poles. He noted the 'ukrainisation of the Roman Catholic episcopate' as a positive development.

Since the UAOC and the UOC–KP have no formal legitimacy, the whole Orthodox region of Ukraine is formally considered to be the canonical territory of the UOC–MP, which is being encroached upon by the advance of the UGCC. As soon as a second canonically recognised Orthodox church appears, the UOC–MP, the majority of whose parishes are in the south and east of the country, will have to agree to Orthodox parts of Galicia falling under the jurisdiction of a new united church. As a result, the conflict between the UOC–MP and the UAOC, which even now is almost a 'virtual' one, given the small number of Orthodox parishes in Galicia, will finally have been played out. Then the Vatican may insist on a papal visit first to Ukraine and then to Russia. Rome will have to keep a firm rein on the Greek Catholics, preventing them from making any inroads into the eastern Ukrainian regions and into Siberian Russia, where, so Yulian Gbur assured us, there are one and a half million Greek Catholics.

Kuchma's Task

In our opinion, the logic of the religious and political situation in Ukraine dictates that Leonid Kuchma will have to reach the conclusion that the synodical form of church government is the most appropriate: in other words, a church without a

patriarch. A collegiate body at the head of a single Ukrainian church would remove a number of the internal contradictions within the church, it would make dialogue with the UOC–MP easier, and it would reinforce the general process of democratisation within the country, compensating for the damage already done to Ukraine's international reputation as a result of interchurch conflicts. Kuchma needs solidarity between church and state. He will need to overcome deep-rooted church divisions and obscure canonical obstacles before Ukraine has its own national church, independent of both Rome and Moscow.

Notes and References

¹ *Natsional'na bezpeka i oborona*, no. 10, 2000.

(Translated from the Russian by Suzanne Pattle)