

Healing the Division of the Orthodox in Ukraine; the Diaspora as a Model for Reconciliation

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Each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?... For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? (1 Corinthians 1:12b-13; 3:3b-5)

Introduction: the state of disunion among Eastern Rite Christian Churches in Ukraine

There is an ancient tradition within Christianity whose worship and culture are distinctly Eastern, Byzantine/Greek, and Orthodox. In Ukraine there are four large Churches that are part of this tradition: the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), the Ukrainian Autocephalist Orthodox Church (UAOC), and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP).

Estimated Size and Popularity of Each Church (in Ukraine)

UGCC	18 Eparchies; 3,433 Communities; 2,136 clergy; 9% of the population
UOC-MP	53 Eparchies; 12,251 Communities; 9,680 clergy; 19% of the population
UAOC	11 Eparchies; 1,190 Communities, 699 clergy, 1-2% of the population
UOC-KP	29 Eparchies; 4,000 Communities, 3,021 clergy 33% of the population

All of these Churches have the same commitment to salvation through Christ, the same belief in the reality and efficacy of the Holy Mysteries (or Sacraments), the same (or very similar) Rite of Worship, and the same (or very similar) ecclesiology (e.g. "apostolic succession"). Ironically, they also profess the same commitment to fulfilling God's desire that "we all be one as He is one" (St. John 17:22b). This is ironic because none of these groups, despite their common beliefs, culture, and purpose, are in communion with one another. Instead, they have parallel structures and often act more like competitors than brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ. In this paper, I describe the common genesis of these Churches and the five "moments" that led to their division, how their disorder asserted itself in America, how some of these divisions in America have been overcome, and how this reconciliation provides reason for our hope of closer ecclesiastical cooperation and even unity in Ukraine.

The Baptism of Rus': the common font

There is a reason why each of the four Churches shares a common theology, spirituality, and liturgy: they have a common heritage, a heritage they intentionally maintain and that constitutes a primary part of their identity. Here I speak not just of their shared genesis in 33 AD (i.e. Pentecost), but more specifically of the planting and flourishing of Greek Orthodoxy in the kingdom of Kyivan Rus'. Each of these Churches tells the early part of that history in very similar terms, from the Apostolic visit of St. Andrew, to the conversion of the regent queen and Holy Enlightener of Ukraine Olha, to the conversion of her grandson the Holy Enlightener of Ukraine, King Volodymyr and the subsequent "Baptism of Rus'" in 988, through the golden age of Kyivan Rus' and the invasion of the Mongol Horde. Each of the four Churches claims those events as their own and bases much of their legitimacy on those claims. And while outside observers usually date the founding of each of the four Churches under consideration based on when it "left" its Mother Church (more on this below), this is not how they see themselves. Rather, they recognize an unbroken tradition running from the events described above to their current state. Nor is this simple myth-making.

So What Happened? Why are there Four Churches?

History is complicated, but if we pause to consider five (intentionally simplified and stylized) moments in time we will have the general thrust of how we went from the baptism of Rus' as an Orthodox nation in 988 to the nation of Ukraine having four Orthodox Churches today.

The first moment is the Great Schism between Rome and Constantinople (and between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy), an event that is commonly dated to 1054, when the Papal Legate laid a Bull of Excommunication on the altar of Hagia Sophia. The fact that this occurred after the establishment of Christianity in Rus' allows the Kyivan Metropolia to be seen as being both Orthodox and Catholic, despite the fact that it received Christianity in the Greek form and was under the Patriarch of Constantinople. Even after the schism, leaders of Kyivan Rus' were pragmatic about their relations with both Rome and Constantinople (e.g. King Danylo in the 13th century), a tendency that became all but necessary when believers in much of what is now western Ukraine found themselves under Catholic rule. Additionally, it is gross mirror-imaging and bad historiography to define rigid modern confessional identities on the past; as Fr. Yuri Avakkumov convincingly demonstrates in this same volume, religious were largely inchoate well into the 17th and even 18th centuries. Regardless, the formal excommunication between Rome and Constantinople set the stage for the second moment, the Union of Brest in 1596.

The sixteenth century was hard on the faith of the Orthodox believers of what is now western Ukraine. There was considerable political, economic, and evangelical pressure for them to convert to Roman Catholicism at the same time that the Kyivan Metropolia was in disarray, Orthodox priests were largely uneducated, and the Patriarchate itself was under the control of the Turks. The lay brotherhoods took up some of the slack, but even there the results were ambiguous as they used their influence to undermine the ecclesial authorities. These things, combined with the precedence of the Council of Florence (1431–1449), and the increasing strength of the new (self-proclaimed) Moscow Patriarchate, made moving from the omophorion of Constantinople to that of Rome appealing. In 1596 the Council of Brest was

concluded with the majority of the bishops of Kyiv going under Rome. This left a rump organization of the Orthodox, a fact that was rectified with the creation or re-creation of a full parallel (and illegal) structure in 1620. Because of this, where there had been one Orthodox Church under Constantinople, there were now two, one under Constantinople and the second under Rome (i.e. the current UGCC).

In the meantime, the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church had been growing in size, power, and ambition. The Russian Orthodox Church had declared itself independent of Constantinople in 1589 and Russia had long considered itself as the proper political and ecclesial heir of Kyivan Rus'.¹ In 1686 the Ecumenical Patriarch transferred the Kyivan Metropolia to Moscow, an act of simony and political pragmatism that the Ecumenical Patriarch renounced in 1924 when he granted the Polish Orthodox Church autocephaly (i.e. independence). Regardless, this “third moment” allowed for the establishment of the institution that is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Russian Empire used the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine as part of its plan to Russify the people of Ukraine. In the early 20th century, as the Russian Empire began to collapse, nationalists and reformers worked to reform the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. They wanted a Church that would “wrest the control of the church away from its conservative Russian episcopate and infuse it with the Ukrainian values, culture, and language through the democratization of its structure. Hence the movement's three guiding principles of 'autocephaly,' 'Ukrainianization,' and 'conciliarism’”.² Because the bishops assigned to Ukraine were all loyal to Moscow the reformers had to work from below. By 1920 they had created a federation of nationalist parishes (the “All-Ukrainian Orthodox Church Council” or, soon thereafter, the “Ukrainian Autocephalist Orthodox Church”) under the spiritual leadership of a retired archbishop (Parfenii Levytskyi of Poltava). However, in early 1921 the Russian Orthodox defrocked all of the movement's priests and threatened the autocephalists with anathema if they continued their efforts. Undeterred, the UAOC held its first Sobor (Council) in October 1921 at which it ordained Archpriest Vasyl Lypkivskyi as the Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine. As the ordination was performed by priests and laity on a priest (and one that had been defrocked by the synod that claimed control over him), it was not recognized as canonical by anyone but itself and the (atheist) Soviet authorities and sundered the UAOC from any orthodox claim to apostolic succession. Although it survived abroad³, the Soviets manipulated and oppressed the UAOC and forced it to disband in 1930. In 1942, as soon as there was enough freedom, the UAOC reestablished itself, this time with bishops that had been canonically ordained by the Polish Orthodox Church.⁴ This rebirth of the UAOC lasted only

1 Note that the seat of the Kyivan Metropolia had been moved East with the coming of the Mongols thus creating two rival claimants; this division continues to the present day but is outside the scope of this paper. See “Fractured Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Politics: The Impact of Patriarch Kyrill’s ‘Russian World’,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 54: 1-2 (2013) 33-68.

2 Bohdan Bociurkiw (1988), “The Ukrainian Autocephalist Orthodox Church” in Pedro Ramet (ed.) *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*. Duke University Press. p 310

3 I serve in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, a Church that is directly descended from the 1921 council through Bishop cum Metropolitan John Teodorovich, the third bishop ordained by the 1921 Sobor. He was sent to America by the UAOC to organize and evangelize Ukrainian immigrants.

4 Displaced Ukrainian clergy from this second incarnation, to include Bishop cum Patriarch Mstyslav Skrypnyk, energized the UOC-USA and gave it orthodox apostolic succession and canonicity (although this remained disputed and

until the Soviets gained control of its area of operation. In 1990, as the Soviet Union was beginning to disintegrate, nationalist clergy and laity yet again reestablished the UAOC⁵. In a beautiful show of continuity, Metropolitan Skrypnyk, who had been ordained as a bishop during the second emergence of the UAOC and who had been serving the autocephalist UOC-USA, was selected as the Patriarch of Kyiv and all Ukraine for the UAOC in 1991. The triple emergence of the UAOC constitutes the fourth moment.

The final moment came in 1992 when Metropolitan Filaret, the recently defrocked (and soon to be anathematized) former hierarch of the UOC-MP, united his supporters (to include three bishops) with the UAOC to form the UOC-KP. Although he had spent most of his career as a pro-Moscow party man, he lost his position in the Russian Orthodox Church after lobbying for Ukrainian autocephaly (with him as its head). The alliance with the UAOC and creation of the UOC-KP was not supported by all the bishops of the UAOC (to include Patriarch Mstyslav, who was too ill to prevent or guide it); thus it ended up creating the fourth and final of the largest Orthodox Churches in Ukraine. It is also worth noting that, due in large part to his charisma and political acumen, the UOC-KP is now the most popular Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Barriers to Reconciliation

There is an abstract desire among all the Churches to heal the schisms that divide them, but it is far easier to break things than it is to put them back together. Discussions of reunion tend to focus on theological and canonical hurdles (e.g. the primacy of the Pope; Moscow's anathema against Patriarch Filaret; the fact that priests and bishops who are defrocked or otherwise disciplined in one Church can start over with impunity in another), but identity issues and personal animosity polarize the divisions and provide the lens through which theological and canonical challenges are viewed. Moreover, while the Maidan and war with Russia have brought the UOC-KP and UGCC into closer alliance, it has threatened to turn the UOC-MP into a pariah, something that becomes more likely with every attack the Russian Orthodox Church makes against the Ukrainian Catholics and the Ukrainian Orthodox it does not control. Nor is everything well with the UAOC; scandals and political scheming have cost it moral legitimacy and popular support. Given current trajectories, the UAOC will continue to fade into irrelevancy, the UGCC will continue to grow in Western Ukraine, and the UOC-KP will continue to gain members and clergy from the UOC-MP – and the chasm dividing each of these heirs of 988 will continue to deepen. The example of the Ukrainian Orthodox in the USA does provide some hope for something better.

Is There Hope? The Witness of the UOC-USA

The organization of the Ukrainian Orthodox in America was affected by events and the disunity in Ukraine. Most of the self-identifying Ukrainian immigrants to the USA were Greek Catholic (i.e. Ruthenian cum Ukrainian Orthodox under Rome). They formed parishes and found priests to lead them. In the 20's and 30's many of these parishes divided, with some members wanting to leave Rome and others wanting to stay, with acrimonious legal battles

constituted a large part of the so-called "Ukrainian Problem" in American Orthodoxy).

5 The UGCC re-emerged at this time, as well; it had been forced underground since WWII when the Soviets took control of its ecclesial territory.

over control of battle being the order of the day. In large part because of the efforts of evangelists like Metropolitan John Teodorovich, most of the self-identifying “Ukrainian” groups that voted to leave Rome became part of the UOC-USA (i.e. the autocephalist group).⁶ This is despite strong efforts of Catholic leaders to discredit the UOC-USA for its lack of apostolic succession and trained clergy. A smaller group, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America (UOCA), went straight from Rome to the original mother Church of Kyiv, Constantinople⁷. Despite its legitimate claim to canonicity and Apostolic succession, the UOCA never rivaled the size of the UOC-USA. Each of these divisions were reinforced by canon (the UGCC parishes were in communion with Rome; the UOCA parishes were in communion with all canonical Orthodox Churches; the UOC-USA was in communion with no one; and none of the three were in communion with one another), by personality, and by identity. As with the situation in Ukraine, the acceptance of disaffected clergy and parishes from the other Churches was all too common. None the less, there were some attempts at unity.

The first major attempt to unite the UOCA and the UOC-USA occurred in 1950, with Sobors of both Churches agreeing to a merger. However, the leader of the canonical UOCA had misgivings⁸ and led his Church to scrap the union. The second major attempt was more successful and in 1996 the two merged into the UOC-USA, with the UOC-USA sacrificing a major part of its self-definition – that it was autocephalous – to do so (the UOCA also sacrificed; it gave up both its name and its leader his primacy). The kind of kenotic Christian leadership that Metropolitan Constantine (UOC-USA), Archbishop Antony (UOC-USA), and Archbishop Vsevelod (UOCA) exhibited was remarkable, as was the bravery of Patriarch Bartholomew I.⁹

The challenge to the “autocephalic” and “Ukrainian” identity was too much for some, and a few parishes left the UOC-USA for the UOC-KP, with the requisite polarization and court battles following soon thereafter. In their defense, it made more sense to them to move straight to what they considered the most legitimate heir of Kyiv (i.e. the UOC-KP) rather than going back to Constantinople, a Patriarchate they considered to be “foreign” and unsuitable for leading a fully developed Ukrainian Orthodox Church.¹⁰ Again The willingness of the UOC-KP to accept UOC-USA parishes only served to reinforce the pre-existing animosity between the leaders of the UOC-USA and the UOC-KP, immediately deepening the newly created schism within Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the USA.

6 Note that those that did not identify themselves as Ukrainian made other choices (e.g. self-identifying Russians to what are now the Orthodox Church in America and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia).

7 The parish I currently serve, St. Mary Protection of the Theotokos (Покрова) Cathedral in Allentown was part of the UOCA and played a large role in the unification process.

8 These misgivings may have been about the canonicity of Metropolitan John Teodorovich's ordination, although it was corrected during this time period. It is my observation that it is usually personal animosities that drive such things, with theology being used as a justification. See Jonathan Haidt. (2012) *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion*. New York: Pantheon Books.

9 Note that this kenotic sacrifice is similar to that offered by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) as it reunited with its long-time enemy, the Russian Orthodox Church,

10 Going under the UOC-MP was never even a consideration, despite its canonicity and proximity, as both the MP and its UOC-MP are seen as parallel Churches (and not mother churches!) at best, and agents of the anti-Ukrainian imperial Russian state at worst.

One of the reasons the hierarchs of the UOC-USA desired union with the UOCA and Constantinople was so that the UOC-USA – the Church that prized its role in keeping Ukrainian Orthodoxy alive when it was martyred in Ukraine – could work towards strengthening Ukrainian Orthodoxy in Ukraine and healing the divisions among the Ukrainian Orthodox there.

In 2015 the bishops of the UOC-USA together with those of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada (also under Constantinople and with a similar history to the UOC-USA) worked tirelessly to get the UOC-KP and the UAOC to reunite. By the Summer it seemed to be a done deal. With the blessing and support of the Ecumenical Patriarch, the two Churches were to merge in September, with the expectation that this merger would make it easier to bring them canonical recognition (something they both crave). Unfortunately, the opposite occurred as the UAOC (allegedly under pressure from Moscow) backed out at the last minute, thus demonstrating its unreliability to their erstwhile partners and world Orthodoxy.

Nonetheless, these efforts did bear significant fruit as they starting healing the relationship between the hierarchs of the UOC-USA and the UOC-KP. In his last two visits (in September 2015 and November of 2016), Patriarch Filaret came to South Bound Brook to meet with the hierarchs of the UOC-USA. The moment that best symbolizes the new relationship between the two Churches came when Patriarch Filaret led the Memorial Litya service at the tomb of Patriarch Mstyslav with Metropolitan Antony and Bishop Daniel in attendance and UOC-USA seminarians from Western Ukraine chanting.¹¹ Moreover, the Ecumenical Patriarch, with the encouragement of the Ukrainian government, the UOC-KP, and the UAOC and the assistance of the bishops of the UOC-USA, continues to investigate a way to bring an end to the sundering of the largest group of Orthodox believers in Ukraine from canonical Orthodoxy without capitulating to Moscow. It must be noted that the Moscow Patriarchate actively opposes these efforts and constantly demeans the hierarchs of the UOC-USA for them.¹²

The relations between the UOC-USA and the UGCC in the USA continue to be good, with regularly scheduled meetings and minor non-sacramental concelebrations between the hierarchs (e.g. at memorial services for the Holodomor). However, the real reconciliation between Ukrainian Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholics occurs at the grass level, with cooperation, concelebration at non-sacramental services, and amiability being the norm. Given the deep divisions that once divided Ukrainian Orthodox communities in America (remember, the majority of UOC-USA parishes resulted from incredibly difficult schisms within UGCC parishes), this may well provide the best hope for reconciliation yet.

Conclusion.

The best way to predict the future is to look at the past. When it comes to Orthodoxy in

11 Patriarch Mstyslav is one of the giants of Ukrainian Orthodox history, having served as a bishop in the second iteration of the UAOC, the Metropolitan of the UOC-USA, and the Patriarch of the current iteration of the UAOC. He reposed in 1993. See Nicholas Denysenko (2005), “A Legacy of Struggle, Suffering & Hope: Metropolitan Mstyslav Skrypnyk & the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA,” in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49; 335-351.

12 Not that this is surprising. Moscow’s rhetoric against all the Orthodox who are not under its control is uncharitable, something that those of us in non-Russian Ukrainian Orthodox Churches are far too willing to match.

Ukraine, the past has brought not only division, but the hardening of those divisions. This leads to the expectation that the witness of Ukrainian Orthodoxy will be “worldly” (as described in 1 Corinthians 1:12b-13; 3:3b-5 in the introduction to this essay). Yet the example of the healing and softening of divisions between the Ukrainian Orthodox in the USA (and between the UOC-KP, UAOC, and UGCC during and after the Maidan) suggests that this need not be the case.