

A Communion of the Holy Spirit in Ukraine: A Theological Rationale for Autocephaly

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Abstract

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After briefly reviewing the history of movements for autocephaly in Ukraine and the traditional arguments favoring and opposing that status, the author argues that autocephaly today – especially in the context of the phyletism of the so-called Russian World ideology promoted by Moscow – must be approached in a new way. Autocephaly must no longer be seen as simply the outgrowth or even the “right” of ethnic nation-states and a political ideology of sovereignty transferred into the ecclesiastical sphere. Instead, autocephaly here is the result of maturing fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit, seen in sacramental and ecclesiological practices, including: apostolic succession, preaching to all the nations, communion with the saints, ecumenical dialogue, theological scholarship, and social service and political witness coherent with the eschatological vision of the gospel rather than with the short-term political goals of the nation-state. On all six counts, and more, Ukrainian Orthodoxy gives much evidence of already having achieved autocephaly, the formal recognition of which by others can only strengthen both Ukraine and Orthodoxy.

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The movement for autocephaly in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is nearing its centennial anniversary, which will occur in 2021.¹ Ukraine's brief independence following the Bolshevik Revolution and relative autonomy in the early years of the Soviet period provided fertile ground for the rapid emergence of an autocephalous body. The first autocephalous Church in Ukraine (henceforth, UAOC) was dubious for several reasons: first, it was established without consensus or even a majority of Orthodox clergy and laity in Ukraine, many of whom remained faithful to the Russian Orthodox Church; second, the leaders of the Church did not include any bishops, so presbyters were chosen and ordained to the episcopacy, depriving the Church of the precious quality of apostolic succession which is customarily interpreted as manifested in the office of the bishop; and third, the first hierarch of the UAOC was Vasil Lypkivsky, a married presbyter, and the UAOC quickly adopted other canonical changes which contributed to its perception as illegitimate – the Ukrainian variant of the Living Church.

¹ The most recent studies on the autocephalous Church in Ukraine are by Irina Prelovs'ka, especially *Джерела з історії Української Автокефальної Православної Церкви (1921–1930) – Української Православної Церкви (1930–1939)* (Kyiv: Inst. Ukraïns'koï Archeohrafiï ta Džereloznavstva Im. M.S. Hruševs'koho NAN Ukraïny, 2013). The classical study of the autocephalous Church in Ukraine is by Bohdan Bociurkiw, "The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, 1920–1930: A Case Study in Religious Modernization," in *Religion and Modernization in the Soviet Union*, ed. Dennis J. Dunn (Boulder, CO: 1977), 310–47. Also see Frank E. Sysyn, "The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the traditions of the Kyiv Metropolitanate," in *Religion and Nation in Modern Ukraine*, eds. Serhii Plokhy and Frank E. Sysyn (Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2003), 23–39, esp. notes 6 and 7. For a recent assessment in Russian, see Metropolitan Feodosij (Protjuk), *Обособленческие движения в Православной церкви на Украине, 1917–1943* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Krutitskogo podvorja, 2004). See Dmitry Pospelovskiy, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime 1917–1982*, vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 73–6, and also in *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 211–5. The history of the UAOC is presented in great detail, including several reproductions of official UAOC documents, appeals, and letters from individual clergy in Osyp Zinkevych and Olexander Voronyn, eds., *Мартирологія Українських Церков*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Smolokskyp Publishers, 1987).

Assessments of the UAOC vary, but its establishment began a pattern of Orthodox Ukrainians proclaiming autocephaly without requesting permission. The uneven Ukrainian journey to autocephaly has been stifled by complications concerning traditional canonical expectations for an independent local church held by global Orthodoxy. The following sketch outlines the arguments for and against the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church in history which rely upon conventional Orthodox canonical nomenclature:

- The impetus for autocephaly among Orthodox Ukrainians has been either complete ecclesial independence or relative autonomy. The UAOC was established in 1921 when Ukraine was under Bolshevik rule; the second manifestation of the UAOC occurred in 1942 when Ukraine came under Nazi occupation and hopes for an independent Ukrainian state were reinvigorated; the final stage occurred in 1989–90, following the millennium of the baptism of Rus' and during the time of Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika;
- A crucial corollary to the emergence of autocephalous sentiments alongside existing or emerging sovereign states was the sustenance of these two phenomena: Ukrainian national identity and the hope for permanent and prosperous statehood in Ukrainian émigré communities of the diaspora, established by Ukrainian immigrants who organized into a brotherhood in Canada and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church shepherded by Metropolitan John Theodorovich in the USA and Metropolitan Ilarion Ohienko in Canada.² The diaspora

² For a survey background, see Paul Yuzyk, *The Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada, 1918–1951* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1981); Roman Yereniuk, *The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada: 90th Anniversary* (Winnipeg: Ecclesia Press, 2009); Serhii Plokyh, "The Crisis of 'Holy Rus': the Russian Orthodox Mission and the Establishment of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada," in *Religion and Nation in Modern Ukraine*, eds. Serhii Plokyh and Frank E. Sysyn (Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2003), 40–57; Nicholas Denysenko, "A Legacy of Struggle, Suffering & Hope: Metropolitan MSTYSLAV