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THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC LAY MOVEMENT 1945-1975: AN INTERPRETATION

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In addressing a group of Ukrainians, Father George Maloney, S.J., once said the following words:

You too must come to know who you are. You must know the family you came from with all its history. And how little we really know about the Ukrainian nation.¹

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In order to respond to this challenging statement and to grasp at least superficially the inner condition of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the diaspora, and understand the activity and mentality of its hierarchy, as well as the ethos of its lay movement, it is necessary to analyze the Ukrainian psyche and the religiosity which emanates from it. Thus we must discuss some aspects of *ethnopsychology* of the Ukrainian nation.

Ethnopsychology is understood here as a branch of science investigating the psyche or a psychological set-up and distinctive characteristics of a particular people or nation with all of its constituent elements, aspects or factors, i.e., psychosomatic (racial), geographical (geophysics), historical, psychosocial, cultural (including religion and religiosity), and psychoanalytical.²

The term *nation* as used in this paper is not synonymous with the American usage of the term. It should not be understood here as a body of inhabitants of a country united under a single independent government, i.e. a state. The term is used here to denote a biological and cultural entity characterized by ties of blood, by a common language, culture, religion, tradition, customs, art as well as by a consciousness of a socio-cultural homogeneity; a people with a collective will, common memory, mutual interest, and future goals.³

The ethnopsychology of the Ukrainian nation⁴ reveals to us that the Ukrainian psyche was formed and determined by four principle frontiers: geographical, geopolitical, philosophical and spiritual. Geographically, Ukraine is located on the Eastern frontier of Europe. Therefore, it comprises both geographically and culturally a transitional situation between East and West. The rich Ukrainian soil, the natural beauty of the country and its moderate climate made Ukraine a very coveted country by all its neighbors. Both trade and cultural routes crossed in Ukraine leaving upon it a distinctive cosmopolitan imprint.

On the other hand, this geopolitical situation was a constant invitation to innumerable invasions by Asiatic hordes as well as by other neighbors, who brought with them destruction, suffering, plagues, hunger, and death. This state of affairs had a very profound influence upon the spiritual formation of the Ukrainian people; it placed them in an existential frontier situation between life and death, existence and non-existence. This in turn precipitated inner psychological crises and imposed a profound sapiential reflection about the meaning of existence which resulted in uncertainty, anxiety, pessimism, and melancholic resignation.

Throughout the centuries, the chivalrous type of Ukrainian man took up the sword and defended his native land from hostile invaders. Since the odds were usually against the defending force, the number of defenders constantly diminished, for they died on the battlefield and left reproduction to the cautious peasant, who evaded battles in order to stay alive. Thus there was a constant diminishing of the heroic type of life and a constant increase of a private and withdrawn type of existence of the peasant who feels responsibility only for his immediate surroundings.

The central problem of the Ukrainian spiritual make-up is the co-existence of two contrasting elements: the heroic, chivalrous (or simply Cossack) ideal of life and the withdrawn, passive, private and asocial existence of the peasant. The heroic ideal lives on in songs, rites, folklore, preaching and in the very intense historic memory of the Ukrainian nation. Everybody looks up to this ideal, and yet it remains an unattainable good. This, in turn, results in a profound introversion, guilt complex and unrealistic dreams of glory.⁵ In order to compensate for their failure and to rid themselves of the guilt complex, Ukrainians are unique as a nation in celebrating major military defeats as national feast days, e.g., Kruty, Bazar, Brody,* paying tribute to their dead heroes not because they gained anything for Ukraine (except glory) but because they

*These are the names of the three towns in Ukraine where Ukrainians suffered defeats at the hands of the Soviet Russian armed forces in 1918, 1921, and 1944 respectively.