

The Nationalism of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church: A Stage in Global Consciousness¹

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Writing under the auspices of the Rauschenbusch Foundation of Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in 1947, Salo Wittmayer Baron noted: "Nationalism has been in ill-repute in recent years" (Baron 3). It is no less the case today. Mikhail Gorbachev denounces it as the most serious problem faced by the U.S.S.R. — more serious, apparently, than even the most pressing economic problems judging by the attention given to it in his policies. It is recognized as a major culprit in the conflicts in the Middle East. And it is also a troublesome matter in Canada.

National consciousness, however, appears to be a different matter. It provides a framework for developing a personal identity in a world where technology contributes to making people into mere faceless consumers. One thinks of the popular *Roots* by Alex Halley. One also thinks of the idea of patriotism in the U.S.A., formerly a matter of ridicule for American youth who once sported U.S. flags on the seat of their faded denims, but recently resoundingly endorsed by the pop prophet Bruce Springsteen, in his hit song "Born in the U.S.A." A corollary to this can be found in the mournful tones of Canadian "nationalists" to the effect that Canada lacks the very sense of patriotism that contributes to the unity of our neighbour to the south.

Martin Buber aptly said,

Being a people is simply like having eyes in one's head which are capable of seeing; being a nationality is like having learned to perceive their

function and to understand their purpose; nationalism is like having diseased eyes and hence being constantly preoccupied with the fact of having eyes. (Cited in Baron 3)

Ukrainians frequently hesitate to describe their movement for preservation and development of national consciousness and the independence of their homeland by the term "nationalism." Although there are certainly groups of Ukrainians throughout the world who are very proud of the term "nationalist," the word has never gained unanimous acceptance in the Ukrainian community. The contemporary "Popular Movement of Ukraine for Reconstruction" (the last two words were dropped recently), known simply as *Rukh* (Ukrainian for "movement"), has rejected the term from the very beginning. *Rukh* was organized as a multi-cultural entity, attracting to its ranks Ukrainian citizens of Russian, Jewish, Polish, Armenian, German and other ethnic derivations, as well as ethnic Ukrainians. It has also remained non-partisan, counting among its members people who would claim the title "nationalist" as well as those who view themselves as internationalists. The point of *Rukh* was to see, rather than be obsessed with seeing. The point was to give meaning to decades of meaningless existence under a system noted for the dehumanization of its subjects, to provide a framework, a story which could help the citizens of Ukraine build a democratic, pluralistic society where they could live, work and develop a mutually beneficial environment.² The term "nationalism," which according to Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* (1976) denotes, "an exaltation of one nation above all others . . . as opposed to subordinate areas or other nations," does not really fit the bill.

This introduction should be considered a qualification of my use of the term "nationalism" with regard to the case of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The nationalism eschewed by those who would

like to see the aberration replaced by global consciousness, i.e., by the consciousness of the value of the entire planet and all its peoples, is not compatible with the ideals of this Church. In fact, the national consciousness that gave birth to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church can be shown to be an inescapable stage on the road to the kind of global consciousness that is so necessary in a world in danger of being torn to bits because of the strivings of people who have long been denied the opportunities to tell their stories and be heard.

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church

Christianity in its Byzantine form was officially accepted by Kyivan³Rus, the antecedent of the Ukrainian state (and indirectly of Russia) in 988. The Kyivan Church (Metropolia) was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (now Istanbul) until 1686, when political pressure was brought to bear by the rising Moscow Empire upon an extremely vulnerable Patriarchate to transfer jurisdiction over the Metropolia to Moscow, which already had political control over its domains. The ultimate result was the alienation of the people of Ukraine from the Orthodox Church; it was bitterly decried by Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), a poet of world calibre, whose freedom from serfdom, bought through the sale to a Russian aristocrat of a painting by a Russian artist, did not make him a grateful consumer of the privileges of Russian courtly life. By the turn of this century the Church had come to be viewed, especially by the nationally-conscious Ukrainian intelligentsia, as

a legitimizer of autocracy, imperial unity, and the old social order . . . (with) contempt for the Ukrainian language . . . employment of religious sanctions against "rebels" (e.g., Hetman Ivan Mazepa (1639-1709), and, in recent memory, its

close collaboration with the reactionary Union of the Russian People. (Bociurkiw 1988, 310)

Thus came about the movement for "autocephaly" of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Fr. Meyendorff writes on the subject of the institutional structures of Orthodoxy:

The Orthodox Church is at present a decentralized organization, based partly on centuries-old traditions going back to the ancient Oriental patriarchates and partly on more modern conditions. It consists of a number of local or national churches, all enjoying an "autocephalous" status, that is to say, possessing the right to chose their own heads, the bishops (Greek *auto-*, "self," *kep-hale*, "head"). (Meyendorff 1962, 143)

The official birth of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church can be dated to 1919, when it was proclaimed by the newly-independent Ukrainian National Republic, or better, to 1920, when the Soviet government that took over Ukraine recognized the Union of Ukrainian Orthodox Parishes as a separate ecclesiastical organization (Bociurkiw 1988, 311), or best, to October 14-30, 1921, with the First All-Ukrainian Sobor of the UAOC, which created its own hierarchy through election and the laying-on of hands by the clerical and lay members of the sobor upon its first episcopal candidate, Archpriest Vasyl Lypkiwskyi, who became Metropolitan and who then, with other sobor members, consecrated Archpriest Nestor Sharaivskyi as another bishop. The two then consecrated other bishops. This consecration was not in keeping with Orthodox canon law which stipulates that a candidate for episcopal office must be consecrated by two other bishops. However, no other Orthodox bishops would assist in this consecration with the hierarchy being dominated by Russian conservatives (Bociurkiw 1988, 312).

At first enjoying recognition by the Communist government, the UAOC was subsequently forced to self-liquidate and its clergy were forced to renounce their office or else they were imprisoned and shot. A brief revival of the UAOC in Ukraine occurred in 1941-42 with the support of Metropolitan Dionisy (a Russian), Primate of the Orthodox Church of Poland, which had been granted autocephaly by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in a 1924 Tomos (decree) in which the transfer in 1686 of jurisdiction over the Kyivan Metropolia (which included territory governed by Poland in 1924) to Moscow was declared uncanonical and void because it had been done under duress. With the return of Russian armies, the Patriarchate of Moscow declared the Polish autocephaly void and the UAOC uncanonical and schismatic.

However, with the coming of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* Ukrainians again took the opportunity to organize a form of Church life that would be compatible with growing Ukrainian national consciousness. An Initiative Committee was set up in Kyiv in February, 1989; on August 19 of that year the first Parish declared its adherence to the UAOC in the city of Lviv; in October, Bishop Ioan Bondarchuk of Zhytomyr left the Russian Orthodox hierarchy to lead the new Church group; on June 5-6, 1990, the first sobor of the UAOC, thus revived for the third time, elected Metropolitan Mstyslav Skrypnyk of New Jersey, U.S.A., as Patriarch (Dunlop 297). On November 18 he was enthroned in the historical Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kyiv. The response on the part of the Moscow Patriarchate was to change the name of its Kyiv Exarchate to "Ukrainian Orthodox Church" and grant it some measure of autonomy, to the point where (not coincidentally) the initials of the Moscow-related Church are now the same as those of the autocephalous group: "Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church" (Marples and Skrypnyk 7).

Orthodox Theological Considerations

Nationalism in the Orthodox Church is also spoken of with some disparagement. On the one hand, Fr. Meyendorff calls it a disease "which can be overcome in the ecclesiastical sphere only with great difficulty" (Meyendorff 1962, 144). Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware says, "Nationalism has been the bane of Orthodoxy for the last ten centuries" (Ware 86), thus attributing to it an origin far earlier than is usually the case (Kohn 851). On the other hand, Meyendorff himself, as we have seen above, noted that it is the norm for the Orthodox Church to be organized into national Churches. John Dunlop of Stanford University states, "The emergence of national churches on the territory of newly-independent states has been a pattern historically sanctioned by the Orthodox Church" (Dunlop 306). And Ware went so far as to say that "the integration of Church and people has in the end proved immensely beneficial" (Ware 86-87).

In fact, some degree of nationalism is an inescapable development of Orthodox anthropology and the closely related ecclesiology, which is based on Christology. That is to say, just as Christ is proclaimed in the Nicene Creed to be at one and the same time truly divine and truly human, so also the Church is divine and human, and so are humans as members of the Church both citizens of heaven and citizens of earth. Citizens of earth need to be involved in the affairs of earth. This is not some abstract concept — one must be involved in the life of one's community. One participates in one's culture, in history. How could such participation be separated from one's national context? The great Orthodox theologian, Fr. Georges Florovsky, said that this participation continues to leave an imprint even in the eternal destiny of the human being: "I would cease to be myself if my concrete, i.e., historical, experience is simply substracted. History, therefore, will not fade away completely, even in the 'age to come,' if the concreteness of human life is to be pre-

served" (Florovsky 124). Along the same lines, Fr. O.A. Krawchenko, a theologian and priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, declares that "the Church's involvement in both historical life and the cultural process of its flock (i.e., of its people) is indeed a theological decision, not simply a practical option" (Krawchenko 1989, 5).

The Romanian theologian, Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, who explored theology in the situation of the oppressive atheist rule of his homeland, linked the Christian's participation in history to the dedication each Christian must have to Christ when he wrote:

If the Christian must see Christ in every man and hear Christ's cry for help in every human cry, then he can not accept with patience the fact that his brother exists in a condition inferior to his own . . . One who struggles to end injustice follows in the path of Christ who was the first to use justice as a means to deprive death of its justification. (Staniloae 209, 211)

In the case of subjugated peoples, viewed as "lacking a true history," and speaking "the 'dialects' of other 'historical' nations" (Ramet 4-5), justice had to begin with the recognition of their worth, their history, their language, their identity. Such was the case of Ukrainians, submerged by other powerful nations (chiefly Russia and Poland) for centuries. Yevhen Sverstiuk, a Ukrainian poet who spent many years in the Gulag, a leader of the UAOC movement, wrote in *Nasha Vira* ("Our Faith"), a journal that he edits: "Some of us, in our impoverishment, have fallen so low as to hate ourselves, and to doubt whether we are indeed people of worth" (Sverstiuk 1990, 2). The movement to redress this injustice, to obtain status for one's native language and culture, to attain independence for one's land and Church, is commonly called "nationalism." Yet it is a "nationalism" which must be embraced

before one can attain the breadth of vision and growth required to see the value (or even the possibility) of "global consciousness." The choice of such involvement in the life of one's community can thus indeed be seen as a theological one and not just a matter of taste or preference.

The "Nationalism" of the UAOC

Yevhen Sverstiuk, addressing the founding congress of *Rukh*, said,

we wanted to create a new world and a new type of human — ideal, careless of nationality, devoted to the leaders and ready to do anything for them. We threw down moral barriers and opened a wide road for this new human. And along it sped opportunists, aggressive incompetents, rapacious egotists, cynics . . . (Sverstiuk 1989, 4)

He thus described the disillusionment with Communist idealism that led him and others like him to reject the internationalist utopia, which he came to see as a cover for the same old Russian imperialism that the first founders of the UAOC had spurned. Bohdan Bociurkiw identified this imperialism with Russian nationalism, saying the latter "provided common ground for alliance between Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet State during and after World War II" (Bociurkiw 1988, 319).

Writing on Ukrainianization, a basic principle of the UAOC, Bociurkiw noted that it "was based on the premise that true religious experience can only be attained in a national Church, in one's native tongue, in the familiar context of national culture" (Bociurkiw 1984, 326). In light of this, one can see that at the heart of the establishment of the UAOC was an attempt to discover authentic values in place of the bankrupt faith in the Tsar

and Mother Russia, later replaced by faith in the General Secretary and the Soviet Motherland. This conclusion is supported by another principle declared by the UAOC, that of Christianization: it is called

to fill in the chasm between Christian values and actual life . . . to strive towards the realization of "the kingdom of social truth (justice) on earth," to impress upon society and the state the hitherto neglected social ideals of Christianity. (Bociurkiw 1984, 329)

One can not but detect in these words the beginnings of a global consciousness that may indeed have blossomed had the UAOC been able to continue its work in Ukraine. It was the embodiment of an effort to remedy a situation which had led the Russian theologian, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, to lament that "culture has been secularized, separated from the Church so that the Church has now been relegated to a position where it is considered simply as one department of culture" (Bulgakov 205). The founders of the UAOC believed that the Church could play a leading role in cultural and social change. They had a vision of a Christian community that could successfully balance between the two apparent extremes of "renunciation of the world and the acceptance of the time" (Bulgakov 193) so as to bring the people of Ukraine into the life of the twentieth century as partners in a world community. They envisioned a Church which would be a "compound of universalism and particularism," which Salo Wittmayer Baron considered to be "historically represented by the Russian Orthodox Church" (Baron 212), but which is a feature of Orthodoxy in general. Bociurkiw felt that the UAOC, while lacking the canonical status enjoyed by the Russian Orthodox Church, "probably came closer [than did the ROC] to the Orthodox ideal of the Christianization of popular life" (Bociurkiw 1988, 318).

Now the chance has come once again. The UAOC is once more alive and visible in Ukraine. Its existence is tenuous, dependent upon the fickle good-will of the arbiters of Soviet life in Moscow, as well as upon its acceptance into the world-wide family of the Orthodox Church. The Patriarchate of Moscow is bound to oppose the latter with all the desperation derived from the fact that some two-thirds of its constituent communities are in Ukraine (Dunlop 295).

The words of caution by Fr. Meyendorff are well worth noting by leaders of both the UAOC and the Patriarchate of Moscow:

it is extremely important to recognize that on the secular level (and we are always part of the secular order except in the Eucharist) our practical choices are not between absolute Good and absolute Evil. We always have to choose a "better" solution or even the "lesser evil." (Meyendorff 1926, 142)

The choices faced by the UAOC and its friends throughout the world are not black and white ones. It will be necessary to struggle to find a balance between the ideal proposed by the Ukrainian Orthodox hierarch Metropolitan Ilarion Ohienko that "service to the people is service to God" (Ohienko 2), and Meyendorff's "essence of the Christian message," which the Russian theologian contrasted with the "disease" of nationalism (Meyendorff 1962, 144). For the two, particularism and universalism, must be made compatible. The citizen of heaven must translate his commitment into life in the kingdom of the earth. The Christian must avoid giving in to what Fr. Krawchenko named the "two basic temptations concerning (the) Church and culture," which he related to two Christological heresies: "Monophysitism" which stresses the *Divine* at the expense of the human (the Church at the expense of culture) and 'Nestorianism' which stresses the

human at the expense of the Divine (*culture* at the expense of the Church)" (Krawchenko 1988, 10). If it can successfully integrate the two, as every Orthodox Church is called upon to do, the UAOC can help the people of Ukraine pass through the stage of nationalism to global consciousness, fulfilling what A.M. Allchin also defines as the call of each nation: "to be true to the whole of its heritage, and by being true to its own heritage . . . to make its specific contribution to mankind as a whole" (Allchin 84).

Notes

1. The title is derived from an address by Bohdan Hawrylyshyn, Professor of the International Management Institute of Geneva, Switzerland, to the First International Dialogue on the Transition to Global Society, September 3-9, 1990, at the Landegg Academy in Wienacht, Switzerland, in which he stated that some East Bloc societies "will have to pass through a stage of nationalism before becoming 'globally conscious'" (Highlights to Proceedings, Dr. James Malarkey, p. 3).
2. Viktor Frankl's "logotherapy" links psychological health of individuals with their discovery of meaning even in dehumanizing situations. Regarding the importance of the story, one might look to the "narrative theology" of Stanley Hauerwas. What applies to individuals may also apply on a wider scale to communities and societies.
3. I use the Ukrainian form "Kyiv" in place of the Russian "Kiev;" the virtually universal acceptance of the Russian name is but another testimony to the submerging of the cultures of subjugated peoples by the Moscow Empire tragically condoned by the world community.

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