

CHURCHES IN THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS



EDITED BY ANDRII KRAWCHUK
AND THOMAS BREMER



Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis

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Editors

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INTRODUCTION

Andrii Krawchuk

In November 2013, when citizens of Ukraine gathered at the Maidan, Kyiv's central square, to protest against a president who had reneged on his promise to sign a trade agreement with the European Union, no one foresaw that they would lead to a massacre of innocent civilians. The state-sanctioned atrocity precipitated a rapid sequence of events that were just as unexpected: a regime change and Russian military intervention. Ukraine's president fled the country, a provisional government was put in place, and Russia annexed Crimea and intervened militarily in the eastern region of Donbas.

Dubbed the Euromaidan, or the "Revolution of Dignity," the popular protests that set this process in motion represented far more than mere disagreement about an economic accord. They manifested a new civic consciousness, the embrace of Western ideas of political accountability, and an unprecedented level of solidarity in a common quest for social and political change. From the very beginning, the uprising had also included members of various Christian churches in Ukraine, who stood together in protest and prayer. In some instances, the churches of Ukraine and their leaders assumed a leading role on the front lines; in others, they were swept up in a wave of transformation and had to catch up with new visions of identity, solidarity, and international relations. Even as Ukraine's social and political foundations were shaken, a new context had emerged for serious reflection about the future of Christian churches in a post-Soviet environment. The aim of the present collection is to study the churches in the Ukrainian crisis and to analyze how their historical journeys, sense of identity, models of governance, interpretation of the conflict with Russia, and visions of peaceful relations informed their participation in, and responses to, the changes that began in November 2013.

Up to the Maidan, several studies of religion in post-Soviet environments had centered on Orthodoxy in Russia. Whether analyzing Russian Orthodox political culture since 2000 (Richters, 2013) or tracing the evolution of Russian religious policy since the end of communism (Fagan, 2013), these contributions approached the religious situation immediately preceding Ukraine's Euromaidan from a political perspective. Other more recent works have usefully reconstructed the diverse contexts of the crisis in Ukraine, whether historical (Yekelchyk, 2015; Kalb, 2015) or political (Wilson, 2014; Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2015; Wood et al., 2016), but left aside the religious dimension.

The institutional and social dimensions of religion in Eastern Europe on the eve of the Ukrainian Crisis were the subject of several groundbreaking studies: a comprehensive, analytical overview of issues and challenges faced by Eastern Christian communities throughout the world (Leustean, 2014); an exploration of Orthodox identities in Eastern and Central Europe, Orthodox perceptions of other cultures and values, and the prospects of dialogue across religious and cultural boundaries (Krawchuk and Bremer, 2014); and analyses of critical Orthodox approaches to human rights (Brüning and van der Zweerde, 2012) and to the West (Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou, 2013).

Very shortly after the Euromaidan and the Russian military interventions in Ukraine, two special issues of journals introduced the study of the religious situation in Ukraine resulting from the crisis. The *East–West Church and Ministry Report's* issue 22:3 (Elliott, 2014) provided three full-length articles and a number of shorter notes on the impact of the Ukrainian Crisis on Protestant and other Christian churches of Ukraine. In 2014, it was the best available early snapshot of where Ukraine's churches stood and how they were affected by the social upheaval. In the following year, the Swiss journal *Euzeinos* published a special issue (Wanner, 2015) on religion and the political crisis in Ukraine that broadened the scope of scholarship with five in-depth analyses of the challenges faced by Orthodox, Jews, Muslims, and Protestants of Ukraine after the Maidan. Each of these two collections was a significant contribution in its own right and both paved the way for further academic research.

In Ukraine, the comprehensive, analytical documentary collection *Maidan i Tserkva* (Fylypovych and Horkusha, 2015) was quickly recognized as an indispensable resource for understanding the Euromaidan's religious dimension. It was supplemented in the following year by a unique collection of eyewitness testimonies from the Euromaidan, *Maidan. Svidchennia* (Finberg and Holovach, 2016), which also provides a wealth of primary source data and insights.

In November 2014, the German Association for East European Studies organized a conference on “The Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis” in Freising, Germany. The aim of the conference was to examine key themes and issues arising in the life of Orthodox and Catholic churches as a result of the social and political upheavals in Ukraine. Proceeding from papers and discussions at that conference, this volume studies the churches of Ukraine as participants in the movement for social justice and human dignity that began at the Euromaidan and continued during the ensuing crisis. It presents the historical development of Ukraine’s traditional churches; their pursuit of autocephaly, or ecclesiastical autonomy; their active promotion of national consciousness and identity; their interpretations of the war and its causes; and their paths to unity and peace.

Part I gives a historical background on the Christian churches of Ukraine, with critical insights into the evolution of Kyivan Christianity since its origin in the tenth century. The theological dimension of that story sheds light on later efforts to restore church unity, on the emergence of ecumenical ideas, and on the perennial formulation and revision of religious identities. Political factors have also shaped the story of Christianity in Ukraine—long before, during, and since the crisis of 2014.

Thomas Bremer outlines the development of religious communities in Ukraine leading up to the Euromaidan of 2013–2014. After reviewing the sequence of political environments which shaped Ukraine’s religious history—Poland, imperial Russia, Austria, Germany, and the USSR—he introduces the key players in the contemporary Ukrainian religious scene: the Orthodox Churches of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Kyivan Patriarchate, and the Autocephalous Church, as well as the Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Churches. In post-Soviet Ukraine, the majority Orthodox jurisdiction (of the Moscow Patriarchate) experienced significant departures by its members—first to the Greek Catholic Church and then to the Patriarchate of Kyiv.

Yury Avvakumov introduces the little-understood Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. He sketches the main features of its turbulent history, from the union with Rome (1595–1596) to its liquidation by the Soviets in 1946 and the resurgence of the church since the early 1990s. He describes the church’s unique identity in terms of ecclesiological liminality, or “in-between-ness”—with the Byzantine Greek Orthodoxy of its Kyivan origins on one side and, on the other, the Catholic universality that followed its unification with Rome. Often criticized as a handicap, this liminality has also served as a catalyst for reform, intellectual creativity, and social engagement.

Part II explores a pivotal issue for the churches of Ukraine: autocephaly, or ecclesiastical independence. A crucial provision of Orthodox Church law, this principle and its practical implementation had tremendous political implications in the past and remains the focus of intense debates today. Beyond the changes of political boundaries between Ukraine and Russia over time, perhaps the most significant determinant of their relationship has been the degree of Orthodox autocephaly in Ukraine. Indeed, the very structure and dynamics of religion in Ukraine have often been assessed according to the extent of their subordination to Russia or, conversely, the degree of their ecclesiastical independence.

Paul Bruslanowski studies this complex question from the perspective of canon law, from its first emergence in the early Christian centuries to its practical consolidation in nineteenth-century southeastern Europe. He then surveys the modern implementation of the principle up to the present day. He argues that, while the procedures for granting autocephaly have always been subject to change, a significant obstacle to its most recent resolution in Ukraine was that it was not placed on the agenda for the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016.

Alfons Brüning examines the interplay of shared Russian and Ukrainian historical experiences and competing visions of autocephaly. Drawing upon Pierre Nora's concept of sites of memory, the study compares different Russian and Ukrainian historiographic approaches to understanding the branches of Eastern Christianity that trace their origins to Kyivan Rus'. In addition to the establishment of Orthodox Metropolitan sees in Moscow and Kyiv and the subsequent subordination of Kyiv to Moscow, the inquiry assesses the efforts to restore Christian unity at the councils of Florence and Brest.

Part III situates the transformation of Russia-Ukraine relations during the Ukrainian crisis, which generated heated identity debates. When hard choices had to be made, whom did the churches really represent and what values would they defend? Contrary to the Western media's simplified, convenient line of geographic demarcation between a "Russian-speaking east" and a "Ukrainian-speaking west," the reality on the ground was far more complex. As the crisis unfolded, family ties began to unravel and opposing convictions came to the fore. Even those citizens of Ukraine who are perfectly bilingual and bicultural, and those who belong to the multiethnic military fraternity that served in Afghanistan, felt the effects of the polarization that swept through the country. For their part, the churches of Ukraine responded to the crisis on two fronts: internally, they

experienced and addressed the same divisiveness and polarization as that which prevailed in the rest of society; and in the public sphere, they had to choose between a stand for democratization or for a return to Soviet ways.

Natalia Kochan demonstrates how the revolutionary developments of 2013–2014 and the subsequent Russian war against Ukraine introduced a new phase of national identity formation in Ukraine. She describes the key patterns of that process: a shift from ethnic to civic nationalism, a transition from criminal oligarchies to legitimate authority, and social solidarity around democratic values. In each of these transitions, the Christian churches played a proactive role, adapting to and supporting the reorientation of civic consciousness in Ukrainian society from a totalitarian to a democratic paradigm.

Lidiya Lozova's reflection gives an eyewitness, personal account of the response of one Ukrainian Orthodox parish in Lyshnia, near Kyiv, to the events of 2014. From its dedicated pastor to its politically diverse community, this parish responded effectively to internal differences of perspective on the crisis, and mobilized humanitarian aid for the Ukrainian war effort. The case study provides a moving testimony of grassroots social action that is driven by a profound spiritual vision and by a higher sense of religious identity that refused to buy into the social polarization of the war.

Part IV shifts the focus of attention to Russian Orthodox official and unofficial interpretations of the war. Whether in its headquarters at the Danilov Monastery in Moscow or in the person of its Ukrainian affiliate, the Moscow Patriarchate is by far the single largest religious player on both sides of the Ukrainian crisis. In Russia, Patriarch Kirill toed the line associated with his concept of the Russian world. In Ukraine, some of his co-religionists followed their leader, but after Russian military intervention numerous bishops adopted an unequivocally pro-Ukrainian posture. The heightened political tensions between Russia and Ukraine also raised security concerns about a church inside Ukraine whose community was (potentially) loyal to the aggressor state. This prompted renewed explorations of ecclesiastical independence from Russia. The Patriarchate took pains to hold things together with a religious interpretation of the theme of Russian political power. Two penetrating analyses of Russian Orthodox thinking about the Ukrainian crisis shed valuable light on the underlying issues of the conflict and on its very nature.

Mikhail Suslov presents the Russian Orthodox Church as a key stakeholder in the religious scene in Ukraine, which put forward a multilayered interpretation of the military conflict that broke out in 2014.

He analyzes three levels of Russian Orthodox interpretation: the integral self-perception of the Russian Church and its reluctance to entertain ecclesiastical autocephaly in Ukraine; the search by church leaders for a coherent conceptual framework for understanding the crisis in Ukraine; and the efforts of Orthodox bloggers to express through powerful images the crisis as a religious war. Beneath the intensive search for a new church paradigm there is a profound rethinking of Russia's relationship with Ukraine—and the world.

Cyril Hovorun explains the origin and nature of the conflict in Ukraine in connection with the notion of the “Russian world.” In support of this idea of Russian hegemonic power, the Russian Orthodox Church has been co-opted to promote a sense of external threats to Christian morality, its own superiority as a Russian Orthodox civilization and an ethos of confrontation. Yet, contrary to Samuel Huntington's prediction that post-Cold War conflicts would center on differences of civilization rather than of ideology, the conflicts in Georgia (2007) and Ukraine (2014) have pitted people of the same Russian (Orthodox) civilization against one another. Examining parallels with nineteenth-century German nationalism, the author finds that the conflict in Ukraine is not really between Russia and the West, but between the desire to return to “Soviet” statism and the contrary desire to establish the common good as a responsibility of the state.

The concluding part considers the implications of the Euromaidan and the armed conflict with Russia for church unity and religious cooperation. For Orthodox citizens of Ukraine, the Euromaidan demonstrations in Kyiv and the war were turning points in which a difficult choice had to be made: either to take the side of civic loyalty to Ukraine and to join the struggle to defend its border, or to align oneself with the mother church in Russia. As the dramatic sequence unfolded from protest to massacre and revolt, then from the occupation of Crimea to the hybrid conflict in eastern Ukraine, Orthodox and other religious communities faced their own internal challenges, yet also demonstrated a desire for creative reflection on encounter and cooperation across religious boundaries.

Andrii Krawchuk examines the polarization of civic and ecclesial loyalties in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate after the Euromaidan and Russia's military interventions. Attentive to the socio-political paradigm shift in Ukraine, Orthodox bishops and theologians developed an alternative line of thinking about the identity of their church and its future orientation. The author identifies and analyzes five principles

of the church's identity that leading Orthodox figures developed through a critical reflection on the church's social engagement and response to the signs of the times.

Katrin Boeckh studies the effects of Ukraine's Euromaidan and Russian military intervention in Ukraine on the religious communities of Ukraine and their ecumenical relations. The uprising, against a president who reneged on his promise to sign an agreement with the EU, drew support from virtually all religious groups. As the conflict ensued, severe oppression of religion took place in the occupied eastern regions, while in the rest of Ukraine religious diversity and cooperation have become key elements in working out a new vision for the future.

This is the first thematically unified and comprehensive scholarly treatment of the churches in the Ukrainian crisis, a conflict that commands global attention. Collectively and in each individual chapter, the contributors shed much light on the religious implications of the war in Ukraine, a country that remains very closely attached to its predominantly Christian identity. It will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the religious underpinnings of Russian-Ukrainian relations, an age-old relationship whose foundations have been tested by hostility and conflict many times before, and whose prospects of peaceful resolution in the present situation will no doubt again depend on the ability of religious thinkers and leaders to contribute to the discovery of common truth behind so many contentious issues.

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PART I

Historical Background

Religion in Ukraine: Historical Background and the Present Situation

Thomas Bremer

Of all the successor states of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine is probably the country with the most complicated and difficult religious situation. Although it is predominantly Orthodox, because of major splits there are several competing Orthodox Churches in the country. Ukraine is also home to a large group of Catholics, most of whom are Greek Catholics, following the Eastern rite yet also acknowledging the authority of the Roman pope. Ukraine is predominantly Christian, but there is a traditional presence of Muslims in Crimea; there is also a Jewish community, which before World War II was very large and important. This community is now again experiencing growth. Protestants in the region consisted largely of German settlers and their descendants, but today there are numerous Protestant congregations, for the most part Baptist or Pentecostal. These congregations were established in recent years and are mostly composed of ethnic Ukrainians. For some 70 years, a major part of the country was subject to militant atheism (the western regions for 40 years). Nevertheless, religiosity in Ukraine is one of the highest of all the former Soviet countries.¹

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Such data reveal the diversity of Ukraine's religious situation. In the crisis which the region has experienced since 2013, its religious communities have played important, albeit differing, roles. Their significance is linked to the fact that the history and contemporary status of all Ukraine's religious communities are narrowly connected with an "identity"—all these religious communities somehow relate to a group identity, which may be a national identity, or a political identity, or both. In order to better understand the importance of religion in Ukraine and the perspectives of its different religious communities, it is worthwhile to consider their historical development.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND²

Ukraine is not, as one frequently reads, split neatly into a western and eastern part. Rather, the country consists of several regions, which have their own particular historical development and traditions, but which nevertheless form a unified state, even though present-day independent Ukraine was only established in 1991, when the Soviet Union finally disintegrated.

Historically, the greatest external influences on religion in Ukraine came from Russia, Poland, and Austria. For centuries, large parts of Ukraine belonged to Russia. Ukrainians were regarded by many Russians as "Little Russians," which means that they were not seen as a distinct nation, but rather as a similar national entity at the periphery of the Russian Empire. Anyone who wanted to make a career in czarist Russia had to be fluent in Russian, the lingua franca of the empire and any non-Russian speaking peasants in the largely agricultural Ukraine were regarded as backward. Ukrainian writers such as Nikolai Gogol and Mikhail Bulgakov wrote in Russian and were regarded as representatives of Russian culture.

During the period of czarist Russian domination, the legal context for religious communities in Ukraine was the same as in Russia proper. Orthodoxy was the predominant religion, and the Orthodox Church in the region was part of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The metropolitan was a senior bishop of the ROC, and was under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarch (or the Most Holy Synod in St. Petersburg, after the patriarchate was abandoned in the early eighteenth century). Until the Manifesto of Tolerance, which was issued by the Czar in 1905, no ethnic Russian (or Ukrainian) was allowed to leave

the Orthodox Church. Only ethnic Germans, Poles, Lithuanians, and others could belong to another Christian church, whether Catholic or Protestant.

After World War I, the situation changed dramatically. The October Revolution terminated any idea of a predominant church. Religion was separated from the state, which meant that not only was there no longer a state church, but that all churches were subject to harsh persecutions that began immediately. In the first few years following the October Revolution, the new rulers accepted and even supported the creation of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, since they claimed to fight not only for the liberation of the working class, but also for the liberation of the subjugated nations.³ A national Ukrainian Church, which would compete with the Russian Church was, therefore, seen as an ally in fighting the dominance of the ROC. However, after a short time this state support ceased, and the Ukrainian Church became subject to persecution as did any form of religion in the Soviet Union; in 1936, the Ukrainian Church ceased to exist. It should also be said that, during its short period of existence, the Ukrainian Church failed to get a bishop on its side, which meant that there were no valid ordinations. In 1921, priests who supported this church elected a metropolitan from among themselves, and ordained him by a collective laying on of hands, arguing that this was the practice of the apostles themselves. However, Orthodox Church law and theology require ordination by a bishop, and this meant that the Ukrainian Church, from its very beginning, lacked validity as far as its hierarchy was concerned.

It is important to note that, during the German occupation of parts of Ukraine during World War II, the German authorities supported Orthodoxy and tried to organize the establishment of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church. To this end, and with a view to gaining the confidence of the population, in 1941 the German authorities used Russian bishops in exile to install a hierarchy and to ordain bishops. After the defeat of the German forces, some of these bishops settled in the West and emigrated to North America. There they installed a Ukrainian Orthodox hierarchy, which was in communion with the patriarchate of Constantinople (which claims jurisdiction over Orthodox Churches in non-Orthodox countries). This church served and still serves Ukrainian believers in North America and other Western countries, but due to the political circumstances following World War II, it could not be active in the Soviet Union. However, this church made the idea of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church independent from Moscow a reality, and it could boast a canonically valid hierarchy.

The Austrian influence in Ukraine largely concerns the Greek Catholic Church, which is based in the western part of the country. After the division of Poland in the late eighteenth century, the Habsburg Empire gained Galicia and Transcarpathia, where Greek Catholics predominated. As in other Austrian areas (Romania, Croatia), the government encouraged the conversion of the Orthodox to Eastern Catholicism, since Catholics were not subject to the jurisdiction of a foreign church, but to one of the Catholic bishops in the country. When a strong Ukrainian national consciousness arose among Greek Catholic intellectuals, it was supported by the Greek Catholic Church.⁴ This gave a strong impetus to the development of the Ukrainian language, the study of history, and the development of a uniquely Ukrainian literature. The Ukrainians of Galicia came to feel that they were the “true” Ukrainians and they tried to propagate this national sense of belonging in ethnic Ukrainian territories under Russian dominance—an effort which conflicted with the Russian understanding of “Little Russians.” However, this attempt was in accordance with Austrian interests—that is, to prevent either Polish or Russian national sentiments from prevailing. Today, there is no longer any Austrian national consciousness in Ukraine but, historically, the presence of Austrians was regarded as significant.

The Polish influence, like the Russian influence, also dates back many centuries. Historically, Poland had been a mighty empire (partly in personal union with Lithuania) and, for a long period, it ruled over large areas of Central Eastern Europe—as such, it was a rival of Russia. It was under Polish dominance that the Union of Brest took place in 1596, which despite its difficult beginnings eventually assumed a pivotal place in the religious history of Ukraine. The church which emerged from the union did not survive in the regions where it was founded, but only in the areas which later came under Austrian rule. The Polish influence on religion in Ukraine resulted largely from the presence of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). After the re-establishment of the Polish state in 1918, Poland gained areas (including Galicia) which, in the Partitions of Poland (in the late eighteenth century), had been turned over to either Russia or Austria. The Polish state tried to “polonize” those recovered areas, and the RCC served as a tool in this aim. Indeed, to be Roman Catholic meant to be Polish; the Catholic Church (of the Western or “Latin” rite) therefore enjoyed certain privileges. This led to serious conflict between Eastern and Western Catholics, and also with Orthodox Christians, and Jews (who in some places constituted the majority of the population). This is why,

even today, many people consider the RCC in Ukraine a “Polish” church, regardless of its attempts to be accepted as a Ukrainian Church. In 1944, these interwar Polish territories became part of Soviet Ukraine.

In addition to Russia, Austria, and Poland, there were other external influences on religion in Ukraine. Crimea, occupied and annexed by Russia in 2014 on the pretext of its allegedly long Russian history, was for many centuries predominantly Turkish. There remains a strong Muslim presence on the peninsula to this day, and it would have been even greater if the Tartars had not been deported during World War II. German settlers also lived in Ukraine for a long time; they too were deported at the beginning of World War II to Siberia, Kazakhstan, and other areas of the Soviet Union. While still in Ukraine, these Germans had been members of the Lutheran and Baptist communities.

After World War II, western Ukraine came under Soviet rule. In 1954, Crimea was separated from the Russian Soviet Republic, to which it had belonged, and given to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. This was for very concrete reasons: Crimea has no land connection with Russia, and it receives its energy supply and drinking water from the Ukrainian mainland. It therefore made sense to administer the peninsula from Ukraine. Since both Soviet republics belonged to the same country, the Soviet Union, this was of little significance at the time. No one expected that this would be at the center of an international conflict some 60 years later.

The Soviet regime in Ukraine implemented the same religious policy as in the other republics of the Soviet Union. For Orthodoxy, the ROC was the only legal church. The Kyiv metropolitan was an “exarch” of the church and an *ex officio* member of the Synod in Moscow. The RCC continued to exist in some places, but lacked any hierarchy. In Ukraine, there were a handful of individual RCC priests who celebrated Mass, but there was no proper church structure. In the Soviet Union, only Latvia and Lithuania had a proper RCC hierarchy. In 1946, the Greek Catholic Church was outlawed and violently merged with the ROC.⁵ All church buildings and parishes were turned over to the ROC. Any priest who resisted faced dire consequences. All thirteen bishops were arrested and exiled—only one survived and was allowed to leave the country for Rome in the 1960s. The Church continued to exist illegally in the underground. The Soviet authorities knew about this, but did not interfere.

Such was the situation in Soviet Ukraine until the late 1980s, when Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev launched perestroika, a process that would eventually reverse the fortunes of the religious communities in Ukraine.