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THE IDEA OF A NATIONAL CHURCH IN THE UKRAINIAN INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The reception of the idea of a national church in the Ukrainian intellectual environment in the context of current socio-political events in the country is examined here. Among the most influential Ukrainian religious scholars, there is a dominant idea that the formation of a national church is a part of the state formation and security of the country. They opposed historical distortions of this idea, as it occurs in case of ethnophyletism—domination of the national over the ecclesiastical, and etatism—the domination of the state, imperial (in the form of the Orthodox empire) over the ecclesiastical. Signs of these distortions are observed in the modern Russian Orthodox Church. They were recognized by the participants of the Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete in 2016. In Ukraine, a fundamentally different model is being formed, which presupposes the unity of religious and national values on the basis of synergy. According to such criteria, a national church is the church of any denomination that bears the national idea—independence of the country, promotes the development and preservation of

the national culture, in particular its language, represents the idea of a sovereign state in various religious centers and institutions including the center of its jurisdiction. The concept of “a national church” is not synonymous with the concept of “a national religion.” In Ukraine, within the same confession, there are ideologically opposing Orthodox churches (Ukrainocentric and Moscow-centric)—the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (PCU) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP). Similar to the concept of “a national church” is the concept of “national religious associations.” In terms of the Ukrainian reality, these include the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (formed in December 2018), the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, and various ethnic communities of Ukrainian neo-pagans, as well as some Muslim organizations, especially those who care for the Crimean ethno-autochthon—the Crimean Tatars. Therefore, in Ukraine, most churches support the country's progressive development. But none of them influences the majority of the population, and therefore can claim to be the only national church.

Keywords: national church, national religion, ethnophyletism, etatism, churches or religious organizations with national orientation (national religious associations).

Introduction

The restoration of the cultural and spiritual traditions and historical identity of the Ukrainian people by many scholars, public figures, and cultural figures is associated with the formation of the national church. For Ukraine, the idea of a national church is not a new one, but the one that echoes the ideas of national liberation revolutions of the 18th to 19th centuries. In the 21st century, it has become particularly important in the context of understanding the existence of the national church as an integral element of the national idea.

Problems related to the criteria of the national church in Ukraine always gain popularity in times of social upheavals: the 17th century, the beginning and the end of the 20th century, the Orange Maidan (2004), the Euromaidan, the Revolution of Dignity (2013), annexation of the Crimea by Russia, and the ongoing war in the east of Ukraine since 2014. In such circumstances, the public request for “a national church” is an element not only of ethnic, but also of state-building and security, a component of a civil society development. In this regard, Professor A. Kolodnyi, President of the Ukrainian Association of Religious Scientists rightly remarked: “... building of the Ukrainian statehood, the revival of the

Ukrainian culture are closely connected with the realization of the idea of building the Ukrainian National Church.”¹

Definition and Differentiation between the Concepts

The concept of “a national church” has different aspects for consideration. It is mostly theologians who are concerned with this concept and see a significant danger in shifting the church doctrine and practice toward national peculiarities. In theology and religious studies, there is even the term “ethnophyletism,” which means “domination of the national over the ecclesiastical” that Orthodox theologians interpret as heresy.

The phenomenon of etatism is related to ethnophyletism and paradigmatically oriented to the construction of Orthodox state-political entities. Etatism refers to a political doctrine aimed at the establishment (revival) of the “Orthodox state” and “Orthodox monarchy” as the only possible model for the further coexistence of the true believers, which occurs under the condition of recognition of the Empire “not just a secular apparatus, but a mysterious soteriological organism, that prevents the coming of the antichrist.”² The purpose of the etatists ideology is the political union of “Orthodox peoples.” This goal involves the cultivation of the idea of an Orthodox state and inter-ethnic unity (empire); recognizing the messianic role of an individual nation as a way of salvation for other nations.³

In retrospect, now and again ethno-phyletism and etatism are interrelated phenomena, because the national-centric model of the church needs its state-bearer. For example, in the case of the formation of the “Second Rome” paradigm, these phenomena developed synchronously in historical and ideological contexts. The ideology of etatism was finally formed as a result of the division of the empire into West and East, and also during the existence of the Kingdom of Nicaea (13th c.).

During this period, Eastern Christianity began to be called Greek, and Western Christianity started to be called Latin. “The great idea” in the interpretation of the Greeks involved profession of only the Orthodox faith, fostering Hellenic culture, the Greek language, etc.⁴

¹ А. Колодний, *Національна Церква українців як форма їх духовного самовираження*. Центр дослідження духовної культури Тернопілля, 2013.

² О. Н. Саган, *Вселенське православ'я: суть, історія, сучасний стан*, (Київ: Світ Знань, 2004), р. 64.

³ К. Костюк, *Три портрета. Соціально-етическіе воззрення в Русской Православной Церкви конца XX века* (митрополит Иоанн Снычев, протоиерей Александр Мень, митрополит Кирилл).

⁴ О. Н. Саган, *Вселенське православ'я: суть, історія, сучасний стан*, р. 245.

The Greeks began to identify Orthodoxy with their own people and the only one empire, creating a monopoly on Orthodox religion. After the loss of etatists charisma of Constantinople, its place was gradually occupied by the Moscow Orthodoxy, which put forward the slogan “unity of brothers in faith” led by Moscow. During this period, the etatists idea was transformed into a confrontation between Hellenism and Slavism (the idea of the “Second” and “Third” Rome). The doctrine of Constantinopolitan megalomania gave way to the doctrine of pan-Slavism, which was later, in the 19th century embodied in the “theory of official nationality” of Sergey Uvarov and was boldly reflected in such expression as “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality.” The most threatening manifestation of etatists ideology is that, in substantiating the doctrines of “gathering lands,” “protection of the faithful,” “the protection of the true faith,” it actually serves as an excuse for external expansion, and thus serves as an instrument for political leverage or playing politics.⁵

If etatism is a purely Orthodox phenomenon, then ethnophyletism can be extrapolated to peoples and states—bearers of other religious systems, which partly occurs when we speak about national and state religions.

Both etatism and ethnophyletism are historical distortions of the idea of the national church, because they offer a false hierarchy of principles, reinforcing the political: state, ethnic, and then national (that is, local) at the expense of the universal—the Christian ideas of equality of all people before God. Likewise, etatism and ethnophyletism are inadmissible from the standpoint of the basic ethical principles of the modern civilization: tolerance, respect and recognition of equal dignity of all people, regardless of their ethnic or racial origin.

The phenomenon of a national church, whose mission is to promote the formation and development of a nation is a different situation. In such a paradigm, Christian and national values interact on the basis of synergy. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to consider the phenomenon of “a national church” in the context of religious and social development of Ukraine. Why is this formulation of the problem important not only for Ukrainian, but also for world theology and religious studies?

In Western religious studies, investigation of the problems of “national churches” and the close link between nations and religion do not cause any debates. After all, nobody disputes the fact that the emergence of “the first modern nation—the English—is connected

⁵ Н. В. Ішук, *Соціальна адаптація православ'я: філософський аналіз*. Дисертація на здобуття наукового ступеня кандидата філософських наук. – Спеціальність 09.00.03 – соціальна філософія та філософія історії. (Kyiv: НАУ, 2007), pp. 95-96.

with the emergence of the first national church.”⁶ However, this is an extremely fundamental question for the Ukrainian reality. It raises resistance in the perception of some Ukrainian scholars, who criticize even the formulation of such questions.⁷ The supporters of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine are also expected to protest. Relevantly, in Soviet times the concept of “a national church” was not used at all in the scientific literature. Communist ideological institutions considered any developments on this subject as a possible factor in the formation of national consciousness.

The rise of the national-religious movements in the late 1980s and the revival of the Autocephalous Orthodox, and later the Greek Catholic churches in the territory of Ukraine, led to the widespread use of the term “national church” in various church, political, and publicistic documents.

However, the interpretation of the term by different authors of these documents is frequently the contradictory. Some scholars consider the national church as the carrier and protector of national identity. Others prefer the criterion of a territorial location, when the historically formed and operating within nation states church is called national.

After Ukraine's declaration of independence, studies of thinkers and ecclesiastical figures of the Ukrainian diaspora, whose names were banned in Soviet times, became widely available. In the diaspora, the notion of a “national church” was most often revealed through the functionality of churches in the public sphere. For example, nowadays, well known are the works of Metropolitan Ivan Ogienko, I. Vlasovsky, A. Richinsky and other researchers who wrote about the national development of the universality of Christianity, the calling of the church to serve its people or the duty of the clergy to preserve folk culture, and so on.

However, the “new” literature in the early 90's did not remove those difficulties, and often opened up speculation concerning the term “national church.” The most common mistakes are trying to replace the notion of “a national church” with the notion of “a state church,” or to declare the analysis of the concept of “a national church” to be archaic or “a return to the past.”

It should be noted that the Orthodox theologians of the Moscow Patriarchate also joined the critics of this term. In particular, they actively speculate on the ecclesiastical doctrine of heresy of ethnophyletism and accuse the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (and before

⁶ See more: В. Єленський, *Велике повернення: релігія у глобальній політиці та міжнародних відносинах кінця XX – початку XXI століття*. (Львів: Вид-во Українського католицького університету, 2013), р. 85.

⁷ See more about this in: *Релігійний чинник у процесах націє- та державотворення: досвід сучасної України* [Монографія]. (Київ.: Інститут політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І.Ф. Кураса НАН України, 2012).

its constitution—the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, suggesting the term “ethnophyletic” as synonymous with “non-canonical” and “unblessed.”⁸

In our view, the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the canonically subordinate Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) have neither factual nor moral grounds for such accusations. Moreover, there are grave fears that the ROC and its satellite—the UOC MP (more properly called the Russian Church in Ukraine), are now displaying their own tendency for both ethnophyletism and etatism. The current stage of etatization and ethnophyletization of the Russian Orthodox Church (and thus the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate) is expressed in its support of the militaristic policy of the current Russian authorities regarding the “gathering of Russian lands.” Here are just a few examples based on the official documents of this church and the rhetoric of its leaders. Particularly noteworthy is the doctrine of “multipolar society,” which was opposed to the Catholic doctrine of “unification of Christian Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals,” proposed at the end of the 20th century by Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyayev).⁹

“Memorandum of the Expert Center of the World Russian National Council on Russophobia” approved on April 28, 2015, is important for the awareness of the tendencies that occur in the Russian Orthodox Church. The document states that the religious identity of the Russians is linked to Orthodoxy, “which created an impetus for the development of Russian statehood and the formation of the best features of Russian national character” when “persecution” of Orthodoxy is recognized as manifestations of Russophobia. Russophobia is proclaimed “not only an ethnic, but a civilizational, geopolitical, cultural phenomenon, aimed at undermining the basic values of Russia and its neighboring countries, which “historically belong to our civilization and share our basic values.”¹⁰

Regarding the rhetoric of the leaders of this church, significant is the Annunciation of Patriarch Kirill held immediately after the annexation of the Crimea (2014), in which he did not condemn the annexation at all, but made an excursion into the history of gathering lands by Moscow “from ocean to ocean,” exalting the wisdom of the Russian rulers and courage of

⁸ See more detailed analysis of the policy of Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate on this issue: С.М. Чокалюк, *Національне питання в Церкві або «єресь» етнофілетизму* // Київська Православна Богословська Академія. <http://kpba.edu.ua/statti/1888-natsionalne-pytannia-v-tserkvi-abo-ieres-etnofiletizmu.html>

⁹ Кирилл, (Гундяев), митр. Смолен. и Калинин. “Обстоятельства нового времени: либерализм, традиционализм и моральные ценности объединяющейся Европы” // НГ – *Религии*.26.05.1999.

¹⁰ Меморандум экспертного центра Всемирного русского народного собора о русофобии.

the Russian army and their mission of defending the Orthodox faith before God.¹¹ The position of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding the war in Donbas is similar. It is a resonant statement made by the head of the Synodal Relations Department of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Society, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, on the nobility of the “peacekeeping” mission of the Russian troops in Donbas.¹² However, after his statement, he was fired for unknown reasons.

The duality of the standards of the Moscow Patriarchate is so glaring that it is severely criticized for it by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who finds it impermissible to set political priorities above the ecclesiastical ones.¹³ Even the participants in the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 in Crete openly accused the Russian Orthodox Church of the heresy of ethnophyletism, since they had placed the national priorities above the ecclesiastical ones.¹⁴ Such criticism is quite fair. After all, by its nature and activity, the Moscow Patriarchate emerged as a purely national, in fact a Moscow (Russian) phenomenon with significant features of government involvement. At one time, a religious scholar (proclaimed by the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church as saint), A. Richynsky noted that “supranational” Christianity, “as evidenced by the context of the world history, is upheld by those who seek to mask the national hegemony of some people and to disturb the others.”¹⁵

Principles of Formation of a National Church in Ukraine

What underlies the formation of the national church? In our opinion, we should first of all talk about the ethno-confessional specificity of religion (a combination of ethnic and religious aspects).¹⁶ This combination forms ethno-confessional communities—one of the most important factors in shaping the self-identification of individuals as representatives of a particular nationality or nation. And this, after all, can be a decisive factor in the state-making process.

The experience of many countries shows that during periods of historic breakthroughs, the formation of ethno-confessional communities has depended, to a large

¹¹ “Проповедь Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла в праздник Благовещения Пресвятой Богородицы в Благовещенском соборе Московского Кремля.” Официальный сайт Покровской Епархии Русская Православная Церковь Московского Патриархата, 2014.

¹² Протоиерей Всеволод Чаплин рассматривает миссию России на Украине как миротворческую, 2014.

¹³ Вселенский Патриарх: “Многие Православные Церкви проникнуты духом национализма и ересью этнофилетизма” // *Релігія в Україні*. – 2015. – 9 жовтня.

¹⁴ РПЦ на Всеправославном соборе обвинили в ереси этнофилетизма // *Rusukraine*. - 2016. - 22 червня.

¹⁵ А. Річинський, *Проблеми української релігійної свідомості*. (Тернопіль, 2001), р. 27.

¹⁶ See more: О. Саган, *Національні прояви православ'я: український аспект*. (Київ, 2001), р. 24.

extent, on the demands (needs) of the nation for its own religious structure. Ethno-national community can significantly support a nation's self-awareness of self-worth and self-sufficiency (it becomes a national or national conservation factor and stimulates nation-building). It can also act as a “destructive, aggressive and assimilating factor.”¹⁷ Therefore, ethno-confessional communities, on the one hand, socialize religion and bring to it the religious and ritual part of the ethnic (national) elements.

On the other hand, they extrapolate some adapted parts of religious doctrines to public relations. After all, they include the whole complex of relations with religious phenomena, both at the institutional (interfaith, interchurch, state-confessional, state-church) and personal levels. This process takes place regardless of the socio-political or economic conditions that prevail in a particular country.

As for the definition of “a national church,” in our view, it needs adjustment, despite the fact that in the scholarly literature nowadays, the terms “national church” and “national religion” are widely used. Depending on the specificity of the culture of this or that region and the level of socialization of religion, the concept of “a national church” may have a distinct meaning. For example, in the countries where national beliefs or religious institutional formations (churches, organizations) created by the adherents of those religions are no doubt identified as national. However, even in some countries, the notions of “a national church” and “a national religion” are also applied to the dominant religious trends in a particular region, which have long been able to adapt to the local culture and customs and have become an integral part of them (e.g., Buddhism).

Based on the above-mentioned, Ukrainian religious scholars have defined the main components of the concept of “a national church.” In particular, S. Zdioruk noted that such a concept (according to the law for a sufficient basis) should reflect at least five parameters: historical; geographical; ethno-cultural; political; demographic.¹⁸ Professor A. Kolodnyi rightly added to these parameters also linguistic and praxeological.¹⁹ Based on these considerations, S. Zdioruk and A. Kolodnyi gave the following definition of the concept of “a national church:” “National is a church of any denomination, which functions in a certain historical period and, based on its tradition and acquiring ethno-confessional specificity, promotes gradual ethno-culture, self-consciousness and state mentality of a certain nation,

¹⁷ Див.: С. І. Здіорук, “Етноконфесійність.” Українська релігієзнавча енциклопедія.

¹⁸ Див.: С. І. Здіорук, *Етноконфесійна ситуація в Україні та міжцерковні конфлікти*. (Київ: НІСД, 1993), р.30.

¹⁹ А. Колодний, “Феномен релігії: природа, структура, функціональність, тенденції.” *Наукові архіви*, 2009.

uses the national language as a liturgical language and has a significant expansion level among its population of a country or region.”²⁰ It should be noted that the concept of “a national church” is not synonymous with the concept of “a national religion.” In Ukraine, this is especially well seen—within the same denomination, there are ideologically-opposing (Ukrainian and Moscow-centric) Orthodox Churches—the Local Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The conclusions of the Ukrainian scholars are close to the work of the well-known American sociologist Edward Albert Shils, who considered society to be an association that meets the following criteria: its existence as an element of a larger system; identification with a specific territory; having its own name and history; marriage between representatives of this association (society); reinforcement at the expense of the children who are recognized by the representatives of this society; its existence in a longer time period than the average life expectancy of an individual; unity of the common value system. The scientist believed that all this could make it possible to interpret society as a social system.

Each of these elements of the social system is interconnected with others, occupies a specific place, and plays a role in it.²¹ As we can see, the conclusions of the Ukrainian scholars are in full agreement with the general context of the development of the scientific opinion on social communities throughout the world.

As a legacy of the past centuries, the concept of “a national church” in Ukraine gives rise to associations with the concept of “a state church.” However, the former is a part of the spiritual and cultural development of the nation, and the latter is a part of a socio-patriotic process. Such conceptual conflation is especially characteristic of the entire post-Soviet space, where the experience of Orthodoxy as a state religion of the Russian Empire is still tangible. In modern Ukraine, the substitution is actively used by the adherents of the Moscow Patriarchate to discredit the idea of the Local Orthodox Church (Orthodox Church of Ukraine).

The Ukrainian religious scholars also distinguish between “a national church” and “churches or religious organizations of national orientation.” “A national church in Ukraine is not a church that uses something of its native ethnic origin (such as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate), not even the one that functions in its native land or has a

²⁰ А. Колодний, “Феномен релігії: природа, структура, функціональність, тенденції.” С. Здіорук, *Національна церква і національна релігія як форми духовного самовираження етносу. Релігія і нація в суспільному житті України й світу* (Київ: Наукова думка, 2006), р. 82.

²¹ Е. Шилз, “Нація, національність, націоналізм і громадянське суспільство.” *Незалежний культурологічний часопис «І»*. №21, 2001, pp. 35–42.

relatively long history here. If the church ignores in its activities the language of the indigenous ethnic group, wholly subordinated to the foreign center, which neglects our national interests, works against Ukrainian sovereignty, then it is not a Ukrainian national church even if a significant number of its parishioners belong to the Ukrainian ethnic group.”²² According to A. Kolodnyi, the “national” is therefore the church which “carries the national idea—independence of the country, promotes the development and preservation of our national culture, in particular the Ukrainian language, is represented in various religious centers and institutions, including the center of its jurisdiction, our sovereign state.”²³

According to these criteria, A. Kolodnyi regards the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (formed in December 2018 as a result of the unification of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kiyiv Patriarchate with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate), to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, as well as the Ukrainian Lutheran Church and various ethnic groups of the Ukrainian neopagans.²⁴ Churches or religious organizations of national orientation may include some Muslim organizations, especially those who are patronized by the autochthonous ethnic group, the Crimean Tatars.

Their own religion helps unite Karaites and Crimeans. At the same time, “Russian” Churches (Old Believers, True Orthodox movements, and the Moscow Patriarchate) are actively working to promote and assert the Russian identity in their faithful church members. This is evidenced by the numerous facts of supporting the main pillars of the *Russkiy Mir* (the Russian World) ideology by these organizations since the proclamation of Ukraine's Independence (1991) and until now. Among them are the true Orthodox faith, the Russian language, and the union of three peoples—Russia, Ukraine, Belarus with the purpose to revive the Russian Empire, which must withstand the influences of the Western civilization.

Considering Orthodoxy as a factor influencing the development of Ukrainian history, it should be noted that in general, its role as a national church is complex and contradictory. After all, we must take into account the fact that for more than three centuries in Ukraine, there was a domination of the Moscow Patriarchate, which promoted and imposed denationalization of Ukrainians. Therefore, it is difficult for the Orthodox Church to claim universal status as a national church—there are too many exceptions in time and space. The times of Ukraine's independence did not become exceptions. The rapid development of the

²² А. Колодний, *Національна Церква українців як форма їх духовного самовираження*. Центр дослідження духовної культури Тернопілля, 2013.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

institutional network of Orthodoxy of all jurisdictions in the early 1990s significantly slowed down in the early 21st century. Orthodoxy has big problems not only in its impact on the Ukrainian society, but also in self-reproduction, as evidenced by the low number of Sunday schools; the low level of religious education; reduction of the number of those who wish to become priests or monks; an excessive conservatism, and the like.

Prospects of the Ukrainian Model of a National Church

Summarizing and objectively assessing the religious situation in Ukraine, let us note that the vast majority of churches support the progressive development of the country. Objectively, the circumstances were such that none of them influenced the majority of the population, and therefore cannot claim to be the only national church. This is the reason that Ukraine has, since the beginning of its independence, pursued a course of religious pluralism that overlaps with political and ideological pluralism. This religious pluralism is also set in the current legislation of Ukraine. In particular, in the Constitution (Art. 35)²⁵ and the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,”²⁶ the equality of all religions, the right of citizens to profess any religion and the inability to declare a religion as obligatory by the state are guaranteed.

In our view, understanding the problems of the national church by the Ukrainian Orthodox believers will help to regulate relations between the largest Orthodox jurisdictions in Ukraine (Orthodox Church of Ukraine and Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate) and will encourage the unity (peaceful coexistence) of believers. Local Orthodox churches have a positive influence on the strengthening of internal and foreign political positions of the states. It enables the nation to enter into various international religious centers and express the interests of its state there; it significantly helps the nation to become aware of its self-worth and self-sufficiency. These ideas are in line with the Paris Charter for a New Europe (1990) and other international legal instruments, according to which each nation has the right to its own religious identity, expression, preservation and development of its specific traditions and customs. The state should create conditions for such development. Knowledge of the theory and practice of the existence of “national churches” will greatly help in understanding this identity.

²⁵ See more: *Конституція України: Прийнята на п'ятій сесії Верховної Ради України 28 червня 1996 р.* Київ: Преса України, 1997, р. 14.

²⁶ See more: “Закон України «Про свободу совісті та релігійні організації» від 23.04.91 // БВР, № 25,

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