



**Macquarie University
School of Modern Languages**

**1000 YEARS
OF
KIEVAN CHRISTIANITY**
by Jars Balan



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The famous icon The Virgin of Kiev.

Cover: St. Vladimir monument in Kiev.

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FOREWORD

The year 988 marks a special founding event for persons of Ukrainian heritage the world over. It was in that year that Prince Volodymyr (Vladimir in Old Church Slavonic – Volodymyr in Ukrainian) of Kiev accepted Christianity and then had the citizens of the city, capital of modern-day Ukraine, baptised in the new faith. Christianity became the established religion of the medieval Kievan Rus' state, whose inhabitants included the ancestors of the present-day Byelorussian and Russian peoples in addition to the Ukrainian. The occasion of 988 was to leave an important imprint on the religion and culture of these three peoples for the next 1000 years, both in their homes and abroad. However, Kiev, the city where the baptism took place, is not the focus of the Millennium celebrations of 1988. Instead, the Soviet government has decided that the event be run synonymously with Moscow and the Russian Orthodox Church, neither of which, as any impartial historian of these affairs can affirm, existed at the time. In the lucid and concise study that follows the reader will note that, "Moscow did not even exist in 988, and is only first mentioned as a small village in 1147". It is therefore somewhat unnatural that the Russian Orthodox Church is celebrating its Millennium in Moscow. To many an observer, unfamiliar with the historical background to the event, the impression given is that what took place in 988 was an exclusively 'Russian' event which led to the simultaneous creation of a 'Russian' Orthodox Church, even though neither one had yet made its appearance. What in fact existed following Volodymyr's conversion was a 'Rus' Church whose Metropolitan had his seat in Kiev. The difference between 'Rus' and 'Russia' is discussed in these pages, and so there is no need to dwell on this issue here.

The reader will note that the Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Russian Churches have had quite independent histories, the latter not coming into being until the Fifteenth Century. In 1448, a separate Russian Orthodox Church, centred in Moscow and drawing its inspiration from the Kievan Rus experience, was founded. More than a century later, in 1589, it established a Moscow Patriarchate. What transpired with the formation of this Patriarchate, explains Balan, was that the "Kievan tradition of Christianity acquired a Muscovite offshoot, characterised by the unique features of nascent Russian identity". The Ukrainian Church, meanwhile, through the circumstances in which it had found itself under Polish-Lithuanian dominance, had managed to "retain a high degree of independence because of its existence within a predominantly Catholic state".

In years to follow several independent churches emerged in what is present-day Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia which claim to be direct descendants of the Church of 988. But the current celebrations of the Millennium are presented as the prerogative of one Church only, namely, the Russian Orthodox Church, these others not permitted to participate. Indeed, in most cases they are not allowed to exist in their homelands at all. Perforce, they are observing the celebrations in their own manner, openly, in exile. Among the Ukrainian communities abroad the Millennium is being celebrated by several religious denominations in North and South America, Europe and Australasia. Each of the communities abroad is publicising the event in its respective country and in the language of its adopted nation. It is in this spirit that the present informative article by Jars Balan was specially prepared for the Ukrainian Studies Centre at Macquarie University, and is intended for the general Australian reader. It is our hope that the reader will find this concise study illuminating and will appreciate its significance for Ukrainians in this country – 1000 years of Christianity which have shaped a whole millennium of Ukrainian culture. The Ukrainian Churches form an integral part of organised Ukrainian life here. In

testimony to this are the existing 25 or so parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholic denominations (with over 30 churches) as well as the Ukrainian congregations of other faiths (Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans etc). Naturally the heirs of the faith of 988 feel a special spiritual bond with the Millennium festivities, but we wish to emphasise that, ultimately, the issue is not one of whose Millennium it is. In concurrence with Andrew Sorokowski, of Keston College, England:

"It is, in a sense, our Millennium – a cause of celebration by all Christians. Precisely because of this, it is our right, and indeed our duty, to insist that this occasion is observed in a Christian spirit – free of political manipulation and consistent with freedom of conscience for all Churches and nations."

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The gold-topped cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev.

Following an agreement with Macquarie University, the Ukrainian Studies Centre was inaugurated in March 1984. It is financed by the Ukrainian Studies Foundation in Australia, an organisation registered under the Charitable Collections Act of New South Wales.

1000 YEARS OF KIEVAN CHRISTIANITY

*Behold your grandchildren
and your great-grandchildren.
Behold how they live and how they
are cared for by God,
How they partake of the Sacraments
of the Holy Church
How they worship before his Holy Name.
Behold your city radiant with grandeur.
Behold your blossoming churches.
Behold Christianity flourishing.
Behold your city gleaming
adorned with holy icons and
fragrant with thyme,
praising God and filling the air
with sacred songs.
And beholding all this, rejoice and be of good
cheer, and praise the Lord, the Creator of all which
you have seen.*

It was with these triumphant words that the first native-born Metropolitan of Kiev, Ilarion, celebrated the progress his church had made since its founding in 988. That was the year Christianity had been adopted as the religion of Kievan Rus' by Volodymyr the Great (978-1015), forever changing the destiny of Ukrainian lands. Written only thirty-five years after the death of the Grand Prince, this famous eulogy called on him to rise from his grave and witness the dramatic transformation that was taking place through the vigorous propagation of the Gospels.

What joy must have filled Ilarion's heart as he composed these inspired words! For indeed, in a very short time, immense strides had been taken toward evangelising his countrymen. Splendid cathedrals now stood in Kiev and Chernihiv, and the hallowed Monastery of the Caves, near the capital, on the banks of the Dnieper River, was already a renowned beacon of spirituality. The beneficent rays of Christ's teachings were penetrating the darkness of pagan barbarism, and the liturgy could be heard by an ever-widening circle of people. The immediate present gave cause for genuine satisfaction, and the future looked bright and full of promise.

Today, Australians of Ukrainian descent are solemnly commemorating the Baptism of their ancestral homeland one thousand years ago by the saintly Volodymyr. In churches and community halls across the country, from Sydney to Melbourne and Adelaide to Perth, they are observing the jubilee year with religious services, banquets, and cultural events that highlight Ukraine's rich heritage of faith. Orthodox Ukrainians take special pride in this anniversary, as it was the Byzantine form of Christianity that Volodymyr accepted in 988. Greek Catholic Ukrainians also attach great significance to this symbolic event, having preserved the Eastern Rite initially brought by missionaries from Constantinople. But Christians of all denominations can celebrate the conversion of Kievan Rus', and its joyous entry into the fold of Christendom.

Sadly, the millennial remembrances in 1988 are being conducted under a cloud of pain and sorrow. For the recent history of Christianity has been characterised by tremendous

suffering, caused by persistent attempts on the part of various governments to destroy every trace of a distinctly Kievan tradition of spirituality. The continuing persecution of many believers, and the calculated degradation of Christian institutions, is casting a heavy shadow over the future of religious communities in Soviet Ukraine. Hence, the Millennium raises mixed emotions and feelings of uncertainty, being a poignant reminder of the injustices that have yet to be redressed.

A GLORIOUS DAWN

How much happier things were when Ilarion ecstatically surveyed the accomplishments of his church. The ruling prince, Volodymyr's grandson, Yaroslav the Wise (1036-1054), was a generous patron of ecclesiastical culture. It was during his reign that the Metropolitan Church of St. Sophia was built, which to this day moves visitors with the exquisite beauty of its architecture. Also erected under Yaroslav's sponsorship were the celebrated 'Golden Gates', atop which stood the Church of the Annunciation. A library and a scriptorium established at this time, laid the foundation for development of literature and learning.

Yaroslav's progeny married into the leading royal families of Europe, often bringing with them a higher level of education. When his daughter Anna became the Queen of France in 1051 she could sign documents in her own name, but her illiterate spouse, Henry I, was merely able to manage an 'X'. Other daughters became the consorts of Hungarian, Norwegian, and Danish monarchs, while a son, Iziaslav, took a Polish princess for his bride. Yaroslav's most renowned grandson, Prince Volodymyr Monomach, had an aristocratic Greek mother and an English wife – Gytha, the daughter of King Harold of England, killed at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. That such intermarriages were obviously desirable bespeaks the sophistication of Kievan society in the eleventh century, attained largely through the civilising influences of the church.

Although accepted from Byzantium, Christianity soon acquired an indigenous character that blended Greek and local elements to produce a distinctly Kievan form of spiritual culture. It is this precious legacy that is being commemorated in 1988, the thousandth anniversary of the 'sprinkling' of Volodymyr, and through him the realm known as Rus'. Unfortunately, official observances of this landmark occasion are being manipulated for political reasons by the Soviet government, which is cynically trying to use the baptism of 988 to legitimise an on-going policy of cultural and linguistic Russification. The purpose of this article is to shed some light on the unique tradition of Kievan Christianity and its unhappy fate under both Tsarist and Communist Party rule.

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Ever more frequently, articles have begun to appear proclaiming the celebration of what is sometimes called the Millennium of 'Russian' Christianity – an inadvertent or often deliberate distortion of the historical record that is particularly insulting to the Byelorussian and Ukrainian people. If anyone, it is the latter who can rightfully claim this important anniversary as their own, for they are the most direct heirs of the Kievan tradition established by Volodymyr. Moreover, Kiev remains the capital of the modern-day republic

of Ukraine, having always been at the heart of Ukrainian lands and at the centre of Ukrainian affairs. Whereas it has consistently tried to maintain the legacy bequeathed by 988, the Church of Moscow, due to the specific circumstances of its development, evolved a separate brand of Christianity that was eventually imposed by autocratic means on all of the Eastern Slavs.

The fiction of the 'Russian Millennium' has been perpetrated by the Russian Orthodox Church with the active support of the officially atheist Soviet regime. Moscow did not even exist in 988, and is only first mentioned as a small village in 1147. The Russian nation itself came into being in the Middle Ages, having been created by the mingling of Slavs with Balto-Finnic peoples over a long period of interaction beyond the pale of written history. A distinctly Ukrainian ethnos coalesced at the same time, through similar Slavic mixing with the various Sarmatian tribes that for centuries inhabited the Black Sea steppes. Therefore, references to Russian Christianity existing a thousand years ago are not just misleading, but historically inaccurate.

When Volodymyr was christened in 988, the different tribes that scholars have identified as forming the eastern branch of the Slavic peoples had just been united in a loose confederation known as Rus'. A term of obscure origin, the name Rus' was originally applied to the Viking elite that first helped to organise the Eastern Slavs into a political entity. It subsequently came to be generalised to include the Slavic subjects themselves, and still later was used to denote a specific area within the boundaries of modern-day Ukraine. Because the word Russian is derived from Rus' (pronounced *Roos*), many people, especially Russophile scholars, use the two names interchangeably despite the confusion this creates. Technically, one can speak of the Millennium of Rus' Christianity, but this is not the same thing as 'Russian' Christianity. It is perhaps easiest to refer to the event as a 'Kievan' anniversary to avoid such conceptual difficulties.

There are many other reasons why it is incorrect and offensive to identify Volodymyr's baptism in 988 with the founding of the church in 'Russia'. To begin with, Rus' was at best a fragile federation of East Slavic tribes, achieved largely by the military conquests of Volodymyr and his immediate predecessors, and maintained, with difficulty, by the threat of force. Held together by often tenuous dynastic ties, the sprawling dominion centered in Kiev was plagued by poor communications and undermined by an essential lack of cohesion and unity. This ultimately helped to bring about the downfall of Kievan Rus', which began to unravel in the middle of the twelfth century with the rise of competing principalities.

The *Primary Chronicle* or *Tale of Bygone Years*, the oldest written record of events in Ukrainian lands, has a very famous passage that is of special interest in terms of the lore surrounding the coming of Christianity to Kiev. It describes a trip up the Dnieper River which St. Andrew is said to have made in the course of his missionary wanderings in the first century AD. A stop made en route to ascend the high banks is related in considerable detail because of its momentous symbolic significance – allegedly noted by the saint himself. "See ye these hills?" he is supposed to have declared. "So shall the favour of God shine upon them that on this spot a great city shall arise and God shall erect many churches therein".

After raising a cross and offering his prayers, the Apostle went on from the future site of Kiev and arrived at the northern city of Novgorod, although it is known to have been founded hundreds of years later. According to this legend, Andrew was introduced to the local practice of frequenting bathhouses, observing how the Novgorodians "warm them to extreme heat, then undress, and after anointing themselves with an acid liquid, they

take young branches and lash their bodies. They actually lash themselves so violently that they barely escape alive".

A conspicuously humorous and fictional account, this anecdote and others like it reveal that civic and tribal loyalties strongly influenced the southern authors of the *Primary Chronicle*. Another mocking reference to Novgorodian soldiers as a bunch of 'carpenters' betrays a similar sense of rivalry, which continues to this day between Kiev and Moscow, as well as Russians and Ukrainians. The latter, for instance, like to point out that Novgorodians stubbornly resisted Christianisation for many years, evident in a revolt led by magicians in 1071. In fact, significant pockets of paganism could still be found in the future Russian territories as late as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, kept outside of the church's ministry by their isolation and remoteness. Although it is true that the effective conversion of the north came somewhat later, and often met with stiff-necked opposition, it should be remembered that Volodymyr formally accepted Christianity for his entire realm, which embraced the tribes that eventually became the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and Russian peoples.

THE HERITAGE OF BYZANTIUM

That the seeds of the new faith were first sown in the south is well-established by archaeology, official documents, and pre-Baptism lore. The Church existed in the Greek colonies of Crimea as early as the fourth century, and these settlements naturally played an important role in transmitting Christianity to the Kievan domain. The first organised attempt to evangelise Rus' began in the 860s, when a missionary bishop was assigned this daunting task by the Church of Constantinople. After some initial successes the initiative ended in failure and pagan reaction, though it likely resulted in some people becoming secret believers. A real breakthrough was finally made almost a hundred years later, when the Grand Princess Olha – Volodymyr's grandmother – was personally converted.

Her baptism probably occurred during a visit made in 959 to Constantinople, some five years before her death. Although her heir and successor, the war-like Sviatoslav, considered Christianity to be unmanly and thus clung to pagan ways, there is no doubt that Olha's example prepared the way of Volodymyr's conversion less than three decades later.

At this time, the Byzantine Empire, having recovered from setbacks previously suffered at the hands of powerful enemies, was approaching the peak of its cultural, political, and economic development. Western Europe was only beginning to emerge from the shadow of the Dark Ages, Rome having just gone through an especially difficult period. The Muslim Empire, after a period of rapid expansion, had been dealt a series of blows that perceptibly harmed its international prestige. Once Volodymyr had decided to break with his ancestral East Slavic paganism, he was confronted with the problem of choosing a major religion from among these potential allies.

That he chose to accept the Byzantine form of Christianity is perfectly logical considering the options before him. Forging links with the strongest and richest empire in his known world offered numerous strategic and commercial advantages, as well as enormous cultural benefits for a developing society such as Kievan Rus'. In turning toward the Eastern Church for spiritual guidance, Volodymyr left an indelible stamp on the

subsequent evolution of Christianity among the East Slavic peoples. For to this very day, the Byzantine heritage underlies the religious customs and forms of worship practised by the majority of Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Russians.

Although all of Christendom was still united at the time of Volodymyr's baptism, by 988 two distinct liturgical traditions had clearly emerged in the Greek and Latin spheres of the Mediterranean cradle of Christian civilisation. A number of schisms had occurred along East-West lines beginning as far back as the fourth century, when Rome and Constantinople first started to drift apart. A particularly serious rupture had taken place in the 860s, revealing that a large gulf had opened between the Byzantine and West European Christian communities. This estrangement was due to cultural, theological, and political differences, and led to a permanent division into separate Orthodox and Catholic formations after 1054. While Kiev was only marginally affected by the dispute between Constantinople and Rome – having only peripheral and generally friendly relations with the latter – by virtue of its Byzantine roots and ecclesiastical connections it ended up within the camp of Orthodoxy.

The Eastern source of Kievan Christianity contributed much to its early development, and despite the collapse of Byzantine civilisation in the fifteenth century, continues to inform the religious sensibilities of the Eastern Slavs.

CULTIVATING THE KIEVAN TRADITION

After Kiev fell to the Mongol hordes in 1240, the peoples inhabiting Ukrainian and Byelorussian lands embarked on a different path than that taken by their counterparts living in the future Russian territories. Especially significant is the fact that whereas the Slavic principalities in the northeast had to languish under Mongol rule until 1480, the people of southwest Rus' were largely able to escape the yoke of nomadic oppression as early as the 1360s. For more than four hundred years the emerging Ukrainian and Byelorussian nations – collectively referred to as types of 'Ruthenians' in this era – lived in close association with one another, concomitantly coming under the domination first of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and then of the Kingdom of Poland.

During this time, the church evolved national and institutional distinctions that reflected the rich folk culture of the common people. It also existed for centuries as a separate administrative entity, with Moscow eventually acquiring a Metropolitanate of its own. In this way, the Kievan tradition of Christianity acquired a Muscovite offshoot, characterised by the unique features of nascent Russian identity. While the Ruthenian Church managed to retain a high degree of independence because of its existence within a predominantly Catholic state, the church in Muscovy came to be completely subordinated under the increasingly autocratic regime established by the princes of Moscow.

In the dynamic age of the Cossacks, beginning around 1550, Ukraine both acquired and then lost its political autonomy, gaining partial freedom from Polish rule before gradually succumbing to external pressures. It was during this turbulent period that the Ukrainian Church experienced a painful but culturally enriching struggle between pro-Roman and staunchly Orthodox tendencies. The end result was the creation of a Catholic Church in 1596, which recognized the authority of the Pope while retaining the Eastern Rite and other Byzantine features such as a married clergy.

Through interaction and competition with their Greek Catholic counterparts, concentrated primarily in Western Ukraine, the Greek Orthodox absorbed many cultural influences from Latin and Protestant Europe and revitalised their ancient traditions. The Crypt Monastery once again became a flourishing centre of Ukrainian spirituality, consciously perpetuating the values inherited from Kievan Rus'. These developments set the Ukrainians and Byelorussians even further apart from their Muscovite cousins who, because of their distance from the West, acquired conservative and xenophobic attitudes to any kind of innovation from abroad.

It was during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Kievan Christianity reached a high point in its evolution, reflected in the rich architecture, music, literature and iconography produced under the auspices of the church. Especially notable in this period is the flowering of what has sometimes been described as the Cossack Baroque style, blending Ukrainian, West European, and Byzantine elements in a unique and harmonious whole. Accompanying this national renaissance was a dramatic rise in the overall level of Ukrainian culture, attributable to the vigorous educational efforts of the church, and the Kiev Mohyla Academy established by Metropolitan Mohyla. This general enlightenment touched the lives of women as well as men, and was made accessible to humble villagers and people of limited means through the generosity of the church. Visitors from foreign lands were greatly impressed by the widespread literacy which they found throughout Cossack Ukraine, commenting favourably on the overall quality of life enjoyed by most people.

Unfortunately, this golden age was to come to an end with Ukraine's subjugation by Poland and Tsarist Russia, as Muscovy had come to be known. With forced integration into the Russian Orthodox formation, the specifically Kievan aspects of the Ukrainian and Byelorussian Church were systematically stripped to remove all traces of national distinctiveness. The democratic nature of ecclesiastical organisation was gradually eliminated, despite repeated protests from members of the clergy and the hierarchy. Unique customs, ritual practises, and ancient privileges were also systematically repressed, often by arbitrary or devious means because of the opposition to such moves.

Illegally removed from the jurisdiction of Constantinople, the Kiev Metropolitanate was eventually downgraded under the Moscow Patriarchate and reduced to complete obedience to Tsarist authority. After 1800 it was forbidden by law to build churches in the Ukrainian style, and a series of foreigners were appointed as the spiritual leaders of the Kievan ecclesiastical domain. Not surprisingly, when Russian was introduced as the language of communication, the general level of education plummeted dramatically and there was a corresponding rise in rates of illiteracy. In this process, the Ukrainian nation was further debased by the enslavement of its agricultural population, who suffered impoverishment and a total loss of personal liberty through their bondage to exploitative estate-owners.

THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

A national revival affecting both Eastern and Western Ukraine in the 1800s brought with it the hope of restoring political autonomy. In Russian-occupied Ukraine, the deep yearnings of the people found eloquent expression in the poetry of a former serf, Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), who celebrated the glories of the Cossack past and protested the harsh conditions of Tsarist rule. He, and others committed to defending their native

land, were severely persecuted by the authorities for fear that they might ignite a national revolt through their cultural and political activities. Arrests and deportations of individuals were followed by more sweeping measures intended to snuff out all patriotic feeling among the Ukrainian masses. Sympathetic Russians spoke out against the draconian methods employed by the autocratic state, but their appeals were of no avail and the situation continued to deteriorate.

In 1876, a secret decree was issued by Tsar Alexander prohibiting almost any form of publication in the Ukrainian language, including such essential religious texts as the Bible. By this time, the Orthodox Church had become an important vehicle of Russification, playing a major part in the implementation of anti-Ukrainian government policies. The spirit of Kievan Christianity survived nonetheless, resurfacing once again when more favourable circumstances prevailed.

In the provinces of Western Ukraine under Austro-Hungarian rule, the Greek Catholic Church became the chief bearer of the Kievan tradition. There, a national awakening also occurred in the nineteenth century, led almost entirely by priests and the sons of clerical families. Although stimulated by developments in Russian-occupied Ukraine, the rebirth of native pride reflected the different backgrounds and conditions of life found in Galicia, Transcarpathia and Bukovyna.

Part of this new feeling of self-respect found expression in the restoration of Byzantine aspects of Greek Catholicism that had been eroded over the years due to Latinisation. The revived use of the three-barred cross by the Uniate Church in the late 1800s was but one indication of the growing confidence and ancestral pride of Greek Rite Catholics as they struggled against the continued pressures of assimilation.

The large-scale emigration of Ukrainians from Galicia, Bukovyna and Transcarpathia, began just as the national movement was beginning to assert itself in the political arena. Seeking to escape their difficult lives as poor farmers, adventurous settlers sought a better future in such distant countries as Brazil, Argentina, the United States and Canada. The Canadian prairies became one of the preferred destinations of these determined pioneers, who largely pursued their traditional occupations as agriculturalists. Many of these early arrivals continued to identify themselves as *Rusyns* or *Ruthenians*, the name by which they were commonly known in the Austrian Empire. However, the religious tradition they brought with them was the one that had been established in Kievan Rus' by Prince Volodymyr. In this way, the seeds of the Baptism took root in the New World, bearing fruit and multiplying a hundredfold.

The first wave of immigrants was subsequently joined by other countrymen who came in the interwar period and after 1945. Together, they built new churches and elaborate cathedrals to serve the changing needs of the Ukrainian population, which was becoming increasingly urbanised and more prosperous with the passing of time. It was, in fact, after World War II that the majority of Australia's Ukrainians (now numbering over 30,000) established themselves here, and hence set the foundations for Ukrainian church-building in this continent. It is these believers who in 1988 are commemorating the thousandth anniversary of Kiev's adoption of Christianity.

THE MARTYRED CHURCHES OF UKRAINE

When the revolution rocked the Russian Empire in 1917, a feeling of hope swept through Ukraine. Taking advantage of the collapse of central authority, the Ukrainian people tried to liberate themselves from the dual yoke of economic and political oppression. Declaring

their independence from Great Russia, they attempted to establish an autonomous existence while seeking friendly relations with their various neighbours. Unfortunately, fate was not to permit them the fulfillment of their desire for self-rule, which had never died out during the long centuries of foreign domination. For the Bolshevik regime that seized power in Russia was determined to hold together the old empire, using force to perpetuate what had always been a vehicle of oppression.

Even after the invading Red Army won control over Kiev, Ukrainians did not abandon their cherished dream of national autonomy. Recognising the depth and intensity of this striving, Lenin was forced to allow a wide degree of cultural self-expression to win support for his government in Soviet Ukraine. His liberal policies made possible a major renaissance in the Ukrainian arts during the early 1920s, when an Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church also came into being with the intent of restoring Kievan Christianity. Although initially tolerated by the Communist Party, which was openly committed to the creation of an atheistic society, the attitude of the Bolsheviks changed as soon as they saw the new formation was winning growing support among the Ukrainian people. Intending to use the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a means of undermining the Russian Orthodox hierarchy that opposed it, the Soviet government now took steps to curb the influence exercised by both religious groupings.

The ultimate objective was to eliminate all religious feeling among the Christian and non-Christian peoples of the USSR. While both Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox were made the target of a mounting anti-religious crusade begun in the mid-twenties, it was the adherents of the Autocephalous Church who were singled out in this increasingly brutal campaign. The intimidation, arrest, and murder of the Ukrainian Orthodox clergy coincided with a broad attack on all nationally-conscious segments of the population of Soviet-occupied Ukraine. This orgy of violence, instigated by Joseph Stalin, reached a climax in 1932-1933, when five to seven million Ukrainian peasants were deliberately starved to death in an artificial famine to break popular resistance to forced collectivisation. The fact that leading Ukrainian churchmen, intellectuals, and even Communist activists were also victimised in this far-reaching 'purge', shows that the reign of terror was directed at destroying any manifestation of patriotic feeling of Ukraine. By the mid-1930s the Autocephalous Church had been completely exterminated in Soviet territories, though the Russian orthodox formation was allowed to cling to survival, albeit by the thinnest thread. Stalin well knew from its long history of subservience under the Tsars, that Russian orthodoxy could still prove to be useful as an instrument of government policy.

The Greek Catholic Church in Polish-controlled Galicia escaped this massive bloodletting, but it, too, had to struggle against discrimination practised by the Warsaw government in the interwar years. In the process, the Uniate formation became a bulwark of resistance to the often violent efforts to promote Polonisation.

World War Two proved to be an especially tragic period for both the Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Although it briefly seemed possible to restore an independent state after the invasion of Nazi armies, it soon became apparent that the racist ideology of Hitlerism would permit no such fulfillment of national yearnings. Indeed, the brutality of the occupation quickly turned the Ukrainian people against their new masters, prompting the birth of a partisan movement whose ultimate goal was to attain freedom from German, Russian and Polish domination.

Some ten million Ukrainians perished in the course of the bitter conflict, including large numbers of Jews in the Nazi holocaust. Although a small minority of Ukrainians participated

in the systematic extermination of the latter – sometimes willingly, but usually under compulsion – others risked their lives to hide their Jewish neighbours from the German authorities. The head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Metropolitan Sheptytsky, was an exemplary figure in this regard, being responsible for saving one hundred and fifty Jews, several of them hidden under disguise in his own residence in occupied Lviv.

Surviving members of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church attempted to revive their formation behind German lines, but their efforts soon got them into trouble with the new administration. With the advance of Soviet armies in 1943, the fate of both Orthodox and Catholic Ukrainians was sealed, for Stalin had struck a deal with the Russian hierarchy that left no place for conscious bearers of the Kievan tradition.

As soon as Western Ukraine was retaken by the Red Army steps were taken to eliminate the Uniate Church, any supporters of the Autocephalous Orthodoxy also being targeted for complete annihilation. By means of physical threat, mass arrests, and the deportation of clergymen, the Ukrainian Catholic community was forcibly 'reunited' with the state-approved Orthodox Church, in a move that showed both the cynicism of the Communist regime and the moral bankruptcy of the subservient Russian hierarchy. It is the successors of this ecclesiastical leadership who in 1988 are proclaiming the joyous celebration of the 'Russian' Millennium.

A RELIGIOUS MILESTONE UNDER A CLOUD

Anniversaries are meant to be times of rejoicing, for looking back over the past, and forward into the future. A thousand year landmark is a truly awesome event, one that in normal circumstances would be cause for jubilation, thankful prayer, and festive praise.

However, the tragic situation of Christianity in Ukraine does not permit such a display of happy emotion, for if anything, the flame of Kievan spirituality is barely flickering in 1988. True, there are churches allowed a modicum of freedom to minister to the basic needs of the Ukrainian people, but these are not the bearers of the tradition established by the baptism of 988. Moreover, these official formations, of which the Russian Orthodox Church remains the largest, are themselves very much circumscribed in the scope of their activities. Forced to toe the Communist Party line in all of their public pronouncements, they are thereby discredited in the eyes of many Soviet citizens who are sincere Christian believers. For this reason growing numbers of the faithful are instead involved in clandestine religious groupings, preferring to live under threat of arrest and persecution rather than adhering to institutions sanctioned by a state actively pursuing the goal of an atheistic society.

But is the distinctly Kievan form of Christianity fated to die out due to relentless political repression? If history is any guide, the answer is a resounding 'No!' despite the current plight of the Ukrainian Churches. For both have had to survive for many centuries under conditions of extreme adversity, rising phoenix-like at times that are more conducive to a faith that is a genuine expression of national dignity.

Today, the Greek Catholic Church continues to exist underground in Western Ukraine, despite being outlawed and ruthlessly suppressed since 1946. Furthermore, the seemingly miraculous emergence of Autocephalous Orthodoxy in the 1920s and 1940s – after long years of determined Russification – are a reminder that decrees, famines, arrests, and deportations, are not enough to break the will of a nation to survive. That young people in the Soviet Union today are turning to religion in increasing numbers,

much to the alarm of government authorities, is but another indication of the depth of spiritual feeling, particularly in Ukrainian society.

Ironically, Marx, Engels, and Lenin all warned of the dangers of trying to extinguish religious sentiment by means of compulsion. Although committed freethinkers, they argued that a heavy-handed approach would ultimately backfire by producing martyrs to inspire even greater fervour. The evidence that this is happening in Ukraine is beginning to mount daily, as Soviet citizens express their growing rejection of the failed ideology promoted by the bureaucracy.

This gives rise to cautious optimism in the year of the Millennium of Kievan Christianity. It provides a ray of hope for an event that is being commemorated under a dark cloud of sadness and uncertainty. It is true that Volodymyr would be deeply troubled were he to rise from his grave today, as in his life he showed great compassion and humanity towards those who had fallen on hard times. But being a committed soldier of Christ, and a firm believer, he would not have been discouraged by this period of adversity, either. He would probably simply rededicate himself to the restoration of the Kievan tradition, with patience, courage, hope, and good cheer.



The Golden Gates of Kiev about the year 1050.

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Monastery of Caves (Pecherska Lavra) with the Collegiate Church of the Assumption in the centre (1900s).