

Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue in Ukraine: Challenges, Prospects, and Approaches

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The emergence of Uniatism as an urgent priority of Catholic-Orthodox dialogues in the early 1990s coincided with the legalization of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) in 1989, Ukraine's independence, and the USSR's collapse in 1991. The UGCC's rehabilitation alarmed the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) because it initiated a catastrophic exodus of its members in Ukraine. Two other waves followed: one in 1992 and another since 2019. For three decades a tectonic shift has been taking place in Ukraine's religious landscape, closely tied to the continuing post-Soviet social and political transformation.

In broad strokes, such is the setting in which Balamand (1993) and related international Catholic-Orthodox initiatives may be properly understood and critically assessed, namely: the rapid decline of Russian Orthodoxy in independent Ukraine. By ignoring this context and subscribing to the supremacy of one Orthodox Church in Ukraine, Catholic-Orthodox dialogues failed to produce significant results. Their shortcomings were noted not only by opponents of ecumenism, but by Catholic and Orthodox ecumenists and leaders too.

We examine the shortcomings and misconceptions of the international dialogues in an effort to identify constructive responses. Next, we assess the prospects of local ecumenical initiatives by two churches that are drawn together by a *natural affinity*: the UGCC and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Finally, we propose five guidelines for local ecumenism that can promote fraternal Catholic-Orthodox relations in Ukraine and reconciliation on the international stage.

1. Problems of Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue and the Case of Ukraine

1.1 It is much to the credit of direct participants of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue that they acknowledged a number of shortcomings in the process. Those insights of practitioners provided valuable clues to something that was missing from the dialogues, and Prof. Vassiliadis has reminded us of two of them.

Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras was frustrated with the lack of tangible ecumenical progress by theologians because he felt that their speculations about the nature of truth were largely exercises in abstraction with few practical outcomes. Instead of the "dialogue of truth" that was mired in conflicting truth claims, the Patriarch was convinced that a meeting of hearts, or a "dialogue of love," between church leaders could be more effective. For Athenagoras, the goal of Catholic-Orthodox unity was not so much about harmonizing doctrinal propositions as it was about healing and *restoring fraternal relations* among Christians. Ecumenical initiatives that pursued the former goal might produce consensus statements, but would not overcome the age-old schism.

The second critical observation, from the Catholic side, was expressed by Fr. Robert Taft, SJ. In order to succeed, the international Catholic-Orthodox dialogue requires a preliminary step, namely a *purification and healing of memories* by all members of the churches. Taft basically agreed with Patriarch Athenagoras: something vitally important was indeed missing in the theological approaches to dialogue. That “something,” the healing of memories, was a connection with the reality on the ground. An effective ecumenical theology had to be rooted in the human, social contexts, where Catholic-Orthodox separation was embedded in lived experience, unresolved traumas of history, and transmitted memory narratives. The vitally important, contextual work of purifying and healing those memories was beyond the reach of international ecumenical dialogues, but unless it was done first those encounters would be reduced to abstraction disconnected from inter-generational wounds and grievances.

Coming from inside the dialogues, these practical criticisms were intended as constructive corrections to observed shortcomings. In order to produce worthwhile results, ecumenical theology could not afford to ignore human hearts and social contexts, but had to attend to them. Following up on these insights, we may note a few further shortcomings of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogues, particularly with reference to the so-called problem of Uniatism as it was formulated at Balamand (1993) and in meetings leading up to and following it.

1.2. The real reason for the shift of attention in Catholic-Orthodox dialogues to Uniatism was in order to address the religious and political transformations in Ukraine and their looming implications for Russian Orthodoxy. Although there are some twenty-three autonomous Greek Catholic Churches, the ecumenical meetings on Uniatism were motivated by developments in Ukraine at the time of the collapse of the USSR: the legalization–rehabilitation of the UGCC (1989) and the independence of Ukraine (1991). Correctly anticipating massive losses in western Ukraine, the ROC reacted swiftly, insisting that previously scheduled themes on the ecumenical agenda be set aside in order to deal with this emergency.¹ Through a language of generalization, the Balamand document sought to maintain a distance from the specific issue in Ukraine. It avoided naming Uniates, referring instead to Catholic and Orthodox as “our two Churches” and when Uniates had to be mentioned they were grouped together with all other Greek Catholic communities. But in the early 1990s no other Uniates were as urgent and sensitive an issue as the

¹ This was stated implicitly: “At the request of the Orthodox Churches, the normal progression of the theological dialogue with the Catholic Church has been set aside so that immediate attention might be given to the question which is called ‘uniatism’.” (Balamand, 1).

Greek Catholics of Ukraine.² Balamand was not about Maronites, Melkites, or Syro-Malabars.

1.3. The Balamand document sought to address Orthodox concerns about Uniatism. The Catholic delegation heard those concerns and conceded that Uniatism “can no longer be accepted either as a method to be followed nor as a model of the unity our Churches are seeking.”³ But at the same time they were duty-bound to disappoint anyone who was seeking an accomplice in terminating the UGCC once and for all. They knew very well Rome’s obligations toward the Greek Catholic churches with which it is in full communion. They may also have been mindful how fickle Ukrainian Uniates could be in their allegiance whenever the Vatican unilaterally altered an iota of its standing agreement with them.⁴

Along with the rejection of Uniatism as an acceptable method of unification, there was also the controversial affirmation that Eastern Catholic Churches have a right to exist. In order to reassure Eastern Catholics, who would be surprised to discover that the method of their unification with Rome was no longer acceptable, something more had to be said – even at risk of displeasing others. The right-to-exist formula resolved nothing, and only compounded the procedural error. Some critics took the statement to suggest that the UGCC was not previously a legitimate church, but the deeper issue was the exclusion and objectification of an ecclesial partner, in effect amounting to a *negation of existing communion* by the Catholic side.

The Roman Catholic ecumenists were not authorized to revoke unilaterally the 1596 bilateral agreement of unification between the Vatican and the Kyivan Metropolitanate. If the Holy See wished to review and reconsider the terms of the Union of Brest, its proper dialogue partner would have been the present-day heirs of the Union of Brest: the UGCC. In any event, the whole method of exclusion that characterized the Balamand process called for serious scrutiny. If the Vatican determined that there was truly something wrong, or unacceptable, about the form of unification accomplished at Brest, then the proper conversation would be between the co-signatories – not with third parties. All in all, Balamand placed the UGCC in the untenable position of an *object of discussion*, rather than as the *sui iuris*,

² The direct connection of Balamand to the legalization of the UGCC has been confirmed in scholarly work, along with the Russian Orthodox interpretation of the revival of Greek Catholicism in Ukraine as a source of problems and a “crisis.” See Thomas Bremer, “The Greek Catholic Churches in post-war Catholic-Orthodox Relations,” in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, Lucian N. Leustean, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 745.

³ Balamand, 12.

⁴ In the early twentieth century, massive transfers from UGCC to Orthodoxy occurred in North America over the Vatican’s refusal to respect the provision on married clergy. *Cum data fuerit* (1929).

autonomous ecclesial subject that it presumably is along with other Greek Catholic Churches.

1.4. There is an unresolved tension in Balamand concerning the *use of violence to achieve religious unity*. On the one hand, given the surprising lack of agreement on this subject, the authors apparently struggled to find something resembling meaningful consensus. From that struggle, a rather obscure compromise was reached: “Suspicion would disappear more easily *if the two parties were to condemn violence* wherever communities of one Church use it against communities of a Sister Church.”⁵ Evidently embarrassed by the inadequate statement, the Catholic side sought to reinforce the position through appeal to higher authority: “As requested by His Holiness Pope John Paul II in his letter of May 31st, 1991, it is necessary that all violence and every kind of pressure be absolutely avoided in order that freedom of conscience be respected.”⁶ This only deepened the generalization and further separated the “dialogue” from the reality on the ground.⁷ The Theological Commission was prepared to reject Uniatism as a problem, yet failed to condemn the violent suppression and forcible absorption of churches in imperial and Soviet Russia, and to declare them likewise unacceptable “as a method to be followed nor as a model of the unity our Churches are seeking.”⁸ That silence eventually became deafening and eventually Orthodox observers would speak out with more balanced approaches, to which we return below.

1.5. For three decades before the achievement of Orthodox autocephaly in 2019, an image was projected to the world of Ukraine as a country in religious turmoil, a hotbed of schism that defied efforts at peace and unity. The information campaign presented a failed state and a chaotic religious landscape, a problem in need of solutions. Since Ukraine’s independence in 1991, its citizens had become accustomed to such messaging and for them there was no mystery about its source and objectives. While they celebrated their independence, they knew that for some Russians the end of the USSR was a catastrophe. In addition, the ROC in Ukraine was shaken to the core by a massive exodus that continues to this day.

⁵ Balamand, 27. Emphasis added.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ At the time, it also emboldened the ROC to use the allegation of violence in relation to parish transfers to the UGCC.

⁸ Studies of the forcible suppressions and violent absorptions of Uniates in imperial and Soviet Russia include: Wasyl Lencyk, *The Eastern Catholic Church and Czar Nicholas I* (Rome-New York: Editiones Catholicae Universitatis Ucrainorum, 1966), and Bohdan Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939-1950)*, (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1997).

The exodus from Russian Orthodoxy comprised three waves. First, on the eve of the Soviet collapse, in one of the final gestures of perestroika the UGCC was legalized. This reversed the effect of a KGB-orchestrated church council of 1946 and paved the way for extensive transfers to the UGCC. Second, in 1992 following his suspension by the ROC Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko) established the breakaway Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyivan Patriarchate), which attracted bishops and thousands of parishes from under ROC jurisdiction. And third, the emergence in 2018 of the OCU caused further departures from the Church of Russia in Ukraine. For over three decades the ROC has fought tooth and nail to undo this ecclesiastical hemorrhage. At stake is not only its majority predominance in Ukraine, but its aspirations in world Orthodoxy too.

With its not-quite-autocephalous branch in Ukraine (the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate: UOC-MP) in an ever less tenable situation in Ukraine, and with Ukrainian society consolidated as never before by Russia's military aggression in Crimea and Donbas, the Moscow Patriarchate launched a campaign to reverse the tide of political and religious change. In ecumenical dialogues and public relations efforts, a wide array of concepts and arguments were marshalled in support of restoring the old order: *Russkii mir*, canonical territory, uncanonical churches, and of course Slavic unity and the shared spiritual legacy of Kyivan-Byzantine Christianity.

Such is the context in which Ukraine became a focal point of a so-called religious schism and crisis, and where Uniatism suddenly became an urgent item for ecumenical dialogue.⁹ Aside from any objections to Uniatism that may be voiced by other Orthodox Churches, the issue in Ukraine is inseparable from the erosion of the ROC in Ukraine, the geopolitical shock of the dissolution of the USSR, and Russia's loss of control of Ukraine.

Beyond the limits of the Balamand process, Fr. Cyril Hovorun as an insider has also confirmed the Russian Orthodox goals in ecumenical dialogues with Rome and the World Council of Churches: to advance images of the UGCC and the conflict in Ukraine according to the Russian perspective. While Russia falsely represented its war with Ukraine (2014–) as a conflict between Orthodox and Greek Catholics, in fact “the majority of those fighting on the Ukrainian side were not ‘Uniates’ from the West of Ukraine, but soldiers from the centre and even East of the country. Most of them speak Russian and if they go to any churches, these are the churches of the

⁹ In addition to its Balamand meeting of (1993), the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholics Church and the Orthodox Church discussed Uniatism at its plenary meetings in Freising (1990) and Emmitsburg, Maryland (2000). Uniatism was also on the agenda of the U.S. Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation in 1990-92.

Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine.”¹⁰ In the absence of inter-Orthodox solidarity the Russian agenda prevails and, according to Hovorun, this produced “shameful episodes” of ecumenism, where the Vatican and the World Council of Churches cling to an imagined neutrality even as they subscribe to Russian propaganda as delivered by the ROC.¹¹

Considering the powerful influence of Russia’s geopolitical priorities, the international Roman Catholic-Orthodox dialogue was unable to produce an accurate analysis of the Catholic-Orthodox situation in post-Soviet Ukraine. In an assembly where no one else had a firm grounding in the history and social reality of Ukraine, the default became a hegemonic agenda of dominance in the ROC’s “canonical territory.” For its part, the UGCC was excluded from discussions that centred on Eastern Catholics in independent Ukraine, denied a voice and agency, and reduced to the status of an *object of ecumenism*.

2. Hopeful Signs

The shortcomings of Catholic-Orthodox dialogues regarding Ukraine and Ukrainian Catholics were not a dead end. By pointing out lacunae, they brought to light new opportunities and hopeful signs.

The Balamand statement actually permits a more irenic reading than what one might initially expect from an Eastern Catholic perspective. In the first place, there is nothing wrong with setting aside a sixteenth-century method of ecclesiastical unification because the premises on which it was based and justified in its time are no longer acceptable. Similarly, obsolescence applies today without controversy to slavery, the Crusades, and most recently to fundamentalism, which the pan-Orthodox Council in Crete condemned in 2016.¹² Secondly, Ukrainian Catholics do not spend much time worrying about their right to exist. Along with the entire Balamand statement, the irksome “right-to-exist” provision was likely intended *not as a message to Eastern-rite Catholics*, but as an emphatic contradiction to anyone who might have imagined that Uniates can somehow be removed from the Catholic communion.

A separate matter is the need for a balanced treatment of historical issues, including an explicit *condemnation of violent suppression and forcible absorption* of Eastern Catholic churches in imperial and Soviet Russia *as unacceptable means*

¹⁰ Cyril Hovorun, “Pan-Orthodox Council and its Ecumenical Implications,” *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bernsheim* 67:04 Juli/August, 2016), 70.
https://www.academia.edu/30558519/Cyril_Hovorun_Pan_Orthodox_Council_and_Its_Ecumenical_Implications_Materialdienst_des_konfessionskundlichen_Instituts_Bensheim_67_no_4_2016_69_70

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cyril Hovorun, “Pan-Orthodox Council and its Ecumenical Implications,” *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bernsheim* 67:04 Juli/August, 2016), 70.

of ecclesiastical unification and violations of the freedom of conscience. Until that official condemnation is made, there may in fact be grounds for worry about the right to exist: as Russian forces stand at the ready on Ukraine's borders, the historical precedent of traumatic conversions in the last two centuries may well be on the minds of Ukrainian Catholics, and possibly members of the OCU as well.

There is also a legitimate expectation by Eastern Catholic Churches of *basic respect as subjects* within the Catholic communion. They should be duly informed whenever Rome's Catholic-Orthodox discussions center on them as sister-churches, or concern the regions of their historical origins. What these churches, in particular the UGCC, need from Rome is strong support in their home territory, not equivocation about someone's presumed "canonical territory." A balanced treatment of history that speaks the truth will promote reconciliation and healing of memories. In its home territory, the UGCC can take the initiative by exercising ecumenical agency, undertaking regional Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, and responding to the call for contextual input to the international encounters. On the Catholic side, a reinvigorated solidarity of Eastern-rite and Latin-rite Catholics would dispel any ambiguity about the full communion of the former and lay to rest any inadvertent objectification or scapegoating by the latter.¹³

The UGCC's closest Orthodox dialogue partner is the OCU, with which it shares a *natural affinity*. Significant portions of both Churches have a living memory of the ROC's jurisdiction (not all UGCC clergy and laity were in the underground). Since its restoration, the UGCC developed good relations with both of the Orthodox churches that united in 2018 to form the OCU. As the granting of autocephaly approached, the UGCC publicly supported, welcomed, and then celebrated the achievement. The OCU's canonical ties to the Ecumenical Patriarchate have given the UGCC an opportunity for substantive contacts with an Orthodox jurisdiction that is sensitive to the historical complexities of Christianity in Ukraine and is not encumbered by geopolitical aspirations.

The goal of UGCC-OCU dialogue can be modest and, keeping in mind the experience and lessons of the international Catholic-Orthodox dialogues, it can steer clear of any illusions of structural unification, absorption, or fusion. Building on existing multilateral cooperation in the AUCCRO and the mutual respect of UGCC and OCU is an achievable long-term goal that can strengthen fraternal ties between the two churches. Without competing with the Catholic and Orthodox higher authorities in their international pursuit of communion, the two Ukrainian Churches can address matters of shared interest locally, learn more about each other in bilateral encounters, and pool resources in areas of common cause. The modest goal of strong

¹³ On the ROC's treatment of the UGCC see Cyril Hovorun, "Uniatism as a Scapegoat in the Exchanges between Moscow and Constantinople."

fraternal relations can have far-reaching, long-term outcomes on the home front and for the international dialogues.

3. Contextual Approaches to Dialogue

In this section, we outline five orientations for contextual Catholic-Orthodox dialogue in Ukraine.

3.1 Local Ecumenism by Particular Churches

Local efforts of ecumenism are legitimate and necessary. Participants of the official international Catholic-Orthodox dialogues have clearly indicated the need to ground their discussions in the reality of local contexts. Catholic and Orthodox theologies also affirm the value of local, decentralized input to ecclesial governance and decision-making. While senior hierarchical structures still take the lead, the delegation of responsibilities to local churches, bishops, and laity reinforces unity and resonates with democratization in the public sphere. Such constructive “best practices” can promote local initiatives while avoiding micro-management and paternalism.

Orthodox theologians have acknowledged the importance of this horizontal, communitarian dimension of the Church that complements its hierarchical side. Their elaborations of collegiality have shed light on the reciprocity of laity and bishops, as colleagues in eucharistic concelebration and pastoral ministry (Afanasiev, Zizioulas) and as sharing in the power of discernment and interpretation (Ware).¹⁴ Russian Slavophile Aleksey Khomiakov (1804-60) rejected the juridical unity of Catholicism and the individual freedom without unity of Protestantism, and proposed sobornost’, a defining feature of the Church as an organic fellowship that respects both freedom and unity.

Catholic ecclesiology still struggles to balance the nineteenth-century affirmations of primacy and infallibility with notions of episcopal collegiality and synodality. While Vatican Council II sought to recover and renew for national conferences of bishops the ancient practice of fully authoritative synodality, a practice preserved in Eastern Christianity, the opposing conservative position prevailed for decades.¹⁵ Yet already in 1931, Pius XI had formulated the principle of subsidiarity:

¹⁴ Nicholas E. Denysenko, “Primacy, Synodality, and Collegiality in Orthodoxy: a Liturgical Model,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48:1 (winter, 2013), 22-26.

¹⁵ See Aldean B. Hendrickson, “National Conferences of Bishops: Primacy, Collegiality, and the “Freshness” of the Second Vatican Council as Expressed in the 1983 Code of Canon Law,” 3,6; and Gilles Routhier, “Beyond Collegiality: the Local Church Left Behind by the Second Vatican Council,” *CTSA Proceedings* 62 (2007), 1-15.

Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also *it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.* For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.¹⁶

In setting its goals, Catholic-Orthodox dialogue in Ukraine would not compete with or duplicate the work of international dialogues. Any questions of unification and communion can be left to the highest authorities, yet local issues are within the specific competence of local churches rather than of Rome, Constantinople, or Moscow.

The highest ecclesiastical authorities can respond to the Russian-Ukrainian war in general terms and at a certain safe distance, but local churches and communities are on-site eyewitnesses of human suffering and they can also detect opportunities for meaningful Christian response. They can bring a voice and a heart that are contextually informed and attuned to the immediate pastoral situation. Given adequate opportunities and support, they may articulate theological insights that benefit their own communities and perhaps the international communion. Occasionally they may be called to provide spiritual support without discriminating against someone who is not of the same denomination or jurisdiction.¹⁷ In responding to spiritual needs, they may discover forms of Catholic-Orthodox collaboration that increase the effectiveness of each other's work and promote fraternal Catholic-Orthodox relations.

Local initiatives require the engagement and support of local bishops and their teams. Cyril Hovorun has described the kind of disconnect and dysfunction that can occur at the international level when archbishops and primates let their ecumenical ventures slide. He warned of the consequences of the unresponsiveness of churches to their own ecumenical work: when synods fail to review draft documents from ecumenical dialogues, the vacuum is filled by ultra-conservatives, who impose their own anti-ecumenical agendas.¹⁸ The same concern exists in the local context.

¹⁶ Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931), §79. Emphasis added. In the encyclical, subsidiarity was put forward as a middle course between capitalist individualism and communist collectivism. But its decentralizing thrust and applicability to ecclesial governance are unmistakable.

¹⁷ The issue was highlighted notoriously in the city of Zaporizhia, where a UOC-MP priest refused to perform a funeral for a child baptized in the UOC-KP. "Moscow-led church in Ukraine refuses to bury boy from Kiev branch," *The Guardian* (5 January 2018). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/05/moscow-led-church-in-ukraine-refuses-to-bury-boy-from-kiev-church>

¹⁸ Hovorun, "Pan-Orthodox Council," 70.

Without active interest and support of bishops even the finest spontaneous initiatives, rather than being celebrated and integrated into constructive memory, run the risk of being forgotten.

3.2 Self-critical Introspection

Taking up Fr. Taft's wise suggestion, effective ecumenism requires a preliminary step: a local encounter that will inform and ground subsequent official dialogues in human contexts and social reality.

That preliminary, local Catholic-Orthodox exchange itself requires methodical preparation. It cannot employ self-serving, pre-critical narratives of triumph or victimization. A critical distance, from received narratives of innocence and involuntary defense reflexes, becomes possible by stepping back and scrutinizing one's own communal identity through an ethical lens, that is, an examination of conscience. In order to heal memories and reconcile competing historical narratives, the impulse to self-justify and to vilify the other must be set aside and replaced by a new self-awareness, recalibrated through the Christian practice of humility. A new narrative of the transfigured moral self presents the proximate neighbor with a clear signal: one is coming to the table of truth and reconciliation with a purified mind and heart, and a new moral vocabulary.

The biblical condemnation of judging others before critically reviewing one's own life gives further explanation of and rationale for such an inward, deeply personal turn as a prerequisite for authentic moral advancement. Notably, it comes with a reminder that until that introspection is complete one remains disabled by moral blindness: "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and *then you will see clearly* to take the speck out of your brother's eye."¹⁹

The actual forms of self-critical introspection will vary, as will their transformative outcomes. No short-cuts or terminological flourishes can substitute for the purified, authentic self. Perhaps the only other way to illustrate what the crucial self-critical step can look like is with specific examples. In his presentation, Prof. Vassiliadis reminded us of Fr. John Erickson's frank observation, which opened up the possibility of a more complete historical picture, a healing exchange of memories, and which enables a productive examination of conscience:

... we are inclined to forget atrocities in which we ourselves have been complicit, such as the forced suppression of the Eastern Catholic Churches during the communist period in Russia and Eastern Europe.²⁰

¹⁹ Mt. 7:5. Revised Standard Version. Emphasis added.

²⁰ Vassiliadis, p. 4. Eastern Catholics were suppressed with violent and lethal force in imperial Russia as well as in Soviet Russia. "We ourselves" refers to the Russian Orthodox Church, which may not have initiated or carried out acts of violence with its own hands, but supported and indirectly participated in such suppression by the respective

Cyril Hovorun drew upon his extensive ecumenical experience as a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church. A self-critical perspective enabled him to enumerate specific shortcomings that troubled him from a moral standpoint, and his testimony was in the form of an apology to the dialogue partners:

In these dialogues, we the Orthodox often behave in a way, for which I should apologize. We do not always respect agreements that we have commonly reached; we refuse to recognise our own faults and to acknowledge the merits of the other side of the dialogue; we solve particular issues of our jurisdictions under the guise of protecting our common tradition. Our partners in the dialogues need to have steel nerves to bear with us.²¹

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky (1965-1944) also understood the value of a self-critical attitude and the difficulties that arose when it was absent. In his view, Ukrainian Catholics suffered from that lacuna in their inclination toward emotional expressions of patriotism:

Indeed this patriotism always lacks self-criticism. We measure patriotism not with our minds but with our hearts. In our view, its temperature overshadows any other trait. For many years we have not had a free press that was not in a constant struggle against national adversaries. All these factors stand in the way of self-criticism. In many ways we are still a primitive people, for whom demonstrations, slogans, and noise appear more important than cool, calm deliberation and dedicated work.²²

For those who may be unfamiliar with the spiritual and ethical dimensions of dialogue or who are invested in grand tales of triumphal power or sanctimonious victimization, the self-critical posture appears futile and a sign of weakness. The transformative dialogue of truth and reconciliation is a voluntary commitment of the willing, who clearly understand its challenges and benefits.

3.3 Church-state relations: letting go of “symphonia”

states. On this same subject, see n.17 above, another instance of an ethical revision and purification of received historical memory.

²¹ Cyril Hovorun, “Pan-Orthodox Council and its Ecumenical Implications,” *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bernsheim* 67:04 (Juli/August, 2016), 69.
https://www.academia.edu/30558519/Cyril_Hovorun_Pan_Orthodox_Council_and_Its_Ecumenical_Implications_Materialdienst_des_konfessionskundlichen_Instituts_Bensheim_67_no_4_2016_69_70

²² Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, “Pro yednist’,” [On the Church], Decree of the Archieparchial Sobor of 1943 (10 June 1943), *Tserkva i Tserkovna Yednist’* [The Church and Church unity] (Lviv: Svichado, 1995), 391.

The self-critical step applies not only to the past, but also to questions of the present and the future. Along with promoting moral transformation, it can also inform ecclesiological orientations.

As churches that unequivocally support the Ukrainian side in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the UGCC and the OCU face fundamental options in their relationship with the independent yet fragile Ukrainian state. Simply put, they must choose between two paths: either coexisting on a par with diverse religious neighbors in a pluralistic Ukraine, or vying for preferential status and a special partnership with the state. Regarding the latter, the concept of “symphonia” has had some currency in informal settings, while formal venues such as the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations have referred to a “partnership” with the state in its published documents.²³

There is no question that several presidents of Ukraine made representations before the Ecumenical Patriarchate in an effort to regularize “uncanonical” Orthodox communities, and that those efforts played an important part in a unification of churches, the establishment of the OCU, and its achievement of autocephaly. As those events came to fruition, many formalities and photo opportunities included church dignitaries – and President Poroshenko. Critics seized upon this to denounce the entire process as politically motivated and politicized. Yet they failed to recognize that in a momentous matter the Ecumenical Patriarchate had wisely required a strong and reliable indication of public will from the democratically elected parliament. That, and not any incidental publicity, was the decisive task and *sine qua non* that fell to the president.

It remains for the Ukrainian Churches to determine the nature of their relationship with the state. That question did not arise from the establishment of the OCU, but has existed since Ukraine’s independence. In the Soviet period there was only one Eastern Christian Church, the ROC. It enjoyed a special status as the majority church and was, in effect, the state church of Russia. That preferred status and symphonic relationship with the state remain in place in Russia today.

Comprised in part of former members of the ROC, the Ukrainian Churches value their ecclesiastical independence from Moscow. In renouncing that past association, they renewed ties with other centers: the UGCC with Rome, and the OCU with Constantinople. Both Churches have embarked on a process of consolidating their ecclesial identities *in contradistinction to* the ROC. Their single-minded focus on difference and on doing things differently is directed toward

²³ The Council’s deliberations on this matter are discussed in Andrii Krawchuk, “Constructing Interreligious Consensus in the Post-Soviet Space: the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations,” *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness. Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 278-82.

hammering out a distinctive ecclesial ethos, and not simply a Ukrainian-speaking mirror image of the Russian state church.

In a country that is pursuing democratization, both churches have the freedom and opportunity to avoid co-optation, submission, partnership, or other types of fusion with the state. Certainly, various factors can pull the churches in precisely that direction: their recent release from under ROC jurisdiction, anti-Russian sentiments in society arising from the war, and a desire to demonstrate patriotism. Yet all such factors can be addressed effectively from the vantage point of church-state separation.

Church-state separation holds advantages that merit consideration: preventing the instrumentalization of churches or their submission to political agendas, the preservation of their free speech and free agency in the public forum (including criticism of unjust laws or policies), the protection of religious equality and anti-discrimination provisions, and the pursuit of fraternal solidarity and cooperation among religious communities. Such goals are consistent with democratization, whereas a state-church model could undermine them.

Both the UGCC and the OCU seek to be different from a co-opted church that operates as a branch of the state, follows its directives, and submits to the geopolitical project of *Russkii mir* and a restored Soviet Union. Neither church wants any part of this, yet the alluring mirage of so-called symphonia with the state can lead precisely to such forms of subordination. In the Russian journey, Nilus of Sora warned of the risk of comfortable arrangements with the state, but it was the opposite position of Joseph of Volokolamsk that laid the groundwork for the future, championing the monarchy, theocracy, and the “Third Rome.” The Ukrainian churches have an opportunity to contribute to democratization by maintaining their autonomy in the public space.

3.4 Saying “no” to ecclesiastical nationalism

In addition to international Catholic-Orthodox dialogues, inter-Orthodox meetings can also be a source for identifying matters of interest to local Catholic-Orthodox dialogue and practical reflection. One such pressing issue is phyletism, or ethno-nationalism in Christian communities.

In 2016 the pan-Orthodox Council of Crete was hampered in its work by the boycott launched by the ROC and its three allies, the churches of Antioch, Bulgaria, and Georgia. Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus was troubled by the lack of solidarity and inter-Orthodox rivalries that obstructed preparations for the Council and prevented the inclusion on the agenda of pressing matters like autocephaly. Attributing the root cause to phyletism, ethnic exclusivism in the Church, the Council of Crete reinforced its original condemnation at the Council of Constantinople in 1872 and pronounced it a heresy. Whereas the earlier assembly

chastised the Bulgarian Church, Cyril Hovorun argues that this recent declaration of phyletism as a heresy was aimed specifically at the Russian Church's ideology of *Russkii mir*.²⁴

Ever since 1872 when the problem was first named and condemned by the Orthodox Church, ethnoreligious fusion of various forms has been debated in Orthodox communities. In Ukraine, the matter is of interest to the UGCC and the OCU. In the ongoing conflict with Russia, both can potentially be pulled into a simple binary opposition of pro-Ukrainian versus Russophobic sentiments, self-justification and demonization of the neighbor, and of silent consent or vocal support for the war – but not moral outrage.

In his time, UGCC Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky addressed nationalist extremism as a threat to Christian patriotism, to social unity, and to the Church. Well aware of efforts to mobilize church support for nationalism and to subsume scriptural teachings under the banner of secular concoctions, he sided unequivocally with the Christian option:

If the mutual love among citizens were to require or permit the hatred of enemies, such love would not be a sufficient basis for national unity. The love of one's own combined with hatred for all others is pagan patriotism. Christian patriotism embraces all people, unites Christians with their opponents and enemies, and provides patriotism with the foundation that it needs: it teaches that unity.²⁵

The UGCC and the OCU have a common stake in avoiding the risk of ecclesiastical nationalism. If they allowed national sentiments to escalate without restraint, that could lead to populism and phyletism, and ultimately subvert the urgently needed work for ecclesial consolidation and unity. Identity narratives devoid of critical reasoning can produce an ecclesial distinctiveness that is illusory. Unless they attend closely to what they are doing, the Ukrainian Churches can become ethnic alter egos of the entity to the north. The road to an authentic ecclesial alternative may take years or decades to design and implement. But it begins with a fundamental option, a determined decision *not to allow* the clannish instinct to prevail and to shape the character and values of these two Churches. In this, they have common cause and a solid basis for constructive dialogue and cooperation.

3.5 Openness to dialogue with Russian Orthodoxy

²⁴ Cyril Hovorun, "Ethnophyletism, Phyletism, and the Pan-orthodox Council," *The Wheel* <https://www.wheeljournal.com/blog/2017/9/14/cyril-hovorun-ethnophyletism-phyletism-and-the-pan-orthodox-council> and http://car.certhidea.it/sites/default/files/12_Hovorun.pdf

²⁵ Sheptytsky, "Pro yednist'," 394.

As of this writing, Russian troops were amassed along Ukraine's borders with Russia and Belarus, and Putin had just recognized the so-called independence of the Eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Polarization, tensions, and the information war were at their height, and any talk of peace was paralyzed by Putin's geopolitical standoff with the West. In the face of unjust military aggression, the Churches of Ukraine were in a precarious situation in their capacity to speak out for peace. In war, individual citizens and institutions have little room for treading a course between loyalty and treason. As a result, the churches have often been silent.²⁶

However, the shared history of neighbors is seldom simply black or white. There is an opportunity to recover and reflect on lesser known episodes of peaceful coexistence, respect, and goodwill. Previous studies have enumerated subtle indications that *not all* Russian Orthodox, or even all Soviets, had done all they could to eradicate every last trace of Ukrainian Catholicism:

With the return of St. George's Cathedral from the Russian Orthodox Church to the UGCC, its underground crypt was examined and found to contain the remains of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, which were duly verified and authenticated. Through all the Soviet years, they had remained intact. Similarly, the extensive archives of the UGCC, confiscated by the regime and ordered destroyed, were instead meticulously catalogued and largely preserved. Other little-known items include a 1991 statement by Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev) of Smolensk, who later became patriarch: "It is not our church but Stalin who banned the Uniates... I was always convinced that when our public life was normalized, the Uniates would certainly have the right to exist."²⁷

Of course, in his 1991 interview with *La Croix* Metropolitan Kirill was speaking in the middle of a political thaw, a brief interval during which such statements were possible. In the present conjuncture of Russia's geopolitical manoeuvres and the ROC's internal dynamics it is not realistic to expect anything of the sort. Nevertheless, dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church, whether the neighbor in Russia or its affiliates in Ukraine, should remain a long-term goal of the Ukrainian Churches. The above examples suggest that, with the passage of time as new facts come to light and dissolve the geopolitical, ideological, or psychological

²⁶ The absence of condemnation of the Russian-Ukrainian war by churches has been occasionally noted. On Russia's aggression in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014-) an astute observer pointed out: "...there was not a single statement from any Orthodox church, which would rebuke both wars and condemn the perpetrator." Hovorun, "Pan-Orthodox Council," 70. As for ROC appeals for peace, they have been premised on Ukraine's surrender to Russian hegemony.

²⁷ Andrii Krawchuk, "Features of a Ukrainian Catholic Social Ethic," *A Common Mission: the Oriental Congregation and the Oriental Institute (1917-2017)*, Acts of the Congress held at the PIO on 4-5 May 2017, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 308 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2020), 472.

obstacles to truth, a climate that is more conducive to dialogue and reconciliation may allow categorical judgments to be revised and memories to be healed.

In Ukraine, individual members of the OUC-MP may be willing to participate in the kind of informal, local dialogue that is envisioned here. They should not be excluded, and only they can demonstrate whether there is sufficient common ground for constructive conversations. The UOC-MP's repeatedly declared autonomy could be evident in practice if the church were to endorse officially those of its own members, who in 2016 condemned the pseudo-Sobor of Lviv as a sham.²⁸ Likewise, an official UOC-MP statement supporting the open letters of its own hierarchs in early 2014 – who implored Putin and Patriarch Kirill not to violate the territorial integrity of Ukraine and international law – could put to rest any doubts about the church's real independence from Moscow.²⁹ And, as Russia's aggression continues to violate Ukraine's sovereignty, the UOC-MP again has a historic opportunity to use its free agency to condemn such violations – a freedom that its mother church in Russia does not possess – or by freely choosing silence to signal its consent.³⁰

The escalation of Russia's military threat put the UOC-MP's autonomy to the test. To condemn the unjust war would place the church on an equal footing with the two Ukrainian Churches. However, to silently consent could reveal a church that is waiting for a military solution to the “crisis” of uncanonical churches in Ukraine. As an autonomous church, it will be judged on the basis of its free choice.

²⁸ In 2016 a significant, unofficial Orthodox initiative was undertaken that will not be soon forgotten. On the 70th anniversary of the pseudo-Sobor of Lviv a group of Orthodox clergy and laity issued a statement of solidarity with the UGCC and declaring the 1946 event a sham. “Appeal for Recognition of the 1946 Lviv ‘Synod’ as a Sham,” *In Communion. Website of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship* (6 March 2016)

<https://incommunion.org/2016/03/06/appeal-for-recognition-of-the-1946-lviv-synod-as-a-sham-2/>

On 17 March, 2016 the head of the UGCC and other representatives issued an official statement of gratitude. “A Word to the Orthodox Brothers and Sisters Who Signed the Statement on the 70th Anniversary of the So-Called ‘Lviv Sobor of 1946’,” *Information Resource of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church* (29 March 2016).

http://news.ugcc.ua/en/documents/a_word_to_the_orthodox_brothers_and_sisters_who_signed_the_statement_on_the_70th_anniversary_of_the_socalled_lviv_sobor_of_1946_76337.html

It remains for the ROC to own up to and retract its collaboration in the heinous, KGB-staged operation.

²⁹ On the open letters of UOC-MP hierarchs Onufry (Berezovsky), Lazar (Shvets), Sofrony (Dmytruk), Alexander (Drabinko), Filaret (Kucherov), and others in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity to Putin and the Patriarch in 2014, see Andrii Krawchuk, “Redefining Orthodox Identity in Ukraine after the Euromaidan,” *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis*, Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 180-84.

³⁰ Putin's 21 February 2022 meeting with a docile “Security Council,” featuring his intimidation of foreign intelligence chief Sergei Naryshkin, left little doubt as to tone that any religious leader could expect from him.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/piece-kremlin-theatre-putin-weighs-fateful-decision-ukraine-2022-02-21/>
The choreographed spectacle eerily recalled the Soviet propaganda film on the 1946 pseudo-Sobor of Lviv.

