

The Confessional Situation and Social Stability in Contemporary Ukraine

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Gaining state independence in 1991 and the rejection of the totalitarian political and economic systems stipulated quite a new situation in the life of the Ukrainian society. The totalitarian system left us with a spiritual vacuum that has resulted in the loss of a positive sense of life and has become a reason for the quest of spiritual fulfillment among people. Aiming at democracy, the young Ukrainian state is eager to affirm priority of moral values, humanization of society, and the enrichment of spiritual spheres of society's life. A complicated process of the formation of individual and collective base of the public life is taking place now and one can see the great desire to set up justice, honesty, and decency. Along with the socio-political and economic reforms deep changes in the character of social interactions are happening. The rejection of unlimited etatization of social life and the right for free self-determination of individuals stipulated the need for new mechanisms for the functioning of social reality.

Religion is one of the main elements of public as well as private life of citizens of the multi-confessional Ukraine. The relationship between state and church is gradually improving as citizens are guaranteed liberty of conscience; conditions for the normal functioning and activities of religious organizations are created so that they can widen their participation in public life, or, for example, develop their international contacts. It has naturally lead to a dynamic development of religious organizations and of church life as the greatly increased number of religious centers, monasteries, religious study centers, religious periodicals and publications well illustrates. The proportion of religious issues in media has widened too.¹ That is why the very first task in the stabilization of public life of the young Ukrainian state is the normalization of mutual relationship between members of different religious movements.

Traditionally, Christianity is the dominant religion and plays an important role in the mixed Ukrainian religious confessional structure. More then 20 million people believe orthodoxy has a great importance in public and political life of the country.²

Ukrainian orthodoxy is represented by three influential religious denominations: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the jurisprudence of the

¹ *Akademiczne religieznawstwo. Podrueznik.* K., 2000, p. 705.

² Sagan O.: *Prawoslawie w Ukraine: osobliwosti rozwitku i suczasnyi stan.* In: *Polsko-ukrainske badania religii.* Krakow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego, 2004, p. 197.

Moscow Patriarchy, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the jurisprudence of the Kiev Patriarchy and the Ukrainian Autocephaly Orthodox Church. By 2004, about 69% of all orthodox local organizations joined the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchy), 22,6% joined the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchy). The Ukrainian Autocephaly Orthodox Church is a regional phenomenon because some 68% of its religious communities are situated in the western regions of the country.³

Each of the above mentioned churches represents a quite different understanding of its place in the world orthodoxy and in the modern world. At hand, there is their regular opposition connected not with dogmatic theological differences but typically, with political issues. Sometimes a disagreement has been aggravated by certain state and political forces interfering in the churches' activities.

Nowadays the situation in the Ukrainian Orthodoxy causes conflicts and opposition of different social and political forces in the society and leaves hardly any space for the great potential of the Orthodox Church in the spiritual development of the citizens. Complicated relations between churches do not promote society's consolidation nor the strengthening of the young state's international status. Not only politicians but parties and even deputy factions in the parliament take different, often contrasting, positions as to solving religious issues. This situation violates peace and the stability of the state, even threatens its security. Continued conflict between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and churches with unregulated canonical status are of totalitarian character⁴, and under certain conditions can become a serious danger for all citizens. In case of the unfortunate escalation of the conflict it can lead to a split between Ukrainians and Russians living in Ukraine and can even cause worsening of the relations between Ukraine and Russia.

Religious situation in the country depends greatly on the relations between the Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the Roman Catholic Church. For many centuries, the Roman Catholic Church existed on Eastern Slavonic lands in a space where the orthodox traditions have been very strong. The visit of the Pope John Paul II in Ukraine in June 2001 became a great impulse for their communities to take action in the newest history. This historical visit has promoted the creating of favorable conditions for a dialogue between Christians, but some factors hinder its successful development. Greatly it is connected with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's activity. The church has more than 5,5 million of followers now.⁵ The church has

³ Religijni organizacyi w Ukraine stanom na 1 stycznia 2004 r., In: *Ludyna i swit.* 2004, № 1 (520), p. 31.

⁴ Bajrak M.: Cerkowna polityka derzawy jak sposib instytucjonalizacji etnokonfesijnych konfliktiw w suczasnij Ukraini. In: *Ludyna i polityka.* 2002, № 4 (22), p. 83.

⁵ Sagan O., Nedawna O.: Ukrainska Greko-Katolicka Cerkwa: czinniki stanowlenia i osobliwosti rozbitku. In: *Polsko-ukrainske badania religii.* Krakow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego, 2004, p. 211.

restored its infrastructure broken during the years of the Soviet regime. About 96,6% of its communities are active in the western regions of Ukraine.⁶

Relations between the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have an openly hostile character. The reason is that the Greek Catholics, since the very first moments of Ukraine's independence, under the connivance of local authorities, have captured more than thousands of orthodox churches and destroyed three eparchies of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: Lvov, Ivano-Frankovsk and Ternopol. The Greek-Catholic leadership moved its administrative center to Kiev, a traditional center of orthodoxy, to spread its influence. Doing it, the church's leadership declared: "There is one God's people in the country on the Kiev hills". The complexity and the difficulties in the development of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy are favorable for the strengthening of the position of the Greek Catholic organizations.

Lately, the tame orthodox population has become more often an object of special attention of the representatives of the Catholic monastic orders active in Ukraine. All orthodox churches rather keenly react to such actions considering them not fraternal and not Christian. It hinders the dialogue, mutual cooperation and the respect for each other's interests. In turn, Catholics declared their right to preach wherever it is possible, rejecting the notion of canonic territory believed in by the orthodox ideologists. Orthodoxy believes that on a territory overfed by one bishop the power of another bishop cannot spread. The problem of proselytism makes relationships between the Orthodox and the Catholic churches even worse. But this conflict is not considered as purely religious since it is not only the struggle for believers, church property, and worship structures but a struggle for spheres of influence in society.

In Ukraine, the relationships between Orthodoxy and Protestantism are gradually developing. The number of protestant communities is constantly increasing at a speed higher than the growth of the orthodox ones. At the beginning of the 21st century the proportion of protestant communities was 27,7% of all religious organizations in the state.⁷ However, these figures do not reflect the real dynamics because the protestant communities existing independently of the main confessional structures are not taken into account and are not registered by the authorities. Powerful material base and simplified worship service practices of protestant confessions give them a chance to actively attract the youth, businessmen, or intellectuals into their membership.

In the independent Ukrainian state, the protestant churches participate in the process of Ukrainian spiritual and national restoration. Their followers believe

⁶ Petrowa L.: Rol religioznogo faktora w stanowlenii grazdanskogo obczestwa. In: *Gosudarstwennaja vlast i politicheskoje uczenie*: Materialy mezhdunarodnoj naucznoj konferencii, Sewastopol, 2003, p. 130.

⁷ Riazanowa L.: Religiozni renesans: Popytka sociologiczeskoj diagnostyki. In: *Sociologia: teoria, metody, marketing*. 2001, № 4, p. 122.

that church is due to serve to all the society and not to take part in political struggle.⁸ They believe that it is necessary “to enter the world”. Sometimes, when decorating their offices for worship, Protestants use national flags, in their sermons speak for democratic victory, for the observance of human rights. Their sermons are in the Ukrainian language, they distribute literature in Ukrainian among believers and thanks to this more and more believers join and become part of the culture of Ukrainian people. Protestant churches give an example of confessional agreement which is absent among Orthodoxy and Catholic churches. At present time Protestantism has spread over Ukrainian soil and has become a real factor with impact on all spheres of national life.

There is one more aspect of the inter-confessional relations and that is the relationship between the Orthodox churches and the Moslem communities. In Ukraine, over 2 million Moslems live now. They are united in more than 400 communities. As to their ethnic structure, they are the Crimean and the Volga Tatars. They form 0,5% of the Ukrainian population.⁹

There are three spiritual Moslem centers in the country now: the Spiritual Direction of the Moslems of Ukraine, the Spiritual Center of the Moslem Communities, and the Spiritual Direction of the Moslems of Crimea. Because of some independent Moslem centers existing in the state there is no possibility to unite all Moslem which weakens their influence on social and political life.

Thus, the religious picture of the modern Ukraine is multi-colored and the relationships among confessions are rather complicated. Alongside traditional religions (Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism and Islam), new religious movements and organizations have sprung up. Their origin is often a result of the appalling controversies among the traditional religious representatives and a result of a coalescence of different trends, mystical cults, and esoteric doctrines. There are few new Ukrainian formations, among them the Ukrainian Lutherans, movements of native faith, the Big White Fraternity, and others.¹⁰

New religious movements and organizations are eager to attract people from anonymous crowd, support their wish to participate, to develop their spirituality, creativity, help them to feel their own value. Although very active in attracting followers, these movements at the same time preserve a rather tolerant approach to the world views of other religions.

One of the possible reasons for the successful spread of new religions in Ukraine is the local character, the Ukrainian mentality which, due to geographical position, has formed certain openness to different ideologies, as for example their tolerant attitude to heterodoxy. Also it should be taken into consideration that

⁸ Jarockij P.: Religijnyj factor w suczasnij Ukraini. In: *Ludyna i swit*. 2004, № 4 (523), p. 4.

⁹ Kiriuzsko M.: Religijna swoboda w oswiti ta presi musulman Ukraini. In: *Aktualni problemy derzawno-cerkownych widnosyn w Ukraini*. K., 2001, p. 114.

¹⁰ Dudar N., Filipowicz L.: *Nowi religijni teczii: ukrainskij kontekst* (ogliad, dokumenty, pereklady). K., 2000, p. 14.

traditional churches do not pursue a very active pastoral care, and thus any attempt to get to know followers better and to address them with new teaching gives often positive results.

Religious variety in the modern Ukrainian society has a set of problems concerning the relations between confessions. One of them is connected with the necessity of improvement of the legislation so that it would correspond to international legal regulations, principles, and standards. According to the Constitution adopted in 1996, Ukraine is a lawful, democratic, social state where a man is the highest social value.¹¹ The Constitution sets up the boundaries and limits of state influence on social processes. The Constitution as complex legal system guarantees preventing the state from suppression and limitation of human rights, freedom of conscience included. One of the first lawful acts of the independent Ukraine was the *Act On freedom of conscience and religious organizations* (1991) which laid down the foundation for the harmonization and cooperation of the state with believers. It gave Ukraine the status of secular state on the territory of which all existing confessions and their canonic rules are not the source of law and cannot influence state authorities, officials' work nor the system of state education. The law says that religious organizations cannot carry out state functions, cannot take part in political parties, cannot give them financial support, cannot nominate candidates of state bodies nor finance and carry out electioneering for political candidates.

It is particularly stressed by the law that the state protects the rights and legal interests of religious organizations, promotes establishing of relationships of mutual tolerance and respect among citizens of different faith as well as among believers and non-believers. The state does not interfere in their activity provided it is legal. The state takes into consideration and respects traditions and internal regulations of religious organizations if they do not contradict existing law.

But in spite of this legal framework, there are some difficulties in Ukraine connected with not efficient legal base regulating relations between state and church.

Having unsolved problems connected with the right of ownership for cult structures, struggles for the spheres of influence in religious and church life lead to continuous conflicts within it and on the inter-confessional level. It proves the necessity to correct existing law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations as solving of many questions existing now between the state and church greatly depends on the amendment of the Act.

The Ukrainian state has to exclude illegal interference in the life of religious organization existing now under the conditions inherited from the totalitarian regime. The state obligation to meet citizens' religious requirements must be carried out within legal bounds. State power must not interfere with religious behavior (influencing religious instructions) and into religious relations. It must support relations formed between religious organizations and other

¹¹ *Konstytucyjna Ukrainy*. K., 1996, p. 11.

institutions. It is particularly important as there is a complicated confessional structure in the modern Ukrainian society. Cooperation of all religious organizations and churches in Ukraine is possible if the principles of political and cultural pluralism are implemented.

To overcome religions enmity and displayed intolerance between representatives of different religions, it is necessary above all to take into consideration the people's interests, to obtain their mutual understanding, to carefully study their positions and opinions and to try to find a common ground. It is important not only to prevent conflict situations but also to be aware of main changes in society. Culture based on trust, mutual understanding, compassion, tolerance and morality is an effective regulator capable of implementing these requirements. It has to become a spiritual source and an important mechanism of public integration.

The confession that traditionally influences the development of all religions occupies an important place in the social and political life of any state. The main task of state structures is to look for suitable ways of coordinating their actions with the interests of the main confession yet at the same time the rights of other religious units as well as of non-believers must not be restrained.

One must not approve the tendency of power to suppress different confessions using a "religions card" in politics. It is not admissible to make political use of popular negative stereotypes by representatives of national groups which are based on historical past, cultural and confessional traditions, types of thinking and behavior. It should be taken into consideration that their emergence was connected with a set of factors. Among them were the changes of ethno-political situation connected with the USSR collapse which sharpened many ethnic and confessional problems.

Having a new reality under new conditions the representatives of different religions try to change confrontation into peaceful discussions and fruitful relations, to carry out a dialogue. But it is only possible provided the participants striving for mutual understanding are considered equal. Thus the Ukrainian state must ensure the equality of representatives of all religions and religious movement of organized structures before the Law, defend their rights and require their duties. It should not treat religious organizations casually or circumstantially.

It is important that both the official structures and the public understand the importance of protecting human rights and values so necessary for the forming of a new society and for the supporting of social stability, normalization of inter-confessional relations, bringing together believers and non-believers in the problem solving process.

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