

**Khomitsky Vasyl. Prerequisites for the Creation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (1989-1990). Journal of Education, Health and Sport. 2024;74:61678. eISSN 2391-8306. <https://dx.doi.org/10.12775/JEHS.2024.74.61678>
<https://apcz.umk.pl/JEHS/article/view/61678>
<https://zenodo.org/records/15545658>**

The journal has had 40 points in Minister of Science and Higher Education of Poland parametric evaluation. Annex to the announcement of the Minister of Education and Science of 05.01.2024 No. 32318. Has a Journal's Unique Identifier: 201159. Scientific disciplines assigned: Physical culture sciences (Field of medical and health sciences); Health Sciences (Field of medical and health sciences). Punkty Ministerialne 40 punktów. Załącznik do komunikatu Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 05.01.2024 Lp. 32318. Posiada Unikatowy Identyfikator Czasopisma: 201159. Przypisane dyscypliny naukowe: Nauki o kulturze fizycznej (Dziedzina nauk medycznych i nauk o zdrowiu); Nauki o zdrowiu (Dziedzina nauk medycznych i nauk o zdrowiu). © The Authors 2024;
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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.
Received: 21.10.2024. Revised: 17.11.2024. Accepted: 21.11.2024. Published: 29.11.2024.

Prerequisites for the Creation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (1989-1990)

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Abstract

The article analyzes the socio-political and religious processes in Ukraine in the late 1980s that led to the establishment of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The catalyst for these events was the period of Gorbachev's perestroika, the processes of liberalization and democratization that emerged on the background of the systemic crisis of the Soviet Union.

It is established that the key event was the 1988 anniversary celebration of the baptism of the Kyivan Rus'. The Russian Orthodox Church decided to change the Statute of the Church, according to which the abbot of the church became the head of a religious organization, and the Church became a legal organization. This significantly reorganized the religious life of the community.

The events that led to the First Synod of the UAOC in June 1990 are traced. The Ukrainian clergy went through a difficult path in the process of recovery of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The author outlines the main problems of the transition period for believers: visitors to churches may not have known to which church jurisdiction they belonged, long-lasting misunderstandings and persecution between representatives of different churches, and the activities of the ROC clergy were threatening to the Ukrainian nation.

It is found that the election of Metropolitan Mstyslav (Skrypnyk), who was a nephew of Simon Petliura, as Patriarch of the UAOC inspired the Ukrainian people to believe in changes in the organization of the Church. However, in the process of institutionalizing the UAOC, misunderstandings between Patriarch Mstyslav and Metropolitan Ivan (Bodnarchuk) divided the believers and clergy.

Research methods. In the course of the research, the methods of induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis, comparative historical research, and systemic historical research were used. The principles of objectivity, non-denominationality, tolerance, and priority of documents were applied.

The **conclusions** emphasize that the revival of the UAOC was based on the interaction of nationally oriented socio-political forces and the clergy. The processes of democratization of society accelerated the development of the autocephalous movement, which aimed to declare independence from the Moscow Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This initiative received the greatest support among the clergy and believers in the western regions of Ukraine. Protoiereus Volodymyr (Yarema), Bishop Ivan (Bodnarchuk), and Metropolitan Mstyslav (Skrypnyk) played a special role in the events of the UAOC creation.

Key words: Russian Orthodox Church; Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; religious processes; national and spiritual revival; clergy; synod.

The statement of the problem. For centuries, the Ukrainian people have fought for the independence of their state and the Ukrainian Church. In the late 1980s, having celebrated the millennium of their baptism, Ukrainians began to create public and political organizations, and actively conducted educational work to revive the autocephalous movement. The powerful work among the Orthodox in the western regions of Ukraine was successful. Among the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), who fulfilled their pastoral duty among the believers of Western Ukraine, there were priests who realized the importance of their civic duty as representatives of the Ukrainian nation. Together with their flocks, first in Lviv, and later in

Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, some priests left the ROC and stood up for the creation of the UAOC, and this process began to spread throughout Ukraine.

The purpose of the article is to investigate the preconditions and course of religious, social and political processes related to the proclamation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) during the period of Ukrainian national revival in 1989-1990.

Analysis of recent researches and publications. Among the scholars who have studied this problem, we need to highlight the works of O. Muravskyi, A. Babynskyi, D. Blazheiovskyi, V. Bondarenko, Y. Isichenko, I. Prelowska, and M. Tsap. It is also important to mention the memories of some eyewitnesses, in particular, Metropolitan Danylo (Kovalchuk), which were used in the process of writing this paper.

Main Body. At the beginning of the summer of 1989, the religious and political situation in the western regions of Ukraine sharply escalated as Greek Catholics tried to regain and assert their influence in the country. Demonstrations, rallies, hunger strikes, and open-air worship services were held to demand the restoration of the Church. The first centres of the Greek Catholic Church revival were Lviv and the cities of the Lviv region. Soon the unification wave spread to Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk and Zakarpattia regions.

The course of “Perestroika” (meaning “restructuring”, a Soviet government policy) of Soviet society, proclaimed by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee Mykhailo Horbachov at the April 1985 plenum, stimulated the rapid development of democratisation of society. M. Horbachov emphasised the need for fundamental reforms in all spheres of public life [1]. The democratisation of socio-political life involved the implementation of constitutional provisions on freedom of conscience [2]. It was about the registration of religious communities, since the artificial inhibition of this process by the authorities caused numerous complaints from the believers [3].

Preparations for the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the Baptism of Kyivan Rus' became an indicator of freedom of conscience in the USSR. Subsequently, the importance of celebrating this event, its impact on the processes of revival of religion and church life, and the formation of a new content of church-state relations was mentioned by the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), Patriarch Filaret [4]. The Council for Religious Affairs of the USSR officially allowed celebrations on the occasion of the church holiday. This was preceded by the decision of the UNESCO Assembly to celebrate ‘the 1000th anniversary of the establishment of Christianity in Rus' as the greatest event in European and world history and culture' [5]. This statement drew public attention to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)

not only in the USSR but also around the world. On 29 April 1988, Secretary General Gorbachev met with Patriarch Pimen of the ROC [6].

Preparations for the celebration of the Baptism of Rus' became a powerful boost for the restoration of religious and church life. On 28-31 March 1988, the Pre-Council Bishops' Meeting was held at the Novodevichy Convent in Moscow. It approved the programme of the jubilee Local Council and drafts of its documents, considered a number of documents that regulated internal church life, including the draft Statute on the Governance of the ROC [7]. Subsequently, the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers approved the draft Statute as one that did not contradict the norms of civil law and could be used in the USSR. The bishops' meeting approved the names of the companions of piety for canonisation at the Local Council [8].

Under the influence of the process of democratisation and openness, the leadership of religious organisations, clergy and believers increasingly raised issues that required the decision or consent of state authorities (reopening of churches closed in the 1960s; registration of new associations; granting church and monastery complexes to believers; increasing the circulation of church literature; transferring religious relics to the church, etc. Believers expressed their discontent with the position of some officials whose actions were not in line with the law.

The state authorities could not ignore the global significance of the celebration of church festivals and were forced to curtail anti-religious propaganda and assist in carrying out activities planned by the Church leadership [9].

The celebration of the anniversary of Christianity adoption in the Kyivan Rus' marked a turning point in the socio-political life of the Church in the late 1980s. For the first time during the years of Soviet governance, 100,000 copies of the New Testament and 500,000 copies of the Prayer Book were printed in Russian and Ukrainian on the eve of the anniversary of the Church. Relics that had been stored in the museums of the Moscow Kremlin were returned to the church: a part of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, stones of the Holy Sepulcher, the right hand of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called, the head of St. John Chrysostom, and a part of the relics of Volodymyr the Great. The authorities did not resist the registration of new parishes, but they were still reluctant to give away church buildings. This was especially true of buildings that housed state institutions, museums, etc. [4].

The process of democratisation of public life had a direct impact on the restoration of the church network in Ukraine. As many as 1,610 religious communities were registered only in 1988 (compared to 104 in 1987). There were 1244 of these communities of the Russian Orthodox Church. The growing dynamics of registration of Orthodox communities continued

in the following years. Thus, at the beginning of 1990 the ROC in Ukraine had 10130 communities. Believers of the Orthodox Church were handed over 788 abandoned religious buildings and permission was granted to build 66 new ones [9].

The increasing number of active churches created a personnel problem in the Church and required the opening of theological educational institutions. After the June 1988 Local Council, a seminary was opened in Kyiv; two theological schools in Lutsk and Rivne; and a psalmist course in Chernihiv. Such monasteries as Koretskyi Monastery and Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra were transferred to the Church [10]. Several large dioceses were divided and new ones were created (in Ternopil and a number of other dioceses abroad) [3].

In 1988, the odious 'Instruction on the Application of Legislation on Religious Cults' (1961), which, among other things, prohibited the registration of 'anti-civil sects', was cancelled. On 1 October 1990, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) Law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations' was adopted, granting individual parishes and church institutions, including the Moscow Patriarchate, the right of legal personality. The Church was granted the right to acquire real estate, defend its interests in court, and religious organisations could participate in public life and use the media. The law allowed citizens to spread religious views in secondary schools, open Sunday schools at churches, apply for alternative service, maintain ties with co-religionists abroad, make pilgrimage trips, and receive and transport religious literature. At the same time, the law made it impossible to influence the political views of both citizens and organisations [11].

The adoption of the Law had its advantages. The constitutional formula for the separation of the Church from the state was for the first time given a clear legislative definition. This meant that the state did not interfere with the activities of religious organisations within the framework of the Constitution and this Law, nor did it finance the activities of any religious (or atheist) organisations or communities. However, the democratic articles of the law were to some extent levelled by the deepening of church-state and inter-church contradictions.

It should be emphasised that the policy of Perestroika gave impetus to the creation of informal groups and organisations that raised the issue of the revival of the Ukrainian Church. One of these groups was Ukrainskyi Kulturolohichniy Klub (The Ukrainian Cultural Studies Club), whose first meeting was held on 6 August 1987 in the Kyiv cafe 'Lubava'. The club gathered about 400 participants to discuss little-known pages of Ukrainian history [12]. In an information report of the KGB of the USSR to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine in July 1988, it was reported that supporters of the UKK, in particular, E. Svertiuk, O. Shevchenko, and S. Naboka, put forward ideas about the need to form a Christian worldview

in society. Other members of this society such as A. Bytchenko, L. Miliavskiy, and I. Zaporozhets spoke of the need to restore the Ukrainian Church [13].

The Initiative Committee for the Revival of the UAOC began its work in Kyiv on February 15, 1989. Fr. Bohdan Mykhailechko and such public and political figures as T. Antoniuk, A. Bytchenko, M. Budnyk and L. Lokhvytska participated in the Committee's work [14]. Regional Committees for the Revival of the UAOC were established in the western regions, which later formed the All-Ukrainian Orthodox Council [15].

The first branch of the UAOC was formed on August 19, 1989 in Lviv [16]. Protopriest Volodymyr (Yarema), rector of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, left the jurisdiction of the ROC together with his parish [16]. The Community of the Assumption Church of the Lviv Stavropigiia Brotherhood joined this process. Protopriest Vitalii (Politylo), the rector of the Assumption Church, who was highly respected in Lviv, joined the autocephalous community and significantly expanded the ranks of the UAOC [17]. There were 10 parishes in the Lviv region that joined the UAOC by October 1989 [18]. The number of priests who supported the church movement for the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church grew rapidly not only in the Lviv, but also in the Ternopil Orthodox dioceses [19]. Communities in the highlands of the Ivano-Frankivsk region massively joined the UAOC [20]. Soon, autocephalous parishes began to form in Volyn, Bukovyna, and Rivne regions [21]. At the same time, there was an intense effort to find bishops for the restored Church [18].

The process of UAOC revival was slow. This was due to a number of reasons, the most prominent of which was the non-canonical status of the Church [22]. The necessity to resolve this issue prompted the leaders of the autocephalous movement to send a letter to Patriarch Demetrius I of Constantinople with a request to accept the UAOC under his spiritual omophorion [23]. The parishes of the UAOC decided to mention Patriarch Demetrius I of Constantinople during their services [24]. However, the autocephalous Church did not receive the blessing of the Patriarch of Constantinople. The lack of clergy and weak church organization slowed the process of its development.

At the same time, there were villages in the western regions of Ukraine where parishioners could not decide on their confessional affiliation. Most of these believers attended their home church as a matter of habit without demanding any changes. Another reason was that believers were not aware of the history of Christianity in Ukraine and in the field of theology. Consequently, some parishes re-registered as independent parishes without indicating their confessional affiliation. In such churches, during the service, “all Orthodox Patriarchs and no one in particular” could sometimes be mentioned [17].

The Council was held in the city of Halych in Ivano-Frankivsk region, on January 22, 1990 with 168 representatives of the Orthodox clergy and 204 representatives of communities. The Council decided to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the ROC and join the UAOC. This was the first time in the modern history of the ROC that so many religious communities left this church structure [25]. Another similar Council was held in Ternopil at the beginning of 1990 [26]. During 1989-1990 there were 500 parishes and 300 former priests of the ROC in Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk regions supporting the idea of autocephaly. Public organizations were created to support the UAOC. For example, the Brotherhood of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called started publishing the periodicals "Tserkva i zhyttia" (Church and Life) and "Nasha vira – pravoslavia" (Our Religion Is Orthodoxy) [27]. It was the narrative dynamics of the support of the national church by believers and priests that required a bishop for its full-fledged activity. Otherwise, it would be impossible to raise the question of the canonicity of the UAOC and its recognition in world Orthodoxy. The Lviv Council of Autocephalous Priests on October 20, 1989 asked Ivan (Bodnarchuk), a supernumerary bishop of the ROC, to become head of the UAOC.

It is known that on October 1, 1989, the bishop sent a telegram to the Synod of the ROC in which he announced his withdrawal from the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate and recognition of the canonical authority of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the United States and the UAOC in the diaspora of Metropolitan Mstyslav (Skrypnyk) over the UOAC [30]. To a certain extent, Bishop Ivan's decision was due to a conflict with the hierarchs of the ROC [31]. On October 22, 1989, as the first hierarch of the UAOC, Bishop Ivan (Bodnarchuk) served the "bishop's liturgy" for the first time in the Peter and Paul Church in Lviv and performed the deacon's ordination of Yurii Boyko [29]. During the bishop's liturgy, Bishop Ivan called for "finally realizing that it is time to become the master of our own house, without instructions and guidance from the outside, but truly free, truly independent" [21].

The emergence of the UAOC in the Russian Church was perceived as a church schism. By the resolution of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of November 14, 1989, Bishop Ivan was defrocked and deprived of his priesthood and monasticism [32].

At the same time, a church council, the governing body of the UAOC, was established in Lviv and the church's statute was adopted. Given the dynamics of the growth of autocephalous sentiments in the western regions and the desire of some communities in Central and Eastern Ukraine to move to the autocephalous Church, on October 31, 1989, the UAOC Church Council, headed by Archpriest Volodymyr (Yarema), announced the conditions under which parishes of other jurisdictions could transfer to the UAOC. The following basic

requirements were declared: 1) recognition of the principles of the UAOC's conciliarity and independence (principles that were formulated by the Kyiv Council of 1921); 2) invalidation of the act of 1686, which was interpreted by the Moscow Church as the withdrawal of the Kyiv Metropolis from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and its inclusion in the Moscow Patriarchate; 3) condemnation of the total destruction of the UAOC in the USSR in the 1921-1930s; 4) recognition of Patriarch Mstyslav (Skrypnyk) as the first hierarch of the UAOC [33].

Supporters of the autocephalous Church and Greek Catholics, who had already established themselves as fighters for the national idea, gradually gained favor among believers in the western regions of Ukraine. This allowed believers of both denominations to use force to seize ROC churches.

Meanwhile, the religious war in the Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk regions was escalating. In Ternopil, by the mid-1990s, not a single church remained under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC: most of the buildings went to Greek Catholics, and the Cathedral of the Nativity of Christ, after its rector, Metropolitan Archpriest Valery (Kudriakov), announced his withdrawal from the ROC, went to supporters of autocephaly [34]. Archbishop Lazar (Shvets) of Ternopil and Kremenets of the Russian Orthodox Church, who defended the position of obtaining canonical autocephaly for the Ukrainian Church from the Russian Orthodox Church, could not resist the development of the autocephalous movement in the Ternopil region. In the Ternopil region, mainly the parishes of the Kremenets district remained subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate.

In Ivano-Frankivsk, of the seven churches belonging to the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC, by the halfway point of 1990, none remained: six buildings were taken over by Greek Catholics, and one was occupied by the autocephalous community. The Orthodox ROC was provided with a kindergarten building that could accommodate 150-200 people [19, 35].

Despite the high activity of parishioners who rejected the ROC and demonstrated their affiliation with nationally oriented churches, and the support of the authorities for the autocephalous and Greek Catholic movements, in 1990 a significant number of parishes remained within the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC/UOC in three oblasts of the western region – Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk.

Sociological surveys published by the party Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy (People's Movement of Ukraine) showed that in the Lviv region 65 % of believers were Greek Catholics, 12 % were UOC believers, and 8% were UAOC believers. Instead, the results of a study conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the USSR Academy of Sciences in March-April 1990

revealed that the share of Greek Catholics among the region's believers was 28 %, the share of UOC believers decreased to 25 % (by 2 %), and the share of autocephalous believers increased from 15 % to 19 %. It was explained that these changes were largely the result of the seizure of churches by autocephalous communities and the propaganda of the national Church [36].

After Bishop Ivan (Bondarchuk) moved to the UAOC, he was responsible for opening new parishes and taking care of the formation of the church hierarchy [21]. In early 1990, the UAOC decided that episcopal ordinations were necessary. Involving the bishops of foreign churches in this process proved to be a difficult task. Archbishop Ivan of Lviv and Halych appealed to the Catholicos of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Bishop Volodymyr of Moldova and Chisinau, and other hierarchs to participate in the ordination of bishops for the UAOC. However, he did not receive their consent [30].

The first bishop of the new UAOC episcopate was Bishop Vasyl (Bodnarchuk). His ordination was attended by Bishop Ivan (Bodnarchuk), Bishop Varlaam (Iliushenko) of Volyn and Rivne, who was ordained secretly by the Russian Orthodox Church, and Bishop Vikentiy (Chekalin) of Yasnopolyansky of the True Orthodox (Catacomb) Church [37]. Subsequently, five more hierarchs were ordained: On April 7, Bishop Andriy (Abramchuk) for the Carpathian region, on April 28, Bishop Daniel (Kovalchuk) for Bukovyna, on May 5, Bishop Mykola (Grokh) for the Volyn diocese, on May 22, Bishop Roman (Balashchuk) for Chernihiv and Sumy, and on May 29, Bishop Volodymyr (Romaniuk) for Transcarpathia [38, 26].

At the same time, the bishops tried to establish contact with Patriarch Mstyslav (Skrypnyk), considering him the most suitable candidate for the UAOC primacy. Metropolitan Mstyslav was abroad and headed the UOC in the United States. According to the founders of the UAOC, the name of the bishop was of great importance for the establishment of the church. Metropolitan Mstyslav's advanced age also guaranteed his minimal interference in the complex chain of conflicts in the Church. In addition, the UAOC, led by Patriarch Mstyslav, although not officially recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch, enjoyed some attention from him. A little later, the Ukrainian Orthodox Word, a magazine of the UOC in the United States, published in its 7-8 issues of 1992 a facsimile of the message of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to Patriarch Mstyslav, in which the Holy Patriarch called the latter "beloved brother and concelebrant" [39]. Therefore, the clergy of the UAOC insisted that Bishop Ivan (Bodnarchuk) appeal to Metropolitan Mstyslav and recognize him as the first hierarch of the UAOC [28].

On 5-6 June 1990, the First Local Council of the UAOC took place in Kyiv at the Cinema House, attended by 700 delegates, including seven bishops and over 200 priests [40]. The reports of Archbishop Ivan (Bodnarchuk) and other delegates analysed the history of the

Orthodox Church in Ukraine, developed a model of church governance, and created seven dioceses. The Council approved the restoration of the UAOC and adopted the Church's Charter. For the first time, the patriarchal structure of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine was proclaimed. Metropolitan Mstyslav (Skrypnyk), head of the UOC in the United States and the diaspora, was elected Patriarch of Kyiv and All Ukraine in absentia.

The Council made a number of important decisions on: opening theological seminaries in Kyiv, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and the Regent-Diak School in Lviv; the prospects for opening a theological academy; returning church buildings seized in the 1920s and 1940s; establishing foreign, publishing, economic, and pension departments at the UAOC Patriarchate; creating a commission to translate liturgical books; restoring the activities of monasteries; and establishing Sunday schools to work with children and youth. The council abolished the documents according to which the Kyiv Metropolis was subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate in 1686 and the UAOC was banned in Soviet times. The 1990 decision of the Russian Orthodox Church to form the UOC was recognized by the Council as groundless [25]. The Council approved the demands for the return of church buildings seized in the 1920s and 1940s.

Archbishop Ivan (Bodnarchuk) of Lviv and Galicia was elevated to the rank of metropolitan with the title “Vicar of the Holy Kyivan Patriarchal Throne” [41]. Thus, during the absence of Patriarch Mstyslav, who did not receive a visa to enter the USSR, the Council entrusted Metropolitan Ivan with the management of the UAOC.

On October 2, 1990, the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR registered the statute of the UAOC, legalizing the activities of this institution.

Conclusions. Thus, the April 1985 plenum stimulated the rapid development of democratization of society, which provided for the implementation of constitutional provisions on freedom of conscience. Preparations for the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the baptism of Rus' at the state level accelerated the adoption of a number of legislative acts that contributed to the revitalization of religious processes in Ukraine.

The revival of the UAOC in Ukraine was based on the interaction of nationally oriented socio-political forces and the clergy. The rapid processes of democratization of society stimulated the development of the autocephalous movement, which aimed to declare independence from the Moscow Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Church. This initiative was widely supported by the clergy and believers of the western regions of Ukraine and in 1989-1990 was led by Archpriest Volodymyr (Yarema) and Bishop Ivan (Bodnarchuk).

The election of Metropolitan Mstyslav (Skrypnyk) as patriarch of the UAOC at the First Local Council of the Church in June 1990 exacerbated intra-church relations, which slowed down the Church's path to canonical status.

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