

The Gospel According to Poroshenko: Politics, Religion, and the New Church of Ukraine

By Nicolai N. Petro

Paper Presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention, Columbia University 2-4 May 2019

[*Yale Journal of International Affairs*](#), vol. 14, № 1 Spring 2019.



(Photo by
Sergei
SUPINSKY /
AFP)

Religious conflict in Ukraine has been much in the news of late, ever since President Petro Poroshenko very publicly embraced the ambitious idea of creating a single, unified Orthodox Christian church out of the country's many Orthodox denominations. This idea, long dear to the hearts of Ukrainian nationalists, kept the issue on the front pages of the media in Ukraine, Russia, and other predominantly Orthodox countries for most of 2018.

Then, quite unexpectedly, he got his wish. On January 6, 2019, the Patriarch of Constantinople, *primus inter pares* among Orthodox Church hierarchs worldwide, granted Poroshenko a church document (*tomos*) designating the newly minted Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) as the sole legitimate and independent Orthodox church in Ukraine. The question that many Orthodox Christians both in Ukraine and elsewhere are now asking themselves is, at what cost?

Poroshenko's achievement has evoked conflicts within both Ukraine and the rest of the Orthodox world. While he has gained the backing of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the rest of the Orthodox world has taken a wait-and-see attitude since, in the tradition of Orthodox Christianity, the consequences of these actions will not become fully manifest until far into the future.

The Tomos *Wunderwaffe*

What makes this turn of events so startling is that before October 2018 all the established autocephalous Orthodox Churches recognized the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, known colloquially as the UOC-MP by virtue of its close spiritual ties with the Moscow Patriarchate, as the sole canonical Orthodox church in Ukraine.¹ This church had been granted “independence and autonomy in its administration” by the extraordinary Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church on October 27, 1990, nearly a year before Ukraine declared its own independence.² Later, in 1992, the Metropolitan of Kiev, Filaret (Denisenko), having earlier lost his bid to become Patriarch of Moscow, proclaimed himself Patriarch of Kiev and set up his own Ukrainian Orthodox Church, known as the UOC-KP, or simply Kievan Patriarchate.

Since then, the UOC-MP, the UOC-KP, and the much smaller Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) have coexisted in tense, mutual non-recognition. Over the next quarter century, the Kievan Patriarchate would go on to establish over 4,000 parishes. By the end of 2018, however, at least two-thirds of the 18,000 Orthodox Christian parishes in Ukraine still swore allegiance to the UOC-MP.³

Ukrainian nationalists have long found it troubling that the majority of the country attends a church whose nominal head resides in Moscow. On the wave of nationalism inspired by the 2014 Maidan Revolution and the war with Russia, therefore, they introduced legislation to change this. Draft law 4128 would have allowed parishes to transfer to another church’s jurisdiction by a simple majority vote of those who self-identify with the community and participate in its religious life.⁴ Since these terms were not defined, critics worried that any organized group of intruders might be able to seize control of a parish and transfer it against the will of parishioners.

¹ By tradition Christians believe that the Church is one-in-essence, since Christ described himself as the vine and his apostles as the branches of that vine (John 15:5). They were also to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). The term “local church” is thus used to identify autocephalous or autonomous jurisdictions within the Orthodox Church. In modern times these jurisdictions have increasingly coincided with national boundaries.

A *tomos* is an ecclesiastical document issued by the highest-ranking body of a local church, a synod of bishops. It proclaims important information, such as a grant of autocephaly. As the Orthodox Church in America web site explains, “An ‘autocephalous’ Church is completely self-governing. It elects its own primate and has the right to consecrate its own Holy Chrism, among other prerogatives unique to autocephalous Churches. . . . An ‘autonomous’ Church is self-governing to a certain degree in its internal matters, but its head is appointed or confirmed by the autocephalous Church which nurtures it. An autonomous Church also receives its Holy Chrism from its ‘Mother Church.’” “Autocephalous/Autonomous - Questions & Answers - Orthodox Church in America,” OCA.org, accessed March 2 2019, <https://oca.org/questions/autocephaly/autocephalous-autonomous>.

² “What Rights Does the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Really Have?” *Orthodox Christianity*, November 29, 2018, <http://orthochristian.com/117556.html>.

³ Vladislav Maltsev, “Mertvye dushi,” *Ukraina.ru*, October 26, 2018, <https://ukraina.ru/exclusive/20181026/1021565946.html>.

⁴ “Proekt Zakonu pro osoblyvyi status relihiinykh orhanizatsiï, kerivni tsentry iakykh znakhodiat’sia v derzhavi, iaka vyznana Verkhovnoiu Radoiu Ukraïni derzhavoiu-ahresorom,” web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, April 22, 2016, http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=58849.

Draft law 4511 was even more intrusive.⁵ It required that all religious charters explicitly endorse the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and laws of Ukraine (art. 3). Candidates for the leadership of religious organizations would require state approval (art. 5), as would any invitations to foreign religious leaders (art. 6). Finally, in the event of systematic violations of law, or collaboration with “military-terrorist groups,” the state could terminate a religious organization (art. 7). Both laws were widely criticized by religious groups in Ukraine and were never even brought up for a vote.⁶

What most people do not know, however, is that these laws were part of a strategy that had been developed within the presidential administration over the course of 2015. That year, Sergei Zdioruk and Vladimir Tokman, two senior analysts at the National Institute for Strategic Research (NISS), which prepares analyses for the presidential administration, wrote a report on the threat that the UOC-MP posed to Ukraine’s statehood.⁷ They later published their analysis in the Ukrainian press, sparking an intense discussion.

Labeling it a “channel for the clerical occupation of Ukraine,” Zdioruk and Tokman claimed that the UOC-MP assisted the rebels in Eastern Ukraine, and collaborated with the occupation in Crimea. These subversive activities, they suggested, could be effectively counteracted by the creation of a single local Orthodox church out of the Kievan Patriarchate and the AUOC. The authors predicted that the creation of such a church would lead to a “chain reaction” of calls for autocephaly from the Russian Orthodox Church throughout the former Soviet Union. Moreover, as the largest church in the Orthodox world, they pointed out that this new Ukrainian church could serve as a “reliable ally” of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (also known as the Ecumenical Patriarch).⁸

Zdioruk and Tokman therefore called upon the government to adopt a nine-point program, worth reproducing in full because subsequent events have followed it with remarkable accuracy:

1. The Ukrainian parliament should adopt draft law №1244 of 4 December 2014 and rename the UOC-MP the “Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine;”
2. The government should begin a discussion on rescinding the property rights of the UOC-MP in all key national shrines;
3. The government should prevent hierarchs of the UOC-MP from taking part in any public celebrations;

⁵ “Proekt Zakonu pro vnesennia zmin do Zakonu Ukraïny ‘Pro svobodu sovisti ta relihiïni orhanizatsii’,” web portal of the Verkhovna Rada, February 23, 2016, http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=58255.

⁶ “Protiv zakonoproekta 4128 ob”edinilis’ pochti vse konfessii Ukrainy,” *UNIAN*, October 5, 2016, <https://religions.unian.net/state/1556986-protiv-zakonoproekta-4128-obyedinilis-pochti-vse-konfessii-ukrainyi.html>.

⁷ “Natsional’nyi instytut stratehichnykh doslidzhen’,” National Institute of Strategic Research, accessed February 22, 2019, <http://www.niss.gov.ua/>.

⁸ Sergei Zdioruk and Vladimir Tokman, “Vydavlivaiia Moskvu po kaple,” *Zerkalo nedeli*, October 23, 2015, https://zn.ua/internal/vydavlivaya-moskvu-po-kaple-_.html.

4. Only those Orthodox organizations that have “shown a capacity for the socio-patriotic education of their flock” should be allowed to take part in government programs;
5. All visits to Ukraine by the “odious activists and functionaries of the Russian Orthodox Church” should be forbidden;
6. Civil servants who attempt to hinder the creation a local Ukrainian Orthodox Church should be summarily removed, under the law of lustration;
7. Current legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organizations should be amended to allow for legal action against religious organizations whose actions violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ukrainian state, or evoke religious hatred;
8. A “system of concordats” should be introduced to “force [religious organizations] . . . to work responsibly on an equal basis for the good of the entire Ukrainian people.”
9. Finally, the government should develop a comprehensive and mutually reinforcing set of initiatives aimed at establishing a local Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

When this plan was first conceived the achievement of autocephaly seemed highly improbable, since not a single Orthodox church recognized either the Kievan Patriarchate or the UAOC. By early 2018, however, Poroshenko’s deputy chief of staff, Rostislav Pavlenko, came to believe that the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholemew I, might be willing to reconsider his position on Ukrainian autocephaly.

According to press accounts, Pavlenko took this idea to the president, promoting it as a sort of *Wunderwaffe* or “silver bullet” that could sharply boost the president’s abysmal ratings.⁹ When the *tomos* failed to materialize on the date that Pavlenko had promised, the president fired him, but kept him close by. Pavlenko now serves as the director the NISS, where he, Zdioruk, and Tokman continue to promote the eradication of the UOC-MP.¹⁰

In retrospect, therefore, Poroshenko’s decision to make the divisive issue of autocephaly a “critical” issue less than a year before the upcoming presidential elections seems far less odd. While it alienates voters in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, these were never Poroshenko’s voters to begin with. The president’s electoral base lies almost exclusively in Western and Central Ukraine, which is also the regional base of the Kievan Patriarchate and of Ukraine’s politically

⁹ Viktoria Venk, “Tranzit v shtab ili rasplata za Tomos,” *Strana* (Ukraine), July 31, 2018, <https://strana.ua/articles/analysis/153710-tranzit-v-shtab-ili-rasplata-za-tomos-pochemu-iz-administratsii-prezidenta-ushel-ideoloh-avtokefalii-pavlenko.html>.

¹⁰ “Tomos: ozhidaniia, realii i puti resheniia problemy rossiiskogo vmeshatel'stva v process predostavleniia avtokefalii,” organized by the National Institute of Strategic Research, *Ukrinform.ru*, November 13, 2018, <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-presshall/2574584-tomos-ozidania-realii-i-puti-resenia-problemy-rossijskogo-vmesatelstva-v-process-predostavleniia-avtokefalii.html>.

influential Greek Catholic Church.¹¹ The president's problem, politically speaking, is that even there he was running a distant third.

To make it into the run-offs Poroshenko would first have to win decisively in the West and Center. This meant embracing a decidedly more nationalistic agenda, of which autocephaly from Moscow has long been a major part.¹² Only after he makes it into the second round can he afford to broaden his appeal. This appears to be the strategy that Poroshenko has adopted, and it has brought from fourth or fifth place in the polls up to a strong second during the last weeks of the presidential campaign.

A Bit of Byzantine Geopolitics

While it is apparent how president Poroshenko benefits from the creation of a local Orthodox Church of Ukraine, what does the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholemew I, stand to gain from endowing it with exclusive legitimacy? Simply put, the chance to prove that he is still an influential figure in the Orthodox world. In the centuries since its own autocephaly, the size and influence of the Patriarchate of Moscow has waxed, while that of the Patriarchate of Constantinople has waned. In the current dispute over who has proper jurisdiction in Ukraine, therefore, the Ecumenical Patriarch makes four points.

First, that in the 1300s the Kievan *metropolia* moved to Moscow without the Ecumenical Patriarch's permission. Second, that the *tomos* of autocephaly granted to Moscow never included the *metropolia* of Kiev. Third, that when Moscow was granted the right to ordain the Metropolitan of Kiev in 1686, it was on the condition that the latter commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarch as his ecclesiastical superior, "to demonstrate the canonical jurisdiction of Constantinople over this Metropolis." Finally, that "since Russia, as the one responsible for the current painful situation in Ukraine, is unable to solve the problem, the Ecumenical Patriarchate assumed the initiative of resolving the problem."¹³

The Moscow Patriarchate disputes each of these assertions.¹⁴ More importantly, it is hard to avoid the impression that revisiting them many centuries later serves some more immediate purpose. Patriarch Bartholomew seemed to suggest as much, when he explained that he took up

¹¹ "Opros pokazal naibolee populiarnye religioznye konfessii v Ukraine," *Liga.net*, June 18, 2017, http://news.liga.net/news/politics/14770805-opros_pokazal_naibolee_populyarnye_religioznye_konfessii_v_ukraine.htm.

¹² Among the 15% of Ukrainians who believe that their country is "on the right track," Poroshenko's closest rivals are the far right candidate Ruslan Koshulinsky, the mayor of Lviv Andriy Sadovyi, and former security services head Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, all candidates with strong nationalist credentials. "Tri chetverti ukraintsev shchitaiat, chto strana dvizhetsia ne tuda," *Pravda* (Ukraine), February 4, 2019, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2019/02/4/7205676/>.

¹³ "Archbishop Daniel Participates in Synaxis of Hierarchs of The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople," website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, September 5, 2018, https://www.uocofusa.org/news_180901_1.html.

¹⁴ "Zaiavlenie Sviashchennogo Sinoda Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v sviazi s nezakonnym vtorzheniem Konstantinopol'skogo Patriarkhata na kanonicheskuiu territoriiu Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi," Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, September 14, 2018, <https://mospat.ru/ru/2018/09/14/news163803/>.

this issue at the insistence of “the honorable Ukrainian Government, as well as recurring requests by ‘Patriarch’ Philaret of Kiev” (quotation marks in the original).¹⁵

This explanation has puzzled many Orthodox Christians. It is quite odd to say that the Ukrainian government has asked for autocephaly, since autocephaly cannot be granted to a country. It can only be granted to a canonical Orthodox Church, and all Orthodox churches, including the Patriarchate of Constantinople, were in agreement that the UOC-MP was that church. Finally, the UOC-MP itself had not asked for autocephaly, and emphatically rejected the intercession of the Ecumenical Patriarch.¹⁶

Second, since there was no alternative canonical church in Ukraine to receive autocephaly, a new church had to be set up quickly to receive its long-awaited independence. Reconciling the desires of the Kievan Patriarchate and AUOC, however, proved more difficult than expected. To facilitate matters the Ecumenical Patriarch sent two envoys to Ukraine to negotiate the following complicated dance: first, the lifting of the *anathema* against the leaders of the two schismatic churches; second, their acceptance of temporary oversight from the Ecumenical Patriarchate; third, the grant of autocephaly to the newly constituted local Orthodox Church. Under the best of circumstances this process could take decades. Thanks to the keen determination of Kievan Patriarch Filaret, and the engagement of president Poroshenko, however, it was all accomplished by the end of year, just days shy of the official start of the presidential campaign.¹⁷

It is therefore easy to see why President Poroshenko took center stage at the Unifying Church Council held in the ancient cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev on December 15, 2018. From the podium, he congratulated his guests with “the final attainment of our Ukrainian independence from Russia,” adding that “not a single patriot doubts the importance of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church for an independent Ukrainian state. Such a church is the spiritual guarantor of our sovereignty.”¹⁸

A few unkind commentators noted that Poroshenko mentioned “Russia” twelve times and “God” only twice in his speech. On the whole, however, this nationally televised celebration of Ukrainian unity served brilliantly as a launching pad for the president’s re-election campaign, which by that time had already adopted the slogan “Army, Language, Faith -- the army defends

¹⁵ “Archbishop Daniel Participates in Synaxis.”

¹⁶ “Mitropolit Kievskii Onufrii: U nashei Tserkvi est' vse atributy nezavisimosti,” Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, September 14, 2018, <https://mospat.ru/ru/2018/09/14/news163814/>.

¹⁷ “Kievskii patriarkhat khochet poluchit' tomos do prezidentskikh vyborov na Ukraine,” *Ukraina.ru*, September 20, 2018, <https://ukraina.ru/news/20180920/1021207016.html>. For more on the intrigues that surrounded the Unifying Council, see Aleksandr Koval, “Intronizatsiia' Epifaniia (Dumenko) v Kieve: chto sluchilos' i chto ostalos' za kadrom,” *Pravoslavie.ru*, February 5, 2019, <http://pravoslavie.ru/119138.html>.

¹⁸ “Vystup Prezydenta za rezul'tatamy Vseukraïns'koho Pravoslavnoho Obiednavchoho Soboru,” web portal of the President of Ukraine, December 15, 2018, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-za-rezultatami-vseukrayinskogo-pravoslavno-52050>.

our land. The language defends our hearts. The church defends our soul.”¹⁹ In 2019 this would be simplified into the more direct, “It’s Poroshenko or Putin.”²⁰

What Does the Future Hold for Ukrainian Orthodoxy?

In the weeks since the *tomos* of autocephaly, the government has continued to “grease the wheels” for the new OCU. On January 17, 2019, the Ukrainian parliament adopted law 4128-D, expanding the states’ authority to register and monitor religious organizations. Earlier, on December 20, 2018, the Ukrainian parliament had passed law 5309, giving the UOC-MP just four months to officially change its name to the “Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine.” It has refused, citing its administrative independence from the Russian Orthodox Church since 1990 and its registration as such in Kiev.²¹ Both of these laws have evoked concern among religious rights organizations in Ukraine, who argue that they violate both the Ukrainian constitution and European human right conventions.²²

Can one therefore conclude that, with the creation of the OCU, the Ukrainian government has established a “state church,” its own national brand of Christianity? President Poroshenko fervently denies this. He insists that every Ukrainian retains the right to make his or her own choice in matters of faith, even though “in *that* church they are praying for the Russian authorities and armed forces that are killing Ukrainians,”²³ and that he, for one, cannot understand how such churches can be called Ukrainian.²⁴

¹⁹ “Poroshenko ozvuchyv ‘formulu suchasnoi ukrains’koi identychnosti,’” *Obozrevatel* (Ukraine), September 20, 2018, <https://www.obozrevatel.com/ukr/politics/poroshenko-ozvuchiv-formulu-suchasnoi-ukrainskoi-identychnosti.htm>.

²⁰ “Na forume Poroshenko pugali Putynym,” *Korrespondent* (Ukraine), January 29, 2019,

<https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/vibory2019/4059102-na-forume-poroshenko-puhaly-putynym>.

²¹ Elena Golubeva, “UPTs nezavisima ot RPTs nastol’ko, naskol’ko Ukraina nezavisima ot Rossii,” *112.ua*, May 28, 2017, <https://112.ua/interview/upc-nezavisima-ot-rpc-nastolko-naskolko-ukraina-nezavisima-ot-rossii-392316-print.html>. Interestingly, the Rada’s own professional staff found that law to be in conflict with the Ukrainian constitution. “Verkhovna Rada pryñiala skandal’nyi zakonoproekt pro pereimenuvannia relihiinykh orhanizatsii,” December 20, 2018, web portal of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, <http://news.church.ua/2018/12/20/verhovna-rada-prijnyala-skandalnij-zakonoproekt-pro-perejmenuvannya-religijnix-organizacij/>.

²² “IRS zaklykaie doopratsiuvaty proekt № 4128 pro zminu pidporiadkuvannia relihiinykh hromad,” Institute for Religious Freedom (Ukraine), January 15, 2019,

https://www.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1943%3A1&catid=34%3Aua&Itemid=61&lang=uk; “Pravozashchitniki raskritikovali novuiu redaktsiiu zakonoproekta №4128,” *Pravoslavnaia zhizn’*,

January 17, 2019, <https://pravlife.org/ru/content/pravozashchitniki-raskritikovali-novuyu-redakciyu-zakonoproekta-no4128>. Meanwhile, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg reached a decision in a dispute between the Serbian Patriarchate and civil authorities in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that some see as a precedent that could be used to challenge 4128-D and similar Ukrainian laws. “IAkshcho derzhava nadaie perevahu odniñ z tserkov...,” *ECHR: Ukrainian Aspect*, January 15, 2019, <https://www.echr.com.ua/yakshho-derzhava-nadaye-perevagu-odnij-z-cerkov/>.

²³ “Khtos’ shukaie v Tomosi vidsutnist’ avtokefalii i te, shcho mytropoliiia ne ie samostiñnistiu,” web portal of the President of Ukraine, January 15, 2019, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/htos-shukaye-v-tomosi-vidsutnist-avtokefaliyi-i-te-sho-mitro-52474>.

²⁴ “Vystup Prezydenta Ukraïny pid chas uchasti u molytovnomu zakhodi za Ukraïnu,” web portal of the President of Ukraine, October 14, 2018, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-pid-chas-uchasti-u-molitovnomu-za-50446>.

But while it may be too early to call the OCU a state church, it is already abundantly clear that, for the president, the speaker of parliament, and the head of the security forces, the UOC-MP is the church of the enemies of the Ukrainian state, of those who “receive instructions from abroad and set up a fifth column.”²⁵ This point is made emphatically each time the president declares that the Russian Orthodox Church is part of the Russian political system,²⁶ and then describes the *tomos* as a “victory for Ukraine and a defeat for Russia, no less important, perhaps even more important, than victory at the front lines.”²⁷

The fate of the UOC-MP thus serves as an important lesson to other civic and religious organizations about the dire consequences of contravening the political establishment. It is, after all, no secret that the cardinal sin of the UOC-MP, in the eyes of the government, has been its refusal to support the war effort in Eastern Ukraine, which Metropolitan Onufry calls a “fratricidal conflict” and a “civil war.”²⁸ With the establishment of the OCU and the simultaneous disestablishment of the UOC-MP, the full power of the state is on display, and all pretense of separation between church and state, as stipulated in article 35 of the Ukrainian Constitution, has been stripped away.²⁹

At the same time, several other strong predictions have not come to pass. First, the UOC-MP has not shattered. The most optimistic estimate of the number of parishes that have transferred over to the OCU puts that figure at over 320.³⁰ This amounts to fewer than 3% of all UOC-MP parishes. The UOC-MP, meanwhile, says it is aware of only 36 voluntary transfers, and 111 that are still in dispute.³¹

It is possible, of course, that the reality of a new church structure has yet to sink in. Still, it is telling that the geographical pattern of transfers has been precisely what anyone familiar with Ukrainian history would expect—almost all have been in Western and Central Ukraine, almost none in the East and South.³²

This glaring divide helps explain why no other autocephalous Orthodox Church has yet recognized the OCU, or even congratulated the new Metropolitan of Kiev, Epiphanius

²⁵ “UPTs (MP) perekhovuvala rosijs'kykh dyversantiv i vbyvtv', - Parubii,” *Religious Information Service of Ukraine* (RISU), October 7, 2018, https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/religion_and_policy/72940/; “Razvedka ubezhdena, chto RPTs na 99% kontroliruietsia spetssluzhbyami RF,” *Pravda* (Ukraine), January 24, 2019, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2019/01/24/7204779/>.

²⁶ Petro Poroshenko, “Derzhat' shturval,” *Novoe vremya* (Ukraine), January 1, 2019, <https://nv.ua/opinion/derzhat-shturval-2515855.html>.

²⁷ “Poroshenko priravnial poluchenie tomosa k pobede na fronte,” *Pravda* (Ukraine), January 15, 2019, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2019/01/15/7203856/>.

²⁸ “Mitropolit Onufrii: Neobkhodimo prekratit' voynu i perestat' ubivat' drug druga,” *Ukraina.ru*, July 14, 2015, <https://ukraina.ru/interview/20150714/1013658370.html>.

²⁹ “Constitution of Ukraine, Article 35: Freedom of Religion,” Berkeley Center for Religions, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/constitution-of-ukraine-article-35-freedom-of-religion>.

³⁰ “Petro Poroshenko, president of Ukraine,” Twitter feed, February 18, 2019, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1097477651244175362>.

³¹ “Episkop Baryshevskii Viktor rasskazal o real'noi statistike perekhodov obshchin iz Ukrainskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v PTsU,” *Patriarchia.ru*, February 21, 2019, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/5375891.html>.

³² See the interactive map on the web site of *Fakty* at <https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20190218-skilky-parafij-rpts-perejshlo-do-ptsu-karta/>.

(Dumenko) on his enthronement. Indeed, in an unprecedented rebuke of their presiding bishop, the Patriarch of Constantinople, the governing body of the monastics of Mount Athos in Greece refused his request to send an official representative to Epiphanius' elevation, saying that the OCU was indistinguishable from "the schismatic branch" formerly known as the Kievan Patriarchate.³³

Also unexpected was the ease with which the new OCU accepted the constraints imposed upon it by the Patriarch of Constantinople under the terms of the *tomos*, such as the head of the OCU's demotion from patriarch to metropolitan. The OCU has also been forced to give up all its jurisdictions outside Ukraine, including its rather extensive and well-funded communities in the United States and Canada, which now fall under the administration of the Patriarch of Constantinople.³⁴ Any OCU clergyman dissatisfied with an administrative decision made by his superiors may now appeal directly to the Ecumenical Patriarch, whose decisions are final. Moreover, on matters of doctrine, the OCU pledges to adhere to "the authoritative opinion" of the Patriarch of Constantinople, who has now been granted areas under of personal jurisdiction (*stavropigia*) within Ukraine, alongside the OCU.³⁵ Some view these conditions as part of an effort by the Ecumenical Patriarch to assert a claim to supremacy among his fellow hierarchs, which has only added to their reluctance to embrace the OCU.³⁶

Finally, the global Orthodox community has not split, as many Western media outlets confidently predicted it would.³⁷ Instead, it has rallied around the beleaguered UOC-MP, highlighting the isolation of the Patriarch of Constantinople. With divisions on full display even within the Greek Orthodox community (in addition to the monks of Mount Athos, the Church of Cyprus has publicly criticized the creation of the OCU), other Orthodox churches have been reluctant to enter the fray for fear of further fracture.³⁸

Instead of submitting in the face of political pressure from the governments of Ukraine, the United States, and Canada,³⁹ the Orthodox world has responded in a time-honored fashion. It has

³³ "Afon ofitsial'no otkazal Varfolomeiu v podderzhke PTsU," *Vesti* (Ukraine), February 8, 2019, <https://vesti-ukr.com/strana/324428-afon-ofitsialno-otkazal-varfolomeju-v-podderzhke-ptsu>.

³⁴ Poitr Safonov, "Unizhenie tomosom," *Ukraina.ru*, January 7, 2019, <https://ukraina.ru/exclusive/20190107/1022283171.html>.

³⁵ "Tekst zaiavleniia Sinoda po Ukraine," *Panoptikon.org*, October 11, 2018, <http://panoptikon.org/articles/109387-tekst-zajavlenija-sinoda-po-ukraine.html>.

³⁶ "Vtorzhenie na chuzhuiu zemliu," *Vesti* (Ukraine), February 9, 2019, <https://vesti-ukr.com/strana/324514-vtorzhenie-na-chuzhuiu-zemliu-v-bolharskoj-tserkvi-ulichili-varfolomeja-v-posobnichestve-vlastjam-ukrainy>; "H tréchoysa krish sthn pagkosmia Orthodoksia den einai mia dimeris sýgkroysh," *Romfea*, February 7, 2019, <https://www.romfea.gr/epikairota-xronika/26939-ilarion-i-trexousa-krisi-stin-pagkosmia-orthodojia-den-einai-mia-dimeris-sugkrousi>.

³⁷ The *New York Times* alone published several articles along these lines: "Russia-Ukraine Tensions Set Up the Biggest Christian Schism Since 1054," October 7, 2018; "Russia Takes Further Step Toward Major Schism in Orthodox Church," October 15, 2018; "As Ukraine and Russia Battle Over Orthodoxy, Schisms," December 13, 2018.

³⁸ "Kiprskaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' ne priznaet 'PTsU,'" *Pravoslavie.ru*, February 18, 2019, <https://pravoslavie.ru/119419.html>.

³⁹ "Canada congratulates the united Orthodox Church of Ukraine on receiving the *tomos* of autocephaly," January 9, 2019, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/2615875-canada-congratulates-orthodox-church-of-ukraine-on-receiving-tomos.html>; "U.S. supports independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine," UNIAN, January 10, 2019, <https://www.unian.info/politics/10404816-u-s-supports-independent-orthodox-church-of-ukraine.html>. The

slowed down its deliberative process and limited its interaction with political and religious opponents, in order to give them time to “come to their senses” (2 Timothy 2:26). That might occur soon, or it could take decades, or even centuries. Only God knows.

Politicians typically overlook this aspect of the Church’s strategy for dealing with the secular world because they fail to appreciate that the Orthodox Church sees itself, first and foremost, as a *supernatural* actor, a tangible manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ The modern view, that man is a political animal (ζῷον πολιτικόν) whose actions ought to be evaluated through the prism of relations between the individual and the state, strikes most Orthodox social theorists as extremely narrow. In any political discourse, they say, some part of the universal and ultimate truth always gets lost. Orthodoxy therefore has no set preference for one form of politics over another, because that which is needful, right, and proper, simply lies beyond the ken of politics.⁴¹

From an Orthodox religious perspective, therefore, fleeting political passions matter very little. The Orthodox liturgy, after all, begins with the admonition of Psalm 146:3, “Put not your trust in princes, in sons of men in whom there is no salvation.” Of far greater importance is the struggle for the soul of mankind, which is the Church’s *raison d’être*. As Orthodox Christians see it, therefore, the Church can always rely on one insurmountable advantage in any conflict with political actors—its timeframe for success is eternity. One should therefore expect it to bide its time in its dealings with its opponents, confident in the promise that was once made to it, that even “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Nicolai N. Petro is Professor of Politics and Silvia-Chandley Professor of Peace Studies and Nonviolence at the University of Rhode Island. He writes frequently about church-state relations in Ukraine and Russia. His latest book, *Ukraine in Crisis*, was published by Routledge in 2017.

American government had indicated its strong support for the process of creating a new church early on in the process. See “United States to support Ukraine’s Tomos of autocephaly once granted,” Information Department of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, September 12, 2018, http://portal.rada.gov.ua/en/news/top_news/161971.html. Meanwhile, Russian president Vladimir Putin first addressed the issue publicly at his press conference of December 20, 2018, saying “The situation with the Orthodox church defies comprehension. This is direct interference of the state in religious life. . . . The rationale behind it is, without doubt, political, and it is not good news for religious freedom in general. This is a clear and flagrant violation of the freedom of religion. I am mostly concerned about the likelihood that property redistribution will follow. This is already happening. This redistribution could turn into a heavy dispute, if not bloodshed, God forbid.” “Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference,” web portal of the President of Russia, December 20, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59455>.

⁴⁰ See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998).

⁴¹ Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 74.