

The Lutheran Church in Ukraine: *in search of a national identity*

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1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ukraine is one of the most widely representative Protestant regions in Eastern Europe. The first Calvinist and Lutheran communities (which are related to the classic Protestant tradition) were founded in Ukraine as early as the middle of the sixteenth century. Their connection with the Magisterial or Church Reformation determined the gentrified character of the early Protestant movement in Ukraine and left a distinct mark on its national and cultural life. Contemporary Protestantism in Ukraine is usually defined by its evangelical segment, including Baptist, Evangelical Christian, Pentecostal, and Adventist congregations, which grew out of the «folk» or Radical Reformation. The latter gave new meaning to the whole idea of the church, subordinating it to the only divine criterion — Holy Scripture (following Martin Luther's well-known maxim: «The church does not define what the Bible is; the Bible defines what the church is»). Later evangelical communities departed still further from church tradition, understanding the latter not as a historical, but rather a biblical apostolic inheritance, as the carrying out of God's commandments in accordance with the letter and spirit of revelation.

Usually in Ukraine, where by far the majority of believers consider themselves to be Orthodox or Catholic, evangelical Protestantism is regarded negatively as «sectarian expansion into native spiritual life.»¹ But Lutheranism, with its favorable attitude to the institutional



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¹ *Golos Ukrainii*, 26 April 1999.

church, and its historical and contemporary dialogue with Orthodoxy, may count on the latter's positive perception. Nevertheless, the position of Lutheranism in the Ukrainian context is problematic.

Lutheranism is essentially a model of moderately-reformed Catholicism, and its rudiments are basically different from those of evangelical Protestantism. This is seen, for example, in its appeals to early patristic literature, in which German (and later Swiss) Reformers saw much truth, albeit perverted by ancient philosophy; its reconsideration of Renaissance humanism (especially concerning the problem of free will); the actualization of Christian ethics and law; and its recognition of the authority of the Apostolic, Nicene (retaining the *Filioque*), and Athanasian creeds.

In contrast to Erasmus, Luther insisted on the absolute sinfulness of man, his inability to participate in salvation. Moreover, the church and its statutes (good deeds) lost their soteriological significance; thus, good deeds are not the means, but the fruit of righteousness. Luther rejected any attempt to reconsider revelation (the idea of the primacy of the Word over philosophy) and substantiated the difference between the two biblical doctrines (Law and Gospel) and the two natures of man («external» and «internal»), which symbolize letter and spirit, false and true faith. This last is the way to restoring a personal relationship between the individual and the Living God. This re-thinking of the function of the church found its logical continuation in the principles of *Sola gratia* (God's

grace is given to the whole human race, therefore there is no sacral difference between clergy and laity; people serve God in their everyday life) and also *Sola Scriptura* (divine inspiration of the Bible alone). If salvation is not in the church, but is God's gift, then truth is not in sacred tradition, but in revelation. The Word of God is the only infallible source of faith.

Based on Augustine's teaching on the Two Cities, Luther worked out the theory of two authorities, according to which state and church have different prerogatives. But inasmuch as a believer and a priest are one indivisible person, secular and church powers also constitute a unified, God-ordained social organism. Secular authorities may (though moderately and only in the state's interest) intervene in church affairs (potential Caesaropapism), and church authorities — in secular interests (potential clericalism). This was the reason for Lutheranism's rejection of radical social and ecclesiastical changes. That is why its creeds are penetrated with the spirit of compromise, and the church has adopted the attributes (altar, crucifix, images, priestly vestments) and the elements of the Catholic rite (fasting, confession, religious processions with a cross, etc.).

Although later Lutheran teaching has undergone some changes (beginning with Luther himself in his ecclesiology, in his re-evaluation of the meaning of culture and philosophy), the Lutheran church has kept its spirit of compromise. For all of its doctrine of justification by faith, Lutheranism insists on the baptism of children; while denying the

grace-imparting significance of churchly «acts of righteousness,» Lutheranism understands the Eucharist as a sacrament. Children «still in the womb... participate in the precept of eternal life»; therefore, «... the baptism of children is not a vain affair, but is necessary for salvation and is effective.»² The doctrine of consubstantiation (the presence of Jesus' body and blood in the bread and wine, thus the presence of four elements in the Eucharist) became the modification of Catholic transubstantiation (transformation of the body and blood into bread and wine, thus changing one element into another). Having formulated the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, Luther still upheld the special authority of the priest as a person who functionally retains the apostolic (especially presbyterial) inheritance. Ordination is not merely evidence of a priest's moral purity, but a pledge of special gifts received from God (*Apology*, Article XIII). Thus, in Lutheranism a person may receive pardon for sin from a priest as if from God himself (*The Apology* claims that confession is the third sacrament of the Lutheran church), believing that those sins will be forgiven in heaven. The priest embodies not only apostolic authority, but also the authority of Christ (*Small Catechism*, part V). On this premise, Lutheranism preserves a hierarchy (synodal-consistorial

church structure, the institution of bishops or superintendents, and archbishops), and, since the nineteenth century, the establishment of men's and women's communities of the monastic type. By sanctifying the state as a divine institution, Luther rejected opposition to authority. That is why Lutheranism was critical of social and religious radicalism and supported the monarchy and the idea of the state church in a number of countries.

Throughout its history in Ukraine, Lutheranism was interpreted as a «German» faith. According to some authors, it was a kind of Prussian intrigue against the Slavic world. (This is one of the themes in the famous polemic between Russian Westernizers and Slavophiles.) Incidentally, this «national view» of Lutheranism is not groundless. The appearance of this denomination is closely bound to the idea of a national church, which was taken up in the sixteenth century in the German principalities as part of their national-cultural aspirations. Lutheranism found support in other European countries that aspired to national independence. But it became the national church only in those places where the «moderate» magisterial reform program was pursued.

But the middle and lower classes hoped for the radical reorganization of church and society, which was proclaimed by Calvinist *Burghers* (in Eastern Europe it was the gentry, or *szlachta*) and «plebeian» Anabaptists. Their radicalism found its expression in more decisive doctrinal initiatives. While the statements of faith introduced by German Reformers be-

² «Stat'i vizitatsij (Svodnye artikuly)» and «Apologija augsburgskogo veroispovedanija» in *Kniga soglasija. Veroispovedanie i učenje Liuteranskoj Tserkvi* (Duncanville, 1998), pp. 830 and 200.

came obligatory for all Lutheran churches in the world, Calvinists did not codify any creeds at all. Although John Calvin's writings are undoubtedly authoritative, Calvinism emphasized the regional creativity of its followers and the composition of national documents (the Heidelberg and Brest Catechisms, the Gallican, Belgic, and Westminster Confessions of Faith, etc.). Calvinism and later evangelical trends supported the spiritual desires of national communities, encouraging them to use their native languages, culture and traditions. Ivan Franko, in his periodization of Ukrainian literature dates the new period from the *Catechism* by Simon Budny (1562) — the first Slavic-Russian biblical translation, and a Protestant work.

But Lutheranism in Ukraine in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the faith of German colonists — townsmen, artisans, and merchants. This fact made it a marginal phenomenon as a new religious movement in a society where it would have needed the upper class as its main promoter. Lutheranism received neither support nor was widely disseminated (with no more than ten groups in the western region), nor did it have a marked influence on cultural life, which was focused on the private estates of feudal lords. If there were many Lutheran patrons in the Kingdom of Poland, then among the Ukrainian gentry there were none. If there was a famous Lutheran academy in Poland (in Königsberg), then in Ukraine we do not find a single school — in contrast to the network of Calvinist and Socinian schools. The

Lutherans left not one written work in the national language. Thus, the widely-disseminated explanation in native historiography concerning the collapse of the early Protestant movement in Ukraine — that it had a «German spirit,»³ alien not only to Orthodoxy, but also to Calvinism and Socinianism — is superficial.

Lutheranism's function as a bearer of German culture is typical for recent Ukrainian history as well. Before the Second World War this religion existed mainly in German settlements. Most often in the south-eastern region — in the colonies of Мьнчен-Харьковская, Rorbach, Worms, Baden, Strasburg, Elzas, and Kassel-Tavricheskaja *gubernii*s and also in Odessa and Kiev (Here the first community was founded in 1765; its church building was built in 1857 for a congregation that numbered 13,000 members by the twentieth century.) In western Ukraine there was Galicia with its numerous German communities: the colonies of Brigidau, Dornfeld, Hartfeld, Unterwalden, Einsingen, Ugarsthal and also the cities of Peremysl', L'viv (here a local congregation had 5,000 parishioners in 1936), Rava-Russkaja, Drohobych, Stryj, Stanislav. By the beginning of the 1920s in Little Poland (that is, mainly Western and Eastern Galicia) there were 39,810 Germans, including 31,920 Lutherans. The number of Germans in Volhynia reached 25,000; the majority of them were also Lutherans.

³ Paslavs'kii, I.V. «Reformatsiia ta ii vplyvy na ukrains'ke dukhovne zhyttia v istoriosofii M. Grushevs'kogo» in *M. Grushevs'kii: Zbirnik prats'* (L'viv, 1994), 164-175.

According to the records of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Ukraine (which united the German and German-Slavic communities in former Volhynskaja, Podol'skaja, Kievskaja, Chernigovskaja, Poltavskaja, Catherinoslavskaja, Khar'kovskaja *gubernii*s and the Crimea), in 1918 there were from 600 to 700 thousand members. But under the conditions of the Soviet regime, church ranks were quickly depleted. For example, on the Black Sea coast alone there were 340 communities with 168,300 members in 1928; in 1938 no fewer than 10,700 of them were deported and sent to the camps. In 1924 this church had 81 pastors; in 1936 — 10; and by the end of 1937 — only one.

In pre-war Poland the Lutheran Church maintained a fairly prominent position, making up 2.6% of the country's population. Lutherans managed to organize several church unions, which had rather large parishes in Ukraine. For example, at the end of the 1920s the German community in Lutsk counted 3,000 members; in Rivne — 3,500; Dubno — 2,794; Vladimir-Volhynskij — 2,525 parishioners.

In the 1930s, of 27,000 believers that were part of the Union of Augsburg-Helvetica Confessional Churches (UAHC), the largest Protestant organization in western Ukraine, Germans made up 89%, Polish — 7%, and Ukrainians — 4%. The UAHC had eighty-five German and seven German-Polish schools. German cultural and philanthropic associations worked in L'viv, Stanislav, Bel'sk, and Stryj, supported by the Gustav Adolph

Society of Germany. The most well-known leader in Galicia was superintendent Theodore Zükler; during his time the social-cultural life of the local German national community reached its greatest heights.

With Zükler's help in the 1930s the process of the Ukrainization of Lutheranism began in western Ukraine, led by former Greek Catholic priests and laymen. Some of them became interested in new religious ideas during the First World War, when they were at the front or in captivity; some became interested during their foreign wanderings in their search for a better life. In 1925 the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) was founded, with its center in Stanislav. Soon it was headed by a former student of the *Collegium Ruthenium* in Rome and graduate of Tübingen University, pastor Theodore Jarchuk. By the end of the 1930s this church had founded congregations in many population centers in Galicia.

The practice of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church was based on national traditions; its preaching, publishing, and educational activity — on the obligation to use the native language. The church's leaders gave fixed consideration to forming its national character, maintaining that Lutheranism «more than any other religion gives answers to the spiritual needs of the Ukrainian people.»⁴ The combination of the Protestant idea with the problems of Ukrainian

⁴ Dombrov's'kii, O. *Narys istorii Ukraïns'kogo Ievangel's'ko-Reformovanogo rukhu* (New York, Toronto, 1979), 436.

national life added a new dimension to this denomination. For the first time Lutheranism in Ukrainian territories burst out of its «German cocoon» and became the owned, native faith of ordinary people. The majority of the members of Ukrainian communities were artisans, petty bourgeois, and peasants. Later many teachers, doctors, and lawyers joined the movement.

Such a social structure made Lutheranism an inalienable element of social and cultural life in western Ukraine with its particular accent on the national idea and its high view of the church. Therefore, although the Ukrainian Lutheran Church had only a small number of parishioners (from 2000 to 2500 at the beginning of the 1930s), it took up an active position in national-cultural processes, bringing up its own publicists, and preparing a series of translations of Lutheran classics, and its own original publications. The destiny of this church was tragic: first the persecution by Polish authorities, then by the Bolshevik regime. After the well-known events of 1939 the Ukrainian Lutheran Church actually ceased to exist, and until the beginning of the 1990s functioned in emigration.

2. One Church or Three?

The revival of the Lutheran presence in Ukraine became possible with the new political situation that changed religious life in all of Eastern Europe. The first to «remember» Ukraine were German Lutherans as part of the national rebirth in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the voices of ethnic minorities began to

be heard. It seemed that quite a large German community had remained in Ukraine, numbering almost 40,000, that had not thinned out after the collapse of the USSR. Moreover, the number of Ukrainian Germans, in spite of those who have emigrated permanently, is still considerable, due to the migration of Germans from Russia and Kazakstan to Ukraine, as well as to the official restoration of German nationality to people who had hidden their origins during the Soviet regime.

The return of the Lutheran church coincided with the «German question,» which was raised under President Leonid Kravchuk, who promised alluring prospects of economic and cultural development to the German community in Ukraine. However, those hopes were quickly dashed by the economic crisis. Therefore, it is not surprising that even now many Ukrainian Germans consider their nationality a ticket to their historical homeland, rather than a model of cultural identification. In this situation the church assumed the function of an ethno-confessional institution for the self-preservation of Germans, a channel for their spiritual unification and development.

Against the backdrop of religious activity in Ukraine, German Lutherans seem to lead quite a reserved and, at first sight, even a hidden life. However, the number of communities is growing steadily. For example, in 1995 the German Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Ukraine (GELCU) had nineteen communities; in 1997 — twenty-seven. Presently, not counting its forty-three registered

congregations, it has about an additional ten active groups. Taking into account the limits of its outward mission (speaking mainly about the German enclave), the church's dynamic nature is evident. The church is replenished by representatives of other nationalities with close ties to Lutheranism (from the Baltic region) or by foreigners who have come to Ukraine for social, business, or scientific purposes.

Recently Ukrainians and Russians have been joining the GELCU, especially people with higher education. They are drawn by the intellectual potential of Lutheranism, its deep theological culture, and its church buildings — visible signs of the church, with its wealth of artistic design and classical music. But the church's movement to the outer world has its own hidden shoals, namely that its denominational identity is closely tied to its national identity. To lose that connection means the loss of identity, and the church leadership realizes that fact. Thus, for example, Gerald Koch, pastor of the Lutheran church in Kiev from 1996-2000, asserted in a conversation that German Lutherans in Ukraine are categorically opposed to proselytism. In the opinion of Dr. Aachem Rheis, pastor of the Kiev church from 1992-1996, Ukrainians and Russians will not change the inner essence of the church: «A German congregation will turn into a congregation of German tradition.»⁵

⁵ *Kiev. Tserkov' Sv. Ekateriny. Tserkov'. Obshchina. Vera: Prazdnichnoe izdanie ko dnu povortnogo osvishcheniia tserkvi* (Kiev, Munich, 2000), 100.

Nevertheless, in the search for visible results of the establishment of Lutheranism, we must assert that the present church has not yet accomplished much. Currently it is more appropriate to speak of the restoration of its former presence. The image of the cathedral Church of St. Paul in Odessa is especially notable as a symbol of the ruins from which Lutheranism in Ukraine is rising. Even in other republics of the former USSR, where Germans were also social outcasts, the church did not experience such great losses. It is no accident that foreign analysts, in their surveys of religious life in the Commonwealth of Independent States, most often refer to Lutherans in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

How does the GELCU look? Its presence is noticeable mainly in the places of long-ago German colonization: in western (L'viv, Lutsk) and eastern Ukraine (Zaporizhzhia, Poltava, Kryvoj Rog, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv). In the south (Odessa, Kherson, Mikolaiiv) and in the Crimea there are quite large communities. The consistory is located in Odessa. The central cathedral building is the Church of St. Catherine in Kiev. Spiritual care of the congregations in the GELCU is carried out by thirty-one pastors, including seven foreigners. Fourteen communities have Sunday schools. Religious education, however, is conducted in almost all congregations during preparation for confirmation. Taking into account the long period of disorder in church life, believers of all ages participate in the educational process. Basic theological education is gained through Bible

courses in the Kiev and Odessa seminaries. The church does not have its own publication, but often publishes articles in the newspaper *Nemetskij kanal (The German Channel)*, issued by the Society of Ukrainian Germans: *Wiedergeburt*, and in *Der Bote* magazine — the publication of Lutherans in the CIS.

The formation of this church structure began in 1992; at the First Synod of German Lutherans in Kiev, a young pastor from Kazakstan, Viktor Grefenstein, was elected superintendent of the restored GELCU. However, after several years he resigned the post. Presently, the leader of the church is the bishop, Dr. Edmund Raz. The GELCU is a permanent member of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakstan, and Central Asia, and maintains close contact with Lutherans in the CIS and Germany. Thus, the «sister church» of St. Catherine's is the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Bavaria. As previously, the relief organization Gustav Adolph of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Diaspora, takes care of its co-religionists in Ukraine. The believers admit that without support from their German brothers and sisters, the existence of communities in Ukraine would be impossible. This help includes the construction of church buildings, the shipment of religious literature, assistance in church practice, financial support, and philanthropic activity. In Pastor Koch's opinion, it is very important for the Lutheran church in Ukraine to organically unite its liturgy (*liturgia*) and service (*diakonia*).

Of course, the church is not indifferent to people of German nationality, which is characteristic of any ethno-confessional minority. The church strives to be not only a church building for the Germans, a place of spiritual support, but also a family home where believers will find human warmth and enjoyment. The church wants to help the German national community assume its own culture, traditions, and native language. Just as the national identity of the church is closely connected to the mentality of its parishioners, so its future is connected to the life of Germans and their future in Ukraine. However, the loss of hope for economic growth has strengthened the desire to emigrate, and most of the emigrants are of middle-age or younger. Many Germans from the former Soviet republics do not regard Ukraine as their final destination, but rather as a transit point on the way to Germany.

Predicting the future of the Lutheran Church in Ukraine is complicated by its contradictory inner processes. Thus, although it is counting on local personnel, not a few congregations are still led by foreigners, who have difficulty getting accustomed to Ukraine. The largest church, St. Catherine's in Kiev, has had four different pastors in eight years. The strong ties that connect the GELCU to Germany make it more attractive to get an education abroad. Meanwhile, the indigenous educational process in Ukraine has not yet taken a significant turn. This means that there are not enough trained pastors. Another serious problem is the lack of religious

literature; what exists is mostly in German, but only a small percentage of parishioners know their native language. Often a congregation's activists are people who are little acquainted with doctrine and ritual.

In its doctrinal position, the GELCU reflects the tradition formed in post-war Germany. In repentance for its collaboration with the Nazi regime, German Lutherans reconsidered many of their concepts. In their current adaptation to the world they are highly liberal, not only in church practice, but also in doctrine. Because of that, other Christian churches and Lutheran communities in the USA and Canada, which keep to original confessional principles, react to them negatively. These churches accuse the Germans of an inclination to liberal theology, non-traditional interpretations of the Bible, acceptance of secular morality, a permissive attitude to divorce, and the ordination of women. These are problems that are knocking louder and louder at the door of religious life in Ukraine. Here the «women's question» has not yet reached the level of doctrine, but is solved quite simply in everyday life. At St. Catherine's a woman who is an active member of the local Lutheran community conducts the Eucharist together with the pastor; women also head the majority of church associations. Incidentally, women also make up most of the membership.

The process of establishing Lutheranism in Ukraine is carried out in the midst of the clash of different confessional traditions. An eloquent example is the story of Viktor Grefenstein, which illustrates one such

ideological contradiction. It concerns Pietism, which encroached on the traditional foundations of Lutheranism as early as the seventeenth century, and not only in Germany. A German traveller, after his visit to Lutheran settlements on the Volga in the eighteenth century, noted down the traits of the colonists that distinguished them from «true Lutherans»: the ideal of a church free from hierarchy; the show of devotion; the emotional nature of worship; the special status of «born again» sisters and brothers.

The inclination to piety was especially strong in Ukraine. Arsenij Rozhdestvenskij, Orthodox historian of the nineteenth century, in his analysis of Little Russian *Stundist* groups, vividly describes the dash of Pietism in German colonies in South Russia. This tendency continued later and nourished separatism in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Ukraine (founded in 1918). In the 1920-30s Lutheran pietistic communities of the «evangelical brotherhood» tradition functioned in Galicia; and in Volhynia — the Evangelical-Augsburg Union, which was founded under the influence of the ideas of the Hernhutters and Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf.

Today the pietistic tradition has its followers again, mainly in the south, although there are adherents in the east and west of Ukraine as well. They advocate the return of «brotherly» Lutheranism, which, in contrast to «church» Lutheranism, with its preference for dogma and religious objects and its accent on culture, will renew the practices of a living faith, and a more intensive community life.

In the opinion of Viktor Grefenstein, this Lutheran tradition speaks most clearly to the spiritual longings of ordinary people.

In a small flat in the center of Odessa, across from St. Paul's Cathedral, there is a prayer room with a crucifix on a table, a shelf with religious brochures, and a piano in the corner. There are no images or other religious objects. Pastor Viktor Grefenstein, dressed in an ordinary business suit, reads verses from the Bible and explains them to a small group of women. The common prayer reminds one of a Baptist or Pentecostal meeting, where believers pray not only individually, but also collectively. Aloud and in turn they appeal to God, openly repent of their sins, and ask for forgiveness and guidance. Those present form the backbone of the Odessa community, which has forty believers. It is perhaps the biggest of those groups that belong to the Association of Evangelical-Lutheran Brethren Congregations of Ukraine. According to Grefenstein, there are ten groups in the Association now, mainly in Odessa *oblast* (province) and in the Crimea. There is also a four-year seminary with teachers from Canada. The Association publishes *Bratskij listok* (*The Brothers' Page*) newspaper and keeps in touch with other pietistic communities in the CIS.

The leaders of this Association explain their cool relationship with the GELCU not so much on the basis of historical precedents, as because of new reasons that have a national flavor and, perhaps, purely human motives. Lutheran Brethren evaluate the national question according to evan-

gelical directives («there is now neither Jew nor Greek»; «we are children of the heavenly kingdom»), and are therefore not much concerned about their ethnic identity. Oriented to an active adaptation to Ukrainian life, they welcome those of different nationalities. According to one young woman from Odessa, Lutheran Brethren «are not sitting on their suitcases and waiting for the *Vaterland*,» and that is why they look out of step with other German Lutherans in Ukraine. Other Lutherans regard Lutheran Brethren as tending toward sectarianism, separatism, and a hidden agenda of evangelization, which are rejected by Lutheran churches in Germany that are more inclined to inter-church dialogue.

And so the analysis of Lutheran congregational life in Ukraine gives evidence of the formation of several traditions, which demonstrate different models of adaptation to Ukrainian reality and offer various prospects for future development.

But there is one more church — the third Lutheran Church in Ukraine.

3. The Phenomenon of Ukrainian Lutheranism

This church is made up of Ukrainian Lutherans. They also connect their return to the Homeland not only with the establishment of the church, but also more broadly with inclusion in the social and spiritual life of the country, involving national, cultural-educational, and inter-confessional aspects. Oriented toward the culture, language, and tradition of local

inhabitants, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) seeks to make the slogan of its pioneering founders a reality: «Ukrainization through Reformation!» — because the present-day church is the direct descendant of its predecessor.⁶ Considering Ukraine's historical interest in the synthesis of religious and national ideas, this slogan could attract many sympathizers in the present period of the establishment of an independent state. It could widen the range of Lutheranism in Ukraine, making it an inalienable element of social and cultural life.

The new period in the history of the ULC is connected with the beginning of the 1990s when pastor Iaroslav Shepeliavets arrived in Ukraine. Born to a family of immigrants, he was ordained to the ministry in the Wisconsin Synod of the USA. An energetic missionary, he undertook an active philanthropic ministry in Ukraine, which was appreciated by the public. In 1997, Shepeliavets, by that time bishop of the restored ULC, was awarded the Ivan Ogienko Prize. (Ivan Ogienko [1882-1972], Metropolitan Illarion: Ukrainian scholar and theologian; national and cultural figure; Minister of Confessions in the government of the Ukrainian National Republic; author of the complete translation of the Bible in the Ukrainian language.) In 1999 the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kiev Patriarchate awarded Bishop Iaroslav, together with other leaders of Protestant unions in Ukraine, the Order of St. Vladimir. The ULC became a member of the All-Ukrainian

Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, and the Ukrainian Bible Society. However, against the background of active philanthropy, the actual religious life of the church was left in the shade.

Recently, the image of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church has acquired clearer contours and its inner life is gaining steadiness and becoming regulated. In 2002 the ULC had twenty-seven registered communities. Having renewed its presence in western Ukraine, this church now, like most of the other denominations in the country, is gradually moving to the central and eastern regions. The largest communities are in Kiev, Ternopol', and Sevastopol'. These territories define the structure of the church, which is divided into three episcopates: Kievan, Galician, and Tavrichiskian. During 1997–2002 Ukrainian Lutherans managed to regain and restore several former church buildings, but they give greater attention to building new ones. Already crosses have been placed on the sites of future churches — the cathedral church in Kiev and the Church of Christ the Savior in Sevastopol'.

The ULC is structured according to the synodal principle. Thus, according to *The Institutions of the Episcopacy of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church* (henceforth — *The Institutions*), its highest body is the council; between councils the synod operates, which consists of bishop, vice-bishop, secretary, treasurer, the pastors of the member congregations, and one representative member from each of the participating churches. Several international philanthropic

⁶ *Stiah*, 1997, Issue 9, p. 1.

organizations cooperate with the ULC.

The cultural and educational activity of the church is prominent, especially its publishing work. For the last five or six years the Publishing Committee of the ULC has translated and published a series of works in Ukrainian with the support of the Lutheran Heritage International Fund. Besides Lutheran classics (works by Luther, early and contemporary theologians, confessional literature), it has also republished tracts by pioneers of the Ukrainian Lutheran movement. The committee is making an effort to publish regularly the pre-war periodicals. *Stiah (The Banner)* magazine has been renewed already. Concordia (St. Louis) publishes *Good News* magazine; its Ukrainian version, *Dobraia vest'* is also published by the ULC.

The educational plans of the church are substantial and far-reaching. In 1994 the church opened the St. Sophia Theological Seminary in Ternopol' to prepare church workers and theologians. Its program is designed for four years of full-time study in the areas of doctrinal, historical, and practical theology. Seminary applicants must have secular higher education, know one or two foreign languages, and be able to read the Bible freely in Hebrew and Greek. As a rule, the seminary students do their practical work in those churches where they plan to serve. At the end of their studies they write an «integrative research project» in which they demonstrate not only their theological preparation, but also their knowledge of regional

history of the place of their future work. The number of seminary students is not large — up to twenty. Emphasis is made on the quality of education and its correspondence to secular standards of denominational theology. Another specific characteristic of the seminary is the special attention paid to Ukrainian language, national history and culture, and the orientation of many subjects toward the Ukrainian situation, i.e. the intentional preparation of pastors for Ukraine. It is not by chance that the almost totally foreign make-up of the seminary faculty (the teaching staff here is recruited mainly from Lutheran seminaries in the USA) does not prevent this educational institution from approaching as closely as possible the demands of a national school.

In 2000 Viacheslav Horpynchuk, a graduate of the seminary, was chosen as leader of the church. Having won the respect of the laity and young priests (an overwhelming majority of clergy are seminary graduates) by gathering documents on the church's history, editing Lutheran literature, and organizing new churches, Horpynchuk has quickly reached a high post. In 1999 he was called as pastor to the Kiev church, and a year later was elected bishop of the ULC. More energy has been put into international relations by the leadership, which is striving for closer cooperation with the World Lutheran Confessional Confederation and the World Lutheran Federation. The latter body is still studying the Ukrainian church, which is such an unusual one against the background of the world Lutheran movement.

It is well known that German Lutheranism, in its adherence to church tradition, preserved a number of Catholic elements, especially in the liturgy. «The form of divine service created by Luther is essentially a German translation of the Latin Mass.»⁷ Lutherans all across the world, just as Germans in Ukraine, celebrate the Western Rite. But Ukrainian Lutherans from the very beginning observed the Julian calendar and Orthodox Rite. Why? The first explanation is the Greek Catholic origin of the church founders. This truly is one of the features that gives the church its national character. However, it should not be forgotten that many leaders of other Protestant groups in western Ukraine are originally from Greek Catholic backgrounds, too. It must mean that there are other reasons.

The Ukrainian Lutheran Church, by the fact of its existence, is connected not only with Germany, but also with the Lutheran movement in North America. By the beginning of the twentieth century American and Canadian Lutherans were already distinct from the German matrix, having lost their original national church characteristics, with preaching intended for all people in the New World. Lutheranism in the USA and Canada functions in the form of regional synods, which, together with different inter-church unions, have the status of local independent bodies. This touch of congregationalism is atypical for religious life in Germany where original doctrinal principles

are strictly followed. Given certain differences in their worldview, Lutheran synods of the USA and Canada are, for the most part, conservative in teaching and practice, and critical of liberalism. It is in such an environment that the restoration of the Ukrainian Lutheran movement began: first, in the camps for displaced persons in post-war Germany, and then in the Diaspora, thanks to the efforts of small a group of parishioners headed by pastor Michael Tymchuk, who miraculously survived after 1939. The preservation of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church was also helped by the Union of Evangelical Churches of North America, founded at the beginning of the twentieth century through the efforts of Ukrainian Protestants. Now the church has returned to its native land and keeps close ties with influential religious organizations in the USA — the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods, which are faithful to the principles of Lutheran orthodoxy.

Let us turn to the doctrinal basis of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. Its priority is the strict following of its own tradition, the classical heritage of Martin Luther and total rejection of different theological schools. (For example, Ukrainian Lutherans have quite a bit in common, in terms of their motivation, with the followers of Neo-orthodoxy — that is, a return to the basics — but they consider it, and other modern Protestant doctrines, to be more of a philosophy than a religion.) *A Short Doctrinal Summary of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church* (henceforth — *Summary*) sta-

⁷ Gejger, F., *Beseda o Liuteranskoj Tserkvi s pravoslavnimi khristianami*, n.p., 17.

tes: «We believe... that Holy Scripture is the sole infallible norm of faith and life. And, as confessional Lutherans, we accept as the basis... the books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church named in the Formula of Concord of 1580: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian creeds, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology; the Schmalkaldic Articles (including the treatise *On the Authority and Primacy of the Pope*); Luther's Small and Large Catechisms and the Formula of Concord... they are in conformity with Holy Scripture and... are the true study of God's Word, which is above all.» The church appeals also to the works of Luther's followers who hold to «pure Christianity,» that is, the teachings unsullied by doubts about the facts of sacred history, the triune nature of God, the divine-human nature of Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and Second Coming, or by philosophical and scientific theories which contradict revelation (Articles 1-5).

Confessional Lutherans (as the followers of the «Lutheran fundamentals» call themselves) essentially share the principles formulated at the beginning of the twentieth century by Lyman and Milton Stewart in their famous *The Fundamentals*. And confessional Lutherans remain true to their principles in the face of new problems presented by the modern world. For example, they completely reject the women's pastorate. In *The Institutes* it states that only men may carry out priestly service, and the members of the episcopacy and synod should be men, too. In the official organ of ULC the women's question takes on a polemic sharpness: «In magazines of the Augsburg Con-

fession, such as *Nemetskii kanal* (Kiev) and *Der Bote* (St. Petersburg) published on the territory of former USSR, we read, that 'a woman-priest is demanded by the times' ... if we understand the Bible correctly and everything about the eternal, unchanging God and His Word, then the question of whether a woman can be a priest does not even exist for us.»⁸ But addressing this question in its *Summary*, the ULC specifies that it will take into account the views of women, because women «are also members of Christ's Body» (Article 9).

Dobraia vest' magazine offers genuine theological training to its own faithful and to anyone who wishes, giving its main attention to the area of confessing the faith. Acquaintance with this magazine gives quite a complete impression of confessional Lutheranism. It is consistent in observing what was formulated by classical Lutheranism, with its respect for the Church Fathers and the ecumenical synods, the refined theology of Luther's later interpreters with their precise position on ecclesiology and the apostolic inheritance, on the grace-imparting significance of the sacraments, and the baptism of children. Here we see a long list of Catholic and Orthodox deviations from the «purity of the Bible» and those retreats from the truth that other Protestant groups have made. Even the evangelical segment of world Protestantism is considered far from the truth. But Orthodox and Catholic churches are recognized

⁸ *Stiah*, 1996, Issue 3, p. 7.

as being closer to confessional Lutheranism by virtue of their respect for Christian beginnings. For, as we read in the preface to the Ukrainian translation of the Augsburg Confession, the latter «never tried to introduce a new teaching to the Universal Church. In the best Orthodox tradition there was no intention of creating a new church, because there is, and will be, only one true Apostolic Church, which is founded on Holy Scripture.»⁹ And even the following of its own national rite, the ULC connects to its identification with the «holy, catholic and Apostolic Church.»¹⁰

The ideological creed of the ULC is formulated quite clearly: «... any deviation of teaching from God's Word cannot... be tolerated by the church» (*Summary*, Article 10). This apparently categorical statement has a biblical motivation: «If even an angel from heaven teaches what is not found in the Bible, a sincere Christian will not follow such a teacher...»¹¹; «Churches which accept compromises... have no future in the Lord.»¹² This faithfulness to the foundations is considered by the leaders of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church to be their special calling — to stop ideological decay in the CIS, to renew its spiritual traditions. This hope was expressed by a professor of Concordia Seminary (Fort Wayne) of the Missouri Synod, Dr. Curt

McWort, who was filled with optimism after getting acquainted with the Ukrainian Lutherans: «I see a revival of the church on the basis of the pure gospel, and, as our Augsburg Confession affirms, pure evangelical preaching and the pure transference of sacrament. It's a miracle right before my eyes!»¹³

But the most notable feature of the church against the background of world Lutheranism is its rite. The ULC for the first time attempts to unite Protestant dogma with the Eastern Rite and thus create a new Protestant model maximally adapted to Orthodox culture. It is a paradox: the national beginning of Lutheranism, which took so long to implant in Ukrainian life, turned out to be in harmony with Ukrainian tradition as soon as those traditions and national interests were recognized as priorities. It is symbolic that the church *Institutions* begins with the section that codifies the «liturgical forms» and obligatory adherence to the foundations of the *Ukrainian Evangelical Service Book*, «published in blessed memory of Theodore Jarchuk in 1939 in Stanislav.»

The contents of the *Service Book* (and also of many articles in the pre-war publications by Ukrainian Lutherans, written by Theodore Jarchuk, Joachim Foliushniak, Pyotr Gil'chuk and others) is very eloquent. In their reform, the founders of the movement emphasized those things that were common for Catholic and Orthodox churches and also for classical Protestantism. Those are,

⁹ *Augsburz'ke virospovidannia*, tr. V. Horpinchuk (Ternopil', 1995), 4.

¹⁰ *Sluzhebnik dlia ukrains'kikh ievangel'c'kikh hromad Avgsburz'kogo Virospovidannia* (1933), tr. (Ternopil', 1998), p. 16.

¹¹ *Stiah*, 2000, Issue 10, p. 22.

¹² *Op.cit.*, 2001, Issue 1, p. 9.

¹³ *Op.cit.*

first of all, a high view of the church and its liturgy; second, the acceptance of texts «...composed by the Church Fathers Vasilii the Great and John Chrysostom, who, as they were not Catholics, did not compose liturgy for Catholics, but without exclusion for all people who want to pray in this way.»¹⁴ That is, a return to the foundations on which the ancient church was built, and «respect for the liturgical form of worship, claimed long ago among the Ukrainian people.»¹⁵

The liturgical canon of the ULC consists of these common church principles: baptism of children; marriage of priests; communion in both kinds; the real, not symbolic presence of Christ during the Eucharist; the exclusive right of ordained priests to serve the Eucharist; understanding of baptism as a sacrament, which is «a true means of grace»; reverence for confession and absolution of sins by a priest; native language used in divine worship; the exterior use of Byzantine architectural elements and interior decoration of church buildings; preservation of the altar; contemplation of the crucifix and icons, which «are not a personification of Christ and the saints, but an indication of salvation»; observation of Orthodox holidays; penitential services with bows, sign of the cross, processions with the crucifix, etc.

In the booklet *Ukrainian Christian Treasury: What Everyone Should Know About the Sacrament of Baptism* we learn that it is necessary to use special symbols in

this solemn rite. The sign of the cross made on the forehead is a sign of belonging to God. A cross made with oil (anointing) is a symbol of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The candle lit during baptism symbolizes Christ. It may be lit again on the anniversary of the sacrament or during prayer. The banners help to express joy and gratitude for God's gifts in baptism.

It is interesting that the ULC's creativity does not contradict the accepted practice of world Lutheranism of uniting a new dogma with an already established rite. The latter, with its many elements, is in tune with Catholicism and Orthodoxy. But that which distinguishes liturgical practice in these two churches, Ukrainian Lutherans evaluate through the prism of their classical position. Thus, for example, in its choice of the cross, in the more simple decoration of church premises, in its attitude to icons (and the resolutions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council), or to such a specific element as *epiklesis* (summoning the Holy Spirit at the Eucharist), the ULC is closer to Catholicism. These elements relate to the sphere of doctrine, which is historically connected with Catholicism. But in its calendar and way of life the ULC is almost Orthodox.

This collection of various Christian traditions forms quite an original blend, unlike anything in the whole Protestant world. The Ukrainian Lutheran loves music. But organ music for him (which Germans call «the fourth principle element,» together with the altar, the baptismal font, and the pulpit of evangelical worship) does not take precedence over choral singing. The Ukrainian

¹⁴ Op.cit., 1933, Issue 9, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Sluzhebnik*, 6.

Lutheran is not indifferent to folk art and, to the astonishment of other Protestants, enthusiastically takes part in competitions for the best *krashanka* (a decorated egg), which the church organizes for its parishioners. The Ukrainian Lutheran fervently serves God in his everyday earthly life, but likes to visit monasteries on pleasure trips. Young parishioners and seminary students conduct summer school with the monks at Pochaev or Holy Assumption monasteries and listen to lectures by Orthodox and Greek Catholic theologians. The Ukrainian Lutheran, along with church and national holidays (and also with combined church/national holidays — for example, the Baptism of Rus'-Ukraine, Memorial Day of the Fallen and Martyrs, Forefathers' Sunday), celebrates Christian saints' days (St. Stephen, St. John the Baptist, Sts. Peter and Paul, St. Andrew, St. Nicholas). And they also add their own people: «the pastor of blessed memory» (whom *Stiah* magazine calls the «Church Father»), Theodore Jarchuk (St. Theodore's Day) and Martin Luther. An important date for Ukrainian Lutherans is the Day of Church Renewal (Reformation Day):

The church year with all of its holidays and church services is a part of our life... The heroic exploits and the virtues of saints, martyrs, and the righteous appear before us. Here we grow in faith, experience days of spiritual joy, grief, repentance, and forgiveness. The church year is a great spiritual practice during which we learn the fear and love of God in such a way that we observe His Commandments.¹⁶

As we see, this is not only a mechanical synthesis of things which, at first sight, are unconnected — the Protestant, who is fervent in studying the Bible and proclaiming the good news, and the Orthodox, who is not indifferent to a candle, an icon, or the sign of the cross as symbols of spiritual life. Here we see the Protestant in search of a place in Orthodox tradition, and a reassessment of himself through the prism of that Christian culture with which his church has bound its historical destiny. This synthesis gives birth to a new model of religious worldview. Thus, in spite of its genetic union with German and American Lutheranism, the ULC strives to find its own worldview and its priorities in the life of society.

The Ukrainian Lutheran Church has intentionally set its course toward the creation of a national church and defines its main goal as the revival of the spiritual and national consciousness of Ukraine.¹⁷ No Protestant church in Ukraine has taken on such a role, holding on, rather, to neutrality in politics and the national idea. The call of the Ukrainian Lutherans is as follows: «Do not look on yourselves as orphans, newcomers, and strangers, but as deeply-rooted by God's Word in your native Ukrainian land, as children of the Heavenly Father who is not indifferent to the future of your nation, its destiny, its way, its life choice, its faith»¹⁸; or this: «Preach the gospel as if it is specifically addressed to the Ukrainian people: For God so loved 'Ukraine' that He gave His one and

¹⁶ *Stiah*, 1996, Issue 9, p. 7.

¹⁷ *Op.cit.*, p.10.

¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, 1997, Issue 11, p. 1.

only Son, that 'Ukraine', believing in Him, shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).»¹⁹ These challenges are dissonant, not only with the position of evangelical Protestants, but also with German Lutherans. For the former, the call suggests political engagement that goes beyond the limits of the gospel; for the latter, it gives priority to interests external to the church, which (taking into account the canonical-territorial claims of Orthodox Church) may represent an encroachment for proselytism. Therefore, in his review of Lutheran life in Ukraine Dr. Aachem Rheis defines the ULC as one which «is very oriented to missionary activity.»²⁰

It would seem that the synthesized basis of the ULC makes its preaching very effective. It «knocks at the heart» of Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic

alike; it is of interest to a worker, a soldier, and a professor; it is in harmony with the feelings of the Galician, who is bound to Western culture, and the man from eastern Ukraine brought up with an Orthodox mentality. But the quantitative indicators of the church, so far, do not give evidence of a serious future. A Ukrainian who sees the church not so much as a mystical body as a bearer of social development will sooner go to a Greek Catholic church. A Ukrainian who understands his earthly life through the prism of the gospel, and rejects everything that contradicts it, will probably turn to a Baptist church. Perhaps that is why the main problem of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church now is its self-understanding. This means not only the creation of its original identity, but also a search for deeper roots in native history and culture.

¹⁹ Op.cit., 1999, Issue 2, p. 7.

²⁰ *Nemetskij kanal*, May 1997, p. 4.

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