One, Holy, Catholic…Ukrainian?
The Catholic Church and Ukrainian National Identity Formation

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I. Introduction

Catholics and nationalists have historically had a difficult relationship. Proponents of nationalism have often looked with suspicion on Catholics’ loyalty to the Pope, supposing it to be at odds with loyalty to a nation. Conversely, the Catholic hierarchy, both Greek and Roman, has not always been a proponent of nation-building projects.¹ This tension between the Catholic Church and nationalists long existed in Ukraine, as well. Thus, it is surprising that for much of the 20th century, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was one of the strongest supporters of the Ukrainian national movement. Today, the predominantly Ukrainian Greek Catholic western region of Ukraine continues to be a bastion of Ukrainian national sentiment, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) is a vocal supporter of Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence.

On the surface, this seems to be a story of the Catholic Church entering the process of Ukrainian national identity formation late in the game. In reality, this puzzle is far more complex. At times unwillingly or inadvertently, the Catholic Church has played a crucial role in the formation of Ukrainian national identity for most of the past millennium. Despite the complexities of proving historical counterfactuals, many scholars have suggested that, without the Catholic influence (especially the Greek Catholic influence), a distinct Ukrainian national identity would not have emerged.

This capstone aims to show how and why the Catholic Church has contributed and continues to contribute to Ukrainian national identity formation. This inquiry will include both the Roman and Greek Catholic Churches, but will focus primarily on the Ukrainian Greek Catholic

Church. The first half of the paper will be devoted to a historical overview of the role of the Catholic Church in various eras of Ukrainian identity formation. The period from the 19th century through World War II will receive significant attention, since this era was pivotal for what is known as the Ukrainian national awakening. Furthermore, during this period, the Greek Catholic Church shifted from influencing the Ukrainian national movement through its opposition to it, to being one of its most ardent defenders. The second half of the paper will examine the Catholic Church’s role in Ukrainian national identity formation through a geopolitical lens. Using classical and critical approaches to geopolitics, it will establish the primary reasons for the Catholic Church’s shift from resistance to support of the Ukrainian national movement.\(^2\) Taken as a whole, this historical analysis will lend support to the primary goal of the capstone, which is to demonstrate the Catholic Church’s indispensable role in Ukrainian national identity formation, with suggestive conclusions about the future role and impact of the Catholic Church on the evolution of Ukrainian national identity.

Before proceeding to the historical analysis, it is important to clarify terminology. This capstone will follow the definition of “nationality” that Paul Robert Magosci lays out in his work, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its People*. According to Magosci, “the term nationality...refers to a group of people...who may have one or more of the following observable characteristics in common: a distinct territory (possibly but not necessarily statehood), language, historical tradition, religion, cultural values, and ethnographic features.”\(^3\) Magosci goes on, to make a crucial distinction between a nationality and an ethnic group, since both are characterized by these traits. “The primary distinguishing feature (of nationality) is not the presence or absence

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\(^2\) Whether the Catholic Church as a whole has made this shift, or only the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, is an interesting question, but will not be explored in this capstone.

of all or some of the characteristics listed above, but the awareness among members of a given
group of people that they have such common characteristics which distinguish them from
neighboring peoples or nationalities.”

Thus, nationality is defined both by the presence of “certain
objective elements,” but more importantly, by the “self-perception” of a people.

For the purposes of this capstone, related terms such as “nationalist” and “national” will be
used in accord with the above definition. Thus, the key concept in this analysis, “Ukrainian national
identity,” refers to Ukrainians’ belief or awareness, based on one or more of the characteristics set
out above, that they are a distinct people. Two things should be noted, though. First, while a
national identity does not necessitate the desire for or achievement of an independent state, the
development of a strong national identity usually leads to a desire for some sort of independence.
For this reason, the concept of nationality or nationalism is generally associated with the
Westphalian order of sovereign states. In the case of Ukraine, it will become clear that early
developments in Ukrainian identity bear a strong resemblance to national identity. The concept of
the nation or nation-state did not exist prior to the Peace of Westphalia, however, and only gained
prominence in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Thus, while the reader should keep in mind the conceptual similarities between early Ukrainian identity and modern Ukrainian national
identity, the former will be referred to as “collective,” rather than “national,” identity. The broader
term “collective identity,” which refers to a feeling of group belonging and distinctiveness, will
thus point to the burgeoning sense of “Ukrainianness” that developed prior to the 1800’s.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
II. History of the Catholic Church in Ukraine

The Catholic Church in Ukraine, 989-1772

Prior to the 19th century, the Catholic influence on Ukrainian national identity was largely unintended. To the extent that a Ukrainian⁸ collective identity existed, it was primarily associated with the Orthodox Church. The earliest contact between the Catholic Church and Ukraine attests to this. Ukraine, along with Russia, traces its roots to Kyivan Rus’, which lasted from the 9th through the 13th century and was the earliest East Slavic state.⁹ The Kyivan princess Olga converted to Christianity, and while she had strong contacts in Constantinople, the center of Orthodox or Byzantine Christianity, in 959 she also requested priests and bishops from the Roman Catholic Otto I of Germany. Nonetheless, the Rus’ did not undergo thorough Christianization until her grandson, Vladimir, took the throne.¹⁰ According to legend, in the late tenth century representatives of various religious groups attempted to convince Prince Vladimir to adopt their faith. These allegedly included some Germans sent on behalf of the Pope.¹¹ Apparently the representative from Constantinople fared better, because Vladimir chose to convert all of Rus’ to Orthodox Christianity.¹² Whether or not this incident actually occurred, it does reflect Prince Vladimir’s decision to reject Roman Catholicism and convert Kyivan Rus’ to Orthodox Christianity—a decision that continues to shape Ukrainian society to this day. When the baptism of the Rus’ occurred in the late 980’s,¹³ the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches were still

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⁸ Due to the inconsistent historical usage of the term “Ukraine,” this essay uses the terms “Ukraine/Ukrainian,” “Rus’,” and “Ruthenian,” depending on context. In general, the author has sought to choose the term that was in use at the time in question, but in some cases the words “Ukrainian” and “Ukraine” have been substituted in order to emphasize that the nation in question corresponds to present-day Ukraine.


¹² Hussey, The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire, 118-119.

¹³ Magosci, A History of Ukraine, 74-75.
united, although their liturgical practices differed considerably and their relationship had grown increasingly distant since the 5th century. In 1054, however, the Great Schism resulted in the complete (and thus far, permanent) separation of the two Churches,14 heightening the significance of the Rus’ alignment with the Orthodox Church.

The next major contact between Ukraine and the Catholic Church came after the fall of Kyivan Rus’, when much of present-day western Ukraine existed as the Galycian-Volhynian principality. The ruler, Prince Danylo, sought an alliance with Pope Innocent IV in exchange for help fighting the Tatars, and the Pope even crowned Danylo king.15 Nonetheless, Galicia-Volhynia remained Orthodox, and both the Rus’ Orthodox clergy and the Orthodox hierarchy in Constantinople strongly opposed the Catholic rapprochement.16 Once it became clear that the Pope would not follow through on his pledge of military aid, Danylo gave up the alliance.17 Historically, the importance of this brief alignment between Galicia-Volhynia and Rome lies in an unintended consequence: the transfer of the Rus’ metropolitan from suspiciously Catholic-leaning Galicia to Vladimir-Suzdal and, later, to Moscow. This contributed to the rise of Muscovy and in turn led to the establishment of the Metropolitanate of Little Rus’ in Galicia.18 The use of the name “Little Rus’” planted the seeds of the Little Russian identity, which would have a profound impact on Ukrainian collective and national identity formation in the centuries to come.19 Thus, the Roman Catholic Church’s attempt to bring Kyivan Rus’ into its orbit had the unintended consequence of

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17 Dvornik, The Slavs in European History and Civilization, 214.
18 The Orthodox Church of Rus’ continued to be united, in theory, under the Metropolitan of Kiev and all Rus’, who resided in Muscovy. In 1448, however, the decision of the bishops of Muscovy to elect a metropolitan without the permission of the Patriarch of Constantinople triggered the independence of the Russian Orthodox Church. (Magosci, A History of Ukraine, 159-160)
strengthening Orthodox Muscovy and facilitating the formation of a Little Russian collective identity.

The Catholic Church gained a more direct role in Ukrainian affairs during the era of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. During the 14th century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania annexed nearly all of the former Ukrainian Rus’ lands. Toward the end of the century, however, Poland and Lithuania were united in a “personal dynastic union” (i.e. they shared a ruler), and in 1569, the Union of Lublin officially merged the two states into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. During the dynastic union, parts of Ukrainian Rus’ had remained in predominantly Orthodox Lithuania, but with the Union of Lublin even these areas were incorporated into the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Poland. The Catholic Church was closely identified with the Polish nationality, while the Rus’—or Ruthenian—Orthodox suddenly found themselves a religious minority in a state with limited minority rights. By the late 1500’s, opportunities for social advancement or higher education lay almost exclusively within the Catholic Church; Jesuit schools, in particular, began to attract the sons of Orthodox Ruthenian nobles. The strategies of the Counter-Reformation (the Catholic Church’s attempt to combat the Protestant Reformation through its own renewal) worked as well on the Orthodox as on Protestants, with the result that many Ruthenians assimilated to Polish culture and converted to Catholicism.

This situation was significant to Ukrainian collective identity formation for two main

21 Ibid., 138-143.
22 Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe*, 60-64.
25 Both terms—Rus’ and Ruthenian—are often used to describe the forebears of the Ukrainian people during this period.
reasons. First, the Catholic challenge led to the creation of the Uniate Church in 1595 with the Union of Brest. Some Ruthenian Orthodox bishops decided to acknowledge the authority of the Pope, thus uniting the part of the Ruthenian Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church while retaining many of its eastern rite traditions. The motivations for this union are still in dispute. For some time, it was thought that the Union of Brest was primarily a political maneuver. In this version of events, the Orthodox bishops were threatened by increased activity on the part of the laity and frustrated with their lack of social standing, so they turned to the predominant religious institution in Poland—the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, it was argued, the bishops were annoyed by the efforts of the Patriarch of Constantinople to reassert his authority over the Ruthenian Orthodox Church and so were eager to rebel against him. More recent studies, however, propose that “the Union of Brest had an authentic religious motive and that the Kyivan bishops saw it as a path toward sweeping reforms in the church, in parish life, and in theological education.” These studies also suggest that the bishops had hoped to remain in communion with the Orthodox Church despite their union with Rome, but that Rome forced them to sever ties with their “mother-church.”

It seems likely that both political and theological factors played a role in the Union of Brest. Whatever the true reasons were, the Union was certainly not motivated by Ukrainian collective identity. Nonetheless, the importance of the union for the continued development of collective identity, and eventually national identity, cannot be overstated. This is somewhat counterintuitive, as the Union of Brest “at first appeared to be another step toward assimilation, or at least the

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28 The term “Uniate” was the common term for this Church at the time of its formation, but today it is often considered to be derogatory.
30 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
westernization, of the Russian (Ruthenian) population.”

Linguistic and cultural differences ultimately prevented such an assimilation, though. With the birth of the Uniate Church, there existed for the first time an institution that transcended the Polish-Catholic/Ruthenian-Orthodox dichotomy. The relevance of this was not apparent at the time, but its impact on Ukrainian collective identity would become increasingly important as the Orthodox Church drew closer to Muscovy, nearly subsuming Ruthenian identity into a larger Russian identity.

The other important effect of the Catholic-Orthodox tension was the revitalization of the Orthodox Church among the Ruthenians. In response to the gains of the Catholic Church, a Ruthenian Orthodox “counter-Counter-Reformation” had already begun before the Union, largely under the patronage of Prince Kostiantyn Ostrozky. This movement later gained strength under the leadership of Yelisei Pletenetsky, Peter Mohyla, and others. These Orthodox efforts led in two seemingly opposite directions, which together furthered the development of a distinct Ruthenian collective identity. On the one hand, Orthodox clergy “turned to the national Rus’ past and the distinction between Ruthenians and Poles as a way of shoring up their faith,” creating a distinctly eastward-looking collective identity around the history of Kyivan Rus’. At the same time, the Orthodox Church looked to the Roman Catholic Church for inspiration in the realms of architecture and education. The result was “a specifically Ruthenian branch of Orthodoxy…the art, music, and literature of the Church integrated Byzantine traditions, Orthodox Slavonic culture, the legacy of Kyivan Rus’, local customs, and Western influences into a distinctive Ukrainian synthesis.”

Thus, through the struggle against the Uniates, the Ruthenian Orthodox Church began

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35 Sysyn, “Recovering the Ancient and Recent Past,” 79.
36 Ibid., 78-79.
38 Frank E. Sysyn, “The UAOC and the Kyivan Metropolitante,” in *Religion and Nation in Modern Ukraine*, Serhii Plokhy and Frank E. Sysyn (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2003), 38.
to discover its identity; its history distinguished it from the Polish nation and church, but its openness to Western influences set it apart from the brand of Orthodoxy prevalent in Moscow at the time. The Ruthenian, or Ukrainian, identity of this Church would largely be stifled by Russia in the ensuing centuries, but the renewal of the Ruthenian Church in the 16th and 17th centuries would serve as a foundation for later attempts to revive a specifically Ukrainian Orthodox tradition.

The era of the Cossack state, known as the Cossack Hetmanate—the period between the 1648 Khmelnytsky uprising and the erasure of the Cossack Hetmanate at the end of the 18th century—saw the continued rise of collective identity among the Ruthenians. One could almost consider this an early form of Ukrainian national identity, as it briefly coalesced in an independent or semi-autonomous state. During this time, the role of the Uniate and Roman Catholic Churches was once again passive or unwitting. The Cossacks’ embrace of Orthodoxy was marked by a strong—and at times violent—opposition to Uniates and Roman Catholics. In many ways, the Ruthenian identity that the Cossacks and their peasant supporters espoused was defined in opposition to Polish, Jewish, and Catholic identities. In these circumstances, it made perfect sense for the Cossacks to turn to their coreligionists in Moscow for protection. This decision would have profound consequences for Ukrainian collective and national identity formation; for hundreds of years, the majority of Ukraine would be dominated by Russia politically and culturally, and, following the subordination of the Kyiv Metropolitanate to Moscow in 1685-86, the Orthodox Church would reinforce this dominance. The unification with the Moscow Patriarchate all but

40 The Khmelnytsky uprising of 1648, led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky, was the most successful Cossack rebellion against the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth and contributed to the ultimate dissolution of the Commonwealth. The semi-autonomous state that resulted from the rebellion—the Cossack Hetmanate—is often considered the first independent Ukrainian state. Depending on the source, the end of the Hetmanate is dated at either 1764 or 1782.
42 Ibid., 98-99.
43 Ibid., 79.
eliminated the possibility that the Orthodox Church would become the locus of non-Russian national identity formation in Ukraine.

Until the late 18th century, the Catholic Church generally did not play a direct role in Ukrainian collective or national identity formation. Although the Uniate Church did retain an identity distinct from that of the Polish establishment and the Roman Catholic Church, it was hardly a hotbed of Ruthenian resistance. For the most part, Catholicism, whether Uniate or Roman, served as an “other,” or at times an enemy, in opposition to which a Ruthenian/Ukrainian/Orthodox collective identity could define itself. Ironically, in their haste to throw off the yoke of Roman Catholic Poland, the fiercely independent Cossacks ran straight into the arms of autocratic Russia and subordinated a key Ukrainian institution—the Orthodox Church—to Moscow. While the Ukrainian national identity that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries would certainly be influenced by the Orthodox Church, the task of spearheading a national movement was consolidated in the Uniate, or Greek Catholic, Church.

**Pivot to Nationalism: The Greek Catholic Church, 1772-1899**

In 1764, Catherine the Great of Russia eliminated the office of the hetman, and by 1782, Russia had suppressed the last vestiges of the independent Cossack state.\(^\text{44}\) Furthermore, the Partitions of Poland, which took place between 1772 and 1795, divided Poland among Russia, Prussia, and Austria, and erased Poland from the map.\(^\text{45}\) As a result, ethnic Ukrainians were divided between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires; western Ukraine, consisting of Galicia, Belz, Bukovina, and Transcarpathia, went to Austria, while eastern Ukraine, also known as Dnieper

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Ukraine, was controlled by Russia.46 The role of the Catholic Church differed significantly for these two populations. In the Russian Empire, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was increasingly integrated into the Russian Orthodox Church and was used to promote Russification.47 The Roman Catholic and Uniate Churches were suppressed during the reign of Catherine the Great, and the Uniate Church all but disappeared through forced conversions to the Orthodox faith. The Church as a whole was dissolved in 1835, and the last Uniate eparchy in the Russian Empire was finally abolished in 1875.48 Thus, there was not much of a Catholic presence in Russian-ruled Ukraine during the 18th and 19th centuries. By the time the 19th-century Ukrainian national movement began, the Uniate Church in Russia was too weak to play a major role, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was too closely aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church to be strongly associated with Ukrainian nationalism.

The situation could scarcely have been more different in Austrian-ruled Galicia. Most ethnic Ukrainians were Uniate,49 and the imperial government treated the Church with great respect. In 1774, Emperor Joseph II even agreed to change the Church’s name to “Greek Catholic Church,” signifying its equal standing with the Roman and Armenian Churches.50 To some extent, Greek Catholics continued to maintain an identity distinct from the Roman Catholic Poles who dominated Galician society, but the Polish influence on Greek Catholic seminarians was strong. Nonetheless, Greek Catholic priests were at the forefront of Ukrainian heritage-gathering efforts in the early 1800’s.51 In fact, to the extent that a national movement existed prior to 1848, it was due to the efforts of Greek Catholic clergy.52 The Church was heavily involved in politics during

47 Ibid., 399-400.
48 Ibid., 398-399.
49 Ibid., 423.
50 Ibid., 424.
51 Ibid., 426.
52 Ibid., 475.
the revolution of 1848, and the first Ruthenian political organization in Galicia—the Supreme
Ruthenian Council—was composed entirely of Greek Catholics, many of whom were priests.\footnote{Himka, “The Greek Catholic Church in Galicia, 1848-1914,” 245-246.}
The Council represented a distinct national identity; it promoted the Ruthenian/Ukrainian language
and stood in opposition to the Poles, even demanding the partition of Galicia into Ruthenian and
Polish territories. At the same time, they were completely loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Empire,\footnote{Plokhy, The Gates of Europe, 163-164.}
doubtless in part thanks to the preferential treatment they received under its rule.

Until the revolution of 1848, East Slavic identity in Galicia was expressed in two main
political and cultural tendencies: Ruthenian and Polish. Given this choice, it is not surprising that
many Greek Catholics gravitated toward Ruthenian politics and national identity (although many
did consider themselves to be Greek Catholic Poles).\footnote{Magosci, A History of Ukraine, 468.}
After 1848, however, the situation became
more complicated, with the Ruthenian national movement dividing into two, or even three,
factions. The most commonly cited are the Ukrainophile and Russophile, but Paul Robert Magosci
also cites a third: Old Ruthenian. The Old Ruthenians maintained the ideas of the pre-1848
movement, embracing a concept of Ruthenian identity that applied only to Galicia and that was
entirely compatible with loyalty to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.\footnote{Ibid., 469.}
Meanwhile, Russophiles
promoted the idea that the Ruthenians of Galicia were Russians, or Little Russians, and hoped for
eventual unification with Russia. In contrast, the Ukrainophiles posited that the Ruthenians of
Galicia were part of a larger Ukrainian nation, which included the Ukrainians of the Russian
Empire, as well those of Transcarpathia and Bukovina.\footnote{Ibid., 469-470.} Ukrainophiles were also distinct in their
advocacy of a “mutually exclusivist” Ukrainian identity, that is, one that ruled out other national

\footnote{53 Himka, “The Greek Catholic Church in Galicia, 1848-1914,” 245-246.}
\footnote{54 Plokhy, The Gates of Europe, 163-164.}
\footnote{55 Magosci, A History of Ukraine, 468.}
\footnote{56 Ibid., 469.}
\footnote{57 Ibid., 469-470.}
or political loyalties.\textsuperscript{58} Today, it is often assumed that a national identity must be mutually exclusivist; however, the Old Ruthenian and Russophile identities were also truly “national” in the sense that they promoted a strong awareness of what it meant to be Ruthenian.

It is worth noting that, for the most part, the national movement in Galicia in the latter half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was not focused on the creation of a new state, whether independent or associated with a larger empire. The radical socialist supporters of the Ukrainophile persuasion, such as Mikhailo Drahamonov and Ivan Franko, wanted an independent Ukraine, and the Russophiles favored eventual union with Russia.\textsuperscript{59} On the whole, however, the activity of the national movement during this period was not dedicated to the issue of independence. Of course, these various branches of the national movement aimed at more than cultural revival; they had clearly defined political goals and maintained an active presence in Galician political life. Their main objectives were: “the division of the province into two parts\textsuperscript{60}… 2) equality for the Ukrainian language in schools and public life; 3) the establishment of a Ukrainian University; and 4) the implementation of universal suffrage.”\textsuperscript{61} For the most part, the political horizons of the national movement during this period remained within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The three branches of the Ruthenian national movement—Old Ruthenian, Russophile, and Ukrainophile—divided the loyalties of Greek Catholics, making the relationship of the Church to national identity formation during this period exceptionally difficult to unravel. Furthermore, the lines between these orientations were not always clear, nor were the attitudes among lower clergy and lay faithful always identical to those of the Church hierarchy. One can be certain, however,


\textsuperscript{60} i.e. one Ruthenian and one Polish

\textsuperscript{61} Magosci, \textit{A History of Ukraine}, 476.
that by 1860 the Church hierarchy had become wary of nationalism of any kind. Nonetheless, Greek Catholic clergy continued to participate in the various factions of the national movement.

The Ukrainophile and Russophile movements created problems for the Greek Catholic hierarchy, which rejected both; it considered the Russophile movement to be dangerously sympathetic to Russian Orthodoxy and criticized the Ukrainophiles for their increasingly radical, secular, and even anti-clerical tendencies. From the 1860’s through the early 1880’s, the Russophile movement posed the primary challenge, as it was prominent among Greek Catholic clergy and dominated Ruthenian society as a whole. Among the clergy, the Russophile orientation was closely associated with an effort to de-Latinize the Church’s liturgical practices, but often manifested in more radical attempts to imitate Russian Orthodox practices or even, in at least one case, to incite conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church. The actual magnitude of the threat posed by Russophilism is unclear, but the Vatican interpreted it as a sign that the Greek Catholic Church was in danger of defecting from Rome. This led, among other things, to the Vatican’s decision to reform the Basilian order and the removal of Metropolitan Sembratovych from office. Such aggressive measures largely succeeded in quelling Russophilism among the clergy and even in Ruthenian society in general.

While the Vatican was subduing the Russophile threat, the Old Ruthenians had become “tainted” by their leaders’ sympathies for Russophilism, effectively eliminating the movement altogether. The result was that the Ukranophile movement, which included the national populists

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63 Ibid., 475.
64 Ibid., 476; Himka, “The Greek Catholic Church in Galicia, 1848-1914,” 254.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 247, 249.
68 Ibid., 252.
69 Ibid., 254.
and radical socialists,\textsuperscript{71} became the preeminent national movement in Galicia. Although Greek Catholics participated in this movement, too, the Church hierarchy once again opposed it. As early as 1865, the Church had banned the faithful from supporting the national-populist organization, Meta.\textsuperscript{72} Nonetheless, Greek Catholic clergy had continued to play an indispensable role in the Ukrainophile movement from the 1860’s through the 1880’s; if the “secular intelligentsia…were the generals of the movement,” then the “village priests were its loyal footsoldiers who brought the national idea to the peasant masses.”\textsuperscript{73} In the 1890’s, however, the relationship between the Church and the increasingly secular Ukrainophiles became more fraught.\textsuperscript{74} By the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the Ukrainophiles had overtaken the Old Ruthenians and Russophiles as the standard bearers of Ruthenian nationalism.\textsuperscript{75} The Galician-Ruthenian cause had clearly become part of a broader Ukrainian cause, and the Greek Catholic Church once again found itself in opposition to the mainstream Ukrainian national movement.

By no means was it back where it started, though. Through the actions of lay faithful and clergy, as well as the hierarchy, the Greek Catholic Church had irreversibly entered the world of Ukrainian national politics. For much of this period, the Church was nearly synonymous with the national movement and made significant contributions to the formation of a strong Ruthenian or Ukrainian national identity. Along with the Vatican, the Greek Catholic Church played a decisive role in turning the tide of Russophilism in Galicia, paving the way for a Ukrainian national identity.

\textsuperscript{71} In \textit{Religion and Nationality in Western Ukraine}, John Paul Himka associates the national populists with the Ukrainophiles while treating the radical socialists as a separate movement. (p. 144-145) Even in his description, however, these two groups share a similar understanding of Ukrainian national identity, albeit with different policy prescriptions. Thus, the national populists and radical socialists are treated here as two branches of the Ukrainophile movement.

\textsuperscript{72} Magosci, \textit{A History of Ukraine}, 248.


\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 35-36.

\textsuperscript{75} Himka, “The Greek Catholic Church in Galicia, 1848-1914,” 254.
to supplant the somewhat amorphous “Ruthenian” identity. Although these developments took place in Galicia, their effect stretched far beyond, to the Ukrainian lands ruled by Russia.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, despite its opposition to the perceived excesses of the Ukrai

ophile movement, the Church played a crucial role in Ukrainian national identity formation during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Furthermore, for the first time this role was a proactive one. The Church was not simply an opposition force or a passive bystander dragged into the fray; it purposefully entered the political arena with the aim of furthering, and at times redirecting, the process of national identity formation among its faithful.

\textbf{The Age of Sheptyts’kyi: 1900-1944}

When Andrei Sheptyts’kyi became the Metropolitan of Halych (the highest position in the Greek Catholic Church) in 1900, Ruthenians were understandably skeptical. He was a Polonized Ruthenian on his father’s side, and his mother was Polish. He grew up worshipping in the Latin rite, but moved to the Greek Catholic Church in 1888, entering the newly reformed and controversial Basilian order.\textsuperscript{77} Despite his strong Polish ties, Sheptyts’kyi would become a strong supporter of the Ukrainian national cause, although at times clashing with its more radical elements, such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.\textsuperscript{78} From his ascension to the foremost position in the Greek Catholic Church until his death in 1944, Sheptyts’kyi would define the Greek Catholic Church and, in many ways, the Ukrainian national movement as a whole. Thus, it is worth examining his tenure in more depth as a pivotal time in Ukrainian national identity formation.

Sheptyts’kyi’s leadership led to a near reversal of the Greek Catholic hierarchy’s policy toward Ukrainian nationalism.\textsuperscript{79} For the most part, Sheptyts’kyi was strongly supportive of

\textsuperscript{76} Plokhy, \textit{The Gates of Europe}, 161.
\textsuperscript{77} Himka, “Sheptyts’kyi and the Ukrainian National Movement Before 1914,” 31-33.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 29-30.
Ukrainian (as opposed to Polish or Russophile) national identity and the national movement. He sided with Ukrainian students in their effort to open a separate Ukrainian university in Lviv\(^{80}\) and promoted Ukrainian political interests with the Austro-Hungarian emperor.\(^{81}\) Along with the political leaders of the national movement in Galicia, he advocated loyalty to the Austro-Hungarian Empire during World War I. While these leaders retained “vague and somewhat confused” hopes for eventual Ukrainian independence, however, Sheptyts’kyi proposed a concrete plan that would unite Austrian- and Russian-ruled Ukraine in a semi-independent Austro-Hungarian state.\(^{82}\) Of course, this plan never came to fruition, as the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed after the war. During Sheptyts’kyi’s tenure, Galicia changed hands multiple times. After the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it briefly declared independence and nominally united with Dnieper Ukraine before being subsumed by the resurrected Polish state.\(^{83}\) In 1939, the Soviet Union\(^{84}\) occupied Galicia before Nazi Germany took over during World War II.\(^{85}\) Sheptyts’kyi just lived to see Galicia reincorporated into the Soviet Union,\(^{86}\) where it would remain until 1991.

Throughout these political upheavals, Sheptyts’kyi remained a staunch supporter of Ukrainian national identity. Widely revered in Galician society, Sheptyts’kyi made the Greek Catholic Church a bastion of the Ukrainian national movement.

It is important to note, however, that Sheptyts’kyi never allowed the Greek Catholic Church to be fully identified with the radical nationalist movement that gained prominence in Galician society in the 1930’s. This movement, embodied in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

\(^{80}\) Himka, “Sheptyts’kyi and the Ukrainian National Movement before 1914,” 34.
\(^{81}\) Ibid., 48.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., 48.
\(^{83}\) Magosci, A History of Ukraine, 552, 559.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 661.
\(^{85}\) Ibid., 667-669.
(OUN), was devoted to the ideal of independent statehood and was willing to use ruthless terrorist tactics to achieve this goal. Sheptyts’kyi did support the Ukrainian national movement, to a point, but forcefully opposed it when it transgressed Christian values. He evidently saw the future of Galicia and the Greek Catholic Church as lying with a strong and independent (or semi-independent) Ukraine, but he took care to respect the identities of Polish and Russophile members of his flock. He opposed the policies of the Polish, Nazi, and Soviet regimes, yet he encouraged his flock to avoid aggravating these regimes (where morally permissible) in order to ensure their safety. The brand of Ukrainian nationalism proposed by Sheptyts’kyi was clearly not that of the radical nationalists, although the two overlapped in certain ways. It was based in a distinctly Christian understanding of national identity, which had no room for violence, ethnic hatred, or “politics without God.”

Thus, while Metropolitan Sheptyts’kyi and the Greek Catholic Church had an enormous impact on the Ukrainian national movement in the first half of the 20th century, the Church was not simply an instrument of nationalism. Rather, the Church and the secular national movement influenced and even challenged one another, often through the mediation of Metropolitan Sheptyts’kyi. Whereas Greek Catholic participation in Ukrainian national identity formation and national aspirations had long been limited to the lower clergy, under Sheptyts’kyi’s leadership, the

89 Cf. ibid., 37.
91 Ibid., 40
Church hierarchy finally embraced the Ukrainian cause, while calling on nationalists to behave in a Christian way.

The complexity of its relationship with secular Ukrainian politics in no way diminishes the Greek Catholic Church’s role during this period; on the contrary, it elevates it. Had Sheptyts’kyi unconditionally supported the radical nationalists, the Church might have brought prestige and moral legitimacy to the movement, but it would not have contributed much that was distinctive. It would have been a follower, accepting that it no longer set the agenda in Ukrainian national identity formation and political organization. In choosing a different path, Sheptyts’kyi used the full weight of the Church to remind Ukrainians that their identity as Christians, and the human identity shared by all ethnic groups, must supersede their own national identity. Although the faithful did not always heed his remonstrances, he essentially “play(ed) the role of ethnarch of Galicia—the supreme arbiter of Ukrainian national life…”

In Galicia, as in the rest of Ukraine, the first half of the 20th century was not so much an era of Ukrainian national identity formation as of a struggle to solidify this identity in the face of oppression. By the end of the 1800’s, the Ukrainophiles had nearly won the battle for Ruthenian identity. Thus, the role of the Greek Catholic Church was not so much to convince Ruthenians of their Ukrainian identity, but to be a national anchor amidst the changing rulers, borders, and conditions of the time. It also worked to counteract the influence of radical nationalists who risked making the Ukrainian national cause synonymous with violence and anti-Polish or anti-Russian sentiments. Although Ukraine would not gain independence until near 50 years after Sheptyts’kyi’s death, his embrace of the Ukrainian national cause would have long-lasting effects.

95 Ibid., 67.
The Church Underground: 1946-1989

The fate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church\(^{97}\) (UGCC) post-WWII largely mirrored that of Ukrainian national identity: both were suppressed under the Soviet regime. In 1946, the UGCC was forcibly united with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). All its bishops were arrested, along with many clergy and laypeople; many were sent to gulags or went into exile.\(^{98}\) Most Ukrainian Greek Catholics did not recognize the union as legitimate;\(^{99}\) some ostensibly joined the ROC while remaining loyal to the UGCC, while others went underground.\(^{100}\) Meanwhile, the Soviet regime was also suppressing Ukrainian national identity. The late 1940’s and early 1950’s saw a campaign to snuff out any traces of Ukrainian nationalism, whether the nationalist in question be a writer armed with a pen or an insurgent armed with a gun.\(^{101}\) With Kruschev’s accession to power, the persecution of the UGCC and of Ukrainian nationalism ebbed slightly, but both continued to suffer until the Soviet Union began to unravel in the late 1980’s.\(^{102}\)

During these decades of suppression, the UGCC played an indispensable role in maintaining Ukrainian national consciousness, as “it (the UGCC) was one of the few elements of Ukrainian identity which were not Sovietized.”\(^{103}\) Underground seminaries taught Ukrainian history, keeping alive the memory of a distinct national identity.\(^{104}\) Meanwhile, the Metropolitan had fled Ukraine, but continued to lead the Church while in exile. He provided encouragement to

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97 While the term “Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church” was probably in use during Sheptyts’kyi’s tenure, the Vatican officially recognized the Greek Catholic Church as “Ukrainian” in 1963, and the Church has been known as Ukrainian Greek Catholic since then.
99 Ibid., 27.
102 Ibid., 299-300.
103 Michal Wawrzonék, Religion and Politics in Ukraine: The Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches as Elements of Ukraine’s Political System (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 146.
the faithful who had remained in Ukraine while establishing a temporary spiritual home for the Church in Rome. While the UGCC was not the only preserve of Ukrainian national identity during this period, it did play a unique role. In fact, the underground church became “the most important cultural and institutional preserve of national identity in Western Ukraine.” Furthermore, the UGCC was the only distinctly Ukrainian church to retain a strong presence in the homeland; the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) existed only in exile during the Soviet era. Although, or perhaps because, it operated underground, the UGCC was the “biggest and best-organized institution of social life which was independent of Soviet power, not only in Ukraine, but also in the whole of the USSR.” Thus, the UGCC was uniquely poised to “raise the spirit of Ukrainian resistance to the level of conscious preparedness to struggle for their national and religious rights and create a strong foundation for (the) sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.”

The Greek Catholic Church received little encouragement from Rome in the early years of the Cold War, as the Vatican’s Ostpolitik generally prioritized dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church over support of the Greek Catholic Church. This changed dramatically with the election of John Paul II to the papacy in 1978. Pope John Paul II was Polish and “was free of

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108 Wawrzonek, Religion and Politics in Ukraine: The Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches as Elements of Ukraine’s Political System, 137.
109 Kindrachuk, “The Value of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Preservation of the National Religious Rights of the Ukrainians,” 104.
110 the name for Vatican policy toward the Soviet Union under Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI
111 George Weigel, The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II—The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy, (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2010), 181.
a ‘Russian complex’ and aware of the needs of non-Russian nationalities” in the Soviet bloc.\textsuperscript{112} He took care to use the Ukrainian language, acknowledged the importance of the Union of Brest, and called a synod of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic hierarchy, making clear his sympathy for the persecuted UGCC.\textsuperscript{113} It is hardly surprising that these overtures deeply concerned the Soviet regime and the Russian Orthodox Church, adding a further layer of complexity to Vatican diplomacy toward the USSR. John Paul II’s efforts on behalf of the UGCC provoked an increase in Soviet anti-Catholic propaganda,\textsuperscript{114} but they also “stirred the faithful to more active resistance.”\textsuperscript{115} It would be a mistake, however, to view this Ukrainian Greek Catholic “revival” as externally imposed or simply the result of geopolitical maneuvering. Pope John Paul II certainly had a profound impact on Catholics throughout the USSR, and his support gave renewed impetus to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic efforts at legalization.\textsuperscript{116} The pope’s efforts had an effect, however, because they resonated with the tradition and national identity that Ukrainian Greek Catholics had already maintained throughout the Soviet persecution.

**Legalization and Renewal: 1987-present**

The strength of the underground Church became evident in the late 1980’s, with the advent of glasnost and perestroika. Although the UGCC had never stopped fighting for legal recognition, it redoubled its efforts during this time, no doubt encouraged by Pope John Paul II’s support. In 1987, “‘a group of Ukrainian Greek Catholics’ publicly declared that they were ‘coming up from the underground.’”\textsuperscript{117} The tipping point in the struggle came when Pope John Paul II interceded

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 266-269.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 270-274.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 271.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 277-278.
\textsuperscript{117} Wawrzonek, *Religion and Politics in Ukraine*, 134.
on behalf of the UGCC with Mikhail Gorbachev; suddenly, efforts at registering UGCC churches were successful.\textsuperscript{118} The UGCC’s battle for legalization had weakened the Soviet regime, though. The Church was “strongly connected with Ukraine’s independence movement” and “her crucial element was anti-communism.”\textsuperscript{119} Although Metropolitan Volodymyr Sternuk, the unofficial head of the UGCC during its underground phase, made it clear that the Church took no official stance on political matters, this did not stop Ukrainian Greek Catholics from associating themselves with the independence movement\textsuperscript{120}—and it probably was not meant to. While many factors contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union, one author has argued that “Greek Catholic priests and laity played a noticeable role in the downfall of the Soviet Union—a role comparable, to a certain degree, to the contribution made by Pope John Paul II to the collapse of the Eastern bloc.”\textsuperscript{121}

As the UGCC reemerged from hiding, it also influenced the burgeoning movement for an autocephalous\textsuperscript{122} Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which in turn was closely associated with the struggle for Ukrainian independence and national identity.\textsuperscript{123} In fact, according to one author, “the Initiative Committee for the Revival of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) was set up as a result of the impulse provided by the Greek Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{124} The full extent of the Greek Catholic influence on the UAOC is debated, but UGCC certainly provided some inspiration. Fr. Volodymyr Yarema, who was a priest of the ROC, but an advocate of Ukrainian Orthodox autocephaly, wrote:

“Uniates seem much more serious, cultured (than the ROC clergy)...Uniates celebrate masses in the Ukrainian language, a Ukrainian sermon and music by Ukrainian

\textsuperscript{118} Bremer, “Religion in Ukraine,” 8.
\textsuperscript{119} Wawrzonek, Religion and Politics in Ukraine, 136.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 42.
\textsuperscript{122} the Orthodox term for self-governing status
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., Religion and Politics in Ukraine, 143-145.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 143.
composers…there is nothing for us to look for in Kiev if the Pope, a foreigner, speaks in the Ukrainian language and the exarch of Ukraine does not want to.”

In the post-Cold War period, the UGCC has continued to revive and even flourish. In 1994, the L’viv Theological Academy was formed, and in 2002, it became the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU). This institution has cultivated a strong Ukrainian national identity and serves as a vibrant intellectual center that is respected throughout Ukraine. The UGCC has also attempted to transition from being viewed as a regional, Galician church to a truly national church. Although the church has remained strongest in the west of Ukraine, it claims to be a church of the Kyivan tradition (i.e. an inheritor of the baptism of the Rus’) and thus a truly all-Ukrainian church.

In 2001, the Roman and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Churches once again contributed to a pivotal event in Ukrainian national identity formation. The UGCC’s unique position at the intersection of East and West opened the door to Rome, and through it walked a Slavic Pope who understood all too well the aspirations of a people who had been oppressed by the Soviet Union. In an effort to shore up support among Ukrainian Greek Catholic voters, President Leonid Kuchma invited Pope John Paul II to visit Ukraine. Although it is impossible to empirically prove a causal connection, there is good reason to believe that “the Pope’s pilgrimage in 2001 was a major catalyst for the process of social awakening in Ukraine, which culminated in the so-called ‘Orange Revolution.’”

One Ukrainian observer wrote that the Pope’s visit created a “unique atmosphere” characterized by “a state of rapture among Catholics of both rites, systemic opposition by the Moscow Patriarchate, caution among state officials and curiosity among ordinary citizens, open

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126 Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 33-34.
dissatisfaction of the Russian state and inarticulated societal expectations.”

Even today, one is struck by the lasting impression made by Pope John Paul II’s visit in Lviv, where his portrait hangs in one of the local Catholic churches and it is still possible to buy souvenirs commemorating the papal pilgrimage. A comment from a Ukrainian journalist who witnessed the visit summarized its impact: “During the pope’s visit to Ukraine…people felt their own dignity, and the inhabitants for at least a decade will realize that they are a nation.”

Given the developments in Ukraine since 2013, one must wonder if the “John Paul II effect” indeed lasted over a decade and inspired the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church’s response to these events. The UGCC was heavily involved in the 2013-2014 Maidan Revolution of Dignity and the continuing renewal of Ukrainian civic life that had begun as the Cold War came to a close. Although Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the UGCC, made it clear that the Church took no official stance on political matters, UGCC members and institutions were overwhelmingly supportive of the protests that led to the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich. Students from the Ukrainian Catholic University were some of the earliest participants in the 2013 protests on the Maidan, and the school itself was the first to declare civil disobedience against the Yanukovych regime after its forces shot at protesters on December 11, 2013. One of the university’s professors was shot and killed on the Maidan two months later. UGCC clergy also played a prominent role in the protests, as they were often to be found on the Maidan, offering spiritual encouragement to protesters. Even the elderly Patriarch-Emeritus Lubomyr Husar “repeatedly joined the Euromaidan protesters and addressed mass rallies with remarks on ethical

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129 Wawrzonek, Religion and Politics in Ukraine, 173.
130 Ibid., 174.
132 Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 34-35.
issues involved in civil protest.”¹³³ In the face of Russian aggression in Crimea and the Donbas, the UGCC has since proven a strong supporter of Ukraine’s independence and territorial integrity. The recurrent theme of the UGCC’s response to the events of Maidan, however, is dignity; Yury Avvakumov has even termed this a “theology of dignity.”¹³⁴ The now-widespread term “Revolution of Dignity” actually originated with Major Archbishop Shevchuk, and the Church has stressed the inviolable dignity of every human person as the basis of Ukrainian civic and political life.¹³⁵

III. Frontier Nation, Frontier Church

This capstone has given an overview of Catholic influence on Ukrainian collective and national identity formation, both by recounting the history of the Catholic Church in Ukraine and by analyzing the significance of this history. Historical evidence indicates that the Catholic Church has played an important role in Ukrainian identity formation over the past millennium, although this role evolved over time. Prior to the 19th century, the Catholic Church (Roman and Uniate) did not directly support the Ukrainian national movement. Nonetheless, the Catholic presence had an indirect impact, often spurring on developments within the Orthodox Church and among Ukrainians. Although the formation of the Uniate Church was an important turning point, its impact on Ukrainian identity was not fully felt until the 19th century. From the 19th century on, however, Catholics played a direct and pivotal role in Ukrainian identity formation, particularly in Galicia. This role was initially limited to lower clergy, but under Metropolitan Sheptyts’kyi spread to the Church hierarchy, as well.

The question remains, however, why the Church that was once considered the enemy of

¹³³ Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 36.
¹³⁴ Ibid.
¹³⁵ Ibid.
Ukrainian nationalism came to embrace it, and what this implies about the importance of the Catholic Church to Ukrainian national identity formation. As to the why, there is no simple explanation. If one examines the long history of Catholic influence on Ukraine, however, certain systemic patterns emerge. This is not to say that the Church’s support of the Ukrainian national movement was inevitable. It was highly probable, though, given the factors at play. Specifically, the Church’s relationship to Ukrainian national identity is closely linked with the role they both share: that of a frontier between East and West.

Looking at the Catholic history of Ukraine through the lens of classical and critical geopolitics helps to clarify this concept. Classical geopolitics focuses on the significance of physical geography for geopolitics. Most classical geopolitical thinkers place special importance on Eurasia and highlight pivotal regions within the super-continent. Sir Halford Mackinder, for instance, considers control of Eastern Europe to be the key to ultimate dominance of Eurasia and the world.136 Thinkers of the critical geopolitical tradition, on the other hand, emphasize the invisible “geographies” of religious, ethnic, national, and other identities. Of course, these two approaches to geopolitics are inextricably connected; decisions on where to draw physical boundaries rest largely on identity, while identities often associate themselves with particular regions or spatial distributions.

Ukraine perfectly exemplifies the intersection between classical and critical geopolitics. The name “Ukraine” literally translates to “borderland.” Samuel Huntington graphically expressed this idea with Europe’s civilizational dividing line slashing through the heart of Ukraine.137 Although this image is an oversimplification, it does illustrate the reality that Ukraine straddles

divides involving both geography and identity. Is Ukraine a part of Europe? It does not lie on the Asian continent, but in the minds of some, it still retains an eastern or Russian identity that differentiates it from Europe proper. In terms of physical geography, Ukraine certainly lies at the crossroads of East and West; its easternmost region actually lies further east than parts of Saudi Arabia. Even the categories of “East” and “West” are contested, as many consider these terms to be overly rigid and simplistic. Can an independent Ukraine survive with a geopolitical superpower to its east and west? Does Ukraine belong to a Western European “civilization” or a Russian “civilization”? Again, the resolution of these questions is complicated further by the lack of agreement over the meaning and existence of such civilizations. These unresolved issues lie at the heart of the current conflict in Ukraine, or at least of perceptions about it. All of these questions have plagued the notion of Ukrainian identity since its inception, making the nation a true borderland or frontier of Europe.

The effects of this tension have been felt throughout Catholic history in Ukraine. At first, the Church clearly aligned with a non-Ukrainian identity. Prior to the formation of the Uniate Church, to be Polish in present-day Ukraine was to be Catholic, and to be Ruthenian was to be Orthodox. Some Ruthenians did convert to Roman Catholicism, but this often came hand in hand with Polonization. After the Union of Brest, the Uniate Church had to justify its own existence by maintaining a distinct identity within the Roman Catholic-Orthodox divide. This would prove no easy feat. At first, an alliance with proponents of a distinct Ukrainian collective identity was out of the question, as the defenders of Ukrainian collective identity were the Cossacks, who closely linked this identity to Orthodoxy. During the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Dnieper Ukraine were brought further under Russia’s control, making it difficult for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and faithful to maintain a distinctive national identity.
Galicia, the heart of the Uniate Church, was brought under Austrian rule, leaving Ruthenians and Poles as the two main cultural forces competing for influence in the region.

Thus, by the 19th century, the geopolitical tug-of-war over Ukraine had created a cultural space between Russian/Orthodox and Polish/Roman Catholic identities, and two entities emerged to fill that void: the Ukrainian national movement and the Greek Catholic Church. The Ukrainian Orthodox were no longer an immediate threat to the Uniates (now Greek Catholics), as they were during the Cossack era; antagonism between Ruthenians and Poles was the major challenge. Many Greek Catholics looked to Russia for their identity, but this solution was unacceptable to the Vatican, as it risked bringing the Greek Catholic Church into the Orthodox sphere of influence. At the same time, the Ukrainian identity had emerged as an alternative to both Russian and Polish identities. Thus, the Greek Catholic Church and the Ukrainian national movement both occupied a cultural space between that of Poland and Russia; it was only logical that they would join forces eventually.

Sheptyts’kyi’s support for the national movement further solidified this alliance. Although his decision to “Ukrainianize” the Church seems surprising in light of his Polish background, this too was molded by the Church’s position on the East-West frontier. By the time Sheptyts’kyi became Metropolitan, Ukrainian identity was well developed in Galicia. To be sure, not all Greek Catholics considered themselves Ukrainian, but the Ukrainophile movement had firmly taken hold in Ruthenian society. It is hardly shocking that a leader deeply concerned with the welfare of his flock would listen attentively to their desire for recognition of their national aspirations. Furthermore, as Galicia was passed back and forth between Poland, Germany, and the Soviet Union, Ruthenians suffered under each regime. Assimilation was almost out of the question. This, combined with the strong Ukrainophile sentiments among the Greek Catholic faithful, made it
likely that the hierarchy would sooner or later follow their lead.

Sheptyts’kyi was also keenly aware of Ukraine’s position on the frontier between Orthodox Russia and Roman Catholic Europe. Although he supported a renewal of the Greek Catholic Church’s eastern roots and traditions, he firmly believed in the importance of Christian unity under the aegis of the Pope. He hoped that Ukrainian identity and a Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church could bridge the divide between East and West, thus bringing both eastern and western Ukraine into communion with Rome. While this was an ambitious project and has not been brought to fruition, the idea of using the Greek Catholic Church to bring Ruthenians/Ukrainians into the Catholic fold was not new. Sheptyts’kyi simply took this logic one step further with the belief that a strong sense of Ukrainian national identity, and even a certain amount of political independence, could help to realize this goal. Thus, although his own convictions and personality were instrumental, the Greek Catholic embrace of Ukrainian identity had as much to do with the logic of nation building and geopolitical circumstances as it did with one, albeit remarkable, individual.

This explanation of the Greek Catholic pivot toward Ukrainian nationalism not only offers insight into the Church’s history, but also into its central importance for Ukrainian national identity formation. The same geopolitical forces that led the Church to embrace Ukrainian national identity also made it indispensable to Ukrainian identity formation. Positioned as the “borderland” of Europe, Ukraine has long been buffeted by the waves of various states, cultures, and religions, each of which has shaped or hindered the formation of a Ukrainian national identity that could sustain political independence. At times, these influences exerted a pull that weakened Ukrainian identity or even led to assimilation; at others, they reinforced the distinct qualities of Ukrainian history, language, and culture. Lithuania, Poland, Austria, Russia, the Crimean Tatars, the Ottoman

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Empire, Islam, Catholicism, Orthodoxy….all these and more left their mark on Ukraine.

A survey of the past millennium reveals that Poland and Russia have posed a particular challenge to Ukrainian collective and national identity formation. At various times, each has dominated Ukrainian society. While this was sometimes done by force or oppression, the greater danger to Ukrainian distinctiveness has been assimilation or considering the Ukrainian identity to be a variation on Polish or Russian identity. If Ukraine was to emerge as a distinct and independent nation, it needed a force strong enough to counter the pull of these identities.

At first, the Cossacks seemed to be such a force. As they drew closer to Russia, however, their ability to sustain a strong Ukrainian collective identity grew weaker, until the Cossack state was entirely subsumed by the Russian Empire. By this point, Moscow had gained supremacy over the Orthodox Church in Kyiv, so the latter’s ability to renew a sense of Ukrainian distinctiveness was limited. Intellectuals such as Taras Shevchenko played a vital role in raising Ukrainian national consciousness,139 and the rediscovery of Ukrainian history and folk culture gave impetus to the national movement.140

Given the restrictions on Ukrainian nationalism under the Russian Empire, it was imperative that Western Ukraine take a leading role in the national movement. In the early 1800’s, this would have been all but impossible without the involvement of the Greek Catholic clergy, as they were the ones who acted as “conduits for national sentiment among rural folk.”141 Furthermore, the Church’s position as neither Roman Catholic nor Orthodox, but sharing elements of each, helped to ensure that the Ruthenians in Galicia retained an identity separate from both Poles and Russians. Although the secular brand of nationalism gained strength as the century drew

140 Ibid., 149.
to a close, the Greek Catholic Church continued to serve an important purpose. Through the first half of the 20th century, political organizations came and went, empires invaded and withdrew, but the Greek Catholic Church remained steady, anchoring Ukrainians in a common identity.

The return of Soviet rule to Ukraine after WWII was not the end of the story of Ukrainian identity formation, or the Greek Catholic role in it. Although forced “reunification” with the Russian Orthodox Church seemed to spell the end of the Greek Catholic Church at the time, the Church was not so easily silenced—nor was the Ukrainian national movement. Ukrainian national identity was far too developed to disappear, even under a Russian-dominated regime. It is impossible to know with certainty how Ukrainian national identity would have evolved without the Uniate/Greek Catholic Church, but it is plausible that without it, the Ukrainian national movement would not have been sufficiently developed to survive the challenges of the 20th century.

This is not to discount the importance of other influences on Ukrainian national identity, or even to claim that the Catholic influence had more importance. The movement to form an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in particular, has both stemmed from and reinforced a strong Ukrainian national identity and desire for independence. It is vital, however, to acknowledge the role the Catholic Church, and particularly the Greek Catholic Church, has played. As was shown earlier, even the autocephaly movement in the Orthodox Church was in some ways urged on by the example of the UGCC. The story of Ukrainian identity formation is not just history; it is ongoing and constantly evolving. Today, Ukraine continues to struggle to assert its independence and to develop a unifying national identity, and the UGCC is playing an active role in this process.

Despite the revival of Ukrainian culture since independence, post-Soviet Ukrainian society
has in some sense suffered from a “deficit of identity.” Michal Wawrzonek argues that modern Ukraine “possesses many traits of the postcolonial society, i.e., it is non-consolidated and divided among various religious and clan loyalties.” To some extent, this identity crisis is due to Ukraine’s traditional position as a borderland, but it has been exacerbated by Soviet efforts to suppress Ukraine’s culture and religion. As Ukrainians continue to grapple with the question of identity, it is no surprise that Russia has been able to take advantage of existing divisions to foment discord and even war.

If it is to survive with its borders intact, Ukraine must find a way to coalesce around a distinctive Ukrainian national identity that transcends religion, ethnicity, and language. Prior to Ukrainian independence, the need for this was less pronounced; Ukrainian nationalism represented one ethnic identity among others in an empire. Granted, this model at times led to an exclusivist mentality among certain Ukrainian nationalists, or even virulent opposition to other ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the consequences of such divisions for the Ukrainian national movement remained minimal so long as the Ukrainian identity was not associated with an independent state. Now, Ukraine must solidify a civic identity that is inclusive of various ethnicities and religious affiliations while somehow retaining the “Ukrainianness” that allowed the nation to emerge from the rubble of the Soviet Union. It must continue the transition from a largely ethnic-based nationalism to a multi-ethnic patriotism rooted in Ukrainian national identity. If this process falters, the prospects for peace in the Donbas and political stability are indeed grim.

Thus far, the evolution of Ukrainian national identity seems headed in a positive direction. As Major Archbishop Shevchuk has acknowledged, the Ukrainians of various ethnicities,

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143 Ibid.
144 Ibid., 108-109.
languages, and religions have embarked on a path toward “a new form of Ukrainian patriotism” centered on “freedom and independence.”145 Clearly, the Ukrainian identity underlying this patriotism is one of inclusion and love of country, rather than ethnic divisions or extremism. Without a firm foundation, though, this movement could easily veer toward an exclusive nationalism or, conversely, lose its distinctly Ukrainian characteristics. Already, the pro-Maidan movement has struggled to keep far right nationalist groups, such as Azov, from coopting their narrative.146 For the foreseeable future, there is little risk of Ukrainian identity returning to Russophilism, but there is a real risk that the pivot to Europe could result in European assimilation rather than integration. As a borderland of Europe, Ukraine has long held characteristics in common with both Europe and Russia. Part of the distinctiveness of Ukrainian national identity has been its ability to transcend the Europe-Russia dichotomy and create something unique. The geopolitical narrative of Russia vs. NATO and the EU risks forcing Ukraine to leave behind aspects of its cultural heritage if it wishes to be a full member of Europe.

All sectors of Ukrainian society can play an important role in navigating these challenges to Ukrainian national identity formation. The history and recent activity of the UGCC suggest that it can contribute in unique ways, though. As a “borderland” church, neither fully eastern nor fully western, the UGCC is uniquely positioned to promote an inclusive identity while reminding Ukrainians of their unique cultural patrimony and position as a bridge between East and West.

As a church of the “borderland,” the UGCC has never risen to the status of a state, or even a majority, church.147 In some ways, it reflects the geopolitical borderland characteristics of

147 Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 30.
Ukraine, defying easy categorization. While the UGCC is subordinate to Rome and is “devoted to Rome as the center of Christian unity,”¹⁴⁸ this attitude never led it to assimilate with Polish or Austrian cultures, which were predominantly Roman Catholic. At the same time, the UGCC’s “ecclesiological liminality,”¹⁴⁹ or its “claim of being both Catholic and Byzantine,”¹⁵⁰ has differentiated it from the Orthodox Church. Although Russophilism was popular among many Greek Catholics in the 19th century, this liminality ultimately prevented Ukrainian Catholics from developing a strong allegiance to Russia, as Russia and the Orthodox Church remained closely intertwined. Thus, the UGCC was never fully identified with the ruling power of Ukraine, whether Polish-Lithuanian, Austrian, Russian, or Soviet. The minority status, and even oppression, of the Church has allowed it to develop two unique characteristics: tolerance and distrust of state authority.¹⁵¹ As Yury Avvakumov notes, the UGCC has never been “in a position to impede the political influence of other communities;”¹⁵² thus, it has learned to tolerate and even cooperate with other religious groups, including the Orthodox. Furthermore, Avvakumov points out that the Church’s persecution has contributed to a healthy suspicion of political establishments.¹⁵³

The geopolitical dynamics shaping the UGCC have also contributed to a third characteristic: the UGCC considers itself a church of the people. In the absence of a major political power with which it could identify, the UGCC became increasingly focused on the ordinary Ukrainians it served. This trend was already evident in the 1800’s, when Greek Catholic priests helped keep Ukrainian national identity alive through their interactions with Ukrainian peasants. Metropolitan Sheptyts’kyi solidified this trend with his attentiveness to his flock and his ultimate

¹⁴⁸ Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 32.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 29.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid.
¹⁵¹ Ibid., 30-32.
¹⁵² Ibid., 30.
¹⁵³ Ibid., 30-31.
embrace of Ukrainian national identity as the primary identity of the Greek Catholic population.\textsuperscript{154} Emerging from the underground after the fall of the Soviet Union, the UGCC fully embraced its role as a voice of the Ukrainian people, supporting and even joining the faithful participating in the 2014 Maidan protests. As Major Archbishop Shevchuk put it, the Church cannot “stand aside when its faithful request…spiritual support.”\textsuperscript{155} The UGCC views itself as residing not in the echelons of power, but among the ordinary citizens on the street.

These characteristics—tolerance, wariness of the political establishment, and loyalty to the Ukrainian people—have been on full display over the past several years. The Church’s tolerance can be seen in its interactions with other religious groups in Ukraine. While this is not a new trend, it became particularly evident during the Maidan Revolution of Dignity.\textsuperscript{156} Relations with the Moscow Patriarchate remain strained, but the UGCC has demonstrated a remarkable willingness to collaborate with other religious groups, including the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kyiv Patriarchate, the Roman Catholic Church, and various Protestant denominations, among others.\textsuperscript{157}

The granting of autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 2019 has added an interesting dimension to this collaboration. For the first time, there is a distinctly Ukrainian, independent Orthodox Church recognized by the Orthodox world at large (with the ROC remaining a notable exception). It remains to be seen how this development affects the religious ecosystem of Ukraine. One can be sure, however, that the UGCC will remain actively engaged in ecumenical dialogue and interdenominational cooperation.

The UGCC’s distrust of the political establishment and its closeness to the people were

\textsuperscript{154} Cf. Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 32.
\textsuperscript{155} Weigel, “The Exhaust Fumes of Stalinism.”
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 30-31.
brought into sharp relief with the Maidan Revolution of Dignity. As was noted earlier, the Church did not officially take a political stance, but Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests, laity, and institutions were overwhelmingly supportive of the protesters. In contrast to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Moscow Patriarchate, the UGCC was not bound by loyalty to a geopolitical power, and it once again was at the forefront of resistance to a corrupt and oppressive regime. When the Yanukovych government threatened to outlaw the UGCC if it persisted in leading prayers at the protests, Major Archbishop Shevchuk was quick to push back against the government’s claim and assert the right of the Church—and the people—to pray wherever they chose.158

These three distinctive traits have converged in one of the UGCC’s most important contributions to the dialogue surrounding Ukrainian national identity: the concept of dignity. Of course, this concept is not unique to the UGCC and is shared by other religious traditions and belief systems. It is probably not a coincidence, however, that the UGCC has been at the forefront of efforts to make dignity a central theme of Ukrainian civic and political revival. The emphasis on human dignity is a natural extension of the UGCC’s salient characteristics. For a religious institution focused on ecumenical dialogue and tolerance, the framework of dignity is a way of staying true to Catholic Christian values while embracing a terminology that is not exclusively Catholic or Christian. Furthermore, the UGCC’s willingness to push back against political elites and to focus on the people has allowed dignity to become a central focus. Human dignity belongs to all persons, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, or creed. It does not favor the rich and powerful, but rather must be respected by those in positions of authority. The UGCC’s “theology of dignity”159 urges Ukrainians to ground their political action in the idea that the intrinsic dignity of the human person calls for a “society free from cronyism, corruption, and violence, a society

158 Weigel, “The Exhaust Fumes of Stalinism.”
159 Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 36.
ruled by law and respect for every human person.”\textsuperscript{160}

This message of dignity has consequences not only for politics and civil society, but for the continued evolution of Ukrainian national identity. The Maidan protests were, in theory, about European integration, but at their heart they were about “the moral and cultural renewal of Ukraine” that is “essential to free politics and free economics in the future.”\textsuperscript{161} The “theology of dignity” is not a top-down imposition on Ukrainian society; rather, it is the UGCC’s attempt to interpret the aspirations of the people and plant them in a firm philosophical grounding that transcends differences in language, ethnicity, and creed. Thus, it is not surprising that the UGCC’s articulation of a Ukrainian identity rooted in dignity is resonating. The UGCC’s message of dignity is valuable for Ukrainian national identity because it reinforces the moral underpinnings of the post-Maidan revival, acting as a rudder as Ukraine navigates the difficult task of finding unity in diversity. What is more, the UGCC embodies this message in a distinctly Ukrainian way, modeling a version of Ukrainian identity that is true to the nation’s “borderland” roots.

It remains to be seen whether the Church, and Ukraine as a whole, can continue to unite behind such an identity. One outstanding challenge is the disconnect between many Ukrainians’ perceptions of Europe and the reality of Europe. For instance, Major Archbishop Shevchuk has stated that “we (Ukrainians) have chosen European and Christian values,” even as Europe has become increasingly wary of identifying itself with Christian values. This tension between perception and reality could lead to difficulties for the UGCC and Ukrainian identity formation. Thus far, however, the Church has proven itself a strong supporter of the Ukrainian national cause and has provided a forum for developing a strong and democratic civil society. As Ukraine is once again torn between East and West, the Church has the opportunity to be a stabilizing force in

\textsuperscript{160} Avvakumov, “Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present,” 36.
\textsuperscript{161} Weigel, “The Exhaust Fumes of Stalinism.”
national identity formation; one can only hope that it will seize this opportunity.
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