

**“The Religious Communities of Ukraine and the Maidan Mobilization”**  
***Prof. José Casanova’s lecture for The Shevchenko Scientific Society in Montreal***

by Alexandra Hawryluk

According to a widely held view, religion with the continued advancement of science and high technology should become obsolete. The decline in church attendance and the diminished role of religious institutions in the public life of Western Europe, for example, appear to support this view. But, at the same time, former Communist republics of Central and Eastern Europe, Ukraine in particular, are experiencing a religious revival.

Dr. José Casanova, professor of sociology and Senior Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University and head of the university’s Program on Religion, Globalization and the Secular, delivered a lecture in Ukrainian on The Religious Communities of Ukraine and Their Role at the Maidan Mobilization at an October 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Montreal chapter of the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada at the Patriarch Yosyf Slipyi Museum. It was his first speaking engagement for NTSh.

In Ukraine, he said, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, a dialogue group comprised of representatives of all Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities of Ukraine, has been tracking successive constitutional amendments and reminding the government that changes in laws must be grounded in traditional moral values and must serve the good of all citizens. In other words, the religious leaders at that table are committed to the development and legal protection of a strong democratic civil society.

When the Yanukovych government security forces started firing on the Maidan crowds, the AUCCRO protested demanding an end to the violence and offered to become an intermediary between the protesters and the government. Putting their beliefs into practice, the good pastors of Ukraine - Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim - went down into Maidan consoled the wounded, buried the dead and turned the neighbouring houses of worship into round-the-clock medical stations. This kind of concerted action, attested Dr. Casanova, could only take place in a democratic country where religious pluralism has become an entrenched value, that is, in a society which treats all religions with equal respect and offers no special status or political advantage to any one faith community. In Ukraine, this means that even the Ukrainian Orthodox Church allied with the Patriarch of Moscow, the UOC-MP, has had to modify its attitude in order to work with all the AUCCRO members and to take its turn at chairing the Council meetings.

This acceptance of religious pluralism is a major social change for Ukraine. It is important to remember that within all republics of the Soviet Union the state-sponsored atheism was the established secular religion. The only church that was tolerated by the Communist regime was the Russian Orthodox Church. As the repository of Russian national identity and imperial dreams, and as the historic partner of the Russian ruling elite, this church was permitted to function under the tight control of KGB. In Ukraine, after the destruction of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church by Soviet authorities, many Ukrainians reluctantly joined the local Russian Orthodox parishes (now the UOC-MP). However, the disintegration of the USSR brought yet another change: the majority of Ukrainians rejected Communism along with the Soviet state-sponsored church and either returned to their ancestral churches, took up membership in the Baptist community of Ukraine (the largest in Europe), or joined other Protestant faith groups. In present day central Ukraine, most of the Orthodox parishes are those of the Kiev Patriarchate, while in the eastern regions the loyalty of the faithful is split between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of

Moscow Patriarchy. And in the western regions, after breaking out from the underground and reclaiming its old properties, it is the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church that has the dominant numbers. At the same time, Jewish and Muslim faith communities are enjoying great success across all of Ukraine. This is not a picture of a dying interest in religion.

Presenting statistical data on the total number of parishes of various denominations, Dr. Casanova stated: “You may notice that Ukraine with less than one third of the population of Russian Federation had one third more religious communities.”

<u>Total Religious Communities:</u>	<u>Ukraine</u>	<u>Russian Federation</u>
	32,521	20,403
Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchy)	11,952	10,764
Protestants	7,000	5,000
Roman Catholics	909	235
Muslims	583	3,377

Even though one third of all Ukrainian believers are members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church affiliated with Moscow, these figures are not only troubling news for the Patriarchate of Moscow, they are also the cause of tension between Ukrainians and Russians within Ukraine. For one thing, the majority of parish priests serving the UOC-MP are Ukrainian, and for another, it is the generosity of Ukrainian parishes, not those in Russia, that provides substantial funding for the Moscow Patriarchy. Should the present status of the UOC-MP in Ukraine change - should its communities go over to the UOC-KP, as several in Volyn have done recently - the status of both the UOC-MP and the Patriarchate of Moscow could change too. Quoting Zbigniew Brzezinski, Dr. Casanova said that “without Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church would not be the largest Orthodox church in the world”. One might also ask, what would happen then to the historic ambition of Moscow Patriarchy to supersede Constantinople and become the world’s highest Orthodox authority?

Professor Casanova, the leading researcher of the new political and cultural importance of religion in the world, then went on to compare the development of Ukrainian religious pluralism with that of Poland and Germany. Although Poland has always been overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, it remains so today, not as a result of any government policy favouring that church, but rather as a result of the citizens’ personal free choice. This democratization process entailed an expression of many diverse interests and values within Polish society which ultimately led to the acceptance of religious pluralism. And it helped that the Catholic Church was a strong supporter of Europeanization and the EU. While 66% of Germans living in what was termed West Germany are believers and 33% are either non-believers or undecided, in former communist East Germany the proportion is reversed: 66% of East Germans profess themselves to be atheists. This makes East Germany the most atheistic society in all of Europe.

By contrast, professor Casanova explained, the “seven oblasts of Western Ukraine form not only the most religious region in Ukraine, but also the most competitive and most pluralistic. Indeed it serves as stronghold of all Ukrainian denominations, with the following distribution:”

	<u>Congregations</u>	<u>Proportion in all Ukraine</u>
UGCC	3,251	96%
UOC-KP	1,564	48%
UAOC	780	72%
UOC-MP	2,204	22%
Protestants	2,285	30%
RCC	389	46%

If in the early days of independence there were debates about the dangers of religious pluralism and how it could damage national identity and unity, pluralism is now an accepted value. As a matter of fact Ukraine is now the most pluralistic society in Europe. “Ukraine has four national churches claiming to be the national church of Ukraine - it has adapted a model of religious pluralism like [that of] the United States and this is a positive aspect of religion in Ukraine,” José Casanova said. In the USA people are very religious, but there is neither an established American church, nor is American identity determined by any one particular faith. That is defined by American civil society and its values. Likewise in contemporary Ukraine: it is no longer necessary to be a member of either the Orthodox or the Catholic church to be considered a good Ukrainian because the Maidan Mobilization of civil consciousness has changed that perception. The Heavenly Hundred, the people who were killed in the Maidan, are not simply members of various faith and ethnic communities who happened to have been in the line of fire - they are Ukrainian citizens who gave up their lives for their country, Ukraine.

Twenty-five years ago it would have been impossible to imagine that all religious groups in Ukraine - the three Orthodox Churches, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Churches, the Judaic and the Muslim congregations - could all work together. Yet, they all took part in the Maidan Mobilization. Their participation in the Revolution of Dignity shows that pluralism is not a cause for fear, but rather a basis for a strong democracy. Dr. José Casanova believes that “the Ukrainian experience is unique” and bodes well for the country’s future.

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