

**RECONCILING DIVERSITY.  
A BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE  
ON THE NATION IN A PLURALISTIC EUROPE**

*The article focuses on the social- theological re-definition of the European cultural and national diversity in the context of discussions on Revolution of Dignity and the nature of the subsequent armed conflict in Ukraine. The crisis of multiculturalism in Western Europe and Russian-Ukrainian conflict require finer distinctions between national and religious dimensions. The author analyses these national and religious correlations in the light of Baptist theology and examines the Ukrainian case by comparing it with Russian and Georgian models. Along with relevancy of the social and political contextualization, the case is made by an equal decontextualization and development of free and dynamic relations between church, government and society, between religious, political as well as cultural and national dimensions. The Ukrainian experiment to reconcile national and religious tensions seems to be the most radical and fundamentally unfinished which makes Ukraine the source of renewing dynamics for the European multiculturalism that is currently in crisis.*

**Keywords:** Church, diversity, Europe, Kingdom of God, nation, theology.

The warning signs and allegations of the collapse of multiculturalism in the West and Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict in the East of Europe are reflected in the new theological attempts to redefine national and religious identities. The most striking position is that of the religious minorities who quietly enjoyed the opportunities of peaceful diversity and good neighborly relations with everyone around them. But now, when the diversity faced an aggressive resistance (for example, on the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia) and stumbled upon its own borders (in case of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant hysteria in the West), the religious minorities had to specify their position. In the following reflections the author will present and analyze the position of Baptist theologians of the post-Soviet space but their main theses are relevant for even broader discussion in regard to European diversity, strengthening its spiritual foundations and reconciling religious and political dimensions.

We live in a critical period in history when Western civilization has reached such a high level of cultural diversity and social complexity that simple solutions (and the thinking patterns themselves), acceptable in previous eras, have become not only obsolete but dangerous. In my opinion, the maturing of humankind should manifest itself in a critique of the simple and obvious, in a conscious refusal of a simple perspective related to ego and ethnocentrism. However, even if the project of multiculturalism has suffered a “complete collapse”<sup>1</sup>, we cannot abandon national and cultural diversity simply because “it does not work” or is too difficult to manage. I think that along with the divine simplicity in cosmology and ontology, it is time for us to talk about divine complexity or divine diversity in social theology. That is why I believe it is right to consider two things incompatible – the meta-historical biblical and theological perspective of pluralism in modern Europe, and the claims of individual nations with their particular histories. Only together can they be combined in a peaceful and promising way.

### **Valuable Complexity and the Complex Value of National Pluralism**

“*Pluralistic Europe*”. For many post-Soviet people this term sounds almost like an obscenity. Pluralism is a sign of weakness, decline, decomposition, “decay.” At the same time, it is difficult for me personally to imagine a non-pluralistic Europe, at least until it remains free and until it cherishes its ancient Christian heritage. That is why the Moscow philosopher Anatoly Akhutin, who moved from Russia to Ukraine (he himself spoke about his escape from “stuffiness” and “hatred”), speaks about Europe as a forum of peace:

It is a culture that cultivates the *communication* of cultures... The very existence of European culture itself occurs, or it can only occur, in the event of the meeting; when these worlds come out of their inner territories, they come out of their unique identity and they are questioned by each other. The existence of European cultures is the existence of boundaries, ends and beginnings – an empty meeting place – agora, forum, square, Maidan – where the meanings of the world in front of each other notice the limits (certainty) of their world.<sup>2</sup>

The Russian philosopher Akhutin “experienced” Europe on the Kiev Maidan, met it and stayed with it, and remained to live in Ukraine. And this meeting is not a coincidence. Maidan expressed those European values that Europe itself has forgotten – the values of solidarity, a loving victim, national identity, and civic

---

<sup>1</sup> This statement, made in 2010 by Angela Merkel, did not prevent her from opening the borders of Germany for refugees in 2015 and from accepting a record number of victims of the Syrian crisis. And this is just one of many examples of how strong moral beliefs (and, I would add, theological principles) go beyond narrowly understood national interests or basic political pragmatism.

<sup>2</sup> Анатолий Ахутин [Anatoly Akhutin]. Европа – форум мира [*Europe – World Forum*]. Київ 2014.

courage. This was noted not only by the participants, but also by the analysts of the revolution on the Maidan (2013–2014), which began as a “Euro-Maidan” (that is, the protest by the supporters of Ukraine’s rapprochement with Europe against the demonstrative turn of former President Viktor Yanukovych towards imperial Russia). As for me, a participant in those events, “pluralistic Europe” is seen as not only existing, but also necessary; not as something that will be there “by itself” but something that requires our constant participation – participation of thinkers, citizens, Christians. “Pluralistic Europe” exists only in our activity.

The second keyword in the title of this paper provokes an even stronger reaction – the word “nation”. Here we immediately, according to some default settings ingrained in us, think about nationalism. We think negatively about the ideological position that gives my nation a special, exceptional meaning. In my opinion, these hidden biases against nationalism can and should be challenged. We should not be afraid of this word, but neither should we make an idol out of it. Moreover, we must distinguish its types. It is worthwhile to heed Eva Thompson’s reminder that criticism of the nationalism of the weak is just a cover for the nationalism of the strong.

National differences are an undeniable and unavoidable fact. Those who appreciate these differences without violence and like their nations in their distinctiveness (and not only their own nations, but their nations primarily) do not require criticism.

We should, in fact, be worried about something else – attempts to destroy the differences, sacrificing them (people and their cultures) to imperial projects. I’m sure that God does not like empires. In an empire, one nation dictates its will to all the rest. However, in God’s plan, each nation has its own special meaning.

Sometimes we hear the following argument: “Empires unite, nations separate. Therefore, in the interests of a common global order, ‘peace and safety’, it is worth placing most of our bets on the empire or even one super-empire”. But, first of all, violent unification cannot be morally justified. Secondly, it is not only empires that unite; and thirdly, almost every imperial project carries the implied or explicit motive of competing with the Kingdom of God. Sometimes separation saves us from great temptations.

In stating the obvious fact that the world is divided – into families, tribes, peoples, and nations – we must pay attention to the fact that the same world is united through the same entities. It should be noted here that nations are a rather late product of historical development, in which people learn to overcome old divisions and unite into new communities. As a rule, they combine in themselves a variety of differences – linguistic, ethnic, regional, and cultural. Thus, a nation is not an atom; it is not an indivisible whole. It is a political entity. And if the nation begins with a search for common ground and a reconciliation of differences, then we can extend this same impulse, beyond its own limits, into interethnic relations. But these processes must be organic, without “peace enforcement” and “imposed friendship of nations”.

Events in the former USSR realm show that the national issue is becoming acute again. We have tended to think that it is no longer an issue, but it is too early to think that way. At the same time, we cannot view it through the paradigm of the previous century, when the connection between nationality and state religion was necessitated and determined by the historical circumstances.

Today, the national issue also needs to be considered in the context of ongoing globalization and regional integration. That is, nationalism does not mean isolationism and hostility. On the contrary, it allows (or should allow) global and regional communities to play with different colours and speak many languages.

Each nation has its own special place in God's global family. Why, then, are there so many blank spots and grey zones on the map of the post-Soviet world, so many bleeding wounds and silent nations? What hinders the colouring of the map of Eastern Europe? What prevents each nation from gaining its own particular voice and joining the choir of nations?

Soviet experience teaches us that nationalism can be a healthy force, but only in a global perspective. All attempts to limit the number of native nations and have them oppose each other end in war. In the USSR, the myth of three fraternal nations—Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine (Little Russia) – was exploited. But this is nothing more than a propaganda trick. All nations are fraternal, and there are none older and younger. I would, therefore, suggest that we need to take into account the existing pluralism, in which there must be respect for individual features. Still, it is universal principles that need to be in place at the core, and they must be unyielding. Only then will these features blend peacefully.

### **Church and Nations in the Light of God's Kingdom**

I suggest that God does not erase national differences, but allows them to take an appropriate place in the rich mosaic of salvation history and the formation of God's Kingdom.

Why do we as Christians need to value originality and diversity? Why can't we be satisfied with a "realpolitik" in which a strong nation oppresses its neighbours and seeks to become an empire? If we belong to a strong nation, then why should we think about the weak ones? If there are more of us, why should we share our rights with smaller ones? I pay tribute to the Greco-Roman tradition, but taking into account the succession of eras, I believe that we need to look for answers to these questions in Christian truths, recognizing in them certain universal principles. Therefore, the natural question arises: Where is the biblical and theological perspective in all this colorful and non-peaceful pluralism?

I see it mainly in the eschatological picture of God's Kingdom, in which all the tribes and nations will gather. They will assemble in such a way that they will not dissolve, they will not lose themselves, but they will bring with them

something special (Rev 5:9; 21:24). The “treasures of kings,” “brilliance and wealth of nations” will flow there, into the capital of God’s Kingdom.

Only God is called the King of kings. Only he can unite under his supreme authority all other states and nations. In this sense, the title of the emperor is truly divine. And every earthly king, claiming such a title, carries with him or her the spirit of antichrist. The spirit of antichrist is manifested not so much in a particular cruelty or violent unification but in religious or quasi-religious justification for such an association. On the contrary, God, building up his Kingdom, does not humiliate, and he never destroys national differences.

Further, as Christians, we must see in the event of Pentecost the birth of an unprecedented global community. Within this community, differences remain (languages and nations), but they are reconciled in one Spirit who:

divided tongues as of fire [that] appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language (Acts 2:3–6).

The flame was divided into tongues. Disciples were divided by tongues. There were no main and secondary tongues, titular or marginal ones. Every language and every nation was represented and respected. But they talked about the same thing, they abode in the same Spirit.

Foreigners were amazed that the Word of God, the “preaching about the mighty works of God,” was expressed in a multitude of languages: “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. [...] What does this mean?” (Acts 2:11–12). This meant nothing less than the birth of a new “nation,” which included all other ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and political differences.

Nevertheless, along with the pious Jews we repeat and must repeat the same question: “What does this mean?” What did this mean to hear the Word of God in different tongues at the same time? What did it mean to see a strange meeting of so many different people united by the Spirit? What would this mean for our own and subsequent relationships between the united ones and those who are at the same time so different from us? What would this mean for our understanding of God and his plan for all nations?

It is something that had never happened before and will never happen again. Empires single out one language and one nation and subordinate the rest. Only God can know and love all the languages and nations. Only his disciples can see history in the light of Pentecost. It is only in the light of Pentecost that the eschatological perspective of the all-embracing and peaceful Kingdom of God is revealed, in which each one is his own: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens” (Eph 2:19).

On the day of Pentecost, the apostles addressed all the nations, transmitting the Good News in the appropriate languages. In the Kingdom of God, the chosen ones of all the nations who have received the message sent on the day of Pentecost will assemble. We, however, still live between the blazing Pentecost and the solemn coming of the Kingdom. Therefore, different languages should sound loud and peaceful, so that all nations can hear the Good News, so that the coming Kingdom will be filled with people and nations, new faces and voices.

Consequently, we must profess God's special providence for every nation and the Church in every nation. It is worth, then, asking the question: How is this perspective revealed and embodied in evangelical churches?

### **Church and Nations in the Post-Soviet Space**

In the post-Soviet world, this perspective is seen in the formation of national churches and the overcoming of the false Soviet "brotherhood". Until recently, all the evangelical churches of the former Soviet Union were united as "Russian Baptists". Then they invented a neater, though not a very sound name – "Russian-Ukrainian Baptists". "Russian," because this was an imposed imperial past for us. "Ukrainian", because there are many more Ukrainian Baptists and to stubbornly ignore the difference in numbers was no longer possible. But this complex name does not reflect all the fullness. Moreover, it cuts off from fullness. So, imperial violence is manifested even in some kind of political theology – it was the will of the "center" that divided and united nations, opposed and assimilated them. It is sad that many church leaders, historians, and theologians have worked towards creating such stereotypes and towards building such artificial walls and arbitrary borders. As it turned out, all this was not accidental at all. Such cartography, I suggest, was a preparation for war and part of a consistent and rapacious imperial policy.

Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war (in March 2014), nobody has had the courage to talk about Russian-Ukrainian Baptists. There are Russian Baptist and Ukrainian Baptist traditions (as well as Moldovan, Georgian, Estonian, etc.). But some borders still exist.

Until now, anti-European stereotypes have been working: we are no longer Soviet, we remember the horrors of those years; but it seems that then the church was holier and livelier, not like the current lukewarm Europe of empty temples and triumphant gay communities. There is no iron curtain anymore, the cage is open, but the invisible border remains. Sown seeds of alienation are still producing poisonous fruits.

Therefore, the first problem is the problem of restoring Europe as an open and free space for Christian fellowship of different ecclesiastical and national traditions.

But there is another, concomitant problem – the development of those national traditions, without which communication will be impossible, because otherwise there will be nobody to talk to and nothing to talk about.

Many post-Soviet countries followed the path of creating national churches (usually Orthodox). But for the Russian Orthodox Church and the Protestant unions this path turned out to be closed. They were historically formed as supranational and suprastate ones. Thus, it was extremely difficult to separate and “nationalize” the common heritage. In general, for evangelical Christians, a weak connection between nationality, statehood, and religion can be considered preferable. Demonstrating a relative passion in ministry to society and respect towards a legitimate power, evangelical believers have personal freedom in how these two areas of obedience are combined with the main thing: loyalty to their King and the mission entrusted by him.

Despite the fact that some Protestant bishops insist on the “nationalization” of the church, the practical implementation of this project is not possible. “Ukrainianization” mainly touched the Western territories, thus dividing the country into post-Soviet-pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian-pro-European regions. And the ethno-cultural “Georgianization” of the Baptist Church in Georgia divided the Baptists themselves into two separate unions. More unity can be found in the Russian “nationalization” of the church, but the nature of this unity is unlikely to be compatible with religious and civil liberties.

In fact, for evangelical churches there are three models of reorganization of religious and national relations in the post-Soviet countries: Georgian, Russian, and Ukrainian.

The Georgian version claims cultural integration: state and national, Orthodox and cultural, spiritual and Baptist identity tend to peacefully coexist in the renewed tradition of Evangelical Christian-Baptists as a subdominant form of religiosity, which is modest in its claims for public influence, submissively recognizing the main, dominant role of the Orthodox Church. As the former leader of the Georgian Evangelical Baptists Malkhaz Songulashvili says:

The ECB has always regarded its mission among Georgian people as a divine imperative which inevitably meant that its life and work were shaped by Georgian culture, for there is no mission that is not shaped by culture. [...] It also realised that traditionally Orthodox Georgian culture could be an ally in this mission and not its foe. [...] Therefore it never developed bitterness and antagonism toward the majority culture and religion.<sup>3</sup>

Such a unique situation, according to Songulashvili, was due to Soviet repressions against local churches and national traditions. The collapse of the USSR gave the Protestants a chance to become a part of a new national religious identity: “It also happened during the Soviet era, when the church had to cope with the pres-

---

<sup>3</sup> M. Songulashvili. *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia: The History and Transformation of a Free Church Tradition*. Waco, TX 2016.

sure of irreligion, and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when the church had to accept the challenges of religious nationalism”.<sup>4</sup>

What we have here is syncretism of national and religious identities, some sort of civil religion. The Russian approach is similar because there is the same connection: “Orthodoxy, autocracy, [and] nationality,” it is believed, should be together. A small niche can, of course, be set aside for those evangelical minorities who unconditionally accept this connection, but all the rest will be effectively outlawed and be persecuted as sects. So, in the Russian case, national, state public and religious identity should coincide seamlessly. Both the Orthodox Church and the Protestants have adopted this path, as the historian Tatiana Nikolskaya notes,

Russian Protestants are gradually integrating into a modern society, overcoming public alertness and their own isolationist ways as they are freed from the influence of foreign gentiles. If in the first half of the 1990s the activity of Russian Protestants was mostly based on the foreign experience (the use of foreign aid, missionary and teaching methodology, the priority of foreign authors and specialists over domestic ones), in recent years, however, the influence of the West has weakened, and financial support for Russian coreligionists has drastically decreased. In addition, among the Russian Protestants themselves, there is a growing dissatisfaction with the fact that samples of a foreign Protestantism are being imposed on Russia, which are very far from the best ones.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting that the book expressing this discontent with the influence of the West is published by the European (!) University in St. Petersburg.<sup>6</sup>

In the context of this discontent with the West, the support of the state and its geopolitical projects has grown dramatically among Protestants. Resolution XXXIV of the Congress of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (On the situation in brotherly Ukraine on May 30, 2014) actually denies the Ukrainian nation’s right to choose their historical destiny and calls the new leaders of post-revolutionary Ukraine “rebels”:

“We proclaim our adherence to the Bible teaching, which does not accept the violent overthrow of legitimate power, nationalism, and the resolution

---

<sup>4</sup> Songulashvili. *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia*, p. 336.

<sup>5</sup> Татьяна Никольская [Tatyana Nikolskaya]. *Русский протестантизм и государственная власть в 1905–1991 годах [Russian Protestantism and State Power from 1905–1991]*. Санкт-Петербург 2009, с. 302.

<sup>6</sup> The book by Nikolskaya was published in 2009, when discontent with the West had not reached its highest point. Since that time the situation has changed for the worse. In 2014 the war against Ukraine started. In 2017 the European University lost its governmental license, with the right for educational activity, despite many petitions and protests.



of social and political contradictions, other than through political negotiations. “Do not join with rebellious officials (Proverbs 24:21)”<sup>7</sup>

The events of Maidan and the subsequent conflict between Russia and Ukraine revealed the deep differences between the Russian and Ukrainian religious and national models and the corresponding theological approaches. As Mark Elliott describes, disappointment and perplexity reigned on both sides:

Given the Ukrainian contribution to the spread of the Gospel in Russia, many Ukrainian evangelicals have been disappointed by the attitudes of their northern brethren in the current political crisis. They sense correctly that, as a rule, many Russians, including many evangelicals, cannot understand why Ukrainians want to be independent: “Many Russians think that Ukraine is and should remain a province of Russia”, and they reject the idea that the two peoples “truly represent two distinct and different cultures”. As a pastor in Kharkiv put it, “Russians see even Ukrainian independence as an unfortunate misunderstanding”, Russian evangelicals hold to the traditional, isolationist position of non-involvement in worldly politics blended with passive submission to authority – in this case Putin – as defined in Romans 13:1. The predominantly Orthodox majority in Russia has always viewed evangelicals as subversive. Today this is compounded by official Russian propaganda that plays up the fact that the interim, “illegal” president of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov was a Baptist – that is, “not one of us”. [...] So Russian Evangelicals’ new nationalist spirit also appears to include an effort to prove that they are not “foreign agents”<sup>8</sup>.

As it turned out, there is a separate “Ukrainian project” in which autonomy and pluralism, peacefully held difference, and natural competition take place. Here the state and society, culture and religion are in dynamic, unstable, developing relations. So that no church can assume the status of an “official,” “national,” “state,” or “main” church. And this creates a unique chance for evangelical churches to become a part of the emerging national identity.

It is worth discussing further the “Ukrainian project” because it has appeared to be in the very center of the ongoing war in Ukraine, and it is this project with which the end of the war is associated. Moreover, the future of this project can determine many things for both post-Soviet and European Christianity.

The “Ukrainian project” “prescribed” religious communities as a part of the emerging civil society, and it reconciled the national, religious, and linguistic differences in the common cause of building a nation (not a mono-ethnic, monlinguistic,

---

<sup>7</sup> Резолюция XXXIV Съезда РС ЕХБ по ситуации в братской Украине [Resolution XXXIV of the Congress of RS ECB on the Situation in Fraternal Ukraine] // Российский Союз Евангельских христиан-баптистов (baptist.org.ru).

<sup>8</sup> M. Elliott. The Impact of the Ukrainian Crisis on Religious Life in Ukraine and Russia // *East West Church & Ministry Report* 22:3, Summer 2014, p. 11.

or monoreligious one). Church historian Alphonse Brüning sees in this an open dialogue where religious traditions, national statehood, and the formation of civil society all cooperate together:

“The “project Ukraine” [...] in rough terms, means a slow but sure establishment of a continuous and positive dialogue within the majority of religious denominations, on the ground of the values and the realities of a plural civic society”<sup>9</sup>

I, too, imagine “the Ukrainian project” in the same way – as an open identity, and everybody is invited to participate in it. Thus,

“Ukrainian Christianity” is not Christianity *sui generis*, but it is the same Christianity that serves all, and, in our case, serves the Ukrainian people. In this sense, Kyiv- or Ukrainian-centrism is not a religious and political counterweight of Moscow or the Vatican, but an orientation to serve in the epicentre of the life of one’s nation. The concept of “Ukrainian Christianity” – for some fortunately and others unfortunately – is the denial of essentialism. There is no magic recipe for *Ukrainianness*. There is no magical substance that produces “Ukrainian Christianity”. This is unfortunate, because it is more difficult without it – no single ruler of secrets, prophet of the nation or primate of a church knows the secret of “Ukrainian Christianity” and thus he or she cannot create, on the basis of his/her knowledge, a single national church. But it is also fortunate, because “Ukrainian Christianity” remains open, it is something that we create together and cannot find somewhere readymade. Thus, the common historical heritage includes not only the three Orthodox churches and the Greek Catholics but also Protestants and Roman Catholics. Historical inclusiveness supplements community in the modern service to the Ukrainian people. Each church can dream about a patriarchate, but for all to be in one patriarchate would be crowded. There are other categories-communities, families, brotherhoods, spiritual unity – where there is room for everyone, where it is possible to emerge from a narrow denominational scope. The long-awaited unity of “Ukrainian Christianity” requires that all denominations be recognised as parts of a whole. Of course, this unity will not be canonical but spiritual, an eucharistic community and not a religious institution. As such the “schism,” that is, the past divisions, and *future whole*, will not be considered a tragedy but a natural plurality of denominational displays of *one large tradition*”.<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting how the former leader of Russian Baptists Yuriy Sipko highlights the differences between the Russian and Ukrainian models.

---

<sup>9</sup> The difficulty of the situation is that even pro-European Ukrainian churches do not accept the reality of pluralism and are not ready to be part of civil society. Like the Moscow Patriarchate, they require exclusive rights. A. Brüning. ‘Project Ukraine’: Christian Churches in Ukraine and their Relations 1991–2014 // *Religion, State, Society and Identity in Transition*. Ukraine 2015, p. 365.

<sup>10</sup> M. Cherenkov. On “Ukrainian Christianity” // *Religious Information Service of Ukraine* (risu.org.ua/en), 31 May 2011.

“The war in Ukraine is an episode in which Russia is further strengthening its position in Islam’s block, creating a common front against the West. [...] Ukraine has become a meeting place not only of civilizational processes. [...] Ukraine has also become a meeting place of religious groups – the Catholicism of the West and the Orthodoxy of the East”.<sup>11</sup>

To his mind, the external Russian aggression helped Ukraine to emerge into a special type of post Soviet nation state and to establish its independence, not only a state independence but also a religious, cultural, and national independence:

“Russia’s aggression gave Ukrainians an understanding of the value of civil society and the state, as well as [an understanding of] the responsibility that citizens have for the fate of their state”.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time church historian Olena Panych fairly indicates that, for post-Soviet Protestants, the formation of the national traditions, a decisive division from the common Soviet Baptist “brotherhood”, is part of the general process of de-Sovietization.

“ECBs are more eager to emphasize the transnational roots of their “brotherhood” than its national roots. The history of a local church is more important for them than the history of the “brotherhood”; but at the same time, the history of any local church is usually imagined in association with the history of the broader Slavic or European or global Evangelical Baptist movement. National aspects and national roots are not dominant in the process of their self-identification; religious identity clearly predominates over national identity. However, the ECBs appeal to their collective memories and history in order to obtain symbolic and cultural capital for competition with the churches that claim to be “national” in Ukraine”.<sup>13</sup>

This thesis that religious identity among post-Soviet Protestants clearly predominates over national identity needs some clarification. Religious identity itself was not formerly “pure”; it was expressed within the framework of the Soviet narrative and it was completely in tune with its spirit. That is why it would be proper to say that there was a religious analogue of the Soviet Class International. The modern “brotherhood” inherited that very same Soviet tradition. That is the reason for its vitality, and that is the reason for its vulnerability.

That is why even nationalistically oriented Ukrainian leaders strongly support this Soviet version of peace and the unity of “brotherly” Russian and Ukrainian Baptist Unions. “The conflict that brought war to eastern Ukraine did not originate in the relationship between Ukrainian and Russian Churches”, emphasized

---

<sup>11</sup> Y. Sipko. Ukraine in Russia’s Sights // *The London Consultation: Focus on Ukraine / Proceedings from the London Consultation on Ukraine*, April 2015, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Olena Panych. Memory and Identity Among Post-Soviet Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Contemporary Ukraine // *Religion, State and Society* 42:4 (2014), pp. 354–373.

First Vice-President of the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists Igor Bandura.<sup>14</sup>

General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation Anthony Peck sees the roots of the conflict much deeper and wider: “Reconciliation is greatly needed within Ukrainian society, but also between Ukraine and Russia, particularly between Christians in these nations”.<sup>15</sup> Pointing to divisions and “bitter roots”, he calls for the reconciliation of Easter and a polite modesty:

Easter is all about breaking down walls of division. Of course, churches are not always good examples of what they preach. To many observers, the conflict in eastern Ukraine appears to be a religious conflict. [...] So if we Christians speak of the possibility of reconciliation, we should speak quietly, humbly, as we have much to repent of ourselves.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting that while Russian Baptists see in the Maidan events a dividing effect, many Ukrainian and Western authors see there a uniting effect, both for the churches and for the nation in general. “It is the Churches above all that are enabling Ukrainians to rediscover themselves as members of the same nation”,<sup>17</sup> says Orthodox theologian Antuan Arzhakovskiy. Alfons Bruening, a Dutch historian, focuses his attention on significant common statements by the members of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, as well as on the practical ecumenism of the participants of the protest:

Next to these public declarations [All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. – *M. Ch.*] the images of priests holding up a cross and standing for hours in the cold on a stone covered area between the front lines of Berkut paramilitary police officers and the protesters belong perhaps to the most impressive pictures of the events.<sup>18</sup>

The picture of the mediation or the intercession of the Church for its nation should inspire Ukrainians and other neighbouring nations to the ministry of reconciliation for the sake of a better future for Europe and Eurasia. In this meaning the “utopia” of Joshua T. Searle looks both inspiring and realistic:

When I look to the future of Ukraine I can see a vision of a reconciled church in Ukraine that transforms society, as the kingdoms of this world recede to make way for the kingdom of God (Rev. 11:15). I can see a new era in which

---

<sup>14</sup> I. Bandura. Imagining Reconciliation // *The London Consultation: Focus on Ukraine / Proceedings from the London Consultation on Ukraine*, April 2015, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> A. Peck. Reconciliation: Transforming Initiatives and Strategy // *The London Consultation: Focus on Ukraine / Proceedings from the London Consultation on Ukraine*, April 2015, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by: Elliott. *The Impact of the Ukrainian Crisis*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Bruening. *Project Ukraine*, p. 364.

Orthodox (notwithstanding their different and sometime conflicting loyalties), Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals and others join together out of common reverence for Christ in order to infuse the social space with spiritual values of love, compassion, forgiveness and solidarity.

And this will definitely impact the reconciliation of nations and the renewal of the whole post-Soviet landscape:

From a Christian perspective, the Revolution may prove to be God's gracious call to the Churches in Post-Soviet space to engage society proactively in the transformation of unjust, corrupt social structures, to demonstrate solidarity with those fighting for freedom and justice and thereby to become salt and light for their society. Ukraine's Christian community, by demonstrating solidarity with its people, has helped to blaze a new trail out of the post-Soviet captivity of the church, which other countries in the region may now follow.<sup>19</sup>

The war of Russia against Ukraine can, thus, consolidate the Ukrainian nation, but it can also inspire the ministry of Ukrainian victims to their Russian brothers. And this should start with the Church: "Russian Christians can expect from their Ukrainian brothers and sisters fervent prayers, material support, and spiritual solidarity as they take a stand with a people on behalf of the Christian values".<sup>20</sup> It is possible to apply such principles in responding to other challenges for modern Europe as well; in particular the migration process arising from the flood of refugees.

Consequently, the "Ukrainian project" can be an opportunity for the renewal and reconsideration of Europe as an ongoing "megaproject". The peaceful and revealing openness of Europe can be its strength but also its demise as well. The experience of Ukraine shows that peaceful diversity can easily end with the aggression of those who consider it a threat. This experience also shows that in a culture with an ignorant majority without, at least, civil and Christian solidarity, conflict of identities sooner or later becomes inevitable.

Thus, in the light of God's Kingdom, the pluralism of modern Europe gains not only a historical value but also an eschatological meaning.

Nowadays diversity is eagerly welcomed but it is not valued to the extent that carefree Europeans would be able to comprehend it or would be ready to fight for it. The post-Soviet space demonstrates several instructive examples of how the interaction of national, religious, and state identities can evolve into hot conflicts or neo-imperial projects, or create an explosive mixture of symphonic sounds that are somewhat strange to a Christian ear. All this takes place in the context of low levels of civic engagement and weak intellectual intelligibility, which places

---

<sup>19</sup> J. T. Searle. *Church Without Walls: Post-Soviet Baptists After Ukrainian Revolution, 2013–2014*. Oxford 2016, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Searle. *Church Without Walls*, p. 40.

high expectations on the Christian theological community's ability to distinguish and prevent, interpret and explain, reprove and instruct, and serve with the word and action of reconciliation.

Pluralistic Europe cannot and should not become the Kingdom of God but with an active and responsible participation of its Christian communities it can express the values of a peaceful Kingdom as a testimony to its own nation as well as to its neighbours, near and far. We can and we should live up to the standards so that the light of God's Kingdom shines brightly in us, so that every nation can see itself in this light, so that the churches of all nations can see themselves as a part of one Church, so that the Church views itself as a messenger and a gateway to the Kingdom. To see such a Europe emerge, Christian theologians should not only have the power of faith, but also the boldness of thought and the courage of imagination. They, or, rather, we must believe, think, and imagine in such way that the "European project" would continue in and towards the light of the Kingdom. After all, it is this bold Christian faith and creative Christian imagination that leaves Europe open, possible, and alive.

### **Bibliography**

- Ахутин Анатолий. *Европа – форум мира*. Киев 2014.  
 Akhutin Anatoly. *Evropa – forum mira*. Kiev 2014.
- Никольская Татьяна. *Русский протестантизм и государственная власть в 1905–1991 годах*. Санкт-Петербург 2009.  
 Nikolskaya Tatyanna. *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaya vlast' v 1905–1991 godakh*. Sankt-Peterburg 2009.
- Резолюция XXXIV Съезда РС ЕХБ по ситуации в братской Украине // *Российский Союз Евангельских христиан-баптистов* (baptist.org.ru).  
 Rezolutsia XXXIV Sjezda RS EHB po situatsii v bratskoj Ukraine // *Rossijsky Sojuz Evangel'skih khristian-baptistov* (baptist.org.ru).
- Bandura I. Imagining Reconciliation // *The London Consultation: Focus on Ukraine*. Proceedings from the London Consultation on Ukraine, April 2015, 24.
- Bruning A. 'Project Ukraine': Christian Churches in Ukraine and their Relations 1991–2014 // *Religion, State, Society and Identity in Transition*. Ukraine 2015, 357-395.
- Cherenkov M. On "Ukrainian Christianity" // Religious Information Service of Ukraine (risu.org.ua/en), 31 May 2011.
- Elliott M. The Impact of the Ukrainian Crisis on Religious Life in Ukraine and Russia // *East West Church & Ministry Report* 22:3, Summer 2014, 6-16.
- Panych Olena. Memory and Identity Among Post-Soviet Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Contemporary Ukraine // *Religion, State and Society* 42:4 (2014) 354-373.
- Peck A. Reconciliation: Transforming Initiatives and Strategy // *The London Consultation: Focus on Ukraine*. Proceedings from the London Consultation on Ukraine, April 2015.

- Searle J. T. *Church Without Walls: Post-Soviet Baptists After Ukrainian Revolution, 2013–2014*. Oxford 2016.
- Sipko Y. Ukraine in Russia's Sights // *The London Consultation: Focus on Ukraine / Proceedings from the London Consultation on Ukraine, April 2015, 19–20*.
- Songulashvili M. *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia: The History and Transformation of a Free Church Tradition*. Waco, TX 2016.

**Михайло Черенков**

**ЄДНІСТЬ У БАГАТОМАНІТНОСТІ.**

**БАПТИСТСЬКИЙ БОГОСЛОВСЬКИЙ ПОГЛЯД**

**НА НАЦІОНАЛЬНЕ ПИТАННЯ У ПЛЮРАЛІСТИЧНІЙ ЄВРОПІ**

*Статтю присвячено проблемі пошуку нового соціально-богословського визначення культурного та національного розмаїття Європи у контексті дискусій про Революцію гідності та подальший збройний конфлікт в Україні. Криза мультикультурності в Західній Європі та російсько-український конфлікт зумовлюють необхідність увиразнити відмінності у релігійних поглядах на національне питання. Автор аналізує співвідношення національного і релігійного кризь призму баптистського богослов'я й досліджує українську ситуацію у порівнянні з російською та грузинською моделями. Одночасно з актуальністю соціальної та політичної контекстуалізації, у цьому випадку мова йде також про деконтекстуалізацію та розвиток вільних і динамічних відносин Церкви, держави і суспільства – як у релігійному чи політичному, так і в культурному та національному вимірах. Український експеримент у напрямку національного та релігійного врегулювання видається радикально і принципово незавершеним, що перетворює Україну на джерело динамічного оновлення для європейського мультикультуралізму, який перебуває у кризі.*

**Ключові слова:** Церква, багатоманітність, Європа, Царство Боже, нація, богослов'я.