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CALENDAR REFORMS IN UKRAINIAN ORTHODOXY

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Abstract

The study provides a brief retrospective, and the current state of the calendar, issue in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. To achieve this, the attitude towards the calendar issue of those Orthodox Ukrainians who, in certain historical periods, lived in Ukrainian territories as part of European states and the Russian Empire, is examined. The ideological discourse of the calendar reform during the existence of the Soviet Union is outlined. Special attention is given to the calendar issue in Independent Ukraine. The reasons, main stages, features, and difficulties of the current transition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine to the new Julian calendar are systematized. The impact of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine on these processes is obvious. The civilizational context of the calendar issue in Ukrainian territories is proven. It is argued that in previous eras, the Julian calendar was a means for Ukrainians to preserve religious and national identity, as well as to resist the Soviet regime's repression against religion. The current calendar Church reform of 2023, besides entirely objective reasons related to the greater accuracy of the New Julian calendar¹, is also a way of distancing from the distorted values of the "Russian world." Currently, non-denominational affiliation, but Christian values and the desire for a better fate for their country, are unifying factors for Ukrainians.

Key words: Church calendar, secular calendar, calendar reforms, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

Introduction.

As of March 2023, among the 36,796 religious organizations in Ukraine, 97% represent various Christian denominations of which 53% are Orthodox, almost 29% are

¹ The New Julian calendar is more accurate, compared to the Julian calendar, and the dating system was developed by the Serbian astronomer Milutin Milanković in 1923. In the same year, the Patriarch of Constantinople Miletius IV convened the All-Orthodox Council, at which the New Julian calendar was proposed as the main one for Orthodoxy. The New Julian calendar system corrected the rather significant inconsistencies between astronomical and ecclesiastical time laid down in the Julian calendar. In particular, immovable holidays (first of all, Christmas) are celebrated in the new style, and movable holidays (first of all, Easter) in the old style. As of the beginning of 2024, ten out of fifteen local Orthodox churches live according to the New Julian calendar, and five according to the Julian calendar.

Protestant, and 14.3% are Catholic.² Orthodoxy is the largest religion in the country, which has a significant impact on the spiritual, cultural, and everyday life levels of society.

Until September 1, 2023, Ukrainian Orthodox celebrated religious holidays according to the Julian calendar. The Church year of Ukrainian Catholics is subordinate to the Gregorian calendar, but Ukrainian Greek Catholics mark Christmas and Easter on the same day as Ukrainian Orthodox. Ukrainian Protestants, although showing some flexibility in this matter, mostly celebrate Christmas and Easter on the same day as Ukrainian Orthodox. However, in late 2017, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church switched to the new Julian calendar, while the Evangelical Christians-Baptists and the Ukrainian Church of the Christians of the Evangelical Faith decided to switch to the Gregorian style in the summer of 2022.³

From September 1, 2023, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church switched to the new Julian calendar, which became an extremely significant event not only in the religious progress of Ukraine, but also in their civilizational progress. This choice, deeply rooted in history and possessing powerful cultural potential, requires analysis from both contemporary and historical retrospective perspectives.

A Brief Retrospective of Calendar Reforms in the Christian Calendar on Ukrainian Territories

Authentic for Ukraine is the tradition of Kyivan Christianity as a spiritual and theological-philosophical paradigm of Ukraine-Rus (Kyivan Rus).⁴ Although Kyivan Christianity gravitated towards the Byzantine tradition, it was open to both Eastern and Western influences, prone to Christian universalism and a tolerant attitude towards various religious centers. It also contained a number of other specific features that protected it from the negative effects of Byzantium (for example, it prevented any significant manifestations of Caesaropapism). Despite this, with the adoption of Christianity, Ukraine-Rus adopted the Julian calendar from Byzantium, approved in the year of 325 at the First Ecumenical Council as the main calendar for all Christian churches. Ukraine-Rus ceased to exist several centuries

² According to the statistical data of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine as of March 22, 2022.

³ “On September 1, 2023, UGCC and OCU to transition to New Calendar.” https://risu.ua/en/on-september-1-2023-ugcc-and-ocu-to-transition-to-new-calendar_n142119.

⁴Ukraine-Rus (Kyivan Rus) was a powerful European state with its capital in Kyiv, which arose as a result of the consolidation of Slavic tribes in conditions of constant threat from nomadic tribes. In 988, during the reign of Prince Volodymyr, the process of Christianization of Rus began according to Byzantine models, which marked the arrival of European civilization in these areas. This state had modern Ukrainian lands as its territorial base and existed during the 9th-13th centuries.

before the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1582. With the emergence of new political entities on the territory of Ukraine-Rus, the calendar issue was resolved situationally in them, depending on the centers of influence.

In historical retrospect, various territories of Ukraine were part of the following state entities: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Poland, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean Khanate, the Moscow State, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, etc. Some of these states, such as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Poland, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Moscow State, and the Russian Empire, were Christian states. In the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate, Islam reigned, and in the Soviet Union there was atheistic ideology.

Calendar vicissitudes that arose from time to time in these states also affected Ukrainians, who in the vast majority professed Orthodoxy. In particular, the new calendar was introduced in the Ukrainian lands as part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by the decree of King Stefan Batory dated October 5, 1582. Suddenly, for citizens, the first day of the calendar reform of October 15th (instead of October 5th) affected the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which at that time included a large part of the territories of Ukraine. Here, the innovation immediately encountered the irreconcilable opposition of the Ukrainian population, which suspected it as a threat to Orthodox identity. Clashes between Orthodox and Catholics took place in Lviv, Lutsk, and other cities of Ukraine. The most famous were the events of that time in Lviv, where on Christmas Day, according to the old calendar, the Catholic Archbishop Jan Dimitriy Solikovskiy ordered all churches to be locked and sealed in order to prevent worship in them. In response to this, the Orthodox bishop of Lviv, Gedeon Balaban, together with the Galician nobles, lodged a protest with the city government on that matter. The protests were supported by Patriarch Jeremiah of Constantinople, who in his appeal to the faithful of the Kyiv Metropolitanate condemned the decision to close the temples. The economic life in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became partially disorganized. Through the changes in the dates of the holiday fairs, which were traditionally oriented to both Orthodox and Catholic holidays, certain cultural and everyday problems were created. Based on a combination of factors, the authorities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth adopted a compromise decision. On January 21, 1584, King Stefan Batory issued a universal decree clarifying that the new calendar should be only applied to secular life: "Because it is and should be free for everyone to practice their faith, to celebrate holy holidays."

The old style was a means of confessional self-identification for Ukrainian Greek Catholics as well. In particular, during the conclusion of the Brest Church Union in 1596,⁵ the Uniates, the representatives of the former Orthodox clergy, defended the right to preserve the Byzantine ritual—in particular, the Julian calendar in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. At the beginning of the 19th century, in the Ukrainian lands that were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Julian calendar became a means of resistance to the takeover of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church by the Roman Catholic Church. Although the Austrian government insisted that the union hierarchy and clergy should be subordinated to the Latin archbishop, the Greek Catholics made considerable efforts to restore their hierarchy and celebrations in the old style. For example, Bishop Hryhoriy Khomyshyn's attempt to introduce the Gregorian calendar in 1916 was criticized by the national intelligentsia as harmful to the Ukrainian cause.⁶ So, in those Ukrainian territories that were part of European states, the Julian calendar, as Ukrainians believed, was a factor of resistance to Catholicization and Polonization.

In the Ukrainian lands as part of the Russian Empire, the Julian calendar remained in civil and Church use until February 1918. Orthodoxy had the official status of the state religion of the Russian Empire, and the Kyiv Metropolis, subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate, closely cooperated with the monarchical authorities in this matter, using the principle of “symphony of powers.” As an ideal structure, the symphony of powers provided for cooperation, mutual support, and mutual responsibility of the church and the state without mutual interference of one side in the sphere of exclusive competence of the other. However, a broad attack on the autonomy of the Church was conducted by Peter I and Catherine II, who introduced secularization processes, subordinating Church power to themselves. In the 18th century, during the time of Catherine II, these processes also affected the lands of Hetmanship. In practical terms, the Caesaropapist transformation of Russian Orthodoxy took place.

⁵ The Union of Brest was concluded in the city of Brest in 1596. The act of uniting part of the hierarchy and believers of the Kyiv Metropolis of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the Roman Catholic Church, resulting in the formation of the Ruthenian Uniate Church, later called the Greek Catholic Church. This church adopted Catholic dogmatics and was subordinate to the Pope. However, it preserved the Byzantine rituals and cultural and spiritual heritage, administrative structures, and canonical legal order.

⁶ О. Сапеляк, “Двокалендарність в Україні : витоки і сьогодення.” *Сучасна українська нація : мова, історія, культура: матеріали науково-практичної конференції з міжнародною участю 16 березня 2016 року з нагоди 15-річчя кафедри українознавства* [О. Sapelyak, “Dual calendar in Ukraine: origins and present.” *Modern Ukrainian nation: language, history, culture: materials of the scientific-practical conference with international participation on March 16, 2016, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Department of Ukrainian Studies* / Scientific editors: prof. Chopyak V. V., prof. Magliovaniy A. V. Lviv: Danylo Halytskyi LNMU Printing House], 2016, 425-427.

The situation changed dramatically after the October Revolution of 1917. It accelerated the already active national liberation movement in Ukraine. As a result, an independent state was formed here—the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UPR), later the Ukrainian State, which controlled the territories of central, eastern and western Ukraine, as well as some lands that now belong to other states.

The government of the Ukrainian People’s Republic introduced its own calendar reform on February 23 (10),⁷ 1918, i.e., a month after the declaration of independence of Ukraine. At the government meeting, the Minister of Roads of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, Yevhen Sokovych, raised the issue of “style and time” and proposed “to establish Kyiv time in Ukraine.”⁸ The idea was supported by the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs Hryhoriy Sydorenko: “With the conclusion of peace, the Ukrainian state has joined European culture, aspires to it – a new style has been established in Europe.”⁹ The Council of People’s Ministers entrusted the Ministries of Roads and Internal Affairs with the development of a relevant draft law and its submission to the Parliament for consideration.

Already on February 25 (12), 1918, the Small Council, which at that time was in Korosten, approved the “Law on the introduction of time in Ukraine according to a new style and setting clocks on the Central European time,” which stated: 1. Establish in the Ukrainian National Republic a new (Gregorian) calendar from February 16, 1918. February 16 is to be counted as the first day of the month of Berezo (March). 2. At the same time, Central European Time is introduced in the Ukrainian People’s Republic.¹⁰

However, unlike the Soviet government, the government of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR) and its successor, the Ukrainian State (UR), although being oriented towards socialist ideals did not show hostility to religion. Moreover, they opposed the separation of church and state. Also, on the territory of the UNR, and later the Ukrainian state, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), arose and operated, advocating the Ukrainization of church worship and independence from the Russian Orthodox Church. The autocephaly of the Orthodox Church was proclaimed by the UNR Directory on January 1, 1919. The Ministry of Cults and Religions was also established in the UNR. Festive traditions

⁷ February 23 (10) is the first date “according to the new style,” the second date, in brackets, is according to the old style.

⁸ Віталій Скальський, “Один календар з Європою. Чому у лютому 1918-го було всього 15 днів [Vitaly Skalskyi, “One calendar with Europe. Why there were only 15 days in February 1918”]: https://www.dsnews.ua/ukr/nasha_revolyutsiya_1917/odin-kalendar-z-evropyu-chomu-u-lyutomu-1918-go-bulo-vsogo-28022018190000 .

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

were respected: Good Friday, Great Saturday, Easter, as well as two days of Holy Week—Monday and Tuesday—were non-working days.

The new style was not recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church, which at that time was the dominant denomination in Ukraine. It refused to adapt to the new style. For example, according to the secular calendar, Christmas fell on January 7. Even after the Council of Constantinople in 1923, which recommended that all Orthodox churches would stick to the New Julian style, neither the Russian Orthodox Church nor its satellite the Ukrainian Exarchate did so.

At the time of the adoption of the new style of the UNR, the undeclared war of Bolshevik Russia against Ukraine was ongoing. The Ukrainian political elites did not recognize the legality of the 1917 coup d'état; they did not submit to the Council of People's Commissars, considering it to be the government of Great Russia. Nevertheless, the calendar reform was also ongoing in Russia, which took place on fundamentally different, atheistic grounds. Here, on January 23 (February 5), 1918, by a special decree of the Bolshevik government, the church was separated from the state, which began a long period of crimes against freedom of conscience.

The decree “On the introduction of the Western European calendar in the Russian Republic” was adopted at the meeting of the Council of People's Commissars on January 24 (February 6), 1918, and signed by Lenin, the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, on January 26 (February 8), 1918. To align the calendar days, after January 31, 1918, it was necessary to count not February 1, but February 14, which was done.

As in the case of the Ukrainian People's Republic, the main pragmatic reason for introducing the Gregorian calendar was the need to harmonize local and European time calculations, which eliminated significant inconveniences in communication with European countries. This was reflected in the wording of the goals of the document, which consisted in “establishing in Russia the same time calculation as that of almost all cultural nations.”¹¹

However, this document canceled the correlation of the civil and church calendars, which made it difficult for a significant number of citizens to celebrate religious holidays. The state began to live according to the new style, while the Russian Orthodox Church continued to live according to the old style.

The Ukrainian People's Republic ceased to exist at the beginning of 1921 as a result of the final seizure of its territory by the Red Army. From that moment on, Ukrainian religiosity

¹¹ *Декреты Советской власти [Decrees of the Soviet government. Moscow: State Publishing House of Political Literature], Vol. 1, 1957. № 272, 6, 404—405.*

was clamped in the grip of the repressive Soviet regime. The upbringing of the Soviet people and the cultivation of the Soviet way of life involved an irreconcilable struggle with the religious worldview as an element in all its diversity.

With the formation of the repressive machine of the Soviet Union, the days of major Orthodox holidays became a time of surveillance and raids by the authorities. During the era of Soviet atheism, religious buildings were plundered, destroyed, or used for other purposes; they were turned into warehouses, vegetable bases, etc. Priests were arrested, shot, or sent into exile; believers were subjected to severe administrative pressure and public condemnation. Until the end of the 1920s, it was still possible to go to church, but with the beginning of the Great Terror organized by Stalin, this opportunity almost disappeared. Religious holidays were finally “removed” from the Soviet calendar in 1929.¹²

The most terrible situation was during the Holodomor of 1932-1933, which was organized by Stalin and the Soviet government and was aimed, for the most part, at the peasantry, one of the most religious strata of the Ukrainian people—from whom the Soviet government confiscated the entire harvest of those years, as well as low use and unfit food substitutes. People were starving and dying in families and entire settlements, and there was no one to bury the dead. There are numerous testimonies that even when they were beyond the limit of physical survival, enduring great torments, Ukrainians did not forget about God and remembered great religious holidays. The Holodomor became another terrible genocide of the Ukrainian people by Russia, taking about 5 million human lives. During this period, crimes against freedom of were overshadowed by crimes against human life.

In Soviet times, the calendar issue was also important for the Ukrainian diaspora. It was on the basis of the difference in the calendar issue that Patriarch Yosif (Blind) formed the patriarchal parishes of the the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the USA and England. In the USA, these were the parishes of St. Volodymyr and Olga in Chicago (Illinois) and Holy Trinity in Silver Spring (Maryland); in England a community in Leicester.¹³ It is significant that the attempts of Greek Catholics outside of Ukraine to shift to a new style led to the emergence of old-style and new-style parishes within a single Greek-Catholic diocese, which

¹² Світлана Шевцова, “Від Леніна до Хрущова: Великдень ‘під совітами’- очима свідків епохи.” [Svitlana Shevtsova: From Lenin to Khrushchev: Easter “under the Soviets” - through the eyes of witnesses of the era]: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3007232-vid-lenina-do-hrusova-velikden-pid-sovitami-ocima-vidkiv-epohi.html>

¹³ Т. Гринчишин, Димид М., “Українська діаспора – католицька і православна.” *Наукові записки УКУ. Серія : Богослов'я*. [Grynchyshyn T., Dumid M., “Ukrainian Diaspora - Catholic and Orthodox”. *Scientific notes of UKU. Series: Theology*], 2015. Issue 2, 346.

could coexist peacefully or conflict with each other. Therefore, a significant part of Ukrainians abroad considered the calendar issue as a key factor in preserving ethno-national identity.

With varying intensity of persecution of religion, the situation persisted until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although Khrushchev's thaw softened the situation, religious freedom was not restored either during Khrushchev's or Brezhnev's time. However, on the eve of the collapse of the USSR, at the end of the 1980s, the religious revival took on a powerful and irreversible character. The main Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter were returned to the secular calendar in 1991, when Ukraine declared its independence.

For the majority of Ukrainians during the USSR times, the church calendar remained a system for organizing sacred and private time, and the secular calendar remained a system for organizing everyday and official time. In Soviet times, there was a double opposition: on the one hand, the religious calendar was against the secular calendar, and on the other hand, the Orthodox calendar was against the Catholic calendar. Taking into consideration the repressive nature of Soviet atheism, the opposition between atheistic and religious worldviews was dominant. The religious worldview, regardless of religious affiliation, was identified by the Soviet ideology as dangerous for the regime, and totally alien. At the same time, various religious denominations were united by resistance to the authorities.

The ethnic factor of identification was also present in the mass consciousness. For example, the ideas of Orthodox (Ukrainian) and Catholic (Polish) Christmas, Easter, etc. were used in social psychology. According to the old style, the New Year (January 14) was called "Ukrainian New Year." Similar trends were observed in the case of national minorities. An illustrative example is Northern Bukovina, which became part of the USSR in the 1940s previously was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Bukovinians celebrated religious holidays according to the Gregorian calendar. Even after joining the USSR, ethnic communities of Poles and Romanians continued to celebrate those holidays in a new style.

Modern Calendar Reform in Ukrainian Orthodoxy

The question of the transition of Ukrainian Orthodoxy to the New Julian calendar arose occasionally in the mass media sphere of Independent Ukraine. Since 2010, with the blessing of the late head of the UOC (MP), Metropolitan Volodymyr Sabodan, a real Christmas service was held on December 25th for the Orthodox workers of the Embassy of Romania in Ukraine, and later with the co-service of clerics of other local churches who, due to various circumstances, came to Ukraine. Unfortunately, the tradition ended in 2014 when

the new head of the UOC (MP), Metropolitan Onufriy Berezovskyi, banned such services in the Kyiv Metropolitanate.¹⁴

As a result of the Revolution of Dignity and the beginning of Russia's military aggression (2013-2014), the discussion about the possibility of changing the celebration of Christmas from January 7th to December 25th revived again. In 2014, the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine legislatively established December 25th as an additional holy day, leaving January 7th as a holy day, too. Public figures also spoke out on this matter. In particular, as a private comment, the acting secretary of the National Security Council, Oleksandr Turchynov, proposed to celebrate Christmas together with the entire civilized world on December 25th, leaving a certain transition period for those people who would like to celebrate it on January 7th.¹⁵ At that time, neither the churches, nor Ukrainian politicians, nor society were ready for such drastic changes.

Another calendar issue was brought up to date on the eve of the receipt of the *Tomos* on autocephaly by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. In December 2018, the *stauropygium* of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which used the New Julian calendar, was opened in St. Andrew's Church in Kyiv. Thus, a place appeared in the center of Kyiv where the Christmas service started to be held on December 25th since 2019. Both parts of the Orthodox clergy and some believers of Kyiv began to attend this service and co-serve with the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.¹⁶

At the same time, the primate of the OCU, Metropolitan Epiphany, declared his openness to discussing the calendar issue,¹⁷ but emphasized that the reform should take place gradually, as a result of educational work and corresponding changes in the views of society, clergy and parishioners. Therefore, when the Orthodox in Lutsk turned to the local

¹⁴ Юрій Коваленко, *Концепція «відкритого православ'я»: функціональність та перспективи розвитку*. — На правах рукопису. Дисертація на здобуття наукового ступеня кандидата філософських наук за спеціальністю 09.00.11 — релігієзнавство. [Yu.I. Kovalenko The concept of "open Orthodoxy:" functionality and development prospects. – Manuscript, copyright. Dissertation for obtaining the scientific degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, specialty 09.00.11 — religious studies. H.S. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine] Kyiv, 2021, 150.

¹⁵ "Турчинов запропонував перенести святкування Різдва в Україні" ["Turchynov proposed to postpone the celebration of Christmas in Ukraine"], *LB.ua*.19.06.2021. https://lb.ua/news/2015/12/25/324472_turchinov_predlozhit_perenesti.html

¹⁶ Коваленко, *op.cit.*, 147.

¹⁷ "ПЦУ може перенести святкування Різдва на 25 грудня за згоди вірян – Епіфаній." *Радіо Свобода*. 14 грудня 2019 р. [OCU can postpone the celebration of Christmas to December 25 with the consent of believers - Epiphany *Radio Svoboda*. December 14, 2019]: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-epafaniy-rizdvo-25grudnia/30325787.html>

metropolitan and received permission to hold a Christmas service on December 25, 2019,¹⁸ the majority of the bishopric and clergy of the OCU reacted to this decision critically. As a result of consideration of that situation, the Holy Synod of the OCU adopted a decision in which warnings were set out regarding rapid calendar reforms “... when there is no such consensus among Local Orthodox Churches, when part of the Orthodox in Ukraine is under the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate, and also taking into account the experience of the emergence of ‘old calendar schism’ in other Local Churches – stated that the ill-conceived and hasty implementation of the calendar reform in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine may lead to the consolidation of existing divisions and the emergence of new ones.”¹⁹ One of the key arguments in favor of such a decision was the consideration of the opinion of Ukrainian residents, among whom at that time there were three times less the amount of supporters of the calendar reform than opponents.²⁰ Instead, a compromise was proposed. By its decision, the OCU Synod allowed, with the blessing of the ruling hierarch, the new style to perform only prayers with an *akathist* for the Nativity of Christ and the performance of folk Christmas carols on December 25th.²¹

The situation changed radically with the beginning of the full-scale barbaric war of Russia against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022. The borderline brutality and injustice of this war, blessed by the Russian Orthodox Church headed by Kirill (Gundyaev), caused Ukrainians indignation and disgust, and a desire to distance themselves from that denomination. A number of questions arose regarding the means and mechanisms of this distancing, among which the calendar issue had a significant impact.

Support for the calendar reform among Ukrainians has grown rapidly. A survey conducted in early June 2023 showed that 63% of respondents supported the transition to a

¹⁸ “Православні у Луцьку святкуватимуть два Різдва.” *Таблоїд Волині*. [“Orthodox Christians in Lutsk will celebrate two Christmases.” *Volyn tabloid*]: <https://volyn.tabloyid.com/zhittia/pravoslavni-u-lutsku-svyatkuvatimut-dva-rizdva> 19.06.2021.

¹⁹ “Відбулося чергове засідання Священного Синоду. 4 лютого 2020 р.” *Офіційний сайт ПЦУ*. [“Another meeting of the Holy Synod took place. February 4, 2020.” *Official site of OCU*]: <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsi-novyny/vidbulosya-cherгоve-zasidannya-svyashhennogo-synodu-2/> (access date: 19.06.2021).

²⁰ According to a study by the sociological group “Rating” conducted in 2019, 25% of surveyed Ukrainians supported the idea of moving the celebration of Christmas from January 7 to December 25, 64% of respondents did not support this idea. If we compare this with a similar study in 2016, the number of those who expressed their support of moving the date of Christmas celebration increased by 10% (in 2016, only 15% supported the idea, 69% were against). <https://www.unian.ua/lite/holidays/10807838-ponad-60-ukrajinciv-proti-perenesennya-dati-svyatkuvannya-rizdva-opituvannya.html>. 24.12.2019.

²¹ “Відбулося чергове засідання Священного Синоду. 4 лютого 2020 р.” *Офіційний сайт ПЦУ*. [“Another meeting of the Holy Synod took place. February 4, 2020.” *Official site of OCU*]: <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsi-novyny/vidbulosya-cherгоve-zasidannya-svyashhennogo-synodu-2/> (access date: 19.06.2021).

new church calendar, 18% were against such an idea, and another 17% said that they did not care about it. For comparison: in December 2022, 44% supported the transition to the new church calendar (which included moving Christmas to December 25th), and 31% did not support it.²² A situation arose when there were more people who wanted to switch to the new calendar than there were opponents of that innovation.

This turn in public opinion was summed up by Metropolitan Epiphany:

Last year I said that it would take time, it would take several years. But in connection with the war, we see that this process is happening very quickly and dynamically. Therefore, we respond to the request of our faithful.²³ Justifying the urgency and essence of the calendar reform, Metropolitan Epiphany emphasized that “this is a decision that the majority of the faithful of our Church and the majority of Ukrainian society are waiting for from us. This decision is not easy, we have been approaching it for a long time, gradually, step by step, and we are making it carefully. But it is just as necessary, as at one time it was necessary to decide to introduce the living Ukrainian language in worship instead of the traditional Slavic one, to introduce an autocephalous structure of the life of the Church instead of centuries-old subordination. Not everyone accepted these decisions, not everyone supported them, but they were true and vitally necessary. Equally true and vitally necessary for us is the decision to change to an updated calendar, which is more accurate astronomically and ecclesiastically accepted, while preserving the traditional paschal cycle.”²⁴

The formalization of the reform took place at the meeting of the Holy Synod on February 2, 2023, at which the Resolution “On the procedure for granting blessings to parishes and monasteries of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine for the use of the New Julian calendar” was adopted.²⁵ The next step was the Resolution of the Council of Bishops of the local Orthodox Church of Ukraine under the chairmanship of the Most Blessed Metropolitan Epiphany of Kyiv and All Ukraine on May 24, 2023. The resolution summarized the main

²² “Двадцять друге загальнонаціональне опитування. Настрої а економічне становище населення (1-2 червня 2023).” [“The twenty-second national survey. Moods and economic situation of the population (June 1-2, 2023).”]: https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/dvadcyat_druge_zagalnonaconalne_opituvanny_nastro_ta_ekonom_chne_stanovisch_naselennya_1-2_chervnya.html

²³ “Синод ПЦУ дозволить парафіям за бажанням повністю перейти на новоюліанський календар, - Митрополит Епіфаній.” [“The OCU Synod will allow parishes to completely switch to the New Julian calendar if they wish, - Metropolitan Epiphany]: https://risu.ua/sinod-pcu-dozvolit-parafiyam-za-bazhannjam-povnistyu-perejti-na-novoyulianskij-kalendar---mitropolit-epifanij_n135635.

²⁴ *Orthodox Church of Ukraine*. <https://www.facebook.com/Orthodox.in.Ukraine/posts/pfbid02UfZWgXG8u5E1NZCCW5ooAmHGpBxYcDDUZDr1qS9MgpEimuZNZgEU6efHNw41TEMJI> May 24 at 1:40 p.m.

²⁵ “Постанова Священного Синоду про порядок надання благословення парафіям та монастирям на використання новоюліанського календаря. 02 лютого 2023 року.” *Православна Церква України*. [“Resolution of the Holy Synod on the procedure for blessing parishes and monasteries for the use of the New Julian calendar. February 2, 2023. ” *Orthodox Church of Ukraine*]: <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsinovynu/postanova-svyashhenogo-synodu-pro-poryadok-nadannya-blagoslovennya-parafiyam-ta-monastyryam-na-vykorystannya-novoyulianskogo-kalendarya/>

positions regarding the transition of the OCU to the New Julian calendar²⁶ and entered into force after approval by the Local Council of the Church on July 27, 2023, with the participation of the laity.²⁷ In accordance with the new calendar adopted by the OCU, the dates of the celebration of immovable holidays, such as Christmas, Candlemas, the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God, etc., have changed. Christmas, in particular, will be celebrated on December 25th (instead of January 7th), Intercession—on October 1st (instead of October 14th), Epiphany—on January 6th (instead of January 19th) and St. Nicholas—on December 6th (instead of December 19th). Despite this, the innovations did not in any way affect Easter and the movable holidays dependent on it, in particular the Ascension or Pentecost.²⁸

Among the important points of the calendar reform are the following: 1) emphasis on the fact that although the new style comes into force with the beginning of the new church year (from September 1, 2023), parishes and monasteries who wish have the right to use the old calendar, which means non-forced, gradual and perceived nature of the reform; 2) recognition of Russian aggression as a catalyst for the calendar reform; 3) emphasis on the strong connection between the Julian calendar and Russian Church culture; 4) perception of the modern (New Julian) calendar as a calendar used by Local Churches friendly to the OCU and vice versa; the Julian calendar is a system used by opponents, in particular the Russian Orthodox Church, etc.

The document pays special attention to the voluntary nature and gradualness of the reform. In particular, it is emphasized that if two-thirds of the parishioners/members of the spiritual council express such a desire, then an exception will be made for them and, according to church economy (grace/mercy), they will be able to continue to follow the traditional Julian calendar. It is possible that the reform will continue similar to the same processes in the Orthodox Church of the Czech lands and Slovakia, where parishes have the right to independently choose which calendar to use. In this Local Church, three church calendars coexist today—the Julian, Gregorian, and New Julian calendars.²⁹ This confirms the

²⁶ Постанови Архієрейського Собору від 24 травня 2023 р. *Православна Церква України*. [Resolutions of the Synod of Bishops dated May 24, 2023.] *Orthodox Church of Ukraine*: <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/202245/>

²⁷ “Відбувся Помісний Собор Православної Церкви України. 27 липня 2023.” [“The Local Council of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was held. July 27, 2023”]: <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsi-novyny/vidbuvsya-pomisnyj-sobor-pravoslavnoyi-tserkvy-ukrayiny/>

²⁸ “Священник надав план переходу на новий календар.” [“The priest provided a plan for the transition to the new calendar”]: https://risu.ua/volinskij-svyashchenik-predstaviv-plan-perehodu-na-novoyulianskij-kalendar_n133704

²⁹ Ibid.

truth that where there is respect for a different opinion and there is no coercion, there is no threat to church unity.

As of the end of 2023, about 120 (less than 1.5%) of 8,500 parishes stick to the old calendar in the OCU; the transitions themselves are painless.³⁰ The rector of the Kyiv Orthodox Theological Academy, who belongs to OCU, Oleksandr Trofymlyuk notes the following features of the transition: “Units from the parishes that joined the Orthodox Church of Ukraine wish to stick to the old calendar for this transitional period. Parishes that move from the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine to the OCU immediately accept the new calendar.”³¹

Calendar reform is also taking place in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which has also switched to the New Julian calendar. In previous years, the desire to agree on the celebration of Easter contributed to the establishment of cooperation between the UGCC and the OCU. On the eve of Russia’s large-scale aggression, in December 2022, the heads of the UGCC and the OCU agreed to jointly move towards the reform of the church calendar. However, the war significantly accelerated these processes. Therefore, on February 1-2, 2023, the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC in Ukraine decided to switch to the new calendar beginning on September 1, 2023, without waiting for the decision of the OCU. As in the OCU, this decision refers to the celebration only of fixed holidays and avoids a number of holidays related to Easter.³²

The situation in the Mukachevo Greek Catholic Diocese remains specific. This diocese reports to the Pope and includes all the Greek-Catholic churches of Transcarpathia. From September 1, 2023, it switched to the Gregorian calendar, which provides for the synchronization of both fixed and movable holidays with the Catholic Church. According to the representatives of this diocese, the basis for such a decision was a survey of parishioners, 90% of whom spoke in favor of this version of the calendar reform.³³

The calendar reform also affected branches of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church that operate outside of Ukraine. Currently, the

³⁰ “ПЦУ розповіли, скільки парафій залишаються на старому календарі.” [“The OCU said how many parishes remain with the old calendar.”]: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3792682-na-staromu-kalendari-zalisaetsa-mens-ak-15-parafij-pcu-golova-kalendarnoi-komisii.html>

³¹ Ibid.

³² “В УГКЦ оновили церковний календар на вересень–грудень 2023 року. 03 березня 2023.” [The UGCC updated the church calendar for September-December 2023. March 3, 2023]: https://risu.ua/v-ugkc-onovili-cerkovnij-kalendar-na-veresengruden-2023-roku_n137232.

³³ Яна Осадча. “Закарпатські греко-католики перейдуть на григоріанський календар: коли відзначатимуть Великдень.” *Українська правда. 8 лютого 2023*. [Yana Osadcha. “Transcarpathian Greek Catholics will switch to the Gregorian calendar: when will they celebrate Easter.” *Ukrainian Pravda. February 8, 2023*] <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2023/02/8/252763/>

transition of these denominations in various countries is announced to a new style.³⁴ The list of these transitions is being dynamically updated. The exception is the exarchate of the UGCC in Italy, which switched to the Gregorian calendar much earlier, on September 1, 2021.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) took a decidedly different position regarding the calendar reform, considering it unacceptable. As its leaders have repeatedly stated, the UOC will continue to live according to the Julian calendar.³⁵ As before the full-scale aggression of Russia, so now its bishops consider the problem of the church calendar to be irrelevant and ideologically motivated. As before, European integration aspirations and efforts to “celebrate Christian holidays with all enlightened nations” are not a valid motive for the OCU.

The rector of the Kyiv Theological Academy and Seminary, Archbishop Sylvester (Stoychev), clarified the position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in a rather comprehensive manner. Among them are the following: the reform gives rise to a number of difficult issues, their solution requires a balanced discussion with the involvement of specialists from the church environment, consideration of the canonical and liturgical dimensions of the calendar problem; inadmissibility of coercion and pressure, as well as politicization of the calendar issue, etc. Against the background of non-acceptance of the calendar reform by the UOC, it is important to declare the preservation of Eucharistic communication both with those Local Churches that stick to the old calendar and with those that use the new style.³⁶ It is obvious that of course, the list of such churches does not include the OCU because the relations between these churches are conflictual.

Prospects and Difficulties of the Calendar Reform in Ukraine

³⁴ “Українські греко-католики Великобританії переходять на григоріанський календар.” [Ukrainian Greek Catholics of Great Britain are switching to the Gregorian calendar]: https://risu.ua/ukrayinski-greko-katoliki-velikobritaniyi-perehodyat-na-grigorianski-kalendar_n140084

³⁵ “УПЦ МП святкуватиме Різдво за юліанським календарем.” [“UOC MP will celebrate Christmas according to the Julian calendar”]: https://risu.ua/upc-mp-svyatkuvatime-rizdvo-za-yulianskim-kalendarem_n141346

³⁶ Архієпископ Сильвестр (Стойчев), “Проблема календаря в Православній Церкві: історія та сучасність – Доповідь ректора Київської духовної академії і семінарії архієпископа Білогородського Сильвестра на пленарному засіданні XII студентської конференції ‘Студентська наука в духовній школі.’ 2023-03-14.” [Archbishop Sylvester (Stoychev), “The problem of the calendar in the Orthodox Church: history and modernity - Report of the rector of the Kyiv Theological Academy and Seminary, Archbishop Sylvester of Byologorodsky, at the plenary session of the 12th student conference ‘Student science in theological school’. 2023-03-14.”]: <https://news.church.ua/?s=%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%80&submit=%D0%9F%D0%BE%D1%88%D1%83%D0%BA#2023-08-22>

Despite a successful start, the calendar reform in Ukrainian Orthodoxy requires certain efforts on the part of religious organizations, the state, and civil society. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed.

Although the church is separated from the state, the level of religiosity of Ukrainians is one of the highest in Europe. This has an impact on the everyday life of people, and, therefore, on the state's policy concerning the calendar issue. In particular, it is about the necessity of harmonizing the religious and secular calendars, especially in matters of solemn and festive dates. It is extremely important that Christian churches take an active part in its development, because the presence of the church in public space makes it more diverse and more open, and therefore more free. The church must be a spiritual guide, a moral authority here, because it is a space of freedom. The presence of the church there is a natural phenomenon for it.³⁷

It is natural that in previous years there was a tradition of synchronizing some public holidays with religious ones. In particular, in the period before the large-scale aggression, the official weekend was Christmas according to the Gregorian (December 25th) and Julian (January 7th) calendars. Now the official day off will be only December 25th.³⁸ Also, in previous years, the feast of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God fell on the Day of Defenders of Ukraine. In 2023, the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God was celebrated on October 1st (according to the new Julian calendar) together with the corresponding public holiday.³⁹ From 2024, the Baptism Day of Rus-Ukraine and the Day of Ukrainian Statehood will be celebrated on July 15th instead of July 28th.

In fact, the synchronization of paired religious and secular holidays already took place through mutual church-state consultations. At the state level, the final resolution on this issue was voted by the *Verkhovna Rada* in July 2023. In the explanatory note to the relevant document, signed by President Zelensky, it is said that the purpose of such innovations is “abandonment of the Russian heritage.”⁴⁰ A similar position is held by the OCU, the leaders of which state the following: “And today for us, the transition to the New Julian calendar

³⁷Nataliia Ishchuk, Hennadii Khrystokin. “Civil Society Values as a Uniting Factor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Community.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. № 57, Vol. 2, 294.

³⁸ “Різдво 25 грудня. Зеленський підписав закон про зміну дат деяких свят.” [“Christmas on December 25. Zelensky signed a law on changing the dates of some holidays”]: https://risu.ua/rizdvo-25-grudnya-zelenskij-pidpisav-zakon-pro-zminu-dat-deyakih-svyat_n141310

³⁹ “Церква попросить перенести державне свято з 14 на 1 жовтня, – митрополит ПЦУ.” [“The Church will ask to move the public holiday from October 14 to October 1, Metropolitan Orthodox Church”]: https://risu.ua/cerkva-poprosit-perenesti-derzhavne-svyato-z-14-na-1-zhovtnya--mitropolit-pcu_n139689

⁴⁰ “Різдво 25 грудня. Зеленський підписав закон про зміну дат деяких свят.” [“Christmas on December 25. Zelensky signed a law on changing the dates of some holidays”]: https://risu.ua/rizdvo-25-grudnya-zelenskij-pidpisav-zakon-pro-zminu-dat-deyakih-svyat_n141310

means that we do fulfill the call to “Get away from Moscow... We confirm our belonging to the family of European nations.”⁴¹ In this way, the common position of church and secular authorities on this issue have been declared and consistently implemented.

Among the extremely unlikely problems that the reform can cause is the emergence of old-fashioned schisms in the church due to the calendar reform within the OCU and the UGCC, such as those that occurred in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, etc. The guarantee of this is the non-violent character of the reform, a significant transition period for the introduction of a new style, as well as fairly democratic transition rules that take into account the position of each religious community.

In our opinion, the most significant obstacle to the transition to the new calendar for a large part of Ukrainians, especially those of a respectable age, is traditionalism and conservative thinking. In this vein, right-wing Yelensky stated, “A complete transition to the New Julian calendar may require a change of generations.”⁴² In particular, for a significant part of the country’s inhabitants, the Gregorian sacred time has become part of the family tradition and personal life path. Hence the conviction that the chronotope of the celebration should be preserved and reproduced again and again, from generation to generation. Also, until now, the chronotope laid down in the Soviet Union, when the holidays were an element of civil rites, which, according to the ideologues of the Soviet Union, had a significant influence on a certain part of Ukrainians, and was supposed to distract people from religious holidays by creating their secular ersatz. The example of the Soviet New Year, which in the Soviet times became an ersatz version of Christmas, is quite indicative here. This concerned the figures of Father Frost and Snow Maiden, as well as the Christmas tree decorated with a star. All of them were devoid of authentic sacred meaning and were used as props for the Soviet New Year holidays.

The role of Christmas in the implementation of the calendar reform is special. Whereas Easter will be celebrated as before, the most innovations fall on the Christmas holiday cycle. It is about the period from Christmas (December 25th) to Epiphany (January 6th), holidays (holy day). At this time, there are large religious services, as well as nativity plays and carols. The family gathers together at the table, for dinner and Christmas party,

⁴¹ The Orthodox Church of Ukraine <https://www.facebook.com/Orthodox.in.Ukraine/posts/pfbid02UfZWgXG8u5E1NZCCW5ooAmHGpBxYcDDUZDr1qS9MgpEimuZNZgEU6efHNw41TEMJI> May 24 at 1:40 p.m.

⁴² В. Єленський, “На повний перехід на новоюліанський календар може знадобитися зміна поколінь.” [“V. Yelensky: A complete transition to the New Julian calendar may require a change of generations.” 29.05.2023]: https://risu.ua/yelenskij-na-povnij-perehid-na-novoyulianskij-kalendar-mozhe-znadobitisya-zmina-pokolin_n139777 .

relatives and friends are also visited. According to the Julian calendar, this period begins with Holy Evening (January 6th).

In 2023, and at the beginning of 2024, Ukrainians for the first time encountered a situation when OCU believers celebrated the birth of Jesus on one day with Catholics and Greek Catholics, but on another day with representatives of the UOC (MP). This experience is a transformed experience of the previous decades, when Orthodox Christmas changed to Catholic, but everyone respected and greeted each other. In the cultural and everyday sense, even atheists were involved in the festivities. Some celebrated in the old style, some in the new style, and some celebrated even twice. After the beginning of Russia's large-scale aggression, the number of people who celebrated Christmas in the "old" style significantly decreased. The reasons for this phenomenon can be conveyed through a saying that spread on social networks during winter holidays: "Christmas used to be 'ours' and 'Catholic.' And from now on Christmas will be 'ours' and 'Russian.' Do you feel it? It is not the calendar that has changed!"

These indicated changes were confirmed by statistics: If before the full-scale invasion 18% of people planned to celebrate Christmas on December 25th and another quarter planned to celebrate it twice, on December 25th and January 7th, then at the end of 2023, more than 60% of respondents answered the question whether they plan to celebrate Christmas on December 25th or not in the affirmative.⁴³ Statistics also show that on Christmas Day, on December 25th, services were held in 7,000 churches and they were visited by 10 million Ukrainians.⁴⁴ Therefore, in the public consciousness, December 25th is rapidly being legitimized as the first day of Christmas.

Conclusions

Summarizing the retrospective and current state of the calendar issue in Ukrainian Orthodoxy, we note that for many centuries in those Ukrainian territories that were part of European states, for Ukrainians the Julian calendar acted as a factor in preserving identity, both religious (for example, resistance to Catholicism) and national (for example, resistance to Polonization). Those Orthodox Ukrainians who lived on the territory of the Russian Empire had no need to defend their calendar, since it existed here both at the Church and

⁴³ "Kantar: Українці про зимові свята цього року." ["Kantar: what Ukrainians say about winter holidays this year"] : <https://www.kantar.com/ua/inspiration/consumers/christmas-2023> December 18, 2023.

⁴⁴ "На Різдво храми відвідали майже 10 мільйонів українців." ["At Christmas, almost 10 million Ukrainians visited churches"]] <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3805943-na-rizdvo-hrami-vidvidali-majze-10-miljoniv-ukrainciv.html>

secular levels. However, in the Russian Empire, the church was completely subordinated to the state, and the Kyiv Metropolitanate had limited rights.

An extremely sharp value conflict arose during the October Revolution of 1917, which gave birth to a repressive atheistic state. In 1921, this state destroyed the independent Ukrainian State and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church. From the moment of the formation of the Soviet Union until the independence of Ukraine, religion was subjected to obstruction, and religious holidays were pushed out of the calendar and, in a repressive way, from the spiritual space of society.

In 1991, with Ukraine's Independence, a religious revival began in the country. For a long time, the calendar issue was not the subject of systematic discussions among the Orthodox. The formal difficulties and conservatism of the thinking of the majority of believers were indicated. The most significant catalyst for a calendar reform in Orthodoxy was the bloody, extremely cruel war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine in 2014, especially its large-scale stage that continues up to this day. This war exacerbated the existential conflict between Ukrainians and Russians, including over a number of religious issues.

The transition to the New Julian church calendar from September 1, 2023, has become one of the markers of mental distancing from the ugly "Russian world" for a large part of Ukrainian citizens. In this case, the fact that most Ukrainians and most Russians share the Orthodox faith turned out to be of little significance. Russian Orthodoxy branded itself with the legitimization of Russia's war crimes on the territory of Ukraine, and with the total disregard for the value of human life. As a result, it was not religious affiliation, but the Christian values and the desire for a better fate for their country that united the people of Ukraine. At the level of mass consciousness, the success of the church calendar reform is evidenced by the rapid legitimization of Christmas, on January 25th, in the public consciousness. There is every reason to believe that the transition to the new church calendar will be conflict-free for the majority of Orthodox and Greek Catholics. At the level of mass consciousness, there will be fewer and fewer Ukrainians who want to celebrate major Christian holidays at the same time as the people who came to kill them.

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