

Leading Historian from Kyiv Delivers Petryshyn Memorial Lecture

ORTHODOX, CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS: RELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE IN UKRAINE IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

The ninth Vasyl and Maria Petryshyn Memorial Lecture in Ukrainian Studies delivered by Dr. Natalia Yakovenko on April 22, 2002

The view that 16th-17th century Ukraine was the venue of irreconcilable antagonisms between Orthodox and Catholics is not borne out by historical reality, -argued Dr. Natalia Yakovenko in her presentation at Harvard University for the annual Vasyl and Maria Petryshyn Memorial Lecture, sponsored by the University's Ukrainian Research Institute (HURI). Dr. Yakovenko, Principal Research Associate at the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and leading authority in Ukrainian history is well-known among peers as the author of such influential books as *Ukrainian Nobility from the End of the 14th to the mid-17th Centuries* (1993), *History of Ukraine, to the End of the 18th Century*, published in Ukrainian (1997) and Polish (2000). Her lecture at Harvard on April 22, 2002 entitled *Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants : Religious Coexistence in Ukraine in the 16th-17th Centuries*, was based on her most recent book *Parallel World: Research of Notions and Stereotypes in the 16th and 17th Century Ukraine*, published this year by Krytyka.



HURI Director Prof. Roman Szporluk introduces Dr. Yakovenko to the audience.

At the beginning of her presentation, Dr. Yakovenko reminded the audience that it became an axiom dating back to classical Russian, Polish and Ukrainian historiography of the of the past and still dominant today that 16th - 17th century Ukraine was an area of antagonisms among people of various Christian faiths; especially so between Orthodox and Catholics. Deconstructing this theory, she addressed three principal issues: 1) The reliability of the extant evidence of religious conflicts during the period; 2) The substantiation of the evidence by the facts and practices of everyday life; and 3) The social and ideological determinants of the religious situation in Ukraine.

The argument supporting the contention for religious antagonism, Dr. Yakovenko pointed out, comes from the vivid works of Church polemicists of the period. Each Church competed with its rivals for the souls of Ukrainian Christians in a fierce ideological struggle. In Ukrainian lands as well as throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Catholics were challenged by Protestants, and Orthodox - by Roman Catholics, Protestants and Uniates. Eventually, "educational" exempla-- a staple of the rhetorical communication of the period - - acquired the status of a bona fide testimony and were widely used by historians for some far-fetched conclusions.

Natalia Yakovenko invited her audience to turn from the Church polemical writings and to examine the everyday relations between people of different religions. Outside the ideological debates, one is hard put to find evidence of an equally dramatic stand-off. Rather, various sources document numerous instances of peaceful religious coexistence in families, within the sphere of social life, and even in services and functions performed by the rival Churches.

Dr. Yakovenko's own research of marriage statistics of the period shows that starting with the middle of the 16th century denominationally mixed marriages - among Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants - (something unheard of before) became a norm for the Volhynian aristocracy and nobility which are generally characterized as being close-knit, conservative and consistently Orthodox. The marital strategies among members of the

nobility were all too often predicated, not so much by lofty goals of perpetuating their "own" faith, but by mundane and calculated "family politics," as well as the desire to strengthen their position in society, or at court, as was the case with the Radziwills and the Ostrozsksys.

Another valuable source of information about the life of mixed-faith families is the genre of funeral panegyrics. For example, the funeral panegyric written by Jesuit Martin Gincza (1636) tells us about a Catholic, Anna Kostczatka who throughout her marriage displayed an exemplary humility, and together with her husband Prince Olexander Ostrozsky, regularly attended Orthodox services.

Natalia Yakovenko also observed that attending other Church's services was not an unusual practice at the time. Traditionally, every Diet (the Congress of the Commonwealth nobility representing different confessions) was opened by the Catholic liturgy. Likewise, every nobleman's retinue had to follow him in attending the Church service of his denomination. On the territory of Ukraine, the regional Diets (sejmiki) took place both in Catholic and Orthodox churches. With the beginning of the 17th century joint Uniate and Catholic Church services became the norm; Polish royals often attended Uniate services, especially on grand or commemorative occasions. One example is the Holy Liturgy of John the Chrysostomus (i.e. "the Greek Canon") at the Holy Trinity Church in Wilno to celebrate the beatification of Yosaphat Kuntsewycz on January 29, 1643 with the King, the Queen, and the whole court in attendance.



Prof. Omeljan Pritsak during the discussion of the lecture.

In extreme cases, religious affiliation of the priest or the Church did not matter. Records of the Lutsk court (1634, 1649) mention the wedding ceremonies of two Catholic couples performed by an Orthodox priest. Both cases were tried in court not because of the theological "irregularities," but simply because the first marriage was taken without parents' consent, and the second involved the kidnapping of the bride who had already been engaged to another man. Contrary to accepted views, records of the military campaigns of 1609, 1634, 1649, and 1663, as well as soldiers' diaries typically show that the denominational affiliation of a church and a priest was of little importance.

The same attitude is evident when it came to sacred objects of "other faiths". Instances of Catholics worshipping Ruthenian (Orthodox) icons were recorded as early as the 14th-15th centuries. In her presentation, Dr. Yakovenko described a particularly striking and little known example: during the Berestechko campaign of 1651, the miracle-working Orthodox icon of Virgin Mary of was taken to the Catholic King's headquarters where the troops prayed to it before the battle of Berestechko and then again immediately following their victory over the Cossacks.

Historical evidence demonstrates that members of the Orthodox church displayed the same tendencies as those of their Catholic counterparts. A direct influence of Catholicism and Protestantism could be found in Kyivan homilies, in the structure of Church administration, in education, in polemical writings, architecture, icon painting, and Church singing.

Many historians of the political culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth are of the opinion that the religious indifference of nobility was a natural byproduct of its ideology of "golden freedoms", of equality, and the "brotherhood" of nobility that belonged to different religions. This ideology promoted the "unity" of the upper classes of the multi-confessional state; it was meant to be a substitute for the law, the custom, and, it also created an atmosphere of tolerance, which allowed a nobleman to preserve his faith while pursuing a career in the military, the law, or in noble pursuits. Such religious tolerance was based not only on rational explanations (as "the birth right" of every nobleman to practice his own faith) but also on mystical ones - every faith was viewed as an unfathomable gift from God who alone could judge which faith was "the true one".

Later on, with the ongoing Catholic reform and the accompanying "Orthodox Counter-Reformation", coexistence between various faiths in Ukraine came under ever increasing pressure, and was finally undermined by the military turmoil of the mid- and second half of

the 17th century. Dr. Yakovenko noted that still, it appears that even then, at the grassroots level, religious tolerance was widely practiced in the Commonwealth. At the same time, the secular literature of that period quickly picked up the ardor and uncompromising fervor heretofore characteristic of church polemics.



Dr. Serhii Plokyh, the Petro Jacyk Distinguished Fellow, comments on the lecture.

Catholic-Orthodox antagonism took the form of a militant "nationalization" of Churches. From that time on, each side was inclined to perceive the other not as a community of a different, and certainly "erroneous", faith but as its mortal enemies - the Catholic Poles on the one side of the chasm, and the Orthodox Ruthenians on the other. To use a popular metaphor of the period, "the war of nations" thus became "the war of faiths"

Emblematic of these attitudes is the record made in 1654, by a Polish author, who wrote: "The Voivode of Kyiv schismatic Kisiel died in the city of Brest. Right before his death, the Jesuit priests, who were by his side asked him if he was dying in good faith. In response to their question, he shook the Fathers' hands. The bells of both Catholic and Orthodox churches tolled for him because both faiths left the final judgment to Our Lord."

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