

Comparative contexts in Ukrainian and Melkite Christianity: The attendance of Patriarch Gregory III Laham at the September 2016 Ukrainian Catholic Synod

Kristian GIRLING

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction; 2. Melkite Catholic origins and development; 3. Ukrainian Christian identity: historical and modern contexts; 3.1 Ukrainian Christian nomenclature; 3.2 Origins and development of the Ukrainian Catholic Church; 4. Eastern Catholics and the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology; 5. Gregory III Laham and the UCC synod of September 2016; 5.1 Themes explored by Gregory III in his speech at the Synod; 6. Conclusion.

I. Introduction

Syria and Ukraine are two states which, in the early twenty-first century, have become foci of competing visions for major powers to advance their own geopolitical interests. Both states, as a result, have struggled to determine the outcome of their own national affairs. The involvement of other powers in local affairs challenges not just the Ukrainian and Syrian governments but also religious communities. Syria is a religiously plural society with more than ten Christian denominations, the Muslim community is also diverse (Sunni, Shia, Alawite, Ismaili) alongside Druzes and Yazidis. Ukraine, meanwhile, is a predominantly Christian society with the majority of Ukrainians belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kievan Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church or the Ukrainian Catholic Church

(UCC).¹ With these concentrations of communities both states have also become, respectively, the confluence of disputes in the Sunni-Shia and Eastern Christian worlds over which Islamic tradition or Eastern Christian ecclesial identity should predominate.

As contemporary conflicts have affected the Christian populations in both countries, attempts have been made by two Eastern Catholic churches – the Melkite Catholic Church and UCC – to support the other as they face varying levels of threat to their communities. In this article I offer, firstly, an overview of Melkite and Ukrainian Catholic history to the present. Secondly, I consider the religious and geopolitical context of the attendance of the Melkite patriarch, Gregory III Laham (r.2000–2017), at the UCC’s September 2016 Synod.

2. Melkite Catholic origins and development

The Melkite Catholic Church is the descendant institution of those members of the Antiochian Patriarchate who entered into union with the Apostolic See in the early eighteenth century.² The origin of the term *Melkite* derives from the Arabic word *malik* [=king] and was applied to those Christians who acceded to the Christological paradigm which was supported by the Roman Emperor from the Council of Chalcedon (451) onwards: the Melkites being thus the “King’s men”.

The term Melkite came in to common use from the late seventh century. The notion of the existence of the term from 451 perhaps a backward projection (in contrast to the historical reality) in order to reinforce the legitimacy of later Melkite identity as of impeccable

1 Viktor Elenskii, “Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the Ukrainian Project”, trans. Stephen D. Shenfield, in *Russian Social Science Review* 56, no. 3 (4 May 2015): 72, doi:10.1080/10611428.2015.1070633.

2 Serge Descy, *The Melkite Church: An Historical and Ecclesiological Approach*, trans. Kenneth J. Mortimer, Newton, MA: Sophia Press, 1993, 16.

orthodox Christological origins as the Melkite Catholic patriarchate's relationship with the Latin church developed in the eighteenth century.³ Prior to the seventh century, Christians who adhered to Chalcedonian Christology would have been Christians associated with *Rum* i.e. the established Byzantine church.

As a result of their orientation of ecclesial life the Melkite liturgical tradition is Byzantine – i.e. that which was shared with the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Jerusalem and the pro-Chalcedonian element of the Alexandrian Patriarchate – and until the early medieval period celebrated in Greek.⁴ The Melkites came to be geographically centred in the Levant and the Holy Land but were also present to West Asia more widely including to Mesopotamia and Persia.⁵

The seventh century Islamic invasions of the Middle East definitively altered Melkite realities with their status as a *dhimmi* people reducing their influence in society. The thrusting of Arab Muslim culture into the Levant and Syria ensured that the Melkites adopted Arabic and the language came to be closely associated with the community's scholarship, liturgy and use as a vernacular instead of Greek.⁶ A robust Melkite presence was sustained throughout Late

3 Cf Sidney H. Griffith, "John of Damascus and the Church in Syria in the Ummayyad Era: The Intellectual and Cultural Milieu of Orthodox Christians in the World of Islam", in *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 218, n 42.

4 Cf Ioannis Stouraitis, "Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach", in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107, no. 1 (2014): 175, doi:10.1515/bz-2014-0009.

5 See: Ken Parry, "Byzantine-Rite Christians (Melkites) in Central Asia in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages", in *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* Special Edition (2012): 91–108.

6 Sidney H. Griffith, "The Church of Jerusalem and the «Melkites»: The Making of an «Arab Orthodox» Christian Identity in the World of Islam (750–1050)", in *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 5, Turnhout, Brepols Publishers, 2006, 187, <http://www.brepolonline.net/doi/pdf/10.1484/M.CELAMA-EB.3.3192>.

Antiquity and the early Medieval period and exemplified by figures such as St John of Damascus.⁷

It is not clear as to what was the precise nature of the relationship between the Apostolic See and the Melkites following the Muslim invasions due in large part to the challenges of maintaining regular communication. As Melkite life was challenged by the surrounding Muslim ethos, for believers on a day-to-day basis ecclesiological questions of union with the contemporary pope were likely of little relevance to the practice of their faith.

De jure union with the Apostolic See was technically broken following the decline of relations between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the papacy in the mid-eleventh century. In the Antiochian Patriarchate's liturgy the pope's name was removed from the diptychs. However, this action appears to have been undertaken as a result of pressure from the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius (r. 1043–1058), and not derived from any explicit Melkite opposition to the Pope having ceased communion with Cerularius.⁸ It seems unlikely that the Melkite decision was made with full commitment to Cerularius' decision when we consider that the Patriarchate of Antioch and the wider Melkite milieu had limited direct interaction with the Latin church and agents of the papacy from the mid-ninth to mid-eleventh centuries.⁹ Ignorance of the historical relationship led to substantial difficulties in Melkite-Latin relations in the Crusader era when Melkite bishops were deprived of their sees by newly established Latin hierarchies in the Crusader States.

7 Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger, "Christian Arabic Theology in Byzantine Antioch: 'Abdallāh Ibn Al-Faḍl Al-An ḥakī and His Discourse on the Holy Trinity", in *Le Muséon* 124, no. 3–4 (2011): 380–81, doi:10.2143/MUS.124.3.2141858.

8 Adrian Fortescue, "Melchites", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), 158, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10157b.htm>.

9 Cf Griffith, "John of Damascus and the Church in Syria", 220–21.

With the rapid decline of the Latin presence to the Levant from the end of the thirteenth century engagements with the Melkites were substantially reduced and only began to re-emerge on a more secure footing in the seventeenth century.¹⁰ Following the foundation of the Propaganda in 1622, Latin activities greatly expanded across the Middle East to fulfil commitments to the missionary imperatives of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and to re-engage with Christians of the Eastern traditions.

The principal apostolates to the Melkites were undertaken by the Capuchins and Jesuits. Their efforts led to the Metropolitan of Aleppo, Meletios Karmeh (r.1612–1634), asserting a strong interest in union with the Holy See.¹¹ Nevertheless, it was nearly a century before a permanent Eastern Catholic Melkite patriarchate was established in Damascus in 1724 under the leadership of Cyril VI Tanas (r. 1724–1760). This union with the Holy See was marked by changing realities and perceptions in the Middle East regarding the best methods to sustain and build the community on a temporal level such as through access to educational resources. What also set the Melkites apart from the Antiochian Orthodox Patriarchate was a sense that they were more representative of the Arab Christian constituency which derived from the more thorough adoption of Arabic language by the Melkite hierarchy.¹² Whereas, the Antiochian hierarchy remained culturally Greek until the end of the nineteenth century.¹³ Al-

10 Fortescue, “Melchites”, 159.

11 Descy, *The Melkite Church*, 24.

12 In the present those Melkites of the Antiochian Patriarchate who did not enter into union with the Holy See are known as the Antiochian Orthodox as in akin to the Russian, Greek or Ukrainian Orthodox churches in terms of theology and ecclesiology. Abdallah Raheb, “La conception de l’union dans le patriarcat orthodoxe d’antioche 1622 – 1672”, *Parole de l’Orient* 3, no. 1 (1972): 133–34.

13 Philip C. Allen, “Early Arab Nationalism and the Orthodox: A Comparative Approach to the Sectarian Environment”, in *The Arab Studies Journal* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1993), 44.

though the Melkite Catholic identity emerged from the Patriarchate of Antioch it should not be regarded as the *only* community in which proto-Melkite Catholic identity could be found. Christians who adhered to Chalcedonian Christology and sympathetic to a rejuvenated union with the Holy See could also be found in the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Alexandria.

Since the 1700s the Melkites have formed a highly distinctive and strongly valued part of Syrian society. During the French mandate in the Levant and Syria in the 1920s–1940s they were afforded substantial opportunities to engage with the wider international Latin Catholic milieu, which aided in the renewal of their relationship with the Holy See and highlighted their presence to those unfamiliar with the Eastern Catholic traditions. The Melkites also became more prominently known as a result of Louis Massignon’s membership of the Church. Massignon’s interests in Arab culture (both Islamic and Christian) saw his formal change of ecclesial rite from the Latin to the Melkite in 1949 and ordination to the Melkite priesthood in 1950.¹⁴

The Melkites position themselves as a community which retains the liturgical and ecclesiological characteristics of an Eastern Church, but are committed to their strong relationship with the Holy See.¹⁵ This was highlighted at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), when Melkite patriarch Maximos IV Sayegh (r. 1947–1967) was a pre-eminent contributor on Eastern Christianity and all the more well received in this context because he was speaking from within the Eastern Christian tradition *and* able to speak to the question of

14 Anthony O’Mahony, “Louis Massignon, the Melkite Church and Islam”, in *ARAM Periodical* 20 (2008), 269–97, doi:10.2143/ARAM.20.0.2033133.

15 Robin Gibbons, “Eastern Catholic Ecclesial and Liturgical Identity: A Melkite Perspective”, in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East*, ed. Anthony O’Mahony and John Flannery (London: Melisende, 2010), 119–30.

Islam and Christian-Muslim relations.¹⁶ The Melkites would consider themselves, to a large extent, as the “natural” church of the Arab Christians of the Levant, Syria and the Holy Land, who, through experience of their predominantly Muslim culture, have a distinctive voice to offer to Christian life internationally.

From the 1960s to 2011 one of the most pressing issues for the Melkites was managing the changes in the Church as the proportion of the community resident in the diaspora substantially increased. As of 2014, as many Melkites were resident in South America and Australasia (c. 700,000 in total) as were resident in the Middle East.¹⁷ This is a challenging factor in terms of the practicalities of ecclesial organisation. However, what is perhaps more challenging for the Melkite hierarchy is to manage the competing expectations of communities which exist in states whose culture can be entirely distinct from that of the Middle East.¹⁸

Since 2011 the preeminent concern has been the crisis faced by Christians in Syria. It is in this context that the Melkites have endeavoured to secure their communities and cope with the dual effects of conflict and persecution. Under the rule of the Assad family and the Syrian Baath Party (1970—present) the Melkites – and indeed all Syrian Christians – have enjoyed a largely comfortable and produc-

16 Gerasimos T Murphy, *Maximos IV at Vatican II: A Quest for Autonomy*, Newton, MA, Sophia Press, 2011, passim.

17 Ronald G. Roberson CSP, “The Eastern Catholic Churches 2014” (Annuario Pontificio, 2014), 6, <http://www.cnewa.org/source-images/Roberson-eastcath-statistics/eastcatholic-stat14.pdf>.

18 Cf Robin Gibbons, “The Eastern Catholic Diaspora in Contemporary Europe: Context and Challenges”, in *The Downside Review* 134, no. 4 (1 October 2016): 154–155 ff, doi:10.1177/0012580616656115; For extended discussion of this issue see: Samir Haddad, “Challenges of Melkite Young Adults in Melbourne: Maintaining Religious Identity and Social Values within Australian Society” (M. Ed. thesis), Australian Catholic University, 2014, <http://researchbank.acu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1513&context=theses>.

tive relationship with the state.¹⁹ Given the rise of Islamism especially from the 1970s in the Middle East, the Melkites, in Syria, were fortunate to be able to avoid the encroachment of rigorist Islamic legal and cultural stipulations into state and public life. The Syrian Baath party retained a lay-state paradigm in order to secure its own position against threats from any emerging religio-political movements but also in order to balance the interests of those communities which make up the Syrian societal plurality.

Christians recognise the state in Syria needs reform and they are independent actors in Syrian society, with criticism of Baathist rule present to the Melkite community. However, the survival of President Bashar al-Assad's government has become a survival issue to the Melkites as well. Indeed, prior to the Russian Federation's military intervention in Syria in October 2015, the fall of Damascus and hence the direct threat of ISIL/Da'esh to the Patriarchate and the 150,000 Melkites in the city appeared likely to occur before the end of the year. The Melkites stand as a particular rebuke to ISIL/Da'esh in their ongoing efforts to ethnically cleanse Christians from Syria. The terrorist groups, in their destruction of Christian cultural heritage, have attempted to sever the link between the living Christian communities and their history and to determine the "reality" of religious discourse in the Middle East. The Melkite Church, of all churches in the region, has grounded itself in Arab culture and assimilated into the predominantly Islamic led *status quo* very effectively. This is anathema to ISIL/Da'esh which seeks to frame a societal narrative that denies the possibility of Christians as integral partners to life in the Middle East and Christian contributions to the formation of Muslim led states and societies.

19 Antoine Audo SJ, "The Current Situation of Christianity in the Middle East, Especially Syria, After the Synod of the Middle East's Final Declaration (September 2012) and the Papal Visit to Lebanon", in *Living Stones Yearbook 2012*, ed. Mary Grey et al., London, Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust, 2012, 13.

3. Ukrainian Christian identity: historical and modern contexts

To outline the development of the Ukrainian Catholic Church from the early modern period is to detail an ongoing struggle for an autonomous ecclesial community which holds the status as the inheritor of the traditions and title of the Metropolitan See of Kiev whilst also being in union with the Apostolic See. A struggle has existed because the Christianity of Kievan Rus' not only forms part of the heritage of the churches of Ukraine but is also integral to the cultural and ethnic identity of the churches and peoples of Belarus and Russia. The conversion of Grand Prince Volodymyr in 987 and the adoption of Christianity in Kievan Rus' as the state religion the following year are foundational aspects of these three ethno-national identities from the early medieval period.

Within Ukraine the UCC has faced further struggles to legitimise its status as an integral part of national life because it has come to be perceived as “Western” in its metaphysical and ecclesiological orientation through its particular connection with the Latin Catholic milieu and *unlike* the other “Eastern” churches to which the numerical majority of Ukrainians adhere.

Alongside this competition in the ecclesial sphere are the political divisions of and claims to Ukrainian territory. Ukrainian Catholic communities and ecclesiastical organisations have been divided among various states and seen periods of rule by Austrian, Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, Czech, Romanian and Hungarian governors from the early modern period. In contrast to the Melkites who, for example, experienced the extended rule of one power in the Middle East for several centuries – the Ottoman Empire – Ukrainian Catholics have been obliged to develop new relationships with the civil authorities on a regular basis since their rise to prominence in the sixteenth century. It is necessary to combine appreciation of these ecclesial and geopolitical factors in order to fully comprehend Ukrainian Catholic identity and sense of self.

1.1 Ukrainian Christian nomenclature

Like the Melkites who adopted their ecclesial appellation two centuries after their origins in the fifth century, the nomenclature in contemporary common use to describe Ukrainian Christians may not reflect that which was used in previous centuries. Ukraine and its people would, until the nineteenth century, have utilised “Ruthene/Ruthenian” – which derives from their origins in medieval Kievan Rus’ – most commonly as their descriptor and not Ukrainian.²⁰

The use of Ruthenian was reinforced by the Austrian Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in their efforts to better categorise the non-Russian and non-Polish populations of the eastern territories of their empire. We might instead see “Ukraine” as a geographical term – like Italy until its political unification in the nineteenth century – with its principal inhabitants of Ruthenian identity and culture. Nemeč emphasising that: “in the nineteenth century the ‘Ukraine’ became the national name of the entire ethnic territory populated by the Ruthenian[s].”²¹ This nomenclature is important, in the context of the UCC’s development, as we see that those who entered into union with the Apostolic See in the 1590s would have been distinguished over time by being referred to as Ruthenian Catholics, Greek Catholics or Eastern Rite Catholics.²²

The Ukrainian name emerged in the context of the consolidation

20 Ludvik Nemeč, “The Ruthenian Uniate Church in Its Historical Perspective”, in *Church History* 37, no. 4 (December 1968), 366, doi:10.2307/3162256; Andrew J. Shipman, “Ruthenians”, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 278, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13278a.htm>.

21 Nemeč, “Ruthenian Uniate Church”, 367.

22 Atanasii Velyky, “Greek Catholic Church”, in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, Edmonton, AB, - Toronto, ON, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1988, <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5C-G%5CR%5CGreekCatholicchurch.htm>.

of Ruthenian ethno-nationalism and the advent of *Ukrainian* as the preferred descriptor in the nineteenth century.²³ Alternatively, we might describe those Ukrainians in union with the Holy See as of the “Kievan Rus’ ” ecclesial tradition, which may more accurately reflect the circumstances and identity of the union minded bishops of the late sixteenth century.²⁴

1.2 Origins and development of the Ukrainian Catholic Church

Christianity in the territory of what is today Ukraine was likely first established among Greek residents of the Black Sea’s northern coast. Church tradition suggests that St Andrew the Apostle brought the Gospel to the area. To the late fourth century evangelisation continued, but the Hunnic invasions (c.370s–460s) interrupted the process of large scale Christianisation until the tenth century. Missionary efforts in the ninth century saw a general ongoing interest in Christianity provoked among the local peoples but actual engagement on a wide scale came via Grand Prince Volodymyr’s conversion from paganism in the tenth century. Following this event Kiev was granted the status of a Metropolitan See and the city became a major centre of Christian activity.

The church hierarchy which emerged from the Metropolia of Kiev was the first to spread diocesan structures across the territory of what

23 Brian J. Boeck, “What’s in a Name? Semantic Separation and the Rise of the Ukrainian National Name”, in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 27, no. 1/4 (2004), 33; Athanasius D. McVay, “The Apostolic See and Ukrainians: Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky and the Roman Curia”, in *Le Gouvernement Pontifical Sous Pie XI : Pratiques Romaines et Gestion de l’universel*, ed. Laura Pettinaroli, Collection de l’École Française de Rome 467, Rome, École française de Rome, 2013), 240, https://www.academia.edu/18429165/The_Apostolic_See_and_Ukrainians_Metropolitan_Andrei_Sheptytsky_and_the_Roman_Curia.

24 Ihor Monchak, *Self-Governing Kyivan Church*, Philadelphia, PA, St Sophia Religious Association of Ukrainian Catholics, 1995), 111.

is today Ukraine, Belarus and western Russia. The Kievan church's hierarchy was derived from the Patriarchate of Constantinople and it is this institution which exercised jurisdiction over Ruthenian Christians and, at least in theory, formally appointed the Metropolitan of Kiev. It is significant to note in light of the later emergence of the UCC that communion with the Apostolic See was never formally broken by the Metropolitans of Kiev. Similar to the Melkite situation from the mid-eleventh century, there were Greek hierarchs in Ruthenian sees appointed via Constantinople who encouraged them to end association with the Latin Church but this was never comprehensively effected and did not become a prevailing attitude among Ruthenians. For example: King Danylo Romanovych of Rus' (r. 1253–1264) sought papal assistance in the fight against the Mongols, and, the then Metropolitan of Kiev, Peter Akerovych (r.1244–1246), attended the First Council of Lyon in 1245.

Ruthenian Christian life was gravely interrupted by the Mongol invasions of 1240, which precipitated the 1299 transferral of the Kievan See to the precursor state of Muscovy: the Grand Duchy of Vladimir-Suzdal. Contemporaneously with these events the political strength of the Ruthenian principalities was in decline and, following the Mongol invasions, Ruthenians increasingly came under the rule of the Kingdoms of Poland and Lithuania. As the Polish elites professed Latin Catholicism as their state religion the Ruthenians were in a disadvantaged position as Christians outside of the norms of the prevailing ecclesial tradition.

The history of the Metropolia of Kiev over the next three centuries, until the Union of Brest in 1596, is a complex narrative underpinned by competing political claims to Ukrainian territory chiefly from the Kingdoms of Poland and Lithuania, the Principalities of Halych (Galicia) and Volhynia and the Grand Duchy of Moscow. In religious terms the legacy of the See of Kiev was a point of competition for these states with each seeking the allegiance of the Ruthenian episcopal hierarchy. For the ruling elites it was recognised

that the Ruthenian populations' ecclesial life in their territories could be advanced through holding control over a Metropolitan See which represented Ruthenian ecclesial affairs. Over the period 1303–1401, for example, two other metropolias were established – “of Halych (Galicia)” and “of Lithuania and Volhynia” – to lay claim to the heritage of the Metropolia of Kiev and in order to secure the allegiance of Ruthenian subjects. Nevertheless, without their own secure autonomous institution, representative of their ethno-religious traditions the Ruthenian communities struggled to maintain the integrity of their ecclesial affairs.

In essence, over the course of the medieval era, Kievan Christian life across eastern Europe, Belarus, Ukraine and western Russia became stretched between the two poles of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Grand Duchy of Moscow. The Ruthenians desired an autonomous ecclesial identity and organisation and which relied neither solely on the Apostolic See and Polish Latin ecclesial structures or the prerogatives of the Muscovite bishops. With the advance of the Muscovite church's autocephaly in 1448 the Ruthenian situation became acute as the newly independent Metropolia claimed jurisdiction over Kievan Christians. The Ruthene Metropolia of Kiev and its hierarchy were not in a position to actively compete with the Muscovites due to Polish-Lithuanian interference in their affairs and over the next hundred years Ruthenian Christians increasingly relied on the work of lay-brotherhoods and monasteries to sustain their ecclesial identity and culture.²⁵

By the mid-sixteenth century, the Ruthenian church was severely weakened as a result of poor standards of clerical formation and status as an inferior Christian community by way of comparison with

25 Ivan Vlasovsky and Arkadii Zhukovsky, “Kyiv Metropoly”, in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, Edmonton, AB, Toronto, ON, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1988, <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CK%5CY%5CKyivmetropoly.htm>.

both the Latin Church in Polish-Lithuanian territory and the influential Muscovite church. With a view to consolidating an autonomous church of the Ruthenians of eastern Europe and the territory of what is today Ukraine and Belarus, several bishops in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth determined to act and to revivify their church through rejuvenating their relationship with the Apostolic See.²⁶ It was perceived that a secure juridical relationship with the papacy would go some way to affirming their equitable status in the Commonwealth and more broadly elevate the church's status to more than a junior partner in the religious life of the state.

A further aspect of uncertainty which prompted the bishops to act was in the principal ecclesiastical leadership of the Ruthenian community which, at the time, remained under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Patriarchate was itself in a weakened position and the ongoing effectiveness of patriarchal leadership was heavily disputed due to the interference of the Ottoman Empire in its affairs.²⁷

In the post-Tridentine era of a Catholic Church which exerted strong, cohesive organisation and zeal for missions to Christians of the Eastern traditions it was highly attractive for Ruthenians to engage more closely with Latin representatives. The relationship had faltered since the efforts of Isidore, Metropolitan of Kiev, at the Council of Florence (1439) to affect re-energised ties with the papacy.²⁸ On Isidore's return to Rus' his activities were strongly opposed by church and state elites and no large scale engagement between Ruthenian

26 Jan Kracjar SJ, "The Ruthenian Patriarchate: Some Remarks on the Project for Its Establishment in the 17th Century", in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1964), 67.

27 Nemeč, "Ruthenian Uniate Church", 374.

28 Sophia Senyk, "The Background of the Union of Brest", in *Analecta OSBM* XV (XXI) Anniversary of the Unions of Brest and Uzhorod, no. 1/4 (1996): Un-paginated version.

Christians and the Latin church was maintained at this juncture.

Initially, Brest was quite popular among Ruthenian clergy with Latin obligations for ecclesiological changes perceived as a relatively light burden if they resulted in the strengthening of the local church. The Union stipulated that Ruthenian rites and customs were to be maintained including use of the Julian calendar. Further, it was obligatory from that time to believe the *flioque* but Ruthenians did not have to include it when reciting the Creed.²⁹ As with the development of the Melkite Catholic patriarchate the concern of being in or out of union with the pope was of principal importance from the Latin perspective. Whilst Polish missionaries desired the Latinisation of Ruthenian Christians, for the Apostolic See the existence of an Eastern Catholic Ruthenian community was in full accord with others then in existence such as the Maronites, Italo-Albanians and Chaldeans.³⁰ Each of these was characterised as an ecclesial rite whose chief bishop was in union with the pope. This exemplified the Tridentine paradigm of one Catholic Church, in which a variety of ecclesial traditions could be manifested as long as they submitted to papal authority. As the Christian community of Ukraine had never definitively established itself as an autocephalous entity led by its own patriarch, the Ruthenians fit well within the Tridentine model. For those bishops well disposed to union with the Holy See, this was an oppor-

29 Aurelio Palmieri OSA, "Union of Brest", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, NY, Robert Appleton Company, 1912, 130, 132, <https://books.google.com/books?id=PqkKeeFYUVgC&dq=catholic%20encyclopedia%20union%20of%20brest&pg=PA130>.

30 See: Pierre Raphael, *Le Rôle du Collège Maronite Romain dans l'Orientalisme aux XVII^e et XVIII^e Siècles*, Beirut, Université Saint Joseph, 1950; Anthony O'Mahony, "Between Rome and Constantinople: The Italian-Albanian Church: A Study in Eastern Catholic History and Ecclesiology", in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8, no. 3 (2008): 232–51, doi:10.1080/14742250802256367; Joseph Habbi, "Signification de l'union chaldéenne de Mar Sulaqa avec Rome en 1553", in *L'Orient Syrien* 11 (1966), 99–132, 199–230.

tunity to transfer their allegiance from one patriarchate to another. Nevertheless, the decisions taken at Brest were far from universally supported and adopted most successfully in the western Ukrainian region of Galicia but had limited impact elsewhere.

A key concern for Ruthenian Christians was the manner in which Polish Latin clergy treated the union minded Ruthenians and their continued attempts to Latinise Ruthenian Christian practices even as these actions were condemned by the Apostolic See.³¹ The extension of further Latin linked influence was sufficiently opposed by the peasantry in southern and eastern Ukraine that from 1648 to 1654 an anti-Polish and anti-Latin uprising substantially set back the spread of Ruthenian Catholic identity. The effects of the uprising could not be sustained in the long-term, however, nor could even nominal Ukrainian regional independence free from the influence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or the Tsardom of Russia.

The effective final end of efforts to advance Ruthenian ecclesial autonomy prior to the twentieth century came in 1686, when the Patriarchate of Constantinople transferred responsibility for its jurisdiction over the Metropolitan See of Kiev to the Patriarchate of Moscow. This was a highly unsavoury episode in Christian history not least because of the Ottoman intervention which precipitated the transferal and the accusations of financial improprieties which accompanied it. This event, more than any other, largely fixed perceptions to the Patriarchate of Moscow as having canonical claim to jurisdiction over Ukrainian Christians into the present. The geopolitical ramifications of this were also substantial and placed eastern Ukraine firmly into

31 Nemeč, "Ruthenian Uniate Church", 371; Palmieri OSA, "Union of Brest", 132; Andrew J. Shipman, "Ruthenian Rite", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, NY, Robert Appleton Company, 1912, 277, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13277a.htm>; Cf Benedict XIV, "Allatae Sunt - On the Observance of Oriental Rites" (Holy See, 26 July 1755), secs 12–16, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Ben14/b14allat.htm>.

the sphere of influence of the emerging Russian Empire.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were years during which many Ruthenians in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became Greek Catholic in identity and those who retained membership of the local Orthodox churches saw their influence and position in society reduced. However, with the partitions of the Commonwealth by the Austrian and Russian Empires from the 1770s a new geopolitical status quo emerged which was, essentially, to remain in place until the First World War. The result of the partitions, from the perspective of ecclesiastical organisation, was troubling for Ruthenian Catholics with their chief metropolitan see in Russian territory and three diocesan sees in Austrian territory.³² Attempts were made to alleviate this situation and Pope Pius VII's bull *In Universalis Ecclesiae Regimine* re-established a Metropolia of Halych – in effect transferring the privileges of the Metropolitan See of Kiev to the Archbishop of Lviv – in order to secure the leadership of the UCC independent of the Russian Empire in Austrian ruled territory.³³

For those under Russian rule, there was initially a relative degree of toleration of the Greek Catholic ecclesiastical structures and identity. However, from the 1820s a change in policy emerged and Ruthenian Catholic life was increasingly regulated by the state. For example: Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855) deprecated the dioceses of Brest and Lutsk and curtailed the work of the Order of St Basil the Great (OSBM), one of the congregations most closely involved in Ruthenian Catholic life since the seventeenth century.³⁴ A turning point came

32 John-Paul Himka, "The Greek Catholic Church and Nation-Building in Galicia, 1772–1918", in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 8, no. 3/4 (1984): 426–27.

33 Wasyl Lencyk, "Lviv Eparchy", in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, Edmonton, AB, Toronto, ON, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1993, <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CL%5CV%5CLviv-eparchy.htm>.

34 John Madey, "History of the Ukrainian Church", in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*,

with the 1831 Polish uprising which sought to remove Russian rule. The Ruthenian Catholic hierarchy had supported the Polish nationalists and, with the defeat of the uprising, a forty-five year period of anti-Greek Catholic activity followed. This saw the absorption and annexation of Greek Catholics in Russian territory to the state church and, as of 1875, no Ruthenian Catholic communities officially remained in the Russian Empire.³⁵

In contrast, those Ruthenian Catholics under Austrian rule had the opportunity to re-consolidate their position apart from the rivalry of both Latin Polish and Orthodox Russian ecclesial institutions and were permitted relative freedom from external interference.³⁶ Ecclesial life was focused especially in Galicia and the city of Lviv (Lemberg), a traditionally strong centre of Eastern Catholic activity.³⁷ It was in this context that the modern Ukrainian Catholic identity was most firmly consolidated and a strong spiritual, monastic and educational base established for the maintenance of the Church throughout the troubled twentieth century.³⁸

In the aftermath of the First World War those Ruthenians formerly living under Austrian rule came to reside in the territories of the newly independent states of Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czech-

Edmonton, AB, Toronto, ON, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1993; Athanasius Pekar OSBM, "Monasticism in the Ukrainian Church", in *Analecta OSBM* XIII (XIX), no. 1/4 (1988): 378–86.

35 Aurelio Palmieri OSA, "The United Ruthenian Church of Galicia under Russian Rule", in *The Catholic World* CIII (April 1916), 352; Shipman, "Ruthenians", 279.

36 Himka, "Nation-Building in Galicia", 426–427 ff.

37 Liliana Hentosh, "Rites and Religions: Pages from the History of Inter-Denominational and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Twentieth-Century Lviv", in *Lviv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture*, ed. John Czaplicka, trans. Andrew Sorokowski, Cambridge, MA, Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2005, 183–91.

38 Himka, "Nation-Building in Galicia", 426.

oslovakia. For those under Polish rule (1920–1939) the issue of Latinisation again became a substantial cause for concern and greatly weakened Ukrainian Catholic revival.³⁹ Nemeč notes that despite the efforts of the Holy See to correct Polish clergy that this Latin mentality continued and in which Ukrainian Catholics were regarded as “Half-Catholics”, *Catholics in fieri* who would later become “true Catholics” by accepting the Latin Rite.⁴⁰

This was an era also characterised by exile and the experience of existing as a consistently persecuted church.⁴¹ With limited opportunities to expand activities in the homeland, the internationalisation of all the Ukrainian churches took place to Western Europe, North and South America and Australasia which is a continuing trend into the present.⁴² A key figure who sustained the Ukrainian Catholic community in this era was the Metropolitan of Lviv, Andrey Sheptytsky (r.1900–1944). His commitment to union with the Holy See and a Ukrainian Catholic identity was crucial to the long-term survival of the Church.

From 1941–1945 Ukrainian territory was some of the most fought over anywhere in the world with highly destructive campaigns of ethnic cleansing alongside conventional warfare impacting severely on local Christian communities.⁴³ The knock-on effects for Ukrainian

39 Serge Keleher, “Trapped between Two Churches: Orthodox and Greek-Catholics in Eastern Poland”, in *Religion, State and Society* 23, no. 4 (1 December 1995), 368, doi:10.1080/09637499508431718.

40 Nemeč, “Ruthenian Uniate Church”, 384.

41 Bohdan Budurowycz, “The Greek Catholic Church in Galicia, 1914–1944”, in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 26, no. 1/4 (2002): 341–342ff.

42 Roberson CSP, “The Eastern Catholic Churches 2014”, 7; Myroslaw Tataryn, “Canada’s Eastern Christians”, in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, Toronto, ON, University of Toronto Press, 2008), 292–99, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442687622.12>.

43 John-Paul Himka, “Second World War”, in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, Edmonton, AB, Toronto, ON, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1993,

Catholics were substantial and they hoped for restoration of the UCC in the “homeland” struggled to gain ground as a result. That being noted, there was a relative rejuvenation in Christian life in Ukraine, in general terms, during the occupation by the Third Reich and its allies, who permitted the restoration of public worship.⁴⁴ However, with the return of Soviet rule, from 1944, religion was driven out of public life and officially opposed.

An event which was to grievously affect the UCC for the entire period of the Cold War was the March 1946 Synod of Lviv. In summary, the Synod saw the “self-liquidation” of most of the Ukrainian Catholic ecclesiastical organisation at the instigation of the Soviet state and as supported by the Patriarchate of Moscow. The Synod was called with the purpose of absorbing the UCC and its parishes into the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian dioceses of the Patriarchate of Moscow. It was timed to coincide with the 350th anniversary of the Union of Brest and to fundamentally dissolve the Ukrainian Catholic identity, traditions and culture. Soviet elites regarded the destruction of the UCC as key to the weakening of the Ukrainian anti-communist movement as the church had been one of its chief supporters. There was, perhaps, also the intention to sour relations between Catholic and Orthodox Ukrainians and to inhibit co-ordinated Christian resistance to Soviet rule.

Sheptytsky’s death in 1944 was a significant blow to the UCC and perhaps why the Synod came to be concluded without an effective opposition. That the Synod took place was also indicative of some level of exhaustion in the face of the Soviet re-occupation of Ukraine from 1944–1945 and the struggle for the UCC to continue to sur-

<http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5C-S%5CE%5CSecondWorldWar.htm>.

44 Cf Karel C. Berkhoff, “Was There a Religious Revival in Soviet Ukraine under the Nazi Regime?”, in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 3 (2000), 536–67.

vive as a normally functioning ecclesial community. Given the strains which many of its members were under following nearly fifteen years of famine and conflict, on a human level it is perhaps unsurprising that many sought some kind of stability even if this came via union with the Patriarchate of Moscow.⁴⁵

The extent to which persecution arose as a result of the Synod varied by region and ecclesial affiliation. For Ukrainian Catholics the level of antagonism was severe, and it was only during Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership of the USSR (r.1985–1991) that the community began to re-emerge into public life on a large scale. This relaxation was perhaps related to Gorbachev's own mixed Russo-Ukrainian heritage.

With the fall of the USSR, attempting to reclaim church property that, owing to the vagaries of Ukrainian ecclesial history had seen ownership (or occupation) change many times, was a crisis for all Ukrainian Christians. The UCC was determined to do whatever was necessary to restore its churches and made substantial efforts to regain ownership.⁴⁶ Such a hard-line mentality was perhaps understandable as it was perceived that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (in union with the Moscow Patriarchate) had compromised itself through close association with the Soviet state and involvement in anti-UCC activities.

In the development of post-Soviet Ukraine, the UCC has been broadly sympathetic to the orientation of the state towards a pro-EU aligned stance. This is not universal with others seeking to find a “third *Ukrainian* way” apart from association with either NATO states or the Russian Federation.⁴⁷ The former position (pro-EU/NATO) has come to be held often most strongly in the diaspora.

45 Cf Natalia Shlikhta, “«Ukrainian» as «Non-Orthodox»: How Greek Catholics Were «Reunited» with the Russian Orthodox Church, 1940s–1960s”, trans. Jan Surer, in *State, Religion and Church* 2, no. 2 (2015): 92–93.

46 Elenskii, “Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the Ukrainian Project”, 64–65.

47 Cf *ibid.*, 83.

However, the Ukrainian day-to-day position, like that of the Syrians, is to attempt to carry on their own autonomous affairs despite other external narratives greatly inhibiting this.

The current head of the UCC is Archbishop-Major Sviatoslav Shevchuk who has been in office since March 2011. He was born in 1970 in western Ukraine and ordained to the priesthood in 1994 as such he has a strong awareness of the effects of Soviet rule on Ukrainian Catholic identity and the challenges which the UCC faced following the foundation of the independent Ukrainian state. Further, having been apostolic administrator to the UCC eparchy of Buenos Aires from 2009 to 2011 he is cognisant of the international nature of the community.

4. Eastern Catholics and the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology

The contemporary model of Catholic ecclesiology was established at the Second Vatican Council. The model holds to a Catholic communion of twenty-four self governing (*sui iuris*) churches each of which is in union with the Holy See.⁴⁸ This was a departure from the model in existence since the Council of Trent in which there was one Roman Catholic Church with a plurality of ecclesial rites (e.g. Maronite, Melkite, Coptic &c). As such, those rites previously in existence have become churches. This is suggestive that they now have the opportunity to determine their own affairs. Such a model moves the Catholic Church towards a more conciliar ecclesiology, with the pope as chief bishop “presiding in love” instead of an authoritative position of teacher and judge. In the context of a switch to such a model, the newly validated Eastern Catholic *sui iuris* churches saw their status

48 Although often under-acknowledged and misunderstood as to its ecclesiological ramifications this includes the Latin Catholic Church. For one of the few works to discuss this issue see: Faris “The Latin Church *Sui Iuris*”, in *Jurist* 62 (2002), 280–93.

increased. It placed them, at least in theory, on a canonically equitable level with the Latin Church and, as such, was suggestive of the need for the chief bishop of each church to be of the same ecclesiastical rank.

In the Ukrainian case it has been an ongoing hope of the UCC to see its chief bishop raised to patriarchal status by the Holy See. However, such an arrangement carries with it historic as well as contemporary political concerns. In the present era, engagements between the Holy See and the Russian Federation and with the Patriarchate of Moscow would be complicated by the elevation of the archbishop-major to patriarchal status. Ukraine, and Kiev in particular, are perceived to be within the geopolitical sphere of influence of the Russian state and integral to the heritage, traditions and identity of the Russian Orthodox Church. Russian ecclesial perspectives on Ukrainian Christians are to the ongoing maintenance of its jurisdiction over the populations and hence why the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is an autonomous (self-governing) church and not an autocephalous one.

During Soviet rule in Ukraine the Holy See had to balance the desires of the UCC for a patriarchate with that of *realpolitik* and the need to be cognisant of those other Christian communities under Soviet rule who might face increased difficulties if the Holy See were to act. On an emotional level the idea of a UCC led by a bishop of patriarchal rank in the post-Soviet era has strong appeal and which would provide a definitive mark of a transition from one set of circumstances to another. Nonetheless, intervention by the Holy See to affect this would still be perceived as an act with political and religious connotations and as unwise in the current tense environment of a fragmented Ukraine.

The direction of the Holy See's policy towards Russian Christianity is also significant in the context of the appointment of Fr David Nazar SJ, a Ukrainian-Canadian, as rector of the Pontifical Oriental Institute in August 2015. Nazar was previously superior of the Soci-

ety of Jesus in the Ukraine.⁴⁹ Such an appointment would not have gone unnoticed in the Russian ecclesial milieu insofar as it places the concerns of the UCC as central to the future of the Holy See's policy regarding the Eastern Catholic churches and Eastern Christianity more generally.

5. Gregory III Laham and the UCC synod of September 2016

I turn now to consider the context of the September 2016 UCC synod and Patriarch Laham's attendance.

Born in 1933 in the Darayaa suburb of Damascus, Laham has been a part of Melkite ecclesiastical life from his teenage years – entering the minor seminary in the 1940s. His vocation with the Basilian Salvatorians (BS) saw ordination to the priesthood in 1959.⁵⁰ His experience of life at the heart of the Eastern Catholic milieu was typified by his ordination taking place at the Abbey of Grottaferrata – a territorial abbacy of the Basilians of the Italo-Albanian Greek Catholic Church. From this time onwards this suggests his ease at mixing between Eastern Catholic contexts.⁵¹

He was consecrated bishop in 1981 and held the role of Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem prior to his elevation to the patriarchate in 2000. Laham succeeded Maximos V Hakim (b.1908–d.2001; r.1967–2000) who was one of the last Eastern Catholic leaders to be drawn from the pre-First World War Ottoman milieu of the Middle East. This was also

49 David Nazar SJ, "Ukraine: A Spiritual Journey in a Political Guise", in *Thinking Faith*, 13 March 2014, <http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/ukraine-spiritual-journey-political-guise>.

50 Cf J Nasrallah, "Basiliani dal SS. Salvatore dei melchiti", in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, Rome, Edizioni Paoline, 1974, 1090–1091 ff.

51 Cf Anthony O'Mahony, "«... Again to Breathe Fully from Two Lungs»: Eastern Catholic Encounters with History and Ecclesiology", in *The Downside Review* 134, no. 4 (2016): 113, doi:10.1177/0012580616669459.

an era in which the Melkites were more widely displaced and to parts of the region outside of Syria especially to Mesopotamia-Iraq, Egypt, Sudan and Palestine. Hakim himself grew up in Cairo, studied in Jerusalem and was Bishop of Akka (Galilee) from 1943 to 1967. These events placed him at the heart of Christian affairs in the Levant and the Holy Land during a period of substantial re-orientation of Christian Palestinian life. As patriarch he proved to be a dynamic organiser and endeavoured to provide support for the Melkite constituencies as the Middle East was further politically re-structured after the Second World War. To succeed such a figure was, perhaps, quite challenging for Laham insofar as the ecclesial networks and relationships Hakim had established were in place for over thirty years. Nonetheless, Laham has himself shown to be an effective administrator in terms of ecclesiastical organisation in an international context, an advocate for the dignities and responsibilities of Christians in West Asia whilst also helping to sustain the culture of scholarship in the Melkite tradition.

As patriarch, Laham has pursued four major interests: (1) Attempting to mitigate the effects of emigration from the Middle East; (2) sustaining the religious plurality of the Middle East; (3) utilising ecumenical discussions as means of sustaining Christian presence to the Middle East in the long-term and regarding ecumenical dialogue as a survival issue; and (4) preventing the widening of the Syrian conflict and maintaining security in the state. His concerns were articulated most clearly in a 2012 statement which offered a series of reflections on the circumstances for Christians in Syria and relationship with the state.⁵²

Laham is a prominent figure within Syrian society and the Eastern Catholic milieu. His presence at the UCC synod demonstrates his

52 Gregorios III Laham, “24 Reflections and Observations on the Current Situation in Syria” (Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarchate, 16 July 2012), <https://melkite.org/patriarchate/24-reflections-and-observations-on-the-current-situation-in-syria>.

ability to think widely and internationally about the Eastern Catholic contemporary *status quo*. Laham has maintained an affinity for the UCC and has consistently supported the elevation of the head of the church to patriarchal status. Alongside this is an awareness that the size of the churches' communities is indicative of the role they should normatively have in joint ecumenical and other Eastern Catholic affairs. For reference the UCC is the largest and the Melkite Church the fourth largest Eastern Catholic church.⁵³ These views may not sit comfortably with the Holy See, which is aware of the geopolitical connotations of raising the UCC leader to patriarchal status in the contemporary context of a difficult relationship between Ukraine's principal foreign supporter – the USA – and the Russian Federation.

From the UCC perspective it would most likely be argued that this provides an opportunity to raise the status of the UCC during a time of substantial difficulty for the communities and Ukrainian economic decline. The Holy See likely perceives that such an act would also endanger the relationship which Pope Francis has begun to develop with the Russian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Kiril. More widely it would be interpreted as an overtly intrusive act in Ukraine. Furthermore, it seems likely Laham's attendance at the Synod would have been received with some concern by the Russian state. As such his decision to attend indicates his independence of political movement from the Syrian state – which would seek to avoid unsettling their relationship with Russia – and willingness to transcend the geopolitical disputes which affect both conflicts.

I suggest that Laham would likely be sympathetic to Archbishop-Major Sviatoslov's uncertain position regarding his ecclesial rank

53 Definitive statistics on the size of the Eastern Catholic churches are often difficult to corroborate particularly in an era of international migration. However, the four largest churches by estimated population are: Ukrainian 4.3m, Syro-Malabar 3.8m, Maronites 3.3m, Melkite 1.6m. Roberson CSP, "The Eastern Catholic Churches 2014".

given the Patriarchate of Antioch is claimed by several other churches as their chief see. In this light the situation for the UCC is akin to the Melkites as the lineage and heritage of the Patriarchate of Kiev is claimed by three Ukrainian churches and the Russian Orthodox Church. However, the Melkites have taken a more liberal attitude to their engagements with their progenitor community and reached a point of near union with the Antiochian Orthodox.⁵⁴ This has not been realised in practice, but is indicative of the lack of difference which is perceived to exist between the two communities on matters of faith. What remains are questions of ecclesial allegiance and/or loyalty to a particular identity: in effect the Melkites and the Antiochian Orthodox are for all intents and purposes in union, and the only barrier to this union is answering questions of allegiance to a certain ecclesiology and ethnic and cultural identities.

Distinct between the Melkites and UCC is the pull of the issue of national identity. The former could not be said to be a church of a particular nation with readily defined borders, even if the notion of it being the Church of the Arabs is advanced. Yet there are several other Eastern Catholic churches whose members are predominantly Arab as well. For Ukrainians there is no other Eastern Catholic church which would advance the claim of being a church of the Ukrainians, and this emphasises the community's closeness to the experience and culture of a particular state. Such distinction perhaps offers Laham greater opportunity to speak more widely than on Syrian affairs and to ensure that the significance of the Melkites resonates to increased audiences. In effect, the Ukrainian Catholic context means that the Archbishop-Major's influence is more limited even if his community is numerically larger than the Melkites.

54 Gregorios III Laham, "The Ecumenical Commitment of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church", in *The Downside Review* 135, no. 1 (1 January 2017): 3–20, doi:10.1177/0012580616657245.

Laham, having been part of the Salvatorian fathers for most of his life, is afforded an additional point of exchange with the UCC. As the Basilian Salvatorians formed a key part of the establishment and maintenance of a Melkite *Catholic* identity so the Order of St Basil the Great likewise have a strong presence in Ukrainian Catholic life.⁵⁵ Both orders derive their structure from the rule of St Basil and as institutions which combine Latin influenced structures in ecclesiastical organisation with the spirituality and charism of a key figure in the Eastern Christian tradition.

1.3 Themes explored by Gregory III in his speech at the Synod

The Synod focused on the theme “Service to Others” which in the contemporary Ukrainian context is of great importance in attempts to begin a reconciliation process at all levels of society and to support the restoration of stability to Ukrainian political and socio-economic life. I suggest Laham and Sviatoslav are keenly aware of the deep wounds in the psyche of their peoples as a result of conflicts not of their own making and a prevailing sense of powerlessness at their situation. As a result and in response to these circumstances, attempting to work for and with one another is perceived as an essential means to recover confidence in their ability to act and manifest their Christianity to the benefit of the peoples of Syria and Ukraine.

In Laham’s case this focus on service to others is manifested both inside and outside his own community. The Melkites in Syria are aware that they are part of Syrian society, and have a duty to support their fellow citizens regardless of their confessional allegiance.

55 Yuriy Koshulap, “The Religious Patriotism of the Monastic Order of St Basil the Great in the Context of the Ukrainian Nation-Building, 1897–1914” (MA dissertation), Central European University, 2010, 39–40 ff, https://www.academia.edu/25697062/The_Religious_Patriotism_of_the_Monastic_Order_of_St_Basil_the_Great_in_The_Context_of_the_Ukrainian_Nation-Building_1897-1914._Chapters_1-3.

This type of paradigm is harder to advance in the current Ukrainian context given that ecclesial allegiance is often linked with political allegiance. The vision one seeks to advance for the future of the Ukrainian state is also tied up with this ecclesial allegiance. Whereas in Syria Christians overwhelmingly support the government, in Ukraine this support is not uniform. Since 2014 the churches have become increasingly politicised and it is challenging to see how this paradigm of co-operation can be advanced. Conflict is further stoked due to ideological antagonisms between those supportive of liberal Western ideologies and those who favour partnership with the Russian Federation. Little thought appears to be given to how the competing narratives are presented and their effects on public perceptions locally, regionally or internationally and the real and damaging consequences which can arise as a result.⁵⁶

Laham also encourages the Eastern Catholic churches in general and the UCC and Melkites in particular to work more closely together in order to secure their future as churches *in their own right* and to prevent further damage to the Eastern Catholic churches which predominate in the Middle East. Laham states that a plan for a “joint formation programme for future priests conducted in the Holy Land” could be an ideal means to rejuvenate an Eastern Catholic culture in the Middle East. Laham is aware of the great benefit which could be brought to the UCC through the opportunity to train its clergy in the Holy Land and to encourage awareness of the lived Christian experience in the region. His idea of establishing a centre in Jerusalem is perhaps obvious to suggest but it is something from which all Catholic churches *sui juris* would greatly benefit: the formation of clergy on a consistent basis in that region of the world most closely associated with the foundation of Christianity. This is already undertaken in

56 Cf Mykhailo Cherenkov, “Orthodox Terrorism”, in *First Things*, May 2015, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/05/orthodox-terrorism>.

certain times and certain places by various Catholic institutions in the Middle East but not conducted, yet, in a comprehensive and united manner.

Laham's speech at the synod was given, I suggest, in the context of a highly sympathetic audience but also as a public reminder to the Holy See of the need to provide greater support to the Eastern Catholics in both Syria and Ukraine. He would be cognisant of the relative uncertainty surrounding Pope Francis' intentions for the future of Holy See-Eastern Christian relations in general terms and how Francis appreciates the role of Eastern Catholic churches in international Catholic life. Visits to Georgia and the Holy Land, along with the pope's meeting with Patriarch Kiril of Moscow in Cuba, all demonstrate that Francis has an interest in Eastern Christian traditions. There is some concern as to the depth of understanding Francis has regarding the Eastern Catholics as a particular type of Eastern Christian community however.

Laham's presence at the Synod was likely very highly regarded by Ukrainian Catholics, both as an aspect of their efforts to share the burden of conflict on a spiritual level but also to note the importance of a meeting between churches which are in communion with one another via the Holy See. This fellowship aspect is also something which might not be possible for other actors, such as the pope, to engage in given the political connotations which a journey to Ukraine could have in the aforementioned context of Holy See-Russian Federation relations.

In noting Syria as "[the] cradle of Christianity" Laham firmly places the crisis of Christianity in the region as a paramount concern for the Holy See and indeed for Christians internationally.⁵⁷ He goes on

57 Gregorios III Laham, "Speech of H.B. Gregorios III Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem, to the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church" (Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarchate, 5 September 2016), <http://www.pgc-lb.org/eng/gregorios/view/sfu>.

to link the situation in Syria with two points which are felt strongly in the Ukrainian Catholic context are strong concerns of Pope Francis. These points refer to the importance of the Jubilee Year of Mercy and the need for reconciliation on a societal level, but also the issue of demographic change. On the latter Laham notes “We are undergoing a real *tsunami* of emigration, which is decimating our communities”.⁵⁸ The departure of Christian Syrians and Ukrainians from their points of origin is underappreciated among Catholics more widely. There is perhaps a perception that there is a much larger Christian population present in both states and, as such, many are not aware of the rate of change.

In the Ukrainian case, Catholic migration is largely taking place in light of the decline of the economic situation and the effects of the conflict in former south-east Ukraine. Nonetheless, competing religious narratives do inform antagonisms and re-awaken historic and communal memories of Catholic-Orthodox struggles for pre-eminence (especially in western Ukraine). It should not be said that Ukrainian Catholics face an existential threat in a similar manner to that of the Syrian Melkites faced with Da’esh/ISIL. However, it is perhaps fair to suggest that the Ukrainian conflict is more poignant because of the Christian culture which the vast majority of the population share. Also highlighted by Laham: this internal state conflict in Ukraine impacts on the status of ecumenism. Whereas in the Middle East ecumenism is often regarded as a survival issue and/or integral to sustaining Christianity in the region, ecumenism is a more complicated issue in the Ukrainian context. Churches in Ukraine have not, largely, desired to reconcile with each other: the Orthodox churches in particular regard the UCC as outside of norms of Ukrainian Christian life and tradition.

58 Italics in original.

6. Conclusion

If the UCC and Melkites are to retain a role in their respective societies, an active attempt to offer a “difference” which no other community can provide, would elevate their status and importance. A focus on reconciliation and conflict resolution could be key and a means by which they continue their presence and, despite being numerical minorities in their own states, sustain an influence inversely proportional to their size.

With Laham’s retirement from active patriarchal duties from May 2017, an astute choice of successor falls to the responsibility of the Melkite synod of bishops.⁵⁹ The choice of new patriarch will be considered keenly by the Holy See and Ukrainian Catholic community. The Melkite leader is the only Byzantine patriarch in union with the papacy and, as such, offers an important voice for the concerns of those fourteen *sui iuris* churches of Byzantine heritage with a total membership of more than six million people worldwide. The Melkite and Ukrainian Catholics as the two largest Byzantine rite *sui iuris* churches have a large degree of responsibility in effectively meeting the needs of those outside of their own immediate frame of reference. Nevertheless, the development of connections between the Eastern Catholic churches is far from a consistent activity and this is understandable to a large extent. For example, beyond their shared ecclesiological status as churches in union with the Holy See, what do Coptic and Belarusian Catholics have in common? Moreover, attempting to place the Eastern Catholic churches together as one constituency can sustain somewhat patronising attitudes which deny the responsibilities and dignities of each church and continue to portray the Latin church as the chief marker of Catholic identity internationally.

It is to be hoped that these two institutions sustain dynamic and

59 “Greek Melchite Patriarch Resigns”, in *The Catholic Herald*, 8 May 2017, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/05/08/greek-melchite-patriarch-resigns/>.

active leadership in the long-term and continue to work for the holistic development of their churches internationally. Furthermore, as the two churches are also the first and fourth largest Eastern Catholic churches overall – the Syro-Malabar and Maronites are the second and third largest respectively – their weight of numbers and and historic significance to the Catholic communion predicates their having a prominent role in encouraging other Eastern Catholic churches in sustaining a strong autonomous ecclesial identity, as well as raising awareness of their traditions and cultures more widely. Finally, they must work to further the reality that to *be* Catholic is not necessarily to *be* Latin.