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ADAPTABILITY AS A SURVIVAL STRATEGY UNDER COMMUNISM: RECONSIDERING THE APPROACH OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH[1]

Abstract

Adaptability is a broad and crucial topic for the Soviet-period history of the Russian Orthodox Church that has not received the scholarly attention that it merits. An important reason for this scholarly neglect is in the highly negative connotation of the very concept, as it was not easy and arguably not right for the Church to adapt to Soviet sociopolitical circumstances. Such a view was formed back in the Soviet era under a combined influence of church opposition's and Soviet officials' critique.

This paper suggests approaching the issue through contextualizing the Church's strategy that allows for a more balanced and less value judgment interpretation. Two major contexts are taken into account: of the ecclesiastical tradition and legacy of the Soviet state. Ever since the Great Terror, Soviet power tolerated no opposition and no Other while it employed quite effective methods of the socialization of population.

Taking into account these contexts, I suggest examining the Church's strategy at two closely related levels. The first is a symbolic and rhetorical level, and the second is a level of practice. They are examined against the historical background of estimations from the Soviet period. The chronological focus of the study is the

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mid-1950s –1960s, and it spatially covers the dioceses of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC. The argument advanced in this paper is that adaptability became an inescapable and viable function in the Church's general strategy of survival under communism.

Church opposition and religious dissenters were primarily concerned with the ideological dimension of adaptability. '*Prisposoblenchestvo* to communism' and/or '*prisposoblenchestvo* to atheist power' were amongst the key points of their critique of the official church. The readiness of the hierarchy to accommodate – to identify themselves as 'Soviet citizens', to appropriate Soviet rhetoric, and to reconsider the church social teaching to conform to Soviet sociopolitical circumstances – was condemned as 'conformist', 'opportunistic', and evidence of their subservience.

The communist authorities of the Soviet state were not satisfied with the Church's attempts to adapt either. Stalinist antireligious struggle in the 1920s–1930s was accompanied with a flow of antireligious literature unmasking the Church and its *prisposoblenchestvo.* After World War II, the most powerful challenge came with Khrushchev's antireligious campaign when every effort was taken to overcome backwardness, to indoctrinate population with 'materialistic and scientific outlook', and to make religion 'wither away'.

In this context, any attempt by the Church to maintain its Soviet identification and reinforce its linkage with the state and society run against the continual attempts of state authorities to draw a line of separation based on religious principle. The Church used every opportunity to reinforce this linkage: from the inclusion of state holidays and the official biographies of state leaders into the church calendar to the dedication of special religious ceremonies to official celebrations. The coincidence of Easter with May Day celebrations was interpreted as a symbolically most powerful sign of the unity of the Church and Soviet society.

An examination of episcopal messages and sermons, as well as sermons by priests, sheds light on what might be called the 'appropriation of contemporary (Soviet) consciousness' by the Church. Peace and social morality became usual subjects evoked by the clergy. Conformity between Christian and communist morality was emphasized: Christian principles were presented as identical with the communist ideas of democracy and moreover as their forerunners.

The rhetorical analysis offers valuable insights into the social concern of the Church and the stance of the so-called 'Soviet bishops' and 'Soviet priests'. A designation 'Soviet' is not confined to their political identification as loyal Soviet citizens: it also denotes their socio-cultural identity. During the late 1950s –1960s, a generational change took place in the Orthodox Church: those who were born and

educated after 1917 came to serve the Church as priests and bishops. For inborn Soviet citizens, it was impossible not to believe in the Soviet system or furthermore oppose Soviet sociopolitical, socio-cultural, and socio-economic reality. Their confidence in that the Church had to follow the path and speak the language of modern Soviet society was a logical outcome.

Already those diocesan bishops who survived the antireligious assault of the 1920s–1930s and became bishops under the conditions of the 1943 compromise accepted the rules of the game: the institutional survival of their dioceses and overall of the Church required certain compromise and accommodation on their part. This approach of approximating the interests of the Church with the interests of the state and society and of *religious* and *Soviet* was seen as natural by the younger generation of the episcopate, even under the conditions of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign. The stance of Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko), head of the Ukrainian Exarchate since 1966, is examined in more details as a perfect illustration.

An interpretation of the Soviet-era adaptability of the Russian Orthodox Church advanced in this paper does not resolve all the complications, however. A case study becomes the most effective research method, as it allows accounting for the context and examining actors' self-justifications, their declared aims, and actual results gained. Simultaneously, when general conclusions are drawn, distant consequences of employing this strategy by the ROC, which became visible after the collapse of the USSR, cannot be completely disregarded.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, Soviet period, Stalinism, Khrushchev's antireligious campaign, the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church

Introduction

Adaptability is a broad and crucial topic for the Soviet-period history of the Russian Orthodox Church (thereafter – ROC) that has not received the scholarly attention that it merits. An important reason for this scholarly neglect is in the highly negative connotation of the very concept, as it was not easy and arguably not right for the Church to adapt to Soviet sociopolitical circumstances. Such a view was formed back in the Soviet era under a combined influence of the church opposition's and Soviet officials' critique.

An approach that presumed the Church's acceptance of Soviet socio-political reality and identification of its clergy and faithful as Soviet citizens was put forth by Metropolitan Sergii (Stragorodskii) in his Proclamation of 29 July 1927. The head of the Church explained the reason: "Only impractical dreamers can think that such an immense community as our Orthodox Church, with all its organizations, may peacefully exist in the country by hiding itself from the Government."[2] He then required from priests and believers:

> "We must show, not in words, but in deeds, that not only people indifferent to Orthodoxy, or those who reject it, can be faithful citizens of the Soviet Union, loyal to the Soviet government, but also the most fervent adherents of Orthodoxy [..] We wish to be Orthodox and at the same time to claim the Soviet Union as our civil Motherland."[3]

The Proclamation was rejected by many from the Church because of an intended approximation of the interests of the Church and of the atheist state that caused the largest split within the Church and the birth of the underground community. Unexpectedly, it was not well received by the Stalinist regime either and did not safeguard the Church from a new wave of antireligious persecutions. Walter Kolarz explains that the reason is to be found in the same – desired by the Metropolitan – approximation of the interests of the Church and the state, "the Soviet communists feared that people could easily misinterpret the fact that Sergei put religion into pro-Soviet attire. They may have harboured the illusion that this made religion 'less harmful'."[4] According to some evidence, the original Russian term *prisposoblenchestvo* was immediately used as a pejorative label for Metropolitan Sergei's approach by Emelyan Yaroslavskii, founder and leader of the League of Militant Godless.[5]

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[2] Quoted in: Fletcher W. C. *A Study in Survival: The Church in Russia 1927-1943.* – London: S.P.C.K., 1965, p. 30.

[3] Ibid, p. 29.

[4] Kolarz W. *Religion in the Soviet Union.* – London: Macmillan & Co Ltd., 1961, p. 44.

[5] Talantov B. Sergeevshchina ili prisposoblenchestvo k ateizmu (Irodova zakvaska). Read on February 11, 2019, in electronic format: http://www.eshatologia.org/329-sergievshina-prisposoblenchestvo-k-ateizmu.html

This paper suggests approaching the adaptability of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet state through contextualizing the Church's strategy. The first step would be to account for ecclesiastical tradition and legacy. As the Church of Byzantine tradition, it relied on the theory of the church-state *symphonia* and the practice of the 'Constantine'/'Caesaropapist' model of relations with state authorities.[6] As the established Church in the confessional state prior to 1917,[7] it used to be 'positive' in its attitude towards secular power[8] and to accommodate itself with state interests, if we recall Ernst Troeltsch.[9] Peter Sugar adds that only a historical tradition could legitimize any possible oppositional role played by the Church in the communist state.[10] Because of the absence of any precedents in the pre-1917 past, it was 'unthinkable' for the ROC (to use Vasyl Ulianovsky's words[11]) to oppose the state, even the one that called itself atheist.

The other is the context of the Soviet state. Adriano Roccucci calls to interpret any decisions by the Church "within their proper historical context".[12] After World War II, the Soviet Union established itself as one of the world's superpowers. At home, the state (because of many reasons

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[6] See, for instance: Papadakis A. The Historical Tradition of Church-State Relations under Orthodoxy // *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by P. Ramet. – Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1988. – Pp. 38-41; Kalkandjieva D. A Comparative Analysis on Church-State Relations in Eastern Orthodoxy: Concepts, Models, and Principles // *Journal of Church and State* 53, 2011. No 4, pp. 587–614

[7] For more details on this see: Kalkandjieva D. A Comparative Analysis on Church-State Relations, p. 594

[8] Stark W. *The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom*. Vol. 1: *Established Religion.* – London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, p.3

[9] Aldridge A. *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction.* – Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, p. 39

[10] Sugar P. The Historical Role of Religious Institutions in Eastern Europe and Their Place in the Communist Party-State // *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, ed. by P. Ramet. – Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989, pp. 42-59

[11] Ulianovsky V. *Tserkva v Ukrainskii Derzhavi, 1917-1920*, vol. 1: *Doba Ukrainskoi Tsentralnoi Rady*. – Kyiv: Lybid, 1997, pp. 4, 184.

[12] Roccucci A. *Stalin i patriarh: Pravoslavnaya tserkov i sovetskaya vlast, 1917–1958*. – Moscow: Politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 2016, p.18

ranging from the mass repressions of the 1920s–1930s to the propagandistic success of Soviet industrialization and educational system) managed to secure loyalty and obedience of Soviet population. The outcome was clear for the Church, as explained by Roccucci, "The Orthodox Church, which wished not to stay aside from the real life of Soviet citizens, had to interact with a new society willy-nilly… But how can you feet into the system, if you are not ready to become alike and wish to remain loyal to tradition?"[13] This was especially so, as the state had totalitarian aspirations and was ready to tolerate no opposition and no Other. Ever since the Great Terror, no institutional opposition was possible in the Soviet state, while institutional survival necessarily presumed accommodation with the dominant system.

The placement of the challenge faced by the ROC under communism and the survival strategy that it chose within a broader comparative context allows for a more balanced and less value judgment interpretation. Back in the nineteenth century, a prominent Catholic theologian John Henry Newman explained that the Church was not "placed in a void, but in the crowded world".[14] Therefore, the views that it expressed must correspond to various "persons and circumstances and must be thrown into new shapes according to the form of society", in which this Church functions.[15]

Taking all these contexts into account, I suggest examining the strategy chosen by the ROC at two closely related levels. The first is a symbolic and rhetorical level, and the second is a level of practice. They are examined against the historical background of estimations from the Soviet period. The chronological focus of the study is the mid-1950s –1960s, and it spatially covers the dioceses of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC. The argument advanced in this paper is that adaptability became an

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[13] Roccucci A. *Stalin i patriarh: Pravoslavnaya tserkov i sovetskaya vlast, 1917–1958*, p. 19

[14] Newman J. H. *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (The Edition of 1845),* ed. by J. M. Cameron. – London: Penguin Books, 1974. – P. 131.

[15] Ibid., p. 150.

inescapable and viable function in the Church's general strategy of survival in the Soviet state.

Soviet-Period Characterizations of the Church's Adaptability

Church opposition and religious dissenters were primarily concerned with the ideological dimension of adaptability. '*Prisposoblenchestvo* to communism' and/or '*prisposoblenchestvo* to atheist power' were amongst the key points of their critique of the official church. The readiness of the hierarchy to accommodate – to identify themselves as 'Soviet citizens', to appropriate Soviet rhetoric, and to reconsider church social teaching to conform to Soviet sociopolitical circumstances – was condemned as 'conformist', 'opportunistic', and evidence of their subservience.

In 1956, an anonymous witness at the jubilee celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the restoration of the Moscow Patriarchy, for instance, criticized 'young bishops' for that "they could adapt to any circumstances, regardless of the interests of the Church".[16] Not unexpectedly, the Open Letter by Moscow priests Nikolai Eschliman and Gleb Yakunin to Patriarch Aleksii (Simanskii) of November 21, 1965, which soon became known in the West thanks to religious samizdat, also raised the issue of *prisposoblenchestvo.* The disastrous consequences of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign, they claimed, largely resulted from the "connivance of the Highest Church Power, which avoids fulfilling their sacred duties before Christ and the Church and has violated the Apostolic testament and adapted to their own time."[17]

The text by a Kirov priest Boris Talantov, named '*Sergeevshchina* or *prisposoblenchestvo* to atheism (Herod's mold)', contains the most eloquent criticism of *prisposoblenchestvo.* Written in 1967, the text condemns

[16] *Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchykh orhaniv vlady i upravlinnia Ukrainy* (TDAVO), F. 4648, O. 5, File 128, pp. 15-17.

[17] *Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromadskykh obiednan Ukrainy* (TDAHO), F. 1, O. 31, File 2972, p. 7.

prisposoblenchestvo as a "lack of faith, disbelief in Divine power and Divine Providence [that is] incompatible with true Christianity".[18] Talantov was convinced that this strategy drew from "a false differentiation of spiritual needs into religious and socio-political ones. [According to this strategy,] the Church has to satisfy the religious needs of Soviet citizens only, not affecting socio-political, which are to be satisfied with the ideology of the Communist party".[19] He sees *prisposoblenchestvo* as a "mechanical [*i.e.*, artificial] conjuncture of Christian dogmas and rituals with the socio-political views and ideology of the Communist party."[20] The author stresses that this attempt to combine what was incompatible turned the "church government [into an] obedient instrument of atheist power" for the destruction of the Church from within.[21] Talantov clearly contrasts the approach by Metropolitan Sergii and his followers to the 'courageous struggle for faith and truth' by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in socialist Poland.[22] Such contrasting will later become commonplace in the historical literature.[23]

It might sound unexpected, but those who, according to Talantov, benefited from *prisposoblenchestvo* – the communist authorities of the Soviet state – were not satisfied with it either. Stalinist antireligious struggle in the 1920s –1930s was accompanied with a flow of antireligious literature unmasking the Church and its *prisposoblenchestvo*.[24] The earliest attack on *prisposoblenchestvo* from the postwar period is found in a letter

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[18] Talantov B. Sergeevshchina

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid. Also see his other text: Talantov B. Tainoie uchastie Moskovskoi Patriarkhii v borbe KPSS s Provoslavnoi Hristianskoi Tserkovyu (Krizis tserkovnogo upravleniya). Read on February 11, 2019, in electronic format: http://afanasiy.net/novomuchenyk-borys-talantov-nepomynaiucshyi-sovetskuiu-lje-yerarhyiu-proslavlennyi-russkoi-zarubejnoi-cerkoviu

[22] Talantov B. Sergeevshchina

[23] See, for instance, Yelensky V. *Derzhavno-tserkovni vzaiemyny na Ukraini: 1917-1990*. – Kyiv, 1991, p. 39

[24] For more details see: Kurochkin P. K. *Evolutsiya sovremennogo russkogo pravoslaviya*. – Moscow: Mysl, 1971, p. 124

written by Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich, director of the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism, on March 15, 1947. The letter became a clear sign that the state-church compromise brought to life by the Stalinist turn in the policy of September 1943 was coming to an end. In his overview of the publications of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy,* the author primarily criticized their inclination to reconcile religion and science, Christianity and socialism.[25] The approach of the journal editorial, defined as "a conjuncture of 'Christian communism' ('the worst of socialism,' as Lenin said) and clericalism",[26] was seen as an instrument enabling the Church to claim that "there are no borders between the Church and the State in the USSR, while there is a close cooperation between them".[27] This caused serious harm to communist ideology, as the author warned.[28]

This criticism should not be surprising, given the regime's persistent striving for the isolation of the *traditionalist* Church from a *modernized* socialist society.[29] Khrushchev's antireligious campaign of 1958–1964 was just an instance in his grand struggle against backwardness and for communist modernity.[30] Religion was labelled as a remnant and an obstacle to building communism and therefore any attempt by the episcopate and clergy to bridge tradition and modernity/religion and communism / the Church and the state at the level of pronouncements, and the level of practice were regarded as an efficient approach to safeguard the Church.

The Resolution of the Communist Party Central Committee of 7 July 1954, which became the earliest sign of the renewal of antireligious

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[25] *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii* (RGASPI), F. 17, O. 125, File 506, pp. 67, 69

[26] Ibid., p. 74

[27] Ibid., p. 68

[28] Ibid.

[29] For more details see: Shlikhta N. *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv. Radianska Ukraina, seredyna 1940-kh – pochatok 1970-kh rr*. – Kharkiv: Akta, 2011, pp. 39-79

[30] Andrew Stone insightfully contextualizes this campaign in his article: Stone A. B. "Overcoming Peasant Backwardness": The Khrushchev Antireligious Campaign and the Rural Soviet Union // *Russian Review* 67, 2008, No 2, pp. 296-320

struggle, mentioned the danger of the adaptation of the Church to "contemporary circumstances [which was seen as a] means of spreading the religious ideology".[31] This assessment was repeated almost literary as soon as the antireligious campaign was waged in the speech of I. Sivenkov, member of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CROCA), on January 20, 1959. He claimed that by "adapting to contemporary circumstances [the episcopate and clergy did not attempt to become] conscious Soviet citizens, [but rather sought] efficient means to influence the faithful and society."[32] Sivenkov defined priests as "ideological enemies" and reminded Lenin's warning that "the embellishment of religion, disguised under socialism, under science… is the most dangerous abomination and vilest infection."[33] The primary danger personified by the *modernized* Church was seen in that it "strengthens its own authority amongst population"[34] and was capable of exerting certain impact also upon Soviet children and the youth.[35]

These remained the key points in the official assessment of church adaptability through the 1960s–1970s. The conclusion was clear: "This form of the self-defence of religion considerably complicates our struggle and requires from us the elaboration of more perfect and effective countermeasures" (1966).[36]

A somewhat different assessment was offered by the Soviet sociologists of religion since the second half of the 1960s. They abstained from using the term *prisposoblenchestvo* while talked about the *modernization* and *update* of religion and considered this to be a complex process, reluctant for the Church, which was aimed at strengthening/spreading religiosity. Simultaneously, this process, as they claimed, undermined the

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31 Quoted in: Kurochkin P. K. *Evolutsiya*, p. 91
32 TDAHO, F. 1, O. 24, File 5028, p. 120.
33 Ibid, p. 119
34 Ibid, p. 139
35 Ibid, p. 101
36 RGASPI, F. 606, O. 4, File 86, p. 38

Church from within because religion as an ideology and church as an institution were highly conservative.[37]

Very much close to the above are characterizations found in the writings/pronouncements of the episcopate and clergy. They claimed it was impossible for the Church not to adapt within the new sociopolitical environment ("It is one thing to write theoretically … about the needs and demands of theology in the time of social revolutions… and it's a different thing to live under these conditions, experience their effects, and profess Christ within socialist and secularized society"[38]) and broader within the context of secular modernity ("[We can see] Christians' ambition to find place for themselves within a new world and to say something of their own to this world of new ideas and new relations"[39]). Such explanations and justifications can be easily (and actually had been) criticized for their 'opportunism' and 'ideological mimicry'. Estimations would most probably become less straightforward when the same necessity to adapt was voiced by those who are commonly praised for their defence of church rights. Archbishop Luka (Voyno-Yasenetsky)[40] was unequivocal when he said that the Orthodox faithful "is completely alien to materialism which forms the ideological basis of communism".[41] Simultaneously, he had no doubts that they had to be/were loyal citizens and "Soviet people… who appreciate… the great social truth of our… socialist system" (1948).[42] Frs. Eschliman and Yakunin in their Open Letter criticized the strategy of the church hierarchy. They were nonetheless convinced that while the

[37] RGASPI, F. 606, O. 4, File 80, pp. 86-97; Ibid., File 15, pp. 6-84; Kurochkin P. K. *Evolutsiya.* – Esp. pp. 85-125

[38] Rev. Vitalii Borovoi (1966), quoted in: Kurochkin P. K. *Evolutsiya*, p. 86

[39] Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) (1966), quoted in: Kurochkin P. K. *Evolutsiya*, p. 97

[40] See one of the recent pieces on him: Petrov I. The Orthodox Church and the Totalitarian Regime in the Post-War Crimea: A Survival Strategy of Archbishops Joasaph (Zhurmanov) and Luka (Voyno-Yasenetsky) // *Reliģiski-filozofiski raksti XXIII.* Riga, 2017, pp. 106-120.

[41] Luka (the Archbishop of Krym and Simferopol). K miru prizval nas Gospod // *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii* 1. 1948, p. 62

[42] Ibid.

essence of church teaching remained changeless, its concrete forms had to be "constantly updated" in order to always make this teaching "available to humankind".[43] They furthermore drew parallels with Christians' life outside the Soviet borders and, for instance, mentioned the *aggiornamento* reforms by Vatican II.[44]

Symbolic and Rhetorical Means[45]

Ever since the 1927 Proclamation of Metropolitan Sergii, the official church claimed it was Soviet and Orthodox clergy and faithful were loyal Soviet citizens. Such identification was not accepted by the state (the 1943 compromise was the only notable exception) that persistently attempted to build the wall between *modernized* Soviet society and the *traditionalist* Church. The most powerful challenge came with Khrushchev's antireligious campaign when every effort was taken to overcome backwardness, to indoctrinate population with 'materialistic and scientific outlook', and to make religion 'wither away'.

In this context, any attempt by the Church to maintain its Soviet identification and reinforce its linkage with the state and society run against the continual attempts of state authorities to draw a line of separation based on religious principle. The Church used every opportunity to reinforce this linkage: from the inclusion of state holidays and the official biographies of state leaders into the church calendar to the dedication of special religious ceremonies to official celebrations (7 November, Victory Day of 9 May, 1 May, etc.).[46] The official attitude towards any attempt by

[43] TDAHO, F. 1, O. 31, File 2972, pp. 32-33

[44] Ibid, p. 33

[45] The issue raised in this section is also addressed in my articles: Shlikhta N. "Orthodox" and "Soviet": the Identity of Soviet Believers (1940s – early 1970s) // *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* 11. 2015. – Pp. 150-154; Shlikhta N. "Pravoslavnyi" i "sovetskii": k voprosu ob identichnosti veruyushchih sovetskih grazhdan // Antropologicheskii Forum 23. 2014, pp. 92-97

[46] For more details see: Beliakova N. Istoricheskii opyt sovetizatsii russkogo pravoslaviya i ego transfer v strany Vostochnoi Evropy posle Vtoroi mirovoi voiny // *Slavia Orientalis* LXVI. 2017, Nr 1, pp. 118-119.

the Church to establish this symbolic linkage was vividly disclosed by the chairman of the village soviet of Olbyn in Chernihivska Oblast. He reportedly exclaimed when discovered the parish priest's intention to celebrate the liturgy on the date of Stalin's seventieth anniversary: "How reckless you are to link the name of Stalin with the name of Christ!"[47]

The idea voiced by Metropolitan Ioann (Sokolov), head of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC, had significant and 'dangerous' political implications, as was made clear by Grygorii Korchevoi, Republican Plenipotentiary of the CROCA, in his report of January 6, 1954. Striving to affirm the historical linkage between the Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, Metropolitan Ioann found it advisable to widely celebrate the anniversary of the 'reunification' of Ukraine and Russia in all the churches of the Ukrainian Exarchate. He proposed to schedule festive liturgies on the dates of official celebrations and required his episcopate and clergy to prepare special sermons to mark this important event.[48] Korchevoi was negatively disposed towards this undertaking and actually forbade the Church to have a voice in these celebrations.

In no other case, the symbolic linkage of the Church and society so markedly manifested itself as when the pre-eminent feast of Easter coincided with May Day celebrations. Soviet officials were alarmed by the increasing number of people who attended the Easter Mass, notwithstanding that the clergy rescheduled the religious ceremony for a less appropriate time to allow the faithful to participate in the May Day demonstrations.[49] An even more troubling recurrent pattern observed by the local plenipotentiaries of the CROCA and later of the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) was that the participation of the youth and children in festive services similarly increased.[50]

The diocesan administrations seemed to worry little about this coincidence, easily complying with the plenipotentiaries' demands to reschedule

[47] TDAHO, F. 1, O. 24, File 12, p. 176
[48] Ibid., O. 24, File 3532, p. 2
[49] TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 5, File 7, p. 2
[50] TDAHO, F. 1, O. 23, File 5377, p. 15-16; TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 1, File 193, p. 2

services during the Holy Week and on Easter to an inappropriate time.[51] They were confident that the faithful would attend churches regardless of public celebrations. Many bishops even issued special orders requiring the clergy to more thoroughly prepare for festivities and increase security measures to keep order in overcrowded churches.[52]

It is, even more, telling that this coincidence usually gave an impetus to a "more solemn and majestic celebration" of Easter.[53] The episcopate and clergy emphasized in Easter sermons that the coincidence of Easter and May 1st was a sign of the unity of the Church and Soviet people. An extract from the sermon of Fr. Mylkov from Berdiansk was presented in the report of Kozakov, plenipotentiary in Zaporizka Oblast, to illustrate his point that "*tserkovniki* had not missed this opportunity to adapt in order to attract as many people to churches as possible."[54] Fr. Mylkov's sermon contained an insightful passage:

> Brothers and sisters! Orthodox! In a few days we will celebrate Holy Easter, which is linked with May Day celebrations. This close unity of two popular holidays is blessed by God and professes our inseparable linkage with our people. God bless our eternal friendship with our people! Thank Jesus Christ![55]

An examination of episcopal messages and sermons, as well as sermons by priests, sheds light on what might be called the "appropriation of contemporary (Soviet) consciousness" by the Church. Glennys Young insightfully caught the essence of such appropriation. Drawing on her assessment of the 'perfect adaptability' of the Orthodox clergy and laity and thereby questioning a simplistic understanding of *prisposoblenchestvo,* she maintains: "They were the assimilators, not the assimilated".[56]

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[51] TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 1, File 429, pp. 8, 36

[52] Ibid, File 193, p. 32, 123

[53] Ibid, O. 5, File 42, p.125

[54] Ibid, p. 118

[55] Ibid.

[56] Young G. *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village.* – University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, p. 276

'Peace' became one of the main subjects evoked by the episcopate and clergy. This served to demonstrate that the concerns of the Church were identical with the concerns of Soviet society. A quote from Archbishop Palladii's (Kaminsky) sermon on the Holy Saturday of April 17, 1971, is representative. The Archbishop began his sermon establishing symbolic linkage between the Church and 'all the progressive people' since both struggled to maintain peace on Earth. He finished it by calling the Orthodox faithful to "actively participate in efforts towards strengthening peace on Earth through the feat of peaceful labour to the glory of Our Great Motherland".[57]

A more careful reading suggests that there was a more significant objective behind such constant references to peace in sermons and messages. Archbishop Palladii's sermon on the Holy Saturday of 1971 opens with the phrase, "After the Resurrection, Christ greeted the Church with the words: 'Peace unto you all!' Today, the call for peace is voiced in all the parts of the Universe".[58] The Easter sermon of 1968 by Rev. Zheliuk from Zhytomyr is representative of priestly sermons, "Jesus sacrificed Himself in order to serve people and He calls us for such sacrifice. He calls us to follow Him and to struggle for peace among all the people."[59] The delivered message was unambiguous: the Christian Church was presented as the perennial guardian of peace. This explains why plenipotentiaries objected to such reference in liturgical sermons, accusing bishops and priests in *prisposoblenchestvo* and 'allegoric pronouncements'.[60]

Another subject developed by the episcopate and clergy was social morality. Conformity between Christian and communist morality was emphasized: Christian principles were presented as identical with the communist ideas of democracy, 'collective behaviour', and 'collective labour'. Archbishop Luka elaborated on the main points of the interweaving of Christian and communist principles in his study *Science and Religion,*

[57] TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 5, File 246, p. 22.
[58] Ibid. See also: Ibid., O. 1, File 193, p. 16.
[59] Ibid., O. 5, File 88, p. 4.
[60] Ibid., File 189, p. 4, 78.

implying causality between the two. The Archbishop defined the Evangelical Message as the 'forerunner of true humanism' and democracy.[61] Particularly, he elaborated on the following Evangelical principles: love of the people[62] and hence the Evangelical Message of peace (he emphasized that this did not presume "love of the enemies of Our Motherland [..] This is a dangerous and an evidently false accusation");[63] call for the active attitude towards life and diligent labor;[64] distrust of individualism ("Nothing is less in conformity with the Gospel than individualism");[65] and protest against social inequality and the "exploitation of man by man."[66]

The episcopate and clergy emphasized that the Ten Commandments first introduced those patterns of human behaviour that were required by Soviet law.[67] A close proximity of Christian and communist principles – they were claimed to be 'synonymous' in many sermons – was used to justify the relevance of the Church in the Soviet landscape: it was "virtually impossible to oppose [communist] democracy and Christianity".[68] Much attention in the 1954 circular by the CROCA, *Regarding the Nowadays Forms and Methods of the Ideological Impact of the Church on Believers*, was devoted to the sermon of an unnamed Orthodox priest who maintained that Christian ideas served as "the primary sources of all progressive ideas... that penetrated deeply into [contemporary] social and individual consciousness".[69] This priest traced the implementation of Christian principles in the Soviet educational system, public health system, public insurance, public charity, etc.

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[61] Luka, Archbishop (Voyno-Yasenetsky). *Nauka i religiia.* – Moscow: Troitskoie slovo, 2001. – P. 75.

[62] Ibid., p. 77, 89.

[63] Ibid., p. 78, 104.

[64] Ibid., p. 95–96.

[65] Ibid., p. 100.

[66] Ibid.

[67] *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF), F. 6991, O. 2, File 528, p. 34.

[68] *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii* (RGANI), F. 5, O. 16, File 669, pp. 89–90

[69] Ibid, pp. 90–91

The circular allows accessing the clergy's own justification of *prispo-soblenchestvo*. These extracts from the private talks of Orthodox priests (again unnamed) serve as insightful illustrations to the argument advanced in these pages:

> "We have to take into account that atheism has penetrated deeply into human society… If we denounce democratic ideals that are identical with Christian, many believers will either become atheists themselves or will not be able to oppose communism.
> If the Church digresses to reaction, it will only add fuel to [anti-religious struggle]. However, if it follows the path of its people, it will disarm atheism."[70]

'Soviet Priests' and 'Soviet Bishops': From Words to Actions

The rhetorical analysis above offers valuable insights into the social concern of the Church and the stance of the so-called 'Soviet bishops' and 'Soviet priests'. A designation 'Soviet' is not confined to their political identification as loyal Soviet citizens. It also denotes their socio-cultural identity and particularly their assimilation of 'contemporary consciousness', if we recall Young. During the late 1950s–1960s, a generational change took place in the Orthodox Church. Those who were born and educated after 1917 came to serve the Church as priests and bishops.[71] For inborn Soviet citizens, it was impossible not to believe in the Soviet system[72] or furthermore oppose Soviet sociopolitical, socio-cultural, and socio-economic reality. Their confidence in that the Church had to follow the path and speak the language of modern Soviet society was a logical outcome.

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[70] *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii* (RGANI), F. 5, O. 16, File 669, p. 92

[71] Some statistics is provided by Roccucci: Roccucci A. *Stalin i patriarch*, pp. 358-361

[72] Stephen Kotkin elaborates on the "willing suspension of disbelief" by Soviet citizens: Kotkin S. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization.* – Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 227–230, 358

Religious dissenters primarily criticized them for their '*prispo-soblenchestvo* to atheism'. Simultaneously, their activities were of great concern for the CROCA/CRA that urged their plenipotentiaries to "restrict in every way their energy and competence" in extra-liturgical matters.[73]

Since the mid-1950s, the CROCA/CRA repeatedly drew attention to a troubling fact that 'Soviet bishops' and 'Soviet priests' in their overwhelming majority were the graduates of theological schools that suggested the failure of the regime's attempt to turn theological education into the means for the preparation of 'traditionalist rite-performers'. The CROCA information note No 777s to the party Central Committee of December 14, 1955, stated, "It is a widely observed phenomenon that those priests who have graduated from theological schools are the most active amongst the servants of the Church. This is confirmed by many laudable comments on their activities received from bishops, the rectors of parishes, and the faithful."[74]

The number of priests who received institutional theological training was not large.[75] Hence the number of those pastorally and socially active 'Soviet priests', of whom these graduates formed a larger part, was not considerable.

Moreover, still Lenin's explanation of the danger personified by such priests was immediately evoked when Khrushchev's antireligious campaign began, which is quite telling:

> "A corrupted traditionalist priest is much less dangerous exactly for "democracy", than a priest… who rejects traditionalism, is loyal to the state, and democratically minded. It is easy to unmask the former… while it is much more difficult to expel the latter; it is a thousand times harder to unmask him (quoted in Sivenkov's speech on January 20, 1959)."[76]

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[73] TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 1, File 176, p. 80.

[74] RGANI, F. 5, O. 16, File 743, p. 91

[75] Statistics on the graduates of seminaries in the Ukrainian Exarchate is provided in: Shlikhta N. *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv*, p. 201

[76] TDAHO, F. 1, O. 24, File 5028, p. 119

The Deputy Republican Plenipotentiary of the CROCA, Katunin, observed in the late 1950s that young 'Soviet priests' paid more attention to preaching than the older clergy, turning it into an important means of communicating with their flock.[77] An examination of the standard subjects evoked in priestly sermons and their language suggests that 'Soviet priests' talked the language of contemporary society, well understood its concerns, and attempted to assert the relevance of the Evangelical Message even within a 'highly secularized' context. According to the plenipotentiaries' observations, the activities of such priests were especially visible in rural areas, where priests interacted with relatively small communities, and it was feasible for them to establish personal relations with others, besides regular churchgoers. Plenipotentiaries, quite predictably, objected to the appointment of active young priests to rural parishes, primarily anticipating their potential influence on the youth with whom they shared a common educational background and socio-cultural outlook.[78]

The activities of 'Soviet priests' were never confined to church walls and communication with the faithful during the liturgy. They were eager to assume the role of pastors, caring for the spiritual and general welfare of their flock, their families and children. Fr. Zheliuk from a village in Khmelnytska Oblast opposed the official secularization program when he urged his parishioners who worried about the improper behaviour of their children to bring them to the church: "If school cannot fulfil its worthy task [of the upbringing of the youth], we will try to accomplish this ourselves."[79] These priests undertook personal visits to the believers' houses during which they had an opportunity to communicate with their families in an informal and relaxed atmosphere.

Furthermore, they openly acted as counsellors when invited people to visit them in their own apartments with any concern the latter had.[80]

[77] RGANI, F. 5, O. 33, File 90, pp. 12–13.
[78] Ibid., File 91, p. 77; TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 1, File 298, p. 27
[79] RGANI, F. 5, O. 33, File 91, p. 78
[80] Ibid., File 90, p. 13; TDAHO, F. 1, O. 24, File 4927, p. 57

Already those diocesan bishops who survived the antireligious assault of the 1920s–1930s and became bishops under the conditions of the 1943 compromise accepted the rules of the game: the institutional survival of their dioceses and overall of the Church required certain compromise and accommodation on their part. Being a devote believer ("All my joy and all my life is in serving God, because my faith is deep," from a letter to son[81]) and a staunch defender of church rights and generally of religion,[82] Archbishop Luka considered church members to be loyal Soviet citizens. He was a perfect embodiment of this intrinsic duality himself: a person who served both God and science and carried the cross together with the medal as a winner of the Stalin Prize.

Not only did Archbishop Palladii use familiar Soviet formulas in his speeches but he also called Orthodox flock to be "loyal children of our Beloved Motherland" and "help the Motherland with your honest and selfless work to build the happy future of Soviet people."[83] He even expressed his support of the Soviet invasion to Czechoslovakia in 1968, "I consider these events in Czechoslovakia, and particularly the fact that our armed forces together with those of other friendly governments entered Czechoslovakia's territory, as quite normal. Something similar happened in Hungary earlier."[84] This, however, did not secure him in the eyes of Soviet officials who called him a "two-faced figure"[85] and even the "most reactionary bishop".[86]

The reason was that many of his actions as a bishop and as the editor-in-chief of the *Orthodox Herald*[87] – from his attempts to raise the

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[81] Quoted in: Roccucci A. *Stalin i patriarch*, p. 210

[82] His study *Science and religion* was an attempt to demonstrate that religion is compatible with modernity and science and to find ways to influence the Soviet youth.

[83] Palladii (archbishop of Zhytomyr i Ovruch) Vsenorodne sviato // *Pravoslavnyi visnyk* 10. 1970, p. 345

[84] RGANI, F. 5, O. 60, File 24, p. 151

[85] TDAHO, F. 1, O. 24, File 5028, p. 167

[86] GARF, F. 6991, O. 1s, File 1788, p. 15

[87] *The Orthodox Herald* was the official magazine of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC.

educational level of the clergy to his opposing remarks on official anti-religious measures and conflicts with local Soviet officials – contributed to securing religious life in his dioceses.[88]

This approach of approximating the interests of the Church with the interests of the state and society and of *religious* and *Soviet* was seen as natural by the younger generation of the episcopate, even under the conditions of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign. The stance of Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko) (born in 1929), head of the Ukrainian Exarchate since 1966, would be a perfect illustration here. It is noteworthy to provide an estimation of the stance of then Archimandrite Filaret provided by Bibik, plenipotentiary in Kyivska Oblast. In the letter to the Ukrainian republican government, Bibik doubted the wisdom of the appointment of Archimandrite Filaret as the Head of the Chancellery of the Ukrainian Exarchate in February 1961. Bibik raised this issue, even though he was aware that "the idea to dismiss Skoropostizhnyi and replace him with Filaret was put forth not by the Moscow Patriarchate but by the KGB… This decision was in the interests of the weakening of the position of the Church in Ukraine and not vice versa."[89] Bibik argued instead, "Filaret is one of the most harmful priests of Kyiv who constantly violates our Soviet legislation on the cults."[90] To elaborate, he contrasted a "well educated, smart, energetic, and able" 'Soviet priest' Denysenko to Rev. Mykolai Skoropostizhnyi, described as a traditionalist priest, moreover compromised because of his collaboration with the Nazis.[91] Bibik emphasized that acting as the Head of the Chancellery, Archimandrite Filaret seriously complicated the CROCA supervision over the activities of the Exarchate and "considerably strengthened the position of the Kyiv Diocesan Administration".[92]

This controversy marking the early stages in the career of Metropolitan Filaret adds to the comprehension of his activities as the Exarch of

[88] For more details see my article: Shlikhta N. Portraits of Two Bishops Defending Their Dioceses: A Study of the Orthodox Episcopate in Postwar Soviet Ukraine // *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55. 2014, Nos. 3–4, pp. 343–355

[89] TDAHO, F. 1, O. 31, File 1671, p. 152

[90] Ibid, p. 160

[91] Ibid, p. 159

[92] Ibid, p. 160

Ukraine. More generally, it provides insights into the conduct of the younger generation of the episcopate, "well socialized into the Soviet system, enjoying the confidence of authorities and demonstrating their complete loyalty to the Soviet system", of whom he was soon to become a prominent representative.[93] The stance of these hierarchs is liable to different – almost diametrically opposite – assessments, for it was too complex and had too many nuances to be estimated in simplistic terms.

His 'undeniable loyalty' was not questioned: the best proof is that he retained his position as the Exarch of Ukraine till the collapse of the USSR. His reactions were exemplary (he, for example, characterized the Open Letter of Frs. Eschliman and Yakunin as an "anti-Soviet and schismatic"[94] and praised 'wise' reforms introduced by the Archbishops' Council of 1961[95]) and his language was abundant with Soviet official formulas and estimations.

Simultaneously, he used his position to safeguard church life in the Ukrainian Republic and moreover strengthen the position of the *loyal* Orthodox Church there. Because he was "well socialized into the Soviet system" and completely loyal, he could use a bargaining tactic in his relations with authorities quite successfully. The 'Uniate threat' (meaning the activities of the underground Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church after 1946 and the stubborn resistance of formally 'reunited' Greek Catholics to any change in their religious life[96]) and the need to win over Ukrainian Orthodox abroad were the major arguments allowing for this. The examples below are illustrative of his tactics.

Metropolitan Filaret was in the position to persuasively argue for the necessity of the publication of the Ukrainian-language church calendar

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[93] Bociurkiw B. R. The Orthodox Church and the Soviet Regime in the Ukraine, 1953-1971 // *Canadian Slavonic Papers* XIV. 1972, 2, p. 208

[94] TDAHO, F. 1, O. 31, File 2972, p. 1

[95] TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 5, File 278, pp. 102–106. For more details on these reforms see: Shlikhta N. *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzyv.*, pp. 102–106

[96] For more details see: Shlikhta N. *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzyv.* – Pp. 252-366; Shlikhta N. "Ukrainian" as "Non-Orthodox": How Greek Catholics Were "Reunited" with the Russian Orthodox Church // *State, Religion and Church*. 2015, No. 2, pp. 77–95

and prayer books, and of the Ukrainian-language *Orthodox Herald*.[97] In his letter to the CRA Republican Plenipotentiary, Kostiantyn Lytvyn, of March 19, 1967, he described all the undesirable consequences of the closure of the *Orthodox Herald*, becoming especially visible after Vatican II. He paid special attention to clandestine Uniate activities and the growth of the 'autocephalist' Orthodox opposition at home as well as the actions of Ukrainian 'Uniates' and 'schismatics' abroad: "Ukrainian nationalists interpret the closure of the magazine as a sign of the restrictions on the use of Ukrainian language [..] especially given that the church magazine written in Russian (*Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy*) is still published."[98] Drawing from this – the (potential) role of the magazine "in the struggle against the activities of Uniates and Ukrainian nationalists" – the Exarch turned to Lytvyn with a request to support his petition for the renewal of the publication.[99]

Metropolitan Filaret's letter to Lytvyn of November 20, 1973, reveals that his "skilful capitalizing on the regime's hostility to the Uniate Church"[100] simultaneously served to gain immediate benefits and to generally secure the position of the Orthodox Church by accentuating the Orthodox – Soviet linkage. The Metropolitan stressed that the conversion of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy turned them into the loyal subjects of the Socialist Motherland and friends of the Russian nation.[101] This preceded his request to the CRA to increase the circulation of the Ukrainian-language church calendar from 10,000 to 150,000 copies. The publication of this calendar was presented as an important step in the struggle against the Unia and the Ukrainian nationalism. When buying the Orthodox calendar, which listed all official holidays and also contained the biographies of state leaders, he claimed, the 'reunited' faithful openly declared their loyalty to Soviet power. The concluding statement sounds as

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[97] TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 5, File 351, p. 69; Ibid., File 128, p. 156

[98] Ibid, O. 5, File 69, p. 54

[99] Ibid, p. 55

[100] Bociurkiw B. R. The Orthodox Church and the Soviet Regime, p. 209

[101] TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 5, File 351, p. 69

if it was borrowed from official Soviet documents, "This explains why the publication of the Orthodox calendar acquires political significance."[102]

Conclusions

This paper suggests approaching the Soviet-era adaptability of the Russian Orthodox Church within a broader context of social and ecclesiastical history. According to James C. Scott, "an accommodation with the system of domination" is implicit in the everyday resistance of discriminated social groups.[103] An attempt by the Church to adapt within the Soviet context was particularly difficult and ambiguous because of the 'conciliatory approach' to a hostile ideology that it implied. However, a choice by the Church in favour of this approach was hardly unique. It was furthermore predetermined from the outset and quite 'normal' if we recall John Henry Newman: assimilation and absorption of new ideas, language, and values are inescapable when the Church finds itself within altered circumstances.

When examining the survival strategy of the ROC after World War II, one has to necessarily account both for the totalitarian aspirations of the Soviet state and for the fact that church members (clergy and believers) were Soviet citizens, born mainly after 1917. Thereby, scholarly findings on the models of coexistence of society and the state can be fruitfully used in the study of the Church living through Soviet times: from Sheila Fitzpatrick's general observations on the subaltern strategies of Soviet citizens[104] to Stephen Kotkin's[105] and Alexei Yurchak's[106] findings on the use of linguistic formulas and belief/disbelief in what is publicly

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[102] TDAVO, F. 4648, O. 5, File 351, p. 70

[103] Scott J. C. *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance.* – New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 4, 292.

[104] Fitzpatrick Sh. *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization.* – New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. – Esp. pp. 3–18

[105] Kotkin S. *Magnetic Mountain.* – Esp. pp. 215–269

[106] Yurchak A. Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More // *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45. 2003, No 3, p. 480–510

declared. Andrew Stone calls not to forget that "[religious] individuals existed in a discursive and social climate defined largely by Soviet ideology and language".[107] His research furthermore demonstrates that far from simply repeating accepted formulas, they managed to "infuse official discourse with different meanings and thereby create a space where their 'normal' Soviet lives could coexist with religion".[108]

If approached like this, adaptability can be seen as an inescapable and moreover viable function in the Church's general strategy of survival through the Soviet period. This cannot resolve all the complications, however. A case study becomes the most effective research method, as it allows accounting for the context and also examining actors' self-justifications, their declared aims, and actual results gained. Simultaneously, when general conclusions are drawn, distant consequences of employing this strategy by the ROC, which became visible after the collapse of the USSR, cannot be completely disregarded.

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[107] Stone A. B. "Overcoming Peasant Backwardness.", p. 314
[108] Ibid, p. 299