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“Ukrainian” as “Non-Orthodox”: How Greek Catholics Were “Reunited” with the Russian Orthodox Church, 1940s–1960s

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Drawing upon archival, published and oral sources, as well as recent studies on the correlation between religion and nationality, this article argues that the formal “reunification” of the Greek Catholics with the Russian Orthodox Church became a successful “subaltern strategy,” ensuring the survival of the Greek Catholic Church through the Soviet period. The article demonstrates that the “Church within the Church,” which came into existence because of “reunification,” for decades preserved its separate identity within the Russian Orthodox Church. The “Church within the Church” did not oppose the regime’s assimilation policy directly, yet positioned itself as Ukrainian and therefore as non-Orthodox (because non-Russian) and even as non-Soviet. This article examines these specific issues within the wider context of the survival of the Church in the Soviet state.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Church within the Church, national Church, Communist (Soviet) regime, reunification, ecclesiastical nationalism.

Introduction

THE “Uniate problem,” which the Stalinist leadership (with the help of the Moscow Patriarchate) undertook to resolve in whatever way possible immediately upon the conclusion of the Second World War, was far from the only national challenge Moscow faced. Earlier, the existence of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in both its 1921 and 1942 incarnations, as well as of the Ukrainian Autonomous Church headed by Archbishop Alexy (Hromadsky; Russian, Gromadsky), had represented similar challenges; the latter Church based its autonomous rights on the Resolution on the Ukrainian Exarchate of 1921. The religious situation in the Ukrainian Exarchate, which had become significantly more complicated in its national aspect (chiefly during the war years), exerted considerable influence on the

official view of the “Uniate problem” as first and foremost a *national* problem. And, in turn, the perceptions of Greek Catholics as they were integrated into the Orthodox Church — and through it, paradoxically, into Soviet society — influenced the formation of their “subaltern strategy” (as defined by Sheila Fitzpatrick [Fitzpatrick] 2008: 12]), as this experience markedly strengthened the element of nationality in the process of their daily survival.

The liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), the majority of researchers agree, was the only logical option for the Stalinist leadership from the moment of the annexation of the “western territories” in 1939. Both historical tradition and the anti-Vatican orientation of the USSR’s foreign policy after the Second World War supported such a solution to the “Uniate problem.” The Greek Catholic Church’s unbreakable bond — in the eyes not only of the region’s population but also of the state leadership — with Ukrainian nationalism, its image as what Dimitry Pospelovsky called the “cradle” of Ukrainian nationalism (Pospelovsky 1984: 2:306) or, in Serhy Yekelchuk’s term, its “cornerstone” (Iekel’chuk [Yekelchuk] 2008: 95), became the main argument in favor of the final liquidation of the UGCC. The French scholar Danielle Hervieu-Léger sees religion as a “chain of memory,” that is, as a form of collective memory that protects the community from historical amnesia (Hervieu-Léger 2000). Consideration of her proposition makes clear why the struggle with “nationalistic” versions of historical memory in Galicia necessitated the liquidation of the UGCC.

Indeed, the decision to liquidate the UGCC through its “reunification” with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) also seemed completely logical and historically grounded, and evoked fewer objections and misunderstandings in the post-1943 atmosphere of state-church rapprochement than it would have in any other circumstances. The ultimate goal of the campaign for the “reunification” and “Orthodoxization” of the Greek Catholics was by no means limited to their religious assimilation. At issue was nothing less than the “formation [*vykhovannia*] of Galician citizens of *Soviet* Ukraine, an inalienable part of the Soviet Union” (Iekel’chuk [Yekelchuk] 2008: 99). Many scholars agree that the regime took for granted the equivalence of *Orthodox — Russian — Soviet*, as far as the implementation of Soviet social, national and religious policy in Western Ukraine was concerned. (See, for example, Markus 1976: 121; Bociurkiw 1972: 192–93.)

The Moscow Patriarchate, despite its own interests and aspirations, also regarded “Uniatism” (*uniia*)¹ and its liquidation primarily

1. The term *uniia* (literally “union”), translated here as Uniatism, signifies the Union of Brest (1596), a fusion of Orthodox praxis with Catholic doctrine and acknowledgment of papal supremacy, and the resulting Uniate Church (later the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church). The tsarist regime and the Russian Orthodox Church opposed

in national-political, rather than religious, terms. Even twenty years after the official liquidation of the UGCC, Archbishop of Tallinn and Estonia Alexy (Ridiger), the executive secretary of the Moscow Patriarchate, emphasized the “national-political significance” of the struggle with “Uniatism” in Western Ukraine. In an official speech given on April 23, 1966, at the celebration in Lviv of the twentieth anniversary of the Council of Lviv, he concluded his detailed review of the “church history of Southwestern Rus” from the national angle with a brief remark about the additional “religious-theological aspect” of this age-old struggle (TsDAVO, f. 4648, op. 5, d. 17, ll. 104–5).

One can only speculate as to how much the Church authorities’ own views determined this approach to the “Uniate problem” and “reunification” and to what extent it was dictated by the regime. Considerations of their own survival certainly inclined Church officials to use the terminology of official Soviet speech, which became especially important for the Church during Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Here it is necessary to set out an important methodological qualification. Usage of the term “reunification” must not be limited chronologically, for example, to the second half of the 1940s. The term is used in this article not only to signify the *fact* of “reunion” (that is, the Lviv Council of March 8–10, 1946), but also to mean the lengthy *process* of turning “former Uniates” into “Orthodox” and “Soviets.” In documents from the Council (*Soviet*) for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and later the Council (*Soviet*) for Religious Affairs, the terms “reunification” (meaning the fact of the liquidation of the UGCC) and “Orthodoxization” (the process of the requisite transformation of the religious life of those “reunited”) were not always consistently applied, but nonetheless a distinction was made. Church documentation differentiated these terms more consistently.²

The “reunited,” for their part, also used both terms. The phrase “to sign [*podpisat*] (a pledge of reunification with — translator)] Orthodoxy” and the derivative “signed [*podpisnoi*] priest were used to un-

Uniatism as a tool of Polish Catholic encroachment. The Soviets, too, perceived the Uniate Church as a threat, hence the negative connotation of “Uniate” in the Soviet era. Especially after the post-Soviet revival of the Ukrainian and other Eastern European Greek Catholic churches, the term “Uniatism” gained renewed negative attention as a bone of contention in Catholic-Orthodox relations. — Translator

2. The terms “Orthodoxization” and “Orthodox churching” were used in Church documentation after 1946 to signify the process of the “introduction of former Uniates into the fold of Orthodox church life.” See, for example, the Synodal resolution of July 8, 1947 (GARF, f. 6991, op. 2, d. 59a, ll. 57–58).

derscore the exclusively formal nature of the oath of allegiance to the Moscow Patriarchate. At the same time, the official term “reunification” was also used, especially when it was necessary to stress their own loyalty (in contrast to the “recalcitrant Uniates”) and thereby to assert their distance from the Greek Catholics. Galicians’ use of the term “reunification” was a prime example of discursive strategies that, according to Andrew Stone, “allowed religious citizens to infuse official discourse with different meanings and thereby create a space where their ‘normal’ Soviet lives could coexist with religion” (Stone 2008: 299).

All of this explains why this article’s written primary sources are by no means confined to those from the 1940s. In the early 1970s (a grand celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Lviv Council took place in 1971) the “reunification” was discussed as an *ongoing process* in both Moscow and Kyiv, and, with a quite different subtext, in Western Ukraine.

The Lviv Council resulted in the “self-liquidation” of the UGCC. The response of the Greek Catholic believers and clergy was not uniform. Some chose the path of open dissent, refusing “to return to our fathers’ holy faith and the Russian Orthodox Church,” in the formula of the Lviv Council (See Serhiichuk 2001: 109). The image of the “Uniate nationalistic anti-Soviet underground” applied for long decades to those who decided to go into the catacombs so as to maintain “the purity of the true faith” and their fidelity to the Holy See. But the majority (3,289 parishes and 1,296 priests, according to official statistics from the Council for the Affairs of the ROC [GARF, f. 6991, op. 2, d. 256, ll. 1–2]) chose a different way, a path that, despite its adherents’ arguments and justifications, members of the “catacomb” church, as well as Ukrainian national historiography, label as the path “of compromise and betrayal.”

By resisting the temptation to squeeze reality, using well-known historiographical clichés, into the convenient dichotomy of opposition-collaboration, I will be able to trace how formal “reunification” became an effective “subaltern strategy” that secured the survival of the Greek Catholic Church in the Soviet period. To investigate the survival strategies of Ukrainian Greek Catholics after the forcible liquidation of their Church I have used both written materials (unpublished and published letters, sermons, internal Church documents, and documents of the Soviet authorities) and oral sources. The latter were collected through a large-scale oral history project, “An Image of the Strength of the Spirit: The Living History of the Underground UGCC (Obraz syly dukhu: zhyva istoriia pidpillia UGKTs),” carried out by the Institute of Church History (Lviv). From 1992 to 2013, the institute’s researchers conducted approximately 2,200 interviews, which can be used for the study of

both the “catacomb” existence of Greek Catholics and the life of “reunited” eparchies in the Soviet era. For the present investigation, 50 interviews were selected, of which 17 are cited in these pages. The following criteria were applied in the selection of the interviews:

1. Age: Respondents were chosen who were old enough during the Council of Lviv to be aware of it. The oldest was born in 1906, the youngest in 1931. There are two exceptions, respondents born in 1940 and 1941, whose recollections were not used to reconstruct the situation in the 1940s.
2. The territorial principle: Respondents represent all the regions of Western Ukraine; one respondent was a Greek Catholic priest from Transcarpathia
3. Interviews given by both clergy (“reunified” and “underground”) and laity were analyzed.

To be sure, these interviews are just as subject to criticism as are all other oral history sources. But with the proper critical reading and comparison with written evidence, they nevertheless permit the reconstruction of Galicians’ perceptions of the Orthodoxy imposed upon them and their attempts to preserve their religious and national distinctiveness after 1946.

The present investigation shows that “reunification” in the territory of Western Ukraine resulted in the formation of a distinctive “Church within the Church,”³ which retained its particular religious, cultural and national features while remaining for decades a foreign body within the structure of the ROC. The members of the “Church within the Church” (believers, clergy and the episcopate) were bound closely together by the shared recognition of their distinctiveness from the ROC, their different religious and national identities and the desire to survive in a state that was not going to tolerate their otherness, regardless of their sincerity and their motives for converting to Orthodoxy.

Moreover, with the use of the concepts of Hervieu-Léger (who, in addition to the definition of religion as a form of collective memory, proposes a view of religion as a means of uniting a specific community — a *communal chain* [Hervieu-Léger 2000]), it becomes clear that at a fundamental level the choice of the “Church within the Church” was not very different from the choice of the “catacomb” UGCC. Both options were local projects for the survival of the Church and became a serious obstacle to the realization of Moscow’s assimilationist plans

3. For the original concept of a “Church within the Church,” see Markus 1989: 153, and Markus 1976: 122–23.

concerning the Western Ukrainians. And while the behavior of the “catacomb” Church embodied “provocative nationalism” (the *nationalist defiant* in Sabrina Ramet’s terminology [Ramet 1988: 18]) in almost pure form, the national element became definitive in the identity of the “Church within the Church” as well.

The problem of the interrelationship between the religious and the national, the church and nationality, and religion and nationalism has a long and complex history in the works of theologians, historians and sociologists. I shall present the observations of those researchers whose projects are important in their methodological and theoretical aspects for the question under consideration here.

First, in the Soviet state, which declared itself to be atheist and international, “[r]eligion and nationalism were compelled to withdraw into the margins of communist society where they found each other as natural allies” (Luukkanen 1994: 29). Second, in conditions of the complete “absence of other autonomous ethnic institutions, a national Church becomes a haven for national traditions and culture,” which explains the striving of “the imperial government and the imperial Church (. . .) to break up the religio-ethnic symbiosis by a variety of means” (Bociurkiw 1990: 152).

Third, the national element automatically lends significant strength to the oppositional role of a church in a Communist state. The fusion of religion and national identity turns a society or social group into an entity with great powers of resistance against the policies of any repressive regime (Ramet 1989: 4). Finally, it is the historical tradition in particular that legitimizes the possible oppositional role of each specific national church in relation to a Communist regime (Sugar 1989: 58).

Havryil Kostelnyk’s Concept of “Reunification”

Natalia Madei argues that through “reunification” with the ROC the leader of the “Initiative Group for the Reunification of the Greek Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church,” Havryil Kostelnyk (Gavriil Kostel’nik), “strove to realize his conception of the Greek Catholic Church, adapting it to the conditions of the totalitarian regime” (Madei 2001: 11). This evaluation of Kostelnyk’s views stands alone in contemporary historiography. Yet, earlier, the first Orthodox bishop of Lviv and Ternopil’, Makary (Oksiuk), whose assignment was to assist the Initiative Group in its “politically important” undertaking, had accused Kostelnyk of “autonomist” tendencies and the desire to use “reunification” with the ROC as some sort of “nationalistic experiment,” such as, for exam-

ple, “the *polikarpovshchyna*⁴ in Volhynia and the *lypkivshchyna*⁵ (original Ukrainian terms) in Ukraine” (quoted from Lysenko 1998: 170–71).

In an official speech to the Lviv Council, entitled “On the Reasons for Reunion of the Greek Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church,” Kostelnyk presented the main points of his understanding of “reunification.” He stressed the necessity of preserving the Church as an institution for the sake of meeting the religious needs of Western Ukrainians and described in detail his vision of religious life after “reunion.” Kostelnyk expressed his conviction that any changes in Greek Catholic rites, customs and religious practices should be introduced “so wisely and carefully, so as not to turn the people away from the Church nor stifle their religious spirit” (Kostel’nyk 1987: 21). He asserted that the “reunified” eparchies should retain their distinctive qualities as part of the ROC, clearly maintaining the differences between the “All-Russian [Vserus’ka] Church” and the “Western Ukrainian Church” (Kostel’nyk 1987: 22). Kostelnyk specifically emphasized that those who had been “reunited” should preserve their national character, opposing any attempts at Russification by Moscow. He concluded his speech with an eloquent statement: “We are in Ukraine and are Ukrainians, and no one shall take this away from us or from our Church” (Kostel’nyk 1987: 22).

Several factors shaped the firm conviction of the leader of the Initiative Group that those who were “reunified” should retain their separate identity and not merge into a single body of the Orthodox Church. The image of the ROC as a “conservative,” “traditionalist” church that was not keeping up with the demands of the time exerted significant influence on him. As early as his first meeting with Patriarch Alexy (Simansky) on December 23, 1944, Kostelnyk had put forward the following: “It is necessary to modernize the [Orthodox] religion, in the sense that in its current state one cannot present it to cultured people. It is fit for the ignorant masses” (Serhiichuk 2006: 1:290).

But one must look to the national sphere for the main reason that the “reunification” “à la Kostelnyk” did not at all meet the expectations of the Stalinist and patriarchal leadership. In his speech to the Lviv Council, Kostelnyk referred to the apprehensions spread among Galicians that “our unity with the Russian Orthodox Church means

4. The term *polikarpovshchyna* refers to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, which was active during the Second World War under the leadership of Polikarp (Sikor-sky), the archbishop of Kovel and Lutsk.
5. The term *lypkivshchyna* refers to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, with Vasyly Lypkivsky (Vasil Lipkovsky) at its head, which was proclaimed in October 1921 and tolerated by the Bolshevik authorities up to 1930.

the Russification of our Western Ukrainian Church” (Kostel’nyk 1987: 22). He expressed his hope that the ROC would respect their “national principles” and “national feelings” and asserted that there was not nor could there be any equivalence between “conversion to Orthodoxy” and “conversion to Russian Orthodoxy.” Kostelnyk consistently conveyed this idea in his public speeches and writings and in private conversations with the relevant “comrades.”

Already during his trip to Moscow in December 1944, Kostelnyk had encapsulated the situation thus: “If directions are issued to Russify the Church (. . .) In this case the Orthodox Church in Western Ukraine will not succeed” (Serhiichuk 2006: 1:287). In a conversation on April 15, 1945 (virtually immediately after the mass arrests of the UGCC hierarchy) with the head of an NKGB⁶ task force, Sergey Karin, who was responsible for the “reunifying” action, Kostelnyk, skillfully playing on the regime’s fears, emphasized the issue as follows:

The most important [question] is with which Orthodox Church we are being reunited — the Ukrainian or the Russian. Consider that in our circumstances, this is a very serious problem. We are after all a Ukrainian church and we must be reunited with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; otherwise, people will think that we have become Muscovites, and the Banderites⁷ will take advantage of this circumstance in particular (Serhiichuk 2006: 1:541–42).

A paper dated August 3, 1945, identified the fear of Russification, “besides faith in the papacy, as the greatest obstacle, a complication for our plan” (Serhiichuk 2006: 2:136). Debunking these fears and simultaneously using their possible realization to bring his ideas to his intended audience, Kostelnyk explained:

I persuade priests, telling them that their anxiety is unfounded, for Ukraine is a state in which the official language is Ukrainian, all our state employees are Ukrainians, and the Ukrainian language is used in

6. *Narodnyi komissariat gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*, or the People’s Commissariat for State Security. Russia’s secret police during 1941 and 1943–46. — The editors.

7. The Banderites (in Ukrainian *Banderivtsi*, in Russian *Banderovtsy*) were followers of the Ukrainian nationalist activist Stepan Bandera and were one faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The Banderite faction played a significant role in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in the 1940s, which continued to fight the Soviets into the 1950s. The Soviets also applied the term to Ukrainian nationalism in general. — Translator.

the schools, which means that in the Church, too, the same course must be followed (Serhiichuk 2006: 2:137).

Moreover, when considering the prospects of a national church, Kostelnyk did not confine himself to the “reunited” eparchies. He considered the merger with Orthodoxy, as required by the regime, to be a step with definite, positive potential. He presented this union as the restoration of Ukrainians’ religious unity, and even as the rebirth of a *Ukrainian national church*. “When the whole Ukrainian people has been joined together in a single state organism, then its Church, too, should be fused into one Church” (Serhiichuk 2001: 62). In fact, the first official communication from the Initiative Group to the Soviet government on May 28, 1945, already expressed this vision of the future.

The preservation of ritual traditions and customs and of everyday religious practices in the “reunified” parishes was an important condition of “reunification” and at the same time an obstacle on the path to possible Russification, in Kostelnyk’s view. “One cannot change sacred religious sensibilities abruptly, without re-education, which requires a certain period of time and a special approach,” Kostelnyk was already asserting in his earliest “pro-reunification” paper, dated April 18, 1945 (Serhiichuk 2006: 1:551). In a letter to Patriarch Alexy dated October 3, 1945, he stressed, “Changes in ritual must be realized slowly, over decades. Therefore, our Galician Church must still hold on to its significant distinctiveness for decades, that is to say, its autonomy in the Orthodox All-Russian Church (. . .) Orthodoxy (. . .) will be at first only an external veneer” (Serhiichuk 2006: 2:286–87).

Havryil Kostelnyk’s concept of “reunification,” especially with his emphasis on the national differences between those being “reunified” and the Moscow Patriarchate, seemed too unrealistic, considering the official understanding of “reunification” as the very prerequisite for national assimilation and the Sovietization of the region’s population. Yet the life of the “reunified” eparchies after 1946 did demonstrate their strong resistance to the authorities’ assimilation policy, which permitted them to remain a “Church within the Church” over a period of decades.

It is possible to define the self-perception of Ukrainian Greek Catholics with the help of the category “ecclesiastical nationalism,” proposed by Sabrina Ramet. “Ecclesiastical nationalism” proceeds from “a conviction that if the church is deeply rooted in the national ethos, then the national ethos, the national culture, cannot survive without the church. (. . .) [I]f the nation is identified with the religion, then the nation becomes infused with transcendent value and conversion becomes tantamount to assimilation” (Ramet 1988: 8). “[The Church and her clergy] are representatives of the people and must act in the name of the peo-

ple,” declared Kostelnyk on December 22, 1944, during his trip to Moscow (Serhiichuk 2006: 1:288). As Greek Catholic priest Petro Dutchak, born in 1926, noted, “Our Church has never been separated from the national state” (AIITs, P-1-1-385, Interview with Fr. Petro Dutchak: 25).

Rogers Brubaker designates this type of interrelation between religion and the nation as their “intertwining.” Moreover, religion “supplies myths, metaphors and symbols that are central to the discursive or iconic representation of the nation” and answers the central question “Who are we?” (Brubaker 2011: 11–12). Clearly, in such a situation both passive and open opposition to forcible “reunification” is perceived in national terms and draws strength from this identification. Moreover numerous precedents in history bear this out, as Ricarda Vulpius, for example, demonstrates (Vul’pius [Vulpius] 2011: 105–7).

The Image of the Russian Orthodox Church

The Galicians’ negative image of the ROC became a major reason that the prospects for “reunification” and “Orthodoxization” remained dubious from the very beginning, despite the devotion of a significant portion of the Greek Catholic clergy to the Eastern rite. Because of their “ecclesiastical nationalism,” Galicians could not regard the ROC other than as a *Russian* church and the willing agent of Moscow’s Russification policy.

Western Ukrainians perceived the ROC first and foremost as the “Muscovite Church,” and they plainly associated “Russian” with “foreign.” The interviews conducted for the project “An Image of the Strength of the Spirit: The Living History of the Underground UGCC” contain the following explanations for the impossibility of accepting Orthodoxy: “The Muscovite Orthodox Church is absolutely harmful for the Ukrainian people and (. . .) it always brought them great losses” (AIITs, P-1-1-304, Interview with Fr. Iosyf Kladochnyi: 29). Conversion to Orthodoxy was seen as a step toward inexorable, thorough Russification. Galicians identified the Orthodox Church completely with the regime in Moscow, whose policy regarding subject peoples, they were sure, always amounted to attempts to Russify and completely assimilate them. “The Russian Orthodox Church is the enemy of all the subjugated peoples (. . .) It went everywhere behind the soldiers, behind the enslavers, and right away planted its imperial [faith]” (AIITs, P-1-1-780, Interview with Ms. Lidiia Zelenchuk-Lopatyn’ska: 35). “Stalin built up Orthodoxy (as did Peter I) (. . .) in order to thrust his Russian Orthodox faith on our Ukraine” (AIITs, P-1-1-419, Interview with Bishop Sofron Dmyterko: 22).

The following quotation comes from an anonymous letter to the editorial staff of the *Orthodox Herald* (Pravoslavnyi vestnik), the official

organ of the Ukrainian Exarchate. Written in 1971, the letter shows that the Galicians' relationship to the *Russian Church* changed little over the course of decades after formal "reunification": "Why on earth do you so (. . .) want to whitewash, to sanctify Russian Orthodoxy, or, more precisely, Muscovite Orthodoxy, to convince us believers of its holiness and infallibility?" (TsDAVO, f. 4648, op. 5, d. 278, l. 181).

Western Ukrainians regarded the ROC not simply as an agent of Moscow's Russification policy — their association of the ROC with the regime went even deeper. The ROC was "a Bolshevik/state-run/state-owned" Church, utterly dependent on the atheistic regime (as earlier it had been on the imperial authorities) and controlled by it. The anonymous letter to the editorial staff of the *Orthodox Herald* contains an additional revealing passage: "The present situation of Russian Orthodoxy and the ROC is so sad and pitiable. The ROC (. . .) leads a wretched existence under the authority and guardianship of godless Communism and materialism, cut off and driven away from its own people" (TsDAVO, f. 4648, op. 5, d. 278, l. 183). The Russian Orthodox "Bolshevik Church" "was blatantly, famously in the service of the state apparatus" (AIITs, P-1-1-419, Interview with Bishop Sofron Dmyterko: 5; P-1-1-192, Interview with Fr. Ivan Kubai: 39).

The Greek Catholic bishop Mykhailo Sabryha (Mikhail Sabriga; born 1940), analyzing the traditions of the UGCC and the ROC from the vantage point of historical experience, and setting out their relations to the Soviet authorities and, correspondingly, the regime's relationship to the Churches, explains:

We see, when we compare our Greek Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church, that every regime has had power over the Orthodox Church, the ability to control the Church. (. . .) While the Orthodox Church has the characteristic trait of submitting to everything, the Catholic Church has its own First Hierarch. (. . .) The world persecutes what it cannot control. It hates what lies beyond its dictates (AIITs, P-1-1-321, Interview with Bishop Mykhailo Sabryha: 49).

Because the ROC was a "Bolshevik/state-run/state-owned" church, completely dependent on atheist officials and itself carrying out the orders of the godless regime, the canonicity of the ordinations of Orthodox clergy and bishops was suspect. "It was not certain, whether [an Orthodox priest] had the proper ordination. This was because the Bolsheviks "destroyed" the entire hierarchy at the start, and thereafter all [the bishops] were impostors" (AIITs, P-1-1-337, Interview with Fr. Mykola Markevych, March 17, 1993, Mykolaiv: 60).

The proximity of the ROC to the Soviet regime established an indissoluble connection not only between "Orthodox" and "Russian," but

also between “Orthodox” and “Soviet” or “Communist.” “And since [they were] Orthodox, they were Communists” (AIITs, P-1-1-687, Interview with Fr. Myron Beskyd: 6). Paradoxically, all those involved in the “reunifying” action agreed that “to be Orthodox” meant “to be Soviet,” although the reasons for that view and the very understanding of the equivalence differed considerably.

For the ROC, the link between “Orthodox” and “Soviet” became the most important element in the formation of the “correct” identity, securing the Church’s existence in the Soviet space. (For more details on the survival strategy of the ROC in the Soviet state, see Shlikhta 2011: 107–18.) For the Soviet leadership, the acknowledgment of the connection between “Orthodox” and “Soviet” was a prerequisite for the desired assimilation of Western Ukrainians. For the Galicians themselves, recognition of the link between “Orthodox” and “Soviet” signified the problematic nature of sincere conversion to Orthodoxy and, consequently, of integration into Soviet society. As did the Soviet state authorities, so too the Galicians considered “Orthodoxization” as a step toward the complete destruction of the Church in the region, toward their utter dissolution within atheistic “Russo-Soviet” society (GARF, f. 6991, op. 1c, d. 222, l. 4; TsDAVO, f. 4648, op. 1, d. 436, l. 409; Serhiichuk 2006: 1:127–30).

The rejection of the ROC was also evident in the contrast Kostelnyk highlighted further between “modernity” and “traditionalism,” and between “real faith” and “ritualism” (the “superficial piety” of the Russian Orthodox). The ROC was perceived as a church “of people of little culture,” mainly peasants, whose pastors had only a superficial theological education (GARF, f. 6991, op. 2, d. 256, l. 3; AIITs, P-1-1-294, Interview with Fr. Izydor Butkovs’kyi: 58; P-1-1-55, Interview with Anna Svirs’ka: 56). Greek Catholics were convinced that the Russian Orthodox believers did not even know the true essence of religion: “They know how to make the sign of the cross; they know nothing else” (AIITs, P-1-1-97, Interview with Fr. Mykhailo Datsyshyn: 9).

The Identity and Daily Survival of the “Church within the Church”

“Reunification” was unacceptable to the Galicians, for it meant incorporation into a Church they scornfully considered “backward” and “thoroughly compromised in the eyes of the people” through its cooperation with the godless regime; they also feared the Russian Church as an agent of Russification. Galicians rejected “reunification” because it was imposed by a regime hostile to them in both national and ideological matters, and because it served the regime’s interests. In light

of the inextricable connection between “Orthodox” and “Soviet,” the repudiation of Orthodox identity called into question Galicians’ political loyalty, in their own eyes as well as the eyes of the Soviet leaders.

Glennys Young’s proposed category of “sectarian” rather than “church” identity helps to designate more correctly the self-perception of members of the UGCC, an identity that stems from the Church’s historical heritage. In analyzing Orthodox self-perception and Orthodox believers’ relationship to the Bolshevik regime, Young clearly differentiates them from an all-encompassing “sectarian” identity. Because of the “ritualism” characteristic of the Orthodox Church, believers’ actions were typically considered more important than their inner experiences. Therefore, “it was actually easier to compartmentalize one’s attachment to Russian Orthodoxy [leaving room for other loyalties] (. . .) than one’s attachment to sectarian belief” (Young 1997: 91). In the case of the Greek Catholics, this compartmentalization did not work, and therefore it was much more difficult for them than for the Orthodox to resolve the conflict between Christian faith and loyalty to a regime of an explicitly anti-religious character. A Greek Catholic priest, Fr. Myron Beskyd (born 1925), notes that Soviet identity had a definite chance to be accepted by Western Ukrainians because of the attractiveness to many of the Soviet social project, but only in conjunction with the rejection of atheism as state ideology: “I more than once thought to myself that if Communism, the idea of Communism would strike out from its ideology its negative attitude toward religion (. . .) this antireligious ideology (. . .) then perhaps they would have won over the entire people (. . .) This is an exceptionally God-fearing people” (AIITs, P-1-1-687, Interview with Fr. Myron Beskyd: 47). In contrast to the Orthodox understanding, Galicians rejected the reconciliation of Christian and Communist loyalties as impossible, for “it is impossible to serve two gods,” especially when each one demands complete and unconditional allegiance (AIITs, P-1-1-231, Interview with Modest Radoms’kyi: 12; P-1-1-1141, Interview with Ms. Mariia Lazar: 20).

The “catacomb” church offered one of the alternatives. Those who went underground decided that, come what may, they would preserve their religious-national identity by rejecting the identities imposed on them — Orthodox and Soviet. They thereby consciously chose exclusion from Soviet society and persecution for “nationalistic anti-Soviet” activity. A clean conscience and the aura of martyrdom for the faith were in this case compensation of a sort.

The choice of the “Church within the Church” was another alternative. Outwardly declaring their Orthodox and Soviet loyalties, these

Galicians constructed a new, or, as defined by David Thompson, a temporary, *lived* identity (Thompson 2002, used with the author's kind permission), which helped to protect their true religious and national distinctiveness. This identity stood in opposition to the imposed identities and rested upon a clear distinction between "us" and "them." "They" were "Orthodox" in the ideological, national, and cultural senses Galicians imparted to that term. "We" consisted of the priests who purely formally "subscribed" to Orthodoxy, and their parishioners, who continued to attend "their own" churches, even if these churches were formally declared to be Orthodox.

Such concepts as "our," "our own," "true," "Galician" and "Ukrainian," as well as the sense of internal communal unity strengthened by external threats became the central elements in the identity of the "Church within the Church." "People went to church because it was their church. It's our church. We built it" (AIITs, P-1-1-218, Interview with Ms. Liubomyra Venhrynovych: 56). "People were saying: 'But where would we go? This is our own, our native Church. We have no other, so where would we go?'" (AIITs, P-1-1-739, Interview with Fr. Illia Ohurok: 16). The "ecclesiastical nationalism" of those who had been "reunified" showed itself in the contrast between "our" *Ukrainian* Church and "their" *Orthodox* Church. "Will the Ukrainian Church have exactly the same rights as the Orthodox Church?" asked believers in Stanislav Oblast as early as March 1945, according to an official representing the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 1638, l. 26). In "their own" Church, those who were "reunified" kept "the true faith," which was contrasted to the "superficial piety" of the Orthodox, and they continued to observe "our Galician" rites. "The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has always been, is, and will remain a national Church, preserving our native rite, which serves outwardly as a mirror and manifestation of the true faith of our Ukrainian people" (AIITs, P-1-1-192, Interview with Fr. Ivan Kubai: 37).

The need for a more or less safe, legal "life within the Church" was an important factor in making the "Church within the Church" the most practical form of Galician religious life after the forcible liquidation of the UGCC. Believers were not very disturbed that their "own" priests, who had served in the parishes for decades before the Lviv Council, "subscribed" to Orthodoxy. What did concern them was the preservation of local religious practices. First and foremost, this involved the traditional performance of rites and the retention of popular local customs and religious holidays. The effort also entailed maintaining the accustomed appearance of churches and the clergy.

Kostelnyk, in a paper dated August 3, 1945, documented in detail all the concessions the authorities had to make in order to secure the conversion of Ukrainians to Orthodoxy:

A religious struggle with the people will be very difficult: it will be necessary to fight over every icon, over every custom, even the least of them. Even our rites and customs that go against the teaching and liturgy of the Orthodox Church (for example, the Sacred Heart of Christ), it will be necessary to do away with them only slowly. (. . .) And as for our Church customs that are in harmony with the teaching and liturgy of the Orthodox Church, it would be foolish to eradicate them, since they encourage piety among the people (Serhiichuk 2006: 2:139).

The people's conservatism ensured the preservation of the "Church within the Church" as a formal part of the ROC.

Vlad Naumescu argues that the focus on praxis — a defining characteristic of a liturgical church — facilitated the conversion of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy for the simple reason that the ritual difference between the two churches was insignificant (Naumescu 2008: 15). But then again, precisely this emphasis on praxis excluded the possibility of thorough, genuine incorporation into the ROC. The retention of local religious practices, from the Greek Catholic tradition of the blessing of Easter cakes (*pasky*) to other customs beloved by the people, including spring songs sung at Easter (*haiivky*), May services in honor of the Virgin Mary (*maivky*), Christmas carols (*koliady*) and the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Christ, was seen as a prerequisite for "reunification." Forced changes to traditional practices would distance believers from the Orthodox Church and sow doubt whether it was right to remain within her; and this would be happening at a time when the "nationalistic," "harmful and malevolent agitation of the Uniatizers" was continuing, stated the bishops of "reunified" eparchies in a report dated March 23, 1959, to Patriarch Alexy to explain their own "passivity" in the matter of "Orthodoxization" (Krivova 2010: 2:244).

As early as 1947 Havryil Kostelnyk explained how important the viability of the "catacomb" church was for the preservation of the "reunified" eparchies as a "Church within the Church": "Strange though it may seem, our opposition group is useful to us, for the Soviet authorities work with us just as long as this opposition exists. Were it not for the opposition, the authorities would have ceased long ago to have any regard for us" (TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, d. 3613, l. 26). The "reunified" Church highlighted the "anti-Soviet nationalistic" activity of

the “recalcitrant Uniates” at every suitable opportunity; they skillfully contrasted it — using official clichés — to the expressly loyal “reunified” believers. Hryhorii Zakaliak, archbishop of Mukachiv (Mukachevo) and Uzhhorod, in his message on the twentieth anniversary of the “reunification,” employed official discourse and the stereotypical image of the enemy (“Uniates-nationalists”): “Orthodoxy for centuries has been the living bond, often the strongest one, that has bound together the triune Russian people. (. . .) Therefore, from a historical perspective it is clear that the enemies of Rus saw in Orthodoxy not so much a religious as a national-political force” (TsDAVO, f. 4648, op. 5, d. 17, ll. 74–75). The bishop’s ultimate objective was to defend the religious needs and local particularities of the “reunified” parishioners, whom he clearly contrasted with these enemies.

Only “our own” priests could serve in the Galicians’ “own” churches. “Give us an Orthodox priest, but only if he does not wear a beard and is always clean-shaven.” This was the promise “reunified” believers made to Archbishop Makary (Oksyuk), who wanted to appoint an Orthodox priest to their parish in 1948 (TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 5667, l. 74). The “Church within the Church” became a unique community, closed to “others” — Russian Orthodox “*popyky*.”⁸ The designation “Russian Orthodox” in this instance by no means referred only to ethnically Russian clergy. Rather, it applied to all priests “sent from the East,” including even Ukrainians from other regions of Ukraine. Documents from the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church often analyze cases of parishes refusing Orthodox priests. The rejection of an Orthodox priest was either open (the parishioners did not give him the keys to the church and did not let him into the church) or passive (the parishioners simply did not attend his services). Both tactics were quite effective, and priests assigned to these parishes did not last long if they were not willing to change, including their personal appearance, and to adapt themselves to local religious practices.

“We had to save our Church.” — “We saved what was ours.” This was how priests who “signed onto Orthodoxy” explained their choice, stressing the lack of a real alternative and pressure from the authorities. “To some degree I let myself be broken” (AII Ts, P-1-1-907, Interview with Fr. Oleksander Bodrevych-Buts: 47). Their understanding of “reunification” as a mere formality, and their own conviction that “I

8. The term *popyk*, from the Russian *pop* (a familiar term for *priest*, sometimes with a negative connotation), was a derogatory term for “priest.” — Translator.

remained the same as I was,” became the chief elements of a “signed” priest’s identity as a member of the “Church within the Church.”

The “reunified” clergy understood the task of “saving the Church” as a dual one. First, it was necessary to maintain the formal Church structure, so that the laity could legally and openly (in registered churches) satisfy their religious needs. No less vital was the need to safeguard “their own” church and “their own” parishioners “from the Russian Orthodox.” “[If] the priests had not accepted Orthodoxy, others would have come from there; they’d have sent priests from the East (. . .) People wouldn’t have gone to church,” as Fr. Mykhailo Lynda (born 1912) explained his motivation (AIITs, No. 2029, Interview with Fr. Mykhailo Lynda: 27–28). In view of the Galicians’ negative image of the ROC and the Orthodox clergy, priests unsurprisingly justified their decision in this way, by affirming the inextricable link between the appointment of an Orthodox priest to a parish and the destruction of that parish.

“Reunified” clergy claimed that they “remained the same,” that they “remained Greek Catholics,” and that they kept themselves apart from the Orthodox. “There were no Orthodox among us; all were Catholic priests at heart” (AIITs, P-1-1-907, Interview with Fr. Oleksander Bodrevych-Buts: 24). The “reunified” clergy themselves were not the only ones to sense their crucial differences from the Orthodox clergy; underground priests and the authorities in Moscow acknowledged the distinction. The “catacomb” church, despite its general negative attitude toward the “reunified” clergy, drew a sharp distinction between them and the “Russian priests of the ROC,” practically never equating the two (AIITs, P-1-1-321, Interview with Bishop Mykhailo Sabryha: 37).

While the catacomb priests mainly considered the convictions and self-perception of the “reunified” clergy, state bureaucrats, as well as inspectors from the Moscow Patriarchate, turned their attention primarily toward external characteristics. Their conclusions offered little comfort: even decades after the Lviv Council the outward appearance of the “former Uniates-nationalists” differed starkly from that of the Orthodox. An official representing the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, D. Kisliakov, made the following observation in 1959, using the terminological distinction between *Ukrainian parish priest (parokh)* and *Russian priest (pop)* to underline the differences: “I did not see a single priest of the former Uniates in a cassock, with long hair or a beard, wearing a cross on his chest or other typical signs of a “pop” (. . .) For the most part, they meticulously maintain the appearance of a Greek Catholic priest, a “parokh” (GARF, f. 6991, op. 1s, d. 538, l.

13). “Look at him: he’s clean-shaven and short-haired. He came here to strengthen Uniatism, not Orthodoxy” (from the “Old Orthodox” opposition’s critical comments to Hryhorii [Zakaliak], bishop of Drohobych and Sambir) (TsDAVO, f. 4648, op. 1, d. 429, l. 99).⁹

One readily surmises that only a bishop who was one of “our own” could administer the eparchies of Western Ukraine. Kostelnyk confirmed this in a letter to Patriarch Alexy dated October 3, 1945: “I (. . .) came to the conviction that on principle all our new Orthodox bishops definitely must be our people, from the Uniates” (Serhiichuk 2006: 2:288). “The bishops must be ours, for otherwise the clergy and believers will consider this the beginning of Russification,” explained a member of the Initiative Group (and future bishop of Drohobych and Sambir), Mykhailo Melnyk (Mikhail Melnik), in one of his regular interviews behind NKGB walls in August 1945 (Serhiichuk 2006: 2:171).

The appointment of the first hierarch to the Lviv-Ternopil’ see is especially telling. In a letter to Khrushchev written in September 1945, the leaders of the Initiative Group explained why the candidacy of Bishop Makary (Oksiiuk) would not receive support from the region’s inhabitants. Mykhailo Oksiiuk was not the first candidate considered in Moscow for this see. At first Moscow wanted to name Nikon (Petin), bishop of Donetsk and Voroshilovgrad, to the largest of the future “reunited” eparchies. In the end they rejected his candidacy “in view of his ignorance of the Ukrainian language” (as formulated in the journal of the proceedings of the Holy Synod No. 8 for April 18, 1945) (GARF, f. 6991, op. 2, d. 34a, l. 9). The Council for the Affairs of the ROC recommended the candidacy of Archpriest Oksiiuk to the patriarchal leadership mainly because he was a native of Podlachia and therefore spoke Ukrainian and understood “the specific situation in Western Ukraine” much better than did natives of Eastern Ukraine or Russia (Chumachenko 1999: 56). Even so, the Initiative Group came out against his candidacy, too:

The present Orthodox Bishop Makary can by no means replace the local Greek Catholic bishop, for although he is Ukrainian by birth, in the eyes of the people and the clergy he is foreign in his dress and external appearance and in the way he conducts divine service, and even in his Christian mentality. (. . .) The personage of Bishop Makary does not represent the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Lysenko 1998: 300).

9. “Old Orthodox (*staropravoslavnye*)” is the term originally used to designate the small groups of Orthodox who lived in Western Ukraine before 1946. They clearly distinguished themselves as the “true Orthodox” from those who had been “reunited.”

Conclusion

The campaign for the “reunification” of “former Uniates” with the Moscow Patriarchate, on which the Soviet leadership had placed such hopes, suffered a crushing defeat. And the cause must be sought even not primarily in the “defiantly nationalistic” activity of the “catacomb” church. One must seek the explanation of the “reunifying” action’s failure mainly in the everyday life of the “reunified” eparchies, that is, not at all in the striking, heroic struggle against the regime, but in what resulted from compromise and was and is regarded by many as “treason.”

The “Church within the Church” arose after the “reunification” as a result of the surprising intertwining of numerous factors: the “ecclesiastical nationalism” and traditional religious conservatism of the Galicians; the corresponding historical tradition; the thinking of those formally in charge of the “reunifying” action regarding the impossibility of effective incorporation into the ROC; as well as the staunch opposition of the “reunified” clergy and episcopate over decades to the introduction of any changes to the accustomed course of Church life. This kind of opposition proved a very successful strategy for the Greek Catholics after the violent liquidation of their Church.

The “Church within the Church” fulfilled its role as a local project of survival, serving as a barrier to the national assimilation and Sovietization of the region’s population, the results sought by the regime. In Moscow they were never able to devise a way to counter this strategy. After all, formally those who had been “reunited” became Orthodox, and therefore, loyal citizens of the Soviet state. And they never forgot to remind Moscow of that — in order to defend their own distinctiveness.

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