

# 1 Change of Ritual Practice under Communism

## The Case of the Russian Orthodox Church in Soviet Ukraine in the Late 1950s to Early 1970s

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### Introduction

The policies of Soviet authorities regarding institutionalised religion and its adherents evolved over time, as circumstances, both inside and outside the country, changed. The Leninist “red terror” against all “former people” (*byvshie liudi*) and anti-religious persecutions of the 1920s were replaced with the Stalinist pragmatic “concordat” with the Russian Orthodox Church (thereafter – ROC) and parallel suppression of other “religious cults” in the 1940s. The revival of aggressive anti-religious rhetoric and harsh anti-religious measures under Khrushchev – quite predictable within the context of his reforms – ended up with “disappointments and failures”, while the Brezhnev era policies “were reoriented to manage the Church’s power and visibility, rather than attempting to eradicate them”.<sup>1</sup>

All these changes notwithstanding, the inherent incompatibility of Soviet and religious was not questioned and “secularization was an integral element to socialist modernity and state building in the USSR”, as Catherine Wanner noted.<sup>2</sup> This necessarily implied continuous struggle (from the rhetorical level to administrative and criminal persecutions) with religious rituals that were seen as providing religious institutions with access to the private life of Soviet subjects, including those who did not fall within the narrow category of “regular churchgoers”.

The chronological focus of this chapter is on the period of Khrushchev’s anti religious campaign and its immediate effects in the early Brezhnev period. In order to trace certain patterns of ritual observance, I will also refer to some earlier instances. Khrushchev’s attack on religion adopted a range of forms: assault on the so-called holy places of local popular traditions, mass closures (of church buildings, monastic institutions, and theological schools), compulsory registration and mass de-registration of clergy, economic control and restrictions, and administrative and criminal persecutions of clergy and faithful. Key measures also included numerous restrictions imposed upon religious ritual performance (most importantly, introduction of special receipt books (*kvitantsionnye knigi*) for the registration of life cycle rituals, a fixed salary for clergy, prohibitions on ritual practices outside church walls) and consistent introduction of new Soviet civil rituals (*bezreligioznaia obriadnost’*) as its alternative. After Khrushchev’s

fall, however, “repressive tactics shifted from raw coercion and violence to propaganda and agitation as the main means to suppress religious practice and belief in the public sphere”.<sup>3</sup>

The territorial focus of the paper is the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC, whose boundaries coincided with the administrative borders of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Although the post-war Ukrainian Exarchate was part of the ROC, whose autonomous status was only nominal, my research shows that it can be viewed as a separate ecclesiastical entity, which considerably differed from the rest of the ROC by many features of its church life.<sup>4</sup> Bohdan R. Bociurkiw suggests that there were two key factors that made religious life in Soviet Ukraine distinctive from the rest of the Orthodox community: one was the greater density of the net of religious communities and another was the complexity of the ecclesiastical situation there.<sup>5</sup>

The high density of the religious community in the post-war Exarchate had its dual origins in the Soviet annexation of Galicia and Western Volhynia in 1939 and the so-called wartime religious renaissance. The view of the Ukrainian Republic as a certain “bulwark of Orthodoxy” in the Soviet Union prevails in the scholarly literature.<sup>6</sup> The complexity of its ecclesiastical situation was primarily caused by the liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (thereafter – UGCC) and forceful but mostly nominal, as my research suggests, incorporation of its clergy and faithful into the ROC under the official slogan of “reunification”.<sup>7</sup> Available information on ritual practices examined in this paper demonstrates the higher rates of recorded ritual observance, as well as numerous mentions of secret rituals in the West Ukrainian “reunited” dioceses, thereby confirming the view on their specific position within the Ukrainian Exarchate.

To answer my research question on how religious ritual practices were preserved throughout the 1950s–1970s, I will focus on the example of life cycle rituals and the sacrament of confession in the Orthodox Church. One important reason for this selection is that they are most extensively presented in available sources because of Soviet officials’ and ideologists’ obsession with life cycle rituals, which were to be replaced with new civil rituals, and ecclesiastical authorities’ concern regarding the preservation of traditional sacramental confession, because of its inseparable linkage to the Holy Communion.

My research is based on sources produced both by state officials and the Church, from central archival holdings in Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The most important are reports at various levels on the “state of religiosity” (*sostoianie religioznosti*) of the population prepared by the commissioners of the Council for the Affairs of the ROC (thereafter – CROCA) and, after 1966, of the Council of Religious Affairs (CRA), as well as internal church documentation and correspondence. Of special importance for such research are ego-documents by the clergy and oral history sources (both collected by the Institute of Church History in L’viv and interviews conducted by myself), which provide a rare possibility to access a personal dimension of the story. For the final part of the chapter, I have analysed published sources presenting the official church view (in the *Journal of Moscow Patriarchy*, thereafter – JMP) on ritual practice and ritual change.

### Secret rituals

The Orthodox Church is a “liturgical” Church, which stresses the necessity of “visible sacraments” (*vidimye tainstva*) for the attainment of salvation. This, together with the ritualism of popular religiosity, made the Orthodox Church especially vulnerable to the regime’s anti-religious measures. In the course of Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign, numerous visible obstacles to sacramental life were created. I primarily mean a drastic reduction of the number of functioning churches, as the sole places where the performance of the majority of rituals was allowed, and of the clergy, especially in rural regions. In the peak years of the Khrushchev-era antireligious campaign, in 1959–1962, the number of registered churches and clergymen was reduced by 24% in Soviet Ukraine.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, as already mentioned, a priest was required by state and ecclesiastical authorities to officially record all rituals that he performed and thereby became a tool of monitoring of the population’s religiosity. Frs. Nikolai Eshliman and Gleb Iakunin pointed in their 1965 Open Letter to Patriarch Aleksii I (Simanskii) to disastrous consequences of the clergy’s compliance with official requirements: a priest was turned into an “informer” denouncing those who “entrusted themselves to the protection of the Mother-Church”.<sup>9</sup> Developing this idea further, Nadezhda Beliakova points to a curious parallel and yet a crucial difference with the imperial period when “the state required recording and metric functions from the Church”. Since the Khrushchev period, the state has required the recording of ritual observance “to limit the possibilities available for the Church” and its members.<sup>10</sup>

As Vlad Naumescu argues, given these restrictions, and within the general secularising context of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, ritual observance required a degree of courage from Soviet subjects and even became a “form of protest” for them.<sup>11</sup> Official data by the CROCA/CRA on ritual observance in the Ukrainian Republic demonstrates that all the efforts to forcefully and rapidly secularise the population paid off only in the case of religious weddings. For instance, in 1964–1965, these amounted to only 8% of all the registered marriages,<sup>12</sup> while the percentage of baptisms amounted to up to 48% of registered births and religious funeral services up to 33–34% of registered deaths.<sup>13</sup> The true figures of life cycle rituals, however, were even higher than official figures, even in the case of weddings – a situation the CROCA/CRA was well aware of. Nadezhda Beliakova quotes a revealing CRA document from 1984: “In some regions of the Ukrainian SSR the rates of ritual performance were underreported by a factor of 10–15 times, religious weddings were not recorded for years”.<sup>14</sup>

One reason for such distorted statistics was a desire by local CROCA/CRA commissioners and local authorities to present a “correct” picture of the “decline of religiosity” in their regions. Another was the spreading of secret – non-registered – rituals. The secret performance of life cycle rituals became a common response from below – by laity and clergy – to excessive restrictions imposed upon sacramental life. This constituted part of a general process of privatisation and so-called domestication of religion, which researchers consider a distinctive feature of the late Soviet landscape.<sup>15</sup> For obvious reasons, researchers have little reliable

records of secret rituals and have to rely primarily upon oral testimony and rare ego-documents.

Secret baptisms were the most widespread practice. This was quite predictable, given the essential role of this sacrament for the Church and a strong popular belief in its sanctifying effects. One of my interviewees, Iaroslava Datsyshyna, widow of Fr. Mykhailo Datsyshyn, a “reunited” priest from the L’viv region, recalls that he always asked whether or not to record baptisms and other rituals prior to accomplishing them. She also remembers numerous instances when, after the performance of a “proper” – duly registered – ceremony, parishioners returned to Fr. Datsyshyn, asking him to remove recordings from the registry book.<sup>16</sup> Inside churches, secret baptisms were often performed at night, mostly with the sole participation of grandparents, even without godparents, or, in fewer cases, with the participation of the mother of an infant. Datsyshyna mentions that baptisms outside church walls were most frequent and that such baptisms were usually performed not at the parents’ or grandparents’ but at someone else’s house.<sup>17</sup>

Fr. Datsyshyn’s conduct was in line with general practices in the context of the “reunited” dioceses. As an anonymous party official observed in his 1995 interview: “I was absolutely sure that in Galicia and Volhynia in the 1970s and 1980s – as well as before and after this period – the rate of baptism among newborn children approached 100 percent. Party officials were not excluded. Even if they did not respect the Church’s rituals, their parents and relatives did”.<sup>18</sup> Although Galicia was exceptional in this regard, an analysis of internal church documentation confirms that secret performance of life cycle rituals was a widespread practice among Orthodox Christians. The message of the Head of the Chancellery of the Moscow Patriarchate, Fr. Nikolai Kolchitskii, to the episcopate of October 23, 1959 elaborated on the “violations of legislation on the cults on the part of the clergy”. Particular attention was given to priests’ inclination to perform baptisms and other sacraments on private premises and the widespread practice of renting apartments and houses specifically for this task.<sup>19</sup> Patriarchal Message no 1917 of December 22, 1964 discloses that secret performance of rituals reached a critical scale by the mid-1960s. The message forbade non-registered baptisms, baptisms without parental approval, and baptisms performed on private premises.<sup>20</sup> It was stated that the baptismal sacrament performed illegally – outside church walls and without due registration – “does not correspond to the sanctity (*vysota i sviatost*) of the sacrament and violates [Soviet] legislation”.<sup>21</sup>

Oral testimony and Soviet officials’ reports reveal priests’ readiness to forge records in registry books: to write down information that was obviously false, particularly inaccurate names and addresses of the parents.<sup>22</sup> Because forgery came out only as a result of administrative checks periodically practiced by local officials, it is difficult to determine the scale of this practice. When interrogated if forgery was discovered, priests usually maintained that they were not aware of whether the information provided was true or false.<sup>23</sup> This excuse sounded quite plausible from urban clergy. The reason was a common practice to baptise children in the large cathedrals of deanery and diocesan centres, even if a local church was still functioning, in order to conceal one’s religious allegiance.<sup>24</sup>

Yet another notable development in the Soviet context was that “lay activists took on more responsibility in the face of clerical shortages, which altered who had authority” in ritual life.<sup>25</sup> In his 1952 report on church life in the Ukrainian Exarchate, the Deputy Republican Commissioner, Katunin, was the first to suggest that so-called lay services – including baptismal ceremonies performed by laypeople, most frequently by older women – had become an important feature of ritual life. He examined various secret gatherings by the faithful for such services in churches and on private premises and mentioned that these services were led by lay activists, “without prior permission” (*v iavochnom poriadke*), who performed priestly functions, since “they remember by heart something from church services or can recite a certain number of prayers”.<sup>26</sup>

Lay baptism is allowed by the Canon Law of the Orthodox Church “in emergency case”: “Baptism can be administered by a deacon or, in his absence or if he is impeded, by another cleric, a member of an institute of consecrated life, or by any other Christian faithful; even by the mother or father, if another person is not available who knows how to baptise” (Canon 677).<sup>27</sup> Still, the mass spreading of this ceremony, as Katunin concluded, was a new phenomenon for the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.<sup>28</sup>

### **Modified baptismal and funeral ceremonies**

In her widely acclaimed study, Catherine Bell pays special attention to “ritual change”, a need faced by religious communities in the modern context to “adapt the traditions of worship to shifting social and spiritual reality”.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, rituals “mediate change”, helping a religious community protect itself from undesirable social transformations and “maintain a sense of cultural continuity”.<sup>30</sup> This role of rituals was an important reason, which rendered inevitable considerable modifications of ritual practices – always a highly thorny issue for the Church.

A careful reading of CROCA/CRA documents discloses officials’ true concern with modified ritual ceremonies. They primarily paid close attention to the modifications of life cycle rituals because these concerned larger segments of the Soviet population, not only regular churchgoers. Theological significance and far-reaching socio-cultural implications turned baptismal ceremony into the main target of official anti-religious and secularising efforts. Because restrictions imposed upon baptisms were most numerous and control over their performance most rigorous, the ceremony underwent the most varied changes.

One of the important undertakings of Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign was to ban any baptisms except for those of infants. “It is forbidden by the authorities to baptise children older than two years. If a child is above this age, s/he is sent back home non-baptised”.<sup>31</sup> By attempting to implement this prohibition, the authorities reacted to the widespread practice of baptising older children, teenagers, and adults. This ritual reached a critical scale in the late 1940s and early 1950s when those who had not been baptised as infants during the earlier years of the regime’s struggle against religion were baptised.

Commenting on the “state of religiosity” in the Ukrainian Exarchate in 1947, Pavlo Khodchenko, CROCA Republican Commissioner, examined non-infant baptisms, which were performed on a particularly large scale, as crucial evidence for the “high level of religiosity among the population”.<sup>32</sup> In the early 1950s, the Deputy Republican Commissioner, Georgii Korchevoi, emphasised that baptisms remained among the most popular rituals. As concerns non-infant baptisms, according to his data, after reaching their peak during the early post-war years, they were performed in less, though still significant, numbers.<sup>33</sup> Unexpectedly, when the prohibitions of the early 1960s were lifted,<sup>34</sup> the number of non-infant baptisms drastically increased once again and during the subsequent decade amounted to more than one half of all Orthodox baptisms in some Central and Eastern regions of Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

Given the scale of non-infant baptisms, the CROCA/CRA leadership required from commissioners to pay closer attention to them and to submit detailed statistics, which would allow for the elaboration of more sophisticated policies to restrict such baptisms. It is significant that in the space of six months in 1965, CROCA Chair Vladimir Kuroedov issued two almost identical orders to commissioners (letters no 494 of 25 February and no 2030 of 27 August) to provide in their reports separate figures for infant baptisms, baptisms of children up to the age of 3, those aged between 3 and 7, those between 7 and 16, and older.<sup>36</sup>

The mass spread of non-infant baptisms thus became a revealing phenomenon in the life of the Orthodox community in the Ukrainian Republic, starting from the mid-1960s. In the view of the CROCA/CRA, these baptisms were a particularly important manifestation of the religiosity of the population. In contrast with traditional infant baptisms, non-infant baptisms “cannot be explained simply by established popular tradition. Most probably, they attest to the strengthening of the impact of the Church upon the population”.<sup>37</sup>

The practice of mass baptisms appears to have been the most troubling for state authorities. When Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign began, CROCA Republican Commissioner Pavlo Pinchuk suggested that it was necessary to ban collective baptisms.<sup>38</sup> At first glance, the spread of general ceremonies only provided evidence for the scarcity of clergy and the desire of laity to hide themselves in the crowds, which filled churches during great holidays, when such ceremonies were usually performed. However, a simple enumeration of those holidays during which mass baptisms were usually performed explains the authorities’ concern. In addition to Easter and Christmas, these were New Year’s Eve, the International Labour Day on 1 May, and the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution on 7 November. The latter two holidays were mentioned in CROCA/CRA documents quite often. Pinchuk traced “the believers’ striving to schedule baptisms of their children on the revolutionary celebrations of 1 May and 7 November” back to the early post-war years.<sup>39</sup> In my view, such timing of baptism to coincide with major Soviet holidays, with an aim to “ensure a more solemn character” for this private event,<sup>40</sup> testified to a curious blend of Soviet and Orthodox identifications in the late Soviet context.<sup>41</sup> The particular popularity of this ritual amongst the working population and intelligentsia of the industrial regions of Ukraine is further evidence of this.

The clergy, especially from the industrial regions of Eastern Ukraine and Kyiv, vividly depicted difficulties that they experienced in having to perform too many baptisms on the dates of major Soviet holidays. Available statistical data helps to contextualise descriptions provided below. In 1958, Pinchuk reported on the performance of baptisms on 7 November in the churches of the large industrial centres of Eastern Ukraine: 496 children were baptised in Kharkiv, 226 in Voroshylovo-grad, and 400 in Stalino.<sup>42</sup>

A dean of the diocesan centre of Stalino stated that each year, on 7 and 8 November, four priests from the diocesan cathedral were unable to satisfy an ever-increasing popular demand. They “baptised children until they virtually died from fatigue”, though they performed simplified collective ceremonies instead of individual ones.<sup>43</sup> Other priests from the Stalino region confirmed that on official holidays they had to baptise infants, children and adults from the early morning until late at night “one by one, in larger and smaller groups”, which left them completely exhausted afterwards.<sup>44</sup> In his *Notes of a Village Priest*, Fr. Georgii Edel’shtein describes a picture commonly observable in Orthodox churches in the late Soviet period: “On the right two-three tens of infants are screaming – they will be baptised together with a few adults... on the left the funeral service has already started according to some new strange patterns”.<sup>45</sup>

Fr. Edel’shtein’s observation directs our attention to another key life cycle ritual, which underwent important modifications. The funeral ceremony was no less essential to popular religiosity and had no less important socio-cultural implications. Available sources indicate that virtually everyone was buried according to religious rites. Communist party members were no exception. Khodin, a commissioner in the Kharkiv region, even considered them “sacrilege” and, in his 1965 report, called for “the elaboration of legal provisions, which will restrict the possibility of performing religious funeral ceremonies for deceased atheists”. He concluded with the statement that there was an urgent need to elaborate a competing alternative in the form of a “solemn and cheap [funeral civil] ceremony”.<sup>46</sup>

An unnamed priest from the industrial village of Novoukrainka in the Kharkiv region admitted in 1947 that he knew of no single occurrence of burial without a religious funeral ceremony. Even if “a funeral is performed according to civil rite, [the relatives of the deceased] bring the soil to a church for the priest to ‘seal’ the coffin”.<sup>47</sup> The latter method was an answer to restrictions on ritual performance, as well as to the scarcity of priests who could perform the ritual, which dated back to the early Soviet period. Already in 1930, funerals *in absentia* (*zaochnoe otkpevanie*) were allowed by the official church, “if circumstances require so”.<sup>48</sup>

In 1969, CRA Republican Commissioner Kostiantyn Lytvyn acknowledged in his official note to the CC CPU on the “Contemporary State of Religion on the Territory of the Ukr.SSR” that funerals remained one of the most widespread religious rituals and the number of funerals *in absentia* even exceeded proper funeral ceremonies.<sup>49</sup> According to his data, in 1968, Orthodox priests in the republic had performed 96,338 funerals and 114,041 funerals *in absentia*.<sup>50</sup> If compared to available statistics from earlier years, Lytvyn’s figures testify to the growing popularity of the modified ceremony: in 1964, the traditional ceremony was performed for

34.2% of all the deceased in the Ukrainian Republic, while the modified was used in 30.3% of all cases; in 1965, the figures were 33.4% and 28.9%, respectively.<sup>51</sup> The modified funeral ceremony became so popular in the late Soviet period because it compensated for the unavailability of clergy, especially in rural areas, and, no less importantly, allowed one to escape state control. This was also part of a general shift of authority from “trained specialists” to “non-specialists”, in Tamara Dragadze’s terms,<sup>52</sup> with laity starting to play a more prominent role in performing rituals than ever before.

According to information available concerning the 1940s and 1950s, priests required that the soil be taken from the grave by the relatives of the deceased and poured back after it was blessed. In the 1960s, the requirements were considerably slackened, and priests allowed “to bring the soil for blessing from any grave and even not from any grave at all, and also to pour it on any grave”.<sup>53</sup> Still, as oral sources show, at least in Galicia, such an oversimplified ceremony was regarded as an option only in the direst cases. Usually, the soil was taken from the deceased’s grave and brought to a priest who “prayed and blessed it with holy water, and performed the [funeral] service over it”. Afterwards, it was carried back with accompanying prayers by the relatives.<sup>54</sup>

Already this mode of performing funerals contributed to the linking of religious and civil ceremonies, since the former was always performed after the latter. The linkage between the two became visible when a combined funeral ceremony was performed. In its common form, it consisted of a funeral procession led by a priest and a church choir, followed by a brass band, the necessary attribute of a civil requiem service. After a proper religious service by a priest, a farewell speech was delivered by an official “comrade”.<sup>55</sup> Such combined funerals vividly testified to the failure of official attempts to replace religious ceremonies with their secular substitute and became one of the most curious manifestations of late Soviet religiosity, with its blending of Soviet and religious elements.

### **Ecclesiastical authorities’ view on ritual change**

Just like secret rituals, modified practices originated as survival techniques from below. As the CROCA/CRA and Soviet sociologists acknowledged, they became a viable means of circumvention of official restrictions.<sup>56</sup> An overview of the evolving view of church officialdom on ritual change helps to interpret them more adequately. This analysis testifies to the scale of the spread of modified ritual practices no less persuasively than the rare statistical data provided by the CROCA/CRA.

William C. Fletcher approaches ritual modifications by distinguishing between “theological conservatism” of the Church and its “practical adaptability”. He claims that church conservatism did not undermine the ability of the Church to adapt to contemporary circumstances but actually strengthened it. “Changes did take place ... but because the dogmas of the Church were sacrosanct, these changes did not necessitate a reconsideration of the theological basis of the Church”.<sup>57</sup> A close reading of church sources reveals that the shift from “dogmatic inflexibility” (using Fletcher’s term) to “practical adaptability” was not as unproblematic as he

implies. It further suggests that some changes introduced at the local level to satisfy popular demand reached the scale when their theological reconsideration or at least authorisation on the part of ecclesiastical authorities was hard to avoid.

The case of confession is particularly revealing in this regard. For the adherents of the ROC, the sacrament of confession is a necessary condition for partaking in the Holy Communion. As Aleksei Beglov observes, regardless of all the changes in the practice of communion throughout the Soviet period, partaking in the Eucharist at least once a year (mostly on Easter), remained a requirement for “non-active parishioners”, which also implied their duty to confess.<sup>58</sup> Given the scarcity of registered priests and functioning churches in the late Soviet period, individual confessions during Lent became most improbable, especially in large urban areas,<sup>59</sup> forcing priests to switch to a simplified general ceremony.<sup>60</sup> Nadieszda Kizenko concludes:

For most believers, the combination of secularizing pressures, church closures, and fewer priests meant that individual confession was replaced by general confession. The routine, institutionalized aspect of confession before 1917, which had made individual auricular confession something familiar to the average Orthodox Christian believer, vanished.<sup>61</sup>

Because of its inseparable linkage to the Eucharist, general confession was one of those modified rituals, which ecclesiastical authorities were the least prepared to tolerate, although it was first allowed by Metropolitan Sergei (Stragorodskii) and his Holy Synod back in 1929.<sup>62</sup> Patriarch Aleksii I (Simanskii) was an outspoken opponent of this practice. He raised the issue of general confession immediately after his appointment as the Guardian of the Patriarchal Throne during the Synodal meeting on 19 July 1944. The future Patriarch claimed that the “practice of so-called general confession radically distorts the mystery of confession”, as “church statutes do not envisage general confession”. He particularly emphasised that general confession threatened the paramount sacrament of the Holy Communion. “Careless attitude towards confession necessarily assumes careless attitude towards the mystery of the Eucharist”.<sup>63</sup>

Notwithstanding his severe criticism, then Metropolitan Aleksii authorised the performance of general confession “in case of need”, the only requirement being an individual absolving prayer for each repentance. The obvious reason was that he was unable to propose another solution to the problem, which the Church faced each year during the Lent period. But in spite of the absence of any alternative solution, church officialdom was reluctant to definitely allow general confession throughout the period we analyse, maintaining that it could be tolerated only as an exception in “extreme cases”.<sup>64</sup>

Available sources concerning priests’ perceptions of general confession are predictably scarce. The diary of Fr. Mykhailo Datsyshyn, written in the 1960s and early 1970s, contains numerous quotations from Orthodox religious literature with his personal approval remarks: “contemporary general confession is, strictly speaking, not any confession at all” and “it is terribly harmful”, because it “retains only the

form, while pointing to indifference towards one's salvation".<sup>65</sup> Still priests practiced this ceremony because of their inability to satisfy popular demand otherwise.

Regardless of such a negative attitude, the official church was compelled to react to numerous modifications in ritual practice, not only through criticism, but also by authorising them. An examination of church documents suggests that, in the late 1960s, the views of ecclesiastical authorities had not changed much since the future Patriarch's statement in 1944: "The teaching of the Orthodox Church says that any sacrament will indeed be a sacrament and have a blessing effect upon the person, only if it is performed precisely according to the established patterns".<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, the interpretation of the formula "precisely according to the established patterns" did change considerably over the following decades. Departures from traditional patterns were seldom approved officially but rather semi-officially. We will not find any Synodal or Patriarchal sanction, but the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy* provides ample evidence of change.

Articles discussing the modification of rituals and the alteration of canonical patterns first appeared on the pages of the JMP in the mid-1950s. Early articles sought to justify ritual changes and customarily accomplished this by referring to apostolic tradition. One of them, discussing ritual changes introduced by the Apostolic Council, explained, "It cannot be otherwise, because the external patterns of rituals often depend on circumstances. Therefore, they must change when circumstances have changed".<sup>67</sup> The author of this article emphasised that only ecclesiastical authorities could allow any modification of ritual practice and thereby he attempted to limit initiatives from below.

Articles from the late 1950s to early 1970s continued to elaborate on this idea of the dependence of ritual practice on changing circumstances in a dialogue with those who criticised the Orthodox practice for its "supposed stagnation and immobility".<sup>68</sup> It is telling that they dropped any mention of the exclusive authority of church officialdom to initiate modifications. Every change was considered valid on the condition that the modified ritual preserved mandatory attributes of the sacrament: the power of the person who accomplishes the rite (a priest, except for lay baptisms), the use of the required substance or visible sign, and the preservation of the sacramental formula.<sup>69</sup>

Such minimal requirements reveal that ecclesiastical authorities were forced to accept and unwillingly tolerate undesirable spontaneous initiatives from below, because they could suggest no viable alternative approach to ensure sacramental life, and because these modified rituals were performed on such a scale that it was no longer possible to simply ignore or ban them.

## **Conclusions**

In the "Introduction" to the 2012 volume on *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Ukraine and Russia*, Catherine Wanner concludes that "the outcome of processes of secularization in the USSR was not a loss of religion, but religious change".<sup>70</sup> The preservation of traditional ritual life of the Orthodox Church was not possible without change, given aggressive anti-religious propaganda, excessive

restrictions on religious life, and administrative and criminal persecutions of those involved. Any such change was immensely difficult and undesirable for the highly traditionalist Church; still it became the key to its survival at the local level, as my study demonstrates.

Religious change brought about “new understandings as to what constitutes the sacred and who has the authority to declare so”.<sup>71</sup> Information on the spread of secret ritual practices and on the modifications of rituals examined on these pages demonstrates this convincingly. Laypeople took upon themselves a much more active role in ritual life than at any time before; so-called lay services were just extreme evidence of this process. As for the clergy, it openly disobeyed the orders of state and ecclesiastical authorities when performing secret rituals and deliberately broke established ritual practices when resorting to modified ceremonies. The episcopate and official church were forced to react to these initiatives from below, which challenged their authority within the Church and endangered their position in front of state authorities. An examination of their answers to this challenge and positions regarding ritual change contributes to study of the ROC hierarchy in the late Soviet period.

Ritual change necessarily presumed accommodation to the Soviet socio-cultural context. The modifications of life cycle rituals are especially revealing in this regard. The mass performance of baptisms on the red dates of the Soviet calendar, on the one hand, and the appearance of a strange mix of religious and civil ceremonies in the form of combined funerals, on the other, demonstrated the gap, which remained between the ideal of complete separation of Soviet and religious life preached by official propaganda and reality. This curious mix of Soviet and religious identifications is an important research question, to which this study partly contributes.

## Notes

- 1 Catherine Wanner, “Introduction,” in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Catherine Wanner (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.
- 2 Wanner, “Introduction,” 1.
- 3 Wanner, “Introduction,” 17.
- 4 For more details, see Natalia Shlikhta, *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv. Radianska Ukraina, seredyna 1940-kh – pochatok 1970-kh rr.* [The Church of Those Who Survived. Soviet Ukraine, mid-1940s – early 1970s] (Kharkiv: “Akta,” 2011).
- 5 Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, “The Orthodox Church and the Soviet Regime in the Ukraine, 1953–1971,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* XIV, issue 2 (Summer 1972): 193–194.
- 6 See, for instance: Adriano Rocucci, *Stalin i patriarkh: Pravoslavnaia tserkov i sovetskaia vlast', 1917–1958* [Stalin and the Patriarch: Orthodox Church and Soviet Power, 1917–1958] (Moscow: Politicheskaiia entsiklopediia, 2016), 391–401; Nadezhda Beliakova, “‘Prizyvaui otsov nastoiatelei strogo sobliudat’ zakonodatelstvo.’ Uchastiie naseleniia v tainstvakh Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v pozdnem SSSR: mezhdru tserkovnymi i gosudarstvennymi ogranicheniiami,” [“I am Calling on the Fathers Superiors to Strictly Observe the Legislation.” Population’s Participation in the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church in the Late USSR: Between Church and State Restrictions] *Istoriia* 4, no 7(23) (2013).
- 7 See, for instance: Natalia Shlikhta, “‘Ukrainian’ as ‘Non-Orthodox’: How Greek Catholics Were ‘Reunited’ with the Russian Orthodox Church,” *State, Religion and Church* 2,

- no 2 (2015): 77–95; Natalia Shlikhta, “The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church,” in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lucian N. Leustean (London: Routledge, 2014): 623–655; Natalia Shlikhta, “‘Verschieden’ und ‘Identisch’: Orthodoxe und griechisch-katholische Gläubige in der Ukrainischen Sowjetrepublik nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in *Religiöse Pluralität als Faktor des Politischen in der Ukraine*, ed. Katrin Boeckh and Oleh Turij (München: BiblionMedia, 2015): 249–276.
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- 11 Vlad Naumescu, *Modes of Religiosity in Eastern Christianity: Religious Processes and Social Change in Ukraine* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008): 5.
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- 13 Shlikhta, *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv*, 404–405 (Appendix 6).
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- 23 Report by a commissioner in Volhynska Oblast, Fedulov, 1963. Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 407, p. 112, TDAVO.
- 24 Report by the CROCA republican branch on the introduction of civil rituals during the 1963 CROCA All-Union Meeting. Fond 1, Folder 31, File 2166, p. 15, TDAHO.
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- 31 Natalia Shlikhta, “Kak uchredit’ ‘antisovetskuiu organizatsiiu’: k istorii Kestonskogo instituta i pisma veruiushchikh iz Pochaieva,” [How to Establish an “Anti-Soviet Organization”? History of the Keston Institute and a Letter of Orthodox Believers from Pochaev Monastery] *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov’ v Rossii i za rubezhom* 35, issue 1 (2017): 251.

- 32 Fond 1, Folder 23, File 4555, pp. 186–187, TDAHO.
- 33 Korchevoi's report, 1950, fourth decade, Fond 1, Folder 24, File 783, p. 39, TDAHO.
- 34 I have not encountered official documents that prohibited non-infant baptisms. Indirect evidence from archival sources suggests that the prohibition was introduced in early 1963. See: Report by a commissioner in Krymska Oblast, Hlukhov, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 407, p. 74, TDAVO.
- 35 Report by a commissioner in Kyivska Oblast, Sukhonin, 1965, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 450, p. 41, TDAVO; report by a commissioner in Donetska Oblast on rituals in 1964–1965, Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 450, pp. 19–20, TDAVO; Kostiantyn Lytvyn's report to the CC CPU on the religious situation in the Ukr.SSR in 1968, Fond 4648, Folder 5, File 281, pp. 206–207, TDAVO; Fond 6991, Folder 2, File 574, p. 172, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Moscow, Russian Federation.
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- 53 Report by a commissioner in Dnipropetrovska Oblast', Dneprovsk, first decade, 1965. Fond 4648, Folder 1, File 450, p. 10, TDAVO.
- 54 Interview with Fr. Ivan Repela, Ivano-Frankivsk, 14 February 1993, P-1-1-275, p. 17, AIT; Iaroslava Datsyshyna, interview by author, 22 March 2002.
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