

‘Church within the Church’ as a mode of the survival of West Ukrainian religious community under Soviet rule

Natalia Shlikhta

PhD candidate in History, Central European University (Budapest, Hungary)

On March 8 – 10, 1946, a ‘self-liquidation’ Council of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) took place in Lviv.¹ Staged by the KGB and the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CROCA), it pronounced the ‘reunification’ of this church, predominant among the population of the recently annexed Western Ukraine, with their ‘Mother-Church,’ the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).² Three years later, after the last remaining Greek Catholic diocese of Transcarpathian Ukraine also ‘returned’ to the Moscow Patriarchate, CROCA leadership had every reason to report on the successful liquidation of the Uniate church in Ukraine. Somewhat paradoxically, the Soviet state professing militant atheism had finally fulfilled the dream of the Moscow Patriarchate to ‘reintegrate’ its claimed ‘ecclesiastical territory.’ This ‘partnership’ of the communist regime and the ROC in their struggle against the ‘Union’ has for decades been the focus of a scholarly debate. The opinions of historians, often influenced by their national identities and religious allegiances, vary from curious assumptions that the Stalinist leadership mounted the attack on the UGCC to ‘reward’ the ROC for its war-period patriotic activity (Stehle) or to secure its support in the future (Chadwick) to the claim that the Moscow Patriarchate became a tool for executing the plans of a totalitarian regime; and from the thesis on ‘willing’ and ‘full-fledged’ cooperation of the latter with the regime in the liquidation of a fellow church to attempts at justifying its ‘unwilling’ involvement in the action, and further to presenting this involvement as the major contribution to securing the framework for religious life in Western Ukraine.³ Only a few studies avoid value judgements or simplistic explanations while accounting for those various and often mutually contradictory motifs and considerations of the participants that brought the official existence of the UGCC to the end.⁴

The most visible consequence of the dissolution of the UGCC was the numerical growth of the ROC. According to CROCA official data for the ‘reunited dioceses,’ 3,289 out of 3,431 parishes became Orthodox and 1,296 out of 1,643 Greek Catholic priests pledged allegiance to the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus.⁵ To properly assess these figures, it is worth recalling that in 1950, the first year after the UGCC officially ceased to exist, West Ukrainian parishes formed approximately one quarter of all the ROC parishes (13,740 church buildings) and the reunited clergy were 11.5% out of its 11,222 priests. These reunited dioceses, whose population constituted just a tiny part of the Ukrainian population, unexpectedly became the ‘bulwark’ of Orthodoxy in the republic.⁶ They provided the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC with 40.0% of its church infrastructure (8,833 churches) and one-fifth out of its 6,348 priests.⁷ An official perception of the ‘reunification’ process by ecclesiastical authorities in Moscow is self-evident. Similarly, one can easily assume how this move of the West Ukrainian majority was estimated by the Catholic community and those few Greek Catholic priests who refused to recognise the authority of the Moscow Patriarch and formed the catacomb church. They interpreted conversion to Orthodoxy, even when acknowledging that it was demanded by the regime, in terms of ‘betrayal’ and ‘apostasy.’ This perception was most sharply articulated by the Polish bishops who in a letter to Pope John XXIII (1959) claimed: ‘The Ukrainian people with few exceptions failed an exam on their faithfulness to Catholicism.’⁸

Although understandable as a reflection of the opposite views in the inter-confessional debate, these estimates are largely superficial, because their proponents consider only a visible aspect of conversion. In *A Study in Survival: The Church in Russia 1927 – 1943*, William Fletcher suggests that to properly estimate the conduct of church members, a researcher should refrain from moral judgements and interpret all of these actions solely from the perspective of their contribution to securing the survival of the church in the Soviet state. Relying largely on Fletcher's approach, I draw from the assumption that the failure of official attempts to 'properly Orthodoxise' Greek Catholics, which became visible when the UGCC was revived in the early 1990s, cannot be explained solely by the activity of the catacomb church.⁹ I rely on Vasyl Markus' distinction between different modes of the survival of Greek Catholics, as the 'church within the church,' encompassing those West Ukrainian believers and clergy who 'reunited' with the Orthodox Church, and in the form of 'marginal religious communities' or the catacomb church, namely those who refused to make compromises to their religious identity and rejected any linkage to Orthodoxy.¹⁰ I furthermore debate the aforementioned thesis dominant in contemporary historiography after Bociurkiw's comprehensive elaboration, by arguing that the contribution of the former to the preservation of the vitality of West Ukrainian religious community in the face of the regime's anti-religious measures and its distinctiveness in the face of Moscow Patriarchate's desire to integrate it was decisive.¹¹

Markus uses the concept of the 'church within the church' to define those Greek Catholic priests and believers who only formally and 'out of political necessity' accepted the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate while they felt 'themselves to be Catholics.' He distinguishes them from 'actual' converts and those who were 'in between' the converted community and 'hard-liners' from the catacomb church and attended the services of both.¹² A detailed archival analysis reveals that it is utterly impossible to empirically draw a clear distinction between those groups, despite all attempts made not to oversimplify a complex character of the converted community that emerged out of their combination. At the same time, abundant evidence testifies to a minimal degree to which this community was integrated into the body of the ROC. Hence in this article I advance a modified notion of the 'church within the church,' seen as the converted community whose various members (laity, clergy and diocesan bishops), regardless of the sincerity and motifs of their conversion, were inseparably linked to each other by the awareness of their distinctiveness from the rest of the ROC and a common desire to survive Moscow's effort at unification.

The acknowledgement of the inherent potential of West Ukrainian converted community to jeopardise their plans made by the Patriarchate and CROCA officials can reveal more than the statistical data. A report prepared by the CROCA, *Concerning the Measures of Strengthening a Struggle with the Remnants of the Union in the Western Oblasts of Ukraine and Transcarpathian Ukraine* (1960), clearly designates the objectives of this struggle. Mentioning the 'hostile' activities of the 'non-reunited' clergy, CROCA leadership nevertheless stressed that the primary task of their plenipotentiaries in the region was to 'liberate the church and believers from the influence of those [reunited] priests who under the guise of reunification with Orthodoxy attempt to preserve the remnants of the Union and Catholicism in their churches, thus *acting against us*.'¹³ A resolution of the Moscow Patriarchate's Special Commission, which also examined the situation in the reunited dioceses in 1960, sounded strangely similar: 'Not abandoning our task of the annexation of the Uniate clergy, we have to focus primarily on strengthening Orthodoxy among already reunited priests and believers.'¹⁴

The 'church within the church' has already become the subject of investigation by scholars who approach it as a 'crypto-uniate community' (Bociurkiw and Kolarz),

‘involuntary converts’ (Bociurkiw) or ‘uniate congregations in disguise’ (Chadwick), thus evidently overlooking distinctions stressed by Markus. However, a core question of which objective reasons allowed the ‘church within the church’ to preserve its distinctiveness and how conscious and unconscious deeds of its members contributed to this remains notably unsung by historians. An examination of the conduct of the Orthodox bishops who managed the reunited dioceses and were West Ukrainians by origin throws light on this complex issue. As the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate in the region and church members most closely supervised by the CROCA (CRA), they seem to be the least probable candidates for the role of ‘resisters’ to the attempts of central authorities to attain uniformity that makes such an investigation even more insightful.

West Ukrainians by origin and converts from Greek Catholicism, constituted an overwhelming majority of those who administered dioceses in the region that was far from accidental, as this survey shows. Two of them, Mykhail Melnyk, the Bishop of Drohobych and Sambir (1946 – 1955), and Antonii Pelvetsky, the Bishop of Stanislav and Kolomyia (1946 – 1957), were prominent Catholic theologians and the formal ‘promoters’ of reunification. Among the bishops who succeeded them, three were the participants in the 1946 Lviv Council: Mykolai Iuryk, who held the Lviv-Ternopil See during 1965 – 1983, Iosyf Savrash, a ruler of the Stanislav-Kolomyia Diocese (1957 – 1982), and Hrygorii Zakaliaka who managed almost all West Ukrainian Dioceses in succession: the Drohobych-Sambir (1956 – 1958), the Lviv-Ternopil (1960 – 1964), and the Mukachevo-Uzhhorod (1965 – 1972). Their origin counts in favour of considering them the members of the ‘church within the church,’ while their involvement in the dissolution of the UGCC raises serious doubts as to such an interpretation.

At first glance, the most striking is the perception of the leaders of the so-called ‘Sponsoring Group for the Reunion of the Greek Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church,’ later Bishops Mykhail and Antonii, held by West Ukrainian believers and clergy, not simply as the members of their religious community, but also as the chief defenders of its interests from Moscow’s encroachments. Strong evidence of the authority that, for instance, Bishop Pelvetsky enjoyed is found in the comments of his former assistant who became the successor to Bishop Melnyk, Hrygorii Zakaliaka. In 1956 when the activities of the catacomb church intensified following the release of a few hundreds Greek Catholic priests from the *Gulag*, he implied in his conversation with CROCA plenipotentiary that the prestige of Archbishop Antonii ‘amongst the reunited clergy not only of the Stanislav Diocese, but also of the rest of Western Ukraine’ was sufficient to prevent movements among the converted community that were ‘undesirable’ for the regime.¹⁵ A closer look at Greek Catholics’ understanding of their conversion to Orthodoxy is necessary to resolve this apparent paradox.

CROCA Deputy Plenipotentiary for the Ukrainian Republic, Katunin, stressed that the Sponsoring Group and those priests who recognised its authority considered reunification not as a matter of conscience and religious conviction, but strictly as a ‘political necessity’ and a ‘tactical move.’¹⁶ Makarii Oksiuk, the Archbishop of the Lviv-Ternopil Diocese (1946 – 1951), who did not share the Uniate past and was appointed by the Patriarchate to ‘assist’ the Sponsoring Group in converting West Ukrainians, echoed this accusation of a Soviet official. He claimed that the leader of this group, Rev Havryil Kostelnyk, professed autonomist ideas, similar to those that inspired the leaders of autocephalous movements in Ukraine during the 1920s – 1940s.¹⁷ Kostelnyk’s vision of a Ukrainian National Church – in the long run undoubtedly contributing to the evolution of ‘Ukrainian Orthodoxy’ in this area – had little chance to be realised in view of official plans concerning Western Ukraine.¹⁸ Nevertheless, a basic necessity to secure pastoral care of their flock, ‘protecting’ believers from the Orthodox clergy who would be sent to the reunited dioceses should Greek Catholic

priests reject an ‘official offer’ and remain faithful to the Holy See, was motivation for the majority of those priests who signed reunification pledges. However provocative it might sound, apparent conversion to Orthodoxy was regarded an effective means of opposing Moscow’s ambitions.

The negative image that the ROC had in the eyes of West Ukrainians was a significant reason that made genuine conversion rather doubtful, in spite of an inclination towards the ‘Eastern rite’ on the part of Greek Catholics primarily under the powerful impact of Sheptytsky’s ideas.¹⁹ The ROC was rejected as a *Russian* church, an active agent of the Moscow ‘Russification’ policy, and as a *Bolshevik* church that was subordinate to the atheist state (just as it was previously in autocratic Russia) and controlled by it.²⁰ This prevailing attitude towards the church, which with the assistance of the communist regime acquired a dominant position in the region, was best summarised in an anonymous letter from a group of the converted Greek Catholics to the editorial board of the official magazine of the Ukrainian Exarchate, *Pravoslavnyi visnyk* [Orthodox Herald] (1971):

*The present-day state of Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church is very sad and lamentable. The Russian Orthodox Church exists today under the authority and guardship of Godless Communism and Materialism, detached and separated from its people...*²¹

The subjection to a ‘godless’ regime, in the belief of West Ukrainians, necessarily presumed the collaboration of the Orthodox hierarchy with it and furthermore its non-canonical character, given that these bishops ‘were appointed by the Bolsheviks... without any consecration and any theological preparation.’²² In addition, Russian Orthodoxy was regarded as a religion for ‘uncultured villagers,’ whose faith was restricted to unreflective participation in rituals, that similarly contributed to a negative perception.

The hierarchy and clergy of the church with such an image had little chance of acceptance by believers who continued to attend their *own* churches even though they suddenly were declared Orthodox. The understanding that there was ‘no other choice’ together with the hope of avoiding a complete integration into the ROC forced priests to sign reunification pledges and believers to support them. This desire to survive as a distinct religious community strengthened both a link between the clergy and the faithful and their common adherence to their *own* bishops. Not surprisingly, one of the major conditions of reunification, advanced by the deanery meetings of parish clergy that preceded the 1946 Lviv Council, was the appointment of bishops from amongst the converted community. Priests’ determination to retain their *own* bishop sometimes had exaggerated manifestations. When a decision to appoint Hrygorii Zakaliaka as the successor to Bishop Mykhail Melnyk was adopted by the Patriarchate, Metropolitan Ioann (Sokolov), the Exarch of Ukraine, received a number of written protests from the priests of the Drohobych-Sambir Diocese. Commenting on these letters, Archbishop Antonii Pelvetsky implied that the reason behind this opposition to the appointment of a secretary of the Stanislav-Kolomyia Diocese was the preference of the Drohobych clergy for a candidate from their own diocese.²³

Bishops who held positions in the West Ukrainian dioceses also were conscious of a close link between themselves and other members of the ‘church within the church.’ Moreover, archival sources suggest that among conflicting aspects of their identity – the members of West Ukrainian religious community and the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate – the former was given a priority. The most obvious reason was their dependence on that community, and for the sake of this investigation it is of a secondary importance whether they were motivated by purely pragmatic considerations or sincere pastoral care of their flock. No matter what their motivation, they realised that only ‘close cooperation’ with the reunited clergy would allow them to fulfil their duties. They were

convinced that the effective administration of their dioceses was an essential condition for the church to continue to function in the region and the only way to secure it from a complete destruction by Soviet authorities.²⁴ Therefore, the Orthodox episcopate in Western Ukraine had to admit that ‘we [bishops] do not simply lay certain demands upon our clergy, but simultaneously should meet their [and our flock] requirements.’²⁵ One consequence, observed by outsiders and admitted by the reunited clergy, was that relationship between various members of the ‘church within the church’ became less formal than traditionally it was in the Greek Catholic Church. Another revealed itself in the bishops’ attempts not to allow a ‘stranger’, in other words a ‘true’ Orthodox bishop from Eastern Ukraine or Russia, amongst themselves. They commonly emphasised difficult and rather specific conditions of the reunited terrain, demanding deep understanding and special skills to manage, in order to persuade the CROCA to select only West Ukrainian natives for these dioceses.

Parallel to clergy desires to have their *own* bishop, the bishops attempted to secure the appointment of their *own* priests to parishes. An acknowledgement made by Bishop Mykhail Melnyk illustrates their determination to secure their *own* church from the Orthodox. He admitted in a private conversation with a priest from his diocese that he would rather appoint those formerly celibate Greek Catholic priests who betrayed their holy vows and thus lost their priestly dignity according both to Orthodox and Catholic canon law, than allow *popyky* into his parishes.²⁶ The petition for the opening of a theological seminary in Lviv provides insight into the adherence of the West Ukrainian episcopate to their *own* church and their desire to preserve its distinctiveness. Official permission to open this seminary was given in 1945, but for a number of reasons it never functioned and the plan was soon abandoned. This idea was promoted again, not unexpectedly in 1955 – 1956 when the activities of the catacomb church intensified, by Archbishop Antonii Pelvetsky, Archbishop Palladii Kaminsky of the Lviv-Ternopil Diocese, Hrygorii Zakaliaka, then the Bishop of Sambir and Drohobych, and then Rev Mykolai Iuryk. In a report to Patriarch Alexei (October 30, 1956), they revealed that they saw the aim of their activities not in struggling for uniformity but, in contrast, in adapting Orthodoxy to the traditions and expectations of West Ukrainian religious community. They moreover emphasised:

*In order to establish Orthodoxy in the Reunited Dioceses, we have to carefully prepare new priests from local [West Ukrainian] believers in an Orthodox school that has to function within the region and whose educational programs have to correspond to and rely on all the peculiarities of church life in the Western Dioceses.*²⁷

To properly assess the contribution of the West Ukrainian bishops to the preservation of the ‘church within the church,’ the approach of Soviet authorities to these dioceses has to be outlined. Markus asserts that the need to convert and later Orthodoxise Greek Catholics ‘ensured continuous usefulness of the ROC’ for Soviet rulers.²⁸ The official conviction of the existence of linkage between the notions of ‘Orthodox’ and ‘loyal citizens,’ which turned religious conversion of West Ukrainians into an effective means to ‘indoctrinate [them] in Soviet patriotism’ or to ‘integrate [them] into the Soviet Russian Body,’ conditioned this usefulness of the Orthodox Church for the atheist regime.²⁹ CROCA leadership acknowledged in their secret documents that apart from purely dogmatic and canonical aspects, the transference of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy had a ‘pronounced political content.’³⁰ This peculiar view on Orthodoxisation created a ‘situation in which [the ROC] could bargain,’ if William Fletcher’s definition is recalled.³¹ Fletcher suggests that a ‘bargaining situation,’ i.e., a situation where the church could ask for certain concessions in exchange for its services considered to be of the political significance for the regime, was ‘a fairly effective approach’ to church – state relationships and an essential condition for church

survival in the Soviet state.³² The preoccupation of Soviet authorities with the liquidation of the ‘remnants of the Union’ created such a bargaining situation not only for the Moscow Patriarchate, but also for its episcopate in the region. Moreover, the West Ukrainian bishops could exploit this situation not only to defend their interests in front of communist authorities, but also to secure a degree of autonomy and receive numerous concessions from the Patriarchate.

The perception of Orthodoxisation by ecclesiastical authorities in Moscow similarly secured favourable conditions for the preservation of the ‘church within the church.’ The CROCA attempted to accelerate Orthodoxisation as crucial for overcoming regional distinctiveness. In contrast, the Patriarchate leadership, for a number of reasons of which a pragmatic estimation of their inability to integrate a few millions of Greek Catholics was not the least, opted for a slower process with the preservation of local religious traditions. They were ready to revise some canonical regulations to conform to those traditions, regarding this as an unfortunate but essential condition for the establishment of Orthodoxy in the region. This careful approach was first pronounced in a letter from Patriarch Alexei to CROCA Chairman, Karpov, a few months prior to the ‘self-liquidation’ Council (December 7, 1945): ‘We will not insist on the rapid and violent change of the external forms of church service and even clergy appearance... Only essential changes are important.’³³ The failure of initial ambitions to change the religious adherence of West Ukrainians quickly and completely forced the CROCA to slightly revise their understanding of Orthodoxisation. The CROCA plenipotentiaries’ frequent critique of the Patriarchate passivity in ‘re-educating the converted population in the spirit of Orthodoxy’ testifies that a perceived link between ‘Orthodoxisation,’ ‘unification,’ and ‘sovietisation’ continued to dominate the official approach. However from the early 1950s, certain concessions were recognised as necessary and CROCA plenipotentiaries in the region received numerous warnings ‘not to forget and ignore many-century religious traditions and customs.’³⁴

Being conscious of the political significance that a ‘struggle with the Union’ had in the eyes of Soviet rulers, the West Ukrainian episcopate *could* and *did* exploit this to strengthen their own position and ensure the vitality of their religious community. Probably the most apt estimate of the stand of the first generation of the reunited bishops is found in the words of CROCA Plenipotentiary for the Ukrainian Republic, Pinchuk. He claimed that instead of struggling with the remnants of the Union, they attempted to preserve a bargaining situation (applying Fletcher’s term), in which ‘it [the Union] will remain a scarecrow for the Soviet state, thus ensuring some privileges for the Orthodox clergy and hierarchy.’³⁵ Even more revealing for the assessment of their stand is the fact that none of these bishops survived the post-Council decade in the same place. While an Orthodox, Archbishop Makarii Oksiuk, was simply removed to another diocese, the leaders of the Sponsoring Group, Bishops Mykhail and Antonii, mysteriously died: the former shortly before the tenth anniversary of the 1946 Council and the latter shortly after.³⁶ According to medical expertise, Bishop Melnyk died of acute cordial-vascular insufficiency, but even the Patriarchate leadership suspected KGB involvement in his death.³⁷ No available archival sources directly confirm a common conviction that Archbishop Pelvetsky’s death was similarly unnatural. Still, CROCA dissatisfaction with his activities, evident from their estimates that during ten years of his rule he ‘did almost nothing to struggle with the Union,’ and their plans to remove him to an East Ukrainian diocese, forwarded just a few weeks before his death, raise certain doubts as to its naturalness.³⁸

The replacement of the Orthodox hierarchy did not ‘improve’ the situation in the West Ukrainian dioceses. The Republican Plenipotentiary had soon to admit that the newly appointed bishops also ‘indulged the Uniates [...] under the guise of their Orthodoxisation.’³⁹

An examination of the character of this ‘indulgence,’ in other words an enumeration of CROCA concrete accusations and claims to their activity, adds to the understanding of the Soviet official view on Orthodoxisation. It also helps researchers to explain why numerous acts of the West Ukrainian bishops were classified by CROCA officials as oppositional. Similarly to the effect of the negative image of the ROC on the West Ukrainian perception of religious conversion, Soviet authorities’ paradoxical involvement in Orthodoxisation stemmed from the stereotype of the ‘Union’ that dominated their thinking. The ‘Union’ was perceived not solely and not primarily as particular religious practice or even in terms of the adherence to the Holy See (although many, primarily Russian, historians put forward this explanation), but was associated with certain features of the political and social character that were regarded as obstacles to a complete sovietisation of Western Ukraine.⁴⁰ In the eyes of Soviet rulers, the UGCC was inseparably linked with such ‘undesirable’ phenomena as Ukrainian nationalism and local distinctiveness, a high level of popular religiosity, the active social involvement of the church, and its independence from secular authorities.⁴¹

Irrespective of the actual deeds of the West Ukrainian bishops, their activities were regarded as ‘unsatisfactory’ and their contribution to the Orthodoxisation of their flock as ‘insufficient.’ The behaviour of Bishops Melnyk and Pelvetsky provided serious grounds for the dissatisfaction of CROCA officials. As well as his attempts to secure a certain social role for parish clergy, his protests against the arrests of priests, and his unwillingness to subject himself to CROCA plenipotentiary, whom he considered just a minor Soviet official, Bishop Melnyk opposed the implementation of any measures on Orthodoxisation. Priests from his diocese testified that he attempted to prevent the adoption of the Holy Synod’s instructions fostering Orthodoxisation and afterwards did not introduce any of them in the Drohobych-Sambir Diocese.⁴² Granted this, it is not surprising that Bishop Melnyk was considered a ‘firm Catholic’ both by the ‘church within the church’ and the CROCA. An enumeration of the ‘faults’ of Bishop Pelvetsky’s conduct would sound rather similar. Pelvetsky’s comment on his conflict with CROCA plenipotentiary in Stanislav Oblast, Kozenko, is revealing for his stand. Caused by opposite views on bishop’s dignity, responsibilities, and the character of his relationship with CROCA official, it forced the Bishop to ‘think over the juridical position of the church [in the Soviet state] in general.’⁴³ Needless to say, this remark was classified as ‘oppositional’ in CROCA documentation.

Much less understandable is a similarly negative evaluation of the activities of the bishops who succeeded them. The personal reports of Bishops Mykolai Iuryk, Iosyf Savrash, and Hrygorii Zakaliaka self-depict them as the active promoters of Orthodoxisation and fighters against the catacomb church. The attitude towards them on the part of their clergy and believers substantially differed from the cordial relationships of the latter with Bishops Melnyk, Pelvetsky and even Makarii Oksiiuk. The bishops’ repeated declarations of their ‘unconditional loyalty’ to the state and ecclesiastical authorities in Moscow also cause difficulties for an estimation of their actual stand. The only overt oppositional action associated with their names is Bishop Hrygorii’s signature under a famous ‘Appeal’ of Archbishop Hermogen of Kaluga from 1965.⁴⁴ The best apparent proof of Savrash’s and Iuryk’s acceptability for central authorities is that they retained their positions for decades that was a rare case in the Soviet state. Still, in a 1974 report of CRA Deputy Chairman, Furov, judging the loyalty of the Orthodox hierarchy, Metropolitan Mykolai Iuryk was listed among the most opposition-minded bishops.⁴⁵ Even Iosyf Savrash, who was frequently called a ‘collaborator’ by other bishops and the West Ukrainian flock, in view of his readiness to introduce demands by the CROCA on restricting church activity, was repeatedly accused of ‘hypocritical behaviour’ by the latter.⁴⁶ CROCA documents contain some mentions of his

attempts to strengthen the church's position under the pretext of opposing illegal Uniate activities.⁴⁷

The West Ukrainian bishops much better than the Patriarchate leadership realised the necessity to make concessions to local traditions, conform to popular expectations, and adopt some Greek Catholic practices in order to ensure the functioning of the Orthodox Church in the region. The need to prevent 'a worsening of the situation and any reactions [anti-Soviet remarks and a turn to the catacomb clergy] of believers,' as defined by Bishop Iosyf, was a common excuse for the slow implementation of any measures on Orthodoxisation.⁴⁸ The bishops' conscious preservation of certain Greek Catholic practices, such as the administration by a priest of two liturgies daily, a simultaneous service by a few priests on different altars, and the management by one priest of several parishes, did not only run against Orthodox canons. It was also a viable approach to solving the problem of the shortage of church buildings and clergy that became especially acute with the progress of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign. The use of the Ukrainian language in sermons and the Ukrainian pronunciation of Church Slavonic for liturgy, which was advocated by these bishops and unwillingly allowed by the Patriarchate, promoted the 'Ukrainisation' of the Ukrainian Exarchate, thus sustaining Moscow's fear of the revival of a national church in Ukraine.

The potential influence of the catacomb church upon the converted population was the most effective bargaining chip that enabled the West Ukrainian bishops to keep the vitality and distinctiveness of their *own* church. A need to oust Greek Catholic religious literature with its 'nationalist' and 'anti-socialist' content was exploited to demand from the Patriarchate that it provides the reunited dioceses with a sufficient amount of Ukrainian-language religious literature and calendars, and to ask Soviet authorities to allow the publication of a Ukrainian prayer-book. The illegal administration of the sacraments by catacomb priests was a powerful argument in the bishops' attempts to preserve functioning churches in their dioceses, to open new ones, and to increase the number of parish clergy. To make their arguments even more convincing, they emphasised the loyalty of the reunited clergy and their desire to conform to Soviet legislation on religious cults, contrasted with the openly 'anti-Soviet' activities of the Uniate clergy. In his letter of December 25, 1971, Archbishop Iosyf explained the 'acute need' to open church buildings in 'threatened localities' by the impossibility for registered clergy to violate Soviet legislation through administering the sacraments outside churches as was the illegal Uniate practice.⁴⁹

Despite similar declarations of other bishops, this reference to Soviet law should be considered a useful rhetorical tool, rather than evidence of their 'unconditional loyalty.' The rulers of the Lviv-Ternopil Diocese, for instance, explained the persistence of the practice of administering the sacraments in believers houses and burials at cemeteries – long after it was forbidden both by Soviet provisions and the Holy Synod decrees – by the same 'acute need' to oppose the 'underground' Uniate activities.⁵⁰ However ambiguous such an interpretation might be, exactly the 'Greek Catholic challenge' allowed the 'church within the church' to survive Khrushchev's struggle with religion with less losses than the rest of the ROC. Fletcher suggests that the loss of the validity of a bargaining situation preconditioned Khrushchev's campaign.⁵¹ The questionable Orthodox essence of the 'church within the church' and the intensification of the activities of the catacomb church, conditioned by the return of Greek Catholic clergy from the *Gulag* and the preparation and later the activities of the Second Vatican Council (though its impact, as emerges from a scholarly debate, was far too complex to be estimated only as stimulating), provided the West Ukrainian bishops with powerful arguments in their strive to secure the vitality of their *own* church.⁵²

By way of conclusion, I would like to again stress that however debatable the subjection of Greek Catholics to the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate might appear, it granted a certain degree of autonomy to the West Ukrainian dioceses and generally the Ukrainian Exarchate, rather than promoting religious, national, and political unification as the regime and the Patriarchate sought. Besides securing the revival of the UGCC, the 'church within the church' also contributed to the regeneration of a 'Ukrainian kind of Orthodoxy,' i.e., to creating favourable conditions for the establishment of Ukrainian Orthodox churches (the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church) in this area in the 1990s. Contributing factors were mainly and some of them emerge from this study: from Kostelnyk's vision and 'Easternisers' program to popular conservatism and inertia always (in the 1940s and in the 1990s) opposing any change, and from genuine conversion of a tiny number of West Ukrainians that still cannot be ignored to official religious policy turning the region into the 'bulwark of Orthodoxy' in the Soviet Union. This 'Orthodox heritage' of the 'church within the church' once again testifies to its complexity as well as to the highly complicated character of the phenomenon of religious conversion as a whole. If approached from the opposite angle, a shared legacy of the UGCC and Orthodox churches now functioning in the region reveals wider relevance of such a survey for the comprehension of the current confessional landscape in Ukraine.

The conduct of the West Ukrainian bishops becomes evident from the analysis and can hardly be described as 'resistance' to the policies of the hostile regime in the conventional understanding of this term. On the other hand, one should not ignore that their activities aimed at the preservation of the vitality and distinctiveness of West Ukrainian converted community, which consciously or unconsciously ran against the plans of secular and ecclesiastical rulers in Moscow, had a significant oppositional potential. I aimed at revealing how subtle the line between the Orthodox hierarchy's 'collaboration' and 'opposition' sometimes was; and furthermore, how these seemingly incompatible modes of behaviour together contributed to the survival of the church in the Soviet state. By providing insight into the complexity of the issue, this investigation also points to the inherent limitations of a black-or-white approach to church life under Soviet rule, which still dominates in contemporary scholarship.

¹ The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has been an official title of the Eastern (Byzantine-rite) Catholic Church of Western Ukraine since the late eighteenth century. The term 'Uniate' will be used in the quotes from Soviet official documents and in a discussion of the means of struggling with the Greek Catholic Church, given that this original self-definition acquired a vivid pejorative connotation during the Soviet period.

² The CROCA was established in 1943 being an important sign of achieving a *modus vivendi* between the Stalinist regime and the leadership of the ROC. In 1965, the CROCA was combined with the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults to form the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA). This governmental agency was aimed to serve as a 'mediator' between Soviet authorities and the ROC, while indeed became a principal instrument of controlling the church. This allows some researchers (Sergii Gordun, Mikhail Shkarovsky) to compare the CROCA (CRA) with the Chief Procurator office in Imperial Russia.

³ Stehle, H., *Eastern Politics of the Vatican, 1917 – 1979* (Ohio University Press, 1981), p. 231; Chadwick, O., *The Christian Church in the Cold War* (Penguin Books, 1993), p. 52. Most uncompromising estimates of the Patriarchate policies are provided in: Havryliuk, O., 'Nyshchennia radianskoïu derzhavoiu relihiinykh konfessii Zakhidnoi Ukrainy iak dukhovnoi opory silskoho naseleння kraïu', [The Destruction by the Soviet State of West Ukrainian Religious Confessions – A Spiritual Core of the Rural Population in the Region] in *Istoriia relihii v Ukraini. Tezy povidomlen Mizhnarodnoho V kruhloho stolu (Lviv, 3-5 travnia 1995)* [A History of Religion in Ukraine: Papers of the Fifth International Colloquium (Lviv, May 3-5, 1995)] (Lviv, 1995), pp. 95-98; Shtrikier, G., 'Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov v sovieskom gosudarstvie. Ocherk istorii otnoshenii

miezhdu Tserkoviu i gosudarstvom', [The Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet State: A Survey into the History of Church – State Relationships] in G. Shtrikier (compiler), *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov v sovietskoie vremia (1917 – 1991). Materialy i dokumenty po istorii otnoshenii miezhdu gosudarstvom i tserkoviu* [The Russian Orthodox Church during the Soviet Period (1917 – 1991): Sources and Documents on the History of State – Church Relationships], Vol. 1 (Propiliei, 1995), p. 46. Dominant in post-Soviet historiography is an inclination to 'justify' the Patriarchate's involvement: Ielensky, V. and O. Patalai, '...Partiia vse vypravliaie, pryznachaie i buduie za odnym pryntsyptom...', ['...The Party Corrects, Appoints and Constructs Everything according to One Principle...'] *Liudyna i Svit*, No. 3, 1992, pp. 39-41; Pashchenko, V., *Hreko-katolyky v Ukraini: vid 40-kh rokiv XX stolittia do nashykh dnev* [The Greek Catholics of Ukraine: From the 1940s to Our Days] (Poltava, 2002); Chumachenko, T., *Gosudarstvo, Pravoslavnaia Tserkov, Veruiushchiie. 1941 -1961 g.g. (Sieria 'Pervaia monografiia')* [State. Orthodox Church. Believers. 1941 – 1961 (A Series 'The First Monograph')] (ANRO-XX, 1999), p. 51; Pospelovskiy, D. V., *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov v XX viekie* [The Russian Orthodox Church in the Twentieth Century] (Riespublika, 1995), p. 261; Tsipin, V., *Istoriia Russkoi Tserkvi 1917 – 1997* [A History of the Russian Church, 1917 – 1997] (Izdanielstvo Spaso-Priobrazhenskogo Valaamskogo monastyria, 1997), p. 345; Vasileva, O., *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov v politieke sovietskogo gosudarstva v 1943 – 1948 g.* [The Russian Orthodox Church within Official Soviet Policy during 1943 – 1948] (Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii RAN, 2001), p. 189. Transliteration in this article follows the Library of Congress System.

⁴ A stress on a complex nature of the liquidation process underlies all the studies of Bohdan Bociurkiw who is undeniably the major authority in the field. Some major references would include: *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939-1950)* (Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996); *ibid.*, 'The Uniate Church in the Soviet Ukraine: A Case Study in Soviet Church Policy', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. VII, 1965, pp. 89-113; *ibid.*, 'The Orthodox Church and the Soviet Regime in the Ukraine, 1953 – 1971', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, Summer 1972, pp. 191-213. Among other valuable contributions: Markus, V., 'The Suppressed Church: Ukrainian Catholics in the Soviet Union', in R. T. De George and J. P. Scanlan (eds.), *Marxism and Religion in Eastern Europe: Papers Presented at the Banff International Slavic Conference, September 4-7, 1974* (D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 119-133; Kolarz, W., *Religion in the Soviet Union* (Macmillan & Co Ltd., 1961), 236-237.

⁵ *Gosudarstviennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Fiedieratsii* [National Archive of the Russian Federation] (Moscow, Russia) (GARF), 6991/2/256, p. 1. The official term 'reunited dioceses' designated the West Ukrainian dioceses: the Lviv-Ternopil Diocese, which incorporated the Drohobych-Sambir Diocese in 1959, the Stanislav-Kolomyia and the Mukachevo-Uzhhorod Dioceses.

⁶ This issue is discussed at length by Bociurkiw, primarily within his examination of the factors contributing to the 'Ukrainisation' of the Ukrainian Exarchate and thus providing grounds for the regeneration of a 'Ukrainian kind of Orthodoxy' in the late twentieth century. Bociurkiw B. R., *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, p. 244; *ibid.*, 'Religion and Nationalism in the Contemporary Ukraine', in G. W. Simmonds (ed.), *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the Era of Brezhnev and Kosygin* (The University of Detroit Press, 1977), pp. 82-83. Also see: Sysyn, F. E., *The Ukrainian Orthodox Question in the USSR* (Ukrainian Studies Fund; Harvard University, 1987), pp. 13-15.

⁷ *Rossiiskii gosudarstviennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politichieskoi istorii* [Russian State Archive of Social and Political History] (Moscow, Russia), 17/132/569, pp. 57-58, 60-61.

⁸ *Rossiiskii gosudarstviennyi arkhiv novieishei istorii* [Russian State Archive of Contemporary History] (Moscow, Russia), 5/33/126, p. 206. Here and further translations from Russian and Ukrainian are mine.

⁹ The term 'Orthodoxisation,' applied in official state and church documentation, had a double meaning: the 're-education' of the converted population in 'Orthodox spirit' and the 'establishment of Orthodox presence' in Western Ukraine.

¹⁰ Markus, V., 'Religion and Nationality: The Uniates in the Ukraine', in P. Ramet (ed.), *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (Duke University Press, 1989), p. 153.

¹¹ According to Bociurkiw's classical definition: 'The "catacomb" church has remained a major problem for the ROC in that region.' Bociurkiw, B. R., 'The Orthodox Church and the Soviet Regime', p. 197.

¹² Markus V., 'The Suppressed Church', pp. 122-123.

¹³ GARF, 6991/1s/1442, p. 26. Italics are mine.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6991/1s/1486, p. 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6991/1s/1271, pp. 126 – 127.

¹⁷ Bociurkiw, B. R., *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, p. 131. Also see: Pashchenko, V., *Hreko-katolyky v Ukraini*, pp. 88-89.

- ¹⁸ Scholars have finally drawn closer attention to Kostelnyk's views and concepts that until recently remained an almost completely ignored issue in the study of 'reunification.' The most insightful latest contribution is Natalia Madei's examination of Kostelnyk's concept of a Ukrainian National Church, which she considers an elaboration of Sheptytsky's ideas: Madei, N., 'Havryil Kostelnyk i Lvivsky Sobor 1946 roku', [Havryil Kostelnyk and the 1946 Lviv Council] *Visnyk Lvivskoho universytetu. Filosofski nauky*, No. 2, 2000, pp. 140-150. This is also one of the central themes of her doctoral dissertation: Madei, N., *Kontseptsiiia Ukrainskoi Hreko-Katolytskoi Tserkvy H. Kostelnyka v konteksti istorii uniatskykh tserkov* [Havryil Kostelnyk's Concept of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church within the History of the Uniate Churches]. PhD Dissertation in Philosophy (NAN Ukrainy; Instytut filosofii, 2001).
- ¹⁹ Significantly enough, Bociurkiw lists 'Latinisers' – 'Easternisers' controversy among major factors leading to the liquidation of the UGCC. Bociurkiw B. R., *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, p. 28.
- ²⁰ It is worth mentioning that even those historians who call not to ignore a genuine inclination towards Orthodoxy emphasise that only a *Ukrainian* Orthodox church would have enough appeal to compete for the adherence of West Ukrainian believers (Kolarz). The acknowledgement found in the writings of Orthodox church historians is even more insightful. They understandably forward the thesis on voluntary conversion, but still point to the cooling effect that the regime's initiative and its association with the Moscow Patriarchate had on the clergy and believers' perception. Gordun, S., 'Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov pri sviatieishikh Patriarkhakh Sergii i Aleksii', [The Russian Orthodox Church under Holy Patriarchs Sergii and Alexei] *Viestnik rossiiskogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, No. 1, 1990, p. 108; Tsipin, V., *Istoriia Russkoi Tserkvi*, pp. 342-343.
- ²¹ *Tsentrалnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchykh orhaniv vlady ta upravlinnia Ukrainy* [Central State Archive of the Higher Organs of Power and Administration in Ukraine] (Kyiv, Ukraine) (TDAVO), 4648/5/278, p. 183.
- ²² *Arkhiv Istorytu Istorii Tserkvy* [Archive of the Institute of Church History], *Lvivska Bohoslovska Akademiia* [Lviv Theological Academy] (Lviv, Ukraine), *Interviu z iepyskopom Mykhailom Sabryhoiu* [An Interview with Bishop Mykhailo Sabryha], March 30, 1994, Ternopil // P-1-1-321, p. 37.
- ²³ GARF, 6991/1s/1271, p. 224.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6991/1s/1442, p. 142.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- ²⁶ *Personally conducted interview with Mrs Iaroslava Datsyshyna, widow of Fr Mykhailo Datsyshyn*, March 20, 2002, Stryi, Lviv Oblast. 'Popyk' was a pejorative name for an Orthodox priest, derived from a Russian popular term 'pop'.
- ²⁷ GARF, 6991/2/178, p. 192.
- ²⁸ Markus, V., 'Religion and Nationality: The Uniates in the Ukraine', p. 145.
- ²⁹ Bociurkiw B. R., 'The Orthodox Church and the Soviet Regime', p. 193; Markus V., 'The Suppressed Church', p. 121.
- ³⁰ GARF, 6991/1s/1054, pp. 210 – 211.
- ³¹ Fletcher, W. C., *A Study in Survival: The Church in Russia 1927 – 1943* (S.P.C.K., 1965), p. 97.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 125.
- ³³ GARF, 6991/1s/1442, p. 163.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6991/1s/1271, p. 155.
- ³⁵ *Tsentrалnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromadskykh obiednan Ukrainy* [Central State Archive of the Civic Associations in Ukraine] (Kyiv, Ukraine), 1/24/5028, p. 22.
- ³⁶ The major reason for Oksiiuk's removal was his readiness to 'satisfy the Uniates' that turned him into 'an Orthodox bishop for the Orthodox and an Uniate for the Uniates,' as the Orthodox faithful who came to the Lviv-Ternopil Diocese from Eastern Ukraine defined in their letters. GARF, 6991/1s/532, p. 27
- ³⁷ GARF, 6991/1s/1271, p. 240; Tsipin, V., *Istoria Russkoi Tserkvi 1917 – 1997*, p. 366.
- ³⁸ GARF, 6991/1s/1486, p. 14.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6991/1s/1788, p. 16.
- ⁴⁰ Vasileva, O., *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov*, p. 192; Shkarovsky, M., *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov pri Stalinie i Khrushchevie (Gosudarstviенno-tserkovnyie otnosheniia v SSSR v 1939 – 1964 godakh)* [The Russian Orthodox Church under Stalin and Khrushchev: State – Church Relationships in the USSR during 1939 – 1964] (Krutitskoie patriarsheie podvorie; Obshchestvo lubitelielie tserkovnoi istorii, 2000), pp. 127-128; Chumachenko, T., *Gosudarstvo, Pravoslavnaia Tserkov, Veruiushchie*, pp. 52-54.
- ⁴¹ Bociurkiw's key concept of the 'ecclesiastical – nationalities' ('religio-national') policy of the Soviet regime provides a useful analytical tool for approaching these issues.
- ⁴² The first official document of the Holy Synod declaring the aim of the Orthodoxisation of West Ukrainians was issued on July 8, 1947. Its major points were confirmed by the Holy Synod Decision from December 12,

1949, and further elaborated in the so-called ‘Sixteen Provisions,’ adopted during the meeting of the West Ukrainian bishops on January 28, 1950.

⁴³ GARF, 6991/1s/1162, p. 128.

⁴⁴ This ‘Appeal’ is the only written evidence of the Orthodox episcopate protest against reforms in inner-church life, introduced in 1961 under the regime’s pressure, that powerfully undermined church structure.

⁴⁵ Tsipin, V., *Istoria Russkoi Tserkvi 1917 – 1997*, p. 442.

⁴⁶ In a letter of the Drohobych clergy from 1965, Bishop Iosyf was even accused of ‘selling our Holy Church to Satan’ and called ‘Judas of the Ukrainian Church,’ because of his instructions concerning restrictions of the administration of the sacraments and the prohibition of traditional religious celebrations. TDAVO, 4648/1/459, p. 39.

⁴⁷ GARF, 6991/1s/1788, p. 155; 6991/1s/1442, p. 24.

⁴⁸ TDAVO, 4648/5/17, p. 90.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4648/5/278, p. 222.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4648/1/459, pp. 21-22.

⁵¹ Fletcher, W. C., *A Study in Survival*, p. 125.

⁵² A ‘Greek Catholic’ issue has not received yet sufficient scholarly attention within the study of the Vatican II and Vatican – Moscow relationships in the period. Insights provided point to its complexity liable to almost opposite interpretations: from the thesis that the Vatican II revitalised the hopes for the legalisation of the UGCC to a view that a ‘Greek Catholic issue’ was regarded as a ‘major obstacle’ to Vatican – Moscow rapprochement by the both sides. Floridi, A. U., *Moscow and the Vatican* (Ardis Publishers, 1986); Stehle, H., *Eastern Politics of the Vatican*; Pashchenko, V., *Hreko-katolyky v Ukraini*, pp. 236-237; Keleher, S., *Passion and Resurrection – The Greek Catholic Church in Soviet Ukraine, 1939 – 1989* (Stauropogion, 1993), pp. 83-85; Markus V., ‘The Suppressed Church’, pp. 128-129.