

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State, 1939–1950. By*Bohdan Rostyslav Bociurkiw.*

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In 1946 at the so-called Lviv Sobor, the Soviet government abolished the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church on the territory of the USSR and drove it into the catacombs. By September 1949, the Communist Party liquidated this church in the five western provinces of the Ukrainian SSR (the Lviv, Drohobych, Stanislav, Ternopil, and Transcarpathian oblasts).

Russian hostility toward the Uniate (Eastern Catholic) Church originated with the church's inception at the Union of Brest (Berestia) in 1596, when the majority of Orthodox bishops in Ukraine and Belarus (then part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) recognized the primacy of the Roman pope. In return, the Commonwealth promised the new church equality with the Roman Catholic Church and the pope guaranteed that the Uniates would retain their Byzantine-Slavonic rite, the Church-Slavonic liturgical language, Eastern canon law, a married clergy, and administrative autonomy. Bishops negotiated this union only seven years after the establishment of the Moscow patriarchate, which claimed jurisdiction over the Orthodox in the Commonwealth. The Muscovite state viewed the Union of Brest not only as a Polish-inspired religious affront to the idea of Moscow as the "Third Rome" but, even more important, as a Western attempt at permanently separating "Little" Rus' (Ukraine) and "White" Rus' (Belarus) from "Great" Rus' (Muscovy).

According to Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, a professor of political science at Carleton University and one of the leading specialists on church-state relations in the Soviet Union, there are striking parallels between the tsarist treatment of the Uniate church in the 1770s and Soviet policies toward the church in Galicia and Transcarpathia at the end of World War II. By forcing the Greek Catholics into the state-dominated Russian Orthodox Church, the tsarist and Soviet governments hoped to remove the religious barriers to the Russification of the Ukrainians.

Bociurkiw carefully describes and analyzes the planning, realization, and consequences of the Soviet destruction of the symbiotic relationship between Greek Catholicism and the intense national consciousness of the indigenous Ukrainian population in western Ukraine. The author's approach is a historical one, not based on any procrustean political science models. He begins with a historical introduction to the emergence and development of the Uniate/Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, then describes and analyzes the first Soviet occupation of Galicia between 1939 and 1941, the Soviet reoccupation of Western Ukraine in 1944 and the search for a *modus vivendi* with the Church, the attack on the Church in 1945 and 1946, the "reunion" of the Greek Catholics with the Russian Orthodox Church (the Lviv Sobor), the aftermath of the "reunion" in Galicia, and the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Transcarpathia.

Using Soviet archives, Bociurkiw discovers that the Kremlin prepared the conversion of the Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy as early as the first Soviet occupation of Galicia in 1939–41. From the very beginning of the Soviet reoccupation of Galicia and the occupation of Transcarpathia in 1944, the state security and Party apparatus secretly assembled the documents and confessions needed to "prove" that the Greek Catholic Church had "collaborated" with the Nazi occupation authorities and their "allies," the OUN (the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) and the UPA (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army). But, until at least February 1945, the new authorities remained on good

terms with the Greek Catholic Church. They thus fed the illusion that a new era in church-state relations in western Ukraine had begun.

In contrast to the tsarist “reunion” campaigns, the Russian Orthodox Church played only a marginal role in the postwar assault on Greek Catholicism. The initiative came from Stalin himself; the NKGB and MGB acted conspiratorially through an initiative group, led by the Reverend Dr. Havril Kostel’nyk. Whether because of “fear or pragmatism or both,” the initiative group, prompted by the NKGB, created a charade in which the Greek Catholic Church would voluntarily dissolve itself and merge with the Russian Orthodox Church. But no imprisoned Greek Catholic bishop joined the “reunion” campaign. Led by rank-and-file priests, the Sobor, as Bociurkiw points out, was canonically incorrect.

This is a well-researched, meticulous, and judicious monograph, not a “martyrological” study of Ukrainian Catholics under Soviet control. The author finished the first draft of this book in 1989; with the opening of Soviet archives during the late Gorbachev period, he then completely rewrote it.

On the basis of Soviet and Western monographs and periodicals, documents in Soviet, Vatican, and Ukrainian Catholic archives, eyewitness accounts, letters, and interviews, Bociurkiw constructs an objective, even encyclopedic, history of the Church’s “reunion” with the Russian Orthodox Church between 1946 and 1949. Ironically, Bociurkiw dug deeper in the former Soviet archives than he did in the Vatican archives; archivists in Russia and Ukraine, even those in the KGB, opened their vaults for him. Unfortunately, he did not gain access to all Vatican archives.

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