

Reviews

Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939-1950)* (Edmonton/Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996), (pp. xvi & 310, illustrated).

Now that the infamous propaganda film of the 1946 'Synod of L'viv' is widely available, nobody who has seen it can fail to be struck by the look of horror on the faces of the clergy who were forced to acquiesce in Stalin's version of church politics. It is no wonder that the film was promptly put away and forgotten – it made only too clear that this was not a triumph of Holy Orthodoxy so much as a sordid piece of state interventionism.

That said, it cannot be denied that people will look at the forced union of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church with the Patriarchate of Moscow in different ways. There are plenty of Orthodox, including some whose ancestors were themselves adherents of the *Unia*, who see the forced union as a bad way of bringing about a good result - but the end does not justify the means! There are others who, from a different perspective, use the Stalinist regime's cynical manipulation of the Russian Orthodox Church as a stick for beating that Church. I am glad to see that no such extreme view finds support in this present work.

Dr Bociurkiw provides us with a very readable and detailed account of the background, and actual unfolding of the events surrounding the 1946 'synod'. He begins with an historical introduction which sets the scene by giving a good and largely dispassionate account of the way in which the Union of Brest-Litovsk came into being, and how its effects were steadily eroded as Russian Imperial control was asserted over lands which at the time of the union were part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. If I have one area of unease it is the easy dismissal of the bishops who became Orthodox in 1859 as apostates. We appear to have little concrete evidence of their motives, and it may well be recalled that the bishops who united with Rome in 1596 were regarded as apostates by the Orthodox. I would humbly suggest that the highly emotive word 'apostate' be avoided unless there is very clear

evidence that a person accused of apostasy acted in a way clearly and openly contrary to his conscience.

The setting of the scene involves a fairly detailed account of the state of the Greek-Catholic Church in its Galician strongholds, and especially under the inspired leadership of Metropolitan Andrew (Sheptyts'ky), whose death in November 1944 cleared the way for the Soviet aggression. The events of this period in the 1940's and the details of the way in which the Greek-Catholic Church provides the greater part of the material at the heart of this book. There is also some account of the figures who set up the 'Initiative Group' for the 'union'; Kostel'nyk, Pel'vets'kyi and Mel'nyk; though this reviewer is still left with a desire to know more about the character and motivations of all three, especially Kostel'nyk, who was as the author says: "A popular priest and respected theologian ..." (p. 121). There is still more to be uncovered about the human character of these priests, and their undoubtedly tragic lives.

Bociurkiw makes clear that we do not have any clear evidence as to the real attitudes and opinions of Patriarch Alexis I and those, such as Metropolitan Nicholas (Yarushevich), who were closest to him. He further points out (footnote 63, on page 119) the uncertain authorship of what purports to be the Patriarch's letter exhorting the Catholics to throw off their links to the Vatican. Bociurkiw does however show that the bishops charged with effecting the union from the Orthodox side, the Ukrainian Oksiiuk brothers, were learned but determined opponents of the *unia* who had at various times shown their sympathy for ecclesiastical autocephaly in Ukraine. In these matters as in others, Bociurkiw seems largely to eschew expressing an opinion of the characters involved, unless there is clear evidence of their attitudes and opinions.

In the penultimate chapter there is an account of the different course taken by the suppression of the Greek-Catholic Church in Trans-Carpathia; the more obviously brutal part played there by the state authorities and its agents leads in to the final assessment of the whole sorry story in the final chapter, the Epilogue.

In this final chapter, Bociurkiw shows that nothing the Greek-Catholic Church could have done would have saved it from suppression. Stalin and his collaborators perceived that Church as insolubly linked with a Ukrainian nationalism which they were determined to

suppress wherever it raised its head. This policy was of a piece with the way in which entirely Russianizing policies dominated Kiev under Kaganovich and Khrushchev. In the long term Stalin had no use for the Church, be it Orthodox, Catholic or any other. Given time it is highly likely that further persecution would have been unleashed, and if Stalin had lived, that persecution would have been far more vicious than that of the 1960s. Bociurkiw leaves us with some questions for future researchers; questions surrounding such important matters as just how strong was the campaign for 'reunion' with Orthodoxy, how many priests were arrested, how many continued illegally, retired from priestly activities? There is still much to be done, and the time is running out for the survivors are elderly and often in poor health. The work being done by the L'Viv Historical Institute under Dr. Borys Gudziak will be of great importance here, so long as too much has not been destroyed in a recent fire.

The photographs in the book include some very interesting ones not readily available, especially those which show various of the players in this drama at the time of Metropolitan Andrew's funeral.

Amongst this reviewer's friends are two Ukrainian laymen who, with their wives, are close personal friends of each other. Both were born in England, but one who is Orthodox is from a Volhynian background, and the other, a Catholic, is Galician. The distant ancestors of the first may well have been adherents of the first union of Brest, becoming Orthodox under Russian pressure; the distant ancestors of the second are likely to have been Catholic only since the so-called second union. This historic reversal may help us see that it is *people* whose lives and faith traditions have been warped in the complex history of Ukraine. In the interests of common humanity, as well as Christian sentiment, we need to work for growth in understanding of both the good and bad sides of our histories, so that we can actually begin to grow towards the union God wants of us, and not towards a union founded on nationalistic presuppositions, nor even upon the presuppositions of ecclesiastical aggrandisement. Books like this are necessary reading in this search for true unity.

Gregory Woolfenden