

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939–1950). By Bohdan Rostyslav Bociurkiw. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996. xvi, 310 pp. Index. Plates. Hard bound.

The Greek Catholic (Uniate) church preserves the rite and customs of Byzantine Christendom but is in union with the Roman Catholic church. The majority of the population of the western Ukrainian territories of Galicia and Transcarpathia had belonged to that church for several centuries before they came under Soviet rule during World War II. Almost immediately after the war the Soviet authorities forcibly liquidated the Greek Catholic church in both Galicia (1946) and Transcarpathia (1949). The process of liquidation is the subject of the detailed study under review.

Bociurkiw makes a compelling case that the suppression of Greek Catholicism

had little to do with the atheism of Marxist-Leninist doctrine (after all, the parishes continued to exist, but as part of the Russian Orthodox Church). Rather, he argues, this was a continuation of tsarist policy toward the Uniates: Catherine II had almost completely eliminated the Uniate church in right-bank Ukraine after the partitions of Poland; Nicholas I finished off the church in the right bank and in Belarus in 1839 and Alexander II liquidated the last Greek Catholic eparchy—in the former Congress Kingdom of Poland—in 1875. Furthermore, the Soviet authorities were unwilling to tolerate the existence of an ecclesiastical body that was not fully subservient to their interests; while the Russian Orthodox church, which reemerged during World War II after harsh persecutions, was pliable, the Greek Catholic church, with strong roots in the local population and allegiance to Rome, was not. Finally and crucially, the abolition of the Greek Catholic church in Galicia was also motivated by the bitter struggle with Ukrainian nationalism, at that time taking the form of large-scale armed resistance to Soviet rule.

This is an unusually well researched book. Bociurkiw had been working on it for many years, amassing printed documentation, conducting interviews on two continents, and consulting unpublished materials in western repositories, when the great set of changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s unexpectedly made it possible for him to expand his source base to include Communist Party records on this sensitive topic. There is still documentation from the Soviet period that remains closed, notably the papers of the three priests who served as figureheads for the campaign to unite with the Russian Orthodox church, the so-called Initiative Group led by Father Havryil Kostelnyk. Much of the relevant documentation in the possession of the Vatican has also not been made accessible to scholars. Still, Bociurkiw was able to make use of a wide spectrum of archival documentation (the book includes a five-page list of these documents); of particular value were the papers of the party archive of the Lviv Oblast' Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine—Secret Section. Many issues surrounding the fate of the Greek Catholic church that had hitherto been the subject of informed speculation at best are now clarified and documented.

The scholarship is scrupulously cautious throughout. One example is the treatment of a certain "Father Author" who wrote a letter to the armed Ukrainian underground justifying the Initiative Group's decision to cooperate with the Soviet authorities and enter the Russian Orthodox church. From the context it is clear that this must have been the group's leader, Father Kostelnyk. Bociurkiw refrains from making the identification, however, since it is unproven; he does point out that a high official of the Ukrainian underground, in an interview in emigration, identified "Father Author" as Kostelnyk (but could not produce documentation) and that the style and arguments of "Father Author's" letter resemble those of Kostelnyk. This type of nuanced presentation runs through the entire monograph.

The book is narrowly focused on the interface between the Soviet state organs and the leadership of the Greek Catholic church. Background information is kept to the minimum, at times even below the minimum. A particularly jarring omission is the exclusion of any treatment of the church under the Nazi occupation in 1941–44. This would have been useful to fill in the narrative between the first (1939–41) and the second (1944) Soviet occupations of Galicia. As it is, the book just jumps from a chapter on the first occupation to a chapter on the second. Yet much more than just the passage of four years had occurred between these chapters. In the course of the liquidation of the Greek Catholic church, the Soviets again and again accused its hierarchy and clergy of having collaborated with the Nazi occupiers, and some account of what had actually transpired would have helped orient the reader. Yet having registered this complaint as a reader, I must in fairness point out that such a chapter would have been exceedingly difficult to write. The complex period of the occupation would have demanded a monograph of its own, and hardly any scholarly spadework has been accomplished as yet. Certainly it would have been impossible to present the complexities of the occupation in the same careful detail and cautious nuance that is sustained throughout the rest of the monograph. In omitting a chapter on the occupation, Bociurkiw was probably opting for what he considered the lesser evil.

This is an important monograph on a crucial episode in modern Ukrainian his-

tory, particularly indispensable for anyone who wishes to understand the current religious politics of independent Ukraine. It is recommended to all interested in twentieth-century Ukraine, to students of Soviet religious policy and of the immediate postwar politics of the Soviet Union, as well as to all connoisseurs of careful scholarship.

JOHN-PAUL HIMKA
University of Alberta