

Bociurkiw, Bohdan R. *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939–1950)*.  
Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press 1996. xvi + 310 pp.  
\$39.95. ISBN 1-895571-12-X.

When western Ukraine was occupied by Soviet forces in September 1939, Soviet authorities prepared a plan for the suppression of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC); this was carried out after the war. UGCC bishops were arrested and a synod staged in Lviv in 1946, which declared the self-liquidation of the UGCC through its absorption into the Orthodox Church.

The book concentrates on the Lviv eparchy, with more general coverage of the rest of western Ukraine and the region that remained with Poland. Based on published and archival sources as well as interviews, the study provides much valuable information. This is often presented with a bias, apparent already in the opening historical introduction, drawn mostly from popular works. In footnote 2 (pp. 1–2) the author labels one group of works as “pro-Orthodox,” but gives no corresponding label to the other group, unabashedly pro-Greek Catholic. Russian authorities occupying Galicia during World War I are quoted as writing that “they will not permit the return from hiding of the Uniate and Catholic priests to their previous posts” (p. 16), after which ellipses follow. The original text gives the motive: priests who abandon their parishes in time of danger do not deserve to be reinstated; the omission insinuates a more sinister intent.

It is difficult to account for the hiatus in the book concerning the German occupation of Galicia between the first and second Soviet occupation. Like Soviet writings, but from the opposite position, the author sees Ukrainian nationalist guerillas (UPA, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and their Communist counterparts in stark contrasts of black and white; he fails to see the tragedy of civil war, with atrocities committed by both forces.

The author views the UGCC primarily as a force in nation-building, never questioning the involvement of its hierarchy and clergy in political-national activity. He writes that the greatest difference between the UGCC and the Orthodox Church in Russian-ruled Ukraine was “between their attitudes to the rising Ukrainian nationalist movements” (p. 13), ignoring entirely confessional differences. The close religious-nationalist symbiosis in Galicia led to persecution of the UGCC chiefly for other than religious grounds; more seriously, from the religious viewpoint, this symbiosis weakened, and in some cases totally obscured, the UGCC’s religious witness to the Christian faith.

Because of the author’s perspective, the events in Galicia appear unique. Having lost sight of the religious aspect, the author makes no attempt to place Soviet policy regarding the UGCC in a wider context—that of organized religion under the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe.

Some minor inaccuracies are found. The Roman “Congregation for the Eastern Churches” (p. 232 and elsewhere) in the period discussed was called the “Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Church”; the name, under whatever form, is missing from the index. The author’s numerous translations from sources seldom read smoothly; they also contain inaccuracies. In the long quote on pages

23–24, “more and more frequently” should be “more emphatically and more frequently”; “are beginning to harm” should read “are beginning to destroy”; the first ellipsis stands for an entire paragraph; the next ellipsis is unnecessary; “twenty years” in the original is “nineteen years”; the following verbs should be in the past tense. On page 43 what appears as a quote from one document is a conflation of two.

The author concludes with the hope that he has presented a “less partisan and more reliable, detailed account than was hitherto possible” (p. 250). His book is indeed more detailed and more, if not entirely, reliable; unfortunately, the absence of an analytical approach and a tendentious selection of facts keeps Bociurkiw in the nationalist paradigm that mars many Ukrainian historical studies.

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