

Portraits of Two Bishops Defending Their Dioceses: A Study of the Orthodox Episcopate in Postwar Soviet Ukraine¹

Natalia Shlikhta

Abstract

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Drawing on the methodological insights of scholars such as James C. Scott, William Fletcher, and Sheila Fitzpatrick, the author, by means of research into Soviet archives, correspondence, and synodal documents and other sources, has uncovered many details of how Bishop Feodosii Kovernynsky and Archbishop Palladii Kaminsky not merely survived but in many cases actively and repeatedly subverted the restrictions placed upon their episcopal ministry in several Ukrainian dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church from the late 1940s until the late 1970s. Shlikhta looks in particular at daily practices of these two men (e.g., redistricting of parish boundaries; promoting to priestly ranks of those who were often locally established deacons or laypeople not hand-picked by the state to be priests; publishing prayer books in Ukrainian rather than Russian as an ostensible tool to help “Uniates” integrate into the official Russian Church more easily) to discover their subaltern strategies, which, while not always rising to the level of mass protest, major manifestos demanding rights, or similarly dramatic defiance of the regime, were nonetheless effective. The portrait that emerges significantly complicates the previous narrative of “two churches” whereby there was an officious and ideologically subservient church under complete communist domination on the one hand, and a rebellious, illegal underground church on the other. These two

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bishops reveal various quotidian strategies by which they demonstrated how it was possible to be rebellious *within* the officially permitted structures of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine in the postwar period.



Introduction

When commenting on the disastrous position of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the Soviet state, religious dissenters and the church opposition argued that the ecclesial hierarchy had been mainly responsible. In support of this claim, one typically finds three of the gravest accusations in their writings. The first was the hierarchs' silence and their refusal to overtly protest against official discriminatory policies. The second was "particularism" of diocesan bishops or, in other words, their inclination to think and act in "local terms" instead of attempting to safeguard the Church as a whole. And the third was the episcopate's "adaptability (*приспособленчество*) to communism" or "adaptability to atheist power," seen as the climax of their policy of compromise. The readiness of the hierarchy to "accommodate" (which meant primarily to identify themselves as "Soviet citizens," to adopt Soviet rhetoric, and to reconsider church social teaching to conform to Soviet sociopolitical circumstances) was condemned by dissenters and the church opposition as "conformist," "opportunistic," and evidence for their "subservience."²

² For elaboration see: *Samizdat Archive of Keston Institute (SAKI)*, SU/Ort 3/5.1 "Обращение к Поместному Собору РПЦ по поводу богословской деятельности Высокопреосвященнейшего Никодима, Митрополита Ленинградского и Новгородского, и других единомыслящих ему лиц. Составители: св. Миколай Татков, миряне: Феликс Карелин (Лев Регельсон), Виктор Капитанчук (недатированное, 1970 или 1971)," ff. 2–3; „Иродова закваска”: В.В. Талантов о приспособленчестве официальных руководителей Русской Церкви к атеизму (Отрывок из книги Глеб Рар „Церковная общественность современной России”), in *Посев* 5 (Франкфурт-на-Майне, 1970): 47–50; the appeals of the Committee for the Restoration of the Church (Центральний державний архів громадських об'єднань України (ЦДАГО), ф. 1, оп. 31, спр. 3833, ф.131 (Protocol No 7,

The Committee for the Restoration of the Church (*Совещательный орган объединенных групп действия Епископов, духовенства и мирян в защиту канонических и гражданских прав Русской Церкви в Советском Союзе*) was established in the late 1960s. Some bishops supported its activities, although these were mainly retired bishops as suggested by sources. One of its earliest appeals from August–September 1968 was a response to the synodal decision regarding the “oppositional activities” of Archbishop Iermogen (Golubiev).³ The Committee stated that the “silence of the leading institutions of the Church,” namely of the ecclesiastical authorities and of the vast majority of diocesan bishops, led the Church to a “complete disaster.”⁴ The appeal criticized a “diplomatic approach” taken by the Synod in relations with the state and a tactic of “small deeds,” which was the episcopate’s mainstream approach to solving problems faced by the Church. It concluded somewhat inconsistently with a caution to active bishops to “refrain from any pronouncement regarding the general catastrophic (*критическое*) position of the Church.”⁵ This last statement was most probably influenced by those bishops who allied with the committee. These bishops manifested their support for this protest against the regime’s antireligious measures and the subservience of the official church. They nonetheless realized that should some from the

1969); Центральный державний архів вищих органів влади і управління України (ЦДАВО), ф. 4648, оп. 5, спр. 128, ff. 32–33 (Protocol No 3, February–March 1969); *Ibid.*, ff. 15–17 (an appeal on the fiftieth anniversary of the restoration of the Patriarchate); the “Open Letter” of Fathers Eshliman and Iakunin (ЦДАГО, ф. 1, оп. 31, спр. 2972, ff. 28–29).

³ Archbishop Iermogen (Golubiev) of Kaluga – the author of the “Appeal” to Patriarch Alexei dated summer 1965, which was the most outspoken protest of the episcopate against the provisions of the 1961 Archbishops Council. The “Appeal” was supported by ten bishops. Archbishop Iermogen developed this criticism in his later note, “К пятидесятилетию восстановления патриаршества. Историко-каноническая и юридическая справка” of December 25, 1967. Владислав Цыпин (прот.), *История Русской Церкви 1917–1997* (Москва: Изд. Спасо-Преображенского Валаамского монастыря, 1997), 410.

⁴ ЦДАВО, ф. 4648, оп. 5, спр. 115, f. 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 52.