

## In the Shadow of Yalta: International Politics and the Soviet Liquidation of the Greco-Catholic Church

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### Резюме

В статті розглядається питання про вплив міжнародної політики на рішення вищих урядових чинників ССРСР ліквідувати Українську Греко-Католицьку Церкву навесні 1945 р. На підставі аналізу підписаної Й. Сталіном інструкції про використання Російської Православної Церкви в боротьбі з католицизмом та матеріалів про дипломатичні заходи президента США Франкліна Д. Рузвельта (напередодні та після Ялтинської конференції), автор приходить до висновку, що поштовхом для ліквідації Греко-Католицької Церкви стали фактори міжнародно-політичного характеру. Серед останніх значну роль відіграли спроби Ватикану утримати США і Велику Британію від поступок Сталіна в країнах Східньої Європи.



In 1996 the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church will mark perhaps the most important two dates in its history: the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brest Church Council which reunited that Church with Rome, and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of L'viv, which terminated its legal activity on the territory of Ukraine

for almost half a century. The L'viv Council of 1946 was master-minded by the Soviet secret police and crowned the Stalinist policy of the liquidation of the Church by its "reunification" with the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>1</sup>

For more than forty years the history of the liquidation of the Greco-Catholic Church was more an object of ecclesiastical and political struggle than of scholarly study. Only in the course of the last few years, since the rebirth of the Church in Ukraine in 1989, has the atmosphere permitted scholars to go beyond a one-sided approach to the history of the Greco-Catholic Church. In his presentation at the Second Congress of Ukrainian Studies in August, 1993, Bohdan Bociurkiw, the pre-eminent authority in the field, denounced both the mythological approach created by the Soviet counter-propagandistic literature and the martyrological approach that dominates Ukrainian diaspora writings on the topic.<sup>2</sup>

Despite obvious differences between the two approaches to the history of the liquidation of the Greco-Catholic Church, both share the view that the main reason for the liquidation of the Church was its close association with the Ukrainian national movement. This article proposes to challenge that position and to examine one of the

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<sup>1</sup> On the history of the Greco-Catholic Church under the Soviet regime, see the writings of Bohdan Bociurkiw, the principal authority on the problem: "The Uniate Church in Soviet Ukraine: A Case Study in Soviet Church Policy," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 7 (1965), 89–113; "The Suppression of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church in Postwar Soviet Union and Poland," in ed. Dennis J. Dunn, *Religion and Nationalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987), 97–119, and "The Ukrainian Catholic Church in the USSR under Gorbachev," *Problems of Communism*, 39 (November-December, 1990), 1–19.

<sup>2</sup> Bohdan Bociurkiw's paper "Мітологія чи мартирологія? Досвід і проблеми наукових досліджень сталінської ліквідації Греко-Католицької Церкви в Галичині, 1944–1946. Повний текст доповіді прочитаної на II-му Міжнародному конгресі українців у Львові 25 серпня 1993 р.," was distributed among the participants of the Congress. Bociurkiw mentions S.T. Danylenko's books *Дорогою ганьби і зради. Історична хроніка* (Kiev, 1970) and *Уніати* (Moscow, 1972) as examples of the Soviet "mythological" approach to the topic. The "martyrological" tendency is represented by the book *First Victims of Communism. White Book on the Religious Persecution in Ukraine* (Rome, 1953) and the collection of documents *Мартирологія українських церков* Том II: *Українська Католицька Церква*, comp. and ed. O. Zinkewych and Rev. T. Lonchyna (Toronto-Baltimore: Smoloskyp Publishers, 1985).

long neglected aspects of the history of the liquidation of the Church, namely, the influence of international politics on the Soviet decision to put an end to the activity of the Greco-Catholic Church.

### *The Decision to Liquidate the Church*

On 2 March 1945, Joseph Stalin and Viacheslav Molotov, at that time the Deputy Head of the Soviet government and People's Commissar for International Affairs, ordered the Head of the Council on the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, MGB (the Ministry of State Security) Colonel Georgii Karpov, to prepare a memorandum that would include historical data and current information on the Russian Orthodox Church's relations with the Vatican and proposals as to how that Church could be used to fight Catholicism. The memorandum was submitted by Karpov to Stalin, Molotov and Beria on 14 March 1945, and was approved by Stalin on 16 March. From that time on it functioned as an instruction that coordinated the activity of the different governmental bodies and the Russian Orthodox Church in their assault on the Catholic Church.

Karpov's memorandum was divided into four parts: 1) on the unification of the Greco-Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church; 2) on government support for Old Catholics and other measures to fight the Roman Catholic Church; 3) on the support of Russian Orthodox Church activity abroad, and 4) on the organization of the World Council of Christian Churches. The first section of the memorandum not only formulated the main goal of government policy toward the Greco-Catholic Church – its liquidation via “reunification” with the Moscow Patriarchate – but also proposed a number of measures to achieve it. These included the creation of an Orthodox eparchy in L'viv; the issuing of a Patriarchal appeal to Greco-Catholics to “reunite” with the Moscow Patriarchate, and the formation of an “Initiative Group” within the

Greco-Catholic Church that would declare the termination of the Church's links with the Vatican.<sup>3</sup>

Once approved by Stalin, Karpov's proposals acquired the force of official government policy and had to be implemented by all possible means. In his letter to the Head of the Council on the Affairs of Religious Cults, Karpov stressed that his proposals had been approved by Stalin.<sup>4</sup> It appears that on the lower level those instructions had been accepted as Stalin's personal orders. (In the Ternopil' region, one of the lower Soviet officials in charge of religious affairs told Greco-Catholic priests that she personally did not care about any differences between Orthodoxy and Greco-Catholicism as long as the priests fulfilled Stalin's wishes).<sup>5</sup>

According to the Soviet legislation that was in place in 1945, the state body directly responsible for the governmental policy toward the Greco-Catholic Church was the Council on the Affairs of Religious Cults. It was established by Stalin in the autumn of 1944 to control the activity of the non-Orthodox denominations. In reality, the Council was only a minor and insignificant player in Stalin's game. The head of the Council, NKGB Colonel Ivan Polianskii, had sent his subordinates the first instructions regarding the anti-Catholic offensive only in May 1945, when the whole Greco-Catholic hierarchy had been in prison for more than three weeks and the anti-Uniate campaign under way in Galicia for more than a month. In order to respond to Polianskii's letter his Ukrainian subordinate, Petro Vilkhovy, had to go on a fact-finding mission to L'viv, and only subsequently reported to his chief about the assault on the Greco-Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup> It would appear from the memoirs of Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj that the head of the

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<sup>3</sup> The text of the memorandum has been published with some minor omissions by Ivan Bilas in his article "Трагедія Церкви," *Патріярхат* 5 (1993), 16–19; 6 (1993), 18–21; 7 (1993), 8–11. This article appeared in a modified version as "Московський Патріярхат, каральні органи СРСР та знищення УТКЦ у 1940-их роках," *Logos* 34:3–4 (1993), 532–76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 (1993), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Василь Гриник, „Церква у рідному краю і Польщі,” *Мартирологія українських Церков*, Vol. 2, 246.

<sup>6</sup> Білас, „Трагедія Церкви,” *Патріярхат* 6 (1993), 20–21.