

# Nadia Kindrachuk

---

## The value of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in preservation of the national religious rights of the Ukrainians : 60s-70s of the 20th century

---

Historia i Polityka nr 22 (29), 97-105

---

2017

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Nadia KINDRACHUK

Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine

## The Value of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Preservation of the National Religious Rights of the Ukrainians: 60s–70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**Znaczenie Ukraińskiej Cerkwi Greckokatolickiej dla zachowania praw narodowo-religijnych Ukraińców w latach 60. i 70. XX wieku**

• **Abstrakt** •

Artykuł bada znaczenie Ukraińskiej Cerkwi Greckokatolickiej jako nieodłącznej części i elementu narodowego w życiu religijnym Ukraińców żyjących w zachodniej części terytorium ZSRR w latach 60. i 70. XX wieku. Badanie uwzględniło wyczerpującą analizę miejsca i roli Kościoła w budowaniu tożsamości narodowej i zachowaniu tożsamości etnicznej i narodowej tytularnych przedstawicieli narodu ukraińskiego w trakcie antyreligijnej kampanii sowieckiej. Opisujemy działalność kleru Cerkwi Greckokatolickiej, których celem była konsolidacja sił narodowo-patriotycznych oraz zbudowanie opozycji religijnej wśród Ukraińców. Artykuł opisuje również wektory polityki ateistycznej komunistycznej elity rządzącej oraz wyjaśnia ich istotę, którą była niejawną próba skierowania wyznawców Cerkwi Greckokatolickiej ku wyznaniu prawosławnemu. Wbrew religijnej opresji i prześladowaniu, Cerkiew Greckokatolicka kontynuowała rozwój w ramach działalności podziemnej i stała się czynnikiem konsolidującym walkę o prawa narodowe i wyznaniowe w Zachodniej Ukrainie. Stała się ważnym czynnikiem w tworzeniu tożsamości etnicznej oraz duchowej i kulturalnej narodu ukraińskiego.

• **Abstract** •

In the article we studied the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church as an integral part, a national factor in the religious process of the Ukrainians, living in western regions of the USSR during the 1960s and 1970s. The research gave a comprehensive analysis of the place and role of the church in nation-building and preservation of ethnic and national identity of the titular representatives of the Ukraine's nation during the Soviet anti-religious campaign. We described the activities of the Greek Catholic clergy, whose aim was the consolidation of national-patriotic forces and the formation of religious opposition among the Ukrainians. The article also outlined the policy vectors of the atheistic communist ruling elite and revealed their essence, covered violent reorientation of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy. In terms of religious oppression and persecution, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church continued its development of underground and become a consolidating factor in Western Ukrainian struggle for their national and religious rights. It has become an important factor in ethnicity creation and a spiritual and cultural self of the Ukrainian people.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Ukraińska Cerkiew Greckokatolicka, Ukraińcy, Ukraina Zachodnia, tożsamość narodowa, państwowo-kościelne stosunki, walka, konfrontacja, ateizm, kampania antyreligijna

**Keywords:** Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Ukrainian, Western Ukraine, national identity, state-church relations, struggle, confrontation, atheism, anti-religious campaign

## **Formulation of Scientific Problem and Its Significance**

For many centuries the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has been the spiritual and Ukrainian national support, the spokesman for their moral, scientific, cultural and educational values. It initiated and contributed the most to the acceleration of western Ukrainians' national identity and revival of traditional values of a Ukrainian family. With its clergy, its patriotic propaganda and educational work in the Soviet times anti-communist opposition became stronger, which laid a strong foundation in Ukraine's struggle for independence. However, due to their firm oppositional views, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has repeatedly suffered devastating destruction by the Soviet totalitarian state because it did not fit into the model of a "new communist society" and was declared to be the root cause of all the most negative social phenomena. In this context we should focus on the 1960s and 1970s, which were characterized by neutralization of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church as a dangerous source of spreading nationalist ideas and a desire to unify the Kremlin state religious policy. In displacing the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the communist regime destroyed not only religious traditions and a long history of the Ukrainians, but also their national consciousness, color and ethnicity.

After gaining Ukraine's independence, declaring a value priority of freedom in all spheres of public life, opening access to many archival sources, the country created favorable conditions for free, unbiased study of the Ukrainian Soviet past. People got a chance to rethink their history, especially the history of religion and the church. Today the question of normalization and updating Ukrainian religious life occupies an important place in the politics of our state. That is why establishing the historical truth about the importance of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in solving national problems of native-born Ukrainians, preservation of historical memory and national consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s always retains its relevance and interest for academicians, ordinary citizens and requires a special approach in the study. Without doubt, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church based on traditional Christian values and moral principles, has

always strived to cultivate not only rich spiritually but also nationally conscious personality by creating a system of ideas and values that can be accepted by society as basic conditions for its revival, strengthening spiritual unity and statehood of independent Ukraine.

## **Research Analysis**

The role of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the public life and the preservation of Ukrainian national colours and religious beliefs during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were partially covered in the works of such authors as: Igor Andrukhiv (2005; 2006), Roman Boyko (2000), Bohdan Bociurkiw (1998), Stepan Gelej (2000), Ivan Koval (2010), Vasyl Marchuk (2004), Stepan Mochkin (2015), Ivan Muzychka (2000), Volodymyr Serhiychuk (2001), Oksana Volynets (2006) and others. These scientists studied only some aspects of the mentioned topics, including the research of confessional, ethnic and political transformation of Western Ukraine, the study of the phenomenon of Ukrainian Catholicism, analysis of its genesis and formation, highlighting the role of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the formation and activity of the civil society of Galicia, clarifying the Soviet authorities' nature of the religious policy, showing the functioning of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the context of church-state relations during this period and so on. However, in the scientific literature the topic remains understudied. This enables us to continue working in this promising area.

## **The Aim of the Article**

Therefore, the focus of this article is to study the role of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in preserving ethnic identity and national consciousness of the Ukrainians during the anti-religious campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s. We also made the analysis of church and religious transformations in western Ukraine, highlighting the relationship of the government and the Church as a social institution, the characteristic of appearance of the spiritual opposition to the politics of the USSR atheisation among the native-born Ukrainians in the outlined period and more.

## The Main Material and Justification of Study Results

In the 1960s and 1970s a religious palette in Ukraine totaled about 40 religious confessions (*Questions Scientific Atheistic Propaganda...*, 1963). Thus, a dominant position in the country was taken by the Russian Orthodox Church, which operated legally and had the support of the then government. The remaining church communities were considered sectarian groups. The Soviet authorities tried to strengthen the position of the Russian Orthodox Church, especially in western region of Ukraine, dominated by Greek Catholics, who defended the Ukrainian national interests. The Soviet authorities used all measures to combat the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. A special meeting of the Council for the Russian Orthodox Church at the Council of Ministers on 10 April 1959 approved a secret resolution on strengthening the work of the “liquidation of the remnants of the union in western regions of the Ukrainian SSR”, which included the activation of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Orthodox priesthood against the underground Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (Marchuk, 2004). Preparing a detailed plan of the uniatic liquidation, top political leadership of the republic used a fairly wide range of repressive measures – from the deprivation of former priests of the UGCC pensions, to the imposition of administrative sanctions and conducting arrests. As of 1 November 1963, refusing to go into the Orthodox faith, 55 priests of the former Greek Catholic Church in Ivano-Frankivsk region experienced harassment (*Communist Party and the Soviet State...*, 1962). By conducting active religious activities and confession of prohibited faith in the early 1960s following priests of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, were sentenced: B. Vasylyk, S. Kysylivskyy, M. Vynnytsky, teachers in the Greek Catholic seminary I. Seleznyuk, S. Lukacs and others (Baydych, 2013). With these actions the authorities have demonstrated their propensity to use terrorist methods to fight this denomination.

Mass liquidation of monasteries, churches, seminaries closures have begun. In the early 1960s in western region of the Ukrainian SSR most sacred buildings were closed in Lviv, Stanislavsky, Ternopil regions (Mochkin, 2015). There was no escape from destruction, even for those churches, which were under the state protection. For example, on 14 June 1961 the Council of Ministers has excluded from the state register of monuments 364 objects that seemingly had no outstanding values (Mochkin, 2015). Such arbitrary destruction led to the impoverishment of historical and cultural fund of Ukraine.

However, despite the deployment of offensive actions against the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Soviet authorities had stated paucity of outputs and acknowledged not much effective atheistic propaganda among the Ukrainians.

The report of the Commissioner for worship in the Ukrainian SSR for 1960 contained a statement of fact unacceptable for the government: “The Catholic Church, despite the reduction of the network community firmly holds its position. The number of believers is still high. Visits to churches served by priests, are high...” (Baydych, 2013). “The hierarchs of the Orthodox Church have done little to destroy the peculiar features of militant Catholicism and Ukrainian nationalism in the Uniate Church...” (Serhiychuk, 2001). As a result of this situation, the resolution “On the problem of party propaganda in modern conditions” of 9 January 1961 noted that the local party organizations do not respond properly to manifestations of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, so they were required to strengthen the fight against local religious vestiges (Andruh v, 2006).

To help Ukrainians not to lose their faith, at this time the metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church J. Slipyj opened its activity in Rome. He was forced to leave the Soviet Union because of the active pursuit and arrest on the grounds of “Soviet motherland treason and anti-Soviet activity” (Orusia Homjak, 2015). In 1963 in Rome with the assistance of the metropolitan the Ukrainian Catholic University of St. Pope Clement was founded. Next year there was opened a monastery for monks Studite, later St. Sophia cathedral was consecrated – the spiritual center of Ukrainian Greek Catholics. The metropolitan maintained close communication with the native land, sent pastoral letters, promoted religious underground activities, encouraged the Ukrainians to listen to religious radio broadcasts of the Vatican. The USSR at that time considered the Vatican to be the enemy of Orthodoxy and instigator of “the cold war” (Marchuk, 2004).

In times of religious persecution in the Ukrainian SSR, in order to continue to be the support for national unity of the Ukrainians, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church continues its development in the underground. On the initiative of its underground leader V. Velychkovsky the process of returning the priests forced to accept orthodoxy has started. “Velichkovsky calls certain priests to break with orthodoxy and move to the side of the Vatican – a leader of Affairs Committee of the Russian Orthodox Church in the city of Kiev with concern reported on April, 1964. Vladimir Suhorin. – Recently, in the districts of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk influenced by the propaganda eight priests refused Orthodoxy” (Marchuk, 2004). In general in Galicia and Transcarpathia 50 priests renounced Orthodoxy in 1967 (Gudziak et al., 1998).

And in the late 1960s and early 1970s there were actually 88 Greek Catholic churches in western Ukraine (Bociurkiw, 1998). In addition, the continuous re-charge of the Greek Catholic clergy by the representatives of the new generation took place. There were clandestine courses, the program which included in addi-

tion to traditional subjects that were taught in the seminary, also the history of Ukraine, which in the higher educational establishments of the Ukrainian SSR were not taught, and tens of thousands of young Ukrainians, having received a diploma in specialty “History” had no idea about the history of the land where they studied (Paliy, 2011). In the clandestine seminary training courses the children and relatives of the Greek-Catholic priests and non-religious activists of the Church were mainly involved.

Due to such revitalization of the Uniate Church, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine in the spring of 1970 pointed to the violation on cults and maintaining their anti-Soviet, nationalist propaganda by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Soviet legislation (Marchuk, 2004). During the 1970s KGB launched a broad campaign to discredit the Catholic hierarchy and against “Ukrainian nationalism”. In the media and in some scientific journals there were distributed ideological clichés about the “anti-people criminal activity of the Uniate”, “their ties with Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists and Nazi punitive bodies” (Andruh v, 2006).

In these circumstances, government institutions have taken a number of important decisions on how to fight “illegal activities of the Uniate churches and sects” and religion in general. In 1969 they arrested Bishop V. Velichkovsky and famous priests P. Gorodotsky in Lviv and R. Bahtalovskoho in Colomyja. They also made searches in the place of Bishop V. Sternuk and in the homes of dozens of priests and monks. Many churches were removed from the registration. In 70 closed churches in the western region the authorities created anti-religious, anti-Uniate special museums and galleries, which, along with other factors contributed to the indoctrination of the Ukrainians (Paschenko, 2001).

The attack on the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and Ukrainian religious life in general took place the coming years (Marchuk, 2004). Seeing in the awakening of national consciousness of the Ukrainian people a direct threat to the existence of the totalitarian communist regime, the Soviet government once again resorted to searches, imposition of fines, arrests and other repressive actions. The peak of the repression took place in the years 1972–1973. In December 1973 bishops C. Dmyterko and I. Slezyuk were arrested. Soon underground priests I. Krivoy and P. Chuchman were treacherously murdered (Marchuk, 2004). Such religious discrimination of the Ukrainians, a gross violation of their rights and freedoms have caused resistance among the titular nation of Ukraine and mass occurrence of complaints and applications for the central party and government institutions, with the signatures of dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of angry believers (*Log Complaints and Applications...*, 1965).

It should be emphasized that at that time letters and appeals to the leaders of the Ukrainian SSR became one of the most common forms of protest. The then Soviet power was also seriously alarmed by performance of Ukrainian dissidents who came to the defense of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Determined Ukrainian oppositionists gained new momentum in the protection of religious life after the signing of Helsinki Accords by the Ukrainian Soviet Union in the 1975, which forced the Kremlin to somewhat loosen its atheistic campaign.

## Conclusions

Thus, during the 1960s and 1970s the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was the catalyst for the national aspirations of the Ukrainian state-building, especially in the western region of Ukraine, where in comparison with other regions of the republic a higher degree of religiosity among the population was observed. Therefore, here the anti-religious campaign of the Soviet totalitarian state had a massive scale. The ruling communist party elite rapidly strengthened control over the activities of the Greek Catholic clergy, organized violent by content and tragic in consequences atheistic experiments: broke the system of church education, implemented atheistic education with the help of ideological influence methods, committed liquidation of religious monuments, confiscated religious books, conducted searches, arrests, chased supporters of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, accused of distributing anti-Soviet propaganda and nationalist ideas. The aim of these measures was a complete destruction of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church as a social institution. And despite the widespread campaign to discredit the Catholic hierarchy and to fight “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism”, the Communist Party failed to completely eradicate religion from the minds of the Ukrainians.

Greek Catholic clergy continued to conduct extensive underground pastoral work and worked directly among the people. Such an approach had a positive impact on the then Ukrainian society and contributed to its consolidation. Often communities that have not adopted the Orthodox Church, illegally opened their churches, where priests sent clandestine service of God (usually on major religious holidays). Clandestine existence of most church structures testified to the ideological and organizational cohesion of the priesthood and millions of believers, reluctance to serve the Soviet totalitarian state. Loyalty to the church and national ideas was demonstrated in exile by J. Slipyj. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has become a powerful force fighting against denationalization and russification of the



Ukrainian people on religious grounds and saw the spiritual future in collegiality of the Ukrainian homeland. In terms of the totalitarian regime, which repressive and punitive apparatus controlled any opposition protest, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church still managed to preserve its structure, educate a new generation of patriotically-minded clergy to join in the ranks of anti-communist opposition, to raise the spirit of Ukrainian resistance to the level of conscious preparedness to struggle for their national and religious rights and create a strong foundation to achieve sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

## References:

- Andruhiv, I.O. (2005). Religious Life in the Territory of Ivano-Frankivsk in the First Half of the 60 Years of the Twentieth Century. In: *Ukraine Cathedral: Collection of Scientific Articles*. Kiev: Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.
- Andruhiv, I.O. (2006). *The Policy of the Soviet Regime in Religion and Religious Life in the Carpathian Region in 40's–80's Years of the Twentieth Century: Historical and Legal Analysis*. Uzhgorod: Publishing House of the Uzhgorod National University.
- Baydych, V. (2013). Anti-religious Campaign of Soviet Power in the 1958–1964 Biennium. *Catholic columnist*, 17 April. Retrieved from: <http://catholicnews.org.ua/antireligiynakampaniya-radyanskoyi-vladi-u-1958-1964-rr-i-rimo-katolicka-cerkva-v-ukrayini>
- Bociurkiw, B. (1998). Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the Catacombs (1946–1989). *Calendar of Evangelist*, 93–118.
- Boyko, R.Y. (2000). *Features Countering Ukrainian Greek Catholic Religious Policy of the Soviet Authorities in 1946–1989 Years*. Ostrog: National University of Ostroh Academy.
- Communist Party and the Soviet State Religion and Atheistic Propaganda: a Collection of Documents and Materials*. (1962). Kiev: the State Political Publishing House of the Ukrainian SSR.
- Gelej, S. (2000). The National Idea in the Spiritual World of the Ukrainian People. *Church and Social Problems*, 394–402.
- Gudziak, B., Hurkina, S., Turij, O. (1998). Hierarchy and Clergy of the Ukrainian Greek – Catholic Church in the Catacombs. *Poland – Ukraine: 1000 Neighborhood*, 4, 323–331.
- Homjak, O. (2015). *The Blind Saw the Church Free*. Retrieved from: <http://wz.lviv.ua/far-and-near/130058-sliipyi-bachyv-tserkvu-vilnoiu>
- Koval, I.V. (2010). Value of Nationalism and Patriotism in Christianity: the Case of Greek Catholics. *Gilea: a Collection of Science Publications*, 40 (10), 473–483.
- Log Complaints and Applications for the 1964–1965 Biennium Believers*. (1965). Fund 4648. Description 1. Case 443. Kyiv: The Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine.
- Marchuk, V.V. (2004). *Church, Spirituality, Nation. Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the Social Life of Ukraine of the Twentieth Century*. Ivano-Frankivsk: Plai.

- Mochkin, S.A. (2015). Religious Sites Western Regions of the USSR in Terms of Anti-religious Campaign 1958–1964 Years. *Scientific Herald Eastern National University named after Lesya Ukrainian*, 5, 134–141.
- Muzychka, I. (2000). The Persecution of the Catholic Church in Ukraine in the Twentieth Century. *Patriarchate. For the Unity of the Church and the Nation*, 7 (8), 11–13.
- Paliy, O. (2011). *Why Hard Spell “Common History” and Easily “Domestic”*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2011/02/9/5895669/>
- Paschenko, V. (2001). *Orthodoxy in the Modern History of Ukraine*. Poltava, 2. *Questions Scientific Atheistic Propaganda. Questions of Religion, Churches, Houses of Worship. Questions to the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church by the USSR in 1963*. (1963). Fund 1. Description 24. Case 2741. Kyiv: The Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine.
- Serhiychuk, V. (2001). *Unconquered Church: Heroic Greek Catholics in Ukraine in the Fight for the Faith and State*. Kiev: Dnipro.
- Volynets, O. (2006). The Religious Factor in Ukrainian Ethnic Nation (for example UGCC). *Ukrainian National Idea: Reality and Prospects*, 17, 54–58.