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The persecution of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in the opinion of the inhabitants of Pokuttia in the Western Ukraine

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THE PERSECUTION OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE OPINION OF THE INHABITANTS OF POKUTTIA IN THE WESTERN UKRAINE

Słowa kluczowe: historia, prześladowania, pamięć, zapomnienie

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1. The situation of the UGCC under the rule of two totalitarian regimes 1939–1944

Adding the territories of Western Ukraine to the USSR the Bolshevik regime began to implement the policy of militant atheism and godlessness, trying to narrow the social activity of the UGCC and other religious organizations. In Western Ukraine the UGCC upheld a widely developed social activity, and a relevant economic, informational and educational infrastructure. Most importantly it had a social weight and credibility. Thus the policy of the communist regime, which was aimed at reducing the range of activities of the church, provoked a negative reaction both among the clergy and the faithful of the UGCC. This began to form a negative attitude to the communist regime.

Inasmuch as the atheist agitation and propaganda had no notable success, the regime mobilized the repressive structures into the fight against the UGCC. Since 1939 it began a systematic policy of weakening and splitting the church as an institution, political pressure and intimidation and repressions of the clergy with the aim to intimidate and subjugate it under its influence. Special operational activities of the NKVD were directed to study and utilize conflicts and disputes in clerical circles and to find and recruit persons that could be manipulated for disruptive activities. Attempts to involve ranks of the ROC¹ in the fight

¹ The Russian Orthodox Church.

against the UGCC were without success. One then turned to outright repressive methods. Introduced were proceedings against the senior church leadership and against many priests, a part of which was subjected to arrests².

A specification of strategic and operational assignments regarding the activation of an anti-uniatic campaign was issued by L. Beria, Soviet commissar of interior affairs. In the system of the NKVD the structure defined directly responsible for relevant duties (Second section of the main leadership of the NKVD for state security). Leaders of the republican NKVD and regional leaderships were compelled to submit to the NKVD of the USSR reports on the state intelligence-operational work against the Greek-Catholic clergy and "anti-Soviet formations" among Catholics. The struggle against the UGCC went beyond the frame of a pure anti-religious atheist drive of the Soviet state against an opponent and it assumed methods of political intelligence and counterintelligence against an enemy. The repressive structure of the USSR concentrated its attention on methods to localize and liquidate the activities of its opponent. Within the framework of such a policy tens of priests of the UGCC were arrested, imprisoned and deported³.

Despite the administrative and repressive pressure, the state failed to establish control over the church, undermine her public authority and subordinate the Greek-Catholics under the Patriarchate of Moscow. The Bishops of the UGCC actively protested against the unlawful actions of the state against the church. Repeatedly they demanded from the leadership of the USSR to terminate various forms of pressure. In Western Ukraine they had broad support from the local population. Therefore, despite the general terror that the communist regime unfolded against the local population in the West Ukrainian territories, Greek-Catholics managed to survive.

The beginning of the German-Soviet war and the occupation of Ukrainian territories by military forces of Nazi Germany led to a new period of trials. In the first months under the new rule the leadership of the UGCC, responding to the general public attitude expressed gratitude to the German army for liberation from the Bolshevik terror. It supported the Act of Renewal of the Ukrainian State, which was proclaimed on the 30th of June 1941 in Lviv and appealed to the clergy and faithful to help build state life⁴.

Under the Nazi occupation the bishops of the UGCC fulfilled their spiritual mission without interfering in state affairs and acting within those laws and cir-

² І. Білас, *Репресивно-каральна система в Україні. 1917–1954*, vol. 1, Київ 1994, p. 330; cfr. О.Є. Лисенко, *Церковне життя в Україні. 1943–1946 р.*, Київ 1998, p. 309.

³ В. Сергійчук, *Нескорена церква. Подвижництво греко-католиків України в боротьбі за віру і державу*, Київ 2001, p. 30–31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33–34.

cumstances that the occupational administration dictated. Thanks to the diplomatic activity of Metropolitan A. Sheptycky the church was able to maintain its structure, extend full religious life and avoid massive repressions against the clergy and the spiritual orders⁵.

2. The liquidation of the UGCC. Analysis of material

The longer period which separates us from the events of our study, not only allows to study in detail and to analyze the research of predecessors as to the history of the UGCC and the relations of the state policy to the church in West Ukraine, but also with more objectivity and with less emotion to re-think the events of that period. Of course, the historiography as to the policy of the soviet authorities to the Greek-Catholic Church has partially been reflected in the works, studies, monographs and articles of such contemporary authors like V.V. Marchuk⁶, Y. Bilas⁷, O. Volynets⁸, S.I. Hnat⁹, O. Lysenko¹⁰, O. Surmach¹¹, and others.

The history of the UGCC over a large period attracted considerable interest of researchers from many disciplines – theologians, historians, scholars of religion, philosophers, and sociologists. But in various periods as church activists and as scholars these pursued an aim – from the exaltation of the church and attempts to highlight objectively its history and activities, to attempts to discredit and condemn, that was typical for the soviet period. Generally, when one studies the problem of the destruction of the UGCC, especially in soviet Ukraine in postwar times, one can distinguish theoretically three groups¹². To the first belong the works of soviet historians, whose studies mostly stand in line with the official theory, substantiating the liquidation of the UGCC with collaboration with the Nazis and Ukrainian Nationalists as well as displaying the church as a reactionary institution that was far from the people. The second

⁵ Ю. Туркевич, *Риси характеру митрополита Андрія Шептицького*, Матеріали конференції, присвячені життю та діяльності митрополита Андрія Шептицького, Львів 1990, р. 22; сфр. О.Є. Лисенко, *Церковне життя в Україні. 1943–1946 р.*, Київ 1998, р. 30.

⁶ В.В. Марчук, *Українська Греко-Католицька Церква. Історичний нарис*, Івано-Франківськ 2001.

⁷ Я.І. Білас, *Митрополит Андрей Шептицький і проблеми національно-визвольного руху українців*, Київ 2003.

⁸ О.О. Волинець, *Функціонування Української Греко-Католицької Церкви в контексті державно-церковних відносин*, Київ 2003.

⁹ С.І. Гнат, *Доброчинна діяльність Греко-католицької церкви у 1921–1939 рр.*, Львів 2003.

¹⁰ О.Є. Лисенко, *Церковне життя в Україні. 1943–1946 р.*, Київ 1998.

¹¹ О.І. Сурmach, *Греко-Католицька Церква в період німецького окупаційного режиму в Україні (1941–1944 рр.)*, Львів 2001.

¹² See: А. Каміньський, *Нарис історії нищення УГКЦ*, Івано-Франківськ 2009, р. 12–22.

group includes the works of Ukrainian researchers and church leaders abroad, as well as some foreign researchers. Living in a democratic society, they are not only free to express their view of the problem, but they also managed to collect material about the UGCC from the lips of those who managed to leave the Ukraine before the arrival of the Soviet Army or escape from a soviet "justice". As notes V. Serhiychuk, these works are to a certain extent biased, but because of the lack of documentary evidence, and because of an attempt to confront official soviet historiography with one own analysis of the problem¹³. To the third group belong the works of contemporary scholars, whose research became possible due to the free development of science in the conditions of Independence, the publication of many archival materials on the history of the UGCC, which previously were held in special funds and were inaccessible. It is contemporary publications, which thanks to the access to various documents and due to the lack of ideological pressure, are attempts to objectively describe the problematic.

Today in Ukraine a number of institutions are professionally engaged in researching church issues including the history of the UGCC. Among them it is worth noting the scientific achievements of the section for Religious Studies of the Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Science in Kiev, the section of the Institute of Ukrainian Archeography and Sources in Lviv, the Museum of History of Religion in Lviv and the works of scholars and graduates in various disciplines in many universities in Ukraine and abroad. Due to their efforts annual conferences, seminars etc. are held and the horizons in the history of the church are broadened.

Approaching now the analysis of the works that throw light onto the relations between the Soviet state and the UGCC in postwar Ukraine it is to note, that this question is widely discussed, especially the evaluation of the role of the church and the Ukrainian Opposition movement in the 40–50-ies of the 20th century becomes today an object of political speculations and electoral speculations by certain political groups. For the argument that the destruction of the UGCC was a component of the policy of stalinistic transformations in Western Ukraine speaks V. Voynalovych¹⁴. An interesting conclusion on the relation between church and state in general represents O. Zemlinska¹⁵. She underlines the fact that the church during the war experienced a significant growth and its increasing impact on the people in the postwar years was in the way of Soviet ideology. The UGCC became

¹³ В. Сергійчук, *Нескорена церква. Подвижництво греко-католиків України в боротьбі за віру і державу*, Київ 2001, р. 16.

¹⁴ В. Войналович, *Партійно-державна політика щодо релігії та релігійних інституцій в Україні 1940–1960-х років: політологічний дискурс*, Вид: Світотгляд, Київ 2005, р. 741.

¹⁵ О.В. Замлинська, *Церква і культура України у перші повоєнні роки. Релігійна традиція в духовному відродженні України*, Матеріали Всеукраїнської наукової конференції, Полтава 1992, р. 149–150.

object of the punitive apparatus of the Kremlin because it was incorporated massively in Western Ukraine, which as a territory remained unbowed.

The liquidation of the UGCC as a legitimate church within the Soviet Union was deployed on state level on the basis of a secret instruction Nr.58 from march 15th 1945 by G. Karpov, a KGB colonel and at the same time the Chairman of a newly formed Council for Religious Affairs. Four years later in a secret report to the Politburo of the Central Committee on 24th September 1949 he emphasized the active role of the government, the party, the secret police and the Soviet government: “in the liquidation of the union a great attention of the Council of ministers of the UkrSSR, the Central Committee of KP of Ukraine, personally comrade N. Khrushhiov. Significant existing measures were carried by the organs of Ministry of interior of USSR”¹⁶.

Through such engagement of the state “quick tempos” in the execution of the instructions of G. Karpov were guaranteed. The events from the beginning of April 1945 to the beginning of March 1946 in Galicia changed each other like a kaleidoscope. The appearance of the anti-uniatic newspaper article of Yaroslav Halan “With cross or with sword?” – the arrests of the bishops of the UGCC – the founding of the Initiative committee for the Re-Union with the ROC and its recognition through the state as the single leading body of the church – the holding of decanate councils, on which the priests were urged to join the “Initiative Council” – arrests of prominent and undefiant priests – the consecration of two celibate members of the Initiative Group to bishops by the orthodox metropolitan Yoan – the publication of prison sentences of the arrested bishops – the holding of the uncanonical so-called “council of the priests of the UGCC”, on which it was decided to reject the decisions of the Council of Brest (1596) and liquidate the union, and break off from the Vatican and join the Russian orthodox Church¹⁷.

The final visible bastion of the church seemed the monastic orders. In the years 1946–49 a successive and methodological elimination of the monks took place. On one side arrests, on the other side the transporting of monks and nuns were made within a region to so-called “concentration monasteries” or monastic homes. Younger members were oft sent home to their parents and pensioners homes awaited the senior members¹⁸.

¹⁶ В. Сергійчук, *Нескорена Церква*, Київ 2001, р. 227.

¹⁷ *Діяння Собору Руської Православної Церкви 8–10 березня 1946 р. у Львові*, Львів 1946, р. 128. На Закарпатті Мукачівська єпархія УГКЦ була ліквідована у 1949 р., через два роки після насильницької смерті її ординарія єпископа Теодора Ромжі. Ibid.

¹⁸ Interview with +Pavlo Wasylyk. Video 1995 from the archives of the television studio UGCC “Cathedral”. Interview of the Oksana Gayova. Published in May 2014, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of episcopal ordination of Bishop Paul Wasylyk and the 25th anniversary of the UGCC legalization. Video editing: Taras Babenchuka, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBksss4qQ4k> (access: 10.06.2015).

Thus by 1950 the UGCC factually stopped existing on the official institutional level in the Soviet Union. Regional officials of the Council for Religious Affairs would only confirm the fight against “remnants of the union”. This would not stop until the end of the 80-ies. The Church, robbed of her bishops, all forms of public ecclesiastic-administrative and educational institutions, church buildings and monasteries, continued to live like a society of faithful as a “church of Silence”.

3. The persecution of Greek-Catholic Christians in Pokuttya and the forms of opposition

The permanent presence of the church, especially priests in prisons, camps and exile at the periods of the totalitarian regime was the push that inspired and enlivened the spiritual tone of Christians. The only common denominator that characterized all the Christian in the Soviet Union, particularly in West Ukraine, was that they had lived more than 47 years under one ideological, economic and political regime. The Marxist-Leninist ideology, and of course the Communist party fully commanded all sectors of administrative, economic, public and cultural life. So they formed a world, living in a hermetically closed space. Totalitarianism touched like a whip – that what is the deepest and most intimate for them – their live relationship with God. Christians were persecuted not because of political or social concepts which are opposite or contrary to the concepts of the Party, but because a person must be atheist, divorced from and deprived of God. If in the field of tactical application in the praxis Marxism-Leninism did not stop maneuvering in its principles, but it never changed one iota as to principles and always maintained that is inherently atheistic. For internal logic, communism had to join the “final solution” – the complete elimination of any religion.

The power of Greek-Catholic Christians is that they asserted an immunity of doctrine. Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant or Baptist – they all kept their doctrine pure. One must underline, that all these Christians resisted the pressure of violence, political provocations and remained thus deeply religious. That is why they did not want to be called “dissidents” or “oppositionists”. They were loyal citizens of their country, but asserted their independence in relations to the political authority, defending their right to “think different”. However, along with brave “defenders”, there were “subordinated”, forced or even active “employees” among them.

As witnesses from those days recall, in the middle of various Christian denominations one could observe different ways of resistance, from heroism to courage, from courage to prudence. Some were relatively advanced in the-

ir “passive collaboration”, especially among some churches of orthodox tradition, since here one mostly tried to keep the church buildings open. In the Christian East the cult of the liturgy is source of Christian, theologian and spiritual life. Therefore, the closure of one church had dramatic consequences for faithful who were not prepared to underground church life¹⁹.

The forms of resistance of Catholics were different. When attacks against Catholics take place, they primarily try to break off the relations with Rome. When massive persecutions of Catholics began and churches were closed, they descended into the catacombs. The UGCC is the most obvious example of this, since a few millions of them in Ukraine lived fully in the catacombs.

Protestant communities of the Lutheran tradition in Pokuttya, who are used to follow the famous principle *cuius regio, eius religio* tried in the rule to maintain a balance between civil loyalty and Christian steadfastness. Baptists and Evangelists (Pentacostalists) on the contrary proved themselves much more steadfast, in order to confirm that “one must subordinate himself under God and not man”. That is why they were object of continuous persecutions.

So many Christians of Western Ukraine persecution became an occasion for ecumenical renewal, especially for reconciliation between Orthodox and Catholics. Due to the trials of persecution, due to the big mix of exile conditions and internal deportations, Christians of various denomination would find unity and recognize themselves as brothers, far closer to one other than they could have ever imagined²⁰.

It must be noted that in those days in Pokuttya lived various Christian communities. They stood obviously under the influence of historical and national divisions and held a prejudiced view of each other, not being made aware of their mutual riches. To-day due to an ecumenical reconciliation the Christians of this region try to develop more dynamic communities to reach out to their dechristianized environment. The whole spiritual potential, which was accumulated during the period of persecutions in Western Ukraine, demonstrates with what steadfastness and love the Christians fought for their faith urging younger generations to strengthen the bonds of friendship, solidarity and mutual assistance.

3.1. Non-public forms of resistance

The resistance of the Greek-Catholics to repressions of the state manifested itself in non-public forma like: private prayers, observance of the sacra-

¹⁹ Interview with O.K., woman, years 60, J.M., woman, years 61 (province. Ivano-Frankivsk, date: 20.07.2014).

²⁰ Interview with M.P., woman, years 88, M.T., woman, years 79 (Paľahycze, province. Ivano-Frankivsk, date: 23.07.2014).

ments, participation in liturgies, religious instruction of children, and support of new vocations to religious life, preparation and consecration of new priests. During the regime of Stalin (1945–1953), when a lot of priests and monks were imprisoned in labor camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan, the faithful who remained in Ukraine continued to meet at prayer gatherings and for the liturgy, which a priest from the catacombs would celebrate or sing the parts of liturgy which are not reserved for a priest²¹. Deprived of their church, they returned to the practice of the first Christians “where two or three are gathered in my name, then I am among them” (Math. 18,20). “Domestic churches” became the homes of Greek-Catholic priests, nuns or faithful, where the Holy Sacraments were kept and Liturgy and Sacraments were held. Often for this purpose were used chapels, cemeteries and churches that were closed by the authorities in villages, which had refused an orthodox priest²².

Underground priests could not often celebrate the liturgy for the faithful due to a couple of reasons: 1) there was not enough of priests, 2) according to soviet labor law they were compelled to have employment until retirement age (60), so that for pastoral duties they had only work-free time, usually in the evenings or on holidays, 3) for conspiracy reasons they would celebrate in different districts or even regions. For that reason private, non-liturgical gatherings for prayer on the rosary, which underline the catholic character, became a reply of the faithful to circumstances like the lack of priests²³.

3.2. Public forms of resistance

On a local level funerals were the biggest public form of testimony of faithfulness of simple Greek-Catholics. They took place with a procession and the placing a cross, but without entering a church with the corpse of the deceased and without a visible presence of a priest. For this reason Greek-Catholics often were regarded as Baptists and they were suspected of ostracism.

On a social-public level there are three forms of protest such as:

1) open collective or individual letters or undersigned petitions addressed to local or central authorities with an expression of protest against the persecution of Greek-Catholics, or letters demanding the registration of a Greek-Catholic community or the opening of a church in a village. As the example, letters of Greek-Catholic priests with a protest against the arrest of

²¹ M.O., woman, years 88, S.N., woman, years 79 (Nadorožna, province. Ivano-Frankivsk, date: 22.07.2014).

²² According to the relation of the bishop Włodzimierz Wojtyśzyn, Metropolitan Ivano-Frankivsk, Greek-Catholic Church (Ivano-Frankivsk, date: 28.07.2014).

²³ Ibid.

bishops²⁴. Many open letters-protests as to the uncanonical state liquidation of the UGCC and against further persecutions of the faithful during 1950-1980²⁵, and collective letters with lots of signatures of Greek-Catholics from Stanislaviv (1962), Stryj (1972), etc.

2) open manifestations with expressions of defiance to the police and authorities with the aim to defend a church from destruction or an underground priest from arrest. For example in the protocols of the Council for Religious Affairs mention “revolutionary actions” in the village of Nadorozhna (Ivano-Frankivsk). In 1958 demonstrations took place there to prevent the arrest of an active and dedicated priest Pavlo Vasylyk, who 1974 became an underground bishop and often would hide in Nadorozhna.

3) the most radical public display of protests is to be seen in the eschatological movement of the Pokutniki. It appeared at the end of the 50-ies in connection with reports of a Marian apparition in the village of Serednje in the region of Ivano-Frankivsk. Two underground priests, Ignaty Sotys and Anton Potochnyak, led this movement that tries to form an alternative society and it refused all relations with the soviet authorities. It rejects state employment, state education for its children, internal passports, rewards and pensions. The Underground Church rejected the radicalism and then the Pokutniki, as the deceased Canadian Scholar Bohdan Bociurkiv writes, turned into a “sect that combined catholic apocalyptic elements, national traditions of the Greek-Catholics and Ukrainian Nationalism in a theological formula: alienation, suffering and salvation²⁶.”

3.3. The role of women

On the basis of many interviews one can remark that it was especially the womanhood that contributed to the conservation of the faith and the communities of Greek-Catholics through two generations under soviet rule. On a family level as mothers and grandmothers they cared for general religious instruction of the children, teaching them traditional prayers (“Our Father”, “Hail Mary”, “I believe”) and the 10 commandments, organizing joint praying on the rosary, taking active part in lay organizations like the “Apostolate of Prayer”. In the villages of the Ivano-Frankivsk region women accounted for the majority of parishioners of the “Domestic churches”. They entered monastic orders and founded new congregations. Women assist the priests in the catechesis, accompanied them to places where liturgy was celebrated. They

²⁴ *Мартирологія Українських Церков*, vol. 2, О. Зінкевич, о. Т.Р. Лончини (ред.), Торонто 1985, р. 83–84.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, р. 259–260, 499–522, 690–691.

²⁶ Б. Бодюрків, *УГКЦ в катакомбах*, Ковчег, part 1, Львів 1993, р. 135.

were a kind of liaison and security guards, carrying the bag with liturgical objects. Females, nuns and lay women, cared for vacations and they usually introduced likely candidates to the underground priests²⁷.

Conclusion

The Church structure of the UGKC was conserved due to secret consecrations of bishops and ordinations of priests. Between 1945 and 1989 altogether 20 bishops, of which five were titular bishops, were consecrated. Titular bishops had the right of succession in the case that a titular bishop should die or be arrested. All underground bishops were persecuted by the soviet state. Seven of them, experienced soviet labor camps in 1940–1950 and five of the bishops were repeatedly arrested and imprisoned within the years 1950–1970²⁸.

The opportunities of Episcopal ministry were extremely limited and confined as a rule to the administration of the priestly ordination. The new priests who were ordained by an underground bishop, were distinguished by a self-sacrifice in their pastoral work. The very presence of the bishops and the emergence of a young clergy gave a vivid evidence of the stability of the faith²⁹.

Numerous works of contemporary scholars clarify the plan of liquidation of the UGKC. The UGKC only did not want to be dependent of soviet authorities, as it happened with the Russian Orthodox Church, but it also was under the jurisdiction of the Vatican, which condemned the communist ideology and the state policy of the USSR. For the liquidation of the church one used an almost religious script (scenario) – through a Church Council.

²⁷ According to the relation of the bishop Włodzimierz Wojtyszyn, Metropolitan Ivano-Frankivsk, Greek-Catholic Church (Ivano-Frankivsk, date: 28.07.2014).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Streszczenie

Prześladowanie Ukraińskiego Kościoła Greckokatolickiego w opinii mieszkańców Pokucia na zachodniej Ukrainie

W zeszłym stuleciu Kościół greckokatolicki (Ukraińska Greckokatolicka Cerkiew) był najbardziej prześladowanym przez władze radzieckie Kościołem. Jednocześnie jego fenomen polegał na tym, że była to największa struktura sprzeciwu wobec ideologii radzieckiej. Udało mu się połączyć wiernych z różnych warstw społecznych – od inteligencji do pracowników fizycznych – gotowych do przeciwstawienia się systemowi. Była to wspólnota powiązana duchowymi wartościami, która „twórczo” sprzeciwiała się systemowi. „Kościół wytrwał, totalitaryzm padł” – wspomina bp Borys Gudziak. Kościół greckokatolicki zawsze był sercem narodu ukraińskiego na terytorium zachodniej Ukrainy. Należy wspomnieć, że w 2014 roku obchodził on 25. rocznicę legalizacji.

Artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań nad pamięcią mieszkańców Pokucia z czasów prześladowań przez władze radzieckie. Wywiady zostały przeprowadzone we wrześniu 2013 roku z osobami duchownymi, które prowadziły prace duszpasterskie w tamtym okresie, oraz z wiernymi Kościoła greckokatolickiego.

Roman Kordoński – doktorant Wydziału Teologii UWM w Olsztynie. W 2012 roku ukończył studia magisterskie na Papieskim Wydziale Teologicznym w Warszawie, Studium Teologii w Białymstoku. Autor kilku publikacji naukowych o tematyce związanej z obrzędowością rodzinną i doroczną wśród mieszkańców Pokucia oraz dotyczącej prześladowań Kościoła greckokatolickiego w XX wieku. Redaktor sześciu naukowych publikacji książkowych (prac zbiorowych) o charakterze międzynarodowym. W marcu 2015 wszczęto przewód doktorski pt. *Przeobrażenia obrzędowości żałobnej greckokatolickich mieszkańców Pokucia w XX wieku.*