

9-2014

# The Response of Ukrainian Greek-Catholics to the Soviet State's Liquidation and Persecution of their Church: 1945-1989

Svitlana Hurkina  
*Ukrainian Catholic University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Hurkina, Svitlana (2014) "The Response of Ukrainian Greek-Catholics to the Soviet State's Liquidation and Persecution of their Church: 1945-1989," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 34: Iss. 4, Article 1.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol34/iss4/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.

# **THE RESPONSE OF UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLICS TO THE SOVIET STATE'S LIQUIDATION AND PERSECUTION OF THEIR CHURCH: 1945-1989**

**By Svitlana Hurkina**

Svitlana Hurkina, Ph.D. is an historian and lecturer in the department of Church History at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine, and Director of the Institute of Church History at UCU. She graduated from the history department of the Lviv National University I. Franko and received her Master of Theological Studies at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, MA, USA. She is the author of several articles dedicated to the issues of the Soviet repressive policy toward Ukrainian Greek Catholics, as well as the history of the UGCC in the second half of the 20th century. Her PhD thesis is about the eparchial clergy of the Lviv Archeparchy of the UGCC in 1944-1950.

The Yalta Conference with the “Big Three” leaders of the United Kingdom, the USA, and the USSR in February 1945 drew lines that re-divided Europe into new spheres of influence. As a result, the Soviet Union approved the annexation of new territories on the western border, which partly was already done between 1939-1941 on the basis of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Among them was western Ukraine (Halychyna and Transcarpathia), which, though multiethnic and multireligious, had a predominantly Catholic population. Catholics in Halychyna practiced their faith in two ecclesiastical structures with visible national character, which existed on the same territory: Lviv Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church (Polish, Latin rite) and Halych Metropolitanate of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church (Ukrainian, Eastern or Byzantine rite). The Soviet State authorities saw in the Catholic Church a danger, because the Soviet totalitarian regime would not tolerate “autonomous institutions and groups outside police-state control,”<sup>1</sup> which,

---

<sup>1</sup> Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939-1950)* (Edmonton-Toronto, 1996), 237.

in the eyes of the regime, could create “*societas publica* to act on a political and social level.”<sup>2</sup>

Before 1944 the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) existed in the ecclesiastical structures of the Halych Metropolitanate in Halychyna (the Lviv Archeparchy, the suffragan Eparchies of Peremyshl’ and Stanislaviv, and the Apostolic Administration of the Lemko Region) and of the Mukachiv Eparchy in Transcarpathia. According to statistical data, by the end of the 1930s, the UGCC within the Second Commonwealth (Poland) had one metropolitan, two bishops, four auxiliary bishops, and one apostolic administrator. They presided over 2,387 parishes with 2,352 eparchial and 143 monastic priests; a theological academy, three seminaries with 480 students (plus 46 students abroad), 31 monasteries and 121 convents and religious houses, with 315 monks and 932 nuns<sup>3</sup>; and nearly 3.6 million faithful.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I intend to present the general characteristics of a variety of responses of Ukrainian Greek Catholics<sup>5</sup> (bishops, priests, religious, and laity) in western Ukraine to the official liquidation of their Church by the Soviet State in years 1945-1989. I will also show some rather atypical forms of resistance to Soviet religious policy on the personal and communal levels, as well as to look at the particularities of the urban and rural circumstances

---

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Simon, “The Catholic Church and the Communist State in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe,” in: Bohdan Bociurkiw and John Strong, eds., *Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe*. (New York, 1975),. 192.

<sup>3</sup> It included three male orders (the Order of Saint Basil the Great or Basilians, OSBM; the Studite Monks, and the eastern branch of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer, or Redemptorists, CSsR) and 8 female monastic orders and congregations (the Sisters of the Order of Saint Basil the Great, OSBM; Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate or SSMI; Sisters of St. Joseph, the Spouse of the Virgin Mary or Josephites; Myrrh-bearing Sisters under the Protection of St. Mary Magdalene; Sisters of the Holy Family; Sisters of the Priest and Martyr St. Josaphat Kuntsevych or Josaphat Sisters, and Studite Sisters).

<sup>4</sup> Bociurkiw. *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939-1950)*, 32-33.

<sup>5</sup> The history of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church officially begins with the ratification of the Union of the Kyivan Orthodox Metropolitanate with the Apostolic See at the Synod of Brest in 1596. Geographically this new Eastern Catholic Church included ethnic Ukrainian and Belarussian territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Union of Uzhhorod joined the Mukachiv Eparchy (in the Transcarpathian region) to Rome in 1646. After the partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century most of the territories of Ukraine and Belarus, including almost all the Eastern Catholic eparchies, were annexed by the Russian Empire, except L’viv and Peremyshl’ These latter were annexed by the Hapsburg Empire. All the eparchies within the Russian Empire were suppressed and “reunited” with the Russian Orthodox Church by the Russian imperial authorities in three stages: (1) in 1772-75, the eparchies of Luts’k, Brest and Pinsk were abolished; (2) after the new “reunion” campaign of 1831-39, the eparchies of Kyiv, Kamianets’-Podil’s’kyi, Volodymyr-Volynskyi, and Polotsk were abolished; (3) in 1875-76 the Kholm Eparchy was abolished. See: Bociurkiw, 5-10, 24.

of religious life and the role of women. For these purposes I will refer to the former secret documents of the State Security organs and the Communist Party, as well as some oral biographical interviews from the collection of the Archive of the Institute of Church History.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Liquidation on the Soviet State Level**

From recent research, published secret archival documents of the State Security and Communist Party organs<sup>7</sup>, as well as from the stories of eyewitness priests<sup>8</sup>, it is known that the process of the liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in western Ukraine in 1945-1946 was organized and closely supervised by the NKGB-MGB. Georgiy Karpov, a high-ranking security officer and the Chairman of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, devised a secret plan, personally approved by Stalin. It specified intensive mass-media anti-Uniate propaganda, based on accusations of anti-Soviet activities and arrests of the UGCC hierarchy (Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj and four bishops) on April 11, 1945. It also proposed the creation within the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of an “Initiative Group for Reunion with the Russian Orthodox Church,” which was officially established on May 28, 1945, and recognized by the Soviet government as the exclusive representative of the UGCC. The Greek Catholic priests were persuaded to sign an agreement and join this group under the pressure and close control of the NKGB-MGB officers. In Kyiv Fr. Antin Pel’vets’kyi and Fr. Mykola Mel’nyk, two celibate leaders of the “Initiative Group,” were consecrated as Orthodox bishops. On March 1, 1946, news about the convictions and sentences of the arrested church hierarchy was published.

---

<sup>6</sup> The Institute of Church History was founded in 1992. Since then the ICH has been developing a research and archive-creation project entitled “Profiles of Fortitude: An Oral History of the Clandestine Life of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, 1946-1989”. It conducts interviews with a broad range of mostly Ukrainian Catholic clergy, religious, and laity representing three generations. The present status of the ICH archive on the underground Church contains about 2,000 audio and 100 video interviews, based on nine different questionnaires, each of which has about 150 questions. For a more detailed history of the ICH see: Fr. B. Gudziak, “The Institute of Church History of the Lviv Theological Academy” in: *Kovcheh* 2 (L’viv, 2000), 1, 5-9.

<sup>7</sup> Serhiichuk V., Sergienko V. (uporiadnyky). *Neskorena Tserkva*. Kyiv, 2001; Kokin S., Serdiuk N., Serdiuk S. (uporiadnyky). *Likvidaciya UGCC (1939-1946). Dokumenty radianskykh organiv derzhavnoi bezpeky* [Liquidation of the UGCC (1939-1946). Documents of the Soviet State Security organs]. Kyiv 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Fr. Omelian Ivasyk / Archive of the Institute of Church History, fund 1, file 322 (further – AICH and file’s number in the parenthesis).

All these events were a prelude to the so-called "L'viv Council," which took place on March 8-10, 1946. According to the decisions (prepared jointly with the secret police and government representatives) of this "rump synod, consisting of 216 intimidated priests and two [Orthodox] bishops hastily ordained from the ranks of the UGCC clergy by Russian Orthodox bishops," "the liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and its amalgamation into the Russian Orthodox Church."<sup>9</sup> was subscribed.

The Greek-Catholic clergy of Halychyna in 1945 faced three choices: (1) to sign an agreement of "re-union with Orthodoxy" with the possibility of continuing to minister at one's own parish (although this did not prevent further arrest or the later closing of the church, during Khrushchev's anti-religion campaign<sup>10</sup>), (2) to refuse openly any collaboration, and (3) to leave the priesthood completely. The last was seen as the best choice by the Soviets, but there are only a few cases documented of such.<sup>11</sup> Officially 997 priests in Halychyna are documented by Soviets in the middle of 1947 to have signed their conversion under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, as interviews with priests who were witnesses<sup>12</sup> show and B. Bociurkiw<sup>13</sup> proves, among them only about 20-30 did this voluntarily on the basis of their own convictions.

In 1949, two years after the assassination of the only acting bishop of Mukachevo, Blessed Teodor Romzha, as planned in Moscow, the Greek Catholic Church was liquidated as well in Transcarpathia by the Soviets through "re-union with the Russian Orthodox Church;" however, unlike Halychyna, the regime could not organize a public council there.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Borys Gudziak and Victor Susak, "Becoming a Priest...", 42. See also: Bociurkiw, 154-161, 175-183.

<sup>10</sup> Some of such priests very soon publicly renounced the Orthodoxy (e.g., see interviews with Frs. Izydor Butkovs'kyi (AICH file 294) and about Fr. Teodor Bemko (AICH file 243)), or did it secretly in the 1950-60s (e. g. see interview with Fr. Mykola Markevych about his father-in-law priest Yulian Rudkevych, whom he received back into the Greek-Catholic Church (AICH file 337)). Many of those forcefully converted to the Orthodox priesthood continued silently to commemorate the Pope, e. g. Frs. Mykhailo Datsyshyn (AICH file 97) and Mykhailo Holovats'kyi (AICH file 334).

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Fr. Olexander Buts'-Bodrevych (AICH file 907); Bociurkiw, 188, footnote 151.

<sup>12</sup> For example, interview with Frs. Omelian Ivasyk (AICH file 322) and Yosyf Antkiv (AICH file 268).

<sup>13</sup> Bociurkiw, 180-181.

<sup>14</sup> See: Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939-1950)*. Ivan Bilas, "The Moscow Patriarchate, the Penal Organs of the USSR, and the Attempted Destruction of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church during the 1940's" in *Logos* 38, Nos. 1-4 (1997): 41-92.

Many Greek-Catholic priests who refused to convert to Orthodoxy were sent to prison camps in Siberia, Kazakhstan, and northern and far eastern Russia. Families of these priests often were deported to special settlements in these areas. After the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church on the official institutional level, the Soviet authorities fulfilled the next stage of their plan: they suppressed religious orders and congregations. This liquidation of monasteries and convents was done gradually. The last Greek-Catholic male monasteries in western Ukraine were liquidated in 1950, but “the last Basilian Sisters’ convent remained open until 1952.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus by 1950 the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church no longer existed in any visible institutional form on an official level in the Soviet Union, and therefore could not count on any rights granted by the special law for churches and religious organizations. Nevertheless, support by the population of western Ukraine played substantial role in its continuing existence in “the catacombs,” and delegitimized Greek Catholics repeatedly requested the official registration of their communities according to the Soviet law on religious organizations as a ground for state recognition of the UGCC. This process started with the death of Stalin in 1953. Within the year, the imprisoned Head of the UGCC, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, was taken from his place of exile in Maklakovo to Moscow during the short rule of Lavrentiy Beria. He met in the Soviet capital with high ranking officials and discussed the possibility of his liberation and return to the Greek Catholic Church *status quo ante* on the territory of the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Metropolitan Slipyj was sure that if only one Greek Catholic church building would be officially opened in the Soviet Ukraine, then it would be full of the faithful, which would start a simultaneous process of opening other churches and restoring other liquidated institutions. However, after the dismissal of Beria, he was taken back to exile and, in 1958, he was again arrested and put under a second trial.<sup>17</sup> In 1963 Nikita Khrushchev agreed to liberate Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj on the request of Pope John XXIII. The Head of

---

<sup>15</sup> Bociurkiw, 193-195.

<sup>16</sup> S. Keleher. *Passion and Resurrection: The Greek Catholic Church in the Soviet Ukraine 1939-1989.* (Lviv 1993), 75-76.

<sup>17</sup> Holovnyj Derzhavnyj Archiv Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy (Main State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine). Sprava 67829-FP. *Delo po obvinenii Slipoho Iosifa Ivanovicha i Blavatskoho Ili Ivanovicha po st. 58-10 chast II, st. 58-11 Uholovnoho Kodeksa RSFSR (6.06.1958-4.05.1959)*, v 11 tomak. – Tom 4.

the UGCC was sent directly from a labor camp to Moscow, and from there to Rome. Despite eighteen years of imprisonment, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj started active work in Rome, beginning with participation in the Second Vatican Council and different reforms of the Greek Catholic Church among world-wide Ukrainian émigré ecclesiastical communities.<sup>18</sup>

The idea of legalization of the UGCC continued to be an acute demand of the Greek Catholics in western Ukraine. A “Catacomb” or “Underground Church” was formed due to the release of numerous Ukrainian prisoners from the GULAG and other Soviet labor camps in the second half of the 1950s. Political events in Hungary in 1956 and the rehabilitation of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia in 1968 stimulated Ukrainian activity to strengthen their own Church, which in turn caused new repressions by the Soviets.

### **The Underground Existence of the UGCC**

The years 1946-1954 were the most difficult for practicing Greek-Catholics because of the fear of imprisonment or deportation, and the lack of priests.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the faithful, especially in villages and small towns, continued their religious practices without a priest in or near closed churches or at home chapels. They gathered for prayer services and sang the eucharistic liturgy, omitting the words of the priest.<sup>20</sup> The most public manifestation of religious practices became funerals. According to numerous respondents, the funerals of Greek-Catholics occurred with religious ceremonies but without the direct participation of a priest. As a rule, priests celebrated the whole rite of burial the night before the funeral took place, or people did it themselves, using earth at the cemeteries that had been blessed by the priest.<sup>21</sup>

After liberation of Soviet political prisoners (two Greek-Catholic bishops, Mykola Charnets’kyi and Ivan Liatyshevs’kyi, more than 500 priests, religious, many laity) and their

---

<sup>18</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan. *Confessor between East and West: a Portrait of Ukrainian Cardinal Josyf Slipyj*. (Grand Rapids, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Interviews with Sister Maria Dyka, OSBM (AICH file 154), Bishops Sophron Dmyterko, OSBM (AICH file 419) and Pavlo Vasylyk (AICH file 455).

<sup>20</sup> Keleher. *Passion and Resurrection*, 221. This is confirmed by the interviews with laity Katherine Bilio-Khadai (AICH file 1056), Maria Ventyk (AICH file 398), Natalia Kornets’ka (AICH 554), and many other respondents.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Fr. Mykhailo Sevchyshyn (AICH file 132), Kateryna Osoba (AICH file 636), Maria Labish (AICH file 963), Yustyna Yashchevs’ka (AICH file 445) and others.

return to Ukraine in 1955-1959, the Greek-Catholics in western Ukraine received new strength and their religious life and practices became more intensive and varied.

### **The Hierarchy and the Continuity of the Clergy**

One of the responses to the State's refusal to recognize the UGCC on the institutional level was the clandestine continuity of the hierarchy. The Church's structure was preserved through the ordinations of new bishops and clergy. During 1945-1989 twenty bishops were secretly consecrated (five of them were regarded as "titular bishops," who would start their episcopal duty only in case of an arrest or death of the acting bishop). Almost all of them received a full seminary education in the 1930s and early 1940s (with the exception of five younger bishops<sup>22</sup>), eleven of them belonged to religious orders<sup>23</sup> (four to the Basilians (OSBM), five to the Redemptorists (CSsR), and two belonged to the Studites). All of the underground bishops were persecuted by the Soviet authorities. Moreover, seven of them of the pre-war generation (with the exception of Pavlo Vasylyk) were in the Soviet prisons and labor camps during Stalin's regime in 1940-50s and five of them were arrested and sentenced a second time in late 1950s-1960s.

The leadership of the secret bishops obviously was quite limited. Usually they lived in the regional center corresponding to the territory of their diocese, in the same conditions as other people. Their main task was to provide continuity of the clergy — not to coordinate clergy activities. Often a new eparchial (diocesan) priest saw the bishop only once, during his ordination. He was introduced to the bishop by the "rector" of his clandestine seminary (there were at least three of these, as well as the more widely used system of individual preparation of candidates). Later this newly-ordained priest recognized the jurisdiction of the "rector" of his clandestine seminary and the bishop who ordained him. Despite some lack of theoretical knowledge, newly-ordained priests were distinguished by their self-sacrifice in ministry, while working during the day in different kinds of civil jobs. Their dedication engaged the laity with belief in and hope for the freedom of their Church. There was another way of resolving the problem of lack of priests: the wise policy of the clandestine bishops Vasyliy

---

<sup>22</sup> They were born accordingly: Yosyf Holovach in 1924, Pavlo Vasylyk in 1926, Julian Voronovsky in 1936, Mykhailo Sabryha in 1940, and Iryney Bilyk in 1950.

<sup>23</sup> There was a practice that a bishop ordained priests from his monastic order.

Velychkovsky and his successor, Volodymyr Sterniuk, was to accept former Greek-Catholic priests who secretly re-converted from Orthodoxy in the 1960-70s.<sup>24</sup> Those priests served as clandestine pastors or were even allowed to continue their ministry at the Orthodox churches.<sup>25</sup>

Liturgies were sometimes rare. For example, in the late 1950s Fr. Pavlo Vasylyk went to the village Nadorozhna every first Sunday of the month and on the same day also had to minister to the Greek-Catholic communities in two other villages. Priests could not celebrate Liturgy very often because: (1) there were not many of them; (2) the underground priests often had their ‘parishes’ in another district; and (3) not recognized by the state as pastors, Greek-Catholic priests, under Soviet law, were required to work, as people below pension age (60 years for men). Thus the response to this situation in circumstances of repression and persecution became private, paraliturgical practices which often stressed the Catholicity of believers. The Ukrainian-speaking broadcast of “Radio Vatican” from Rome served for many believers as an alternative way to participate in the liturgy every Sunday and during feasts when the priest was not present.<sup>26</sup> Some people even got blessings, e.g. for Easter food, through such broadcasts.

The Greek-Catholic opposition to the Soviet religious policy consisted mostly of the non-public form of secret catechism teaching to children, celebration of clandestine liturgies and participation in different devotions. Deprived of church property by state authority, Greek-Catholics organized “domestic churches” at homes of the faithful, nuns, and priests. There the Eucharist was kept and there priests and believers came for clandestine liturgies, prayer services, and confessions. For this purpose, sometimes, officially closed churches in villages were used, opened by local people (e.g. church in the village Nadorozhne). In the

---

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Bishop Philymon Kurchaba (AICH file 142), Fr.s Mykola Markevych (AICH file 337), Roman Kyiak (AICH file 900), Izydor Butkovs’kyi (AICH file 294).

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Fialka Yosyf (AICH file 1014).

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Bohdanna Maiik (AICH file 38), Oksana Ivasiv (AICH file 428), Fr. Ivan Sen’kiv (AICH file 281), Anna Maidans’ka (AICH file 359), Andrii Borsukevych (AICH file 726), Sister Sophia Chornii, of Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent De Paul (AICH file 83).

1970s-80s, liturgies and confessions sometimes took place in the forests near destroyed prewar Marian shrines, e.g. in Zarvanytsia in Ternopil region.<sup>27</sup>

However, there were also some public forms of resistance to the Soviet communist system and ideology. The most radical was expressed by the *Pokutnyky* (Penitentials) *movement*, based on a claimed Marian apparition on a mountain near the village of Serednie, in the Ivano-Frankivs'k region in 1954. The Blessed Virgin Mary supposedly delivered a message about repentance for people's sins, in order to be freed from their present Soviet yoke. Owen Chadwick refers to *Pokutnyky* as an extreme form of an underground sect which "combined secret forms of religion - night prayers in homes, strict observance of fasts, pilgrimages to a place where the Virgin appeared - with a total rejection of the Soviet state."<sup>28</sup> This rejection was publicly manifested in the refusal of any connection with the Soviet state, e. g. citizenship, passports, pensions, state rewards, and so on. The reaction of the hierarchy of the underground Greek Catholic Church toward this apparition was negative. Vasyl' Markus' provides an account of this reaction and its reasons:

The established underground Ukrainian Catholic Church questioned the veracity of the miracle and reacted even more critically to certain postulates and practices of the group, such as preaching the end of the world (announced for 1962), prescribing a nine-day penitence (Novena) and a pilgrimage to the 'Holy Place of the Virgin's apparition' in order to be saved, anathematizing Rome for its cooperation with the 'antichrist', and proclaiming the 'Holy Mountain' in Serednie as a 'New Rome' along with the announcement that a 'true pope' had appeared in Ukraine in the person of Archyerei [Archhierarch] Emmanuel as a 'visible Peter II on earth'. This led to an actual break between the regular Ukrainian Catholics and the *Pokutnyky* sect.<sup>29</sup>

The Greek Catholic community also used other forms of public protest. Though rare, occasionally a rebellion against the militia took place, staged in the villages in order to

---

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Fr. Vasyl' Semeniuk (AICH file 171), Mykhailo Ivashkiv (AICH file 1194), Sister Markiana Kolodii, OSBM (AICH file 270).

<sup>28</sup> See: Bociurkiw, "UGCC v catacombakh" *Kovcheh* 1 (L'viv, 1993): 124-125; Owen Chadwick, *The Christian Church in the Cold War*. Allen Lane, 1992, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> Vasyl' Markus', "Religion and Nationalism in Ukraine," in: Pedro Ramet, ed., *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*. (Durham, N.C., 1984), 156-157.

protect either a church building from destruction or an underground priest from being arrested while performing his duties.<sup>30</sup>

In a more civilized and organized way through the 1970-80s individual, collective letters, and signed petitions started to flow to the central and local Soviet authorities. These documents expressed protests against persecutions of the Greek-Catholics, requests to register a Greek-Catholic parish, or requests to open a closed church in a village.<sup>31</sup> In particular, in 1974 many petitions for “returning the rights to the Church” with about 12,000 signatures were gathered in western Ukraine and submitted to the Central government in Moscow.<sup>32</sup> This resulted in the persecutions of the signatories. Despite that, in the late 1970s and early 1980s a new wave of similar petitions took place with an increased number of signatories – about 30,000 believers.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the number of signatories scaled up even more during the legalization of the UGCC in late 1980’s.

### **Monastic Communities**

Monastic communities reorganized themselves. They lived in apartments or houses where they could lodge together in groups of two or three, and they obtained secular employment. They usually gathered together in a smaller group for a so-called "day of spiritual renewal" on Soviet holidays (e.g., Labor Day on May 1st) and met once a year in a bigger group (e. g. 5-10 nuns) for a 4-5 day retreat or conference.<sup>34</sup> Such gatherings helped them to keep the mission of the order or congregation, as well as a sense of religious community.

---

<sup>30</sup> For example, there was a people's rebellion in the village of Nadorozhne of the Tlumach district in 1958 in order to protect Fr. (future Bishop) Pavlo Vasylyk from arrest. See: interviews with Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk (AICH file 455), Iryna Vas'ko (AICH file 345), Yaroslav Vodnyts'kyi (AICH file 348).

<sup>31</sup> Among such signed petitions and letters, protest against persecutions and repressions should be named “Petition of sixty-one Greek-Catholic priests” from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945, numerous open letters of Fr. Studite Hryhorii Budzins'kyi, who wrote them to the Soviet local and central authorities newspapers during late 1950-1980s, and a letter with 180 signatures of the Greek-Catholics from city of Stryi from 1972. See: O. Zinkevych and T. R. Lonchyna, Fr., eds. *Martyrolohiia Ukrain's'kykh Tserkov*, 83-84, 259-260, 499-522, 690-691; Interview with Stefania Shabatura (AICH file 791).

<sup>32</sup> Peter Babris. *Silent Churches. Persecution of Religions in the Soviet-dominated Areas*. (Arlington Heights, IL, 1978), 149.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk (AICH file 455).

<sup>34</sup> For example, see the interviews with Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate Daria Gradiuk (AICH file 1264), Marta Kozak (AICH file 912); Sistes Studites Yulita Pochudai (AICH file 78) and Olimpia Katala (AICH file 211), Sister Margareta Hutnyk, OSBM (AICH file 1107), Bishop Mykhailo Sabryga, CSsR (AICH file 321).

Among Greek Catholic religious congregations, only the Eastern branch of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent De Paul in L'viv could continue to live as larger community of 12-30 nuns. During 1944-54, the community was forced to move five times. Nevertheless, the Soviet authorities had to tolerate this monastery because of their Mother-Superior Elisabeth (Alicia Poppe), who kept her Belgian citizenship and could create an international scandal. These nuns also kept their charism by continuing their work as nurses in their former hospital. Obviously, they were under close state security surveillance. This is why the first novice could only join the community in 1956 and had to live separately.<sup>35</sup> The Sisters of Mercy emerged from the underground in 1990 in L'viv with a total of 49 nuns.

### **Urban and Rural Practices**

The cities provided many opportunities for an underground priest to “get lost” among the vast population of inhabitants. It was easier to find a job in a big city. Often it was an unskilled job, which allowed a priest to have more days off to dedicate to his ministry; such jobs included, for example, a night guard or day-laborer.<sup>36</sup> Underground Greek-Catholic priests heard confessions during Lent at the “domestic churches” while others used, with the agreement of Roman Catholic priests, the confessionals of their parishes (e. g. in the city of L'viv Redemptorist Fr. Evstakhii Smal' heard confessions in the cathedral and St. Anthony's parish, where many of the church-goers were Greek-Catholics<sup>37</sup>). However, there were also disadvantages to practicing religion in urban areas. In a city, supervision was tight over religious practitioners and priests ordained before World War II, because the security officials “kept an eye” on them. Believers who had good-paying and prestigious jobs or held certain positions in society were constantly at risk of losing them. If clandestine liturgies and prayer services took place in urban territories, they were celebrated secretly, not sung, usually

---

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Sister of Mercy of St. Vincent De Paul Eremia Poburyinna (AICH file 40).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Frs. Ivan Dan'kiv (AICH file 20), Mykhailo Chervins'kyi (AICH file 45), Mykola Kuts' (AICH file 60) and Taras Dmytryshyn (AICH file 1008).

<sup>37</sup> Interviews with Stefania Soltys (AICH file 23), Vasyl' Kobryn (AICH file 160), Liubov Osadcha (AICH file 1036).

for a small, trusted group of believers. They were held as a rule in private homes in the suburbs or in apartments with closed windows during the night or early morning hours.<sup>38</sup>

The rural areas also had advantages and disadvantages. Among advantages were the quasi-absence of the authorities' control over people's religiosity. It was also possible to accommodate more faithful for the liturgy or prayers in private homes, to protect and to hide an underground priest from being caught by the police.<sup>39</sup> There were villages which never accepted an Orthodox priest, as in, for example, the villages of Bilky in the Transcarpathia region and Nadorozhna in the Ivano-Frankiv'sk region.<sup>40</sup> Lay organizations, such as the "Apostleship of Prayer," "Marian Congregations," and the Third Order of Redemptorists and of Basilians, kept together the spirit of the community of the faithful, while the official parish was suppressed.<sup>41</sup> In the villages, life was still very communal, so it was not easy to keep religious practices in secret. If the majority of the village inhabitants went to the Orthodox church on Sundays, and only a few families adhered to their Greek-Catholic faith, those families often were regarded by others as sectarians, because they did not attend church.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Role of Women**

Women played a significant role in preserving the faith and the Church through the two generations that grew up under the Soviet regime. On the family level, mothers and grandmothers gave basic religious education to their children by teaching them the traditional prayers and catechism. Most of the parishioners of the clandestine Greek-Catholic parishes were also women. Many women joined religious orders and congregations. Often women, lay and religious, were helping priests as catechists and as contact persons between the priest and communities or individual faithful. They fostered new priestly vocations among young

---

<sup>38</sup> Interviews with Bishop Ivan Margitych (AICH file 1148), Fr. Volodymyr Kharyna (AICH file 21), Fr. Stephan Gafych (AICH file 30), Halyna Dobosh (AICH file T-13), Fr. Ivan Kubai (AICH file 192), Fr. Volodymyr Shafran (AICH file 198), Fialka Yosyf (AICH file 1014), Sister Servants Myroslava Yakhymets' AICH (file 1055).

<sup>39</sup> Keleher. *Passion and Resurrection*, 228.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews with Fr. Peter Madiar, OSBM (AICH file 499), Anna Vintoniak (AICH file 467), Yaroslav Vodnytskyi (AICH file 348), Fr. Volodymyr Vjityshyn (AICH file 730).

<sup>41</sup> Interviews with Vira Tarakh (AICH file 1142) and Andrii Grytsai (AICH file 128).

<sup>42</sup> Interviews with Ivanna Vol'viv (AICH file 291), Sisters Pavlyna Hul', OSBM (AICH file 208), and Mother Anatolia Ivashkiv, OSBM (AICH file 70).

people and introduced young men to priests (as illustrated by Bishop Mykhailo Sabryha who acknowledged his gratitude to the mother of his friend from the factory, who after several conversations introduced him to the Redemptorists<sup>43</sup>). Women accompanied priests to their secret parishes, following them at a distance, serving as “bodyguards” and carriers of their priestly vestments in shopping-bags, and so on. Their support and activities kept the Church as well very much alive.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church under the Soviet communist regime and religious persecutions in the second half of the 20th century continued to thrive through the believers’ faithfulness and persistent resistance to the state’s antireligious ideology and abolition of their Church. The Greek-Catholics succeeded in containing the continuity of bishops and clergy, practiced their faith in many different forms, showing both accommodation and resistance. Thus the UGCC successfully defied the religious policy of the Soviet communist superpower intent on its annihilation, and intensified public movement for State recognition and legalization in the 1980s, which was finally achieved at the end of the year 1989.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church under the Soviet communist regime and religious persecutions in the second half of the XX century continued to thrive due to the believers’ faithfulness and persistent resistance to the state’s antireligious ideology and attempted abolition of their Church. The Greek-Catholics succeeded in providing the continuity of bishops and clergy, and practicing their faith in many different forms, showing both accommodation and resistance. Thus the UGCC successfully defied the religious policy of the Soviet communist superpower intent on its annihilation, and intensified public movement for State recognition and legalization in the 1980s, which was finally achieved at the end of the year 1989.

Editorial assistance Dianna Dragonetti

---

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Bishop Mykhailo Sabryha CSsR (AICH file 321).