

The Russian Orthodox Church as a Soviet Political Tool

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Abstract

It has been said that the Second World War saved the Russian Orthodox Church from extermination. Ever since the Revolution of 1917, the religious peoples of Russia were constantly persecuted by Soviet ideologists and politicians. Prior to Operation Barbarossa, in 1941, it seemed that the days of the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest religious institution in the Soviet Union, were numbered. However, the unique climate of the Second World War forced the Soviet government to end its war against the church. The Kremlin soon saw the Church as a useful tool to help aid in the re-occupation of Eastern Europe.

The history of Russia from 1917-1991 has often been described as the Soviet experiment. This is an accurate title, because many new political, economic, and social policies were implemented that were unprecedented in modern history. Canadians may recognize some of these experiments such as universal health care and multiculturalism, both of which were first implemented, with varying degrees of success, in the Soviet Union. This paper, however, will not address these policies; instead it will focus on one of the better known and brutal Soviet experiment: state atheism. Indeed, the Soviet Union was the world's first atheist state, and the history of this doctrine is indeed a dark one. Religious people, especially Orthodox Christians, faced brutal persecution from 1917 onwards. However, the German invasion of Russia, in 1941, changed this trend for at least one religious institution. Even prior to the invasion, the Soviets used the Russian Church to help assimilate the population in the territories occupied by the Soviets in 1939. However, a reversal of religious policy did not occur until 1941 when Stalin was forced to relax religious persecution in Soviet-held territories to counter the new religious freedoms allowed in German-held Soviet lands. Following the military turning point of 1943, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) once again became incredibly useful to the state. As the Red Army re-occupied areas previously controlled by the Germans, the church followed, and re-established its state-approved episcopal network. While religion once again had a legal place in the USSR, it occurred at the expense of many regional and national Orthodox churches. Additionally, the actual freedom the ROC had after its alliance with the Kremlin is questionable.

The first instance in which the Soviets employed the services of the ROC occurred in the newly acquired territories of Western Ukraine, Eastern Poland, and the Baltic States. These new territories were pivotal in Orthodox history and must not be overlooked in any account of Orthodox-Soviet relations. As historian William C. Flecher notes, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact “probably saved the Russian Orthodox Church from extinction”.¹ This point is highlighted by the fact that in 1941, because of nearly two decades of Soviet anti-religious campaigning, the Orthodox churches of these borderlands accounted for more than

¹William C. Flecher, *Nikolai: Portrait of a Dilemma*, quoted in Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 47.

seventy percent of the total number in the entire USSR.² The seizure of these churches greatly increased the numerical strength of the ROC. But why would the Soviet government, which had for so long tried to destroy the Russian Church, allow it to extend its reach into these new territories? The Soviets realized that in order to assimilate the borderland populations they would need to establish control of the region on a local level. Thus, the Soviets employed an old Tsarist method of absorbing national churches the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodoxy. In the territory of Eastern Poland, the native Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (POC) became a target for the ROC, which was in league with and directed by the Soviet government.³ During the interwar years, the Polish government had moved against the POC and by the time the Soviets entered Eastern Poland, it contained only fifty-three Orthodox Churches.⁴ Stalin realized that oppression of these churches would be unwise and instead allowed the remaining parishes and clergy to be incorporated into the Moscow Patriarchate.⁵ This manoeuvre would not alienate the local Polish Orthodox as much as outright persecution and would allow the Kremlin to keep checks on religious affairs. Although the POC parishes were relatively easily incorporated into the Moscow Patriarchate, their influence was limited because of their small number. Conversely, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) of Galicia, under the leadership of the popular Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, wielded considerable influence over the region's population, but unlike the POC, it would prove to be much more difficult to subordinate.⁶

In Western Ukrainian territories occupied by the Red Army, there were approximately 2,120 Greek Catholic parishes with 2,030 priests serving over 3.1 million faithful.⁷ While comparatively slow in their oppression of the church, the Soviets had by 1940 nationalized church property, imposed discriminatory taxes, and even begun to arrest Greek Catholic clergy and laymen.⁸ The Soviets endorsed the ROC to undertake "reunion" efforts in the almost entirely Greek Catholic Galicia. The Kremlin's need to communize the Galician population fit with the ROC's never abandoned ambition to recover its jurisdiction over the western territories lost in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Thus, the Soviet authorities allowed the Moscow Patriarchate to appoint exarchs in the new territories, redraw eparchial boundaries (ordaining new bishops therein), and finally, ease out bishops who refused to submit to Moscow, establishing the malleable ROC as an alternative to the nationalistic UGCC. On October 28, 1940, the Patriarchate decreed the establishment of the eparchy of Ternopil' and Halych, which covered all of Galicia, its centre was the Kremianets' *raion*, the old outpost of Russian Orthodox missionary activity and anti-Ukrainian propaganda during the Austro-Hungarian period.⁹ The former archbishop of Volhynia (a predominantly Orthodox region), Oleksii (Hromads'kii), was put in charge of the eparchy and tasked with

² Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, Vol. 1, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984). 194.

³ Wassilij Alexeev and Theofanis G. Stavrou, *The Great Revival: The Russian Church Under German Occupation*, (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1976).45.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939-1950)*, (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996). 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

“converting Uniates to Orthodoxy”.¹⁰ However, the most important Orthodox Church hierarch to be involved in Ukraine was Metropolitan Nikolai (Iarushevich) who, in mid-October, 1940, assumed direction of the Volhynia eparchy. The metropolitan visited L’vov in February, 1941 to gauge the reunion effort’s probability of success. His report to Metropolitan Sergii sheds light on the intentions of the Patriarchate and, by extension, the Kremlin. In it Nikolai mentions that a continuation of their “apostolic” cause of “reuniting” the Uniates with Moscow is advisable.¹¹ He also proposed the establishment, in L’vov, of an episcopal see for a vicar bishop, to help the Galician Orthodox parishes in the area. To fill this position, Nikolai suggested the prominent Galician Russophile, Archmandrite Panteleimon (Rudyk). Thus, in June 1941, the patriarchate sent the newly-ordained bishop Panteleimon to L’vov so as to, “under the general direction of the exarch [Nikolai], ...assume direct care of the Orthodox parishes of Galicia.”¹² However, the outbreak of the German-Soviet War, on June 22, 1941, prevented Panteleimon’s move to L’vov and, for the time being, the Kremlin-sponsored Orthodox attempt of “reunion” with the Uniates.

The last region to be incorporated into the Soviet Union was the Baltic sector.¹³ Here, ecclesiastical opinion of the Russian church and government were divided. On one hand, the Latvian and Estonian Orthodox Churches which separated from Moscow in 1924 and 1936, respectively, were highly nationalistic and thus, quite Russophobic. Conversely, the Lithuanian Orthodox Church, under Metropolitan Elevation, remained loyal to the Moscow patriarchate.¹⁴ While Orthodox populations in the Baltic States were small,¹⁵ Moscow nevertheless sent one of her four remaining bishops to administer the region. The arrival of this hierarch, Sergii (Voskresenskii), profoundly influenced the region. Upon his arrival, the churches under Constantinople’s jurisdiction (the Latvian and Estonian churches) were encouraged to attach themselves to Metropolitan Elevation of Lithuania, and thus, to the Moscow Patriarchate. Additionally, after Elevation’s death on January 1, 1940, Archbishop Sergii was named Exarch of the Baltic States and this, according to Sergii, motivated the heads of the Estonian and Latvian Churches to request the Patriarchate include them in ‘its canonical jurisdiction,’ thus ending the church ‘schism.’¹⁶ It is also important to note that Sergii, like all high-ranking church officials, was constantly monitored by the Kremlin, as internal travel within the Soviet Union had to be approved by the NKVD. Sergii’s case was unique however, as his mother was held in Moscow by the NKVD which naturally made him even more cooperative with the regime.¹⁷ Indeed, the Soviet authorities had a vested interest in the Patriarchate’s activities in their newly-acquired territories.

When Hitler invaded the USSR in June 1941, Stalin again changed the Soviet position on religion. All anti-religious publications ceased and some churches in major urban centres were allowed to open. However, religious education was still prohibited, and there was no mention of religious tolerance in domestic publications. Notwithstanding, the Kremlin was

¹⁰ Archbishop Oleksii’s letter (August 1941) to one of the Orthodox bishops in the *Generalgouvernement*, cited in Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, cited in Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 61.

¹³ It is important to note that this region was not a part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, but was invaded by the Soviets later, in 1940. Nevertheless, the Kremlin still utilized the ROC, as it did in Ukraine and Poland.

¹⁴ Alexeev and Stavrou, *The Great Revival*, 76.

¹⁵ For the numbers of Orthodox in the Baltic States, see Alexeev and Stavrou, *The Great Revival*, 76.

¹⁶ *Denkschrift betreffend die Lage der orthodoxen Kirche im Ostland*, 1941, 13, cited in *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷ Alexeev and Stavrou, *The Great Revival*, 78.

not ignorant of foreign opinion about the Soviet Union and its policy on religion; to this end, in publications sent abroad, the Soviet press gushed about the ‘freedom’ of the church in the USSR, in an attempt to convince the West of Moscow’s benevolence toward religion.¹⁸ Although the Soviets continued to cultivate Western opinion throughout the war, their priorities shifted by the spring of 1943. At this time, the balance of power on the Eastern front, and for that matter, in the entire war, had shifted. The Allies were now on the offensive, and the Red Army, fresh from its victory at the Battle of Stalingrad, was moving westward and looming over Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe. During this time, the Polish government-in-exile, a constant thorn in Moscow’s side, was picking up hints that the Russian Church was once again looking to subordinate Orthodox parishes in eastern Poland. This manoeuvre raised more than an ecclesiastical problem, because if the Moscow Patriarchate – or more precisely its Soviet masters – could gain control of Orthodoxy in Poland, they would be able to dictate episcopal appointments and, more importantly, excommunicate clergy who did not cooperate with the communist regime. They could establish a trustworthy and subservient network of individuals at the local level, which would make military occupation and political domination of the region much easier.

The Poles were, however, veterans of such manoeuvres from the struggles in 1939-1941, and would offer far more resistance a second time around. To this end, the Polish government, seeking asylum in London, argued that Moscow had no ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Poland. Their strongest argument against the Patriarchate’s claim to Poland was simple: the ROC, was in league with an officially atheist regime, and was without an official patriarch, thus they held no canonical power.¹⁹ The Poles presented a valid argument and the Russian Orthodox hierarchs were fully aware that their lack of a Patriarch handicapped their struggle against regional churches. The Poles were confident that communism and religion were truly incompatible. The fact that the ROC had no Patriarch – the legal and spiritual head of the Orthodox Church – greatly diminished its credibility. However, on September 4, Stalin would shock the Poles and Orthodox clergy by changing that very situation.

With the Red Army moving ever westward, the Soviets were encountering Orthodox churches re-opened by the German occupiers.²⁰ The Kremlin needed a well-organized ecclesiastical body which could administer these new parishes. Thus, the ROC had to be given more freedom and power to properly deal with these new churches. By early September, Stalin approved a plan, motioned by the People’s Commissar for State Security, to return Metropolitan Sergii to Moscow (he had been evacuated eastward to Ulyanovsk when the Germans threatened Moscow in the autumn of 1941).²¹ The *locum tenens* complained that he was losing control of the church, because of his isolation, and – more importantly to the Soviets – he was unable to handle the practical matters in managing the “large number of churches on liberated territory, which had been previously occupied by the Germans.”²² This, as far as the Soviets were concerned, was to be the Patriarchate’s primary function. Keeping the de facto leader of the Church in Moscow would allow him to be closely monitored by the NKVD, while he dealt with the sensitive issue of administering the

¹⁸ Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, 93.

¹⁹ Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, 115.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

²¹ document 88. people’s commissariat of state security, 3 July 1943, cited in Felix Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union: An Archival Reader*, (Houndmills, England: Palgrave MacMillian, 1996). 139.

²² *Ibid.*

western churches.²³ On September 4, Stalin summoned metropolitans Sergii, Nikolai, and Aleksii (of Leningrad) to Moscow to meet with the Georgian Generalissimo, the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, and Georgii Karpov, former NKVD officer and soon-to-be head of the emerging Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church.²⁴ In the meeting, which lasted just short of two hours, Stalin asked his clerical guests to “spell out any pressing questions.”²⁵ They responded by pointing out three major points: churches should be reopened to deal with the people’s needs, a new patriarch should be re-elected, and seminaries should be opened to train new priests. According to A. Letvin-Krasnov, who interviewed Sergii, these requests elicited the following response from Stalin:

“Why haven’t you any personnel? Where have they got to?” he asked, taking his pipe out of his mouth and staring intently at the company. Aleksii and Nikolai were confused...everyone knew that the “personnel” were scattered in the camps. But Metropolitan Sergius was not discountenanced. . . . The old man replied, “We lack personnel for several reasons, one of which is we train a man to be a priest, but he becomes a Marshal of the Soviet Union.” A satisfied grin moved the dictator’s moustache. He said, “Yes, yes, I was a seminarist. I even heard about you.” He then fell to reminiscing about his years as a seminarist...He said that his mother had regretted to her dying day that he had not become a priest. The conversation between the metropolitan and the dictator took on a relaxed air. After tea had been served, they talked business.²⁶

This business entailed creating a new church publication (*Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*), establishing seminaries, providing the three hierarchs with extra food supplies and lavish living quarters, and moving “at a Bolshevik tempo”²⁷ to hold a *sobor*, which would officially name Sergii patriarch.²⁸ To end the meeting, Stalin emphasized that the church had the government’s full support; and, regarding the ‘misplaced personnel,’ Stalin told a concerned Aleksii to “draw up a list and we will look into it.”²⁹ The September 12 *sobor*, which elected Sergii as patriarch, sheds some light on clerical opinions of the Soviet government’s new alliance with the church. It is important to note that this meeting was a far cry from the 1917 *sobor* that elected Patriarch Tikhon.³⁰ The religious oppression between 1917 and 1943 had clearly taken its toll as a dispirited group of nineteen hierarchs signed the *sobor*’s declaration.³¹ Gregorii Karpov, leader of the newly-created government body that monitored

²³ Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, 124.

²⁴ document 89. people’s commissariat of state security, 3 July 1943, cited in Felix Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union*. 139.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁶ From the work of A. Letvin-Krasnov, who interviewed Sergii, quoted in Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, 124.

²⁷document 89. people’s commissariat of state security, 3 July 1943, cited in Felix Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union*. 139.

²⁸ Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, 126.

²⁹ document 89. people’s commissariat of state security, 3 July 1943, cited in Felix Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union*. 143.

³⁰ Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, 127.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the church, observed that many priests held the belief that the government's new policies were temporary and that "once the war ends, the church will end."³²

With the ROC now headed by an official patriarch, the Kremlin was ready to embark on its re-occupation of Eastern Europe, and as in 1939-1940, the Orthodox Church would prove its utility in this matter. Uniting all Orthodox Christians under the cooperative and pliable Moscow Patriarchate would allow the Soviets to establish a web of loyal cultural figures and root out any uncooperative churchmen, all the while portraying to the West the image of a religiously tolerant state. Undoubtedly, the region which would be the biggest thorn in Stalin's side was Ukraine. Here, just as in 1939, the church served as a subterranean network for anti-Soviet feelings. Pavel Sudoplatov, who headed the NKVD division that swept through Ukraine with orders to assassinate any individuals who constituted a threat to the Soviet order wrote that "the bulk of guerrilla commanders came from the families of Ukrainian clergymen."³³ One should be careful about accepting such claims at face value as Stalinist secret police were not fastidious when it came to identifying possible enemies. Nevertheless, Ukrainian clergy were seen as a threat to the Soviets and were prepared to use the Moscow Patriarchate to help deal with this matter. In November 1943, Metropolitan Nikolai issued a stern warning to supporters of the splinter Ukrainian Autocephalous and Autonomous Churches.³⁴ While he recognized the "peace loving character of the Ukrainian people," and respected their "fiery love of their homeland," he urged them to "be true to the end to our Holy Mother Orthodox Church," and equated "all those guilty of the betrayal to the common cause of the church" to fascists and anti-Christ.³⁵ Patriarch Sergii also addressed the Ukrainian schismatic churches stating:

It is not for nothing that our church so urgently requires that the name of the patriarch should be commemorated in all the churches of our country. He who suppresses the commemoration of the Patriarch has 'neither part nor lot' (Acts VIII.21) with the faithful children of the Orthodox Church.^{36z}

The schismatic clergy were told to submit to the patriarch or face excommunication; thus the Ukrainian Autocephalous and Autonomous Churches ceased to exist as institutions.³⁷ These clergy had little choice in the fate of their churches. With Sergii on the patriarchal throne, backed by the advancing Red Army, these men were left with few alternatives.

As a contrast to east-central Ukraine, the religious question in the western region of Galicia would prove to be a much more complicated affair. Despite admitting that Soviet reoccupation would "possibly have the beneficial effect of ending the anarchy that exists today in the entire country,"³⁸ Greek Catholic Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky knew that his church was not in good favour with the Kremlin. During the previous three years the church had openly sided with the enemies of the Soviet Union, supported the methods of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, and even blessed the formation of the volunteer *Waffen SS*

³² *Ibid.*, 128.

³³ *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 138

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁸ The Metropolitan's letter of March 22, 1944, quoted in Bocurikiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 63.

division, *Galicia*.³⁹ This led the Metropolitan to make a move to “normalize relations with the Soviet government.”⁴⁰ To this end, he sent a letter of greetings to Stalin and prepared to send a delegation to Moscow to negotiate a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet government and the Russian Patriarchate.⁴¹ However, unlike in 1939-1941, the Soviets displayed a much more complacent and tolerant attitude towards the Greek Church.⁴² This was mainly due to the Metropolitan’s great popularity. A top secret report, submitted to the highest level of Soviet leadership based on intelligence gathered by the NKVD, discouraged any movement against the Greek Church as long as Sheptytsky was alive.⁴³ Unfortunately for the Greek Catholic Church, Sheptytsky did not live very long. In the early afternoon of November 1, 1944, the elderly cleric passed away. The church was then left in the hands of the less prestigious and inexperienced archbishop, Iosef Slipyi, who played the role of intermediary between the Soviet government and the UPA (*Ukrayins’ka Povstans’ka Armiya*). On November 23, Slipyi issued his first pastoral letter, in which he praised the “heroic, invincible Red Army” for their “liberation of Western Ukraine.”⁴⁴ He accused “various [nationalist] armed groups-units” of luring civilians into their ranks to combat state authority and thereby bringing about the punitive measures of the Soviets upon the region.⁴⁵ Slipyi also finalized his predecessor’s plans to send a delegation to Moscow, which was dispatched in mid-December.

However, the fate of the Uniate Church did not rest in this conference, but in its ability to pacify the UPA.⁴⁶ This role of intermediary proved to be a difficult one for the church and it was not able to persuade the UPA Supreme Command to meet with church and Soviet delegates until February 28, 1945. The Soviet representatives offered to spare from reprisals UPA officers and men who surfaced, and orderly and unconditionally, surrendered their arms. They guaranteed that the men would be able to resume normal lives, jobs, or studies and have freedom and choice in where they wanted to live. Unconvinced, the UPA representatives declined.⁴⁷ Despite Slipyi’s continued pleas to the UPA, asking it to “not offer [the Soviets] even the slightest excuse for extermination of the people,” the organization was unresponsive and eventually paved the way for the Uniate Church to be dissolved and replaced by the Moscow Patriarchate. With the final utility of the Uniate Church gone, and the Soviet annexation of Western Ukraine recognized by the other two major Allied Powers (at Yalta, in February 1945), the Kremlin saw no practical reason to allow this nationalist and independent church to exist.⁴⁸ By April, Karpov was in communication with Ukrainian Party leader Khrushchev (who eventually succeeded Stalin as leader of the Soviet Union), and outlined the measures that should be taken increase the Orthodox presence in Galicia. These plans coincided with the beginning of an NKVD

³⁹ Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 64.

⁴⁰ M. Odintsov, “Uniaty,” *Argumenty i fakty* (Moscow), October 7-13, 1989, cited in Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 79.

⁴¹ Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, 181.

⁴² Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 73.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁴ “Dukhovenstvu i virnym, myr u Hospodi i blahoslovennia” (typescript), preserved at the TsDIAU, *fond*408, *opys* 1, *sprava* 50, fols. 19-20, cited in Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 88.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 94.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

sponsored propaganda campaign against the Greek Church, even though the cooperative attitude of Metropolitan Slipyi did not change.⁴⁹

The most prominent assailant of the Church was the Ukrainian Central Committee Director of Propaganda and Agitation, Iaroslav Halan (or Galan), who took the pseudonym Volodymyr Rosovych.⁵⁰ He unleashed a personal attack on the late Metropolitan Sheptyst'skyi and challenged the historical legitimacy of the Greek Church, painting it as a tool of the former Polish and Austro-Hungarian administrations “to break up the unity and friendship of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples.”⁵¹ Halan claimed the “demise” of the church was “inevitable” and called for its “return” to the Orthodox Church as its only means of salvation.⁵² In the face of such hatred, the great majority of Uniate clergy refused to submit to the Moscow Patriarchate, but the Soviets, not known for their democratic convictions, continued with their plot to sever Ukrainian connections with the Vatican through the destruction of the Uniate Church.⁵³

Once again, the Russian Church played an invaluable role in the destruction of a regional church. In April an “Initiative group” (which consisted of Fr. Havril Kostel'nyk, and a few other Uniate clergymen loyal to Moscow) was formed to aid in the process of replacing Greek Catholicism with Russian Orthodoxy.⁵⁴ Kostel'nyk appealed to other Uniate clergy to join the Russian Church based on the rationale that Ukraine, finally united into a single state, needed a single faith. He attested that the Uniate Church was a “sinking ship,” “leaderless and disorganized,” and if it were to survive, it needed to be “led away from anarchy” into union with the Moscow Patriarchate.⁵⁵ Of course, Kostel'nyk did not represent the general views of all Uniate clergy (he was part of a tiny minority); however, Kostel'nyk was in league with the Soviet authorities, who had transferred all effective authority over the Greek Catholic Church to his ‘Initiative Group’ – an organization of Uniate clergy who supported the Uniate church’s ‘reunion’ with Russian Orthodoxy.⁵⁶ Following the publication of 5,000 copies of his appeal, the Soviet government arrested all Uniate bishops and deported a further 500 priests.⁵⁷

Soviet persecution of the Uniate Church continued throughout the year and eventually broke the will of the Uniate clergy. By March 1946, 986 of the remaining 1,267 Uniate priests joined the Initiative group.⁵⁸ Some defenders of the Orthodox ‘invasion’ of Galicia use this to justify the dissolution of the Uniate church. However, it would be foolish to think that these priests had much choice in the matter or that they truly supported the change because of the Stalinist repression they experienced for almost two years.⁵⁹ The dissolution of the Uniate Church became official on March 8, when a ‘*sobor*’ was held at St. Georges Cathedral in L'vov. There, 216 delegates of the Initiative Group, led by Fr. Kostel'nyk, unanimously

⁴⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁰ Miner, *Stalin's Holy War*, 182.

⁵¹ Halan, *Tvory*, 2: 286, quoted in Bocurikiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 108.

⁵² Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 110.

⁵³ Miner, *Stalin's Holy War*, 185.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 186; Bocuirikiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 121.

⁵⁵ Miner, *Stalin's Holy War*, 188.

⁵⁶ Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 131.

⁵⁷ Miner, *Stalin's Holy War*, 189.

⁵⁸ Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 189

⁵⁹ Miner, *Stalin's Holy War*, 189.

declared the Russian Orthodox as the official church of a united Ukraine.⁶⁰ Following this, the government shut down 9,900 primary and 380 secondary schools run by the church and closed its three seminaries, arresting almost all the instructors. Furthermore, as priests became available from the newly-opened Russian seminaries, they moved into former Uniate parishes. Many of these men had connections to the NKGB and were far more loyal to Moscow than to the Ukrainian national movement.⁶¹ Thus, the Uniate Church ceased to exist as an institution (although it survived as a ‘catacomb church’ until its revival under Gorbachev), replaced by Russian Orthodoxy. Soviet security organs were quite satisfied with the assistance provided by the Russian Orthodox Church, as Sudoplatov writes that “Reunification was a decisive blow against the Ukrainian guerrilla [sic] resistance under [Stepan] Bandera’s leadership because the bulk of guerrilla [sic] commanders came from the families of Ukrainian clergymen.” The Russian Church had succeeded in driving a wedge between the resistance movement and its regional support network, but at a great cost. Many Russian clerics had misgivings about their brother priests languishing in Soviet gulags. Additionally, there is little doubt that most of the clerics who were arrested had not supported the murderous tactics of the UPA, even if they did support an independent Ukraine.⁶²

The Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet-German conflict of 1941-45 was known, had a profound impact on the entire Soviet Union. The Russian Orthodox Church was no exception. Prior to the war, the ROC was broken after many decades for persecution at the hands of the Soviets. In the newly-acquired territories of Eastern Poland, Western Ukraine, and the Baltic, the Russian Church was used as a tool to assimilate and control the local population. It was the Nazi invasion of 1941, however, that brought new life to the church. As the German army swept eastward, churches were re-opened to incise the local population to accept their new rulers. This was a great threat to the Soviets, as people in Soviet-held territory long yearned for that freedom. Thus, Stalin was forced to end his attack on religion. Once the Red Army began to push the Germans out of Russia the problem of the re-opened churches became apparent. In order to gain control over these new institutions, a body controlled by the Soviet government was created to administer them. The alliance between the Kremlin and the Russian Patriarchate was formed. When the Soviets forced the Germans out, the re-opened churches were absorbed into the Russian Orthodoxy. While the persecution of the Russian Church ended, all other churches were eliminated. As a result, the sole legitimate religious institution was firmly in the grasp of the Soviet government.

⁶⁰ Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 164.

⁶¹ Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, 189

⁶² *Ibid.*, 188.

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