

The Moscow Patriarchate and the Liquidation of the Eastern-rite Catholic Church in Ukraine

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L'vovski tserkovny sobor. Dokumenty i materialy 1946-1981. Moscow: Izdaniye Moskovskoi patriarkhii, 1982, 224 pp.
(The L'vov Church Council. Documents and Materials 1946-1981.)

Among publications produced by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church for the Millennium of the adoption of Christianity in Kievan Rus' (988-1988), one of the first books to appear was a Collection of documents, in Russian, on the liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate) Church in Western Ukraine in 1946. As the editor notes, this collection appeared with "the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and all Russia". It merits close scrutiny for two reasons. First, the published documents and materials, it is noted in the foreword, "reveal the solely correct, Orthodox view of events connected with the history of the Union". Thus, at issue is the question of the appraisal of Ukrainian Catholicism by the present-day leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church. Secondly, documents in this collection also show many instances of censorship, which will be discussed in the second part of this review article.

The book consists of three parts: (1) a historical survey entitled "The unity of the church and church unions" (pp. 7-40); (2) documents pertaining to the 1946 L'vov (L'viv) Synod (pp. 43-106); and (3) a chapter entitled "Anniversaries" which contains the texts of speeches, telegrams and journal articles occasioned by the Russian Orthodox celebrations of the tenth, twentieth, 25th and 35th anniversaries of the liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholic Church (pp. 109-203). The book concludes with a bibliography of works dealing with the history of the Union (217 items). It is enhanced by black and white as well as colour photographs of leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church, some churches in Western Ukraine and celebrations of anniversaries of the L'vov Synod. The latter are shown with many believers in attendance, which is apparently calculated to demonstrate visually the "blossoming" of religious life of the population of Western Ukraine under the Soviet regime.

The author of the historical survey entitled "The unity of the church and church unions" is I. F. Oksyuk, former editor of the journal *Pravoslavny Visnyk* (The Orthodox Herald), which has been published in

Ukrainian in Kiev since 1968. Oksyuk makes an attempt at a scholarly approach to the problematics of the history of the 1596 Brest Union with Rome of the Orthodox Church in the Ukrainian and Belorussian lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He discusses the causes of the origin of the union, preparations for, and the course of, the Brest Synod and the effects of the union on the religious and social life of Ukraine in the following centuries. Oksyuk dedicates a large part of his article to the history of the conversion of Eastern-rite Catholics to Russian Orthodoxy in the territory which after the first division of Poland in 1772 became part of the Russian Empire. He considers the tragic events in the liquidation of the Uniate Church on the territory of Russia in 1795-96, 1839 and 1875 simply as a return of believers to their ancestral Orthodox faith and as "shining events" in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, he ignores the fact that after 1905, when freedom of religion was proclaimed in Russia, approximately two hundred thousand Orthodox believers, former members of the Uniate Church, accepted Catholicism. This time, however, they accepted Roman Catholicism as the law concerning freedom of religion did not apply to the Uniate Church.¹ The author also neglects to discuss the plans and the politics of "conversion" of Ukrainian Eastern-rite Catholics to Russian Orthodoxy in Eastern Galicia (Halychyna) in Western Ukraine at the time of the Russian occupation of 1914-15. The first victim of this policy was Metropolitan Andrei Sheptyts'ky, who was arrested by the Russian occupation authorities, brought to Russia and incarcerated in a Suzdal' monastery which served as a prison for leaders of religious sects and "religious criminals". Oksyuk mentions that the "eyes of the population of Halychyna" were always turned eastward "whence they expected help and not in vain" (p. 32). He continues with a discussion of the history of the "reunification" of the Ukrainian Catholics of Western Ukraine and the Transcarpathian region with the Russian Orthodox Church. This "reunification" was achieved at the L'vov synod of 1946 and proclaimed in Mukachevo in Transcarpathian Ukraine in August 1949.

Obviously, thirty pages are not adequate for a detailed analysis of such a complex historical event as the Union of the Orthodox Church with Rome in 1596 and its consequences for the religious and national life of the Ukrainian nation. However, one cannot fail to notice several tendentious conclusions on the part of the author or note their ideological slant. Oksyuk subscribes to the view that the Brest Union was an artificial creation engineered by influential circles of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with the aim first of Catholicisation and later colonisation of the Ukrainian and Belorussian nations. He states:

The idea of a union of the Orthodox Church with Rome found ardent support from the Polish government of the king and the magnates. Being the surest means of assimilation [viz. polonisa-

tion] of the Orthodox population of the Commonwealth, the [Church] Union was to have strengthened the political foundation of the Union of Lublin (p. 13).

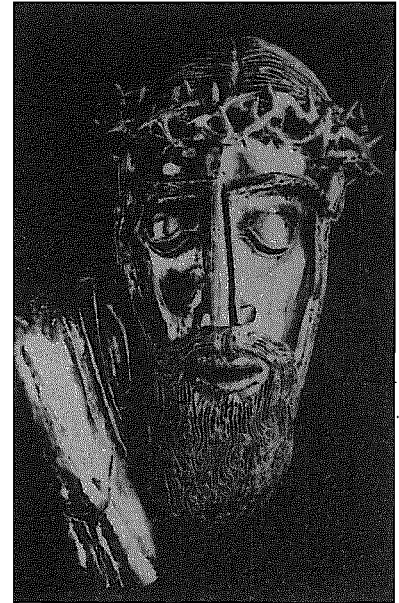
Such an appraisal of the Union of Brest is too one-sided and does not explain the real reasons for the rise of the Union. It is indeed true that the ruling circles of the Polish-Lithuanian state hoped that such a union would make the latinisation and eventual polonisation of the Ukrainian and Belorussian population possible. This plan, however, was not the basic reason for the origin of the union, but arose only as its consequence. As early as the end of the 19th century the Ukrainian (Orthodox) historian Orest Levytsky criticised the concept of the "Polish initiative" for the union of the Orthodox Church with Rome. In his introduction to a collection of documents concerning religious life in Ukrainian lands from the 14th to the 17th century Levytsky writes:

The established view of the Union as a violent political measure, undertaken and executed by the Polish government with the aid of the Catholic clergy seems to us one-sided, and in no way whatsoever can we agree with the opinion of our historians who accuse King Sigismund III and the Jesuits of being the main culprits behind the Union. In the lives of nations, upheavals such as the Union are never accomplished solely by the will of governments, especially weak ones, such as the governments of Poland and Lithuania have always been. They usually occur as a result of certain internal, organic damage which violates the normal course of life of a given society.²

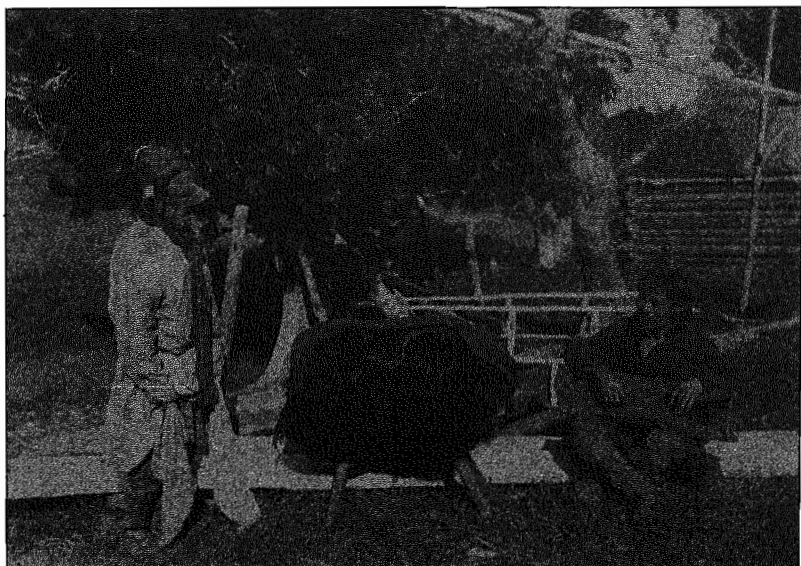
Orest Levytsky provides an exhaustive analysis of the "internal damage" afflicting the Orthodox Church at that time. He believes this to comprise: demoralisation of a great part of the hierarchy, effects of the reformation movements in Eastern Europe, alienation of the polonised Ukrainian nobility from their own faith and their people. Levytsky concludes that sooner or later the Orthodox Church in the Polish-Lithuanian state would have come, if not to a union with Rome, then to another radical solution to its internal problems. Levytsky, without idealising the Union, writes:

it awoke in the West Rus' [Ukrainian and Belorussian] society dormant or transient forces and urged them to action on behalf of the church and the restoration of its former order and welfare . . . [The union] eventually made possible the appearance in southern Rus' of various people in various positions in the church hierarchy who radiated a purity of morality, a loyalty to their pastoral duties and a selfless devotion to the religious common good.³

Oksyuk is most certainly familiar with the work of Levytsky, but he

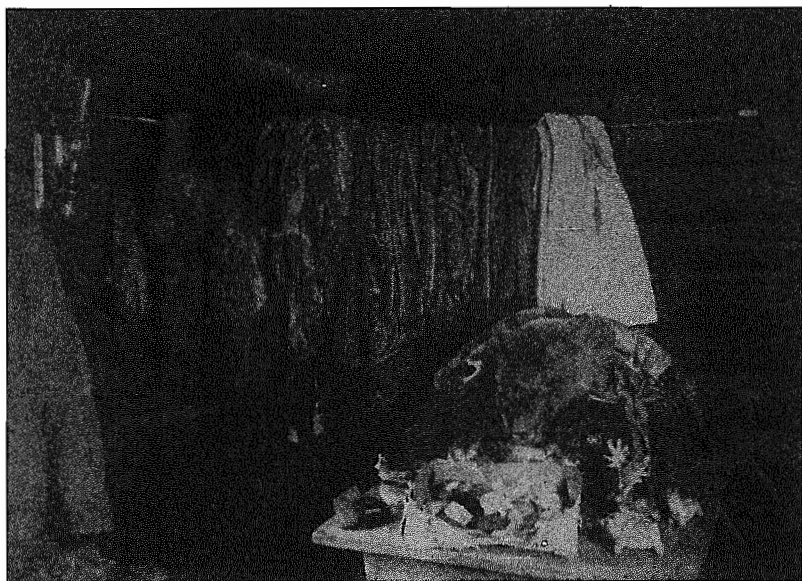


Moravian artist Vladislav Vaculka (centre) and two examples of his sculpture. His work as an engraver, painter, and sculptor, was commemorated in a *samizdat* volume entitled *In Memoriam Vladislav Vaculka*, following his death in 1978, in the town of Uherske hradiště. (All photos courtesy Keston College).



Above: A scene from the Khant Bear Festival: An actor in a mask and a musician wearing a bearskin. See article on pp. 166-81.

Below: The skin and head of a bear in place of honour in a Khant dwelling.
(Both photos date from the 1920s and are reproduced by kind permission of Boris Chichlo.)



does not find it necessary to mention it or, in particular, the Ukrainian author's appraisal of the Brest Union.

One should also have reservations about Oksyuk's appraisal of the awareness of the Ukrainian masses concerning the union and its consequences. He writes:

The fruitless revolts of 1637-38 strengthened the realisation among the broad masses in Ukraine of the necessity of union with the fraternal Russian nation, a nation of like faith and like blood, and convinced them of the Russian nation's ability to give aid in the struggle against Uniate violence and inhuman social oppression (p. 23).

To endow a 17th century people as a mass with the attributes of a motive force in a state is either nonsensical or, at most, means following the Marxist-Leninist methodology with regard to the interpretation of historical processes. In this case it seems that the author is guilty of gross exaggeration and wishful thinking.

The Russian (and Marxist) historian Mikhail Pokrovsky seems to have come much closer to the truth when in 1933 he wrote:

alliances between states in the 17th century, as today, were formed not on the basis of the sympathies of the popular masses involved but by the political considerations of the ruling strata. Sympathies were staged very easily then as well as they are now, if the ruling strata found it necessary.⁴

One of the most important arguments against Oksyuk's thesis that in the mid-17th century there was in Ukraine a "desire" for unification with the "co-religionist" and "consanguine" Russian people under the leadership of the Patriarch of Moscow is the refusal of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev, Sylvester Kosov, to swear allegiance to the Russian tsar in 1654 in Kiev, at the very time of unification of Ukraine with Russia.⁵

To sum up, it must be stated that I. F. Oksyuk's examination of the history and consequences of the union of the Orthodox Church with Rome in the lands of Ukraine is by no means dispassionate. His survey is a mixture of scholarship and propaganda. He is trying to suggest to the reader that the Russian Orthodox Church has always concerned itself with the fate of the Orthodox Ukrainians and Belorussians; that today, on the eve of the celebration of the millennium of the Christianisation of Kievan Rus', it (the Russian Orthodox Church) is the sole and true heir and steward of the traditions of the Orthodox Church among Eastern Slavs; and finally, that the Russian people has always played the noble role of the "elder brother" with regard to Ukrainians and Belorussians.

Let us now proceed to an examination of the documents published in the Moscow Patriarchate's collection which pertain to the 1946 Synod of L'vov at which the decision was reached to liquidate the Ukrainian

Catholic (Uniate) Church on the territory of Ukraine. First of all, it must be recalled that documents concerning the preparations for and the course of the L'vov Synod were originally published in that city in that same year, 1946, in Ukrainian.⁶

Insofar as that publication has since naturally become a bibliographical rarity and no other documents about the synod have been published, one would have hoped that anyone interested in the history of the Ukrainian Catholic Church would find a scholarly republication of those documents in this collection of the Moscow Patriarchate. Unfortunately, this is not the case. What one finds is merely a reprint of the original documents from the 1946 edition; a reprint which, it must be noted, has undergone special "editing". Not only isolated sentences but also whole paragraphs are deleted, altered and distorted with no explanation from the editors. What one sees here is an attempt to bring the documents on the liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in line with the demands of the present-day "solely correct view" of the Russian Orthodox Church on the history of the liquidation.

It is noteworthy that the editors of this collection have not included the previously published texts of two important documents connected with the preparation of the Synod of L'vov. The first of these is the text of the "Appeal of the Action Group for the re-unification of the Greek Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church" addressed to the "Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR", dated 25 April 1945. The authors of the appeal, *inter alia*, glorify "Generalissimo Stalin" for gathering the Ukrainian lands, note the "great services" of Nikita Khrushchev and acknowledge that at the end of the German occupation of Ukraine they had "only fear and no hope" because they "were mistaken in their appraisal of Soviet reality and the historical mission of the USSR" (*Diyannya*, p. 17). The editors of the collection of documents reviewed also did not include the text of the answer of the plenipotentiary of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church attached to the Council of People's Commissars, P. Khodchenko. In this letter, dated 18 June 1945, he legalised the activities of the Action Group and dictated the following instructions to its leaders: "The Action Group must send representatives to the plenipotentiary for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church attached to the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR with a list of all the deacons, parish priests and priors of monasteries who refuse to be subject to the jurisdiction of the Action Group . . ." (*Diyannya*, p. 20).

Non-inclusion of these two important texts represents the efforts of the editor to erase the traces of the close cooperation of the Action Group with the representatives of the communist government of the Soviet Ukraine, and thus to conceal evidence of outside assistance in the liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. This is obvious from another

document, which describes how the Soviet authorities in L'vov "secured accommodation for the delegates [of the Synod of L'vov] in the better hotels of L'vov . . . they also provided for the priests' food during [the proceedings of] the synod" (*Diyannya*, p. 33). Not surprisingly, these interesting details are omitted from the new publication of the documents.

In the context of a propaganda campaign against Ukrainian Catholicism to this day, Metropolitan Sheptyts'ky is accused by Soviet publicists of "treason" to the Ukrainian people and of "collaborating" with the Nazis. One Soviet author claims that the Metropolitan was "a Gestapo spy". If these accusations had any real grounds they would undoubtedly have served as important ammunition in the case for the liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholic Church during the L'vov Synod of 1946. However, the Synod documents do not contain the slightest hint of such things. On the contrary, the delegates of the Synod spoke of the (then already deceased) Metropolitan with respect. They said he was a man who had "obtained for himself great popularity among the Orthodox believers in Poland" because, among other things, he "had had the courage to protest against the destruction of over a hundred Orthodox churches in the areas of Kholm" (in Russia until 1918, then in Poland as Chełm) in 1937-38 (*Diyannya*, p. 44). One of the participants in the synod stated that "the Metropolitan Andrei was above all a good Christian, no one has any doubts as to this — he was also a good Catholic" (*Diyannya*, p. 98). In the Moscow "edition" of the documents for the L'vov Synod all mention of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptyts'ky are carefully expunged.

It is perhaps bitterly ironic that in several places the editors of this collection even censored the words of one of the greatest promoters of the liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, the chairman of the Action Group, Fr H. Kostel'nyk. We will mention only the most glaring example of this censorship. During the L'vov Synod Fr Kostelnyk made a speech in which he explained the motives behind the liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholicism of the Eastern Rite and the return to the Orthodox faith. He said, *inter alia*:

The Church and the clergy are totally dependent on the people. And we are anxious that all changes in our church discipline, in rites, in traditions proceed wisely and carefully so as not to thrust the people away from the church, or extinguish the religious spirit within it . . . We are in Ukraine and we are Ukrainians and no one will take that away from us in our church either (*Diyannya*, pp. 74-75).

These words of Fr Kostel'nyk are missing from the collection of documents about the liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholic Church edited in Moscow. In this way the editors themselves give an appraisal of the

attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church concerning the development and the present situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church once rich in specific national traditions. This censorship is further proof of the fact that the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church does not wish to allow the Orthodox churches of Ukraine and Belorussia in the Soviet Union to develop in accordance with the traditions of these nations. Neither does it want to allow these churches to become national orthodox churches in accordance with the traditions of autocephalism. Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church in the USSR is an accessory to the regime in the process of russification of the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union.

Several points must be mentioned in summing up the documents:

1. the editors do not have a serious attitude to the documents on the history of the church and demonstrate their contempt for the elementary requirements of scholarly norms in connection with the publication of historical documents;

2. in so treating the documents of the so-called L'vov Synod of 1946, the editors of the collection themselves give proof of the fact that this was not an ecumenical synod held in accordance with canon law, but simply the forced liquidation of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, which was in the interests of the Soviet regime, as well as of the Moscow Patriarchate;

3. offering to the reader historical documents in such a censored form as the "solely correct, Orthodox" view of the history of Ukrainian Catholicism and its liquidation, the editors have proved that their main concern was not a serious analysis of the question, but rather the publicising of the ideological point of view of the Russian Orthodox Church on this subject. This is probably also the motive behind the announcement of the publication of this collection in English. It is regrettable that the appraisal of Ukrainian Catholicism on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union is identical with the appraisal of this same subject found in the writings of Soviet anti-Catholic publicists.

¹ A. H. Velyky, *Svila i tini ukrains'koi istorii*. Rome: 1969, pp. 33-34. Much important documentation on the liquidation of the Uniate Church in the territories of Ukraine and Belorussia which were forcibly included into the Russian Empire has been published in Ks. Franciszek Stopniak, *Kościół na Lubelszczyźnie i Podlasiu na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*. Warsaw: 1975, pp. 268-325. Władysław St Reymont, among others, has written about the persecution of the Uniates in *Ziemi Chełmskiej*, Biblioteczka Uniwersytetów Ludowych, No. 180, Warsaw-Cracow (n.d).

² Orest Levitsky, introduction to the collection of documents *Arkhiv Yugo-Zapadnoi Rossii*, Part One, *Akty o tserkòvno-religioznykh otshoseniyakh v Yugo-Zapadnoi Rusi (1322-1648)*, Vol. 6, Kiev, 1883, p. 16.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴ M. N. Pokrovsky, *Ob Ukraine. Sbornik statei i materialov*. Kiev: 1935, p. 73.

⁵ Ivan Vlasovsky, *Narys istorii Ukrains'koi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvy*, Vol. 2 (17th century). New York: Bound Brook, 1956, pp. 292-343.

⁶ *Diyannya Soboru Hreko-katolyts'koi tserkvy u L'vovi 8-17 bereznya 1046*. Vydannya Prezydii Soboru, L'viv, 1946 (referred to in the text as *Diyannya*).

⁷ *The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, No. 10, 1983, p. 79.