Beyond Statistics: The Persistence of Active Churches in West Ukraine During Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Campaigns

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Introduction

From 1958 to 1964 Russian Orthodox churches and monasteries were closed all over the Soviet Union as part of Khrushchev's atheism campaigns. These closures were tied to other repressive measures against the official Russian Orthodox Church and other recognized confessions, including punitively high taxation. As Nathaniel Davis points out in his statistical analysis, this campaign dealt devastating blows to the Russian Orthodox Church in particular. In Ukraine alone, the number of Russian Orthodox Churches decreased from 8,537 to 4,540. However, these losses were nowhere near evenly distributed. Some Ukrainian oblasts lost nearly three quarters of their churches. Others lost closer to half. Yet during the onslaught, the oblasts that had had the highest number of churches before 1958 were the oblasts that faced the least amount of church closure, both in percentages and raw numbers. These oblasts made up the region of West Ukraine, specifically the Ukrainian territories that became part of the Soviet Union beginning in 1939.[1] What explains this outcome?

Before 1958, the comparatively large number of Orthodox Churches in West Ukraine was as a product of the fact that, as a later addition to the territory of the Ukrainian SSR this

[1] In this region (excluding Volyn), there were a little over 4,000 registered Russian Orthodox churches—by the end of the campaign of church closures there remained 2,600 in the region, significantly less than the losses of 50 and 75% in other oblasts. More importantly, however, this region retained its high concentration of churches in comparison to other Soviet regions. By 1966, more than one-third of all Russian Orthodox Churches in the Soviet Union were located in West Ukraine, despite the region making up a small percentage of the Soviet population and its territory. Nathaniel Davis, "The Number of Orthodox Churches before and after the Khrushchev Anti-Religious Drive," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 3 (Autumn, 1991): 612-620.

region did not experience the mass closure of religious spaces that the rest of Soviet Ukraine faced in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, Soviet authorities chose to keep churches open that had been opened under the Nazi rule in West Ukraine, as they did in other parts of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Lastly, the forced "reunification"[2] of West Ukraine's majority Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church with the Russian Orthodox Church beginning in 1946 added a significant number of parishes to the ROC.[3]

These factors, however, do not account for the persistence of this concentration of churches in West Ukraine past the immediate postwar years, through the Khrushchev era of anti-religious campaigns. According to Davis, after the Khrushchev campaigns of church closure concluded in 1964, 7,500 Russian Orthodox churches remained in the Soviet Union. Of these churches, 4,540 were located in Ukraine, about 60% of the total. Within that number, the

[2] The term "reunification" [rus. *vossoiedinenie/* ukr. *vozz'iednannia*] is not my term but reflects the vocabulary of the Soviet actors planning the project. In their view, the transfer was a "reunification" because it considered Greek Catholics as having been "separated" from their rightful Orthodox church when the church was established in the 16th century. These terms were also used to discuss the annexation of Galicia to the Soviet Union—instead of annexation Soviet officials used the term "reunification" to emphasize that Galicians had originally been part of Ukraine and had been unjustly separated when borders shifted in early modern Europe. I continue to use "reunification" as a term throughout the paper without quotations to use the language the architects of the project use, as well as to emphasize this discursive connection. I acknowledge that while the term "reunification" implies a voluntary choice, the reunification project of 1946 was a coercive one.

[3] The first forced reunification, in March of 1946, was proclaimed in L'viv and applied to the Greek Catholic churches in the historic region of Galicia. In 1949, a *sobor* was held in Uzhhorod, the capital of Zakarpats'ka oblast, "reunifying" the Greek Catholics of Zakarpattia (Trans-Carpathian Rus'). Unlike the situation in the former territories of Galicia, there was a small but notable presence of Russian Orthodoxy in the region before the reunion. The Zakarpattia reunification proceeded quite differently from the reunification in Galicia, but was promoted and implemented with a similar narrative in mind. The historical context of Galicia, however, was the dominant one in justifying reunification, leading Soviet authorities to focus more on the Greek Catholic Church and its historic ties to national movements in Galicia than in Zakarpattia and thus the Galician context is the one I focus on in this paper.

majority of churches were located in the western oblasts of Ukraine.[4] Breaking it down further, on the oblast level in West Ukraine, 428 of these churches were located in Zakarpattia, 194 in Volyn, and the remaining 2100 were in the formerly Galician oblasts of L'viv, Stanislav, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil.[5] This means that after the anti-religious campaigns of the early 1960s, one-third of all Russian Orthodox Churches in the entire Soviet Union came from regions that had undergone a forced reunification of the majority Greek Catholic confession with the Russian Orthodox Church.[6] A significant number of the active, Russian Orthodox Churches in West Ukraine that made up such a large percentage of the Soviet Union's ROC parishes were, in fact, "reunified" churches, churches that had been Greek Catholic until their forced transfer to the ROC. What does this statistic tell us about Soviet religious policy in the Khrushchev era more generally and the role of West Ukraine in this policy specifically?

[4] Davis, 620.
[5] Davis, 620.
[6] This number is even more fascinating when we consider that before 1939 when these West Ukrainian regions were annexed to Soviet Ukraine, the oblasts of Ternopil, Stanislav, L'viv, Drohobych and Zakarpattia had few Russian Orthodox Churches at all. In their historical regions of Transcarpathian Rus' and Galicia, Russian Orthodoxy was a minority faith. Before the forced reunification of 1946, the Galician Oblasts of L'viv, Drohobych, and Stanislav had only 21 Russian Orthodox churches, about 1% of the parishes (Davis, 620). By 1949, these oblasts had nearly 2,000 Russian Orthodox Churches (Shlikhta, 398). During the mass church closures in the USSR, this number dropped significantly, however these church closures did not result in these oblasts ending up with church numbers similar to their neighboring regions—instead, these oblasts were able to retain their relatively high concentration of sacred spaces. For example, in 1952 the formerly Galician Stanislav oblast had 606 Russian Orthodox Churches, one of the highest concentration of churches in Soviet Ukraine. During a particularly active period of church closures in 1962, 1,470 churches were closed in Soviet Ukraine—of that number 104 were in Stanislav. In comparison, 112 churches were closed in Chernivtsi oblast, which had just 367 Russian Orthodox Churches in 1952, compared to over 600 in Stanislav. Similarly, in Odesa oblast, 93 churches were closed. In 1952, Odesa oblast had 270 Russian Orthodox Churches. Even though Odesa oblast had less than half the number of churches as Stainslav, its losses were similar (Shlikhta, 398). See Davis and Natalia Shlikhta, *Tserkva tykh, khto vyzhyv: Radians'ka Ukraïna seredyna 1940-x–pochatok 1970-x* (Kharkiv: Akta, 2011): 398.

The persistence of the concentration of Russian Orthodox Churches in West Ukraine is party explained by the understanding of the 1946 state-led campaign that transferred Greek Catholic churches, clergy, and laity to the Russian Orthodox Church, the project that consecrated these active churches as Russian Orthodox to Soviet policymakers in the first place, as an ongoing one, even in the Khrushchev era.[7] The unique role for Russian Orthodoxy in West Ukraine that began with reunification set up Russian Orthodoxy as both a counter to Greek Catholicism and anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism. This meant that Russian Orthodox institutions and clergy could justify their presence in West Ukraine on terms not available in other parts of the Soviet Union. In the era of atheism campaigns, the Orthodox Church was able to maintain a robust presence in West Ukraine more so than anywhere else in the Soviet Union through this strategy. In addition, the return of Greek Catholic clergy and laity to West Ukraine as part of Khrushchev's amnesty policy led to the creation of an underground, or catacomb Greek Catholic Church that existed alongside the Russian Orthodox Church. In this environment, an official and loyal Russian Orthodox Church was seen by secular Soviet authorities as an institution worth supporting, especially as the underground church grew in size and influence.

Statistics on the number of churches in each oblast, as well as how the numbers of churches fluctuated in comparison to each other demonstrate how the formerly Greek Catholic oblasts, despite facing mass church closures, retained the highest concentration of Russian Orthodox Churches in the Soviet Union throughout the changing religious policies of the

[7] This point has been made by historian Natalia Shlikhta who has encouraged scholars to distinguish between reunification as the "fact" of reunion as it was declared in 1946 and the reunification "process", which she defines as "the lengthy *process* of turning 'former Uniates' into 'Orthodox' and 'Soviets.' See Natalia Shlikhta, " 'Ukrainian" as 'Non-Orthodox': How Greek Catholics Were 'Reunited' with the Russian Orthodox Church, 1940s–1960s," *State, Religion and Church* no. 2 (2015): 77-98

postwar era. These variations in numbers alone show that while Khrushchev's orders demanded church closures *en masse*, this did not necessarily mean local contexts and considerations were not taken into account. The particularity of West Ukraine and the history of both imperial and Soviet religious policy in that region meant that Khrushchev's campaigns were applied differently there. While Khrushchev's policies were developed in the center, local authorities had a great deal of autonomy in how and to what extent they should be implemented. In exercising this authority, however, local Soviet officials still explained and justified their actions on terms that would be acceptable to their superiors in Moscow.

This dynamic becomes clear when we look beyond statistics and examine the debates and discussions among local Soviet authorities, between local cadres and their superiors and Moscow, as well as between Russian Orthodox clergy and secular state representatives on the topic of church closures, a topic where they had the authority to determine *how* aspects of the atheism campaigns would be implemented. In archival documents from the Committee for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC), surveillance reports of clergy and churchgoers conducted by Soviet security services (de-classified in the SBU Ukraine archives), and in reports from the AgitProp section of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Churches stood for an extension of the Soviet state in West Ukraine, and not a source of instability as Khrushchev imagined them to be in other parts of the Soviet Union. This understanding of Russian Orthodoxy determined how (and if) the directives of the atheism campaigns would be applied. For their part, clergy and laity were able to mobilize this image of the Russian Orthodox Church in their appeals to authorities to ensure a presence for their religious spaces in the region. Finally, through these debates it becomes clear in the Khrushchev era, some of the same concerns that motivated official atheism could be addressed outside of the

atheism campaigns. In some cases, rebuilding postwar, post-Stalin Soviet society could be achieved by keeping churches open, instead of closing them.

The Sobor of 1946 and the Aftermath

At a *sobor* held in St. George's Cathedral in L'viv Ukraine, the "reunification" of the Greek Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church was decided upon by a unanimous vote of 216 priest-delegates on March 10, 1946, less than two years after L'viv had become part of Soviet Ukraine. However, in a quarterly report to Georgii Karpov, the head of the Committee for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC, an agency under SovNarKom), P. Khodchenko (CAROC's head for Ukraine) noted that after the *sobor* "The work has just begun" ("*Rabota tol'ko nachalas'*) a phrase underlined by the reader of the report.[8] In the immediate post-war era, for Soviet authorities, the "work" of reunification was the recruitment of the Galician Greek Catholic clergy to the Russian Orthodox Church, work that was tied to critical to Soviet state-building in Galicia. Recruiting Greek Catholic clergy into the Russian Orthodox Church mobilized priests into both Soviet society and a "reunified" Soviet Ukrainian nation. After 1946, reunification became a project to be continually enforced, by connecting the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church and the performance of its religious rituals to assurances of continued loyalty and participation in the Soviet project.

The promotion of Russian Orthodoxy as part of becoming Soviet in West Ukraine was tailored to the unique role the Russian Orthodox Church had played historically in connecting Ukrainian territories to each other and to the Russian Empire. Church reunification as a tool of territorial reunification was a tactic that made sense in the localized understanding of Ukrainian national belonging that Soviet authorities hoped to foster in Galicia. The transfer of the

[8] GARF f. R-6991, op. 1, d. 99, 65. 15 May 1946.

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to the Russian Orthodox Church was called a "reunification" by state and religious authorities because it was intended to express and consolidate the political "reunification" of Ukrainian territory and the movement westward of the Polish border, all of this justified as uniting all Ukrainians into one nation-state and, importantly, away from Poland.[9] Territorial and church reunification of Galicia with Soviet Ukraine was promoted as a liberation of Galician Ukrainians *from* Polish rule and *into* Soviet Ukrainian society. While territorial reunification was also used to justify annexing other parts of Poland to Soviet Ukraine, it was only in Galicia that this was connected to religious policy, or previous imperial "reunification" of churches. Thus, the process of becoming Soviet for Galicians in 1945 was not only different from what Ukrainians to the East experienced after 1917, but also distinguished Galicians from other newly Soviet populations in Ukraine and across the western borderlands.

The most helpful framework for understanding this connection between Sovietization and Orthodoxy in West Ukraine is Soviet nationalities policy and its mobilizing and evolutionary goals as articulated by Francine Hirsch, Terry Martin, and others.[10] In the case of Orthodoxy in

[9] The connection between the promotion of Ukrainians as the titular nationality in Galicia and a simultaneous "de-Polonization" of the region by Soviet authorities has an extensive literature. For more on the Soviet Ukrainization of Galicia and the "Polish question" see Tarik Amar, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015): 86-7; Roman Szporluk, "The Making of Modern Ukraine," in Eds. Georgiy Kasianov and Philipp Ther, *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009): 249-280; Christoph Mick, *Lemberg. Lwow. L'viv, 1914-1947* (West Lafayette, In: Purdue University Press, 2016); and Vladislav Hrynecvych, *Druha svitova viyna i suspil'no-politychni nastroï v Ukraïni* (Kyiv: Lira, 2012): 240-255.

[10] Both Francine Hirsch and Terry Martin argue that Soviet nationalities policy was a key way to assimilate the former subjects of the Russian Empire into the USSR and mobilize groups through that category of the nation to build Soviet society. While Hirsch focuses on Soviet nationalities policy as a "double assimilation" into a nation and into the USSR that would eventually create "socialist nations" that would fuse together under communism, Martin argues nationalities policy should be seen as an "affirmative action" policy meant to promote national minorities at the expense of national majorities. For Martin, Soviet policymakers were invested in nation-building

West Ukraine the framework of Soviet nationalities policy can be applied—with key differences. Unlike in the earlier years of nationality policy where everyone was mobilized through a nation, in this case only those deemed both "Ukrainian" and newly Soviet were mobilized through Orthodoxy. Just as early Soviet nationalities policy resulted not in assimilation but in the creation and enforcement of strict ethno-national categories and territories, using Orthodoxy to incorporate Galician Ukrainians into Soviet Ukraine also served to preserve the constructed differences between these western oblasts and the rest of Ukraine.[11]

Despite the radical changes to Soviet society, especially in the realm of religion, brought on during the Khrushchev era, this specific role for Orthodoxy in West Ukraine that came out of the reunification campaign was never called into question. This allowed the Soviet policymakers in West Ukraine who saw the usefulness of official Orthodoxy, specifically those in CAROC and local security services, to successfully advocate for a continued presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in West Ukraine at the same time as the Soviet state decreased the presence of the Church nearly everywhere else. Because Russian Orthodoxy became tied to both Sovietization and Ukrainization in West Ukraine, the continued promotion of Russian Orthodoxy remained a key element of Soviet governance particular to the western oblasts of Soviet Ukraine in the decades that followed.

The Atheism Campaigns: What was official atheism?

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as the end itself, instead of simply as a modernizing means to an end. See Francine Hirsch. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005): 4 and Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 43.

[11] In his work on Soviet nationalities policy, Terry Martin argues that the ultimate goal for Soviet policymakers was nationalism, not assimilation. In this case, the promotion of Russian Orthodoxy may originally have been conceived as a way to assimilate Galicians and later Carpathian Ukrainians into the rest of Ukraine, but the way the project was carried out led to particularism, not assimilation, for Galician Ukrainians. Martin, 43.

The promotion of Russian Orthodoxy during the Khrushchev era begins to appear less paradoxical after considering the roots of Khrushchev's atheism campaigns and its policy goals. Two recent works address the origins of Soviet atheism campaigns as an attempt to explain both the motivations behind Khrushchev's embrace of atheism and the implementation of the campaigns. Victoria Smolkin argues that for Khrushchev, anti-religious campaigns were part of the positive aspects of de-Stalinization, which called for a return to ideological purity and material progress toward the Communist future. For Khrushchev, Stalin's previous rapprochement with religious institutions was evidence of the rot at the core of Stalin's communism.[12] However, the anti-religious campaigns were only one aspect of Khrushchev's plan to rebuild communism after Stalin. In West Ukraine where building Russian Orthodoxy was necessarily connected to building communism, improving Soviet society in the ways Khrushchev envisioned need not mean the eradication of religion. In his analysis of the Khrushchev anti-religious campaigns, Andrew Stone argues Khrushchev's antireligious campaign "existed as part of a larger effort to modernize the rural Soviet Union." Within these efforts, Stone notes, "often local officials, average citizens, and parish clergy found ways that religion and the Soviet system in practice could coexist." The official Russian Orthodox Church, Stone argues, at times successfully presented itself as a partner in these modernization campaigns by participating in state-run campaigns to combat superstition and unauthorized religious practice. [13] In some cases, this came out of genuine fear from hierarchs in the Russian Orthodox

[12] Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018): 59-60.
[13] Andrew B. Stone. " 'Overcoming Peasant Backwardness': The Khrushchev Antireligious Campaign and the Rural Soviet Union," *The Russian Review* 67, no.2 (April 2008): 297.

Church that their authority and legitimacy was being directly challenged by unofficial religious communities.

These wider goals and contexts of the atheism campaigns under Khrushchev explain how the oblasts of West Ukraine maintained their high concentration of churches. Whereas in the rural Russian contexts Stone focuses on, Russian Orthodox clergy could portray themselves as more "modern" in the face of superstition and backwardness, the "reunified" Russian Orthodox clergy in West Ukraine could present themselves as a product of Sovietization, in comparison to a historical relic like the Greek Catholic Church, which came out of the backwards Polish and Habsburg historical contexts. Because reunification was not only a Soviet state project but specifically tied to the liberation of Galician Ukrainians and their territorial reunification with Soviet Ukraine, the reunified Russian Orthodox clergy could tie their presence to Soviet progress.

The presence of Russian Orthodoxy as "progress" in West Ukraine is also directly related to another aspect of Khrushchev's reforms--mass amnesty for those deported or arrested under Stalin. The return of thousands of people from the gulag under Khrushchev had an enormous impact on the USSR, especially, as Amir Weiner argues, in the regions that had been annexed to the Soviet Union during WWII. The returnees to the borderland regions, unlike returnees in other parts of the USSR, were those who had never become part of Soviet society or as Weiner puts it, were "remnants of opposition forces in the Soviet Union who rejected co-optation and reform 'from within'".[14] In the realm of the clergy, this meant the return of Greek Catholics who had refused church reunification. From the view of Soviet state authorities, support for the reunified

[14] Amir Weiner. "The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics." *The Journal of Modern History* 78 (June 2006): 334.

clergy and their parishes was support for those who had been mobilized to build Soviet society in Galicia. In contrast, mass closures of Russian Orthoox churches could result in believers turning to the underground church built by gulag returnees, an institution that rejected Soviet authority by design.

Another aspect of Khrushchev's drive to purify communism motivated both amnesty and atheism—what Miriam Dobson refers to as the "rediscovered desire to perfect human nature." In this view of the "new Soviet" man or woman, the Soviet state should aim for correction and reform of the individual within society, instead of forcing the person outside of society. [15] Atheist education was a way to reform a believer's mistaken views without excising them from the Soviet body politic. For gulag returnees, this meant allowing them to return back to Soviet life despite their previous "mistakes." As Weiner argues, the decision to let many (but certainly not all) returnees return to their homes in unstable border regions like Galicia was a way for the Soviet state to demonstrate "their confidence in their ability to conquer the opposition without resorting to mass terror."[16] One of the ways this philosophy manifested in the Galician oblasts was an attempt to encourage reunification with Russian Orthodoxy among gulag returnee clergy who had begun building an underground Greek Catholic Church. With regard to the laity, local authorities believed the presence of a Russian Orthodox Church that local believers could be assured would not be closed would bring returnees back into the fold of Soviet society. In both cases, Russian Orthodoxy, not atheism, was considered the mechanism by which to win over gulag returnees to the Soviet system in Galicia.[17]

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[15] Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009): 8-9.
[16] Weiner, 339.
[17] The notion that Greek Catholic clergy among gulag returnees should be encouraged to "reunify" with Russian Orthodoxy was first suggested (and implemented) at the beginning of

Appeals During Atheism

In the summer of 1958, a few months after the policy shift known as Khrushchev's atheism campaigns began, the head of CAROC for Ukraine, Hryhoriy Pinchuk gave a presentation to the Central Committee of the Communist Party for Ukraine on the importance of a robust presence for Russian Orthodoxy in West Ukraine. Pinchuk delivered remarks that included his own thoughts, as well as suggestions from a church hierarch, the head of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. In his speech, Pinchuk argued that amnestied gulag returnees were undermining the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine and that the solution was to provide more state support to the reunified clergy and encourage Orthodox clergy to recruit these recalcitrant Greek Catholics to the Russian Orthodox Church. Pinchuk asserted that urging these Greek Catholics to "reunify" with Russian Orthodoxy and become Russian Orthodox priests would prevent them from engaging in anti-Soviet activity as underground un-reunified Greek Catholic priests. This presentation, which made the case for Russian Orthodoxy from a Soviet state and clerical perspective, demonstrates the continuing relevance of the 1946 reunification project for Soviet authorities, even twelve years later.[18]

As CAROC and the church tried to negotiate a place for themselves in the changing environment of Khrushchev's atheism campaigns, this type of appeal can perhaps be expected. What is unexpected, however, was the Party's response to this presentation. After hearing from Pinchuk, two members of the Agitation and Propaganda section of Ukraine's Communist Party, Nikulin and Hladarevskiy, presented a plan that began with an endorsement of Pinchuk's

mass amnesty in 1956 and continued throughout the atheism campaigns that followed. See for example: GARF f. R-6991, op. 1, d. 1386, ll. 15-6. 25 January 1956 and GARF f. R-6991, op. 1, d. 1442, ll. 28. January 1960

[18] TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, spr. 4829 ll. 115-119. 4 August 1958 reproduced in Volodymyr Serhiychuk. *Neskorena Tserkva* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 2011): 303-5.

recommendations but proposed going a step further. Nikulin and Hladarevskiy proposed forming a committee that would include CAROC plenipotentiaries, AgitProp section officials, a journalist for the newspaper "Komunist" and a Kyiv University professor to investigate Greek Catholic activities in two Galician oblasts, Stanislav and L'viv and then present the results to the secretary of the Ukrainian central committee, Stepan Chervonenko. Nikulin and Hladarevskiy concluded this proposal stating that this commission would be in direct response to the recent Central Committee decree on past deficiencies in scientific atheism, the decree that was the official start to Khrushchev's atheism campaigns.[19]

To be sure, investigating and reporting on Greek Catholics in L'viv and Stanislav could easily be justified as part of the educational aspect of the atheism campaigns. The "scientific" aspect of scientific atheism included enlightening the population about the dangerous activities of sects and unofficial religious movements, a category that sometimes included Greek Catholics. But while Pinchuk's recommendations included this kind of investigation, his proposed solution was not enlightenment of these Greek Catholics through atheist education—it was reunification with Orthodoxy. For Pinchuk, the danger of these Greek Catholics was their undermining of the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church and it was this church—not atheist education—that Pinchuk believed should be strengthened to address this threat. By the time the AgitProp committee concluded their investigation, they had accepted this aspect of Pinchuk's recommendations as well. In January of 1959, Nikulin and Hladarevskiy presented their findings to the secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Chervonenko. While their first recommendation concerned atheist lectures (they wanted more lectures on specifically Catholic

[19] TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, spr. 4829 ll. 114. August 1958 reproduced in Volodymyr Serhiychuk. *Neskorena Tserkva* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 2011): 306.

topics), the rest of their proposals relied on the strengthening of Russian Orthodoxy, continuing a push for reunification, and putting a stop to indiscriminate church closures. Critiquing the work of their fellow Party activists, Nikulin and Hladarevskiy raised concerns about closing churches in places where Greek Catholic activity is high and Party education initiatives are low:

> Party organizations in many districts of the Western oblasts have become worried [заспокоїлись] because Soviet authorities have formally closed parishes that include non-reunified citizens, but do not conduct atheist work widely among this population, which has led to former Uniate churches continuing their illegal activities.[20]

Despite their critique of the Party, the solution Nikulin and Hladarevskiy propose is one that relies on the Russian Orthodox Church, not just increased political work:

> In order to limit the field of activity for the Uniate clergy, we must continue to register churches in areas where believers are actively campaigning for this clergy to reunify with Russian Orthodoxy… Russian Orthodox clergy should continue to work with these individual priests in order to convince them to reunify with Russian Orthodoxy.[21]

[20] TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, spr. 5028 ll. 2-15. 19 January 1959 reproduced in Volodymyr Serhiychuk. *Neskorena Tserkva* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 2011): 322.
[21] Ibid, 324-5.

Later correspondences between AgitProp and CAROC, as well as church statistics, reveal that these measures were put into place.[22]

In 1960, during the peak of church closures, appointed a new head of CAROC, Vladimir Kuroedov. The decision to replace Georgii Karpov, the founding head of CAROC with Kuroedov reflected Khrushchev's desire to reform CAROC itself—and make it an institution that would keep religious institutions in line, instead of facilitating a greater role for them in the Soviet state. Under Kuroedov, CAROC's perceived cozy relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church was supposed to come to an end. Yet when Kuroedov introduced the new party line to his plenipotentiaries in a May 1960 presentation, he still emphasized the places where he hoped to partner with the Russian Orthodox Church—the most important of which was in fighting the Vatican.[23] In discussing the Vatican, Kuroedov notes that one of the places the Vatican has been making inroads was in West Ukraine—through the activities of the Greek Catholic Church. Kuroedov goes on to instruct his plenipotentiaries that in this fight against Greek Catholics—one which he characterizes as fighting Vatican influence—the Moscow Patriarchate should be seen as a partner.[24]

Taken together, these documents show a flexibility in the center (Kyiv and Moscow) towards fulfilling Khrushchev's atheism plans in a way that made sense in the context of West Ukraine. These reports show the willingness of central authorities to accept the case made by local authorities for the particular importance of Russian Orthodoxy in West Ukraine. And local

[22] In reports from the KGB, for example, officers recommend that gulag returnees under surveillance for illegal Greek Catholic activity should be invited to participate in official Russian Orthodox life by KGB agents among the Russian Orthodox clergy, who also should work to convince them to "reunify" and register as Russian Orthodox priests themselves. See DA SBU f. 2, op. 27, spr. 8, ll. 118-120. December 1958.
[23] DALO f. P-1332, op. 2, spr. 28, ll. 115-6. 27 May 1960.
[24] Ibid, 116.

authorities, both in CAROC and the party, continued to make this case throughout the atheism campaigns—for a variety of reasons. First, as discussed before, the legacy of the church reunification project meant that local authorities came to see the Russian Orthodox Church as a partner. The association between the Russian Orthodox Church and stability for local Soviet authorities began during WWII and remained resonant during the flood of gulag returnees and the subsequent growth of the underground Greek Catholic Church. Second, for CAROC plenipotentiaries who worried for the future of their agency, arguing for the continued importance of Russian Orthodox clergy as partners in Soviet governance was also an argument for the importance of CAROC and the work of its plenipotentiaries. Third, the sources of information for local Soviet authorities in West Ukraine were often clergy and believers themselves—people who deployed the alleged "Uniate threat" in their conversations and appeals to authority in order to preserve the Russian Orthodox Church.[25]

For example, during the height of church closures, the Moscow Patriarchate put together a commission whose stated goal was to "strengthen [*utverzhdeniia*] Orthodoxy, conduct a campaign against remaining elements of the Orthodox Church and the liquidate Uniate ritual in churches." From 1960-1961, church hierarchs inspected reunified churches all over Ukraine to ensure they were properly Orthodox and investigated instances of illegal Uniate activity. They presented their findings to both CAROC, as well as to Party officials in the AgitProp section. These findings presented a dire picture—of the persistence of Greek Catholic rituals in formally Orthodox churches, rituals that often had "nationalist" content, of church spaces that retain

[25] Natalia Shlikhta explores the ways in which church hierarchs could take advantage of the Soviet system of official Orthodoxy to advocate for their believers in Natalia Shlikhta. "Portraits of Two Bishops Defending Their Dioceses: A Study of the Orthodox Episcopate in Postwar Soviet Ukraine." *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55, nos. 3-4 (2014): 329-357.

Latinized architectural elements and Catholic ritual objects, and of the underground Greek Catholic church taking away authority from loyal Orthodox clergy. The commission concluded their report with a series of recommendations that included providing more resources to seminaries, increasing the distribution of the publications of the Ukrainian Exarchate, printing Ukrainian language prayer books, and, finally, preventing the closing of churches in areas with Greek Catholic activity.[26] Some of these recommendations were indeed put into place, including keeping certain churches open. Beyond these concrete measures, putting together this commission was also a way for the Patriarchate to present itself as useful during a precarious time. Positioning their church in the role of monitoring and containing dangerous Greek Catholic political activity was an effective strategy for continued relevance in the Khrushchev era, as well as a way to portray themselves as a useful partner at the moment that the partnership was called into question.

Believers in West Ukraine also saw in the reunification legacy an opportunity to keep their churches open. Appeals and petitions sent to local authorities to re-open closed Orthodox churches demonstrate believers' awareness of authorities' anxieties about the negative effects of closing churches in West Ukraine, as well as the prescribed role for Russian Orthodoxy that went with it. For example, in a 1961 complaint against closing an Orthodox parish church in the village of Nove Znesinnia (L'viv oblast), the petitioners argue:

> … as a consequence of closing our church… individual believers will begin to meet in homes or fall under the influence of sects, which include elements that

[26] TsDAVOU f. 4648, op. 1, spr. 193, ll. 68-71. 28 January 1961.

> often are hostile to Soviet power. It's no secret that various sects are spreading their influence throughout L'viv, this has been written about in the local press.[27]

Here, the petitioners not only appeal to authorities' own concerns about closing churches, but also refer to the educational materials printed on dangers of sects as part of official atheism campaigns. Yet, these materials are being used here not to support the closure of a religious space—but in the service of one staying open. In this complaint it becomes clear that not only were atheism campaigns implemented differently in West Ukraine, but that the targets of these campaigns may have come to similar conclusions as the authorities in determining that church closures were not the best way to spread atheism.

In another 1961 complaint, this time from a group of Orthodox believers in Sokal' (L'viv oblast), the petition explicitly mentions that the Orthodox Church in their town that was closed was a "true" Orthodox Church, in contrast to a reunified Greek Catholic one. The church that remains open, the petitioners contend, is an active Greek Catholic Church that has reunified with Orthodoxy in name only:

> We believers of the Russian Orthodox Church have been thrown out [выгоняют] of our church by the clergy and parishioners of the Greek Catholic Church…For some reason it is the Greek Catholic Churches that have not been closed and instead the churches that are subject to closure are Russian Orthodox churches.[28]

[27] TsDAVOU f. 4648, opis 1, Sprava 304, ll. 177. 1961.
[28] TsDAVOU f. 4648, opis 1, Sprava 304, ll. 116. 1961.

Whether the petitioners were aware of this or not, the history of a church's designation was indeed a factor in determining which churches to close. As part of AgitProp's recommendations to the Central Committee on church closures in 1959, Nikulin and Hladarevskiy suggested that in a situation where a town has an "old Orthodox" (that is, originally Russian Orthodox) church and a reunified Greek Catholic church, authorities should close the reunified Greek Catholic Church and keep the "old Orthodox" church open.[29] The Orthodox petitioners also contrast the symbolic and historical importance of the Russian Orthodox Church, with the Greek Catholic Church which they identify as a "hotbed of fascism" [очаг фашизма]. This contrast becomes all the more stark when the petitioners identify the specific historical importance of the church that was closed as a place where Bohdan Khmelnystsky had once prayed:

> This church—which was opened for us with the permission of the Soviet government [правительство] is a historical monument, that is, at its walls once prayed Bohdan Khmelnystsky, who over 700 [sic][30] years ago extended a brotherly hand to the Russian people.[31]

In invoking the legacy of Khmelnytsky, the petitioners are referencing another Khrushchev policy: the promotion of Bohdan Khmelnytsky as a usable historical figure for the Soviet

[29] TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, spr. 5028 ll. 2-15. 19 January 1959 reproduced in Volodymyr Serhiychuk. *Neskorena Tserkva* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 2011): 324.
[30] Either the petitioners themselves or the person charged with typing up the petition made a mathematical or typographical error here. The treaty that Khmelnytsky signed with Muscovy was in 1654, a little over 300, not 700, years before this petition was written.
[31] TsDAVOU f. 4648, opis 1, spr. 304, ll. 114. 1961.

Ukrainian nation.[32] With the mention of Khmelnytsky, these petitioners are not only arguing that their church is historically significant[33], but that its historical significance relates to the role that the Russian Orthodox church ought to play in West Ukraine—connecting Soviet Ukrainians with Soviet Russians through a shared history.

Conclusions

These petitions, along with the official reports and directives in the archives are a key part of the story of the statistics on churches in the Soviet Union, at a moment when these numbers changed drastically. The atheist campaigns under Khrushchev, like most other Soviet campaigns, attempted to quantify success and failure in the form of numbers. The number of atheist lectures delivered, the amount of tax levied against a church, the decrease in pension for a priest, and of course the number of sacred spaces in a given region were key markers for Soviet authorities as they attempted to remake Soviet society through the eradication of religious belief and the promotion of scientific atheism. Yet, the large variation in these very markers reveals that metrics for success, however standardized they might be, were understood and applied differently in different regional contexts. As Jane Burbank and others have argued, the "recognition and engagement of cultural difference within the population" and flexible policies of governance to account for these differences was an imperial legacy Soviet authorities mobilized in managing the diverse populations of the USSR.[34] The recognition of difference

[32] For more on Khrushchev's "rehabilitation" of Khmelnytsky beginning in 1954, see John Basarab. *Periaslav 1654: A Historiographical Study* (Edmonton: The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1982): 180-1.
[33] Recent works have explored efforts to preserve churches as historical monuments in the Soviet Union. See for example Catriona Kelly. *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularization and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988* (Dekalb, IL.: NIU Press, 2016); as well as the work also presented on this panel by Erin Hutchinson.
[34] Jane Burbank. "Eurasian Sovereignty: The Case of Kazan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 62 (2015): 1.

within Soviet society was enshrined in Soviet governing practices known as "nationalities policy." The case of West Ukraine and its fate during the Khrushchev era demonstrates that recognition of difference existed within national categories and confessional categories as well. The acknowledgement of the local West Ukrainian context that led to different atheist policies likely was not an isolated incident. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, analyzing the atheism campaigns in diverse regions, such as in the Old Believer heartland of the Urals or in regions of "unofficial Islam" in Central Asia, may be a fruitful era of inquiry.

The root of the fundamental difference of the western oblasts from the rest of Ukraine not only comes from categories of ethnicity, region, confession, or nation. The acknowledgement of West Ukraine's particular context is also derived from the consequences of earlier Soviet policy. The state's intervention into the confessional belonging of its citizens that began with the forced church reunification of 1946 was both based on a perception of West Ukraine as different and constructed it that way as well. In the Khrushchev era, authorities made a conscious decision to preserve that difference and apply a particular set of conditions and outcomes to these areas. This led to a reification of Russian Orthodoxy in West Ukraine as an institution of Soviet loyalty and pro-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism that continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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