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THE LITURGICAL AND PASTORAL LIFE OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE CATACOMBS

By Marko Yaroslav Semehen

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Introduction.

In a sad period of Ukrainian history, on December 23, 1945, Pope Pius XII took the stage to defend the persecuted Greek Catholic Church when issuing his encyclical Orientales Omnes Ecclesias. In the first part of the encyclical he presented the Christian and Catholic history of the Ukrainian people. In the second part he thoroughly analyzed their centuries-long aspirations for preservation of faith, tradition, rite, as well as their successful combat against denationalization, Latinization of their rite, their struggle to develop monastic and religious life, to maintain their steadfastness in faith even by means of sacrifices and martyrdom. In the third part the Pope described the contemporary times of unrest, stating:

56. For we have learnt with great grief that, in those territories which have recently been made over to the sway of Russia, our dear brethren and sons of the Ruthenian people are in dire straits in consequence of their fidelity to the Apostolic See; every means are being employed to take them away from the bosom of their mother, the Church, and to induce them, against their will and against their known religious duty, to enter the communion of the dissidents. Thus it is reported that the clergy of the Ruthenian rite have complained in a letter to the civil government that in the Western Ukraine, as it is called today,
their Church has been placed in an extremely difficult position; all its bishops and many of its priests have been arrested; and at the same time it has been prohibited that anyone should take up the government of the same Ruthenian Church.

57. We are well aware that this harsh and severe treatment is speciously attributed to political reasons. But this is no new procedure used today for the first time; very often in the course of the centuries the enemies of the Church have hesitated to make public profession of their opposition to the Catholic faith and to attack it openly; they brought cunning and subtle allegations that Catholics were plotting against the State.¹

The Moscow Patriarchate was not inert in its role in the process of “re-unification.” Days before the pseudo-“Sobor” of 1946, newly elected Patriarch Alexey I issued his pastoral letter “To the Clergy and Faithful of the Greek Catholic Church Living in Western Regions of the Ukrainan Soviet Socialist Republic,” in which he expressed his joy on the occasion of re-unification of the “Western Russian lands with their Motherland”; he also was saddened by the fact that Western brothers remain “separated from their Mother, the Russian Orthodox Church.” The Patriarch accused Greek Catholic bishops in their appeal to accept Hilter’s yoke, and openly prompted people of Halychyna to “tear your ties with the Vatican which, by its heresies, is leading you to the darkness and spiritual downfall. . . Haste to return in the embrace of your true Mother, the Russian Orthodox Church.”

On March 10, 1946, the “L’viv Sobor” finished its deliberations. The main document issued was the “Resolution of the Sobor on the Liquidation of the Union of Brest 1596, on the Rupture of the Ties with the Vatican, and Reunification with the Russian Orthodox Church.” The letters of the Sobor can hardly be called ‘ecclesiastical.’ In the “Appeal of the Sobor to the Priests and Faithful of the Greek Catholic Church Living in Western Regions of Ukraine”, the main coordinative body, ‘Central Initiative Group’ encouraged people to renounce “the spirit of the Roman enslavement” and “the remnants of Polish rule.”

Fallibility and illegitimacy of the “Sobor” were clearly emphasized in the Metropolitan Josyf Cardinal Slipyj’s pastoral letter to the clergy and faithful entitled “Our

¹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_23121945_orientales-omnes-ecclesias_en.html
Despite all these aspects, the “Sobor” can be considered an important event commencing a new period in the history of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Catacomb Era, which would last several decades.

Means of Combat

The NKVD services [Soviet secret service] in the L’viv, Ternopil, Stanyslaviv, and Drohobych regions played a crucial role in preparations for the “L’viv Sobor.” Their task, directly coordinated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, was to recruit agents from the representatives of the clergy, religious and laity of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Preparing conspicuously for the ‘Sobor’, its ideologists set foundation for its successful conduct. All petitions about opening Orthodox Churches received favorable response; those Greek Catholic parishes whose pastors were imprisoned were given to Orthodox priests. In the rural areas, the NKVD officers recruited loyal villagers who would favor the alternate services by both a Greek Catholic and an Orthodox priest, a practice which would lead to internal split of the parish.

In one of his reports, Commissioner of the the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in the L’viv region A. Vishnevsky asked to delegate Orthodox clergy to all closed Greek Catholic churches even if the villagers did not submit their official request for a priest. Therefore, Vishnevsky requested Metropolitan Ioann of Kyiv and Halych to send 10-15 Orthodox priests to the L’viv region.

Eparchial Newsletter

In October 1945, Archbishop of L’viv and Ternopil Makariy (Oksiyuk) initiated circulation of the monthly eparchial newsletter «Єпархіальний вісник», an official publication of the newly established Orthodox eparchies in Western Ukraine, Transcarpathia and Bukovyna. Its main goal was to sustain the anti-Union propaganda. Soviet authorities enthusiastically supported the idea of launching the eparchial newsletter, and the Commissar of the Council for the Russian Orthodox Church Affairs in the Ukrainian Soviet Social Republic P. Khodchenko personally supervised the campaign.³
Part IV “The Articles”, of the newsletter was to negatively present the Church history in
general and the Union in particular. The articles were supposed to be of theological and
polemical nature aimed at the defense of Orthodoxy against Catholicism. The newsletter
succeeded in its mission, with Rev. Havryil Kostelnyk being one of the most active
contributor of the anti-Uniate articles. No. 11-12 published Rev. Yevheniy Borschchevsky’s
article “Bishop of L’viv Hedeon Balaban, a Defender of the Orthodox Church in Halychyna
During the Union.” Readers in Halychyna were educated about the unknown saints of the
Russian Orthodox Church; to name a few, Serafim Sarovskiy, Sergei Radonezhkskiy, Petr
Moskovskiy. Widely criticized were religious practices of the Latin Church in Halychyna, as
in Nosenko’s article “On the Latin Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Orthodox
Akathist Hymn to Our Sweetest Lord Jesus Christ.” Such articles were allegedly aimed at the
purification of the local liturgical tradition, especially in the parishes where the
‘reunification’ process was considerably inert and slow.

Among other objects of harsh criticism was the Ukrainian diaspora. K. Holovenko’s
article “The Enemies of Christ’s Cross” mocks the nationalistic views cultivated in the
diaspora whom the author calls the “servants of Imperialism” using the words of
condemnation from the Holy Gospel. As could be anticipated, the authorities ceased to fulfill
several promises given to the ‘Initiative Group’ and the newsletter stopped its circulation in
the second half on 1946. Briefly having re-opened in 1947, it subsequently changed its name
to the “Orthodox Newsletter” as of No. 2 in 1948. The format of the publication remained
unchanged except for the fact that periodically it published open letters written in a
Komsomol propaganda manner by the “converted” priests who encouraged their “stubborn”
brothers of the Underground Church to accept reunification.

Opposition Clergy

Although the majority of clergy were forcibly registered under the jurisdiction of the
Archbishop of L’viv and Ternopil Makariy (Oksiyuk), there were those who refused to
“reunify”. According to the Commissar K. Kulichenko in the Ternopil region, there were
14 priests as of the last quarter of 1947 who did not serve in churches. Furthermore, he stated:

4 Православний Вісник №3 (1953), 363-376.
5 Там само, №6 (1952), 186 -№ 7-8, 249.

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Former Uniate priests are highly respected among the people, while Orthodox clergy are not. Moreover, faithful, especially those of the wealthier social strata, show no confidence in Orthodox priests and prefer to go to confession to the church where a former Uniate priest is in service. The reason being is the fact that several priests of the Uniate Church refused to reunite with the Orthodox Church and went to work as accountants, drivers etc., where leading anti-Orthodox propaganda, they continue to serve as Missionaries of the Union.6

Several priests who initially converted to Orthodoxy subsequently returned to the Underground Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. On March 14, 1948, Rev. Vasyl Baran from Ternopil submitted his resignation to Archbishop Makariy and returned his certificate №1421 issued on November 14, 1946, a document certifying his reunification with the Moscow Patriarchate. Thus, he denounced his ties with the Russian Orthodox Church and confirmed his dogmatic and canonic loyalty to the Greek Catholic Church. Several months later, he was arrested by the service which controlled the religious situation in the Ternopil region. Similar was the case of Rev. Avksentiy Ostafiev, pastor in the village of Babynetsi in Borschchiv district, Ternopil region. On June 13, 1949, he returned his registration certificate and officially denounced his ties with the Orthodox Church, remaining under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The authorities did not allow the priest to celebrate divine liturgies and evicted him from the parish residence. Having realized that it would be impossible to protect their pastor, Fr. Avksentiy’s parishioners officially requested the Head of the Borschchiv District Committee not to send a substitute, but to grant permission for celebrating liturgies without a priest.7

The “reunification” process stopped around 1950. All those who had not “reunified” by then did not join the Russian Orthodox Church afterwards; even those who, due to various reasons, continued to serve in churches, used their place for anti-Orthodox propaganda. Remaining priests, working as laity, served clandestinely in private homes.

Joseph Stalin’s death in March 1953 and the so called “Khrushchev thaw” gave new hope and began a new phase of the Via Dolorosa of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in

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7 Там само, 117 – 118.
the Catacombs. During the “thaw” began the retrial of cases of those convicted and forcibly displaced into various parts of the Soviet Union. Bishops, priests, religious and laity who returned from camps and exile were primarily responsible for the life of the Underground Church. Deprived of any apparent administrative structures, such as ecclesiastical institutions and parishes, the UGCC continued its service under constant persecution. The faithful received pastoral care from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests serving in the Catacombs.

Securing the structures of the Underground Church was primarily in the hands of Bishop Mykola Charnetsky and Bishop Vasyl Velychkovsky. In early 1960s, when the Church in the Catacombs experienced dire need for new priests, it was necessary to establish a network of underground seminaries which would educate young candidates for priesthood. The first period of the Catacomb Church is associated with the leadership of Bishop Vasyl Velychkovsky. Upon his release from prison, he immersed himself into full-ranged pastoral life. It was Bishop Vasyl who introduced into the life of the Church in the Catacombs the principles later elaborated upon by the Vatican II. Although these principles were not based on the resolutions of the Council, the faithful were allowed to go to Orthodox churches if there was a lack of “our” priests; during the liturgy, priests could ‘remember Orthodox Christians,’ etc. Bishop Vasyl administered the faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church through regular divine liturgies in private homes not only in L’viv, but also in Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, and other towns and villages of Western Ukraine. When in Ternopil, he usually celebrated liturgies at Maria Vatsyk and Mykhaylyna Bosa’s homes, or at the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate. It was in the Ternopil region that Bishop Velychkovsky met with underground priests; to name a few, Rev. Myron Korduba, Pavlo Koval, Ivan Pasika from Ternopil, Rev. Vasyl Kurylas from the village of Butsniv, Rev. Volodymyr Telenko from the village of Bila.8 It was Bishop Vasyl who prompted those priests to establish a clandestine seminary in Ternopil in mid 1960s. In 1968, the KGB disclosed the seminary’s existence; a search was conducted at the organizers’ as well as at the seminarians’ homes. At Fr. Kurylas’ place, the officers found a letter from Bishop Velychkovsky in which he was inquiring about Rev. Korduba and Rev. Pasika’s “good

8 Б. Головин, Мученики та ісповідники української Церкви XX століття, Тернопіль 2000, 18.
deeds” in mentoring and “educating young priests”, namely the nine students of the seminary. Having obtained this information, the KGB agents only had to find out the specifics of those “good deeds” and “educating young priests”. Violation of the “Law on the Separation of Church and State and School System” was subject to a fine of 50 karbovanets’ (about half of a monthly paycheck) or one to five years of corrective service with a possibility of property forfeiture. Under this accusation, Bishop Vasyl’ Velychkovs’ky, locum tenens of the Head of the UGCC, was arrested and convicted in 1969. He was accused of “reproducing and circulating religious literature, educating candidates for priesthood and teaching children.”

There was no specific, systematic coordination of the pastoral work of the clergy. Bishops could only ‘prompt’ priests to go to certain areas or to perform certain duties. In most cases, however, the underground priests acted according to their own discretion, consulting with the bishops only in cases of urgent matters. Moreover, in light of the secrecy, not all priests had access to bishops; even the name of the local bishop was “not revealed to the young […], but to the elderly only.” (Interview with Fr. Metodiy Kostyuk). There were no territorial boundaries in serving the faithful; it was as if Ukraine and places of exile comprised one big parish.

**Clergy and Faithful**

To diminish the role of a priest, the Soviet regime endowed faithful with more authorities through the parish committees which were now responsible for rental of the church and for “hiring” priests for services.9 As a result, priests became completely dependent on the laity. However, this situation benefited the priests of the Underground Church; in many Greek Catholic parishes people refused to accept an Orthodox priest even when authorities threatened to have the church closed and to leave them without any pastoral care. By boycotting Orthodox clergy, such parishes became the stronghold of the Underground Church. As an example, on Easter of 1949, there were no liturgies in the Orthodox church of the village of Zazdrist in the Ternopil’ region, the birthplace of Cardinal Josyf Slipyj. The reason was that the local underground priest Rev. Volodymyr Ternopilsky served clandestine divine liturgies in private homes of his parishioners who refused to attend

9 Б. Бощоків, «УГКЦ в катакомбах», 127.
the Orthodox Church. Therefore, the Orthodox priest was forced to quit, leaving the keys to the church with the Secretary of the Communist Party in Strusiv.\textsuperscript{10}

On the other hand, priests depended on the faithful, as laity offered great support to them and underground bishops. Their homes were offered as make-shift sanctuaries for divine liturgies to be celebrated and sacraments to be administered. With great dedication and devotion, the faithful of the UGCC looked after the Christian upbringing of their children. They also produced and kept liturgical vessels, looked after closed churches, escorted and guarded their pastors; functioned as links between priests and those in need of spiritual care. Therefore, lay people could be justly named the strongest support of the Underground Church. They oftentimes “illegally” opened churches, or organized \textit{Moleben} even at the locked doors of the churches, praying without a priest, only with participation of a cantor or other experienced parishioners. Greek Catholic laity listened to the divine liturgy on Vatican Radio, and sometimes attended Roman Catholic services\textsuperscript{11}.

For security reasons, a priest would come to villages where he was not known to the majority of residents. Therefore, he was completely dependent on his ‘trustees’, the local people who controlled the situation. Many priests would only appear in public accompanied by lay people. This was the case of Rev. Yevstakhii Smal, Redemptorist, who lived in L’viv but celebrated clandestine liturgies in Ternopil where he would always be accompanied by faithful. Most underground priests realized that the secrecy they maintained was only partial; many a time they were proved to be constantly spied on by the agents who were well informed about their whereabouts and places of secret liturgies. Therefore, to some extent, we can speak of a certain illusion of conspiracy.

As recalled by Rev. Vasyl Voronovsky\textsuperscript{12}, who was ordained a priest by Bishop Ivan Slezyuk in 1959, his pastoral service in Western Ukraine, Transcarphathia, Kyiv, and even in Kryvyy Rih was constantly subject to the KGB surveillance:


\textsuperscript{11} To the Light of Resurrection through the Thorns of Catacombs.

\textsuperscript{12} http://dyvensvit.org/articles/852.html
At night, I would hear confessions, administer baptisms, and celebrate Divine Liturgy, sometimes twice a day, or even three-four on a holyday. I also heard confessions of the KGB official’s mother and married Procurators. KGB officers were constantly after me. Once, it was in the village of Khlopchyntsi, I celebrated Divine Liturgy very early in the morning, and was about to baptize a child when I saw militiamen coming. I managed to hide liturgical vessels in a bag under a mirror, and tried to jump out of the window, but they had already encircled the house. I got arrested and was taken to Sambir. The militiaman who did the search in the house noticed the bag but, thankfully, did not retrieve it. They released me at 1 a.m.; I stepped outside, into the strange city, and saw people waiting to escort me into safety. Yet another time, we were praying in a house when the militia came. The housekeeper pretended she fainted right at the door, and that gave me a minute to escape through the window. In the village of Susliv, people dressed me as a beggar, and I managed successfully to walk through entire village in the daylight.

I think people’s spirituality was much stronger in the underground. They prayed sincerely, asking for freedom of their faith, confessed their sins frequently, and received the Holy Communion during every Liturgy.

The Most Reverend Josyf Milan, Auxiliary Bishop of Kyiv and Halych, recalls his experience as an underground Studite monk and a priest:

It was a challenging time, filled with deep spiritual experience, trepidation, and fear. Even when preparing for a prayer, one had to close the windows, speak quietly, and make sure no unexpected visitors were at the door. All of it created a special feeling that you are a priest of the Christ’s Church, which, too, was once persecuted. You are a follower of Christ, persecuted and crucified. This thought was very uplifting.

We, the young Studites, were constantly warned by our Superior, Rev. Yulian Voronovsky, to be careful with the KGB; yet, we wished to work in the Lord’s vineyard. Fr. Sevastiyan, Fr. Petro and myself visited many villages trying to organize catechism classes for children and summer camps for youth. There were many incidents, both tragic and funny, but the spirit of those times was remarkable. For instance, we were going for our first meeting with Bishop Volodymyr Sternyuk, and it was planned in an apartment of former lawyers. When we got ready, our Superior instructed us to leave behind everything except for an ID. Fr. Sevastiyan and I were surprised about the passport, but we were explained that in case on an ambush, they could let us go should we have an ID on us; that way, we would have time to prepare for future interrogations. At that moment, I clearly realized how dangerous my chosen path was; yet, I was sure that it was the right one, and that we lived and worked on our land, for our people and our Church.
Clandestine Liturgies

Secret liturgies were celebrated in private houses, in places of veneration, and nearby closed churches. The best pictures of life in the Catacombs are offered by eyewitnesses:

_I was in Zarvanytsya during one of the services when Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk, Fr. Hryhoriy Simkaylo and Fr. Taras Sen’kiv were celebrating the Liturgy. Although it took place in a forest, praying to God in such circumstances was most festive, solemn, and majestic. This prayer, I think, was coming from the depth of our hearts, because all of us were asking for the times when we would be able to pray in our churches, and not in the woods.”_ (Interview with Fr. Mykhaylo Sushko).

Lay people were organizers of liturgies in places of veneration, especially on days preceding major holydays. A system of security was formed to alert and warn congregations of possible impending danger to the church during liturgies was created. Guards were assigned to each site where liturgical services took place. Should these warnings become a reality the priest would be whisked away to safety, while people remained and continued to pray. Gatherings for liturgies were planned in strict secrecy, never once mentioning the priest’s name in conversation.13

While in the Catacombs, the faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church celebrated various services. Due to the lack of priests and because of the constant surveillance of the KGB, widespread became prayer services led by cantors or other active parishioners. In many villages where churches were closed down and there was no priest, lay people gathered clandestinely to celebrate the so-called “Liturgies without a priest”: they would omit the ektenias reserved for clergy. People’s desire to imitate the divine liturgy was conditioned by the fact that it, the divine liturgy, is the central sacrament of the Church and without it the Church ceases to exist. Obviously, celebrated without a priest, such a service was an expression of individual piety similar to the rosary or the stations of the cross. Yet, the spirituality of the Church of the Catacombs was anchored on such acts of faith. Similar tendency could be observed among the priests who celebrated daily liturgies in solitude. The divine liturgy constituted foundation of their faith, its visible expression which strengthened their daily life and priestly vocation. Therefore, getting used to celebrating regular divine

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13 To the Light of Resurrection through the Thorns of Catacombs.
liturgies in churches, with crowds of parishioners and accompanied by choirs, imposed a great challenge for the priests at the dawn of the legalization of the UGGC in early 1990s.

Popular were “home churches” where one room housed a Tabernacle with the Holy Gifts in it. Here, people would gather for clandestine divine liturgies celebrated by a priest who would come for a brief visit. His sojourn was also an occasion for the sacrament of reconciliation and pre-marriage counselling lectures, and this opportunity was greatly cherished as a rare instance. Oftentimes, clergy relied on the nuns in their catechetical service, and priests would then administer the sacraments of first reconciliation and holy communion. At the beginning of 1960s, catechetical classes gained in their popularity. Based on the reports of the KGB, one could be under an impression that pastoral work in the Catacombs resembled service in a remote colony:

Liturgies celebrated by the Uniate priests are short, simplified and clandestinely performed at nighttime. These requirements are also observed when administering other religious sacraments. Leaders of the illegal Uniate services encourage their faithful not to draw others’ attention to their religious life and to conceal their Greek Catholic identity. A certain village is prepared in advance by two or three individuals; then a minister of cult arrives. By then, requests of baptisms, weddings, and communions are collected. Services and sacraments are administered in small groups, in private houses, late at night or at dawn. Many Komsomol members and Communists who are afraid to attend churches participate in such secret devotions. If the situation is ‘stable’ in the village, the priest stays for a week or more until he has seen all those who requested his service; however, there are instances when he is forced to leave the village within a day or two...14

As previously stated, clandestine liturgies were celebrated at nighttime, behind closed doors and windows. The number of those present varied from several individuals to several dozens. Liturgy was usually recited in Church Slavonic. A priest would deliver his homily, encouraging and inspiring people to remain faithful to their Church and to be hopeful for its legalization. Every liturgy was preceded by the sacrament of reconciliation. Women constituted a majority of the parishioners.

14 Хресною дорогою, 57.
During divine liturgy, priests would usually wear a stole, not a *phelonion* (full vestments) as it could be easily taken off and hidden should a raid occur. For security purposes, priests did not always carry liturgical vessels with them; these were carried by people who would be inviting and accompanying him, for example a wife or children. The vessels had to be small and portable; a goblet would oftentimes serve as a chalice, a small saucer as a paten, a regular teaspoon as a communion spoon. The wives of priests and/or nuns baked *prosphora* (host).

Families would oftentimes gather privately for a prayer in their houses and apartments; this would also resemble the church community which was lacking. The faithful would say the stations of the cross, chant *Molebens*, and pray the rosary. Popular were ceremonies of entrusting families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Due to the lack of printed liturgical books, the originals were photographed or hand-copied. The list of such books included: prayer books, Holy Gospel, Catechism, “The Imitation of Christ” by Thomas á Kempis, etc. In 1963, two young men, Skral and Palchynsky were arrested for possession of several thousand photographed icons and for distributing them among the faithful.

**Sacraments**

Priests organized the Apostleship of Prayer, and if there was an opportunity they held missions for their faithful, especially during Lent. Catechetical work was conducted by nuns and activists of the Apostleship of Prayer. Priests secretly administered sacraments of matrimony and baptism, they visited the sick when invited by family or by nuns working as nurses in hospitals and homes. Funeral services were celebrated at home, and only under special circumstances would the priests follow people to the cemetery (after Fr. Hirnyak’s funeral in Zymna Voda, L’viv region, Fr. Adam Husar was arrested at the cemetery and sentenced to fifteen days of community work).

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16 *Prosphora* (Greek for “offering”) is unleavened bread prepared for use in the Divine Liturgy
17 To the Light of Resurrection through the Thorns of Catacombs.
18 To the Light of Resurrection through the Thorns of Catacombs.
Baptisms of small children were administered at homes in order to avoid attention of unwanted witnesses and to prevent possible complications for the parents at their place of work. Therefore, a number of those present was kept to minimum and the sacrament itself was held modestly. The situation was even more complex when the parents were high officials or members of the Communist party. They tried to baptize their children through grandparents or friends who were active in the Underground Church. For safety reasons, an underground priest was preferred over the minister of the official Orthodox Church who could have been in collaboration with the KGB.

Similar was the situation with the sacrament of matrimony. For the faithful living under the Soviet regime the option was to get married in the official church or to search an opportunity to be married by an underground priest. Soviet authorities kept strict control over both churches: the official Orthodox and the illegal Ukrainian Greek Catholic. Orthodox priests were required to submit monthly reports on the numbers of sacraments administered and the names of those receiving them. Therefore, being married by an underground priest was less public and more secure. In order not to expose a priest to unnecessary jeopardy, in most cases nuns prepared the couples for the sacrament. Respectability of the couple was witnessed by a person inviting a priest or by those preparing them for the matrimony. A priest would examine the couple’s knowledge and would conduct a spiritual lecture prior to the sacrament of reconciliation. Then, the divine liturgy would be celebrated and the sacrament of matrimony would conclude it. The wedding rings were mandatory, as well as the presence of witnesses who, in most cases, were their immediate family members. Marta Kohut from L’viv recalls details of her daughter receiving the Sacrament:

*My daughter Oksana was married by Rev. Roman Choliy in Zymna Voda. The closest family gathered late at night. First, each of us went to confession, and then, interviewing the bride and the groom, Father started writing a protocol. Everyone was frightened; should this protocol be seized by the KGB, Oksana would be in hot water in the institute. Still, having finished the paper, Father asked the couple to put their signatures under it, saying that all formalities had to be properly recorded. Following the Divine Liturgy, all the documents were burnt.*

If the couple were Orthodox, underground priests required their conversion to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. If one of the two was of a different rite, both of them had
to choose one common faith. Their conversion had to be permitted by parents who also had to confirm their children’s baptism as there were instances when many young people, especially those from other regions of the Soviet Union, were not baptized. If there was no priest to administer the sacrament, the bride and the groom, kneeling in front of an icon, would solemnly exchange their vows in presence of their parents. Presented with an opportunity to meet with a Greek Catholic priest, they would be properly married, even years after. Indissolubility of marriage in the UGCC was emphasized along with the necessity to register their marriage in the civil court.

Sacrament of the holy orders took place after four to six years of clandestine education. Each candidate had to take an exam before a committee of experienced priests. Ordination itself was always conducted in secrecy, in presence of few witnesses. Moreover, as recalled by Fr. Masyuk, “when [a bishop] ordained a candidate, he was required to take an oath never to reveal when, where and by whom he was ordained.”

In terms of priestly vestments, as recalled by Fr. Kostyuk, “there were none of them. Therefore, when the bishop [Dmyterko] ordained me a deacon, he gave me a sticharion [alb] and tied it with a rope. Later, when I was ordained as priest, he gave me a sticharion and an epitrachelion [stole], as there was nothing else. He himself used only a stole and a mantum and instead of a miter, he wore a zucchetto [skull cap].”

Being an important link between the underground clergy and laity, sisters assisted in the religious upbringing of children and kept the holy communion at their homes. Nuns also assisted priests by making arrangements for liturgies, especially at Christmas and Easter time. They carried everything necessary for the services with them. In those “wandering churches” sisters were sacristans, cantors, and catechists.

The majority of Greek Catholic nuns worked as hospital attendants, cooks, seamstresses, cleaners, etc. Their work was especially important in hospitals; here, they spread their apostolate among those sick and suffering by means of spiritual conversation and moral support. Sisters arranged sick calls for those in critical condition, secretly bringing in
priests for baptism, Eucharist, anointing of the sick (among those priests cooperating with hospitals were: Fr. Sinhalevych, Fr. Hural’, Fr. Hodun’ko, Fr. Mayik, Fr. Smal’).  

Conclusions

“Reunification” of 1946 did not bring its anticipated results; the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church continued to exist. Stalin’s death in 1953 had obvious impact on the Church in the Catacombs. Beria’s attempt to seize power in the Soviet Union envisaged improvement of the relations with the Vatican and suspension of the Russification of the Ukrainian people. It was then that Cardinal Josyf Slipyj was transported from Siberia to Moscow, but further attempts of legalization of the UGCC were ceased by Beria’s arrest. In 1955-56, Khrushchev cut down the number of Soviet penal institutions; thus, several hundreds of priests and religious who survived their imprisonment returned to Western Ukraine bringing new strength to the Underground Church.

Subsequent years of the “Khrushchev thaw” brought some relief for the Church in the Catacombs. Avoiding the question of public legalization of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Pope Paul VI acknowledged the existence of the Underground Church on December 23, 1963, elevating Josyf Slipyj to the title of the Major Archbishop of L’viv for the Ukrainians and naming him Cardinal on January 25, 1965.

In 1965, following the refusal of authorities to register the Ukrainian Greek Catholic parishes, the faithful opened a great number of previously closed churches inviting the underground priests to serve there and protecting them from militia. In 1967, there were 88 such churches in Western Ukraine. From February 1963 till his arrest in January 1969, Bishop Vasyl Velychkovsky was locum tenens of the Head of the UGCC in the Archeparchy of Lviv.

Despite persecution in 1965-66 and a new wave of repressions against human rights movement in Ukraine, many courageous Greek Catholic priests began to openly celebrate Divine Liturgies on Sundays and holy days in previously closed churches. Those services quickly gained on popularity. By August 1967, the Ukrainian Greek Catholics opened nearly

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200 churches, although a great number of requests to register parishes were rejected by the authorities.

However, following the suppression of the “Prague spring”, a new wave of repressions was launched. Most of the churches were either closed down or converted to museums of atheism, storages, etc. Authorities used various provocations to cause split within the Underground Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Final years of the Brezhnev rule were marked by intensification of secret surveillance. In 1982, the movement for the legalization of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was launched; information about massive persecution spread throughout the world. Reforms introduced by Gorbachev encouraged a group of priests and monks led by Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk, to announce their decision to leave the Underground in 1987 and to appeal to Pope John Paul II to support the UGCC in the Soviet Union. Despite massive repressions, persecutions, exile, and martyrdom of thousands of people, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church survived four decades in the Catacombs, strengthened by the continuity of faith and dedication of its members.