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'Orthodox' and 'Soviet': the Identity of Soviet Believers (1940s — early 1970s)

In 1999 a routine presidential election was held in Ukraine. One of the candidates that went through to the second round was the leader of the Ukrainian Communists, Petro Simonenko. A typical leaflet encouraging citizens to vote for him began with the expressive phrase, 'For Petro Simonenko, for the people, for Orthodox Ukraine.' In the Western regions of Ukraine, the Orthodox Church is viewed not only as the 'Moscow' Church, but to this day as a 'Soviet' Church, a unique relic of the Soviet past. Indeed, 'If they were Orthodox, they were Communists'¹ [AIITS. P-1-1-687, L. 6]. This perception has only been strengthened by the actions of the current leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate, such as awarding the leader of the Russian Communist Party, Gennady Zyuganov, the Order for 'Glory and Honour', Third Class, in June 2014, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.

These are just a few examples of how a paradoxical dual 'Orthodox-Soviet' identity manifests itself and is perceived in the post-Soviet landscape. The widespread theory about the transformation or 're-painting' of everything 'Soviet' into 'Orthodox' after 1991 ('the former "Soviets" became "Orthodox" just like that') also has its roots in the unusually harmonious reconciliation between the 'Soviet' and the 'Orthodox'.

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¹ This quotation is translated from the original Ukrainian.

This article, based primarily on archive documents and published sources about the life of Orthodox believers in Soviet Ukraine from the latter half of the 1940s to the early 1970s, aims to trace the origins of this modern situation in the Soviet past. For our research, material was gathered from the traditionally Orthodox area of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The situation in the so-called 'reunited' Western Ukrainian dioceses was substantially different: the vast majority of believers and clergy entirely resisted being categorised as either 'Orthodox', or 'Soviet citizens'. The central reason for not accepting these imposed loyalties was the steadfast conviction of these former Greek Catholics in the existence of an indissoluble link between the 'Soviet' and the 'Orthodox': 'The Orthodox Bolshevik Church <...> was clearly and notoriously at the service of the state apparatus'¹ [AIITS. P-1-1-419. L. 5; AIITS. P-1-1-192. L. 39]. Although based on Ukrainian material, this research also allows us to draw some broader conclusions: the practices and discourse analysed in this article were by no means confined to the Ukrainian dioceses of the ROC.

The theoretical basis of my research consists of the works of Western and Russian scholars on identity problems (Brubaker and Cooper, Malakhov, Bauman), including religious identity (Newman, Young, Siegelbaum, Stone) and Soviet identity generally (Hellbeck), on the anthropology and sociology of religion (Naumescu, Scott, Wilson, Stark) and the anthropology of Soviet society (Firsov, Fitzpatrick, Kotkin, Yurchak).

The article addresses in turn the following questions: a) why has the need to reconcile the 'Orthodox' and the 'Soviet' arisen? b) how was the dual 'Orthodox-Soviet' identity constructed? and c) how (and with how much conflict) was this dual identity manifested in the everyday life of Ukrainian Orthodox believers who were loyal Soviet citizens? These issues have previously been raised by scholars in a variety of different research contexts, but no comprehensive study exists. The scholarly literature is characterised neither by broad historiographical discussion nor historiographical consensus in relation to the topics under consideration. Rather, we are witnessing the formation of a new research field in the wider context of traditional studies of relations between Church and State in the USSR. Researchers are studying how religious practices and attempts to secularise Soviet society interacted to shape the opportunities that existed for individual and collective self-definition during Soviet times [Wanner 2012: 2]. The correlation between 'Soviet' and 'Orthodox', as well as 'socialist' and 'religious' is examined on a practical level (Kormina and Shtyrkov, Stone, Naumescu) and

¹ In my other publications I examine in detail the situation in Western Ukrainian dioceses after the 'reunion' [Shlikhta 2004; Shlikhta 2011: 251–366].

on a discursive level (Young, Siegelbaum, Stone, Peris, Husband). What first evokes the interest of researchers is *how* these two, theoretically mutually exclusive, identities co-existed in everyday life. Andrew Stone metaphorically expressed this paradox in the concept of the ‘Soviet believer’ (another example of such self-definition would be the ‘Soviet priest’): this term suggested that Soviet citizens ‘participated in both religious and Soviet activities as part of their daily lives’. In this way believers challenged the official vision of these ‘practices as mutually exclusive’ [Stone 2008: 311].

This article’s main contribution to the formation of this research field is in its examination not so much of *how* the two loyalties correlated in the perception and practices of Ukrainian Orthodox believers during this period, but rather *why* this symbiosis was consciously selected as a survival strategy in a socialist state and to what extent this strategy proved to be effective.

Choosing a survival strategy

The Church’s affirmation of its unconditional political loyalty was a key constituent of the political philosophy of the Moscow Patriarchate in the post-war period. Boris Firsov’s observation provides a very accurate summary of our particular situation: ‘The loyalty of citizens to the regime was a reflection of the principle of self-preservation that dominated all levels of the social pyramid without exception’ [Firsov 2008: 61]. Complete integration into the ‘new socialist reality’ was viewed by the Church as an essential condition of its survival under the Soviet state. There were several main reasons for choosing this particular strategy. State policy in relation to the Church was a defining factor. Ensuring the Church’s social isolation was viewed by the regime as an effective way of fighting it.¹ It is therefore logical that any attempt to dismantle the artificially erected barriers between the Church and the State was seen as a way to support its survival.

In part this led to the second reason for the selection of this strategy, which is social in nature. Scholarly literature usually contrasts the compromised position of the Moscow Patriarchate in the post-war period with the position of the Catholic Church in socialist Poland, which was able to assert its rights in the face of the Communist authorities [Elensky 1991: 39]. However, this contrast does not take into account a number of fundamental contextual differences. In socialist Poland the Catholic Church was able to rely upon the support of the population, which opposed the new regime that was supported by a foreign power, therefore by definition was hostile to

¹ I examine the regime’s tendency to isolate the Church in more detail in my other publications [Shlikhta 2010; Shlikhta 2011: 64–89].

the people. At the same time, the ROC was seeking its place in a post-war society that, while it never actually turned into the 'silent masses', and never unconditionally accepted the 'correct consciousness', whether in the late 1940s (as Boris Firsov demonstrates) or still less in the late 1960s, yet for various reasons still identified itself with the regime.

Under these conditions any church that openly positioned itself in opposition to the regime, would have weakened its own social basis and would have been compelled to oppose Soviet society too. Mikhail Odintsov develops this idea when analysing the declaration of loyalty made by Metropolitan Sergy (Stragorodsky) on 29 July 1927. Under the palpable influence of the 'totalitarian school', he represents the society of the 1920s rather simplistically. However his conclusion represents the post-war situation very accurately. Emphasising that the 'political sympathies of the ordinary rank and file of believers were mainly on the side of the Soviet authorities', he affirms: 'If the Church ignored this fact it would have positioned itself both in opposition to the structures of power and its millions of followers' [Odintsov 1992: 124]. The danger of isolation was intensified since in the politicised Soviet context any action by the Church was interpreted in political terms.

Another factor in choosing a suitable strategy for State-Church relations was the tradition of interaction with the State that Dimitry Pospelovsky emotionally called 'the tragic legacy of Constantine' [Pospelovsky 1995: 10–33]. As a Christian church, the ROC based its behaviour on the Christian tradition of obedience and loyalty to the government. As a church of Byzantine tradition, it proceeded from the theory of Church-State harmony and the practice of Caesaropapism in its relations with a secular State. Finally, having traditionally been an established church, the ROC was accustomed to being 'positive' in its attitude towards the government [Stark 1966: 3] and 'adapting to the interests of the State', to use the definition of Ernst Troeltsch [Aldridge 2000: 39].

Constructing an identity 'appropriate to the times'

It was essential for the Church to construct an 'appropriate' socio-political identity in order to confirm its own political loyalty and its place within Soviet society. As Zygmunt Bauman observed:

Identity comes to mind when there is no certainty in people's sense of belonging, when they cannot with any certainty define their place in the diversity of behavioural styles and patterns, do not know how to persuade those around them that they occupy this place by right; so that both sides might know how to behave in the presence of one another [Bauman 1995: 134].

By substituting for the term ‘person’ any of the designations for the ‘collective’, we acquire a basic explanation as to why the issue of identity cannot be avoided when examining the Church in a Soviet state. Despite all of the ‘inconveniences of identity’ (in Malakhov’s words) as an analytical category [Malakhov 1998; Brubaker, Cooper 2000], I propose to use this term here to designate ‘self-definition’, the Church’s search for its own niche in Soviet society, as well as the ‘self-perception’ of the clergy and believers.

The Church authorities encountered manifold difficulties in their attempts to construct an identity capable of safeguarding the existence of the Church under the Soviet government. At the same time, the task facing the Church was far from unique. The need to reconcile a ‘religious’/‘Christian’ identity with the ‘societal’ (political, national, social) aspects of identity has permeated the entire existence of the Church since the decline of *pax Christiana*. As the Catholic theologian John Henry Newman emphasised back in the nineteenth century, the Church is not ‘placed in a void but in the crowded world’ [Newman 1974: 131]. Therefore, the position of the Church should correspond to ‘persons and circumstances, and must be thrown into new shapes according to the form of society’ in which the Church functions [Newman 1974: 150]. The State is the most powerful identifier (although it is never a complete monopolist in this issue, as Brubaker and Cooper remark [Brubaker, Cooper 2000: 16]). It does not simply impose a way of thought and perception, but rather sets the conditions and models of behaviour by which the Church should be guided, defining its own position at each individual moment in relation to each specific question.

Although the problem of constructing a socio-political identity that might be ‘appropriate to the times’ arose again and again for the Church throughout the process of modernisation and secularisation,¹ in the Soviet state this problem was particularly acute. The difficulties were largely due to the regime’s reluctance to allow the Church to find an effective model for survival in Soviet conditions. The ‘honeymoon period’ in the relations between Stalin’s regime and the Orthodox Church after reaching the ‘Concordat’ in September 1943 was (or at least seemed to be) the only deviation from the general trend.² The second reason for the particularity of the situation was

¹ I share José Casanova’s views on secularisation as a process of social differentiation, as a result of which the various spheres of social and political life are freed from the influence of religious institutions and norms. This differentiation does not automatically suggest either a decline in religious beliefs and practices or a marginalisation of religion in the private realm, as supporters of classical secularisation theory have asserted [Casanova 1994].

² Daniel Peris has demonstrated how this event was perceived by believers and clergy in the Ivanovo and Yaroslavl provinces during the Second World War [Peris 2000: 104–9]. Elsewhere, I use Ukrainian material to examine the widespread — but unjustified — enthusiasm about the changes in state policy and the ‘inclusion’ of the Church within Soviet reality [Shlikhta 2011: 75–9].

the regime's aspiration to establish total control over the lives of its subjects, erasing the boundary between the public and the private, which left Soviet citizens no opportunity to protect their private space. Finally, the complete incompatibility of the identities that had to be reconciled was the cause of highly specific problems.

The construction of an identity 'appropriate to the times' became possible in the context of two successfully completed tasks: the assertion of a 'correct' political and social position by the Church and the reconciliation of political loyalty and religious convictions. We use the terms 'Soviet identity' and 'dual identity' to designate the principle of existing within the Soviet state and to signify an existence defined by the official Church and accepted by Orthodox believers. The term 'Soviet identity' defines the essence of the Church's socio-political position and is the authentic term that was used in Church circles. The term 'dual identity' indicates the correlation between a belief in God and loyalty to the atheist regime, which at first glance appear to be mutually exclusive, and is an analytical category proposed by scholars.

Metropolitan Sergy's 'Declaration to Pastors and their Congregations' of 29 July 1927 prescribed the main parameters of the position of the ROC in the Soviet state. The head of the Church repudiated the very possibility of the social (self-) isolation of the Church: 'Only abstract dreamers could think that an institution as huge as our Orthodox Church, with its entire organisation, could exist peacefully in a state in which it has shut itself away from the government' [Odintsov 1992: 132]. Further developing this idea, Metropolitan Sergy demanded of the clergy and believers:

We must demonstrate not in words, but in actions, that true citizens of the Soviet Union, loyal to the Soviet authorities, can include not just people who are indifferent to Orthodoxy, not just traitors to it, but its most zealous adherents, for whom Orthodoxy is as dear as truth and life [Odintsov 1992: 132].

After this he articulated a unique declaration of loyalty: 'We wish to be Orthodox and at the same time acknowledge the Soviet Union as our Motherland in a civic sense. Its joy and success is our joy and success, and its ills are our ills' [Odintsov 1992: 132]. In scholarly literature this declaration is viewed as an 'unreserved profession of Soviet patriotism' by the Church, whose aim was to 'fully identify' the Orthodox Church with the Soviet state, which in turn defined the 'political position of the Church in the Soviet state' (in other words — its complete subordination to the regime) [Kolarz 1961: 42; Fletcher 1965: 27].

This reading of the document remains one-sided in that it completely ignores the social consequences of a declaration of this kind.

Metropolitan Sergy indicated the opportunity to combine two seemingly incompatible loyalties — Soviet and Christian — through the creation of a unique ‘dual identity’ (to use Glennys Young’s term [Young 1997]) or a ‘dual faith’ (to use Lewis Siegelbaum’s term [Siegelbaum 1992]). The desire to reconcile faith in God with loyalty to the Bolshevik regime can be easily detected in the declaration, and it is no coincidence that it openly emphasises the statement that ‘we wish to be Orthodox’. Metropolitan Sergy went on to develop this idea, demanding that the clergy and congregation remain loyal Orthodox people, for ‘only [our] attitude towards the authorities has changed, our faith and Orthodox life remain unshakeable’ [Odintsov 1992: 132].

The reaction from Stalin’s leadership to the head of the Church’s declaration well encapsulated its attitude towards the declared ‘Soviet-ness’ of the Church generally. Instead of securing the Church’s position, Sergy’s statement merely triggered a new wave of persecutions. Walter Kolarz’s observation explains this apparent paradox: ‘The Soviet communists feared that people could easily misinterpret the fact that Sergy put religion into a pro-Soviet attire. They may have harboured the illusion that this made religion “less harmful” than before’ [Kolarz 1961: 44].

On the most fundamental level, the concept of ‘Soviet identity’ (as it was understood in the post-war period) included four basic components: political loyalty, acceptance of the official Marxist-Leninist ideology, loyalty to the idea of constructing socialism, and Russianness. In order to explain the last, somewhat unexpected component, we can turn to the difference, proposed by Bohdan Bociurkiw, between the ‘Soviet’ and ‘Russian’ alternatives for conducting national policy, each of which had its supporters in the Party elite [Bociurkiw 1990: 149]. David Brandenberger persuasively demonstrates that from the early 1930s Stalin’s leadership tended towards ‘Russo-centric statism’ as the most effective instrument for maintaining the population’s loyalty [Brandenberger, Dubrovsky 1998: 873, 883]. This change in policy, and later the circumstances during the war, laid the foundations for the triumph of the ‘Russian model’ of national policy after the Second World War. That said, Khrushchev’s short-lived attempt to return to the ‘Soviet model’ of national policy cannot be completely ignored. This was one of the important reasons for the re-examination of State–Church relations that created the conditions for the anti-religious attacks of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which in turn provoked yet another identity crisis in the Church.

This understanding of Soviet identity envisaged that just one of its components (albeit a defining one, especially in view of the regime’s aspiration for total control) was incompatible with the religiosity

of the Orthodox Church. This appeared to facilitate the task of constructing a 'correct' identity. However, a solution that might resolve the conflict between Christian faith and the atheist identity of the population, whose parameters were set by the regime, was by no means obvious. Furthermore, if the sociologist Brian Wilson is right and Christian logic does not allow its adherents to simultaneously 'believe in "A" and "not A"' [Wilson 1982: 54], any attempts to reconcile what may not be reconciled are doomed to failure from the very beginning. Based on this understanding, or merely owing to a simplified vision of Soviet society, Western researchers in the 'pre-archive' period made a clear distinction between 'Soviet people' and those who 'believed in God' [Prulovich 1964: 8]. We cannot fail to notice the extent to which this vision coincided with the ideal fostered by Soviet ideologues themselves.

Glennys Young, Lewis Siegelbaum, and Andrew Stone demonstrate that the resolution of this contradiction and the reconciliation of two seemingly incompatible components of one's identity were not in fact impossible in the everyday life of Orthodox believers, notwithstanding their impossibility at the theoretical and philosophical level [Siegelbaum 1992: 162; Young 1997: 91; Stone 2008: 299]. Meanwhile, from an anthropological perspective, as Alexei Yurchak emphasises, 'practices that may appear contradictory to outside observers (or in one context) do not have to be so for insiders (or in another context)' [Yurchak 2003: 497]. Also important is Glennys Young's observation with respect to the nature of Orthodox 'church' identity, which she succinctly distinguishes from the comprehensive 'sectarian' identity. Owing to the ritualism of the Orthodox Church, outward behaviour is typically viewed as more important than one's internal experiences. For this reason it is 'much easier to compartmentalize one's attachment to Russian Orthodoxy than one's attachment to sectarian belief' [Young 1997: 91]. At its most basic level, the dual identity of Orthodox believers in the Soviet state is nothing other than an expression of the innate syncretism of the people's religiosity, which, to use James Scott's expression, 'makes [its] own working blend without much concern for... contradictions' [Scott 1977: 26]. At the same time this identity was just one of the manifestations of the everyday 'doublethink' of Soviet citizens who were quite proficient in the 'rules of the game' set by the regime and, by demonstrating complete submission to it, were able to preserve their 'traditional local practices and forms of collective life, interpersonal networks and ways of using the state in one's personal goals, real everyday actions linked to protecting oneself from the omnipotence and persecutions of the State' [Firsov 2008: 65].

The liturgical nature of the Orthodox Church ('in Orthodox understanding the church becomes a community of people experiencing the divine, united around liturgical practice <...>'. Orthodox believers

tend to focus on ritual practice, or on “practicing the sacraments”, rather than on the meaning of the ritual’ [Naumescu 2008: 18, 19]) and the syncretism of the people’s religiosity therefore created essential prerequisites for reconciling religious loyalty with political loyalty. Leading Orthodox theologians devoted their time to the task of integrating the Church into the proclaimed atheist nature of the socio-political reality.

The declaration of Luka (Voino-Yasenetsky), Archbishop of Crimea and Simferopol, was published in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* in 1948, when it was being strongly hinted that there would be a departure from the state-church ‘Concordat’ of 1943. A letter from Metropolitan of Leningrad Grigory (Chukov), which was approved by Patriarch Alexy (Simansky), was an idiosyncratic response from the Orthodox hierarchy to the Party resolution of 7 July 1954 that began the ‘hundred-day campaign’ against the Church, the harbinger of the anti-religious persecutions of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The letter was addressed to the head of the Council for the Affairs of the ROC, Georgy Karpov, and had the revealing heading ‘On the Issue of the Intensifying Battle against Religion in the Press’.

Archbishop Luka proposed isolating the atheist (ideological) component of Soviet identity and asserted that it was possible to be integrated in Soviet society without accepting its atheist ideology. He emphasised: ‘We are, of course, strangers to materialism, which comprises the ideological basis of Communism.’ At the same time, he characterised the supporters of the Church as loyal Soviet citizens: ‘We <...> live in complete peace with our Government <...> and [Christian faith] does not hinder us from seeing everything good and complete in the great social truth that we had been given by our new socialist system’ [Luka (Archbish.) 1948: 62].

Metropolitan Grigory proposed an even more subtle way of grounding the Church’s ‘correct’ socio-political position under conditions where this position was openly called into doubt. He asserted that atheism could not only be excluded as a component of Soviet identity, but that in fact it was not even an essential component of Marxist ideology, upon which the authority of the regime was based. By examining Marxism as a ‘highly attractive socio-economic doctrine’, he asserted that Marx committed a ‘logical error’ in making atheism the philosophical prerequisite of his doctrine. The Metropolitan explained: ‘Religion is an area of psychology where emotions and conscience are all-important, whereas economics is exclusively material in nature’ [TsGAOO. F. 1. Op. 24. D. 3532. L. 141]. He was therefore certain that there were no real obstacles to the complete and painless integration of the Church into Soviet society: ‘If we liberate Marxist economic doctrine from the atheist

prerequisite then both atheists and those who believe in God could join together in the doctrine with light hearts' [TsGAOO. F. 1. Op. 24. D. 3532. L. 141].

All the while the clergy and believers were striving in vain for a complete, conflict-free reconciliation of the two loyalties. The concept of a 'dual identity' indicates not only an attempt to reconcile two incompatible loyalties, but also the inevitable failure of these attempts. The conflict between identities was further intensified due to the regime's unwillingness to accept the 'correct' identity of the Church, which would have made the task of isolating the Church and marginalising its ministers and supporters much more difficult.

The most difficult ordeal faced by the Church in the post-war period came during the years of Khrushchev's religious persecutions, when there were persistent attempts to finally realise the ideal of separating the *believer* segment of the population from the *Soviet citizenry*. Assessing the resolution of 7 July 1954, Metropolitan Grigory called into question the political and social viability of a domestic policy that, 'instead of being concerned about the unity and close solidarity of the state's millions of citizens as a monolithic body, is contriving to disunite them on the principle of religious discrimination' [TsGAOO. F. 1. Op. 24. D. 3532. L. 139]. The official reaction of the Church, which was made public in November of the same year, affirmed that the most controversial issue was the political loyalty and Soviet identity of the Church. In the words of Metropolitan Ioann (Sokolov), the real political wisdom of the resolution of 10 November 1954, which brought the 'hundred-day campaign' to an end, was that the authorities no longer called into question the loyalty of the clergy and believers merely on the basis that 'they believe in God' [TsGAOO. F. 1. Op. 30. D. 3683. L. 18].

Dual identity and 'Church adaptability'¹

Lambasted by dissidents and Church opposition [SAKI.SU/Ort 3/5.1. L. 2–3; 'Irodova zakvaska' 1970], the 'Church's adaptability' was the result of accepting a dual identity and was a practical instrument for the Church's integration into the socialist reality. In the 1960s the Institute of Scientific Atheism designated it a 'form of self-defence for religion, [which] substantially complicates our battle against religious ideology and requires the development of more absolute and effective ways of opposing religion' [RGASPI. F. 606. Op. 4. D. 86. L. 38].

¹ The phenomenon of 'Church adaptability' is examined in detail in my other publications [Shlikhta 2011: 190–204; Shlikhta 2012].

The ROC's aspiration to adapt within the Soviet state is a particularly complex and ambiguous phenomenon because it envisaged a 'conciliatory attitude' towards the hostile ideology. However, the Church's choice in favour of this strategy cannot be called unique in the modern world, as has been outlined above. If issues of '(in) sincerity', 'hypocrisy' and 'cunning' unfailingly arise when studying this topic, then they are, in the words of Boris Firsov, inalienable components of studying the culture of Soviet society as a whole. If we approach this phenomenon from a different perspective, Alexei Yurchak's observations seem very pertinent. In his study of how in the post-war period Soviet citizens used official ideological formulae and symbols and imbued them with another — favourable for themselves — meaning (as will be examined below), he asserts: 'The act of the re-production of form with the reinterpretation of meaning <...> cannot be reduced to resistance, opportunism, or dissimulation; indeed, it allowed many Soviet people to continue adhering to Communist ideals and to see themselves as good Soviet citizens' [Yurchak 2003: 504]. This dilemma is impossible to resolve based on the sources available to us. Therefore we will confine ourselves to a description of the external manifestations of this 'Church adaptability', which vividly demonstrate the paradoxical Orthodox-Soviet identity of the Orthodox clergy.

As logically flowed from its established political philosophy, the Church continually affirmed that it was indissolubly linked to Soviet society and that Orthodox believers were loyal and fully-fledged citizens of the Soviet state. The symbolic link between the Church and society was accented at every suitable opportunity: from the inclusion in the Church calendar of Soviet festivals and key dates in the lives of Soviet leaders to the timing of special religious ceremonies to coincide with Soviet festivals (7 November,¹ Victory Day, the birthdays of Soviet leaders and so on). The official attitude towards any attempt by the Church to confirm this symbolic link was demonstrated by the head of a village council in the Chernihiv Oblast. Having heard about a parish priest's desire to hold a service of festive liturgy on Stalin's seventieth birthday, he exclaimed: 'Who permitted you to connect the name of Stalin to God?' [TsGAOO. F. 1. Op. 24. D. 12. L. 176].

This symbolic link and dual identity of Orthodox believers was most eloquently manifested when Easter Sunday fell on 1 May. The Party leadership's concern was indicative of the fact that the number of people who took part in services on these feast days had increased, despite the clergy's having appointed the festival services at a less convenient time in order to give believers the opportunity to

¹ The anniversary of the October Revolution. [Eds.].

participate in the May Day parades [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 7. L. 2]. This sense of alarm was further reinforced because the number of children and adolescents who participated in such services was also growing [TsGAOO. F. 1. Op. 23. D. 5377. L. 15–16; TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 1. D. 193. L. 2]. The first such coincidence took place in 1921,¹ and from that time no religious festival ever lost the 'battle for the souls' of the Soviet people.

Even more telling was the fact that such a coincidence might unexpectedly prompt the still more 'solemn and majestic' celebration of Easter (as the festival sermon of Fr. Kostyuk from Zhytomyr, 1967, chose to put it) [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 42. L. 125]. In their festival sermons bishops and priests emphasised that the coincidence was a symbol of the unity between the Church and the Soviet people. The following is an excerpt from a sermon of Fr. Milkov from Berdyansk, given during Holy Week 1967:

My Orthodox brothers and sisters, in a few days we will celebrate the holy day of Easter, which is linked to May Day. This is a great union of two national festivals blessed by the Lord and it proclaims our close link to the nation. May our friendship with the nation be eternal and all glory be to Jesus Christ! [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 42. L. 118].

Textual analysis of bishops' messages and church sermons reveals a phenomenon that can be called the 'assimilation of the modern (Soviet) consciousness' by the Church. In her examination of this phenomenon, Glennys Young draws the following conclusion: 'They were the assimilators, not the assimilated' [Young 1997: 276]. To use Stephen Kotkin's formula, we can say in summary that the Orthodox clergy and believers (as will be discussed in the concluding section) also successfully learned to 'speak Bolshevik' [Kotkin 1995]. On the one hand, they thereby represent loyal Soviet citizens, while on the other they made Soviet language an instrument for asserting their own interests. Andrew Stone summarises thus: 'Discursive strategies allowed religious citizens to infuse official discourse with different meanings and thereby create a space where their "normal" Soviet life could co-exist with religion' [Stone 2008: 299].

The theme of peace is central to episcopal messages and church sermons. The rhetoric imposed by the State of the fight for peace (in the realm of foreign policy) was used by the Church to protect their own interests and was an ideal illustration of the fact that official expressions could be full of favourable meaning. The goal of these rhetorical techniques was to emphasise that the interests of the Church and State were identical. An excerpt from the sermon of Archbishop Pallady (Kaminsky) on Holy Saturday 1971 is revealing.

¹ For a description of the festivals of 1921, see [Timasheff 1944: 60–61].

The Archbishop asserted that the Church was at one with ‘all of progressive humanity’, since it was fighting alongside it to keep peace in the world. His sermon concluded with an appeal to believers: ‘We will take a most active part in consolidating peace on earth — <...> a feat of peaceful and glorious labour to the glory of our great Motherland’ [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 246. L. 22].

The continual appeal to the theme of peace also had another deeper aim. The sermon by Archbishop Pallady began with the phrase: ‘Upon his resurrection Christ greeted his Church with the words, “Peace be with you!” This call for peace still resounds today in all the ends of the universe, and not only from the lips of the Church’ [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 246. L. 22]. The words of the Easter sermon of Archpriest V. Zhelyuk from Zhytomyr (1968) are completely in harmony with this: ‘Jesus gave himself entirely to serve us and that is why he calls us now. He summons us to follow him in creating peace, to strive towards peace among the nations’ [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 88. L. 4]. The idea was quite clear: the Church was represented as being the eternal keeper of peace. This explains why the commissioners of the Council for the Affairs of the ROC and later the Council for Religious Affairs¹ did not approve of appealing to the theme of peace, accusing the episcopate and clergy of ‘allegorical statements’ [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 88. L. 4, l. 78]. This also explains the allegation, which appears in the Council’s documentation, that ‘religious fanatics’ brought up the topic of peace with particular frequency in their sermons.

Another governing theme of sermons and official messages was public morality. An important task was to emphasise the correspondence between Christian and Communist morality, and Christian and humanistic ideals. Peace, collectivism, diligence, condemnation of social inequality and exploitation and national conflicts – these were the Christian ideals that were depicted as the sources of common democratic and Communist principles. Archbishop Luka (Voino-Yasenetsky) presented the main points of intersection between Christian and Communist principles in his work *Science and Religion* (written in the 1940s and 1950s), having in mind the existence of a causal link between them. The archbishop referred to evangelical preaching as the ‘herald of the highest, genuine humanism’ and democracy [Luka (Archbish.) 2001: 75]. He paid particular attention to evangelical principles such as love for one’s neighbour (and, correspondingly, the message in the Gospels about peace to all men); he highlighted the fact that such love did not make provision for ‘love of the enemies of our Motherland. This is a very dangerous and

¹ The official departments of the Soviet government managing church-state relations before and after 1965. [Eds.].

manifestly erroneous political accusation' [Luka (Archbish.) 2001: 78]. Alongside this came an appeal for an active attitude towards life and diligent labour, strictures on the unpleasantness of individualism ('There is nothing less in keeping with the Gospel's teaching than individualism' [Luka (Archbish.) 2001: 77]); and protest against social inequality and 'human exploitation' [Luka (Archbish.) 2001: 77–8]. If we recall the definition of the Church's Soviet identity proposed by Archbishop Luka back in 1948, the essence of these parallels becomes quite clear.

The episcopate and clergy highlighted the fact that the Ten Commandments first proposed the same principles of human communal living that were also prescribed by Soviet legislation [GARF. F. 6991. Op. 2. D. 528. L. 34]. At the same time they explained the Ten Commandments and the teaching of the Church as a whole, using modern rhetoric and examples from Soviet life to make them more understandable for believers and to demonstrate the 'contemporary relevance' of the Church. Council commissioner Ivan Kotenko broached the question of withdrawing the registration of Fr. Grigory Solovyanov from the Church of the Ascension in Chernihiv virtually immediately after he was appointed to the parish in 1965. The reason was twofold, as in many similar cases: the priest's 'religious fanaticism' and his 'opportunistic activity'. The link between these two behavioural strategies, which at first glance appear to be mutually exclusive, is clear from a sermon of Fr. Solovyanov, which begins with the words: 'We should pray and carry out rituals not just for appearance, we should pray from the heart.' Indeed:

The sportsmen who go to the Olympics do not receive their reward immediately, but train for a long period of time, just as you must labour and pray from the heart, then you will receive the salvation of your soul and will inherit the Heavenly Kingdom [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 1. D. 458. L. 289].

The proximity of Christian and Communist ideals (they were often described as identical) was highlighted by the clergy. 'Contrasting democracy and Christianity is physically impossible because they are synonymous' [RGANI. F. 5. Op. 16. D. 669. L. 89–90]. A memorandum of the Council for the Affairs of the ROC 'On the Forms and Methods of Ideological Influence of the Church on Believers at the Present Time' (1954) paid significant attention to the sermons of a priest who presented Christian ideas as 'primary sources of ostensibly modern progressive ideas, <...> fundamental Christian ideas permeated deep into the public consciousness and the individual's consciousness' [RGANI. F. 5. Op. 16. D. 660. L. 90–1]. This priest discerned the embodiment of Christian principles in the Soviet system of education, the system of healthcare and insurance and so on.

This same memorandum gives a very rare opportunity to glimpse how the priests themselves justified the necessity for the Church to adapt to Soviet conditions, in other words creating a ‘discursive space <...> where Soviet socialism and religion could coexist’ [Stone 2008: 300]. Below are two excerpts of private conversations between Orthodox priests (again anonymous), whose behaviour was analysed by the Council:

If we take into account the fact that atheism has permeated deep into human society <...> then there can be no doubt that if we now speak out against democratic ideals that are identical to those of Christianity then it will lead to many believers either simply becoming atheists or they will not find the strength to fight against atheism.

If the Church supports the reaction, it is spreading atheism, but when it walks shoulder to shoulder with its people it disarms atheism [RGANI. F. 5. Op. 16. D. 669. L. 92].

The Soviet identity of Orthodox believers

A unique source for analysing the self-perception of Orthodox believers is provided by their ‘letters to the powers that be’. As Sheila Fitzpatrick highlights, ‘Thus, “public” letter-writing was essentially a form of individual, private communication with the authorities on topics both private and public’ [Fitzpatrick 1996: 80]. Their pages contain believers’ painstaking attempts to ‘write themselves’ (to use Jochen Hellbeck’s expression [Hellbeck 2000]) as loyal Soviet citizens, who have, on this basis, the right to demand (or rather to request) respect for their religious convictions. As a unique source that allows us to hear the ‘voice from below’, these texts are used in studies on ‘the Church’s resistance strategies’ (as William Husband calls them) both in the 1920s and 1930s [Husband 1998: 87–91] and in the post-war period [Peris 2000; Geraskin 2007: 94–118, 176–88; Stone 2008: 311–20].

A textual analysis of the addresses, requests and complaints of believers demonstrates their dual Orthodox-Soviet identity, their adaptation to the new socio-political reality, and their skilful use of Soviet political rhetoric that helped or at least should have helped believers to protect their religious rights. Similar discursive devices were used as early as the 1920s, when Soviet language was only just developing [Husband 1998: 88]. Interestingly, after the ‘Concordat’ of 1943 the rhetoric of letter-writing changed: the widespread conviction about reinstating the unity of Church and State was transmitted through ‘a mix of pre-revolutionary and Soviet terminology’ [Peris 2000: 107]. Traditional rhetoric did not disappear completely from such letters even in the post-war period, although, as my analysis demonstrates, from the late 1940s it was only used in very rare cases. References to Soviet legislation on religion, mainly

the decree of 1918 on the separation of Church and State and article 124 of the 1954 Constitution of the USSR, which both declared the provision of (albeit limited) religious rights, became an indispensable component of the petitions. Letters that did not contain such references were rare exceptions.

The authors of these letters would mention that 'according to the Constitution, Christian faith (freedom of conscience) is permitted' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 1. D. 365. L. 198], and that 'Church and State are distinct from one another' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 1. D. 365. L. 204]. The letters ended with a customary phrase about the fact that the local authorities have no legal grounds to interfere in the life of the Church and such interference is 'called unlawful and is an outrage to the Soviet Constitution and to Democracy' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 1. D. 411. L. 97 ob.].

In very rare cases, believers were compelled to re-consider their perception of themselves as loyal Soviet citizens. A campaign to defend the Holy Dormition Pochayiv Lavra (running from 1961 to the late 1980s) indicated the impossibility of a complete, conflict-free reconciliation between religious and Soviet loyalties. Already any decision to send on requests for help to the West was viewed by the government and believers alike as 'anti-Soviet actions'. Letters that reached the West and gained notoriety thanks to *tamizdat* (foreign publication) indicated the willingness of believers in similarly extreme cases to refuse to profess to be loyal Soviet subjects:

Our godless Communists have built a terrible persecution around the Orthodox Church, true pastors, monks and Christian people, and they wish to construct their Communism on the tombs of Christians <...> These same godless Communists, sitting in their godless gloom, ruining their souls with the force of their violence and all the repressions, they wish to ruin our souls and those of our children <...> On the radio and in the newspaper and all across the Soviet Union they talk about peace <...> they are supposedly fighting for peace, to avert nuclear war and thereby preserve all humanity from death. But the peace of these godless Communists is only in their language, whereas they have started a terrible war against the Orthodox people [SAKI.SU/Ort 7/14.1. L. 1].

I would not allow [my son] to join the Pioneers, for it is a godless organisation and I am a Christian mother and cannot permit my child to join a godless organisation [Varrava 1964: 5].

Letter writers not only indicated the impossibility of reconciling their faith in God and loyalty to the Communist State, openly accusing the regime of religious persecution, but they also declared their willingness to commit open acts of unrest. Their arguments, as was

customary, reference the decree of 1918 and more broadly Soviet legislation on religion, although the emphasis had shifted considerably. Instead of justifying their religious rights legally, the letter-writers wrote about infringements of Soviet legislation by Soviet civil servants themselves. The last hope was to appeal to the international community for help, whom they called upon to compel the Soviet government to respect its own laws.

[I am requesting] to intercede on behalf of myself and my children and to bring our godless Communists within the bounds of Soviet law, the Constitution and the Decree [of 1918], the Convention on Discrimination [on the struggle against discrimination in education] (1/11/62) <...> For these laws do not exist for them: on paper these laws exist, but in reality they have rejected them (from an appeal by Feodosya Varrava to the UN, 1964) [Varrava 1964: 5].

Openly accusing the government of ‘persecuting faith’ and of refusing to perceive believers as loyal Soviet citizens was rare, as has been stated above. Usually, even when they were compelled to commit symbolic or real acts of unrest because they had no hope of defending their rights in a legal way, believers would do everything possible to avoid their belonging to Soviet society being cast into doubt. Their appeals and petitions (as was the case with ‘letters to the powers that be’ by Soviet citizens in general) stemmed from the fact that central government simply did not know about the catastrophic situation at the local level. Therefore the main goal was to ‘let the powers that be know’ that the rights of believers prescribed in the Constitution were being violated.

A campaign by believers in Chernihiv to defend Holy Trinity church, which was closed in 1962, lasted for more than two decades, until the church was returned to them in 1988. During these years hundreds of ‘letters to the powers that be’ were written, which form a unique body of documents for the microanalysis of the identity of Orthodox believers.¹

The first thing that draws our attention when we analyse the petitions and complaints of the Chernihiv inhabitants is how completely they had mastered the art of ‘speaking Bolshevik’ (or rather, ‘Soviet’), how skilfully they created a ‘discursive space’ in which religion and Communism and the Church and the Soviet state co-existed in a mutually advantageous way. The rhetoric of the letters is completely in harmony with the language of official Soviet documents. For example, letters written from 1970–1972 reflect the process of preparing and holding the Twenty-Fifth Party Congress, elections to

¹ For a more detailed analysis of this campaign, see my other publications: [Shlikhta 2003; Shlikhta 2011: 225–50].

the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR, celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Victory Day, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Ukrainian SSR and the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Lenin. The timing of acts in defence of the Church to coincide with prominent events in the country's political life, not to mention regular red-letter days, mainly 1 May and 7 November, was considered to be an effective method of confirming one's own loyalty and refuting the view that the believers among the population were the carriers of a 'hostile' ideology. These techniques were called upon to demonstrate, as Andrew Stone summarises, that believers were 'people like us' and members of Soviet society [Stone 2008: 313].

An even more persuasive way of confirming one's 'Sovietness' was considered to be the use of linguistic clichés, referencing Marxist-Leninist classic literature and Soviet legislation. With the aid of these rhetorical techniques, letter-writers believed they could oblige their recipients to heed their requests. Indeed as early as 1874 Engels called the struggle against religion a 'folly', while the founder of the Soviet state was a 'consistent fighter' against 'bureaucracy in the work of the Soviet government' and demanded that government bodies 'understand with all [their] heart and soul the position of petitioners' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 277. L. 183, 198].

Believers set themselves against the discriminated classes in capitalist countries, 'where laws and freedoms are only on paper' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 218. L. 54]. 'We are not negroes <...> we are not merely members, but patriots of our dear Motherland' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 67. L. 139]. They demanded that their requests be met 'in the name of the historical and humanistic meaning of socialism' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 277. L. 45, l. 52]. The assertion that millions of believers were building a new democratic society alongside the whole Soviet nation underlines the justice of the demand that follows: 'The Christian people have the right to democracy. They have the right to enjoy its benefits and to demand punishment for anyone who infringes it' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 218. L. 106].

The arguments continually repeated in these letters were evidence of a subtle understanding of socialist reality and of political current affairs and were intended to persuade those in power that returning churches to them was as much in their own interests as in the interests of believers. For example, during a routine crackdown on the 'remnants of the Uniate Church' in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a letter chose to recall that 'The Trinity Church is a monument to the struggle between Orthodoxy and the Uniate Church — foreigners who wished to enslave our people and Motherland' [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 313. L. 28, l. 23].

The dissatisfaction of believers became ever more perceptible and the style of the letters became increasingly forceful as time went on, precisely because their lawful demands continued to be ignored. Despite this, it is impossible to detect any open criticism of the regime or its religious policy: this would have been contrary to the specific mode of thought characteristic of protest by ordinary people and would have created serious problems for their identity. The typical display of ‘thinking otherwise’ [*raznomyslie*] (to use Boris Firsov’s concept) by the inhabitants of Chernihiv consisted of blaming only the local authorities for their difficult position, or, more rarely, the leadership of the individual Republic. The rhetorical question ‘Why is it that Russia does not have a hostile attitude towards the Church and believers like wretched Ukraine?’ was a leitmotif of many letters [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 313. L. 78].

In the late 1960s and early 1970s letter-writers were obliged (and this is continually emphasised) to re-consider their perception of themselves as fully-fledged and loyal citizens of the Soviet Union. Depicting the discriminatory attitude they faced, they laid things on as thick as they could. At the beginning of the campaign the position of fully-fledged citizens of the Soviet Motherland was placed in opposition to unfortunate situations in other countries, but as time went on the Chernihiv inhabitants began to use other comparisons: ‘Old people involuntarily remember the time of the union when churches <...> were taken away from Orthodox people and put into the hands of Jews’ [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 313. L. 78].

Believers highlighted with increasing frequency the fact that their requests were being incomprehensibly ignored, which was legally unsatisfactory and even provoked ‘anti-Soviet statements’: ‘We do not wish to allow the trampling of Soviet laws and the mockery of believers to lead to wrongdoing or to cause resentment, but in any case we must think in this way <...> Is it possible that we must lose patience?’ [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 277. L. 6]. The Chernihiv inhabitants did not confine themselves to rhetorical questions such as these, but indicated the specific statements and even actions to which they would be provoked. For example, they declared their willingness to travel to Moscow during the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress to tell the deputies of the whole Soviet Union about the situation in Chernihiv [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 277. L. 11]. Furthermore, they were driven to ‘civil disobedience’ and refused to participate in elections to local and higher authorities, for indeed, ‘How can we vote when no one wants to pay any attention to the long-standing, well-founded, lawful requests of hundreds and thousands of believers?’ [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 218. L. 54].

Eloquent evidence that believers were driven to extremes, had lost all hope of having their demands met through legal means and were

driven, as they themselves acknowledged, to 'crime', is provided by the fact that some of them began to address their petitions 'to the West', to various international human rights and religious organisations. In 1970 believers demonstrated this perspective, simultaneously emphasising their own reluctance to do it:

Surely it cannot be that our only option is to address the UN or the World Council of Churches? Indeed the incentives to do so are more than sufficient, both in terms of the time and of the grounds and circumstances enforced us, which we nevertheless do not wish to do, for we have not given up hope of mercy and for our concerns to be satisfied by our own dear native government [TsGAVO. F. 4648. Op. 5. D. 218. L. 107–8].

The following year, both the UN and the World Council of Churches were continually targeted, which eloquently testified to the acute crisis in the Soviet identity of believers.

* * *

The construction of an identity 'appropriate to the times' is an effective 'subaltern strategy', as Sheila Fitzpatrick writes [Fitzpatrick 2008: 12]. This assertion is also quite accurate in relation to the clergy and believers of the Russian Orthodox Church during Soviet times. Opting for a dual 'Orthodox-Soviet' identity was actually a case of Hobson's choice. On the one hand, like society as a whole, Soviet citizens who believed in God unavoidably developed a 'correct consciousness' imposed by the most powerful identifier in the face of a totalitarian State (which we have illustrated through the Ukrainian material). On the other hand, their integration into the Soviet socio-political reality through accepting Soviet identity, and their virtually irreproachable (for personal purposes) use of Soviet political language, were conscious steps that were intended not to allow the isolation of the Church for which the regime was striving.

The choice to opt for a dual identity was predetermined and generally logical, although it was far from trouble-free. It was difficult to reconcile the ideologically incompatible systems of belief in God and loyalty to the 'theomachist' regime (the identity crisis of Orthodox believers became particularly acute during periods of intense anti-religious persecutions). Added to that, in the opinion of many critics of this strategy, it was not irreproachable in a moral sense (the criticism is particularly persuasive when it comes to the phenomenon of 'church adaptability').

Despite its problematic nature, the dual Orthodox-Soviet identity can nevertheless be acknowledged as a successful strategy for the Church's survival in a society that declared itself to be atheist. It is another issue altogether that after the fall of the Soviet Union the

paradoxical historical symbiosis of the ‘Orthodox’ and the ‘Soviet’ has undermined the moral authority of the Orthodox Church and complicated the adaptation of Orthodox believers to post-Soviet reality.

Abbreviations

AIITs — Archive of the Institute of History of the Church

GARF — State Archive of the Russian Federation

RSANI — Russian State Archive of Contemporary History

RGASPI — Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History

SAKI — Samizdat Archive of Keston Institute

TsGAOO — Central State Archive of Public Organisations of Ukraine

TsGAVO — Central State Archive of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine

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