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State, church and local response
The fall and rise of a Greek Catholic parish in socialist Poland*

Here, in Poland, we have to go through Purgatory. But our brethren in the East—they go through Hell.

Fr Bazyli Hrynyk1

Introduction

Governments and churches tend to compete in the same field. As authorized, hierarchical institutions, they lay claims to territory and to the cultural and national identity of the people they represent. This overlap of interests is what makes the relationships between governments and churches so delicate. It explains why the origin of nation states in Europe often ran parallel to the expansion of and divisions within churches. The so-called ‘state churches’, such as the Russian Orthodox church of Russia and the Anglican church of England, are clear outcomes of such processes. It also explains why secular authorities always enforce some kind of ‘religion policy’, that is, a policy that controls and regulates the freedom of local churches and religious organizations. This chapter discusses one particular example of religion policy, namely the policy implemented by the Polish socialist state with regard to Poland’s Greek Catholic minority. The relationship between the Polish state and the Greek Catholic church (also referred to as Uniate church) in communist Poland was particularly strained. This was because of the hostile attitude of the

* This is a revised version of an article published in ‘State-church relations in contemporary Europe’, Inglish, Tom, Mach, Zdzisław and Mazanek, Rafał (eds.), Dublin: UCD Press, 2000, pp. 93-112.

1 Quoted in Wojewoda (1994: 5). Bazyli Hrynyk (1896-1977) served as a Greek Catholic bishop for the Przemyśl diocese since his appointment by Polish Primate Hłond in 1947. He was arrested in 1954 on suspicion of subversive activities and sentenced to six years in prison in 1955. In 1956 he was released after which he resumed his work as a bishop until his death in 1977 (Syrnyk, not dated).
socialist government to churches and religious organizations in general and to Poland’s Greek Catholic Ukrainian community in particular. The aim of the Polish state was to build a secular and homogeneous socialist society. Since ethno-national minorities derive an important part of their cultural identity from religion, religion policy offered the state a particularly effective means of exerting influence on ethnic and religious groups and their organizations.

To illustrate the close interrelation between ethnicity, nationality, and religion, I shall examine the fall and rise of the Komantza Greek Catholic parish (southeast Poland, see Map 4.1) in the past four decades. Archival documents and interviews provide detailed insight into how the Greek Catholic community in the village of Komantza coped with the intense political persecution by the socialist state, and how it managed to survive as a community, while maintaining its cultural identity. The chapter focuses on the response of the Greek Catholic parishioners when the state closed their parish church in the early 1960s. The first section introduces the village Komantza and discusses the disintegration of the Greek Catholic church as well as its impact on the local parish. This is followed by a description of the strategies pursued by the local parishioners in response to the state interventions. The third and fourth sections explore the implications of this struggle for survival for local relationships. The concluding section contains some comments on the influence of lay people on state-church relations.

A church, a people and a community under siege

Komantza is a rural village of some 900 inhabitants. Today the village is comprised of three parishes, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and Orthodox, and is inhabited by two ethnic groups, Ukrainians and Poles. The vast majority of Poles are Roman Catholic; the majority of Ukrainians are Greek Catholic. The five Orthodox Ukrainian families that live in the village constitute a tiny minority. The Orthodox parish, established in 1962, is the youngest of the three parishes. The Roman Catholic parish was established in 1927. The building of a Roman Catholic chapel and monastery was completed shortly thereafter. Dating back to the seventeenth century, the Greek Catholic parish is the oldest parish. Before World War II the wooden Greek Catholic parish church served both the local Ukrainian and Gypsy communities. When in the 1870s the railway line was built

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2 The archival material used in this chapter is drawn from three collections: the Greek Catholic parish archive in Komantza (henceforth referred to as GCPA); the Roman Catholic parish archive in Komantza, and the archive of the deanery of the Orthodox church in Sanok (ADOC). The archival documents were collected and the interviews conducted during two extensive periods of fieldwork in southeast Poland in 1997 and 1998.
connecting Przemyśl with Budapest and passing, among others, through Komańcza, Poles started to inhabit the village in ever growing numbers. They too frequented the Masses in the Greek Catholic parish church until they had their own chapel built (interview with Sławka S.). During the 1940s the Germans destroyed the local gypsy and Jewish communities and the Polish authorities expelled and deported most of the residual Ukrainians (chapter 3). This marked the beginning of the end of the Greek Catholic parish in Komańcza.

The decline of the Greek Catholic parish coincided with the overall disintegration of the Greek Catholic church in postwar Poland. This process was spurred by a number of factors. First, the westward shift of the eastern border of Poland in 1945 deprived the church of its religious leadership, as it disconnected the Greek Catholic diocese of Przemyśl (still on Polish territory) from its main administrative and religious center in Lwów (now part of the Soviet Republic of Ukraine). Second, following the liquidation of the Greek Catholic church on Soviet territory in 1946, the Polish state adopted a similar repressive policy towards the Greek Catholic church. In 1945 the Soviet authorities closed down the Greek Catholic diocese in Lwów and arrested the church leaders. When the
Lwów Synod of 1946 (organized at the instigation of Moscow) voted for the forced conversion of the Greek Catholic church to Orthodoxy, the Greek Catholic church ceased to exist on Soviet territory. Even though the Polish authorities never went so far as to formally ban the Greek Catholic church from Poland, they were clearly out to destroy the church’s infrastructure. This was effectively achieved by means of the expulsion and deportation of both the Greek Catholic clergy and laity from their parishes in southeast Poland between 1944 and 1947 as part of a general demographic engineering project to establish an ethnically homogeneous Poland (see chapter 3).

The Greek Catholic church was targeted because the Soviet and Polish authorities considered the church as being subversive and a stronghold of Ukrainian nationalism. Particularly problematic was the subordination of the church to Rome (Majkowicz 1990). This direct link of the church with the imperialist West was seen as providing a gate for counterrevolutionary influences, which the state authorities were unable to control. The strong position of the Roman Catholic church in Poland made state-church relations even more precarious. With the Polish state seeking ‘internal sovereignty’, that is, its superior authority with respect to all organizations in society, its religion policy was primarily aimed at undermining the influence of the strongest and least submissive of all church organization in Poland, the Roman Catholic church (Urban 1996). To that purpose, it broke the 1925 concordat between the Vatican and Poland that, until its abolishment in 1945, had given considerable autonomy to the Roman Catholic church within Poland’s state boundaries. In addition, it formed an alliance with the Orthodox metropolitan in Warsaw, whose traditionally pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian stance suited the state authorities. Finally, it entrusted the Ministry of Public Security with state religion policy, which resulted in extremely repressive methods of state control. Although repression was less rigorous after the political spring of 1956, the involvement of the security organs in religious affairs would dominate church-state relations throughout the socialist period (Dudek 1995; Urban 1996).

Ironically, the state attack on the Greek Catholic church drove Poland’s Greek Catholics right into the arms of the Roman Catholic church. In December 1946, after the arrest of the Greek Catholic episcopate by the Soviet authorities, the Vatican appointed Polish primate Hlond as special delegate for Eastern Rite Catholics in an attempt to offer some protection to Poland’s vulnerable Greek Catholics. Following the expulsion and deportation of Poland’s Greek Catholics from southeast Poland, the Congregation of

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3 Ironically, as all the bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic church were at this point either in prison or exile, no bishops were involved, making the conversion canonically illegitimate by the canons of both the Orthodox and Catholic churches (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Greek_Catholic_Church).
Eastern Catholic churches in Poland decreed that all vacant church properties would henceforth fall under the care and administration of the Roman Catholic church. As the Polish state had broken the concordat with the Vatican it simply ignored these church provisions (Wojewoda 1994). But whereas Poland’s Roman Catholic church was unable to protect Poland’s Greek Catholic church from disintegration, it successfully incorporated Poland’s Greek Catholics into the Roman Catholic church hierarchy. Greek Catholic priests could become active in the Roman Catholic church on the condition that they complete a short preparatory course, no longer celebrate eastern rite Masses, and accept priestly celibacy. This being the only way to fulfill their mission, a new generation of ‘latinized’ Greek Catholic priests was raised in socialist Poland (Sorokowski 1986; Majkowicz 1990).

Serving the twenty or so families that survived the expulsion and deportation policies, the Greek Catholic parish in Komańcza was one of the few parishes that were still active after 1947. In the early 1950s the parish even had a resident priest, Fr Kalenyuk, former prisoner of the Jaworzno concentration camp, who on high holidays attracted people from far and wide (interview with Pelagia S.). But the situation of the Greek Catholic parishioners was far from secure. As is clear from the stories told in the village, people felt that they had passed through the eye of the needle and that every day could be their last. The extremely tense atmosphere during the last days of Stalinism fed this idea. The arrest of cardinal Wyszyński in September 1953, who spent a couple of months of his detainment in the Roman-Catholic monastery in Komańcza, was one of the consequences of state repression that came very close to the people (Szpara 1996). Even though the Greek Catholic villagers somehow kept on living their lives as they had always done before, their presence was indeed hardly tolerated. Consider the following excerpt from a memoir written by Marian Marczak (1994: 81), Ukrainian and inhabitant of Sanok (30 km north of Komańcza), who visited Komańcza in the early 1950s.

It was 1952, the period of our Easter. I went to Komańcza to visit the Greek Catholic parish church. When we arrived at the railway station, the border guard took us, Ukrainians, apart and locked us up in the waiting room of the railway station. They would not allow us to visit the church. The deputy commander soon explained to us that we would be fined for having entered the ‘prohibited area’. They searched us and took all our money. When they locked us up, one of the elderly women broke into the song “Christos Woskres”. She had tears in her eyes. We all were caught up with this sacramental song. And I was surprised by its majestic sound from the breasts of these elderly women.
Local responses: opposition and accommodation

Given the tense atmosphere it is hardly surprising that Fr Kalenyuk predicted the end of the Greek Catholic parish after his own death. He knew the state authorities would not allow anyone to replace him (interview with Włodzimierz H.). That was exactly what happened. Fr Kalenyuk passed away on 10 June 1961. Less than two weeks later the newly appointed Fr Złoczowski was called to appear on an interview at the Department of Religious Affairs in Sanok. During the interview Fr Złoczowski was told to refrain from taking up a position as a priest for the Greek Catholic parish in Komańcza, and, instead, continue his job as the curate of the Roman Catholic parish. He was told that if he complied he would be left in peace and could keep the keys of the Greek Catholic parish church as a private person.4

Thereupon, Fr Złoczowski informed the villagers that they were no longer allowed to enter their parish church and that he had been forced to resign as the priest of their parish. He also told that under the circumstances he was no longer able to lead the funeral of one of the villagers who had passed away the day before.5 However, to bury a deceased person without a funeral was inconceivable for the villagers. In order to show their disapproval the villagers wrote two letters to Fr Złoczowski in which they implored him to stay on as their pastoral leader and lead the funeral according to the Greek Catholic rite in their own parish church.6 Fr Złoczowski, in turn, forwarded the letters to Przemyśl, and asked for the bishop’s permission to meet the villagers’ demands. The bishop gave his support after which Fr Złoczowski gave the funeral service and continued to say Masses in the Greek Catholic parish church.7 On 5 July 1961 two officials of the Department of Religious Affairs demanded the keys from Fr Złoczowski and locked and sealed the church doors. In a short conversation with the priest, the two officials explained that he had acted against the Polish state by leading and organizing the local Greek Catholic parish and by illicitly using state property.8

In spite of the sealed doors, which were clearly meant to discourage the Greek Catholic villagers from practicing their religion, the villagers continued to attend Greek Catholic

4 Report addressed to the Episcopate in Przemyśl by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, 5 July 1961, the Greek Catholic parish archive in Komańcza (GCPA).
5 Report by Fr Złoczowski, GCPA.
6 Letter addressed to Fr Złoczowski by the Greek Catholic parishioners, Komańcza, 23 June 1961, GCPA; Letter addressed to Fr Złoczowski by the Greek Catholic parishioners (45 signatures), Komańcza, 23 June 1961, GCPA.
7 Report addressed to the Episcopate in Przemyśl by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, 5 July 1961, GCPA.
8 Report by Fr Złoczowski, GCPA.
Masses, celebrate high holidays according to the Julian calendar, and prepare for Communion with their own priest. They were aided in this by Fr Złoczowski, who had no intentions of stepping back from his commitment as a priest, and by Fr Porębski, the Roman Catholic parish priest, who had invited them to his parish church. Meanwhile, the villagers went on to petition for the reopening of their parish church. In a number of letters directed to the Presidium of the People’s Provincial Council in Rzeszów they demanded the right to free conscience and religion. They enforced their arguments by stressing their absolute loyalty to the Polish state and to the socialist government.9

What followed was a tug of war between civilians appealing for reason and bureaucracy emphasizing standard regulations and laws.10 The argument put forward by the state authorities was that since the church was no longer the property of the Greek Catholic parish, as it had by decree been transferred to the state’s treasury in July 1949, the Greek Catholic parish of Komańcza was effectively non-existent [sic]. That being the case, the state authorities further argued, Fr Złoczowski could not be appointed as the head of the parish. In any event, such an appointment would have violated the decree of December 1956 dictating that a parish can only be recognized as such and that a church representative can only be appointed to a post with the consent of the state.11 Considering the fact that the Polish state did not acknowledge the Greek Catholic church as a legal body, the Greek Catholic parish of Komańcza found itself in a deadlock situation. This became all the more clear when a delegation of women from Komańcza set off to Warsaw to call in the help of the First Secretary of the Communist Party Władysław Gomułka in August 1961 and were refused access to the Party headquarter. Below is a fragment of their letter:

We appeal to you with a request and with pain in our hearts. The Greek Catholic church in Komańcza has a history of more than three hundred years, but never before have any authorities considered to close down our church […] I am an old woman of 69 years. I have grieved over many losses. I have seen many things. And I have had my portion of suffering in this life. But neither my grandparents, nor my parents, nor I have ever heard of anything like a state forbidding a people to visit their church […] That is why we appeal to you, our dear Secretary […] We know that you gave freedom of religion to others, so why proscribe us Greek Catholics? After all, we obey the commandments of the Polish state, we pay our taxes in time, and of our husbands, fathers, and sons who left Komańcza in 1944 only half returned, some of them

9 Letter addressed to the Department of Religious Affairs of the People’s Province Council in Rzeszow (PWRN) by the Greek Catholic parishioners (126 signatures), Komańcza, 23 June 1961, GCPA; letter addressed to the PWRN in Rzeszow by Stefan Barna (on behalf of the Greek Catholic parishioners), Komańcza, 7 July 1961, GCPA.

10 Letter addressed to Stefan Barna (Komańcza) by the PWRN, Rzeszow, 30 June 1961, GCPA; letter addressed to Stefan Barna (Komańcza) by the PWRN, Rzeszów July 1961, GCPA.

11 Letter addressed to Stefan Barna.
seriously wounded, as they fought in the ranks of the Polish army [...] That is why, on behalf of all the inhabitants of Komańcza, we would like to ask you, our dear secretary, to give the order to open our church and to appoint Fr Złoczowski as our priest. So that we, elderly people, will shed no more tears and live peacefully in our faith until we die. 12

Meanwhile, Fr Złoczowski called in the assistance of his Roman Catholic superiors in his dealings with the state authorities, asking for the intervention of the bishop of Przemyśl, the Catholic Parliamentary Club, and the Cardinal Primate of the Roman Catholic church of Poland. 13 As is clear from the correspondence between Fr Złoczowski and the church authorities, the latter were very much in favor of retaining the Greek Catholic parish in Komańcza. 14 At stake was the autonomy of the Roman Catholic church. If the Polish state prohibited Fr Złoczowski to take up a position as a Greek Catholic priest, whose appointment by decree of the Vatican fell under the aegis of the Roman Catholic church, the state in fact would interfere with church affairs. In doing this, the church authorities argued, the Polish state violated the right of freedom of religion and conscience. 15 The state authorities, on the other hand, holding to the political doctrine of ‘internal sovereignty’, justified the state’s intervention by claiming that the Roman Catholic church, following the decrees of 1949 and 1956, had no rights to succession of the former Greek Catholic parish church. 16

The persistent pleas for freedom of religion and conscience from the side of the villagers, the Greek Catholic priest, and from the Roman Catholic church authorities did result in a temporary breakthrough. One year after the closure of the Greek Catholic parish church, on 11 July 1962, the Department of Religious Affairs in Warsaw informed the inhabitants of Komańcza that “for the time being” they were allowed to “satisfy their religious needs” in the local Roman Catholic parish church. 17 Interestingly, this decision

12 Letter addressed to Władysław Gomułka, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR), by Katarzyna Szumeldowa (on behalf of the Greek Catholic parishioners), Komańcza, 12 August 1961, GCPA.
13 Letter addressed to Cardinal Primate Wyszynski by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, 17 October 1961, GCPA; letter addressed to the Catholic Parliamentary Club by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, 24 October 1961, GCPA.
14 Letter addressed to the PWRN in Rzeszów by the General Curate of the Episcopate in Przemyśl, Przemyśl, 20 July 1961, GCPA; letter addressed to the Department of Religious Affairs (Urząd do Spraw Wyznań) in Warsaw by the Episcopate in Przemyśl, Przemyśl, 20 July 1961, GCPA.
15 Letter addressed to the PWRN in Rzeszów.
16 Letter addressed to the Episcopate in Przemyśl by the Department of Religious Affairs in Warsaw, Warsaw, 26 September 1961, GCPA.
17 Letter addressed to Katarzyna Szumeldowa (Komańcza) by the Department of Religious Affairs in Warsaw, Warsaw, 11 July 1962, GCPA.
was not communicated to the Roman Catholic episcopate in Przemyśl or to Fr Złoczowski; the letter was addressed to the delegation of Greek Catholic women of Komańcza, who had visited Warsaw a year before. This, and the fact that the letter stressed the provisional character of the solution, seems to suggest that the state authorities were careful not to set a precedent. But whereas the decision showed some goodwill from the side of the Polish state to the local village population, it did not give legal security to the Greek Catholics.\textsuperscript{18} Fr Złoczowski observed that since the closure of the parish church, church attendance had significantly dropped. The allowance to use the Roman Catholic parish church did not alter this trend; some thirty parishioners (all of them males) had stopped frequenting the Greek Catholic Masses all together.\textsuperscript{19} Fr Złoczowski also observed that the parishioners were very worried about the future of their church. The prospects were not too bright, as they had heard of other churches that had been pulled down for building material, that were being used as storage depots, or that had been dismantled and taken to open-air museums.

The growing dissatisfaction among a significant number of Greek Catholic villagers inspired some to take action in defense of their parish church. In October 1961 a delegation of villagers proposed to Fr Złoczowski that they convert to Orthodoxy for the purpose of saving the parish church. Fr Złoczowski refused angrily; in his opinion conversion to orthodoxy was commensurate with apostasy.\textsuperscript{20} But the idea had struck a responsive chord in the Greek Catholic community. When the Orthodox deanery in Sanok (which was established in 1958) sent priests to the villages to recruit members for Orthodoxy things developed very rapidly. According to Fr Złoczowski, by the end of September 1962 at least twelve parishioners had signed for membership to the Orthodox church. Those who had signed the petition withdrew their Greek Catholic membership. One of them officially converted to Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{21} The deanery of the Orthodox church in Sanok subsequently submitted the list of signatures to the state authorities and asked for permission to open up an Orthodox parish in Komańcza. On 28 December 1962 officials of the Department of Religious Affairs transferred the keys of the parish church to the

\textsuperscript{18} This is clear from a letter sent by the PWRN in Rzeszów to the Episcopate in Przemyśl some seven years later (29 October 1969), in which the PWRN gives the Episcopate serious warning and demands that Przemyśl stops the Roman Catholic priest in Komańcza from giving shelter to the Greek Catholic priest and parishioners.

\textsuperscript{19} Report on the religious and moral condition of the Greek Catholic parish of Komańcza for the year 1961, by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, 6 December 1961, GCPA.

\textsuperscript{20} Report addressed to the Episcopal Curia in Przemyśl by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, 16 September 1962, GCPA.

\textsuperscript{21} Report addressed to the Episcopate in Przemyśl by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, 16 September 1962, GCPA; Report on the religious and moral conditions of the Greek Catholic parish of Komańcza for the year 1962, by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, December 1962, GCPA.
deanery of the Orthodox church in Sanok. The privilege granted to the Orthodox deanery, to use and administer the former Greek Catholic parish church as well as the Greek Catholic cemetery in Komańcza, was a fact.

A village conflict: the struggle between two religious communities

The Orthodox takeover gave rise to a serious conflict in the village. Orthodox informants recalled that they were being intimidated by Fr Zloczowski and by a number of Greek Catholic fellow villagers. They were physically attacked, scolded and spat on when they made their way to the church (interviews with Pelagia S. and Włodzimierz H.). Greek Catholic informants, on the other hand, claimed that not they but the Orthodox converts were the aggressors. This is also the opinion expressed by Fr Zloczowski in a report from 16 September 1962, written at the height of Orthodox missionary activity. In this report Fr Zloczowski depicts the local protagonists of conversion as malicious individuals who tried

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to recruit as many as possible supporters by means of swindle and slander. He found proof of this in a personal conversation with the Orthodox priest who came to collect signatures in the village. The priest told Fr Złoczowski that local villagers had asked him to petition in Komańcza and that his intention was to save souls and not to split up the village. Fr Złoczowski further reported that each time the Orthodox priest visited the village he was welcomed by the same group of men. One or two of them usually accompanied the priest during his rounds through the village. Fr Złoczowski suggested that the local petitioners put pressure on their co-religionists to sign the list. He reported that a number of Greek Catholics who had initially signed the list made a complaint to the local police about the rude behavior of the petitioners.23

Even if it were the intention of the visiting orthodox priest to just save the souls of those who wanted to keep to the ‘true faith’, his actions inevitably resulted in a schism within the local Greek Catholic community. That this schism would almost certainly result in frustration, anger and hostilities at both sides of the religious divide was well understood by the Orthodox authorities in Sanok, as is clear from a letter written by Fr Lewiarz, deacon of the Orthodox diocese in Sanok, to his parishioners in Komańcza. In this letter the deacon summoned the parishioners to set up a board for the care of the former Greek Catholic cemetery that had just been assigned to the local Orthodox parish. He urged the parishioners to admit each deceased person to the cemetery and avoid any trouble and conflict, as this would induce the state authorities to turn the church cemetery into a communal one. He further insisted that the parishioners keep remembering that they were part of a village in which people once “lived in unity”, a fact which should prevent them from discriminating in the case of an ensuing death. He finally stressed that “everyone has the right to be buried on the cemetery”, even though the administration of the cemetery is in the “hands of the Orthodox church”.24

Tensions reached a climax in 1974 when the local Orthodox priest died a sudden death and his position stood vacant for a couple of months. In a series of letters, the Orthodox Fr Roszczenko, who served at the time as a priest in a neighboring village and who temporarily substituted the deceased priest in Komańcza, expressed his worries about the local situation. In early March 1974, he reported that the Greek Catholic Fr Czerwińczak (who had replaced Fr Złoczowski in 1968) encouraged his parishioners to take back by force the former Greek Catholic parish church, using the argument that he as a Greek

23 Report addressed to the Episcopate in Przemyśl by Fr Złoczowski, Komańcza, 16 September 1962, GCPA.

24 Letter addressed to the Orthodox parish council in Komańcza by Fr Lewiarz, Sanok, 1963, ADOC.
Catholic priest had presided at the funeral of the deceased Orthodox priest.25 A few days later Fr Roszczenko reported the visit of the local police and of the provincial security police to the home of the church elder of the Orthodox parish in Komańcza. During this visit the church elder, a man aged in his eighties, was advised to seek the company of his co-religionists when making his way to the parish church.26 The visitors feared an attack by the Greek Catholics to rob the old man of the church keys. The officials also pressed the old man to take good care of himself, as the news had spread that the Greek Catholics ventured a take-over so that they could celebrate Easter in their former church.

Why some villagers did and others did not opt for conversion is hard to establish. Membership to either of the two religious communities cut across family boundaries. Still, some of the families that signed for conversion were related through extended family. All Orthodox families of the first generation were ‘native’ to the village (that is, they were excluded from deportation). But then again, other ‘native’ families remained with the Greek Catholic parish. What is remarkable is that whereas women had played an important part in the initial protests against the closure of the Greek Catholic parish church, the villagers who later on pushed for conversion were predominantly men. The Greek Catholic Fr Zloczowski reported that the villagers who withdrew their membership from the Greek Catholic parish between September and December 1962 were male villagers. The Orthodox Fr Lewiarz reported that all attendants (eighteen local villagers and six persons from outside) of the Orthodox Mass held in the local parish church on 30 December 1962 were male as well. The number of female participants gradually increased (there were six women out of a total of thirty-two who participated in the Mass on 7 January 1963), but men remained dominant.27 The prominent role of men in the establishment and maintenance of the Orthodox parish in Komańcza in the first years of the parish’s existence points to a conflict between male groups competing for power.

The conversion to Orthodoxy by some of the villagers can be explained in terms of a struggle for symbolic power within the village community. At the centre of this struggle was the attempt of the members of the Greek Catholic community to maintain their identity despite attempts by the state authorities to suppress it. The conflict took a decisive turn when a group of villagers separated themselves from the mainstream and took control over the main object of cultural identity of the village: the parish church. This act not only meant a break with the religious and cultural traditions of the village, it also meant a break

25 Letter addressed to the Metropolitan of the Orthodox church BazyJi in Warsaw by Fr Roszczenko, Morochów, 2 March 1974, ADOC.
26 Letter addressed to the deanery of the Orthodox church in Sanok by Fr Roszczenko, Morochów, 15 March 1974, ADOC.
27 Report on the Orthodox parish in Komańcza by Fr Lewiarz, Sanok, January 1963, ADOC.
with village solidarity. By forcing the reopening of the parish church through conversion to Orthodoxy, a small group of villagers blocked the recovery of the parish church by the Greek Catholic majority. This stirred up ill feelings. What is more, it marginalized the Orthodox converts. The families that formed the original alliance still make up the core of the Orthodox parish. Over the last three decades the growth of the Orthodox community depended solely on the natural increase of this Orthodox village core. Due to migration and a decrease of birthrates their numbers have declined. Church records registered fifty Orthodox men and women in Komańcza in 1966; in 1997 this number has declined to thirty-three. For comparison, in the same period the number of Greek Catholics in Komańcza has increased by a third.\textsuperscript{28} Church records from 1972, covering besides Komańcza all the other villages belonging to the respective parishes, registered 1460 Roman Catholics, 750 Greek Catholics and 145 Orthodox.\textsuperscript{29} These figures suggest that Orthodoxy hardly gained ground in the village and in the larger Komańcza district.

**From defeat to victory: the return to power of the Greek Catholic church**

Due to its marginal position Orthodoxy in Komańcza never really constituted a threat to the Greek Catholic community. But it took several decades for the Greek Catholic community to accept the status quo and resign from any claims to the local parish church. The firm presence of security organs certainly encouraged the Greek Catholic villagers to keep a low profile. Over time the “temporary solution” had become permanent: the Greek Catholic villagers would visit the Roman Catholic parish church to attend church Masses, which were led by their own priest, on Sundays and on high holidays. Tensions calmed considerably as soon as the men who led the factions left the village (the successive Greek Catholic priests) or died (the local Orthodox protagonists). Also, plans to build a new Greek Catholic parish church, first conceived in the early 1980s, set the Greek Catholic villagers on an entirely different track. Since the Greek Catholic parish was formally non-existent, it needed the support of a wide range of sponsors. The Greek Catholic Fr Teodor Majkowicz, then priest of the Greek Catholic parish in Przemyśl, was one of them. Born in the neighboring village Rzepedź he regularly gave sermons in a number of villages in the area between 1969 and 1988. Fr Majkowicz promoted the idea of a new Greek Catholic parish church among his Roman Catholic colleagues and superiors and arranged the bulk

\textsuperscript{28} Statistics on the parish of Komańcza for the year 1966 and 1969, ADOC; letter addressed to the Orthodox Archbishop in Sanok by Fr Martyniuk, Komańcza, 29 December 1997, ADOC; Report on the religious and moral condition of the Greek Catholic parish of Komańcza for the year 1966, by Fr Złoczowski, Kornancza, December 1966, GCPA; Fr Pipka, personal communication.

\textsuperscript{29} Questionnaire by Fr Porębski, Komańcza 1 February 1972, Roman Catholic parish archives.
of formalities and funds. The legal applicant of the church project was the Roman Catholic parish in Komańcza. The legal investor was the Roman Catholic diocese in Przemyśl.\textsuperscript{30}

![The new Greek Catholic parish church in Komańcza. Komańcza, May 2005.](image)

Even though local and non-local church authorities primarily carried the church project, it was the local population that was involved in the building of the church. Besides the local Greek Catholic parish priest, the building committee consisted of local villagers who dedicated much of their free time assisting the building process. One of them was Jan D., who served as an acolyte during church services. He spent three years of his life—from 1985 to 1988—in the building pit of what was to become the new Greek Catholic parish church. Volunteer workers, mostly retired men and women and those working in state jobs did much of the work, since they were the ones with spare time to devote to the church project. Since also specialists were needed, people came from all over. They all worked for free, except for the men who laid the concrete foundations. Jan D. recalled the arduous work of a group of elderly women, who were excited about the idea of having their own parish church built. Even when they were urged to take some rest by the others present,

\textsuperscript{30} Note (\textit{Notatka}, not signed nor dated), Roman Catholic parish archives. See also Majkowicz (1990).
they persisted with their work saying that this was what they had waited for their entire lives: to make a contribution. Jan D. mentioned that the Roman Catholic diocese covered part of the costs. But a considerable amount was drawn from members of the Greek Catholic community, especially from those with overseas relatives. Even the state, albeit unknowingly, made its contributions. After some squabble with a local (Orthodox) forest ranger, the (Roman Catholic) chairman of the local state forestry department offered the Greek Catholic parish loads of wood (drawn from the communal forest) for free (interview with Jan D.).

Church service in the Greek Catholic parish church in Komańcza. Komańcza, May 2005

With the Greek Catholic community now venturing its own symbol of religious and cultural identity, the struggle for power entered a different plane. Protests came not so much from the local Orthodox community but from Orthodox circles outside of Komańcza. They accused the Greek Catholic parish of committing ‘culture destruction’ and advised against the use of an old cupola from a ruined wooden church (located in the Sanok district and taken down with the accord and assistance of a curator from the Sanok ethnographic museum) in the present building. It came to a meeting of specialists in the local village hall and a visit from an official of the Department of Monuments on site, but
it did not lead to an interference with the building process. The symbolic weight of the new parish church in Komańcza is clear from the grand political advertisement during its consecration in 1988. The church authorities stressed that the Komarna parish church was the first Uniate church opened in Poland since 1947. Also, they took the opportunity to commemorate the millennium of the conversion to Eastern Christianity of Kiev Rus, thereby claiming historical rights of the Catholic church as the true representative of the Ukrainian people. Present were, besides local and non-local laity, a dozen representatives of the Western and Eastern Catholic churches from all over the world: Rome, Stanford, Philadelphia, Przemyśl and other Polish towns.

Already in the 1980s, but even more so with the introduction of new political liberties in the 1990s, the reconstruction of the Greek Catholic church proceeded rapidly, resulting in the numerical and material preponderance of Greek Catholics in the Przemyśl area. The expansion of the Greek Catholic church runs parallel with the erection of monuments and the introduction of memorial days commemorating Ukrainian victims of Polish repression. During the 1990s the Greek Catholic church has come to present itself as the main spokesman of Poland’s Ukrainians. That being the case, religious identity has become a statement of national identity and vice versa; a plaque on the Greek Catholic parish church of Komańcza says ‘Ukrainian Catholic church’. This does not mean that members of the Orthodox community feel less ‘Ukrainian’ than members of the Greek Catholic community. It simply means that the Greek Catholic church is currently monopolizing the symbols that are considered relevant to the history and identity of the Ukrainian people. In other words, members of the Orthodox parish are denied a fair share in the celebration of politically and culturally relevant events. This puts the Orthodox Ukrainians in a still more vulnerable position, which at times results in intensified competition between the two religious factions at the local level.

Conclusions

The liquidation of the Greek Catholic church by the Polish socialist state in the 1950s and 1960s coincided with the cultural and national oppression of Poland’s Greek Catholic Ukrainians. A striking slogan at the time was ‘take their churches and you destroy their

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31 In 988, at the command of Prince Vladimir of Kiev, the people of Rus embraced Byzantine Orthodoxy. The baptism of prince Vladimir and the subsequent conversion of his people are generally taken as signifying the establishment of the Christian religion among the Eastern Slavs. (The Poles are Western Slavs who adopted Western Christianity in 966). For a discussion of Poland’s Eastern and Western Christian traditions in the wake of the millennium celebrations see also Hann (1988).
culture’. The case study of what happened in Komańcza shows this policy had ramifications for the cultural and religious identities of the people involved. The state-enforced closure of the Greek Catholic parish church left the villagers deprived of the main symbol of their cultural identity. This temporary ‘culture void’, resulting from the attempted elimination of shared practices and traditions, gave rise to a sectarian conflict in the village. In this conflict, the different parties had the same objectives in view: the perseverance of local traditions and cultural values. But their opinions about the way to achieve this varied. The battle over the true cultural values eventually led to a schism within the Greek Catholic community and the foundation of an Orthodox parish by some of the Greek Catholic families.

Komańcza was not the only village that became subject to rigid state intervention. The closure of the parish church in Komańcza was part of a general ‘vindication action’ (akcja ‘rewindykacyjna’), during which secret police officials closed and sealed the few remaining Greek Catholic parish churches that were still active. Of these sealed parish churches, between 1961 and 1966, fifteen were reopened by formerly Greek Catholic parishioners who had converted to Orthodoxy. This number eventually grew to twenty-two churches by 1989 (Wojewoda 1994: 66). The ‘vindication action’ also involved the closure of parish churches that at the time were being used by Roman Catholic parishioners. Most of these parish churches were subsequently converted into storage depots for cereals and fertilizers; some were converted into cattle barns (Nałęcz 1988). This grim perspective may explain the following statement by a Greek Catholic inhabitant of Komańcza in 1997: “we owe a thank you to those who took care of our church, because if not for them [Orthodox] our church would surely have fallen subject to destruction and decay.”

The case study shows that even under extremely repressive circumstances there may be room for people to develop their own defense strategies and, by this means, manipulate the outcome of state policies. Local initiatives forced the state authorities to seek compromise solutions. As a result, all over Poland numerous Greek Catholic parishes (albeit affiliated to Roman Catholic parishes) were being established: an estimated seventy by the end of the 1980s (Wojewoda 1994: 66). An even greater number of sealed, formerly Greek Catholic, parish churches had been handed over to Roman Catholic parishes. It was this kind of local opposition and accommodation as well as state-church compromise, which in the long run undermined the effectiveness of repressive state religion policy.