To the light of resurrection through the thorns of catacombs. The underground activity and reemergence of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Edited by Svitlana Hurkina and Andriy Mykhaleyko (trans. Iryna Ivankovych). Pp.104 incl. numerous illustrations. Lviv: Ukrainian Catholic University Press, 2014. 078 966 2778 19 9.

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This volume, lavishly illustrated and produced with a double-column layout, is a classic. It gives immediacy to the life of a branch of the Church which is far too little known, although today a vibrant presence in Eastern Europe, as well as in the USA and Canada. Its official name does not ease the path to understanding. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was once known as 'Uniate', but this name is now disowned by its adherents. It is truly 'Catholic', in the sense that it is fiercely loyal to Rome; it is also 'Greek', deriving from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Thus an untutored visitor to St George's Cathedral in Lviv, which features heroically in this volume, would imagine from the splendour of the chant that he had walked into a Russian Orthodox church.

The reality is far different. Rivalry with the Russian Orthodox, in one form or another, dates back to the founding of the Greek-Catholic Church in the late sixteenth century. It was the focus of Ukrainian nationalism from 1919 to 1939, when its territory was under Polish rule, having previously been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus it had developed freely under its great leader, Metropolitian Andrey Sheptytsky. He died in 1944, having seen his Church come under threat as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which dismembered Poland and put his Church under Soviet jurisdiction.

Following the German invasion and the subsequent triumph of the Red Army, Lviv and the associated territories of Western Ukraine and Transcarpathia finally (as was then thought) fell victim to Soviet terror. Among countless acts of brutality, designed quickly to bring the newly conquered lands to heel, one of the most heinous was the suppression of the Greek-Catholic Church.

This book does not delineate the earlier history, but jumps straight to the tragic moment in 1946 when Nikita Khrushchev, then political supremo in Ukraine, on the orders of Stalin, became the butcher of the men and their families for whom this Church was central to their lives. 'Families' is relevant, for this tradition has married parish clergy (alongside celibate monks eligible to become bishops). The Communist threats to their families caused many parish priests to submit to intimidation and hand their churches over to the Moscow Patriarchate, which thereby acquired its strongest representation in any region of the Soviet Union.

The light of the resurrection is the work of many editorial hands, but the result is a work of perfect unity. It focuses on those who resisted persecution and recounts their fate. The documentary evidence from the prison camps is simply presented, but overwhelming. One marvels that such photographs survived. The Church was even organised there – the perfect model of a catacomb church, symbolised by the survival of a single bishop, Cardinal Slipyi, whom the regime exiled to Rome in 1963, but not before he had consecrated other bishops clandestinely in prison.

The book documents the underground activity of the Church during the later Soviet period, leading to its growing public activity and, finally, its legalisation under Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989. A struggle to regain all the property which the Russian Orthodox Church had seized ensued. Most, but not all, was recovered.

The Russian Orthodox Church, freed from its political subservience in 1991, might well have repented of its complicity in these events, but it has never done so and continues its open hostility to the Ukrainian Catholics.

The book, however, ends on an optimistic note. In March 1991 the head of the Church, Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lubachivs'ky, returned to Ukraine from exile. A visit by Pope John Paul II took place the following June, during which several Ukrainian bishops and priests were beatified at a divine liturgy in St George's Cathedral. It is an inspiring story told in a most accessible form in this small book, which is much more attractive than its rather cumbersome title.

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Churches in the Ukrainian crisis. By Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer. Pp. xviii + 225 incl. 4 figs. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. £70. 978 3 319 34143 9
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This book consists of essays based on contributions to a conference on 'The Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis' held in November 2014. But the ground covered is far more extensive than the question of how the Churches in Ukraine responded to the demonstrations at the Maidan in Kviv, and what they have done during the crisis sparked off by the Russian annexation of Crimea and the Russian-backed war in Eastern Ukraine. It begins with a lot of background information. This is reasonable, because many people will be unfamiliar with the Ukrainian religious situation. Ukraine has a high proportion of believers (Katrin Boeckh quotes a 2013 survey by the Kviv-based Razumkov Centre according to which 88 per cent of the population declared that they were believers, and only 11 per cent declared no religious affiliation). As Natalia Kochan points out, 'the Ukrainian public's trust towards the churches (60–70 per cent) has surpassed by far its trust for any other institution' (admittedly the competition is not strong). And, as Thomas Bremer explains, 'of all the successor states of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine is probably the country with the most complicated and difficult religious situation'. The Orthodox Church is split in three (the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), the Orthodox Church of the Kviv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). In addition, mainly in the west, there is the Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which follows the Orthodox rite, but accepts papal primacy. There are also Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, the Crimean Tatars form a significant Muslim presence (though many have had to flee following the Russian annexation), and there is a Jewish community.

But there is too much background here. It takes up the first two out of five parts, and quite a lot of the rest of the book. One essay, by Paul Brusanowski on 'Autocephaly in Ukraine: the canonical dimension', could have been omitted. The reader needs to know that only the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is recognised by other Orthodox Churches, and that a generally accepted Ukrainian autocephalous Church is unlikely to be achieved without Moscow's agreement. But Brusanowski spends a lot of time on, for example, the Council