

## The Surprising Eastern Connection of Pope Francis

As a Ukrainian Greco-Catholic, I am very happy about the election of Pope Francis for all the reasons that most people are happy: his humility, his simplicity, his love of the poor and disdain for careerism in the Church. But there is more, which is important for Eastern Catholics especially. A long time ago, in the 1930s, Metropolitan Andrey (Sheptytsky), who was head of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church 1901–1944, sent a group of young men to Italy to study and be formed by the Salesians of Don Bosco, so that they could return to Ukraine to do youth ministry, which is the specialty of the Salesians. World War II caught them in Western Europe, the Iron Curtain descended; the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church was banned in the USSR. The young Salesians could not return to Ukraine. It looked like Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky's plans had been thwarted. But God had other designs. The young Salesians were sent to various places in Italy, and some to Argentina. One of them, Fr. Stepan Czmil, was assigned to a high-school seminary in Argentina. There he celebrated the Divine Liturgy early every morning. One of the students, Jorge Bergoglio, served with him daily, hours before the other students would rise.

We all know what became of Jorge Bergoglio. But what happened to Fr. Czmil? After twelve years he returned to Italy and the Ukrainian Salesians opened a minor seminary in Rome, the Pontifical Minor Seminary of St. Josaphat on the Via Boccea. This high school seminary was right next door to the Collegio Santa Sophia of the Ukrainian Catholic University, where I was a seminarian. Fr. Czmil was one of our spiritual directors. I had occasion to go to confession to this holy priest. Fr. Czmil was indeed a very humble and saintly man (the process of his eventual beatification has been started) and he became a close collaborator of Patriarch Josyf Cardinal

Slipyj, the successor of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, and a confessor of the faith who spent 18 years in Siberian concentration camps because he would not renounce the pope or the Catholic Church as the Russian Bolsheviks demanded. He had been released from imprisonment in 1963 through the efforts of Pope John XXIII and President John F. Kennedy.

Patriarch Josyf trusted Fr. Czmil so much that he ordained him a bishop. In the mid-seventies things looked very dark for the Ukrainian Catholic Church. The Soviet authorities would not relent in their persecution of this Church. And Vatican diplomats seemed to be more intent on rapprochement with the Kremlin at the time than on protecting the interests of Ukrainian Catholics. Patriarch Josyf was afraid that the Ukrainian Catholic Church might be left without a hierarchy, so he decided to provide a hierarchy for the Church in Ukraine. Let us remember that the man to whom Patriarch Josyf had entrusted the leadership of the underground Church in Ukraine, Archbishop Vasyl' (Velychkovsky), had himself been imprisoned, tortured with mind-altering psychiatric drugs, and released, only to die, a broken man, in 1972. Fortunately, he had ordained Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sterniuk), who served as locum tenens until the return of Patriarch Myroslav Ivan (Lubachivsky) in 1991. It was in this climate of fear for the very future of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church that Fr. Czmil and two other men were consecrated bishops in April 1977 in the chapel of the Ukrainian Catholic Studite Monastery in Castel Gandolfo.

This was done by Patriarch Josyf Cardinal Slipyj and two co-consecrating bishops without the papal permission (apostolic mandate) in an act which caused many irritations in the Roman Curia as Roman canon law required papal permission for the consecration of a bishop, but at that time Eastern canon law did not. The other two men were Patriarch Josyf's secretary, Fr. Ivan Choma and the archimandrite of the Studite Monks, Fr. Lubomyr (Husar). The three men never spoke of the fact that they had been secretly ordained bishops, and continued to serve as priests. The Holy See refused to recognize their ordinations until 1996. By then the Soviet Union was just a bad memory and the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church had

come out of the underground after 45 years with over 5 million faithful. But Fr. Czml, the bishop of Lutsk in Ukraine, had died in 1978. He is buried in the Ukrainian Catholic Basilica of Santa Sophia in Rome. As was mentioned, in 1996 Pope John Paul II recognized all three ordinations. Fr. Lubomyr was eventually given some very important assignments and in 2001 was elected patriarch of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and named Cardinal shortly afterwards.

In September 2008, the Synod of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops, under the presidency of Patriarch Lubomyr, acceded to the request of the Salesians to begin the process of beatification for Bishop Stepan Czml. Cardinal Husar, who knew Father Czml personally, testified: "Father Stepan was so holy that his holiness did not show, it was indeed deep within him and it flowed from him, throwing its light on those who came in contact with him. [...] To speak of the reputation for holiness of Father Stepan is more than right and proper because he really was a saint."

A few months later 38-year old Fr. Sviatoslav Shevchuk was named auxiliary bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy (Diocese) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the next year he was appointed apostolic administrator of that eparchy. To whom did he turn for guidance and mentoring on episcopal ministry in Argentina? To the humble and prayerful Roman-rite Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Bergoglio, who surprised him by revealing that one of his mentors was a holy Ukrainian Catholic priest, Fr. Stepan Czml.

In March of 2011, after Patriarch Lubomyr Cardinal Husar retired, Bishop Sviatoslav was elected patriarch of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, and left his diocese in Argentina to serve at the helm of the largest of the Eastern Catholic Churches. At the preparatory meetings before the 2013 Conclave Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio came up to the 80-year old Patriarch-emeritus Lubomyr Cardinal Husar and greeted the now blind Patriarch-emeritus with the words: "Slava Isusu Khrystu!" which is Ukrainian for "Glory to Jesus Christ," the traditional Ukrainian greeting. Surprised, he asked where Cardinal Bergoglio had learned the Ukrainian greeting. Cardinal Bergoglio told him all about his mentor, Fr. Czml, and about his fami-

liarity with Eastern liturgy and spirituality. A few days later Cardinal Bergoglio was elected pope and took the name Francis. The rest is history (in the making).

Perhaps Pope Francis will himself testify in the beatification process of the humble and holy Stepan Czmil. Many people have written off Eastern Catholics again and again over the centuries, even to the point of seeing us as somehow being obstacles to Orthodox-Catholic re-union, even though our whole *raison d'être* is East-West understanding and reunification. Again and again, God has found ways of keeping the long-suffering and often martyred Eastern Catholics at the heart of His Church. The story of Pope Francis and his Ukrainian Catholic connection is just one more chapter in that amazing saga. Will Pope Francis be the one who takes the bold step of recognizing the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Patriarchate of Kyiv-Halych? Will he be the one who oversees the canonization of such figures as Metropolitan Andrey (Sheptytsky) or Patriarch Josyf the Confessor (Cardinal Slipyj)? One thing is for sure: the Lord's surprises are far from over.

One Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Bishop recently mused: "Those Roman Catholics can't do anything original these days. The head of our Church retires; the head of their Church retires. We select the next head of our Church from Argentina; they select the next head of their Church from Argentina." These seem to have been blessed moves for both parties. Let us pray that the Eastern Christian spirituality which Pope Francis imbibed in his youth, as an acolyte at the daily celebration of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, will assist him in implementing a vision of Church that truly breathes with two lungs.

Andriy Chirovsky  
Editor-in-Chief