

## Adaptation Without Assimilation: The Genius of the Greco-Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

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The events of 1646, which eventually came to be known as the Union of Uzhhorod, led to the creation of the Greco-Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo, and those of Prešov, Oradea/Nagyvárad and Hajdúdorog, which were carved out of this original ecclesiastical unit. Furthermore, the faithful of the Eparchy of Križevci and the Metropolitan Province of Pittsburgh, with its four eparchies, and the Slovak Eparchy in Canada also trace their roots to the Union of Uzhhorod. While originally these people might have identified themselves as Rusyn or as people of the "Rus' faith," over time, they accepted diverse national identities. The author focuses on this aspect as the genius of the Union of Uzhhorod, which created a Church in Carpathian Rus' which has been able to adapt to various political and socio-economic situations without losing its essence, i.e. assimilating. He examines three different

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<sup>1</sup> Originally delivered by the author as one of four keynote addresses at celebrations on April 22, 1996 in Uzhhorod, Ukraine, marking the 350th anniversary of the Union of Uzhhorod. Prof. Magocsi attended as a representative of the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia of Pittsburgh. A modified version of this paper was presented in Ottawa at the Sheptytsky Institute Colloquium, December, 1996.

approaches to the issue throughout history: those of the purists, adaptors, and assimilators. He concludes that adaptation has best served the Greco-Catholic Church with roots in the Carpathian region and suggests it as an approach for the present and future.



The year 1996 marks the anniversary of an important historical event that took place 350 years ago in the city of Uzhhorod. On April 24, 1646, sixty-three Orthodox priests made a Catholic profession of faith. That solemn proclamation eventually came to be known as the Union of Uzhhorod, which established the foundation for the Uniate Church in the Carpathian region of the former kingdom of Hungary.

The manner in which the Union of Uzhhorod came about and how it was finally secured among the population in the Carpathian region – not to mention the subsequent historical development of what became the Greco-Catholic Church with its triumphs, trials, brutal liquidation after World War II, and resurrection only a few years ago – are all part of a fascinating story. It is a story, however, which time does not permit me to elaborate upon here. Moreover, there are others more qualified than I who could tell that story better.<sup>2</sup>

Instead, what I would like to do is share with you some reflections on the historical and cultural significance of the Greco-Catholic Church for the inhabitants of the Carpathian region or, more precisely, Carpathian Rus'. These reflections, moreover, come from someone who is neither a priest nor even an adherent of

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<sup>2</sup> Among the published general histories of the Church, the most useful are Атанасій В. Пекар, *Нариси історії Церкви Закарпаття* (Rome, 1967) – revised English version: Athanasius B. Pekar, *The History of the Church in Carpathian Rus'* (New York, 1992); and the older work by Antal Hodinka, *A munkácsi görögkatholikus püspökség története* (Budapest, 1910). For details on the movement for Church Union, see Michael Lacko, *Unio Uzhorodensis Ruthenorum Carpathicorum cum Ecclesia Catholica* (Rome, 1955), published in English translation as *The Union of Uzhorod* (Cleveland and Rome, 1966).

an Eastern Christian Church, whether Greco-Catholic or Orthodox. Therefore, the following reflections are from the perspective of a religious outsider, although an outsider who has spent at least the past quarter century trying to understand the historical and cultural complexities of the East Slavic peoples living along the southern slopes and adjacent lowlands of the Carpathian Mountains.

### *Statistics and Geography*

The original Eparchy of Mukachevo to which the Union of Uzhhorod applied was geographically much larger than it is today. When, in 1771, the eparchy was proclaimed to be an independent ecclesiastical entity, it had over 800 parishes spread throughout thirteen counties in the northeastern part of the Hungarian Kingdom, territories which today are within Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania.<sup>3</sup> The size of the eparchy first began to change in 1818, with the removal of 192 parishes from its western counties to create a new Eparchy of Prešov. Five years later, 72 parishes from Szatmár county in the south were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Greco-Catholic Eparchy of Oradea/Nagyvárad, and in 1853 another 94 parishes to the Eparchy of Gherla. Finally in 1912, 68 parishes from the southwestern region of the Mukachevo eparchy were transferred to the newly-created Eparchy of Hajdúdorog. Thus, by the eve of World War I, significant parts of the original Eparchy of Mukachevo were within three neighbouring Greco-Catholic eparchies in territory that today is in Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary.

At the same time that its geographical extent decreased, the influence of the Eparchy of Mukachevo radiated far beyond its European homeland, as a result of the immigration of Greco-Catholics who carried their faith abroad. Already in the mid-

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<sup>3</sup> The actual statistical data submitted by Bishop Ivan Bradach to Rome during the 1750s reported 150,000 faithful in 829 parishes with 858 churches served by 690 priests. M. Lacko, "The Pastoral Activity of Manuel Michael Olšovský, Bishop of Mukačevo," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 27 (1961): 152-53.