

## Orthodox-Catholic Reconciliation and the Ukrainian Church<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

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The author provides an overview of the alienation and rapprochement between Ukrainian Catholics and Orthodox, relating these to similar movements among Catholics and Orthodox as a whole. He gives details of his own ecumenical initiatives, in the West as well as in Ukraine; and describes the genesis of the Kievan Church Study Group.



Later this week, the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church will assemble for a Plenary meeting at the Orthodox Seminary in Balamand, Lebanon. This is the first such Plenary meeting since 1990, and it has not been easy to gather the Commis-

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<sup>1</sup> An address to Toronto clergy, 14 June, 1993, delivered at St. Demetrius Ukrainian Catholic Church, Etobicoke.

sion for this meeting. All of us who care about the reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church should be praying fervently, upholding this Plenary before the Lord and asking God's abundant blessings upon it. And all of us should be watching with impatient interest to see what the meeting will produce.

If this dialogue, or any ecumenical effort, is going to succeed, it must involve not only the hierarchs, not only the members of Joint Commissions, and not only the church scholars – although all of these people have important work to do – but ecumenical work must involve the parish clergy and the faithful. Your concern, your involvement, your support and your commitment are absolutely necessary.

Ukraine received Holy Baptism into the Orthodox Faith from Constantinople, when Constantinople and Rome were still in communion. The schism between East and West took effect in different ways in different places at different times, and our own Church of Kiev tried for several centuries to remain neutral, perceiving that this quarrel did not concern the Ukrainians directly. This policy of “Kievan neutrality” succeeded until well after the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire in 1453. Kiev accepted the Union of Florence, and for another two generations or so continued the policy of being friendly to both Old Rome and Constantinople.

But developments beyond the control of our own Church demanded our attention. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople endured a difficult period under the Ottoman Turks after the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire, and communications with Kiev were virtually severed more than once. At that time, there was little to hope for in the way of help from Constantinople.

The political union of Poland and Lithuania, together with the rise of Muscovy, put the Kievan Church into a dangerous position. The establishment of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1589 was a serious threat, and the Kievan Church reacted by seeking help from the West, from Old Rome, in the Union of Brest in 1596.

The Union of Brest was only a partial success; the result was a division *within* our Kievan Church which persists to the present day and divides our hierarchs, our clergy, and our faithful. For about one hundred years after Brest, both sides were actively

pursuing a policy of finding a means to reunite the divided Kievan Church. But by 1700, the two sides seem to have turned their backs to one another and taken separate paths. It was not until Andrew Sheptytsky became Metropolitan that the Greek-Catholics again sought dialogue with the Ukrainian Orthodox.

After the failure of the Union of Florence, contacts continued between the Eastern and Western Churches, and in the seventeenth century relations between Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire were relatively good. But Latin missionaries began promoting “Uniate” ideas among the Arabs, the Romanians, and even the Greeks (as well as among the non-Chalcedonian Eastern Churches). In 1700 a distinct “Greek-Catholic” Church was formed in Romania.<sup>2</sup> In 1724 the Church of Antioch was divided, much as the Church of Kiev had been divided: since 1724 there have been two “Greek” Patriarchs of Antioch simultaneously, the Orthodox and the Uniate. This soured relations between Catholics and Orthodox; the Orthodox began to look on Catholics as subversive proselytizers who wanted to destroy the local Orthodox Churches and turn the faithful into Roman Catholics by degrees. The bitterness remaining from this period is still quite serious. Meanwhile, some Roman Catholics began to consider these Uniate bodies to be the “real” Eastern Churches, and to regard the Orthodox Churches as nothing more than schismatic assemblies. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were almost no authentic *ecumenical* relations, as there should be between Sister Churches, between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. A few outstanding figures on both sides realized that the practical situation did not reflect a genuine theological understanding, but they were largely isolated and ahead of their time. On ground level, the two Churches were virtually at war with one another – and it was the Greek-Catholics who usually were caught between the two sides.

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<sup>2</sup> Just as in Ukraine, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church took root only in the western part of Romania. Even there, it was a minority Church. As a result, Romanians often consider the establishment of this “union” as an effort to divide the Romanian Church and people.

Rome taught the Greek-Catholics to believe that obedience to Rome is absolutely necessary to salvation, and that “schism” from Rome is inevitably, invariably punished with eternal damnation to hell. Rome further taught the Greek-Catholics to be ashamed of their Orthodox past, their Orthodox culture, and even their Orthodox liturgy, spirituality, and discipline (to say nothing of Orthodox theology – most Greek-Catholics during that period were unaware of the existence of Orthodox theology). Real theology, real wisdom, real values of any kind, could only come from Roman Catholicism. To give only one example, a book still in print and written by a leading Greek-Catholic theological writer just before Vatican II, attempts to analyze the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom by beginning with the Council of Trent!<sup>3</sup> Such confusion is still with us, despite the progress which I shall describe.

Rome also followed a policy of keeping the Eastern Catholic Churches isolated from each other. Among the Orthodox, it is normal and frequent to exchange professors and graduate students between the seminaries of one Local Church and another: Romanians studied in Greece, Arabs studied in Ukraine, Russians taught in Serbia, and so on. Patriarchs, hierarchs, clergy, monastics, and faithful of one Local Church readily go on pilgrimages to the shrines and holy places of another Local Church. And many Orthodox frequently voice the need for still more of such contacts. Among the Greek-Catholics, there is almost nothing similar. Romania is just over the border from Ukraine, but Ukrainian Greek-Catholics seem to be unaware of the existence of the Romanian Greek-Catholics, and certainly do not sense any common interest with them. It is a strange “union” which cuts people off from those who should be their closest friends and brothers.

For all these reasons and many more – you probably know them better than I do – most Orthodox have perceived the “Unia” as a wicked deceit, and consider Greek-Catholics to be “flesh torn from the Orthodox Church.” In theory, Catholics considered

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<sup>3</sup> Meletius Michael Solovey, *The Byzantine Divine Liturgy: History and Commentary*, trans. Demetrius Emil Wysochansky (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, Inc., 1970).