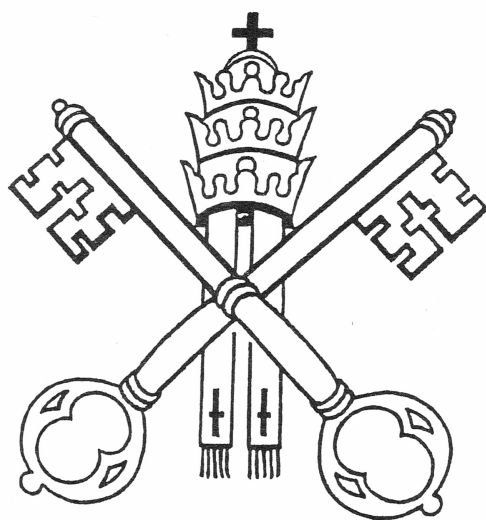


A Report for the Holy Father
Pope John Paul II
The Church in Ukraine
and the USSR - 1989



A REPORT FOR THE HOLY FATHER POPE JOHN PAUL II: THE CHURCH IN UKRAINE AND THE USSR - 1989

This report is prepared at the request of His Grace, the Most Reverend Archbishop Angelo Palmas, Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to Canada, for direct submission to the Holy Father. The facts and recommendations presented here have been elaborated and verified on the basis of direct contacts with the Hierarchy in Ukraine.

I. The present situation in Ukraine:

A. The Hierarchy.

By a special protection of God, despite the persecution the Hierarchy of the Greek-Catholic Church in the Soviet Union has remained intact, through three particular consecrations:

Bishop Theodore Romzha was able to consecrate his Vicar General, Msgr. Alexander Chira, to the episcopate before his own death at the hands of the Soviet Army.

Bishop Ivan Latyshevsky and Nicholas Charnetsky, upon their release from prison in 1956, consecrated a bishop unknown to me by name, who is now deceased, but who in turn consecrated the present Bishop of Kolomyia, Kyr Sophron Dmyterko, OSBM.

Before leaving the Soviet Union to participate in the Second Vatican Council, Metropolitan-Archbishop Joseph Slipyj (later Cardinal) consecrated Archbishop Vasyl Velychkovsky and named him to act as head of the Greek-Catholic hierarchy in the Soviet Union. In turn, before his own arrest and expulsion from the USSR, Kyr Vasyl consecrated the present Archbishop, Metropolitan Volodymyr Sterniuk, who continues to head the Synod of Ukrainian Greek Catholic hierarchs inside the USSR.

Both because of the persecution and because the existing eparchies were in any case too large and unwieldy, the existing eparchial circumscription have been modified, taking into account also the new civil delineations.

At present, the Metropolitan and six bishops have emerged from concealment and allowed their names to be made known. These include the chief hierarch of the Synod and Archbishop of Lviv, Metropolitan Volodymyr Sterniuk, C.Ss.R.; his Auxiliary Bishop Philemon Kurchaba, Bishop Sophron Dmyterko of Kolomyia, Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk of Ivano-Frankivsk (formerly called Stanislaviv) Bishop Ivan Semedi of Mukachevo-Uzhorod, Bishop Pavlo of Transcarpathia, and the Auxiliary Bishop Ivan Margitich of Transcarpathia. Other bishops remain unannounced because of the danger of arrest of those whose names are known.

The Metropolitan Volodymyr Sterniuk, Archbishop of L'viv and Ruling Hierarch of the Halych Metropolia, enjoys a special respect and authority, both because of his position (in that he traces his mission and consecration directly from Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, Metropolitan Joseph Slipyj, and such a

line is of great importance in the Eastern Churches - and because of his personal prestige (he was among the first Ukrainian Redemptorists, having trained in Belgium and received his theological doctorate there; he was ten years in prison for the Catholic Faith; he is a very well-known preacher and confessor). Despite his advanced years (83), he governs the Church with a firm and sure hand. Even among Ukrainian Catholics abroad, his word enjoys the highest esteem.

B. Church properties and finance - de iure sovietico, all church properties and assets were confiscated in 1946; since the Greek-Catholic Church has no legal existence in the eyes of the Soviet authorities, it is unable even to have bank accounts or conduct ordinary business transactions.

However, the faithful are extraordinarily generous to the Church. Metropolitan Volodymyr has made it clear that the hierarchy does not want and will not accept financial subsidies from outside the Soviet Union; they do not need it; it is necessary for the clergy to live in close unity with the faithful, rather than being funded from abroad, and to accept money from abroad could seriously compromise the Church. Church funds are normally held in secret ways by the Bishops and their agents.

Obviously, when the Church regains legal status, the question of the confiscated properties will arise at once. Most difficult is the matter of actual church buildings (the Divine Liturgies and other services are presently held in the open air, or in private homes). Approximately one-half of the churches, which were functioning Greek-Catholic churches in 1946, are now in the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church - the rest are considered "closed" by the government - although the people gather there to pray and sometimes Greek-Catholic priests are able to conduct services in these buildings.

Metropolitan Volodymyr has expressed a willingness to permit the sharing of churches in villages where there is only one building and where there are groups of the faithful desiring both Greek-Catholic and Russian Orthodox services.

In other places, the church must have the legal right to construct new church buildings to accommodate the faithful.

In the large cities, of course, the Greek-Catholic Church must have its own church buildings, of a sufficient size and number to accommodate the numerous faithful. Church buildings of special historic or artistic interest are liable to be a matter of some contention (this is particularly true in the case of the Cathedral Churches - such as Saint George's Cathedral in Lviv, which contains the relics of Andrew Sheptytsky - and the Assumption Church in Lviv). On the other hand, in the large cities there are a number of church edifices formerly used by Roman Catholics and Protestants which are now unused; if these could be given to either the Orthodox or the Greek-Catholics to replace whichever of the original churches would be given to the other party, at least the practical situation might thus be alleviated.

C. *Monastic and paramonastic communities*

There is a rich diversity of monastic and paramonastic life among the Greek-Catholics, including the Studites (who follow a strict monastic tradition), the Basilians (both of these orders have both men and women members - in separate communities, of course), the Redemptorists (who have only men) and communities of Sisters: the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate (who are more numerous) and the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent. These last are also the most recent; they were brought to Lviv by Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky to form a community of Ukrainian nursing sisters, and they have flourished very well. For complicated reasons, they have managed to remain in possession of their convent building.

D. *Education of the clergy*

Metropolitan Volodymyr Sterniuk supervises this matter very closely. In the absence of a recognized Seminary, he has gathered a faculty of learned priests with theological doctorates and requires all candidates for the priesthood to undergo a four-year course of study and then to pass examinations before the candidate may be accept for Holy Orders. To facilitate this process, the Metropolitan and his associates in this work have compiled textbooks in the various ecclesiastical sciences and translated them into Ukrainian. The Metropolitan regrets that he found it impossible to demand sufficient fluency in Latin from the candidates, and thus has been forced to resort to conducting theological education in the vernacular.

E. *The laity*

By estimates which are careful and conservative - and in general accepted orally by even the Soviet authorities and Russian Orthodox interested parties - the Greek-Catholic Church has about five million faithful in Western Ukraine, and another two million in other parts of the country (the reasons for this growth in other parts of the USSR will be discussed below). To have remained faithful to the Church during more than forty years of persecution witnesses to the splendid Christian heroism of these people.

In particular, there is a striking loyalty and attachment of young people to the Greek-Catholic Church, manifested by an unswerving determination to achieve the restoration of legal rights to the Greek-Catholic Church, and by the large numbers of young people with vocations to the priesthood and the monastic life, as well as the general thirst for prayer-books, Bibles, catechism, and religious literature.

F. *Transcarpathia* is the south-western most section of Ukraine and very strongly Greek-Catholic by inheritance and by conviction, with some important local traditions.

Among the particularities of Transcarpathia, there is a significant Hungarian-speaking community, and some of these people are also Greek-Catholics, who need to have divine services in their own language. Before World War I, Transcarpathia belonged to the Hungarian Crown, and there are still many contacts with Hungary (which is just across the border).

G. Greek-Catholics in other parts of the country:

Even before the persecution began, there were already Greek-Catholics outside the stronghold of Western Ukraine, and Exarchates were erected for Great Ukraine, Russia, Siberia, and Bielorussia. But the number of the faithful has increased greatly since World War II, because the demographic changes within the Soviet Union have encouraged people to move to different parts of the country, and because the Greek-Catholic Church enjoys great prestige among the general population of the USSR because this Church has not compromised with the atheists. Several regions deserve special mention:

1. *Siberia* - like the Tsar, the Communists have used Siberia as a place to exile and imprison persons and even communities whom the government wants "out of the way". Many Ukrainians - numbering into the hundreds of thousands - were deported here by Stalin. Many died, some returned to their homes, but many remained and established families, so that now there is a substantial Greek-Catholic population. The deportees included many bishops, priests, and monastics, so there was no special difficulty in organizing pastoral care; the graves especially of the bishops, who died as martyrs and confessors, are places of great popular devotion.
2. *Kazakhstan* - the same situation as that of Siberia; Bishop Alexander Chira of Transcarpathia was deported to Kazakhstan, and served faithfully there for decades, ordaining many priests. He lived far longer than the other imprisoned bishops, and as he was dying sent a most edifying message to the Holy Father, concluding with the words of Daniel O'Connell: "I leave my soul to God, my body to my homeland - but my heart I leave to Rome!"
3. *Belorussia* is a most urgent situation. The Tsars suppressed the Greek-Catholic Church here in 1839, but the Greek-Catholic tradition persisted. In the years just after World War I, Exarch Leonid Feodorov was able to organize parishes, and the people wanted many more, but the Stalin persecution of the nineteen-thirties destroyed them. Most recently, in the "perestroika" period, there is a massive demand by the faithful for the restoration of the Greek-Catholic Church in Bielorussia. This is a country of ten million people, where the future belongs to whichever church will preach the Gospel and celebrate the Mysteries in the Bielorussian language with respect for the Bielorussian tradition. The Orthodox Church has been completely annexed to a Muscovite

identity, and the Roman Catholic Church is completely polonized - to the point of publishing prayers written in Polish in the Cyrillic alphabet.

The people want the Greek-Catholic Church; already Orthodox parishes have declared themselves Greek-Catholic. They must be given adequate and sympathetic pastoral care at once.

4. *Moscow and Leningrad* are also special cases. These two capital cities have a population explosion, with a disproportionately high percentage of Ukrainians, many of whom are Greek-Catholic and who desire and need pastoral care. At least three congregations with priests are functioning in Leningrad and at least one in Moscow; there is need for much more (in Moscow alone there are over a million Ukrainians; at least ten percent are Greek-Catholic, and obviously one parish cannot serve a hundred thousand faithful).

5. *Russian Greek-Catholics*. There is an outstanding heritage of Greek-Catholicism among ethnic Russians, particularly in Moscow and Leningrad, and these people also are demanding the restoration of their parishes. At the moment, they have no priests, but they have several candidates for ordination (including Mikhail Anashkin, presently a student at the Roman Catholic seminary in Riga). Obviously they must be served - particularly as there are also many people and clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate who wish to join them. And they must not simply be told to merge with the existing Ukrainian communities; this would offend both the Russians and Ukrainians and do harm to the Catholic cause in general.

The grave of Vladimir Soloviov at the Novodievichy Cemetery in Moscow is venerated as a holy place by the Russian Catholics. They are also anxious to restore the veneration of the grave of Exarch Leonid Feodorov at Viatka (now called Kirov).

II. Options offered by the Soviet Government:

The "illegalization" of the Greek-Catholic Church in the Soviet Union is itself an unlawful act, contrary to international treaties accepted by the USSR, the Holy See, and other states, contrary to the Soviet Constitution, and contrary to the relevant Soviet legislation on religion. And in fact the persecution has not only failed to destroy the Greek-Catholic Church; the Church has emerged with renewed strength and numbers. There is no serious possibility that a renewal of open persecution would wipe out the Greek-Catholic Church now - if even Stalin was unable to do that, Gorbachov would certainly not be able to do it.

Nevertheless, the government has still not recognized the inevitable. Instead, they offer suggestions to the Greek-Catholics which might be summed up or epitomized thus: "those who are strongly attached to the Catholic Church may attend the existing Roman Catholic Churches in Ukraine; those who are strongly

attached to the liturgical tradition may attend the existing Russian Orthodox Churches in Ukraine."

Neither of these options is acceptable to the Greek-Catholics.

To attend the Roman Catholic Churches is to accept the failure of the very idea of Church Union; for four hundred years, since the Union of Brest, the Holy See has consistently promised that the Ukrainian Greek-Catholics will not become Roman Catholics. And as a practical matter, there are less than fifty Roman Catholic parishes in the entire Ukrainian Republic; they could not accommodate five million faithful. There is no Roman Catholic hierarchy anywhere in Ukraine - not even a deanery - and the existing Roman Catholic pastors frequently approach the Greek-Catholic bishops for dispensations and so on, since there are no other Catholic bishops. The existing Roman Catholic parishes are all either Polish or Hungarian; to attend them is to abandon the Ukrainian (or Russian) ethnic identity - and this the Greek-Catholic faithful absolutely will not do. Furthermore, the Greek-Catholic faithful strongly venerate the martyrs and confessors who have witnessed to the Church during the persecution, and they would regard any abandonment of the specific Greek-Catholic ecclesiastical identity and tradition as a betrayal of those martyrs and confessors.

To attend the Russian Orthodox Churches would present a similar set of problems. Obviously it means a rejection of the Union of Brest which is a strong element in the Faith of the people, and which the Holy Father himself reinforced in connection with the Millennium observances. For the Catholic Church even to appear to abandon these people to the Russian Orthodox Church would give the semblance of a betrayal without parallel in Christian history.

In addition, the problem of identity is not addressed by the Russian Orthodox option; the vast majority of the Greek-Catholic faithful are strongly attached to their Ukrainian identity, and are fully aware that the Russian Orthodox Church in practice rejects the Ukrainian identity and does not permit any distinctively Ukrainian religious expression, contrary to the unanimous tradition of the Christian East.

As a result, nobody will accept either the Roman Catholic Church or the Russian Orthodox Church as a viable alternative; the demand for the restoration of legal rights to the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR will continue to intensify.

III. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and Christian Unity

The author of this report is a founding member of the North American Academy of Ecumenists, and still very active in the ecumenical movement, particularly the search for unity between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. He is strongly of the opinion that the ongoing persecution of the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR is one of the most important obstacles to Catholic-Orthodox rapprochement - and there is no lack of hierarchs, clergy, and laity in

the Moscow Patriarchate, who agree with this evaluation, and who wish to see this persecution ended by the restoration of legal rights to the Greek-Catholics.

A striking example of this convergence of views occurred at the funeral of Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress Zita of Austria, who was also Apostolic Queen of Hungary, Queen of Galicia, and so forth. As the Ukrainians, particularly the Greek-Catholic Ukrainians, have a long standing attachment to the Habsburg Imperial House, this writer traveled to Vienna to take part in the state funeral.

There he met with Metropolitan Ireneus of Vienna, Acting Patriarchal Exarch for Central Europe (Moscow Patriarchate). A year ago, Metropolitan Ireneus summoned a press conference and stated that the suppression of the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR in 1946 was accomplished only by state power, that the Greek-Catholic Church continues to exist in the USSR, and that the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR is entitled to the same legal rights as any other religious body. To stress his point, Metropolitan Ireneus has twice conducted services together with Greek-Catholic clergy.

The day after this press conference, Metropolitan Ireneus was summoned to Moscow to appear before Patriarch Pimen, who upbraided him for speaking about the Greek-Catholics; Patriarch Pimen told Metropolitan Ireneus that it is forbidden to speak about the Greek-Catholic "problem" in public. The Patriarch of Moscow also told Metropolitan Ireneus that the Soviet Government and the Russian Orthodox Synod have taken a joint decision to enter into direct negotiations with the Vatican on the matter of the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR.

IV. Support for the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR from Ukrainian Greek-Catholics in the Diaspora

The Church in the USSR looks to the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic ecclesiastical circumscriptions in other countries for important moral support. In the last eighteen months, three Ukrainian Catholic Bishops from the West have visited Ukraine: Kyr Ivan Prashko of Melbourne, Australia; Kyr Andrew Sapeliak of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Kyr Isidore Borecky of Toronto, Canada. Priests and lay people have also visited more frequently in the last two years, and these fraternal visits are of high importance in bringing new courage to the Church in the USSR. For that matter, the experience of the heroic faith of Greek-Catholics in the Soviet Union is bringing new courage to the Church in the Diaspora.

It is now possible to send letters back and forth to the Hierarchy and clergy and laity in the Soviet Union, and sometimes even telephone calls can be placed successfully. These forms of contact provide an essential life-line, to reassure the persecuted Greek-Catholics of the Soviet Union that they are not all forgotten.

Bibles, prayer-books, catechetical materials (including audio-visual aids) are very much needed by the Church in the USSR, and are not available at any price in that country. Eparchies of the Ukrainian Catholics in the Western countries are organizing large-scale shipment of these items to the Greek-Catholics in

the USSR. Most recently it has become possible to send chalices and other necessities of liturgical worship; this work also is being organized.

The Greek-Catholics in the Soviet Union are not at all anxious to accept gifts without giving in return; the bishops and priests from the West, who have visited the USSR, have been overwhelmed with the very valuable presents which the hierarchy, clergy and faithful of the Greek-Catholic Church lavish upon their guests. Most often these gifts consist of ecclesiastical handcrafts such as embroidered vestments or hand-carved crosses and the like, which are either prohibitively expensive or completely unobtainable in the West. Often the bishops in the USSR try to give monetary payment for the religious materials they receive from the West - but for legal reasons this should not be accepted.

V. Moral Support for the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR from the Apostolic See

The first and most important point is the matter of formal recognition of the Greek-Catholic hierarchy in the Soviet Union, which would take the form of listing the bishops and so forth in the *Annuario Pontificio*. Earlier this was not done for fear of endangering the bishops, but now that everyone knows perfectly well who the bishops are and where to find them, it will be much better for them to have all the usual marks of recognition from the Holy See. They should also be sent all the usual circulars, correspondence, and so on.

As the Holy See is a signatory to the international agreements on freedom of religion, it is entirely proper for the Holy See to continue to make strong, ever more intense representations to the Soviet Government in support of the effort to obtain the restoration of legal rights to the Greek-Catholic Church in that country.

To raise the level of international awareness of the situation of the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR, the Holy Father might benevolently consider the possibility of an Encyclical or Apostolic Letter on the subject (this has been done under similar circumstances on previous occasions by Pope Pius XII and Pope Gregory XIV).

Regular reporting of Greek-Catholic events in the USSR over Vatican Radio, in the *Osservatore Romano*, and so on would be most welcome.

Vatican representatives and other Catholic delegations visiting the Soviet Union (which happens very frequently) should be encouraged to visit Lviv if possible, and in any case to insist on meetings with the Greek-Catholic bishops in the Soviet Union.

There is as yet no Vatican diplomatic representation to the Soviet Government. However, it might well be possible for the Holy See to arrange to send Apostolic Visitor to the Soviet Union with the express purpose of verifying the situation of the Greek-Catholics. Since the Soviet Government used to claim (and some official representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate still claim) that the Greek-Catholic Church does not exist, it would be difficult for the Soviet Gov-

ernment to deny the Holy See an opportunity to see the situation at first hand. With careful planning, such a Visitor might be present on the occasion of one of the great feast days or pilgrimages, such as the annual pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Holy Theotokos at Zarvanytsia.

