

At this time when the Ukrainian Church readies itself solemnly to commemorate the millennium of the official entry of the Ukrainian people into Christendom, there is a development in the Catholic Church which is of great importance to Ukrainian Catholics and of which cognizance on a church-wide scale has yet to be taken. It has been clarified that the Ukrainian Catholic Church, alongside other Eastern Catholic churches, is not a simple part of the Catholic Church of Rome but an associated church, parallel and of equal standing in law, to the Roman or Latin Church.

It is appropriate that we should become aware of this newly evolved factor, draw the proper conclusions and place it into the consciousness of all members of the Ukrainian Church, the bishops, clergy, religious and the faithful, and that we do everything possible that this understanding take hold also in the minds and actions of the members of the numerically preponderant Latin Church.

## I. The Eastern Catholic Communities are Churches

In connection with Vatican II Catholic theologians and canonists had to formulate new concepts or clarify old ones, among others also those that delineated the relationship of the Eastern churches toward the Universal Church, especially in respect to the various categories of the groupings in the church, such as parishes, dioceses, ecclesiastical provinces, patriarchates, major archiepiscopates, etc. Once it had been decided that all baptized persons belong to the church, though in various degrees of communion, including the Eastern non-Catholics and the Protestants, the problem was how to conceive these subdivisions of the church, as regional, national, provincial or particular churches. It became soon clear that the Eastern Catholic churches constituted a class of its own, not to be equated with any of the parts of the Roman or Latin Church.

The Decree on Ecumenism and the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, both promulgated on the same day, November 21, 1964, are the documents of Vatican II which clearly state both for the Eastern Orthodox as well as for the Eastern Catholic communities that they are churches in the same meaning as the Latin Church is. **Unitatis Redintegratio**, the Decree on Ecumenism, has a separate chapter on the "Special Position of the Eastern Churches" (Art. 14—18), in which it is stated:

"To remove any shadow of doubt, then, this sacred Synod solemnly declares that the Churches of the East, while keeping in mind the necessary unity of the whole Church, have the power to govern themselves according to their own disciplines, since these are better suited to the temperament of their faithful and better adapted to foster the good of souls. Although it has not always been honored, the strict observance of this traditional principle is among the prerequisites for any restoration of unity."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the Council affirms the right of these churches to govern themselves, acknowledges that this "power" (**facultas**)<sup>2</sup> had not received recognition, but that henceforth the observance of this principle is an implied condition in any attempt at restoring unity in the church. If this is said of the Eastern non-Catholic churches in view of a possible union in the future, it must apply also to the Eastern Catholic churches of today.

**Orientalium Ecclesiarum**, the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, is clearer on the question of the subdivisions of the Universal Church. Art.2 states:

"That Church, Holy and Catholic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful... combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or rites."<sup>3</sup>

That this is not spoken only of the Eastern churches, but includes also the Western church or churches, is said in Art.3: "Such individual Churches, whether of the East or of the West...". The Council continues to say of them that they are "of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others by reason of rite. They enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligation..."

The recognition of the character of true churches of the various Eastern Catholic communities, side by side with the Latin Church, was given a legal formulation in the ongoing codifications. That of the Latin Church has already appeared in the **Revised Code of Canon Law** (RCIC) of 1983, while the corresponding code for the Eastern Catholic churches (RCICO) is still in the process of being drafted. From these documents it is now evident that the Universal Catholic Church, headed by the bishop of Rome, the Successor of St. Peter, and known to us under the title of "Pope" (from the Greek papas, "father"), is actually a communion of churches (**communio ecclesiarum**), Latin and various Eastern ones. Each of these churches is a Christian community in its own right, comprised of a hierarchy and faithful. These churches are bound together in the Catholic unity by the Vicar of Christ, the Pope of Rome :

"The holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government. They combine into different groups, which are held together by their hierarchy, and so form