

Eye on Washington by Stanley Ezrol

Russian priests pray for U.S. disarmament

One hundred peacelovers from the World Council of Churches gathered at Georgetown University's Intercultural Center May 19 to hear Soviet Metropolitan Juvenaly and other Russian church leaders deliver a solemn plea for the West to lay down its nuclear arms.

Juvenaly, a leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, is also Vice President of the Society for Friendship with the United States. He came to Washington with a delegation of Russian religious leaders, to spread the word that the Reagan administration's beam-weapon defense program is a devilish plan that threatens world peace.

The Russian delegation was warmly introduced by Canon Michael Hamilton of the Washington Episcopal Cathedral, with the words: "You no doubt fear this administration's plans to develop abilities to fight nuclear war in space." Hamilton added that a new Commission of Inquiry had been formed by the Episcopal Church to study nuclear arms policy and "whether there should be new forms of political loyalty, perhaps no longer to a nation state, but perhaps to some new form of world-wide government."

The Russians nodded in agreement, no doubt contemplating the day that Moscow would become the center of a Third and Final Roman Empire.

Lest anyone naively assume that Russia's bearded priests represent a Christian threat to the communist state bureaucracy, listen to the words of Alexei Bichkov, of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Baptist Christians:

Bichkov said that he found "offensive" the remarks of some at the conference that the Soviet government had "aggressive intentions," violated human rights, and the insinuation "that

of course the Soviet people are good, but their government is not as good as their people." Bichkov insisted that "we recognize as a reality and a blessing that God has ordained us to live in the country in which we live. . . . The Central government, as a rule, promptly corrects any violations of human rights."

Metropolitan Juvenaly began his homily with the irrefutable observation that "the Bible does not contain even a single text on the subject of nuclear annihilation." Then he came to the support of Robert S. McNamara, Gerard Smith, and other U.S. advocates of a No First Use of nuclear weapons policy: "It is necessary to reject the very idea of a nuclear war. . . . It is impermissible under any circumstance whatever to use nuclear arms. No First Use is the only practical and reasonable position."

Referring to the U.S. Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter endorsing the nuclear freeze, Juvenaly rejected its backing of the McNamara-Kissinger doctrine of "deterrence." "You mean deterrence against the Soviet Union! . . . You mention the 'Soviet threat,' and 'Soviet ambitions for hegemony.' . . .

such conditions, the possession of nuclear weapons is acceptable. This position is diametrically opposed to ours and we cannot agree."

The Metropolitan proceeded to read a list of the "peace initiatives" submitted by the Soviet government over the last 40 years, including a pledge to forego the first use of nuclear weapons.

No first strike policy?

Juvenaly then put on his marshal's stars and delivered the following attack on NATO and the United States:

"The policy of the Reagan administration is, we can judge, the attempt to achieve strategic superiority over the Soviet Union. A clear example of that is the deployment of first-strike weapons in a number of countries of Western Europe.

"The NATO understanding of deterrence is to achieve supremacy over the socialist countries. This will eventually lead to retaliatory action on the part of the Soviet Union. . . . The policies of the Soviet Union are always to achieve a balance of forces for mutual security. . . . It is always NATO which introduces new types of arms. . . . The initiative was always on the U.S. side, while the Soviet Union was always forced to develop these weapons. . . . The military doctrine of the Soviet Union does not contain the concept 'First Strike.' . . . NATO recognizes the possibility of nuclear war. The Soviet Union believes such a war is impermissible."

Juvenaly debunked the idea that NATO is a defensive alliance. "Defensive from whom? In 1949 my country had just emerged from a terrible war. . . . This alone speaks for itself. Can anyone seriously speak of a Soviet threat when NATO was founded? . . . It was not until six years later that the Warsaw Pact was formed, when Germany, from whose wounds our country was just barely recovering, joined NATO."

Another conference speaker was Alexei Osipov, a professor at the Moscow Theological Academy, who outlined the Russian Orthodox Church's activities in support of "peace," including such events as a March 1983 conference which called for an "Outer Space without Weapons." The conference resolved that "not a single person will feel secure if the plans for placing weapons in outer space are implemented."