

The Ukrainian Catholics: 'Achilles Heel' of Moscow's Third Rome

by Oksana Polishchuk

Behind the ongoing Jubilee spectacle in the Soviet Union lies the truth that the Russian Orthodox Church, whether it was under the czars or under Soviet tyrants Lenin, Stalin, and their successors, has been responsible for the persecution of non-Russian nationalities and religions. This has proved to be the most vicious persecution of Christians since the Roman emperors' assault on the Christians. Persecution of non-Russian Orthodox religious communities continues to this day under Gorbachov. The Millennium celebration provides a platform from which to promote his *glasnost* campaign, trying to persuade the West that the persecutions, sufferings, and murder of Christians are a thing of the past.

As a state church of a totalitarian empire, the Russian Orthodox Church has fully endorsed that state's suppression of "competing" religions—Roman Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish. The ROC has never done anything—not even a gesture of protest or displeasure—against Moscow's persecution of Protestant Christians in the Baltic Republics of Latvia and Estonia, nor the massive Russification of the Baltic region. The same is true concerning the decades-long relentless persecution of the Protestant parishes of the ethnic German population of the Soviet Union—since Stalin's August 1941 mass deportation of the Volga Germans, now living mostly in Central Asian Kazakhstan and in Siberia. This is the conduct of an imperial church, not very Christian, and, for that matter, not very Orthodox either; it does not even tolerate the existence of non-Russian *Orthodox*, as its complicity with the Communist regime in the obliteration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has proven.

The two Ukrainian churches, Catholic and Orthodox, exist clandestinely in the Ukraine today, and many of their believers suffer persecution at the hands of the occupying Soviets.

What the Soviet "glasnost machine" has been covering up, is the fact that the number of non-Russian political-religious prisoners released has been disproportionately low, despite the fact that they comprise the vast majority of known political prisoners in the U.S.S.R. This glaring inconsistency has been all but completely overlooked by the Western media. It is clear that so-called "openness" has its limits, that religious "dissenters," especially Ukrainian Catholics, the national rights campaigners among the captive nations of the Russian empire, and Jewish refuseniks are not to be among

those who will be released.

These facts, which underscore the fraud of the "Russian Millennium," are, with few exceptions, rarely expounded in the Western media today. The history of the Ukraine provides a lesson for all those in the West stupid enough to believe Moscow's siren song of the East-West "common European House."

Baptism of Kievan Rus

A simple look at history will show that the Muscovites (the original name for the Russians) have no right to celebrate the Millennium, let alone declare for themselves the sole right to celebrate it. Only in 1147 did Moscow begin to be mentioned in the Chronicles of the Middle Ages. It is ironic that the same Russian hierarchy—state and church—that is now with such ceremony celebrating a "Millennium," acknowledges 1147 as the founding of Moscow. In September 1987, there were huge celebrations in Moscow commemorating its 840th anniversary. In the subsequent nine months, a "New Math" has been born. Miraculously, $840 + 1$ now = 1,000.

Kievan Rus was the name given to the political formation uniting the Eastern Slavs, the Ulychi, Poliany, Silveriany, Drevliany, et al., who existed in those times, occupying a greater part of what is now the Ukraine and the North European part of Russia. The adoption of Christianity played an important part in the development of the area from a pagan culture to a highly organized proto-Western culture, with the help of the Carolingian "drive to the East" campaign of Emperors Otto I, II, Henry II, and Frederick Barbarossa from the West, competing with the Eastern influence from Byzantium.

It is noteworthy that, despite the Great Schism of 1054, when Kiev was part of the Orthodox world until the Kievan state collapsed in 1135, and through to the Mongol invasions, extensive relations were maintained with the Catholic states of Western Europe. From 988 until 1200, of 73 royal marriages of Kievan rulers, 60 were conducted with Catholic princes, princesses, and kings, and only 13 with rulers of Byzantium.

Russia is the modern name for the Muscovy state, whose center was, and still is, Moscow, and which has existed for 840 years. Christianity was adopted by Prince Vladimir (in

Ukrainian, Volodymyr) in 988 in Kiev, the capital of the Kievan state which is now known as the Ukraine. At the time, the Western and Eastern Churches were still at least formally united. To refer to Kiev's baptism as an "Orthodox" triumph, is a gross historical inaccuracy.

It is doubly absurd for Russia to celebrate the adoption of Christianity, as the state of Muscovy (and the Russian Orthodox Church later) was formed precisely because it rejected the new Christian religion of the Kievan state and the culture and social codes associated with it. Russia is desperate to claim Ukraine's early history as its own. The Muscovite historiography is designed to suppress the historical truth that, in reality, the Kiev and Moscow branches of the Church for the Eastern Slavs waged a centuries-long war over the question of unity with the Western Church.

A simple chronology of historical facts proves the point. When the Russian yoke was broken during the Mongol conquests in the 13th century, the Metropolitan of Kiev (alone among the Eastern Slav principalities) took part in the Council of Lyons in 1245, called by the Catholic Church to reunify the Western and Eastern Churches. The Mongol occupation, with Kiev's total loss of independence, brought this first effort to nought.

The striving for unity with Rome, against Moscow, never died. As the records of the 1438-39 Council of Florence document, it was Metropolitan Isidor of Kiev who signed, on behalf of the Eastern Slavs, the agreement for the unification of the Western and Eastern Churches, recognizing the primacy of the Pope, accepting the *Filioque* clause of the Creed, and creating, unfortunately only for a few years, a universal Catholic Church.

The Moscow Patriarchate itself was proclaimed as an autochthonous entity in 1448, to lead the Eastern Church resistance to the 1439 Council of Florence unification of the Western and Eastern Churches on the basis of the *Filioque* doctrine, which had been accepted by the Church in Kiev. Moscow brutally dissolved that union by jailing Metropolitan Isidor and purging the Ukrainian clergy.

When Moscow's rule loosened at the end of the 16th century, after the death of Ivan Grozny ("Ivan the Terrible") and the following "Time of Troubles," the Ukrainian Church again sought, and this time achieved, unity with Rome. Ignoring the hostility of Moscow, the Ukrainian Orthodox bishops recreated the Council of Florence unification with the Catholic Church at the Council of Brest in 1596. This Union lasted for 350 years, until 1946, when, on Stalin's orders, a Russian Orthodox Church "Council of Lvov" forcibly dissolved the Ukrainian Catholic Church. The entire hierarchy and most of the priests were either murdered, arrested, or sent to Siberian labor camps. With only a handful of exceptions, none survived. The action cannot simply be called "religious persecution." It was an act of cultural genocide against a population which has always wished to be joined with Western Europe.

For more than 30 years, the 1946 cultural genocide as a subject was more or less taboo, even in the Catholic Church. This changed totally after Karol Wojtyla became Pope in 1978.

Soon after becoming Pope, John Paul II issued a letter, *Cum superioris*, dated March 29, 1979, to Ukrainian Cardinal Slipiy, saying: "The Brest Union *to this day* retains all its ecclesiastical and religious power, whose fruits have been plentiful. *Today as yesterday, the Apostolic See attaches particular importance to that Union*" (emphasis added). No other Pope since 1946 has ever dared to say this before in public.

The Moscow Patriarchate considered the Pope's attempt to revive the Union in the Ukraine as "unpardonable." Commenting on the Pope's letter, Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev wrote in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*: "The Unions of Lyons (1274), of Florence, and of Brest" represent "a great danger to Russia . . . especially its western regions [i.e., the Ukraine] which were under the power of Catholic rulers who were endeavoring to tear [them] away from Moscow." ROC Metropolitan Nikodim of Lvov and Ternopol added: "It would be an *unpardonable sin to support the Uniate* tendencies, and it would be an unpardonable sin to support in our people hatred and fratricidal strife which the [Brest] Union had been."

One often reads today in ROC and Soviet publications how the Ukrainian Catholics were "reunited with their Mother Church" (ROC) by the Lvov Council of 1946 under Stalin, after "liberation of the Ukraine by the valorous Red Army from German fascist occupation. . . . In the united family of Soviet nations, there is no national strife between the blood-related [sic] Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian peoples."

In his March 21 Apostolic Letter *Euntes in mundum*, on the "Millennium of the Baptism of Kievan Rus," Paul II, while stressing his respect for Russian Orthodox traditions, made a point of thanking God for those other "sons and daughters" of "the Baptism administered at Kiev"—the Eastern Rite Catholics of the Ukraine and Belorussia, who are not recognized by the Moscow Patriarchate and remain illegal as a denomination in the U.S.S.R. The Pope concluded his message with the hope that recent improved relations between Rome and the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople would encourage "the Orthodox and Catholic heirs of the Baptism of Kiev, stirred by a renewed awareness of their original communion" to take up the "challenge" of ecumenism.

The fact that the Pope will never give up the goal of restoring the Ukrainian Catholic Church is of enormous significance. His policy is in the interest of the West and the captive nations under Russian rule, because it would spark a movement to ally with Western traditions and culture in the Ukraine and Belorussia, forming a potentially powerful proto-bloc of Poland, Lithuania, the Ukraine, and Belorussia, in resistance to Russian occupation. That is indeed a "can of worms" for Moscow.