
Interview: Mateo Mychajlo Havryliv

What lies ahead for Ukrainian Church?

On June 25-26, for the first time the Ukrainian Uniate (Catholics of Eastern rite) bishops, who were all consecrated clandestinely, and oppressed by one of the harshest religious persecutions of any East European nation, met with Pope John Paul II in the Vatican. Also present were the Ukrainian bishops of the diaspora. On the eve of the meeting, EIR's Maria Cristina Fiocchi met Father Mateo Mychajlo Havryliv, Superior of the Hoshiv Monastery in Eastern Ukraine, at the Monastery of the Basilian Fathers on the Aventine in Rome, and spoke with him about this historic occasion:

EIR: One of the main topics of the meeting will be the legal recognition of the Catholic Church of Byzantine rite in Ukraine and the recovery of its property. What are the obstacles to be overcome?

Havryliv: The Soviet government and the Russian Orthodox Church have recognized up to now the Catholic Ukrainian Church only in the form of groups of believers, but they refuse to recognize it as a legitimate institution. After years in clandestinity, today we are allowed to celebrate mass, administer communion, and pray together. But all our Church's property, confiscated by the state in 1946 on Stalin's orders and turned over to the Orthodox, is still denied to us. We are restructuring the churches, but we are denied their possession. Our religious orders live in monasteries which they cannot own. It is not possible to open seminaries to train new priests. Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky, the archbishop of Lvov and head of the Ukrainian Church, is not allowed to visit his flock nor to take his place in Ukraine. Our bishops don't have the means to administer their dioceses—no telephones, no Catholic publications.

EIR: Is the Catholic press banned?

Havryliv: Legally no, but in fact no religious community has the right to own a press and print papers, not to mention an eventual television or radio spot. We cannot even have a bank account. In short, we exist, but it's as if we weren't there.

EIR: During his visit to the Vatican, Gorbachov promised the Pope a rapid enactment of the new law on freedom of conscience and religious association in the U.S.S.R. How has the situation changed since their meeting?

Havryliv: The only improvement since Gorbachov's visit was the suspension of religious persecution; everything else has yet to change. Gorbachov promised that the new law on freedom for believers would be enacted; he made big promises, but so far the mountain has given birth to a mouse.

EIR: What is the attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church toward the Ukrainian Catholic Church?

Havryliv: The hierarchy is very hostile, but the believers have ecumenical feelings toward the Catholic Church. They take part in our masses and pray in our churches. In many villages Catholics and Orthodox share the same church and alternate their religious functions with different rites.

EIR: Last March the negotiations carried on by two delegations, one Orthodox, the other from the Vatican, in Leopold, to discuss questions regarding the Greco-Catholic Ukrainian Church, were broken off by Ukrainian Bishop Sterniuk. Why?

Havryliv: Because the Russian Orthodox Church spokesman wanted to be the boss and impose their viewpoint by authority, and unhappily, the Holy See's delegates, Monsignor Mursyn and Monsignor Sulik, were not adequately prepared. The two Catholic archbishops should have met the Ukrainian bishops as soon as they reached the Soviet Union to go deeply into the problems to be dealt with, but they did not. . . .

EIR: In the West there is more and more talk about the danger of a civil war breaking out in the U.S.S.R., which would follow the failure of Gorbachov's perestroika. What is your opinion?

Havryliv: I will probably surprise your readers, but even here, one has to know certain things. Perestroika is essentially an economic reorganization to permit the restructuring of the military apparatus. The Kremlin leaders are concentrating all their resources to catch up with, and eventually surpass, the Americans in the conquest of space; I refer to the strategic defense system. The true strength of the Soviet Union is the Russian Army. Gorbachov is a puppet used by the army, and when he becomes useless, they will dump him. By that I do not mean that he does not show a certain political ability, doubtless greater than his predecessors had.

EIR: How is the population experiencing this reality which is so unstable and full of uncertainty?

Havryliv: Very intensely, and also quite nervously. The people understand that Gorbachov's biggest problem is the nationalist problem, and history teaches that every Muscovite regime, from the czarist to the communist, has always resolved the nationalist problem militarily. President Bush and Mrs. Margaret Thatcher ought to reflect on this reality. We must hope and pray to God. In such an uncertain period, we should pray more.