

changes' — especially concerning the religious education of minors. He also felt that it was extremely important to build churches in

the new city suburbs of the post-war era.

MARITE SAPIETS

## The Church in Ukraine — 1988

*Greek-Catholic Bishop Isidore Borocky of Toronto visited Ukraine in September, 1988. His report is given here in a slightly abridged form.*

On the death of Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky in 1944 and the conclusion of the Second World War, the Stalin government moved to suppress the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic church. In 1945 all the bishops in Western Ukraine were arrested. In 1946 a mock 'synod' was held, virtually at gun point, which proclaimed the 'reunion' of the Greek-Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church. Since 1946 the Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine has been *de facto* illegal: in other words, the Soviet government regards the Greek-Catholic Church as an illegal assembly not entitled to the rights accorded other religious bodies.

In the early years, priests were arrested in very large numbers, along with religious and lay people. Over the past two decades, fewer priests were actually imprisoned, but arrests occurred often enough to remind everyone that no one was safe. For the last year or so, no priest has been actually imprisoned for the 'crime' of conducting Greek-Catholic worship — but instead both priests and laity have suffered heavy fines.

All of the properties and church buildings of the Greek-Catholic Church were given to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1946. In the intervening years, rather more than half of the functioning churches have

been closed to any religious use. Today slightly more than 2,000 formerly Catholic parishes are still functioning under the aegis of the Russian Orthodox Church. The faithful — and not infrequently even the clergy — of these parishes usually retain the consciousness of being Catholic and will say so readily.

'Illegal' Greek-Catholic services have been held wherever there was a priest to serve — often even without a priest. To replace the clergy who died or were killed, new priests have been ordained. Sometimes the Catholic priests are able to celebrate the Eucharist in actual church buildings which are legally considered closed, but in the great majority of cases the Divine Liturgy and other services must be held in private premises, or in the open air.

There are about five million Greek-Catholic faithful in Western Ukraine, plus a large but indeterminate number elsewhere in the Soviet Union [ . . . ]

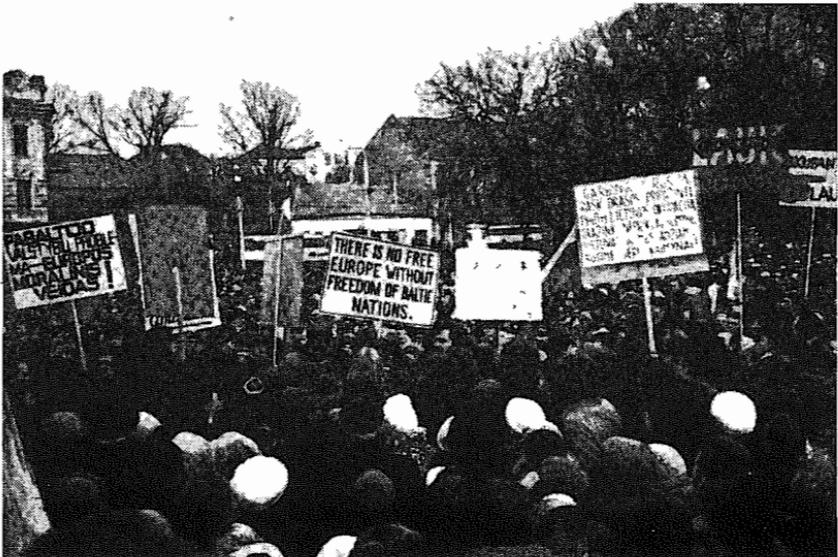
With the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev, and the whole movement of *perestroika*, hopes have risen for the restoration of equal rights to the Greek-Catholic Church (this is often referred to as the struggle for legalisation of the Catholic Church). The specific goals of this movement include a formal recognition of the church's right to exist and function, the right of the clergy to hold divine services and of the faithful to attend services without legal, social, or political repercus-



6 February 1989:  
crowds pack Gediminas Square at the reconsecration of Vilnius Cathedral.

### Recent Events in Lithuania

See *Chronicle* item on pp. 150-52.  
(Photos © Keston College)





Bishop Steponavičius at the reconsecration of Vilnius Cathedral.

## Recent Events in Lithuania

See *Chronicle* item on pp. 150-52.  
(Photos © Keston College)

Fr Tamkevičius conducts his first liturgy since release from detention.  
He was freed in October 1988 after more than five years in labour camp and exile.



sions; the right of monastic communities (which are numerous and influential) to have their community life; the right to have one or more seminaries for the education of the clergy; the right to catechise both children and adults; the right to have the traditional eparchies (dioceses) and to organise new ones, and the right to remain in full unity with the Apostolic See of Rome and the whole Catholic Church as well as the right to remain part of the organised structure of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. None of these rights is particularly controversial in most other countries.

The Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR has managed to retain its hierarchy. Because of the prudent desire to refrain from exposing the entire Catholic hierarchy to arrest, not all the bishops' names have been made known. Two of the most visible in recent years have been Archbishop Volodymyr Sterniuk, C.Ss.R., and Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk.

#### *Archbishop Volodymyr Sterniuk*

Now 82 years old, Archbishop Volodymyr is the son of a priest. He was among the early recruits to the Redemptorists from Western Ukraine; he did his novitiate and theological studies in Belgium, where he was ordained priest in 1933 by the then Greek-Catholic Bishop of Winnipeg, Canada, Kyr Basil Ladyka. The new priest then returned to Ukraine.

After the Second World War the Soviet government dispersed the Redemptorist community and told the Redemptorists to become Russian Orthodox. Together with his confrères Father Volodymyr Sterniuk declined to leave the Catholic Church; he was arrested in 1947 and spent several years in prison under conditions which are beyond description.

Upon his release he had to have work recognised by Soviet law, so he trained as a feldsher (a sort of assistant physician) and worked in that capacity until his retirement.

Consecrated to the episcopate by the late Archbishop Vasyl Velychkovsky, Bishop Volodymyr succeeded his consecrator when Archbishop Vasyl was arrested in January 1969. Archbishop Volodymyr has been first hierarch of the Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine ever since.

Archbishop Sterniuk administers what is probably the largest Catholic diocese of the Byzantine Rite anywhere in the world. Yet he lives in a very small room, with no water most of the day, three flights up from ground level. To reach the building where this residence is located, one must go through another building and pass through an enclosed courtyard where the many windows offer abundant possibilities for observers to notice who comes and goes.

The Archbishop does not go out often; his priests usually come to him. His household needs are looked after by a community of Sisters who also looked after Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky in his last years.

Archbishop Volodymyr is in remarkably good health, and his mind is quite clear. He is highly articulate, with a very temperate and calm disposition. Those who meet him often remark that he has the same broad vision of the vocation of the Greek-Catholic Church in Eastern Europe that inspired Andrew Sheptytsky and Joseph Slipyj.

When asked what sort of help or assistance the church needs in Ukraine, Archbishop Volodymyr answers at once, decisively: 'We don't need money; give us moral support!' The only tangible assistance the Archbishop asks for is religious literature — the Bible, liturgical books, catechisms, and so forth.

At the meeting which took place in Moscow on 10 June 1988 between representatives of the Greek-Catholic Church in the USSR and Cardinals Casaroli and Willebrands, Archbishop Volodymyr Sterniuk was represented by his Auxiliary, Bishop Philemon Kurchaba, C.Ss.R.

### *Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk*

Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk is about 60 years of age. He was ordained priest — after the ‘illegalisation’ of the church — by Bishop Nicholas Char-netsky, C.Ss.R., and consecrated to the episcopate in 1973 by Bishop Josaphat Fedoryk (who has since died).

Bishop Pavlo appears to be the most energetic and dynamic of all the Catholic bishops in Ukraine. He has encouraged many young candidates to the priesthood — and has done his best to see that they have an adequate theological formation — and he sets an example of zealous pastoral service that would be hard to equal anywhere in the world. He suffered two terms of imprisonment, totalling 13 years altogether, yet he seems to know no fear.

On 17 July 1988, Bishop Pavlo accomplished a great triumph, with a grand celebration of the millennium of Christianity in Ukraine at the traditional Greek-Catholic pilgrimage centre of Zarvanytsia, near Ternopil. Thousands of people attended this celebration, which seems to have caught the Soviet authorities off guard.

Those who know Bishop Pavlo often say half-jokingly that it is impossible to find the bishop, but that there is no need to worry because as soon as we need him he is guaranteed to find us! The bishop does not maintain a fixed address, and he is usually on the road visiting parishes or looking after other as-

pects of his far-flung ministry (in the prevailing conditions in the USSR diocesan boundaries are often vague). There are persons who are able to notify the bishop when visitors would like to see him, and Bishop Pavlo will soon appear in L'viv, or Odessa, or Moscow, or Leningrad, or wherever.

Bishop Pavlo is a man of irrepressible optimism, hope, and courage. His good humour and paschal joy make him marvellous company. Like Archbishop Volodymyr, Bishop Pavlo emphasises that the Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine does not need financial support from the West — and he absolutely will not accept any money whatever. (A visiting priest was once embarrassed, because someone else in the USSR had given him a sum of roubles to be given to the Greek-Catholic Church. Neither Archbishop Volodymyr nor Bishop Pavlo would accept the money. In desperation, the priest explained that it was not his own money, that he had not asked for it, and that as an obligation in conscience he had either to put it directly into the hands of Bishop Pavlo or throw it away. The bishop took the money from the priest's hands, counted it, announced that he had indeed received it — and promptly stuck every rouble in the visiting priest's shirt pocket.)

Again like the Archbishop, Bishop Pavlo stresses the importance of moral support for the Catholic Church in Ukraine. He also requests literature, and lays special emphasis on the need for Catholic materials for children.

Bishop Pavlo is an excellent, inspiring preacher and a most prayerful celebrant of the Divine Liturgy. He might perhaps be criticised for a certain confusion of some external symbols of Catholicism (which in fact do not pertain to the Byzantine-Ukrainian tradition) with adherence

to Catholicism itself — but one must add immediately that he is a man of broad, peaceful toleration with a heart full of love, far more anxious to accept than to judge.

### *The Russian Orthodox Church*

Because of the events of the past 42 years, the Russian Orthodox church now finds itself in a peculiar position. It claims rather more than 6,000 parishes in the entire USSR (except Georgia, which has its own Patriarchate); this figure is probably inflated. Slightly more than half of these parishes are former Greek-Catholic parishes in Western Ukraine.

Western Ukraine produces a large majority of vocations to the priesthood entering the three Russian seminaries currently open in the USSR (Leningrad, Zagorsk, and Odessa). Many clerics of Western Ukrainian origin have risen to important positions within the Patriarchate of Moscow (even Patriarch Pimen's secretary, Archpriest Matthew Stadniuk, who also serves as the Pastor of Theophany Cathedral in Moscow is originally from Ternopil). The parishes in Western Ukraine are large, and the people are generous to the Orthodox Church.

If legal status is restored to the Greek-Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church fears the immediate loss of nearly half of its parishes, a good many of its clergy, and an important element of its financial base. And this is no idle threat.

The problem is not only the traditional Orthodox antipathy for the *Unia*, but also the disproportionate closing of churches by the Soviets in the northern and eastern sections of the USSR — where whole eparchies have been wiped out. Until 1988 there were no convents of nuns anywhere in the Russian Federation,

while in Ukraine several flourishing Orthodox convents have managed to remain open despite the worst years of Khrushchev and Brezhnev.

So there is near panic at the Greek-Catholic resurgence. Many conscientious, clear-sighted people in the Russian Orthodox Church realise that they cannot postpone legalisation of the Greek-Catholic Church much longer in any case, and that the time has come to ask forgiveness for what happened and then get on with life. But the ecclesiastical bureaucracy cannot yet bring themselves to accept this, and they continue to issue more and more outrageous statements opposing any religious freedom for the 'Uniate' Catholics. (As only one example, a pamphlet published in 1988 in Kiev asserts that the Ukrainian Catholic Church advocates nuclear war! No citation was offered for this absurd libel.) Some sincere Russian Orthodox clergy and laity are sorely grieved by such brazen lying, but they have not yet managed to change the situation.

### *The Soviet Government*

The chief difficulty with the Soviet government is persuading it to take the issue of legalisation of the Greek-Catholic Church seriously at a level high enough to make a firm decision. The Council for Religious Affairs is not important enough to decide the matter — but petitions to higher bodies are invariably referred to the CRA, which procrastinates and produces frivolous excuses for doing nothing.

The government is reluctant to legalise the Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine, because it fears that the church will encourage the already-active nationalist movement. While that is no doubt true to some degree, it is also true that the Russian Orthodox Church is a very active

instrument of russification and Russian nationalism (although Russian culture has also suffered severely in the Soviet period); the Georgian Orthodox Church is the traditional guardian of Georgian language and culture; the Armenian Apostolic Church is the most important institution of the Armenian nation, and so forth. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church is far from unique in this regard. And in a civilised, democratic society people are penalised for law-breaking, not for the suspicion that they might break some unwritten law at some undetermined future date.

The necessity of prompt legalisation of the Greek-Catholic Church must be raised in every available public forum, particularly when representatives of the Soviet government visit western countries. Clearly, when five million Catholics have not a single church building — although

they are the lawful owners of some 5,000 edifices — there can be no serious claim to religious freedom!

The Soviet government is not likely to concede legalisation to the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church until the government is convinced that as a matter of practical politics it is cheaper to legalise the church than to maintain the persecution. The campaign will continue to rest on two pillars: the determination of the bishops, the clergy and religious, and above all the millions of faithful in the USSR who have kept the Greek-Catholic Church flourishing at the cost of amazing self-sacrifice and are not about to give up now — and the assistance of Christians and other honest persons in the West, who must not rest until the goal of full equal legal rights for Greek-Catholics in the USSR has been achieved.

ISIDORE (Borecky)