

10-1992

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Recommended Citation

Lefevere, Patricia (1992) "Orthodox - Catholic Ecumenical Developments," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 12: Iss. 5, Article 4.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol12/iss5/4>

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ORTHODOX - CATHOLIC ECUMENICAL DEVELOPMENTS

By Patricia Lefevere

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Prospects for improved relations between Roman Catholics and Orthodox believers advanced in May 1992 after what many leaders in both churches saw as one of the darkest hours in recent history for relations between the two sister churches, which have been in dialogue for more than two decades.

The new light dawned first on Orthodox Christmas, January 7, 1992, when Catholic Archbishop Francis T. Hurley of Anchorage, Alaska, was warmly received by Orthodox Bishop Arkadi in Magadan, Siberia where Hurley's previous trips had drawn criticism both locally and from the Moscow Patriarchate, headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The light of peace and reconciliation shone more brightly during the week of Christian Unity when representatives of the Croatian Catholic and Serbian Orthodox churches held three days of talks in St. Gallen, Switzerland and signed a joint communique on January 23, 1992. In it they agreed to seek just and non-violent solutions to problems between their peoples, to work for a lasting peace, to meet again and to share a common responsibility for the fate of Christianity in their newly independent states. Serbian Patriarch Pavle I also informed Rome in the Spring of 1992 of his wish to send an Orthodox delegation to the Vatican.

A further hopeful light was seen in the announcement in Constantinople that the newly-elected Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios--spiritual father of the Orthodox world--has called a meeting of all patriarchs in June, probably in Lebanon. Chief on their agenda will be the building of a harmonious climate in which to make decisions about the Catholic church. Some observers believe that such a conference could lead to an historic Orthodox Synod this millennium, which might be to Orthodoxy what Vatican Council II was to world-wide Catholic renewal.

These two ancient churches, which together count more than one billion members, have lived separately since the Tenth century; the larger Catholic body wed to Rome, its Eastern sister the bride of Constantinople. It took a "decade of love" in the 1970s for leaders of both sides to know one another, followed by a "decade of truth" in the 1980s, during which they ventured into some theological issues that impair their unity, said Brother Jeff Gross of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington.

In the light of such historic, multi-textured divisions, which involve politics, ethnicity, culture, language, and ecclesiology, observers on both sides see Catholic-Orthodox relations moving in a better way in 1992. They point especially at the release of tension felt in Rome in December where Pope John Paul had invited all European Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox bishops to a special synod on Europe--one which Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek and Romanian Orthodox chose to boycott.

In their absence Constantinople's representative, Metropolitan Spyridion Patagherghiou of Venice lambasted Rome for fostering the rebirth of the Oriental Rite Catholic Church, for treating former Communist countries as missionary lands, and for creating "parallel ecclesial structures" within these lands.

Russian and other Orthodox believers were affronted by the Vatican's appointment of five bishops--four of them ethnic Poles--to sees in Moscow, Byelorussia, Karaganda, and Novosibirsk without consultation with the Patriarchate. Many Orthodox throughout the western Soviet republics and the border states hold painful memories of discrimination against their families and church at the hands of Polish Catholics earlier this century.

Announcement of the new prelates came just days after the Patriarchate's external affairs officer, Metropolitan Kyrill, had held productive talks with Vatican officials, including the Pope, and had reported favorably on his meetings back in Moscow.

During the November 1991 visit of Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksy II to America, he raised the question of these tensions with Catholic hierarchs in Washington, DC, challenging them to be more ecumenically sensitive and consultative. One of those attending was Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert Weakland, who has co-chaired the dialogue between Orthodox and Catholic bishops in the US since 1981. In an article in America in January 1992 on the "Crisis in Orthodox-Catholic Relations: Challenges and Hopes," Weakland puts himself into Orthodox shoes and compares their distress over the competition for souls in their motherland to the concern of Latin American bishops last decade when their traditionally Catholic continent was crowded with Protestant evangelical proselytizers. Many Orthodox officials--including the Patriarch--equate Catholic evangelization in the newly independent states with efforts by fundamentalist preachers and tele-evangelists. This equation greatly wrangles Catholics working in these newly free lands, who say they are only serving

Catholics even if some of them were transplanted against their will into what were formerly Orthodox strongholds.

"In the long or even medium term, these charges will be differentiated," said the Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, ecumenical officer of the Orthodox Church in America. "But after 74 years of frequently violent and even genocidal Christianity, the sense of fragility and of the unknown is great," he said.

While Catholic-Orthodox relations in North America are viewed by all sides as healthy, it is not possible to export an ecumenical model to Eastern Europe in the same way as one can send canned meats or antibiotics. "Both churches have to find their own way," said Ukrainian Catholic Bishop Basil Losten of Stamford, Connecticut.

Many Orthodox found comfort and balance in Weakland's article and his assertion that the current situation of the Greek Catholics (or Uniates) does not represent a model for Roman treatment of the Orthodox. But Bishop Vsevolod, Ordinary of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and Canada, fears that the way Rome handles the Uniates--appointing their hierarchs, imposing celibacy, requiring adherence to a "Code of Eastern Canon Law"--portends the manner in which it would treat the Orthodox since no other model exists. What is needed to advance relations between the two sisters is an end to the 'verbal and psychological violence' and the propaganda on both sides that poisons relations, Bishop Vsevolod said. An end to the appointment of Polish clergy to work in these newly free churches would also help, he said, as would the translation into the vernacular and study of the documents of theological dialogue between the two church bodies in order that their understanding may be assimilated into the life of the churches at the grassroots.

Unlike some in the interreligious movement, Atonement Brother Bill Martyn, who is ecumenical officer for the New York Catholic Archdiocese welcomed the airing of tension. "Healthy tension is good. There's a new openness. We're moving in the right direction when we talk about people and their feelings."

Full communion between Christian denominations will occur like the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe--"a great leap forward just when it is least expected," according to the Vatican's highest ecumenical officer, Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy. The cardinal, a 67-year-old Australian, who is president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, is a passionate spokesman for church unity as well as a realist who has stated that when the day of unity dawns "it will be a gift from God and it will come in his good time." Legislating church activity, settling for common prayer and social service will not

hasten ecumenical progress, but could in fact hamper it, Cassidy told an ecumenical forum in Rome last May. The Cardinal has said that the work of Christian unity cannot be left for "an elite group of specialists" and commissions, but must become the "journey" of every Christian-- a journey of personal conversion, he said, requiring a change of heart and a recognition that other Christians are one's brothers and sisters.

Although he has just marked his second year as Unity director, Cassidy brings more than three decades of diplomatic skills to his post. With a global background Cassidy is an ideal choice to deal with two of the thorniest areas of ecumenism in recent years: relations between Rome and the Orthodox churches and between the Vatican and Jewish groups. During the past two years, he has often jetted between Rome, Moscow, Kiev and other outposts of the newly-freed states of Eastern Europe trying to ease tensions arising from the legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, which Stalin outlawed in 1946 and whose churches were destroyed or given to the Orthodox.

The cardinal authored a set of recommendations designed to normalize relations between Eastern Rite Catholics (or Uniates) and the Orthodox, and he helped to set up a commission on which the Vatican, the Moscow Patriarchate (administration of the Russian Orthodox Church) and the local churches of the Ukraine were represented. Although talks have broken down from time to time and ugly scenes of name-calling and propaganda-leafletting have occurred on both sides with the return of the churches--long used by the Orthodox--to their Catholic owners, Cassidy has worked diligently to ease anxieties and suspicions in the region. Interviewed by this reporter in Canberra, Australia in February 1991, the prelate noted that the church handovers had been conducted by local government authorities and not through ecclesiastical channels. "It is not our desire that the Orthodox be left with no churches," he said at this interview. In an area where emotions run high and where ethnic, cultural, political, nationalistic, and religious divisions have long existed, there has not been a history of cooperation and little ecumenical experience, he noted. "Not all Catholics are saintly people," he said with a smile. "But our church didn't have the chance to form them (the Uniates). They were mainly formed by the Orthodox . . . who felt they'd practically eliminated the Catholics (in the former Soviet Union), he said.

Cassidy won recognition for helping to restart talks with Jewish religious officials after a three-year interruption. Official dialogue between the Vatican and the Jews had broken down in protest of the presence of a Carmelite convent at the former Nazi death camp of Auschwitz and as a result of Pope John Paul's meetings with Palestine Liberation Organization head Yasser Arafat and with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, who had been accused of Nazi atrocities. Cassidy's call in September 1990 for Christians to make an "act of repentance" for allowing a place for anti-Semitism in their thoughts and practices drew praise

from Jews as did his meeting that same month with Jewish leaders in Czechoslovakia which smoothed the way for resumption of dialogue.

In the face of disillusionment and frustration at the pace of the church's ecumenical activity, Cardinal Cassidy has proscribed patience, faith, and an understanding of "just how far we have actually come." Speaking in May 1991 at Rome's Centro Pro Unione, an ecumenical center run by the Atonement Friars, Cassidy said that Catholics must not abandon the search for a community of faith and settle instead for doing charitable and social justice work ecumenically. While these tasks remain important, it is "a unity in the profession of faith," which is the only basis for full communion and for the oneness for which Christ prayed, he said.

The word "ecumenism" does not exist in the Soviet Far East. When Archbishop Francis T. Hurley of Anchorage, Alaska, asked people in the Siberian port city of Magadan what the word meant to them, they answered: "We seek the least common denominator." Archbishop Hurley was not sure just what they meant or what he himself sought in the region, which he said he had been drawn to by "curiosity."

After five visits to Soviet East Asia in thirty months, he was surprised to discover that in a city with no Catholic churches, no priests, and no evident sign of religion, some people were "curious" about God, others were "interested" in religion, and still others wanted an active Catholic faith and life. Their numbers were not large--only a few hundred descendants of Russians, Ukrainians, and Poles whom Stalin had ordered transhipped in the 1930s as slave laborers to this capital of his Gulag and entry to Siberia's gold mines. The majority--95 percent of Magadan's 160,000 citizens--were reared in atheism and have remained "religiously illiterate," the archbishop said. But he has grown to love them much as he has his own Alaskan archdiocese which he has been serving fifteen years. He has stayed in their homes, heard their confessions in his hotel (he listened in Russian, absolved in Latin; neither side understood more than the rite of forgiveness). In 1990, he celebrated the first ever public Christmas liturgy in Magadan to which some 270 people came. He also managed to find them a Russian-speaking priest from New Jersey, Father Austin Mohrbacher.

On his first visit to Magadan in February, 1990, he had tried to make contact with a Russian Orthodox priest or bishop but could find none. He had heard of the destruction of 30 to 40 Orthodox churches in the region. Hurley travelled another thousand miles to find an Orthodox bishop. He also informed the Moscow Patriarchate of his reception by Magadanian Catholics. The archbishop was well aware of Orthodox anxiety over the bazaar

of religions that had set up shop in the republics since freedom of conscience and freedom of religion was legislated in October 1990. In fact, Pentecostals were busy in the port city before he arrived. "I take very seriously Patriarch Aleksy's criticism" of Catholic evangelization on Russian soil, the archbishop said by telephone from his chancery in Alaska. Aleksy II raised the question of Hurley's mission to Magadan when he met with American cardinals in November in Washington, D.C.

Hurley had been the subject of several negative statements by the newly appointed Orthodox Bishop of Magadan around the time of his fourth visit there in May 1992. But Hurley decided to be patient and 'lay low'. "I had a certain reputation by now in the city," said the 65-year-old cleric who also brought much needed food and medicines on each visit. He had met with local officials, had become friends with the director for religious activities, and had given interviews to the press. His visits had generated a plan to build an ecumenical center for culture and religion, to be supported by Alaskan Christians. By January 1991, a dozen Magadanian Catholics--with Hurley's encouragement--have successfully petitioned the authorities to be registered as the Church of the Nativity of Christ. "I hoped the new bishop would see some of the things we'd done as positive. I hoped he'd understand that local people respected the Catholic church, but didn't see it as a national church," he said.

Hurley's hopes and ecumenical patience paid off. In December, both prelates met in a government office building in Magadan. "Sometimes we say things we should best forget," Hurley recalled hearing at this meeting. He said that Bishop Arkadi spoke of the need to work together "to push aside the clouds over our land." He wanted everyone to help "move the people toward God." Arkadi also invited Hurley to join him in celebrating the Orthodox Christmas liturgy on January 7 in the new Russian Orthodox chapel. At that service Arkadi gave thanks for Hurley's initiatives. He embraced the American archbishop and presented him with an Orthodox rosary made of precious stones. Aware of the Russians' fondness for giving gifts, Hurley wondered nervously what gesture he could make to express his love and gratitude to the bishop and church who had so warmly welcomed him that night. He felt the pectoral cross around his neck--a gift of his brother, Mark J. Hurley, the retired bishop of Santa Rosa, California. He removed it from his vestments and told Bishop Arkadi and all assembled: "My blood brother is also a Catholic bishop. He ordained me as a bishop and gave me this cross 22 years ago. I present it to you as a sign that we will be spiritual brothers, brother bishops in Christ." Bishop Arkadi immediately put the cross around his neck. Mindful of the tensions that had existed during his former visit, the archbishop said that the exchange marked a moment of high drama, great joy, and release of anxiety. "A bishop by office is to be a sign of unity," he said. "More than gestures are needed but gestures often make a good start by turning the tide."

To those critics who have accused Hurley of "being used" by the authorities, he responded: "Look, we have a church; we have a priest. If we can work together, we'll have a good thing going."

Hurley does not maintain--as do some Christians both in Eastern Europe and the United States--that the Russian Orthodox Church must publicly recant its collaboration with the Communists before ecumenism can advance. "Salvation will come with imperfect contrition," the Alaskan bishop said. Quoting a passage from Pope John Paul II's recent encyclical on mission, Hurley added: "All we have to do is provide the opportunity for people to do good."

The first ever visit of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch, Aleksy II, to the United States in November 1991 signaled a spiritual and emotional crescendo for the one million Christians who belong to the Orthodox Church in America. Not only did thousands of Orthodox believers have a chance to see and hear their religious leader during his 10-day visit, but through his presence they also received the blessing of the 70 million Orthodox Christians in Russia for whom they have anguished and prayed during many years. Father Daniel Donlick, talked about the approaching patriarchal visit as "a blessing and joy beyond explanation. We never expected this in our lifetime," said the 50-year-old academic dean at St. Tikhons Russian Orthodox Seminary. "Our parents and grandparents always expressed a sense of loss," he said, referring to the widespread persecution of the church in Russia during much of this century. "Now through this event God is blessing all our prayers," Donlick said.

A state of disorder and ongoing antagonism is likely to persist between leaders of the Moscow-based Russian Orthodox Church and its sister Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Kiev, note observers as tensions between the world's two largest Orthodox bodies continue to unfold. The drama took a sudden about-face in May 1992 when Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko) returned to Kiev from Moscow where it had been announced on April 2 that he had resigned his leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church at a *sobor* (council of the church) attended by some 70 Orthodox bishops from Russia and 18 Ukrainian Orthodox bishops.

A major item at the *sobor* was to have been the question of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's request for independence from the Moscow Patriarchate. However, following a meeting in Kiev with his bishops, Filaret withdrew his resignation and announced at a press conference April 14 that he had no intention of stepping down, that his resignation "would cause chaos and disunity in our Ukrainian Church" and that he had been appointed

metropolitan for life by the Moscow Patriarchate and intended to fulfill "this canonical responsibility until I die."

Agitation for Filaret's resignation has occurred among Russian Orthodox hierarchs and even among some in Filaret's own Ukrainian church since last June when the release of KGB archives named Filaret as an agent of the former Communist regime. The metropolitan has also incurred criticism for certain aspects of his lifestyle and financial dealings. Speaking to the press during Holy Week, Filaret said that for him the Moscow *sobor* has been "my personal Golgotha, a Golgotha during which I was blamed and attacked for everything. I have never been under such pressure," he said. Filaret stated that Moscow was unwilling to allow or deny the Ukrainian church's independence claim and instead was stalling in order to buy time "to agitate against the idea of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's independence." His remarks were reported in the Ukrainian Weekly April 26 by its Kiev correspondent Marta Kolomayets.

Filaret announced that he would keep his church administratively independent from Moscow but will refrain from declaring canonical independence until that issue can be examined by the Local *Sobor* of the Russian Orthodox Church scheduled for 1995. Filaret criticized Ukrainian bishops from the regions of Kirovohrad, Vinnytsia, Donetsk, and Chernivtsi who had voiced opposition to separating from Moscow without consulting Filaret prior to his departure for the Moscow meeting in late March. He said he wished to assure the faithful that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church would not be separated spiritually from its brothers and sisters in the Russian Orthodox Church. "Nor are we heading toward unity with the Catholic Church," said Filaret, who for years before the fall of communism maintained that the Ukrainian Catholic Church did not exist.

The Metropolitan said it was necessary for the church to be involved in the movement for an independent Ukraine and he asked "why should people from Siberia or Northern Russia decide the status of the Ukrainian Church." Once the church is independent Filaret promised to "reclaim our history. Kiev is the mother of Rus cities, and Christianity started here, not in Moscow," he said. Pointing to Ukraine's President Leonid Kravchuk, a former Communist official, Filaret said that the president is a powerful ally in the movement for ecclesial independence from Moscow. However, Filaret was quick to add that "the president does not interfere in the internal affairs of our church."

Whether Filaret's refusal to step down at Moscow's urging causes a further split in the Orthodox world remains to be seen. Already Ukraine has three Eastern-rite churches--the largest being the Ukrainian Orthodox, followed by the Ukrainian Catholic and then by the break-away Ukrainian Autocephalous Church which continues to attract new members.

"The church in the Ukraine is already in schism," according to the Rev. Anthony Ugolnik, professor of Humanities at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. "This

situation creates the possibility that a fourth church could emerge," an Orthodox church that is unable to accept Filaret as its leader, the priest scholar said. He speculated that many Ukrainian Orthodox clergymen might well find it impossible to "tolerate a hierarch under suspicion, who has been so discredited." He thought that some priests would not want to serve in any diocese under Filaret's jurisdiction. Other observers agreed that much will depend on how Moscow handles the independence issue and whether it seeks to disassociate from Filaret and work with other Ukrainian bishops. Ugolnik thought that Filaret's refusal to resign must "indicate that he's operating from a position of power" and will remain someone to be reckoned with in Ukraine. Father Leonid Kishkovsky, ecumenical officer for the Orthodox Church in America, regretted that conflict between Moscow and Kiev will continue to deflect some of the church's energy at a time when millions more Christians are being baptized and when the pastoral and catechetical work of the church is increasing. "The road ahead will be difficult," he said.

"In-fighting" between these two churches has also "paved the way for ill-informed evangelicals to discredit the Orthodox church" and has caused some US evangelicals, "who were once ecumenical, to turn hostile towards our church," Ugolnik said. He pointed to an Easter Sunday (April 19) NBC telecast by Garrick Utley in which members of evangelist Pat Robertson's "700 Club" were shown celebrating a Western-rite Easter service in Russia. Ugolnik said that Utley commented that many Russians were flocking to this new church--free of Communist influence. The telecast noted that this phenomenon may represent "the perestroika of the Russian soul." Ugolnik predicted that increasing hostility between Orthodox leaders will only advance the message of those evangelicals who preach that their model of Christianity is "superior" to that of traditional Russian Orthodoxy. The sins of the past are "part of the legacy of our martyrdom," the professor said.

On June 25, 1992, Metropolitan Filaret Denysenko announced that he would become the acting leader of the merged Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church calling it the United Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kiev Patriarchate. This union, however, was rejected by the 94-year-old Patriarch Mstyslav of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. At a council of 18 of the 23 Orthodox archbishops on June 11 Filaret was accused of promoting schism, and was stripped of priestly faculties. Metropolitan Volodymyr Sobodan of Rostov and Novocherkassk was named to replace Metropolitan Filaret. It was expected that clashes might break out between supporters of the supporters of the two Metropolitans. The church in the Ukraine faces times of troubles.