
The 'Third Rome'

Russian Church backs Gorbachov's war drive

by Luba George

From late 1984 through 1985, the most significant role of the Russian Orthodox Church/Moscow Patriarchate has been to assist the Soviet state and military leadership in psychologically preparing the Slavic populations of the Russian Empire to fulfill Moscow's "destiny" and become the seat of world empire, the Third and Final Rome.

There are two leading facets to the Church's campaign: 1) the massive efforts, funded by the State, to restore the main Russian Orthodox cathedrals and monasteries to their imperial splendor, in time for 1988, the 1,000-year anniversary of Russian Orthodoxy—and the beginning of the Russian version of the Byzantine Empire; 2) an across-the-board assault on the Roman Catholic Church, on a scope not seen in decades. This began with the KGB kidnap-murder of the Polish Catholic priest Popieluszko in late 1984, and the simultaneous mass crackdown on Roman Catholic churches in Soviet Lithuania, and in Czechoslovakia. By early 1985, Soviet state media had declared open warfare against Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Church, rivaling the most intense levels witnessed under Josef Stalin.

It is therefore not surprising that during the celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of victory in what Moscow calls "the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45," the Moscow Patriarchate lost no time in praising Stalin's wartime role and in placing its ecclesiastical blessing on the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachov, soon after his formal assumption of power (in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, no. 3, 1985).

In late summer 1985, Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk, in discussions with U.S. embassy representatives in Moscow, confirmed Gorbachov's personal interest and involvement in preparations for the 1,000th anniversary celebrations. Filaret disclosed that Gorbachov had exchanged several letters with Moscow Patriarch Pimen stressing that in conjunction with the Church's involvement in the 1988 celebrations, there would be state activities as well.

On Nov. 10 a Service of Intercession was conducted at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Moscow, in connection with the Reagan-Gorbachov summit in Geneva. A message from Pimen was read: "We have no qualms about our side in these talks. Mikhail Gorbachov has the full support of all our people in his peacemaking endeavors."

The Russian Orthodox Church is not a church as we in the West would understand it, but an imperial church in the Byzantine tradition where Church, State, and military join to promote imperial interests.

The ROC versus the Vatican

The past year has seen a marked escalation of the hate campaign against the Roman Catholic Church, as both the Russian Church and State have accused both President Reagan and Pope John Paul II of launching a "crusade" against the Soviet Union: Reagan for his Strategic Defense Initiative, and the Pope for his campaign to restore the Ukrainian Catholic Church and to crack down against "Liberation Theology" and related wings of the Roman Catholic Church that work hand in glove with the Russian Church. In late 1984, top Soviet mouthpiece Aleksandr Bovin, writing in the government newspaper *Izvestia*, detected "an indubitable shift to the right by the Vatican," and concluded, "The Vatican is working all out for Washington."

Beginning in January-February 1985, Soviet radio and TV, reporting on the Pope's trip to Ibero-America, denounced his attack on the Theology of Liberation. These attacks were followed by a five-page article appearing in the Soviet weekly *New Times* (no. 2, 1985) which listed the "crimes" committed by the Pope and the "reactionary quarters in the U.S. and in the Catholic Church." To cover up the "Bulgarian connection" in the attempt to assassinate the Pope, *New Times* concocted the incredible line that the assassination attempt on the Pope was a plot "cooked up" by Washington "to manipulate Catholic thinking in the United States, Latin America and Europe."

March 1985, the month Mikhail Gorbachov took power, saw a new level of attacks launched by the top leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate. In a 1,200-word interview with the Italian Communist Party daily *Unità*, Metropolitan Filaret (Vakhromeyev) of Minsk threw down the gauntlet to the Vatican, declaring war against the Pope and his collaborator, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, for denouncing Liberation Theology. "Liberation Theology is the policy of the Russian Orthodox Church," declared the Metropolitan of Minsk, who is also the Patriarchal Exarch of Western Europe and chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate. In the interview, he warned that the Pope's activities will have "adverse" effects on Orthodox-Catholic dialogue and that, in addition, the Vatican's campaign to restore Uniate parishes in the Ukraine (outlawed by Stalin) would also be "harmful" to dialogue.

During October-November, attacks against the Papacy reached a new peak. Just prior to the convening of the Vatican's Extraordinary Synod, Radio Kiev broadcast a tirade, "Vatican versus the Ukraine," which accused the Pope of launching a "confrontationist" course by trying "to restore the Uniate Church in the Ukraine . . . in line with the policy of imperialist and reactionary circles in the West, which declared psychological warfare against real socialism."