

Ukrainians seek to legalize their church

by Oksana Polischyk

Very often a single case tells more about how vicious police-state repression can be than giving statistics. Ukrainian Catholic priest Mikhaylo Havryliv was sent to Chernobyl, as a punishment, to clear contaminated radioactive debris. His "crime" was that he served as a Ukrainian Catholic priest, openly celebrating the sacraments according to his faith. This punishment occurred under Mikhail Gorbachov, while the West was praising the birth of so-called *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Whether under Khrushchov, Brezhnev, or today under Gorbachov, such punishment typifies the cruelty and barbarism of Moscow towards Ukrainian Catholics and their deeply held faith.

Despite years of the most brutal KGB police and militia repression, which continues to the present day, over 150,000 Ukrainian Catholic faithful turned out to celebrate the *moleben* (devotional mass) in the city of Lviv Sept. 17. The date chosen for this huge anti-Moscow protest, demanding legal status for the Ukrainian Catholic Church, outlawed by Stalin in 1946, was not accidental. It was the 50th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland, after the Hitler-Stalin Pact, an invasion which began the Soviet occupation of the Western Ukraine.

The Synod of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops is about to convene in Rome. Their agenda: To elaborate a strategy to pressure the Gorbachov regime into legalizing their church. The Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Eastern Rite (also called the Uniate Church), with some 5 million believers, is the largest underground church in the world. Banned by Stalin in 1946, the church continues, despite brutal repression against illegal clandestine services. Today many Ukrainian Catholic priests have emerged from the underground to hold public masses, running the risk of having services broken up by police and being detained.

The question of legalization will soon come to a head. According to Nikolai Lunkov, Soviet ambassador to Italy, Mikhail Gorbachov is to meet Pope John Paul II when he visits Italy at the end of November. The Vatican confirmed in the first week of September that Gorbachov had expressed interest in meeting the Pope to review Soviet-Vatican relations. The Ukrainian Catholic Church, as well as Catholic Lithuania and Latvia, with a Catholic minority, are expected to be high on the meeting's agenda. The Pope has often sent messages to Gorbachov expressing his desire that the Ukrainian Catholic Church be allowed legal status.

This year has already seen the biggest mass organizing for the legal restoration of the Ukrainian Church since its banning in 1946. On May 16, a Ukrainian Catholic clerical delegation, including bishops F. Kurchaba, S. Dmyterko, and P. Vasylyk, went to Moscow, bringing a petition, addressed to Gorbachov, for the legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. As Gorbachov was in China, the delegation requested to meet Gorbachov's close ally, number two in terms of state protocol, Vice President Anatoli Lukyanov. Lukyanov refused to meet, sending instead low-level Supreme Soviet functionaries and a representative of the Soviet Ministry for Religious Affairs, Valeriy Vespanov, to meet with the delegation. All appeals fell on deaf ears. At the same time, repressions of Ukrainian Catholic priests and believers increased.

The next protest took the form of a very publicized hunger strike in Moscow organized by the Committee for Defense of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, with the goal of bringing public attention to the plight of their Church. The hunger strike was timed with the late May opening session of the newly elected Soviet parliament.

The Sept. 8 founding of the Ukrainian National Movement for Restructuring, Rukh (see *EIR*, Sept. 21, 1986, "Ukrainian freedom movement gathers strength, backed by Polish Solidarnosc") has accelerated the mass campaign for legalization. One of Rukh's leaders is the head of the Committee for Defense of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Ivan Hel—known in the Ukraine as the "Ukrainian Lech Walesa." In 1987, he was released after 15 years incarceration, where he was often beaten and tortured. On many occasions he was denied even the meager daily prison food ration, and forced to stand outdoors half-naked in sub-zero temperatures. To-

'You admire Gorbachov too much'

"... It is your great mistake, the fascination with [Hollywood] stars, stars, stars. When someone becomes a star, he can blind people. We must be cautious. Stalin was also applauded (in the West). You admire Gorbachov too much. Nobody should be admired like that. Only God.

"We see . . . very real changes. . . . I rejoice at these changes, but I am afraid they may not last long. As long as you have a one-party government, there is a danger of dictatorship. Stalinism is dormant, but it is not dead."

—Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevicius, as quoted in the *Washington Post*, Feb. 4, 1989.

day, as a leader of Rukh, he is fighting not only for the legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, but for the creation of a mass Christian Democratic movement whose platform would include the restoration of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church for the Orthodox believers who comprise 80% of the Ukraine's population.

Forbidding silence from Moscow

So far Gorbachov has not said a word. The only answer the Ukrainian Catholics have received from the Soviet government has been more and more repression.

The other answer to the Ukrainians' appeal came from the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev, who in an interview with *Radianska Ukraina* warned that the "consequences" of legalizing the Ukrainian Catholic Church would be "undesirable." "The Ukrainian Catholics have negative attitudes towards the Russian Orthodox Church, which they call unholy, even the church of Satan, whose hierarchs they disrespect and whose liturgies they counsel others not to attend. And this is the case when the Ukrainian Catholic Church is not legalized. Can you imagine what will happen when it is legalized?"

Furthermore, the Metropolitan lied, "On the territory of Ukraine, there are other religions in addition to the Russian Orthodox Church, and among them, is Catholicism. Those who call themselves Catholics may attend Catholic churches. Those who live in the faith of their forefathers, the Orthodox faith, can attend Orthodox liturgies."

Indeed, when the Metropolitan says anyone can worship in a "Catholic Church"—this may *sound* totally "logical" to people in the West. The facts, however, tear this argument to shreds. The only legal Catholic churches in the Ukraine are in the Carpatho-Ukraine, bordering on Hungary and Poland. These very few churches serve the Ukraine's tiny Polish and Hungarian minorities. They are physically inaccessible to nearly all Ukrainian Catholics, and in the Hungarian case, services are in a totally alien, non-Slavic language.

In the meantime, the Ukrainians have not given up, as proven by the 150,000-strong march under the blue and yellow national flag in Lviv on Sept 17. Like the Church of Poland, the church in Ukraine is seen by many Ukrainians as part of their national and cultural identity.

As Ivan Hel put it: "Stalin destroyed the people physically, Shcherbitsky spiritually." Shcherbitsky, the Ukrainian party boss and "Brezhnev relic" is gone now, having been "retired" at the September Plenum. Gorbachov's mask will either have to fall or he will have to give in to at least some of the Ukrainian Catholics' demands. His meeting with the Pope will be the test. Legalizing the Ukrainian Catholic Church would mean opening up for Moscow another can of worms: Ukrainian Orthodox, of whom several tens of millions, are waiting in the wings to break the Russian Orthodox grip and press for their own Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

Documentation

Michnik calls for anti-bolshevik front

The following are excerpts from a translation from Polish of the speech by Adam Michnik, a leading spokesman for Poland's Solidarnosc movement, delivered before the founding congress of the Popular Movement in Ukraine for Perestroika (Rukh) in Kiev on Sept. 8.

We are experiencing together the end of the totalitarian system, the end of Stalinist communism. I bring you greetings from Poland on behalf of Solidarnosc and the deputies of the Polish Sejm. We are listening to your congress and are overjoyed and moved as we observe your national rebirth.

Behind us lies a great stock of common history, both good and bad, but common. Today we ask, what has always marred our coexistence? And we believe the time has come to call this evil by its real name: chauvinism. You as Ukrainians and we as Poles know the face of Great Russian chauvinism, which over the centuries has stifled our national cultures. We know how much harm it has brought to the Russians themselves. No nation can be happy if it degrades and oppresses other nations. Hatred between nations is called chauvinism. Distinctions are made between the chauvinism of great and powerful nations and that of the weak and subjugated, but it is an illness in both cases. Let us renounce it! Let us, as Poles, drive chauvinism from Polish hearts, and you, as Ukrainians, from Ukrainian hearts.

I represent Solidarnosc, the Solidarnosc that is striving to build democracy on traditions of understanding and struggle against totalitarian ideologies. We draw from Christian traditions, from the freedom-loving aspirations of the Polish intelligentsia, and from the resistance of the Polish countryside to collectivization; and above all, from the striking struggle of Polish workers. . . . The Church has taught us that each of us must reject the totalitarian assault on our conscience and answer only to God. And, thanks to this, we are free, and as one free nation we wish to build our alliances with other free nations, as an equal among equals. . . .

We are glad that now, on this historic day, at this solemn moment for Ukraine and for all of Europe, there are Poles in this hall. We are glad that at this time of national rebirth—for which you paid the price of camps, trials, suffering, pain, and the death of the best sons of this land—Solidarnosc is with you, Poland is with you. May fortune be with you! May God give you strength! Long live a democratic, just, free Ukraine!