

The Ukrainian Catholic Church in the U.S.S.R.

FORTY YEARS HAVE PASSED since the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the Soviet Union descended into the catacombs. In the last five years repressions against it have intensified. Despite them, the Church continues to live and grow. The trials and persecutions endured by Ukrainian Catholics have strengthened their faith and hope. On September 9, 1982, the Initiative Group for the Defense of the Rights of Believers and the Church in Ukraine was founded by Yosyp Terelya, the Rev. Hryhoriy Budzinsky, the Rev. Dionisiy, the Rev. Ihnatiy and Stefaniya Petrash-Sichko. After the arrest of Terelya in December 1982, Vasyl Kobryn became the head of the Group.

The Initiative Group for the Defense of the Rights of Believers and the Church of Ukraine boldly turned to the government of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic with a memorandum requesting the legal recognition of the Ukrainian Catholic Church under the following conditions:

1. Free elections in all the eparchies of Western and Eastern Ukraine, with the understanding that in the eparchies where the majority of faithful are of the Byzantine Catholic rite their churches, monasteries and chapels will be returned to them.

2. Wherever the faithful belonging to the Ukrainian Catholic Church are in the minority with respect to other groups of believers, the former are to be permitted to establish their own houses of prayer.

3. The reopening of the institutions of learning of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and of the major seminaries in Lviv and Uzhhorod.

4. At least 50 students of theology are to be allowed to complete their studies in the Vatican; visas to Vienna, Warsaw and Munich are to be issued for another 10 students.

5. The restitution of the publishing houses of the five eparchies of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, which had been taken over by the state.

6. The establishment of a commission to examine the criminal actions of the KGB and MVD against Ukrainian faithful and priests.

7. The establishment of investigating commissions to examine the criminal activities of Soviet psychiatrists, responsible for reprisals against active members of the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

8. The Church obligates itself to respect all laws of the State and to urge the faithful to do the same.

9. The Church recognizes as its supreme authority, His Holiness, the Pope of Rome; therefore, it is impossible for it to be dependent on Soviet authorities.

Also requested is respect for the principle of separation of Church and State.

CLEARLY, IN THE PRESENT political situation in the Soviet Union, it was unthinkable for the authorities to even partially satisfy the demands of the Group. So, in Terelya's words, "the Ukrainian Catholic Church has remained that which it was: a clandestine Church," repressions and persecutions have multiplied. "Since 1980 the local authorities with the help of KGB agents disguised as priests (and monsignors), began to methodically destroy Ukrainian architectural monuments, all for the sake of the struggle against the Uniate Church." From the beginning of 1983 through April 23, 1984, more than 30 Ukrainian Catholic churches, where the people did not wish to accept Russian Orthodox priests, were closed.

In 1982 Bishop Nikanor Deneka died in Lviv. On May 26, 1983, another heroic confessor of the faith, Bishop Oleksander Chira, died in Karaganda at the age of 87, after 35 years of prison and exile. In 1982 two priests, Vasyl Kavashyn and Roman Esyp, were imprisoned. September 29, 1982, a 28-year-old nun, Maria Shved, was killed. Another priest, the Rev. Petro Pyrizhka, was imprisoned around that time. In 1982 the authorities arrested Rev. Ihnatiy Soltys, head of the Catholic Penitents. On March 7, 1984, the Rev. Stepan Hryhorovych and his daughter were arrested. In April of the same year, in the village Zastavne of the Transcarpathian Region, Soviet authorities searched the home of the Rev. Oleksander Tovt, confiscating his books, among them the *Bible for Children*, published in 1981 in Estella, Spain, by the Aid to the Church in Need, with an introduction by Patriarch Slipy. On May 19, 1984, in a concentration camp near Lviv, the KGB tortured to death a former schoolmate of Cardinal Lubachivsky, the Rev. Antin Potochniak. In either November or December of 1984 the Rev. Hryhorij Budzinsky "disappeared." In December 1984 at the principal train station in Lviv, drunken hooligans brutally murdered a Ukrainian Catholic nun who had been preparing children for their First Holy Communion. On March 22, 1985, Vasyl Kobryn was sentenced to three years of general-regime camps, and recently, on August 20, 1985, in Uzhhorod, Yosyp Terelya was condemned to 12 years — 7 at forced labor and 5 in exile.

THESE ARE BUT A FEW examples that testify that the regime's iron hand still strikes religious groups in Ukraine. The Helsinki Accords have remained mere words on paper.

During the past two years, Western media have written more and more about the underground status of the Catholic Church in Ukraine. Credit for this must go to Terelya, Kobryn and Budzinsky, who, with their declarations, and principally with the *Chronicle of the*

Catholic Church in Ukraine and the *Ukrainian Catholic Bulletin*, have passed on a great amount of information about religious persecution and other violations of the Helsinki Accords by the Soviet regime.

Thus far nine regular issues of the *Chronicle*, an extraordinary issue concerning police actions against Vasyl Kobryn, parts of issue No. 10, and materials for subsequent issues, have reached the West. There has also been one issue of the *Ukrainian Catholic Bulletin*.

According to the *Chronicle*, at least 1,000 people have destroyed or returned their Soviet passports. Issue No. 1 of the *Chronicle* discusses the burning of 520 passports. According to *Chronicle* Issue No. 3 — 290 passports were returned in the Transcarpathian Region, and between 921 and 927 in all of Western Ukraine. Terelya estimates that more than 3,000 more Catholics would do the same thing and adds: "One can enter the concentration camps even without a passport."

The centers of the *Chronicle* are Lviv and Uzhhorod. Samizdat documents, obviously, would never see the light of day without the support of large segments of the population; thus, the fact that the *Chronicle* reaches the West through diverse channels testifies to the moral support it enjoys among the people.

According to the *Chronicle*, Issue No. 2 — "In only the last three years, 81 Catholic priests have been ordained in the Transcarpathian Region, of whom only nine have completed middle-level technical studies, the rest having some higher education. In Western Ukraine there exists a three-year clandestine school, run by monks, in which boys and girls learn the basics of Christian teaching." This is very precise testimony, which attests to the dynamism and vitality of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, and also attests to the great amount of work done under very difficult conditions by the bishops and priests of this Church.

Issue No. 7 of the *Chronicle* describes the missionary reach of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. On May 5, 1984, in Byelorussia, in a village of Grodno Region, searches were conducted at the homes of Catholics. The KGB was looking for "subversive" Catholic literature. Recently the authorities launched a campaign of intimidation of Byelorussian Catholics. The Byelorussian Catholic Church of the Eastern Rite was almost completely liquidated; still, since the late 70's five Ukrainian Catholic priests have gone to Byelorussia to begin underground missionary "in the catacombs." So far three deaneries and scores of individual parishes have been renewed. Issue No. 7 of the *Chronicle* declares: "The Byelorussians have not forgotten their faith, nor the fact that they are Byelorussians. Pray for Byelorussia, for its martyred Catholic Church! Ukrainians! Catholics! Help with your work and prayer for the rebirth of the Byelorussian Catholic Church. God is with us! May His love illuminate you and illuminate all those who burn with the desire to be members of the living Church of Christ."

The *Chronicle*, Issue No. 9 discusses "local Uniates" in Gomel Region in Byelorussia. *Chronicle* No. 7 states: "Scores of Catholic priests have taken up mission work in Eastern Ukraine; they perform a difficult and heroic task, full of valor, in a completely ungrateful land." In

Chronicle No. 5, there is mention of persecutions of Ukrainian priests and faithful doing missionary work in Russia.

The *Chronicle* does not speak of nuns, but sources within the Polish Catholic hierarchy have stated that at least 1,000 Ukrainian nuns work in Western Ukraine. Their daily work is performed not only in hospitals, schools, and hospices, but also in factories and cooperatives. In the evening, on Saturdays and Sundays, they devote themselves to catechetical and pastoral work. They live privately or in groups of three or four.

From the *Chronicle* and other documents it becomes clear that the most vocal defenders of the Ukrainian Catholic Church are laypersons: Yosyp Terelya, Vasyl Kobryn, Valeriy Marchenko, Oleska Tychy, Polanya Batyo, Pavlo Kampov, Mychaylo, Maria and Anna Trykur, Yuriy and Maria Bodnar, Ivan and Fedir Versta, Ilya Ulihaneynech and others.

The *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Ukraine* does not limit itself to the work of Catholic martyrs and confessors. It speaks of Orthodox, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews and Muslims, describing their suffering, repressions against them, the violation of their fundamental rights by the authorities. But, with regard to the officially recognized Russian Orthodox Church, one senses a feeling of disdain, a lack of respect, because it is too close to the authorities. This attitude, in some measure, is evident also among Orthodox faithful. The ties of Catholics with various Protestant groups are stressed more emphatically. On the other hand, a great many Catholic faithful go to the officially open Orthodox churches, especially when they have faith in the pastor. These are also candidates for the priesthood who, though "affected by the Uniate spirit," attend Orthodox seminaries in Leningrad and Moscow. A great many priests with Catholic hearts serve the Russian Orthodox Church in order to salvage what can be salvaged.

There are two principle requests from the Catholics of Ukraine to their brothers scattered all over the world; unity and obedience to the Head of the Ukrainian Church. There are also other requests, such as prayer, solidarity, etc. Another fact of great importance — at least for the authors of the *Chronicle*, — is that the Ukrainian Catholic Church has a patriarch as its head.

The *Chronicle* demonstrates solidarity with neighboring peoples and their struggles — with the Poles, with Russian dissidents, with the Rumanians, and with Afghanistan. Through the *Chronicle* Ukrainian Christians also appeal to the nearest and farthest peoples, to Western Churches, for cooperation and Christian solidarity in their struggle.