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### **The Ukrainian Catholic Church in America: The First Forty Years (1884-1924)<sup>1</sup>**

From time to time, we reflect on our life. Organizations also re-evaluate where they are going in relation to where they are and whence they have come. As a small sampling, I present four monographs, which offer an historical reflection about the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

On December 5, 1965, Dr. Petro Bilaniuk delivered a talk that was published the following year under the title: *Ukrayinska Tserkva, Yiyi Suchasne i Maybutnye* [*The Ukrainian Church, Its Present and Future*].<sup>2</sup> He makes mention of the Universal Mission of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, while discussing issues such as: patriotism, particularity (*pomishnist*), Latinization, and the liturgical calendar.

The next three monographs under consideration are: *Nashi Suchasni Problemy* [*Our Contemporary Problems*]<sup>3</sup> by Fr. Volodymyr H. Kovalyk, OSBM; Myron Fedoriw's *Nash Obryadovyi konservatyzm u praktytsi* [*Our Ritual Conservatism in Practice*]<sup>4</sup>; and *Ukrayinska Kato-*

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<sup>2</sup> Petro Bilaniuk, *Ukrayinska Tserkva, Yiyi Suchasne i Maybutnye* [*The Ukrainian Church, Its Present and Future*] (Toronto-Chicago: The Committee for the Defense of the Ritual and Tradition of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the U.S.A, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> Volodymyr H. Kovalyk, *Nashi Suchasni Problemy* [*Our Contemporary Problems*] (New York: Basilian Fathers Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Myron Fedoriw, *Nash Obryadovyi konservatyzm u praktytsi* [*Our Ritual Conservatism in Practice*] (Philadelphia, 1981).

*lytska Tserkva 1945-1970* [*Ukrainian Catholic Church 1945-1970*] by Dr. Isydor Nahayewsky.<sup>5</sup>

These well-written works reflect their time, with a great deal of focus on the persecuted church and on survival. They also are prisoners of their time, because I think they do not focus enough on the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States. Instead of focusing on growth and evangelical mission, they focus on stability and tradition. They are more about maintenance than expansion. I hope to build on their foundation — by using history as a foundation.

On the cover of a 1975 issue of *For the Patriarchate*,<sup>6</sup> a bulletin of the Society for the Promotion of the Patriarchal System in the Ukrainian Catholic Church, we see a picture of Patriarch and Cardinal Joseph Slipyj baptizing a child. Under the photo, in a succinct yet powerful sentence, we are presented — perhaps inadvertently — with the primary mission of the Ukrainian Catholic Church: “Jesus Christ gave the command-instruction to the apostles to preach His teaching and alongside with that the necessity of Baptism: ‘Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19).”

This primary mission and how we fulfill it is at the core of this reflection. In short, I want to refocus the tradition-based ecclesiology of the four monographs cited earlier to an ecclesiology which reinvigorates a forward-looking church.

Jesus called his followers to be “salt” (Matthew 5:13), “light” (Matthew 5:14-16) and “leaven” (Matthew 13:33) for the world. These metaphors remind us the church is meant to increase, not decrease. In a very real sense, we carry this treasure — the gospel — in “earthen vessels,” but it is a treasure that is not simply for us. This treasure is to be shared by adding flavor to life, shining the light of faith and providing growth.

Using the first 40 years of the Ukrainian Catholic Church’s existence in America as an example, I would like to present some positive facets of our history we should emulate. I will also present some negatives in our history, against which we should maintain a constant vigilance. Perhaps we have forgotten some traits that made our church vibrant in the past. We are not a church simply of memory — but one of vision.

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<sup>5</sup> Isydor Nahayewsky, *Ukrayinska Katolytska Tserkva 1945-1970* [*Ukrainian Catholic Church 1945-1970*] (New York-Chicago: St. Andrew’s Society of Ukrainian Catholic Priests, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> *Za Patriarchat* [*For the Patriarchate*], no. 10 (October 1975).

I make no claim that this paper is an evaluation of present structures or persons in the church; this paper is more for reflection than analysis. For a critical assessment of present-day structures and ecclesiology, I would refer the reader to an excellent article by Peter Galadza:

“It is my contention that the structure of the church now in place throughout large segments of Eastern Catholicism is detrimental to the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of Christ’s church, and is a structure that prevents Catholics of varying ethno-national backgrounds — not to mention those who would like to become Catholic — from gathering and collaborating for the purposes of witnessing to the gospel according to a particular church’s theology, liturgy, spirituality, and canonical discipline.”<sup>7</sup>

This paper looks at the history of the Ukrainian Catholic Church from 1884 to 1924 and attempts to extrapolate some ideas for reflection. The first date is taken from the arrival of Rev. Ivan Wolansky, the first Ukrainian Catholic priest in American, in December 1884.<sup>8</sup> The terminal date, June 8, 1924, is taken from the appointment of two bishops for the Ruthenian Catholics: Bishop Constantine Bohachevsky for the Galician Ruthenians (*pro Ruthenis ex Galitia oriundis*) and Bishop Basil Takach for the Ruthenians from Subcarpathia (*pro Ruthenis ex Podcarpatia Russa*). In effect, the Ruthenian or Greek Catholic Church, as it was most often called at the time, was still one ecclesial unit with two eparchies.

This unity in the face of much misunderstanding and suspicion rises from the past as a testament to the many in our church who did not say the “Ruthenian” Church is only for a particular ethnic group. For 40 years, there was one church that many members did not refer to neither as “Ruthenian” nor as “Greek” — but as *nasha* [ours]. There was a sense of ownership on the local level that underlined the manner in which every parishioner saw their parish: not by the title, but by the relationship it created — *nasha* [ours].

For the sake of further elucidation, we must briefly outline the relationship of all Catholic Churches in the U.S.

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Galadza, “The Structure of the Eastern Churches: Bonded with Human Blood or Baptismal Water?” *Pro Ecclesia*, XVII, no. 4 (Fall 2008), p. 373.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Krawcheniuk. “Fr. Ivan Wolansky, The first Ukrainian catholic priest in the U.S.,” *Logos: Periodicum Theologiae Trimestre*, LXXXI, no. 3 (July-September 1981), pp. 161-184.

From the appointment of the first Catholic bishop in the United States in 1789<sup>9</sup> until 1908, all the Catholic Churches in the United States, both eastern and western, fell under the jurisdiction of the *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith*. The entire U.S. was considered missionary territory. From 1908 to 1917, only the Eastern Catholic Churches remained under the Congregation “*Propaganda Fide*.” For the period 1917-1924, the Eastern Catholic churches<sup>10</sup> fell under the jurisdiction of the *Congregation for the Oriental Churches*.

This last change was done out of respect to the eastern churches: “By creating a Congregation for the eastern Churches Benedict removed an obstacle to dialogue. Previously the East fell under Propaganda Fide, the church’s organ which regulates affairs in mission territories, so that one could hardly avoid the impression that Eastern Churches were in this way themselves considered almost like mission territory.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the power in the United States was firmly entrenched in the Latin hierarchy.

The Ukrainian Catholic Church of the day had to deal with several sources of power: the Congregation “*Propaganda Fide*,” each individual bishop and a unique annual meeting of Archbishops. The Archbishops met from 1890 to 1919, and the Eastern Catholic Churches were the third most frequently discussed topic.

At that time, Rev. Nicephorus Chanath was the first Ruthenian priest to present the case of the Eastern Churches to the Archbishops, in the years 1892 and 1894, where he “read a lengthy communication on the present conditions of the Catholics of the Greek Rite in the United States.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John Carroll was appointed the first Bishop of Baltimore by the same Brief that erected the diocese: *Ex hac apostolicae* of Pope Pius VI on November 6, 1789. For an English translation see: John Tracy Ellis (ed.), *Documents of American Catholic History – Vol. I 1493-1865* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), pp. 163-167.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief yet comprehensive survey of Eastern Christianity, see: Ronald Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Rome: Orientalia Christiana, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Edward G. Farrugia, SJ, *The Pontifical Oriental Institute: the First Seventy-five Years 1917-1992* (Rome: Edizioni “Orientalia Christiana,” 1993), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Trisco, “An Extracanonical Institution: The Annual Meetings of the American Archbishops, 1890-1919,” *The Jurist*, no. 68 (2008), p. 83.

The situation of the Ruthenian Church of the day was secondary to the desire of the Latin Church for conformity and unity of jurisdiction. Throughout the work of Chanath's successor, the Apostolic Visitor Very Rev. Andrew Canon Hodobay (1902-1907), the Latin hierarchy kept the Ruthenians in check and in abeyance.

In 1907, Bishop Soter Ortynsky (1907-1916), over the protests of the Archbishops, was nominated as the Greek Catholic bishop for the Ruthenians. It was not until 1913 that Bishop Ortynsky received Ordinary jurisdiction and finally was able to lead the Ruthenian Church.

Following the bishop's death in 1916, two administrators were appointed for the one Ruthenian Church. On April 11, 1916, Rev. Peter Poniatyshyn and Rev. Gabriel Martyak were called to Washington, along with Valentine Balogh, the chancellor:

"The Delegate informed us that the Apostolic See had named two administrators for our church in America, although the entire organization was still a single church. Thereupon, he gave us both our letters of appointment. These documents confirmed that both administrators enjoyed full Episcopal authority and all spiritual authority normally accorded to bishops in America."<sup>13</sup>

The administrators of the Ruthenian eparchy, Rev. Poniatyshyn and Rev. Martyak, continued to serve and rule one church. This cooperation between two of the major factions in the Ruthenian Church shows that it was possible to maintain that core unity — possible, because it happened, but not easy.

There were two basic tensions in the early church in America. One of the tensions was between the Latin (Irish) bishops mentioned above and the tension just alluded to — between Galician and Subcarpathian Rusins.<sup>14</sup>

One author, Foraneus (which may be a pen name), in 1915 revealed the unabashed bias of the majority of the Latin hierarchy and clergy in a two-part article that appeared in *The Ecclesiastical Review*<sup>15</sup> and ex-

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<sup>13</sup> Walter Paska, *Sources of Particular Law for the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1975), p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> Both branches of the Ruthenian Church were often referred to as "the Greeks."

<sup>15</sup> Foraneus, "Some thoughts on the Ruthenian Question in the United States and Canada," *The Ecclesiastical Review*, LII (1915), pp. 42-50; part two appeared in the same journal as "The Ruthenian Question Again," pp. 645-653.

emphasizes the prevailing attitude toward the Ruthenian church. In this article, the author presents the biases of the Latin hierarchy in a very clear way, his protestations of respect to the contrary. I will present each of his assessments with a brief comment.

1. Only one bishop per jurisdiction, because “parallel jurisdictions have the tendency to perpetuate differences and strife.”<sup>16</sup> Commentary: This need to hold on to European categories of governance and an overzealous attachment to unity placed the needs of the Ukrainian Church on the back burner: “The possible loss of a few souls of the Greek rite, the archbishops thought, ‘bears no proportion to the blessings resulting from uniformity of discipline’.”<sup>17</sup> The Ukrainian Catholic Church needs to be its own advocate and defend its rights and rites and church in the face of much ignorance and misguided intentions even within the Catholic communion.
2. “Compared with the Latin rite, the Byzantine is and always will be in a state of inferiority.”<sup>18</sup> Commentary: It was said that the sheer numerical superiority of the Latin Church makes it easy to be Latin but difficult to be Catholic. The overriding belief that the Latin Church, her tradition and liturgy, is normative for the United States, and indeed the world, is a skewed ecclesiology that finds resonance in the common parlance of most Catholics.
3. “By making itself subservient to the principle of nationality... it has done great harm to the cause of the peoples it thought to serve.”<sup>19</sup> Commentary: In some ways and in some days this is true; yet, in essence, one cannot be Catholic and be exclusively tied to one nation. In other words, one’s mission to preach must be open to all.
4. “The situation in Canada is bad, because it sets up permanently a distinct national church.”<sup>20</sup> Commentary: This theme is repeated often. If you are from Western Europe, you can be in Canada or the United States. Eastern Europeans are often interminably viewed as foreigners.
5. The Ruthenians in Canada and U.S. “will remain Ruthenians for some years, but their descendants born there speak no other language but

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> James Hennesey, S.J., *American Catholics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 193.

<sup>18</sup> Foraneus, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

English. They will not feel at home in a church which by its very name presents itself as un-American.”<sup>21</sup> Commentary: The *Latin* or *Roman* Church, even though it used Latin as its liturgical language, could not see itself as Italian- or European-based. There is some validity in the view that the exclusive use of language is detrimental to membership; nevertheless, there is a failure to realize that all the Eastern and Catholic churches use multiple languages.

6. “The Church protects the national rite in his old home, but she has no reason for keeping it up artificially amid surroundings to which it is foreign.”<sup>22</sup> Commentary: Once again, there is a penchant for viewing all non-Latin churches as non-American. The temptation of any majority is to view itself as normative for the entire body of believers. It is also unusual to refer to Ruthenians, who had no nation at the time and had several ethnic minorities in its ranks, as a national rite. The idea that all the Catholic Churches have an evangelical command to be universal and preach to all nations was and is a difficult concept to accept.
7. On August 17, 1914, the decree *Cum Episcopo*, for the *Graeco-Rutheni* was published, and Foraneus disagrees with article 10: “Article X expresses the hope that the Graeco-Ruthenian Church may increase, spread, and fulfill its mission toward the Graeco-Ruthenians in the United States ... This can hardly mean that the Ruthenian Church in America is expected to make converts from people of other races and languages.”<sup>23</sup> Commentary: Yes, the church is expected to make converts. The Latin hierarchy had proposed that all eastern Catholics become Latin in the U.S., but they could not see themselves as accepting any of the Eastern Rites. This was a recipe for diminishment, not for growth.
8. “The Catholic Church in the United States can gain nothing by perpetuating foreign elements. It implies no disrespect to the Holy See to make representations in behalf of the liberty of the Ruthenian Catholics, so that the latter may adopt, if they please, the Latin rite. It means simply that *Ea Semper* (June 14, 1907, art. XXII) be maintained for the Ruthenian people, allowing the children to be baptized and reared in the profession of the Latin rite.”<sup>24</sup> Commentary: Many years ago, John Carroll, the first Latin bishop in the U.S., wrote to the Vatican

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 647.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 653.

asking for permission to use English in the Liturgy because, as he said: “We are called to preach the Gospel to everyone using a language understood by no one.” Every church needs to adapt its methods to the circumstances of the times. To continually refer to the Eastern Churches as “foreign,” even though the Latin parish “down the road” may have more non-Americans as members, is a habit that has come down to our day. Why is it that having liturgies and services in English still is not enough for many people who still consider us “un-American.”

One of the legacies of the initial years was to focus on ethnic origin as opposed to the spirit of the first Pentecost, where the apostles “were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves ... each of us hears them in his own native language” (Acts 1:4, 8). Yet, this was not the idea that was prevalent in the leadership of the church. Our first immigrants, at least those who spoke for the church, focused on the rite more than nationality:

“The reason for a separate hierarchy for the Ruthenian Greek Catholic Church in the United States is a very different one from that argued by certain foreign Catholics ... With the Ruthenian Greek Catholics, however, there is an absolute difference in the Rite, form of worship and usages ... No question of Ruthenian racial affiliations or of nationality, whether Austrian or Hungarian, is involved, but only that of religious Rite.”<sup>25</sup>

The prejudice of the Latin churches has been known from as early as 1775: “Since the Latin rite is the rite of the holy Roman church and this church is mother and teacher of the other churches, the Latin rite should be preferred to all other rites.”<sup>26</sup>

Andrew Kania wrote: “A statement such as that made by Pope Benedict XV that: ‘The Church of Jesus Christ is neither Latin nor Greek nor Slav but Catholic,’ is still today valid in theological terms, but devoid

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<sup>25</sup> From a small booklet entitled “Complaint against certain false and seditious attacks made by recalcitrant Ruthenian priests respecting their bishop” (New York City, March 12, 1912), p. 6; this is an English translation of a Latin booklet in which Greek Catholic priests support and defend Bishop Ortynsky: “*Protestatio adversus quasdam falsas et seditiosas accusationes, promotas a nonnullis rebellibus sacerdotibus ruthenis contra ipsorum episcopum.*” (Romae, Typ. Pontif. Pio IX, 1912).

<sup>26</sup> Pope Benedict XIV, “Allatae Sunt” [On the Observance of Oriental Rites], Encyclical #20, promulgated on July 26, 1775.



of impact, for most Catholics perceive the term Catholic to mean Latin, be the members of the Church, Greek or Slav (Benedict XV, 1917, *Dei providentis*).<sup>27</sup>

We should defend the gospel we are called to preach. We have survived in the United States not simply because of luck but because we provide an alternative presentation of the gospel which can provide hope and meaning and salvation to all. This diversity is an essential characteristic for the Catholic Church, not simply for canonical reasons but for spiritual ones. The Eastern Churches are repositories of the wealth of human reflection on the divine and are a living church that can provide real access to the divine. The Eastern Churches were never meant to be primarily preservers of a national language or culture as much as they are called to be living members of the Body of Christ.

Our first immigrants to America perhaps intended to return to “the old country,” but after several years they realized all the good they received in America and decided to stay:

“That which Ukrainian immigrants were looking for in the United States, they found; they even found more, because aside from work/wages, still something, what they did not have in the old country and for which they had not traveled to the United States, but they felt its absence — liberty and the respect of the individual’s dignity.”<sup>28</sup>

Bishop Ortynsky spoke openly in defense of his church in his *Pastyrskie Poslanya* of 1908 (published in Ruthenian and Hungarian), and he repeated it in quite a graphic way on February 24, 1916 in Philadelphia, a month before he died, when asked about the bull *Ea Semper* that treated the Ruthenians in a subservient manner:

“The Bull does not exist, I never acknowledged it; therefore, the Bull does not obligate us, because at that time I did not have full jurisdiction, for which I am very thankful to God. Furthermore, I was always against the Bull.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew T. Kania, “Breathing Deeply, with One Lung: The Problem of Latin Church Dominance within the Catholic Church,” *Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2003), p. 9; *The Australasian Catholic Record*, vol. 81, no. 2 (April 2004), pp. 198-211.

<sup>28</sup> Julian Batchinsky, *Ukrayinska immigratsiya v Zyedynenykh Derzhavakh Ameryky* (Lviv, 1914), p. 482.

<sup>29</sup> John Slivka, *Historical Mirror: Sources of the Rusin and Hungarian Greek Rite Catholics in the United States of America, 1884-1963* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1978), p. 118.

Hopefully, we can see from the first years of our Church history in America that we are called to be a universal church in all countries and to all people of the world. The gospel is never alien, and we have an obligation and honor to preach the treasure that causes growth and enlightenment. A fervent dedication to our prime mission of preaching the gospel will benefit both national aspirations and ritual integrity. We do this not simply because we want to survive. We do this because we are called to grow, prosper and make the church as diverse as possible by our vital presence.

The Catholic Church is a composition of vibrant churches of which we are one — called by God to preach his word in the uniqueness and beauty that provided inspiration and strength for a particular church, which has offered martyrs as its seeds of faith. The Lord has called us and anointed us as Ukrainian Catholics. We help the entire Catholic Church be Catholic in the beauty of diversity and we help her to “breathe with two lungs.”

Kania concluded his article with the following: “Throughout the course of this article it has been my intention to reveal to the reader that the Body of Christ, His Church, truly has two lungs — the West, and the hereto poorly recognized East. For far too long the Catholic Church has expressed herself to the world with a singular profile, and as such has often been perceived by the world as speaking with one dimension. Yves Congar mentions that up until the second half of the Sixth Century there existed a magnificent pluralism in the Catholic Church: ‘one passed easily from East to the West and vice versa, celebrating the mass with the people of any particular place, in their language and according to their rubrics.’<sup>30</sup> As Catholics of the third millennium we must seek to regain the catholicity of the past in order to renovate the Church for a resplendent future. We must endeavour to give our children both catholic hearts and catholic minds. Like the athlete in St. Paul’s *First Letter to the Corinthians*, if we wish to run the race and win the prize, we must learn to breathe fully and deeply with both lungs. By so doing we will win for ourselves that wreath which will never wither, and with our efforts combined shall reveal to the world the true Church, She who is the splendid icon of our God, a God who is

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<sup>30</sup> Yves Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years: The Background of the Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1959), pp. 34-35.

universal in goodness, understanding and love. (See 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, *The New Jerusalem Bible*.)”<sup>31</sup>

Let me summarize the major points of this reflection. The Ukrainian Catholic Church has a Gospel mandate to preach and baptize. She must be faithful to this call, or else she risks losing the energy, which drives growth in the Church. The Church can be faithful to its Kyivan/Ukrainian Roots without forbidding others who are not ethnically Ukrainian from joining. We are not an ethnic church — nor were we one in our first 40 years.

We are a worldwide church whose mission is not confined to any particular territory. Our particularity needs to be defended by clergy and faithful, not simply because we need to protect an institution but because we have a spiritual treasure blessed by generations of faithful Christians that can still inspire. We have survived persecution not to preach to ourselves but to spread the Gospel in the beautiful Ukrainian Catholic tradition. We are not foreigners in America. The gospel and Christ’s Church is at home in every culture.

I think that if we continue to focus on the gospel command to be open to everyone and to preach to everyone, then we become relevant. This “catholicism-*katholicos*” would infuse a new life in the Ukrainian Catholic Church. We would be a people with a future and a vibrancy that would rejuvenate the church. We would not be living simply with a glorious history but with a relevant message for a wonderful future. For these reasons, we celebrate a tradition that is not simply a heritage for admiration — but a gift for all. Those who would not want us to be open to the world must be persuaded or convinced, but we must never let their old ideas lead us to a dead end.

In the words of Jesus: “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). We are to follow Christ and lead others to him. That is our vocation and our privilege.

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<sup>31</sup> Kania, p. 12.

