

For Russian Orthodox, Greek Catholic Spread “Like Virus,” Says UCU Vice-rector

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The Russian Orthodox Church considers the development of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) “like the spread of a dangerous virus.” This is according to Myroslav Marynovych, vice-rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University and director of its Institute of Religion and Society in Lviv, Ukraine. On 25 February 2003, Marynovch gave his comments on the results of the trip of Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to Moscow last week to discuss the development of the Roman and Greek Catholic churches in the lands of the former Soviet Union.

According to AGI.it, on 19 February the cardinal met with Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev) of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church. On 21 February, the Press Department of the Holy See issued a note stating, among other things, that “Both parties have agreed that, in order to solve any issues that may arise in the future with regards to relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, a work group will be set up featuring members of both Churches. The aim of the group will be examining and solving these issues.”

According to the BBC Monitoring Service, Cardinal Kasper met with Patriarch Alexis II, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, on 22 February, and said that the Catholic Church would not set up a Greek Catholic Patriarchate in Ukraine. At the same meeting, Patriarch Alexis said “Proselytism in the territory of Russia and other CIS countries is spreading more and more widely and broadly.” Patriarch Alexis added, according to ITAR-TASS, that the establishment of a Greek Catholic Patriarchate in Ukraine will give up for lost relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican for decades. The patriarch is concerned about “the union spreading onto east Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan.”

Myroslav Marynovych commented on the situation for the Religious Information Service of Ukraine:

“The address of Patriarch Alexis II is set,” said Marynovych, “in a key traditional for the Russian Orthodox Church. If the ‘Uniate’ Church will be allowed to exist, this will be, to put it figuratively, only [hidden from view] ‘under the table’ of history, in its own special regional ghetto. Though natural in an era of migration, the church’s extensive development is treated like the spread of a dangerous virus that threatens Christian peace. It is not possible to accept such an interpretation.

“However, the obstinacy and ultimatum-like character of the patriarch’s language is, in my opinion, not only the result of the worries of those leaders of the ROC who refuse to reconcile. Some Roman Catholics in the West with whom I have conversed express their unease with the supposedly unreasonable acts of Eastern Catholics. In their understanding, Greek Catholics should avoid actions that could aggravate the Moscow Patriarchate. The UGCC’s struggle to have its patriarchate established and to transfer the patriarch’s see to Kyiv, unfortunately, is received by some Roman Catholics not as an element of the normal development of the UGCC, but as unmotivated steps in the direction of confrontation. This creates a background against which the obstinacy of patriarchal Moscow looks understandable.

“However, this result of the discussions in Moscow, seemingly negative for the UGCC, is in fact an important step towards the normalization of interchurch relations. It has allowed one main conclusion to emerge: the Moscow Patriarchate’s efforts to return relations with the Vatican to the old rut of *ostpolitik*, and the hypnotic dependence of Vatican propositions on the ultimatums of the Moscow Patriarchate, both contradict the spirit of the modern era. I am convinced that, both in Catholicism and in world Orthodoxy, dissatisfaction with the style in which the discussions in Moscow were conducted will grow. Therefore, there will still be changes.”

Sources: www.agi.it, BBC Monitoring Service, ITAR-TASS, and UKRAINE REPORT-2004, No. 30