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Uniate Church Renounces Vatican, Rejoins Orthodox, Moscow Says

By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS

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LONDON, March 17—The Moscow radio broadcast the news this afternoon that the Uniate Church of the western Ukraine had decided to break its centuries-old union with the Catholic Church of Rome and return to the Russian Orthodox Church. This is a blow for the Vatican and it seems like a direct answer to the charges of persecution of Ukrainian Catholics made by the Vatican and especially by Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, prefect of the Oriental Congregation, in a statement issued in Rome earlier this month.

In fact, the radio report, in quoting a message to Premier Stalin from the Synod of the Uniate Church meeting in Lwow, said that the "abolition of the clerical sovereignty of the Vatican has become possible only now that all

seeks to use as political instruments, and the Roman Catholic Church, which is trying to hold the Catholics of eastern Europe within the Roman fold, protect them from persecution and continue its perennial efforts to heal the eastern schism.

Pope Denounces Persecution

At the recent Consistory when the Cardinals received their red hats, the Sacred Congregation of the Oriental Church was strengthened by the Pope's naming eight of the new Cardinals to that congregation, which, among other duties, is concerned with the border zone between the Orthodox and the Roman churches. The Pontiff, in a recent encyclical letter, had denounced the persecution of Catholics in Ruthenia. Cardinal Tisserant, in his statement, gave new details about the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. He told how priests and nuns were being systematically deported.

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Ukrainians have been reunited in a single state. Henceforth nothing can separate our unified Ukrainian people." The message indicates clearly enough a political as well as a religious basis for this move.

It was a union that had lasted since 1596, when the Uniate Churches acknowledged the supremacy of the Pope although retaining their old rites and liturgy. The Greek, Syrian and Armenian Catholic communities and the Maronites, as well as other Catholics of eastern Europe, made that pact of exactly 350 years ago that is breached today for the first time. It underlines what a tense and determined tug-of-war is going on between Moscow, working through the Orthodox Churches, which it

"By acting this way, the Communist authorities are effectively coming to the aid of the dissident schismatic Patriarch of Moscow, Alexis, who on his election invited the Ruthenian Catholics to separate themselves from the Vatican," Cardinal Tisserant said. "Since in Russia, practically speaking, no Christian Church other than the Cerkiev Orthodox Church of Moscow is allowed, the order of the day is that the Ruthenian Catholic Church must disappear."

It is interesting now to recall the recent Vatican announcement that the Apostolic Administrator for Ruthenian refugees, Msgr. Piotr Werhun of Lwow, was arrested in Berlin and deported by the Russians.

TEXT OF CHURCH LETTER

The text of the letter to Premier Stalin from the Uniate Church Assembly follows:

Three hundred fifty years ago the imperialist Poland of the gentry, striving to increase the enslavement of Ukrainian lands that had been forcibly separated from

their mother country, also broke the religious and church unity of those lands with the east of the same race and religion with the help of proud and power-loving Rome, which had always dreamed of its own dictatorship in the Christian world.

Today before our eyes an act of historic justice has been done through the heroic deeds of the Red Army—truly an army of the people—and of the entire Soviet Union. Under your great leadership, what seemed to be an unattainable dream for which the best generations of the Ukrainian people had fought has come true. All the Ukrainian lands, from the Tissa across the Carpathians and from the San up to the Don, from the Pinsk swamps up to the Black Sea, have been reunited.

"Cast Off Moral Yoke"

In our new free life, feeling ourselves independent masters of our land, we have cast off the moral yoke that had been forced on us against our will and for our destruction. The assembly of the Uniate Church of the western Ukraine, having gathered in

Lwow, decided today, March 8, 1946 to abolish the Brest union with the Vatican established in 1596 and to return to the bosom of the Holy Russian Orthodox Church of our forefathers, whose light shone from Kiev, Russia, historic cradle of the Russian, Ukrainian and White Russian peoples.

We are happy to request you, the leader of the great Soviet Union, to accept our message as an expression of our joy over the fact that henceforth nothing will separate our reunited Ukrainian people. At this historic, epoch-making moment, we cannot help expressing our profound gratitude for your great deed—the reunion of the Ukrainian lands—without which it would be impossible even to dream of putting an end to our religious separation.

The letter was signed, on behalf of the 216 delegates of the assembly, representing all three dioceses and all deaneries, by the presidium of the assembly: the chairman, Dr. Gavril Kostelnik, and the members, Dr. Mikhail Melnik and Antoni Pelvetsky.