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Vatican Holds Uniate Shift Void; Charges Bishops Are in Prison

By SAM POPE BREWER

By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

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ROME, March 18—Russian authorities have forced a false and invalid denunciation by Eastern European Uniates of the accord that united them to Rome 350 years ago, Vatican circles charged tonight in commenting on Moscow's announcement that Ruthenian Uniates had reverted to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The statement, issued by the Vatican's Sacred Congregation of the Oriental Church, said it was the work of a few renegade priests and declared:

"By 'the Church of Western Ukraine' it is probably meant to designate the three Catholic dioceses of the Oriental rite in Galicia: Lwow, Przemysl and Stanislavow. In that case it must be recalled that the Bishops of these dioceses and their respective auxiliaries have been either deported or

imprisoned while a large part of the clergy has been put into a position where they cannot exercise their ministry."

An ecclesiastic holding a high position in the Congregation of the Oriental Church put the situation still more bluntly tonight, saying:

"There is nobody in those regions who is not imprisoned and whatever the Russians have done cannot therefore be valid."

There are four Bishops in the area affected, he said, and all have been arrested. In any case this move affects only a section of the Uniates. There are also Rumanian, Greek, Armenian and other Uniate groups.

Pius XII expressed his concern over the persecution of Ruthenian Catholics by Soviet authorities in

an encyclical issued Jan. 19, saying: "There are even forces that are working with all their power to the end that they leave the bosom of the mother church and join dissidents."

He said Catholics were accused of being enemies of the State and accused Patriarch Alexus of Moscow, "elected by dissident Bishops," of backing this move.

The director of the Ruthenian Pontifical College of San Giosafat, Father Giosafat Labaj, said tonight that it was the view of the Ruthenian clergy here that it is impossible for the Ruthenian church to make any such move at this time because only Bishops could do it, and, with the Bishops under arrest and the congregations intimidated, a change could not be valid.

The interpretation given in the statement of the congregation of the Oriental Church is:

"The so-called 'synod' held at Lwow, which decided to abrogate the union of the Ruthenians to the Church of Rome, brought about in 1596, was probably headed by some few apostate priests, one of whom recently published a booklet against the primacy of the Roman Pontiff."

The move is regarded here as a Russian coup in the campaign against the Vatican. It cannot have much ecclesiastical significance, but is important politically because of the influence of local priests on the ignorant peasants of eastern Europe. If clerics who resist the Russian Government's direction of the church are removed discreetly enough to avoid angering the peasantry their successors should be able to eliminate any opposition to the Government.

It is pointed out here that the Russians already precipitated similar action in the Orthodox Church outside Russia by separating the Baltic and Polish Orthodox churches from the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Istanbul and even persuading that patriarchate to recognize their transfer to the authority of Patriarch Alexus of Moscow.

Uniates Appealed to World

By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, March 18—A vigorous appeal against the forced separation of their church from the Vatican has been made to the Catholic world by the Eastern Polish Regional Association in a document that charges "ruthless pressure was exerted by the Soviet Union upon members of the Greek Uniate Archdiocese of Lwow and the dioceses of Przemysl and Stanislavow to obtain their return to the Russian Orthodox Church. The appeal was issued before yester-

day's Moscow announcement that the Uniate Church of Western Ukraine had decided to break away from the Roman Catholic Church.

According to the appeal, the Metropolitan of Lwow, Msgr. Sliptyj, and the Bishop of Stanislavow, Msgr. Chomyszyn, died in prison at Kiev. It also reported that Msgr. Latiszewskij, Bishop adjutant of Stanislavow; Msgr. Lakota, Bishop adjutant of Przemysl, and two Bishops adjutant of Lwow, Msgr. Budka and Msgr. Chornecki, had been "deprived of their liberty."

The Uniate community, which at the outbreak of the war numbered about 3,000,000 persons, is being subjected to Soviet measures that are "vividly reminiscent of the days of Nicholas I," the appeal says. Forty-two Uniate priests have submitted to the new dispensation, but about 2,600 are

"struggling against great odds," it continues.

"Soviet Trick" Charged

Moscow's announcement that the Uniate Church of the Western Ukraine had decided to return to the Russian Orthodox Church was branded yesterday as "another false Soviet trick" by Bishop Ambrose Senyshyn, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Seminary at Stamford, Conn.

"The message reported to have been sent to Premier Stalin from the Synod of the Uniate Church," said Bishop Senyshyn, "could not have come from any of the Ukraine's total of seven bishops of the Catholic Eastern Rite because four of them are dead and the other three are believed to be still in prison. Three of the four deceased bishops died in the prison in Kiev, where they were confined by the Communist Government."