

Unorthodox Views – Part II

By Volodymyr Kish

My last week's column on the unfortunate stand taken by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada (UOCC) on the visit of Patriarch Filaret of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Ukraine (Kyiv Patriarchate) to our country stimulated a lot of commentary. Virtually all of the feedback I received agreed that Metropolitan Yuriy's instructions to all his clergy and parishes here in Canada forbidding any contact with Patriarch Filaret fell short of what most Ukrainian Orthodox faithful expected of their spiritual leader. Further, it reflects poorly on the Church's values and principles, especially considering that the rest of the Ukrainian community including the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the Ukrainian National Federation and others had no problem welcoming the Patriarch with the respect and fellowship that his visit deserved. It is ironic that the Patriarch was welcomed at St. Demetrius Ukrainian Catholic Church in Toronto, but was shunned and prevented from stepping into any Orthodox church during his visit to Canada.

Whichever side of the "canonicity" issue one believes in, and regardless of the legalistic debates over historical legitimacy, few would argue the purely spiritual credentials and leadership of Patriarch Filaret. He is the accepted and respected leader of the majority of Ukrainian Orthodox faithful in Ukraine. In the spirit of ecumenical fellowship, he deserved to be welcomed here by the leaders of all the different Ukrainian communions here in Canada. There should have been a continuation of the dialogue initiated over the past decade towards the re-unification of all the Christian churches in Ukraine, as well as the rest of the world.

At the very least, Metropolitan Yuriy could have clearly enunciated publicly, that though he was obliged to follow canonical principles regarding official recognition, that did not exclude engaging in brotherly dialogue with a fellow Christian. The doors of our churches should be open to anyone who comes in friendship. Closing our doors to a fellow Christian sets the wrong precedent and sends a message that cannot be justified on Christian grounds.

Jesus in his time had no issue engaging with Jews, Pharisees, prostitutes, unbelievers, lepers or the least of those he met in his day-to-day life. He cared not a whit as to what conclusions people may have drawn from his associations with others, and I would submit Metropolitan Yurij should have followed his example. Regrettably in this case, I believe that political considerations superseded what was the right and Christian thing to do. The only ones who benefited from all this are the dubious Orthodox leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate.

I acknowledge that I am not an expert on the intricacies of Orthodox Church dogma, laws, conventions, regulations and policies. However, I also do not believe that you need to be a legal and theological expert to understand the basic precepts of what it takes to be a good Christian. As I have stated on many previous occasions, I believe that the organized church structures and religions have gone too far in over-complicating, over-regulating and over-bureaucratizing the activities and requirements of how our churches should operate. The original “churches” two thousand years ago were engaged, active and involved communities of believers. It was their essential faith that was important, and the political and bureaucratic elements were minimal. Today, that is no longer the case.

Events of the past week clearly demonstrate what happens when political considerations supersede the most basic teachings of the Faith.

Interestingly enough, this issue comes to the fore at a time when two Orthodox parishes in Canada, one in New Westminster, BC and another in Regina, SK have left the UOCC, and accepted the jurisdiction of the Kyiv Patriarchate. Whether that had some bearing on Metropolitan Yurij’s actions is obviously a question worth asking.