

What if?

A Historical Opportunity Rejected

Protopresbyter Mirone Klysh

On November 30 2008, His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America attended the celebrations marking the 25th Anniversary of the Episcopal Consecration of His Eminence John, Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada. In a conversation with Protopresbyter Mirone Klysh, parish priest of his St George Orthodox Church in Winnipeg, Archbishop Nathaniel recalled a previous visit the two of them had made, in 1988, to the then Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, Metropolitan Wasyly (now reposed).

Early in 1988, in anticipation of the celebration of the 1,000th Anniversary of the Baptism of Kyivan Rus', Father Mirone approached His Beatitude Metropolitan Theodosius of the Orthodox Church in America with the suggestion that, as part of the celebrations in North America, the Orthodox Church in America offer to recognize the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada as a sister, autocephalous Church. The suggestion was accepted by Metropolitan Theodosius.

Since then-Bishop Nathaniel was committed to making a pastoral visit to the St George Parish in Winnipeg from April the 22nd through April the 25th 1988, it was decided that Bishop Nathaniel and Father Mirone would make an official visit to Metropolitan Wasyly and make the offer of autocephaly to the Ukrainian Church of Canada from the Orthodox Church in America. Well in advance of this official visit, Father Mirone informed the Very Reverend Father Dr Stephan Jarmus, Chairman of the Presidium of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, of the desire of Bishop Nathaniel and Father Mirone to have an official visit with Metropolitan Wasyly on Monday, April the 25th 1988. Father Mirone told Father Stephan that the purpose of the visit was to offer autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada from the Orthodox Church in America. He was reminded of this a few days before the visit.

On Monday, April the 25th 1988, at the appointed time, Bishop Nathaniel and Father Mirone arrived at the headquarters of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada in Winnipeg. They were met by Father Stephan and escorted to the office of Metropolitan Wasyly. Bishop Nathaniel informed Metropolitan Wasyly that the purpose of the official visit was to offer autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada on behalf of the Orthodox Church in America. Metropolitan Wasyly responded: "I know nothing about this!" It was clear that he was not willing to discuss the offer.

Bishop Nathaniel gracefully managed the uncomfortable situation by expressing his appreciation for the theological education provided by St Andrew's College in Winnipeg to two men who had become priests in the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America. Having expressed his appreciation, Bishop Nathaniel and Father Mirone left the headquarters of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada.

What if the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada accepted the offer of autocephaly from the Orthodox Church in America? First and foremost, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, together with the Orthodox Church in America parishes in Canada, would have become the Orthodox Church in Canada, serving Canadians in a variety of languages, as required by the faithful. This would have been a big step forward in the formation of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Canada, since every country is entitled to have a Synod of Bishops headed by a patriarch, in this case, Patriarch of Ottawa and All Canada. This formation would fulfill the teaching and vision of Blessed Memory Metropolitan Ilarion, a reposed Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada.

Second, having been recognized as the Orthodox Church in Canada, the autocephalous Church could have developed the Faculty of Theology of St Andrew's College in Winnipeg into the Orthodox Seminary of Canada. Such a seminary would be needed to train clergy and others to carry out the work of the Church in Canada and beyond. This, especially, would be beneficial in providing more regular services in areas that presently are not provided with a service every Sunday or Holy Day.

Third, the Orthodox Church in Canada would be able, through the work of the seminary to more widely and fully inform Canadians about the Orthodox faith. Hopefully, through instructions and through publications about the Orthodox faith, Canadians would no longer ask the questions such as: "What is the Orthodox Church?" "What is an Orthodox Christian?"

Fourth, the Orthodox Church in Canada, having more trained clergy and other workers could expand mission efforts in Canada. As a result, there would be an Orthodox presence in every major city and

town of the country. Faithful members of the Church, who had to move because of employment or other reasons, would not have to travel miles from their home in order to attend an Orthodox service.

Finally, the Orthodox Church in Canada could create monasteries across the country as centers of spiritual healing and growth. Throughout the history of the Orthodox Church in the world, monasteries have played an important role in preserving the Faith.

What has been the result of the rejection of the offer of autocephaly by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada? First of all, the Archdiocese of Canada of the Orthodox Church in America is continuing to fill the potential role of the Orthodox Church in Canada. In order to provide clergy and faithful to expand the work of the Archdiocese, in 2003 it established Saint Arseny Orthodox Christian Theological Institute to prepare men to become Deacons. To date, five students from the Institute have been ordained into the Diaconate, and two others will soon complete the program of studies. In total, over twenty students have enrolled in the Diaconal program, including students in the United States.

Because of the need for Readers in parishes, the Institute developed a program of studies for Readers. Over fifty students have registered for this program. As with the Diaconal program, the Reader's Program has attracted students from the United States, and even from Ireland. To assist with religious education in Orthodox parishes in Canada and the United States, the Institute provides a course in Christian Education.

In 2006, the St Arseny Institute, through the prayers of Archbishop St Arseny of Winnipeg and the Grace of God, became affiliated with the Faculty of Theology of the University of Winnipeg,

thereby, benefitting from the Faculty of Theology's accreditation under the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) – the main accrediting agency for North American schools offering post-baccalaureate degree programs in theology. The Institute is now able to offer a program of studies leading to the Master of Divinity degree.

Through the ongoing mission commitment of the Archdiocese, parishes that were declining are being revived. More and more missions are being established across Canada. As noted above, the mission work is being supported by St Arseny Institute through its programs of studies, which are open to both orthodox and non-Orthodox students. All this is helping to enlighten Canadians about the formerly "best kept secret in Canada – the Orthodox faith!"

In closing, it is necessary to note that, having rejected the offer of autocephaly from the Orthodox Church in America, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church submitted herself to the control of the Patriarch of Constantinople, which will make it difficult for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada to become autocephalous in the foreseeable future.

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