

Mother Russia by Luba George

German bishops will attend jubilee

The Catholic delegation's decision amounts to a slap in the face of the Pope.

Despite Moscow having in effect declared Pope John Paul II *persona non grata* (the Soviet Foreign Ministry recently ruled out a 1988 papal visit to the Soviet Union), a German Catholic Bishops' Conference delegation has accepted a Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) invitation to attend the June "Russian" Millennium (Christianization of Kievan Rus) celebrations in Moscow.

This was decided Feb. 11, after 10 days of talks in Bavaria between an ROC delegation led by Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk, and Munich Archbishop, Cardinal Friedrich Wetter. The agreement constitutes a slap in the face to the Pope, whom Moscow has publicly disinvited from attending the June festivities, and followed the December Moscow visit of Bavaria's Minister-President and Christian Social Union leader Franz Josef Strauss. The connection was underscored when, on Feb. 9, the Bavarian state government hosted a reception for the Russian Church delegation.

The major part of the itinerary of the ROC delegation (including the ROC "German Question expert" Archbishop German, the Exarch of Berlin and Central Europe) were meetings with the German Catholic Bishops Conference, Feb. 6-12, in the Fürstenried Castle, near Munich. The Russian Church visit marked a major thrust in Moscow's use of the 1988 Jubilee to stage a deep cultural offensive into the West, above all in Germany. The declared Soviet aim of this cultural offensive is to "eliminate the enemy image" of the Soviet Union in Germany, and to promote the sup-

posed "cultural unity" of East and West, to undermine the Western cultural identity of Germany, Moscow's priority target on the European continent.

With these aims in mind, the ROC delegation scored big successes. The German Catholic Bishops' Conference, while admitting "differences" between the two churches on the role and authority of the Pope, announced that the German Catholic Church will "continue the brotherly talks" with the ROC "soon" in the Belorussian capital of Minsk. The Minsk talks will mark the third round (the first was in Moscow in 1986) of ecumenical discussions between the German Catholic Church and the Moscow Patriarchate.

The initial call for the "ecumenical dialogue" between the two churches came from a group, known to insiders as the "Sankt Emmeran Club" (named after the old Benedictine Abbey near Regensburg), around the Ostkirche Institut (Institute of Eastern Churches) in Regensburg, the seat of an extremely rich and powerful oligarchic family, Thurn und Taxis. On April 21-26, 1987, the Institute was host to a Symposium on the theme "Mir-Miru [Peace on Earth]—A Millennium Between the Volga and the Rhine." The event was co-sponsored by the Ecumenical Council of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference headed by Cardinal Wetter. Thirteen ROC delegates of bishop rank and higher attended, including Metropolitan Pitirim of Volokolamsk and Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev.

The "spiritual high point" of the February talks was a co-celebration of

mass Feb. 7 in Altoetting, followed by a Byzantine Rite Vespers at the Niederaltaich Benedictine Abbey. The German Catholic Bishops stressed that the Fürstenried Castle talks opened with "thoughts on the theme, Unity of the Church, Unity of all people, in accordance with the Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist (Communion)." While strong divisions remain, "trust has grown and more openness has been reached," said the German Bishop Eder of Passau. The closing communiqué of the German Catholic Bishops and the ROC stated that there exists "the hope that a consummation of the unity of both churches" can be achieved. The communiqué's language is astounding, given that Moscow Patriarchate publications and the Soviet government have been engaged in brutal attacks on the Pope over the past two years.

Even as the German Catholic Bishops' played ball with the ROC in Bavaria, the Soviet Foreign Ministry issued a sharp attack on the Pope. It appeared in the February 1988 edition of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's German language monthly *Soviet Union Today* published by the Soviet embassy in Bonn. The Pope was denounced above all for "the conduct of the Vatican regarding the status of believers, above all the Catholics in the U.S.S.R., as well as the Vatican's support for the [Ukrainian] Uniate Church, with which it is allied, and which operates illegally on the territory of the Soviet Union. . . . The Uniates abroad, are today aiming at splitting Soviet society, and heating up conflicts among different nationalities. The hard course which the Vatican has followed in its *Ostpolitik*, has not brought the expected results. Neither social-political nor any kind of significant religious changes [re: Uniates], which one had counted on, have emerged in the Soviet Union."