

**“Facing the burden of the soviet past.
Challenges and contributions in a post soviet society”**

**Speech of Lubomyr Cardinal Huzar
Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church**

Kyiv, 23 September 2007

I express my gratitude to Reverend Auxiliary Bishop Schwarz! You raised our spirits on a very high level. Today we want exchange gifts, not highly spiritual but visible. I am extremely grateful for the occasion to meet with you and I hope that you had a chance to see, feel and experience a lot of new things not known to you before. Today I would like to give the background of former events, which were discussed. All the endurance did not happen in a vacuum, emptiness, but in certain surroundings, which had very distinctive character. All three speakers of yesterday's evening: Professor Yaroslav Hrytsak, Mr Eugen Sverstiyk and Professor Myroslav Marynovych recounted and implied a lot of actualities. Properly speaking, I will to a certain extent continue their speeches and also will add something looking back at our past and from this perspective trying to foresee some aspects of the future. While looking back on the whole situation in the Soviet Union we should not forget the truth, which is not often discussed, and even seldom carefully considered.

I mean that at least the first 30 years of Soviet Union's existence were marked by a very strong religious element. The new ideology which dominated in the Soviet Union was built by the example of a religion. A question "Why?" may be brought up. The answer will be as follows, because the man who was responsible for the further development of communist ideology – Joseph Stalin – was once prepared to become a priest and it was the only schooling which he received. His criteria of thinking were religious ones. He hadn't received any other education except seminary. That is why most of the actions in the Soviet Union and their performance should be regarded through the prism of religion. Therefore Stalin intended to establish a new religion, which in many ways imitated basic aspect of any religion. Those who lived in the Soviet Union till the time of his death or even some years later, in many ways felt that many of the performed rituals, processions, different procedures (such as giving a name, initiation into the pioneers, marriage) to some extent resembled religious rituals. Stalin tried to introduce a religion without God, religion in which Lenin performed the role of a tin, or in a way a real idol.

This moment is very important and it should not be discarded. It formed the further background to the events which happened in the Soviet Union, it brought about horrible consequences to the population of that big empire. Yesterday Mr Sverstyck mentioned that there also was an attempt to create a new person – "homo sovieticus", which sometimes, certainly not without reason, is described rather comically as a person who "thinks about something, tells another thing and does a different thing". This is, to my mind, a rather shallow, though not an unsound, description. This is a very important issue because it includes the desire to substitute a primeval creature and the act of God's creation by a new creature, entirely independent and distant from God. Obviously, this had a strong influence on the development of mentality and life in the Soviet Union. These facts testify to one very important thing: there existed a serious intention to deprive a person of the Christian, religious, moral principles. A person was obliged to live according to a communist morality, which was completely different had its peculiar character. Professor Hrytsak mentioned yesterday that such morality could not prevail utterly. A compromise had to be reached in that situation taking into account thousand-year Christian tradition of this part of the world. Still a lot had been already done to deprive people of the sense of moral principles. It came to the worst: the idea was not only to deprive people of moral principles but also to lead them to nought, to non-existence. A person, an individual was considered as nothing. According to the teachings of Carl Marks a person can exist and express oneself only in a community. But we must stop here and bare in mind that trying to behave in this way people ceased being conscious of their origins, dignity and rights given by God. A person was made to feel as a nil.

If you read magazines of those times, you would, perhaps, be surprised by the photographs of parades, celebrations or big communist meetings, which show people whose chests were covered with medals. Even today in Ukraine people are fond of medals, which are generously awarded starting from the Government ending with the Church. These medals are not ordinary rewards or gestures of goodwill. In the Soviet Union the Government demanded a certain kind of gratitude from people. In what way did they achieve it? By awarding a medal. Those who received it gained authority and became treated with a particular respect by the Government or the society.

In 1920s, in the time of Lenin, and perhaps at the beginning of Stalin's rule there was a certain amount of idealists who believed in communism. It is known that there were fervent

adherents of communism among writers, who believed that it will make people's lives better, will bring about something new. Their belief was largely a matter of the life circumstances in XIX and at beginning of XX centuries, in particular misfortune of the World War I and famine in the early 1920s. Therefore, somebody really might have believed in it, became an idealist, and acted as an idealist. But in the course of time, at the end of 1920s, and particularly in 1930s, this idealism diminished considerably, because people saw what was really happening and realized that entirely different regime was coming to power.

We do not take into consideration idealism of the Communists, even of party members let alone common citizens. Entirely different levers were put into operation. A very strict control was introduced, and fear as a strong argument for serving the country was established. The system aimed to make a person serve for the purposes of the country. At the same time, it occurred, as it was already mentioned yesterday, that the whole system was destitute of the essence of law. Certainly there was nominal legislation, namely a very good constitution, but the law wasn't observed. There were ten thousand of different instructions which were used by the power authorities to keep everything under control.

Later on a new element was introduced. What a person can count on, how can people protect themselves? There was no law, even the highest officials, party functionaries, even legendary figures of the communist party were destroyed. The period of such terror refers mainly to 1930s, it was slightly mitigated in 1940s due to the war and in 1950s – because of Stalin's death.

In 1906s, and particularly in 1970s it was a terror of a different nature. Those who had possibility started looking for safety. I was told by the official of that time that in 1970s and in 1980s a lot of high officials of communist party attempted to occupy advantageous positions in the industrial world, became directors of big or smaller but efficient enterprises. At the same time, a new philosophy started dominating, it was no longer idealism. Fear still remained, though it wasn't as strong as in the time of Stalin, however one could still undergo difficulties. In general a so called relief could be observed. What could make a person with soviet mentality feel safe? Money, property. So by occupying main, productive positions in industry or in other spheres one could receive profits, and that was entailed by corruption. People tried to protect their position in

life to such an extent that they would be able to bribe the needed person anytime or make their life not only advantageous but also safe.

It can be seen that some of these processes continue even today, particularly among the people who started working in 1970s. They grew up on this life practice. Today in Ukraine we can also observe the fight for power, but everyone knows, and it is talked openly, that this fight has one reason – to provide oneself with money and property. On the other hand we can't forget that greed especially of people with soviet mentality (things are different with young generation) persuades them that everything can be bought, even human's soul. Nowadays a lot of political processes are aimed at money. This is a kind of disease from which we suffer.

I was offered to examine the topic "How to deal with the endured past?". On observing the situation in modern Ukraine, I would like to state that the first thing which we need today is a **religious healing**. We have to heal people whom the former regime aimed to mutilate and destroy; people who were deeply wounded, but didn't lose sense of goodness. Today from the point of view of a clergyman I see our main task in curing and saving those longsuffering people with the help of the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments.

I would like to mention several wounds which caused sufferings to people. First of all it is *lack of responsibility*, which took place not because people were unscrupulous, dishonest but because they were afraid of responsibility. It was very dangerous to take the responsibility, if somebody showed the ability to become a leader he would be in danger. I recollect an episode from my life, when in 1990 I returned to Ukraine for the first time and received a visa in the passport. I wanted to stay in a hotel. One man at the reception looked at the passport and immediately turned to his colleague for advice. That man turned to another person, because probably he didn't know how to act in this situation and was afraid to do something which could have bad consequences... The second big wound is *lack of trust between people*. The system was constructed in such way that nobody could be trusted. If people trusted each other, sooner or later they could cooperate and make a revolution, which was dangerous for the communist regime. So nobody could start doing something independently. There was fear even within one family, a brother was afraid of brother. There are a lot of other wounds which need healing to let people return to normal life.

Yesterday Professor Yaroslav Hrytsak was talking about the compromise. To my mind, this is an urgent point, because we can not count on straight away suggestions of certain easy and open ways to solve the problem, which would be approved immediately and unanimously. We should realize that we can not make big steps presently. We must move on gradually, step by step. Otherwise we won't achieve anything; we would talk in vain, because nobody would listen to us. Nobody can change totally and at once; it should happen gradually and a person should reach a compromise with oneself. Otherwise one won't be cured, won't regain consciousness, this also concerns bigger compromises mentioned yesterday by Professor Hrytsak.

I would also like to touch upon a subject of Orange revolution. It was said yesterday that events in Kyiv on Maidan, which happened a couple of years ago, were not the only peaceful revolution in the history of our country (though any of the previous can hardly be compared with it). Why is this event of great importance to us? Not only because of big amount of people (namely the open-minded youth) who participated in it. This revolution happened without single drop of blood and without the slightest act of vandalism. Some experts may interpret it as purely political event, which favoured a certain political grouping known today as "the orange". My personal perception of this event is different – it was an inner impulse of the people, who wanted to remind about their existence and express their will to the strong and their motto was: "Justice and Truth". The people did not intend to persuade with force or use violence. It was genuinely peaceful and deep inner impulse.

Can we consider it as an important event? The communist party during decades of its rule through the machinery of government and coercive powers tried to tear out of people's hearts senses of truth and justice, along with belief in God, by using sophisticated means and studying the situations from scientific point of view. The Orange revolution proves that this long lasting carefully planned affair was not crowned with success, that people, despite severe persecution, cherished goodness in their hearts. People's soul may be wounded, but it is not dead. And this is a very important point when we talk about the future.

I would like to draw attention to one more subject – work of the Church. There is not a slightest doubt that in the process of revival the Churches have to play a very significant role. Interestingly, people who suffered a lot bear no resentment or wish for revenge. It testifies that hearts of the oppressed and persecuted are filled with good will. We should not have doubts of

the future concerning spiritual welfare of the people, but we should realize that the Church can not simply wave a magic wand to solve the problem. The clergy are not angels sent from heaven to save people, they are also victims of the past like everyone else. We are obliged to work obediently, honestly and hard, not claiming to have all the clues on hand. We have to advance step by step, curing first of all ourselves, to be able to preach the word of God with trustworthiness.

The revival and structural renewal of Ukrainian Church happened after 1990. The Church was aimed to be liquidated during the Soviet Union, but notwithstanding its ruined structure it continued existing. The Church had its bishops, priests and the faithful. Since 1990 and on, there was an opportunity to develop normal life of the Church with its structural and supportive elements (administrative arrangement, monasteries and convents, the press etc.). But structural revival is only the first step which cannot lead immediately to solving all the problems. Work with the youth is the example of additional directions of development. Within last eight years three surveys of the youth were carried out in all parts of Ukraine. As the result, they showed that young people in the process of their self-examination are searching for God. However, this search tends to be very difficult for the youth both in Western and Eastern Ukraine. This deep spiritual experience is not easy for them, because they live in the world which is searching freedom. Within certain boundaries of previous experience of the past the majority of young people think that the only way to be oneself and to be free is to have money. That is why there is desire to find easy, fast earnings, people are scattered all around the world to find a job, and they have a dream to find the optimal place of work with the best earnings. People see money as the only thing which can secure their existence in the restless and uncertain world. It is not an easy task to reach the hearts of young people, because one has to distort the reality, figuratively speaking, to bleach it.

The former structures of the Church have fallen down, but the youth sometimes still identifies modern structures with the old ones. It is hard to persuade them that current structure is entirely new. They often treat the Church as another structural authority and do not lend an ear to it. Is it possible to reach the hearts of young people? There is an effective, but not an easy method: it consists in the authentic truthful personal example. The youth react to it very positively; they are open to believers who bring freedom and happiness. Therefore our prospects for the future inhere not in the building of new structures and extensive projects or programmes but in securing souls, by the example of our life. Our response to the ruins made by the

communist regime is as follows: **the Church should become the essence of faith, and should be formed by true believers who live by their faith.** If, with the grace of God, we can form our communities and our Church in this way, then we will be able to look with a great hope at the overcoming of the wounds of past.

Thank you for the attention.