

## **Andrew Sorokowski on "Fears and Phobias"**

### **Culture**

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**Ukrainian autocephaly is a threat to the Moscow Patriarchate's control of East Slavic Orthodoxy. And the Moscow Patriarchate's ecclesiastical control over Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Belarus is an important element of the Kremlin's political control over those countries.**

Commentary by Andrew Sorokowski Although the word "phobia" is often understood to mean "hatred," its basic meaning is "fear." True, fear often causes hatred. It can also cause aggression. But the fear denoted by "phobia" is not a rational fear. Thus, for example, fear of the number 13 is phobic, because it is irrational. But fear of Russia is not a phobia because, in the wake of that country's invasion of Ukraine, it is entirely rational. What about religious phobias? Is Orthodox fear of Catholicism, for example, rational? One might argue that if one considers how many Orthodox Churches have entered into union with Rome over the past several centuries, thus becoming "Catholic," such a fear is rational. Indeed, they were often treated unfairly, losing much of their heritage as they became "Latinized." But Roman Catholics recognized long ago the injustices that the Orthodox had suffered (Yves Congar's *After 900 Years* was published in 1954). Today, more than fifty years after the Second Vatican Council and its 1964 Decree on Ecumenism, no one would propose a union on such unequal terms as were once common. The Catholic Church views the Orthodox as separated parts of the Church of Christ, and in ecumenical contacts treats them as equals. Hence, an Orthodox fear of Catholicism, or of Union with the Catholic Church, is irrational. It qualifies as a phobia. A recent example of this phobia appeared on the website of the Union of Orthodox Journalists (25 July 2017). In a Russian-language article entitled "How Much More Will Georgiy Kovalenko Pay Off the Uniates?" Aleksandr Voznesenskii collects excerpts from his forthcoming book, which bears the lurid title *The New Crusade: Ukraine in Blood*. What is curious, however, is that his article is not aimed directly at the Uniates or the Roman Catholics. Rather, it chastises a priest of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) — Protopresbyter Georgiy Kovalenko. According to Mr. Voznesenskii, Fr. Kovalenko (born 1968), who belongs to the entourage of Metropolitan Aleksander (Drabynko) of Pereiaslav-Khmelnytsky and Vyshneve (born 1977), has exhibited a dangerous attraction to "Catholics and Uniates" (as if Uniates were something other than Catholics). It is telling that some of the "sins" ascribed to Fr. Kovalenko — such as favoring the protestors on the Maidan — are political. In 2015, the protopresbyter joined the "21 November" initiative, which according to Mr. Voznesenskii was supported mostly by personnel of the Ukrainian Catholic University, hence Greco-Catholics. Fr. Kovalenko also advocated making what Voznesenskii calls the "Catholic Christmas" — December 25 — a state holiday. The author seems to have forgotten that Christians set the date of Christmas at December 25 back in the fourth century. The Orthodox Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, and Romania celebrate it on that day. The only reason that the Moscow Patriarchate celebrates Christmas on January 7 is that it uses a different calendar, the outdated Julian one — according to which January 7 is "really" December 25. Thus, December 25 is

not "Catholic Christmas," but simply Christmas according to Christian tradition and the Gregorian calendar used by most countries and churches today. Another one of Fr. Kovalenko's alleged infractions is his founding of the "Open Orthodox University" of St. Sophia. Here again, Voznesenskii sees the hidden hand of the Uniates, for this initiative was supported by members of the Ukrainian Catholic University. Worse yet, Fr. Kovalenko joined the list of Orthodox who condemned the 1946 "re-union" of the Greco-Catholics with the Russian Orthodox Church – which as is well known, was orchestrated by the Soviet secret police with the collusion of the recently restored Moscow Patriarchate. Furthermore, the protopresbyter has supported draft law 4128, which threatens the Moscow Patriarchate's control over the Orthodox faithful of Ukraine. Aleksandr Voznesenskii points to some of Fr. Kovalenko's supposedly dubious contacts – people like Ukrainian Catholic University professor and Russian Orthodox layman Antoine Arjakovsky, Ukrainian Orthodox theologian Cyril Hovorun, and the "autocephalist" Fr. Andrei Dudchenko. These men are apparently dangerous because they support ecumenical contacts with the Catholics -- in accord with Christian teaching about the unity of the Church. As evidence of Fr. Kovalenko's schismatic propensities, the author cites his support of Ukrainian Orthodox autocephaly (for example, his advocacy of the recent parliamentary bill No. 4793) on the one hand, and of joint prayer with "Catholics and Uniates" on the other. For in Voznesenskii's view, autocephaly – that is, Ukrainian Orthodox independence from the Moscow Patriarchate – would be simply a bridge to union with the Catholic Church. Why that is so he does not say. The Orthodox Churches of Serbia and Bulgaria have been autocephalous for centuries and have not joined with Rome. Neither have the autocephalous Orthodox Churches of Romania and Greece. There is no reason why an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church would do so – unless it wanted to, and then only on terms that the Orthodox themselves would find acceptable. In short, Aleksandr Voznesenskii's lengthy condemnation of the perfectly Orthodox Fr. Georgiy Kovalenko bears all the marks of a phobia – an irrational fear of contact with Catholics, especially Greco-Catholics, and of ecumenism altogether. But in all fairness, one must admit that there is one fear expressed in Mr. Voznesenskii's article that is perfectly rational. It is the fear of autocephaly. This is not, as the author would argue, because autocephaly is a threat to Orthodox unity. If that were so, he would also have to condemn the autocephaly that the Muscovite Church obtained (through dubious means) in 1589. Rather, it is because Ukrainian autocephaly is a threat to the Moscow Patriarchate's control of East Slavic Orthodoxy. And the Moscow Patriarchate's ecclesiastical control over Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Belarus is an important element of the Kremlin's political control over those countries. This explains why Voznesenskii begins his list of complaints against Fr. Kovalenko with a political charge: the latter's support of the Maidan. To be sure, one should not look at church affairs solely or even chiefly in political terms. After all, Christianity is based on love, not power. But in the case of a church organization so closely wedded to the state as the Moscow Patriarchate, realism demands that political factors be counted. And Aleksandr Voznesenskii's fear of Ukrainian autocephaly and its ecumenical potential is, in the final analysis, political.

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