

Vatican assesses coup aftermath

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — A dizzying week of developments in the Soviet Union left Soviet-Vatican relations in a hopeful yet fluid state.

The impact of the failed coup against Mikhail Gorbachev and the accelerated pace of change in the Soviet Union gave the Vatican much to consider regarding future relations.

What, for example, will become of a proposed papal visit to the Soviet Union in 1992?

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, papal secretary of state, told the Italian state television network RAI Aug. 20 that he had a "secret hope" that a papal trip might be moved up if the coup succeeded. The cardinal based the comment on his belief that "the Soviet Union would have had more need for (the visit) than ever" if the coup succeeded.

His remarks ignited speculation that the papal trip was in the works. But Yuri Karlov, the Soviet envoy to the Vatican, noted Aug. 22 — a day after Gorbachev's return to power — that it was too early to say whether planning for a papal trip to the Soviet Union would be speeded up.

Pope John Paul II was traveling in the former Soviet bloc nation of Hungary when coup plotters replaced Gorbachev, allegedly for health reasons.

It may not be a healthy Gorbachev to whom the Vatican must look, but a politically robust Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Republic president who stood up against the coup.

Although a largely untested figure from the Vatican's point of view, Yeltsin is

viewed sympathetically by church leaders, according to one Vatican official.

The official, who asked not to be named, met last year with a close Yeltsin adviser in Moscow. The prelate said he came away with the impression that Yeltsin favored a radical improvement in relations between the state and religion.

The adviser cited three elements that inspired Yeltsin's position on church-state relations:

- The spiritual traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church, which need renewal, along with the religious and moral basis of daily life.

- The ecumenical vision of Vladimir Solov'ev, a 19th-century Russian mystic whose writings are again enjoying popularity.

- The "lay" tradition in Russia as represented by human-rights activist and physicist Andrei Sakharov, a non-believer who supported religious freedom.

Russian Orthodox clerics favor Yeltsin over Gorbachev as their leader for the future, the Vatican official said. Whether Yeltsin is as attuned to the needs of other churches is another question.

Gorbachev's strength, as the Vatican sees it, is his interest in "legalities" — such as the freedom-of-religion law passed last year, which placed all religions on an equal juridical footing.

Gorbachev has forged a close personal relationship with the pope. He visited the pope twice at the Vatican, in 1989 and 1990.

Pope John Paul sent Gorbachev a tel-

egram Aug. 23, in which he thanked God for the "positive outcome of the dramatic trial."

"I wish that you can continue the tremendous work of the material and spiritual renewal of the peoples of the Soviet Union," the pope added.

Yeltsin, in contrast, has never conferred at length with the pope or other top Vatican officials. An earlier trip to Rome by Yeltsin was canceled because of a Soviet political crisis.

Gorbachev also appears to understand better than Yeltsin the international weight of the Catholic Church, the Vatican official said.

Vatican officials point out that Yeltsin is willing to recognize the independence of the Baltic states, including predominantly Catholic Lithuania.

The Vatican said Aug. 26 that it would study "as soon as possible" how to reactivate its diplomatic missions in Lithuania and other Baltic states.

In an Aug. 24 statement, Ukrainian-rite Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky of Lvov, threw Catholic support behind the Ukrainian parliament's declaration of independence, issued earlier that day.



AP/Wide World Photos
A priest leads a dawn vigil in Revolution Square of the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, Aug. 21. The vigil commemorated those who died amid overnight violence in Moscow during the Soviet coup attempt.



AP/Wide World Photos
AIR ATTACK — The body of a Croatian truck driver lies under his vehicle on a road near the Croatian village of Bilje Aug. 22, when at least 20 people were killed and 55 wounded as federal Yugoslav warplanes strafed villages. As fighting raged between Croatian and Serbian forces in Yugoslavia, Catholic and Orthodox leaders there issued a joint appeal for peace and political self-determination.

Soviet dissident predicts confrontation in U.S.S.R.

By Paulinus Barnes
Catholic News Service

MANCHESTER, England — A former Soviet dissident now living in exile in London said she expects a confrontation — if not actual violence — in the wake of the failed coup of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

The battle, said poet Irina Ratushinskaya, would be between the Russian Parliament and the Supreme Soviet.

"During the three days of the coup, the Communist Party compromised itself completely. Not one communist official protested against the coup," Ratushinskaya said. She added that Gorbachev, the former leader of the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R., had consequently lost the people's trust.

"If the people had their say Gorbachev would never be elected. When the media and politicians in the West speak about the 'constitution' they should remember that it was written and rewritten by the Communist Party," she said.

"And the last time it was rewritten it was rewritten by Gorbachev. He established the position of president of the Soviet union — and then he took that position.

"Now (Russian President) Boris Yeltsin is the hero of the Russians. (Lithuanian President Vytautas) Landsbergis is the hero of the Lithuanians. Gorbachev is nobody's hero apart from the Western politicians," Ratushinskaya said.

The poet, who had been sent to a Soviet labor camp for writing religious poetry, said she kept in close telephone contact with friends in the Soviet Union during the coup and its collapse.

"My main impression is that the Russian people tend to blame Mr. Gorbachev for what has happened, because all the people responsible for the coup were chosen personally by him," Ratushinskaya said.

"The Russian people feel that the eight people that led the coup betrayed not only Gorbachev, they betrayed all the people of



M. Roundou/San Jose Mercury News via AP
The statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the KGB, is dismantled in front of KGB headquarters near Red Square in Moscow Aug. 22.

the Soviet republics."

In the failed coup's aftermath, "people in Russia and all the other republics will insist on getting their own power. I don't think they will ever trust centralized power again," Ratushinskaya said.

"The republics are going to demand serious changes, demand more power. I wish them luck."

Brooklyn bishop urges dialogue to help calm Black-Jewish strife

BROOKLYN (CNS) — Bishop Thomas V. Daily of Brooklyn is urging peace and dialogue in place of the racial strife that erupted between blacks and Hasidic Jews.

"We who have every reason for loving unity with one another are so frequently at odds," Bishop Daily said Aug. 23. "We are all brothers and sisters.... Violence is never the way to resolve the issues which separate us."

The tensions began in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn Aug. 19 when a car driven by a Hasidic Jew struck and killed Gavin Cato, a 7-year-old black from Guyana, and critically injured his cousin, also 7.

Angry blacks took to the streets and, a little later, Yankel Rosenbaum, a 29-year-old Hasidic scholar from Australia, was fatally stabbed. Daily demonstrations and incidents of violence took place in the week that followed.

About one-tenth of the 300,000 Crown Heights residents are strictly orthodox Hasidic Jews of the Lubavitcher sect. Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, head of the Lubavitcher movement, has his world headquarters there.

It was a car in the rabbi's entourage that jumped the curb and killed young Cato,

touching off long-seething resentment against the Hasidim by blacks in the community, who feel the Hasidim receive favored treatment by police and other officials.

The anger was fanned by a rumor, later denied by officials, that the first ambulance crew on the scene treated the lightly injured Jews in the car before turning attention to the black children.

In another effort to ease tensions, New York Mayor David N. Dinkins attended services Aug. 25 at the First Baptist Church of Crown Heights and later met with Rabbi Schneerson at his Crown Heights headquarters.

In a talk at the Baptist church, Dinkins described the deaths of Cato and Rosenbaum as "two tragedies — one a tragedy because it was an accident, the other a tragedy because it was not."

"Two precious lives lost, for no reason. Their senseless loss is our shame, and one that we cannot deny," he added. "And yet, brothers and sisters, in the tragic deaths of these two young people also lies the seeds of our redemption. We have an opportunity now to right old wrongs, to heal old wounds and to make our city a better, more just place."