

Thrilling book bears witness to one man's faith in face of persecution

Witness: to Apparitions and Persecution in the USSR, by Josyp Terelya with Michael H. Brown; Faith Publishing Co., (Milford, Ohio, 1991); 324 pages; \$10.

By Father Robert F. McNamara
Guest contributor

Witness is the tumultuous, thrilling and touching memoir of a Ukrainian lay activist who has emerged, battered but indomitable, from 20 years of imprisonment in more than 30 Soviet jails. Although his "crimes" were various, the principal charge was his advocacy of the Greek-Rite Ukrainian Catholic Church. More than once he would have been set free had he denied that faith.

Born in 1943 in the rural woodlands of Carpathian Ukraine, Josyp Terelya was the son of officious parents high in the Soviet bureaucracy. Providentially, he was raised by his peasant grandmother in her own staunch, ear-

thy Catholicism.

In 1946, while Terelya was still a toddler, Stalin — by means of a canonical trick — abolished the Ukrainian Catholic Church by forcibly transferring its members to the Russian Orthodox Church. When Terelya grew older, idealistic and mettlesome, he vowed to devote his life to battling for Ukrainian independence, the welfare of the Ukrainian peasantry, and, principally, the defense of underground Ukrainian Catholicism.

Bold, inventive, and a born leader, he cheerfully accepted any risk in order to organize the laity, fund the clergy and their secret seminaries, arrange for Masses in safe venues, catechize the youth, and print and circularize religious literature.

Because all these activities were "illegal," the KGB was soon tailing Terelya. He was eventually arrested and subjected to the Soviet jail system's dehumanizing, diabolical cruelties.

Prison eventually broke his health but did not destroy his resilience.

When Terelya was finally released early in 1987, the great thaw under Gorbachev had already allowed more free speech. He took a leading part in announcing to the Soviet and free worlds, that the Ukrainian Catholic Church — more than six million strong — was leaving the catacombs and demanded Russian legal recognition. This is still in process.

Terelya can also bear witness to Marian apparitions. Our Lady allegedly visited him twice in the dreadful Vladimir prison (1970, 1972). In the spring of 1987 he claims he saw Mary for a whole week during her astounding appearances at Hruschiv, Ukraine. Making her presence felt for three weeks to perhaps 450,000 Ukrainians, she urged them — in these end times — to pray and make sacrifices for the all-important conversion of Russia.

Terelya claims she had special mes-

sages for him. This book provides the fullest written account of the Hruschiv marvels yet available in the Western World. When the reborn Ukrainian Catholic Church studies these alleged apparitions with a view to judging their supernaturality, Terelya and his book will furnish valuable testimony.

One need not subscribe to all of Terelya's incidental deductions to acknowledge that whether on political or religious subjects he is a careful and honest reporter. We in the West would likewise be less than prudent if we ignored this victim of Communist materialism when he warns us, prophetically, to beware of our own brand of materialism.

Like another Alexander Solzhenitsyn, he cautions us, "America, remain vigilant; but America, also look at the plank in your own eye."

Father McNamara serves as diocesan archivist.

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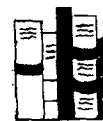
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