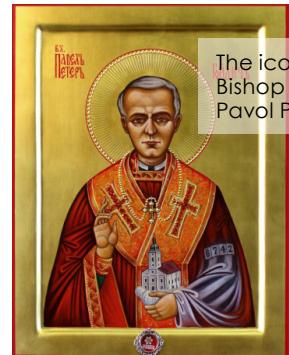




Greek Catholic churchgoers at a pilgrimage in Lutina in 1989

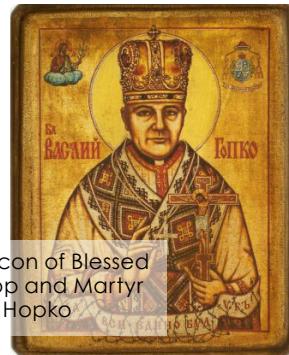


Photography of P. Gojdič in pretrial custody

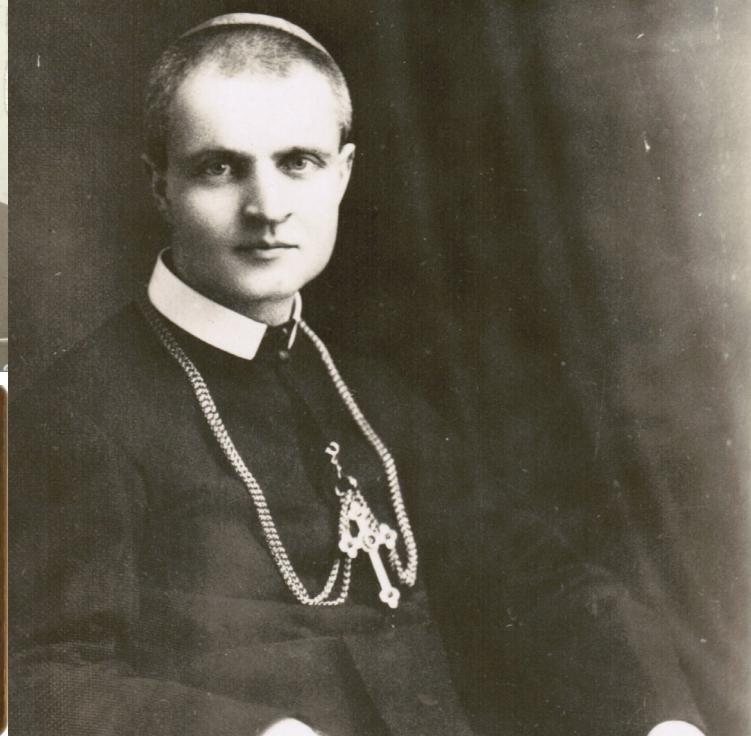


The icon of Blessed Bishop and Martyr Pavol Peter Gojdič

The building of the Franciscan monastery in Hlohovec where in 1950 the "nonunited" Greek Catholic priests were concentrated



The icon of Blessed Bishop and Martyr Vasil Hopko



used measures to control the Greek Catholic Church and limit its religious activities.

BISHOP PAVOL PETER GOJDIČ (1888–1960)

He was born into the family of a Greek Catholic priest. He was ordained in 1911 and later joined the order of St. Basil the Great. In 1927, he was ordained a bishop and started working as an administrator of the Eparchy of Prešov. During the existence of the first Slovak Republic (1939–1945), he expressed critical views of the domestic regime and actively engaged in saving Jews. During Action P he was pressured to accept the post of an Orthodox bishop which he unequivocally refused. This led to his arrest in 1950 and conviction a year later when he was sentenced to life imprisonment. He died as a result of torture and inhuman treatment in the Leopoldov prison on his 72nd birthday, 17 July 1960. He was buried in an unmarked grave in the prison cemetery in Leopoldov. Today his remains are kept in the Greek Catholic Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Prešov. In 2007, he was posthumously awarded an honorary title Righteous Among the Nations by the State of Israel for his aid of Jewish citizens. Pope John Paul II beatified him in 2001 in the Vatican. The Greek Catholic Church remembers him every year on 17 July.

„Three subjects were involved in the destruction of the Greco-Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, each one with its own cause: the Soviet state and party leadership, the patriarchy from Moscow with an exarchate in Czechoslovakia and governing community in Czechoslovakia. Undoubtedly, the incentives came from Moscow.“

Michal Barnovský, historian

Sources of photographs: Národní archiv České republiky, fund State Office for Church Affairs, Box 208, Number 200, Archive of Peter Borza, www.greckokatolici.sk



www.upn.gov.sk

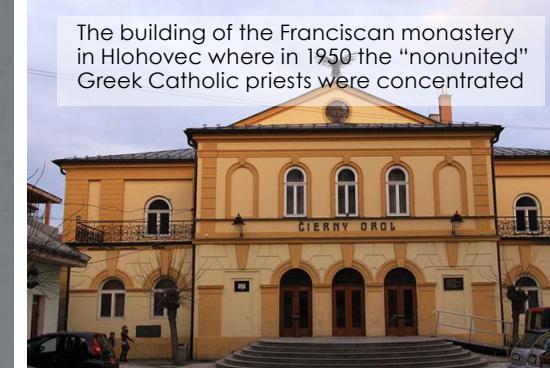


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ELIMINATION OF THE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Attacks aimed at weakening the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia began in 1946. They were carried out by the State Security and the justification they gave was the help that the Greek Catholics, led by Prešov-based Bishop Pavol Peter Gojdič, offered to the refugees from Ukraine. The State Security labelled all the people fleeing the Soviet Union as terror bandits and members of the Ukraine Insurgent Army. The main reason, however, was an attempt to strengthen the position of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was being presented as the symbol of Slavs and the Soviet Union.

Sarcophagus of Blessed Pavol Peter Gojdič in a side chapel of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Prešov



Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Prešov that was acquired by the Greek Catholic Church in 1950



PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

After the government of Czechoslovakia was overthrown in February 1948, the communist state authority included amongst its greatest enemies the Churches which had distanced themselves from the communist ideology. Gradually, the plan of total elimination of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia became part of the communist fight against the Catholic Church. The possibility of such a scenario in Czechoslovakia was already suggested by the post-war elimination of the Greek Catholic Church in the Ukraine and Romania. The communist representatives in Czechoslovakia decided to carry out a gradual "Orthodoxisation" of the Greek Catholics. This plan received the code name Action P (Orthodoxisation). Several trials of Greek Catholic priests and monks took place, male and female monasteries of the Greek Catholic Basilian order were closed, and so called return committees were created in municipalities to support the conversion of Greek Catholics to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The culmination of Action P was the Large Council (Sobor, religious gathering) that took place on 28 April 1950 in Prešov. Orchestrated by the communist state authority, it was supposed to look like an internal meeting of Greek Catholic priests and worshippers. The delegates

approved a document called "A Manifesto to the Greek Catholic Clergy and the worshippers of Czechoslovakia" which was prepared beforehand and which disbanded the union of the Greek Catholic Church with the Holy See and the Pope and voiced their wish to convert to Orthodoxy. The government approved the outcome of the Sobor and the Greek Catholic Church was thus de facto outlawed. On the day of the Sobor the Greek Catholic Bishops P. Gojdič and V. Hopko were arrested. Afterwards, pressure began to be applied to priests and worshippers to accept Orthodoxy. Greek Catholic priests who refused to convert were gradually removed from their parishes and sent to Labour Camps or interned.

ACTION P – 100

Neither the applied pressure nor intimidation brought the desired results. Out of approximately 280 Greek Catholic priests working in Slovakia, only 130 agreed to convert. Many of them accepted Orthodoxy only formally. The majority of priests and worshippers refused to convert. This was one of the reasons why in 1951 a plan was devised by the state authority to expatriate the non-united priests along with their families to the Czech parts of the country. The expatriation process received a code name Action P – 100. The goal was to separate priests from

worshippers, prevent them from contacting each other and thus make it easier to influence the worshippers. Almost 100 Greek Catholic priests along with their families were brutally expatriated by the end of 1951. The homes they were supposed to move into were often in a terrible condition, completely unsuitable for living. During the years that followed many of the priests worked as manual labourers in the woods, on various construction projects and in crop fields. They were officially forbidden from returning to eastern Slovakia. Orthodox priests gradually took the places of the expatriated Greek Catholic priests; however, many worshippers refused to accept them.

RESTORATION OF ACTIVITIES

During the 1960s, there were many petitions from worshippers, addressed to the highest dignitaries of the party and state, in which the citizens demanded the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church. These petitions along with political and societal changes at the end of the 1960s led to the decision of the government in June 1968 to restore the Greek Catholic Church. However, any issues involving property that was transferred to the Orthodox Church at the beginning of the 1950s during the forcible orthodoxisation remained open. The communist state authority in the 1970s and 1980s applied all its regularly