



Ján Chryzostom Korec,
bishop of illegal
Secret Church



Massive support of underground church increased pilgrims' participation to record numbers in Levoča and other places



1980s

"You hold the Power in your hands, but we have the Truth. We do not envy your Power, neither long for it, we are satisfied with the Truth, as it is larger and stronger than Power. He who wields the Power thinks that he can suppress the Truth. Kill it or even crucify it. But the Truth has always risen from dead."

Silvester Krčméry, Main proceedings of Higher Military Court in Trenčín, June 24, 1954

"Where Communism has been able to assert its power, it has striven by every possible means to destroy Christian civilization and the Christian religion by banishing every remembrance... Bishops and priests were exiled, condemned to forced labor, shot and done to death in inhuman fashion; laymen suspected of defending their religion were vexed, persecuted, dragged off to trial and thrown into prison."

Pope Pius XI., Encyclical Divini Redemptoris



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S REACTION TO THE PERSECUTION

In the case of the Catholic Church the persecutions initiated the establishment of the so-called Secret Church. The Secret Church provided for otherwise common religious activities, but they had to be held in secret from the Communist state power. The most significant personalities of the Secret Church in Slovakia were bishop Ján Chryzostom Korec, the religious activists Vladimír Jukl, Silvester Krčméry and František Mikloško. In the Secret Church there were many secretly ordained priests, but also priests who were deprived of their approval to work as pastors. Thanks to the activities of the Secret Church, small religious groups and communities started to be established in the 1970s, the aim of which was to maintain beliefs and keep them alive through illegal prayer meetings. These communities gathered mainly young people, who thanks to them started to lose their fears of being persecuted by the totalitarian regime. It was also due to the activities of those groups and communities that the numbers of participants in traditional religious pilgrimages, e.g. in Levoča, Nitra or Velehrad in Moravia, increased rapidly in the 1980s. A great lack of religious literature was substituted by publishing and disseminating so-called

samizdats, illegally published texts and publications, or by smuggling literature from abroad. Almost 300,000 signatures were collected to support the petition for religious freedom at the beginning of 1988, which also demonstrated that the believers had lost their fears of the regime. The Candle Manifestation on March 25, 1988 in Bratislava was a signal of the future changes within society. But it was only the fall of the Communist regime in November 1989 that brought complete religious freedom.

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EUROPEAN NETWORK
REMEMBRANCE AND SOLIDARITY

PERSECUTION OF CHURCHES IN SLOVAKIA

FROM 1948 TO 1989

This means the actions of the Communist state power and all its forces directed against the Christian religious world-view and the citizens who espoused it, as well as the restrictions towards the institutional structures of Christian churches in all areas of their activities. The Catholic Church, as the leadest one, suffered most from these persecutions. But this was also the case of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Reformed Christian Church and many other smaller churches and religious communities.



Communists considered Churches as ideological enemies

1950s and 1960s



Religious people were often persecuted

1970s and 1980s



Religious literature was smuggled across the borders...

April and August 1950



Monastery in Podolíneč was one of concentration monasteries

1950s and 1960s



Church property and entities were confiscated

1970s and 1980s



... or manufactured on illegal cyclostyle-machines

REASONS FOR THE CHURCHES' PERSECUTION

- Contradictions between the Christian and materialistic world-view, creating the basis of the Communist ideology;
- Unsuccessful attempts made by the Communist totalitarian regime to have full control of the churches, with the aim of liquidating them in the long run;
- The Communists considered churches to be their enemies in developing Communism and thought that belief in God was a relic that society had to get rid of.

ATTACKS AGAINST CHURCHES

In 1949 the so-called Church Laws were adopted, through which the state could fully control the churches and decide which priests would be allowed to work among people. Violation of these laws was strictly punished. Thanks to those adopted laws, the state took the financing of churches over to a full extent, although with the hidden intention to restrict them. On the night of April 13, 1950 Action 'K' ('K' standing for 'kláštor', i.e. monasteries) directed against male orders took place. At the end of August 1950 it was followed by the Action 'R'

('R' standing for 'rehoľníčky', i.e. nuns) related to female orders. These actions were meant to abolish all monasteries and the liquidate a monastic life. Members of orders and religious societies were forcibly interned in the so-called concentration monasteries with a regime similar to that in prisons. On April 28, 1950 the state power staged a unification of the Greek Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church. In reality it was a liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church. Greek Catholic priests, and also the believers who refused 'unification', were persecuted. In June 1950 the diocesan theological seminaries were closed down in accordance with the governmental decree. In Slovakia only one Catholic Theological Faculty and a Seminary for Priests in Bratislava were left, as the government attempts to reduce the numbers of new priests and influence their education. In January 1951 there was a show trial of catholic bishops. The Bishop J. Vojtaššák was sentenced to 24 years in prison, while Bishops P. Gojdič and M. Buzalka were given life sentences. Later on bishops V. Hopko and Š. Barnáš were also condemned to long sentences in prison. There were also other bishops who were detained under house arrest. During the next few years, number of priests, members of orders, and common churchgoers were sentenced for their active beliefs and for practising their religion, or for helping those being perse-

cuted. Actions and sanctions hit believers of all churches. The state power apparatus struggled against religious pilgrimages and processions. The visits of people at church services were curtailed by various administrative measures. Religious education at schools was restricted. Parents who wanted their children to get a religious education were threatened by state authorities and at their place of work. To 'cope with the issue of religion', in fact to condemn religion, became an important criterion to be met if a student wanted to study at a high school or university, or get a better job and foster their career growth. In 1968, within the reform movement in society, there was a relief movement of anti-religious oppression. Nevertheless, in the following years, in the period of 'normalisation', the Communist state power repeatedly took a hard line against churches and believers. In the 1970s and 1980s active priests were deprived of approval for their pastoral activities, so they could not work as pastors. Many believers as well as priests were judged in court and imprisoned for smuggling and disseminating religious literature from abroad, or organising religious events. All interventions and actions against churches and believers happened in spite of the fact that the constitution of the state guaranteed religious freedom for all citizens.