

PROCES

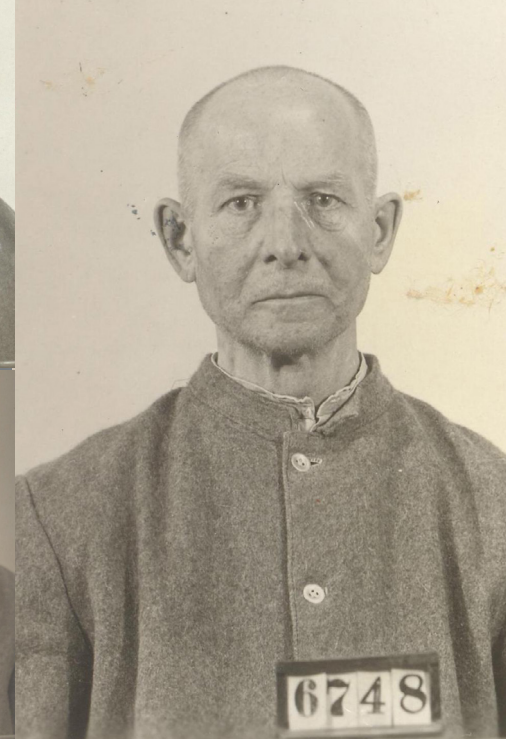
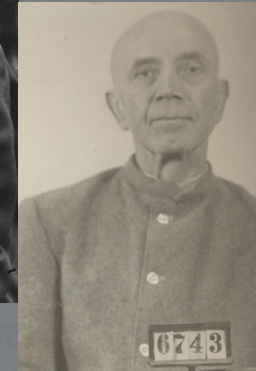
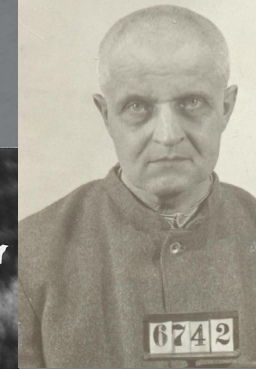
proti
vlastizradným biskupom

VOJTAŠŠÁKOVI
BUZALKOVI
GOJDIČOVI

The process was described
in a propaganda publication



Ján Vojtaššák (left) and Michal Buzalka during their internment in Děčín in 1957



sonment while J. Vojtaššák to 24 years' imprisonment. Based on the trial against J. Vojtaššák and others, further trials followed involving two more Slovak bishops – the Spiš-based auxiliary bishop Štefan Barnáš and Bishop Vasil' Hopko (both sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment).

RESULTS OF THE TRIAL

Considering the scope of preparations and both the domestic and foreign political impact, the trial of Slovak Catholic bishops ranks alongside the most important political trials in Slovakia during the years 1948 – 1954. In no other countries of the Soviet Bloc were three bishops tried and convicted at the same time. The impact of the large-scale propaganda is also reflected in the 2,418 resolutions and messages approving of the bishops' convictions. Voicing of a different opinion brought persecution and this is the reason why there were only 25 anonymous letters received that condemned the trial. In 1955, M. Buzalka and P. Gojdič had their life sentences changed to 25 years' imprisonment. The following year, the Attorney General suspended the sentences of M. Buzalka and J. Vojtaššák but the communist regime kept them in isolation in the Czech territory. J. Vojtaššák was imprisoned again in 1958-1963. P. Gojdič never left the prison and died in Leopoldov in 1960. The remaining two bishops lived out their lives in the Czech Republic: M. Buzalka died in 1961 and J. Vojtaššák in 1965. They

were all rehabilitated after 1989. Bishops P. Gojdič and V. Hopko were beatified by Pope John Paul II.

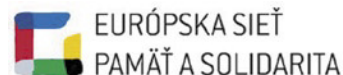
"A dark room – day and night I tried to walk or stand several times and the mere memory of the dark room and the threat of it were enough to make me an obedient tool of the will of the interrogating officer... Under this duress I signed my confession."

Pavol Gojdič, Bishop

Sources of photographs: Archive of Security Sections Prague, Archive of the Corps of Prison and Court Guards in Leopoldov, Bishop's office Spišské Podhradie, Archive of the Greek Catholic Archeparchy in Prešov, Archive of Róbert Letz



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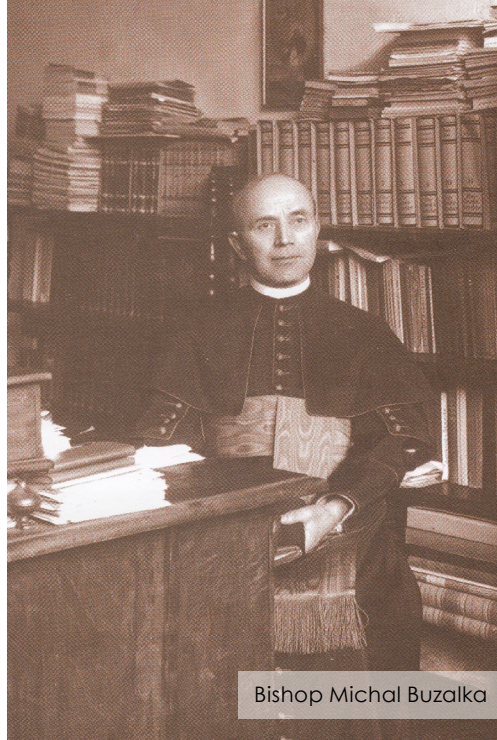
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POLITICAL TRIAL OF SLOVAK BISHOPS

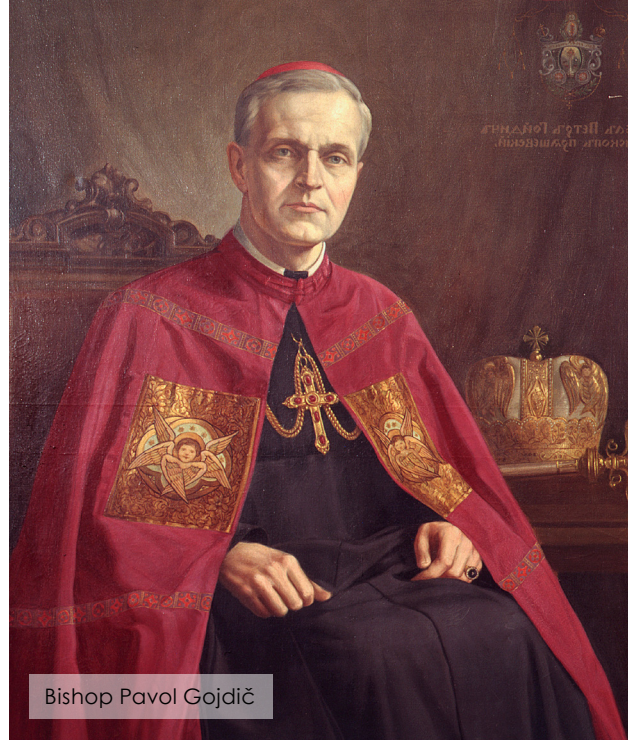
From the very beginning, the communist ideology expressed a very negative attitude towards religion regarding it as outdated. In religious Slovakia, this became obvious after 1945 but intensified especially after February 1948 when conditions became ripe for the confrontation of the communist regime with various churches. The initial sanctions gradually grew into very harsh persecution measures, the highest form of which was anti-clerical trials. The Catholic Church, due to its dominant position in Slovakia, bore the brunt - including highest representatives in Slovak, bishops - suffering greatest persecution.



Bishop Ján Vojtaššák



Bishop Michal Buzalka



Bishop Pavol Gojdič



The interrogation of the bishops was led by the State Security investigator Milan Moučka

ROAD TO THE TRIAL

The conflict between the communist regime and the Catholic Church stemmed from a very deep antagonism between the Christian philosophy and the materialist philosophy on which the communist ideology was built. After the overthrowing of the government in 1948, the communist leadership set two basic goals in the area of church policy: in the short term, to set the lower Catholic clergy against higher, and in the long term to separate the Catholic Church from the Vatican and transform it into a so-called national church whose total allegiance would be with the regime. The effort to control the Catholic Church, however, met with resistance from the bishops who refused to pledge total allegiance to the regime and who, with their subsequent actions, radicalised the authorities against the church hierarchy. The communist regime decided to intervene and take drastic action against them. The first suggestion of its willingness to try Czech and Slovak bishops came in 1949 during a trial of the Hungarian Cardinal József Mindszenty.

A trial against members of male religious orders became the basis of the strike against the bishops; it culminated in Prague on 4 April 1950 during a trial when the communist regime created and tested its governmental mechanism and then used it in the anti-clerical trials that followed. It consisted of the State Security (secret

police), Attorney General, Ministry of Justice and the State Agency for Religious Affairs (and for the Slovak trials, the Slovak Agency for Religious Affairs).

At the beginning, three trials were being considered, but eventually the communist leadership only approved of two, one Czech and one Slovak. In the Slovak trial, three bishops were to feature: the Spiš-based eparchial bishop Ján Vojtaššák, the Trnava auxiliary bishop Michal Buzalka and the eparchial bishop of the Greek Catholic Eparchy in Prešov Pavol Peter Gojdič.

INVESTIGATION

The first governmental crackdown hit Bishop Gojdič in April 1950 and his auxiliary bishop Vasil' Hopko in May 1950. They were both arrested under the so called Action P - Orthodoxisation - which culminated in the elimination of the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia. Two months later, Bishop Gojdič was handed over to the Attorney General. In July 1950, Bishop M. Buzalka was arrested by the State Security police in Bratislava. The last to end up in detention - in September 1950 - was Bishop J. Vojtaššák, almost 73 years old. They were detained in the Ruzyně prison in Prague where for several months they were subjected to harsh interrogation methods. The State Security police used mental and physical duress to coerce them into signing confessions which supported evidence fabricated against them. The terror of the law enforcement agencies was successful.

PREPARATION AND COURSE OF THE TRIAL

From September 1950, the basic concept of the trial was being developed: it was to be the same as the Czech trial, only with the addition of some of specific Slovak issues. According to the organisers' plan, the trial was to solve the conflict between the bishops and the communist regime once and for all, to bring exemplary punishment to some of the bishops (and to scare the rest), to compromise the church hierarchy in the eyes of the believers, to contribute to the political re-education of the masses, to increase trust towards the regime and its ideologies, to condemn the idea of the Slovak statehood and the tradition of Slovak nationalism and to unveil the Vatican as a tool of international imperialism.

The complaint against the trio of bishops was filed by the State Security Police Command in November 1950 and the Attorney General's office brought the charges in early January 1951. The bishops were accused of crimes of military treason, high treason and espionage.

The trial against J. Vojtaššák and others took place on 10 - 15 January 1951 in the Judicial Palace in Bratislava in front of the State Court tribunal. The trial was accompanied by a huge propaganda campaign in the press and on the radio. The court agreed with the fabricated charges brought by the Attorney General's office and demonstrated this by imposing harsh sentences - M. Buzalka and P. Gojdič were sentenced to for life imprisonment.