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THE HISTORY OF THE GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SLOVAKIA

The old Greek proverb says: „Know yourself !” This is valid both for individuals and for national and church communities. Nobody can know himself without knowing his history – because the present is mostly a result of the past. If we want to understand our present, we must know our history. And the history of the Greek-Catholics is little known. What is their history – and that of Slovak Greek-Catholic Church – like?

The Greek-Catholic Church presents the oriental model of Christianity, but simultaneously, forms a constitutive, indissociable, part of the Catholic Church. It is not a separate community and differs from the Roman Catholic Church only in ceremonies: its objectives and missions are identical. On the other hand, this church can be considered as is both distinctive and an example of unity. It is the oriental church, but concurrently it is the western one. Its old theological, liturgical and austere traditions, its ceremonies, originality and mentality, are eastern, byzantine, but its relationships and membership are western, Roman. It inhabits the oriental model like the Eastern Orthodox, but is united with Rome. Although it is bipolar, it has an oriental identity, preserving some original traditions that are no longer in the Western Church. The Greek-Catholic Church is clear evidence that it is possible to retain particularity without breaking unity. It is a typical example of the approach of St. Cyril and St. Methodius. The Holy Brothers (by their evangelising activities) developed a model of the ecclesiastical life that connects the riches of the oriental tradition in the field of law, liturgy, theology, and spirituality with the principle of One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in conjunction with the Bishop of Rome. The Greek-Catholic Church provides a vivid picture of the ancient apostolic tradition and oriental practice and, simultaneously, the western way of thinking. It thus creates a Christian symbiosis, demonstrating that this way is possible for the whole Christian and also for the non – Christian world.

THE WORK OF HOLY CYRIL AND METHODIUS AND ITS IMPACT AFTER THE ENDING OF THE GREAT MORAVIAN EMPIRE

The Catholic Church of the Byzantine-Slavonic rite, that is the Greek-Catholic Church (but also Roman-Catholic Church), derives its presence in the territory of Slovakia from the activities of the Holy Brothers. Their arrival in the Great Moravian Empire in 863 strengthened the empire's special position, which came from its geopolitical position on the frontier of two cultural and political worlds, western and eastern. Methodius, the archbishop, simply reflected and strengthened the special position of the empire where East met West. He did not become an exponent of Byzantine imperial policy. Although he was on the territory of Byzantine ideology he was also at the service of Rome.

The question arises: What happened with Cyril and Methodius's legacy in our country after Methodius's death? What happened to the oriental model of Christianity now adapted to the conditions of the Great Moravian Empire? Did it definitely disappear or did it survive in another form? If so, until when? If so, was the model, connecting differences of tradition with the demands of unity, maintained after the schism in 1054? What happened to the most important element of this model – the Byzantine – Slavonic liturgy?

The Greek-Catholic Church in Slovakia considers itself to be the direct and continuing heir of Cyril and Methodius's legacy. It is very difficult to monitor the vitality of this legacy in Slovakia. For a long time there was a view that this model was not asserted here, and it was not confirmed as effective and vital. New historical research has brought new knowledge. The evidence suggests that the Cyril-Methodius model could have been maintained in Slovakia despite difficult historical circumstances.

After the ending of the Great Moravian Empire the church hierarchy gradually disintegrated. This did not necessarily mean that Christianity suddenly and totally disappeared in Slovakia. Although many priests escaped from Hungarian rule into Poland or Bohemia, there is a strong probability that some of them stayed in our country. According to some historians and archaeologists, eastern Slovakia and some hillier parts of central and north-eastern Slovakia preserved their own life for a long time after the end of the Great Moravian Empire, until they did not become a part of the Hungarian state¹.

In Slovakia this region, where the united oriental Christians lived, could have been the area of „Spiš“. In 1198 the provostly administration in Spiš („Spišská pre-

¹ A. Ruttkay: *Problematika historického vývoja na území Slovenska v 10.–13. storočí z hľadiska archeologického bádania*. In: *Veľká Morava a počátky československé štátnosti*. Praha – Bratislava 1985, p. 145–146, compare Kučera, Matúš: *Veľká Morava a slovenské dejiny*. In: *Veľká Morava a počátky československé štátnosti*. Praha–Bratislava 1985, s. 255; Chropovský, B. – Ruttkay, A.: *Archeologický výskum a genéza slovenského etnika*. In: *Historický časopis* 33, 2, 1985, p. 288.

pozitúra”) was established here with its seat in Spišská Kapitula – this is connected with a document termed „Spišské zlomky”². The record from 1228 mentions a certain Jakub from Farkašovce, later bishop of Spiš, who was of the Greek rite. Membership of this rite is mentioned in relation to the Spiš provost Lukáš from 1293³. Jakub and Lukáš are the representatives of the Catholic Church, the supreme exponents of the Roman Church in „Spiš”. If the supreme Church officials were of the oriental rite the logical implication is that the local church, or at least part of it, belonged to the oriental rite at the end of the thirteenth century.

This point of view can be confirmed by a reference from the later period. This is in the document written by the Spiš provost Pavol from 1306. By this document priests in the villages in Spiš, for example Štrba and Važec, were invested with the power to confirm. In the light of this evidence we may suppose that the inhabitants in those villages belonged to the oriental rite.⁴

The so-called „Spišské modlitby“ („the Spiš Prayers“) are proof that part of the church in Spiš was admitted to the Cyril-Methodius liturgical legacy. The Spiš Prayers are liturgical texts with a structure similar to the Byzantine-Slavonic liturgy of St. Ján Zlatoústy. They are written according to word of mouth – this form must have been compiled and used in the ninth and tenth centuries during the time of the Old-Slavonic liturgy⁵.

„Valachian colonization“ (Valašská kolonizácia)⁶ is a very important element that could have helped to maintain the languishing legacy of the Holy Brothers. This view is taken by many historians. The agents of this colonization were particularly the Ruthenians, who were mostly Eastern Orthodox and so from the Catholic point of view were considered to be schismatics. This colonization served to rescue the original model of Oriental Christianity that had survived in parts of Slovakia already mentioned, but its main impact was to bring the gradual end of the unity with the Catholic Church.

² See Bárdossy, J.: *Supplementum Analectorum Terrae Scepusiensis, nototionibus, ex veteri ac recentiorie Hungarorum historia depromptis*. Levoča 1902; also Miškovič, A. – Pogorieľov, V.: *Spišské cyrilské úlomky XII.–XIII. storočia*. Bratislava 1929, p. 80–87.

³ „Lucas Praepositus Scepusiensis, et ipse Graeci Ritus“; see Bárdossy, J.: *Supplementum Analectorum Terrae Scepusiensis, nototionibus, ex veteri ac recentiorie Hungarorum historia depromptis*. Levoča 1902, p. 223.

⁴ Ratkoš, P.: *Hranice Liptova a Spiša po cirkevnoprávnej stránke*. In: *Historický zborník MS 5*, 1945, p. 66; compare Beňko, J.: *Osídlenie severného Slovenska*. Košice 1985, p. 134.

⁵ See Povala, G.: *Spišské modlitby, otázka ich genézy*. In: *Jazykovedné štúdie. X. Štolcov zborník*. Bratislava 1969, p. 246–266; Stanislav, J.: *Modlitby pri kázni zo Spišskej Kapituly*. In: *Jazykovedný zborník IV.*, 1950, p. 141–155; ID.: *Dejiny Slovenského jazyka III.*, 1957, p. 172–178.

⁶ See Ratkoš, P.: *Problematika kolonizácie na valašskom práve na území Slovenska*. In: *Historické štúdie XXIV*. Bratislava 1980, p. 215.

THE EPARCHY OF MUKAČEVO

The religious life of the oriental-rite believers in our country after the „Valachian colonization“ is not well known, either. The modest information we have relates particularly to a number of monasteries that became the centres of religious life. These centres were not located in our area but in so called Podkarpatská Rus (Sub-Carpathian Russia), mostly inhabited by the Ruthenians. These were the two oldest Eastern - Orthodox monasteries in Hruševo and Mukačevo. The superiors of the Mukačevo monastery began to assert their authority to control local priests, but we do not know from where this authority derived. Gradually, the monastery in Mukačevo became the official seat of the supreme church hierarchy of the oriental rite in the Mukačevo jurisdiction. Later the Mukačevo eparchy developed from the parishes controlled by the superiors of the monastery : these superiors became the first bishops of the new eparchy. The Mukačevo eparchy became the only eparchy for believers belonging to the Oriental-Slavonic rite in Hungary (until its division in 1818).

The official establishment of the Greek-Catholic Church in Hungary is considered to be on 24 April 1646, when 63 Eastern-Orthodox priests from the Šariš, Zemplín and Uh administrative unit united with the Catholic Church in the so-called „Union of Užhorod“.⁷ This union became the important turning point in the religious and church life of the believers belonging to the Oriental-Slavonic rite in the north-eastern part of Hungary (eastern Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ukraine). The first united bishop of the Mukačevo eparchy was Peter Parthenius Petrovič, OSBM, one of the main Union leaders⁸.

He was publicly supported by 400 priests during the episcopal election of 1651, although not all of them were united⁹. When he was bishop there were 769 Eastern-Orthodox priests in the original Mukačevo eparchy and 313 of them became Greek-Catholics (from 276 parishes in 6 archdeaneries)¹⁰. The Ostrihom archbishop Juraj Lippay says that in 1650 there were about 100 united priests (in 1652 about 200, in 1654 about 400, and in 1661 about 500)¹¹.

Misunderstandings and mutual rivalry between church, state, and local authorities (over the power of appointing the bishop) became evident after the death of Peter Parthenius Petrovič in 1665. Each of these parties supported their own candidate, resulting in a rapid turnover of bishops one after another and sometimes

⁷ Lacko, Michal: *The union of Užhorod*. Romae Cleveland 1976, p. 100.

⁸ Vasiľ, Cyril: *Gréckokatolíci. Dejiny – osudy – osobnosti*. Košice 2000, p. 63.

⁹ See Hodinka, A.: *A munkacsí görög szertatásu püspökség okmánytára*. Tom. I. 1458–1715. Budapest 1911, p. 119; or Lacko, M.: *Unio Užhorodensis Ruthenianorum Carpathicorum cum Ecclesia Catholica*. Romae 1955, p. 123–124.

¹⁰ Kubinyi, J.: *The History of Prjašiv eparchy*. Romae 1970, p. 55.

¹¹ Lacko, M.: *Užhorodská únia*. In : *Most* 3, vol. 5. Cleveland 1958, p. 121, compare Novotný, J.: *Užhorodská únie*. In: *Viera a život*. Trnava 1996, no. 4, p. 336.

at the same time. Circumstances in the eparchy were improved by the bishop Ján Jozef de Camillis (1689–1706), who is called the „saviour of the Užhorod Union”¹².

Disagreements intensified again after he died. They were solved in 1716 when Juraj Bizanci was appointed bishop (1716–1733). His name is connected with the beginning of the administrative subordination of the Mukačevo bishops to the Jäger Latin bishop. Without their agreement the bishops of Mukačevo could not convene clergy synods, could not ordain, designate and move new priests, and could not establish new parishes or consecrate new churches. Greek-Catholic priests could not marry Roman-Catholic wives. Decrees about stole charges were advantageous for Roman-Catholic priests, and so on. Rectification of this situation began in 1771 when Pope Clement XIV declared the formation of the independent Greek-Catholic eparchy of Mukačevo by the bull *Eximia Regalium Principum*¹³.

The successors of bishop Bizanci were: Šimon Štefan Olšavský (1735–1737), Juraj Gabriel Blažovský (1738–1742), Manuel Michal Olšavský (1743–1767), Ján Bradáč (1768–1772) and Andrej Bačinský (1773–1809). The last-mentioned bishop A. Bačinský established two new episcopal vicariates in Szatmár (1776) and in Košice (1787 – moved to Prešov in 1792¹⁴) for better administration of the extensive eparchy¹⁵.

The territory of the Košice vicariate was created by the following administrative units: Spiš, Gemer, Šariš, Turnia, Abov, Boršod and the northern part of Zemplín. The vicariate was divided into 17 church – administrative districts or deaneries. The head of the vicariate was the episcopal vicar, who was nominated by the Hungarian Royal Vicegerent Council. Ján Pásztélyi, a canon of the Mukačevo chapter, became the first episcopal vicar. The seat of the vicariate was formally in Košice but in reality it was in Prešov.

The Košice vicariate became the base of the later independent Prešov Greek - Catholic eparchy. The official reason for division of the Mukačevo eparchy was its vastness. Canons of the chapter raised the impossibility of one bishop managing the entire eparchy, given the distances between the particular parts and the number of believers. In 1759 the bishop of Mukačevo, Michal Manuel Olšavský, in his report to Rome stated that according to the results of the visitations of 1750–1752

¹² See Pekar, A.: *Tribute to bishop Joseph J. De Camillis, OSBM (1641–1706)*. In: *Analecta OSBM XVIII (1984)*, p. 131–164.

¹³ Welykyj, A.: *Documenta Pontificum historiam Ucraine illustrantia, vol. II. Romae 1953–1954*, p. 214–218; also Basilovits, J.: *Brevis notitia fundationis Theodori Koriatovics, olim ducis de Munkacs pro Religiosis Ruthenianis Ordinis St. Basilii Magni in monte Csernek od Munkacs anno 1360 factae, exhibens seriem episcoporum graeco-catholicorum Munkacsiensium, cum praecipuis eorundem aliorumque Illustrum Virorum gestis, e variis Diplomatis, Decretisque Regiis, ac aliis Dokumentis authenticis potissimum concinnata. Cassoviae 1799 vol I.*, p. 197–206; also Pekar, A.: *De erectione canonica eparchie Mukačoviensis. Romae 1956*, p. 129–134.

¹⁴ The emperor Francis I. removed the vicariate to Prešov by decree on 8 March 1806 when he established the Košice vicariate with a residence in Prešov.

¹⁵ Pekar, A.: *Narysy istoriji cerkvi Zakarpatia. Roma 1967*, p. 83.

there were 150 000 believers (at the age of being able to confess)¹⁶. In 1792 there were 443 514¹⁷ and in 1804 there were 541 963 Greek-Catholic believers in 724 parishes.¹⁸

THE PREŠOV GREEK-CATHOLIC EPARCHY

The proposal for division of the Mukačevo eparchy was developed by the Viceregent Council, which sent the proposal to the emperor Francis I. The emperor then decided to divide the diocese of Mukačevo by the document of 3 November 1815. In area the new Prešov eparchy corresponded to the Košice vicariate, with 194 parishes. Gregor Tarkovič was designated the first bishop. Pope Pius VII's bull *Relata semper* (on the establishment of the Prešov eparchy) was presented for the first time on 19 September 1818 and ceremonially announced on 22 September 1818. The bull also contained the regulations governing the activities and specifying the powers of the new eparchy¹⁹.

After he assumed his post, Gregor Tarkovič as bishop started to build and develop basic episcopal institutions. Gradually he established the episcopal office, the consistory, the archive and the library. In 1823 he endeavoured to establish some eparchial funds. Bishop G. Tarkovič was a spiritually-motivated man, a very devout ascetic, and this was the reason he sometimes experienced problems with material issues of the eparchial administration. Although he was not blessed with organizational abilities, he did take care of the material concerns of the new eparchy (except the repair of his residence)²⁰.

One of the most important representatives of the Prešov diocese was Jozef Gaganec. It was he who completed the formation, stabilisation and operation of the Prešov eparchy in the nineteenth century. He endeavoured to develop it. He took care of its organizational stability, social issues and pastoral unity. His office is inseparably connected with the renovation of the bishop's residence and the rebuilding of the cathedral and its adaptation for the oriental rite.

After the Austro-Hungarian equalization (*Ausgleich*) in 1867 the policy of so-called „Magyarization” (the attempt to force the Hungarian language on inhabit-

¹⁶ Lacko, M.: *Z našej minulosti : Biskup Michal Manuel Olsavský*. In: *Mária* no. 7–8, 1980, p. 15, 23–24.

¹⁷ *Consignatio parochorum, parochiarum et filialium, numeri animarum, nec non parochialium preventuum almae diocesis Munkacsiensis per respectivos Comitatum continens eorum subdivisionem in vice – archi – diaconatum facta die 1 – ma 7 – bris anno 1792*. In: *Magyarország története 1790–1848*. Budapest 1980, p. 425–441.

¹⁸ Udvari, I.: *A munkácsi görögkatolikus püspökség lelkészégeknek 1806. évi összeírás*. In: *Vasvári Pál társaság füzetek* 3. Nyíregyháza 1990, p. 79–84.

¹⁹ Archivum of Greek-Catholic eparchy in Prešov (AGBP), fund: Bežná agenda, division : Spisy, fixturely no. 454, signature 442. See also Duchnovič, A.: *Chronologia Historiae Almae Diocesis Eperjessiensis ab origine videlicet, usque obitum primi Episcopi Gregorii Tarkovics deducta*. Prešov 1848.

²⁰ Coranič, J.: *Dejiny slovenskej grécko-katolíckej cirkvi očami gréckokatolíckeho historika v ich európskom kontexte*. In: *Východná katolícka teológia v premenách časov*. Košice 2004, p. 74.

ants of the monarchy) affected all spheres of social life in Hungary. It affected especially the Greek-Catholic Church. Hungarian governmental officials proposed candidates for the post of the Greek-Catholic bishop to the imperial court. These candidates had to agree with Hungarian policy and have the approval of the Hungarian primate. The first of the so-called „Hungarian bishops” was prof. Mikuláš Tóth. Although he was not a radical exponent of the Hungarian policy, in the domain of culture and education he was unambiguously in favour of using the Hungarian language. On the other hand, he was against the extension of the Hungarian language into the Eastern liturgy. He founded the theological academy and the eparchal seminary and had the interior of the cathedral renewed²¹.

Ján Vályi became M. Tóth's successor. He was a great philanthropist, loved his believers, was great – hearted and generous, and completed the other necessary eparchal institutions. However, he was a submissive executant of Hungarian government policy. In his time the Hungarian language became the official language of the episcopal office, and the language of instruction used in the theological academy, seminary, and teachers' preparatory academy. This Hungarian influence upon future priests and teachers had the effect that these institutions created graduates who were „Hungarians” and became estranged from their own nation. Despite these developments, the Greek-Catholic believers did not follow their example. The main reason why common people were not influenced by the Hungarian policy was the practice of the Slavonic liturgy. The Old-Slavonic liturgy (and the whole Eastern Church tradition) remained the most important agent of national awareness, and through it these believers maintained their original Slavonic ethnic identity²².

The last of „the Hungarian” bishops in Prešov was Dr. Štefan Novák. He became bishop just a few months before the outbreak of World War I and managed the eparchy in this especially difficult period, which influenced some of his decisions. The activities of the so-called „Hungarian” bishops must be judged from two points of view. On the one hand they showed honest solicitude for the priests and the people. On the other hand there was their support of Hungarian nationalism. Novák's support of the Hungarian government and its policy often contradicted his concern for the good of the eparchy and its believers. His period is also assessed rather negatively because he escaped from the new Czechoslovak Republic and voluntarily gave up his office.

Without the permission of the Vatican, on 1 October 1918, Štefan Novák abandoned his office (authorising his vicar-general, Mikuláš Russnák, to be administrator of the eparchy²³) and moved to Miškolc (later to Vienna) where awaited the outcome of the situation in the monarchy. The Prešov eparchy stayed

²¹ Šturák, P. – Hric, J.: *Prešovské biskupstvo*. Prešov 1998, p. 74.

²² See Pekar, A.: *Historie backround of the Eparchy of Prjashev*. Pittsburgh 1968, p. 29–33.

²³ AGBP, Bežná agenda, Spisy, fix. no. 435, sign. 70.

without its shepherd, and also without funds, and its priests were divided into streams of different opinions. The Vatican, waiting for the consolidation of conditions, sought to avoid making a rash decision and did not want to dismiss the old bishops and appoint new ones. The Czechoslovak government wanted to retain the right to appoint new bishops, and thus waited to see how the problem would be solved. The Vatican appointed Dr. Mikuláš Russnák, the vicar-general, to be a provisional administrator of the eparchy.

Dr. Mikuláš Russnák was one of the most educated representatives of the Prešov eparchy in its history. His lifelong work crossed a whole range of theological disciplines (dogmatic theology, moral theology, liturgiology and so on) and other disciplines, including history, law, and linguistics. He could speak several languages, published more than 20 independent works, and wrote more than 160 essays. He actively participated in the new publication of „The Canonical Directive for the Oriental Church“. His essay on the Bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Mariology), which was published in 1936 in Prešov, was recognised by the Vatican. (His arguments based on oriental liturgical books are excellent).

In August 1922 the Vatican appointed Dr. Dionýz Njaradi to be the Apostolic Administrator of the Greek-Catholic eparchy²⁴. In the course of four years he definitively insulated the orthodox movement from the eparchy and repeatedly established discipline and order there, bringing priests back to their believers and strengthening their belief. As he was bishop of two eparchies (Prešov and Kríževac – the latter his previous diocese) after consolidation of conditions he decided to request the Vatican for permission to leave Prešov. The Congregation for the Oriental Church complied with his request – so he was able to leave – and simultaneously the Congregation appointed Paul Peter Gojdič to be the new Prešov administrator on 14 September 1926²⁵. The new Apostolic Administrator arrived in Prešov on 19 February 1927, and was immediately installed in his new office²⁶. He was consecrated in the ancient Basilica of St. Clement in Rome on 25 March 1927, the Feast of the Annunciation²⁷.

With his characteristic determination and resolution Bishop P. P. Gojdič started his work in the eparchy not only in the spiritual but also in the social and cultural field. He fulfilled this task very successfully. He managed to deepen religious life, improve priestly discipline, and uplift the quality of the Greek-Catholic Church in many spheres, in spite of strong political and media pressure

²⁴ Mihajlovič, Š.: *Dr. Njaradi a prešovský biskupský stolec*. In: *Slovenský denník* 22. 4. 1923, no. 91, p. 1.

²⁵ Welykyj, A.: *Documenta Pontificorum Romanorum historiam Ucrainae illustrantia, vol. II. Romae 1954*, p. 548.

²⁶ *Apoštolský administrátor prešovský, dr. Gojdič zaujme svoje miesto v Prešove v nedeľu dňa 20. febr. 1927. Reorganizácia pomerov v gréckokatolíckej Cirkvi v našom štáte*. In: *Eudová politika*, 3, 19. 2. 1927, no. 40, p. 1.

²⁷ *Vysviacka prešovského apoštolského administrátora Pavla Gojdiča za biskupa v Ríme*. In: *Slovák*, 9, 25. 3. 1927, no. 69, p. 6.

on his person, particularly after the Slovak State was established. The Vatican reacted to his activities and on the 19 July 1940 appointed P. P. Gojdič to be the bishop of Prešov²⁸.

Soon after the Czechoslovak Republic was established, modification of the boundaries of the Slovak dioceses became necessary because they did not correspond with the state frontiers. This was also a problem for the Prešov Greek-Catholic eparchy. After 1918 21 parishes of the Prešov eparchy ended up in Hungary. The Vatican reacted and as a solution to this situation in 1923 established a special Apostolic administrative unit in Miskolc.²⁹

The next modification of the boundaries of the Prešov eparchy was in 1938, after the Vienna Arbitration, when Hungary annexed some parts of southern and eastern Slovakia. In March 1939 Slovakia had to abandon some eastern parts of the republic (the Sobrance District and a part of the Snina District). The Vatican reacted very quickly to resolve the problem : the parishes of the Mukačevo eparchy remaining in the territory of Slovakia were exempted from the jurisdiction of the Mukačevo bishop and were formed into a special Apostolic administrative unit. P. P. Gojdič, the administrator of the Prešov eparchy, was appointed to be the provisional administrator. 47 parishes belonged to the Mukačevo administrative unit and P. P. Gojdič managed them through the vicar-general Anton Tink. The administrative unit was under the jurisdiction of the Prešov bishop until the 28 October 1944 when the Red Army liberated Užhorod and the bishop of Mukačevo was able to manage the diocese. On 29 June 1945 the Czechoslovak Republic ceded „ Sub-Carpathian Russia” to the Soviet Union and P. P. Gojdič, the Prešov bishop, assumed administration of this part of the Mukačevo eparchy (in fact without a decree from the Vatican). This procedure was entirely affirmed by the Vatican at the beginning of 1946³⁰. In Prešov 2 January 1947 ThDr. Vasif Hopko was appointed to the office of auxiliary bishop.

In the first years after World War II there were relatively good conditions of existence for the Greek-Catholic Church in the Czechoslovak Republic. Indeed bishop P. P. Gojdič was praised by the new government for his oppositional attitudes towards some representatives of the Slovak Republic. However, the bishop was to be very disappointed by this „democratic“ government. Political events in the autumn of 1947 in Slovakia and then in February in Prague meant the beginning of the extermination process for the Greek-Catholic Church in the Czechoslovak Republic. The plan of the Communist Party allowed for the fact that

²⁸ Welykyj, A.: *Documenta Pontificorum Romanorum historiam Ucrainae illustrantia*, vol. II. Romae 1954, p. 567–568.

²⁹ *Administratura Apostolica Miskolcensis pro parochiis ex diocesibus Eperiesensi et Mukachensi regio Hungariae incorporatis*. In : *Schematismus Venerabilis Cleri Graeci Ritus Catholicorum Dioeceseos Fragopolitanae (Prešov – Prjašev) pro anno Domini 1931. Ab erecta Sede Episcopali anno 115. Fragopoli 1931*, p. 128–129.

³⁰ *Decretum Sacra Congregatio pro Ecclesia orientali*. In: *Úradné zvesti*, 20. 2. 1946, no. 1, p. 1–2.

the Greek-Catholic Church would be transformed into the Eastern Orthodox Church whose centre, the Moscow patriarchate, was already under the control of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The process of eliminating the Greek-Catholic Church was later known as „the P action“. „The Small Convocation“ („Malý sobor“) called together on the 24 April 1950 was the first attempt to integrate the Greek-Catholic Church with the Eastern Orthodox Church. This first attempt was unsuccessful : although the priests who took part in it were specially chosen, most of them did not want to transform the Greek-Catholic Church into the Eastern Orthodox. The idea of creating an independent Greek-Catholic Church which would stand against the Vatican was also unsuccessful. The whole attention was then turned to the sadly known „Great Convocation“ („Veľký sobor“) – which took place four days later on the 28 April 1950 in Prešov after long preparation. This manipulated convocation adopted the so called „Manifest“ that proclaimed „the abolition of the Užhorod Union with the Vatican and which resulted in Greek-Catholic Church ending in the Czechoslovak Republic and the priests, believers with presbyteries and churches returned back to the Eastern Orthodox Church this day“. The government „accepted“ the results of the Great Convocation. By government intervention, more than 300 000 Greek-Catholic believers would become members of the Eastern Orthodox Church in a single day. This was the understanding of the representatives of the communist regime. Communists thought that there would be massive conversions. They thought that persuasion, threats and violence would help them. However, the great majority of priests did not fall. Although some of them at first agreed under psychological pressure, later most of them withdrew their decision³¹.

In 1950 bishop P. P. Gojdič was arrested and in 1951, after a fabricated trial, was sentenced to life imprisonment for his alleged cooperation with the „Bander-a's“ troops and treason and espionage in favour of the Vatican and „the imperialist powers“. He died on 17 July 1960, his 72nd birthday, still imprisoned. In 2001 Bishop Pavol Peter Gojdič OSBM was beatified by Pope John Paul II. In 2003 in Bratislava auxiliary Bishop of Prešov Vasiľ Hopko was also beatified by Pope John Paul II.

After all these events, from 1950, the Greek-Catholic Church necessarily had to change the form of its existence . From the church acknowledged by the state it became the so-called silent, underground, church. Despite the liquidation the Prešov eparchy remained in the hearts of its believers. In 1968, with the democratic changes, the Greek-Catholics also applied for their rights. At this time an increase in „normalisation“ was occurring following the military invasion of August 1968 which returned Czechoslovakia and also the Greek-Catholic Church to Communist totalitarianism. The situation changed after social changes in November 1989 when

³¹ See Šturák, P.: *Dejiny gréckokatolíckej cirkvi v Československu v rokoch 1945–1989. Prešov 1999*, p. 199.

Pope John Paul II appointed Mgr. Ján Hirka to be bishop of Prešov on the 21 December 1989. The nearly 40-year long Babylonian captivity of the Greek-Catholic Church in Slovakia was finished and it was able to develop its activities in every sphere and achieve rehabilitation.

One great organizational and legal change for the Greek-Catholic Church occurred on the 21 February 1997. on that day Pope John Paul II established the new special Apostolic Greek-Catholic Eparchy (Exarchát) in Košice by decrees published by the Congregation for Oriental Churches. Mgr. Milan Chatur, CSsR, who was at that time auxiliary bishop of the Prešov eparchy, was appointed to be its first bishop (exarcha). There was also one personal change in the present Prešov eparchy. On 10 December 2002 Pope John Paul II appointed Mgr. Th Dr. Ján Babjak, SJ to be the new bishop of Prešov bishop, as the eighth bishop of the Prešov eparchy from its establishment in 1818.

We may conclude with Pope John Paul II's words to the Greek-Catholics during his visit to Prešov in 1995: „Here the West meets the East, the Latin rite meets the Oriental..., here we can feel traces of St. Cyril and Methodius's heritage and legacy”.