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Transformation in the Life of Orthodox Church in the Carpathian Region in 1939 – 1945

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***Трансформации в жизни православной церкви
на Закарпатье в 1939–1945 гг.***

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The Serbian Orthodox Church began pastoral work in 1921 after the revival of Orthodoxy among Rusins in Austria-Hungary. The Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church was established under the leadership of the Serbian bishops-delegates. In 1931 this Church formed the basis of the Mukachevo-Pryashevsky Orthodox Diocese.

The first permanent bishop of the new diocese was Damaskin (Grdanichki). Before 1938, when the bishop was transferred to Canada for the pastoral ministry, he had established a strong diocesan structure which included about 150 000 believers.

On June 23, 1938, Vladimir (Rajic), was elected to the vacant post of the Mukachevo-Priashev (Prešov) bishop. The consecration took place in Belgrade on October 30, 1938. On November 16, 1938, Bishop Vladimir arrived in Mukachevo, where his enthronement occurred on November 20. The representative of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Bishop Seraphim took part in the celebrations. 130 parishes, including 12 parishes in the Priashev (Prešov) region, located in 6 deaneries, 5 monasteries and 13 hermitages with 417 inhabitants were under the direction of Bishop Vladimir. On November 26, Bishop Vladimir moved to Khust, due to the fact that on November 2, 1938, according to the above-mentioned Vienna arbitration, the Hungarians

seized Mukachevo. Bishop Vladimir reorganized the Ecclesiastical Consistory for the effective management of the diocese in the new situation.

After the seizure of Carpatho-Ukraine by the Hungarian army, the situation in the Orthodox Church began to rapidly change. In early 1939, in Budapest there arose the idea to establish the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Hungary. Therefore, in Transcarpathia they began covert support of a small group of the clergy, which since 1923 had been subordinate to Archbishop of Prague Sabbatius (Vrabec). His supporters even worked in the diocesan office in Khust, where they spread the anti-Serbian propaganda. Bishop Vladimir knew about clandestine activities against the Serbian jurisdiction on the part of some priests, headed by Mikhail Popov, whom the Hungarian government considered as a candidate for the episcopal office in the new church.

Despite the difficult situation of the diocese due to the Hungarian occupation, the bishop was actively performing his functions. He visited parishes, ordained and consecrated the clergy and hallowed churches. On his orders, the boarding school for Orthodox gymnasium students re-opened in Khust in 1939. It was founded in the middle of the 1920s by Archimandrite Alexis (Kabaliuk). The situation in the Priashev (Prešov) part of the diocese was still very complicated. Bishop Vladimir was not able to carry on ecclesiastical guidance for the parishes in Eastern Slovakia to the full extent, after the proclamation of the independent Slovak state (14 March 1939) and full occupation of Subcarpathian Rus'. 12 parishes of the diocese, the monastery of the Rev. Job in Vladimirova and two church communities under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Evlogy (Georgievsky) operated at that time on the territory of Slovakia. (On February 24, 1939, the bishop officially recognized the typographical fraternity of the Rev. Job of Pochaev to be the monastery under the jurisdiction of the Synod of Bishops of ROCOR).

After the German attack on Yugoslavia, the situation changed drastically. Bishop Vladimir and all the priests of the Diocese were offered Hungarian citizenship. But the bishop refused point-blank. Then, on April 8, 1941, the bishop was arrested at the railway station of Mukachevo. The patriarch was sent to a concentration camp, and Bishop Vladimir was interned by the Hungarians in the country house of the Roman Catholic bishop in the city of Vác. In mid-October 1941, Bishop Vladimir (Rajic) was exiled to Yugoslavia.

After the arrest of Bishop Vladimir, the administrator Hegumenos Feofan (Sabov) took up managing the Orthodox parishes in

Transcarpathia. However, on April 12, 1941, the Regent of Hungary, Miklos Horthy, appointed the above-mentioned Mikhail Popov "the administrator of the Greek-Eastern Hungarian and Greek-Eastern Rusin Churches". Popov coordinated these actions with Archbishop Sabbatius, who issued a decree as early as September 26, 1940, appointing Popov as his own administrator in Hungary.

When the attempts to establish the Autocephalous church in Hungary failed, and its establishment was prevented first and foremost by Germany, Popov reflected on changing jurisdiction. Besides, on May 30, 1942, the Gestapo arrested Archbishop Sabbatius (Vrabec), and Popov was left without a church patron. It is known that on January 11 and 20, 1943, he met with Metropolitan Seraphim (Lade) with whom he discussed the situation of the Orthodox Church in Hungary. In June 1943, Popov was dismissed. Hegumenos Feofan (Sabov), a supporter of the Serbian jurisdiction was restored to the office of an administrator. He began to lay the groundwork for the return of Bishop Vladimir from Serbia. In October 1944, Transcarpathia was liberated by the Soviet Army.

1944 was a turning point in the history of Transcarpathia. The changes affected almost all the spheres of socio-political, socio-economic, cultural and religious life. It was a new stage in the life of the Orthodox Church too. Although the Orthodox clergy, unlike their Greco-Catholic counterparts, expressed their loyalty to the new government and took an active part in the reunion movement and in the activities of people's committees, they were unable to avoid pressure.

On November 24, 1945, the Moscow Patriarch consecrated George Sidoruk as the bishop of Uman, vicar of the Kiev Metropolis, under the name of Nestor, at the same time appointing him administrator of the Orthodox Mukachevo-Priashev (Prešov) Diocese. On November 6, 1945, Bishop Vladimir arrived in Mukachevo together with Bishop Nestor. On November 9, the new Bishop took over the diocesan archive from his predecessor, and on November 11 his enthronement took place at the Mukachevo Cathedral.

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Bishop, Orthodox Church, Patriarch, Orthodox Synod.

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