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Archbishop Alexy (Dekhterev): The Life and Career (1889 – 1959)

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Архієпископ Олексій (Дехтерьов): життєвий та творчий шлях (1889–1959)

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The personality of Archbishop Alexy (mundanely known as Alexander Petrovish Dekhterev) is not sufficiently studied in modern historiography. Present-day scholars somehow passed over his activities, despite the fact that he lived in Transcarpathia for a long time and was active in his missionary and publishing work.

Alexander Petrovich Dekhterev was born on April 19 (May 2), 1889 in Vilna. In 1908 Alexander finished the local Vilna Classical Gymnasium and in 1911 he graduated from the Libava Naval School majoring in deep sea navigation. He was Captain of the ocean-going merchantman “Birma” belonging to the Russian East Asian Steamship Company. In 1913 – 1914, he worked as a research associate in the Department of Statistics for subtropics flora survey of Transcaucasia.

Besides, Alexander published his poems in the North-West Voice newspaper. In 1906 he published “Eyas Wings”, a book of poems.

While being in merchant fleet, Dekhterev writes about sea voyages for the magazines “Vershiny” (“The Summits”, SPb.) and “Around The World” (Moscow). With the outbreak of World War I he served in the technical division of the 12th Army, then he was appointed head of the shipyard in Riga.

In 1917 Alexander landed within the boundaries of the region of the Don Army. He was a journalist and wrote for the newspapers "Priazovsky Krai" (The Priazov Region) and "Voronezhsky Telegraph" (The Voronezh Telegraph). He was also the editor of the literary and art magazine "Luchy Solntsa" (The Sunbeams). But he managed to produce just one issue of the magazine.

Under the rule of Ataman P. Krasnov, he organized the scout movement. He became Senior Scout in the Russian Scout Youth Organization and published the The Pedagogical Newspaper and The Don Scout Newspaper.

In 1920 Alexander Dekhterev arrived in Turkey together with the evacuated Russian Army. He was an educator in Baron P. Wrangel gymnasium in Gallipoli and a teacher in the Russian school in the Halki island. He was also a member of the Constantinople Committee of the Russian Scout Association.

Since 1923 A. Dekhterev lived in Bulgaria. There he worked as an employee of the Department of School Education for Children in Bulgaria (1924 – 1934) and a teacher in the gymnasium in Tirnovo (Tarnovo) and Shumen. He was the founder and head of My Little Russia boarding school. Working in the field of education, Alexander published a number of his articles in the Prague journals such as Russian School Abroad and the Bulletin of the Pedagogical Bureau for the Middle and Lower Schools Abroad.

While in exile, he corresponded with hieromonk Savva (Struve) who pursued his religious activities in the monastery of St. Job of Pochaev in the Prešov Region (Rusin: Preshovska (Priashevskaya) Rus'). In 1934 he leaves Bulgaria for Czechoslovakia. At the monastery, he fulfilled various obediences: taught Russian and mathematics at the monastery school while teaching the Law of God to children in the surrounding villages, and edited the newspaper "Pravoslavnaya Rus'" (The Orthodox Rus'). The Childhood and Youth supplement to "The Orthodox Rus'" was published in 1934 on Dekhterev's initiative.

In April 1935, he was tonsured into monasticism with the name Alexy. In April 1936, he moved to Mukachevo, where he became editor of "The Orthodox Carpatho-Russian Messenger", the official publication of the Mukachevo-Priashev (Prešov) Orthodox Diocese. He continued working with young people and was among the organizers of the Union of Orthodox Youth Congress of Subcarpathian Rus'. The sessions of the Congress were held at the Lipchansky monastery in 1938. In December 1938, Alexy was ordained to the priesthood by the Bishop of Mukachevo-Priashev (Prešov) Vladimir (Rajić) and appointed rector of the Orthodox Memorial Church in Uzhgorod. In office of priest, he

carries out active missionary work and maintains contacts with the White Russian émigrés' community worldwide.

In December 1938, he left Uzhgorod for Belgrad. In 1941, he became rector of the Russian Church of St. Alexander Nevsky in Alexandria, Egypt. At that period, the parish fell within the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. During the visit to Egypt of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexy I (Simansky) on June 14, 1945, Alexy (Dekhterev) became subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate.

On November 1, 1946, he was elevated to the rank of archimandrite. In 1947 he received Soviet citizenship.

In August 1949, Father Alexy was arrested by the local authorities on charges of pro-Communist propaganda. Till May 11, 1949, he was imprisoned in Fort de Kom-el-Dik, whereupon he was deported to the Soviet Union.

Upon returning to Moscow, he was appointed librarian of the Holy Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius (Troitse-Sergyeva Lavra). His articles were published in the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate. In December, 1949, Alexy was transferred to Czechoslovakia to be at the disposal of the Czechoslovakian Exarchate. On December 30, 1949 the Council of the Orthodox Church in Priashev (Prešov) elected him bishop. On February 3, 1959, the rite of the naming of bishop took place in Prague. It was very difficult to manage the Priashev (Prešov) Diocese because it consisted largely of former Greek Catholics. At the beginning of 1955, there were some cases of conversion Bishop Alexy's diocesans to Catholicism. Being concerned about the growing influence of the Catholic Church in Slovakia, the State Administration of Church Affairs of Czechoslovakia accused Bishop Alexy of inaction and took up the matter with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. They deemed it necessary to replace him by another bishop.

In the summer of 1955, Bishop Alexy left Priashev (Prešov) and moved to Moscow. On November 22, 1955, by order of the Synod he was appointed temporary administrator of the Vilnius Diocese. Then, on November 22, 1956, Alexy was appointed bishop of Vilnius and Lithuania. On July 25, 1957, the bishop was promoted to the rank of archbishop. He died on April 19, 1959, and was buried in the crypt of the Saint-Spirit (Sviato-Dukhov) Cathedral in Vilnius.

Keywords

Alexy/Alexis (Dekhterev), Archimandrite, monk, Orthodox Church, Orthodox, Subcarpathian Rus', Czechoslovakia.