

Petr Balcárek

Martyrdom of Orthodox Christians in Czechoslovakia (1945-1990).¹ Some Preliminary Remarks, Typology, and Ideas for Further Research

Abstract

In this article I will briefly present the life stories of some of the lesser known people persecuted by the totalitarian communist regime in Czechoslovakia, in the latter half of the twentieth century. They were Orthodox Christian believers, some of whom ended as martyrs. There will be an attempt to make a classification of types of martyrdom during this period and some questions towards further research will be raised.



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¹ Introductory accounts of Czechoslovak history in Romanian language have been written by Milan Ťesan. See for example his articles recently published in: *Vocație si dăruire. In memoriam Părinților Profesori Milan Ťesan si Teodor Bodogae*, Sibiu, Astra Museum: Editura Andreiana, 2012, esp. pp. 234-268 (about the first Martyrs and Saints in Czechoslovakia as St Methodius, St Wenceslav, St Ludmila etc.).

Keywords

Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia, martyrdom, communist regime, typology of martyrdom

“For most Orthodox Christians in the twentieth century, Communism has been *the* enemy. But it is wise to remember that our enemy lies not only outside us but within.”²
(Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia)

1 Introduction

Any scholar trying to deal with the issue of martyrdom in communist Czechoslovakia faces a difficult task, since religious affairs at this time are intricately linked with ideological and political ones. The present study will approach the theme of martyrdom in the Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia by first giving a very brief outline of the situation in the period of the two World Wars, then by attempting a typology of martyrdom in the communist state and, finally, by looking at the concept of martyrdom in this historical period from different angles.

2 Czechoslovak Martyrs in the period of the two World Wars

While in Romania, Russia, or other “traditionally Orthodox” countries a great number of studies have been written about their own national Orthodox martyrs and suffering Orthodox Christians during the communist period, in post-socialist Czechoslovakia there is not a single one. This raises the

² Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New Edition, London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 171.

question whether there were any such people as Orthodox Christian martyrs in the Czechoslovak territories.

The only known “martyr” in the Orthodox Church in the Czech and Slovak lands in the historiography of these countries is the Holy New Martyr Bishop, St Gorazd (Pavlik, 26 May 1879 – 4 September 1942) of the Czech-Moravian Diocese of the Serbian Patriarchate in Yugoslavia. He was first canonised by the Serbian Patriarchate and some decades later in Czechoslovakia.³ The Church has officially recognized no other Czechoslovak martyrs, despite the fact that, together with St Gorazd (Pavlik), other Orthodox priests and laymen who had participated in the anti-Nazi resistance movement were shot.⁴ Among the native Czechs or Moravians martyred during the World War II there is also St Stanislav (Nasadil, 1904 – 20th June 1941),⁵ who came from the Moravian city of Brno. He was, just like Gorazd, priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church who, during the World War II, lived in the former Yugoslavian village of Ličkoj-Jasenica, in today’s Croatia. He was killed with a hammer by the Ustaša Croatian Revolutionary Movement

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorazd_Pavlik (accessed on 3rd November 2014). The Serbian Orthodox Church recognized Bp. Gorazd as a new martyr on 4th May 1961. Later, the Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia canonised him in the Cathedral of St. Gorazd in Olomouc in Moravia on 24th August 1987.

⁴ Gorazd was judged and shot together with the Dean of the Orthodox Cathedral of St Cyril and Methodius in Prague, parish priests Alois Vaclav Číkl (1900 – 1942) and Vladimír Petřek (+ 1942) and also with a layman, Jan Sonnenvend. The priests were canonised by the Serbian Orthodox Church on 4th May 1961.

⁵ Svjaščenomučenik Stanislav ličkoj-jeseničkoj. See: Serbian National Defence Council of Canada, *Holocaust in the Nazi Catholic Croatia* (Chicago, Illinois, n.d.) in: <https://archive.org/stream/HolocaustInNaziCatholicCroatia19411945/Holocaust%20in%20Nazi-Catholic%20Croatia-1941-1945#page/n11/mode/2up> (accessed on 3rd November 2014).; see also on: http://www.krajinaforce.com/dokumenti/stradanje_svestenstva.html (accessed on 3rd November 2014).

people. He was discovered in a mass grave in the Jadovno Caves. He has been canonised only by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Going back to the World War I period, there is also a new-martyr commemorated first by ROCOR (the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia) and later by the Moscow patriarchate and by the Polish Orthodox Church. St Maxim (Sandovich, 1886 – 1914)⁶ was a native Ruthenian, coming from today's Eastern Slovakian territory. As a missionary Orthodox clergyman during World War I, he was thought to be a Russian spy and shot by the Austro-Hungarians as an enemy.

3 The Communist Period or “Render to the Caesar the Things That Are Caesar’s”: Where to Draw the Line?

If the Orthodox Church in the Czech and Slovak lands does not mention people from the Czech and Slovak lands such as St Maxim Sandovich (martyred during World War I) or St Stanislav Nasadil (martyred during World War II), it finds it even more difficult to celebrate its local Orthodox martyrs from the communist period. Unlike other denominations in these

⁶ See the article ‘Maxim Sandovich’, in *Orthodox Life* 45/1 (Jordanville, 1995); Sandowicz, Tatiana, ‘In Memory of Rev. Maksym Sandowicz, a Martyr of Talehof, *Karpatska Rus*’ (New York: Yonkers), 6 March 1992, p. 3. Also http://orthodoxwiki.org/Maxim_Sandovich (accessed on 3rd November 2014); the entry ‘Maxim Sandovich’, in Ken Parry, David J. Melling et al. (eds.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 309. Sandowicz studied at the Orthodox Seminary in Zhitomir in Ukraine and was ordained in 1911 by Antonij Khrapovitskij. Before the First World War Sandowicz was a successful missionary in his homeland, around the town of Snina, as well as in Ruthenia and Galitzia. In Grybow he became the Orthodox parish priest, after converting all the believers from Greek-Catholicism to Orthodoxy. He was in prison in Snina, Gorlice and Talehof. He is commemorated on 6th September by ROCOR and on 6th August by the Polish Orthodox Church.

territories (as Roman Catholics, Protestants, Greek Catholics, Jews, a. s. o.), the Czech and Slovak Orthodox Christians have not published any study about their own Church members who suffered under the communist regime. It is also highly probable that Czech or Slovak Orthodox martyrs or other people who have been unjustly prosecuted and made prisoners are not recorded in the Western documentary human right centres.⁷ Would research in the West-European or American archives confirm this hypothesis or would it bring any fruits?

In any case, the lack of records of oppressed Czechoslovak Orthodox Christians raises several questions, one of them being: does this mean that all Orthodox Christians were loyal to the communist regime? A statement such as “Orthodox equals Communist” has become a common journalistic cliché in the post-communist media in the Czech and Slovak Republics. This statement is grounded in the fact that most leading Orthodox Church personalities were more or less loyal to or active in promoting the communist ideology but this is true of leaders of other Christian denominations in these countries in the communist period. “There is no truth in the assertions that the Church is oppressed in our country [in the USSR, author’s note]. Needless to say, there are instances of violations of believers’ rights.”⁸ Are Patriarch Pimen’s words published in Soviet Russia valid for Czech and Slovak historiography?

⁷ For central Europe it is: *The Open Society Archives* (OSA) Budapest, at the Central European University Budapest <http://www.osaarchivum.org/about-us> (accessed on 3rd November 2014), see also the British Keston Institute. (<http://www.keston.org.uk/>, <http://www.baylor.edu/kestoncenter/>) (accessed on 3rd November 2014), the American *Wilson Center* (<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/cold-war-international-history-project>), (accessed on 3rd November 2014), especially *Kennan Institute*, where young scholars are financed by the Fulbright Foundation.

⁸ Alexander F. C. Webster, *The Price of Prophecy. Orthodox Churches on Peace Freedom and Security*, Ethics and Public Policy Center (Washington, D.C., Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans

4 Typology of Persecuted Believers and Martyrs during Communist Czechoslovakia

4.1 The Fool for Christ

The first example of a Fool for Christ immediately after the World War II was the Russian monk Sava (Konstantin Petrovic Struve, born on 11. 10. 1900 – died on 13. 3. 1949),⁹ who lived in the Eastern part of Czechoslovakia. The tradition of the Fool for Christ has always been deeply rooted in the regions of Galicia and Western Ukraine.¹⁰ Hieromonk Sava was Igoumen of the Russian Orthodox Monastery in Ladomirova, Eastern Slovakia. He was a graduate of the University in Heidelberg (1924), of the Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology at Charles University in Prague (1925), and of the St Serge Institute in Paris (1929) and knew very well the price of inner freedom after his confrontations with the Soviet Secret Police.¹¹

Before the World War II, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia had, at Ladomirova, a large monastery and printing house, whose religious books, periodicals, and pamphlets and other missionary activities were oriented against the atheistic Soviet regime. However, with the Red Army troops advancing into the cities and villages of Slovakia, the monks in Ladomirová

Publishing Company, 1993), p. 54. Quotation taken from: Patriarch Pimen, *The Baptism of Rus 1000 Years Ago Determined, to a Large Extent, the Development of the Peoples of Our Country*, Expert Opinion series (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, n.d.), p. 9.

⁹ Sava Struve (born on 11. 10. 1900 – died in 13. 3. 1949), see [http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Савва_\(Струве\)](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Савва_(Струве)), (accessed on 3rd November 2014). His Father was a famous anti-communist: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Berngardovich_Struve (accessed on 3rd November 2014).

¹⁰ Dmitrij Sergejevič Lichačov – Alexandr Michajlovič Pančenko, *Smích stare Rusi* (Prague: Odeon, 1984), pp. 193–202. Translated into Czech from the original: Dmitrij Sergejevič Lichačov – Alexandr Michajlovič Pančenko, *Smechovoj mir, drevnej Rusi* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976).

¹¹ NKVD, *Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del* (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) in the Soviet Union.

fled to Bratislava, Berlin, and finally reached Jordanville in the U.S.A., where they founded a new monastery. It was only the forty-five year old Igoumen Sava and two other monks who were seriously ill that stayed on in Ladimirova. During the war, in 1945, the monastery buildings were completely destroyed, with only the church remaining.

Under the new, Soviet, regime, Igoumen Sava Struve became a parish priest in the village of Ladomirova, under the Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate. He accepted from them the rank of Archimandrite and he also agreed to hold the function of Chairman of the local Committee in Ladomirova and, later on, to be member of the Regional Committee in the district town of Svidník. This was the time when the Communists were waging war against “Bandera” soldiers and against the breakaway communist Tito and his followers. It was also the time of the show trials of the revisionists of communism in Slovakia, such as the former communist partisan, colonel Viliam Zingor.¹² At the same time trials were proceeding against the various local supporters of “imperialism”, “Clerical Fascism”, or of the “anti-democratic American and Jewish enemies”, but mainly of the opponents of the collectivization of private lands and properties in the young and fragile Czechoslovak socialistic democracy.

During this period Sava corresponded with his former fellow monks now in Berlin and the USA, as well as with the former Russian Prague bishop Sergiy Stragorodskij (formerly under the Ecumenical Patriarchate) now in Vienna (this time under the Moscow Patriarchate) and with his brother Alexej Petrovič Struve (1899-1976), a bookseller, who was trying to free him from the communists.¹³ From the beginning of the new regime

¹² See: <http://style.hnonline.sk/vikend-140/justicna-vrazda-partizanskeho-velitela-291649> (accessed on 3rd November 2014).

¹³ Ľubica Harbulová, *Ladomirovské reminiscence. Z dejín ruskej pravoslávnej misie v Ladomirovej 1923–1944* (Prešov: Pravoslavná

Igoumen Sava was being watched by the Soviet Secret Police. There was a time when Sava was taken by “his parishioners” to the mental hospital. After sending some letters from the hospital in which he asked to be let out, he was finally freed by his fellow monk Igoumen Hieromonk Ignatie Ciochina (1899-1976).¹⁴ Sava abandoned his office as member of the District Committee in Svidník and became a wandering priest, leading a life similar to that of Igoumen Ignatie Ciochina. Sava Struve died on 13th March 1949 and, according to today’s official Moscow Patriarchate sources, he was a “Fool for Christ”¹⁵. He spent his final days in Ladomirova, locked in the church building. He was surrounded by the ruins of the previously prosperous and large Orthodox monastery there. Nobody was allowed to visit him or to speak with him.¹⁶ He chose voluntary death, chased down like an animal. He did not eat or drink anything. His final message as recorded by the journal *Vestnik pravoslavnogo eksarchata Moskovskoj patriarchiiv Českoslovakii* of the Moscow Patriarchate in Czechoslovakia is supposed to have been the following:

bogoslovecká fakulta Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, 2000), pp. 80-81.

¹⁴ Danielc Jurij Vasilievič, ‘Archimandrit Sava (Struve)’, in: *Troickoe Nasledie. Listok Svjato-Troickoj seminarii*, nr. 4 (30), zima 2010-2011, p. 78, omitted the information about Sava’s relation to NKVD and his being imprisoned in the mental hospital. Štefan Horkaj and Štefan Pružinský do not describe the dramatic end of Sava’s life in their book *Pravoslávna cirkev na Slovensku v 19. a 20. storočí. Ľudia-události-dokumenty* (Prešov: Pravoslávna bogoslovecká fakulta Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, 1998), pp. 161-162. Only the Slovak secular researcher Dr. Ľubica Harbulová, in her book *Ladomirovské reminiscence* mentioned above, is most explicit in what concerns the dark part of Sava’s life. She works exclusively with archive sources. Later authors only receive her information as facts and do not themselves work with archive sources.

¹⁵ Danielec Jurij Vasilievič, ‘Archimandrit Savva (Struve)’; see also ‘Sava Struve’ on the website [http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Савва_\(Струве\)](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Савва_(Струве)) (accessed on 3rd November 2014).

¹⁶ Danielec Jurij Vasilievič, ‘Archimandrit Savva (Struve)’, p. 78.

“I a sinner am asking for forgiveness, if I bring worries and sorrow to any of those close to me, to my spiritual children and my fellow priests. Before God I am a great sinner but before my Fatherland and all the Slav nations I have not sinned, since I have supported all the national events with all my strength, during the last war as well as after it. I ask my fellow priests to bury me as a monk in the graveyard among my fellow brothers and mark my grave with a simple wooden cross; please pray for the peace of my sinful soul”.¹⁷

It is not clear whether the message above attributed to Igoumen Sava Struve was made public on the basis of compromising materials that the Soviet Secret Police might have had about his possible cooperation in “building the new social order” or simply due to the fact that he had kept silent at the end of his life thus leaving space for any speculations that those in power might have wished to make.

4.2 Active Opponents of the Regime

There were also active opponents of the totalitarian regimes and they had a rich tradition in Czechoslovak history. Among them were the “Czechoslovak legionaries”, the first significant group of converts to Orthodoxy during the World War I. They were former defectors from the Austro-Hungarian army, who had become a separate military unit under the high command of the Russian Tsar and who were fighting for the independence of Czechoslovakia. When the Tsarist family was imprisoned by the Bolsheviks, the Czechoslovak legionaries struggled to free them, yet, by the time they reached Yekaterinburg, the execution of the Tsar and his family had already taken place. It was during their service in the Tsar’s army and the Bolshevik

¹⁷ My translation from the Russian original, *Vestnik pravoslavnogo eksarchata Moskovskoj patriarchiiv Českoslovakii (Newsletter of the Orthodox Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate in Czechoslovakia, no. 6, 1949)*, p. 83.

Revolution that some of these legionaries married Russian women and became familiar with the Russian Orthodox culture. After their return from Russia, during World War II, they became the first target of the German police. Those who managed to avoid the Nazi prisons took active part in the anti-Fascist resistance as partisans. Some of them also assisted in the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in the resistance group connected with the now canonized bishop Gorazd (Pavlík).

After World War II, the legionaries' children continued their parents' struggle, this time against the totalitarian communist power. Such was the group of the Mašín brothers (as they are known in Czechoslovak historiography).¹⁸ The Mašíns came from an Orthodox family.¹⁹ Their father had been a legionary who, together with other Czech soldiers, had founded a resistance group called *The Three Kings* and had fought against the German occupation; he was killed during one of his numerous military activities against the occupiers of Czechoslovakia.²⁰ Once the Communists seized power, Mašín's sons witnessed how some of their family's friends – opponents of the regime – were silenced, vanished without a trace, or were sentenced to death in public show trials. The Mašíns shared the idea that the Americans, who had helped to establish the Czechoslovakian state, would soon come and "wipe out Communism". The Mašín brothers fought against the leading Communists and their police but finally, exhausted and

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_and_Ctirad_Mašín (accessed on 3rd November 2014).

¹⁹ Zdenka Mašínová – Rudolf Martin, *Čtyři české osudy* (Praha: Paseka, 2001); see also: Jan Němeček, *Mašínové, zpráva o dvou generacích* (Praha: Torst, 1998); Barbara Masin: *Gauntlet* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006); Josef Švéda, *Narrative and Ideological Discourses in Representations of the Mašín Brothers* (Lambert: Academic Publishing, 2011); Ctirad Mašín – Josef Mašín – Milan Paumer: *Cesta na severozápad* (Prague: Academia, 2010).

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Mašín (accessed on 3rd November 2014).

hopeless, fled to the USA crossing East Germany into West Berlin (1953).

Since the 1950s up to the present, due to the very successful communist propaganda (in literature, radio, and films), Czechoslovak society has been divided in their view of the Mašíns' group: some consider them heroes, others criminals. While in Romania,²¹ Poland, Slovakia,²² or Ukraine the anti-communist resistance movements were supported by the local people and, after 1989, have been made public, in Czechoslovakia²³ the situation was in some ways different, since, under president Edvard Beneš, there was no consistent resistance either against the Fascist occupation in 1938, or

²¹ For example in: Matei Marin (ed.), *Fericiți cei prizoniți. Martiri ai temnițelor românești* (București: Bonifaciu, 2008), pp. 191-209; *Martiri pentru Hristos din România în perioada regimului comunist* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2007); or about Hungarians living in Romania, on: http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Márton_Moyses (accessed on 3rd November 2014).

²² One active opponent of communism was the Slovak Alexander Pavlis, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in the trial he shared with communist revisionist and former anti-Nazi partisan Viliam Zingor. Pavlis worked in the communist concentration camp at the uranium mines of Vojna near Příbram for twelve years. See: <http://style.hnonline.sk/vikend-140/justicna-vrazda-partizanskeho-velitela-291649>. (Accessed on 3rd November 2014).

²³ On 28 February 2008 the Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek awarded the Mašíns with the new "Prime Minister's Medal" at a ceremony at the Czech Embassy in Washington. At a later ceremony in the Czech Republic on 4 March 2008, he also decorated another member of the group, Milan Paumer. The Prime Minister's Medal is a personal decoration, not one given in the name of the Czech Republic. The Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek hoped that, as a result of such discussions, the Mašíns will eventually receive official state recognition but, up to the present, this has not happened.

against the Soviet totalitarian regime that later led to Czechoslovak socialism.²⁴

4.3 The 'Classical' Type of Martyrs under the Communist Regime

Even though there are what we could call 'main stream' martyrs of the Czechoslovak communist regime, they have not been recognised and canonised by the official authorities of the Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

i) One of the martyrs who suffered under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was Vladimír Sís, whose novice name while at the Chilandar Monastery, on Mount Athos, was Valerián (30.6. 1889 – 2.7.1958).²⁵ He was the disciple of one of the first Czech Orthodox monks, Sava of Chilandar (1837–1912),²⁶ the latter being well known in Serbia. Novice Valerián had been Sava's disciple since 1910. After Sava's death he studied at the seminary in Prizren and, instead of becoming librarian and archivist at the Chilandar Monastery as originally planned, fled the monastery and got married in Czechoslovakia. Before World War II he was a conservative politician, an influential intellectual and expert in Balkan and Russian issues, who published several studies including one of the most valuable books about the Russian Émigré Olšany cemetery in Prague. In 1949 he was sent to the communist concentration camp in Leopoldov, accused of being a 'rotten', 'anti-

²⁴ Petr Balcárek, 'Edvard Beneš a české pravoslavlí', in Pavel Marek – et al., *Jan Šrámek a jeho doba* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2011), pp. 653-666.

²⁵ Marcel Černý, 'Recepce literárního díla českého mnicha na Chilandaru otce Sávy a nový zájem o jeho osobnost v Srbsku', *Slavia*, 69 (2000) 3, p. 308, notes 101, 110.

²⁶ Petr Balcárek, 'Slavibor Breüer (1837-1912) a jeho vliv na společnost první poloviny 20. století', in *Osobnost v Církví a politice. Čeští a slovenští křesťané ve 20. století* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2006), pp. 56-65; Petr Balcárek, *Monk Sáva of Chilandar. A Scholar*. A Foreword by Graham Speake. Eastern Christian Studies VI. No. 18 (Olomouc: IBYZ 2012).

proletarian' person, oriented against the Soviet 'democratic' polity. He died in this camp in 1958. The story of Vladimír Sís's last days in the concentration camp was published by a Leopoldov survivor, Antonín Bradna (1922-2006), a Roman Catholic priest, in his book *Zaradoval jsem se. Útržky ze života* (*I Rejoiced. Scraps of Life*).²⁷

ii) Another person who spent part of his life in prison and under persecution was Josef (monastic name Sávva) Neruda (5. 11. 1898 – 16. 11. 1989).²⁸ He was an educated Orthodox priest (having graduated from the grammar school and from the Teacher Training College in Brno) who, from 1919, worked as a teacher at primary and secondary schools in Southern Moravia. On 24th September 1924 he was ordained as an Orthodox priest by Archbishop Sawatij (Ecumenical Patriarchate). As parish priest he was extremely successful; he had a congregation of around 200 believers and, together with them, built a church and a large parish house. During World War II the churches of the Serbian Patriarchate (headed by Bishop Gorazd) and also those under the Ecumenical Patriarchate (headed by Archbishop Sawatij) were closed and serving the liturgies or any other religious activities were prohibited. In 1943 Josef Neruda declared himself as having German nationality and was allowed to serve liturgies under Archbishop Seraphim Lade of Berlin, the head of all the Orthodox in the Third Reich and in the territories it controlled. After World War II priest Josef Neruda was imprisoned for 15 years by Czechoslovak communists and spent all this time in the various labour camps, concentration camps, and prisons.

²⁷ Antonín Bradna, *Zaradoval jsem se. Útržky ze života* (Prague: Kostelní Vydří – Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2002).

²⁸ Pavel Marek – Martin Lupčo, *Nástin dějin pravoslavné církve v 19. a 20. století. Prolegomena k vývoji pravoslaví v českých zemích, na Slovensku a na Podkarpatské Rusi v letech 1860-1992* (Brno: Centrum demokracie a kultury, 2012), pp. 436-437.

Then he was amnestied and afterwards worked as a factory labourer, in agriculture, etc.

As a pensioner – during what has come to be known as the Prague Spring – he received the Czechoslovak state's agreement to serve as an officially recognised priest (from 1966 onward). In 1967 he received the monastic name Sávva (after Sávva of Jerusalem). He was also known as an active opponent of Bishop Gorazd's canonisation (by the Serbian Patriarchate). Nevertheless, the most significant role he played in the Orthodox Church was the fact that he translated the majority of the Orthodox Liturgical books from Church Slavonic into the Czech language – the Lenten Menaion, the Festal Menaion, the Synaxary, and others (more than 40 titles). He also translated liturgical textbooks, such as Evgenij Fencik's and Lazar Mirkovič's, as well as several books of Orthodox spirituality (John of the Ladder, Nicolas Velimirovič's Sermons, etc.) from Serbian. He wrote Orthodox studies such as the *Biblical History*, *The Life of Jesus*, *St Cyril and Methodius*, etc.). These he printed at home as samizdat, thus risking their confiscation and also a fresh term of imprisonment. He lived his final days in his private hermitage in Smrček u Nedvědice in Bohemia and died on 16th November 1989. Since hieromank Sávva Neruda has been an unpopular person, his books have remained unknown with the exception of those published under another name.

iii) There were also people who did not undergo physical martyrdom but who, during a large part of their lives, were persecuted and sometimes even mobbed by their fellows. Such a person was hieromonk Igoumen Ignatie Ciochina (1899–1976) from Eastern Slovakia, about whom a short study was recently published, or the former Archbishop Sawatij of Prague (1880-1959)²⁹ of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. After World War

²⁹ Pavel Marek – Volodymyr Bureha – Jurij Danilec, *Arcibiskup Sawatij (1880-1959). Nástin života a díla zakladatelské postavy pravoslavné církve v Československé republice* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, Filozofická fakulta, 2009).

II, the latter was repeatedly asked by the Soviets to transfer under the Moscow Patriarchate³⁰ and each time he refused: he did not wish to serve a church that cooperated with the Soviet atheistic regime. Therefore the communists did not allow him to celebrate public liturgies (he did not have “státní souhlas” – the “state’s agreement”), he could serve only for himself, in his own flat.

In 1948, the Moscow Patriarchate wanted the Catholics and the Old Catholics in Czechoslovakia to join the Orthodox Church, promising to allow them to use the Western Roman Catholic rite. It was an offer the Moscow Patriarchate had also made in France and other countries but failed. At the time, the Old Catholics in Prague had approached Archbishop Sawatij asking him to be their representative under the Moscow Patriarchate, since he was well known for his pastoral work and for his friendly interreligious relations. Nevertheless, a letter from Moscow informed the Czechoslovak government that “pro moskevskou patriarchii není potřebný”³¹ (“for the Moscow Patriarchate he [Sawatij, translator’s note] is not needed”) and “nehodí se pro zodpovědné úkoly”³² (“he is unsuitable for responsible tasks”). Archbishop Sawatij’s loyalty to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and his refusal to cooperate with the Soviet-affiliated Moscow Patriarchate throughout the difficult post-war period, when he had to undergo numerous interrogations and experience various losses (e.g. the loss of parishes and church property), makes him a martyr in the broader sense of the word. Had he chosen a different path, he could have been a bishop of the Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate in Czechoslovakia or, after 1950, he could have

³⁰ The last time Sawatij was asked for his decision was in 1955. See Pavel Marek – Volodymyr Bureha – Jurij Danilec, *Arcibiskup Sawatij (1880-1959)*, p. 142.

³¹ Pavel Marek – Volodymyr Bureha – Jurij Danilec, *Arcibiskup Sawatij (1880-1959)*, p. 141.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 142.

been even the head of the Autocephalous Church in Czechoslovakia proclaimed by Moscow, as it had been offered to him several times. Instead, he wrote to the Patriarch of Constantinople, asking him to allow him to go to Mount Athos and spend the rest of his life there.

4.4 The 'Anonymous' Lay Martyrs

So far only ordained Orthodox believers have been mentioned. In this section we shall look at Orthodox laymen who were persecuted during the communist period in Czechoslovakia and who have never been mentioned in Orthodox publications. These were the majority of the Orthodox believers who, even though they lived in communist Czechoslovakia, trusted the Orthodox Church's high ethical stance and were therefore surprised at the political involvement of some of its representatives outside liturgical activities. There were priests who recruited lay people into the service of the Czechoslovak secret police or other unpopular organizations such as Union of the Fighters for Freedom, the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, or the Union of Antifascist Fighters. Those lay Orthodox believers who were employed by the Church (as curators, vergers, church wardens, sacristans, lay parish leaders, members of choirs, etc.) and who did not agree with such ways of promoting the Orthodox Christian faith and paid critical attention to inconsistencies in the accounts of the parishes or in the Church's liturgical or theological life, were consequently removed from their offices and were comprehensively maligned, slandered, denigrated, had their reputations blackened, men and women alike. Some of those who remained stubbornly active in the hope that things could be changed for the better had their lives endangered.

We shall mention here only one such example, the lay martyr Jan Dokulil (24.4.1887-10.9.1957), an intellectual and a journalist. He was a primary school teacher living in Moravia, who had promoted Orthodox Christianity in the interwar period, having supported the foundation of the modern

Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia (under the Serbian Patriarchate in the 1920s). Immediately after World War II, in 1945, he became a school director, inspector of libraries, and a zealous Orthodox intellectual. Nevertheless, the political atmosphere was more brutal than in the interwar period and to be an active Orthodox Christian meant facing a new way of dealing with problems, according to the model given by the Soviet communists. In the year 1955, Dokulil was invited to participate in the Council Meeting of the Orthodox Diocese of Michalovce in Eastern Slovakia, where the Soviets forced the Greek Catholic believers to join the autocephalous Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia. After the meeting, as he was returning from Michalovce to his home in Moravia, he was thrown off the express train, by unknown perpetrators, into the woods near the train station of Kysak in Eastern Slovakia. Because of his painful injuries he died in 1957.³³ Had his murderers been Greek Catholics, the regime would have publicized his case as yet another criminal act performed by the 'enemies'. As it was, his case was never investigated or made public. The little information we have about his person has so far been available only in some archive materials.

5 A Critical Reflection of the Teachings of the Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Period

There exist some theological studies written by Prokop Palama Hoffmann (1975-2009), a Czech lay member of the Greek Old Calendar Orthodox Church under Metropolitan Cyprian, in which he criticises the teachings of the official Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia in the communist period. Hoffmann analyses

³³ Pavel Marek – Martin Lupčo, *Nástin dějin pravoslavné církve v 19. a 20. století*, p. 409.

some of the Orthodox leaders' discourses,³⁴ for example Metropolitan Jelevferij's sermons and other speeches in which the values of social equality, social justice, peace, democracy, and international justice were stressed rather than those values that were specifically Christian. According to Hoffmann, this is a clear sign of modern Gnosticism.³⁵

5 Being an Orthodox Christian in Czechoslovakia Means Being a Martyr. Various Interpretations and Views

a) In official Orthodox historiography, that is, in the texts written by those who have had the opportunity to publish in the last 60 years, the Orthodox in the Czech and Slovak lands see themselves as being martyrs – collective martyrs. This is the position taken by Jiří Aleš (formerly Jiří Axmann), Pavel Aleš, or by Slovak (Ruthenian) Orthodox spokesmen such as Štefan Horkaj and Štefan Pružinský. They believe that the Orthodox believers in Czechoslovakia were collectively persecuted by the Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church or by the state authorities who were against Orthodoxy as a whole social group. In their view, Czechoslovak Orthodox Christians have undergone repressions irrespective of the regime or social system, simply as a principle.³⁶

b) Nevertheless, there are historical facts that could cast a different light on martyrdom in the Czechoslovak Orthodox

³⁴ During the Communist period, the Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia was headed by Metropolitans (Archbishops of Prague) who had Soviet citizenship. This Church was formally declared 'autocephalous' by the Moscow Patriarchate, but not by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. For the latter, the Orthodox Church in Socialist Czechoslovakia was autonomous and it received the status of an autocephalous Church only in 1998.

³⁵ Samizdat publication, from the personal archive of the author.

³⁶ See Štefan Horkaj – Štefan Pružinský, *Pravoslávna cirkev na Slovensku*.

Church. One could mention that, in Socialist Czechoslovakia, the candidates to priesthood were selected from communist families or from families who showed loyalty to the regime, as well as from among active security informers or agents. Students of theology had classes in Marxism-Leninism and were supposed to pass exams in these courses. During their first years of study students were usually forced to sign a declaration of cooperation with the state security service. After graduation, it was not the bishop who decided about their placements; instead they were sent as directed by the local state secretary of religious affairs to the place(s) where they were to 'operate'. Before the newly ordained priest signed his work contract with the state, he had to sign an agreement in which he would express his loyalty to the regime in the socialist republic, to its people and to the Communist Party. The same type of agreement was also signed by active, key lay people such as deputy parish leaders (church warden, members of the Diocesan Council, etc.). For those believers who loved their Church but did not appreciate the totalitarian communist regime, this situation must have been perceived as real martyrdom.

c) To complete the picture, we shall look at a passage from a document revealing the role which the leading clergy was expected to play in the Soviet countries: they were supposed to be people whose task was primarily to prevent the teachings of the Church from being communicated effectively. The head of the church was selected by the socialist state. In 1974, a secret report was written for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Its author, V. Furov, was the deputy chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA). Furov's main message, concerning the list of Orthodox bishops loyal to the regime, was that they were

“ruling bishops whose words and deeds attest not only to their loyalty but also to their patriotism to our socialist society, who strictly observe the laws on cults and who foster the same spirit in their parish clergy

and believers, who realistically acknowledge that our government is not interested in expanding the role of religion and church in our society, and who, realizing this fact, are not personally involved in spreading the influence of the Orthodoxy among our population".³⁷

As a result, Orthodox lay believers did not trust their priests. It was common for believers not to be able to confess to their priests since they knew that their secrets could be divulged to the priests' superiors and further (some priests even refused to confess people). This is the reason why the so-called 'common confession'³⁸ became the practice that, in some places, continues even today.

Real martyrdom was also experienced by having to participate in church services in which the atmosphere was sometimes little different from that in assemblies of secular groups (priests' sermons were in fact speeches about peace, about the communist party and government, and were often followed by further speeches made by state secretaries who were responsible for Church affairs; churches would also house celebrations of political anniversaries such as the Bolshevik revolution in the Soviet Union, a. s. o.). In the 1950s the majority of the priests were members of the Communist Party and, from the late 1950s until the Velvet Revolution all the priests had to be members of the Union of Fighters for Freedom, of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, or the Union of the Antifascist Fighters. In this atmosphere church life was absent, any gathering of believers was closely observed,

³⁷ Alexander F. C. Webster, *The Price of Prophecy*, p. 40, quoting V. Furov, 'Cadres of the Church and Legal Measures to Curtail Their Activities: A Report by the Council of Religious Affairs RCDA 19', nos. 10-12 (1980) 149-61.

³⁸ It is a custom which some Czechoslovak Orthodox priests attribute to St John of Kronstadt and consists of the priest standing in front of the believers and reading aloud some prayers and a list of general sins, followed by the prayers of absolution.

while the theological and social dimensions of the church were missing.

The role of the church was to accompany state officials when laying wreaths over the graves of fallen Red Army soldiers and publicly to sing the Soviet anthem or the Internationale and, in more remote places, occasionally a 'panychyda', prayers (for the departed). The Church officials promoted the state policy of secularisation and atheism in their own country. However, abroad, in the USA, Germany, etc., the priests represented "Church freedom" in communistic countries and their belief that their church contained the socialist and communist values of which they were messengers.³⁹

d) Given all these historical and political circumstances, the mere fact of being a common Orthodox Christian meant leading a life of martyrdom. The Orthodox, especially in regions such as Eastern Slovakia, where the majority of the population had been Greek Catholic, were a priori suspected of collaborating with the Soviet occupation army and, later, with the totalitarian Czechoslovak communist regime. Moreover, the fact that the Russian army, both in the Czech and the Slovak regions, helped the local Orthodox clergy (for example with menial jobs around the church building and others) strengthened the feeling of xenophobia among the non-Orthodox Czechoslovak population, especially after the 1968 Soviet army occupation.

Conclusion

The study of Orthodox martyrdom in Czechoslovakia is a difficult task, the reason being that there are no reliable sources and, if there is any scattered information, it is usually distorted or ideologically biased. Each regime reinterprets information so

³⁹ Georg Novak, *A Sign of God. Orthodoxy 1964. A Pan-Orthodox Symposium* (Athens, Greece: The Brotherhood of Theologian Zoe, 1964), pp. 240-252.

that it suit its own needs. The study of this topic is also problematic because most of those who survived the communist period in Czechoslovakia are now very old or are no longer alive.⁴⁰

Christian life during the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, simply surviving in a hostile, atheistic system, entailed real martyrdom for everybody living in such a system. Confessing Christ in the 'prison of darkness' and in the 'belly of the totalitarian beast' (as Czechoslovak communism was) was a heroic act. In fact, whether the people mentioned above and many others are seen as martyrs or not depends on each scholar's profession, ideological stance, social category, or religious affiliation.⁴¹ That is why this theme will always be open to further research. Where does the observer concerned with this issue have his own identity rooted? In democracy? In Christianity? In the world's social order? In equality? In the independence of nations? The interpretation of the acts of martyrdom or persecution has also had a relative value in mass media during the various regimes and social orders. There are some values relating to human rights which can be undermined even in contemporary Europe.⁴² Yet, the martyrs' eternal value is only in God's hands, as only He can see deep into the human hearts.

⁴⁰ When one is reading what has been written on the topic it is important to bear in mind whether the author was an Orthodox or a non-Orthodox Christian, a Russian, a Slovak, or a Czech.

⁴¹ Miroslav Tejchman – Pavel Hradečný – Josef Kolář, etc. (eds), *Sovětzace východní Evropa. Země střední a jihovýchodní Evropy v letech 1944-1948* (Praha: Historický ústav, 1995).

⁴² See: Gudrun Kugler, *Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe*, Shadow Report, 2005-2010 (Vienna: Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, 2010). Also www.intoleranceagainstitians.eu (accessed on 3rd November 2014).

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