

ORTHODOX EUROPE

The Orthodox West (4) :: The Holy Martyr Gorazd,
Bishop of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia (+ 1942)

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A Twentieth Century Western Orthodox Missionary by Monk Gorazd

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

Hebrews 13,7

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

John 12, 24-26

It is now nearly sixty years since the martyrdom and birth into eternal life of Bishop Gorazd of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. In this ever darkening age, the image of this martyred Bishop now shines forth ever brighter.

The future Bishop Gorazd (Pavlik) was born on 26 May 1879 in the Moravian town of Hrubavrbka in the Czech Republic and was

baptised Matthias. After schooling he finished the Roman Catholic theological faculty in Olomouc and was ordained priest. During his studies he had become interested in Orthodox Christianity and the mission of Sts Cyril and Methodius and visited Kiev.

With the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and freedom from Austro-Hungarian Catholic tyranny, hundreds of thousands of people left the Catholic Church, among them Matthias Pavlik. Some of these people turned for help to the Serbian Orthodox Church (parts of which had also suffered from the same tyranny ¹). As a result the Serbian Church consented to consecrate Fr Matthias bishop with the monastic name of Gorazd.

When the Serbian Bishop responsible, Bishop Dositheus, made Fr Gorazd an archimandrite in the monastery of Hopovo in Serbia, he uttered the following words:

'In history the successor to St. Methodius, the Archbishop of Moravia, was Bishop Gorazd. Through the intrigues of those who hated Orthodoxy, he was chased out of his native land and went to the south Slavs ². And in you, Fr Gorazd, the Lord is raising up in Moravia a new Gorazd, the renewer of Orthodoxy amid the Czech people'.

On the 24 September 1921, now aged 42, Archimandrite Gorazd was named Bishop of Moravia and Silesia at the Vigil Service in the Cathedral of the Holy Archangel Michael in Belgrade. On the next day Patriarch Dimitri of Serbia consecrated Fr Gorazd bishop. His concelebrants were Metropolitan Antony (of Kiev) ³ and Bishops Barnabas ⁴, Dositheus and Joseph. Entrusting the new bishop with his staff, Patriarch Dimitri exhorted him to follow the example of Sts Cyril and Methodius and their successor St Gorazd. Much moved and in a trembling voice, Bishop Gorazd expressed his profound gratitude to the Serbian Orthodox Church for its help to the Czechs who wished to return to the faith of their forebears of the time of Sts Cyril and Methodius.

Thus began the selfless labours of a new worker in the harvest-field of Christ. The spiritual meadows made fruitful and sown by the work of grace of the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius and their disciples had long since become thick with the weeds of various heresies and vain philosophies. Bishop Gorazd was to suffer many attacks, trials and tribulations from those who fell into temptation at 'the foolishness of the cross'. Vladyka suffered everything patiently, saying that every truth must be tried in the fire of temptation. Unfortunately, most Czechs in the movement towards

Orthodoxy did not remain in the truth; holy Orthodoxy seemed to them too heavy a burden. They did not wish to believe in the words of the Saviour, that 'strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life' (Matthew 7, 14). But once Bishop Gorazd had come to believe in the saving truth of Orthodoxy, he kept faith with it even unto death. This consistent standing in the truth and personal integrity were very characteristic of him. They are a reproach to our times when there are so many lies, compromises and bad consciences. When still a child, his father had said to him: 'Never be afraid of anyone, and when you are right, do not give up'. . He always acted so, even when the price was at times very high.

Together with those who had remained faithful to Orthodoxy, the Bishop set to work. Churches were built and parishes organised in various parts of Bohemia. In all eleven churches and two chapels were built under him. Services were in Czech. Essential church books were published, for example the Book of Needs, catechisms and so on. Using his knowledge, experience and contacts, Bishop Gorazd also helped those who had returned to their ancestral Orthodox Faith in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Russia, which was then part of Czechoslovakia. He was keenly interested in the monastery at Ladomirovo in

Slovakia, founded by Archimandrite Vitaly Maximenko, later an Archbishop in the USA who valued and supported Bishop Gorazd. Thus in 1934 Bishop Gorazd took part in the twentieth anniversary commemoration of the shameful Marmarosh-Sigotsky trial. This had taken place in 1914 when 94 Orthodox together with Fr Alexei Kabaliuk had been condemned for renouncing Uniatism and returning to the faith of their fathers. At the time the Hungarian judge had severely fined them and imprisoned them ⁵.

Bishop Gorazd was to carry his heavy cross for twenty one years in all. But just as during the Passion of Christ, signs of His future glorification began to appear (for example when the wife of Pilate called the Lord righteous after her pre-monitory dream, or when Judas said that he had spilt innocent blood), so in the many trials of Bishop Gorazd's life, some began to see something of the spiritual greatness of this faithful servant of Christ. When many Roman Catholic priests rose up against Bishop Gorazd, even the Catholic Bishop Stoian said: 'Leave Pavlik alone, you are not worthy to tie his laces, it would be good if everyone were like Pavlik'. The Catholics tried to persuade Bishop Gorazd to return to Catholicism, while remaining in bishop's orders and with the choice of rites.

Bishop Gorazd understood that

Orthodox life is the way of the cross, a daily bloodless martyrdom⁶. He took this truth into his life and this helped him when the time came to accept the martyr's crown. It is impossible not to be moved by his words in a work he devoted to Jan Hus⁷: 'For far too long we have failed to give much value to martyrdom. We think that it is better to live and toil for a great cause than to die for it. But there is nothing greater than to lay down one's life for the Gospel of Christ'.

When the Second World War broke out, Bishop Gorazd asked Metropolitan Seraphim (Liade) of Berlin to oversee his diocese until such time as normal relations could be resumed with Serbia. The Metropolitan supplied Bishop Gorazd with myrrh, antimensia and helped him to strengthen his position in Bohemia and Moravia⁸.

In 1942 the Czech Resistance assassinated the Nazi governor Heydrich in Prague. The resistance fighters were allowed to hide in the crypt of Sts Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Cathedral. When Bishop Gorazd learned of this a few days later, he was greatly troubled, realising that if the occupying Germans found out, then the whole Czech Orthodox Church would suffer repression. Before leaving for Berlin to take part with the Metropolitan in consecrating Fr Philip (Gardner)⁹ to the

episcopate, he asked that the resistance fighters be moved elsewhere as soon as possible. However the Nazis found the Czech hiding-place and on 18 June 1942, seven of them were shot there. The two Cathedral priests and other Orthodox were arrested. Bishop Gorazd did not try to save himself, but wishing to avert repression of the Czech Church, took all responsibility on himself. He wrote three letters to the Germans with the words: 'I am giving myself up to the authorities and am prepared to face any punishment, including death'.

On the 27 June 1942 Bishop Gorazd was arrested and tortured. He was executed by firing squad on 4 September 1942. He was aged 63. The two Cathedral priests were also shot. The Orthodox Church in Bohemia and Moravia was forbidden to operate and its churches and chapels closed. Orthodox priests were exiled to forced labour camps in Germany. For his part Metropolitan Seraphim courageously refused to issue any statement condemning Bishop Gorazd.

Bishop Gorazd was truly a good shepherd, always guiding his flock. He showed his love to the end and by his death was counted worthy of fulfilling the Saviour's words: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'. (John 15, 13).

The martyred bishop was recognised as a New Martyr by decision of the Serbian Orthodox Church on 4/17 May 1961. On 24 August/ 6 September 1987 he was glorified in the Cathedral of St Gorazd in Olomouc in Moravia. He is feasted by the Czechoslovak Orthodox Church on the day of his martyrdom 22 August/ 4 September.

Of particular interest in the missionary context are the relations between the martyred bishop and Metropolitan Antony ³. The following details are taken from an article by Fr Dr Pavel Alesha in, 'The attitude of the holy Bishop Gorazd to Russian Orthodoxy' (An Anthology of Orthodox Theology, Prague 1989).

Metropolitan Antony reposed on 10 August 1936 in Serbia at the age of 73 'in the brotherly arms of Patriarch Barnabas' - in the words of Bishop Gorazd, he passed away, 'like a lamp that had burnt down to its last drop of oil'. Bishop Gorazd wrote an article dedicated to his radiant memory in The Herald of the Czech Orthodox Diocese (1936, No 9).

On the twentieth anniversary of his episcopal consecration, Bishop Gorazd also recalled the bishops who had consecrated him, men who 'were distinguished by their living faith, wisdom, love and holy life'. These were 'Patriarch Dimitri

of Serbia and Metropolitan Antony of Kiev of the Russian Church, both great men of prayer, the latter also the foremost luminary of Russian theology and the kindest of advisors in missionary work, as well as my constant defender against various reproaches made against me' (The Herald, 15 September 1991, No 8).

Bishop Gorazd wrote about the activities of Metropolitan Antony in Volhynia in Western Russia, where he had been bishop for twelve years. Then he had met the 60,000 or so Orthodox Czechs who lived there. The Volhynian Czechs had immediately attracted his attention as an ethnic island. They lived differently from those who surrounded them with their own traditions, brought by the previous generation from Bohemia and kept by the new generation. These were reflected in their Orthodox Church life. As a good psychologist, missionary and a spiritual pastor, he took action against local church activists who, imbued with a strict ritualistic spirit, wanted to do away with the differences of the Orthodox Czechs ¹⁰. He made sure that as far as possible the Czechs had priests from their own midst, priests who understood the soul of the Czech people with its strengths and its failings.

Further Bishop Gorazd wrote: 'Metropolitan Antony did our Orthodox mission great service; from the beginning he was

interested in it. Without interfering in the authority of the Synod of the Serbian Church, he gave fatherly or rather brotherly advice as to how I should operate in my missionary work. And this in such a way that the Czech and Slovak people, for whom the movement to enlighten the Slavs was in fact created by Sts Cyril and Methodius, would once more come to love their ancestral faith, strive to know it and return to it. His starting-point was the conviction that the Czechs would not be attracted to the Orthodox Church, if it were immediately presented to them in a historically set form in all its fullness, and at the same time in a purely formal, ritual way. He said that no mission should act in this way, especially in an Orthodox mission, since Orthodoxy in principle respects the ways each people thinks and feels ... Orthodoxy has certain special forms among each people which naturally do not affect its dogmatic essence ¹¹.

Metropolitan Antony asked: 'Which ready form of Orthodoxy would you offer to your fellow-countrymen - Serbian Russian, Bulgarian, Greek, or another? If you wished to set out from such a viewpoint, which is in fact alien to Orthodoxy, taking into consideration your conditions, then I would advise you to accept the Serbian form, because your canonical ties with the Serbian Church would cause the least hurt.'

But I would not advise you to act thus. On the contrary, you must start from what there is in your people, as always happens in matters of upbringing and education. First of all look at the confessional views of your compatriots and find what is Orthodox and what is not Orthodox in them. Then restricting yourself to the main points alone, try to eradicate from religious life what does not appear to be part of the Orthodox confession of faith. A lot of work will have to be done before you overcome prejudices ... proceed slowly and step by step as you introduce Orthodoxy into liturgical life. Acting thus, let no one who is not competent in these matters trouble you. The opinion of the Patriarch, the Synod and the Council of Bishops of the Serbian Church must be decisive in all things. In their representatives they wholly understand your Czech conditions and the tasks that await you. Those who are unable to rise above mere formal ritualism will probably criticise you and perhaps condemn you ¹², but do not worry. You are not responsible to them. Work according to your understanding and trust in God's help. I will personally accompany your work with my prayers, for I know what a great and holy task you are accomplishing. I will follow with interest your successes and your failures, not as your master - which I am not - but as a bishop and

elder brother who is always ready to help you with advice' (The Herald, pp 4, 7-8).

Bishop Gorazd said that at his every meeting with Metropolitan Antony in Yugoslavia he always asked many questions about the successes and the difficulties of the Czech Orthodox mission and encouraged him to be patient and constant. In his letter of 14 January 1926, Metropolitan Antony wrote:

'You will have found just the right method for your missionary work when you strive to bring to the conscience of your flock at first only that which is essential in Orthodoxy. In this way souls that are lit up by the grace of God, with love and patience will deepen their understanding of organisation and ritual, and will raise their minds to the spirituality of the faith, and then without pride and protest will accept it not as something alien, but as their own. If it is God's Will that Orthodoxy take root and spread among the Czech people, then this will take place thanks to you. I am not writing this to make you proud, God forbid, and I am sure that you keep in your heart the words of St Paul, 'not I, but the grace of God within me' (I Corinthians 15, 10). It is better when the preaching of Orthodoxy moves ahead slowly, not too fast, and not according to the slogan, "I came, I saw, I conquered". I was afraid that the Russians who

understand very little as to what is faith and what is ritual, will be unpleasant to you, as in Apostolic times the Jewish-Christians behaved with Gentile neophytes. I set great store by the ritual and the canons of the Church, but I well understand that the creations accumulated through history cannot be adopted all at once'.

Bishop Gorazd added: 'This was the speech worthy of a great man of God, who knew to perfection the problem of missionary work in general, and among the Czechs in particular'.

In conclusion we would like to turn to the words of prayer once uttered by the disciples of St Methodius to his faithful follower and successor, the holy martyr Gorazd: 'O Thou, holy and all honourable prelate, through thy prayers look down upon us who love thee from above! Deliver thy disciples from attack, spreading the Orthodox teaching and chasing away heresies, that we who dwell here may be worthy of our calling and that we thy flock will stand together with thee on the right hand of Christ our God and will receive eternal life from Him, to Whom belong all glory, honour and worship unto the ages of ages! Amen.'

Editor's Notes

¹ It was the tyranny of the Austro-Hungarian Empire against

Orthodox in Serbia that sparked off the First World War.

² St Gorazd was a Moravian and linguist, one of the seven disciples of Sts Cyril and Methodius. Despite initial Papal support, in the ninth century he was chased out of Moravia by Frankish political machinations and persecutions of Orthodoxy. He then went to the south Slavs (Yugoslavs) in Ochrid in southern Serbia.

Feast: 27 July.

³ Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev (1863-1936) was the great renewer of theology and Church life in Russia before the Revolution and also the main organiser of the 1918 Russian Church Council. Probably the finest theological mind the Russian Church produced in the twentieth century, he was the leading advocate of the restoration of the freedom of the Russian Church and the Patriarchate, after the decadent period instituted by Peter I. After the 1918 Council he was imprisoned in a Uniat monastery. Released, he went to Constantinople and then Serbia, and with the blessing of the holy Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow, he founded the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. The seventeen volumes of his works total 6,000 pages. Although some have found him overzealous in stamping out Russian

Scholasticism and renewing genuine Patristic theology in Russia, he has been accorded the title 'Blessed'

⁴ (1880-1937). He was elected Patriarch of Serbia in 1930.

⁵ The vicious Austro-Hungarian persecution of Orthodox in the East of their Empire went on for hundreds of years until the First World War. During that War in well-documented war-crimes, hundreds of Orthodox were hanged by the Austro-Hungarian authorities because of their Faith.

⁶ 'A daily bloodless martyrdom' . Until these words have been taken to heart by Orthodox converts, they will remain but converts.

⁷ Jan Hus (1369-1415) was an early Czech reformer who was inspired by Orthodoxy and in turn inspired the English reformer Wyclif. Both men, but especially Hus by reason of his knowledge of early Czech history, knew that the Orthodox alone had kept the Faith. Hus was burnt at the stake by the Catholic Church. Sadly, later reformers both in Bohemia and elsewhere in Western Europe overlooked Orthodoxy and invented Protestantism.

⁸ Metropolitan Seraphim was a German convert to Orthodoxy and had studied theology in Russia well before the First World War. During the Second World War he was the

Orthodox bishop in Germany and stood up valiantly to German Fascism. The Felixstowe parish serves the liturgy on an antimimension signed by him. (The antimimension is a special cloth signed by the former or present diocesan bishop, without which no liturgy can be served).

⁹ Bishop Philip Gardner was the foremost Russian Orthodox musicologist of the twentieth century.

¹⁰ As a very young bishop in Western Russia in the 1900's, the future Metropolitan was also particularly active in stopping the anti-Jewish pogroms of unchurched Russian and Ukrainian racists. His protection of the Orthodox Czechs and his appreciation of their customs against local Russian racism and ritualist bigotry shows his true stature as an Orthodox churchman, rising above the level of those around him. No wonder he later became the foremost churchman and theologian not only in Russia but all over the cosmopolitan Orthodox world and consecrated St John the Wonderworker bishop. His biography for this period is extremely interesting since it well illustrates both the spiritual depth but also the extreme decadence of the Russian Church before the Revolution - which in itself explains that Revolution. Perhaps one day this biography will be translated

and made obligatory reading for all converts. His spirit is sorely lacking in the international Orthodox church of today.

¹¹ This may seem obvious to us, and yet the main Orthodox Patriarchates seem to believe in practice that Orthodox missions are all about hellenisation or russification - the sad results of such a way of acting are known to all.

¹² And they do!

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