

21st anniversary of autocephaly of Czech and Slovak Orthodox Church



The Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia celebrates on Tuesday its 21st anniversary since the bestowing of autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1998.

The history of this Church dates back to the 9th century legacy of Sts Cyril and Methodius, the enlighteners of the Slavs.

Its modern history started after World War I when Czechoslovakia was mainly inhabited by Catholics.

At that time, many Russians and Ruthenians came to Czechoslovakia.

Among them, priest Matej Pavlik, the future Orthodox bishop and martyr Gorazd, stood out. He had a major influence in the country's future and was declared a saint in 1987.

Back then the Orthodox numbered almost 40 000.

In 1921, the Serbian patriarch of Belgrade consecrated Bishop Gorazd of Prague as the first independent bishop of the Czechs. During World War II, the church was

disbanded and Bishop Gorazd and other Orthodox clergy members were executed in the summer of 1942 by the Nazis for alleged connections with the resistance movement. Also, many people, including Orthodox priests, were taken to forced labor camps.

In September 1987, bishop Gorazd was glorified by the Czechoslovak church for his contribution to the development and organization of the church and also for his martyrdom in the events of 1942.

After the fall of the Communist regime and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Church restructuring was needed. Thus in November 1992 the Holy Synod resolved to establish two Metropolises, one for each of the two countries, which would include two suffragan dioceses each.

In 1993, the Slovak government decided that almost all the Churches and the church buildings owned by the Orthodox Church be handed over to the Greek Catholics, and the Orthodox believers were forced to build new churches and parish houses with some financial support from the state.

So far, over 50 churches were built on the territory of the Czech Republic and Slovakia and aspiring priests study at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Prešov at the Šafarik University, receiving study grants from the state.

Today the church is headed by His Beatitude Rastislav, Archbishop of Prešov and Metropolitan of the the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

Metropolitan Rastislav visited Romania in 2017 at the feast of St Demetrius the New, protector of Bucharest, when he concelebrated at the festive Divine Liturgy together with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, Patriarch Daniel of Romania, and Archbishop Anastasios of Albania.

A short time after his visit to Romania, His Beatitude Metropolitan Rastislav gave an exclusive interview which was published on basilica.ro.

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