

A COLLECTION OF SERBIAN NEW MARTYRS, vol. III

Translated and compiled by Sava Beljovich

Additional help from Subdeacon Tikhon Fread, Reader Kristofer Dabrowski and Timofey Orlov.

In memory of Anastasija Androich, my beloved grandmother

**Вечная память! Царствие Небесное!
Memory eternal! May the Heavenly Kingdom be granted to her!**

---ST. MILOSH OF CRNI LUG---

Milosh Bilbija was born on November 2nd 1870 in the village of Ugarci – near Bosansko Grahovo – within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father Ilija Bilbija, was an Archpriest and a prominent figure during the Herzegovina uprising of 1875-1877. Milosh's older brother Danilo became a priestmonk and eventually an Archimandrite; he served in the Diocese of Zvornik-Tuzla and was Martyred by the Ustashe in 1942.

From a young age Milosh wished to become a priest and after his primary education he entered the Reljevo Seminary, graduating in 1893. Milosh's teachers noted his particular zeal and recommended he be ordained to the Priesthood. Shortly after his graduation Milosh married Milka Vojvodich and on November 16th 1893 was ordained to the Diaconate by Metropolitan Djordje (Nikolajevich) in Sarajevo.

On November 21st Metropolitan Djordje ordained him to the Priesthood and appointed Fr. Milosh as a second priest at the Holy Archangel Gabriel parish in Grahovo. While serving as a priest, he took care of his elderly father and also taught Catechism and the Law of God to Orthodox Students at the Grahovo Communal School. Fr. Milosh delivered public lectures and wrote a newsletter titled: “The True Christian”, published within in the newspaper: “Bosnian-Herzegovinan Source”.

In The True Christian much writing was dedicated to the spiritual life and Fr. Milosh exhorted the faithful to defend themselves from common vices that were rampant in secular society. On July 13th 1894 Petar and Marija Princip, from the

village of Obijaj had their ninth child, a son. Marija wished to name the child Shpiro after her late brother.

By evening the child became seriously ill and had to be baptized immediately as he was not expected to survive infancy. The Princip brought the child to Fr. Milosh, who recommended the infant be named Gavriilo after the Archangel Gabriel, as he said St. Gabriel would protect the boy: Fr. Milosh baptized Gavriilo Princip on the evening of July 13th 1894 – the Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel – and recorded this in the parish “Domovnik” (Church record book).

Eight days later the Princip brought the boy to Ugarci, where Fr. Milosh and Fr. Ilija tonsured Gavriilo, gave him Holy Unction and served the Krsna Slava service to the Archangel Gabriel in thanksgiving for protecting the young boy. Petar – a coppersmith by trade – donated copper kitchenware and Marija donated goat cheese to the Bilbija family for their prayers and efforts to save their son.

On August 4th 1894 Fr. Milosh was transferred to serve at the Holy Prophet Elias Church in the village of Crni Lug within the Diocese of Bihach-Petrovica. He served as the rector of the parish and served various churches within the Grkovci district. People came from Chelebichi, Vrbica and Grahovo just to hear Fr. Milosh's sermons, which he delivered with great zeal.

Fr. Milosh gave special attention to evangelism towards the Bosniak Muslims who lived in Bihach-Tuzla, successfully bringing many to the Orthodox Faith. In Crni Lug Fr. Milosh and his wife Popadija Milka declared St. Elias the patron Saint of their household, in thanksgiving to St. Elias for having blessed his service in Bihach-Petrovica. He became well known all throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, being raised to the rank of Archpriest for his service.

In 1908 the Austrian government formed the “Schutzkorps”; a secret police force dedicated to suppressing anti-Austrian sentiment among the Serbian population. The Schutzkorps primarily recruited its members from the Bosniak Muslim population, who were told to wear civilian clothing and speak Serbian. Fr. Ilija Bilbija was one of the first victims of the Schutzkorps, being brutally murdered in 1908 in the village of Livno.

In the ten years of their existence the Schutzkorps murdered 5,700 Serbs and deported another 5,200 from their ancestral lands. Making the Sign of the Cross in public was enough to be arrested and killed by the Schutzkorps. The Serbs called

Schutzkorps members “Shkuras” and many of the former “Shkuras” went on to join the Ustashe. Fr. Vladimir Popovich wrote a book detailing the crimes of the Schutzkorps titled: “Serbian suffering and victims: Treatment under the 'Treaty' 1914-1918” (pub. 1929)

After the murder of his father and the beginnings of the genocide against the Serbian people Fr. Milosh wrote an article for his newsletter, The True Christian:

“The words of the Apostle Paul tell us: 'If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus lives in thee, He who raised Christ from the dead will give life unto thy mortal bodies through the Holy Spirit who liveth in thee...' (Romans 8:11) This is the basis of the True Christian's hope in the afterlife. Death to man is nothing more than a tool that opens the door to his true homeland – eternal life. The grave is for him a simple portion of earth, in which the human garment rots and rests until the Dread Judgement, waiting to meet again with the soul that will be revived in this world.”

The majority of Fr. Milosh's sermons after 1908 warned people to prepare for Martyrdom. He continued to teach at the Reljevo Seminary – where he had originally obtained his alma mater – but after the Schutzkorps attempted to arrest him, Fr. Milosh retired from teaching and stayed in the village of Crni Lug; where the locals were armed and refused to let any harm come upon their beloved priest.

On June 15th (O.S.) 1914 a student group called “Young Bosnia” assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand – heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne – while he was visiting Sarajevo. After several unsuccessful attempts, the Archduke was shot and killed by the 19 year old Gavrilo Princip; the assassination of Franz Ferdinand led to the Austro-Hungarian Empire invading Serbia in July, further causing the start of the First World War.

Serbs in Sarajevo were killed in pogroms instigated by the Austrian authorities and the Orthodox Church was outlawed in Bosnia; hundreds of Serbs were arrested in Sarajevo and the surrounding area, with hundreds more having warrants issued for their arrest, including Fr. Milosh.

The Austrian government wanted to give Gavrilo Princip the death penalty, however by their laws they could not sentence anyone under the age of 20 – considered minors – to death. The Austrians arrested Fr. Milosh on June 16th 1914 and brought him to a prison in Livno on June 17th. The Austrians demanded Fr. Milosh sign a document stating Gavrilo Princip was born on June 13th 1894 rather

than July 13th and was thus 20 years old. Fr. Milosh refused to sign the document and be complicit in a lie, as a result the Austrians subjected him to severe torture.

One of the witnesses to Fr. Milosh's tortures was the Hegumen of the Milesheva Monastery Fr. Aleksija (Nenadich), who at the time was a layperson and Fr. Milosh's assistant. He was arrested with Fr. Milosh and recalled in 1965 that he was tortured by members of the Schutzkorps in the Livno prison; they burned Fr. Milosh with cigarettes, ripped out his beard and threw heavy sandbags on his body. After two days of torture, Fr. Milosh was barely alive but still refused to sign any document claiming Princip was 20 years old.

Seeing he would not comply, the Austrians put Fr. Milosh on the back of a horse and brought him to his home. For two years he suffered from kidney failure due to the torture, after untold sufferings Fr. Milosh fell asleep in the Lord on July 28th 1916 at the age of 45. Fr. Aleksija recalled: "...when they finally released him, the locals in Crni Lug gave him lamb stew and alcohol, cleaned his wounds, however by then his kidneys failed... Nothing helped and he died, may his soul rest like that of a true Martyr..."

After St. Milosh's Martyrdom people came from Grahovo, Chelebichi, Vrbica and elsewhere; children he had baptized, pious laypeople and spiritual children came to attend St. Milosh's funeral. The Austrians forbid any funeral procession from taking place and closed the Prophet Elias Church in Crni Lug, sending soldiers to drive out those who gathered in the village. A week after his repose St. Milosh was buried unceremoniously with a small group of family in attendance.

After months of attempting to claim Gavrilo Princip was 20 years old at the time of the assassination, the Austrians were forced to admitted he was 19 years old and had to be charged as a minor. He was given the maximum sentence for a minor of 20 years in prison on October 15th 1914. Gavrilo was kept in solitary confinement in the Terezin fortress and while in prison contracted tuberculosis, resulting in his right arm being amputated in 1916. Gavrilo Princip died on April 15th 1918 and at the time of his death only weighed 40 kilograms (88 pounds) due to severe malnutrition and advanced tuberculosis.

In 2018 St. Milosh's relics were exhumed from the Crni Lug cemetery and solemnly transferred by his grandson Vojislav Bilbija to the Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Bosansko Grahovo, where they were placed in a dedicated reliquary with the proto-icon above it. The Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of St.

Milosh Bilbija on July 28th.

---THE HOLY NEW MARTYRS OF PRNJAVOR---

Prnjavor is a small village located in the Machva plains, near the Drina river and between the Dzhjevac hill and Cer mountain. Originally the village was within the property of the Chokeshina Monastery; having been founded by pious laypeople who wished to live near the Monastery. In the middle ages it served as an outpost on the Shabac-Loznica road, as it is 26 kilometers from Shabac.

By 1717 the land was separated from the Monastery. On April 28th 1804– Lazarus Saturday – 313 Serbian hadjuks led by Djordje and Dimitrije Nedich defeated a Turkish army of 5,000 men during the First Serbian Uprising. The village saw warfare once again during the First World War; on August 4th 1914 the Austro-Hungarian Army crossed the Drina and captured Prnjavor.

Austrian soldiers began murdering civilians that lived in Prnjavor, in total over the course of several days they murdered 535 Serbs. 365 Serbs from Prnjavor were brought to the Milutinovich railway station within Leshnica and the Austrians set the building on fire, killing all inside. The elementary school in Prnjavor was also set on fire, killing several children.

At least five Serbian men were crucified by Austrian soldiers and several more being hanged from trees. After the massacre the village of Prnjavor was destroyed and the Austrians continued their advance into Serbian territory. At the end of the war, the Serbian military recaptured Prnjavor and began investigating the crimes that happened there.

The Serbian military uncovered several mass graves in Prnjavor and invited a Swiss professor at the University of Lausanne, Dr. Archibald Rice, to take photographs of the site and record witness testimonies about the massacre in December 1918. Dr. Zhivko Barlovac, the Serbian ambassador to France, also visited Prnjavor in 1918 to investigate the massacre.

On November 5th 1922 a Memorial Chapel built in Prnjavor was consecrated with King Aleksandar I of Yugoslavia in attendance. The Memorial Chapel was designed by the architect Milan Minich and the relics of the 535 Martyrs were placed in a crypt below the main floor. Prime Minister Nikola Pashich, Minister Lazar Markovich, Dr. Archibald Rice and writer Milorad Vujich also visited the

chapel in 1922.

The chapel's construction is in the shape of a Cross in the neo-Byzantine architectural style, above the front entrance an inscription reads: “It is glorious to die for the Fatherland: To the victims of the Austro-Hungarian atrocity on August 4th 1914. This ossuary was erected as a monument to those killed from 1912-1918 by the Serbian people and the government of His Majesty Aleksandar, circa 1922.”

In 1924 Serbian artist and Iconographer Shpira Bocarich painted several frescos inside the Memorial Chapel depicting the sufferings of the New Martyrs of Prnjavor and the names of all 535 Martyrs were inscribed in the chapel later that year. The proto-icon of the Martyrs of Prnjavor was created in 2012 by Bozhidar Pantovich – based off the frescos painted by Shpira Bocarich – and placed in the St. Elias Church in Prnjavor.

The Holy Orthodox Church commemorates the sufferings of the New Martyrs of Prnjavor on August 4th and on December 30th. The veneration of the New Martyrs of Prnjavor is well observed in the Machva plains region.

---ST. VLADIMIR OF KILNOVAC---

Stojan Protich was born in the village of Kilnovac, Kosovo vilayet, in the Ottoman Empire on January 25th 1843. Stojan's father Velichko was a priest, his brother Stoljiko became a priest and his other brother Atanasije served as a reader in the Church. In Stojan's extended family were eight priests and a Bishop and as a child he often visited the St. Prohor of Pchinja Monastery near Kilnovac.

Stojan married Jelena Uzunovich – from the village of Bushtranje – in 1871. Together they had two sons, Jovan and Milan. In 1873 he was ordained to the Priesthood and served at the St. Nicholas Church in Kilnovac while also Fr. Stojan teaching the Law of God from his home, which he converted into a small school.

In 1890 the Serbian statesmen Vladimir Karich sent David Dimitrijevič to Skopje (the capital of the Kosovo vilayet) to teach secular sciences to Serbian children of the region. Albanian and Turkish bandits roamed Kosovo and often robbed or killed Serbs that travelled along the roads near Skopje, making the journey difficult for Dimitrijevič.

On his way to Skopje, Dimitrijevič stopped in Kilnovac and Fr. Stojan greeted

him warmly, giving him alcohol and meat, even when others in the village refused to host him for fear of reprisal. When Fr. Stojan learned Dimitrijevič was a teacher, he begged him to stay in Kilnovac and educate children in the secular sciences, Dimitrijevič agreed and stayed in Kilnovac, living in Fr. Stojan's home for three years.

Dimitrijevič previously was a man who did not take the Faith seriously, but when he returned to Belgrade, his family and friends noted he became very pious due to the spiritual councils and direction of Fr. Stojan. David Dimitrijevič wrote to Fr. Stojan regularly for years following his stay in Kilnovac.

After Popadija Jelena Protich fell asleep in the Lord, Fr. Stojan entered the St. Prohor Monastery near Kilnovac and was tonsured with the name Vladimir after St. Jovan Vladimir by Metropolitan Firmilian of Skopje (the first Metropolitan of Skopje) on October 2nd 1902. Two days after his tonsure, the Hegumen of the Monastery fell asleep in the Lord and the Brotherhood unanimously elected Fr. Vladimir as their Hegumen.

By 1903 the Ottoman Turks decided to withdraw from the Kosovo vilayet and several surrounding countries claimed the area for themselves, leading to warfare and nationalist struggles which was called the “Macedonian crisis”. Fr. Vladimir's tenure as Hegumen came during this troubled time, but he continued work on restoring dilapidated buildings on the Monastery property and guiding the Brotherhood.

He oversaw renovation on the Monastery Church and built a new guesthouse with funds donated by King Petar I of Serbia, later called the “Royal House”. In August 1903 the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) launched the unsuccessful Iliden uprising; following the revolt Turkish soldiers moved into Kilnovac and arrested Fr. Vladimir, taking him to Preshevo for questioning.

After concluding Fr. Vladimir was not involved with the uprising, he was released and returned to the St. Prohor Monastery. Soldiers from various countries came to the Monastery asking for food or refuge; Fr. Vladimir gave whatever he could to anyone who came, regardless of their ethnicity or if they were even Orthodox, following the example of the Athonite Fathers.

At the battle of Chelopek, Fr. Vladimir personally brought food to the Serbian Chetniks fighting against the Turks. At the end of the First Balkan War in October

1912 the Kosovo Vilayet came under the control of the Kingdom of Serbia, after almost a decade of conflict. Fr. Vladimir served a thanksgiving service for the Serbian Army after they liberated Kilnovac from the Turks.

The region around Kilnovac continued to see conflict with the Second Balkan War in 1913 and subsequent attacks by IMRO who claimed the area for the Tsardom of Bulgaria. With the outbreak of the First World War, the Austrian Army invaded Serbia, but were eventually caught in a stalemate due to the efforts of the Serbian Army.

The Tsardom of Bulgaria declared its neutrality in July 1914, but the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Ottoman Empire – both part of the “Central powers” – promised to give Bulgaria territories they claimed if they invaded Serbia. On October 7th 1915 the Bulgarians invaded the Kingdom of Serbia, quickly capturing much of Macedonia and Kosovo and the Bulgarians – driven by nationalist hatred and ethnophyletism – committed several massacres against the Serbian people.

By October 22nd the Bulgarian Army captured Kilnovac and occupied the St. Prohor Monastery and later that evening the Bulgarians arrested Fr. Vladimir with two other priests, Hieromonk Arsenije (Nikolich) and the married priest Jovan Markovich. Bulgarian soldiers brought the three Fathers to Mount Rajan and over several days brutally tortured them.

The Bulgarians cut off the limbs of the Fathers and eventually on October 27th burned the three priests alive. Locals from the nearby village of Lukarc wished to collect and bury the relics of the Martyrs, but the Bulgarian Army forbid them from doing so; threatening anyone who attempted to collect the relics with execution.

In 1918 near the end of the war the Bulgarian occupational authorities finally allowed St. Vladimir's children, Jovan and Milan, to collect the relics of the Martyrs and properly bury them. All three Martyrs were buried in a small cemetery near the St. Nicholas Church in Kilnovac, where Fr. Vladimir originally served as a married priest.

After the Treaty of Salonica on September 17th 1918 ended the Bulgarian aggression against Serbia, the St. Prohor Monastery was re-opened and the proto-icon of St. Vladimir of Kilnovac was painted on the western wall of the St. Nicholas Church in December of that year.

The Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of Sts. Vladimir, Arsenije and Jovan of Kilnovac – whose relics are now located in the St. Prohor Monastery Church in Kilnovac – on May 16th; the commemoration of all Saints who were Martyred by Bulgarian phyletists during the First World War.

---ST. VICHENTIJE OF SKOPJE---

Vasilije Krdzhich was born on January 30th 1853 in Kraljevo, within the suburb of Usche. He completed primary school at the Studenica Monastery and later enrolled in the Belgrade Theological Seminary. After graduating from Seminary, Vasilije entered the Studenica Monastery and was tonsured with the name Vichentije after St. Vincent of Saragossa in 1873.

After his tonsure, Fr. Vichentije was ordained to the Diaconate and appointed as the Archdeacon to Bishop Vichentije (Krasojevich) of Zhicha. On September 8th 1875 he was ordained to the Priesthood and remained in Studenica until he left to live as a Hermit in 1885. In 1887 he returned to Studenica at the request of the Brotherhood and was elected as the Hegumen of the Monastery.

He governed the Brotherhood of the Studenica Monastery before retiring to the Holy Trinity and Meeting Monastery in the Ovchar-Kablar Gorge in 1893. During his time in Ovchar-Kablar, Fr. Vichentije became well known as a Holy Elder and in 1894 he was elevated to the rank of Archimandrite. In 1900 Fr. Vichentije was requested by the Serbian government to move to Hilandar Monastery on Mt. Athos in an attempt to resolve several issues and controversies among the Serbian Monks on the Holy Mountain.

Fr. Vichentije went to Mt. Athos with three other monks and was elected by the Brotherhood of Hilandar Monastery as the Hegumen. On January 23rd 1905 Metropolitan Sevastijan (Debeljkovich) fell asleep in the Lord after struggling with tuberculosis; only two months after his consecration to the Episcopacy.

Losing two Bishops for the newly-organized Metropolis of Skopje in less than two years, the Serbian Orthodox Church realized they needed a candidate who was in good health. Fr. Vichentije was referred by several Synodia Elders on the Holy Mountain for the Episcopacy due to his spirituality and young age. In February the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church elected Fr. Vichentije as a Bishop.

Fr. Vichentije travelled to Constantinople and was invited to stay as a guest in the Phanar. On behalf of the Serbian Church, Patriarch Joachim III of Constantinople and two Phanorite Bishops consecrated Vichentije to the Episcopacy and enthroned him as the third Metropolitan of Skopje in late February 1905.

Vladyka Vichentije quickly began work on serving the Church in Macedonia and Kosovo, being active in restoring church buildings, setting up schools, building orphanages and ordaining clergymen. The ecclesiastical territory of Macedonia belonged to the Serbian Orthodox Church, but the Bulgarian Exarchate – which had been excommunicated by the Church of Constantinople in 1870 – had set up churches and claimed the area for themselves because the majority of the population spoke Bulgarian.

He was very diligent during the “Bulgarian schism”, returning many churches in Macedonia to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Vichentije was also active during the “Macedonian struggle” and blessed the creation of Chetnik units. In 1907 a disagreement in the central leadership of the Serbian Chetniks occurred, Vladyka Vichentije intervened and attempted to mend the conflict with little success, causing a scandal.

In Serbia newspapers and government officials began to slander Vladyka Vichentije accusing him of working against the nationalist struggle, having Bulgarian sympathies, and being a Turkish agent. Over time the accusations changed into claims that he lived an immoral lifestyle. Several Bishops in the Serbian Orthodox Church believed the slanders against Metropolitan Vichentije and prepared to take action against him.

Metropolitan Nichifor (Perich) of Rashka-Prizen defended Metropolitan Vichentije and disproved the slanders against him. Envious Bishops in the Synod of the Serbian Church transferred several priests that were under the omophoria of Metropolitan Vichentije and Metropolitan Nichifor to other Bishops in Serbia in retaliation. Eventually the leadership crisis of the Chetniks was resolved in late 1907 and many of the slanders against Vladyka Vichentije ceased.

Vladyka Vichentije dedicated great effort in bringing the phyletists and Albanian Muslims in Macedonia to the Orthodox Faith. At the end of the Balkan Wars in 1913, Macedonia was placed under control of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Metropolis of Skopje saw a brief revival with the Serbian government giving more resources to Vladyka Vichentije.

The peace was brief as the Austrians invaded Serbia in July 1914 and the Bulgarians in October 1915. After the Bulgarian Army captured Skopje, Metropolitan Vichentije was arrested by the Bulgarians and imprisoned for two months; at trial he was charged with working against the Bulgarian government and deported him to a prison camp in Gnjilane in Kosovo. On the road between Ferizaj and Gnjilane, Vladyka Vichentije was robbed and murdered, and his relics were burned.

After the war ended, the Serbian government launched several investigations into the whereabouts of Vladyka Vichentije: In 1940 an elderly Albanian man from Ferizaj reported that on one night in December 1915 Bulgarian soldiers came into the town intoxicated and an officer showed off a Panagia to other Bulgarian soldiers and Albanian locals, stating it belonged to Vladyka Vichentije and he stole it from him before they murdered him.

The government concluded St. Vichentije had been killed on December 15th 1915 and that his relics were destroyed after the Bulgarians burned them. St. Vichentije of Skopje is commemorated by the Orthodox Church along with all the victims of Bulgarian phyletism on May 16th.

---THE HOLY NEW MARTYRS OF SURDULICA---

After the Bulgarian invasion of Serbia, the area between the cities of Nish and Skopje (previously fought over during the Serbo-Bulgarian War in 1885) were placed under Bulgarian occupation and organized as the “Moravian District” on October 14th 1914, with the rest of Serbia being occupied by the Austro-Hungarian and German armies.

The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization's armed forces – known as “komitadjis” – were placed as gendarmeries over the Moravian District. The Bulgarian government organized prison camps outside of Sofia for Serbs, with the town of Surdulica being used as a transfer point for the deportees; with the goal of the Bulgarian government being to “Bulgarianize” the Serbs who lived in Macedonia by deporting them to Bulgaria, forcing them to speak Bulgarian and placing them under the Bulgarian Exarchate.

The IMRO – made up mostly of socialists – wanted to murder Serbs from Macedonia and despite the disagreement between the IMRO and Tsar Ferdinand I

of Bulgaria (an ethnic German and Roman Catholic), the Bulgarian army let the IMRO murder Serbian prisoners in Surdulica, Shtip, Vranje, Zajechar, Kachanik and other places in Macedonia.

Aleksandr Protogerov, commander of the IMRO and 33rd Degree Freemason, was appointed the military governor of the Moravian District by the Bulgarian Army. In December 1915 Protogerov issued an order that: "...all males between the ages of 16 to 50 who had served in the Serbian Army, all local officials, teachers, priests, journalists, former members of government, military supporters and all suspected persons are to be arrested and deported immediately..."

Most of the Serbian prisoners brought to Surdulica were taken in the forests near the town and murdered. Gendarmeries at first executed prisoners by shooting them, but over time began using bayonets and the stocks from their rifles, and eventually started using clubs and axes so as to not dull their bayonets or damage their rifles.

Between December 1915 and February 1916 between 200-400 Serbs were brought to Surdulica daily, with most being killed outside of the town. At first only men were brought but starting in 1916 women and children were brought to the site and murdered by the Bulgarians. Within the first three months of the occupation at least 3,000 Serbs were killed in Surdulica.

The bodies of victims were buried in a mass grave near a stream called Duboka Dolina. After this area had been filled, the Bulgarians started burying the bodies in the nearby towns of Kalifer, Dubrava and Romanovachki. After filling most of the cemeteries in the region, the Bulgarians began throwing bodies in the Vrla river.

Colonel von Lustig, liason of the Austro-Hungarian Army to the German 11th Army wrote:

"It is known most of the Serbian intelligentsia, i.e. functionaries, teachers, priests and others, withdrew with what's left of the Serbian Army, but a number of them gradually started to return for psychological or material reasons. Here in (Bulgarian) occupied territory, it is virtually impossible to find either them or those who did not flee; they have 'gone to Sofia', as the new Bulgarian saying goes. Men are handed over to komitadjis as suspects without any juridical procedure, with the order they are to be 'taken to Sofia'. The komitadjis return the next day without them, regardless of whether they are 20 or 200 kilometers away. It is all the same,

the patrols pack up shovels, disappear into the mountains and quickly return, without any prisoners. Bulgarian officers do not even conceal their executions, they boast about them...”

Aleksandr Protogerov publicly acknowledged the massacre happening in Surdulica and described the Serbian people in a newspaper interview as: “...killers, thieves and butchers. Their crimes are so great it will take at least ten years to rid (Macedonia) of this evil.”

The murders at Surdulica continued until February 1917, when Serbian Chetniks under the command of Vojvoda Kosta Pechanac launched the Toplica uprising in the Moravian District; Pechanac's Chetniks crossed into Bulgarian territory and burned down the town of Bosilegrad, before being forced to retreat to Kosovo.

While the uprising was unsuccessful, it convinced the Bulgarian authorities to end their genocide against the Serbian people in Macedonia for fear of revolt. Aleksandr Protogerov was fired from his position as military governor of the Moravian District and the IMRO's komitadijs were replaced with a new gendarmerie force. The IMRO later went on to collaborate with the Ustashe during the Interwar period and by the Second World War allied themselves with Tito's Communists.

After the war ended in December 1918, an American journalist named William A. Drayton went to Surdulica to investigate the massacre that occurred there. Drayton and Dr. Jovan Hadzhi-Vasiljevich – serving as Drayton's translator – arrived in Surdulica and between December and January 1919 they recorded witness testimonies and uncovered several mass graves.

William Drayton in his report to the League of Nation's Inter-Allied Commission on the Determination of Bulgarian Crimes wrote: “All Serbs who were educated or prominent in any way among their fellow citizens were rounded up and taken to camps in Bulgaria. On the way to internment (in Sofia), many stopped in Surdulica... The entire area near it is a vast cemetery, and it was called the 'Serb slaughterhouse' by the Bulgarians. On the way to Bulgaria, from November 1915 until February 1917; 200 to 400 Serbs were killed here every day...”

Dr. Jovan Hadzhi-Vasiljevich wrote: “The Bulgarians deported thousands to their lands and brought most through Surdulica. Of the people they deported, more than half never reached Bulgaria, with most being killed in Surdulica and other places...”

The majority were killed in the most brutal methods...”

Dr. Archibald Rice visited Surdulica in December 1918 and in his report wrote: “From the six witnesses I interviewed, they counted up to 3,000 victims within the first few months, but there were so many killed that they could not count them all...”

Mass graves of Martyrs killed by the Bulgarians were found all throughout Macedonia, including in Kumanovo, Vranje, Leskovac, Prokulje, Kurshumljia, Nish, Chuprija and Pozharevac. From eyewitness testimony, Albanian Muslims or Romani Gypsies were forced by the Bulgarians to bury the dead.

During one of the exhumations of the mass graves, a skull was found with a bayonet driven through it that couldn't be removed. The last exhumation of graves occurred in 1926 and in total over 6,000 Serbs were killed and buried around Surdulica.

On June 28th 1922 the foundation stone for the Memorial Chapel was laid in Surdulica. King Aleksandar of Yugoslavia was present along with 20 ministers of the Yugoslav National Assembly and many citizens from all over Serbia. King Aleksandar declared June 28th – the Vivodian and feast of St. Tsar Lazar – to be the commemoration for the New Martyrs killed by the Bulgarians.

The relics of the Martyrs were originally kept in a small Church near a shooting range for the Serbian Army in Cigan Mala while the Memorial Chapel was being built in Surdulica. On August 24th 1924 the construction on the Memorial Chapel completed.

The relics of the Martyrs were kept in ten different reliquaries that resembled large chests around the Chapel; the skull with the bayonet in it was placed in a glass case near the entrance. A plaque reading: “Chapel for those killed by the Bulgarians in Surdulica. Memory Eternal!” was installed on the outside of the Chapel.

The chapel was designed by the architects Vlaho Bukovac and Petar Popovich, with the former painting frescos depicting the sufferings of the Martyrs on the walls. The construction of the stone and marble chapel cost 800,000 dinars, which was donated personally by King Aleksandar. The locals of Surdulica in gratitude to His Majesty placed a second plaque inside the chapel that read: “For our Martyrs,

in gratitude to King Aleksandar and Queen Maria.”

Dr. Milivoje Petrovich in the 1920s requested the Bulgarian Army Archives for records on the Surdulica massacres and other crimes of the Bulgarian Army against the Serbian people. The Bulgarian Army informed him all records had been destroyed.

After the Axis powers invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941, local priests with pious laypeople feared the Bulgarians would seize the relics and destroy them and took the relics of the Martyrs by night, and buried them in a nearby cemetery close to the Church of St. George in Surdulica.

In April 1941 Bulgaria once again occupied Macedonia and outlawed the wearing of shajkaca and usage of the Serbian language, and placed all Orthodox Churches in Macedonia under the authority of the Bulgarian Exarchate. On February 17th 1943 Bulgarian soldiers destroyed the Memorial Chapel in Surdulica with explosives and destroyed the granite plaque outside the chapel with pickaxes.

In 2009 the reconstruction of the Memorial Chapel began, which completed in 2010. In 2010 the relics of the Martyrs were uncovered in the cemetery; the relics were only under a meter of earth, with all the bones being perfectly white and strong. Shortly thereafter the relics were transferred to the crypt of the Church of St. Panteleimon in Surdulica.

The Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of the New Martyrs of Surdulica and 30,000 New Martyrs killed by the Bulgarians on May 16th with an additional commemoration for the New Martyrs of Surdulica observed on June 28th.

---ST. NIKODIM OF DALMATIA-ISTRIA---

Nikola Milash was born on April 4th 1845 in Shibenik, Dalmatia, within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father Trifun was a merchant and his mother, Maria, an Italian who converted to Orthodoxy before her marriage. The Milash family was an important merchant family in Dalmatia since the late 17th century, primarily in the city of Zhupanjac (now known as Tomislavgrad).

Due to having an Italian mother, by Austro-Hungarian law Nikola had to attend public schools that were run by the Franciscans and Jesuits. By the fourth grade Nikola was transferred to a private gymnasium run by the Dominicans, graduating

in 1856. His father paid for him to receive secondary schooling at the Bovan Serbian School where Nikola received religious education from Orthodox teachers.

Due to the Dominican gymnasium not being accredited by the state, Nikola had to retake the fourth grade at a Jesuit school in Dubrovnik. When tested on his learning, Nikola's intelligence showed not only he had a fourth grade education but also a fifth grade education and he was immediately transferred to the sixth grade.

Nikola received a scholarship from the Zelich foundation and continued his studies at the Zadar gymnasium, graduating in 1863. Nikola's extensive education had made him a brilliant student and he was fluent in several languages including German, Latin, Italian and Greek. Nikola at this time had no intention of becoming a priest, but he decided to enroll in the Theological Seminary in Sremski Karlovci to continue his studies.

He graduated from the Sremski Karlovci Seminary in 1866 and transferred to the University of Vienna, where he studied philosophy until 1867. Not being satisfied with philosophy, Nikola travelled to Kiev and enrolled in the Kiev Theological Seminary. Nikola graduated in 1871, receiving a Master's Degree in Theology at the age of 26; his thesis was on the Nomocanon of Patriarch St. Photios the Great. Over the years in addition to the other languages Nikola knew, he learned French, Russian and English.

Nikola returned to Dalmatia and was appointed a substitute teacher at the Zadar Theological Seminary on November 17th 1871 and on June 30th 1872 he became a permanent teacher. In 1873 the Austro-Hungarian government separated the Diocese of Dalmatia from the Karlovac Metropolis and merged the Diocese with a newly created legal entity of the Bukovina-Dalmatia Metropolis, which was completely separate from any local Orthodox Church.

By Austro-Hungarian law the holder of the Diocese had to be seated in Vienna – all of this was an attempt to divide the Orthodox Church and open it to the efforts of the Uniates – Nikola Milash organized protests to oppose the efforts of the Austro-Hungarian government to divide the Orthodox Church and met with several local governors to voice his opposition.

The Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church arrived in Vienna to negotiate with

the Austro-Hungarian government and Nikola served as a translator, helping arrange for the Serbian Orthodox Church – which was only partially recognized by the government – the ability to continue to operating in Dalmatia. Nikola wrote about the events that occurred in Dalmatia in a book titled: “Historical-Canonical view of the Establishment of a new Serbian-Romanian Metropolis” (pub. Vienna 1873) which was well received by Serbs all over the world, especially due to Nikola's boldness concerning the Austro-Hungarian government.

On the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord in 1873 Nikola was tonsured a monk at the Dragovich Monastery in Zadar with the name Nikodim. On the Feast of Theophany Fr. Nikodim was ordained a Hierodeacon; a few months later he was awarded the right to wear a red sash and elevated to the rank of Archdeacon. On the Feast of Nativity in 1875 Fr. Nikodim was ordained a Hieromonk in the Church of St. Elias in Zadar.

Fr. Nikodim remained active in speaking out against the proselytization of the Papists towards the Serbs and advocated for the usage of the Serbian language in secondary schools; helping organize private schools to teach Serbian children the Orthodox Faith in Dalmatia. At the request of Ljubomir Vujnovich, Fr. Nikodim entered politics and became a founding member of the Dalmatia-based Serb People's Party in 1873.

He left the Serb People's Party in 1875 after party president Sava Bjelnovich promoted a secular view of Serbian nationalism; which Fr. Nikodim criticized harshly, stating the Serbian people could not exist separately from Orthodoxy. Croatian and Austrian politicians supported Bjelnovich's position and slandered Fr. Nikodim, accusing him of being a Russian spy – citing articles he wrote in the “Srpski list” newspaper as proof – to divide the Serbian people in Dalmatia.

Fr. Nikodim used his understanding of various languages to research primary sources which he used in his writings; he published over 21 books over the course of four decades and several more were published after his repose. Among Fr. Nikodim's writings were Nomocanons, edifying treatises on the spiritual life, volumes on Church history, apologetic works against the Papists and many other books that are still read by Orthodox Christians today.

He translated many of his works into different languages, bringing invaluable information about Orthodoxy into Western languages for the first time. These works would be instrumental in bringing converts from Western Europe into the

Orthodox Church for decades. Fr. Nikodim learned Romanian – as the Diocese of Bukovina-Dalmatia served both Serbs and Romanians – and translated many of his works into Romanian.

In 1880 the ethnic Croatian and Roman Catholic bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer called for the unification of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic church, citing Sts. Cyril and Methodius (who had only recently been canonized by the Papists) as common Slavic ancestors. Fr. Nikodim wrote an article in response titled: “Sts. Cyril and Methodius and the Truth of Orthodoxy”, where he strongly condemned Papism and described Sts. Cyril and Methodius as: “...great warriors of Orthodoxy... who suffered greatly in battle against the enemies of Orthodoxy, including the ancestors of the modern Catholic church...”

For his service to the Orthodox Church in Dalmatia, Fr. Nikodim was raised to the rank of Archimandrite in late 1880. Fr. Nikodim continued to serve in politics and had a great influence; Croatian politicians often visited Fr. Nikodim and suggested he become a Papist, or participate in the talks of union with Rome: He rejected all these suggestions, for which the Croatian nationalists deemed him a traitor to his Italian heritage and a Russian agent.

When Bosnia and Herzegovina was formally inducted as a condominium of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1885, Fr. Nikodim wrote in response to the Austrian attempt to remove Metropolitan Sava (Kosanovich) from Bosnia, writing that all Orthodox Bishops should remain in communion with the Serbian Church and resist any attempt to be transferred to a different Dioceses.

In 1885 Fr. Nikodim wrote articles for the newspaper “Istrina”; one of Istrina's readers was the Serbian Minister of Education Milan Kujunzhich, who invited Fr. Nikodim to Serbia to reorganize the Belgrade Theological Seminary. Fr. Nikodim arrived in Belgrade on November 16th 1886 and became dean of the Seminary, updating the curriculum to the standards he had seen in Russia.

Fr. Nikodim was invited by the Serbian government to become a board member of the National Educational Council; at first Fr. Nikodim saw his stay in Belgrade as a respite from the increasingly hostile environment of Dalmatia, but eventually certain people slandered him in Serbia claiming he was an Austro-Hungarian agent, and a secret Uniate sent to subvert the Orthodox Church in Serbia.

On the Feast of St. Sava (January 13th) 1887 Fr. Nikodim delivered a Sermon

speaking of the need for the establishment of more educational facilities, which his enemies claimed was proof he was working against the Serbian people and a mob formed outside of the Seminary wishing to kill him; Fr. Nikodim escaped Belgrade by night and returned to Zadar. In 1888 he began work on two important books: “Roman Catholic propaganda: Foundation and its rules today” (pub. 1888) and a six-volume treatise: “The Orthodox Church and Canon Law” (pub. 1890).

In 1889 Fr. Nikodim was invited once again to Belgrade by the new Minister of Education, Dr. Vladan Djordjevich, to teach Canon Law at the University of Belgrade (then called “the Great School”); Fr. Nikodim was hesitant to return to Serbia, but was assured of safety by Djordjevich. Fr. Nikodim taught at the Great School and was complimented on his work by Bishop Djordje (Brankovich) of Timishoara (later Metropolitan of Karlovci).

Vladyka Djordje offered Fr. Nikodim the position of Dean of the Karlovci Theological Seminary, but he refused this offer as he believed it should be given by the Metropolitan of Karlovci (whose seat was empty at this time). Bishop Djordje and Fr. Nikodim were close friends, both being active in the movement to restore the Serbian Patriarchate. In 1890 Metropolitan Stefan (Knezhevich) of Dalmatia-Istria (previously Bukovina-Dalmatia) fell asleep in the Lord.

The Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church unanimously voted to elect Fr. Nikodim to the Episcopacy on July 10th 1890. Fr. Nikodim was consecrated to the Episcopacy on September 16th 1890 and enthroned as the Metropolitan of Dalmatia-Istria; Vladyka Nikodim's appointment as the Metropolitan of Dalmatia-Istria was confirmed by Prince George Vojnovich of the Dalmatian District.

Vladyka Nikodim returned to Dalmatia and zealously served the Church, visiting his churches often and appointing Diocesan officers. Vladyka Nikodim was very generous in almsgiving – especially during Great Lent and the St. Philip Fast – using the pension he received from the state and distributing it to the poor without partiality. He donated his personal library consisting of thousands of books, ancient manuscripts and rare volumes to the National Library of Serbia after his consecration.

Overseeing the Church was not without difficulty, as he wrote shortly after his consecration: “It is not an easy job to be an Orthodox Bishop in Dalmatia dealing with these so-called Orthodox 'intelligentsia'. These and similar people have forced previous Bishops to flee from Dalmatia to other Dioceses... But it is most

difficult to be an Orthodox Bishop... (especially) if he wants to be a true Orthodox Bishop and a guardian of His Faith and Church. Within the Austrian Empire, it has been a law since 1868 – forcibly – that the Orthodox Church enjoys equal rights as does any other confession. However in practice only the Papal church is tolerated in Austria.”

Vladyka Nikodim continued to personally teach classes at the Zadar Theological Seminary, eventually retiring from teaching in 1910. In 1891 he published the first volume of his work: “Documents describing the history of the Diocese of Dalmatia and Istria from the 15th to the 19th century”; written in Latin for Croatian and Italian audiences (the second volume was published after his Martyrdom).

For his efforts in resisting the proselytization of the Papists, Metropolitan Nikodim in 1894 was declared by a Papal encyclical to be an: “...enemy of the Catholic church”. When Uniate bishop Julius Drohobechki visited Dalmatia on Pascha in 1896, Metropolitan Nikodim gave a Sermon on Bright Monday warning the Faithful of the efforts of the Uniates and highlighting the heresies of the Latins.

The increased efforts of the Papists to force a unia on the Serbian people led to Vladyka Nikodim spending years writing a book titled: “Orthodox Dalmatia” (pub. 1901) which covered the early history of Orthodoxy in Croatia and how the Roman Catholics used force and coercion to lead the Croatian people away from the Orthodox Church. Vladyka Nikodim's work was criticized by Croatian nationalists, but praised by Orthodox readers.

The hatred of the Croatian nationalists led them slander Vladyka Nikodim to the Austrian authorities on May 31st 1901; claiming that since all of his mail was written in the Cyrillic alphabet (which was legally protected by Austrian law) he must have had correspondence with the Russian government. At trial Vladyka Nikodim defended his usage of Cyrillic by stating: “...(it) could only be considered worldly by the foolish... I will not write my letters in a foreign alphabet, but only with the one used by my Fatherland and my Church.”

Vladyka Nikodim served in the Diet of Dalmatia in 1901 to represent Serbian Orthodox interests and was being increasingly targeted by the secret police of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; especially after the formation of the Croat-Serb Coalition in 1905 which declared Orthodoxy and Catholicism to simply be “two different Confessions”. Vladyka Nikodim refused to attend the “Zabar Resolution” of the Coalition on November 14th and wrote several condemnations in the local

newspapers.

In 1905 due to his resistance to the Croat-Serb Coalition, Tsar (St.) Nicholas II of Russia awarded Metropolitan Nikodim the Order of St. Anna in the First Class. King Nikola I Petrovich-Njegosh of Montenegro awarded Vladyka Nikodim the Order of St. Danilo's Cross in the First Degree, he also received several Honorary Doctorates from Universities in Greece for his resistance to the Coalition.

When Metropolitan Innokenty of Karlovci fell asleep in 1905 the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church offered Metropolitan Nikodim to become the First-Hierarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church: Vladyka Nikodim refused as he felt he was unworthy and incapable of holding such a position. Due to claims by the Uniates that St. Vasilije of Ostrog converted to Papism, Vladyka Nikodim wrote a work refuting the claims of Vicko Zmajevich and Gashpar Petar Vinjalich in 1906 titled: "St. Vasilije of Ostrog".

Metropolitan Nikodim wrote: "Ordination as an obstacle to marriage" (pub. 1907) which refuted the Roman Catholic claims that priests cannot be married. This book was not well received by the Seminaries in Serbia – who were influenced by Latin thought – with Stefan Veselinovich of Belgrade and Jovan Vuchkovich from Sremski Karlovci starting a petition to have Metropolitan Nikodim removed from the Episcopacy.

In 1910 Vladyka Nikodim blessed the effort to build a new Orthodox Church in Split, however the construction was halted several times and eventually Vladyka Nikodim wrote: "The main obstacle in this endeavor is the Viceroyalty of Dalmatia. They are completely under the influence of the Roman Catholic bishop in Split, who used all possible means – mostly secretive ones – to ensure that the Orthodox in Split would not get a Church."

The Papists convinced Bishop Dositej (Jovich) of Boka Kotorska to embezzle 73,000 crowns – meant for the construction of the Church – and spend them on personal expenses; after the scandal was discovered Dositej chose to commit suicide. The suicide was blamed on Vladyka Nikodim and many called for Vladyka Nikodim to be charged criminally and suspended Synodally. The Orthodox Church in Split wasn't completed until after the First World War.

Within his Diocese many envious and disobedient clergymen joined the petitions calling for him to be removed. With slanders coming against him from all sides,

Metropolitan Nikodim wrote a letter on December 21st 1911 to the Synod informing them of his resignation as a serving Metropolitan and his wish to retire to the Dragovich Monastery in Zadar, where he had originally taken his monastic vows.

Vladyka Nikodim addressed the controversy surrounding the suicide of Dositej Jovich in his letter: “there is fault on my side (in this matter)...” His request to be retired was accepted by the Serbian Orthodox Church on January 12th 1912 and Vladyka Nikodim returned to Dragovich Monastery. Such retirement was an uncommon occurrence and the news of Vladyka Nikodim's retirement was received with sorrow across the Orthodox world. In Russia especially the news was met with sadness and several Russian Bishops wrote in defense of Metropolitan Nikodim.

After his retirement, the Kiev Theological Seminary declared Vladyka Nikodim an honorary board member on March 2nd 1912 and the Slavic Benevolence Society in Petrograd inducted him as a member on May 5th. Metropolitan Nikodim continued writing and responded to personal letters addressed to him after his retirement.

After the start of the First World War in July 1914 the Austro-Hungarian secret police raided Vladyka Nikodim's cell at the Dragovich Monastery and took several possessions, personal correspondences and a manuscript of one of his works. Not long after the raid he was evicted from the Dragovich Monastery and forced to live in a public housing in Dubrovnik.

After the Martyrdom of St. Maksim Sandovich in August 1914 – a Lemko priest who left Uniatism and was executed for “treason” – Vladyka Nikodim publicly acknowledged him to be a Martyr and exhorted the Orthodox Faithful to prepare for Martyrdom in an article published in a newspaper.

For his article Vladyka Nikodim was arrested; the Austro-Hungarian authorities let him off on a warning that if he continued to speak out against the Roman Catholic church or the policies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he would be charged with treason. Vladyka Nikodim knew Austro-Hungarian law well and that the Orthodox Church enjoyed equal rights to the Roman Catholic church, and that nothing in his writings could be considered seditious or treasonous. In November 1914 Metropolitan Nikodim was placed under a court order to not to publish anything or write any letters.

Over the next few months Vladyka Nikodim received continual harassment by the secret police of the Austro-Hungarian government and several anonymous threats warning he should leave Dalmatia. Vladyka Nikodim refused and stayed in Dalmatia, living quietly in prayer and solitude.

During Great Lent in 1915 Vladyka Nikodim fell seriously ill, with his symptoms being consistent with poisoning. After weeks of struggling with illness, Metropolitan Nikodim fell asleep in the Lord on Great and Holy Friday (March 20th 1915) and was buried in a private tomb near his parents in Dubrovnik.

In the years following his poisoning, many of St. Nikodim's enemies expressed their regret at slandering the Holy Bishop and asked for forgiveness before his tomb, with several requests being made to have his relics transferred to a Church. On October 4th 1930 the Serbian Orthodox Church transferred St. Nikodim's relics to a special chapel near the Holy Ascension Church in Shibenik, where they remain to this day.

In 1994 a statue of St. Nikodim was erected near the source of the Cetna river in the village of Spasovdan. In 1995 during the midst of the Croatian War of Independence, the statue was destroyed during “Operation Storm”. In 2012 a proto-icon of St. Nikodim of Dalmatia-Istria was painted in the Krka Monastery near Shibenik.

The Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of St. Nikodim of Dalmatia-Istria on September 21st. Many of St. Nikodim's books have been reprinted in Serbia and were translated into English. Of the thousands of letters he wrote in his lifetime, several were compiled and published in volumes in the 1930s and 1990s.

---THE NEW MARTYRS OF DABAR-BOSNA---

The commemoration of the New Martyrs of Dabar-Bosna (July 11th) – which includes all Martyrs killed in the region over the centuries including by the Turks, Ustashe and Communists – there are three Martyrs commemorated who were killed by the Austrians during the First World War:

– **The Hieromartyr Trifun of the St. Ilija Skete:** Trifun Maksimovich was born in the village of Zenika – near Sarajevo – in 1843, his secular name and the names of his parents are unknown. He graduated from the Rajjevo Seminary in 1899, tonsured with the name Trifun and was ordained to the Diaconate and Priesthood

later that year. He lived at the St. Ilija skete and even before the First World War was persecuted by the Austrian authorities; at the beginning of the war he was arrested and was executed by firing squad in Seminzovac by the Schutzkorps in September 1914.

– **The Confessor Lazar of Arad:** Lazar Chulibrk was born in Vojevca in 1847 and was ordained to the Diaconate and Priesthood in 1874. At the start of First World War he was arrested by the Schutzkorps and imprisoned in Arad, after enduring many sufferings he fell asleep in the Lord and received a Martyr's crown on March 12th 1915.

– **The Hieromartyr Sava of Sarajevo:** Sava Shkaljak was born in 1881 in Stupina to an important family originally from Montenegro. He attended Seminary in Raljevo and after graduation was tonsured a monk, later being ordained to the Priesthood in 1907. During the First World War Fr. Sava was arrested by the Schutzkorps and held without charges for several months. The Austrian authorities offered to release him if he renounced Orthodoxy and became a Papist; Fr. Sava refused and was considered insane, being committed to a mental asylum. He suffered for four years – enduring unimaginable sufferings – until he fell asleep in the Lord in 1918.

---PATRIARCH ST. VARNAVA---

Petar Rosich was born in the village of Pljevlja, Old Herzegovina District, in Montenegro on August 29th 1880 to the parents Djordje and Krsmana (nee Pejatovich), both of whom were Ottoman citizens. 40 days after his birth the young boy was baptized at the Holy Trinity Monastery in Pljevlja with the name Petar.

Petar attended elementary school in Pljevlja and received theological education in Prizren, graduating in 1899. Due to his brilliance in study Petar was given a scholarship to attend the Petrograd Theological Academy, where he graduated in 1905. Petar wished for the monastic life and on April 30th 1905 was tonsured a monk with the name Varnava – after the Apostle Barnabas – by Archbishop Sergei (Stragorodsky, eponymous founder of Sergianism) of Finland and Vyborg.

Archbishop Sergei ordained Fr. Varnava to the Diaconate on May 6th and to the Priesthood on June 6th 1905. After his ordination to the Priesthood, Fr. Varnava travelled to Constantinople and enrolled in the Halka Theological Seminary while

also serving the Divine Liturgy at the Serbian Embassy.

In Constantinople Fr. Varnava wrote for “Carigradski glasnik” – the only Serbian language magazine in the Ottoman Empire – and for his work among the Serbian community, he was elevated to the rank of Archimandrite and appointed the rector of the Serbian School in Constantinople. The Serbian Orthodox Church later appointed Fr. Varnava as a Church ambassador to the Phanar; he was also appointed as an ambassador for the Russian Embassy in Constantinople.

Metropolitan Partenij (Galas) of Veles and Debar – who was often absent from his Diocese due to being the Synodal secretary – recommended Fr. Varnava for the Episcopacy. After being elected by the Synod of the Serbian Church and later confirmed by the Kingdom of Serbia, Varnava was consecrated and enthroned by Phanarite Bishops (on behalf of the Serbian Church) as the Vicar Bishop of Glavinica on April 10th 1910 in the Patriarchal Church of St. George in Constantinople.

Vladyka Varnava immediately set to work establishing printing houses to publish spiritual works in the Serbian language in his Diocese and protecting the Serbian Orthodox from the efforts of phyletists, especially during the Balkan Wars. In 1913 Metropolitan Partenij was transferred to the Diocese of Melnik and Vladyka Varnava was given temporarily administration over the Diocese of Veles and Debar.

After the departure of Greek Exarchs from Serbian territory, Vladyka Varnava temporarily administered the Dioceses of Prespa-Ohrid, Pelagonia, Voden, Poljana and Strumica. During the First World War Vladyka Varnava fled with the Serbian Army in 1915 during the “Great Retreat” through Albania and arrived with the Serbian Army in Corfu in January 1916, where he served as a Bishop in exile for the Serbs and was given a Church by the Greek Church.

After the Treaty of Salonica in 1918 the Serbian government requested Vladyka Varnava travel to Russia for a diplomatic mission: Shortly after his arrival in Russia, the Bolsheviks issued a warrant for Vladyka Varnava's arrest, claiming he was a spy for the Serbian government. Vladyka Varnava avoided being captured by the Bolsheviks and returned safely to Serbia in 1919.

In 1920 the Patriarch of Constantinople granted permission for the Serbian Orthodox Church to elect a Patriarch for the first time in almost 200 years,

Metropolitan Dimitrije (Pavlovich) was elevated to the rank of Patriarch in Sremski Karlovci on August 30th by the entire Synod; Vladyka Varnava in the restoration of the Patriarchate.

On November 17th 1920 Vladyka Varnava was elevated as the Metropolitan of Skopje by the request of Patriarch Dimitrije; the Metropolis of Skopje had been left without a Bishop after the Martyrdom of St. Vichentije of Skopje by the Bulgarians in 1915. As the fourth Metropolitan of Skopje, Vladyka Varnava restored many churches that were destroyed during the war and ordained many clergymen.

During the 1920s Vladyka Varnava established close relationships with other Bishops including Bishop (St.) Nikolaj (Velimirovich) of Ohrid and Zhicha – whom he gave advice to on how to run the Diocese he temporarily oversaw – Bishop Georgije (Letich) of Timishoara and Bishop Josif (Cvijovich, later Metropolitan of Skopje and Communist collaborator.)

After King Aleksandar of Yugoslavia married Queen Maria on June 8th 1922, Vladyka Varnava sent a congratulatory letter to the King. At first King Aleksandar and Vladyka Varnava were close friends, corresponding frequently and cooperating closely.

When Patriarch Dimitrije fell asleep in the Lord on April 6th 1930 the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church immediately convened to elect a successor: Several candidates were put forth, including Bishop Nikolaj of Ohrid, Bishop Georgije of Timishoara and Metropolitan Josif of Skopje; but each Bishop was seen as being unfit for the seat of Patriarch for one reason or another.

After much debate Vladyka Varnava's name was put forth by Bishop Nikolaj and Metropolitan Josif due to his excellent administration skills, his humility and his pastoral ability. Vladyka Varnava saw himself as unworthy for the position of Patriarch and wrote to the Synod that he was: "...not obedient enough to be a commander."

With a unanimous vote, Varnava was enthroned as the Archbishop of Pech, Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and Patriarch of Serbia on April 12th 1930. Patriarch Varnava was relatively young – only being 50 years old at his enthronement – which was seen as a great benefit.

Patriarch Varnava immediately set to restoring order to the Serbian Church which had been left in chaos as his predecessor, Patriarch Dimitrije, had lost his memory prior to his repose leaving the Church in disarray. Patriarch Varnava drafted a Constitution for the Serbian Orthodox Church that divided the Serbian Church into six different administrative, financial and hierarchal districts.

This new administration for the Church worked very well and under Patriarch Varnava, new dioceses were established in Zagreb and Mukachevo. Patriarch Varnava further oversaw and organized the Albanian Church which had recently gotten its Episcopal consecrations from Patriarch Dimitrije and the ROCOR, leading to a brief revival of Orthodoxy in Albania in the 1930s.

He helped consecrate several new Bishops for the Serbian Church, including Bishop (St.) Platon of Banja Luka and Bishop (St.) Sava of Gornji-Karlovac. Patriarch Varnava maintained good relations with the hierarchs of the ROCOR – headquartered in Serbia until 1944 – visiting Met. Antony (Khrapovitsky) and Met. Anastasy (Gribanovsky) quite often.

When Sergei Stragorodsky “suspended” the ROCOR Bishops for refusing to submit to the authority of the Soviet state, Patriarch Varnava broke communion with Sergei and co-signed a ROCOR document condemning Sergei for illegally usurping the position of Locum Tenens of the Russian Church and for collaborating with the Soviet authorities.

Patriarch Varnava wrote a letter to Sergei urging him to repent, as he had considered him a spiritual father, received tonsure and ordination at his hands. Patriarch Varnava remained in communion with the ROCOR, giving his support to their Bishops wherever he could; Patriarch Varnava officiated Metropolitan Antony's funeral on August 10th 1936 as per Metropolitan Anthony's final wishes.

With the rapid secularism of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia under King Aleksandar, Patriarch Varnava and Bishop Nikolaj of Ohrid wrote several letters to King Aleksandar exhorting him to avoid support of secularist policies. Eventually Patriarch Varnava added an addition to the Constitution of the Serbian Church: “...if the state wishes there to be a separation between Church and state, we must separate from that state first.”

King Aleksandar became upset with Patriarch Varnava's addition to the Church Constitution, eventually becoming a bitter enemy of Vladyka Varnava. Serbia at

this time was in political turmoil as many reactionary, nationalist and revolutionary movements formed in the wake of Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the Spanish Civil War and other events across Europe; existing groups Ustashe and IMRO used the political instability to their advantage.

Patriarch Varnava strongly condemned political violence and reactionary movements; despite his strong condemnations of such movements, secularist politicians in Yugoslavia still accused Patriarch Varnava of being a reactionary or in contact with foreign states to destroy Yugoslavia. Even Bishops who did support such movements – such as Metropolitan Josif of Skopje – criticized Patriarch Varnava's statements and made accusations against him.

Shortly after his elevation Patriarch Varnava blessed the construction of a Church on Vrchar hill – where the Turks burned St. Sava's relics in 1596 – and hosted a competition for architects to submit their designs. Two architects, Bogdan Nesterovich and Aleksandar Deroko, were chosen for their designs and placed in charge of construction on the Church.

The construction of the Church on Vrchar hill halted with the start of the Second World War. The Church was completed in 2004 with the final frescos and mosaics being installed in 2020. At the time of completion it was the largest Orthodox Church building in the world and the final name of the Church became: “the Cathedral Church of St. Sava in Belgrade” in 2018.

For his service throughout the years Patriarch Varnava was awarded many decorations including the Order of the Star of Karadjordje, the Order of the White Eagle and the Order of St. Sava by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. For the relief efforts he organized to aid victims of the Mount Lebanon famine in 1919 – a man-made famine caused by the Turks, primarily affecting Christians – he received the Order of Merit from the French-backed Lebanese Republic and Tsar Boris III of Bulgaria awarded Patriarch Varnava the Bulgarian Order of St. Alexander.

On July 25th 1935 the National Assembly of the Yugoslav Royal Government headed by the Radical Politicians, the Serb Milan Stojadinovich and Croat Ljudevit Auer, secretly negotiated with the Vatican in an effort for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to sign a “Concordat”; a document that would give the Roman Catholic church equal standing in Yugoslavia with the Orthodox Church.

Without consulting the Orthodox Church, Ljudevit travelled to Rome and met with

Cardinal Pachelli (who later became Pope Pius XII) to draft a text for the Concordat, with the public not being made aware of any of these decisions for months. The Yugoslav Radical Community recently aligned itself politically with Benito Mussolini and Fascist Italy, thus Stojadinovich saw befriending the Vatican as a way to improve relations with Fascist Italy.

After being proposed by members of the Yugoslav National Assembly it went unratified for fifteen months. In November 1936 the regent for King Petar II, Prince Pavle (later a Nazi collaborator) stated he would ratify the Concordat, which caused protest from the Orthodox Church and the public. The unfolding controversy was named the “Concordat crisis” and the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church wrote shortly after Prince Pavle's announcement:

“The proposed 'Concordat', which has been submitted for constitutional resolution to the House of Representatives, grossly violates the principle of equality – especially to the detriment of the Serbian Orthodox Church – and for other religions. The proposed 'Concordat' with the Roman Catholic church in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia grants greater privileges and powers to state authorities than to the Serbian Orthodox Church... This proposed 'Concordat' would even place the Serbian Orthodox Church in a subordinate position to the Roman Catholic church...”

In December 1936 the Synod delivered another statement, now addressed personally to Milan Stojadinovich: “According to the knowledge of this municipality, it is contrary to the principles of the state constitution, as it would give one religious community greater rights and supremacy over others, especially over the Church of St. Sava... By adopting such a Concordat, many of our people in the border regions would be exposed to persecution and severe personal and familial upheavals...”

Under the Concordat the Serbian Orthodox Church would not be allowed to evangelize to Papists – though the Papists would still be allowed to proselytize to Orthodox Christians – and could seize properties of the Orthodox Church without the need for lawsuit or court proceeding. Muslim lawmakers proposed similar laws that would give Islam a legal position of prestige, which the Yugoslav Radicals also supported.

Stojadinovich attempted to broker a deal outlawing Freemasonry in Yugoslavia as a concession for allowing the Concordat, to which Patriarch Varnava wrote he

would refuse any attempt to pass the Concordat as he was against it: “...in all manners of principle.”

The Papist Archbishop of Zagreb Anton Bauer also wrote to Patriarch Varnava, quoting the works of Josip Juraj Strossmayer and suggested the Concordat would promote shared Yugoslav identity and unity among the Slavic peoples. In a public response Patriarch Varnava declared: “The Concordat jeopardizes the principles of state sovereignty, as the will of the Roman Curia is placed above the will of the state, thereby the Concordat would cause a whole range of legal issues in the state, as they run contrary to the provisions of the canon law of the Roman Catholic church.”

Bishop Nikolaj of Ohrid gave his support to the opposition Yugoslav National Movement (also known as the ZBOR) led by Dimitrije Ljotich, as they had voiced the greatest opposition to the Concordat in the Yugoslav National Assembly. Patriarch Varnava blessed any and all who opposed the Concordat, as did the Bishops of the ROCOR in Sremski Karlovci.

The proponents of the Concordat insisted it would have been supported by King Aleksandar of Yugoslavia – who was assassinated by the Ustashe and the IMRO in France in 1934 – and the late Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pashich. Patriarch Varnava stood firm in his opposition to the Concordat and after months of attempting to bargain with Patriarch Varnava, many of the Radical politicians stopped contacting the Serbian Church altogether.

In the midst of the Concordat crisis, Patriarch Varnava's health deteriorated rapidly; he suffered from chest pains, shortness of breath and fluid loss. Patriarch Varnava was transferred to the hospital in November 1936, doctors could not find a reason for his illness but noted the symptoms were similar to that of arsenic poisoning.

Patriarch Varnava was discharged from the hospital shortly before Nativity in December 1936 and dedicated his Nativity Epistle to the ongoing Concordat crisis writing: “Either we will be Serbs aware of our past and the legacy of fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers; or we become apostates to our nation – internationalists, in other words members of great fog – citizens of the 'white world' (the Western world), destroyers of life and everything, without national identity, without faith, without morality...”

After months of antagonism against the Orthodox Church, the National Assembly decided to have its final vote to pass the Concordat into law on July 19th 1937. Bishop Nikolaj of Ohrid and Zhicha organized a prayerful Procession from the Cathedral Church of the Archangel Michael in Belgrade to Vrachar Hill. Bishop Nikolaj stated the procession was a thanksgiving service for the recovering health of Patriarch Varnava and also served as: “...(a) great Church-people manifestation in the fight against the Concordat.”

Patriarch Varnava blessed the Procession and stated his intention to attend in spirit; he called upon the Faithful in an Epistle to take part in the Procession and: “...rise, rise up and form ranks like the Army of God against the army of Satan.” The Yugoslav government deemed this Epistle to be seditious and banned its printing. Many other Bishops of the Serbian Church stated their intention to attend or organize similar protests elsewhere in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and the Krajina.

On July 18th the Yugoslav Militia banned the gathering, stating it was: “...not in accordance with Church regulations.” The Militia brought many ethnic Croatian and Slovenian gendarmeries by train to stop the Procession. On the morning of July 19th several Bishops, priests, deacons and thousands of people started the Procession, slowly moving through the streets of Belgrade.

When the Procession reached Kralja Mihailova street on the intersection of Kralja Petar street, the Orthodox Faithful were met by squadrons of gendarmeries, armed with rifles and led by Slovenian minister Anton Koroshec – a Roman Catholic theologian – who declared the Procession to be a riot and demanded everyone disperse or force would be used.

Without hesitating, the Orthodox Faithful stood their ground and the gendarmes attacked; a contemporary opposition newspaper recorded: “Across King Petar Street, at the upper corner of the National Bank building, several rows of gendarmeries were lined up. The gendarmeries were already aggressive and met the Procession with cursing and with bloodshot, frantic eyes. They began beating clergy dressed in church vestments and the people, cursing the priests and all Serbs. From the accents, one could tell the gendarmeries were Croats and Slovenes...”

In a report to the Royal Chancellery: “...a general fight broke out, horns and whistles were blown, clothes were torn and even the banners of St. Sava were trampled (by gendarmeries). To defend themselves from attacks from rifle stocks

and batons, priests used their ceremonial sabers and hit the gendarmeries with them.”

Bishop Simeon (Stankovich) of Shabac was beaten and fell to the ground; even on the ground Vladyka Simeon was struck in the head with rifle stocks, causing a broken nose and a severe concussion. Vladyka Simeon was brought to the hospital where it took several weeks for him to recover.

Hundreds of laypeople and dozens of priests were injured and protests in Belgrade, Kragujevac, Shabac, Uzhice and Mladenovac continued for the next two days. National and international press were quick to report on the “Bloody Procession” and it became a great scandal for the Yugoslav Radicals. On July 20th the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church sent a telegram to Stojadinovich demanding he resign and the Concordat to be removed from the National Assembly's agenda.

Stojadinovich refused to resign and on July 23rd the Concordat was signed into law after 166 ministers voted in favour: The Serbian Orthodox Church excommunicated all Serbian members of the government who voted for the Concordat. Patriarch Varnava once again fell seriously ill after the Bloody Procession and fell asleep in the Lord on the night of July 24th (July 11th O.S.) 1937.

In the early morning of July 25th at an extraordinary meeting of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Synod announced the falling asleep of Patriarch St. Varnava and declared the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to be: “in a state of exile.” Patriarch St. Varnava was buried on August 3rd (July 21st O.S.) and all members of the government – except Secretary of War General Ljubomir Marich, who voted against the Concordat – banned from attending Patriarch St. Varnava's funeral.

Milan Stojadinovich requested his excommunication by the Serbian Orthodox Church be lifted, which was ignored. Eventually Stojadinovich had pangs of conscience and abandoned his support of the Concordat, calling for a secondary vote. The secondary vote in February 1938 failed to gather enough votes and the Concordat was not signed into law. That same month the Serbian Orthodox Church elected Metropolitan Gavriilo (Dozhich) as Patriarch.

The official Vatican newspaper printed Pope Pius XI's statement on failure of the Concordat in February 1938: “The day will come – and I wish I did not have to

say it, but I am deeply convinced – the day will come when there will be no small number of souls who will regret they did not generously, generously and actively receive such a great good as that which the representative of Jesus Christ (the Pope) offered to their country, not only for the sake of ecclesiastical and religious peace of the nation, but also for the sake of its social and political peace.”

Stojadinovich's Radical party lost most of their seats in the National Assembly in the 1938 elections as a result of the Concordat crisis and the Bloody Procession. Patriarch Gavriilo V lifted the excommunication against Stojadinovich since he repented, but the Serbian public remained embittered towards him. Milan Stojadinovich was arrested by the British Army at the start of the Second World War and died in exile in Argentina in 1961.

Patriarch St. Varnava was buried in a small chapel on Vrachar Hill, now called the Small Church of St. Sava in Belgrade. Despite several attempts by the Yugoslav government to refute claims that Patriarch St. Varnava was poisoned, all contemporary government documents concerning St. Varnava were destroyed and the doctors who suggested he was poisoned were arrested in the months following Patriarch St. Varnava's repose.

In 2019 the Serbian Patriarchate announced they would sell Patriarch St. Varnava's family home in Pljevlja; claiming they did not have funds to support its upkeep. Despite several organizations offering to purchase the home and turn it into a museum, the Serbian Patriarchate sold it to land developers who later demolished the home.

The Serbian poet Delfa Ivanich wrote in her letters that Patriarch St. Varnava was one of the greatest Serbian Patriarchs to have ever lived. St. Nikolaj Velimirovich extolled the virtues of St. Varnava in his writings and St. Iustin Popovich wrote in his memoirs of his great spirituality and unyielding Confession of Orthodoxy.

During his seven years as Patriarch of Serbia, St. Varnava helped popularize Jovan Dragashevich's motto: “Only Unity Saves the Serbs”, which has become a slogan for the Serbian people across the world.

The Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of the New Hieromartyr Varnava of Serbia on July 11th according to the Patristic Calendar. His relics are in a marble sarcophagus located at the Small Church of St. Sava in Belgrade and Icons of Patriarch St. Varnava can be found all throughout Serbia.