

A MEMORANDUM ON JOHN TOROK

Submitted to the Bishop of New York at his request,
for confidential use in the House of Bishops,
by Robert Frederick Lau.

John Torok was born in Hungary, the son of Jewish parents named Toch or Tokash. In early youth he was baptised and became a communicant in the Roman Church. He has claimed that he became a Uniat priest. Ordinarily Uniat priests come from the Eastern Orthodox Communion, not from Judaism.

Torok's claims concerning his academic training and his activities during the World War have been questioned by at least one reputable authority. Without going into this phase of his life in this brief, we may accept his claims as correct. One definite fact emerges. After the war Torok associated himself with the former Bishop of Eperjes. This Roman Catholic bishop had fled from his diocese and was living in Austria in dire poverty, not in touch with his diocese. He gave Torok written authority to collect money. He also gave him a high-sounding title. It is on the basis of this title, conferred on him by an ex-patriate bishop without a diocese, that Torok has posed as a Roman Catholic Monsignor. He has permitted it to be stated recently that the title he held was the equivalent of the rank of Monsignor. That is not true. It is true that in Europe high-ranking clergy are frequently addressed as Monsignor, a very different matter.

Torok came to this country as secretary to a Roman Catholic priest visiting the United States on a personal, political mission. The Roman Catholic authorities in this country endeavored to silence them, but Torok had already applied for reception in the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Bishop Murray received him as a Presbyter. For a brief while he was in touch with Dr. Burgess of the Foreign-born Americans Division. He stayed at Holy Cross Monastery. He taught in St. Stephen's College for, I believe, one year. He was transferred to the Diocese of Fond du lac, where he was made Arch-deacon for the Foreign-born.

It was at this time that John Torok met the Reverend Michael Yuhas, a Russian Orthodox priest of Hungarian nationality. Yuhas had formerly been a Uniat priest. Like many of his people (Russians living in Hungary, forced to forsake Orthodoxy for Roman obedience, but as Uniats) he had become Orthodox in the United States and was an Orthodox priest under the Orthodox bishop Stephan, bishop of Pittsburgh, under the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Platon. Yuhas was related to Stephan by marriage. Bishop Stephan, formerly a Uniat, had recently returned to Uniat obedience, first appointing Yuhas as Administrator of the Orthodox Diocese of Pittsburgh. This appointment the Metropolitan Platon did not confirm.

Father Michael Yuhas visited me (R. F. L.) early in 1930 and told me that Torok had come to him in 1923 or 1924 with a scheme to keep those of Stephan's parishes which accepted Yuhas as Administrator (Very few did) from diverting to Uniat obedience. Torok's plan, as outlined to Yuhas, was to have himself elected bishop for the Russian Orthodox diocese of Pittsburgh, receive Orthodox consecration in Europe and later effect association with the Episcopal Church. Yuhas, doubtful of Torok's usefulness as a Hungarian-speaking bishop over Russian-speaking people, was persuaded because Torok assured him that the Episcopal Church was interested. It would mean a pension for Yuhas and many others who joined the scheme. So persuaded was Yuhas that he lent Torok enough money for a trip to Europe for Consecration and accompanied him. By 1930 the money had not been repaid; furthermore, Yuhas informed me that Torok had forged his name to notes. This key-man, Yuhas is important, for he appears later in the story.

Torok also approached an entirely unrelated group, certain independent Catholic Slovak parishes. They were not interested. Later one of the leading Slovak priests warned Dr. Burgess not to believe Torok should he claim to represent them.

Burgess
In July 1924 Torok secured from Dr. Burgess a letter to be shown to Bishop Weller only, in which Burgess personally, not officially, approved a plan according to which Bishop Weller would join an Orthodox bishop in consecrating Torok for what was left of Bishop Stephan's Russian Orthodox Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Torok next appeared in the Foreign Office of the Czechoslovak Republic, in Prague, with an entirely different scheme. If the government would arrange for his consecration, he said, he would be able to win one hundred thousand Roman Catholic Hungarians, resident in the United States, to ORTHODOXY and so weaken their interest in Hungarian Roman Catholic politics. The Czech Secretary was interested but claimed inability to finance the scheme. He suggested an approach to the Serbian government.

The Serbian government, interested in the plan, ordered the Consecration without consulting the Serbian Patriarch or the Holy Synod and set aside the sum of \$12,000 per annum, of which sum Torok received only the first quarterly payment. However, the consecration took place neither in Czechoslovakia nor in Serbia, but in Vienna, Austria. Here Orthodox authorities could not interfere. It was in Vienna that John Torok, although he was planning to marry, deliberately took the solemn vows of MONASTICISM which precede consecration according to the Serbian Orthodox Rite.

Dositej and Gorazd

There is no doubt that the Serbian Orthodox Bishop Dositej and the Czech Gorazd performed the Consecration. There is also not the slightest doubt that they had absolutely no right to perform it. And the capacity in which each acted has been misrepresented. Bishop Dositej, it has been claimed repeatedly, acted as Patriarchal Delegate FOR THIS CONSECRATION. That is not true. Bishop Gorazd, it has been asserted, acted as the Sovereign Bishop of the Autocephalous National Church of Czechoslovakia. There never was such a Church nor was Gorazd ever "sovereign, independent bishop" of ANY Church. He hoped to be, but his hope has never been fulfilled. As a plain matter of fact, Gorazd, at the time of Torok's consecration, had NO POSITION WHATSOEVER.

Dositej

To put the situation as briefly as possible (see other memoranda for details), a large number of Roman Catholic clergy in Czechoslovakia left the Roman obedience and planned, with governmental permission, to found an independent church. Many of the adherents of this church, among them a simple parish priest Gorazd Pavlik, hoped for an independent Czechoslovak Orthodox Church. The Serbian Orthodox Church was also interested in the movement and Bishop Dositej was appointed the Serbian Patriarch's Delegate to watch over the movement. He was Patriarchal Delegate NOT for Torok's consecration but for the development of a possible Czechoslovak Orthodox Church.

Gorazd

There were only Czechs, no Slovaks, in this new Church. Three men were elected bishops, one of them Gorazd. Although a strong Protestant tendency was making itself felt in the Czechoslovak Church, the Serbian Orthodox consecrated Gorazd. The new church, however, elected Dr. Karl Farski, not Gorazd, to be its Patriarch. Farski and the third bishop were no longer interested in Orthodox consecration, nevertheless, Gorazd remained a member in and a bishop of this church, subordinate to the Patriarch Farski. Soon Gorazd's clergy forsook him and were reordained by the Orthodox Archbishop of Prague, Savatty. Gorazd then resigned from the Czechoslovak Church. He had never been a member of the Serbian Church nor did he now become a member. He was a stranded bishop. As such he took part in the consecration of John Torok. The Serbian Bishops in Synod assembled, drew up a resolution advising him to submit to Archbishop Savatty of Prague, representing the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Gorazd refused. About a year after Torok's elevation to the episcopate the government permitted Gorazd to form a church in Olomuc and thereafter the Serbian Church recognized Gorazd as a missionary bishop under its jurisdiction, but without a vote or seat in the Serbian House of Bishops. That is his position today.

Bishop Nicolai Velimirovich desired to have Dositej disciplined. As any enquiry would have resulted automatically in deposition of a beloved bishop, the matter was squashed.

But the Serbian Patriarch was highly indignant over the whole affair.

The new Bishop John Torok now betook himself to Prague to secure, if possible, recognition by the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch, namely Archbishop Savatty. Savatty refused.

In January 1925, shortly after I began my work as Assistant Secretary in the Foreign-born Americans Division, Dr. Torok appeared in the office of the Division, announced the fact of his consecration and declared that he desired recognition by the Protestant Episcopal Church. Dr. Emhardt informed him that that was impossible; that the consecration was a grievous error. Bishop Torok began to indulge in vague threats (quite characteristic of the man, as I have come to learn), especially that the Serbian Minister in Washington would protest to the Presiding Bishop and "other influential Epsicopaliens". Asked to show letters from the Serbian Patriarch, he was unable to do so. Finally Drs. Emhardt and Burgess left the office, and I was alone with Torok. I advised him to gather at least ten bona fide congregations with priests who desired him as their bishop and then approach the Episcopal Church. This he never did. He officiated and preached ONCE in Father Yuhas' church, but the congregation would not accept a bishop who could not preach in their language, - I have this on the authority of Yuhas himself. He tried to interest the independent Slovaks, but they cared neither for Torok nor for Gorazd.

Nothing was known of Torok by the officers of the Foreign-born Americans Division from that time (January 1925) until late in 1930. There were occasional rumors, that he had married, that he had for a short time been vice-president of the Chicago Evening Post (then a bankrupt periodical owned by a relative of his wife), that he ^{had} made vast sums in real estate.

In January 1930 Father Michael Yuhas appeared in our office. His congregation, he said, was about to lose its property and would revert to Rome unless help were forthcoming. During the whole of 1930 he tried to gain Dr. Emhardt's sympathy, without success. This incident is of great importance in view of later claims made by Dr. Emhardt and Dr. Torok. At the time Yuhas was not associated with any other priests. He wanted to be under the guidance of the Episcopal Church. He was bitterly disappointed in Dr. Emhardt's lack of sympathetic interest. I wish to emphasize the significance of this.

Late in the year 1930 Dr. Emhardt and Dr Torok again met. From that date until Dr. Emhardt's resignation Torok monopolized Emhardt's time. Scheme after scheme was proposed to give Dr. Torok some standing as a bishop in connection with the Episcopal Church. One plan included a collection of non-descript Hungarian clergymen of various ecclesiastical bodies. Torok knew more about Emhardt's movements than the latter's secretary or I, his assistant. My Chief seemed to be reluctantly furthering Torok's plans and grew more and more secretive. It was difficult to get him to attend to other matters. It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of this signal devotion on the part of Dr. Emhardt. He tried hard to get the Serbian Patriarch, the Greek Archbishop Athengoras and others to ACCEPT TOROK'S RESIGNATION AS BISHOP. But these prelates were not to be tricked into acknowledging the validity of the consecration by such acceptance.

The first man whom Emhardt informed of his resignation was Torok. He telephoned the latter within five minutes. Only the next morning did I learn of it, - from Torok. I then also learned that Dr. Emhardt owed Torok "huge sums of money", but the lender was disposed to be magnanimous about this and forget it. Later it developed, according to Torok, that Emhardt had, ever since Torok's consecration, maintained an active interest in a Uniat group. Bereft of Emhardt's moral support and fearing that the Episcopal Church would not make good his promises, this group was about to make public the shoddy manner in which the Episcopal Church was treating them. (All of which is utter nonsense). Scandal threatened, and Torok offered his disinterested services to clear the matter. He asked nothing for himself, desiring only to help the Episcopal Church. But speed was of primary importance.

A curious fact emerged. The key-man of this vague Uniat group which Emhardt had been encouraging ever since 1925, the man through whom he had conducted his negotiations, is divulged as the former Administrator of the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Pittsburgh, Father Michael Yuhas, the same man who had unsuccessfully tried to gain Emhardt's interest throughout the year 1930. This gives the lie to the whole story.

And now it appeared, according to Torok, that the only way in which a 'dangerous situation' could be averted was, TO APPOINT TOROK BISHOP over this vague group which desired his leadership. Haste was necessary, he asserted. The individuals in the group were not all named by him to me. Of the seven names mentioned by him at least three were Orthodox, and ~~the~~ one had just been released from an institution for the feeble-minded.

Torok's plan of 1924 was succeeding at last, thanks to the fact that Dr. Emhardt was evidently under some strong obligation to him.

He invited the Russian Orthodox bishop Adam (who factually was Stephan's successor) to go with him to Eau Claire and be present at the election of a Suffragan Bishop. Bishop Adam refused. Torok suggested to him that together they might be bishops in this new movement.

On the very eve of General Convention an article appeared in the Living Church dealing with the consecration of Torok by Dositej and Gorazd. It is safe to say that those sentences in it which were not false were at least calculated to give the reader a false impression of the facts and of their significance. During General Convention generous publicity was given to the importance of Bishop Torok, - "five hundred thousand Uniats are looking toward our church". There are almost that many Uniats in America.

Despite these propagandist articles, the House of Bishops declined to confirm the election of a Suffragan for the Diocese of Eau Clair. Early in the following year there came to me a representative of a credit agency, asking for information concerning one John Torok, who in the early part of 1934 had been sued by a number of concerns for non-payment of bills; who had sworn that he had no assets, BUT WOULD BE ABLE TO SETTLE AFTER OCTOBER. That meant, after General Convention.

In conclusion be it noted, that the biographies of Dr. John Torok, drawn up by him for the Stowe's Clerical Directory and for Who's Who in America, do not harmonize. I brought this fact to the attention of Dr. Emhardt in 1933, especially the fact that certain statements were untrue.