

---METROPOLITAN FEOFIL (BULDOVSKY) OF KHARKIV---

Fyodor Ivanovich Buldovsky was born on August 5th 1865 in the village of Vasilyevka, Khorol region, Poltava province in the Russian Empire (modern day Ukraine). His father was an Archpriest at Kladovyshchenskaya Church in Poltava. He would enroll as a student in the Lubny Theological Academy and graduated on August 15th 1880. He would obtain a second doctorate from the Poltava Theological Academy in 1886 and after graduation he would become a school teacher in Vasilyevka.

Fyodor married a woman named Maria and had three sons and a daughter. His sons were Vitaly, an Army Officer, Oleksandr, a professor at a school in Poltava and Aleksei, who would become a priest and would serve at the St. Nicholas Church in the town of Mayachka in Kobelyatsky district. His daughter was named Elena and lived with her father most of her life.

In 1887 Bishop Ilarion (Yushenov) of Poltava and Pereyaslav would ordain him to the Priesthood and appoint him as the rector of the St. Nicholas Church in the village of Mayachok in the Kobelyatsky district. He proved himself to be an active pastor, having built two parish schools in Mayachok, establishing a lay brotherhood, a Church library, a cultural center and a teahouse during his ministry.

In 1900 he would serve as the second priest at the Poltava Memorial Church of All Saints while also teaching the Law of God at the Poltava Diocesan school and the Kobzychensky Zemstvo primary school. In May 1908 he would be appointed a Diocesan officer for Makarievsky and join the lay brotherhood of Makarievsky.

For his work in Makarievsky Fr. Fyodor would be awarded the Order of St. Anna in the third degree in May 1909. Throughout his ministry he was well known as a “Ukrainophile”, speaking in the common Ukrainian language rather than the “High Russian” in his sermons and campaigning for more autonomy within the Ukrainian Exarchate.

In 1910 his wife Maria fell asleep in the Lord, shortly thereafter he would be tonsured a monk with the name Feofil after St. Theophilus of Antioch. Between May 3rd and 6th 1917 Fr. Feofil would attend the Poltava Clergy Synaxis and deliver a report about how the Ukrainian Exarchate should be administered after the February Revolution. Fr. Feofil's report would be well received by Archbishop Parfeniy (Levitsky) of Poltava.

Archbishop Parfeniy would ask Fr. Feofil to become his secretary. The following year in 1918 at the All-Ukrainian Church Council in Kyiv he would be elected as a Church delegate to the Ukrainian People's Republic under the government of Ataman Pavlo Skoropadsky. At the same Council he would denounce the Renovationists and be placed as a permanent Diocesan officer in Poltava.

The time during the Civil War was very difficult for Fr. Feofil, one of his sons Vitaly had become an officer of the Sich Riflemen and was killed by the Bolsheviks in 1919. The shift of power within the Ukrainian People's Republic to the presidency of Symon Petilura would result in a restructuring of the government and Fr. Feofil's church delegate status being left vacant.

In 1920 Fr. Feofil was captured by the Red Army and sentenced to death. Fr Feofil would escape prison before he could be killed with the help of Cossacks under the command of Ataman Skoropadsky. During the events of the 1921 so-called "Kyiv People's Church Council" where the former priest Vasyl Lypkivsky created an illegal church structure, Fr. Feofil and Abp. Parfeniy would strongly condemn Lypkivsky and his followers.

While struggling against the Lypkivskites, in the autumn of 1921 Abp. Parfeniy would petition Archbishop Mikhail (Ermakov, who later signed the infamous "Declaration") to help him consecrate Fr. Feofil to the Episcopacy and appoint him as a Vicar Bishop to the Poltava Diocese; Abp. Mikhail refused to help Abp. Parfeniy consecrate Fr. Feofil due to personal grudges he had against him.

When Archbishop Parfeniy reposed on January 16th 1922 Fr. Feofil was saddened, having lost a man whom he considered a spiritual father. He continued to speak out against the Bolsheviks and the Lypkivskites and was arrested again by the Communists in 1922, but escaped prison with a group of other inmates. He was present at the Kyiv Clergy Conference on September 4th 1922 where his presentation was praised by Patriarch St. Tikhon.

On January 13th 1923 Feofil Buldovsky would be consecrated a Bishop by Vladyka Parfeniy's successor Archbishop Grigori (Lisovsky, later the founder of the sect known as the "Gregorians") of Poltava and his two Vicar Bishops, Bp. Pyotr (Kireyev) of Zolotonosha and Bishop Nikolai (Braylovsky) of Cherkasy and Chigrin in the Dormition Cathedral in Poltava. Vladyka Feofil would be another Vicar for the Poltava Diocese as the Bishop of Lubny and Mirgorod, which had

been left without a Bishop since the Revolution.

When Fr. Feofil arrived at the Dormition Cathedral in Poltava to be consecrated to the Episcopacy, he wore a tattered riassa and kamilavka. At first the guards outside the Cathedral turned him away, thinking he was an impoverished monk and not the Bishop-elect who was to be consecrated. After his consecration Vladyka Feofil became Abp. Grigori's secretary.

Bishop Feofil travelled to Moscow after his enthronement, but would not arrive until September of 1924. There in Moscow he met with Metropolitan Sergei (Stragorodsky, eponymous namesake of the heresy of Sergianism) and would discuss the need for an autonomous Ukrainian Church, a condemnation of the parasynagogues of the Lypkivskites and Renovationists and how to maintain canonical order during the persecutions of the Bolsheviks.

Met. Sergei agreed with Bishop Feofil on all matters except for granting autonomy to the Ukrainian Church and recommended Vladyka Feofil break communion with Abp. Grigori – who had since gone into schism from the Temporary Higher Church Authority led by Metropolitan (St.) Joseph of Petrograd – and commemorate him instead. Upon his return to Lubny in December 1924 Vladyka Feofil broke communion with Abp. Grigori.

On December 12th 1924 Met. Sergei elevated Vladyka Feofil to a ruling Bishop and bestow on him the rank of Archbishop, soon after they would consecrate the Archpriest Sergei Ivanitsky as the Bishop of Chernigov. Mikhail Ermakov, who became the Metropolitan of Kyiv and Galicia – succeeding Met. Antony (Khrapovitsky) – would not accept Vladyka Feofil as a ruling Bishop, secretly convening a Council against him.

Metropolitan Mikhail attempted to get the support of Patriarch (St.) Tikhon to condemn Abp. Feofil, who refused to make or accept any accusation against Archbishop Feofil. Thus Mikhail Ermakov decided to wait until Patriarch Tikhon's repose on March 25th 1925 before taking any action against Archbishop Feofil.

Without inviting Vladyka Feofil and gathering 13 “bishops” (many of whom had been ordained by the Gregorian schismatics or the Renovationists) a trial would only last for one session with no witnesses being brought forth. Mikhail Ermakov and his followers declared Abp. Feofil to be defrocked and excommunicated. Abp. Feofil and Bp. Sergei upon learning of this, refused to recognize the decision and

excommunicated Met. Mikhail and the other “bishops” for making an illegal assembly and causing a schism in the Church.

While trying to involve other Bishops to heal the schism, Abp. Feofil would write a letter to Met. Sergei, who promised he would condemn Met. Mikhail's actions. In January 1926 Met. Sergei would betray Abp. Feofil, condemning him and the “Lubny Sobor” as schismatics. Disheartened, Abp. Feofil would write to other Bishops, but by this point the persecution in Russia had meant most Bishops were imprisoned or killed, leaving the situation unresolved. One of the few Bishops who would write in support of Abp. Feofil was St. Damascene of Glukhov.

Archbishop Ioannikiy (Sokolovsky) – who was on trial for hiding Church vessels and funds from the Soviets – wrote a letter condemning Met. Mikhail and claimed his actions served the Soviet state in an attempt to divide the Church. Abp. Ioannikiy would declare his loyalty to Vladyka Feofil and become a sitting member of the Lubny Sobor.

Archbishop Feofil would receive Pavel Pogorilko – one of the “bishops” of the Lypkivskites – into his communion after hearing his Confession and correcting his orders. After a probationary period, Pavel would be consecrated to the Episcopacy. The cathedral seat of Lubny was the Mgarr Transfiguration Monastery, but since it had been closed by the Soviets, Abp. Feofil instead had his residence in a small summer house outside of Lubny, nor far from Mgarr.

Vladyka Feofil continued to serve and consecrated another Bishop with the help of Bishop Sergei of Chernigov, Bishop Sergei (Labutsnev) was appointed as a Vicar in Zolotonosha. In 1927 Sergei would send out his “Declaration” claiming the Orthodox Church had to be subservient to the god-fighting Bolshevik government. Archbishop Feofil and the Sobor wrote a letter in response, condemning the Declaration and calling Sergei to repentance.

The Lubny Sobor continued to struggle against the Lypkivskites, Renovationists, Gregorians and Sergianists, ordaining several new priests for existing parishes in Polish-occupied and Soviet-occupied Ukraine as well as establishing new parishes. There would be over 200 parishes that commemorated Abp. Feofil throughout Ukraine by August 1927.

As a result of condemning Sergianism, the OGPU would order the arrest of Vladyka Feofil and all of his clergy in Soviet Ukraine. Pavel Pogorilko and

Ioannikiy Sokolovsky would be intimidated into joining the Sergianists, Sergei of Zolotonosha would end up renouncing the Faith completely.

By the end of 1927 Archbishop Feofil convened a secret meeting of the Sobor in Lubny, where he convinced the remaining Bishops Sergei (Ivanitsky) and Vladyka Iosif to ordain more clergy, but by early 1928 Sergei Ivanitsky would join the Sergianists. The persecution of the Soviet authorities against Archbishop Feofil in Ukraine was severe, with the operations of the OGPU reducing the number of parishes to only two dozen by 1929. By 1930 Archbishop Feofil and Vladyka Iosif – who were already in hiding – decided to dissolve the Lubny Sobor and act according to Ukaz № 362, becoming Catacomb churchmen.

During this time in the 1930s not much is known about Archbishop Feofil's activities; in 1937 he would move to Luhansk to serve Catacomb Christians there. His son Fr. Aleksei would be arrested on August 2nd and executed by firing squad on September 15th 1937 in Kharkiv for belonging to a “counter-revolutionary organization”. His son Oleksandr was arrested on August 28th 1937 and killed by firing squad in Vladivostok on August 21st 1938 for “anti-Soviet behavior.”

In 1939 the Catacomb churches in Luhansk were discovered and dismantled by the Soviet authorities, however they failed to capture Archbishop Feofil. By the end of 1940 Archbishop Feofil had no churches to serve, moving to Kharkiv and serving the Divine Liturgy secretly with only one or two faithful present and under constant fear of the Bolsheviks.

With the outbreak of the Second World War and the German invasion of the Soviet Union the Germans would capture Kharkiv in October 1941. Abp. Feofil in late September would enter communion with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and be elevated to the dignity of Metropolitan of Kharkiv and be placed as administrator of the churches in Poltava, Sumy, Voronezh and Kursk.

His first action as the Metropolitan of Kharkiv would be serving a panikhida for Patriarch St. Tikhon and giving a lecture about the Sergianists and warning the faithful to avoid Alexey Gromadsky, who was placed by the Sergianist church as the Exarch of Ukraine.

In November 1941 members of the German Gestapo visited Metropolitan Feofil along with the Diocesan officers of Kharkiv and demanded that Vladyka Feofil support the political positions of the Nazi Party, work for German interests in the

Church, condemn the Soviet church structures, commemorate Adolf Hitler and the German Army in the Liturgy, to give five percent of all Church funds to the German government, for the clergy to report anyone who spoke against the Germans – even in Confession – and to not baptize Jews.

Vladyka Feofil agreed to condemn the Soviet church structures, pray only for the victory of the German Army and to not actively go against the German government, but refused to fulfill all the other demands. The Gestapo attempted to arrest Metropolitan Feofil, especially after he converted several Jews to the Orthodox Faith, but he avoided arrest due to the efforts of General Petro Dyachenko.

After months of trying to arrest Metropolitan Feofil, in January 1942 the Gestapo would write in their records that he was no longer a threat and did not need to fulfill their demands. That same month Vladyka Feofil blessed members of the Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurgent Army (also called the Poliska Sich) led by Ataman Taras Bulba-Borovets who were fighting against the Bolsheviks.

On May 14th 1942 Archbishop Nikanor (Abramovych), Archbishop Oleksandr (Inozemtsev) and Bishop Igor (Guba) would consecrate Mstyslav (Skrypnyk) to the Episcopacy and enthrone him as the Bishop of Pereyaslav in the cathedral of St. Andrew the First-Called in Kyiv. Metropolitan Feofil would be the first to send a congratulatory letter to Bishop Mstyslav – a Poltava native – and shortly thereafter the two became close friends.

In a personal letter to Bishop Mstyslav dated July 14th 1942 Metropolitan Feofil wrote: “God by His providence has been pleased to save me from death at the hands of the Bolsheviks, but they would take my sons to unknown places. My oldest Vitaly, during the Civil War, my second Oleksandr – a professor in Poltava – to Vladivostok where he has been missing since 1937. My third, the Archpriest Aleksei, was also taken from Kharkiv the same year and is still missing... I pray God may unite us in this life or the next.”

Metropolitan Feofil would not know the fate of his two younger sons during his earthly life. He would give much advice and instruction to Bishop Mstyslav, who considered him a mentor; Metropolitan Feofil invited Bishop Mstyslav to Kharkiv many times until Vladyka Mstyslav's arrest by the Gestapo in August 1942.

At a meeting on July 27th 1942 with Bishop Mstyslav of Pereyaslav and the

Archpriest Fr. Aleksei Potulinitzky, it was discussed how to organize the Kharkiv Metropolis and the reports written by Fr. Aleksei recorded: "...we recognize the parishes subordinate to His Eminence Feofil in the territories of Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy and Kursk to be an integral part of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church under our First Hierarch Polikarp (Sikorsky)."

Sometime in the summer of 1942 Metropolitan Feofil would establish contact with Metropolitan Serafim (Lyade) of Berlin, the ROCOR Bishop over Europe. The two became close friends and through the cooperation of Abp. Oleksandr and Vladyka Feofil, Metropolitan Serafim and the ROCOR considered the UAOC to be canonically regular and allowed concelebration between their clergy during the war years.

In the fall of 1942 he visited Slovakia and Hungary, being given an audience with the President of Slovakia Jozef Tiso. When Tiso – who was also a Roman Catholic priest – wished to pray together before a meal; Metropolitan Feofil walked out of the room and refused to eat anything that had been blessed by him.

In Hungary Metropolitan Feofil ordained a Hungarian man surnamed Shad to the priesthood. Shad invited Metropolitan Feofil to Budapest to help consecrate a Bishop for the country with the trip being planned for March-April 1943, but this was cancelled due to the Soviets capturing the city of Kharkiv.

Between the 1st and 8th of December 1942 he was present at the Sobor in Lutsk for the elevation of Archbishop Polikarp (Sikorsky) to the rank of Metropolitan and proposed a resolution to the Sobor that no clergy from the Lypkivskites be accepted without a correction of orders. Metropolitan Polikarp would give Metropolitan Feofil temporary administration of the churches in Crimea during this Sobor meeting.

Vladyka Feofil's ministry in Kharkiv during the war would be very difficult; constant bombing raids by the Soviets and Partisan attacks – along with the German reprisals to them – would leave the city in ruins and the population in fear. Vladyka Feofil would serve without any fear of death, even as bombing raids occurred while he was serving the Liturgy he would not attempt to hide or show any effort to protect himself from harm, trusting completely in the will of God.

Vladyka Feofil personally visited the sick and infirm, gave bread to the hungry during famines and alms to those who lost everything. On the first day the Soviets

recaptured territory within the city of Kharkiv on February 19th 1943, Soviet soldiers occupied the Bishop's residence in the city and took Metropolitan Feofil as a hostage.

Despite Metropolitan Feofil being an enemy of the Bolsheviks and wanted by the Soviet authorities, he showed great hospitality to the Soviet servicemen, offering them tea and bread. The soldiers were confused by these actions, knowing that he was considered a “traitor” by the Soviet state and would ask Metropolitan Feofil about his life, which he told in detail. The officer of this group – a hardened atheist – had pangs of conscience and decided not to report Metropolitan Feofil's whereabouts to the Soviet army command, leaving him in peace temporarily.

Metropolitan Feofil continued to serve peacefully until August 1943 when the Soviets fully captured the city from the Germans. The Moscow Patriarchate Exarch in Ukraine Mikhail Yarushevich shortly after the capture of the city sent an ultimatum to Metropolitan Feofil; that he must sign a document condemning the German government and commemorate Sergei Stragorodsky as Patriarch. Vladyka Feofil would agree to condemn the German government – as he had personally witnessed several atrocities committed by their forces – but refused to commemorate Sergei.

Vladyka Feofil requested Mikhail to give him time to write a letter to Sergei, which would delay his arrest for a few months. He would receive another ultimatum on November 9th 1943 which prompted him to write a letter to Sergei Stragorodsky the following day on November 10th stating:

“I send my greetings as a friend. I had heard about thy appointment as Patriarch from various clergy and from the telegram that was sent out... I wished to send an explanatory letter but; there was a delay... Nevertheless any past wrongs between us I forget, for I do not wish there to be any bitterness between us for any mistakes I may have made... I cannot set my case on paper by law, which thou brother, know... I am a 78 year old man, halfway dead as is from illness. I cannot come to Moscow so I ask for thee to be a mediator with His Eminence (Mikhail). I hope to ask this as a friend:

As for the request to join the Patriarchate, I already mentioned my advanced age and illness. I only have two companions, not counting the supervisors the Soviets have placed over me. My daughter also lives with me and cares for my health. If I wish to join the Patriarchate, thou will know... Otherwise I ask to be granted a

peaceful repose.”

As a result of this letter the NKVD arrested Metropolitan Feofil on November 12th charging him with collaboration with the German forces and being part of an “illegal counter-revolutionary Church organization.” In court he argued that even by Soviet law there was a guaranteed freedom of religion and that he had almost been arrested by the Germans because he refused to collaborate with them.

He was found guilty by the Soviet court and placed in a makeshift prison camp in Ukraine, being deprived of the most basic of needs and enduring severe torture by the Soviets. He asked several times to be brought to Moscow to stand trial there before the Supreme Court, but soon he was deprived of his right to appeal or have meetings with lawyers.

While in prison he was offered to join the Moscow Patriarchate several times by priests and bishops of the MP with the promise he would be released if he did; each time this offer was proposed, Vladyka Feofil refused to join the MP. It was recorded by the NKVD that he reposed on January 23rd 1944 but how he was killed, where he was killed and where he is buried was not recorded; as of today his place of burial is still unknown.