

Vasili Popel (1908-1982)



Profession: Greek-Catholic priest, accountant

1908: Born on February 12th in Boryslaw

1922-1929: Attending the grammar school in Drohobycz

1930: Greek-Catholic theological seminary in Przemyśl; after graduation several years of priestly service. After an accident (disability in the right hand) he can no longer practice as a priest

1941-44: The Popel family repeatedly helps and hides their Jewish neighboring family Lippman. Vasili feels encouraged by the pastoral letter of the Lviv

Metropolitan Sheptytskyi "Thou shalt not kill".

1946: Repressions against the Russian Orthodox Church are eased in return for its commitment to "homeland and fatherland" in the war. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (Uniate Church), on the other hand, is dissolved, all bishops are arrested, the church is forced into illegality.

1947: The Soviet authorities demand that he converts to the Russian Orthodox Church. Vasili Popel refuses. He is then sentenced to 25 years in the Gulag. Under inhuman conditions, he is forced to cut down trees in Kolyma

1953: Nach Stalins Tod wird er infolge einer Amnestie wieder freigelassen, darf aber nicht heimkehren. Er arbeitet noch drei Jahre in Kasachstan.

1957: Return to Boryslav. Vasili remains unemployed for a long time; he makes ends meet with casual work, e.g. as an accountant

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The historian Snyder notes that mainly churches that were far from the state before the war, such as Baptists and the Greek Catholic Church, saved Jews:

»Andrei Sheptyts'kyi was the only Christian churchman of such high rank to act decisively against the mass murder of Jews. He had initially welcomed the German invasion as a liberation from Soviet rule ... Without ever changing his opinion about the evil of the Soviet regime, he quickly came to believe that Nazi occupation was worse. Aside from his labor of rescue ... he protested to Himmler, protested to Hitler, and asked the pope to intervene to protect Jews. He told Pius XII that Jews were "the first victims" of German rule and that National Socialism meant "hatred of everything that is honorable and beautiful." He issued pastoral letters reminding his flock of the divine commandment not to murder.« (Timothy Snyder, Black Earth, p. 265f.)

Sources: Yad Vashem Righteous database, M.31.2/9968/1; Prokschl, „Glaube und herrsche“, Zeit.de/Zeit-Geschichte, 2015/03; Kappeler, Geschichte der Ukraine; Snyder, Black Earth