

The Wind from the East: The Life and Work of The Right Reverend Professor Petro Borys Tereshkovych Bilaniuk

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Childhood and Education

Petro Borys Tereshkovych Bilaniuk was born in Zalishchyky, a small but fashionable resort town on the banks of the Dnister, a winding river in Galicia (Western Ukraine) on August 4, 1932. He was baptized and chrismated in the same town in the parish church which had been built by his grandfather Fedir.

On both sides, his immediate forbearers were patriotic and traditionalist Ukrainian peasants and cossacks, very honest, profoundly religious, and highly respected by friend and foe. In 1814, his great-great-grandfather had come from the Khreshchatyk district of Kyiv (Kiev) and founded a village and an Orthodox monastery, both called „Khreshchatyk“, on the Dnister river on the bank opposite Zalishchyky. His son, Petro Moroz, was known to all as „the Devout“, for twice he had visited all the places in the Holy Land on foot — especially Jerusalem; and after that he had gone as a pilgrim on foot to Rome to venerate the Apostles, Saints Peter and Paul. This was done in an ecumenical spirit, for Petro Moroz was Orthodox and not a Greek-Catholic. His daughter Anastasia (grandmother of Petro Bilaniuk) was a mystic immersed in constant prayer and meditation. She married Fedir Romanko, who became the mayor of Zalishchyky and a reeve of the adjacent countryside. For his long and outstanding service, His Imperial Majesty Franz Joseph von Habsburg decorated Fedir with a gold medal at the Imperial Palace in Vienna. He was also granted the rare privilege of an imperial salary payable in gold.

Anastasia and Fedir Romanko were the parents of Stefan and Paraskevia, Petro's mother. Paraskevia became an accomplished stage artist in dramatic and tragic roles. She also accomplished in Ukrainian embroideries, national costumes, ancient customs, and ritual dances. Her embroideries received international recognition at expositions in Lublin, Stuttgart, Ludwigsburg and Toronto. At times during Petro's childhood, he stayed with his uncle Stefan and his wife Lina. They were both teachers, and they expected a good quality of Ukrainian language from their little nephew. At this time, Petro knew his cousins Ihor and Yurko, who eventually died in battle in the ranks of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Uncle Stefan Romanko was, at this time, the head of a relief committee for the Soviet prisoners of war in a camp in the vicinity of Lubartów; and he took his nephew Petro on several relief trips to the camps. Young Petro saw too much hunger, death and brutality.

On the paternal side, Petro B.T. Bilaniuk stems from an ancient family of margraves (corresponding in rank to British marquesses or marquises) whose