

ELKO

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ROMAN CATHOLICS

Bishop in Exile

Except for such compelling reasons as scandal, heresy or outright incompetence, a Roman Catholic bishop is almost never separated from his see. For the past seven months, however, the Most Rev. Nicholas T. Elko, Ruthenian-rite bishop of Pittsburgh, has been in Rome, barred by his church superiors from returning to his diocese. The case of Bishop Elko, who describes his situation as "exile," casts fascinating

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ELKO (HOLDING A CIBORIUM) IN 1964 PROCESSION
Few hopes for quick parole.

light on Catholicism's current internal stresses—and on the problems of its little-known Eastern-rite churches.

The Ruthenian rite is one of 17 semi-autonomous branches of Catholicism that acknowledge the Pope as head of the church but have their own non-Latin customs and liturgies. Ruthenian Catholics, for example, use a Byzantine liturgy identical to that followed by Eastern Orthodox Christians who are not in union with Rome, and which is traditionally celebrated in Hungarian, Greek or Old Slavonic. In the U.S., there are about 600,000 Eastern-rite Catholics. For many of them, their church is a God-given way of maintaining nostalgic ties with their homelands in Eastern Europe and Russia. But their peculiar ways of worship, puzzling and mysterious to most Latin-rite Catholics, can also instill a parochial insularism and fan the flames of best-forgotten feudal quarrels. Except for language and a few special artifacts, the Ruthenians and the Ukrainian-rite Catholics have an almost identical liturgy, but, says one

Ruthenian priest, "no self-respecting Ruthenian would have a Ukrainian in his house."

Bricks & Mortar. One of two Ruthenian bishops in the U.S., Elko for twelve years has been the spiritual leader of 220,000 souls in 120 scattered parishes from Pittsburgh to Alaska. The first American-born priest ever to become a Ruthenian prelate, Elko was in many respects a typical U.S. bishop: a blunt, tough, brick-and-mortar administrator who built 93 new churches and schools for his diocese. Nonetheless, his no-nonsense ways managed to offend both liberals and conservatives in his far-flung see.

Elko alienated Ruthenian traditionalists by requesting that priests also use English in the liturgy. Although Byzantine churches traditionally adopt the language of their native country, many conservatives in his diocese indignantly protested the holding of services in English as well as in European tongues. The bishop likewise alienated conservatives by removing the iconostasis, or screen, which separates the altar from the faithful in Oriental churches, and by shortening Easter services from 4½ to 3½ hours. Elko's firm administrative

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methods caused further complaint; diocesan clergy accused him of being a ruthless autocrat, who was averse to discussing problems with priests. Although Ruthenians outside the U.S. are permitted to ordain married men as priests, Elko ignored clerics' complaints and stuck to the letter of a papal decree imposing celibacy on American Ruthenian priests.

Suppressed Pastoral. Complaints about Elko began to roll in to Apostolic Delegate Egidio Vagnozzi (TIME, July 14), who recommended that the bishop be called to Rome for a discussion of the problems. Once in Rome, Elko was forbidden to communicate with his parishioners; his traditional pastoral letter for Easter Sunday was suppressed. This month, in a statement that in effect probated the bishop's spiritual estate, Rome announced that Elko's vicar-general, Msgr. Edward Rosack, had been appointed administrator of the diocese; Elko remains bishop in title, with no ecclesiastical powers.

In his own defense, Elko insists that he has done nothing that was not in conformity with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the sense of papal directives. Distressed over the dissension in his diocese, he hopes eventually to return to Pittsburgh. But the tone of a recent letter to a friend is that of a prisoner with no expectation of immediate parole. "Excuse the typing," he wrote. "In the past, I have had the good fortune to have others do my typing. Now, however, in this exile I have become accustomed to doing things as best I can alone under the circumstances that surround me."

