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## AN IMPORTANT TASK

OF ALL THE DEVASTATIONS wrought by the invader on Poland, the most painful and perhaps the most difficult to rectify are those which have affected the religious life of our nation. According to rather accurate data, perhaps even over-optimistic because they refer to the position as it was about the middle of last year, 30% of the Catholic clergy in Poland have died in the course of the first three years of the war. These priests were murdered or died a slow death in concentration camps and prisons both in Germany and Poland, or else they died from the hardships of an exile's life after they were ejected from their parishes. The depletion of the ranks of the monks and nuns is probably no less than in the secular clergy.

These data refer to the numbers of the Polish clergy in August 1939. The losses described above have particularly affected the dioceses in western Poland, that is to say the metropolitan see of Gniezno and Poznan and parts of the arch-dioceses of Cracow and Warsaw and even Wilno (the Diocese of Lomza), i.e. the areas incorporated into the Reich, inhabited by over 9,000,000 Polish Catholics. One of the most affected was the Diocese of Chelmno, which covered this part of the historical territory of Polish Pomerania, which was returned to Poland by the Treaty of Versailles; of its numerous and so patriotic clergy only a few priests remained alive by the summer of last year.

Things are comparatively better in Greater Poland, in so far that there are far more priests left there than in Chelmno. This does not mean that they are to be allowed to exercise their spiritual duties. Throughout the incorporated Polish area the spiritual needs of the Polish Catholic population cannot be taken by Polish priests. As a rule it may be said that only a part of the clergy of the Arch-Diocese of Gniezno and Poznan has been left alive, and even this part, small as it is, is constantly being reduced.

But even these facts, dismal as they are, do not give a complete picture of the devastation in religious life in Poland. Here one should add the losses sustained by the Church owing to the fact that since the beginning of the war no new priests have been educated or ordained. The education of new priests was brutally stopped at once in the territories annexed to the Reich, while for some time it was permitted in central Poland, in the so-called General Government, in its boundaries prior to the outbreak of the German-Soviet war. But now for the second year the work of the few seminaries remaining there has been made impossible. The situation of the Catholic Church in Poland at the present time can be summed up as follows:

About one-third of the pre-war clergy are no longer alive, and no new priests are being ordained, and their flow has completely stopped.

It is obvious that these facts will burden the Catholic clergy in restored Poland with new and heavy tasks, and Polish Catholics, whose religious feeling has been greatly deepened according to all reports from Poland, will have to face them too.

We all believe that Poland will be greater than before the war, and that it will comprise all the lands inhabited by large numbers of Poles. Thus the historic Diocese of Ermland will return to Poland, and with it a hundred thousand Polish Catholics of Ermland and the Lower Vistula valley; similarly, the fairly large group of Polish Catholics from the Free City of Danzig will also be re-united to Poland; and so will the parts of the Diocese of Chelmno and Arch-Diocese of Gniezno and Poznan, which were separated by the Treaty of Versailles; and above all the purely Polish part of the Arch-Diocese of Breslau, in which there were almost 700,000 Polish

## "WITH GOD'S HELP"

LET US VISUALIZE THIS YEAR OF our Lord 1943 as it would have been without the war. . . . The fourth centenary of Copernicus's death — and of the first edition of *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* would have been celebrated by

But that would have been only a part of the homage paid to the brilliant son of Torun. His native town — Torun — and the city where he was undergraduate — Cracow — as well as the capital of his country — Warsaw — would organize

in the domain of science, just as Kochanowski was its greatest poet and Skarga the greatest political and religious writer. It was a time when a Hohenzollern swore fealty to the king of Poland on his bended knees, in the Market Square of Cracow; it was the time of the victories of Ostrogski at Orsza and of Tarnowski at Obertyn. No wonder that the name of Copernicus, who solemnly charged the Teutonic Knights at the royal court of Cracow, who endeavoured to help the royal exchequer by writing the economic work "On the best manner of minting money," rings in Polish ears with a rich and full tone, like that of the great bell of Zygmunt, which was then cast for the Wawel cathedral of Cracow.

Afterwards, when the changeful fortunes of history wiped Poland off the map of Europe, the name of Copernicus remained deeply engraved in the mind of the nation. The time of the Partitions of Poland was the period of triumphant rationalism. It was the end of the eighteenth century, an era of optimism and faith in enlightenment, justice and happiness derived from a rule of pure Reason. It seems only natural, then, that in that age of rationalism the countrymen of Copernicus derived hope from the fact that a Pole had been a forerunner of scientific progress. The generation which started its work for the liberation of Poland by establishing a Society of Science, erected in Warsaw a statue with the inscription "Nicholas Copernicus — from his countrymen." The famous speech of Casimir Brodzinski on the subject of Polish nationality was based on the idea that Poland was a "moral Copernicus" — that is the discoverer of new ethical truth. At the same time Ludwik Osinski, in his "Ode to Copernicus," derided the "passing power of man," and declared:

*The world is changeful  
Forgetfulness engulfs its works;  
But thy glory, Copernicus — and ours  
Will survive time itself.*

Such was the part played by Copernicus in enriching the national life of Poland. But his discovery had also a profound influence in the religious sphere.

☆

"With God's Help" ("Bok pomagaj" — in old Polish orthography) was the motto written by Copernicus's hand in 1505 on the copy of *Calendarium Magistri Joanni de Monte Regio*, which he used in his work and which is now kept in the university library of Uppsala. In the original preface to the *De Revolutionibus* he expressed the hope that the knowledge proclaimed by him would "encourage virtue and fill hearts with admiration for the Maker of the universe, who is the Fount of all Good and all Happiness. . . ."



The Copernicus Monument in Warsaw.

On the back page: Copernicus, painted by Jan Matejko.

the world of science and by the whole of Poland as it deserves to be.

There would have been — of course — international congresses of astronomers, mathematicians, economists and other men of science, discussing the latest achievements of those many branches of learning in which the genius of Copernicus left its mark. The Polish Academy of Science would have published monumental monographies, perhaps a new annotated edition of his works. Every university and every learned society would have a contribution to make.

Silesians, who always remained faithful to Poland and the Church.

We believe that these people will be restored to their country in whose bosom their national and religious needs will be properly satisfied; but unfortunately these people will return to Poland without native spiritual leaders of whom they were mostly deprived. Indeed one could almost count on one's fingers the number of those Polish priests who shared the fate of the Polish people under the German yoke during the last twenty years. Those who did belong almost exclusively to the older generation, which was decimated by natural death even before the war; thus such high-minded and experienced leaders of the Polish people there as Father Domanski, Father Osinski, and Father Wajda, died before the war, and I cannot say whether any of the remaining are still alive. . . .

So the needs that the Polish Catholic clergy will have to care for after the war will be very great. They will be very great on the pre-war territory of the

great meetings and popular pageants to acquaint the widest public with the work of the great scholar. Shop windows would have been filled with his portraits. The Post Office would have produced commemorative stamps. Theatres would have staged plays about the life of Copernicus and there would have been exhibitions of objects associated with his life.

The Copernicus anniversary has a particularly profound significance for Poland. It recalls not merely a man, but an era, the golden age of Polish history. Copernicus was its greatest representative

Republic, and even greater in the newly recovered territory.

Thus every Pole who seriously considers all the manifold problems of the organization of our national life after the war must ask himself the question: what shall we do in order to fill the gaps in the ranks of our clergy, if only partly?

All the planning and other preparatory work for post-war reconstruction made both by our official and private bodies, have so far ignored this question completely. Other problems are dealt with, better or worse, on the whole I think to an extent insufficient for future needs, but something is being done at any rate. But with regard to this matter nothing is done, absolutely nothing.

I do not wish to discuss here and now who is responsible for that. I only want to stress the problem and call the attention of the public to it. I was spurred to do this by news which I have recently received from a friend of mine, an American Pole. This prominent social worker, ever so watchful of any attempts to

destroy the national life of the Polish immigrant, wrote to me sadly, though he is perhaps himself rather tinged with anti-clericalism, that the unavoidable liquidation of the only Polish Seminary in Orchard Lake, U.S.A., would be a dire blow for the national life of the American Pole. This worthy institution, founded by a great patriot, the late Father Joseph Dombrowski, is being closed not for financial reasons, which happens only too often. It dies, so to speak, a natural death, simply because it has no more candidates for priesthood. In September 1942 there were only fourteen students there on the last three years of the course of Theology, and no one applied for the preliminary course.

This is not the place for explaining this sad state of affairs, the source of which lies in the peculiar policy of the Catholic American Bishops, mostly recruited from Irish Americans. But no matter how we shall appraise this policy, and what we shall decide to do in this matter, we cannot remain passive and

God did help Copernicus in his task, for that modest canon of Warmia did perhaps more to clarify the religious ideas of his epoch than the most eminent theologians of the time.

It had seemed at first that his influence might be dangerous and destructive: his work was even placed for a time on the "Index of Forbidden Books." But the words of Cardinal Newman were never proved more true than in his case: "If anything seems to be proved by astronomer, or geologist, or chronologist, or antiquarian, or ethnologist, in contradiction to the dogmas of faith, that point will eventually turn out, first, not to be proved, or, secondly, not contradictory, or, thirdly, not contradictory to anything really revealed, but to something which has been confused with Revelation."<sup>1</sup>

The picture of the Universe presented by modern science, although it is difficult to visualize and full of mysteries, is in closer accordance with our religious belief than were the scientific theories of half a century ago. The Universe — as we conceive it now — is no longer eternal and therefore it is no longer impossible to think of its beginning and end. Over and above the structure of the created world we find room for the idea of a Creator, while religious dogma is no longer something contradicting current notions of science, but rather something only outside their scope.

There is, however, one development of scientific knowledge which has changed the current conceptions of Christianity since the times of Copernicus. In the Ptolemaic system, of which the earth was the centre, it was perfectly natural to see the greatest event in the history of the Universe occurring just on our planet. It was clear that the Incarnation could only have occurred at this point, the nucleus of the Universe.

But today, when the earth is proved to be an insignificant particle of matter amidst millions of other celestial bodies, the mystery of the Passion has become more inscrutable than ever. And in this contrast between the physical insignificance of our planet and the magnitude of the Divine act of Incarnation on this earth we perceive better than ever the immeasurable value attached by the Creator to the human soul.

"Strange are the ways of Thy mercy," wrote Sep-Szarzynski, the most eminent religious poet of Poland's Golden Age, wondering that the Maker "fulfilling all Power and all Happiness within Himself" requests human prayers. The human mind will never be able to grasp these "strange ways," which the boldness of Copernicus's exploration made even more mysterious than ever and compelling to even greater faith and humbler worship.

<sup>1</sup> John Henry Newman: "Christianity and Scientific Investigation."

allow that at a time when our enemies have closed all the seminaries in Poland educating Polish priests, the only institution of this kind on free American soil should close its doors for the lack of candidates. If it is difficult for pupils of the Polish Seminary in Orchard Lake to get benefices in American dioceses, there should be no obstacle I think to prepare there clergymen for Poland from candidates who, provided that proper action is taken, could be found undoubtedly both among the older Polish immigrants and also, to some extent, among the present war refugees. The difficulties connected with this scheme, which are partly financial but mostly legal, are not insuperable. In the past we find a most interesting precedent: after the rising of 1863 Pope Pius IX founded a Polish Seminary in Rome.

Of all our unfulfilled tasks which should be fulfilled, this is one of the most important, and Polish Catholic opinion will certainly demand an account of those who are guilty of neglecting it.

