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LONGING
FOR UNITY

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ONE HALF OF POLAND

IN APRIL 1938 I WAS RETURNING from Rome where I attended the canonization of St. Andrew Bobola. Almost every seat was engaged in the direct carriage between Rome and Berlin. The passengers conversed in a variety of languages. It was only in Munich that our compartment emptied a bit, and when a German passenger left in the morning I had a whole bench to myself. Facing me there only remained one tall, slender and blonde girl, who was travelling from Rome, and who, as I had noticed, spoke fluently in French, Italian and German to her casual fellow passengers. With dawn, she took out a musical score from her bag and began to study it intently. Again she took off heaps of photographs and pictures of Rome and her art treasures, and seemed to enjoy them. I was reading a Polish book, the title of which was rather obvious. At last she broke the silence.

"Excuse me, please; may I ask in what language your book is written? I see from your dress that you are a Catholic priest, like those I saw in Italy, but I do not think you are Italian?..."

And thus began an unusually interesting chat which opened my eyes to problems of which I had not the faintest idea before. It appeared that my companion was a Swedish girl, and an opera singer in Helsinki, where she was returning after a three months' holiday in Italy. There, she came across the Catholic Church and Catholics for the first time in her life. Her sojourn among Catholics, and educated Catholics at that, destroyed many of her prejudices and, as she called them herself, "ridiculous ideas" which the Protestants of her native country seemed to have about Catholics. She was not content with talks alone, she began to read. She happened to put her hand on the works of a French Dominican Father Serpillanges, which obviously made a profound impression on her.

"If you ever meet Father Serpillanges, please thank him on behalf of a Swedish Protestant for his beautiful books. Oh, I shall remain a Protestant," she continued. "I love Luther too much. In Italy they attempted to convert me. A Jesuit in our boarding-house was wasting his time..."

Her further confessions were even more interesting.

"You mustn't think that only you Catholics have a monopoly of piety. Will you believe me that in our opera in Helsinki there is an association of actors, called the Society of the Holy Ghost, whose members pray that the unity of hearts and souls in Christendom should come through the intercession of the Holy Ghost?"

I told her that the Catholics were also fervently eager to achieve this unity, and praying for it. She did not know that the Anglican Church started an Octave of prayers for the unity of the faith, and that this initiative was followed by Catholics, including those in Poland, in the last few years. She also had not heard of the efforts of the late Cardinal Mercier and of the conferences in Malines started by him.

"Do you know what appeals to me most in your services? It is the Eucharist and your magnificent Liturgy, and also your worship of the saints... It is a beautiful thought that they are men who teach us not only in theory, but by their example, how to serve and love God. It is so nice to know that between the greatness of God and our nonentities there are intermediaries who give us courage and intercede for us. We shall learn this worship from you, just as you should learn from us to study the Holy Scriptures—this knowledge you lack so far." Unfortunately I had to admit that she was right, although I could point out that during the last few years the Holy Scriptures, and especially the New Testament, ceased to be a terra incognita for Catholics and that the Church strongly

HISTORICAL NATIONS WITH A tradition of many centuries have a sort of national instinct which shields them whenever they are threatened. The stronger the danger the stronger and more universal is the echo of this instinct. Figuratively, it may be said that

waver for a moment? No. We rejected these temptations at once, sternly and finally. And in consequence, we accepted the struggle against the invader in conditions which were hopeless from a military point of view, and tragic in their consequences.

In 1942, another danger to our national territory was revealed. This time, attempts to deprive us of the eastern half of our national territory was revealed. In this event again, the intuition of the Polish people has been manifest in each and every one, and again our public opinion has been absolutely united.

Of course, all of us must take the same interest in all the affairs of our country. It is only natural, however, that the people from Eastern Poland know this subject better than the Poles from other provinces. For this reason, on October 31st, 1942, a "Union of the North-Eastern Provinces of Poland" was founded in Edinburgh, the purposes of this association being to safeguard the future of this territory and its people. Now, a similar Union of South-Eastern Provinces is being formed. These two unions will work in close co-operation.

This question of our Eastern Provinces is a matter which is a real to be or not to be for Poland after this war.

In 1921, the Polish Republic settled the fate of its historic territories in the East by a compromise, of which the Treaty of Riga is the expression. Poland withdrew to frontiers which were then settled amicably by both sides, to frontiers which assured the minimum of our demands. If our country were to be deprived of any further Eastern territories, she would be incapable of having an independent existence in this part of Europe.

This Polish *raison d'etat* must consider the Treaty of Riga as final and indissoluble, and the frontiers drawn therein as stable and uncontrovertible—without these frontiers drawn there can be no truly independent Poland.

What, indeed, are these territories which are often wrongly called "Marchlands" and which some international elements would like to make the subject of bargaining and haggling?

These territories comprise 51 per cent of the area of the Republic. According to the census of 1931, 37 per cent of our population lives there. These territories comprise 40 per cent of the arable land, 63 per cent of the pastures and meadows, 57 per cent of the forests and more than one-half of the peat-bogs. In this eastern half, about 85 per cent of our oil-fields are to be found and 42 per cent of our water-power sources. Our crops of flax, hemp, tobacco, hops, apricots, peaches, vines, sunflowers, maize, and poppies, etc., are almost exclusively to be found there.

There also all the deposits of phosphorus, potassium, kaolin and granite, so far known in Poland, are found. These territories are also the most promising for stock-raising, and they are the biggest suppliers of butter, milk, meat, hides and bristles, etc.

Our agriculture and our agricultural industries, and also our textile and

leather industries would be maimed if deprived of the raw materials of Eastern Poland. The sources of power of a Poland deprived of oil, of the Carpathian water-power, of her lores and peat, would almost cease to exist. The growth of the automobile industry would become impossible.

But the most important consideration is that Poland, thus sliced from North to South, would be incapable of self-defence. Our territory would become so small that we would not be able to defend our independence for even the shortest space of time. It would even be short of man power after losing some 40 per cent of its population.

Forty per cent of the population of Eastern Poland is Polish, while the Russians form just 1 per cent, the Ukrainians 34.5 per cent, the White Ruthenians 14.13 per cent, and the Jews 8.7 per cent (1931).

Thus it is a territory of mixed nationalities, of which the Poles are the most important.

Two thirds of the Christian population of this country and 59 per cent of the total are Catholics of the Roman or Greek rite, and 29 per cent of the total belong to the Orthodox Church.

All the Slav population, whether Polish, Ukrainian or White Ruthenian, belongs to the same type of culture; for almost a thousand years they have been brought up within the orbit of Christian and Western civilization. Their life is based on private property, and this is particularly important for the farmers, as 80 per cent of the population of these lands are villagers. These farmers, whether Poles, Ukrainians or White Ruthenians, will never agree to any socialization of the land, and they are all strong individualists in this field of life, which is of most interest to them.

Christian culture in its Western form permeates the greater part of the inhabitants of these territories deeply. These people have also, irrespective of their religion or language, a deep sense of their own dignity, and they are deeply attached to personal freedom. They demand respect for the individual, confidence from the state and freedom for individual initiative in every domain of life. No totalitarianism or dictatorship can agree with the psychology of these people. If our frontiers were pushed back 300 kilometres to the west, this would mean a retreat of Europe to the same distance.

We may well ask, not only from a Polish but from a general point of view, why should the Russians, who represent only 1 per cent of the people of this territory, be entitled to impose on the remaining 99 per cent a legal, ethical, social, economic and political system deeply distasteful to them?

The fate of 13 million Europeans is in the balance.



Ostra Brama — the medieval gate in the city walls of Wilno. In this gate is the chapel of the famous miraculous image of Our Lady.

On the back page: A typical landscape from the Nowogródek district.

nations with an old culture have "the salt of statesmanship" in their blood.

Four generations of Poles have lived under foreign rule. But this is but a short time in the life of a nation. Thank God, the salt of statesmanship did not evaporate from our blood during this period. Whenever there are signs that our country is really in danger we are all united and ready to accept the challenge.

In 1939, Nazism wanted to use us as an instrument for dominating the world, and it would have lured us into a brotherhood in arms for the conquest of the East, with dazzling promises of dividing the spoils. Did our nation

In this case, too, the salt of statesmanship did not fail us. The Golgotha of our nation was a historical necessity. We could have avoided it only in one way, by throwing ourselves over a moral precipice. We would have destroyed the highest values of the Polish spirit had we allied ourselves with the power of Satan. Poland would have destroyed the very reason for her existence as the centre of the ethical values which gave our national life our proper meaning. We deplore the loss of our fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers. We deplore the sufferings of our nation, but we do not regret our decisions.

wished that the Word of God should nourish Catholic souls as it did centuries ago.

The train was entering Anhalt station. "Will you please promise me that you will pray the Holy Spirit for the unity of Christendom in faith, and I shall pray for it too in our own little circle," she said while saying goodbye.

A few weeks later I received a little packet from Helsinki: a book in French containing short reflections for everyday, written by some Protestant pastor. I repaid this by sending her "The History of a Soul," by St. Theresa of Lisieux.

A year later bombs fell first on Wloclawek, and later on Helsinki. . . .

Eastern elements from the days of the great Constantine, and of the Emperor Monomach of Byzance are blended so strangely with the western Gothic of the Crusaders. I passed the dark passage behind the Greek choir, and I approached the steep steps leading to Calvary. The usually closed doors to the Greek Sacristy stood open. At the end of this room a Greek priest with a grey beard and long hair tied under the characteristic headwear of the Eastern priests, sat behind a green baize table. He looked at me, and in his kind eyes the spirit of eternal life and communion with God, so rare among the Eastern Orthodox priests, was shining. He nodded to me, and when I approached he asked me whether I would like to see their treasures. He showed me many precious gifts of the Russian Czars and the princes of the Christian East, and even more valuable relics from more distant ages, and finally he asked me:

"I see you are a Catholic priest, but of what nationality?"

When I told him I was a Pole, he added: "A gallant nation, but the

majority of your people, aren't they Orthodox?"

"You are mistaken," I replied. "With few exceptions, the Poles are Catholics." He seemed to be somewhat taken aback, and saddened, but he added after a while:

"When shall we unite in faith at last? When will Christ's wish 'that they should be one' be fulfilled?"

I replied that on both sides we should first pray for unity of faith, and wish not for separation but for concord; that we should also learn to know each other, because in this way alone the unity of the Christians could be achieved, and this unity is indeed necessary in view of the attacks of the atheists and anti-Christians.

"So let us pray," he said, clasping my hand.

In September 1942 several members of the Anglican clergy visited the Polish Church in London. They were members of an association which has more than a

thousand adherents among the Anglican clergy. They live in celibacy and are completely dedicated to God and to the service of the souls under their care. They accept all the Catholic dogmas, they say the Mass, sometimes even in Latin, and they are separated from us only by the fact that they are not subjected to Peter and, as a result of the lack of apostolic succession, they are not properly ordained as priests. Before the war, a large pilgrimage of these clergy visited Rome, and they were received in audience by Pius XI. I must add that the members of these associations take a most serious view of their spiritual office, and that their true piety is really uplifting. Many of them have already found the proper road.

Of course it would be too early to see in these symptoms the signs of approaching unity of Christendom. But in any case there are ever more souls in which the Holy Ghost has awakened the longing for such unity. The post-war times, so different from former times, will find the ground prepared not only here and there, but "kat holen ten gen."

