

innumerable crowds of all classes gave expression to their faith. The 'Academic Vows,' renewed every last Sunday of May by the Youth of Poland were uniting them in faith and love of their ideal.

The first of September, 1939, has stopped suddenly that line of development, which was so full of hope. Amid the western territories of Poland incorporated into Reich is the diocese of Wloclawek, the actual state of which can be characterised by two words: *religio depopulata*. Of the 507 priests of the diocese at the outbreak of the war, the Germans have left only 14, if the reports from Poland are correct. And those 14 can say only a Low Mass on Sundays and Holidays of Obligation. In Wloclawek itself, where there were about 50 priests, none is left. The innocent blood of peaceful people has soaked the Polish soil—the blood of priests also—priests who can justly be called martyrs of the faith. *Sanguis martyrum*. . . .

MGR. KAROL RADONSKI,  
*Bishop of Wloclawek.*

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## THE POLISH DOMINICAN PROVINCE TO-DAY

THE Dominican map of Poland is a queer one. It is true that one can hardly find a town in Poland without a Dominican church and priory (the fathers numbered more than 2,000 and had about 200 houses at the first partition in 1772), but the churches do not belong now to the Order and the priories are being used as schools or prisons. For in the provinces occupied by Russia and Germany in 1772 and 1795, i.e. in 80% of the Polish territory, the religious life was proscribed and the monasteries confiscated. What we see now on the Dominican map is the result of this historical fact, combined with the striving of the new Polish Province to re-occupy its right place in Catholic life of the whole country.

So it happens that the bulk of the priories is situated in the south, in the former 'Galicia.' There the Dominicans had eleven out of their 16 houses which were flourishing in 1939—among them the venerable Monastery of Cracow, the great former 'studium generale' of Podkamien with about 300 cells, and the actual seat of the Provincial with its fine baroque church at Lwów. The other priories are small and unimportant relics of the time when the Austrian

Government allowed the religious orders to exist only on condition that they occupied themselves exclusively in plain parish work.

To the priories preserved from ancient Poland, the new Dominican Province has added four. One of these is the new and large house of studies at Warsaw, built in 1938. Another, finished in 1939, in the University town of Poznan, was also a chaplaincy and a students' home. A third one was re-occupied in the same year in Lublin, the seat of the Catholic University. And finally there is the small priory with a shrine to Our Lady at Gidle, the only Polish Dominican house outside the former Austrian occupation to have continued without interruption in Dominican hands. This was due to the perseverance of a single priest, who fought for it for more than forty years.

So much about the map. Those numerous priories were being not only held, but also increased in number by a very small body of fathers—no more than sixty in 1939. There were several reasons for the slow increase in number—the most weighty being that the Order was until recently the only one in Poland which did not receive anybody without a full university standard of education. Some people thought that the Order would die out in Poland when it was decided to leave the parishes and go to the universities. They were wrong: during the last years more and more novices, often men of culture, joined the Order of Preachers and Teachers.

From the monastic point of view there were two priories in Poland with full liturgy including sung mass every day—Cracow and Warsaw. The Liturgy is carried out at its best at Cracow, I believe. The huge pseudo-Gothic church is recent, from the second half of the XIXth century, and rather ugly—except for the splendid stalls in the choir. But the priory is a jewel. A good deal of the foundations dates from the XIIIth century, a substantial part of the cloister with good stained glass from the XIVth. Here too is one of the most striking Gothic refectories, about fifty feet high, with a great picture of the Crucifixion dating, I think, from the XVth century. The interesting thing about this priory is that the choral recitation of Divine Office begun in 1223 has been only once interrupted, namely in 1240, during the Tartar invasion. From this point of view, and also as containing the shrine of St. Hyacinth, Cracow is one of the most venerable priories of the Order. I am allowed to say that about eighteen months ago I received a letter from one of our fathers abroad who wrote me that 'in Cracow they are pretty well starving, but the choir has not been interrupted.'

The church is very large and generally packed with people. Several hundred people will assist every evening at Compline, and

during October it is not easy to find a seat for the Rosary and the sermon. One peculiarity of Cracow is its procession to the shrine of St. Hyacinth on Wednesdays after Compline, when the novices and fathers descend the high staircase of the shrine singing the Saint's anthem, *Ave flos*.

But Cracow is not the intellectual centre of the Province. A Dominican father lectures at the University (a philosopher) and the priory has a good, ancient library, but the fathers are mostly occupied in hearing confessions. Their church is, as a matter of fact, the centre for confessions in Cracow. I know of a father who never left the confessional from after his Mass until lunch at noon every day. As a general rule the great work of the Dominicans in Poland is still the Sacrament of Penance. I have myself heard confessions for fourteen hours without interruption, except for a short walk every two hours, from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m.—on a pilgrimage, of course. Those pilgrimages are a peculiar feature of the Polish religious life, and the Dominicans look after some of the important shrines to which the faithful flock in tens of thousands on every feast of Our Lady. Gidle, for example, situated near Czestochowa, is visited by something like 30,000 people a year. Podkamien on August 15th welcomes an average of 40,000 pilgrims. Such pilgrimages are a great experience both for the faithful and the priests. Some pilgrims walk in procession singing on their way, which is sometimes even hundreds of miles. The religious spirit is at its height, and one of the fathers' greatest experiences is to preach in a Dominican church overcrowded with pilgrims before a general Communion. I leave the imagination of the reader to reconstruct the scene during the distribution of Holy Communion to some 10,000 people.

Polish Catholic life has been only too often represented from this popular and rather idyllic side. This is however only one aspect of it. There is also the other side—a much sterner aspect of a continual and difficult fight for the soul of the intelligentsia, who, in Poland, as in nearly all Catholic countries, is sometimes far from being what good Catholics would like it to be. For the last twenty years the Order of St. Dominic has striven to re-occupy its rightful place in this fight. At one time reduced to an insignificant role as a body of little-known parish priests, the Polish Province in 1939, after only twenty years of freedom, had become a small but real spiritual power.

Here are some data which may give an idea of its importance at this time. The Polish Dominicans were editing three reviews in 1939. The popular 'Roza Duchowna' (Rosa Mystica) was selling

about 6,000 copies, as far as I remember; this however is not a large circulation as compared not only with the 'Knight of the Immaculate' (of which the Franciscan Fathers were printing above one million copies) but also with the average Polish popular religious papers. The other monthly 'Szkola Chrystusowa' (The School of Christ), founded in 1927, was, however, the only periodical of its kind in Poland, and it enjoyed an increasingly good repute for its high standard. It was edited for cultivated Catholics and was selling 2,500 copies. Lastly, in 1939, a scientific quarterly, 'The Polish Thomistic Review,' was started, beginning with a circulation of upwards of 600 copies.

Five of the Fathers were appointed professors or lecturers to the Polish Universities—two moralists, one dogmatic theologian, one Professor of scripture and one of philosophy. The University work of the Province was increasing. In 1939 the Chaplaincy of the Poznan University with about 3,000 students, was entrusted to them by Cardinal Hlond. They also directed two retreat houses frequented mostly by university students.

The effort made, especially during 1928-38, backed up by the splendid work of the French Dominican Fathers, was showing its first results. During the last years before the war the Dominican habit was in Poland already the best recommendation in intellectual circles, both Catholic and non-Catholic. The youth, and especially the youth leaders, were more and more attracted by the Dominican spirituality and ideal. Large communities of the secular Third Order were developing in the great University towns—hidden and never appearing as bodies, but working slowly at the very foundations of the national culture.

A few years before the catastrophe of 1939 the Polish fathers decided to embark on a new venture—to start a Polish Dominican Mission abroad. Given the small number of fathers and the always growing demand for preachers in Poland, the undertaking was a difficult one. But the Mission was started. Three fathers went to China and are still there. They stood the Japanese bombing and the famine; one has been wounded, but their work is being carried on. There is naturally no possibility of reinforcing their number now.

A word must be said—last but not least—about the sisters. There are actually two convents of the Second Order. One in Cracow, another in a small place in Central Poland, called St. Anne's. Both are old foundations, still living the austere life which is well known to all friends of the Order. Both have a high number of sisters and their development is quite satisfactory.

There exist also three congregations of the regular Third Order. One of them, founded during the XIXth century by Mother Bialecka, has several hundred convents; these sisters devote their lives to teaching in schools and succouring the poor. Another congregation has been recently founded in order to collaborate in the apostolic work among the Oriental Christians in Eastern Poland. Lastly the French Sisters of Bethany had started their first convent near Warsaw and had already found a number of Polish vocations.

The reader may be interested to learn the situation in Poland now. Unfortunately the news reaching this country is slight and not always reliable. The following details however can be given. The priory of Warsaw has been hit by several shells and one bomb during the siege. The library (once of about 60,000 volumes) is gone. The chaplaincy of Poznan has been confiscated and the last news of the fathers there was that they had been arrested and deported to a concentration camp. This is a most serious loss for the Province, as Poznan was manned by the very flower of the young, well-educated Dominicans, and the German concentration camps generally mean death. The Monastery of Podkamien has been dispersed by the invaders. The fine church of Tarnopol was shelled by a tank two days after the occupation in 1939, and partly burnt. The five fathers and three brothers from Czortkow are said to have been shot by Russians in 1941. One of the most eminent preachers of the Province, Fr. Ceslas Kaniak, was last seen in a death cell, waiting execution in the U.S.S.R. Nothing more has been heard of him.

In Cracow, however, not only the choir, but also the noviciate is still functioning. For some time at least the stadium, which has been transferred there, was carrying on. Several priests were ordained in 1941. It seems that the Priory of Lwów was re-occupied by the fathers in 1941.

Three Dominican fathers are now serving as chaplains in the Polish Force—two of them on the Italian front. One thing of some importance has been achieved by them during the war. Since all Polish religious papers (which amounted to 400) have been stopped by the invaders, the Polish Dominicans started abroad, first in Rome, then in France, and lastly in hospitable Britain, the only Polish religious review in Europe, called 'Nauka Chrystusowa' ('The Christian Teaching'). Thirty-two issues have been published. The circulation was from 500 to 4,000, depending on circumstances. For a year one of the fathers edited a Polish religious weekly ('In the name of God'), but this had to be closed down owing to shortage of paper.

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