

ghetto. His faith has isolated him from the things and people about him. Even that rich exchange with white people that should be a characteristic of the Church in such a country as South Africa has been denied to him.

The remedies for this situation are obvious. Catholic African intellectuals must be fostered, trained, encouraged and inspired. The Church, in its religious aspects as well as in its contact with society at large, must be placed in their hands. Intelligence is born of an integrated responsibility.

C. COLLINS

## POLISH OPINION

### And Quiet Flows the Vistula

FOND of potatoes and strong liquor, inefficient and optimistic, extremely good company but always late for appointments, oppressed through the centuries and Catholic almost to a man—the Polish people inevitably remind the casual Western observer of the Irish. But of course today their predicaments are very different. The presence (and that, in some respects, is about all it amounts to) of a Communist government confronts the Poles in general and Polish Catholicism in particular with an extraordinarily delicate situation. For the Poles have sought freedom for two centuries and tasted it for twenty years; and Poland, as any visitor will tell you, is the most Catholic country in Europe. Whether you go to Mass in the mountain village of Dcmbno (where five hundred years ago a captive artist was compelled, for his ransom, to paint the bandit's church, which task he performed by juxtaposing on the plain wooden roof the styles of half the world, Dutch, Italian, Swedish, Persian, Jewish, Japanese—a rare synthesis indeed), where you watch the Gouralski (mountain-men) stand so close that you sweat and cannot move, and kneel around the doorways, while their singing almost deafens you; or whether you are in Warsaw, and find that you can never sight-see the churches because they are always inhabited by people at prayer—you will be overwhelmed by the devotion of the Poles to their religion. The peasants are traditionally Catholic; the new industrial workers and the various classes of town-dwellers take Catholicism into the life of the urban quarters. It is said that more people go to church than before the war. The story is told of a pre-war atheist who now attends church, and, when asked by his atheist friends for the reason, replies, 'I too am against the régime'.

The unpopularity of the régime does in some ways help the Church. Atheist social reform has not the intellectual and moral appeal that it has in the West. Of the many people we met and worked with in Poland, only one was a Marxist; and he behaved rather like an Old Etonian, being the only person I remember who, when asked what he studied and where, said politely 'Why do you want to know?' One meets several people who sympathize with some of the policies of the Government; and what sane person would not admire its achievement in, for instance, education? But

these people are not numerous, and this attitude does not imply sympathy with the Government doctrines. The almost total failure of Communist anti-religious propaganda at present is partly due to Polish history. In Poland the Church has always stood on the side of national aspirations and, especially since the Partitions, of social justice and political liberty. The Marxist teaching that the Church is part of the machinery of oppression is sheer nonsense to the average Pole. Today, the Church is the strongest element of non-agreement with a régime which is almost universally disliked, often despised, and which shows no signs of coming to terms with the people it is attempting to govern in an ostensibly beneficent way. To quote a few examples. Three peasants on different occasions said that living conditions in Poland are bad; as one put it, 'The trouble is that we have all these comrades about the place; I would like the capitalists back'. Workers are paid about eightpence an hour and individual workmen have told us that it was better before the war; they are worse off than the peasants, and they were the backbone of the 1956 *coup*. Professional people have come down in the world more than anybody; even among university professors, who are to some extent handpicked by the government, only about one in ten is a party member, and perhaps two or three in ten are pro-government. These figures we learned with reference to a physics faculty. Russian influence, negligible since '56 except in foreign affairs, is detested; the story goes that someone suggested a luxury tax on those Warsaw apartments which do not face onto Stalin's Palace of Culture, a Russian gift which was received in the spirit of 'timeo Danaos et dona ferentes'. The inefficiency of the economy is unbelievable: new wireless sets cease to function after a week, and great capital is made by the humourists out of the state shops, which put up a sign 'remanent' (stock-taking) or 'remont' (repairs), and take a holiday on the strength of it, sometimes for months. Another sign is 'gone for lunch'—also used by restaurants. The Communist Party itself has a very low standing in public eyes. When asked how many workers belonged to it an intelligent student replied, 'Only a very few—the ones that are rich'. And a children's psychiatrist said that when you speak of a Communist who is a good man, you say, 'He is a party member, *but* he is a good man'. All this operates as a sort of silent propaganda for those who say that Communism is not the final answer to human problems.

The last great turning-point of Polish history was October 1956, and in those dramatic events the people achieved something of what they wanted, i.e. some degree of personal and national freedom. For this they rightly thanked themselves, because it was the attitude of the people which made the secret house-plots of the Gomulka faction the only possible line for the Polish Communist party to follow. They gained a very good result for very little trouble. In comparison with previous showings, it is said (by the Poles) that in '56 'the Poles behaved like Hungarians, the Hungarians like Czechs, and the Czechs like swine'. Eighty per cent voted Gomulka in, and he was encouraged by the Church; up till recently the new situation has been tolerated as the best possible for the time being. The people still do not feel sympathetic towards the government; the relationship is rather like that

between management and shop-stewards after the last wage-dispute has ended in favour of the latter, but both sides know that the bosses are going to do their best to regain lost ground before their opponents have time to call another strike. The lesson of these events seems to be that the Polish people, and the Polish Church, have learned to manoeuvre in a Communist framework.

But the comparative popularity of Gomulka's liberal socialism has waned considerably 'since October' (a favourite phrase). Gomulka is on closer terms with Russia and he is known to have plans for recollectivizing the land; decollectivization was the most popular thing he did in '56. Whereas religion was restored to the schools in '56, it is being ousted again at this very moment. A priest told us how his friend had received that same day a note from the government forbidding him to teach at the school next term. Bienkowsky, former speech-writer for Gomulka, and co-leader of the liberalizing faction, whom we met at a top people's summer residence near Warsaw when he returned from mushroom-picking with his son, was removed from the post of Minister of Education about a year ago. The Catholic university at Lublin, which exists solely on funds raised by Catholics, has had its quota of students lowered again this year, and was recently threatened with taxes amounting to 1½ million zlotys. It seems to be part of a plan to close the university.

Literature and the Press are still enjoying the freedom won in the Polish *annus mirabilis*. Western books abound, and are often cheaper than in the countries of their origin; English books and the English language are especially popular at the moment. Several Catholic papers and magazines were restored in '56, and are flourishing today. An editor told us how *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a non-Pax Catholic cultural weekly, sold 42,000 out of 47,000 copies printed, in comparison with 13,000 out of 25,000 copies printed for equivalent government papers; and *Znak*, a learned Catholic monthly, sells out 7,000 copies each issue. An independent Catholic publishing organization has been able to bring out its first books this year, though only seven in all. They included Evelyn Waugh's *Helena*. Graham Greene, C. P. Snow and Oscar Wilde are among numerous English authors receiving eager attention in Poland today. But earlier in the year some check was put on foreign books, and no one can say how long Western culture will remain accessible. *Pax* continues to publish about a hundred books a year, and many journals. Closely linked with the government and owning several factories, it nevertheless seems to be of some use; it only brings the *sale* of religious articles under state control. We asked a priest whether it was recognized by the hierarchy; he replied: 'It has never asked for recognition'. On the whole, however, the situation is definitely taking a turn downhill, as far as freedom is concerned; and the future is fraught with uncertainty, and with fears of the worst.

So much for the Church and the régime. Now a third factor must enter our discussion, one which will prove, I think, to determine our ideas about modern Poland. I refer to the process of social and intellectual change which is at present sweeping through Poland. One can even apply Marxist

analysis to Marxism itself, and see how it too, like all other ideologies, can be borne down the tide of such a social development like flotsam. It is here too that we shall find the first really disquieting facts about the Polish Church, facts that will wipe away the smile that has lingered until now on the face of the religious statistician who looks at Poland. For if Marxist philosophy is still-born in Poland, and is mismanaged even by its own expositors, urbanization and industrialization go forward with the relentless stealth of the real crooks who pad forward when the decoy has danced his piece. To put it simply: the movement of people from the country into the towns, from farming into industry, and the rapid growth of the population are changing the whole pattern of life for, since the war, about a quarter of the Polish people. This change will touch as many souls again in the next ten to twenty years. The change in environment has the classic results one would expect: a questioning of old beliefs, amounting, in one aspect, to a desire to understand how old ideals fit in with the new conditions of life (towns) and with the new weapons of life (science). The day-to-day problems of this upheaval are great enough—the shortage of housing, the mental instability. But they only lead up to the great problem, which may be expressed as, ‘What is it all for?’, and which can be the womb or the hearse of a religion. This is what is facing the modern part of Poland, the Poland of the future. It is reflected in the indifference of some students to religion, born of a weariness with the old expressions of religion. Talk of Poland’s past and of the greatness of the nation is not enough for them. Add to this the first experience of universal education, the rapid influx of Western books in the last four years, the advent of new studies like psychology, and the ardent desire to imitate the more advanced parts of the world, i.e. the West; and it becomes plain that Poland is being plunged into all that welter of moral and intellectual development which we have known for two centuries.

The Church starts with several grave disadvantages; many of the best leaders were killed in the war as a part of Nazi policy, the majority of the clergy are uneducated, and too sunk in a traditional way of life and thought to face the new problems with the necessary vigour. The state campaign against religious education, while it will do little to rescue Polish Communism from the slag-heap of history, strikes at the very organ which the Church needs most at this moment. The Western achievement in cynicism is more easily digested than the Western achievement in understanding. One educated priest suggested to me that Gilson is a Communist sympathizer.

But for the time being there is a strong gleam of hope. Many of the Church leaders have an extraordinarily clear grasp of what is needed, and a mature attitude to the social and intellectual problems involved, to which one can only pay the humblest respect. Though opposed to the government, they recognize the benefits of industrialization and of universal education; ‘there is some good in socialism’. They realize, as the more naïve *avant-garde* does not, the faults as well as the virtues of the West; ‘We Catholics say that neither capitalism nor Communism are good’. There is a very fine Thomist school of natural and social philosophy at Lublin. In the last issue

of the university magazine there were, as well as an article on late medieval Thomism, articles of a profound nature on 'the prolegomena to philosophy of nature', 'Norwid's view of war and tragedy', 'social and moral aspects of the housing problem in Poland; and 'the ethical act and its justification'. A 'philosophical week of the student' was devoted to the problem of evolution. Teilhard de Chardin is well known; though Bernard Lonergan is not. One cannot say that a new concept of the Christian society is likely to arise; they are not in a strong enough position, not sufficiently culturally independent, to achieve something so original. But the present crisis in Polish opinion will find them well-equipped. One only hopes that the number of such people can be increased.

One of the most admirable things achieved by the Poles in their present predicament is a boiling-down to essentials. A priest said to us, 'We will remain in Poland so long as there is work for us to do'. And a nun commented on the present complexity by saying, 'The main trouble is that we cannot do all the good that we would like to do, that's all'. Poland still may have something to teach the West from whom she has learned so much.

ANTHONY BLACK

### HEARD AND SEEN

#### Reach and Grasp: Bresson's 'Pickpocket'

OF all contemporary film directors, Robert Bresson is the one who has been most continuously tempted by the impossible: in his latest picture, *Pickpocket*, which has now reached London some nine months after it first opened in Paris, it is clear that the impossible has, often enough, eluded him. He has chosen a theme which is, on the face of it, capable of the liveliest visual and intellectual excitement—that of an arrogant, intelligent young man's choice of crime as a protest against the human situation—and has deliberately drained it of almost every possible element of sensationalism in the treatment, so that the ingredients of a story of conventional low-life adventure have been transmuted into an austere psychological exploration. The tremendous risk he takes in balancing scenes of extreme speed and manual dexterity in the actual robberies with long sequences where all the action, so to speak, takes place in the mind of Michel and is conveyed by the expressions flickering across his bony face, demands from the spectator a concentration and intelligence equal to that of the director himself—a challenge that is unlikely to be met by more than a smallish proportion of any audience.

Solitude, isolation, limitation, whether physical or mental—some type of nonconformity—has been the *leit-motif* of all Bresson's films. His anti-heroes fight their way through to a kind of solution largely through their resolute refusal to compromise, and in a way this is true of Michel (Martin Lasalle) too. He is a young man of potential promise, living on the edge of destitution, in rebellion against his own predicament; fascinated by the concept of stealing, he makes a first half-hearted attempt at the races, and is picked up by the police just as he is congratulating himself on his superiority, and so makes his first contact with an inspector (Jean Pelegri) who, in a detached