

PRIESTS FACING DEATH

DISPLAY FAITH AND COURAGE OF THE EARLY MARTYRS

[This graphic pen-picture of a world-stirring event is published by permission of the N. Y. Herald, -E. C. R.]

The New York Herald published on Wednesday an account of the trials of the Roman Catholic prelates condemned to death by the Bolsheviks, cabled by its correspondent in Russia.

Special Cable to The New York Herald, Copyright, 1928, by The New York Herald, By Francis McCullagh

Moscow, March 26, via London, April 5.—Before describing the trial of Archbishop Zepiak and seventeen of his clergy at the Moscow trial, which ended last night, I should say I do not describe from hearsay. I attended every sitting from the first day to the last, sometimes going without food or sleep in order to do so and send telegraphic accounts afterward.

Whether any of these telegrams ever reached my paper is for my editor to say.

[They did not.—The New York Herald.]

The Bolshevik Foreign Office at first refused tickets for the trial to all correspondents, though they were ready enough to supply admission cards to Red army parades and Bolshevik meetings, but being an old hand in journalism I got in. Later on other correspondents obtained admission. I should also say I am personally acquainted with none of the prisoners and do not know a single Pole in Moscow.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

For the last two years the Polish policy has been antipathetic to me and I have never called on Polish representatives here or got a single scrap of information from Polish sources directly or indirectly. For the Polish priests put on trial here I had no personal feeling, and I should not have hesitated to denounce these priests if it had been proven to my satisfaction they had plotted against the Soviet Government on behalf of Poland.

But having carefully listened to all the evidence I am convinced these Petrograd priests never engaged in any plot against the Soviet Government. Their persecution was on religious grounds alone. It is the first item in a program for the destruction of Christianity in Russia.

Krylenko, who conducted the prosecution, and Galkin, a renegade priest, the presiding judge, made this perfectly clear. They asked every one of the clerical prisoners whether they had taught the catechism to children, and every prisoner answered yes.

They then read the Bolshevik law, which makes it a crime to impart religious teaching to any one under eighteen years old, and asked each prisoner if he would continue to teach the catechism. The reply in every case was yes, always delivered in a firm tone and sometimes accompanied by a smile—a smile of pity, I fancy, for the ignorance of a man who would ask such a question of priests who had remained with their flock in Petrograd during the last five years of terror.

DEFY BAN ON TEACHING

The Archbishop's face lit with pleasure and surprise when he answered. It was as if he had been asked if he could see the way to accept the miraculous gift of health, youth and unlimited riches. The prelate said the young priest, Edward Yunevich, newly ordained, as one could see from his tonsure not yet covered by his hair. Joy flashed in his eyes and irradiated his whole countenance when asked if, in obedience with the Bolshevik law, he would cease teaching children their catechism. Joyousness so marked his voice in his "No" that the three Bolshevik judges, who were all smoking cigarettes at the time, looked up simultaneously in surprise.

The priests were next asked if, after the churches had been closed they dared disobey the Bolshevik law by saying Mass. Yes, of course they all said Mass. Not only did they own up to the crime but admitted there was always a congregation of about 150 or 200.

They used empty halls for the purpose. Petrograd is half empty and there are many halls and suites of rooms available for such services, though in the winter time the cold in those unheated rooms must have been murderous.

CASE AFFECTS ALL RELIGIONS

And, to the surprise of the Red judges, they would not promise to cease saying Mass. This case, however, does not concern Roman Catholics alone. It concerns all religions, including the Jews. It is a crime under the Bolshevik law to impart religious teaching to any person under the age of eighteen years, even though the teacher be

the mother and the pupil her child. This law therefore strikes at all religions and at one of the most sacred rights of parents.

COUNTER REVOLUTION CHARGES

The trial, as I have indicated, was a religious trial and not a political one, though the procurer or prosecutor, tried hard to make out of it what he pleased. He tried to make out that in meeting at the ordinary diocesan conferences the Catholic clergy of Petrograd had ipso facto formed themselves into an illegal counter revolutionary organization.

This was nonsense. The papers seized at the house of Father Butchkavitch, where they were found in an open drawer, concerned discussions held at various times by the clergy with regard to questions which the clergy were bound to discuss—what attitudes they should take toward the new divorce law, the law separating Church and State, the law separating church and school, and there were also innumerable crazy decrees which the Soviet Government had poured forth at the rate of ten a day.

Prosecutor Krylenko made clear that any men who meet together to discuss in a critical spirit the decrees of the Soviet Government are counter revolutionaries and as a matter of fact he is right. Such is the law of the Soviet, and the sooner English and American concessionaires know that the better. Englishmen and Americans up to the present have been treated with special consideration and practically conceded extra-territorial privileges, but once London and Washington recognize the Soviet Government fully the mask will be dropped and all foreigners here will be made to feel that they live under an un-supportable tyranny.

The reading of the death sentences was begun on the stroke of midnight of Palm Sunday. The audience throughout was largely composed of Communists.

BLOODTHIRSTY PROSECUTOR

Of all the bloodthirsty, wild beasts I have ever set eyes on, Krylenko is the worst. I do not refer to his personal appearance, which is that of a nimble, dapper little man of about forty with a pugnaeous face and a small mustache.

His smile, when first I saw it, seemed to me not unpleasant; but now I see it at night, see it as it looked when he was gloating over innocent men whom he had condemned to death. Again and again he looked Father Butchkavitch in the eye, his own eyes filled with revolting merriment. His face wore the same smile during the most pathetic parts of Bobrshiff Pushkin's speech for the defense.

He actually tried hard to catch the eye of that lawyer, to make him smile, too, in an attempt to undo all the work of his emotional appeal. This was bad enough, but nothing compared to the energy which he threw into his demand for blood. The public prosecutor, in any country where there is such a functionary, is quite right in asking with firmness for the punishment of the guilty; but Krylenko's thirst for the death sentence transcended all limits. He raged like a wild animal sated in its allowance of blood, and devoured in consequence by a raging thirst. And he must have known, for he is an educated man, that he had not proved his case. Most of it was built up on admissions made by the prisoners under cross-examination.

FILMISY EVIDENCE OFFERED

In my earlier dispatches I have explained how the Cheks in Petrograd seized a number of documents in the rooms of Father Butchkavitch, and in one of those I stated that the charge of high treason could not be based upon such documents in any other country in the world and that is true. I heard all of them read out in court, and found them incoherent and, as cabled earlier, Krylenko showed Father Butchkavitch each of these documents, one after another, and asked: "Do you admit having written this?"

And the prisoners: how did they bear themselves under the ordeal? It reassured my faith in human nature, that these days of disillusion, depression and doubt, most could rise to such heights. Never once did they falter. Not an inch did they yield. No Christian martyrs never bore themselves more nobly before the tribunal of Nero.

One old priest with a fine ascetic face did, indeed, become confused under the fierce cross-examination of the prosecutor, and for some moments his mind seemed unable to function, but it was physical, not moral failure. When he returned to the dock after a short adjournment of the court, I noticed that he sat between two strong and sunny spirits—a young priest and the former Archbishop Federoff, both at once gentle and strong. At all subsequent sittings he was seen between these two.

When, on Palm Sunday, the old priest was asked what he had to say before sentence was passed, he spoke as firmly as the others.

At the beginning of the trial Archbishop Zepiak looked feeble and worn, as well he might, for he is near seventy and he was brought every day from the Butyrka prison in a patrol wagon of the Cheka. But when he heard Krylenko demand the death penalty he seemed rejuvenated. His color rose, his eye brightened, his tall figure

straightened, and, in his long black cassock fastened at the waist by a broad red sash, he looked what he was—a prince of the Church, head of all Russian Catholics, from the Baltic to the Pacific, from the frozen sea to the frontiers of India.

WEARS MARTYR'S COLOR

On the day death sentence was passed on him, his face shone with pleasure, his gray hair was brushed carefully back, and he had been able somehow or other to procure a new skull cap, and a sash of the brightest red. The journalists who reported the trial for the Bolshevik papers alluded to this sash and this cap as symbols of the rank of Archbishop. None of them seemed aware, that the color of blood had been purposely chosen because so many early Christian Bishops died as martyrs, and that election to the episcopal chair was generally sentence of death.

When called upon to say his last words the Archbishop rose to his full height and delivered an address so touching and so simple that a profound hush, with something of awe in it settled down upon that hostile audience of Red soldiers, atheists, sneerers and demoralized students. So great was the effect on myself that I could not put pen to paper.

ARCHBISHOP'S DEFENSE

The few words of that speech from the dock which remain in my mind are but a faint reflection of what he really said. The Archbishop denied, as did all those who spoke after him, that he had belonged to any political organization, or had engaged in any counter-revolutionary intrigues. He had, on the contrary, confined himself to teaching his people the truths of their holy religion, these same truths which the Church had taught for nearly 2,000 years.

The Church had never taught the people to do wrong, he said, and he had never taught anything that did not tend to good morals and good citizenship. It had been his duty as the head of the Catholic Church in Russia to set a good example to the priests under him, and to the flock entrusted to his care.

"Today," concluded the Archbishop, I stand before a temporal judge tomorrow maybe I shall stand before an eternal judge, and I hope the temporal judge may be just to me and the eternal judge merciful."

Next after the Archbishop, spoke Father Maletzki, a kindly old man near seventy, but agile and upright of figure as a man of fifty. His commanding appearance, stern countenance and bushy eyebrows made him look severe, but as soon as he opened his mouth early in the trial everyone knew he was a gentle type. He had a soft voice and perfect articulation. It was a pleasure to hear him. Had the hall been twice as large as it was he would have been heard distinctly at the further end—not a word would have been lost.

PRIEST TELLS OF HIS CHILDHOOD

Father Maletzki began by telling with touching simplicity and candor of little incidents of his boyhood. He said he was of a noble family—a bold thing to say to an audience holding the belief that everybody not belonging to the working class is a parasite and a tyrant. His father, he said, had been a very wealthy man who kept many servants, but he was a very kind and just master and a good Christian. Once when his son was little the boy had, in a moment of irritation, called the door-keeper a fool. The father made the lad kneel down to kiss the man's hand and beg his forgiveness. This was to show the boy that all men were equal before God, and the lesson was never forgotten.

Young Maletzki afterward became a priest, and in an orphanage which he founded in Petrograd he placed many starving boys whom he picked up in the streets. He had never engaged in political plots of any kind, but had been prosecuted under the Czar because he worked for his people and the poor.

EXTRAORDINARY SPEECH

These crude translations of disjointed phrases of Father Maletzki's speech convey only the faintest idea of how extraordinarily touching that speech was. The Bolsheviks must indeed be blind if they cannot see that a religion which makes a rich man's son devote his life to the poor must be infinitely superior to their irreligion of cant and talk of cruelty and corruption.

Vicar-General Butchkavitch, as the Archbishop's right hand man, necessarily had to make a different kind of speech, for he had to deal with the business side of the diocese, a diocese covering all Russia, and he also was accused of originating a plot. Therefore, he had to enter into many details to confute the charges leveled at him and his colleagues; and he did confute these charges completely. During his speech, the speech of a man about to be condemned to death, the prosecutor interrupted him and jeered in his face.

WAS VICAR'S REASONED DEFENCE

Father Butchkavitch showed he had never conspired with Poland against the Soviet Government. If he had tried to get money from Poland for his church, which was burdened with debt, where was the crime in that? He was a Polish citizen, and naturally would turn for financial help to his own

country. He might also have scoffed at the charge of conspiring with a foreign Power, which was based by the prosecutor upon the fact that he had several times, several years ago, sent letters to Poland otherwise than through the post.

I have not sent letters through the Russian post recently, and not a single foreign correspondent in Moscow has; and two years ago the Bolshevik post office was even worse than it is now.

Why did not the Archbishop send his letters through the Foreign Office? roared Krylenko; the Archbishop's neglect to do so was actually made one of the most serious charges against him. Father Butchkavitch spoke of the years leveled at him on account of the large sums of money that passed through his hands; but one must remember, the diocese embraced all Russia. He had, as a matter of fact, spent all his own money in building several primary schools, a technical school and a professional school for Catholics. The prosecutor could easily ascertain these facts for himself.

His church in Petrograd was burdened with enormous debts; he was a Polish citizen. What wonder, therefore, that he should appeal for money to his friends in Poland? He was accused of conspiracy on the strength of letters found lying unconcealed on his desk, but had he been engaged in a conspiracy he would have concealed them. Had his activities been compromising some evidence of a conspiracy would have been produced. The minutes of vestry meetings are not evidence of a conspiracy.

A YOUNG PRIEST'S CANDOR

A great speech was made by Edward Yunevich, the young priest already described. His bright eyes seemed fixed. He described how, as a student he heard in Petrograd the shots announcing the fall of czarism. He had rejoiced, for czarism had been the enemy of Catholicism in Russia. Young as he was he knew of the persecution of friends who had been sent by hundreds to prison and Siberia because of their faith. But he saw Bolshevism as a worse enemy than czarism.

It realized none of its expectations, it gave none of the liberty it had promised. The people of Petrograd were now weeping and miserable. What were the poor Catholics of Petrograd to do if their priests did not return to them? This naive question excited bitter mirth among the hardened Communists who filled the courts, and the judges asked, not unkindly, that he might leave the question of Petrograd alone, and confine himself to the charges against him personally. The prisoner apologized for being carried away, but said he thought he would be allowed to say everything, as these were the last words he would say. He ended with Christ's last words on the cross: "Not my will, but Thine, be done."

There was a profound sensation, and some minutes of silence. I noticed tears in the eyes of even the Bolshevik women who had crowded into the court, owing to the fact that there was no tragedy in the theaters that night to compare with the thrill of emotion in the real tragedy being enacted at the trial.

"IT IS THE LAW"

"Ex-Archbishop Federoff said he was in the same position as the Archbishop, being the head of the whole unite or United Greek Church of Russia, with priests under him and many of the faithful following his rite. He tried to argue with the Judge on the injustice of the law preventing religious teaching to minors, but the Judge stopped him sternly saying: "It is the law of the republic. It is not your right to comment on it; you must obey it."

COURTING MARTYRDOM

The younger clergymen in the dock were perhaps too aggressive, if anything. They were courting martyrdom, now that Holy Week had come. But the old Archbishop while equally firm, is suave: "Yes, our religion teaches us to pray for our enemies," he says in answer to a question put by Krylenko.

The young priest called Eismont is particularly aggressive. "You do not consider yourself bound to obey the orders of the Soviet Government?" Krylenko asked, meaning the orders regarding Catholic churches. "I do not," replies Eismont.

After his church had been closed by the Soviet authorities this young priest continued to say Mass to a congregation of 200 more in a deserted orphanage underneath his private rooms. He calmly admitted this crime against the Bolshevik law, as if he were proud of it.

ADMIT TEACHING RELIGION

Further questioning brought the calm admission that in defiance of the Soviet law that religion must be taught to nobody under eighteen years of age Eismont had made a practice of collecting children in the cold and deserted orphanage and had spoken to them about God. Similar testimony was given by two other young priests, Fathers Onovitch and Hodnovitch of the Churches of St. Stanislaus and

Catherine. At St. Stanislaus the curate had told the Bolshevik commission who had come to take an inventory: "Clear out of this at once!"

CONTINUES MASS DESPITE LAW

"Citizen Hodnovitch," roared Krylenko, "do you not consider yourself bound to obey the orders of the Soviet Government?" "I am not only a citizen," said the young clergyman, "but also a Roman Catholic priest." Father Hodnovitch also continued to celebrate Mass after his church had been closed by a commissar, who had warned him not to celebrate public worship until further orders.

About 150 persons were present every time he said Mass, and he also had taught children the catechism. He admitted both facts proudly.

Ex-Archbishop Federoff and all the other priests made similar admissions: they had all said Mass and collected Christian children together to teach them about God, despite the fact that the Soviet Government had strictly forbidden it.

Sapunoff, a Bolshevik official serving in Basil Island, Petrograd, testified to the trouble he had with a little Catholic chapel there. The first time he went to close the place the attitude of the crowd was so threatening he judged it prudent to retire. The next time he did the job, but the crowd insulted him, crying, "This is what the Communists call liberty of conscience!"

DRAMATIC ENDING

The proceeding ended amid the most dramatic circumstances. A witness, Smirnov, had testified that the priests had celebrated Mass after he had cleared their churches and notified them they must not carry on public worship until they had received permission from the Soviet Government. Galkin, the presiding Judge, asked the prisoners if this was so and they admitted it was.

"Now you must choose once and for all," yelled a savage faced ex-priest on the scarlet bench. "Are you going to continue saying Mass?"

It was a tense, dramatic moment. Each priest was questioned in turn. Each stood up and declared calmly, firmly and proudly that he would continue to say Mass and teach children the catechism, no matter what the consequences to himself.

FOURTEEN OF EARLY CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

The Judge savagely questioned one young man who had been ordained in 1914 when twenty-three years old. "Do you teach children their catechism?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that under article 131 of the penal code it is a crime to teach children the catechism, and that religion must be taught to no one before he is eighteen years old?"

"Yes, I know that."

"And will you continue to teach the catechism?"

"Yes, with God's help, I will. It is my duty to do so, no matter what the consequences may be. If a father asks me to teach his child the catechism I cannot refuse."

Galkin, himself a renegade priest, scowled darkly. He had selected the youngest priest, thinking he would yield and practically abjure his faith, but he found himself struggling against a rock.

"Rome teaches you this," yelled Galkin, "and Soviet Russia teaches the contrary. Which will you choose, Rome or Red Russia?"

In the deep silence that followed the voice of the young priest rang out like the voice of an early Christian in the amphitheatre.

"Rome," he said, with a smile. And the electric light overhead shone upon a face that might have been the model for the great medieval picture of Saint Sebastian in the National Gallery in London.

The death sentence on the Archbishop and the Vicar-General were pronounced at midnight on Palm Sunday. The Archbishop and Butchkavitch looked as men who had obtained their lifelong heart's desire. The Archbishop embraced his aged, white-bearded lawyer who, though of the Orthodox Church and not a Catholic, broke down and wept bitterly. Then the Archbishop embraced all the clergy and all were removed under a heavily armed escort of Reds.

Meanwhile there was a frightful scene in court, when many Polish women fainted, others had hysterics and screaming fell to the floor, to be roughly dragged out by Red soldiers. The aged manservant of the Archbishop, a Pole and a typical old soldier with white mustache, struggled desperately to the dock to bid farewell to his master, but he was overpowered and thrown out by the Reds, who finally, panic stricken by a fear of rescue, cleared the court at the point of the bayonet.

BAYONETS-GUARD PRISONERS

There were extraordinary military precautions in the street when the prisoners were removed beneath a double hedge of bayonets, from the court into a huge covered lorry van like a "Black Maria" police wagon. The same van was formerly used in carrying piles of the dead who had been murdered in the cellar of the Cheka, 11 Bolshoi Lubanka, to the dead-house of the hospital in the outskirts of the city, whence they were buried.

Since I write the above the Archbishop has been revived. Nevertheless, the civilized world should

know of the scenes whereby Soviet Russia panders to the bloodthirsty men who alone keep it in power. The above account of the priests' trial is not second hand information, but comes from one who, as the Bolsheviks knew, attended every sitting of the court.

AN APPRECIATION

To the Editor of the CATHOLIC RECORD:—I was very much edified by the paper on Blessed Thomas More read by Mrs. James Rigney, of Kingston at the monthly meeting of the Catholic Women's League in London, Ont., Sunday, March 11th, and published in the issue of March 31st of the RECORD. The paper is so scholarly that it should be published in pamphlet form and as widely disseminated as possible, for Catholic lawyers everywhere would welcome it to their desks, and Catholic laymen would admire the high ideals and charitable career of the lawyer who has deserved from his Church the title of Blessed. Mrs. Rigney so reverently approaches her subject and uses such a pleasing and elegant style that it is to be hoped she will prepare many more such papers that will really enrich our Canadian literature. It is a very gratifying sign of the times that the Catholic Women's League everywhere throughout Canada are being entertained by papers on Catholic subjects, and especially on men noted for their loyalty to principle; and on literary subjects viewed from a Catholic standpoint. Every Catholic should with voice and pen encourage such efforts. Hence my only reason for writing now is to express my appreciation.

D. J. R.

Artsaig, N. S., March 31st, 1928.

We find in the Gospel, Mary and Joseph seeking Jesus. Let us ask them to help us seek Jesus . . . but we must be on our guard to seek Him as soon as we perceive that we have lost Him.—Bishop Curtis.

We must not fear the corrections we receive here below; but it is well to think often of the accusations that will be brought against us at the Day of Judgment.—St. Anthony of Padua.

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