

Catholic News
March 19, 1949
Sursum Corda

What's Right With the World

By REV. JAMES M. GILLIS, C.S.P.

(Contributing Editor, The Catholic World)

How Were They Enslaved?

IN THE midst of all the agitation over the lynching of Cardinal Mindszenty, we must not be distracted from what is perhaps the primary problem: how did seven million Hungarian Catholics, out of a total of nine million, permit themselves to become enslaved? Of



Rev. James M.
Gillis, C.S.P.

the two million who are not Roman Catholics only a small proportion were Communists. So how did it come to pass that an overwhelming majority of the people permitted themselves to be subjugated by an insignificant minority?

To put it more precisely, how did it happen that seven million Catholics sold themselves—no, not sold but surrendered themselves to be slaves to a small gang of tyrants against whom they had been a thousand times warned, whose savagery they had experienced under Bela Kun in 1919, and whose villainies they had witnessed in half a dozen neighboring countries?

The same question might perhaps be asked of Poland, which is even more Catholic than Hungary. And of Czechoslovakia. And of Yugoslavia. The case of Poland is not an exact parallel. Poland was sold out shamelessly by the big nations which had promised to save her. Poland was traversed and ravaged by Nazis and then by Communists. She was exhausted. There may, therefore, be some explanation of Poland's enslavement. So, too, for Lithuania, Latvia and Esthonia. But what about Czechoslovakia in which three-quarters of the population are Roman Catholic and the rest largely Protestants?

Yugoslavia we can understand because it was predominantly of the Orthodox Rite, and the Orthodox Church in Russia had made an apostate peace with the Communists. (Imagine a compromise between Christianity and atheism!)

To come back to the Hungarians. How and why did they permit themselves to be hoodwinked, ensnared, captured, subjugated? No American who had attended the Eucharistic Congress at Budapest in 1938 could, for an instant, imagine that such an enthusiastically Catholic population could in less than 10 years become impotent before a few score of treacherous, murderous agents of Moscow. Speaking for myself, I thought the Budapest Congress just as magnificent a demonstration of Catholic faith as that of Montreal or of Chicago. I was not at Dublin in 1932 but I feel sure that there was no more fervent piety in the capital of Eire than there was in the beautiful twin cities on the Danube, Buda and Pest.

To make the problem still more puzzling, it must be remembered that the Hungarians were the outpost of the Western World for 11 or 12 hundred years, and that they held the Turks at bay or had driven them back again and again, saving not only Hungary and Austria, but all Europe from the fate that befell North Africa.

So the question recurs yet once again: how did it happen that more than seven million Hungarian Catholics, descendants of heroes and saints and martyrs, meekly submit their necks to the yoke of a little group of devils more savage than the Mongols and more bitterly anti-Christian than Mohammed and the grand Caliphs?

To switch the emphasis somewhat: why didn't those good Catholics listen to the Pope, who kept repeating "Beware! Beware!" Did they think the Vicar of Christ, the recipient of multitudinous informations from every corner of the globe, behind as well as before the Iron Curtain—did the Hungarian Catholics, I say, imagine that the Holy Father was carrying "wolf, wolf" when there was no wolf?

Still more, could they have imagined that the Holy See had some kind of political axe to grind? It is not surprising if certain ignoramuses in America Oxnam, (for example) suffering from an anti-papal fixation, should allege that all the Pope's words and all the Pope's deeds are "political." But did the Hungarian Catholics share that pathological phobia?

It is no help to remind us that in the January election of last year, eight million Italians (presumably Catholics) voted what was in effect the Communist ticket, in spite of the warning of the Vicar of Christ and the entire body of priests and Bishops, as well as their friends in America. But we are not now discussing Italy. Let's have one problem at a time. Let's stick to Hungary. How did the sons of St. Stephen, the brothers of Hunyadi Janos, the allies of Don John of Austria, the spiritual children of Prohaszka and Mindszenty—how (I repeat again and again) did they "knuckle under" to a couple of dozen fiends who were just as obviously emissaries of Moscow as Stalin and his group are emissaries of Satan?

Those questions are not rhetorical. They are very real. I don't know the answer—not the entire answer, the satisfactory answer. But if someone who knows Hungary and the Hungarians better than I feels inclined to read me the riddle, I shall be happy to use his explanation in this column.

25
31