

**BLESSED ARCHBISHOP  
GEORGE MATULAITIS-MATULEWICZ  
HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS**



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Archbishop George  
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Selection of texts by  
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MARIAN  
HERITAGE  
STOCKBRIDGE, MA, USA

2019

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The present publication is based on the following books:

T. Górski, MIC, Z. Proczek, MIC, *Rozmówiony w Kościele*, Centrum Formacji Maryjnej “Salvatoris Mater”, Licheń 2017;

*For Christ and the Church – Short biography and excerpts from letters of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, Renovator of the Congregation of Marian Fathers*, Marian Press, Stockbridge, MA, 2012;

George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, Stockbridge, MA, 2003

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Layout and page design:

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**Cover:** A frozen frame from the short movie footage showing Blessed Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz’s visit to one of the Lithuanian communities in the U.S. during his trip in 1926.

ISBN: 978-1-59614-423-1

**Imprimi potest**

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Superior

of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy Province

of the Congregation of Marian Fathers

Stockbridge, Massachusetts, USA

January 27, 2018

Second revised edition.

Printed in Poland

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## Introduction

**B**lessed Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz belongs to a group of people who initiated the process of renewing the religious life in Poland and Lithuania in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was born to a Lithuanian family, but he dedicated the most important years of his apostolic life to serving the good of the Church in Poland, especially in Warsaw and Vilnius. He was only 56 years of age, when he passed away in 1927. His relatively short life was extremely rich. He was a pastor of the workers and the intelligentsia, educator and teacher of priests, the founder of new religious communities, protector of abandoned children, the bishop of Vilnius, and the Pope's representative in Lithuania.

In his work, Blessed George skillfully combined his faithful adherence to the traditional teachings of the Church with proper understanding of progress.

Breaking away from overstated conservatism, he proclaimed the social teachings of the Church, the idea of the secular apostolate, basic principles of ecumenism, respect for the language and culture of every nation, and the great dignity of every person.

Defending these values, he bore great suffering and learned to accept defeat in a Christian manner. Thanks to his work and ideals, he entered permanently into the history of Polish and Lithuanian national culture. But it was his "style" with which he undertook all these works that demonstrated his greatness. His life-long motto was: "For the glory to God and the salvation of souls." His spiritual profile can be concisely described as a man enamored of the Church. The authenticity of Archbishop George's position was confirmed in 1987 by St. John Paul II, who placed him among the Blesseds of the Church and gave him to the faithful as a model to follow.

Both Archbishop Matulaitis's activities and spiritual life were very richly fulfilling. The goal of the present biography is not to describe his entire life and character, but merely to draw the

readers' attention to the most salient aspects of the outstanding character of this man.

Along with excerpts from Blessed George's correspondence, this book also includes passages from his *Journal* from 1910 to 1914, which detail the author's spiritual profile.



**TOWARDS THE IDEALS OF PRIESTHOOD**



## On the Threshold of His Life

**O**n the River Šešupe near Marijampole, the largest city of the Suwalki region in Lithuania, there is a little village called Lugine. It was there that a boy was born on April 13, 1871, to the family of Andrew and Ursula Matulaitis. On his Baptism, that took place on April 20<sup>th</sup>, this boy received the names of George and Boleslaus. He was the eighth and last child of his pious and hard-working farming parents. The Sacrament of Baptism was administered by Fr. George Czesnas, pastor of the Marijampole parish and also the General Superior of the Marian Fathers. Father George had no inkling that the son of the Matulaitis's family, whom he just baptized, would take care of his religious community 40 years later, by becoming its renovator and rescuing it from annihilation.

In the meantime, little George was growing up, surrounded by the tender care of his parents and siblings. However, the period of his carefree childhood came to a premature end: when the boy was only three and a half years old, his father passed away. The entire responsibility for the family fell upon his mother. She surrounded her youngest little son with a special care and endeavored to lighten the burden of the duties that usually fell on the farmer's children, while teaching him sensitivity to God's causes, prayers, and kindness to others. Unfortunately, the health of his tender mother was deteriorating, and on May 15, 1881, she departed from this world. To George, this was a very painful blow. Although his oldest brother, John, was not taking care of the boy, yet, being overwhelmed by his concern for preserving his father's legacy, he insisted on the little boy's doing very hard work. George's life improved a little after his brother married Veronica Witkowska. His sister-in-law was more considerate of the little boy. George did his best to help with work on the farm, but his greatest desire was to learn and acquire knowledge. From 1878-1881, he attended elementary school in Marijampole, located more than four kilometers away from their village. One of George's classmates, Vincent Šlekis, thus recalled these years: *George's brother did not take good care of him; he did not provide even proper garments. In wintertime, all of us little boys, were*

*dressed in warm clothing, while George went to school in some thin, worn out jacket. In the fall, as he sometimes picked me up at my house to go to school together, he was chilled to the bone. My mother would warm him up by the fire, speaking harsh words about his brother John who did not take proper care of the boy.*

Also at that time, George received the First Communion, for which he was prepared by Fr. Vincent Sękowski.

Perhaps, it was then that was born his desire to become a priest, so barely credible to achieve by a poor orphan. However, Divine Providence watched over him and made it possible to arrive at his goal.

### **At the Marijampole Junior High School**

**A**fter finishing elementary school, George spent a year working on his brother's farm. During summer vacations, another brother, Andrew—a student at Moscow University—came to visit. He noticed George's great learning potential and tried to convince the family to allow the boy to continue his education. Also, Andrew prepared him for the entrance exams to the junior high in Marijampole. Thus, George started making another, nearly 10-kilometer daily walk to and from school, often in cold and rainy weather. Every free moment he had, the boy used to read books, while he continued to work on the farm during his vacation, to help his brother. The hardships of his own life did not obscure George's sympathetic understanding of the difficult fate of his homeland, oppressed by her enemies. In a letter of Sept. 25, 1897, to his friend Vincent Šlekis, George thus remembered these days: *Perhaps, you also recall sometimes these fine moments we spent together cooped up in the tiny room upstairs, while our thoughts were running faraway, toward Niemen and Džwina, to where the Wilia flows and where Kaunas and Vilnius lay; toward the places where so many of our Lithuanian countrymen suffered. We use to follow this road leading all through our beloved motherland—Lithuania—gathering her wounds and torments, discussing and talking about what could be done to save our dear homeland.*

Thanks to the help of his brother Ladislaus, George was able to rent a room in Marijampole for the winter. Yet, at the start of his fifth year, when the studies became more interesting, absorbing him completely, George had to interrupt his education. A painful wound opened on his leg, which made normal walking impossible. The treatment did not bring any truly productive results, and the boy barely avoided amputation. A different doctor was called in, who was able to heal the wound; however, George had to walk on crutches for some time. Only many years later was he diagnosed with tuberculosis of the bone.

Although George had to use crutches, he still managed to help his brother significantly on the farm, by collecting wood, retrieving water, and minding the cattle. Sometimes, he was treated like a farmhand and mocked for his disability. Yet, George bore in silence all these life trials and humiliations. In trust and faith, he placed his future in God's hands. He lived by the spirit of faith and was frequently seen praying the rosary or reciting the Way of the Cross in the Mariajmpole church. In spite of hard physical labor, he dedicated every free moment to reading books borrowed from the Mariajmpole library.

### **At the Beginning of His Life at the Seminary**

**W**hen all hopes for attaining the priesthood seemed to be lost, George's paternal cousin, John Matulewicz arrived in his hometown in 1889. He was a professor of foreign languages at a State-run junior high school and also taught Russian at the seminary in Kielce. He took the boy into his home and spent two years preparing him for the continuation of his studies.

George chose to become a priest. On Oct. 1, 1891, he entered the seminary in Kielce. Undoubtedly, it was under the influence of his guardian that he changed his last name to Matulewicz, which was also used by his paternal uncle, Felix Matulewicz, the pastor in Piaseczno near Warsaw. In spite of assuming the Polish-like form of his last name, George did not renounce his deep love and attachment to Lithuania as his homeland. His Lithuanian

origins did not prevent him from feeling “at home” in Kielce and Warsaw or calling the Polish land “our country, our place.” In this way, the centuries-long coexistence of Lithuania and Poland in the Commonwealth of the Two Nations burgeoned in his person.

During his time at the seminary, he surpassed his classmates with his talents and hard work who, on their part, won over by his easy manner and tactful helpfulness, highly valued and respected him. They were particularly impressed with his command of Latin, which he owed to his guardian. Even the Latin professor, initially biased against George, had to give him excellent marks for his knowledge, while George’s colleagues dubbed him “Cicero.” During his two-year stay at the seminary, George Matulaitis received only excellent marks in all subjects.

His Sundays and holidays, seminarian George Matulaitis used to spend with the family of his paternal cousin, where he was always warmly welcomed. Unfortunately, it was not meant for him to finish his studies in Kielce because on Apr. 5, 1893, the tsarist officials closed down the seminary in that town. As a pretext, they both used the refusal of Bishop Thomas Kuliński to have the seminary inspected by the head of the School Directorate, as well as the fire set to the seminary by one of its students, a provocateur, Paul Gawroński. A search conducted in the seminary discovered books by Sigismund Krasiński and Adam Mickiewicz, as well as a booklet on devotion to the Heart of Jesus and the history of the pontificate of Pius IX, composed by Bishop Joseph Pelczar. However, as wrote Fr. Joseph Zdanowski, the historian of this seminary, the most serious evidence against the school came in the form of a harmless note made on the book margins under the impression of the news about the deportation of Bishop Charles Hryniewiecki by one of the seminary professors, a former student of the St. Petersburg Academy. This note was regarded as a dangerous, revolutionary proclamation that was the foundation of the political movement in the seminary which gave birth to the idea of secret congresses of the alumni of St. Petersburg Spiritual Academy.



The horror of the 12-day long review of the seminary was concisely described in his memoirs by the seminary Vice-Rector, Fr. Ladislaus Frelek: *It is quite sure that not even at the hour of death would one experience such extreme pains as the ones we bore in these several days. Seven of our professors were forcibly taken to Warsaw and put into Pavilion X of the Citadel, where they remained for 23 months, at the end of which they were deported to Siberia. The Russian administration seized a part of the seminary building and closed down the school.*

### **In His Studies in Warsaw and St. Petersburg**

Seminarian Matulaitis was not included in the group of people named by the provocateur Gawroński in his accusations, thanks to which he was able to continue his education at the seminary in Warsaw. By moving to that town, George found himself in the center of the ecclesial and nationalist life under the Russian partition, and he could come into contact with the elite of the Polish clergy. In 1893, the seminary in Warsaw had 132 students. The third year had, including George, 32 students, one of whom was Henry Przeździecki, later the bishop of Podlasie. He thus attested to George Matulaitis: *Two students transferred from Kielce to the seminary in Warsaw. From the first moment, we have been elated by the intelligence, exceptional talents, and nobility of character of one of them, namely: George Matulaitis. At once, he took a prominent place among us. Quiet, calm, well-balanced, very hard-working, kind and friendly to all, he was burning with the flame of love of God and thus won over our hearts. We knew that he was of Lithuanian origin, and we respected his feelings, as he respected ours. In him we loved Lithuania, and he loved Poland in us for both our homelands were oppressed and persecuted.*

George Matulaitis's abilities and diligence are attested to by the fact that out of his 43 marks during his two-year stay at the seminary of Warsaw 40 were excellent, and only one satisfactory and two good marks for singing. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the seminary professors suggested to Bishop Kuliński

to dispatch George Matulaitis to the Spiritual Academy in St. Petersburg. And thus, after receiving four minor ordinations in Warsaw, at the onset of September of 1895 George was sent to study in St. Petersburg.

The Academy first year had 26 students, among whom was also Francis Būčys, later Matulaitis's successor in the office of the General Superior and a bishop of the Eastern Rite. Just as in the years before, George's studies went well, accompanied by the deepening of his interior life. He was friendly and helpful to all. Noteworthy are two testimonies of George Matulaitis from that period. The above-mentioned Bishop Przeździecki, George's classmate and friend, once wrote: *I was witnessing George's continuous spiritual and intellectual growth at the seminary and then at the Academy in St. Petersburg. He was becoming more spiritually and intellectually powerful by the minute.* The respect and love with which he was surrounded in Warsaw were accorded to him also at the Academy in St. Petersburg. On the other hand, Bishop Būčys, also a native of Marijampole, would add many years afterwards: *Matulaitis was well aware of the high opinion about himself of his colleagues and professors, and yet, he continued to remain artless, calm, modest, without any false humility, and without a shadow of haughtiness. I noticed this virtue of his, but was not able to appreciate it fully at the time. He never gave himself airs, and I judged it to be only natural. Only now, having learned a few life lessons, I begin to understand how difficult it must have been for a young man to persevere in his natural simplicity and not to drink in the accolades nor become arrogant.*

George's superiors highly regarded his intellectual and spiritual qualities, and at the end of the third year they appointed him Senior of all the students. In addition to carrying out his normal duties, Matulaitis also began at that time to write articles for a Lithuanian magazine *Tevynes Sargas* published in the United States. This work gave cause to the Russian gendarmes to conduct a search in his room. Fortunately, they did not find anything incriminating.

On Nov. 20, 1898, George was ordained to the priesthood by the Academy Rector, Bishop Charles Niedziałkowski. He celebrated his first Mass at the Academy's chapel.

Father George graduated in 1899 with the degree of Master of Theology. He prepared his Master's thesis entitled *De iure belli et de pace aeterna* [On the Right of War and Eternal Peace] under the direction of Fr. Prof. John Maciulevičius. His work received the highest grade *cum eximia laude* with additional *cum nota primus*. According to the local customs, he was decorated with a gold medal for his achievements in studying. As Fr. George was bidding farewell to the Academy, its rector advised him to do some specialist studies at one of the Western universities and promised to give him his own chair of apologetics upon their completion.

### In Fribourg, Switzerland

The Diocese of Kielce was in need of new personnel to work in parishes, at the seminary, the Curia, and at the ecclesiastic tribunal. And they received a new priest at their disposal. On Aug. 3, 1899, Fr. George Matulaitis was dispatched to work at the parish of Daleszyce near Kielce. Officially, he served there until Aug. 2, 1902, but in fact he stayed there only for a few months. Due to his poor health, he went to Kreuznach in Germany, from where, after an unsuccessful treatment, the doctor sent him to Meran in the southern Alps. Having extended his permission to stay on the basis of the doctor's certificate, at the end of December of 1899, Fr. George went to Fribourg in Switzerland, where he enrolled in the Theology faculty of the local university, run by the Dominicans. He chose dogmatics as his major and apologetics and sociology as his minor. Father George was particularly influenced by the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Fr. Prof. Joseph Beck, who lectured on pastoral theology and sociology; and also by Fr. Albert Maria Weiss, a Dominican, who taught apologetics but was also active in the field of the social teachings of the Church. It was under the latter's direction that Fr. George prepared his Doctoral thesis.

In view of his financial difficulties, Fr. George started working at St. John's Parish in Fribourg. He occupied a damp room in a house on the bank of the River Sarine, which gave cause for his old illness to return. It was in Fribourg that Dr. Mayer diagnosed him with tuberculosis of the bone. Father Matulaitis had to undergo surgery and subsequent treatment, which was given to him without charge by Dr. G. Clement. In his letter to Bishop Kuliński, Fr. Matulaitis described his experiences: *As soon as I bade you farewell, Your Excellency, I went to take waters in Kreuznach, hoping to cure my rheumatism—what my ailment was erroneously believed to be. After two and a half months, having spent fruitlessly my money and time, I decided to go to a warmer climate in the hope that it would alleviate my illness. It was only when I was facing the amputation of my arm that the true cause of my ailment was discovered: it was not rheumatism, but tuberculosis of the bone. Surgery was performed. However, it was not yet the end of my misery. I had to have injections, due to which my entire body suffered such great pains and even my mind was so weakened that I felt dazed and not always in possession of my senses; in this condition I lived for months on the border of human existence. Eventually, the grace of God and the expert medical assistance and care helped me overcome this evil. Now, I am in my third month of slowly recovering the strength of my body and soul. However, the evil has not been totally uprooted: I must still visit the clinic and have the injections. I asked my doctor frequently to tell me when my misery might be over. Now, my Dearest Shepherd, I repeated the same question on your behalf, and the doctor revealed the truth to me: I needed three to four months more to be fully cured with a chance for another surgery, however minor, along the way.*

The bishop needed this statement in view of his plans of employing Fr. Matulaitis at the seminary as well as to present it to the tsarist administration. The governor of Kielce wanted to know why the vicar of the Daleszyce parish still did not come back to his post although he was granted the extension of absence for another 28 days only, *while he comes in person to collect the money sent to his name* (the pension was collected by John Matulewicz, Fr. George's paternal cousin, on the basis of the former's authorization).

Regardless of his many health problems, Fr. George managed to defend in 1902 his Doctoral thesis *Doctrina Russorum de statu iustitiae originalis* [The Russian Doctrine on the State of Original Justice], which was accepted with *summa cum laude*. His thesis was released in print in Krakow, in 1903. One of the ecclesiastic reviewers in Fr. Matulaitis's beatification process remarked on the lively intelligence, profound critical mind and great erudition of its author. Also, this reviewer indicated the author's active desire to explain certain disputed issues and to facilitate the Russian Orthodox' reconciliation with the Catholic Church.

Father George's stay in Fribourg had become extremely valuable for his continuous cultural and spiritual growth as well as his works, which he would undertake later. This town was one of the greatest centers of Catholic thought and religious renewal in the Church of the day. It was also the place where persons such as Fr. Jack Woroniecki, Fr. Ladislaus Kornilowicz, and Fr. Ladislaus Lewandowicz—all very close to Fr. Matulaitis—received their education. They all exerted a powerful influence on the history of Polish Catholicism. Father Būčys, who was also studying in Fribourg at that time, remarked: *The Polish influence reigned in Mariampole, Kielce, Warsaw, and St. Petersburg. In Fribourg, Matulaitis came into contact with both German and French cultures. The town was dominated by French influence, but the university was ruled by the German spirit. In Fribourg, Fr. Matulaitis's mind rose above the influence of his neighbors and reached the intellectual heights leading the cultural field of these nations. And Fr. Matulaitis remained on these heights until his dying day.* In turn, Bishop Przeździecki added: *I saw him [Fr. George] in Fribourg, in Switzerland, where—having graduated from the Academy with the Master's degree 'cum eximia laude'—he continued to study. Always quiet, always immersed in a book, he—being already a priest—was burning with pastoral zeal in helping the Swiss clergy in their pastoral work. Never and nowhere have I noticed in him even the smallest manifestation of personal, self-seeking interest.*





**VARIOUS FORMS OF HIS PASTORAL MINISTRY**





## Professor at the Seminary in Kielce

**F**ather Matulaitis returned to Kielce equipped with medical certificates and carefully concealing from the police his university degrees. He was sent to serve as the vicar of the parish of Imielno, in the district of Jędrzejów. However, he did not stay there long. On Dec. 29, 1902, the bishop obtained the consent of the tsarist administration to appoint Fr. George as a professor at the seminary in Kielce. At that time Fr. George was in Piaseczno, where he attended the funeral of his uncle—Fr. Felix Matulewicz.

In January of 1903, the newly appointed professor started his lectures on Latin and Canon Law. Father Marian Wiśniewski, then a seminarian, recalled 50 years later Fr. George's beneficial influence on the seminarians to whom he communicated not only his knowledge, but also his fervent love for the Church: *Latin classes did not inspire us because the subject was not poetical, but neither were they boring or discouraging. The professor did not burden us with grammatical rules or with memorizing. On the contrary, he was able to extract from the grammar and show us the beauty of Roman speech, its power of expression and logical construct, by which we could model and shape our own speech (...). He managed to engage us, and we owe to him our love of classical study, which many of us kept throughout our entire life (...). The professor was also obliged to teach Canon Law, which he did for the higher levels until December of 1904. This subject was considered the duller of all theological subjects, but in Fr. Matulaitis's classes, it took on vivacity and color. It is difficult to express in one word what it was that made the subject lively. Undoubtedly, it was primarily the professor himself, but also his way and method of delivering the material, which appeared as a breath of fresh air.*

*Professor Matulaitis radiated kindness and warm affection. He loved us, and we all felt it. We have no recollection of his ever embarrassing or humiliating anyone. If he noticed that a less capable or an unprepared student was mumbling in confusion, he would immerse himself in his textbook, as if looking for something, while the unfortunate man would seek help of his cheat or his classmates. The professor pretended not to hear or see these manipulations,*

*and we were grateful for his fatherly understanding. Showing lenience to the youthful weakness, he also knew how to demonstrate—not really his sternness—but such a grave and sad countenance that each one of us clearly saw the line that should not be crossed. Father George did not condone laziness, negligence, or flippancy. As he noticed any of them, he looked calmly but penetratingly upon the culprit, and we could read in his eyes: ‘If you want to have me as your friend, you must work honestly and wholeheartedly.’*

*We all worked eagerly not only for fear of losing his friendship, but also for another reason. Professor Matulaitis taught us wisely, in a practical manner, but above all he poured into us the philosophy of the spirit of faith.*

*Our young and sprightly minds, unused to tedious and rigorous work, began to grasp slowly and with considerable effort yet increasingly better, the relationship between law and our present and future life, the fate of individuals and nations. In his lectures conducted ‘sub specie aeternitatis,’ as he used to say, the canons of the law, even the minor ones, appeared in their proper light. To the said qualities of his lectures we must add another, which may be called progressive, or even revolutionary. This quality flashed sometimes in his eyes so unexpectedly and strongly that we regarded it as if some sort of revelation. Then we would begin not only to understand, but to feel that the Church is not a rigid legal institution, but a living organism that grows, develops and intensifies; that there is not nor ever should be any room for stagnation and apathy because the ever-living and active God is at her heart; and that the mission of the Church is not limited to time or space because it encompasses all times and all eternity, in the life in this world and in the afterlife.*

In addition to his purely didactic work, Fr. Prof. Matulaitis dedicated his time to writing. The magazine *Maryawita* of the Diocese of Kielce published in 1903 the first part of his article entitled *O dogmacie Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Panny Maryi* [On the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary]. Unfortunately, its subsequent parts were never finished.

This same magazine also released Fr. George's review of the book by Cecilia Plater-Zyberk, entitled *Kilka myśli o wychowaniu w rodzinie* [A Few Thoughts About Education by the Family]. Father Matulaitis also was in contact with his countrymen. Two articles appeared in the Lithuanian media in the United States, signed by his first name only—Jurgis [George in Lithuanian]. The first article, which discussed the way of renewing old prints and publishing old manuscripts, was printed by the magazine *Dirva*, and the second—on the need for active social and religious work—appeared in *Dirva-Žinynas*.

The disease which had plagued Fr. George in the past flared up anew. Once again, he had to seek medical assistance of the Warsaw specialists. One day in 1904, he returned home with his arm and his leg enclosed in metal braces. He was able to continue his work for some time afterwards, but his disease intensified and he had to stop his lectures at the seminary. The last time he put his signature under the minutes of the professorial meeting came in November of 1904. Toward the end of that year, Fr. George departed to Warsaw, never to return to Kielce.

### Minister to Youth

**A**n historian of the Church, Fr. Walerian Meysztowicz, remarked once in his Radio Vatican program that the history of the Polish nation encompasses something like dynasties of the saints and movements to holiness, and that Fr. Matulaitis was also involved in one of such movements, *whose main personage was Miss Cecylia Plater-Zyberk, foundress of the well-known "Miss Plater's school" in Warsaw. To bring this about, the Lord God used George's illness.* Father Matulaitis chose the hospital of the Transfiguration of the Lord, in a Warsaw neighborhood of Praga, as the place for his treatment. It was nicknamed "the poor peoples' hospital." This hospital was incapable of providing the kind of medical assistance and care that he required. At that point, the "Ladies from Piękna Street" came to his rescue in cooperating and understanding with Dr. Sawicki. Undoubtedly, these ladies had known Fr. George already. They were running an agricultural school in

Chyliczki near Piaseczno where the chapel under the care of Fr. Felix Matulewicz was located. Most likely the pastor introduced his relative to them. The earlier mentioned review of the book by Cecilia Plater-Zyberk can also attest to this connection. The ladies placed Fr. George in their facility at 24 Piękna Street. Thanks to their attentive care, he was slowly regaining his health. For the next three years, this facility would become the center of Fr. George's apostolic work in Warsaw. Professor Eugene Jarra, who taught at that school while still attending the university, recalled the impression that the ailing cleric made on him on the very first meeting: *[It was] a young man about thirty, wrapped in a blanket; he had a full round face, wide mouth showing in the welcome smile his healthy, white teeth; he had a nose with prominent nostrils and a wide, clear forehead under a thick crew cut. His most impressive feature was his deep dark eyes, looking at you with wisdom and attention from under strong eyebrows; his gaze was friendly, cheerful, jovial, and benevolent. The head was set on strong shoulders. Extending his hand toward the entering guest and speaking in a quiet, natural, honest manner, inviting him to take the chair next to his own, he looked delighted to have his solitude broken (...). There was something in his figure that spoke from the first moment of his uncommonness, attracted and inspired trust and a desire to approach him; there was something [in him] that captured my heart.*

Father George was bedridden, treated with painful iodine injections into one hand and one leg. However, thanks to these drugs the patient's condition began to improve gradually. Jarra recalled: *A few weeks later, I had a great surprise. Upon entering the room, I saw for the first time Fr. Matulaitis dressed in his cassock and having metal and leather braces which enclosed one of his arms and his leg above the ankle, carefully moving with limp around the room, with the help of a thick cane, twisted at its top. His face was irradiated by a smile from the joy of finally being free from forced bed rest.* At that time, Cecilia Plater-Zyberk's institution had some educational problems caused by revolutionary turmoil. Many students were expelled from the public schools. Strong socialist trends were in the air. The girl-students refused to obey their educators and to perform religious practices; and

they even went as far as mocking the Faith. In an attempt to restore order and students' proper behavior, Fr. Matulaitis was involved to deliver conferences on apologetics. One of his listeners, Ludwika Żukauskaitė left us her reminiscences of these conferences: *I remember that at first he was led to the classroom by two people, supporting him on both sides. He had no control in one hand and only limited use of one leg. He taught apologetics in the seventh grade. He did not use any textbooks, although there were many of them in the Polish language; instead, he urged us to write down his conferences. Along with the students, their teachers also attended his conferences. The classroom used to be so packed that it was difficult to breathe. His conferences absorbed us so much that we all stayed very quiet. Father Matulaitis was always calm, polite, and patient. In case of possible questions about the faith, he asked the girls at the beginning of his conference to write them down and to place them afterwards on his desk. During the next class, he would answer these questions in an exhaustive and comprehensive way. Father Matulaitis exerted quiet, but considerable influence on this school. He taught us to value time always, to be patient, and to work hard.* Slowly the atmosphere in the school improved distinctly. In his interactions with the young students at the Cecilia Plater-Zyberk School, Fr. Matulaitis dealt with an important issue: education of the Catholic intelligentsia. The intelligentsia was departing from the Church and constituted in the aspect of religion the most endangered social stratum. Stanislaus Brzozowski thus wrote in his *Diary: Christianity, Catholicism, Church, and religion are the matters that exist in our life outside of literature, philosophy, and science, everything that constitutes culture.* This state of affairs was a threat to the Church in Poland. Working together with Fr. Matulaitis, Cecilia Plater-Zyberk—who was considered to be the precursor of the organized movement of Polish Catholic intelligentsia—directed her efforts to dealing with this issue in various ways. One of her accomplishments was the founding in 1905 of the Society of Friends of Youth. The Society organized what was known as ethical circles and family groups for college and high school students. This organization's network encompassed the main academic centers attended by Polish youth. In 1909, this

movement consolidated thanks to the publication of *Prąd* [Current], the first Polish magazine of religious and social character produced by lay people. On the basis of this movement, Ladislaus Lewandowicz established in 1919 the Association of Academic Youth called *Odrodzenie* [Rebirth]. Father Matulaitis—in support of Cecilia Plater-Zyberk's efforts—delivered conferences for the youth and participated in their meetings. In the future, he would find among these young people candidates to the renewed Congregation of Marian Fathers: Robert Wierzejski, Bronislaus Załuski, Ladislaus Łaszewski, and the afore-mentioned Lewandowicz. Father Matulaitis did not limit his apostolic activity to the youth alone. He was also a confessor and spiritual director of many sisters belonging to clandestine religious congregations. He delivered conferences for them and assisted them in writing their religious constitutions. The authorities of the Archdiocese of Warsaw, taking advantage of his erudition, appointed him the censor of religious books. However, his main efforts were directed to creating organizations of laborers and priests, which we shall describe below.

### Social Activist

In 1905, the newspaper *Przegląd Powszechny* [Universal Review] organized a survey on: *What are the most important tasks that Catholicism in Poland faces today*. The survey responders put in the first place social work. Along with the development of industries there appeared a large class of factory laborers who were frequently denied basic human rights and were living in penury. Whether the workers would remain faithful to the Church or depart from her would depend upon the stance taken by the Church with regard to the working class. Thanks to his studies in Fribourg, Fr. Matulaitis was one of the prominent experts on the social teachings of the Church in Polish lands, especially of the encyclical *Rerum novarum* of Pope Leo XIII. By reading and studies, Fr. George continued to deepen systematically his knowledge of the subject. In cooperation with Plater-Zyberk, he organized a series of conferences on political economy

for a select group of people. Professor Louis Krzywicki, a socialist, delivered these conferences at the Przeździecki family's apartment. In the audience were, among others: Fr. Przeździecki, Cecilia Plater-Zyberk, members of their families, as well as Julius Ostrowski, Taddeusz Błazejewicz, and Eugene Jarra. Father Matulaitis was coming to these conferences with a notebook and was recording them diligently. In his ensuing discussions, he would emphasize the consensus between the scholarly socialist's views and the principles of Catholic ethics. Eugene Jarra wrote about Fr. Matulaitis: *Cheerful at that time, he laughed at the scholarly socialist's critique of the capitalist system, which called the landowner proprietors—who represented a large group of his listeners—the relics of feudalism.* Having prepared himself, Fr. Matulaitis actively joined the Christian social movement, which was defined then as broadly understood Christian Democracy. He became the main ideologist in the Kingdom of Poland and took part in the most significant actions in that domain. In his discourse at the social study course of 1907, he claimed that the Church ought first to be directly involved in the matters of salvation, but he also added: The Church fully realizes that a certain profusion of material goods is needed also for practicing virtues and religion. Therefore, he believed that attending to social matters belongs exactly to priestly duties.

Due to the force of the Russian revolution of 1905-1907, the tsarist oppression lightened, which created opportunities for doing social work. On Oct. 9, 1905, the Conference of Bishops in the Kingdom of Poland established a Committee on Social Work, headed by Bishop Casimir Ruszkiewicz. In one of the first Committee meetings Fr. Matulaitis and Fr. Henry Przeździecki proposed the basics and principles of conducting social work by the Church. The Committee accepted their proposal as their own and published it in print in 1906, in an anonymous brochure entitled *Chrześcijańska Demokracja* [Christian Democracy]. This document stated: *It is an irrefutable fact that abnormal correlations exist in the present social system [...]. People dedicated to the idea of justice cannot look indifferently on this state of affairs. Therefore, they get united and organized in order to fight evil with combined*



*forces in a communal action. Christian Democracy is one such action involved.* The Committee in its first session commissioned Fr. Marcel Godlewski to organize a workers' union. In the effort to carry out this program, Fr. Godlewski took advantage of Tsar Nicholas II's manifest of Oct. 30, 1905, which promised greater civic liberties, and on Nov. 16, 1905, he proclaimed at St. Martin's Church at Piwna Street, of which he was the rector, the founding of the Society of Christian Laborers.

Father Matulaitis, who had been a long-time close associate of Fr. Godlewski in the laborers' movement at the church of Holy Cross in Warsaw, was asked to compose the statutes for the new Society. In the opinion of Fr. Richard Bender, Fr. Matulaitis was most probably the author of these statutes and definitely their co-author. For this reason, *he also became the co-creator of the Society of Christian Workers in Poland.*

The first article of these statutes, which were entered into the register of records by the Russian administration on Dec. 21, 1906, declared the intent to improve the laborers' understanding of religious, moral, intellectual, social, and national topics. At the time of its peak growth in 1908, the Society outreach extended over the entire territory of the Kingdom of Poland and it numbered more than 22,000 members.

Father Matulaitis was actively working at the Society center in Warsaw. He dealt mostly in the ideological matters. First of all, he dedicated himself to organizing the Society main library in Warsaw as a workplace for Christian activists and union members. His legacy includes a manuscript of *Projekt założenia Biblioteki Centralnej Dziel Ekonomiczno-Społecznych i Apologetycznych* [Proposal to found a central library of economic and social publications].

To achieve its goals, the Society published a magazine *Towarzysz Pracy* [The Work's Companion], of which Fr. Matulaitis was the editor-in-chief in 1906 (issues 13 to 25). It seems that he was also the author of the majority of the magazine's articles. The front page displayed the motto: *Justice, charity, freedom, equality, and fraternity.* The magazine was intended for a wide group of



laborers, and its intent was to inform and instruct. The magazine emphasized the importance of workers' unions created in England, *where a laborer is neither defenseless nor alone and left to be looted by the capitalists, but closely joined with his companions because they are backed up by the entire union [...]. A laborer over there is not just an extension of a machine, but he is a part of the enterprise and has a share in its profits* (issue No. 13). The magazine positively acknowledged the fact of the seasonal and full-time laborers' participation—to some extent—in the profits of Equity Society of Lion. The magazine reported that French laborers won the right to celebrate Sunday; it was further emphasized that a laborer is a person and therefore, he must participate in the public life, in the pursuit of knowledge, and to have time for family life. Another article informed that women in Finland won a right to be members of parliament and stated that it was an act of justice. Attention was drawn to the importance of a strike and it was explained that sometimes a strike becomes a necessity, but that it may turn into a double-edged sword, if not properly prepared. The laborer's remuneration should not only suffice for deferring the needs of the laborer and his family, but also to create an opportunity to have certain material assets.

The *Towarzysz Pracy* pointed out the inadequacy of the French Revolution's demands for freedom, equality, and fraternity if they are not carried out in the spirit of justice and charity. Also, the magazine opposed all forms of anti-Semitism. Its editors thus responded to a correspondent from Kiev: *Our publication is not anti-Semitic; therefore, we cannot accept your article for print. Our motto is charity and justice* (issue No. 13). Another issue published the following statement: *Since our publication is based upon unconditional justice and is guided by charity, it scorns all attempts to incite one group of people or one party against another* (No. 14). The *Towarzysz Pracy* was edited by Fr. Matulaitis until Sept. 15, 1906, after which it was combined with the *Robotnik Polski* [Polish Laborer], thus creating a new magazine *Pracownik Polski* [Polish Worker]. Father Matulaitis cooperated with that magazine as well, even after his departure from Warsaw in 1907. This magazine published his extensive article entitled *Demo-*

*kracja Chrześcijańska* [Christian Democracy] signed with his name. As an expert in this field, he was asked to prepare an article on Christian Democracy for the Catholic Encyclopedia.

Among Fr. Matulaitis's permanent duties was also the organization of social science courses for the Society of Christian Laborers. More than 700 people came to participate in the main course held in Warsaw on Aug. 27-30, 1907. Among the keynote speakers were notable experts from all over Poland, such as Fr. Stanislaus Adamski, later the Bishop of Silesia; Fr. Peter Wawrzyniak, the sponsor of cooperatives in Wielkopolski region and in Pomorze (Pomerania); Fr. Casimir Zimmermann, the most prominent Polish sociologist of the time and later the professor of the Jagiellonian University; and Fr. Marcel Godlewski. At that meeting Fr. Matulaitis delivered a two-hour lecture entitled *Chrześcijańska teoria prawa własności* [Christian Theory of the Rights to Property]. This discourse was one of the most significant ones. Father Matulaitis stated, among other things that [...] public and collective property are equally justified, and even necessary, as private, individual property. Not only can an individual be the owner, but also the State, a commune, and any other collective body, such as an association, a union, etc. How wide should be the scope of a given property, how are its different forms to interconnect and mutually supplement depends on the natural conditions in which a nation exists, on its customs and traditions, on its culture and prevailing ideas and views, as well as on its economic conditions, etc. These words sounded very innovative considering the prevailing conditions. They undermined the assertion of the adversaries of Catholic social science who claimed that Catholics do not recognize collective property. Also, they created a basis for the Society of Christian Laborers functioning. Father Matulaitis's discourse gained great recognition and was debated at length. It was meaningful that shortly afterwards Fr. Matulaitis was offered the newly opened chair of sociology at St. Petersburg Spiritual Academy.

In his letter to Bronislaus Załuski of Apr. 12, 1948, Fr. Alexander Wóycicki, an historian of social movement in Poland,

thus characterized Fr. Matulaitis's role in organizing the Christian laborers in the Kingdom of Poland: *Without his wise counsel this organization could have taken many false steps. Father Matulaitis had the opportunity to watch a similar organization in Switzerland, he knew the social teachings of the Church, but most importantly, he himself possessed a Catholic social spirit. And he poured these very qualities into that organization at its very inception. The same spirit found its manifestation in the statutes of the Society of Christian Laborers and in its very first actions. In other words, Fr. Matulaitis put the movement of Christian Laborers in the Kingdom of Poland on the right track. It is a pity that he did not have time to train a large group of co-workers, the lack of which was the main cause of decline of that movement. His cooperation with Fr. Godlewski was not at all easy: Fr. Matulaitis was called prudence incarnate [prudencia incarnata], while Fr. Godlewski possessed some autocratic tendencies. It was the movement's great loss that Fr. Matulaitis left Warsaw so soon. Surely, the growth of the movement would have been more secure under Fr. Matulaitis's guidance.*

The last flash of Fr. Matulaitis's spirit in Warsaw was his participation in the social science courses in 1907. Father Matulaitis's conference on property was probably the best of all delivered during this meeting by other speakers, especially those from Warsaw. The lecture itself demonstrated conclusively the level of the professor's preparedness to take over the chair of Catholic Sociology. Bishop Przeździecki, Fr. George's close colleague in social actions, left us the following testimony: *During the time of war with Japan (1905), Fr. Matulaitis worked in Warsaw preparing and defending the program of Christian Democracy according to the principles set forth by Leo XIII. Father George had to fight the opinions of such people who believed only their own views to be properly Catholic, while they questioned the authenticity of faith of everyone who opposed their views.*

Recalling his cooperation with Fr. Matulaitis, the bishop gave him the following assessment: *I had the opportunity to be Fr. George's associate. Over time, I came to admire more and more the purity of his soul, his zeal and great erudition, his clear understanding of the theological, legal, educational, social, and nationalist issues. Every moment of his life was dedicated to prayer and work, to loving God and the neighbor: all of this left no room for relaxation.*

### **Professor at the Spiritual Academy in St. Petersburg**

The Spiritual Academy of St. Petersburg was of a great importance to the Church, the Polish people, and neighboring nations because it was the only higher education institution of its kind under the Russian partition and the entire Russian Empire. Father Matulaitis spent four years working on formation and education of the clerical elite there. The bulletin *Academia Caesarea Romano Catholica Ecclesiastica Petropolitana* published at the time identifies that from Sept. 1, 1907, to Dec. 20, 1909, Fr. George taught sociology there, and also dogmatic theology from Oct. 1, 1909. In the academic year 1910/1911, Fr. George was the inspector of the Academy, working directly under the Rector, Fr. Alexander Kakowski, later the Archbishop of Warsaw.

For nearly two years, Fr. George was the professor of sociology. Although he informed the Academy delegate in Warsaw that *his knowledge of the social issues came rather from experience*, he had nevertheless all necessary qualifications to become a good lecturer. He possessed extensive knowledge of the Church's social doctrine, as well as of the dogmatic theology. For this reason—as testified by Fr. Būčys, his colleague from the Academy—in *Fr. Matulaitis's sociology we find the rarely seen elsewhere concurrence between the Catholic dogmatic orthodoxy and healthy progress.*

On Oct. 1, 1907, at the inauguration of the new academic year, Fr. Prof. Matulaitis delivered a conference in Latin on property rights, which he preceded with this declaration: *I fully realize the*

*great responsibility entrusted to me in these troubled times as the social issues are being resolved with so much force and bitterness. I shall do my best in the measure of my abilities to fulfill this responsibility, relying on the principles of our Faith and following the leadership of Pope Leo XIII.* His discourse met with great approval of both the professorial staff and the students.

The topics discussed in Fr. George's lectures included, among others: man's relationship to material goods; solidarity and unity of the workers' associations; matters of the state, nationality and patriotism, war and peace, and international law.

Father Matulaitis had a knack for illustrating theory with practical examples, thus demonstrating to his audience the miserable conditions of the working class people who were frequently wronged and humiliated. He advocated for the emancipation of women, suffering from unfair treatment, and also spoke in defense of villagers. Therefore, it is not surprising that his conferences attracted many students who would skip for this reason their obligatory classes. Many of them wanted to write their Master's theses under his direction, and Fr. Matulaitis had to remind them there were other disciplines, especially theological ones, in which specialists were needed.

Father Matulaitis did not limit the scope of his social teachings only to the Academy. He actively participated in the work of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul in St. Petersburg. He delivered conferences at the meetings of the Conference members and served with them with his sagacious advice. In 1909, he managed to obtain the consent of the tsarist administration for founding a Roman-Catholic Association *Oświata* [Education], of which he became the first chairman. The association conducted the educational and cultural work among Catholics and was allowed also to set up charities. In a few years, the association had already five sections which covered with its outreach the workers' districts of the city. Under the direction of Fr. Matulaitis, the Academy professors and other specialists delivered lectures on Holy Scripture, apologetics, social and natural sciences.

Another form of Fr. Prof. Matulaitis's social activity was his work for the Social Study Courses, organized for the Lithuanians in Kaunas on Jan. 3-5, 1909. He delivered there three basic papers: *Rzut oka na dzisiejszą kwestię społeczną* [Overview of Today's Social Issues], *Kościół a własność* [The Church and Property], and *Zagadnienie robotnicze w mieście i przemyśle* [The Question of the City and Industry Workers]. All these papers appeared in the Lithuanian monthly *Draugija*, in 1909 (Nos. 31-32). In his first paper Fr. George stated: *The first big social question arose when the teaching of Christ has spread and people understood who they were. Perhaps, nowhere else had foreign religious been better tolerated than in Rome. The Romans gladly included foreign gods into their pantheon, placed them next to and worshiped along with their own gods. It is astonishing that they hated only the faith of Christ and His followers. Why? Because they felt that Christ's teaching is a new social power that would destroy the old order. Their old regime was based on slavery, and Christ preached freedom, equality, and brotherhood to the people. People understood that after the implementation of these ideals the old order would have to disappear. That is why the bloody battle began between the reigning order with its legislation and its views on the world, and the new doctrine of Christ, the new ideals of His ethics. In a special way, Christ went about organizing and reforming the world. He did not oppose directly the existing system nor destroy a single one of its institutions. He did not even offer any pre-established, ultimate project of social renewal. But He did much more, reaching into the depths of the human soul, to his heart and conscience. From here he began to change the world.*

By his articles and conferences Fr. Matulaitis created the foundations of sociology in Lithuania and, after the country regained its independence, he was instrumental in establishing the Christian social movement. This is why the well-known social activist Michael Krupavičius placed him among *the fathers and founders of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party*.

Father Matulaitis majored in dogmatic theology. Thus, when the former professor of dogmatics, Fr. John Cieplak, was ap-

pointed Suffragan of Mogilev, Fr. George succeeded him on the chair, while the lectures on sociology passed on to the freshly arrived Fr. Alexander Wóycicki, a specialist in social and political sciences. Father Marian Wiśniewski, who became once again a student of the professor from Kielce, thus described his professor of dogmatic: *The classes on theology were marked by his usual clarity and logic, and—one can say—simplicity. He was not detached from reality, did not use big words or useless subtleties. However, sometimes, as he wished to introduce us to a more subtle way of thinking or to demonstrate the precision of St. Thomas Aquinas' reasoning, he would venture into such abstract spheres that our heads would begin to spin.*

Father Matulaitis's teaching always had a practical tone. In order to bring closer to the Lithuanian priests the Western achievements in the field of pastoral theology, he published in 1911 an extensive article *O duszpasterstwie miejskim* [On Urban Pastoral Care] in the monthly *Vadovas*. He wrote: *Human life does not stand still like water in a marsh, but it flows and changes. New problems, difficulties, tasks and responsibilities arise in the pastoral field with changes in living and cultural conditions. It is necessary to search for new ways, new methods of meeting these challenges [...]. Just as human life always goes forward, so the pastoral ministry must also be like living evangelical water, constantly flowing and refreshing people. The pastor should be an evangelical salt that never loses its value. All occurrences of life must be permeated by the spirit of Christ, as by the leaven, of which the Gospel speaks. [...] The pastor must remember the supernatural means, but he cannot forget the earthly ones. The success of pastoral work frequently depends on economic, social, and intellectual conditions.* Father Matulaitis endeavored to implement these principles in his priestly life.

In the academic year 1910/1911, Fr. Matulaitis carried out the duties of inspector, i.e. the Vice-Rector of the Academy. His tasks included the actual education of the young people. The academic community was small but complex: it incorporated Poles, Lithuanians, Belarussians, and a few Germans. This was the period of



great revival of national consciousness, which led sometimes to a conflict. To manage this community, the Rector, Father Alexander Kakowski, chose Fr. Matulaitis for the office of the inspector because, as he stated in a public speech at Bielany in 1934: *I knew his soul, good character, absolute control over himself and his passions, so I enlisted him to be my assistant in the capacity of the Academy inspector.* And he was not disappointed in his expectations. In his diary called *Z niewoli do niepodległości* [From slavery to independence] he noted: *During my time as the Rector, I was able to suppress the nationalistic fights at the Academy and to set up at the school a harmonious co-existence between students and professors thanks to appointing as my deputy a Lithuanian, Fr. Matulaitis, and then—after his departure—Fr. Būčys. They were loyal in keeping a grip on the Lithuanians and suppressing all of the Lithuanian nationalist demonstrations in the bud.* Thus, the Academy had become Fr. Matulaitis's first experience in leading an international community. Later, he would use this experience in his service as the General Superior of the Marian Fathers and the bishop of Vilnius.

Father Professor Matulaitis delivered conferences and conducted retreats for the students. These retreats, that supplemented the conferences, stimulated students to work more zealously both on themselves and others. One of the Academy alumni, Fr. Zenon Kalinowski, testified in the beatification process: *Under the influence of his lectures I was deeply convinced of the need for intensive social work in the vineyard of the Lord, so I neglected my classes of natural science and took up sociology. Once, as Fr. George was visiting our study room, he saw me immersed in the textbooks of my new subject. He looked at me and said with a gentle smile the unforgettable words: 'Please remember throughout your entire life that a priest who chooses this kind of way and wants to see the good fruit of his work must be a holy priest.' I was deeply touched by these words, although I did not understand then their meaning. Only later, already as a priest, I looked at my own life and watched the priests working socially, I became convinced of the weight of this principle.*



Formed in that spirit, the students pondered the necessity for leading a more perfect and fruitful life. They sought advice and help from their professor and educator. Father Matulaitis praised such intentions, but did not offer any concrete instruction. Smiling gently, he would only say: Think, think, as I do, too. Later, to some of us he secretly revealed his thoughts that led him to the renewal of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, but also to the departure from the Academy. Several Academy alumni were quick to follow his example.

The successor at the Chair of Sociology, Fr. Wóycicki, so assessed the importance of Fr. Matulaitis's work at the Academy: *In Fr. Matulaitis came together various educational values: beautiful priestly character, modern knowledge, tact and disinterested support of the idea. Thanks to these values, Fr. Matulaitis gained the authority and sympathy of the academics, which no one had since the time of Fr. Symon as the Rector. And again—it is a pity that Fr. Matulaitis's stay in this office was so short. None of his successors ever had this beneficial influence on the young people as he did.*

Looking at the first nine years of Fr. Matulaitis's priestly service, we see that it was oriented towards the education of the clergy, the Catholic intelligentsia, as well as it was seeking to settle social issues in the spirit of justice and love. These areas of the apostolate were among the most important tasks of the Church of this age.

As he was dedicating himself to these ministries, Fr. Matulaitis also felt how weak and insufficient were the efforts of a single man; therefore, he started looking for co-workers among the clergy (which we will discuss in the next chapter) and among the lay people.

While working among the workers and academic young, Fr. Matulaitis saw the great possibilities of spreading Christ's teachings with help of the lay people. Moreover, these people were in the factories and universities, where a priest had no admission or would be accepted reluctantly, with prejudice; therefore, only the lay people could bring the light of faith there.

Consequently, he noted in his *Journal* on Oct. 27, 1910: *One of the most pressing needs of our times is, it seems to me, to involve larger groups of people from every segment of society in a more active apostolate for the faith and the growth and defense of the Church. Just as at the present time good Catholics are involved in charitable institutions, they could also become active for the propagation of the faith and in making the Church better known and loved. Lay men and women could do so much good here, once they have been instructed and educated in matters of faith and better informed about the needs of the Church; fired with holy zeal, they could then be organized.*

From that time on, he would continue to develop further this idea. On March 5, 1911, he entered into his *Journal*: *Nowadays, the battle to maintain a Catholic view of life is at its height everywhere and among all classes of people. A priest cannot reach them all, even if he tries his best to do so. The laity must come to the aid of the clergy so that both might work together in this most important task of spreading true Catholic teaching. The propagation and defense of the faith with the help of the laity should be one of our major concerns. Various organizations, societies, and institutes could be established for this purpose. Men and women could be selected and trained as teachers of the faith. They could carry the light of our holy faith everywhere and at the same time be a living example of Christian virtues.*

In Fr. Matulaitis's later statements we can hear even the voice of Vatican I, stating that the whole Church is apostolic. In his pastoral letter to the clergy of the Diocese of Vilnius, he recommended to the priests: *To explain to the faithful that everyone is obliged to participate in the work of expanding the Kingdom of Christ by supporting the missions and providing the means to carry out this work of God. It is wrong to think that the apostolate among the infidels concerns missionaries exclusively.* Undoubtedly, Fr. Matulaitis's views and activities paved the way for the modern apostolate of the laity.

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What Fr. Matulaitis preached and performed, was so innovative in his day, and on a scale much broader than just within the Polish or Lithuanian culture, that it caused sometimes anxiety among conservatives who closely adhered to their vision of the authentic teaching of the Church. An Italian prelate, Umberto Benigni, head of the secret international organization that fought modernism, wrote in 1910 that in her activities Cecilia Plater-Zyberk *was inspired by Fr. Matulewicz, a professor of the Spiritual Academy in St. Petersburg, one of the most dangerous modernists in the world*. Naturally, such opinions were an expression of the backwardness and misunderstanding of the modern teaching of the Church, but they also hindered Fr. Matulaitis's work.





**RENOVATOR OF  
THE CONGREGATION OF MARIAN FATHERS**



**F**ather Matulaitis was an ardent supporter of religious life. In his article for the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, he wrote about it thus: *A part of the holiness of the Church is that she shall never lack people striving for perfection on the road of following the evangelical counsels.* Besides, he considered religious families as a powerful instrument in the renewal of religious life within the community of the Church. Meanwhile, as a result of the tsarist dissolution of existing religious orders in 1864, nearly all of them had been annihilated in the lands under the Russian partition. Through the work of a Capuchin, Fr. Honorat Koźmiński, Divine Providence that guides the Church raised in their stead new religious orders of clandestine character. However, these were mainly female communities. There was still a lack of male religious orders, especially clerical ones.

Fully aware of the needs of religious life, Fr. Matulaitis felt a tremendous necessity for organizing male religious families in order to revive the religious life. Due to his work with the workers and students, he came to a painful realization of how little a single person can do.

His first attempt to fill this gap was to establish together with Fr. Honorat Koźmiński the *Society of Marian Secular Priests*. This was a clandestine association of diocesan priests based upon the rule prepared in 1892 by Fr. Honorat Koźmiński. The first mention of this Society's existence is found in 1904. The main source of this information is Fr. Matulaitis's letter to Fr. Honorat of Apr. 27, 1904: *I would like to tell you, Dear Father, about the life of our Society: It had a very weak pulse, mainly because of my illness. This fact troubles and saddens me. I worry because I feel greatly responsible for this cause's lack of growth, and I feel sad as I realize how much it depends upon my miserable person. I shall endeavor to make sure that they could go along without me, in case of some unforeseen situation. We are very few, only nine in total: four men in Warsaw, and another five scattered all over the country. We would have more members, but some of them joined only for a brief while and then broke off all contacts; the others are either too timid or calculating and thus, they hesitate and fear to join us; and the*

*third group of men still needs to be tested first.* This small assembly included future Marians: Fr. Casimir Bronikowski, spiritual director at the seminary in Warsaw; and Fr. Vladimir Jakowski, founder of the Association of Christian Laborers in Częstochowa.

The Society members residing in Warsaw held their meetings—probably, at Fr. Matulaitis’s home—where they heard conferences of theology of the inner life, discussed various theological writings and more difficult cases from their pastoral practice. Also, they had a communal treasury. On the other hand, members living outside Warsaw, would deliver their reports by mail. We learn about the goal of this work from the following part of the same letter of Fr. Matulaitis, where he writes: *I beg you, Dear Father, to pray fervently that the Lord God help us to get organized properly and to start leading a truly priestly life. In the face of all the unrest everywhere, in the face of the socialists’ demonstrations and the weak influence that the priests generally exert upon people, I feel an ever greater need for this Society and I wholeheartedly long for it. We, the clergy, need to reform, to take up social work, and particularly to strive for perfection, if we wish to prevent from happening here what happened in France.*

The above words demonstrate that on the road of communal life Fr. Matulaitis was seeking efficacious methods for reviving the internal life and making the apostolic work more fruitful, especially among the working people.

We do not have any information about the further development of this organization’s work. It is quite probable that it ceased to exist after Fr. Matulaitis’s departure from Warsaw. One of the essential causes of its demise was the Mariavites’ case which caused quite a reverberation around the country at that time. As Fr. Matulaitis summed it up: *They discredited our idea and the very thought of such societies all together.*

After the fall of *the Society of the Marian Secular Priests*, Fr. Matulaitis directed his attention to the Order of Marian Fathers, with which he was acquainted since his childhood from his home parish in Marijampole. In his letter of 1908, to the General



Superior of the Marian Order, Fr. Vincent Sękowski, Fr. George wrote: *For a long time now I have been feeling a need to lead a more perfect life. However, I was reluctant to abandon the Church in our lands –where the needs are so great and the workers so few—and go abroad; therefore, I stayed.* Thus, his wish to serve the Church in the lands under the Russian partition prompted him to enter the road of religious life.

The Order of Marian Fathers was founded by St. Stanislaus Papczyński in 1670. The aim of that community was to spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculately Conceived; to pray for the dead, and to work pastorally, especially among the simple folk. With the passage of time, the community's pastoral goals were broadened to include parish missions and later—after establishing the National Committee for Education—also the running of schools. In 1864 or the time of dissolution of religious orders, the Marians had their monasteries only in the regions under the Russian partition, while the entire Order numbered about 60 men; therefore, it was subject to closure, as well. Some of its members were exiled to Siberia for their participation in the January Uprising. The others decided on their own to transfer to various dioceses, and about 40 men were assembled in the Marijampole monastery, where they were to live until the end of their lives under the watchful eye of the Russian gendarmes. The number of Marians dwindled; yet, the administration forbade them to admit new candidates. Towards mid-1908, out of all the community members, only the General Superior, Fr. Vincent Sękowski was still alive. The Order was facing total annihilation.

For a considerable time this sad fate of the Order was the topic of Fr. Matulaitis's conversations with Fr. Francis Būčys, like himself an alumnus of the Marijampole junior high, and presently also a professor at the Spiritual Academy in St. Petersburg. During their summer vacations of 1908, they went to consult with Fr. Sękowski. Taking advantage of tsarist administration concessions of 1905, which allowed for certain religious freedom, both professors sought permission of the Russian authorities in St. Petersburg to create conditions for the development of the

Order. However, the administration categorically opposed any attempts of renewing religious life and was prepared to counteract all efforts directed to the attainment of this goal.

Both professors, as well as Fr. Sękowski, clearly understood that the only way to save the Order in this situation was to work in secret. The entire Order-founding activity of Fr. Honorat demonstrated that this was indeed possible. They all fully realized that they were running the risk of being discovered and punished, yet the good of the Church urged them to take necessary steps. At that time, Fr. Matulaitis wrote in his *Journal*: *Each member of our Congregation must be prepared for the eventuality that sooner or later the authorities will find and punish him, that he may have to spend time in prison or be exiled. [...] Of course, we must be prudent and, as far as possible, be careful to protect ourselves against such a calamity, but with moderation, lest we become panic stricken and negligent in our work for the glory of God and the good of the Church.*

This plan entailed far-reaching changes in the life of the Order, which required the consent of the Holy See. In order to get such consent, with the help of the Academy Fr. Matulaitis obtained a passport and went to Rome in the end of July 1909. He carried a petition of the General Superior, Fr. Sękowski to the Pope and a letter of recommendation of Bishop Casimir Ruskiewicz, the Suf-fragan of Warsaw, who was also native of the Marijampole parish and was well acquainted with the General of the Marian Order, as well as both professors.

Father Sękowski's letter to Pope Pius X opened the whole process of renewal of the Marian Order; therefore, we shall quote extensive excerpts from this document. On July 20, 1909, Father General wrote that *it so happened* [as a result of the dissolution of the religious orders] *that out of all members of the Order of Marian Fathers I alone still remain alive: all others are already dead. Since I am old and do not enjoy good health, it can happen that at the moment of my death the entire Congregation will expire, unless some unusual measures are taken—with the consent of the Holy See—to prevent it from happening. Seeing that everyone believes*

*it necessary to have centers of religious life in our area and seeing that candidates have long been petitioning to join our Congregation; therefore, having given the matter a thorough consideration, we are intent—should the Holy See be agreeable—to lead religious life in the Congregation of Marian Fathers without giving any outward sign, as much as possible any signs, of our vocation because it is impossible to do so in any other manner due to the government's persecutions.* Father Sękowski also asked the Holy Father to release the Marians from wearing habits and to allow receiving Fr. Matulaitis's one year vows at once, without his making the novitiate, as well as to admit other candidates to the novitiate and trial period.

He concluded his petitions with these words: *I, the General Superior of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, before God entrust to the same Fr. Matulaitis all the power that I wield and authorize him to act on my behalf at the Holy See in all the matters concerning the further existence of our Congregation.*

In Rome, Fr. Matulaitis was received in audience by Cardinal Joseph Vives y Tuto, the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious. During their conversation the cardinal pointed out to Father Matulaitis that the Constitutions of 1787, which were still bidding for the Marians, are outdated and incompatible with the current Church Law. He also indicated that it would be good if the Marians would make simple instead of solemn vows, since they intended to live their religious life in secret, and that Fr. Matulaitis would compose new constitutions adapted to the *Norms, according to which the Holy Congregation for Bishops and Religious used to follow when approving new religious institutes of simple vows.* Following this conversation, Fr. Matulaitis—as the General Superior's plenipotentiary—filed a special official document, in which he reiterated Fr. Sękowski's request and included the above-said concerns.

On Aug. 2, 1909, the Congregation for Religious issued an introductory decree that allowed Fr. Matulaitis to make his religious vows without first doing the novitiate; the decree also permitted admitting Fr. Būčys into the novitiate. We shall quote this decree

in full: *Taking into consideration the letter of recommendation from the Ordinary of Warsaw, we entrust him with the authority of admitting to the Congregation of Marian Fathers the said candidates upon obtaining the lawful consent of the present General Superior. No less than three months after their admission, the candidates shall submit the letters of recommendation from the venerable Ordinaries of Mohilev, Warsaw, and Sejny.*

This cause, which seemed to be exceptionally difficult, had been positively resolved in an unusually short time. In fact, the decisions were made by the Congregation's Prefect personally during his meeting with Fr. Matulaitis even before he submitted the official petition.

After receiving this decree, Fr. Matulaitis lifted up his thanksgiving prayers at the Roman basilicas and then went happily back to Warsaw. He informed Frs. Sękowski and Būčys of the outcome of his mission and invited them to come to Warsaw.

The ceremony took place on Sunday, Aug. 29<sup>th</sup>, at Bishop Ruszkiewicz's chapel at the old monastery of the Missionary Fathers, presently converted into the presbytery of the church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw. On this occasion, Bishop Ruszkiewicz issued the following document: *I, the undersigned, Casimir Ruszkiewicz, Titular Bishop of Berissa and the Suffragan of Warsaw, hereby attest that on August 29, 1909—by the power granted to me by the Sacred Congregation for Religious in its decree No. 3544/09—in the presence of Fr. Vincent Sękowski, the General Superior of the Congregation of Marian Fathers received into the said Congregation the following candidates: George Matulaitis and Francis Būčys, Doctors of Theology and professors at the Spiritual Academy of St. Petersburg. I admitted George Matulaitis to the profession of first vows and Francis Būčys to the novitiate.*

*This fact is confirmed by the signatures of the Very Reverend General Superior and both candidates.*

It was the bishop who admitted both priests into the Congregation in the presence of its General Superior. The existing documents do not leave even a shadow of doubt about it. That was

an exceptional circumstance. It was not the general law that ruled there, but the special decision of the Holy See. Bishop Ruszkiewicz was Rome's delegate empowered to act in the matter. The only provision made by Rome was that the ceremony be performed with the consent of the Congregation's General Superior.

This way the continued existence of the Order had been secured. The date of Aug. 2, 1909, is justly considered as a turning point in the history of the Marian Fathers: on this day the process of renewing the Marian family began.

Both professors returned to St. Petersburg to continue their lecturing. That year was exceptionally difficult to Fr. Matulaitis. In addition to giving classes on dogmatic theology and sociology, he also had to fulfill temporarily the Vice-Rector's duties. For this reason, in his letter of Feb. 7, 1910, he complained: *Up until Christmas holidays I have been carrying out the duties of more than two people*. Also, Fr. Būčys was doing his novitiate at that same time, under Fr. George's direction. Aside from the local bishop, no one at the Academy even suspected that the Marian religious family had begun its revival.

Working under these difficult conditions, Fr. Matulaitis also prepared the new constitutions. According to his instructions received in Rome, in addition to the old Marian Fathers' regulations, he also used the *Norms* of 1901. He also consulted the constitutions of the Jesuits and other thriving modern religious orders. He discussed every article with Fr. Būčys. Toward the end of January 1910, the new constitutions were ready. After obtaining the approval of the General Superior, the document was sent to print. The constitutions were published in Latin under the title "The Institute of the Marian Brethren Under the Invocation of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary." Although the constitutions had been released illegally, that is without the knowledge of tsarist censorship, by some strange coincidence they were displayed at the public exhibition of books. Upon seeing it there, Fr. Būčys was frightened: some inappropriate person might have taken interest in the book. Without hesitation as to

what needed to be done, the book found itself in his pocket. The danger was averted.

In May of 1910, Fr. Matulaitis sent the draft of the constitutions to Rome. According to the instruction from the Congregation for Religious, he included with it the letters of recommendation from Bishop Ruszkiewicz of Warsaw, of Fr. Joseph Antonowicz, the Chapter Vicar of the Diocese of Sejny, to which Marijampole belonged; and of Bishop Stephen Denisewicz, Councilor of the Diocese of Mohylev, where both Frs. Professors were residing. In addition, the Congregation demanded to see the “Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Marian Constitutions of 1787, and the personally written petition of the General Superior, Fr. Sękowski, asking for approval of the reformed Marian Institute and its new constitutions. Father Matulaitis was able to send all these documents in only at the beginning of September 1910. After making certain small alterations in the draft of the constitutions, Pope Pius X ratified them permanently along with the reformed Congregation. Following is an excerpt from the decree of Nov. 28, 1910: *Certain secular priests, watching with sadness the dying out of a once flourishing institute, dedicated their efforts—with the consent and encouragement of the Most Reverend Bishops of Mohylev, Warsaw, and Sejny, as well as the still living General Superior—to revive this institute, and they achieved their goal in accordance with the norms and regulations of the Holy Congregation for Religious. However, they judged it necessary—in view of existing conditions—that future candidates make simple vows instead of solemn ones and that the Office of the Dead, which was recited daily as stipulated by the old constitutions, be kindly replaced with a special devotion for the souls in purgatory, without placing on the community members any permanent and specific burden.*

*The Cardinal Prefect of the Holy Congregation for Religious, who signed below, presented the above matters together with attached amended constitutions to the reigning Pope Pius X in the audience on Sept. 15, 1910. His Holiness most kindly deigned to give his approval of this reformed Congregation and its Constitutions, as well*

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*as gave permission to replace the Office of the Dead, only stipulating proper respect for the Apostolic Constitutions and the jurisdiction of bishops.*

When Fr. General Sękowski first petitioned the Holy See for the rescue of the Order of Marian Fathers he stated that he was the last surviving member of the community. Yet, we know that there still were other former Marians living in dispersion. Elderly Fr. Bernard Pielasiński (1832-1914) resided in Góra Kalwaria near Warsaw; he was still wearing the white Marian habit and he was listed as a religious in the diocesan yearbooks. How can this be reconciled? There is no doubt that the General Superior of such a small community knew exactly his subordinates. Also, the same claim was repeated not only by Fr. Matulewicz, but also by the administrator of the Diocese of Sejny who had the custody of the Marijampole monastery, while the entire matter was under the patronage of Bishop Ruszkiewicz who certainly knew Fr. Pielasiński personally. So, no mistake has been made here. Everything indicates that Fr. Pielasiński, who lived outside the community and did not participate in any manner in its life, no longer had full rights of a religious. Consequently, the statement saying that the General Superior was the only surviving member of the community, found its way into the decree of the Holy See.

The crowning of Fr. Matulaitis's work of the renewal of the Marian Order in the legal aspect came in the form of his draft of the constitutions, composed mainly in 1923 on the basis of his rich experience and extensive studies, as well as the new Code of Canon Law. The new constitutions were ratified in 1930, after Fr. Matulaitis's death.

Fr. Aleksis Petrani, a long-time professor of Church Law at the Catholic University of Lublin, who had studied more than a hundred various religious by-laws, thus characterized these Constitutions: *These Constitutions belonged among the very best ones that passed through my hands. They are totally original, written in beautiful Latin, very clear and transparent in their meaning. Out of respect for the lawgiver, certain ascetic fragments, which nearly touched on mysticism, were left intact.* A similar opinion about

Bishop Matulaitis's Constitutions have been expressed by Frs. John Orth and Cirył van Terneuzen.

The guiding ideas of Fr. Matulaitis's two constitutions were the same. On the one hand, they take into consideration all the essential elements of the old Marian Order such as spreading devotion to the Blessed Mother Immaculately Conceived, praying for the souls of the dead, apostolic works, and the banning of alcohol. On the other hand, they introduced certain new elements, such as, for example, the following: Wanting to live, work, and grow, the Marian Fathers had to do so in secret from the tsarist administration. For this reason, they had to abandon the traditionally worn white habit and the *decade*<sup>1</sup>. The new lifestyle also demanded the replacement of solemn vows with simple ones. In turn, this entailed a change of form of the Marian Fathers' Institute from a religious order to a religious congregation. The principle of clandestine existence also demanded the adaptation of such a way of living and praying, which would not attract anybody's attention and, therefore, called for abandoning communal prayer in choir, night vigils, and particular mortifications. Father Matulaitis saw some positive elements of that principle: it allowed the Marians to penetrate circles that were either disinclined or even hostile to the Faith and to minister in the most threatened areas of religious life. Father Matulaitis entered in his *Journal* on Oct. 25, 1910, as if commenting on the Constitutions: *Should we not, then, do our best to find our way into any place, get in somehow, wherever there is any hope of gaining something for Christ and for His Church: into all kinds of associations and institutions, into every land and nation—and especially into the cities where there are universities and young people to bring to Christ? Just as these places have become the sources of misleading philosophies, they could become springs of the true teachings of Christ; into workers' unions and organizations so that these become strongholds of the Christian faith, defending and upholding the*

<sup>1</sup> Decade—a chaplet consisting of one *Our Father* and 10 *Hail Marys* that the Marians recited in honor of the 10 evangelical virtues of the Blessed Mother, using a set of 10 beads, which they wore on their sashes.



*Church, rather than hotbeds of sedition used to promote the cause of all sorts of revolutionaries; and into any other place where the greater glory of God demands that we go.* Although the Constitutions of 1930 were composed in times of freedom, yet they retained the said alterations, thanks to which the Congregation of Marian Fathers kept its character as a community prepared to work under difficult conditions.

In the history of the Church, the post-Vatican I period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became known as the century of the Church. This found its reflection in Fr. Matulaitis's spirituality and his constitutions. Article 5 of his Constitutions of 1930 is very indicative for his two legal documents. This article stated: *Let them care for the Church, which is the Kingdom of God on earth and the spouse of Christ, in every respect with honor, love, and devotion. Let them be guided by its principles and spirit, adhere faithfully to its hierarchy, comply with its wishes and desires and be in its service with all of their strength, with all effort, and in every way possible, by bravely overcoming all obstacles and dangers and not hesitating when the necessity or the good of the Church demands it, to encounter difficulties and adversities and to expend and sacrifice themselves completely.* This feature of the Congregation is also expressed in its motto 'For Christ and the Church.'

The Constitutions of the renewed Congregation were markedly intent on adapting to modern conditions. At the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Church in the Russian-partitioned regions was quite conservative: hampered in its scholarly growth, it could not keep up with the pastoral needs of its faithful. As Fr. Matulaitis was writing an article on pastoral ministry in urban settings for the Lithuanian monthly *Vadovas* in 1911, he thus formulated the existing problem: *The effectiveness of the priests' service, blessings granted for it and its success would greatly depend on the measure of the Church's representatives' understanding of the present times; of the people with their desires and aspirations; it would depend on how well they were prepared to face the demands of continuously changing life and their ability to fulfill the demands of their own vocation under the new conditions of cultural life.* For

this reason, his two Constitutions placed first among the goals of the Congregation the acquirement and promotion knowledge along with instruction of others; as to the community itself, he strongly emphasized the necessity of studying new papal documents and other new publications along with the ever-changing life conditions.

The same inspirational source is manifested in the draft of his first Constitutions, which grants equal rights to all members of the Congregation, priests and religious brothers alike. Father Matulaitis reserved to the priests only the office of the General Superior and his Vicar. At that time, this article could not possibly be accepted by Church authorities, and, therefore, it was deleted. Later, this issue was partially re-evaluated after Vatican II. In later years, as Fr. George was working on the constitutions for various female religious communities, he similarly postulated the elimination of division into two choirs because, as he wrote to Mother Superior Leontina Gałęcka: *We must look to the future. The choirs might prove to be very obsolete.* In this case also, his proposal found its full implementation only after Vatican II.

Another specific feature of Fr. Matulaitis's constitutions is their universal character with regard to both the community's aims and means. This corresponded to the author's mentality and resulted from the circumstances under which the Congregation was being renewed, when clerical religious orders were nearly completely lacking. Hence, the following was assigned as their aims: education of youth; running all sorts of schools; scholarly and journalistic activity; publishing of books and magazines, founding and directing various Catholic organizations; pastoral ministry in parishes; missions within the country and abroad; and—as the lawgiver phrased it in article 2 of the Constitutions of 1930—*to make their utmost effort to contribute in all possible manner suggested by their zeal, to the salvation and sanctification of souls according to the needs and circumstances of times and places.* Or, in other words, the entire apostolate of the Catholic Church.

Perhaps these two Marian by-laws are illustrated the most succinctly, yet the most profoundly through the figures of the Con-

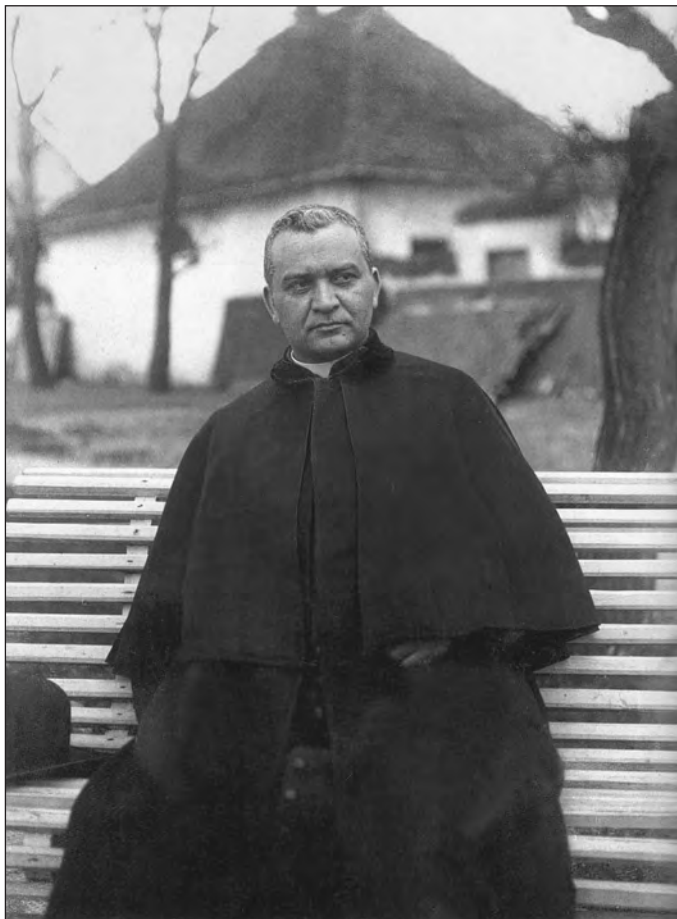
gregation's patrons: the Most Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculately Conceived—the personification of the Church's holiness; and St. Paul the Apostle, with a special emphasis on his works and sufferings borne for Christ and the People of God.

Giving these Constitutions the most general evaluation, it is possible to say that Fr. Matulaitis adapted them to the conditions and needs of his time and even foresaw the future.

Aside from all alterations and improvements, the Marian Fathers still represent the same religious family that was founded by Fr. Papczyński. The Congregation for Religious declared in 1928 that *the renewed Institute of the Marian Fathers is a legal continuation in a new form of the same Order of the Marian Fathers founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.*

Let us see now in what way Fr. Renovator introduced into life the outlined principles.





**GENERAL SUPERIOR OF  
THE MARIAN COMMUNITY**



## **Election to the office of the General Superior**

**M**embers of the renewed Marian Fathers' community were spending their summer vacations of 1910 in the town of Pohulanka near Dźwińsk, on the estate of Count Plater. They made a chapel available to the local faithful there. They invited possible candidates to join their group. It was there that Fr. John Totoraitis was admitted into the novitiate, who was followed there by the first secular candidate Constantine Songaila, who studied physics and mathematics at the university of St. Petersburg. On Aug. 29<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Matulaitis renewed his vows before Fr. General Sękowski, and on Sept. 15, Fr. Būčys made his first annual vows.

At the start of the new academic year all new Marians went to St. Petersburg. Two new young candidates took up residence along with them; passing themselves as servants of the two Frs. Professors, they could live in the building belonging to the Academy.

The death of Fr. General Sękowski, who passed away at the age of 70, on Palm Sunday, Apr. 10, 1911, became an important event in the history of the community. Father Būčys and one of the priest-candidates attended his funeral. The faithful, present at the ceremony, were convinced that they witnessed the funeral of the last Marian. This belief was also expressed in the speech of the local vicar, Fr. Matthew Gustaitis, who underlined that the Order of Marian Fathers ceased to exist with the death of its General Superior. Little did he know that the Marians had already accomplished their rebirth and were actually present at that solemn ceremony. In his will, Fr. Sękowski left 6,000 rubles to Fr. Matulaitis as his successor. However, the governmental officials did not respect his last wish and confiscated the money.

After the death of Fr. Sękowski the Congregation had only two professed priests. For this reason, the election of the new General Superior had to be postponed until such time when Fr. Totoraitis would complete his novitiate.

The first General Chapter of the renewed Congregation was celebrated on July 14, 1911, in the town of Gelgaudiškis of the

Diocese of Sejny, where Fr. Būčys' uncle, Francis Būčys, was the pastor. After dinner served at the rectory, all priests went to the church for adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament. Seeing that his guests were taking their time there, the pastor went about his own business. At that point the Marians moved to the sacristy, where Fr. Totoraitis made his first vows before Fr. Matulaitis. Now, there were three professed Marians. Father Matulaitis mentioned that the right moment had come for electing the General Superior. Then, Fr. Būčys proposed to elect Fr. Matulaitis to this office; from that moment on, he took good care of the community's affairs. Father Totoraitis concurred, and in this way the right to lead was entrusted to its Renovator. As a sign of respect, the voters kissed the hand of their newly elected superior. The entire ceremony, including prayers, lasted a mere 10 minutes. Father Matulaitis guided the community until his dying day.

### **In Fribourg, Switzerland**

**T**he need for secrecy constituted a serious handicap for the development of the Congregation. In addition, some candidates left the community, which led to fear for a possible loss of its conspiratorial status. In 1911, Russian administration intensified the police search for clandestine religious orders. Organizing a sizeable novitiate under such conditions was absolutely inconceivable. It was particularly difficult for the priests to hide. Yet, Fr. Matulaitis was not about to resign from the once taken proper course. Hence, he decided to move the novitiate to Fribourg in Switzerland. He thus presented his reasons to the Congregation for Religious in Rome: *I resigned from my duties of professor and inspector at the Academy in St. Petersburg and moved to Fribourg in Switzerland when it transpired that it was impossible to establish a substantial novitiate in St. Petersburg or anywhere else in Russia, especially if the candidates are priests. The secular authorities would take note at once. On the other hand, many priests and seminarians, also from Russia, come to Fribourg for university studies. For this reason, it would be possible to hide here under the*



*pretext of university studies. At this time, the Russian government is not hostile toward Fribourg; they dislike only Innsbruck and they fear Rome. Therefore, I hope that we will be able to easily and freely conduct the spiritual and intellectual formation and continue our organizational process and return without problems to Russia later and undertake our work there in accordance what has been discussed and agreed upon with some of the bishops.*

Father Matulaitis's friend, Fr. Būčys, remarked in regard to this decision: *At that time, Fr. Matulaitis was carrying out the important duties of inspector or Vice-Rector of the Academy; he was also considered one of the best speakers, for which reason he was one of the sure candidates for the Episcopal title, yet he abandoned all of this for the sake of the Marian novitiate.* Some of Fr. George's "reasonable" friends generally did not approve of his decision, and some even went as far as suspecting there were some hidden intentions, which in turn led to the creation of gossip, beneficial to the Marians, of Fr. Matulaitis's nomination to the post of a professor in Fribourg.

In the last days of July, Fr. Matulaitis went to Switzerland. He rented an apartment and went back quickly to settle his own affairs and to invite candidates. Seven priests applied for admission into the novitiate, as well as one seminarian and two lay persons. After doing their retreat guided by Fr. Matulaitis, this group of ten men began formal preparations for their religious life. For the purpose of greater security, the novitiate was called "House of Studies," and some of the novices were attending university lectures.

That was the new legal situation in the life of the Congregation. Thus, in mid-November Fr. Matulaitis went to Rome in order to give a report on the community's growth and to ask for necessary approval and permission. He was already well-known in Rome and was able to conclude successfully nearly all his business. Father George spoke with great enthusiasm about the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious: *How good a father to all religious is His Eminence Cardinal Vives y Tuto!* Taking advantage of his stay in Rome, Fr. George sought counsel in matters of the Marian com-

munity of a group of highly experienced men, especially Fr. Vladimir Ledóchowski. He also visited numerous Roman colleges in order to establish closer contacts with candidates to the Congregation. Filled with great joy and strengthened in spirit he went back to his novices.

Father Wiśniewski, who belonged to the first group of Fri-bour novices, recalled the cordial climate of these days. He said that the Novice Master never showed any sign of suffering, caused by his physical ailments, and that he was always smiling and rejoicing in other people's joy in spite of his work load and illness. He took great care of spiritual formation for the religious life of the new members who were often of the same age as he was, making sure at the same time that they had appropriate accommodations. What is more: *Our beloved Father was concerned with such things as daily exercise. Today, one remembers fondly how he taught us during recreations the best systems, showing us with his ailing arms and legs the difficult gymnastic movements so as to support the theory with practice.*

*On warm sunny days we used to take a walk outside of the city, wrote Fr. Wiśniewski. We noticed that sunlight was very beneficial to our Father; that it gave some relief to his ailing bones, made better his sleep and appetite; therefore, we always tried to take him into the sunniest places. On Sundays and holidays we used to go to the railroad bridge over the River Sarina. Perhaps, this trip was a bit too long for Fr. George, but he was walking along willingly and was happy to see us playing ball under the bridge and frolicking merrily. And yet he, as some other priests, such as Frs. Bronikowski, Dvaranauskas, and Kudirka, were nearly 40 years old.*

Father Matulaitis conducted days of reconciliation and meditation, conferences on the constitutions, and spiritual readings. He was familiar with ascetic literature and supplied the house library with the best books from that field, and recommended to individual novices other suitable books to read.

The financial situation of the community was difficult. Its entire resource consisted of 4,000 rubles which was the sum of savings made by Frs. Matulaitis and Būčys. This money could only cover two years of upkeep. As to the future, Fr. Matulaitis expected that he and his priests would be able to earn enough to continue forming the young Marians; but above all he counted on Divine Providence. In his letter of Feb. 8, 1912, to Fr. Anthony Staniukynas, the founder of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Casimir in the United States, he wrote: *As to riches, we are all equally poor, not having a penny. It is hard to believe that anyone of such people that like to accumulate wealth would want to join us. It is likewise with health: not all of us can boast of a good one. If only we continue to do what is possible and on the measure of our strength, the Lord God would not ask for more. In my opinion, aman himself, his good spirit and good will, is the greatest treasure which he contributes when joining the congregation.*

In spite of difficulties, such as the need to change their quarters four times during the seven-year stay in Fribourg, the climate in the community was joyful. It was noticed by H. Przeździecki, who left us the following testimony: *I had met Fr. George in Fribourg, Switzerland, after he resigned his duties as professor and inspector at the Academy in St. Petersburg. He was in the midst of his companions of the Marian community, which he renewed, and happily rejoicing in his religious status, totally absorbed by the future of his congregation and working hard on its behalf. To his brethren, Fr. George was at once a father, a mother, and a brother. Peace and heavenly joy pervaded this quiet Swiss house of the first Marians. Ailing, Fr. George was constantly wrapped in bandages, yet he never complained. He was always cheerful and smiling, full of God's spirit, speaking of God, directing ing to God, working for God, and wanting to make everyone happy through God.*

Sometimes, Fr. Matulaitis grumbled in his *Journal* against the obstacles on the way of fulfilling his plans: *But as soon as I had taken the first step really to walk in the footsteps of Christ, people began to offer me important and influential positions: they wanted to make me rector of a seminary or a canon. After I had been ap-*

*pointed Vice Rector of the Academy (of St. Petersburg) without my consent, rumors spread that I would soon be made auxiliary bishop or rector. [...] People to whom we had to report about what we were doing, even priests, made fun of us and of our plans, predicting that nothing would come of them (Aug. 17, 1911).*

He repeated the same complaint in Switzerland. During Fr. George's stay in Rome, he was approached by Msgr. Adam Sapieha, an employee of the Roman Curia, who proposed Fr. George—with Cardinal De Lai's consent—to come to work for the Consistory Congregation as *the representative of the Church's interests in Russia, Lithuania, and the Kingdom of Poland, including Galicia [Western Ukraine] and the Poznan region*. His duty would be mainly to provide detailed information about the state of the Church in these areas. This proposal was backed up by Archbishop Joseph Teodorowicz. It was suggested to Fr. Matulaitis to move the novitiate to Rome and carry out simultaneously these two functions. After consulting some knowledgeable people, such as Fr. Ledóchowski, Fr. Matulaitis rejected this proposal, but he suggested to offer this position to Fr. Henry Przeździecki. Later, Fr. George entered in his *Journal*: *In my heart I was certain that, first of all, I ought to make every effort to foster the growth and development of our Congregation and not be sidetracked. Besides, I would not be happy that any member of our Congregation should be mixed up in politics or diplomacy. My ideal is that we should be good workers in the Lord's vineyard, not politicians. Deep within, my spirit prompted me to disregard Monsignor Sapieha's and Father Grum's arguments and continue the work we have begun, to follow the poor, humble, hardworking Christ, to keep walking along the path of peaceful and quiet labor. It is not right for us to get involved in diplomacy or high places where decisions are made, even about the fate of bishops. Rather, we ought to be the bishops' servants (Nov. 26, 1911).*

In this very spirit Fr. George prepared his spiritual sons for their future challenges. The novices were recruited from two nationalities: *Polish and Lithuanian. Nationalistic differences between the Poles and the Lithuanians had no role to play in Fribourg,*

wrote Fr. Wiśniewski. *Father Matulaitis knew how to harmonize perfectly the proper and reasonable aspirations of both nationalities to such an effect that their differences were nearly ever felt. All the Lithuanians spoke Polish, and Fr. George himself addressed us in that language. The Poles started to learn a bit of Lithuanian, mainly out of sympathy and spirit of brotherhood.*

This blissful climate the Novice Master had to pay with his toil and fight, since these were the years of the Polish-Lithuanian conflicts, and Fr. George was under attack by Lithuania politicians for his associations with the Poles. He responded that he was not associating with the Polish nationalists for the purpose of resurrecting the union, but with Polish Catholics in order to serve God and the Church. No doubt, this atmosphere is linked to the vow which he made during his last visit in Rome. This is what he entered in his *Journal*: *In the afternoon, I went to St. Peter's Basilica. There, at the tomb of the Holy Apostle, I made a vow to do everything in my power that neither I myself, nor any of our members, nor the Congregation itself would ever pursue any other aims, whether national, political, or the like, but seek only to serve God, the Church, and work for the salvation of souls, making use of all natural and supernatural means as instruments in the pursuit of this highest goal, namely, the greater glory of God.*

On Sept. 19, 1912, Stanislaus Zdzitowiecki, the Bishop of Kalisz, arrived in Fribourg from Włocławek. He was accompanied by Msgr Owczarek, secretary of the Consistory. The purpose of his visit was to speak with Fr. Matulaitis about the *rebirth and spiritual renewal of the monastery on Jasna Góra*, since that monastery belonged at the time to his diocese.

The bishop described the sad state of the monastery in the aftermath of the crime committed by Damasus Macoch; the inability of the brethren to conduct any reforms, and the actions of the tsarist police directed to prevent the reforms from ever happening.

In response, Fr. Matulaitis said that the Marian community was still small and mentioned other problems encountered. However, to conclude, he said that the Congregation was ready to try, and would do everything possible to serve the Church—and especially the Most Blessed Virgin Mary—ever more efficiently within the measure of its strength. Since our Congregation is dedicated to Mary and venerates her in a special way, therefore, we will be glad to do everything in our power to defend and spread her honor. However, he made one stipulation: the bishop had to present this matter to the Holy Father and the Congregation for Religious, as well as discuss it with the Polish bishops who ought to send candidates for the priesthood to the Marians and to Jasna Góra. He promised the bishop that he would carefully prepare these men for carrying out priestly duties.

In addition, Fr. Matulaitis aired his doubts as to the Pauline Fathers' agreement to join the Marians. He reserved for the Marians the right to have their own constitutions, government, and lifestyle, as well as the right to keep all their privileges outside of Częstochowa. The whole matter was very complicated and seemed to be dragging on indefinitely. Meanwhile, the political climate changed and the Pauline Fathers were able to deal with their problems on their own. The above visit speaks of the great prestige accredited by Church authorities to this small Marian community, which was making its first steps in the Church under Fr. Matulaitis's guidance.

No obstacle was capable of breaking Fr. George's determination. The last note added in 1914 to his *Journal* spoke again of his resolve to give himself in the total service of Christ: *Lord, You see my heart and You know that I love You and desire to love You more and more. If you should see a single vein in my body that is not throbbing with love of You, tear it out and destroy it!*

The Marian novitiate in Fribourg functioned until 1918. In total, 32 novices were admitted, and 24 of them made religious vows, of which number 14 men were priests, two seminarians, and eight religious brothers. The majority of these men underwent their first three-year training for religious life under the

guidance of Fr. Matulaitis. The priests graduating from the novitiate were sent by Fr. Matulaitis to work apostolically in Lithuania and Poland. Without revealing their religious vocation, these men served as pastoral ministers and professors at various seminaries in the Dioceses of Włocławek and Sejny, and ministered in the Archdiocese of Warsaw.

At the same time, Fr. Matulaitis felt the need for some stabilization for his community. This is what he wrote on Feb. 8, 1913, to Fr. Staniukinas: *We would like very much to establish our religious house in America in order to have some sort of a base for our Congregation. It is difficult for a whole Congregation to live in secret; therefore, we need to have at least this one house, where we could openly interact with the public and keep and guard necessary documents. Hence, we shall endeavor with your assistance to settle in America.*

Soon after, the issue was ready for action: on July 19, 1913, Fr. Matulaitis and two Lithuanian priests, Frs. Felix Kudirka and Julian Kazakas, arrived in the United State onboard the boat "Savoie." Everything was successfully arranged, and a month later a religious house was formally opened in Chicago.

Father Matulaitis's stay in America lasted for about two months. In addition to the Marian Fathers' business, he dedicated his special attention to the matters of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Casimir. He corrected their constitutions, conducted retreats, and helped them to get organized. In addition, Fr. George participated in parish ministry by delivering sermons and conferences and by hearing confessions. The United States impressed him greatly and positively. He was particularly edified by the peaceful coexistence of 60 various ethnic groups within one state organism.

The community of Marian Fathers transplanted to the United States was developed relatively well. In Fr. Matulaitis's lifetime they acquired three religious houses, their own novitiate, and 50 members. They were involved mostly in pastoral ministry, education, and publishing.

### At Bielany

In July of 1914, Fr. Matulaitis conducted a retreat in Marijampole for the Lithuanian priests from the Diocese of Sejny. World War I found him staying in that town. Unable to go back to Switzerland, Fr. George settled in Warsaw. He was well known there thanks to his previous commitments and had many tried and true friends. The Archdiocese of Warsaw was governed at that time by Archbishop Alexander Kakowski, the former rector of the Spiritual Academy in St. Petersburg, with whom Fr. Matulaitis closely cooperated.

As once before, Fr. George took up residence at the facilities run by Cecilia Plater-Zyberk and immersed himself in pastoral work. Female members of the clandestine orders lined up at his confessional. They also asked him to deliver conferences or, at least, to run a retreat. During Advent and Lent, Father professor—as he was generally called there—was continually asked to run retreats for the youth, the intelligentsia, seminarians, and priests. And this is how it would go on nearly throughout the entire time of the war, although Fr. Matulaitis was about to take on some very concrete and responsible duties. *I shall never forget,—wrote later Bishop Przeździecki—the retreat under Fr. George’s direction, in which I participated in 1917 together with other priests. I also understand why Pope Pius XI—who as the Nuncio to Poland made his retreat at Bielany in preparation for his Episcopal ordination—used to call the late Archbishop Matulaitis his friend and publicly declared being honored by his friendship.*

After the retreat for the intelligentsia, which Fr. George conducted at the seminary church together with Archbishop Joseph Teodorowicz, the participants came to thank him for his profound and creative ideas, to which he replied: *I did not do anything extraordinary, I just taught you the catechism.*

In August of 1915, the Russians left Warsaw, which was occupied by the German Army. The Germans did not persecute religious orders. Thus, a chance presented itself to the Marians for coming out of hiding and organizing their religious house. Arch-



bishop Kakowski entrusted to them the former Camaldolese hermitage at Bielany near Warsaw along with the adjacent church and parish. In 1923, the entire property was leased to the Marians for an 80-year period. For the next 40 years, Bielany would remain the main Marian outpost in Poland and an important center of national culture. Here, Fr. Matulaitis started to gather his confreres who were working thus far in dispersal throughout the Archdiocese of Warsaw and the Diocese of Włocławek.

In September of 1915, Fr. Casimir Bronikowski came to settle at Bielany as the parish pastor, and, in October of the same year, Fr. Matulaitis also arrived and opened a religious house there, followed by the opening of a novitiate in November. In fact, the ecclesiastical authorities were in possession only of the church building at Bielany along with the house for the pastor and church personnel. And that was exactly what the Marians took over under the lease. Other buildings were occupied by the shelter for Russian invalids.

*Living conditions were difficult, as Br. Bronislaus Załuski—one of the novices—recalled later. We were like an island on the public road, squeezed in between strange and unfriendly people. In 1916, through Fr. Matulaitis's effort, the invalids were relocated to other facilities in Warsaw. The entire property of the former Camaldolese monastery was now in Marian hands. Thanks to Fr. Matulaitis, Bielany was saved for the Church. On July 24, 1922, he thus wrote about the matter to Fr. Bronikowski: All the invalids' shelter possessions were in a state of great neglect, disrepair, and ruin. Thanks to the change in the political climate, the material and moral support of H.E. Archbishop of Warsaw, the assistance of the Magistrate of the City of Warsaw, the general public and individual benefactors, with the tremendous effort and expense that we could afford, we have recovered Bielany for the Church and have brought it to the state in which it is now [...]. If not for our pains, efforts, and work, Bielany would be now most probably in the possession of the Magistrate or the Government, not of the Church.*

In these difficult circumstances Fr. Matulaitis also was running personally the Marian novitiate. In the course of two and a half years, 14 novices—including four priests—were prepared under his guidance for making religious vows and leading religious life. Their memoirs preserved for us the image of difficult material conditions, various labors at the parish, shelter, and religious house, but also of the accompanying enthusiasm. *Humanly speaking, it was hard*, recalled the novice Fr. John Sobczyk, *and yet the novices competed with their Master in zeal and self-abnegation. Sometimes men were so tired that sleep would overcome them during readings or even at table. Father Matulaitis recommended, and personally practiced, his characteristic simplicity. I have heard him many times saying: 'I am so tired; run along then, I must rest.' But when I would meet him, perhaps a quarter of an hour later, he would be his cheerful self again and say to me: 'And I took a rest.' He was getting up at four in the morning and tirelessly worked all day long.*

After opening the religious house at Bielany, Fr. Matulaitis together with his confreres also took over the running of the vast Bielany parish, which stretched from Łomianki and Izabelin to Citadel and Powązki. Their occupations mainly consisted of strictly religious matters, but Fr. George also cooperated with the Central Welfare Council in the effort of providing food for the most needy. His novices confessed that sometimes they were unable to comprehend why this profoundly and comprehensively educated man was dedicating his time to such prosaic matters as distributing potatoes among the local poor residents.

In 1916, a new parish chapel was opened in the former palace of Queen Maria Kazimiera in Marymont. The walls of this chapel are today the main nave of the parish church of Our Lady Queen of the Polish Crown. On May 3, 1916, in the climate of the re-awakening of life as a Polish State, Fr. Matulaitis organized a religious and patriotic procession that carried religious and national emblems, walking from that chapel to the parish church at Bielany.

Relatively, Fr. Matulaitis dedicated most of his energy to organizing and running a shelter for homeless children, which he opened in October of 1916, in a building previously occupied by the invalids. The number of children at the shelter quickly rose to 200. Formally, the funds for the shelter's upkeep and running of an adjacent elementary school were provided by the Magistrate's department of social works. However, in practice, due to general impoverishment and monetary devaluation, the burden of keeping the children fell on Fr. Matulaitis and the Marians together with Sisters of the Congregation of the Name of Jesus, who worked alongside of them. In order to keep the shelter running, Fr. Matulaitis knocked with greatest dedication on the doors of various German offices in Warsaw, pleading for the allotments of food, clothing, fuel, and cleaning supplies. And yet, the distance from Bielany to Warsaw was nearly 10 kilometers. Father George covered this distance either on foot or riding a horse wagon. As his health was poor, from time to time his inveterate tuberculosis of the bone would flare up painfully.

The memory of witnesses of Father Professor's "battles" kept several episodes that speak of his determination and great wisdom. Once, a German official lost his patience and offended Fr. George by calling him 'a barnacle,' to which the latter replied: *Well, that was for me, but what do you have for my 200 children?* On another occasion Fr. Matulaitis was given a perverse reproach: *It would be better if you trust more in Divine Providence, Father.* To which Fr. George replied: *True, one must have trust in Divine Providence, but it is also true that Divine Providence acts through good people.*

Hedwig Reutt, a longtime principal of the Cecilia Plater-Zyberk Junior High, thus recalled these years: *Once, in 1916, I was asked to make sure that Fr. George would take some food as he would come to visit for a short while. The time was already late, thus Fr. Matulaitis had to be very hungry and very tired, because he had spent several hours waiting in line for the food for his orphanage at Bielany. Yet, he did not take his place at the table until after he told me of how much flour, lard, cereals, and bread he was*

*able to procure for his poor children. 'And now, he said, as I am hungry, I shall eat with a good appetite because my children will not starve.' I could feel his great love for these children and his concern for them. Later, when he was already on the Episcopal See in the Lithuanian capital and was accused of being unfriendly towards the Poles, I remembered this moment. He dedicated himself as the best of the Poles to the care of our Polish children. And these were not just words, but the actions of a man who saw God's child in every person and served them.* In 1918, a junior high school was opened at the shelter. Later this school became known throughout entire Poland as a good educational and schooling facility.

Periodically, Fr. Matulaitis also dedicated his attention to other Marian posts in Warsaw. In September of 1915, he took under the Marians' care the church the of Infant Jesus at Monuszek Street in the very heart of the city. Under the guidance of Fr. Leon Kulwieć, this church soon became the center of youth ministry and the ministry to the Lithuanians in Warsaw. To reciprocate this ministry, in the inter-war period between World War I and World War II, the Lithuanian Marian in Kaunas would celebrate services in Polish at their church of St. Gertrude for the Poles living in that town.

In 1917, on behalf of the Marians, Fr. Matulaitis took over the administration of the educational facility for poor boys called 'the Wenceslaus Mańkowski House of Work for Boys.' This institution was located at Wileńska Street, in the Warsaw neighborhood of Praga. The institute was active until 1949. Later, the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes was established there.

On June 20-23, 1917, the Congress of Priests-Professors of the Kingdom of Poland took place in Warsaw. This was the first of its kind, large-scope meeting of priests. All attending priests unanimously elected Fr. Prof. Matulaitis the chair of this congress. When the Polish priests would later reproach the Nuncio Achille Ratti for *imposing upon them a Lithuanian* as a bishop of Vilnius, the Nuncio would remind them of the Polish priests who designated him for this office.

Another proof of recognition for Fr. George's service comes from a document of 1918, by which the Magistrate of the Metropolitan City of Warsaw *informs the Reverend Fr. Professor Matulaitis that he was elected in absentia a member of the City Government and appointed to work at the Child Care Committee*, also indicating that *members of that body were recruited from the male and female city residents known for their philanthropy and untiring work in alleviating the fate of the unfortunate homeless children*.

Father Matulaitis was an expert in matters of religious life. For this reason, Archbishop Kakowski asked him to conduct visitations of certain religious orders. On the other hand, the bishops of the Metropolis of Warsaw, gathered in their congress on June 20-21, 1918, elected him together with Bishop Ruszkiewicz and Fr. Joseph Wojtkiewicz, also a Marian, as members of the central committee on religious matters. However, at that point, Father Matulaitis had already departed Warsaw.

Having laid foundations for the religious life and work in Warsaw, Fr. Matulaitis went to Lithuania, after he entrusted the guidance of the Polish stations of the Marians to Fr. Vladimir Jakowski, whom he shortly named the General Vicar in Poland.

The Marians in Poland continued to grow successfully. In the following years they were able to return to their old monasteries in Skórzec in the Diocese of Podlasie, and in Raśnia, then belonging in the Diocese of Vilnius, and later to the Diocese of Pińsk.

In 1924, a new religious house with its own novitiate for the Belarussians was opened in Druya, in the Vilnius region. In total, during Fr. Matulaitis's lifetime, the Congregation of Marian Fathers acquired approximately 100 members in Poland. This was the Congregation's largest vicariate.

The harmony existing among the Marians and the work carried out were regarded positively by the public. This fact found its expression in the words of the Apostolic Visitor A. Ratti of Dec. 7, 1918, who spoke about the Marians to Secretary of State Cardinal Gasparri: *The Polish bishops are very pleased with the*

*Congregation of Marian Fathers. Also, I heard only good things about them from the clergy. The Congregation has priests of Polish and Lithuanian origin who live and work in perfect agreement and harmony because they are first and foremost good and holy priests, formed in the true ecclesiastical and apostolic spirit. Therefore, this Congregation teaches well what is to be done in the seminaries of such dioceses that have mixed nationalities. Also, this Congregation prepares, and even already has trained workers, which would be most likely called upon to serve in difficult circumstances, such as those presently existing in Vilnius.*

### **In Marijampole**

**O**n March 1, Fr. Matulaitis left Warsaw and, travelling via Vilnius, arrived to Kaunas. Apparently, his arrival was already anticipated there because he was asked at once to conduct retreats in Lithuanian and Polish for the seminarians and the faithful. Father George contacted the local ecclesiastical authorities and—as a result of his persistent efforts –obtained permission to reopen the Marian monastery in Marijampole. He arrived in his home parish in mid-April. Two Marian Fathers had been already serving there: Vincent Dvaranauskas as the pastor, and Justin Novickas as his vicar. The parish was big and there was much work to do; thus, the Marians asked Fr. Matulaitis at once to conduct retreats for the youth and the elderly.

Marijampole was the main religious center of the Lithuanian part of the Diocese of Sejny. The monastery building was used for various meetings for the priests, as well as a hotel for the clergy. This is how Father Renovator described his work of 1918-1925 in his *Journal*: *With God's help, we were able to find some candidates who wanted to enter our monastery in Marijampole. Refugee priests began to return from Russia. Many of them came through Marijampole and a few stayed in the monastery for some time. Gradually, we introduced spiritual reading at meals as well as readings and commentaries on the Constitutions and Instructions. Then we closed our doors to enforce the cloister. Soon the*

*secular priests found lodgings in town, and little by little we began to live as religious.* Shortly after, Fr. Matulaitis opened at the monastery the novitiate for new candidates and entrusted its running to Fr. Totoraitis.

Having noticed the total lack of native female religious communities in Lithuania, Fr. George started the founding of the Congregation of Sisters of the Poor of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. He assisted the Sisters with their organizational process, helped to find candidates for the community, and composed Sisters' constitutions, which were ratified by the ecclesiastical authorities. This congregation grew successfully in Lithuania and in North America. In 1940, the community had nearly 200 members. The Congregation specialized in running various kinds of kindergartens and orphanages and also developed a book publishing apostolate.

Just as it was in previous years, Fr. Matulaitis would not be left alone to deal with his own matters. Priests were petitioning him to organize a seminary for the Diocese of Sejny, the lack of which had been badly felt. He was able to excuse himself from participating in this project.

Father Matulaitis's entire stay in Marijampole went under the watch of his impending appointment as the bishop of Vilnius. On the one hand, he—as a candidate—had to endure scrutiny, to receive many and various visits, as well as to undergo interviews. On the other hand, he was actively endeavoring to prevent this appointment by petitioning various ecclesiastical and political entities. However, he did not succeed in avoiding the appointment. In December he left the monastery to start his service for the Diocese of Vilnius.

During the eight months of his work over the development of the Lithuanian branch of the Marian family, Fr. George laid strong foundations for its further growth. In the future, the Marijampole monastery together with its junior high school, scholarly library containing 50,000 books, large publishing apostolate producing books and several magazines, became a very important center of

religious life in Lithuania. Unable to attend personally to the matters of his Congregation, Bishop Matulaitis appointed Fr. Būčys his General Vicar in Lithuania. In the Renovator's lifetime, the Marian community in Lithuania grew to have 60 members who belonged to three religious houses. In addition, to that same vicariate belonged the monastery in Vilani, Latvia, with its 12 religious. That monastery, together with its novitiate, was established in 1924, as the first Catholic monastery in Latvia.

As the bishop of Vilnius, and subsequently the Apostolic Visitor to Lithuania, Fr. Matulaitis could no longer exercise personally direct supervision of his Congregation's affairs. For this reason, he divided it into three vicariates: American, Polish, and Lithuanian, and entrusted them to the care of his general vicars. He watched over the whole and conducted business by correspondence. On Jan. 25, 1924, he thus wrote to Fr. Jakowski: *I serve the Congregation to the best of my abilities. I work as much as my strength will allow. I get up nearly daily at three or four in the morning, since it is the only time that I can be in peace to work on the Congregation matters.* This strenuous work later found its expression in the release of two considerable-size volumes containing his correspondence in religious matters: one holds his letters in Polish, and the other in Lithuanian. Through his correspondence Fr. George took care of nearly the entire life of his Congregation: he organized the chapter and appointed confreres to offices, but he also had time to send a prayer card to Brother Felix Holy and to write a letter to the seminarian Joseph Jarzębowski, reminding him to take care of his health *because it is a great treasure and much can be done, being in good health, for the glory of God.* During Fr. Matulaitis's beatification process, one of the ecclesiastical censors said, after evaluating these letters: *Each letter is a jewel of prudence, wisdom, and righteousness.* While the other censor added: *By studying these letters people can learn a better way of governing.*

The convocation of the General Chapter in 1923 was an important event in the life of the entire Marian community and Fr. Matulaitis himself. Due to the Polish-Lithuanian conflict at the



time, neither Poles nor Lithuanians could attend in the other's country. For this reason, Fr. Matulaitis convened the Chapter in Gdańsk, where his friend Bishop Edward O'Rourke was the administrator of the diocese. At this Chapter the draft of the new constitutions was presented. With consent from the Holy See, Fr. George was re-elected the General Superior.

On the day of Bishop Matulaitis's death in 1927, the Congregation had 234 members, including 55 priests. The community was divided into three vicariates and had a general house in Rome, of which we shall speak later. The Congregation was running five schools, one orphanage, and one home for the elderly; it also published one daily newspaper, two weekly, and one monthly, as well as operated three book publishing apostolates. Members of the Congregation were running eight parishes and seven rector churches. In addition, two priests were lecturers at the university, seven conducted parish missions, and two served as chaplains to religious sisters. Also, the Marians cooperated with other various organizations. As we can see, this was a thriving community. For this reason, Fr. Matulaitis wrote thus in this circular letter to the Marians in 1924: *God Almighty, who is inscrutable in His plans and whose treasure of goodness is unfathomable, blessed our Congregation. The Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of God and our Gracious Patroness gave us her assistance. The infallible Church, the Teacher of truth, deigned to approve anew our Congregation, reformed and adapted to modern times. Have we not seen with our own eyes how this tiny Congregation, which still has many matters in disorder, and even more imperfections, frailties, and shortcoming, was planted by God's hand, like mustard seed, and now grows and branches out. Let us praise and give glory to Almighty God, whose ways are wondrous and whose Spirit breathes at will.*

Father Matulaitis regarded his working for the Congregation of Marian Fathers as his special mission in the Church. Having acquired experiences through serving in various offices, he admitted to Fr. Būčys in his letter of Nov. 3, 1925: *I have always been, and continue to be, completely convinced that my most important*

*vocation is to serve the Congregation of Marian Fathers, to dedicate to it all my strength and to organize it properly. I always believed it to be, and still believe, that it was God's calling and I am nearly sure of it now.*



**BISHOP OF VILNIUS**



## Appointment

The end of the World War I was approaching. Taking the opportunity of the new political situation, the Holy See was appointing bishops to the borderland Episcopal Sees, which had been deprived of shepherds for many years. On Oct. 23, 1918, Pope Benedict XV appointed Fr. Matulaitis the Bishop of Vilnius. This seven-year period of his Episcopal service was a very difficult one. Victor Piotrowicz, a lay official, who had the opportunity to observe closely Bishop Matulaitis's Episcopal service, remarked that *Bishop Matulaitis is one of the most tragic figures of the See in Vilnius*. Let us take a broader look on that period of time and the difficulties that emerged then.

As a result of centuries-long coexistence between Poland and Lithuania in one state organism, the area of the Diocese of Vilnius was ethnically mixed. After years of captivity, both Poles and Lithuanians alike were striving to re-establish their own States. At the same time, the Lithuanians regarded their former union with Poland as unfavorable and started to lay foundations of their own independent state. They could not imagine their reborn state without its historic capital—Vilnius, which was largely inhabited by Poles and constituted an important center of Polish national life. The countryside, on the other hand, was predominantly non-Polish. Aside from the Lithuanians and Poles, it was populated by the Belarussians, many of whom professed Russian Orthodoxy.

The problems of mutual coexistence of these three nationalities could be solved only by way of a far-reaching compromise. Meanwhile, both Lithuanians and Poles kept making extreme demands impossible to accept by the other side. The Poles also counted on the assimilation of the Belarussians, whose self-awareness was maturing in the atmosphere of nationalistic struggles, which led them to demand their own due rights. Also, Vilnius belonged in the sphere of Russia's interests. Since no compromise solution could be found, the fighting began. During Bishop Matulaitis's time in the Episcopal See of Vilnius, the city passed from hand to hand eight times. As he took over the diocese in Decem-

ber 1918, Germans were still there along with the State Lithuanian Council, subordinated to them. However, on New Year's Day Vilnius passed into the hands of Polish self-defense troops. Five days later, the power was taken over by the communist government of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic. On Apr. 19, 1919, Piłsudski's<sup>2</sup> companies entered Vilnius, where they established a provisional Civilian Administration of the Eastern Territories, headed by the General Commissioner, George Osmołowski, directly subordinate to the commander-in-chief. On July 14, 1920, Russian troops occupied Vilnius, but on Aug. 26<sup>th</sup>, they handed the administration of the city over to the Lithuanian authorities. In October General Lucian Zeligowski seized Vilnius and established in the surrounding areas the so-called Central Lithuania. In 1922 this region passed under the Polish administration. Although the armed struggle ceased, Polish-Lithuanian clash continued in the forum of the League of Nations. The League's work, and especially its proposal of a plebiscite, continued to cause concern. Eventually, on March 15, 1923, the Council of Ambassadors approved the *status quo* which Lithuania, however, refused to recognize and remained in a state of cold war with Poland. A part of the Vilnius diocese, numbering 54 parishes, remained within the Republic of Lithuania.

All this fighting took place in the climate of great tensions with members of the diocese—priests included—fully participating. Sometimes clashes occurred also in the shrines. Attempting to resolve matters in their own favor, Polish and Lithuanian authorities alike addressed demands to priests, and especially to the bishop.

Father Matulaitis's candidature for the Episcopal See was proposed by the Polish bishops, although the active political groups of the time, namely the Polish Regency Council, the Lithuanian State Council and the German occupants, had to give their con-

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<sup>2</sup> Józef Klemens Piłsudski (Dec. 5, 1867 – May 12, 1935) was a Polish statesman; Chief of State (1918–22), "First Marshal of Poland" (from 1920), *de facto* leader (1926–35) of the Second Polish Republic, and Minister of Military Affairs. From mid-World War I he had a major influence in Poland's politics, and was an important figure on the European political scene.

sent. Later, the Pope would remind the 73 Polish officials that Bishop Matulaitis was appointed as a result of the efforts of Polish bishops (letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister of Jan. 25, 1924). On behalf of the Polish bishops, Rev. Henry Przeździecki presented Fr. George's candidature to Eugenio Pacelli, the Nuncio in Bavaria, writing thus: *He is a Lithuanian, held dear by the Lithuanians and well regarded by the Poles [...], a very pious priest, an extremely educated and humble person. In these very difficult times for the diocese of Vilnius, caused by different struggles, only this model priest is capable of directing the Vilnius clergy to the right road, and unite the faithful of this diocese in true Christian love.*

Father Matulaitis was of a different opinion. As soon as the rumor spread that he was a candidate for the Episcopal See of Vilnius, he wrote to Fr. Leon Kulwieć in Warsaw in May 1918: *I would not be able to manage in Vilnius; I am not sure if even an angel from heaven would please everyone there. Naturally, as soon as I go there, I will be shouted at and buried [...].*

Under the influence of Fr. Matulaitis's letters, a delegation of Marian priests from Bielany went to the Apostolic Visitor, Achilles Ratti, to explain that Fr. Matulaitis was absolutely indispensable for the further development of the Congregation. The Visitor listened to their petition, then smiled and said: *All of this is only to confirm that we have chosen well. Let it be a comfort to you.*

Bishop Matulaitis received the episcopal consecration on Dec. 1, 1918, in Kaunas, and arrived in his diocese a week later, on the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Speaking on the day of his ingress to his feuding dioceses, he said: *In the example of Christ, I will try to embrace everyone, be everything to everyone. I am prepared to suffer death for the sake of truth. To you I wish to be an imitation of Christ, only a father and shepherd. My field of work is the Kingdom of Christ, the Church militant; my party is Christ.*

Did he succeed? There are many opinions that he did not, expressed particularly by the Polish side. The criticism came mainly from the circles of the National Democracy Party. As a member of the “hostile” nation, Bishop George was suspected of political activity in favor of national minorities. Let us take a look at his work.

### Pastoral Ministry

Reverend Ladislaus Małachowski recalled a custom that existed in the diocese of Vilnius, that each parish or several parishes from one deanery would organize together every year a pilgrimage to Vilnius: to Calvary and to the Gate of Dawn. Bishop Matulaitis introduced still a third destination—the cathedral, where he celebrated Mass for the pilgrims, delivered sermons, heard confessions, administered Confirmation if the occasion called for it, talked with people, and distributed souvenir prayer cards. Reverend Małachowski remarked that the meeting with the Bishop became the most important part of the pilgrimage. At the same time it was like a small-scale illustration of the Bishop’s entire pastoral service. He was not forgetting the Dawn Gate either, where he conducted commemorative services; about this place Bishop George wrote to Nuncio Lauri that *the shrine is the true heart and center of piety not only for all the faithful and clergy of this diocese, but also for the people of the neighboring areas*.

As he was starting his service in the diocese, Bishop George took care in the first place to engage cooperators. The seminary of Vilnius under his direction became one of the best in Poland. The bishop particularly recommended catechesis to the young priests.

Many religious order members came to Vilnius upon his invitation also, in order to repair damages wrought by the tsarist administration. In his report of 1923, Bishop George mentioned that 588 consecrated persons worked in 55 monasteries. Out of concern for the most neglected part of the diocese, he founded in 1923 the Congregation of Sisters Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist (colloquially called the Eucharistic Sisters). The Orders



were running kindergartens, nursing homes, various schools including boarding schools, Catholic organizations, and publishing houses. During the war and in the post-war years of starvation, these centers demanded the bishop's special financial assistance.

The bishop was a good speaker. Nearly every year he delivered a sermon on the Passion of Christ during Lent. He constantly bore personal suffering, and it would seem that this topic was particularly close to his heart. On Palm Sunday of 1921, Bishop Matulaitis entered in his *Journal: The Cathedral was full of people, just as it had been during all the sermons on the Passion. The people must like these sermons. It seems that this is what they want to hear, since they have had enough sermons on political and ethnic topics. Whoever wants politics can go to a political meeting. The people are happy to get a respite, in church at least, to hear the Word of God, to calm down and turn inward to meditate on their eternal salvation.*

The Vilnius cathedral held relics of St. Casimir, patron of the Diocese of Vilnius, and of Poland and Lithuania. It was believed that the year 1921 marked the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his canonization. However, due to the restless times, it was decided to postpone the celebrations until the next year. Bishop Matulaitis organized the ceremony on May 28-30, 1922. He asked the Holy See for special privileges for the cathedral and issued a pastoral letter in Polish and Lithuanian to the faithful of his diocese. In this letter, he called everyone to honor in a special way their patron Saint: *As prince of Poland and Lithuania, Saint Casimir held both Krakow and Vilnius, Poland and Lithuania equally dear in his fervent heart. Today we are to implore for his intercession, that he may remove from among us the nationalistic and social flaws, so that the love of Christ and agreement of brotherly hearts might flourish, that true peace might reign in our country.*

On the occasion of this special feast, two commemorative events were organized: one in the Polish and the other in the Lithuanian language. The festivities attracted great crowds of various ethnic backgrounds. In this letter of thanksgiving to Pope Pius XI, Bishop George wrote: *In the general opinion, the celebra-*

*tions made a profound impression on the souls of attending people and contributed to the invigoration of the holy Faith and the upsurge of piety. This was the biggest event in the diocese.*

George Matulaitis had extensive contacts with people professing Russian Orthodoxy. One of his written works completed at the Spiritual Academy was about the fairy tales of Krylov. Also, his doctoral thesis was based entirely on the works of the Orthodox theologians, and his studies at the higher education institution were done within an Orthodox community. As the professor at the Academy, he continued his associations with the Russian Orthodox faithful. Members of the Orthodox Church constituted a large part of his diocese. Due to these numerous contacts, he developed an original view on restoration of unity between them. In 1925, he wrote about this to Nuncio Lauri: *As to the renunciation of errors and the profession of faith by those who convert from schism, I believe that it should not be demanded. For the Orthodox people here are completely ignorant of religious matters and believe that the difference between their Church and the Catholic Church consists not in dogmas, but in the languages they use, as well as in rites and ceremonies; they also see it in the hierarchy. As to the dogmas, people will be depending on the teaching of missionaries; therefore, they should be instructed in a positive way about the truths of Faith. Based on my own experience, I believe that, to a large extent, the same principle applies to the intelligentsia, as well.*

It was in the same spirit that he spoke at the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago in 1926, proposing to talk to the Orthodox faithful not about union, nor about conversion, but about returning to the times of the first Universal Councils from before the rift in Christianity. His views differed significantly from the commonly accepted teachings and practices, and they pioneered the path to modern ecumenism.

Bishop George also provided the Orthodox faithful with material help. He contributed to the founding of an orphanage for Russian expatriates, thanks to which he gained their great sympathy. One of them, Doroteus Bochan, wrote in *The Vilnius Review*

after the archbishop's death: *The late archbishop left the best memory of himself among the Russian community in Vilnius. The Russians remember him and will be remembering him a long time, not only with true respect but also with deep reverence.*

A significant part of his pastoral work consisted in visitations throughout the diocese. The bishop did not have a car or even a horse. He traveled by train to distant parishes, and from there, thanks to the accommodations provided by pastors, he was able to go to individual parishes, some of which had not seen a bishop for several years.

Bishop George's visitations further convinced him that he was needed at the diocese. On Apr. 22, 1924, he wrote to Cardinal Gasparri, who was concerned about the bishop's difficulties and accusations made against him by the government: *During my pastoral visits I was welcomed everywhere—including the city of Vilnius—by numerous crowds with the greatest reverence and joy; and on my departure I was surrounded with no less gratitude and respect. Since during my visits I often proclaimed the word of God during the day, in pastors' opinion it constituted a kind of parish mission. I do not believe that my pastoral ministry could do any harm to the Republic of Poland. For what better could happen in the Republic of Poland, as when the Gospel is proclaimed to her citizens and their customs are shaped after the example of Christ.*

In order to instill the proclaimed Word of God better and also reach the remotest corners of his diocese, Bishop Matulaitis wrote pastoral letters. We have eight of them, along with numerous appeals addressed both to priests and to the faithful. Each one of his letters is valuable, but the letters about papacy and missions deserve our special attention. Bishop George had a most cordial bond with the Pope and considered him to be the symbol of unity of the divided faithful. He wrote this letter after returning from Rome and concluded it with the following words: *Strengthened by the papal blessing, which is the presage of God's blessing, let us become as befits the children of the same land, the same Church and God, having 'one heart and one soul,' and let us all be united and work together for the common good.*

For the following year's solemnity of Pentecost, he wrote a letter about the missions. It was permeated with the idea that would be later fully developed by the Vatican II: the missionary character of the whole Church. Here are the opening words of this letter: *The solemnity of the Pentecost provides me with a happy opportunity to draw your attention to a very important and great duty concerning priests and all good Catholics alike, namely: to contribute in the measure of one's strength and ability to the spreading of our holy Faith throughout the world and to instill it firmly in the minds and hearts of the faithful.*

### **Departure from the Diocese**

**T**he source of Bishop Matulaitis's greatest difficulties and annoyances was the matter of filling the ecclesial offices and the language of worship.

As the result of a specific historical process, the Catholic Church in the diocese of Vilnius and surrounding areas was closely related to Polish culture for centuries. In their teachings, partially also in celebration of the Sacraments and in supplementary devotions, the priests used Polish. In people's understanding, Catholicism was a 'Polish faith, like the Orthodox which was a 'Russian faith.' At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Lithuanians, awakening to conscious national existence, demolished this 'centuries-old,' replacing the Polish language in their churches with the Lithuanian language. From the legal point of view, this problem was regulated in 1911, by the Apostolic Administrator, Rev. Casimir Michalkiewicz. In practice, attaining equilibrium in this matter—especially in ethnically mixed parishes—was very difficult. By contrast, Belarussians in their vast majority continued to use Polish. Many of them still falsely believed that the Polish language belongs to the essence of Catholicism. A certain breakthrough in this respect was made in 1917 by Archbishop Edward Ropp, who introduced the Belarussian language alongside the Polish language in the northern outskirts of the diocese.

Certain Polish political groups, especially those associated with the National Democrats, were counting on the Catholic Church as an important factor in the consolidation of Polish rule over the Eastern Borderlands. Valery Roman, the delegate of the Polish government to the Vilnius Province (he had the powers of a provincial governor) regarded the Church—as he wrote point-blank—as the most powerful factor for *winning for the Polish culture and customs the Catholic masses of the 'local' population, or people of undecided national identity*. In practice, this most often took the form of demands upon the bishop to remove unsuitable priests, to which generally belonged Belarussians and Lithuanians, and to limit the use of Belarussian and Lithuanian languages in churches. A similar, although completely opposite attitude, was adapted by Lithuanian political factions in the part of the Vilnius diocese which lay within the borders of the Republic of Lithuania.

Seeing this acute conflict between his faithful, Bishop Matulaitis wanted the priests to avoid dealing with political matters completely. On June 28, 1919, he issued a special communique on this subject, which he repeated with emphasis on Apr. 2, 1925. He also wanted priests of a given nationality to serve their ethnic counterparts; however, this was not always possible due to the ethnically complex composition of each community. On the other hand, Bishop George refuted the claims of political groups wishing to have their say in the matter of staffing ecclesial offices. On the whole, the Poles did not realize that the bishop, who defended the Belarussian and Lithuanian priests in Poland, was defending in the same manner the Polish priests in the Republic of Lithuania. For example, on May 25, 1923, he wrote to Rev. Joseph Kukta, Vicar General for the part of the diocese, which was under Lithuanian rule: *As much as you can, please defend Rev. Szylejko and Rev. Puzyrewski. If the local authorities out there would start removing Polish priests because of their Polish descent, and here because of their Lithuanian roots, then what shall we all come to? The authorities have no cause for fearing these priests: they will not abolish Lithuania nor do her any harm.*

Bishop Matulaitis took a similar attitude in the matter of the language. He believed that the Church's mission is not to teach languages, but to teach what is necessary for salvation, using the language comprehended by the people. Hence, he thought that using the Polish language in the church by Belarussians was unfavorable for pastoral reasons. He also believed that such a practice deprived the Catholic Church of its influence on Orthodox Belarussians, who identified their faith with the language to a great extent. However, in view of the extremely tense political situation, he thought that it was not possible to make such significant changes in very sensitive matters. Therefore, with his circular letter of June 28, 1919, he forbade priests to make any changes in the language of worship. He solved only the urgent problem of catechizing the children, by instructing the priests to teach them in their native language. Without making any changes for pastoral reasons, he also decidedly opposed any attempts to introduce changes for political reasons, and because of this he faced extremely fierce antagonism. However, his adamant stance in the matter undoubtedly saved the diocese from a religious war.

Bishop Matulaitis never doubted his obligation of loyalty to any legal authority. After the ratification of the Polish State borders by the Council of Ambassadors in 1923, he greeted President Wojciechowski on his arrival in Vilnius with all his honors, saying, among other things: *As a shepherd of the diocese, on behalf of the clergy and the faithful, I whole-heartedly greet you in this ancient cathedral and pay you homage as the Supreme Authority and the Head of State, which represents the majesty of the Most Serene Republic of Poland and is the manifestation of its power and unity.*

Bishop Matulaitis's governing the Vilnius diocese in the spirit of universalism of the Church, upholding the equal rights of all ethnic groups, did not suit the various nationalist factions who wanted to use the shrines for achieving their own goals. The bishop was fiercely attacked for his attitude by the press, at rallies, in letters addressed to the central State government and to Church authorities. In fighting against him, the opposition often used fraudulent means. The entire action against the bishop had

an organized character. Its goal was to disgrace the bishop in the eyes of the faithful so that it would become possible to petition the Holy See to remove him as someone hated by and without any influence on the faithful.

Bishop Matulaitis bore a great deal of suffering caused by this hostility and impediments to his fulfilling of his pastoral ministry, but he continued to carry out his obligations. For his motto he chose the words of St. Paul *Conquer evil with good*, which he placed on his Episcopal coat of arms. In his journey on this thorny road, Bishop George was greatly supported by Pope Pius XI, who—while serving as the Apostolic Nuncio to Poland—had proposed his candidature for the Episcopal See in Vilnius, and assisted him with his counsel in his difficult pastoral work. In his *Memoirs*, Matthias Rataj, the Speaker of the Polish Parliament, wrote that the Pope felt warmly and trustful toward Bishop Matulaitis and ranked him as first among the Polish bishops.

In 1923, the Polish establishment decided to take diplomatic action at the Vatican, in order to have Bishop Matulaitis dismissed from Vilnius. On May 15, 1923, Valery Roman, the Polish government representative to the Vilnius Territories, petitioned the central authorities to make this move. In his letter, he suggested: *However, bearing in mind the high merits of Bishop Matulaitis as a man and a priest, as well as his external loyalty and correct attitude toward the formal requirements of the State, I imagine that his removal would have to be a promotion to a higher position in the Church hierarchy, or at least not to cause externally any impression of personal persecution. This correct attitude toward the formal requirements of the State* manifested by Bishop Matulewicz, his loyalty and integrity, caused real concern for the central authorities. In 1923, Władysław Kiernik, the Minister of Internal Affairs, lamented: *As a man and priest, Bishop Matulaitis is beyond reproach, which makes it even more difficult to counteract his influence and activity.* The same ‘grievance’ is found in the *Memoirs* of Stanisław Grabski, the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Education, who wrote: *Only the bishop’s unworthy conduct could have prompted the Vatican to remove him from the Episcopal See. But Bishop Matulaitis was a truly exemplary, holy priest.* Even

more 'doleful' is the line of reasoning presented by the Polish envoy to the Vatican, Ladislaus Skrzyński. On May 9, 1924, he wrote to Warsaw: *If it only be possible to imagine the Pope acting even more adamantly than usual in a case of some bishop, it would be in the case of Fr. Matulewicz, who succeeded in making an exceptionally close friendship with Msgr. Ratti during his time at the Nunciature in Warsaw. Furthermore, action against Bishop Matulaitis is impeded by the fact that—while the letters against him arrive openly—other letters come secretly from Vilnius asking to keep him at the head of the diocese. One of our bishops assured me that he personally saw the same signatures appearing on letters against Bishop Matulewicz, as on the petitions asking to keep him in Vilnius.* Since efforts failed to remove Bishop Matulaitis from Vilnius based on accusations, Skrzyński proposed that the Holy See reward the bishop and transfer him to the newly emerging diocese of Częstochowa. This is what the ambassador reported on the subject: *I have reasons to suppose that—because of Bishop George's special devotion to the Mother of God—Pius XI would be willing to transfer him to the newly created Episcopal See in Częstochowa. This See will have such a Church prestige that by appointing to it the bishop of Vilnius, the Pope will reward this priest who became his closest friend in Poland.* The Warsaw government accepted this proposal, which was presented to Bishop Matulaitis by the Nuncio Lauri, to whom he replied: *If I am not fit for Vilnius because it is a purely Polish city, how can I possibly be suitable for Częstochowa, which is not a Lithuanian city* (letter to F. Būčys of Sept. 9, 1925).

Also at the same time, the Senate of the Catholic University of Lublin offered him the office of the university's rector. The bishop's response in the matter to Rev. Jacek Woroniecki was: *It seems to me absolutely impossible that I—whom the National Democrats declared to be an enemy of the State and of the Polish nation—could ever have been appointed Rector of the University of Lublin without thus causing any harm to that school* (May 11, 1925).



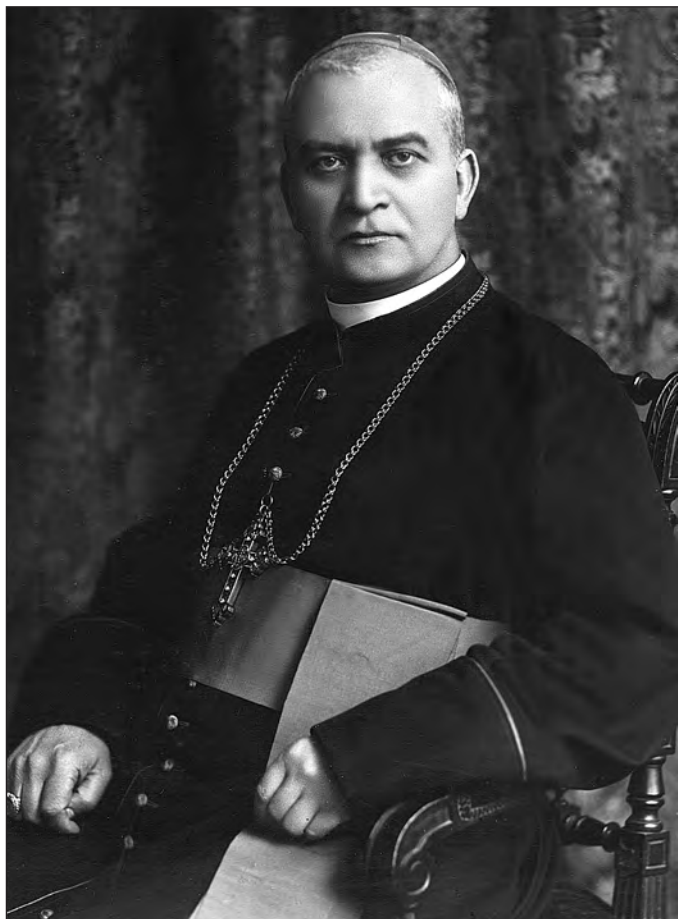
On Feb. 10, 1925, a Concordat was signed between Poland and the Holy See, which brought some stabilization within the State and in the Church. In this situation, Bishop Matulaitis decided that he should leave Vilnius for the good of the Church and his own. On May 1, 1925, he resigned from the diocese. But this resignation was not accepted. It seems that in view of the intense efforts of the government and the National Democrats, the Vatican wanted to emphasize that Bishop Matulaitis could leave Vilnius only at his personal strong request. In his next, much broader resignation dated June 27, 1925, the bishop wrote: *It happened so often that I was surrounded everywhere by such difficulties, that I would have fallen powerless, if not for the strength given by Christ and His Cross and by my obedience to the Holy See.* This time his resignation was accepted, which occurred on July 14, 1925.

Saying farewell to Vilnius, Bishop Matulaitis wrote to the cathedral chapter: *I assure you that I will always remember the diocese of Vilnius in my prayers and that I will beseech the Almighty to let its inhabitants mind more things which can bind and unite them rather than those that can divide them. I shall pray that harmony and love may reign so that everyone may become one in Christ, and that Christ may give them true peace, His blessing and all happiness both in this life and in the next.*

On Aug. 3<sup>rd</sup>, the bishop went to Rome to attend to matters of the Congregation of Marian Fathers.

While in the Eternal City, he behaved courteously towards the Poles in a particularly refined manner: he took up residence at the Resurrectionist Fathers, paid a visit to the Polish embassy at the Vatican, accompanied the Polish pilgrimage to the audience with the Pope. On Aug. 13, he noted in his Journal: *I did all this so that the Poles could see that I am not bitter toward them. Wherever and whenever possible I spoke in praise of the good that I had experienced in Poland and among the Polish people. May the Lord bless them all and bestow His goodness on them. After all, the injuries that I suffered were not the work of the Polish people, but rather the result of the politics of certain parties. I prayed for them too and resolved to keep praying for them with all my heart.*

Casimir Okulicz, a Vilnius-born historian of the Vilnius region, wrote in his work “Dawn, Daytime and Twilight in the Lands of Historical Lithuania,” released in London in 1973: *In the memory of impartial people who were striving for peaceful coexistence of the resident ethnicities, Bishop Matulaitis remained as an outstanding figure, distant from all forms of chauvinism, staying on a high intellectual and moral level, and endowed with a priestly vocation.* A similar opinion of the clergy’s community, which was placed in the preface to Archbishop Matulaitis’s [Polish edition] of his *Journal*, was delivered by Archbishop Henry Gulbinowicz: *In the memories of the clergymen I have known, he [Bishop George] remained as a man and a bishop in possession of great qualities of mind and heart. They spoke about him, as one speaks of a good father, in the warm tone of respect and love. They valued him highly as a shepherd of the diocese, with whom they were building a new life in the Church after 120 years of captivity, in the difficult climate of newly regained freedom in those lands. They valued him as a bishop of a vast diocese, which was inhabited by people of different ethnic backgrounds and which was like a melting pot of various creeds and customs Archbishop George Matulaitis—they stated—served everyone with devotion and with a special understanding of their spiritual needs.*



**APOSTOLIC VISITATOR TO LITHUANIA**



*I feel calm and happy in Rome, in this center of Catholicism,* wrote Bishop Matulaitis to one of his confreres. Indeed, he was no longer obliged to work in such a harsh climate caused by the complex situation of the diocese of Vilnius. As a token of sympathy and recognition, on Sept. 1, 1925, the Holy Father appointed him the titular Archbishop of Aduli. From that moment, Archbishop Matulaitis intended to devote all his efforts to the Congregation of Marian Fathers. Requesting assistance, he thus explained his decision to Fr. Casimir Reklaitis: *We must at last create the General Government and the Curia of our Congregation. It is equally necessary to establish a College for educating and training our brethren-seminarians. I alone cannot manage this work. We do not see any other more suitable candidate for this job than you, Father.* He then went on to say that the Pope was in favor of his intentions: *The Holy Father received me very warmly, and prior to that, he had sent me a very nice letter. He promised to continue to support me in my service and help in the work concerning our religious matters; he advised me to talk to His Eminence Cardinal Vicar of Pompili. It would seem that he wanted to find for us a small church and a residence.* Unfortunately, it was not meant for him to enjoy a time of tranquility and work exclusively for his Congregation.

At this time a new, very important and urgent matter emerged on the church's forum. The Concordat concluded between the Vatican and Poland placed Vilnius under the Polish ecclesiastical administration. The Lithuanian government considering this step to be harmful for Lithuania's interests and claiming that the Holy See was siding with the Polish, refused the apostolic delegate, Archbishop Antonio Zecchini, the right to enter. Among the Lithuanians this matter aroused great resentment towards the Pope. In order to assuage the tensions, on Dec. 7, 1925, Pope Pius XI appointed Archbishop Matulaitis the Apostolic Visitor and sent him to the Republic of Lithuania as his representative. After a long conversation with the Pope, Archbishop Matulaitis immediately went to Kaunas, where he arrived on Dec. 13. Having learned the situation *in situ*, he thus wrote with a great deal of pain to Fr. Lucian Chalecki: *I found the Church in Lithuania in a*

*terrifying state in many respects. It made me cry like a baby. It would seem that Lucifer himself had worked there with a legion of evil spirits, undermining and destroying the foundations of the Church. Contacts with the Holy See are nearly broken off due to incomprehensible prejudice and distrust, often turning into hatred towards the Head of the Church. The Masons took advantage of the situation, skillfully infiltrating Catholic circles. On the one hand, they endeavored the best way they could to offend the Holy Father, speaking on behalf of the Catholics; and on the other hand, they blamed the same Holy Father and slandered him before the Lithuanians. The hidden devil's hand seemed to be pushing the nation nearly to apostasy. And what shall I say about some priests, God save them! But I also found many souls both among the clergy, as among the laity, that are truly devoted to God and the Church. Thus, I understood that there was no other way of getting rid of that kind of evil spirit than by 'oratione et ieiunio' [praying and fasting].*

Generally, the Apostolic Visitor was received in Kaunas with sympathy; however, certain voices were raised, still claiming that he had come to defend Polish interests. Ignoring these voices, Archbishop George immediately went to work. His task came down to three aspects: re-establishing contact with the Holy See, organizing a new ecclesiastical province, and preparing the Concordat.

Only two days after his arrival, Archbishop George organized a meeting of leaders of Catholic associations, to which he invited also the members of the government and the parliament. During this meeting he explained the goal of his mission, and called all Catholics to defend the Church. The meeting participants resolved to send a delegation to Rome for the conclusion of the Holy Year, which delegation would express their gratitude to the Holy Father for sending his representative. This pilgrimage was to be led by Bishop Joseph Skvireckas. Archbishop Matulaitis also held a special interview with the priests in charge of political affairs. To them he explained that the Holy See was not prejudiced against Lithuania and thus managed to bring some of them back on the right track.

Following the introductory talks and successfully concluded meetings, Archbishop George started the process of organizing the new ecclesiastical administration, according to the geographical borders of the Republic of Lithuania. Thus far, the State borders included only the Diocese of Kaunas and a part of the Dioceses of Sejny, of Vilnius, and of Warmia. As a result of many conferences with the experts, both ecclesiastical and governmental, Fr. Matulaitis proposed that the new province would consist of one metropolitan area with its capital in Kaunas, and of four dioceses. With the draft of this project, primarily approved in its key points by the National Conference of Bishops and the government, on March 6, 1926, Archbishop George returned to Rome. A week later, he was received by Pope Pius XI in a private audience. Following this meeting, Fr. Matulaitis wrote to F. Casimir Bronikowski: *The Holy Father was much pleased with the conducted visitation and gave me in memory of it a gold medal with his own image and the images of the six saints whom he canonized.*

After passing through proper dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the project of the new ecclesiastical organization was proclaimed by the Pope as his Apostolic Constitution *Lituanorum gente*. For the day of its proclamation, the Holy Father chose the solemnity of the Resurrection of the Lord, Apr. 4, 1926, which undoubtedly had a symbolic meaning. Archbishop Matulaitis thus assessed his document in his letter to Fr. Ladislaus Tołoczko: *The Apostolic Constitution took the area that is presently located within the borders of Lithuania and created the above-named dioceses, at the same time reserving the right to re-shape the new province in case of changing conditions. This way the Holy See successfully omits the unfortunate political issue and dispute between Lithuania and Poland in regard to their national borders, and seems to be thus emphasizing that it neither establishes new borders nor ratifies the already established ones since such measures are not part of its competence. Instead, it only introduces order and organizes the ecclesiastical life under the existing conditions. For Lithuania this document [the Apostolic Constitution] has important historical significance.*

The appointment of new bishops that happened the next day came as an important continuance of this Apostolic Constitution. Suffragan Joseph Skvireckas became the Archbishop of Kaunas. The previous Ordinary, Bishop Francis Karevičius resigned from that office and joined the Congregation of Marian Fathers. Archbishop Matulaitis arrived in Vilnius in possession of the said documents. On May 13<sup>th</sup> he solemnly proclaimed *Litaunorum gente* and performed the enthronization of Archbishop Skvireckas. Soon afterwards, other bishops received the sacraments and made the ingress into their dioceses. Archbishop Matulaitis described the new Conference of Bishops as “serious” body and announced his intention of cooperating with it in the future in the most important matters concerning the Lithuanian Church.

As this basic stage of his apostolic works was concluded, Archbishop Matulaitis went to Chicago, to attend the International Eucharistic Congress, during which he delivered a talk on the missionary work among the Russian Orthodox. Using this occasion, he also visited the Marian Fathers’ outposts on the American soil, the installation of which he initiated several years earlier. All the remaining time of his stay, up until September, he dedicated to strengthening his compatriots in faith. He visited 92 Lithuanian parishes which were mainly scattered throughout the eastern states of the country and in Chicago. On his visit to the parish he usually celebrated Holy Mass, delivered a sermon, and met with the parishioners. In case of large centers, such as Chicago and New York, these meetings were organized on a regional scale and had a very festive character. Some of the donations received during his visits, Fr. George assigned to founding a General House of the Marian Fathers in Rome.

In returning to Lithuania in the early days of September, he found there a new government of a leftist character, unfriendly and even hostile to the Church. Its functionaries refused to recognize the newly established ecclesiastic province, boycotted the newly appointed bishops, and treated suspiciously the Apostolic Visitor himself. Archbishop Matulaitis did not wish for any confrontation with the authorities, but continued to strengthen the



work of the ecclesiastical reforms. He conducted a separate visitation at the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology of the University of Kaunas, as well as of the seminaries and monasteries together with the schools under their care. He established also the Ordinariate for the military chaplains and started organizing Catholic Action; pointed out the need for preparing the new ritual; visited new dioceses, and frequently spoke before the assembly of the faithful.

On Dec. 17, 1926, a military coup d'état occurred in Lithuania. The nationalists took over power. Anthony Smetona was elected President, while Augustine Voldemaras became the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Foreign Affairs. The new powers, seeking to strengthen their positions on the international theater, as well as to unite all the Catholics, at once approached the Apostolic Visitor with a proposal for concluding the Concordat. Archbishop Matulaitis immediately began working on the draft of this document. On Jan. 20, 1927, this work was completed. On the next day, he prepared a report for the Holy See, addressing it to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Gaspari. Archbishop George thus concluded his report: *In the face of the state of affairs in Lithuania, which I have described above, I believe that my mission in this country may be considered as accomplished.*

The Concordat, which Archbishop Matulaitis prepared, was signed after his death, on Sept. 27, 1927.

Reflecting on the archbishop's observations, Cardinal Gasparri remarked: *It would seem as if the Most Gracious God wished to keep this exceptional and truly apostolic Bishop alive until he could complete his mission.*

Having dispatched his report to Rome, the Visitor fell ill and sustained at night an acute attack of appendicitis. Marshall law was still in effect, which made difficult calling a doctor in. After a long delay, the patient was transported to the clinic of Dr. Alexander Hagentorn, where surgery was immediately performed. Holy Communion was brought daily to Fr. George, but on Jan. 27<sup>th</sup> he asked it be administered to him in the form of Viaticum as it is

usually administered to the dying, because on that day he suddenly felt exceptionally poor. In the morning of that same day he said that he still had a lot of work to do, but in the evening he uttered: *Enough, I pass into eternity.*

One of the Marians, Fr. Ignacio Česaitis, who witnessed the Archbishop's last minutes on earth, wrote later of the serenity with which the dying archbishop bore his sufferings, of his remembrance for the Congregation and the Church, and his spirit of prayer. Following are the excerpts of his memoirs: *At one in the morning I went to see the weary and weakened patient. Your Excellency, I said kneeling at his bed, please give your blessing to our Congregation. He put his hand over my head and stoked it like a mother stokes her child; making a sign of the cross on my forehead, he repeated a few times: 'Close your ranks and sacrifice yourselves.' Then he lifted his hand and imparted his blessing; then he put it over my head again and lightly touched my face a few times as if confirming the blessing imparted to the Congregation. Tears rose to my eyes as I kissed the hand of our beloved Father. I stayed very close to him for a long, long time, and his hand remained on my head. A true leader gives war orders even at the hour of his death. 'Close your ranks' meant to say, as I understood it, to preserve the unity and a uniform communal front, standing for Christ and the Gospel. To close ranks in order to be strong and to sacrifice ourselves in order to win the battle.*

*Then I got up and asked: Your Excellency, shall I administer the Last Rights? 'Good,' he replied, 'I received the Viaticum this morning and now you can administer the Unction to me.' [...] After administering him the Unction, I kissed his hand, while he said 'Now you can go home.' But I could not! So, I said nothing. He repeated his words. I kissed the hand of his Excellency and moved aside. A moment later I hear him reciting the Psalm, I could not recognize which one it was; then he folded his arms as a bishop was accustomed to do, opened them up, and imparted a blessing. This was his last farewell to all his friends and acquaintances, to all those whom he loved, to his beloved nation, to the world [...]. At two and three in the morning, his pulse was difficult to find. At three thirty*

*the patient was completely quiet, his breath was very weak. Three nurses, a doctor, and I stood near the patient. I did not let the Rosary out of my hand all night long, and at that moment I started reciting prayers for the dying. We all knelt. Our prayers and tears accompanied the Archbishop to the realm of the Supreme God. This was Jan. 27, 1927.*

On Jan. 29, 1927, numerous crowds of the faithful, male and female members of the religious congregations, priests, bishops, and members of the Lithuanian government came to bid farewell to the deceased Apostolic Visitor. In the face of the majesty of Death, it had become even more evident the kind of person this man was, who ignited around himself the flames of love for Christ and for every person. Alexander Stulginskis, the Speaker of the Parliament, said on that occasion: *Today, we are burying the remnants of the man who surpassed everyone by his extraordinary strength of spirit, his powerful intellect, and his holy life. He taught us the Gospel not only by his beautiful speech, but by his exemplary behavior, his holy life. He was our evangelical light that shone brightly upon Lithuania and the entirety of humanity. He was this holy person that does not disappear, but who remains preserved in a miraculous manner and broadly influences the entire society. Being a true messenger of God and apostle of love, he stayed close to all: to the poor and the rich, to the educated and simple folks, to the youth full of hope and the elderly at the end of their life.*

The body of Archbishop Matulaitis was originally deposited in the vaults of the Kaunas Cathedral, but several years later, but on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Renewal of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, which marked the day of Oct. 24, 1934, it was solemnly transferred to the parish church in Marijampole.

As we reflect upon the last period of the Apostolic Visitor's life, we see that it was an unusually fruitful time. During this period, the archbishop averted the danger of schism, restored trust to the Holy See in the Catholics of Lithuania, prepared the Concordat, organized a new ecclesiastical province adapted to the borders of the revived Lithuanian State, and assisted in raising proper persons to the Episcopal Sees. In this way, he introduced

order into the life of the Lithuanian Church and laid strong foundations, on which future generations would build.

Into these works, Archbishop Matulaitis put all his talent, his strength of spirit, and his physical powers. In his letter to Br. Bronikowski of March 26, 1926, he confessed: *I was working day and night, I fasted and prayed. God blessed my work, and after a month I felt that the climate began to change for the better. In the first month I slept six hours during one night only, while usually I slept three to five hours.* His dedication was noticed and appreciated by his countrymen, and it brought wonderful fruits. In his article for *L'Osservatore Romano* of Feb. 11, 1927, Fr. Aloisius Faidutti, the Archbishop's closest cooperator, who accompanied him on his apostolic mission, thus described the attitude of the Lithuanians to the Archbishop: *The Lithuanians, who knew his nobility and gentleness, his extensive and profound culture, his devotion to the Church, were greatly delighted with his arrival in December of 1925 and immediately surrendered him with respect. And these were not only the faithful, but good number of those whose beliefs differed from these of the Catholics, with whom he discussed many times issues of great interests for the whole community. And what is to be said about the Catholics, who trusted in his goodness, prudence and energy? The reverend bishops were attached to him, priests respected him as a father, and the faithful felt the same way, wherever they heard his warm and convincing voice; while the young Catholics saw him as a teacher and friend.* With the passing of time, these feelings of his countrymen have intensified. Years later, Bishop Būčys expressed in his memoirs the belief that Archbishop Matulaitis would be considered the most outstanding figure of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Lithuania.



**SPIRITUAL PROFILE OF BLESSED GEORGE**



**A**s we look at the 56 years of Archbishop Matulaitis's life we see how he had come a long way. Beginning his life in the hut of a Lithuanian peasant, he went through studying at schools of increasingly higher educational levels and carrying out various forms of priestly ministry. He eventually came to fulfill the sublime functions of the Episcopal office as well as of the Pope's envoy to the Church and the Lithuanian people. Some people could have called it making a career, but such a description is not appropriate in the case of the person and work of George Matulaitis.

First and foremost, his life was focused on God. Instructed by his mother and the Marian Fathers in the secrets of friendship with God, Archbishop George always took great care to remain close to Him. The opening words of his *Journal* or his spiritual diary were: *My motto shall be: to seek God in all things, to do all things for the greater glory of God, to bring the Spirit of God into all things so that all may be filled with it. May God and His glory be the center of my whole life, the axis about which all my thoughts, feelings, desires, and actions continually turn.* Analyzing his life, one unfailingly comes to the conclusion that God was the driving force behind his actions and a strong support in all adversities. On his way to God, the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the humble Handmaid of the Lord, whom he venerated personally and instructed his spiritual sons to revere as their best Mother and Patroness, was his model and guide. Father George greatly cared for the growth of true Marian devotion among the faithful. Also, he renewed and developed the Congregation of Marian Fathers.

As a great venerator of Mary, Fr. George was asked to take over the administration of the Diocese of Częstochowa. His proper understanding of Marian devotion helped him serve wholeheartedly and with complete self-abnegation the Church and all people with the goal of advancing the growth of the Kingdom of God on earth.

After the example of Mary, Fr. George loved the Church and served her with all his strength. The key for understanding his spiritual attitude are the words from his own prayer: *If I may ask, Lord, let me be but a dishrag in your Church, a rag used to wipe up messes and then thrown away into some dark and dirty corner. I*

*want to be used up and worn out in the same way so that your house may be a little cleaner and brighter. And afterwards, let me be thrown away like a dirty, worn-out dishrag (Journal, Jan. 13, 1911).*

Knowing his own human weakness, he even made an oath before God that neither he nor the Congregation guided by him would ever serve any other secondary purpose, such as political or nationalist affairs, but only God and the Church. Led by that spirit throughout his life, he toiled for the good of the Church, and at the end of his road he confessed in a letter of March 31, 1926: *Today I can truly say that the Church is my only homeland, and I am only her patriot.*

To Fr. George the Church was not some abstract notion, but the tangible, living family of God, with the Pope as her head. Hence, he focused his love primarily on the Holy Father as the Head of the Church. In his pastoral letter to the faithful of the Diocese of Vilnius, Bishop George wrote: *As Christ the Lord established His Kingdom on earth—the Holy Catholic Church, which is the greatest and most perfect human community and which is to last for all ages and encompass all people, nations, and countries—He deemed it necessary to give her the power and the arm to unite all, as well as a head to rule all. Therefore, He established the papacy.* Father Paul Tochowicz, one of the witnesses in Archbishop George's beatification process, testified: *He [Archbishop George] was truly dedicated to the Church and the Holy Father. Each time he talked about him, his eyes would shine from joy and emotion.* The respect he felt for the Pope, Fr. George also extended to all forms of papal teachings, to his cooperators at the Roman Curia, and to the Nuncio. After Archbishop Lorenzo Lauri was appointed the Nuncio to Poland, Fr. George wrote to him on Jan. 19, 1921: *For I see and greet in your person the Holy Father himself, our Highest Shepherd, on whose behalf you act and whom you represent.* He tried to make his love for the Pope manifest in his actions and put his whole life at the disposal of the Holy Father. Pope Pius XI thus spoke about Fr. George after his death: *Whatever I would ask of him, he never refused to do. And these had been truly difficult matters.* This exceptional love for the Pope, Fr. Matulaitis endeavored



to instill also in the Congregation of Marian Fathers, which he renewed.

To Fr. George, bishops constituted a particularly revered part of the Church. He thus wrote in his *General Idea*: Both the Congregation as such and its individual members must try in everything they do, to promote only the greater glory of God and to seek their own and their neighbor's salvation with the Catholic Church, in the Church, and through the Church. Hence, they will be in constant and very close communication with the Holy Apostolic See and with Local Ordinaries—with the Catholic Hierarchy, in short. They should consider themselves humble servants of the Catholic Hierarchy and try to give it all the productive help they can, within the norms of the Constitutions. They will always try to choose work that is more humble, difficult, and dangerous, but which is, nevertheless, of greater value to the Church and souls.

In his apostolic service, Bishop Matulaitis dedicated great attention and effort to priests. He formed and instructed them, ran retreats and guided them. In his *Journal*, he made the following note for the benefit of the Marian Fathers: *If we are asked to conduct a retreat for priests or seminarians, we ought to lay everything aside and respond immediately. We should also willingly undertake the spiritual direction of priests whenever requested to do so.*

A special place in the Church Fr. George reserved for religious life. He considered it a sign of the holiness of the Church and saw in it a powerful factor in reviving apostolic work. Therefore, he regarded the care for the development of religious families as his life's calling. Starting the renewal of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, he resigned from all other responsible and important duties in the Church, not even hesitating to put at risk his personal freedom. In our times, his mission is carried on by two female religious congregations, which he founded and the Congregation of Marian Fathers, which he renovated.

The "little ones" always remained at the center of Fr. George's attention. Among them were primarily the homeless children for whom he founded orphanages and provided material and spiritual assistance to all, whether they were of Polish, Lithuanian, Be-

larussian or Russian origin. No doubt, his own difficult childhood urged him to such dedication to the children. Also among “the little ones” were the laborers. Father George, being comprehensively educated at the most modern scholarly center of the time in Fribourg, Switzerland, was one of the first in Poland to start working to resolve difficult social issues. He also immersed himself in practical work as a social activist—especially at the *Society of Christian Laborers* in Warsaw—as well as theoretically, by editing magazines, writing articles, and delivering conferences and lectures on sociology.

As the Bishop of Vilnius, Fr. Matulaitis stood up to defend the threatened rights of the workers, thus putting his own life at risk. While being active in social matters, he never stopped to be first a priest. Undoubtedly, he was guided there by this maxim, which he later communicated to one of his students: *A priest that chooses this way of life and expects to see good fruits must be a holy priest.*

A different ecclesiastical field to which Fr. George dedicated his efforts was work with the youth studying both at middle and high schools, as well as at colleges. In this endeavor he cooperated particularly with Cecilia Plater-Zyberk, who was the precursor of the organized movement of the Polish Catholic intelligentsia.

Working among the laborers and the youth, Fr. Matulaitis was emphatic in underlining that lay Catholics were equally called to apostolic work. Their role in the Church was so great that they could not be replaced even by priests. He also came up with this “conciliar” concept that the entire Church was apostolic and missionary. He had a chance to work in close cooperation with the Russian Orthodox and felt painfully the rift within the Universal Church, trying all his life long to mend and repair it. To this matter he dedicated his Doctoral thesis and a conference, which he delivered at the International Eucharistic Congress in Chicago, in 1926. He perceived the Russian Orthodox Church as his brethren who unsuspected their error and claimed that they needed only to receive additional instruction. With this goal in mind, he founded the Congregation of Sisters of the Eucharist and

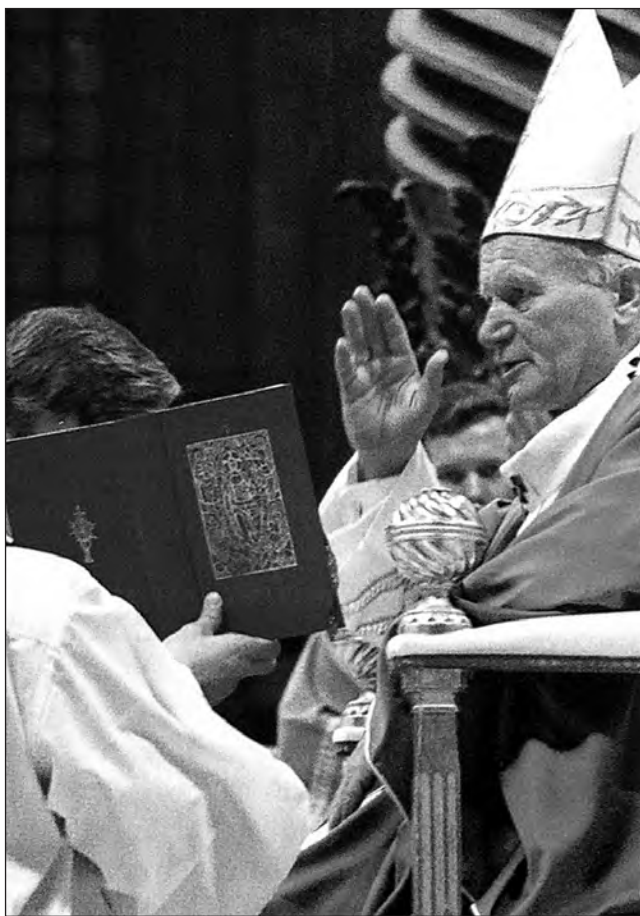
a religious house of the Marian Fathers in Druya (Belarus). By his teachings he most certainly paved the way for modern-day ecumenism.

In all his works he had St. Paul as his model and chose his order to *Overcome evil with good*, as his Episcopal motto, which he placed on his coat-of-arms. People who had a chance to be closer observers of his life were fascinated by the great appeal of his spiritual beauty. What is more telling is that even his opponents could not deny this appeal. We have here an exclusive witness of Pope Pius XI. Being the Apostolic Visitor to Poland, he proposed Fr. Matulaitis's candidacy for the Episcopal See in Vilnius, dealt with complaints against him, and kept an active correspondence with him. During the time of the media's violent attacks on Bishop Matulaitis, he came to visit Bielany and to express his condolences to the Marian Fathers, stating: *Your General Superior is a true man of God.*

Later, writing his congratulations to Pius XI on his election as a new Pope, Bishop Matulaitis recalled this occasion: *I greatly rejoiced, Dear Holy Father, at the news of your election. You have been to us a fatherly and cordial Visitor and Apostolic Nuncio and a dear guest who consoled and strengthened us, who walked together along our paths, noticing our afflictions and mishaps and as if healing our wounds with your own hands.* To which the Pope responded by his personally written letter: *We ourselves had the opportunity to notice the prudence and righteousness with which you carried out your duties of a good shepherd, always seeking the greater glory of God and salvation of souls not the people's accolade. Keep doing your fruitful work in the Vineyard of the Lord.*

Thanks to this kind of contact, the attitude of Pius XI showed something that Ladislaus Skrzyński, the Polish ambassador to the Vatican, described in his reports from Rome *an exceptional affection, exceptionally warm amity of the two priests, exceptional veneration and friendship.* After departing from Poland in 1925, Fr. Matulaitis was received in a special papal audience, following which he wrote: *The Holy Father showed me much kindness and fatherly affection.* These words are as a refrain repeated after each

of his personal encounters with the Pope. As the earthly conclusion of his friendship came the incident that happened eight years after Archbishop Matulaitis's death, and was described by Fr. John Sobczyk in his memoirs: By the decree of Divine Providence, I had the honor of participating in a private audience granted to the members of our Congregation by the Holy Father Pius XI on July 9, 1935. During this audience, our Reverend Father General Andrew Cikoto presented to His Holiness on behalf of our Congregation the portrait of our Renovator, Archbishop George Matulaitis. After greeting all present, the Holy Father stood in front of this portrait and said '*Gratum donum, quia gratissima persona* [a precious gift because the person is very dear]. *And after a moment of reflection, he added 'Vir vere sanctus* [a truly holy man].' This was, as someone called it later, 'the unofficial canonization.'



**BEATIFICATION OF  
ARCHBISHOP GEORGE**



**I**n view of the above opinions, prompted by the personal encouragement of Pius XII, the Congregation of Marian Fathers, began the process of beatification of Archbishop Matulaitis in 1953. The process was conducted in two stages: first, as an informational process in Rome, then as an apostolic process in Rome, Chicago, and Warsaw. In total, 50 witnesses gave their testimonies.

All the writings of the Servant of God were collected and evaluated from the point of view of their compatibility with Catholic teaching. In this way, a huge base of source material was created. In the meantime, petitions from many Cardinals, Bishops, General Superiors of Religious Orders and groups of lay Catholics came to the Holy See asking to elevate the Servant of God to the altars.

Among these petitions were the letters of the Polish bishops including those of Cardinal Wyszyński and of Cardinal Wojtyła. Communist authorities were concerned about the impending beatification. In order to impede it, the Office for Religious Affairs tried to discredit Archbishop Matulaitis, spreading false information about him both in the Vatican and in the country, especially among the clergy.

After a profound examination, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints issued a decree on the basis of the collected materials, declaring that the Holy Father St. John Paul II solemnly pronounced that Archbishop George Matulaitis had been practicing virtues to the heroic degree throughout all his life.

The beatification required a sign of God's intervention in the form of a miracle. Out of the many graces received through the intercession of Archbishop Matulaitis, one was chosen. Archbishop Liudas Povilonis, apostolic administrator of Kaunas and Vilkoviskis, chairman of the National Conference of Bishops of Lithuania, presented in 1985 the case of healing of varicose veins the one Adelaide Tamošiunaitė, a teacher from Panevėžys. Due to lack of religious freedom in Lithuania, he could not produce full medical records. Nevertheless, the proffered case was accepted, analyzed by expert physicians and theologians, and rec-

ognized as an extraordinary occurrence that could not be explained by natural or scientific laws. This opinion was later ratified by cardinals and bishops in their session. On June 30, 1986, Pope St. John Paul II solemnly declared in the presence of assembled cardinals: *We confirm that a miracle was granted by God through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God George Matulaitis, namely: a sudden, complete, and lasting healing of one Adelaide Tamošiunaitė of the varicose veins in her left leg.* The Pope decided to hold the ceremony of Archbishop George's beatification together with the 600<sup>th</sup> Jubilee of Baptism of Lithuania. Being prevented from travelling to that country, the Pope decided to hold this great ecclesiastical event in Rome.

In anticipation of the ceremony, the Pope issued an apostolic letter to the bishops of Lithuania. In this letter he outlined the spiritual profile of Archbishop Matulaitis, emphasizing his merits before the Church. Pastoral letters were also proclaimed by the Lithuanian and Polish bishops.

The Pope invited representatives of all European National Conferences of Bishops to participate at the ceremony that took place in St. Peter's Basilica on June 28, 1987. Bishop Antanas Vaičius, Apostolic Administrator of Telsiai, represented the National Conference of Bishops in Lithuania, while Poland was represented by Cardinal Henry Gulbinowicz.

The Basilica was filled with the venerators of Archbishop Matulaitis, among whom were Lithuanians living abroad (only eight priests were allowed to come from Lithuania) and members of the religious families founded by the Servant of God.

The candidate to the altar was presented by Bishop Vaičius, followed by St. John Paul II reciting the formula of the beatification: *In fulfillment of the wish of our brother Antanas Vaičius, the apostolic administrator of Telsiai, as well as requests of our many confreres in the Episcopal service and the numerous faithful, after consultation with the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, by our Apostolic Dignity we resolve that the Venerable Servant of God George Matulaitis will be henceforth called Blessed, and his annual*



*liturgical celebration will take place on the day of birth in heaven, i.e, on January 27<sup>th</sup> in places and in the manner stipulated by the law. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

As the Pope finished uttering these words, the image of the newly Blessed was unveiled in the Gloria by Bernini and its copy on the balcony outside St. Peter's Basilica. Bishop Vaičius fell to his knees at the feet the Pope, which was not anticipated by any ritual, while everyone present at the ceremony expressed their joy with enthusiastic applause. The words of the Blessed: *I can truly say today that the Catholic Church is my only homeland, and I feel that I am becoming more and more only its patriot*, became to a certain degree, the property of all the assembled.

The Pope spoke several times about the newly Blessed: in his beatification homily, at the meeting with the Lithuanian pilgrims, to the Polish pilgrims, to the Marian Fathers, and briefly at the Angelus. He also spoke of the links between the Catholic Church and her sister Churches throughout Europe, as well as the bishops of Lithuania, which were celebrating the 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its Baptism; and he also added: *I am very happy that I was given the joy of elevating to the altars the great son of the Lithuanian people, the servant of God, George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, the exemplary bishop and religious, the founder and the renovator of religious communities, the man who was inspired by a great love for Mary Immaculate, a wonderful example of an untiring and fearless pastor.*

The post-beatification ceremonies were held in the Roman Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore for three days for groups of people speaking various languages. Holy Mass in English for the Lithuanians was presided over by the Archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin; Mass in Italian was led by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Cardinal Pietro Palazzini; and at the close of the event the triduum of thanksgiving in the Polish language was presided over by Cardinal Henry Gulbinowicz.

The joy experienced in Rome spread to the countries in which the new Blessed worked and places where were located the pastoral centers of the Marian Fathers and congregations of the sisters founded by him. Of particularly sublime character were the celebrations held at the Blessed's grave in Marijampole on July 12, 1987. Members of the entire National Conference of Bishops in Lithuania were in attendance along with the faithful from all over Lithuania and neighboring countries: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia and the Ukraine. The High Mass was presided over by Archbishop Liudas Povilonis, while Bishop Antanas Vaičius delivered the homily and shared his impressions from celebrations in Rome. This event was preceded by the construction of a new altar to which the relics of the Blessed One were transferred from the sarcophagus.

Also the celebrations in Kielce—the Blessed's native diocese—took on an all-Polish character. They were held in the church of St. Joseph on Nov. 8, 1987 with the participation of the entire National Conference of Bishops in Poland. Cardinal Joseph Glemp presided and Cardinal Henry Gulbinowicz delivered the homily.

This ceremony was preceded by a scholarly session in the cathedral and the pontifical Masses in all churches in Kielce, at the headquarters of the deaconates and in some other shrines. Blessed George may be considered as the patron of relations between peoples, especially between Poland and Lithuania, because he had something in him of the universalism of St. Casimir, about whom he wrote in his pastoral letter that—*as the Prince of Poland and Lithuania—he embraced with his loving equally Krakow and Vilnius, Poland and Lithuania.*

### **From the Homily of St. John Paul II at the Beatification**

**D**ear Brothers and Sisters! The Bishop of Rome greets you with a warm and open heart and in this Eucharist extends to you a brotherly embrace of peace...

With deep longing in my heart I wanted so much to be with you. Every day I visit your native land in prayer. The entire Church joins me in this prayer and this heartfelt desire...

We rejoice in your constant fidelity to the Christian Faith [...] we owe a debt of gratitude to your forefathers who for six centuries shared in the mysteries of God. Today we also give thanks that the Baptism of Lithuania brings forth its salvific harvest in this our present century, with is evident in the person of your newly-Beatified co-national whom today I have the joy to raise to the honors of the altar.

Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz is a special gift to the Church and to the Lithuanian nation in his jubilee year.

This true “servant and apostle of Jesus Christ”—zealous and tireless in his priestly ministry in his own native land, in Poland, in Rome, and in other places—he was a shepherd full of courage and initiative, capable to challenge with prudence and dedication the difficult situations facing the Church. His only concern was always the salvation of the souls entrusted to his care.

In a special way I would remind you of his zeal with which he himself practiced and promoted religious life—by renewing the Marian Order and founding the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the Servants of the Blessed Eucharist. His spiritual sons and daughters represented here in large numbers received from him the priceless treasure of holiness and dedication to the Church and to the brethren. The richness grew out of an intense interior life by virtue of which he remained ever united with God.

Blessed George Matulaitis who in a heroic degree strove to be “everything to everyone,” deeply conscious of his pastoral mission, a true apostle of unity, dedicated without reserve to preaching the gospel and the salvation of souls—is a splendid model of a bishop.

**At the Angelus**

**D**ear Brothers and Sisters,

This morning the Church of Rome together with the churches of Europe united spiritually in a solemn concelebration in the Basilica of St. Peter with the Bishops of Lithuania who today in Vilnius celebrate the centenary of that nation's "Baptism."

At the same time, I have had the joy to elevate to the honors of the altar a great son of that nation, the servant of God George Matulaitis-Matulewicz—exemplary bishop and religious, founder and renovator of religious congregations, inspired by a great love for Mary Immaculate, an eminent example of a tireless and fearless shepherd.

During these 600 years from that first evangelization the Christian Faith has set down solid roots in Lithuania...

In a special way (Lithuania) manifests devotion to Our Lady—so much so that the future Pius XI when he was Apostolic Visitor in that nation said: "Lithuania is a country of Mary." Without doubt, the most famous sanctuary is that of the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius which the Lithuanians call "Austros Vartai." For 400 years this was a place of prayer for all the people who venerate in that miraculous icon the *Mother of Mercy*—who is the Mother of God, the advocate and protectress of people who in their need have recourse to her with faith.





The important source of learning about Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz's thoughts and aspirations is his *Journal*. It was released first in Polish translation in Rome in 1973, and then twice in Warsaw. Its English translation appeared in Stockbridge, MA, in 2003.

In the introduction to the Roman edition of this *Journal* Fr. Witold Nieciecki, MIC, thus wrote about Bl. George Matulaitis: Without being autobiographical, the *Journal* gives us the author's great self-portrait made "on the spur of the moment," and devoid of festive pose and later retouching. It is an unpretentious, charmingly simple and honest profession of the author's faith and love of God and the Church of Christ, as well as his approach to carrying out his duties, with he took deeply into his heart and believed to be of utmost importance.

### **The Highest Ideal**

**M**y motto shall be: to seek God in all things, to do all things for the greater glory of God, to bring the Spirit of God into all things so that all may be filled with it. May God and His glory be the center of my whole life, the axis about which all my thoughts, feelings, desires, and actions continually turn.

The glory of God and the salvation of souls. Can any other goal be greater or more sublime than this? Compared to this goal, everything else seems trivial. Of what value are even the best and noblest human ideals beside it? And so, is it not right and just for us to devote our whole life and all that we have—our possessions, talents, even life itself to attain this goal? (Oct.14, 1910)

### **As a dishrag, as a fertilizer...**

**I** kiss the hand of Providence; I surrender myself completely to Your guidance—lead me, Lord. Heavenly Father, do whatever You wish with me. It has pleased You to lead me along wondrous

paths, Lord. But who can understand Your ways or anticipate Your thoughts? I am your servant, Lord; send me wherever You will. Like a little child I fall into Your arms. Carry me! You have been pleased to lead me along a road filled with obstacles, difficulties, and hardships. For this I thank You, for this I am deeply grateful. As I travel this road, I trust that here I will not lose my way so easily because this is the road that my beloved Savior Jesus Christ has taken.

Lord, how I love You! Grant that I may love You more and more and never stop loving You. My heart is aflame! I would pour out my blood for You, down to the last drop; give up everything and anything, even life itself so that Your glory would increase and Your Church grow and prosper. Show me what to do, Lord!

You have given me so many graces, O Lord. What can I give You in return? Everything that I have—but I have nothing of myself, only Your grace makes me rich. Still, all I have is Yours! If I may ask, Lord, let me be but a dishrag in your Church, a rag used to wipe up messes and then thrown away into some dark and dirty corner. I want to be used up and worn out in the same way so that your house may be a little cleaner and brighter. And afterwards, let me be thrown away like a dirty, worn-out dishrag.

My God, let me be used in Your vineyard, in Your field as manure, as fertilizer, so that Your harvest would be richer and the fruit more abundant. Let me be despised, used up, and worn out so that Your glory may increase and so that I may be of some use to the growth of Your Church. Fool that I am, I do not know what to ask for! O God, grant that Your will be done in all things. Here I am, take me and do with me what You will; let me be a docile instrument in Your hands. May Your glory increase, may Your Kingdom grow, may Your will be done! (Jan. 13, 1910)

Animated by the Spirit of Christ, we must try to gather together and organize people of good will—to train and prepare them to work, and then, together with them and through them to bring Christ everywhere, to restore and renew all things in Christ, to encompass all for Christ, to win all for Christ, to attract



all to Christ. Lord Jesus, enkindle our hearts with the fire of this zeal. That I shall ask you for. (Oct. 15, 1910)

### Love of the Church

**O** holy Catholic Church, true kingdom of Christ on earth, my greatest love! If I were to forget you, may my right hand wither. Let my tongue glue to my palate, if I do not remember you, if I would not regard you as my dearest Mother and my greatest consolation. *If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither. May my tongue stick to my palate if I do not remember you, if I do not exalt Jerusalem beyond all my delights* (Ps 137:5-6, NAB).

May these words echo continually within my heart. Grant, O Lord, that we may be ruled by this one great thought: to work, to toil, and to suffer for the Church; that the Church's sufferings, trials, and wounds may become the sufferings and wounds of our own hearts. May we burn with this one great desire: to devote our lives to God and to His Church, not seeking or expecting any earthly reward or anything this world has to offer; to be used up and to burn out in struggle, suffering, and combat for the sake of the Church. Oh, that we would have such great courage as to remain undaunted in the face of any obstacle created by the world or by the powers that be, never giving in to fear, but rather boldly moving forward to work and to do battle for the Church wherever the need is greatest, wherever the civil authorities are persecuting the Church and interfering with the life of its religious orders, organizations, and institutions. We should fear one thing only: to die without having suffered, struggled, and toiled for the Church, for the salvation of souls, for the glory of God. May all our thoughts, desires, and longings be directed toward that one goal: to bring Christ everywhere, to restore all things in His Spirit, to glorify the name of the Catholic Church in every place.

In order to achieve this, we should make use of any lawful and worthy means available to us: the cassock of the priest or the habit of the religious or, if need be, the clothes of the layman; we can use every trade, profession, every field of learning or labor—

and even our own blood—everything that is good and created by God can be used, if need be, for the greater glory of God and for the good of the Church. “... For you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God” (1 Cor 3:23). Each and every field of work can thus be useful, but especially the priestly ministry which is concerned with educating and organizing people—this field has enormous possibilities—keeping in mind and selecting that which will result in the greater glory of God and best meet the needs of the Church. (Oct. 13, 1910)

### **The Apostolate of Lay People**

**O**ne of the most pressing needs of our times is, it seems to me, to involve larger groups of people from every segment of society in a more active apostolate for the faith and the growth and defense of the Church.

Just as at the present time good Catholics are involved in charitable institutions, they could also become active for the propagation of the faith and in making the Church better known and loved. Lay men and women could do so much good here, once they have been instructed and educated in matters of faith and better informed about the needs of the Church; fired with holy zeal, they could then be organized into groups and actively involved in the task of spreading the faith. They could bring Christ into those places where we priests do not have access.

We should gather such people of good will around us and prepare them for such an apostolate, which would certainly result in the greater glory of God and promote the welfare of the Church. As for us, a special characteristic of our work among the people should be our ability to organize, unite, and direct them toward the task of spreading the faith and defending the Church. (Oct. 27, 1910)

### **The Mother of God**

**I** thank You, Lord, for having given me such extraordinary feelings of love for the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the past I found this prayer difficult. But now, how sweet it is to fall at her feet and to immerse myself in prayer! Overwhelmed by these feelings of incomparable sweetness, my soul swoons and my body is filled with wondrous, incomprehensible, and inexpressible tremors. It is like the feeling I had when I pressed the holy cross to my heart.

Thank You, Lord, for everything! O my God, my God, how I love You and long to love You! Only let me work and suffer for You and for Your holy Church and for its visible head, the Holy Father. May prayer, work for God, and hardships with suffering for the Church be woven into the very fabric of my life. May Christ himself be my model. (Jan. 13, 1911)

Most Blessed Virgin Mary, I ask you to obtain from your Son the grace to love you more, to have ever more confidence in you, and to cherish your glorious protection more and more. Take our Congregation under your powerful protection, O Mother. Accept us, unworthy though we are—so destitute, such spiritual beggars—if for no other reason, than, at least, because of the name we bear. Grant that our lives be pure and untainted. (Sept. 7, 1911)

### **The Vow to Serve God Alone**

**I**n the afternoon I went to St. Peter's Basilica. There, at the tomb of the Holy Apostle, I made a vow to do everything in my power that neither I myself, nor any of our members, nor the Congregation itself would ever pursue any other aims, whether national, political, or the like, but seek only to serve God, the Church, and to work for the salvation of souls, making use of all natural and supernatural means as instruments in the pursuit of this highest goal, namely, the greater glory of God. I prayed for some time. (Nov. 24, 1911).



17

do mi to te a procent nie  
 będzie dobre. Jutro napisz  
 do Dąbrowy skądś. Nie sta-  
 nie, nie chce odpisać.  
 przeżyj to życie. Tak prze-  
 żył. Przyjacieli. - Napisać  
 do niego by stał się  
 na polski. Głównym  
 jest to i odpisać -  
 Jędrzej walczył, przysłał  
 mu po francuskiej Głównie-  
 rzy  
 Władysław Wroński: do niego  
 pisał wiersz i błogosławieństwo.  
 Hrabia Wroński ma pro-  
 wadzić. - Władysław by  
 się udato do niego z rękopisem.  
 Dr. Wroński i Borysian  
 + Jędrzej.

## SELECTED LETTERS OF BLESSED GEORGE



### **1. From a letter to Rev. A. Civinskas:**

Perfection also means knowing how to bear your own imperfections patiently: in other words, knowing how to combat them patiently and steadfastly.

1909.02.09

### **2. From a letter to M. Ruškytė:**

A heart burning with love of God and neighbor is worthier than the loftiest of sciences. It is important, therefore, to keep your soul pure and undefiled. But just as it is difficult to remain clean while sloshing through mud, so is it hard not to stain your soul and corrupt your character while mingling with all types of people, listening to all kinds of talk and observing all sorts of conduct.

In the meantime do not be too disturbed about the future and do not give in to fear and doubts. If man were to depend only on his own strength to do everything, we would have an excuse for becoming desperate, because we are weak. But God is our help and strength. With His aid we can do all things.

A good religious must not seek a peaceful existence, but must work and dedicate herself for God and men.

Petersburg, 1910.01.22

### **3. From a letter to Rev. J. Vaitkevičius:**

We are experiencing our share of all kinds of hardships and we expect to have more, but up to now God has helped and blessed us. Although slowly, still the work is going forward. We are doing what we can; we want everything to go as well as possible and hope God accepts our good intentions. More and more people wish to join us but we are very careful in that respect; we would have even more candidates if we were not forced to keep hiding like sparrows.

Our Constitutions are already being printed; as soon as they are ready we shall send them to you. You will not find anything special or new in them. As directed by the Holy See, in their composition we followed the Norms as much as possible. We deleted only those things which might constrict us in our difficult life. Besides, the Rules are more of a juridical foundation and buttress for our life. We incorporated in them, therefore, whatever was law; our spirit, experiences, observations and suggestions, we plan to place into other books which will be called Instructions, as they are now commonly termed. These we shall develop together, with an eye on modern day life and demands, drawing material from our experience.

St. Petersburg, 1910.02.6

#### **4. From a letter to Rev. J. Vaitkevičius:**

I am of the opinion that not only individuals but institutions, too, should strive to become more and more perfect and never remain static. We must, therefore, find out how other religious live and work, how institutions similar to ours operate and thrive, what their good points are. When we have acquired this information we should strive to make use of it by applying it to our own life as much as circumstances permit.

I regard our Rules as something set up for the time being, so that we may have something to which we can hold. It is difficult to draw "a priori" Rules which would immediately be good enough to fit in new conditions. As far as I know, all Rules were formed gradually and were based on the experience of long years. We, too, after having lived a while and gained a bit of experience, will be able to make more suitable Rules. At present, it seems to me, the Rules are not as important as the men we have, their views and spirit, because on these men who will begin the work will mostly depend the future course, spirit and progress of the Institute.

St. Petersburg, 1910.03.11



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**5. From a letter to Rev. A. Čivinskas:**

Although it is painful there is nothing left for us to do but to submit to God's will. I am deeply sorry for you, dear Brother; with all of us striving together we may possibly have hastened the creation of fair and favorable conditions for working for God's glory. It hurts us personally to lose an old, close friend. But what can you do? You must take the cross that the Lord God gives you and bear it in patience. Perhaps, God willing, as time passes, the obstacles will disappear and we shall again be able to work together.

1910.04.13

**6. From a letter to Rev. VI.:**

You did well to rent a better room. One must not take one's health too lightly because it, too, is a gift of God. Let us not forget that according to the Latin maxim: "Prius est esse, dein philosophari."

If you ever find yourself in difficult straits and need funds, let us know and we will share what we can with you.

1910.09.30

**7. From a letter to Rev. N. N.:**

You ask how one can recognize God's will. As you yourself well know, God very rarely reveals His Holy Will directly, through Himself. Those occurrences are miraculous. Generally, God draws us to Himself and guides us to this or that way of life through holy desires, affections, aspirations, propensities, longings and so on, which He created and arouses in our heart; further, through various events in our life, through all kinds of circumstances, through other men.

But all these acts only more or less strongly awaken, urge and bend a man to this or that side: they have, so to speak, only a consultative voice. Man himself, having examined and pondered his

whole life with a mind illumined by the grace of faith, having measured all things in terms of God's greater glory, that is, on the one hand, his own perfection and salvation, and on the other, the salvation and greater welfare of men, the needs and good of the Church, must decide in what direction it would be better to tend to, on which road he should set foot. Man himself must have the final say in this matter and make the final step.

Sometimes a person very clearly sees where this final step should be made: this is a signal grace of God. But more often one wavers and doubts. Yet for the greater glory of God he should not be afraid to bear the consequences of his choice of one course or another; he must have courage enough to take a gamble, so to speak. And how often everyday life presents us with a dual choice which involves risk! Why not, therefore, take a chance for God's greater glory? Even if one were to make a mistake, God would still accept his good will.

Therefore, after considering everything carefully in the presence of God and submitting yourself completely to God in all things, do not hesitate to make your final step in one direction or another for the greater glory of God. But you must make that final act yourself; no one will make it for you. You yourself have to make the choice between the two ways. No one else can do this for you, no one else has the right. If someone did choose for you, he would incur responsibility before God and would be intruding between the Lord and you.

The same day I received your letter I happened to make my meditation on the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus, In the meditation the author, Father Meschler, SJ, says that Jesus had to redeem us: that was His vocation. But the manner in which this would be accomplished He Himself freely selected, not only as the Son of God, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, but also as God-Man. He could have redeemed us by living here on earth as a great King, or Priest or Lawgiver as were David, Solomon, Aaron, Moses, etc. But Christ freely chose His mode of life here on earth and its circumstances, His way of death, etc. All this was His own free choice.

Neither does God force any of us. We, ourselves, of our own free will, must choose our state of life and the Congregation we wish to enter. We must tend toward perfection, toward salvation, but with God's help we ourselves select our own particular vocation, our own road.

### **8. From a letter to Rev. P. Andziulis:**

Not so long ago a young lady who is a student and wishes to serve God applied to us for aid. She needed at least fifty dollars to help her through this year. Although it is not easy for us to part with such a sum, yet recalling the words of the Gospel—"Date et dabitur vobis" (Lk 6:38)—we promised to assist her.

Behold, unexpectedly, a priest acquaintance of ours handed us fifty dollars for the Congregation, to be used as we saw fit! And so Divine Providence repaid us at just the right time. We believe God will not abandon us in the days to come, either, as long as we strive to live continuously in closer accord with the spirit of the Gospel.

1910.11.17

### **9. From a letter to Rev. P. Andziulis:**

My trip to Warsaw was quite successful. His Excellency, Bishop Ruskewicz, approves of our project and work wholeheartedly; he promised us his help and his patronage in the matter of vocations.

I had a great deal to do while in Warsaw. I preached retreats, heard confessions and settled many matters. I was so busy that I sometimes had to do with only four or five hours sleep.

The Congregation I used to work for is doing well, thank God, and is continually growing stronger in organization. I found several young Lithuanian girls here, but the trouble is that most of them lack schooling. Only a few have teachers' certificates or a higher education. The others need instruction and training. Although these sisters are quite particular about the type of can-

didates they accept and do refuse many, they take great pains in educating the ones they accept and fashion their nuns into good workers. I believe that within a few years we shall have a fine group of industrious and useful sisters in Lithuania.

After I left St. Petersburg for Warsaw, Father Dembinski, the Vice-Rector of our Academy, resigned his position for various reasons. After conferring with the Archbishop, the Rector asked if I would accept the post. I considered the matter thoroughly in the presence of God and decided definitely I could not accept.

Someone must devote himself fully and untiringly to our project and work. This is an important task we have begun and requires serious doing. It is especially significant to build a good beginning. It seemed to me that it would be best if I gave myself wholly to the work already initiated. I am well enough informed and experienced in the matters at hand and have worked extensively in the same field. You might say that I reorganized and, in effect, renovated that women's Congregation which I mentioned earlier.

And then, too, Father B. is in a much better position than I to continue as a professor at the Academy. He has his matter all prepared, while I have to write out new lectures. It seemed to me, therefore, and still does, that it is I, and no one else, who must drop and abandon everything and wholly apply myself to the organization and guidance of our own life. And I am now completely convinced that such is the Will of God in this matter and that I cannot take any other course, unless God should indicate that I am wrong.

But his Excellency, the Metropolitan, did not wait for my answer, nor did he give me an opportunity to explain the facts on my return to St. Petersburg. He has summarily appointed me Vice-Rector and forwarded the documents to the Ministry for confirmation. I shall receive ratification from the civil authorities any day now.

When I returned to St. Petersburg I learned about the whole affair from friends, then from the Rector and, finally, from the

Archbishop. Nothing could be done. I had to give in. But I told his Excellency that I would have to resign after the vacation and I gave my reasons. However, the Archbishop would not even permit me to explain everything. The matter was thus left inconclusive. I expect to have a great deal of difficulty in shaking myself loose from this situation by vacation time. In the meantime, I shall have plenty of troubles and woes...

Remember us in your prayers, especially me, that I may succeed in the performance of my new duties and, when the time comes, that I may disengage myself from them and devote myself solely to our work and plan.

1911.01.19

#### **10. From a letter to Rev. K. Bizauskas:**

Your plan to travel to Siberia to preach missions is excellent and most noble. The same idea occurred to me more than once. But it will be practicable only when there is an organization consisting of many members. Then, with episcopal permission and the consent of the civil authorities, several priests could be assigned to visit Siberia and preach missions everywhere. Otherwise the project is hardly feasible. Siberia is divided into parishes. The local pastors—at any rate not all of them—would hardly permit a stranger to travel through their parishes. Undoubtedly, many incidents would occur.

1912.01.30

#### **11. From a letter to Rev. J. Vaitkevičius in Warsaw:**

I am of the opinion that it would be better to have fewer members as long as they are men truly practiced in self-denial, full of spirit, trustworthy, men who would be unafraid to give up not only their comforts, but even their health and life, if need be, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

In our day and in the present condition of the Church, ordinary workers are not enough; we need real apostles. We must be wary

of men of meager spirit: not only are they pedestrian and inactive themselves but they also later become a drag on others.

1912.08. 24

### **12. From a letter to Rev. P. Bučys:**

We are better off with only a few working as long as they are men of good spirit, self-denial, who, in case of need, are unafraid of suffering, of working or of sacrificing their health and life for God's Church. We must be very wary of men of poor spirit. In our situation it is not enough to have good hirelings; we need men who have the spirit of the apostles.

1912. 08. 24

### **13. From a letter to Rev. P. Bučys:**

What can you do, Brother? "Per multas tribulationes oportet intrare in regnum coelorum" (Acts 14:21). The cross, adorned as it is sometimes with flowers, looks handsome, of course, but only in pictures. The real cross, the cross of life, is always heavy and weighs one down.

I do not know what I would have done in similar circumstances. When I heard from a trustworthy priest friend for the first time that I would not even get my approbation, I was very hurt; I was really so sick that I walked about in a daze for two weeks. But it turned out well. I took a deep look at myself, my life, my words and my actions. I began to accept such insinuations with equanimity and even became so accustomed to them that later more grievous faultfinding and suspicions hardly made any impression.

Perhaps God has also heavier crosses in store for you and this is only an introduction to condition you. Keep in mind only that all things turn out well for those who love God.

1912.09.20

**14. From a letter to Rev. J. Vaitkevičius:**

Do not forget that health is also a gift of God and as such must be cherished. It would be better to labor ten years or more longer than to burn out quickly in a few months.

1912.12.09

**15. From a letter to Rev. P. Bučys:**

With the approach of the Christmas season, may I extend you heartiest greetings from myself and from all your acquaintances. May the Lord God grant you the health you need to work many more years for God's greater glory and the Church's welfare!

I heard from Johnny that your health has not been too good and that you have been complaining about your throat. You had better see a doctor, Brother, before complications set in. If you feel that your health is not improving, call off the various lectures and retreats you have on schedule and when summer comes go some place where you can really rest and recuperate. You could even come here. My brother, you have been working now without a break for some years, vacation or no vacation. You will not be able to work much longer that way. Think it over thoroughly, therefore; you must not ruin your health. Remember that health is a gift of God that is to be used prudently, so that it might last as long as possible in the service of God.

Fribourg, Switzerland, 1912.12.19

**16. From a letter to Rev. J. Totoraitis:**

For a long time I have been meaning to talk with you about those matters which you touched on in your other letters: relations among the nationalities in our Community.

I have been and still am worried about this matter. I have thought a great deal about it myself and have discussed it with others. I have prayed much, too. I asked the Lord God to enlighten us so that we may not make a misstep or leap too much

toward one side or another. And I have not ceased praying. I, myself, and some of the other brethren have even been the object of all kinds of accusations and rumors in this same concern. At times it was very painful. I hope the Lord God accepts our little crosses and helps us find the right road. There is plenty of good will among us and God blesses good intentions. It is good that you began to deliberate about this thing.

A religious must be the representative, servant, defender and herald of supernatural life... the Church is our Mother. Her crosses and sufferings should be our aches and pains; Her needs, our needs; Her troubles and cares should be our trials and anxieties; Her joys, our happiness... We should live and work primarily for the Church, and if need be, die for Her. We should fear only one thing: to pass through this life like a shadow without having done anything for God's glory or for the Church, that Kingdom of God here on earth.

Applying the words of the Psalmist to the Church, we should cry: *si oblitus fuero tui Ierusalem, sancta Dei Ecclesia, oblivioni detur dextera mea; adhaereat faucibus meis lingua mea, si non meminero tui, si non prospuero Ierusalem in principio laetitiae meae* (Psalm 136:5).

I cannot even find words to express the love that I would wish to have myself for our dear Mother, the Church, so that I could implant it in others. Nowadays, as always, the Church unites and welcomes under its wing all the various nations on the face of the earth. It seems to me that this love of Christ and of the Church will be powerful enough to unite and conciliate men of different nations also in our Congregation. We have ample room for everybody; we have as much work before us as we all can possibly do. If we only never forget that we are gathered together not to engage in politics, nor to judge nations, nor to enter into their disputes and quarrels, not to regulate their relations, but solely to work for the salvation of souls, to bring Christ's doctrine and spirit wherever we can—then there would be few or no opening for us to argue about national matters, to provoke or look down on one another.



... Men of all different nations should strive to live in harmony and work together for the Church in the same religious community ..., because they are united by the higher ideals of Christ and the Church.

Even when violent quarrels, wars and bloody battles arise among nations, religious know how to live and work together in harmony.

... We must be continuously united and kept united by higher ideals. I believe in the might of ideals.

You write, Brother, that men often know how to hurt and take advantage of others under the cover of lofty and holy motives. You are right. That is the most detestable, the most disgraceful debasement of an ideal. It is something to fear and guard against.

But it happens more frequently still that because of passions, because of this world's goods and demands, because others toppled the ideal by dishonoring and exploiting it, men renounce the ideal entirely, quit loving and serving it. This is even a greater danger. I fear it more.

I agree with you that our entire life should be well determined in all its details and bound by certain regulations. Ideals alone are not enough, at least not for a longer period of time: they may fire men's hearts and keep them united for a while, but ordinarily, as time passes, men's hearts have a way of cooling; hence, they need also the compelling bonds of precepts to hold them together.

But neither can we live without ideals and spirit. Even the best Rule will not avail much if ideals lose their luster, if the spirit weakens and dies. Ideals and spirit can substitute for laws in Religious Orders, as they actually have, for longer intervals of time; but laws alone, even though they may be the best, the most minutely devised, cannot make up for the lack of spirit. Naturally, we need laws and we must strive to make ourselves the most perfect we can: in the life of society they are a stronghold, a buttress and a sanctuary. But only the true spirit of Christ, the pure, sublime ideals of the Church must remain our life, our real power and might. We must take care not to transgress the ideals which Christ has indicated to us.

It seems to me that men attack us because they regard the Congregation from the aspect of international relationships rather than from the viewpoint of the principles of faith and of the Church. Although the Congregation is in "hoc mundo," yet it should not be "de hoc mundo" (Jn 8:23): Its ends and ideals reach much higher and its field of work is different.

... Since many are so very absorbed themselves in national relations, they imagine everyone else's interest is national policies; it seems that they cannot even conceive that some people exist who are not in the least concerned with the destruction or establishment of alliances, but are anxious about an entirely different matter: the work of the Church, the arousal, preservation and augmentation of Christ's spirit in those nations.

Years ago I used to dislike Jews; there was a time when I disliked Russians and Poles. But God enlightened me, granted me the grace to understand that such an attitude was not consonant with the doctrine of Christ, Who commanded us to love every neighbor like ourselves; Who commanded us even to love our enemies, to pray for them and do good to them. From that time, thank God, I shook off all prejudices and dislikes. And experience has taught me that there are good people everywhere, good devout Catholics in every nation who want to serve God and with whom it is possible to work in harmony.

It is evident that all things in a Religious Order must also be based on justice. We must see to it that no one is wronged or hurt, that men of different nations can thrive and work among us equally well. But we need love too; we will get nowhere without it. I am thinking of the true love of Christ ... In our times we see so much self-love, hate and anger in the hearts of individuals as well as of whole nations. I hope we, at least, can live by the true love of Christ in our Community and avoid sinning against His Commandments and ideals. "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:35).

*Mandatum novum do vobis, ut invicem diligetis, sicut ego dilexi vos. Rogo, Pater, ut omnes sint unum sicut ego et Tu unum sumus. Omnium credentium erat cor unum et anima una: omnes erant*

*idipsum sentientes; perseverabant in communicatione panis et in oratione* (Jn 13:34; Acts 2:42).

We are not permitted to renounce this unity of Christ. According to St. Paul: *Omnes in Ecclesia sive iudaei, sive gentiles, sive liberi, sive servi—unum sunt in Christo* (1 Cor 12:13). This does not mean that we may hurt one another under the cover of these words of love, or that we should submit to injustice; we must hold to justice and to the other virtues. However, if we do not have love, all our efforts will be for naught. *Nisi caritaten habuero—ero sicut aes sonans, sicut cymbalum tinniens, nihil ero* (1 Cor 13:1).

Although we are men of different nations, we in the Congregation should so love one another with the true love of Christ, that others, regarding us, would say, as was observed about the first Christians: "see how they love one another!"

We must hold to the principle that we are not uniting [. . .] with nationals, but with Catholics of various nations: we are uniting, therefore, to serve God and the Church, because our Mother the Church is in distress everywhere.

We do not renounce love for our own country. According to the doctrine of St. Thomas, love of country *pertinet ad virtutem pietatis*. Hence, in our quest for perfection, we cannot neglect this virtue either. It seems to me that in this regard everyone of us could serve his own country best by making it his first concern to give her the doctrine of Christ, to bring in Christ's spirit wherever he can, scorning no respectable toil, no honest means.

Just as for individuals, so for nations: *Non est salus in aliquo alio nisi in Jesu Christo.—Querite primum regnum Dei, et cetera vobis adicientur* (cf. Acts 4:12, Mt 6:33, Lk 12:31).

Although Christ Himself was directly concerned only with the establishment of God's kingdom in men's souls here on earth, that is, His holy Church; although He served only supernatural ideals, yet no one did more good for humanity in all spheres of life than Christ.

We may say the same also about the Catholic Church. Can one give his nation anything more sublime or more important than

Christ's doctrine and spirit? Then the other things seem to come and fit in by themselves. We should not, therefore disdain the other things: any good works, any good means. *Omnia vestra, vos autem Christi. Christus vero Dei* (1 Cor 3:23). We can and ought to engage in any work by which we may please and serve God and men.

We do not renounce love for our own country and we are resolved, if and when possible, to return men to their own countries to work among their own people, among their countrymen.

But it seems to me that love of one's country can and should exist without hate and disdain toward other nations: while loving our own, we should also wish others well. We religious, especially, must desire and prayerfully do our utmost to propagate God's glory and spread God's Kingdom everywhere, to help the Catholic Church grow and flourish. While loving and serving our own countrymen, we must not forget the common needs of all Christendom: wherever we can and as much as we can, we must help in the salvation of the souls of other people, *ut omnes perveniant ad agnitionem veritatis*.

That is why the Church never lacks for noble souls who willingly leave the land of their fathers and go forth to preach the doctrine of Christ to pagans; particularly among religious there is no lack of such men.

I trust that our love of country, being true and according to the spirit of Christ, will not make our hearts ungenerous or hard: I trust that we, too, will be ready, wherever we are needed, to serve others and help save the souls of men of other countries.

1913.01.08

### 17. From a letter to Rev. Bučys:

We must never tread uncertain paths and by-paths. And if some matter should come up it would always be best to confer with his Excellency, the Bishop, and follow his advice; so be care-

ful. All kinds of diplomatic and political routes do not please me and I have no faith in them. Best to do your work, adhere to the bishops and consult with them: they are the real representatives of the affairs of the Church and the true leaders in ecclesiastical matters.

1913.01.08

### **18. From a letter to Rev. P. Bučys:**

It seems to me that you are perhaps too sensitive to certain trifles, that you become angry and hurt too quickly. I try to overlook such little things. I do not even show I feel them. I have discovered this to be the best way with people; often when they have composed themselves they wish to repair the harm done and afterward become milder and more courteous. "In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras." No matter where he is, man cannot escape his share of smaller or larger crosses; they are to be found everywhere and in many assorted sizes.

1913.02.11

### **19. From a letter to Rev. J. Novickas at Pajevone:**

Wherever we come in contact with people we should always have a good word for them: tell them how Catholics live, work, and serve God elsewhere; instruct the children wherever possible; teach them how to do better. Often even a few cheerful, sincere words reach the heart and in time bring forth fruit. One's spirit merely needs arousing and refreshing. Every parish contains a number of really pious souls who desire to follow the road of perfection and dedicate themselves wholly to God. Once such souls have received some training and their hearts have become enkindled with the love of God, they can be formed into a little unit and taught what needs to be done for the greater glory of God and the welfare of the Church. And it often happens that the efforts we put into the sound spiritual formation and training of one soul, give us later, a worker through whom we can ac-

comply a great deal of good. It is possible to find excellent and talented young men and women and make them useful workers for God and the Church. If you should happen on souls of such promise, mold them gradually.

1913.02.12

## **20. From a letter to John Matulaitis in Warsaw:**

In my life since I became a priest I have not desired or sought any honors or great wealth; I have only wished to bring more glory to God and more good to the Church. When I myself became convinced, and other sober minds concurred, that by leaving my high position at the Academy (St. Petersburg) and by going abroad I could accomplish more good, I did so straightway, without regrets, without wavering. The work here has been difficult and it still is; I have had a great deal of difficulty and I still have. But I do not mind. I dedicated myself to Christ, Who took the way of toil, of hardships and of the cross and I intend to follow Him as long and as much as I can. What fruit my efforts will bear, only God knows. I dedicate all things to Him; He will, undoubtedly, accept my good intentions.

1913.03.27

## **21. From a letter to Rev. J. Totoraitis:**

I, too, am very sorry about the death of Father Anthony Čivinskis. I got the sad news from Father Vincent. All that night I slept but little; instead, I prayed for the repose of Father Anthony's soul and meditated.

He was so close to us: he was ready to join us in St. Petersburg when his brother-in-law's death prevented him; he was so sorry for his sister's children that he remained to help raise them. Informing us of his decision he then wrote: "Man proposes, God disposes." How very true! All things are in the hands of Divine Providence! No matter how useful and necessary a man might be, no matter what grand plans he may have had, death comes

along; God's will is done. In death we must abandon all things, bid them all adieu. There is only One Who remains absolutely necessary, without Whom no one can be—all other things are but instruments to serve Him.

I am sorry about Father Anthony. He was a man of good heart, high, noble sentiments and great talents; he loved God, the Church and served souls: no wonder people showed him such respect.

I am sorrowful about Father Anthony's death, but what can you do? We must agree with God's Will. He knows what is best. We who have lost a good worker must strive to groom others to take his place. God grant that we find good ones!

This world and its spirit are dreadful. It is no wonder that Christ denounced the world and bade us to be on our guard against it, to fear and despise it: "mundus in maligno positus." Before the evil spirit entices man and draws him into his vortex, he shows and offers man wondrous goods, promises him heaps of gold; but once he has man caught in his toils, he devours and destroys him and then casts him aside like a rotted apple; or having sucked him dry of juices, he spews him forth like husks.

Christ's way with us is entirely different. He clearly tells and shows us what this world has in store for us. He enjoined us to renounce ourselves, to take our cross upon our shoulders, to die like the seed which falls to the ground, to abandon all things—but for this He promises a hundred-fold in return and the Kingdom of heaven besides.

And Christ keeps His promise! Although the man who follows Christ has to endure many hardships and toil assiduously, he receives in return manifold blessings, consolations, joy and peace here on earth; besides, heaven awaits him in eternity. *Vanitas vanitatis et omnia vanitas praeter amare Deum et Ei soli servire* (Eccl 1:2).

The same thought strikes me as I read what you write about possible candidates for the Cathedral Chapter. True, it would be good and ideal if really sound and worthy men got to occupy

those positions; it would edify and greatly fortify all the clergy. But, it seems to me, that because such is not the case we should not lose hope nor lament overmuch. They are, Brother, the personages who although adorned with gold and silver on the outside, have clay feet like the statue mentioned in Holy Writ: they soon crumble!

Our true strength is that which Christ indicated to us: lively faith (*haec est victoria quae vincit mundum—fides nostra*) (cf. 1 Jn 5:4) self-denial and love (*dilectio fortis ut mors*). What significance have all the powers of the world against this might? They are specks of dust, emptiness, nothing.

You, Brother, can get closer to the hearts of young people than others. Arouse in them a vigorous faith, the kind that moves mountains. Teach those young men to renounce and sacrifice themselves; enkindle the love of God in their hearts, that fire which may consume the man himself, yet inflames others. If only the seminary could produce two or three such priests each year, we would then have nothing to fear: they are the real strength—*ex semine eorum, per quos salus venit venit in Israel*.

His enemies fell upon Christ with the whole weight of their hatred: true, they overpowered Him, threw Him down and nailed Him to the cross, had Him executed and bore Him to the tomb which they sealed with a stone. But could they destroy His spirit? After His resurrection Christ revived all.

Let us recall the valiant St. Paul. What did not the Jewish leaders and later the pagans try? They threw him out of synagogues, chased him from city to city, flogged him, stoned him, imprisoned him but did St. Paul cease working and did he accomplish little?

We need spirit, Brother, spirit! Nothing can stifle it. I do not find it so alarming when a man who is unfit becomes a member of the Chapter,... but I am appalled when I hear that the spirit of unbelief is spreading among the youth, even in the villages, that moral laxity is growing: these are forces which destroy nations. A man who has no faith or morality cannot have a real, sincere love for his country or serve society as he should. *Non datur salus in aliquo alio nisi in Jesu Christo* (cf. Acts 4:12).



But in the final analysis it is not for us to judge and weigh men: *quis te constituit iudicem super Israel?* (cf. Acts 7:27, 35). We can but pray in silence that everything turns out for the greater glory of God and strive to perform our own duties ever better.

I am sad not so much because things are not going as they should but because priestly spirit is on the decline and priests are becoming disheartened. Except for the spirit of unbelief and licentiousness we have no more terrible foes than despair and pessimism.

Therefore, Brother, shout it, at least when you are talking to the youngsters: *sursum corda!*

1913.04.11

## **22. From a letter to Rev. V. Dvaranauskas in Pilypava:**

It would be better to have only a few working in smooth harmony for the glory of God than to fret and worry later over a collection of many misfits.

1913.04.12

## **23. From a letter to Rev. Staniukynas in Chicago:**

There is no great hurry about the purchase of land or building. When we arrive we shall discuss the matter. But we have no money at all. We are concerned that we will have enough with which to reach America; after that the good Lord will have to provide for us and feed us. If God only gives us health we will earn our bread. We will be very grateful if, at least in the beginning, you give us a place to stay and a bite to eat. We are not fancy folk and will be satisfied with anything at all.

1913.04.13

**24. From a letter to Rev. P. Bučys:**

Your health worries me very much. You seem to be exceedingly afraid of taking a vacation; burdened as you are with so much work, how will you last? A man cannot keep... going for long at such a pace. My health, as you know, is also ragged; I am holding on fairly well but every so often I feel somewhat unwell. And our health is so very necessary just now!

Let us, therefore, use this gift of God prudently. All things are in the hands of Divine Providence and God can get along without all of us, but we must strive to live according to the precepts of Divine Providence, that is, we must employ our energies judiciously, so that we may have as long a time as possible to work for the glory of God.

So, Brother, you, too, had better see to it that you do not break down because you are needed very much. I am very apprehensive as to how you will last much longer, working the way you are. Lately, for some reason, I miss you and often think about you. You were always dear to me, Brother, but you have now become dearer, more necessary and closer to my heart.

1913.04.22

**25. From a letter to Miss Minetaite in Obeliai:**

Remember that a smaller or bigger cleavage always exists between an ideal and our own life. Who can say that he has attained his ideal? The greatest saints felt like weak creatures and sinners. They often complained and lamented that they were still so far away from Christ. St. Paul, himself, complained that he was tormented by temptations; and he said that he did not always do that which he had seen and praised. We are constantly but striving to attain perfection; we never can say that we have reached it.

Strive, therefore, to become ever more perfect and to rise ever higher. Do not be so worried about how far you still have to go. God rewards us for effort and good will. As you observe your weaknesses and imperfections, therefore, abase yourself the more before God. The Lord, seeing your humble heart, will not spurn you.

But you must never despair on account of your defects and failings. The weaker we feel ourselves to be, the more should we confide in God. He is our strength and salvation. Valiantly cry out in the words of St. Paul: "I can do all things in him, who strengthens me." And fight. God will not abandon you.

I wrote to you before that the evil one often attempts to make the life, station or vocation in which a person is, seem ugly and drab but shows us the golden apples of elsewhere and promises us paradise. Satan has enticed more than one person out of the monastery in this manner. That you are on the wrong road, that you have missed your vocation, are whisperings of the evil one.

1913.05.16

## 26. From a letter to Rev. J. Totoraitis:

Naturally, no one likes to hear talk against people he loves or against his country. However, what else can one do but bear it? *In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras* (Lk 21:19). Formerly I, too, was wont to be very hurt when I heard such words. But now when I hear them somewhere, they make little or no impression on me: in one ear and out the other. I comfort myself with the thought that such remarks cannot really change us for better or for worse. Let them talk as much as they wish; let us mind our own affairs and strive constantly to become better men. So, there is no reason to be upset.

Christ said: *orate pro persequentibus vos et calumniantibus* (Lk 6:28). If we heeded this precept we would gain much: at least our own hearts would not become corrupt.

Life is not Paradise, men are not angels and we cannot live without crosses. We must try to learn how to bear all crosses patiently and calmly. How serene the Lord Jesus always was! How often the victim of men's knavery and wickedness, yet, He never ceased loving and serving men; He died for them even though He knew and saw their ingratitude and selfishness. This love of Jesus is an incomprehensible mystery of His heart. Of all men, perhaps

the Lord alone joined the knowledge of men with love of them. He alone knew men down to their very depths and in all their dark aspects. Although He experienced their dreadful ingratitude and deceit, He never stopped loving them; He died for them out of love; He remained in the Blessed Sacrament out of love.

Jesus thoroughly realized Judas's infidelity but, nevertheless, permitted Himself to be kissed because He desired to overcome obstinacy with love. We, ordinarily, do the opposite: the closer acquainted we become with even a good man and the more we learn about his imperfections, the quicker we cool toward him, the weaker grows the love in our hearts. And what of those who insult and hurt us?

We are so far, Brother, still so far from the true spirit of Christ! That embittering sourness of hate which we allow to prevail in our hearts, hurts us more than it does those who offend us; it corrodes and spoils our own hearts and often does not affect our enemies in the least. Brother, strive to cultivate peace in your heart, the true peace of Christ which the world cannot give, and does not know. If you can, sow and nurture that peace among others. Christ continually greeted the apostles with the words: "Pax vobis, peace be to you." He constantly offered them peace: "Pacem meam do vobis..." Evidently, this peace which Christ gave to His apostles was a precious thing.

As we observe how men of our own day feud, quarrel and vilify one another; how, filled with hatred, they plot against one another, we are sad and anguished. How distant we are from Christ's spirit, from the example of the first Christians who were nourished by one spirit, so united and bound by ardent love that even the pagans marveled.

We must pray God for more peace. Naturally, it is difficult to change others, but we can learn to see and yet not to see, to hear and yet not to hear, to bear all that chicanery and wickedness with equanimity, without brooding over them. You can attain this peace by uniting with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, by dedicating the sorrows of your heart to Him.

**27. From a letter to rev. J. naujokas in St. Petersburg:**

You wrote me some time ago, Brother, mentioning obstacles and difficulties. indeed, there is no lack of them. i once used to think that men obstruct others only when they see them rising high and charging toward better positions. i am now convinced that men become much angrier and interfere much more when they see others trying to follow in the footsteps of Christ even from afar. What can you do? Perhaps this world was always like that; it will probably remain that way.

And, Brother, I am becoming more and more convinced that truly: *omnia vanitas vanitatum praeter amare Deum et Ei soli servire* (eccl 1:2); that all things are in the hands of divine Providence; that unless He wills it, not a hair falls from one's head; that God is wonderful and wonderful are His ways.

Although at times things were difficult and painful up to now, I have not regretted nor do I regret coming here. What the results of my work will be, only God knows. *Neque qui plantavit est aliquid... sed Deus qui dat incrementum* (1 Cor 3:6). If such be His holy will, everything will go well and nothing will stop us; and if it be not, then I trust that God will accept our good intentions. God may have been sending us many crosses up to this time, but He has also been helping us wonderfully.

1913.05.29

**28. From the letter to Rev. Kasparavičius:**

Organization gives religious extraordinary power, but, naturally, only if all pull as one. While ordinary man works alone and often has no one to help him, in a Congregation work is a community effort, a matter of mutual support; much more, therefore, can be accomplished.

But it is evident that if a Congregation is to bestow all these advantages on a man, monastery walls and investiture with monastic garb are not enough; a man must be trained and de-

veloped: his spirit must be continuously stimulated and maintained. We know from experience how much effort must be expended before a man is trained and prepared for work, how much we must pray and toil. That is why we would rather deny ourselves edifices and robes so that we might have more latitude to train our men as thoroughly as possible.

Because of our trust in Divine Providence we are not at all concerned about the personal wealth of our candidates. The assets we prize and desire most in a candidate are a sound mind, good will and piety; we want a candidate to be unafraid of dedicating himself wholly to God, the Church, and the Congregation—*ut mortuus sibi vivat Deo* (cf. Rom 14:7-9).

We wish to be religious who can be active even in the most difficult conditions. We have a bare minimum of external forms so that we may be able to penetrate everywhere and adapt ourselves to the most severe and demanding circumstances. For this reason we concentrate on the formation and perfection of the spirit of our members. We rely very strongly on obedience, submission to the direction of superiors, communication with them, rendering them reports on our life and activities so that we may look after, teach, and admonish one another.

1913.06.04

### **29. From a letter to Rev. V. Jurgutis in Munich:**

We are coming along passably here and keep striving to push forward. All beginnings are difficult and ours is no exception. As time goes on I trust in God and His Providence more and more. I believe that all that storm which was raised against us, helped us considerably. Perhaps it frightened a good man or two away from us, but I perceive that it also prevented some from joining who would perhaps have harmed us more than all those attacks. And in other matters God's help is truly wonderful; gradually we will perhaps be able to get our work really underway.

1913.06.13

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**30. From a letter to J. Matulaitis in Warsaw:**

People are fond of discussing and criticizing everything and everybody, so, naturally, they say all kinds of things about me, too. I can only tell you this, dear Brother, that I did not take the important step that I did, without a great deal of thought, without conferring with prudent and devout men and without Rome's knowledge and encouragement. Whether anything will come of my difficult and arduous work, only God knows—He Who gives fruitfulness to all things.

Although people call my work an empty dream, I have not time to dream. I have to work hard from morning to night and rarely find time even to go out for a walk. While I am primarily serving the Church because I am a priest, yet I believe that I will not forget Lithuania and will one day be of service to her if the Lord deigns to bless my work. Even if nothing results from my toil and hardships, I think God will at least accept and reward me for my good intentions—and this should be of paramount importance to us all.

The judgment of God is one thing my dear Brother, that of men, another. My conscience tells me that I am on the right road. The Church authorities encourage me. For the time being, that is enough for me. I never did crave wealth, glory, or high positions and I seek them even less now; my only interest is to please God, to be able to do something good for the Church and men. What men will say about me is their own affair.

1913.06.20

**31. From a letter to Rev. P. Bučys in St. Petersburg:**

Right after my arrival in Chicago I began to work. I directed a ten day retreat for the Sisters of St. Casimir. God blessed us as the fruits of the work were good. I also preached several sermons and heard the whole Community's confessions a few times. Besides, I corrected, completed and coordinated their Constitution according to canon law and the requirements of the Church. In three

parishes I gave lectures on social questions. In Brooklyn I preached two sermons in church and gave a lecture in the parish hall; the lecture was quite stormy because the socialists kept badgering me, but it all ended harmlessly enough. I am of the conviction now, however, that such lectures do not produce much good: a specially prepared mission would be better for the people.

1913.09.08

### **32. From a letter to Rev. Dvaranauskas in Pilypava:**

We may as well resign ourselves to the fact that man cannot live without crosses and hardships. We cannot please all men; not even Christ could.

The voyage to America was quite successful. I did not become sick on the way but my head became dizzy, heavy, and rather uneasy. I made the most of the trip. I struck up an acquaintance with a Marist Brother, a man of experience, and learned many good things from him... My work in America is going well; I conducted a ten day retreat for the Sisters of St. Casimir. I finally put their Constitution in order. I delivered lectures in three places in Chicago and preached a pair of sermons in Brooklyn.

1913.09.08

### **33. From a letter to Rev. Novickas in Pajevone:**

You must watch and control your nerves to keep them from being damaged; a nervous priest is a hardship to himself and to others. Whenever you feel tired try to get some rest; you will be able to work longer and your work will perhaps be better. Do not mind too much being ridiculed by other priests; that type always mocks zeal and sometimes even persecutes it.

1913.09.23



**34. From a letter to L. Bistras:**

You must remember that in the matter of vocation, except for very rare, extraordinary and even miraculous cases, we can have neither physical nor metaphysical certitude, but only moral. In other words, with the help of God's grace, man must himself select his state and way of life. The future is unfathomable; it is difficult to predict what will be. Man, therefore, often hesitates and doubts when he ought to venture and dare. But man must take one road or another by himself, of his own volition. Theologians console those in doubt by saying: *Elige quod vis, et gratia Dei non deerit*. In the selection of a vocation the most important thing is a sincere, genuine intention: God, then, grants His graces, and most abundantly, if man decides to strive for a more perfect state, a way of life which ordinarily is a surer road to salvation. God then blesses man's good desires and efforts.

It seems to me that your doubts stem from the fact that your life is much too dominated by self; your life revolves about your person as on an axis. You would like to put yourself and your life into a kind of bank so that your ego might realize as much interest as possible. You would like to protect and insure yourself well so that your ego would not perish or meet with an accident. But even the most cautious of men are sometimes unable to protect their wealth.

You must not be afraid to take a chance for the glory of God. Christ clearly says: *Nisi frumentum cadens in terram mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet* (J 12:24). Only when it has fallen to the ground, died and decayed does the grain bring forth new life and fruit from itself. Do not wish to protect yourself so very much and do not be afraid to immerse yourself in God and die to yourself for God's sake—then, when you become a priest, you will give forth much fruit.

You ask where you could do more good for society. It is difficult to say. In my opinion you could do nothing more noble and grand for society than to give it the doctrine of Christ and teach it Christian virtues. *Quaerite primum regnum Dei, cetera vobis adicientur* (cf. Mt 6:33, Lk 12:31). Man's influence on others and

the fruitfulness of his work are things ordinarily most difficult to weigh or measure. Neither must we be misled by that which glitters or is held in high esteem by men. In reality he who does the will of God accomplishes much. Often a priest can benefit society much more by converting one soul than by establishing any number of organizations or retail co-operatives, although the latter are, of course, useful things and must not be belittled. But what I wish to indicate here is that the matter of influence is hard to determine: it is an imponderable which will be explained in eternity.

1913.09.29

### **35. From a letter to Rev. Dvaranauskas in Pilypava:**

It seems to me that newspapers should at least be scanned for the sake of orientation on our work. We should not, of course, spend a great deal of time on them but inspect them we should, and whenever we find something worthwhile, we ought to read it through.

Moreover, we should find time every day or at least every other day for more serious reading. Without it a man's mind becomes very shallow and vain.

Whether it is worthwhile to visit the Mariavites is hard to determine; depending on the circumstances, do as you deem best.

You should visit not only your true Catholic parishioners who belong to the Church but also the errant sheep who live within the boundaries of your parish. You must strive to draw them back to the Church *ut fiat unum ovile et unus pastor* (Jn 10:16).

I knew a pastor who visited not only Catholics but heretics, strayed sheep and even Jews—if he were asked and could find the time. He sometimes succeeded in retrieving a lost one and brought it back to the Church. You must strive to introduce Christ and His spirit everywhere you can and draw men to Him in every virtuous way.

1913.11.17

**36. From a letter to Rev. Vaitkevičius in Częstochowa:**

We need patience, too. Once we start a task, trusting in God's help, we should stubbornly bring it to its conclusion. If it is not a success, we will at least have the consolation that it is not our fault: we will perceive that it was not in God's will.

1913.11.20

**37. From a letter to Rev. P. Bučys:**

As for those honors offered you, I take this view: if those trifles are vitally necessary to the glory of God and the welfare of the Church, which is in such dire straits in our part of the world, then we must be ready to wear not only decorations but sackcloth and chains also. I am positive that it is better to wear irons and rags than gold and silks because the former are not good company for self-love. But God's glory and the Church's good must be our *lex suprema*.

1913.12.01

**38. From a letter to Rev. Totoraitis in Seiniai:**

Man would become spoiled if God did not chastise him at times. I wonder if our ... priests would have exercised their ministry so successfully if there had not been someone to discipline them. Only one thing is really necessary: a good spirit, the spirit of God and the Church. Then no persecutions are frightening: they even turn out to our benefit. And so, Brother, you, too, stir up and lift the spirit all you can. May God be praised in all things!

I trust that God will not abandon us. He is giving us men; He will also provide us with bread. At least up to now no one went hungry. God willing, no one will in the future either.

1913.12.20

**39. From a letter to Rev. Vaitkevičius in Częstochowa:**

By July 25<sup>th</sup> we intend to be living at another address. We experienced a great deal of difficulty before we found a new place. We did not want to move out of the city into the country somewhere because that would have entailed considerable trouble. It was just about the last day before the twenty-fifth that we unexpectedly succeeded in finding this new dwelling. Had we not, there would have been trouble because the new owner of our former place raised the rent 340 francs. The Blessed Virgin truly helped us and that is why we have decided to make a chapel out of the handsomest room.

1914.01.30

**40. From a letter to Rev. Matulaitis in London:**

I think the most immoral and detestable kind of exploitation is that which operates behind the facade of religion. The moment we observe a wolf-operator of that type mingling among Christ's sheep, we should put the shepherd's crook to him and drive him forth with great clamor so as to protect the flock and prevent him from tearing some lamb to pieces. I consider it a wicked thing to support an evident swindler and fraud because by doing so we but embolden such scoundrels to continue plying their evil trade.

1914.02.16

**41. From a letter to Rev. Dvaranauskas in Pilypava:**

Strive as hard as you can to sustain and strengthen your spiritual life, for this is the source of all our energies and influence among men. If at times you are unable to perform some spiritual exercise, then at least humble yourself before God and strive to lift your mind and heart to Him with short acts. Such a practice means not a little in spiritual life.

1914.02.25

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**42. From a letter to Rev. Gedvila in Liebau:**

Memorizing sermons is perhaps not worthwhile. I never did. It is more important to collect good material, arrange it well, think it through and live it so that your words would flow from the heart. Writing out sermons is a most commendable practice.

1914.04.01

**43. From a letter to Sisters of St. Casimir:**

I love so much and value highly all people dedicated to God. I hope that you would say a prayer to God for me. I myself feel very blameworthy in the sight of God.

1924.12.15





**PRAYERS**





## LITANY OF BLESSED GEORGE

Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.

Christ hear us. Christ graciously hear us.

Blessed Archbishop George,

*pray for us.*

Devoted Servant of Mary Immaculate,

Ever obedient to the Holy Spirit,

Faithful son of the Church,

Good and wise shepherd,

Promoter of spiritual renewal,

Renovator and founder of religious communities,

Nurturer of religious vocations,

Example for priests and bishops,

Friend and inspiration of workers,

Man of firm faith,

Model of diligent work and piety,

Lover of humility and meekness,

Flower of patience and self-control,

Vowed religious according to the heart of God,

Peacemaker among people and nations,

Cultivator of the public conscience,

Model of love toward enemies,

Father and protector of orphans,

Example of holiness in modern times.

**R.** Pray for us, Blessed George,

**V.** That we may be worthy of the promises of Christ.

**R.** Let us pray.

O God, You enkindled in the heart of Blessed George a fervent love of Christ and His Church. Grant that, inspired by his example and strengthened by his prayers, we may faithfully follow Christ and dedicate ourselves to the growth of His Mystical Body, the Church.

**V.** Amen.

**PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF BLESSED GEORGE**

O most holy and indivisible Trinity, You make Your abode in the hearts of those who serve You faithfully on earth, and after death crown their merits with a reward in heaven. Grant, we humbly pray, that Your Servant Blessed George, who with the help of the Immaculate Virgin Mary served Your Church with apostolic zeal, through her intercession be crowned soon with the glory of sainthood. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory be...*

**PRAYER TO BLESSED GEORGE**

O God, You who inflamed the heart of Blessed George, Bishop, with an ardent love for Christ and the Church, grant, we pray, that by his example and through his intercession, we may remain untiring in following Christ and building up his Mystical Body. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**PRAYER FOR RESTORING HEALTH**

Lord Jesus Christ, You teach us that if two or three will ask for something in Your name, it will be granted them by Your heavenly Father. Encouraged by this promise, we turn to You in all confidence that through the intercession of Your faithful servant Blessed George You would restore to health those whom we recommend to Your mercy and especially for... (here mention the name of the person you wish to pray for) who places all hope in You. In You, O Lord, we have placed our trust may we not be put to shame. Amen.

**PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS TO  
THE CONGREGATION OF MARIAN FATHERS**

O Lord Jesus Christ, Our Savior, graciously look upon this Congregation founded in Your name and in the name of Your Immaculate Mother. Gaze upon, visit, and perfect that which Your right hand has established, multiplying its company, augmenting its joys, and calling others from all nations.

Since it is Your house, O Lord Jesus, let no stone be found in it which Your sacred hand has not placed therein. Preserve and

sanctify those whom You have called, that they may praise Your holy name, accomplish Your work, and courageously wage Your battles. Who live and reign the world without end. Amen.



While many receive favors through the intercession of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, prayers for his canonization are requested, especially for another miracle attributed through his intercession.

To report all favors received through the intercession of Blessed George or to request his biography and prayer cards, please write to:

**Vice-Postulator  
for Marian Canonization Causes  
for North America and Asia  
2 Prospect Hill Road  
Stockbridge, MA 01263, U.S.A.**



## **PHOTOGRAPHS**





*On June 28, 1987, Pope St. John Paul II beatified  
Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.*



*Representants of the Marian Fathers and of the Sisters of the Poor of the Immaculate Conception bring gifts during the Mass of beatification.*



*His Holiness Pope St. John Paul II performs the incensation during the Mass of beatification.*





*Priests concelebrating the Holy Mass gather around the altar. Behind them on the right, a group of Marianists who will distribute Holy Communion.*



*Bishop Antanas Vaičius, apostolic administrator of Telsiai, Lithuania, thanks His Holiness, St. John Paul II for the beatification.*



*Young Lithuanians bring gifts to the Holy Father.*



*Beatification image of  
the new Blessed.*



*The Marianas and Sisters Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist on the steps of St. Peter's Basilica after the Mass of beatification.*





*Blessed George's native home  
in the village of Luginė, Lithuania.*





*Father George Czesnas (1835-1892), who baptized the little George Boleslaus Matulaitis in the church of Marijampole on Apr. 20, 1871.*



*Father Vincent Sękowski (1840-1911), Superior General of the Marians during the time of their renewal.*



*The church in Marijampole during George Matulaitis's childhood.*

*The Marian Fathers' old monastery in Marijampole during the expansion works, which were undertaken soon after the renovated Congregation came back to town.*





*Chapel dedicated to Blessed George in his native village of Luginė, Lithuania, in the present day.*

*George Matulaitis-Matulewicz as  
a seminarian.*



*Frater George as  
professor at the Spiritual  
Academy in St. Petersburg,  
Russia (1907-1911).*



*Father George  
Matulaitis-  
Matulewicz as the  
General Superior of  
Marian Fathers.*





*A house near St. John's Church in the neighborhood of Basse Ville in Fribourg, Switzerland, where Blessed George lived and worked.*



*The old building of the university in Fribourg, Switzerland, where Blessed George attended courses in 1899-1902.*





*Cardinal Jose Vives y Tuto,  
Prefect of the Congrega-  
tion for the Religious  
who had a decisive  
influence on the renewal of  
the Congregation of  
Marian Fathers.*



*Pope St. Pius X ratified  
the renewed Congregation  
and its Constitutions  
on Nov. 28, 1910.*



*The basilica of the Holy Cross in Warsaw, Poland,  
where the Congregation of Marian Fathers was renewed on Aug. 29, 1909.*



*The Spiritual Academy in St. Petersburg, Russia.*

*Father George  
Matulaitis-Matulewicz  
at Bielany near Warsaw,  
Poland, ca 1917.*



*The Marian Fathers' religious house at Bielany near Warsaw, 1918.*



*Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz,  
Bishop of Vilnius, December 1918.*



*Blessed George's episcopal seal,  
coat-of-arms, and ring.*



*Pope Benedict XV named  
Fr. George the Bishop of Vilnius  
on Oct. 23, 1918.*



*The Cathedral in Vilnius, Lithuania.*



*Bishop Matulaitis-Matulewicz during the visitation in Brest on the River Bug in the fall of 1919.*





*Bishop George Matulaitis-Maulewicz and  
Bishop Władysław Bandurski.*



*Bishop Matulaitis-Maulewicz with Polish officers.*



*Members of the Marian Fathers' General Chapter  
celebrated in Gdańsk in 1923.*



*Father Francis Peter Bučys –  
Blessed George's friend and co-worker*



*Archbishop Matulaitis-Matulewicz in Rome, November 1925.*



*Archbishop George as the Apostolic Visitor in Kaunas, Lithuania, 1926.*





*Archbishop  
George in Cicero,  
USA,  
June 13, 1926.*



*Archbishop George visiting a farm in the U.S.  
owned by Lithuanian immigrants, June-August 1926.*



*Archbishop George and  
Fr. Felix Kudirka – one of  
the first Marian priests in  
the USA,  
June-July, 1926.*



*Pope Pius XI whose attitude toward Archbishop George was described as “an exceptional affection, exceptionally warm amity of the two priests, exceptional veneration and friendship.”*



*Archbishop Matulaitis-Matulewicz died on January 27, 1927,  
in Kaunas, Lithuania.*



*Funeral solemnities were held in Kaunas for three days. The  
body was first placed in state at the Marian Church of St.  
Gertrude and then it was carried in solemn procession, presided  
over by Archbishop Karivicius, to the Kaunas cathedral.*



*Transfer of the Archbishop George's earthly remains from  
the cathedral in Kaunas  
to the church in Marijampole, October 24, 1934.*



*Marijampole Basilica:  
In 1987, the Blessed George's relics were deposited at the altar  
of the chapel dedicated to him.*

## About the Marians

The Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception is a worldwide community of about 500 priests and brothers who have been serving Christ and the Church for more than 340 years.

Founded in Poland in 1670 by St. Stanislaus Papczynski, the Marians were the first Catholic men's order still in existence to give witness to Mary's Immaculate Conception by bearing her title.

As the years passed, the Marians continued to spread beyond the borders of Poland. However, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Marian Congregation's very existence was being challenged by a flood of political oppression. By 1909, the Congregation was reduced to a single elderly priest, Fr. Vincent Sękowski. At the moment of extinction, God sent Fr. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz who, as a child, was spiritually formed and educated by the Marians. He undertook renewing the religious order.

As an educator and social reformer, Fr. George—now Blessed George—renovated the Congregation of Marians in 1910, calling on its members “to serve where the need is greatest.” It was a period of restoration and great renewal for the Marians. Known as the Renovator of the Congregation, Blessed George served the Church as bishop of Vilnius, archbishop and apostolic delegate, and founder of two religious congregations of women. He challenged his fellow brothers in Christ to “Respond to the signs of your times ...” and “see how the gospel is touching humanity.”

The principal apostolic goals of the Marians are to promote and foster devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, to aid the Holy Souls detained in Purgatory with God's abundant grace and merciful love, and to assist diocesan priests in their pastoral ministry and catechetical formation offered to the faithful. Faithful to Christ and His Church, and attentive to the spiritual needs of God's people, the Marians have been spreading the salutary message and devotion to the Divine Mercy since 1941.





# HIS WORK AND DEDICATION BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE THE CONGREGATION OF MARIAN FATHERS

Meet Blessed Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz (1871-1927), a pastor of the workers and the intelligentsia, educator and teacher of priests, founder of new female religious communities, protector of abandoned children, bishop of Vilnius, and the Pope's representative in Lithuania.

Archbishop George belongs to a group of people who initiated the process of renewing the religious life in Poland and Lithuania in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Breaking away from the overstated conservatism, he proclaimed social teachings of the Church, the idea of the secular apostolate, basic principles of ecumenism, respect for the language and culture of every nation, and great dignity of every person.

His spiritual profile can be concisely described as a man enamored of the Church.

The authenticity of Archbishop George's position was confirmed in 1987 by St. John Paul II, who placed him among the Blesseds of the Church and gave him to the faithful as a model to follow.

In this volume the Marian Fathers share the life and legacy of their Renovator, whose life-long motto was "For the glory of God and the salvation of souls," while his guiding principle was "Vince malum in bono" (Conquer evil with good).

*From Introduction*

More information  
about Blessed Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz is available at  
[www.matulaitis-matulewicz.org](http://www.matulaitis-matulewicz.org)



MARIAN  
HERITAGE  
STOCKBRIDGE, MA, USA  
2019

ISBN 978-1-59614-423-1



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