



Jan Mikrut. *BischÖffe aus Galizien berichten an Kaiser Franz I: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der katholischen Kirche in der Habsburgermonarchie.* Vienna: Wiener Dom-Verlag, 1995. 387 pp. DM 32,00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-85351-114-5.

Reviewed by John-Paul Himka (University of Alberta)

Published on HABSBURG (January, 1997)

The State of the Soul in Early-Nineteenth-Century Galicia

In the 1820s and 1830s the Roman Catholic bishops of Galicia embarked on a major series of visitations across their extensive dioceses, through the mud and up the mountains, inquiring into the state of the souls of all those under their jurisdiction. They visited isolated parishes that had not seen an episcopal visitation for generations, and some that probably had never seen one at all. They brought the sacrament of confirmation to hundreds of thousands of people, some over a century old. And all that they had seen and learned on these forays they reported back to the emperor, who was in several ways responsible for their adventures in the first place.

The volume under review is based on the bishops' reports to Emperor Francis I, and in fact three of them are included in full in the appendix. The author of the volume and editor of the reports is Father Jan Mikrut (born 1960), who studied in Cracow and received holy orders there in 1985, but went on to doctoral studies at the University of Vienna and ended up as pastor of Vienna-Liesing. This is his second book. His first (*Neues begann in Galizien: Geschichte eines Priesterlebens*) concerned Father Wojciech Blaszyński, who propagated abstinence and penitence in the Galician countryside.

Father Mikrut's text surveys the political, economic, and ecclesiastical situation in Galicia in the first century of Austrian rule, and then describes the clergy, pastoral work, religious orders, and abstinence societies in the early nineteenth century in the light of visitation reports. Although this text has its uses, it is a bit disappointing. Father Mikrut has not kept up with the literature on Galicia, so some old-fashioned or one-sided views crop up,

and his analytical framework shows that he has not kept up with general historical works either. There are also some surprising omissions, such as capsule biographies of the three bishops whose reports are included. In short, the text is more a labor of love than a professional piece of history-writing. I would recommend that readers head straight for the documentary appendix with the bishops' reports (pp. 233-375) and skim Father Mikrut's introductory text afterward.

The first of the bishops' reports is by Thomas Gregorius (Gregor Thomas) Ziegler, the bishop of Tyniec. Bishop Ziegler was born in Swabia in 1770. He became bishop of Tyniec in 1822 (the see was transferred to Tarnow in 1826), but left after five years to become bishop of Linz, where he died in 1852. His report concerns visitations in 1822 and 1823, with particularly memorable descriptions of the landscape, people, and parishes of the Tatra mountains. The second report, concerning visitations in 1822, stems from the archbishop of Lviv (Lemberg, Lwow), Andreas Alois Ankwicz. Born in Prague in 1784, Ankwicz served as Roman Catholic archbishop of Lviv from 1814 until 1833; in the latter year he returned to Prague, as archbishop of the city, and died there in 1838. The third report is that of Bishop Franz de Paula Pischtek (Pistek) of Tarnow. Like Ankwicz, he was born in Bohemia (1786). He became bishop of Tarnow in 1831 and made the reported visitations in 1832. In 1835 he was named Roman Catholic archbishop of Lviv, a post he retained until his death in 1846. Thus all three bishops were part of that army of German and Czech officials whom the enlightened Habsburg monarchs dispatched

into Galicia to clean up the mess left by the former Polish state. In the language of the reports one can often hear the tones of missionary condescension. Sometimes the bishops' sense of superiority to the natives is altogether blatant. Bishop Ziegler, for example, noted that although the Galician clergy received the same education as priests in Germany, there was no comparison between them; but the Galician clergy could be much improved if it would adopt German as its "haeusliche und freundschaftliche Sprache" (pp. 266-67).

They may have been outsiders with their noses in the air, but these bishops also kept their ears to the ground, and were able to report a great deal about the religious life and morality of Galician Roman Catholics of all social strata.

They paint a very sorry picture of the state of the Roman Catholic parish clergy (the religious orders, especially the Jesuits, come off much better). According to the bishops, the Galician priests were, by and large, irritable with their parishioners, grossly neglectful of their duties, extortionate in the fees charged for sacramental services, and too ready to seek comfort in the bottle. Many of them had to be transferred from post to post after alienating their parishioners; quite a few also had to be sentenced to recollections or even correctional institutions. The bishops do not comment much, however, on concubinage; in fact, there is only one incident mentioned of a priest's being disciplined for his intimate relations with his housekeeper (p. 371). (I have the impression from other, rather anecdotal, evidence that the practice was more widespread than that among the Galician clergy, but perhaps I am wrong. On the other hand, the one incident that is mentioned in the reports is rather unique in that the priest in question did not even bother to maintain discretion during the bishop's visitation.)

Perhaps the bishops were exaggerating the problems with the parish clergy. But if not, it is not hard to understand, from the reports and from Father Mikrut's introductory text, the circumstances that probably produced the problems. The Roman Catholic priests were really in an impossible situation. In the eastern part of Galicia, Roman Catholics were in a minority (the vast majority were Greek Catholics), so one parish might serve half a dozen villages, some quite distant. Much of western Galicia was mountainous so that here, too, parishes were few and far between and the parishioners widely scattered. Surely it must have been difficult to organize catechism classes, to keep in touch with parishioners, and to earn enough from the all-important sacramental fees to maintain a de-

cent standard of living. Archbishop Ankwicz also makes a compelling point about negative selection in the recruitment of priests in the context of an expanded system of centralized education (p. 328). Among students in higher educational institutions, those who were better off and/or more intelligent tended to enter civil careers; those who became priests were almost exclusively "weak heads" and the children of "common, poor parents."

The priests were bad, but the landlords and officials of all sorts were, with few exceptions, much, much worse. The upper classes did not attend the Mass and did not partake of the sacraments. They even postponed the baptism of their children until the children reached early adolescence. They paid no attention at all to church fasts and did nothing to support the Roman Catholic church in the villages. Archbishop Ankwicz records the following (p. 325): In one market town, both the Roman Catholic church and the rectory burned down. The peasants collected wood and other construction materials to rebuild them. Now usually it was the custom (although the archbishop does not mention it) that the peasants provided only labor, not the materials; the landlord was obliged to provide the materials. In this case, not only did the landlord not provide the materials, but he expropriated the materials collected by the peasants and used them to construct not a church and refectory, but taverns!

The bishops also accused the upper classes of the loosest sexual mores, thus setting bad examples for the common folk. Bishop Pischtek brought a particularly egregious case directly to the attention of the emperor (pp. 372-73): one Galician baron would abduct and rape young girls with the aid of his estate officials, and he never suffered any legal consequences, since he controlled the local administration. (Perhaps Father Mikrut had this in the back of his mind when he let slip a typographical error on p. 223: "Das Koenigreich Galizien und Sodomerien"!)

The bishops had a much higher opinion of the Galician peasantry, whose piety impressed them time and time again (see especially the moving passage on the piety of the Tatra mountain folk, the *gorale*, in Bishop Ziegler's report, pp. 245-46). The people took religion much more seriously than their social betters. They made pilgrimages, official and unofficial, attended services with genuine devotion, kept the fasts, and generally lived by the church's teachings with regard to sex and marriage. Soldiers, on extended leave or retired, formed an exception: they came back to the village with contempt for the church and its works, and tended to live in

concubinage.

The common people also had their faults. The main one was drunkenness, and both the reports and, especially, Father Mikrut's introductory text provide rich material for a social history of alcohol in early-nineteenth-century Galicia. The other widespread sin of the peasantry was petty larceny. Other problems that the bishops mentioned were: some peasants trafficked with the Jews in the market on Sunday, some Christian girls worked for Jews (thus also on Sunday and frequently in the tavern), children and others tending livestock would miss catechetical instruction and services during the summer.

The bishops' reports also provide a fascinating glimpse into the nascent, or rather embryonic, school system in Galicia in the early nineteenth century. The bishops ranked the school teachers just above the priests and somewhat below the peasants in their moral scale, although there were some very bad apples indeed among them: teachers who were corner-scribes and/or rebels and/or drunks. What is particularly interesting about the reports is that the bishops visited every school dur-

ing the visitations, interviewed and assessed the teacher, tested the children's knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic and religion, investigated how many school-age children there were in the locality and how many actually attended the school (always a minority), and then wrote this all up for the emperor. The reports are excellent sources on rural education.

Father Mikrut has done a fine thing in bringing these sources to print and indicating that there are more just like them in the archives. He has unearthed a significant corpus of documentation based on the first-hand, concrete observations of an astute, if not altogether objective, group of investigators interested in mentalities, souls, and social circumstances and not afraid to generalize.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the reviewer and to HABS-BURG. For other permission, please contact <h-net@h-net.msu.edu> and <habsburg@ttacs6.ttu.edu>.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/habsburg>

Citation: John-Paul Himka. Review of Mikrut, Jan, *Bischöffe aus Galizien berichten an Kaiser Franz I: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der katholischen Kirche in der Habsburgermonarchie*. HABS-BURG, H-Net Reviews. January, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=760>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.