

there, blinking and lashing their tails,” as Czesław Miłosz said of poetry. Elsewhere, Valles’s extensive notes provide welcome background for readers whose familiarity with the classics may not be as extensive as hers.

This collection also includes unfinished or abandoned and previously unpublished pieces from *The King of the Ants*, Herbert’s fascinating reinvigoration of many Greek and Roman myths. The conclusion of “Sacrifice—Dionysus” is less than one page long, yet it manages to loudly echo the devastating response of creation and the ancient gods to the death of Pan. Valles has also included more than one hundred pages of previously unavailable pieces of short prose dating from 1948 to 1998. One of these, “Hamlet on the Border of Silence,” recalls Herbert’s signal achievement in “Elegy of Fortinbras” included in his *Selected Poems* in the Miłosz and Peter Dale Scott translation that introduced him to the West. In the latter poem, Fortinbras eulogizes Hamlet as someone who “knew no human thing you did not even know how to breathe.” In the former, Herbert “understood that Elsinore means everywhere, that it is a nameless space, a flat table on which fate throws its dice.”

Alissa Valles has provided two remarkable companions, two gifts for everyone who enjoys Herbert’s work. ▲

Rome’s Most Faithful Daughter

The Catholic Church and Independent Poland, 1914–1939

By Neal Pease. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009. xvii + 288 pages. Index, bibliography, notes. ISBN 13-978-0-8214-1856-7. Paper.

Mark Edward Ruff

The title of Neal Pease’s beautifully written study on the Roman Catholic Church in interwar Poland is deliberately misleading. Labeling the Polish church “Rome’s most faithful daughter,” as did a 1932 newspaper article, fails to do justice to the complex relationship between the Second Republic and the Church. As much as Polish patriots extolled an idealized harmony between church and state, the often-secular leadership of the Second Republic frequently found itself at odds with the Catholic Church in Poland and the Polish church was often at loggerheads with the Vatican. But as Pease compellingly shows, the myth of a pious Poland is also not devoid of truth. Such

ambiguity serves as the core for his extremely cogent and highly nuanced analysis of Polish church-state relations.

That the Church would have difficulties in steering a smooth course with the Second Republic should have come as no surprise to those familiar with the Church’s relationship with the national movement during the years of partition. During these years, in which the Church suffered severe repression in the Russian and Prussian zones, the doctrine of

Polak-katolik took shape; this was centered on “the conviction that to be Polish was to be Catholic, and, just as important, not to be Catholic was not to be genuinely Polish” (7). Yet the Church also tended to keep its distance from the Polish national movement. The Vatican feared that open support would only lead to further oppression from the Russian and German governments. In addition, the church often looked askance at the Polish intelligentsia. These keepers of the national flame had imbued the same anticlerical and skeptical spirit that had informed movements like the Freemasons, traditional ideological foes of the Church. As a result, the Church functioned like a prison chaplain, “a solace to the inmate, to be sure, but also an accessory to the jailor” (8).

Complicating matters were rifts within the national movement, fissures that church leaders had to negotiate throughout the first two decades of Polish independence. One reason for these fissures was demographics. Twenty-five percent of the population of the new Polish state were not Western Latin rite Catholics. It included German Protestants (who do not feature in this study), the most substantial Jewish minority in Europe, Eastern Rite Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox Christians in the regions on the eastern frontier that were home to Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians. On one side stood Roman Dmowski, the leader of the patriotic Right whose movement for national democracy promised a national Poland that excluded or disenfranchised these minorities. On the other side loomed Józef Piłsudski, who aimed to resurrect the older vision of a tolerant, multicultural Poland. Both leaders posed special problems for the Church. While Dmowski’s strident antisocialism found many supporters in the ranks of the Church, his movement strikingly resembled that of Charles Maurras’ *Action Française*, the target of occasional papal condemnation. Piłsudski kept company with Freemasons and socialists; his private life was scandalous. Yet he also clung to the Marian

piety of his native Lithuania and was surprisingly open to the entreaties of individual Church leaders.

Many chapters serve as case studies of how leaders from church and state negotiated this difficult terrain with mixed ease and success. Paving the way was the unlikely friendship and partnership forged between Piłsudski and Achille Ambrogio Damiano Ratti. The bookish prefect of the Vatican library with a fiery temper, Ratti was plucked from obscurity by Pope Benedict XV to head the Vatican embassy to Poland and then to serve as the full nuncio to the newly independent nation. In Piłsudski the nuncio saw a Polish Garibaldi, a great man of action, however flawed personally. Ratti was ignominiously sent back to Rome in 1921, having earned the enmity of Polish nationalists for not siding more strongly with Poland in the Silesian border dispute with Germany. His warm relations with Piłsudski nonetheless continued and had a bearing on future Vatican relations, once Ratti—“Il Papa Polacco” as he was dubbed—assumed the papal throne as Pope Pius XI. Under Pius’s aegis, the Vatican and the Second Republic painstakingly worked out the terms of the concordat, a legal document that spelled out the relationship between church and state. The negotiations were prolonged by thorny issues including land reform (potentially involving church properties) and the drawing of diocesan borders to coincide with national borders, a question that threatened to unsettle Poland’s relations with its neighbors.

Notably ill-fated were the forays into the religious affairs of Poland’s religious minorities and neighbors. The appointment of the Marian General, Father Jerzy Matulewicz, member of a Polonized minority in Lithuania, to the bishopric of Wilno (now Vilnius) triggered an ongoing row. In a city whose ownership had changed seven times since his arrival in October 1920, Matulewicz’s moderate course pleased no one. The Polish government requested his removal numerous times (139), and he was eventually given a new assignment as the apostolic visitor to Lithuania shortly before his death in 1927. Moreover, influential voices in both Poland and the Vatican hoped to bring the Orthodox back to the Roman fold. Conversions, some hoped, would pave the way for Belarusians and Ukrainians into the Polish nation state. However, these efforts quickly foundered, so much so that the number of conversions from Orthodoxy was less than those from Uniate Catholicism to Orthodoxy. With support from the Vatican, the Warsaw government attempted to create an autocephalous Polish Orthodox church,

which opened up a wedge between its adherents and the “true” Orthodox (149).

Pease’s chapters on the friends and enemies of Catholic Poland and on Pius XII and the onset of the Second World War will no doubt be of the greatest interest to lay readers. “The interwar Polish Church has earned few commendations from historians for its words and deeds concerning the Jews, and by modern light it deserves none,” he writes; Catholic publicists “dished out crude anti-Semitic invective, pure and simple” (118–119). But, he adds, “the record is not entirely abysmal,” noting that the Polish Church was also home to advocates of toleration who sought to protect this “vulnerable minority.” Pease anchors these anti-Jewish attitudes within the Church’s larger antipathy towards modernity, whose agents within the intelligentsia included Jews, Masons, communists, and socialists. Addressing Pius XII’s refusal to censure Hitler for his invasion of Poland and his unwillingness to take sides in the conflict, Pease notes that “it is trite, but true, that above all Pope Pacelli sought the keeping of the peace nearly to the exclusion of any other end” (206). Pius was the last of the “popes of the old style”—men of diplomacy, inapproachability, and external reserve.

In sum, Pease’s concise work is a first-rate work, one that eschews polemic for balance and nuance. Drawing on an impressive array of archival sources in Poland, London, the United States, and the Vatican, this work deserves to become the standard word on the subject. ▲

Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland

By Jack Jacobs. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009. Notes, bibliography, index. 185 pages. ISBN 978-0-8156-3226-9. Hardcover.

James R. Thompson

On my first reading of this book I tended to agree with the contentions of Bernard Johnpoll and Antony Polonsky that the politics of the Bund were “the politics of futility” (101). True, the Bund did provide some medical care for very poor Jews, but as a political force it did not seem to make a difference. One has to do a bit of head scratching to see its lasting political and cultural contributions. The Bundists were strongly Marxist secular Jews who had no intention of