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Arma Veritatis: Poland and the World Exhibition of the Catholic Press (Esposizione mondiale della stampa cattolica), Vatican City, 1936

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Abstract

The World Exhibition of the Catholic Press held in the Vatican City from mid-May 1936, though not a ‘universal’ exhibition, but – seemingly – an internal affair of the Catholic Church, attracted representations of 45 states of Europe and America and 53 regions of the remaining three continents. True to its motto, its aim was propagandistic, directed against the current communist and liberal tendencies. The present paper, which looks at the exhibition from the perspective of the Polish room, is based on documentary materials left by its prime mover, Fr Stanisław Adamski, bishop of Katowice, responsible for the mass media in Polish episcopate. An interesting paradox is that it was not Poland as a state, but the representation of Polish Church that participated in the event. The state authorities were contacted only as much as political correctness and diplomatic courtesy required, or with the prospect of some financial support. They seemed to be indifferent and, at any rate, unwilling to spend any money on the exhibition, even though it was advertised by the Church as an excellent promotional opportunity. Bishop Adamski almost single-handedly devised the Polish exhibit, including the iconography and political message of a painting entitled *Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis* (‘Poland – Mother of the Saints and Shield of Christianity’), which depicted important personalities from Polish history, including – tellingly – the figures of King John III Sobieski and Marshall Józef Piłsudski.

Keywords

Catholic press; World Exhibition of the Catholic Press / Esposizione mondiale della stampa cattolica 1936; Vatican City; Stanisław Adamski; Jan Henryk Rosen

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On 12 May 1936 the World Exhibition of the Catholic Press opened in the Vatican City (**Figure 1**).¹ It was organised to mark the 75th anniversary of the Vatican daily *L'Osservatore romano* (founded in 1861) and was dedicated to Pope Pius XI (the date of the opening ceremony – held on the Pope's name day, 12 May, in the liturgical calendar a feast of St Achilleus of Terracina, a name saint of Achille Ratti, was thus not accidental).

Representations from the Catholic press of 45 states across Europe and America, and from 53 regions from the remaining three continents, appeared in the main part of the exhibition (Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia were conspicuous by their absence).² During the show, which ran for over a year until the following May, numerous accompanying events were held on the exhibition grounds, including a Week of Sacred Art and the Second International Congress of Catholic Journalists (24–27 September 1936).³ Simultaneously, a sort of a 'counter-exhibition' was staged in the Pontifical Oriental Institute, though on a far smaller scale, of the so-called 'evil' press, specifically, an exhibition of the international

1) Remarkably little scholarship has been devoted to the exhibition, and the present paper is based mainly on documentary sources related to the Polish exhibit (papers of the organising committee, for which see in what follows) and contemporary press reports. For a short dictionary entry dealing with the exhibition in very general terms, see A. Martini, 'Esposizione Internazionale della Stampa Cattolica', in *Mondo vaticano. Passato e presente*, ed. Niccolò Del Re, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, 465–66; for the Vatican City daily paper, see Niccolò Del Re, 'Osservatore Romano (L)', in *ibidem*, 754–56. Numerous detailed reports of the inauguration of the exhibition appeared in the press (here, necessarily, because of the main interest of the present paper, mainly Polish press will be referred to), see e.g. Jan Kawczyński, 'Święto prasy katolickiej... (Światowa wystawa Prasy Katolickiej – Wielkie rozmiary imprezy – Niezwykłe pomysły dekoracyjne i architektoniczne – Pawilon Polski – Spotkanie z "Kurjerem Poznańskim")', *Kurier Poznański*, 24 May 1936, 15, and 'Wystawa prasy katolickiej w Watykanie przedstawia się imponująco', *Gość Niedzielny*, 21, 24 May 1936, 290. The exhibition is only casually mentioned at best in studies dealing with Church or press history; for a detailed bibliography see J. Wolańska, 'Wawel i Kresy. Malowany fryz Jana Henryka Rosena w dziale polskim Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica w Watykanie (1936)', *Przegląd Wschodni* 13, 3:51, 2014, 609–69. A study by Viktoria Pollmann, 'Die katholische Presse – Waffe der Wahrheit' in Pollmann, *Untermieter im christlichen Haus. Die Kirche und die 'jüdische' Frage in Polen anhand der Bistumspreise der Metropole Krakau 1926–1936*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001, 141–158, is an exception that seems to prove the above rule.

2) Their 'dolorous absence' was noted by the pope in his address pronounced at the opening of the exhibition. See 'Discours à la cérémonie d'inauguration (12 mai 1936) de l'Exposition internationale de la presse catholique à la Cité du Vatican', in *Actes de S.S. Pie XI. Encycliques, Motu Proprio, Brefs, Allocutions, Actes des Dicastères, etc. Texte latin et traduction française*, Tome XIV (Année 1936), Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1939, 30.

3) On the week of sacred art see Martini, 'Esposizione Internazionale', 466. On the Congress see Stephen J. Brown, 'A Congress of the Press and Two Exhibitions', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 25:100, 1936, 659–64 (on the exhibition, 661–63); Stanisław Bednarski, 'Rzeczymskie kongresy prasowe', *Przegląd Powszechny* 4: 212, 1936, 255–60.



Figure 1: Gio Ponti, poster and cover of the official catalogue to the exhibition: *Arma veritatis*: *Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica* (Città del Vaticano, 1936).

Source: Archive of the Archdiocese of Katowice (AAKat.).

Communist and ‘godless’ press.⁴ This ‘counter-exhibition’ was meant to emphasise the propagandistic aim of the ‘main’ show, which was directed against Communist and liberal tendencies in the press of the time. True to its motto – *Arma veritatis* (‘the arms of truth’) – the exhibition was by no means a neutral event but rather was intended as a powerful manifestation of Catholic propaganda. Its motto threw up associations with the ‘*Ecclesia militans*’ (or Church militant) and concepts such as that of the ‘*miles Christianus*’ (Christian

4) Brown, ‘A Congress of the Press’, 663, calls the Institute ‘Russicum’, and describes the exhibition as ‘of Communist propaganda’; Bednarski, ‘Rzymskie kongresy prasowe’, 259, and idem, ‘Dwie wystawy prasowe w Rzymie’, *Przegląd Powszechny* 213, 1937, 125–36, on the exhibition esp. 130–36.

soldier). In view of the political situation in fascist Italy, these phrases had been gradually losing their theological or symbolical dimension and the notion of ‘spiritual warfare’ had come to acquire a rather literal meaning. Undoubtedly, the military phraseology used in the exhibition’s title seems to have quite consciously reflected the then current attitude of militant Catholicism already at war, for instance, with the godlessness of Communism. It was no secret that the press was a powerful weapon in this campaign, as one of the visitors remarked, ‘Statistics and diagrams show clearly the enormous and increasing influence which must be possessed by those who control the newspapers of the world, even when compared with such rivals as the wireless and the cinema. The most careless inspection (...) makes it impossible to doubt the vital need for a Catholic press which is capable of sustaining the burden of responsibility thus thrust upon it.’⁵

It was a one-of-a-kind event, without precedent and with no successor and, curiously, has attracted hardly any scholarship.⁶ Even in studies of the pavilion’s designer, Giovanni, or Gio, Ponti – an otherwise celebrated architect – the exhibition is only mentioned cursorily at best. So what we are left with is scanty documentary evidence and a handful of press articles. This is despite the fact that the exhibition would make a significant object of study for historians of the Church and of political history of the interwar period, or for press historians, across Europe, and, possibly, also worldwide. With only one national exhibit more or less thoroughly researched, a more in-depth, let alone comprehensive, analysis of the exhibition, is impossible given the current state of research. The present art-historical treatment of this article focuses on just one national exhibit, that of Poland, looking at it from the perspective of the ‘human factor’: the way it was conceived by Bishop Stanisław Adamski, its organiser and prime mover. Being only a tiny contribution to a vast topic that could be approached from many different angles, the present paper may perhaps become an incentive for research on other national exhibits, as it is only from a sum total of such detailed contributions that an overall picture of the Catholic Press Exhibition might emerge. Although it was not a ‘world’s fair’ in the proper sense of the word, it was evidently organised with comparable ambitions in mind, had a worldwide scope, and deserves at least a mention also in this context. It was, in a way, an ecclesiastical, Catholic ‘ideological’ world’s fair, after all.⁷

It must be stressed from the outset that although it included the Week of Sacred Art event, it was neither an art exhibition in general nor an exhibition of Christian art in particular.

5) P. F. Firth, ‘The Vatican Press Exhibition’, *The Venerabile* 8:1, 1936, 32–33.

6) If any attempts were made to find a parallel for the 1936 Press Exhibition – as for instance in Gio Ponti, ‘La Mostra della stampa cattolica’, *Emporium*, 84:502, 1936, 199, and in Firth, ‘The Vatican Press Exhibition’, 30, it was compared with the Universal Missionary Exhibition (Esposizione Universale Missionaria) organised at the behest of Pius XI, to celebrate the Jubilee Year 1925 (the latter author wrote, ‘[the 1936 press exhibition] may indeed be regarded as the natural sequel to the Missionary Exhibition of the Holy Year, 1925’). For more on the latter exhibition, see the special bi-weekly journal that appeared during its run *Rivista illustrata della Esposizione Missionaria Vaticana* (15 Dec. 1924 – 31 Dec. 1925) and Luigi Gramatica, ‘L’Esposizione Missionaria Vaticana’, *Emporium*, 62:368 (1925), 74–87. The Esposizione Missionaria may be treated as a sort of predecessor of the press exhibition also because the pavilions of the former exhibition were located around Cortile della Pigna (but then the courtyard had not been roofed in as was the case in 1936; see below).

7) The online Vatican News does mention the exhibition in question among ‘world’s fairs’ in which the Vatican City participated (‘principali partecipazioni della Santa Sede alle Esposizioni Internazionali’), next to, for instance, the Paris international exhibition of 1937; see Paolo Ondarza, ‘La Santa Sede e le Esposizioni Internazionali’ <<https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2018-03/partecipazione-vaticano-expo-internazionali-e-biennale-venezia.html>> (accessed on 10 Sept. 2022).

This was in contrast to the *Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Sacra Cristiana Moderna*, held in Padua in 1931–1932 (organised to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the death of St Anthony of Padua), or the *Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Sacra* that took place in Rome in 1934, to mention just two.⁸ Any artworks that appeared in the individual national sections and on the common exhibition grounds were meant mostly as ‘decoration’. In the absence of a proper visual record of the exhibition, little can be said about the appearance of individual national exhibits. Apart from a small number of photographs that appeared in the press, the only purpose-made visual documentary of a national exhibit at the event known to have survived is that of Austria: *Österreichische katholische Presse in Rom 1936*.⁹ It takes the form of an album containing about twenty original photographic prints showing the maps, diagrams, and decorations that were depicted on the walls of the Austrian room and specimens of Catholic periodicals displayed there. It seems that the album may be treated as a *pars pro toto* of a typical display encountered in the national sections. According to one reviewer: ‘Perhaps the most beautiful of all the national sections is that of Austria. Here the walls have been panelled with beech wood, upon which the figures are drawn by a special process which gives the effect of old carving and painting. There is a fascinating map of the country with toy trees, buildings and mountains and little people in appropriate national costume to mark the regions, whilst everywhere are dotted little cream coloured rhomboids to show the positions of the Catholic papers. Above the Tyrol sits a typical Austrian family; the crucifix is on the wall and Father is reading from his Catholic newspaper. The diagrams and graphs give their information clearly but in the same spirit of pleasant fantasy, and there are two splendid Tyrolese works of art to set off the whole scheme of decoration – a carved and painted wooden statue of St Paul and a stained glass window to St Francis de Sales’.¹⁰

Otherwise, what is known is that the displays mostly consisted of large numbers of statistical data related to the output of the Catholic press, arranged in all kinds of graphs and diagrams, accompanied by maps, decorative motifs and perhaps also some photographs.¹¹ The only other artwork known to have been displayed, apart from the painting in the Polish section, a subject of the present paper, and which appears on the scarce photographs showing national exhibits, is a statue of St Wenceslas in the Czechoslovakian room (**Figure 16**).

8) For the exhibitions see Pia Vivarelli, ‘Dibattito sull’arte sacra in Italia nel primo Novecento’, in *E42. Utopia e scenario del regime*, vol. 2: *Urbanistica, architettura, arte e decorazione*, exh. cat. eds Maurizio Calvesi, Enrico Guidoni, Simonetta Lux, Rome (Archivio centrale dello Stato, aprile–maggio 1987), Venice: Cataloghi Marsilio, 1987, 249–60; for more on the Anthonian exhibition, see Maria Beatrice Gia, ‘L’Esposizione Internazionale d’arte sacra cristiana moderna di Padova nel 1931–32’, *Il Santo*, 52, 2012, 397–434.

9) Authorship is attributed to ‘das unter dem Ehrenprotektorate ihrer Eminenzen der Herren Kardinäle Erzbischof Dr. Theodor Innitzer und Apostolischer Pronunzius Dr. Enrico Sibilis und des Herrn Bundeskanzlers Dr. Kurt v. Schuschnigg stehende österreichische Komitee für die ‘Internationale katholische Presseausstellung im Vatikan 1936’. It is held in the Library of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (Universitätsbibliothek der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien), call no. 17580-D.

10) Firth, ‘The Vatican Press Exhibition’, 35. The display in the Austrian room was designed by Clemens Holzmeister, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.

11) Brown, ‘A Congress of the Press’, 662, writes that the individual rooms were filled with ‘graphs, diagrams, symbolical figures and so forth, as well as by actual specimens of the Catholic newspapers, reviews and magazines’; he also notes that ‘The Czechoslovakian room is remarkable for its graphs and diagrams’. Similarly, Firth, ‘The Vatican Press Exhibition’, 33–34, stated, ‘In an exhibition of this kind it is natural that the medium of expression should be somewhat limited: maps, statistics, graphs and diagrams do not permit of much variation, and one newspaper or magazine is very much the same as another, whatever the language in which it is printed. As it is, the originality and skill displayed by those responsible for the arrangement of each room is little short of marvellous.’

The Pavilion in the Pinecone Courtyard (Cortile della Pigna)

The structure in which the exhibition was held is referred to here as a ‘pavilion’, as it was after all a semi-permanent roofed construction, but because of its specific arrangement and the fairly large area it covered, the venue could just as well be called ‘exhibition grounds’ (**Figure 2**). It was ingeniously designed by the architect Gio (Giovanni) Ponti (1891–1979) on the Pinecone Courtyard (Cortile della Pigna), spanning its area between the ‘nicchione’, or Bramante’s Niche, and the Braccio Nuovo (the New Range), which at that time held the Museo Chiaramonti, part of the Vatican Museums (**Figure 3**). The entrance to the exhibition through the Porta Angelica towards the Belvedere Court and then along a ramp leading to the Vatican gardens (Salita del Giardini). At the entrance proper, located at the Cortile della Galera (Court of the Galleon), with the sumptuous Fountain of the Galleon by Carlo Maderna (**Figure 4**) the visitors were greeted by the exhibition’s emblem: an image of an open newspaper surmounted by a cross, along with the exhibition’s motto *Arma Veritatis* (**Figure 5**).¹² The inner entrance was located slightly further in, in the Cortile della Pigna proper.

The exhibition pavilion was supposed to embody the vitality and dynamics of the modern Catholic press and to be a product of its time. Visitors were led through corridors of various length, their height and width changing gradually (some corridors had side walls reminiscent of old-style concertinaed cameras, as in bellows joining a lens to a camera body), and unevenly lit, only from above (**Figures 6 and 7**). Next to the rooms with national or topical exhibits, smaller spaces were arranged, dramatically lit, using light wells and other similar devices, with impressively displayed artworks – statues or stained-glass panels – which were intended to act as visual foci. Contemporary accounts repeatedly emphasised the theatrical aspect of the design, marvelling at its dynamic appearance and changeability – ‘come una vera e propria successione di scene’ (‘like a veritable and real sequence of scenes’).¹³ This effect, however, was achieved by simple and modest means characteristic of

12) The motto was reportedly derived from the words of Pius X spoken in a conversation with a French journalist at the beginning of the twentieth century: ‘“The importance of the religious press”, said the Pope, “is not even yet understood either by faithful or clergy. The elders say ‘formerly’ souls were saved without newspaper and press work. But ‘former’ times are not our times. We live to-day, when an evil press is widely diffused, when Christians are deceived, poisoned, destroyed by impious journals. In vain would you build churches, preach missions, found schools; all your efforts, all your good works would be defeated should you not simultaneously wield the defensive and offensive arm of the press, Catholic, loyal, sincere”’. See J. F. Boyd, ‘The French Ecclesiastical Revolution’, *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*, 32:128, 1907, 665.

13) B. Moretti, ‘L’Esposizione della stampa cattolica – Architetto Gio Ponti’, *Edilizia Moderna*, 23, Oct.–Dec. 1936, 36–45, citation here 38. Four hundred tonnes of iron and 1.5 thousand cubic metres of timber were used in the construction of the pavilion; seven thousand square metres of linoleum in various colours covered the floors; the total exhibition area was estimated at twenty thousand square metres. For more on Ponti’s work and the exhibition in general in Italian scholarship and contemporary press, see: Gio Ponti, ‘L’Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica: il concetto architettonico’, *L’Illustrazione Vaticana*, 7, 1936, 421–26; Marcello Piacentini, ‘Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica nella Città del Vaticano (Arch. Giovanni Ponti)’, *Architettura*, fasc. VII, July 1936, 297–309 (with numerous photographs); Vivarelli, ‘Dibattito sull’arte sacra’, 249–60; Lucia Miodini, ‘Mostra Internazionale della Stampa Cattolica, Città del Vaticano (1935/36)’, in Lucia Miodini, *Gio Ponti. Gli anni trenta*, Milan: Electa, 2001, 161–62 (the author especially emphasised the theatrical effects of Ponti’s design and his role as a sort of ‘director’ of a theatrical production which kept surprising the ‘viewers’, i.e. the visitors to the exhibition); Lisa Licitra Ponti, *Gio Ponti. L’opera*, Milan: Leonardo, 1990; Carlo Capponi, ‘Esposizione mondiale della Stampa Cattolica, Città del Vaticano 1936’, in Maria Antonietta Crippa and Carlo Capponi, Cinisello Balsamo, eds, *Gio Ponti e l’architettura sacra. Finestre aperte sulla natura, sul mistero, su Dio*, Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2005, 127–31; Ponti, ‘La Mostra della stampa’, 199–205; E. Rosa, ‘L’apostolato della stampa e la “Mostra internazionale della stampa cattolica” in Vaticano’,

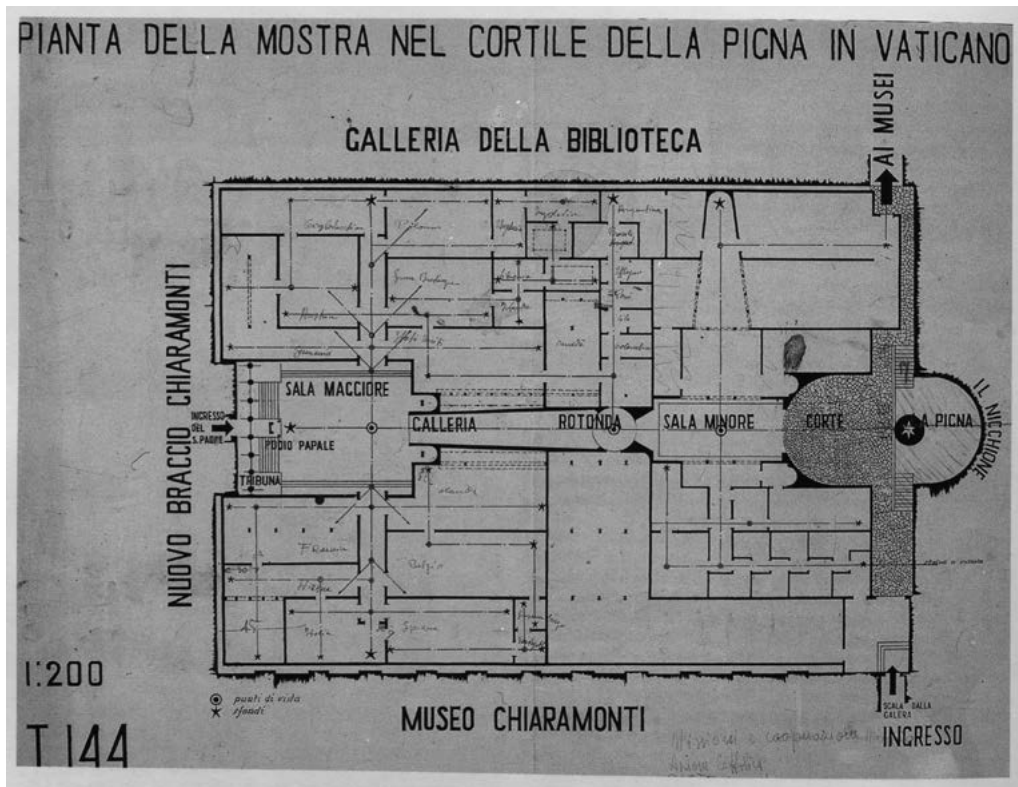


Figure 2: Gio Ponti, Ground plan of the exhibition marked with perspectival focal points and viewing axes.

Source: Miodini, *Giò Ponti*, 162.



Figure 3: Courtyard of the Pinecone (Cortile della Pigna), view towards the Braccio Nuovo (with a columned portico).

Source: Wikimedia commons.

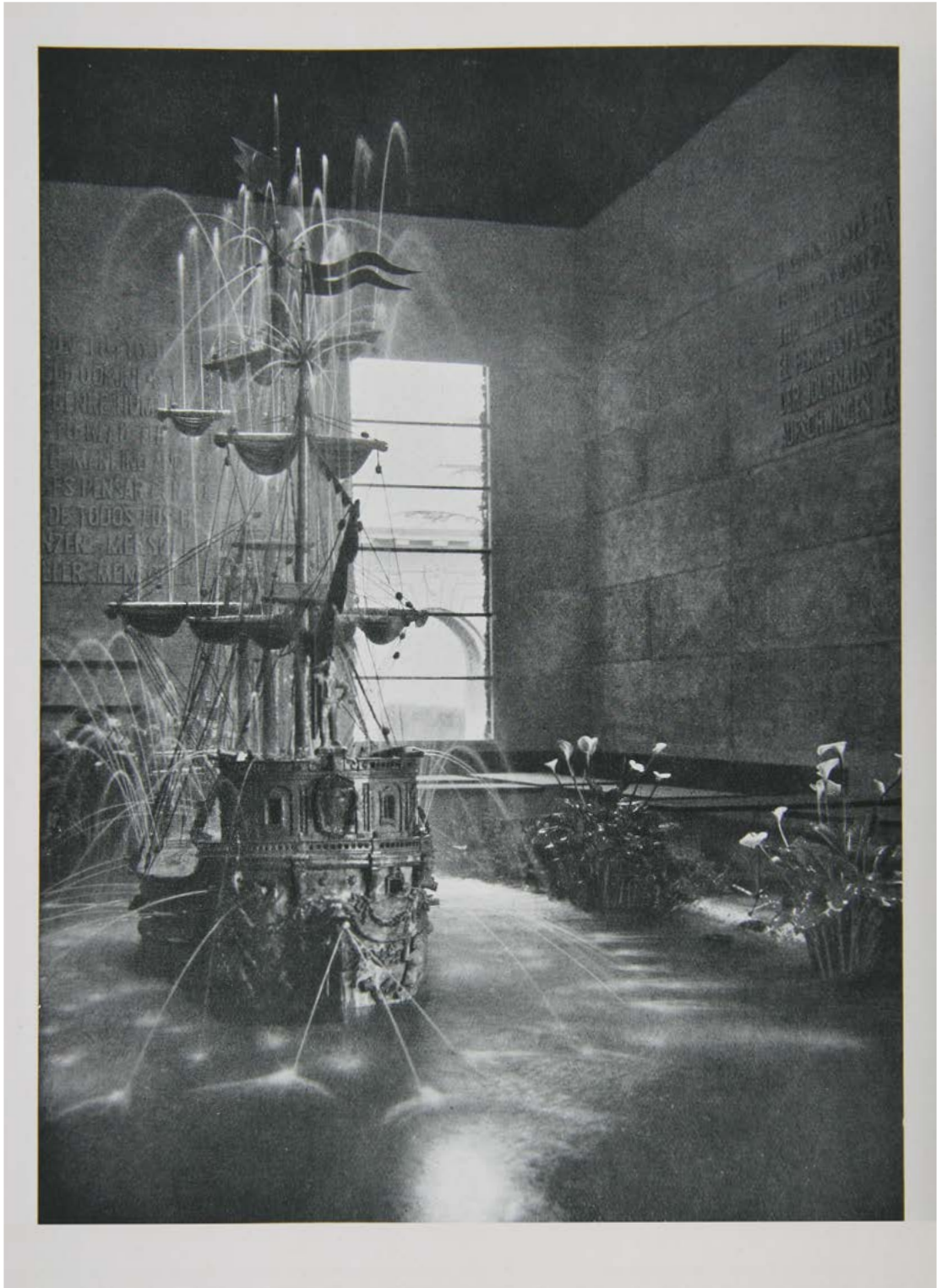


Figure 4: Fountain of the Galleon in the vestibule to the exhibition grounds.
Source: *Emporium* (1936).

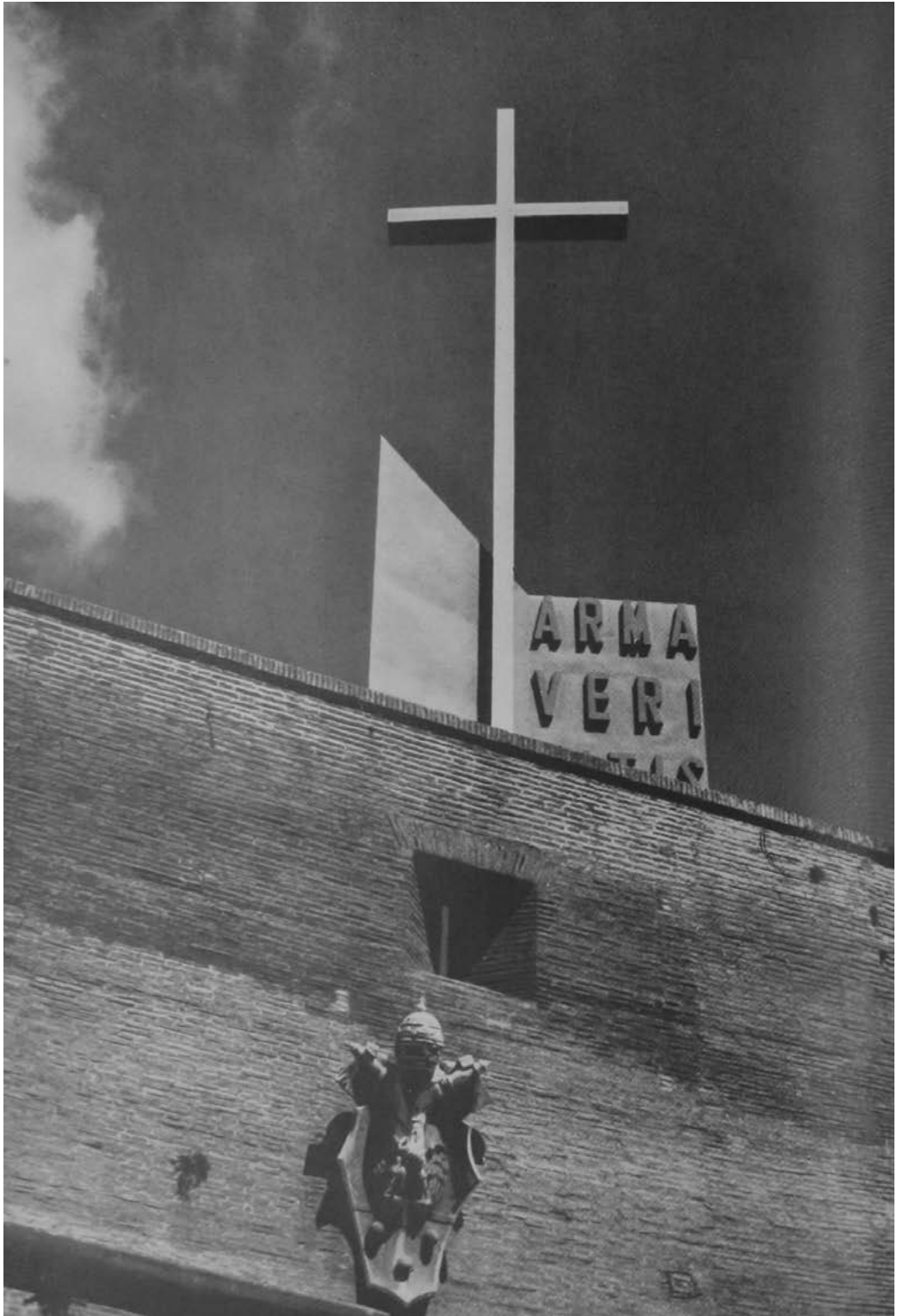


Figure 5: The exhibition emblem and motto above the walls of the Vatican City, at the entrance to the exhibition.
Source: *Emporium* (1936).

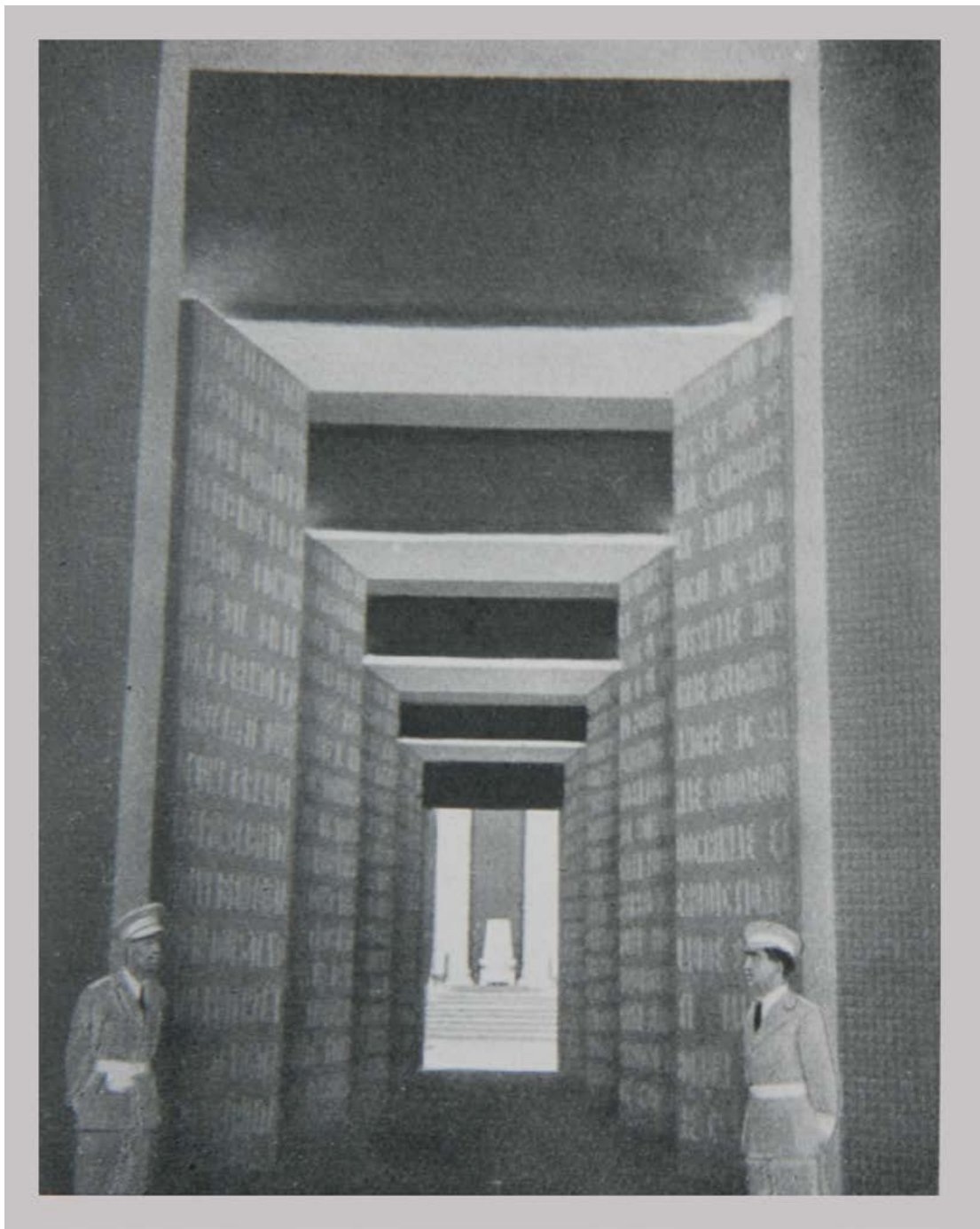


Figure 6: Central gallery in the exhibition pavilion.

Source: *Emporium* (1936).

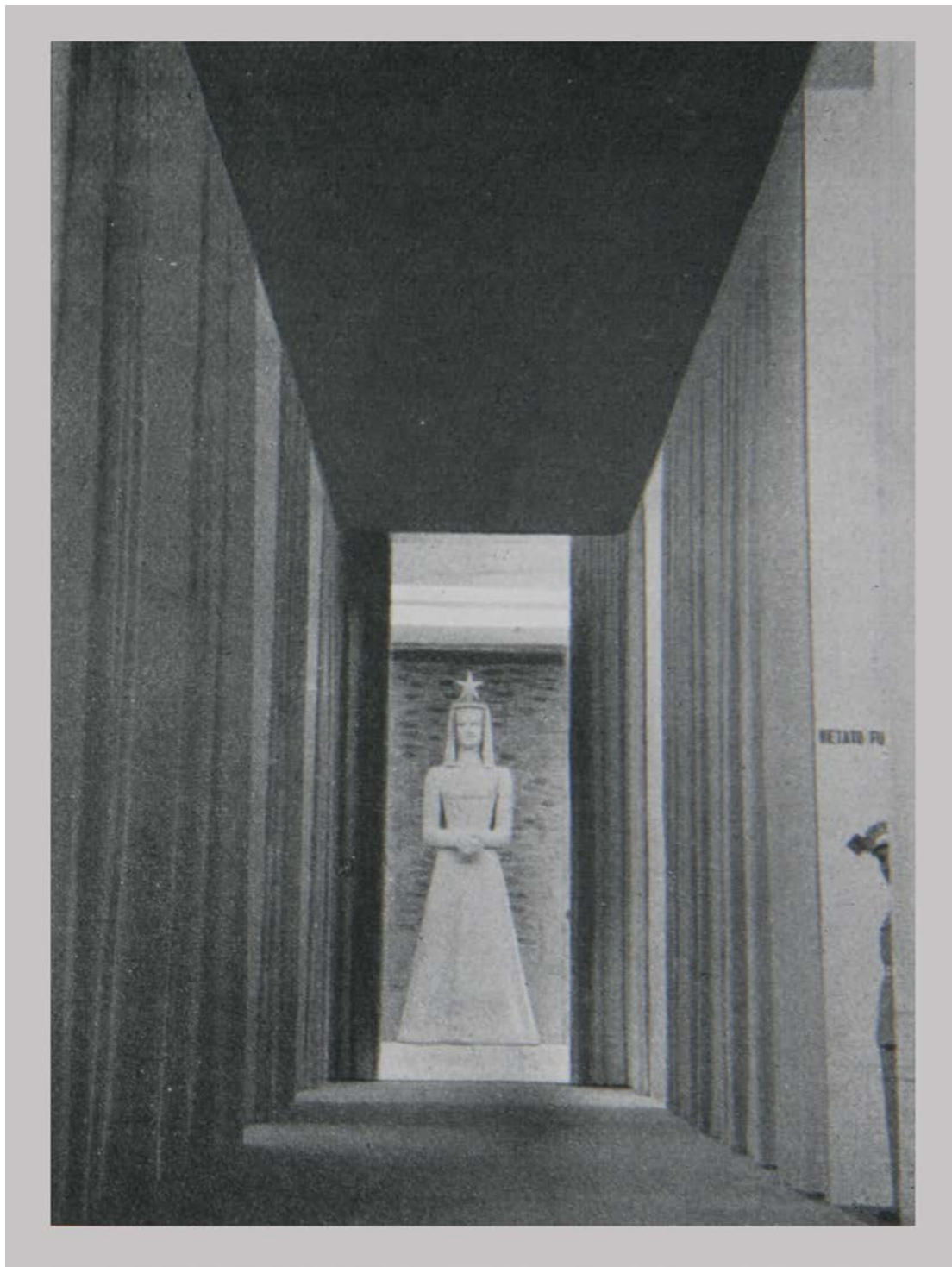


Figure 7: One of the transverse galleries in the exhibition pavilion
(with a statue of *Italia cattolica* by Italo Griseldi).
Source: *Emporium*, 84 (1936).

modernist architecture: plain and pure lines, shapes and colours. As far as the last aspect is concerned (although, as far as is possible to ascertain, no visual record of the exhibition in colour exists), special emphasis in press reports was put on the various colours (mainly grey, red, black and white) and the textures of the linoleum that covered the wooden floors of all rooms and corridors in the pavilion. The architect himself compared the simplicity of his design to that of a complex of buildings of a religious order, the pavilion, in his words, representing the ‘Order of the Catholic press’ (Ordine della stampa Cattolica).¹⁴ He did not conceal the fact that he intended the harmonious combination of possibly the most up-to-date architecture with the historic tissue of the existing buildings, mostly in Renaissance and Mannerist styles, such as, for instance, the Niche of Bramante, the walls of Julius II, and the Neo-Classical portico of the Braccio Nuovo.

The exhibition space was divided into three parts: a general one, charting the history of the written word from monastic scribes to the invention of the movable type, to the contemporary press (and other mass media, including the radio and cinema); another that encompassed presentations of the national presses, and a final one focused on periodicals published by the organisation Catholic Action, religious orders and missionary work.¹⁵

The ‘heart’ of the exhibition was located in a large audience hall called the Sala Maggiore, adjacent to the Braccio Nuovo and inventively arranged using the building’s eight-column portico, with the papal throne mounted atop the stairs leading to the entrance (**Figure 8**). Above the columns, along the cornice, there ran a Latin inscription referring to the pope seated underneath: *Inerranti veritatis magistro veritatis arma deduntur* (‘To the unerring teacher of truth are given the weapons of truth’). This hall, much taller than other parts of the pavilion, was decorated only with two large tapestries, executed after the famous Raphael cartoons depicting the *Adoration of the Magi* and *The Resurrection* (**Figure 9**), hung opposite one another on the side walls. A huge window facing the papal throne – above the remaining lower parts of the pavilion – afforded a spectacular view of the Bramante niche at the other end of the Cortile della Pigna (**Figures 10 and 11**). The Polish room (No. 27) was located next to the Czechoslovak (No. 26) and Hungarian (No. 28) sections; and the exhibits of Austria (No. 25), Great Britain (No. 34) and Lithuania (No. 32) were located nearby (**Figure 12**).

La Civiltà Cattolica, II:87, 11 March 1936, 267–75; A. Benedetti, ‘La mostra della stampa cattolica’, *La Rivista illustrata del Popolo d’Italia*, August 1936, 23–27; M. Labò, ‘Mostra universale della stampa cattolica al Vaticano’, *Casabella*, 105, Sept. 1936, 18–23. See also the guide to the exhibition: *Arma veritatis: esposizione mondiale della stampa cattolica, Città del Vaticano, 1936*, Rome: n.p., 1936 (French edn: *Guide de l’exposition mondiale de la presse catholique*, Rome, 1936, for description of the Polish room, 65–66). Separate guides to individual national sections, often in various languages, were published, for instance, by the Netherlands (*Arma veritatis: gids voor de Nederlandsche afdeling op de wereldtentoonstelling van de katholieke pers* [Vaticaanstad, 1936] = *Guida per la sezione olandese* = *Guide pour la section des Pays-Bas* = *Führer für die niederländ. Abteilung* = *Guide for the Netherlands Exhibition* = *Guia para la Sección Holandesa*, Leiden: De Leidsche Courant, 1936) and France; see S. Wyszynski, ‘Arma Veritatis – Watykańska Wystawa Prasy Katolickiej’, *Ateneum Kapłańskie*, 22:38, 1936, 312.

14) ‘Addossati alle grandi muraglie i padiglioni esterni nella severa semplicità della linea e nella candida chiarezza della costruzione annunziano subito il concetto che ha informato l’opera: “intonazione severa e candida che caratterizza la Mostra quasi fosse la casa di un Ordine, l’Ordine della stampa cattolica” dice l’arch. Ponti’, E. Lucatello, ‘Guida alla Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica’, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 13 May 1936, 5; see also an account by the architect himself, in Ponti, ‘La Mostra della stampa’, 202, 205. Lucia Miodini (‘Mostra Internazionale’, 161) compared the layout of the Vatican pavilion to the ground plan of the medieval Benedictine abbey of Sankt-Gallen.

15) Ponti, ‘La Mostra della stampa’, 199; a detailed description, along with a discussion of the ground plan of the pavilion and its functions can be found in Wyszynski, ‘Arma Veritatis’, and Bednarski, ‘Dwie wystawy prasowe.’

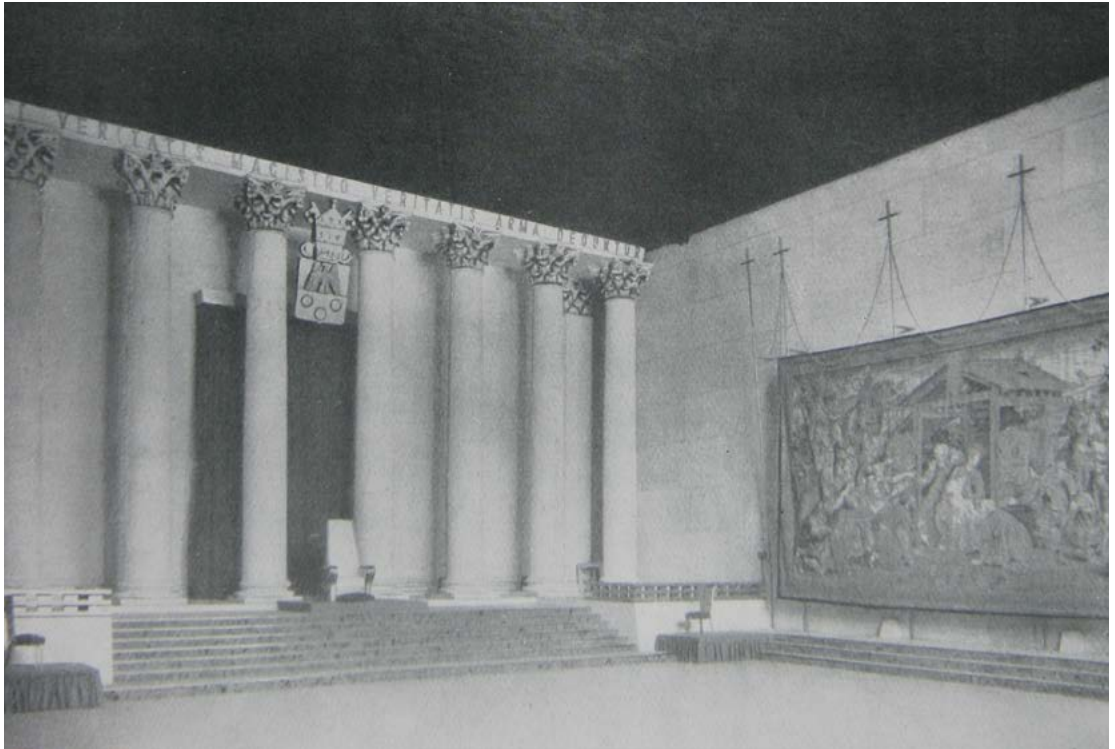


Figure 8: *Sala Maggiore* with the columned portico of the Braccio Nuovo serving as a backdrop for the papal throne.

Source: *Emporium* (1936).

The pavilion was ingeniously conceived – not with the inside out but, so to speak, with the outside turned inwards: the external elevations of the existing buildings surrounding the courtyard became the internal walls and – as in the case of the Braccio Nuovo portico – formed a splendid setting for the papal throne. Ponti’s design was an excellent example of the imaginative appropriation of the existing architecture.

The Polish room: organisation and decoration

In contrast to world’s fairs proper, it was not individual states, but organisations of the Catholic Church operating in particular states that participated in the World Exhibition of the Catholic Press. Yet, such an arrangement was, at its very roots, a contradiction in terms: it was impossible to separate a ‘national’ Catholic Church from the country within which it operated, and to represent the church without – in some way at least – representing the state itself. This led to an interesting paradox: although it was not Poland as a state, but Polish Catholic Church that participated in the event, the exhibit was, ultimately, a ‘Polish section’,

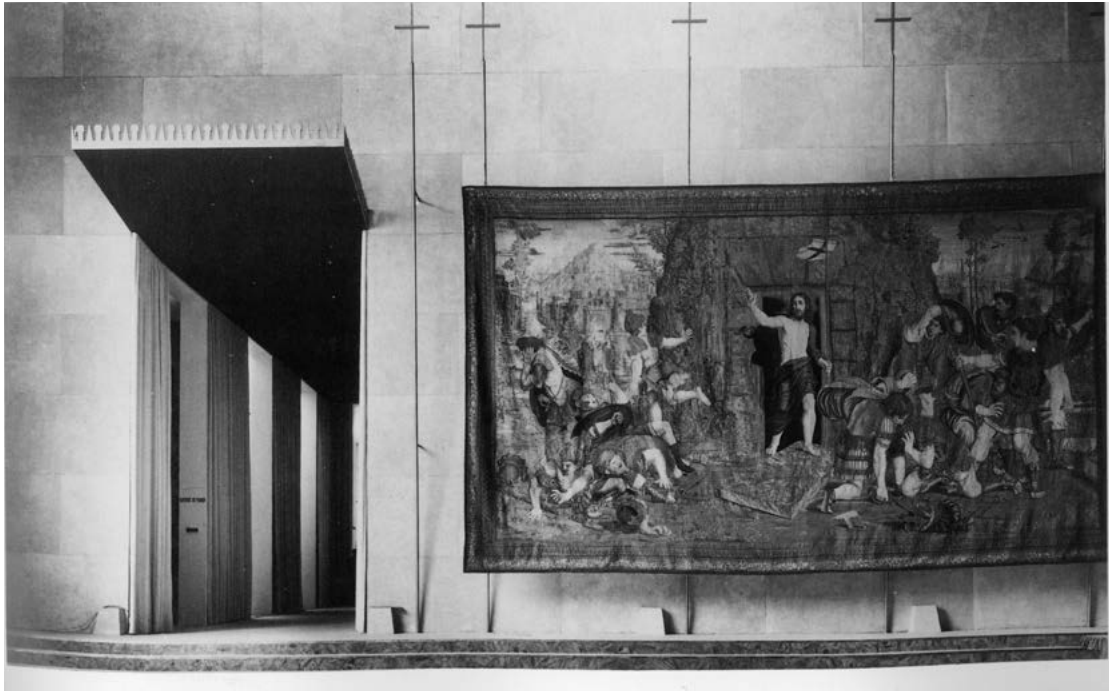


Figure 9: *Sala Maggiore*, one of the side walls hung with a tapestry depicting the Resurrection, designed by Raphael, and a doorway to one of the lateral galleries.

Source: Capponi, *Esposizione mondiale*, 127.

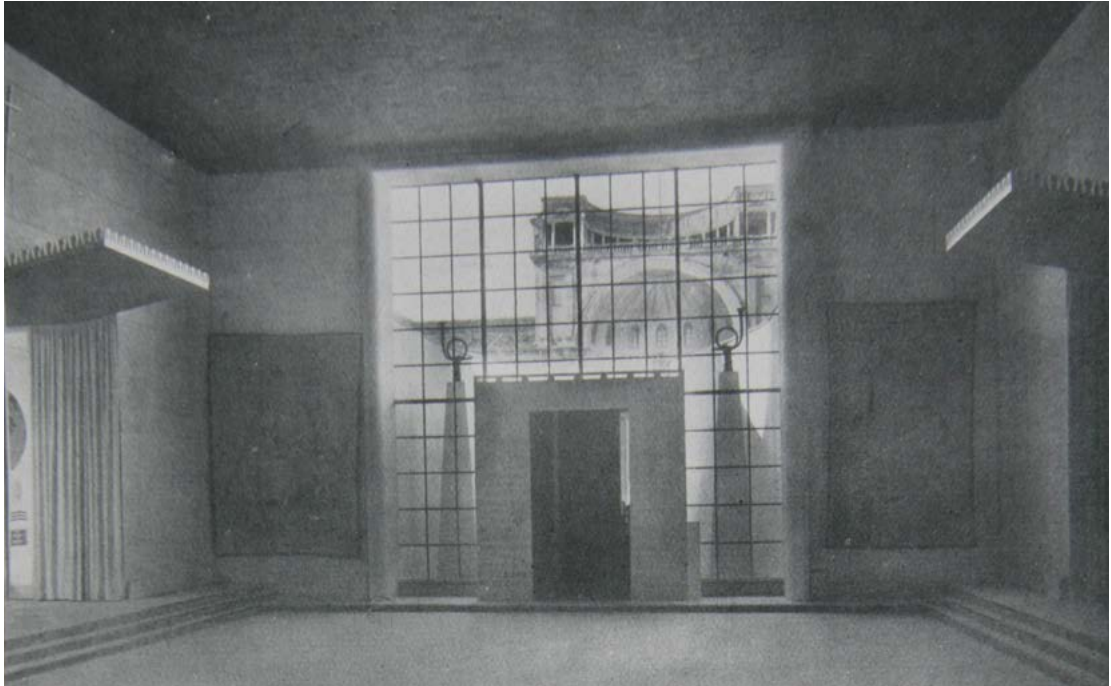


Figure 10: View from the window of the *Sala Maggiore* towards Bramante's Niche.

Source: *Emporium* (1936).



Figure 11: Bramante's niche on the Cortile della Pigna (1505).

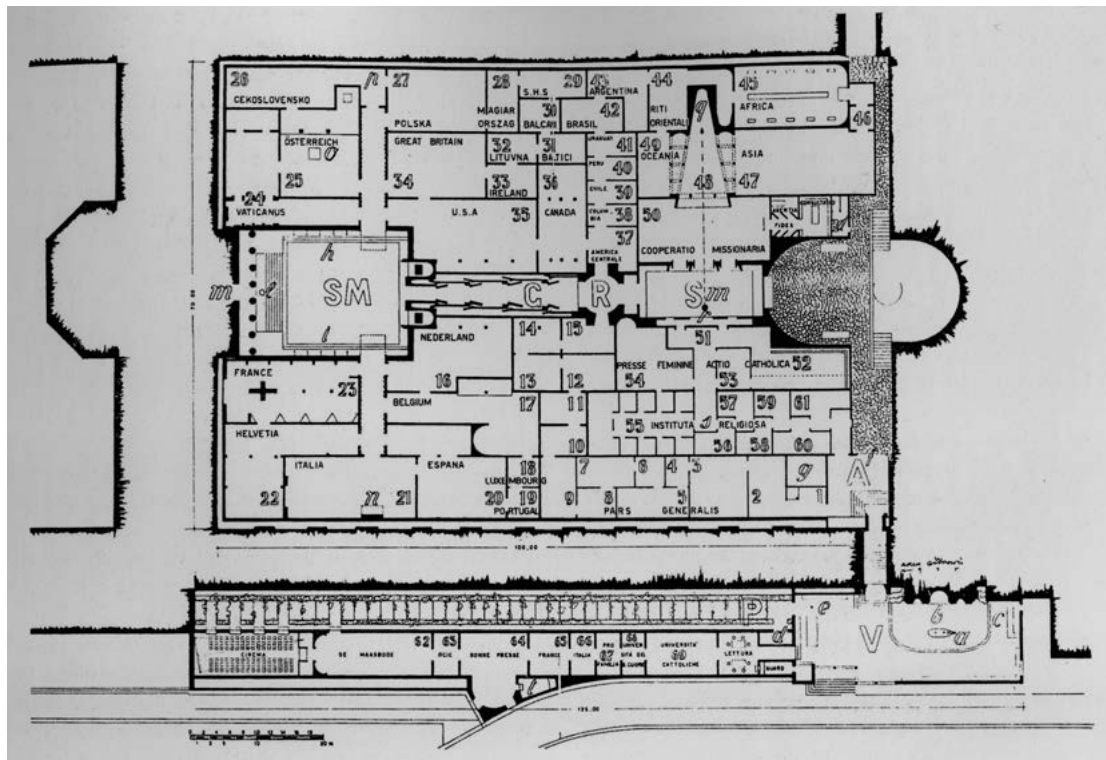
Source: Wikimedia commons.

displaying Polish national emblems and other items.¹⁶ State authorities were contacted by ecclesiastical organisers only as far as political exigency and diplomatic courtesy were required or there was a prospect of some financial support from the government. The state authorities, however, seemed to be almost indifferent to the event and were, at any rate, unwilling to spend any money on the exhibition, even though it was advertised by the Church as an excellent promotional opportunity for the country's tourist attractions.¹⁷ The entire Polish exhibit, including the iconography (and political message) of a figural frieze that decorated it, was almost single-handedly devised and realised by Fr Stanisław Adamski (1875–1967), since 1930 bishop of Katowice and chair of the executive committee of the Press Commission in the Polish Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In view of the convoluted political status of the exhibition, another paradox is that the centrepiece of display in the Polish room was a huge frieze (measuring 254 × 726 cm), entitled *Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis* ('Poland – Mother of the Saints and Shield of Christianity'), showing life-size figures of important personalities from Polish history, including – very tellingly – King John III Sobieski and the then recently deceased (in 1935) Marshall Józef Piłsudski, whose 'secular cult' was only beginning to take shape at that time

16) An official enquiry with the Director of Protocol in the Polish Embassy at the Vatican, about the proper colours and form of the Polish flag and the national emblem, to be displayed in the Polish room, was one of very few instances that the organisers were compelled to contact the state authorities. Nevertheless, they were very well aware of the fact that the enquiry was rather awkward, since Poland (similar to other countries) did not officially (i.e. as a state) participate in the exhibition.

17) It was not the case, for instance, of Austria, whose participation in the event and the exhibit itself was considered an event of national importance, having been organised under patronage of the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg. However, nothing is known in this regard about any other participating countries.



**Figure 12: World Exhibition of the Catholic Press, Vatican, 1936,
Ground plan of the exhibition pavilion, by Gio Ponti (after Miodini, 162).**

Legend: V – vestibule; A – atrium; R – rotunda; G – gallery; SM – *Sala Maggiore* (Great Hall);
Sm – *Sala Minore* (Little Hall); P – pergola

a – Fountain of the Galleon; b – pool of the fountain; c – bar; d – services; e – ground plan of the exhibition;
f – stained glass St Francis de Sales (by Gio Ponti); g – John of Gutenberg’s printing press; h-i – Raphael’s tapestries;
l – papal throne; m – papal entrance; n – statue of *Italia cattolica* by Italo Griseldi; o – statue of St Paul by Hans André
p – statue of St Wenceslaus; q – statue of the *Virgin of the Missions (Regina Missionum)* by Aurelio Mistruzzi;
r – *Pax Christi in regno Christi* by Gio Ponti; s – *Three Brothers* by Gio Ponti
t – small shrine at the exhibit of the Bonne Presse publishers

(Figure 13).¹⁸ The Latin motto reiterated the notion of Poland as a bulwark (or shield – the Latin word ‘scutum’ could be understood as both) of Christianity, referring to Sobieski’s relief of the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 and the fairly recent victory over the Soviet Union of the

18) Press reports inform that, for instance, also the exhibition in the neighbouring Czechoslovak section carried a political message (little is known in that regard about other national exhibits). Fr Wyszyński (*Arma Veritatis*, 314) wrote about it very favourably, stating that it is ‘not only a presentation of the press, but at the same time a political and religious testimony to the role played in [the history of] religion by Bohemia from 863 to 1936: “La Repubblica Cecoslovacca – un ponte verso L’Oriente” [The Czechoslovak republic – a bridge to the East] – is the motto of the Czech exhibit’. Interestingly, Czechoslovakia styled itself a ‘bridge’ between the East and West, whereas Poland resolutely cut, or even barricaded, itself off from the East, in keeping with the centuries-old *topos* of the country being an *antemurale Christianitatis*, or a ‘bulwark of Christianity’.



Figure 13: Jan Henryk Rosen, *Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis* (1936).
Residence of the Archbishops of Warsaw, Warsaw.

Source: author's photograph.

Battle of Warsaw in 1920.¹⁹ Pius XI would have known the latter first hand, since he had been a nuncio in Warsaw at the time. Famously, he was the only member of the foreign diplomatic corps who did not flee the Polish capital in August 1920, in the face of the approaching Red Army.²⁰ These two battles, especially the latter, more recent, one, proved to be extremely useful in terms of both religious and national propaganda abroad. The battle may have occurred fifteen years earlier, but it is important to bear in mind that it was as recently as 1931 that the book *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920*, by the Chairman of the Interallied Mission to Poland in July 1920, Viscount D'Abernon, appeared.²¹ D'Abernon, a British diplomat, had added 'Warsaw, 1920' to 'the best of' list of historical battles originally started by Sir Edward Shepherd Creasy back in 1851 with his publication of *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World: from Marathon to Waterloo*.²² Apart from making the 1920 battle famous by putting it on an imaginary chart, D'Abernon's attitude towards the event seems to have been fully in tune with the message that the Polish Catholic Church, including Bishop Adamski, wanted to communicate through the decoration of the Polish room to its viewers. This suggests that at that time the sentiment was not limited to Polish nationalist circles but was more widespread, at least across Europe. D'Abernon famously wrote – as Norman Davies has aptly put it – in Gibbonian tones, quoting the great Enlightenment historian's lofty phrases

19) For a useful introduction to the notion of 'bulwark of Christianity' applied to Poland, see Norman Davies, 'Antemurale: The Bulwark of Christianity', in *God's Playground. A History of Poland*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, I, 125-155. Characteristically, Davies writes that 'The concept of "Antemurale" has been specially favoured by Catholic writers' (ibidem). Bishop Adamski wrote in a letter to Rosen that 'antemurale Christianitatis' was the most apt term to describe Poland's situation in the history of the world, and that it imbued Poland with a special character extending from the past into the present, and was of worldwide importance.

20) For the historical background to the 'relief of Vienna', see Davies, *God's Playground*, I, 362-70; for the Battle of Warsaw, see Davies, *God's Playground*, II, 292-97.

21) Viscount D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931.

22) D'Abernon intentionally refers to Creasy's work right at the start of his book; see D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle*, 7.

about the decisive role of Charles Martel's victory in the Battle of Tours of AD 732 against 'the Saracen' in the history of Western civilisation:²³

Had Pilsudski and Weygand failed to arrest the triumphant advance of the Soviet Army at the Battle of Warsaw, not only would Christianity have experienced a disastrous reverse, but the very existence of Western civilisation would have been imperilled. The Battle of Tours saved our ancestors of Britain and our neighbours of Gaul from the yoke of the Koran; it is probable that the Battle of Warsaw preserved Central and parts of Western Europe from a more subversive danger – the fanatical tyranny of the Soviet.²⁴

Furthermore, D'Abernon painted a bigger picture, which was, again, entirely in keeping with Bishop Adamski's intent, including even the notion of the bulwark – if not of Christianity, then at least of the West (which was, in any case, roughly synonymous with Christianity):

In 1684 [*recte*: 1683] the Ottoman invasion made its furthest advance west. The Battle of Vienna was one of the occasions when Europe owed safety to Polish valour. Already at Chocim in 1280 [*recte*: 1621] Polish arms attained an important victory over Asiatic assailants, but the danger was even more grave before the walls of Vienna, and John Sobieski earned the gratitude of all who value the maintenance of European civilisation.

It is difficult to estimate the relative importance of these events in the tenth and seventeenth centuries as compared with the Battle of Warsaw in our own time, but the surmise is justifiable that in its influence on the civilisation of Europe the victory before the walls of Warsaw in 1920 was no less vital than the historical contests in which Poland in earlier years acted as a bulwark to the west.²⁵

It may be mentioned as an aside that a few years earlier, in 1933, apparently to commemorate his heroic stance in 1920, Pius XI had commissioned Jan Henryk Rosen, the artist who executed the frieze for the press exhibition, to paint two compositions of a similar subject matter: the Defence of Jasna Góra, or the 'Bright Mountain', and the Battle of Warsaw, for his private chapel in the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo (**Figures 14 and 15**). The latter subject also appeared in Rosen's Vatican frieze – represented there *pars pro toto* by a figure of the dying Fr Skorupka, a heroic chaplain in the Battle of Warsaw (**Figures 13 and 20**). This earlier papal commission, no doubt, must have contributed to the fact that he was chosen by Bishop Adamski to execute the painting for the Vatican press exhibition. In spite of Pius XI's earlier contacts with Poland, first as an apostolic visitor and then a nuncio in Warsaw (1918–1921), and his commission of paintings from Rosen, the pope himself was not involved in any way in the arrangement of the Polish exhibit, nor in any other matters related to the press exhibition in general, which, as stated at the outset, was organised in his homage.

23) Davies, *God's Playground*, II, 297.

24) D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle*, 8.

25) D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle*, 11. Polish circles would definitely not have needed Lord D'Abernon's book for such an interpretation of the events, but it cannot be excluded that Bishop Adamski may have been influenced in some way by the thoughts of the British diplomat. Nevertheless, Viscount D'Abernon's name does not turn up in the surviving archival materials related to the exhibition, which include Bishop Adamski's correspondence and similar documents (for which see below).

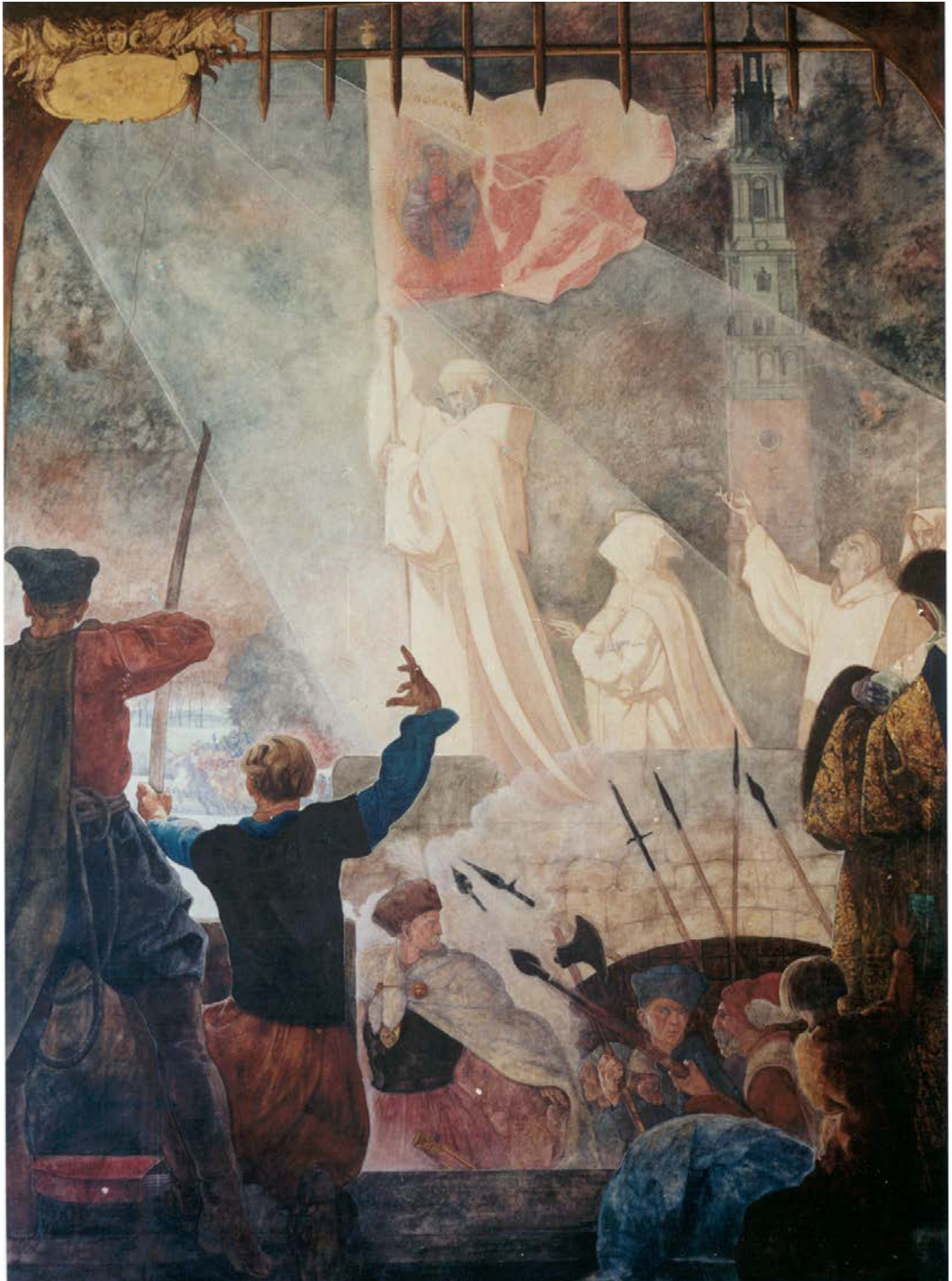


Figure 14: Jan Henryk Rosen, *The Defence of Jasna Góra* (1655) (1936) in the private chapel of the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.

Source: author's photograph.

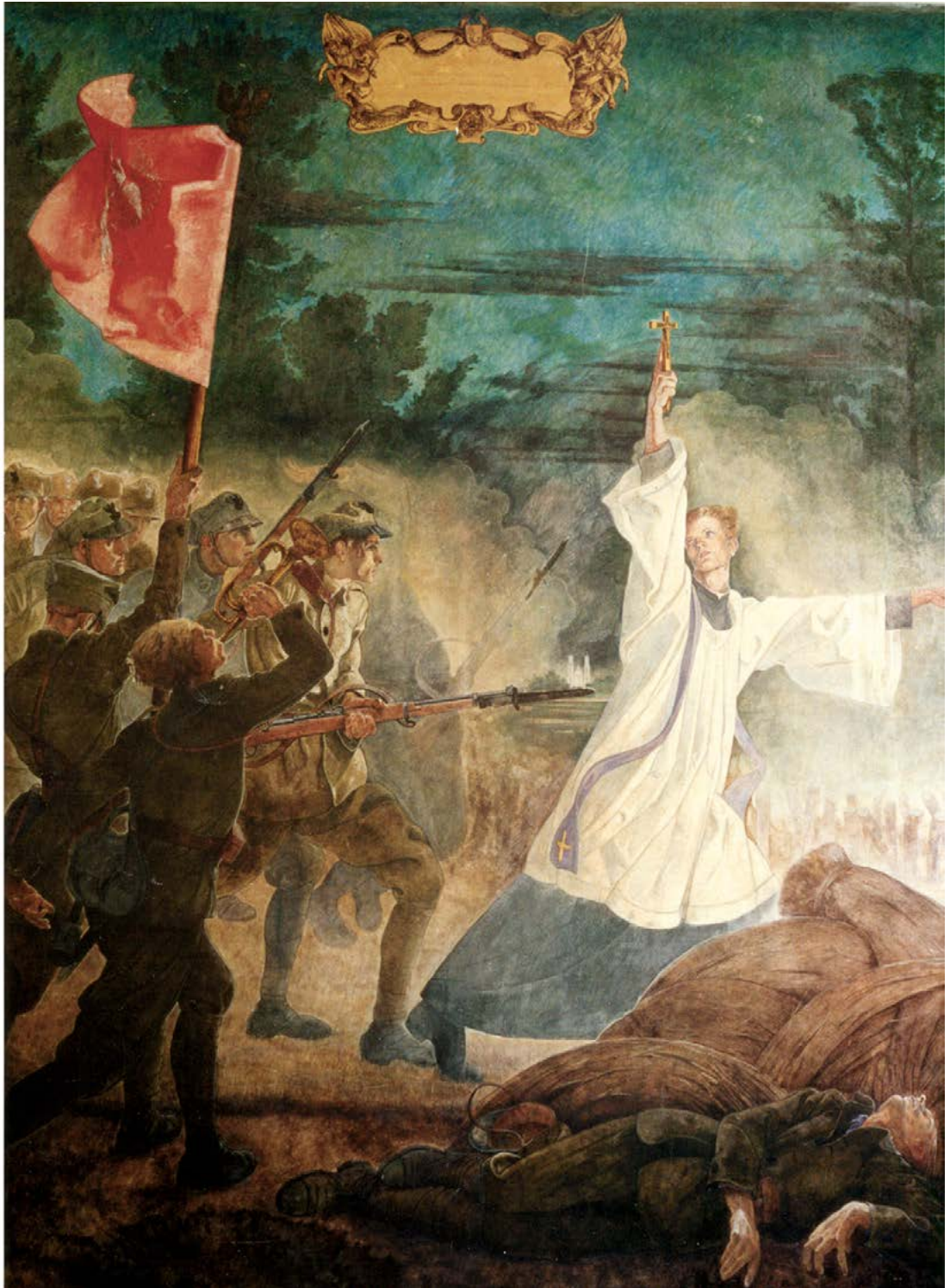


Figure 15: Jan Henryk Rosen, *The Battle of Warsaw* (1920) (1936) in the private chapel of the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.

Source: author's photograph.

A wealth of information on the organisation of the Polish exhibit can be found in the papers of Bishop Adamski who had kept a meticulous record of his correspondence related to the event.²⁶ He was the moving spirit of the undertaking, and masterminded an enormously difficult task. The Catholic Press Agency, which was supposed to organise the Polish section, had hardly any funds. Nor did the Polish Catholic publishers and Catholic journals that were supposed to become involved in the show and contribute to the organisation of the Polish section financially; they turned out to be unable or reluctant to lay out considerable sums of money for participation in the exhibition. Happily, Bishop Adamski had found a dedicated assistant in Rome, with whose help all his plans and ideas could be realised. This man was Fr Tadeusz Zakrzewski (1883–1961), from 1928 to 1938 rector of the Polish Pontifical Institute in Rome (Pontificium Institutum Ecclesiasticum Polonorum), which had been founded in 1910 to take care of the affairs of the Polish church in the Vatican curia, on behalf of Polish bishops. It was Zakrzewski who made sure that all decisions of Bishop Adamski were painstakingly carried out on site. Apart from that, both prelates evidently enjoyed good relations, both of them having come from Poznań and having trained as priests in a seminary there.

Comparison of the aforementioned archival documentary evidence with the few extant photographs attest to the fact that the ideas of Bishop Adamski, voiced in letters and written instructions sent to the painter and other people involved in the decoration of the Polish room, designed by the architect Włodzimierz Padlewski (1903–2007), were executed to the letter.²⁷ In the message of the decoration, Adamski wanted to combine ‘two main ideas’, as he had put it: the religious element with the national one, resulting in the all too familiar stereotype – or myth – of Catholic Poland, or one equating Polishness with Catholicity, that is, an assertion that every Pole must necessarily be Catholic (the Pole-Catholic, or ‘Polak-katolik’).²⁸ In addition to the frieze, the White Eagle, Poland’s national emblem, featured prominently (**Figures 16, 17 and 18**), as did the image of the Virgin Mary, the so-called Black Madonna of Jasna Góra (or the ‘Bright Mountain’), the most sacred of Poland’s holy images (depicted on a knightly gorget), and a sword, symbolising the military victories, expressed by inclusion of their dates and names (in Latin): 1683 | VINDOBONA and 1920 | VARSOVIA (**Figure 19**). These

26) Archive of the Archdiocese of Katowice (Archiwum Archidiecezji Katowickiej; AAKat), Katowice, collection: Office of Bishop Stanisław Adamski (Kancelaria bpa Stanisława Adamskiego; KBA), call no. KBA 80: The Press Commission of the Polish Conference of Catholic Bishops (Komisja Prasowa Episkopatu Polski), 1935–1936 and KBA 186, KBA 187: Conventions and exhibitions related to the Catholic press. The exhibition of the Catholic press in Vatican in 1936 (Zjazdy i wystawy dot. prasy katolickiej. Wystawa prasy katolickiej w Watykanie w 1936 r.). Bishop Adamski had stood at the head of the archdiocese for 37 years and was a highly respected prelate of the Catholic Church. The literature dealing with his life and various aspects of his administration is vast; nevertheless, nowhere is his role in the organisation of the Vatican press exhibition, under discussion here, even mentioned. For a detailed bibliography on Bishop Adamski (in Polish), see Wolańska, ‘Wawel i Kresy’, n. 20, 14.

27) An extensive monograph on the architect: Hubert Bilewicz, ed., *Włodzimierz Padlewski: architektura i sztuka. (W roku jubileuszu stulecia urodzin)*, Gdańsk: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych, 2008, which includes only a laconic reference to his involvement in designing the Polish room at the Vatican exhibition; see Bilewicz, ‘Curriculum twórcze Włodzimierza Padlewskiego’, in *ibidem*, 8, and 42, 87 (reminiscences of Janina Padlewska, the wife of the architect).

28) Zygmunt Zieliński, ‘Mit “Polak-katolik”’, in *Polskie mity polityczne XIX i XX wieku*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994, 107–17. On this concept, an association of ‘Pole’ with ‘Catholic’, see Chapter 9: ‘Polak-Katolik’, in Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 328–59 (for the interwar period, esp. 328–40).

were only, so to speak, catchwords, further elaborated in the figural frieze (the gorget with the image of the Virgin, among other elements, having been replicated there outright, while the above-mentioned battles were personified by the figures of their military commanders, Sobieski and Piłsudski, respectively), illustrated by Jan Henryk Rosen according to precise instructions of the bishop. All of the above decorative elements, including the map of Poland, display cabinets with specimens of Catholic periodicals published in Poland and historical and statistical information on Polish Catholic press as well as an exhibit of photographs of Polish historic architecture – the last-mentioned element eventually sponsored by Polish ministry of transport as a sort of advertisement for Poland’s tourist attractions (**Figure 20**) – were designed by Włodzimierz Padlewski. It is very striking that the general tenor of the decoration in the Polish room – emphasising two military victories and featuring a prominent display of chivalric accoutrements: a gorget and a sword – was perfectly consonant with the overall militaristic tone (and motto) of the exhibition as a whole.

Rosen’s painting: art and politics

Rosen and the bishop exchanged a number of letters and several sketches (mentioned in their correspondence, none of them is known to have survived), and agreed upon the final appearance of the frieze-like picture (and a – rather meagre – fee for the artist). As attested by documentary evidence, the idea and choice of the personages depicted in the painting were conceived by bishop Adamski from beginning to end. And again, written documentary evidence surviving in bishop Adamski’s papers compared with the final work confirms that the painter painstakingly realised the wishes of his patron and executed every correction he was ordered to make; he literally illustrated the bishop’s ‘vision’, narrated in his letters. The painter’s only contribution was in fact, the artistic form and style. And the latter, especially technical, aspects of the work were quite significant. As there was no money to pay for the painter’s trip to Rome, he had to execute a large-scale, impressive artwork fairly quickly that would be lightweight, transportable and fairly long-lasting, and that could be installed easily on site. So, the picture was executed in Lvov where the painter was living at that time (**Figure 21**). What he had come up with was the technique of crayons on paper pasted on canvas. Strictly speaking, he used crayons, or chinks, in three colours (black, red and white), the so-called ‘aux trois crayons’ technique, favoured by French eighteenth-century artists, applied to brown paper, the acres of which were covered with gold ground (**Figure 22**). Conforming to the overall idea of the pavilion’s architect, the work was hung on a wall at the end of one of the visual axes (to the left of the entrance), in keeping with the instructions of the architect Gio Ponti.

Rosen’s frieze should be construed as a work of applied, rather than fine art, and not as a painting in its own right. It should be thought of, perhaps, as a sort of oversized poster, or an element of a stage set design, whose function was purely utilitarian, meant to disseminate straightforward propaganda.

Although, technically, the frieze is a drawing, the addition of the gold ground greatly enhanced its overall appearance making it look like a true painting. Furthermore, the limited palette must have looked quite ‘modern’ and seems to have fitted well into the



Figure 16: Entrance to the Polish section (in the background) from the Czechoslovak room (with a statue of St Wenceslaus on the left).

Source: *Guide de l'exposition mondiale de la presse catholique* (1936).



Figure 17: General view of the Polish room.

Source: *Rodzina Polska* (1936).

design of the pavilion, as it was apparently based on a similar principle of simplicity (the main colour accents came from the linoleum floors, mostly in white and various shades of grey; the roofs over entrances to individual rooms as well as some draperies were red – as was the brocade fabric with a repeated pattern of stylised eagle in Polish room). The frieze (**Figure 13**) presents eleven figures (eight main characters and three accompanying figures, the latter quite meaningless from historical point of view and the political message the composition was to convey), depicted in two groups on either side of the central panorama of the royal castle on Wawel Hill in Cracow, Poland's ancient capital city.²⁹ It was intended here as a symbolic 'personification' of Poland, its appearance roughly based on a seventeenth-century print, with the miraculous image of the Virgin Mary of Częstochowa on a gorget 'suspended' above, and inscribed with the composition's title:³⁰ POLONIA SANCTORUM MATER | SCUTUM CHRISTIANITATIS in a banderole below the view of Wawel Castle. Each

29) Since the period of the Partitions, Wawel Hill, with the royal castle and Cracow Cathedral housing the tombs of Polish kings and the country's national heroes, had been considered a Polish 'Capitol', 'pantheon', 'Acropolis' and the 'crown of Poland', or simply it was a synecdoche of the then non-existent state; it was synonymous with Polishness in general.

30) It was probably based on a view engraved by Mathäus Merian, published in Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg's *Civitates orbis terrarum*, Cologne: Peter Brachel, 1617.

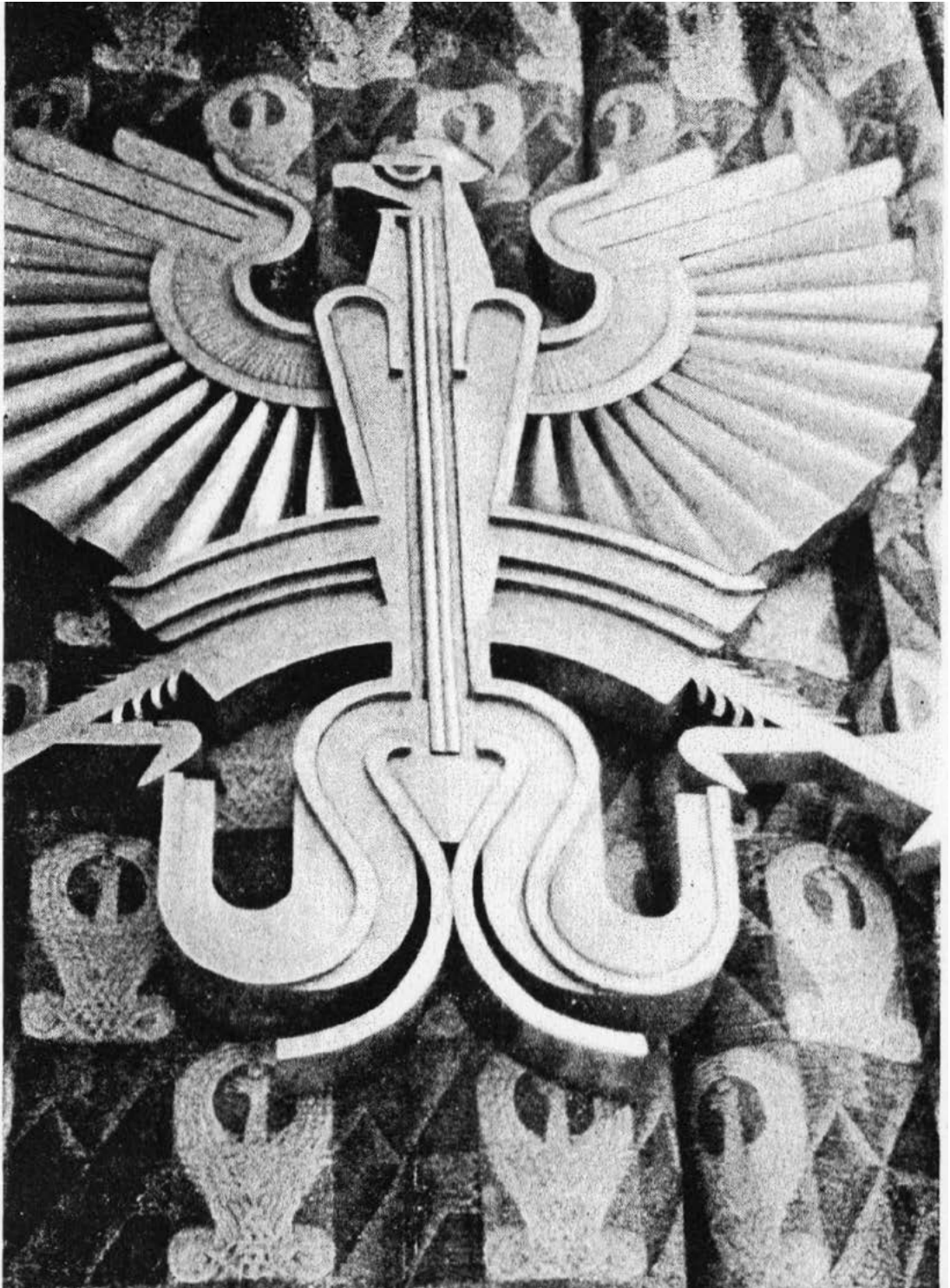


Figure 18: The White Eagle made of sheet silver against a (red and white) fabric decorated with a pattern of stylised eagles.

Source: *L'illustrazione vaticana* (1936).

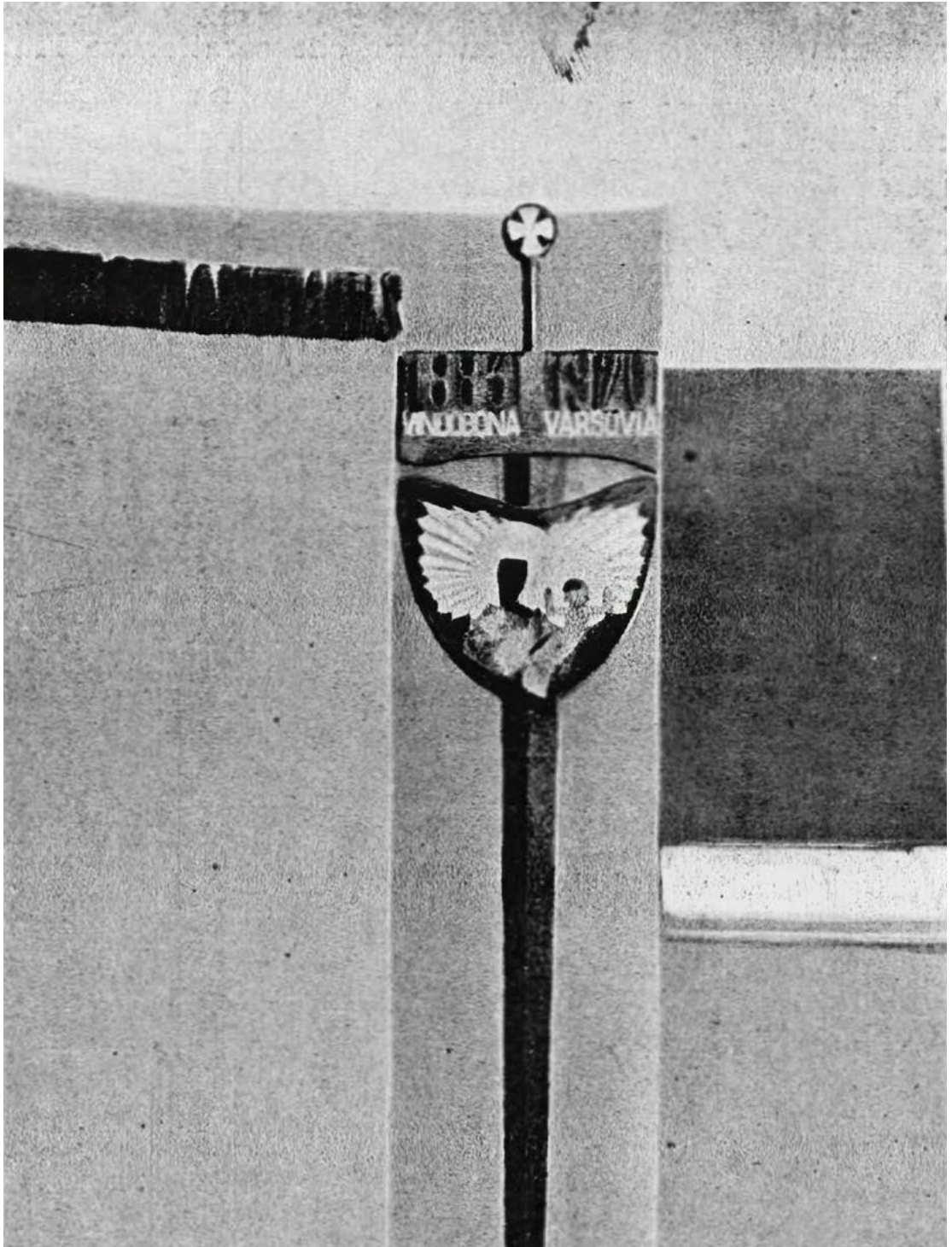


Figure 19: Fragment of the motto 'Polonia antemurale christianitatis', a sword with the dates and names of battles and a gorget bearing an image of the Virgin and Child.

Source: *L'illustrazione vaticana*, (1936).



Figure 20: Rosen's painting, exhibition of photographs of Polish historic architecture and display cases with specimens of Catholic periodicals in the Polish room. Source: *Rodzina Polska* (1936).

Source: *L'illustrazione vaticana*, (1936).

of the figures – for the most part emblematic personalities in Polish history – has been identified with a name inscribed on a scroll or banderole running in various arrangements on the painting. Broadly speaking, the left-hand side represents the men of letters ('Poland spiritual', as Bishop Adamski has put it), while military figures ('Poland heroic') have been depicted on the right-hand side. Starting from the left we see: St John Cantius, a medieval professor of the University of Cracow, apparently intended to personify here medieval learning and the ecclesiastical origin of the university, seated at a pulpit in his study, with inscription on a banderole: S. JOANNES CANTIUS; Jan Kochanowski, Poland's outstanding poet of the Renaissance period, whose contribution to the formation of Polish language is comparable to that of Shakespeare's for English, standing before an open book and holding a scroll inscribed with his name and profession: JOANNES | KOCHANOW | SKI | POETA; Cardinal Ledóchowski, a nineteenth-century bishop of Poznań, a capital of the Prussian province of partitioned Poland, known for his opposition to the Germanisation of the Kulturkampf, intended to eradicate the Polish language and national sentiment, conducted by Prussian authorities (labelled: CARD. LEDÓCHOWSKI), a figure apparently close to Bishop Adamski who came from Poznań himself (Catholic faith seen as synonymous with Polishness); then we see St Josaphat Kuntsevych (SANCTUS JOSAPHATUS MP.), a martyr of the Union of Brest-Litovsk, which established the Uniate Church, and the kneeling St Stanislaus Kostka



Figure 21: J. H. Rosen while painting the exhibition frieze.

Source: NAC – Polish National Digital Archive.



Figure 22: J. H. Rosen, *Detail of Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis*, showing a soldier supporting the dying Fr Skorupka (1936).

Source: author's photograph.

(S. STANISLAUS KOSTKA), an internationally known Polish Jesuit novice saint, accompanied by a page boy.

On the other side of the view of Wawel Hill appear: the dying Fr Ignacy Skorupka (PSB SKORUPKA), a military chaplain who fell in the battle of Warsaw in 1920, with a cross in his hand, the very stance in which he was believed to have led Polish troops against the Bolsheviks, the collapsing priest supported by an anonymous Polish soldier; King John III Sobieski (JOANNES III REX), a victor of Vienna, considered to have saved the Austrian capital (and Europe in general) from the Ottoman Turks in a battle fought on the outskirts of Vienna on 12 September 1683, paired here with his modern counterpart, Marshall Józef Piłsudski (captioned: PIŁSUDSKI), a head of Polish state during the Polish-Bolshevik war and victor of

the Battle of Warsaw on 15 August 1920, who kept the Bolshevik army at bay, accompanied by a drummer boy whose costume roughly situates him in Sobieski's times.³¹

In keeping with the intention of Bishop Adamski the picture was supposed to summarise of the history of Poland as a country that had always defended Christianity – either through the intellectual work of its greatest men of letters, or in action, on the battlefield. The frieze and the remaining decoration of the Polish room reiterated the same ideas again and again, or, rather, the decoration of the room mirrored the message of the painting and the other way round, and even the inscription in the painting was replicated in the motto 'Polonia antemurale Christianitatis' inscribed next to the sword. It was the very concept favoured by the Catholic church in Poland in the interwar period, and one so powerful that the preceding phrase, Poland – mother of the saints – was vastly overshadowed by it. What is more, it perfectly combined religion with politics and apparently was in tune with the then current political situation.

Given this strong political message, consciously and skilfully reiterated all over the Polish room, it is little wonder that information about the state of the Catholic press in Poland – after all, the main purpose of the exhibition – was hardly noticed (as it was evidently hardly present there at all). Apparently all efforts concentrated on the decoration, a strategy that reflected the attitude of the bishop towards the exhibit. One of the very few matter-of-fact accounts of the exhibition, incidentally, written by the future Polish Primate, Fr Stefan Wyszyński, who visited the exhibition in 1936 when still a young priest and journalist, stated: 'the decorative aspect of the Polish room stands out favourably [against other exhibits], whereas its press display leaves much to be desired, especially when compared with other rooms'.³²

Conclusion

This pithy comment by Fr Wyszyński seems to be a valid and accurate summing up of the Polish presence in the press exhibition. Having defended his doctorate in 1929, Wyszyński spent the following year (from September 1929 to June 1930) gaining experience on a study trip that brought him to 'research centers in Austria, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. He listened to universities' [sic] lectures, learned a lot about Catholic social teaching, and collected comparative material relevant to his future studies'.³³ Wyszyński's extensive and

31) As a relatively recent parallel for a similar pairing of the saintly and lay figures within a single artwork, though in a sacred space of a church, one can cite the mosaic decoration in the apse of the Sacré-Cœur in Paris, designed around 1912 and completed in the 1920s, by the French 'pompier' artist Luc-Olivier Merson, under whom, incidentally, Rosen had trained privately for some time in Paris before 1914. (I realise that distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane' in the case of such a highly ideologically charged event, directed unequivocally to the clergy and the faithful, as the Vatican exhibition of the Catholic press may be problematic, but the exhibition space must after all be deemed 'secular'.) For Merson and the Sacré-Cœur mosaics, see *L'étrange Monsieur Merson*, eds. François Ribemont, Anne-Blanche Stévenin, exhib. cat. Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, Lyons: Lieux Dits, 2008, 179–81 (esp. 181, where such a mixture was termed as 'religioso-national').

32) Wyszyński, 'Arma Veritatis', 317 ('strona dekoracyjna sali polskiej wyróżnia się dodatnio, strona wystawowa ma wielkie braki, widoczne w porównaniu z innymi salami').

33) R. Ficek, 'The Włocławek Period of Fr. Stefan Wyszyński's Pastoral Ministry: Presbyterate and The Time of Priestly-Spiritual Leadership (Part 2)', *Resovia Sacra* 28, 2021, 61 (Ficek, in turn, refers here to the work of A. F. Dziuba, *Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński*, Cracow: WAM, 2010, 19).

very incisive review of the Vatican Press Exhibition attests that the young and eager journalist was probably the most knowledgeable person in Polish Catholic Church as far as the current state of affairs of international Catholic press was concerned, and one can only lament that his help and expertise in the field had not been solicited by the organisers of the Polish section of the 1936 show. As noted at the beginning, while a proper assessment of the exhibition within a broader context of the history of the press in the interwar period and in the political tensions between the Polish state and church, including the attitudes of both parties towards ethnic and religious minorities at that time, must be left to qualified historians in the respective fields, what may be said on the basis of the present preliminary analysis is that the Polish presentation missed the point, focusing, as observed by Fr Wyszynski, on the room's aesthetic impact, but offering very little factual content related to the actual state of Polish press. Furthermore, what Bishop Adamski asked Rosen to do was to illustrate a rather trite 'sermon', a banal story one would expect to hear preached at a mass in a church in newly independent Poland to people who until fairly recently had lived under various regimes on the lands of partitioned Poland, and for whom the national unifying aspect was undoubtedly of paramount importance. But it was this very aspect that was probably hardly understandable to international audiences who visited the Vatican exhibition in 1936.

Coda

The fate of the furnishings of the Polish room after the exhibition had closed is not entirely clear. Some objects must have been returned to Poland, some were intended to be gifted to people involved in the mounting of the display and running of the Polish room (as for instance the eagle-patterned fabric that was offered to Fr Tadeusz Zakrzewski), but Rosen's huge painting – even though relatively lightweight and portable – evidently remained in Rome, in all likelihood, in the Polish Pontifical Institute. It must have been held there until the 1970s when Wyszynski, then Primate of Poland from 1948, who held his private rooms at the Institute and had lived there during his sojourns in Rome, took it to Warsaw, to the residence of the Archbishops of Warsaw, where it has remained ever since. In the summer of 2020 – 86 years after its execution – Rosen's unassuming (and generally long forgotten) work was suddenly plucked from obscurity and exhibited nowhere else but at the Royal Castle in Warsaw – an honour the artist would have never dreamt of.³⁴ The reason for this unexpected elevation was the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw – or the 'Miracle on the Vistula', as it is nicknamed in Poland.³⁵ A special exhibition of the painting was staged at the castle from late July to mid-November 2020, with the title *With Sword and with Cross*.³⁶ Laudable though this action might have been, the organisers did not (or did not want to) understand the circumstances of

34) It was virtually unknown until the publication of Wolańska, 'Wawel i Kresy'.

35) Initially the term was sarcastic and slightly derogatory, but it has stuck, while its negative connotations seem to have been forgotten over time; now the 'miracle' is an accepted term, used by historians while referring to the Battle of Warsaw – as for instance in the title of the exhibition catalogue quoted in the next note.

36) Paweł Tyszka, ed., *Szablą i krzyżem: pokaz obrazu Jana Henryka Rosena w stulecie Cudu nad Wisłą 1920* (Exhibition catalogue Zamek Królewski w Warszawie – Muzeum, 23 July – 15 November 2020) Warsaw: Zamek Królewski w Warszawie – Muzeum, 2020.

the work's origins and presented it in an oversimplified narration limited to the two figures immediately related to the battle: Fr Skorupka and Marshall Piłsudski.³⁷ Regrettably, the artwork was seen merely as a vehicle of an ideological message – in 2020 identical as in 1936 – and a once in a lifetime occasion to present it in historical perspective and a broader context of the Vatican Press exhibition was irretrievably lost.

37) A tiny exhibition catalogue, published to accompany the showing, features two historical papers, one dealing with the rebirth of the Polish state, and the other one with the 'Miracle on the Vistula' proper; the third text – bearing striking similarities to Part II in Joanna Wolańska, *Katedra ormiańska we Lwowie w latach 1902–1938. Przemiany architektoniczne i dekoracja wnętrza*, Warsaw: Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, 2010 (Poza Krajem) offers a sketch of Rosen's life and work.



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