

# CHRISTIANITY ON STAMPS OF Poland

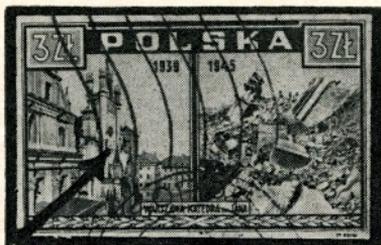
By J. L. BRODOWSKI

PART VI

Warsaw, the capital city of Poland, suffered terribly during the last World War, especially during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Whole districts of the city were found in complete ruins after the war came to the unhappy end. Many monumental structures, cathedrals, churches and other buildings of great architectural value were destroyed or damaged.

This war destruction found its expression in some postage stamp issues of the Polish G.P.O. after the war. In 1945 Poland issued a set of stamps known as "Warsaw Accuses", representing different edifices of Warsaw as they appeared before 1939, and after 1945. I have already mentioned this set (374-379) and the one with the overprint "Warsaw is Free" (383-388) in a previous article in **COROS Chronicle** no. 88.

Stamp nos. 375 and 384 represent St. John's cathedral in Warsaw. The first church on this site dated back to the 12th century and was of wooden construction.



St. John's Cathedral, Warsaw

In the 14th century the church was rebuilt, in brick, in the Gothic style, and again reconstructed in the 17th century after destruction at the beginning of the century. A few chapels were added to the main construction in the 17th and the 18th centuries. The church was completely destroyed during the last war, as it is seen on the stamp, then rebuilt after 1945.

Stamp nos. 379 and 388 depict the Holy Cross Church in Warsaw which had been associated with the early Catholic missionaries. On this site there once



Holy Cross Church, Warsaw

stood a little wooden church, later destroyed. In 1682 the cornerstone of a new church was laid and after 14 years a 3-nave church was built on the plan of a Latin Cross. In 1700 a chapel (St. Mary's) was added to the construction and in 1726-1754 the towers. The facade of the church was finished by Italian architects of the Fontana family. Partially destroyed during the last war, the church was completely rebuilt in post-war years.

Tczew (in German, Dirschau) lies on the left bank of the Vistula river, about 20 miles from Gdansk, and belongs to the Gdansk Province. It was also a very old Slavic center having the status of a "royal city" as early as 1260.

Stamp no. 952 A represents a panorama of Tczew with its churches as it appeared in the 17th century. The church with the ridge-shaped tower seen on the right side of the stamp is the oldest in the city and presently bears the name of the Holy Cross. It was once a very small church, of wood, built in the 12th century and later burned by the Prussians (in 1224) during one of their assaults on the town. It is not known what the name of the church



Holy Cross Church,  
Tczew

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was at that time. It was probably called the church of St. Nicholas, as statues of this saint had very often been mentioned in the local ecclesiastical chronicles. Following the destruction by the Prussians, a new church, of brick, had slowly been built, part after part, and was finished in the middle of the 14th century. Mainly in this structure, the church has lasted to the present time, sharing in the meantime various fates. It was plundered by the Hussites in 1433. Later came the period of the Reformation which had found many followers in Tczew, mostly among the German population of the town. Protestantism had spread there so rapidly that in a few years the city of Tczew became mostly Protestant. As a result, the Holy Cross church of Tczew served both the Catholics and the Protestants at the same time for a few decades. The Counter Reformation again changed the situation and the church once more became the local Catholic parochial church of the city. During a fire in the city in 1577 the church was partially damaged, especially the tower and presbytery, but after twenty years it was rebuilt again.

Owing to the dynastic ambitions of Gustav Adolf, king of Sweden, Poland became entangled in wars with Sweden which lasted throughout nearly the whole 17th century and brought much ruin in their train through Swedish invasions of the whole country. Pomerania suffered the most. The city of Tczew and its churches were plundered and devastated, including the Holy Cross church. By the order of King Gustav, the church of the Holy Cross was left to the Protestants in 1626. When in 1635 the Protestants received permission to build their own church inside the walls of Tczew, close to the High Gate, the Holy Cross church returned to the Catholics. This Protestant church (not visible on the stamp) lasted for nearly 200 years.

The partitions of Poland and the Napoleonic wars again brought damage and devastation. Many churches in Poland were closed for lack of funds for restoration. After World War I (1918) Tczew became Polish and the Holy Cross church again the parochial church of the city. Many relics of the church have survived through the centuries in spite of difficulties.

In the foreground (to the left) of the same stamp (no. 954A) is seen another church of Tczew with its tower touching the upper frame of the stamp. It had once been the monasterial church (St. Mary's, later St. Nicholas) of the Dominicans who were brought to Tczew

from Gdansk in 1289 by one of the Polish dukes of Pomerania. The oldest part of this Gothic church, the presbytery, dates back to the 13th century, and the nave to the 14th century.

In the period of the Reformation the monastery and the church were abandoned by the monks and remained closed for over 50 years. In 1600 the Dominicans came back to their property, but in 1819 the Order was liquidated by the Prussian Government (after the partitions of Poland) and the monasterial buildings were partially demolished, partially left for the needs of the local schools. From 1851 to 1945 the church belonged to Protestants as the St. George Protestant Church. During the last war it was seriously damaged, then reconstructed after 1945, and left to the Catholics as the St. Stanislaw Kostka church for the local schools.

St. Stanislaw Kostka, a Polish Jesuit, lived in Poland in the 16th century, was canonized in 1726 and became the patron saint of Polish youth.

In the far background of the same stamp is seen the old town-hall of the city of Tczew which no longer exists.

It is difficult to state which edifices the designer had in mind when he was planning stamp no. 960. The picture on this stamp seems to portray his imagination of the past rather than reality.

Opole (in German-Oppeln) was a very small settlement in the 10th century in Upper Silesia, situated on the small island of Pasięka on the Odra (Oder) River. Only a tower from the old castle built on this island in the 13th century remained and not even a trace is left of a little chapel which once stood close to the castle. The Opole settlement had started to spread in the 13th century on the right bank of the Odra river, on the so-called "Hill". There, on the Hill, had once stood another castle of which there also remains only a part of a tower from the 16th century.

Opole became a very important ecclesiastical center when the Franciscans and Dominicans settled there in the 13th century, and the Bernardines in the 15th century. The oldest parochial church of Opole, St. Adalbert's, was founded in the 10th century and in 1295 was left to the Dominicans as a part of their convent. The parochial rights of the church were transferred to the newly-built collegiate church of the Holy Cross, the present cathedral of Opole.

During 1250-1287 another church, that of the Franciscans, was built in Opole. This church became the burial place



Franciscan  
Church,  
Opole

of the Opole dukes of the Polish dynasty of Piast, and here have survived the best examples of the sarcophagus sculpture in Upper Silesia. A portrayal of this church (arrow) was probably intended by the designer in his composition of stamp no. 960.

The city of Opole, as many other cities of Silesia, is very rich in history. In about 990 Silesia had already been a part of the Polish state and the territory of constant controversies between Poland, Austria and Germany. In the 13th century Silesia consisted of about 30 duchies which had belonged to several Polish dukes of the Piast dynasty (see also **COROS Chronicle** no 88). It later became partially united under the Austrian and then the Prussian rules. After the partitions of Poland (1773-1795) Silesia became the subject of rapid Germanization. When the independence of Poland was declared in 1918, a part of Silesia came back to Poland. Since 1945, all of Silesia belongs to present Poland as a result of the last war.

In 1946 Poland issued semi-postal stamp no. B46 to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the founding of Bydgoszcz (in German, Bromberg), a city on the elbow of the Vistula river, north west of Torun. In the 11th century a very strong Polish military defense center existed there. It was possessed by the Teutonic Order during the period 1309-1343, after which Bydgoszcz came back to Poland, together with a part of Pomerania and received "town status" in 1346. This date is visible on the stamp, which represents a part of the local waterway leading to the Vistula river with the St. Martin and St. Nicholas church in the far background. The church was built of wood in 1399 and completely destroyed by fire after a short time. A new church, of stone and bricks, was built much later. Only a part of the structure has survived from that time. In the period 1460-1502 the church was rebuilt and enlarged. Since 1945 it has been under conservation.

I mentioned in my previous article

(**COROS Chronicle** no. 88) stamp no. N62 of the "General Gouvernement" (German occupation 1939-1945). The stamp is mistakenly catalogued by Scott as the "Dominican church, Lublin", being rightly located in Krakow. Dedicated to the Holy Trinity, it dates back to the 13th century. The Holy Trinity church had previously been the wooden parochial church of Krakow, taken over by the Dominicans in 1222. The church and other monasterial buildings were completed in the 14th century. This time the church was built of brick in the Gothic style.

Several fires through the centuries had partially consumed the church, and during the last one, in 1850, the roof, facade and the inner part of the church were destroyed. The reconstruction lasted for several years. Since 1945 the church has remained under conservation.

In my first article (the **COROS Chronicle** no. 87) an error seems to have crept in. Stamp no. 14 represents king John Sobieski's statue in the capital city of Warsaw and NOT in Lwow. The monument stands near the Lazienki palace, surviving the last war and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

(To be continued)

## CHRISTMAS STAMP

(Continued from page 97)

Conn., member of the Post Office Dept.'s Stamp Advisory Committee, and the stamp was modeled by Victor S. McCloskey, Jr., of the Bureau of Printing and Engraving. The vignette was engraved by Richard M. Bower, and the lettering is by Howard F. Sharpless. The word "postage" has been left off so as not to crowd the design of the 5¢ stamp in "regular issue" size. Colors are blue, green and red on white paper.

The custom of the National Christmas Tree was inaugurated by President Coolidge with a tree which was the gift of his native state of Vermont. Each President since then has retained the custom and each year a different state donates the tree. The 1963 tree will be donated by West Virginia, with New York scheduled for 1964 and Arizona for 1965. The tree is set up in the Ellipse between the White House grounds and the Washington Monument. The Pageant of Peace is staged in the Ellipse Park around the giant 100-foot Christmas tree. Printing order for the 1963 Christmas stamp is **two billion**, largest order ever placed for a special issue U.S. stamp. ■