

April 28, 1944

Statement by Rev. Stanislaw Orlemanski at a Press Conference

Citation:

"Statement by Rev. Stanislaw Orlemanski at a Press Conference", April 28, 1944, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Soviet Foreign Policy During the Patriotic War: Documents and Materials, Vol. 2, January 1, 1944 - December 31, 1944, trans. Andrew Rothstein. (London:Hutchinson, 1946), 78-80.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/209828>

Summary:

Rev. Stanislaw Orlemanski holds a press conference to describe his trip to the Soviet Union and discuss the Polish question with Joseph Stalin.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

According to the Chicago correspondent of the Associated Press, the Rev. Stanislaw Orlemanski on his return from the U.S.S.R. had stated at a press conference that Marshal Stalin told him in the course of conversation that he is a supporter of freedom of conscience and of worship, and thinks co-operation with the Pope possible against the coercion and persecution of the Catholic Church.

The correspondent also reports the most important remarks made by Orlemanski at the press conference:

□"Some time in January I wrote a letter to Mr. Hull asking for a passport to visit the Soviet Union. I received no reply to this letter and wrote again, asking for permission to investigate myself and to study the Polish question. The reply was that the American Government had no objection, but did not know what the attitude of the Soviet Government would be. I wrote to the Russian Consulate in New York, and they replied that permission from Marshal Stalin was necessary. Finally, a reply came personally from Marshal Stalin, inviting me to Russia."

□After describing the route followed and the circumstances of his journey from the United States to the Soviet Union and back, Orlemanski referred as follows to his stay in the U.S.S.R.:

□"I shall not make any statement about Russia. It would be futile for me to speak about religion. I spend two days in visiting the Army, two days on my way back, and one day I spent in visiting Polish children at Zagorsk.

□Now about Stalin. For one hour I had a conference with Molotov. I was at the theatre, and they rang me up to go to the Kremlin, and I went there. Molotov and Stalin were together. I don't speak Russian, and therefore we had an English interpreter. I talked with Stalin for two hours fifteen minutes. My second talk lasted about as long. I found Stalin very democratic and very open. I spoke to Stalin as an American citizen, as an equal to an equal. I said to Stalin that the most important problem to solve was the religious problem. He asked: 'How do you conceive it? What would you do? I said to him that I would like to put two or three questions to him. I put down a list of questions. At first sight it may seem to you that they are very insignificant. Study them from all points of view, and you will see that they are important. Being an American, I didn't sell America, and I wasn't authorized to sell Poland to anyone. As regards religion, I am proud of my Church, and I shall do all in my power to help my Church. I hope that this little document [the record of Orlemanski's talk signed by J.V. Stalin] will mark the beginning of better mutual arrangements and mutual understanding. I shall not make any statement on the Polish question."

Orlemanski handed representatives of the press the following text of an official statement: "I went to Moscow not as a representative of the Roman Catholic Church nor as an ambassador of the United States [State] Department, but as a private citizen to study the Polish question. I am not a Communist, and I plainly said so in Moscow in my public address to the Polish Army. I am an American. And I emphasize that I travelled to Moscow alone and returned alone. I belong to no clique, faction, or party. In my thirty years of priesthood this was my first vocation, a mission to Moscow to help my Church and Poland.

"Let us look at some of the statements made by my fellow-clergy. Here is the first. The Rev. James Lawler, assistant General Secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Charitable Societies, has stated: 'The world, which has been a witness of the militant atheism of the Soviet Government for many years, must be careful in its attitude to such statements as the statement of Father Orlemanski.' This was in the News Week magazine. Father Lawler, you are only talking, but I take my stand on an official historic document. I must reply to you as follows. The first job in my programme was to bring you an official statement on this question. Talk and criticism

will lead us nowhere if we don't act. I acted. Could you or any other Catholic demand of expect more of me? Are you now convinced that my mission to Moscow was successful?"

With reference to a statement by Michael Ready, Secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Charitable Societies, who described Orlemanski's journey as a "political burlesque," Orlemanski stated: "I must say that it is not decent of him to use such vulgar words. By such insinuations you will not undermine and infringe my life in holy orders and in Christ. Nevertheless, Monsignor, I assure you that it was not a burlesque but a high-class opera. I am sure that the American public will understand my position and judge it. I have remarkable news about Poland, but this will become known later."

The statement was accompanied by the following questions which, in Orlemanski's words, he put to J.V. Stalin, and the latter's replies. The following is the text of these questions and answers:

"1. Do you think it admissible for the Soviet Government to pursue a policy of persecution and coercion with regard to the Roman Catholic Church?"

Reply by Marshal Stalin: "As an advocate of freedom of conscience and freedom of worship, I consider such a policy to be inadmissible and precluded."

"2. Do you think that co-operation with the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, in the struggle against the coercion and persecution of the Catholic Church is possible?"

Reply by Marshal Stalin: "I think it is possible."

"The Rev. Stanislaw Orlemanski wished that the above questions and answers should not be published at present, but handed to him personally. Marshal Stalin did not object to this suggestion, but at the same time he said that he also had no objection to these questions and answers being made public, should the Rev. Stanislaw Orlemanski consider it necessary.

□□□□(Signed) MARSHAL STALIN." (TASS)