

Chapter Ten

A NEW ENGLAND JESUIT COSSACK CAPTAIN

While the New England area was going through its vice-provincial phase, one of those later associated prominently with its general administration, colleges, residences, social action and writing was engaged in famine relief work in Russia. This was Fr. Louis J. Gallagher, S.J. (1885-1973). In 1905 he had entered the Society in the then relatively new noviceship-juniorate at St. Andrew-on-Hudson, Poughkeepsie, New York. At some point in his Jesuit life, this man originally from Boston's North End and later from Malden, Massachusetts, had become acquainted with Fr. Edmund A. Walsh, S.J., a native of South Boston, who in 1917 had established the Georgetown School of Foreign Service. It has sometimes been said that Fr. Walsh was nicknamed "Nicodemus", since as a theologian at Woodstock he had broken grades and visited philosophers by night. Night in this context was the period from the end of recreation at 7:45 until the time for community litanies at 9:00. By a daring extension it might cover the time of examen and points from 9:15 to 9:45. Such a night visit to Fr. Gallagher would have been a difficult feat for Fr. Walsh, since Fr. Gallagher made his philosophy in Canada. At any rate, the two became friends and in the declining years of Fr. Walsh at Georgetown, it was Fr. Gallagher who put in order Fr. Walsh's papers and wrote a brief memoir of his friend's achievements.

This chapter in the history of the vice-province necessarily has some reference to Fr. Walsh. It will, however, concentrate on the period when Fr. Gallagher became a coordinate director of the papal relief mission in the city of Orenberg. From his contemporary notes Fr. Gallagher, late in life, it would appear, wrote his own autobiography with his whole Russian experience as central. He gave most color and zest to his months in Orenberg with its variety of interesting characters: a chameleon-like Russian governor, a Cossack captain, a railroad expert from czarist days, a group of Russian Orthodox priests, and an orthodox priest who wished to be received into communion with Rome. So enmeshed was this special Russian section with matters of much less general interest and with minor personal experiences that the memoir was never published. It was among Fr. Gallagher's effects and sent from Weston, where he died, to the province archives. This chapter hopes to encapsulate in the first place what was an interesting and intriguing episode at Orenberg. But Orenberg with its color and interest is eclipsed by the task which was assigned to Fr. Gallagher when the Orenberg mission closed. This task was to bring the remains of Blessed (now Saint) Andrew Bobola, S.J. from Moscow to Rome. The journey, as will be seen, was filled with alarms and trepidation. It is perhaps not surprising that after the Russian experience and the Bobola saga that Fr.

Gallagher's name was placed second on the terna for rector of Boston College in 1925. However, he had to wait until so appointed on January 1, 1932 when Fr. James H. Dolan, the first choice on the 1925 terna, finished an extended term.

Some introductory material is necessary before we can get Fr. Gallagher in Orenberg. It was toward the close of the school year, 1921-22, when he was principal of Xavier High School in New York City, that he received a telegram from a passenger on an incoming ocean liner to meet its sender, Fr. Walsh, at five o'clock on May 27, 1922 at the Cunard Pier. There was a brief pointed question for him from Fr. Walsh, "Will you come to Russia with me?" In February of that year, while Fr. Walsh was a tertian at Paray-le-Monial, he had been summoned to Rome to confer with Vatican officials on the feasibility of a papal relief mission to Russia, many of whose subjects were experiencing a severe famine. During this Roman visit, it was thought advisable to choose the option of affiliating the papal mission with the American Relief Administration (hereafter, A.R.A.) under Col. William Haskell, U.S.A. On March 23, 1922, Fr. Walsh was welcomed by Col. Haskell in Moscow and given a quick visit to the famine-stricken Volga valley area of Samara. Back in Rome, Fr. Walsh conferred on June 3, 1922 with Pope Pius XI, Cardinal Gasparri, the Papal Secretary of State and Fr. General, Wlodimir Ledochowski. Since Col. Haskell had recommended the affiliation of the papal mission, there remained only the need to obtain the approval of Herbert Hoover, who was both Secretary of Commerce and Director General of European Relief, and also the authorization of President Harding. On the return to the United States, when Fr. Gallagher was recruited, the required U.S. Government approvals were obtained on May 31 and June 1. Before leaving for Russia, both Fr. Walsh and Fr. Gallagher were made members of the A.R.A. Then began their trip to Rome, then to some German cities with its first goal as Riga in Lithuania. Necessary contacts with Col. Haskell delayed Fr. Walsh's arrival. Fr. Gallagher, after waiting for a time in Riga, was instructed to proceed quickly to Moscow where he was initially an A.R.A. guest.

Prior to December 1922, Fr. Gallagher inspected sites in Petrograd, and spent four months on his own organizing relief stations in both the southern and northern Crimea. This entailed rough rides on the Black Sea, and entering ports where the Captain was not totally sure that mines from World War I were not still active. Fr. Gallagher had just completed this tour when Orenberg was first being heard of. The Russian government was most committed to having both the American and the papal missions operate there. In the earlier days of the famine relief, the A.R.A. had set up a station there, but in this one instance had been obliged to abandon it because of the thwarting hand of Russian bureaucracy. Fr. Walsh in his added capacity as representative of Pope Pius XI on church affairs was most ready to cooperate by establishing a station at Orenberg. He hoped that by sparing his official assistant for the task some alleviation

might come in church-state relations. These were particularly acute after the trials, convictions and imprisonment of prominent ecclesiastics, and the execution of one Catholic prelate. So Fr. Gallagher was selected for the task. His position ceased to be assistant director of papal relief. He was now Director of the Eastern Division of the Papal Relief.

Orenberg was in the South Ural area, 300 feet above the Ural River, a frontier fortress constructed in the eighteenth century against eastern invasions. It became also an important market for rugs, silks and shawls. By the autumn of 1921, half its population had died due to famine and the violent stealing of its sheep and goats. So heavy were snows as one approached it from the west that there was constant fear of trains being stalled for lengthy periods. It was on January 26, 1923 that Fr. Gallagher's train from Moscow left. One hundred miles away from its goal, snow stalled the train. Though food was low, as well as heat, a plough train arrived the next morning and it reached Orenberg only one day late. The temperature was 38° below zero.

Soon a division was made on what territory each mission would expend its food and clothing. The A.R.A. was to concentrate on the city proper. The papal mission was in charge of the surrounding countryside on both sides of the river. Fr. Walsh had sent along an experienced Russian supervisor to tackle difficult problems in transportation. Sleighs were hired to carry goods. Schools which had been closed were opened to serve for storage and distribution. At first, food was the chief item dispensed. But with the office of Fr. Edward Farrell, S.J. being opened in Moscow, generous supplies were soon available of clothes and shoes. By the middle of March, the papal station had 9000 people fed and clothed. Despite this success, there were problems. Night raids were a common occurrence and Fr. Gallagher was urged to carry an automatic. He does not say in his memoirs if he did, but it might be implied.

In this remote town, Fr. Gallagher's gift for friendship had great scope. Among his friends was the head of its central government, a man who could be rigorous by day in his interpretation of his authority, but friendly and relaxed at night with the mission officials. He would never consent during a conference to any outside suggestion, but later either carried out the suggestion as though it was his own idea, or even at a later time authorized the suggestion in writing. Thus he saved face while yielding. Although he ordered the removal of a group of exiled Russian priests from those eligible for feeding by the papal mission, he yielded to Fr. Gallagher's explanations that since the donor, Pius XI, was himself a priest, other priests should be able to enjoy his gifts. A Polish Catholic was the custodian of a school which also served as a papal relief station. In keeping with some agreed-on practice, the school flew a papal insignia over its door. This annoyed the governor, so he ordered the building, school and station closed. When it was explained to him

that the insignia was a commonplace on papal relief stations, he permitted it to be open as a station, but no longer as a school. The janitor, who was hired by the school was out of work, so Fr. Gallagher put him on the payroll of the mission. A member of the A.R.A., who experienced the difference between this man's unbending rigor by day, and his geniality by night termed him a "sunset chameleon".

But Fr. Gallagher's chief Russian friend during his Orenberg stay was a Cossack captain, a member of the old Russian aristocracy and a former official of the czarist cavalry. At an evening dinner to which the Russian governor invited the directors of both missions, he included among the local authorities this Cossack captain. Later this captain, with full authorization, made both Fr. Gallagher and Mr. Hartley, the chief of the A.R.A., honorary captains in the 11th Division of the Cossack cavalry. Both the Russian captain and Mr. Hartley were excellent horsemen. One day they arrived at the papal mission on horseback and with a third horse for the wholly inexperienced Fr. Gallagher. After instructing him never to gallop on a paved road, they set out. As soon as they came to a paved road, the Cossack captain called fiercely to the horses to gallop. Despite the fact that his horse had no bit in his mouth, Fr. Gallagher's performance not only won him commendation, but the horse as a gift. As the snows melted in the country districts, a horse was a more reliable source of transportation than a Ford. Often the captain went with Fr. Gallagher on his missions, and his presence expedited matters. Through Fr. Gallagher, the captain extended an invitation to five exiled orthodox priests to dine. No one, the captain insisted, could take umbrage at such a gathering since the ecclesiastics were meeting with a Russian officer as an interpreter. He also told Fr. Gallagher what Fr. Walsh hoped was not true, that no matter how much good the papal mission accomplished, none of its charity would rub off on the anti-religious animosities of the Russian government.

Orenberg was furthermore a place where political prisoners were sent and scrutinized. One day a man came seeking a clerkship. Since the Russians hired and paid clerks, Fr. Gallagher could at best offer him a post as a private secretary on the papal payroll. The man admitted he had come to Fr. Gallagher with his services in reading and translating Russian because the Cossack captain had sent him. This captain seemed to know something about everyone who came to Petrograd. The stranger proved to be an orthodox priest from a Petrograd seminary who was under surveillance in Orenberg. He refused money payments for his services to the mission since any money found on him would jeopardize his partial freedom. Perhaps coyly, he later asked if he might serve Fr. Gallagher's daily Mass. He informed Fr. Gallagher that he had learned of his priestly character from the Cossack captain who knew this fact, but kept it safe from the authorities. As an unmarried orthodox priest, he was seeking union with Rome and continuation as a priest. A letter with this request was sent by Fr. Gallagher through the diplomatic pouch a few

weeks before the closing down of the papal mission. Before an answer could come, the priest had died of galloping tuberculosis.

It was not merely unusual people one met in Orenberg. Its climate was also unusual. Summers were as hot as possible, and winters equally cold. When winter ended in March, the heat of summer arrived by April. Flooding was then a common and serious condition. The stations in the lowlands across the river from high-cliffed Orenberg were flooded, but from the supplies of the papal mission in the town the country people could be fed. When the skill of the A.R.A. crew had overcome the damage, the countryside was everywhere dotted with lilies of the valley. The rich and fertile soil could soon produce foodstuffs capable of feeding the inhabitants of the city and its country areas.

However, in early June 1923, both missions were ordered closed and Fr. Gallagher was expected back in Moscow by June 19, 1923. With its records carefully triplicated and its surplus supplies allocated between city and country and bonus gifts for its workers, everything was ready for the mission staff to depart. A final talk with the Cossack captain indicated his intention to stay with the Soviets and to alleviate where he could the harshness of their regime. He indicated that any future correspondence would be most unwise. Fr. Gallagher's pages of appreciation in his memoirs, hurriedly summarized here, were his way to make known the character of a man willingly remaining in a strange system in the hope that some of its rough edges might be smoothed. The Orenberg people held back the departure of the train by a half-hour to express their appreciation for kindnesses which their government just took for granted without any visible sign of gratitude.

When the A.R.A. departed from Moscow on July 20, 1923, the papal mission was left isolated. It had to buy its supplies at high prices from the Russian government to distribute gratis to needy Russian people. All its requests were treated with severity. Its lodging became precarious. Courier service was denied. The worst of the famine had passed so the government had no reason for friendly cooperation. Fr. Walsh's requests about the church and churchmen were ignored. Once after three requests he was allowed to visit Archbishop Cieplak in prison.

There was one request which Fr. Walsh made in the name of Pope Pius XI. This was permission to move the remains of Saint (then Blessed) Andrew Bobola from Russian territory to Rome. Once in the fall of 1922 when Fr. Walsh had made this request, he was informed that he might take them provided he left Russia for good. Not wishing to jeopardize any possibility of doing some good for the church in Russia, he had declined this offer calculated to get rid of him. Now that the relief work of the papal mission was all but impossible, it appeared to be time to repeat the request. This time it was more genteelly granted.

To know how the remains of Bobola were in Moscow, it must be recalled that in the late spring of 1922 when the churches were being despoiled, they were taken from a church in Polodsk. They were stripped of vestments, found strangely incorrupt and moved first to Vitebsk, and then to someplace in Moscow. When Fr. Gallagher first arrived in Moscow ahead of Fr. Walsh, he had been informed that the remains were in the Petrovska Museum. Despite an early visit there to a room where remains of clerics were said to be on exhibition, no sign of Bobola remains were evident.

In September of 1923, negotiations for the transfer began with Tchitcherin, Russian Secretary of Foreign Affairs, a former Czarist official. They were concluded with his subordinates. An agreement had to be reached on the route to be followed. In all events it was to avoid all Polish territory, since Bobola was a favorite figure there. Despite a Russian proposal for travel by rail to northern Europe and then by water to Naples, the final agreement was to follow a route from Moscow, Odessa, Constantinople, Brindisi and Rome.

Fr. Gallagher, who had been a full Director in Orenberg, was designated as the one to accompany the remains and to do so without fanfare. He was supplied with a diplomatic passport signed in red ink by the Russian Secretary of State. Since Russian control would end with the arrival at Constantinople, Fr. Gallagher contacted Muktah Bey, the Turkish Ambassador in Moscow to arrange for a transfer of the remains from a Russian steamer to an Italian liner on its way to Brindisi. The man was cordial toward expediting what was termed "diplomatic baggage" which was being forwarded by the Russian State Department to the Vatican. He made no inquiries as to its contents. On Fr. Gallagher's Vatican passport, Muktah Bey put a signature for use with Turkish officials. He also wrote a letter whose content he disclosed to Fr. Gallagher. It was to be used only in an emergency if the Turkish-countersigned Vatican passport was questioned or not honored.

To obtain the "diplomatic baggage," the term officially used for the remains of Bobola along with a trunk or two of mission records, Fr. Gallagher was brought to the Petrovska Musuem, the same one he had visited earlier in vain for the Bobola remains. Fr. Gallagher and his official interpreter met the Russian officials -- two secret police officials and the Moscow Director of Customs. Off the main exhibition hall was a store-room with dusty objects, plus a much less dusty casket with the Bobola body. The casket appeared to have been placed rather recently in this room. Since the vestments had earlier been removed, the marks of Bobola's martyrdom, as described in the breviary, were evident. Efforts to have an examination by a priest who had examined the body in Polodsk were in vain. In a private conversation, this priest, by the name of Baronavski, informed Fr. Gallagher what were the basic identifying marks. These could be verified. The coffin was stuffed with cotton and placed in a strong wooden box with its empty spaces also stuffed with cotton. Then this

outside box was padlocked and sealed with the seals of Pope Pius XI and the Moscow Customs.

Since the express from Moscow to Odessa had no freight car for this diplomatic luggage, a special caboose (called a tripluska in Russian) was attached to the train. The doors of this car were also locked and sealed. To get the expedition off to its first bad start, the interpreter of the papal mission was arrested just before the train pulled out. The showing of the diplomatic passport signed in red by Tchitcherin freed the man from the secret police. A special interpreter was supplied for the Russian portion of this trip. He was a Russian Jew named Joe, a genial man of thirty years of age who had been educated in London. When the train reached Bryansk in the Ukraine on October 4th, it took on an overnight special guard of 16 armed soldiers as a precaution against night-time robbers. Joe rewarded these men next morning with coffee, bread, marmalade and cigarettes. The next stop was at Kiev, where a change had to be made for Odessa. The station master objected to joining the tripluska to this newly-organized train since he lacked explicit authorization. However, when Joe took the diplomatic passport to a G.P.U. man in the town, everything went well. He could hardly believe the magic quality which this passport had on the secret police both there and in Moscow. When the train arrived at Odessa on October 6, the passengers and baggage had to be placed on a transport named the Tchitcherin for the Black Sea voyage. There were delays, and the trip resumed only on October 15. The collector of the port maintained that the passport precluded from inspection only the relic box and the documents. All else was most meticulously inspected. Finally the box with the remains of Bobola were safely bestowed in a cargo of grain which the Russian authorities were exporting despite the rigors of the recent famine.

All seemed destined to go well on this last portion of the trip under Russian supervision as the Tchitcherin sailed on October 15 from Odessa to Constantinople. The Russian captain and the passengers were friendly, although of the latter some were not quite sure if they had really quitted Russia. Toward the middle of the night, the ship was ordered to stop by a Russian submarine chaser. It seems that a Russian secret service agent, whose presence aboard was assumed as routine by the captain, had either boarded without all necessary formalities or was suspected of being a defector. He was brought on deck, and taken away from the boat by the submarine chaser crew. The interrupted sailing then continued.

The Bosphorus was now near at hand and had even been entered, when suddenly the vessel was quarantined by Turkish officials for five days due to a fear of cholera. No plea or passport was of any avail. Telegrams could be sent to alert those in Constantinople who were expecting Fr. Gallagher. After five days of quarantine and after rough injections against cholera, Fr. Gallagher was welcomed at the dock by the Apostolic Delegate, Msgr. Philippi. The box with the rel-

ics was left in the cargo since precautions had to be devised not to upset the Moslem views about moving the dead. The next day a small barge arrived to take the papal baggage which the Russian captain of the Tchitcherin had obligingly placed on the deck. The removal was challenged by the head of the harbor police. He was not satisfied with answers as to diplomatic cargo covered by both Russian and Vatican passports. In his eyes the shape of the box indicated that the dead were being disturbed contrary to Moslem tradition. If any removal of the box to the barge was possible, permission must come from the Collector of the Port. His office was some distance away, so Fr. Gallagher hired a launch to go off to interview this official, hoping the Carnero, on which he and his cargo was to travel, would not have sailed in his absence. Only the Collector's assistant was on duty that day since it was a Moslem holiday. The time had come for Fr. Gallagher to use the letter of Muktah Bey. Since it was addressed to the collector, his assistant would not think of opening it, but since Fr. Gallagher knew the contents, he explained that the Turkish ambassador in Moscow wanted the full cooperation of Turkish officials in the moving of this diplomatic cargo. The assistant thought he could take the chance, but he kept the unopened letter. Fr. Gallagher had hoped that this letter might have been preserved as an external sign of the friendship and cooperation of Muktah Bey. So with this somewhat meager authorization from the assistant collector, the precious cargo went on the barge, and then on the Italian liner, the Carnero.

This episode was the last serious delay experienced in bringing the remains of St. Andrew Bobola from Moscow to Rome. However, by regulations stemming from World War I, no vessel could go through the Dardanelles by night. Hence the hours of the first night were lost. The voyage was uneventful but enjoyable with stops at Athens, Corinth and Corfu and a good look at Lepanto. Finally the Carnero was in Brindisi. By an overnight express, Fr. Gallagher and his cargo reached Rome on November 1, 1923. Since it was a holy day, the body of Bobola could not be moved until the following day. Then it was deposited in the Matilda Chapel of the Relics in the Vatican. Three prominent Italian surgeons examined the remains, and saw its relation to the arm of Bobola which had gone to Rome directly from Poland before the theft by the Russians.

Despite the holy day, Fr. Gallagher, who was met at Brindisi by Msgr. (later Cardinal) Pizzardo, could go quickly to Rome and to the German College. Because Fr. General was visiting there that day, the two could meet without formality and with Fr. Gallagher still in mufti and mustache. On the early evening of November 2, he had a private audience with Pope Pius XI. Within a few days a message from Fr. Walsh proposed the return of Fr. Gallagher to Russia since the Russians were denying admission to Fr. Henry Irwin, S.J. who was expected to assist Fr. Walsh there. This new proposal never eventuated because the papal mission, as earlier the A.R.A., came fully to a close. Fr. Gallagher, though late, was setting out for the Irish

tertianship whose long retreat he had to experience near the beginning of the following year. On an arranged stop-over in Paris, he met the A.R.A. head of the Orenberg mission, Neil Hartley and his assistant, Mr. Hale. Were they surprised when in meeting their fellow honorary Cossack, they found out for the first time that Mr. Gallagher, whom they knew, was a Catholic priest and a Jesuit.



Fr. Gallagher and Fr. Feikus