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The Eastern Polish /Northern and Southern/ Regional Associations abroad consider it their duty to do everything in their power to make known to the Catholic world the fate of their Catholic fellow-citizens in these regions/ always remarkable for constancy in their attachment to the Faith/ and the irreparable damage which threatens the Church there.

While the severing from Poland of her eastern half has not been decided nor confirmed by any international authority, even less by the population concerned, its Catholic inhabitants, under the deceptive appearance of a peaceful exchange of population, are being driven from their homes in thousands, deprived of their possessions and transported to distant districts, in the west or east. In this way, the Archdiocese of Wilno and the diocese of Pinsk, which emerged from long years of religious oppression under the Tsarist regime, impoverished indeed, and exhausted, but unthwarted in spirit, and which, after the restoration of the Polish State witnessed a remarkable renaissance of Catholic life, are now wasting away and perishing on the morrow of a war waged inter alia, in vindication of religious freedom. The Archbishop of Wilno, Mgr. Jakubzykowski, interned by the Germans, has now been definitely expelled from his See. The Bishop of Pinsk, Mgr. Bukraba has also been removed. All church-sponsored institutions and activities are dying out and sanctuaries standing empty.

At the other extremity of our native land, the Church is in an equally perilous position. While the people of the Latin archdiocese of Lwów are being forced to leave their homes in ever growing numbers, the largest extant branch of the Catholic Church belonging to the eastern rite, the Greek Uniate Archdiocese of Lwów and the dioceses of Przemyśl, and Stanisławów, are subject to ruthless pressure with the purpose of disrupting their Union with Rome. After having finally resumed communion with the Holy See in the beginning of the XVIII century, these dioceses had peacefully developed their peculiar forms of religious life for over two centuries. At the outbreak of war in 1939, they numbered 3,000,000 persons, the remnant of the great Uniate community which, before the Partitions, represented about one third of the population of the Polish Republic.

In spite of political struggles which were violent at times, the religious position in the past remained unchanged and the attachment of the Uniates to their Church was always remarkable. Now after the many trials and evil influences attendant on the German occupation, these dioceses have been deprived of their bishops. The Metropolitan of Lwów, Mgr. Slipyj and the Bishop of Stanisławów Mgr. Chomyszyn, have recently died in prison at Kiev, and the Bishop of Przemyśl, is out of touch with the parts of his diocese situated beyond the newly established frontier line. The old means calculated to subordinate the Uniate Church to the Orthodox Church organization, are being applied anew in a way vividly reminiscent of the days of Nicholas I. A "Committee of Initiative for the Transference of the Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy" has been set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. H. Kostelnik of Lwów, and it is to this Committee that the administration of the Uniate Church has been transferred. Only 42 Uniate priests have submitted to the new dispensation, but the remainder, about 2600 in number, are struggling against great odds as the Soviet Union has decided to extend the jurisdiction of the new Patriarch of Moscow to the Uniate Church of Poland.

In a similar spirit, the Provisional Polish Government in Warsaw is being urged by the Moscow Government to transfer such Uniates as live under its administration across the frontier, and many thousands have already suffered that fate, producing a further painful breach in the ranks of the Uniates.

We realise the difficulty of the present political situation, but we are confident that Catholics in all countries will spare no effort to come to the aid of the Church in Eastern Poland.

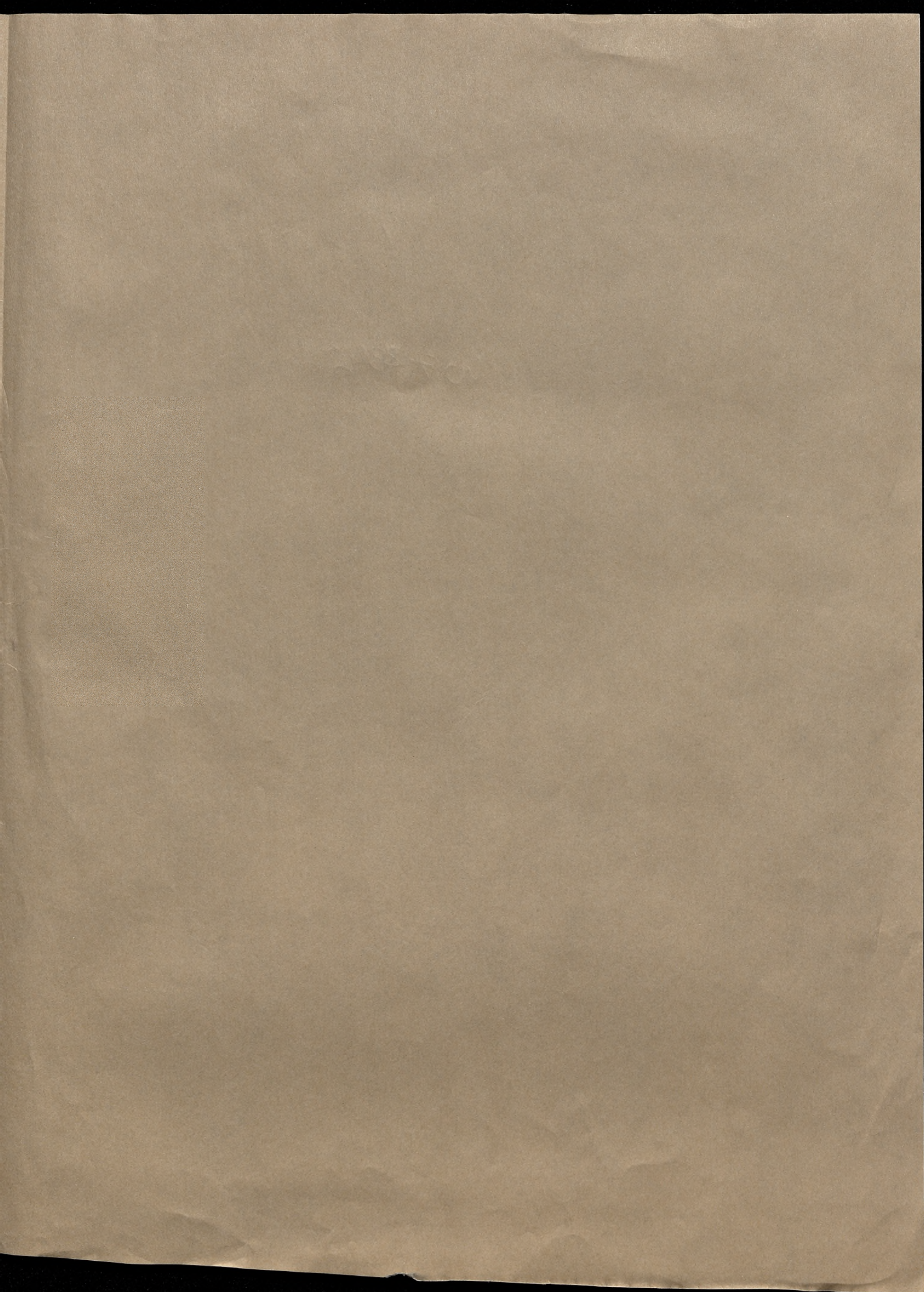
Dr. Piotr Siekanowicz

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