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**The Polish Section of Vatican Radio,
1940–1941: Ethical and security challenges**

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Abstract

The Polish Section of Vatican Radio, 1940–1941: Ethical and security challenges

The goal of this article is to present the communication of the Polish Section of Vatican Radio during the Second World War, based on preserved broadcast transcripts (13 January 1940–30 December 1941). It was seen that, in addition to reporting on the activities of the Pope and the Holy See, the broadcasts informed listeners about the unlawful and brutal actions of the occupiers and “the agony of the Polish nation.” They also documented “the consequences of godless atheism, whether brown or red.” The Polish Section of Vatican Radio also firmly denounced the actions of the occupiers in other countries. It also reported on the unlawful measures undertaken by the Germans against their own citizens. In April 1941, a radical change occurred in the way the Polish Section of Vatican Radio communicated. Such uncompromising reporting on the situation in Poland and other countries provoked sharp protests from the occupying authorities. It was observed that, alongside the criticisms aired by Vatican Radio, acts of terror against the populations of occupied countries intensified. In this context, Pope Pius XII, through the Secretary of State, Cardinal Luigi Maglione, issued a letter dated 28 April 1941 ordering a temporary suspension of broadcasts on anti-German topics. From that moment on, the programs avoided current wartime issues in Poland and other nations, focusing instead on the activities of the Pope, the Holy See, and the life of the Church in various countries. The adoption of this change was motivated by ethical concerns regarding listeners’ safety.

Keywords: Vatican Radio, Pius XII, Vatican, Second World War, Poland, Germany

Vatican Radio was founded by Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of radio, at the request of Pope Pius XI. The first broadcast took place on 12 February 1931, during which Pius XI delivered his inaugural radio address and imparted the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing to the listeners. This was a historic event: the Church had begun to make use of the most modern means of communication available at the time (Bea & De Carolis, 2011; Adamowski, 2021).

On 20 March 1931, Vatican Radio aired a message from Pius XI on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum novarum* in several languages. The Polish version was read by Rev. Tadeusz Zakrzewski,

then Rector of the Polish Pontifical Ecclesiastical Institute in Rome. This marked the first appearance of the Polish language on the papal broadcaster's airwaves.¹

The Pope entrusted the management of Vatican Radio to the Jesuits. At that time, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, worked to ensure that Polish was broadcast on Vatican Radio. On 24 November 1938, Fr. Feliks Lasoń celebrated Holy Mass in Polish and delivered the first broadcast addressed to listeners in Poland. From that moment onward, Polish-language programs began to be transmitted regularly on Vatican Radio. As it later turned out, the significance of Vatican Radio increased even further—particularly for Poland and the Polish people—during the approaching war.

During the Second World War, the Polish Section of Vatican Radio provided ongoing reports on the activities of the Pope and the Holy See, as well as on the life of the Universal Church, with particular attention to Poland. As Vatican Radio was perceived as “the voice of the Pope and the Church,” the editorial team faced numerous challenges, especially during the wartime period. This is evident from the surviving broadcast transcripts, which date from 13 January 1940 to 30 December 1941. The excerpts presented below offer direct insight into the content of these broadcasts and the characteristic language and narrative style of the Polish Section of Vatican Radio.

Reporting on the situation during the war

In the first broadcast, dated 13 January 1940 and titled *The Situation of the Catholic Church in Poland under German Occupation*, the situation in the homeland was presented, describing the incorporation of Polish territories into the Reich. It was noted that “the use of the Polish language has already been prohibited in offices and schools.” All Poles who refused to undergo Germanization were to be deported to the General Government, where “space is to be made by removing the Jews.” The broadcast continued: “Everything Polish is to be eradicated from the areas as mentioned earlier, root and branch. And

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¹ About the reform of the Vatican Media: Hejmo, 1982; Matelski, 1995; Dobrowolski, 1996; 1998; Dobrowolski, & Majewski, 2001; Rędzioch; 2008; 2018; Radio Vaticana Programmes, 2008; Woźny, 2009; 2011; Gęsiak, 2017.

since what is Polish has for centuries also been Catholic, one can imagine what terrible consequences this extermination of the Polish element will have for the Catholic Church.” At this point, the typewritten record of the broadcast ends, and the editor added by hand: “carried out by Germany.” The editorial commentary that followed reflected on these events in Poland: “But let us trust! The greater the suffering of the Polish nation, the greater the injustice inflicted upon Christ’s Church and His innocent faithful, the closer is deliverance. God is near—God of mercy and God of justice!”

Immediately after these words, a second report, entitled *The Struggle Against the Catholic Church in Eastern Poland*, appeared. It was announced that Khrushchev, then the Communist Party Secretary in Kyiv, had undertaken a “lengthy informational journey” to the territories of Poland forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union. According to Vatican Radio, upon his return, Khrushchev declared that “the Polish population in the annexed provinces is deeply religious. The campaign against religion in Poland must be prepared with exceptional care and carried out intensively with the assistance of all propagandists.” As Vatican Radio reported, Khrushchev was convinced that “the Soviet league of the militant godless must send to Eastern Poland at least 25,000 trained propagandists.” After presenting this news, the editorial commentary responded: “We may calmly assure him that his efforts, and those of all Bolshevism, will be in vain. They left the battlefield of Catholic Spain in disgrace; with the same disgrace, they will stealthily withdraw from Polish soil.” It was further noted that through such actions, the Communists would merely provide an opportunity for the revival of the heroic traditions of the Podlasie Uniates. “The Polish nation will not allow the faith of its fathers to be taken away. So help us God!” the broadcast concluded. The next segment of the program featured a reading of Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*. The broadcast of 13 January 1940 thus encapsulated, as if in a lens, the editorial line of the Polish Section of Vatican Radio. Subsequent broadcasts continued to address current issues, with particular emphasis on matters concerning Poland.

Vatican Radio consistently and resolutely monitored and denounced the actions of the occupying forces. On 27 January 1940, it reported on the forced deportations from Pomerania, Greater Poland, and Silesia to Central Poland. These expulsions particularly affected children left without parents and parents deprived of their children, as well as the healthy and the sick, the elderly, and the paralyzed—people exposed to freezing temperatures, without drink or food. “And to think,” the broadcast stated, “that such a fate is to befall

eight million Poles who have inhabited their native Polish lands for centuries" (*Broadcast*, 1940a, January 27).

The Polish Editorial Office also reported on developments in Poland's eastern territories. Citing *L'Osservatore Romano*, which in turn referred to the Swiss press, it was announced on 4 April 1940 that

the People's Commissariat for Posts and Telegraphs has ordered that the heads of post and telegraph offices in the territories of Poland occupied by the Soviets are not to accept any postal or telegraphic correspondence originating from the Vatican State, because—as stated in the circular of the Soviet Commissariat—the Vatican does not exist either as a state or as a city (*Broadcast*, 1940d, April 4).

In the same broadcast, information was also given about the significant human and financial resources devoted to Soviet propaganda, which had organized 15,000 meetings aimed at indoctrinating the Polish population. Attention was likewise drawn to media activity:

"*Bezbożnik*" ["the Godless"], the organ of the Moscow atheists, writes that repressive measures against religion can no longer be postponed, since the recent riots that broke out throughout the occupied territories of Poland are the work of "religious elements." The same publication, as well as other newspapers, expresses admiration for the German authorities' achievements in persecuting the Catholic religion and publicly thanks Dr. Frank, the General Governor of the Polish territories, for what he has already done in this respect, announcing the first measures he has undertaken against the Church and religion in Poland (*Broadcast*, 1940d, April 4).

As the examples above demonstrate, the vocabulary reflects the direct, uncompromising style of communication adopted when reporting on Poland's situation at that time.

The Polish Section of Vatican Radio also reported on how Poland's situation was perceived abroad. For example, it was noted that the Japanese press devoted considerable attention to Poland: "All newspapers express a lively sympathy for the Polish nation, to which the Japanese wish a better future" (*Broadcast*, 1940e, May 2). It was further reported that a fundraising campaign had been organized in Tokyo for the Red Cross.

The editorial office also covered the activities and appeals of Cardinal August Hlond. In the broadcast of 2 May 1940, it was reported that the Primate

of Poland had written to the Primate of Ireland, Cardinal Joseph MacRory, stating that the current “persecution of the faith is far more cruel and threatening than ever before (...) atheism is flooding Europe and encounters only weak resistance” (*Broadcast*, 1940e, May 2)².

Listeners were also informed that in Germany, there was on sale a “German Bible, cleansed of all Jewish influences.” It was explained that this publication was a compilation of New Testament fragments accompanied by commentary. “All references to Bethlehem have been removed. Jesus is said to have been born in Galilee, where various races lived, and therefore He could have been ‘of pure Aryan blood,’” the broadcast of 9 June 1940 recorded (*Broadcast*, 1940f, May 9).

At the same time, close attention was paid to developments in the eastern part of occupied Poland. The broadcast of 25 June 1940 reported that Polish children from Lviv were being deported *en masse* to an unknown destination. They were taken from schools in trucks, transported to the nearest railway station, and from there sent into the unknown – all without their parents’ knowledge. “Some mothers, however, managed to find their children on the road from the school to the station; yet they were unable to save them from deportation and achieved only this – that they could leave together with them,” the transcript reads (*Broadcast*, 1940g, May 25).

The plight of the Polish people in the occupied territories was reported so frequently and emphatically that, on 27 January 1940, an explanation was provided for why this was necessary. It was noted: “It may seem to some that it is superfluous to speak to Poles about the persecution of the Catholic Church in Poland. After all, they are well aware of it – indeed, they know better than those living abroad, for they themselves are experiencing this cruel persecution” (*Broadcast*, 1940a, January 27).

The broadcasts provided several arguments justifying their focus on Poland. First, it was emphasized that the intention was “to make the tormented nation aware that the world knows of its suffering, that it thinks of them, sympathizes with them, and prays for them to the merciful God” (*Broadcast*, 1940a, January 27). In addition, they spoke of “the agony of the Polish nation, to document for the world the consequences of godless atheism, whether brown or red.” A third reason was “to demonstrate, through this painful

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2 In citing this statement, reference was made to *Tygodnik Polski* from 1940 (no. 14/4).

example, that peace and concord can prevail if all nations put the Gospel into practice.”

Corrections to the broadcasts, made by the superiors, were very rare. One such correction is evident in the broadcast of 15 February 1940. The original version contained the following statement:

Dear listeners, the Polish nation, until recently free, has been delivered to the hands of two mortal enemies, who respect neither divine nor human law. Through unjust military aggression, the Polish state organism has been overthrown, and the current bloody rule seeks the radical extermination of the Polish nation itself and its sacred faith (*Broadcast*, 1940b, February 15).

The editor noted that the original statement was essentially true, but it was advisable to revise it to avoid being “troppo generale e ostile” (too general and hostile). The revised version read:

Poland, until recently free, has suddenly come under the administration of the allied atheisms of nationalist and Bolshevik orientation. These regimes, through unjust military aggression, have overthrown the Polish state organism, and under their current rule seek to consolidate their domination over Polish territories, employing methods whose severe and just assessment will one day be made by history.

This example illustrates the nature of the editorial corrections.

Pope Pius XII’s Attitude Toward Poland and the Polish People

Vatican Radio provided ongoing reports on Pope Pius XII’s peace initiatives as well as his assistance to the Polish people.³ One broadcast summarized the situation and the motives of certain hostile groups:

Hostile individuals, taking advantage of the tragic plight of the Polish people, seek to instill in their hearts distrust and animosity toward the Holy See and the Holy Father, and

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³ The issue of Pius XII’s attitude toward Poland has recently been presented, among others, in Szpotaniski, 2025.

consequently to undermine their faith, which has always been the strongest foundation of the moral strength and patriotism of the Polish nation (*Broadcast*, 1940i, October 1).

Various broadcasts also highlighted specific examples of Pope Pius XII's engagement in aid and support for Poland and the Polish people.

The broadcast of 14 March 1940 reported that Pope Pius XII had made every possible effort to prevent the outbreak of war. On the afternoon of 31 August 1939, at the Pope's request, the ambassadors of Germany, Poland, France, Italy, and Great Britain were summoned to the Secretariat of State. Cardinal Luigi Maglione, the Secretary of State, handed them a letter from Pope Pius XII, which read:

Vatican City, 31 August 1939. The Holy Father does not lose hope that the ongoing negotiations may lead to a just and peaceful resolution of the dispute, for which the whole world continues to pray. His Holiness therefore implores, in the name of God, the governments of Germany and Poland to do everything in their power to avoid any incident and to refrain from taking any action that might worsen the present tension. He further appeals to the governments of England, France, and Italy to support this initiative (*Broadcast*, 1940c, March 14).

The same broadcast also reported on the Pope's assistance to Polish refugees who had arrived in Romania. It was stated that "the Holy Father, concerned for their fate, sent a substantial sum of money to provide them with aid" (*Broadcast*, 1940c, March 14).

The same broadcast also mentioned Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, in which he wrote about Poland, "where countless families have been overtaken by death, abandonment, mourning, and destitution." Poland, he emphasized, "rightly demands from all people human and fraternal compassion" (Pius XII, *Summi Pontificatus*, trans. Radio Watykańskie).

In the broadcast of 25 July 1940, it was reported that "the Holy Father has granted greater material assistance to Poles in Rome who have been left without means of subsistence, and another equally large sum has been allocated for Polish refugees residing in Portugal." It was also added that "the Holy Father shows no less solicitude for refugees afflicted by the war in other countries" (*Broadcast*, 1940h, July 25).

In December 1940, extensive reports were broadcast on "the care of the Holy See for Polish refugees." Pope Pius XII was referred to as the "merciful

Samaritan” because of his immense material and spiritual assistance to Poles in exile. “Thanks to the great generosity of the Holy Father, a special Aid Office for Polish Refugees has been operating for six months at the Apostolic Nunciature in Rome” (*Broadcast*, 1940j, December 17).

It is noteworthy that, according to Vatican Radio transcripts, the Pope himself was aware that the image many Poles had of him did not reflect reality. A broadcast on 10 June 1941, granting an audience to Mother Laureta Lubowidzka, Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, was reported. As stated in the program, she conveyed to the Holy Father a question from the Sisters about his health, to which he replied: “Tell them and write to them that the Vicar of Christ loves them all and loves all of Poland, that he carries them in his heart; tell them not to believe those who say otherwise.” Then the Holy Father asked whether Poles believed what they heard from their enemies. When he was told that some deceived people did believe it, he emphatically repeated: “Write to them and tell them not to believe it, because the Pope loves Poland very much—and that is the truth, that is the truth, that is the truth” (*Broadcast*, 1941, June 10). Moreover, as reported in the broadcast, Pius XII several times said, “I love Poland, I love the Polish people, and I wish them all good.” The Pope authorized the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth “to repeat this declaration, both orally and in writing, to whomever they wish” (*Broadcast*, 1941j, June 10).

Persecution of the Church in Other Countries

On the air, the Polish Section of Vatican Radio also reported on the tragic situation of the Church and society in other countries during the Second World War.

Almost the entire broadcast of 4 April 1940 was devoted to the issue of the persecution of the Catholic Church in Austria. It reported on the forced expulsion of monks and nuns, the closure of five churches and twenty-four chapels, the imprisonment of priests in concentration camps, and the fact that “about one hundred priests were not granted permission to teach religion in schools.” The program also mentioned the dissolution of Catholic organizations, including *Caritas*, and noted that “150 Catholic parish and association libraries were abolished. Eight religious magazines, with a total

circulation of over 100,000 copies, can no longer be published." The editorial commentary that followed stated:

Here is an overview of the anti-religious and anti-Church activities of National Socialism observed in a small area of the country. Considering all this, one cannot resist the conclusion that National Socialism is an enemy and persecutor not only of religion and the Catholic Church, but also an enemy and persecutor of its own nation, just like communism (*Broadcast*, 1940d, April 4).

Reports on the crimes of the occupiers and the persecution of the Catholic Church in Poland and around the world were broadcast regularly. On 8 April 1941, a program was primarily devoted to the suffering of the Church in several European countries. "Archbishop Gröber of Freiburg is right when he says that the Catholic Church in Germany is enduring persecution and restrictions without precedent. These restrictions extend to almost every aspect of life" (*Broadcast*, 1940d, April 4). A few days earlier, Vatican Radio had quoted *L'Osservatore Romano*, which published a letter from Archbishop Konrad Gröber that strongly denounced the actions of the National Socialists. He rejected accusations that "the German people, because of Christianity, had undergone a flawed development," and noted that Christians were regarded as those who "like an old wall or a pile of rubble, obstruct the victorious ideological march of hitlerism" (*Broadcast*, 1941d, April 4). As Vatican Radio reported, Archbishop Gröber wrote that "the truths of the Christian faith correspond to the German soul" (*Broadcast*, 1941d, April 4).

In April 1941, Vatican Radio broadcast the speech of General Władysław Sikorski, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, which had previously been published in *L'Osservatore Romano*. In his address, he informed the public about the continual violation of international law by the Germans.

German law within Germany is synonymous with violence—when it seizes citizens' property, their freedom, their civil rights; when it deprives them of life without any guilt on their part and without any trial; when it abolishes all civic liberties. In international relations, German law is synonymous with the violence inflicted upon the norms of the law of nations (*Broadcast*, 1941d, April 4).

Furthermore, General Sikorski emphasized that this law serves the Germans

to shoot defenseless women and children; to incorporate Polish lands; to execute tens of thousands of Polish citizens for their loyalty to the Polish State before the war and to the principles natural and dear to every civilized nation; to carry out mass deportations of Poles from their homeland; to remove the monuments of their civilization (*Broadcast*, 1941d, April 4).

Vatican Radio also reported on German propaganda, which claimed that “the development of the Catholic Church in Poland is proceeding in a more than satisfactory manner” (*Broadcast*, 1941d, April 4). Meanwhile, the Papal broadcast station provided up-to-date information on the atrocities committed by the German Nazis in the territories of Poland under their occupation.

At the same time, Vatican Radio reported on initiatives for prayer for peace during a time when war “torments and tears at human souls” (*Broadcast*, 1941c, April 25). Attention was also given to Poles under Soviet occupation. An example of this was the reading of a poignant letter from a listener in Lviv, who, using her own words, described the hell of exile to Siberia, where, as she wrote, “Grandmother, three children, and I” were sent. The letter recounted stories of immense suffering endured by the children and all the exiled, who prayed for a “wise order of death” (*Broadcast*, 1941c, April 25).⁴

Change in Vatican Radio’s communication

A turning point in the communication of the Polish Section of Vatican Radio occurred at the end of April 1941. Fr. Ludwik Grzebień, SJ, emphasizes in his monograph that such uncompromising reporting on the wartime situation in Poland and other countries provoked a sharp reaction from the occupying authorities (*Polish Section of the Vatican Radio*, 1990, 63). However, the most important consideration was ethical. Based on reports from occupied countries, the Secretariat of State observed that, alongside criticisms of the occupiers on Vatican Radio, acts of terror against the population in these countries were intensifying. In response, Pope Pius XII, through the Secretary of State, Cardinal Luigi Maglione, issued a letter dated 28 April 1941

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4 This program, including a letter from a listener in Lviv, was rebroadcast on the North American transmission on May 2, 1941. See: DPC, Polish Section, Broadcast of May 2, 1941.

ordering a temporary suspension of broadcasts on anti-German topics (*Polish Section of the Vatican Radio*, 1990, 63). In reply, Fr. Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, the Superior General of the Jesuits, informed by letter on 30 April 1941 that these restrictions would be implemented. From that moment, the broadcasts were subjected to even greater internal censorship. The programs' transcripts were reviewed by Fr. Ortiz de Urbina, SJ, before transmission, with explanations provided by the Jesuit brother Eugeniusz Otrębski (*Polish Section of the Vatican Radio*, 1990, 63).

From that moment on, the situation in Poland during the war was hardly addressed. When it was mentioned, it primarily consisted of quotations from *L'Osservatore Romano* or from the Jesuit publication *Civiltà Cattolica*, which the Secretariat of State had previously reviewed.

On the airwaves on 20 May, the broadcast covered the index of banned books, Fr. Fulton Sheen's radio address, and actions in Buenos Aires against immoral books. It also reported on pastoral care for French and Polish prisoners in Bern and quoted the "golden thoughts of Kraszewski" (*Broadcast*, 1941e, May 20). A week later, the program focused on religious orders, providing statistical information, updates on the College of Cardinals, and a quotation from Cyprian Norwid's prayer to the Queen of Angels, "On the Resurrection." Three days later, the broadcast highlighted the recognition of the Catholic Church by Japan, discussed the essence of law, Japanese Catholics and legal matters, as well as spiritual care for soldiers in the United States, and announced an upcoming radio address by Pope Pius XII (*Broadcast*, 1941g, May 30). In the following days, summaries were provided of the papal speech delivered on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (*Broadcast*, 1941h, June 3; *Broadcast*, 1941i, June 6). These topics illustrate the fundamental change in communication within the Polish Section of Vatican Radio.

The situation in wartime Poland was mentioned only exceptionally and either on explicit instructions or from a theological perspective. On 10 June, a broadcast quoted a prayer for the reign of Christ over Poland, published in the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* in London. In the same program, the previously mentioned audience of the Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth with Pope Pius XII was recounted, during which the Pope assured her that he loves the Polish people and Poland. At the same time, he authorized the Sisters of Nazareth to convey this message "both orally and in writing."

In subsequent broadcasts, quotations from *L’Osservatore Romano* (cf. *Broadcast*, 1941k, June 13; *Broadcast*, 1941n, June 26; *Broadcast*, 1941p, July 11) and *La Civiltà Cattolica* (*Broadcast*, 1941q, July 15) were used, or the focus was on the Universal Church—for example, the situation of the Church in the United States (*Broadcast*, 1941l, June 17), Bolivia (*Broadcast*, 1941m, June 20), Canada (*Broadcast*, 1941m, June 20), France (*Broadcast*, 1941m, June 20; *Broadcast*, 1941q, July 15), Portugal (*Broadcast*, 1941p, July 11), Syria (*Broadcast*, 1941q, July 15), Switzerland (*Broadcast*, 1941r, July 22), Finland (*Broadcast*, 1941s, July 25), Venezuela (*Broadcast*, 1941s, July 25), Mexico (*Broadcast*, 1941s, July 25), and other countries. Ongoing reports covered the activities of the Pope and the Holy See. Regarding the war, the broadcasts highlighted the charitable assistance provided by Pope Pius XII and the Vatican, including aid to Poland and the Polish people (*Broadcast*, 1941o, July 8).

The extent to which communication changed following Cardinal Maglione’s letter to the Jesuit Superior General on 28 April is also evident in internal censorship practices. As seen from the previously cited broadcast transcripts, Vatican Radio in Polish had spoken directly about the unlawful and brutal actions of the Germans and Soviets. However, in the broadcast of 22 July 1941, a poem by Juliusz Słowacki, titled *In Tears, O Lord*, was subjected to censorship. In the margin next to the lines, “Remember what we suffered under the scourge of these powers, yet we did not give up our spirit,” the censor noted regarding the remainder of the poem: “I fear that this second part may give cause for complaints, and at the present moment it is better to follow the safer course (*sequi tutiorem partem*).”

Another instance of editorial intervention occurred in the broadcast of 28 October 1941. The program reported on the construction of churches in Argentina. It included an allusion to the situation in Poland, accompanied by the following commentary: “May God grant that Polish bishops and priests, too, may soon be able to gather freely and deliberate on the reconstruction of Polish churches and on the building of God’s Kingdom in the hearts of their faithful” (*Broadcast*, 1941t, October 28). The censor deleted this passage.

At times, the corrections involved deleting part of a sentence. During the 18 November 1941 broadcast, information was given about the death of Bishop Zygmunt Waitz of Salzburg. As a commentary on his biography, the following words were included: “At the end of his life, he had to witness the decline of more than one ecclesiastical institution, destroyed by a hand hostile to

the Catholic religion.” The section following the comma was removed at the censor’s order.

It should be noted that instances of censorship were relatively rare, as efforts were generally made in the broadcasts to respect the directive expressed in Cardinal Maglione’s letter of 28 April 1941, which was of key importance for the Polish Section of Vatican Radio. It would be significant to compare the transcripts of these broadcasts with those of other sections. A preliminary verification conducted in the Archives of the Dicastery for Communication revealed that the records of broadcasts from other sections have not been preserved. However, some programs from the French Section were transcribed by the French Resistance and delivered to the editorial office. Naturally, these transcriptions do not reflect editorial work or censorship activities but only what was actually broadcast on air. In this context, the transcripts of the Polish Section of Vatican Radio constitute a unique source material of particular value both for Poland and for the history of Vatican Radio as a whole.

Conclusions

The transcripts of broadcasts from the Polish Section of Vatican Radio from 1940–1941 show that listeners were regularly informed about “the ordeal of the Polish nation, so as to document before the world where godless atheism—whether brown or red—leads.” Vatican Radio consistently monitored and denounced the actions of the occupying forces, both in Poland and in other countries. It also reported on unlawful actions by the Germans against their own citizens. At the same time, the broadcasts conveyed information about the Pope’s and the Holy See’s activities and documents, including examples of Pope Pius XII’s assistance to Poland and the Polish people.

At the end of April 1941, a radical shift occurred in the communication strategy of the Polish Section of Vatican Radio, prompted by ethical considerations and concerns for listeners’ safety. It became evident that the uncompromising dissemination of information about the situation in Poland and other countries had provoked strong protests from the occupying authorities. It was observed that as criticism intensified on Vatican Radio’s airwaves, acts of terror against the populations of occupied countries also increased. In this context, through the Secretary of State, Cardinal Luigi Maglione, Pope Pius

XII issued a letter dated 28 April 1941 instructing the temporary suspension of anti-German topics. In response, Father Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, Superior General of the Jesuits, confirmed in a letter dated 30 April 1941 that these restrictions would be implemented. From that point on, the broadcasts avoided current wartime issues in Poland and elsewhere, focusing instead on presenting the activities of the Pope and the Holy See, as well as the life of the Church in other countries.

The surviving transcripts indicate that superiors' censorship occurred occasionally; however, in general, the editors adhered faithfully to their superiors' directives.

Research into the Polish Section of Vatican Radio sheds significant light on Vatican communications during the Second World War.

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