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## Enslavement of the Church in Poland in 1953

### Abstract

The accord entered into by and between representatives of state and Church authorities on April 14th 1950 did not protect the Catholic Church from further repression. On February 9th 1953, the State Council decreed with regard to the filling of ecclesiastical posts in the Church. Through such normative, the state authorities awarded themselves the right to interfere with the human resources aspect of religious creed. A categorical objection (*Non possumus!*) to this policy determined the imprisonment of the Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. The primate's detention offered proper political conditions to engage in this and other campaigns targeting the authority, independence, and identity of the Catholic Church. The clergy's influence on public life was restrained, and the Church was deprived of independence. It might well be assumed that were it not for events of October 1956, the Church in Poland would have been permanently subjugated to the State.

### Keywords

Stefan Wyszyński, Bolesław Bierut, Catholic Church, communist government, anti-Church policy

“I hereby commence a New Year of our Lord at the birthplace of Catholic Poland, St. Adalbert's tomb. [...] I delivered my sermon to a setting of today's missal lesson and a wondrously beautiful introit. I portrayed the fickleness of time in reference to the year departed, and the great unknown of the new and upcoming

one”. Cardinal Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, thus proceeded to describe the beginning of a new year on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1953 – a year which would prove to be one of the thorniest over the span of his entire service as primate.<sup>1</sup>

The accord entered into by and between representatives of state and church authorities on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1950 did not protect the Catholic Church from further repression, albeit it had provided for rights as well as responsibilities of the Church.<sup>2</sup> While postponing some religious policy-related action, the accord was duly used to harass the clergy and place one demand after another upon ecclesiastical hierarchy, until the culmination of the year 1953 and claims the Church could no longer accept as a threat to sovereignty and independence, intended to subjugate the Church to state authority. In the first half of the 1950s, communists introduced Poland to solutions resulting in a temporary enslavement of the Church; yet these very same solutions proved ineffective in the long-term, ultimately resulting in a stronger position of the ideological „enemy”.

## 1. Contradicting the Accord

The accord signed in April 1950 did not prevent repression, in line with the intent and tactics of the authorities. On May 15<sup>th</sup> that year, Bolesław Bierut – acting chairman of the State Council, president of the Republic of Poland, and head of the hegemonic Polish United Workers’ Party at the time – notified Joseph Stalin of the accord entered into with the Catholic Church. In a letter directly addressing the Soviet leader, he explained, or, to be precise, offered justification that the pact had arisen from a tense situation, resulting from “the immense attack we had launched over the previous year, depriving the Catholic Church of multiple positions in the process”. He also pointed to a resonance favouring the authorities: the Church’s accord with the communists sowed doubt among the clergy, even in bishopric circles. Bierut went on to accentuate, “We will use this

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<sup>1</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 2: 1953, ed. E. K. Czaczkowska, Warsaw 2017, published by the Institute for National Remembrance, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> To view the content of the accord, see *Podpisanie porozumienia między przedstawicielami Rządu RP i Episkopatu Polskiego (Accord Signed by and between Representatives of the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Episcopate)*, “Dziennik Polski”, No. 104 (1874), April 16th 1950, pp. 1–2. Document available in digital format at <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=8793&from=FBC> (16.02.2019).

gainful compromise to develop further confrontation, to the end of restricting the Catholic Church's influence across our country".<sup>3</sup>

The largely adopted tactic provided i.a. for religious congregations being deprived of the right to operate schools they had been running, or to have any influence over the upbringing of children and youth. School buildings, boarding houses and dormitories, as well as hospitals and sanatoriums owned by religious orders were all seized. Nuns working as nurses were removed from nationalised institutions. Contrary to provisions of the accord, efforts were made to eliminate religious education from schools.<sup>4</sup> Minor seminaries were closed down in 1952. Catholic press and publications were destroyed. The clergy were forced into political involvement, participation in peace-promoting movement used as a ploy. Factions of so-called patriotic priests were formed, with a membership of clergy loyal to the authorities and critical of actions taken by the Polish Episcopate and Holy See.<sup>5</sup>

In the aforementioned letter to Stalin of May 1950, Bierut emphasised that some bishops attempted to expand their activities, adding that "this, however, is countered by our resolute defiance".<sup>6</sup> Over subsequent years, the authorities organised a number of campaigns directly targeting the clergy. In January 1951, Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, ordinary of Kielce, was arrested; five governors

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<sup>3</sup> A. Kochański, G. P. Muraszko, A. F. Noskowa, A. Paczkowski, K. Persak (selection and compilation), E. Rosowska (translation), *Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich 1949–1953* (*Poland in Documents from Russian Archives 1949–1953*), Warsaw 2000 ("Dokumenty do dziejów PRL" [*Documents Concerning the History of the Polish People's Republic*] series, brochure No. 12), published by the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, pp. 79–80.

<sup>4</sup> By 1952, religious education had been withdrawn from all schools operated by the Children's Friends Society, from 75% of schools located in Western and Northern Polish Territories (Upper Silesia included), and from 25% of the remaining Polish regions; over the course of one year, however, the proportions were greatly altered, if not evened out. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce (1944–1989)* (*The History of the Catholic Church in Poland (1944–1989)*), Warsaw 2003, published by Neriton, Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, p. 117 *et seq.*

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, pp. 130–132. A. Dudek, *Państwo i Kościół w Polsce 1945–1970* (*The State and Church in Poland 1945–1970*), Cracow 1995, published by PiT, p. 27 *et seq.* In December 1951, a convention of the clergy and secular activists (chiefly from the PAX Association) was held in Wrocław to the purpose of criticising action taken by the Polish Episcopate and the Holy See with regard to ecclesiastical administration in so-called Western and Northern Territories. The Vatican proclaimed that permanent bishoprics would be formed once Polish state borders were recognised by West Germany.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kochański, G. P. Muraszko, A. F. Noskowa, A. Paczkowski, K. Persak (selection and compilation), E. Rosowska (translation), *Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich...*, p. 80.

of the apostolic administration were removed from the Western and Northern Territories (from Gdańsk, Olsztyn, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Opole and Wrocław), chapters were forced to elect vicars capitular as their successors.<sup>7</sup> On April 1<sup>st</sup> 1952, Fr. Antoni Słomkowski, the first post-war rector of the Catholic University of Lublin, was detained. Sentenced to three years of imprisonment for alleged foreign currency embezzlement, he had in all actuality been penalised for objecting to a forming a chapter of the Union of Polish Youth (youth organisation disseminating Marxist ideology) at the university. The helm of the Lublin University was taken over by Rev. Professor Józef Iwanicki, a catholic activist associated with the PAX Association, loyal to the establishment.<sup>8</sup> Authorities applied a policy of introducing intra-community diversities to the Catholic University of Lublin.<sup>9</sup>

In May 1952, the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party considered and made a number of decisions to the end of further restraining Catholic Church activities and their impact on the population. Yet given the upcoming autumn elections to the Polish *Sejm*, “no sterner action was taken in this regard”, efforts shifted instead to weaken the influence of “reactionary priests” and foster “patriotic priests”.<sup>10</sup> The machine was set in motion in the wake of October elections. In early November, Bishop Stanisław Adamski, ordinary of the Katowice diocese, was displaced along with suffragan bishops Juliusz

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<sup>7</sup> B. Fijałkowska, *Partia wobec religii i Kościoła w PRL*, (*The Party vs. Religion and the Church in the Polish People's Republic*), vol. 1: 1944–1955, published by the University of Warmia and Mazury, p. 109 *et seq.*; A. Dudek, *Państwo i Kościół...*, pp. 25–26.

<sup>8</sup> In March 1956, after Bolesław Bierut's death, Rev. Rector Iwanicki convoked a special session of the Senate of the Catholic University of Lublin, in the course of which he paid tribute to the communist leader; a message of condolences drafted during the session and dispatched to the government of the Polish People's Republic referenced the death of a “great patriot”. M. Sobieraj, *Między oporem a lojalnością. Działania SB wobec KUL na przykładzie rozpracowania prof. Jerzego Kłoczowskiego* (*Between Resistance and Loyalty. Security Service Actions Targeting the Catholic University of Lublin, Investigation and Invigilation of Professor Jerzy Kłoczowski as Case in Point*), Lublin 2015, published by the Institute for National Remembrance, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła...*, pp. 120–121. Some of the “inconvenient” professor staff were forced to take early retirement, while approvals for independent academic positions were routinely denied. The new rector of the Catholic University of Lublin decided to yield to manifold compromise when faced with demands by the establishment – yet the institution remained “spiritually” independent.

<sup>10</sup> A. Kochański, G. P. Muraszko, A. F. Noskowa, A. Paczkowski, K. Persak (selection and compilation), E. Rosowska (translation), *Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich...*, p. 150.

Bieniek and Herbert Bednorz, as a direct result of a campaign petitioning the restoration of religious education classes to schools. In an atmosphere of terror, efforts were made to talk to priests to, at least, assure their loyalty, after the aforementioned bishops had been driven out.<sup>11</sup> During the following month, Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak and suffragan bishop Stanisław Rospond were detained, then banished from the neighbouring diocese of Cracow, on charges of allowing espionage and illegal foreign currency trading on curia territory.<sup>12</sup> These developments were linked to searches carried out throughout November, and arrests of curialists and persons suspected of working for an espionage network, later tried during the so-called Cracovian Curia Trial in January 1953.<sup>13</sup> The showcase trial was accompanied by a propaganda campaign also targeting Cardinal Stefan Sapieha, an ordinary deceased in July 1951. “The course of the trial itself is hugely convincing [...], and enjoys immense public interest”, and “our Party has been enormously successful”, the head of the Cracovian security service messaged in a cable to the head of the Ministry of Public Security in Warsaw after the third day in court.<sup>14</sup>

An approximate total of two hundred consecrated persons (priests, monks, and nuns) were in detention in the year 1953.<sup>15</sup> Arrests of members of the clergy

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<sup>11</sup> A. Dziurok, *Kruchtoizacja. Polityka władz partyjno-państwowych wobec Kościoła katolickiego w latach 1945–1956 w województwie śląskim/katowickim*, (*Kruchtoizacja. Policies of Party and State Authorities Regarding the Catholic Church in the Years 1945–1956 in the Silesian/Katowice Voivodship*), Katowice 2012, published by the Institute for National Remembrance, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup> See R. Terlecki, *Uwięzienie i powtórne wygnanie ks. arcybiskupa Eugeniusza Baziaka* (*The Imprisonment and Repeated Banishment of Fr. Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak*), in: R. Terlecki (ed.), „Do prześladowania nie daliśmy powodu...” *Materiały z sesji poświęconej procesowi kurii krakowskiej* (“We Gave no Grounds for Persecution...” *Materials from the Session Regarding the Cracovian Curia Trial*), Cracow 2003, published by the Institute for National Remembrance, pp. 159–173.

<sup>13</sup> See F. Musiał, M. Lasota, *Kościół zraniony. Proces księdza Lelity i sprawa kurii krakowskiej* (*A Church Wounded. The Trial of Father Lelita and the Cracovian Curia Case*), Cracow 2003, published by the Institute for National Remembrance.

<sup>14</sup> Cited after: J. Szarek, *Propaganda komunistyczna w czasie tzw. procesu Kurii krakowskiej* (*Communist Propaganda during the so-called Cracovian Curia Trial*), in: R. Terlecki (ed.), „Do prześladowania nie daliśmy powodu...”, p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> B. Noszczak, *Polityka państwa wobec Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego w Polsce w okresie internowania prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego 1953–1956* (*Polish State Policy towards the Roman Catholic Church in Poland during the Period of the Detention of Primate Stefan Wyszyński 1953–1956*), Warsaw 2008, published by the Institute for National Remembrance, p. 345.

on charges of espionage, financial fraud, attempted armed coups, and collaboration with Nazi occupants, accompanied by publicly held trials and embellished with propaganda, were intended to impact the authority of the clergy and restrict their influence over the public, while strengthening the position of patriotic priests submissive to the establishment. This is how ground was prepared for the next stage: that of communist authorities assuming full control of in-house ecclesiastical policies, and depriving the Church of its independence.

## 2. State Proceedings to Fill Ecclesiastical Positions

On February 9<sup>th</sup> 1953, the State Council decreed with regard to the filling of ecclesiastical posts in the Church. Through such normative, the state authorities awarded themselves the right to interfere with the human resources aspect of religious creed. In view of the newly passed regulations, the taking of an ecclesiastical position in the Church – as well as dismissals, and transfers to other posts – required the former consent of relevant state bodies. Furthermore, official approval was also needed for the forming, transformation, and dissolution of said positions, as well as for any change to the scope of responsibilities concerned. In case of diocesan ordinaries and suffragan bishops, the governmental Presidium was recognised as the correct authority of approval – with regard to all other posts, approval of presidiums of competent voivodship (provincial) state councils for the respective territory sufficed. Persons holding ecclesiastical positions in the Church were obliged to take “*an oath of allegiance*” to the Polish People’s Republic at the Authority for Religious Affairs, or to the presidium of a competent voivodship state council for the respective territory. The ordinance further provided for priests suspected “*of activities violating the public law and order, or of supporting or shielding such activities*” to be removed from office. The provision allowed authorities to eliminate irreverent members of the clergy on trivial and occasionally false charges.<sup>16</sup>

Only after three months had passed since the proclamation of the aforementioned normative did the president of the Council of Ministers issue a normative ordinance, executive by name, yet in all actuality – as aptly noted by Bishop

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<sup>16</sup> *Journal of Law* 1953 No. 10 item 32, Ordinance of February 9th 1953 concerning the filling of ecclesiastical posts in the Church.

Tadeusz Pieronek – expanding the scope of the respective law.<sup>17</sup> In the opening words of the ordinance, the prime minister justified its intent, namely that all persons of the cloth in ecclesiastical positions “discharge their duties in conformity to the principles and requirements of the Constitution of the Polish People’s Republic” of July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1952. In reality, as indirectly confirmed by subsequent sentences herein, the purpose of the law was to promote so-called patriotic priests – clergy loyal to the establishment – and to marginalise priests who followed guidelines proclaimed by the Primate and Episcopate, defended the rights of the Church and persons of the catholic faith, and supported opposition circles.<sup>18</sup> The ordinance laid out a sample questionnaire which had to be submitted on demand by respective authorities, jointly with a *curriculum vitae*, by members of the clergy in ecclesiastical positions. Disclosure requirements included i.a. military service records, decorations awarded, and membership in public and political organisations (by date: pre-1939, under Nazi occupation, and upon liberation), as a clear indication of political and ideological criteria of assessing the general views and attitudes of the clergy.<sup>19</sup>

A sample oath was further attached to the ordinance. The pledge contained within referenced loyalty to the state system and authority, efforts to develop “People’s” Poland, and, in all actuality, to foster the communist system across the society. The following declaration was demanded of diocesan and suffragan bishops: “I hereby solemnly pledge allegiance to the Polish People’s Republic and Her Government. I do promise to take any action required to develop the Polish People’s Republic, and fortify Her power and security. I shall make any and every effort indispensable for my subordinate clergy – in conformity to their civic responsibility – to continue appealing to their respective congregations to show due respect for state law and authority, intensify work to expand the national economy, and improve the prosperity of the Nation. I do promise not to take any measure potentially contradicting interests of the Polish People’s

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<sup>17</sup> T. Pieronek, „*Non possumus*”. *Linia obrony biskupów polskich przed skutkami dekretu „O obsadzaniu stanowisk kościelnych z 9 II 1953 (‘Non Possumus’)*. *The Line of Defence of Polish Bishops against the Outcomes of the Ordinance ‘On Filling Ecclesiastical Posts in the Church’*, in: R. Terlecki (ed.), „*Do prześladowania nie daliśmy powodu...*”, pp. 55–56.

<sup>18</sup> See *Polish Monitor* 1953, No. A-43, item 522, Ordinance No. 61 of the President of the Council of Ministers of May 5th 1953 regarding the enforcement of the ordinance concerning the filling of ecclesiastical posts in the Church, I. General Provisions, §1.

<sup>19</sup> See *ibidem*, Attachment No. 1 – Questionnaire for persons in ecclesiastical positions in the Church.

Republic, or affecting the security or integrity of Her borders. Striving to secure the State's interest and welfare, I shall make every effort to avert any endangerment I am made aware of".<sup>20</sup>

The oath to be taken by other clergy in ecclesiastical posts, while slightly differing in mid-section, expressed the intent behind the bishops' pledge, but with regard to congregations the clergy were in service to. Priests in ecclesiastical positions were obliged to declare that they would plea "for respect for state law and authority, intensified work to expand the national economy, and improved prosperity of the Nation".<sup>21</sup>

The ordinance concerning the filling of ecclesiastical posts in the Church was to serve as a legal justification of communist efforts to control staffing policies of the Church, and impact system-related matters. A demand tabled by authorities in 1952 was a distinct sign of the law having been usurped. In conversations with Cardinal Wyszyński, authorities required that a single candidate only be put forward for each of the vacancies in Cracow and Włocławek. As three candidates were to be nominated for each position under ecclesiastical rules, the primate questioned the claim, recognising it as an attempt to appoint staff and restrain papal jurisdiction.<sup>22</sup>

### **3. *Non possumus* of the Polish Episcopate**

The ordinance of February 9<sup>th</sup> 1953 was unacceptable to the Polish Episcopate. Bishops could not accept atheist secular authorities – hostile towards the Church and religion at that – as arbitrary decision-makers in the staffing of parish or diocesan leadership. On February 16<sup>th</sup>, Episcopal Secretary Bishop Zygmunt Choromański filed a protest with Antoni Bida, the governmental minister responsible for affairs of religion and creed. The bishop accentuated that the normative contradicted the state-Church accord of the previous two years, the ordinance on freedom of conscience, and the constitution – statutory solutions the authorities had so frequently referenced when admonishing the clergy for their actions.<sup>23</sup> One day later, a similar position was taken by the primate

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<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, Attachment No. 2 – *The Oath*.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, Attachment No. 3 – *The Oath*.

<sup>22</sup> T. Pieronek, "*Non possumus*"..., p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 49.



in conversation with deputy speaker Franciszek Mazur. Cardinal Wyszyński took notes after the meeting: “Mr. Mazur explained that the ordinance carried no malicious intention [...]. Following it would not be disruptive to the Church, as it were”. The primate did not trust these assurances, thus commenting on the deputy speaker’s words: “Mr. M[azur] presented his case with no enthusiasm or real conviction”.<sup>24</sup>

As reported by Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, the Episcopate engaged in legal debate with the government, attempting to limit the circle of positions potentially affected by the ordinance to the bare minimum by interpreting and defining the concepts and norms of canon law. The governmental party followed their own and different interpretation, rejecting all Episcopal postulates. Already during the first month after ordinance enactment, ordinaries were summoned and presented with lists of priests to be removed from office (effective immediately, or no later than within a term of three to five days), with no justification, charges, or appeal or defence options. In violation of the Constitution, the primate was also refused the right to appeal against the ordinance.<sup>25</sup> The proclamation of executive provisions was delayed, all related Episcopal requests summarily ignored. One month after the enactment of the normative act, the ecclesiastical party declared that state authorities were interpreting the letter of law arbitrarily, or even applying practices not provided for in the document. A pledge of allegiance to the Polish People’s Republic was demanded from persons already holding ecclesiastical posts, whereas the statutory obligation had been only intended for priests newly taking position. Furthermore, the content of the pledge extended beyond the framework of the ordinance.<sup>26</sup>

Communist authorities usurped the right to interfere with ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Any attempt to take possession of the said space gave rise to the hazard of losing independence, or even identity. Bishops referred to the ordinance as “an assault on the organisational freedom of the Church”. They further accentuated that while according to the Gospel, the Catholic Church in Poland shall “render

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<sup>24</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 2: 1953, ed. E. K. Czaczkowska, Warsaw 2017, published by the Institute for National Remembrance, p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> For more information, see: Bishop T. Pieronek, “*Non possumus*”..., pp. 51–53.

<sup>26</sup> Letter of the Episcopal Secretary to the Government with regard to the priests’ pledge of allegiance to the Polish People’s Republic, Warsaw, April 20th 1953, in: P. Raina, *Kościół katolicki a państwo w świetle dokumentów 1945–1989 (The Catholic Church vs. the State in Light of Documents)*, vol.1: 1945–1959, Poznań 1994 (“*Kościół w PRL*” (*The Church in the Polish People’s Republic*) series), published by *W drodze*, pp. 405–406.

unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's", it cannot remain silent when the "*Caesar*" (that is, the authorities) reaches for things that are God's, systematically appropriating rights undue to him.<sup>27</sup> The Plenary Episcopal Conference of May 8<sup>th</sup> 1953 addressed the government with a memorandum describing the circumstances of the Church. Bishops pointed to acts of persecution experienced by ecclesiastical institutions and persons over the preceding three-year period, the accord in force notwithstanding, and – primarily – took position with regard to the ordinance passed in February. They categorically rejected all demands contained therein as unlawful and exceeding any acceptable boundaries of compromise. They further declared that should authorities obstruct the staffing process, bishops would rather not fill vacant positions than allow them to be assumed by unworthy individuals who "had let themselves be used as tools of diversion within the Church". Bishops defended rights constituting the very essence of the Church. "We cannot render things that are God's unto Caesar's altars. *Non possumus!*", read one of the final sentences in the memorandum – a sentence which duly became a symbol for the protest, and for the resulting events. Primate Cardinal Wyszyński and Episcopal Secretary Bishop Choromański signed the memorandum on behalf and in the name of all bishops.<sup>28</sup>

Over the period of September 14<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 1953, Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek was tried before the District Military Tribunal of Warsaw, following indictment on charges of espionage for the Vatican and the US, of attempts at overthrowing the system of the Polish People's Republic by force, and of inciting warfare. The bishop was joined by other defendants: three priests from Kielce (Frs. Jan Danilewicz, Józef Dąbrowski, Władysław Widłak), and a nun (Servant Sister Syksta Waleria Niklewska). They were not the only persons indicted and sentenced for alleged "*anti-state and anti-national*" collaboration with the ordinary of Kielce. The years 1952–1955 saw the so-called ricochet trials tying in with the case of Bishop Kaczmarek, resulting in the sentencing of ecclesiastical as well as of secular defendants.<sup>29</sup> Towards late May 1953, Bierut as prime minister of the Polish government sought advice with the Soviet government – via Arkadyi

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<sup>27</sup> *Non possumus*. Memorandum of the Polish Episcopate Addressing the Council of Ministers, Cracow, May 8th 1953, in: P. Raina, *Kościół katolicki...*, p. 418.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 426–427.

<sup>29</sup> For more related information and on the *status quo* of research, see T. Domański, D. Kozieł (compilation), *Wokół procesu biskupa kieleckiego Czesława Kaczmarka. Wspomnienia nazaretanki s. Izabelli Machowskiej (On the Trial of the Bishop of Kielce Czesław Kaczmarek.*

Sobolev, ambassador of the USSR to Warsaw – as to the “*purpose and timeliness*” of holding a public trial for Bishop Kaczmarek. Bierut feared adverse international repercussions of a trial unprecedented in that never before had the defendant been a bishop. Arguing in favour of a public trial, he declared that it would indubitably “help expose actions of the reactory management of the Catholic clergy in the eyes of Polish believers”.<sup>30</sup>

In the course of proceedings involving the Bishop of Kielce, Fr. Karol Wojtyła, soon to become the ordinary of Cracow, reportedly said, “The machine is operating flawlessly and attacking consciously, using even the most objective of our utterances to its own purpose. [...] Any unconsidered action eventually takes its toll on those who fail to remember the circumstances we live and operate under. The screw is slowly tightening, the battle progressively exacerbating”.<sup>31</sup> Bishop Kaczmarek’s trial was the finale in a string of showcase proceedings targeting the Church, inaugurated in January 1951 with the so-called Wolbrom Trial, the list of defendants including i.a. the parish priest of Wolbrom Fr. Piotr Oborski, and his vicar Fr. Zbigniew Gadomski, both charged with collaboration with the covert Underground Army, and as Accomplices to manslaughter.<sup>32</sup> Bishop Kaczmarek’s trial was broadly publicised, as had been the Cracovian Curia Trial. The *Książka i Wiedza* publishing house printed transcripts of both trials that same year, making them public.<sup>33</sup> The primate believed that while the public

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*Memoirs of Sister of the Holy Family of Nazareth Izabella Machowska*, Kielce 2013, published by *Jedność*, Institute for National Remembrance, pp. 7–86.

<sup>30</sup> A. Kochański, G. P. Muraszko, A. F. Noskova, A. Paczkowski, K. Persak (selection and compilation), E. Rosowska (translation), *Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich...*, p. 165.

<sup>31</sup> J. Marecki, F. Musiał (ed.), J. Marecki, M. Lasota, R. Szczęch, *Ku prawdzie i wolności. Komunistyczna bezpieka wobec kard. Karola Wojtyły (Towards Truth and Freedom. The Communist Security Service vs. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła)*, Cracow 2009, published by the Institute for National Remembrance, WAM, p. 56.

<sup>32</sup> See D. Pasich, *Działalność Armii Podziemnej w Wolbromiu (Operations of the Underground Army in Wolbrom)*, in: Ł. Kamiński, G. Wołek (ed.), *Zimowa Szkoła Historii Najnowszej 2012 (Winter School of Contemporary History)*, Warsaw 2012 (the „*Zimowa Szkoła Historii Najnowszej*” series, vol. 1), published by the Institute for National Remembrance, pp. 36–47; R. Gryz, *Oborski Piotr (1907–1952)*, in: J. Myszor (ed.), *Leksykon duchowieństwa represjonowanego w PRL w latach 1945–1989 (Lexicon of Clergy Persecuted in the Polish People’s Republic in the Years 1945–1989)*, vol. 1, Warsaw 2002, published by *Verbinum*, pp. 205–206; *idem*, *Gadomski Zbigniew (1921–1993)*, in: *ibidem*, pp. 58–59.

<sup>33</sup> See *Proces księdza Lelity i innych agentów wywiadu amerykańskiego. Stenogram procesu odbytego przed Rejonowym Sądem Wojskowym w dniach 21 I – 26 I 1953 r. (Trial of Father Lelita and of other American Intelligence Agents. Transcript of the Trial before the District Military*

generally approached charges faced by bishop Kaczmarek with mistrust,<sup>34</sup> the case did not remain without impact on the public standing of other bishops. The primate had an inkling that “more would have to happen for the Episcopate of Poland to preserve moral authority”.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. A Church Weakened and Enslaved

Several days after the close of the Kielce ordinary’s trial, on September 25th 1953, in a staged climate of anti-ecclesiastical propaganda, the authorities apprehended and detained Cardinal Wyszyński. The uncompromising objection (*Non possumus!*) to attempts to subject the Church to state authorities sealed the primate’s fate. The primate’s secretary Bishop Antoni Baraniak found himself in an identical predicament in the early hours of the following morning. Such were the final cases of detaining senior members of the clergy with attitudes perceived by authorities as hazardous to effects of taking political action against the Church. While communists were planning to hold a showcase trial against Cardinal Wyszyński – in semblance to proceedings against Bishop Kaczmarek – the idea was not followed through. The primate believed he owed such an outcome to the martyr’s stance assumed by Bishop Baraniak. Authorities also withdrew from proceedings against the primate’s secretary, for reasons of insufficient evidence.<sup>36</sup>

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*Tribunal, January 21st – January 26th 1953*), Warsaw 1953, published by *Książka i Wiedza*; *Proces księdza biskupa Kaczmarka i innych członków ośrodka antypaństwowego i antyludowego. Stenogram procesu odbytego przed Wojskowym Sądem Rejonowym w Warszawie w dniach 14 IX – 21 IX 1953 r. (Trial of Bishop Kaczmarek and other Members of Anti-State and Anti-National Circles. Transcript of the Trial before the District Military Tribunal in Warsaw, September 14th – September 21st 1953)*, Warsaw 1953, published by *Książka i Wiedza*.

<sup>34</sup> According to some accounts, chemical substances were administered to defendants, making them testify in line with judicial expectations, and confess to deeds they had not committed. People would switch their radios off during court broadcasts, and wear black as if in mourning. Ł. Kamiński, *Spółeczeństwo polskie wobec konfliktu Państwo – Kościół w latach 1944–1956 (Reactions of the Polish Society to the State vs. Church Conflict of the Years 1944–1956)*, in: Kawecki, K. Kowalczyk, A. Kubaj (ed.), *Spółeczeństwo – Państwo – Kościół (1945–2000). Materiały z ogólnopolskiej konferencji naukowej, Szczecin 15–16 VI 2000 r., (Society – State – Church (1945–2000). National Scientific Conference Follow-up Materials, Szczecin, June 15th–16th 2000)*, Szczecin 2000, published by *Zachodniopomorskie*, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 3: 1953–1956, ed. I Czarczińska, fr. A. Gałka, Warsaw 2018, published by the Institute for National Remembrance, pp. 26–27.

<sup>36</sup> B. Noszczak, *Polityka państwa...*, p. 68.

The official decision may have also been affected by the overall mood across the public and among the clergy. The very fact of the most senior members of the clergy having been detained gave rise to terror and a sense of intimidation. The afore-quoted Fr. Wojtyła reportedly declared, "I am prepared for the worst, not least because multiple priests have openly been showing an inclination to adopt the State concept and co-operate with the Government. I do believe the struggle is slowly entering a new stage".<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in the wake of Bishop Kaczmarek's trial and the primate's detention, the establishment organised a major anti-ecclesiastical propaganda campaign in the autumn of 1953.<sup>38</sup> Their mission was duly accomplished: the clergy's influence on public life was restrained, any objections against the anti-Church religious policies duly suppressed.

At the time of the primate's detention, ten out of the twenty-five dioceses and apostolic administrations were deprived of lawful governance, thirteen members of the Polish Episcopal Conference subject to a variety of limitations.<sup>39</sup> It goes without saying that the detention of Cardinal Wyszyński ultimately weakened the Church, allowing authorities to interfere with the process of staffing ecclesiastical positions. Blackmailed with threats of further arrests, bishops yielded to official demands (appointing Bishop Michał Klepacz chairman of the Polish Episcopal Conference; publishing communication of appeasement and submissiveness to the establishment after the primate had been apprehended; and pledging "*allegiance*" to the Polish People's Republic and the government). To quote Jan Żaryn, "The time of the most profound politicising of the Church had come".<sup>40</sup>

The authorities were ruthless in enforcing the ordinance of February 9<sup>th</sup> 1953, often as not in violation of the letter of the referenced law. Irreverent priests were removed, ecclesiastical jurisdiction brutally interfered with. In 1954, a campaign of displacing priests, monks, and nuns was duly carried out. Not only were indigenous inhabitants and clergy suspected of revisionism deprived of their dwellings: sisters included in operation "X-2" were detained in centres in all

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<sup>37</sup> J. Marecki, F. Musiał (ed.), J. Marecki, M. Lasota, R. Szczęch, *Ku prawdzie i wolności...*, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> For more on the subject, see B. Noszczak, *Polityka państwa...*, pp. 110–123.

<sup>39</sup> See J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła...*, pp. 146–147.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151 *et seq.*

actuality serving as labour camps.<sup>41</sup> Action to the purpose had been considered at least as early as 1952, as confirmed by a memo from the journal of Arkadyi Sobolev, ambassador of the USSR to Warsaw.<sup>42</sup> The primate's detention offered proper political conditions to engage in this and other campaigns targeting the authority, independence, and the identity of the Catholic Church. It might well be assumed that were it not for events of October 1956, the Church in Poland would have been permanently subjugated to the State.

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While Catholic bishops agreed to concede to the establishment of communist Poland, such concessions did not endanger the identity of the Church itself. The ordinance of February 9<sup>th</sup> 1953 regarding the filling and dissolution of ecclesiastical posts resolved by the State Council was unacceptable; this is why the primate saw the final days of 1953 – the year he had opened in Gniezno, at the cradle of Polish Catholicism – in Stoczek near Lidzbark Warmiński, in solitude, far away from his home and congregation. In recapitulating his work and events of previous months, he wrote, “I have a profound sense of harm done to me by the government. I feel particularly injured by Mr. Mazur, who was aware of my guileless efforts to bring peace to the process of establishing proper arrangements between the Church and government. I bear no grievance against pres[ident] Bierut, albeit I do believe that he had failed to discharge his duty of defending a citizen deprived of his freedom in violation of the law. Nonetheless, I harbour no unfriendly feelings towards any of these people. I would have found myself incapable of causing them even the most minuscule of hurts. [...] Sic volo! And with such feeling, I can now close the year, which is breathing its last this day”.<sup>43</sup>

While the 1953 events weakened the Church, they also proved disadvantageous to the authorities and their policy in the long-term. The primate referred to his detainment as “*violence*” on behalf of the government, yet serving the purpose “of the Polish Episcopate preserving its moral authority” which had

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<sup>41</sup> See A. Mirek, *Siostry zakonne w obozach pracy w PRL w latach 1954–1956 (Sisters of Religious Orders in Labour Camps in the Polish People's Republic in the Years 1954–1956)*, Lublin 2009, published by the Catholic University of Lublin, pp. 190–250.

<sup>42</sup> See A. Kochański, G. P. Muraszko, A. F. Noskowa, A. Paczkowski, K. Persak (selection and compilation), E. Rosowska (translation), *Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich...*, p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 3..., p. 46.

been jeopardised i.a. in all the showcase court trials. He proceeded to explain, “From the vantage point of the «political *raison d'état*», the government could not have committed a greater mistake than consenting to the rapid succession of two facts transpiring: Bishop Kaczmarek's trial, and my imprisonment – the combination of the two is hugely meaningful”.<sup>44</sup> The primate's detainment and the martyrdom of the clergy yielded an outcome counterproductive to that which had been intended. Friedrich Engels' notion of “persecution being the best way of activating unpopular beliefs” was duly confirmed in reality.<sup>45</sup> Nearly one year after Cardinal Wyszyński's release and the once-banished bishops' return to their dioceses, party circles began criticising the effects of action taken against the Church. That and similar declarations were made: “It goes without saying that we suffered losses in our policies of religion and creed, having encountered a number of obstacles. The authority of the Catholic Church is on the rise, including that of her bishops, Cardinal Wyszyński leading them all”.<sup>46</sup>

Fr. Wojtyła proved to be a prophet in having uttered the following during times of 1953 repressions: “The screw is slowly tightening, the battle progressively exacerbating; the outcome is known well in advance, ours the only victory imaginable”.<sup>47</sup> The primate regained his freedom on October 28<sup>th</sup> 1956, in the wake of political changes across Poland. Ironically, he was the one dictating conditions of his return to Warsaw. The authorities agreed to a number of concessions to the Church, i.a. by repealing the ordinance of February 9<sup>th</sup> 1953 and passing a new one on the organising and filling ecclesiastical positions – yet it swiftly transpired that the move was purely opportunistic, a short-lived period of warming up to the Church, which duly passed with the so-called political thaw.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, pp. 26–27.

<sup>45</sup> F. Engels, *Literatura emigracyjna (Emigration Literature)*, in: *Dzieła Marksa i Engelsa (The Writings of Marx and Engels)*, vol. 17, Warsaw 1968, published by *Książka i Wiedza*, pp. 589–590.

<sup>46</sup> State Archive in Katowice, Voivodship Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. Executive committee sessions, File No. 301/IV/298, minutes No. 19 of September 21st 1957, *Information on Activities of the Clergy on the Territory of the Katowice Voivodship and on Prevention Measures*, undated, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> J. Marecki, F. Musiał (ed.), J. Marecki, M. Lasota, R. Szczęch, *Ku prawdzie i wolności...*, p. 56.

<sup>48</sup> See Ł. Marek, *Priorytety polityki wyznaniowej władz w okresie Gomułki (Official Religious Policy Priorities in Gomułka's Times)*, “*Glaukopis*” 33 (2016), pp. 254–284.

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