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***“We should continue this dialogue...”.***  
***Operational interviews between Polish***  
***Security Service and Rev. Henryk Gulbinowicz***  
***from 1969 to 1985. Case study.***  
**With the introduction and discussion**  
**written by Rafał Łatka, Filip Musiał,**  
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On the 16th of November 2020 Card. Henryk Gulbinowicz, metropolitan bishop emeritus of Wrocław Diocese, who is remembered as a priest supporting the anti-communist opposition in the 1980s, who significantly influenced the life of the Polish Catholic Church, and was distinguished by a number of orders for his merits including The Order of White Eagle,<sup>1</sup> passed away in Wrocław. In the last years of his life the accusations of committing wrongdoings and causing sex scandals, alongside with the issues of ambiguous contacts with the agents of the communist secret police (Security Service) cast a shadow on the public reputation of this hierarch. Shortly before his death the Apostolic Nunciature in Poland, in a special press release, informed the public about disciplinary measures undertaken against the hierarch by the Holy See, which were the outcome of “the investigation concerning the accusations” and the analysis of “other allegations

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<sup>1</sup> See: decision of the president of Poland as of 17 October 2008 on honoring the cardinal with the order.

concerning the Cardinal's past."<sup>2</sup> The severe punishments for the Wrocław metropolitan emeritus and other charges in the media concerning his "collaboration with Security Service" and "benefiting from that (including the nomination to the post of Archbishop of Wrocław)" aroused widespread opposition among the former political opposition activists which was expressed in an open letter to the Apostolic Nuncio in Poland, the Primate of Poland, the President of the Conference of Poland's Episcopate and the metropolitan of Wrocław.<sup>3</sup>

The death of Card. Gulbinowicz and the surrounding events mentioned above coincided with the release of the book authored by two historians from the Institute of National Remembrance – Rafał Łatka and Filip Musiał – which contained and reviewed the source documents related to the controversial contacts of the priest of Wrocław and Security Service agents. The publication, which is the subject of this review and which has been released by the Institute of National Remembrance, is an important and necessary addendum to the biography of this undoubtedly merited hierarch, though his image lacked the features neglected so far, including his dialogue with the agents of the communist machine of repression. This research release which now may reach the readers, has filled in missing facts about him. The reasons for initiating this area of research are unquestionable because, as the authors commented: "The mentioned contacts have not been addressed in the research literature. Also, the fact that archbishop Gulbinowicz was recognised as the operational contact by the agents of the Security Service, has been neglected. Therefore there is an urgent need for a detailed representation of those issues and for providing critical and verified knowledge about them" (p. 13). The contributors undertook a difficult issue, but of urgent public concern in view of media debates which revealed the need for a reliable analysis of those historical sources.

The publication developed by Łatka and Musiał consists of two parts: an extensive discussion of conversations of Rev. Gulbinowicz with agents of the Security Service shown against the background of Security Service operational methods and the critical edition of the historical sources. This book shows the operational dialogue of the priest and the agents of Department IV of the Ministry of Interior Affairs (which was the main anti-Church unit active within

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<sup>2</sup> The press release on Card. Henryk Gulbinowicz, Warszawa, 6 November 2016, see: <https://nuncjatura.pl/2020/11/06/komunikat-dotyczacy-kard-henryka-gulbinowicza/> (16.02.2021).

<sup>3</sup> Open letter, November 2021, signed by Władysław Frasyniuk on behalf of 51 signatories, see: [https://ocdn.eu/dziennik/g.infor.pl/p/\\_files/28617000/1-gulbinowicz-28616540.pdf](https://ocdn.eu/dziennik/g.infor.pl/p/_files/28617000/1-gulbinowicz-28616540.pdf) (16.02.2021).

the structures of the Security Service) which started from the end of 1969 and closed in October 1985. The encounters with Rev. Gulbinowicz were initiated when he was the Rector of the Theological Seminary of Olsztyn. After a few interviews in January 1970, he was registered as a candidate for an undercover agent by Division I of the Department IV of the Ministry of Interior Affairs (the unit of the central division for confession matters of the Security Service which dealt with the surveillance of the lay priesthood, and leadership of the Catholic Church). This registration coincided with the appointment of Rev. Gulbinowicz for the position of the apostolic administrator in Białystok. Six years later – a few months after he assumed the position of the metropolitan of Wrocław – he was re-registered as the contact of Vice-Director of the Department IV. In turn, in June 1985, that is several months after his being appointed cardinal – he was again registered as the contact of the Division II of the Department IV (before the re-organisation in 1984 it was the Department I). In December 1986 his files were archived.

In the Ministry operating records kept from January 1970 up to the closing of the interviews, the priest was shown as a candidate for undercover agent. Such was his formal status. However, in the reports from the encounters he was mentioned twice as the operational contact in 1983 and 1985 (see pp. 15, 211, 216), and additionally he was described as a confidential contact in 1983 (see pp. 15, 209). According to the contributors "Most frequently the interviews with him were described as operational interviews, simply oral conversations and/or encounters, which confirms that this contact was recognised as the operational dialogue" (p. 13). The fact that the agents of the Security Service conducted interviews with Rev./Bishop/Archbishop/Cardinal Gulbinowicz is self-evident. But the assessment of those conversations and the attitude of the hierarch as well as the terms used to describe the priest as: operational contact and confidential contact, may cause misinterpretations. Those terms define the category of personal sources of information in the Ministry of Security, but also the method of the operational work whose objective was to obtain information, influencing the attitude of the interlocutor and influencing his *milieu* (see below).

The appropriate analysis and evaluation of the interviews with the agents of the secret police should be supported by the knowledge of the procedures and methods of operations which were used by the Security Service. In the first part of this publication the contributors showed theoretical issues related to personal source of information, and the operational interviews in the light of ministerial instructions and the practice of operational work. Also, they

outlined the procedures related to the selection and gathering of information on the candidates for undercover agents and the methods of recruitment. They explained the terms used by the Security Service which played a key role for the interpretation of the discussed issue. They quoted the Security Service standards of procedures which showed that the operational interviews were one of the methods of offensive operations allowing the gathering of information and/or success in political manipulation (including inspirations and disinformation), and also affecting the interlocutor by means of propaganda rhetoric and gentling him with the agents as well as neutralising the activities of specified persons and their milieus. This type of cycle of interviews were defined by the term operational dialogue which was used for the purpose of obtaining information, inspiring specific behaviours and influencing the views of appropriate persons while affecting their *milieus* in the manner desired by the authorities. In this meaning the concept “operational contact” was used in the dialogues of Archbishop Gulbinowicz with the ministry staff. In the operational dialogues the agents used the tactics as if they possessed limitless knowledge (they attempted to instil the conviction that they knew everything about the interlocutor) and affecting their feelings (arousing friendliness with respect to the Security Service staff). Also, the above-mentioned factors were crucial in the dialogues with the hierarch.

The contributors not only discussed the historical documents which may be recognised as “sensational,” but they reviewed the lifetime of the main protagonist and the political and historical background where he lived. They showed the dialogues of Rev./Bishop/Archbishop/Cardinal Gulbinowicz and the Security Service agents in a wider context and dimension. They outlined the pastoral ministry of the hierarch and the Security Service operations against him. They sketched his surveillance initiated in the ‘1950s (from the time of his studies at the Catholic University of Lublin). Also, they mentioned the priest’s early criticism of the political power and the persecution of the Catholic Church in Poland alongside his favourable approach towards the local state confession administration and its officer in the times when he took the position of the Rector of the Theological Seminary of Olsztyn. The hierarch clearly declared his views on political power. His position was to support the legal aspect of the life of the Catholic Church and establish relations with the authorities in the dialogue. His stance changed at the beginning of ‘1980s. He was a supporter of the “Solidarity Trade Union in the times when it operated legally (1980–1981) and later on in the martial law period. He approved of the penetration of trade

union activists and other forms of political elements into the pastoral ministry of labourers. He helped the democratic opposition activists which led to an increased surveillance by the Security Service. A dramatic event took place in May 1984 when “unidentified offenders” (agents from the department of the Security Service which was responsible for so-called special operations) set Archbishop Gulbinowicz’s car on fire while he was visiting the parish in Złotoryja. In views of the Security Service held in late ‘80s invoked by the historians (p. 12), public speeches of the hierarch contained “social and political elements.” Then, he was included in the group of bishops who supported “a tough political line with regard to the state authorities”.

In the late 1960s, while Rev. Gulbinowicz occupied the position of Rector of the Theological Seminary, he was perceived by the security agency as a person with critical views on the reality of the Polish People’s Republic and the communist system. The branch of the Security Service of Olsztyn attempted to undermine his reputation in the priesthood *milieu*. For this reason, they issued a passport for him despite the earlier refusal, and then they spread an anonymous letter containing suggestions that the authorities’ approval was the outcome of his contacts with “a specific institution.” Rev. Edward Pietkiewicz, a friend of Rev. Gulbinowicz and undercover agent of the Security Service, using a pseudonym “Orion,” played a major role in this action. Under his influence and by the inspiration of the Security Service Rev. Gulbinowicz allegedly led to the dismissal of two lecturers from the Theological Seminary, and impelled a seminary student to withdraw from studies. Later on, he succumbed to his friend’s persuasion regarding the dialogues with the Security Service agent. Those actions prepared the way for further steps and encouraged lieutenant colonel Józef Maj from the Department IV of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to initiate the dialogue with the priest because of the rumours about his bishophood nomination. This agent initiated the contact with Rev. Gulbinowicz which was the beginning of 16-year operational dialogues aiming at obtaining his consent for undercover collaboration and/or at least his loyalty towards the Polish People’s Republic and obtaining essential information.

The Security Service agents described Rev. Gulbinowicz as a person devoted to the Catholic Church, but inclined to enter into the dialogue and ambitious. He was also described as someone who interested in obtaining the bishop anointment. Surely, those features allowed the initiation of the dialogue with the priest. During the first interview the priest expressed his intention to sustain contacts with the agent of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and he repeated this

declaration in the following years. Most likely this consent of Rev. Gulbinowicz was due to his intention to avoid conflicts with the provincial authorities, since he was the person who would be ruling the diocese and later on actually in charge of it. It is also likely that it was due to his willingness to use this contact to help fix the Church's matters which were blocked by state administration, especially with reference to the construction of sacral buildings. Here, we need to refer to the fact that the security department was in possession of reports containing information about Rev. Gulbinowicz's moral misconduct in the period of his pastoral ministry in Białystok and Olsztyn. However, nothing shows that the reasons behind the decision to start the dialogue were motivated by his fears of disclosing them. The preserved archives reveal that those aspects were not discussed during the meetings, and as the contributors justifiably stated "today it is difficult to assess if they were in the background as a potential threat" "or – if so, then to what extent – [did they] influence the stance of the priest" (p. 28).

During those sixteen years the dialogue with Reverend/Bishop/Archbishop/Cardinal Gulbinowicz was led by three agents at the central level of the Security Service: Józef Maj, Konrad Straszewski, Czesław Wiejak, and one at the provincial level, Czesław Błażejewski. The priest's stance was similar to that presented to the authorities. He was co-operative, moderate, and he showed care for good relations between the Church and the state. This was due to the legalistic stance mentioned above, to fix all matters of the diocese, and requiring the authorities' consent in the dialogues and mutual consultations, and to avoid illegal steps (e.g. illegal sacral building). It seems that Rev. Gulbinowicz was convinced that dialogues with the Security Service would be useful for the relations between the state and the Church which, in fact, was a method of operational tools used by the security agents to assure priests' favour for the contacts with the secret police. Yet, during the first interview with Maj he made an effort to gain profit for the Catholic Church by requesting assistance in obtaining the consent of the authorities for the extension works and restoration of the library and archives (p. 112).

The attitude of Bishop Gulbinowicz shown in the interviews with Maj, which were conducted till his appointment as the metropolitan of Wrocław, arouses at least puzzlement. The hierarch *inter alia* made critical remarks about his predecessors on the position of apostolic administrator in Białystok, namely the Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and the Bishop of Przemyśl Ignacy Tokarczuk. His declared attitude on the issues was in line with the authorities, but in reality, it was totally different or significantly less supportive than it was recorded in the

agent's accounts. Rev. Gulbinowicz informed them extensively about his plans and issues mainly related to the works of construction on religious buildings. However, he did not disclose any concrete information concerning the activities which the Catholic Church was planning, e.g. he did not reveal any information about the course of meetings of the Polish Episcopate. On the grounds of the analysis of the Bishop's positions in all dialogues, the contributors drew a conclusion which, in my opinion, is correct, that: "Those statements should be interpreted as components of his tactics which he assumed for the interviews with the Security Service. They show that the hierarch was convinced that if he played along with the communist regime this could allow him to achieve important goals, above all concessions for sacred buildings. However, it was not less important for him to create his image of a person inclined to dialogue and compromise, and to abiding by the rules imposed by the communist state which in the future could assure him the favour of the communist regime and further career in the Catholic Church" (p. 37). Additionally, later on, he proved to be the most compromising and convenient candidate for the authorities to have in the position of the Metropolitan of Wrocław. The Security Service recommendation could contribute to the approval of his nomination by the authorities.

Rev. Gulbinowicz shared his views on the first interview with his friend, the secret collaborator, "Orion," who convinced him to continue the dialogues with the security agents. Later on, he cared for the discretion and confidentiality of those encounters, and only in rare occasions did other persons witness them. He kept his contacts with the security agents in secrecy before his milieu, Primate Cardinal Stefanem Wyszyński and the Polish Episcopate members, because he was aware that they could be interpreted as encounters of espionage. He did not accept any gifts which were offered with the camouflage of friendship by the agents. Such gifts were *de facto* the element of building emotional relationships with the department, and personal kindness to the secret agent. After the nomination for the position of the Metropolitan of Wrocław, the hierarch's behaviour could be seen as attempts to avoid the contacts because they were more and more troublesome. In the years 1976–1985 the meetings were rare. The conversations became more tense after 1983, due to storing of financial means belonging to the Lower Silesia branch of the "Solidarity" by the hierarch, and a radical change of the hierarch's behaviour followed the murder of Rev. Jerzy Popiełuszko by the agents of Department IV of the Ministry of Interior Affairs in October 1984. Even lieutenant colonel Maj, who was specially sent to Wrocław, did not succeed in overcoming the resistance of Cardinal Gulbinowicz, though they had

a good rapport. After the encounter, the agent recorded that the priest “wishes to avoid further operational contacts, because they seem treacherous” (p. 222).

The contributors’ conclusions are fully justified when they wrote that from the very beginning “Rev. Gulbinowicz was aware of the nature of the conversations and what the consequences of such encounters might be.” The historians showed an essential fact. At the time when agent Maj initiated the dialogue with Rev. Gulbinowicz, the priest warned his priest confreres that the Security Service gathered information about clergy which they later used in contacts with them. Therefore, he recommended “the priests to be cautious in their statements, and be more attentive in contacts with them” (p. 26). In view of the historical sources and analyses, the contributors’ hypothesis is correct and convincing that “it seemed to him that due to his contacts with the Security Service he may establish such a model of relations with the authorities which should allow for effective actions in this area” (pp. 29/30). Presumably, it was important that his interlocutors were employed at the central level of the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

Controversial statements of bishop Gulbinowicz addressing the secret agent should be interpreted as “a form of a game which the priest – in his opinion – led with the apparatus of repression, and by means of that with the communist authorities” (p. 41). Critical remarks about Bishop Tokarczuk and Cardinal Wyszyński were the components of easing the emotions in this spirit and an attempt to persuade the Security Service about the loyalty of the Church to the Polish People’s Republic. It sometimes happened that in the interviews with the secret agent the hierarch crossed the limits imposed on himself and that a good rapport with Maj influenced his speech and he forgot whom his interlocutor represented, so that he disclosed such information he should not have to in his opinion. In the agents’ opinion the dialogues with the priest were useful for the communist apparatus of repression, so they used them to influence his attitude and subordinate priests. However, taking all aforementioned facts the historians’ conclusions are fully justified: “On the basis of historical sources we should clearly state that Rev. Gulbinowicz was never a personal source of information for the Security Service (the term of the operational contact appears in the aforementioned meaning)” (p. 89). The hierarch’s attitude may be accurately rendered by the phrase included in his characteristics recorded in the secret police files in 1984: “In his relations with the authorities he is generally double-tongued” (p. 90).

In the preface to this publication the historians noted that Cardinal Gulbinowicz had a chance to refer to his interviews with the security agents and explain them. However, he did not use this opportunity. The co-contributor, Rafał Łatka, talked to the Cardinal in 2018. "In his view the hierarch was fully aware of the meaning of the questions, but he refused to provide a reply about the interviews which the Security Service led with him in the years 1969–1985. He also did not want to talk about the circumstances concerning the appointments to the positions of apostolic administrator in Białystok and metropolitan of Wrocław. Cardinal Gulbinowicz also did not reply to the questions prepared at his request in writing" (p. 13).

The publication authored by Łatka and Musiał is a reliable and balanced case study, free from extreme black-and-white opinions and conclusions. It is the outcome of a thorough and factual analysis of the files of the Secret Service in the light of their theory and operational practice. It is an effort to study the motivation and purposes which drove the protagonist leading the dialogue with the secret agents, and it is not meant to defend his attitude, but rather to understand it and to outline the patterns of actions taken by priests and lay-men in their relations with the secret agents. This publication is not a white-washing of this figure, though such unreliable claims may be raised by the milieus representing extreme opinions, which are created from the modern point of view, but neglecting real situations in those times.

The hierarch interpreted his interviews with the secret agents as an element of the game which he played with the communist system. The person who took up an informal dialogue and contacts with a secret agent entered a dangerous area where the enemy had an upper hand. Even though the battle was not lost, and they did not lose themselves either, in the end they were morally wounded, with detriment to their image, and other negative effects. At the end of this review I wish to repeat the words of the historians: "The issue of interviews which the Security Service led with Rev. Gulbinowicz for sixteen years should not be underestimated. The reading of related documents is also an interesting study showing on the one hand the methods of the communist apparatus of repression, and possible behaviours and tactics of some priests and laymen on the other" (p. 15).