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## **PASTORAL MINISTRY OF CARDINAL STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI AND THE REALITY OF THE PEOPLES' REPUBLIC OF POLAND: A PRAGMATISM OF RESISTANCE (1956-1970)**

**ABSTRACT:** This publication analyzes the specificity of the denominational policy of the communist state in the period 1956-1970 through the prism of the pastoral ministry of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland. The main research goal of the article is, therefore, to expose the “post-Stalinist” stage of the history of the Church in the context of the then socio-political situation in Poland, dominated by the rule of Władysław Gomułka’s regime. The exploration of the research topic will be based on the analysis of source texts and studies using the historical method to reconstruct historical facts and their reinterpretation using the inductive-deductive method. Interpretation of source materials focuses on showing the role and significance not only for understanding that period of history characterized by the struggle of Cardinal Wyszyński with the atheistic state of „real socialism”, which – as a totalitarian system – used all possible means – both party and administrative – to fight with the Church and the Nation rooted in the thousand-year Christian tradition. An essential goal of this publication is to present the vital components of the teaching and pastoral ministry of the Primate of the Millennium, also relevant for shaping the contemporary reality of the Church, civil society, nation, and state.

**KEYWORDS:** Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Catholic Church, communism, the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, Vows of Jasna Góra.

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### **POŚLUGA PASTERSKA KARDYNAŁA STEFANA WYSZYŃSKIEGO A RZECZYWISTOŚĆ POLSKIEJ RZECZYPOSPOLITEJ LUDOWEJ. PRAGMATYZM OPORU (1956-1970)**

**STRESZCZENIE:** Niniejsza publikacja analizuje specyfikę polityki wyznaniowej państwa komunistycznego w okresie 1956-1970 przez pryzmat posługi pasterskiej Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Prymasa Polski. Podstawowym celem badawczym artykułu jest zatem ukazanie „post-stalinowskiego” etapu historii Kościoła w kontekście ówczesnej sytuacji społeczno-politycznej Polski, zdominowanej przez rządy reżimu Władysława Gomułki. Eksploracja podjętego tematu badań będzie polegała na analizie tekstów źródłowych oraz opracowań metodą historyczną w celu rekonstrukcji faktów

historycznych i ich reinterpretacji metodą indukcyjno-dedukcyjną. Interpretacja materiałów źródłowych koncentruje się na ukazaniu roli i znaczenia nie tylko dla zrozumienia ówczesnego przedziału czasowego charakteryzującego się zmaganiem Kardynała Wyszyńskiego z ateistycznym państwem „realnego socjalizmu”, który – jako system totalitarny – wykorzystywał wszelkie możliwe środki – zarówno partyjne, jak też administracyjne – do walki z Kościołem i Narodem zakorzenionym w tysiącletniej tradycji chrześcijańskiej. Istotnym celem niniejszej publikacji jest przedstawienie najistotniejszych komponentów nauczania i posługi pasterskiej Prymasa Tysiąclecia, aktualnych także dla kształtowania współczesnej rzeczywistości Kościoła, społeczeństwa obywatelskiego, Narodu i państwa.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński, Kościół Katolicki, komunizm, Tysiąclecie chrztu Polski, Śluby Jasnogórskie.

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## Introduction

The Catholic Church, as well as the Christian religion, to a greater or lesser extent, were the objects of attack by the communist authority practically throughout the entire period of People's Poland (PRL). The communist rulers of the country relieved the Church only during periods of socio-political crises when they needed her authority to calm the turbulent population and strengthen their forces for further struggle. A similar situation also had occurred in the first years of Polish post-war history.

However, soon after the war, the highest-ranked communist dignitaries often participated in religious ceremonies, but only to a particular moment. After the fraudulent parliamentary elections in 1947 and the suppression of the independence underground movement, they had changed their seemingly positive attitude towards the Church into a „proper one”, more consistent with Marxist-Leninist ideology. In practice, this was expressed in mass arrests, brutal tortures, displacements, and intensified repressions against the bishops, diocesan priests, monks, nuns, as well as ordinary lay Christians, essentially, all those still faithful to the Church<sup>1</sup>. The apogee of the repression against

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. F i c e k, *A Realism of Survival: Stefan Wyszyński and the Post-War Political Transformation of Poland (1945-1956)*, „UR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences” 18 (2021) 1, 99-103.

the Church was expressed in many mock political trials of the Stalinist area, and, particularly, in the imprisonment of the Primate Stefan Wyszyński, after his famous „*Non possumus*” declaration<sup>2</sup>.

## 1. Deceptive Normalization of Church-State Relations

1956 was a turning point in the history of post-war Poland. The process of changes in the political sphere had already started two years earlier. In December 1954, by a decree of the Council of State, the Ministry of Public Security was abolished. In its place, however, the Ministry of Internal Affairs headed by Władysław Wicha was established. Gomułka, like many other people, was released from forced solitary confinement. Khrushchev's secret speech, delivered in February 1956 at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU, had a significant influence on shaping the situation in the country. It was there that the rule of Stalin was criticized, revealing some of his crimes. Bolesław Bierut died, and Edward Ochab was appointed the first party secretary. All these events gave citizens hopes for changes in the country and the weakening of the communist system<sup>3</sup>.

During his first speech, Edward Ochab announced the rehabilitation of party members who had been innocently sentenced during the Stalinist era. It also covered the Home Army generals: General Jerzy Kirchmayer, General Stefan Mossor, and General Stanisław Tatar, who were sentenced to life imprisonment in 1951 for espionage. The release and rehabilitation of former Home Army soldiers were also announced. As a result of the speech of the first secretary, concrete measures were taken by the authorities. In April, the Sejm passed an amnesty, which released about 7,000 people, and the sentences

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Bartos, „*Non possumus*”: *kompromis i jego granice*, „*Studia nad Rodziną*” 5/2: 2001, (9), 159-163.

<sup>3</sup> The decree of the Council of State of February 9, 1953 made the creation, transformation and clergy personnel policy of the Church dependent on the consent of state authorities. In addition, it obliged those holding these positions to take an oath of loyalty to the Polish People's Republic. On May 8, 1953, the Primate, on behalf of the Polish Episcopate, sent a memorial to the Council of Ministers about the situation of the Catholic Church in Poland. The document emphasized categorical opposition to the decree and went down in history under the term *Non possumus*. Cf. P. Raina, *Kościół w PRL. Kościół katolicki a państwo w świetle dokumentów 1945-1989*, vol. I: 1945-1959, Poznań 1994, 413-427.

were reduced to 70,000. However, the amnesty did not cover Primate Wyszyński, who was still imprisoned in Komańcza<sup>4</sup>.

From a formal point of view, the situation of the Catholic Church did not improve until Primate Wyszyński was released from internment and the December agreements were concluded. However, this did not prevent the church hierarchs from fighting to increase religious freedom. An essential postulate of the Church towards the state authorities was to amend the decree of February 9, 1953. Petitions were filed to provide pastoral care to prisoners and the sick in hospitals, release bishops who were the rightful administrators of the diocese, and return religion to schools<sup>5</sup>.

While political games were still going on in the communist party, the Church revived its pastoral activity and prepared itself for the celebrations of significant anniversaries in the history of the Church in Poland, falling in 1956. Among them, the tercentenary of King Jan Kazimierz's vows in Lviv was the most important. The main celebrations of the renewal of vows took place at Jasna Góra on August 26, on the feast of Our Lady of Częstochowa. Several hundred thousand believers took part in them, filling the square in front of the Church to the brim, despite the press's censorship, which did not inform the ceremony's preparations. The text of the Jasna Góra Vows of the Nation, written by the imprisoned Primate Wyszyński, was ceremonially read out for this occasion. They became the basis of the Great Novena program, preparing the public to celebrate the Millennium. A telegram was also read from the Holy Father Pius XII, who blessed the tormented Polish nation<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Polish October 56' and Its Repercussions

It was only the events referred to as „October ‘56” that had stopped the repressive religious policy of the communist government, giving hope for a better relationship between the state and the Church.

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<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the thaw in state – Church relations was short-lived. Cf. A. D u d e k, *Państwo i Kościół w Polsce 1945-1970*, Kraków 1995, 185-199; A. D u d e k, R. G r y z, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945-1989)*, Kraków 2006, 101-145; R. G r y z, *Odwilż dla Kościoła na przykładzie Kościołów lokalnych*, in: *Kościół i Prymas Stefan Wyszyński 1956-1966*, red. A. D z i u r o k, W. J. W y s o c k i, Katowice-Kraków 2008, 23-46; P. R a i n a, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Losy więzienne*, Warszawa 1993, 173-174.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. K a c z m a r e k, *Historia Polski: 1914-1989*, Warszawa 2021, 598-602.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 55.

Nevertheless, the Primate returned from the prison to the capital on October 28, 1956, and called on the Nation to participate in the January 1957 parliamentary election. Also, the displaced bishops came back to the diocese and their apostolic duties. The government declared the release of arrested priests and nuns from jails and labor camps. The „Joint Commission of the Government and Episcopate” (the equivalent of the former „Mixed Commission”) began to work<sup>7</sup>.

In December 1956, after further demonstrations in Warsaw, Plock, Olecko, Bydgoszcz, and Szczecin, the so-called „small agreement” was announced. This upheld the hope of Władysław Gomułka, the new first secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers, in the normalization of relations between the state and the Church<sup>8</sup>. In October 1956, however, there was a political turning point in the country. During the session of the Central Committee of the PZPR, Władysław Gomułka was elected the first secretary of the party<sup>9</sup>. Several other personnel changes were also made to the composition of the Central Committee. In his first speech, Gomułka announced the liberalization of relations and the improvement of the situation in the country, but with the continuity of the rule of the communist party<sup>10</sup>.

One of the first and most important steps taken by the newly elected First Secretary to democratize the country was the soon-to-be-released

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<sup>7</sup> The Mixed Commission, composed of representatives of the power apparatus and the Episcopate, dealt with the regulation of church-state relations. Its first meeting took place on August 5, 1949. It ceased work after the February decree of 1953 and the arrest of the Primate. Cf. J. Żaryn, *Kościół a władza w Polsce 1945-1950*, Warszawa 1997, 249-259.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Komunikat Komisji Wspólnej przedstawicieli Rządu i Episkopatu o zasadach uregulowania wzajemnych stosunków, 8 XII 1956 r.*, in: P. Raina, *Kościół w PRL*, vol. I, 575-576.

<sup>9</sup> More about Władysław Gomułka and his political strategy in 1956-1970: J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce (1944-1989)*, Warszawa 2003, 185-217; A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce*, 101-276; Z. Zieliński, S. Bober, *Kościół w Polsce 1944-2007*, Poznań 2009, 93-142; Ł. Marek, „Kler to nasz wróg”. *Polityka władz państwowych wobec Kościoła katolickiego na terenie województwa katowickiego w latach 1956-1970*, Katowice 2009; Ł. Marek, *Priorytety polityki wyznaniowej władz w okresie Gomułki*, in: *Priorytety polityki wyznaniowej władz PRL w latach osiemdziesiątych*, red. R. Łatka, „Glaukopis. Pismo Społeczno-Historyczne” 33: 2016, 254-284.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. A. Paczkowski, *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego PRL-ZSRR 1956-1970*, London 1998, 36-47; P. Codoński, *Rok 1956*, Warszawa 2006.

decision to release the Primate. Gomułka realized that Wyszyński, like him, had been unjustly imprisoned, and the tense relations between the church hierarchy and the state authorities had to be normalized as soon as possible. Besides, the party leadership wanted to avoid the bloodshed and Soviet intervention that took place in Hungary after the uprising against the communist regime. Therefore, it was decided to send to Komańcza two close associates of the 1st secretary, Władysław Bieńkowski and Zenon Kliszko, to conduct talks with the Cardinal. Wyszyński stated that stabilizing mutual relations and support for the October changes would be possible after accepting the presented demands. They were concerned about the repeal of the February decree on filling church posts, the restoration of bishops expelled from their dioceses, the reactivation of the Joint Commission, the release of bishop Kaczmarek, and ensuring the operation of the authentic Catholic press. These demands were accepted, and – after informing the Politburo about the course of the conversation – a resolution was adopted, allowing the Primate to return to the capital and take up his previous position<sup>11</sup>. As a result, on October 28, 1956, Wyszyński solemnly returned to Warsaw.

On November 8, the work of the Mixed Committee was resumed. The authorities were represented by Jerzy Sztachelski and a member of the Political Bureau of the Polish United Workers' Party, Jerzy Morawski, who was soon replaced by Zenon Kliszko. The church party delegated bishops Michał Klepacz and Zygmunt Choromański to these talks, who had also participated in its work in earlier years. The Commission met every few days to analyze all the disputable issues and determine how to implement the hierarchy's postulates. The most important meeting took place on December 4. It was then

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<sup>11</sup> Wyszyński informed the government delegation sent to Komańcza that he would be responding positively to the political changes. Still, to gradually reassure the Catholic nation's opinion, vividly affected by the government's activities so far, it is necessary to abolish the decree on filling church posts as soon as possible. A similar position after the release of Primate Wyszyński was taken by the Main Commission, which emphasized that for the agreement to be credible, „everything contrary to church jurisdiction must be removed”: Archiwum Archidiecezjalne Warszawskie (hereinafter: AAW), Sekretariat Prymasa Polski (hereinafter: SPP), Protokoły Komisji Głównej Episkopatu Polski (hereinafter: KGEP), sygn. 04/11, 1956 r., Protokół KGEP, Warszawa, 7 XI 1956 r., k. 11.

decided that the Church's personnel policy matters would be resolved likewise as adopted in the 1925 Concordat<sup>12</sup>.

Only four days later, a message was published containing the adopted solutions. The December agreement provisions repealed the 1953 decree on filling church posts and replaced it with a new legal act prepared by the Joint Commission<sup>13</sup>. Religious instruction in schools was allowed as an optional subject. Clergypersons were facilitated to perform religious services in hospitals, prison chaplains were appointed, and pastoral care rules over prisoners were established. Permission was also given for the return of priests and nuns displaced from the Western Lands and the office's assumption in those areas by bishops previously appointed by the pope<sup>14</sup>.

Soon after, the implementation of the December agreements' provisions began, which was expressed in several issued legal acts. The decree of the State Council of December 31 on organizing and filling Church positions was of the most significant importance. Its purpose was to identify fundamental issues in relations between the party and the Church. It regulated the principles of creating, removing, transforming, and determining the boundaries and seats of parishes and dioceses. If, within 30 days, the authorities did not raise any objections to the information provided by the Polish Episcopate, the planned changes could be introduced<sup>15</sup>.

In December 1956, the authorities also issued legal acts of a lower rank concerning the Church. Two ordinances of the Ministry of Education, published on December 7 and 8, as well as a circular of December 11, regulated issues related to teaching religion in schools. It had been stated that religion lessons would be conducted for students whose parents had made a written request. Religion has acquired the status of an optional subject. According to an order of the minister of justice,

<sup>12</sup> The Main Episcopal Commission selected the representatives of the Church for the Mixed Commission at its meeting on November 7, the first after the Primate's release. Cf. AAW, SPP, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/11, 1956 r., Protokół KGEP, Warszawa, 7 XI 1956 r., k. 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. S. W y s z y ń s k i, *Zapiski więzienne*, Warszawa 1995, 252-254; P. R a i n a, *Kardynał Wyszyński, t. 2: Losy więzienne*, Warszawa 1993, 199-205.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. AAW, SPP, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/11, 1956 r., Protokół KGEP, Poznań, 25 X 1956 r., k. 7; ibidem, Protokół KGEP, Warszawa, 7 XI 1956 r., k. 11; AAG, Stefan Wyszyński, Pro Memoria, zapisy z XI-XII 1956 r.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. K a c z m a r e k, *Historia Polski*, 650-652.

the rules of chaplains' activity in prisons were regulated. They followed the instructions of the minister of health related to the pastoral care for the sick in hospitals and sanatoriums<sup>16</sup>.

It was also essential that the Primate of Poland persuaded the faithful to cast their votes in the January parliamentary elections. The clergy, especially those of the lower rank, were actively involved in the election campaign, manifested in candidates' admission for deputies in the parish rectory. Group voting by priests and in front of cameras was also characteristic. In the Polish People's Republic history, it was the only gesture of this type made towards power. Never again has the Church given this kind of support<sup>17</sup>.

The party then made many concessions to Catholics, including the Church. Permits were issued for the construction of new churches and the creation of new parishes. The Church Building Committee, legally registered with the Nowa Huta parish in Krakow, obtained a building permit within a month<sup>18</sup>. The authorities tolerated parish committees supporting local parish priests. Under pressure from the sick and parents, crosses were hung in hospitals and schools. It should also be mentioned that *Tygodnik Powszechny* was again operated under the former editorship of Jerzy Turowicz, and the party agreed to establish and operate clubs of the Catholic intelligentsia in Poznań, Toruń, Kraków, Warsaw, and Wrocław<sup>19</sup>.

The government introduced norms regulating some specific predicaments: teaching religion in schools, religious services in hospitals and prisons, and a new declaration on the organization and filling Church positions. In practice, issued on December 31, 1956, a decree of the Council of State limited the state's interference in appointing Church positions. The Church was obliged to „be ensured” (not obtain consent) whether „there are no justified objections from the competent state authority” in the case of a nomination for higher church positions.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. P. R a i n a, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. Ł a t k a, *Czy prymasa Wyszyńskiego możemy określać mianem realisty politycznego?* In: *Realizm polityczny. Materiały z konferencji*, red. R. Ł a t k a, „Politeja” 25: 2013, nr 3, 205. (201-211; J. Ż a r y n, *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce*, 176.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. L. F r a n c z y k, *W obronie Krzyża. Wypadki nowohuckie – 27 kwietnia 1960 roku*, in: *Kościół w godzinie próby. 1945-1989. Nieznane dokumenty i świadectwa*, Kraków 2006, 213-219.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. R. K a c z m a r e k, *Historia Polski*, 654.



(archbishops, diocesan bishops, and associates with succession rights, as well as parish priests and administrators). The obligation to take the oath of loyalty to the People's Republic of Poland was designated for these positions. The decree also regulated the issues of creating, transforming, and abolishing church administrative units (dioceses, parishes). However, such activities required „prior agreement with the competent state authority”<sup>20</sup>.

Political changes also caused the Church's involvement in the parliamentary elections to the Sejm of the People's Republic of the second term for the first time and the pre-election campaign that preceded them. Primate Stefan Wyszyński initially hesitated whether to support the communists. However, the belief prevailed that – if a group of Władysław Gomułka's supporters would be defeated in the elections – all the blame would fall on the Catholic Church. After the Primate official meeting with the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Poland, Józef Cyrankiewicz, in the first half of January 1957, the Polish Episcopate issued a communiqué asking the faithful to vote in the elections to the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic on January 20, 1957. It was the only time a Cardinal became directly involved in political elections. Many years later, in the 1970s, the Primate in an interview with Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik, said: „When an ordinary person goes to the elections, it is not a sin, but if a public person goes, it can be a sin of scandalizing others, because he/she sets a bad example”<sup>21</sup>. It is the significance of Primate's later opinion on participation in elections that in January 1957, he had a similar view because Jerzy Zawieyski, in his journal on January 12, 1957, noted that the Primate hesitated to support the election<sup>22</sup>. However, Wyszyński was influenced by realism and responsibility for the state. So he also decided to participate in the ballot vote himself.

For the first time in the post-war Polish Sejm<sup>23</sup>, there was a symbolic representation of Catholics, which enjoyed the trust, support, and sympathy

<sup>20</sup> Cf., Dz. U. 1957, nr 1, poz. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M. Siedziako, *Kampania wyborcza i wybory do Sejmu PRL w 1957 roku: stan badań, aktualne ustalenia i perspektywy badawcze*, „Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość” 28: 2016, 279-310.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Zawieyski, *Dzienniki 1955-1959*, vol. I, Warszawa 2011, 79-96.

<sup>23</sup> The Sejm of the Polish People's Republic was a unicameral parliament of the Polish People's Republic existing in the years 1952-1989. Formally, the highest organ

of Cardinal Wyszyński. Ultimately, after the parliamentary elections, the legislatorial club „Znak” had eleven deputies, and as agreed earlier, Jerzy Zawieyski became a member of the State Council<sup>24</sup>. In January 1957, an ordinance of the Ministry of Finance was issued about the taxation of clergy and church corporate entities. It introduced relatively favorable conditions for the clergy. It was planned, among others, tax-exempt on income allocated to religious worship as well as the exemption from tax on church premises and real estate. Moreover, priests were not required to keep tax books, and the tax declarations of the clergy were not to be questioned by state financial authorities<sup>25</sup>.

The result of these events was an improvement, at least in the short term, of the situation of the Catholic Church as well as all citizens of Poland. Above all, the communists no longer tried to resolve conflicts with the church hierarchy by using force and violence. Society awakened from apathy and sensitized it to problems and transformations taking place in the country. The creators of culture were active, and the press was granted certain independence. There were seeds of social institutions that were poorly controlled by the state. Above all her leadership, the Catholic Church appeared then as an institution that legitimized the actions of the state administration accepted by the nation<sup>26</sup>.

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of state authority, operating based on the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic. Cf. S. Drabik, *Wojewódzka organizacja partyjna PZPR w Krakowie w Październiku 1956 i w okresie wyborów w styczniu 1957 roku*, „Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość” 17: 2011, nr 1, 247-261; J. Wróbel, *Kampania polityczna w Łodzi przed wyborami do Sejmu PRL 20 stycznia 1957 r.*, in: *Łódź w latach 1956-1957*, red. L. Próchniak, J. Wróbel, Warszawa 2006, 212-247; J. Kwiek, *Przebieg wyborów do Sejmu w styczniu 1957 roku w województwie krakowskim*, „Studia Historyczne” 2000, z. 1, 105-124; M. Skoczylas, *Przygotowanie, przebieg i wyniki wyborów parlamentarnych z 20 stycznia 1957 r. w województwie gdańskim w świetle dokumentów KC PZPR*, „Rocznik Gdański” 59: 1998, z. 1, 61-76.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. A. Friszke, *Koło posłów „Znak” w Sejmie PRL 1957-1976*, Warszawa 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce*, 117; R. Łatka, *Prymas Wyszyński wobec rzeczywistości politycznej doby Władysława Gomułki*, in: *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego na Pomorzu Zachodnim*, vol. 2: 1956-1972, red. M. Siedziako, Z. Stanch, G. Wejman, Szczecin 2018, 51-54.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Archiwum Archidiecezjalne Gnieźnieńskie (hereinafter: AAG), Stefan Wyszyński, *Pro Memoria*, zapis z 21 XI 1956 r.; AAW, SPP, 04/12, Komisja Główna Episkopatu Polski 1957, Protokół Komisji Głównej Episkopatu, Warszawa dn. 20 III 1957 r., k. 1-3; M. Jasiekiewicz, *Kościół katolicki w polskim życiu politycznym 1945-1989. Podstawowe uwarunkowania*, Wrocław 1993, 145-146.

But these concessions did not indicate a change in the state's attitude towards the Church as much as a response to the tense political atmosphere. After several months the mood of the populace had calmed, and this appearance of „normalization”, as well as the effects of the parliamentary elections in January of 1957, gave the communist rulers the leeway to once again begin treating the Church as the enemy.

### 3. Return to the Past: New Regime, Old Methods

However, the normalization of relations between the church hierarchy and the state did not last long. From the very beginning, Gomułka emphasized that the party's gentle policy towards the Church was temporary, and the matter of solving his situation had only been postponed. The people of the Church strived to strengthen their position among citizens. Still, the authorities, shaking off the short crisis, returned to the earlier policy to secularize public life and subjugate the Episcopate to themselves<sup>27</sup>.

For Polish citizens, the Catholic religion was not only a faith but also a system of truths and principles organizing social life, defining the collective identity and national tradition. Meanwhile, the party leadership treated religion as a backward remnant of a feudal mentality and wanted to limit the Church's activity – the only organization completely independent of the authorities – to religious service and achieve political neutrality of the clergy. Gomułka's goal was to strengthen the process of secularization and the atheization of millions of Poles. He considered the activity of the hierarchy a threat to the authorities and their monopoly on controlling and organizing social life<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. AAG, *Stefan Wyszyński, Pro Memoria*, zapis z 21 XI 1956 r.; AAW, SPP, 04/12, Komisja Główna Episkopatu Polski 1957, Protokół Komisji Głównej Episkopatu, Warszawa dn. 20 III 1957 r., k. 1-3.; A. Dudek, T. Marszałkowski, *Walka z Kościołem 1958-1966*, „Więź”, 390: 1991, nr 4, 115.

<sup>28</sup> According to the communists, it was necessary to take appropriate steps. The authorities decided to deal the main blow in mid-1958. The Primate Institute of the Vows of the Nation at Jasna Góra, which was established by Primate Wyszyński under the decree of May 3, 1953, was the target of the attack. The most important task of this institution was to research the history of Christianity in the country and preparing citizens for the Great Novena and the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland. The party was aware of this fact but initially did not react in any way. However, in July, for the first time since the breakthrough in October, there was an administrative and political intervention. On July 21, 1958, about twenty people entered the offices of the Institute

A novelty was creating a permanent „Commission of the Central Committee for the Clergy” operating under Zenon Kliszka at the Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR. It made strategic decisions, formulated guidelines and recommendations, implemented by relevant ministries. Members of the Commission also met in Moscow with local leaders to explain their mistakes and seek advice in doubtful situations<sup>29</sup>.

The reorganization of the power departments was supposed to serve to cement the totalitarian system. Already in 1956, the Security Service was established under the Ministry of the Interior. Initially, the fight against the Church was the 3rd Department of the Interior's responsibility. Due to many operational tasks, Department V of this Department became a separate Department IV later by order. Its duties included counteracting the actions of the reactionary clergy, which was carried out based on subsequent instructions from the head of the Ministry of the Interior and the director of the Department to subordinate units in the field. An extensive network of secret collaborators soon spread to all dioceses and religious orders. By 1961, around 1,300 priests had been recruited as secret agents, and files were opened for them and even for their families. The clergy became the most closely monitored social group, considered the enemy of the authorities and their policies<sup>30</sup>.

The actions of the state authorities followed a very severe direction, which was reflected in a wave of administrative repressions. The primary importance was limiting the possibility of creating new parishes and dividing the existing ones, which could not perform their tasks fully efficiently due to their large size. The presidencies of the Provincial Supervisory Boards explained these decisions with the high costs of maintaining the parish priest and the parish, which burdened the faithful. Personnel issues regarding the appointment of church positions were

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to conduct a search. The clergy tried to convince about the unlawful nature of this incident, but the protests were to no avail. Due to the great agitation of the public opinion, the communists explained the steps taken by illegal publishing activities at the Institute and the necessity to seize devices with a high production capacity. This attack was intended not so much to question the right of the clergy to use duplicators freely but to attack the program of the „Great Novena” and the increasing pilgrimage movement. Cf. A. D u d e k, R. G r y z, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce*, 140-141.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J. Ż a r y n, *Dzieje Kościoła*, 217-218.

<sup>30</sup> A. L. S o w a, *Historia polityczna Polski 1944-1991*, Kraków 2011, 128-136.

considered for months, rejecting applications without giving reasons, which resulted in vacancies in many parishes. Steps were taken to enable the State Treasury to take over the flats of priests that were not occupied at a given time due to the adverse decisions of the authorities for particular candidates for parish priests. All actions directed against church dignitaries were led by the Office for Religious Affairs, headed by Jerzy Sztachelski<sup>31</sup>.

Acts of persecution and harassment against priests increased more and more: the conscription of clerics to the army and the closure of seminaries. Crosses were removed from schools because their presence violated the rights of non-believers, and religious instruction was limited to one hour a week after school. Religious people were removed from teaching. Restrictions were introduced in social and cultural life. Censorship deepened, the youth magazine „Po Prostu” (Simply) was closed. There was no question of the development of the youth movement and an increase in Catholic clubs or organizations. Gomułka argued that it was necessary to limit the rights and freedoms of the Church and bring it to an institution subordinate to the state<sup>32</sup>. The most painful field of conflict was the education of young people in a broad sense. Communists returned to their old practices. By Gomułka's decision of July 1960, almost all lower theological seminaries were irretrievably liquidated, religious schools and orphanages run by nuns were closed. Soon the only nursing school in Warsaw was closed, and nuns were not admitted to state hospitals and nursing schools. In the school year 1958/59, however, religious schools were granted state authority, and then they were subjected to onerous visits. The liquidation of schools was motivated not under the applicable law<sup>33</sup>.

In 1959, the authorities issued tax regulations, the primary purpose of which was to reduce the Church's finances. At the same time, large-scale action was against this background; there were clashes, among others in Zielona Góra, when an attempt was made to take back

<sup>31</sup> Cf. AAW, SPP, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/15, 1958 r., Protokół KGEP, Warszawa, 21 VI 1960 r., k. 31; AAW, SPP, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/15, 1958 r., Protokół KGEP, Warszawa, 15 XI 1960 r., k. 42.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. E. J a r m o c h, *Sytuacja Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce powojennej (1944-1968)*, in: *Stosunki między władzą państwową a Kościołem katolickim w Polsce powojennej (1944-1989)*, red. W. W a ż n i e w s k i, Siedlce 1997, 51.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. J. Ż a r y n, *Dzieje Kościoła*, 189.

the Catholic House<sup>34</sup>. Meanwhile, the newly elected Sejm of the 3rd term of the People's Republic of Poland, elected in April 1961, started work on the bill on the education system before the summer holidays. Ultimately, it was to lead to the removal of religion from public schools. During the meeting of the Joint Commission, the bishops submitted comments to the proposed draft. Still, they did not affect the form of the Act on the Development of the Education System, adopted on July 15, 1961. According to the new law, schools and other educational institutions had to respect the secular nature of upbringing, which – in practice – meant compulsory secularization of schools. The headmaster of the high school was to be a layperson appointed by the board of trustees. All non-school educational activities and other forms of work with young people were subject to the supervision of the Minister of Education<sup>35</sup>.

In the interim, Minister Władysław Tułodziecki, without waiting for the beginning of the school year, issued an order on the running of catechetical centers, which supplemented the act. Its content, however, was a complete surprise for the church side, as it was not consulted with it. Teaching religion in catechetical places was dependent on the fulfillment of specific requirements: registering the point in the education inspectorate, having appropriate hygienic and sanitary conditions by the premises, and catechesis by a layperson or a secular clergyman who had the consent of the education inspectorate for teaching<sup>36</sup>.

Another significant but painful area of conflict was the issue of building new temples. The communists began to withdraw from the commitments made earlier. The process of obtaining approval for

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. Eisler, *Milenium 1966*, „Więź”, 367: 1989, nr 5, 105. Significant tensions in mutual relations occurred due to the liquidation of the anti-alcohol „Crusade of Temperance”, founded by Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki in Katowice in 1957. Thanks to the priest's organizational skills, it covered almost the entire country, gathering around 100,000 people. The activity of the „Crusade of Temperance” also manifested itself in other spheres, including in anti-abortion, and, meanwhile, began to cause concern to the authorities. In August 1960, a decision was issued to liquidate the Crusade, citing the failure to legalize the activity in the manner prescribed by law. The liquidation of the Katowice Crusade Headquarters itself was brutal. In March 1961, Father Blachnicki was arrested and sentenced to 10 months imprisonment due to the trial brought against him. Cf. A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościoł w Polsce (1945-1989)*, 199-200.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce*, 190.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościoł w Polsce (1945-1989)*, 160.

the construction of a new temple consisted of four basic steps. Completing any of them did not guarantee the completion of the entire procedure. The issuing of permits was suspended, the letters were left unanswered, and the possibility of implementing already started investments was effectively blocked. The most famous example is the withdrawal of permission to build a church in Nowa Huta, where the authorities removed the cross standing there to start building the school. It caused riots. And the dispute was softened by the personal intervention of Karol Wojtyła. The church side agreed to change the location of the temple and elect a priest loyal to the state as a pastor<sup>37</sup>.

At the same time, anti-church propaganda was strengthened, mainly by the atheist milieu associated with the later Society for the Promotion of Secular Culture. Attempts were made to divide bishops into the so-called „progressives” and „retrogrades” as well as quarrel clergymen. The reactions of hierarchs to pastoral letters were analyzed, administrative penalties were imposed, and sometimes arrests were used. Through the agency, information on the behavior of priests was obtained. Meanwhile, the Joint Commission stopped meeting regularly. In the years 1962-1966, it did not debate at all. It was not until December 1966 that its work was resumed to discuss the issues of the autonomy of the Major Seminaries. The next meeting did not occur because the Primate, against the state authorities' pressure, appointed Bishop Ignacy Tokarczuk as a Commission member. The Church did not want to bow and act according to the will of the rulers<sup>38</sup>.

Relations between the Church and the party remained tense until the end of Gomułka's rule, but the leadership of the PZPR must have realized that they would not be able to win the fight against the church hierarchy. Attacks on the Primate and bishops favored increasing unity and closure of the ranks. The authorities were also unable to react to the emerging opportunity to establish relations with the Vatican<sup>39</sup>.

#### **4. A Millennium of the Baptism of Poland: National Retreat**

Unfortunately, the rules of the Gomułka team coincided with the preparation of the Church for the celebration of the „Millennium of the

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce*, 197.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. A. Friszke, *Polska, Losy państwa i narodu 1939-1989*, Warszawa 2003, 279.

Baptism of Poland”<sup>40</sup>. This fact considerably influenced the aggressive and confrontational nature of the denominational policy conducted after the end of the „October thaw”. During this time, however, two stages of conflict escalation can be distinguished. The first period involved intensive anti-church activities carried out in the years 1958-1961. They were referred to as secular counteroffensive against the – alleged – clericalisation of society. The second phase took place in 1965-1967. In the subject literature, it was described as the so-called „millennium confrontation”<sup>41</sup>.

These two stages of growing tensions and intensified struggle were intertwined with a period of some stabilization. Nevertheless, it was the campaign against the clergy, but rather a suspension of overt hostilities and suppression, in favor of new and more surreptitious methods in the war against the Church. Its consequence was usually a thaw period, which was primarily caused by the effects of current political events (international as well as local). It should be emphasized, however, that this did not mean an abandonment of the conflict with the „clergy”. Instead, it was a „suspension” of actions’ escalation, continuation, and enhancement of the already used means of the fight as well as the search for new methods of struggle and more camouflaged anti-church initiatives<sup>42</sup>.

To understand the specifics and opportunism of these activities, one needs to go back to the events that took place on August 26, 1956. On this day, on the solemnity of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the square under the summit of the Jasna Góra Sanctuary and the Avenue of the Blessed Virgin Mary leading to it in Czestochowa were tightly filled

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. Szot, K. Sychowicz, *Białostockie milenium. Białystok na milenijnym szlaku Obchody tysiąclecia chrztu Polski (1966 r.)*, Białystok 2006; D. Gucewicz, *Próba sił? Rok 1966 w Gdańsku. Milenium kontra Tysiąclecie*, Gdańsk 2014; D. Gucewicz, *Pół wieku Milenium. Religijne, polityczne i społeczne aspekty obchodów Tysiąclecia Chrztu Polski (1956-1966/1967). Studia i materiały*, red. B. Noszcza, Warszawa 2018; S. Wyszynski, *Zapiski milenijne. Wybór z dziennika „Pro memoria” z lat 1965-1967*, red. M. Okońska, Warszawa 2001.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. A. Grześkowiak, *Represje wobec osób duchownych i konsekrowanych w PRL w latach 1944-1989*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2004, 107-134.

<sup>42</sup> P. Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Konflikty roku milenijnego 1966*, Warszawa 2000; B. Noszcza, „Sacrum” czy „profanum”? *Spór o istotę obchodów Milenium polskiego (1949-1966)*, Warszawa 2002; W. J. Wysocki, *Reakcje władz na milenijną nowennę i peregrynację*, „Studia Prymasowskie” 2: 2008, 21-43



with pilgrims. To this day, historians are not sure how many there were. According to the estimated calculations of the chronicler from Jasna Góra, there were more than a million pilgrims. According to official data, almost 600-650 thousand. However, at the confidential meeting of the “Communist Party Central Committee”, Zenon Kliszko – one of Gomulka’s most trusted associates – talked about 1, 4 million<sup>43</sup>.

The culminating moment of the ceremony in Czestochowa was the „Jasna Góra Vows of the Nation”. The above celebrations took place two months after the workers’ rebellion in Poznań, which was directly caused by the protest of employees of the Cegielski factory (then named after Joseph Stalin) against unfair payroll calculation. However, the workers demanded not only better wages. They wanted “bread and freedom”, as well as the right to worship God. The liturgical ceremony at the Marian Shrine began at 10 am. The „miraculous icon” of Our Lady of Czestochowa was brought to the Jasna Góra embankment. Twenty-eight bishops, seven capitular vicars, and over 1 500 priests stood at the altar. Bishop Michał Klepacz read a telegram from Pius XII, blessing Poles. However, there was no Cardinal Wyszyński. He was still in prison. An empty throne with the primate’s coat of arms reminded the gatherers of this, and a bunch of white and red roses laid on the armchair as a symbol of spiritual communion with the Primate.

Undoubtedly, the empty armchair, which symbolized the demand for the presence of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, had made the most significant impression on people. This symbolic scene with a vacant armchair would be repeated twice more in the history of Poland. The next time, ten years later, on May 3, 1966, when the communists banned Pope Paul VI from the millennium celebration in Jasna Góra, the empty throne awaiting the Pope was an eloquent commentary of his absence. Thirty-three years later (June 15, 1999), the empty armchair stood not on the Jasna Góra ramparts but in Kraków Błonia (Blonia Park), where over a million people prayed in the rain for the health of John Paul II, who could not say the scheduled Pontifical Mass because of an infection<sup>44</sup>.

Nevertheless, Cardinal Wyszyński was present in Jasna Góra spiritually. First of all, he was the author of the Vows text, which,

<sup>43</sup> Cf., E. K. Czaczkowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński, Biografia*, Kraków 2013, 244.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 244-246.

declaimed by Bishop Klepacz, were repeated by perhaps more than a million faithful. In this sense, Jasna Góra Vows of the Nation initiated the most significant pastoral program of the Church after the war – the Great Novena, which was Primate Wyszyński's life's work<sup>45</sup>. The idea of composing and orchestrating the taking of the „Jasna Góra Vows” had occurred to Wyszyński during his imprisonment in the Prudnik Śląski monastery-turned-prison by the communists. Reading „the Deluge” by Henryk Sienkiewicz, while in prison, The Primate realized that Głogówek where, in the autumn of 1655, King Jan Kazimierz took refuge to avoid the Swedish invasion, was near the Primate's place of confinement. As Sienkiewicz had recounted, the King had set off from Głogówek to Lviv, using nearly the same route to the East that Wyszyński had taken when being transported to the prison in Komańcza.

In the Lviv Cathedral, King Jan Kazimierz solemnly entrusted the entire nation to the Mother of God on April 1, 1656. It was his thanksgiving for having successfully defended Jasna Góra against the Swedes who had besieged the monastery for almost two months. From that moment, the tide of the Polish-Swedish war began to turn in favor of Poland. The king promised to improve the life standard of burghers and peasants if the Commonwealth dominated by the Swedes would regain freedom. However, the „Lviv Vows” were not only an expression of gratitude but also a rallying cry to convince the citizenry to join the fight against the invaders. Three years later, the „Swedish deluge” ended. The Swedes withdrew from Poland. Unfortunately, King Jan could not fulfill his promises to the people because of solid nobility resistance<sup>46</sup>.

Nevertheless, those same unfulfilled „Lviv Vows” had inspired the Primate to create a new version of the vows to be instituted during a solemn celebration on their 300th anniversary. After three hundred years, the threats were different. According to Primate Wyszyński, systemic atheization was the greatest danger to Poles. It was not maybe the „Swedish Deluge” that had threatened Poland in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, but the „Red Flood” of godless communism. In the new socio-political situation in Poland, the defense of Jasna Góra was

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. AAN, UdsW, 78/83, Działalność duszpasterska, obchody „Millenium”, uroczystości kościelne na terenie miasta Krakowa i województwa, Notatka służbowa z uroczystości na Skałce 8 V 1966, k. 54-55.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Z. W ó j c i k, *Jan Kazimierz Waza*, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1997, 115-118.

*a defense of the Christian spirit of the nation, a defense of native culture, a defense of the unity of human hearts – in God's Heart, a defense of the free-breathing of a man who wants to believe more in God than in people, and people for God's sake*, wrote the Primate in December 1954. A little bit later, he added: *Defense of Jasna Góra – it is a victory over myself, over this enemy that I am for myself*<sup>47</sup>.

The concept of Jasna Góra Vows of the Nation referred to Poland's role as a „Bulwark of Christianity”. There were echoes of Polish messianism perceiving Poland as a tortured Christ who was sent with a unique mission to be fulfilled in the history of Nations. In the past, Poland at least twice had played a rampart role: once in 1683, when King Jan III Sobieski dealt a blow to the threatening Turks near Vienna. The second time was in 1920 when Józef Pilsudski stopped the vicious storm of the Bolshevik army on the Vistula, which wanted to go to the West with slogans of the communist revolution on the banners. In 1956, however, in Poland, ruled by communists controlled by Moscow, it was not only about preserving religion but also about morality and culture that grew out of Christianity and the Greco-Roman world. First of all, it was about the preservation of Polish culture and national tradition<sup>48</sup>.

The „Millennium” project of the Church was carefully prepared and spread over in several phases: from The „Jasna Góra Vows of Nation” (August 1956-May 1957), through the „Great Novena of the Nation” before the „Millennium of the Baptism of Poland” (1957-1966), to the celebration of „Jubilee Year: 1966” („*Te Deum* of the Polish Nation”). From a pastoral point of view, the „Jasna Góra Vows” program was understood as a response to Poles' spiritual devastation, caused by the traumatic experiences of the last war, as well as the godless communist system established after 1944. The above venture was devoted – first of all – to ethical and social issues: defending the lives of conceived children, marital fidelity, the holiness of the family, Catholic education of children and youth, fighting against social vices, as well as an extension of the Marian cult, etc. They were renewed

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<sup>47</sup> Cf., Wyszynski, *Zapiski więzienne*, 137-141; Cf. R. Ficek, *Mariological Dimension of the Theological and Pastoral Concepts of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland*, „*Studia Sandomierskie*” 27: 2020, 243-244 (229-249).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. P. W. Kno11, *Poland as „Antemurale Christianitatis” in the Late Middle Ages*, „*The Catholic Historical Review*” 60: 1974, 3, 381-401.

every year, every time with a new pastoral theme, until April 1966. In this sense, the „Jasna Góra Vows” project comprised the nine-year cycle of the Church’s pastoral-liturgical program, known as the „Great Novena of the Nation”. Its apex and conclusion were the solemn celebrations of the „Millennium of the Baptism of Poland”.

The central theme, as well as the task to be fulfilled by the faithful in each year, were subsequent promises of the vows. The Novena of the Millennium Years was, after the „Jasna Góra Vows” and the act of their renewal, the third stage of the „Millennium Pastoral Program”. According to the Polish Episcopate, its essence was expressed in the moral and religious revival of Poles, deepening their spiritual life, enabling the Nation to reveal its Christian identity through active apostolate, as well as eliminating the effects of secularization and distorting the Christian identity caused by vices and sins. A characteristic feature of the Church’s Jubilee Program, however, was its orientation towards the future of Christian Poland<sup>49</sup>.

Moreover, the „Great Novena” was the first nationwide pastoral-liturgical program covering almost all pastoral care fields and aimed at its revival in the entire country. Impressive was an innovation, careful development, and implementation of the program, as well as the scale of the undertaken initiative and the introduction of new forms of pastoral ministry, e.g., peregrination around the country of Our Lady of Czestochowa’s Icon (Icon of Black Madonna)<sup>50</sup>.

Liturgical celebrations of that time, combined with Novena, emphasized the prayers for the Second Vatican Council, as well as for the implementation of its resolutions. Although the „Church’s Millennium” program was mainly pastoral and religious, it focused on „man” and assumed the fight against the mental-emotional and spiritual breakup of the Nation. Its goal also emphasized the consolidation of clergy after an interval when the Church’s structures were significantly weakened due to destructive religious policy in 1944-1956. After Stalinism’s experience, it was about revival, unleashing new initiatives of the clergy, and encouraging them that great undertakings of the Church are possible.

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. R. F i c e k, *Mariological Dimension of the Theological and Pastoral Concepts of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland*, „Studia Sandomierskie” 27: 2020, 239-242.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. R. K a c z m a r e k, *Historia Polski*, 655-656.

## 5. Towards the Solemn Celebration of the Millennium of Baptism of Poland: Among Friends and Among Enemies

Simultaneously with the restriction of the Church's freedoms by the communists, preparations were made to commemorate the thousandth anniversary of the baptism of Poland. The basis of the activities was the Great Novena program initiated in the presence of the Primate on May 3, 1957, at Jasna Góra. For the next nine years, the faithful renewed the Jasna Góra Vows, and each year of the Great Novena was held under a specific slogan, had its own pastoral program, and was another stanza of the vow. It was dedicated to a particular moral and religious issue. The above program was personally prepared by the Primate, supported, among others, by the Archbishop of Krakow, and from 1967 by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła and many other bishops. All preparations were supervised by the Marian Commission of the Polish Episcopate<sup>51</sup>.

The preparation program, ending on December 31, 1965, was an innovative, extremely varied undertaking and aimed at activating the faithful not only in the purely religious sphere. It included various types of pilgrimages, retreats, sermons, missions, council vigils undertaken in all parishes at the Polish Episcopate call, days of recollection, or thematic parish meetings. Thematic publications on the celebration of the Millennium were also distributed. People were encouraged to read brochures and books from parish libraries, watching movies and performances related to the theme of the celebration. In this context, the Church presented pragmatism, adjusting to the reality of that time and aiming at reviving people on a national scale<sup>52</sup>.

As one can see, the Great Novena program was large-scale, covering practically the entire society. Preparations took place in an atmosphere of general social enthusiasm with no division into believers and non-believers. In the opinion of the communists, they were aggressive, especially to the policy of the state authorities. In some way, they were a kind of offensive of the clergy, who wanted to manifest their greatness in this way. The aim of the Great Novena was, apart from the strictly theological aspect related to the dedication of the Polish nation to

<sup>51</sup> Cf. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła*, 218-219.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. B. Noszcza, *Przygotowania do Milenium Chrztu Polski i Tysiąclecia Państwa Polskiego (1956-1965) in: Milenium czy Tysiąclecie*, red. B. Noszcza, Warszawa 2005, 23.

the slavery of Mary, the spiritual preparation of society for the Millennium of Poland's baptism. Its task was to deepen the religiosity of Poles through the manifestation of faith and to oppose state propaganda, convincing – especially young people – to live without God. It allowed for a revival of the sense of national identity, shaken by the influence of Marxist ideology and the nation's unification around religious and patriotic symbols and values. Wyszyński acted as an interrex, convinced that communism in Poland would be an episode in the face of the thousand-year history of Polish Christianity<sup>53</sup>. One of the essential acts of spiritual preparation for the Millennium was the pilgrimage to Poland of a copy of the painting of Our Lady of Częstochowa, which Pope Pius XII consecrated in May 1957 during the Primate's stay in Rome. After returning to Poland, a copy of the painting began to wander the country – through parishes and houses, where crowds of believers appeared, and the roads were decorated with flowers. However, there were concerns about the reaction of the state authorities and non-Catholic minorities to the peregrination, as it could be interpreted as an act of national and political demonstration<sup>54</sup>.

The „Church's Millennium” undermined the influence of the communist atheization policy. Thus, it went against the authorities and necessarily entered the sphere of politics. In this context, the celebration of the „Great Jubilee of the Baptism of Poland” had become an opportunity for the Church to manifest not only religious beliefs but also – in some sense – political convictions. The latter ones, however, were not expressed directly. The Episcopate was aware that, despite the primary spiritual dimension of the „Great Novena”, as well as the entire „Millennium” celebrations, it also carried the accents of a political manifestation whose purpose was to demonstrate the authorities the strength of the Church and the attachment of society to her. The action of the Faithful's mobilization was understood as an expression of their devotion not only to the institution exercising the mandate of pastoral care but also to a center that was consistently opposing the communist state. This distinctive political aspect of the „Church's Millennium”

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. R. F i c e k, *Mariological Dimension of the Theological and Pastoral Concepts of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland*, „Studia Sandomierskie” 27: 2020, 239-244.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. B. N o s z c z a k, *Przygotowania do Milenium Chrztu Polski*, 60.

was legible both for Gomulka's government and for the entire society. It should be emphasized, however, that this was only a secondary aspect of the „Polish Millennium” celebrations. After all, what remained imperative was its transcendental-spiritual dimension<sup>55</sup>.

In the authorities' eyes, the already mentioned political *sui generis* dimension of the „Millennium” program grew to be a hazardous aspect of the „Great Jubilee of 966”. For this reason, it became not only the object of many provocative actions aimed at the foundations of the „Church's Millennium” but also – paradoxically – a stepping stone for the attacks against the Church. However, the „Novena of the Millennium” was criticized not only for its alleged „anti-statehood”, but a portion of the Catholic laity had accused it of excessive centralism and for appealing to the „simplified” folk forms of liturgical devotion. Some were afraid that focus on the fundamental truths of the faith might be lost. Others were afraid of the „excessive” role of Marian's devotions. Despite these difficulties, as well as the considerable harassment and restrictions from the communist authorities, the Great Novena preparing for the celebration of the Millennium of Baptism embraced the whole country, mobilizing crowds of faithful and unleashing in them an authentic „enthusiasm of faith”<sup>56</sup>.

Following the millennium initiative of the Church, the state authorities realized that they had been remiss in initiating their own celebrations related to the upcoming „Jubilee of 966”. It was noted that the Episcopate began to activate society more and more. Therefore, Church celebrations were seen primarily as a challenge to the authorities. In general, their spiritual and moral dimension – which was also positive for the state – was neither unnoticed nor wanted. Over time, fear of the government of „appropriating” the celebration of the „Great Jubilee” increased. Therefore, after strengthening their structures after a period of so-called thaw, the authorities began to prepare and implement their own autonomous festivities. In February 1958, the Sejm adopted a resolution announcing the years 1960-1966 as a time of the „Millennium of the Polish State” commemoration. As part of it, a lot of „community actions” were carried out throughout the country

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. R. F i c e k, *Christians in Socio-Political Life: An Applied Analysis of the Theological Anthropology of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland*, Toruń 2020, 315-317.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. C z a c z k o w s k a, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, 269-272.

(among them, the most important were: the construction of „Schools of the Millennium” and the forestation of the country), as well as a series of historical celebrations, commemorating significant events from the past of Poland. Cultural and historical studies also played an essential role in the celebration of the Millennium. All this, meeting fundamental needs, was supposed to mobilize society’s energy and sacrifice, bring about an extension of knowledge and interest in Polish history, as well as strengthen and deepen the patriotic unity of the nation around the communist party and the state<sup>57</sup>.

Nevertheless, the „Millennium Celebrations” officially unveiled purpose was to neutralize the „Millennium Action” of the Episcopate. The measurable result of these actions was the construction of over a thousand schools from the social funds (and a few thousand from the state funds), afforestation of the country, creation of thousands of kilometers of new roads, hundreds of public utilities, municipal facilities, as well as an improvement of the aesthetics of cities and villages, etc<sup>58</sup>. The celebration of the „Millennium of the State”, saturated with historicism, also revived the pace and scope of scientific research devoted to the history of Poland. On an unprecedented scale, science had gained a powerful patron in the form of the communist state. An excessive turn towards the past also favored the development of state-fueled nationalism, directed mainly „outside” against Germany.

Nevertheless, in the millennium celebrations, the scale of implemented undertakings was striking. It manifested, among other things, in mobilizing the state administration, mass activation of society, as well as the use of millions of cash outlays. The degree of public involvement in this action was significant, although often insincere and even forced. In other words, two jubilees – Church and state programs for the celebration of the „Jubilee of 966” – have been implemented in parallel since 1960 but independently of each other. Another thing was that the characteristic feature of both programs was a kind of rating battle to see who could draw the more significant crowds. It was important for

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. AAW, SPP, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/21, 1966 r., Protokół KGEP, 18 XI 1966 r., k. 90; D. Bednarski, *Watykan i Paweł VI wobec Milenium Chrztu Polski (w relacji ambasadora Kazimierza Papee)*, „Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne” 49: 2016 (2), 371-389.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. K. Wałaszewski, *Tysiąc szkół na Tysiąclecie: Szkoły Tysiąclecia – architektura, propaganda, polityka*, Łódź, 2018.



both sides to mobilize as many people as possible to participate in various types of jubilee initiatives. Moreover, each side considered its actions as comprehensive<sup>59</sup>.

Neither revelry side showed a willingness to join the „competitive” festivities. Both the Church and the communist authorities perceived their own anniversary celebration only in one dimension. It was primarily influenced, however, by the political reality of the time, which was determined, among other things, by mutual prejudices, lack of institutional cooperation, and – first of all – doctrinal differences, including the divergence of goals that both sides wanted to achieve during the celebration of the „Great Jubilee”. The church began the commemoration of the „Millennium of Baptism” at a time when the whole structure of the communist government was disturbed so much that a window of opportunity for freedom of action had been opened for the Church, which – in time – had taken on the competition with the state.

The Polish Episcopate skillfully took advantage of the opportunity given by the growing phenomenon of relative liberalization of socio-political life (so-called thaw), which had been progressing gradually in the country – at least since 1954. After the events of „October’56”, there were significant transformations related to the „de-Stalinization” of the political scene of the entire Eastern Bloc countries. Also, on the Polish political scene, the society was freed – to some extent – from the ruthless dictate of the communist authorities, characteristic of the internment of the Primate Wyszyński (1953-1956). Cardinal Wyszyński himself had a substantial role in this unfolding drama as he relentlessly, and at times autonomously with respect to communist authorities, attempted to carry out the Church’s policies<sup>60</sup>.

In other words, the plain truth was that the authorities were aware that they had no majority support and feared that a large part of society could be mobilized against them. At the time, the Church was the only force capable of succeeding in such an endeavor. Through this prism, Gomulka’s government saw the Episcopate’s Millennium activities as an anti-state „offensive”.

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. B. Noszcza k, *Przygotowania do Milenium Chrztu Polski*, 27-30.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Cf. AAW, SPP, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/21, 1966 r., Protokół KGEP, 30 VIII 1966 r., k. 72-73; J. Żurek, *Kościelny Październik’56*, „Biuletyn IPN” 10: 2006, 69-71.

## 6. Gomulka Strikes Back

As the Gomulka's team strengthened its power and control, which had been diluted during the „thaw,” they began to return to pursuing the challenging course of religious policy. One of the objects of undisguised and robust hostility had become the church's campaign of preparation for the „Millennium of Baptism”. The beginning of the state-inspired conflict over this background should be considered 1958. In June 1958, at a meeting of the PZPR Central Committee Political Bureau (KC PZPR), in the language typical of those years, the committee members had recognized the emergence of „offensive of militant clericalism” (its most significant expression was to be the „Great Novena”). Therefore, KC PZPR was obligated to formulate some activities that seemed to be necessary to its neutralization. In July, a permanent Central Committee of the KC PZPR for the Clergy was appointed, whose task was to develop the principles of the party apparatus operation, coordinate activities, and control the implementation of PZPR guidelines in the field of relations between the state and the Church<sup>61</sup>.

In the same month, the Central Committee of PZPR issued a letter to the party executive authorities regarding religious policy. It was stated in it, among other things, that the alleged activation of the „political action of the clergy” aimed against „people's power” and undermining the principles of normalization of mutual relations between the state and the Church. Therefore, it formulated the rules of the PZPR's religious policy, which came down to the need to counteract the “clergy offensive” in the spirit of the principles established at the Politburo KC PZPR meeting in June 1958<sup>62</sup>.

Even though the state authorities were busy fighting, among others, for inventory books, teaching religion in schools, or collecting taxes, of course, they remembered about the Great Novena and the preparations of the Church for the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland.

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce 1944-2002*, Radom 2003, 145; R. Ficek, *Moral Renewal As A Socio-Religious Imperative And The Destructive Actions Of An Oppressive Totalitarian State: In The Context Of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's Personalistic Concept Of Social Life* „Roczniki Teologiczne” 67: 2020 (5), 48-51.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. T. Kemp-Welch, *Dethroning Stalin: Poland 1956 and its Legacy*, „Europe-Asia Studies” 58: 2006, 1263-1270; P. Bühler, *Polska droga do wolności 1939-1995*, tłum. Jerzy Eisler, Warszawa 1999; 134-168.

In 1958, however, the Sejm of the People's Republic of Poland announced the celebrations of the Millennium of the Polish State, which were to last in the years 1960-1966. The Council of State established an event committee headed by prof. Tadeusz Kotarbiński. For the party, it was a specific ideological and political challenge. The actions of the hierarchy were considered an attempt to question the achievements of the authorities and their national legitimacy. Therefore, it was necessary to bring up its own counter-arguments to limit the significance of the Millennium Year and the participation of the faithful in church ceremonies<sup>63</sup>.

The preparations of the Communist authorities to confront the Church's program were facilitated by the knowledge of the timetable of the Great Novena. Great importance was attached to history, which favored the organization of partial anniversary events, such as the „Celebration of the 10th century of Gdańsk”. The slogan of building 1,000 schools out of public contributions for the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Polish state was proclaimed. Numerous social and political organizations undertook several commitments to implement this, the whole society was activated. Another action taken was the program of planting and treeing Poland for the entire decade. A hundred million trees were planted in May 1968. Several dozen national events were organized. May 1 and July 22, 1966<sup>64</sup>.

At the same time, massive changes were also taking place in the universal Church, promoted by Pope John XXIII. In numerous encyclicals, he pointed to the need for dialogue between the Catholic Church and people of other faiths and world views and spoke of the need for cooperation with a pluralist world. The Second Vatican Council, which lasted from 1962 to 1965, introduced many fundamental changes. They concerned both the place of the Church in the contemporary world and internal reforms. Masses were to be conducted in national languages and not in Latin, as previously, the role of Christ as the only savior and the importance of the laity in the life of the Church was emphasized. However, most of the deliberations were already conducted by the new Pope Paul VI.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. AAW, SPP, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/14, 1959 r., Protokół KGEP, Warszawa, 14 IV 1959 r., k. 17; J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła*, 225.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 226.

The letter of Polish bishops sent to German bishops in December 1965 on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Polish Church's presence in the Western and Northern Territories gained symbolic significance. It concerned the mutual relations between the two nations and contained the famous phrase: „we forgive, and we ask for forgiveness”. Polish bishops, in connection with the upcoming celebration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, desired reconciliation with the German nation and reached out to their consent, forgiving the Germans for the wrongs suffered during the war, asking for forgiveness. In a moral and religious tone, this letter was the cause of an increased campaign of the authorities against the Episcopate and the Primate himself, who allegedly betrayed the Polish *raison d'état* and interfered with politics, publicly taking a position on Polish-German relations<sup>65</sup>.

The failure to formally notify the authorities about preparing a letter to the German Episcopate was an undoubted mistake, although the clergy were not obliged to inform the government. However, the relations between the state and the Church prevailing at that time and the total monopolization of matters concerning external links by the party leadership suggested that the initiative of the hierarchs would be used to fight the Church, the more so as the content of the message was dominated by the analysis of Polish-German relations, pointing to the positive and negative aspects of the millennial neighborhood<sup>66</sup>.

Meanwhile, the celebration of the Millennium Year was approaching. Officially, the Church began them on April 9 and actually on April 13-14

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. J. Myszor, *Orędzie biskupów polskich do niemieckich z 18 XI 1965 r.: z perspektywy czasu*, „Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne” 39: 2006, (1), 172-177; P. Małajczyk, *Przebaczymy i prosimy o przebaczenie...*, „Więź” 9: 1990, 112-124; id., *Na drodze do pojednania. Wokół orędzia biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich z 1965 roku*, Warszawa 1994; W. Janowski, *Orędzie biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich i obchody Tysiąclecia Chrztu Polski Państwowości Polskiej na tle stosunków państwo-Kościół w opiniach i komentarzach zachodnich środków masowego przekazu*, in: *Millennium polskie. Walka o rząd dusz*, Warszawa 2002, 121-149; A. Chmiel, *Prasa krajów socjalistycznych o Orędziu biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich i obchodach Millenium*, in: *Millennium polskie. Walka o rząd dusz*, Warszawa 2002, 150-166; J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce (1944-1989)*, Warszawa 2003, 234-241; S. Stępień, *Sobór Watykański II i orędzie Episkopatu Polski do biskupów niemieckich*, in: *Milenium czy Tysiąclecie*, red. B. Noszcza, Warszawa 2006, 44-51; *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek – prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945-1989)*, 218-219.

in Gniezno. The ceremony ended in July of the following year. Ceremonies chaired by Wyszyński were held in the capitals of the diocese. A copy of the Icon of the Black Madonna was transported with him, and the faithful were present on the routes, decorating streets and houses. The Episcopal Conference and its Secretariat established the program and the order of visitations, as well as the Primate's Institute of the Vows of the Nation, the Marian Commission, and the National Committee for the Millennium<sup>67</sup>.

At the same time, talks were held regarding the arrival of Pope Paul VI to Poland. However, Edward Ochab, chairman of the State Council, refused to invite Pope Paul VI to come to the People's Republic of Poland. On May 3, 1966, during the central celebrations at Jasna Góra, Archbishop Karol Wojtyła, the principal celebrant, sat next to the empty papal throne, on which a photo of the Pope with a bunch of red and white roses was placed. The Holy Father was replaced by the Primate of Poland, who was elevated to the rank of papal legate during the Millennium celebrations. The faithful, despite the restrictions of the authorities, came to Częstochowa in huge numbers. After the Holy Mass, there was a solemn procession. After that, the summit Act of the Millennium: the Act of Dedication of Poland to Mary, Mother of the Church, was delivered by Cardinal Wyszyński<sup>68</sup>.

Subsequent church ceremonies took place in Krakow, in the Sandomierz region, and Silesia. About 400,000 people gathered in Piekary Śląskie. In the following months, the celebrations moved to Wrocław and Trzebnica. On October 17, at the plenary conference of the Polish Episcopate, a series of services was completed, which referred to the idea of the Polishness of the Lower Silesian lands and the healing of wounds inflicted during World War II. Together with the Miraculous Icon, he moved again to the northern and central areas of the country, including to Szczecin, Gorzów, and Białystok. The celebrations were attended by Primate Wyszyński, most often supported by Karol Wojtyła<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła*, 251.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. D. Bednarski, *Watykan i Paweł VI wobec Milenium Chrztu Polski*, 377-380.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. A. Dudek, *Państwo i Kościół w Polsce 1945-1970*, Kraków 1995, 169-170; G. Ryś, *O krakowskie agiogramy. Archidiecezja krakowska pod rządami arcybiskupa Wojtyły (1963-1978)*, in: *Kościół krakowski w tysiącleciu*, Kraków 2000, 451-481; M. Lasota, *Donos na Wojtyłę...*, 106; R. Łatka, *Polityka władz Polski „ludowej” wobec Kościoła katolickiego w latach 1944-1979 (przypadek krakowski)*, „Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u” 39: 2014, 175-188.

State ceremonies related to the Millennium of the Polish State were planned to coincide in terms of time and territory with the church ceremonies. So there was a kind of confrontation in many places. Attractive events were organized, such as concerts of musical bands, competitions, and a Poland-Hungary football match. On May 3, 1966, a music show of „The Beatles” in Częstochowa was also planned, but the idea was abandoned. During local Millennium Celebrations, Western movie screenings, student balls, and „Teachers’ Day” ceremonies were held in local cinemas throughout the country. People were threatened with penalties for participating in church celebrations. Secret Service officers took photos of the participants of church processions and arrested the photographed people after that. Similar measures to reduce the importance of religious ceremonies were used throughout the country<sup>70</sup>.

The rulers prepared and implemented several restrictions to discourage the faithful from participating in the Great Novena. Pilgrims traveling to Jasna Góra were harassed. In 1958, an ordinance was issued regarding the granting of permits to organize state and parish peregrinations. There were only a few positive responses to make preparations for the marches as tricky as possible. The local party apparatus instructed PKSs (*Motor Transport Company*), forbidding them to rent coaches to Częstochowa on the days preceding the Marian holidays. At the beginning of 1966, it was decided to call the peregrination organizers before making a pilgrimage to Częstochowa. The Ministry of the Interior received the right to decide in this respect from the local administration<sup>71</sup>. The party mobilized thousands of its members, the militia forces, the state administration, and the Security Service to implement its broad-based concept of counteracting the Millennium Celebrations. As late as 1965, the Central Committee of the PZPR handed over to the Provincial Committees particular theses that were to prepare the apparatus for confrontation with the actions of the episcopal hierarchy. The communists from the headquarters also issued a specific letter, mobilizing the lower instance authorities to conduct numerous lectures, training sessions, and mass events. The clergy were stigmatized, the history of Poland was presented following

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<sup>70</sup> *Centrum władzy. Protokoły posiedzeń kierownictwa PZPR. Wybór z lat 1949-1970*, red. A. Dudek, A. Kochański, K. Persak, Warszawa 2000, 107-143.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Czaczkowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, 269-272.

the party's needs, and the youth were severely indoctrinated. Interviews were conducted with the religious and secular clergy representatives to investigate the atmosphere among the clergy and undermine the bishops' authority, which led to a divergence between priests<sup>72</sup>.

The culminating moment in the state celebrations was the extraordinary session of the Sejm, followed by the military parade, the major harvest festival, and the Culture Congress. They did not hold back from obstructing and disrupting religious ceremonies. The Citizens' Militia (MO) units dispersed the faithful after the Corpus Christi procession in the capital with sticks. Meanwhile, party members marched down Miodowa Street, organizing "cat music" in front of the Primate's seat. A copy of the Icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa was stolen, which was wandering around the country, and then taken to Jasna Góra. Summing up, the conflict with the Church took place in the dimension of moral rivalry. Despite all the difficulties and limitations of state authorities, the millennium celebrations were universally recognized as a triumph for the Church. They were also assigned a significant role in rebuilding the national and religious identity of the Polish nation, even though they could not remain detached from the current ideological disputes and the political context. In turn, counter-measures by the authorities and any competing ceremonies did not achieve their goal. However, there was no entire agreement within the leadership of the PZPR as to the assessment of the confrontation between the millennium celebrations and the course of the ceremonies themselves<sup>73</sup>.

On the one hand, however, the authorities were to formally comply with constitutional principles, avoid aggressive tone or use of administrative measures that could initiate fanaticism and provide „martyrs” to the Church. On the other hand, they must vehemently oppose any manifestation of direct „hostile political agitation” allegedly practiced by the clergy. The authorities' moves were to be accompanied by an extensive propaganda campaign, „explaining” the sense of their policy towards religion and the Church. They should avoid using an offensive tone and any clumsy actions that could disturb the feelings of the Faithful or tip them off to their true goal to

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 243-244.

<sup>73</sup> J. Eisler, *Jakim państwem była PRL w latach 1956-1976?*, „Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość”, 10: 2006, nr 2, 16-19.

limit the People's religious freedoms. In the July letter of the PZPR's Central Committee, despite a clear focus on opposing the Church's activities, there were signs of a new religious policy course. Instead of a decisive confrontation, a more sophisticated approach was used. It was based on limiting the Church's influence in society by propaganda, subjective and selective „respecting” the legal principles, obstructing pastoral work, depleting the material base of the Church, more strict control of her financial activities, limiting pilgrimage movement, etc. In this new “reality,” these more sophisticated tactics allowed the authorities to mask their genuine, unchanging hostility towards the Church<sup>74</sup>.

Nevertheless, the anti-millennium activities of the state in 1958-1965 were not the most fruitful. Most of the celebrations associated with the „Great Novena” program still took place. The intended obstacles generated by the state were not significant enough to hinder the Faithful's attendance at these celebrations. Despite several incidents and administrative activities – e.g.: the arrival of SB officers at the „Primate Institute of the Nation Vows” at Jasna Góra, the abolition of religious education in schools, the removal of crosses from public buildings, the tightening of censorship of the Catholic press or the destruction of all editions of Primate Wyszyński's books related to the „Jubilee of the Baptism of Poland”, etc. – the signs of conflict over the Millennium celebrations were not very obvious during this period. Instead, it was a „silent war” that was being waged. However, the dispute over the celebrations of the „great anniversary” grew with each passing month, and, as it approached 1966, it became increasingly visible and sharper in form<sup>75</sup>.

It can be said that while in the Stalinist period, it was about intimidating the people of the Church. Later, however, it was focused on her acquisition, neutralization, and maximum weakening of the influence of the clergy on society, not necessarily by direct repression. In other words, the stick was replaced by persuasion and by appealing to the issue of loyalty to the state (so-called civic responsibility). One of the tactics used to weaken the Church was the attempts to destroy her unity.

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Czaczkowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, 175-183; R. Ficek, *Moral Renewal* 52-56.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. S. Janikowiak, *Milenium Polski*, Poznań 2006, 11-14.



Therefore, the Security Service officers include initiated writing anonymies, publishing periodicals compromising some priests and bishops, and publishing articles defaming the Church in the daily press<sup>76</sup>.

Fomenting tensions and internal conflicts within the Church in the late 1950s became one of the primary weapons used against the Church by the communist security service. These tactics increased with their growing determination to neutralize the structures and influence of the Church. Furthermore, as in the instructions of the Interior Ministry of July 1960, the “reactionary clergy of the Catholic Church” was recognized as „the main antisocialist force within the country”<sup>77</sup>, these disruptive tactics had become much more essential. Therefore, intra-church conflicts, even if they were not the result of the methods employed by the Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, were closely monitored by them<sup>78</sup>.

Another example of intra-Church conflict was the controversial Polish Bishops Pastoral Letter to their German Brethren in November of 1965, which, though somewhat overshadowed by the communist authorities in preparations for the neutralization of the Church’s „Millennium,” served for the „Gomulka’s team” as a convenient argument to intensify the anti-church campaign in the „Jubilee Year”<sup>79</sup>. The first half of 1966 witnessed the culmination of this state-inspired confrontation.

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. B. Fijałkowska, *Śłużba Bezpieczeństwa wobec Kościoła katolickiego w PRL w okresie popaździernikowym*, in: *Spoleczeństwo, państwo, Kościół (1945-2000). Materiały z ogólnopolskiej konferencji naukowej. Szczecin, 15-16 VI 2000 r.*, red. A. Kaweckki, K. Kowalczyk, A. Kubaj, Szczecin 2000, 29.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. T. Ruzikowski, *Instrukcje pracy operacyjnej aparatu bezpieczeństwa (1945-1989)*, Warszawa 2004, 95.

<sup>78</sup> In the analysis of parish conflicts in the years 1960-1964, which was to be used to assess the expected effects of projects undertaken by the SB, a total of 121 events of this type were included. Forty of them took place in 1962. The above conflicts were divided into three categories: parish, conflict between parish clerics and parishioners, and disagreements between clergy. Most conflicts were noted between priests and the faithful of their parish. Cf. W. Sławiński, *Dziel i rządź. Spory i konflikty wewnątrzkościelne jako narzędzie w walce z Kościołem katolickim w PRL – przyczynek do zagadnienia*, in: *Kościół w obliczu totalitaryzmów. Zbiór studiów dla uczczenia XXV rocznicy męczęńskiej śmierci księdza Jerzego Popiełuszki, Toruń 16-17 X 2009 r.*, red. W. Polańk, Toruń 2010, 683.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. T. Krafczak, *Orędzie biskupów polskich w ocenie struktur partyjnych i Śłużby Bezpieczeństwa*, in: *Pojednanie i polityka. Polsko-niemieckie inicjatywy pojednania w latach sześćdziesiątych XX wieku a polityka odprężenia*, red. F. Boll, W. J. Wysocki, K. Zimmer, Th. Roth, Warszawa 2010, 152-157.

From the meeting of the „Clergy Team” at the Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR in mid-February 1966, the authorities began to coordinate efforts not only to organize the „Millennium of the State” in the best possible way but also to create a program aimed at paralyzing and drawing the faithful away from church’s jubilee celebrations.

At the end of March 1966, the „Party-Government Commission for the Millennium Ceremonies” developed detailed plans for countering the „Millennium” celebrations organized by the Church. They outlined the directions of activity and cooperation of ministries of Culture and Art, Education, Communications, the Radio and Television Committee, the Main Committee of Physical Culture and Tourism (GKKFiT), the Main Political Board of the Polish Army (GZP WP), as well as the interested departments of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (KC PZPR). They aimed to coordinate projects related to the celebration of the „Millennium of the Polish State” and – above all – to limit the range of the church’s „Millennium” celebration<sup>80</sup>.

Implementing the recommendations of the commission, among others, it was the confidential order of Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, pointing out the need to observe work discipline, which – in reality – was to prevent participation in „religious events”, as well as to ban the use of road transport to convey pilgrims. During the Church millennium celebrations, the Minister of Communications ordinance reduced the number of permanent trains running through the places where the ceremonies were held. In April and May 1966, the government implemented the principle of not granting permits to pedestrian groups of faithful. The Ministry of Higher Education issued an order to tighten university disciplines from March 1966. Student organizations were ordered – from April to August – to organized mass events in academic centers and attractive vacation resorts, such events having no connection with the millennium celebration<sup>81</sup>.

Similar actions were to be taken by the Ministry of Education concerning primary and secondary school youth. The Ministry of

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce*, 229; P. Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Konflikty roku milenijnego*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. W. J. Wysocki, *Reakcje władz na milenijną nowennę i peregrynację*, „Studia Prymasowskie” 2: 2008, 21-43

Communications forbade granting permits to install additional loudspeaker devices in churches and churchyards. Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced maximum visa restrictions for foreign clergy<sup>82</sup>. On Holy Saturday (April 9, 1966), the last year of the Great Novena ended. At the same time, the solemn celebration of the „Millennium Week” began throughout the country as an expression of the Church’s gratitude for baptism and faith, as well as a reminder of the date of the „Baptism of Poland”. That day began the „Jubilee of the Millennium”, the essence of which was the renewal of baptism promises in reference to the event from a thousand years ago.

### **7. *Sacrum Poloniae Millennium: The Bitter Taste of Victory***

Almost simultaneously with the inauguration of the church celebrations of the jubilee year of the Baptism of Poland, the authorities undertook the implementation of extensive counter-measures, including a propaganda campaign covering mainly rural areas, which they considered as the „bastion of clericalism”. Its primary goal was to strengthen the party’s influence on society and undermine the Episcopate’s authority both among laypeople and the lower clergy. The subsequent most important church celebrations, organized in 1966-1967 in historic Polish cities located in the so-called „The Millennium Trail”, were accompanied by many different activities, whose goal was primarily to limit the participation of the faithful in them as much as possible<sup>83</sup>.

Having almost unlimited possibilities in using the „tools” of the millennium fight, the authorities demonstrated tremendous forces and resources. This activity took on a mass character, covering the whole society, including children and young people. This had often yielded some results. On the solemnity of the Queen of Poland (May 3, 1966), the main „Millennium” celebration took place at Jasna Góra. The central moment of it was the „Act of Surrendering Poland to the Maternal Slavery of Mary, Mother of the Church, for the Freedom of the Christ’s

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. A. Grzeškowiak, *Represje wobec osób duchownych i konsekrowanych w PRL*, 87-104.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. P. Raina, „*Te Deum*” narodu polskiego. *Obchody Tysiąclecia Chrztu Polski w świetle dokumentów Kościelnych*, Olsztyn 1991, 39-43; Z. Zieliński, *Duszpasterski aspekt obchodów Tysiąclecia Chrztu Polski*, in: *Kościół i prymas Stefan Wyszyński 1956-1966*, red. A. Dziurok, W. J. Wsocki, Katowice-Kraków 2008, 79-81.

Church”, which was the crowning of the ninth pastoral work of the „Great Novena” and religious action undertaken during the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council. The whole Episcopate came to Jasna Góra under the leadership of the Primate Wyszyński, who was there as the personal legate of Pope Paul VI. He was accompanied by numerous diocesan and religious clergy, parish delegations, social groups (farmers, workers, guilds, etc.), professions (teachers, doctors, etc.), and the Polish diaspora<sup>84</sup>.

As in other centers where celebrations related to the jubilee year were held, also in Jasna Góra, the authorities sought to limit the number of faithful participating in them as much as possible. Therefore, difficulties were created on access roads to Częstochowa. In Katowice and Warsaw, communists organized an international soccer championship. Authorities, according to their calculations, were then quite successful in the millennium confrontation. As a result, in the opinion of the Office for Religious Affairs, central church millennium celebrations were one of the more modest ones that Jasna Góra experienced. Office for Religious Affairs provided the number of about 80-90,000 pilgrims, while church sources presented the figure of 200,000<sup>85</sup>.

Despite the differences in the calculation of the number of pilgrims, it should be emphasized that the Church had her own ways of reaching out to the faithful Poles. „The Jasna Góra Act of Devotion to the Mother of God” was repeated on May 3 in the evening in all parishes in Poland. The closing ceremony of the „Millennium of the Baptism of Poland” took place on December 31, 1966, in Warsaw. On this day, the second Millennium of Christianity in Poland was also inaugurated.

The central celebrations of the jubilee celebrations of the „Millennium of the Polish State” were, in turn, held on July 21-22, 1966, in Warsaw. On July 21, an extraordinary session of the Polish Parliament was convened, and the day after, on the Feast of Poland’s Rebirth, the communist government organized the most significant military parade in the history of the Polish People’s Republic, combined with a youth manifestation and a sports parade<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. D. Bednarski, *Watykan i Pawel VI wobec Milenium Chrztu Polski*, 371-389.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. S. Jankowiak, *Milenium Polski*, Poznań 2006, 18-24; Cf. Z. Zieliński, *Duszpasterski aspekt obchodów Tysiąclecia Chrztu Polski*, 82-84.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Jankowiak, *Milenium Polski*, 27-30.

In the second half of 1966, the millennium conflict settled down. The last major incident was the “arrest” by the police apparatus of the „Icon of the Visitation” (September 1966) and detaining it under duress in Jasna Góra. Even though until July 1967, the millennium church celebrations were still taking place in nearly twenty Polish cities, in general, there were no such violent confrontations with the Church as in the first half of 1966. It was mainly influenced by the end of the most important 966 jubilee celebrations by both the Church and the state. But also causing the Gomulka government to shift their focus away from the Church and lose sleep were the country’s deepening economic crisis and the worsening confrontation between the Soviet Union and China, which threatened to destabilize the entire communist system<sup>87</sup>.

The church and authorities balanced their celebrations after 1966. At the same time, each party saw in itself a potential winner of their confrontation. The communist authorities’ opinions were dominated by the tone of triumphalism, which appeared in almost all official or semi-official documents. Only a few pointed to the shortcomings and errors of the anti-millennium campaign. In turn, in the hierarchy’s assessments, the celebration of the „Millennium of the Baptism of Poland” was a clear victory for the Church over the authorities’ failed attempts to disrupt the celebrations<sup>88</sup>.

However, the celebration of the 966 anniversary had a „Janus face”. On the one hand, it became an impulse for significant actions carried out both in the spiritual realm by the Church and in the measurable, material realm by the state, which brought many positive effects. On the other hand, especially in 1966, it turned into a conflict with the Church inspired by the authorities, which ultimately did not bring the effects expected by Gomulka’s team. First of all, it was impossible to divide the Episcopate, which strengthened its own structures, consolidated the faithful around itself, deepening its mandate of self-confidence. It was significant for the then situation of the Church in Poland that, after twenty years of atheization and administrative fight against church institutions, she managed to organize the Millennium of Baptism celebrations on a large scale and with the significant participation of the faithful Poles. These celebrations undoubtedly contributed to the

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. P. R a i n a, *Kardynał Wyszyński, Konflikty roku milenijnego*, 37-49.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 248-267.

strengthening of Catholicism. In this aspect, they became a manifestation of faith and an expression of the faithful's connection with the Church<sup>89</sup>.

It was also, to some extent, a kind of „voting with the feet” of a part of society against the socio-political system of the communist PRL. Another thing is that some parts of society (by no means forced to do so) during the jubilee celebrations of 1966 gave testimony of their relationship with People's Poland. So, there was a clear polarization of Poles' attitudes. The anti-church policy of the authorities, aiming at the „Millennium” celebrations to limit the social impact of the Episcopate and limit the Church's activity to the „Christianity under the sign of sacristy”, provoked resistance and undermined confidence in the state, at least among a significant proportion of the faithful Poles<sup>90</sup>.

In this context, the communist authorities displayed a lack of realism. Its vivid expression was a propaganda campaign related to the „Message to German Bishops”<sup>91</sup> as well as the attempt to obstruct the peregrination of the „Icon of the Visitation” around the country. The anti-millennium confrontation also had an adverse effect outside of Poland. The intensified fight against the Church during the „Great Jubilee” celebrations, the lack of consent for the coming of Pope Paul VI to Poland in 1966, as well as the limitation of permits for the arrival of guests from abroad, undermined the trust of the world to the authorities of the PRL.

### **8. March 1968 – December 1970: The Closing Stages of the Gomulka Regime**

The elevation of Gomulka to the first secretary marked a milestone in the history of communist Poland. Most importantly, it was the first time that popular opinion had influenced a change at the top of any communist government. Gomulka's regime began auspiciously by curbing the secret police. In turn, most collective farmlands returned to private ownership. The new government loosened censorship, freed

<sup>89</sup> Cf. J. Eisler, *Stefan Wyszyński i Władysław Gomulka – dwie wizje Polski, in: Pojednanie i polityka. Polsko-niemieckie inicjatywy pojednania w latach sześćdziesiątych XX wieku a polityka odprężenia*, red. F. Boll, W. J. Wysocki, K. Zimmer, Th. Roth, Warszawa 2010, 138-140.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. J. Eisler, *Co nam zostało z tamtych lat. Dziedzictwo PRL*, Warszawa 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. E. Heller, *Macht Kirche Politik: der Briefwechsel zwischen den polnischen und deutschen Bischöfen im Jahre 1965*, Köln 1991.

political prisoners, improved relations with the Catholic Church, and pledged democratization of communist party management. In general, Gomulka's Poland gained a deserved reputation as one of the more open societies in Eastern Europe. The new party chief disappointed many Poles, however, by failing to dismantle the fundamentals of the Stalinist system<sup>92</sup>.

Regarding himself as a loyal communist and striving to overcome the traditional Polish-Russian enmity, Gomulka came to favor only those reforms necessary to secure public toleration of the party's dominion. The PZPR was to be both the defender of Polish nationalism and the keeper of communist ideology. By the late 1960s, Gomulka's leadership had grown more orthodox and stagnant as the Poznan uprising memory faded. In 1968 Gomulka encouraged the „Warsaw Pact” military suppression of the democratic reforms occurring in Czechoslovakia<sup>93</sup>.

Primate Wyszyński and the Polish Episcopate assessed the events of 1968 through the prism of their multi-layered nature. On the one hand, he treated them as a manifestation of a struggle for power in the party-state apparatus. Anti-Semitism (of Russian origin) was used in this battle with the intra-communist opponent, which resulted in the emigration of Jews and unfair blaming for their misfortunes on Polish society. On the other hand, he saw in them a freedom spurt, related to the fight – mainly of the intelligentsia – for the natural rights of Poles to live in freedom, freely express their views, and develop their culture<sup>94</sup>. The bishops assessed the attitudes of Polish youth with whom they expressed their solidarity and whom – unlike the communists – they did not fear<sup>95</sup>.

The internal crisis faced by the ruling elite meant that in the following years, less and less attention was paid to the issues of limiting the influence of the Church. There were some pragmatic elements in the policy towards the clergy. The bishops sent a letter to the prime minister on this matter, which included, among other things,

<sup>92</sup> Cf. S o w a, *Historia polityczna Polski 1944-1991*, 89-97.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. G. B i s c h o f, *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968*, New York-Toronto, 2010; Cf. M. A n d r z e j e w s k i, *Marzec 1968 w Trójmieście*, Warszawa-Gdańsk 2008.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. A A W, S P P, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/23, 1968 r., Protokół KGEP, 19 IV 1968 r., k. 38-40; J. E i s l e r, *Marzec 1968. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje*, Warszawa 1991.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Głos biskupów polskich w obronie zagrożonego bytu Narodu. 4 IX 1970*, in: *Listy Pastorskie Episkopatu Polski 1945-1974*, Paris 1975, 620-629.

a proposal to resume the work of the Joint Commission, but it was ignored. Three months later, however, the authorities granted the Primate a passport, which was a sign of a weakening of religious policy restrictions<sup>96</sup>. In August of the same year, information about the participation of Polish troops in the invasion of Czechoslovakia appeared in Warsaw. Wyszyński was expected to react, but he remained silent. In a small group, he called this move a mistake while trying to understand Gomułka's motives. At the same time, he was aware of the negative consequences for the prestige of Poland in the world, which was considered a country of the same imperialist line as the USSR<sup>97</sup>. The official decision of the Polish government was strongly criticized and considered ineffective and even harmful. However, the Polish Episcopate did not take any official position on this issue, recognizing that speaking publicly on purely political matters is neither its role nor task<sup>98</sup>.

Nevertheless, the above events meant that the state authorities did not fight so intensely with the Church and did not restrict her freedoms, as it was in the earlier period. Religious clashes were continued concerning particular issues in common relations, such as, for example, religious architecture or the appointment of alumni from previously selected dioceses to the army. Three main events characterize this period: the student incidents in March 1968 and the anti-Zionist campaign related to them, the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops, and the "December events" in 1970<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła*, 269.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. AAW, SPP, Protokoły KGEP, sygn. 04/23, 1968 r., Protokół KGEP, 19 IV 1968 r., k. 40.

<sup>98</sup> In June 1969, elections to the Sejm of the fifth term were held. Stanisław Stomma became the chairman of the „Znak” Parliamentary Circle. There was no room for Jerzy Zawieyski, who was punished for his March speeches. The dividing line between the members of the Circle became more and more apparent. One part of it, led by Zabłocki and Łubiński, was on the side of the marsh faction and saw Gierek as the successor of the increasingly discredited Gomułka. On the other hand, the group of Stomma and Mazowiecki was loyal to Gomułka and Kliszka, which, in practice, gave them more opportunities to act more effectively. Cf. J. Żaryn, *Kościół a władza w Polsce (1945-1950)*, 94.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. M. Mazur, *Kościół wobec wydarzeń grudnia 1970 i sierpnia 1980 roku*, in: *Grudzień 1970 r. genezę sierpnia 1980 r.*, red. K. Kozłowski, Szczecin 2000, 113-119; J. Zabłocki, *Prymas Wyszyński wobec wydarzeń grudniowych 1970 roku i ich konsekwencji*, „*Studia Prymasowskie*” 3: 2009, 273-292; *Grudzień 1970 roku w oczach Episkopatu Polski. Protokół z posiedzenia Rady Głównej Episkopatu*, Warszawa



At the same time, more and more people realized that the time of Gomułka's reign was irretrievable. His political and economic programs and strategies were rapidly depleting. Dissatisfaction and frustration among the population grew. It caused the accumulation of negative phenomena and the creation of an explosive situation. Conflicts of power with various sections of society multiplied. However, the confrontation with the Catholic Church in the mid-1960s still had extraordinary publicity. Gomułka's hold on power weakened that year when Polish students, inspired by the idealism of the „Prague Spring,” demonstrated to protest the suppression of intellectual freedom. Widespread disenchantment mounted as police attacked student demonstrators in Warsaw. The PZPR hardliners, who had been alarmed by Gomułka's modest reforms, seized the opportunity to force the first secretary into purging Jews from party and professional positions. In this way, attempts were made to suppress social discontent among the most vocal elements of Polish society<sup>100</sup>.

The downfall of the Gomułka regime in December 1970 was triggered by a renewed outbreak of labor violence in protest of drastic price increases on essential goods. When strikes spread from the „Lenin Shipyard” in Gdansk to other industrial centers on the Baltic coast, Gomułka interpreted the peaceful stoppages and walkouts as a counterrevolution. In turn, he ordered them met with deadly force<sup>101</sup>. The bloodshed claimed hundreds of victims and inflamed the entire coastline before the PZPR annulled the price increases and pushed Gomułka into retirement, replacing him as the first secretary with Edward Gierek. The Baltic slayings permanently embittered millions of workers, while the events of the later Gomułka period convinced Polish progressives that enlightened communist rule was a futile hope. Many of the future leaders of „Solidarity” and other opposition movements gained their formative political experiences in 1968 and 1970<sup>102</sup>.

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29 grudnia 1970 r., red. J. Eisler, J. Żaryn, Polska 1944/45-1989, „Studia i Materiały” 7: 2006, 307-357; R. Ficek, *Christians in Socio-Political Life*, 241-242.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. A. Paczkowski, *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, 106-123; *Byłem sekretarzem Gomułki. Z Walerym Namiotkiewiczem rozmawia Grzegorz Soltysiak*, Warszawa 2002.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. L. Mażewski, *Schylek Gomułki*, „Dziś” 12: 1999, 102.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. K. J. Lepak, *Prelude to Solidarity*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, 37-142.

## Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Poland in the years 1956-1970 faced serious challenges and problems. It was the only institution independent of the state that was not subordinated to the communist regime. From the very beginning, however, the communists tried to eliminate the Church from the public scene and relegate her to a subordinate and fully controlled organization. Henceforth, mutual relations were regulated by normative acts issued unilaterally by the state and hostile actions undertaken in practice. The drastic and unfair restriction of the rights of the Catholic Church, clergy, and the faithful caused increased tensions in mutual relations, leading to increased conflicts and misunderstandings.

The communist *apparatchiks* considered Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and the entire church hierarchy as the ultimate threat to the ruling system of state power. It was connected with the great authority they enjoyed among the citizens and their steadfast attitude in the fight against all restrictions and limitations. The state authorities' religious policy consisted of introducing more and more repressive measures, consisting mainly in depriving the Church of livelihoods, access to the media, and censorship of sermons and pastoral letters. The Polish United Workers' Party's leadership set itself the goal of the secularization of the nation and indoctrination in the spirit of Marxist-Leninist philosophy to effectively combat the Church and deprive it of any influence on Poles.

Wyszyński and other church representatives, however, tried to normalize relations and reach an agreement, also in such difficult times as the Gomułka government. It was to serve this purpose, among others Joint Commission of the Episcopate and the Government. However, it turned out to be impossible to conclude a permanent agreement with the communists. Despite the hostile relations on the part of the state, Primate Wyszyński tried to implement the pragmatics of resistance to minimize losses and make the communist regime more bearable. In other words, the Church facilitated the confrontation between the leaders and the Polish nation torn apart by the imposed dictatorship. Therefore, she acted as an intermediary and mediator, upheld citizens' rights and freedoms, and supported their aspirations for independence in a country devoid of democratic mechanisms.

As the years passed, it turned out that despite all the attempts and steps taken by the communists, the clergy maintained significant independence.

Attempts to marginalize the church hierarchy and impose communist doctrine proved unsuccessful. It was connected with the Primate of the Millennium's great prudence and the inner strength of the clergy, which remained adamant to the persecution of the authorities, and the common belief in the role of the Church as a guarantor of national identity.

The issue of relations between the state and the Church during the People's Republic of Poland in the period of the Władysław Gomułka regime remains one of the most complex and most exciting issues, despite many publications still disclosed to a limited extent. However, it is impossible to forget the great importance that the Catholic Church played during this period. The sacrifices of priests, the ferocity of actions, and the immense political wisdom of Cardinal Wyszyński and the clergy contributed to the fight against totalitarian enslavement and the survival of the tormented Church. It confirmed that faith is an inseparable element of human existence and that Catholicism is inscribed in Polishness and can survive the most challenging trials.

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