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Communist Totalitarian Regime and the *Status Quo* of the Catholic Church in the Context of Post-War Reality of Poland (1945–1956)

Summary

This article presents the specificity of the totalitarian communist regime and the *status quo* of the Catholic Church operating in the Polish People's Republic in the early post-war period (1945–1956). The analysis of the discussed topics allows one to expose the nature of the Stalinist system of repression described as the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, taking into account the tough and challenging situation of the Catholic Church, forced not only to fight for her survival but – above all – to preserve the Christian identity of the Polish nation. The reinterpretation of the Stalinist totalitarian system from the standpoint of Christian personalistic praxeology discloses its unprecedentedly outrageous nature. Moreover, the presentation of the fundamental issues of the totalitarian, anti-human, and anti-Christian paradigm that characterizes the “dictatorship of the proletariat” makes it possible to interpret Stalinism in terms of not only defining but also legitimizing and even authenticating one of the most terrifying and degenerate forms of totalitarian systems of the 20th century. However, this is of crucial importance, specifically today, when many emerging ideological trends often downplay the excessively iniquitous nature of Stalinism and even treat the “totalitarian model” – particularly communism – as a “specific historical phenomenon” attempting to resolve many complex and diverse socio-political, cultural and economic issues.

Keywords: totalitarianism, Stalinism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, Catholic Church, communism, personalism

Introduction

In the literature on the subject, there are two prevailing currents of interpretation related to the political system in post-war Poland and the role enacted by the Catholic Church in this process. They can be defined as (1) a comparative-

explanatory trend and (2) a negative-disapproving attitude. The first case is based on the methodological concept of political processes in ideological, historical, economic and social, international, civilization, and religious contexts. In other words, the so-called “comparative-explanatory trend” prefers a “comprehensive” approach. It focuses on the premises of the genesis and development of the ideology of “real socialism”, the ideological influence of Marxist-Leninism, as well as the doctrine of the Catholic Church on the systemic transformation of post-war Poland. In this case, much emphasis is placed on the critical and explanatory analysis of the impact of the factors mentioned earlier on the nature of the relationship between the bureaucratic and authoritarian entities of the institutions of the Polish Peoples’ Republic state, and less on critical analyzes contentious assessments of its effects. The second interpretative trend is grounded on the “a priori” acceptance of the paradigm defining the bureaucratic and authoritarian system of real socialism. Many significant facts and events confirm the harmful nature of the post-war political system of the People’s Republic of Poland are attempted. However, the negative-disapproving approach does not penetrate too deeply into the influences of the situational context. Still, it focuses more on the comparative method of searching for external similarities between models of political systems¹.

Also, the research concept presented in this paper is an example of the first methodological attitude. It aims to display the evolutionary transformation of the Communist totalitarian regime characteristic of the post-war political system of the People’s Republic of Poland, taking into account the significant influence of the Catholic Church on the processes of general changes taking place in the realm of the evangelizing mission carried out through several important pastoral initiatives, which the leading advocate and promoter was Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland. Moreover, in a country devastated by war and enslaved by communist totalitarianism, the church became the only support for its citizens.

Therefore, the church comprehended as a community of faith and hope helped overcome the temptation to hate the imposed totalitarian power. Still, it was also a place of discovering authentic freedom in a country where there was a lack of freedom of speech, freedom of association, and organization. The communist party monopolized social and political life. Belonging to the church’s community also made it possible to express disagreement with Polish reality while serving as a screen for non-communist beliefs and criticism of the system prevailing in Poland. However, this did not mean that the church gave up her strictly pastoral tasks because her essential skill was to balance the prophetic function and errands of a political or social nature².

¹ Cf. R. Ficek, *Christians in Socio-Political Life. An Applied Analysis of the Theological Anthropology of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński*. Toruń 2020, p. 199.

² Cf. J. Marecki, F. Musiał (red.), *Niezlomni. Nigdy przeciw Bogu. Komunistyczna bezpieka wobec biskupów polskich*, Warszawa–Kraków 2007.

Communist Totalitarianism as a “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”: Geneses, Agenda, and the Specificity of its Systemic Transform- ation in the Actuality of Post-War Poland

Totalitarianism, understood in terms typical of the Stalinist regime, was a form of governmental administration and political authority characterized by the following characteristics: Stalin’s demi-god status whose personal authoritarian power was law; the systematic use of terror to intimidate the population and destroy even potential opposition in the “ruling” party; highly centralized planning, with the highest priority for heavy industry and minimal attention to citizens’ needs: hierarchy, privileges, social inequalities; emphasis on “traditional” values, however understood in terms of Marxist-Leninist ideology: patriotism, family, education, science and art treated instrumentally; imposed unanimity in all areas of public life, with Marxist ideology treated as authoritarian dogma; the complete subordination of the trade unions, which must - whether they like it or not - turn their “face to production”; minimum rights for workers, ubiquitous poverty in the “world of work” and neo-serfdoms for the peasants; strict censorship, total media control, prohibition of the activity of independent social and cultural organizations, etc. Of course, the above attributes of Stalinist totalitarianism (a kind of *differentia specifica* of Stalinism) did not appear overnight. They represent a reality that can be described as the apogee of Stalinism – a totalitarian system in full bloom already in the second half of the 1930s, and above all in the post-war years – until the despot died in 1953³.

However, the culmination of the emerging communist regime in Poland was 1944. The intensification of this process was related to the offensive of the “Red Army”, which crossed the borders of German-occupied Poland at the beginning of that year⁴. Yet, as the fate of the war tilted to the side of the Allies, the specter of Soviet domination over the territory of Poland, as well as the whole of Central Europe, became more and more accurate⁵.

³ Cf. A. Nove, *Stalinism*, London 1987, pp. 7–8.

⁴ Cf. Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 315–316; R. Ficek, *Primate of the Millennium*, Toruń 2021, pp. 103–136.

⁵ In the summer of 1944, when the Red Army was getting closer and closer to Warsaw, the command of the Home Army decided to start the Warsaw Uprising. Although the Home Army was loyal to the Polish government-in-exile, nevertheless – quite naively – she hoped that the Soviet troops would support her actions aimed at liberating the Polish capital. However, it happened otherwise. The command of the Soviet armed forces decided to stop the offensive in the outskirts of Warsaw. After two months of bloody fighting, it allowed the Germans to crush the uprising ruthlessly. In response to the actions of the Home Army, the German army – before retreating to the western territories - not only committed a bloody massacre on the inhabitants of the capital but also terribly devastated the city. Almost 90 percent of Warsaw remained in ruins. Cf. A. Borowiec, *Destroy Warsaw! Hitler’s punishment, Stalin’s revenge*. Westport, Connecticut 2001.

Nevertheless, even before the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, the communists created in Lublin the "Polish Committee of National Liberation" (PKWN), also known as the so-called "Lublin Committee". In their intentions, the PKWN was to become the nucleus of official power in the territories liberated by the Soviets. On July 22nd, 1944, the PKWN proclaimed the "Communist Manifesto", in which it declared the creation of the "State's National Council" (KRN) as the only legal authority in Poland. The "Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile" was declared "self-proclaimed" and illegal. Also, the so-far binding rudimentary law, the "April Constitution" of 1935, was inconsistent with the law in force. At the same time, the "Communist Manifesto" stated that both the NCR and the Polish Committee of National Liberation function based on the laws contained in the "March Constitution" of 1921, which was recognized as binding fundamental law, until the election of a new parliament after Poland regained "sovereignty and independence"⁶.

Moreover, along with the liberation of the country from German occupation, the legally recognized center of state power should become the center coordinating the national process of the struggle for the "freedom and independence" of the country. It is why, as emphasized by the manifesto, the "Polish Committee of National Liberation" established the "State's National Council" (KRN) as the legal temporary executive power: "the actual political representation of the Polish nation, authorized to act on behalf of the nation and manage its fate until the liberation of Poland from occupation"⁷. The Communist Manifesto also announced the need to reconstruct the structures of Polish statehood in the context of the new constitution, which was to be drawn up by the newly elected legislative authority in the process of future parliamentary elections. In other words, the KRN was established as an interim parliament (the only legal authority in Poland). However, the PKWN was to exercise temporary executive power. On December 31st, 1944, Stalin transformed the PKWN into the "Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland" headed by Edward Osóbka-Morawski⁸.

In January 1945, the KRN was officially recognized by the Soviet Union and installed in Warsaw. However, Polish communists took control of the entire process to rebuild post-war Poland. It, therefore, seems that the lack of Soviet intervention against the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 was a deliberate and deliberate action by Stalin, aimed at eliminating all political factions unfavorable to the communists⁹. Eventually, in March 1945, the Red Army pushed German troops out of Polish territory a few weeks before the final Allied victory in Europe. Consequently, despite enormous losses, ruined Poland emerged from the ruins of

⁶ Cf. Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy*, pp. 18–63.

⁷ E. Duraczyński, *Między Londynem a Warszawą*, Warszawa 1986, p. 101.

⁸ Cf. P. Wieczorkiewicz, *Historia polityczna Polski*, Warszawa 2005, p. 459.

⁹ Cf. K. Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy*, pp. 71–79.

the war as a communist state, incorporated into the newly formed Soviet East-European sphere of influence. Paradoxically, it happened despite the clear opposition of the overwhelming majority of Poles. The seal of this process was the dominant position of the Soviet Union as the victorious power and conqueror of Hitler's empire, remaining in alliance with the most significant powers of the world at that time.

At the conferences in Yalta (February 4–11, 1945)¹⁰ and Potsdam (June 17th – August 2nd, 1945)¹¹, during the meeting of the “Big Three”, i.e., US President Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin, it was decided on the conditions shaping the post-war situation also in the areas “liberated” by the Red Army¹². On June 28th, 1945, the so-called “Provisional Government of National Unity” (TRJN). Although the TRJN had many representatives considerate to the “London government”, the pro-Soviet communists played a decisive role in practice. As a result, Edward Osóbka-Morawski was awarded the post of Prime Minister of the Government. In turn, Władysław Gomułka and Stanisław Mikołajczyk were appointed deputy prime ministers. On July 5th, 1945, TRJN was recognized by Great Britain as well as the US and soon by most Western countries¹³.

In practice, this meant the withdrawal of support for the activities of the exile London government. In other words, the “Provisional Government of National Unity,” despite the theoretical “multiparty” formula, was entirely controlled by the communist PPR and other pro-Moscow politicians fully convinced of the inevitability of Soviet domination. As a consequence of the previously adopted arrangements, TRJN was obliged to hold parliamentary elections, which – as a consequence – would stabilize the socio-political situation in Poland. In turn, the “Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile”, due to the loss of support by the international community, lost its actual influence on shaping the political situation in post-war Poland¹⁴. However, the Republic of Poland authorities in exile ended their activity in 1991, after Lech Wałęsa was elected and sworn in as President of Poland. After that, the presidential insignia was handed over to him by the President of the Republic of Poland, Ryszard Kaczorowski¹⁵.

¹⁰ Cf. F.J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 139–181.

¹¹ Cf. N. Neiberg, *Potsdam*, New York 2015, pp. 139–145.

¹² As a result of the Yalta agreements (February 1945), Stalin promised to hold “free elections” both in Poland and in the rest of the Eastern Bloc (cf. S. M. Plokhy, *Yalta: The Price of Peace*, New York 2011, pp. 152–165). Thanks to this, during the conference in Potsdam (July–August 1945), the winners Alliants granted Poland over 100,000 km² of territory to the west of the “Odra-Nysa Łużycka line”. As a result, over 3 million Poles were resettled from the territories allocated to the Soviet Union to the so-called “Regained Territories”, formerly belonging to Germany. At the same time, more than 2 million Germans were moved west of the newly established borders. Cf. M. Neiberg, *Potsdam*, pp. 92–104.

¹³ Cf. Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy*, pp. 79–83.

¹⁴ Cf. E. McGilvray, *A Military Government in Exile: The Polish Government in Exile 1939–1945. A Study of Discontent*, London 2010.

¹⁵ Cf. R. Habielski, *Polski Londyn*, Wrocław 2000.

In 1946, the coalition regime gained total control over the holding of a national referendum, which – as a result – approved the nationalization of the national economy, land reform, and a unicameral parliament (Sejm). Meanwhile, the right-wing provincial parties were banned, labeling them “enemies of the people.” In 1947, a pro-government “Democratic Bloc” was created, including representatives of the future “Polish United Workers’ Party” (PZPR) and its extreme “left-wing” allies¹⁶. Therefore, the Polish Episcopate developed for its faithful the so-called “Electoral principles”: “(1) Catholics, as members of the state community, have the right to express their political views; (2) Catholics have the right to decide with their votes about the most basic rights of Polish public life; (3) Catholics have a civil, national and religious duty to vote; (4) Catholics must not belong to an organization or party whose principles are contrary to Christian teaching, or whose acts and actions are actually intended to undermine Christian ethics; (5) Catholics may only vote for persons, lists and election programs that do not oppose Catholic teaching and morals; (6) Catholics may not cast their votes for candidates from such lists whose programs or methods of governing are hostile to common sense, the good of the nation and the state, Christian morality and the Catholic world view; (7) Catholics should vote only for candidates of proven honesty and integrity, deserving of trust and worthy representatives of the good for the nation, the Polish state and the church; (8) Catholics cannot abstain from voting without a just and reasonable Reason. Every vote cast under the above indications either helps the common good or hampers evil¹⁷.”

It does not seem, however, that the position of the Polish Episcopate made too much of an impression on the communists. Moreover, immediately after the referendum, the authorities undertook intensive preparations for the elections to the Sejm. Large-scale military actions against the underground were also launched, as well as repressions against the political opposition were intensified.¹⁸ At the first session of the Sejm, Bolesław Bierut – an allegedly non-party member – was elected President. Józef Cyrankiewicz from the PPS became Prime Minister. On February 19th, despite the opposition of PSL MPs, the so-called “Little Constitution” introduced, among other things, the institution of the “State Council”¹⁹. It was the end of the opposition’s ability to act. Nevertheless, throughout the entire period of the Polish People’s Republic, party propaganda used the above elections as an event sanctioning the takeover of power by the communists²⁰. In other words, the so-called electoral victory of The “Democratic Bloc” (PPR, PPS, SL, and SD) – with the simultaneous elimination of the opposi-

¹⁶ Cf. A. L. Sowa, *Historia polityczna Polski 1944–1991*, Kraków 2011, pp. 123–138.

¹⁷ *Orędzie Episkopatu Polski w sprawie wyborów do sejmu (Jasna Góra, 10.09.1946)*, pp. 42–43.

¹⁸ Cf. M. Korcuć, *Wybory 1947 – mit założycielski komunizmu*, „Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej” 2007, nr 1–2, p. 113.

¹⁹ Cf. R. Ficek, *Christians in Socio-Political Life*, p. 232.

²⁰ Cf. M. Korcuć, *Wybory 1947*, p. 113.

tion party (PSL) – meant not only the defeat of the pro-Western opposition but also the liquidation of the democratic system of governance in post-war Poland. In this context, the comment of Primate Wyszyński becomes meaningful: “We must be aware that the last elections were an act of great terror, deception, and lies; this is the general view of elections at home and abroad. Now the government wants the situation to be recognized by the church - they want the church to be noticeably identified. [...] It is clearly said from the other side that the church could gain a lot for the price of supporting the Government by Church factors”²¹.

In post-war communist political practice, fundamentally new goals and priorities, taken over from the Soviet model of systemic transformation, began to play a fundamental influence. Along with the growth of the hegemony of the communist party, the decision-making centers of the state power were gradually “shifted” from the legislative power (parliament) to the so-called “extra-parliamentary structures.” Consequently, it caused numerous and long-lasting parliamentary tensions and crises, as well as conflicts within the structures of the communist party²². Another essential element of the post-war political strategy was culture, traditions, and national values. In practice, as early as 1943, the communists began to use “nationalism” as an essential element of their policy. It was crucial during the war. The patriotic-nationalist character of the national-liberation struggle was to legitimize the activities of the communist underground. Therefore, to make their actions more credible, attempts were made neither to distance themselves from the pre-war – largely discredited – communist parties (SDKPiL or KPP) nor to eliminate the term “communist” from the official name of the party. As a result, efforts were made to conceal its “international” character, and at the same time to expose the openness of the new “party avant-garde” to a wide range of political worldviews²³.

This type of political strategy was also continued in the post-war period. Moreover, it even obtained the “temporary” approval of Stalin, who recognized it as an appropriate concept adapted to the conditions of post-war Poland. In other words, the process of nationalization of industry, land reform, adjustment of the territory of the “regained lands” to the standards of the communist state, industrialization of the country, as well as the transformation of Poles’ mentality to the norms of Marxist-Leninist ideology required the communist party to use appropriate tactics. Therefore, the post-war program of the PPR emphasized the subordination of socialism to national goals. However, the communist administration also wanted good relations with the church²⁴.

²¹ Cf. P. Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, vol. 1, London 1979, p. 218.

²² Cf. M. Kallas, *Historia ustroju Polski*, Warszawa 2006, p. 345.

²³ Cf. R. Blobaum, *Feliks Dzierżyński and the SDKPiL: A Study of the Origins of Polish Communism*, New York 1984.

²⁴ Cf. W. Ważniewski, *Władza i polityka*, Siedlce 2001, pp. 27–38.

In 1944–1947, however, the Soviet authorities supported this kind of political line. In the opinion of Soviet ideologists, the use of specific methods and solutions typical of the USSR would not be advisable in the circumstances of Polish systemic solutions. A similar opinion was shared by zealous supporters of “Moscow system solutions” such as Jakub Berman, Hilary Minc, or Roman Zambrowski. In their view, “people’s democracy” fits into specific political conditions typical for a given country. In other words, the “Polish road to socialism” must have its own distinct and particular characteristics. Władysław Gomułka was also an advocate of this approach. In May 1945, he denied the “reactionary conjectures” that – allegedly – the Polish post-war transformation of the political system was to duplicate the Soviet patterns²⁵.

In early 1953, after years of brutal repression, Eastern Europe experienced a brief “thaw” with the death of Joseph Stalin. The consequence of that time in Poland was the demand for systemic political and economic reforms, which – in turn – led to severe perturbations in the ranks of the Polish United Workers’ Party. Undoubtedly, what happened in March 1953 led to an avalanche of dire consequences. A series of complex problems of the Stalinist period created enormous pressure in the entire Eastern Bloc, which caused an outbreak of public mood demanding the liberalization of the political system and economic reforms. The above process could be seen first in the Soviet Union itself, from where – to a varying extent – it spread to other satellite communist countries. Reorientation of the concept of “party centralism”, changes in the structures of the security service, a breath of freedom in cultural life, changes in economic strategy: a number of the above reforms began in the Soviet Union only after Stalin’s death²⁶.

The de-Stalinization of the official dogmas of the communist system put the Stalinist regime in Poland in a complicated situation²⁷. In addition, Nikita Khrushchev’s speech condemning the Stalinist cult of personality “coincided” with the death of Bolesław Bierut, one of the most “hardline” representatives of the Stalinist faction in the Polish United Workers’ Party²⁸. Admittedly, in 1951, Bierut won a competition with Władysław Gomułka, the goal of which was party leadership. However, the “Poznań June” of 1956, initiated by a strike in the “Cegielski” Works, led to a bloody protest of the Greater Poland community against the government, which – paradoxically – was to represent the proletarian state of workers and peasants²⁹. It seemed that the events in Poznań would initiate

²⁵ Cf. A. Werblan, *Stalinizm*, Warszawa 2009, 57–77.

²⁶ Cf. C. Brzoza, A.L. Sowa, *Historia Polski*, Kraków 2009, pp. 165–196.

²⁷ Cf. T. Kemp-Welch, *Dethroning Stalin: Poland 1956 and its Legacy*, “Europe-Asia Studies” 2006, 58, (8), pp. 1267–1279.

²⁸ Cf. Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 435–490.

²⁹ Cf. Ł. Jastrząb, *Rozstrzelano moje serce w Poznaniu: Poznański Czerwiec 1956 r. – straty osobowe i ich analiza*, Warszawa 2006.

a policy of “stiffening” the party’s political line and abandoning the “liberalization” of social life.

Nevertheless, during the July 7th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, the party ‘reformers’ were partially blamed for the bloody events in Poznań. The “errors and distortions” of the communist party (rehabilitation of Gomułka) and the security apparatus from 1948–1955 were also condemned³⁰. Moreover, the government’s policy did not meet the expectations of the society, which called for further changes. The management of the power apparatus, headed by Edward Ochab, did not enjoy social trust – unlike Gomułka, who gained it more and more and was perceived as a continuator of changes³¹. For many days, talks had been held to return to the top of Gomułka’s party. The crisis in the PZPR meant that most of the leadership saw this as the only solution³².

The events of 1956 also caused a reshuffle into the camp of the ruling communist party. In October 1956, the Central Committee of the PZPR chose Gomułka as its First Secretary. Ironically, the above decision was made in the face of a severe threat of a Soviet invasion if the PZPR party “dared” to elect Gomułka as its leader. Nevertheless, when Khrushchev made sure that Gomułka did not intend to change the fundamental principles of socialism in Poland, he withdrew the threat of Soviet intervention³³. On the other hand, the new First Secretary of the PZPR promised to implement the basic assumptions of the “Polish road to socialism”. According to the new party team, the Polish version of real socialism should be coherent with the national culture and tradition. Nevertheless, many keen observers of the Polish political scene were convinced that the dramatic events of “Polish October 1956” clearly indicated the beginning of the end of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”³⁴.

Party with the Nation, Nation with the Church

In the initial period of their rule, the communists, in order not to aggravate relations with the Catholic Church – at least officially – tried to avoid mutual animosities and misunderstandings, which could lead to an escalation of the

³⁰ Cf. W. Ważniewski, *Władza i polityka*, pp. 136–139.

³¹ Cf. A. Friszke, *Rok 1956*, [in:] A. Paczkowski (ed.), *Centrum władzy w Polsce 1948–1970*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 190–192.

³² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 194; A. Markowski, *Sytuacja polityczna w Polsce w latach 1944–1956*, [in:] <https://historia.org.pl/2017/09/22/sytuacja-polityczna-w-polsce-w-latach-1944-1956-czesc-2/> [access: 24.11.2019].

³³ Cf. P. Jones, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, New York 2006.

³⁴ Cf. A. Paczkowski, *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego PRL–ZSRR 1956–1970*, London 1998, pp. 36–47; K. Persak, *The Polish-Soviet Confrontation in 1956*, pp. 1285–1310.

conflict. However, attempts were made to torpedo church initiatives and incite anti-clerical public moods. For their part, the clergy exposed and condemned the atheism and materialist ideology of the communist regime. Over time, the negative attitude of the government resulted in breaking the concordat agreement with the Vatican (September 12th, 1945). However, despite increasing hostility on the part of the state, the church tried to pursue a neutral position. However, the intensification of anti-church policy took place after 1948. Communist politics began to attack the church more and more in their official speeches. Secret services (UB) also stepped up their actions against this institution³⁵.

The communist authorities undertook a more decisive struggle with the church in the early autumn of 1947. They carried it out practically without interruption until 1956. It was carried out simultaneously on two levels: (1) On the one hand, the communists sought to take control of the entire public life of the nation and eliminate the influence of the church, which – in their opinion – was to serve social progress. (2) On the other hand, they tried to penetrate the interior of the church structure in order, with the help of obedient individuals, to turn it into another tool for enslaving society. In this fight, the authorities used various means, primarily legal and administrative forms³⁶. However, at first, the most crucial problem for the communists was taking over the influence on the young generation, which, under the applicable law and against the party's intentions, gathered around the clergy and Catholic churches. With the help of the subordinate administrative apparatus and the political police, the authorities intimidated members of the associations while encouraging young people to join the communist ZWM (ZMP from 1948). According to secret police instructions, Catholic circles were under surveillance, the registration of the most significant associations was made difficult, or they were brutally dissolved. There were also more and more arrests³⁷.

Yet, religion was gradually withdrawn from schools. Efforts were made to ensure that the religion grade was not censored. Attempts were made to remove the catechist sisters and priests, who were accused – thanks to denunciations - of defamation during the lessons of the people's government from public schools. Some of the priests arrested were already subjected to political trials. Parallel to these activities, atheistic schools began to be established. Opposing

³⁵ Cf. A. Dziurok, *Kruczoizacja*, Katowice 2012, pp. 23–45; Cf. R. Ficek, *A Realism of Survival*, pp. 99–103.

³⁶ Cf. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła...*, p. 88.

³⁷ Cf. A. Paczkowski (ed.), *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w latach 1944–1956. Taktyka, strategia, metody*, cz. 1: *Lata 1945–1947*, Warszawa 1994; A. Paczkowski (ed.), *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w latach 1944–1956. Taktyka, strategia, metody*, cz. 2: *Lata 1948–1949*, Warszawa 1996; A. Dudek, A. Paczkowski (ed.), *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w Polsce w latach 1950–1952. Taktyka, strategia, metody*, Warszawa 2000; G. Majchrzak, A. Paczkowski (ed.), *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w Polsce w latach 1953–1954. Taktyka, strategia, metody*, Warszawa 2004; J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła*, p. 89.

to the parents' opinion, they were often created in the only school in the vicinity, only changing the signboards. It resulted in the necessity of arduous travel to far-flung institutions or the abandonment of religious lessons. The clergy tried to counteract this by writing complaints to state authorities and appeals to parents. The fight against the church was even more intense in March 1949. It was related to the global religious policy of the Soviet "bloc" and the specific situation of the Church in Poland at the turn of 1948 and 1949. The year 1949 brought significant changes in both the religious and political life of the country. On October 22nd, 1948, primate August Hlond died suddenly after a successful appendix operation. On his deathbed, however, Hlond stated that he would like to choose Lublin's bishop, Stefan Wyszyński, as his successor, which only his closest associates knew. Even though the funeral of the Primate, among the ruins of Warsaw's Old Town, became a great religious and patriotic demonstration.

People of the church were aware that the successor of Hlond should have the appropriate authority among all the clergy because, without it, the purely titular dignity of a primate would not be worth much. Above all, however, it had to face new challenges. On November 16th, Pope Pius XII signed a bull appointing the archbishop of Gniezno-Warsaw, and thus the Primate of Poland, the former Lublin ordinary, then 47-year-old bishop Stefan Wyszyński. Despite this, in July 1949, the government launched an anti-church propaganda campaign³⁸.

In response to the escalation of the anti-church policy, on July 16th, 1949, the Holy See issued a decree excommunicating Catholics belonging to the PZPR³⁹, which further intensified the reluctance of the government apparatus towards the church as well as boosted the anti-clerical propaganda activities of the government administration. However, the decree of the Holy See was only a reminder of the natural and eternal principle of the Catholic Church, defending herself against the influence of all atheistic ideology and constituting an internal matter of the church. It did not question the competence of political parties to regulate their internal discipline, as suggested by the propaganda of the authorities and the government's statement on July 26th⁴⁰.

³⁸ Cf. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła...*, pp. 95–96.

³⁹ Cf. *The Decree of the Holy Office against Communism: Some Implications*, "The Tablet", August 6, 1949. (derived, September 27, 2019).

⁴⁰ Cf. W. Ważniewski, *Władza i polityka*, p. 19. On July 5, 1949, the Minister of the Treasury issued an ordinance on the obligation to keep tax books by clergy (cf. Dz.U. nr 40, poz. 292). It violated all the existing legal provisions, including the binding constitution. The ordinance of July 12, introduced soon after, also by the Minister of the Treasury, required entering the names and surnames and addresses of people who made any alms and sacrifices for the Church, which in turn violated the secret of the priestly office and offended the freedom of conscience of the faithful, as well as their religious feelings. In order to effectively fight the clergy, the communists had to learn about its weaknesses and penetrate inside. It was to be achieved primarily by establishing a Mixed Commission of the Government and the Episcopate, whose official goal was to regulate the relations between the state and the Church. In the atmosphere of prepa-

A severe blow to the church was the nationalization of the charity organization "Caritas," headed by Cardinal Sapieha. Hundreds of older people and the poorest families benefited from this organization. Support was also given to monasteries, seminaries, and other Catholic institutions. On January 23rd, 1950, the state authorities inspected the premises of "Caritas" throughout the country, finding alleged abuses. A compulsory board was established consisting of Catholic activists and priests deemed trustworthy. The bishops protested against this lawlessness in a letter to President Bierut and the clergy. In response, Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz threatened with legal consequences as well as a court trial. Therefore, the episcopate stated the liquidation of "Caritas" as a church institution⁴¹.

The authorities' next step was to issue on March 20th, 1950, the act on the takeover of the goods of the "dead hand" by the state and the creation of the state Church Fund, from which benefits for religious purposes were to be provided⁴². Then, the principle of excluding the land belonging to the church from the provisions of the Land Reform Act was abolished. It was another step aimed at limiting the autonomy of the church by controlling one of its sources of financing. Under this law, the church lost nearly 155,000 hectares of land, and funds from the Church Fund were used to support the movement of pro-government priests. The act of taking ownership of the church's land took place on March 6th. As a result, before the law entered into force, which is perfectly illustrated by the authorities' attitude to how the legislation was enacted⁴³.

In this climate, on April 14th, 1950, an agreement was finally signed between the state and the church. The authorities forced a settlement on the episcopate, which wanted to stop it, at least for a while, the more and more repressive measures against him. The church decided to sign this act of loyalty to the state, and more so, the situation in other countries of the Soviet bloc took an even more dangerous turn than in Poland. According to the concluded agreement, the Pope was the respected and highest authority for the church in matters of faith. On other issues, the episcopate was to be guided by the Polish *raison d'état*. In addition, the episcopate undertook to explain to the clergy not to oppose the development of cooperatives in the countryside. The government also stated that it would not restrict religious activities in schools or Catholic associ-

rations for the first meeting of the Joint Committee, on August 5, 1949, the decree of the Council of Ministers on the protection of freedom of conscience and religion was implemented. Theoretically, it guaranteed equal protection for believers and non-believers. In practice, however, it was repressive in nature and served primarily as a pretext for security officers to test the loyalty of priests to the communist authorities. Cf. R. Ficek, *Christians in Socio-Political Life*, pp. 235–238.

⁴¹ Cf. D. Zamiatała, *Caritas. Działalność i likwidacja organizacji. 1945–1950*, Lublin 2000, p. 23.

⁴² Cf. Dz.U. nr 9, poz. 87.

⁴³ Cf. A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945–1989)*, Kraków 2003, p. 53.

ations, church publishing houses, pilgrimages, processions, or religious congregations⁴⁴.

A few days later, however, on April 19th, the law on changing the organization of the highest state authorities in the municipal economy and public administration was passed⁴⁵. On its basis, the Office for Religious Affairs, reporting to the Prime Minister, was established. The scope of the Office's activities included matters related to the state's attitude to religious denominations. However, in practice, he focused on limiting the activities of the Catholic Church and religious associations, taking into account the denominational policy of the state, and on managing this activity under the assumptions of communist ideology. The scope of the steps taken was so broad that religious associations could not, in practice, undertake any non-cultural activities without the consent or lack of objection from this Office⁴⁶.

Another planned action by the authorities was the removal of apostolic administrators in the Recovered Territories and the appointment of capitular vicars. The performance of this task was scheduled for January 26th, 1951. A commission was also appointed, composed of Cyrankiewicz, Berman, Mazur, to prepare a government declaration on the liquidation of the current church administration in the Recovered Territories. A decree abolishing this administration was issued on January 26th. The episcopate accepted the authorities' decision but assessed that the removal of apostolic administrators and the appointment of capitular vicars by the government did not remove the temporary administration but created a double temporality. Therefore, the Primate went to the Vatican, where he obtained from the Holy See extensive powers and permission to appoint bishops in Gorzów, Olsztyn, Opole, and Wrocław⁴⁷.

The year 1951, with among the few gestures by Bierut, was marked by the utmost terror against the church. In January, a trial was pending before the Military District Court in Kraków against the underground organization Polish Army.⁴⁸ However, the most crucial factor in determining the legal and moral situation of the church was the enactment of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic on July 22nd, 1952⁴⁹. This Basic Law recognized the existence of one political authority – the State, the equality of citizens before the law, irrespective of religion, and the principle of the separation of Church and State. However, the authorities interpreted the regulations to their advantage.

On the one hand, religious criteria had no meaning in public life, including determining citizens' rights and obligations. On the other hand, separation

⁴⁴ Cf. W. Ważniewski, *Władza i polityka*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Cf. Dz.U. nr 19, poz. 156.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. Mezglewski, H. Misztal, P. Stanisław, *Prawo wyznaniowe*, Warszawa 2006, p. 30; W. Ważniewski, *Władza i polityka*, pp. 26–27.

⁴⁷ Cf. W. Ważniewski, *Władza i polityka*, pp. 27–28.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Cf. Dz.U. nr 33, poz. 232.

meant the supremacy of public law over church law, state *raison d'état* over church law, and the submission of churches' political and administrative control of state bodies. It was a "separation" established on the principle of subordination and the Communist party's hegemony – not on partnership and cooperation. So, the episcopate called for the complete protection of the rights of the Church and Catholics⁵⁰.

The Krakow curia became another target of the communist attack. The trial of the clergy of this curia, carried out by the secret police using the assumption: "give a man, and a paragraph will be found," took place on January 21–27, 1953, with the participation of the general public⁵¹. However, it turned out that the attack on the Krakow Curia did not bring the breakup expected by the communists and discredit the Catholic Church. Attempts to intimidate, except in a few cases, priests and appointment of priests loyal to the state in important positions were also unsuccessful. It has not been possible to present the church as a treacherous institution, dangerous for citizens and – consequently – paralyze her pastoral work, especially among young people⁵².

The climactic act of subordinating the church to state power was the government decree on filling church posts of February 9th, 1953. It stipulated that the Communist authorities controlled each appointment and jurisdiction act in the church. It meant the complete subordination of the secular authority and power to the church's internal affairs in the organizational and purely religious sphere. The above decree, which marks the beginning of the end of the church's independence, did not remain unanswered. On May 8th, 1953, the bishops gathered at the Polish Bishops' Conference sent a memorial to the government of the People's Republic of Poland, later called "Non Possumus". It stated that further concessions from the hierarchy were not possible due to the government's harassment, interference in filling church positions or removing religion from schools. This letter was emphatic, which was confirmed by the words of Primate Wyszyński, delivered on June 4th, 1953: "What is Caesar should be returned to Caesar, and what is God's to God. And when Caesar wants to sit on the altar, we say briefly: we do not allow it"⁵³.

In the following weeks, a series of meetings between the Primate and Bolesław Piasecki, who acted as an envoy of the authorities, took place. He unsuccessfully tried to persuade the cardinal to change his position and accept the February decree. During one of them, Wyszyński said directly that he even

⁵⁰ Cf. A. Anusz, A. Anusz, *Samotnie wśród wiernych. Kościół wobec przemian politycznych w Polsce (1944–1994)*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 29–30; A. Mezglewski, H. Misztal, P. Stanisławski, *Prawo wyznaniowe*, p. 30.

⁵¹ Cf. M. Lasota, F. Musiał, *Kościół zraniony. Śledztwo oraz proces księdza Lelity i innych*, [in:] F. Musiał, J. Szarek (ed.), *Partia z narodem, naród z Kościołem*, Kraków 2008, pp. 68–69.

⁵² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵³ Quotation after: R. Ficek, *Primate of the Millennium*, p. 192.

counted the possibility of imprisonment. Still, despite this, he could not agree to the abolition of the autonomy of the church. The brave attitude of the episcopate deepened the existing dispute even more. The authorities' retaliation was to publicize the trial of Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek and several people from his curia. In this way, the government wanted to scare the episcopate and persuade Wyszyński to compromise, who protested to the authorities regarding the show trial of the bishop of Kielce⁵⁴. In that trial, which took place on September 22nd, 1953, bishop Kaczmarek was sentenced to 12 years in prison. However, he was tried as an enemy, Nazi, and spy of the Vatican. In this way, the communists attempted to fight the Catholic Church – the only institution that remained free, opposing atheistic ideology and defending the truth⁵⁵.

The Internment of Primate Wyszyński

On September 23rd, 1953, the Primate was imprisoned based on a resolution issued the day before by the Presidium of the Government of the Polish People's Republic⁵⁶. Shortly after Wyszyński's arrest, the episcopate, whose leadership was entrusted to Bishop Klepacz and Bishop Choromański, issued a loyal statement to the authorities, and in December 1953, decided to take a humiliating oath "to be faithful to People's Poland and its Government". At that time, the ruthless and firm implementation of the decree began. On February 9th, 1953, the Communists sought not so much to tame the church to destroy it. In particular, the state authorities interfered with filling church positions. The period of the most profound politicization of the church began⁵⁷.

Soon after, the security authorities began implementing a plan to initiate a show trial of the Primate, accusing, among other things, espionage for the Vatican and sentencing it to many years' imprisonment. For this purpose, evidence was collected, and an indictment was prepared. For unknown reasons, however, no further preparations were made. Meanwhile, Wyszyński was cut off from the outside world. Initially, he was imprisoned in Rywałd. The monastery of the Capuchin Fathers, where he was held, was taken over by the UB, and the monks

⁵⁴ Cf. W. Ważniewski, *Władza i polityka*, p. 48.

⁵⁵ Cf. J. Szarek, *Wszystko dla Chrystusa – wierny biskup kielecki*, [in:] F. Musiał, J. Szarek (ed.), *Partia z narodem, naród z Kościołem*, Kraków 2008, p. 81.

⁵⁶ According to the resolution of the Presidium of the Government of the People's Republic of Poland No. 700/53, Wyszyński was prohibited from holding the position of primate and from staying in Warsaw. It should be noted that the resolution was signed neither by the prime minister nor by any of his many deputies. Even then, people feared the consequences of the internment of the primate, and nobody in the government wanted to take responsibility for it. This decision was, in fact, devoid of any legal basis. Cf. A. Dudek, *Ślady PEEReLu: ludzie, wydarzenia, mechanizmy*, Kraków 2005, p. 78.

⁵⁷ Cf. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła*, pp. 143–144; pp. 151–152.

were told that there was a high-ranking officer there⁵⁸. The next place of the Primate's prison was Stoczek Warmiński, where he was transferred in October 1953. Due to the deteriorating health of the cardinal, his place of stay was changed to Prudnik Śląski. The last place of the cardinal's prison was the convent of the Sisters of Nazareth in Komańcza in the Bieszczady Mountains. He was transferred there in October 1955 and stayed there until his release⁵⁹.

In addition to Wyszyński, the communist authorities arrested and held many other priests in prison or solitary confinement in 1953–1956. Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek was still imprisoned. Former apostolic administrators did not have the right to reside in their ordinaries. The bishops who were in jail and their families were under the constant surveillance of the security services. The officers prepared a particular program of harassment and persecution against priests⁶⁰. At that time, the process of removing religion from schools continued. In the end, the teaching of religion in pedagogical high schools and vocational schools was abolished. In the other types of schools, in the 1955/1956 school year, catechesis was to cover about 36% of the schools. The methods used for this purpose, however, aroused much controversy and concern among the central authorities. However, they did not agree to teach religion outside the church walls, which was another cause of the deepening conflict⁶¹.

December 1954 brought significant changes in the organization of the security apparatus, which were to indicate the coming thaw. According to the decree of the State Council of December 7th, the Ministry of Public Security was dissolved. In its place, the Ministry of the Interior was appointed, headed by Władysław Wicha, who replaced Stanisław Radkiewicz. The changes resulted in the release of many people imprisoned for political reasons, including Władysław Gomułka, who was released on December 13th from his forced isolation⁶². In January of the following year, other significant events took place. During the 3rd plenary session of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, it was stated that there had been a brutal violation of the rule of law in the recent period. These statements and the publication of bolder reports in the press were to herald the ever-approaching changes.

In these difficult conditions for the clergy, the bishops tried to minimize the losses and survive the difficult period. They demanded that the law be obeyed by the authorities, as the arbitrariness of the officials caused more and more persecution. The hierarchs intervened in the release of the Primate and other arrested priests, protested against removing religion from schools, and increased the taxation of remaining church property or its liquidation. Generally,

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 140.

⁵⁹ Cf. A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945–1989)*, p. 89.

⁶⁰ Cf. J. Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła*, p. 146.

⁶¹ Cf. A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945–1989)*, p. 96.

⁶² Cf. P. Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Losy więzienne*, Warszawa 1993, p. 147.

however, these protests were unsuccessful. It seemed to the state authorities that they had achieved their goal of depriving the church of a courageous, charismatic, and steadfast guide and subordinating the episcopate to itself. However, it turned out that the church hierarchy aimed primarily at surviving this difficult time. The imprisonment of the Primate only strengthened his authority and increased the unity and sense of community of Catholics⁶³.

In fact, the communist persecution only strengthened the moral side of the church and legitimized its actions in the public eye. The situation began to change in April 1956⁶⁴. Despite the government's suggestions, Wyszyński refused to release him from prison while other bishops were prevented from returning to their diocese. As the Primate said: "I can come back last, but never the first"⁶⁵. The solution to the situation required an amendment to the government act of 1953, which gave the government administration the right to control nominations to higher ecclesiastical positions. In his notes from the spring of 1956, Wyszyński states that those who questioned the validity of the "Stalinist cult" are now being rehabilitated. "Who should go to jail today when it turned out that the" non-communists "were much more communist because they understood the Marxist spirit better? [...] Such is the fate of human self-righteousness that the doctrine condemned today was brought to the altars just yesterday"⁶⁶.

Conclusions

With the end of World War II, global and local political changes led to the severe systemic transformation and the establishment of the Polish People's Republic (PRL). The Catholic Church in Poland faced tough challenges and problems determining her survival. However, the social and political conditions of the time meant that the church became the only institution independent of the state that was not subordinated to the Stalinist totalitarian rule. No wonder, then, that the communists from the beginning of their political rules aimed at marginalizing or even eliminating the church from the public scene or pushing her down to the role of a subordinate and fully controlled "social" organization. Mutual relations of the state were now regulated by normative acts issued unilaterally by the state and by its political actions taken in practice. The drastic and unfair restriction of the Catholic Church's rights, control of the clergy, and the faithful caused increased tensions in mutual relations, leading to increased conflicts and misunderstandings.

⁶³ Cf. R. Ficek, *A Realism of Survival*, pp. 106–108.

⁶⁴ Cf. A. Paczkowski, *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, pp. 13–15.

⁶⁵ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *A Freedom Within*, New York, 1984, p. 246.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 234–245.

In this context, the church hierarchs were regarded by communist ideology as the greatest threat to the ruling system of “proletarian dictatorship”. The main reason was the great authority they enjoyed among the citizens and their steadfast attitude in the fight against all restrictions and limitations of the Stalinist era. The authorities’ religious policy introduced more and more far-reaching repressions, consisting mainly in depriving the church of livelihoods, access to the media, and censorship of sermons and pastoral letters. The leadership of the PZPR set itself the goal of secularization of the nation and indoctrination in the spirit of the materialist Marxist-Leninist philosophy to effectively combat the church and deprive it of any influence on Poles. Faced with the cruel reality of the Stalinist state, the church tried to minimize losses, to make the communist regime more bearable, while easing the confrontation between the leaders and the Polish nation torn apart by the imposed dictatorship of the Stalinist “dictatorship of the proletariat.” In this sense, the Catholic Church acted as an intermediary and mediator, guarded the rights and freedoms of citizens, and supported their aspirations for independence in a country deprived of all democratic mechanisms.

In the gloomy period of Stalinist enslavement (1945–1956), the relationship of the Catholic Church with the communist regime can be described as a struggle in terms of “survival realism”. However, the Church side did not initiate a fight and never wanted to participate. Moreover, the church’s resistance was not preoccupied with the state as an institution but against a godless ideology that defined corrupt systemic evil and anti-human structures. However, the issue of the relationship between the state and the church in the People’s Republic of Poland during the Stalinist era remains neither one of the most difficult nor the most exciting and thought-provoking topics, which, despite many publications, is still shown to a small extent. However, it is impossible to forget about the great importance that the Catholic Church enacted during the Stalinist enslavement of the country. The martyrdom of the clergy, the ferocity of brutal actions, and the great wisdom of the episcopate 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, that Catholicism is inscribed in Polishness, and that it can survive the most harrowing trials.

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Totalitarny reżim komunistyczny i uwarunkowania sytuacyjne Kościoła katolickiego w kontekście powojennej rzeczywistości Polski (1945–1956)

Streszczenie

Głównym celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie specyfiki totalitarnego reżimu komunistycznego w odniesieniu do uwarunkowań sytuacyjnych Kościoła katolickiego funkcjonującego w przestrzeni Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej wczesnego okresu powojennego (1945–1956). Analiza omawianych zagadnień pozwala ukazać naturę stalinowskiego systemu represji określanego jako „dyktatura proletariatu” z uwzględnieniem wyjątkowo trudnej sytuacji Kościoła katolickiego zmuszonego nie tylko do walki o swoje przetrwanie, ale przede wszystkim o zachowanie chrześcijańskiej tożsamości narodu polskiego. Dokonana reinterpretacja stalinowskiego systemu totalitarnego z perspektywy chrześcijańskiej prakseologii personalistycznej ukazuje jego bezprecedensowo zbrodniczy charakter. Przedstawienie fundamentalnych założeń absolutnie antyludzkiego i antychrześcijańskiego paradygmatu charakteryzującego „dyktaturę proletariatu” pozwala zinterpretować stalinizm w kategoriach nie tylko definiujących, ale także legitymizujących, a nawet uwierzytelniających jedną z najstraszniejszych i najbardziej zdegenerowanych form systemów totalitarnych XX wieku. Ma to kluczowe znaczenie, zwłaszcza dzisiaj, kiedy pojawiające się tendencje często bagatelizują zbrodniczy charakter stalinizmu, a nawet traktują „model totalitarny” – zwłaszcza w kontekście komunizmu – jako „specyficzne zjawisko historyczne” usiłujące rozwiązać wiele skomplikowanych kwestii społeczno-politycznych, kulturowych i gospodarczych.

Słowa kluczowe: totalitaryzm, stalinizm, dyktatura proletariatu, Kościół katolicki, komunizm, personalizm.