

The structure and activities of the Department of Religious Affairs in Lodz and in the province (1950-1975)

My doctoral dissertation is devoted to the Polish administrative apparatus responsible for religious matters. It is about people and their views and decisions regarding the organization and normalization of religious life of the country and the policy that was conducted in the years 1950-1975. The work consists of four chapters arranged chronologically in terms of events. The subsequent chapters describe the structure of the administrative apparatus, the history of selected institutions, state activities in selected areas of religious life, subsidizing and financial activities, decisions, regulations and legislation regarding this sphere of social life in Poland.

The first chapter introduces the history of Lodz in the interwar period and its cultural and national diversity. It also discusses the situation of Lodz after World War II. The system of political forces in Poland which was the consequence of World War II and the findings of the Yalta conference put the Roman Catholic Church in a qualitatively new situation. The position of the church when communists took power in Poland was determined by several components. The first extremely important factor was very large losses incurred by the clergy as the result of the war, reaching almost 40% of the total number of clerics. Changing borders, resettlement and the Holocaust had a great impact on the nation unification and thus also on religious denomination after World War II. A great value for the Roman Catholic Church was strengthening its authority among the society, which was the result of the events of the German occupation and the political situation after the takeover of power by communists in Poland after 1945. The Polish United Workers' Party, inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology, created a precise plan to fight the Church in the People's Republic of Poland. One of its priorities was to break the unity of the Catholic clergy by making a split in the Church and making priests dependent on state authorities.

The second chapter draws attention to the attitude of communists to churches and religious associations. It also discusses the process of creating an administrative apparatus responsible for religious matters in 1950-1975. In the first years after World War II, Polish communists did not decide to conduct an open fight with the Church. The tactics of the new authorities to successively subordinate and rebuild the social system based on Marxist-Leninist ideology, which assumed building a new legal order at its initial stage was maintaining good relations with the Church. The first waves of repression against the Church



and religious denominations began in the late 1940s. In the years 1944–1950, all religious affairs on behalf of the state authorities were supervised by the Religious Department at the Ministry of Public Administration. On April 17, 1945, the Ministry of Public Administration separated the city of Lodz out of the Lodz province and raised its status to the capital of province. In Lodz, the basic organs of the state apparatus dealing with the formation and implementation of the religious policy towards churches and religious associations in the period from April 17, 1945 to July 9, 1949 belonged to the Administrative Department of the Lodz Municipal Board and from July 9, 1949 to June 1950 to the Socio-Political Department of the Lodz Municipal Board separated out of the Administrative Department. However, at the province level the religious policy was pursued by the Socio-Political Department of the Province Office in Lodz.

The third chapter presents the changes that took place in the administrative system of the state in 1950. The end of the reconstruction of the entire post-war system in Poland was the liquidation of the Ministry of Public Administration on the basis of the Act of April 19, 1950. The Department of Religious Affairs subordinated to the minister of Public Administration raised its status to an independent department - the Office of Religious Affairs reporting directly to the Prime Minister. This office had its local branches. In Lodz province and Lodz as a separated city, there were two parallel organs of the state apparatus responsible for forming and implementing the religious policy towards churches and religious associations. At the province level in the years 1950-1955 there were Offices of Religious Affairs of the Presidium of the Provincial City Council. In 1955, they were transformed into Departments of Religious Affairs and in 1973 as a result of reorganization of the local administration, they were incorporated in the structure of Provincial Offices. However, in the city of Lodz in the years 1950-1955 the religious policy was dealt with by Offices of Religious Affairs transformed into departments in 1955. The transformation was aimed at giving sections responsible for the religious policy at the Presidium of the Provincial City Council and City Councils of Warsaw and Lodz greater importance.

Under the Act of November 22, 1973 the Presidium of the Provincial City Council was liquidated and their place at the provincial level was replaced by the Provincial Office. On the basis of this Act, Departments of Religious Affairs operating at the Presidium City Council of the so called separated cities were liquidated and incorporated to Departments of Religious Affairs. After the changes introduced at that time, the two Departments of Religious Affairs operating in Lodz were abolished and one Department of Religious Affairs for Lodz Province and the capital of province operating at the Provincial Office in Lodz was



established. The 70s are primarily associated with the reform of the territorial division of the Polish Peoples' Republic and the establishment of 49 provinces. As a result of these changes, new Departments of Religious Affairs were established in Lodz Province. They operated at the Lodz City Council and the Provincial Offices in Piotrków Trybunalski, Płock, Sieradz, Skierniewice and Konin.

This chapter also discusses the background and competencies of officials who were responsible for the religious policy in Poland. The manager of the Department of Religious Affairs was responsible for resolving all issues of the religious policy. The manager's competencies included preparing action plans and instructing employees on the basis of obligatory decrees and regulations of central and local authorities. He was also responsible for submitting reports on the division activities to Departments of Religious Affairs of the Presidium of the City Council of Lodz. Together with the School District Department of Education he also supervised seminaries. Apart from the manager, there were three senior inspectors in Departments of Religious Affairs. One of them dealt with pastoral institutions of non-Catholic denominations and oversaw the activities of monasteries. Another one dealt with matters related to priests-patriots and oversaw the correct implementation of statutory provisions regarding the creation and transformation of parishes and deaneries in the Roman Catholic Church. His duties included keeping records of priests, religious buildings, pastoral establishments and church estates, supervising the activities of Roman Catholic organizations and associations and controlling pilgrimages and processions. The next one conducted visits and inspections of convents. Moreover, he cooperated with the School District Department of Education and Education Inspectorates in matters of supervision over the activity of catechetical rooms and the Health Department in matters of employing nuns in health-care facilities. He also kept a register of alumni for military purposes. There was also a position of a senior clerk in the Department of Religious Affairs who supervised church documentation of parishes, monasteries and convents and kept a register of complaints.

Another issue raised in the third chapter was the analysis of the structure of state bodies dealing with the religious policy. Departments of Religious Affairs consisted of the General Department, the Department of Roman Catholic Denominations, the Independent Supervision Division of Religious Associations and the Independent Supervision Division of the Church Fund. The divisions supervised the correct implementation of provisions related to religious associations, the implementation of religious freedom and religious education, securing the rights and obligations of the clergy, financial satisfaction of religious needs and other activities concerning relations between the state and the Church.



Finally, the last part of the dissertation was an attempt to show the state's religious policy in the discussed period. Analyzing the state's actions and the official approach of the state authorities in relation to religion, attempts were made to demonstrate how such policy was conducted in the Polish People's Republic. The fourth discusses activities of the state apparatus regarding issues related to religious life. The Office of Religious Affairs did not pursue the independent religious policy, but performed the arrangements of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. Formally, the Office was one of central offices of the government administration. However, it politically reported to the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party and was responsible to it for implementing the religious policy. Province party executives even decided about the appointment or dismissal of managers of Departments of Religious Affairs. Moreover, managers, heads of the Departments of Religious Affairs and managers of its local structures maintained constant contacts with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Office of Religious Affairs closely cooperated with ministries, central and local offices and institutions that were obliged to send all the information, documents and draft decisions related to Church affairs. Most often they cooperated with departments responsible, among others for:

- architecture, supervision of construction and spatial planning in matters of religious and church construction,
- the financial and tax sphere in relation to the fiscal policy towards clergy and religious associations,
- granting permits for public collections and assemblies,
- municipal economy and housing matters concerning cemeteries and the allocation of housing for priests and monks as well as clergy man leaving priesthood,
- education concerning the availability of classrooms for the purposes of periodic religion teaching,
- culture and art in matters of conservation of movable and immovable monuments in the field of sacred art.

In the proceedings of the state administration in the religious policy, one should pay attention to the fundamental difference in actions aimed at excluding the Catholic religion from people's lives. In the first period the authorities used radical methods, ranging from unfounded espionage charges of priests for the Vatican to the internment of the Primate of Poland. The following years testify to the mitigation of the conflict and the attempt to enforce their arguments by using a settlement policy of mutual respect. At that time, more attention



was paid to local priests who used the pulpit to deliver anti-government and anti-communist homilies. However, all attempts to deprive the Roman Catholic Church of its moral authority ended in failure due to the unique position of religion in the consciousness of the Polish society.

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