



LAW AND ADMINISTRATION IN POST-SOVIET EUROPE

Vol. 1/2018: 35–51

DOI: 10.2478/lape-2018-0005

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Objectives, tactics, and actions of communist authorities towards the Christian religious minorities between 1945 and 1956

Key words:

The article aims at presenting the outline of the tactics applied by the communist authorities towards religious minorities. Its ultimate aim was, regardless of whether we consider it to be a real plan or not, the liquidation of the institutional form of religions (Churches), and later on the religion per se. The below presented theses ought to be regarded as an invitation to the discussion and completion of suggested conclusions, or revision, or the criticism proving their inadequacy.

Theses for discussion

Getting to the core of our pondering, we ought to note that the realization of the denominational policy in a communist state had always been conducted on two planes: –open, legal one, since there were always the attempts to preserve at least the appearances of the rule of law in all the official actions the communist authorities had undertaken towards the Churches. In the worst cases, the actions were legitimized in propaganda by referring to the support of democratic majority within a particular Church, which demanded the restitution of

legal and democratic order in its religious community, hence various Temporary College of Authority, which, e.g. in case of Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (Polish Orthodox Church) had not been provided for in the act. Also accusations (mostly fake ones) towards clergymen of various denominations, as well as laymen detained during the proceedings against Churches, concerned mainly espionage, currency trade or the collaboration with the Germans during the occupation period¹.

The –classified, yet „legal” in accordance with the communist law and acts, and the classified and illegal, against even the law of the People’s Republic of Poland, nowadays defined as „communist crime” according to

¹ It was only the decree from 5th July 1949 on the protection of the freedom of conscience and religion, Dz. U. 1949.45.344, that introduced legal sanctions for „the excessive use of the freedom of religion to achieve the aims hostile towards the system in the Polish People’s Republic” with the punishment for even preparations „to commit the crime”. It might have been writing but not giving of a sermon that was not law-abiding². And the punishment was sever, even up to 5 years in prison.

the regulations of the Act on the Institute of the National Memory².

The tactics as well as activities of the communist authorities could be summarized in several points, however one ought to remember that on no account could they be ordered chronologically. Various elements of the tactics had been applied simultaneously towards different individuals, organizational units of Churches. In one place, for instance, the property of a parish was confiscated (the state took over the Lutheran church of St Trinity in Warsaw), whereas in the other it had been returned (Protestants of Augsburg Confession regained their pre-war church building in Lipno, which after 1945 was used by the Catholics), the Orthodox Church received both material and organizational support (with a view to acquiring Greek Byzantine Catholics) in areas of the Recovered Territories, while at the same time the property of this Church was confiscated in the deserted due to relocation parishes in the eastern regions of Poland.

The recognition of „the opponent”

Through the data collected by the state administration responsible for denomination issues, i.e. at the central level by the Denomination Department of the Ministry of Public Administration and afterwards by the Office for Religious Affairs.

Through strong and directed invigilation with all the methods applied by the security apparatus: first of all by informers, but also eavesdropping techniques, the review of correspondence (*perlustracja*), etc.

The data on Churches and Communities was collected by the state administration officially responsible for denomination issues, independently, during their everyday work, for the sake of the office as well as ordered by upper level administration. There used to be also orders from the security apparatus. This was the case of collecting characteristics of all national Catholic and Lutheran clergymen³. The administration authori-

ties, however, were mainly interested in the information necessary for the everyday work, i.e. the register of organizational units of Churches, their authorities, acts regulating their position (their complexity would be clarified to low level officials in the first after-war period in special circulars) internal statutes, registers of real property also for tax purposes, cemeteries, historical buildings, or the ones owned by the state but used by Churches (for fiscal reasons, to claim the rent).

Part of the information was conveyed, as it was in case of characteristics, to the security apparatus, which was collecting also the basic data. While reading the files from the first post-war period one may notice that the officials of the Security Office were rather inapt whole describing minority Churches, and were not fully familiar with the details, at times referring to terms used by Catholics⁴. Afterwards, however, their knowledge developed, also the one concerning the genesis and reasons for the origins of some Churches. There also appear agents' reports in the form of a concise history of a particular denomination and its apologia with some polemical or even accusative accents towards the Catholic Church⁵. It is not easy to answer the question whether the knowledge was acquired by public officials themselves or during some training. In the Ministry of Internal Affairs library run by the „C” Bureau, the studies were collected concerning particular Churches, including the ones dating back to previous years. The oldest position prepared for the state services came from 1947⁶. Obviously, the information on the organi-

⁴ The Archive of the Institute National Remembrance, Delegation in Bydgoszcz, [furtherj: IPN BY], sygn. 069/116, k.k. 3, 6–7, 9–20; IPN BY 069/1160, k. 1.

For several years according to the guidelines of Centralna Komisja Metodyczna (the organ recommending methods of managing the national archives) at Naczelną Dyрекcyję Archiwów Państwowych (the Headquarters of Polish Archives) the method of standardizing the pagination of particular archival materials stored in the Institute of National Remembrance. Once, e.g. photos in an envelope marked with subsequent number did not bear numbers themselves, these days they frequently bear subsequent numbers like the pages of a stapled file. It results in the situation that the entries made by the author still in 2007 are slightly misleading when it comes to pagination. Since the author of the text has not managed to introduce all the corrections, he is forced to inform the Honorable Readers that the page numbers might be shifted 1 to 3 numbers forward.

⁵ „Evangelical Church is a small group loyal towards our statehood, which cannot be stated about the Roman Catholic Church”, IPN BY 069/1235, k. 179.

⁶ Bureau „C” was responsible, most of all, for operational register and the archive. In the library there are amongst the other the following studies: Religious sects and non-Catholic

² Art. 2.1 of the act from 18th December 1998 on the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) – The Commission of Pursuing Crimes against the Polish Nation, Dz. U. 1998.155.1016 with amendments.

³ The Archive of Contemporary Acts [AAN], Office of the Denomination Affairs [further: UdSW], sygn. 5b/6. See. R. Michalak, *The Protestant Churches and the State and Party Authorities in Poland (1945–1956)*, Warszawa 2002, [further: R. Michalak, *Protestant Churches*], p. 220.

zational structure of the Church as well as the manner of taking decisions, i.e. who, which group and to what extent were responsible, were of significance.

At the level of district and county Security Office the information was obviously much more detailed. The description of a parish was a basic document. The seat, territorial range, count, social structure, (whether intelligentsia was prevailing or individuals of working class background), who the parson of the parish was. Beside these descriptions of clergymen passed from the field to Warsaw, there was also collected the description of so called parish activists, members of parish boards, records of all societies acting at churches, along with individuals in charge, at times including the full list of members, even though it might just be a parish choir. With the passing of time, along with the development of agency there appeared the records of all members of a parish. Apart from a name, surname, address, and date of birth, one could find there a short opinion of the following types: „loyal”, „critical towards current reality”, „secretive”, „not active”, „ex rich peasant”, „has a family abroad”. The information on party membership and habitat during the war was also of significance. There also could appear the information on likely cooperation with the German during WW II.

At times one could encounter a standard form of a report⁷, as it was in case of the parish of Polish National Catholic Church in Grudziądz, whose characteristics was made every month and included in several elaborate points with subsections:

1. The state of agency in target and its division into residents, agents, and informers⁸,

denominations in Poland Legionowo 1947, The Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance the Central Office in Warsaw, [further: IPN BU], sygn. 01521/225; E. Panek, Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Poland, IPN BU 01521/2136, A. Gasztold, United Evangelical Church, IPN BU 01521/2245, J. Walewski, Evangelical Reformed Church, IPN BU 01521/2985, J. Drogostaricz, Seventh-day Adventist Church in Poland, IPN BU 01521/2986, B. Szpakowski, Jehova's Witnesses in Poland, IPN BU 01521/2183.

⁷ Comp. The Methods of Operational Work of the Security Apparatus towards the Church and Religious Organizations 1945–1989, ed. A. Dudek, Warszawa 2004, [further: The Methods of Operational Work s. 77–85, p. 86–87 and p. 88–89.

⁸ Informers on the lowest level in the hierarchy of undercover delators, were recruited to acquire basic information on individuals, institutions and to observe them. Apart from conveying information agents more actively participated in working out of individuals or groups. Residents were frequently full time employees of the Ministry of Public Security MBP (working secretly) or these were the individuals introduced into a group on

2. The number of cases run by the Ministry of Public Security at the target
3. The number of registered cases
4. The number of arrested in the target
5. The short review of situation in the target with particular focus on „personal changes of individuals in charge” and conflicts within parishes, organization of meetings, conferences, or any activity requiring involvement and group work. Monitoring the sermons of a clergyman and their possible political influence, as well as distributing any publishing amongst believers including the ones that were not entirely legal, was of importance.
6. The list of registered cases „concerning believers”
7. The influence of security organs on the situation of the „the target and its activities”⁹.

There were also collected all possible materials that could be taken advantage of while blackmailing, useful at recruiting secret collaborators, or diversely, the ones that could be the evidence that a loyal informer could be gained due to the recognition of his „patriotic and civic attitude”. Also, the systematic analysis of agency work and evaluation of its usefulness was conducted¹⁰. Such materials were usually collected by agents, eavesdropping and checking correspondence. It happened that correspondence was not only checked but also conducted by secret collaborators of Security Office and Security Service to complete particular assignments. In Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, for instance, it was the invigilation of other clergymen, post-war emigration or former members of United Evangelical Church¹¹. Unfortunately, the development of technology was advantageous for the progress in operational techniques of security services.

purpose and promoted in it, at the same time supervising several agents or informers subordinate to him, Methods of Operational Work p. 60, footnote. 161. This division was valid till 1960 r. Later on there was just one category—undercover informer.

⁹ .The points were reconstructed on the basis of IPN BY 069/1161, k. 26–29.

¹⁰ The Methods of Operational Work, doc. 31.

¹¹ This was the exchange of letters between parson E. Sauter, i.e. TW (undercover informer) „Jan Stanisławski” and Artur Damic, the head of the parish board in Grudziądz and the member of synod, also registered as an informer of the Security Service IPN BY 069/1235, k. 151–156 and k. 211–213.

The attempts to put „the religious scene” in order

The legal recognition by the state of Churches, which during the period of the Second Republic were religious organizations barely tolerated in accordance with the rules of the freedom of conscience and religion guaranteed to the citizens and inhabitants of Poland in accordance with articles 111 and 112 of the 1921 Constitution¹², or acquired recognition on the grounds of the partition legal regulations,

Supporting, inspiring and planning „religious scene”, the attempts of merging and unifying some Churches and denominations in the name of „ecumenical rules”. Here we also place the legal subjection of all Evangelical-Lutheran parishes to the power of Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession.

In order to simplify and quicken the legal procedure of recognizing Churches by the state the pre-war practice of associating the legal recognition with passing by the Polish Parliament (Sejm) the act on the state attitude towards a particular religious society after the previous agreement on its content with the rightful representation of this Church was resigned from¹³. As a consequence, legal recognition by the state based on this formula was acquired (beside Catholic Church) merely by six other religious organizations of religious and national minorities¹⁴.

This altered procedure, which by the way was supported by the part of specialists on religious law (also of Catholic background)¹⁵, provided for the recognition in an administrative act basing merely on art. 116 of the 1921 Constitution, which stated that, „The recognition of a new or so far legally unrecognized denomination will not be denied to religious societies, whose organization, teaching or system are not against public order,

nor public decency”. Since there was no mention of the legal form of the recognition, a suitable, ordinance of the Ministry of Public Administration in accordance with its competences was to suffice. Such a manner of recognition obviously would not mean the regulation of the state’s attitude towards a particular Church, or the precise determination of the state offices competences towards the Church, issues of administration supervision, or the internal autonomy of religious organizations guaranteed in the act. Obviously, this state was advantageous for communists who did not need to initiate works on legal solutions, which could possibly limit them in the future.

Still, the Methodist Church acquired the recognition on the basis of the decree on the state’s attitude to the Methodist Church in the Polish Republic from 16th October 1945. Its content was remarkably short and consisted of barely 5 articles¹⁶. The legal position of the Methodist Church had been strong since then, and based on a legal act of a higher rank, and its regulations, however brief, did not differ from the pre-war ones. Apart from the guarantees of equal rights and the freedom of conscience and religious cult, the document determined its independence and, „the freedom from any foreign superiority”. It confirmed the fact that the Church was ruled with its internal law. The statute required, though, the confirmation of the Council of Ministers. The decree granted legal entity to both to the as a whole, as well as its parishes, and confirmed the right to purchase and sell chattel and real property. It also granted the Methodist clergymen the entitlements of a registry office civil servants. Due to the brevity of its regulations the act was decidedly more liberal compared to the pre-war regulations of its kind as, for example, it did not condition the appointment on Church positions on administrative authorities, or the requirement of having Polish citizenship by the clergymen, it also did not include the obligation of the agreement on the part of secular authorities for selling or purchasing real property, neither did it require the duty of signing the loyalty oath to the state by members of the church authorities.

Another Church that gained the recognition of the new Polish authorities was Polish National Catholic Church. It did not, however, acquire it on the basis of the act, like the Methodist Church, or even on the basis of ordinance. Its authorities simply received the official letter from the Ministry of Public Administra-

¹² S. Grelewski, *Protestant Denominations and Religious Sects in Contemporary Poland*, Sandomierz 1935, [further: S. Grelewski, *Protestant Denominations* p. 7–8.

¹³ It resulted from the joint interpretation of articles. 115 and 116 of 1921 Constitution and significantly prolonged the process. J. Sawicki, *Studies on the Legal Situation of Religious Minorities in the Polish State Warszawa 1937*, [further: J. Sawicki, *Studies on the Legal Situation* p. 120–121.

¹⁴ These were: Jewish Religious Society (gradually, finally in 1928), Old Believers Church without cleric hierarchy (1928), Muslim Religious Society in the Polish Republic (1936), the Religious Society of Crimean Karaites in the Polish Republic (1936), the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in the Polish Republic (1936), Polish Orthodox Church (1938).

¹⁵ See. S. Grelewski, *Protestant Denominations*, p. 4.

¹⁶ Dz. U. 1945.46.259.

tion dated for 1st February 1946 including the information on the legal recognition on the basis of art. 116 and the promise of agreeing on a separate act on the State's attitude towards the Polish National Catholic Church. However, it was not an ordinance since it would require the publication in Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) The fact that several days later an appropriate circulatory had been sent to all the voivods was not enough. Therefore, it could be perceived as the declaration on the part of the Ministry of Public Administration at the most, and an internal by-law, which imposed a particular manner of behaviour on civil servants. The Polish National Catholic Church authorities were aware of this solution's weakness, forwarding a motion to publish an appropriate ordinance over a year and a half later¹⁷. It had never happened, though. We must agree with the opinion of J. Dziobek-Romański that, „One ought to take into account here the freedom to rescind the act of recognizing the Church, which the administrative rescript undoubtedly was, articulated in such a manner. This, in the context of the program fight against religion, especially in the Stalin period, ought to be considered as a hazardous practice”¹⁸.

Likewise, legal recognition on the basis of the Ministry of Public Administration rescript was granted to the Union of the Communities of the Seventh-day Adventists on 26th April 1946¹⁹, and as the last one, to Polish Church of Baptist Christians on 4th May 1946. Also in these cases voivods were informed in an appropriate circulatory about the decision and ordered to „issue a by-law for lower rank authorities to treat this religious organization as a legally recognized denomination”²⁰. Instead of publishing ordinance in Journal of Laws or by-law in the Official Journal of the Ministry of Public Administration, a press information was issued

that, „The Ministry of Public Administration in its decision from 4th May 1946 recognized Polish Church of Baptist Christians as the public and legal religious organization”²¹.

In many respects the legal situation of the above mentioned three Churches looked similar to the legal situation of the Catholic Church after terminating the concordat of 1925. Without taking into consideration the legal aspect of this termination, the resolution of the Provisional Government of National Unity from 12th September 1945 had not been published in Journal of Laws, but announced in daily press, and the termination of concordat was accompanied with a declaration: „The Provisional Government of National Unity announces that as it has not limited in any way the activities of the Catholic Church so far, likewise it still guarantees the Catholic Church the entire independence in acting within the acts in power”.

Hence, since May 1946 there had been four Churches whose legal situation was not regulated in a separate act, and which were treated as legally recognized denominations on the basis of the one-side declaration of the Polish authorities, and whose fundamental rights resulted from art. 111–115 of 1921 Constitution. Obviously, the actual situation and position of the Catholic Church in society was of great significance and due to the support of millions of the Poles it was in a much more advantageous situation compared to other denominations.

New legal regulations had also been issued for some of the Churches existing on the basis of legal acts dating before 1914, i.e. Prussian, Austrian and Russian law. One decree from 5th September 1947 comprised the believers of two fractions of the Mariavite Church, Old Catholic Church and Reformed Evangelical Church²². This legal act, however, was specific due to several aspects. On the one hand, it referred to the previous practice and interpretation of art. 115 of 1921 Constitution statutorily confirming that all the three Churches, „acquire the character of religious organizations legally recognized in the whole territory of Poland”, which aborted territorial limitations, inherited from the partition period, which was binding them during the period of the Second Republic, on the other hand the

¹⁷ K. Białecki, *The National Church in Poland between 1944 and 1965*, Poznań 2003, [further: K. Białecki, *The National Church*] p. 48–49.

¹⁸ J. Dziobek-Romański, *The Recognition of Religious Organizations in Poland (1944–1989) as a Tool of Discrimination Policy of Authorities* Lublin 2004, [further: J. Dziobek-Romański, *The Recognition of religious organizations*], p. 105.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 101. Z. Łyko, *Seventh-day Adventists Church*, Warszawa 2000, p. 91, footnote. 51* states that this letter was to be published in Official Journal of the Ministry of Public Administration, nr 17, from 24th October 1947 r. This eventually dismisses the possible doubt on the character of this act. It certainly was not an ordinance, but a by-law.

²⁰ The official letter of the Ministry of Public Administration [further: MAP] from 23rd May 1946 r., AAN, MAP, sygn. 932 after H.R. Tomaszewski, *Baptists in Poland between 1918 and 1958*, p. 267, footnote 47.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 267.

²² Dz. U. 1947.59.316. Comp. J. Dziobek-Romański, *The Recognition of Religious Organizations*, p. 226–228 and T.D. Mames, *Mysteria Mysticorum. The Sketches on Spirituality and history of Mariavites*, Kraków 2009, [further: T.D. Mames, *Mysteria*], p. 63–69.

entire positive content of the decree was limited to art. 2, which declared that „the internal relations” of the Churches „are to be determined by their internal legislation, due to be approved by the Council of Ministers”. The guarantee of freedom and religion, as well as the basic rights had to be interpreted from the Constitution regulations. The third, longest article, since it included 13 paragraphs, correlated legal acts (still the ones from the partition period), which were losing their validity, even though they were regulating more thoroughly the rights of the state administration within the range of supervision over these denominations, as well as the rights themselves or the organization of the Churches²³. Although, these short regulations referred to all three religious organizations together, they also bore different legal consequences for each of them.

Most of all, the decree was establishing legally a new Church, the Old Catholic Church. After the decree had come into power, it became an independent religious organization, since from then on, according to the Prussian law from 1875, Old Catholics made however a separate, yet religious community within the Catholic Church, and „Old Catholic parishes did not establish independent system units, but became a constituent part of Roman Catholic parishes, with separate spiritual administration functioning on the basis of a special ordination for the Old Catholic church commune”²⁴. Of course, in practice it was not about parishes originating directly from the Old Catholic movement, but about a group of communes and clergymen of undetermined number remaining, at the moment of announcing the decree, under the jurisdiction of bishop Zygmunt Szypold (ex Mariavite)²⁵.

Moreover, it ordered, although actually only seemingly, the issues of the Reformed Evangelical Church in the Polish Republic with the Consistory in Warsaw. It acquired the character of a religious organization legally recognized on the whole territory of the state, anticipated the determination of its system by internal regulations approved by the Council of Ministers later

²³ See more T.J. Zieliński, *The Work of Legislative Sejm in 1937 on the Legal State of the Protestant Churches* [further: T.J. Zieliński, *The Work of Legislative Sejm*], [in:] *Polish Protestantism in Times of Nazism and Communism. The Collection of Studies* edited by Jarosława Kłaczko, Toruń 2009, [further: *Polish Protestantism*], s. 351–354.

²⁴ S. Grelewski, *Protestant Denominations* p. 89–94; J. Sawicki, *Studies on the Situation* p. 331–333; T. Piątek, *The Role and Position of the Old Catholics in Silesia Opole* 1993, p. 17.

²⁵ T. Memes, *Mysteria*, p. 66–67.

on. Since it terminated Tzar’s order and the regulations on the management of the issues of the Reformed Evangelical Church in the Kingdom of Poland (Congress Poland) from 20th February 1849, in this way „The Church was deprived of even these brief system rules which determined them”²⁶. Interestingly, the decree did not terminate the regulations concerning the Reformed Evangelical Church of Vilnius Community, which had its parishes in Lublin during the pre-war period²⁷, neither did it decide on the fate of reformed parishes, which had previously been the parishes of Union Evangelical Church, both within the pre-war borders as in the Regained Territories²⁸.

When it comes to Mariavites the decree slurred over the actual division of this denomination into two Churches with different hierarchies, internal organization and doctrine. The derogating clause comprised, like in the case of the reformed ones the Tzar’s regulations, hence also this church (Churches) did not have their own internal law which would be accepted by the state authorities.

Undoubtedly, it was a purposeful activity of communist authorities, which had no intention of to bind themselves with legal obligations that would make it difficult to introduce denominational policy favoured by them. Contrary to appearances, the lack of detailed regulations would initially allow Churches to avoid deep interference into their internal issues.

The situation changed when on 5th August 1949 communists altered the pre-war regulations on societies²⁹. Most importantly, every religious society which had not been legally recognized was subdued to the regulations of the law on societies. Additionally these regulations referred to convents, spiritual congregations and all societies of religious character of legally recognized Churches. All of them had to be registered

²⁶ H. Winiarczyk-Kossakowska, *The Acts of the Third Republic on the Relations between the State and Christian Churches* Warszawa 2004, [further: H. Winiarczyk-Kossakowska, *The Acts of the Third Republic* p. 200. Formally, the article was realized only in 1968, *ibidem*, p. 205.

²⁷ E. Alabrudzińska, *Protestantism in Poland between 1918 and 1939*, Toruń 2004, [further: E. Alabrudzińska, *Protestantism*], p. 88.

²⁸ Comp. Z. Tranda, *The Fate of Evangelical-Reformed Parish in Pstrążna in the Kłodzko Area after WWII*, [in:] *Polish Protestantism*, p. 471–72; R. Michalak, *Protestant Churches*, p. 80.

²⁹ The decree on changing some of the regulations on associations, Dz. U. 1949.45.335 it changed the ordinance of the President from 27th October 1932 Dz. U. 1932.94.808.

within 90 days to avoid being disbanded according to the law. If it happened the fate of their property was to be decided on by the Council of Ministers. Apart from the Catholic Church, the decree concerned most Polish Orthodox Church, Mariavite Churches and the Old Catholic Church since they had orders, even if, in case of the latter, few ones.

According to the ordinance of the Minister of Public Administration from 6th August 1949³⁰ in order to be registered they were obliged to submit thorough documentation including, e.g. the statute (constitution) of the convent, „the list of the board members (the heads of the province or convent or spiritual congregation) and their functions”, the register of convent houses with the list and data of their heads, the register of all institutions, unit (educational, economic, charity) run by the convent, complete register of real estate and the overall number of the convent or spiritual congregation members. This made it possible to gain the information that previously was difficult to acquire³¹.

Additionally, due to the regulations of the act on the right to consociate itself the state authorities acquired broad supervision over them. It concerned the finances, property disposal, insight into documents, also the confidential ones³². The authorities could deprive the Churches registered as societies of the right to take advantage of the public collection, as well as delegate their representatives to each assembly of the church authorities (legal organs of a religious society). Moreover, they had the right to apply admonition and objections towards issued by-law, suspension of the activity of religious societies, and even dismantling. They also had the possibility to prolong almost endlessly the registration of religious societies, even if delivered documents met all the formal requirements. It was enough to claim that establishing new religious society, „does not appeal to the sake of social avail”³³. No wonder then, that the first Church recognized and registered on the basis of

the above described regulations acquired an appropriate decision after 10 years, in 1959³⁴.

The aim of all these actions was clear-subduing newly registered religious societies to much wider supervision. In case of ZKE the „ecumenical” program introduced by communists was of great significance.

The first attempts of merging some of the Churches and denominations with similar historic tradition, and doctrine, were an authentic initiative started in the period of German occupation amongst the members of Provisional Ecumenical Council, consisting of the representatives of Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, Reformed Evangelical Church, Methodist, National Catholic Church and the Mariavites. After the war its activity was continued officially under the modified name (Christian Ecumenical Council), yet not as the initiative of individuals but seven Churches, since it was joined by the representatives of the Orthodox Church and the Baptist one. Beside Christian Ecumenical Council there also functioned The Council of Protestant Churches, which suspended its activity in 1947³⁵.

The most known unifying initiative was the plan of merging all the Churches of Old Catholic tradition into one religious organization³⁶. According to K. Białecki the initiative was to be led by the head of Provisional (Christian) Ecumenical Council Zygmunt Michelis from the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, and Henryk Świątkowski, the minister of justice at that time, was its main initiator and director. The Polish Catholic Church was to include the believers of the Pol-

³⁴ J. Dziobek-Romański, *The Recognition of Religious Organizations*, p. 250.

³⁵ J. Kłaczek, *The Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Poland between 1945 and 1975*, Toruń 2010, [further: J. Kłaczek, *The Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession* p. 197–199; A. Seweryn, *On the Route of Dialogue. The Ecumenical Involvement of the Baptist Church as the Member of the Polish Ecumenical Council between 1945 and 1989*, Warszawa 2006, p. 55–58; R. Michalak, *Protestant Churches*, p. 225–227.

³⁶ Obviously, the fact that this initiative is the best-known one does not mean that it is the most thoroughly explored. We will not make an attempt to clarify all the doubts, focusing on the issues that are not discussable. I am basing on the findings of W. Pietrzyk, *The Role of Bishop Józef Padewski in the Struggle for the Legal Stabilization of Polish National Catholic Church in the Country* Warszawa 2011, p. 69–73; T.D. Mames, *Mysteria*, p. 63–69, K. Białecki, *The National Church*, p. 245–248. In T.D. Mames's opinion Polish Catholic Church was a project, which was temporarily successful. It had been functioning for circ. 2 years. As far as other authors are concerned, it was a failed attempt, which had never gone beyond the planning phase.,

³⁰ Dz. U. 1949.47.358.

³¹ The official letter from the director of the Political Department of the Ministry of Public Administration to the director of Department V of the Ministry of Public Security from 29th October 1949 on the registration of religious society of Mariavite Sisters from Felicjanowo, BU IPN 01283/1630, k. 175.

³² The „official” breach of the seal of the confessional could not be taken into consideration, though, J. Dziobek-Romański, *The Recognition of Religious Organizations*, p. 121

³³ Comprehensive information on the issue, *ibidem*, p. 121–139

ish National Catholic Church, Old Catholic Mariavite Church and Old Catholic Church of bishop W. Faron. The initiative was granted the support and legal recognition to the Church by the state. It was also promised financial back up. Bishop Faron and bishop Przysiecki (a Mariavite) expressed their preliminary agreement.

The first assembly (synod) took place on 26th June 1945 and 30 people: 15 clergymen and 15 secular ones participated in it. Church Council was elected with J. Kwolk as its head. The final version of „The organizational statute of Polish Catholic Church” was delivered to the Denominational Department of the Ministry of Public Administration on 1st September 1945. The Provisional Council of Polish Catholic Church was to consist of: I President acting as the head bishop – a Mariavite, II President – from the Polish National Catholic Church, vice President from the Old Catholic Church. The Denominational Department acknowledged the establishing of this Church’s Council, „whose role it will be to work on the consolidation of all the fractions of Christianity” (sic!)

The first to breach the initiative was the Church Council of the Polish National Catholic Church in September 1945. The news arrived from the USA on the imminent return of bishop Padeski (the US citizen) to Poland and the financial support from overseas³⁷. In November 1945 the project was abandoned by Mariavites. The Old Catholics as it was mentioned, acquired the recognition of their Church in 1947.

The issue was returned to in Stalinism period, in 1954. The document was released, „Materials for the discussion on the possible Union of Churches: Polish-Catholic, Old Catholic and Mariavite”. It is not known, however, who this document was prepared by, and if there were any activities undertaken concerning it³⁸.

The issues concerning believers of Augsburg Confession took another course. Before the war in the Second Republic there inhabited over 835 thousand people declaring themselves as Protestants. Almost 425 thousand declared the Augsburg Confession, 270 thousand United Evangelical Church believers, over 100 thousand „Protestant without clear determination”, and below 34 thousand Reformed. When it came to nationality as many as 72% of Protestants were German (and analogically 81% of Germans were protestants). The

Poles constituted 26% of the minority (only 1% of the Poles declared to be Protestants). Even in the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, the most numerous religious organization in the Second Republic, they were 31–34% minority that reached for the power in the Church (the bishop’s office for J. Bursche in 1934) only due to the support and taking advantage of legal regulations by the state administration. In the second largest Evangelical United Church with the Consistory in Poznań, the Germans made at least 95% believers. The also prevailed in United Evangelical Church in Polish Upper Silesia, Old Lutheran Church and Evangelical of Augsburg and Helvetian Confession³⁹.

Still before the actual end of the war on Polish territories the national structure of Lutheran believers had changed. The mass escape of the Germans westwards resulted in the desertion of Lutheran parishes in Wołyń, eastern Małopolska, Lubelszczyzna already in 1944. On the old Polish territories, which had not been taken away by Stalin, the national proportion of amongst Protestants transformed entirely. All of the five above mentioned denominations, apart from the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, had practically ceased to exist. Their churches, parishes got deserted, despite the fact that legally they were still legal entities of religious organizations which were formally recognized by the state. The authorities of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession were continuously soliciting for the actual and legal liquidation of the United Evangelical Church on the whole territory of the state within its new frontiers. The first appeals referring to subduing the United parishes in Poznań region and Pomerania to the authority of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, and gradually also the parishes in the Regained Territories, were forwarded to the Ministry of Public Administration already in the first months of 1945⁴⁰. In the following year the ministry received further petitions from Evangelical believers, the National Evangelical Council, the Consistory of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession Church, as well as parishes⁴¹.

A new decree on the change of the decree of the President of the Republic from 25th November 1936 on the relation between the State and Evangelical Church

³⁷ Sz. Włodarski, *The History of the Polish Catholic Church*, vol. 1 (till 1946 r.), Warszawa 1964, p. 342 it presents, however, the date of 12th September 1945 r.

³⁸ K. Białecki, *The National Church*, p. 247–248.

³⁹ E. Alabrudzińska, *Protestantism*, p. 79–99.

⁴⁰ AAN, MAP, sygn. 1057, p. 19–20, The letter of ks. J. Szeruda and ks. Z. Michelis to the Ministry of Public Administration MAP from 28th April 1945 r.

⁴¹ AAN, MAP, sygn. 1055, p. 17.

in the Polish Republic, announced by the authorities on 19th September 1946, did not meet all the expectations of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession⁴². It was also decided that individuals belonging to these parishes would automatically become the members of Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, provided they inhabited the Polish territory (citizenship was not obligatory). The Church itself was granted independence in establishing and organizing its structures on the whole territory of the state on the basis of the regulations determined in 1936. The decree, considered imperfect, was abolished entirely by the act bearing the same name on 4th July 1947⁴³. The amendments, which the above mentioned act introduced to the President's decree from 1936, referred also to affiliation of parishes on the whole territory of the State, „United Evangelical Churches as well as Old Lutheran and Evangelical Churches of Augsburg and Helvetian Confession, and additionally of Moravian Church (Herrnhut)”.

It ought to be added here that from the formal perspective the legal structures of the United Evangelical Church had remained unaltered until this moment⁴⁴. A part of communities along with parsons (so called Restgemeinde) had made attempts to act and organize themselves. These were, e.g. Polish activists from Mazuria in the East Prussia⁴⁵ and the circles of, e.g. Confessing Church in Lower Silesia⁴⁶, as well as a lot of Evangelical believers of German nationality in Middle and Western Pomerania. The administrative merger of all Lutheran parishes and subduing them to the jurisdiction of Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, and actually encompassing them with care and spiritual and religious guidance was far beyond the capabilities, also organizational ones, of the Church⁴⁷. It is

⁴² Dz. U. R.P. from 1946 r. nr 54, poz. 304.

⁴³ Dz. U. from 1947 nr 52, poz. 272. See more on this issue. J. Zieliński, *The Work of Legislative Sejm*, p. 341–355.

⁴⁴ Obviously, it did not concern the property issues, which will be discussed further on.

⁴⁵ R. Michalak, *Protestant Churches* p. 154 and J. Kłaczko, *The Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession*, p. 29.

⁴⁶ After the inevitable and necessary displacing of the German population from the Regained Territories, still in 1948 r., there appeared 6 out of 7 United Church clergymen at „The Conference of priests and the church workers of Wrocław Diocese”. They were working with 90 layman readers, 70 deaconesses and the group of 30 thousand Evangelical believers, K. Urban, *German The Communities of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Poland between 1948 and 1970*, Kraków 2003, [further: K. Urban, *German Protestant Communities*], p. 59.

⁴⁷ According to ks. W. Preiss in 1948, *German Evangelical*

also symptomatic that different treatment was applied to parishes consisting of believers acknowledged to be indigenously Polish, Mazurians and Silesians, and the ones consisting of doubtlessly German population. The latter ones, somehow against the act acquired special and separate statute as „non-Polish communities”⁴⁸.

Another, much more dramatic example of „ecumenical” activities of state authorities was opening the United Ecumenical Church. Religions of Baptist and Evangelical types initiated on their own the talks on the cooperation and establishing one Church soon after the war. It resulted in establishing the already mentioned Polish Church of Baptist Christians. Unfortunately, due to disagreement between particular denominations included in this Church, it soon disintegrated. The communities of the Church of Evangelical Christians, the Church of Christ and Free Christians abandoned it. At the end of 1946 Polish Evangelical Church of Baptist Christians became solely Baptist denomination.

The secessionists and Christian Church of Evangelical Confession as well as the Society of Strict Christians (Pentecostalism community) met in February 1947 at the conference in Ustronie, where the decision was taken on establishing the Union of Evangelical Churches in Poland. The system of the Union was to guarantee the internal autonomy of Churches, and there was to be the common representation towards the administration and state authorities. At the second assembly in Ustronie in May 1947, however, there were not the representatives of the Church of Christ and the Church of Christ of Evangelical Confession. Hence, the United Evangelical Church established there included three denominations. The attempts undertaken in June 1947 to acquire legal recognition were futile, though. The Denominational Department of the Ministry of Public Administration was carrying consultations with the Political Department of the Ministry. The latter one had restrained from any administrative activities since September 1948, when it received the statute of the United Evangelical Church, rewritten according to its recommendations.

At this time a broad scale invigilation of these circles was being in progress, of which traces can be spotted, e.g. in the archive of the Institute of National Remembrance Delegation in Bydgoszcz. The Heads of

believers in Silesia had better pastoral care than the Polish ones in this area, K. Urban, *German Protestant Communities*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ More on this issue J. Kłaczko, *Evangelical Churches of Augsburg Confession*, p. 187–196.

the Church of Christ e.g. Paweł Bajeński, had been entangled with the dense network of delators. These individuals pretending to be kind acquaintances, or even remaining „friends of the family” gained information by talking to wives and children. The invigilation did not only concern the prominent Church personalities. The same thorough observation was applied also to a small community in Dorposz Chełmiński, a small village. It was a community consisting of 3–4 families, of whom the best educated ones had primary school education and the illiteracy was not rare. This group of not more than a dozen of poorly educated peasants had been qualified as likely to act „against the state interests, and be the base for Anglo-American intelligence”.

The arrests amongst the believers of Evangelical Churches had place on 19th/20th September 1950. They affected leaders of particular Churches as well as common members. Also the above mentioned P. Bajeński got arrested, as well as an ordinary housewife from the vicinity of Chełmno⁴⁹.

Relatively soon, the arrested ones got released, and the plan concerning repressed Churches clarified eventually in 1952. As estimated by the Ministry of Public Security, „currently there exist actual possibilities of merging sects into one religious organizations”. Firstly, appointed by the authorities the Church of Christians of Evangelical Confession and Union of Christian Churches requested the Council of the United Evangelical Church to be joined to this Church, later on 8th March 1953 the talks began between the representatives of all five groups. Communists did not allow any of the groups to preserve their internal autonomy. Even local communities ceased to be, e.g. communities of the Church of Christ within the United of Evangelical Churches and became just the parishes of the United Evangelical Church. If in any city there were communities of several denominations constituting new Union (for example in Warsaw, Gdańsk, Szczecin) they established a new parish (most often one) already as United Evangelical Church. New elections to the authorities of a new parish were held and all real estate was transferred to it. It occurred to be of particular significance in cases of secession, which took place in 1956. Then the situations took place when the believers the Christian Church of Evangelical Confession, who had left the Union, were not allowed to use the chapels, which had previously belonged to them. They could not even rent them for their services. It was the case, e.g. in Bydgo-

szcz, where the board of the United Evangelical Church parish did not agree to use the prayer room by its ex-co-believers⁵⁰. At the same time, there was no agreement for the registry of the Church of Christ of Evangelical Confession as a religious society, since according to the Office of Religious Affairs its establishment, „does not correspond with the sake of social avail”⁵¹. The last Protestant community forced with administrative and economic repression returned under the jurisdiction of the United Evangelical Church in 1962⁵².

Taking control over the Churches

Taking the actual control over the Churches (entirely or partly). It was affected to a great extent by the structure of authorities of religious organization. The stronger the role of, e.g. synod, the election by more numerous group, the more difficult task it was. At times it was preceded with the alterations in the internal law of some churches, the best example being the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession. However, it was accompanied with the construction of „spiritual patriots” fractions within the religious organizations. It was accomplished by:

- appointing individuals cooperating with the security apparatus or entirely submitted to the communist authorities to hold church functions. In extreme cases these were individuals directed purposefully by security-state authorities to work in a particular Church.
- the further acquisition of agents from amongst the clergymen (all) and laymen, focusing on individuals in the position in Church authorities or likely to hold them due to their predispositions, as well as supporting their careers. Also during the merging actions some inconvenient individuals holding high positions in Church could be relegated, and some denominations could cease to function independently.
- taking advantage of possibilities granted in acts to influence the manning of church posts in pre and post-war legislation, occasionally interim actions, as it has been mentioned demanded by a democratic majority in a particular Church.

⁵⁰ J. Mironczuk, *The State Policy Towards the United Evangelical Church in Poland (1947–1989)*, Warszawa 2006, [further: J. Mironczuk, *The State Policy*], p. 75.

⁵¹ R. Michalak, *Protestant Churches*, p. 115.

⁵² J. Mironczuk, *The State Policy*, p. 86.

⁴⁹ IPN BY 069/1149, k. 12.

- such a property and financial policy of the state towards the Churches that could be summarized in two words „giving-taking”, leading to material dependence of Churches on the state. Due to this type of actions the assumption was constructed on the „friendliness” of the authorities towards minority Churches, and „benefits” of obedient attitude towards authorities.

In connection with the forced merger of Evangelical churches the actual control over the new religious organizations was taken. It was in no way a coincidence, but the purposeful actions conducted in a planned and intended manner. In this case with the use of every, including criminal and extremely brutal methods.

As mentioned before the arrests amongst believers of Evangelical denominations were held during one day and night in all over the country. The instructions sent from Warsaw to the District Office of Public Security sounded literally dreadful, „I am enclosing the information referring to the United Church of Christ, Christian Church of Evangelical Confession, United Evangelical Church in Poland acting in your area and meant for liquidation [underlined by the author] on 19th September 1950”. After completing the action it was ordered to send a wireless to Warsaw on the accomplished results. The arresting took place according to the previously prepared lists. Specific public officials were appointed for particular surname of an arrested individual. The arrests were of great scale. In studies concerning this matter there functions the number of 199 individuals listed for the use of the Central Comity of the Polish United Labour Party (PZPR)⁵³. In spite of the credibility of the source the number seems to be underestimated. Why? Because in Dorposz Chełmiński, where according to fake statistics the number of believers and supporters was determined to be 31, as many as 9 were arrested, and 18 members of the community were interrogated⁵⁴! We ought to bear in mind that there were at least one hundred communities or outposts of that kind all over Poland⁵⁵.

⁵³ H.R. Tomaszewski, *The Church of Christ in Poland between 1921 and 1953*, Warszawa 1992, p. 92–94.

⁵⁴ For instance, the postman was considered to be a supporter, since he was systematically visiting the seat of community, i.e. the house of the head of the community, Rybarczyk the farmer. He was visiting it regularly and delivering brochures sent by post because it was his job. The whole material referring to the Protestant community in Dorposz IPN BY 069/1149.

⁵⁵ See registers of the outposts of the Church of Christ of Evangelical Confession, United Church of Christ and United Evangelical Church after J. Mironczuk, *The State Policy*. 20, p. 25–26, 158–59.

The arrested were divided into three groups according to the aim of the arresting. The first one included individuals were to be released after short arrest and testify. In the second one, there were to be previously marked individuals, who after testifying and intimidation were to be recruited as secret collaborators. The third one consisted of individuals who were to undergo a thorough investigation⁵⁶.

The results of action „B” were highly estimated. As it was reported, „The Organs of Internal Security have manned agency in the majority of the above mentioned sects”. The first task the recruited ones were to perform was to describe the United Evangelical Church. It was possible since agents held, „the head positions in the mentioned sects”. This made it possible to plan not only „merging into one religious organization” but also „appointing homogenous management consisting of individuals, who would guarantee loyal and positive realization of general state and operational assignments”.

Slightly less drastic measures had been applied while replacing the church authorities of Polish National Catholic Church. Less drastic since the scale of arresting was smaller. Beforehand, a thoroughly appointed group of clergymen „concerned” with the state of the Church appealed in the letter from 5th December 1950 to J. Cyrankiewicz for the appointment and intervention⁵⁷. The addressers of the letter were: A. Jurgielewicz⁵⁸, S. Piekarz⁵⁹, and J. Dobrochowski⁶⁰. A month

⁵⁶ If we presume that there was one individual behind each nickname, it would mean that in Dorposz „on the outposts” of the United Church of Christ there were as many as 5 informers, including the head of the community at that time. What could have been the real operational value of information delivered by them for the Security Office?

⁵⁷ IPN BU 01283/1629, k. 228–228v.

⁵⁸ Before the war the bishop of Old Catholic Church of bishop W. Faron, the major of the Polish Army, later on the lieutenant of the communist Militia, educational instructor in the District Command of Militia in Łódź, a member of the Polish Labour Party still during the occupation period. Resigned from the service in 1946 and resumed the priesthood, K. Białecki, *The National Church*, p. 36, footnote. 48.

⁵⁹ Since May 1946. the Ministry of Public Security had at its disposal the discrediting materials concerning, ks. S. Piekarza, referring to his attitude during the German occupation, see e.g. IPN 01283/1930, k. 6 and the following.

⁶⁰ In the priesthood since 1932. After graduating from the Catholic Church Seminar in Łuck and receiving consecration he moved to PNKK, and later on Old Catholics of bishop W. Faron. Since July 1945 a member of the Polish Socialist Party till the reunification „of the labour movement”. Afterwards, resigned as recommended by KW PZPR. From July 1945 to April 1946 the deputy of the director of Settling at the Agriculture

afterwards, again at night, on 15th/16th January 1951, under the supervision of major Jan Onacik from the Ministry of Public Security the Temporary Managing College of Polish National Catholic Church was established⁶¹. The same night or the following morning bishop Padewski, the head of the Church, was arrested⁶². Church buildings in Warsaw and Kraków had promptly been undertaken. Not even a month after arresting bishop Padewski, the assembly of the Polish National Catholic Church clergymen was organized on 15th February, at which a decision was taken unanimously (during the open voting) on breaking the diocese in Poland from the Church in the USA and announcing its independence⁶³.

The tragic, still unexplained death of bishop Padewski⁶⁴ simplified the task for the authorities. After his quiet funeral (14th May 1951) Provisional College of Authority was transformed (on 25th–26th May 1951) into the Church Council and the bishop Curia was established. A little bit later, Disciplinary Commission was appointed with A. Jurgielewicz as its head. Its task was to clear the ranks of the priests who were „inappropriate, coincidental and harmful in any way to the Church”, as well as conducting any necessary changes in manning of parishes. The first to be made redundant was... Józef Dobrochowski. He was accused of financial maladministration, ideological aberration and internal sabotage aiming at „chaos and decomposition”⁶⁵. The purge was conducted very orderly, invalidating all seals, stamps and clergymen IDs. The new ones were issued only for the ones who had been verified positively⁶⁶.

Department of the District Office in Bydgoszcz. Further on, the deputy of the director of fishnet factory, and from January 1947 to August 1948 the director of the net curtains and stockings factory. After resigning from this position he devoted himself solely to the church service, IPN BY 069/1236, k. 64.

⁶¹ K. Białecki, p. 56–57.

⁶² Ibidem, p. 59.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 63–66.

⁶⁴ The most comprehensive information on the tragic circumstances of the death of bishop Padewski and the doubts connected with it written by H. Winiarczyk-Kossakowska, *The Legal Acts of the 3rd Republic* p. 396–7.

⁶⁵ The accusation might have been true, however J. Dobrochowski, was removed since he had fulfilled his task and was replaced with more useful individuals. Białecki, *The National Church*, p. 69–70, p. 73.

⁶⁶ Białecki, *The National Church*, p. 70, footnote. 156 and p. 73, footnote. 163 and 164. It had been conducted on the basis of the characteristics of clergymen that had been made all over the country, see footnote. 5.

In July 1952 it was possible to convoke II Assembly of Clergy. It had been preceded by the deanery assembly (secular believers were allowed to take part in them), whose course was reported by the agents to avoid any unexpected situations⁶⁷. At the assembly a new composition of bishop Curia was determined and new consecrations of new, unanimously elected bishops: J. Pękala and E. Krieglewicz, were performed. The name of the Church was changed to break its associations with PNCC in the USA.

The consecrations of bishops took place during I Synod of Common Catholic Church held from 8th to 11th November 1952. Mariavite bishops Waław Maria Bartłomiej Przysiecki and Roman Maria Jakub Próchniewski were the consecrators. There was no doubt that the state authorities had taken the control over the Polish Catholic Church entirely.

The elections of the highest authorities of Polish Catholic Church were conducted in a seemingly democratic manner by selected and intimidated group. The fact the legal regulations concerning the National Church were imperfect made the case easier. Election procedures could be customized for the current needs.

However, in the Church where the synod system had long tradition, and clergymen and members of authorities were of high intellectual and moral level (excluding the Security Services informers) conducting elections according to the wishes of the state apparatus was not an easy task. The best example being here the difficulties the state administration and Security Office encountered during the election of a bishop in Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession.

As mentioned before, Lutherans in Poland were in a special position. National transformation, the loss of half of the believers, the death by murder of main activists, whose authority reached far beyond the circles of EWANG, as in case of J. Bursch, resulted in the weakening of the Church after the occupation period. Moreover, the communist authorities could take advantage of all the measures given by the pre-war decree in issues concerning the supervision over this denomination. The statutory possibilities of influencing the manning of posts in Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession by the authorities were remarkably wide. They also had at their disposal some measures for exerting pressure when it comes to the property issues of the Church. This influence had increased remarkably in the post-war period. War damage, and most importantly the takeover of pos-

⁶⁷ IPN BY 069/1161, k. 21.

sessions of numerous deserted parishes, contributed to the impoverishment of this religious organization.

There are several regulations that, amongst the other, had led to this state of matters: the decree on abandoned and post-German property from 2nd March 1945⁶⁸, later on the act on left and abandoned property from 6th April 1945⁶⁹, a decree on abandoned and post-German property from 8th March 1946⁷⁰ and the act from 4th July 1947 on altering the President's decree on the relation of the State towards Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in the Polish Republic⁷¹ as well as their inappropriate interpretation by numerous low rank civil servants.

Amongst errors and mistakes, and maybe purposeful actions (?), one can mention the qualification of the property of a legal entity of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession as abandoned (post-German) property, which due to this qualification was becoming the property of the state.

Additionally, the already mentioned act from 1947 included then parishes of United Evangelical Church, Old Lutheran Church, and Evangelical Church of Augsburg and Helvetian Confession into Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, however without the majority of the property of incorporated parishes! Only in cases when Polish Lutherans took under its rule the property of previously German churches before 30th September 1946, it became the property of the new Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession parishes. The remaining property of the three churches became the property of the state.

Later on a lot of trouble was caused by the free interpretation of the act from 20th March 1950 on the overtaking by the state of properties Churches acquired in the last wills (*dobra martwej ręki* – the property of a dead hand), guarantee to the parsons the possession of farms and establishing the Church Fund⁷². As the Consistory wrote to the Office of Religious Affairs, „It was a distortion to take over on the basis of this act the following: churches, chapels, the houses of prayer, presbyteries, parish houses, gardens, several-hectare plots located in cities and towns which had nothing to do with „land property” referred to in art. 1 of the Act. It was, due to particular concentration of real estate of this type in this area, particularly severe”.

⁶⁸ Dz. U. 1945.9.45

⁶⁹ Dz. U. 1945.17.97.

⁷⁰ Dz. U. 1946.13.87.

⁷¹ Dz. U. 1947.52.272.

⁷² Dz. U. 1950.9.87.

In 1955 the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession made the list of real estate which were in its possession, but not under its rule. These were 25 churches, 10 larger chapels, 138 cantors offices (in this number smaller chapels and the houses of prayer) and 39 „other objects” of different kind. They were taken advantage of by, in order according to the official letter of Consistory, „the local level state authorities, the units of state and socialized economy, as well as units of the Roman Catholic Church”.

The loss could not have been compensated with acquisition handed to Lutherans from United Evangelical and Old Lutheran church property, even if some of the pre-war parishes in the old West Territories of the Second Republic had been significantly benefited⁷³.

Hardly ever did the authorities make a gesture and led to regaining by Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession its pre-war property. If it happened, they made an attempt to kill two or even three birds with one stone. The splendid example being church in Lipno. The Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession parish in this town had already existed as the parish of this Church before the war. After the war the church building in Lipno was taken by Camillians⁷⁴. The Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession regained it in September 1950. This was not, however, associated with the liberalization of denomination policy, but the signing so called Zgorzelec agreement on 6th July 1950 between Poland and the communist German Democratic Republic. Taking the church from Camillians and giving it back to Lutherans, allowing the parish consisting of German nationality individuals to function, and celebrate mass in German, communists strictly determined its position in the ranks, realized in practice the policy of friendship between two states of the people's democracy, and to some extent gained the gratitude of Lutherans giving back their property, as well as strengthened the position of local parson, R. Trenkler, trusted by the authorities, as an efficient spokesperson of the parish interest⁷⁵. In order to develop the network of informers the advantage was taken of, „the State bailout which could be granted for the church assuming that they will be supported for a particular activity”⁷⁶.

⁷³ Comparing the acquisitions of Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession with the ones of the Roman Catholic Church.

⁷⁴ IPN BY 069/1235, k. 2.

⁷⁵ See the characteristics of ks. R. Trenkler from 9th November 1950. IPN BY 069/1236, k. 61 and the further one from 26th November 1951 AAN, UdSW, sygn. 14/509, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Quoting J. Kłaczko, Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, p. 46.

Of course, gaining agents at the highest positions or the ones prognosticated to reach high rank in the church had not been abandoned. When in the Ministry of Public Security so called „analysis of the internal situation in churches” was being prepared in 1951, the remark was made that, „Recently 4 informers have been recruited that are tipped for the head positions in the new authorities of the church (...)”. The activation of new agents aimed at, „granting the constant influence on the church management (...)”. It had been planned to „lead to the election of authorities in accordance with the enclosed list in association with the oncoming Synod held on 18th November 1951”. Their main task was to prepare well new elections to the new Synod, which was to be held in the following year. It was then, that the new, entirely reliable „executive authorities” of the Church were to be elected.⁷⁷ As it seems, the scenario reminded of the one introduced at that time in Polish National Catholic Church. In case of Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, however, they did not manage to implement it so rapidly. It was only when A. Wantuła, i.e. TW „Barański”, was placed at the bishop’s office, that the plan from 1951 could be marked as fulfilled. This, however, had place in 1959 in entirely different political reality⁷⁸.

Also in other Churches, the management was shaped in accordance with the state authorities’ intentions:

- The Orthodox Church – Provisional College of Authority – 1948⁷⁹
- Mariavite Churches – Provisional Church Council 1953⁸⁰.

⁷⁷ The analysis of the situation of Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession from 14th November 1951, quoting J. Kłaczko, Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, p. 44. As the author states „The most important issue was to replace the Church authorities with the group entirely subdued to the communist authorities [Karol] Kotuła, [Zygmunt] Michelis and [Brunon] Umgelter”, *ibidem*, p. 46.

⁷⁸ The fact of registering A. Wantuła as TW „Barański” seems to be an inevitable conclusion drawn from the work by J. Kłaczko, Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession. The author himself, however, does not state this explicitly. About other cases see G. Bębnik, From „Góral” to „Gustaw” – the Heads of Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Upper Silesia Towards the Security Apparatus in the Light of Documents from the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (the outline of the issue), „The Repression Apparatus in the People’s Poland between 1944 and 1989”, nr 1/6/2008, p. 43–77.

⁷⁹ S. Dudra, Metropolitan Bishop Dionizy (Waledyński) 1876–1960, Warszawa 2010, p. 105; K. Urban, Orthodox Church, p. 94. On agents in Polish Orthodox Church M. Krzysztofiński, K. Sychowicz, In the Circle of „Byzantium”, „The Repression Apparatus in Poland between 1944 and 1989”, nr 1/6/2008, p. 79–153.

⁸⁰ K. Mazur, The Mariavite Church in Poland Kraków 1991, p. 123–124.

Churches as a tool of the religious policy of communists

After taking over the control (individual, parish, Church) – limiting the missionary activity of religious organizations, by particular intensification of disorganization activities, partial disintegration of church structures, instrumental treatment of Churches in propaganda actions shaping most of all public opinion abroad and in actions of authorities aimed at other Churches.

This idea was explained explicitly in several documents, so there is no need to conduct the reconstruction on the basis of the analysis of the events. For instance, when in August 1952 the Ministry of Public Security was preparing the analysis concerning Evangelical Churches, whose pieces have already been cited, it included there planned undertakings, which it was intending to conduct after establishing the United Evangelical Church. These were:

1. The complete isolation from the centres abroad, or staying in contact with the abroad provided it served operational purposes.
2. Gradual and systematic clearing and working out of sects of activists hostile towards the people’s authority.
3. Not allowing the former activists, serving their sentences in prisons.
4. Regulation of the increase in number within the limits meeting our requirements, slowing recruitment and ideological work at the youth part
5. Using sects to ROZPR other Protestant denominations (particularly Jehova’s Witnesses) as well as fight against the underground (Białystok, Lubelskie, Mazury), etc.
6. Directing the activity of sects according to the state interest (the Six-year plan) especially on the part of the countryside, where sects have the majority of communities
7. Using for all state actions.

Another, also already cited document, concerned Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession. As mentioned before, the main task the officials of the Ministry of Public Security appointed for themselves was to man the head position of the Church with figureheads obedient to the communists. Since the election was performed by special Election College and Synod, the decision was made to activate, „agents meant to participate in Synod”. Beside the personal matters, the proceedings were to be directed in a way that, „the resolutions undertaken by the Synod ought to reflect the new direction of the Church. „It was about the state matters: the support for the 6-year plan, purchase action, struggle for peace, as well as international matters: depreciation

of war incitement and appealing to the clergymen and the believers of Protestant churches abroad to fight for peace, deprecation of the remilitarization of Germany, as well as the appeal to „anti-Nazi Protestant activists of Germany for the common struggle for peace”.

The future “Tasks for the management of church” had also been appointed. Since the preparations for the election of the destined heads at the following synod were of the greatest significance, there were two additional tasks: the development of ‘mass popularization’ of “Evangelical Watch Tower” and granting it a suitable ideological profile⁸¹ as well as the work amongst “the indigenous inhabitants most importantly Mazurians”. On the other hand, they wanted to prevent the development of the Church by establishing new parishes and pastoral posts. Its extension could only be possible on “the account of Methodists”, Lutherans were to displace them gradually. The overall balance of parishes would not be altered then. It was to be the supervised process so that the Church would not gain authority beyond the religious matters⁸². The attempts were also made to take advantage of RE lessons still present at schools by removing Methodist RE teachers, and replacing them with Lutheran ones⁸³. Today we are aware of the fact that not all of these plans had been realized successfully.

In this part of the study I am intending to refer to the frequently appearing statement concerning the creation of “counterbalance for the Catholic Church out of religious minorities”. Using minority Churches against the Catholic Church, frequently without particular unwillingness and quite often with the acceptance on the side of the interested ones, was the fact. However, claiming that the “counterbalance” had been created is an overstatement, like establishing the past that had never existed. Since which denomination, even supported by the authorities (and each case of the support from the

communists was a discrediting a Church in the view of the society) could become the counterbalance for the Catholic Church in Poland? Taking into account proportions alone, on the one side 23 million Catholics of Latin rite, whereas on the other approximately 900 thousand religious minorities, over half of which were national minorities⁸⁴. Polish Orthodox Church basically consisted only of national minorities and was perceived as a foreign, Moscovite denomination, could not possibly be the alternative of any kind. The second largest Church, Evangelical of Augsburg Confession, even though it had lost its most valuable Polish clergymen, e.g. bishop J. Bursche, during the war, had to struggle against odium of Germanity, resulting from the fact that Germans had constituted the majority in it since the collapse of the Third Reich. Using the minority Churches in propaganda actions and campaigns of the state authorities striking directly or indirectly at the Catholic Church in Poland is commonly known⁸⁵, yet one ought to admit that the direct influence of religious organizations on the society due to the number of their believers was but slight, and in order to achieve its aim the authorities had to harness additionally the state press, radio and later on TV⁸⁶.

There was, however, one area where the word “counterbalance” was justified. It did not concern the Poles but national minorities, though. It was so called “orthodoxization” of Greek Byzantine Catholics. In its classical shape in Ukraine, Romani and Slovakia, it was following one pattern. The Synod was held, organized and manipulated by communists, for every of Uniate Church (Greek Byzantine Catholic): in Lwów 1946 (Ukraine), Alba Julia 1948 (Romania), Preszow 1950 (Slovakia). At Synod delegates, brought there and intimidated, announced the annulment of the church Union act, and

⁸¹ Kłaczek, Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, p. 454–463.

⁸² Ibidem, p. 46.

⁸³ It was the measure applied towards other denominations. The attempts were made to apply such methods towards Catholics. For instance, when the school church in Grudziądz was taken away and passed to Polish National Catholic Church (20th December 1947), order of the Holy mass for children and the youth planned for the following day in the Advent period had not been altered. They were to be performed without giving a notice by a national parish priest. Gomza. However, when on 21st December 1947 at 9.00 he entered the church, almost all the young people „informed the day before by Catholic clergymen” rushed out of the church shouting „oh you nationals, crawlers”, IPN BY 069/1161, k. 68.

⁸⁴ J. Żaryn, *The History of the Catholic Church in Poland (1944–1989)*, Warszawa 2003, [further: J. Żaryn, *The History of the Church*], p. 75 writes about 1.5% national minorities and 7–8 % religious minorities. Taking into account that after the war the population in Poland reached no more than 24 million people in absolute numbers it would be respectively circ. 360 thousand and 1 mln. 700–800 thousand. The first number is underestimated whereas the second one is overestimated, unless the Germans awaiting displacement are included.

⁸⁵ See e.g. J. Kłaczek, *Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession*, p. 397–414, chapter VI. 2 and O. Kiec, *The Millennium Celebrations in 1966 and the Religious Minorities in Poland*, „Roczniki Historyczne” 2002, R. LXVIII, p. 175–193.

⁸⁶ The obvious exceptions were two regions: part of białostockie voivodship, where the Orthodox population prevailed and cieszyńska land inhabited by several dozen thousand Polish Evangelical believers.

declared the return of the old Church to Orthodoxy. The removing and arresting of bishops, forcing clergymen to subdue to new heads appointed by communists, gradually led to the stability of new-old structures. It was obviously associated with making the legal activity impossible for the ones who preserved Greek Byzantine Catholic rite. The prohibition was justified with the will of believers themselves, expressed freely at the synod⁸⁷.

When it comes to the situation in Poland it was quite unique. After the displacement of the Ukrainian population to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic (and the Polish population from the Republic) on the basis of international agreements, at the end of 1946 there still remained circ. 150 thousand Ukrainians, Lemkos, Boykos and Hutsuls. They were dislocated a year later, in 1947, to the new Polish territories in the North and West within the "Vistula" action⁸⁸. As a result, Greek Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox church structures had been destroyed in these areas⁸⁹. Hence, it was not possible, like in other countries, to transform Greek Byzantine Catholic parishes into Orthodox ones even in administrative scope, since the first ones were practically non-existent in Western Pomerania, Lower Silesia, or East Prussia. Obviously, there was no permission for the establishing of new Greek Byzantine Catholic parishes, or even practise the religion in new places of settlement, where the Ukrainian-Greek Byzantine Catholic population inhabited in dense communities⁹⁰. Also the Orthodox encountered difficulties, however lesser ones. By the end of the 1940s at least 32 Orthodox pastoral outposts (parishes or their branches) had

been established⁹¹. The situation improved at the beginning of the 1950s. As J. Urban states, it was associated with the inclusion of the Orthodox Church into the process of, "liquidating Ukrainian nationalism, and in this case Greek Byzantine Catholic rite". On the part of the Church, a newly brought from Moscow Metropolitan Bishop Makary was responsible for this⁹², whereas the action in the Regained Territories was led by Jan Lewiarz⁹³. The action had been sanctioned by the resolution of Political Bureau of the Central Comity of the Polish United Labour Party in April 1952⁹⁴. After 1956, as a result of individual returns of displaced people to their homeland, "the actions were undertaken in the direction of restitution of parishes or continuing the orthodox activity amongst Greek Byzantine Catholics"⁹⁵. With the support of the Office for Religious Affairs, despite frequent sabotage of its orders by local authorities, during two years 14 outposts were established, Orthodox Deanery was established in Rzeszów and Mission Comity in the People's Republic of Poland was appointed at the office of Metropolitan Bishop of the Orthodox Church⁹⁶. After 1956 Greek Byzantine Catholics got the permission to perform the liturgy, yet the Orthodox were still supported. In 1969 there were 91 active Orthodox outposts (with 44 clergymen) and 38 Greek Byzantine Catholic ones (with 26 clergymen), acting among the Ukrainian population that was included in the relocation (as well as Lemkos and Boykos)⁹⁷.

The banning of Churches

The intention towards the Churches of religious minorities, even if they were considered to useful temporarily, are clearly explained in a note by one of officials of the Department for Religious Affairs of a local National

⁸⁷ J. Stocki, *The Ecumenical Council of Lwów 8–10 March 1946: Preparations Conduct and Consequences. The Role of the Totalitarian System*, „Pamięć i sprawiedliwość” 2009, nr 1 (14), [furtherj: J. Stocki, *The Ecumenical Council of Lwów The* p. 237–267.

⁸⁸ There were up to 45 thousand of Orthodox believers, M. Krzysztofiński, K. Sychowicz, *In the Circle of „Byzantium”*, p. 81.

⁸⁹ J. Żaryn, *The History of Church* p. 69–75; S. Dudra, *The Orthodox Church on the Polish Western and Northern Areas after the Second World War Zielona Góra 2004*, [furtherj: S. Dudra, *The Orthodox Church*] p. 89–113; I. Hałagida, *The Deportations of Greek Byzantine Bishops from Przemyśl to USSR in 1945 and 1946. New documents*, „Pamięć i sprawiedliwość” 2008, nr 2 (13) 2008, p. 284–288, 298; K. Urban, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 158–160.

⁹⁰ It seems that Polish bishops remained relatively restrained, and ordinary diocese priests, as well as Roman Catholics, frequently replaced from the eastern cordon, had reluctant attitude towards Ukrainian co-believers, J. Żaryn, *The History of Church*, p. 72–75.

⁹¹ K. Urban, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 160–163.

⁹² Previously, after being consecrated for bishop of Lwów and Tarnopol in 1945 he participated in the liquidation of Greek Byzantine Catholic Church in Soviet Ukraine, J. Stocki, *The Ecumenical Council of Lwów*, p. 238.

⁹³ Once, Greek Byzantine Catholic priest, removed in 1941 for disobedience by Metropolitan Bishop A. Szeptycki, P. Gerent, *The Orthodoxy in Lower Silesia between 1945 and 1989*, Toruń 2007, p. 491. On the collaboration of ks. J. Lewiarz with the security apparatus A. Brożyniak, *The Case of Priest Jan Lewiarz, „The Repression Apparatus in People's Poland between 1944 and 1989”*, nr 1/6/2008, p. 155–180.

⁹⁴ S. Dudra, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 65.

⁹⁵ K. Urban, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 175–179.

⁹⁶ S. Dudra, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 29

⁹⁷ K. Urban, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 318–319

Council from 1957, „It ought to be admitted that between 1951 and 1956 the state authorities had no interest in the development of religious organizations. The standpoint of the political management at that time was that the possible support for religious minorities was pointless, and some advantages could be gained only when a citizen breaks his resolution with a particular organization and accepts the views based on science”⁹⁸.

Hence it is clear that the ultimate aim of communists was to build the new free from „religious superstition „society. The banning itself could not lead to achieving this aim, however was a significant, milestone step towards reaching it. In our view the period between 1947/48 and 55/56 was the time of intense preparations for the future liquidation or rather banning of religious organizations. Several religious organizations had experienced strong repressions, which apart from the arresting of hundreds individuals resulted in the deaths of a couple of dozen, especially in small religious organizations of the United Evangelical Church and the Jehova’s Witnesses⁹⁹. These activities were not effective, anyway as it seems they did not aim at the liquidation of these religious organizations, however in the first case it was subduing it to the denominational authorities (security apparatus), and in the second the destruction of the structures, disorganization and weakening the structures of Jehova’s Witnesses¹⁰⁰.

The liquidation plans towards the Churches in Poland were postponed and the decision was made to

await the suitable moment. The change of tactics concerning the Church did not only result from the change of internal policy of communists in Poland in 1956. It was already in November 1955 that it was admitted that despite the intentions of state and party authorities the Catholic Church, ” will remain for the long time in the communist system”, at the same time propounded focusing on limiting its influence and fighting against its „hostile activities”, as well as limiting „merely” to the liquidation of convents. It did not mean, of course, retiring from the main aim, but applying slower pace in achieving it. It simply meant that in Poland something else had to suffice, namely the continuous invigilation of all Churches and religious organizations in Poland. This situation can be illustrated by paraphrasing the statement of a victim of Soviet religious repressions, Tania Chodkiewicz, „You are not forbidden to pray... as long as your prayers are heard but by the God”¹⁰¹. Instead, the prayer was allowed, but all the measures had been taken so that it was heard also by the communist state.

⁹⁸ K. Białecki, *The National Church* p. 28.

⁹⁹ The number of 100 thousand believers, which Jehova’s Witnesses claimed in 1947 does not seem credible, since the repressions were to touch 90% members of this religious organization, i.e. 15 thousand people, see K. Urban, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 26, footnote. 33.

¹⁰⁰ We do not mention here the special case of the Old Catholic Church, whose legal recognition was withdrawn by the Office of Religious Affairs, seemingly because after the death of bishop Z. Szypold the remaining believers ceased any activity and did not appoint any legal representation of this religious organization. This church had been in a permanent financial and personal crisis or several years any way, without any special „attempts” on the side of the state authorities. After the election or nomination of bishop I. Wysocznński for the head of the church had not been acknowledged and the few properties the church owned had been taken away the church existed without legalization. More on this issue, T. and J. Piątek, *The Old Catholic Church*, Warszawa 1987, p. 140 i 143–145; W. Słomscy, *Polish Old Catholics*, Warszawa 1997, p. 52–53; K. Bielawny, Ignacy Wysocznński – the bishop of the Old Catholic Church and Eastern Churches, [in:] *Bishop–Presbyter–Dean. The Polish-Catholic and Roman Catholic Perspective* ed. bishop J. Jezierski, Olsztyn 2008, p. 196–197.

¹⁰¹ A. Sołżenicyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956. The Attempt of literary investigation*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1990, p. 45