

# Repressions Against the Catholic Clergy in Warsaw (1939–1940) in Testimonies Made Before the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland

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## Abstract

The present article concerns German repressions against the clergy of the Catholic Church in occupied Warsaw in the years 1939–1940. Its source base is formed from the testimonies of victims and witnesses of Nazi terror, collected after the war by the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland. The text presents a variety of aspects relative to the violence, both physical and administrative, employed by the occupying forces, including restriction of religious freedoms, arrest, torture, transport to concentration camps, and execution. The author strives to identify whether the central motive for the persecution of the clergy was based on adherence to the Catholic faith or rather on nationality. The intention herein is to present the extremely complicated reasons for the repressions against the clergy, who were at once priests, Poles, and members of the national elite. The persecution of the clergy is presented in the more general context of German repressions in Warsaw and the General Government in order to facilitate consideration whether the clergy were a special case, or whether the occupier's actions were part of a broader criminal plan.

We later learned that my uncle had been taken to Szucha Avenue, where he was brutally interrogated and maltreated. He was promised his freedom on the condition that he sign a declaration to nurture loyalty to the occupants in his parish. Father Nowakowski refused and, as we discovered, was sentenced to death. One of the German Gestapo officers [...] said that, after the sentence was read out, the accused used his last words to condemn the Germans' crimes and cruelty and prophesied their losing the war. The German was furious, and said "it was not we who judged him, but he us" (Testimony of Stanisława Przedpeńska, n.d., p. 27).

This was how Stanisława Przedpeńska remembered the events surrounding the murder of her uncle, a priest, in January 1940.

Rev. Augustyn Mańkowski, a Piarist arrested in Warsaw in early 1940 and transported to KL Auschwitz after a brutal interrogation, recalled:

Three Gestapo men called me in and, having declared that they were only taking me to check some issues, took me to the Pawiak prison. I remained there until June 1940. The conditions were abominable both in terms of food and hygiene, as well as how the prisoners were treated. We were beaten without mercy, particularly during interrogations. I was interrogated on more than a dozen separate occasions. I was often woken up several times at night especially for this purpose. I was not questioned about anything at all during those interrogations; I was told explicitly that I was being hostile toward the German nation, that I was raising the younger generation in the same spirit, and that I gave sermons to that effect. I was whipped, kicked, had my hands bound behind my back, and had the tips of my fingers beaten during each of these interrogations. This latter in particular caused me intense pain (Testimony of Rev. Augustyn Mańkowski, n.d., pp. 47–48).

I must indicate that priests were detained as they were leaving the church, without even being asked for their name. This was how Rev. Dr. Franciszek Roślaniec, a University of Warsaw professor, was arrested; later he was transported to a camp, where he died (Testimony of Rev. Zygmunt Kozubski, n.d., p. 237).

This was how Rev. Zygmunt Kozubski recalled the events. During the war, he was the Archbishop of Warsaw's plenipotentiary for matters related to the German administration.

Rev. Marcei Nowakowski, a prewar social activist, was murdered in Palmiry near Warsaw along with many other representatives of Poland's political, intellectual and cultural elites. Rev. Mańkowski was made a victim of repressions aimed against the Polish intelligentsia employed in the education system. The martyrdoms of Revs. Franciszek Rosłaniec and Zygmunt Sajna resulted in their beatification by Pope John Paul II in 1999. What connects these clergymen is the fact that they were all persecuted in Warsaw at the very beginning of the German occupation. There were many more such cases, which I will strive to investigate over the course of the article.

### Testimonies of terror

Statistical indices of martyrs take on a fuller meaning when they are juxtaposed with the stories of specific individuals, especially when told by eye witnesses to or participants in the events in question. A valuable and engaging record of the experiences of the violence used by the totalitarian Third Reich against the Polish civilian population from the first days of the Second World War can be found in the collections of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in 1945, it gathered materials that documented the German atrocities committed during the war. These materials went on to form one of the most valuable archival resources for research into the history of the occupation. It is my intention to use records of testimonies from this vast collection as the source material that will form the foundation of the present paper as they made up part of the evidence in cases brought against Nazi criminals. I will analyze the protocols gathered by the Main Commission, its regional delegations, and the Supreme National Tribunal, which cooperated with the Commission. It was before this latter body that the trials were held.

Much of the material relevant to the present article can be found in the records from the trial of Ludwig Fischer, governor of the Warsaw District in the General Government.<sup>2</sup> Among the testimonies given at that

1 Polish: *Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce*. The name was changed in 1949 to *Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland* (Polish: *Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce*).

2 Eg. AIPN GK, 196/72, Protokół Rozprawy Głównej w formie stenogramu w sprawie Ludwika Fischera i innych z dnia 17 XI, 18 XI, 19 XI 1946 r. [Protocol of the Main Hearing in the case of Ludwik Fischer and others dated 17.12, 18.12, 19.12.1946, in stenogram], vol. II–III; and AIPN GK, 196/67, Akta w sprawie oskarżenia

trial, the testimony of Rev. Stanisław Mystkowski, an expert witness in cases of the occupier's battle against the Catholic Church, is of particular significance. Another important collection of testimonies can also be found in the volume recorded from the investigation into crimes committed against the clergy of the Warsaw Archdiocese, conducted in the mid-1970s.<sup>3</sup> Supplementary information is also located in other materials from the Main Commission and District Commissions for the Investigation of German Crimes in Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, and Bydgoszcz, which include the testimonies of clergymen who were arrested in Warsaw at the start of the occupation and who spent much of the war as prisoners in camps such as Gross-Rosen or Auschwitz.

The accounts of repressions against the Catholic clergy were related mainly by the clergymen themselves. These included monastic and diocesan priests who served as parish priests or reverends in various parishes, professors at theological seminaries and at the University of Warsaw. It was not possible to locate any testimonies of priests deported into the General Government who suffered persecution within Warsaw at the beginning of the war. Testimonies from laymen, which proved less relevant during research, were generally given by relatives of the victims or simply by eye witnesses. Representatives of other denominations, including spiritual leaders, were also known to testify with regard to Catholic priests. No testimonies were provided by the hierarchs of the Church. It was similarly impossible to find testimonies from nuns concerning the events of 1939–1940. Approximately 25 testimonies have been examined in total.<sup>4</sup> The amount of documentation concerning the persecution of the clergy in the first year of the occupation of Warsaw is relatively small in comparison to the testimonies given before the Main Commission or the Supreme National Tribunal with regard to repressions against other social groups. For example, the 18 volumes of testimonies later used in the

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Ludwika Fischera i innych [Files in the case against Ludwik Fischer and others], vol. XIII–XIV. Fischer was sentenced along with Ludwig Leist, Josef Meisinger, Max Daume.

- 3 AIPN, s 2/75, Śledztwo w sprawie zbrodni na duchowieństwie archidiecezji warszawskiej [Investigation into the case of crimes committed against the clergy of the Warsaw Archdiocese]. These testimonies were recorded in 1975–1977. This collection appears to have arisen from the wave of renewed investigations against German criminals that surged in the 1960s amid concerns that, among others, perpetrators would escape justice via natural death.
- 4 In the collections of the Main Commission, by far the largest number of accounts of German repressions against the Catholic clergy in Warsaw concern the period of the Warsaw Uprising. On the one hand, they describe the most dramatic events, such as the mass murders of Jesuits or Redemptorists; on the other hand, they are more biased than the testimonies concerning the earlier years of the occupation, as they speak of physical destruction and do not reflect the great variety of repressions that occurred prior to 1944.

trial against Ludwig Fischer include a total of 198 testimonies, of which only seven were given by clergymen.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible to reconstruct an image of Polish religious life during the occupation from the numerous testimonies collected by the Main Commission; however, this article focuses on the course and forms of German repressions against the Church and the martyrdom of the Catholic clergy. This approach was suggested by the very content of the testimonies, as the threads relative to persecution in these sources were undoubtedly among the aspects most often described by the witnesses.

While the credibility of the testimonies given before the Main Commission has been debated for years, their enormous historical value cannot be called into question. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remain cautious with regard to testimonies made under the rule of a Communist regime and to the willingness and ability of the witnesses to discuss their traumatic experiences, even though most of the interviewees were eye witnesses of or participants in the events in question. Testimonies given just after the war are especially valuable, as time had not yet eroded the facts in the memory of the witnesses, and had not “influenced” their stories with other narratives, descriptions or interpretations of the events, as likely happened in subsequent years. Prof. Piotr Madajczyk rightly says of these documents:

As with any subjective source that deals with memory, they require a critical analysis. They do, however, describe perfectly what the war meant in terms of society, what it meant for local communities, for families, for individuals affected by the terror – what mark it left on their psyches and on their lives (Madajczyk, 2017, p. 30).

Analyses of these materials are encouraged by their relatively rare usage in research on the history of the occupation in the context of the Catholic Church. This has also been the case in the past. The archival resources of the Main Commission were not used in the five-volume study of this phenomenon by Revs. Wiktor Jacewicz and Jan Woś (Jacewicz & Woś, 1977–1981). This may be explained by the fact that the book was published

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5 I took the following files into consideration: AIPN GK, 196/61, Akta w sprawie z oskarżenia Ludwika Fischera i innych; vol. I–II; AIPN GK, 196/62, Proces Fischera; vol. III–IV; AIPN GK, 196/63, Proces Ludwika Fischera; vol. V; AIPN GK, 196/64, Akta w sprawie oskarżenia Ludwika Fischera i innych; vol. VI; AIPN GK, 196/65, Akta w sprawie oskarżenia Ludwika Fischera i innych; vol. VII–VIII; AIPN GK, 196/66, Akta w sprawie oskarżenia Ludwika Fischera i innych; vol. IX–XII; AIPN GK, 196/67, Akta w sprawie oskarżenia Ludwika Fischera i innych; vol. XIII–XIV; AIPN GK, 196/68, Akta w sprawie oskarżenia Ludwika Fischera i innych; vol. XV–XVII; AIPN GK, 196/69, Proces Fischera; vol. XVIII.

during the era of the communist Polish People's Republic, during which there existed a conflict between the Catholic Church and the Communist state, to which the Main Commission was formally subordinated. After 1989, in a free and independent Poland, use of the collected materials similarly left much to be desired. Today, at a time when a broad dissemination of these resources and knowledge about their contents is being carried out,<sup>6</sup> it is worth turning to them in research on repressions against the Catholic clergy, if only to supplement or verify knowledge that we already have.

To mention briefly the chronological and geographical framework within which the accounts were analyzed: firstly, consideration was given to the former of the two phases of German terror in Warsaw, as distinguished by Władysław Bartoszewski in his seminal work (Bartoszewski, 1967, p. 314), this being the period from the beginning of the occupation until autumn 1940. This distinction was also dictated by the testimonies given before the Main Commission, in which witnesses described the first year of the occupation in abundant detail. In comparison, similar levels of detail in subsequent accounts were only given to the events of 1944. This paper concerns the persecution that took place in Warsaw; consequently, if a priest ministering in a village in the Masovian region were repressed within the capital, for example with incarceration at the Pawiak prison, his fate consequently fell within the scope of the present analyses. Villages located outside Warsaw, but within the bounds of the city's metropolitan area, such as Wilanów, Palmiry, or Włochy, were also taken into account as they were closely connected with the capital by the events that took place there.

It should also be noted that the testimonies collected by the Main Commission are a research resource on repressions not only against the Catholic Church, its clergy, and its congregations, but also against other Christian Churches in Poland – particularly the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession – as well as on German violence committed against the followers of the largest non-Christian religion in the Second Polish Republic: Judaism.

## The occupation

Prewar Warsaw was a city of distinctive praxes. Not only was it the nexus of Polish statehood and the main center of Europe's Jewish population, but also a key location in the life of the Catholic Church in the Second Polish Republic. According to the municipal council, the population of Warsaw

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<sup>6</sup> For example, in the "Chronicles of Terror" online database of testimonies, run by the Pilecki Institute.

on 1 January 1939 amounted to 1,289,500 souls, and the same council stated that a total of 67% of Warsaw residents practiced Roman Catholicism (*Warszawa w liczbach...*, 1939, pp. 15–16). Of course, the outbreak of the war resulted in migration and loss of life. Historians estimate that the city was inhabited by some 1,275,000 people at the start of the war. The number of Catholics was undoubtedly more than half. An examination of organizational structures within the Church also aids an understanding of Warsaw's position in Polish Catholicism. Within the city limits was a metropolitan curia with all its offices, an apostolic nunciature, the seats of various institutes and associations (e.g. *Instytut Wyższej Kultury Religijnej* ["Institute for Higher Religious Culture"], the Catholic Action institute, Sodality of Our Lady, the "Caritas" Catholic Association), the Archdiocesan Museum and Archives, a seminary, and the Department of Theology at the University of Warsaw. There were as many as 36 parishes, 24 filial and monastic churches, and 104 chapels. A total of 12 all-male congregations had their convents within the city, and 135 alumni were being prepared for priesthood at the seminary. Immediately prior to the war, there were 721 secular priests and 222 monastic priests throughout the entire archdiocese, more than half of whom ministered in Warsaw (*Katalog kościołów i duchowieństwa...*, 1939). Even if imprecise, these numbers certainly show the scale and weight of the phenomenon faced by the Germans.

Warsaw capitulated on 28 September 1939. Officially, the Wehrmacht entered the capital on 1 October, but the Germans' actual first appearance in the city occurred one day earlier. The first arrest of clergymen on 3 October 1939 (another was made on 8 October) became a harbinger for the coming terror. The prisoners were placed in prewar prison facilities at Pawiak and Rakowiecka Street, as well as at the detention center on Daniłowiczowska Street, as part of broader preventive arrest operations. The Germans also conducted similar methods of population control in the other cities they entered (Fijałkowski, 1983, p. 74).

The priests who were arrested along with other representatives of the elites and the intelligentsia were made German hostages. On 5 October, a parade of the Third Reich's victorious forces was held in Warsaw, in the presence of Adolf Hitler. Nearly all the priests who described the initial period of the occupation in their postwar testimonies were placed under arrest at this time. They recalled the brutality (beatings, plundering) that came with the arrests, which were often carried out in a perfidious manner: priests were lured away from their parishes under the pretext of being led to the sick, or having been presented with a document to protect them from arrest, while they were in fact taken directly to prison. The priests themselves placed the number of arrests between 150 and 300. Some attributed their imprisonment to the Germans' desire to intimidate the people of Warsaw. Rev. Jan Rzymełka, priest of the Holy Cross parish, recalled having heard threats that "if there was any operation carried out by the Poles on 5 October aiming to interfere with Hitler's victory parade,

we would be executed” (Testimony of Rev. Jan Rzymelka, n.d., p. 57). The priests also stated that they were not presented with any formal accusation or even questioned, and no evidence was brought against them. Rev. Antoni Czajkowski said: “at that time, the occupiers still had no idea about many of the clergymen’s individual political activities” (Testimony of Antoni Czajkowski, n.d., p. 75).

The vast majority of the detained priests were released within a few weeks, although there were several who remained as hostages. Some attributed their release to intervention from the apostolic nuncio in Germany or the Vatican itself. Many stated that they had been forced to make a verbal pledge prior to their release that they would foster loyalty toward the occupational authorities. Rev. Mystkowski, vice-chancellor of the seminary, said:

Before my release, Dr Otto,<sup>7</sup> the Warsaw Governor at that time, gave a speech in which he stressed that our motherland was a concern for the German authorities, who would answer for their actions before God, and that we priests should only concern ourselves with the good Lord and otherworldly matters (Testimony of Rev. Stanisław Mystkowski, n.d., p. 274).

Rev. Czajkowski remembered that the Nazis “declared [to them] that it was the duty of the clergy to preach to their congregations about the Germans’ mission to put former Poland in order” (Testimony of Rev. Antoni Czajkowski, n.d., p. 75). The wave of arrests that took place in early October 1939 was primarily the work of Einsatzgruppe IV (Böhler, Mallmann & Matthäus, 2009, pp. 32–35). Rev. Mystkowski’s testimony contains an interesting exchange between him and Josef Meisinger. The staff member of Einsatzgruppe IV, and later its commander, who went on to become *ss*-Standartenführer nicknamed the “Butcher of Warsaw,” responsible for the massacres in Palmiry among others, attempted to absolve himself at his trial by claiming that his efforts had led to the release of innocent priests; furthermore, he emphasized: “I was one of the few who, despite the existing compulsion, did not leave the Catholic Church” (Testimony of Rev. Stanisław Mystkowski, n.d., p. 285).<sup>8</sup> Rev. Mystkowski declared that he was not aware of who was responsible for the release of the clergymen, but that the priests generally attributed it to Helmut Otto, Reichskommissar in Warsaw, while he himself had remained a hostage in the Pawiak prison until 3 May 1940.

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<sup>7</sup> Helmut Otto was Reichskommissar in Warsaw at the time.

<sup>8</sup> The protocol contains a misspelling of the German’s name as “Meissinger.”



It should be noted that the Polish capital found itself under Wehrmacht administration in the initial transitional period of the occupation, and that formal police authority was exercised by the commissionaire chief of police *ss-Oberführer* Wilhelm Claasen, who was subordinated to the head of the so-called civic administration of the military command in the city. In November 1939, the structures of the terror apparatus were solidified and systemized. The *ss* and Police Commander (*ss- und Polizeiführer im Distrikt Warschau, SSPF*) was appointed head of the entire police force in the city of Warsaw and its municipal area, to whom were subordinated the local commanders of the Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*) and Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst, SD*), the Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*) and *ss* units. This position was filled by *ss-Gruppenführer* Paul Moder until 1941. In autumn 1939, *Einsatzgruppe IV* was transformed into the Office for the Commander of the Security Police and Security Service (*Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD für den Distrikt Warschau, KdS*), which was subordinate to the *SSPF*. This office was initially headed by *ss-Brigadeführer* Lothar Beutel, and then, from December 1939, by the aforementioned Josef Meisinger. The structures of the Security Police catered for methods and units to combat the Catholic Church. In department IV, i.e. the Gestapo, Section IV B – led by *ss-Hauptsturmführer* Paul Werner from 1940 – was charged with issues relative to the Church (as well as Freemasonry and Judaism). In department III, the *SD*, religious matters were the responsibility of Section III C (Bartoszewski, 1967, pp. 298–304).

On 9 November, two days before Independence Day, a group of priests was again arrested and held hostage as a preventive measure (Sziling, 1988, p. 193). The majority was soon released, but some remained in prison until they were deported to KL Sachsenhausen in 1940. Unlike the arrests that took place in early October, this event was not mentioned in the clergy's postwar testimonies.

The arrests of the clergy described herein were preventive and deterrent in nature, and were carried out rather chaotically. The subsequent arrests that began in late autumn 1939 were linked with the Germans' extermination operations and were conducted more systematically in response to broadly defined "anti-German activities," often based on prohibition lists drawn up before the war. Cases of prisoners being released grew increasingly rare. In November, numerous clergymen who had previously been involved in political, social, and cultural organizations or employed in the education system were imprisoned as part of a campaign against the Polish intelligentsia. Many of them were transported to concentration camps or shot.

In their accounts, the priests felt that the clergymen who were most specifically targeted at the time were the professors at the seminary or who worked at the Department of Theology at the University of Warsaw. They attributed this to the Germans' desire to hinder the teaching and

training of seminarians. Rev. Zygmunt Kozubski stated: “Even ailing and very old priests were not spared. They detained people who had nothing to do with politics; their only fault was that they were priests” (Testimony of Rev. Zygmunt Kozubski, n.d., pp. 236–237). One example of monks who were arrested at that time regarded Augustyn Mańkowski, the Piarist mentioned above, who was involved in the education of children and young people. He was arrested by the Gestapo in Warsaw on 10 January 1940, held at the Pawiak prison for five months, and then transported via a prison in Tarnów to KL Auschwitz on the first mass transport to the camp on 14 June 1940.<sup>9</sup> The repressions being carried out by the Germans in Warsaw were just a fragment of larger operations conducted by the occupier on the territory of the General Government and the lands annexed directly into the Third Reich. Their goal was to eliminate the Polish intelligentsia, and the persecution of the clergy was an inseparable part of this goal. Biologically speaking, extermination was intended to eradicate all of the Third Reich’s enemies, regardless of whether these enemies were actual or potential threats.

The testimonies of the clergy show very clearly the special role played by prisons (especially the notorious Pawiak) in their experience of the occupation. The first Poles were imprisoned on as early as 2 October, and many clergymen were locked up just one day later. After control of the facility was taken over from the Department of Justice of the General Government by the German Sicherheitspolizei and SD in the Warsaw District in March 1940, Pawiak became the largest political prison in the whole of occupied Poland. Rev. Mańkowski described the conditions of his time there as “abominable” (Testimony of Rev. Augustyn Mańkowski, n.d., p. 47), referring not only to the state of the food or of hygiene, but also to the treatment of the prisoners. Rev. Mystkowski described the Warsaw prisons where the priests were held in these terms:

no window panes, bedding, food supplies or water. The toilets were unwashed and the cells infested with insects. In some cells and sick rooms, the priests were kept together with public criminals (Testimony of Rev. Stanisław Mystkowski, n.d., p. 273).

Undoubtedly, then, the prison sentences tied the fates of the clergy to those of other members of society (including non-Catholics) who were also held in Pawiak and other detention centers.

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<sup>9</sup> Rev. Mańkowski escaped from the camp in 1944. He later wrote one of the first published memoirs about Auschwitz, *Za drutami obozu koncentracyjnego w Oświęcimiu* (Mańkowski, 1945).

The Germans forbade all official religious practices at Pawiak, those sentenced to death were deprived of the possibility of receiving the sacraments, and the prison chapel was converted into a torture chamber for the detainees. Religious life descended into clandestine territory, as Janina Kozak recalled:

At the beginning of 1940, we were confessing in secret, as the Germans had prohibited confession and communion. The arrested priests would hear confession; as for communion, a priest [...] would bring communion bread and one of the prisoners, a woman named Mynka, would take it upstairs where the priests would distribute it (Testimony of Janina Kozak, n.d., pp. 78–79).

One of the priests who illegally performed pastoral duties as far as he possibly could was Rev. Mystkowski. Not only was he able to provide spiritual support to the inmates, but he also received various messages from his fellow prisoners. Similarly, he encountered attempts by the Gestapo to cynically exploit the religious sentiment of the prisoners. He witnessed a situation in which a German officer approached a dying, tortured member of the resistance and, posing as a Catholic priest, encouraged him to “confess.” When, in the course of this confession, the officer began to ask questions of a political nature rather than a spiritual one, the tortured Pole realized that he was being duped.

It is worth examining the repressions against the Catholic clergy in Warsaw from a comparative point of view in relation to other places in the General Government. These, however, must not be compared with the realities in the territories annexed into the Third Reich, where the Germans began a ruthless crackdown on all forms of Polishness, of which only one aspect was a very brutal attack on the Polish clergy. Just as within the city of Warsaw, the Germans carried out mass preventive arrests of the clergy in the remaining areas of the General Government in October and November 1939. In time, most of the prisoners were released. In the autumn, the arrests began to be associated with the general campaign to destroy the intelligentsia, whose victims included clergymen employed in the education system. One characteristic feature of these arrests was that they took place in dioceses in the eastern part of the General Government (Siedlce, Lublin, Przemyśl) and in its two main urban centers, Warsaw and Kraków (Sziling, 1988, p. 194). In Lublin, a group of professors (with clergy among them) from the Catholic University of Lublin was imprisoned on 11 November. The local bishops, metropolitan Marian Fulman and his suffragan Władysław Goral, were also arrested, a phenomenon that had not occurred in Warsaw (Lewandowska, 2012). As many as 10 priest professors from the Department of Theology at the Jagiellonian University were among those arrested on 6 November in Kraków as part of Sonderaktion

Krakau. At the turn of 1939 and 1940, a large number of monastic priests in the General Government was also detained and deported to concentration camps, an example of which is the story of Augustyn Mańkowski in Warsaw, the Piarist described above (Fijałkowski, 1983, pp. 75–76).

## Martyrs

The testimonies given after the war by the priests who survived the German occupation represent a crucial resource for reconstructing the fates of many victims of the Nazi regime. They present at least a fragment of the war-time lives of the murdered priests, several of whom went on to be revered by the Catholic Church as martyrs. One such martyr was Rev. Zygmunt Sajna, a parish priest in Góra Kalwaria, who was arrested for giving a patriotic sermon. Rev. Kozubski recalled him in these words:

It happened that a priest who expressed hope during a sermon that everything would change, or mentioned the name of Poland, would be immediately arrested and killed. This happened to the dean, Father Sejna from Góra Kalwaria (Testimony of Rev. Zygmunt Kozubski, n.d., p. 237).

In April 1940, he was taken to the Gestapo prison on Szucha Avenue, where he was tortured. He was later imprisoned in Pawiak, but he did not abandon his cassock and breviary, and provided spiritual support to his fellow prisoners (Testimony of Jan Maciejewski, n.d., pp. 36–37; Testimony of Stanisław Baranowski, n.d., pp. 77–78). He was shot during a mass execution in Palmiry on 17 September 1940, as part of the German AB-Aktion. Pope John Paul II beatified him in 1999 along with 107 other Polish martyrs from the Second World War.

Rev. Marcei Nowakowski, parish priest of the Church of the Most Holy Savior in Warsaw, had been a political, social, and educational activist in the prewar era, as well as a member of parliament ideologically associated with the National Democracy movement in the Second Polish Republic. He was arrested for the first time in early October. Zygmunt Michelis, an evangelical priest at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Warsaw, who was also being held at that time, devoted a part of his testimony to Rev. Nowakowski. The Germans starved Michelis in order to force him to sign the *Volksliste*, however Rev. Nowakowski secretly provided him with food via a Polish guard, an act which the priest described after the war as: “a great help” (Testimony of Zygmunt Michelis, n.d., p. 32).<sup>10</sup> As Tomasz

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<sup>10</sup> After the war, Michelis became a bishop coadjutor of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland and a herald of ecumenism with the Roman Catholic Church.

Szarota has observed, this kind of behavior during the occupation was far from unusual: “In the public consciousness, a Catholic priest was a person who could always be counted on to help” (Szarota, 1988, p. 468).

After several weeks of freedom, Rev. Nowakowski was imprisoned once again in early December 1939, this time for having celebrated a solemn mass on 11 November, during which patriotic pamphlets had been given out. Despite torture, he did not confess to the charges against him and refused to sign a declaration of loyalty to the occupiers. Bishop Stanisław Gall intervened on his behalf, and the Germans replied that the priest would soon be free to go. In reality, he was executed in Palmiry on 22 January 1940. This was attributed not only to his previous conviction in autumn 1939, but also to his prewar political and social activities, which were judged to have been patriotic and anti-German (Testimony of Father Antoni Czajkowski, n.d., p. 75). Interestingly, the testimonies of his nieces Stanisława Przedpeńska and Maria Orłowska reveal that they did not know the actual location of Rev. Nowakowski’s execution, although they believed he had been shot in the gardens of the Sejm (Testimony of Stanisława Przedpeńska, n.d., p. 28; Testimony of Maria Orłowska, n.d., p. 30).<sup>11</sup>

DTh. Rev. Jan Krawczyk, priest of the Wilanów parish, was arrested in January 1940. Rev. Wincenty Malinowski met him when they were together at the Mokotów prison: “He told me that he was accused of having buried Polish soldiers and of harboring designs to join the conspiracy” (Testimony of Rev. Wincenty Malinowski, n.d., p. 41). Rev. Władysław Jędrych, who was appointed priest of the Wilanów parish in 1941, heard from local residents that the reason for Krawczyk’s arrest was that he had offended a large group of *Volksdeutsche* living in nearby Kępa Zawadowska (Testimony of Rev. Władysław Jędrych, n.d., p. 59). The Germans executed Rev. Krawczyk in Palmiry on 2 April 1940.

The three priests mentioned above were victims of the latter stages of the atrocities committed in Palmiry. In reality, Catholic priests were killed in almost all of the mass executions of Polish people that took place there (Fijałkowski, 1983, p. 76). Many priests were deported to concentration camps after their arrest. Rev. Prof. Franciszek Rosłaniec, a renowned biblical scholar and dean of the Department of Theology at the University of Warsaw, was arrested at the end of 1939 and taken in the first transport of Pawiak prisoners to KL Sachsenhausen on 2 May 1940 (Testimony of Rev. Stanisław Mystkowski, n.d., p. 286; Testimony of Rev. Zygmunt Kozubski, n.d., p. 237). He was later sent to Dachau, and was murdered in a gas chamber in 1942. He was also among the martyrs beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1999. Rev. Wincenty Malinowski, chief priest of Warsaw’s

<sup>11</sup> This is understandable when considering that Rev. Nowakowski’s remains have never been recovered.

schools, was arrested by the Gestapo on 19 April 1940. As he put it: “I was charged with having performed duties as a scout priest and of working with a publishing committee that edited a scout magazine called ‘Pobudka’” (Testimony of Rev. Wincenty Malinowski, n.d., p. 40). This is but one example of a repressive arrest for alleged conspiratorial activity. He was imprisoned at Rakowiecka Street and Pawiak, interrogated on Szucha Avenue, and transported to KL Sachsenhausen in May 1940, but he managed to survive the war. This was not the case for Rev. Jan Kuydowicz, the priest of the Puszcza Mariańska parish. He was arrested in April 1940 and placed in the Pawiak prison, then transported to KL Sachsenhausen on 2 May. He suffocated to death in a cattle car during the transport (Testimony of Kazimierz Kuydowicz, n.d., pp. 42–45).

### Administrative repressions

From the beginning of the occupation of the Polish capital, the Catholic Church and its priests also suffered administrative repressions that indirectly affected the clergy, their lives and their pastoral work. This is strongly reflected in the testimonies of the priests themselves, who stressed that German persecution went beyond mere arrest, imprisonment, torture, deportation, and execution. It also meant repressions in the form of limits to religious freedoms and hindering priests in carrying out their religious mission in the community.

Ordinances regulating religious rites and Catholic holidays were issued for the first time at Easter in 1940. Resurrection processions were banned, and in July of the same year all holy processions were forbidden, even within the grounds of the church, i.e. not only in the streets, but also in cemeteries. The occupying authorities expropriated the churches from the clergy who kept them. In this way, the Dominicans in Służew were prevented from making use of much of their newly constructed (and unfinished by the outbreak of the war) monastery by the Wehrmacht troops who occupied it in April 1940 (Testimony of Bertrand Czyrnek, n.d., p. 10). The monks were left the use of only the chapel and some of the monastery cells. The publication of Catholic magazines and books was also banned, as Jesuit Aleksander Kisiel recalled: “our congregation received an order of confiscation of all printing and bookbinding devices. We received this order directly from the district in 1940. The printing house and the bookbinding house were then sealed off” (Testimony of Rev. Aleksander Kisiel, n.d., p. 223–224). The liquidation of the University of Warsaw also meant the closure of its Department of Theology. Lay Catholics and the priests who worked with them faced the dissolution of various Catholic associations.

In their accounts, the priests emphasized that the orders limiting the freedom of the Church were issued by the German authorities in the

Warsaw District and were passed down to the clergy by the metropolitan curia. Rev. Mystkowski, for example, claims:

the oppression of the Church [was] not the responsibility of the superior German authorities alone, but also of the local officials of the Warsaw District, who constantly informed the high-level authorities of the clergy's activities and presented their conclusions concerning the arrests of priests and the plunder of Church property (Testimony of Rev. Stanisław Mystkowski, n.d., p. 277).

Rev. Kozubski, who was responsible for contact with the German authorities on behalf of the curia, noted: “the attitude of German officials towards me as a representative of the clergy was constantly rude, often brutal and accompanied by threats” (Testimony of Rev. Zygmunt Kozubski, n.d., p. 236). In their testimonies, clergymen stressed that all these administrative prohibitions were a violation of the concordat. In the Germans' view, however, this document was no longer valid as one of the signatories, the Polish state, had ceased to exist (Łażewski, 2013, p. 293). The clergy perceived such actions as intended to undermine the prestige of the Church and strike a blow at its universality.

The period described in this article marks the beginning of administrative repressions, which developed over time and grew ever more onerous and frequent. These went on to include not only the prohibition of baptizing Jews or providing sacramental service for Germans and *Volksdeutsche*, but also attempts at interfering with the content of certain prayers or the melody of songs of worship. From the testimonies of the clergymen, who experienced all these repressions themselves, it may be concluded, however, that they felt the physical persecution applied by the occupiers more acutely than the administrative repressions.

### Balance sheet

The witness testimonies contained in the collections of the Main Commission do not shed light on every aspect of the German repressions against the Catholic clergy, but they are an important resource for supplementing knowledge and forming a picture of the occupation in an area that inevitably requires further analysis. By reading and analyzing them, several conclusions are brought to the fore. With these accounts, it is possible to outline a catalog of repressions used by the Germans against the clergy, as well as a map of terror, detailing the places where this persecution took place. The first forms to be mentioned must necessarily be: arrest, torture, execution, transport to camps, plundering, looting, expropriation, and administrative persecution, whereas the locations that must be included

are: Pawiak, Mokotów prison, Daniłowiczowska Street detention center, Szucha Avenue jail, and Palmiry. An examination of the extermination methods used against Poles listed by Bartoszewski (Bartoszewski, 1967, p. 313) forces us to conclude that all these methods were also used against Catholic priests. It can therefore be concluded that the clergy suffered just as drastically as the Catholic laity and other non-Catholic members of society in general. No exceptions were made for them. Pawiak prison is just one location that clearly presents the similitude of these fates.

The persecution of Catholic priests forms part of the general repressions against the Polish nation as a whole, as well as its successive phases, such as the AB-Aktion. The accounts submitted to the Main Commission also show individual elements of the German campaign, as described by Jan Sziling, including efforts to annihilate the Polish intelligentsia, and preventive and repressive operations as a response to anti-German activity (Sziling, 1988, p. 190). For the clergy, the years 1939–1940 were remembered as a period when German repressions were already in an advanced stage. Rev. Kozubski testified:

From the very beginning of the occupation, that is, from the moment the Germans entered Warsaw, I observed the particularly hostile attitude of the Germans towards the Church and priests. German propaganda spread words of hatred, claiming that the Catholic Church, and priests in particular, encouraged the Polish-German war during sermons and in occasional speeches, especially on the radio (Testimony of Zygmunt Kozubski, n.d., p. 235–236).

On the other hand, Father Kisiel commented:

I got the impression that through their political actions, the Germans wanted to create the appearance of a certain religious freedom, which in fact did not exist, since we lived in an atmosphere of constant terror (Testimony of Rev. Aleksander Kisiel, n.d., p. 224).

Although the witnesses giving their testimonies were not always aware of the reasons for a particular clergyman's arrest or murder, their accounts paint a general picture of systematic – rather than chaotic – persecution. Between 1939 and 1940, they did not notice any great changes in the Germans' occupational policies – or rather they witnessed a steady increase in persecution combined with an intensifying application. They held the authorities of the Warsaw District responsible for administrative persecution, and the Gestapo above all for physical repressions. This was not always the case. In many memoirs from occupied Warsaw, including those analyzed herein, representatives of the terror apparatus are



referred to as “Gestapo men” (or sometimes “gendarmes”). The Gestapo officers were often mistaken for members of the *Waffen SS* due to their gray uniforms, while the *gendarmes* served outside Warsaw. Of course, their identities were not known.

Some testimonies present the intricate and overlapping reasons for the persecution of the clergy, who were at once priests, Poles, and members of the national elite. It may be concluded that the clergy were persecuted for their faith, and that the Nazi terror apparatus had a predilection for preying on the Catholic clergy for ideological reasons. At the same time, merely being of Polish nationality was enough to strengthen repressions against the Church in the systematic anti-Catholic policies of the Third Reich. It is also worth noting that the witnesses rarely mentioned the involvement of priests in conspiratorial activity in the period in question.

Finally, the testimonies given before the Main Commission constitute a great contribution to speculation on the nature of human memory. Many accounts show some moment or element of persecution – someone was arrested, someone had a friend imprisoned, someone else recalled a priest who was murdered. Some even witnessed the persecution of people whose identities were not known. The testimonies also reveal how information about the events in question was obtained in cases when the person testifying was not an eyewitness: from the curia, from colleagues, parishioners, or the congregation in general, and from family members. Sometimes the testimonies were inaccurate, as in the listed number of priests arrested in October 1939, and sometimes erroneous information was presented, as in the testimony of Kazimierz Kuydowicz, who said that Rev. Zygmunt Sajna had been deported to KL Sachsenhausen (Testimony of Kazimierz Kuydowicz, n.d., p. 45), while the priest was actually murdered in Palmiry. Nevertheless, it is possible to painstakingly reconstruct at least a partial image of the persecution during this period from these often discordant fragments, this particularly due to the fact that these accounts did not follow the certain patterns or conform to the specific rules of historical memory. All remarks made here, however, are not intended to undermine the virtues of the materials collected by the Main Commission, as they are sources of great cognitive value with carefully gathered information (Madajczyk, 2017, p. 30).

The fate of priests of the Catholic Church from the very first days of the German occupation of Warsaw shows how significant a mark was left by Nazism on the physiognomy of Polish Catholicism, but its survival in spite of these repressions carries a universal message of hope.

(transl. by Ian Stephenson)

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