

*The Person and the Challenges*  
Volume 9 (2019) Number 2, p. 91-108  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15633/pch.3452>

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## **The Stalinist Trial of Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, the Ordinary of the Diocese of Kielce**

### **Abstract**

The Kielce Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek is rightly considered one of the martyrs of the Catholic Church in Poland during the Stalinist era. He was the only bishop to be tried by the communist authorities. The allegations of cooperation with Germany and spying for the US were propaganda and nothing to do with the truth. For several years, the bishop had been kept in prison and was subjected to a brutal investigation. The authorities also imprisoned a number of priests and nuns. The Kaczmarek trial, as shown by events in the courtroom, was directed not only against him but against the entire Church in Poland and the Vatican. The communist authorities did not cease their repressions against the Kielce ordinary, after 1956, seeing in Czesław Kaczmarek a determined enemy of the system.

### **Keywords**

Catholic Church, Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, Stalinism, anti-communism

By the end of the 1940s, after the destruction of the underground and elimination of political opposition, the Catholic Church was to remain the only organised institution over which the totalitarian communist authorities exerted no control

only or to a certain extent. However, the everyday reality of Stalinist times in Poland included measures aimed at the destruction of the Church through quite a literal attack on the clergy, their structures, material living conditions and their moral authority, as well as through creating the collaborationist movement of “patriot priests.”

The state and party authorities also organised show trials of selected members of the clergy, which through discrediting and bullying constituted an equally important factor in the war against the Catholic Church. In the early 1950s, the Polish society was shaken by many trials, also those aimed at the Archdiocese of Krakow. One must mention the Wolbrom trial<sup>1</sup>, the Krakow curia trial<sup>2</sup> and one of the most publicised during the Stalinist times, i.e., the so-called Kielce curia trial of Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, the ordinary of the Diocese of Kielce, and his associates<sup>3</sup> who – as Stalinist propaganda put it – formed an “anti-state and anti-socialist centre.”

From the late 1940s and for many years on, the Diocese of Kielce became a testing ground for the totalitarian communist regime’s fight against the Catholic Church. From 1938 the diocese was led by Rev. Czesław Kaczmarek, PhD, who had studied at the University of Lille and had social work experience

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<sup>1</sup> The Wolbrom trial was held before the Military District Court of Krakow on 16–18 January and 20 January 1951. Ten people were put in the dock, including two priests from the Wolbrom parish, a part of the Diocese of Kielce: Vicar Zbigniew Gadomski and the parish priest Piotr Oborski. The priests were mainly accused of conspiring with the Underground Army (also called the Polish Army) and complicity in murder. The priests were sentenced to life imprisonment on account of multiple charges. Rev. Oborski was never acquitted and died in 1952. See also R. Gryz, *Gadomski Zbigniew*, in: *Leksykon duchowieństwa represjonowanego w PRL w latach 1945–1989*, vol. 1, consulting editor J. Myszor, Warszawa 2002, pp. 58–59; R. Gryz, *Oborski Piotr*, in: *Leksykon duchowieństwa represjonowanego w PRL w latach 1945–1989*, pp. 205–206; R. Gryz, *Państwo a Kościół w Polsce 1945–1956 na przykładzie województwa kieleckiego*, Kraków 1999, pp. 254–257.

<sup>2</sup> The so-called Krakow curia trial was held before the Military District Court of Krakow on 21–26 January 1953. The defendants were priests from Krakow: Rev. Józef Lelito, Rev. Franciszek Szymonek, Rev. Wit Modest Brzycki and Rev. Jan Pochopień, as well as a few laymen. The jury under Lt Col Mieczysław Widaj imposed three death sentences. Rev. Józef Lelito’s death sentence was subsequently altered to life imprisonment. See also F. Musiał, M. Lasota, *Kościół zraniony. Proces księdza Lelity i sprawa kurii krakowskiej*, Kraków 2003; P. Mardyla, F. Musiał, *Lelito Józef* in *Leksykon duchowieństwa represjonowanego w PRL w latach 1945–1989*, Warszawa 2003, vol. 2, pp. 161–164.

<sup>3</sup> See *Proces księdza biskupa Kaczmarka i innych członków ośrodka antypaństwowego i antyludowego. Stenogram procesu odbytego przed Wojskowym Sądem Rejonowym w Warszawie w dniach 14 IX – 21 IX 1953 r.*, Warszawa 1953.

gained in his home Diocese in Płock.<sup>4</sup> There were probably many reasons why it was actually the Bishop of Kielce to be arrested, imprisoned and, finally, tried in court. Hardly had the war ended when the communist authorities started to gather evidence against the bishop. His several steps did not go unnoticed: major efforts for the restitution of ecclesiastical property, failure to sign the Stockholm Appeal or resistance against the 1950 agreement between the state and the Church.<sup>5</sup> The authorities may have also manipulated the case of the so-called green notebook, in which Rev. Leonard Świdorski, a personal enemy of the bishop, described the allegedly immoral life led by the ordinary.<sup>6</sup> However, the main factor that seems to have decided against the bishop was his objection to tolerating the pro-government movement of “patriot priests.”<sup>7</sup> The opportunity to arrest Bishop Kaczmarek arose with the already mentioned Wolbrom trial of priests from the Diocese of Kielce, which took place before the Military District Court in Krakow in January 1951. The authorities did not fail to seize the opportunity and on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1951 a group of MBP (Ministry

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<sup>4</sup> There are many publications regarding Bishop Kaczmarek, his social activities and ministry. See i.a. J. Śledzianowski, *Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek w pamięci duchowieństwa diecezji kieleckiej*, Kielce 1989; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek biskup kielecki 1895–1963*, Kielce 1991; J. Śledzianowski, „Boskie” i „cesarskie” w pasterskiej posłudze biskupa Czesława Kaczmarka w okresie totalitaryzmu, *Kielecki Przegląd Diecezjalny*, issue 6/1995, pp. 576–587; J. Śledzianowski, *Osobowość księdza biskupa Czesława Kaczmarka* [Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek's Personality], „*Kielecki Przegląd Diecezjalny*”, issue 2/2004, pp. 172–180; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek biskup kielecki 1895–1963*, Kielce 2008; G. Bujak, *Działalność duszpasterska biskupa Czesława Kaczmarka na stolicy w Kielcach (1938–1963)*, in: *Omnia pro Christo Rege*, edited by P. Tkaczyk, Kielce 2008, pp. 35–62; J. Gapys, *Bp Czesław Kaczmarek jako patron i organizator akcji charytatywnej duchowieństwa w Diecezji Kieleckiej 1939–1945*, in: *Trzy rocznice. Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek 1895–1963*, edited by J. Gapys in cooperation with S. Gawlik “Natasza”, Kielce 2014, pp. 79–104; D. Kozieł CSFN, *Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek – animator katolickiej działalności oświatowej w Diecezji Kieleckiej*, pp. 57–78.

<sup>5</sup> J. Stępień, *Biskup Kaczmarek przed stalinowskimi sędziami*, in: *Pamiętnik Świętokrzyski. Studia z dziejów kultury chrześcijańskiej*, edited by L. Kaczanowski, Kielce 1991, pp. 306–327; J. Śledzianowski, *Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek męczennik komunizmu (w 50 rocznicę śmierci)*, in: *Trzy rocznice. Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek 1895–1963*, p. 33; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek biskup...*, pp. 135–215; R. Gryz, *Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek – męczennik komunizmu (1945–1963)*, in: *Omnia pro...*, pp. 54–60; R. Gryz, *Państwo a Kościół...*, Kraków 1999, pp. 157 and following.

<sup>6</sup> J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 1991, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> R. Gryz, *Kościół kielecki w latach 1945–1963*, in: *Kielce przez stulecia*, edited by J. L. Adamczyk et al., Kielce 2014, p. 604; R. Gryz, *Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek – męczennik...*, p. 60.

of Public Security) functionaries led by Colonel Józef Światło entered the Kielce curia. After the entire day of questioning, Bishop Kaczmarek was arrested and transported to Mokotów Prison in Warsaw.

Pursuing the investigation against the bishop, the security authorities arrested priests and nuns as well as lay persons connected to the curia of Kielce, or to those who had been detained. The following clergymen from the Diocese of Kielce were imprisoned: Jan Jaroszewicz (January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1951); Mieczysław Połoska (January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1951); Szczepan Sobalkowski, the rector of the Seminary (August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1951); Jan Danilewicz, the treasurer of the Curia (September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1951), Franciszek Tomczyk, the parish priest of the Christ the King Parish in the Baranówek district of Kielce (September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1951); Władysław Widłak, the procurator of the Seminary (August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1951); Henryk Peszko, the notary of the Curia (January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1952); Roman Zelek, the parish priest of the Cathedral (January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1952); Romuald Błaszczakiewicz (February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1952); Józef Rybczyk (February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1952) and Józef Dąbrowski, the secretary of the ordinary, who was arrested in the street in Kielce on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1952.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a few or even several more priests were imprisoned during the first weeks of the investigation. Rev. Adam Molisak from Busko Zdrój was held in the Security Service offices for three days. Rev. Adam Ludwik Szafrąński was detained in prison in Foch Street in Kielce. Rev. Piotr Styczeń was intimidated through repeated searches conducted with the aim of breaking and recruiting him; he was being “talked into testifying against the ordinary.”<sup>9</sup>

In connection with the Kaczmarek case, the authorities undertook apprehensions of priests, as has already been mentioned, throughout the country. Among others, in the Diocese of Katowice Rev. Rudolf Adamiec was arrested with the view of serving as a link between Bishop Kaczmarek’s “espionage” and Silesia.<sup>10</sup> In the aftermath of the Kielce case, in the Diocese of Sandomierz

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<sup>8</sup> More priests (those arrested on other charges, e.g. Rev. Stanisław Marchewka detained on 16 July 1947 in Świdnica) were also subject to investigation. Altogether in the Stalinist period the following priests from the Kielce Diocese were incarcerated: Rev. Stanisław Połetek, Rev. Piotr Banach, Rev. Tadeusz Marchaj, Rev. Stanisław Ryńca, Rev. Stefan Rzemieniec. See J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008, pp. 244–245; J. Żurek, *Marchewka Stanisław*, in: *Leksykon duchowieństwa...*, vol. 1, p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> T. Domański, *Wstęp*, in: *Wokół procesu biskupa kieleckiego Czesława Kaczmarka. Wspomnienia nazaretanki s. Izabelli Machowskiej*, edited by T. Domański, D. Kozieł, Kielce 2013, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> R. Adamiec, *Czyścić*, Paris 1985, pp. 20, 36. The testimony given by Bishop Kaczmarek was used again long after his trial in order to prepare operational procedures against e.g.

two priests were arrested: Stefan Siedlecki, a professor and procurator in the Sandomierz Seminary and Stefan Rola, the parish priest of the All Saints parish in Starachowice.<sup>11</sup> In the Diocese of Włocławek Rev. Jan Grajner was detained.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Public Security functionaries arrested twelve nuns coming from various religious orders, who were one way or another connected with the curia of Kielce, worked in the diocese or whose work outside the diocese might be taken advantage of according to the needs of the investigation. These are the names of the detained: Albina (Eleonora) Budzowska, Cecylia (Maria) Klamut, Laurencja (Alojza Rozalia) Długosz, Błażeja (Rozalia) Tomalak, Germana (Stanisława) Poprawa, Beatrix (Jadwiga) Kirkor, Izabella (Jadwiga) Machowska, Benigna (Julia) Westwalewicz, Domicela (Helena) Gonet, Filipa (Weronika) Janusewicz, Ermina (Stanisława) Jędrzycka and Syksta (Waleria) Niklewska.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from priests and religious sisters, the list of the arrested also comprised lay persons, such as: Józef Stemler, the head of the Polish American Council; Tadeusz Chromecki, an official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Jan Archita, a curia employee; Jan Brożek, a sacristan and even Hipolit Modrzejewski, Bishop Kaczmarek's dentist.<sup>14</sup> Prosecutor Jan Wrzeszcz, who worked as a lawyer for the diocese, was also arrested.<sup>15</sup>

From the first days of his imprisonment, the Security Service subjected the ordinary, as well as others detained within the framework of the case, to an extremely rigorous investigation. A special group of investigators was formed.<sup>16</sup>

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Bishop Juliusz Bieniek, the Kielce suffragan. In 1948 Bishop Bieniek allegedly 'kept Bishop Kaczmarek up to date about Silesian industry'. See *Dok nr 15: Plan operacyjnych przedsięwzięć wobec Bp. Juliusza Bieńka, Warszawa, 7 II 1955 r*, in *Niezlomni. Nigdy przeciw Bogu. Bogu. Komunistyczna bezpieka wobec biskupów polskich*, edited by J. Marecki, F. Musiał, Warszawa-Kraków 2007, pp. 103–104.

<sup>11</sup> B. Stanaszek, *Księża diecezji sandomierskiej więzieni przez władze komunistyczne po II wojnie światowej*, Rzeszów 2008, pp. 115, 118–119, 121, 126.

<sup>12</sup> S. Stępień, *Grajner Jan Paweł* in *Leksykon duchowieństwa...*, vol. 1, pp. 67–71.

<sup>13</sup> T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>14</sup> J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008, pp. 240–245; T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> R. Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, *Prokurator Jan Wrzeszcz. Historia odważnego człowieka*, *Tygodnik eM. Dodatek historyczny IPN*, issue 10, 2 July 2017, pp. 1–4.

<sup>16</sup> The whole governing body of the security service took part in the investigation: the head of the investigation department of the Ministry of Public Security Col. Józef Różański; the head of department V meant to fight against the Church Col. Julia Brystygier; Col. Adam Humer; undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Security Gen. Roman Romkowski and the Ministry

Researchers have established that just in the course of the preparatory procedure to the main trial, Bishop Kaczmarek was interrogated as much as 223 times; Rev. Jan Danilewicz – 167 times and S. Waleria Niklewska – 120 times.<sup>17</sup> The arrested were totally cut off from the external world, subjected to the rigours of prison and the “conveyor method” of interrogations, which lasted for hours on end without any possibility to use the toilet. The detainees suffered hunger and were surrounded by collaborating inmates. All the employed methods significantly affected the arrested and served to break them.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Bishop Kaczmarek, with the help of the secret collaborator sharing the cell, investigators managed to seize his secret messages to Primate Stefan Wyszyński and knew the information he wished to conceal. The collaborating inmate drew up almost daily reports on Bp. Kaczmarek’s behaviour in the cell. In the case of Rev. Jan Danilewicz, the secret informer was able to freely manipulate the priest.<sup>19</sup>

As part of the investigation, a special team of the Ministry of Public Security functionaries conducted a search in the Cathedral of Kielce, looking for allegedly hidden weapons, grenades and a radio station, which were to provide evidence of attempts to abolish the “worker-peasant authority.” These materials were never released.<sup>20</sup> In turn, Public Security functionaries from the Office

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of Public Security minister Gen. Stanisław Radkiewicz. The investigation team also included Sgt. Józef Fugas, Capt. Władysław Zdanowicz, Capt. Bogdan Lisowski, 2Lt Mieczysław Habinka, 2Lt. Wincenty Kołaczyk, Lt. Bogdan Kielbasa, 2Lt. Stefan Miszewski, Capt. Stanisław Morawski, 2Lt. Kazimierz Opara, Lt. Edmund Szulc and Maj. Jerzy Kędziara. Almost all of them received commendations and monetary rewards after sentence was pronounced on Bishop Kaczmarek. See T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>17</sup> T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>18</sup> These issues are broadly discussed by Sister Jadwiga Machowska (in her memoir), Rev. Rudolf Adamiec and the priests who were also detained and later asked for vindication. See *Kielecki Przegląd Diecezjalny*, special issue of 1988; R. Adamiec, *Czyścić...*, *passim*; Sister I. Machowska, *Moje wspomnienia z lat łask i cierpień*, edited by T. Domański, D. Kozieł CSFN in *Wokół procesu...*, pp. 87–205; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008. W. Niklewska, *Wspomnienia z czasów stalinowskich. Skazanie i rehabilitacja*, *Przewodnik Katolicki* issue 5/1989, pp. 6–7; In the light of these sources Joanna Tokarska-Bakir’s thesis on Bishop Kaczmarek receiving gentle treatment in prison sounds peculiar. However, it is less astounding if one remembers that J. Tokarska-Bakir’s source of information was Col. Adam Humer. See B. Szaynok, *Utrwalanie uproszczeń*, *Więź*, issue 2/2018, p. 97, a review of J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego*, vol. 1–2, Warszawa 2018.

<sup>19</sup> See T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, pp. 39–42; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008, p. 258.

<sup>20</sup> J. Śledzianowski, *Pytania nad pogromem kieleckim*, Kielce 1998, p. 176.

in Kielce conducted a search in the monastery of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Kielce in 5 Słowacki Street and in the flats of two families who were the sisters' close friends.<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that the atmosphere created by the imprisonment of the bishop, several priests and nuns was used by the authorities to intimidate the rest of the clergy and the congregation and to keep the "hostile milieu" under an even more thorough surveillance. The general atmosphere in Kielce was literally unbearable.<sup>22</sup> As a result of the psychological pressure exerted on priests, many of them were forced to sign the agreement to cooperate with the security apparatus. From January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1951 to April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1951 twelve informers were recruited. Furthermore, with the help of agents also among the clergy, the Security Office was working out several priests in various districts, professor priests of the Kielce Higher Seminary and members of religious orders. In total, we know the code names of over 30 informers.<sup>23</sup>

Primate Wyszyński, Bishop Zygmunt Choromański and the clergy of Kielce intervened in vain to acquit the ordinary.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, when Moscow gave the green light Polish authorities decided to take legal action against Bishop Kaczmarek in a public show trial.<sup>25</sup> It was assumed that he was the head of an 'anti-state and anti-socialist centre'. Bishop Kaczmarek was put in the dock with his 'associates': Rev. Jan Danilewicz, Rev. Józef Dąbrowski, Rev. Władysław Widłak and Sister Waleria Niklewska. The main charges brought against the bishop involved spying for Washington and the Vatican, attempting to overthrow socialism in Poland using force and conspiring with Nazi Germans during the war. While setting up the trial and accusations, the communist authorities drew upon Bishop Kaczmarek's real contact with American post-war ambassador in Poland, Arthur Bliss Lane. They also found a use for the bishop's visits at the Pius XI House in Warsaw and his pastoral letters from the time of World War II. The

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<sup>21</sup> T Domański, *Wstęp...*, pp. 84–85.

<sup>22</sup> J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008, p. 241; D. Wojciechowski, *Kapłani kieleccy więzieni i szykanowani w PRL (1945–1963)*, Kielce 2003, pp. 252–253, 264, 274, 295, 299, 313.

<sup>23</sup> For more information see T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, op. cit., pp. 53–56; B. Stanaszek, *Diecezja sandomierska w powojennej rzeczywistości politycznej w latach 1945–1967*, vol. 1: *Problematyka personalno-organizacyjna*, Sandomierz 2006, pp. 163–165.

<sup>24</sup> See S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. II: 1953, edited by P. Skibiński et al., Warszawa 2017, p. 184; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008, p. 258.

<sup>25</sup> B. Noszczak, *Polityka państwa wobec Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego w Polsce w okresie internowania prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego 1953–1956*, Warszawa 2008, p. 62.

accusations thrown against the bishop and his ‘associates’ were, for the most part, fabricated. For example, in the well-known pastoral letter of October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1939 the word *dignity* was replaced with *hospitality* to better serve the propaganda.<sup>26</sup>

The trial took place before Military District Court of Warsaw in 14–21 September 1953. Making use of previously drafted ‘notes’,<sup>27</sup> the accused pleaded guilty. The prosecutors together with the barristers (Mieczysław Maślanko, Bishop Kaczmarek’s ‘counsel’, in particular), condemned the defendants’ actions. For those who observed the proceedings or studied them later on it was obvious that accusations were thrown not only at Bishop Kaczmarek but the whole Church in Poland and the Vatican itself. Primate Wyszyński put it quite aptly when he wrote in his *Pro Memoria*: “The trial of Bishop Kaczmarek is now being held. But the accused one is not only the bishop but the Holy See, the episcopacy and the ministry. I must firmly admit that I have not been given any instructions from the Holy See and that the See does not want to interfere with political matters in Poland. The alleged suggestion of the Holy Father on the diocese borders in the western parts of Poland, as one of the witnesses testified, is a flight of fantasy. The same applies for the conferences of the episcopacy: as the witnesses now present in court could confess, the conferences have never dealt with economic or political issues in the country. The units of pastoral ministry have always been of purely religious character. They have no relations whatsoever with Akcja Katolicka [Catholic Action]”.<sup>28</sup>

Eventually, on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1953 the Military District Court of Warsaw (Lt Col. Mieczysław Widaj as its head together with Lt Col. Kazimierz Stojanowski, Lt Col. Jan Radwański and Lt. Jan Paramonow) found Bishop Kaczmarek guilty of six separate offences. These were: attempting to overthrow the political system in the Polish People’s Republic as the animator of the ‘anti-state centre’ (art. 86 para. 1 and 2, k.k. WP [Criminal Code of the Polish Army]); economical

<sup>26</sup> J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 1991, pp. 68–69.

<sup>27</sup> The notes could have been prepared by the Ministry of Public Security investigators. See T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, pp. 46–47.

<sup>28</sup> See S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. II: 1953, edited by P. Skibiński et al., Warszawa 2017, p. 227; R. Gryz, *Sprawa biskupa Czesława Kaczmarka przykładem antykościelnej polityki w systemie stalinowskim*, in: *Państwo – Kościół – Europa nowe wyzwania. Materiały z konferencji zorganizowanej przez redakcję Zeszytów Naukowych US „Acta Politica” Sekcję w Szczecinie Wydziału Teologicznego UAM w Poznaniu*, edited by M. Drzonek, J. Mieczkowski, K. Kowalczyk, Szczecin 1999; J. Stępień, *Proces biskupa Czesława Kaczmarka*, „Przegląd Katolicki”, issue 26/1988, p. 28; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 1991, pp. 111–115.



spying for 'the American and the Vatican intelligence centres' (art. 7 m.k.k. [so-called Small Criminal Code]); accepting material benefit (20 thousand dollars) for intelligence activity (art. 6 m.k.k.); spreading war propaganda (art. 1 of the Act of 29<sup>th</sup> December 1950 – Dz.U.RP [Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland] vol. 58, no. 521); conspiring with the Germans during the war (Article 2 of the Decree of 31<sup>st</sup> August 1944); spreading fascism in Poland in the interwar period as well as attenuating 'the fighting spirit' of Poles (article 1 of 'The Decree Concerning the Responsibility for the Disaster of the September 1939 Campaign and Spreading Fascism in Poland'). As a result of these charges Bishop Kaczmarek was sentenced to twelve years of imprisonment. Rev. Jan Danilewicz, Rev. Józef Dąbrowski and Rev. Władysław Widłak were found guilty of attempts to overthrow the political system in Poland. Together with Sister Waleria Niklewska they were also held culpable for economical spying for 'the American and the Vatican intelligence centres'. Moreover, Rev. Jan Danilewicz was found guilty of accepting material benefit (200 dollars) for intelligence activity (art. 6. m.k.k.), and inspiring war propaganda (article 1 of the Act of 29<sup>th</sup> December 1950 Dz.U.RP vol. 58, no. 521). Rev. Jan Danilewicz was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment, Rev. Józef Dąbrowski to nine years, Rev. Władysław Widłak to six years and Sister Waleria Niklewska to five years of imprisonment. Their temporary arrest was treated as part of the punishment and Sister Waleria Niklewska was acquitted.<sup>29</sup>

Undoubtedly, the trial of Bishop Kaczmarek corresponded to practices established in the USSR. While it was being conducted, the authorities launched a nationwide propaganda campaign to persuade the society of the justness of the trial, the truth of the accusations and the guilt of the defendants.<sup>30</sup> Following the guidelines of the Organisation Department and the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR), the campaign included meetings for the active members of the party

<sup>29</sup> *Proces księdza biskupa Kaczmarka...*, pp. 345–352; W. Niklewska, *Wspomnienia z czasów stalinowskich. Skazanie i rehabilitacja, „Przewodnik Katolicki”*, issue 5/1989, pp. 6–7; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008, pp. 263–264, 382–383; R. Gryz, *Dąbrowski Józef* in *Leksykon duchowieństwa...*, vol. 2, p. 55; R. Gryz, *Danilewicz Jan* in: *Leksykon duchowieństwa...*, vol. 2, p. 51; R. Gryz, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...* [Rev. Czesław Kaczmarek], p. 55; J. Miłosz, J. Żurek, *Niklewska Waleria* in: *Leksykon duchowieństwa...*, vol. 3, p. 145; J. Stępień, *Proces biskupa*, *Gazeta Kielecka*, issue 12/1991, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> K. Sychowicz, *Działania Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Białymstoku oraz propaganda władz w związku z procesem biskupa Czesława Kaczmarka*, in: *Między Wisłą a Pilicą. Studia i materiały historyczne*, edited by U. Oettingen, vol. 5, Kielce 2005, pp. 292–293.

belonging to various professional groups in many districts, mass meetings in workplaces and teach-ins.<sup>31</sup>

The press and radio played an extraordinarily significant role in convincing the society of the clergymen's guilt. News bulletins on the subject were being broadcast by means of loudspeakers and multiple public address systems installed in local community centres.<sup>32</sup> Articles and reports were being published in both widely circulated newspapers with *Trybuna Ludu* [People's Tribune] leading the way and local press such as *Słowo Ludu* [The People's Word], which is particularly worth mentioning as it was issued in Kielce and constituted the organ of the Voivodeship Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in Kielce. Extensive and whistle-blowing articles accused the tried bishop of most despicable crimes: fascist views, collaboration with Nazi Germans, treason and espionage.<sup>33</sup> *Słowo Ludu* would inform its readers in detailed and extensive reports about the charges against the bishop and published the defendants and witnesses' testimonies as well as the prosecutor's and defender's speeches.<sup>34</sup> Propaganda headlines and headings would leave no doubts: "Traitors in Priestly Robes Acted Against the Nation and Polish State Following Guidelines from the Vatican and Washington."<sup>35</sup> The article entitled "In the Eyes of Simple People" draws particular attention as it comprises the essence of Stalinist hypocrisy and anti-church propaganda: "Bishop Kaczmarek and his associates, in selling out the Homeland in exchange for American dollars, blessed by the Pope. are being tried not only by the judges. They are being tried by the entire nation, who is building a bright, happy future in peace. They are being judged by millions of simple people to whom they wished to bring the greatest disasters: war, captivity, destitution."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> R. Gryz, *Państwo a Kościół...*, pp. 331–332.

<sup>32</sup> T. Domański, *Echa procesu biskupa kieleckiego Czesława Kaczmarka w świetle materiałów UB*, in: *Trzy rocznice...*, p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek biskup kielecki 1895–1963*, Kielce 2008, pp. 271–274; G. Tokarz, *Sprawa biskupa Czesława Kaczmarka w propagandzie PZPR*, in: *Propaganda antykościelna w Polsce w latach 1945–1978*, edited by S. Dąbrowski, B. Rogowska, Wrocław 2001, pp. 159–171.

<sup>34</sup> T. Domański, *Procesy Pokazowe księży katolickich w czasach stalinowskich na łamach „Słowa Ludu”*, „*Kuryer Kielecki*”, a supplement to *Echo Dnia*, issue 29/2015, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Słowo Ludu*, issue 219/1953, pp. 2, 5.

<sup>36</sup> T. Domański, *Procesy pokazowe...*, p. 5.

According to the logic of a show trial, the condemnation of the “traitor” could not be confined to the courtroom. All the society had to express their “protest and indignation.” Here again the press was an instrument of the propaganda. *Słowo Ludu* would publish articles entitled “The Kielce Region Society Condemns Bishop Kaczmarek’s Anti-Polish Actions and His Vatican and Washington Principals,”<sup>37</sup> which contain alleged pronouncements of people indignant at those “treacherous actions.” Obviously, the articles present a broad cross-section of the society, “citing” representatives of the workers’ class, peasants and intelligentsia. All the statements direct severe criticism at the defendants, especially the priests. The alleged well-being and happiness prevailing in the People’s Poland is juxtaposed with the “imperial policy pursued” by the clergy. However, some of the opinions strike the reader as unoriginal, inauthentic and thoughtlessly repeating the propaganda mantras.<sup>38</sup> Small wonder “patriot priests” joined the group of “the appalled by the facts” that had been revealed during the trial. Similar articles castigating Bishop Kaczmarek and other priests tried in the case would be published nation-wide, e.g., an article by Rev. Ludwik Mucha in *Gazeta Zielonogórska* [The Zielona Góra Daily].<sup>39</sup>

The authorities paid meticulous attention to all social reactions arising in connection with the trial. The case truly aroused great interest in the society, though perhaps less so in rural areas. Various departments of the Ministry of Public Security drew up daily reports on noticeable situations and utterances, which were directed at revealing hostile attitudes and actions on the part of the milieux perceived as opposing the system. The state authorities, as well as the Ministry of Public Security, attached particular significance to taking the full advantage of secret agents, which is clearly shown in the preserved archival materials. During the trial, the District Office of Public Security functionaries conducted 44 meetings with informers in the District of Busko, 32 meetings in the District of Włoszczowa, on only two days, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> September 1953, there were 38 meetings in the District of Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1953 there were 19 meetings in the District of Końskie and 35 meetings

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<sup>37</sup> *Spółeczeństwo Kielecczyzny potępia antypolską działalność biskupa Kaczmarka i jego waszyngtońsko-watykańskich mocodawców*, „*Słowo Ludu*”, issue 223/1953, p. 1; and issue 224, p. 1; „Głosy społeczeństwa Kielecczyzny w związku z procesem Kaczmarka”, „*Słowo Ludu*”, issue 225/1953, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> T. Domański, *Procesy pokazowe...*, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> D. Koteluk, *Proboszczowie parafii Czerwińsk w latach 1945–1989 w świetle dokumentów proveniencji państwowej*, Poznań-Warszawa 2017, p. 39.

in Skarżysko.<sup>40</sup> The reports focus on the utterances and attitudes of diocesan priests, members of religious orders and priests working in the curia.<sup>41</sup> Security Office functionaries monitored religious services, wiretapped sermons preached throughout the voivodeship.<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting that during the trial very few priests stood by the bishop in their pronouncements from the pulpit: Rev. Franciszek Rosłaniec in the Staszów parish, Rev. Stefan Bonar from Chrzęstów, Włoszczowa District and an unknown priest from the Czarnca parish, Włoszczowa District.<sup>43</sup>

The present state of research points out that despite the massive propaganda campaign launched by the communist authorities, a substantial part of the society remained unconvinced about the truthfulness of the Kielce curia trial and the plotting of the Vatican and the Polish bishops. A number of people commented on the underlying objectives of the trial.<sup>44</sup> Franciszek Wojciechowicz, a smith from Stromiec village, could be cited here, making his exemplary statement: the trial “serves no other purpose than [providing] a pretext to incite hatred in the society against the Catholic faith; the accusations [are] wholly unjustified.”<sup>45</sup>

The ordeal of the convicted priests did not end with the sentences passed by the Military District Court in Warsaw. The state and investigating authorities made use of the cringing/intimidated and psychologically broken clergymen as witnesses in the so-called spin-off trials, several of which had been conducted to investigate “the alleged connections with the anti-state and anti-socialist centre led by Bishop Kaczmarek” up to 1955.<sup>46</sup> There were even attempts to force

<sup>40</sup> T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, p. 46; T. Domański, *Echa procesu...*, p. 109.

<sup>41</sup> K. Bialecki, *Działania aparatu bezpieczeństwa wobec kurii arcybiskupiej w Poznaniu w okresie rządów arcybiskupa Walentego Dymka (1946–1956)*, in: *Aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec kurii biskupich w Polsce*, edited by A. Dziurok, Warszawa 2009, p. 239.

<sup>42</sup> T. Domański, *Echa procesu...*, p. 117.

<sup>43</sup> G. Miernik, „My” i „Oni”. *Spółczesność Kielecczyzny i stalinowski system władzy*, Kielce 2007, p. 250.

<sup>44</sup> T. Domański, *Echa procesu...*, pp. 113–115; See. K. Sychowicz, *Działania Wojewódzkiego...*, *passim*; D. Wojciechowski, *Reakcje społeczne na proces biskupa Kaczmarka*, „Kielecki Przegląd Diecezjalny”, issue 2/2004, pp. 189–190.

<sup>45</sup> T. Domański, *Echa procesu...*, p. 115.

<sup>46</sup> See T. Domański, *Wstęp...*, pp. 58–68; J. Miłosz, *Tomalak Rozalia*, in: *Leksykon duchowieństwa represjonowanego w PRL w latach 1945–1989*, vol. 3, consulting editor J. Myszor, Warszawa 2006, pp. 250–251; J. Miłosz, J. Żurek, *Jędrzycka Stanisława*, in: *ibidem*, pp. 83–84; J. Miłosz, J. Żurek, *Poprawa Stanisława* in *ibidem*, pp. 173–175; R. Gryz, *Peszko Henryk*, in: *ibidem*, p. 164; T. Żarnowiecka-Gryz, *Sobalkowski Szczepan* in *ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 263–265;

him to “convert politically.”<sup>47</sup> Not until the general political change took place in Poland did anything alter in Bishop Kaczmarek and others’ situation. Only on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1955 the bishop was allowed a one-year break in serving his sentence. He was forced to return to prison on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1956 and by the decision of the Polish State Council on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1956 was ultimately released on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1956. Simultaneously, a decision was made to confine the bishop to the Capuchin monastery in Rywałd Królewski, which he left without an authorised permission on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1956.<sup>48</sup> The main court trial was formally closed on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1957. The Chief Military Prosecutor Office decided to discontinue the investigation due to the “absence of evidence of guilt.” Finally, by the decision of General Prosecutor Aleksander Bentkowski, the convicted were fully rehabilitated as they “had not committed offences they were charged with.”<sup>49</sup>

Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek’s return to the Diocese of Kielce in 1957, which followed the October thaw, did not end his struggle with the communist authorities. The sharp conflict that lasted until the bishop’s death arose in 1959 and was triggered by his so-called Chinese sermon. As a result, the authorities kept him under surveillance, refused to recognise his right to manage the diocese and persecuted the Seminary through various inspections. Moreover, the Security Service strove to disintegrate the clergy of the diocese through intimidating and forcing the priests to refuse to implement the bishop’s directives. The Higher Seminary in Kielce became a particular target of the harassment directed at the bishop and his diocese, with the authorities openly admitting it: the seminarists were conscripted for the compulsory military service.<sup>50</sup> Attacking Bishop Kaczmarek, the authorities reached again for the libellous *Zielony Zeszyt* [Green

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R. Gryz, *Rybczyk Józef*, in: *ibidem*, pp. 189–190; R. Gryz, *Błaszczakiewicz Romuald* in *ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> The issue is broadly discussed in: B. Noszczak, *Polityka państwa...* [State Policy Towards the Roman Catholic Church in Poland at the Time of Primate Stefan Wyszyński’s Internment 1953–1956], pp. 351–357; B. Noszczak, *Polityka władz PRL wobec izolowanego biskupa Czesława Kaczmarka (1953–1956)*, “*Przegląd Archiwalny IPN*”, vol. 2/2009, pp. 292–293.

<sup>48</sup> As soon as Bishop Kaczmarek was acquitted, the authorities strove to keep him under constant surveillance through secret agents. See W. Polak, W. Rozykowski, *‘AS’. Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek w Rywałdzie Królewskim*, Toruń 2008.

<sup>49</sup> J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008, pp. 307–400.

<sup>50</sup> See *Dok. Nr 169: 1977 [brak daty miesięcznej i dziennej]*, Warszawa – *Projekt notaki dotyczącej służby wojskowej alumnów WSD*, in *Instrukcje, wytyczne, pisma Departamentu IV Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych z lat 1962–1989*, edited by Dziurok, F. Musiał, Kraków-Katowice 2017, p. 745.

Notebook] authored by ex-priest Leonard Świdorski and published it as a book entitled *Oglądały oczy moje* [What My Eyes Saw]. The People's Militia received an order to take all measures in order to prevent any attempts to "discriminate against the political factors that approved the publication to be printed."<sup>51</sup> All the above-presented actions of the state authorities targeted at the Bishop of Kielce make us think of him as one of the greatest martyrs of the Catholic Church in Poland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Dok nr 18: 1963 kwiecień 8, Warszawa – Pismo naczelnika Wydziału I Departamentu IV MSW do naczelnika Wydziału IV KWMO w Katowicach w sprawie działań operacyjnych związanych z wprowadzeniem na rynek wydawniczy wspomnień ks. Leonarda Świdorskiego „Oglądały oczy moje”, in: ibidem, p. 212.*

<sup>52</sup> See T. Domański, *Władze wobec bp. Czesława Kaczmarek i diecezji kieleckiej w latach 1957–1963. Wybrane zagadnienia*, in: *W kręgu obchodów milenijnych na Kielecczyźnie (1956/7–1966/67). Państwo – Kościół – nauka – popularyzacja*, edited by A. Młynarczyk-Tomczyk, S. Orzechowski, Kielce 2017, pp. 61–81; J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek...*, Kielce 2008, pp. 439–537; R. Gryz, *Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek – męczennik komunizmu (1945–1963)*, in *Omnia pro...*, pp. 68–77.

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