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The Catholic Church and the January Uprising, Illustrated with the Example of the Piotrków Region*

Kościół katolicki a powstanie styczniowe
na przykładzie regionu piotrkowskiego

Abstract

In the 19th century, the Catholic Church in Poland was a form of Polishness. When the January Uprising broke out, activities of the Catholic clergy included pastoral care over insurgent troops, insurgent administration, participation in armed operations, and announcing of orders from insurgent authorities and information on insurgent activities from the pulpit. Piotrków clergy also joined the activities to support the uprising. In Piotrków, as in many other cities, priests preached independence sermons. The main share should be attributed to Piotrków nuns and monks who responded positively to the collection of national tax for the uprising. Conventions did not escape post-insurgent repression – they were dissolved.

Abstrakt

Kościół katolicki w XIX wieku w Polsce stanowił formę polskości. Gdy wybuchło powstanie styczniowe działanie duchowieństwa katolickiego polegało na opiece duszpasterskiej oddziałów powstańczych, administracji powstańczej, udziale z bronią w rękę i ogłaszaniu z ambon zarządzeń władz

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powstańczych oraz informowanie o działalności powstańczej. Również piotrkowskie duchowieństwo przyłączyło się do działalności popierającej powstanie. W Piotrkowie, jak w wielu innych miastach, księża wygłaszali kazania niepodległościowe. Główny udział należy przypisać piotrkowskim zakonnikom i zakonnikom, którzy pozytywnie odpowiedzieli na zbiórkę podatku narodowego na rzecz powstania. Zakonów nie ominęły popowstańcze represje – uległy one kasacie.

Keywords: clergy, monastics, Piotrków, dissolution, repression, uprising, Pius IX

Słowa kluczowe: duchowieństwo, zakonnicy, Piotrków, kasata, represje, powstanie, Pius IX

The Catholic Church in Poland, especially in the 19th century, was very strongly associated with Polish national elements. It can be said that Catholicism constituted a form of Polishness. Thanks to maintaining the Catholic religion, related to the institution of the independent head of Church in Rome, as the leading denomination, the state and clerical functions in the Republic of Poland never became combined. The relation between church and state was perceived differently in Russia. The Orthodox church was in principle controlled by civil authorities. With a view to breaking the spirit of the nation and making Church a subordinated tool, tsarist authorities reached for ultimate means during the January Uprising. We can say that some of the most harshly treated insurgents were those who were clergyman at the same time. It was among others in the clergymen that the authorities saw some of the main supporters of the rebellion. They were condemned for the slightest offences, as well as for performing ministry for insurgents, for reading the *Manifesto* of the National Government from the pulpit. Altogether more than 400 priests were exiled, 8 bishops were deported, and several tens of Polish Catholic clergyman were executed¹.

Initially, bishops maintained distance from the uprising; they did not want it because they saw some anticlerical revolutionary movement in it. Among the

¹ A. Górecki, *Kościół katolicki w Królestwie Polskim po upadku powstania styczniowego*, "Christianitas" 2018, vol. 71-72, p. 112.

Polish insurgents, they perceived inspiration related to Garibaldi, who was oriented anti-clerically, especially in the context of opposition to the authority of the Pope. On the other hand, the higher clerical hierarchy of the Kingdom had, owing to the functions they held, more frequent and closer relations with the Russian state administration. To some extent, bishops owed their nominations to tsar as the king of Poland. However, it must be clearly noted that the lower clergy, the ones who had the closest ties with the nation and because of whom the nation felt ties with the Church, supported the actions leading to the uprising to a large extent, and at least aimed at gaining as broad rights as possible by the Polish subjects of the Russian tsar². Taking a comprehensive look at the attitude of bishops and higher clergy, it must be noted that they did not completely turn their backs on Polishness and independence, but rather they could not see any possibility of gaining it through military and revolutionary action. They were afraid that a national uprising would turn into a social revolution which might aim at destroying the Church and religion.

Activity of the clergy during the uprising consisted in providing pastoral care over insurgent troops, insurgent administration, participation in armed operations and announcing orders from insurgent authorities and information on insurgent activities from the pulpit. Nearly every insurgent troop had their chaplain, who conducted pastoral activity³.

Pope Pius IX was obviously against any movements which were aimed at introducing changes in a revolutionary way, but he was unable not to feel deep sympathy for those who, also as a result of religious persecution, reached for such a drastic measure as arms. In moral terms, the Pope supported the Polish, but he could not openly show it, and he did not express official approval of the outbreak⁴. On 26th June 1863 the insurgent government sent a letter to Pius IX: *Most Holy Father. Harried with a hundred years of bondage, a hundred years*

² J. Wojda, *Prześladowania Kościoła katolickiego na ziemiach polskich w dobie powstania styczniowego w świetle raportu konsulatu Francji w Warszawie z 1869 roku*, "Civitas et Lex" 2016, no. 4 (12), p. 87.

³ M. Różański, *Duchowieństwo wobec powstania styczniowego*, [in:] *Gloria victis 1863 r. studia i szkice z dziejów powstania styczniowego*, ed. T. Matuszak, Warszawa – Piotrków Trybunalski 2013, pp. 14-15.

⁴ M. Żywczyński, *Kościół i duchowieństwo w powstaniu styczniowym (Stan badań w zarysie)*, "Przegląd historyczny" 1937-1938, vol. 34, no. 2, p. 520.

of wrestling with a cruel and faithless enemy who, having deprived us of freedom and trying to take away the heart's dearest feelings of attachment to the faith of the ancestors and love to the Motherland, the Polish people have once again taken up arms, only in it seeing the salvation of their hope. Our land has once again soaked with blood. However, fear has no access to our hearts, since we prefer a hundred times death over atrocious bondage, as we have all sworn to win or to die. For many long years, our fathers protected Europe from Asian savages with their own breasts, and Your Governors, Most Holy Father, with their blessing reinforced them in their valour. Today we, descendants of Christian knights, also on our way to mortal battle, humbly kneel before You, pleading: Most Holy Father, give Your blessing to the Polish Nation.

National Government on behalf of the Polish nation.

Having received no reply from the Pope, on 29th October 1863, the insurgent government once again turned to the Pope with the following appeal: *In order to support and confirm in their duty those weak, however few there are of them, to bolster up the courage in those who are fighting to prepare the triumph of the most just of causes, we beg You, Holy Father, hear our request in Your graciousness, give us and the Polish people Apostolic blessing, of which we wish to become worthy in our strength and for which we beg. With filial love.* The insurgents did not get the Papal blessing. The Pope defined his position towards the uprising in a letter to tsar Alexander II of 22nd April 1863, in which he discusses the reasons for the uprising and points to ways in which unrest could be avoided in the future⁵. One of the major causes of the outbreak of the uprising, Pius IX believes to be improper attitude of the Russian government to Catholicism in Poland⁶. Finally, during a secret Consistory on 29th October 1866, in an official statement Pope Pius IX, complaining about the oppression towards the Church in Poland, emphasises that it was caused by the uprising and condemns it as godless⁷.

The early 1860s brought about the harbinger of the coming uprising. After bloody patriotic demonstrations in Warsaw, the Kingdom of Poland was engulfed in a wave of unrest of national and social character. The wave also

⁵ W. Bortnowski, *O powstaniu styczniowym. Wybrane dokumenty, odezwy i wyjątki z opracowań i pamiętników*, Warszawa 1950, pp. 41-43.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

reached Piotrków. It is worth stressing that the first patriotic manifestations whatsoever were related first of all, if not exclusively, with church services or other aspects of religious cult. The services were combined with processions around churches, during which people carried emblems with nationally imbued contents. Concerned with such a social attitude, tsarist authorities tried to prevent the growth of revolutionary feeling by introducing restrictions concerning organisation of religious ceremonies. In a circular letter, the governor of the Piotrków district wrote to heads of communes and municipalities of towns about restrictions in organising religious ceremonies. The letter of 20th November 1862 included a copy of the decision of the Viceroy of the Kingdom of Poland regarding a prohibition of conducting funerals and processions after 4 o'clock p.m. owing to the falling darkness, which invited people to sing revolutionary songs and which the police would not be able to effectively counteract⁸. Pro-independence sermons in churches in Piotrków were preached by Reverend Józef Ludwiński and Curate Jan Michalski. Both of them also organised and sent people to insurgent troops after the uprising started⁹. Insurgent ideas among peasants in the Piotrków district were also propagated by Reverend Ignacy Mrowiński¹⁰.

In Piotrków, as in many other cities, the priests called upon people to organise shared Easter breakfasts with food blessed on Easter Eve. The Easter in question was the one on 31st March to 1st April 1861. It was a response to events of February 1861, when a patriotic-religious manifestation of Polish people was dispersed in front of St Anne's church in Krakowskie Przedmieście and five participants of this event were murdered by Cossacks (compared later by some local priests to five wounds of Jesus Christ). The formal organiser of the ceremonial Easter breakfast in Piotrków was the Piotrków Citizens Association. It was a cultural institution which had 173 members. Although each member of the association was supposed to personally invite as many people

⁸ J. Jażdż, *Źródła do dziejów powstania styczniowego 1863 r. w zasobie Archiwum Państwowego w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim*, [in:] *Gloria victis 1863 r. studia i szkice z dziejów powstania styczniowego*, ed. T. Matuszak, Warszawa – Piotrków Trybunalski 2013, pp. 231-232.

⁹ A. Barszczewska, *Udział Piotrkowa Trybunalskiego w powstaniu listopadowym i styczniowym*, [in:] *750 lat Piotrkowa Trybunalskiego. Materiały na sesję naukową*, ed. R. Rosin, Piotrków Trybunalski 1967, p. 89.

¹⁰ J. Kukulski, *Piotrkowskie w okresie powstania styczniowego*, [in:] *Z dziejów powstania styczniowego w piotrkowskim*, ed. M. Gąsior, Piotrków Trybunalski 1991, p. 10.

as possible, without the help from the local Church it would not have been possible to achieve the attendance of more than a half of the inhabitants of the city. The decisive fact was that priests, irrespective of the possible repercussions, informed about the planned breakfast. As a matter of fact, the original idea of the local clergy and members of the Association was that the breakfast should resemble the shared meals of the first Christians as a token of the Last Supper. This was the official position. Informally, it was about uniting the citizens in the face of Russian persecution in Warsaw. On the morning of the first day of Easter, thousands of people gathered in the lecture theatre of the gymnasium and in the courtyard. They were greeted by Prefect Wojciechowski in a homily prepared specially for the occasion. It is important to add that despite the religious character of the event, the Jewish community with the rabbi were also invited to participate. Kosher food was prepared specially for them. Russian authorities realised that the shared Easter breakfast was not only of religious character, but it was also about manifesting patriotism and unity of all estates. The authorities did not hesitate to undertake appropriate action. Because, as a rule, such gatherings were organised by citizen associations, by the Government Commission for Internal Affairs' decision of 4th April 1861 a decree was issued to shut down all the citizen associations in the Kingdom of Poland under threat of using police resources and, if necessary, also military ones in case of resistance. The Piotrków Citizen Association suffered the same fate¹¹.

Since autumn 1862, the Piotrków district was incorporated into the Kalisz province. Canon Wawrzyniec Cent from Piotrków was appointed as the insurgent commander of this province by the Central National Committee. In accordance with the commander's powers, he appointed district commanders in the subordinate area¹². Russian military administration began to occupy municipal properties for their own council needs. In Piotrków, tsarist army took over 15 properties for soldier barracks, including the Dominican and Bernardine monasteries¹³.

Despite the above-mentioned repercussions, activities aimed at uniting the local community were not ceased. One of them was to undertake preparations for organising a fundraiser for the needs of the uprising. The action was also

¹¹ B. Mucha, *Dawny Piotrków Trybunalski*, Łódź 2012, pp. 79-81.

¹² A. Barszczewska, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹³ J. Jażdż, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

joined by the Piorków clergy. For example, the Piorków congregation of Dominican nuns positively responded to the appeal about the fundraiser, by offering part of the money they received from donations for the congregation (a contemplative one in Piorków). Although, in principle, the ongoing uprising had no influence on the monastic life, the nuns were interested in its fate, devoting days and nights to prayer for the motherland. Despite the fact that the monastery congregated contemplative nuns, in 1864 Russians combed all the rooms in search of weapons. Nothing was found in the monastic quarters, but it did not stop the colonel in command of the action from opening a silver box with the remains of an 18th-century Dominican nun, Kolumba Potkańska. The search initiated a series of repressions which led to annihilation of the Dominican convent in Piorków. The first blow was struck by a tsar's decree which liquidated all kinds of convent schools in the territory of the Kingdom of Poland. Thus, the Dominicans' boarding school was closed. The convent was most effectively hit by a dissolution edict *On establishing orders and convents* of 27th October 1864, which ordered to close all the novitiates. A consequence of the dissolution was the confiscation of property, based on a tsar's ukase of 29th December 1863. The Piorków Dominican nunnery was transformed by the partitioner's authorities into a so-called *etatowy* monastery. The tsar's intention was for the monastery to become a place where nuns from different monastic rules came to live out their days. According to tsar's decree of 12th December 1865, after the property was seized, the nuns were given a governmental salary and exempted from tax. In spite of the dissolution in 1864, 19 nuns were left, who were joined by 5 Mariavite Sisters from Częstochowa. Deprived of their school and property, they devoted themselves to prayer. Although they lived in the same nunnery, the Dominican and Mariavite sisters led separate lives. In February 1866 Agnieszka Gumińska died and was one of the last Piorków Dominicans to be buried in the vaults of the church. On 28th August 1869, Kochanow made a decision to relocate the 17 Dominicans and 5 Mariavites to St Anne's near Przyrów. The buildings were given to the newly established state female gymnasium. In this way, the only enclosed nunnery in Piorków ceased to exist. The church was closed and was not reopened until 1881.¹⁴

¹⁴ P. Stefaniak, *Dzieje klasztoru mniszek dominikańskich w Piorkowie Trybunalskim*, Piorków Trybunalski 2009, pp. 192-205.

As for the Bernardine monks, who constituted the largest group in comparison with the other orders in Piotrków, they simply actively participated in the January Uprising. Father Zefiryn Strupczewski, guardian and rector of the Bernardine monastery in Piotrków, took up arms in defence of religion and homeland. He was a chaplain in Józef Oksiński's unit. After a defeat in the battle of Rychłocice on 8th May 1863, he was injured and taken prisoner.¹⁵ Without trial, he was sentenced to death by hanging.¹⁶ Before the execution he was whipped¹⁷, and due to the lack of tools for the execution, he was beheaded in the end¹⁸. The order did not escape dissolution. The monks were sent through Bełchatów to Wisła, and the church was left in the custody of the organist. The monastic buildings were used as an archive, apartments and police remand prison. In the wing, the governorate printing house was also located. At one of the entrances to the monastery, a plaque was placed to inform of Father Zefiryn's sacrifice. Most probably, it was because of the person of the guardian of the monastery, who sacrificed his life during the uprising, in the period of fight for independence during the First World War, when Piotrków became one of the places where the strength of Polish Legions was built, that this sacred building was selected by Wacław Tokarz (at the time an employee of the Military Department of the Supreme National Committee, and at the same time one of the most eminent historians of national uprisings) as the location of the patriotic celebrations organised by soldiers of the Third Brigade of Legions (it was also them who erected a cross to commemorate the January insurgents, which was changed into a monument in the interwar years)¹⁹.

Another monastery which operated in Piotrków before the January Uprising was the Dominican order, which – as was the case with the Bernardines – was robbed for helping the insurgents. The local congregation was dissolved, and the building became a secular sanctuary. It was during the Russian post-

¹⁵ M. Rawita-Witanowski, *Monografia Piotrkowska Trybunalskiego*, ed. P. Głowacki, Piotrków Trybunalski 2017, p. 516.

¹⁶ <https://genealogia.okiem.pl/powstania/index.php?nazwisko=Strupczewski> [access: 15.01.2020]

¹⁷ M. Rawita-Witanowski, *op. cit.*, p. 516.

¹⁸ <https://genealogia.okiem.pl/powstania/index.php?nazwisko=Strupczewski> [access: 15.01.2020]

¹⁹ <http://trybunalscy.pl/node/1838> [access: 01.12.2019]

insurgent persecution that the oldest Piotrków chronicle, run by the Dominicans, went missing. The symbol of the dissolution of the Order of Preachers became the person of the last monk – Father Henryk Stronczyński, who stayed in the city as a retiree and settled less than a hundred metres from the former monastery²⁰.

The congregation of Piarists, which took over the property of their predecessors, after the dissolution of the Jesuit Order by the National Education Committee and continued education of the Piotrków youth²¹, was deprived of this important function after the November Uprising. The Administrative Council of the Kingdom of Poland took the school away from the monks and since then, it was to be run by a headmaster appointed by the administrative authorities²². The majority of male youth who studied there joined the public riots, and the headmaster belonged to the managerial circle of the local movement, who were in contact with the Warsaw conspirators. The years 1861-1863 were reflected in the history of the building. The classrooms, left by the youth, were transformed into tsarist political prison. In 1864, as a result of the dissolution of the Piarist Order, under the decision issued by the organising committee for the Kingdom of Poland²³, the new college with the adjacent part of the courtyard and garden became the property of the ministry of education. The old college with its part of the courtyard and garden near the church became the property of the ministry of internal affairs and was assigned for use by priest administrator of the post-Piarist church. The remaining part was regained by the city for the purposes of widening the street²⁴. As a result of tsarist repressions, the school was turned into a Russian gymnasium for the participation of the youth in the uprising. The collection of historical paintings, which had been given by donors and benefactors of the school as well as wealthy citizens since the construction of the building had been finished, was

²⁰ M. Furman, *Między prowincją a wielkim światem. Życie społeczno-kulturalne Piotrkowa 1867-1884*, Kraków 2012, pp. 42-43.

²¹ K. Głowacki, *Kościół Św. Franciszka Ksawerego i kolegium jezuickie w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim*, Piotrków Trybunalski 1982, p. 41.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 51-52.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 54-55.

²⁴ M. Rawita-Witanowski, *op. cit.*, p. 573.

removed from the walls of the new college²⁵. In 1867, the later outstanding historian, Tadeusz Korzon debuted in the newly formed gymnasium theatre²⁶.

One of the Catholic clergymen who died during the uprising was Father Ignacy Mosiński, a parish priest from Dmenin, who finished his life in the Piotrków citadel, located in the very centre of the city, near the Marijski Square (today's Trybunalski Square). For open support for the uprising, announcing the manifesto of the insurgent dictator²⁷ and for not administering absolution to a peasant who turned in one insurgent to the authorities, he was arrested and taken to the Piotrków citadel²⁸. Here, after a three-month investigation and tough interrogations, he was sentenced to death, which was executed on 5th March 1864 by hanging. In order to honour the memory of Father Mosiński, a memorial plaque, funded from voluntary donations, was set in the external wall of the parish church in Dmenin on 21st May 1925²⁹.

In the 19th century, the church played an important role in preserving Polishness. The clergymen put forward various initiatives with a view to uniting the nation against the partitioners' authorities, which was punishable with different kinds of repressions. It was particularly noticeable during the January Uprising, when the clergy, especially Catholic, provided pastoral care over insurgent troops, were active in the administration of the uprising by announcing from the pulpit decrees of insurgent authorities and by informing about the activities of insurgent structures, and even fought in armed operations. Also the Piotrków clergy joined operations which supported the uprising. In Piotrków, as in many other towns, priests preached pro-independence sermons. The main share should be attributed to monks and nuns from Piotrków, who positively responded to the collection of the national tax for the needs of the uprising. The orders from the Piotrków region did not evade post-insurgent repressions, as they were dissolved.

²⁵ K. Głowacki, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

²⁷ M. Rawita-Witanowski, *op. cit.*, p.328.

²⁸ J. Szubert, *Pamiętnik częstochowianina-powstańca styczniowego*, edited by Z. Strzyżewska, Częstochowa 2012, pp. 55-56.

²⁹ W. Koleczko, *Dla ciebie Polsko, dla twojej wolności i chwały ze wspomnień powstania styczniowego, ku uczczeniu pamięci poległych bohaterów męczenników, żołnierzy powstańców w grodzie Trybunalskim 1863-1864 roku*, Piotrków Trybunalski 1926, p. 16.

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