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PRIEST FELIKS OŹGA AND HIS STRUGGLE
WITH THE COMMUNIST REPRESSIVE APPARATUS

Key words: the Catholic Church, the Chełmno diocese, martyrdom of clergymen, military regional courts, repressive apparatus

INTRODUCTION

As a result of WWII, the Catholic Church in Poland suffered great personnel and material losses. After the communists had succeeded to power in Poland, they did not start an open war with the Catholic Church as they were busy fighting with the Polish underground. The communists even made some kind gestures towards the Church and its believers. In 1944, the communist authorities agreed to the reintroduction of religious education classes at school and the reactivation of the Catholic University of Lublin. In dioceses, bishops commenced the restoration of parish structures. In March 1945, the first issue of “Tygodnik Powszechny” came out in Cracow. The authorities not only supported the reconstruction of destroyed sacral buildings financially, but they also did not disturb the restoration of Catholic educational and care centres. Many Catholic schools took up the challenge of educating the next generation of Poles. Monastic hospitals resumed their activity. It was in 1947 that a visible deterioration in relations between the state and the Church started to be observed. It was then that the communists did away with the Polish People’s Party [*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL] after their victory in falsified elections. They started to control all forms of social life. The state authorities aimed at the total secularization of society and a reduction in the influence of the Catholic Church. A campaign of massive repression against clergymen commenced. Many priests were imprisoned on the basis of fabricated evidence. The security apparatus were told to invigilate Catholic communities. Over time the authorities started to abolish Catholic education and dissolve denominational schools. They also halted the dynamic development of the Catholic press. The repression also affected monastic assemblies. In 1950, the state took over “mortmain estates” [*dobra martwej ręki*], and the Catholic

Church lost over 155 000 hectares of land along with many buildings. Propaganda attacks on the hierarchs of the Catholic Church became stronger. The authorities also started to break the unity of the Catholic Church. The appearance of groups of Catholic laymen declaring the intention to collaborate with the communist party was also inspired by the communist authorities. In 1949, a group of pro-state “priests-patriots” launched their own campaign. In 1950, the authorities took over “Caritas” – the biggest religious charity organization. The anti-Church policy of the state authorities reached its peak in the years 1950–1953 when the authorities decided to arrest and conduct a show trial of the Bishop of Kielce Czesław Kaczmarek and the internment of the Primate of Poland Stefan Wyszyński.¹

THE ISSUE OF PRIEST FELIKS OŹGA’S ASSAULT

One of the priests who started their pastoral activity in those difficult post-war years was Feliks Oźga. The future priest was born on 11 October 1917 in Sypniewo. His parents Jan and Katarzyna owned a farm in Sypniewo. Jan Oźga’s father died in 1935. Feliks Oźga attended an elementary school in Sypniewo, after which he continued his education in a secondary school in Bydgoszcz. After taking his final high school exam [*matura*] in 1938 he joined the Congregation of the Mission founded by St. Vincent de Paul. After a three-month stay in the congregation, he made the decision to become a diocese priest and join a Theological College. Initially, he did not carry out his plans as WWII broke out. During the occupation years he found shelter in his mother’s house and helped her by working on the farm. In 1943, the Germans murdered his oldest brother Józef. During the war Feliks Oźga, along with his younger brother Jan, worked as volunteers and helped prisoners in the Nazi concentration camp in Potulice. When the German authorities found out about their

¹ Antoni DUDEK, Ryszard GRYZ, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945–1989)*, Kraków 2006, pp. 13–88; Jan ŻARYN, *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce (1944–1989)*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 64–113; Józef MARECKI, *Państwo a Kościół katolicki w latach 1945–1989. Walka o „rząd dusz”*, [in:] *Polityka władz państwowych wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Pomorzu Zachodnim i ziemi lubuskiej w latach 1945–1989*, ed. Tadeusz CEYNOWA, Paweł KNAP, Szczecin 2010, pp. 15–18; Ryszard GRYZ, *Państwo a Kościół w Polsce 1945–1956 na przykładzie województwa kieleckiego*, Kraków 1999, pp. 13–32; Jacek ŻUREK, *Ruch „Księży patriotów”*, Warszawa–Katowice 2008, pp. 35–70; Artur MEZGLEWSKI, *Szkolnictwo wyznaniowe w Polsce w latach 1944–1980. Studium historyczno-prawne*, Lublin 2004, pp. 275–318; Elżbieta KACZMAREK MChR, *Dlaczego przeszkadzały. Polityka władz partyjnych i rządowych wobec żeńskich zgromadzeń zakonnych w Polsce w latach 1945–1956*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 21–52; Konrad BIAŁECKI, *Najważniejsze założenia polityki wyznaniowej państwa i ich realizacja w latach 1945–1956*, [in:] *Władze wobec Kościołów i związków wyznaniowych w Wielkopolsce w latach 1945–1956*, ed. Konrad BIAŁECKI, Poznań 2008, pp. 11–29; Paweł ŚRODA, *Proces likwidacji placówek opiekuńczo-wychowawczych w Polsce w latach 1946–1965*, *Studia z prawa wyznaniowego*, vol. 11: 2008, pp. 292–303.

activity, they were both arrested by the Gestapo in August 1942. Only Feliks managed to escape from the German prison. After the breakout, Feliks hid under a false name. His younger brother, sister and mother were murdered in concentration camps. After WWII ended, Feliks Ożga went to the Archbishop's Theological College in Gniezno, where he graduated in Philosophy after a short period of intense study. In November 1946 he started his education in the Theological College in Pelplin. In 1948 he was ordained as a priest and on 1 January 1949 he became a parish priest in Grodziczno. After a few months of service in Grodziczno, he was transferred to the parish church of St. Nicholas in Gdynia-Chylonia, where he also worked as a religious education teacher in local schools.²

The first problems with the authorities started when in his sermons he started to criticize the political system. The clergyman got on very well with the youth, which would eventually lead to more problems later on. After being transferred to Gdynia-Chylonia he made friends with a group of young people including members of the underground anti-communist organization of the Home Army "Orleńta". The organization operated in the years 1949–1951 in Gdynia. Its first commander was Kazimierz Partyka, who was later replaced by Bogdan Kryszk. Members of the organization included Zdzisław Świeszczakowski, Stefan Kollmetz, Zenon Karwowski, Bronisław Staszczuk, Józef Hebel and Brunon Kaczyński. Organization activists were sworn in and obliged to recruit new members and acquire weapons. The security apparatus quickly tracked the illegal youth organization down. In April 1951, the City Bureau of Public Security started to arrest the activists of the Home Army "Orleńta", which had already managed to store considerable weapons, ammunition and explosives. As a result of the interrogation, the material against Feliks Ożga was collected – it was proved that he was associated with members of the underground organization such as Zdzisław Świeszczakowski, the treasurer Bronisław Staszczuk and Józef Hebel. Probably at the beginning of 1950, the Security Bureau called Feliks Ożga to interrogate him in connection with anti-state sermons. Having been interrogated, the priest became convinced that he would soon be arrested, too. He asked Józef Hebel to find him a hiding place. Hebel contacted his friend Stefan Kollmetz. The young conspirators decided to help the priest. However, they did not manage to find a safe hiding place for him. Probably Rev. Feliks Ożga took refuge in another parish church in Gdynia. The

² Archiwum Diecezji Pelplińskiej [Archive of the diocese in Pelplin] (further cit. ADP), Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska [Bishop of Chełmno Curia] (further cit. KBC), Akta personalne [Personal records] (further cit. Ap), ref. 376, [no page], Life history of F. Ożga, Pelplin, 13 Nov. 1946; [no page], Biskup chełmiński K. J. Kowalski do F. Ożgi Pelplin, 18 XII 1948; Mariusz WŁODARCZYK, *Ożga Feliks (1917–1973), kapłan diecezji pelplińskiej*, [in:] *Leksykon duchowieństwa represjonowanego w PRL w latach 1945–1989*, vol. 1, ed. Jerzy Myszor, Warszawa 2002, p. 210.

Bishop's Curia of Chełmno tried to explain the priest's transfer to another parish and summoned him for a talk, but the priest failed to arrive at the meeting on the excuse of being sick. The first activists of the organization were arrested in April 1951.³

Originally, the authorities decided not to imprison the priest. Probably, the Bishop's Curia in Pelplin took some measures to protect the priest. At the beginning of August 1950, the Vicar General Bernard Czapliński appointed Rev. Feliks Ożga as a vicar of the parish of Przyjaźń, and next transferred him to the parish in Stężycza. The frequent change in the priest's place of work was probably intended to protect him from being arrested. Eventually, Ożga was arrested in October 1950. The Bishop's Curia of Chełmno notified the secretary general of the Polish Episcopal Conference Zygmunt Choromański and asked him to intervene. It was not until November 1950 that the Provincial Bureau of Public Security in Gdańsk informed the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno that the investigation against the priest had started. Feliks Ożga was accused of earlier critical comments about the People's Polish Republic, not about the organization of the Home Army "Orlęta". He was also charged with convincing believers not to sign the Stockholm Appeal of 1950. On 21 June 1951, on the basis of art. 170 of the Criminal Code Rev. Feliks Ożga was sentenced by the County Court in Gdynia to eight months in prison for the distribution of false information that threatened public order. Probably the priest was released from prison earlier; possibly the period spent in custody was included in the sentence of imprisonment. He regained his freedom in 1951. After leaving prison, Rev. Feliks Ożga renounced his position as the parish priest in Stężycza and asked the church authorities to give him a three-month period of sick leave. At first, he was not granted permission from the church authorities and came back to Stężycza. At the beginning of October 1951, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno appointed him as provost of the parish in Konarzyny and

³ ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do ks. prefekta F. Ożgi, Pelplin, 26 XII 1950; [no page], Ks. F. Ożga do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Gdynia, 27 XII 1950; *Wyrok Wojskowego Sądu Rejonowego w Gdańsku z dnia 26 VII 1952 r.*, [in:] Maciej Roman BOMBICKI, *Księża przed sądami specjalnymi 1944–1954*, Poznań 1993, pp. 217–219; Bogdan RUSINEK, Zbigniew SZCZUREK, *Dzieje drugiej konspiracji niepodległościowej na Pomorzu Gdańskim w latach 1945–1956*, Gdańsk 1999, pp. 62, 305–307; *Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1945–1956*, ed. Rafał WNUK, Sławomir POLESZAK, Agnieszka JACZYŃSKA, Magdalena ŚLADĘCKA, Warszawa–Lublin 2007, p. 372; Krzysztof SIDORKIEWICZ, *Represje władz polskich wobec uczestników konspiracji na Pomorzu*, [in:] *Powojenne losy konspiracji na Pomorzu. Materiały sesji naukowej w Toruniu w dniu 19 listopada 1994 roku*, ed. Elżbieta ZAWADZKA, Ryszard KOZŁOWSKI, Toruń 1995, pp. 100–101; Daniel CZERWIŃSKI, *Pierwsza dekada. Aparat bezpieczeństwa w województwie gdańskim w latach 1945–1956*, Gdańsk 2016, pp. 339–345; Dariusz BURCZYK, *Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy w Gdańsku (1946–1955)*, Gdańsk 2012, p. 285.

asked him to reconstruct the destroyed parish church. After leaving prison, the priest's problems with the state authorities did not end. The Department of Education of the Presidium of the County Council of the National Council in Kościerzyna did not give their written approval for the priest to work as a religious education teacher in the Primary School in Konarzyny despite the fact that unofficially the headmaster of the school had agreed to give him the job. After two months of teaching religion at the school, the priest was forced to find a replacement.⁴

Even more serious problems began when Rev. Feliks Ożga moved to the parish of Konarzyny as the authorities decided to return to the issue of his cooperation with the members of the underground organization of the Home Army "Orleń". His mail had been monitored for some time now. In the first months of 1952 the Security Bureau attempted to arrest the priest at least twice, but the parishioners defended him. The presence of the parishioners forced the Security Bureau officers to renounce since they probably did not have an arrest warrant and had acted illegally. In the night of 29 May 1952, officers of the Security Bureau made another unsuccessful attempt to arrest the priest. Five officers of the apparatus of repression broke into the rectory at 3 a.m. The only thing they managed to do achieve was to assault the priest. After all these events, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno summoned a church committee including the chancellor of the Curia Rev. Stefan Trzeciński and the lawyer of the Curia Adam Lewicki to explain all the circumstances of the night-time incidents in Konarzyny. The information about the night assault on the priest was sent by legal advisor Rev. Leon Kręcki from Stara Kiszewa and Rev. Ernest Jesionowski from Garczyn. After arriving at the scene of the incidents, the members of the church committee interrogated the witnesses – i.e. Rev. Feliks Ożga, Rev. Ernest Jesionowski, Leon Kręcki and a member of the Parish Council Jan Szweda. All the conversations were entered in the minutes in order to write a report of the events in Konarzyny for the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno. The County Bureau of the Public Security [*Powiatowy Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*

⁴ ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Wikariusz generalny B. Czapliński do ks. F. Ożgi, Pelplin, 5 VIII 1950; [no page], Wikariusz generalny B. Czapliński do ks. F. Ożgi, Pelplin, 13 X 1950; [no page], Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej w Pelplinie, Gdańsk, 18 XI 1950; [no page], Ks. F. Ożga do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Bydgoszcz, 19 VII 1951; [no page], Wikariusz generalny B. Czapliński do ks. F. Ożgi, Pelplin, 6 X 1951 r.; [no page], Prezydium Powiatowej Rady Narodowej w Kościerzynie do ks. F. Ożgi, Kościerzyna, 25 I 1952; ADP, KBC, ref. 23, Wikariusz generalny B. Czapliński do biskupa Z. Choromańskiego, Pelplin, 25 X 1952; Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [Institute of National Remembrance], Biuro Udostępniania [Sharing Office] (further cit. IPN BU), ref. 01283/590, fol. 1809, Charakterystyka ks. F. Ożgi, Gdynia, 26 IX 1962; Lidia POTYKANOWICZ-SUDA, *Państwo a Kościół katolicki w województwie gdańskim w latach 1945–1970*, Warszawa 2011, p. 34.

Publicznego, PUBP) in Tczew was quickly informed by their secret informer regarding the Curia committee's departure from Pelplin.⁵

According to the findings of the church committee, some unknown people, having broken into the flat of the priest, split up into separate groups. Three of them woke up housekeeper Bronisława Łuszczynska and her sick mother, who were sleeping downstairs. Having searched through the rooms they ordered the women to keep calm. One of them stayed on guard downstairs while the remaining two went upstairs. The housekeeper heard a loud cry uttered by the priest and a noise resembling broken glass. Afterwards, she got up with the intention to inform the neighbours about the attack, but she was stopped by the man who was on watch downstairs. Bronisława Łuszczynska noticed a militiaman standing outside who was holding a weapon. This man was later identified by the local population as the commandant of the station of the Citizens' Militia [*Milicja Obywatelska*, MO] in Stara Kiszewa – Bernard Kluk. Shortly afterwards, the church bell started ringing and local people, predominantly women, entered the rectory. Seeing them, the officers of the Security Bureau quickly left the building. It was not until their escape that Rev. Oźga went downstairs. After a short rest, he returned to his bed upstairs. At about 7 a.m. a member of the Parish Council Jan Szweda accompanied by the head of the village [*sołtys*] visited the rectory. In their presence, the priest related what had happened the previous night. According to what he said, the unknown men demanded that he get up and go with them, but he refused and asked them to show an arrest warrant. Then they attacked him, dragged him out of bed and bound his hands. One of the assaulters knelt on the priest's chest and they beat him with a hard object on his head, face, chest and knees. One of the men put a towel into the priest's mouth to prevent him from shouting for help. The witnesses later confirmed that the priest had been injured and they called for a doctor from Kościerzyna who examined him and dressed his wounds. Al-

⁵ Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie [Central Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw] (further cit. AAN), Urząd do Spraw Wyznań [Office for Religious Affairs] (further cit. UdsW), ref. 18/1737, fol. 2, Sprawozdania z przeprowadzonych w dniu 8 VI 1952 r. na polecenie Kurii Biskupiej dochodzeń w sprawie dotyczącej ks. Oźgi z Konarzyn; ref. 18/1658, fol. 1, Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Bydgoszczy, Referat do Spraw Wyznań do Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Gdańsku, Referat do Spraw Wyznań, Bydgoszcz, 8 Mar. 1952; ref. 44/1464, fol. 67–68, Protokół informacyjny spisany dnia 6 VI 1952 r. w Starej Kiszewie, powiat Starogard Gdański w sprawie wypadków w Konarzynach; ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Ks. L. Kręcki do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, ze Starej Kiszewy, 30 May 1952; [no page], ks. E. Jesionowski do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, z Garczyna, 31 V 1952; Instytut Pamięci Narodowej w Gdańsku [Institute of National Remembrance in Gdańsk] (further cit. IPN Gd), ref. 0046/193/1/DVD, fol. 75, Sprawozdanie miesięczne z pracy PUBP w Tczewie za okres od dnia 3 VI 1952 r. do dnia 4 VII 1952 r. włącznie, Tczew, 4 Jul. 1952; IPN BU, ref. 01283/590, fol. 47–48, Doniesienie agenturalne, [s.l.], 10 VI 1952.

though the doctor did not observe any fractures, he persuaded the priest to go to hospital, but Ożga refused. At about 2 p.m. the militiamen from Konarzyny came to the rectory and arrested the priest. The inhabitants of the village of Stara Kiszewa saw the militia convoy and the priest lying on the backseat of the car with his head bowed down. His face was covered with a white cloth. On the same day the commandant of the Station of the Bureau of Public Security in Kościerzyna Aleksander Pokało came to Rev. Ernest Jesionowski and informed him about Rev. Feliks Ożga having been arrested on the charge of conducting activity against the Polish state and cooperating with the Gestapo. He told him to look for a replacement for Rev. Ożga. The members of the church committee also described the condition of the priest's room after the night assault. Although they did not observe any window glass having been broken (in fact, the window glass had been replaced before their arrival), they meticulously recorded all the signs of a scuffle (the damaged bed, a capsized chair, a rug pushed over to one corner of the room, etc.) They also found the priest's clothes stained with blood.⁶

At about midnight on the following day, two officers of the Security Bureau searched Rev. Ożga's flat. They wanted the housekeeper to give them back the document they claimed to have lost during the night-time escapade – the order of the Provincial Commandant of the Security Bureau permitting the search of the rectory. This fact was later quite significant as the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno accused the authorities of their not having a formal arrest warrant, which the authorities denied. From the report of the church committee it could be inferred that the apparatus of repression officers only had a search warrant, but not an arrest warrant. This fact was confirmed by the information included in the documents of the Ministry of Public Security [*Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, MBP] about fighting “the hostile activity of the reactionary clergy” of 1952: “In the work involving clergymen there are still serious shortcomings and deficiencies; very often improper and inadequately thought-out measures are taken [...]. The Provincial Bureau of Public Security in Gdańsk arrested the priest for belonging to an illegal organization. The priest expected to be arrested as the investigation had started many months earlier. The arrest was carried out without being planned well in advance, the result of which was the gathering of local people; officers of the Security Bureau entered the priest's house through a window; the priest resisted arrest, which led to disorderly fighting; eventually, under the pressure of the crowd the officers were made to withdraw having failed to arrest the priest. In this

⁶ AAN, UdsW, ref. 18/1737, fol. 2–4, Sprawozdania z przeprowadzonej w dniu 8 VI 1952 r. na polecenie Kurii Biskupiej dochodzeń w sprawie dotyczącej ks. Ożgi z Konarzyny [Reports concerning the investigation in the case of Rev. Ożga of Konarzyny commissioned by the Bishop's Curia].

way, this unprepared arrest turned into a public demonstration in defence of the »assaulted« priest»⁷ [transl. by Agnieszka Chabros].

For some time the further fate of Rev. Feliks Oźga remained unknown for the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno. Rev. Ernest Jesionowski from Garczyn informed the church authorities in Pelplin that at midday on 31 May 1952 the clergyman had died in the hospital in Kościerzyna owing to the injuries he had suffered. At the beginning of June 1952, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno summoned the above-mentioned church committee and authorized the chancellor of the Curia Rev. Stefan Trzciński and legal advisor Adam Lewicki to represent it in the court case concerning Rev. Feliks Oźga. The Curia's committee immediately prepared a report of the night-time incidents in Konarzyny, while the Curia itself intervened in the highest state authorities. In a letter dated 6 June 1952 to the head of the Bureau of Denominational Affairs [*Urząd do spraw Wyznań*, UdSW] Antoni Bida, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno described the night-time assault on Rev. Feliks Oźga, his subsequent arrest and his transfer to an unknown destination. Similar letters were sent by the Church to the Minister of Public Security Stanisław Radkiewicz and the Minister of Justice Henryk Świątkowski. The church authorities of the Chełmno diocese insisted on an investigation being launched immediately regarding this matter. In their letter, the church authorities suggested that the clergyman had probably died in hospital owing to the injuries he had suffered. Later on, this point generated many controversies as the authorities accused the Church of deliberately spreading gossip about the priest's alleged death. From the preserved archival documents it may be concluded that the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno could have been convinced about the priest's death since they had received the information from a close coworker. However, the information was not confirmed in other sources. The state authorities was astonished at the quick and decisive reaction of the Bishop's Curia in Pelplin. Apart from assault on the priest, the reason why the Church had become so determined to explain the case was the information about his alleged death.⁸

⁷ *Opracowania na temat zwalczania „wrogiej działalności reakcyjnego kleru” oraz innych środowisk w okresie przedwyborczym (sierpień lub wrzesień 1952 r.)*, [in:] *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w Polsce w latach 1950–1952. Taktyka, strategia, metody*, introduction Andrzej PACZKOWSKI, selected and compiled by Antoni DUDEK, Andrzej PACZKOWSKI, Warszawa 2000, p. 224.

⁸ ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Ks. E. Jesionowski do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Garczyn, 12 Jun. 1952; [no page], Upoważnienie Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Pelplin, 5 VI 1952; AAN, UdSW, ref. 18/1737, fol. 1, Pismo Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej do A. Bidy, Pelplin, 7 VI 1952; [no page], Wikariusz generalny B. Czaplński do ministra sprawiedliwości H. Świątkowskiego, Pelplin, 7 VI 1952; IPN Gd, ref. 0046/193/1/DVD, fol. 75, Sprawozdanie miesięczne z pracy PUBP w Tczewie za okres od dnia 3 VI 1952 r. do dnia 4 VII 1952 r. włącznie, Tczew, 4 July 1952.

The state authorities closely monitored the measures undertaken by the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno about Rev. Feliks Ożga's assault and arrested. The case went public and the serious accusations directed towards the highest state authorities by the Bishop's Curia required a quick response from the state. At the beginning of June 1952, the head of the Department of Denominational Affairs of the Presidium of the Provincial National Council [*Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej*, PWRN] in Gdańsk Zygmunt Burczyk visited the congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Kościerzyna. He asked about the arrested priest. In the meantime he tried to sound out public opinion about the events in Konarzyny. He also collected information about the activity of the church committee set up to explain the circumstances of the night-time assault on the priest from the Chełmno diocese. The state authorities quickly started to impugn the gossip about the alleged death of Rev. Feliks Ożga to weaken the strength of the accusations expressed by the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno. As early as 12 June 1952 both officers of the Security Bureau informed Rev. Ernest Jesionowski that the priest was healthy and had been remanded in the Gdańsk jail awaiting trial and long-term imprisonment. Having received the message the Bishop's Curia in Pelplin sent a letter to the Military District Prosecutor's Office [*Wojskowa Prokuratura Rejonowa*, WPR] in Gdańsk, which confirmed that the priest was on remand. The Church tried to force a meeting between the chancellor of the Curia Rev. Stefan Trzcziński with Rev. Feliks Ożga to confirm that he was still alive. The Military District Prosecutor's Office in Gdańsk rejected the Curia's request and agreed only to send a breviary to the priest. It should also be added that in the subsequent years the state authorities opposed a new priest taking over the parish of Konarzyny. Further requests of the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno encountered the refusal of the Military District Prosecutor's Office in Gdańsk.⁹

REV. FELIKS OŻGA'S TRIAL
BEFORE THE MILITARY DISTRICT COURT IN GDAŃSK

The transferal of Rev. Feliks Ożga's case to the Military District Court [*Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy*, WSR] in Gdańsk was the consequence of an earlier trial involving members of the organization "Orlęta" of the Home Army having

⁹ AAN, UdsW, ref. 18/1737, fol. 4, Sprawozdania z przeprowadzonych w dniu 8 VI 1952 r. na polecenie Kurii Biskupiej dochodzeń w sprawie dotyczącej ks. Ożgi z Konarzyny; ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Ks. E. Jesionowski do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Garczyn, 12 VI 1952 r.; [no page], Wojskowa Prokuratura Rejonowa w Gdańsku do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Gdańsk, 27 VI 1952; [no page], Wikariusz generalny B. Czapliński do Wojskowej Prokuratury Rejonowej w Gdańsku, Pelplin, 3 VII 1952; ADP, KBC, ref. 44, fol. 1, Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Gdańsk, 4 VII 1953.

been conducted by this court. In September 1951, a trial against eight activists from the organization commenced. All the activists were sentenced to imprisonment from one and a half to five years. Among them were acquaintances of Rev. Ożga: Zdzisław Świeszczakowski, Stefan Kollmetz and Józef Hebel. The case of Rev. Feliks Ożga was not isolated as military special courts sentenced many Catholic priests. As mentioned above, the court trial of Rev. Feliks Ożga took place in the Provincial District Court in Gdańsk. It was headed by Lieutenant Edwin Kęzik. This distinguished communist judge after the end of WWII took the position of the deputy commandant of the militia station in Śliwice. In October 1945, he started a preliminary course to prepare to study law. In the years 1946–1949 he studied law at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Having graduated from the university, he was given the role of assessor in the Military District Court in Olsztyn, and he was the acting judge and the vice-head of the Military District Court in Gdańsk. Having left the army in 1955 he worked in the judiciary holding many responsible positions such as the president of the County Court in Sopot and Gdynia and the vice-president of the Provincial Court in Gdańsk. Under his effective supervision, the trial of Rev. Feliks Ożga was conducted at an amazing pace since the sentence was announced as early as 26 July 1952. The Bishop's Curia of Chełmno had a serious problem in finding a defence attorney for the priest. Eventually, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno elected Józef Tarczewski PhD, from Sopot and authorized the Curia's legal advisor Adam Lewicki to represent him in the court. Although no files of the priest's trial have survived (they were destroyed in 1986), it is possible to reconstruct the main elements of the accusation on the basis of the preserved sentence of the court. The priest was charged with a few offences: 1) distribution of information that could threaten the interests of the Polish state as he had spoken hostilely about the Polish United Workers' Party [*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR] and the Association of Polish Youth [*Związek Młodzieży Polskiej*, ZMP] in the presence of two activists of the organization "Orlęta" of the Home Army – Józef Hebel and Bronisław Staszczyk (art. 22 of the decree of 13 June 1946 about offences particularly dangerous in the period of the reconstruction of the State involving imprisonment of a maximum of 5 years or arrest; 2) the failure to notify the state authorities of Józef Hebel and Stefan Kollmetz belonging to an illegal organization (art. 18 §1 of the decree of 13 June 1946 about offences particularly dangerous in the period of the reconstruction of the State in connection with art. 86 §2 of the Criminal Code of the Polish Army [*Kodeks Karny Wojska Polskiego*, KKWP] involving imprisonment of a maximum of 5 years); 3) the incitement of inhabitants of Konarzyny to attack officers of the Security Bureau and the Citizens' Militia during their attempt to arrest him (art. 27 KKWP in connection with art. 1 §2 of the decree of 13 June 1946 about offences particularly dangerous in the pe-

riod of the reconstruction of the State involving the imprisonment of a minimum of 5 years or life imprisonment); 4) the use of violence on 29 May 1952 in Konarzyny towards two officers of the Security Bureau (Tadeusz Kopeć and Kazimierz Woźniak) during their attempt to arrest him (art. 129 of the Criminal Code of 1932 involving the punishment of three years' imprisonment or arrest). On the basis of the bill of indictment one may draw a few interesting conclusions. The Military District Prosecutor's Office (WPR) in Gdańsk prepared the evidence concerning the priest's cooperation with the underground youth organization much earlier and on this basis they planned to sentence the clergyman. After the events taking place at the end of May 1952 in Konarzyny, the Military District Prosecutor's Office (WPR) in Gdańsk decided to extend the bill of indictment by adding other offences. What was particularly dangerous was the accusation against Rev. Feliks Ożga of inciting the inhabitants of Konarzyny to attack the officers of the Citizens' Militia and the Security Bureau as this gave the prosecutor the right to sentence the priest even to life imprisonment. The first three accusations concerning the distribution of anti-state information and the failure to notify the state authorities of the illegal organization jointly entailed the punishment of 10 years in prison, but not life imprisonment.¹⁰

During the investigation, the activists of the organization "Orlęta" of the Home Army testified against Rev. Feliks Ożga. During the trial the priest was accused of talking with the organization's activists and indoctrinating "adolescents through discussions and debates with a spirit of hatred to the socialist political system of the Polish State, particularly to the Polish United Workers'

¹⁰ *Wyrok Wojskowego Sądu Rejonowego w Gdańsku z dnia 26 lipca 1952r.*, p. 223; B. RUSINEK, Z. SZCZUREK, op.cit., pp. 307–311; ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Upoważnienie Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej dla A. Lewickiego, Pelplin, 10 VII 1952; Wikariusz generalny B. Czapliński do E. Jesionowskiego, Pelplin, 29 VII 1952; D. BURCZYK, *Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy w Gdańsku (1946–1955)*, pp. 130, 137, 188–190, 207, 291; idem, *Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy w Gdańsku 1946–1955. Inwentarz idealny (CD)*, Gdańsk 2012, p. 1001; Zbigniew K. WÓJCIK, *Procesy polityczne duchowieństwa diecezji przemyskiej obrządku łacińskiego przed Wojskowym Sądem Rejonowym w Rzeszowie (1946–1954)*, [in:] *Przestępstwa sędziów i prokuratorów w Polsce lat 1944–1956*, ed. Witold KULEZA, Andrzej RZEPLIŃSKI, Warszawa 2001, pp. 168–193; Krzysztof SZWAGRZYK, *Księża przed Wojskowym Sądem Rejonowym we Wrocławiu (1946–1951)*, [in:] *Represje wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Dolnym Śląsku i Opolszczyźnie 1945–1989. Studia i materiały*, vol. 4, ed. Stanisława A. BOGDANOWICZ, Sylwia KRZYŻANOWSKA, Wrocław 2004, pp. 47–59; Jacek ŻUREK, „Prawo jest dla nas, a nie my dla prawa...”. (*Duchowieństwo katolickie przed sądami komunistycznymi*), [in:] *Represje wobec duchowieństwa kościołów chrześcijańskich w okresie stalinowskim w krajach byłego bloku wschodniego*, ed. Jerzy MYSZOR, Adam DZIURK, Katowice 2004, pp. 137–156; Andrzej WITKOWSKI, *Polityka karna organów wymiaru sprawiedliwości narzędziem represji wobec osób duchownych i konsekrowanych*, [in:] *Represje wobec osób duchownych i konsekrowanych w PRL w latach 1944–1989*, ed. Alicja GRZEŚKOWIAK, Lublin 2004, pp. 141–150.

Party (PZPR) and the Association of Polish Youth (ZMP) [...]”. The priest was to persuade one of the activists of the organization to leave the ZMP. Moreover, he convinced his young collaborators to help him to hide when he was afraid of being arrested. The WPR in Gdańsk also presented evidence that the priest had concealed the existence of the illegal youth organization. The most interesting were the findings of the military prosecutor’s office concerning the incidents in Konarzyny. They differed in many instances from the conclusions of the church committee. The WPR in Gdańsk confirmed the appearance of unknown people in the rectory, but they did not identify them as officers of the Security Bureau or the Citizens’ Militia. It was also difficult to verify the veracity of the prosecutor’s findings that Rev. Feliks Ożga had incited the inhabitants of Konarzyny by ringing the church bell to inform others about his possible arrest (should such an attempt take place) so that they could arrive at the rectory to prevent the priest from being arrested. During the night-time events at the end of May 1952 in Konarzyny the church bell did ring, but it is hard to establish whether parishioners had arranged this in advance or maybe one of them had reacted spontaneously. The church committee did not examine this element in their investigation.¹¹

Further conclusions made by the military prosecutor’s office concerning the night-time incidents in Konarzyny included quite a few inconsistencies. The prosecutor was not at all astonished by the fact that the officers of the County Bureau of Public Security in Kościerzyna and the Provincial Bureau of Public Security in Gdańsk elected to conduct their activities at 3 a.m. as if they had not been able to arrest the priest during the day. The description of the events in the rectory presented by the prosecutor differed from the findings of the church committee. According to the investigators, the officers of the security apparatus entered the flat, introduced themselves, explained the motive of their visit and showed the arrest warrant and search warrant. In fact, none of those elements were mentioned in the testimonies of the witnesses who had given statements in front of the Curia committee. The military prosecutor omitted to mention the night-time break-in, the intimidation of the housekeeper and her mother, and the assault on the priest. The prosecutor failed to explain the doubts arising in connection with the arrest and search warrants. New elements concerned mainly the action of the parishioner’s gathering near the rectory. According to the findings of the prosecutor, Franciszka Lipska woke up the sleeping neighbours while Leokadia Lubiszewska rang the bell. Hearing the bell ringing the parishioners rushed to the rectory and, as the priest had instructed them, they began to shout. The officers of the Security Bureau heard the screams and asked the priest to get up and get dressed. When

¹¹ *Wyrok Wojkowego Sądu Rejonowego w Gdańsku z dnia 26 lipca 1952 r.*, p. 219.

the priest refused to do so, they told him about their intention to search the house. It was not until the priest had jumped out of bed and ran towards the door that one of the officers stopped him. The priest struggled with the officer, pushed him back, broke the window glass and started to shout for help loudly. The workers of the Security Bureau tried to calm the priest down, but he got aggressive, pushing them back and kicking them; about fifty parishioners clamoured near the rectory. Owing to the escalating violence of the crowd, the officers stopped their actions, while the local people brandished rods and pales at them using foul language. Two officers were slightly injured. After the incident the parishioners came back to their houses. On the other hand, the report of the church committee said nothing about the use of violence against the officers of the Security Bureau by the local people. In the more recent reports of the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno there appeared some accounts about the shouting of the women gathered around the rectory, who had come to defend their parish priest. The issue was of utmost importance – had the parishioners fought against the priest's arrest, the prosecutor could have sentenced him for life imprisonment. During the trial the military prosecutor interpreted the conduct of the parishioners against the priest and charged him with the violent assault on the officers of the Citizens' Militia and the Security Bureau, which might have involved life imprisonment. The weight of the remaining charges against the defendant was much smaller and allowed to punish him only for a few years' imprisonment.¹²

During the trial Rev. Feliks Ożga pleaded not guilty. Although he did not deny having frequent contacts with the young people of Gdańsk, he tried to convince the court that the aim of the meetings was to exchange religious literature. He also declared that he had not known about the young people's membership of an illegal organization and that is why he had not informed the state authorities about it. The members of the "Orłęta" of the Home Army organization and parishioners testified against the priest. Now, it is hard to establish to what extent the testimonies were forced. In the verdict of 26 July 1952, the Military District Court in Gdańsk found Rev. Feliks Ożga guilty of the charges made against him and sentenced him to 8 years' imprisonment and deprivation of public and civil rights for two years. The trial was non-public, while the verdict and the justification were read out publicly.¹³

After the priest had been sentenced, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno asked the Military District Court in Gdańsk to get a copy of the sentence with the jus-

¹² Ibid., pp. 219–220.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 222–224; Daniel CZERWIŃSKI, *Działania gdańskiego aparatu bezpieczeństwa wobec kurii biskupiej w Pelplinie w pierwszej połowie lat pięćdziesiątych XX wieku*, [in:] *Letnia Szkoła Historii Najnowszej 2012. Referaty*, ed. Kamil DWORACZEK, Łukasz KAMIŃSKI, Warszawa 2013, p. 32.

tification, or at least to make it possible for the defence attorney to copy it. The diocese authorities were astonished with the severity of the sentence, but they still continued to make efforts to free the priest. The Military District Court in Gdańsk did not make the above mentioned documents accessible saying that they had already been sent to the Supreme Military Court (NSW), where the Church had appealed. Despite the insistence of the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno, the NSW procrastinated in establishing the date of the appeal hearing. According to the preserved sources, the NSW did not agree to annul the sentence, nor did it reduce the sentence. What is more, the Curia turned to the Minister of Public Security Stanisław Radkiewicz. In the above-mentioned letter the church authorities tried to indicate that unlawful actions had been undertaken by the state authorities. They did not agree with the accusations that the priest had cooperated with the organization of the Home Army "Orłęta". The Curia also questioned the charge that the priest had persuaded his parishioners to resist officers of the Security Bureau. The Church also considered the reaction of the authorities to the incidents in Konarzyny to be exaggerated. According to the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno the fact that the faithful had gathered around the rectory did not bear any traces of a criminal offence as the workers of the Security Bureau had acted anonymously, and the local people had been concerned about the health of their parish priest as he had already been harassed by unknown visitors before. The inhabitants of Konarzyny could not confirm the identity of the officers of the Security Bureau as they were wearing civilian clothes and had not shown their identification cards. All this made them believe that their parish priest had been attacked. The Bishop's Curia of Chełmno also debated with the remaining accusations cast against the priest. According to the Curia, Rev. Feliks Oźga did not struggle with the officers and accusations based exclusively on the testimony of the workers of Security Bureau did not constitute sufficient evidence against the priest. Moreover, there were no arguments justifying the necessity to arrest the priest at night since he had not been avoiding the investigators. For the church authorities it was obvious that Rev. Feliks Oźga had been beaten and injured. They also protested against punishing the members of the church committee and its witnesses (I write about this below). The letter of the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno to Stanisław Radkiewicz did not yield any results.¹⁴

¹⁴ ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do Wojskowego Sądu Rejonowego w Gdańsku, Pelplin, 5 Aug. 1952; [no page], Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy w Gdańsku do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Gdańsk, 11 Aug. 1952 r.; [no page], Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do Najwyższego Sądu Wojskowego, Pelplin, 11 XII 1952; AAN, UdSW, ref. 44/1464, fol. 58–63, Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do ministra bezpieczeństwa publicznego S. Radkiewicza, Pelplin, 4 VIII 1952; IPN Gd, ref. 667/7, fol. 65, Repertorium ogólne spraw Wojskowego Sądu Rejonowego w Gdańsku.

SUBPLOTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The trial of Rev. Feliks Ożga in the Military District Court in Gdańsk had also a subplot. Prior to announcing the sentence, the City Prosecutor's Office in Gdańsk started an investigation against the members of the church committee – the chancellor of the Curia Rev. Stefan Trzciński and the legal advisor Adam Lewicki. Rev. Ernest Jesionowski was also included in the investigation. They were suspected of breaching art. 22 of the decree of 13 June 1946 about offences particularly dangerous for the reconstruction of the State (“The person who distributes false information that could harm the interest of the Polish State or that could undermine the authority of its superior bodies shall be subject to the penalty of five years' imprisonment or arrest”). The investigators tried to prove that the members of the committee had distributed gossip about the alleged death of Rev. Feliks Ożga deliberately as suggestions of this kind appeared in the letter of the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno to the head of the Bureau of Home Affairs Antoni Bida, the Minister of Public Security Stanisław Radkiewicz and the Minister of Justice Henryk Świątkowski. The Curia had good intentions as they had received the information about the priest's death. However, it was a mistake not to have confirmed the information before sending the letters to the state authorities.¹⁵

During the investigation, the prosecutor Jan Midas heard the members of the church committee and many other witnesses connected with the case. The legal advisor Adam Lewicki refused to testify and declared all the measures undertaken against Rev. Feliks Ożga as unlawful. He did not intend to stand against the Church dignitaries as he was employed by the Curia. During the interrogation, the attorney of the Curia did not react to the utterances of the prosecutor. After the interrogation finished, Jan Midas planned to put forward a motion for the temporary custody of Adam Lewicki. Rev. Stefan Trzciński testified to the prosecutor that the letters sent by the Bishop's Curia to the representatives of the highest state authorities had been written on the basis of the report made by the church committee. The chancellor of the Curia expressed his concern about the events taking place in Konarzyny. He also confirmed the establishment of the church committee by the vicar to general Bernard Czapliński. In a conversation with the prosecutor, Rev. Stefan Trzciński declared there to be sound reasons for the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno to write to the state authorities as the Curia had wanted to prevent similar incidents from happening again. Rev. Stefan Trzciński was heard as a witness on 26 June 1952, and on 27 June 1952 he testified as a defendant. The whole investigation

¹⁵ Instytut Pamięci Narodowej w Bydgoszczy [Institute of National Remembrance in Bydgoszcz] (further cit. IPN By), ref. 084/2055, fol. 44–45, Odpis pisma do Prokuratora Wojewódzkiego w Gdańsku, [s.l.].

was conducted by the Gdańsk prosecutor's office and was supervised Department V of the Provincial Bureau of Public Security [*Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, WUBP] in Gdańsk. The next hearing of Rev. Stefan Trzcíński was carried out in such a way as to prove that the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno had launched their campaign on the grounds of the false information about the alleged assault and death of the clergyman. The prosecutor Jan Midas tried to find out how the Curia had learnt about the events in Konarzyny. Rev. Stefan Trzcíński spoke vaguely about the issue. He only confirmed that Rev. Ernest Jesionowski had sent a letter concerning the priest's case. The church authorities learnt about the night-time incidents in Konarzyny from other clergymen, whose surnames the chancellor of the Curia did not give in order not to involve them in the investigation. He was also careful providing the names of the witnesses who had testified to the church committee. He considered their testimony to be fully credible. The prosecutor was also interested in what the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno thought about the case of Rev. Feliks Ożga. The prosecutor asked a few detailed questions concerning the church committee. He wanted to find out whether Rev. Stefan Trzcíński had really said: "May Rev. Ożga rest in peace". The chancellor of the Curia denied having uttered such words. During the interrogation, Rev. Stefan Trzcíński did not withdraw from the declarations included in the report of the church committee although he confirmed to the prosecutor that he had not been completely sure about whether the officers had had an arrest warrant or not. The prosecutor also tried to get information from Rev. Stefan Trzcíński regarding who was responsible for sending the letters to the state authorities. The prosecutor was also interested in the fact that in the report of the church committee there had been no entry about the priest's struggle with the officers. The chancellor of the Curia declared that the injuries of the administrator of the parish in Konarzyny had indicated that the priest had resisted the officers and the members of the church committee had not been obliged to document it as the cause was obvious. The prosecutor tried to find out the motives of the church authorities to present the night-time incident in Konarzyny as an attack. According to the chancellor of the Curia and his superiors, breaking into the rectory bore the hallmarks of an assault. The prosecutor did his best to undermine this opinion as he did not treat the events in Konarzyny as a criminal offence. He also accused the Church of including the false information of the priest's death in the letter. Next, the chancellor of the Curia confirmed that the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno had acquired information that the priest was still alive before sending the letter, but the complaints had included the opinion of the local population – not the official opinion of the Church. Eventually, Rev. Stefan Trzcíński did not plead guilty to insulting the state authorities. He also did not take responsibility for the distribution of the gossip of the alleged death of Rev. Feliks

Ożga. He refused to withdraw his earlier statements included in the report of the church committee about the assault on the priest.¹⁶

The prosecutor Jan Midas also heard other people connected with the case such as the head of the church committee Feliks Szczypiński, a member of the Parish Council Jan Szweda, the housekeeper's mother Maria Nikucka and other witnesses. He was mainly interested in the details of the work of the church committee. He tried to establish the content of private conversations held by the committee with the witnesses and to reconstruct the course of events. The prosecutor asked about the details concerning the creation of the church committee and its findings. He also attempted to find out whether the members of the committee had exaggerated the case of Rev. Feliks Ożga. During the interrogation a member of the Gmina National Council [*Gminna Rada Narodowa*, GRN] Leon Koprowski testified that he had heard screams of "Get up everybody! The bandits and thieves are taking the priests away!". Analyzing the testimonies of the witnesses one may conclude that most of them were made under the pressure of the prosecutor as it was his aim to undermine the credibility of the church committee's report and to prove the guilt of the priest. The testimonies included, for instance, fabricated declarations that all the residents of the village had known perfectly well that it had not been an ordinary assault, but an attempt to arrest the priest upon the order of the prosecutor. The words that the officers showed their identity cards and the arrest warrant should be treated in the same way. The witnesses marginalized the priest's injuries and underlined his struggle with the officers during their attempt to arrest him. According to Leon Koprowski, the priest resisted arrest and called upon the parishioners to help him. During the incident the priest was neither killed nor seriously beaten. He was only slightly scratched, and the state of the rooms in the rectory did not show any marks of an assault. Leon Koprowski's testimony also charged other witnesses – e.g. a member of the Parish Council Jan Szweda and the head of the village Wacholec, who had informed the authorities about the attack on the priest via telephone. Koprowski also confirmed that Rev. Feliks Ożga had admitted to having been shown the arrest warrant by the officers of the Security bureau. Another witness Antoni Narloch accused the members of the Parish Council of preparing the joint strategy of the defence of the priest in case the authorities should make another attempt to arrest him. According to Narloch, the members of the church committee possessed credible information that the priest was alive. Antoni Narloch did not confirm the words of Leon Koprowski that the clergyman had admitted to resisting the officers of the Security Bureau in their attempt to arrest him. The witness Leon Baron

¹⁶ IPN By, ref. 084/2055, fol. 44–45, Odpis pisma do Prokuratora Wojewódzkiego w Gdańsku, [s.l.]; fol. 47–56, Protokół przesłuchania świadka ks. S. Trzcíńskiego, Gdańsk, 26 VI 1952.

declared that when the officers left the rectory, it was in order. On the other hand, Jan Szweda testified to the prosecutor that Rev. Feliks Oźga had said to him that the officers of the Security Bureau had shown their identity cards and shown a fake arrest warrant. Apparently, the priest admitted struggling with the officers. It was Rev. Feliks Oźga's idea to notify the Citizens' Militia that he was attacked and that the notification be signed by all the parishioners. The priest was said to have dictated the whole content of the letter. Later Jan Szweda was supposed to have burnt the notification after the clergyman had been arrested. This testimony differed from what Jan Szweda had said to the church committee. Apparently, Szweda changed his testimony under pressure from the prosecutor. However, he did not deny all his earlier words. He still considered the incident in Konarzyny to have been an ordinary attack and confirmed his conversation with the church committee. Still, he interpreted the causes of the committee's arrival in a different manner. According to him, the Curia's committee had come in order to appoint a new administrator of the parish, but not in order to examine the circumstances of the night-time attack. Dr Trawicki was also interrogated. He confirmed that the injuries of the priest had been marginal and not particularly serious.¹⁷

After the interrogation had finished, the prosecutor Jan Midas prepared a report from the investigation, in which he charged the inhabitants of Konarzyny with displaying an active resistance to the state authority as they had known about the planned arrest of the priest. The prosecutor of Gdańsk applied a pre-trial detention of three female suspects and he also ordered the arrest of another two people. They were accused of helping the priest and inciting the crowd. We do not know what happened to them later. The prosecutor's investigation ended after sentencing Rev. Feliks Oźga, so it was not possible to sentence other suspects during the same court trial. The prosecutor also accused the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno of provocative conduct towards the state authorities since it had sent the letters including false information about the priest's being beaten and killed. The prosecutor Jan Midas did not qualify the incident in Konarzyny as a criminal offence, but as lawful conduct by the officers of the Security Bureau. According to the prosecutor, the priest intentionally inflicted injuries upon himself; the injuries were not serious or life-threatening. The priest also rearranged the rectory – after the officers of the Security Bureau had left – to look as if a fight had taken place. According to the prosecutor, the church committee was biased and subjective in that they conducted the investigation only to prove the thesis of the priest's death. Jan Midas did not regard

¹⁷ Ibid., fol. 57–86, Protokoły przesłuchań świadków; fol. 94–98, Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Gdańsku do Departamentu V Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, Gdańsk, 26 Jun. 1952.

the testimonies of the members of the church committee as credible. He also found the Church's activities provocative. In his report, the Gdańsk prosecutor suggested that Rev. Stefan Trzciński, the legal advisor Adam Lewicki and Rev. Ernest Jesionowski be held liable for the distribution of false information about the priest's death. All the dealings of Jan Midas were approved of by the Provincial Bureau of Public Security in Gdańsk, which confirmed the findings of the prosecutor. Although the authorities decided not to bring the case against the members of the church committee, in 1953 Rev. Stefan Trzciński was forced to resign from the office of the chancellor of the Bishop's Curia.¹⁸

YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT

Having been sentenced by the court, Rev. Feliks Ożga was imprisoned in Gdańsk, Sztum, Potulice, Koronowo and Wronki. The Bishop's Curia of Chełmno sent money and the basic necessities to the priest. Clergymen and representatives of the Chełmno diocese very often paid him a visit. The Church continued to make efforts for his earlier release from prison. The authorities of the prison limited the possibility to send letters – the priest could send only one letter a month. Originally, Rev. Feliks Ożga tolerated the severe conditions of the jail well, but he was anxious at the thought of many years in prison. In May 1954, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno sent another letter to the minister Stanisław Radkiewicz asking to release the priest from the sentence of imprisonment owing to his health problems. The Ministry of Public Security replied that they thought it improper to consider the petition as the issues connected with pardon were left to the Council of the State of the Republic of Poland, but only after the prisoner has served half of a term of imprisonment. In January 1955 the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno again requested the head of the Bureau for Home Affairs Jan Izydorczyk that the prison sentence of Rev. Feliks Ożga be shortened. The response was not positive. The Supreme Court did not find any legal grounds for bringing an extraordinary appeal in the case of the priest of the Chełmno diocese. Subsequent letters to the highest state authorities by the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno to lower the sentence of imprisonment bore no fruit. Despite the harsh conditions in the jail, Rev. Feliks Ożga gave religious service to his fellow prisoners. The priest also took measures to be released from prison earlier. He sent his request to the General Prosecutor's Office,

¹⁸ Ibid., fol. 89–91, Sprawozdanie z czynności śledczych dokonanych przez prokuratora Miasta i Powiatu Gdańskiego w sprawie zajęć w Konarzynach w dniu 29 V 1952 r.; fol. 91–94, Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Gdańsku do Departamentu V Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, Gdańsk, 26 VI 1952; Arkadiusz CZWOŁEK, *Ksiądz Stefan Trzciński – „wróg Polski Ludowej”*. *Sprawa odwołania kanclerza kurii chełmińskiej w 1953 r.*, [in:] *Czas Próby. Kościół katolicki w okresie PRL*, ed. Wojciech POLAK, Arkadiusz CZWOŁEK, Sylwia GALIJ-SKARBIŃSKA, Toruń 2017, pp. 114–177.

which then transferred it to the Provincial prosecutor in Gdańsk. The clergyman also made an effort to be assigned a new defence attorney. It was not until mid-1955 that a positive sign emerged when the Bureau for Home Affairs put forward a motion to release the priest from prison earlier after half the sentence had elapsed. The Provincial Prosecutor's Office in Gdańsk again dealt with the case of the priest. On the strength of the amnesty, Rev. Feliks Oźga, in a very poor health, left the jail at the beginning of May 1955 and temporarily stayed at the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows in Poznań. The gehenna of this illustrious clergyman of the Chełmno diocese was over. Yet, for subsequent years the apparatus of the Security Bureau observed him closely.¹⁹

THE LAST YEARS OF HIS SERVICE AS A PRIEST

The first months after leaving the jail Rev. Feliks Oźga spent on the recovery of his health. The unfavourable prison conditions had seriously affected the priest. Health problems accompanied him till the end of his life. However, he did not give up his service as a priest. He still wanted to care for young people. At the end of August 1955, he returned to his family village – Sypniewo. Originally, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno offered him a position as chaplain in the convent of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Mgoszcz. Earlier attempts to appoint him as the administrator of the parish of Dąbrówka in the county of Starogard were unsuccessful since the Department of Denominational Affairs of the Presidium of the Provincial National Council [*Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej*, PWRN] in Gdańsk did not agree to this nomination. The authorities blocked any further attempts of the diocese authorities to give the clergyman the responsibility of administering a parish – e.g. in Cieleta. Rev. Feliks Oźga gave up the position of parish rector in Czersk owing to his ill health.²⁰

¹⁹ ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Wojskowy Sąd Rejonowy w Gdańsku do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Gdańsk, 27 Dec. 1952 r.; [no page], Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do ministra J. Izydorczyka, Pelplin, 10 I 1955; [no page], Sekretariat Prezydyjny Sądu Najwyższego do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Warszawa, 10 XI 1955; [no page], Biskup chełmiński K. J. Kowalski do Naczelnego Prokuratora Wojskowego, Pelplin, 10 VI 1955; [no page], Prokuratura Generalna do ks. F. Oźgi, Warszawa, 27 VII 1955; [no page], Ks. F. Oźga do biskupa chełmińskiego K. J. Kowalskiego, Poznań, 7 V 1956; ADP, KBC, ref. 24, fol. 235, Biskup chełmiński K. J. Kowalski do biskupa Z. Choromańskiego, Pelplin, 23 II 1952; AAN, UdSW, ref. 44/1464, fol. 69–70, Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do ministra bezpieczeństwa publicznego S. Radkiewicza, Pelplin, 5 V 1954; fol. 71, Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Warszawa, 27 VII 1964; IPN Gd, ref. 667/7, fol. 65, Repertorium ogólne spraw Wojskowego Sądu Rejonowego w Gdańsku.

²⁰ ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Biskup chełmiński K. J. Kowalski do ks. F. Oźgi, Pelplin, 18 XII 1956; [no page], Ks. F. Oźga do biskupa chełmińskiego K. J. Kowalskiego, Bydgoszcz, 20 II 1957; ADP, KBC, ref. 45, fol. 166, Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Gdańsku, Pelplin, 16 V 1956; fol. 192, Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Naro-

At the beginning of 1957 Rev. Feliks Ożga made an attempt to serve as a priest in the convent of the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration in Kłodzko. After the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno and the Archbishop's Curia in Wrocław [*Kuria Arcybiskupia we Wrocławiu*, KAW] had consented, he began to work as a chaplain in Kłodzko. He wished to stay there permanently, but the state authorities thwarted these plans. In August 1958, the newspaper "Głos Ziemi Kłodzkiej" published an article which defamed the priest accusing him of denying the successes of the People's Poland [*Polska Ludowa*] and attempting to divide Polish society. The reason for such a harsh propaganda attack on Rev. Feliks Ożga were his letters distributed among young people in Kłodzko and Międzylesie. His letters promoted the principles of morality and Catholic teachings. Soldiers doing their basic military service also received his letters. The clergyman wrote standardized letters, which he retyped in many copies and sent to possible addressees awaiting their reply. It was not until much later that he wrote individual and very personal correspondence. For this reason the press charged him with running a "paper conspiracy". A similar article was published in "Żołnierz Wolności", where the dejection of Rev. Feliks Ożga was described after he had been forbidden to meet young soldiers. The article also included complaints of anonymous conscripts who complained about the priest's imposing behaviour. According to them, the priest accosted them in the street, asked for their addresses and talked them into attending holy mass. The author of the propaganda text accused the clergyman of unleashing religious conflicts at home. In fact, the Security Bureau stood behind the press attacks on the priest. The communist bodies observed the priest's conduct after he had been released from prison. After the press publications, the Archbishop's Curia in Wrocław's problems with the local authorities also started. The Department for Denominational Affairs of the PWRN in Wrocław demanded that Rev. Feliks Ożga be removed from the position he held and be given a new function within the Church that would not allow him to continue this kind of activity. The authorities of the archdiocese of Wrocław asked the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno to dismiss the priest from their area until 10 November 1958. For Rev. Feliks Ożga a difficult time once again commenced as the church authorities were forced to look for another parish for him. Originally, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno intended to appoint a chaplain in the old people's house near Pruszków, or in the convent of the Congregation of the Mission founded by St. Vincent de Paul in Gdynia. After leaving Kłodzko, Rev. Feliks Ożga stayed for some time in the territory of the Warsaw archdiocese, where he played

dowej w Gdańsku do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Gdańsk, 28 V 1952; fol. 62, Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Bydgoszczy, Pelplin, 30 VI 1956.

the role of a chaplain in the educational childcare centre in Fiszor run by the Congregation of the Benedictine Sisters. At the beginning of 1959, the church authorities of the Warsaw archdiocese did not agree to prolong the stay of the priest in Fiszor. It was after many requests made by the Benedictine Sisters that the church authorities changed their decision, but on the condition that the priest stopped the distribution of letters. At the end of 1959 the clergyman returned to the Chełmno diocese and took the position of a penitentiary in the parish church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Gdynia. The rector of the parish was the priest Hilary Jastak,²¹ well known from his anti-communist opinions.

Rev. Feliks Ożga did not desist from sending letters to young people. He sent many of them to young soldiers, who were particularly threatened by the influence of a materialistic ideology. He continued his mission in the parish church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Gdynia. In one of his letters, Rev. Feliks Ożga wrote “my soul yearns for great and violent work. I would like to convert the whole world. The thought that somebody depraves the youth disturbs me [...]. I am not afraid of either prison or death”. His struggle for the Catholic education of the young generation contradicted the atheist policy of the state. That is why one might have expected a quick and decisive reaction from the authorities. At the end of October 1960, the Provincial Prosecutor’s Office in Gdańsk launched an investigation concerning the letters sent by the priest. In the priest’s correspondence the prosecutor tried to spot any content that would be hostile to the state. The authorities had received information about the priest’s sermons in Gdynia churches, where he sharply criticized the law permitting abortion. His letters to former soldiers of the basic military service were interpreted as espionage as the soldiers had stayed in the border regions. The priest’s flat was searched, but no evidence of crime was found. During the interrogation, Rev. Feliks Ożga did not admit his guilt. Despite hearing over 100 witnesses and collecting a significant quantity of the priest’s correspondence, the evidence turned out to be too weak to bring his case to court on the basis of art. 23 of the decree of 13 June 1946 about offences particularly dangerous in the period of the reconstruction of the State (the distri-

²¹ ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Press extracts from *Głos Ziemi Kłodzkiej* of 17–23 August 1958 along with *Żołnierz Wolności* of 24–25 August 1958; [no page], Kuria Arcybiskupia Wrocławska do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Wrocław, 17 Oct. 1958; [no page], Ks. F. Ożga do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Gdynia, 9 Oct. 1959; AAN, UdSW, ref. 56/171, fol. 2, Wydział do Spraw Wyznań Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej we Wrocławiu do Kurii Arcybiskupiej Wrocławskiej, Wrocław, 9 X 1958; fol. 4, Kuria Arcybiskupia Wrocławska do Wydziału do Spraw Wyznań Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej we Wrocławiu, Wrocław, 3 XI 1958.

bution of false information that could harm the interests of the Polish state). In December 1960, the Provincial Prosecutor's Office in Gdańsk decided to discontinue the investigation in the case of Rev. Feliks Ożga on the account of the lack of sufficient evidence. The Department of Denominational Affairs of the PWRN in Gdańsk notified the Bureau of Home Affairs (UdSW) in Warsaw of the decision. They also asked for guidelines on how to treat the priest now as he did not formally hold any position in the parish church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Gdynia so they could not remove him from there. As the investigation had been terminated, the Bureau of Home Affairs in Warsaw found no legal grounds to remove Rev. Ożga from Gdynia. It was suggested to the local authorities that they should check whether the priest could be removed on the basis of the regulation about the border zone. Probably the Gdańsk authorities did not use this device as Rev. Feliks Ożga remained in Gdynia. In the subsequent years his health deteriorated, which made it impossible to continue his service as a priest. In August 1962, the Bishop's Curia of Chełmno dismissed Rev. Feliks Ożga from the duties of the penitentiary in the parish in Gdynia and moved him to a retirement home in Zamarte. Retired, the priest frequently organized spiritual retreats. The authorities' interest in the priest waned. He died on 17 June 1973 in the maritime hospital in Gdynia-Redłowo.²²

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²² ADP, KBC, Ap, ref. 376, [no page], Ks. F. Ożga do biskupa chełmińskiego K. J. Kowalskiego, Fiszor, 26 XI 1958; [no page], Kuria Metropolitarna Warszawska do Kurii Biskupiej Chełmińskiej, Warszawa, 10 Jan. 1959 [no page], Kuria Biskupia Chełmińska do ks. F. Ożgi, Pelplin, 22 VIII 1962; Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, fonds 2382, no. 34, vol. 1–5, fol. 1–700, Akta Prokuratora Wojewódzkiego w Gdańsku w sprawie ks. F. Ożgi; AAN, UdSW, ref. 61/980, fol. 1, Wydział do Spraw Wyznań Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej do Urzędu do Spraw Wyznań w Warszawie, Gdańsk, 3 II 1961; fol. 2, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań w Warszawie do Wydziału do Spraw Wyznań Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Gdańsku, Warszawa, 8 IV 1961.

PRIEST FELIKS OŹGA AND HIS STRUGGLE
WITH THE COMMUNIST REPRESSIVE APPARATUS

Summary

Key words: the Catholic Church, the Chełmno diocese, martyrdom of clergymen, military regional courts, repressive apparatus

The article presents the repressions of the communist apparatus against the clergyman of the Chełmno diocese – priest Feliks Oźga. The problems of the priest started at the end of the 1940s, when in his sermons he criticized the political system of the time. In 1951 he was sentenced for the first time for his anti-Polish activity and imprisoned for 8 months. The real problems of the priest commenced when he started to cooperate with activists of the youth independence organization of the Home Army “Orlęta.” During the attempt to arrest the priest, officers of the Security Bureau beat him up and abducted him. The Curia of the Bishop of Chełmno set up a committee, the aim of which was to explain all the circumstances of the nightly events in Konarzyny. Eventually, the Military Regional Court in Gdańsk sentenced the priest Feliks Oźga for 8 years in prison for his anti-Polish activity. After he was released from jail, the priest did not give up his activity, which entailed further repressions.

PRIESTER FELIKS OŹGA UND SEIN KAMPF
GEGEN DEN KOMMUNISTISCHEN UNTERDRÜCKUNGSAPPARAT

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselwörter: Katholische Kirche, Bistum Kulm, Martyrium der katholischen Geistlichkeit, Militärische Bezirksgerichte, Unterdrückungsapparat

Der Artikel schildert die Repressalien des kommunistischen Unterdrückungsapparats gegen einen Geistlichen des Bistums Kulm, den Priester Feliks Oźga. Die Schwierigkeiten von Feliks Oźga mit den kommunistischen Behörden begannen am Ende der vierziger Jahre des 20. Jahrhunderts, als er in Predigten das damalige politische System kritisierte. 1951 wurde er zum ersten Mal wegen staatsfeindlicher Tätigkeit zu acht Monaten Gefängnis verurteilt. Die eigentlichen Schwierigkeiten des Geistlichen begannen, als er anfang mit Aktivisten der Jugendorganisation „Orlęta“ der Landesarmee zusammenzuarbeiten, die nach staatlicher Unabhängigkeit strebte. Bei dem Versuch einer nächtlichen Verhaftung im Jahr 1952 wurde Feliks Oźga von Angehörigen des Sicherheitsdienstes verprügelt und danach mit unbekanntem Ziel verschleppt. Die bischöfliche Kurie von Kulm berief eine kirchliche Kommission, der sie die Aufklärung aller Umstände der nächtlichen Ereignisse in Konarzyny (Groß Konarczyn) auftrag. Schließlich wurde Oźga vom Militärischen Bezirksgericht in Danzig wegen staatsfeindlicher Tätigkeit zu einer Strafe von acht Jahren Freiheitsentzug verurteilt. Nach seiner Entlassung gab er seine Tätigkeit nicht auf und war deshalb weiteren Repressalien ausgesetzt.

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