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THE BUILDING OF CHURCHES IN THE CZEŃSTOCHOWA DIOCESE  
IN THE PERIOD OF 1945-1989  
SUMMARY

In the period of 1945 to 1989 the Catholic Church in Poland was forced to face the hitherto unknown enemy in its entire history – a system of state rule based on communist ideology which believed in the “liberation” of masses from religion as a pre-condition for the building of a new social order. The Catholic Church was perceived by the communists as a political enemy for whom there was no place in the totalitarian state. The Church became a subject of adverse actions whose aim was to reduce its social role to a minimum and finally to total incapacitation. The authorities attempted to destroy its organizational structures, interfered in the Church’s personnel policy, victimized the defiant, hindered any development including the material one. The so-called “material bases” of the Church had been declared as one of the most important elements of the state religious policy, a field which had to be under constant strict surveillance therefore the building of new churches was the key problem in the relationship between the state and the Church in the period of the People’s Republic of Poland. The government and the ministries, the communist party, the secret police were much engaged in this policy. It had the following forms of destructive actions: hindering the development of parish networks, blocking the initiatives of erecting new churches, rationing the purchase of properties and building materials, introducing new bureaucratic procedures and finally heavy punishment and repressions.

The aim of the hereby dissertation is to present the answer to the question: how in the totalitarian communist conditions the Church of Częstochowa Diocese fulfilled its need to acquire more church buildings. It also presents what actions were undertaken by the Bishops, the clergy (the parish priests, administrators or vicars) as well as the believers in their attempt either legal or illegal to build a parish church and what problems they had to face. On the other hand the thesis presents the legal conditions which they had to face and what methods the state used to limit the construction of churches.

The Częstochowa Diocese has been chosen as the subject of studies. The Diocese was established in 1925 and its territory encompassed rural areas in the north, Częstochowa and its

environs and the highly industrialized Zagłębie Dąbrowskie (Dąbrowa Industrial Region) in the south. The organizational and pastoral achievements of the Diocese's first years of existence were badly destroyed as a result of the Second World War. So the post-war years should have been a period of reconstruction of the Diocese – its Curia, its parishes, churches and chapels, however, the attitude of the state was negative to this policy. The subsequent years were marked by numerous conflicts and constant tension between the Diocese and the authorities. In many respects it was a typical situation characteristic for the Catholic Church in Poland.

Independently of the political condition of the post-war Poland many dynamic social and cultural changes were taking place. Poland was undergoing industrialization, urbanization and demographic development. The Częstochowa Diocese was also following these processes. The sudden and uncontrolled industrial development took place not only in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie but also in Częstochowa itself and since the sixties in the newly created Bełchatów Industrial Region. In the period of 1946 to 1970 the population of Poland grew by 38.1%. The population growth in the Katowice Province, territorially encompassing much of Częstochowa Diocese was 57.7%. To give one more example, the population increase of Czeladź in the Dąbrowa Industrial Region was 99.3%.

The post-war history of the Częstochowa Diocese can be treated as an exemplary study of the functioning of the Catholic Church under the communist system both in rural and highly urban areas which were under special interest of the state authorities.

In the period of 1945 to 1956 twenty five churches were built or rebuilt in the Częstochowa Diocese. In 1957 the state authorities imposed on the Catholic Church new laws which seriously limited the initiative of parish priest and the followers which aimed at the construction of new churches and chapels. The new regulations aimed at subordinating the Church hierarchy to state authorities. According to the rules specified in Circular Number 3 of the *Urząd do Spraw Wyznań* (the Office for Religious Matters) of March 27<sup>th</sup> 1957 concerning the construction of sacral buildings and churches and providing these with building material, only the diocesan curia had the right to hand in their needs in this respect and were supposed to do it in yearly plans of sacral buildings for a given year. Next the plans were to be negotiated between the Curia and the Province authorities. Only after such negotiations were the parish priests allowed to purchase the land, hand in the request for

construction permit and purchase the building materials. Getting over these bureaucratic procedures usually took many years and engaged the bishop and his office considerably.

In the period of 1957 to 1970 Częstochowa Diocese Curia submitted plans for the building of four to twenty one sacral buildings every year. In the majority of cases the plans concerned the constructions of churches in big towns and in the sprawling new quarters of Częstochowa, Sosnowiec, Będzin, Zawiercie, Radomsko and Myszków. During these fourteen years the Czestochowa Diocese was able to increase its number of churches by two small ones in Żeliszawicach i Ciężkowicach.

The number of permits for the construction of new churches in the period of 1971 to 1981 is higher. In spite of the Circular Number 3 being in force the Church Authorities of the Częstochowa Diocese managed to break the resistance of the state authorities and gained the permission to build twenty two churches and eleven chapels. It is important to mention here that these permits applied to the biggest towns of the Diocese that is Częstochowa, Zawiercie and Będzin.

This situation was the result of new policy of the Bishop S. Bareła and Diocese Curia which broke away from "humble requests" presented to the authorities and called upon the believers to take the matters in their own hands by informing the public of the difficulties and obstacles created by the authorities in order to receive permissions. The followers became actively engaged in putting pressure on the authorities. Their protest took the form of petitions sent to the state and communist party officials signed by a few dozen up to several thousand believers of a given region. When this action did not bring positive results delegations were formed to petition at state offices or party headquarters.

New laws were introduced at the end of 1981. They were directly connected with the "solidarity revolution" which had been sweeping Poland since August 1980. The new regulations markedly liberalized the way of gaining the legal rights for the construction of the new churches. It became possible to hand in the plans for the building of sacral buildings and churches by the Curia, by convents as well as parishes and rectorates as long as they intended to build buildings up to 600 square meters. In the period of 1982 to 1985 the Province authorities gave a consent to build, in the Częstochowa Diocese, twenty four churches exceeding 600 square meters and in the period of 1986 to 1990 further eight concessions. Also local parishes were granted the rights to build smaller buildings as well. As a result, in

1986 there were sixty churches and thirty nine chapels under construction in the Częstochowa Diocese.

Apart from the obstructions in granting new permits for the construction of churches the authorities were blocking the setting up of parishes and fought against the attempts to set up initiatives by the believers and the activities of priests in that matter. The authorities were trying to prevent priests from finding a permanent abode in a village or town, they torpedoed the attempts to buy a property which could in the future be the source of church activity, they also blocked the creation of a modest material bases for new parishes or field vicariates. Even after issuing a consent the authorities would accumulate problems with issuing the decision of locating buildings by not accepting the conceptual and technical plans. At the early stages of the construction the priests had to struggle against the difficulties in purchasing building materials and to sign contracts with special state construction enterprises.

It was a phenomenon of the People's Republic of Poland to build churches illegally, without the authority's consent. This situation reached its peak at the beginning of the 70s that is after a dozen or so years of continuous neglect of the needs of the believers by the state authorities. In the Częstochowa Diocese the above described situation existed from 1959 to 1989. The authorities regarded the following churches as illegally constructed, for example Matki Boskiej Zwycięskiej in Częstochowa, Podwyższenia Krzyża Świętego in Sosnowiec Śródula, Świętego Jacka in Sosnowiec Dańdówka and in Rogoźnik and Sygondka.

Two examples of illegal church construction in this Diocese are of special interest. The first one being in Brudzowice where the authorities, with the help of militia (MO), secret service(SB) and militarized unit of militia ZOMO) "invaded" the premises and pulled down a barrack which was to be used as a church. All this was done in the presence of local inhabitants. In turn the church in Rększowice is an example of carefully planned and constantly pursued undertaking of erecting a church by a parish priest who was fully aware of his lawless activities which led to dire consequences not only for the initiators but also for state officials unaware of the situation.

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