

# IV. DIALOGI EKUMENICZNE I PROCESY INTEGRACYJNE

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## **THE LEADING ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE ECUMENICAL PROCESS OF POLISH-GERMAN/ RUSSIAN/UKRAINIAN RECONCILIATION**

The experience of genocides of the II World War deeply traumatized Polish society. This trauma caused long lasting tensions and untruthfulness between Poles on one side and Germans, Russians and Ukrainians on the other side. Common memory of the Polish society safeguarded the harms done even in past generations. While the civil societies and state authorities turned to be unable to fruitfully launch the process of reconciliation, the religious communities and their leaders step forward with the initiatives starting the process of reconciliation from the spiritual side and thus opened the path to success. The first example is the letter of Polish Catholic episcopate to German bishops<sup>1</sup> in 1965 which launched the Polish-German healing of memories process. The second and third examples are respectively the common message of Polish Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church to the nations of Poland and Russia<sup>2</sup> in 2012 and the

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<sup>1</sup> *Orędzie Biskupów Polskich do ich Niemieckich Braci w Chrystusowym urzędzie pasterskim*, <http://www.cdim.pl/en/edukacja/zasoby-edukacyjne/teksty/52-oficjalne-teksty-kocioa-katolickiego/49-1965-11-18-ordzie-biskupow-polskich-do-niemieckich> (21.12.2013).

<sup>2</sup> *Wspólne Przesłanie do Narodów Polski i Rosji, Przewodniczącego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, Arcybiskupa Józefa Michalika, Metropolity Przemyskiego i Zwierzchnika Rosyjskiego Kościoła Prawosławnego Patriarchy Moskiewskiego i Calej Rusi Cyryla, podpisane 17 sierpnia 2012 r. w Warszawie*, <http://ekai.pl/biblioteka/dokumenty/x1430/wspolne-przeslanie-do-narodow-polski-i-rosji/> (21.12.2013).

common message of Polish Roman Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to the nations of Poland and Ukraine<sup>3</sup> in 2013.

## 1. Polish-German reconciliation

The need of reconciliation between the Polish and German nations after the Second World War seems obvious enough, so one can go immediately to the heart of the matter. The first encounter between the heads of Catholic episcopates of Poland and Germany: Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and Cardinal Julius Döpfner took place in 1957, on the initiative of the latter. It was only 12 years from the end of the Second World War and the relations between two episcopates, likewise between the clergy and laity, were deeply cold. Enough to remind, that Polish clergy shared the genocide of Poles performed by Nazi-Germans during the war.

In 1965 the Evangelic Church in Germany issued the “Tübingen Memorandum”<sup>4</sup>, appealing to the German authorities to acknowledge the new frontier on Oder and Neisse, as German Federal Republic still recognised in those days the border from 1937. Many German Roman Catholic bishops also inclined to the concept of their Evangelic brothers. This situation prepared the atmosphere for future reconciliation. The next step was however done by the Polish Roman Catholic episcopate. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November Polish bishops issued an address to their German brothers. The text of this letter has been prepared by three eminent Polish bishops: archbishop Boleslaw Kominek from Wrocław (Breslaw)<sup>5</sup>, Karol Wojtyła, archbishop of Krakow and future pope, and Jerzy Stroba, then auxiliary bishop of Gorzów Wielkopolski. The context for this address was the forthcoming celebration of the millennium of Christianity in Poland in 1966.

Major part of the address was consecrated to the description of difficult events in the common history of neighbouring nations. We have then in the text of Polish bishop’s elaborate the explanation of Polish attitude to such realities as middle-age German colonisation and settlement, which included many religious

<sup>3</sup> *Declaration of the Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the Kiev-Halicz Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Archbishop Metropolitan of Przemyśl of the Latins Józef Michalik, the President of Polish Bishops Conference, Archbishop Metropolitan of Lviv of the Latins Mieczysław Mokrzycki, the President of Roman-Catholic Ukrainian Bishops Conference Archbishop Metropolitan of Przemyśl-Warsaw of the Byzantine-Ukrainian Church Jan Martyniak*, <http://jmichalik.episkopat.pl/dokumenty/5240.1,DEKLARACJA.html> (21.12.2013).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. STRÜBIND, *The Tübingen Memorandum. Political Responsibility of Non-Politicians*, in: „Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte KZG/CCH“ 24 (2011), 327–334.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. W. KUCHARSKI, G. STRAUCHOLD, *Wokół Orędzia: kardynał Bolesław Kominek, prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, Wrocław 2009.

orders and saints, the Teutonic Order on Polish lands, the Prussian state and the role of its representatives in the partition of Poland from the end of XVII to the beginning of XX century and finally the German invasion and occupation of Poland during the Second World War as an act of planned, total extermination. Recalling the memory of past events aimed to explain the complexity of situation in which the Poles understandingly feel mistrust towards their German neighbours. In the address there has also been introduced the reference to the new Polish-German border on Oder and Neisse, as a bitter for Germans fruit of last war and massive murders and destruction of our country and the sufferings of its population. But there has also been introduced a reference to the sufferings of those Germans, who were voluntary refugees and who were expelled from their homes in the consequence of resettlement decided by victorious powers in Potsdam conference.

The most important words are situated in the last part of the address, which has been issued in the frame of the Second Vatican Council coming to its end: "In this the most Christian and the very human spirit, we extend our hands to you, sitting here on the benches of concluding Council and we offer our forgiveness as well as we ask for it. And if you, German bishops and Council Fathers, fraternally take our extended hands, then we will be able to celebrate our millennium in the very Christian way"<sup>6</sup>.

The offer of forgiveness presented to the Germans by Polish Catholic Episcopate went far beyond what Polish communist authorities could in those times expect and accept. But the asking for forgiveness from the German part has been immediately classified by them as treason. Many Poles were also still restraint to the concept of reconciliation with the oppressor.

German Roman Catholic Episcopate answer came in the letter of 5<sup>th</sup> December 1965<sup>7</sup>. The contents of this letter could be and was deceiving for Polish counterpart. There was neither a mention of apologies from German side, nor acknowledging the new state border on Oder and Neisse. But even if this first reaction turned out to be very insufficient, we can state from the perspective of 47 years now, that the address of Polish bishops launched the process which could not be stopped. Three years later, in 1968, 180 theologians and prominent personalities a professors from so called "Bensberg Circle" ("Bensberger Kreis")<sup>8</sup>,

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<sup>6</sup> *Oreǳie Biskupów Polskich do ich Niemieckich Braci*, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> S. MEINGAST, *Der Briefwechsel der westdeutschen und polnischen Bischöfe 1965*, Norderstedt 2001, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. G. FEINDT, *Semantics of Reconciliation. Theological Backgrounds regarding the Reconciliation with Poland using the Example of the Correspondence between Polish and German Bishops and the Memorandum on Poland of the Bensberg Circle*, in: "Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte KZG/CCH" 24 (2011), 335–344.

representative for the environment of German Catholics, issued a manifesto in which pronounced themselves pro recognition of the Polish-German border on Oder and Neisse. One of the signatories of this manifesto was professor Joseph Ratzinger.

All what is described here took part on the ecclesial ground, but had a strong influence on civil society. Polish communist authorities strongly disapproved the gesture of Polish Episcopate accusing the bishops even of treason. But in fact they played double-game on the nation's feelings. The communists counted too much for the sentiment of revenge in the society and for the possible divorce between Polish public opinion and the voice of the Church. They however underestimated the power of religious message of Christian forgiveness.

A kind of breakthrough and a little apogee in the still on-going process of Polish-German reconciliation came with the encounter of German chancellor Helmut Kohl and Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989 in Krzyżowa (Kreisau)<sup>9</sup>. In the famous place known for German anti-Nazi resistance, where the so called "Kreisau Circle" was formed, both politicians participated in the Mass. In the moment of giving the sign of peace, they embraced fraternally, what was read as a sign of symbolic beginnings of new chapter of Polish-German relations<sup>10</sup>.

In the year 2005, the 21<sup>st</sup> of September, the common statement of Polish and German Catholic episcopates has been signed in Fulda, and signed anew in Wrocław the 24<sup>th</sup> of September. In the statement the bishops underlined how great meaning for the relations between Polish and German nations had the famous exchange of letters in 1965. "In the extremely difficult political conditions – write the Polish and German bishops together – by this sign of readiness to forgive, they laid a solid foundation for the work of Polish-German reconciliation"<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. Polish-Russian reconciliation

The history of harms experienced by Polish nation from its Russian neighbour date long before the Second World War. On the 12 June the Russians celebrate their

<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. FRANKE, *Kontakty polsko-niemieckie. Spojrzenie z Krzyżowej*, in: *Od wojny o granice do dobrego sąsiedztwa*, ed. M. CHOROŚ, M. EIDEN, B. LINK, M. LIS, Opole 2012, 156–163.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. SZURLEJ, J. MALECHA, *12.11.1989 – krótka historia Mszy Pojednania w Krzyżowej*, Krzyżowa 2009.

<sup>11</sup> *Wspólne oświadczenie Konferencji Episkopatów Polski i Niemiec z okazji 40. rocznicy wymiany listów między oboma episkopatami w roku 1965*, <http://info.wiara.pl/doc/186505.Tekst-wspolnego-oswiadczenia> (21.12.2013).

national feast in commemoration of the events from 1612, when the Polish garrison has been finally expelled from Kremlin, after ruling there for nearly three years. From that time on, in return, Polish territory has been successively invaded by Russia of the tsars, concluding with the partition of Poland from the end of XVIII to the beginning of XX century, when Poland for about 120 years lost its independence. Restored to life in 1918 the young Polish II Republic has been attacked in 1939 almost simultaneously by two powers: Germany from the west, and Soviet Union from the east. The new partition of Poland has been decided by two Allies: Hitler and Stalin and written in a secret protocol of the pact Ribbentrop-Molotov.

The Soviets in their treatment of Polish population were not less oppressive than the Nazis. Murdering in Katyń of dozens of thousands of Polish officers captured to the concentrations camps was only the top of an iceberg. Official version of communist propaganda sustained the myth of Red Army as liberators of Poland from German occupation. Half of a million of this Red Army however stayed in Poland for next 45 years after the war as the occupant and thus sustained the system of oppression experienced by Polish nation from Moscow-dependent Polish communist authorities.

The chance to launch the process of reconciliation came after the break down of the communism in Europe in the years 1989–1991 and – in this case – with the enthronement of a new Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow and the whole Russia, Kiryll I, in the beginning of 2009. Here once again, as in the case of Poland and Germany, the civil state was unable to start any process of healing. Only the religious communities, the majority Churches in both our countries, had the courage and moral power to pronounce themselves in the name of the believers, but also in the name of the nations.

17<sup>th</sup> August 2012, at the king's palace in Warsaw, the president of the Polish Episcopal Conference, metropolitan of Przemyśl archbishop Józef Michalik and the Patriarch of Moscow and the whole Russia, Kiryll I, signed the *Common message to the Nations of Poland and Russia*. They did it, according to the first words of the text: “in the sense of responsibility for the present time and the future of our Churches and our nations”<sup>12</sup>.

The declaration points at the many-centuries long neighbourhood and the Christian heritage of East and West. As the source of, primarily, the division of the Church, and secondly, the hostility among the nations, the two hierarchs enumerate sin, human's frailty, egoism and political influences. This culminated in the painful experiences of the last war and the atheism imposed upon our nations.

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<sup>12</sup> *The common message*, op. cit.

As the path to reconciliation the declaration points at the fraternal dialogue, which can help in better knowing one another and rebuilding the mutual trust. The reconciliation presumes the readiness to forgive the harms and injustice, as we – the Christians – pray in the “Our Father”: “And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

The forgiveness does not mean forsakenness, as the memory constitutes an integral part of our identity. “To forgive means to renounce to revenge and hatred, and to participate in the building of consent and fraternity between the people, our nations and countries, what gives a basis for peaceful future”<sup>13</sup>.

The declaration refers further to the political and social changes at the end of XX century which enabled the Churches to undertake anew their mission of evangelisation, and in consequence of shaping our societies according to the traditional Christian values. Acknowledging the autonomy of civil state and authorities the co-signers opted for the collaboration with them for the sake of family, education and other questions important for the societies.

The common statement of the heads of Polish Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church has been read in public in all parishes in Poland. In Russia the faithful could hear about it mainly from the media. We can hope that the hierarchs message will play the role of a little stone launching the avalanche. The subject has been deepened and the first fruits were gathered at the conference held in Warsaw from 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2013<sup>14</sup>. The first step is done, we await the results. Realistically speaking the reconciliation needs generation if not generations to come, but because of our neighbourhood we have to face this issue<sup>15</sup>.

### 3. Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation

The 28<sup>th</sup> June 2013 in Warsaw the Church leaders have signed the *Declaration of the Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the Kiev-Halicz Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Archbishop Metropolitan of Przemyśl of the Latins Józef Michalik, the President of Polish Bishops Conference, Archbishop Metropolitan of Lviv of the Latins Mieczysław Mokrzycki, the President*

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> The conference: *Przyszłość chrześcijaństwa w Europie. Rola Kościołów i narodów Polski i Rosji*, <http://www.pojednanie2013.pl/> (21.12.2013).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. KŁOCZOWSKI, *Debata polsko-rosyjska w kontekście dziejów chrześcijaństwa w Europie*, <http://ekai.pl/biblioteka/dokumenty/x1540/prof-jerzy-kloczowski-debata-polsko-rosyjska-w-kontekście-dziejow-chrzescijanstwa-w-europie/> (21.12.2013).

*of Roman-Catholic Ukrainian Bishops Conference Archbishop Metropolitan of Przemyśl-Warsaw of the Byzantine-Ukrainian Church Jan Martyniak.*

The need of reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians dates back to the time of the Second World War<sup>16</sup>. In June 1943 in the Wołyń region in nowadays Ukraine and then Poland, dozens of Polish civilians died from the hands of their Ukrainians neighbours. In this region Polish villages were scattered among the Ukrainian ones. After the June 1943 from 1145 Polish villages survived only 90. 1055 were totally exterminated by Ukrainian nationalists and around 50–60 thousand people were killed often in very barbarian way<sup>17</sup>. Those Ukrainians, who try to defend their Polish neighbours, shared their fate and were also killed. Officially Ukrainian state never acknowledged genocide in those events. For the Poles living on this territory the term “An Ukrainian” meant even worse than “A Nazi” for those living in the western part of occupied Poland. Still, the troops of Ukrainian nationalists often collaborated with the German army. To complete the picture we have to admit, that the troops of Polish Underground Army, very few as they were on this lands, tried to defend Polish villages and killed some thousands partisans of the Ukrainian nationalist troops<sup>18</sup>.

The occasion to issue the above mentioned declaration was the 70-tieth anniversary of the Wołyń massacre. The celebrations brought together the highest representatives of the Roman Catholic Church from Poland and Ukraine and of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland and Ukraine. The key figure there was the head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Major Archbishop and the Kiev-Halicz Metropolitan Sviatoslav Shevchuk.

In the declaration the hierarchs wrote: “We are aware that only truth can set us free (cf. Jn 8:32); that truth which does not embellish or leave anything out, which does not stay silent about anything, but which leads to forgiveness and remission of wrongdoings. As children of the one Father in heaven we direct a prayer to His mercy for forgiveness in the spirit of Our Lord’s Prayer: «Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us»”<sup>19</sup>.

The religious leaders did not hesitate also to issue the direct appeal to the neighbouring nations: “We want today to honour the ones who were innocently

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. T. PIOTROWSKI, *Polish-Ukrainian relations during World War II: ethnic cleansing in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia*, Toronto 1995.

<sup>17</sup> A. SHEKHOVSTOV, *By Cross and Sword: Clerical Fascism in Interwar Western Ukraine*, in: *Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe*, ed. M. FELDMAN, M. TURDA, T. GEORGESCU, New York 2013, 59.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. MOTYKA, *Tak było w Bieszczadach*, Warszawa 1999; IDEM, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do akcji „Wisła”. Konflikt polsko-ukraiński 1943–1947*, Kraków 2011. *Polacy i Ukraińcy pomiędzy dwoma systemami totalitarnymi 1942–1945*, vol. 1–2, ed. G. MOTYKA, J. SZAPOWAŁ, Warszawa – Kijów 2005.

<sup>19</sup> *Declaration*, op. cit.

murdered, but also to ask forgiveness of God for the crimes committed and once more appeal to all,

Ukrainians and Poles, living both in the Ukraine and in Poland, or anywhere else in the world, to bravely open their hearts and minds to mutual forgiveness and reconciliation”<sup>20</sup>.

The Metropolitans did not measure the weight of crimes committed to find and judge whose guilt is bigger, but instead pronounced open apologies: “(...) some sons and daughters of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church did wrong – alas, consciously and willingly – to their neighbours both from their own nation and from other nations.” As the head of the Greek-Catholic Church I want to repeat these words today and apologize to Brother Poles for the crimes committed in 1943.

In the name of truth we believe that the attitude of those Poles who did wrong to Ukrainians and replied to violence with violence requires a sincere apology and a request for forgiveness. As the President of Polish Bishops Conference I address a request for forgiveness to our Brothers Ukrainians”<sup>21</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

The thesis of this article was that when the civil societies and states show themselves unable to launch an efficient process of reconciliation between the nations, the religious communities and their leaders can offer an open invitation and prompting in right direction. It is because especially the Christianity contains in itself an inner power of forgiveness, made commandment by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In the last of quoted declarations the Church hierarchs wrote: “We also pray for God’s mercy for those who succumbed to the ideology of violence and hatred and also that the war, which came to an end in our lands a long time ago, will not live on in the hearts of the people. So, having in mind the current and future generations, we repeat in the name of our Churches that hatred and violence are always a degradation of man and nation, while forgiveness, brotherhood, sympathy, help and love become a lasting and dignified foundation of the culture of human co-existence”<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem.*



It would be naïve to expect that any declaration signed and announced will solve immediately all the long-lasting tensions between people. But we are entitled to believe that a clear taking of the position by religious leaders can start the process of awaking the conscience of individuals and even nations. The process of healing memories is long-lasting and difficult. However only religious communities have enough moral authority to be listened and followed by the faithful. Let all begin even in small circles of the most pious believers. And then penetrate the inmost being of the societies and nations.

### **Wiodąca rola wspólnot religijnych w ekumenicznym procesie pojednania polsko-niemieckiego, polsko-rosyjskiego i polsko-ukraińskiego**

#### Streszczenie

Doświadczenie II wojny światowej pozostawiło głęboką traumę w polskim społeczeństwie i przyczyniły się do powstania trwającej przez dziesięciolecia nieufności pomiędzy Polakami z jednej strony, z drugiej zaś Niemcami, Rosjanami i Ukraińcami. Zbiorowa pamięć polskiego społeczeństwa przechowała krzywdy wyrządzone nawet w poprzednich pokoleniach.

Teza prezentowana w artykule dotyczy wiodącej roli społeczności o charakterze wyznaniowym, religijnym, w procesie pojednania narodu polskiego z narodami niemieckim, rosyjskim i ukraińskim. Podczas gdy społeczności świeckie ani władze państwowe nie były w stanie uruchomić procesu zmierzającego do pojednania, przywódcy wspólnot religijnych dominujących w omawianych krajach podjęli inicjatywy zmierzające do zapoczątkowania procesu pojednawczego w jego wymiarze duchowym i tak otworzyli drogę do sukcesu. Pierwszym przykładem takiego działania jest *Oreǳcie Biskupów Polskich do ich Niemieckich Braci w Chrystusowym urzędzie pasterskim* z 1965 roku, które zapoczątkowało proces pojednania polsko-niemieckiego. Drugi i trzeci przykład to odpowiednio: *Wspólne Przesłanie do Narodów Polski i Rosji, Przewodniczącego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, Arcybiskupa Józefa Michalika, Metropolity Przemyskiego i Zwierzchnika Rosyjskiego Kościoła Prawosławnego Patriarchy Moskiewskiego i Catej Rusi Cyryla*, podpisane 17 sierpnia 2012 r. w Warszawie oraz *Deklaracja Arcybiskupa Większego Światosława Szewczuka, Metropolity Kijowsko-Halickiego Ukraińskiego Kościoła Grekokatolickiego, Arcybiskupa Józefa Michalika, Metropolity Przemyskiego obrządku łacińskiego, Przewodniczącego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, Arcybiskupa Mieczysława Mokrzyckiego, Metropolity Lwowskiego obrządku łacińskiego, Przewodniczącego Konferencji Episkopatu*

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