

MARIAN BRUDZISZ, C.SS.R.

REDEMPTORIST MINISTRY AMONG THE POLISH  
IN THE SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS OF  
LITHUANIA AND BYELORUSSIA,  
1939-1990\*

*Introduction; 1. – The foundation of the Redemptorists in Wilno-Pośpieszka as their base for the apostolate; 2. – The pastoral activities of the Redemptorist Polish community in Wilno-Pośpieszka; 2.1 The Pośpieszka Redemptorists in the early days of World War II; 2.2 In Wilno and the Wilno Region – under the first Soviet occupation; 2.3 Pośpieszka under the German occupation; 2.3.1 The Pastoral ministry of the Redemptorists continues; 2.3.2 Father Jan Dochniak's mission in Prozoroki, Byelorussia; 2.3.3 Help Given to the Jewish Population; 2.3.4 Defending the Polish nation: correspondence, clandestine courses, and the resistance movement; 2.3.5 Away with the Church and religious congregations; 2.3.6 Pośpieszka in the hands of Archbishop Mieczysław Rejns and «Ostland»; 2.3.7 The Redemptorists after their return to Pośpieszka in 1943; 2.3.8 Social Care; 3. – The Redemptorists' Apostolic Ministry during the dispersion of the community, 1942-1944; 3.1 Father Franciszek Świątek's ministry 1942-1944; 3.2 Father Ludwik Frąś, ministry 1942-1944; 3.3 Father Jan Dochniak, ministry 1942-1944; 3.4 Father Stanisław Grela, ministry 1942-1944; 4. – The second Soviet occupation and "repatriation"; 5. – Thirty years of Father Franciszek Świątek's continued apostolate among Poles under the Soviet Regime, 1946-1976; 5.1 Pastoral work in Pośpieszka and Wołokumpia, 1946-1951; 5.2 His «secret mission» to Novogródek; 5.3 Father Świątek in Braśław, Byelorussia, 1952-1959; 5.4 Father Świątek in Czarny Bór (Lithuania), and briefly in Poland, 1959-1964; 5.5 Father Świątek's last twelve years, 1964-1976; 6. – Apostolate of Father Jan Bartos, 1969-1990; Conclusion.*

*Introduction*

In 1918 Poland regained its independence and her borders were reestablished. At that time the Redemptorists of Poland could count monasteries in seven locations. These were: Mościska, Tuchów, Kraków, Warsaw, Kościan, and Toruń-Podgórze. Of these only Mościska was in the eastern region of the country, beyond the San and Vistula Rivers.

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However, Redemptorists of the Polish province did conduct missions and retreats in the region around Lwów (present-day Lviv, Ukraine), and Wilno (now called Vilnius, Lithuania), as well as in parts of today's nation of Belarus (formerly Byelorussia) where many Poles lived. There were also early attempts by the Polish Redemptorists to begin a house in Lviv, but these failed.

Finally, after 1934, they were able to establish another house in eastern Poland, namely, Zamość, and from there they were able to preach missions and provide other pastoral care in in Kościelec, Dąbrowa (near Grodno), and Porzecze (near Druskienniki). In 1935 we find that they provided retreats in Wilno, Lithuania, for both the men's and women's branches of the Association called *Marianum*.

In 1936 the records show that the Redemptorists were active in parish missions in Suwał, Krzywoszyn, Lachowice (near Brarnowicze), Stołpce, Rubieżewicze, and Derewna. The result of these missions and retreats in eastern Poland assured that the Redemptorist congregation grew in the favorable opinion of both the clergy and laity, especially in Wilno (today, the capital of Lithuania).<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about the history of Catholicism in the region which today lies in Lithuania and Belarus. However, almost nothing has been mentioned about the presence of the Polish Redemptorists in these territories.<sup>2</sup>

It was in 1937 that a Redemptorist residence in Wilno was completed, and a community established there. This became a reality partly because these missionaries, known formally as the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, had an overall plan of creating a network of houses in Poland. But the Wilno foundation was also due to the spirited response to their preaching ministry in eastern Poland as mentioned above.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Litterae Annales de Rebus Gestis Provinciae Polonicae Congregationis SS. Redemptoris 1927-1938*, Cracoviae [n.d.], 74-78.

<sup>2</sup> Some references to Redemptorist presence in these areas can be found in the doctoral dissertation of Father M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy w latach, 1939-1945* [*Polish Redemptorists in the years 1939-1945*], Kraków 2005, 32, 191-192, 195-196, 220, 222-223, 252, 256, 308-109, 321-322 404-411.

<sup>3</sup> The main sources for this article are: *Kronika klasztoru OO. Redemptorystów w Wilnie ... od 1937* [*The Chronicle of the Redemptorist monastery in*

1. – *The foundation of the Redemptorists in Wilno-Pośpieszka as their base for the apostolate*

The realization of the project began when Tadeusz Birecki<sup>4</sup> invited Father Franciszek Świątek (1889-1976)<sup>5</sup> to come to the

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*Wilno ... from 1937*]; and F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Pamiętnik misjonarski* [A Missionary Diary] found in Archives CSSR, Warsaw Province, (These Tuchów CSSR Archives will hereinafter be cited: AWPR-Tu). Other sources are: *Korespondencja o. Franciszka Świątka do 1976 lub dotyczą jego osoby, 1954-1991* [Correspondence of Franciszek Świątek, until 1976, or the correspondence about him, 1954-1991], found in Archives CSSR, Warsaw Section, *Personalia* No. 44/Ch Franciszek Świątek; also, *Zeznania świadkó życia o. Franciszka* [Testimony of Witnesses of Father Franciszek's Life]. [Note that these testimonies, gathered after 1991, are now in Tuchów, in care of vice-postulator]; also, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki Lasztoru i Kościoła pod wezwaniem Matki Boskiej Zwycięskiej czyli Rożańcowej w Wilnie na Pośpieszce od roku 1946 do 1963* [Continuation of the Chronicle of the Monastery and Church of Our Lady of Victory (Rosary) in Wilno-Pośpieszka from 1946-1963]. Note: it is believed that Father Świątek wrote these chronicle entries in Poland in 1963-1964, a copy of which was available to the author.

<sup>4</sup> Tadeus Birecki, b. Pantalowice, 1894; besides urging the cult of Polish saints, was editor of a periodical encouraging Marian devotion, began a congregation of women religious, and another of men, was the inspiration behind two well-known paintings of Mary which were often carried by prisoners in USSR and by Polish soldiers.

<sup>5</sup> Świątek Franciszek, b. in Mędrzechów, the Diocese of Tarnów, on 16 May 1889; he began novitiate on 1 August 1908; went to the theological seminaries in Makszymówka and Mautern (Austria); he received the Holy Orders on 25 July 1915. From 1916 he worked in a minor Redemptorist seminary; from 1924 he worked as a missionary. At the same time he was interested in the Polish hagiography and published two volumes of *Świętość Kościoła w Polsce w okresie rozbiorowym i porozbiorowym* [The Sanctity of the Church in Poland During the Period of the Partitions and in the Post-Partition Period], Kielce – Miejsce Piastowe. His missionary activities in the eastern Polish lands caused him to become interested in founding a Redemptorist monastery in the Wilno Region. The Polish Province realised this plan in 1937. He spent the rest of his life in the Region of Wilno and Byelorussia, becoming a great missionary in the Polish eastern lands during the partitions. See M. BRUDZISZ, *Świątek Franciszek (1889-1976). Słownik polskich teologów katolickich* (SPTK) [entry in the Dictionary of Polish Catholic Theologians], vol. 7, Warszawa 1983, 287-289; ID., *Piśmiennictwo historyczne redemptorystów polskich do 1939* [The Historic Writing of the Polish Redemptorists till 1939], in: *Kościół w Polsce. Dzieje i kultura* [The Church in Poland. History and Culture], vol. VI, Lublin 2007; B. AUGUSTYN, *O. Franciszek Świątek, misjonarz na wózku inwalidzkim* [Fr Franciszek Świątek, a missionary in the wheelchair], in: "Rodzina Odkupiciela", no. 4 (1991)

region of Wilno. Świątek became the leading missionary, preaching effectively to laity and priests, with his special emphasis on the cult of Polish saints. In September of 1935 both Birecki and Świątek visited Wilno's Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski (1876-1955) to explain their current preaching program. They also proposed that the Redemptorists have a house within Jałbrzykowski's archdiocese. The idea was that from this residence they could minister to the poor suburbs and distant villages of the archdiocese, and, in fact, they could reach out to all of the lands generally north and east of Poland, where so many of Polish descent and language resided.

The archbishop offered them the location of Krasne, near Mołodeczno, on the Russian border. The Redemptorist who was then the Polish provincial superior, Franciszek Marcinek (1875-1955), came to investigate the Krasne offer but he rejected it because most of the inhabitants were Russian Orthodox Catholics. Then followed a second suggestion of the archbishop. This was near Wilno, in a location called Pośpieszka. The area was poor, and some Catholics had to walk as much as eight kilometers for Mass. Also, a wealthy widow in the vicinity named Aleksandrowiczowa was reported to have offered the archdiocese a two-hectare plot for a church.

Later the Redemptorists found that the lady was offering only one-half hectare, and, besides, some Redemptorists opposed the Pośpieszka foundation. Those most in favor of it were Father Świątek, the provincial Marcinek, and Archbishop Jałbrzykowski of Wilno.<sup>6</sup> With no decision forthcoming, Świątek continued his preaching ministry in the area and did not give up on the idea of the proposed foundation. The biggest problem, he came to realize, was money. The Redemptorist Polish province was in debt, especially since a large preparatory seminary had been built in Toruń.

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15-17; J. BARTOS, *Misjonarz Wileńszczyzny, o. Franciszek Świątek CSsR* [*The missionary of the Wilno Region, Fr Franciszek Świątek, CSsR*], in: *ibid.*, 43/1 (2005) 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Archbishop Jałbrzykowski told the provincial Marcinek, «Please tell Father General that if he wants a war with the archbishop of Wilno he will have it if he does not give me the Redemptorists».

Nevertheless, by 1936, by way of vigorous fundraising among the laity<sup>7</sup> and by his multiple preaching efforts, Father Świątek moved closer to achieving his goal of seeing the Redemptorists in Pośpieszka. On April 2 of that year bricks were already being delivered to the site for the new Redemptorist building.<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Jałbrzykowski was very involved in the project. On 8 August, 1936, he wrote a letter to Świątek giving consent for a Redemptorist community to be founded in Pośpieszka, and even agreeing to allow a founding group to live temporarily at St. Bartholomew Church in nearby Zarzeczce. The prelate went so far on 15 August, 1936, as to bless the cornerstone of the new house along with its public chapel of Our Lady of Victory. Apparently he did this although the legal consent of neither the Holy See nor of the Redemptorist General Government had yet been obtained.<sup>9</sup>

The provincial, Father Franciszek, proceeded prudently. He sent two fathers to evaluate things in Wilno-Pośpieszka; they reported back with favorable comments. Eventually official approbation by the Polish province took place on 14 December, 1936. This was followed by a December 24 report to the Redemptorist Superior General, Father Patrick Murray, outlining the major details of the project and requesting Roman approval. Of interest among the details mentioned were that the Wilno archbishop donated a «considerable sum of money» for this foundation, actual construction was to begin in early-to-mid 1937, and there would be no parish ministry involved. Already by 22

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<sup>7</sup> Included in this fundraising in early 1936, Świątek organized the «Committee for the Construction of the Redemptorist Church and Monastery» in Pośpieszka. Signing the first book of minutes of this Committee were the «Governor» of Pośpieszka, and also a diocesan priest whose cause for sainthood has advanced to where he is now declared, since 2008, Blessed Michał Sopoćko (1888-1975).

<sup>8</sup> See *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 5-11; also, *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 174-177; *ibid.*, Acts of the Wilno monastery, 2 April 1939.

<sup>9</sup> The name of the Church, Our Lady of Victory, was to commemorate Poland's victory over the Bolshevik army in 1920. See *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 11-16. Also, AGR, Provincia Polacca, *Localia*, No. 9, which has a plan of the property and the wording of the cornerstone blessing. For more on this topic, see M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 32, and 408, esp. FN 74.

January, 1937, Father Murray gave his approval, and a few weeks later appointed Father Franciszek Świątek as the first community superior of Wilno-Pośpieszka.<sup>10</sup>

In the first week of February Świątek arrived and assumed temporary ownership of St. Bartholomew Church in Zarzecze. He took up rented quarters in a house next to the church. Assigned to help him oversee the construction of the Redemptorist residence were two professed Brothers, Emanuel (Wawrzyniec/Lawrence) Szczepaniak<sup>11</sup> and Jan Filipek.<sup>12</sup> In February two more priests, Ryszard Vetter<sup>13</sup> and Aleksander Piotrowski<sup>14</sup> were assigned to the community, both of whom proved to be very effective missionaries. These two men were sometimes assisted by the Rector Świątek as they conducted a number of parish missions and retreats in the Wilno area.<sup>15</sup>

There was strong public support for this Redemptorist foundation. This support came from a group called «The Construction Committee», and also from the civil authorities of the district, the local university, and Polish people living in the area. Furthermore, it was known that a prominent architect, Jan Borowski, had been engaged to design the church and residence for

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<sup>10</sup> AGR, Polish Province, *Provincialia*, Number 10, Francizek Marcinek Letters, 69, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Brother Emanuel (Wawrzyniec/Lawrence) Szczepaniak, b. 24 Dec., 1903; prof. 2 Aug., 1930. Was a member of the Polish Corps formed in Russia 1917 by General Józef Dowbór-Muśnicki. Left Redemptorists after 1945.

<sup>12</sup> Brother Jan Filipek, b. 5 Jan., 1892; prof. 16 Oct., 1920; left Redemptorists Dec. 29, 1946.

<sup>13</sup> Ryszard Vetter, b. 25 Oct., 1907; prof. 28 Oct., 1923; ord. 15 Aug., 1931. He was eventually assigned to the mission in Argentina and after several years there left the Redemptorists.

<sup>14</sup> Aleksander Piotrowski, b. 23 Jan., 1882; 1903 entered Tarnów diocesan seminary, ord. as diocesan priest 29 Jun., 1907; came to Redemptorists in 1912, prof. 8 Sept., 1913; known for work as missionary and promoter of cult of Polish saints. See Marian BRUDZISZ, in: *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, Lublin 2008, vol. 12, col. 1081. This *Encyklopedia* hereinafter cited: *EK*.

<sup>15</sup> Known locations where they ministered were: Iwie, Przewalka, Ejszyszki, Smorgonie, and Raduń. Retreats for women religious included those for the Bernardine and Ursuline Sisters (among others). See *Litterae Annales pro rebus gestis Provinciae Polonicae Congregationis SS. Redemptoris* 4 (1927-1938) 106-108. This work is a log of daily activities and events in the Polish Province; hereinafter cited: *LAPol*.

the Redemptorist community. This resulted in many benefactors coming forward with sizeable donations.

The eagerness of the people to be supportive of this project can be seen from the fact that a temporary wooden chapel was put up so that the faithful could worship at the site even before the main church and residence were completed. Both daily and Sunday liturgies were celebrated in this wooden chapel beginning in June 1937.<sup>16</sup>

Even though parts of the residence were yet to be finished, in November 1938 four priests and four professed brothers began living there. The solemn dedication of the residence, along with its public chapel and chapel bell, did not come until 15 August, 1939. This date coincided with the 100th anniversary of the canonization of St. Alphonsus de Liguori, their founder. The Redemptorists decided to observe this jubilee with retreats for youth and a «*Great Mission*» from 13 until 27 August.<sup>17</sup>

It so happened that the solemn dedication in 1939 coincided with the looming specter of World War II. This danger on the horizon, no doubt, contributed to the extraordinarily large attendance at the liturgies and devotions surrounding the dedication. On 23 August, 1939, the mobilization of armed forces

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<sup>16</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 51. Other details of these early Redemptorist days in Pośpieszka can be found in two volumes of memoirs from a certain Wiktoria Karaś-Bohdziewicz which came into the possession of the author in the 1970s. – Another Redemptorist came to the community in June 1937: Władysławm Całka, b. 4 Nov., 1897; prof. 2 Aug., 1918; ord. 28 Jun., 1925; arrested and imprisoned briefly in 1942; d. 7 Dec., 1965.

<sup>17</sup> For this mission confreres from other houses were invited. These included Fathers Jan Dochniak, Marcin Nuckowski, and Ludwik Fraś. – Jan Dochniak, b. on 04 July, 1908; prof. 2 Aug., 1930; ord. 11 Aug., 1935, d. 19 Jan, 1992. He went into hiding 1942-1944 to avoid arrest by occupying armies, wrote a diary of this experience which, along with data on his life, all kept in the Polish province archives. – Marcin Nuckowski, b. 13 Sept., 1875; prof. 08 Sept., 1892; ord. 31 July, 1898, d. 04 Mar., 1945. Novitiate and seminary studies in Austria; took part in famous missions for Polish Catholics in Siberia. Suffered much in Soviet occupation of Wilno; – Ludwik Fraś. b. 16 Aug., 1901; prof. 02 Aug., 1919, then in medical army service; ord. 16 July, 1926; d. 12 Apr., 1953. Received doctorate in (military) history 1932; came to Wilno 1939; in hiding 1942-1944 fearing Gestapo arrest (see *Kronika lasztoru w Wilnie*, 274-289); Polish provincial 1948-1953. Promoted devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and wrote several valuable books.

was announced. For the next two days there was a large exodus of young people from the Wilno-Pośpieszka vicinity. Some who were in the Army Reserve did not have the chance for confession during the «*Great Mission*» which reportedly saw more than 2000 of the faithful approach the sacrament of reconciliation, while over 4000 received the Eucharist.

The mission concluded on 27 August with the hymn of praise *Te Deum*, but also with a moving rendition of *Boże coś Polskę* («God Save Poland»).

## 2. – *The pastoral activities of the Redemptorist Polish community in Wilno-Pośpieszka*

The Redemptorist house at Wilno-Pośpieszka remained the center from which the Redemptorists continued to serve the Polish people of Lithuania and Byelorussia during the next thirteen years, 1939-1952, with some interruptions when they were forced out of their residence. For with these years, of course, came fierce wartime hostilities and incredible political upheavals, in which the Redemptorists knew from up close the reality of harassment, deportations, imprisonments, atrocious torture, and executions.

In order to better comprehend the conditions under which the Redemptorists carried on their mission, we present here a sketch of the *major* political and ecclesiastical events through which they lived. One must remember, however, that political situations were almost constantly fluctuating.

In the confusion of wartime, the Redemptorist ministry had to be diversified according to these varying conditions. Much depended on who was occupying the areas generally designated as Lithuania and Byelorussia, and the policy of a given ruling power toward the Catholic Church and toward religious congregations of the Church.

- On 1 September, 1939, World War II broke out. Germany invaded the country of Poland which, after a few days, was claimed as «territory» belonging to other nations.

- On 19 September, 1939, Soviet forces arrived in the Wilno, Lithuania, area. This was in keeping with the late-August



1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop mutual Non-Agression Pact between Germany and Russia. Thus these two countries dealt each other «spheres of influence» in Polish and Baltic areas.

- On 10 October, 1939, the Archdiocese of Wilno (in which the Redemptorist residence in Pośpieszka was located) found itself in *two different political entities*—with eighty-six of its parishes in Lithuania, and 275 parishes in the new *Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic*.

- On 15 June, 1940, the region of Wilno, and all of Lithuania was dissolved by Russia, and was declared the *Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic*.

- On 22 June, 1941, Hitler's Germany invaded the Soviet union—in blatant violation by Hitler of the previous (Molotov-Ribbentrop) mutual Non-aggression Agreement mentioned above. This news roused «The Lithuanian Activist Front» to quick action. In Kaunas the «Front» took over public offices and the radio station. It set up a Provisional Government and harassed the retreating Soviet army. (But Lithuania was to keep this status for only thirteen months, until ...)

- On 17 July, 1941, the region of Wilno, and all of Lithuania was overrun by the German army and became the *Reichskommissariat (of) Ostland*.<sup>18</sup>

- During July and August 1944 the Soviet army again retook Lithuania and remained in control for the next forty-six years; in 1990 Lithuania and Byelorussia both declared independence as nations free of the power of communist domination.

## 2.1 – *The Pośpieszka Redemptorists in the early days of World War II*

Notwithstanding the news that war had begun on 1 September, 1939, two Redemptorists from Pośpieszka (Fathers Dochniak and Nuckowski) had conducted an eight-day parish

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<sup>18</sup> Reichskommissariat Ostland [*Ostland* literally meaning «Eastern Lands», i.e., east of Germany], was the civilian occupation regime established by Germany in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), the northeastern part of Poland and the western part of the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic during World War II.

retreat near Lida in Raduń, Byelorussia. But when they proceeded directly to Ławryszyki (not far from Wilno) to lead a Forty-Hours Eucharistic service, they chose to cancel the event and fled quickly back to the Redemptorist residence in Pośpieszka.<sup>19</sup>

By September 19, 1939, the Soviet military arrived in the Wilno area to occupy the area around Wilno as a «sphere of influence». This was when the local Lithuanians in Wilno rejoiced because they saw the Soviet occupation as an end to «*Polish occupation*». In Lithuanian eyes Wilno now «was returned to Lithuania». This joy was expressed in Lithuanian newspaper articles and in printed leaflets.<sup>20</sup>

But Father Franciszek Świątek wrote poignantly in the house chronicles:

Wilno now came into the hands of Kaunas, Lithuania. This small state tormented [the Polish] in Wilno and the Wilno region with the cruelty of tiger cubs whose mother has thrown a half-dead deer to eat. The designs of the Lithuanians in Wilno were aimed at a barbaric destruction of all that was Polish; this included looting of Polish properties, beating people in the streets, in churches, and in prisons, along with torture and even death sentences. The Lithuanians wanted instantly to turn the Polish into «Wilno Lithuanians».<sup>21</sup>

The Poles to whom the Redemptorists were ministering decided to take a small but symbolic action by preserving the newly blessed and dedicated chapel bell of the Redemptorists. They buried it in the ground (not to be resurrected until 1944). Perhaps the people sensed that these days in 1939 were only the beginning of much suffering for themselves and their priests.

Father Świątek also recorded that the nationalist sense of «Lithuania for Lithuanians» had become so strong by mid-June 1940 that all members of religious orders were scheduled to be

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<sup>19</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 375, an insert of Jan DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia o Wilnie [Memories of Wilno]*.

<sup>20</sup> Some of these printed items were saved and can be seen as inserts into the Wilno-Pośpieszka house chronicles, *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, section IV. See also, P. ŁOSOWKI, B. MODZELEWSKA, *Litwa-Kościół-katolicki*, B, in: *EK*, vol. 10, Lublin, 2004, cols. 1247-1251.

<sup>21</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 326-327.

transported to a detention camp near the city of Kaunas. But on June 14, 1940, the Soviets declared that nationalist Lithuania under President Antanas Smetona<sup>22</sup> was officially dissolved. By Soviet order Lithuania was now the *Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic*—a puppet state forced to live under communist rule. As President Smetona fled, so disappeared the dream of a «liberated Lithuania».<sup>23</sup> The recent joy of the nationalist-minded Lithuanians had been short-lived, lasting only some nine months.

During the time when Lithuania still formally considered itself independent in 1939, there was a bit of tolerance shown toward Poles. For instance on November 11, 1939, Poles were allowed to celebrate their Independence Day. But the Lithuanian government soon showed hostility toward Poland and the Polish spirit. It introduced Lithuanian as the mandatory language for teaching in schools. In all of Wilno it changed any Polish names on street signs, and all Polish inscriptions on other signboards. Furthermore, the Wilno university was declared «a Lithuanian institution». Laws were passed requiring a formal registration of the population, and accorded Lithuanian citizenship to only a small percentage of inhabitants. The rest were regarded as foreigners and refugees, deprived of all civil rights. Those so deprived were mainly Poles and Jews.

Oversight groups in the streets and churches of Wilno forbade singing of any Polish songs, and, in fact, left only one church to the Poles. Polish priests were removed from chaplaincies in schools, hospitals and the army. In the spring of 1940 the Apostolic See appointed Mieczysław Reinys<sup>24</sup> as an auxiliary bishop

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<sup>22</sup> Antanas Smetona was twice president of Lithuania, 1919-1920, and 1926-1940. He was a famous proponent of Lithuanian nationalism.

<sup>23</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 326-327. See also, B. CYWIŃSKI, *Ogniem próbowane* [*Hardened by Fire*], vol. 1 of *Korzenie tożsamości* [*The Roots of Identity*], Rome 1982, 78 and 103.

<sup>24</sup> Mieczysław Reinys (1884-1953), studied in Wilno, Petersburg and Louvain; ordained priest 1907; participated in the Lithuanian independence movement; a university professor after Wilno had been annexed to Lithuania. On 18 July, 1940, appointed auxiliary bishop in Wilno, and titular archbishop of Cypsela, with the right of succession in case of vacancy of the bishopric of Wilno. In 1947 he was arrested by the Soviets; died in prison 1953. P. NITECKI, *Biskupi Kościoła w Polsce w latach 965-1999. Słownik biograficzny* [*The Bishops*

in Wilno, but with the rank of archbishop. Reinys was thought at times to be antagonistic toward Poles.<sup>25</sup>

During this difficult period of Lithuanian «independence» and «occupation» the Redemptorists tried to meet the pastoral needs of the Polish population. They gave religious instructions to the children. In those days this was not considered a usual Redemptorist activity. But they did it, remembering the example of the Redemptorist Saint Clement Hofbauer.<sup>26</sup> Father Ludwik Frańś, not officially a member of the Wilno-Pośpieszka community, but who was to remain there when war broke out, was especially helpful in preparing 200 orphan children for their First Reconciliation and Eucharist. Later he taught religion in a school in Wierszuba and helped conduct retreats for interned Polish military officers in Kalwaria Wileńska. Father Dochniak led retreats in St. Bartholomew parish and at the famed chapel known as «Gate of Dawn»,<sup>27</sup> and also in nearby Niemenczyn.

Father Franciszek Świątek also kept busy at this time. He conducted retreats for the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the Seraphic Sisters and the Ursuline Sisters in Wilno, as well as for school children in the chapel inside the Redemptorist

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of the Church in Poland], Warszawa 2000, 178.

<sup>25</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 378; J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia z Wilna*, card (2r); T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 14-28, passim; B. CYWIŃSKI, *Ogniem próbowane*, vol. I, 79, 103-104; P. ŁOSOWSKI, B. MODZELEWSKA, *Litwa. Czasy najnowsze [Lithuania, Modern Times]*, in: *EK*, vol. 10, Lublin 2004, cols. 1247-1251, bibliography; A. SREBRAKOWSKI, *Duszpasterstwo polskie*, D. 2, in: *ibid.*, vol. 10, Lublin 2004, cols. 1253-1254; I. MIKŁASZEWICZ, *Polityka sowiecka wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Litwie 1944-1965 [Soviet Policy Towards the Catholic Church in Lithuania 1944-1965]*, Warszawa 2001, 22-26. – Archbishop Reinys at times had a cordial relationship with the Redemptorists.

<sup>26</sup> Clement Mary Hofbauer, b. with name John, Tasswitz, Moravia, 26 Dec. 1751; entered Redemptorists in Italy, prof. 19 Mar., 1785; ord. 29 Mar. 1785. Responsible for taking Redemptorists to northern Europe. In Warsaw saw need for education and care of children; d. 15 Mar. 1820. Beatified 29 Jan., 1888; canonized 20 May, 1909.

<sup>27</sup> The «Gate of Dawn» is one of the city gates of Wilno; here Carmelites founded a monastery, and in the chapel built over the gate was picture of «Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn» venerated since the late 1700s. See *Ostrobramska Matka Boża*, in: *EK*, vol. 14, Lublin 2010, cols. 950-956, and bibliography.

residence.<sup>28</sup> The other «public chapel» which was near the residence never suffered any repressive measures, but after the outbreak of the war in 1939 its services were severely limited, and after 1941 almost completely suspended.

After the middle of September 1939 the chapel within the Redemptorist residence functioned as open to the public. There was a Sunday Mass at 6:00 A.M. followed by a Solemn Mass at 10:00 and a Vespers service at 4:00 P.M. (5:00 P.M. in summertime). People were welcome for Reconciliation in the mornings until 12:00 noon. Weekdays offered the opportunity for various afternoon services. The attendance was always large, especially on Sundays when people came from distant villages. During the first months of the «Lithuanian occupation», prayers were offered for Poland's independence. As late as 11 February, 1940, the hymn *Boże coś Polskę* was sung<sup>29</sup> and in 1940 people especially eagerly participated in the service of the Lenten Lamentations (*Gorzkie Żale*).<sup>30</sup>

As for the so-called «public chapel» maintained by the Redemptorists in Wilno-Pośpieszka, it was generally under the direction of Father Władysław Całka who had arrived in June 1937. He was known as a priest who took great care in providing beautiful liturgical vestments as well as superb decor. He also arranged regular devotions in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. With the aid of a young woman named Wiktoria Karaś, Father Całka also gathered a choir and organized various devotional societies which included the Apostolate of Prayer (giving special honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus), Rosary Circles, and a group named «Communion of Reparation».<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 190, 192; *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 205-207; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 222.

<sup>29</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 190. Translation, as seen above was: «God Save Poland».

<sup>30</sup> M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 283-284.

<sup>31</sup> The «Communion of Reparation» group consisted of circles of seven women who promised to come to Mass and receive the Eucharist on a set day of each week. – This Wiktoria Karaś was very active and helpful in a number of ministries at Wilno-Pośpieszka, and, as we will see, operated in various «resistance» roles. See FN 16 above for data on her written memoirs.

In the chapel at the Redemptorist residence, the devotion of Divine Mercy, based on the 1933-1936 revelations of Sister Faustina (baptized Helena Kowalska) was promoted.<sup>32</sup> The experience of these revelations took place when she was stationed in the convent of her Sisters in Wilno. In 1934 her confessor and spiritual director, Blessed Michał Sopoćko (1888-1975),<sup>33</sup> advocated the painting of the *Merciful Jesus* according to the direction of Sister Faustina.<sup>34</sup> This painting, at least for a short time, was displayed in the Redemptorist house chapel. A novena of the Divine Mercy devotion was held in the chapel before the patronal feast of Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in July, and it is recorded that Blessed Michał Sopoćko himself preached there on July 21, 1940.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.2 – In Wilno and the Wilno Region – under the first Soviet occupation

Following the September 1939 seizure and liquidation of Lithuania by the Soviets came the definitive flight into exile of

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<sup>32</sup> Sister Faustina is now a canonized saint; b. Aug. 25, 1905; prof. as religious April 1928; d. Oct. 5, 1938; beatified Apr. 18, 1993; declared saint Oct. 5, 1938. Recognized as a mystic.

<sup>33</sup> Blessed Michał Sopoćko, b. 1888; ord. 1914; from 1934 professor of theology at Stefan Batory University, Wilno; d. Feb. 15, 1975, Białyostok; beatified Sept. 28, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> The artist of the painting was Marcin Eugeniusz Kazimirowski, b. Nov. 11, 1873; studied at Kraków Academy of Fine Arts 1892-1897, and further studies in Munich, Paris, Rome; his enormous output of art was lost in World War II; d. 1939. – See *Kronika wileńska*, 205; F. H. KOWALSKA, *Dzienniczek*, p. XI, 4 and FN 1 on pp. 603-605, 128, 132, 313, 171, 416, 636, FN 244.

<sup>35</sup> P. SOCHA, *Rozwój nabożeństwa do Miłosierdzia Bożego w nowej formie w Polsce i za granicą [The Development of the devotion to the Divine Mercy in a New Form in Poland and Abroad]*, in: *Posłannictwo Siostry Faustyny*. Symposium on the Divine Mercy held in Kraków – Łagiewniki on 18-20 May 1988, ed. Czesław Drażek [no date nor place], 203-208; T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 62-63; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 284-285. – Sadowski writes on the basis of J. Lejsza's reports (Wilno, 24 May, 2004) that Sister Faustina prayed in the Redemptorist chapel in Pośpieszka several times. See M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 285, FN 140. But this may be impossible because Sister Faustina left Wilno on 21 March, 1936, when the chapel was not yet built.

President Antanas Smetona from Lithuania and the annexation of his country to the USSR as the *Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic*.

Father Franciszek Świątek remarked in his diary, with wry expression:

After the Lithuanians, the Bolsheviks came to rule (us) with an iron hand. [Just as before, we now witnessed] the same torment of the Poles, and the destruction of all that was Polish, only now [it was] more professional and cruel, yet diligently and treacherously disguised. In the spring of 1941 we were on pins and needles, not knowing the day nor the hour of what was going to happen to us. At the beginning of July, thanks to the grace of the good father Stalin [we learned that we were] to go to Archangielsk, «to go see the white bears». The Germans deprived us of this pleasure, the Germans who despite the news of the German-Soviet friendship as announced worldwide on the Moscow radio, declared war against the Soviets on 20 June, 1941.<sup>36</sup>

Even the exact date of the transfer of the Redemptorists had been set for 4 July, 1941, but the outbreak of the German-Russian war on 21 June, made this deportation impossible.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, the beginning of the Russian occupation in 1940 had been welcomed with relief especially by the Poles and Jews who, by virtue of the Russian presence, were made equal with the Lithuanians, and even were provided with jobs.<sup>38</sup>

This euphoria, however, did not last long. The new Soviet authorities, supported by Lithuanian nationalists (who were sometimes referred to as «those repainted with red»), enacted revolutionary reforms and regulations quickly. On 25 June, 1940, they called for a separation of church and state. Then on 2 July they broke their own concordat, forbidding the placement of religious symbols in public places, and removing chaplains from hospitals and the army.

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<sup>36</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 326-327.

<sup>37</sup> See *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 257, stating that after the Russians' departure there was found a list, assembled by the NKVD ([Soviet] People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) in June 1941; this document named the religious to be deported to Archangielsk, Russia, on 4 July, 1941.

<sup>38</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 378: J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia z Wilna*, card (2r).

On 22 July, 1940, the Soviets announced that all industrial works, land and its resources belonged to the state. Following this, on 31 October, 1940, they announced that large estates in cities and industrial centers were now the properties of the nation. Soon came the expropriation of the buildings of the archdiocese as well as seminaries, parishes, and monasteries. Religious instruction was removed from schools on the following 28 June, and all Catholic publications were closed down. Authorities of Soviet Lithuania began to stage mass arrests of known Lithuanian and Polish «activists», including men and women religious. Tens of thousands were transported deep into Russia.<sup>39</sup>

During the thirteen-month period of the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic, that is, until well into June 1941, the Redemptorist ministry, which was directed by Father Władysław Całka, embraced the Poles living and working in Pośpieszka. Everything functioned more or less normally. On Sundays the Redemptorist chapel was filled several times. The Poles seemed especially fond of the morning Masses celebrated on Sundays and Holydays of that Advent. There were no evening devotional services in wintertime because the faithful were concerned about their safety after dark. In 1941 there was no Christmas Midnight Mass. Likewise the «Apostolate of Prayer» as organized by Father Całka continued in its popularity, and he was also sought out as a favorite confessor.

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<sup>39</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 378. See also: J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia z Wilna*, card (3r); I. MIKŁASZEWICZ, *Polityka sowiecka*, 23-26; B. CYWIŃSKI, *Ogniem próbowane*, vol. I, pp. 3-106; T. KRAHEL, *Kapłani sybiracy archidiecezji wileńskiej* [*The priests of the Wilno Archdiocese who were sent to Siberia*], in: "Czas Miłosierdzia", no. 10 (90) (1997) 14, 17, stating that from 1939-1941 about one and one-half million people were transported from Lithuania, mainly Poles; T. KRAHEL, *Martyrologium kapłanów archidiecezji wileńskiej 1939-1941* [*The martyrology of the priests of the Wilno Archdiocese, 1939-1941*], in: *ibid.*, no. 2 (94) (1998) 13-14; T. KRAHEL, *Zginęli w końcu czerwca 1941* [*They lost their lives at the end of June 1941*], in: *ibid.*, no. 4 (94) (1998) 4; T. KRAHEL, *Kapłani archidiecezji wileńskiej wywiezieni na Sybir w latach 1939-1941* [*The priests of the Wilno Archdiocese who were sent to Siberia in the years 1939-1941*], in: "Sybirak", no. 31 (2003) 39-46; A. PATEK, *Polska diaspora w Rosji Radzieckiej i Związku Socjalistycznych Republik Radzieckich* [*The Polish diaspora in Soviet Russia and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics*], in: *Diaspora Polska*, ed. A. Walaszek, Kraków 2001, 293-318.



He and the other priests often helped other clergy in neighboring villages when needed.<sup>40</sup> They also provided religious instruction, carefully and in secret, whenever possible. There were government restrictions regarding the conducting of parish missions and retreats; yet they did manage to have a few of these both in their own house chapel and in the out-of-the-way village of Antokol. They also quietly but effectively conducted a number of retreats for women religious of the area. These retreats were conducted especially by Fathers Świątek, Całka, and Fraś.<sup>41</sup>

A real danger for the Redemptorists, and for the whole Catholic Church, arose on 22 July, 1940, with the decree which deprived the Church and all her institutions of material means to function in Lithuania. Thus on 10 August the Agricultural Commission appropriated three hectares (about seven and one-half acres) of the Redemptorist garden. Father Dochniak sent an appeal to authorities in Wilno, as did Father Całka to Kaunas; both pleas were rejected.<sup>42</sup>

The next act of nationalization took place on 16 March, 1941. Officers arrived at the Redemptorist house and declared that the building was being seized for needs of the army. The community was to move to the Jesuit residence. Protests were organized with three thousand signatures being collected by trustworthy supporters under the discreet direction of Father Dochniak. Effective interventions were made by the so-called «Committee for the Parish Church», which included Ms. Helen Oleńska and Father Sawicz. These were handed over to a Mr. Vitas, President of the City Committee in Wilno, causing the Russian authorities to give up the idea of appropriating the Redemptorist

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<sup>40</sup> *Kronika klasztoru wileńskiego*, 193-213, 269, 379; J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia o Wilnie*, card (3r); M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 285-286. In order to survive those hard days the two younger priests (Fraś and Dochniak) did physical jobs, dug up potatoes and sawed wood for use in stoves.

<sup>41</sup> *Kronika klasztoru wileńskiego*, 175, 179, 223; *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 206-208; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 239, FN 269. The retreats in women's convents were for the Bernardines, Dominicans, Magdalenes, Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, Seraphic Sisters, and Ursulines.

<sup>42</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 207; *ibid.*, 379; J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia o Wilnie*, (card 2v); W. SZOŁDRSKI, *Redemptoryści*, vol. II, pp. 325-327; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 405-408.

house. Their alleged excuse was that it was not as large a building as their «informers» had told them. Moreover, the Redemptorists were then allowed to use the garden that had been nationalized. Credit must be given to those faithful of the neighborhood who, in this critical situation, had emphasized that the Redemptorist in-house chapel served poor workers.<sup>43</sup>

As the Germans invaded on 24 June, 1941, the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic ceased.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3 – *Pośpieszka under the German occupation*

#### 2.3.1 – *The Pastoral ministry of the Redemptorists continues*

With the German occupation, life became even more difficult for all Poles and, in particular, for the Redemptorists who ministered in Pośpieszka and its vicinity. Thousands of German soldiers, on foot and in military vehicles came through Wilno. The Lithuanians cheered their arrival once the Russian authorities had fled.

But the Germans soon took several significant steps. They deprived the people of all radios and made lists of the area clergy. Army personnel occupied the first floor of the Redemptorist residence and on 4 July, 1941, installed their top commanding officers in the parlor area. In some respects these military men acted with proper discipline. For instance, instead of demanding, they requested food.

The presence of military personnel made it easy for them to observe whatever took place in the Redemptorist house and

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<sup>43</sup> *Kronika klasztoru wileńskiego*, 239-241: Father J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia o Wilnie*, (card 2r-2v); M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 406-408. Wiktoria Karaś writes about collecting signatures but she does not give any date. It was Father Jan Dochniak who persuaded her to take up this delicate task and she fulfilled it very well, for which she received special words of recognition. See W. KARAŚ-BOHDZIEWICZ, *Wspomnienia*, II. *Wspomnienia żywe*, 54-83. Wiktoria writes about the «German occupiers» but she means the Russians. When she wrote thirty years after these events, she could easily have been confused, especially since she also wrote extensively about the events during the German occupation.

<sup>44</sup> T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 30; W. SZOŁDRSKI, *Redemptoryści*, vol. II, p. 327.

chapel. Nevertheless, the Redemptorists sometimes assumed great risks as they successfully hid people whose lives were in danger.

The house chronicles, however, describe more pleasant events such as the unexpected visits of Redemptorist confreres. For instance, on 19 July, 1941, a Bavarian Redemptorist, Father Georg Mehler [sic],<sup>45</sup> came to visit in Pośpieszka; he was an orderly in the German army, stationed in Pohulanka. Visits such as his were occasions to get information on the international situation.

Masses continued to be celebrated, as well as other services such as the «Communion of Reparation» and the Rosary Circles. Father Ludwik Fraś held clandestine religious courses for youth. As house chronicler, Father Fraś wrote in early 1942:

Despite various difficulties the fathers still help priests in the vicinity, especially with confessions, and they also give religious instruction to children. Father Dochniak did work in his «parish» in Kojrany; on 7 July he organized the First Communion liturgy for about 100 children. [But] because of my pastoral mission in Byelorussia<sup>46</sup> he had to pass this task on to Father Grela<sup>47</sup> who had experience in catechizing children in Warzówka and served as a chaplain in the hospital for people with tuberculosis.<sup>48</sup>

The services in October were held in the Redemptorist chapel, but they began earlier because of the mandatory wartime «blackout» of all lights at night. On the Sundays and Holydays of Advent there were also the *Rorate* Masses which were popular among the Poles for their solemnity.<sup>49</sup> The «Apostolate

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<sup>45</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 257. This was almost surely Father Georg Meller, b. 17 Jan., 1908, prof. 19 May, 1928; ord. 25 Jun., 1933; d. 08, Jul., 1980. He was a member of what was called the «Upper German Province», meaning the province at higher mountain altitudes.

<sup>46</sup> Dochniak's mission in Prozoroki, Byelorussia will be explained in our next section, below.

<sup>47</sup> Stanisław Grela, b. 17 Apr., 1912; prof. 21 Nov., 1931; ord. 20 June, 1937; in Wilno from 1939 till 1946; was last superior in Pośpieszka; left Wilno for Poland May 1946, to assume pastoral tasks in Głogów; died in Zamość 26 Sept., 1983.

<sup>48</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 257.

<sup>49</sup> *Rorate* in Latin refers to Is. 45:8 and is a refrain used in Advent liturgies which pray for the presence of God as Savior. A translation of the versicle reads: «Like dew from Heaven, let justice descend».

of Prayer» continued to be observed and appreciated. The Christmas season of 1941-1942, however, brought its own sadness because of an outbreak of typhus. Both the civil authorities and the church authorities had to impose restrictions on public gatherings. There was no Christmas Midnight Mass, nor any other «Solemn High Masses»<sup>50</sup> but only subdued liturgies celebrated for small groups.

### 2.3.2 – Father Jan Dochniak’s mission in Prozoroki, Byelorussia

Father Jan Dochniak’s mission in Prozoroki, Byelorussia, (near Głębokie) deserves special mention. It was different from the ministry he had conducted among Poles. After the German Army had seized eastern Byelorussia in July 1941, there were numerous Polish parishes who had been deprived of priests by the Russians.<sup>51</sup> This was of such great concern to Archbishop Jałbrzykowski that he turned to the Salesians, Franciscans and Redemptorists for help. From the Redemptorists, Father Dochniak stepped forward, and on 27 August, 1941, he was appointed for Prozoroki.<sup>52</sup>

After having obtained a necessary travel permit, Dochniak had to wait several weeks for means of transportation. When this became available on 14 September, he set off immediately. First, he went to Konstantynów, about eighty kilometers from Wilno. There he had to wait again for transportation. En route he helped local priests in their pastoral ministry, first in Szemietowyszczyna where he conducted a Forty Hours Devotion. Several days later he went to Łyntup to celebrate the same service.

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<sup>50</sup> Before 1970 liturgical reforms, «Solemn High Mass» meant a Tridentine Eucharistic liturgy in Latin with a «Main Celebrant» assisted by clergy serving as Deacon and Subdeacon, each with specific functions. Typical singing was in choral Gregorian chant; incense and multiple blessings added solemnity.

<sup>51</sup> *Za wschodnią granicą 1917-1993 [Behind the eastern order 1917-1993]*. Jan Pałysa, SAC, talks to Roman Dzwonkowski, SAC, about Poles and the Church in the former USSR. Second edition, Warsaw 1995, 180-181; A. HLEBOWICZ, *Polskie duchowieństwo katolickie na Białorusi i Ukrainie po drugiej wojnie światowej [Polish Catholic clergy in Byelorussia and Ukraine after World War II]*, in: *Polacy w Kościele katolickim w ZSSR*, ed. E. Walewander, Lublin 1991, 175-177.

<sup>52</sup> Prozoroki, Byelorussia, about 200 kilometers northeast of Wilno.

In Hoduciszki he heard confessions during another Forty Hours devotion. Half of the parish of 10,000 faithful was Lithuanian, the other half was Polish. Here the atmosphere was depressing since the Lithuanians had reportedly murdered many Jews the day before. Never before had Dochniak confessed so many people in Lithuanian. From Hoduciszki he proceeded to Postawy where he delivered a sermon on October 4, the patronal feast of St Francis of Assisi. Then he went to Woropajewo to conduct yet another Forty Hours devotion. Finally, on 11 October, 1941, after almost one month of travelling and doing pastoral ministry, he reached Głębokie, 250 kilometers away from Wilno. In Głębokie, he was able to locate the dean, a man named Father Antoni Zienkiewicz<sup>53</sup>.

Prozoroki was a «parish» of only six Catholics dispersed along the former Polish-Russian border on both sides. Apart from the Catholics there were Orthodox believers who had a church there. The Germans had already closed the former Polish-Soviet border. The young parish priest of Prozoroki, Father Czesław Matusiewicz,<sup>54</sup> had arrived there only during the previous August. He had a permit to cross the closed border whereas Father Dochniak did not. Under these circumstances Father Dochniak was to help the parish priest in Prozoroki which was in the area of the former Polish Republic, and Matusiewicz was to work among Poles in the Russian part (in Uta, Zachać and Zaskorki, about twenty kilometers away).

In Prozoroki Father Dochniak used the forbidden language of Polish as he provided a well-rounded ministry to the people. Some of the faithful he served came over from the other side of the border. In his memoirs of those days he remarks that at first the German Central Government intended to annex Byelorussia and have it administratively under their General Headquarters. But after the Russian-Polish treaty signed in London on 30 July,

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<sup>53</sup> Father Antoni Zienkiewicz, parish priest in Głębokie; after the Germans had invaded Byelorussia in 1941 he was appointed a delegate of Archbishop of Wilno for the region of Głębokie and Wilejka. He died in Głębokie in 1951. See T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 21-22.

<sup>54</sup> Father Czesław Matusiewicz, ordained in 1939. See T. KRAHEL, *Ksiądz Czesław Matusiewicz*, in: "W Służbie Miłosierdzia", 3 (2006), no. 4, p. 14.

1941 (called the Mayski-Sikorski Agreement<sup>55</sup>), the Germans, who remained in control, created the *Byelorussian District* and placed it under their «*Kommissariat*» in Ukraine. The official language in this district was Byelorussian, and the use of Polish was forbidden in the schools. In Prozoroki such «Byelorussification» was very difficult for Father Dochniak because he ministered to the local people only in Polish. Thus resentment of the Poles by the Byelorussians kept increasing after the Mayski-Sikorski Agreement. In fact Byelorussians began denouncing Poles (especially clergymen) to the German authorities.<sup>56</sup>

It was in this context that an inspector from the German District Command in Głębokie appeared one day in Prozoroki. He first visited the local Orthodox priest, who chose to accuse the Roman Catholic priests of «Polish activities», adding that a new priest had come from Wilno. Father Dochniak was then summoned to the District Command on 26 November, 1941.

With no preliminary courtesies the German official demanded, «Are you from Prozoroki?» Dochniak answered, «Yes». «The Vicar there?» «Yes.» At this the official snapped, «*Get out, or it's prison for you!*» When the Redemptorist demanded to have this decision in writing, the bureaucrat declared, in Polish, that it was an oral command with no recourse. Dochniak had to depart from Prozoroki. By 4 December, 1941, he was already back in the Redemptorist house in Pośpieszka.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> This 1941 agreement basically reestablished diplomatic relations between the Polish government-in-exile in London and the Russians, after Stalin's Russia had in 1939 declared Poland to be «non-existent». Polish General Władysław Sikorski was architect of the agreement. Ivan Mayski was Russia's ambassador to England. The Mayski-Sikorski Accord lasted only until April 1943 when Dictator Stalin grew angry with Sikorski for requesting an enquiry into a massacre by Russian secret police of Polish nationals in the Katyń Forest.

<sup>56</sup> T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 20, 38-45.

<sup>57</sup> *Kronika klasztoru wileńskiego*, 266-269; this is a personal report of Jan Dochniak; AWPR-Tu, Personal data of Jan Dochniak: *Labores apostolici*; T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, in: *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją 1939-1945. Metropolie wileńska i lwowska, zakony*, ed. Z. Zieliński, Katowice 1992, 37-45; Generalny Okręg Białoruś; M. BRUDZISZ, *Redemptoryści*, in: *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją hitlerowską 1939-1945*, ed. Z. Zieliński, Warszawa 1982, 715; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 222-223, 287-289.

This event turned out to be providential for Father Dochniak. In 1942 a severe anti-Polish crackdown came. All the Salesians who had come to that Byelorussian area in September 1941 were summarily shot.<sup>58</sup> On Christmas Eve of that year Father Antoni Światopełk Mirski, S.J., was also shot.<sup>59</sup> He had been appointed parish priest in Połock just weeks before. Only Father Jan Dochniak and a Carmelite priest were spared.<sup>60</sup>

### 2.3.3 – Help Given to the Jewish Population

Steps taken in 1941 to save people of the Jewish community who lived in the Wilno region were very successful. Numerous priests were involved in this effort. They issued documents even if the Jews had not been baptized, and baptism was voluntary.<sup>61</sup> In the case of conversions to Christianity, preparation and instructions were held in the Redemptorist residence, as were baptismal ceremonies. The issuance of proper documentation followed. For example, on 19 November, 1941, Doctor «Stanisław Juchniewicz» (i.e., Stanisław Szaja), a Jewish neurologist, was baptized.

Such baptisms were numerous. Wiktoria Karaś-Bohdziewicz has written:

The priests expanded their activities so as to include the baptism of Jews and giving them documents with Polish names, but the priests did not display their own true signatures.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 268; L. MIKHALIK (MICHAJLIK), *Kościół katolicki na Grodzieńszczyźnie 1939-1956* [*The Catholic Church in the Grodno Region 1939-1956*] Warszawa 2008, 136-137; W. ŻUREK, *Salezjańscy męczennicy Wschodu* [*The Salesian Martyrs of the East*], Lublin 2003, 153-154; T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 40.

<sup>59</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 268; *Materiały dotyczące kapłanów rozstrzelanych przez Niemców 4 III 1942 w Berezwezu* [*Materials concerning the priests who were shot by the Germans in Berezwezu on 4 March 1942*], in: "Studia Teologiczne", 12 (1994), 387-406; L. MIKHALIK, *Kościół katolicki na Grodzieńszczyźnie*, 136.

<sup>60</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 380-385; J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia z Wilna*, (card, lines 3-5). This Carmelite must have been Father Nikodem Poręba, who had been warned and left in time, see L. MIKHALIK, *Kościół katolicki na Grodzieńszczyźnie*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> T. KARHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 51-57.

<sup>62</sup> W. KARAS-BOHDZIEWICZ, *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 263, 264; *Wspomnienia*, II. *Drugi etap młodości*, 66.

Father Świątek continued to rescue Jews, utilizing the hospital in Zarzecze as a refuge. There he prepared two Jewish women for baptism; they were Mrs. Mościcka and her daughter, Iwona Teresa, who was known as a deeply spiritual person. Sad to say, a Jewish relative denounced the mother who foolishly disclosed her daughter's address. The German Gestapo, the secret police, then tortured the daughter to tell where she had been baptized and by whom. These events led to the death of both mother and daughter. The records show that in May 1944, Father Świątek prepared for baptism another Jewish woman who had the joy of receiving the sacrament of baptism on the Feast of Pentecost.<sup>63</sup>

#### 2.3.4 – *Defending the Polish nation: correspondence, clandestine courses, and the resistance movement*

Other issues, apart from Redemptorist ministry *per se*, involved secret contacts with confreres who lived in other locations, and clandestine courses being taught inside the Redemptorist house at Pośpieszka.

Regarding the correspondence with Redemptorist confreres, some of this has been lost. But it well known that it was frequent. Much credit must be paid to the Mother Superior of the Seraphic Sisters in Antokol. She was responsible for sending outbound letters of the Redemptorists, utilizing the various types of German postal service.

Receiving letters was more difficult. However, Father Kazimierz Smoroński<sup>64</sup> was a regular correspondent writing from the

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<sup>63</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 337-340. Concerning the actions to save Jews in the Wilno Region see T. KRAHEL, *Prorocy miłości w morzu nienawiści. Ratowanie Żydów przez duchowieństwo Wilna i okolic w czasie okupacji niemieckiej (1941-1944)* [*Prophets of love in the sea of hatred. Saving Jews by the clergy in Wilno and the surroundings during the German occupation*], in: *Prorocy Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XX wieku* [*Prophets of Central-Eastern Europe of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*], ed. S. C. Napiórkowski, Lublin 2009, 711-722.

<sup>64</sup> Kazimierz Smoroński, b. 02 Feb., 1889, prof. 02 Aug. 1906; ord. 02 Jul. 1911; d. 21 May, 1942 in Oświęcim. He pursued his philosophical-theological studies in the Redemptorist seminary, his biblical studies in the Biblical Institute in Rome 1912-1914, 1923/1924, professor of Scripture in Redemptor-



community of Tuchów. He wrote to Father Ludwik Fraś using a special coded vocabulary, which at least some confreres could interpret. He passed on the information that the Germans did not like Father Fraś. However, as Father Dochniak noted, the Gestapo already suspected Father Fraś of organizing his clandestine courses, and the letters he received served as a good pretext to summon and interrogate him. In fact, the Gestapo wanted to discover what was being taught inside the Redemptorist house in Pośpieszka.<sup>65</sup>

After the Germans had entered Wilno, Father Fraś had requested that they allow him to teach German. His request was granted, but then he had proceeded to use his «German courses» to organize his four year underground *gymnasium*/secondary school in Pośpieszka. This obviously constituted a serious threat to the Redemptorists, and especially to Father Fraś.

It so happened that a German officer of high rank lived near the Redemptorist community and often walked his dog along the lane near the manor house where he lived. During his walk he often asked Wiktoria Karaś,<sup>66</sup> whom he used to meet on his way, about these «courses in the priests' house». It was clear that he suspected what was going on, as a group of about twenty young people could be seen entering the Redemptorist residence every day.

The clandestine lessons, which the historian Father Fraś had organized in 1941, were conducted in the parlor area. The Germans occupied the first floor of the house. Even though the approximately sixty students were divided into distinct groups, still they were conspicuous, as were two women, Helena Obiezierska and Janina Wysocka<sup>67</sup> who helped in this venture of Father Fraś.

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ist seminary 1915-1942; editor of "Choraǳiew Maryi": 1927-1933 and founder of the paper for priests "Homo Dei". His careless correspondence with the Redemptorists outside of Poland, occupied by the Germans, caused his arrest on 6 February, 1942, and subsequent death in Auschwitz on 21 May, 1942. See M. BRUDZISZ, *Smoroński Kazimierz*, in: *SPTK*, vol. 9, Warszawa 1983, 125-128.

<sup>65</sup> This is Father Jan Dochniak's opinion, based on the later events. See *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 350, 385-386.

<sup>66</sup> See FNs 16 and 31, above.

<sup>67</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 274, 385; J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia z Wilna*, (card 5r); M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 308-309.

It is hard to know whether Fraś was on his guard or not. The fact is that the above-mentioned German officer questioned Wiktoria Karaś, and even threatened her with a gun.<sup>68</sup> One day, after being questioned by this German officer, the frightened Wiktoria got word to the Redemptorists immediately. Consequently, the teaching was stopped for a while. Then later it was taken up again, but with better methods to disguise it.<sup>69</sup>

For a good part of January 1942 Father Fraś had been under surveillance, it was in February that he was summoned to the post office and then sent to the Gestapo. On this occasion he was released, but in March he was warned by the Polish resistance movement that the Gestapo was observing him more intensely, and they fully suspected him of conducting his clandestine courses. On 5 March, 1942, Father Fraś fled from Pośpieszka to Troki (Trakai), Lithuania.

That the Pośpieszka Redemptorists did actually participate in the local resistance movement cannot be doubted. There is enough documentation about this participation to verify the basic fact. What is lacking is extensive information on the involvement of individual community members.

For many years these men did not speak about their resistance activity. Even in the 1980s they were reluctant to discuss these matters.<sup>70</sup> There are some extant notes which reveal that Father Całka was involved in the movement, as were Fathers Fraś and Dochniak; their contacts with the Polish Home

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<sup>68</sup> W. KARAŚ-BOHDZIEWICZ, *Wspomnienia*, II. *Wspomnienia żywe*, 5-12, 17-23 («Warning»).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-5, 13-23, 84-91.

<sup>70</sup> The author of this present article became very aware of such reluctance to speak in the case of Father Marcin Karaś (1910-2003). In the 1980s Brudzisz was writing about the Redemptorists in Mościska, tracing the closure of that Redemptorist residence and the fate of its members. For two years Brudzisz tried to convince Father Karaś to write his memoirs of Mościska, and finally Karaś consented. For four more years Brudzisz encouraged Karaś to continue these memoirs. Moreover, Brudzisz copied everything Karaś wrote (this, without Karaś' permission). He never knew whether Karaś would fear danger from the secret services and would then burn his notes. Such a loss did happen in the case of Archbishop Włodzimierz Jasiński. Incidentally, Jasiński spent his last years in the Redemptorist residence in Tuchów.

Army<sup>71</sup> are mentioned in a general way in the house chronicles. We also know that towards the end of 1944 two noteworthy people found shelter in the Redemptorist residence; they were the brother and nephew of the famed General Władysław Sikorski.<sup>72</sup> According to the Redemptorist chronicler, various pieces of information and even some directives of the Polish Underground Movement passed through the Redemptorist house in Pośpieszka.<sup>73</sup>

There is also evidence that several times Wiktoria Karaś was employed a «courier». Fulfilling Father Całka's request, she passed along coded information, not knowing its content or meaning. She knew only the passwords. One time she also delivered to Father Całka an extraordinary find. It was the wallet of the high-ranking German officer who lived in the nearby manor house. The officer was seen searching for the lost wallet along the lane on which he was accustomed to stroll; even his dog was looking for it. When Father Całka saw the contents of the wallet he was so frightened that he dashed inside the Redemptorist residence. It is recorded that the same Wiktoria Karaś one day came to Father Całka with a serious request. She was asking that this Redemptorist help her brother make contact with the Polish Underground Movement. He did so, but only after verifying all necessary data.<sup>74</sup>

### 2.3.5 – *Away with the Church and religious congregations*

At the beginning of 1942 the Redemptorists of Pośpieszka were hearing reports that the occupying Germans were preparing mass arrests of clergy and intending the closure of religious houses. Because of this imminent threat, they stored valuable items from their chapel, and certain other possessions, in the homes of friends.

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<sup>71</sup> The «Polish Home Army» [Armia Krajowa, or AK] was the largest of all Polish resistance organizations. By 1944 it is believed to have numbered over 400,000.

<sup>72</sup> Sikorski, of course was prominent in the Polish government-in-exile in London.

<sup>73</sup> M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 309.

<sup>74</sup> W. KARAS-BOHDZIEWICZ, *Wspomnienia*, II. *Wspomnienia żywe*, 1-5, 13-23, 84-91 («Zguba na szosie» [A loss on the road]).

Throughout the Wilno Region it was soon a matter of frequent arrests and execution of priests.<sup>75</sup> But it came as a surprise on 4 March, 1942, when the terrorism was widened to include the arrests of even teachers and seminarians. The Polish faithful suffered even more intensely on 22 March when news spread of the arrest of Wilno's Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski. After this, there came an avalanche of more arrests of religious, and the subsequent closure of their houses by the German and Lithuanian police.

We have already seen that on 5 March, 1942, Father Ludwik Fraś had fled to Troki, Lithuania, as the Gestapo were looking to arrest him because of his clandestine school. Several days later, on 8 March, Father Świątek was taken off to the neurological hospital in Zwierzyniec. On 26 March, Father Całka, after seeing some suspicious behavior by men lurking around the seminary, took the money of the community to some friends named Borowski, but he had no intention of escaping.

That same afternoon of 26 March, 1942, the Gestapo and the Lithuanian police came to the house to conduct a thorough search. They arrested Fathers Całka and Nuckowski and Brother Jan Filipek. They were allowed to take some small personal items along with altar wine, hosts, a small missal and a gospel book, and then they were transported to the prison in Łukiszka. The Redemptorist residence was then closed and sealed.<sup>76</sup> A German governmental Land Management Office assumed control over all the Redemptorists' land and possessions, including the building and garden.<sup>77</sup>

Prior to the arrival of the German and Lithuanian police, besides the hospitalized Father Świątek, and Father Fraś who

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<sup>75</sup> T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 22-28.

<sup>76</sup> There is conflicting evidence about the length of time this «closure and sealing» lasted, as well as exactly *how* it was sealed shut. To be seen is that the chapel was soon functioning again albeit under the archbishop.

<sup>77</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 270 (a), letter – report of Father Fraś to the provincial dated to 3 May 1943 about the situation of the Wilno community; *ibid.*, 291-292 («Exile of Father Jan Dochniak»); T. KRAHEL, *Tragiczny marzec 1942 [Tragic March 1942]*, in: «W Służbie Miłosierdzia», 7 (2007) no. 3, p. 14; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 379.

was in hiding, four other members of the community were away from the house for various reasons. They received a warning to stay away; these were Fathers Grela and Dochniak, and Brothers Efreim Tymoszek<sup>78</sup> and Antoni Zygałło<sup>79</sup>, all of whom found shelter with friendly families. According to the opinion that spread later, the Redemptorists came through this German-Lithuanian assault of 26 March, 1942, with relatively minimum losses.

Inside the prison at Łukiszki Father Całka suffered from cold and hunger. He could hear the weeping, shouts and moans of those being tortured.<sup>80</sup> Until 8 July, 1942, he was writing «diary entries» into a little notebook, describing his own experiences and those of fellow prisoners.<sup>81</sup> Sometime later, as the result of an organized group effort, Fathers Całka and Nuckowski were released from prison on 24 July, 1942. This rescue group was made up of Father Ludwik Fraś, Professor Janina Hurynowicz,<sup>82</sup> Professor Kazimierz Pelczar,<sup>83</sup> Brother Antoni Zygałło, and a Re-

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<sup>78</sup> Efreim [Piotr] Tymoszek, b. 24 Dec., 1900; prof. 2 Aug., 1923; in Pośpieszka from 1938-1942; later was sacristan in Tuchów; died Toruń 26 Sept., 1987.

<sup>79</sup> Antoni Zygałło, b. 15 Aug., 1888; prof. 2 Aug., 1914; the next day he was drafted and fought in World War I till its end, i.e., 22 November, 1918. Then he worked in various C.Ss.R. houses; from 1939 till 1945 he was in Wilno. He was also a caretaker of Archbishop Emeritus Włodzimierz Jasiński, residing in Tuchów; d. Wrocław 20 Apr., 1962.

<sup>80</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 304-306 (Father Całka's report). On 20 September, 2010, the author was able to read Father Całka's «Diary», written in prison from 26 March to 9 July, 1942, which belongs to Father Całka's family. The priest wrote down his religious experiences in prison; he mentions the behavior of the prison personnel, the priests and nuns he met there, sometimes using only their initials. According to Father K. Zymuła, Father Całka's family in Bardo Śląskie received his writings and documents after his death.

<sup>81</sup> *Dzienniczek*, a little diary, belonging to the family, is being prepared for publication. The author has copies of some parts of the diary; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 380-382.

<sup>82</sup> Janina Hurynowicz, M.D., b. Krystynopol, Ukraine, 10 Nov., 1894; died 2 Oct., 1967 Toruń; a neurophysiologist, eminent professor at the Stefan Batory University in Wilno, and from 1945 professor at the M. Kopernik University in Toruń. In Wilno she participated in the resistance movement. See [wikipedia.org/wiki/](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/); also Hurynowicz, Janina in *Encyklopedia PWN*.

<sup>83</sup> Kazimierz Pelczar, b. Truskawiec, 2 Aug., 1894; professor at Stefan Batory University in Wilno, pioneer in oncology studies; during the occupation organised the Polish War Victims' Relief Fund; he also treated Father Fran-

ligious Sister named Janina Pawela from Poznań. Unfortunately, Brother Jan Filipek was not released; instead he was transported to a camp in Szałupie near Kaunas.

### 2.3.6 – *Pośpieszka in the hands of Archbishop Mieczysław Reinys and «Ostland»*<sup>84</sup>

Immediately after the arrests and dispersion of the religious community in Pośpieszka there was no more Redemptorist activity in what had been their house chapel. The group called «Communion of Reparation» and its bulletin were discontinued. But according to some accounts, on 29 March, 1941, just three days after the Sons of Alphonsus were dispersed, Archbishop Mieczysław Reinys, the apostolic administrator of Wilno, entrusted pastoral ministry in the Redemptorist chapel to a diocesan priest, J. Żarnowski, the former parish priest of the Church of St James. According to Father Świątek, it was in the middle of April that Father Żarnowski assumed his duties in the chapel. But very soon this new priest became dissatisfied with the income he got from the chapel, so he departed.

Not long afterwards Archbishop Reinys visited Father Świątek to ask his opinion about a possible successor to Father Żarnowski. A second visitor to Świątek not long after the archbishop turned out to be a providential solution in the person of a priest named Marcin Puzyrewski. He was of Lithuanian ancestry and had formerly been the parish priest of Odelsk, near Białystok. Within a short time Archbishop Reinys approved Father Puzyrewski to serve in the former Redemptorist chapel in Pośpieszka. He showed friendliness to the former occupants and conscientiously cared for his new quarters. Though not having ownership of the garden, he was granted use of it.<sup>85</sup>

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ciszek Świątek; was executed 17 Sept., 1943, together with nine people who were arrested by the Lithuanian Security Police (*Sauguma*) as revenge for the death of their agent Marian Padabas. See *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 371 (Father Całka's report). After p. 371 there is the announcement of the Lithuanian police about the sentence of ten Poles, with their names, dates of birth and posts.

<sup>84</sup> See FN 18 above.

<sup>85</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 331-332; see also 351 – «corrections» of Father Dochniak.

An «administrator of the estate» had to be presented to the Germans after they had seized the Redemptorists' properties and handed them over to the political district of Ostland. This area's officer, a «Mr Raube», was a «Polish clerk» who was favorably disposed to the Redemptorists. Raube asked Father Świątek to choose trustworthy people to administer the property, and Świątek's choice fell on one man named Komorowski and another named Trzebski. The latter moved into the former Redemptorist house with his family, but then betrayed Father Świątek's confidence. Instead of simply administering the property, he formulated the contract in such a way that he became its owner.<sup>86</sup>

After the ailing Redemptorist Father Nuckowski had been released from prison on 24 July, 1942, he stayed first with the Ćwirko-Godyckis,<sup>87</sup> then with the Dolorists<sup>88</sup> and finally, the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Father Całka, meanwhile, accepted the hospitality of the family of Tomasz Kulesza in Kolonia Magistracka. When he arrived there, the Jackiewicz family also gave him a warm welcome. The next day, 25 July, Father Całka went to Pośpieszka to celebrate Mass before the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Father Puzyrewski, who was taking such good care of the chapel,<sup>89</sup> welcomed him cordially and spontaneously proposed that he celebrate daily Masses there, and help in confessing the people and preaching. On the Sunday, 26 July, Father Całka celebrated a Solemn Mass and was again warmly welcomed by Father Puzyrewski and numerous faithful who gathered for the service. In the afternoon Father Całka was visiting the Peda family where it was announced that Father Ludwik Frańś had been appointed the new rector of the Redemptorist community in Pośpieszka. The others present at this announcement included some priests who had been in hiding, and also Brother Efreem.

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<sup>86</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 333 (Father Świątek's report).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>88</sup> «The Dolorists» was a popular name for a Polish Religious Community for men: Sons of the Sorrowful Mother of God, founded in Warsaw in 1880. See *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, vol. 3, Roma 1974-80, col. 1499. These Polish Religious will be met again in this article.

<sup>89</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 292-293.

From that date Father Całka came to celebrate Mass and hear confessions at the chapel in Pośpieszka. Several days after his release from prison he had paid a visit to Archbishop Reinys, the administrator of the diocese, who gave him a cold welcome. Reinys consented to his celebrating Mass and providing confessions in the chapel in Pośpieszka but refused permission to preach there. Not long after Father Całka, following the request of the parish priest of St. Anne's Church, Father Florian Markowski, heard confessions at this church every Saturday. It is known that soon he was serving as confessor to numerous women religious at the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Family, the Seraphic Sisters in Antokol, the Magdalenes, and the Pallottines. He provided the same ministry to other women religious who of necessity were living «in dispersion», as they found work in hospitals, factories or in providing help within families. It must be added that after Całka was set free he was the only Redemptorist available for hearing the confessions of Polish people the Wilno area. This is why he was constantly in demand for this ministry, especially in the evenings when people were free from their work.<sup>90</sup>

As Father Całka helped Father Puzyrewski in his pastoral ministry, he also revived the Communion of Reparation and the bulletin which supported these services. But this revival did not continue for long. The Gestapo agents were observing the former Redemptorist house and chapel closely, with suspicion that an undercover anti-German group was operative there.<sup>91</sup>

In 1943 the puppet civilian regime in Lithuania softened slightly towards the Polish religious. Evidence of this softening approach was seen in late April when, first, Father Całka was allowed to return home and live in his old room. Then, later, Brother

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 318 ff; J. Z. KASPERCZAK, *Siostry Misjonarki Apostolstwa Katolickiego (pallotycki)* [Missionary Sisters of Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines)], in: *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją. Metropolie wileńska, lwowska, zakony*, Katowice 1992, 402-405.

<sup>91</sup> W. KARAŚ-BOHDZIEWICZ, *Wspomnienia przeszłości, I. Drugi etap młodości*, 71-78; II. *Wspomnienia żywe*, 91-96; M. Sadowski writes that the initiator of this work was Janina Szymonowiczówna (*Redempcyści polscy*, 284). However, in *Wspomnienia* her name does not appear.



Ephrem was also given similar authorization. In May the Lithuanian authorities began releasing elderly religious from the detention camps. One of them, a Salesian priest named Sowiński, was told that he could return to his former church in Wilno. Likewise the Franciscan Father Dąbek returned to his church.

In this context Father Fraś went to Archbishop Reinys and was received with courtesy. The archbishop eagerly gave his consent to the Redemptorists' return to their former home in Pośpieszka and agreed that they could again conduct pastoral ministry in their chapel again. Moreover, the archbishop proposed to have Father Puzyrewski (who had been attending the Redemptorist chapel) begin ministry in a separate parish. But Puzyrewski wanted to stay on with the Redemptorists as a resident, something to which Father Ludwik Fraś happily agreed. In the next months, Puzyrewski both assisted in the chapel ministry and, as a Lithuanian, was able to smooth over certain problems involving various Ostland governmental offices.<sup>92</sup>

### *2.3.7 – The Redemptorists after their return to Pośpieszka in 1943*

In the situation of this «definite thaw», some Polish parish priests began organizing retreats for their Polish parishioners, and then began asking the Redemptorist, Fathers Dochniak and Całka, to conduct these retreats. Responding to the invitation of Father Stanisław Tracewski, Father Całka gave such a retreat in Kalwaria Wileńska from 18 until 21 April, 1943. Since Archbishop Reinys had forbidden Całka to preach, Father Tracewski petitioned the archbishop to cancel his ban and this was easily granted. The attendance by the Polish faithful was huge.<sup>93</sup> The following 2 July, 1943, Całka celebrated Mass and delivered a sermon in the private chapel of the Pallottine Sisters; afterwards he presided over the profession of temporary vows by seven of their members.

Once again in their residence, there were three Redemptorists, Fathers Całka and Grela and Brother Efrem, who were able to resume their communal life of prayer and work. The small community, especially Father Całka, took an interest in current

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<sup>92</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 370-371.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 369, 371.

events and politics. They were aware of recent defeats of the German army, Germany's withdrawal from southern Italy and its eventual surrender of the Italian peninsula. The community on occasion received Bolshevik, Russian and Lithuanian leaflets which encouraged resistance against the Germans, and promoted ideas about «freedom and certain privileges», if there were to be, instead, a Soviet regime. The house chronicler cynically remarked that local people had already grown quite capable of «learning the lesson of a Bolshevik regime» which had been in force during the first Soviet occupation (1940-1941). As a consequence, they were now awaiting the Soviet «liberators» with considerable anxiety.<sup>94</sup>

In November 1943, Father Całka went to the Wilno civilian administrative board of Ostland to ask how much annual rent he owed for use of the garden. Mr Raube, the Polish clerk, told him «Your plot leased to the board of the Pośpieszka church is exempt from rent». «And the next year?» – «The same!» he was told. Furthermore, when Całka made it known that Archbishop Reinys had named him director of this church, he was advised to apply for a *return* of the church's property and to write a suitable petition for this to the board of Ostland; Mr Raube said he would support this petition. Father Całka wrote such a petition with the help of Father Fraś and submitted it to Mr Raube. Several days later the Land Management Office of Ostland, Kaunas Branch, sent him a *Transfer Certificate* in triplicate, issued on 2 December, 1943, signed by a clerk, Mr. Reychmann and Father Całka.<sup>95</sup>

The first Mass on Christmas Day 1943 was held early in the morning in the crowded house chapel. The words of the Christmas hymn, «...and peace to people of good will» assumed a profound meaning as everyone knew of the approaching battle front. A German army transportation unit, which was now stationed inside the residence, also celebrated «*Fröhliche Weihnachten*» with much drinking.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 370

<sup>95</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 372. A copy with attachments of the transfer is in this house chronicle. The city of Kaunas is written in its German form, *Kaune*, on the certificate.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

On New Year's Day 1944 there came a surprise visit from a Redemptorist chaplain of the German army, a member of the Cologne province by the name of Father Josef Luckas.<sup>97</sup> The visitor joined his Polish confreres in the community's festive dinner; their conversation with Luckas extended into the evening. (It helped that Father Ludwik Fraś, who spoke German quite well, had come out of hiding and joined the others). Father Luckas spoke of his experiences as a chaplain, about the English and American bombardment, and about wartime events in general. Among other things he said, «I do not pray for Germany's victory, since it would be a ruin of the Catholic Church and Christian faith. Instead, I pray that God's Will be fulfilled». He gave to his confreres some letters written by the bishop of Münster, and a copy of Pope Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis*.<sup>98</sup>

In the late months of 1943 and into 1944 the situation on the eastern front had turned grim for the Germans as they drew back before the advancing Russian army. In June of 1944 the German officers, who had been in the Redemptorist Pośpieszka residence for almost nine months, were replaced by a German Field Bakery. This new installation operated there only a short time because the war front continued its stubborn advance westward.<sup>99</sup>

It was a time of extreme poverty, incredible suffering, raids, frequent arrests, and brutal transport to labor camps within Germany. Despite all this and the looming reality of battle, Father Całka preached Lenten retreat talks in the chapel until Palm Sunday 1944. His theme was appropriately chosen, namely, *The Suffering of Christians*. Numerous people participated in the Sacred Triduum at the end of Holy Week. At the Resurrection Mass on Easter Sunday, only half of those who came to Mass could fit inside.

For the month of May 1944 there were the traditional Marian services and sermons; the participation was enormous,

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<sup>97</sup> Josef Luckas, b. 27 December 1911; ord. 13 April 1939; after the war he was imprisoned in a Russian camp; in 1955 he was in Bous, Saarland, Germany, d. 25 July, 2001, Region of Weetebula, Indonesia. See *Catalogus C.Ss.R. 1948*, Romae, 432; *Catalogus C.Ss.R. 1955*, Lovanii, 354, 363.

<sup>98</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 373. The theme of this encyclical is the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

both in the churches in Pośpieszka and Antokol.<sup>100</sup> Despite the gathering clouds of war with all the attendant tension and suspense, on 18 June, 1944, Father Ludwik Fraś went to Landwarów. His purpose was to preach and lead the services in anticipation of the June 27 feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.<sup>101</sup>

### 2.3.8 – Social Care

The years of World War II caused severe poverty conditions in the region of Wilno, especially among the Polish population served by the Redemptorists. The Lithuanians cared for their fellow countrymen, which is understandable. Some help for the Poles came from Polish underground organizations, led notably by women and men religious who began caring for the Poles, especially for children.

Special funds were able to reach the Wilno's Polish population people; the source of the financial aid was the London-based Polish Government-in-exile. It was delivered locally by a delegate of that London group, Zygmunt Fedorowicz, whose code name was «Albin». Distribution was through the Department of Social Care directed by Father Aleksander Lachowicz (and he, too, had a code name: «Leszcyna»). Father Całka received monetary aid from Lachowicz, using the money to organize centers in Pośpieszka for the sake of the poorest Polish families. This activity, of course, was kept secret from the German and Lithuanian authorities.<sup>102</sup> Całka had to create a way of disguising the source of these funds, so he saw to it that collections were taken up «for the poor» in the Redemptorist chapel. Into these local collections he mixed the money from London.

Other important charitable activities were a secret kindergarten in Kolonia Magisterska, and also the providing of food for

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 374

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 376 (Father Całka's memoirs).

<sup>102</sup> J. BOHDANOWICZ, *Działalność niepodległościowa na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1939-1945*, see [www.akwilno.pl/pdf/Dzialalnosc-niepod.pdf](http://www.akwilno.pl/pdf/Dzialalnosc-niepod.pdf), 23-24; L. TOMASZEWSKI, *Kronika wileńska. 1941-1945. Z dziejów Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego*, Warszawa 1992, 61-62; *Id.*, *Wileńszczyzna lat wojny i okupacji 1939-1945*, Warszawa 2001, 365-367; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 321.

the orphan children of men who had served in the military. Two Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth at times provided meals in the Redemptorist community room for school children who otherwise would have gone hungry. All of these «poverty outreach services» worked well until the arrival of the Red Army and the Soviet authorities. Then they had to be discontinued.<sup>103</sup>

3. – *The Redemptorists' Apostolic Ministry during the dispersion of the community, 1942-1944*

The reader will remember that in an aggressive raid on 26 March, 1942, a combined throng of German and Lithuanian police forcibly closed the Redemptorist house at Pośpieszka. This ended a certain stage of ministerial activity of their community. Returning now to that time period, here follows an account of what ministries these Redemptorists exercised as best they could while ill, in prison, or in some interludes of freedom.

The superior, Father Franciszek Świątek, suffering from partial paralysis, had been hospitalized since 9 March, 1942. Father Nuckowski, Father Całka and Brother Jan Filipek were imprisoned. The remaining priests (Ludwik Fraś, Jan Dochniak, and Stanisław Grela, and the Brothers, Antoni Zygađło and Efreń Tymoszek, had gone into hiding. Each community member had to create his own living conditions and possible gainful employment. Friendly families courageously offered them housing. The Brothers, accustomed to physical labor found jobs somewhat easily, Antoni as a cook, and Ephreń as a carpenter. Brother Jan Filipek was soon released from prison, but was assigned to the work camp in Szaktupie (near Kaunas), where he would stay until 1944.<sup>104</sup>

The priests in hiding lacked training in other professions, and were unaccustomed to physical labor, and so could not easily find salaried jobs. Nor could they exercise their ministry openly. They did, however, celebrate Eucharist «privately» among Poles whom they knew. For the ailing Świątek and Nuckowski, their li-

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<sup>103</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 375; M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy*, 321-322.

<sup>104</sup> Jan Filipek was able to escape from that camp in all the confusion of the 1944 Soviet invasion; then he made his way again to Pośpieszka.

ves included a quiet testimony of humility and lengthy suffering, although Świątek was surprisingly quite active.

### 3.1 – Father Franciszek Świątek’s ministry 1942-1944

Father Świątek, impaired as he was, enjoyed receiving visitors in his hospital room and these often included prominent clerics and layfolk.<sup>105</sup> The main topics of their conversations were the future the Church in the Wilno Region, current events and the future of Europe.<sup>106</sup> In July 1942 he was transported to the Dolorists’ hospital, and later he went to live with the Godycki family in Antokol.

It was in the Godycki home that he began to translate into Polish the work of Justin of Miechów,<sup>107</sup> *Discursus praedicabiles super Litanias Lauretanus* (which he was to complete in May 1944). In the next two years he prepared Jewish converts for baptism and conducted a number of more or less secretive retreats for lay people, both youth and adult, and also for women religious—all of these activities were held inside the Godycki home. But his zeal was not exhausted yet, as he began writing the next volumes of his work *Świętość Kościoła w Polsce* [Sanctity of the Church in Poland]. However, he did not finish these because of the approaching Russian-German front.

After the battle of Wilno on 1-9 August, 1944, Father Świątek stayed briefly with the Magdalene Sisters in Antokol. Then on 13 August 1944, after over two years of being away, he returned to the Redemptorist residence in Pośpieszka.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Some of the notable visitors were Fathers Leopold Chomski and Stanisław Czyżewski, Prof. Janina Hurynowiczowa, and Doctor Zygmunt Konigowski.

<sup>106</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 335 (from the report: «Father Świątek, *Przeżycia 1942-1844*; special report for the chronicle»); *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 209-210.

<sup>107</sup> Justin de Miechów was a Dominican priest, 1549-1640. His home in Miechów was some forty kilometers north of Krakow, Poland. The Latin title is translated: *Preachable Sermons on the Litany of Loreto*. These sermons treat the «titles» of Mary, Mother of Jesus, invoked in this litany honoring her.

<sup>108</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 337-346; see also *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 209-221. The women religious present at his retreats in this period included

3.2 – *Father Ludwik Fraś, ministry 1942-1944*

When Father Fraś went into hiding in March 1942 in Kurkliszki near Troki, he was in a village of Polish folk, but these were Poles who had Lithuanian passports. (In 1939, when passports had been issued, the passports of the Poles were stamped with the words «Lithuanian nationality»).

Father Fraś decided he needed to be very cautious and chose to live in the ruined manor house of his hosts, the Gorzuchowskis, and avoid all publicity. Every morning he celebrated Mass in which some members of the Gorzuchowski family participated. After Mass he did the simple chore of gathering and chopping wood. When springtime came in 1942, he began caring for horses—which he had never done before. He received very poor meals like an ordinary farmhand. It is said that the family manor’s storehouse was filled with pork, yet Fraś was never offered any of it. He also tried to serve as a teacher for the Gorzuchowski daughters, although not with much success.

Shortly before Easter Sunday, 5 April, 1942, Fraś wanted to go to Pośpieszka to learn what had happened to their Redemptorist residence, but several obstacles arose to prevent his making the trip. Instead he went to Rykonty dressed as a peasant and introduced himself to the parish priest, Father Alchimowicz. Here he found a warm welcome and was entertained «as in the good old times». But Alchimowicz had no information about Pośpieszka or the other Redemptorists.

After Fraś returned to Kurkliszki from Rykonty, Brother Efrem Tymoszek visited him, bringing him clothing, food, news—and a letter from the Redemptorist General, Patrick Murray, naming him as superior of the Pośpieszka community. This letter had passed through the hands of the Gestapo, who, in turn gave it to a servant at the Pośpieszka farm house. This was a Gestapo scheme in an attempt to discover Fraś’ hideout—a trap which Fraś recognized. He returned the letter marked «unclaimed by recipient». Then, aided by Father Dochniak and Brother Efrem, he

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the Pallotines, Seraphics, Magdalenes (and others). It is noted that Świątek adjusted his schedule to that of the Sisters, since they worked mostly in hospitals all day. Forbidden to wear religious garb, they appeared dressed as laywomen.

went to the family of Władysław Peda who lived in a small settlement called Ožerele near Wilno, where he remained until the arrival of the Red Army.<sup>109</sup>

From Ožerele he made secret visits to the house in Pošpieszka and made contact with his Redemptorist confreres in hiding. On 26 July, 1942, in the presence of several of these men he announced that he was their new rector. Then he intensified contacts with his community members, visited the house at Pošpieszka at least once a week, and even resumed his clandestine courses.

Another venture in Pošpieszka during a period of surprise raids by the Gestapo was to help hide a man then known as «Mr. Syrwid». In actual fact this man was the neurologist, Doctor Jan Juchniewicz, who was still suffering from the torture which he had received when imprisoned by the Lithuanians. Father Fraś himself had to hide in the Redemptorist cellars if he happened to be at Pošpieszka when such raids occurred.

Following the suggestion of various resistance contacts, Father Fraś was able to compose a very convincing petition concerning the release of Fathers Nuckowski and Całka. It so well done that the Nazi authorities accepted it.

Towards the end of June 1944 the Germans began to withdraw before the advance of the Russians. In this situation Father Fraś, together with Mrs. Peda and «Mr. Syrwid», fled from the Peda home in Ožerele to the Wilia River. There they witnessed the beginning of the battle of Wilno on 7 July. The next day, Father Fraś returned to the Redemptorist house at Pošpieszka and together with the few Redemptorists who were hiding in the cellars, he awaited the end of the battle.<sup>110</sup>

### 3.3 – Father Jan Dochniak, ministry 1942-1944

When the oppression by the German and Lithuanian police gained momentum in March 1942, Father Jan Dochniak did not at first think that he was in danger. But when he himself wit-

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<sup>109</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 389: J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia o Wilnie*, (card 7r).

<sup>110</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, [388-389]: J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia o Wilnie*, (card 6v-7r)



nessed some Carmelite priests being seized, he lost no time in escaping the Wilno area and taking refuge in Kojrany. There he stayed with Mr. Fiedziuk, the director of a local power plant.

To disguise his identity Dochniak had his head shaved and obtained new clothing. Soon he learned that the Redemptorist community in Pośpieszka had been raided and the house closed and sealed. For a year and a half, until the end of August 1943, Dochniak stayed in Pieczuki on the Wilia River with a family named Runiewicz. Authorities within the Polish Resistance provided him with new identity papers; his assumed identity was now «Kulak Wojciech, native of Warsaw». Virtually no one knew he was a priest. When a select few learned who he really was, he began celebrating Mass, but only on Sundays. To help support himself he learned bookbinding and how to build tile stoves.<sup>111</sup>

At the beginning of May 1943, believing he was somewhat more secure, Dochniak conducted a Forty Hours Service in Nowa Wilejka and then preached retreats in Rzesza, in the deanery of Kalwaria. But danger again arose when he learned there had been a raid on a family named Rumieniec. The Gestapo killed several members of that family. On 25 August, 1943, Father Dochniak left Pieczuki for Ożerele in order to stay with Michał and Helena Stankiewicz.<sup>112</sup> He accepted their hospitality until 22 July, 1944, regularly praying the rosary with them, as well as sharing various religious books with them.<sup>113</sup>

While in the Stankiewicz home in the spring of 1944, Dochniak felt secure enough to conduct a parish retreat from 19 until 21 March in the town of Sużany. It so happened that this was a center for the Sixth Wilno Brigade of the Polish Home Army. It was also where the so-called (Resistance) «Sużany Republic» was created. During the parish retreat on 19 March he was a witness to the maneuvers of the entire famous Sixth Home Army, Wilno

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<sup>111</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, [385-388]: J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia o Wilnie*, (card 5r-6v).

<sup>112</sup> This couple were both medical assistants; the wife, Helena, was able to treat Father Dochniak for his ulcers from which he had suffered for two years.

<sup>113</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, [382]: J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia z Wilna*, (card 8v-9r).

Brigade,<sup>114</sup> and, in fact, blessed their banner—although he did not appear dressed as a priest.<sup>115</sup>

Especially dangerous for Father Dochniak was the retreat which he conducted in Pobrżeże from 30 April to 3 May, 1944. The Lithuanians authorities had moved in and expelled several thousands of Poles from this small town the previous year; in place of these Poles the Lithuanians had settled their own countrymen there. Consequently, the situation was very tense, especially since the local parish priest and his assistant had been arrested only several days earlier. Moreover, a unit of the Home Army was approaching. In order to control the situation, the Lithuanians brought in a battalion known as the «Ponary Riflemen». These famous killers had seen to the liquidation of the Jewish Ghettos in Lublin and Warsaw. They were known for their many varieties of brutal executions.

Despite the atmosphere which threatened the seizure of Polish priests, Father Dochniak conducted the retreat in Pobrżeże. He employed prudence and moderation in his preaching so as not to offend Poles or Lithuanians, and he succeeded. He even heard the confessions of the local Lithuanians, including the village-mayor.<sup>116</sup> His knowledge of Lithuanian, which he used during the retreat, along with his general demeanor, seems to have been what eased the tension of the situation.

As indicated above, the Russian-German front was approaching rapidly into Lithuania and on 7 July, 1944, came the battle of Wilno. The fighting was close to Ożerele, and very fierce around Pośpieszka, which the Germans had reinforced. The Redemptorist residence did not suffer heavy damage. But the center of Wilno saw major destruction and remained burning for several few days.

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<sup>114</sup> For more on the Sixth Home Army, Wilno Brigade, see T. SZYMKOWSKI, "Błyskawica" na ziemi sużańskiej ["Błyskawica" in the Sużany Land], *Wydawnictwo Polskie* 2000, 149; W. BORODZIEWICZ, *Szósta Wileńska Brygada AK* [*The Sixth Home Army, Wilno Brigade*], Warszawa 1992; *6 Wileńska Brygada AK*, see [wikipedia.org/wiki/6\\_Wile](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/6_Wile)

<sup>115</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 293-301, 373, 393; J. DOCHNIAK, (card 9v); T. KRAHEL, *Archidiecezja wileńska*, 45, 60. – At Sużany Father Dochniak also came to know the chaplain of the Brigade, Father Piotr Loska.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 301-302, 393-394; J. DOCHNIAK, *Wspomnienia z Wilna*, (card 9v-10r).

Father Dochniak was in Ożerele when the Soviet «liberation» came. After being absent for more than two years he returned to the house at Pośpieszka on 24 July, 1944.

#### 3.4 – *Father Stanislaw Grela, ministry 1942-1944*

Father Stanislaw Grela's reaction to the 1942 raid on the Redemptorist house at Pośpieszka was thoughtful and measured. He was returning there but had not yet arrived when told that the raid was in progress. From a safe distance, he could see that this was so. He then requested and received civilian clothes and only later did he return to the abandoned Redemptorist house. After hurriedly gathering some belongings he went into hiding at the Ćwirko-Godycki home in Antokol. While staying there, he regularly celebrated Mass for trusted friends, kept to his schedule as a religious, and perform at least one infant baptism.<sup>117</sup> After a month, Father Świątek who was still the community rector, got word to him that he was not safe in Antokol.

Grela then moved to Sara Cegielna and the home of Jan Kisielewski. There he celebrated liturgies for the family and trusted friends and also conducted Marian services in May 1942. Some of his hours were also spent in composing new sermons. In July he was able make contact with Father Fraś, his newly appointed superior. But in October the threat of being discovered led him to move once again, this time to the home of Michał and Helena Stankiewicz in Ożerele, just as Father Dochniak had done. To thwart the police who scrutinized that area carefully, he took on the appearance of a farmer and garden laborer as he dug potatoes and planted trees. On Sundays, however, he discreetly offered Mass with a brief homily. In October he led select groups in praying the rosary, and at Christmas 1942 he did what he could to bolster the faith of these people by having a Midnight Mass complete with Polish carols.<sup>118</sup>

January of 1943 found him venturing out to the Pallotine Sisters in Antokol where he let it be known that he was available

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<sup>117</sup> *Kronikaklasztorum w Wilnie*, 319-325. Father Grela's report «During Dispersion». – The infant baptism was a relative of the Ćwirko-Godycki family.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 321-323.

for confessions. Not far away in Podwerke he visited and celebrated Mass for his partially paralyzed confrere Father Nuckowski. Back in Ozerele he complied with a request to take on the role of schoolteacher for some youngsters.<sup>119</sup>

Fortunately it was about this time that Father Grela was able to obtain a different identity card, one which gave him a greater possibility of moving from place to place.<sup>120</sup> On 11 June, 1943, he was able to return to the Redemptorist house in Pośpieszka. (Father Całka had been living there since April, and soon Brother Efrem was able to join them.) From Pośpieszka Grela travelled regularly to minister in Warzówka. Moreover, in July and August 1943 he prepared forty-eight children for their First Communion in Pośpieszka, and in June and July 1944 another group of forty children.<sup>121</sup>

#### 4. – *The second Soviet occupation and «repatriation»*

The battle of Wilno lasted from 7 until 13 July, 1944. Already on 7 July the conflict encompassed the area around the Redemptorist house in Pośpieszka where Fathers Całka and Grela and Brother Efrem had again taken up residence (after their 1942-1944 absence). In fact, on that very same day Pośpieszka was seized by the Soviets after fierce flights with the Germans who had entrenched themselves there.<sup>122</sup>

But the battle of Wilno, in which the Polish Home Army units participated on the side of the Soviets against the Germans, lasted till 13 July. Then the commanders of the Red Army turned on the men of the Polish Home Army, betraying and arresting them. In recording this betrayal, the Redemptorist chronicler noted:

On 16 July [1944] London<sup>123</sup> read in English on the radio a protest against the incorporation of Wilno into Soviet Lithuania, stating that England does not acknowledge the change of borders

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 323-324.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 345, 377 (Fr Całka's report); M. SADOWSKI, *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 410.

<sup>123</sup> «London», as used here, most likely means the Polish government-in-exile based in London.

during the war. The radio also commented on the battle of Wilno [stating] that the sacrifice and heroism of the Polish Home Army units: the First, the Third, the Fourth and the Twenty-Fourth Brigades which fought courageously, being in contact with the Soviet commanders, cannot be wasted ... Wilno has been set afire, and the Polish Army disarmed.<sup>124</sup>

After the battle of Wilno/Pośpieszka, all the community members were eventually reunited in their Redemptorist residence in Pośpieszka. As mentioned, three of them (Całka, Grela and Brother Efrem) were already there. Joining these men in July 1944 were the superior Fraś, along with Dochniak, Świątek, and the quite ill Nuckowski. The last to arrive was Brother Jan Filipek who came in mid-August, recently set free from his imprisonment in Szatupie near Kaunas.<sup>125</sup>

Community life was restored and so was the pastoral ministry in the house chapel. The feast of the Assumption of Mary on 15 August, 1944, was celebrated with solemnity. Soon there were again appeals to conduct religious and parish retreats. The first to go out to preach a retreat was Father Świątek; it was provided for Sisters of St. Casimir in late August. Then in October came an invitation for preaching a Forty Hours Devotion in the parish of Nowa Wilejka; Fathers Całka and Dochniak fulfilled this request, delighted to see the services attended by crowds of Polish faithful.<sup>126</sup>

However, the political situation did not give rise to optimism. In the restored Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic the power figures were Russian communists, experts in denationalization of previously independent areas and ready to eradicate Church institutions. Moreover, these communist officials in the Wilno-Pośpieszka area treated the old «reforms» of 1940-1941 during their First Occupation as being still valid.

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 378-379 (Father Całka's report).

<sup>125</sup> W. SZOŁDRSKI, *Redemptoryści w Polsce*, vol. III, pp. 116-119. It is clear that Brother Antoni Zygałdo had also returned, but available records are unclear on when he returned.

<sup>126</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 347-348, 350; *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 217-218.

In addition, now in 1944, specific new regulations soon appeared. Those which most threatened Catholic Church life were: 1) Church documents relative to baptisms, weddings and deaths issued after 1941 lost legal status, needing to be replaced by state papers; 2) Exorbitant fees and tax assessments were levied on church premises causing closure of these churches; 3) total separation of church and state was declared; no religious subjects could be taught in public schools; 4) no young people could go to town before 2:00 P.M. on Sundays, clearly causing a hardship for Mass attendance; 5) major seminaries were closed, except for one (in Kaunas) which could admit only 150 students; 6) religious orders had to begin «registering» as of 16 February, 1945, as did Catholic parishes as of February 1946; 7) Archbishop Jałbrzykowski of Wilno was arrested on 24 January, 1945, and deported along with several of his curia; 8) buildings owned by men or women religious, and other church buildings could be seized for government purposes; 9) orders of women or men religious were dissolved and «merged» with forced placement in predetermined locations beginning in 1948, on the basis of a special act of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Lithuanian Socialist Republic.<sup>127</sup>

At the beginning of October 1944 the atmosphere among the Redemptorists of Pośpieszka was sad. Father Świątek commented, «Russia did not give any help to Polish insurgents who resisted the Germans, and did not let anyone else help them».<sup>128</sup> Another reason for sadness was the uncertainty regarding the fate of the Polish state. Poles were asking whether the Polish state would be restored, with what borders, and what would happen to the Wilno Region.

Of course the Redemptorist community members were wondering whether their residence might survive under this communist regime. Remembering the suffering of the Church and the Polish people in Soviet Russia, and in the Lithuanian

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<sup>127</sup> I. MIKŁASZEWICZ, *Polityka sowiecka wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Litwie*, 38-77, 172-178. Concerning the liquidation of religious orders the author refers to the work of R. LAUKAITYTĖ, *Lietuvos vienuolijos. XX a. istorijos bruožai*, Vilnius 1997, 125-131.

<sup>128</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 349-350.

and Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, in the years 1940-1941, did not bring optimism to any Polish heart.<sup>129</sup> Then came the horrific news of 22 February, 1944, when Winston Churchill announced in London that eastern Poland, including Wilno (and the surrounding Region) would be given over to Russia; this was with the consent of the Allies—a repayment to Russia for its help in conquering Germany. The Polish population was stunned with disbelief. In August 1944 the population of Wilno was overwhelmingly Polish, numbering 82,000 Poles in the city, while its entire population was slightly over 99,000.

By 1 December, 1945, the Soviet-Lithuanian authorities had arrested over 12,000 Poles.<sup>130</sup> The decision taken at Yalta and announced on 13 February, even before repatriation was declared, caused many intelligentsia, and others who believed themselves in danger, to leave for the city of Lublin, Poland.

The detention of Polish Home Army soldiers and the deportation of suspected Poles and eminent Polish figures deep into Russia in the years 1944-1945 terrified the Polish who lived in the Wilno Region.<sup>131</sup> The state-sponsored (mandatory) collective farming and the consequent deportation of farmers in the years 1948-1952 forced not a few of them to repatriate. From 1944 till 1952 over 300,000 Poles were transported or displaced from Lithuania. It was evident that not only the Russian communists holding the major posts in Lithuania, but the Lithuanians themselves, decided to get rid of the Polish population. On 28 December, 1944, registration for repatriation began and was to last till 28 February, 1945. Lists of those Poles who «volunteered» to leave Lithuania were made.

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<sup>129</sup> M. IWANOW, *Polacy w Związku Radzieckim w latach 1917-1990*, in: *Polacy w Kościele katolickim w ZSSR*, ed. E. Walewander, Lublin 1991, 59-82.

<sup>130</sup> I. MIKŁASZEWICZ, *Polityka sowiecka wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Litwie*, 164-165.

<sup>131</sup> F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki Klasztoru i Kościoła pod wezwaniem Matki Boskiej Zwycięskiej czyli Różańcowej w Wilnie na Pośpieszcie od roku 1946 do 1963*, (a ms., in possession of author), 3; R. DZWONKOWSKI, *Kościół katolicki na Białorusi [The Catholic Church in Byelorussia]*, in: *Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego* 39 (1996) no. 3-4, pp. 92-101.

The Wilno community of the Redemptorists at first did not know what decision to make, and they could not establish contact with their provincial in Kraków.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, the authorities of the Socialist Lithuanian Republic were quoting the decree of 18 March, 1941, concerning the nationalization of church buildings, on the basis of which the Redemptorists house had been confiscated and the community members were ordered to move to the Jesuit house. But vigorous protests by «working people» had saved the Redemptorists from that eviction. The officials now pressed them to leave their residence. Some religious had already left Wilno. There were virtually no missions and retreats to give, and one priest was enough to minister in the chapel since a considerable part of the faithful Catholics had already left or was preparing to leave. Another problem was the high tax assessment on the building in which the chapel was situated. These taxes were levied on various Wilno churches in December 1945.<sup>133</sup> No one could pay these sums.

The Redemptorists had to take all these factors into consideration. They believed their duty was to stay with «their people», but the authorities forbade them to minister and were seizing local religious houses, as had already been done in Russia. Antokol was already a burned-out village, largely deserted. Kolonia Magistracka was becoming much the same; only a handful of families decided to stay; numerous villagers registered to be repatriated. It was repeatedly remarked that for such a small number of believers the diocesan priests, those born in the Wilno Region, would be sufficient.

After considering all aspects of the situation on 5 February, 1945, the decision to leave Pośpieszka was unanimous and signed by all members, including Father Świątek. However, the following stipulation was added: «It was generally assumed that Father Świątek could stay the longest in Wilno because of his age and

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<sup>132</sup> *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 362-365: Father Fraś writes about repatriation and registration. See P. ŁOSOWSKI, B. MODZELEWSKA, *Litwa. C. Czasy najnowsze*, cols. 1247-1249.

<sup>133</sup> The cathedral was assessed 45,000 rubles; another church, St. John's Church at almost 31,000. See I. MIKŁASZEWICZ, *Polityka sowiecka wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Litwie*, 40.



health condition». What this meant is that the Russian authorities were likely to tolerate Świątek, considering how old he was and his deteriorated physical condition. In this context, he had signed the resolution and was ready to leave, but he showed a willingness to remain as long as possible.

Father Całka should leave first and contact the provincial to consult his opinion and wishes. As this resolution was being executed, on 4 March, 1945, Father Marcin Nuckowski, who had continued to be seriously ill, passed away.

After the funeral of Father Nuckowski, Father Całka and Brother Jan Filipek left on 13 March, 1945, their destination being the Redemptorist residence in Zamość, about 300 kilometers northeast of Kraków, which the Redemptorists had already regained.<sup>134</sup> Meanwhile back in Pośpieszka, having received no news from Father Franciszek, their provincial superior, Father Dochniak and Brothers Antoni and Efrem left on 13 April. Their departure meant that only three men remained in Pośpieszka, Fathers Grela, Świątek, and Fraś.

By August it was clear that the NKVD<sup>135</sup> were closing in on Father Fraś but he managed to slip away on 16 August. The dwindling flock who came to the Pośpieszka chapel were mostly a poor, working class group who had always been attached to the Redemptorists. The last two priests at Pośpieszka, Grela and Świątek continued to serve these faithful people as best they could. But, finally, Grela, too, found it necessary to leave in May of 1946.

Now alone, Father Świątek, partially paralyzed and limping, was convinced that at least one priest should stay there. Finally, he received the provincial's consent to remain, which reassured him.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki klasztoru i Kościoła [...] w Wilnie*, 1; see *Kronika klasztoru w Wilnie*, 50-51, Father Dochniak's corrections; W. SZOŁDRSKI, *Redemptoryści w Polsce*, vol. II, p. 336.

<sup>135</sup> NKVD (or in Polish NKWD), loosely translated «People's Ministry of Internal Affairs», was both the public and the secret police force of the Soviet Union under Stalin; it was noted as being involved in torture, executions, deportations and the direction of forced labor camps.

<sup>136</sup> F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki klasztoru i Kościoła [...] w Wilnie*, 1-2.

5. – *Thirty years of Father Franciszek Świątek's continued apostolate among Poles under the Soviet Regime, 1946-1976*

Father Świątek remained alone in Wilno, in the suburb of Pośpieszka. He loved it there because this was the base from which the Redemptorists had done so much for so many in the «eastern lands» of the Wilno Region and Byelorussia. But in 1944 he was again in the Red Empire, behind the inhuman *Iron Curtain*.

Świątek probably had no idea that he would continue to live and labor in this general region for another thirty years. From his wheelchair he depended greatly on others including several priests, women religious and laity. He dedicated his missionary efforts to the Polish folk for whom this territory was a Homeland, providing them with Eucharist, sermons, retreats, Reconciliation and his own personal example.

5.1 – *Pastoral work in Pośpieszka and Wołokumpia, 1946-1951*

In May and June of 1946 this lone Redemptorist, Franciszek Świątek, provided the Marian and Sacred Heart of Jesus devotions which the people of Pośpieszka knew and loved. He was their priest on Sundays and weekdays; he baptized, catechized and visited the sick. In the late autumn and winter of 1944-1945 he witnessed the tragedy of those who «... were arrested en masse and transported in terrible conditions deep into Russia, to labor camps, during severe cold, and almost dying of starvation».<sup>137</sup> And this was happening not only to Poles, but also to Lithuanians.

These horrors were eased somewhat after strong protests from England and the United States of America. Due to this pressure, Moscow consented in 1947 to allow the return of thousands of deportees from Siberia and other locations. Their sad arrival went on for weeks and Father Świątek wrote:

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<sup>137</sup> On Palm Sunday 1945 Father Świątek began a retreat for Poles in despair about their «repatriation» and deportation to Siberia, their arrests and hunger. The local chapel was always crowded. See *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 221-222.

They ... returned to Wilno and Pośpieszka, came to the chapel to thank Our Lady for help and for their happy return ... I saw people swollen from hunger for the first time in my life; a young man in his twenties and men older than he—and they seemed no different. For some men who were starving I provided jobs in our garden.<sup>138</sup>

In February 1948 the Soviet authorities attempt to revive the force of the nationalization act of 1940 by seizing the Redemptorist house of Pośpieszka. In fact they aimed at wiping out any «remnants» of religious congregations.<sup>139</sup> The officials said they wanted the building to make it into a summer house for children. Świątek refused to sign, arguing again that the residence and chapel had been built with the money of workers. Thus it belonged to them; furthermore he would defend its ownership, applying to Stalin himself.

Some officials accepted this argument while others did not, and the dispute lasted five months. It was all just a game since Stalin's orders were clear: he wanted no men or women religious to exist and demanded the seizure of their buildings. Meanwhile Father Świątek held a pre-Easter retreat in 1948 with superb attendance. Nevertheless, government officials siezed the residence and garden in July. As a token of compensation, they let this lone Redemptorist Świątek live in a structure on the farm and have some use of the garden. He even set up a makeshift chapel and, when Christmas arrived, he had some 200 come for Midnight Mass. Then someone reported the event and the authorities banned such assemblies.

Finally, tired of constant pressure, in November 1949 Świątek relocated in Wolokumpia on the River Wilia. He was given the use of a pleasant, but deserted, house of a Mr. Runiewicz, who had departed for Poland.<sup>140</sup>

In Wolokumpia he avoided publicity and, for the most part, was not persecuted, as he quietly kept up a ministry inside his borrowed house. Various groups of women religious appreciated his presence, among whom were the Seraphic Sisters and the

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<sup>138</sup> F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki klasztoru i Kościoła [...] w Wilnie*, 3.

<sup>139</sup> I. MIKŁASZEWICZ, *Polityka sowiecka wobec Kościoła katolickiego*, 178.

<sup>140</sup> F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki klasztoru i Kościoła [...] w Wilnie*, 4-11.

Bernardines. Once more, however, the poverty of his flock was noticeable. In his diary of this time he lamented that, for the sake of surviving, some were driven to stealing. Also, he described how some Poles had been deceived into believing the propaganda that emigration to the Soviet Union would mean a kind of «paradise» for them and their families. Instead they experienced a hell that they could not leave.<sup>141</sup>

### 5.2 – His «secret mission» to Nowogródek

In May 1951 Father Świątek was requested by a Pallotine Sister to transfer his missionary efforts to Nowogródek, at least for a short time. No Polish priest had been there for two years. A member of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, Sister Maria Małgorzata,<sup>142</sup> was taking care of the parish church. Świątek did not have a government work permit for that region, but he agreed to go for two weeks, managing to travel in secret. During the two weeks he ministered in the back of a well-known tailor shop. As faithful Catholics came and went, they appeared to be clients coming for tailoring needs.

For two weeks Father Świątek cared for twenty people, providing Eucharist, confession, instructions, and the Sacrament of the Sick—especially to numerous elderly and infirm. Baptism of children was excluded for fear that crying children could betray the «clandestine church». The missionary returned to the Wilno area without incident on 25 May.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-15.

<sup>142</sup> Sister Maria Małgorzata, b. Ludwika Banaś 10 April, 1896, in Leczy Dolnej near Wadowice; entered the order in 1917. From 1934 onward she was in Nowogródek, eastern Poland. On 1 Aug., 1943, the eleven Holy Family Sisters with whom she was stationed were taken to a wooded area by the Gestapo. All eleven were shot and buried in a mass grave. Sister Maria Małgorzata had been momentarily away from their convent, and so was spared. She stayed on in Nowogródek, alone, ministering to the people. Died 26 April, 1966. Now officially a Servant of God, her cause for Beatification began on 19 Feb., 2003.

<sup>143</sup> *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 234; F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki klasztoru i Kościoła [...] w Wilnie*, 15-21; M. BRUDZISZ, *Świątek Franciszek (1889-1976), redemptorysta*, in: *SPTK*, vol. 7, Warszawa 1983, 285-287.

### 5.3 – *Father Świątek in Brasław, Byelorussia, 1952-1959*

Soon after his return Father Świątek at first had some thought about working in Ukraine. Instead, however, in September 1952 he decided to go to, Brasław, Byelorussia, about 215 kilometers northeast of Wilno, after being invited there by the local people who had been without a priest for four years.

During this time there were almost no clergy in Byelorussia as they had been deported to Siberia or forced to leave for «repatriation» in Poland.<sup>144</sup> Arriving in Brasław on 7 October, 1952, initially with no permit or registration, Father Świątek discovered that his ministry would involve fifteen neighboring parishes.<sup>145</sup> People in Brasław had organized a special transport to bring his belongings and church equipment to their town. Thanks to «connections» in Połock, and with a generous gift of some vodka, the people also managed to obtain a permit for his pastoral work, and his necessary civil registration.

During that time the faithful reclaimed their church which had been converted into a grain storage center, as well as having been vandalized and robbed of anything thought to be of value. Within a short time it was readied for worship. Father Świątek applied for and received diocesan faculties from Bishop Kazimierz Paltarokas (Póltoragas) of Poniewież, who, at the same time, served as administrator of the Wilno diocese.<sup>146</sup> On 1 November, 1952, Mass was again celebrated in the beautiful church. The

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<sup>144</sup> R. DZWONKOWSKI, *Kościół katolicki na Białorusi*, 88-95; I. MIKŁASZEWICZ, *Polityka sowiecka wobec Kościoła katolickiego*, 179-185.

<sup>145</sup> *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 235; F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki klasztoru i Kościoła [...] w Wilnie*, 23.

<sup>146</sup> Kazimierz Paltarokas (1875-1958), Bishop of Poniewież; defended religious instruction of children conducted at least in churches and parish houses; he also appealed to Stalin in the matter of the limitation of seminarians in Kaunas; together with other bishops he did not condemn the Lithuanian opposition in 1946, did not agree to the registration of parishes, which the communists demanded; from 1949 he was the administrator of the Dioceses of Telsze and Wilno; after Stalin's death and the certain thaw in 1954, as the only bishop in office, having the consent of the authorities he proposed three candidates to the Apostolic See, two of them received appointment and consecration. See I. MIKŁASZEWICZ, *Polityka sowiecka wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Litwie*, according to the personal index: "Paltarokas".

church was packed on that day, and into the following months and years.

Considering Świątek's physical condition, one must admire the heroic schedule he maintained. For almost eight years on Sundays and holydays it was as follows: confessions from 7:00 till nearly 9:00 A.M., followed by a Mass and sermon at 9:00; then more confessions and sometimes weddings until noon when there was «High Mass». Then came a light breakfast taken in the sacristy. Later in the afternoon there were Vespers with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by baptisms and confessions, often until 9:00 P.M. Only then did he return to his quarters for some dinner and recitation of his breviary. On weekdays there were stipulated times for Mass and more confessional ministry. He also made visits to the sick, held regular catechism sessions, instructed youngsters prior to their First Communion, and prepared the engaged for matrimony.

From the beginning of his time in Braślów Father Świątek tried not to irritate the Soviet authorities, yet they could be malicious toward him. For instance they arrived late on one Christmas Eve demanding to have a «short conversation» with him. They released him only after seven hours of interrogation, leaving no time to rest before his first Christmas Day Mass at 5:00 A.M. (and he had other Masses to follow). Some consolation arose from the fact that people traveled during the night from all the fifteen scattered parishes and packed the church on Christmas. It was their first chance in years to celebrate Christmas Eucharist. Although Christmas fell on a working day, no one left to go off to factories, offices or other jobs.<sup>147</sup>

In the summers (May till September) when farm work was lighter, all the other parishes who were then without priests, came to the church in Braślów in order to celebrate their patronal feasts days with special festivities. Then, of course, Father Świątek had much more work to do. He took this opportunity to catechize all the children who were on summer vacation from the public schools where religion classes were forbidden. (These catechetical classes each year included about 1000 children who needed preparation for their First Communion).

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<sup>147</sup> F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki klasztoru i Kościoła [...] w Wilnie*, 31.

With time Father Świątek became even more paralyzed and dependent upon assistance from those around him. At first he had tried occasionally to visit all the outlying parishes, but this became impossible. Consequently, some more distant parishioners had to journey over ninety-five kilometers to reach the church in Braślów.<sup>148</sup>

Stalin's death in March of 1953 brought about limited changes in the harsh Soviet communist rule. Priests were released from Gulags in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, while others crept out from their hiding places in Byelorussia or elsewhere. But not all benefitted from their release due to their lack of «work permits». Many of the priests found their way to Father Świątek generally in a physically and psychologically exhausted condition. They wanted to talk, to rest, to go to confession, and hear something comforting for their spirits.

Father Świątek deeply admired these priests and he found ways to mobilize them. He arranged that they assist him, serving discreetly as confessors, since he still had many confessional requests. Moreover he provided them with Mass intentions and stipends since he had a large surplus of these. In Father Świątek's memoirs he mentions a number of these priests by name; among them were both diocesan priests and members of religious orders. In some cases he relates their stories of having endured extended imprisonment and torture.<sup>149</sup>

Father Świątek was also visited by Poles who had been drafted into the Soviet Army as well as by Poles from the Ural and Siberia. Once he had a visitor from the Kamchatka peninsula in far eastern Russia. She was the wife of a Polish Catholic,

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<sup>148</sup> Father Świątek recorded that every year he preached between 150-170 sermons, confessed people every day from noon till 3:00 P.M.; every year he ministered the sacrament of the sick to about 250 people, baptised about 250; there were about 200 weddings and instructions for about 140 converts. Moreover, every year he conducted several retreats for priests and women religious. See *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 236-237.

<sup>149</sup> F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy Kroniki klasztoru i Kościoła [...] w Wilnie*, 34 ff. See also A. HLEBOWICZ, *Kościół w niewoli*, Warszawa 1991, 62-63, and *Za wschodnią granicą*, 38-40; T. POLESKI, *Duszpasterstwo katolickie na Białorusi (1917-1984)*, in: "Libertas", no. 4 (1985) 62-63; R. DZWONKOWSKI, *Losy duchowieństwa katolickiego w ZSSR 1917-1939. Martyrologium*, Lublin 1998, 167-169.

being of the Orthodox faith herself. Her wish was that her son be baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. She had traveled for three weeks to reach Braślów. Another visitor was a Russian officer, an Orthodox believer, who became Roman Catholic through the example of his Polish wife. He arrived in Braślów from Brześć, not in military uniform, but wearing peasant clothing and accompanied by his wife.<sup>150</sup>

During this time in Braślów Father Świątek was constantly monitored in his pastoral work and even tormented by police officials. The large crowds that came to the Braślów church made the police nervous. They began to look for an occasion to get rid of him. In 1958 they used a false pretext by which to accuse him of spying and subsequently came for an inspection of his living quarters. In the end these authorities saw to it that he was removed as leader of the Braślów parish. A priest named Zawistowski was installed in his place, but Świątek was allowed to remain for a while as the parish assistant. Then in May 1959 the Russians forbade Father Świątek to preside in the church. On the following 25 July there was a thorough search of his house in which he lost all the valuable documents concerning the Beatification process of a mystic named Aniela (Angela) Salawa.<sup>151</sup> He was so affected by these interrogations and losses that on 13 June, 1959, he left Braślów secretly, his destination being Czarny Bór a small settlement near Wilno, Lithuania.<sup>152</sup>

#### 5.4 – *Father Świątek in Czarny Bór (Lithuania), and briefly in Poland, 1959-1964*

The Redemptorist residence in Pośpieszka was now completely in the hands of Soviet authorities; this is what led Father Świątek to choose Czarny Bór. Here, too he was harassed by the Russians. From June 1959 until January 1960, after many inter-

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<sup>150</sup> F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy kroniki klasztoru ... w Wilnie*, 37.

<sup>151</sup> Aniela (Angela) Salawa, b. 9 Sept., 1881, in Siepraw near Kraków; a house maid, mystic, and member of Third Order Franciscans; d.12 March, 1922; beatified in Kraków 13 Aug., 1991.

<sup>152</sup> The Czarny Bór is not to be confused with a town by the same name in southwestern Poland, near the border of today's Czech Republic. Its name means Black Forest, or Black Woods, a reference to the dense trees nearby.



ventions with authorities, he was finally registered. His housing was in a rented flat in the home owned by Mrs. Emilia Zielewicz. One room became a chapel in which he again took up his pastoral ministry as he had done in Braślów. He was also in contact with many congregations of women religious. Because he was still under close surveillance, the retreats which he managed to conduct were usually for small groups, and sometimes held even in a forest.

Just as in Braślów, many priests and religious contacted him for confession and spiritual direction and he helped them in other ways, especially with Mass stipends and intentions.<sup>153</sup> But one of his ventures in Czarny Bór is deserving of special recognition: this «Missionary in the wheelchair» (as he was known) organized a secret seminary-of-sorts inside his flat. He actually prepared candidates for priesthood, with most of these ordinands eventually going off to Poland for their ordination.<sup>154</sup>

In 1963, at the invitation of his relatives, and after many efforts, he went to Poland to visit his family and his Polish confreres. He crossed the Polish border on 17 September, 1963. While in Poland he visited various Redemptorist houses. He also sought to publish his written works, but in this he was not successful. While in his native land, he was often invited to lead retreats, especially in women's convents.<sup>155</sup> Disregarding his physical difficulty, he moved from place to place, with the help of Father Marian Celej and a seminarian, Jan Noga. He wanted to become «repatriated» and stay permanently in Poland mainly because of his health condition. He applied to the authorities many times to receive this permission, but they never gave consent. The only concession was that his visitor's visa was prolonged until February 1964.

### 5.5 – *Father Świątek's last twelve years, 1964-1976*

After Father Świątek had reached Wilno on 30 April, 1964, he moved to a new flat at 20 Nogaletoiu Street, in a house of the

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<sup>153</sup> He even hosted the visit of some Redemptorists of the Eastern Rite. See F. ŚWIĄTEK, *Ciąg dalszy kroniki klasztoru ... w Wilnie*, 44-49.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-43.

<sup>155</sup> *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 239.

Jancewicz family, and very close to Pośpieszka.<sup>156</sup> There, once again, he fashioned a chapel in his flat and was soon deep into another quiet and discreet stage of pastoral care among Poles. He now mainly served priests and women religious, but at times also the laity. They came from the Wilno Region, Byelorussia, Ukraine and even from Kazakhstan.

A year later, on 5 October, 1965, due to the shortage of priests he was appointed to fulfil the duties of parish priest in Nowa Wilejka; he was to maintain this position until 1974. Since his legs were paralyzed he was driven to his parish on Sundays and Holydays. Yet he was reluctant to celebrate the Eucharist in a seated position, so at least one man (and often two) had to help him stand.<sup>157</sup>

But this disability did not disturb him in hearing confessions and, in fact, he spent hours in the confessional. Nor, of course, was he prevented from preaching and leading retreats. He bore his disability cheerfully and patiently even as it intensified. People continued to be thankful for such a good priest who helped so many, even financially when possible.

There came a time when he was almost totally occupied with work inside his flat in Wilno, especially with religious instructions of all kinds. Strictly speaking, catechizing was forbidden, but he did not worry about this prohibition. Until 1966 he faithfully kept his diary, his *Pamiętnik*, and, although the writing is sometimes illegible, it remains a testimony of his devotion and determination. This diary is a faithful and very detailed record of his many pastoral activities, day by day, for years.<sup>158</sup>

Again credit must be accorded to Father Świątek for his secret preparation of candidates for the priesthood. He was not the only one involved in such clandestine «seminary training»,

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<sup>156</sup> AWPR. Branch in Warsaw, Personal Acts CH/44, Świątek's letters of December [n.d.], 1963 and from Wilno, 6 May, 1964.

<sup>157</sup> See the collection of the vice-postulator of the Polish Redemptorist Province. «Świątek, Franciszek: Testimonies of witnesses for the information process, the testimony of Brother Sebastian, Warszawa, 15 January 2004».

<sup>158</sup> See for example his record of 1965 and into 1966, in *Pamiętnik misjonarski*, 240-244.

or, as it was sometimes called, «this vocational ministry».<sup>159</sup> But it was dear to Świątek's heart and involved various intermediate agents who would pass on requisite data (never by way of documents) to the bishops who approved and presided over the ordination of such candidates. Helping Father Świątek as a key contact person with the bishops was the Redemptorist Brother Sebastian (Władysław) Lachowicz.<sup>160</sup>

With time the paralysis in Father Świątek's legs grew to the point where he lost feeling in them. His hands were similarly affected and so, unable to write, he began using dictation. Much of what he had written before 1959 was lost when Soviet inspectors confiscated his papers during searches. He attempted to reconstruct some of what he had lost but succeeded only in part. A portion of his works have survived because sometime after 1964 Sister Aniela Wróblewska (of the Institute of the Mother of Mercy) made copies of them.<sup>161</sup>

In the early 1970s, being over 80, the venerable Świątek still worked in Nowa Wilejka and in his own flat. But the Curia of the Archdiocese of Wilno, upon becoming aware of his increasingly bad eyesight, released him from the duties in Nowa Wilejka on 30 January 1974.<sup>162</sup> According to his wishes, many people tried to obtain a permit for him to go to Poland, applying to both Russian and Polish authorities, but all efforts were in vain.

During his last years special care was provided for him by a group of people which included the Redemptorist Brother Sebastian (Władysław) Lachowicz, several diocesan priests, a number

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<sup>159</sup> In Ukraine, for instance, Monsignor Waclaw Piątkowski worked to effect these ordinations; Eastern Rite Redemptorist priests did the same, as did various groups of men religious in the Czech Republic. The author of this article was himself likewise so involved. See also *Za wschodnią granicą* [*The Eastern Boundary*] 256-265.

<sup>160</sup> See J. BARTOS, *Misyjne drogi wśród rodaków na wschodzie*, Toruń 2002, 22-23; and A. HLEBOWICZ, *Kościół w niewoli*, 33-34.

<sup>161</sup> The collection of the vice-postulator of the Polish Redemptorist Province. «Świątek, Franciszek: Testimonies of witnesses for the information process, The testimony of Maria Julia Wróblewska».

<sup>162</sup> AWPR-Tu, *Personalalia*, no. 144, «Acts of Father Franciszek Świątek: Personal documents, the letter of the Curia in Wilno, no. 55 issued on 30 January 1974».

of women religious, his neighbor Michał Niewiarowicz, and the Jancewicz family who owned the house where Father Świątek had his flat in Wilno.<sup>163</sup>

Father Franciszek Świątek died on 4 March 1976.<sup>164</sup> His funeral Mass was celebrated in Nowa Wilejka where he had lived those final years. A priest who attended said it was a beautiful service and when his coffin was lowered into the grave he heard a fellow priest near him say in a whisper, «We are burying a great missionary and a Polish Patriot».<sup>165</sup>

#### 6. – Apostolate of Father Jan Bartos, 1969-1990

When Father Świątek died in 1976 the Soviet regime had witnessed the rise to power of Nikita S. Khrushchev<sup>166</sup> and also his downfall in 1964. Then came the eighteen-year leadership of Leonid Brezhnev. It was during the Brezhnev era that another Redemptorist exercised significant ministry in the same area which had known the heroism of Father Świątek. This man was Father Jan Bartos.<sup>167</sup> It was a priest-uncle of Bartos, Father Jan Zieja,

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<sup>163</sup> AWPR. Branch in Warsaw, Personal Acts no. 44/Ch Świątek Franciszek: *Korespondencja 1954-1991*, till 1976 dictated and undersigned by Father Świątek; Collections of the vice-postulator of the Polish Redemptorist Province, Tuchów: «Świątek, Franciszek, Testimonies of witnesses for the beatification process: Father Cz. Tyszkiewicz, Brother Sebastian Władysław Lachowicz. Sister Apolonia Pietkun, Sister Renata Fierkowicz, Sister Aniela Julia Wróblewska, Sister Bronisława Żabiłowicz, gathered in 1991 by Fathers Bogusław Augustyn, C.Ss.R., and Mirosław Juruś, C.Ss.R.». After Father Świątek's death numerous witnesses of his life promoted his beatification. Therefore, these many testimonies were collected.

<sup>164</sup> Abundant material to the life of Father Franciszek Świątek is also in AWPR-Tu: Personalalia, including *Pamiętnik misjonarski*.

<sup>165</sup> AWPR-Tu, Personalalia, no. 144 Father Franciszek Świątek's acts: documents, the letter of Rev. Monsignor Stanisław Kuczyński. *Wspomnienia z Wilna*, 31 January, 1991.

<sup>166</sup> Nikita Sergejevich Krushchev, b. 3 (or 15) Apr., 1894; d. 11 Sept., 1971. Worked way up Soviet hierarchy; supported purges of Stalin, but later denounced them; after death of Stalin in 1953, emerged as head of communist party and Premier of Russia; chose to rely on missiles for national defense. Sometimes erratic in behavior, deposed by party leaders Oct. 1964.

<sup>167</sup> Jan Bartos, C.Ss.R., b. 13 June, 1936; prof. 15 Aug., 1955; ord. 19

who inspired him to come to serve the Catholics, especially the Polish, of the «eastern lands» annexed by and persecuted by the Soviets. Zieja had himself labored in the diocese of Pinsk from 1928 until 1939.<sup>168</sup>

Although there were relatively brief periods when Catholics could breathe a little easier in these lands, the newcomer Father Bartos would know plenty of Soviet oppression.<sup>169</sup> Churches were closed, parishes liquidated, and various documents of permission were withdrawn from the clergy. Nevertheless the Redemptorist Father Jan Bartos persevered as a clandestine itinerant missionary.<sup>170</sup>

In 1970 Bartos had begun to work undercover in the Soviet Republics, especially in Byelorussia. Ordained in 1964, Bartos made his first trip to Wilno in 1969, coming on a short visit as a tourist. During those days he saw many things which influenced his future. He saw that committed Catholics in the Soviet Union were deprived of the Eucharist and of hearing Word of God—and how much they yearned for both. After his return, with the help of his uncle, Father Bartos met Poland's Primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who blessed his planned missionary visits into the Soviet Union.<sup>171</sup>

After that initial visit, beginning in 1970, Bartos went yearly on similar trips. Outwardly he appeared to be a layman as he carried a new passport and the identity of an *agitator przeciw alkohola*, that is, *an agitator against alcoholic beverage*. He later explained that he was always accompanied by a priest or woman religious and was welcomed into the homes of relatives or friends of these fellow-travelers.<sup>172</sup> Thus he hoped to realize the special

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July, 1964; d. 06 July, 2008.

<sup>168</sup> J. ZIEJA, *Życie Ewangelią*. Written down by Jacek Moskwa, Paris 1991, especially 67-113: chapter. *Na Polesiu*; J. BARTOS, *Misyjne drogi*, 16-17.

<sup>169</sup> See M. RADWAN, *Duszpasterstwo katolickie na Białorusi 1917-1984*, in: *Ewangelia i kultura. Doświadczenie środkowoeuropejskie*, ed. M. Radwan, T. Styczeń, Rome 1988; A. HLEBOWSKI, *Kościół odrodzony. Katolicyzm w państwie sowieckim*, Gdańsk 1993, 85-102.

<sup>170</sup> It is to be noted that Father Jan Bartos was one among a dozen or so itinerant missionaries attached to dioceses or members of religious orders.

<sup>171</sup> J. BARTOS, *Misyjne drogi*, 19.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

charism of Redemptorists: to continue the saving work of Christ among the spiritually abandoned, and particularly the economically poor.

Father Bartos's ministry was made easier by his first contacts with the priests working in Wilno, especially that of Father Franciszek who was still alive. The crippled but tireless veteran Redemptorist introduced Bartos to what he was doing to provide clandestine formation of candidates for the priesthood. When Bartos was able, he helped Świątek in this secret vocation ministry.

In Wilno Father Bartos made close contacts with other priests including: Father Stanisław Kuczyński (d. 1997),<sup>173</sup> vicar general in the northern part of the Archdiocese of Wilno; Father Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, in 1981-1988 working in the Church of the Holy Spirit and the Church of St. Theresa in Wilno, and who later became administrator of the Diocese of Mińsk,<sup>174</sup> Father Aleksander Kaszkiewicz, who in 1991 became bishop of Grodno, and, as of this writing, still holds that office.<sup>175</sup> While in Wilno, Bartos also came to know Father Antoni Dubietys, a Lithuanian, who served as parish priest in Antokol.<sup>176</sup>

Within the two decades spanning 1970 until 1990, the zeal of Father Bartos carried him over almost the whole European part of the Soviet Union, and especially the former Polish lands, including those in Byelorussia. Besides his first and subsequent contacts in the Wilno area, he was also in Murmansk, Leningrad, Moscow, Smolensk and Katyń. He especially sought out those places which were (and, in some cases, still are) purely Polish.

In 1973 he spent ten days in Kandałaksza, searching for Catholics, including those from Byelorussia. At first he was discouraged, as his efforts seemed to yield poor results. But like

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<sup>173</sup> A. HLEBOWICZ, *Kościół w niewoli*, 65; J. BARTOS, *Misyjne drogi*, 20-21.

<sup>174</sup> B. KUMOR, *Historia Kościoła*, vol. VIII, Lublin 2001, 214; A. HLEBOWICZ, *Kościół w niewoli*, 46-47, 61. – Father Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, on 25 August, 1989, ordained bishop – administrator of the Minsk-Mohylev Diocese and Belarus, and two years later, 13 April 1991, administrator of the Church in the European part of Russia, with the capital in Moscow.

<sup>175</sup> A. HLEBOWICZ, *Kościół w niewoli*, 51. Father Bartos writes about the friendliness and help of Father T. Kondrusiewicz and Father A. Kaszkiewicz on p. 27 in *Misyjne drogi*.

<sup>176</sup> J. BARTOS, *Misyjne drogi*, 6-27.

«seed falling on good ground» in following years a number of people met him who remembered and spoke glowingly of his days in Kandałaksza.<sup>177</sup> Also, in Duniszewo near Smorgoń there was the devout family of Stanisław Skrobot. In that home he was able to gather some twenty people and secretly celebrate Masses, confessions and baptisms, and bless the graves of loved ones.

In the same location there was a wooden church, now shabby and desecrated, being used as an oversized storehouse for corn. People cried when seeing their church in such condition. Father Bartos wrote in his memoirs that he promised them, «Someday this church of yours will be returned to you; you will renew it and I will celebrate Mass and preach here». Then his memoirs add that after seventeen years his words came true.<sup>178</sup>

He made similar visits into Byelorussia, until *Perestroika*,<sup>179</sup> when after 1986 the Soviet regime softened. In 1990 the Byelorussians proclaimed independence and changed the name of the country to Belarus. Father Bartos eventually became a parish priest in Wołpa, Belarus, where he labored until 1998. Then he returned to Poland and died in Toruń, Poland, on 6 July, 2008. He left behind his memoirs *Misyjne drogi wśród rodaków na Wschodzie* (*Mission Roads Among his Countrymen in the East*), and his heritage as a Redemptorist missionary among abandoned people.

### *Conclusion*

Since 1998, into the present time, the Polish province of Redemptorists has continued ministering to their countrymen in the «eastern lands» where Fathers Świętek and Bartos, and other outstanding Redemptorists, first labored. They have gone into Belarus and Kazakhstan, into both the Siberian and the European parts of Russia and into Ukraine. They have been known throughout the Archdiocese of Grodno. They have become welcomed in other large and smaller locations such as Pietropawłowsk, Kemerovo-

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>179</sup> *Perestroika*: roughly translated means *Restructuring*. It was a movement with the communist party of the Soviet Union during the 1980s, associated with Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his *glasnost* program which meant «openness» to policy reform.

wo, Orenburg, Orsk, Togliatti, Pioniersk, Mościska and Truskawiec. Moreover they have reached beyond their own Polish roots and touched the lives of other cultures and nationalities. They have become beloved among those with Polish roots and souls, but among whom Polish is no longer spoken as a first language.

#### SUMMARY

To many English-speaking readers of the *Spicilegium Historicum*, the lands of eastern Poland, Lithuania, Byelorussia (today's Belarus) – and even deeper in what was once Soviet Russia – may remain a mystery.

Yet the author of this article leads us into these lands and describes the heroic ministry which Polish Redemptorists provided in the years 1939-1998. Much of what he describes focuses on the community which Polish confreres had established in Pośpieszka, near Wilno, Lithuania, in 1936-1937. Their first intent was typical of Redemptorists as they preached missions, retreats, and Forty-Hours Devotions in a wide area to Polish-speaking Catholics, while keeping up a lively «ongoing mission» in their large residence chapel which was open to the public. With the outbreak of World War II, the ministry of the Pośpieszka Redemptorists changed dramatically as successive occupations of this territory (by armies of the Soviets, then of Germany, and then of the Soviets again) ripped into the lives of everyone. The Fathers and Brothers knew the reality of capture, imprisonment, resistance and counter-resistance movements, spies, sudden house searches, and eventual dispersion. Still they carried on as best they could, often in secret, and very often with the sterling assistance of laity and women religious, in order to support the faithful in their belief in the person of Christ. Nor were they negligent in aiding, where possible, their persecuted Jewish sisters and brothers. After the dispersion of the community in 1946, one man, the crippled Father Franciszek Świątek (1889-1976) stayed behind, sometimes serving out of Pośpieszka, but also from other locales. The author gives special attention to the thirty years (1946-1976) when Świątek was able, even with his disability, to carry on the Redemptorist ministry alone, and often in clandestine circumstances because of harassment by the Soviets.

A brief treatment of the ministry of Father Jan Bartos, C.Ss.R. in the years 1969-1990 concludes this article. The sources which the author has consulted include many personal diaries preserved in the archives of the Polish province



## RÉSUMÉ

Pour nombre de lecteurs anglophones du *Spicilegium Historicum*, les pays de la Pologne orientale, Lituanie, Biélorussie (l'actuelle Belarus) ainsi que ce qui était jadis la Russie Soviétique, restent un peu mystérieux.

Cependant l'auteur de cet article nous introduit dans ces pays et décrit le ministère héroïque que les Rédemptoristes polonais ont exercé à Pośpieszka près de Wilno (Vilnius) en 1936-1937. Leur première tentative était typiquement rédemptoriste: prêcher des missions, des retraites, les XL Heures dans un vaste rayon aux catholiques polono-phones, tout en maintenant une «mission permanente» dans leur vaste chapelle ouverte au public. Lorsqu'éclata la seconde guerre mondiale, leur ministère changea radicalement au gré des occupations successives (d'abord les Soviétiques, puis les Allemands, et de nouveau les Soviétiques) qui bouleversèrent la vie d'un chacun. Les Pères et Frères connurent alors la réalité: captures, emprisonnements, mouvements de résistance et de contre-résistance, fouilles imprévues des maisons, dispersion. Mais ils continuèrent du mieux qu'ils purent, souvent en secret, et très souvent avec l'aide précieuse de laïcs et de religieuses afin de soutenir les fidèles dans leur foi en la personne du Christ. Ce qui ne les empêchait pas d'aider, si possible, leurs frères et sœurs juifs persécutés. Après la dispersion de la communauté en 1946, un Père handicapé, le P. Franciszek Świątek (1889-1976) resta sur place, opérant parfois de Pośpieszka, mais aussi d'autres endroits. L'auteur prête une attention spéciale aux trente années (1946-1976) pendant lesquelles le Père Świątek, quoique handicapé, réussit à poursuivre un ministère rédemptoriste, tout seul, et souvent dans la clandestinité à cause du harcèlement des soviétiques.

Une brève mention du ministère du Père Jan Bartos CSsR dans les années 1969-1990 conclut cet article. Les sources citées par l'auteur incluent les nombreux *journaux* personnels conservés aux archives de la Province polonaise.