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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SITUATION  
IN WARSAW AT THE TURN  
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

SUMMARY

1. - The Redemptorists in Poland. 2. - Conditions in Warsaw at the end of the Eighteenth Century. 3. - Russian Occupation. 4. - The Prussian Regime. 5. - Warsaw under French Rule. - 6. Suppression of the Redemptorists.

The Redemptorists came to Warsaw just when a great work of reform was beginning. They appeared in the Polish capital in 1787, and the very next year was the commencement of the four-year term of the Diet (Sejm). It was a time of fundamental changes, when hopes were high for the future, as the country began to recover from its decline. Then came the years of collapse: defeat of the campaign in defence of the Constitution of 3rd May and the regime of the traitorous 'Targowica'. In 1794 Kościuszko's rebellion burst the bonds that held Poland captive; but he was later defeated, and this time it was final, The Republic being completely annihilated.

During the struggles of Kościuszko's rising Warsaw lived through three battles for the town. In April after heavy fighting the city was delivered; in the summer the Prussian and Russian armies had to raise an unsuccessful siege; but finally in November Praga, a suburb of Warsaw, was stormed and taken by the army of General Suworow. The final catastrophe was to occasion the refuges and schools set up by the Redemptorists to care for the children of those who fell in the massacre that followed.

Then there came the Russian occupation, lasting over a year, and the third partition of Poland in 1795 and ten years under the Prussians.

### 1. - *The Redemptorists in Poland*

Let us return to look at the beginnings of the Congregation in Poland. Stanisław August, the last king, was unable to revive the dead nation: « his hand merely spread flowers and smiles of art on its deathbed and made ready its tomb ». The quotation, which so accurately and beautifully describes the cultural activity of Stanisław August, is taken from the address of Achille Ratti, later Pius XI, greeting President Wojciechowski in Łazienki on behalf of the diplomatic corps. Among the indisputable merits of the last Polish king one must count his interest in education and philanthropy.

This explains his attitude towards the Redemptorists. Emanuel Roztworowski, writing in *Tygodnik Powszechny* an article entitled « Religion and Religious Policy of Stanisław August », stressed the fact that some religious institutes sympathised with the enlightened king. He mentioned the Theatines, missionaries, the Piarists and the Jesuits. Among the Orders supported by the king, he was especially inclined towards the Jesuits. The Redemptorists also enjoyed the king's favour. Czesław Deptuła, too, in an interesting comment on the congress devoted to trends in Christian thought from the end of the seventeenth century to 1830 drew attention to the distinction between « Enlightened and Sarmatian Orders ». Under Stanisław August State policy took a different view of religious not numbered among the « Enlightened ». Many a monastery fell victim to decrees of dissolution. Among others who contributed to their fate was Michał Poniatowski, the king's brother, Primate and at the same time administrator of the diocese of Cracow.

### 2. - *Conditions in Warsaw at the end of the Eighteenth Century*

What sort of people did the Redemptorists meet when they came to Warsaw? According to statistics of 1792 Warsaw at the beginning of their sojourn had a population of 115,000. That represented a considerable increase on what it had been at the beginning of Stanisław August's reign in 1764, as the capital then counted only 30,000 inhabitants. Under Stanisław August the city witnessed marvellous cultural and economic development.

The period saw a great influx of impoverished gentry, who were well represented among the ranks of the artisans. There was no lack of the wealthy among this class of immigrant. In addition there were

foreigners of various professions, Germans, Italians, Frenchmen. Warsaw's population, consequently, showed a great diversity both ethnically and culturally. There were also great differences among the people as regards economical status. And we must note an increase of what are called 'people at a loose end', seeking a livelihood in Warsaw.

We must look especially at the districts known as the Old and the New Town, since they were the focus of the first activities of the Redemptorists, called Bennonites from St. Benno's church in Piesza Street. What was their population and occupational structure? It is difficult to be precise about the number of those we have described as 'at a loose end', unemployed, day-labourers, beggars, vagrants. They were quite numerous, and among these social misfits by all means must be numbered the prostitutes. The bars in Walowa and Swietojarska Streets were their principal haunts. They are mentioned in the diary of his journey through Poland by Fryderyk Schultz.

« Debauchery here as nowhere else turns people from marriage and each year increases the number of the single. It is perpetuated by the multitude of young people going into public service, the army, the counting houses, offices and so on, by the influx of gentry from the country, most often in search of entertainment and prodigal in the tolerance of public opinion, which condones debauchery, accustomed as it is to the excessively wanton fashions of a free republic in pandering to one's fantasies, lack of supervision of street women of the lower classes, bad example by the aristocracy and complete lack of control on the part of the government and of the police at all levels. That is how it has come about that there is unparalleled looseness of morals, the openness and spread of evil, the extravagance it occasions, a mixture of shamelessness and profligacy found perhaps in no European capital to the extent it is in Warsaw ».

The Old Town, wrote Barbara Grochulska in her study of the population structure of Warsaw, remained generally behind the mainstream of the city's urban life. From here the more energetic individuals made their way beyond the walls: the wealthier merchants, the manufacturers, the big business men, established themselves in other districts. When the nobles came to the capital, very many servants of the barons, impoverished gentry and generally speaking the poor, settled in the Old Town. To a large extent that is the reason why the Old Town so readily espoused Kościusko's rebellion. And that is why it was precisely the Old Town Market that witnessed 'the gallows of June' (the lynching of the traitors) and why it was

from there that revolutionary spirit spread to engulf the entire city.

Certainly the Old Town was not indifferent to the changes taking place in Warsaw society as a whole. So much is clear from the fact that magnates of the Old Town commanded large fortunes in liquid assets and conducted great business houses. The Old Town then saw developments like those noted by Anna Bradecka in her studies. Among contemporary historians Andrzej Zaborski has been drawn to the Warsaw of Stanisław August.

Generally speaking, the times of Stanisław August were characterised by a definite and considerably advanced stratification in all professions. In the guilds one must note the growing hostility between masters and journeymen.

### 3. - *Russian Occupation*

After a short Russian occupation of just over a year (the regime of General Bulhōwden, military commandant of the city) there ensued after the partition of Poland the Prussian occupation of Warsaw. The sad condition of the city is feelingly described in the diary of Leon Potocki.

« At the end of the last century and the beginning of the present Warsaw was in a state of physical and moral prostration, as though after a bad illness, as after the plague. Most of the citizens emigrated; the youth disappeared; the bankers became insolvent; the merchants closed their shops for lack of customers; the tradesmen sat idly by wondering whether they would find enough bread for tomorrow for their wives and children ».

After the massacre of 1794 Praga was ruined and chaotic up to 1807, that is until the time of Napoleon. Until this time only 40.5 % of the estates were inhabited. The population of Warsaw declined considerably from what it had been in the last years of the Republic. In 1797-1798 it was 64,500 and in 1806 68,000. In Warsaw itself the population fell also in New Town. Studies by Jerzy Rakowski and Zbigniew Wójcik confirmed by Anna Bradecka show a drop of 40% in the population of New Town after the fall of the Republic. According to the city register of 1796 the number of Germans in the city increased on the left bank of the Vistula. In the district of New Town according to Olgierd Puciaty we may cite ten German surnames out of fifty property owners in New Town Market Square. There were 6000 Lutherans in Warsaw and 300 Reformed.

The calculations we have given do not include the army. The Jewish population at this time amounted to 8,500, Catholics about 50,000 and Uniates 1,500. There was evidence of French immigration. According to statistics of 1803-1804 there were 200 French, mainly émigrés in flight from the revolutionary terror at home. During the years 1801 to 1804 there lived in Warsaw the brother of Louis XVI who in 1814 was to reign as Louis XVIII, King of France. The convent of the Order of the Holy Sacrament for some years gave hospitality to Duchess Louise Adelaïde de Bourbon Condé, daughter of Louis Joseph Condé. Both Prussia and Russia opened their borders to these refugees from the Revolution.

#### 4. - *The Prussian Regime*

What was the economic condition of Warsaw during the Prussian occupation?

The building trade was not only at a standstill, but was even in total disarray. The economic life of the city after the third partition had sharply declined. Workshops could not challenge competition from Prussian industry, flooding Poland with its cheaper products. Usury and speculation were on the increase. The historian of the Prussian regime, Jan Kosim, in his work on Warsaw of 1796-1806 after reflections in detail offers the following general description of the economy.

« Warsaw was reduced to a provincial town on the fringe of economic life in the Prussian State. This trend was revealed not only by the check to economic life and the amelioration of social structures experienced in the times of the Republic in the growth of Warsaw's middle class and the development of industry and trade. It was evident even in the spectacle of underpopulated Warsaw, a city of empty palaces, dirty, dark and muddy streets, enlivened at night only by the clamour of Prussian patrols and the lights of bonfires lit by the soldiers of the Prussian garrison preparing their supper and at carnival time by the shouts of merry gentlemen returning from masked balls. It must be admitted that there was no lack of revelry in Warsaw for the gilded youth. The number of bars did not decrease from the days of Stanisław August. Drunkenness was rife. Crime was on the increase.

« Polish society was oppressed by Germanisation, exclusion from positions of influence in the civil service and heavy burdens of tax-

ation. Józef Krasieński wrote in his diary of the Prussian tax squeeze: 'Prussia introduced new taxes, dissolved monasteries, plundered Church lands, absorbed the post-Jesuit educational endowments, accumulated in her coffers untold wealth from seizure of private estates, from crown land tenancies and tributes' ».

Prussian policy towards religious, so clearly described in the last work of Piotr Gack on the suppression of religious in the territories of the former Republic, was marked by a comprehensive control of monastic life, some monasteries falling victim to dissolution. After the rising of 1794 control was extended and tightened even more. Even before Kościusko's rebellion there had been attempts to prevent Church authorities in Prussia having contact with the Vatican. Without permission of the proper authorities it was forbidden to publish Papal Bulls or Briefs. It was also forbidden to collect alms for charitable purposes, a practice the government termed 'tramping'.

Regulations stipulated conditions for admission to noviciates and required personal reports to the authorities. Prussian attitudes towards religious show an official aim at controlling the most intimate details of monastic life and reducing the numbers of clergy, both secular and regular.

Under this increased State control the Polish clergy, religious as well as diocesan, maintained primary and secondary schools. Besides the Polish schools an educational system with German as the language of instruction had been introduced, the higher classes of Warsaw Secondary School commencing in 1804. The Redemptorists in Warsaw conducted only free primary schools. In some classes they taught in Polish; in others in both Polish and German. They also set up two orphanages.

In the Redemptorist schools poor children of Old and New Town were educated. The orphanages gave refuge to those whose parents had been murdered during the Praga massacre in 1794. The Redemptorists in this way brought healing to the wounds suffered by Poland in the frightful suppression of the rebellion. In the Germanised country (with German as the official language and Germans in all important public offices) they created an important establishment for education of the very young in Polish, even though the Poles among them were a minority. What a contrast this educational activity offered to that which prevailed in certain circles (for example the palace of Prince Józef Poniatowski, roofed with sheet iron), namely French language and cosmopolitan manners. Let us hasten to

mention here that Prince Józef, like his uncle, Stanisław August, was friendly to the Redemptorists. Other aristocratic circles condemned the cosmopolitanism of Prince Józef. Polish traditions and customs were cultivated particularly by the houses of Wincenty Krasieński, Stanisław Małachowski and Stanisław Sołtyka.

##### 5. - Warsaw under French Rule

The educational and charitable activities of the Redemptorists, together with the refuges they provided and the improvement generally in morality and religion in Warsaw, these were rays of light heralding the dawn during the dark night of Prussian bondage. After the Prussians were defeated in 1806, on 27th November Napoleon's army, the first companies of the advance guard, marched into Warsaw.

There followed an *interim* period of government by the Ruling Commission created in January 1807 as the emperor's collegial deputy for the occupied territories of the second and third Prussian sectors of partitioned Poland.

In the middle of 1807 by virtue of the Treaty of Tylza the Duchy of Warsaw was erected. Warsaw, where the Redemptorists were established, became once more the capital of Poland. At the time it counted only 68,000 inhabitants. It was a territory situated on a great historical highway, the route of march for Napoleon's armies. The petty, semi-sovereign State, in loose federation with Saxony, was in reality a vast military encampment, a bastion thrusting towards the East. The brief term of existence of this new State, a period of some six years, was filled with wars or military preparations. The Duchy of Warsaw, however, had some few democratic and progressive institutions. National culture was encouraged: in administration and the schools the Polish language prevailed.

There was also a Polish army. The enthusiasm of the Warsaw populace which greeted the French in 1806 changed dramatically when the victorious army outraged the people, behaving brutally as though on enemy territory. « If you met a distressed person in the streets in those days », wrote a contemporary witness, « or a woman in tears, it was sure to be a householder complaining about the French troops ».

In December 1806 Warsaw was flooded by crowds of sick and wounded French. Father Tadeusz Hübl, a Redemptorist and rector of St. Benno's died of spotted fever, contracted while generously

hearing the confessions of Napoleon's soldiers. Marcei Handelsman, one of the most outstanding historians of the Napoleonic period, describes French behaviour in 1806-1807.

« The progress of French troops, particularly of VI corps, was signalised by harsh oppression in town and country [...] murders, outrage, plundering of houses marked [...] the passage of the corps. Horses were requisitioned, cows were appropriated in the villages, ripe crops destroyed when they were ready for harvest [...]. Coldness gave place to indignation, where there had been effusive cordiality. There were even cases when French soldiers discovered alone were beaten [...] The French Marshal Davoust introduced into Warsaw 'the strictest discipline'. Bitterness became indifference: former relations never returned ».

The country, and Warsaw in particular, groaned under burdens of various kinds imposed by the government. These were compulsory contributions, rights of forage for the troops and all sorts of confiscations.

Society was also dissatisfied with the political situation which had emerged. The Treaty of Tylza had established a State with territory even smaller than that of the Prussian sector of partitioned Poland, which had been seized by Napoleon. The Vistula estuary and the territories of Białystok had been lost.

The name Poland was not mentioned in the Treaty of Tylza. Half a year after the Duchy of Warsaw was created the edict of 27th January 1808 extended to the Duchy the *code Napoléon*, the famous codification of law of 1804. This, too, was a source of discontent to large sectors of the public. The clergy objected to the new marriage laws. The gentry were horrified, seeing the code as introducing changes in rural institutions, especially the abolition of the villein services. In due time their misgivings were to be allayed by the interpretation of certain passages of the code and the non-application of others. The so-called 'Polish Jacobins' contributed a further block of opposition. They were linked with the secret society of the time of the Prussian occupation, the Society of Polish Republicans. They had at first been enthusiastic for French ways, loyal to Napoleon's aims in the beginning of the Duchy; but they had been passed over by the regime, which ignored their political and social importance in the country.

Napoleon intended to establish his government first of all on the Polish aristocracy, to which the Jacobins did not belong. He wanted to bind this influential social class to his chariot and draw

them from their pro-Russian orientation. Hopes that Tsar Alexander I would rebuild the old Republic had been very strong up until the establishment of the Duchy of Warsaw. Very few Jacobins gained important government posts. Summing up public sentiment, we must say that it was carrying heavy burdens caused by the wars, but with hopes, at least among the majority, that Poland would be restored by Napoleon.

The state of affairs, the feelings of society, the increasing hostility, were carefully noted by Davoust. What was his position? After the war of 1807 he was commander of the Polish and French armies posted to the Duchy of Warsaw. He was also commissioned to supervise and control the authorities of the Duchy. « He acted », writes Antoni Ostrowski in *The Life of Tomasz Ostrowski*, « like a viceroy with far-reaching powers, so that the authorities of the Duchy and of Saxony trembled before him, and even the French themselves as well ».

Davoust showed himself most suspicious of society in the Duchy. He was always looking for activities favouring the Russians or the Prussians. Archbishop Raczyński was suspected of belonging to the latter faction. Prince Józef Poniatowski, Minister of War, who had at first been frigid and cautious towards the new rulers, was also under suspicion, but he soon whole-heartedly embraced the cause of Napoleon, confirming his loyalty in 1813 by his death on the battlefield of Leipzig while covering the emperor's retreat.

« Morale in Warsaw », wrote Davoust, « is excellent, but the nobles are using their influence to keep down the enthusiasm which had captured the middle classes. Fearful of an uncertain future, they make it plain that they will not act openly unless with the declaration of Poland's independence they are given guarantees that it will be maintained ».

Davoust was especially suspicious of Germans living in the Duchy of Warsaw. They were allowed to remain in the administrative and judiciary services, but in the lesser positions, such as office records or special professional services. At the intervention of Davoust in 1808 a charge of hostile propaganda led to the dismissal of many Germans from the ministry of finance and other departments. His suspicions were undoubtedly exaggerated, but during the war with Austria in 1808 proofs multiplied of disloyalty among the Germans, some of them State officials. To the French resident in the Duchy of Warsaw Davoust wrote: « Time will reveal the scoundrels, hypocrites, loafers, the ill-intentioned and the ill-disposed ».

His misgivings were increased by the atmosphere that pervaded the international scene. In Europe under French domination there had appeared forces opposed to Napoleon. In May 1808 revolution in Spain spread to the whole country. Anti-Napoleon sentiment was on the increase in German lands. And there was a rapid deterioration of relations with Pius VII. They had been worsening since 1805, with the Pope remaining neutral in face of Napoleon's wars. In vain the emperor insisted that the pope break off diplomatic relations with the enemies of France. Since 1805 Pius VII had refused to participate in the blockade of England. On 2nd February 1808 Rome was occupied by the French army. Two months later the Pope withdrew his nuncio from Paris. Diplomatic relations were ruptured. In May 1808 Napoleon confiscated some provinces of the Papal States.

#### 6. - *Suppression of the Redemptorists*

Davoust's suspicions were bound to be directed with redoubled force against the clergy of the Duchy of Warsaw. The Redemptorists, too, he realised were dissatisfied with the secularisation, with the Church's role in the State, so much less than it had been before the partition. And he knew that the Redemptorists opposed the influence of freemasonry, which was quite powerful in the Duchy. We shall come back to this issue. Correspondence of the Redemptorists with foreign countries, with French royalist émigrés, already hostile to Napoleon under the Prussian regime, Louise Adelaïde de Bourbon Condé and others, their formidable influence over the people of Warsaw and the foreign element in their institute, all served to increase Davoust's anxieties.

In fact, in Warsaw and Lutkowo Poles were 47% of the total number of Redemptorists, and 18% of them were of Warmia. That is how they described themselves, and it is difficult to assess their national consciousness. In that area it was not fully developed. The rest of the religious were Germans, some of other nationalities and some of origins investigators have not identified.

One grave reason why the Congregation was suspect was that the Redemptorists had been expelled from Bavaria in 1808, accused of arousing the people against the government. In April 1808 there were riots in Warsaw occasioned by the devaluation of the currency. In this connection again suspicion was directed against the Redemptorists. And then at last a convenient pretext, long awaited by Napoleon's government, presented itself.

It was the incident in St. Benno's church on 16th April 1808. Two French officers started a fight, very probably as deliberate provocation. The Redemptorists were accused of hostility to the State; but no evidence was forthcoming of their guilt. None the less, the King of Saxony, Duke of Warsaw, was compelled to sign the edict of 9th June 1808 expelling the Redemptorists from the Duchy.

One reason why a certain section of society, notably government officials, was prejudiced against the Redemptorists was the foundation of the Association of the Oblates of the Most Holy Redeemer, one of whose aims was to oppose the freemasons. It challenged that extremely influential organisation, which had so thoroughly infiltrated all classes of society in the Duchy of Warsaw. Freemasonry was resisted by no more than a part of the clergy, men of the stamp of Karol Surowiecki or the Archbishop of Gniezno, Ignacy Raczynski. The Redemptorists' opposition to the freemasons hastened their expulsion from Warsaw. It was, however, the whole complexity of the political conditions we have described which contributed to the suppression of the Congregation in the Duchy, the process of « purging » Warsaw of real or imaginary enemies of the regime, the wars of resistance that broke out in the Duchy in the years 1807-1808, the poisoning of relations with the Church and the fact that the Bennonites found themselves on Napoleon's 'black list'.

Most of the higher officials were freemasons. When Napoleon's army entered Warsaw, the old lodges, which had been in existence since before partition, revived with renewed strength, with Frenchmen joining the Poles as members. Even during the four years of the Diet (Sejm), that is when the Redemptorists had newly arrived in Warsaw, freemasonry enjoyed an immense influence. According to calculations quoted by Hass in his study of freemasonry in Poland from its beginnings to 1821, of the 177 deputies elected for the four years' Diet (Sejm) at least 30% were freemasons. Of 217 leading members of the Society of Friends of the Constitution of 3rd May at least 70.5% belonged to the lodges. Hass declares: « Reviving after the collapse of the Jacobin terror, French masonry not only began once more to influence the thought of European nations, but wherever the French army was garrisoned for any extended period it established its organisation ». Masonic lodges were the instruments and the foundation of the Napoleonic government while the Bennonites were in Warsaw.

Among the freemasons were to be found even some members of the clergy, for example Konstanty Dembek, the Carmelite, Edward

Czarnecki, rector of the Piarist college, and the Dominican, Bernard Bibrowicz. « Just as there were among the higher authorities in the territories liberated from Prussian domination », writes Hass, « so with the coming of the Duchy freemasons were to be found at the highest levels of the hierarchy ».

After the proclamation of the Constitution, in the Cabinet of seven members named in October 1807 by the King of Saxony as Grand Duke of Warsaw heads of departments who were members of the lodges were: the Minister for War, Duke Józef Poniatowski, the Minister of Internal Affairs and of Religious Observances, Jan Paweł Łuszczewski, the Police Minister, Aleksander Potocki, and Secretary of State, Stanisław Breza, had behind him a history of association with the lodges. The successive presidents of the Cabinet and of the Council of State, Ludwik Gutakowski and Stanisław Potocki, stood high in the masonic hierarchy. Of eight professors in the School of Law established in 1808 six were members of masonic lodges. In 1812 after the Duchy of Warsaw had been in existence for four years, according to what Hass writes, « in the lodges of Warsaw, a city of some 78,000 population, there were twice as many members as there had been among the 100,000 inhabitants during the late eighties of the previous century ».

To conclude, let us look at the attitude of the Napoleonic government towards religious. The regime in France itself as well as in the Great Empire, and according to its limitations in the Duchy of Warsaw, regarded religious institutes engaged in education and care of the sick in hospitals and refuges as being of use to society. There was also some recognition of pastoral work such as assistance in diocesan ministry or as army chaplains. For other activities of religious the attitude was negative. In the Duchy of Warsaw the number of monasteries diminished. Those were tolerated which had only few religious. Acceptance of candidates was subject to limitations. Many former monastic buildings now became barracks, prisons or factories.

Religious life was subjected to severe and comprehensive control. The Duchy of Warsaw gave some support to such institutes as the Piarists or the Premonstratensian nuns. The government also partly financed the larger hospitals. The policy with regard to religious life as we have described it has been briefly discussed in recent times by the priests, Tadeusz Walachowicz, in his study of the Catholic Church in the legislation of the Duchy of Warsaw.

Teaching in primary schools as conducted by the Redemptorists

was favourably regarded by the government education authorities in the middle of December 1807. Indeed, in view of the general policy of the regime towards religious one would have to presume that the Redemptorist foundation in Warsaw would meet with ready approval in government circles of the Duchy. But it happened otherwise on account of political suspicions falling on the Bennonites.