

REVIEW

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Rev.: WŁODZIMIERZ CIEŃSKI, *FROM LVIV TO TEHRAN. PASTORAL MEMORIES 1939-1942*

Selection and study by Jacek Żurek, Fr. Prof. Wincenty Myszor
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Collegium Verum, Katowice-Warszawa 2021, p. 566

In the works dedicated to Fr. Józef Gawlin,¹ bishop of the World War II, referring to the organization of the Polish pastoral ministry in USSR,² we encounter the name of Fr. Włodzimierz Cieński. His life and activities have not been analysed thoroughly so far, despite the fact that a few articles were published discussing his stay and pastoral ministry in the USSR.³

¹ *Biskup Józef Gawlina w Związku Sowieckim*, study by J. Myszor, Warszawa 2013; J. Gawlina, *Wspomnienia*, study by J. Myszor, Katowice 2018; K. Kantak, *L'Aumônerie Militaire Polonaise en U.R.S.S. (1941-1942)*, [in:] *Sacrum Poloniae Millenium. Rozprawy – szkice – materiały historyczne*, vol. 8-9, Rzym 1962; *idem*, *In viam pacis. Dziennik Biskupa Polowego Wojska Polskiego 1939-1945*, study by J. Myszor, Katowice 2019.

² R. Dzwonkowski, *Duszpasterstwo w Polskich Siłach Zbrojnych w ZSR, 1941-1942. Źródła, Przegląd Wschodni* (Warszawa), 2014, z. 1(41); K. Kantak, *L'Aumônerie Militaire Polonaise...; Duszpasterstwo wojskowe wobec działań zbrojnych II wojny światowej w świetle dokumentów i rozporządzeń biskupa polowego Polskich Sił Zbrojnych na Zachodzie*, study by A.C. Żak, M. Wesołowski, parts 1-2, Warszawa 2007-2008.

³ *Wspomnienia z Rosji*, Marianum w Służbie, 1980, No. 6(146), pp. 67-79; *Dalszy ciąg wspomnień z Rosji. Wyprawa duszpasterska do polskiej ludności zesłańczej w Dolinie Fergany*, Marianum w Służbie, 1981, No. 1(147), pp. 7-13; *Wspomnienia ks. Włodzimierza Cieńskiego*, [in:] *M. z Cieńskich Dubanowiczowa, Rumuńska okupacja Pokucia w 1919 r.*, Biuletyn. Koło Lwowian w Londynie, czerwiec 1983, No. 45, pp. 31-32; *Z dziejów polskiego duszpasterstwa wojskowego (Wspomnienia z lat 1941-1945 od Związku Radzieckiego do Wielkiej Brytanii)*, Duszpasterz Polski

Włodzimierz Cieński was born on 6 April 1897 in Lviv into a family of landed gentry. His father Leszek was known for social and political activities. He was one of the leaders of the Podolacy party, a politician and a member of the Galician Sejm. He suffered from epilepsy. After graduating from the secondary school (1915), Włodzimierz attended the Agricultural Academy in Dublany (Lviv). He studied at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Fribourg in Switzerland (1919-1923). In February 1924, he was ordained by Archbishop Bolesław Twardowski priest of the Archdiocese of Lviv of the Latin rite. He worked in Żółkwia (1924-1926), Wełdzirz nad Świcą (1926-1927), Niżniów (1927-1929), Lviv and surroundings (1930-1939). In 1930, he made a six-month tour around Western Europe (Italy, France, Belgium, England, Germany) in order to familiarise himself with the activities of the educational centres for young people. After the outbreak of the World War II, he was involved in social and welfare work. Until 1940, he was a chaplain in the Vilnius conspiracy (the Union of Armed Struggle). He was also involved in organising material aid for military men of various specialities and couriers going mainly to Hungary. In the years 1940-1941 he was imprisoned by NKVD in Lviv and Moscow, tortured, sentenced to death (7 June 1941) and pardoned (15 August 1941). On the night of 1 and 2 September 1941 he regained freedom. He was appointed by General Władysław Anders Head of Chaplaincy of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR (4 September 1941). He assigned Polish priests to the military ministry, visited Polish centres, engaged in the evacuation of greatest number of Poles from the USSR. On 1 September 1942 he went to Persia. On 12 September he was in Tehran. On 14 January 1943 he was appointed Dean of the Polish Army in the East, and later Head of the Catholic ministry in 2nd Corpus (1 September 1943). In June 1944, he was nominated vicar general for the army in the Middle East and Italy. In November 1946, he became Head of Catholic ministry of the divisional group of the 2nd Corps within the Polish Resettlement Corps in England and Wales. He did his military service until June 1949, and subsequently

Zagranicą, 1985, No. 2(155), pp. 286, 288-333; 1985, No. 3(156), pp. 513-545; 1985, No. 4(157), pp. 727-757; DPZ 1986, No. 1(158), pp. 117-133; DPZ 1986, No. 2(159), pp. 363-378, 380-382; *eundem*, *Z dziejów polskiego duszpasterstwa wojskowego w Związku Radzieckim 1941-1942. Wspomnienia*, study by J. Wołczański, Lwów-Kraków 2014, pp. 13-138.

worked with the Poles in England. He was one of the founders of the Polish Institute of Catholic Action in the United Kingdom (1947) and was assistant of the Catholic Publishing Centre “Veritas” in London (1948-1954). In 1955, he entered the Trappist Order of Bricquebec in Normandy, where he died in 1983.

The reader has the opportunity to learn more about Fr. Włodzimierz Cieński. Thanks to this monographic work, we learn about stages of the life of this outstanding chaplain. The aim that the author of the book pursued depended not only on the presentation of subsequent events from the life of Fr. Cieński, but also, as he stated in the Introduction (p. 15 and n.), the activities of the priest in the context of the role that his superior field bishop Józef Gawlin played.

At the beginning, Żurek, as the author of the substantive parts of the book, describes the life of the Poles in the USSR during the World War II, with particular emphasis placed on national and denominational issues.⁴ He does not touch upon the history of the pastoral ministry in the Soviet Union. This is the first part of the book, up to page 152. Subsequently, he includes, the annotated and re-edited, Fr. Włodzimierz Cieński’s “Memoirs” from 1939-1942 (pp. 153-386) and documents from 1941-1942 referring to the organisation of the pastoral ministry in the USSR (pp. 387-413).

We are, therefore, dealing with a multi-faceted publication, well documented, excellently edited in terms of language, containing rich scientific apparatus, which includes: footnotes, bibliography, indexes of localities (pp. 533-540) and persons (pp. 541-554), maps⁵ (pp. 433-440), photographs and documents (pp. 442-532) and a life calendar of Fr. Cieński (pp. 145-152).

Nevertheless, in my opinion, the book contains some shortcomings. When writing about Fr. Cieński, Żurek excessively expands certain

⁴ Originally, this part was published as the collection of the monographic articles (p. 16).

⁵ „Dekanaty trojga obrządków katolickich w Galicji i na Bukowinie (1914)”, „Podziały okupacyjne ziem polskich (wrzesień 1939 – grudzień 1941)”, „Biskup Józef Gawlina w Związku Radzieckim (19 IV – 7 IX 1942)”, „Obywatele polscy w republikach południowych Związku Radzieckiego po ewakuacji Polskich Sił Zbrojnych (1 I 1943)”, „Polskie Siły Zbrojne w ZSRR – Armia Polska na Wschodzie – 2 korpus (wrzesień 1941 – grudzień 1943)”, „Kampania włoska 2 korpusu (grudzień 1943 – kwiecień 1945)”, „Polski Korpus Przysposobienia i Rozmieszczenia w Wielkiej Brytanii (1946-1949)”, „Polscy w Anglii, Walii i Szkocji (1951)”.

themes, for instance the issues of the Lviv conspiracy and the activities of the masonry in Poland, the issue of the rights of Archbishop Andrzej Szeptycki and nominations of Fr. Cieszyński by Anders (4 September 1941). I would argue that it would be sufficient to mention these facts in order to draw readers' attention to this problem and not to lose sight of the main character and his work. In the same vein, numerous interjections, additions, digressions, "time travels", proving the author's erudition, blur the topic and hinder the comprehension of the main themes.⁶

Another problem relates to the nature of the book: it appears to be somewhat difficult to determine whether it is a scientific or popular and scientific study. The apparatus used argues in favour of the former possibility, but the journalistic interjections⁷ of the latter. We can also find there some glaring oversimplifications. For instance, what is the basis of Żurek's claims that Father Jan Brandys was a friend of Gawlina's (p. 127)?⁸ Was it only because they both came from Silesia? Knowing their mutual relations, the word friend should rather be noted in inverted commas.⁹ It is not clear what purpose is served by emphasising the nationality of the diocese from which the priests Brandys, Gawlina and Tomasz Reginek come from – "the German diocese of Wrocław" (p. 128). Is it to convince the reader that this was only a "short episode" in the history of this diocese and that historically it belonged to the Polish state? If so, then the author forgets about the complicated history of these lands: that from the beginning of the 16th century Silesia was incorporated into Bohemia, that in 1526 it came under the rule of the Habsburgs, and from the mid-18th century under the rule of the King of Prussia. Additionally, we can get the

⁶ Particularly tiring is the paragraph "Sprawa biskupstwa" (Eng. "The case of bishopric" (pp. 37-43)), in which the author starts with the revival of Catholicism in the USSR, the activities of Szeptycki, activities of Gall and Baziak, and ends with Paul VI and Wojtyła.

⁷ We can read here about Cieński's "pangs of remorse" (p. 42) or Gawlina's "taking bull by the horns" (p. 51) and many other.

⁸ However, already in the first lines, he mentions the source of conflict between these two clergymen.

⁹ The evaluation of the proceedings of Fr. Brandys by Bishop Gawlina was very critical. He accused Brandys of having usurped the competences that he did not have. He reproached him for megalomaniac tendencies, see: J. G a w l i n a, *Wspomnienia*, study by J. M y s z o r, Katowice 2004, p. 285.

impression that the author suggests that in his personnel decisions the Field Bishop was guided by his sympathies, which was the reason for the “promotion” of Fr. Brandys or Fr. Reginek, “a Silesian from the Opole region and a graduate of the seminary of the German diocese of Wrocław like Brandys and Gawlina” (p. 128).

However, the greatest number of remarks concerns sections in which Bishop Gawlina refers to the Jews in the USSR. It is a pity that while discussing the attitude towards the representatives of the “Chosen People”, being a source of numerous controversies and arousing intense emotions, Jacek Żurek did not reach for the article by Waldemar Szczerbiński,¹⁰ in which the author draws our attention to the need for accurate formulation of opinions referring to this very topic. Unfortunately, Żurek did not avoid the trap, which (as Szczerbiński holds) is “the reduction to a single denominator of the references of non-Jewish to Jews, which we refer to as anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, anti-Jewishness and anti-Zionism”,¹¹ yet “these phenomena differ in a significant way”.¹²

Unjust is as well the verdict that Żurek announces, who claims that “Gawlina was undoubtedly, if not an outstanding, then a serious anti-Semite” (p. 105). Moreover, he tries to close the discussion on this, ending the sentence with the phrase: “which can be confirmed by any reader of his memoirs no matter what their views are” (p. 105).

According to the author of the reviewed position, the mere fact of Jewish origin (of Józef Retinger, Zygmunt Kaczyński) was to be for Bishop Gawlina a serious flaw burdening his interlocutor (p. 48). What is more, he puts forward a general thesis that the Field Bishop evaluated persons and events of Polish politics through the prism of “Jewish influences” (p. 59), and that “his anti-Semitism corresponded to the general feeling of danger that threatened the world as a result of World War I” (p. 106).

I cannot agree with Żurek in the evaluation of the reasons for the attitude of Bishop Gawlina. It was anti-Jewish,¹³ but not anti-Semite.¹⁴

¹⁰ W. Szczerbiński, *Od alienacji do akceptacji. Antysemityzm – antyjudaizm – antyżydowskość – antysyjonizm*, „Studia Europaea Gnesnensia” 2012, No. 6, pp. 95-108.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ “Anti-Jewishness – the next term discussed – constitutes a negative effect of the co-existence of individual nations with the Jews and existential contacts with them. It has

He was not irritated, as Żurek claims, by “the solidarity of the Jews, foresight, their ability to use self-promotion, to assimilate, to persevere against life’s adversities” (p. 106), but national egoism, no sense of fraternity, dishonesty and document trading confirming proper origin of the owner and places in transportation (p. 103). This is the impression one may get, reading the preserved letters of rabbis to Bishop Gawlina.¹⁵ Nor do we know what is hidden behind the statement that Gawlina’s “anti-Semitism does not rather run in the family” (p. 105).

We should, however, give credit to Żurek that he recalls help Jews received to leave the USSR by Bishop Gawlina, but he was annoyed by Jewish cheek, unjust earning and trade. Pre-war president of the Union of Rabbis in Poland Mendel Hager was among the people whom Gawlina helped (p.107). The author (quoting Gawlina) writes that after his leave twenty-five Orthodox Rabbis thanked Bishop for help he provided (p. 112). We can only guess whether in the eyes of the author of this book this help was an expression of “weakness” in the face of threat to life of the members of the “Chosen People” or was dictated by his Christian inner conviction (pp. 107, 112).

It is a pity that the author used documents from the Vatican archives only to a limited extent.¹⁶ We also do not know whether he

economic, political, social, cultural and moral foundation. The above phenomenon is accompanied by a fear of Jews who are perceived as the threat for the local community, security, existence, social status and identity. In such a case, a Jew is not seen as the worse one, but as a different one and is suspected of disloyalty to the society among whom they exist. It can paradoxically be said that anti-Jewishness appears usually when the Jews – rightly or not – are regarded in the eyes of non-Jews as better, more educated, richer, those who have power or position, those influential or more resourceful. Therefore, the conviction is fostered that it happens at the expense of a certain nation, or against certain nations” (*ibidem*, p. 100).

¹⁴ “Anti-Semitism is hostility and hatred towards Jews, and all kinds of prejudice and resentment against them. A criterion that is used by the anti-Semite is race. It is not subject to discussion that it is a reprehensible and dangerous ideology because it treats Jews as a lower and inferior human species, or even as subhuman or non-human. For racial reasons, anti-Semitism encourages isolation or elimination of Jews from the society. The term was first used by Wilhelm Marr in 1879, after the official equality of Jews in the German Empire” (*ibidem*, p. 99).

¹⁵ The forthcoming publication of Michał Kłakus.

¹⁶ The book only refers to a few documents from the Historical Archives of the Vatican Secretariat of State and those included in the multi-volume work *Actes et*

made efforts to obtain access to the Russian archives encompassing the period of World War II.

Despite the reservations presented, the book prepared by Jacek Żurek “From Lviv to Tehran...” is worth recording. The reader will have the opportunity to become acquainted with the life and activities of this outstanding Pole and patriot Fr. Włodzimierz Cieński. We learn about the life situation of the Polish diaspora in the USSR. Jacek Żurek discusses fundamental problems connected to the ideological and religious differences existing within this group. He also carefully analyses the activities of Field Bishop Józef Gawlina in the Soviet Union. All this makes it possible for the reader to reach for the reviewed publication.

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documents du Saint Siège... No bibliographical research was made in the Archives of the Holy See (Archivio Apostolico Vaticano) “Deleg. Ap. in Persia”, which contains information on the organisation of the Polish pastoral ministry in the USSR, including the activities of Fr. Włodzimierz Cieński.

