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## THE CATHOLIC PRESS IN INTERWAR POLAND AND ITS RELEVANCE TO CHURCH TEACHING

**ABSTRACT:** The press was an important element of the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in the Second Polish Republic. Along with its development, there was also a development of the media doctrine expressed in the teaching of the Church and in Catholic journalism. Both opportunities and threats related to universal access to this medium of social communication were emphasized. Catholic clergy strove for the greatest possible access of their faithful to Catholic periodicals, being aware of the availability and influence of the liberal press.

**KEYWORDS:** press, Catholic Church, Catholicism, doctrine, interwar Poland.

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### Introduction

In the inter-war Poland the Catholic Church appreciated the role of the press in the formation of the faithful. This was expressed in the documents dedicated sometimes exclusively to this means of social communication. The following article aims at the presentation of the selected official statements of the Church concerning the Catholic press between 1918 and 1939. The initiatives of the Church and the teachings that emphasised its importance for the development of the spiritual life have as well been depicted.

Article 216 of the Code of Canon Law states that without the recognition of the competent ecclesiastical authority, no initiative can be ascribed to be Catholic. Bishop Adam Lepa provides us with the following definition: “the term Catholic press includes those publications which, with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority, are printed periodically and distributed to the public with the aim to comprehensively present reality, especially current events and problems from the life of the

Church and his doctrine”.<sup>1</sup> The above definition appears to be most accurate and finds its reflection in the article to follow.

### **The origins of the Catholic press in Poland**

The Catholic press in Poland has a long tradition, dating back to the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> For example, the well-known Jesuit monthly “Przegląd Powszechny” began to appear in 1884 and was published intermittently until 2012. Michał Jagiełło made the periodisation of the above monthly, distinguishing three periods: 1884-1939, 1947-1953 and 1982-2012.<sup>3</sup> The periodical played an important social and political role in the Second Republic. Its editor-in-chief Fr. Jan Urban SJ was an influential person at the time.

The first issue of the socio-religious weekly entitled “Przewodnik Katolicki” was published on 17 January 1895. It was produced at the request of metropolitan of Gniezno and Poznań, Archbishop Florian Stablewski. A certain impetus for the creation of the magazine was supplemented by the appearance of Poznań “Poślaniec Niedzielny”, the content of which was kept in the Prussian spirit. The above magazine had a nationwide character since 1918 and was addressed to Catholic families and associations. It was published by the Bishop’s Chancellery in Poznań, and from 1897 its financial base was the Printing House and Bookshop of St Adalbert. The function of the first editor was performed by Wawrzyniec Kostecki, who resigned from this position after a few months. He was replaced then by Fr. Józef Kłós, who edited the periodical until 1915 and in 1924-1935. „Przewodnik Katolicki” was published until September 1939. After the war, efforts

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<sup>1</sup> T. Mielczarek, *Prasa Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce w latach 1989-2004*, [in:] *Media wyznaniowe w Polsce 1989-2004*, eds. E. Kossowska, J. Adamowski, Warszawa 2004, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> On the beginnings of the Catholic press, see: C. Lechicki, *Polskie czasopiśmiennictwo katolickie w latach 1833-1914*, „Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 1 (1983) pp. 19-42; *idem*, *Polska prasa katolicka 1945-1948*, „Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 1983, vol. 22, No. 2; C. Lechicki, *Prasa katolicka Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, „Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 1983 No. 2 pp. 45-70; E. Kristanová, *Program społeczny i kulturalny „Tęczy” (1927-1939) na tle prasy katolickiej w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Łódź 2006, pp. 11-30.

<sup>3</sup> M. Jagiełło, *Trwałość i zmiana. Szkice o „Przeglądzie Powszechnym 1884-1918*, Warszawa 1993, p. 5.

were made to restore its publication. However, it did not take place owing to the opposition of the communist authorities. On the occasion of the 950th death anniversary of St Adalbert in April 1947, only one issue was published as a one-day paper. It was re-published during “the thaw” in December 1956.<sup>4</sup>

In 1895, “*Posłaniec Niedzielny*” started to be published for the Wrocław diocese of the Holy Family Union.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, the bishops lacked reliable press information concerning Church matters. In an attempt to redress this situation, Archbishops Bilczewski, Teodorowicz and Bishop Pelczar established a Catholic daily in 1900 entitled “*Prześwit*”.<sup>6</sup> Apart from Catholic periodicals, there were also titles linked to the Protestant, Orthodox communities, or those referring to the national church, yet they did not play any major role in shaping the press market.<sup>7</sup> Adam Stefan Sapieha acknowledged the importance of the press in social communication when he stayed in Rome during the pontificate of Pius X.<sup>8</sup> Other bishops often turned to him at that time for help in establishing the press market. At the request of Tadeusz Cieński, president of the National Council in the Vienna Parliament, the Polish Press Office was appointed in Rome.<sup>9</sup>

In the second half of the 19th century, the press commenced to be addressed not only to the clergy but also to the lay faithful. The development of the Catholic press was facilitated by the favourable social and political situation. By way of illustration, in Upper Silesia, censorship was abolished in 1848, and legislation letting interfere in the press was withdrawn. There was also a simultaneous increase in the importance of the clergy in politics. An important factor was also

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<sup>4</sup> J. Płis, *Kościół katolicki w Polsce a prasa, radio i film: 1918-1939*, Lublin 2001, pp. 75-76.

<sup>5</sup> B. Warząchowska, *Książka, prasa i biblioteka w działalności Kościoła katolickiego w województwie śląskim (1922-1939)*, Katowice 2012, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> J. Wołczański, *Listy ks. Stanisława Stojałowskiego do arcybiskupa Józefa Bilczewskiego z lat 1901-1902*, „*Nasza Przeszłość*” 1998, vol. 90, p. 128.

<sup>7</sup> A. Kaleta, *Polskie katolickie czasopiśmiennictwo misyjne w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Kalisz 2001, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Sapieha, later bishop of Krakow, played the role of Papal Chamberlain at the beginning of the 20th century, and was as well an unofficial ambassador of the Polish case at the Holy See.

<sup>9</sup> Ks. J. Wołczański, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

the noticeable development of religious life.<sup>10</sup> The *spiritus movens* for the emergence of the press in Poland was undoubtedly the situation found in other countries. In 1822, in France, the Lyon Society for the Propagation of the Faith established “Les Annales de la Propagation de la Foi” and “Les Missions Catholiques”. In Germany, in turn, the Jesuits published “Die Katolischen Missionen” in the 1870s. Analogous periodicals were published in Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, the USA and Italy.<sup>11</sup>

### The development of the Catholic press in the Second Republic

The Polish press became a real power in the inter-war period when it reached huge circulation with a high number of titles.<sup>12</sup> Among over three hundred religious magazines, which were published in 1935, “Rycerz Niepokalanej” deserves particular attention, whose founder was “a genius of the Catholic media” St Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941). The circulation of the periodical exceeded 750 000 copies; also its version for kids “Rycerzyk Niepokalanej” attracted huge interest (221 000 copies).<sup>13</sup> In 1936, the total circulation of all the Catholic periodicals amounted to over 2 500 000 copies, of which c. 1 200 000 was the circulation of two magazines issued in Niepokalanów by Father Kolbe. Around 27% of the total circulation in the Polish printed media was the Catholic press.<sup>14</sup>

“Posłaniec Niedzielný”, which was the follow-up of the periodical issued in German, was published in the Wrocław Archdiocese from 1895. This weekly magazine was published from January 1895 until February 1939, but, in 1931, its title was changed into “Posłaniec Niedzielný Archidiecezji Wrocławskiej zarazem organ Związku św. Rodziny”, and, in 1935, into “Posłaniec Niedzielný Archidiecezji Wrocławskiej z Dodatkiem ilustrowanym Świat katolicki”.<sup>15</sup> Since this periodical manifested its clear pro-German orientation, a need was born

<sup>10</sup> B. Warząchowska, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> A. Kaleta, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>12</sup> See: A. Paczkowski, *Prasa polska w latach 1918-1939*, Warszawa 1980.

<sup>13</sup> G. Łęcicki, *Media katolickie w III Rzeczypospolitej (1989-2009)*, „Kultura – Media – Teologia” 2010, No. 2, p. 116.

<sup>14</sup> A. Paczkowski, *Prasa polska w latach 1918-1939*, Warszawa 1980, p. 295.

<sup>15</sup> D. Zapała, *Media katolickie w archidiecezji wrocławskiej*, Wrocław 2003, pp. 65-66.

to establish a new periodical – “Gość Niedzielny”. Its founder was Cardinal August Hlond and its first administrator was Fr. dr Teodor Kubina, a parish priest of St Mary Church in Katowice, a social worker and a columnist. The first issue of the periodical was published on 9 September 1923 under the title of “Tygodnik dla ludu katolickiego Administracji Apostolskiej Śląska Polskiego”. Since the beginning, religious and moral and social themes were combined in its journalism, such that concerned the political and social life of Upper Silesia. At the same time, regional culture, its morality and religiousness were addressed.<sup>16</sup> In total, in the inter-war period a number of readers amounted to c. 100 000.<sup>17</sup>

The success of the Catholic publishing houses resulted from the Catholic Action supported by Pope Pius XI and adopted by the Conference of the Polish Episcopate in April 1929. It constituted a response to the necessity of greater involvement of the lay people in the life of the Church.<sup>18</sup> In the Polish context, it was to attend to solving social problems, such as family life, moral and socio-economic issues. The aim was to fight against secularisation or appropriate upbringing of the youth. One of the tools for these postulates was to be the press. In the opinion of Bishop Stanisław Adamski, the influence of the Catholic press was to be as far-reaching as the programme of the Catholic Action. The press was to participate in shaping the public opinion of the Catholics, crystalizing future Catholic elites and forming the foundation of the religious life. Bishop Adamski fulfilled the function of the Head of the Executive Body of the Press Commission of the Polish Episcopate. In fulfilling his commitments, he called the editors of the Catholic periodicals to participate most actively in the programme promoted by the Action. He indicated that the Catholic press should enter into close cooperation with the Polish Episcopate in order to

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<sup>16</sup> A. Grajewski, *Świadek i uczestnik. 60 lat „Gościa Niedzielnego” (1923-1993)*, Katowice 1993, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Pius XI specified its tasks in the following manner: “the Catholic Action is the participation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate of the Catholic Church for the defence of the principles of religion and morality and for the development of healthy and useful social action under the leadership of the Church hierarchy – above and beyond all political parties – in order to renew the Catholic life in the family and society”. *Cit. per: J. Płis, op. cit.*, p. 42.

jointly realise the goals and to avoid situations which may cause conflicts. At the same time, he outlined its most important tasks: to preach the message of Christ, to introduce Christian values into the social life and to cooperate with the Church hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> The Catholic Action was active in Poland through its so-called columns, which were: the Catholic Women's Union, the Catholic Husbands' Union, the Catholic Women's Youth Union and the Catholic Men's Youth Union. Her activities concentrated not only on religious and educational issues, but they presented the views of the Catholic Church concerning society, economy and culture.<sup>20</sup>

The Polish Episcopate acknowledged the importance of the press in realising the pastoral tasks. The minutes of the congress of bishops in Krakow (28 May – 3 June 1921) read: "The Commission [of Bishops] considers the Catholic press to be the most urgent matter and therefore proposes the creation of a press office... The press office is headed by the Archbishop of Lviv of the Armenian rite, the Bishops of Krakow and Podlasie".<sup>21</sup> The activities of the Press Commission were extended at the next congress in 1928.<sup>22</sup> The Press and Pastoral Commission of the Polish Episcopate was chaired by Bishop Józef Teodorowicz, who led it until 1936.<sup>23</sup> His decisions referred to both methods of media operation and their substantive matter. In this way, it also established relations with other commissions operating within the Conference of the Polish Episcopate. In the opinion of Zygmunt Zieliński, the Commission's activities were of almost "propagandist" nature. Its very name was a "bogey" for the circle of people associated with the secular circles.<sup>24</sup>

Magazines that promoted cheap sensationalism with, for example, descriptions of crimes, met with unequivocal condemnation from

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 42-44.

<sup>20</sup> M. R z a d k o w o l s k a, *Czytelnictwo powieści w opiniach środowisk katolickich II Rzeczypospolitej*, Łódź 2003, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> K. K l a u z a, *Wstęp*, [in:] Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński Prymas Polski, *Kościół i media*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 7-8.

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

<sup>23</sup> K. K r a s o w s k i, *Biskupi katolicki II Rzeczypospolitej. Słownik biograficzny*, Poznań 1996, p. 293.

<sup>24</sup> Z. Z i e l i ń s k i, *Bibliografia katolickich czasopism religijnych w Polsce 1918-1939*, Lublin 1981, pp. 130-131.

the clergy, for they were believed to exert a negative impact on readers. For example, Father Stanisław Karaś referred to the case of a 12-year-old who committed suicide after reading an article. The article described in detail how another boy had hanged himself. According to Fr. Karaś, every newspaper or book could, in its content, provide instruction for future criminals. He believed that the magazine entitled "Tajny Detektyw" fulfilled such a role. The analysis of the survey conducted in Poznań schools indicated that the magazine's readers were most often boys with poor school results, who were most intrigued by descriptions of murders, suicides and thefts.<sup>25</sup>

At the Conference of the Polish Episcopate in Gniezno on 17-20 September 1928, the idea emerged to formulate new guidelines for pastoral ministry and at the same time to assess religious life in the country. The bishops unanimously agreed that the task of the Catholic press was not only to protect the deposit of faith, but also to popularise it among the readers.<sup>26</sup>

In the Second Republic, the sanation press became an object of criticism in the Catholic circles. They were accused of relativism and permissiveness, and also of pursuance of mainly substantial profit by its editors.<sup>27</sup> The sanation periodicals had worse reputation in the Catholic circles than periodicals whose editors were openly against the Church. This resulted from the fact that they were daily and essentially the only source of information and spiritual formation for millions of readers, who accepted them uncritically.<sup>28</sup> An example of the Piłsudski periodical with anti-cleric inclination was "Głos Prawdy", who openly called for breaking off concordat and eliminate the Church from the social life.<sup>29</sup> The Catholic press attempted to preserve apoliticality, although to a certain extent they supported Christian and National Democracies.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> J. P l i s, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> W. T. K u l e s z a, *Koncepcje ideowo-polityczne obozu rządzącego w Polsce w latach 1926-1935*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Lódź 1985, p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> W. M. K o l a s a, *Kierunki badań nad historią prasy polskiej 1918-1939*. P. 1. *Tendencje rozwojowe, typologia*, „Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 2011, vol. 14, iss. 1-2 (27-28), p. 48. See also: E. K r i s t a n o v a, *Ilustrowany miesięcznik społeczno-*

The involvement of the Catholic press in the socio-political issues has sometimes aroused controversies, and still does. According to Fr. Leon Dyszewski, the press should be created by professional journalists as well as non-professionals, because, unlike the audience of other periodicals that have their regular readers, they are aimed at the audience from different social, professional and cultural groups. In his opinion, Father Maximilian Kolbe understood the above need for the bilateral perspective on the press, therefore the laymen were most often the publicists of his periodical (“Rycerz Niepokalanej”), being able to reach the ordinary man with their message.<sup>31</sup> In 1933, Fr. Wyszyński drew attention to the educational function of the press in shaping the character of the young men: “the contemporary periodical often loses its informational and educational character, its new speciality becoming criminalistics and eroticism. And these are the things that most likely thwart the educational work of shaping a new type of citizen”.<sup>32</sup>

### **The teachings of the Pope and Polish bishops**

The teachings of the Polish Church referring to the press were a derivative of the papal enunciation. The Catholic media doctrine had been shaped since the second half of the 19th century.<sup>33</sup> Already Pope Leon XIII observed that “a good magazine constitutes a continuous mission of the parish”<sup>34</sup>. In turn, Pope Pius X claimed that “there is no nobler mission than the journalist’s one in today’s world”.<sup>35</sup> Some other time he was to say: “The importance of the press is still underestimated. Neither the faithful nor the clergy devote themselves properly. In vain,

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*kulturalny i literacki „Rodzina Polska” (1927-1939). Ogólna charakterystyka pisma, [in:] Ludzie i książki. Studia i szkice bibliologiczno-biograficzne, ed. E. Andrzyśiak, Łódź 2011, pp. 283-301; Eadem, Program społeczny i kulturalny „Tęczy” (1927-1939) na tle prasy katolickiej w II Rzeczypospolitej, Łódź 2006.*

<sup>31</sup> L. Dyszewski, *Znamiona prasy katolickiej, „Mikrus Dziennikarski” 1995-1996, Nos. 2-3, p. 40.*

<sup>32</sup> Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński Prymas Polski, *Kościół i media*, Warszawa 2002, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> See: P. Sołga, *Prasa jako czynnik kształtujący katolicką doktrynę medialną w XIX i XX wieku*, „Res Gestae. Czasopismo Historyczne” 2016, No. 3, pp. 170-193.

<sup>34</sup> *Co mówią wybitni mężowie o prasie?*, „Niedziela” 1935, vol. 10, No. 41, p. 493.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.



however, you will build churches, establish schools, maintain missions. All your efforts will be fruitless if at the same time you do not use the provocative and resistant weapons of the Catholic press".<sup>36</sup>

During the pontificate of Pius XI, the importance of the press in the formation of the faithful was emphasised. Threats were as well noticed. In the *Caritate Christi compulsi* encyclic we read: "Equipped with their own printing houses, they press their own magazines in every language, with the face expression and gesture of winners, they openly spread unholy press and their printing houses. However, this is not enough. They opened political, economic, military organizations operating efficiently and relentlessly pursue their purposes by their agitators, who during protests, with the aid of posters and illustrated magazines and, whatever means they have, implement their propaganda secretly".<sup>37</sup> Pope believed that "the Catholic press is at present the most powerful means of propagation and defence of the Christian faith".<sup>38</sup> Pius X giving an audience to the directors of the Catholic Action in the Italian Universities insisted that "every Catholic should be an Apostle of the Catholic press, not only with reference to necessary information, but also its spreading".<sup>39</sup>

The Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Pacelli, wrote on 26 December 1931: "May the recognition of the Holy Father be a stimulus for everyone to understand the necessity and importance of the apostolate of the press, especially its militant branch, the Catholic newspapers. It is particularly important in our times, when many are moving away from the salvific influence of the Church and her religious and moral teachings".<sup>40</sup> "Ruch Katolicki", however, quoted the Patriarch of Lisbon, Cardinal Consalvez Cereyra, saying: "The Catholic journalist is by his very nature something of a representative of the Church, for he is for the general public a herald of the Church's directives and its views. By this we do not mean to say that the Catholic journalist is merely a special organ of the hierarchy, speaking as a herald – as much as the views of the Church

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> *Hierarchia kościelna o znaczeniu prasy katolickiej*, „Ruch Katolicki. Organ Akcji Katolickiej w Polsce,” 1932, vol. 2, Nos. 9-10, p. 261.

<sup>38</sup> *Pius XI o prasie*, „Niedziela” 1935, 10, No. 41, p. 492.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 262-262.

extend – the Catholic journal takes part to a certain extent in the mission of the Church”.<sup>41</sup>

Metropolitan Archbishop of Krakow Adam Stefan Sapieha in 1938 reminded us of the recommendations of the Polish Episcopate. He committed the faithful in the synodal acts to both buy Catholic periodicals (mainly diocesan and those issued by the Catholic Action) and avoid those hostile to God and faith. Every believer was obliged to spread faith and “subscription of the Catholic periodicals was the easiest and most effective means of accomplishment of this apostolic mission”.<sup>42</sup> The archbishop of Krakow in a special address dedicated to the Catholic press indicated that “subscription and reading of the Catholic magazines is a duty first of every Catholic [...]; owing to the flood of magazines that surround us, we are exposed to distortion of our own convictions. Many do not realise this, or wish to pretend that it does not harm”.<sup>43</sup>

The Metropolitan of Vilnius, Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski, in his pastoral letter on the occasion of the Jubilee Year 1933, wrote: “We should immediately break with all evil, perverse and godless writing and its blight. (...) Let us sincerely resolve to support only good writing and to use the press as vigorously as possible in defence of our religious ideas, in defence of the principles of Christ’s teachings, in defence of good and truth. This bad, godless press can effectively be combatted exclusively by the good press. The bad press should be opposed at all costs by the good press, imbued with the spirit and principles of the doctrine of Christ. (...) If we neglect to support and expand the Catholic press, everything is in grave danger: churches will become empty, associations and organisations will be dissolved, and charitable institutions will come under other foreign and hostile influences, since they will have no defence”.<sup>44</sup> He established a Catholic Press Day in the parishes of the diocese. It was to be celebrated on any Sunday in spring or summer. The activity stemmed

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 263.

<sup>42</sup> *W sprawie prasy katolickiej. Orędzie Ks. Metropolity A. Sapiehy z dnia 6 III 1938*, „Ruch Katolicki. Organ Akcji Katolickiej w Polsce” 1938, vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 145-146.

<sup>43</sup> *Orędzie o znaczeniu prasy katolickiej*, „Przegląd Powszechny” 1938, vol. 76, No. 13, p. 205.

<sup>44</sup> *Ks. Arcyb. Jałbrzykowski o prasie katolickiej*, „Niedziela” 1933, vol. 8, No. 15, pp. 177-178.

from lack of understanding of the importance of reading by Catholics. People wrote: “Unfortunately, our Catholic society does not yet generally appreciate the press, is indifferent to it and even unknowingly supports the harmful bad press and bad literature by subscribing to them and spending money on them. (...) To be a Catholic and to buy or subscribe godless, pornographic or anti-Catholic magazines, or books of this kind, is almost contradictory. An enemy should not be allowed into our home, nor should we fraternize with him”.<sup>45</sup> Pornography in the definition of the Polish Church in the inter-war period was a term used quite widely, with many contexts. The liberal milieu of “Wiadomości Literackie” warned against its extended definition, which had the effect of declaring even the greatest literary works obscene. In Catholic teaching, artistry was, however, inextricably linked to morality. The repeated desideratum was rejected: “what is beautiful is permitted”. Some literary works, performances, cinema productions, photographs in the windows of night cabarets, songs, etc. were deemed obscene. “Eroticon”, “Adam i Ewa”, “Wesoły Bocian”, “Nowy Dekameron” or “Wolna Myśl – Wolne Żarty” were regarded as pornographic.<sup>46</sup> Aside from the boycott of the pornographic materials, Fr. Henryk Weryński postulated a fight with a prejudice that sexual abstinence harmed health and this was considered a remedy for the phenomenon of pornography. At the same time the inferiority of women to men was also opposed and the cultivation of a sense of shame among the youth, “which is a natural and a strong armour of innocence”.<sup>47</sup>

Archbishop Józef Bilczewski strongly encouraged to boycott indecent magazines. He spoke about this in a quite patronizing manner, claiming that they are “issued by miscellaneous journalistic bandits disregarding Catholic faith, robbing them of good name and smelling carrion everywhere as hyenas do. My dear brothers, please do not spend a penny on these filthy rags, do not take them in hand, since they will wither tomorrow in the dump, from which they grew”.<sup>48</sup> Archbishop Nowowiejski emphasised, in turn, that no less important

<sup>45</sup> *List pasterski o prasie katolickiej*, „Przegląd Katolicki” 1933, vol. 71, No. 15, p. 233.

<sup>46</sup> See: P. B e c z e k, *Przejawy pornografii według prasy katolickiej II Rzeczypospolitej*, „Nasza Przeszłość” 2020, No. 133, pp. 236, 240-247.

<sup>47</sup> H. W e r y ń s k i, *Walka z bezwstydem i pornografią*, „Przegląd Katolicki” 1932, vol. 70, No. 42, pp. 660-661.

<sup>48</sup> *Co mówią wybitni mężowie o prasie?*, „Niedziela” 1935, vol. 10, No. 41, p. 493.

from fight against “bad” press is support of this “good”. A good Catholic publicist has, in his opinion, even greater merit before God than the one who fed the hungry with bread: for he feeds the soul of man, casts the light of truth, in which God will certainly help him and award him.<sup>49</sup>

The obligations of Catholics concerned not only the reading of the Catholic press, but also its support and distribution, which was linked to the missionary duty of Christians. In a decree of 29 January 1936, on the day of the commemoration of the liturgical patron of the Catholic press, St Francis de Sales, the Bishop of Łódź Włodzimierz Łasiński enumerated three duties of the faithful towards the Catholic press. These were: material support for the Catholic publishing houses, popularisation of the Catholic press (especially in associations and confraternities), and forming one’s own views according to their journalism.<sup>50</sup> The clergyman claimed that “the gift of the word is in power to move and convince man, the whole masses even, [...] to express convictions, but also to reflect feelings to a certain extent”.<sup>51</sup>

The reading of the Catholic press was inexorably linked to the development of readership, which was particularly significant with reference to those living in the province, often devoid of the access to education. Biskup Stanisław Łukomski argued that reading the Catholic press would contribute to the development of the religious life and would increase the social and national involvement of the faithful (mainly in the countryside). For this reason he modernised the printing office existing from 1934 in the Łomża diocese. In his opinion, a duty to care about the development of the Catholic magazines rested on the clergy. In 1937, he accentuated that “I therefore recommend to Priests Pastors, Prefects and Church organisations that they pay close attention to the promotion of Catholic books and magazines, their content and authors, and at the same time investigate what books and magazines with immoral content are read in their parishes or among young people, and consequently warn them against this spiritual plague”.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Co mówią wybitni mężowie o prasie?*, „Niedziela” 1935, vol. 10, No. 41, p. 493.

<sup>50</sup> W. J a s i ń s k i, *Rozporządzenia J.E. Pasterza Diecezji. 1. W sprawie prasy katolickiej*, „Wiadomości Diecezjalne Łódzkie” 1936, vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> T. B i a ł o u s, *Biskup Stanisław Kostka Łukomski (1874-1948). Pasterz Niezłomny*, Rajgród 2010, p. 132; more on the promotion of the boo, see: E. K r i s t a n o v a, *Promocja książki na łamach „Tęczy” (1927-1939)*, „Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis.

A religious magazine that reached the circulation of 10 000 copies was "Życie i Prasa". The Shepherd of the Łomża diocese had influence on its content. Political matters were often discussed there, with critical disposition towards the authorities. In 1935, the publication of this weekly paper was suspended by the district attorney in Łomża. "Sprawa Katolicka" continued its activities.<sup>53</sup>

The press at the opposite end of the spectrum, with its liberal provenance, posed a significant threat to spiritual development from a Catholic point of view. The Bishop of Moravian Brno, Fr. Joseph Kupka, warned of the danger of a "godless and immoral" press. He stressed that the so-called colourless press, which is indifferent to religion, does less damage.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Bishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski also called for combating the "bad press" through the "good press". In his opinion, the lack of the popularisation of the Catholic press was to result in "churches becoming deserted, associations and organisations being dissolved, and charitable institutions coming under other foreign and hostile influences, because they would have no defence".<sup>55</sup> The division into the above-mentioned "good" and "bad" press was often used in the Catholic journalism of the Second Republic. It was pointed out that the spiritual effects of reading "bad" press could lead to the imbalance of faith and moral principles: "The unreliable, immoral press, against which Goethe and Schopenhauer warned mankind, not only corrupts, but, worse still, deprives their readers of critical judgement, spreads filth of all kinds through towns and villages".<sup>56</sup>

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Folia Librorum" 2007, No. 14, pp. 45-52; *Eadem*, *Reklama książki na łamach poznańskiej „Kultury” (1936-1939)*. [In:] „Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Librorum” 2001, No. 10, pp. 107-118; *Eadem*, *Reklama książki na łamach „Rodziny Polskiej” (1927-1939)*, „Toruńskie Studia Bibliologiczne” 2009, Vol. 2, No. 2 (3), pp. 27-47; *Eadem*, *Wybrane zagadnienia literackie okresu dwudziestolecia międzywojennego w świetle publikacji kwartalnika „Verbum” (1934-1939)* [in:] *Region i książka. Szkice z dziejów książki regionalnej*, eds. E. Andrysiak and E. Steczek-Czer-ni a w s k i e j, Kalisz 2016, pp. 27-43.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>54</sup> *Hierarchia kościelna o znaczeniu prasy katolickiej*, „Ruch Katolicki. Organ Akcji Katolickiej w Polsce”, 1932, vol. 2, No. 9-10, p. 262.

<sup>55</sup> R. Jałbrzykowski, *O prasie katolickiej*, „Ruch Katolicki. Organ Akcji Katolickiej w Polsce”, 1933, vol. 3, No. 6, p. 243.

<sup>56</sup> O. Prohászka, *Istota kryzysu moralnego*, „Ruch Katolicki. Organ Akcji Katolickiej w Polsce” 1933, vol. 3, No. 12, p. 540.

Bishop Adolf Szelażek of Łuck diocese issued an address to his clergymen, in which he insisted that the Catholic press were supported. As he emphasised, it was not sufficient to defend the faithful against a bad book or press: “Who defended the good of souls in that manner would be similar to the one who would shout: do not eat this poison – but would not give healthy food. The soul should be nourished with good food, which the enemy uses, with the difference that in terms of moral values our weapon would be much higher, more ideal. (...) The diocesan letter plays here a pivotal role. However, the point is to popularise them”.<sup>57</sup>

Both Latin and Greek Catholic bishops encouraged the faithful to read the Catholic press and warned against publications that were immoral from the point of view of the Church. The months of the Catholic press, organised annually, became an opportunity to promote Catholic readership.<sup>58</sup> The teachings of the Polish Episcopate were to some extent a derivative of the enunciations coming out of the Holy See. In his official speeches, the Holy Father Pius XI paid particular attention to their development and importance. He encouraged the youth of the Catholic Action to prepare and distribute journals and to reach out to the broad strata of the society. At the same time, he accentuated that its activists should promote the reading of the Catholic periodicals. Journalism, according to the Pope, is an art that requires not only knowledge, but also “mental and spiritual technique”.<sup>59</sup>

### **Enunciations in the Catholic press**

In the Catholic periodicals in Poland, statements appeared concerning the publishing market. Publications could be helpful in evangelization or could contribute to indecent content and anti-Christian values. The significant influence of the written word on the readers was also observed. The message could serve both in the development of faith

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<sup>57</sup> I. K o w a l s k i, *O poparcie dla prasy katolickiej*, „Niedziela” 1934, vol. 9, No. 29, p. 341.

<sup>58</sup> M. S t r u t y ń s k i, *Mysł społeczno-polityczna Kościoła greckokatolickiego w II RP*, Kraków 2019, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ojciec Święty o prasie katolickiej. Przemówienie Ojca Świętego do kierowników włoskich stowarzyszeń akademickich Akcji Katolickiej z dnia 23 XII 1932, z okazji zakończenia „tygodnia studiów”. (W streszczeniu według „Osservatore Romano”), „Ruch Katolicki. Organ Akcji Katolickiej w Polsce” 1933, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 98.*

and its loss. Fr. Wiktor Kamieński drew attention to a huge role of the press in shaping the public opinion. He stated that “to convince someone of the power of the press, of its immense significance, influence on shaping public opinion, etc. would be to convince one of the need for sun, air and other natural factors, so indispensable for life and its development”.<sup>60</sup> An effort was made to ensure that utmost part of the press available on the market was imbued with the Catholic spirit, since the majority of printed material promoted religious indifference in the spirit of materialism or moral decay. The atheist novelty readily found the audience among the rural population. For this reason, the development of the Catholic press and the restriction on the spread of “bad press” was considered an important pastoral task. The creation of a special press fund, press departments in every parish, the establishment of Catholic newspaper kiosks at the entrance to the church and the distribution of Catholic periodicals in the countryside were also postulated.<sup>61</sup>

Fr. Jan Grabowski believed that readership (including Catholic press) should serve to develop the intellect. Attention was paid to the fact that if the faithful did not practise this, the clergy would be replaced by freethinkers effectively convincing the people to read their texts.<sup>62</sup> The level of illiteracy at the beginning of the inter-war period, especially in the province, was relatively high. This situation changed to the better in the 1930s. Those uneducated and living in the countryside, as was believed, were more vulnerable to the transmission of the printed material. It was also feared that they could exert greater influence than homilies delivered from the pulpit, elusive and not necessarily understandable for an ordinary inhabitant of the Polish village. The access to books was also limited, therefore, readership had to be developed via the Catholic press sold near the church on Sundays and during feasts, since benefits obtained could be enormous.

Fr. Stefan Piętka noted that it was necessary to confront “the modern enemies of the Church” in an effective way: “In these days of culture and progress, only the press is such a guarantor, because it is more effective

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<sup>60</sup> W. Kamieński, *Prasa katolicka*, „Wiadomości Diecezjalne Podlaskie” 1936, vol. 18, No. 1-2, p. 61.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>62</sup> J. Grabowski, *Prasa katolicka (koreferat)*, „Wiadomości Diecezjalne Podlaskie” 1936, vol. 18, Nos. 1-2, p. 65.

than any firearm, stronger than a cannon, above the best-equipped army. (...) God forbid that domination of the bad press should exist in any nation. Such a state whose nation lives under the influence of the evil press will perish miserably. (...) The Bolsheviks and their spiritual guides the Jews understood well the importance of the press, and for this reason millions of rubles were spent on the press fund”.<sup>63</sup> He warned against the “bad press”, which wore “a mask” being “a Masonic-Jew work leading the nation to disaster. Since there are periodicals which are edited by people who declare liberal ideology, at times even practising Catholicism, where the majority of the staff are Jews, who with skilfully formulated articles prepare the reader to be a Mason, a godless person-communist”.<sup>64</sup> As was believed, the parish clergy was to warn their faithful against such periodicals, they should expose them and have the list of their titles.

The future Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in the inter-war period was the editor of many widely read Catholic periodicals, including “Ateneum Kapłański”.<sup>65</sup> In 1933, he drew attention to the educational function of the press: “the contemporary periodical often loses its informational and educational character, its new speciality becoming criminalistics and eroticism. And these are the things that most likely thwart the educational work of shaping a new type of citizen”.<sup>66</sup>

They understood well that the development of the Catholic press and readership is not only the issue of the development of a means of social message<sup>67</sup> and “a sign of the contemporary times”, but the authority the Church in Poland may depend on. J. Czarnecki concluded this in a following manner: “Tell me what periodicals and magazines you read and I will tell you who you are, a well-known proverb may be easily travestied. Therefore, a Catholic should read magazines that are decisively and programmatically Catholic if he wants to use the influence of the press to his own advantage. (...) Pope Pius X said: as it was a merit to

<sup>63</sup> S. Piętko, *Referat p.t. „Dobra prasa”*, „Wiadomości Diecezjalne Podlaskie” 1938, vol. 20, Nos. 1-2, pp. 163-164.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 164.

<sup>65</sup> K. Kłaza, *Wstęp*, [in:] Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński Prymas Polski, *Kościół i media*, Warszawa 2002, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński Prymas Polski, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>67</sup> The adjective “mass” was deliberately not used in the text, which, according to the teachings of the Church, is in dispute with the spirit of personalism.



fund churches, now it is to establish and support Catholic periodicals”.<sup>68</sup> As an example of the power of the then press he quoted a casus of France, where one of the Catholic leaders was to note that if one-tenth of the income of the church estate had been allotted to the development of the Catholic church, there would not have been secularization of the social life, confiscation of the church estate and liquidation of the Catholic schools at the beginning of the 20th century. The liberal agitation of the Masons and socialists in the press brought results. Therefore, the role of the Catholic publications was emphasized and a warning was issued against an anti-Catholic offensive in the newly established press titles of the Second Polish Republic.<sup>69</sup>

The hypocrisy of the leftist circles: “socialists in Poland fight for freedom of the press, whereas what happened with this freedom of the press in the socialist country? This is again best evidenced in communist Russia. There is no harsher censorship or greater slavery of thought and speech in the world. Is it not again to disprove one’s own slogans?”<sup>70</sup> It was indicated that the readers of the periodicals with liberal, ultra-nationalistic and “neutral” provenance were Catholics, which exerted considerable influence on their morality and views. Since there were no Catholic journals on the press market, there was a need to establish them. For this reason, the cooperation between the lay Catholics and the clergy was proposed to create journals that would not be subordinated to any other interests but Catholic.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

The Catholic press in Poland commenced to be published in the first half of the 19th century.<sup>72</sup> In the inter-war period, despite numerous titles that were published, it competed with the liberal press periodicals of anti-religious and anti-clerical overtones. It was the medium that

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<sup>68</sup> J. Czarniecki, *Potrzeba prasy katolickiej*, „Przegląd Katolicki” 1932, vol. 70, No. 17, p. 262.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup> *Noworoczne złudzenia socjalistów*, „Przewodnik Katolicki” 1936, vol. 42, No. 4, p. 50.

<sup>71</sup> X.S.M., *W sprawie prasy katolickiej*, „Przegląd Katolicki” 1926, vol. 64, No. 32, p. 518.

<sup>72</sup> C. Lechicki, *Polskie czasopiśmiennictwo katolickie w latach 1833-1914*, „Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 1983, Vol. 22, p. 19; E. Kristanova, *Program społeczny i kulturalny „Tęczy” (1927-1939) na tle prasy katolickiej w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Łódź 2006, pp. 10-30.

could wield influence on the strengthening of the faith of the Catholics as well as on the weakening of it. The hierarchy of the Church and Catholic columnists were aware of its role. Journalists who were the representatives of the clergy gave advice to the bishops on how to organise the press market within given diocese in order to make the Catholic press more widely available.

The Church in Europe initially criticised the press because it served political agitation. Freedom construed democratically was regarded as the breach of the contemporary legitimacy and threat to the role of the Church. With time, its virtues were noticed, although the clergy warned against dangers which were linked to it. Other functioning media, such as the radio and film in the 1920s, were not as widespread and did not perform any major role in evangelization. Therefore, the Catholic media doctrine concentrated their attention mainly on the press.

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