

**Kasper Sipowicz, *Prześladowania religijne w Kraju Warty. Represje wobec Polaków i duchowieństwa polskiego a polityka wyznaniowa rządu III Rzeszy 1939–1945*, Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy, Łódź 2016, pp. 217.**

The Catholic Church – despite the occasional cases of collaboration of individual priests with the invaders – was undoubtedly a victim of Nazism during the Second World War. Fortune did not spare the Protestant communities either, as they often openly opposed Hitler's ideology. The work by Kasper Sipowicz, German philologist, political scholar and teacher, professionally associated with Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw, undertakes this topic, referring to the fate of the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Reichsgau Wartheland, the former territory of the Second Polish Republic annexed by the Third Reich. The publication was reviewed by three reviewers, who assessed the substantive value of its content: Bogusław Milerski (Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw), Ludwik Malinowski (Maria Grzegorzewska University), and Marian S. Wolański (Jan Wyżykowski University), which could potentially indicate its high substantive level; however, the reality in this case was not entirely up to my expectations.

The subtitle of the book, in my opinion, should rather read: 'Repressions against Poles and the Polish clergy in Reichsgau Wartheland and the religious policy of the Third Reich government in 1939–1945'<sup>1</sup>, since the Author's conclusions concern this particular area, not the entire territory of the former Second Polish Republic occupied by Germany. Religious policy is mentioned in the first two chapters, however, the reader has to make their own assumptions on the ways they relate to the persecution in Reichsgau Wartheland. This last – eponymous – issue was covered in the third chapter, or – more precisely – in its second sub-chapter, but as its title suggests, it is devoted in particular to 'Arthur Greiser's repression policy' and his decisions, rather than the policies that resulted from political decisions at the central level. In my opinion, the inclusion of these two first chapters would make much more sense if they referred to the specific

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<sup>1</sup> 'Represje wobec Polaków i duchowieństwa polskiego w Kraju Warty a polityka wyznaniowa rządu III Rzeszy 1939–1945'.

repressions that the Catholic and Protestant clergy suffered in Reichsgau Wartheland. After all, what impact did the 'anti-religious' rhetoric of *Mein Kampf*, the enunciations of Alfred Rosenberg, the National Socialist ideology, the occultism among the members of the NSDAP or the Third Reich's concordat with the Vatican have on Greiser's decisions? These are the issues covered in the first two chapters, and it remains unclear how their content refers to the remaining two. Religious policy was not the result of religious repression – in reality, it was quite the opposite, so perhaps the 'Religious policy of the Third Reich government and repressions against Poles and Polish clergy in 1939–1945'<sup>2</sup> subtitle would make even more sense?

The comment above also concerns my doubts regarding the structure of the book. Every single one, or almost every single, scholarly work in the humanities, in particular in the field of history, requires a 'preliminary' chapter of sorts, which explains the most pertinent issues that will appear in the remaining part of the work, or that provides an earlier chronology of events, required to understand the content of the other chapters. In the book I reviewed, the first two chapters deal with 'religion in the view and interpretation of the key National Socialist ideologists' and 'the relationship between the Third Reich authorities and the German Christian churches'. Both take up almost a hundred pages and account for almost half of the work. It would make sense if – as I already mentioned – the information contained therein referred directly to specific events in Reichsgau Wartheland, pertaining to repressions against the local clergy. A short, third chapter entitled 'Kraj Warty jako wzorcowy okręg III Rzeszy' ['Reichsgau Wartheland as an exemplary district of the Third Reich'] is a chapter I would personally move to the fore and make it the first chapter, developing the topic further. I would also leave the two previous ones completely out or include it within the third one as sub-chapters. I have similar thoughts about the final chapter devoted to repressions against the Protestant clergy, where the greater part of it is devoted to the description of the development of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland until the outbreak of the Second World War, and not the repressions themselves.

The sources cited by Fr. Sipowicz in the book's bibliography are relatively extensive. The Author took advantage of the resources of the Łódź and the main branch of the Institute of National Remembrance, the State Archive in Łódź, several diaries and memoirs, as well as selected

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<sup>2</sup> 'Polityka wyznaniowa rządu III Rzeszy a represje wobec Polaków i duchowieństwa polskiego 1939–1945'.

printed sources, which comprise mainly church documents. However, links to archives in the book are generally incidental, mainly in the fourth chapter. The two first chapters hardly have any archive citations at all, the majority refer to printed publications and sources, although largely in German. The Author readily takes advantage to German-language publications among the sources he cites. I believe that the list of works cited could have been expanded slightly, since a very good collective work published in 1982, edited by Fr. Z. Zieliński exist, devoted to religious life under Nazi occupation<sup>3</sup>, while the works of Nicholas Goodrick-Clark<sup>4</sup> and Manfred Deselaers<sup>5</sup> are valuable sources of knowledge about the Nazi occultism. A paper by Polish researcher Aleksandra Kmak-Pamirska<sup>6</sup> and a book by Michael Hassemann<sup>7</sup> were devoted to the analysis of the ideology of Nazism as a para-religious phenomenon.

The book comprises an *Introduction*, five chapters, a *Conclusion*, a glossary of abbreviations and 'selected works cited'. The first chapter was devoted to the attitude of National Socialist ideologists, with the main emphasis on Adolf Hitler and Alfred Rosenberg, towards religion. The final sub-chapter, dedicated to occult inclinations of prominent NSDAP activists, piqued my interest. The second chapter describes the complex relationship between the authorities of the Third Reich and the Catholic and Protestant churches. The third chapter presents Reichsgau Wartheland as an administrative unit, as well as its authorities and their policies, including policies concerning its Jewish populace. The fifth and sixth chapters present the characteristics and repressions of Nazi officials against the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. The book is written using a very accessible and enjoyable language, characterized by rich vocabulary, although in my opinion the Author abuses the term *ipso facto*, which he apparently likes to use.

Some of the Author's statements can be certainly considered controversial, and K. Sipowicz presents them already in the *Introduction* to the book, where the reader can find a statement about Emil Rappaport's enunciations, who believed that the German equivalent of the word 'war' – *Krieg* – derives its etymology from the desire to 'conquer something'. In this way 'in the opinion of this jurist it confirms the natural propensity of

<sup>3</sup> *Życie religijne pod okupacją hitlerowską*, ed. Z. Zieliński, Warszawa 1982.

<sup>4</sup> N. Goodrick-Clark, *Okultystyczne źródła nazizmu*, Warszawa 2001.

<sup>5</sup> M. Deselaers, *Bóg a zło. W świetle biografii i wypowiedzi Rudolfa Hössa komendanta Auschwitz*, Kraków 1999.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kmak-Pamirska, *Elementy 'religijne' w ideologii i obrzędach narodowosocjalistycznych Trzeciej Rzeszy*, 'Studia nad Autorytaryzmem i Totalitaryzmem' 2012, 2(34), pp. 19–37.

<sup>7</sup> M. Hassemann, *Religia Hitlera*, Warszawa 2011.

Germans to looting and robbery, which is instilled in their consciousness on the level of their vocabulary'<sup>8</sup> (p. 7). The Author seems to agree with this position, since he quotes it and does not argue with it in any way. However, it sounds quite grotesque and certainly offensive to the Germans – while claiming that, I do not deny that at one time more than 90% of them supported the Nazi regime.

The Author emphasizes that the works published to date, devoted to the subject at hand were written by Catholic and Protestant clergy, but did not present the fate of the churches in a comprehensive manner, and the fact that their authors were members of the clergy 'may raise doubts concerning the objectivity of their conclusions'<sup>9</sup> (p. 8). If K. Sipowicz believes that their works were biased in some respects, he should have demonstrated this in his work and refute their claims on the basis of his own findings. The Author does not explicitly state what kind of sources he was referring to, but in his bibliography he cites the work by Fr. Marek Budziarek<sup>10</sup>, which I have owned for many years, and – even though it is very short – I would be hard-pressed to claim that the Author has put forth any arguments that are biased. I am just as far away from claiming that the reviewed book presents the subject in a comprehensive manner.

The Author devoted a lot of space to the attitude of Alfred Rosenberg, one of the key ideologists of Nazism, towards the Christian faith, but apart from that, the most church-averse Third Reich officials were Martin Borman, Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich<sup>11</sup>, who were in Hitler's closest circles. The latter spoke openly about the planned destruction of the Church after the war. Hitler himself claimed: 'The Catholic Church will have nothing to laugh about when I gain power, but I cannot do it without its help'<sup>12</sup>. The statements of Rosenberg and Hitler quoted from *Mein Kampf* are not the only source of knowledge about the religious philosophy of Nazism, but the fact that – as the Author points out – Hitler 'officially belonged to the Catholic Church until the last days of his life'<sup>13</sup> (p. 16)

<sup>8</sup> 'zdaniem tego jurysty potwierdza to naturalną skłonność Niemców do łupiestwa i rabunku, obecną w ich świadomości już na poziomie słowotwórczym'.

<sup>9</sup> 'może budzić wątpliwości co do obiektywizmu ich ustaleń'.

<sup>10</sup> M. Budziarek, *Katedra przy Adolf Hitlerstrasse. Z dziejów Kościoła katolickiego w Łodzi 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1984.

<sup>11</sup> W. Kulbat, *Kościół w Niemczech i narodowy socjalizm*, 'Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne' 2005, 2, p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> 'kiedy otrzymam władzę, Kościół nie będzie miał się z czego śmiać, lecz by dojść do władzy, nie mogę się obejść bez jego pomocy'. After: B. Grott, *Nacjonalizm chrześcijański. Myśl społeczno-państwowa formacji narodowo-katolickiej w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Kraków 1991, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> 'należał oficjalnie do Kościoła katolickiego'.

in no way influenced his disdain towards Christianity (not only towards Catholicism, to the benefit of the Protestant Church, as K. Sipowicz points out – p. 32), which he considered to be a ‘weaker’ faith, compared to Islam.

Concerning the attitude of Pope Pius XII, the Author highlights that the ‘sheer scale of the atrocities committed by the authorities of the Third Reich was unprecedented, and Pius XII leaned towards conservative 19th-century solutions – diplomacy and its talks behind-the-scenes’<sup>14</sup> (p. 92). However, the Pope’s capabilities were very limited at that point – after all, the Vatican was surrounded by fascist Italy allied with the Third Reich. The Author mentions the help provided to Jews living in Rome by Pius XII. I find it difficult to understand what he expects from the Pope in terms of condemning the Nazi regime, apart from diplomatic activities. Allied states had much more room to take measures in this respect, as well as in terms of helping Jews. We might ask the question – ‘Was the help of the powers at war with Nazi Germany as multilateral, selfless and spontaneous? They were beyond Hitler’s reach, without fear of any repercussions, and – unlike the Pope and ordinary Catholics – they showed embarrassing inertia or even complete lack of willingness to help’<sup>15</sup>. The ‘absolute neutrality’ of Pius XII in international relations, as Marek Kornat<sup>16</sup> puts it, should be analyzed in the context of the contemporaneous situation and the teachings of the Church. Currently, there are a lot of books concerning the war-time stance of Pius XII, including works translated into Polish, and it is a pity that the Author did not use them. One of the most exhaustive ones is the collective work edited by the aforementioned M. Kornat<sup>17</sup>.

Kasper Sipowicz’s book can serve as a good source of knowledge on the attitude of the Third Reich towards religion, especially Christianity. It also covers the fate of Christian churches in Reichsgau Wartheland, somewhat glossing over the details. What is important, however, is that the book is

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<sup>14</sup> ‘skala okrucieństw, jakich dopuścili się władze III Rzeszy, była dotąd niespotykana, a Pius XII skłaniał się ku zachowawczym rozwiązaniom rodem z XIX wieku – dyplomacji i charakterystycznych dla niej rozmów kularowych’.

<sup>15</sup> ‘czy pomoc mocarstw pozostających w stanie wojny z Niemcami hitlerowskimi była równie wielostronna, bezinteresowna i spontaniczna? Znajdowali się poza zasięgiem władzy Hitlera, bez obaw przed jakąkolwiek represją, w przeciwieństwie do papieża, a zwłaszcza zwykłych katolików, a wykazywali kompromitującą inercję lub wręcz niechęć do udzielania pomocy’. Fr. K. Dola, *Papież Pius XII wobec Szoah (artykuł sprawozdawczy)*, ‘Studia Nauk Teologicznych’ 2016, 11, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> M. Kornat, *Papież Pius XII i jego koncepcja neutralności absolutnej Stolicy Apostolskiej w stosunkach międzynarodowych (1939–1945). Przypadek Polski, ‘Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały’* 2009, 5, pp. 104–127.

<sup>17</sup> *Pius XII. Papież w epoce totalitaryzmów. Historiografia i polityka*, ed. M. Kornat, Warszawa 2010.

intended by the Author to cover the attitude of *gauleiter* Arthur Greiser towards these Churches in Reichsgau Wartheland (p. 8). On the cover we read that 'this book is dedicated to this very issue, and its originality lies in a comprehensive approach to the subject [...]. Thanks to an in-depth analysis of archive materials'<sup>18</sup>. Meanwhile, one has to be aware that in the book, only pages 150 to 194 are strictly devoted to these issues, while the references to archive documents are a minority – and in previous chapters, there are virtually no references to archives at all. Then, on the back cover of the book, we read that 'one of its key elements is the analysis of the repressions against the Polish and Pole-supporting Evangelical pastors as a consequence of their patriotic attitude'<sup>19</sup>. Only six pages(!) in total are devoted to this 'key element'. The Author devoted many pages to issues that have little to do with the book's subject matter, such as the social teaching of Pius XI concerning economics (p. 68) or the Civil War in Spain and the situation of the local Church (pp. 82–83). I fail to understand the Author's concept as far as the structure of this book is concerned – perhaps he will be willing to explain it to me in response to this review.

(translated by LINGUA LAB)

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<sup>18</sup> 'właśnie temu zagadnieniu została poświęcona niniejsza książka, której oryginalność polega na kompleksowym ujęciu tematu [...]. Dzięki dogłębnej analizie materiałów archiwalnych'.

<sup>19</sup> 'jej niezmiernie istotnym elementem jest analiza represji stosowanych wobec środowiska polskich i propolskich pastorów ewangelickich jako następstwo ich patriotycznej postawy'.

Kulbat W., *Kościół w Niemczech i narodowy socjalizm*, 'Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne' 2005, 2.  
*Pius XII. Papież w epoce totalitaryzmów. Historiografia i polityka*, ed. M. Kornat, Warszawa  
 2010.

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PUBLICATION INFO			
			e-ISSN: 2449-8467 ISSN: 2082-6060
			
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SOURCE OF FUNDING: Financed from the author's own funds			
SUBMITTED: 2019.10.23	ACCEPTED: 2020.11.17	PUBLISHED ONLINE: 2020.12.28	
WEBSITE OF THE JOURNAL: <a href="https://journals.umcs.pl/rh">https://journals.umcs.pl/rh</a>		EDITORIAL COMMITTEE E-mail: reshistorica@umcs.pl	