

---

# AN ATTEMPT TO LIQUIDATE THE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC (1945-1956)

**Roman Drozd\***

*Pomeranian University in Slupsk, Institute of History, Arciszewskiego 22a Str., Slupsk, Poland*

(Received 3 February 2023, revised 6 April 2023)

---

## **Abstract**

After World War II, the authorities of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics intended to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church. In 1946, a non-canonical Church council took place in Lviv where the transition of the Greek Catholics to the Orthodoxy was announced. Also, the Romanian and Czechoslovakian authorities made the same announcement under the pressure of the USSR. Contrary to those countries, Poland did not take any legal steps concerning this matter. The authorities assumed that the resettlement of Greek Catholics to the Soviet Ukraine and to the West and North of Poland within 'Operation Vistula' would eventually eliminate the problem. However, the Greek Catholic priests and followers did not accept it and made efforts to revive their Church in Poland. The authorities counteracted as they wanted to eliminate the Greek Catholic issue altogether with the help of the Orthodox Church. Despite initial success, they did not manage to force the Greek Catholics to transfer to the Orthodoxy. The political events in 1956 in Poland, the USSR and Hungary prevented it. The political changes that took place then as well as the release of the Primate Stefan Wyszyński were favorable for the restitution of the Greek Catholic Church. However, the communist authorities did not accept the demands for domestic and international reasons. Nevertheless, it was necessary to keep the Ukrainians in the West and North of Poland so they agreed for Greek Catholic liturgy to be celebrated based on the Roman Catholic Church. This meant that the foregoing attempts to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church in Poland had ended in failure. When in 1958 the primate granted the Greek Catholic priests the same rights as the parish priests enjoyed, it became possible to start building the Greek Catholic Church structures in Poland until its full restitution.

*Keywords:* Soviet Union, Poland, Greek Catholic, clergy, Roman Catholic Church

---

## **1. Introduction**

In 1054, the Great Eastern Schism took place, which led to the deepening of the division of Christianity into Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Catholic). However, the unification tendencies did not disappear. The papacy, along with strengthening its position in Europe, tried to impose its supremacy on Orthodox

---

\*E-mail: roman.drozd@apsl.edu.pl

churches in countries where Catholicism was the dominant denomination. Unions concluded between the pope and the Orthodox hierarchy served this purpose. The most famous of them was the Union of Brest concluded in 1596. Under it, most of the Orthodox hierarchs in Poland recognized the supremacy of the pope, but retained the previous rite, customs, Julian calendar and the possibility of priests marrying. Thus, the hierarchs became independent of the Patriarch of Moscow, who was strengthening his influence among the Orthodox, acting in symbiosis with the Moscow rulers. The patriarch obtained the possibility of religious expansion, and the ruler an ally in his imperialist policy. For this reason, both recognized the existence of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) rite as a threat and started to combat it. Along with the territorial expansion of Russia, the Greek Catholic Church in the areas subordinated to it was liquidated. It survived only in the Habsburg Monarchy, whose rulers wanted to prevent Russia from exploiting the Orthodox issue. Apart from Galicia, Greek Catholicism was introduced in the northern areas of the Kingdom of Hungary as a result of the Union of Uzhhorod in 1646. In turn, in 1700, the Union of Transylvania was announced, i.e. after the occupation of this area by the Habsburgs. In the following decades, the process of Orthodox Christians coming under the authority of the pope also covered the areas of Vojvodina, Bosnia and Slavonia. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Greek Catholic Church operated in these areas until the end of World War II. His situation changed dramatically with the establishment of communist rule in this part of Europe.

The Union of Socialist Russian Republics took advantage of the war with the Third Reich to subordinate the states and nations of the Eastern and Central Europe to them. After the Red Army had entered the territory of a given state, they formed a new government, which was joined by representatives of the communist party. Basically, they were state power ministries which helped to fight anti-communist opposition also physically. As a result of rigged elections, the communist party and its supporters constituted a majority in the Parliament. The process of political subordination ended with passing a constitution that implemented the communist system and also strengthened the domination of the Soviet authorities over the state government. In the case of neighbouring countries such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Russian Union made a full annexation of their territories while in the case of Czechoslovakia, Finland, Poland and Romania they made a partial annexation, which made the humiliation of the annexed nations even worse. Establishing political, military and economic superiority did not end the repressions towards ideological opponents such as the Roman Catholic or Protestant Churches. Particularly drastic repressions were applied to the Greek Catholic Church. There were several reasons. Firstly, it was subordinated to the Holy See like the Roman Catholic Church. Secondly, it opposed the communist ideology and atheism and so did other religious organizations. Finally, its followers mainly came from the Ukrainian population in former Galicia where it developed Ukrainian national identity, which particularly angered the Kremlin. The Russian authorities

understood that the development of Ukrainian national awareness would destabilize the situation within the Soviet Union and might eventually lead to the proclamation of independence of Ukraine, thereby to the fall of the communist empire. Due to the fact that the Church had its structures and followers not only in the USSR but also in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania and Hungary as well as within the Ukrainian diaspora, its activities had both national and international character. Moreover, the Russian authorities used Moscow Patriarchy in their foreign policy to weaken the position of the Vatican and promote the 'Russian Mir' [1]. The existence of the Greek Catholic Church weakened Moscow's ideological influence on the subordinated nations.

## **2. Analysis**

The USSR as the winning and dominating country in Eastern and Central Europe did not care much about international or national issues concerning the Greek Catholic Church. They considered the Church to be a dangerous enemy that must be fought. For the Western countries its existence did not have much significance. By accepting the dominance of the USSR over those countries, they gave a passive permission to carry out their policy in the dependent countries. Also, the local communist authorities had to follow the orders of the Soviet authorities concerning all religious organizations including the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church. On the other hand, the Greek Catholic issue was of secondary importance for the local Churches. They had their own problems resulting from the new political reality and supporting the Greek Catholics might have brought more trouble. Only the Orthodox Church openly advocated its liquidation. Firstly, they did not accept its canonicity. Secondly, they saw an opportunity to gain more followers and increase their own wealth. The public of those countries treated the Greek Catholic issue as concerning a small group of followers and did not pay much attention to the existence of that Church. In Poland, a part of the public supported its liquidation due to the ongoing Polish-Ukrainian conflict. On the other hand, the Greek Catholic Church and its followers were too weak to oppose the repressions and its liquidation. Therefore, the circumstances were favourable for the USSR to finally resolve the Greek Catholic issue in their own and the neighbouring countries.

Although the communist authorities considered the Catholic Church as their main ideological enemy and aimed to weaken or even liquidate it, they awaited the orders from Moscow. It mostly concerned the Greek Catholic Church as the Orthodox Church, i.e. Moscow Patriarchy, was to be used to liquidate it. However, it must be emphasized that the Greek Catholic Church had well-developed structures and the most followers in the USSR. In the night of 10 to 11 April 1945, the Soviet authorities arrested and imprisoned the Greek Catholic hierarchs together with their superior archbishop Josyf Slipyj [2]. After a fake lawsuit, all of them were sentenced to a long term in the gulag. Lower diocesan and monastic clergy met with a similar fate. The authorities ignored Pope Pius XII who spoke in the *Orientalis Omnes Ecclesias* to defend the Greek Catholics on 23 December 1945 [1, p. 121]. After a campaign of slander and

accusations, which was to prepare the public for the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church, during the days of 8-10 March 1946, the Greek Catholic Church Council was held in Lviv where a resolution was passed to break the union with the Vatican and transfer to the Orthodoxy. However, the Council was non-canonical, thus illegal, as no Greek Catholic Bishops participated in it. It was held contrary to Canon Law and not only the Catholic Church law but also contrary to the Orthodox Church law and the Soviet law. Most of the priests were escorted to Lviv by security officers and did not know what they were supposed to participate in until the last moment. The priests and the followers did not accept the liquidation of their Church and went underground [3].

After 'the Lviv Council' the authorities began the liquidation of the Greek Catholic diocese of Mukachevo in the area of Carpathian Ruthenia joined to the USSR. It was not a part of the Lviv metropolity but was subject to the Holy See. There were attempts to convince its superior bishop Teodor Romża to transfer to the Orthodoxy. After he had refused, he was murdered on 1 November 1947 and the diocese and monastic clergy were subjected to prosecution. Thereby, the authorities recognized the liquidation of that Church in Carpathian Ruthenia. Some of the clergy and the followers transferred to the Orthodoxy while others went underground [4].

The official liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in the USSR was perceived by the communist authorities of the satellite countries as a permission to take similar steps against the Greek Catholics. The permission was obviously inspired by the Kremlin. Similar actions were taken in Romania as well and repressions against the Catholic clergy, including the Greek Catholic ones, began in 1946. Initially, the Romanian communists intended to lead to a rupture among the Greek Catholic hierarchs and persuade some of them to transfer to the Orthodoxy. When they did not succeed, on 1 October 1948 a 'Church council' was held in Cluj according to the Soviet pattern where they proclaimed the annulment of the Transylvanian Union and joining the Romanian Orthodox Church. The apostolic nuncio and local Roman and Greek Catholic episcopacies stood against it. However, their protests were ignored, the Greek Catholic hierarchs arrested and three of whom died in prison. Repressions were also applied to lower clergy. On 1 December 1948, the authorities dissolved the Greek Catholic Church by decree. Its assets were divided between the state and the Orthodox Church. A part of its followers went underground as they could not accept the situation [5].

Another country where the Greek Catholic Church was liquidated was Czechoslovakia. At first, the authorities did not interfere in its activity. However, the situation changed after the communist authorities had strengthened their positions, the local Orthodox had been granted autocephaly by Moscow Patriarchy and the Orthodox eparchy had been established in Prešov. In spring 1947, the authorities launched an anti-Greek Catholic propaganda and the Greek Catholic clergymen were accused of providing assistance to the units of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army that were trying to get from Poland through Czechoslovakia to the western occupation zones. Then, repressions were applied

to the diocese and monastic clergy as well as the nuns. Similarly to Romania, the authorities tried to cause rupture among the clergy offering some of them high positions in the Orthodox Church. However, the attempts ended in failure. Therefore repressions were applied towards the Greek Catholic male and female monastic associations, which were a form of pressure on bishop Pavol Gojdič, the Greek Catholic superior. In the face of the hierarchs' opposition, a Church council was held in Prešov on 28 April 1950 where breaking the union with Rome was announced [6]. Afterwards, arrests of the clergymen began. They were charged with treason, collaboration with the Nazis and espionage. Bishop Gojdič was sentenced to life imprisonment and bishop Vasil Hopka was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment. The other priests on trial also received very harsh penalties. Consequently, the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia facilitated the process of Slovakization of the Ruthenians-Ukrainians [1, p. 139].

An attempt to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church was also made in Hungary. The plan was to strengthen first the Orthodoxy in Hungary based on Moscow Patriarchy. It was difficult due to the small number of the Orthodox (about 35 thousand people) which included various nationalities majority of whom were Romanian. Moreover, individual parishes recognized the supremacy of different patriarchs. As nearly 70% of the followers were Romanian, it seemed obvious that Patriarch Justinian of Romania should play an important role in the liquidation of Greek Catholicism there. However, the Hungarian authorities did not agree to that, as they feared increased influence of Romania in their country [1, p. 141-144]. Consequently, the Greek Catholic Church was not liquidated in Hungary. The authorities in Moscow agreed to gradual transition of Greek Catholics to the Orthodoxy, which also ended in failure.

Similarly to Hungary, the Greek Catholic Church was not liquidated in Yugoslavia. This does not mean that the communist authorities did not undertake such actions, but they were part of the regime's struggle against the entire Catholic Church. The Greek Catholic bishop Janko Šimrak was arrested and then died after being released from prison in 1946. The Greek Catholic Church did not constitute a serious problem for the authorities. The followers were few (about 50 thousand people) and of different nationalities just like all Yugoslavia [7]. Moscow authorities could have exerted pressure on Yugoslavian communists to force them to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church because local Ruthenians-Ukrainians belonged to it. However, breaking close relations between Yugoslavia and the USSR excluded such possibility.

As far as the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in socialist countries is concerned, Poland took a different course of action. Polish communists chose a different path, which resulted from the political situation in the country and was the consequence of the New Polish-Soviet border. In order to strengthen it, the Soviet authorities decided to exchange people between Poland and the USSR. The number of Ukrainian people in Poland was estimated at 650-700 thousand. On 9 September 1944, a resettlement agreement was signed by the Polish Committee of National Liberation, a substitute of a communist government, and the government of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist

Republic dependent on the Kremlin. Under this agreement, Ukrainian people were to leave Poland and Polish people were to leave Soviet Ukraine voluntarily. This way, the border would become ethnographic in character, which would exclude the claims of the Polish government in exile to the eastern lands of the Second Polish People's Republic, which now belonged to the Soviet Union. However, a majority of Ukrainian people refused to leave their homes. Having experienced the Soviet occupation in the years 1939-1941, they knew that they would be placed in kolkhozes. What is more, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army defended them and started activities aiming to prevent deportations. In this situation, the authorities tried to force Ukrainian families to leave. First, they applied administrative methods and when they did not work, the units of the Polish People's Army were engaged in the resettlement operations in September 1945. Consequently, nearly 500 thousand Ukrainians were resettled from Poland in the years 1944-1946 [8].

The resettlement operation was to resolve the issue of Ukrainians in Poland once and for all. It was assumed that religious problems would also disappear together with Ukrainians. The followers of the Greek Catholic Church were basically only Ukrainians, while the followers of the Orthodox Church included Ukrainians and other nations mostly Belarusians. Therefore, the authorities perceived the resettlement of the followers and the clergy as the end of the Greek Catholic Church and the end of the Orthodox Church in the southeast of Poland. However, neither the followers nor the clergymen wanted to be resettled. That is why coercive measures were applied to both of them. The resettlement of the clergy was also to make the followers realize that their deportation was inevitable and persuade them to leave their homes.

At the beginning, the authorities asked bishop Jozaphat Kotsylovsky, the ordinary of the Greek Catholic diocese in Przemyśl, to issue a pastoral letter to encourage the followers to leave Poland but he refused. It coincided with the preparations of the Soviet authorities for complete liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church. In April 1945, the Soviet authorities were considering to arrest bishop Kotsylovsky as they feared that he might be nominated the superior of all Greek Catholics by the pope after the Greek Catholic hierarchs had been arrested in the USSR [1, p. 160]. Therefore, they decided that he would be arrested by the Polish security service. He was arrested on 20 September 1945. The reason for such delay is not known. Perhaps Polish communists did not want publicity, which arresting the bishop would definitely cause. That might worsen the relations with the Roman Catholic Church highly respected by the Polish. The whole operation had to be prepared very carefully and that required time. In the meantime, the authorities still hoped to convince the Ukrainian people to leave. For those reasons, prime minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski called a conference on the Ukrainian issue in the Ministry of Public Administration (MAP) on 24 July 1945. It was attended by the representatives of the government and selected delegates of the Ukrainian people from Kraków, Lublin and Rzeszów provinces. Its aim was to convince the delegates that resettlement was inevitable and that they should take action to convince the Ukrainian people as well [8, p.

42-43]. Such attitude was very convenient for the Polish communists. They did not have to take any legal steps, which might meet with opposition from the Holy See, and the Greek Catholic Church would be liquidated as a result of the resettlements of its followers.

The bishop and Bazyli Hrynyk, the parish priest of the Greek Catholic cathedral in Przemyśl, as well as several followers were imprisoned in Rzeszów. There, the authorities tried to persuade them to leave for the USSR voluntarily but the arrested did not agree to it. In the night of 17 to 18 January 1946, the ordinary and the parish priest were transferred to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKWD) and then taken to Mościsk on the Polish-Russian border. However, they were released after a few days and were able to return to Przemyśl. It is hard to explain why they were released. Preparations for the Lviv 'Church council' were going on, which meant liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in the USSR. Perhaps it was due to lack of cooperation at the local and central levels. The local NKWD did not know what to do with the bishop so they released him. The decision to bring him to Kiev arrived just after his release [1, p. 162-163]. However, freeing the ordinary did not mean the end of the repressions towards the Greek Catholic Church. The authorities continued closing Greek Catholic institutions and forcing diocese priests, monks and nuns to resettle. Several priests were killed. The bishop and his suffragan bishop Grzegorz Łakota were under constant surveillance.

The communist authorities in Poland did not give up on arresting bishop Kotsylovsky but were waiting for the Kremlin decision. However, they were too busy there with the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church but got back to this matter after the 'Lviv Church council'. On 11 April 1946, the vice-governor of Rzeszów Province, the head of the political department of MAP, commander of security units, militia and the army as well as a secret advisor of NKWD for security colonel M. Novikov took part in a meeting in Przemyśl. They made a decision to resettle the Ukrainians and bishop J. Kotsylovsky from Przemyśl. Colonel M. Novikov took all the matters connected with the arrest of the bishop and 15 representatives of the chapter on him [9]. This way, NKWD wanted to prevent such misunderstanding as had happened during the first arrest of bishop Kotsylovsky. They were afraid that lack of professionalism of the Polish security officers might disrupt the whole operation. On 26 June 1946, bishop Josaphat Kotsylovsky, his suffragan bishop Grzegorz Łakota and most of the chapter members were arrested and handed over to the Soviet authorities. Only three members of the chapter (reverends Bazyli Hrynyk, Mykoła Deńko, Bazyli Pynylo) managed to avoid arrest. It is estimated that at least 23 Greek Catholic priests were killed and about 300 were resettled in the years 1944-1946. Nearly all monastic houses and religious institutions and organizations were closed. The researchers assume that about 130 priests managed to avoid deportation [10]. Those members of the chapter who had evaded arrest, took care of the matter of legal regulations concerning the Greek Catholic Church in Poland. On 16 July 1946, reverend B. Pynylo applied to the primate of Poland, cardinal August Hlond, for help in the choice of the chapter vicar due to the absence of the hierarchs. The cardinal claimed that such decision could be made only in the

presence of at least three members of the chapter. However, it was impossible to contact priest Pynyło as he was seriously ill and kept in isolation by Carmelite Fathers who were interested in taking over the building of the Greek Catholic cathedral. In this situation, Pope Pius XII granted emergency powers to A. Hlond and metropolitan of Kraków, cardinal Adam Sapiecha, concerning the Greek Catholic clergy and followers on 25 October 1946 [11]. Then, on 10 December 1946 during the visit of cardinal Hlond to the Vatican, the pope appointed him Delegate of the Holy See for the Eastern Churches in Poland. Thus, the cardinal became the superior of the clergy, followers and assets of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland. On 1 April 1947, cardinal A. Hlond appointed reverend B. Hrynyk the General Vicar of Przemyśl diocese [12]. That meant that the Greek Catholic Church still existed in Poland despite the deportations of the hierarchs and had a new superior. The more, so that the authorities did not issue any legal act on its liquidation.

The events in the Holy Administration of Lemkivschina took a different course as it had been established in 1934 from the Greek Catholic diocese of Przemyśl and directly subordinated to the Holy See [13]. Its establishment was to prevent the conversion of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy, which was initiated by the Tylaw schism in 1926. Fearing arrest, its administrator, reverend Aleksander Malinowski, delegated his powers to reverend Stefan Jodłowski, reverend Jan Pidharbij and reverend Andrzej Złupka, and left the country. However, reverend Pidharbij was soon deported to the USSR and reverend Jadlovskyj went to Slovakia to escape deportation but returned in 1946. Thus, the Church jurisdiction was not broken in Lemkivschina although the authorities did not allow it to function normally [14]. On April 1947, cardinal A. Hlond appointed reverend A. Złupka the General Vicar of the Holy Administration in Lemkivschina.

The deportation of the hierarchs, a majority of the clergy and followers did not mean the Greek Catholic Church was liquidated in Poland. 130 priests and about 21.000 Ukrainians avoided resettlement. The authorities did not allow them to stay. They wanted to resettle them to the Soviet Ukraine but the Kremlin did not agree to it for technical reasons. Polish communist authorities wanted to transform Poland into a monoethnic state, therefore they intended to deport all non-Poles. They decided to resettle the rest of the Ukrainians to the West and North of Poland. They also assumed that they would succumb to Polonization more easily when they were dispersed and were not allowed to organize their national and religious life. In this way, the Greek Catholic problem would be solved for good.

In April 1947, the communist authorities started another resettlement operation of Ukrainians in Poland. This time they were deported to the West and North of Poland within *Operation Vistula*. Nearly 150 thousand people were resettled about 70% of whom were Greek Catholics [8, p. 75-77]. After primate Hlond had died, the resettled vicars lost the powers they had been granted by him and the new primate archbishop Stefan Wyszyński did not extend their validity. A majority of the priests were resettled together with the followers and



22 of them were placed in the Central Labour Camp in Jaworzno. Only six priests stayed in the area and only reverend Zenon Złoczowski had been celebrating Greek Catholic masses in Komańcza until the return of the parish priest Emilian Kaleniuk. Also, reverend Jan Wysoczański occasionally celebrated masses for the remaining Greek Catholics [1, p. 188-189]. The communist authorities assumed that the resettlement of the Greek Catholic clergymen, hierarchs and followers would lead to the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland. However, they did not take any steps to give it some legal basis the way that the USSR did in 1946, Romania in 1948 and Czechoslovakia in 1950. The only step that was taken was issuing a decree on 5 September 1949 under which the assets of the Greek Catholic Church were nationalized.

The Roman Catholic Church did not defend the Greek Catholics and their Church. Probably, they did not want to further worsen the relations with the state authorities. They also had problems with building new Church structures especially in the territories that had been annexed to Poland. Moreover, most of the Roman Catholic clergy had a negative attitude towards Ukrainians and therefore to the Greek Catholics, which was the result of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict. That made it difficult to take a unified position on the Greek Catholic issue. What is more, some of the hierarchs and clergymen intended to take over the abandoned Greek Catholic assets and property thus increasing the ownership status of the Roman Catholic Church. In addition, the Holy See did not take any decisive measures to defend the Greek Catholics in Poland probably due to lack of clear position of the Roman Catholic hierarchs regarding this issue.

After *Operation Vistula*, all Greek Catholic priests faced a choice, either to stay with their religion and face repressions by the communist authorities or serve as vicars in the Roman Catholic parishes using bi-ritualism. Due to financial reasons and fear of repressions, a majority of them chose the latter option. Reverend Michał Ripecki was an exception who established a chapel in a school building which he was allocated for housing and celebrated the first mass there on 2 July 1947. Chrzanowo (Ełk County) soon became the religious centre of the Greek Catholics where many followers, especially from Warmia and Masuria, arrived for church service [15]. Reverend Bazyli Hrynyk, the administrator of the Roman Catholic parish in Wierciny, followed his footsteps and began celebrating liturgy in Nowy Dwór Gdański every two weeks from April 1948 with the consent of the Gdańsk curia as they wanted to prevent the Greek Catholics from transferring to the Orthodoxy. After some time, he was allocated a church with a presbytery in nearby Cyganek, which enabled him to celebrate liturgy every Sunday. In 1950, he was permitted by the Curia in Gorzów Wielkopolski to celebrate liturgy in Bytów and Kwasowo (Sławno County) [16]. By the order of the new primate archbishop Stefan Wyszyński, the ordinary of the Warmia diocese officially erected the Greek Catholic chapel in Chrzanów and appointed reverend M. Ripecki its rector in 1952 [17].

The Greek Catholic clergy's activities were constantly supported by the followers. After settling down in new places, they began to organize their cultural and religious life. They sent applications to the authorities in order to be

allocated their churches and receive permits to celebrate liturgy according to their religion. When they could not get a permit, they gathered for prayers in private homes [Archiwum Państwowe w Koszalinie, Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej (PWRN), sygn. 4625, Pismo Wydziału Społeczno-Administracyjnego PWRN w Koszalinie do KC PZPR na ręce tow, Zawadzkiego w sprawie ludności ukraińskiej z 12 II 1952].

The authorities opposed the revival of the Greek Catholic life and decided to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church in Poland once and for all. Therefore, they applied repressions towards the active Greek Catholic priests and the followers were taken over by the Orthodox Church [18]. The idea came up after establishing the Religious Denominations Bureau Ud/sW) in March 1950. Under this plan, archbishop Makary arrived in Poland from the USSR in 1951 and was elected the head of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland. His election was not random as he had previously gained experience while liquidating the Greek Catholic Church in the USSR [19]. As the Metropolitan of Warsaw and all Poland, he set down to implementing his ideas that aimed to transfer the Greek Catholics to the Orthodoxy. The local authorities were to hand over churches by agreement with Ud/sW and the hierarchs' task were to allocate clergymen to them. This operation, however, met with opposition of the local authorities, which did not support most cases of erecting churches. Nevertheless, under the pressure from the central authorities and engagement of the Orthodox clergy, they began to set up Greek Catholic establishments in the places where they resided, especially where there was demand for Greek Catholic liturgy. For instance, 28 Greek Catholic establishments had been set up in Wrocław and Zielona Góra Provinces by the middle of 1952 [Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Warszawie, Prezydium Rady Ministrów, sygn. 98/350, Sprawozdanie Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej we Wrocławiu z realizacji uchwały kwietniowej Biura Politycznego KC PZPR, 19 V 1952]. In Koszalin Province, five such establishments had been set up by the end of 1952 and more were planned in the counties with the largest concentration of Ukrainians [Archiwum Państwowe w Koszalinie, Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, sygn. 4577, Sprawozdanie Referatu do Spraw Wyznań PWRN w Koszalinie z działalności wśród ludności ukraińskiej, 13 XII 1952]. A similar rise was reported in the other provinces of the West and North of Poland, contrary to Lublin and Rzeszów provinces where the local authorities opposed setting up new Orthodox establishments fearing the revival of Ukrainian life. Also, Ud/sW was not interested in the development of the Orthodox Church in these territories [Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Urząd Rady Ministrów, sygn. 99/242, Sprawozdanie PWRN w Rzeszowie z wykonania kwietniowej uchwały Biura Politycznego KC PZPR, 9 VII 1953]. They believed that might encourage Ukrainians to return to their homeland.

The missionary operations of the Orthodox Church were followed by the authorities' repressions towards the Greek Catholic clergymen. Like in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, many of them were arrested. In December 1952, the authorities arrested father Paweł Puszkarski, the superior of the Basilian

Order, rev.dr. Mykola Deńka, father Pasyw Szewaha and reverend B. Hrynyk in April 1954. They were sentenced to several years of prison. The only places where Greek Catholic liturgy was still celebrated were Chrzanów and Komańcza. It was not forbidden as they were probably useful for the security authorities to watch the mood of the Ukrainian population.

The authorities could have stopped the revival of the Greek Catholic activities but were interrupted by the political changes in the USSR and Poland caused by the events in 1956. Condemnation of the cult of personality at the XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, riots against the authorities in Poznań and then changes at the highest levels of the authorities gave hope for a change in the policies towards national and religious minorities. The hope became stronger when the Ukrainian Social and Cultural Association (UTSK) was founded as they began reporting the needs of the Ukrainian population to the authorities [20]. At the same time, previously arrested Greek Catholic clergymen were released from prisons and the followers demanded that Greek Catholic liturgy to be celebrated in the churches. Taking advantage of the political confusion, the clergymen took up action to revive the Greek Catholic Church in Poland. There was the legal basis to do so as it had never been officially liquidated and still had its clergymen and followers. However, there were obstacles of national and international nature. As mentioned before, the Greek Catholic Church had been liquidated in the USSR, Romania and Czechoslovakia. Therefore, its reactivation might have disrupted the relations between those countries, especially with the Soviet authorities. Moreover, Warsaw was so dependent on the Kremlin that the decision would have to be made in Moscow anyway. In addition, the Roman Catholic hierarchs and clergy in Poland were afraid that the reactivation of the Greek Catholic Church would arouse demands to return its assets and properties, which were now in the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. It would also involve the assets nationalized by the state [1, p. 293-294].

Initially, the actions undertaken by the Greek Catholic priests were not successful. The situation improved after primate Stefan Wyszyński had been released from prison on 26 October 1956. Then, the representatives of the episcopate began talks with the authorities within the Joint Board, whose task was to normalize the state-Church relations. Reverend B. Hrynyk decided to take advantage of that and tried to meet the primate. However, he did not succeed. Therefore, a group of Greek Catholic priests headed by reverend Hrynyk submitted their demands in writing on 14 November 1956. They demanded that the Greek Catholic Church be reactivated, a network of religious facilities be built in the places inhabited by Greek Catholics and the clergymen allowed into the cathedral in Przemyśl, Greek Catholic churches in Kraków, Sanok, Jarosław, Lubaczów and Krynica. They also wanted the talks between the government and the episcopate to cover the Greek Catholic issue [17]. Due to lack of the primate's response to the petition, reverend B. Hrynyk and reverend M. Ripecki wrote a memorial on the Greek Catholic issue. Once again, they stated their demands that had been written in the above-mentioned petition. They also demanded the return of the Greek Catholic assets and properties,

compensation payments for the dismantled and demolished churches, the restitution of the Przemyśl diocese and the Holy Administration of Lemkivschina, as well as handing over the unused churches in the West and North of Poland to satisfy the needs of the Greek Catholics there and enable them to celebrate their liturgy in the Roman Catholic churches [Archiwum Akt Nowych, Urząd Do Spraw Wyznań, sygn. 30/613, Petycja duchowieństwa greckokatolickiego złożona na ręce prymasa, 29 IX 1956]. The primate did not answer the Greek Catholic priests in writing but held a meeting to listen to their arguments.

The actions of the Greek Catholic clergymen and followers were supported by UTSK, which enjoyed certain freedom at that time. Demands to reactivate the Greek Catholic Church were made at nearly all meetings of UTSK branches. There were also more and more applications to open Greek Catholic establishments not only in the West and North of Poland but also in the Rzeszów Province. On 27 November 1956, the management of UTSK applied in writing to Ud/sW demanding the reactivation of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland, appointing an apostolic administrator with headquarters in Przemyśl, returning the churches used by the Roman Catholic Church and the cathedrals in Przemyśl and Sanok, returning all the Church equipment and all the Greek Catholic churches taken over by the state [21].

However, the authorities were far from reactivating the Greek Catholic Church in Poland. They justified their attitude with political and economic reasons. The authorities thought that „allowing the Greek Catholic Church in Poland would mean establishing the only organized and legal centre for Greek Catholicism in Europe [Central-Eastern], which would constitute a great support for the Vatican and its main discretionary Centre. That fact would have a great impact on the religious situation and the moods among the Greek Catholic populations in the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Romania.” [Archiwum Akt Nowych, Urząd Do Spraw Wyznań, sygn. 131/284, Informacja Ud/sW dotycząca zagadnienia greckokatolickiego, 3 I 1957] Also, because the Greek Catholic Church was still being combated in those countries. Furthermore, the authorities feared that the reactivation of the Greek Catholic Church would involve the necessity to return the assets taken over before and to pay compensations for the buildings that had been either demolished or used by other institutions. In this situation, Ud/sW did not agree to the restitution of the Greek Catholic Church as a whole or to appoint apostolic administrators, general vicars, establish dioceses and bishop curias. Nevertheless, Ud/sW realized the necessity to eliminate „an undesirable and harmful phenomenon such as the existence of a ‘religious underground’” and was in favour of „taking into account some of the demands such as satisfying the religious needs of the Greek Catholics by the clergymen in their native language” [Archiwum Akt Nowych, Urząd Do Spraw Wyznań, sygn. 131/284, Informacja Ud/sW dotycząca zagadnienia greckokatolickiego, 3 I 1957].

Eventually, the efforts made by the Greek Catholic priests supported by the followers and making the Greek Catholic issue public in the West changed the attitude of the authorities who were more inclined to make certain concessions. Another reason was the unabated trend among Ukrainians to return to their homeland and an increasing phenomenon of arbitrary departures to their former places of residence. The authorities wanted to prevent that at all costs [8, p. 171-188]. Finally, they agreed celebrating Greek Catholic liturgy in the West and North of Poland within the Roman Catholic Church but did not agree to establish its structure, thereby did not agree to its restitution. On 14 March 1957, the primate informed reverend B. Hrynyk and reverend M. Deńka about the decision of the authorities.

The authorities condoned celebrating Greek Catholic liturgy for publicity reasons. They tried to prevent the Ukrainians from returning to their family lands at all costs. They could only succeed if they satisfied their religious needs in their present places of residence. Nevertheless, the development of the Greek Catholic clergy was observed not only in the new places of their settlement but also in the old territories. In 1957, 17 institutions were established and 15 new ones the following year [10, p. 25]. However, their activities were very limited. There were not enough clergymen, so religious services could not be offered in all places every Sunday. The priests did not have powers that parish priests were entitled to. That changed on 17 October 1958 when cardinal S. Wyszyński granted 16 Greek Catholic priests the same powers as parish priests had. Granting the necessary powers enabled establishing parish structures of the Greek Catholic Church in the next years until its full restitution in 1990. Moreover, giving consent to celebrate Greek Catholic liturgy caused a crisis in the Orthodox Church. Numerous Orthodox churches ceased to exist as the followers returned to the Greek Catholic Church.

### **3. Conclusions**

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the Greek Catholic Church was in a very difficult situation after World War II. The authorities of the Soviet Union forbid its activities not only in their own country but also in the other Eastern Bloc countries where it existed. It was also forbidden to function in Poland but not legally sanctioned. Polish authorities assumed that resettling the Greek Catholics, first to Russian Ukraine and then to the West and North of Poland within *Operation Vistula* would lead to its actual liquidation. However, the Greek Catholic priests and the followers that had remained in Poland made efforts to revive their Church. To achieve the goal, they used the status of biritualists and the approval of some Roman Catholic hierarchs and priests who allowed Greek Catholic liturgy to be celebrated in their churches. The situation that evolved in Poland in 1956 and so called *Polish October Thaw* enabled the Greek Catholic priests and followers to take active steps in order to reactivate their Church. They applied to primate Stefan Wyszyński and the state authorities. However, the government was against reactivating the Church structures for international, political and economic reasons. Nevertheless, the

pressure from the clergy and the followers and taking up the issue in the talks with cardinal S. Wyszyński brought certain success. In 1957, the government did not agree to reconstitute the Greek Catholic Church but gave consent to celebrate liturgy on the basis of the Roman Catholic Church. That decision meant that the former attempts to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church ended in failure. A year later, the primate granted powers to the Greek Catholic priests that parish priests are entitled to, which enabled building the Greek Catholic Church structures in Poland in the future. Thanks to the support of the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholics were able to survive the difficult period in the Polish Peoples' Republic and succeed to fully reconstitute their Church after 1989.

## References

- [1] I. Hałagida, *Między Moskwą, Warszawą i Watykanem. Dzieje Kościoła greckokatolickiego w Polsce w latach 1944-1970*, Wydawnictwo 'Bazyliada', Warszawa, 2013, 116-117.
- [2] B. Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State (1939-1950)*, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, Toronto, 1996, 174-175.
- [3] A. Kosyło, *Prawo-Administracja-Kościół*, **1-2** (2003) 148-154.
- [4] V. Pashchenko, *Drohobyckyj krayeznavchyy zbirnyk*, **8** (2004) 358-372.
- [5] S. Keleher, *Religion, State and Society*, **1** (1995) 99-100.
- [6] J. Coranič, *Theologos*, **1** (2005) 4-9.
- [7] R. Myz', *Kovchek*, **2** (2000) 302-305.
- [8] R. Drozd, *Polityka władz wobec ludności ukraińskiej w Polsce w latach 1944-1989*, Zakład Wydawniczy TYRSA, Warszawa, 2001, 55.
- [9] I. Biłas, *Likwidacja Greckokatolickiej Diecezji Przemyskiej oraz tragiczne losy jej ordynariusza biskupa Jozafata Kocyłowskiego w kontekście polityki wyznaniowej ZSRR*, in *Polska-Ukraina. 1000 lat sąsiedztwa*, S. Stępień (ed), vol. 3, Instytut Południowo-Wschodni, Przemyśl, 1996, 287-288.
- [10] I. Harasym, *Hreko-katolyčka Cerkwa na peredodni ta pislra akciji 'Wisła'*, in *U poszukach prawdy pro akcju 'Wisła'*, M. Kozaka (ed), *Ukrajinijskyj Narodnyj Dim, Peremyszl*, 1998, 21.
- [11] E. Misiło (ed.), *Repatriacja czy deportacja. Przesiedlenie Ukraińców z Polski do USRR 1944-1946*, Vol. II: *Dokumenty 1946*, Archiwum Ukraińskie, Warszawa, 1999, 322-325.
- [12] E. Misiło, *Hrekokatolyčka Cerkwa u Polsce (1944-1947)*, in *Ukrajina i Polska między minyłym i majbutnim*, A. Pawłyszyn (ed.), *Wydawnychyj Centr FENIKS*, Lwiv, 1991, 111-113.
- [13] B. Prach, *Apostolska Administracja Łemkowszczyzny*, in *Łemkowie w historii i kulturze Karpat*, J. Czajkowski (ed.), Vol. 1, Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego, Sanok, 1995, 299-311.
- [14] I. Harasym, *Zustriczi*, **5-6** (1990) 21.
- [15] I. Hałagida, *'Szpieg Watykanu'. Kapłan greckokatolicki ks. Bazyl Hrynyk (1896-1977)*, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warszawa, 2008, 55.
- [16] S. Dziubyna, *I stwerdydiloruk naszych. Spohady (dokumenty)*, Archiwum Ukraińskie, Warszawa, 1995, 107-109.
- [17] I. Hałagida, *Nowa Ukraina*, **1-2** (2007) 149-155.
- [18] R. Drozd, *Dzieje Najnowsze*, **4** (2003) 75-88.

- [19] K. Urban, *Kościół prawosławny w Polsce 1945-1970*, Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, Kraków, 1996, 77-78.
- [20] J. Syrnyk, *Ukraińskie Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne (1956-1990)*, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Wrocław, 2008, 37-40.
- [21] B. Huk (ed.), *Źródła do dziejów Ukraińskiej Cerkwi Greckokatolickiej w Polsce w latach 1944-1989*, Vol. 1, Inne, Przemyśl, 2007, 210-211.