

THE POLICY OF REPRESSION OF THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES TOWARDS THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CLERGY IN THE TERRITORY OF WESTERN UKRAINE DURING THE GREAT TERROR

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Abstract: The article examines the policy of repression of the Soviet authorities against the Roman Catholic clergy in the eastern territories of the Second Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, in particular Volhynia, during the Great Terror. The main attention is paid to the reasons and prerequisites of the anti-religious policy of the Soviet authorities, the analysis of the instruments of the systematic destruction of the material and spiritual base of the Church, including the closure and destruction of churches, repressions against priests and active parishioners, as well as the distribution of propaganda materials with the aim of discrediting the Catholic religion. The relevance of the topic is due to the insufficient development of the problem of repressions against the Roman Catholic Church in domestic historiography, which especially concerns the Volyn region. The article uses an interdisciplinary approach that allows combining the analysis of archival documents, scientific works and conclusions from declassified materials. The results of the study highlight the scale of repressive measures, methods of liquidating religious structures and leaders, and demonstrate the consequences for the religious life of the region.

Keywords: repressions, Roman Catholics, clergy, great terror, Polish operation.

1 Introduction

The anti-religious policy of the Soviet Union was part of the overall strategy of building a totalitarian society, where religion was seen as the main threat to communist ideology. Therefore, the fight against religion was systemic and multi-level in nature, encompassing physical repression, propaganda activities, destruction of church infrastructure and discrediting the clergy.

The prerequisites for the extermination of Poles and Catholic clergy in the USSR, especially during the Polish operation of the NKVD in 1937–1938, stemmed from the general policy of the Soviet authorities to combat religion, national minorities and "enemies of the people". This policy was deeply rooted in the ideology of the Stalinist regime, which saw religion and national identity as threats to the communist system (Байдич 2008, 294).

2 Materials and Methods

The article uses the historical-genetic method to analyze the origins and development of the repressive policy of the Soviet authorities towards the Roman Catholic Church, which made it possible to trace its evolution in the context of the annexation of Western Ukrainian lands. The archival method was based on the study of documents from the Central State Archive of Public Associations of Ukraine and the State Archive of the Volyn Region, which contributed to the reconstruction of the mechanisms of repression and specific cases of persecution of the clergy. Content analysis was used to study propaganda materials that discredited the Catholic clergy, and the comparative method allowed to compare the Soviet anti-religious policy with similar practices in totalitarian states. The historical-descriptive method helped to recreate a holistic picture of repressions in Volyn, and the interdisciplinary approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the topic through the integration of historiographical sources, archival materials and socio-cultural analysis.

3 Results

The Polish NKVD operation, which became one of the key episodes of the Great Terror, was aimed at eliminating real and fictional "spies" and "counter-revolutionaries" among the Polish population. The reasons for such repressions were the historical enmity between the Soviet Union and Poland, which in the interwar period was considered the main enemy of the USSR in the West (Гайоз, 2022). The Soviet authorities perceived the Polish population as a potential "fifth column" that could be used for espionage activities in favor of Poland. A special role in this

was played by order No. 00485 of August 11, 1937, issued by Mykola Yezhov (Ленинградский мартиролог 1996, 454-456), which defined the categories of persons subject to arrest and destruction. Representatives of the clergy, intelligentsia, political emigrants, former military personnel and ordinary peasants and workers of Polish origin fell under repression. In particular, a wave of repression was caused by the resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) "On Anti-Soviet Elements" of July 2, 1937 (Нікольський, 2003, 90) and J. Stalin's telegram to the secretaries of regional committees, the Central Committees of the republican communist parties and regional committees, which stated the following: "take into account all kulaks and criminals who have returned to their homeland, so that the most hostile of them are immediately arrested and shot in the order of administrative proceedings of their cases through troikas..." (Нікольський, 1995, 40-45).

The Soviet Union's anti-religious policy was part of a broader campaign to combat religion as a social and spiritual institution (Бистрицька, 2011, 40). The Soviet authorities systematically discredited Catholic priests, portraying them as spies, reactionaries, and enemies of the Soviet system (Яроцький, 2001, 151; Горбач, 1998, 73; Бондарук, 2021, 58; Wierzbicki, 2017, 17-24). This was accompanied by mass arrests of the clergy, confiscation of church property and the closure of churches. Propaganda played a special role in the destruction of the Catholic Church. The Soviet media systematically portrayed Catholic priests as enemies of the people, engaged in subversive activities and "exploiting" the population. Through the educational system and cultural events, the authorities sought to eradicate religion from public life, instilling in the population the ideas of atheism and contempt for religion as a "relic of the past" (Пивоваров, 2022).

In the western Ukrainian lands that were part of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where the Catholic Church had significant influence, the anti-religious policy proved to be particularly destructive. The closure of churches, the confiscation of property, and the arrest of priests led to the practical destruction of religious communities. At the same time, ethnic repression continued against Poles, who were accused of "bourgeois nationalism" and collaboration with foreign powers. Such a policy had not only an immediate destructive effect, but also long-term consequences for the cultural and religious heritage of the region (Гайоз, 2022).

Repressions against the Catholic clergy and the Polish population became part of a large-scale policy of Stalinism aimed at total control over society. They were accompanied by physical terror, ideological pressure and discredit, which deprived the community of its spiritual identity and forced it to survive in conditions of constant fear and repression. Already on September 1, 1937, I. Leplevsky reported to Moscow on the first results of the "kulak operation", in particular on the results of the struggle "on the religious front", and also provided statistical data, which included the following: "174 sectarians" (of which 93 in the 1st category were to be "shot"; 81 in the 2nd category), 101 representatives of the clergy (55 in the 1st category; 46 in the 2nd category), 132 persons of the counter-revolutionary church active (67 in the 1st category; 65 in the 2nd category), 17 persons of the monastic order (8 in the 1st category; 9 in the 2nd category) (ГДА СБ, 1937).

The ideological justification for the fight against religion was an integral part of Soviet propaganda. The Soviet authorities positioned religion as the "opium of the people", which hindered the development of a progressive socialist society. Religious values were opposed to materialism, and faith in God was opposed to atheistic upbringing. Propaganda was spread through books, newspapers, films and lectures. The central aspect of this

campaign was to convince the population that religion was a vestige of the feudal past, which contradicted modern "scientific" reality. In schools and higher education institutions, students received mandatory lectures on atheism, which emphasized that belief in God was a sign of weakness and ignorance.

Anti-religious propaganda carried out by the Soviet authorities during the Great Terror and in the context of the Polish Operation of the NKVD in 1937–1938 was a tool not only to discredit religious institutions, but also to manipulate mass consciousness in order to strengthen the totalitarian regime. The Catholic Church, as a symbol of the national identity of the Poles and one of the main spiritual centers, became the object of a systematic campaign of destruction.

The Soviet authorities actively disseminated theses about the Catholic clergy as the main agents of anti-Soviet conspiracies that threatened the stability of the USSR. In particular, on October 31, 1944, V. Merkulov, the People's Commissar of State Security of the USSR, sent to the People's Commissars of State Security of the Union republics and regional departments of the NKVD Directive No. 140 (ЦДАГОУ, 1944) to which was added the following document "Review of the anti-Soviet activities of the Vatican and the Roman Catholic clergy", which stated that "with the beginning of hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union, the Vatican began to send its agents to the territory occupied by the Germans to conduct espionage and subversive activities against the USSR." (ГДА СБУ, 1944). In propaganda materials distributed through newspapers, radio, educational institutions, and cultural events, Catholic priests were constantly portrayed as spies for Polish intelligence. Their actions were interpreted as attempts to "undermine" Soviet statehood, which became an important pretext for repression (ЦДАГОУ). The main emphasis of this propaganda was to assert the idea that religion was not only a relic of the past, but also a direct threat to the "bright future" promised by Soviet socialism.

The Catholic Church, which had strong traditions in the eastern territories of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in particular in Volhynia, was perceived as a center of resistance to Soviet power. Because of this, youth organizations were involved in anti-religious propaganda, in particular the Komsomol and pioneer movements, which organized public lectures, demonstrations and even theatrical performances that portrayed Catholic priests as exploiters or enemies of the people. Educational programs aimed to "educate the new generation" in the spirit of atheism, which reduced religion to an "anti-scientific superstition" and formed stereotypes that justified the state's aggressive actions against believers (Бородін, 2018, 345).

Particular attention was paid to discrediting the clergy through coverage of the so-called "trials" of Catholic priests accused of collaboration with Poland, espionage, or anti-Soviet propaganda. These show trials were often accompanied by open sessions, in which "confessions" from the defendants were obtained through torture (Герман 2019, 298). All this was broadcast as evidence of the "anti-state nature" of religion, creating the impression in the public that the Catholic Church was an obstacle to social progress.

The large-scale anti-religious campaign also included the active destruction of the material base of the Church. Propaganda materials constantly emphasized that religious buildings could be used with greater benefit, for example, as clubs or warehouses. This not only destroyed the church infrastructure, but also deprived believers of the opportunity to freely participate in divine services. At the same time, "clarification" campaigns were carried out, aimed at convincing people of the unnecessaryness of religious rites and the importance of atheism for personal development.

Thus, anti-religious propaganda in the USSR was not just an ideological campaign, but part of a large-scale policy of repression aimed at destroying traditional institutions and eradicating religion as a component of society's identity.

Propaganda had a particularly significant impact on young people, who were brought up in a spirit of contempt for religion. In books and films, the clergy were often depicted as cruel exploiters or enemies of progress. The Soviet authorities actively discredited the clergy, portraying them in a negative light. In propaganda materials, priests were portrayed as parasites who live off the labor of ordinary people and spread reactionary ideas. Such stereotypes were aimed at undermining the authority of the clergy among the population.

Discrediting the clergy in the Soviet Union was an important component of the anti-religious policy aimed at undermining trust in religious institutions and forming a negative attitude towards priests among the population. Particular attention was paid to Catholic priests, who in the Polish-Ukrainian and Soviet contexts were perceived as bearers of national identity and potential participants in anti-Soviet activities (ЦДАГОУ).

Soviet propaganda systematically portrayed Catholic priests as enemies of the people, spies and reactionaries working against the interests of the state. During the Polish Operation of the NKVD in 1937–1938, the Catholic clergy became the target of large-scale repressions, accompanied by public trials. These trials were an important propaganda tool: they were widely covered in the press, presenting the priests as agents of Polish intelligence or organizers of counter-revolutionary activities. The use of torture and psychological pressure ensured the extraction of "confessions", which were then presented as evidence of the criminality of the religion and its leaders (ДАВО, 1937).

The anti-religious campaign also had a social dimension: in the mass consciousness, an image of the clergy as exploiters of ordinary people was formed. The Soviet press and cultural events actively covered cases when priests allegedly profited from their parishioners, organized anti-Soviet conspiracies, or concealed crimes. In films and plays created in the spirit of atheistic propaganda, priests were often shown as cruel, corrupt, or hypocritical characters.

The actions of the Soviet special services to spread provocative rumors about the moral imperfection of priests became particularly public. They were accused of collaborating with the occupiers, financial fraud, anti-Soviet agitation, and even ties to criminal elements. Such actions not only undermined the authority of the Church, but also created an atmosphere of distrust and fear among believers, many of whom avoided contact with the clergy, fearing repression.

The central element of the discrediting was an ideological campaign aimed at demonstrating the "negative" influence of religion on the development of society. Priests were portrayed as opponents of education, science and progress, which became an important aspect of atheistic education in schools and youth organizations. This allowed the Soviet authorities not only to justify repression against the clergy, but also to involve young people in active participation in anti-religious campaigns.

The discrediting of the clergy had long-term consequences. It undermined trust in religious institutions, contributed to a decrease in the number of believers and created conditions for the further strengthening of anti-religious policies. The example of the Catholic clergy during the Soviet occupation shows how propaganda combined ethnic, political and ideological aspects, which made the campaign particularly destructive for the religious community. Show trials of priests and bishops were used as a tool to demonstrate the "anti-Soviet essence" of religion. During these trials, the priests were accused of collaborating with Polish secret services, espionage, and anti-Soviet propaganda. At the same time, their testimonies were mostly fabricated. Such measures contributed to the formation of an atmosphere of fear and distrust of religious institutions. As a result, many parishioners refused to participate in religious life, which further weakened the communities.

Thus, the Soviet anti-religious policy was a purposeful campaign that sought to destroy religion as a social institution and part of

the national culture. This had devastating consequences for Catholics and their spiritual heritage, especially in the territories of Volhynia, which became the object of double pressure - ethnic and religious.

The policy of the Soviet authorities regarding religion is explained by several factors. First, the communist ideology saw in religion a competitor that could influence the consciousness of people and undermine the party's monopoly on ideological power. Second, the Church, having significant international ties, could be perceived as an object of espionage activity, which also increased the suspicions of the authorities. Thirdly, the anti-religious policy was part of a broader campaign of terror aimed at eliminating social groups that could potentially pose a threat to the regime.

The policy of the Soviet authorities in Volhynia had a clearly expressed anti-Catholic character. To implement this policy, special anti-religious committees were created, which were engaged in organizing propaganda and carrying out repressions. Orders and instructions were issued aimed at the physical destruction of the clergy, as well as the destruction of church institutions, which were the embodiment of the religious and national identity of the Poles (ДІАБО). Particular attention was paid to priests who continued their religious activities even during the war, which made them targets for persecution.

The nationalization of church property was one of the main tools in the fight against religion. Temples, churches and monasteries, which had not only religious but also cultural significance, were confiscated from the church community. A significant part of these buildings was converted into warehouses, clubs, cinemas or barracks.

The destruction of the material foundation of the Church in the Soviet Union was one of the key components of anti-religious policy. This activity was aimed not only at depriving religious communities of their material base, but also at destroying their cultural and spiritual heritage (ЦДАГОУ). Particular attention was paid to Catholic churches, which were associated with Polish national identity and were considered by the Soviet authorities as centers of potential resistance.

In the western Ukrainian lands, after their annexation in 1939, the Soviet authorities began a mass closure of Catholic churches. Many religious buildings were confiscated by the state and converted for the needs of Soviet society. They were used as warehouses, barracks, clubs or schools, as a result of which the churches lost their sacred function (Калішук, Стрільчук, Кучерпа, Разиграєв, 2021, 414). A significant part of these buildings underwent architectural changes or were simply destroyed. It is known that before the war in Volhynia there was an extensive network of Catholic churches, which practically ceased to exist after the Soviet repressions.

The policy of destroying the material base of the Church was justified by Soviet propaganda, which spread the idea of a more "economically beneficial" use of religious buildings (ЦДАГОУ). For example, Catholic churches, which played an important role in the local community, were called "bourgeois relics" that hindered the creation of a new socialist society. Along with the physical destruction of churches, the Soviet authorities confiscated religious artifacts, including icons, crosses, and liturgical books (ДІАБО), which were later destroyed or transferred to museums as "exhibits of the past".

Against the backdrop of the physical destruction of temples, the persecution of the clergy continued, depriving the community not only of religious buildings but also of leaders. The closure of temples was accompanied by repressions against priests, who were arrested, deported, or executed (ДІАБО). This policy contributed to the demoralization of the religious community and its gradual weakening. In the case of Catholic parishes in Volhynia, this led to the complete disappearance of many of them, leaving thousands of believers without access to places of worship.

Thus, the destruction of the material foundation of the Church became an important mechanism of oppression aimed at the liquidation of religious communities. This had not only an immediate impact on the Catholic population, but also long-term consequences for the cultural heritage of the region. For the Catholic community, this meant the loss of the opportunity to hold services, and parish life declined. Churches that remained open were under close surveillance by the NKVD, and their services were often recorded in reports on "suspicious activities".

Religious communities were deprived not only of their buildings, but also of the material resources that were used to support educational and charitable initiatives. This significantly reduced their influence on society.

One of the most tragic aspects of Soviet anti-religious policy was the mass repressions against the clergy. As part of the policy of "militant atheism," the state arrested, imprisoned, and destroyed representatives of all religious denominations, including Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. In particular, the Catholic clergy in Western Ukrainian lands suffered particularly badly because of their association with Polish national identity. During the Polish Operation of the NKVD in 1937-1938, Catholic priests were among the group of persons subject to repression as "counter-revolutionary elements." They were accused of espionage for Poland, counter-revolutionary activities, and "inciting national enmity." These accusations were often based solely on testimony obtained under torture. For many priests, these repressions ended in years of imprisonment in the Gulag or death. A total of 143 810 people were arrested, of whom 111 091 were shot (Коваленко, 2023, 47-55).

Catholic priests and active parishioners were among the main targets. They were often accused of anti-Soviet activities, espionage for Poland, or propaganda of religion as a "bourgeois ideology." Arrests were accompanied by fabricated cases in which confessions were extracted under torture. One example is the "Polish Club case" in Kharkiv, where 28 people were convicted, most of whom were shot (Коваленко, Серякова, 2021, 264).

In addition to physical terror, the Soviet authorities systematically destroyed Catholic infrastructure. Churches were closed, turned into warehouses or clubs, and believers were left without the opportunity to hold religious services. All this took place against the backdrop of a propaganda campaign that accused the clergy of exploitation and anti-Soviet agitation.

Arrests and imprisonment were often accompanied by psychological and physical violence. The scale of repression was so significant that even individuals who had no connection with the resistance or religious activity were targeted simply because of their Polish origin or participation in church ceremonies. The procedures for considering cases were simplified as much as possible: sentences were passed by extrajudicial bodies, the so-called "twos" or "threes", and were carried out immediately (Бачинський, 1994; Білас, 1994; Білокін, 1999; Шаповал, 1993).

These measures became part of the USSR's broader policy of combating religion as a threat to the communist regime. Terror not only physically destroyed religious figures, but also destroyed the spiritual and cultural connection between generations of believers. The systematic liquidation of the clergy also included the physical destruction of church leaders who had significant influence on communities. Catholic priests often became victims of public trials aimed at intimidating the rest of the faithful. During the annexation of Western Ukrainian lands in 1939, the Soviet authorities began to actively purge religious communities, repressing not only priests but also active parishioners.

It should be emphasized separately that an important aspect of these repressions was their intertwining with interethnic confrontation (ДІАБО). In the difficult political conditions that arose after the collapse of the Russian Empire, sharp

confrontations arose between various national groups, in particular between Ukrainians and Poles. The Polish clergy, which played an important role in the life of local Polish communities, became the object of special persecution by the Soviet authorities. Since Poles were often equated with "enemies", their repressions acquired a clear national connotation. Mass arrests, deportations and executions of Polish priests became part of a broader policy aimed at the physical and moral destruction of the Polish population and any influence of the Catholic Church. In this context, many of those who became victims of repression not only belonged to a religious minority, but were also ethnic Poles, which further complicated their situation under Soviet occupation (Instytut pamięci narodowej, 2018, 35).

4 Discussion

Using the example of the priests of the Lutsk diocese, the tragic consequences of the Soviet Union's policy towards the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church are examined.

Fr. Alexander Chaban was born in 1896 in Porytsk (now Pavlovka, Ivanychiv district, Volyn region). In 1914, he entered the theological seminary in Zhytomyr, which he successfully graduated from in 1919. After receiving his priestly ordination, Father Chaban began his ministry as a vicar at the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Zhytomyr. According to the testimony of Father Kazimierz Konopka SJ, in 1921, due to constant persecution by the Chekists, Father Chaban was forced to leave Zhytomyr and in June of the same year fled to Poland. During World War II, Father Chaban became a victim of Soviet repressions. There is conflicting information about the circumstances of his arrest: some sources indicate that he was detained in October 1939 in Rivne, others - on the territory of the Belarusian SSR. The further fate of the priest remains unknown, but there is evidence that in 1940 he was transferred to Ukhtizhim (Ukhta, Komi Republic), where he probably died before the amnesty was announced for Polish citizens in August 1941. The fate of his family was no less tragic, when in April 1940 the closest relatives of Fr. Chaban were deported to Kazakhstan. However, in addition to these versions, there are also others, according to which the priest could have been killed by Soviet soldiers during his escape in October 1939 or shot on June 23, 1941 in Lutsk prison (Dzwonkowski, 2003, 178).

Another prominent representative of the Catholic clergy who fell victim to the Soviet regime was Fr. Józef Churko, born on July 7, 1906 near Szczercz (now Lviv region). On June 10, 1933, he was ordained a priest and, thanks to his intellectual abilities, was sent to study in Rome. With the beginning of the Soviet occupation, his ministry acquired a new meaning. Fr. Churko actively participated in conspiratorial activities, helped military deserters and produced documents for those who needed it. His activities did not go unnoticed by the Soviet authorities, and as a result, in the fall of 1940, he was arrested on charges of "Polish counter-revolutionary activities." During the trial on November 6, 1940, Fr. Churko was sentenced to death and was on death row in Lutsk prison until the sentence was carried out. His life was cut short on June 23, 1941, during a mass execution of prisoners carried out by Soviet troops before their retreat (Dzwonkowski, 184; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 54-55; Szawłowski, 1996, 227; Чаплицкий, 2000; Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (AIPN); Peretiankovicz, 2010, 22; Krętosz, 2007, 48-49; Dębowska, 2008, 140, 424; ADL, 61; Dąbkowski, 2006, 71; Dębowska, 2015, 125).

Fr. Bronislaw Galitsky was born on November 29, 1884 in Zhuromin (Mlava County). He entered the theological seminary in Zhytomyr and studied at the Academy in St. Petersburg. In 1908 he was ordained a priest. With the occupation of Volhynia by Soviet troops, Fr. B. Galitsky, together with Fr. Churko, began active conspiratorial activities helping those in need. At the end of April 1940, he was arrested by the NKVD and was in prison in Lutsk. In November 1940, he was sentenced to death in accordance with Articles 54-2 and 54-11 of the Criminal Code of

the Ukrainian SSR. Like Fr. Churko, he was on death row. He was shot on June 22, 1941 in the Ukrainian courtyard of the Lutsk prison (Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 71-71; Szawłowski, 1996, 227-229; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 231; Dębowska, 2008, 140, 427; Krętosz, 2007, 64-65; Peretiankovicz, 2010, 23; AIPN; Dąbkowski, 2006, 71; Archiwum Generalne Zgromadzenia Sióstr św. Teresy od Dzieciątka Jezus w Podkowie Leśnej (AGCST), 1926; AGCST, 1936).

Fr. Francisk Rutkovskiy was born in 1882. He was ordained a priest in 1906, belonged to the Mogilev Archdiocese. Since 1933, he worked in the Lutsk diocese and served as vicar in Klevan. In 1935-1936, he was a vicar in the parish of Guta Stepanska. And in 1938, he was appointed abbot in Litowizh, and in 1940, abbot in Ustylug. It is worth emphasizing that Ustylug performed an important function in conspiracy activities, since he was responsible for the crossing of the Bug. On December 21, Fr. F. Rutkovskiy was arrested by the NKVD. During the investigation, he was in Lutsk. On February 17, 1941, he was sentenced to death. Shot by the NKVD on June 22, 1941 (*Miesięcznik Diecezjalny Łucki*, 1926, 137; 138, 258; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 130-131; Krętosz, 2007, 124-125; Dębowska, 2008, 443; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 524-525; Wnuk, 2007, 176-187; Peretiankovicz, 2010, 25; Dąbkowski, 2006, 72; Dębowska, 2015, 132; AGCST).

Fr. Bronislaw Fedorovich was born on October 3, 1901 in Podillia. He was educated in Buchach. In 1922 he began studying at the theological seminary in Łomża. However, on October 18, 1926 he moved to Lutsk, where on June 11, 1927 he was ordained a priest. He worked as a vicar and catechist in Korka. From 1930 to 1932 he was the rector of the Velyka Hlusha parish. In the following years he worked as a vicar in Lyuboml and Olytsia, and from December 1934 he was the rector of the Vyshenki parish. Before the outbreak of World War II he worked in the Skrundzi parish. On September 19, 1939, together with the organist, he was murdered by a Soviet sabotage group (*Miesięcznik Diecezjalny Łucki*, 1927, 198; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 67-68; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 222; Krętosz, 2007, 58; Dębowska, 2008, 427; Michajlik, 2008, 37-270; Tararuj, 79-85; Dębowska, 2015, 126).

Father Kazimierz Voznitskyi was born on August 16, 1898 in Puchava, Volyn near Sukhodolsko. He graduated from high school in Zhytomyr, and in 1916 he entered the theological seminary in Zhytomyr. After its closure as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution, he moved to Lutsk. In June 1920, he was ordained a priest.

After the Soviet occupation, the authorities repeatedly persuaded him to cooperate. On June 2, 1940, he was arrested by the NKVD and sentenced under Article 84 of the Criminal Code of the USSR to 3 years of hard labor in the Kargopolag camp (Arkhangelsk region). He served his sentence from November 26, 1940 to October 21, 1941. He was released under the amnesty for Poles in August 1941. At the end of November he reached the troops of General Anders in Buzuluk. He died on December 11, 1941 (Dąbkowski, 2006, 74; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 647-648; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 165-166; Dębowska, 2008, 140, 453; Krętosz, 2007, 334-335; Wesółowski, 2004, 8, 98; Peretiankovicz, 2010, 26).

Father Stanislaw Zientara was born on March 14, 1886 near Tarnów. In 1905 he joined the Congregation of the Salesian Fathers. In 1915 he was ordained a priest. In 1926 he moved to the Lutsk diocese, where he worked as a catechist in Mosurów. From 1928 he worked in Mlynów, and later in Satyów. Later he was the administrator of the parish in Radów. From September 1934 he worked as a catechist in Rivne. In September 1939 he was appointed vicar of the parish in Rivne. With the beginning of the Soviet occupation he began active activities in the conspiracy, namely: he prepared clean metrics, with the help of which it was possible to leave Rivne. On April 23, 1940 he was arrested, and already on December 14, 1940 was sentenced to death under Articles 54-2 and 54-11. He was shot on April 8, 1941 in prison in Rivne (*Miesięcznik Diecezjalny Łucki*, 1926,

33; Dębowska, 2008, 140, 341, 454; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 672; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 171-172; Dąbkowski, 2006, 74; Peretiankowicz, 2010, 26-27; Krętosz, 2007, 177-178).

Fr. Marian Tokazhevsky was born on February 2, 1873 in Shepinky in Podillia, in the family of Wilhelm and Eleonora from the Smolinsky family. He entered the theological seminary in Zhytomyr. Ordained a priest in 1896. During 20 years of priesthood, he changed over 27 parishes due to constant conflicts with the tsarist authorities. As a result, in 1909 he was exiled for 5 years of isolation in a liquidated monastery in Zaslavye. In 1913 he was released from the Lutsk-Zhytomyr diocese and left to work with other Poles in the Russian Empire: Yaroslavl on the Volga, Kostroma, Volgograd, Turkmenistan.

In 1917, Fr. Tokazhevsky returned to Podillia. One of the merits of Fr. Tokazhevsky is that he opened the first Polish school, which on September 10, 1918, he requalified as a gymnasium. In June 1940, he was arrested by the NKVD. At first, he was imprisoned in Kovel and Lutsk. In the Lutsk prison, he was in inhumane conditions, because his feet were constantly in water. The death sentence was replaced by 10 years in camps. It is more likely that on April 1, 1941, he was transported from Lutsk to Kyiv. There is an unconfirmed version that due to illness he was unable to march and therefore Fr. Tokazhevsky was pushed into a pit with lime. Although he could probably have died on the way from Lutsk to Kyiv (Dębowska, 2008, 140, 337, 341, 450; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 595-596; Peretiankowicz, 2010, 25-26; Dąbkowski, 2006, 74; Krętosz, 2007, 158-160; Cabanowski, 1999, 71-82; Stowarzyszenie Pamięci Kapelanów Katyńskich, 2018, 7; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 158-160; Dębowska, 2015, 134-135; Misięcznik Diecezjalny Łucki, 1933, 55-56).

Fr. Michal Tyszko was born on January 7, 1906, to Adolf and Józefa from the Czeszkowski family. In 1926, he entered the theological seminary in Lutsk. On January 19, he was ordained a priest. From 1931 to 1938, he worked as a catechist in Zdolbuniv. On September 1, 1938, he was appointed chaplain of the Zdolbuniv Regional Religious Center. On September 18, 1939, he was immediately arrested by the NKVD. On March 28, 1940, he was transported from Rivne to Dnipropetrovsk. There is no further information about Fr. Tyszko. There is an assumption that he could have been killed in Katyn, since he was found on the Ukrainian Katyn list under number 2928 (Dzwonkowski, 2003, 606; Dąbkowski, 2006, 74; Peretiankowicz, 2010, 26; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 161-162; Krętosz, 2007, 331-332; Dębowska, 2008, 140, 451).

Fr. Vladyslav Shpachynsky was born on March 13, 1887 in Chudnov to the family of Raimund and Francisca of the Ogiński family. He graduated from the theological seminary of the Lutsk-Zhytomyr diocese. He was ordained a priest in 1910. In connection with the seizure of Ukraine by the Bolsheviks in 1919, he moved to Poland. In April 1923, he was appointed vicar in Rivne, and in August 1923 he served as a catechist at the gymnasium in Volodymyr-Volynsky.

In June 1940, he was arrested together with Fr. M. Tokazhevsky for conspiratorial activities. The death sentence was replaced by a long stay in labor camps. There are two versions of his death: one says that he died during transportation to the place of serving his sentence, the other says that he died in Lutsk prison in June 1941 (Dębowska, 2008, 140, 332, 337, 448; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 568-569; Krętosz, 2007, 149-150; Dąbkowski, 2006, 74; Peretiankowicz, 2010, 25; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 152-153).

Fr. Tadeusz Bonczkowski was born in 1877. In 1900, after completing the necessary training courses, he was ordained a priest and began his ministry as a vicar in Bila Tserkva until 1904. With the beginning of the Soviet occupation, Fr. Bonczkowski showed his courage when, realizing the threat to important historical documents, he decided to hide the Acts of the Senate of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, his act did not go unnoticed by the Soviet authorities, and he was soon arrested by the NKVD. After his arrest, he was imprisoned

in Lutsk, and later transported to another place, and according to legend, he was executed in Bykivna on November 18, 1940 (Peretiankowicz, 2010, 21; Dąbkowski, 2006, 71; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 117; Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 41; Dębowska, 2008, 140, 420; Krętosz, 2007, 28-29).

Fr. Stanislav Galetskyi, born in 1895. After graduating from the Zhytomyr Theological Seminary, he was ordained a priest in 1919 in Lutsk. His first place of service was the parish in Skirch. Later, from 1935 to 1937, he was the rector in Sofiivka, and from 1937 he served in Kolky. However, the tragic events of World War II did not bypass him. On July 1, 1941, when Soviet troops occupied these lands, Fr. Galetsky was shot for his devotion to his duty and protection of parishioners who turned to him for help (Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 71; Dębowska, 2008, 140-141, 427-428; Dzwonkowski, 2003, 231; Krętosz, 2007, 66; Dębowska, 2005, 44).

Fr. Leon Khudy was born on April 12, 1906 in Recklinghausen in Rhineland-Westphalia (Germany). On June 20, 1931, he was ordained a priest. With the beginning of World War II, he was a military chaplain and participated in the September military campaign. In the fall of 1939, he remained in the Lutsk diocese. He served as the administrator of the parish in Antonivka, Volodymyretskyi deanery. On June 24, 1941, Fr. Khudy was arrested by the NKVD in Dubrovytsia with several parishioners. They were sent to Sarny. One of the charges was that Fr. Khudy was a spy for the German troops. He died on July 7, 1941 in Sarny. At the end of July 1941, an exhumation was carried out (there were about 70 people in one grave). All the bodies were transferred to the parish cemetery (now a sports field). According to eyewitness accounts of the exhumation, the remains of a "priest in a cassock from Salesia" were there (Dębowska, Popek, 2010, 51; Dębowska, 2008, 141, 459; Krętosz, 2007, 308-310).

5 Conclusion

Thus, Soviet policy towards Poles and Catholics was systemic and aimed at the complete elimination of both religious and national identity. The Polish operation of the NKVD in 1937-1938 was one of the most tragic manifestations of the Great Terror, during which repressions were carried out on ethnic and religious grounds. The destruction of the Catholic clergy and believers consisted not only in physical repressions, but also in large-scale discrediting aimed at undermining trust in the Church among the population. Anti-religious propaganda and the destruction of the material foundation of the Church became important mechanisms in the eradication of religious life. The Stalinist regime perceived religion as a threat to communist ideology, and the Catholic Church as a stronghold of Polish identity. As a result, the clergy and believers were subjected to repressions, confiscation of property and the destruction of religious buildings. The propaganda that accompanied these actions portrayed Catholic priests as enemies of the people and agents of foreign intelligence. At the same time, the closure of churches and the physical liquidation of the clergy contributed to the destruction of religious communities and their cultural heritage.

This policy had catastrophic consequences for the religious and cultural heritage of Western Ukrainian lands. The destruction of the Catholic Church was not only part of an anti-religious campaign, but also an element of the fight against Polish national identity, which was perceived by the Soviet authorities as a threat. Repressions against Poles and Catholics became one of the most striking examples of the cruelty of a totalitarian regime that sought to destroy any opposition.

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