



ARTYKUŁ

## **Hemmed in. The dangers circling priest Jerzy.**

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On October 19th 1984 priest Popiełuszko, the pastor of the working class, organiser of Masses for the motherland, one of the chaplains of "Solidarity" was arrested. For the last two years of his work at the Stanisław Kostka church at Warsaw's Żoliborz district, he had to face the Communist Security Service hemming in.

The operative case file (SOR) codename "Popiel" found at the Warsaw Regional Court and handed to the Institute of National Remembrance is one of the few remaining physical pieces of evidence proving that priest Popiełuszko was invigilated by the Security Service. It shows very clearly, how the Communists perceived the activity of the Żoliborz priest. They hadn't seen him as a priest who was simply engaged in public matters and

wanted to help those in need, but rather as a politician convincing the people to change the system.

The first document in the file is the motion from July 26<sup>th</sup> 1982 to begin operative work against pr. Popiełuszko. In the motion, apart from Popiełuszko's personal information – his address, profession and family, there were also reasons for why the SB (Security Service) began the invigilation, but also goals they wanted to achieve by this. It was written, that Popiełuszko became the person of interest because of his ties with activists of the NSZZ "Solidarity" and also due to the fact that "using a church charity event to give away medicine brought from abroad he takes part in anti-socialist activities". The purpose of oppressing pr. Popiełuszko was to stop his cooperation "with organisations and communities hostile to the People's Republic of Poland" and the neutralisation of his "hostile activities in the Catholic communities and his closest environment". The officer who filed the motion also noted, that pr. Popiełuszko held Holy Masses with Warsaw actors to "commemorate certain anniversaries", giving them "a political overtone". They were the famous Masses for the motherland.

### **Holy Masses for the motherland**

On July 27<sup>th</sup> 1982, a letter came to the Office for Religious Affairs (an institution created in 1950 to make the Catholic Church's life difficult) from Józef Paliwoda, a citizen of Warsaw. In said letter, Paliwoda reported that in the St. Stanisław Kostka parish in Żoliborz, 2 days earlier, during a Holy Mass there were "artistic performances of very anti-state and anti-socialist overtone". The author of the denunciation wrote, that the artist performing at the church "with specially procured song lyrics and modified declamations of well-known poems spread hatred towards the people's authorities and urged for hostile actions against them". The Mass took place in a special, anti-Communist scenery: national flags had black ribbons attached to them and in the central, honorary place "shined" an eagle with a crown (the coat of arms of Poland, the crown symbolises independence and had been removed from all national symbols during the Communist-era; translator's annotation). All this, according to citizen Paliwoda, was "aimed at completely disgracing the system of People's Poland".

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In reality, the Holy Masses lead by pr. Popiełuszko were not only a chance to pray for Poland, but also an oasis of freedom in an enslaved country. "I felt like I was in another world, that it wasn't the horrible reality of the martial law" – recalled pr. Jan Sikorski, who also had ties with the "Solidarity".

The first Holy Mass for the motherland in the St. Stanisław Kostka church was held by the parish's rector, pr. Teofil Bogucki, on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1981. Priest Jerzy Popiełuszko took over during the martial law.

### **Security Service in action**

The first Holy Mass for the victims of martial law pr. Popiełuszko held on January 17<sup>th</sup> 1982. The artistic setting was prepared by actors: Danuta Szaflarska, Damian Damięcki, Andrzej Fedorowicz, Andrzej Zaorski, Maja Komorowska, Marian Opania, Daniel Olbrychski and Zofia Mrozowska. Less than a week later, on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Warsaw auxiliary bishop Jerzy Modzelewski was called for a talk with the Warsaw mayor Jerzy Majewski and the head of the Office for Religious Affairs Jerzy Śliwiński. During the meeting, several charges against pr. Popiełuszko were presented – described as unsettling for the authorities facts concerning the activities of "some of the clerical individuals and certain priests". Priest Popiełuszko was accused of directing the January 17<sup>th</sup> Mass, as it was stated, "to create the atmosphere of sublimity, terror, injustice" and also "hostility towards the authorities". The actors taking part in the ceremony and reciting poems were meticulously noted. The Communist authorities knew exactly what happened at the Mass thanks to the Security Service's observations. Officers of the SB recorded the ceremony and described the participants' behaviour in their notes. The fact, that already during the January 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting with bishop Modzelewski the Communists used information obtained via invigilation conducted at the Kostka church, proves that from the very beginning of pr. Popiełuszko's Masses for the motherland, the Security Service had them under observation – even before the official case, codename "Popiel" was opened.



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**The patriotic overtone of pr. Jerzy's Holy Masses for the motherland angered the Communist authorities; in the picture: liturgy on September 25th 1983**



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**Even though, the inside of the St. Stanisław Kostka church is considerably spacious, there were so many participants of the Holy Masses for the motherland, that some of them had to stay outside in the courtyard; in the picture: August liturgy, 1984**

The two hours of free Poland, described by pr. Sikorski, were a big threat to the Communist authorities, which were trying to convince the society that resisting the order set after December 13<sup>th</sup> (on December 13<sup>th</sup> 1970

the Citizens' Militia and the People's Army violently crushed shipyard workers' protests against the raised prices of everyday products; translator's annotation) is unrealistic and doomed to fail. When on August 29<sup>th</sup> 1982, in St. Stanisław Kostka church, another Holy Mass for the motherland was to take place, the Security Service called the artists, who were to perform at the ceremony, to talk (the so-called warning talks). According to the information in the "Popiel" case file, Katarzyna Łaniewska, Kazimierz Kaczor, Bronisław Pawlik and Piotr Szczepanik stated despite the threats that they won't give up the participation in the Mass. At the end of the ceremony, they all presented prayers and poems prepared beforehand by pr. Popiełuszko.

The Security Service observed the Holy Mass' participants and its course; on August 29<sup>th</sup> there were approximately 5 thousand people noted present. The SB was particularly interested in the church's decorations, namely the "Solidarity" banners and national flags - that way was commemorated the second anniversary of signing the August 31<sup>st</sup> 1980 Gdańsk agreement. In the Security Service's documents, it was also noted that the central decoration of the church was a poster portraying a boy in a "Solidarity" t-shirt saying "I'm already two years old". In the homily pr. Popiełuszko used parts of primate Stefan Wyszyński's, pope John Paul's II and primate Józef Glemp's sermons. He said, that to rule is to serve, which was read as a direct allusion to the country's situation. He underlined, that Poland needed to respect its citizens' rights and dignity. What's more, he stressed that despite the martial law "the nation is still ready to work hard for the good of its motherland". Characteristic to his sermons was comparing the Polish nation, which longed for freedom and felt responsible for its motherland, with the Communist authorities, which were unfair, not bringing peace and enslaving their own motherland. The nation, as pr. Jerzy said, can't "live in an organised prison". Popiełuszko also mentioned the violent crushing of the Kwidzyn prisoners' mutiny by the Communists. Typical for the Holy Masses for the motherland were the prayers for the imprisoned, oppressed Poles and their families and for the actors regarding their boycott of the state media. Pr. Popiełuszko ended his homily with an appeal to the gathered people to disperse peacefully and not seek confrontation with the Citizens' Militia. Katarzyna Soborak, one of the participants of the Holy Masses for the motherland, today the director of the Centre for the Documentation of Life and Worship of Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko, recalled in one of the interviews, that pr. Jerzy concluded every ceremony asking the gathered crowds not to pick up patriotic leaflets and not chant anti-Communist slogans upon. He asked that, since the Citizens' Militia and the Security Service would often arrest or even sometimes hit the participants upon them leaving the church.

The Communist authorities reacted very quickly to pr. Popiełuszko's words from August 29<sup>th</sup> - on the next day, minister Adam Łopatka, the head of the Office for Religious Affairs sent a letter to archbishop Bronisław Dąbrowski, the secretary of Polish episcopate. Łopatka argued, that because of pr. Popiełuszko the religious gathering transformed into a political demonstration "carrying a threat to peace, security and order". Unacceptable for the Communists were the parts of Popiełuszko's sermon in which he pointed out the injustice of the authorities and demanded them to follow the rule of law. In the letter, pr. Popiełuszko was quoted saying: "We have become witnesses to the actions of dictatorship states, where the citizens are talked to in police-prosecuting tone". The priest was also accused of constantly referring to the "Solidarity" movement, delegalized on December 13<sup>th</sup> 1981. It was noted, that pr. Popiełuszko used following words during his homily: "Solidarity always has and will be there and it will be victorious". For the Communist

authorities, the Holy Masses for the motherland were “carefully orchestrated spectacles”, during which “the faithful’s feelings are being manipulated, creating the sense of terror and unneeded commotion”.

## **Pressure on the Church**

At first, the Communists tried to make pr. Popiełuszko look bad in the eyes of his superiors – they presented accusations after accusations, sending letters and demands to the bishops. There are seven letters of this nature in the “Popiel” case file. The Catholic church was presented with an ultimatum: the Church was either to “make pr. Popiełuszko, and other priests brewing up emotions among the society, stop their activities” or in the future be held co-responsible for “the possible repercussions for disrupting order and public security”. The Communists threatened the Church officials with using force against the participants of the Holy Masses for the motherland – the priests would become co-responsible for the brutal methods of oppression used by the state, for the prosecution of the faithful, beating up the crowds leaving the church, the arrests. However, the Catholic Church never caved and didn’t agree to meet the demands to “discipline” pr. Popiełuszko.

Asked by a philosopher, Klemens Szaniawski about his night in jail, Popiełuszko responded with joy: “I heard the confessions of 4 murderers.”

In Autumn of 1982, the atmosphere surrounding pr. Jerzy became more and more tense. The Communist authorities changed their strategy – they started threatening to prosecute him for organising the Holy Masses for the motherland and “conducting illegal activities”. They based their accusations on the document implementing the martial law. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1982 pr. Zdzisław Król, the chancellor of the Warsaw curia, warned pr. Popiełuszko that the state authorities wish to intern him. This message was supposedly sent by bishop Jerzy Dąbrowski, the deputy secretary of the Polish episcopate, engaged in talks with the Communists. At the same time, the Security Service doubled its activities around pr. Popiełuszko, not only to control him better, but also to discredit him among the priesthood. This was the goal of secret collaborator “Jankowski”, a priest who reported on what was happening during the Masses for the motherland to the Security Service and who, following his orders, presented pr. Popiełuszko in a bad light to primate Glemp. Repressions of priest Jerzy and his surrounding grew even bigger: the Citizens’ Militia in Suchowola called Popiełuszko’s brothers for questioning and in December “unknown perpetrators” painted his car white and threw a brick with explosives on it into his apartment. The information that he could be arrested was also given to pr. Jerzy by bishop

Władysław Miziołek. Among the documents of the operative case file “Popiel”, such incidents were obviously not mentioned.

### **Accused Popiełuszko**

Since neither the pressure on the Church officials, nor the attempts to discipline the defiant priest from the Żoliborz parish with the actions of “unknown perpetrators” brought the results expected by the Communist authorities, in Autumn of 1983 they decided to prosecute pr. Popiełuszko. The official actions were postponed, probably due to the pope’s pilgrimage to Poland (June 1983) – as to not provoke the public opinion. According to the Security Service, pr. Popiełuszko, who held the Masses for the motherland for the whole year of 1983, still “used religious practices for anti-state initiatives” and “his sermons bore signs of breaking the art. 194 of the criminal law”. According to this article, “who abuses the freedom of conscience and religion when performing ceremonies or other religious functions to harm the interests of the Polish People’s Republic is subject to the penalty of imprisonment for up to 10 years”. This article was in fact in opposition to the freedom of religion in Communist Poland and was only used to prosecute the Church officials. Pr. Jerzy’s sermons were analysed by the Main Office for Control of Publications and Public Events. In the censoring opinion it was noted, that pr. Popiełuszko’s speeches were “a threat to the public order and security”. Prosecutor Anna Jackowska of the regional prosecution in Warsaw, infamous for accusing Polish patriots in political cases, officially began an investigation against pr. Jerzy On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1983. The investigation was given to the Investigative Division of the Capital’s Office for Internal Affairs – a special unit responsible for leading political cases and prosecution of members of the opposition. The Security Service taped, among other things, seventeen sermons of pr. Popiełuszko – since August 29<sup>th</sup> 1982 to October 11<sup>th</sup> 1983.

The case file, which was supposed to have the evidence of hemming in pr. Jerzy, looks like it was cleared out of any proof of the Communists’ actions against him. However; the file does contain the protocols of destroying archival materials.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1983, at the presbytery of the St. Stanisław Kostka church, as many as twelve officers of the Security Service came to serve pr. Popiełuszko with a subpoena. However, pr. Jerzy did not accept it – by

doing so he denied the charges he was faced with. It was a popular way among the members of anti-Communist groups to defend against the unlawful actions of the prosecution. Officers of the SB tried to force their way into the priest's apartment, but thanks to the people gathered there, who defended the entrance to the presbytery, they failed to hand the court order. Priest Jerzy showed up at the prosecution on December 12<sup>th</sup> (in the end, he was served by archbishop Bronisław Dąbrowski). He was then accused of abusing the freedom of conscience. According to the prosecution, he was also to "abuse the place of religious cult and the position of a priest to inspire the faithful to stand up to the state authorities and undermine their credibility and authority." What's more, he "lied" about the government, saying that it takes away society's freedom of thought and action. Following a questioning, which lasted several hours, pr. Jerzy was taken to the search of his own, private apartment at Chłodna 15 Street in Warsaw. The search was a provocation orchestrated by the Security Service to discredit pr. Popiełuszko before his superiors and gain an excuse to hold him in prison.

"On our way to the search I was calm, I didn't have a single leaflet from before the martial law" - noted the priest in his private journal. "How shocked I was, when one of the four investigative officers in the presence of the prosecutor, Waldek (Waldemar Chrostowski - a friend and driver of pr. Jerzy) and myself for 3 minutes kept digging up evidence against me".

According to the priest's notes, the Security Service's officer found not only over 15 thousand illegal papers, but also bullets and explosives.

"I reacted calmly. [...] To the protocole [...] I added a note: <<I point to the fact, that upon entering the apartment, one of the officers headed directly to the spots, from which he took out incriminating materials, as if he knew they were there.>>" - wrote pr. Popiełuszko.

All the evidence was previously planted in the apartment by the Security Service. Following the search, he was faced with much worse charges than before: he was charged with the illegal possession of ammunition, explosives and anti-state papers. Pr. Jerzy was then held up in a cell for a day in Mostowsky palace; he was released due to the Catholic officials' pressure on the Communists. Asked by a philosopher, Klemens Szaniawski about his night in jail, Popiełuszko responded with joy: "I heard the confessions of 4 murderers."

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RAJNE  
spec. bezpieczeństwo

Nr. ewidencyjny

KWESTIONARIUSZ  
indywidualny (z wyjątkiem "specjalny")

1. Nazwisko i imię: P.O.P.I.EŁ.U.S.Z.K.O. Jerzy

2. Imię rodziców i nazwisko panieńskie matki: Wacława i Marii-Scyliana

3. Data urodzenia: 23.11.1927r. w miejscowości: Chocz

4. Narodowość: polaka z obywatelstwa: polaka

5. Wykształcenie: średnie w tym: pięć klasy

6. Wyznanie: katolickie

7. Zawód wyuczony: ksiądz w zawodzie: ksiądz

8. Wykazano wyjątki: nie

9. Wykazano wyróżnienia: nie

10. Wykazano wyróżnienia: nie

11. Inne uwagi: nie

12. Czy posiada wykształcenie i pracę tego rodzaju: nie

13. Miejsce pracy, podległość administracyjna, data przydziału: nie

14. Wykazano wyróżnienia: nie

15. Wykazano wyróżnienia: nie

Okres	Wykazano pracę	Nazwa rodzaju pracy	Wykazano wyróżnienia
1. 1950 - 1970	nie	nie	nie
2. 1970 - 1975	nie	nie	nie
3. 1975 - 1978	nie	nie	nie
4. 1978 - 1980	nie	nie	nie
5. 1980 -	nie	nie	nie

Fot. AFPN

“Learned profession - cleric,  
performed profession - priest” -  
pr. Jerzy’s description in the  
questionnaire of an individual  
investigated by the Security  
Service



Priest Jerzy Popiełuszko was an  
unofficial chaplain of the  
Solidarity movement; upon his  
beatification in 2010 he was  
named as the movement’s  
patron; in the picture: pr.  
Popiełuszko with Lech Wałęsa  
(from right to left), Gdańsk 1983

## Physically harass

One of the officers of the Security Service that took part in the provocation at the Chłodna Street was Leszek Pękala, who on October 19<sup>th</sup> 1984, along with Grzegorz Piotrowski and Waldemar Chmielewski, kidnapped and murdered pr. Jerzy Popiełuszko. In their explanation, the three perpetrators claimed it wasn't their intention to kill the priest, but to "strongly, physically harass him". Grzegorz Piotrowski stated, that he merely wanted to scare the defiant priest. In reality, the "physical harassment", as the three perpetrators called it, consisted of: brutal beating, torture and finally murder. During the investigation it became clear, that they acted with intent, which wasn't only to give the priest a scare and torment him, but also to take his life. It can be highlighted by parts of the murderers' testimonies, in which they admitted of carefully preparing for the kidnapping: they prepared batons, to beat the priest with, and bags with stones which they tied to the priest's legs to dump his body somewhere it would never be found. An additional proof is the fact, that the perpetrators tried to assassinate pr. Jerzy before, on October 13<sup>th</sup> 1984, when he was returning from Gdańsk to Warsaw in a car – Grzegorz Piotrowski threw a rock at the vehicle and wanted to cause an accident. The assassination failed only because Piotrowski missed.

In the investigation, it was discovered that the actions against pr. Jerzy Popiełuszko were taken with the blessing of the superior of the accused. The killers did not act alone; the assassination attempt was not the only action taken against pr. Jerzy by the officers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – the division responsible for fighting the Church. At the ministerial meetings, the issue of the "complete defiance" of pr. Popiełuszko was raised several times. Piotrowski stated during the investigation, that the idea of a kidnapping came up, because the Communist law enforcement and prosecution didn't know what to do about pr. Jerzy. He also added, that the concept of "physically harassing" pr. Popiełuszko came up already during the meetings of the management of the 4<sup>th</sup> Department. One of the officers promised to deliver a concrete plan of actions against the priest – that's when Adam Pietruszka said: "we need to act, not to plan"; he was also to say that the priest "may fall off a moving train". These words were understood as consent for a brutal persecution of pr. Jerzy.

The case file "Popiel" lacks the documents which are usually found in cases like this – the plans of following the priest and tormenting him, the tapes from recording devices planted in his apartment etc. Apart from the aforementioned letters to the Church officials, only few archival materials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs remained – a few notes of the Security Service concerning pr. Popiełuszko's sermons, written by the officers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Capital Division of the Office of Internal Affairs. The case file, which was supposed to have the evidence of hemming in pr. Jerzy, looks like it was cleared out of any proof of the Communists' actions against him. However; the file does contain the protocols of destroying archival materials. They state, that in August of 1989, just before the Communists lost their power, many documents were destroyed the officers of the Security Service. More than five hundred documents regarding the persecution of pr. Popiełuszko were got rid of. That way, the evidence of the Security Service's crimes were gone. In the motion to close the "Popiel" case, it was written: "On October 19<sup>th</sup> 1984, the individual died in tragic circumstances".

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The title was adjusted by the editors

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