

The State and the Church in the Post-War Struggle for the Ideological Aspect of the Polish Academic Society (Wrocław 1945–1956)

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According to the treaties of Teheran (1943) and Yalta (1945), Wrocław was made a part of the Recovered Territories as a compensation for the eastern Polish territories being taken by the USSR. All the Polish people who arrived started creating a new, diverse society that had no prior connection to the previously German city.

The Polish Government faced the task of introducing peace and order to the city and organizing education because it was supposed to double as a political indoctrination tool that would shape the young generation even among students. A number of demands were made to incorporate universities as quickly as possible into the process of creating a socialistic nation and society. The political opinions of a majority of faculties and the Church stood in opposition to these demands and to the communist government.

An official war with the Church had started, coupled with repressions. The Church fought not only for its place in the religious life of the citizens but also in the political and social one. The postwar history of Polish universities is closely related to these activities because of, among other things, the student participation in various academic ministries.

Key words: *Postwar Poland; country; the Church; indoctrination; academic ministry*

At the beginning of the 20th century, Breslau, called 'Die Blume Europas' (Europe's Flower), was considered to be the biggest German city east of Berlin. At that time, the city had over half a million inhabitants. The Polish minority in the city consisted of 4,000 people. However, the number fell after 1918 due to migration to the new Polish State.¹ Before

¹ S. Orgelbranda *Encyklopedia Powszechna* (1912). Warszawa: S. Olgebranda synowie, t. XVIII (suplement cz. II), p. 709.

1933, Wrocław had a Polish consulate, Polish School, Polish Library, a branch of the Poles in Germany Society, "Polish House", a Polish scout team and the Choir Society "Harmony." In addition to that, two churches offered masses in Polish. From 1933, both the Polish culture and education were in a difficult situation. All signs of being Polish were eradicated. The final straw was the expulsion of all Polish students from the University of Wrocław and a resolution that was passed in Leopold's Assembly Hall, which stated that: "We are certain that no Polish foot will ever cross the threshold of this German university ever again".²

In 1945, despite the fact that the course of the war was already decided, the Germans decided to keep on fighting and not to surrender the city. The Festung (Fortress) Breslau battle lasted from January 1945 until the German capitulation on May 6th, 1945. Even though there was no damage to the city during the first half of January, around 70 to 80 percent of its buildings were destroyed as a final result of the battle.

According to the treaties from Teheran (1943) and Yalta (1945), Wrocław was made a part of the Recovered Territories as a compensation for the eastern Polish territories taken by the USSR. These decisions changed the borders of Poland and, as a consequence, started a resettlement process that lasted for a couple of years. As a result of resettlement, people from Central Poland and Lesser Poland arrived in a city destroyed and burned down by the Germans and the Soviets. Among them, there were inhabitants of Warsaw, which was ruined during the uprising, looters, thrill-seekers and those that had to hide their past because of ties to the AK (Home Army) or to London. One of the more significant groups consisted of the people of Kresy Wschodnie (the Eastern Borderlands), which were annexed by the USSR and now are a part of eastern Lithuania, western Belarus and Ukraine.³

All those who arrived started creating a new, diverse society that had no prior connection to the previously German city. It was a mix of different experiences and ideas on what their future, and the future of the country, should look like. The majority considered this new reality to be temporary, similar to the way in which they perceived the new borders of Poland. As a result, some of them did not unpack their belongings even for a couple of years after the war had ended, believing that they were yet to return to the true Motherland. This feeling of not belonging was multiplied by the

² Davies, N., Moorhouse, R. (2002). *Mikrokosmos. Portret miasta środkowoeuropejskiego. Bratislavia. Breslau. Wrocław*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, pp. 394–395.

³ Kersten, K. (1995). Jajta – mit i rzeczywistość. In *Jajta z perspektywy półwiecza*, S. Nicieja (Ed.). Opole: Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, pp. 15–25.

ever-present rubble and the surrounding German language: street names, signposts, statues and storefronts. Poles moved into German houses with German furniture, books, paintings, clocks and German newspapers sticking out from under the wallpaper.

Life in the city was very difficult. There was looting, even during the day, in which even the Soviet soldiers participated. The bad reputation that Wrocław got was known across Poland, to the point where the administration of Kraków proposed that “the unemployed, the spivs and the criminals” should be relocated to Wrocław.⁴

However, German Breslau was slowly beginning to fade and Polish Wrocław started to appear. The Breslauer population was regularly being relocated (exiled) and more Poles replaced them. Over a short period of time, a total exchange of population took place. By the end of May 1945, there were around 2,000 Poles and over 200,000 Germans in the City. In March 1947, there were 197,000 Poles and only 17,000 Germans living in the city.⁵

The new Polish Government was facing a difficult task of introducing peace and order to the city. Organizing education seemed like a particularly difficult task as it was supposed to double as a political indoctrination tool that would shape the young generation.

On August 24th, 1945, the University of Wrocław and the Wrocław University of Science and Technology were created as “Polish academic schools,” with one rector, two vice-rectors, a shared Senate, budget and administration. Prof. Stanisław Kulczyński, who arrived in Wrocław in May of 1945 from the Lwów University of Jan Kazimierz, was named the first rector of the joint universities. Until 1947, the university operated chiefly in accordance with the bill from March 15th, 1933. The pre-war laws and academic structures served as a guarantee for the freedom of science and the independence of academic society.⁶

Student candidates, who came to Wrocław after the war was over, were very diverse when it comes to their societal, cultural and political backgrounds. They were not able to start their studies immediately as the entire university infrastructure had been destroyed, including lecture halls, classrooms, the library and museum collections.⁷ They also had no

⁴ Thun, G. (2008). *Obce miasto Wrocław 1945 i potem*. Wrocław: VIA NOVA, pp. 223–231.

⁵ Davies, N., Moorhouse, R. (2002). *Op. cit.*, p. 454; Kaszuba E. (1997). *Między propagandą a rzeczywistością. Polska ludność Wrocławia 1945–1947*. Warszawa: PWN.

⁶ Suleja, T. (1995). *Uniwersytet Wrocławski w okresie centralizmu stalinowskiego 1950–1955*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, pp. 13–16.

⁷ Kulak, T. – Pater, M. – Wrześniński, W. (2002) *Historia Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 1702–2002*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, p. 206.

place to live. In December of 1945, there were only 198 places available in student houses.⁸ The students themselves had trouble finding food, clothes and there was a shortage of academic books. The university was in dire need of faculty members as well. At the time, most of the faculty came from the Lwów University of Jan Kazimierz and other Lwów schools. They introduced the academic traditions and academic heritage of Lwów to Wrocław and also often brought their collection of academic books with them. The government officials quickly noticed the danger of allowing the University of Wrocław to become the heir to the pre-war traditions of the Lwów University. In the eyes of the government, the University of Wrocław was supposed to be only a small, provincial higher education school.⁹

The first academic year of 1945/1946 at the University of Wrocław started on November 15th, 1945. Around 2,350 students started their studies at the university, including 1,221 first-years. The faculty consisted of 50 professors and 120 assistant professors. However, the official celebration of the opening of the university and the Wrocław University of Science and Technology took place as late as June 9th, 1946. The highest government officials and the representatives of diplomatic institutions, including the USSR ambassador, participated in the celebrations. This specific date was chosen for propaganda purposes: on June 30th, there was a referendum on the acceptance of political and economical changes in Poland.¹⁰ This was one of the first instances where the University was used for political purposes by the communist government. The government itself was not content with the nearly-guaranteed autonomy of universities, both in terms of the way they were democratically managed and the way the academic society shaped the course of research topics, independent of political conditions. All this stood in opposition to the “systemic realities of *people’s democracy*”.¹¹ As a result, a number of demands were made to incorporate the university as quickly as possible into the process of creating a socialistic nation and society and, thus, breaking away from the pre-war ideals of university autonomy and universalism.

The political opinions of a large part of the faculty, especially those from Lwów, stood in opposition to these demands and to the communist

⁸ Ciesielski, S. (1993). Warunki socjalno-bytowe studentów Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego w latach 1945–1956. In *Studia i materiały z dziejów Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego*, t. II, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, p. 177.

⁹ Kulak, T. – Pater, M. – Wrzesiński, W. (2002). Op. cit., pp. 207, 210–211.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 222–223.

¹¹ Suleja, T. (1995). Op. cit. p. 16.

government. The faculty believed that it was their duty to teach students to “think for themselves, reach the truth on their own and to cultivate a high sense of ethics that would guard their patriotism”.¹²

The kind of influences the professors had on their students were deemed dangerous by the communist government because, in the eyes of the government, these students were to become the faculty that would help them create the new political reality of the country in the future.

The Church was another obstacle the communist government faced when bringing their vision of socialist higher education schools to life. The Church had a lot of support from the Polish society, which started to irritate the new government. As a result, the government started fighting with the Church: on September 12th, 1945, it broke the concordat and, on the following day, decided to annul the pre-war bill on compulsory religion classes for children of the Roman Catholic faith. In the following years, an official war with the Church had started, coupled with repressions that included intensified censorship, spot searches, threats, arrests, interrogations, mock trials ending with high punishments (including capital punishment), the confiscation of the Church property (lands and buildings), the closing of catholic schools, and limiting the number of permits for catholic celebrations.¹³

The difficult relationship between the state and the Church was especially important in the western part of the country. The government hoped that resettling the area with a diverse, often random, population that was snatched from their previous environments would be beneficial for ideological indoctrination. At the same time, the government also hoped that similar factors would deprive the Church of the ability to influence the unintegrated society. However, the displaced population, especially the part from Kresy, ended up being especially resistant to propaganda and seemed very religious. This phenomenon was also present at the Wrocław universities, where the faculty and many of the students had a hostile position towards the government and its representatives.¹⁴ After all, a lot of the students practiced traditions similar to those of their professors.¹⁵

¹² Prof. Józef Gierowski (1999). In *Pięćdziesiąt lat Duszpasterstwa Akademickiego we Wrocławiu*, Wrocław: Papieski Wydział Teologiczny, pp. 35–36.

¹³ Szuba, L. (2002). *Polityka oświatowa państwa polskiego w latach 1944–1956*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL; Raina P. (1994). *Kościół w PRL. Lata 1944–1959*. t. I, Poznań: Polska Prowincja Dominikanów; Jaworska, K. (2013). Rola Kościoła katolickiego w integrowaniu społeczeństwa dolnośląskiego w latach 1945–1951. *Zeszyty Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej w Legnicy*, t. 9, pp. 8–19.

¹⁴ Davies, N. – Moorhouse, R. (2002). Op. cit., pp. 491–492.

¹⁵ Szwagrzyk, K. (1996). *Golgota wrocławska 1945–1956*. Wrocław: Telewizja Polska.

With this kind of support from the society, the Church fought not only for its place in the religious life of the citizens but also in the political one. The history of Polish universities, including the University of Wrocław, is closely related to the activities of the Church due to, among other things, the student participation in various academic ministries. Those who felt lost in the new and alien societal, political and cultural reality, sought the support and stability available in the Church, which provided spiritual guidance, material help and a feeling of security.

Academic ministries in post-war Poland could relate to their previous experiences from the 19th and 20th century, when the contemporary catholic academic organizations offered students the ability to expand their personal religiousness and Christian outlook on the world.¹⁶ Among these ministries, there was the Sodality of Our Lady Ministry of Academics created in Lwów (1889), Kraków (1891) and Warsaw (1916). In the interwar period, these ministries were functioning in all academic communities in Poland. The work done by these ministries was based around systematic meetings during which discussions and lectures were held. Over time, several sections were created to include other work.¹⁷ Another important ministry working in interwar Poland was the Catholic Academic Youth Society "Odrodzenie," ("Revival") which was tied to the Warsaw, Kraków and Wilno academic centers before the World War I. After Poland regained independence, the Society changed its policy into a catholic and a patriotic one, especially after merging with the academic organization Catholic National Youth (1929). The Society was fairly popular and influential among students. It aimed to introduce catholic principles into the way universities operate. Through meetings, the society increased the importance of national, educational and moral concepts, the Christian-social doctrine and also sport and artistic initiatives. The initiative came from the students, who did not work directly with priests.¹⁸ Another

¹⁶ Jakubiak, M. (2016). *Relacje państwo-Kościół na tle polityki oświatowo wychowawczej sanacji*. Warszawa: PWN; Świętostawski, W. (1927). Zadania uczelni akademickich jako ośrodków kształcenia mas młodzieży, *Nauka Polska*, t. 8.

¹⁷ Gajewski, S. (1993). *Chrześcijańskie organizacje akademickie w Polsce (1889–1939)*, Rzeszów: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, pp. 5–27; Gotąb, M. (1928). *Akademickie Sodalitje Mariańskie w Polsce. Rys historyczny ruchu i jego rola w życiu akademickim*. Lwów: Ossolineum.

¹⁸ Turowski, K. (1987). „Odrodzenie”. *Historia Stowarzyszenia Katolickiej Młodzieży Akademickiej*. Warszawa: Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych, pp. 14–52; *Czem jest Odrodzenie – Stowarzyszenie Młodzieży Akademickiej (1928)*. T. 2, Lublin: Uniwersytet [Lubelski]; Przybecki, A. (1999). *Między poczuciem zagrożenia a potrzebą obcości. Koncepcja duszpasterstwa akademickiego w Polsce po przełomie 1989 roku*, Poznań: UAM, Wydział Teologiczny, pp. 70–72.

significant student organization before World War II was the Academic Catholic Youth Association "Iuventus Christiana," which operated in Warsaw, Poznań, Wilno, Lwów and Kraków. Its aim was religious and societal formation, teaching critical and independent thinking as well as the courage to proclaim one's own belief. In addition to that, the organization also aimed to prepare students to pick their own approach to life. The organization had self-study and learning at its core and worked on various goals in smaller seminar groups. The role of priests was limited to that of advisors.¹⁹

In the interwar period, the Church had also maintained its activities through other catholic organizations: pastoral (e.g. the Academic Catholic Union in Lwów), charitable (e.g. Academic Charity Society "Pomoc Bliźniemu" ("Helping Your Neighbor) in Warsaw, Lwów and Lublin), mission (Academic Missions) or spiritual retreats (e.g. Spiritual Retreat Union of Saint Dominic in Lwów).

The first academic ministry that operated as a Church institution was created in Kraków through the actions of academic ministries of the Jagiellonian University in 1927 and in the Saint Anna Church in Warsaw in 1928. In the thirties, these institutions were present in all academic centers in Poland.²⁰

During the war, the work of ministries was either suspended (in Wilno, Poznań), conducted in secret (in Warsaw) or continued in a limited scope (Lwów, Kraków, Lublin).

After the war, the ministries could not continue operating in the same way because of the different political environment of the new Polish state. Over the course of 1945–1947, the reactivation and creation of new Catholic associations and academic ministries was possible thanks to the pre-war bill on academic associations from 1933 that was still in power at that time. Thanks to the bill, the Sodality of Our Lady Ministry of Academics "Iuventus Christiana" and the "Caritas Academica", created in Poznań in 1945, which conducted religious and societal activities, were able to operate. Its primary goal revolved around helping the poor and students affected by the war by giving out grants, scholarships, free meals, books and clothing and also by organizing preventoriums, common rooms, canteens or by helping students to get employment. Resources were gathered in street collections, charitable parties, sales of

¹⁹ Niwiński, M. (1932). *Iuventus Christiana*, *Przegląd Powszechny*. T. 194, nr 580.

²⁰ Przybecki, A. (1986). *Urzeczywistnianie się Kościoła w środowisku akademickim. W poszukiwaniu koncepcji duszpasterstwa studentów w Polsce*. Poznań: Papieski Wydział Teologiczny, p. 52.

Christmas trees, Palms and candles. The work of the "CA" was supported by the Norwegian Red Cross, the Polish Center of Blood Donation, Caritas, The Church, The Council of Polish Expatriates in the USA, social organizations and private donors.

One of the contemporary forms of Church activity in the academic societies at that time was setting up Institutes of Higher Religious Knowledge, which also operated in a few academic centers before the war. These Institutes partook in developing religiousness among students by preparing lectures and conferences on Christian philosophy and moral sciences. Additionally, the Institutes had also popularized religious press and books, helped secular teachers prepare for teaching religion and organized conferences for engaged couples.²¹

In the case of academic workers, some of them found their way to the Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs as a result of the "October Thaw" in 1956. The first clubs were created in Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań and Toruń. The Wrocław Club was created in 1958. The majority of their work was based around ecumenical and social activities and the German issues, which were very relevant for Wrocław.²²

As early as in 1946, the Catholic associations started to lose their privilege to freely operate at universities. Their place was taken by youth organizations mandated by the state: The Youth's Fight Union, The Union of Country Youth "Wici," The Union of Democratic Youth, The Organization of Youth of the Worker's University Society.²³

The activity of Catholic student organizations was coordinated by the academic ministry, which was officially recognized in 1946 by the Polish Episcopate as a Catholic institution. In the years 1945–1949, it was run in two ways: elite and mass. The elite way was conducted mainly through the Catholic student organizations, which were to be first revived and then integrated into academic life by the academic ministry. The mass way was targeted towards the entire academic community, mainly

²¹ Biedroń, T. (1991). *Organizacje młodzieży katolickiej w Polsce w latach 1945–1953*. Kraków: Znak; Bober, S. (2011). *Walka o duszę dzieci i w pierwszym dwudziestolecu Polski Ludowej*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.

²² *Pięćdziesięciolecie Klubu Inteligencji Katolickiej we Wrocławiu: wkład klubu w budowę postaw obywatelskich we Wrocławiu i na Dolnym Śląsku*. (2008). W. Wysoczyński (Ed.). Wrocław: Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej.

²³ „Jesteście naszą wielką szansą”. *Młodzież na rozstajach komunizmu 1944–1989*. (2009). P. Ceranka, S. Stępień (Ed.). Warszawa: IPN; *Oblicze ideologiczne szkoły polskiej w latach 1944–1955*. (2002). E. Walewander (Ed.). Lublin: „Bamka” Studio Komputerowo-Wydawnicze; Kochanowicz, J. (2000). *ZMP w terenie. Stalinowska próba modernizacji opornej rzeczywistości*, Warszawa: Trio.

through formation and religious work, including spiritual retreats, academic pilgrimages to Częstochowa, academic masses and meetings with famous priests.

The increasing conflict between the State and the Church gave start to a propaganda "battue" aimed against the Church. Priests were accused of political and economic crimes and the monitoring and arrests of priests started. The youth was being forced more and more often to participate in activities on Sundays to block them from participating in religious practices. The Union of Polish Youth became more active, and participation in this formation started to become, in many cases, mandatory. From 1947, the government wanted to limit the scope to which the Church participated in state celebrations.²⁴ In the same year, the autonomy of higher learning schools was lifted and the creation of the Polish United Workers' Party at the end of 1948 marked the intensification of an ideological fight between the communists and the only remaining independent social structure – the Roman Catholic Church. Released on August 5th, 1949, the decree on "the protection of freedom of conscience," was aimed at organizations that participated in the practice of religious cults and forced them to be formally legalized by enforcing them to deliver member lists to the government.²⁵ In response, the Church suspended the activities of all youth religious organizations, including the activities of the academic ministry. As a result, the academic community started organizing around churches, where, in addition to religious activities, there were also formation activities being carried out²⁶.

In 1953, the National Commission of Academic Ministry was created. The statutory document confirmed the inclusion of the ministry into the structure of the Church. Its goals included the organization of religious life in the academic community, ethics education and expanding the religious knowledge of the students. Additionally, the Commission also took care of academic boarding houses and charitable help. In the same year, the pastoral centers in Warsaw and Poznań were ordered to cease all activities.

²⁴ Ordyłowski, M. (2000). Władze komunistyczne wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1948. *Dolny Śląsk*, nr 8, p. 109–110; Jaworska, K. (2009). *Relacje między państwem a Kościołem katolickim w (archi)diecezji wrocławskiej w latach 1956–1974*. Legnica: Zeszyty Naukowe PWSZ w Legnicy, p. 78.

²⁵ Fijałkowska, B. (2001). *Partia wobec religii i Kościoła w PRL*, t. 1: 1944–1955. Olsztyn: Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski.

²⁶ Błasiak, D. (2003). *Duszpasterstwo akademickie jako środowisko społeczno-kulturowe. Proces stawania się członkiem grupy od „oni” do „my”*. Katowice: Księgarnia św. Jacka, pp. 37–43; Przybecki, A. (1999). *Między poczuciem zagrożenia ...* Op. cit. pp. 98–125.

In Wrocław, almost immediately after the cessation of hostilities, the Church started working in favor of the academic community. In 1945, there was one pastoral center operating in the city, and it was made into an official ministry only a year after that. It was organized by a monk – Father Stanisław Mirek, who came to Wrocław from Lwów and set up the ministry around the Jesuit university church. He continued his pre-war work in the parish of Saint Maciej, which also housed the university. Both these temples suffered heavy damage on Easter Monday of April 2nd, 1945, when the Soviet forces bombarded them. As a result, they had to be rebuilt.

The especially difficult conditions of living in the ruins of Wrocław meant that the students suffered and required some charitable help to be able to survive. Providing help for the students was made easier through the cooperation of Father Mirek and a Redemptorist priest, Father Marian Pirożyński, who had arrived in Wrocław in June, 1945. He became the first administrator of the Holy Family Parish. As early as in January, 1946, Father Pirożyński initiated a number of masses for students, first spiritual retreats and a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of the Virgin Mary in Bardo, in which around 300 young people participated. As the manager of the diocese Caritas²⁷ branch, he was able to restore the “Caritas Academica” organization. Thanks to that, he was able to organize three canteens, two academic libraries and, in February of 1946, he was able to open two student houses with 30 places each, which grew to 70 places each after some renovations. Thanks to the donations from UNRRA, he was able to clothe and feed the poorest and most needy students. He also financed their vacations.²⁸

Father Mirek had also developed ways to help students by including them in his priestly work. They continued a pre-war tradition and conducted collections in churches to gather funds that would be later used to run student canteens, to buy clothes for students, to pay for their medical treatment and vacation trips for the poorest students. Father Mirek also cultivated the pre-war traditions of Lwów and Warsaw and conducted priestly work among students in the form of lectures and spiritual retreats. In 1947, he started academic masses at 12:00 in the University Church.

In January 1950, Father Mirek was arrested. The apparent reason for the arrest was a letter he signed asking for permission to perform

²⁷ Janiak, E. (2000). *Dzieje i aktualna działalność „Caritas” Archidiecezji Wrocławskiej. Dolny Śląsk*, nr 8, pp. 168–169.

²⁸ Ciesielski, S. (1993). *Op. cit.* p. 177.

a collection for the sake of poor students. An inquest, lasting for more than a year, was eventually forfeited due to lack of evidence. However, during spring of the following year, the priest faced another baseless charge related to a collection for the cause of helping the poorest students who were “persecuted for their faith by the government, which took their scholarships, benefits, and free meals from them”.²⁹ During the interrogation, the priest was forced to stand up for several dozens of hours without being able to rest. He was also beaten. Eventually, the court sentenced him to one and half years of prison.

The Center of Academic Ministry of Father Marian Pirożyński was closed down by the government after the detention of Father Mirek in 1950.

In 1953, in addition to the Academic Ministry run by Jesuits, another ministry for students was set up in the Wrocław cathedral by Father Aleksander Zienkiewicz (often called “Uncle”), who was tied to Nowogródek before the war. The ministry received the small church of Saint Idzi as its headquarters. Initially, the ministry operated in secret and its activities were based around the Sunday mass, weekly lectures, spiritual retreats and summer trips to the sea. This secrecy lasted until October of 1956, when Bishop Bolesław Kominek was officially assigned to the Wrocław archdiocese.

Although the communist terror was toned down a little, the SB (Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) still interrogated priests and students, threatened and harassed them. Father Zienkiewicz³⁰ was also among the affected. Despite the threat of prison and high financial penalties, the priests still organized secret summer and winter camps, which helped to enrich the internal life of young people and served as a way to integrate the academic community together to a great degree.

In 1957, at Katedralna no. 4, the Catholic Scientific Institute was opened, which was to serve as a higher Catholic culture center. The students, along with the priests from the church of Saint Idzi, were moved there. When, in the next year, the Institute was closed down, a Catechetical Study remained there and, along with the students and Father Zienkiewicz, they created the Center of Academic Ministry (called “Four”). Since the ministry located in the University Church lost some of its power at that time, “Four” became the central place from which the academic ministry in Wrocław operated. Father

²⁹ Lubczyński, Z. (1999). In *Pięćdziesiąt lat Duszpasterstwa Akademickiego ...* Op. cit. p. 40.

³⁰ *Ksiądz Aleksander Zienkiewicz. Kaptan i wychowawca. (2001). Symposium w pięćdziesiątą rocznicę śmierci. Wrocław 18–19 listopada 2000 r.* Wrocław: Papieski Wydział Teologiczny.

Zienkiewicz used to mention that “the best youth from all over the city came to him and you could say that it was a renaissance of interesting people, ideas, initiatives, and interests, with systematic lectures and conferences. The students came en masse to participate in academic ministry masses and spiritual retreats in the cathedral”.³¹ Conservatories, lectures and conferences about theology, philosophy, society and history became the basis for intellectual formation. Work began in relation to the “Love, marriage, family” initiative. Meetings with remarkable people from different areas, e.g. Polish Primate Stefan Wyszyński, Bishop Karol Wojtyła, Father Franciszek Blachnicki (who created the Light-Life movement), writer Roman Brandstaetter, Wanda Póttawska and Elżbieta Sujak (medical doctors practicing family counseling) or Poles returning after spending years in soviet gulags, served as formational and culture-making experiences.

October of 1956 and March of 1968 served as a way to prepare for the “Solidarność” movement. After that, the Martial Law era was brought in. Wrocław students who participated in the academic ministry were a part of these events. The Church always stood closely behind them, against the communist violence, defending freedom and the subjectivity of the society. The academic priests played an important role in this time of turmoil. Father Zienkiewicz (1910–1995), an intellectual priest, mentor and a social-worker, is a perfect example of that stance. He stood hand-in-hand with students during the worst years of the Stalinist regime, celebrated with them the “October Thaw,” the release of the Polish Primate and the selection of cardinal Wojtyła to become the new Pope. He enjoyed the creation of “Solidarność” and, along with his student pupils, experienced the events past the 13th of December, 1981 to participate with the students in meetings with Pope John Paul 2nd and to learn what it meant to be free after 1989. When students finished their studies and left the academic ministry, he often performed wedding ceremonies for them and baptized their children or even grandchildren. He persisted in his service nearly to his last days, and his students persisted by his side when he was dying. He was known and is remembered by many citizens of Wrocław. His catchphrase was “Watch out! A person!” and he often quoted the words of Ludwik Hirszfel (1884–1954), a Polish doctor and microbiologist: “If you want to set someone on fire, you have to burn yourself” – which is a perfect testament to his dedication to his pastoral work for the sake of the academic community during the difficult time of communist enslavement. At the moment, there is an ongoing beatification process for Father Zienkiewicz.

³¹ Zienkiewicz, A. (1999). Zarys historii 30-lecia Centralnego Ośrodka Duszpasterstwa Akademickiego we Wrocławiu. In *Pięćdziesiąt lat...* Op. cit. pp. 84–85.