The Catholic Church in Siberia and its Educational Activities for the 19th Century Polish Exiles

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Polish 19th century exiles to Siberia are inseparably connected with the activity of the Catholic Church in the area, which was organized by the Mohyliv archdiocese with an archbishop in Sankt Petersburg. The two central Siberian Roman Catholic parishes (east in Irkutsk and west in Tomsk) were the first official organization for Poles living in the area. They played an important role in the life of a community of people sent away from home against their will, far away from home and their families. The parishes gave these people the ability to fulfil their religious needs and, at the same time, meant a part of their home country and freedom for these people. Thanks to the tremendous effort from Polish priests, who were often exiles themselves, there were libraries, orphanages, refuges, small schools and charitable societies organized in the parish.

Key words: 19th century; Siberia; Polish exiles; Catholic church; Education; Patronage

Poland entered the 21 century with memories of Siberian exiles that started in the 18th century and lasted, without a stop, throughout the entire 19th century. In the 20th century, Soviet deportations and gulags made their mark on another generation of Poles, who were transported east for gruesome exploitative work with the intent of extermination. The "Polish Sibir" was not limited to the geographical Siberia but also the broader Russian Empire area, including Caucasus, the steppes of Kazakhstan, and the Permian and Arkhangelsk (its European part) Governorates. There were Poles experiencing Russian exile as early as 16th century as prisoners of war during the era of Stefan Batory's war with Muscovy. However, the proper beginning to the series of Polish exiles is marked by the 18th century Bar Confederation (1768–1772), which was created by the Polish nobility against Russian guardianship and in defense of the catholic faith and freedom. As a result, more than 10000 Poles ended up in Russian exile. The next group of exiles originated from Tadeusz Kościuszko's soldiers, who fought to sustain the Polish state in 1794. After the loss of its independence (1795) the Commonwealth of Poland disappeared from the map of Europe for over 120 years. However, the fight for its independence continued and more Poles were sent beyond Ural as punishment. Among those, there were the Napoleonic era prisoners of war at the beginning of 19th century and, in the twenties of 19th century, the school youth and academic students from the Vilnius Educational Area (1803–1832) who were involved in patriotic conspiracies. Up until this point, around 70 thousand Polish patriots were sent to Sibir.

A new era in the history of Polish exiles was marked by the November Uprising (1830–1832). After its failure, the tsarist authorities began to use exile on a grander scale by force-drafting people to remote areas in deep Russia, to Siberian battalions, for drudgery and settlement. Only for the 1830–1835 years, it meant the exile of 30–40 thousands of Poles. Despite the failure of the military uprising and, as a result, far-reaching repressions, the idea of independent Poland was not forgotten. More and more Polish patriotic conspirators were sent to the Siberian exile, e.g. the partisans of lieutenant Józef Zaliwski (1833), the members of patriotic conspiracy of Szymon Konarski (1838) along with the members of Association of the Polish People. Among those sent beyond Ural in the forties of the 19th century, there were members of the peasant movement of father Piotr Ściegienny, members of the Gerwazy Gzowski association, students of the Warsaw gimnasium for the preparation of an assassination of Iwan Paskiewicz, who was a russian general and the governor of Polish Kingdom, the emigrants sold out by Austria from the era of 1830 uprising, the members of the following uprisings: Cracovian, Greater Poland, members of the conspiracy organization of Henryk Krajewski from Warsaw and Vilnius and patriots from the Lithuanian Association of Dalewski Brothers. The sixties of the 19th century were marked by another series of mass exiles of Poles to Sibir tied to patriotic manifestations (1861) and repressions after the fall of January Uprising (1863–1865). More than 30 thousands insurgents were exiled at that time, and often they were voluntarily followed by others. The insurgents were usually tried by war-time courts and came from different classes: nobility, peasantry, burgerhs and clergy. They were usually sentenced to drudgery in the mines of East Siberia, to heavy-duty military work in fortresses or in penal battalions with very strict regulations (where corporal punishment was allowed) or to settle.¹

¹ Jędrychowska, B. (2000). Polscy zestańcy na Syberii 1830–1883. Dziatalność pedagogiczna, oświatowa i kulturalna. Wroctaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wroctawskiego, pp. 21–26; Brus, A. – Kaczyńska, E. – Śliwowska, W. (1992). Zestanie i katorga na Syberii w dziejach Polaków 1815–1914. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 58–78.

The partition of Poland led to crucial changes on the political map of Central-East Europe. The Commonwealth of nobles ceased to exist and its land was annexed mostly by Russia. As early as 1772 around 1 million 300 thousand inhabitants of this area were deemed to be Russian subjects: among them, there were 900 thousand Catholics (Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics).² As a result, the Orthodox church authorities were tasked with organizing the spiritual life of Catholics in the entire Russian Empire in order to limit their ties to Rome as much as possible. At the same time, it was stated that the Catholic church in Russia was only "tolerated" and did not retain its previous rights. For this reason, the Roman Catholic Mohyliv Archdiocese with an archbishop in Sankt Petersburg was created in 1772. It encompassed all catholic parishes in the Russian Empire. As a result, it also encompassed all the Polish Catholics who were exiled to Siberia. Thanks to the fact that there were Polish diasporas created there, the possibility to create catholic parishes, houses of prayers and churches, which were often called Roman Catholic Orthodox churches, arose,

The foundation for the creation of the Roman Catholic Church's structure in Siberia were laid by the Jesuit mission from 1812, who ministered over a huge area of the Irkutsk and Yeniseysk Governorates, as well as Zabaykalsky and Yakutsk areas.³ In 1815, the Irkutsk mission was divided into a Tomsk branch, which ministered over the West Siberia, and Irkutsk over the lands of East Siberia. The Jesuits served spiritually until 1820, when the Tsar ordered them to leave Russia.

On the basis of truling of the Mohyliv administrator from 1834, the official division of Siberia onto two Catholic parishes was introduced: the west parish included the territories of the Tobolsk and Tomsk governorates, as well as the Omsk region (including the Petropavlovsk, Semipalatinsk and Ust Kamenogorsk regions, which are now located within Kazakhstan's borders), on the other hand the east parish (Irkutsk) included the territories of Yeniseysk and Irkutsk governorates. The first catholic church in the area was built in Irkutsk in 1825. It was a wooden temple with a brick-and-mortar foundation. The parish office, library and lodging for priests was located in the outbuildings of the church. The building burned down in the great fire of Irkutsk on the 4th of July 1879. However, thanks to the collection from Catholics from all over the Russian

² Loret, M. (1910), Kościół katolicki a Katarzyna II: 1772–1784. Kraków–Warszawa, pp. 20–21.

³ Zamek-Gliszczyńska, A. (1992). Misja jezuicka w Irkucku 1811–1820. *Przegląd Powszechny*, nr 2, pp. 289–298.

Empire, the building was rebuilt in 1881-1885 as a neo-gothic church, which exists to this day.⁴ The Irkutsk parish gave start to the parishes west of Irkutsk in the Krasnoyarsk Krai and to the east in Zabaykalsky Krai. These parishes grew into branches on the verge of 19th and 20th century and became autonomous Roman Catholic parishes before 1914.⁵

One of the more influential churches in the West Siberia was the first Siberian brick-and-mortar temple built by Bernardines in Tomsk in 1833.⁶ The construction of the next Roman Catholic parish church in West Siberia was completed in Tobolsk in 1848.⁷ Over time, more churches appeared under the Mohyliv diocese, which was created as a result of Catherine the 2^{nd's} actions.

Roman Catholic parishes, including the Siberian ones, were the first official organizations for Poles living in the area. The parishes allowed them to fulfil their spiritual needs as well as were considered a piece of homeland and freedom. Despite the level of religious involvement of the exiles, the churches were a place where Catholics from the Polish Kingdom and lands annexed by Russia (Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine) could meet. Along with the parish organizations, the churches played an important role in the life of the community that was forced to live in exile, away from their homes and family.

The scope of activities undertaken by each of the Siberian parishes was largely dependant on the involvement of the parson (superior). The first parson of the Irkutsk parish, father Modest Romaszkiewicz was replaced in 1830 by father Dionizy Milewski and, after three years, he was replaced by father Dezydery Haciski who held the function for 22 years, right until his death in 1855. All three priests belonged to the congregation of Bernardines. At a later date, the duties of the parson were given to Krzysztof Maria Szwermicki (1812–1894), a priest from the congregation of Marian Fathers who was living there in exile. At first, this appointment was only temporary. In 1856, he was appointed permanently. His 38-year tenure as a parson of the Irkutsk church could

⁴ Masiarz, W. (1996). Zarys dziejów kościoła i parafii rzymskokatolickiej w Irkucku 1812–1937. *Zestaniec*, nr 1; Burdziej, B. (1987). Ksiądz Krzysztof Szwernicki – duszpasterz Sybiru. *Przegląd Powszechny*, nr 1.

⁵ Masiarz, W. (2002). Powstanie i rozwój pierwszych parafii rzymskokatolickich na Syberii Wschodniej (1805–1937), In Kuczyński, A. (Eds.) *Kościót katolicki na Syberii. Historia. Wspótczesność. Przysztość.* Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Silesia, pp. 125–140.

⁶ Ostrowskij, B. (1890). Tomskaja rimsko-katoliczeskaja cerkow (kratki oczerk jeja soorużenija. *Sibirskij wiestnik*, nr 67.

⁷ Masiarz, W. (2012). Istorija kostieła i polskoj diaspory w Tobolskie: 1838–1922. Moskwa: Nauka.

be considered extremely vital. He was an outstanding and well-educated priest who knew 5 foreign languages and had surdopedagogical qualifications (he was allowed to teach to the deaf). During his stay in the Mariampol monastery (Augustów governorate) he was charged of conspiracy and tried under military court in 1846. After his banishment to the Irkutsk governorate, he took on the deceased father Haciski's duties and, like his predecessor, he also fulfilled them right until his death.⁸ Despite the fact that the amnesty manifesto of 1856 gave him the right to return to his home, he decided to stay in Siberia of his own volition to continue serving the spiritual needs of the exiled Poles.⁹

The Irkutsk diocese, especially during the tenure of father Szwermicki, played a considerable role not only in the religious life of Polish exiles. Its parson, who observed the gradual demoralization and religious listlessness of orphaned children in the rough Siberian circumstances, organized a school in 1858 by the Irkutsk church and, three years after that, a nursery for Polish orphans, the children of poor Polish exiles and the children of exiled criminals. He was able to run these institutions thanks to the help of other priests, exiles as well as the help from the home country.¹⁰ On his own, he taught the children religion lessons, reading, writing and arithmetics. He was aiming to help the orphans first and foremost. Because of his worry about their well-being: the possibility of starvation, homelessness, alcoholism, converting to Orthodoxy and russification, he usually came from his journeys around East Siberia "with a few orphans collected over the way, which were later brought on and located in foster families as best as possible".¹¹ In 1861, there were seven wards living at the presbytery who had their livelihoods provided. In 1868, father Szwermicki took care and provided for several boys, and a few dozen of them was able to find work in the Irkutsk shoe-making factory thanks to him. Thanks to his calls for financial supports targeted at his fellow countrymen and the collections in the home country, he was able to provide for several dozen wards in the nursery. Warsaw newspapers wrote about the collections, both the financial ones as well

⁸ Szostakowicz, B. (1998). Dzieje irkuckiej parafii rzymsko-katolickiej do początków wieku XX (na podstawie materiałów Archiwum Państwowego Obwodu Irkuckiego), In Kuczyński (Eds.) *Syberia w historii i kulturze narodu polskiego*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Silesia, pp. 106–115.

⁹ Śliwowska, W. (1998). Zestańcy polscy w Imperium Rosyjskim w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku. Stownik biograficzny. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, pp. 603–605.

¹⁰ Gazeta Polska (1861), nr 235.

¹¹ Jędrychowska, B. (2005). Wszystkim obcy i cudzy. Feliks Zienkowicz i jego listy z Syberii 1864–1881. Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Ossolineum, p. 269.

as the material ones.¹² When in 1862 a fire consumed a part of the nursery as well as its equipment, thanks to the appeal of the Gazeta Warszawska (Warsaw Newspaper) a lot of donations were made for "the creator of nursery in Irkutsk, father Szwermicki", and the readers were informed about the amount of money collected several times.¹³

The school and the nursery operated well into 1894, when their creator had died. They probably operated later on as well since father Szwermicki, in his last will and testament, gave a part of his assets for the poor and the rest for the church and the school.¹⁴

The parson took care of older exiles too. A famous violinist and composer Wolfgang Szczepkowski died in the parson's Irkutsk parish home in 1857 from heart and lung diseases. Out of gratitude, he gave several hundred rubles for the Iktusk church.¹⁵ Szwermicki also took care of a sick and old Russian Decembrist Pavel Duncov-Vygotsky, who lived near the catholic church since 1871 and died there ten years later.¹⁶

The Irkutsk Roman Catholic parish played a considerable role in the life of Polish exiles in terms of educational work. Father Szwermicki, in 1857, transferred a private library to the church's grounds, which was gifted to him by Polish exiles returning to the home country after their amnesty in 1856. Thanks to this fact, the library had around three thousand books, both Polish and foreign,¹⁷ and also newspapers and magazines, among which there were seven Polish titles present. In 1859, the parish was subscribed to 12 of these titles in total¹⁸. The library served the entire Irkutsk community of Poles, which was around 150-strong at that time. The next batch of exiles, who found themselves sent to the city after the uprising in 1863 had to remake the library almost from nothing since the parson "had lent the entire library without a receipt [...] and it was not returned".¹⁹ As a result, the books and newspapers had to

¹² Burdziej, B. (1987). Ksiądz Krzysztof Szwernicki – duszpasterz Sybiru. Przegląd Powszechny, nr 1.

¹³ *Gazeta Warszawska* (1863), nr 14 (19. l. 1863), nr 28 (5. ll. 1863), nr 67 (23. lll. 1863).

¹⁴ Pietrzak, J. S. (1928). O. Krzysztof Marya Szwermicki. Kraków, p. 40.

¹⁵ Nowiński, F. (1995). Polacy na Syberii Wschodniej. Zestańcy polityczni w okresie międzypowstaniowym. Gdański: Gdańskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, p. 227.

¹⁶ Mironienko, S. W. Diekabristy. Biograficzeskij sprawocznik (1988). Moskwa: Nauka, pp. 46–47.

¹⁷ Talko-Hryncewicz, J. (1930). *Z przeżytych dni (1850–1908)*. Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej, p. 233.

¹⁸ Giller, A. (1870). Z wygnania. T. 1. Lwów: F. H. Richter, pp. 222–224.

¹⁹ Czapski, E. (1893). *Ze wspomnień sybirskiego zestańca. Edward Czapski* (1819–1888). Kraków: Spółka Wydawnicza, p. 82.

be imported again, mostly from the home country. In 1889, the library included around 1000 books (usually in Polish) and was located, as previously, on the grounds of the catholic church's parish.

Father Szwermicki was also known for his stern educational activities in terms of the exiles' abstinence and gambling habits. Alcohol and card gambling posed a big threat for the Polish exiles. The Irkutsk parson described these addictions as "a plague of the society, the start of all evil, the source of misery". In his priestly work, he stressed abstinence from "card games" and participation in alcoholic libations.²⁰ However, his attempt to organize a society for abstinence among the exiles did not succeed, mostly because of the lack of willingness of the exiled intelligentsia.²¹

At the beginning of the 19th century, the number of Catholics in West Siberia was not large. The members of the Orthodox church made up around 80 to 100% of populace in larger urban areas. Two years after the arrival of Jesuits to Tomsk (1816), in a group of around 150 Catholics, there were Polish exiles and also local administrative and military officials, who came to the city on official business. The friars received a brick-andmortar building, in which they organized a chapel. They were also assigned land, on which, in the thirties of the 19th century, the first brickand-mortar Catholic church in Siberia was built. Over the period of three years, they also managed to set up the first Catholic cemetery and a farm outside city borders with dwellings and apiaries. In the short period during their stay in the area, the primary goal of the Jesuits was to deliver spiritual services to Siberian Catholics.²²

After the Jesuits left Russia, Bernardines took their place in Tomsk. Father Jakub Jurewicz (1820–1825) became the first parson of the Tomsk parish. However, this office was mostly handled by father Remigiusz Apanasewicz from 1822 to 1834. The Bernardines stayed in the same house as their predecessors until the Spring flood of 1828. After the church building was destroyed by the cataclysm, the friars had to move out to a rented quarters. Thanks to the efforts of father Apanasewicz, as well as the help of catholic parishioners (who were also exiles), a new

²⁰ Pietrzak, J. S. (1928). Op. cit. p. 20.

²¹ Dybowski, B. (1930). Pamiętnik dra Benedykta Dybowskiego od roku 1862 zacząwszy do roku 1878. Lwów: Zakład im. Ossolińskich, p. 35.

²² Caban, W. – Legieć, J. (2017). Tworzenie się wspólnoty katolickiej w guberni tomskiej (lata 1806–1820). Misja jezuitów. In Caban, W. – Legieć, J. (Eds.) Kościół katolicki na Syberii Zachodniej w XIX i początkach XX wieku (szkice historyczne, materiały, dokumenty). Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, pp. 82–101.

church building was built in 1832. Four years after that, a brick-andmortar parish building was built next to the church. At that time, father Apanasewicz, who was sick and suspected of participation in the Omsk conspiracy (1833), along with father Dionizy Milewski, had left Tomsk and went to their monasteries in Mohylov and Vitebsk. They were replaced by Dominicans: Hieronim Grinczel (1834–1861) and Rudolf Jurgilewicz (1834–1852).

Similar to Jesuits, the Bernardines primarily focused on fulfilling the religious needs of the parishioners in the vast area of the West Siberia parish. They often ventured outside of Tomsk for pastoral visits to reach Catholics in need of spiritual rites. They held masses, accepted confessions, ministered over marriages, baptized children, participated in burial rites. However, the biggest merit in terms of helping Polish exiles in Tomsk and in the Tomsk parish should be assigned to father Walerian Gromadzki (1835–1917). He was sentenced to exile to Siberia in 1861 for delivering a patriotic sermon. He left it as "the father of all west-siberian Catholics" in 1899. At first, he stayed in Omsk, where he had managed to build a small catholic church.²³ As early as that time, he was involved in the activities of a society which aimed to organize self-help in a group of around 300 Polish exiles.²⁴ In 1868, he was allowed to move to Tomsk, where a secret police oversee was placed on him. As the helper of the Tomsk parson, he placed especially a lot of effort on pastoral work among the Poles exiled to the Tomsk governorate after the January Uprising. He supported them primarily in religious terms, however, he also provided educational help. In 1870, he issued an official request to the local authorities to be allowed to take care of the orphaned catholic children. The governor did not allow it and reminded the priest about the existing ban that prevented him from teaching children. At the same time, he ordered the parson father Justyn Zacharewicz to place his subordinate under supervision and to prohibit him from giving sermons and from leaving the city. However, father Gromadzki did not heed to the orders of the Governor and started teaching in the homes of Polish exiles.²⁵ He continued the work of his predecessor, father Józef Dawidowicz, who also as an exile arrived in Tomsk in 1866. In a rented building on the outskirts

²³ Liebiediewa, N. I. (2001). Kostieł i katoliczeskaja obszczina Omska: istoriczeskij oczerk. In Sibirsko-polskaja istorija i sowriemiennost: aktualnyje woprosy. Irkutsk, pp. 181–187.

²⁴ Skok, H. (1974). Polacy nad Bajkatem 1863–1883. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, p. 213.

²⁵ Ostromęcka, J. (2004). Pamiętnik. In Brus, A. (Eds.) *Pamiętniki z lat 1862–1911.* Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, pp. 186.

of Tomsk, he set up an illegal nursery and a school for the children of poor Catholics and orphans of Polish exiles. Several dozen boys and girls stayed there under the care of priests who prepared them for taking their first communion. Apart from catechism, the priests also taught the children to read and write in Polish. Polish female exiles helped the priests with educating the girls. The school and the nursery were supported mainly from the donations from the home country and father Dawidowicz himself supported it by trading in wood. As a result of a tip-off, he was arrested and sent to Kainsk. He continued teaching there by educating catholic children.²⁶ After the transfer of Tomsk parson Zacharewicz in 1883 to Sankt Petersburg, father Gromadzki was nominated by the Mohyliv archbishop to the parson of the Tomsk parish. He would go on to fill that position for 16 more years. It was at that time that the church in Tomsk "would become not only a religious and national center but also a cultural and communal one"27 and the father Walerian Gromadzki himself "received great respect in Siberia for his communal and nationalistic activities". In the years of 1890-1894, he completely renovated the church and cleaned the catholic cemetery. He opened a Polish library and a reading room in the parish building. He also opened a Roman Catholic Charitable Society by the church of The Care of the Holy Mother in Tomsk in 1893, which helped to build a refuge for Polish orphans of exiles in the years of 1897-1899. Gromadzki, along with the members of the society, viewed their charitable activities not only as help for the poor, the old and the orphans, but also as a service for the wellbeing of the catholic community and as a form of integration of the catholic and national minority.

In 1899, the sick father Gromadzki received a permission to leave Tomsk for a holiday in the home country. The parishioners funded a scholarship in his name for the newly-created nursery for orphans.²⁸ The care for their fate was one of the key tasks of the society. Thanks to all the petitions to the authorities and monetary collections, the society built a new wooden building with 16 rooms in front of the church in 1900 for that purpose. The nursery accepted Roman Catholic children, aged four to twelve, after inquiring about their livelihood situation or the material

²⁶ Dawidowicz, J. S. (1901). Z listów sybirskiego misjonarza X. Józefa Sylwestra Dawidowicza. Kraków: Spółka Wydawnicza Polska, pp. 69, 74; Tabeńska, E. (1897). Z doli i niewoli. Wspomnienia wygnanki. Kraków: W. Kornecki, p. 102.

²⁷ Maciesza, A. (1934). Dzieje kolonii polskiej w Tomsku. Poznań: Drukarnia Nakładowa, p. 114.

²⁸ Talko-Hryncewicz J. (1930). Op. cit., pp. 102, 228.

situation of their guardians. The wards were supplied with food, clothing and school aids. Depending on their age and health status, some children performed basic cleaning work. Over time, the nursery started its own school, in which the Polish language was also taught. In 1908, an annex was built next to the nursery with the aim of using it as a refuge for older people (1908). In the first years of its activity, people who were exiled to Siberia for their participation in the January Uprising found shelter there. They were provided with a roof over their heads, food and the people running the institution collected funds for their return to the home country.

After the 1917 revolution, the Roman Catholic Society of Charity in Tomsk ceased its activities.²⁹

As the Polish exiles reached Siberia, and after the arrival of the voluntary settlers on the verge of 19th and 20th century, within the borders of two vast parishes (Irkutsk and Tomsk), new parishes sprung to life. Their primary goal was to provide religious services for Catholics, as well as providing basic educational needs as well as the creation of a community which aimed to make the exile more bearable. The Catholic church was the beacon of Polishness on Siberia at that time. It was the single place that reminded the exiles what they had lost and, at the same time, the religious activities united the exiles in prayers for "a return to the homeland, a return to free and independent Poland".³⁰

²⁹ Niedzieluk, T. (2002). Rzymskokatolickie organizacje dobroczynne i kulturalnooświatowe na Syberii Zachodniej na przetomie XIX i XX w. In Kuczyński, A. (Eds.) *Kościót katolicki na Syberii. Historia. Wspótczesność. Przysztość.* Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Silesia, pp. 157–170; Caban, W. – Legieć, J. (2017). Dziatalność dobroczynna katolików tomskich (druga potowa XIX – początek XX wieku). In Caban, W. – Legieć, J. (Eds.). Op. cit., pp. 175–190.

³⁰ Ruciński, J. (1895). Konarszczyk 1838–1878. Pamiętniki z zestania na Sybir Justyniana Rucińskiego. Lwów: Drukarnia i Litografia Pillera i Spółki, pp. 110–111.