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THE IMAGE OF PARISH CLERGY
BASED ON WINCENY DE SEVE'S INSPECTION (1608–1609)
—SELECTED ASPECTS

Poland belongs to the so-called “younger Europe,” being one of the states which—compared to the already well-established western and southern states—built their structures and resolved to accept Christianity a little later. By Mieszko I's decision, it was not only the religion that was chosen. As a result, Poland was admitted into a specific civilizational sphere—Latin, Western, or Mediterranean.

The carrier of this religion and the entire cultural heritage connected with Christianisation were clergy. In the case of Poland, the clergy who were initially arriving from other countries constituted a small group in this functional society. They formed the elite, used by the authorities not only for strictly spiritual tasks, but also for organizing and managing state structures. At the early stage churches were few, concentrated mainly in centres of power, so the extent of their influence was not great.

This situation began to change significantly in the 13th century. This was caused by many diverse factors: the emancipation and strengthening of church institutions, including their growing independence from the secular authority; social and economic changes and development; the emergence of new types of religious orders, i.e. mendicant orders, action-oriented and working among people; the consolidation of Christianity in Poland, which also meant a greater number of secular and religious clergy; the familiarity of society with their presence and the rites they introduced; the increased

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number of churches and monasteries; and, very importantly, the growth of the parish network.¹

Internal Christianization became an extremely important task, that is, elucidating the core of the Christian religion or at least its fundamental and precepts. For centuries, Poland was commonly subjected to external Christianization, which perhaps only slightly changed the mindset and attitudes of its inhabitants, living by the old rules and practicing old habits. They only adapted their life to certain external forms, according to the top-down requirements issued by the authorities, also secular ones, to prohibitions and orders, often without any grasp of the reasons.

However, in order to embrace the whole nation with a better, more organized and more outreaching pastoral care, the country needed efficient parishes.

The parish is a unit located at the bottom of church hierarchy, yet it is most directly in touch with the faithful, thus exerting the greatest influence on them. Most people, especially those living at some distance from larger centres, had little opportunity to meet a member of the chapter or a bishop, even once in a lifetime. An ordinary person might sometimes come into contact with the monastery and monks, but above all his or her most immediate link was with the parish church, which was expected to be in a location that the faithful could reach easily. The distance to the parish church in the Gniezno archdeaconry of the Post-Tridentine period, addressed by the article, ranged from two to six kilometres on average, while the mean size of the parishes in the discussed Holy Trinity Deanery was 42 km², 41 in Saints Peter and Paul's, 66 in Łekno, 49 in Sompolno.²

¹ For detailed information about the medieval history of the Church and Christianization in Poland, see for example *Do roku 1764*, part 1 entitled *Do roku 1504*. Edited by Bolesław Kumor, Zdzisław Obertyński, and Kazimierz Dola (Poznań–Warszawa: Pallottinum, 1974), vol. 1 of *Historia Kościoła w Polsce*. Jerzy KŁOCZOWSKI, *Wspólnoty zakonne w średniowiecznej Polsce* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010); Jerzy RAJMAN, "Kościół państwowy i prywatny, X–XII wiek," in *Dzieje Kościoła w Polsce*, edited by Andrzej Wieniec (Warszawa: PWN, 2008), 10–89; Jerzy RAJMAN, "Wolność Kościoła, XIII wiek," in *Dzieje Kościoła*, 92–129; Jerzy RAJMAN, "Pod monarszym patronatem," in *Dzieje Kościoła*, 132–197; Stanisław SZCZUR, *Historia Polski. Średniowiecze* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002); Eugeniusz WIŚNIEWSKI, *Parafie w średniowiecznej Polsce. Struktura i funkcje społeczne* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2004).

² Marian ALEKSANDROWICZ, *Archidiakoniat gnieźnieński w latach 1706–1721* (Lublin, 1973, doctoral dissertation, author's typescript), 155–158; Stanisław LITAK, *Atlas Kościoła łacińskiego w Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w XVIII wieku* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2006), 86–91 (data on the Gniezno archdeaconry, including a comparison with other areas).

The importance of the parish was emphasized by the Fourth Lateran Council held in 1215. The Council of Trent, meeting in the 16th century, also put emphasis on its proper functioning. The role of the parish in the Middle Ages and the modern era was to reach out to all the faithful with pastoral care and educational action: teaching and enforcing the basic truths of faith, instilling knowledge of the ritual, behaviour in church, specific habits, formation of morals and customs. The parish also had social roles to perform, such as the maintenance of schools and charity work including provision of hospital care. The parish was also in charge of fraternities. The parish church was also a centre of culture and art and, to a greater or lesser extent, an intellectual centre,³ especially in rural areas. It would also determine a specific rhythm of time. Moreover, the parish influenced life in its secular, family and public, daily and festive spheres. It was also from the parish church that information, the latest news or guidelines came from; it was here that the working of the world was explained, shaping people's world views and horizons. The parish was a natural centre for bringing together a specific local community, creating various types of internal ties, going far beyond the liturgical role within the sacred space.⁴

In addition, the church, cemetery, and the religious space for various purposes was used as a venue for social gatherings, exchange of information, and doing business of all sorts. In turn, the existence of the parish itself also meant that typical material issues had to be dealt with: the movable and immovable property of the church and the clergy, which had to be taken care of, the fees charged, monetary transactions, the financial side of various institutions such as schools or hospitals, etc. The parish was also buildings, livestock and people working there, just like a typical farm. This situation sometimes required a typically secular relationship to be developed between the clergy and the faithful. Conflicts and disputes occurred, too.

Using the definition developed by Eugeniusz Wiśniowski, we can say that “the parish is an institution composed of many different elements: church,

³ For more information about the parish and its role in the Middle Ages and modernity in Poland, see Eugeniusz WIŚNIEWSKI and Stanisław Litak, *Parafie w Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku. Struktura, funkcje społeczno-religijne i edukacyjne* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2004).

⁴ For the relationship between religion and sociology, see, among others, *Leksykon socjologii religii. Zjawiska—badania—teorie*, edited by Maria LIBISZOWSKA-ŻÓŁTKOWSKA and Janusz MARIANŃSKI (Warszawa: Verbinum, 2004); Władysław PIWOWARSKI, *Socjologia religii* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 2000); Francois Houtart, editor, *Socjologia religii. Wprowadzenie*, translated by Zofia Skórzyńska and Krystyna Wróblewska (Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy ZNAK, 1962).

«cura animarum», church jurisdiction, parish district, the faithful, the *omnis utriusque sexus* obligation, revenue of the church and priest, or the priest's residence."⁵ The existence of the Church implies a hierarchical structure, wealth, specific authority, but also a community of people who make it up—clergy and the faithful. Clergy plays a vital role in this.

In old-time Poland there was parish clergy—a parish priest (*plebanus*), a vicar, sometimes an altarist or a mansionary chaplain, and church staff: a teacher, organist, and sexton. Given such a significant role of the parish, the attitude of those figures was very important because there must be no discrepancy between the word they taught and their deeds.

In the Catholic Church, teaching by examples of one's own life had a long and very important tradition. It should be taken into account, however, that the clergy of former Poland in charge of a parish were rarely elite, and the smaller and poorer the parish was, the lesser the requirements for the clergy living off such a benefice were. In addition, there was the right of presentation. Also, we need to be aware of shortages of clergy, especially well-educated and presenting an adequate standard of living. During the Old Polish period, would-be clergy men roaming the country were a nuisance, who could not put down roots anywhere for long and presented a potential threat, sometimes ending up in groups of marginalised people.⁶

The subsequent centuries of the Middle Ages brought an increase in clerical standards in Poland, as well as an increase in the number of the clergy and, as a result, better functioning of both old and newly created church units. This was influenced by the developing schooling system—cathedral, collegiate, and parish schools, as well as universities that were increasingly available. In the case of the Polish state, the end of the medieval era signified development in various fields. At the same time, however, the irregularities which testified to the growing problems of the Church as a whole were on the rise, such as a decline in morality among clergy and their secularization, poverty and the insufficient numbers of the lower clergy. On the other hand, the secular society was also changing. Its expectations were much higher, also in relation to the clergy, who were supposed to be role models.

Criticism of the Church and efforts to repair it emerged in the 16th century as the Reformation and the birth of new sections within Western Christianity.

⁵ Eugeniusz WIŚNIEWSKI, *Parafie*, 18.

⁶ Jan KRACIK, *Prawie wielebni* (Kraków: Petrus, 2011).

Humanism, the basis of the Renaissance and Reformation changed the face of Catholicism in Poland. Some parishes were taken over by Protestants and staffed by their ministers, which is also mentioned in the inspection mentioned in the article title.⁷ Some Catholic priests became acquainted with innovative currents, which had its practical dimension—Stanisław Orzechowski would be a relevant example.⁸ Ecclesiastical benefices and a career in this institution could be a kind of reward to the laity for their merits, as exemplified by the story of Andrzej Krzycki and his literary rival, Jan Dantyszek.⁹ Jan Kochanowski was granted a parish benefice in Zwoleń, although he was never a clergyman and was never ordained.

I have deliberately raised issues concerning the periods sometimes removed from the 17th century because in my opinion they constitute a process and very important context for the parish clergy in Poland in the era of the Church reform. On the one hand, there were centuries-old dependencies, *status quo* and old habits, later consolidated by the Reformation and humanism in the 16th century. On the other hand, there appeared new demands and challenges facing the clergy.

The Council of Trent, taking place in the years 1545–1563 and being one of the most important chapters of Church history, had a very important role to play—to clearly establish dogmas and worship, to renew and improve the functioning of church structures and organizations, and to properly educate the clergy.¹⁰ King Zygmunt August accepted its resolutions in 1564, and the Polish clergy a little later, in 1577.¹¹

The newly introduced, extended control system involved visitations of individual church units, archdeaconries and deaneries, conducted by appropriate

⁷ ARCHDIOCESAN ARCHIVE OF GNEZNO, ARCHIVE OF THE GENERAL CONSISTORY, *Wizytacja archidiaconatu gnieźnieńskiego Wincentego de Seve 1608–1609*, file ref. no. E 40 [henceforth quoted as AAG, ACons, E 40], sheets 31v–32, 83, 267v, 270–270v, 272v, 324, 325v, 326.

⁸ Jerzy ZIOMEK, *Renesans* (Warszawa: PWN, 1995), 196–204.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 82–86; Piotr NITECKI, *Biskupi Kościoła w Polsce. Słownik biograficzny* (Warszawa: Ośrodek Dokumentacji Studiów Społecznych, 1992), 45, 115–116.

¹⁰ *Lateran V, Trydent, Watykan I. (1511–1870)*, edited by Arkadiusz Baron and Henryk Pietras (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2007), 197–866. Vol. 4/1–4/2 (1511–1870) of *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*.

¹¹ For the effects of the adoption of the reform in Poland, see, among others: Andrzej BRUŹDZIŃSKI, *Działalność prymasa Stanisława Karnkowskiego w zakresie wprowadzania uchwały Soboru Trydenckiego w Polsce 1581–1603* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Papieskiej Akademii Teologicznej, 1996); Tadeusz GLEMMMA, Marian BANASZAK, and Bolesław KUMOR, “Przyjęcie reformy trydenckiej w Kościele polskim,” in *Historia Kościoła*, vol. 1/2, 173–207; Elżbieta E. WRÓBEL, “Kościół w szlacheckim państwie. XVII wiek,” in *Dzieje Kościoła*, 228–248.

superiors. An inspection of this kind would leave behind books recording the actual state of affairs in a given area verified against the required norms. They had a specific structure, dependent on the type of information collected. Nowadays it is a very important source of information about the history of the Church in former Poland.¹²

The visitation, falling within the scope of the presented article, dates back to 1608–1609. The priests described in it were installed in benefices at various times—the last few years or even end of the 16th century. Thus, the book is an excellent source of information on customs in this landmark era of transition between the old order and the new one, whose implementation had just started.

The visitation concerned the Gniezno archdeaconry and, judging by its recorded outcomes, it was conducted very meticulously by Archdeacon Wincenty de Seve. This is the first control of the archdeaconry which yielded information of this kind. The book describes each parish, showing the following elements: type of the place—village, town, settlement, or ownership; the church—its invocation and the body of the building; the staffing of the clerical posts—personal data, procedure of taking up the benefice, the date of its acceptance, the right of presentation; the territorial reach of the parish; conditions of storing the Eucharist, holy water and oils; place of storing keys, for example those to the tabernacle; the presence, condition and record form of the parish register; information about possible altar services, foundations, indulgences, fraternities, hospital; information about the bells and belfry, sacristy, cemetery, organs, crosses and banners for processions; the condition of the church interior, paraments, and the library; description of the house and buildings belonging to the priests and church staff; information about parishioners, i.e. whether they confessed and received the Holy Communion, whether any adulterers, excommunicated individuals or heretics lived in the parish. The account of each parish ends with a list of all irregularities detected. The inspectors paid a lot of attention to the clergy. The staff was also scrutinised: the teacher, cantor, organist; the existence of a belfry man and a sexton was taken note of.

For the purposes of the article, only selected deaneries of the Gniezno archdeaconate were chosen to fit in the space permitted by the article form.

¹² The principles of visitation were laid down by the Council of Trent—*Dokumenty soborów*, pp. 739–741, 749. For detailed information on the importance of the visitation for historical research, see for example Stanisław LITAK, “Visiting files of the parish from XVI–XVIII century as a historical source,” *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 5, no. 3 (1962): 41–58.

These will be: Holy Trinity Deanery, covering the most important parish of Gniezno and its surroundings; St Peter's Deanery, also belonging to Gniezno but less important; the deanery of Łekno: a decent unit with many parishes and a fair number of towns (including e.g. Kcynia or Wągrowiec); and finally the deanery of Sompolno, one of the least developed and not in the best condition.

The Council of Trent introduced the following requirements for the parish clergy: the obligation to receive holy orders as strictly defined, the residence order, its control and the necessity to obtain consent for combining benefices, the appropriate form of their assumption, appointment of a temporary administrator of a benefice in the absence of the parish priest, administration of the sacraments, celebrating Mass in the appropriate form, the obligation to teach the faithful, giving sermons, and having appropriate education. The Council also introduced punishments for clerical misconduct, scandals, various offences, or concubinage.¹³

The visitation of the Gniezno Archdeaconry at the end of the first decade of the 17th century lay within the framework of the Council's recommendations concerning parish clergy. The visitation records contain information of the parish priest, his vicars and temporary administrators with respect to the procedure of assuming a benefice, the obligation to exercise worship and *cura animarum*, the catechesis of the faithful, conducting Easter confession and administering communion, residence with the church, keeping the parish registry. It provides data concerning the buildings in the care of the clergy. It also describes the attitude of the benefice holders towards matters of estate and economy. The inspection also verified the qualifications of the clergy—their intellectual level, knowledge of the practices and theory required by the church, the books in their possession, and whether the one who was nominated to hear confessions of parishioners confessed himself and with whom. Also, information on the character, morality and conduct of the clergy was collected. It was also investigated whether they took care to dress as appropriate and keep tonsures to distinguish themselves from the laity.

Adam Nakielski, the parish priest of the village of Chojna, *legitime ordinatus*, was very close to the ideal. He was instituted by the owner's presentation, taking up his office on 14 July 1603, and he held relevant documents to prove that. Just as it was prescribed, he fulfilled his residence commendably

¹³ Individual provisions address the proper functioning of the parish and its clergy, see *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*, vol. 4/1–4/2, pp. 369, 617–623, 739–743, 747, 755–759, 765–769, 825–829, 833 and others.

with the church, living in a good and comfortable house. He had a separate house for a vicar, but he did not employ one. The building was in a state of disrepair but it was occupied by the rector of the school.

The *cultus divinus* was perceived as excellent. The parish priest always celebrated *Matutinum cum vespis* on Sundays and feast days and never omitted Mass with a sermon. No irregularities in the sermons delivered to the faithful were found. After the sermon, Father Adam would explain and teach his parishioners the rudiments of the faith.¹⁴ The priest administered the sacraments as appropriately as it was possible, which, according to the report, above all suggested his concern for the necessity of baptism and confession during the Easter Season and in the hour of death, as well as the appropriate form of marriage preceded by banns. His *cura pastoralis* was impeccable. The only minor deficiencies were noted in the manner of storing the sacraments, but the latter were in the best possible order. In addition, the priest recited the canonical hours and had a breviary. As expected, he himself confessed with Prior Andrzej Kcyński.

Adam Nakielski also took care of the prescribed costume and tonsure, while for many centuries the enforcement of this recommendation encountered serious difficulties. In addition, the priest repaired and decorated the church building beautifully.

Apart from a handful of very minor matters concerning the buildings and their equipment, no irregularities were found. The priest was judged to have done an excellent job. However, since nothing was mentioned about his knowledge, conduct and personal life, it can be assumed that those aspects probably did not raise any doubts.¹⁵

Also, the visitators reviewed the priest of Żydów very positively, since he held residence, led an exemplary life, and was concerned about the matters of worship and proper parish pastoral care. Thus, no sloppiness was noticed in his recitation of canonical hours, giving sermons, teaching the basics of the faith, prayers, announcing feasts and fasting prescribed by the Church. It was emphasised that no one would die in that parish without baptism and communion. The priest often confessed the faithful; he also confessed himself, going to see Gniezno penitentiaries for this purpose. He also made sure his apparel was appropriate and wore the mandatory tonsure.¹⁶

¹⁴ According to the visitor, this was understood as the catechism, the basic prayers, the Ten Commandments.

¹⁵ For all information about Adam Nakielski, see AAG, ACons, E 40, sheets 60v–61v.

¹⁶ AAG, ACons, E 40, sheet 149.

Such ideals or near ideals were not too many. In fact, they are exceptions to the general rule. It must be admitted, however, that the average level of the clergy working in selected deaneries of the Gniezno archdeaconry was quite good. However, any attempt at evaluation runs into the problem of considerable ambiguity and diversity of individual elements mentioned by the visitators compiling descriptions of individual priests, a catalogue of their virtues and flaws. However, it is possible to indicate some general characteristics of this majority.

It was made up of decent clergy, so to speak, who were not fully able to discharge their obligations well. Typically, there were no major problems with the so-called administration of the sacraments (baptism, Holy Communion, and confession)¹⁷. However, the evaluation showed problems with regard to the forms of worship used, the required number and quality of church services. The point is that solemn feasts and Sundays were usually dealt with by celebrating Mass with a sermon.¹⁸ Devotions on other days were probably not held as a rule, since their absence or presence was noticed.¹⁹ The deficiencies noted concerned the other expectations—first of all the absence of *Matutinum* with vespers,²⁰ underscored in the case of the exemplary parish priest Adam Nakielski. It would be noticed sometimes that the priest “recites canonical hours” and sometimes “has a breviary” with him²¹—so it might not have been the rule. The accounts compiled by the visitators usually considered the following: *neglectus cultus divinus* with the proper administration of the sacraments at the same time.²² However, the appropriate form of worship and sacrament administration are both noted equally frequently.²³ The decline visible in various areas did occur, understandably, when the parish had no priest in charge of it—through vacancy or lack of residence.²⁴

On the other hand, there were many indications that the social educational campaign was carried out properly: giving sermons, and then explaining and teaching the most important prayers and foundations of the faith.²⁵

¹⁷ Ibid., e.g. 41, 173, 175v-176, 184v.

¹⁸ Ibid., e.g. 34, 35v, 47, 58v, 71v, 235v, 241.

¹⁹ Ibid., e.g. 63, 70, 143, 147v, 151v, 162, 173, 232, 241.

²⁰ Ibid., e.g. 153v, 165v, 173v, 232v, 236, 239.

²¹ Ibid., e.g. 39v, 155, 162, 229v, 234.

²² Ibid., e.g. 147-147v, 151v, 153, 165.

²³ Ibid., e.g. 38v, 41, 46, 51, 55, 61v, 65, 75, 78, 82v, 149, 155.

²⁴ Ibid., e.g. 157-157v, 170v, 182v-183v, 230-230v, 236v-238.

²⁵ Ibid. 149, 155, 159v, 162, 227, 229v.

Also, two combined elements were noted, i.e. proper pastoral care with deficiencies in another area. For even these decent clerics were described as churls, who did not read or study, and simply did not have the adequate level of knowledge, nor did they know the current ritual of Mass. These objections concerning the lack of knowledge and sophistication also applied to priests whose life was seen as exemplary.²⁶ The state of the archive was also examined and it often turned out that the parish lacked the books required for its proper operation²⁷ in order to guarantee the implementation of new requirements, for example regarding forms of worship. It happened, therefore, that individuals living their lives commendably were not able to fulfil all the recommendations concerning liturgy and various types of services.

For a long time, the question of an adequate intellectual level was problematic in the work of the clergy of the lowest tier. Admittedly, the Council of Trent ordered that a seminary be established in each diocese,²⁸ but in Poland at the beginning of the 17th century it was still a thing of the future, although the first schools of this type, run by the Jesuits, appeared already in 1565.²⁹ However, the needs were much greater than those numbers of the alumni could handle. Various facilities of higher and secondary education were available, but intellectuals or well-educated people did not necessarily see their future careers in a parish, especially an unattractive one.

A common issue noted in the post-inspection records compiled by Wincenty de Seve was the keeping of BDM registers. In some cases there were no such books at all, but even where they existed, some defects were often observed, for example only baptismal books existed or an incorrect form of notation was used.³⁰

The inspection of the archdeaconry run by de Seve also noted how the parish clergy fulfilled their duty of their own confession. In the case of this “decent” group, such confession did not present a problem for the majority, while some of them went to confession either rarely or it was not known with whom they confessed their sins.³¹

²⁶ Ibid., e.g. 40, 46, 57-57v, 79v, 159v, 250.

²⁷ Ibid., e.g. 43v, 81, 151v-152, 180.

²⁸ *Dokumenty soborów*, 705-713 (canon 18, year 1563).

²⁹ Anna JABŁOŃSKA, *Funkcje społeczne parafii archidiaconatu gnieźnieńskiego w XVII wieku* (Kielce: UJK, 2013), 101-103; Marian ALEKSANDROWICZ, “Początkowe dzieje seminarium duchownego w Gnieźnie (1602-1718),” *Nasza Przyszłość* 24 (1966): 167-183; Marian ALEKSANDROWICZ, “Wychowawcy i wychowankowie seminarium gnieźnieńskiego w latach 1602-1718,” *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* 12, no. 4 (1965): 111-131.

³⁰ AAG, ACons, E 40, e.g. 25v, 36, 46v, 72v, 149v, 154, 164.

³¹ Ibid., e.g. 40, 47v, 57, 245v; 41v, 81v, 152.

From the perspective of the proper functioning of the Church as a structure, the procedure of staffing benefices was an important aspect, which was checked during the inspection. In the case of the Gniezno archdeaconry, save for certain omissions,³² no gross irregularities were detected. In parishes which were vacated by the death, voluntary resignation or, sporadically, removal of the parish priest, attempts were made to fill the post with successors in accordance with the applicable procedure.³³ There were also attempts to mitigate the effects of a vacant benefice by employing a temporary administrator or a vicar or to provide minimum pastoral care in a given place.³⁴ In the case of dependent units such as oratoria, *sacella*, or filial churches, they were usually in the care of priests from some other parish.³⁵ All parish priests, on the other hand, were properly ordained as presbyters.³⁶

For the proper execution of the various tasks assigned to a parish, it was necessary for the parish's superior to be present at all times. In the case of the deaneries in question, residence was a common phenomenon. Cases of its absence were sometimes due to interesting reasons. For example, on one occasion the parish priest of the Słupia parish (rarely sober, by the way) was wandering around the village because his proper accommodation with the church was occupied by the owner of the village after his own house had burnt down. On another occasion, a religious priest who held the post of parish priest in Tarnowa, residing permanently in his monastery in Wągrowiec, was excused by his prior.³⁷ The reason for not residing was also the accumulation of benefices and possession of those which definitely prevailed over the parish ones. For example, Łukasz Gaietius, a penitentiary from Gniezno and the guardian of St Martha's Hospital, was a rare guest in his parish of St Laurentius in Gniezno. Also the parish priest of Jarząbkowo did not show much concern about his parishioners because as a Poznań canon he resided with the local cathedral. Such a situation caused a lot of harm to the faithful. For the most part, they did not know how to make the sign of the Cross, they died without confession and communion.³⁸ On the

³² Ibid., e.g. 33, 156, 236v.

³³ Ibid., e.g. k. 33, 45–45v, 50, 71, 140v, 148, 150v, 160–160v, 231 and others.

³⁴ Ibid., e.g. 40, 45, 59, 72–72v, 149v, 164, 236v, 238 and others.

³⁵ Ibid., e.g. 28, 32, 69, 149v.

³⁶ Ibid., e.g. k. 25v, 26v, 34v, 57v, 140v, 160, 226 and others.

³⁷ Ibid., 76–76v; 52, 53.

³⁸ Ibid., 147–147v; 157–157v, 158v. On Łukasz Gaietius, see Anna JABŁOŃSKA, . "XVII-wieczny szpital św. Marty w Gnieźnie w świetle księgi rachunkowej," *Nasza Przeszłość* 109 (2008): 128–131.

other hand, an altarist from Słupca, residing with the local church, often came to his parish in Ślesina to take care of its good functioning.³⁹

Since permanent parish residence was so important, the visitators of the Gniezno archdeaconry also paid attention to clerical homes, which formed part of the church estate. The vast majority of these houses were in good condition, occasionally requiring some repairs. Not very frequently, buildings were in ruin, burnt down, freshly refurbished or erected.⁴⁰

Permanent residence and living at the parish church were also special in the sense that the mode of life of the clergy could be observed by the faithful. However, their life did not always meet the official requirements. The next group, after the largest “decent” group of the clergy in point, were those who, for various reasons, had as many virtues as faults, or those whose faults prevailed. The catalogue of chief offences included two equal problems: women and drunkenness.

In Poland, a serious struggle against clerical marriage and concubinage began in the 13th century as a result of reforms implemented at that time. Marriages of priests were became illegal. However, if someone was still in a relationship with a woman or in cohabitation, his children were treated as illegitimate offspring. However, this ban was introduced gradually and without any brutal pressure.⁴¹ Over the following centuries and during the 16th-century turmoil, some clerics still lived in the close circle of their families, ran a farm and faced the same problems of secular life as their parishioners. The Council of Trent and its “Rules for the treatment of priests living in concubinage” categorically and under penalty “forbid all priests to keep concubines or other women in the house or outside of it, who may give rise to suspicion.”⁴²

In the Post-Tridentine era, in order to emphasize the proper moral attitude of the clergy, de Seve’s visitation reports said, among other things, that the parish priest “shall not keep a suspicious woman in the house.” However, their presence was noticed in 15 cases, which constituted about 19% of the group under scrutiny. Some of them concerned only suspicions or reports of this presence—it is impossible to say to what degree they were correct. For example, the parish priest from Morzysław refuted allegations, explaining

³⁹ AAG, ACons, E 40, k. 229v.

⁴⁰ Ibid., e.g. 25, 27v, 29v, 41, 47, 157, 164v, 230v; 52, 55, 57, 235v.

⁴¹ Adam KRAWIEC, *Seksualność w średniowiecznej Polsce* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2003), 86–95, 111–129.

⁴² Session 25/A: IV (Decree on General Reform, 14), in: *Dokumenty soborów*, pp. 834–837.

that his suspicious Jadwiga was married to a decrepit beggar, and that the priest accepted her only as a servant in the household. Curiously, a year earlier that same parish priest had lived with a woman whom he later sent away pregnant.⁴³

Some of them lived openly with women who acted as mistresses or concubines. A “scandalous” life was led, for example, by a parish priest of the Sokolnik parish, who shared life with a woman for four years.⁴⁴ In some cases it is possible to see a borderline of sorts between “private” and “professional” life as there were also priests among those who properly discharged their pastoral and liturgical obligations.⁴⁵ Such was the parish priest Jabłkowo, who nevertheless “lived scandalously” with a woman. However, at the request of the archdeacon, he sent her away although she was pregnant by him.⁴⁶ Similarly, at the order of his superior, the temporary administrator from Miesciska parted with Katarzyna, a fact which was communicated by the parish priest from Kcynia (allegedly)—where in turn the “young daughter of a notary from town” was living.⁴⁷

In the Gniezno archdeaconry, at the beginning of the 17th century, however, there were also some clergy who did not observe the orders and calls of the dean or archdeacon, not wanting to or not intending to get rid of the person with whom they shared more than just the bed. Among such individuals was the otherwise decent parish priest Maciej Poznański, or the prudent priest from Panigródz, who was diligent in his duties but kept “a suspicious young woman at home.”⁴⁸ In Mąkolin, the village owner repeatedly urged the parish priest to send away the woman with whom he lived, but the clergyman ignored these calls.⁴⁹ The case of a “normal” family was that of the parish priest of Racięcice, who took up residence there in 1598 and was with one Małgorzata, who never married, and in 1608 she was described as an elderly person. The couple were accompanied by two almost adult daughters of Małgorzata and a 6-year-old boy, who the parish priest would call son.⁵⁰ Therefore, Andrzej and Małgorzata must have lived together for a long time, at least a dozen years or so, creating a union. On the other hand, the mode of

⁴³ AAG, ACons, E 40, 253v.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27v.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, e.g. 35v, 38–38v.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35v.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41, 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 57v–59, 65.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

life of the parish priest of Dembno indicated that he belonged both to the clergy and to the nobility. He was an “ancient man” who was most often accompanied by another nobility as well as officially living with a woman and had a son by her.⁵¹

Another man, the parish priest in Dziewierzew (also referred to as a drunkard) had such a fierce argument with the village owner, who was also the patron of the parish church, that he was forced to leave the parish. The escalation of the situation and source of disagreement was reputedly due to the presence of a certain woman in the priest’s house.⁵² For the parish priest from Kołdrąbie, who happened to be a quick-tempered drunkard, the acquaintance—which was openly called concubinage—with a certain Jadwiga, whom he “kept in Rogów,” ended badly. He did not want to break up with her, so he was deprived of his parish as punishment. The parish priest of Dziekanowice shared a similar fate.⁵³

The information presented above on the misdeeds of the parish clergy of the Gniezno archdeaconry also shows that, in line with the precepts of the Church reform, a system of supervision was being launched in that area, intended to safeguard the proper conduct and morals of the local clergy. The relations between parish priests and owners of the village were revealed, the latter having the right of presentation. Disputes would arise on account of women living with parish priests, whereas in certain cases it was the owner who demanded the clergy to behave properly, so there was an element of supervision exercised not only by the archdeacon or dean, who acted by the power of their offices and obligations.

The second main offence of the clergy of these deaneries was weakness for alcohol. The already mentioned priest who had been deprived of his accommodation and was now wandering around the village, Walenty from Słupy, was rarely sober, while the parish priest of Janowiec would get drunk with vodka almost every day⁵⁴. Parish priests and vicars would get themselves intoxicated not only in the quiet of their homes but also visited the inn, where they sometimes entertained themselves in the company of their parishioners, and they sometimes achieved a state which “was close to being disgraceful.”⁵⁵ While under the influence of alcohol, the clergy would

⁵¹ Ibid., 241.

⁵² Ibid., 78.

⁵³ Ibid., 45v, 169v.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 76v, 43.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 189, 36v–37, 152, 187, 41v.

engage in brawls, and they were prone to violence and arguments. Some of them also lived with women, as has already been mentioned.

In some cases, a liking for alcohol also caused parish duties to be neglected.⁵⁶ This was what happened to the parish priest from Niechanów, a drunkard frequenting the inn, where he was once found by a servant of the archdeacon looking for him.⁵⁷ Some, however, especially those who would drink at home, tried to discharge their parish obligations as best as possible.⁵⁸

The intoxicating drinks used by the clergy of the archdeaconry were beer, wine and vodka.⁵⁹ Drunkenness took place at home or in public places. In old-time Poland, alcohol abuse was a problem not only for priests but also for the whole society and its various strata, a phenomenon increasing over time.

Some cases of misconduct and misbehaviour were more complicated and were also linked to the age of a particular cleric. The superior of the parish in Wągrowiec, "already an old man," transferred his concern for the church on his three vicars. In turn they were *scandalosi* and *excessimi*: Marcin lived with a woman and frequented the inn, Jan had a cohabiting woman and four children and often drank at the inn, and Benedykt was a drunkard.⁶⁰ An old parish priest from Wszeradów tried to carry out his tasks, but neither had the required knowledge nor he knew the ceremonial, and he celebrated services without an indult which was necessary because a so-called heretic was buried at the church. He was also seen as an uncouth and dirty man.⁶¹ Another individual, aged 60, was vulgar, scruffy, drank and would spend his time at the inn, where he also provoked brawls; he rarely celebrated Mass; he was negligent in his pastoral duties and did not have any necessary knowledge required of a priest.⁶² In turn, the parish priest of Licheń, hard of hearing and with a shaking hand, was described by the visitor as a stupid drunkard, scruff, and simpleton. Nonetheless, the priest tried, without much success though and with very fragmentary knowledge, to fulfil his basic duties.⁶³

⁵⁶ Ibid., e.g. 48v, 72.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 57v.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 43v, 176, 185, 187.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 55v.

⁶¹ Ibid., 70v.

⁶² Ibid., 72.

⁶³ Ibid., 232.

Abuse of alcohol was often accompanied by improper discharge of clerical duties, ignorance, sloppiness, improper appearance, belligerence and forbidden contacts with women.

So, the cases of negligence noted by the Gniezno visitor at the beginning of the 17th century included not decent enough clothes, generally scruffy appearance (which predominantly concerned drunkards), lack of concern for the building and furnishings of the church and the so-called “family.” There were also priests who were very quarrelsome by nature, looking for trouble without alcohol and those who were described as indolent, lazy, and sluggish.⁶⁴

The temporary administrator of Mieścisko, Stanisław Kłlecki, overstepped all boundaries by, among other things, starting excesses and leading a scandalous life, getting drunk and keeping a “suspicious woman” at home, whom he then sent away. He also exceeded his powers by marrying a couple of noble persons from another parish without a permission. For that, he was punished by the official and had to do penance. He did promise though to improve his life and morals.⁶⁵

The extreme case of inappropriate behaviour was demonstrated by a parish priest from Gosławice, who not only did not reside, had no dispensation to join benefices, lived with a woman and their child, did not take care of the church and kept a vicar—a drunkard wandering about villages—but he also confessed an excommunicated person, married a couple of relatives, and even married a peasant and a young girl, although the former already had a wife in Czarnków. And to make things worse, his vicar was a crude drunkard leading a scandalous life.⁶⁶

Interestingly, those irregularities, negligence and immoral life were relatively frequent among vicars, especially where they were deprived of proper legal supervision and among those who were in charge of the parish for someone else and were not necessarily officially appointed as temporary administrators. In the group of vicars, there were also those who showed disobedience towards their parish priests.⁶⁷

Various weaknesses and misdeeds, incompatible with the model of a clerical person, were nothing unusual and limited to the Gniezno archdeaconry only and the early 17th century—they were a feature of different epochs,

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 254-256.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 178v.

different places and different clerics.⁶⁸ Poland's civilizational "younger age" and its peripheral location in relation to Rome were visible in lesser emphasis laid on the introduction and enforcement of orders and prohibitions concerning the clergy. Christian humanism and optimism were also important, which caused that certain processes and their adaptation to the local Polish conditions progressed smoothly.⁶⁹ For many centuries, the Polish secular parish clergy led a lifestyle which did not differ considerably from that of the faithful. This applied to various fields such as activities and entertainment, family, farming, pastimes and even clothes worn. The clergy shaped their parishioners, but the parishioners also influenced the clergy, who operated in a secular environment.

For the purposes of this article, we have analysed data concerning parish priests, vicars and temporary administrators of 75 Catholic parishes functioning at that time in the area of four deaneries, apart from oratories, hospital parishes and chapels. On this basis, the following picture can be painted. Single figures here can be treated as very close to the ideal. The largest group consists of priests representing an average level—decent but with certain shortcomings. Slightly less numerous, but also a visible group are those who had problems with women (about 19%), only alcohol or alcohol and women (about 27%—with some individuals falling into the former category). Other weak points are offences occurring in the medium-level group. And finally, at the opposite end far from the idea are those individuals whose life, morals and attitude to duties were unacceptable in many ways.

Our analysis of Wincenty de Seve's visitation from the beginning of the 17th century, done with the aim of gaining an overall picture of the clergy described in the visitation records, shows three important things. Firstly, the secular lifestyle was still strong. Secondly, it can be seen that the recommendations of the Council of Trent were not just a dead letter and the Church made attempts to put them into practice. Thirdly, we can see how the elements of the old and new lifestyles intertwine and how the top-down recommendations of the authorities clash with the reality of daily life.

⁶⁸ Anna KOWALSKA-PIETRZAK, *W kręgu średniowiecznego duchowieństwa łęczyckiego* (Łódź–Łęczyca: Wydawnictwo UŁ, 2012); Andrzej RADZIWIŃSKI, *Życie i obyczajowość średniowiecznego duchowieństwa* (Warszawa: DiG, 2002); Jerzy RAJMAN, *Wolność Kościoła*, 102–105.

⁶⁹ Jerzy KŁOCZOWSKI, *Dzieje chrześcijaństwa polskiego*, supplemented ed. (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2007), 132–133, 145, 149, 177.

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THE IMAGE OF PARISH CLERGY BASED ON WINCENTY DE SEVE'S INSPECTION
(1608–1609)—SELECTED ASPECTS

Summary

The article discusses an important period in Church history, namely the so-called Church reform. It occurred after King Zygmunt August (1564) and the Polish clergy (1577) had adopted the resolutions of the Council of Trent. The implementation of those resolutions started at the turn of the 17th century. One of the proposals was to renew the life of clergy—their attitude to obligations and improvement of morals, customs and even appearance. Wincenty de Seve's inspection in the years 1608–1609 concerned the area of the archdeaconry of Gniezno. For the purposes of this article, its four deaneries were analysed, i.e. Holy Trinity, Saints Peter and Paul, Łekno and Sompolno.

The main purpose of the visitation was to inspect the parish, which played an extremely important role in society. The article discusses the image of the parish clergy emerging from the findings of the inspection, which took into account guidelines for the reform. This image shows that both those who were role models and those who drastically violated various norms were exceptions. The most numerous group were priests, who mostly met the requirements, but various irregularities were noticeable. The biggest problems of the next, slightly smaller group were women and alcohol. The offences also included ignorance, sloppiness and inappropriate clothing.

The inspection shows that at the beginning of the 17th century, attempts were made to implement the reform of parish clergy, but traces of old habits and new requirements were still to go hand in hand.

Key words: Council of Trent; Church reform; parish clergy; inspection; Wielkopolska; Archdiocese of Gniezno.

Translated by Tomasz Pałkowski



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