

Tomasz Domański
Institute of National Remembrance
Sub-Branch in Kielce

CONVERSIONS OF JEWS TO CATHOLICISM IN THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT: THE EXAMPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF KIELCE

While pursuing the anti-Jewish policy and, ultimately, the *Endlösung* during the Second World War, the German authorities in the occupied Polish territories issued a considerable number of various orders defining the situation of the Jewish population. These affected almost the smallest details of existence. Some of these documents, which even forbade trading with Jews or offering them any help either directly or indirectly, also applied to the rest of the subject population.¹

The ordinances organising Jewish life that the German occupying authorities issued in accordance with their racial policy also affected the religious sphere, concerning issues such as conversion to Catholicism or other Christian denominations. Both in practice and in theory, the German authorities treated Jews who converted to Christianity as persons who were still subject to the anti-Jewish racial laws. Starting at the ghettoisation stage, Jews who had converted

¹ From the latest literature on the subject, see M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, 'Relacje polsko-żydowskie w okresie II wojny światowej. Kontekst i uwarunkowania', in *Represje za pomoc Żydom na okupowanych ziemiach polskich w czasie II wojny światowej*, ed. M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, Warszawa 2019, pp. 7–63; B. Musiał (in collaboration with O. Musiał), *Kto dopomoże Żydowi...*, Poznań 2019, and others.

to Catholicism were still forced to live in ghettos, and the issues concerning the presence of Catholic Jews inside the Warsaw ghetto are well known. The problem then arose of enabling them to carry out their religious practices.² Similar requests to the German authorities were also made by Jewish Catholics from other ghettos in the General Government, including Jews from Kielce, who arrived there as part of a wave of people displaced from Vienna.³ In June 1942, the German authorities refused to allow them to participate in Catholic services.⁴ Ultimately, as a consequence of the German orders, these converts were murdered on an equal footing with the rest of the Jewish population.

The conversion of Jews to Catholicism during the German occupation also took place in the Kielce region, and although the history of the diocese of Kielce in that period has already been frequently discussed,⁵ this particular issue has not appeared in historians' considerations at all. Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap in the research through quantitative and qualitative analysis. Attention will be paid to the scale of the phenomenon, the motivations driving the Jews who wanted to convert to Catholicism, and the position of the church authorities towards the requests they received. In the latter case, the tangible question of the various phases of German policy towards the Jews was also taken into account. Above all, however, this article will present the role of the German occupying authorities, whose orders decisively determined the possibility of conversion in the General Government. For this purpose, source texts in the form of three small 'legal' acts have been attached to the article.

² K. Madaj, *Proboszcz getta*, Warszawa 2010.

³ For more on the fate of Jewish deportees from Vienna, see G. Zeisler, *Zza drutów kieleckiego getta*, ed. J. Daniel, R. Nowakowski, Kielce 2012.

⁴ See Archiwum Diecezji Kieleckiej (Archives of the Kielce Diocese; hereinafter: ADK), *Acta Kurialne Ogólne* (General Curial Files; hereinafter: AKO), OE-2/2, Letter from the Catholic Jews to the Kielce Curia, Kielce, 4 June 1942, pp. 162–63.

⁵ M. Paulewicz, 'Diecezja kielecka', in *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją hitlerowską 1939–1945*, ed. Z. Zieliński, Warszawa 1982, pp. 234–52; D. Olszewski, *Diecezja kielecka. Zarys dziejów 1805–1987*, Kielce 1988; A. Szafrński, 'Diecezja kielecka w XX wieku', in *Księga jubileuszu stulecia Diecezji Kieleckiej (1883–1983)*, Kielce 1986; L. Müllerowa, 'Organizacja terytorialna diecezji kieleckiej', *ibid.*; T. Gocel, *Duszpasterstwo w diecezji kieleckiej w latach II wojny światowej 1939–1945*, Kielce 2012. See also biographical works: J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek biskup kielecki 1895–1963*, Kielce 2008; J. Gapys, 'Bp Czesław Kaczmarek jako patron i organizator akcji charytatywnej duchowieństwa w Diecezji Kieleckiej 1939–1945', in *Trzy rocznice. Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek 1895–1963*, ed. J. Gapys (in collaboration with S. Gawlik 'Natasza'), Kielce 2014, pp. 79–104.

Contrary to the belief, which existed until recently, that Jewish interest in conversion increased during the German occupation and the ongoing Holocaust,⁶ a preliminary diagnosis suggests that in the diocese of Kielce, which was led during the entire period under discussion by Bp. Czesław Kaczmarek, no increase in the number of requests was recorded. For the period from September 1939 to October 1942, a total of 25 applications (concerning 44 people), sent from various parishes of the Kielce diocese to the curia with a request for baptism, have been found. Most often these applications were written by individual parish priests, and less often by those directly involved. The state of the documentation as preserved does not allow us to give an unambiguous answer as to whether the statistics presented are complete and final.⁷ We have detailed data on the number of baptisms in relation to the cathedral parish, the second largest in Kielce at that time.⁸ All the Jews baptised in this parish first addressed their requests to the Kielce curia, which issued the final consent. During the Second World War, from 1 September 1939 to 10 October 1942, a total of nine baptisms of Jews were recorded in the *Liber Conversorum*, i.e. one less than in the entire interwar period.⁹ For the Jewish community, which until 1942 numbered around 100,000 people in the geographical area of the diocese of Kielce (c. 27,000 in Kielce alone), the figure of 44 people applying for conversion constituted a number which was less than marginal.¹⁰ The negligible phenomenon of conversion undoubtedly confirms the Jews' deep religiousness and their deeply rooted attachment to tradition.¹¹ In the Kielce region, most Jews lived according to Hasidic principles, mainly in small towns and

⁶ J. Wysocki, 'Archidiecezja warszawska', in *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją hitlerowską 1939–1945*, ed. Z. Zieliński, Warszawa 1982, p. 280.

⁷ ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2 and OJ-9/1.

⁸ During this period, there were a total of six parishes in Kielce: the cathedral parish, St Wojciech (Adalbert), Holy Cross, Christ the King, the garrison church, and the church at Karczówka. See ADK, AKO, OW-A/34, List of priests and parishes in the Kielce powiat, Kielce, 27 March 1940, p. 200v. The cathedral parish numbered around 11,000 parishioners (*ibid.*).

⁹ Files of the Cathedral Parish in Kielce, *Liber Conversorum* 1905–, unpaginated.

¹⁰ Relations in the Archdiocese of Kraków were quite similar. See M. Grądzka-Rejak, "Od dłuższego czasu straciłem wszelki kontakt z żydami i żydostwem". Neofici w okupowanym Krakowie w świetle materiałów Archiwum Kurii Metropolitalnej w Krakowie', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2017, no. 13, p. 344.

¹¹ An unknown author using the initials EG, quoted by Marian Fuks, wrote on this subject in *Gazeta Żydowska*. See M. Fuks, 'Życie w gettach Generalnej Guberni na tle *Gazety Żydowskiej* 1940–1942', *Biuletyn ŻIH* 1971, no. 4 (80), p. 26.

settlements.¹² No wonder, then, that some of the neophytes came from immigrant populations, forced to live in the region by the circumstances of the war. Certainly, the phenomenon of acculturation and assimilation must have played a large role in the decision to convert, just as their previous contact with Polish culture undoubtedly facilitated their decision to convert to Catholicism.

In the initial period of the German occupation, the position of the Kielce diocesan authorities as addressed to the clergy regarding the consent to the baptism of Jews was a continuation of their pre-war stance. Priests submitting requests were, according to 'standard procedure', ordered to check and certify whether the candidate's motivation was due to the desire to 'save the soul' (*ex unico salutis desiderio*) or "for the sake of one's own life or out of material calculations".¹³ The position of the curia resulted from the general practice of the Catholic Church, which was quite clearly described in the letter to Fr. Tadeusz Kozłowski, dean and parish priest in Piekoszów, written by Bp. Franciszek Sonik (then vicar-general of the diocese): "Because, when welcoming people of the Mosaic faith into the bosom of the Catholic Church, both the Holy See and the bishops ordinary advise parish priests to be very prudent, especially nowadays, when the material and utilitarian element plays a predominant role".¹⁴

In fact, in Kielce, these guidelines were not strictly followed. The readiness of catechumens for baptism, as it appears from an analysis of the correspondence between the parishes and the curia, was mainly determined by individual parish priests who 'examined' candidates on the spot. For example, in May 1940, the diocesan authorities received applications from the following parishes: Blessed Wincenty Kadłubek at Jędrzejów, the cathedral parish, and Our Lady, Queen of the Polish Crown (the garrison church) in Kielce, and the parish of Piekoszów. In turn, in July 1940, two requests were received from the cathedral parish in Kielce;

¹² This issue already has its own literature. See M. Pawlina-Meducka, 'Zmierch świętokrzyskiego sztetl (1918–1939)', in *Życie codzienne społeczności żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich do 1942 roku*, ed. E. Majcher-Ociesa, B. Wojciechowska, Kielce 2013, pp. 169–80; R. Renz, 'Polacy i Żydzi w małych miasteczkach województwa kieleckiego w okresie międzywojennym. Wzajemne relacje', *Biuletyn Kwartalny RTN* 1999, vol. 34, pp. 33–41.

¹³ ADK, AKO, OJ–9/1, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 4 May 1940, unpagged.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter from the Diocesan Curia of Kielce to Fr. Tadeusz Kozłowski, dean and parish priest at Piekoszów, Kielce, 8 May 1940, unpagged.

and in September from the parish of the Holy Cross in Kielce. The curia gave its consent to the baptisms in the same month (sometimes the answer even bore the same date as the application). All the documents began with the words:

Since the priest [...] recognises [the applicant] as sufficiently prepared and enlightened in the principles of the Roman Catholic faith, and is convinced that the mentioned [...] wishes to be baptised only for the salvation of his soul, and not for the sake of his own life or out of material considerations, the Diocesan Authority finds no obstacles to baptising him according to the provisions of the Roman Ritual.¹⁵

The processing of Kaila Perla Z's application took place at an equally rapid pace. The letter to the curia was received on 5 May 1941, and the positive response to the parish priest in Skala was dated 8 May. It seems that in this particular situation the rush resulted from the poor health of the 'petitioner'.¹⁶ The personal convictions of individual priests regarding the baptism of Jews were also important, as they could extend the procedure if they chose.¹⁷

¹⁵ ADK, AKO, OJ-9/1, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 4 May 1940, unpagged; *ibid.*, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to Fr. Tadeusz Kozłowski, dean and parish priest at Piekoszów, Kielce, 17 May 1940, unpagged; *ibid.*, Letter of Bp. F. Sonik to Fr. F. Wajda, Kielce, 10 May 1940, unpagged; *ibid.*, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 16 July 1940, unpagged. *ibid.*, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 23 July 1940, unpagged. *ibid.*, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 19 September 1940, unpagged.

¹⁶ The request clearly indicated that the catechumen was in poor health (with a heart defect) and asked that the baptism take place in Skałka near Ojców (ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Request of the parish priest in Skałka to the Kielce ordinariate, Skałka, 2 May 1941, unpagged; *ibid.*, Letter from the vicar general of the Kielce diocese to the parish priest in Skałka, Kielce, 8 May 1941, unpagged).

¹⁷ In a letter addressed to the Kielce curia, Fr. Zdun, the parish priest in Brzesko-Nowe (Miechów powiat) wrote: "Basically, I was against the baptism of the Jews. However, this matter has been bothering me for several months. As far as I have been able to ascertain, no material or other benefits are expected or anticipated. Nationalities are not mentioned [changed]. So despite my great prejudice, when I examine my priestly conscience, I feel it is my duty to present their request to the Illustrious Curia". The reply addressed to the Brzeg parish priest was of an extremely diplomatic nature, although it formulated the Church's theses very clearly: "There are no grounds for a fundamentally negative attitude towards Jewish conversions. In each case, when such candidates apply, the pastor is obliged to convince himself of the sincerity of the applicants' intentions, and then prepare them thoroughly so that they not only get to know the Catholic faith properly, but also live according to these rules". (*ibid.*, Letter from the notary of the Kielce Curia to the parish priest of Brzesko-Nowe, Rev. Józef Zdun, Kielce, 19 August 1941, unpagged). It is significant that in December 1941 the same priest asked the diocesan authorities to shorten the catechumenate for spouses and their children seeking baptism. The curia responded positively to this request (*ibid.*, Letter from the parish priest of Brzesko-Nowe to the diocesan curia in Kielce, Brzesko-Nowe, 29 November 1941, unpagged).

In the case of Kielce diocese, it is not possible to make a definitive statement about the intentions of Jews applying for baptism.¹⁸ The letters sent to the curia, in which the catechumen's motivation was clearly indicated, assured the purely religious factors. However, under the conditions of the occupation, pragmatic issues could play an important role, such as 'legalisation' as a Christian which could enable the acquisition of 'Aryan' papers,¹⁹ getting help from trusted Catholics, or getting married to a Catholic woman.²⁰ From some of the applications, a belief in salvation thanks to the new religion was clearly apparent: "Apparently the father of this family (an intellectual) is very much interested in Christian teaching, which he has already learned with his family members in general terms, because he often tells me about different dreams. For example, 'I saw the Mother of God, who assured me that I would not die'".²¹

The situation in Kielce diocese changed at the end of 1940. In the curia's writings, precise guidelines appeared as to the length of the catechumenate and the preparation period. When granting consent to baptism, the diocesan authorities recommended that, before making a final decision, the applicant should be 'tested' as to their sincerity for a period of six months, and sometimes even a year.²² For the same reasons (as in other dioceses located in the General Government, such

¹⁸ This problem is discussed in detail by Grądzka-Rejak, 'Od dłuższego czasu', pp. 348 and ff.

¹⁹ This possibility is demonstrated by the findings of Dariusz Libionka regarding Róża and Marek Reibschoid, who were baptised in Wawrzeńczyce in August 1942. Their conversion was dictated by pragmatism. See D. Libionka, 'Powiat Miechów', in *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, vol. 2, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2018, p. 119.

²⁰ For example, in a letter to the bishop of Kielce, Lola and Salome P. (daughter and mother) wrote: "The material side does not motivate us, nor the fear of the ghetto, because we know that even neophytes are often treated equally as Jews. I and my mother have only a sincere desire to become Christians" (ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Letter from Lola and Salomea to Bishop Kielecki, [Chęciny], 17 April 1941, unpagged). From the examination of this request, as issued by the local parish priest, Fr. S. Marchewka, it appears that the women had come to Chęciny from Zakopane, and were known among the local community as Christian women who regularly attended services. In the light of the above findings, it seems that the issue of obtaining an official certification of baptism was a priority for P., for her own safety. The letters asking for permission to be baptised were sent by P. on 17 April and 27 May 1941.

²¹ *Ibid.*, letter from Fr. Józef Nowak, pastor of the Saspów (Sułoszowa) parish to the Diocesan Curia in Kielce, Sułoszów, 30 January 1942, unpagged.

²² ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Chwistek, dean in Wolbrom, Kielce, 19 December 1940, unpagged; *ibid.*, letter from the notary of the Kielce Curia to the parish priest of Brzesko-Nowe, Fr. Józefa Zdun, Kielce, 19 August 1941, unpagged.

as the Archdiocese of Warsaw), a minimum 6-month period of preparation for baptism was recommended as early as the mid-1940.²³

It remains an open question as to whether the steps taken resulted only from care for the purity of the rite, or whether they were the result of the increasingly harsh conditions of the occupation policy, as the German authorities increasingly limited the options for converting Jews. In April 1941, the *Kielecki Przegląd Diecezjalny* [Kielce Diocesan Review] announced that accession to or apostasy from the Church would have legal force if it was certified by the relevant district or city *starosta*.²⁴ In practice, therefore, it was not the Church which decided whose baptism would be recognised, but the local German administration. The contents of the correspondence between the Diocesan Curia in Kielce and the parish priest of Mieronice in the Jędrzejów powiat regarding the case of Szyja Lejbuś E. clearly show that the German authorities treated the baptism of Jews as a form of assistance to them. After obtaining the curia's consent for baptism, E. went with the parish priest to 'Kreis Jendrzewoj' (the powiat *starosta* in Jędrzejów) to ask about the possibility of 'civil legalisation of the change of religion.'²⁵ There he heard the following words from a clerk: "Priests, do not dare to dip your fingers in this matter, because it could go very bad for you if we found out that during the war you were smuggling [*szwarcujecie*] Jews into the Catholic religion".²⁶ The words of that clerk effectively discouraged the priest from baptism, because – as he himself wrote – he was trying "not to cause any trouble for the curia or himself".²⁷ This unidentified clerk quite clearly stated that the baptism was intended to save a Jew, and was thus an illegal activity. Importantly, the diocesan authorities strongly supported baptism. In response to the parish priest's letter, they rebuked him to a degree, referring to the officially published regulations: "The Pastor will wish

²³ According to Fr. Jan Wysocki, the order from Bp. Stanisław Gall was a positive manifestation of church life, and not dictated by security or concern for personal safety (Fr. Wysocki, 'Archidiecezja warszawska', p. 280).

²⁴ See document no. 1.

²⁵ The records show that E. lived with a farmer in the village of Emilianów. After receiving baptism, the host supposedly gave E. his daughter to be his wife. The case of E's baptism lasted several months (ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, letter from the parish priest of Mieronice to the bishop's curia in Kielce, Mieronice, 20 February 1941).

²⁶ ADK, OJ-2/2, letter from the parish priest in Mieroki, Fr. Stanisław Sajan to the Diocesan Curia in Kielce, Mieronice, 16 January 1942, unpagged.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

to fulfil his pastoral duties imposed on him by the law of the Church, without paying attention to the opinion of the unreliable clerks [*referentów*] of the secular authorities. The decree of the secular authorities regarding the change of religion was announced in the Diocesan Review [...] along with the relevant official note, which the Pastor will wish to apply to the fullest extent'.²⁸ Finally, on 23 January 1942, E. was baptised in the parish of Mieronice, taking the name of Jan Sylwester.²⁹

The rapidly changing situation in the General Government and the transition of the German authorities to a programme of total extermination of the Jews is also noticeable in the tone of the letters sent by the diocesan authorities to the parish priests' subordinates. While in January 1942 the chancellor of the curia firmly recommended baptising the Jewish 'petitioner', as it was officially formulated, in June 1942 he wrote to Fr. Piotr Pytlakowski, pastor of Minoga parish:

With regard to the preparation to admit three Jews into the bosom of the Church and to give them baptism. The Curia recommends that the Rev. Father exercise great caution and pastoral prudence. The petitioners should be subjected to a longer trial, and check whether they are guided by sincerity of intentions and whether it is not due to material or worldly reasons. It should also be made clear to them that by being baptised they will not be free from life's difficulties.³⁰

The Curia responded similarly to a request from the parish priest in the parish of Smardzewice, from which an application for the baptism of Stella S. was received:

Regarding the letter of 9 June, in which the Rev. Father asks for information about the transition to the Church of the Jewess Stella S., the Curia explains that this matter should be approached with great caution, as the Rev. Father still has no evidence of complete and moral certainty about the [petitioner's] purely

²⁸ Ibid., Letter from the chancellor of the curia to the parish priest of Mieronice, Kielce, 16 January 1942, unpagued.

²⁹ State Archives in Kielce, Town Court at Jędrzejów, 2076, Birth and baptism certificate, Mieronice, 18 March 1942, p. 3. On 3 September 1944, this man was abducted by unknown perpetrators from his place of residence in the village of Olszówka Nowa and shot dead (ibid., Statement, Wodzisław, 16 December 1946, p. 2).

³⁰ ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Piotr Pytlakowski, parish priest of Minoga parish, Kielce, 22 June 1942, unpagued.

idealistic reasons for baptism, [i.e.] that no material or utilitarian considerations or benefits are involved. It should also be said openly that the reception of [the holy sacrament of] baptism will not free [her], especially nowadays, from the difficulties of life. Regardless of this, the provisions of the civil law as issued by the authorities of the General Government must be strictly observed.³¹ Finally, the law on civil status records prohibits the name of a neophyte from being changed. Only the administrative and judicial authorities are competent to change the name.³²

From the above situation, it can be concluded that the position had been changed. We should refer once again to the already discussed case from Mieronice parish and the baptism of the Jew E. In view of the refusal to legalise the official baptism which had initially taken place in May 1941,³³ the vicar general wrote that “Baptism itself may be given independently of civil legalisation, but due to the [petitioner’s] intended marriage to a Catholic woman, such legalisation would be desirable”.³⁴

The curia sent the same answer as to Smardzewice to Michał Wójcik, parish priest at Bodzentyn.³⁵ In this case, the content of the parish priest’s request for baptism for “a certain 18-year-old Jewess” is much more important than the instructions of his superiors. In a veiled form, the clergyman wrote about the brutal reality and difficult dilemmas facing him. The baptism of Jews, while not formally banned, aroused his fears for his own safety. The letter reads:

I kindly ask the Illustrious Curia for advice or authorisation in the following matter. An 18-year-old Jewish woman has lived in Bodzentyn throughout the war, and she has been begging for admission to the Catholic faith for a long time. The curriculum vitae of this person, according to her story, is as follows – she

³¹ See document no. 1.

³² ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Stefan Cichoń, parish priest of Smardzewice, 4 July 1942, unpaginated.

³³ *Ibid.*, Letter from the parish priest of Mieronice, Fr. Sajan to the curia in Kielce, Mieronice, 10 May 1941, unpaginated.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Sajan, parish priest of Mieronice, Kielce, 4 June 1941, unpaginated.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Michał Wójcik, parish priest of Bodzentyn, Kielce, 18 May 1942, unpaginated.

was born in Berlin in 1924, the illegitimate child of a German father and a Jewish mother. Her father died soon after, and her mother left her unattended. A certain charitable Catholic institution took care of the child, raising her up to the age of 14. There she learned the principles of the Catholic religion in German. She claims that she was not baptised. Shortly before the war, the mother suddenly moved to Berlin and took her daughter to Warsaw, then to Łódź. Here she left the girl to her fate again. The latter joined a certain Jewish family as a servant, and in the first weeks of the war she came to Bodzentyn with this family. Here, from the beginning, she thought about being baptised. and she was learning Catholicism. Several weeks ago now she broke off completely with the Jews. An intelligent and religious person has taken care of her, and she has quietly been receiving lessons in Catholicism. She is quite an intelligent, quick-witted girl, and in general she makes quite a nice impression. I do not know how to proceed in this case in today's conditions – whether to take the matter seriously without fear of conflict, or to drop the whole thing. The girl desires baptism very greatly, she is well prepared. Therefore, I kindly ask the Illustrious Curia for their guidance in this matter.³⁶

In the content of the official correspondence, the allusion to the situation of the Jewish population and the awareness of the German regulations, euphemistically called 'today's conditions', draws very considerable attention.³⁷

Finally, on 10 October 1942, the Internal Department of the General Government issued an order prohibiting the baptism of Jews.³⁸ The prohibition applied not only to conversion to Catholicism, but to all denominations recognised by the Germans.³⁹ The document referred to the definition of the term 'Jew' in accordance with the ordinance of 24 July 1940, and required detailed verification

³⁶ Ibid., letter from Fr. Wójcik to the diocesan curia in Kielce, Bodzentyn, 30 April 1942, unpaginated 1332.

³⁷ Perhaps, however, Fr. Wójcik baptised an unknown Jewish woman, which may be indicated by an entry in the baptism book from this parish. On 5 October 1942, the parish priest prepared a certificate confirming the birth in 1923 in Germany of a child by one of the parishioners (Act no. 147/1942).

³⁸ The existence of the above prohibition has been mentioned in previous publications. See Fr. Wysocki, 'Archidiecezja warszawska', pp. 280–81; Grądzka-Rejak, 'Od dłuższego czasu', p. 347; D. Libionka, 'Polska hierarchia kościelna wobec eksterminacji Żydów – próba krytycznego ujęcia', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2009, no. 5, p. 29. Importantly, the prohibition was not mentioned in the book *Dalej jest noc*.

³⁹ See document no. 2.

of the candidates. It is undeniably necessary to reflect upon the sources of this prohibition because, as mentioned above, baptism did not protect Jews from repressions. So what was the purpose of this prohibition? Reading the above-mentioned ordinance and analysing the circulation of internal correspondence among the clergy of Kielce diocese, we can come to the fairly obvious conviction that the convergence of the ban with the ongoing mass deportation of Jews to death camps could not have been accidental. It was this time that saw the publication of the German criminal regulations, as issued by the *starostas* and representatives of the police authorities, which prohibited any assistance to Jews under the penalty of death. The ordinance of 10 October 1942 fit into a logical sequence of norms. By prohibiting baptism, the Germans met two of the basic goals accompanying the mass genocide of Jews. First, the occupiers strongly emphasised the anti-religious and racial nature of National Socialism. Second, the prohibition was a clear warning to the clergy; anyone who dared to baptise Jews would be committing an offense against German legislation. Thus the ban, combined with a very real awareness of the possible consequences, served to effectively scare clergymen of various denominations and the rest of the conquered population from helping the Jews. Certainly, the Germans feared that the Poles would be more willing to help a baptised person; there would be a motivation here to save a fellow believer. And finally, this official act was part of the German authorities' overall policy of limiting the rights of the Churches, for whom the acquisition of new members was (and remains) one of their main forms of activity.

It can be assumed that this ordinance was not followed strictly, and that unregistered baptisms did take place. After all, it was not without reason that the diocesan authorities of Kielce, fearing possible German reactions, reminded the clergy of another order by the General Government of 26 November 1942. This document mentioned the need to "document matters concerning marital status".⁴⁰ It is known that the baptism of Jews by priests continued despite the German ban;⁴¹ however, due to the realities of the occupation and the underground nature of such activity, this phenomenon is extremely difficult to confirm by precise sources.

⁴⁰ See document no. 3.

⁴¹ Libionka, 'Powiat Miechów', p. 165.

The text presented here does not treat the issue of Jewish conversion to Catholicism in the diocese of Kielce exhaustively. It presents issues that could be analysed further on the basis of the preserved archives, mainly correspondence. We do not know – as already stated – whether the number of requests and baptisms indicated corresponded to reality. In any event, in the light of the above findings, the figures appear to be low. We also do not know whether, apart from the formal letters, the diocese authorities provided parish priests with more detailed, oral guidelines on how to deal with Jewish converts, which would have been quite an obvious step to take in the reality of the occupation. The attitude of the Jews themselves to the Jewish catechumens and neophytes in the period 1939–42 would also require a factual analysis.

Undoubtedly, however, the materials presented confirm the large and then decisive influence of the German occupying authorities on the option of baptising Jews. Below are three documents related to this topic. They come from the official body of the curia, the above-mentioned Kielce Diocesan Review, and from the Diocesan Archives in Kielce. The translation attempts to reflect the original spelling.

Documents

No. 1

[no date or location] – Order of the Governor General's Office in Kraków, on joining and leaving the Catholic Church

The Office of the Governor General in Kraków (department for church matters) announced that joining and leaving the Church under civil law will only be legally binding if the act has been testified to by the rel[evant] city or poviát *starostas*. The *starostas* will *ex officio* notify the respective parish priests. – In announcing this, it is noted that this provision will in no way infringe the provisions of the canon law on the admission of dissenters and schismatics, and they should therefore be applied in their entirety. On the other hand, the parish priests will wish to inform those interested about the existence of the above-mentioned provision of the civil authorities in order to save them from undesirable consequences.

Source: Kielce Diocesan Review 1941, no. 4, p. 161, typescript

No. 2

1942, 10 October, Kraków – Order of the Governor General's Office in Kraków, prohibiting baptism for Jews

^aV. S. 26 X 42^a

Government of the General Government

Kraków, 10 October 1942

Internal Administration Department

1st General State Administration

1492/42 (VIII - 6)

To

The heads of all churches in the General Government

Subject: Subdivision for Church Affairs

Re.: Ban on baptising Jews in the General Government

It is hereby prohibited to baptise Jews in the General Government.

Who is a Jew, or who passes for a Jew, results from the ordinance on the definition of the term 'Jew' in the General Government of 24 July 1940 (VBlGG [*Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement*] I p. 231). For your information, I am enclosing a copy of this regulation.

The prohibition on baptising Jews in the General Government implies an obligation for priests and clergy to check carefully before each baptism whether the baptised person is not a Jew or does not pass for a Jew. How the priest obtains such certainty depends on the circumstances surrounding each case. The priest should check this especially carefully in cases where adults present themselves for baptism. He will then have to request that the baptised person show documents and certificates in order to be able to state without any doubts that the baptised person is not a Jew and does not pass for a Jew.

Regarding the duty of control incumbent on priests, attention is particularly drawn to the following:

1. If the baptised person has German citizenship, is of German nationality or German descent, they should be able to show a German passport, a German

^{a-a} Text written by hand in red on the right-hand side.

Kennkarte, a *Kennkarte* of a person belonging to the German race (see the regulation on granting *Kennkarte* to persons belonging to the German race in the General Government of 26 January 1940 (VBlGG I p. 36) and the executive orders published here of 2 February 1940 (VBlGG II p. 73) and of 15 July 1942 (VBlGG I p. 412), or a *Kennkarte* for persons of German descent (see the regulation on granting the *Kennkarte* to persons of German descent in the General Government of 29 October 1941 (VBlGG I, p. 622), as well as the executive amendment of 2 June 1942 appended to it (VBlGG I p. 357). If a priest is presented with one of these documents, then he can generally assume that the person being baptised is not a Jew nor passing for a Jew.

2. The same applies in a situation when the baptised person can show a blue card (for persons belonging to a minority) or a grey card (for all other persons obliged to have a *Kennkarte*) in accordance with the order of 26 October 1939 on the introduction of *Kennkarten* in the General Government (VBlGG I p. 8) and its executive regulation of 13 June 1941 (VBlGG I p. 344). In such cases, the priest will additionally inform himself about the race of the baptised person only if, for special reasons (such as the name or appearance of the baptised person), he suspects that he is dealing with a Jew despite the documents submitted.

3. Pursuant to the first executive order of 13 June 1941 (VBlGG I p. 344) to the order on the introduction of *Kennkarten* in the General Government of 26 October 1939 (VBlGG I p. 8), yellow cards are issued to Jews. These cards have a black capital letter 'J' on the front side. If the baptised person submits such a *Kennkarte*, it is information for the priest that he cannot offer baptism.

4. In addition to submitting the documents listed in points 1, 2 and 3, the priest in each case should also require the baptised person to provide the following declaration:

“I assure you that, despite careful checking, I am not aware of any circumstances that would justify the assumption that I am a Jew or that I may pass for a Jew”.

If the baptised person can prove that he does not yet have an official document about his/her person or nationality, then it will suffice to submit a written declaration.

The declaration should indicate which documents and certificates have been submitted, or for what reason the submission of documents has not taken place.

5. If the baptised person is under the age of 15, then parents, guardians or other persons with the right of care should prove that the baptised person is not a Jew and does not pass for a Jew. In addition, they should make the following statement:

“I assure you that despite careful checking, I am not aware of any circumstances that would justify the supposition that the baptised person is a Jew or may pass for a Jew”.

Point 4, paragraphs 2 and 3 shall apply accordingly.

6. If, during the baptism of new-borns, it is proved that the documents necessary to prove their nationality do not exist and cannot be delivered on time, then it is sufficient to provide the written statement required in point 5), unless special circumstances raise doubts as to the truthfulness of such documents.

Point 4, of paragraph 3 shall apply accordingly.

7. The written declarations submitted in accordance with points 4, 5 and 6 of this regulation should be bound into the annals on an ongoing basis. With each declaration, the appropriate number in the record book should be indicated.

I am asking for the special commitment of the priests and clergy of your diocese – your Church – in abiding by this ordinance, and for your ongoing supervision of the precise fulfilment of your duty of control.

Signed, Dr. Siebert

Authenticated by^b
(Hilse)
Clerk

Source: ADK, OW-A / 34, pp. 554–55, typescript

^b Signature handwritten below.

No. 3

1942, 26 November, Kraków – Order of the Governor General's Office regarding Church matters

Order of the General Government, Kraków, 26 November 1942.

Re.:

Subdivision: Keeping files of civil status

The events recurring in the field of keeping files of civil status compel the following order:

The clergy of religious denominations recognised by the GG who keep records of civil status are obliged to comply with the orders of the *Kreis-* and *Stadthauptmännern* of their district in the field of documenting matters of civil status. The obligation to investigate further details regarding the validity of these data will be waived once the order of the competent *Kreis-* or *Stadthauptmann* has been issued. If, however, the data in the *Kreis-* or *Stadthauptmann's* instruction are insufficient to make a complete record, according to the former Polish [government's] records, these data should be clarified by asking the relevant *Kreis-* or *Stadthauptmann*.

[Ordered] by Wilden

Source: Kielce Diocesan Review 1942, no. 8–9, p. 4, typescript

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SUMMARY

This article presents the phenomenon of the conversion of Jews to Catholicism during the German occupation. The research conducted proved that conversions attracted little interest among the Jews living in Kielce diocese. For the period from September 1939 to October 1942, we found a total of 25 applications (concerning 44 people), sent from various parishes of the Kielce diocese to the curia with requests for baptism. At the same time, the German authorities treated the baptism of Jews as an obvious form of assistance. During the period analysed, pressure on priests not to baptise was gradually increased. Finally, on 10 October 1942, the German occupying authorities introduced a total ban on the baptism of Jews in all Christian rites on the territory of the General Government.

KEYWORDS

The Holocaust • Jewish converts • Catholics
• the diocese of Kielce