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MILENA KINDZIUK¹

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

FR. JERZY POPIEŁUSZKO – VICTIM OF POLITICAL REPRESSION OR MARTYR OF THE FAITH?

Summary

There is an ongoing debate on the character of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko's activity between 1980 and 1984, as well as the major motives for his abduction and murder on October 19, 1984 perpetrated by officers of the Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Pol. SB). The present paper argues that treating this activity and death in a purely political way constitutes a fundamental misunderstanding of the priest's attitude or a conscious propaganda. An analysis of the priest's activities, motives behind his pastoral commitment, the course of the Holy Masses for the Fatherland as well as the content of his sermons, shows that he was guided by religious, pastoral and spiritual reasons, and his death was martyrdom for the faith.

Keywords: Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, Masses for the Fatherland in Poland, martial law in Poland, martyr for the faith

KS. JERZY POPIEŁUSZKO – OFIARA POLITYCZNEJ REPRESJI CZY MĘCZENNIK ZA WIARĘ?

Streszczenie

Wciąż toczy się dyskusja dotycząca charakteru działalności ks. Jerzego Popiełuszki w latach 1980-1984, a także istotnych motywów jego uprowadzenia 19 października 1984 roku przez funkcjonariuszy Służby Bezpieczeństwa oraz zamordowania. Artykuł dowodzi, że traktowanie tej działalności i śmierci w kategoriach wyłącznie politycznych jest rażącym niezrozumieniem postawy księdza bądź też świadomym zabiegiem propagandowym. Analiza działań księdza, motywów jego zaangażowania duszpasterskiego, przebiegu Mszy za Ojczyznę oraz treści jego kazań dowodzi, że kierował się on racjami religijnymi, duszpasterskimi i duchowymi, a jego śmierć miała charakter męczeństwa za wiarę.

Słowa kluczowe: ks. Jerzy Popiełuszko, Msze za Ojczyznę w Polsce, stan wojenny w Polsce, męczennik za wiarę

¹ Milena Kindziuk, PhD in History of Humanities, lecturer at the Institute of Media Education and Journalism at the University of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in Warsaw, author of books on the history of the contemporary Church in Poland, among others, about blessed Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko. E-mail: mkin@interia.pl.

INTRODUCTION

It was one of the most widely known murders from the period of the communist rule in Poland: on October 19, 1984, Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, whom the Polish authorities of the time accused of conducting forbidden political activity, was abducted and murdered by officers of the Security Service. The authorities were irritated by social resonance caused by the priest's pastoral work and sermons delivered during the Masses for Fatherland celebrated during the martial law in Poland (1981-1983) and continued after its lifting. Popiełuszko's death was also treated by them in political terms.

However, contrary to that view, in the opinion of the Church and the faithful, Fr Popiełuszko was rather a courageous defender of Christian values and he was beatified in 2010 as a martyr for the faith. Currently, the process of his canonization is also drawing to a close.

As the two above-mentioned points of view still tend to come into conflict, it seems necessary to provide an objective analysis of the circumstances of Fr. Popiełuszko's pastoral work, the motives behind his social involvement as well as reasons for his persecution and death as perceived from the historical perspective.

1. EARLY ACTIVITY AMONG WORKING PEOPLE

Fr. Popiełuszko became involved in social activity almost spontaneously, since, when in the mid 1980's he was sent to the parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka in Żoliborz, he was only meant to be a resident there and to take care of the health care workers in the Archdiocese of Warsaw. This, however, was a period of social tensions in Poland due to the economic crisis caused by the economically ineffective communist system (Kaminski 2010, 410-420). In response to further food price increases imposed by the government in July 1980, strikes broke out and soon swept across the country. The first factory which stopped production was the Gdansk Shipyard (Roszkowski 1992, 360-367), which was followed by the Szczecin Shipyard, Vladimir Lenin Steelworks and H. Cegielski Metal Industry Complex in Poznan. Sit-in strikes (workers remained in the factory 24 hours a day, but did not work) were also commenced by workers of the Warsaw Steelworks, who turned to Primate Stefan Wyszyński as a bishop of Warsaw asking for a priest to celebrate a Holy Mass on Sunday. That priest was Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko (he lived in the parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka in the vicinity of the steelworks and, since he did not have as many Sunday duties as a health care minister, he was more available than other priests working in the parish).

The situation was a complete novelty. Priests did not enter the premises of workplaces, since the socialist regime prevailing in Poland did not allow that. Fr. Popiełuszko, as he himself owned, went to the steelworks "under considerable stress", but he met with kindness on the part of workers and was welcomed with

applause. "It was applause to greet the first priest in the factory's history to cross its gate. I thought at that time: applause for the Church, which for thirty years had been knocking on the gate of the factory", said the priest (Kindziuk 2010, 69).

This exceptional Mass on the premises of the Warsaw Steelworks initiated the close relationships between Fr. Popiełuszko and the workers. In the following days, he continued to celebrate Masses for them and many workers experienced religious conversion, many went to confession, while others asked for baptism or a church wedding (Kindziuk 2010, 69-72). Fr. Popiełuszko's pastoral activity undertaken at the Warsaw Steelworks had such a typically religious character.

When on August 31st, 1980, workers and the communist authorities signed an agreement at the Szczecin Shipyard, which guaranteed the creation of independent, self-governing trade unions, the NSZZ "Solidarity" was formed and strikes came to an end. However, Fr. Jerzy did not cease his activity among workers. He still celebrated Masses for them, however, he moved from the premises of the Warsaw Steelworks to the church of St. Stanislaus Kostka. Popiełuszko also organized religious and educational meetings, among others, lectures on the social science of the Church and on the history of Poland. They met with high approbation on the part of the workers: "He seemed to be one of us. It is very important to talk with workers in the workers' language. It became a tradition that after Mass he invited us home. It was a surprise to us. No priest so far had taken care of metalworkers. None had opened up so much to the workers' world," said Karol Szadurski, an employee of the Warsaw Steelworks.

With time, beside workers from the Warsaw Steelworks, also those from other factories or centers started to gather around Fr. Popiełuszko. They came to his Masses in the church, or gathered at his rectory. They appreciated his extraordinary human goodness and priestly charisma and invited him also to perform pastoral ministry during strikes. For example, Popiełuszko was asked to celebrate the Mass at the Warsaw Fire School where they held an occupational strike in November 1981 for a number of days.

It can be said, therefore, that Fr. Popiełuszko's commitment in social matters had a religious and pastoral character. It was a response to the spiritual needs of the working people. All the more so, that the social movement was then very widespread. "Solidarity", the first free trade union registered in the countries of the Socialist camp, developed at an impressive pace. At the time of its registration in 1981, there were about 10 million members (80 per cent of the employed). Participants of this movement expected moral and religious support from the people of the Church. Hence, many priests supported them with their pastoral work. Fr. Popiełuszko was among them, although he distinguished himself by his zeal, strictly religious motivation and an extraordinary gift of establishing relationships with people.

2. FR. POPIEŁUSZKO DURING THE MARTIAL LAW

Another important stage of Fr. Popiełuszko's activity was the period of the martial law in Poland, introduced on December 13, 1981. By that time, he had gained a reputation of an informal minister of steelworkers, but also as a caretaker of the Warsaw diocese's health service. Fr. Jerzy maintained close spiritual relationships with many faithful in Warsaw and other cities.

In order to have a clear understanding of Popiełuszko's stance in this period, one should pay attention to the role of the Church in Poland during the martial law. The Church remained a sphere of freedom, but also of social support. It extended its care over the repressed, formed aid committees and delivered food from the West. The Church also intervened with the authorities, while many of the clergy supported the families of the imprisoned.

Again, Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko was one of them. He was willing to help, to offer hope and to keep up the spirits of Poles teaching forgiveness and love to all. That is why, on December 24, 1981, the first Christmas Eve during the martial law, he went out into the streets of Warsaw and visited military stations to distribute Christmas wafers to soldiers and offer them wishes. On the first day of Christmas, in 1981, he appealed to the assembled in the church to break the internal resistance and anger growing in their hearts and to serve festive food to armed soldiers.

Fr. Popiełuszko helped people interned by the regime of the People's Republic as well as their families. He did so in various ways: he went to courtrooms and participated in court trials of those who were imprisoned for political reasons, which - apart from providing moral support - contributed to the less brutal treatment of the accused. Fr. Jerzy also gained information about the fate of the internees, took care of their families, assisted them spiritually and materially. He also invited to his home families of the interned and imprisoned, sometimes helping them to find workplaces, or mediating in seeking legal aid. His little flat was constantly filled with people. It repeated every day throughout 1982. "I noticed that sometimes I stayed at home, although I could go somewhere, because I felt worried that someone might need help in my absence" he wrote in *Zapiski (Notes)* on November 11, 1982 (Popiełuszko 1991, 102).

Finally, Fr. Popiełuszko became involved in charitable activities in the Primate's Committee of Relief for the Detained and their Families, established by Primate Józef Glemp in Warsaw. He provided lists of names of families that needed help and intermediated in delivering gifts for them. Later, he himself began to convey transports with gifts from Western European countries, including food and medicine, to distribute them among people. At one point, his small apartment was turned into a warehouse and people were constantly coming to him for help. This shows that his activity during the martial law had a typically pastoral character: Popiełuszko pursued the evangelical principle of charity by providing spiritual and material assistance.

3. MASSES FOR THE FATHERLAND

Fr. Popiełuszko, however, won the greatest popularity due the Masses for the Fatherland. Because of their spiritual and social impact, they became the main cause of the attacks on the part of the communist authorities and subsequent persecution of the priest.

Popiełuszko celebrated Masses for the Fatherland since January 1982 in Warsaw (Kindziuk 2010, 90-93) on the last Sunday of each month. From the very beginning, they enjoyed great popularity among people. Why? This was explained by Fr. Popiełuszko: "From month to month attendance at the Masses for the Fatherland is growing. There are thousands of people right now and they come from different cities. What they derive from them is, above all, the awareness that they can feel one aspiration in this great community, they can strengthen their hope" (Popiełuszko 2009, 116).

Undoubtedly, the Masses for the Fatherland offered the gathered faithful a glimpse of freedom, a safe refuge. But above all, they were a place of prayer. As formerly in the Warsaw Steelworks, also here the faithful expected spiritual strengthening, but also the words of truth.

The Masses in the intention of the Fatherland quickly became a thorn in the flesh of the authorities. All the more, that the crowds of people attending them was constantly rising. The Masses gathered workers and the most prominent representatives of the cultural world from all over Poland. Almost all of the opposition at the time focused on them. This was exactly what the communist authorities feared, as they were afraid of losing their influence. Due to that, the Security Service was taking steps to intimidate Fr. Jerzy. He was constantly monitored and became subject to various provocations organized against him. Organization of the Masses for the Fatherland was repeatedly hampered and during celebration, the church and the area around it was surrounded by armed officers of the Security Service. Meanwhile, Fr. Popiełuszko asked people leaving the church not to let themselves be drawn into riots and provocations. People listened and went very quietly. This, in turn, even further aggravated the communist authorities it made it difficult to organize a provocation. It did not, however, stop the authorities from formulating accusations towards Fr. Popiełuszko of inciting political activity against the communist system (Kindziuk 2014, 71-146). "Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko's participation in the Masses for the Fatherland was a continuation of his presence among people of hard work and a response to their religious and moral needs" as aptly assessed Fr. Piotr Nitecki, a former friend of Fr. Popiełuszko, well acquainted with the pastoral activity conducted in the Żoliborz district in Warsaw (Nitecki 2004, 17).

4. RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF THE SERMONS

Fr. Popiełuszko's sermons aroused a great deal of interest. It was exactly the sermons that were the source of major controversy. The Communist authorities defined them as strictly political and considered Fr. Jerzy as a political activist. What was the truth? What subjects did Fr. Jerzy raise in his sermons during the Masses for the Fatherland?

First and foremost, it should be emphasized that he took the motto of his sermons from the Letter of St. Paul of the Romans: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:21, these words later became the slogan of Popiełuszko's life and work). The themes of the sermons revolved around the evangelical principles of truth, freedom, justice, love of enemies and, also, around work shown in the light of the social doctrine of the Church.

Fr. Jerzy spoke in a sermon on April 24, 1983: "Effort, work require an inner order, moral principles and even religious incentives and motives to bring benefit for man" (Popiełuszko 2004, 164). In another, he emphasized: "Polish people do not feel hatred and that is why they are able to forgive a lot, but only at the cost of returning to the truth, since it is the truth and only the truth which is the first condition of trust" (Popiełuszko 2004, 355).

Fr. Popiełuszko pointed out how one should understand basic human rights in the light of the Gospel, how to shape consciences and defend human dignity in the situation of external enslavement. He used quotes from the speeches of Pope John Paul II. At times, he even paraphrased his homilies. He also often cited the teaching of Primate Wyszyński.

These sermons deepened faith in people and kept up their spirits. Fr. Zdzisław Król, at the time the Chancellor of the Warsaw Curia, emphasized that there were no political accents in them, although such charges were officially raised. "This is very important: he had a great chance to get involved directly in politics. He could have become a political activist, but he deliberately did not do it. He had a different understanding of his mission." (oral account, Kindziuk 2010, 169).

Instances of how hatred gave way to love and forgiveness under the influence of Fr. Jerzy's words are also evidenced by hundreds of letters received after the Masses for the Fatherland. Many of them have survived to this day. Here are some of them (manuscripts in: ODŻiDJP):

"Reverend Fr. Jerzy, I would like to thank you warmly for the fact that your teachings purify my heart from evil and vindictive thoughts that I have for people acting against me. You have taught me to pray for my enemies and forgive my adversaries."

"In your sermons, you always teach about love with capital «L». You have never called for destruction or use of force."

"The feeling of hatred is unworthy of Christians and if, as a result of the sad and painful events taking place in our country, it sprouts in some souls, it fades out due to your homily."

“Here, at this Mass, hearts closed by pain open to those who have caused this pain, because Christ so preaches in the Gospel; here open the fists clenched against enemies - not enemies, but errant brothers and sisters, because so they are called by Christ; here faith is strengthened in the final victory of good, of truth and of justice, but through the cross and suffering, for such is the way that Christ followed.”

The above passages illustrate how unfounded were the charges of communists who saw in Fr. Jerzy a political activist or one of the leaders of the opposition. This conviction, however, led to the persecution of Fr. Popiełuszko, to numerous repressions and instances of pressure imposed on him.

5. PERSECUTION AND MURDER

Negative campaign against Fr. Jerzy increased in April 1982, since Fr. Popiełuszko became an object of “active interest” on the part of the 4th Division of the Civic Militia in Warsaw (ODŻiDJP). The, so-called, “Operational activities” were also undertaken against him by the Security Service. The militia and also the Security Service collected materials on Fr. Popiełuszko, all his sermons were recorded, wherever he preached. Various people who attended the Masses were interviewed and bullied. Fr. Jerzy was also called upon for interrogations which was undoubtedly a prelude to his martyrdom.

Since the end of 1983, these initiatives of the state services took the form of propaganda led by Jerzy Urban, spokesman for the government in 1981-1989. Urban played a leading role in shaping the public opinion in Poland. He was a person most frequently appearing in the government media and he became famous for organizing weekly government press conferences not only for Polish, but also for foreign journalists. The spokesman’s conferences were broadcast live on television and widely covered by all newspapers on the following day. Jerzy Urban was the person who formulated the most serious objections to Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko. The pivotal point of these attacks was an article by Urban, written under the pseudonym Jan Rem, in the Warsaw weekly “Tu i teraz” (lit. “Here and Now”), entitled “Seanse nienawiści” (“The Spectacles of Hatred”) It was the most despicable libel on Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko. First and foremost, Urban tried to convince the public opinion that Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko’s activity was strictly political and that he was the leader of the political movement and an enemy of the communist system as well as a rebel. Urban wrote: “In the part of Żoliborz inhabited by intelligentsia, there is the church of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko - next to St. Brygida in Gdansk, the most reputed political club in Poland” (Rem 1984, 2).

In another article, published in “Expres Wieczorny” (lit. “Evening Express”) under the name of Michał Ostrowski, “Garsoniera obywatela Popiełuszki” (“The Alcove of Citizen Popiełuszko”) the spokesman of the government described the results of the search in the apartment of Fr. Jerzy in Warsaw. Prior to that, the Security Service planted explosives in the priests’ apartment in order to suggest that

he intended to organize political demonstrations in Poland. The author of the article wrote: "There were thousands of leaflets in the apartment, among others, calling for street demonstrations, various propaganda materials, matrices, paints needed to produce conspiratorial literature, and other yet less religious accessories" (Ostrowski 1983, 4). The article was read in all programs of the Polish Radio, and was reprinted a day later in "Trybuna Ludu" (lit. "Tribune of the People"). This is a key text illustrating the mechanism of building up the image of Popiełuszko as a political activist.

Highly organized and intensified media propaganda against Fr. Jerzy resembled old Stalinist and post-Stalinist actions, e.g. those undertaken against the imprisoned Cardinal Wyszyński, or one in relation to Bishop Kaczmarek's trial. It was a propaganda conducted in all state media and it was designed to legitimize the actions of the communist authorities in the eyes of the public, or to prepare them for such activities. The same mechanism was implemented in the case of Fr. Jerzy. Actions of the Security Service and media propaganda were correlated.

Allegations against Fr. J. Popiełuszko were most fully formulated at his interrogation at the Civic Militia headquarters in Warsaw. They sound straightforwardly absurd: "Between 1982 and the end of June 1984, in Warsaw, Gdansk, Czestochowa and other cities, acting as a continuing offense in carrying out religious rites in sermons, he abused the freedom of conscience and religion by including in them permanently defamatory content against the state authorities, in particular, he allegedly claimed that they, by resorting to falsehood, hypocrisy and lies and through anti-democratic legislation, destroy human dignity and deprive the public of freedom of thought and action, thus turning churches into places of anti-state propaganda, which is detrimental to the interests of the Polish People's Republic, i.e. committing an offence in the understanding of Art. 194 of the Penal Code in relation to Art. 58" (*Akt oskarżenia* 1990, 178).

The true character of Fr. Popiełuszko's activity is best illustrated by his last public reflections, which he shared at the church in Bydgoszcz on 19 October 1984. He spoke of triumph over evil: "Evil can only be conquered by those who are themselves rich in good, who care for their own development and enrichment in those values that represent human dignity of the child of God." He reflected upon the issues of truth and justice, but beyond claiming that: "To win evil with good means to remain faithful to the Truth", he also reminded that the struggle with truth had been going on for centuries, "The truth, however, is immortal, and the lie dies a quick death, therefore, as the deceased primate Cardinal Wyszyński said: There need not be many who speak the truth. Christ chose few to preach the truth. Only the words of the lie must be numerous. At the end of his deliberations he appealed: "Let us pray that we are free from fear, intimidation, but above all, from the desire for retaliation and violence" (Popiełuszko 2010, 418).

It is known that, when he was returning to Warsaw with his driver Waldemar Chrostowski after this service in Bydgoszcz, he was detained by officers of the Security Service, dressed in uniforms of the Civic Militia. What happened to

Fr. Popiełuszko later is known only from the murderers and from the autopsy, as well as from the photos taken after the massacred body Fr. Jerzy was taken out from Vistula river. There is no doubt, that Fr. Jerzy was cruelly beaten and tortured, and he died the death of a martyr.

Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Warsaw, Fr. Grzegorz Kalwarczyk, who saw the battered body of Fr. Popiełuszko said: “The body of Fr. Jerzy was spread over with white cloth, which uncovered the right side and the arm lying along the body as well as almost entire legs. When the cloth was removed, a naked body appeared, stitched along and across. The left arm was also stitched from the elbow to the shoulder. The whole body was so altered that we had trouble recognizing it. I had always thought myself “hard”, tough, but what I saw at the time really shook me. The whole body was covered with bruises, the lower parts of the shins looked as if they had been peeled off the epidermis, or as if they had been eaten by the aquatic fauna. The face - yellow, the eye sockets blackened, fingers and legs gray-brown, decomposed by water. The hair seemed thinner” (ODŹIDJP).

6. MARTYR FOR THE FAITH

After the death and funeral of Fr. Popiełuszko, official communist propaganda repeatedly said that he had suffered a political death. This was an interpretation imposed during the public process of Fr. Jerzy’s murderers, which was held in Torun at the turn of 1984 and 1985. The perpetrators and the communist prosecutor repeated theses of the “non-religious” and “anti-state” activity of the priest. Such theses were reiterated by Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski and other representatives of the communist authorities.

Accusations of that type stemmed from the desire to provide self-defense and self-justification. They were based, however, on false understanding of the nature of the Church’s activity, which cannot be confined to proclamation of the truths of the faith, but also involves promotion of moral principles and their defense.

Such an understanding of the role of the faith and the concept of martyrdom was clearly formulated throughout the history of Christianity. On the other hand, martyrs were often condemned to death for political reasons, although they were guided solely by religious motives (Naumowicz 2016, 87-110).

This problem was well grasped by a great expert of the theology of martyrdom, Card. Prospero Lambertini, later Pope Benedict XIV, in Book III of his enormous work *On the Beatification of the Servants of God and the Canonization of Blessed* issued in Bologna in 1738, which for centuries provided the basis of the canonization processes in the Catholic Church. According to this work, the testimony of faith is given not only when suffering is endured for the person of Christ and His doctrine, but also when it is induced by the good done, by avoidance of sin or because of any act of righteousness performed out of love of Christ. Suffering for such values as truth, justice, or love professed in the name of Christ, the Christian endures suffering for Him who is the Truth, Love, etc. The Pope pointed to the example of John Baptist who is venerated in the Church as a martyr, though “he did not die directly for the faith, but for being faithful to the virtue related to

the faith,” namely, for bearing witness to the truth which prevented him from remaining silent in the face of the moral wickedness of the ruler. Jesus Himself was formally put to death for political reasons, because he had called himself “the king of the Jews” though, in fact, religious reasons were the decisive factor (Lambertini 1738, 218-239).

Hence, Lambertini described martyrdom as: “voluntary endurance of death or its acceptance because of the Faith in Christ, or another act of virtue referred to God” (Lambertini 1738, 460: *voluntary mortis perpassio sive tolerantia propter Fidem Christi, vel alium virtutis actum in Deum relatum*). The faith, therefore, includes all the values that result from it and the actions inspired by the Gospel and done in the name of God. A similar opinion was adopted by the current *Instruction of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints*, entitled *Sanctorum Mater*, published in 2007, which based on the experience of the ages, defines martyrdom as: “the death of the Servant of God for the faith or a virtue issuing from that faith” (5,2).

Thus, the church documents do not narrow down the notion of “faith” only to professing religious truths, but also include the values and acts that arise from it. This understanding provides sound justification of the proper nature of Fr. Popiełuszko’s activity. It certainly makes it clear that he shed blood for religious values, not for non-religious ones.

As in the days of the early Christians, the contemporary persecution of Fr. Popiełuszko and of other martyrs of the modern world, takes place in a political context. This does not mean that political issues play a decisive role here. The ultimate reason for imposing a death sentence on Christians, have always been, and still are, religious motifs. If not for them, there would be no martyrdom.

Undoubtedly, the persecution of Fr. Popiełuszko was ultimately a consequence of the atheistic character of the contemporary sociopolitical system of Poland. This was emphasized by Archbishop Angelo Amato in a sermon delivered during the beatification of Fr. Popiełuszko on June 6, 2010 in Warsaw: “Religion, the Gospel, the dignity of the human person, freedom were not concepts compatible with the Marxist ideology. That is why, the destructive wrath of the great liar, the enemy of God and oppressor of mankind, the one who hates the truth and spreads lies was vented on him [i.e. Fr. Popiełuszko – MK]. In those years, as had sometimes happened in history, across a large area of Europe, the light of reason was dimmed by darkness, and good replaced by evil” (Amato 2010, 58-60).

The above quotations indicate, that the perpetrators of Fr. Popiełuszko’s murder were motivated by hatred of the faith, values that arise from it, good acts performed in the name of this faith, conscientious execution of the priestly mission, and finally, the person who professed this faith. This statement constituted another element providing evidence that the death of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko had the character of martyrdom. Therefore, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints officially announced on December 19, 2009 that a decree was issued on “martyrdom” of Fr. Popiełuszko “killed out of hatred of the faith” - *ucciso in odio alla fede* (Congregazione delle Cause dei Santi 2009).

Archbishop Amato, during his sermon at the beatification Mass in Warsaw, said: “This defenseless priest was followed, persecuted, arrested, tortured and eventually brutally bound and, even though he was still alive, thrown into water. His torturers,

who did not have the slightest respect for life, were disdainful even towards death. They abandoned him as some abandon a dead animal” (Amato 2010, 58-60). It was the death suffered for the faith and inflicted because of hatred of the faith, and not merely for political or social reasons.

In the case of Fr. Popiełuszko, the opinion that he died the death of a martyr was almost universal and clearly formulated from the very beginning, especially, since his body was found in the Vistula on October 30, 1984. This opinion was manifested by uninterrupted vigil held by crowds of people in the church of St. Stanislaus Kostka, both before and after the funeral, by numerous visits to the tomb in Warsaw Żoliborz and prayers held at it, or by solemn celebration of the anniversary of his death or the name of Fr. Jerzy. Rarely had any martyr enjoyed such a wide spontaneous private cult since the moment of death.

An important expression of this opinion were also prayers and numerous spiritual graces as well as instances of physical healing obtained through the intercession of Fr. Jerzy. Marianna Popiełuszko, mother of Fr. Jerzy, in the testimonies composed during the process of beatification of Fr. Popiełuszko, said: “My son Jerzy, from the moment of his death, enjoys the fame of the martyr for the faith, for the cross and love of the Fatherland. Some may visit his grave with curiosity and know my son from his work among the workers, but he died in defense of the faith and of the Church in Poland”. And she added, “I, as his mother, believe that my son, Jerzy, is a martyr in the religious sense, that is, a martyr who defended the cross, the faith and the fatherland” (ODŻiDJP).

One manifestation of the universal recognition of Fr. Jerzy as a martyr, are numerous pilgrimages to the tomb in Warsaw, which have a typically religious character. Since 1984, this tomb and sanctuary in Warsaw Żoliborz have been visited by more than 20 million people from almost all countries and continents.

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

A universal, spontaneous cult of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, as well as a thorough analysis of his activities, writings and sermons, became the basis for the official proclamation of his being the martyr for the faith. He was beatified as a martyr on June 6, 2010. This was the decision of Pope Benedict XVI, who on December 19, 2009, accepted and approved the proposals of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and proclaimed that: “On the subject of the Servant of God, Jerzy Popiełuszko, a diocesan priest, there is certainty regarding his martyrdom and its causes as well as its considered consequences [of beatification – MK]” (Super martyrio 2010, 668: *Constare de martyrio eiusque causa Servi Dei Georgii Popiełuszko, Sacerdotis Dioecessani, in casu et effectum de quo agitur*).

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