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Broken and Scattered. Polish Baptists during World War II

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SUMMARY

Large numbers of Polish people and among them many Baptists died during World War II. Those who survived were devastated physically and emotionally. This article considers the consequences of the War and the occupation for the Polish society. The changes and struggles during the occupation affected the whole nation – the economy, social life and whole religious denominations. Baptists shared in the terrible losses and Baptist work was greatly hindered, but there were ways in which it continued. Members of the disrupted Baptist congregations sought opportunities to worship God in their homes or other places. Life in the churches was at a low and there were internal tensions as well as external persecu-

tion, but Baptist worship and witness continued. Baptists continued to meet, conduct baptisms, evangelise, serve and help others. In spite of the repression, Polish Baptist communities tried to be places where people could find help. As a suffering community, they drew alongside others who were suffering.

Particular attention is paid to the question of Baptist help of Jews during this period. Although many German Baptist churches were submissive to the Nazi regime, the Polish Baptists wanted to protect Jews and some, very courageously, found ways of putting that desire into practice. Finally, evangelical denominations in Poland, which were all going through the same difficulties, became more united for a time. In the aftermath of the war Polish Baptists had to rebuild and forge a new identity.

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RÉSUMÉ

Un grand nombre de Polonais, et parmi eux beaucoup de baptistes, sont morts durant la seconde guerre mondiale. Les survivants de cette période se sont trouvés détruits aux plans physique et émotionnel. Cet article traite de la manière dont la guerre a affecté la société polonaise et des conséquences tragiques de l'occupation de la Pologne. Les changements provoqués par l'occupation et les luttes qu'elle a suscitées ont affecté l'ensemble de la nation, son économie, sa vie sociale, et elles ont eu des conséquences sur les dénominations religieuses. Les baptistes ont payé un lourd tribut et leur œuvre a été grandement freinée, mais l'article montre que, par certains côtés, elle a pu se poursuivre. Les membres des congrégations baptistes démantelées ont cherché à rendre leur culte à Dieu dans leur foyer ou en d'autres lieux. Malgré la répression, les communautés baptistes polonaises se sont efforcées d'être des lieux où les gens pouvaient obtenir de l'aide. La vie des Églises était très

limitée ; elles ont connu des tensions internes en même temps que les persécutions externes. Mais elles ont continué à célébrer le culte et à témoigner. Les baptistes ont continué à se réunir, à célébrer des baptêmes, à évangéliser, à servir et à aider leurs semblables. Ces communautés souffrantes ont attiré à elles d'autres personnes dans la souffrance.

L'auteur s'intéresse en particulier à l'aide apportée par les baptistes aux Juifs durant cette période. Bien que beaucoup d'Églises baptistes allemandes se soient soumises au régime nazi, les baptistes polonais ont eu le désir de protéger des Juifs et certains, avec grand courage, ont trouvé des moyens de passer du désir à l'acte. Enfin, les diverses dénominations évangéliques polonaises, qui connaissaient toutes les mêmes difficultés, ont vécu une unité plus grande entre elles pendant un temps. Dans les années qui ont suivi la guerre, les baptistes polonais, après avoir été brisés et dispersés, ont dû chercher à reconstruire et à se forger une nouvelle identité.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Eine beträchtliche Zahl polnischer Menschen – darunter viele Baptisten – starben während des 2. Weltkrieges. Die

Überlebenden waren körperlich und seelisch am Boden zerstört. Der vorliegende Artikel fasst die Auswirkungen des Krieges auf die gesamte Gesellschaft Polens und die tragischen Auswirkungen seiner Okkupation ins Auge.

Die Veränderungen und Kämpfe während der Besetzung betrafen die gesamte Nation – Wirtschaft, soziales Leben und religiöse Denominationen samt und sonders.

Auch die Baptisten erlitten furchtbare Verluste, ihre Arbeit wurde in grossem Maß behindert. Doch ich werde aufzeigen, dass es Mittel und Wege gab, sie fortzusetzen. Mitglieder von auseinander gerissenen Baptistengemeinden suchten Möglichkeiten, Gott in ihren Häusern oder anderswo anzubeten. Trotz der Repressalien bemühten sich polnische baptistische Gemeinschaften zu Orten zu werden, an denen Menschen Hilfe finden konnten. Das Gemeindeleben erreichte einen Tiefstand. Es gab sowohl Spannungen von innen als auch Verfolgung von außen, doch baptistischer Gottes- und Zeugendienst währte fort. Weiterhin kamen baptistische Christen zusammen, hielten Taufen

ab, evangelisierten, dienten und halfen anderen. Als Gemeinden, die selbst von Leid betroffen waren, standen sie denen zur Seite, die durch Leid gingen.

Besondere Aufmerksamkeit werde ich der Frage widmen, inwieweit Baptisten während dieser Zeit Juden unterstützten. Obwohl viele deutsche Baptistengemeinden sich unter das Naziregime beugten, war es den polnischen Baptisten ein Bedürfnis, Juden zu schützen. Einige waren mutig genug, Wege ausfindig zu machen, diesen Wunsch umzusetzen. Letztendlich schlossen sich alle evangelikalen Denominationen in Polen, die durch dieselben Schwierigkeiten gingen, in dieser Zeit enger zusammen. In den Nachwehen des Krieges mussten die polnischen Baptisten nach Zerbruch und Zerstreuung eine neue Identität aufbauen.

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Introduction

On 1 September 1939 the Germans marched into Poland from the west and seventeen days later the Russian armies crossed the Polish borders from the east. In Poland the World War drastically affected all aspects of life – social life, the economy, religious communities and the political system. It is likely that during the occupation which followed Poland suffered worse losses than any other country, with one estimate suggesting that on average 3000 Polish people – Christians and Jews – died each day.¹ Hitler's determination to conquer had been absolute² and resulted in two occupied areas: the Nazi area and the Soviet area. Polish forces put up a brave fight, but by 29 September 1939 the whole of Poland was occupied, and divided up on the basis of the previously secret Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement. The country was once more wiped off the map.³

A deliberate policy of extermination began almost immediately. The idea was to target younger Polish people, the potential leaders, as well as the existing intelligentsia and scientists. On 12 September 1939 Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the *Wehrmacht* (the German army), declared that the Polish intelligentsia, the Polish nobility and the Jews in Poland should all be killed.⁴ In the subsequent targeted killing campaign, professionals, industrial leaders and academics were murdered. More than six million men, women and children in Poland were tortured and put to death by the Nazis. Some were murdered in gas chambers and burned in crematoria, others were shot in mass executions on the streets of Polish cities and towns. The cultural, material and moral loss to the

nation was incalculable.⁵ Tragedy touched people who lived in different regions, belonged to different ethnic groups, professed different faiths and came from different social classes and occupations.

The Germans tried to suppress all Polish religious organisations, both Catholic and Protestant.⁶ Consequently, many people from all religious groups in the country died – Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, Muslims and Jews; bishops, priests, monks and nuns, pastors of Protestant churches, Orthodox priests and rabbis were among the victims.⁷ Between 1939 and 1945 a total of 836 Polish ministers of religion died in prisons and concentration camps. The Nazis also issued orders obstructing the religious practice of the population. All Bibles, hymn books, prayer books and other books had to be removed from the churches.⁸ There was a ban on religious activity of any kind among young people.⁹ All churches experienced pervasive loss of freedom. In the district of Poznań, almost 97% of the church buildings were closed. There were firing squads in the streets. Cardinal Hlond wrote: 'All this spells extermination, extermination conceived with the malice of the devil and carried out with unparalleled brutality.'¹⁰

In Hitler's eyes Christianity was a religion for slaves¹¹ but the situation in Poland was different from Germany. The attack on the clergy was a result of the decision to exterminate the Polish intelligentsia. Whereas in Germany the Nazis adopted various strategies to suppress dissent within the Protestant and the Catholic communities, in Poland the main aim was more far-reaching: to destroy the Catholic Church as an independ-

ent entity. As a consequence, this period saw the Catholic Church become the primary place of security for many people and gain the image of a suffering servant – not least because of the deaths of so many priests.¹² The Catholic Church cooperated with the resistance to the Nazis and this cemented the Church more deeply into the national and historical setting of Poland and, more importantly, into the consciousness of Polish people. Christian ministers of all denominations, however, not only Catholic priests, took patriotic stands. Within the Lutheran Church especially, German ministers were installed in place of Polish ministers who had been removed.¹³ Although there were examples of heroic Protestants, on the whole Protestantism in Poland – which was often equated with Lutheranism but which included Baptists and other evangelicals – was identified as a religion of Germans.¹⁴ This association was to have serious consequences for Polish Baptists after the war. At that time, Polish society identified closely with the endeavours of the Catholic Church to help the nation recover from the war-time conflict. Thus the war-time is crucial in understanding the struggles that Baptists had after the war to show that they were a genuinely Polish movement.

Baptists and other free churches

A great deal was lost, never to be recovered. Before the war, Baptists in Poland had a Union of Slavic Baptist Churches and a Union of German-speaking Churches, of roughly equal size. This was to change dramatically. At the beginning of the war, when much of the Polish territory was annexed to Germany, all Polish Baptist churches were forced to join the wider German Baptist Union, then known as the *Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden – Baptisten*, with its centre in Berlin.¹⁵ Polish Baptist churches were supplied with German preachers or came under the authority of German-speaking churches, and the use of the Polish language during the services was banned. This restriction did not apply to the Czech, Ukrainian or Russian languages.¹⁶

In ‘General-Government’ (*General Gubernya*, the main part of occupied Poland), Baptists were the largest free church, evangelical group, although among Poles the Union of Evangelical Christians was slightly larger. Polish evangelical groups which had sought to work together in the past now looked at the question of cooperation again. The main groups were the (pre-war) Union of Slavic

Baptists, the Union of Evangelical Christians, the Association of Mutual Help of Evangelical Christians, the Free Christians (Brethren) and the Union of Churches of Christ.¹⁷ In May 1940 the German authorities issued a decree which forbade unregistered religious groups to meet, thus making the situation for the Baptist Church and other free evangelical groups much worse, since they had to prove that they were legitimate. In March 1941 the government went further and decided to eliminate all smaller Polish religious sects. It was now forbidden to pray in the Polish language in a German-speaking congregation, something which had been continuing up to this point. The occupying forces then ordered that any church consisting of Germans and Poles must be split and the Polish members should worship alone.¹⁸ These decisions made it impossible to regard the two main groups, German and Slavic, within any local church as being united. In Chelm, for example, the church split completely because of this order; the Polish pastor started a new congregation with 20 Polish members.¹⁹

Baptist problems

Whereas in Germany itself the Baptists could attempt to remain political neutral, for Polish-speaking Baptists the situation was very different.²⁰ Although Polish-language Baptist work in Poland was put under enormous pressure, it did not cease to exist. In many cases, members who could no longer worship in German-speaking churches started services in their homes. Private meetings were less visible to the authorities. Many Baptist buildings were taken over by the occupying powers (Russian as well as German) and were no longer available. In Narewka (in the part of the country occupied by Russia) a platoon of Russian soldiers was quartered in the Baptist church building and the Baptist old people’s home became a military hospital. The Baptist church building in Łódź, which had been a strategic centre for the country, became a theatre.²¹ In these years, Polish Baptist identity managed to survive to some extent, but the gains of the previous period were largely lost.²² The Poles might have been able to look for help to fellow-believers in the Slavic Baptist Unions, especially in Russia, but the paradox was that the Russians, through their invasions, were the enemies of the Polish people.²³ Hundreds of thousands of Poles from the eastern part of the country were deported to Siberia; on the basis of Soviet archives,

Polish historians estimate that the number was as high as 1.5 million people.²⁴ Amongst the deportees were a considerable number of Baptists and their leaders.²⁵

Among the Baptists many saw it as their calling to oppose the Nazis, which involved them in acts of considerable courage. Two female members of the Polish Warsaw Baptist community (there were two Baptist congregations, one German-speaking and one Polish), Helena Kurzawa and Janina Siczko, kept important letters that were circulating among conspirators in their home, as it was thought unlikely that their home would be searched. Baptists often supported Russian prisoners who were forced to work for the Nazis, for example in the building of fortifications near the River Bug, supplying them with food as well as evangelical literature.²⁶

Losses during the occupation

War-time losses in Poland as a whole were enormous. Human life was regarded as of little or no consequence by the oppressors, but it had very high value among Polish people. Abraham Levin, a Jew who was in the Warsaw Ghetto, recorded in his diary:

One of the most surprising side-effects of this war is the clinging to life, the almost total absence of suicides. People die in great numbers of starvation, typhus epidemic or dysentery, they are tortured and murdered by the Germans in great numbers, but they do not escape from life by their own desire. They are tied to life by all their senses; they want to live at any price and to survive the war.²⁷

Many Baptists were driven from their homes and lost all that they possessed. One of two things could happen to the dispossessed individuals concerned: either the Nazis took them to concentration camps or the Russians sent them to Siberia. Those arrested by the Gestapo were usually killed and the chances of survival once in the hands of the Gestapo were minimal. However, even in these circumstances Baptist believers gave testimony to remarkable – for them miraculous – events. In 1941 Bazyli Dubowski, an active member of the Baptist church in Łódź, was imprisoned by the Gestapo. His wife, who spoke German, told the Nazis that her husband had nothing to do with any political parties or political organisations, and that he was merely a member of a Baptist com-

munity. Amazingly, after seven days Bazyli was set free. The reason seems to have been that although some Baptists became more politically active during the war, before the war they had a reputation of not being involved in politics.²⁸

This is how one report, written in 1961, summarised the situation of Baptists in Warsaw after the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.²⁹

Out of over 100 members in the church in Warsaw, only 14 were left in 1945. Many people were shot and many died in the Warsaw Revolt and in concentration camps. Many members died in other situations, for example Aleksy Horny, who was killed by a mine. We also lost many material things. A chapel and a house at Wolska 46 Street in Warsaw were burnt and many of the church's archives were destroyed. But we continued to hold services and even though it was forbidden, we organised short courses for preachers and also held youth conferences.³⁰

The loss of members in local Baptist congregations, as indicated by the figures for Warsaw, was devastating. The number of 100 mentioned above is too low: Before the War there were two Baptist churches in Warsaw, with about 500 members in the German Baptist church, and none of these members remained in Poland after the war.³¹

Other reports speak of the extensive loss of property. Sometimes Baptist church buildings were confiscated by the Soviet or the German army. Often these buildings were then used for other purposes, in many cases military, as seen in the case of the Narewka church. If this happened, the result was often much the same as was the case when Polish people left German-speaking Baptist churches: Polish worship services were held in the homes of believers.³² There was an extensive underground network, especially in areas rigidly controlled by the Nazis.³³

A final area of loss was the liberty of conscience. One very painful aspect of the war was that the Germans would call up Polish people into the Wehrmacht, especially those who lived in Silesia. The Polish Baptists were profoundly challenged by this compulsory recruitment. There is evidence that at least some of them were pacifists.³⁴ However, even for those who were not strictly pacifist in their outlook, fighting for the *Wehrmacht* was another blow to their sense of being Polish and having a Polish Baptist identity. Left without a choice if they wanted to survive, many Poles,

including Baptists, found themselves fighting against their own people.³⁵ Many more, however, fought for liberty in different ways and sought to subvert the Nazi oppression.

Continuity of worship

The six years of occupation did not entirely stop Baptist work and worship. Even under threat the church members continued to be as active as possible in the life of the churches. Services were held in church buildings where these were available but also, as noted above, in private houses. Parents tried to ensure that children attended Sunday school classes. Courses at the Baptist Seminary in Łódź continued throughout the war, with the seminary providing four biblical courses which were offered at a distance through the local churches.³⁶ This shows concern for the kind of education which would enable the churches to continue to have solid teaching. This aspect of Baptist life was a priority and was not to be stopped, even if forbidden by the Nazis.

In Zduńska Wola the Baptist church, unusually, experienced a temporary increase in membership because of Germans moving into the area. The Zduńska Wola church, founded by Gotfryd Alf,³⁷ had been a pre-war multicultural congregation.³⁸ But the circumstances of war created a new situation. The influx of German members during the war was not popular with the Polish members, who did not wish to befriend the occupiers of their country. What made the situation worse was that many people in the city still viewed all Baptists with suspicion and considered them friends of the Germans and enemies of the Polish nation. As a result, when later the Soviet Army entered Zduńska Wola, the entire 700 member church simply disappeared as a worshipping community. The German members were evacuated and the Polish members started to meet in private homes. During the final days of the war the sanctuary of the church was turned into a prison housing German and Ukrainian prisoners-of-war.³⁹

The Baptist churches also attempted to continue the musical tradition for which they were known in society. Singing hymns of spiritual conviction encouraged the congregations and also at times attracted people who were not committed to Baptist life, although the musical ministry was usually on a much smaller scale than before. The Warsaw Polish-speaking church is a good example of this persistence. The lives of the members were

completely disrupted yet their passion for music remained alive. The following moving words were written down at the time:

Four members of our choir have just died, four other have been taken to concentration camp, one is suffering in a prison camp in Germany. Members of the choir were dying daily but the song did not, because song cannot be murdered.⁴⁰

Just before the end of the war, however, during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the Warsaw Baptist sanctuary burned down and all the songbooks and music were lost.⁴¹ There was some continuity but more was lost than was retained.

War-time mission

Although so much was lost, and outreach was severely limited, some organised Baptist mission did take place during the war. Baptists from the villages delivered food to people they knew in the cities – Baptists and others – and took children from the cities for summer vacations. Others, in villages and towns, visited the many sick people in their homes and in hospitals. Some sent food packages to prisoners in concentration camps or at the Gestapo headquarters in Lublin; aspirin, rice, onions, garlic and fat were sent in response to requests.⁴² Thus during the occupation the charity work which had always characterised Polish Baptists did not stop but rather took on new forms. One important task was to help displaced and homeless (and often very poor) children to find adoptive homes. There were continual requests for Baptist families to receive children who were starving and two villages in particular welcomed large numbers of displaced children.⁴³

Many dislocated people, away from their normal surroundings, were open to new experiences. Krzysztof Bednarczyk wrote in vivid terms of how a Baptist home was opened and what kind of experiences resulted:

Our home during the war became like a hostel where demobilised soldiers, undercover officers or previously important officials or senators slept in almost every corner. In the morning they ate soup while listening to a Scripture reading and then they travelled on.⁴⁴

This Baptist family's home became a shelter for insurgents of the Warsaw Uprising and both Jews and Polish refugees found in it a place of survival. Bednarczyk was also one of those who encour-

aged the use of the Bethel centre in Radość near Warsaw, which acted as a place of refuge.⁴⁵

Towards the end of the war, both sides in the conflict became bitter and it seemed as if hatred was flooding through Poland. Villages and towns were burned. Symbols appeared on the walls of the buildings announcing who would live and who would die. Roads were covered with bodies and partisans hiding in forests stopped trains to kill and rob people. In the midst of this the Baptist churches were like islands of sanity in a sea of hysteria. Krzysztof Bednarczyk wrote:

My brother and I visited the churches in Lwow and Rawa-Ruska. People were singing and praying both in Polish and German. The consciences of people were touched so deeply that just before the end of the war we experienced something like a spiritual awaking.⁴⁶

It is remarkable that both Polish and German hymns were being used. This was a very unusual sign of mission that included reconciliation. This awakening was connected with the displacement of Polish people. Again Krzysztof Bednarczyk on being in Russian Rawa:

I remember a last baptism from that period when 80 people were baptised in Ruska-Rawa. In June of 1944 an Armenian preacher, Galustians, came. He arrived still wearing his prisoner's uniform – he had spent eight years in jail for preaching the Gospel. My brother and I, after listening to his passionate sermon, decided to be baptised and this was done in a pond outside the town during the bombing of the city of Lwow.⁴⁷

Although the Baptist churches were willing to use any mission opportunity as the war came to an end, the extremely difficult situations meant that often they could do little. There was lack of transportation, buildings were destroyed, and life in the cities was in a state of collapse. These upheavals were to have a huge impact on Baptist life after the war.

Displacement, not only to Germany but also within Poland, was a major factor that weakened Baptist mission. An example of a displaced family was the Bednarczyk family, who moved from Rawa-Ruska (now a city in the Ukraine) and settled in Żyrardów, near Warsaw.⁴⁸ This family was to become influential in Baptist life but others lost contact with the Baptist community. Nevertheless, even at this time, members of Baptist churches sought to give help if at all possible, and this will-

ingness to help a totally destroyed nation had its effect in the early days of liberty. Help from countries like Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden flooded into Poland through the Baptist churches, the foundation for this charity work having been laid already during the war.⁴⁹ A search for an authentic post-war Polish Baptist mission and identity began.

Help for Jews

Within the Polish Baptist congregations there were a number of Jews who had become evangelical Christians in the late 1930s. This drew several Polish Baptist congregations into solidarity with the sufferings of the Jews. From 1933 onwards, Jews in Germany were increasingly hunted down.⁵⁰ The exodus of German Jews began when those who had not been born in Germany were forced to flee the country. Thousands of refugees came to Warsaw and settled in an area of the city which later became the Warsaw Ghetto; and this is where they encountered evangelicals. Just before the war, evangelical witness was well received by many in the Jewish community. For a time, meetings in evangelical mission centres in Poland were attended by many Jews who wanted to hear what evangelicals said about the Messiah.⁵¹ A missionary name Miller rented a large hall near Warsaw where more than 150 Jews gathered regularly to discuss issues of faith and practice, Jewish and Christian. There were Bible study courses and discussions about how Jesus could be the Messiah.⁵² When the war started, the Jews defended Warsaw, as did the population of the city generally. But under the power of the Nazis, the remains of the Polish government gave up the attempt to stand with the Jewish community.

Before the war Jews in Poland had been persecuted, but during the war the persecution turned into mass killing, as was the case with millions of Jews all over Europe.⁵³ In Poland the pressure mounted step by step. Michael C. Steinlauf writes that some pre-war attitudes towards Jews made many individuals uncertain of their neighbours' reactions to attempts at helping.⁵⁴ Under Nazi occupation, all Jews were forced to wear a sweatband with the Star of David painted on it, which became a way of singling them out. This was quickly followed by the introduction of the ghettos. The Jews simply could not escape from those places, which were created in every large town and city in Poland. The German occupying forces sur-

rounded the ghettos with walls and barbed wire. Jews who lived in towns could no longer travel at all. Repression was greatly increased after 15 October 1941, when Governor-General Hans Frank announced the death penalty for any Jews living outside the ghettos. With this new law he also threatened death for any Poles who provided support or hid Jews outside the ghettos.⁵⁵

These policies and practices were resisted by many Polish Baptists who helped Jews who were fleeing the Germans. Examples have already been noted. Krzysztof Bednarczy wrote that all Baptists he knew helped the Jews they had contact with, giving bread to those who otherwise would have gone hungry.⁵⁶ In terms of numbers, a major ministry was helping the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, some of whom were Christian Jews. Those Jews who had been baptised in a Baptist congregation had documents testifying that they were members of a Baptist church and although it was hoped that this might offer protection from the authorities, they were tried in the same way as other Jews.⁵⁷ Rachmiel Frydland, a Jew who had become an evangelical believer, described how Christian believers died in the Warsaw Ghetto, and he saw them as martyrs.⁵⁸ Christian worship took place in the ghettos and there were even instances of baptisms. Pastor K. Krakiewicz baptised a young person inside the Ghetto but when this young man was late for his work, he was punished, put into jail and told he would die. While waiting for his execution, he wrote the words of his favourite Christian song on the wall. When the German officer appeared and asked the prisoner to translate the words into German, the officer listened and left the jail. About two hours later the young prisoner was set free.⁵⁹ This was celebrated as a miracle.

Among the Christian Jews living in the Warsaw Ghetto were Stanisław Eisenberg and Pastor Wolfin with his family, who had been helping Jews before the war. He often visited the Warsaw Ghetto undercover and eventually decided to stay in the Ghetto even if it meant death.⁶⁰

All through the horrors of the Holocaust, the Polish Baptist community was involved in rescuing Jews who were likely to be killed. Some could be saved through the Baptists network of communities. In a testimony, Ivan Yatsy describes the travels of a Jewish man named David Prital who was on the run from the Nazis and sought shelter with Baptists. Prital entered a farm and knocked on the door, to be welcomed with the words: 'God has brought an important guest. Come, let us

thank the Lord for this.' David Prital was placed in a number of different Baptists homes, travelling from one place to another by night. During one of these secret moves, he asked why he was being moved so often. He was told:

We usually place our trust in our fellow believers. But people are being tested in adversity and in difficult situations. Tonight we shall take you to a farmer who does not know you; his attitude and response will test the sincerity of his faith. There is no danger in this for you. At most, he will refuse you hospitality and we shall take you elsewhere. But to us, his response will be a serious indication of the strength and depth of his faith.

Moshe Bejski wrote that many helpless Jews were saved by Baptists for whom these acts of rescue were the ultimate test of their Christian creed.⁶¹ Members of Koszalin Baptist Church risked their lives by giving shelter to Jewish children who had escaped from Warsaw.⁶² Rozelia Bernet was a Jewish child who would have been killed but for Baptists. Years later she described how members of the Baptist church rescued her: In 1941, when the Germans started to murder all the children, her parents gave her away to a Polish woman, Ciechanowska, who was a Baptist. Ciechanowska helped the nine-year-old girl to communicate with Christians and taught her the Lord's Prayer and some other prayers, although as a Baptist she herself did not pray in that liturgical way.⁶³

Although there were Jews who survived the time of occupation and told stories of being helped as children by Christians, others recall that relationships with members of the Christian Churches generally were not good.⁶⁴ Jews were often afraid of Roman Catholics because they were the biggest religious group in Poland. Although there were Catholics who assisted Jews, the Jewish community feared Nazi sympathizers among Catholic Church members. The Orthodox Church in Poland was sympathetic to suffering, but the converted Jew Rachmiel Frydland, writing of his own experiences, recalled that of the Christian denominations it was evangelicals who most often treated the Jews with kindness.⁶⁵ The shared history of persecution was probably a crucial factor in this attitude.

One day Frydland visited the Warsaw Ghetto and wondered if he should stay on longer with some of the people he met there. The next day the Nazis exterminated them all.⁶⁶ Frydland also

describes an episode during the war when he was hiding in a forest with a group of Jews, as more and more Jews who had escaped either from villages or from trains found their way there and were hiding together. Each day they begged Polish people in a village for food. But the threat of the death penalty for aiding Jews, as well as limited ability to provide for the escapees, were factors which made Poles unwilling to provide direct help.⁶⁷ According to Frydland the Jews in the forest, some of whom had been in contact with evangelicals, read only one book, the Bible, and they prayed that God would allow them to survive. Some did survive, but others were killed. Frydland writes that in his case God did not allow him to die, although on many occasions he was sure his life would end.⁶⁸ He asks himself why he survived while his wife, parents and sisters were all killed. He alone was left.⁶⁹

The Polish Baptist church in Warsaw was probably faced with needs on a larger scale than any other Baptist church. In 1974 Aleksander Kircun recalled that in the very early days of the war this church received tragic news: Wiktor Michalski, a very active member of the church and a lieutenant in the army, had been killed during the defence of Warsaw. Wiktor's mother was a very courageous woman and even after having heard of the death of her son she did not stop helping those in need, Jews and Poles. Her home was always full of people who were hiding from the occupying forces. Kircun also spoke about Kamila Michalska, who very often crossed the lines into the Ghetto with a Star of David on her arm so that she would not arouse any suspicion. Michalska distributed bread and other food to those in the Ghetto, and as she did so she witnessed about Jesus, the Messiah. Her house was searched many times by the Gestapo but they never found anyone and she survived the war. Her husband was killed, however, just before the end of the war, on a Warsaw street.⁷⁰ For a number of Jews such as Rachmiel Frydland, the Polish Baptist communities in Warsaw and elsewhere were able in some measure to provide a home, and this is one reason why during the occupation Baptists were perceived by some people as being Jews.⁷¹

Nazi sympathies

But not all was well. Many Polish Baptists, even some leaders, adopted the ideology of the oppressors. Some preachers stated that it was right to obey the Nazis because 'every authority comes

from God'.⁷² How was this possible?⁷³ Most German Baptists had been supportive of Hitler's increasing power, seeing his leadership as 'averting the peril of atheist-communist domination'.⁷⁴ Another factor is that anti-Semitic attitudes were strong in the eastern provinces which were occupied by the Russians after the 1939 invasion. The local population there witnessed the repressions and the mass deportation of Poles to Siberia. This operation was led by the Soviet security apparatus, and recently opened archives reveal that some local Jews collaborated with them.⁷⁵ On the Polish side some massacres of Germans took place.⁷⁶

It is impossible to know how many Poles supported the Nazis. John Connelly says that estimates range from 7,000 to one million:

The low estimate of seven thousand is based primarily on the sentences of the Special Courts of the Polish Underground State, sentencing individuals for treason to the nation; the highest estimate of about one million, includes all Polish citizens who in some way contributed to the German activities, such as low-ranking Polish bureaucrats employed in German administration, members of the Blue Police, construction workers, slave labourers in German-run factories and farms and similar others. Notably the highest figure originates from a single statistical table of outdated scholarship with a very limited source base.⁷⁷

Outsiders have sometimes judged the whole nation or the entire Christian denomination, including the Baptists, by the responses of some. Yet, as we saw above, there were many Baptists who helped Jews. Help was also offered by Catholic clergy and nuns. A special role was played by members of female Catholic orders: In about 200 monasteries and 40 orphanages more than 1500 Jewish children were given protection and so saved from the Nazis.⁷⁸ Whereas many Baptists as well as other Christians took the easier option and tolerated or even supported Nazi policy towards the Jews, many others opposed that policy. Nechman Tec wrote that only 16% of Poles who rescued Jews were making money on doing so.⁷⁹ In the Yad Vashem Institute the Role of Honour, 'Righteous among the Nations', contains many Polish names.⁸⁰ As of 1 January 2009, 22,765 men and women from 45 countries had been recognised as 'Righteous among the Nations', representing over 10,000 authenticated rescue stories; over 6135 of these were from Poland.⁸¹

The unity of evangelicals

All the structures of the Polish Baptist Union and of Baptist Associations in the region of *General Gubernya* were liquidated when the war began and there was absolutely no leadership of the churches until 1942, when representatives of Baptists and other evangelical churches began to work together.⁸² The new wider Union or Federation began in April 1942.⁸³ As chair, Aleksander Kircun issued all members of the board with membership cards, but this action was used by the Gestapo to accuse the organisation of seeking to undermine the state authorities, who were the only body able to issue membership cards.⁸⁴ As a result of this incident and of the continued determination of the Nazi authorities to suppress anything that was Polish, even little known Polish preachers, deacons and lay church members were called up before the Gestapo. Some of them were arrested and thrown into prison,⁸⁵ others were accused of spying and sentenced to death, others were sent to work in Germany⁸⁶ and others were taken to concentration camps. Protests had little effect.⁸⁷ Both the German and the Polish-Russian authorities persecuted the evangelical groups. The monthly newspaper *Słowa Prawdy*, like other Polish-language magazines, could not be published.⁸⁸ In spite of all this, the board of the new evangelical organisation tried to coordinate the situation in the churches, and theological training for pastors was even offered in secret. To maintain a sense of identity was extremely difficult but not entirely impossible. The following is an example from a war-time programme of the ways in which evangelical churches cooperated.⁸⁹

- Monday: youth meeting in the Free Evangelical Church
- Tuesday: Bible study in Russian in the Free Evangelical Church
- Wednesday: prayer meeting
- Thursday: prayer and Bible study in the Baptist church
- Friday: prayer meeting in the Free Evangelical Church
- Saturday: evangelistic meeting and choir practice in Wolska Street
- Sunday: morning and evening services at all the above venues

In Kraków two congregations, the Free Christians and the Baptists, were united, holding the Sunday morning service in one and the evening service in the other building. It is widely agreed that the

evangelical churches became both more united and less rigidly denominational during this period of distress.⁹⁰ It seemed that a new perspective on Polish Baptist identity was opening up.

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Notes

- 1 Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Hill & Wang, 2000) 416.
- 2 Asa Briggs and Patricia Clavin, *Europa Dwóch Stuleci 1789-1989* [Modern Europe, 1789-1989] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo, 2000) 320.
- 3 Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 2nd ed. 2006) 255. See also Norman Davies, *Europe at War, 1939-1945: No Simple Victory* (London: MacMillan, 2006), who argues that much more attention must be given to Eastern European experiences.
- 4 Czesław Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce* [Population Policy and the Economy of Nazi Germany in Occupied Poland] (Poznań: Wyd. Poznańskie, 1979) 11.
- 5 Janusz Tazbir, *Zarys Historii Polski* [Outline of Polish History] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980) 678-679.
- 6 Bernard Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2008) 82-83.
- 7 Daniel Olszewski, *Dziesięć wydarzeń które wstrząsnęły kościołem XX wieku* [Ten Events that Shook the Church of the Twentieth Century] (Poznań: Księgarnia Św. Wociecha, 2002) 62.
- 8 Adam Piekarski, *The Church in Poland* (Warszawa: Interpress Publishers, 1978) 78.
- 9 Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 228-229.
- 10 Report by Cardinal Hlond, cited in A. Chandler, 'Catholicism and Protestantism in the Second World War in Europe', in Hugh McLeod (ed.), *World Christianities: c. 1914 - c. 2000*, The Cambridge History of Christianity vol. 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 271.
- 11 Alan Bullock, *Hitler. Studium Tyranii* [Hitler: A Study of Tyranny] (Warsaw: Iskry, 2004) 311.
- 12 Piekarski, *The Church in Poland*, 73.
- 13 In Poznań, Gustaw Manitius, senior pastor/bishop of the Poznań-Pomeranian District of the Lutheran Church, was arrested on 9 October 1939 and three

- months later murdered by the Gestapo. John L. Hoh, 'Lutherans in World War II', *Lutheranism*, 16 November 2001, 1.
- 14 Paul Bock, 'Protestantism in Czechoslovakia and Poland', in Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.), *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1992) 73-74. Some German Lutherans belonged to the United Protestant Church, which took a pro-Nazi stance.
 - 15 The German Baptist head office in Berlin was destroyed by bombing in 1943. Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich*, 134.
 - 16 Author Unknown, 'Manuscript' (Archive of the Baptist Seminary in Warsaw), 129.
 - 17 Author Unknown, 'Chelm-Lubelski' [Chelm-Lubelski], *Słowo Prawdy* no. 3 (1969) 21. The Union of the Churches of Christ was also known as the Disciples of Christ.
 - 18 Author Unknown, 'Chelm-Lubelski', 22.
 - 19 Author Unknown, 'Chelm-Lubelski', 23.
 - 20 For German Baptists, see Andrea Strubind, 'German Baptists and National Socialism', *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 8.3 (May 2008) 5-20.
 - 21 Waldemar Gutsche kept a record of the events and wrote to J.H. Rushbrooke in 1945. See Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich*, 83. The memorandum is held in the BWA (Europe) Box 1B of the Rushbrooke Collection at the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.
 - 22 Jerzy P. Rogaczewski, 'Polish Identity in Historical Context', Master's Thesis (McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, 1995) 71.
 - 23 Briggs and Clavin, *Europa Dwóch Stuleci 1789-1989*, 320.
 - 24 Piotr Wrobel, *The Devil's Playground: Poland in World War II* (Toronto: The Canadian Foundation for Polish Studies of the Polish Institute of Arts & Sciences. Price-Patterson, 1999); cf. George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Mentor Books, 1962) 333. Norman Davies, *Europe East and West* (London: Pimlico, 2007) 145, citing Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union* (Charlevoix MI: Crescent Lake, 1994), says that more than 160,000 people were deported in a single day.
 - 25 Ronald E. Davies, 'Baptists in Poland – Past and Present', *Religion in Communist Lands* vol.18 (1990) 53.
 - 26 Krystyna Rybicka, 'Historia Baptyzmu w Koszalinie po 1945' [History of the Baptists since 1945 in Koszalin], Unpublished dissertation (Warsaw: Wyższe Baptyistyczne Seminarium Teologiczne, 2006) 25.
 - 27 Extract taken from Ronnie S. Landau, 'The Diary of Avraham Levin who was in the Warsaw Ghetto', in *Studying the Holocaust: Issues, Readings and Documents* (London: Routledge, 1998) 83.
 - 28 Bazyli Dubowski, 'Autobiography of Bazyli Dubowski', *Słowo Prawdy* 10 (1996) 23.
 - 29 Author Unknown, 'Zanim doszło do budowy...' [Before we came to Build...], *Słowo Prawdy* 9 (1961) 9.
 - 30 Stanisław Markiewicz, 'Polski Kościół Chrześcijan Baptystów' [Polish Baptist Church], *Problemy Wyznań, i Laicyzacji* 12 (1988) 4.
 - 31 Davies, 'Baptists in Poland – Past and Present', 55.
 - 32 Włodzimierz Sawczuk, 'Jubileusz 50-lecia zboru w Rokitnie' [50th Anniversary of the Church in Rokitno], *Słowo Prawdy* 10 (1973) 7.
 - 33 Alexander Kircun, Jr, 'Poland', in G. Keith Parker (ed.), *Baptists in Europe: History and Confessions of Faith* (Nashville: Broadman, 1982) 172.
 - 34 Waldemar Zaborowicz, 'Wyznania religijne w Polsce międzywojennej' [Religious Denominations in Poland between the Wars], *Fakty i Myśli* 2 (1958) 8. Aleksander Kircun, 'O zborze warszawskim w czasie okupacji' [About the Church in Warsaw during the Nazi Occupation], *Słowo Prawdy* 3 (1974) 27.
 - 35 Tadeusz Zieliński, 'Filar Katowickiego Zboru' [The Pillar of the Katowice Church], *Słowo Prawdy* 6 (2000) 20.
 - 36 Wiesław Jedras, 'The History of the Polish Baptists' (Unpublished paper, Warsaw Baptist Theological Seminary, Senior Seminar, 1986) 46.
 - 37 Gotfryd (Gottfried) Fryderic Alf (1831-1898), a school-teacher of German extraction and a cantor in the Lutheran Church, became the leader of the first Baptist group in Poland. The best English source for his life is Albert Wardin, *Gottfried F. Alf: Pioneer of the Baptist Movement in Poland* (Brentwood, TN: Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2003).
 - 38 Later, in 1931-1945, this congregation was led by Edward Kupsch.
 - 39 The Church building was finally returned to the Baptists on 17 May 1990. Konstanty Wiazowski, 'Kościół Baptystów w Zduńskiej Woli' [The Baptist Church in Zduńska Wola], *Słowo Prawdy* 12 (1995) 14.
 - 40 Andrzej Seweryn, '60-lecie Chóru Zboru Warszawskiego' [Sixty Years of the Warsaw Choir], *Słowo Prawdy* 5 (1980) 26.
 - 41 Seweryn, '60-lecie Chóru Zboru Warszawskiego', 26.
 - 42 Aleksander Kircun, 'Kościół Baptystów w Służbie Społecznej' [The Baptist Church in Social Service], *Słowo Prawdy* 12 (1969) 9.
 - 43 Those two villages were Rokitno and Rudka. Kircun, 'Kościół Baptystów w Służbie Społecznej', 9.
 - 44 Krzysztof Bednarczyk, 'W słońcu Bożej miłości' [In the Sunshine of God's Love], *Słowo Prawdy* 2 (1975) 9.
 - 45 Michał Popko, 'Brat Stefan Bendarczyk' [Brother Stephan Bendarczyk], *Słowo Prawdy* 6-7 (1977) 55.
 - 46 Bednarczyk, 'W słońcu Bożej Miłości', 9.

- 47 Bednarczyk, 'W słońcu Bożej Miłości', 9.
- 48 Popko, 'Brat Stefan Bendarczyk', 55.
- 49 Aleksander Kircun, 'Akcja Pomocy Światowego Związku Baptystów dla Polski' [Action Aid World Association of Baptists for Poland], *Słowo Prawdy* 3-5 (1949) 6.
- 50 Eugeniusz Dąbrowski, 'Rachmiel Frydland, Człowiek Pod Bożą Ochroną' [Man under God's Protection], *Słowo Prawdy* 4 (1999) 5.
- 51 Rachmiel Frydland, *Skazani na zagładę* [Doomed to Destruction], (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Sefer, 2004) 35-36.
- 52 Krzysztof Bednarczyk, 'Na 40-lecie zboru krakowskiego' [On the 40th anniversary of the church in Kraków], *Słowo Prawdy* 6 (1972) 19.
- 53 Briggs and Clavin, *Europa Dwóch Stuleci 1789-1989*, 301.
- 54 Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997) 41-42.
- 55 Robert Szuchta on Jan Grabowski, 'Ja tego żyda znam! Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie 1939-1943' [I know this Jew! Blackmail of the Jews in Warsaw 1939-1943] (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Wydawnictwo IFIS PAN, 2004) 2.
- 56 Bednarczyk, 'Na 40-lecie zboru krakowskiego', 20.
- 57 Frydland, *Skazani na zagładę*, 41.
- 58 Dąbrowski, 'Rachmiel Frydland, Człowiek Pod Bożą Ochroną', 5.
- 59 Rachmiel Frydland, 'Uszedłem z rąk oprawców' [I escaped from the hands of Torturers], *Słowo Prawdy* 7-8 (1976) 9-12.
- 60 Frydland, *Skazani na zagładę*, 68.
- 61 Mordecai Paldiel, *Sheltering the Jews* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 132-133.
- 62 Krystyna Rybicka, 'Historia Baptyzmu w Koszalinie po 1945' [The History of Baptists in Koszalin after 1945], Dissertation (Warsaw: Wyższe Baptystyczne Seminaarium Teologiczne, 2006) 25.
- 63 Rozalia Bernet, *Dzieci Żydowskie Oskarżają* [Jewish Children Accused] (Warsaw: Foundation Shalom, Archv. ZIH. Prot. nr 2740) 7.
- 64 The writings of Jan T. Gross on this subject have caused much heart-searching in Poland. See his *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007).
- 65 Frydland, 'Uszedłem z rąk oprawców', 9-12.
- 66 Frydland, 'Uszedłem z rąk oprawców', 9-12.
- 67 Richard C. Lukas, *Out of the Inferno: Poles Remember the Holocaust* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989) 13; also earlier in Richard C. Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles Under German Occupation 1939-1944* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, Google Print, 1986) 13.
- 68 Frydland, *Skazani na zagładę*, 51.
- 69 Frydland, *Skazani na zagładę*, 53.
- 70 Aleksander Kircun, 'Nasza Siostra Kamila Michalska' [Our Sister Kamila Michalska], *Słowo Prawdy* 7-8, (1975) 38.
- 71 For example, in the chapel in Warsaw someone placed the Star of Zion and at the bottom wrote the words *Baptists are Jews*. See http://warszawa.wikia.com/wiki/Baptystyczny_Zbór_Centralny
- 72 Frydland, *Skazani na zagładę*, 56.
- 73 More on this subject in Reinhold Kerstan, *Blood and Honor* (Elgin, IL.: David Cook, 1980); see also the 'Declaration of guilt' from the Baptist Union of West Germany in 1984, in which Baptists confessed their mistreatment of others and asked for forgiveness.
- 74 See Strubind, 'German Baptists and National Socialism', 5-20.
- 75 Jerzy J. Lerski, Piotr Wróbel and Richard J. Kozicki, *Historical Dictionary of Poland, 966-1945* (Westport CT & London: Greenwood, 1996), 538.
- 76 Paweł Machcewicz, 'Płomienie nienawiści' [The Flames of Hatred], *Polityka* 43 [2373], (26.10.2002) 71-73.
- 77 John Connelly, 'Why the Poles Collaborated so Little: And why that is no reason for Nationalist Hubris', *Slavic Review* 64.4 (Winter 2005) 771-781.
- 78 Marcin Urynowicz, *Życie za życie' – pomoc polska dla ludności żydowskiej w okresie II wojny światowej* [Life for Life – Polish Support for the Jewish Population during World War II], Essay (Irena Sendlerowa Multimedialne Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne, October 2009) 10. This paper is also on www.dzieciirenysendlerowej.pl/images/esej3.pdf.
- 79 Nechama Tec, *Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 90.
- 80 Urynowicz, *Życie za życie' – pomoc polska dla ludności żydowskiej w okresie II wojny światowej*, 2.
- 81 Including Irena Sendler, a Polish social worker who served in the Polish Underground and the Żegota resistance organisation in German-occupied Warsaw during World War II and saved 2500 Jewish children. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Righteous_among_the_Nations.
- 82 Author Unknown, 'Trzydziestolecie uznania Prawnego Kościoła Baptystów' [Thirtieth Anniversary of the Legal Recognition of the Baptist Church], *Słowo Prawdy* 5 (1976) 3.
- 83 Bohdan Jaroszewicz, 'Zarys dziejów Kościoła Baptystów' [Outline of the History of the Church], thesis, (Warsaw, 1955) 130. Its board consisted of members from each participating denomination: Michał Popko – Baptist Union; Jan Mańkowski – Union of Evangelical Christians; Stanisław Krakiewicz – Free Christians (Brethren); and Paweł Bojeński – The Union of the Churches of Christ; and as chairman of the board, Aleksander Kircun, who was to be the influential pastor of the

- Warsaw Polish Baptist Church. Michał Popko, 'Życia Polskiego Kościoła Chrześcijan Baptystów w czasie okupacji i w pierwszych latach po wojnie' [About Polish Baptist Church life during the Nazi Occupation and the first years after the War], Typescript (Published for internal use of Baptists in Poland, Date Unknown) 3-5.
- 84 In January 1944 Kircun was appointed senior pastor of the Warsaw Polish Baptist church. Testimony of his ministry is published on the website of the Baptist Union. 28.08.2008. See <http://dlajezusa.pl/dj/content/view/1125/206/>
- 85 An example is Piotr Gordziejewicz who was imprisoned in Lublin.
- 86 Author Unknown, 'Prezbiter Dziekuć-Malej' [Presbyter Dziekuć-Malej], *Słowo Prawdy* 5 (1957) 9-10.
- 87 Gustaw Kubik was involved in correspondence with the authorities: 'Polskiego Kościoła Ewangelicznych Chrześcijan Baptystów' [A letter of the Polish Church of Evangelical Christian Baptists], September 3rd 1947, to Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej in AAN, zespół MAP, Departament Wyznaniowy i Departament Polityczny), sygn.1071, [Akta sygn. 1071-1073 dotyczą Baptystów 1945-1949].
- 88 Alfred W. Kurzawa, 'Ćwierczwiece Słowa Prawdy' [25th Anniversary of *Słowo Prawdy*], *Słowo Prawdy* 3 (1950) 2.
- 89 Adam Kircun, 'Wspomnienia' [Memories], *Słowo Prawdy* 3 (1949) 5.
- 90 Michał Stankiewicz, 'Informacja o Kościele Bapatystów' [Information about the Baptist Church in Poland] *Kalendarz Słowa Prawdy* [Calendar of *Słowo Prawdy*] (Warsaw, 1970) 36-37.