

Clerical Professionalisation and Catholic Enlightenment in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

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The article evaluates clerical professionalisation in the eighteenth-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by examining the division of labour within parishes. It argues that proponents of the Catholic Enlightenment endeavoured to achieve post-Tridentine reforms while also assigning to the clerical profession responsibilities for the material well-being of parishioners and service to the Commonwealth. It concludes that the process of clerical professionalisation remained incomplete. Firstly, approval for hiring assistant priests resulted in the delegation of many, if not all, ecclesiastical duties to them. Secondly, the improved professional education of priests occasionally led to unexpected withdrawal from pastoral duties seen as falling below their acquired competencies.

In 1786 Józef Kazimierz Kossakowski (1738–94), bishop of the tiny diocese of Livonija [Livonia] 1781–94,¹ published a novel in Warszawa [Warsaw], simply titled *Ksiądz pleban* [The parish priest],² in which he presented an ideal parish priest, and mocked various kinds of parish negligence and pathology. Despite their differences, all but one

AAG = Archdiocesan Archive, *Gniezno*; ABMK = *Archiwa, Biblioteki, i Muzea Kościelne wieku*; DAP = Diocesan Archive, Płock; MDDZP = *Materiały do dziejów ziemi płockiej: z archiwałów diecezjalnych płockich XVIII wieku*, i–xv, ed. M. M. Grzybowski, Płock 1981–2012; NAVK/DRCH = *Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History*; PK = *Prawo Kanoniczne: Kwartalnik Prawno-Historyczny*; PSB = *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 1935–; SCH = *Studies in Church History*; SP = *Studia Płockie*

The research upon which this article is based was funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, under the project PRELUDIUM 16, no 2018/31/N/HS3/02079.

¹ In Central Europe many places have been contested since the eighteenth century, and even a multi-ethnic society used various names. In this article names are given in the formal language of the state currently in possession with the English version in brackets.

² J. Kossakowski, *Ksiądz pleban*, Warsaw 1786.

of the satirically depicted priests were criticised for a lack of engagement in pastoral duties. For example, the first priest met by the narrator was a well-educated former friar (implicitly an ex-Jesuit). His rationality, as well as his historical and physical knowledge (he advocated heliocentrism), made a very good impression on his guest until he confessed that he did not teach catechism, because, firstly, he had no faith in the ability of the people to gain an understanding of it, and secondly, it could be done by any ordinary itinerant storyteller. In his estimation, he was too well educated to perform his professional duties, so he delegated them to an assistant priest.

Interestingly, the reason why all the priests Kossakowski mocked did not do their jobs properly had no connection with the plagues which post-Tridentine Catholicism had fought against,³ such as lack of residence in the parish, possession of more than one ecclesiastical benefice, religious ignorance or inadequate benefices. On the contrary, the parish priests depicted by Kossakowski were affluent, educated and resident, but they neglected parish tasks because they delegated them to assistant priests, a practice which was allowed by the Council of Trent to the peril of its own goal of professionalising the clergy.

Taking Kossakowski's satiric and exhortatory novel as a starting point, this article examines clerical professionalisation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1569–1795. Michael Hayden noted that the Council of Trent wanted pastors to hire vicars, so that the people did not suffer lack of service caused by too many duties falling on parish priests, and he assessed the increased number of assistant priests in the French diocese of Coutances to be a marked success for the reformers.⁴ However, as noted by Jan Kracik and Waldemar Kowalski, in the Polish diocese of Kraków [Cracow], parish priests who hired vicars delegated to them many or even all their duties, and therefore their presence could not have contributed to any increased quality of service.⁵ In the light of these contradicting observations, this article argues that the patterns of labour division within the parish are the key to any assessment of the success of

³ The terms post-Tridentine Catholicism and Catholic Reform are here used interchangeably as both indicate the intrinsic changes which happened to the Catholic Church after the reforms conducted during and after the Council of Trent. The term Counter-Reformation, as describing reactive actions, and early-modern Catholicism, which does not assume the transformations, are not used in the article: J. O'Malley, *Trent and all that: renaming of Catholicism in the early modern era*, Cambridge 2010.

⁴ M. Hayden, *The Catholicisms of Coutances: varieties of religion in early modern France, 1350–1789*, Montreal 2013.

⁵ J. Kracik, *Prawie wielební, Cracow* 2011, 132–6; W. Kowalski, 'Środowiska parafialne dekanatu jędrzejowskiego doby recepcji ustaw trydenckich', in W. Kowalski and J. Muszyńska (eds), *Kościół Katolicki w Małopolsce w średniowieczu i we wczesnym okresie nowożytnym*, Kielce 2001, 237–57.

clerical professionalisation. It is concluded that the main factor shaping parish priests' willingness to engage in pastoral duties personally was the social prestige of the given activity.

Research described in this article advances the argument that despite relative successes, the process of clerical professionalisation in Poland and Lithuania was not complete at the end of the eighteenth century, because not all, but still a significant minority of parish priests, were delegating all their tasks to assistants. That happened even when parish priests lived in the parish, which means that residence, so strongly advocated by the Church, was not sufficient to make priests dutiful.

Despite the special role played by proponents of the Catholic Enlightenment in the professionalisation of the clergy, reforms of clerical life conducted at the end of the eighteenth century are often omitted in the literature about post-Tridentine clergy,⁶ and historians of Catholic Enlightenment usually focus on intellectuals and their ideas, rather than on clerical lives.⁷ This article brings together the intellectual history of Catholic Enlightenment with the social history of post-Tridentine Catholicism.

It is argued that Catholic Enlighteners at the end of eighteenth century not only reinforced post-Tridentine demands for clerical professionalisation, but also redefined the ideal of clerical professionalism by requiring priests to attend to parishioners' earthly wellbeing and the political interests of the state. It also shows how the post-Tridentine increase in the quality of clerical education, and the secularisation of curricula in seminaries established by the Catholic Enlightenment, was successful but

⁶ S. K. Olczak, *Duchowieństwo parafialne diecezji poznańskiej w końcu XVI i w pierwszej połowie XVII w.*, Lublin 1990; M. Forster, *The Counter-Reformation in the villages: religion and reform in the bishopric of Speyer, 1560–1720*, New York 1992, 178–214; H. Kamen, *The phoenix and the flame: Catalonia and the Counter Reformation*, New Haven 1993, 340–85; L. Schorn-Schütte, 'The Christian clergy in the early modern Holy Roman Empire: a comparative social study', *Sixteenth Century Journal* xxix/3 (1998), 717–31; A. Bonzon, *L'Esprit de clocher: prêtres et paroisses dans le diocèse de Beauvais (1535–1650)*, Paris 1999; H. Rawlings, *Church, religion and society in early modern Spain*, London 2002, 50–76; H. Dudała, *Clerus Decanatus Plesnensis w świetle protokołów kongregacji dekanalnych pszczyńskich z lat 1691–1757: edycja źródłowa*, Katowice 2015; C. McNamara, *The bishop's burden: reforming the Catholic Church in early modern Italy*, Washington, DC 2020, 133–210.

⁷ S. David, *The religious enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*, Princeton 2008; R. Butterwick, 'What is Enlightenment (Oświecenie)? Some Polish answers, 1765–1820', *Central Europe* iii/1 (2005), 19–37, and 'Catholicism and enlightenment in Poland-Lithuania', in U. Lehner and M. O'Neil Printy (eds), *A companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, Leiden 2010, 297–358; U. Lehner, *Catholic Enlightenment: the forgotten story of the global movement*, Oxford 2016; J. D. Burson, *Culture of enlightening: Abbé Claude Yvon and the entangled emergence of the enlightenment*, Notre Dame, IN 2019; U. Lehner and S. Blanchard (eds), *The Catholic Enlightenment: a global anthology*, Washington, DC 2021.

unexpectedly disincentivised many parish priests from engagement in pastoral duties.

Research on post-Tridentine reforms of the clergy has been hampered by the lack of agreement regarding terminology and methodology. Historians write about clerical office, professional identity, professionalisation, clericalisation and sacerdotalisation⁸ or decide not to add any label to the descriptions of various changes in clerical life.⁹ This confusion has caused Ian Green to ‘doubt whether the Christian ministry, whose special powers are ascribed rather than achieved, can ever be fitted satisfactorily into a category of the professions’, and he has ‘suggested that the concept of professionalisation must be refined and qualified to be proven useful’.¹⁰

This article attempts to dispel these doubts by proposing the distinction between the process of professionalisation, which happened to priests as well as other occupational groups, and the process of sacerdotalisation, which was unique to the clergy. Clerical professionalisation is defined here as the process of ensuring that all priests perform their duties knowledgeably and skillfully. For the parish priests, the group that this article is focused upon, such duties should entail performing the liturgy, administering the sacraments, preaching and teaching the catechism, taking care of

⁸ R. O’Day, *The English clergy: the emergence and consolidation of a profession, 1558–1642*, Leicester 1979; G. Deregnaucourt, *De Fénelon à la Révolution: le clergé paroissial de l’Archevêché de Cambrai*, Lille 1991; L. Schorn-Schütte, ‘Priest, preacher, pastor: research on clerical office in early modern Europe’, *Central European History* xxx/1 (2000), 1–39; K. M. Comerford, ‘“The care of souls is a very grave burden for [the pastor]”: professionalization of clergy in early modern Florence, Lucca, and Arezzo’, *NAVK/DRCH* lxxxv/1 (2005), 349–68; E. A. Macek, ‘Advice manuals and the formation of English Protestant and Catholic clerical identities, 1560–1660’, *NAVK/DRCH* lxxxv/1 (2005), 315–31; M. Forster, *Catholic Germany from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, London 2007, 117–28; F. Ciappara, ‘Trent and the clergy in late eighteenth-century Malta’, *Church History* lxxviii/1 (2009), 1–25; C. McNamara, ‘Conceptualizing the priest: lay and episcopal expectations of clerical reform in late seventeenth-century Padua’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* civ/1 (2013), 297–320; J. Bergin, ‘Between estate and profession: the Catholic parish clergy of early modern western Europe’, in M. L. Bush (ed.), *Social orders and social classes in Europe since 1500*, London 2014, 66–85.

⁹ P. T. Hoffman, *Church and community in the diocese of Lyon, 1500–1789*, New Haven 1984, 71–98; Hayden, *The Catholicisms of Coutances, 147–95*; A. Kopiczko, *Duchowieństwo katolickie diecezji warmińskiej w latach, 1525–1821*, i, Olsztyn 2000; W. Bobryk, *Duchowieństwo unickiej diecezji chełmskiej w XVIII wieku*, Lublin 2005; M. Różański, *Duchowieństwo parafialne archidiaconatu uniejowskiego w XVIII wieku: studium prozopograficzne*, Łódź 2010; J. Szczepaniak, *Duchowieństwo diecezji krakowskiej w XVIII wieku: studium prozopograficzne*, Cracow 2010.

¹⁰ I. Green, ‘“Reformed pastors” and *bons curés*: the changing role of the parish clergy in early modern Europe’, in Diana Sheils and W. J. Sheils (eds), *The ministry: clerical and lay* (SCH xxvi, 1989), 251.

the church buildings as well as establishing and maintaining hospices and schools and managing the church benefice economy.

On the other hand sacerdotalisation is defined as the process of shaping the private lives of priests to reflect their distinct and elevated status, which arose from their special relations with God established when they were ordained. It entailed changing the everyday practices by which priests communicated their social position, such as being celibate, avoiding taverns, dressing in clerical attire and reciting the breviary.

Although Catholic reformers demanded from priests both full engagement in professional duties and the adoption of distinct sacerdotal standards in their private lives, these two goals should be treated separately, because they were implemented through different means, their realisation depended on different factors and they proceeded at a different pace. What is more, recognising the distinct nature of sacerdotalisation helps to avoid the recent mistake of Frans Ciappara, who treated characteristics of private life, such as living with one's parents, as evidence of a lack of clerical professionalism.¹¹ This article is focused exclusively on the clearly defined professionalisation.

Although many historians have thoroughly analysed post-Tridentine professionalisation, some regions have not been adequately treated, which compromises conclusions. For example, changes in clerical lives are sometimes linked to the emergence of the centralised and bureaucratic early modern state, especially but not only in Protestant countries.¹² However, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before the end of eighteenth century the state government degraded and it was the Church that was the most centralised and effective public institution.¹³ As a consequence, in the Commonwealth, clerical professionalisation did not correlate with the emergence of the bureaucratic state, but rather preceded its development.

This article is based on both quantitative and qualitative research. The main sources for statistical analysis were protocols of visitations to the diocese of Płock ordered by Bishop Michał Poniatowski and performed in 1775, 1776 and 1781 which allowed for the investigation of 244 out of 301 parishes.¹⁴ The supplementary data came from protocols and

¹¹ F. Ciappara, 'The professionalization of the clergy: parish priests in early modern Malta', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* xvix/1 (2023), 17–35.

¹² Schorn-Schütte, 'The Christian clergy', 717, and 'Priest, preacher, pastor', 1–39; R. Bireley, *The refashioning of Catholicism, 1450–1700: a reassessment of the Counter-reformation*, Basingstoke 1999, 70–95.

¹³ R. Butterwick, *Polska rewolucja a Kościół katolicki, 1788–1792*, Cracow 2012, 59–61; R. Butterwick-Pawlikowski, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1733–1795: light and flame*, New Haven 2020, 128–54.

¹⁴ Visitations from the remaining sixty-seven parishes are not available or they do not contain the necessary data. Percentages of priests and parishes of the diocese of Płock,

visitations of the deanery of Lutomerz in the archdiocese of Gniezno, which were conducted in 1791 according to the scheme established by Michał Poniatowski but ordered by Stefan Łubieński, who replaced Poniatowski when he left the Commonwealth during the Revolution.¹⁵

Nuances of labour division in the parishes have been examined *via* a case study of Słaboszów parish in the diocese of Kraków. The unique, personal and detailed diary of Kazimierz Dziuliński, parish priest from 1676 to 1701, as well as baptism registers from 1676 to 1701, have been investigated.¹⁶ Although Dziuliński lived decades before the visitation conducted by Poniatowski, the division of labour was a consequence of the benefice and patronage system, which did not change during the eighteenth century. Understanding of clerical engagement in pastoral duties has been further enhanced by the use of other clerical memoirs.

Education and residence

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the decrees of the Council of Trent were accepted by King Zygmunt August as early as 1564, and the clergy followed suit in 1577 during the synod of the province of Gniezno in Piotrków. Later diocesan synods and bishops repeated the requirement for priests to properly engage in their duties as well as to maintain elevated standards of behaviour. Slowly but surely institutional reforms were introduced.¹⁷ From the wider geographical and historical perspective, post-Tridentine reforms in Poland and Lithuania must be considered quite successful within the limitation of the benefice and patronage system.

At the end of the eighteenth century, priests in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were professionally educated, and their skills were tested before ordination. This was the result of a long and gradual process. For example, the first seminary in the diocese of Kraków was established in 1601, the second in Sandomierz in 1635 and the third in Lublin in 1675. At the end of the seventeenth century, these three schools could not yet provide all the knowledge and skills required for priests working in more than 900 parishes. However, in the following decades, the situation

calculated later in this article, are related to the number of parishes with available data (144) rather than all parishes (301): *MDDZP*.

¹⁵ 'Visitatio Decanatus Lutomiciensis', Gniezno 1791, AAG, MS A.Cons 24 a.

¹⁶ K. J. K. Dziuliński, 'Diariusz potocznych rzeczy i wydatków na różne domowe potrzeby', Manuscripts Department, Jagiellonian Library, Cracow, MS 2433; 'Akta urodzonych, 1664–1707 i małżeństw, 1669–1695', Diocesan Archives, Kielce, Acta Metricalia, MS Słaboszów 3.

¹⁷ S. Litak, *Od reformacji do oświecenia: kościół katolicki w Polsce nowożytnej*, Lublin 1994, 58–61; D. Kisiel, 'Recepcja reformy trydenckiej w diecezji płockiej', *SP* xxviii (2000), 187–206.

gradually improved. Existing seminaries gained new revenues and could support more students without charging tuition fees, and another four seminaries were established, in 1714 in Lublin, in 1726 in Kielce and in 1732 as well as in 1758 in Kraków.¹⁸ In other dioceses, there was similar progress and eventually, by the end of eighteenth century, the decisive majority of clergy in the whole Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had a professional education. That was true for priests from modest backgrounds who could count on scholarships in order to attend seminaries and for the most affluent, who despite being more or less guaranteed to become bishops did not avoid a seminary education.¹⁹ What is more, the basic professional skills and knowledge of all priests were examined before ordination by theologians appointed by bishops.

Some contemporaries, such as Hugo Kołłątaj (1750–1812), one of the most prominent adherents of enlightenment, who took part in the reform of the University of Kraków and co-authored the Constitution of 3 May, and consequently historians, complained that these examinations were not challenging enough because they were just an assessment of the ability to perform liturgy, administer the sacrament and listen to confessions, which resulted in focusing attention on casuistic moral theology to the detriment of other areas of theological knowledge. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the evaluation of the process of professionalisation, it was certainly enough. When it comes to professional education, proponents of the Catholic Enlightenment could only complain about the curricula and the quality of education in seminaries and universities, rather than the lack of professional skills and knowledge among priests.²⁰

At the end of the eighteenth century the majority of priests in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth resided in their parishes and did not accumulate benefices with *cura animarum*. For example, in the diocese of Płock absenteeism was not a big problem (see Table 1). As many as 211 (87 per cent) parish priests lived in their benefices.²¹ And in all but two cases,²²

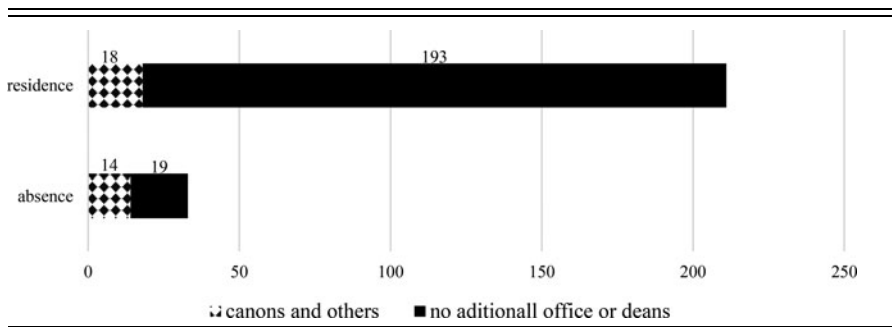
¹⁸ Kracik, *Prawie wielebni*, 86; Szczepaniak, *Duchowieństwo diecezji krakowskiej*, 180–218.

¹⁹ Kopiczko, *Duchowieństwo katolickie*, 56–73; Olczak, *Duchowieństwo parafialne diecezji poznańskiej*, 114–24; S. Litak, *Parafie w Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku: struktura, funkcje społeczno-religijne i edukacyjne*, Lublin 2004, 187–203; Bobryk, *Duchowieństwo uniwersyteckiej diecezji chełmskiej*, 65–70.

²⁰ H. Kołłątaj, 'Pamiętnik o stanie Kościoła polskiego katolickiego i o wszystkich innych wyznaniach w Polsce', in H. Kołłątaj, *Stan oświecenia w Polsce w ostatnich latach panowania Augusta III (1750–1764)*, Wrocław 2003, 204–8; Kracik, *Prawie wielebni*, 91–2.

²¹ All data analysis is based on the visitations of the diocese of Płock described above.

²² The only two absent parish priests who were not pluralist were Wincenty Chmielewski, the parish priest of Kamienica, who as a monk from the Apostolic Union of Secular Priests in Płock had required permission to live in Płock, and Jan Bohomolec of Skaryszew, philosopher and ex-Jesuit, who was summoned to reside by visitors: *MDDZP* viii. 103; ix. 9, 168.

Table 1. *Absenteeism in the diocese of Płock, 1774–81*

Source: Calculation based on visitation protocols: Michał Marian Grzybowski (ed.), *Materiały do dziejów ziemi płockiej: z archiwaliów diecezjalnych płockich XVIII wieku, i–xv*, Płock 1981–2012.

the failure to do so was correlated with the two types of pluralism tolerated by the Church.

The first group of seventeen (7 per cent) parishes without resident parish priests were kept *in commendam* (temporal supervision) by the resident priest of another parish. Keeping parishes *in commendam* was pluralism *de facto*, but not *de iure*. The other fourteen (6 per cent) parishes were held by priests who held additional benefice/s without *cura animarum*, such as cathedral and collegiate canonries, or were employed in the bishop's curia or as head of a diocesan seminar. Such an accumulation of benefices was also legal, as a way of providing parish priests with insufficient benefice income with the means to maintain priestly dignity.²³

Both types of absenteeism were not only legal, but also treated as the norm because diocesan visitors themselves were recruited from the ranks of bishops' courtiers, canons and deans, and naturally had sympathy for their colleagues who treated parish benefices as sources of the additional income believed to be necessary for priests of a certain social position, such as canons. Above all, such lack of residence was tolerated because it had not deprived parishioners of pastoral care. In all parishes where parish priests did not reside and did not engage in parochial duties, there were resident, assistant priests.

The case of Jan Bohomolec (1724–95), ex-Jesuit and the author of the famous treatise *Diabeł w swojej postaci* [The Devil in his nature], in which he criticised popular beliefs about witchcraft, illustrates the limits of the Church's tolerance of non-residence. Bohomolec did not live in his

²³ J. Kitowicz, *Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III*, Warsaw 2003. This is also available online at Wirtualna Biblioteka Literatury Polskiej, <<https://literat.ug.edu.pl/kitowic/koo07.htm>>.

parish of Skaryszew near Warszawa²⁴ and, as he confessed to visitors in 1775, he delegated all his duties to vicars. Because he possessed only one benefice and no additional office, visitors were not satisfied by his excuses and instructed him to abide by the law and to live in the parish to give a moral example to his parishioners; however they did not mention the necessity to perform parish duties personally.²⁵ The case of Bohomolec illustrates correlation between an advanced education and negligence of pastoral duties.

Division of labour in the parish

Early modern priests can be divided into three groups according to their engagement in ministerial duties. The first and biggest was a professionally active group consisting of vicars and parish priests with benefices too poor to hire assistants. The second, smaller but significant group, consisted of priests who held rich benefices, with or without *cura animarum*, who hired other priests as assistants, and who delegated a chosen portion of their duties. The final and the smallest group entailed those benefice holders who did not engage in ministry at all, completely relying on their assistants. Their everyday life was not defined by professional activities at all.

The exact proportions can be analysed for the diocese of Płock between 1775 and 1781. As many as 136 parish priests (56 per cent) and all assistant priests performed their duties personally and only 37 parish priests (15 per cent), including just 13 (5 per cent) who resided in their parishes, delegated all pastoral duties to vicars (see Table 2).

An example of the latter practice can be illustrated by the parish priest Józef Poliwczyński, who employed monks from the local monastery of the Order of Friars Minor to preach and teach catechism and additionally a vicar, Grzegorz Kruszewski, to perform any other duties.²⁶ Poliwczyński was a cathedral canon of Livonija, which was a superficial title, and his attitude bears a resemblance to that of the another character from Kossakowski's *Ksiądz pleban*, a dean who despite residing, had a completely secular and modern lifestyle, and even called his assistant disdainfully *parobek duchowny* [spiritual farmhand].²⁷

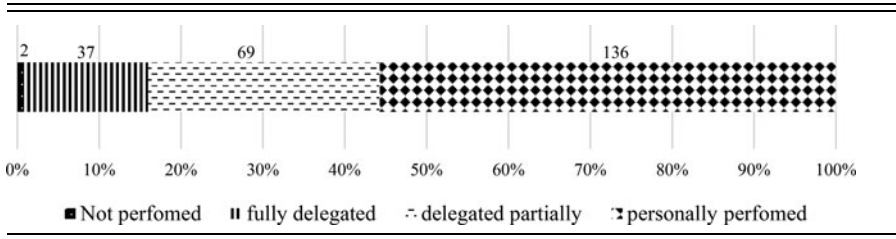
However, other parish priests who delegated all their duties at least assumed the role of active legislators and supervisors of the parish ministry

²⁴ D. Pietrkiewicz-Sobczak, 'Jan Bohomolec sj – oświecony filantrop', in I. Stasiewicz-Jasiukowa (ed.), *Wkład jezuitów do kultury i nauki Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów i pod zaborami*, Cracow 2004, 683–712.

²⁵ MDDZP viii, 84, 103.

²⁶ Ibid. vii, 131.

²⁷ Kossakowski, *Ksiądz pleban*, 18–29.

Table 2. *Duties in the diocese of Płock*

Source: Calculation based on visitation protocols: Grzybowski, *Materiały do dziejów ziemi płockiej*.

performed by the vicars. For example, Kołłątaj, after his appointment to the parish of Krzyżanowice in the diocese of Kraków, issued detailed instructions to his newly hired vicar.²⁸ Bohomolec, in 1788, wrote his last will in which he not only gave detailed instructions about methods of ministry but also established a fund, the interest from which was to support vicars in Skaryszew.²⁹ Another example is Teofil Gałęcki, an Augustinian, who did not work himself, but actively decided which books should be read by his vicars.³⁰

Another sixty-nine parish priests (28 per cent) hired assistants but occasionally or regularly performed at least some of the tasks themselves. In twenty parishes (8 per cent) the benefice could not support the full employment of vicars, and parish priests generally did everything themselves, but asked monks from nearby monasteries to help them, especially in preaching and hearing confessions before Easter.³¹ Assistant priests were envisaged by the Council of Trent as playing exactly such a role. However, forty-nine parishes (20 per cent) in the diocese of Płock had vicars employed full-time, and parish priests delegated to them duties according to personal preference rather than objective necessity. Their practice has been overlooked by both Catholic reformers and many historians (*see* Table 2).

The decision on which duties should be delegated to vicars was usually based on the relative social prestige of a given task. Some parish priests

²⁸ E. Rostworowski, 'Ksiądz pleban Kołłątaj', in *Wiek XIX: prace ofiarowane Stefanowi Kieniewiczowi w 60 rocznicę urodzin*, Warsaw 1967, 49–63.

²⁹ 'Testamenta śp. ks. Franciszka Bohomolca dnia 9 stycznia 1781 roku i Jana dnia 1 stycznia 1788 roku', Central Archives of Historical Records, Warsaw, MS Warszawa-Ekonomiczne 1223/335.

³⁰ Only one resident parish priest, Stanisław Malanowski, did not perform his duties either personally or with the help of vicars. Priests allegedly did not because people were used to going to the main parish church in the town, Sieprc, rather than to the hospital parish church: *ibid.* i. 97–8.

considered pastoral work such as preaching and teaching catechism more important and did it themselves while delegating the administration of the sacraments to the vicars.³² Such division of labour might have been quite popular for financial reasons. Baptisms, weddings and funerals were occasions to collect the customary sacramental fees (*iura stolae*). Because the salary of most assistant priests was very modest, they eagerly sought the opportunity to administer the sacraments, and accordingly parish priests, by delegating these tasks, could have kept salaries lower.³³

Among ministerial chores, preaching was considered more prestigious than teaching catechism. In Kossakowski's *Ksiądz pleban*, most of the satirised priests deliberately chose not to teach it because they claimed that it was beneath them in terms of their educational and social position. They left teaching the people the articles of faith to the vicars. Visitation protocols of the deanery of Lutomierz in the archdiocese of Gniezno confirm that parish priests delivered sermons mostly on holidays when more distinguished parishioners were present, whereas the catechism was taught by vicars every Sunday.³⁴ In the diocese of Płock, thirty-five priests (14 per cent) divided their chores thus (see Table 3). Roch Stanisław Ciechanowicz, parish priest of Lutocin in Biezuń deanery, even explained that he did not preach on Sundays because addressing sermons to the simple folk was pointless.³⁵ In the southern part of diocese of Vilnius, where most of the Catholics were noblemen and most peasants were Greek Catholic, parish book collections at the end of eighteenth century had few seemingly unnecessary catechisms, but were full of erudite collections of sermons.³⁶

There were also parishes where parish priests delegated some chores, but still engaged a little in all types of pastoral work. An example of such an arrangement was provided in the memoirs of Józef Kazimierz Kossakowski. When he resided in his parish of Boyna (Vowpa), despite having as many as three assistants, a secular priest and two monks from the Jesuit and Vincentian orders, he occasionally taught catechism, listened to confessions and took the sacraments to the sick.³⁷

Kossakowski did not clarify why he personally performed certain duties while delegating others to subordinates. Fortunately, the principles of

³² That was so in the case of Józef Niemierka, parish priest of Brok and canon collegiate in Pułtusk as well as that of Paweł Różański, parish priests of Daniszewo: *ibid.* xii. 22; ii. 53.

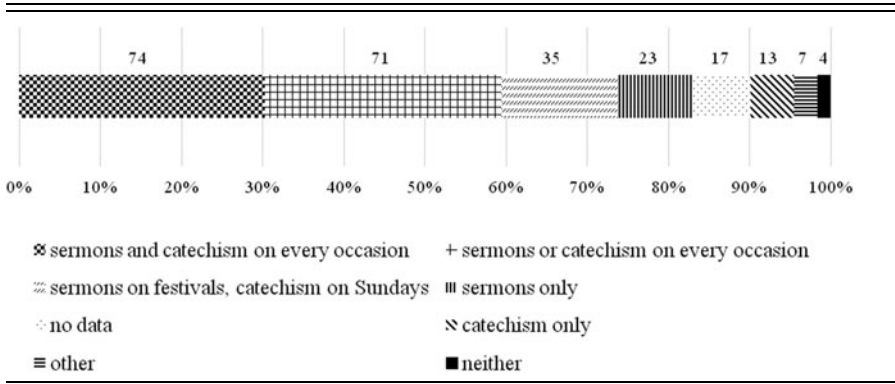
³³ D. Główna, *Gospodarka w dobrach plebańskich na Mazowszu w XVI–XVIII wieku*, Warsaw 1991, 81; Kracik, *Prawie wielebni*, 137–8.

³⁴ 'Visitatio Decanatus Lutomierciensis'.

³⁵ MDDZP i. 169.

³⁶ S. Witecki, *Przekaz kulturowy w parafiach katolickich Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów czasów stanisławowskich*, Cracow 2018, 246–7.

³⁷ J. Kossakowski, *Pamiętniki Józefa Kossakowskiego biskupa inflanckiego, 1738–1788*, Warsaw 1891, at <<http://polona.pl/item/92536/>>, 45.

Table 3. *Pastoral methods in the diocese of Płock*

Source: Calculation based on visitation protocols: Grzybowski, *Materiały do dziejów ziemi płockiej*.

parish labour division can be analysed on the basis of a unique set of sources related to the parish of Słaboszów. Kazimierz Dziuliński opted to personally undertake all kinds of professional duties, but he did so infrequently and on condition that they were distinguished by solemnity and the social position of the parishioners involved.

Firstly, Dziuliński would delegate most liturgical duties. Only twice did he mention saying mass: on Easter Sunday, 10 April 1695, he indicated that he did so after an illness of undefined length; and on the Saturday before the fourth Sunday of Advent, i.e. 18 December 1700, he confessed to doing so for the first time after a one-year break caused by chronic headaches.³⁸ It seems that the main reason for noting these events was his illnesses, to which he always paid close attention, and one may draw the conclusion that the priest generally did not mention services, not necessarily because he did not perform them, but because they were not worth mentioning as something performed regularly.³⁹ However, during the year when he did not say mass at all, citing sickness, he travelled, traded and administered the parish benefice. It would appear that he did not need much of an excuse to delegate liturgical chores, and when he was quite

³⁸ Dziuliński, 'Diariusz', 14, 67.

³⁹ By this logic, he mentioned three occasions on which he said mass outside his parish, which were clearly exceptional events: on 22 Oct. 1696 he said a votive mass in the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Kraków suburb of Piasek; on 21 Sept. 1699 he said mass in the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the village of Zielenice; and on 10 Oct. 1699 he said a votive mass in the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Kraków: *ibid.* 3.1, 59–60.

ill he felt justified in missing church altogether, as happened on 12 December 1699, when his left arm was paralysed for thirteen weeks.⁴⁰

On the other hand, he assumed the role of supervisor and organiser of more important celebrations. For example, every year on the feast day of St Nicholas (6 December, the patron saint of the church in Słaboszów), he would invite distinguished preachers and a few priests from neighbouring parishes to concelebrate. Thus, on 6 December 1697, mass was said by the parish priests from Mały Książ, Działoszyce and Kalina, and the sermon was delivered by Stanisław Humiński, a preacher from nearby Skalmierz.⁴¹

During his frequent trips to Kraków, Dziuliński would also buy liturgical equipment and vestments, such as three sculptures in wood and painted paxes, two porcelain altar frontals, a purple patterned cape, a surplice and two white chasubles embroidered with gold and silver threads. He clearly cared about liturgical decorum in his parish church.⁴²

Secondly, he engaged only in the rites of passage of people whom he considered important or with whom he had personal relations. In his diary, Dziuliński mentions only a few cases when he took part in baptisms, marriages and funerals, and without exceptions these involved distinguished people such as a church patron's family, local gentry or at the very least members of the peasant elite. The parish registers confirm the picture drawn in the diary. Dziuliński performed baptisms very rarely. Between 1676 and 1702, he baptised as few as forty-one children, only 2.8 per cent of all baptisms.⁴³ Another 10 per cent of children were christened by the successive promoters of the Rosary Fraternity and as many as 86.4 per cent by vicars (see Table 4).

Dziuliński baptised sixteen children of the local nobility, 64 per cent of all baptisms of noble children. Apart from local nobility, he also baptised twenty-five peasants, and the motives for his participation in twelve of them were very clear. They were the children of peasants with whom he might have had personal relations, such as village artisans, *kmiecie* (the richest of peasants with full farms), direct parish serfs, residents of the village of Słaboszów and children of peasants whose sponsors were lords. Over a span of thirty-six years, he baptised only thirteen children without a distinct reason, probably when no other priest happened to be available (see Tables 5 and 6).

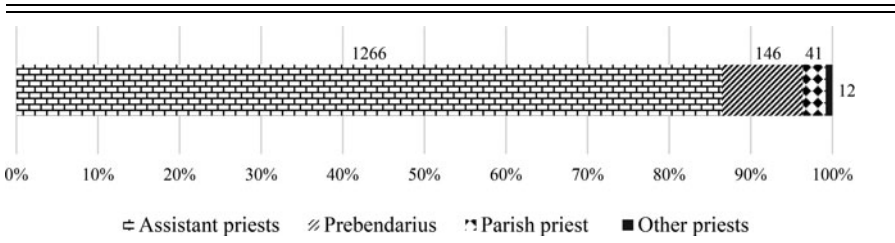
The situation in Słaboszów illustrates that the administration of the sacraments significantly distinguished the life of a priest with and without direct engagement in pastoral duties. It was the most time-consuming clerical duty, much superseding responsibility to preach and teach catechism. In the average parish, there was one baptism, one last rite and one funeral

⁴⁰ Ibid. 61.

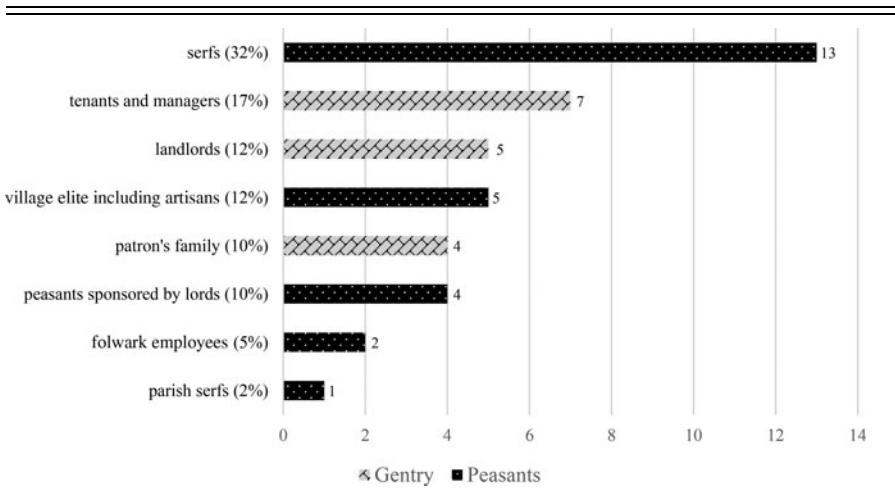
⁴¹ Ibid. 43.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ All following data analysis is based on: 'Akta urodzonych, 1664–1707, i małżeństw, 1669–95'.

Table 4. *Priests who baptised in Słaboszów*

Source: Calculation based on 'Akta urodzonych, 1664–1707 i małżeństw 1669–95', Archiwum Diecezjalne w Kielcach, Acta Metricalia, Słaboszów 3.

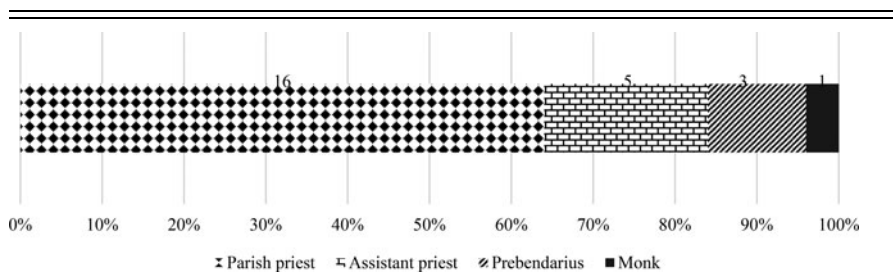
Table 5. *Children baptised by Kazimierz Dziuliński*

Source: Calculation based on 'Akta urodzonych, 1664–1707 i małżeństw 1669–95'.

a week, and only weddings were more infrequent and more solemn occasions.⁴⁴

Dziuliński also carried out or delegated other duties depending on how much social prestige they carried. For example, on 29 November 1696, he blessed a *boża męka* (small chapel depicting the passion of Christ) in front of the parish hospital funded by the nobleman Józef Wojciechowski. He also

⁴⁴ M. Wyżga, *Parafia Raciborowice: od XVI do końca XVIII wieku: studium o społeczności lokalnej*, Cracow 2011, 150–7; W. Baś, 'Historia parafii św. Bartłomieja w Mogile', unpubl. MA diss. Jagiellonian University, Cracow 2012.

Table 6. *Priests who baptised children of nobility in Staboszów*

Source: Calculation based on 'Akta urodzonych, 1664–1707 i małżeństw, 1669–95'.

described personal pastoral visits to the families of parish patrons and other landlords, but never mentioned visiting peasant parishioners.⁴⁵

This explanation of the ecclesiastical division of labour should not obscure the fact that a clear majority of parishes were under professional pastoral care. From the perspective of both diocesan authorities and parishioners, it was of little significance whether duties were discharged by a priest or an assistant priest. Protocols of visitations of the diocese of Płock confirm that at the end of the eighteenth century, in all but a few parishes masses were said on every Sunday and holiday and that priests would regularly give instruction on the faith with the help of specialist literature, which was often newly published and recommended by the bishop.⁴⁶

What is more, according to parish registers from the diocese of Kraków, by the late sixteenth century the clergy possessed the literature necessary for preaching and teaching catechism, something which was not so apparent in Tuscan dioceses at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁴⁷ Later visitations from various dioceses in the Commonwealth show a steady growth in parish book collections, mainly of professional literature.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ On New Year's Day 1696 and on 6 January 1697 he visited Stanisław Piegłowski, patron of the parish, and on 15 January 1696 his daughter Justyna Dębińska: Dziuliński, 'Diariusz', 20, 33.

⁴⁶ MDDZP i–xv; Witecki, *Przekaz kulturowy*, 125–96.

⁴⁷ H. E. Wyczawski, 'Biblioteki parafialne w diecezji krakowskiej u schyłku XVI wieku', *Polonia Sacra* vi–vii (1953–5), 114–42, 27–68; J. Kracik, 'Biblioteka parafialna a prywatne księgozbiory duchowieństwa: Dekanat Nowa Góra w XVII–XVIII wieku', *ABMK* xxxii (1976), 249–71; Comerford, 'The care of souls'.

⁴⁸ J. Szady, *Księgozbiory parafialne w prepozyturze wiślickiej w drugiej połowie XVIII wieku*, Lublin 2008; T. Moskal, *Biblioteki parafialne w archidiecezji sandomierskiej w XVIII w.*, Sandomierz 2005; S. Witecki, 'Oświecony katolicyzm trydencki: Księgozbiory duchowieństwa parafialnego diecezji płockiej w okresie pontyfikatu bp Michała Jerzego Poniatowskiego', *Wiek Oświecenia* xxxiii (2017), 149–88.

Proper administration of baptisms, weddings and funerals was also undoubtedly the norm at the end of the eighteenth century. Bishops did not have to admonish parish priests to perform these duties, and properly kept parish registers confirm that parishioners generally did not complain about the lack of a priest's assistance in their rites of passage. There were however, some scandalous conflicts between parishioners and priests regarding fees, in consequence of which some bishops, such as Poniatowski, issued an official tariff to replace the, theoretically voluntary, but in fact inflated donations.⁴⁹ That, however, is another story.

In the context of the post-Tridentine Catholic Church, it is important to underline that in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth the practice of church weddings preceded by calling the banns was fully established by the end of seventeenth century. That is somewhat exceptional, because in other European countries opposing clandestine marriages seems to have been much more difficult.⁵⁰

Clerical professionalisation and Catholic Enlightenment

With the relative success of post-Tridentine reforms, much more was expected of priests. At the end of the eighteenth century a new generation of Polish-Lithuanian bishops, better educated and generally more focused on ecclesiastical affairs than their direct predecessors, assessed the state of the Church, and took action to eliminate the shortcomings they identified.⁵¹

A few individuals are worth mentioning. Wojciech Skarszewski (1743–1827), first as the actual author of the pastoral letter sent out in the name of Józef Ignacy Rybiński (1745–1806), bishop of Włocławek, and then as Latin bishop of Chełm and Lublin (1791–1805), issued elaborate pastoral instructions reminding priests of all their duties. He also re-established deanery congregations.⁵² In 1793 Ignacy Massalski (1726–94),

⁴⁹ M. Poniatowski, 'Ordinatio jurium stolae i innych niektórych kościelnych obwencji', *Rozządzenia i* (1774), 55–69.

⁵⁰ J. Bossy, 'Blood and baptism: kinship, community and Christianity in western Europe from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Sanctity and secularity: the Church and the world* (SCH x, 1973), 129–43; J. Sperling, 'Marriage at the time of the Council of Trent (1560–70): clandestine marriages, kinship prohibitions, and dowry exchange in European comparison', *Journal of Early Modern History* viii/1 (2004), 67–108.

⁵¹ Litak, *Od reformacji do oświecenia*, 164–6; Butterwick-Pawlikowski, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, 146–7.

⁵² J. Wysocki, *Józef Ignacy Rybiński, biskup włocławski i pomorski (1777–1806): zarys bibliograficzny na tle rządów diecezją*, Rome 1967; M. Deszczyńska and E. Zielińska, 'Skarszewski h. Leszczyz Wojciech Józef Marcin', *PSB xxxviii*, ed. Henryk Markiewicz, Warsaw–Krakow 1997–8, 50–61; Witecki, *Przekaz kulturowy*, 108–11, 257–82.

bishop of Vilnius (1762–94), published the anonymous parenetic book, *Kapłan Sługa Boży* [The priest, servant of God], where he presented the ideal of a fully engaged parish priest focused on teaching the faith in a simple manner.⁵³ Porfiriusz Skarbek Ważyński (1730–1804), bishop of the Ruthenian diocese of Chełm (1790–1804),⁵⁴ reminded priests during synods that teaching the faith was their duty, wrote a new simple catechism and ordered visitations during which questions were asked about parochial ministry. These revealed that he had managed to get priests to engage in catechisation.⁵⁵

A prominent reformer was Michał Jerzy Poniatowski (1736–94), the king's brother, bishop of Płock (1773–85), administrator of the diocese of Kraków (1782–90) and, finally, archbishop of Gniezno and primate of Poland and Lithuania (1785–94).⁵⁶ In an elaborate pastoral letter to the faithful of the diocese of Płock, issued in 1775, he not only repeated the post-Tridentine calls for engagement in parish duties but also called on all parish priests to work in their parishes, singling out cathedral and collegiate canons, known for delegating their chores.⁵⁷ What is more, he forced parish priests to justify their conduct by making his visitors ask not only about the numbers and names of priests in the parish but also if parish priests performed pastoral duties *executive* (personally) or only *directive* (by supervision).⁵⁸

Reformers in the second half of the eighteenth century not only called for engagement in pastoral duties but also adopted a few methods of mitigating the results of the benefice and patronage systems. They did not succeed in making all priests professionally engaged, but at least brought

⁵³ *Kapłan sługa boży i pasterz dusz, czyli list księdza plebana do księdza brata swego zamykający w krótkim zebraniu obowiązki kapłańskie i pasterza dusz*, Wilno 1793.

⁵⁴ The Ruthenian rite (*obrzędek ruski*) of the Catholic Church was established by the Union of Brześć (*Unia Brzeska*) in 1589. It was also called the uniate rite (*obrzędek unicki*). Today this branch of Church is called the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

⁵⁵ J. Łapiński, 'Porfiriusz Skarbek Ważyński jako zakonnik i hierarcha unicki', *PK xxviii/3–4* (1985), 269–74; P. Skarbek-Ważyński, *Katechizm albo krótkie zebranie nauki chrześcijańskiej, dla pożytku dusz ludzkich spisane, do druku podane i dna dwie klasy podzielone*, Poczajów 1792; *Synody dyecezyi chełmskiej ob. usch.*, ed. E. Likowski, Poznań 1902; Witecki, *Przekaz kulturowy*, 108–11, 257–82.

⁵⁶ M. Grzybowski, *Kościelna działalność Michała Jerzego Poniatowskiego biskupa płockiego, 1773–1785*, Warsaw 1983; Z. Zielińska, 'Michał Jerzy Poniatowski h. Ciołek', *PSB xxvii*, ed. Emmanuel Rostworowski, Wrocław 1982–3, 455–71; Witecki, *Przekaz kulturowy*, 58–84.

⁵⁷ M. Poniatowski, 'List pasterski do obojga stanów diecezji płockiej tak duchownego jako i świeckiego wydany', *Rozrządzenia 1* (1775), 309–401.

⁵⁸ Idem, 'Obwieszczenie generalnej wizyty diecezji płockiej', *Rozrządzenia 1* (1774), 292–308; S. W. Łubieński, 'Ingressacya obwieszczenia o mającej się odprawić wizycie generalnej wydanego przez JWIX administratora generalnego archidiecezji gnieźnieńskiej w niebytności xięcia jmcj prymasa', in *Acta postcurialia Michaelis Poniatowski archiepiscopi Gnesnensis et primatis*, AAG, MS A.Cons 3, 639–46.

all clergy together and forced them to reflect upon their vocation and responsibilities.

Firstly, the right to hear confessions was made dependent upon passing annual theological exams, which forced all priests to revise at least their moral theology. Michał Poniatowski inquired about the fulfilment of these duties during visitations and verified that all but a few priests indeed had valid certificates.⁵⁹ He also used the threat of not receiving permission to hear confessions to encourage priests to attend spiritual retreats, another device aimed at professionalising clergy. At such retreats, secular priests were forced to lead the life of a religious with the hope that after returning to their parishes, they would re-establish relations with God, and this would have a long-term effect on their professional activity. In the diocese of Płock, spiritual retreats were introduced by the synod organised by Bishop Andrzej Stanisław Załuski in 1733. All priests were required to spend at least five days a year at diocesan seminars or at Jesuit or Lazarist monasteries.⁶⁰ Despite this obligation, many members of the clergy did not attend and Poniatowski in 1774 issued new, complex regulations.⁶¹ All priests were obliged to stay for a five-day retreat every year in a monastery chosen by the bishop in advance. Evidently, the clergy were reluctant, so Poniatowski threatened absentees with a fine of fifty zlotys, to be given to charity. In 1787 Poniatowski repeated these regulations for the archdiocese of Gniezno.⁶² Visitations of the diocese of Płock from 1775 to 1776 and especially those from 1781, as well as the visitation of Lutomierz deanery in the archdiocese of Gniezno, confirm that after the introduction of coercive methods, all but a few priests had participated in retreats, and this included parish priests of affluent parishes, who generally avoided pastoral duties.⁶³

Unfortunately, the general history of obligatory spiritual retreats in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth has not been written, and the scale of this practice outside the diocese of Płock is difficult to assess. But, Poniatowski, in his letters concerning the practice, mentioned that participation in retreats was required in other dioceses. Wojciech Skarszewski repeated the requirement to take part in spiritual retreats in a pastoral letter for the diocese of Włocławek, written in the name of Bishop Józef Rubiński in 1778 and as bishop of the diocese of Chełm and Lublin in 1792. Moreover, in 1792, he ordered priests in his diocese to buy his

⁵⁹ *MDDZP* i–xv; ‘Visitatio Decanatus Lutomierciensis’.

⁶⁰ J. Surmacz, ‘Ostatni synod płocki w Polsce’, *SP* iv (1976), 167.

⁶¹ M. Grzybowski, ‘Formacja intelektualna i moralna duchowieństwa diecezji płockiej w czasach rządów bp M. J. Poniatowskiego (1773–1785)’, *ibid.* 83.

⁶² M. Poniatowski, ‘Rozrządzenie dla duchowieństwa archidiecezji gnieźnieńskiej względem corocznych rekolekcji’, *Acta postcurialia Michaelis Poniatowski archiepiscopi Gnesnensis et primatis*, 87–92.

⁶³ ‘Visitatio Decanatus Lutomierciensis’; *MDDZP* i–xv.

book on spiritual exercises, which at least four parish priests had done.⁶⁴ Retreats were probably also organised in the diocese of Łuck, or at least, that was required by the synod organised in 1726 by Bishop Stefan Bogusław Rupniewski.⁶⁵

Another method of mitigating the consequences of the patronage and benefice system was deanery congregations. The idea of organising them spread in Poland and Lithuania after the provincial synod organised by Archbishop Jan Przerembski in 1561. Although in every diocese congregations differed in specifics, the universal rule was that there were supposed to be annual or biannual gatherings of all priests from the deanery. Most meetings consisted of prayers, lectures about clerical duties, the dean's investigation of priests' work and knowledge, discussion of difficulties which priests were facing in their parishes, as well as pointing out each other's sins.⁶⁶ Some bishops gave deanery congregations the additional goal of educating priests and checking their theological knowledge. For example Poniatowski, as bishop of Płock in 1774, and Skarszewski, as bishop of Chełm and Lublin, required priests to submit and discuss theological essays on topics set at previous meetings. Melchior Kochanowski, auxiliary bishop of Chełm, would also expect deans to read and study their regulations during congregations.⁶⁷ Participation of parish priests alongside assistants integrated them as a group, and peer control helped to work out common standards of professional behaviour.

A few existing deanery archives allow for confirmation that congregations were organised and, at least in some regions, served the purposes defined by bishops.⁶⁸ According to the memoir of Jędrzej Kitowicz,

⁶⁴ W. Skarszewski, *Rozporządzenie pasterskie na diecezję chełmską i lubelską roku 1792*, Warsaw 1792, 8–9, and *Rekollekcje dla duchowieństwa dyecezyi chełm skieyy lubelskiej od... Woydecha Leszczyca Skarszeuskiego biskupa... przepisane*, Warsaw 1792; R. Butterwick, 'Polska rewolucja a Kościół rzymsko-katolicki, 1788–1792: problemy badawcze i wstępne wnioski', in A. Kaźmierczak and K. Matwijowski (eds), *Rzeczpospolita wielu wyznań*, Cracow 2004, 626–9; Witecki, *Przekaz kulturowy*, 273.

⁶⁵ W. Jemielity, 'Rekollekcje i kongregacje dekanalne duchowieństwa w diecezji augustowskiej czyli sejneńskiej', *PK* xlv/1–2 (2002), 220.

⁶⁶ Dudała, *Clerus Decanatus Plesnensis*, 43–61; J. Kracik, 'Najstarsze akta kongregacji dekanalnych w Archiwum Kurii Metropolitalnej w Krakowie', *ABMK* xxix (1974), 261–72.

⁶⁷ M. Poniatowski, 'Rozrządzenie względem odprawiania co półrocznych kongregacji dekanalnych przez duchowieństwo diecezji płockiej i względem innych obowiązków dziekańskiego urzędu', *Rozrządzenia* 1 (1774), 207–67; M. Kochanowski, 'Incipit: Najmilsi w Chrystusie Bracia Zapobiegając Szkodom Którebyście Albo Przez Omylne Uwiadomienia de Subidio Charitativo', in *Odezwy królewskie i listy pasterskie biskupów chełmskich, 1776–1783*, Archdiocesan Archives, Lublin, ms Rep 64 A 59; Skarszewski, *Rozporządzenie pasterskie*, 29–35.

⁶⁸ Kracik, 'Najstarsze akta kongregacji dekanalnych'; Grzybowski, 'Formacja intelektualna i moralna'; Dudała, *Clerus Decanatus Plesnensis*; 'Liber Decanatus Gnesnensis Sanctissimae Trinitatus' (1697; 1720–1893; 1687), AAG, ms AD GTr 17; DAP, ms

deanery congregations at the end of the eighteenth century were one of the most important and regular social events integrating clergy in the entire Commonwealth.⁶⁹ On the other hand, when Poniatowski and Skarszewski were issuing new programmes for congregations in their dioceses, they indicated that the practice of organising deanery congregations was not satisfactory. In the diocese of Płock, some priests mentioned that before bishops' regulations, many priests would simply ignore the congregations. However, after Poniatowski had revived the practice, in almost all parishes congregations were organised biannually and according to the bishop's programme.⁷⁰ In Lutomierz deanery, in the archdiocese of Gniezno, congregations would also assemble regularly.⁷¹

There is evidence that at the end of eighteenth century there might have been a change in the pastoral engagement of parish priests. This, however, was the result of political and economic pressures rather than the bishops' intervention. Bishop Onufry Okęcki, in his pastoral letter of 14 April 1771 greeting the faithful in his new diocese of Chełm,⁷² mentioned that parish priests were complaining to the diocesan authorities that there was a scarcity of priests to hire as assistants, and hence they were forced to perform duties personally. The bishop admonished parish priests to treat the new situation as a chance to do what they were supposed to do, but had earlier delegated to vicars.

Okęcki indicated that the number of available priests had actually dropped because the seminaries were not producing enough new priests, because benefices were too poor to support additional employees and because of the increase in the number of chapels in private houses for which priests were hired as chaplains. Whereas seminaries were always underfunded, the parishes had indeed become poorer: some because they were separated from their benefices by the new state border imposed after partition, and all because of the newly accepted and regularly collected taxation, *subsidium charitativum*. The number of private chapels must have indeed grown: it is enough to skim through the bishops' acts to notice countless permissions given to the gentry to hear mass in their own homes. It is therefore likely that in the late eighteenth century more parish priests were engaged in pastoral duties, but not willingly.

Promoters of the Catholic Enlightenment attempted to achieve post-Tridentine professionalisation and mitigate the consequences of the

'Akta kongregacji dekanatu Wyszków, 1728-1862' (Akta kongregacji dekanalnych, 1862 1728), 432; 'Akta kongregacji dekanalnych dek. Mława, 1779-1833' (Akta kongregacji dekanalnych, 1833 1779), 431.

⁷⁰ MDDZP i. 98; ix. 112.

⁷¹ 'Visitatio Decanatus Lutomierciensis', fo. 62v.

⁷² O. Okęcki, *Incipit: Powołanie nasze z woli Najwyższego na Pasterstwo Dusz Waszych, gdy z bojaźnią Ducha i upokorzonemi barkami od nas przyjęte*, Skierbieszów 1771.

benefice system, but they also assigned to the clerical profession duties concerning the earthly well-being of parishioners and the responsibility to serve the Commonwealth. In his novel Józef Kossakowski presented the most elaborate new ideal of priesthood. His clerical hero taught parishioners to eat better and acquire better housing, replaced the parish hospice with a proper hospital and allocated most of their incomes to a new charity, the Brotherhood of Mercy. The perfect parish priest organised a school for boys, girls and adults, marked cottages with letters to help peasants get used to the alphabet, and provided them with summaries of the most useful agricultural manuals, as well as taught them to do their own gardening. Kossakowski based this programme on the real-life achievements of Paweł Brzostowski in Merkiné. However these ambitious reforms were conducted in a private village and were an exception to the rule.⁷³

Other bishops had more modest requirements, but made them obligatory for parish priests. Ignacy Massalski, as a leading supporter of physiocracy, made priests preach about such issues as reform of serfdom and agriculture during the Jubilee of 1776.⁷⁴ Michał Poniatowski demanded that priests from his dioceses preach about health and fire protection as well as organise proper healthcare and poverty relief by establishing the Brotherhood of Mercy.⁷⁵ Both Massalski and Poniatowski also introduced secular subjects such as history, geography and foreign languages into seminary curricula to make priests equal participants in the discussions with their more educated parishioners and better prepared to serve not only the Church but also the Commonwealth.⁷⁶ As illustrated in Kossakowski's novel, and in a few cases in the diocese of Płock, the success of this particular reform had unforeseen and unwelcome results: some well-educated priests were less willing to engage in pastoral activities.

⁷³ E. Rostworowski, 'Reforma pawłowska Pawła Ksawerego Brzostowskiego (1767–1795)', *Przegląd Historyczny* xlv/1–2 (1953), 101–52, 271–2; M. Motyka, "Ksiądz Pleban" Józefa Kossakowskiego wobec doświadczeń Rzeczypospolitej Pawłowskiej', *Rocznik Naukowo-Dydaktyczny WSP w Rzeszowie. Nauki humanistyczne* vi (1969), 7–17.

⁷⁴ I. J. Massalski, *Instrukcje na jubileusz dla ks. plebanów*, Wilno 1776; *Książka jubileuszowa na diecezję wileńską z rozkazu jaśnie oświeconego pasterza roku 1776*, ed. T. Hussarzewski, Wilno 1776; T. Kasabuła, *Ignacy Massalski: biskup wileński*, Lublin 1998.

⁷⁵ M. Poniatowski, *Zalecenie względem niektórych okoliczności ochrony zdrowia ludu roboczego w czasie letnim*, Warsaw 1785, and 'Przeostroga o niedzwonieniu na chmury', *Rozrządzenia* iv (1784), 183–6; J. Kracik, 'Oświeceniowa dobroczynność w sarmackim świecie? Bractwo Miłosierdzia prymasa Poniatowskiego w diecezji krakowskiej', *Studia Historyczne* xxxii/2 (1989), 208–12; M. Surdacki, 'Bractwa charytatywne w Polsce od średniowiecza do końca XVIII wieku', *ABMK* ci (2014), 267–77.

⁷⁶ M. M. Grzybowski, 'Reforma studiów seminaryjnych w diecezji płockiej biskupa Michała Jerzego Poniatowskiego (1773–1785)', *SP* i (1973), 175–93; T. Kasabuła, 'Seminarium diecezjalne wileńskie w okresie rządów biskupa Ignacego Massalskiego', *Roczniki Teologiczne KUL* xliii/4 (1996), 129–44.

Other bishops, regardless of their support for the Catholic Enlightenment, had to issue government orders, which burdened priests with new duties towards the state. Among the most significant was the organisation of parish schools according to the recommendations of the Commission on National Education; management of the system of aid for the frail and disabled; forcing healthy beggars to work; and gathering information for the first nationwide census. To be clear, these regulations were issued with the blessing of Catholic bishops who were members of the government and with direct support given in pastoral letters from Massalski and Poniatowski. Most members of the episcopate also participated in the project for a new map of the Commonwealth, initiated by Poniatowski in the diocese of Płock. Bishops ordered parish priests to prepare geographical descriptions of their parishes and to send them to the royal cartographers.⁷⁷

These new duties were fulfilled by a majority of the clergy, but many priests encountered insurmountable difficulties or did not undertake the task at all. The details of the implementation of these obligations require a more detailed discussion, for which there is no space in this article, apart from the statement that the collection of geographic data turned out to be a decisive success.

Assessment of the process of clerical professionalisation requires precise definition and a nuanced approach that combines methods from both social and anthropological history. Simple judgements of success or failure are inevitably inaccurate and may obscure deeper cultural patterns that governed early modern clerical lives. To avoid these pitfalls, this study clearly defines clerical professionalisation as the process of ensuring that all priests perform their duties knowledgeably and skilfully.

Excluding standards of private life from the definition made it possible to avoid questions of priestly moral conduct, which did not necessarily influence their performance of their duties. As discovered by Celeste McNamara, parishioners might have considered clerical dutifulness more

⁷⁷ K. Buczek, 'Dzieje kartografii polskiej od xv do xviii wieku: zarys analityczno-syntezy', *Monografie z Dziejów Nauki i Techniki* xxiv, Wrocław 1963, 80–91; B. Szady, 'Działalność Michała Jerzego Poniatowskiego na rzecz rozwoju kartografii polskiej', in P. Wespiański and J. Ostrowski (eds), *Kamienie milowe w kartografii*, Warsaw 2013, 183–92; P. Jędrzejewski, 'Szkolnictwo parafialne województwa krakowskiego w dobie Sejmu Wielkiego (1788–1792)', in K. Dormus (ed.), *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej: kontekst historyczno-pedagogiczny*, Cracow 2014, 251–78; R. Szczurowski, *Zaradzić potrzebom doczesnym i wiecznym: idee oświecenia w Kościele katolickim w Polsce (do 1795 r.)*, Cracow 2014, 130–9, 147–51; M. Surdacki, *Opieka społeczna w Polsce do końca XVIII wieku*, Lublin 2015, 422; E. Kaźmierczyk, 'Spisy Komisji Porządkowej Cywilno-Wojskowej Województwa Krakowskiego jako źródło do badań demograficznych – przykład powiatu proszowickiego', *Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski* xxxviii (2016), 79–80.

crucial than the private lives of priests.⁷⁸ On the other hand, by concentrating on the actual pastoral work of all priests, it becomes evident that, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, by the end of the eighteenth century, most parishes had at least one priest fulfilling the necessary tasks. This did not imply, however, that all priests led professional lives.

This was possible because a significant number of parish priests, even those residing in their parishes, delegated all or at least some duties to assistant priests. This statistical finding is crucial for the general history of the Catholic Church since the option of assigning duties to vicars was permitted by the Canons of Trent and could have occurred universally. The division of labour within parishes is evidently a matter of vital importance, deserving more attention from church historians.

Furthermore, the reasons why parish priests in Poland and Lithuania exploited the canon law, as revealed in this study, also highlight a more general pattern within early modern culture. It appears that the primary factor influencing the engagement of priests in pastoral duties was the prestige associated with a given task, correlated with the social position of the parishioner involved. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the distinction between parish priests and their assistants extended beyond their ecclesiastical positions to encompass their social origins. The most affluent benefices were typically reserved for the nobility, while peasants rarely received any benefice and spent their lives in the roles of vicars. The middle ranks of the parish priesthood, holding moderate and poor benefices, were comprised of townsmen.⁷⁹

Consequently, parish priests were generally actively involved in the affairs of parishioners of equal or higher social rank and readily delegated pastoral care of the peasants to their vicar. For example, parish priests tended to administer the sacraments exclusively to members of the parish elite. Naturally, social stratification within the clerical order is not exclusive to Poland-Lithuania. This should prompt historians of the Church to delve deeper into the relationships between parish and assistant priests, rather than solely concentrating on the formally distinct duties of priests with or without *cura animarum*.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the parish clergy not only possessed the skills to satisfy the spiritual and ritual needs of parishioners

⁷⁸ McNamara, 'Conceptualizing the priest'.

⁷⁹ For example, according to the protocols of visitations ordered in 1748 by Bishop Andrzej Stanisław Załuski, in thirteen deaneries of the diocese of Kraków 55.1% of parish priests were from the nobility, 23.3% were burghers, 2.3% were peasants and the social origin of 19.3% is unknown. However, it is unlikely that these latter were nobles, whose status would have been noted: Olczak, *Duchowieństwo parafialne diecezji poznańskiej*, 97–106; Kopiczko, *Duchowieństwo katolickie*, 38–44; Litak, *Parafie w Rzeczypospolitej*, 181–6; Szczepaniak, *Duchowieństwo diecezji krakowskiej*, 165–8; Kracik, *Prawie wielebni*, 47–56.

but further advances in their education in some cases proved counterproductive. The more the clerical curricula resembled those of the nobility in scope and content, the less inclined priests were to instruct peasants in the fundamentals of faith.

It is important to note, however, that supporters of the Catholic Enlightenment in Poland and Lithuania endeavoured to improve the education of all faithful, including serfs. If they had fully succeeded, the improvements in clerical education might not have deepened the cultural gulf between priests and the majority of parishioners. Since Catholic reformers focused on the education of both clergy and faithful, not only in Poland-Lithuania, it would be beneficial if more studies concentrated on the direct and short-term social consequences of the apparent success of enlightened reforms.

The perceived social and cultural hierarchies, which permeated the clergy despite the formal equality of all ordained priests and the belief in the equality of all Christians before God, were significant but not the only reasons for the failure of full clergy professionalisation. Equally important was the Church's inability, as well as unwillingness, to break the benefice and patronage system. Clerical professionalisation could only have been fully realised if the Church were free to employ and dismiss clergy regardless of the will of patrons and adjust the size of parishes according to the needs of parishioners, irrespective of the rights and privileges of individual parishes. Only then would bishops have been able to adjust benefice incomes to the number of parishioners, ensuring the employment of vicars only when necessary, and have the power to compel all priests to work.

Implementing such change was extremely difficult as it conflicted with the rights of patrons, including monarchs, noblemen and priests holding ecclesiastical offices with the right of patronage. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the revolutionary Sejm (parliament) of 1788–92 took the initial steps toward breaking the benefice and patronage system by voting for the equalisation of episcopal revenues and diocesan sizes. In 1792 envoys discussed significant adjustments to parish benefices, but they were unable to enact them before the Polish-Lithuanian revolution succumbed to the military forces of the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia.⁸⁰

A few years earlier, the emperor Joseph II had achieved more by leveraging state power in collaboration with the episcopate. Firstly, the benefice system was undermined by aligning priests' income and pastoral duties more evenly and interdependently. Larger and wealthier parishes were divided, and new parishes were established, although fewer than

⁸⁰ R. Butterwick, 'Jak nie doszło do schizmy: rzeczpospolita a Stolica Apostolska w czasie Sejmu Czteroletniego', *Kwartalnik Historyczny* cxvi/3 (2009), 73–90.

initially intended. Secondly, the newly created Religious Fund supplemented incomes up to a set amount, with vicars receiving only half that of parish priests. This theoretically reduced the dependency of assistant priests on employers and increased the clergy's overall dependence on the state.⁸¹

Before the state-aided reforms of the benefice system took place, both post-Tridentine and enlightened professionalisation had impacted all parishes, but not every priest. The clergy remained unified as an order rather than as a group of active professionals. Although the early modern Church had succeeded in ensuring that the faithful had access to professional clergy, its resources were not optimally allocated. The existence of wealthy benefices with few parishioners strengthened the position of specific priests but weakened the Church as an institution, because the hierarchy of wealth and prestige was unrelated to responsibilities.

⁸¹ Idem, *Polska rewolucja*, 609–20.