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badacz niezależny

## **Priestly Blood – for the Faith: Martyrdom of Rev. Stanisław Streich in the Light of the Beatification Process**

In his apostolic letter entitled *Tertio millennio adveniente*, which prepares the Church for the third *millennium*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote:

In our century, the martyrs have returned. And these are often unknown martyrs, as if “unknown soldier” of God’s great cause. If possible, their testimonies should not be forgotten in the Church. As suggested by the Consistory, it is necessary that the local churches, collecting the necessary documentation, do everything to preserve the memory of those who suffered martyrdom (n. 37).

Their spiritual, martyrdom journey is symbolic of the journey for all disciples of Jesus Christ. It is in them that the dramatic synthesis of the 20th century is contained, as it were. On the one hand, it was an age of civilizational development and technological progress, and on the other, the time of two world wars, terror and mass murder. Christians have become the most persecuted religious group in the world. They fell prey to the fanatical followers of the religions (Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists) that are widely recognized as the most discriminated against. The persecution of Christians has not ended. They still persist in the 21st century.

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Despite the passage of many years, the question of the “Luboń crime” committed on Rev. Stanisław Streich on 27 February 1938, is still intriguing, primarily because of its many facets. It is expressed in the specificity of occurrence of this fact against a political, ideological and social background. All three planes originate in the motives for the crime and are closely related. The political aspect is particularly evident in the press interpretation of the incident, most of which blamed the Communists for it. The ideological basis of the murder shows the individual’s turning against certain values, or lack thereof, symbolized by the Catholic priest. The social dimension reveals, on the one hand, the protest of Wawrzyniec Nowak – the murderer – against the living conditions in Poland at the time, and on the other hand, it illustrates the public reaction to the event.<sup>2</sup> These planes can contribute to many observations and insights made in retrospect.

The murderer of Rev. Stanisław Streich raised a cry at the time of the crime, “Long live communism”. The interpretation of this event by the media of the time was not uniform, and often even different. The reasons for the murder and the characteristics of the social mood in Luboń were described in various ways. The picture outlined by most newspapers spoke of plight of the residents, making them victims of the Communist threat. Almost all the magazines pointed out that the huge unemployment rate in Luboń enabled various agitators to operate. Nationalists, socialists and communists competed for popularity among the population. All these aspects are important, but they do not change the fact that a crime was committed against an exemplary priest and citizen, the parish priest of Luboń, Rev. Stanisław Streich.<sup>3</sup>

It is certain that in the face of the tragedy of the murder of Rev. Stanisław Streich, the influence of the left-wing organizations on the citizens of Luboń and the surrounding area, diminished considerably. By participating in the funeral of their priest, many inhabitants of Luboń clearly declared and defined their position in manifestations condemning the crime. In the parish of St. John Bosco in Luboń, over the years there have been numerous initiatives aimed at the beatification process of the Servant of God, which began on 28 October 2017. Currently, the person of the martyr is being remembered and promoted in various ways. The memory of him still lives in the hearts of many, making him an exceptional Witness of Faith for the entire Archdiocese of Poznań.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Pryjda, *Sprawa księdza Streicha na łamach prasy* [*The Case of Rev. Streich in the Press*], MA thesis written at the Theological Faculty at the seminar on the History of the Church in the 19th and 20th Centuries under supervision of professor Rev. Zieliński from the Catholic University of Lublin. Lublin 1995, “Rocznik Historyczny Lubonia” 4 (2014), p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Karwat, *Wprowadzenie* [*Introduction*], in: *ibid.*, p. 70.

## Martyrdom

The Church constantly reminds us that martyrdom from ancient times was likened to baptism with water and was called baptism of blood. While martyrdom itself has the power to take away sins and to give grace, it is required, if possible, that the martyr be inwardly disposed to receive full grace. In canonization investigations, the Church pays special attention to the need to accept the death exemplified by Christ. He is a model of accepting suffering and appropriate attitudes toward the persecutor, even when He has been unjustly condemned and tortured. Repeatedly in the pages of the Gospels is the foreshadowing of Jesus's sufferings and willing acceptance of the agony. Although Christ is accompanied by apprehension, anxiety, and even fear of martyrdom, He fully consciously and voluntarily accepts the sentence of death to fulfill His saving mission. He accepts agony and death willingly, with love instead of hatred towards his persecutors. He forgives them, and even prays for them.<sup>4</sup> The necessity of an act of the will is a necessary condition for the fact of martyrdom to be meritorious. It is very important that this act be free, not determined by any outside action. The freedom of such an act presupposes the full consciousness of the person. Without it, there can be no confession of faith, and without freedom there is no act of merit.<sup>5</sup>

Acceptance of death is to be accompanied by the virtue of fortitude, from which flows the constancy of faith necessary to be a martyr. It is manifested in patiently enduring suffering and not resisting the persecutor. Therefore, the essential elements to be considered in the canonization process, conducted by way of proof of martyrdom, are: identification of the specific martyr, identification of the persecutor, proof of the actual death, and demonstration of the cause of death.<sup>6</sup> This structure in martyrdom cases has been adopted since the time of Pope Benedict XIV, who drew attention to the above elements in volume III of his fundamental work *De Servorum Dei beatificatione et Beatorum canonizatione*. According to his teaching, martyrdom is “the voluntary acceptance of death, for faith in Christ or for some virtue that pertains to God”.<sup>7</sup>

The martyr should give up such features as revenge, threatening the persecutor or asserting legitimate rights. Perseverance and patience in the act of death are

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. H. Misztal, *Kształtowanie się pojęcia męczeństwa „in odium fidei” i kult pierwszych męczenników* [Formation of the Notion of Martyrdom “in odium fidei” and the Cult of the First Martyrs], in: *Świętość Kanonizowana. Postępowanie beatyfikacyjne drogą męczeństwa* [Sanctity Canonized. Process of Beatification by Way of Martyrdom], red. S.T. Praškiewicz, Kraków 2021, pp. 25–26.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. W. Bar, *Zagadnienie męczeństwa w obowiązującym prawie i praktyce kanonizacyjnej* [The Issue of Martyrdom in the Current Law and Practice of Canonization], in: *ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 37.

key elements in canonization. The traditional doctrine of martyrdom also could not ignore the persecutor, who must be specifically identified by the Court in the procedural inquiry. During the process, there are three essential elements that should be considered in the evidence to identify the persecutor. Thus, it must be shown that: the persecutor is a person distinct from the martyr. The persecutor is the cause determining the death, the punishment was inflicted out of hatred for the faith or some Christian virtue, and the fact of death is the key moment that constitutes actual martyrdom.<sup>8</sup> Death must therefore be real and physical. The law excludes so-called legal deaths, nor is adjudicated death sufficient. It must be real, physical and actually performed. The same is true of what is called psychological death, when a person is sophisticatedly tormented for his or her faith, but without the desire for their life to be taken. Even when such conduct on the part of the persecutor led to unintentional death, martyrdom in the strict sense cannot be spoken of. A martyr can always be considered a person who dies for professing faith in God, not for professing faith in humanity or false teaching. A true martyr is also one who dies in defense of a virtue that is certain and unquestionable and that cannot be claimed false.<sup>9</sup> Rev. Stanisław Kostka Streich became such a martyr.

## Martyr

He was born on 27 August 1902 in Bydgoszcz at 53 Pomorska street. His parents were: Franciszek Streich, age 25, a clerk at the “Westa” Insurance Company in Bydgoszcz, and Władysława Streich, née Birzyńska.<sup>10</sup> Both parents were raised in Catholic and patriotic families. According to the family tradition, the future spouses met in Górka Klasztorna near Łobżenica, where they professed their love. They got married in the parish church in Łobżenica.<sup>11</sup> Elżbieta Kasprzak, the granddaughter of Franciszek and Władysława Streich, recalled, “It was a very religious, God-fearing couple. They attended Mass regularly and took Holy Communion”<sup>12</sup>. Their first child was Stanisław, who was baptized on 30 September 1902 in the parish church of Saints Martin and Nicholas in Bydgoszcz. Stanisław also had younger brothers: Kazimierz, who died of diphtheria at the age of five, and Czesław, born in 1913 in Bydgoszcz at 12 Chrobry street.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 51–54.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>10</sup> The Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań, *Stanisław Streich’s request for admission to the seminary*, Bydgoszcz, 28 June 1920.

<sup>11</sup> The Register of Marriages of the Roman Catholic Parish of the Holy Trinity in Łobżenica – 19 November 1901/item 23. The sacrament of marriage was administered by the Rev. Karol Blümell, the parish priest.

<sup>12</sup> Kobylnica Postulation Archive, *A Memoir Note about Elżbieta Kasprzak*.

In 1912, Stanisław completed three years of public schooling and entered an 8-year humanistic junior high school. On many occasions, he was described as pious to the point of arranging service for his peers at home even as a child, and revealed by this an inclination toward his future vocation. He was a very good student at school who diligently applied himself to his studies,<sup>13</sup> and was a cheerful person who enjoyed photography and communing with nature. Later, as a priest, he organized mountain trips for young people. When Stanisław received the Sacrament of Confirmation from Bishop Wilhelm Kloske on 30 May 1915, he took the name Kazimierz in memory of his late brother.

He finished his education in free Poland, with the high school diploma from the State Junior High School in Bydgoszcz, issued on 15 May 1920.<sup>14</sup> According to the report for the years 1920–1929, only one student – Stanisław Streich – passed the high school graduation exam in 1920. This was due to the fact that after the end of World War I, German officials left Bydgoszcz, and thus there were fewer students, so at the beginning of the 1920 school year, only Polish classes were left in the school.

As early as on 28 June 1920, Stanisław applied for admission to the Theological Seminary in Poznań.<sup>15</sup> He was greatly helped in this by the intercession of two priests: Jan Konopczyński, administrator at the parish church in Bydgoszcz, and Stanisław Janasik, rector of the Seminary in Poznań. In a letter dated 28 May 1920, Rev. Konopczyński wrote,

Stanisław Streich, son of noble and deeply religious parents, has taken the high school graduation exam at the local humanist lower secondary school and intends to devote himself to priesthood. I can conscientiously and highly recommend him, as the boy has always conducted himself in an exemplary manner<sup>16</sup>.

He was admitted to studies in Poznań, which he continued in Gniezno. On 6 June 1925, Stanisław Streich was ordained a priest by Stanisław Kostka Łukomski,<sup>17</sup> bishop suffragan of Poznań. Three days later, in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Bydgoszcz, he celebrated his First Holy Mass.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> The Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań, *Copy of the high school diploma (No. 1526)*.

<sup>15</sup> The Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań, *Stanisław...*

<sup>16</sup> The Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań, *Request in the case of Stanisław Streich*, Bydgoszcz, 28 May 1920.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Święcenia w Katedrze Poznańskiej [Ordination at the Poznań Cathedral]*, “Goniec Wielkopolski” (11 June 1925). Cf. W. Mueller, *Błogosławiona krew. Męczeństwo Sługi Bożego ks. Stanisława Streicha [Blessed Blood. Martyrdom of the Servant of God Rev. Stanisław Streich]*, Poznań 2017, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. W. Mueller, *Błogosławiona krew...*, p. 16.

From 1925 to 1927, he studied classical philosophy at the University of Poznań. He was also chaplain to the Elizabethan Sisters and taught religion at the Poznań School of Commerce.<sup>19</sup> In 1927, he became a vicar at St. Florian and Sacred Heart of Jesus parish in Poznań<sup>20</sup>. In 1928 he left for Koźmin to teach religion at the male teachers' seminary,<sup>21</sup> and in 1929 he became the vicar at the Corpus Christi parish in Poznań.<sup>22</sup> In 1932, in turn, he became a vicar at St. Martin's parish in Poznań.<sup>23</sup> He became a parish priest of St. Barbara Parish in Żabikowo in 1933, after passing his pastoral exam on 1 July of that year. After assuming this position, he made efforts to erect a new church in the area – in the village of Luboń.

## Persecutes

In 1935 there was established the parish of St. John Bosco (separated from the parish of Żabikowo), whose parish priest he became on 1 October 1935. Father Streich's ideological opponents included members of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), an illegal and deeply conspiratorial organization operating in St. John Bosco parish. One of its secret cells was located at Dąbrowski street in Luboń, in a house owned by Jan Mazurek, just 800 meters from a church that was being built at the time.<sup>24</sup> Probably in January 1938, a plan was slowly developing in the mind of the communist, Wawrzyniec Nowak, to assassinate Rev. Streich and, as mentioned at the assassin's trial, also the vicar – dr. Wiktor Koperski.

A major problem in the prosecution of Rev. Streich's martyrdom case was proving that Wawrzyniec Nowak, Rev. Stanisław's killer, was imbued with hatred for the faith and the Catholic Church, and shaped by the communist system. It was this system that led to the deaths of millions of people, and was born out of hatred for the universal truths proclaimed by the Christian religion. Communist ideology had atheistic principles at its core. The consequences of state atheism

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. S. Malepszak, *Luboń i okolice. Dzieje osadnictwa i dziewięciu parafii [Luboń and Surroundings. The History of Settlement and Nine Parishes]*, Luboń 2005, p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> The Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań, *Dekret powołujący ks. Stanisława Streicha na wikariat [Decree Appointing Rev. Stanislaw Streich to the Vicariate]*, 17 September 1927.

<sup>21</sup> The Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań, *Dekret odwołujący ks. Stanisława Streicha z pracy w Seminarium Nauczycielskim w Koźminie [Decree Dismissing Rev. Stanislaw Streich from the Teaching Seminar in Koźmin]*, 11 July 1929.

<sup>22</sup> The Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań, *Dekret powołujący ks. Stanisława Streicha na wikariat przy parafii pw. Bożego Ciała w Poznaniu [Decree Appointing Rev. Stanislaw Streich to the Vicariate at the Corpus Christi Parish in Poznań]*, 20 June 1929.

<sup>23</sup> The Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań, *Dekret powołujący ks. Stanisława Streicha na wikariat przy parafii pw. św. Marcina [Decree Appointing Rev. Stanislaw Streich to the Vicariate at the St. Martin Parish in Poznań]*, 12 December 1931.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 116.

were manifested in active and sometimes violent hostility to religion, persecution of religious institutions, leaders, and followers. If an individual wanted to succeed in the society, they were firmly required to demonstrate atheism and stay away from temples. This practice was particularly intensified during the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union. Archbishop Fulton John Sheen made the following statement in 1948, “It is true that communism and atheism are closely related and that no one can be a good communist without being an atheist, while every atheist is a potential communist. [...] Communism begins where atheism begins”.<sup>25</sup> So it was a system programmed to persecute the faith, guided by hatred of believers, especially clergy people, hostility to the truths of Christian faith and customs. In practice, this manifested itself in the extremely harsh treatment of prisoners, in the abuse of prisoners, in the use of sophisticated means to destroy their health, leading to terrible agony and complete annihilation. This attitude stemmed from an ideology that was instilled through propaganda and programmatic training.

The development of communist ideology in the territories of the Second Polish Republic began already after regaining independence in 1918. In March 1925, the Third Congress of the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland took place, at which it was transformed into the Communist Party of Poland (KPP for short). The new name emphasized a break with the old government and condemnation of former activists. It was a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party of a new type. It differed from other parties operating in Poland at that time in two main respects: an anti-Polish program of activities established in 1934 and having its own armed force concentrated in the secret Military Department.

In 1934, the program of the party for the next few years, adopted at the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party of Poland, contained the following provisions: to strive to overthrow the capitalist system in Poland by force, after the victorious socialist revolution, the Free City of Danzig should be given to Germany, the eastern borderlands of Poland, i.e., the so-called areas of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, should be given to the Soviet Union, the inhabitants of Upper Silesia and Pomerania should be given the right to self-determination up to and including separation from Poland, the rest of Poland should be renamed the Polish Soviet Republic.

From that time, i.e., from the Third Congress of the Communist Party of Poland in 1925 until the dissolution of the Communist Party of Poland in 1938, in all its resolutions and appeals, even in those which spoke of Polish independence, there appeared the slogan of struggle for Poland of the Republics Councils. Another Poland for the leadership of KPP, regardless of its personal composition, was becoming a foreign and hostile creation.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.facebook.com › permalink abp. Fulton J. Sheen.>

The events of the second half of the 1930s led to a radical change in the direction of the KPP policy. The party which aimed at changing the Polish system by force, and which was subordinated to a foreign decision-making center and financed from abroad, was an illegal party throughout the entire period of the Second Republic of Poland's existence. KPP called for revision of Poland's borders in favor of Germany, i.e. giving Upper Silesia and Pomerania to Germany, and in favor of the Soviet Union, i.e. giving them the Eastern Borderlands. The Poland thus truncated was to be rebuilt into the Polish Soviet Republic.

Such assumptions were fundamentally harmful to the most vital interests of the Polish nation, to Polish independence, and as such could never be accepted by the Polish labor movement. The Communist Party demanded that Polish workers not defend their homeland if an enemy attacked it. They were to direct their entire military effort to building the Polish Soviet Republic. Such a program of national treason could not encourage Polish workers to join, hence KPP was a sparse party, isolated from the Polish working masses. Thus, in their eyes, it became an agent of the Soviet Union, undermining the independent existence of the Polish nation. The position of the KPP leadership in Warsaw was therefore a reflection of the position on Polish independence taken by the Politburo at the time, headed by Stalin, who was pro-German and always regarded Poland as his most dangerous enemy. The Soviet Union did everything to weaken Poland, to blow it apart from within, to prevent it from stabilizing its existence. Criticism of the current government of the country, which was suspected of favoring the imperialists from the West, especially criticism of Britain, was taken as the norm. Apart from the propaganda service, diversionary, sabotage, intelligence and recruitment activities were carried out, multiplying the already numerous ranks of communists throughout Poland. They were waiting for a convenient moment to cause a bloody revolution on Polish territory. They acquired their military skills at training grounds in the USSR. It is worth noting that Poznań housed secret Soviet sabotage headquarters, headed by the NKVD<sup>26</sup> directly from Moscow. Members of the illegal KPP, of whom there were 40 to 60 in Poznań and 20 to 30 in Luboń

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<sup>26</sup> People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR (Rus. Народный комиссариат внутренних дел СССР) – a central state authority (ministry) which is a part of the Council of People's Commissars – USSR government existing under that name from 1917 to 1946. Initially, the NKVD dealt with administrative and orderly matters. From 1934, the role of the Commissariat increased, which was one part of Stalin's preparation to the Great Purge of 1936–1939. The NKVD thus brought together the entire apparatus of police repression of the USSR – from the criminal militia through intelligence and counterintelligence, border protection troops, summary administrative courts to the system of concentration camps and forced labor camps Gulag. The Commissariat also supervised local government institutions, and then, in 1946, was renamed the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR. Throughout the country, the NKVD operated both directly and through the internal affairs commissariats of the respective republics, which were its branches.



and the surrounding area, did not know of its existence. These people were idealists, based on reading the pamphlets provided to them, they considered the USSR to be a workers' paradise where there is no exploitation.<sup>27</sup> In the face of the situation concerning not only Poland, but also many other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as East and Southeast Asia, Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, sounded prophetically<sup>28</sup> – it was promulgated before the outbreak of World War II, on 19 March 1937, and devoted entirely to the Communist threat. The Pope had already described the outline of communist ideology, pointing out the reasons why it was irreconcilable with the teachings of the Catholic Church, in particular he emphasized dialectical materialism and the theory of class struggle. Communism, in the encyclical, was called “godless” and “barbaric”, and described as a “terrifying danger”. The Pope saw the failure to embody the social teachings of the Catholic Church as the cause of spread of this ideology, which led to excessive economic inequality. Similarly – the remedy, in the opinion of Pius XI, was to promote this teaching and to embody the ideal of a Christian state and society.<sup>29</sup>

Against this background, it is necessary to look at some facts that preceded the tragic crime against the parish priest of Luboń. It is certain that the nascent and developing parish had an increasing influence on the lives of the residents. In 1933, Rev. Stanisław Streich became the parish priest in Żabikowo. Two years later, he was transferred to the newly created parish of St. John Bosco Church in Luboń. The temple was erected thanks to his organizational skills. The priest founded several Catholic organizations influencing the attitudes of parish residents. Thanks to his systematic educational work, leftist influence declined. Most inhabitants of Luboń actively participated in parish life. That is why, the priest's murder echoed all the more in Luboń and beyond. By following the tone of press reports, one can clearly see the phenomena that were emphasized when the assassination was discussed. The right-wing press added criticism of the communist ideology and system, including socialism, to the description of the tragedy. There was also no shortage of anti-Jewish themes. In turn, left-wing newspapers, including those of the peasant movement, emphasized the difficult economic situation of Luboń's residents, criticizing state institutions, including the Church. Despite the poverty and often misery caused by unemployment, the people happily supported the construction with modest donations and their own work. Thanks to Rev. Stanisław Streich, who resiliently directed its organization, the work moved forward quickly. In five months (May–September), the south aisle was constructed and equipped with liturgical equipment. It was dedicated on the Sunday of

<sup>27</sup> W. Mueller, *Blogosławiona krew...*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>28</sup> The encyclical is more widely known as *De communismo atheo*. In writing the encyclical, the pope used materials from the apostolic administrator of Moscow, bishop Eugène Joseph Neveu.

<sup>29</sup> Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, the Vatican City, 19 March 1937.

6 October 1935. It was a great day for the entire Luboń community organized in Catholic parties and societies. On the other hand, it was received very critically by members of the illegal Communist Party of Poland and concentrated in the secret Military Department of the Communist Party of Poland.

## Crime

During the last twelve months of his life, Rev. Streich lived in constant tension and uncertainty, and was physically exhausted. On 28 February 1937, in a letter to his mother, he wrote,

My Dearest Mother! Thank you very much for your last letter, I am replying to it only today because I have been very busy, simply exhausted. [...] In my opinion, it will be better if you arrive, Mother, shortly before Christmas, because now it is cold in my apartment [...] and secondly, I am still busy with my duties.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the year, Rev. Streich received many anonymous letters in which his imminent death was announced in abusive terms. The church was broken into, the tabernacle and indulgence box were damaged, and church linens were scattered around. Sometimes unknown perpetrators would throw stones at him. It was after the October service, on a dark road between the church and the priest's apartment. A group of adolescents, standing in an undeveloped field on the east side of the street, threw stones at Rev. Stanisław, which they had prepared for themselves in broad daylight.<sup>31</sup>

Nowak and his likely accomplices devised a plan that guaranteed complete safety for the attacker. The plan was to kill the priest among schoolchildren, es-

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<sup>30</sup> Family archive in Skoki, *Letter from Rev. Stanisław Streich to his mother Władysława Streich*, Luboń, 28 February 1937. A valuable source of information about the life of Rev. Streich is 17 letters to his family which he wrote between 1920 and 1938. The most numerous part (12 items) are epistles written in the academic year 1920/1921, when the Servant of God was a first-year pupil at the Theological Seminary in Poznań. The remaining five letters date from 1925–1938, one of which is undated, but the subject of his father's death allows the conclusion that it was written after 15 January 1931. Rev. Streich describes clerical life in the seminary in particular detail. In several letters from the period after his ordination, he also focuses on everyday life, sharing his joy at the enormity of his pastoral work, which prevents him from even visiting his hometown of Bydgoszcz more often. This is a valuable source of information not only about his daily life and attachment to his family, but is a reflection of Rev. Stanisław's spiritual and psychological state. All his letters were handwritten and their authenticity is beyond any doubt. The originals are in the family archive of the murdered priest in Skoki. They unequivocally stress that Rev. Stanisław never betrayed the grace of his vocation. This is also confirmed by the will drawn up before Rev. Streich's death and preserved in the above-mentioned archive.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. S. Malepszak, *Luboń...*, p. 122.

cape through the empty unfinished central nave and the construction site (a total distance of about 60 m), then jump to a car standing on Kościelna street in Luboń and quickly drive to Poznań. 12–15 minutes would be sufficient for all of these activities. Meanwhile, the police manhunt would only begin after about 25 minutes. This was the shortest time needed to reach the phone located in the parish priest's apartment, to notify the police station in Fabianowo (about 5 km away from Luboń) and to have them come to Luboń on bicycles. In February 1938, Wawrzyniec Nowak came to the church to test the viability of his plan on the spot.<sup>32</sup>

On 11 February 1938, Rev. Streich wrote his last letter to his mother,

Thank you sincerely for your last two letters full of gratitude. I did not write back sooner, because I had only finished my visits to parishioners this week, and anyway we had agreed that you would, Mother, write two letters and I would write one. As for me coming to Bydgoszcz, I actually had to give it up because I just don't have the free time. But I will come for a few days to sleep and rest. I will probably arrive only on Tuesday for a week, i.e. on 22 February at 7 o'clock in the evening via Inowrocław.<sup>33</sup>

Stanisława Zyta Błażejka, an eyewitness, in her reminiscences about Rev. Streich, quoted his words spoken during one of her religion classes as a testimony to his desire for holiness. Rev. Stanisław then said,

it will be most difficult for all the clergy, and therefore for me as well, to deserve to be called saint, because we (the clergy) in doing good, are fulfilling our duty – so it is a simple obligation, not any merit. The merit for us would be a heroic act, such as in the early days of Christianity: persecution or death for the faith.<sup>34</sup>

On 13 February 1938, on Sunday afternoon, in the common room of the dr. R. May Chemical Works, a fair was held with the participation of many parishioners, the proceeds of which were to be used for charity. The following week passed quietly, but on Sunday, 20 February 1938, a puzzling event occurred in the church. It was probably then, during an unusual confession, that Rev. Streich was informed by the murderer of his plan to take the priest's life.<sup>35</sup> After the incident, Rev. Streich was thoughtful and somehow changed. On Tuesday, 22 February 1938, he left to his mother in Bydgoszcz.<sup>36</sup> At that time, the parish priest from

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>33</sup> Family archive in Skoki, *Letter of Rev. Stanisław Streich to his mother Władysława Streich*, Luboń, 11 February 1938.

<sup>34</sup> Kobylnica Postulation Archive, *A Memoir Note about Stanisława Zyta Błażejka*.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. W. Mueller, *Sacerdos et Hostia. Rev. Stanisław Streich – Męczennik sprawy Chrystusowej [Martyr of the Cause of Christ]*, Poznań 2021, pp. 160–161.

<sup>36</sup> Kobylnica Postulation Archive, *A Memoir Note about Stanisława Zyta Błażejka*.

Kiekrz, Rev. Michał Skórnicki, was calling this friend in Luboń, inviting him and Rev. Stefan Kaczorowski for a chat next Tuesday. As family members said later, Rev. Stanisław fell ill during this stay, but he did not want to stay there any longer, because, as he told his mother, “what I vouched to do, I must do”.<sup>37</sup> He still had time to confess and return to Luboń late on Saturday evening. As Rev. professor Jan Kanty Pytel noted, “Here we arrive at the pinnacle of his consent to martyrdom. Consent certainly experienced, I suppose, throughout the sleepless night that allowed him to prepare to receive the gift of the grace of martyrdom”.<sup>38</sup>

On Sunday morning, 27 February 1938, before the designated wake-up time, the housekeeper noticed that the priest was already dressed and left the house without saying a word. Startled, she called out – asking him what to cook for dinner. Rev. Streich replied, “Cook whatever you want, because I’m not going to eat it anyway.”<sup>39</sup> At 9:30 a.m., he sat down in the confessional as usual to hear confessions. Even before Mass began, he returned to his apartment to confer by phone with Rev. Skórnicki, the parish priest of Kiekrz, regarding a possible visit.<sup>40</sup> At 10 a.m., Rev. Stanisław began his Mass. After leaving the altar, he removed his chasuble at the table and headed toward the pulpit to read the Gospel and preach the sermon. Suddenly, unexpectedly for everyone, a man with his hand raised high jumped out and shot twice at the priest, aiming at his face which was facing the attacker. The first shot, as it later turned out, was the fatal one, as the bullet passed under the right eye, pierced the cranial bone and lodged in the brain. The second bullet hit the raised gospel book. The priest immediately fell backwards on his right side and did not move again. After a few seconds, the assassin took a step forward and fired two more shots into Rev. Streich’s back.

Three letters in the Archive of the Apostolic Nunciature in Warsaw constitute a valuable source of information about the circumstances of the murder of the Servant of God. Surviving correspondence between the then Nuncio to Poland, Archbishop Filippo Cortesi, and Cardinal August Hlond, Primate of Poland, as well as between the Nuncio and the Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli.

On 3 March at 11 a.m., Mass was held in the nave for the first time, celebrated by the dean, Rev. Adamski. The sermon was preached by parish priest Stefan Kaczorowski, and the process of moving the corpse to the grave was supervised by bishop Walenty Dymek. The funeral was attended by multiple numbers of the public. Numerous delegations of local associations and organizations also came from the late priest’s hometown of Bydgoszcz.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Kobylnica Postulation Archive, *A Memoir Note about Rev. professor Jan Kanty Pytel*.

<sup>39</sup> Kobylnica Postulation Archive, *A Memoir Note about Stanisława Zyta Błażejczak*.

<sup>40</sup> Archive of the St. John Bosco Church parish in Luboń, *Ostanie dni życia śp. ks. proboszcza Streicha [Last Days of the Life of the Late Parish Priest Streich]*, 1938.

## Reaction to the crime in Luboń

What is certain is that in the face of this tragedy, the influence of leftist organizations on the population diminished significantly. By participating in the funeral of their priest, many inhabitants of Luboń clearly declared and defined their position in manifestations condemning the crime. Rev. Streich's martyrdom became an important component of Luboń's history. He is the patron of one of Luboń's streets. Rev. Stanisław, a faithful servant of the Church and a Polish patriot, received the palm of martyrdom. Rev. Stanisław Streich became a spiritual father to the faithful he was responsible for, enjoying the universal respect, trust and love of his parishioners. He was the good shepherd of the sheepfold entrusted to him by Christ, whose life's purpose was to love God above all else. He combined his pastoral work with the erection of a new church dedicated to St. John Bosco Church in Luboń, which ended with his death at the hands of a communist persecutor *in odium fidei*.

The Luboń crime was widely covered in the Polish press of the 1930s, which at that time did not all present the event in the same light. The reasons for the murder and the characteristics of the social mood in Luboń were described in various ways. The respective newspapers represented the political orientations of the time. Most attention to the crime was devoted by the newspapers that were hostile to communism and socialism. Among Catholic press, "Przewodnik Katolicki" and "Przegląd Katolicki" covered it. The nationally-oriented newspapers mainly included: "Kurier Poznański", "Wielkopolanin", "Orędownik" and "Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy". "ABC" and "Samobrona Narodu" were among the far-right ones, and "Dziennik Poznański", "Czas" and "Dziennik Poranny" were considered representatives of pro-government press at that time. Among the working class titles most often covering the murder were "Robotnik", "Dziennik" and "Robotnik Poznańsko-Pomorski". These newspapers had the largest circulation at the time, and thus had the greatest impact on shaping readers' opinions. Parish periodicals are also noteworthy, as well as documents collected in the archives.

In contrast, the press articles that appeared after the collapse of the Communist bloc in Eastern Europe after 1989 focused mainly on Rev. Streich's spiritual profile and his path to martyrdom. In addition, the texts contained hopes for the longed-for beatification process of the Servant of God, which began on 28 October 2017. It is worth mentioning here the articles by Szymon Babuchowski,<sup>41</sup> Michał Gryczyński,<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See S. Babuchowski, *Przedwojenny męczennik komunizmu [Pre-War Martyr of Communism]*, "Gość Niedzielny" 44, 5 November 2017, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> See M. Gryczyński, *Ksiądz Stanisław Streich [Priest Stanisław Streich]*, "Przewodnik Katolicki" 45 (2004); id., *Zabić księdza [To Kill a Priest]*, "Przewodnik Katolicki" 11 (2008), pp. 32–33; id., *Zbrodnia w świątyni [A Crime in the Temple]*, "Przewodnik Katolicki" 15 (2004).

Katarzyna Jankowska,<sup>43</sup> Karolina Koziółek,<sup>44</sup> Przemysław Kubacki,<sup>45</sup> Henryk Kulpiński,<sup>46</sup> Stanisław Malepszak,<sup>47</sup> Janusz Marciszewski,<sup>48</sup> Father Walter Rachwałik,<sup>49</sup> Krzysztof Smura,<sup>50</sup> Damian Szymczyk.<sup>51</sup>

A great role in this regard is played by the Catholic press, mainly by “Przewodnik Katolicki” as well as “Miesięcznik Kościelny Archidiecezji Poznańskiej”. Secular newspapers, too, have often taken up the subject of Rev. Streich’s murder or provided up-to-date information about the progress of the diocesan stage of the beatification process, as was the case in “Wieści Lubońskie”. The interest in the case was also visible in the interviews with the postulator and in another poem about Rev. Streich entitled, *W ołowianej kuli, zimnej posadzce i bezczasowym trwaniu* [“In a leaden bullet, a cold floor, and a timeless existence”].

Efforts to commence the beatification process of the Luboń martyr began immediately after his death. Unfortunately, at the very beginning, they encountered objective difficulties related to historical facts that took place on Polish territory. First, the outbreak of World War II, and then the location of the post-war Polish Republic under strict control of the Soviet Union. There is no doubt that such a zealous community worker as Rev. Streich, was very badly perceived by the communists who, after World War II, introduced a dictatorship based on Marxist ideology throughout Poland. The martyrdom of Rev. Stanisław preceded the Katyń massacre, committed by the same communist regime, by just two years.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. K. Jankowska, *Pamięci proboszcza* [To the Memory of the Parish Priest], “Głos Wielkopolski”, 2 March 1998.

<sup>44</sup> See K. Koziółek, *Zamordowano go podczas Mszy. Ma zostać świętym* [He was Murdered during Mass and is to Become a Saint], “Głos Wielkopolski” 226, 9 November 2016, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. P. Kubacki, *Morderstwo w kościele* [Murder in the Church], “Tygodnik Numer 1” 240, February 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. H. Kulpiński, *Pierwszy w Polsce mord* [The First Murder in Poland], “Przewodnik Katolicki” 39 (1990), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. S. Malepszak, *Luboń...*, pp. 108–144; id., *Tło zamachu. Agenty komunistyczne w Polsce lat międzywojennych i ich wpływ na śmierć księdza Stanisława Streicha* [Background of the Assassination. Communist Agents in Poland in the Interwar Years and Their Influence on the Death of Rev. Stanisław Streich], Luboń, 27 February 2007, pp. 1–4; id., R. Jaruszkiewicz, *Parafia św. Jana Bosko na tle historii Lubonia* [St. John Bosco Parish against the Background of the History of Luboń], Luboń 1993.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. J. Marciszewski, *Mord u stóp ołtarza* [Murder at the Foot of the Altar] Kobylnica Postulation Archive.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. W. Rachwałik, *Ks. Stanisław Streich świadek Chrystusa Ukrzyżowanego* [Rev. Stanisław Streich, Witness of Christ Crucified], Kobylnica Postulation Archive.

<sup>50</sup> See K. Smura, *Zabić księdza. Morderstwo w lubońskim kościele* [To Kill a Priest: Murder in a Luboń Church], 2/3 February 2002, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. D. Szymczak, *Potępiając komunistycznego bandytę* [Condemning the Communist Bandit], Kobylnica Postulation Archive, pp. 1–2; id., *Wyrok zapadł w Kościanie* [Judgment Passed in Kościan], “Elka.pl” (29 January 2016).

Based on the decisions made in Yalta<sup>52</sup> and Potsdam,<sup>53</sup> Poland found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence. Liberated from Hitlerism, it fell into another slavery. The country was in a deplorable condition after the war, many cities razed to the ground, huge losses, both in the state treasury and in people. The government of the Soviet Union was expansively imposing its power and political system on Poland and USSR's satellite countries. Thus, there was no appropriate political climate that was conducive to the acceptance of efforts to elevate a martyr, murdered by a communist, to the altars. The tense social situation in the country at that time did not create favorable conditions for the initiation of the beatification process and for the collection of complete documentation and its impartial examination.

The Catholic Church in Poland has faced serious problems since the end of World War II. One of the first acts of the Provisional Government of National Unity was breaking the concordat with the Vatican in September 1945. With each passing year, the communization of the country intensified at all levels of social, political, and spiritual life. In that situation, the Church appeared as the only independent social structure, against which the communist authorities fought from the very beginning. It appeared as a threat to the system through his enormous influence on the Polish people. Essentially, this condition lasted until the late 1980s.

It was only after 1989, when communism collapsed in Poland, that it became possible to resume the appropriate organizational work for the process of beatification of Rev. Stanisław Streich. Rev. Stanisław Streich's street in Luboń, which was changed to Ludwik Waryński's street in communist times, has returned,<sup>54</sup> but what has returned above all, has been the possibility to speak openly and to remember the Luboń martyr who died for his faith.

The fame of the martyrdom and holiness of the Servant of God, as well as the requests of the faithful, led to the appointment on 4 November 2011 of the first postulator of the process of beatification. In 2011–2012, 5 living 'eyewitnesses' to the death of the candidate for the altars were interviewed under the *ne pereant probationes* procedure in accordance with Article 82 of the *Sanctorum Mater*

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<sup>52</sup> Crimean Conference – held from 4 to 11 February 1945, a meeting of the leaders of the anti-Hitler coalition, the so-called Big Three leaders: the leader of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin, Prime Minister of Great Britain Winston Churchill and President of the USA Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

<sup>53</sup> The Potsdam Conference, which took place from 17 July to 2 August 1945 in the Cecilienhof Palace. Meeting of the leaders of the anti-Hitler coalition, the so-called Big Three. The meeting was attended by the leader of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin and President of the USA Harry Truman who succeeded the late Franklin Delano Roosevelt (who died in April). The third participant in the conference was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Winston Churchill who was replaced as of 28 July by the country's new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee.

<sup>54</sup> Kobylnica Postulation Archive, *A Memoir Note about Romuald Pawlenty*.

instruction: Andrzej Marcinkowski, Stanisława Zyta Błażejczak, Józef Pawlicki, Marian Drajerzszak and Stanisław Malepszak. Moreover, the following were included in the files of the process for the commencement of the procedure: photocopies of the personal file of Rev. Stanisław Streich from the Archdiocesan Archive in Poznań, photographs of the Servant of God taken during various church celebrations, as well as copies and originals of press publications about him and written statements and recollections of witnesses.

On 28 October 2017, in the Church of St. John Bosco in Luboń, the first session of the beatification process at the diocesan stage was held, combined with establishment of the Tribunal in the persons of Rev. dr Jan Słowiński – bishop’s Delegate, Rev. dr Marcin Czujek – Promoter of Justice and Rev. lic. Jarosław Żurawski – notary. From that day forward, the candidate for the altar is entitled to the title: Servant of God. The vast majority of witnesses testifying in the process of Rev. Streich’s beatification visit the martyr’s resting place, pray for his intercession, care for his grave, light candles and place fresh flowers. This was also confirmed by historians from the Historical Commission, Rev. Paweł Zając OMI and Rev. Piotr Neumann OCD.

The Tribunal continued with further sessions to question witnesses, to learn the opinion regarding sanctity, virtues and, above all, the martyrdom of Rev. Stanisław Streich. Thirty-one witnesses were interviewed, whose testimonies deserve special attention, particularly those given by 10 eyewitnesses to the Luboń crime, which took place on 27 February 1938, in St. John Bosco Church in Luboń. Their value is inestimable, as they include altar boys who served the priest at Mass that day, or just ordinary parishioners who came to Sunday service and accurately described, minute by minute, the events of the Mass during which their parish priest was killed. Among the witnesses were those who stood next to the assassin during the crime, saw and heard the shots fired at Rev. Stanisław, saw the priest fall to the floor of the church, and later fled in terror to the door, fearing for their lives. During the beatification process at the diocesan stage, their testimony was supplemented by information obtained from other witnesses, both clergy and lay, including one from the murdered priest’s family, i.e. his niece Elizabeth Kasprzak. All of them have dealt with the subject of the martyrdom of the Servant of God, the information presented by these people is reliable, and their statements have confirmed the consistency of the information. All of them gave a full picture of the life, pastoral activity and martyrdom of the Servant of God, and the collected and analyzed documentation unequivocally showed the exceptional spiritual values that distinguished Rev. Stanisław Streich. The cardinal virtues that matured in him through education, conscious activities and persistent effort, as well as the theological virtues, allowed him to participate in the divine nature. For this reason, all the materials collected during the process of canonization of Rev. Stanisław Streich, carried out in the Archdiocese of Poznań,



with all the historical and critical accuracy, made it possible to reconstruct, in chronological order, all the stages of his life, not only in the context of his pastoral activity, but above all of his martyrdom.

Unfortunately, the Historical Commission, appointed in the process of Rev. Streich's beatification, despite its diligent search of the archives, did not come across the documents drawn up during the investigation of the priest's murder. The only material at our disposal today is a journalistic account of the trial of the murderer, Wawrzyniec Nowak, and an account of the Luboń crime in the archives of St. John Bosco Church in Luboń. In this regard, the document from autopsy of the murdered priest is extremely valuable. However, this does not change the fact that the numerous evidence which has been preserved and studied has made it possible to conclude that the life of the Servant of God was conditioned by many factors: facts, situations, or a combination of events which ultimately, to a greater or lesser degree, influence the whole of human existence. The interpretation of these factors related to Rev. Stanisław Streich may vary, but in the light of faith, they all take on a completely different meaning. For it is in faith that God's plan for him is revealed, and it is ultimately in faith that we can see his life and martyrdom, which took place on 27 February 1938, at St. John Bosco Church in Luboń. Just a holistic look at the life of the Servant of God, over the years of: 1902–1938, makes it possible not only to better present this extraordinary person, but also to better understand who he was and what he did, as well as showing the richness of the spirituality that he himself lived and through which he led others to God.

At the same time, in addition to the work of the commission and of the tribunal, work began in the Luboń parish to complete and equip the "Chamber of Remembrance" devoted to the life, activity, and martyrdom of the Servant of God. Also, there have been continuous prayers for his cause, because the opinion of sanctity of his martyr's death is visible in the lives of many believers, not only his parishioners. It was already present when he tragically died. And still today, he inspires many to discover the richness of the spiritual life and to give their lives for the faith, if only through white martyrdom. Besides, the topic of the Luboń crime is still publicized, so believers from other parishes visit the Luboń church and the grave of Rev. Streich.<sup>55</sup>

On 13 April 2019, after more than a year and a half of work of the Tribunal, a final public session to conclude the diocesan process was held at St. John Bosco Church in Luboń. The Metropolitan of Poznań, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, and members of the Tribunal signed the relevant documents. An extensive dossier of almost 3,500 pages together with the files of the procedure, was transferred to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome.<sup>56</sup> On 20 June 2020, the Or-

<sup>55</sup> Cf. W. Mueller, *Sacerdos et Hostia...*, p. 327.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 329.

dinary Congress of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints issued the decree of validity of the diocesan investigation and appointed the relator of the cause in the person of Rev. Szczepan Praškiewicz, OCD. On 5 July 2021, the *Positio*, a description of the life of the Servant of God including his martyrdom, was submitted to the congregation.

It is with great joy that efforts have been underway since 2020 to make a feature film on the Luboń crime. The work was undertaken by director and screenwriter Krzysztof Magowski, author of many documentary films. The film about Rev. Streich will be entitled *Krew na ołtarzu – męczeństwo Sługi Bożego ks. Stanisława Streicha* [“Blood on the Altar – Martyrdom of the Servant of God Rev. Stanisław Streich”], and is to be produced for Polish Television in a 55-minute version, and in an expanded version of up to 75 minutes.<sup>57</sup>

For this moment, a trailer, several minutes long, was created and shown to the Archbishop of Poznań Stanisław Gądecki.

The words of the historian Rev. professor Piotr Neumann, OCD, may serve as an apt summary of all these activities,

It seems to me that the beatification of Rev. Stanisław Streich would be very welcome and timely. I would see several motives for that. First, priests would receive another model from one among them who was characterized by fidelity to the end of his priestly vocation, concern for the salvation of people, and devotion to the Church. Secondly, the faithful would receive a model of a priest totally devoted to them, exemplary and zealous. Thirdly, the general public would see a man who was not afraid to make a life-long decision and remained faithful to what he had decided, even though the path to priestly work was difficult, and he knew that he could pay the highest price for his faithfulness and commitment to priesthood.<sup>58</sup>

## **Kapłańska krew – za wiarę. Męczeństwo ks. Stanisława Streicha w świetle procesu beatyfikacyjnego**

### **Streszczenie**

Pomimo upływu wielu lat zagadnienie „zbrodni lubońskiej” dokonanej na ks. Stanisławie Streichu 27 lutego 1938 r. wciąż intryguje, przede wszystkim ze względu na jego wieloaspektowość. Wyraża się ona w specyficze zaistnienia tego faktu na tle politycznym, światopoglądowym i społecznym. Wszystkie trzy płaszczyzny biorą swój początek z motywów zbrodni, są ze sobą ściśle związane

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>58</sup> Kobylnica Postulation Archive, *Report of Historian Rev. Peter Neumann, OCD.*

i mogą być przyczynkiem do wielu uwag i spostrzeżeń uczynionych z perspektywy czasu. Pewne jest, że w obliczu dramatu zabójstwa ks. Stanisława Streicha przez komunistę Wawrzyńca Nowaka wpływy organizacji lewicowych na mieszkańców Lubonia i okolicy znacznie zmalały. Wielu lubonian, uczestnicząc w pogrzebie swego duszpasterza, w manifestacjach potępiających zbrodnię, jasno zdecydowało i określiło stronę, po której się opowiadają. W parafii pw. św. Jana Bosko w Luboniu na przestrzeni lat powstały liczne inicjatywy zmierzające do procesu beatyfikacyjnego Sługi Bożego, który rozpoczął się 28 października 2017 r. Obecnie na różne sposoby przypomina się i promuje osobę męczennika. Pamięć o nim nadal żyje w sercach wielu, czyniąc z niego wyjątkowego Świadka Wiary dla całej Archidiecezji Poznańskiej.

### Słowa kluczowe

męczeństwo, proces beatyfikacyjny, osoba męczennika, prześladowca, zbrodnia lubońska

### Keywords

martyrdom, beatification process, person of the martyr, persecutor, crime of Luboń

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