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## The Procedure of Joining the order in Belarus in the Second Half of XIX and at the Beginning of XX Century: Legislation and Practice

The article highlights the evolution of the legislation of the Russian Empire regarding the rules for joining the monastic order. It also shows how the approach to understanding the organization of monastic life in the Russian Empire has evolved: from the order as the main form to the monastery. On the examples of some people who wanted to join a monastic order, the discrepancy between the state legislation that allowed entry, and the practice that forbade them is shown

**Key words:** monastic orders, Russian empire, monastery, XIX century, monastery.

The activity of Roman Catholic monastic orders in the lands which were annexed by the Russian Empire after partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (today's Belarus) was actually destroyed in XIX century. It resulted from the planned and diligently realized government action. Generally it included the activities concerning certain orders (e.g. banning of the activity of Jesuits in the Russian Empire in 1820), or the massive dissolution of monasteries (which began after suppression of the November Uprising 1830-1831). Realization of the government's ordinance contributed to the gradual cease of their activity. The final wave of closing down monasteries took place after the suppression of the January Uprising 1863-1864. It lasted until the late 1870s. After the dissolution, in Belarus there were only three Catholic convents: Bridgettines in Hrodna, the Bernardine Sisters in Słonim

and the Franciscan male monastery in Hrodna. In my article I did not mention the emergence of the female Catholic congregations – the so called “secret congregations”.

Concerning the regulations on joining the male or female orders, they evolved until the end of XVIII century, particularly in the first half of XIX century: from meeting the criteria imposed by the internal Roman Catholic ecclesial regulations to the procedures created by the Russian state legislation.

In order to properly understand the essence of the Russian state’s attitude towards the reform of the procedures of joining the order, it is important to understand the basic terms, concepts and definitions used by the tsarist authorities. Therefore, in the “Regulations” from 1798 the orders are called<sup>1</sup> the structures of the Catholic Church. In that period the main aim of the tsarist authorities was to deprive the orders of the external (foreign) management, which was reflected in the ban to contact the Provincial Superior and General Superior (if they were abroad).

In the Russian legislation of the first half of XIX century, instead of the terms: “order” and “admission to the order”, they used the terms: “monastery”<sup>2</sup> and “joining the monastery”. The proper membership of the monasteries in the particular orders or religious congregations since 1830s, became meaningless for the state authorities. The Russian authorities moved from concerning “the order” to “the monastery” as the main form of the organization of monastic life. And each particular monastery became the object of interest of the authorities or at least of the planned transformations. The reforms and transformations undertaken in the Russian legislation concerning the Catholic orders, appeared in connection with the authorities’ understanding of the essence of organization of the monasticism which followed the example of the Orthodox Church, the main centre of which was each particular monastery. Therefore, we can often find the definition: “сословие” (class), (e.g. “Бенедиктинско-цистерское сословие”<sup>3</sup>, “Сословие св. Викентия а Пауло”<sup>4</sup> and others) and not “the Order”. With regard to that, we can claim that the action of the Russian authorities with regard to the Catholic monasteries aimed at unification of the

<sup>1</sup> Полное собрание законов Российской империи (further PSZRI), nr 18734, vol. 25, 436-438.

<sup>2</sup> PSZRI, Sobr. 2, nr 2773, Vol. 4, 200.

<sup>3</sup> National Historical Archives of Belarus (further: NHAB), F. 1781, Wop. 2, Spr. 1913, k. 4-9.

<sup>4</sup> NHAB, F. 1781, Wop. 2, Spr. 4206, k. 46-47.

organization of monastic life assumed in the Catholic Church, following the example of the Orthodox monasteries. The apparent reluctance to maintain the traditional organization of the monastic life assumed in the Catholic Church was clearly noticeable. This process was followed by the change of the traditional structure of management: from the superior general – the superior provincial – the prior into: bishop – visitor – prior.

With regard to that, in the second half of XIX century, the direction of receiving permission to join the monastery also changed radically: from the decision of the Provincial superior/prior to the permission of the secular authorities: governor general or governors and of the Department for Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions in the Ministry of the Interior. Unity in management of the monasteries of all orders (instead of the branched network in each of the numerous orders), was gradually introduced by the state authorities as it was supposed to make it easier for the clerks to control the monks.

The first regulations were written in the legislation which concerned joining the order, they were noted down in the “Regulations” from 1798. § 20 of “Regulations” stated that: “No order can receive vows from those joining the novitiate other than the simple vows (*Simplicia vota*), the solemn vows (*vota Solemnia*) which cannot be concluded by the novices before they received the degree of a subdeacon<sup>5</sup>, and admission to orders only for the candidates of over 22 years old”<sup>6</sup>.

On May 24th 1827 the Senate issued a decree presenting the new procedure for admission to the female Roman Catholic monasteries. After entering the nunnery, the candidate’s dowry was given not to her nunnery but to the Prikaz of Public Charity for certain income. During the woman’s stay in the nunnery she received dividend from her dowry. After the nun’s death, the money was to be returned to the heirs and only in case of the lack of heirs, the money was given to the nunnery authorities. It was controlled by the diocesan bishop<sup>7</sup>. It is difficult to assess to what degree these rules were applied in Belarus.

<sup>5</sup> In the regulations concerning the Catholic Church the legislators used the terminology assumed in the Orthodox Church.

<sup>6</sup> PSZRI, nr 18734, 438; However, the idea of regulating the age limit of those entering the monastery date back to the Warsaw Sejm from 1768 which suggested that male candidates before 24 years of age and female candidate before 16 would not be allowed to enter the novitiate. However, this decision was not introduced. See.: P.P. Gach, *Kasaty zakonów na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej i Śląska 1773-1914* (Lublin: 1984), 18.

<sup>7</sup> PSZRI, Sobr. 2, nr 1111, vol. 2(1827), 453-454.

The provisions of the “Regulations” from 1798 on joining the order were repeated on March 27th 1829, when the legislator established the provision on the vows of the Roman Catholic clergy and on the responsibility for violation of them<sup>8</sup>. In the same decree the legislators noticed that the preparation of a monk lasted until the perpetual vows for at least three years regardless of his age<sup>9</sup>. Admission to the solemn vows could take place not earlier than after the subdeacon’s ordination and not earlier than 22nd birthday. The decree clearly stated that all the solemn vows which were concluded but which violated any of the regulations were considered invalid<sup>10</sup>.

The decree also determined the course of the procedures which should be fulfilled in order to be admitted in the order (monastery). First of all, the candidate had to receive the permission of the Governorate’s authorities: had to submit the certificate of the being unmarried in the office as well as the certificate of no criminal record (not having been judged or sentenced or under investigation) and to express the desire to join the order in writing. The Governorate’s authorities had to verify those data and the provided documents. Next, from the Governor’s office these documents were sent to the order’s authorities and since 1842 to bishops. Then they passed this request to the officials of the Department of Religious Affairs of Foreign Faiths which gave permissions for entering the Order in every particular case<sup>11</sup>.

Tsar’s decrees made the procedure of joining the order very bureaucratic and time consuming, however, to a greater extent, they did not violate any canonical principles of the Roman Catholic Church. In that period, receiving the permission required a formal authorization. The state authorities mainly allowed for entering the Order. The monastic authorities (apart from the Piarist monks) accepted the decree calmly<sup>12</sup>.

After suppressing the November Uprising, the state authorities exacerbated the policy with regard to the Church. They started to strictly control the observance of the decree, particularly paying attention to the age of candidates joining the order and to the duty of serving the time in novitiate. In 1832 the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia issued a special decree concerning the regulations of joining

<sup>8</sup> PSZRI, *Sobr.* 2, nr 2773, Vol. 4, 200.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>11</sup> PSZRI, *Sobr.* 2, nr 2773, Vol. 4, 200-201.

<sup>12</sup> P.P. Gach, *Struktury i działalność duszpasterska zakonów męskich na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej i Śląska w latach 1773–1914* (Lublin: 1999), 169.

the orders for western Governorate's<sup>13</sup>. In the procedure of accepting the candidates to the Order, he ordered the absolute adherence to the regulations from 1829. With regard to that, in 1833 another round of surveys were conducted in order to determine the legitimacy of the religious vows in the convent concluded previously.

Special caution was expressed by: governor-general of Smolensk, of Vitebsk and of Mahiloŭ, K. Chowański; A. von Drebusch, the civil governor of Minsk; the civil governor of Volhynia<sup>14</sup>. Chowański was the first to guard the observance of the law<sup>15</sup>. In the letter to the governor of Minsk he asked for information about the monks from the dissolved monasteries, who concluded their vows violating the decree from 1829. Chowański knew about three monks from the dissolved convent of Dominicans in Škloŭ who violated the state legislation which concerned the procedure of concluding the vows. They were: G. Piotrowski, W. Budrewicz, A. Naruszewicz. As a result of the investigation conducted by secular authorities, it was determined that Budrewicz “may<sup>16</sup> be dismissed from the Dominican Order”, because there was no information about his religious vows<sup>17</sup>. The two other monks lived in monasteries outside the Minsk governorate, so the information about their fate was not revealed<sup>18</sup>.

Another legislative act which concerned joining the order was the decree from December 5th 1839. It allowed for entering the priesthood to not only the man of noble origin but also to *odnodvortsy* and peasants. However, peasants had to obtain a special permission from their owners and present them to the Minister of Internal Affairs. According to the decree, the state peasants had to obtain the permission of the municipality and State Property Chamber<sup>19</sup>.

The subsequent decrees provided for a series of limitations concerning the functioning of certain monasteries and Orders. With the decree from July 30th 1842<sup>20</sup> all the Roman Catholic monasteries in

<sup>13</sup> PSZRI, *Sobr.* 2, nr 5773, Vol. 7, 863-864.

<sup>14</sup> In the documents there are no names and surnames but in the years 1831-1835 A. P. Rimskij-Korsakow took this position.

<sup>15</sup> NHAB, F. 295, Wop. 1, Spr. 452.

<sup>16</sup> The “can” meant “must” here.

<sup>17</sup> NHAB, F. 295, Wop. 1, Spr. 452.

<sup>18</sup> Канфесійны фактар у сацыяльным развіцці Беларусі (канец XVIII – пачатак XX ст.), (Мінск: 2015), 107.

<sup>19</sup> M. Valančius, *Namų užrašai* (Vilnius: 2003), 154.

<sup>20</sup> M. Valančius, *op. cit.*, 132.

the Empire were divided into the into regular (shtatnyy monastyr') and non-regular (zashtatnyy monastyr'). The latter were meant to be gradually closed<sup>21</sup>.

The order which consisted only of non-regular (zashtatnyie) monasteries was not allowed to admit novices which automatically resulted in self-liquidating. The regular (shtatnye) monasteries could accept the novitiate which contributed to their further existence and providing new staff. For example the Carmelite Monastery in Zaswir (of the third class) financially supported the maintenance of the novitiate in the monastery in Vilnius. In May 1862 the monastery donated 202 rubels, and in September 100 rubels<sup>22</sup>.

At that time the number of regular (shtatnych) monasteries was limited: in the Russian Empire it was allowed to maintain only 50 of such monasteries, including 36 of male ones and 14 female ones. Particular monasteries were divided according to the class and it was the base on which the number of monks in each monastery was established. And so: the male monastery of the 1st class needed to consist of at least 22 monks; of the second class – of at least 16, and of the third class – of at least 13. In female nunneries: in the first class ones there were at least 19 nuns, in the second class – at least 16; and in the third class – at least 11<sup>23</sup>. As we can see the positions determined the required minimum but did not define the maximum number of monks or nuns. According to the clerks, the determined minimum regularly turned out to be a stable unit which was the reference point while equipping monasteries.

Before the January Uprising 1863-1864 on the turn of 1850s and 1860s, joining the orders in the Vilnius diocese, after fulfilling all the bureaucratic demands, took place without the basic refusals from the secular authorities and the clergy authorities. The Spiritual Collegium as the last instance which had the influence on obtaining the permission, also gave away mainly positive opinions<sup>24</sup>.

The number of the monks in each convent depended on the financial capability. Every monastery, depending on their class, obtained

<sup>21</sup> The tradition of dividing monasteries into regular (shtatnyy) and non-regular (zashtatnyy) in the Orthodox Church existed in the Russian Empires since XVIII century. The regular monasteries received donations from the state, while the non-regular ones did not. The monasteries were also divided into classes.

<sup>22</sup> Vrublevskiy Biblioteka (Vilnius), F. 318 – 1209, k. 4, 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Католическая Церковь накануне революции 1917 г. Сборник документов*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 175.

a certain amount of money from the dividend of their post-monastic assets taken over by the authorities to the state treasury.

However, the amount of the state donation did not allow to increase the number of the regular monasteries with new posts. While even before the January Uprising these situations connected with the number of monks in monasteries could have been regulated. For example in 1853 the military governor's office of Kaunas received a request from a noblewoman from the Raseiniai County, Monika Matusiewicz, for admitting her to the Vilnius monastery of the Discalced Carmelite nuns. She enclosed the necessary set of documents: the letter from her mother with her blessing, a certificate from marshal of the gentry of the Raseiniai County about her noble origin and a copy of her birth certificate. The governor and bishop agreed and she could enter the nunnery<sup>25</sup>. During further procedures it turned out that there were no vacancies in the nunnery which, according to the decree from 1842, belonged to the second class<sup>26</sup>. Matusiewicz had to wait for a vacancy<sup>27</sup>. Unfortunately, this situation could have lasted eternally because the nuns from the non-regular nunneries were regularly moved to the nunneries with posts, regardless of the number of inhabitants in the latter. With regard to that, Matusiewicz informed the governor that until there was a vacancy for her in the nunnery, she was able to earn her own living by herself in the nunnery. The governor left the decision to the bishop<sup>28</sup>. As a result of the bishop's decision in May 1854, M. Matusiewicz was admitted in the Vilnius monastery of the Discalced Carmelite nuns<sup>29</sup>.

Similar situations were characteristic not only for female monasteries but also for the male ones. In 1862 the application documents with request to be admitted to the Trinitarian Order monastery was submitted by a retired lieutenant colonel Eugeniusz Rakilewicz. In this case, too, there was a full set of monks in the monastery and there were no vacancies. The candidate undertook to maintain himself until the vacancy of the full-time position. The diocesan authorities and the superior of the monastery did not mind and so they applied

<sup>25</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 48, k. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, k. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, k. 3v.

<sup>28</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 48, k. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, k. 11.



to the Spiritual Collegium to admit the candidate, they received the permission on July 10th 1862<sup>30</sup>.

The given examples were not individual cases, which indicates that before the January Uprising the procedure of joining the order, although it was still overly bureaucratic, was not unreasonably banned.

Since 1863, in case of a dissolution of a monastery, the people who belonged to the monastery (e.g. were still in the novitiate) were in a difficult situation. In such case, in order not to leave the ministry, they were sent to other monasteries or theological seminaries (mainly to Vilnius and Minsk). The same happened to the mentioned Eugeniusz Rakilewicz. After the dissolution of the monastery in Vilnius in 1864 he was sent to the Seminary in Vilnius and from there, a year later, to the Saint Petersburg Roman Catholic Theological Academy. After graduating and receiving the holy orders he worked in the parish church in Bobrujsk<sup>31</sup>.

Not always those who were sent from the dissolved monasteries to the diocesan seminary were satisfied with the changes. It concerned Stanisław Demidowicz, who obtained the permission to join the Marian monastery in Rasna in 1862<sup>32</sup>. In 1864 the monastery was dissolved. The novices were sent to the diocesan seminary in Vilnius<sup>33</sup>. Demidowicz left the seminary voluntarily in November 1864.

Similarly, in 1860s three monks: Maciej Ożyński, Józef Buknis and Cezary Wilkonecki left seminaries in Vilnius and Minsk after being sent there from the dissolved monastery of Bernardines in Vilnius<sup>34</sup>. After dissolution of the Bernardines monastery in Vilnius, Wincenty Gromko was sent to the Bernardines monastery in Minsk. However, the monastery in Minsk was also soon dissolved. Then Gromko was sent to the seminary in Minsk from which he was expelled “for his resistance to the seminary’s discipline”<sup>35</sup>. Next he took his documents and went to Cracow to join the Bernardines convent in the monastery in Cracow<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 221, k. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, k. 14.

<sup>32</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 217.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 175.

<sup>35</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 165, k. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, k. 15v.



Some unusual case also appeared, e.g. after the dissolution of the Marian monastery in Rasna, Józef Petraszka was sent to the army and became a recruit<sup>37</sup>.

At the beginning of 1870s the Saint Petersburg Roman Catholic Spiritual Collegium carried out an inspection of all people who applied to join the monastery and were admitted to it ten years before the January Uprising<sup>38</sup>. The Spiritual Collegium, but also the Ministry of Internal Affairs, were interested in the fact when and where those who obtained the permission concluded their vows, and in case of men, whether they were ordained to be priests and who allowed them to and where they were ordained, where they were and what they were doing there.

All monasteries present on Belarus soil after 1875 were regular (shtatnyy) monasteries. The Brigittines nunnery in Hrodna belonged to the first class (19 posts), the Bernardines nunnery in Słonim belonged to the third class (11 posts), the monastery of Franciscans in Hrodna belonged to the second class with 16 posts<sup>39</sup>.

The January Uprising radically changed the attitude of Russian authorities to the candidates who wanted to join the orders. The practice of receiving the permission also changed. Mainly the list of required documents was extended. The bureaucratic procedures were also extended. Thus, in order for a candidate to have his or her documents considered by the Department, it was necessary to go through a few obligatory proceeding stages. Mainly the candidate had to send a written request to the governor with included documents: the birth certificate, the baptism certificate, the certificate of education, the written permission from the parents (guardians), marital status certificate, the certificate of the affinity to nobility (in case when the candidate declared it), as well as four stamps for 60 kopeck each. In case of men, it was necessary to provide a certificate of military service practice or of being relieved.

After receiving these documents, the governor's office sent letters to the municipal courts or district court and to the local police headquarters (according to the place of living of the candidates). The police authorities transferred information about the candidates with particular attention to their political right-mindedness, no criminal record – that is the candidate's presence before the court or investigation. After

<sup>37</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 166, k. 18.

<sup>38</sup> LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 221; LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 217; LVIA, F. 604, Ap. 5, B. 48 and others.

<sup>39</sup> M. Valančius, *op. cit.*, 132-140.

receiving such information from the office, a letter should have been sent to the local bishop asking about his opinion about the candidate and the possibility of admission to the chosen monastery. The bishops usually supported the requests of all candidates. Then the set of documents with the cover letter was sent to the general-governor and from him to the Spiritual Collegium, later to the Department for Spiritual Affairs of foreign Confessions in the Ministry of the Interior. It was the decision of the latter factors that resulted in either the consent or the refusal of admission of a candidate to the convent. At the end of XIX century the decisions of the state authorities were in all cases negative and thus the possibility of development and further existence of the Catholic convents was strongly limited.

To give example of this phenomenon let's consider the cases of 20 people who in the years 1898-1900 applied for the admission to one of the three existing monasteries on Belarus soil: (Słonim – Bernardine nunes, Hrodna – Brigittes nunes, Hrodna – Franciscans).

In 1898 Helena Butoka, an inhabitant of Hrodna applied to be admitted to the nunnery in Hrodna with a set of documents necessary for further consideration. In response to the question of her credibility, both the police commissioner and the president of the regional court confirmed that "Butoko's conduct, lifestyle, moral features are good, she has not been judged and she has not dealt with anything harmful<sup>40</sup>". The bishop did not notice any obstacles either so he informed that there were 13 posts in the nunnery at that time, and as a result, she could have been admitted to the post<sup>41</sup>.

In the Autumn of 1898 the same request with a set of necessary documents was sent to the governor of Hrodna by a noblewoman of Slutsk county and Minsk governorate, Emilia Niewiarowska<sup>42</sup>.

In November 1898 the governor's office received the request of Maria Picewicz, the inhabitant of Odelsk, Sokółka country of the Hrodna governorate of the joining to monastery of Brigittines.

In October 1898 the home teacher Emilia-Natalia Hess, who lived in Hrodna, sent an application to the governor of Hrodna. In her application she wrote: "After graduating from the female gymnasium in Hrodna I was teaching children in private houses but when I had my calling to go to nunnery I decided to join the nunnery of Brigittines of Hrodna"<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> NHAB in Hrodna, F. 1, Wop. 9, Spr. 960, k. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, k. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, k. 9-11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, k. 44-46

In October 1898 a noblewoman who lived in Hrodna, in the Mińsk governorate of Sluck county Konstancja Tomaszewska, applied to be admitted to the nunnery of Brigittines in Hrodna<sup>44</sup>.

At the beginning of 1899 a townswoman of Vilnius Pelagia Wąsowicz applied to be admitted to the same nunnery<sup>45</sup>.

Some women wanted to join the Bernardine nunnery in Słonim. In October 1898 a townswoman of Hrodna who lived in the village of Juravičy, in the Hrodna governorate, Marianna Pyska also applied<sup>46</sup>.

In December 1898 a landowner's daughter, Maria Terlikowska, applied to be admitted<sup>47</sup>.

In August 1899 the governor's office received the application and documents from Anny Semenowicz from Hrodna<sup>48</sup>.

In the summer of 1899 a noblewoman Barbara Rewkiewicz, who lived in Hrodna sent an application for admission<sup>49</sup>.

Sometimes the requests were sent to the governor according to the place of living of the candidate. In such cases they were sent to the governor's office of the governorate where the monastery in question was situated. And so on April 29th 1899 the governor's office in Vilnius sent three applications of a noblewoman from Vilnius, Adela Aurelia Osmolska, to the governor's office in Hrodna with request for admission to the convent and with a report of the commissioner of the police in Vilnius with information about her. In her application it was emphasized that she wanted to enter the nunnery of Benedictines nuns in Vilnius but, as there were no posts, she asked to be admitted to the Bernardines nunnery in Słonim<sup>50</sup>.

In the previously sent information which had been presented to the governor of Vilnius in the report of the commissioner of the police in Vilnius it was noted: "the lieutenant colonel's daughter Adelia-Aurelia Aleksandrowna Osmolska, 21 years old, a Catholic. Her parents died in 1892 and she lives with her aunt, a nun, Tekla Osmolska, in the buiding of Saint Catherine in Vilnius since September 19th 1892. (...) there are no obstacles for her so she can join the nunnery, although it is assumed that the applicant wants to be admitted to the nunnery

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, k. 95-100.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, k. 18-20.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, k. 41-43.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, k. 35-38.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, k. 120-127.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, k. 128-136.

<sup>50</sup> NHAB in Hrodna, F. 1, Wop. 9, Spr. 960, k. 49-53.

probably under the influence of her aunt Tekla Osmolska, and of other nuns among whom she had lived since her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, not having been in contact with any secular people”<sup>51</sup>. So at the very first stage of collecting data, even the policeman analyzed the reasons for the call and for her eagerness to join the nunnery.

Sometimes the requests for admission to the convent were collective. In 1879 the noblewomen Zofia and Aleksandra Przyborowskie, Waleria Nasutówna and Malwina Deichman, sent applications to the governor of Hrodna to be admitted to the Słonim nunnery of Bernardine<sup>52</sup>. As a reply they received the request for a set of traditional documents required to be submitted before the further considerations. Collecting these documents in this case lasted for 3 months and since January 12<sup>th</sup> 1880 the candidates sent the required documents and referring to art. 428, 429 and 430 of “The Collection of Laws” (ed. 1876) they asked for admission to the nunnery of Bernardines in Słonim once again. At that time the number of candidates decreased and there were only 3 of them (Zofia and Aleksandra Przyborowskie, Waleria Nasutówna). Malwina Deichman probably did not manage to collect the necessary set of documents. Since that moment the traditional procedure of testing the candidates before admitting them to the nunnery began. The procedure was conducted anyway despite the fact that the result was already known but the bureaucratic procedures were still required and unchanged<sup>53</sup>. As a reply, the district clerks reported that the candidates (each of them was reported separately) “was not judged or investigated about and she is morally and politically trust worthy”<sup>54</sup>, and the chancellery of the Criminal and Civil Court Chamber informed that the candidates “were not judged or investigated about”<sup>55</sup>. After collecting and submitting all the necessary documents, there was the next stage of correspondence and bureaucracy. The governor’s chancellery informed the bishop of Vilnius chancellery (at that time it was monsignor Wacław Żyliński), that the documents of the mentioned candidates are proper (letter from February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1880)<sup>56</sup>.

After receiving the letter from the governor’s chancellery, prelate Żyliński, in his letter from February 29<sup>th</sup> 1880 to the governor reported

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, k. 53.

<sup>52</sup> NHAB in Hrodna, F.1, Wop. 8, Spr. 281, k. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, k. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, k. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, k. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, k. 7.

that “at present in the nunnery of Bernardines in Słonim there are only four nuns, and in order to complete the staff, that is providing for the other of 11, now on the order of the Minister of Internal Affairs, seven nuns are to be sent to this nunnery from Vilnius’ Bernardines. However, due to the fact that almost all these nuns are elderly and weak, I cannot refuse to admit to this nunnery these novices who are preparing to be nuns”<sup>57</sup>. Another step was to inform the general-governor of Vilnius about these facts and about the positive decision of the bishop in this case<sup>58</sup>.

The further correspondence was going to and from: the general-governor’s chancellery sent a letter to the governor of Hrodna with request for information about the number of vacancies in the Bernardine nunnery in Słonim, particularly, how many novices should there be and how many of them are there at present<sup>59</sup>. Thus the question was sent to the office of the bishop of Vilnius. As a reply, the chancellery of the diocese of Vilnius indicated that: “at present there are seven vacancies for the nuns from Vilnius who had not yet been transferred, in the Bernardines nunnery in Słonim. At present in the nunnery there are no novices and the number of the present ones is not determined; but those who want to become nuns, are preparing in the nunnery and they are called novices for at least a year<sup>60</sup>”, and in the next letter stating that at present there are no novices in the nunnery of the Bernardine Sisters<sup>61</sup>.

Probably the information obtained from the Catholic clergy could not be considered reliable, therefore, on April 9th 1880 a request was sent to the Słonim district clerk to inform about the present number of novices in the Bernardines nunnery in Słonim. The clerk answered that “there are no novices who are preparing to become nuns but the nunnery needs them very much because the nuns who live there are very old”<sup>62</sup>.

Despite the complete fulfilment of the requirements as far as the set of documents and the real number of vacancies for the novices were concerned, the decision of the general governor from June 6th 1880 was the following: “it should be announced to the noblewomen Zofia

<sup>57</sup> NHAB in Hrodna, F. 1, Wop. 8, Spr. 281, k. 8.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, k. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, k. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, k. 12.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, k. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, k. 16.

and Aleksandra Przyborowska and Waleria Nasut, that their requests for admission to the Bernardines nunnery in Słonim cannot be granted due to the lack of vacancies in this nunnery. Their documents (...) are returned to the owners”<sup>63</sup>.

One more collective request was sent in the summer of 1899 by sisters Jadwiga and Maria Szunejko asking for admission to the Briggittines nunnery in Hrodna<sup>64</sup>.

Similar requests were also sent by men. In 1898 Stanisław Sarosiek, “the inherited nobleman”, sent to the chancellery of the governor a request for admission to the Franciscan monastery in Hrodna. He enclosed all the necessary documents<sup>65</sup>. In the bishop’s act in case of admission of Sarosiek to the monastery it was noticed that at the time when he requested for admission, in the monastery of Franciscans there were five monks (four in the monastery and one in the delegation) with the certain number of 16 posts. With regard to that, the bishop supported the request for admission<sup>66</sup>.

At the end of 1898 a request for admission to the Franciscan monastery in Hrodna was sent by a servant of the same monastery, a peasant from the governorate and district of Hrodna from the village of Skomoroszki, Adam Pawłowski<sup>67</sup>. In May 1899 Pawłowski, sent a the second request to the chancellery of the governor for admission to the monastery. He emphasized that he had not received any reply to his previous letter. He also indicated that he enclosed a certificate of his military service to the previous set of documents<sup>68</sup>.

In January 1899 the chancellery of the governor received a request from an inhabitant of the governorate of Hrodna and the Białystok district Franc Pelszyński for admission to the monastery of Franciscans in Hrodna<sup>69</sup>.

The citizens of the Kingdom of Poland also expressed their will to enter the monasteries which were situated in the Belarus and Lithuanian governorates. On October 13th 1898 Stanisław Furmański from the governorate of Radom, district of Sandomierz, municipality of Łoniów, who at that moment lived in Warsaw in 52 Krakowskie

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, k. 19-19v.

<sup>64</sup> NHAB in Hrodna, F. 1, Wop. 9, Spr. 960, k. 79-88.

<sup>65</sup> NHAB in Hrodna, F. 1, Wop. 9, Spr. 960, k. 12-16.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, k. 17-17v.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem, k. 21-26.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, k. 61.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, k. 31-34.

Przedmieście Street, sent a request for admission to the Franciscan monastery in Hrodna to the chancellery of the governor of Hrodna. In his application he referred to the legislation<sup>70</sup>.

On January 16th 1899 the peasant Iwan Wasilewski who lived in Vilnius sent a request for admission to the Franciscan monastery in Hrodna to the governor of Hrodna<sup>71</sup>.

In September 1898 a request for admission to a monastery was sent by Adam Żdanuk, a 43-year old peasant from the governorate of Hrodna from the county of Sokółka from the village of Nierošno<sup>72</sup>. However, in this case the obstacle appeared when the police started their investigation as a reply to the governor's request, the president of the regional court in Hrodna informed that on September 21st 1898 "a peasant from the village of Nierošno, the county of Sokółka, Adam Wikcentiew Żdanuk was judged by the Regional Court in Hrodna on charges of a crime from art. 1049. And by the sentence from March 24th 1888 he was fined of 3 rubels (...) or in case of not paying the fine – he was to be arrested for two day. The sentence was carried out"<sup>73</sup>. The report of the clerk from Sokółka stated that: "Żdanuk is a man of good qualities". The bishop also confirmed that the candidate's request can be fulfilled.

However, the police worked efficiently and during the investigation they sent information from October 27th 1899 to the chancellery which stated that Jan Wasilewski and Adam Żdanuk came to Hrodna without the permission and while waiting for the admission, they started to live in Hrodna.

This fact was negatively received by the civil authorities and the governor demanded explanations from the bishop of Vilnius. The bishop called the prior of the monastery in Hrodna for explanation. After the meeting, in the letter to the governor from January 12<sup>th</sup> 1900 the bishop informed that the candidates really lived in the Franciscan monastery even though the bishop did not allow the prior to let them. The bishop strictly reprimanded the prior for that illegal act and told him to expel the men from the monastery<sup>74</sup>.

As we can see, it was considered a serious violation not only by the candidates but also by the monastery's prior. On February 11th 1900 the police commissioner informed the governor that the peasants Jan

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, k. 47-48.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem, k. 67-69.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, k. 62.

<sup>73</sup> Ibidem, k. 63.

<sup>74</sup> NHAB in Hrodna, F. 1, Wop. 9, Spr. 960, k. 76.



Wasilewski i Adam Źdanuk who had been living in the Franciscan monastery in Hrodna, were expelled from the monastery on January 12th 1900.<sup>75</sup>

Another request for admission to the Franciscan monastery in Hrodna was sent by a 38-year old nobleman Kazimierz Innokencjusz Maksymilian Emiljanow-Cesarjew Umiastowski, who lived in Vilnius and worked in the Roman Catholic Consistory in Vilnius<sup>76</sup>.

On September 22nd 1899 another peasant, Antoni Kazimierz Jarosewicz, who lived in Hrodna, sent a request for admission to the same monastery to the governor<sup>77</sup>.

As a result of the collective requests for admission to monasteries, the Ministry of Internal Affairs sent collective responses, which replied to the group of requests collected in a certain period of time. On January 30th 1900 the chancelleries of the governors of Vilnius, Kaunas and Hrodna sent a confidential memo to the office of the governor of Hrodna, which stated: "The head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who according to my request, does not see any reasons to maintain the Catholic monasticism in our western outskirts, rejected the requests of 20 people sent by the Spiritual Collegium for admission to the Roman Catholic monasteries in the Northwestern Krai, that I have just been informed about. I have the privilege to announce it to Your Excellency in order to inform you"<sup>78</sup>. Thus none of the mentioned requests for admission to a monastery was accepted.

Such decisions caused legislation violations to a certain extent because they were clearly against the regulations of law. Even the governors did not know on what bases they were supposed to reject the requests for admission with the sets of documents of the people who did not have any legal issues and who provided all the necessary documents. It is confirmed in the feedback letter from February 28th 1900 to the general-governor, in which the governor of Hrodna wrote: "With the circular from January 30th you informed me that the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who did not see any reason to maintain the Catholic monasticism in our western outskirts, rejected the requests sent by the Spiritual Collegium for admission of 20 people to the Roman Catholic monasteries in the Northwestern Krai. Meanwhile I am considering a few requests of various people for a certificate according to Art. 429-430.v.9 "Collection of Laws" ed.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, k. 70.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, k. 89-93.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, k. 112-119.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, k. 136.

1876 before the Roman Catholic diocesan management to certify their being under the judgement and still under investigation and I am constantly receiving new requests. [...] I have the honor to ask Your Excellency not to refuse providing proper explanation whether these requests should be submitted in a set order or should these requests be rejected in the set order”<sup>79</sup>.

Thus it is clear that such situations aimed at: a) preventing any minimal stabilization of the situation of the monastery life, b) moreover, they aimed at gradual destruction of monasteries. In such conditions monasteries inevitably started to gradually collapse. For Russian authorities the situation was not so critical as monks and nuns were sent from the dissolved monasteries to others. According to the authorities, there was no emergency situation, only the monasteries' staff were completed with new monks. The fact that according to the law and tradition of the Catholic Church such a monastery was still not such a one specified convent, was not important for the authorities. In fact from that moment the monasteries turned into a dormitories for monks<sup>80</sup>.

For example since 1883 the Franciscan monastery in Hrodna was a traditional dormitory where the following monks from different monastic orders lived: 1) prior Steckewicz (Franciscan), 2) friar Wojtkiewicz (Franciscan), 3) friar (“novice”) Skalski (Franciscan); the so called “prescriptive”<sup>81</sup>: 4) Pomen (Dominican); 5) friar Medard (Dominican), 6) friar Senczyno (Benedictine); and the diocesan priests: 7) F. Senczykowski and 8) Markowski. The so called “prescriptive” monks were considered to be the members of a certain monastery on the basis of the state legislation, but they were not according to the Catholic law.

After the decree from 1905 the formal obstacles in joining the monasteries were removed. However, the monasteries (on Belarusian lands) which still existed, were not able to resume their activity and as a result of non-canonical manipulation, they changed their monastic affiliation (e.g. the Bernardines nunnery in Słonim was taken over by the sisters of Immaculate Conception<sup>82</sup>, while the nunnery of Brigit-

<sup>79</sup> NHAB in Hrodna, F. 1, Wop. 9, Spr. 960, k. 138.

<sup>80</sup> More on the subject: R. Zianiuk, “The Evolution of the Role of Roman Catholic Monasteries in Belarus from the Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century”, *Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej* 2021, Vol. XX: 103-122.

<sup>81</sup> They were sent to the monastery of a different order as a result of the dissolution of the convents where they were at the time of cassation.

<sup>82</sup> *Klasztory bernardyńskie w Polsce w jej granicach historycznych*, ed. H. E. Wyczawski (Kalwaria Zebrzydowska: 1985), 541.

tines – by Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Only the Franciscan monastery in Hrodna remained in the same order affinity.

Thus, as a result of the policy of Russian authorities, the organization of monastic life on Belarus soil was completely changed. Mainly, the traditional structure of managing convents changed: from general – provincial – abbot was changed into the bishop – visitor – prior. Secondly, the decision to accept candidates for monastery was transferred from ecclesiastical authorities to the secular authorities. As a result of that since 1880s the ecclesial law to provide the monastic human resources has been gradually destroyed.

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