In March 2007, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (ECAC) in Poland established a historical commission for the purpose of investigating the infiltration of the church’s structures by the communist secret police, or Security Service, as it was officially called. The ECAC was the very first church body in Poland to face its past in this manner. The step earned it much praise from certain Catholic journalists and clergy, who are to this day waiting for a similar act of institutional courage, as the Lutherans’ decision was then widely viewed.

Not surprisingly, things got off to a rather slow start, given the intricacies of archival work, for which only some of the commission’s members were professionally qualified as either archivists or historians. However, as time went by, what was initially seen as seriousness and caution gave way to the impression that the commission was, in reality, dragging its feet rather than fulfilling its mandate. Its most important task was the investigation of the archival material pertaining to the church’s current leadership: the bishops and members of the Consistory and of the Synodical Council.

Reasons for this reluctance became clear when, in September 2008, the nationwide daily Rzeczpospolita published an article entitled “The Pastor and the Security Service” by Lutheran journalist Cezary Gmyz. It brought the startling revelation that among political police informers in the church’s ranks was also its current presiding bishop (and, ironically, president of the commission’s supervisory college), the Rt. Rev. Janusz Jagucki. When elected Bishop of the Church in 2001, Jagucki never disclosed to the church that, as a pastor, he had for seventeen years maintained secret contacts with the Security Service. What the archival evidence showed with painful clarity was not only Jagucki’s collaboration but also its more-than-willing character.

The historical commission eventually concurred in this judgment and, in March 2009, declared in a secret ballot that Jagucki was guilty of persistent and conscious collaboration with the communist secret police—a collaboration, the commission concluded, that had undeniably harmed the church. Materials gathered in Jagucki’s thousand-page file, some of them in his own handwriting, showed that as a pastor he was the one who often initiated meetings. He informed widely on parishioners, fellow pastors, and even members of his own family, as well as undertaking to obtain intelligence of interest to the Security Service. A particularly egregious example was Jagucki’s betrayal of a runaway from the German Democratic Republic who had turned to him for help. For his collaboration, Jagucki seems to have occasionally accepted small financial gifts (some signed receipts have been preserved).

Jagucki’s collaboration, it is now known, was hardly an isolated case. The past three years have seen a flurry of historical studies of the Polish Lutheran church’s entanglement with the communist regime, including the first monograph that covers the years 1945 to 1975. While there is little doubt that pastors who were secret informers remained a minority, it was clearly a significant and influential minority. Today it is estimated that 20% to 30% of the clergy were, in some measure, Security Service informers. The figure, it seems, does not differ much from the level of infiltration of the Roman Catholic church. But there are several factors that make matters worse in the case of the Lutherans. The first is the church’s small size. With only two hundred or so pastors, professional and personal interconnectedness is extremely high. It was practically impossible not to know more than prob-
ably should have been known about fellow pastors. Second, the informers were generally high-ranking church officials, diocesan superintendents, or pastors of prominent parishes. They were the decision makers, and the fate of their brothers in the ministry

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often lay in their hands. The Security Service was obviously interested in informers deemed valuable. Finally, as the former military bishop Ryszard Borski notes in a biographical essay, students graduating from the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw—in contrast to graduates of Catholic seminaries—received no preparation for or even an informal warning about the possibility of an enlistment attempt. This made young Lutheran pastors all the more vulnerable in confrontation with the seemingly all-powerful communist apparatus of repression.⁵

Jagucki’s case must be set within the context of a larger, though necessarily selective, picture of Polish Lutheran pastors’ collaboration with the Security Service in the years from 1945 to 1989. As noted, the extent of the problem is becoming clear only now. What is disturbing, however, is not only that historians have shattered the all-too-convenient myth of the church’s victimization by the communist regime and brought to light the church’s complicity. The problem also has a present-day side. The investigative work has been taken over by individuals, many of them professional historians, with no institutional ties of dependence to the ECAC. This has been a reaction to what is seen as the church’s lack of real interest in coming to terms with its communist past. Once it became clear that too many members of the ECAC’s current leadership would be implicated and would then have to act as judges in their own case, the historical commission’s enthusiasm seems to have petered out. Already in Jagucki’s case, the commission showed itself to be susceptible to those who are deliberately not interested in raking things up because the church’s communist past is also very much their own past. Church-political maneuvering has effectively reduced the commission’s activity to issuing warnings against hasty conclusions, with which it typically greets the results of others’ investigations.

However, if there were some in the church’s leadership who expected the problem eventually to go away or remain interesting only to a handful of historians, they have so far been proved wrong. The perceived political maneuvering in the church’s highest ranks has given rise to a largely lay-led grassroots initiative concerned about the ECAC’s moral voice. The emergence of this group has brought to light a dangerous fault line between the church’s clerical leaders, resorting to self-defense theological platitudes, and a minority group of mostly younger laypersons who are concerned about the credibility of the ECAC’s witness.

Polish Lutherans and the Communist Government

In the interwar period, there were several Lutheran and Union churches in Poland. The largest of those, with some 425,000 members, was the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, headquartered in Warsaw. Its general superintendent and then presiding bishop throughout the entire period was the Rt. Rev. Juliusz Bursche, widely known for his pro-Polish sympathies. The ECAC was largely Polish-speaking, though with a substantial German-speaking minority. The Prussian Union churches had about 270,000 members and were predominantly German in ethnicity. Altogether Lutheran, Union, and Reformed Christians added up to 2.6% of the population.⁶

The losses suffered by the Lutherans during World War II were incalculable. At the war’s outbreak, the ECAC had 227 clergymen, of whom 125 declared Polish nationality. Of those 125, sixty-three were arrested by the Nazis, thirty-nine were sent to concentration camps, and three were murdered in prison. The ECAC was also the only Polish church body to lose its leader. Already in early October 1939, the Nazis arrested Bursche, who had refused to leave the country and issued a statement condemning Germany’s aggression. Bursche was then sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp on charges of participation in the Versailles Peace Conference and betrayal of the Germans in Poland. He died under uncertain circumstances in 1942.⁷ When the war ended, Poland had 352 Lutheran places of worship, served by only forty-two pastors. The number of Lutherans in the first years after the war is estimated at 235,000, half the prewar number.⁸ (Today the ECAC has 80,000 members.)
The war’s end brought no relief but a host of new challenges. In 1945 Poland found itself within new borders, with a large portion of its prewar territory annexed by the Soviet Union and with new territorial gains in the west, granted at Germany’s expense by Stalin and his western allies. The country was ruled by a communist government, entirely dependent on Stalin’s orders and legitimated solely by the presence of Soviet troops and the ever-expanding apparatus of terror. Even after a considerable relaxation of the Soviet grip on the country, which took place during the 1954–1956 period of de-Stalinization, the reality in which the Lutherans had to function was that of a state that sought far-reaching control over the lives and socio-political aspirations of its citizens.

What made matters even worse for the Lutherans was the popular post-war stereotype that portrayed them as Nazi sympathizers or at best a foreign, German element in the native Catholic soil. The only exception was the former Duchy of Cieszyn in Austrian Silesia, where Lutheranism was traditionally associated with Polish ethnicity; it remained a Lutheran stronghold. In other parts of the country, the Lutherans were dispersed and forcibly thrust into an ethnic mold with which many did not identify. The years immediately following the war saw numerous takeovers, despite protests, of Lutheran churches by Catholics on the pretext that the buildings were former German property.

The weakness of the ECK—the which in 1947 became, by law, the sole Lutheran church in Poland, incorporating parishes formerly both Union and “Old Lutheran” (that is, Lutherans who had refused to join the Prussian Union in Germany in the early 1800s)—made it turn to the government for protection. But not surprisingly, the government was only interested in guaranteeing the ECK’s legal rights because it saw a place for the Lutherans in its own plans. One of the Lutheran church’s abiding roles was to weaken the position of the Catholic church, which by virtue of its sheer size remained the only real competitor and threat in the communist struggle for the rule of souls.

In addition to this intermediate propaganda function (the government’s goal was not, after all, to have Catholics turn into Lutherans), there were also other roles that the government, at various times, envisaged for the Lutheran church. Among them was, in the 1950s, the polonization (though here the government also feared accidental clericalization) of the native population of former East Prussia. The government was further interested in monitoring Lutherans’ institutional and private contacts with the West, which became possible again after 1956. The ECK could perform this function less obtrusively. Further, because of its contacts with the West, the Lutheran church served a vital role in presenting Poland as a country where freedom of belief and other civil rights were respected. The church also proved useful in supporting the Polish government’s and even the entire Soviet bloc’s policies in face of their Western detractors. Notorious in this regard is presiding bishop Andrzej Wantula’s reference to the Berlin Wall as “a wall of peace.” Last but not least, the communist regime by its very nature, even aside from those goals, remained vitally interested in the activities of the church as a potential source of discontentment and subversion.

All of those roles required the predictability of the church’s actions and its close cooperation with the authorities. After 1956 this was to be achieved not through direct coercion, as in the Stalinist period, but through intrigue and indirect control, exercised by means of a network of reliable secret informers within the church’s ranks. This is not to say that there were no informers in the church prior to 1956. Far from it. But once the government was no longer concerned with the imminent suppression of all church life, the issue of control became more pressing, while at the same time more complex and requiring greater sensitivity.

Interestingly enough, as one historian has observed, it is chiefly among the older generation of pastors who survived the war that one comes across skepticism and criticism of the new political reality. An informer’s report accuses one pastor of having said at a pastoral conference in 1953, “It is our task to proclaim not that social change or the six-year plan is important but that God’s Word is. One must not engage in polemics during instruction, so that the other side might not accuse us of activism; but one must present the most important information where their textbooks attack our positions. It is not so bad, because their teachers don’t believe yet what their textbooks say.” Likewise, one must admire the Kraków pastor Karol Kubisz who, after he had been forced to sign an informer’s agreement in 1953, not only did not deliver on it but, when repeatedly pressed by the Security Service officer, reiterated that “he has his own job and is not going to snitch on people.” This, it seems, put
an end to any further demands for collaboration.\textsuperscript{12}

In this light, it seems all the more surprising that, with Stalinist terror gone, so many pastors agreed "willingly" (if one is to believe the recruiters' reports) to serve as secret informers. What motivated them? So far, according to Jan Sztorc, the archives have yielded not one single case of blackmail pertaining to the informer's financial dealings or his private life. Most informers actually seem to have been driven by a desire to gain a position of prominence in the church. The prevalent sentiment appears to have been that one could not make a career in the church without government support. Another common type of motivation had to do with obtaining goods that were scarce, such as a passport to be able to travel abroad or material goods and other favors. Among the motivating factors was also the fear of Roman Catholic dominance; as long as the Catholic church suffered government restrictions, the restrictions imposed on the Lutherans did not matter.\textsuperscript{13}

This latter reason is related to how some informers justified their collaboration to themselves: they were doing it for the good of the ECAC, since both the communists and the Lutherans shared a common enemy, the Catholic church. However, the good of the church was, according to Sztorc, invoked merely for the sake of appeasing one's conscience. The guiding officers' reports convey practically no expectations, on the informers' part, of benefits to the ECAC at large or to the informer's own parish. There was also a number of other strategies that helped the informers to appease their guilty consciences. In some cases, the informers refused financial remuneration, though usually they did not shy away from accepting small gifts. The Security Service also stopped requiring written declarations of collaboration, which may have created the impression of an informal though secret chat, instead of a confidential exchange of sensitive information. Not without importance here was, finally, the fact that some informers may have been led to believe that the information they divulged was only insignificant gossip. The most common excuse heard today is, "What I said didn't hurt anyone"—even though this cannot be anything more than a subjective impression.

There remains no doubt that the Security Service achieved its goal in the Lutheran church. Grzegorz Bebnik notes that the "saturation of the ECAC's structures with informers was so high that not infrequently several informers, knowing nothing of another, informed on one another." One informer that particularly stands out is the former superintendent of the Katowice diocese, Adolf Hauptmann. His extensive connections to various Lutheran and charity organizations in the West and the seriousness with which he took his task earned him the reputation of an especially valuable source of operationally worthy intelligence. In fact, he was such a prized informer that his guiding officer came to his funeral with a wreath in gratitude for the thirty-one years of fruitful collaboration.\textsuperscript{14} For many informers in the church's ranks, collaboration ended automatically only when Poland became a free country.

Problems with Repentance

In light of its sluggish performance to date, one can only speculate about why the ECAC's historical commission was formed and what it was hoped it might find in the Security Service archives. What is certain is that the decision to establish the commission followed the 2006 revision of the lustration law, which requires some public officials to submit lustration statements disclosing their dealings, if any, with the communist secret police. The truthfulness of these statements is then vetted by the Institute of National Remembrance, where the archives are now deposited. Those found to be "lustration liars" are barred from public office.

The law does not, of course, extend to churches. However, the opening of the Security Service archives led some in the church to express concern about its moral authority—especially if it were to be historians and journalists, rather than the church itself, who first made public and then passed judgment on the unsavory pages in the ECAC's history. Concern about moral credibility, as well as the issue of timing, was certainly at play in the establishment of the ECAC's historical commission.

It must be mentioned, further, that the archives are only partially preserved, many files having been destroyed in 1989 and 1990. For someone aspiring to public office, not to disclose the past may well be a risk worth taking. Yet in reality, as we now know, even if operational reports are missing, the pseudonym of an actual informer appears in so many places that the fact of collaboration is generally beyond doubt. The Security Service was not stupid enough to be foibed off with worthless information; it carefully evaluated and verified operational reports, for example, against other informers' accounts.\textsuperscript{15} Thus there is a paper trail even if actual reports no longer exist. Given the partial nature of the preserved files, many perhaps hoped, rather naively, that the church would find in the archival material only confirmation of its self-perception as victim or "a hostage of the times," as a 2003 publication of the Polish Ecumenical Council described the Protestant Churches in Poland and Germany in the twentieth century. But that was not to be.

Since Jagucki's secret, conscious, and harmful collaboration with the Security Service became public knowledge, the response of the ECAC's leadership has been hubristic in the extreme. The commission's decision brought to light the tremendous pressure exerted on its members by the Consistory and the bishops, clearly stunned by what could be found in the archives and determined not to allow matters to progress any further. Following the
commission's declaration of Jagucki's collaboration and absent any remorse on his part, military bishop Ryszard Borski put forth a motion to the Synodical Assembly for Jagucki's immediate retirement. To prevent the motion from being considered, Jagucki and his consistorial supporters asked that a vote of confidence be taken first, evidently hoping it would be in his favor. This turned out to be only a partial victory: the vote failed but only by a simple, rather than absolute, majority. This led to the shortening of Jagucki's term, but allowed him to remain in office for another eight months. He then retired with full benefits, even though he never served a full term as bishop and to this day has repeatedly refused to recognize the harm his actions caused, let alone apologize. He remains the vice president of the Polish Ecumenical Council and the ECAC's representative on the Council. Earlier this year he also took a part in the consecration of a new diocesan bishop.

Before he left office, Jagucki made sure—in what is widely viewed as an act of revenge—that the military bishop would not be reelected for another term but rather forced into early retirement. This was not difficult to accomplish, considering there are still some twenty pastors, registered as Secret Service informers, who currently occupy high-ranking positions in the ECAC. Until earlier this year, this number also included four of the six diocesan bishops (at present it is down to three). The entire group reacts allergically to the idea of raking up the past and even more so to calls to accountability and repentance. Most, it seems, would simply like to reach retirement age without having to face any uncomfortable questions.

However, being left in peace may no longer be an option in the era of the internet. The sense of incredulity at Jagucki and his camp's political maneuvering has led to the rise of a mostly lay-led internet forum where rank-and-file Lutherans have been able to comment on the state of the ECAC and the hubris of its leadership. Some members of the forum appear to be historians with access to the Security Service archives; some are journalists; most are concerned laity, joined by a handful of pastors, usually appearing under pseudonyms.

What brings them all together is concern for the church's moral credibility in today's world. But there is also a theological concern. The ECAC's renunciation of its own moral voice for the sake of self-preservation is symptomatic of an underlying perversion of the Lutheran teaching on justification. Why repent if people are justified apart from works? This attitude, it is widely felt, seems to pervade the misguided actions of the ECAC's leadership. It has taken the place of the genuinely Lutheran question: why not repent? Why not repent when, thanks to our Lord and master Jesus Christ, the entire life of believers can be one of repentance?

It has taken the place of the genuinely Lutheran question: why not repent? Why not repent when, thanks to our Lord and master Jesus Christ, the entire life of believers can be one of repentance? own admission, he met with a guiding officer several times but offered no information and, therefore, does not feel the need to apologize. It is especially in cases like Szurman's that accused informers should have the courage, as Cezary Gryz postulates, to petition for auto-lustration in order
to have their names cleared. This procedure entrusts the tracking down and analysis of the archival material to a specially established court. The court determines, on the basis of the extant evidence, not only the fact of secret collaboration but also whether it was conscious and caused actual harm. A pastor registered as an informer should take advantage of this procedure in his own interest and in the interest of those whom he serves.

Unfortunately, the current presiding bishop, the Rt. Rev. Jerzy Samiec, seems largely inclined to let sleeping dogs lie. He was, in any case, elected on the platform of putting a stop to lustration proceedings and had himself played a role, as Synodal Assembly president, in the maneuvering to save Jagucki’s head. The sentiment prevalent among the current leadership remains that expressed by the historical commission’s chair, Dawid Binemann-Zdanowicz, shortly before the meeting that was to decide Jagucki’s guilt. In a letter to the Consistory, Zdanowicz accused pastors who had refused to collaborate with the communist secret police of harming the church. “Every pastor,” he writes, “knew that the Security Service was the secret political police, and that showing hostility to or disregarding its representatives was obvious foolhardiness and an activity that harmed the church.” What all this means in practice can be illustrated by the example of one pastor who was legally declared a victim of secret informers among fellow pastors. This pastor has been denied the right to have the court sentence published in the church’s official periodical “for fear of causing grief to those on the other side.”

Given all this, it remains to wish perseverance to the concerned laity of the ECAC as they call on the church to face its past with integrity. They seem to have a better sense of what a life of repentance and enjoyment of God’s forgiveness is all about. Already in this, there is hope.

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Notes
2. Throughout this article I shall make no distinction between the commission as made up of two research teams, on the one hand, and the supervisory college, distinct from those, on the other. I shall simply refer to “the commission” and take it for granted that it is the college that has actual decisional powers. The historical commission’s statute is available via the ECAC’s website at www.luteranie.pl/pl/materialy/Statut%20KH.pdf (accessed April 15, 2011).
3. Ryszard Borski, “Doswiadczenia zycia w komunizmie jako duszpasterskie i historyczne wyzwanie” (The Experience of Life under Communism as a Pastoral and Historical Challenge), and Cezary Gmyz, “Co kryje archiwum RZ?” Both articles can be found at www.luteranie.net.
5. Not insignificant here is the fact that the Academy was (and to this day remains) a state school, created and supported by the government after the expulsion of the Lutheran theological faculty from the University of Warsaw in 1954.
6. The data come from the 1931 census. For a more detailed breakdown, see Elżbieta Alabudzińska, Protestantiści w Polsce w latach 1918–1939 (Torun: Adam Marszalek, 2009), 90.
7. For a discussion of the German atrocities committed against Polish Lutheran clergy, see Waldemar Gastpary, Protestantiści w Polsce w dobie dwudziestu lat wojen światowych (Warszawa: ChAT, 1981), 203–18.
9. Ryszard Michalak, “Kościoly Prot-