

# Summary

## STANISŁAW KONARSKI BEFORE THE HOLY OFFICE (1769-1771)

In the eighteenth century, the Holy Office occupied the supreme position in the Roman Curia, and was headed by the Pope himself. The task of this Congregation was to watch over the correctness of Catholic doctrine of the faith, including the verification of publications suspected of heresy, doctrinal error or hostility to the Church, and possibly classifying them for the index of forbidden books. This objective was pursued by the Holy Office in parallel with the Congregation of the Index, reserving for itself the right to evaluate books by authors of greater importance and influence. At the end of the 1760s and the beginning of the 1770s, several books published or made available in Poland came under the evaluation of the theologians of the Holy Office, including one by a Polish author, Stanisław Konarski.

Father Stanisław Konarski (1700-1773), a Piarist priest, belonged to the intellectual elite of the eighteenth-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He was a precursor of the Enlightenment in Poland and a prominent representative of the Catholic Enlightenment. The most important achievement in his life was to reform education in Piarist colleges, which initiated a general improvement in the level of education in schools run by other orders. The renewed institutions produced a new generation of noble youth, well prepared for the challenges of responsible public and social life and intellectual work. His second important achievement was to develop the doctrinal basis for political reform in the Commonwealth, in a four-volume work on Polish parliamentarism entitled *O skutecznym rad sposobie* (On an Effective Way for Councils). The background to these achievements was Konarski's indefatigable activity in state and ecclesiastical affairs, as well as his intensive intellectual and creative work, from historical studies, through pedagogical publications, to poetic works. His political and pedagogical ideas were perfectly in line with the reform programme initiated by Stanisław August Poniatowski, the last King of the Commonwealth, who was crowned in 1764.

In 1769, Konarski published a book entitled *O religii poczciwych ludzi – On the Religion of Honest Men*, which was a kind of an apologia of authentic Christianity against deism. It combined a critique of deism with a positive interpretation of Christian honesty. In the context of the tense political situation and religious feuds fuelled in Poland by Russia and Prussia, Konarski simultaneously wished to contribute to building bridges between feuding citizens who differed in their religion. He postulated the formation of a civic conscience based on Christian values, and therefore did not directly accentuate religious differences within Christianity or declare the superiority of

Catholicism over Protestantism or Orthodoxy. It was largely for this reason that he came under attack from several Polish theologians and the apostolic nuncio in Warsaw, Archbishop Angelo Maria Durini, who officially denounced the book to the Holy Office and regarded Konarski as a representative of the pro-Russian royal party. The course of the Roman trial, which took place at the initiative of the nuncio at the Congregation of the Holy Office, is the subject of the book whose contents are dealt with in this summary.

The book is the product of an NCN grant, following research in Roman and Polish archives, including materials hitherto unknown to historians from the Archivio del Dicastero per la Dottrina della Fede (Archives of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, ADDF). It consists of two parts: a comprehensive historical introduction and an editorial section. The latter part includes a transcription of the full collection of original archival materials of the Holy Office concerning Konarski's trial (in Italian and Latin), together with a commentary and translations into Polish. Part One is a historical introduction consisting of eight chapters. Stanisław Konarski's biography is outlined, including the basic facts of his life: the education he received at Piarist colleges in Poland and Rome, the path of his religious vocation, his journalistic, political, intellectual and organisational activities, his international contacts, and finally, his most important achievements and publications. The second chapter provides an overview of the debates and polemics provoked by the book *O religii poczciwych ludzi* from the end of the eighteenth century through the entire nineteenth century, and shows this book's place in research on the history of the Enlightenment in Poland. Subsequent chapters deal with Konarski's main ideas developed in the book - honesty, deism, ecclesiastical jurisdiction and tolerance - in their historical context.

The concept of honesty/righteousness as a term describing a human attitude in social and personal life has its roots in antiquity. Its richness of meaning is expressed by a whole range of words and concepts known for centuries. These are associated not only with rational and philosophical but also mystical and theological reflections on the morality of human conduct. Within European culture, these reflections began in ancient Greece, from where they found their way into ancient Latin and early Christian culture, then into Renaissance Italian and modern French culture, and through them became the heritage of the whole of Enlightenment-age Europe. At the same time, the secularisation of this idea progressed, as is exemplified by the relevant articles from Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopaedia*, which were already completely devoid of references to Christian ethics. By contrast, Konarski, when writing against deism, asserted the Christian foundations of an authentically righteous life. To him honesty was not merely a matter of the personal and individual dimension of virtue or ethical values, but had consequences for the greater common good. In writing about religion and ethics, Konarski did not cease to be a political writer. He was as much concerned with defending religion as with shaping citizens capable of lifting the state out of the decline into which it had plunged since the end of the seventeenth century. Indeed, Konarski's book saw the light of day at a tragic moment in Poland's history, when the intervention of neighbouring powers was throttling the first attempts at reform during Poniatowski's reign, and was soon to lead to the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian state, and in time to its total liquidation, along with the plundering of its territory and all its resources.

Polemics against deism belonged to the educational canon for students at Piarist schools, reformed by Konarski from 1740 onwards. The context for this was the growing popularity of 'philosophers' questioning the Christian doctrine of divine revelation and the significance of the institution of the Church. In *On the Religion of Honest Men*, Konarski singled out just two such philosophers, Pierre Bayle and Voltaire, but he often wrote about freethinkers in the plural, having in mind the entire circle of French encyclopaedists. In an attempt to broaden the context of Konarski's reflections, after briefly referring to the achievements and successes of the 'philosophers' in the 1760s and to the abundance of apologetic literature from the same

period, the chapter on deism discusses the penetration of the deistic worldview into Poland and the significance this process had in the eyes of the Polish Piarists. Those religious saw it as a threat to Christianity and thus as a risk that the foundations of social life based on a sense of responsibility for the common good might be destroyed. In *On the Religion of Honest Men* Konarski adopted a twofold defence: first, a critical re-painting of the milieu of the ancient philosophers, whose ideas were drawn on by contemporary 'philosophers'. Konarski pointed out that by so doing the 'philosophers' were deprived of originality and fell into the snare of libertinism, reminiscent of the bad customs of the ancients. Subsequently, he also depicted their moral hypocrisy. The counterweight to such an 'enlightened' worldview was authentic Christianity, with the concomitant assumption that it too should be rational and enlightened, devoid of hypocrisy, superficiality and superstition.

The problem of ecclesiastical jurisdiction was one of the classic issues of the Age of Enlightenment, which saw the progressive curtailment of the rights of the Church institutions in favour of state administration implementing various forms of state control. This tension had its own form in Poland, whose noble society had a long tradition of disputes with the clergy, including those regarding the scope of clerical jurisdiction. At the beginning of Stanisław August's reign, ecclesiastical issues were treated in a moderate manner, alongside the more important projects for the reform of the state, but extreme tendencies also emerged, including demands for the total abolition of papal jurisdiction in the country and for the abolition of the apostolic nunciature. These radical ideas, however, tended to arise in circles associated with the Russian ambassador, who effectively dominated Polish political life, while he had no power to change the mentality of the entire noble society. The latter remained for the most part attached to Catholicism and the papacy, although they were sometimes critical of the clergy and regularly demanded an increase in the Church's tax burden. Konarski devoted little space to questions of jurisdiction, but even his brief reflections drew the attention of critics. The Piarist author criticised the deists for their hatred of the clerical state, which they 'would like to completely eradicate' from the face of the Earth. Meanwhile, the state was called on to care for spiritual and eternal goods, which are of greater rank than earthly and temporal ones. Konarski therefore called for 'concord between the *sacerdotium* and *imperium*'; the state and the Church, and encouraged everyone to obey the laws proper to both estates – the clergy and the laity. In secular matters, the ruler had the highest authority to adjudicate disputes, but even he should be subordinate to the clergy in matters of soul and conscience. Both estates should respect the boundaries set for themselves, and any abuse of jurisdiction should be rectified fairly.

The key issue that brought the thunder of critics to Konarski was the question of tolerance. In the context of debates raging in Poland and Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century this word demands careful definition. It was one thing to discuss tolerance in France, where Voltaire was involved in the affairs of Calas, de la Barre or Sirven, and quite another in the Polish-Lithuanian state, where, in the name of tolerance, foreign powers supported or even inspired the aspirations of religious minorities demanding for themselves political equality with the Catholic majority. In practice, such equality would have meant the establishment of permanent foreign agents who, acting as non-Catholic MPs, would have been able to control the Polish parliament, the only place where laws were made. Moreover, this issue was used by Russia to nip the enlightened reforms of the Polish-Lithuanian state proposed by Stanisław August Poniatowski in the bud. It was a sad paradox of history that the Russian-sponsored Voltaire, an Enlightenment luminary, used his authority to portray Tsarist despotism in the best possible light as a promoter of tolerance and the politically wronged nation as a hotbed of fanaticism. He thus adopted a stance exactly opposite side to that of his native France. In his letters, Voltaire spoke flatteringly of Stanisław August Poniatowski as a truly enlightened ruler, and in his journalism, he supported Catherine II, who was

destroying Poniatowski's reforms. Russia effectively divided Polish-Lithuanian society, in which the idea of armed resistance against Russian lawlessness matured over time. Several years of national uprising - the Bar Confederation (1768-1772) - immediately preceded the first partition of the Commonwealth. In this context, it becomes clearer how extreme emotions could be aroused by the word 'tolerance' in the circumstances of that time, in which the word was sometimes used to attack the Polish state and its dominant religion, Roman Catholicism. It was at this time that Stanisław Konarski published his treatise against deists, referring in his argument to Christian values in general. This brought criticism on him that he was favouring non-Catholics, putting them on a par with Catholics. This was one of the crowning charges brought against him at the Congregation of the Holy Office.

At almost the same time, charges were being considered in the Congregation against a small publication by Voltaire on matters of religious conflict in Poland, written at the request of Catherine II (*Essai historique et critique sur les dissensions des églises en Pologne*) and against the Polish publication of Jean-François Marmontel's *Bélisaire*, a work also raising the issue of tolerance. Both were placed on the index of prohibited books. This fate was almost shared by Stanisław Konarski's book, although following a meticulous theological analysis, the verdict on it was milder.

The procedures reformed by Pope Benedict XIV with the papal constitution *Sollicita ac provida* of 1754 were applied to books submitted to the Holy Office for evaluation at the time of Konarski's process. What was of greatest importance to the authors under examination, who had hitherto enjoyed an impeccable reputation, was the strengthening of the old principle of *donec corrigatur*. This involved the obligation to read the contested book more carefully, to interpret ambiguous statements in favour of the author, to be able to appeal against a negative assessment and to appoint super-reviewers in the event of conflicting assessments.

Nuncio Durini's letter of 26 June 1769 denouncing Stanisław Konarski's book reached Rome at the end of July. To the denunciation, Archbishop Durini attached three reviews written in Latin by Polish theologians (a fourth review appeared later in the Roman documentation). Two consultants were appointed to evaluate Konarski's book: the auxiliary Serafin Maccarinelli OP, who was also a commissioner of the Congregation, and the primary consultant, Archbishop Giorgio Maria Lascaris (1706-1795). Lascaris saw to it that Konarski's book was translated into Italian and Latin so that Roman theologians could familiarise themselves with it. Earlier, letters in defence of Konarski had been received by the Roman Curia from the Polish Piarists and the Bishop of Poznań, who was also Grand Chancellor of the Crown. It is known that Stanisław August Poniatowski acted discreetly in Konarski's defence through his Roman plenipotentiary minister. However, these actions were of limited significance, as the rank of the Holy Office precluded external pressure on its theologians and consultants. The months-long and arduous procedure of analysing the content of the book was documented by several reviews and opinions, which were collected before the end of June 1770. The process ended with a papal verdict, signed on 19 July 1770. The opinions of the theologians were divided. Lascaris, author of the final opinion, held the view that most of the charges brought against Konarski in Poland were exaggerated. He suggested that the ambiguous statements made by Konarski found in the book should be corrected in the second edition of the work. Konarski was to be encouraged to do so by means of a simple letter. This opinion was shared by some of the consultants and cardinals of the Congregation. However, the opinion of a second group of members of the Holy Office prevailed. They agreed with Lascaris on the lack of legitimacy of most of the charges, but given the tense atmosphere in the Commonwealth resulting from internal and external pressures on the issue of politically conceived tolerance for dissidents, they considered it advisable to admonish Konarski more firmly. The verdict was: 'the book (...) should be banned until it is corrected, but the decree of prohibition should not be published, and, in the meantime, the author should be instructed according to what is stipulated in §. 9 Quoniam of the constitution of the holy memory of Benedict XIV, beginning with the words

*Sollicita ac provida*. This verdict was communicated to Stanisław Konarski via the Procurator General of the Piarists in Rome. As the author submitted fully to the verdict, the Holy Office's decision was kept secret. In December 1770, a compliment was addressed to Konarski by Pope Clement XIV. In 1771, a revised and expanded second edition of Konarski's book, entitled *De religione honestorum hominum*, was published in Latin in Warsaw. It is worth mentioning that the decision of the Holy Office was kept secret to great effect, as in the centuries that followed historians did not know the true genesis of the second edition of the book, nor the details of the Roman trial about its first version.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*