



ZYGMUNT MICHELIS

Warsaw, 21 May 1946. Deputy Prosecutor Zofia Rudziewicz interviewed the person specified below as a witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Zygmunt Michelis
Date of birth	4 March 1890
Names of parents	Piotr and Anna
Place of residence	Warsaw, Emilii Plater Street 7, flat 8
Place of birth	village of Bycz, Nieszawa county
Religious affiliation	Protestant of the Augsburg Confession
Occupation	minister at the Augsburg Protestant parish in Warsaw
Relationship to the parties	none
Criminal record	none
Education	University of Dorpat [Tartu], Faculty of Theology

Before the war, since 1921, I was the minister of the Augsburg Protestant parish in Warsaw. Our church operated in Poland on the basis of the act on (the relation of the State to) the Augsburg Protestant Church in the Republic of Poland, dated 1936.

After the Germans entered, all priests of the parish were arrested by the Gestapo and committed to the prison in Daniłowiczowska Street. This took place at the beginning of October 1939. We were interrogated by a Gestapo *Sturmführer*, Bonifer, who was accusing us of the Church's hostile attitude towards [those of] its members who were Polish citizens of German nationality. I was locked away in a solitary cell and forced to starve for three days. They demanded that I confess to the crime I was accused of; they promised to release

me if I signed a declaration of belonging to the group of *Volksdeutschen*. Every other day Bonifer would come to my cell, escorted by two Gestapo men, trying to force me to sign, waving his horsewhip in front of my nose and threatening that my family would be arrested and deported. Those examinations ceased after ten weeks, and after New Year's Day solitary cells were abolished as a result of the prison being overcrowded. On 2 May 1940, together with other priests from my Church, I was sent in the first transport to the concentration camp in Oranienburg. The following people were arrested with me: Father August Loth, Father Otto Krenz, Father Henryk Wegener, Father Robert Nitschman, Father Edmund Bursche – a professor of the University of Warsaw; his brother, the reverend Bishop Juliusz Bursche, had been arrested earlier. Together with us the following people were also arrested: Father Waldemar Golczer and the parish secretary, Ryszard Goler, Father Kożusznik. From among those sent to Oranienburg, the following people died: the reverend Bishop Bursche, Professor Father Bursche (he was beaten to death with clubs by the Gestapo men). Father Nitschman, Father Loth, and Father Kożusznik died from exhaustion after they had been released from prison; the Germans did not even have the time to send them to Oranienburg.

As to imprisonment, I must also mention Alfred Bursche, member of the Church Collegium, detained together with us in October 1939 – he died in Gusen. Teodor Bursche M.Eng. was also arrested together with us at the same time. This was repression against the entire Bursche family, for the alleged anti-German activity of Bishop Bursche. This constituted the application of collective responsibility, because they themselves were not accused of anything.

During our absence the parish was deprived of all priests, and ministers brought from Germany were exercising pressure to coax or threaten the parishioners into going over to the German side. At the beginning of 1941, on the basis of a regulation of the occupation authorities, all churches, presbyteries, and parish houses were seized and given over for the possession and use by specially created German Augsburg Protestant parishes. Thus, there were two Augsburg Protestant parishes, one for a congregation of Poles, and the other one – Germans. The first existed based on the Polish provisions of law; the Germans did not acknowledge these provisions – which was inconsistent with the law – and demanded that we legalize this parish, submitting a relevant application with the German authorities. Yet, the Polish parish did not want to agree to that, believing that it already existed legally. Creation of a separate German parish was in breach of the law. The regulation confiscating

our assets was also in breach of the provisions of law then in force, since according to the act on (the relation of the State to) the Augsburg Protestant Church in Poland, each person leaving the Church automatically lost the right to these assets.

At the same time the Warsaw district authorities took away a part of the public charity facilities for the benefit of the German Augsburg Protestant parish (two larger facilities were taken over, two smaller ones were left alone). All allegedly German children were taken away from the orphanages under the management of the Protestant commune. This was done by the Warsaw district authorities. Children who did not even speak German were selected; it sufficed that even a distant family member was a *Volksdeutsch*. Already after this selection had been carried out, in 1942, Germans evacuated all healthy children from the orphanages, leaving only the sick and mentally disabled children; these children, although previously considered Polish, were sent to Germany to be Germanized.

All these regulations were issued by the Warsaw district governor and signed by relevant clerks. I am familiar with these matters, since – as a result of my family's efforts – I was released from Oranienburg at the end of 1940, and after I returned to Warsaw, I was in direct touch with the head of the charity facilities of the Warsaw parishes.

As a result of the above-mentioned German regulations, the Augsburg Protestant Church was deprived of the capability to function properly, deprived of all of its Church authorities (there was no bishop, no consistory, no synod or seniors), since in 1940 all of these authorities were dissolved upon the regulation of Governor Frank, whereby the existence of the Church was made contingent upon the request for legalization to the German authorities, which we did not want to agree to, as I have already mentioned. Since the churches were taken away, the parishioners were not able to celebrate mass, so that in the entire Warsaw district, we celebrated mass in Polish only in Warsaw, and in the Reformed church on Leszno Street at that.

The Augsburg Protestant hospital was on the border of the ghetto, and was under compulsory administration of a *Volksdeutsch* [named] Hubert. In 1943 the district authorities ordered an evacuation of the hospital within twenty-four hours, without assigning a substitute location. This meant total destruction of the hospital. During the liquidation of the ghetto the hospital, in which there were many medical machines and tools, was blown up by the German authorities.