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HAZARDS TO PARTICIPANTS OF RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS

Abstract

Security is usually associated with stability and peace. It is a phenomenon related to the absence of risk of loss of things that a person particularly values, such as life, health, work, respect, feelings or material goods. This concept, despite the diversity of interpretations, is one of the most important values appreciated by people, including believers. Threats to religious gatherings may be of a primary or secondary nature, endogenous or exogenous, real and imaginary, natural and civilisational and, in addition, non-military. These threats may be related to the sphere of public safety and public order also common order. The aim of this article is to present hazards threatening the safety of participants of religious assemblies and to indicate ways to effectively counteract them. The conclusions of the conducted research indicate that the rational preparation of religious gatherings must be accompanied by the knowledge of potential threats, including, among others, their causes and effects and the frequency of their occurrence, which allows to manage the risk and, consequently, to render the security subject immune to a threat that cannot pass from the potential to the real form. Research shows that these threats are numerous, diverse in nature and can be classified as both common and public security dangers.

Keywords

security, threat, religion, offence, crime, public safety, public order

Introduction

Congregations of a religious nature are characterised by the assembly of numerous people for the purpose of performance of religious rites. They are usually celebrated in designated places: churches, chapels, parish houses or monasteries. However, some religious ceremonies are held outside temples due to traditions, customs, liturgical regulations or the inability to accommodate the faithful in churches or sanctuaries. These include processions, pilgrimages to places of worship, gatherings at saints' monuments or shrines, and field masses. The organisers of these gatherings use their own law enforcement services, as well as the help of state organs¹ and institutions responsible for internal security, (mainly: the Police², Fire Brigade, Ambulance Service), acting on the basis of their own regulations, which are intended to ensure an appropriate level of security of the participants. While the issue of safety during the celebration of the liturgy in the church building is seemingly simple, the problem arises when church ceremonies are organised outside sacred buildings. However, the fundamental problem of the security of religious gatherings does not come down only to the question of the place and its nature, but mainly – to the number of attendees.

In this regard, it is already necessary to refer to the alternating use of

the phrases “religious gatherings”, “religious festivities”, “church celebrations”, “pilgrimages to places of worship” etc. in this study. From a philological point of view this is not an unjustified procedure. Instead of “nomina propria” we use terms that are often employed as equivalents, but which are used in church circles and are not known to the general public. Modern access to highly specialised knowledge and information, however, does not ensure full absorption of language that is not colloquial but highly specialised, and this can naturally raise questions of interpretation. Unfortunately, the modern world is still not free of translation problems, also in this respect, especially when it comes to dealing with language units that are strongly labelled with different domain-specific features. It is precisely in this respect that individuality is often explicated, as was the case in this instance.

Due to the aforementioned circumstances, it could be noted that the phrases mentioned in the introduction shall be used interchangeably. Nevertheless, in order to maintain the quality, accessibility of the message, the nomenclature used has been unified throughout the text. As a result, the article will refer to a religious assembly understood as: a conscious and religiously motivated grouping of people or a journey of people in a certain area, for the purpose of common worship, expressed in a course strictly determined by law, culture and tradition, characterized by the presentation of appropriate attitudes and behavior.

¹ P. Lubiewski, *Bezpieczeństwo państwa w ujęciu systemowym*, „Zeszyty Naukowe SGSP”, No. 74/2/2020, SGSP, Warszawa 2020, p. 115-116.

² B. Wiśniewski, J. Prońko, *Ogniwa ochrony państwa*, Warszawa 2003, p. 61.

The adopted methodological and methodical assumptions

The aim of the research presented in the article was “striving to enrich the knowledge about individuals, items and phenomena that are the subject of research”³. Taking into account the above and the problem situation outlined in the introduction, it seemed necessary to define the objectives of the research⁴, which took the form of the following questions:

- what threats compromise the safety of participants in religious gatherings?
- how to counteract the threats to religious gatherings?

Assuming the highest possible level of efficiency in conducting the research, it was premised that in addition to the objectives presented above, it is essential to formulate the research problem, which, according to the position of Mieczysław Łobocki, is the question to which “we seek answers by way of scientific research”⁵, given the following content: how do threats determine the security of attendees of religious gatherings?

Theoretical research methods were used in the course of the research process. A special place in the array of these was occupied by:

- critical analysis of the literature on the subject served to understand the specifics of religious assemblies, their

risks and requirements for achieving an adequate level of security for the participants of these gatherings;

- synthesis was used to formulate conclusions and inferences in the scopes presented above;
- analogy was used to formulate requirements for organisers of religious assemblies within the process of providing security to their attendees;
- the method of document analysis.

Characteristics of hazards of a religious nature

Among the most serious threats to public security⁶ is criminality. It can be differentiated into unorganised and organised crime as well as terrorism. On the occasion of holding large religious gatherings, there is an increased interest of perpetrators in committing criminal acts facilitated to be carried out due to the situational opportunity created by a large concentration of unwary people⁷ (preoccupied with the religious event, in whom there is a high level of trust in the gathered).

A particular form of threat to religious congregations is exceptionally socially troublesome crime, including but not limited to: robbery crime (robbery, extortion, theft); intentional infliction of bodily harm; participation in a fight and battery; theft; car theft; burglary; inten-

³ W. Dutkiewicz, *Przewodnik metodyczny dla studentów pedagogiki*, Kielce 1996, p. 31.

⁴ More: *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria-Badania-Praktyka*, ed. A. Czupryński, B. Wiśniewski, J. Zboina, Józefów 2015, p. 38.

⁵ M. Łobocki, *Metody badań pedagogicznych*, Warszawa 1978, p. 56.

⁶ More: B. Wiśniewski, *Przygotowania obronne resortu spraw wewnętrznych*, Szczytno 2014, p. 22.

⁷ More: B. Kaczmarczyk, B. Wiśniewski, R. Gwardyński, *Security of an individual*, Zeszyty Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Witelona w Legnicy, No. 3 (28) 2018, Legnica 2018, p. 67-78.

tional damage to or destruction of another's property⁸.

The traffic offences that may be related to the conduct of a public religious gathering are the acts of causing a catastrophe in land traffic endangering the life or health of many people or property of great dimensions; bringing an imminent danger of a catastrophe in land traffic; violation, even if unintentional, of the principles of safety in land traffic, causing an effect in the form of injuries to another person, impairing the functions of organs for more than 7 days; driving a vehicle (steering it) in the state of intoxication in land traffic.

In recent years, terrorism has become a particular criminal menace to religious gatherings⁹. The term 'terrorism' is vague. In EU legal arrangements, the term covers terrorist offences, crimes related to a terrorist group and acts of terrorism. Pursuant to Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA, terrorist offences are defined as active attacks on human life which may cause death:

- attacks upon the physical integrity of a person;
- kidnapping or hostage-taking;
- causing extensive destruction to government or public facilities, the transport system, infrastructure, including the information system, fixed platforms located on the continental

shelf, a public place or private property, where such destruction is likely to endanger human life or result in major economic loss;

- seizure of aircraft, vessels or other means of public or material goods transport;
- the manufacture, possession, acquisition, transportation, supply or use of explosives or weapons, including chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons, as well as research into, and development of such weapons;
- releasing dangerous substances or causing fires, floods or explosions the effect of which is to endanger human life;
- disturbing or disrupting the supply of water, power or any other essential natural resource, resulting in hazards to human life;
- unlawful interference with information systems;
- threatening to commit any of the above acts.

Among the offences relating to terrorist activities, the aforementioned legal act of the European Union classified: public provocation to commit a terrorist offence; recruitment for terrorism; providing training for terrorism; receiving training for terrorism; travelling for terrorist purposes; financing terrorism; aggravated theft perpetrated with the intent to commit one of the terrorist acts; extortion perpetrated with the intent to commit one of the terrorist offences; making or using false official documents performed with the intent to carry out one of the terrorist crimes or with the in-

⁸ *Statystyka*, www.statystyka.policja.pl. (4.02.2021 r.).

⁹ *Watykan: Papież potępił atak w kościele we Francji*, <https://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje/watykan-papiez-potepil-atak-kościele-we-francji/>, (access 3.02.2020 r.).

tent to lead a terrorist group or to travel for terrorist purposes¹⁰.

Threats to the public order of a religious assembly of a general nature also include misdemeanours, especially those against state, local government and social institutions and against the safety of persons and property; against the security and order of communications; against the person; health; property; public morals and public use facilities.

During religious assemblies of a public character, there may be a threat caused by destructive factors in the sphere of public safety. Risks to public safety occurring during religious gatherings of a general character can be located in the categories of protection: sanitary-epidemiological; life and health of participants of the dangerous event; fire protection of religious facilities where religious gatherings are held.

Sanitary-epidemiological protection, the purpose of which is to protect human health from the adverse impact of detrimental and arduous environmental conditions, prevention of the occurrence of diseases, including infectious and occupational diseases, is included in the area of public health tasks. Sanitary-epidemiological protection during religious assemblies is associated with counteracting risks associated with:

- inadequate nutrition (lack of drinking water, lack of properly prepared meals);
- a lack of rest in conditions which ensure renewal of strength;
- lack of possibility to use toilets of appropriate standard;

– spreading of infectious disease.¹¹

In addition, the participation of the faithful in religious assemblies is often associated with great physical exertion on the part of the worshippers, whose age, health and daily lifestyle do not allow for a prolonged state of bodily overload. Risks to health and life often occur during long, strenuous pilgrimages on foot to places of worship, as well as during protracted stays at the place of celebration (often preceded by many hours of waiting because of the desire to occupy a place convenient for the devotee).

In her research, Joanna Sowizdraniuk points to health problems of religious assembly participants, dividing them into: cardiovascular (ischemic heart disease, myocardial infarction, thromboembolic complications), respiratory (exacerbation of bronchial asthma, aggravation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and nervous (stroke, epilepsy); musculoskeletal diseases (dislocations, fractures); organic deprivation (overheating, hypothermia, dehydration); dermatological problems (blisters, deep abrasions) and allergies; mental disorders (exacerbation of anxiety, numbness, impaired self-integration, etc.)¹².

When religious assemblies take place in sacred buildings there is a risk of fire, which endangers the participants. Fire

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ P. Sowizdraniuk, *Zabezpieczenie sanitarno-epidemiologiczne uroczystości religijnych* [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo uczestników zgromadzeń religijnych. Wydanie drugie uzupełnione*, ed. B. Wiśniewski, A. Prędecka, J. Bryk, A. Szela, SGSP, Warszawa 2017, pp. 362-374.

¹² J. Sowizdraniuk, *Specyficzne potrzeby zdrowotne uczestników uroczystości religijnych a zabezpieczenie medyczne*, [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo uczestników zgromadzeń religijnych. Wydanie drugie uzupełnione*, ed. B. Wiśniewski, A. Prędecka, J. Bryk, A. Szela, SGSP, Warszawa 2017, pp. 345-350.

is a phenomenon that threatens people not only directly through heat or carbon monoxide, but also has a psychological impact, turning the audience of a religious assembly into a panicked evacuating crowd, with a devastating effect on the weaker, less able human beings in the escape path.

The organiser – in this case the Catholic Church – is primarily responsible for counteracting the threat to a religious gathering. Cooperating with state institutions and voluntary non-governmental organisations, the Church often sets up its own policing and medical groups (services). Order and medical services subordinate to the Church are important for maintaining the safety of religious ceremonies in situations requiring experience in the field of emergency management, when the priest's ability to counteract threats is insufficient.

Continuing to highlight this issue, let us add that threats to religious gatherings may also have their source in periodic weather changes amplified by global climate change. In the territory of Poland, periodic threats are recorded in the form of, inter alia, floods, landslides, windstorms, tornadoes, strong frosts, blizzards and snowstorms, heat, drought, forest fires and infectious diseases of the respiratory system.

Due to the different types of religious gatherings, i.e. those adopting a static form (e.g. Masses) and those taking a kinetic form (e.g. processions, pilgrimages), among the periodic threats one can distinguish those that can particularly affect the safety of religious gatherings. These include: heat, floods and strong winds.

Let us explain that the term 'heat' is a meteorological notion referring to a weather condition when the air temperature at the ground surface exceeds +30°C. Hot weather occurs in Poland in July and August (when average annual temperatures are the highest). Heat deteriorates the health of the elderly, children and ailing people. It negatively affects the cardiovascular and thermoregulatory systems, leading to sunstroke, heatstroke, dehydration, reduced efficiency and physical performance. The heat phenomenon has three levels of severity:

- first degree – hot weather up to three days, prevailing over the major part of Poland (risk of sunstroke);
- second degree – hot weather up to five days, prevailing over the major part of Poland (high risk of sunstroke);
- third degree – heat more than five days in most parts of Poland (high risk of sunstroke).¹³

Moreover, the term "flood" used in these analyses means "the submergence of coastal areas by water, along a river bed or the seashore, as a result of a surge of water"¹⁴. In Poland, it is one of the most dangerous threats that can cause a natural disaster. According to the criterion of cause, floods can be divided into:

- rainfall (resulting from heavy rainfall);
- snowmelt (resulting from the rapid melting of snow);
- storms (resulting from strong winds that raise the water in inlets or coast);

¹³ *Zagrożenia okresowe występujące w Polsce*, RCB, 2012, p. 14.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

- storm surges (resulting from strong winds that raise water in flood plains and on the coast);
- ice surges (resulting from ice or icing/ice jams);
- thawing and precipitation (caused by the melting of snow, intensified by rainfall);
- caused by failures of flood control structures;
- caused by inappropriate water management on water reservoirs.

Furthermore, due to the area inundated, floods can be divided into:

- local (extent of a small spillway);
- regional (extent of one region – hydrographic);
- national (extent of several basic hydrographic districts).¹⁵

Floods can result in, among other things, drowning, escalation of poisoning, infectious diseases and loss of property. Flooding reduces access to drinking water, destroys and cuts off humanitarian aid sites.

In Poland, as the climate continues to change, the number of strong storms, such as gale force winds and tornadoes, is increasing. Strong headwinds in Poland are called:

- wind (period of their occurrence from November to March);
- “halny” wind (mountains – period of appearance from October to February);
- tornadoes (“usually from June to August, sometimes in May. Generally, the occurrence of a tornado in a particular place and time cannot be predicted”¹⁶)

Next, among the important threats which concern the whole area of Poland, but also religious gatherings are contagious illnesses which may assume epidemic proportions. The term “infectious diseases” refers to those diseases that are caused by a biological agent (e.g. virus, bacteria) that can spread through various routes, including direct contact and through droplets¹⁷.

The scale of the infection can assume the framework:

- epidemic – is “the occurrence, in a defined area and at a specified time, of more cases of a given disease unit than statistically expected”¹⁸;
- pandemic – is a large-scale epidemic affecting large geographical areas at the same time¹⁹.

Among infectious diseases it is possible to distinguish a group of particularly dangerous and highly infectious illnesses, i.e. easily spread, with a high mortality rate, causing a particular threat to public health and requiring special methods of control. This group includes such conditions as smallpox, viral fevers, haemorrhagic cholera, plague²⁰.

The onset of conditions or indications of risk of an epidemic in an area triggers the outbreak risk. If an epidemic hazard or an epidemic occurs in an area:

¹⁷ <http://www.wsse.gda.pl/nadzor-sanitarny/oddzial-przeciwepidemiczny/choroby-zakazne>, access 3.04.2020 r.

¹⁸ <https://www.medonet.pl/zdrowie, epidemia--na-czym-polega--czym-sie-rozni-epidemia-od-pandemii-, artykul, 1726522.html> (19.04.2021 r.).

¹⁹ <https://www.medonet.pl/zdrowie, czym-jest-pandemia--najwieksze-pandemie-w-historii, artykul, 1726644.html> (5.04.2020 r.).

²⁰ Ustawa z dnia 5 grudnia 2008 r. o zapobieganiu oraz zwalczaniu zakażeń i chorób zakaźnych u ludzi, art. 2. pkt 4., Dz. U. 2019 poz. 1239.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 8.

- in the case of a voivodship exceeding one province, the voivode, upon the motion of the state regional sanitary inspector, shall declare, by way of a regulation, an epidemic emergency or an outbreak on the territory of a voivodship or a part thereof;
- exceeding one voivodship, the minister in charge of health matters shall – by means of a regulation – declare an epidemic emergency or an outbreak of disease on the territory of a given area or part thereof.²¹

In situations of particular epidemic threat, if the ordinary constitutional measures are insufficient, the Council of Ministers may introduce an appropriate state of emergency in the form of a state of natural disaster²². The name “natural disaster” means “a natural catastrophe [infectious diseases] or technical failure, the consequences of which threaten the life or health of a large number of people, property in large quantities or the environment in large areas, and assistance and protection can be effectively undertaken only with the use of extraordinary measures, in cooperation of various bodies and institutions and specialized services and formations acting under unified direction”²³

Currently, the biological agents that may cause a pandemic and consequently lead to the imposition of a state of emergency in the form of a natural disaster in Poland are:

- type A influenza virus (a type with particular mutational possibilities), which causes influenza disease. In the past (at the beginning of the 20th century, influenza, the so-called “Spanish flu” led to the deaths during the pandemic of more than 100 million people (these are losses in people exceeding those of World War I²⁴);
- SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, causing COVID-19 acute infectious disease of the respiratory system (as of 14 April, there are 7, 202 confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection in Poland. 263 people died in Poland within 3 weeks due to coronavirus.²⁵).

Let us therefore add that infectious diseases are a real threat to religious gatherings.

Counteracting risks

With regard to the risks of religious gatherings, they can be counteracted (i.e. their destructive potential can be consciously reduced) if they are first of all perceived indirectly (within the framework of a risk analysis) or directly (perceiving with the help of the senses a situation, a phenomenon that carries danger).

The mere perception of an unusual situation by people, e.g. participants in a religious meeting, although important,

²¹ Ibidem art. 46.

²² *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* art. 228 i 232.

²³ Ustawa z dnia 18 kwietnia 2002 r. o stanie klęski żywiołowej, Obwieszczenie Marszałka Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 15 września 2017 r. w sprawie ogłoszenia jednolitego tekstu ustawy o stanie klęski żywiołowej, Dz. U. 2017 poz. 1897.

²⁴ M. Kosińska, *Hiszpanka: czego nie wiecie o największej epidemii w historii*, https://www.medonet.pl/koronawirus/to-musisz-wiedziec_grypa-hiszpanka--czego-nie-wiecie-o-najwiekszej-epidemii-w-historii-, artykuł, 43757339.html (1.01.2020 r.).

²⁵ *Koronawirus w Polsce, aktualna sytuacja epidemiologiczna*, https://www.politykazedrowotna.com/56875_covid-19-raport-polska-sroda-357-nowych-przypadkow-zakazenia-koronawirusem-30-zgonow (14.04.2020 r.).

does not yet condition the implementation of an effective aid intervention, since the decision-making act of a relief operation (relief response) consists of five essential points:

- noticing an abnormal situation;
- identification of the situation as dangerous;
- taking responsibility for carrying out assistance;
- analysis of possibilities to help with the available means based on existing skills;
- proceed to provide assistance.

Participants in religious assemblies, for their own sake and for the benefit of the religious meeting serving their needs, must have the relevant knowledge and skills to make them resilient.

Taking the above into account, it must be stated that religious gatherings involve both opportunities (the possibility of satisfying a religious need and other psychological (social) needs that are important to humans) and risks.

Religious gatherings can be a place where primary risks are realised (road traffic accident, terrorist attack, theft), and they can also be a source of secondary risks (e.g. participants in gatherings can transmit to their homes infections acquired during contact with people attending the gathering).

With this in mind, we must not lose our vigilance in constantly countering the dangers, i.e. keeping them in a potential form, i.e. not evolving into a viable form. Risks are different – some are caused by natural forces, others by human behaviour. Human conducts can be a threat to others by accident or by conscious action. When the source of the

hazard is deliberate human activity, security guarding takes the form of combat as a special case of cooperation – negative coordination.

In order to counteract the threat caused by human activity, the fight is not waged against a phenomenon, such as the struggle against wind, drought or rain, but against an acting subject – a criminal or a terrorist, aiming at obtaining victory over him. Such a victory may consist in the fact that as a result of the actions the situation of independence of the aim of the battle from further actions performed by the opposing party is initiated (the criminal loses the possibility of influencing the situation as a result of any impulse of the opposing party)²⁶

Combat refers strictly to an entity consciously threatening another party, e.g. participants in a religious gathering. Towards phenomena causing danger, protective measures are rather taken.

The multitude of threats that can affect the security of religious gatherings is – as one can observe – impressive. This requires the organiser, which is the Church, to efficiently carry out actions to maintain a state of harmlessness. These actions should be carried out in cooperation with non-church entities and with properly prepared participants of religious meetings – albeit minor to perform – but useful activities

Conclusions

The research indicated that religious gatherings are specific meetings of numbers of people whose religious purpose is

²⁶ T. Kotarbiński, *Hasło dobrej roboty*, Warszawa 1968, p. 195.

to pray, to come closer to the Absolute, which is God, and to participate in a worshipping community.

The conducted research has shown that religious assemblies belong to specific meetings of many individuals, which are guided by the religious goal of prayer, bringing people closer to the Absolute – God – and participation in a religious community. It is in the general interest of society that measures taken to ensure the safety of participants in religious gatherings are first of all feasible, but also efficiently carried out. Feasibility depends on situational and dispositional capacity. The situational ability is created by the environment in which the religious assembly is held. Other conditions accompany the different types of religious services, which are divided according to criteria:

- accessibility of places where religious meetings take place;
- the availability of the assembly to its participants
- the characteristic use of the places where religious meetings are held
- the types of building in which religious meetings are accommodated;
- the cultural significance of places and facilities for religious meetings
- the size of the religious gathering;
- the level of organisation of the participants in the religious meeting
- the level of threat to religious festivals and meetings
- the scale of interest in religious meetings.

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