

Rev. Ireneusz Skubiś

## THE HISTORY OF DIOCESE OF CZĘSTOCHOWA (1925—1975)

### Summary

The history of the Catholic Church in the territories which form nowadays the Diocese of Częstochowa reaches back to the beginning of Christianity in Poland. The oldest written sources date from the XII century and relate to the churches in Ruda near Wieluń (1106) and Siewierz (1105). The XII century saw the spreading of parish churches in the area; between the XII and XV centuries the network of parish churches was set up and stayed almost unchanged till the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century. The northern territories along the line of Krzepice, Brzeźnica, Radomsko, Mstów were subordinate to the archdiocese of Gniezno up to the Papal Bull of April 30, 1818 „Ex Imposita Nobis”.

To the south of the above mentioned towns the territories were subordinate to the Diocese of Cracow. After the partition of Poland in the XVIIIc., the area of Częstochowa and a part of Silesia fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Wrocław—Breslau, on 5 of April 1801. On October 22, 1811 the bishop of Wrocław—Breslau transferred his powers to the bishop of Cracow. The Bull „Ex Imposita Nobis” incorporated the southern part of the diocese of Gniezno, which included a part of Częstochowa district, into the diocese of Włocławek. The northern part remained with the diocese of Cracow and was later on taken over by the diocese of Kielce.

Besides the parish churches other important centres of religious life were Catholic Orders and monasteries, the oldest of them being Regular Canons at Mstów, the Franciscan Friars at Brzeźnica and Radomsko, the Paulist Fathers in Częstochowa and the Dominican Friars in Gidle. In the course of time there were also feminine orders founded in the area, and some new masculine e.g. in Wieluń. The members of those orders had taken part in the national up-risings in 1831 and 1863 which brought on them several reprisals from the occupying forces; some religious were banished and their houses closed.

Before the foundation of the diocese of Częstochowa there were four shrines of Our Lady in the region. The main one has always been the church of Our Lady in Częstochowa, run by the Paulist Fathers, with her famous picture of the Black Madonna. The whole site is known to everyone in the country as Clairmountain. The others are the churches of Our Lady in Gidle, Wieluń, and Dąbrowa Górnicza. The Clairmountain with its Chapel of Our Lady is the main national shrine and a place of pilgrimages to millions. It has become famous after the siege of Częstochowa by the Swedish Army in 1665 and the successful and heroic defence of the monastery.

During the time of the partitions of Poland (between Prussia, Russia and Austria, 1772—1918), it was to Częstochowa that Poles from all over the country were coming in pilgrimages to reinforce their spirit of national unity. There were some difficulties during the time of the Reformation when the sects of Polish Brothers and

Calvinists gained some footing in the deanery of Lelów in the XVI and XVII centuries. Several Catholic churches were then changed to Arian and Calvinist worship.

No traces of the new faith were found in the principality of Siewierz belonging to the bishopric in Cracow. There were some Lutherans in Wieluń, of German origin, who tried to preach the new faith but their influence was almost none.

The development of elementary schools and education in general were due to the efforts of the clergy in the XIX c. Some people of renown originated from the region like Marcin Bielski and the historian Jan Długosz.

After the First World War when Poland became again a free, independent country, Pope Pius XI set up the Diocese of Częstochowa on October 28, 1925 with the bull „*Vixdum Poloniae Unitas*”. At the same time a concordat was signed between the Polish Government and the Vatican. Częstochowa became a cathedral town with a residential bishop. The foundation of the Bishop's See in Częstochowa was due to the recognition by the church authorities of her nationwide status as a shrine of Our Lady which has been influential as a unifying power in the dim period of the partition. The bishop of Włocławek could not assist each great national pilgrimage and the assistance of a high church dignitary was essential on such occasions.

Bishop Kazimierz Zdzitowiecki of Włocławek asked then the Polish Episcopate to establish the new diocese, out of a part of his very large diocese of Włocławek.

The new diocese was formed of eleven deaneries belonging to Włocławek, i.e.: Bolesławiec, Brzeźnica, Częstochowa, Gidle, Gorzkowice, Kłobuck, Mstów, Praszka, Radomsko, Wieluń, Wieruszów. All of them embraced 126 parishes. Four deaneries were taken over from the diocese of Kielce, it was the so-called Zagłębie Dąbrowskie with the towns of Będzin, Sączów, Zawiercie and Zarki. There were 48 parish churches in this area. The bishop of Włocławek Mgrs. Stanisław Kazimierz Zdzitowiecki was appointed the first administrator of the new diocese by the Nuncio for Poland Mgrs. Laurence Lauri on Nov. 16, 1925. The first Vicar General and Coadjutor for Częstochowa became Mgrs. Władysław Krynicki on Nov. 21, 1925.

The Papal Bull „*Vixdum Poloniae Unitas*” ascribed the local priests to the new diocese, whereupon the Nuncio Laurence Lauri promulgated an executive decree on Nov. 11, 1925. Those priests who were residing legally in the territory of the new diocese on the day of its promulgation were ascribed to it. There were 169 priests transferred from the diocese of Włocławek, 125 parsons, 27 curates, 16 school-teachers of divinity and 1 priest without special appointment; 88 priests were transferred from the diocese of Kielce, 47 parsons, 21 curates, 20 school-teachers of divinity. The new diocese counted 556, 311 faithful from Włocławek and 320, 727 from Kielce, respectively. It embraced the area of 8, 524 square kilometres. The Patron Saint of the new diocese has become Our Lady of Częstochowa, the Queen of Poland. The Holy Family church in Częstochowa was given the status of the Cathedral.

The first bishop nominated for Częstochowa was Mgrs. Dr. Teodor Kubina (1880—1951). He graduated from philosophy and theology in Rome. Before his nomination he held the post of the parson in a parish church in Katowice and had been active in the Plebiscite in Upper Silesia (1921). He was fighting for the incorporation of Upper Silesia into Poland. He was appointed bishop of Częstochowa on Dec. 14, 1925. He had to organise the administration from the very start. Because of the Mariological character of his diocese he called himself the „First Minister of Our Lady”. His successor was bishop Zdzisław Goliński (1908—1963). Before his nomination for the See in Częstochowa on April 22, 1951, he had been bishop coadjutor to Lublin. He followed the policy of his predecessor, created many new parishes, sent his priests to universities to have them specialised in divinity subjects. The third and actually ruling bishop of Częstochowa Mgrs. Dr. Stefan Bareła was nominated on Jan 1, 1964. He took part at the Vatican Council II and the Synod of Bishops in Rome.

The first bishop coadjutor in the diocese was Mgrs. Antoni Zimniak (1878—1943), consecrated on Oct. 18, 1936. He was remarkable for his devotion and his oratory skill.

During the Second World War the function of bishop coadjutor was performed by Mgrs. Dr. Stanisław Czajka (1897—1965), the previous Regent of the Diocesan Seminary, nominated bishop on Aug. 5, 1944. He was twice Vicar General during the period of sede vacante after the death of the bishop ordinary. Pope Pius XII nominated in June 1950 the General of Pallotti Congregation S.A.C. father Wojciech Turowski to become bishop coadjutor cum jure successionis. The nominee did not accept, either the office or the consecration. On Oct. 26, 1960 suffragan bishop for

Częstochowa was nominated Dr. Stefan Bareła, the spiritual father of the Diocesan Seminary. He was to become bishop ordinary on Jan. 17, 1964. There are two suffragan bishops at present, Dr. Tadeusz Szwagrzyk (from Nov. 3, 1964) and bishop Franciszek Musiel M.D. (from Nov. 12, 1965).

Bishop Kubina opened the Diocesan Curia in April 1926 together with the Diocesan Ecclesiastical Court. At first very few officials were working in these institutions because for lack of priests. During the rule of Bishop Goliński several new departments opened within the Curia, they were Administrative, Patorial and Propagation of Faith Depts. In the same way the Court staff was enlarged and highly qualified specialists appointed. The Court has become known among Episcopal Courts in Poland and in the Roman Rota.

It was essential for the new Diocese to open its own Seminary for the clergy. Bishop Teodor Kubina organised the Seminary for Częstochowa Diocese in Cracow to enable the students to attend at the same time the Faculty of Theology at the Jagellon University, the oldest and most famous in Central Europe. The clerics from Częstochowa studied as undergraduates at the Jagellon Academy up to 1954, then the Seminary founded its own „studium domesticum”. The lecturers were professors from the Częstochowa clergy. The first bishop cared very much for the candidates to his seminary as the number of priests in those first years was scarce and many posts, especially those of curates, were vacant.

There were two ways of recruiting priests for the new diocese. One was an agreement with the bishops of Włocławek and Kielce to have those graduates from their diocesan seminaries who originated from Częstochowa district, to be nominated curates in the new diocese. Another way was the encouragement given to religious congregations as well as priests from other dioceses to settle for good in the new one. Between 1926—1931 there were 44 priests „gained” for Częstochowa either from other dioceses, or from Seminary graduates as mentioned above, or religious priests.

The first graduates from the Częstochowa Seminary left it in 1932, and from then on, each year a new course of graduates strengthened the ranks of the local clergy. Still it was not enough to have all work in the diocese done properly. Therefore bishop Kubina sponsored a Secondary School in Wieluń, which acted as the Minor Seminary. This private school, bearing the name of T. Kościuszko was opened between 1932—1939 and many of its graduates entered the Diocesan Seminary afterwards.

After the Second World War in 1948—1952, the school building was used for a residence hall for boys. Another residential hall for boys, prospective candidates to the Seminary, was run in Częstochowa by a religious congregation, the School Brothers, under the auspices of bishop Kubina in 1949—1957.

Bishop Goliński opened two Minor Seminaries, one in Częstochowa working up to now, another one in Wieluń in 1952—1955. Both of them provided a sufficient number of candidates to the Diocesan Seminary. Its alumni continued their studies, specialising in philosophy and theology. Up to 1974 there were 756 priests who had graduated from the Diocesan Seminary of Częstochowa, situated in Cracow. Out of them 126 had attended the Minor Seminaries.

During the 50 years of the existence of the Diocese, the number of the inhabitants of the district increased considerably. It reached the number of 1,400,000 faithful whereas there were only 900,000 at the beginning. The rise of population was due to the rapid increase of industry in the area of Zagłębie industrial district and the development of metallurgical industry in Częstochowa. Fifty years ago the inhabitants were mostly peasants, especially in the southern part of the Diocese. They regularly migrated to Germany and France as seasonal workers. Their standard of living was low. The number of inhabitants increased rapidly with the industrialisation of Dąbrowa Coal Basin and Częstochowa.

In 1939 according to bishop's Kubina estimates the number of inhabitants amounted to 1,200,000 people. After the Second World War the living standard of the working people has become much higher and the number of inhabitants has been growing steadily. It became necessary to open new parishes. Bishop Kubina believed that town parishes should not embrace more than 10,000 people and country parishes not more than 5,000. When new parishes were created they numbered approximately 2,000 parishioners. Because of scarcity of priests in the 1920-ies, the Bishop was not able to open new parishes from the beginning of his officiating. He was able to start this work in the tenth year of his administration. During the Second World War he

opened filial churches and chapels with full parish rights. There were 200 parish churches in 1939 and twice as many were needed. The War stopped all building activities. During the 25 years of his administration bishop Kubina opened 30 rectorates, 3 filial churches, 3 permanent vicarages and 17 parish churches. At the moment of his death, the diocese had 191 parish churches and 24 rectorates.

His successor bishop Goliński continued the work of his predecessor. He opened several churches of different legal status up to 1956. In 1957 the legal status of some filial churches was changed and thus new parishes created. It was also possible to open some quite new parish churches. Thus 51 new parish churches were founded. At the year of his death the diocese had 242 parishes.

The actual bishop ordinary Mgrs. Stefan Bareła is the third bishop of Częstochowa. He founded 12 new parishes and opened some country vicarages. He has increased the number of deaneries. Bishop Kubina divided the diocese in 7 deaneries, bishop Goliński added two new ones and bishop Bareła another one. The Diocese has now 25 deaneries. Some reorganisation is needed. Bishop Kubina divided his diocese into three parts: the region of Będzin, Częstochowa and Wieluń, respectively. Bishop Goliński formed the fourth region of Radomsko.

The diocesan church authorities paid much attention to enabling their priests advanced university studies in postgraduate courses. It was not easy for bishop Kubina to send his priests for four years to universities because of the scarcity of priests. But he was able to send a few to Rome and some others to Catholic University in Poland. The second bishop of Częstochowa, himself a professor at the Catholic University in Lublin, was sending his priests regularly to that Academy. He also sent some priests to other Catholic Universities in the country and abroad.

The third bishop Mgrs. Dr. Stefan Bareła opened the Ecclesiastical Institute in his diocese, offering courses in philosophy and theology.

The Curia in Częstochowa sponsored its own publishing office, issuing the following publications: „Diocesan News”, a periodical „Niedziela” (Sunday), „Czyn Katolicki” (Catholic Activities), „The Diocesan Catalogue” and „The Liturgical Calendar”. The weekly „Niedziela” was a local paper up to 1939, since 1945 it has gained a nationwide status. There have been also books and pamphlets published every year by the publishing office of the Curia.

The Pastoral Department and the Propagation of Faith Dept. work out their own programmes of catechize and pastoral activities, they organise national assemblies and meetings of teachers of religion. From the very start there was a Circle of Chaplains attached to the Curia who were teachers of divinity subjects in the Diocese, whose members were priests and monks, religious sisters and lay people. All of them were working in elementary and secondary schools as teachers of religion. The amount of work done by religious orders has to be specially stressed. The number of congregations has been steadily increasing with years.

In 1925 there were only 6 masculine orders counting 22 priests, 28 lay brothers and 6 novices. Fifteen feminine congregations had 30 nunneries embracing 338 sisters. In 1973 the number of male orders rose to ten with 91 priests, 20 novices and clerics and 77 lay brothers; there were 35 feminine congregations with 937 sisters.

The tragic years of the Second World War were as fatal for the Częstochowa Diocese as for the whole country. The German administration incorporated the area of the Diocese into three different administrative units divided by regular frontiers. One part of the diocese was joined to the so-called General Gouvernement, another was incorporated to Upper Silesia considered then the German Reich, the third joined the „Warthe Gau”, envisaged by the Germans as Germany (but not the „Alt Reich”). The church unity was preserved in a clandestine way. Bishop Kubina did not nominate any Vicar General for that part of Upper Silesia which was taken over from his diocese, despite a strong German pressure. He himself carried on the administration of his whole diocese through his emissaries visiting Silesia and the „Warthe Gau”. His letters reached his delegates in the respective territories who had been never nominated legal church authorities.

The Catholic Church in the „Warthe Gau” suffered a planned and cruel policy of extermination of which even the German Cardinal Bertram of Wrocław—Breslau had written that it was meant to erase Poland together with Christendom out of those purely Polish territories.

In the district of Wieluń (Warthe Gau) 61 catholic churches were closed by the Germans, only one church with two Polish priests was left open for the 240,000 Polish inhabitants. Fifty five priests out of eighty three were arrested on Oct. 6, 1941

and sent to the concentration camp in Dachau. Only 18 of them survived. Farther 62 priests of Częstochowa diocese were either killed or died in concentration camps. The loss of lives amounts to 10 per cent of the local clergy. There were seventy eight priests who were prisoners in concentration camps.

This martyrdom or priests in Częstochowa diocese, as in other parts of Poland, was meant as reprisal for their patriotic attitude, for the help they offered to the resistance movement and the steady support of patriotic feelings among their parishioners. The extermination of educated Poles in the district of Wieluń which was treated as a pilot district for organised crime, lead to the annihilation of catholic clergy. At the same time strong measures were taken against the Protestant Pator in Wieluń. Heavy losses of lives were accompanied by heavy material losses.

Since September 1, the first day of the war, the German occupation meant pillage, robbery, burning down and plunder of church possession, ban on religious publications, evacuation of the Seminaries and taking over of their buildings. It meant a prohibition for the bishop to exercise his pastoral rights and any religious instruction of children was strictly forbidden.

The tragedy of the Second World War is long over. The religious life is again expanding. The great events of the Church, like Papal Jubilees, the Millenium of Christianity in Poland, the Second Vatican Council were milestones in the development of religious life in the Diocese of Częstochowa.