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## REVEREND PROFESSOR JERZY CHMIEL

*The scribe's profession increases his wisdom ...  
[he] devotes himself  
to the study of the law of the Most High!  
He explores the wisdom of the men of old  
and occupies himself with the prophecies;  
He treasures the discourses of famous men,  
and goes to the heart of involved sayings;  
He studies obscure parables,  
and is busied with the hidden meanings of the sages.*

(Sir 38, 24. 39, 1–3)

With these words a sage of the Old Testament expresses his praise for a man who devotes himself to the studies of the Holy Scriptures. Let these words also begin a presentation of a Biliblicist from Cracow Rev. Prof. Jerzy Chmiel, who is not only entirely devoted to the studies of the inspired word, but – enriched by this knowledge – shares it with others in many different ways. His merits in spreading theological knowledge within the framework of a revived Academy in Cracow – St. Jadwiga, Hedwig of Anjou's heritage and an accomplishment of the Polish pope, John Paul II – must not be forgotten.

Rev. Jerzy Chmiel was born in the royal city of Cracow on October 5, 1935, where he completed his primary and secondary education during the dark years of German occupation and Stalinist terror. While he was an alumnus studying at the Cracow Seminary, a most unfortunate decision was taken by the communist authorities of Cracow to close down the Faculty of Theology at the Jagiellonian University. The decision meant a great loss for the academic circles of Cracow.

The beginning, then, of his road to priesthood was not easy. He was ordained as priest in 1958 and spent the next two years carrying out all pastoral duties of a vicar and catechist. He has performed them ever since

to the extent allowed by numerous other scientific and academic assignments.

From 1961 to 1968 he lived and studied in Rome, where he was awarded first a licentiate in theology (at the Pontifical Georgian University), then licentiate in Biblical Studies (at the Biblicum) and doctorate at the Pontifical Gregorian University. His stay in Rome coincided with the Second Vatican Council, the time of extreme importance for the Church. Students from Cracow in particular had a possibility of direct contact with one of the more eminent Fathers of the Council, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who was later to implement the Council's resolutions.

It would be impossible to provide here a complete list of all fields and issues Rev. Jerzy Chmiel then researched or the academic experience he gained at that time. From Rome he returned to Cracow and started a lasting cooperation with the Pontifical Faculty of Theology, where he began work in 1968. Though much ignored by state authorities the Faculty was dynamically developing owing to work and devotion of such people as Rev. Prof. Jerzy Chmiel. In 1975 he was awarded the title of assistant professor on the basis of a thesis: *Interpretation of Old Testament in Apostolic Prophecy on Resurrection of Christ. Hermeneutic Study*. Following the conferment, he was made head of the Department of Biblical Hermeneutics and Judaism, the terms summarising the most essential directions of his broad academic interests.

Following the erection of the Pontifical Academy of Theology (December 8, 1981) Rev. Jerzy Chmiel was asked to join the Academy authorities: first he was vice-dean of the Faculty of Theology (1982–1985), and for the next six years 1985–1991, dean of this faculty. It requires no special proof to show that in these pioneering years, Jerzy Chmiel became one of the major organisers of the Academy. His contribution towards laying the foundations for the further development of the Faculty would be difficult to present in detail. It will for ever remain the solid grounds for the activity and achievements of this Faculty.

In 1989 momentous political changes took place in Poland. Simultaneously, the Pontifical Academy of Theology gained its due place within the structure of Polish higher education institutions. It was yet another time when Rev. Jerzy Chmiel's life coincided with the turning-point of our history, in which it was necessary to find a new place not only for oneself, but for the institution one was in charge of. After three years of break Jerzy Chmiel took office again as a deputy rector of the Pontifical Academy of Theology and served it one term (1997–2000).

Apart from the organizational, his contribution to the life of the Academy is primarily of academic and didactic character and manifests itself

through his lecturing on many Biblical subjects, supervising doctor, licentiate and M.A. theses as well as collecting professional literature and depositing it with the library for academics and students to use. Rev. Jerzy Chmiel's didactic work has not been limited to Cracow Academy; he has often been invited as guest-lecturer, especially by the Jagiellonian University, where he has taught most regularly, has delivered a lot of occasional lectures and has often been asked to review theses of academics qualifying for philosophy doctors or assistant professors.

In recognition of his merits Rev. Jerzy Chmiel was awarded the St. Queen Jadwiga *Bene Merenti* medal at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow. Rector Magnificus, Bishop Prof. Tadeusz Pieronek handed the medal over to Rev. Jerzy Chmiel at a solemn ceremony of inauguration of an academic year which took place on October 18, 2002. For students it was a nice occasion to learn about the work and achievements of a highly esteemed Assistant Professor.

He is an expert and well-known orator, who does not bury his talent but takes part in numerous congresses, conferences, symposia and meetings, both Polish and foreign, delivers papers which are enthusiastically received and participates in discussions. This activity led to his membership in more than a dozen societies and other academic bodies and in some of them he is the only representative of the Cracow circle. Numerous reports from these meetings printed in various periodicals inform wider groups of those who are interested about new events that take place in the world's Biblical studies.

The society which Rev. Jerzy Chmiel finds most absorbing is the Polish Theological Society in Cracow, the only remainder of the pre-war Theological Society, which – never deleted from official register – survived the times of the communist rule. Publishing Section of this Society served for many years as unofficial printing house for the Faculty of Theology, which – scrupulously censored – could under the name of the Society print its papers, with a periodical *Analecta Cracoviensia* in the forefront. Rev. Jerzy Chmiel was chairman of the Society for nine one-year terms (1978–1987), including the period of martial law, which was directed against all true forms of social activity. Within the Society he was for many years head of the Biblical and Liturgical Section, at which he organised a Syndonological Department assembling the researchers of the Shroud across Poland. As part of the Society activities, both within and outside he delivered countless lectures in various meetings, propagating the knowledge of the Bible and the most recent findings.

A manifestation of Jerzy Chmiel's academic activity is the fact that the Polish Theological Society is one of the ten scientific associations of

which he was or is a member. He has been a member of the Learned Society of the Catholic University of Lublin since 1976, of Commission on Oriental Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow Branch (since 1995), whose chairman he was from 1996 to 1999 and whose deputy chairman he has been since 1999. He has also been a member of the Commission on the History and Culture of the Jew of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences since 1996. He is also a member and founder of the Society of Jewish Studies (since 1996). His involvement in international academic associations is worth stressing, too. These include: International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT, since 1968), Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (SNTS, since 1982); Association Catholique Française pour l'Étude de la Bible (ACFEB, since 1989), Schweizerische Theologische Gesellschaft (since 1995); Gärres-Gesellschaft (since 1995).

Apart from didactic work Jerzy Chmiel actively engaged in editorial work of a periodical *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* (*Biblical and Liturgical Movement*), whose secretary he became in 1968. In 1982 he was made editor-in-chief. Before him the post was held by eminent professors of the Cracow Biblical studies Rev. Aleksy Klawek and Rev. Stanisław Grzybek. Rev. Jerzy Chmiel managed to print the periodical under most unfavourable circumstances which seemed to lead to its closure notwithstanding the fact that it was singularly liked by Biblicists from all academic circles in Poland.

A selection of Rev. Jerzy Chmiel's writings, prepared to celebrate his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, lists 509 items, most of which are papers on Biblical hermeneutics, Judaism, syndonology and many interesting Biblical issues. They include papers in foreign languages, reports and reviews. His predilection for art is clearly recognisable in the publications.

Academic activity highlighted here is but one of many spheres of Jerzy Chmiel's activity. He has used his knowledge and experience in service of the Church in Poland. From 1984 to 1989 he was a member of the Polish Episcopate Commission on Liturgy and from 1986 to 1996 a member of the Polish Episcopate Commission on the Dialogue with Judaism. Since 1999 he has been a member of the University Accreditation Commission.

Presenting such a varied and multi-dimensional output is necessarily sketchy and undoubtedly incomplete. It is difficult to show in this brief presentation all merits of Rev. Prof. Jerzy Chmiel, to harvest all the good which he bountifully sows on the many fields of his activity.