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THE SALESIAN SOCIETY IN THE FACE OF EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN THE YEARS 1918–1939²

TOWARZYSTWO SALEZJAŃSKIE WOBEC WYZWAŃ EDUKACYJNYCH W LATACH 1918–1939

Abstract: After regaining independence in 1918, Poland began the long process of rebuilding its state structures. The legacy of the three partitions made this process very difficult. The Salesian Society, together with the whole society, actively joined in the creation of the missing school and care structures. Until 1918, the Salesians could only exercise their charisma within the Austrian partition. One of the first activities of the Society after 1918 was the opening of general schools, most of which were established in the 1920s. Some of them faced many problems, such as the lack of properly prepared staff or financial challenges. Despite many difficulties, they enjoyed a rather good reputation in Polish society, making it easier for many Polish young people to obtain secondary education.

Keywords: regaining independence, Salesian Society, secondary modern schools, school-education activity, preventive system

Streszczenie: Po odzyskaniu niepodległości w 1918 r. Polska rozpoczęła długi proces odbudowy struktur państwowych. Spuścizna trzech zaborów proces ten bardzo utrudniała. Towarzystwo Salezjańskie, razem z całym społeczeństwem, włączyło się aktywnie w tworzenie brakujących struktur szkolnych i opiekuńczych. Do 1918 r. salezjanie mogli jedynie realizować swój charyzmat jedynie w zaborze austriackim. Jedną z pierwszych czynności Towarzystwa po 1918 r. było otwieranie szkół ogólnokształcących. Czyniono to na prośbę władz oraz polskiego społeczeństwa. Większość szkół tego typu powstało w latach dwudziestych. Niektóre z nich borykały się z wieloma problemami, jak odpowiednio przygotowana kadry czy problemy finansowe. Pomimo

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wielu trudności cieszyły się raczej dobrą opinią w polskim społeczeństwie, ułatwiając dużej liczbie polskiej młodzieży zdobycie wykształcenia średniego.

Słowa kluczowe: odzyskanie niepodległości, Towarzystwo Salezjańskie, szkoły ogólnokształcące, działalność szkolno-wychowawcza, system prewencyjny

Introduction

After many years of slavery, Poland regained its independence in 1918. The reconstruction of the country and its statehood encountered many difficulties. The most important problems included lack of political stability, a difficult economic situation, the ravages of war, the global crisis, and a lack of adequate civil servants. One of the most important tasks was organizing education (Pęcherski, Świątek 1978, p. 25; Możdżeń 1995, p. 53). Everything was lacking in this area—tradition, experience, structures, bases, and financial resources. Even textbooks and teaching staff were lacking in the territories of the Russian and Prussian partitions. The first challenge that the authorities of the young state wanted to take up was the unification of the education system. The legacy of the three partitions left behind three different systems, educational structures, and sets of school regulations (Kot 1996, vol. II, p. 363; Wroczyński 1996, p. 245). Another problem hindering the introduction of a uniform school system was language. Polish children and youth from the Russian and Prussian partitions had to be re-Polonized (Szafran 2010, p. 13).

The Salesian Society, present in Poland since 1898, was actively involved in care and education. Jan Bosco was the founder of the Salesian Order (Niewęgłowski 2003, vol. I, pp. 422–425). The first area of Salesian involvement in education and upbringing were general schools. They were opened with the idea of enabling a certain number of talented young people to acquire secondary education. They followed a classical curriculum including expanded Latin and Greek. The Salesians not only cared about the quality of education and upbringing, but also tried to ensure that their schools complied with the legal regulations established by the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Enlightenment, which allowed graduates to continue their education in state schools (Krawiec 2004, p. 130; Możdżeń 2006, p. 140).

Middle School and High School for the Humanities in Oświęcim

The Salesians began their work in the town of Oświęcim (known in English as Auschwitz) in 1898. At the time of the regaining of independence, the school center in Oświęcim had 304 pupils. 213 attended the gymnasium and 91 learned a profession. In the school year preceding the outbreak of World War II, the total number of students in the Oświęcim schools was almost 500 (ASIK, A 516). In 1922, the director of the institution began efforts to obtain full state rights for

the gymnasium. The grammar school was granted them in the school year 1923/1924 (Żurek 2010, p. 153; Krawiec 2006, p. 136).

Thanks to the donations collected in the United States by Fr. Jan Świerc, the director of the House from 1922 to 1925, the expansion of the establishment was begun. It was completed in October 1933 and the building was put into use in 1934. However, the entire school complex lacked recreational and sports space. The mayor of the town, Roman Mayzel, and the Oświęcim City Council came to the rescue. The 900-meter site was given to the institution.² In this way, the acute problem of the lack of sports facilities was solved (Oświęcim – Zakład Księdza Bosko, Pokłosie Salezjańskie 1933, s. 67).

In the first years of its existence the gymnasium had four classes. As a result of the Jędrzejewicz reform, the certificate of completion of lower secondary school (*mała matura*) was introduced. After obtaining it alumni were able to continue their education in state schools without any obstacles. In 1937 it was decided to open a general secondary school next to the existing gymnasium. In this way, the Salesians responded to the many requests of parents for their sons to be fully educated in one institution. Father Ignacy Antonowicz—who was responsible for secondary education in the inspectorate of St. Jacek—on March 30, 1937, asked the School District Superintendent's Office in Kraków for permission to open a high school with a humanities and natural sciences profile. The Board of Trustees replied positively by letter on 3 May 1937 (Świda 1974, p. 40).

Aleksandrów Kujawski Middle School

In 1905, a toleration decree was issued in the Russian partition. Although it did not give Poles more rights, it did relax the tense situation somewhat (Wroczyński 1996, p. 216). A group of inhabitants of Aleksandrów Kujawski took advantage of the situation. They registered an official organization, the Circle of the Polish Educational Society (Skwierczyński 2006, p. 723). One of its founders was the local parish priest, Fr. Franciszek Szczygłowski. After purchasing a suitable plot of land, in 1913 the KPMS started to build an educational institution on it. The work was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I. After the building belonging to the KPMS had been partially finished, the “Soldatenheim” (soldiers' casino) was opened in the building. In 1916, after long requests from Fr. Szczygłowski's, the German authorities vacated a few rooms, where a four-class secondary school was organized. As many as 80 pupils started their first year of education (Wilk 2009, p. 75). The name of the school was the Real School of the Polish Educational Society (*Szkoła Realna Polskiej Macierzy Szkolnej*, Świda 1974, p. 48). Father Franciszek Szczygłowski, seeing the need for its existence and at the same time its dynamic development, wanted to ensure its stability for the future. With the consent of the local Ordinary he began to search for a religious order to which he could entrust the institution. He chose the Salesian Society, which was not yet well known

in the Russian partition. Bishop Stanisław Zdzitowiecki, who had already come into contact with the educational system of Fr. Jan Bosko. The Salesians took over the school on 13 August 1919. In the school year 1923/1924 it was transformed into an eight-class male grammar school with a humanities profile. From the moment the Salesians took over the school they tried to obtain state rights for it. The school in Aleksandrów retained these rights until 1939 (*Dzieje Zakładu 1927*, p. 5). Due to the increasing number of local pupils, a boarding school was built. Thanks to the help of the local authorities, it was completed in 1927 (*Z naszych zakładów – Aleksandrów Kujawski 1924*, p. 6). In the same year, the school was given the name of the Kujawski College of the Salesian Fathers by the Board of Trustees (*Kolegium Kujawskie XX. Salezjanów in Aleksandrów 1927*, p. 87; *Wąsowicz 2009*, p. 379).

Middle School in Różanystok

In 1918, the Bishop of Vilnius Jerzy Matulewicz appointed Fr. Witold Sarosiek. After taking over the parish, the priest quickly realized that a religious congregation was needed to serve the parish and the Marian shrine, and to properly administer the numerous Dominican buildings. The choice was made for the Salesian Society, and Ordinary Bishop Jerzy Matulewicz approved the idea. Father Witold Sarosiek went to Oświęcim, where he met on September 3, 1919, with Fr. Piotr Tirone, the Superior of the inspectorate. On behalf of the bishop, he asked him to take over Różanegostok and to use the large premises for educational work with the local youth (*ASIW 1964*, p. 1).

One of the first things to be done was to regularize the title (*ASIW 1919–1927*, p. 1a). The Dominicans were the legal owners of Różanystok and the Apostolic Nuncio in Warsaw, Achilles Ratti, took part in the negotiations. He was very anxious to establish an educational institution in Różanystok, which would be run according to the system of Fr. Jan Bosko (*Fiedorowicz 1974*, p. 20; *Różanystok 1920*, p. 11). Initially, the main occupation of the Salesians was pastoral work and the organization of an agricultural school, which survived until 1928 (*ASIW 1928–1939*). However, plans were made to organize a comprehensive school and a gymnasium. In the borderland regions there was a shortage of schools of this kind. For the first school year 1920/1921, 84 pupils were enrolled in the gymnasium. Soon afterwards a comprehensive school was opened. However, due to the lack of qualified staff, in 1923 it was handed over to the Salesian Sisters (*Wrońska 2012*, p. 293). The grammar school had a classical profile with an expanded German language profile. As a result of the Jędrzejewicz reform, the eight-year grammar school was transformed into a 6-year secondary school with a humanities profile. The grammar school was granted partial state rights in the school year 1924/1925 (*ASIW 1928–1939*).

One of the most acute problems that the Różanystok center faced for many years was the lack of staff with appropriate pedagogical qualifications. Representatives

of the Board of Trustees, when visiting schools, drew the attention of the directors to this problem (ASIW 1919–1927, p. 55a).

Middle School in Kraków

In the autumn of 1918, the Salesian Society bought from Count Zdzisław Tarnowski a small hunting lodge located in the suburbs of Kraków. The place was commonly called Łosiówka. It housed two houses of educational formation—a novitiate as well as philosophical studies, which were part of a higher seminary. When the candidates for the novitiate and the seminarians studying philosophy arrived at Łosiówka, it turned out that the house would be too small for the number of inhabitants. Already in the autumn of 1918, permission to extend the building was requested from the City of Kraków (Krawiec 2004, p. 129).

At the same time, the newly introduced Code of Canon Law laid down the conditions for studying in a major seminary. A seminarian had to pass the high school matriculation examination before he could begin his philosophical studies. Many Salesian seminarians, especially those returning from Italy, did not have such an education. In order to complete their secondary education and pass the state matriculation examination, it was decided to organize a gymnasium for them at Łosiówka. In 1923, appropriate letters were sent to the Custodian's Office in Kraków and to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education. The Minister's decision of 21 February 1924 gave the grammar school partial rights of state schools and for one year only. The directorate had to repeat such requests every year. These authorizations allowed the matriculation examination to be held in the Salesian house in Łosiówka. The first such examination took place in 1924. The headmaster of the St. Stanisław Grammar School was the headmaster of the St. Stanisław Secondary School. In the previous years, the seminarians had been able to complete their education at the school run by him (Żurek 1996, p. 60).

In the following years aspirants—that is, candidates for the novitiate—were admitted to the gymnasium. Some of them chose the Salesian vocation. Most of them, however, went on to other schools with their matriculation (Świda 1984, p. 141).

Middle and high school in Sokołów Podlaski

Thanks to the initiative of Fr. Andrzej Mazurkiewicz, on 15 August 1915 a four-class Men's and Women's Pro-Gymnasium was established in Sokołów (Niewęglowski 1999, p. 378). Lessons were held in private houses. Another difficulty was the shortage of teaching staff, caused by the longstanding, deliberate policy of the tsar (Mauersberg 1982, p. 555). After the end of the war, the Sokołów District Regional Assembly (*Sejmik*) took over the school in 1919. It had more space and was able to obtain the appropriate licenses for the school more quickly from the Polish

authorities. The Sokołów school was granted the rights of a state school in 1920. The number of pupils enrolled in the school also increased from year to year: in the school year 1925/1926 there were already 256 pupils, while in the school year 1938/1939 the number of pupils was 347 (ASSP, T. Sokołów Podlaski, p. 41).

After the completion of the teaching building, the Salesians started to build the boarding house. It accommodated about 150 pupils. The good conditions of the premises and the high standard of the school contributed positively to the opinion of the establishment. The school management made sure that the teachers were qualified and well prepared. The main aim of the Sokołów school was to provide a solid education and good upbringing (ASSP, T. 48. Correspondence; From Sokołów Podlaski, p. 28).

As a result of the Jędrzejewicz reform, the structures of the Salesian school were changed. The eight-class grammar school was abolished. It was replaced by a four-class grammar school and a two-year high school. The first matriculation examination according to the new requirements took place in the spring of 1939. Both schools enjoyed a good reputation among the local community. This was undoubtedly due to the correlation between the humanities and the sciences, which was introduced after long discussions in the pedagogical council. Another factor that had a positive impact on the quality of education was the management's concern for proper equipment in the school and its scientific laboratories (Sokołów Podlaski, p. 278). But undoubtedly the greatest influence on the level of education and upbringing in the school was the competent teaching staff (ASC, E 998). This was often emphasized by the curatorial inspectors in their post-inspection reports. The elitist nature of the school also had an impact on educational performance. The fees for the school and boarding house were quite high. Most of the pupils came from wealthy families. However, archival data confirms that many boys came from poorer families. They were exempted from paying school fees, either in whole or in part (Niewęgłowski 1999, p. 379).

Middle and high school in Marszałki

In 1930 Józef Mamica, a professional officer in the Polish army, put his estate up for sale in Marszałki near Ostrzeszów in the Poznań Province. The inspectorial superior, Fr. Antoni Hlond decided to purchase the property (Marszałki – Małe Seminarium w pełni rozwoju 1947, p. 125). The Kraków School Board approved the transfer of the grammar school from Łosiówka to Marszałki. The Poznań School Board granted the gymnasium full rights of a state school. The statutes of the school were approved on 15 December 1933.

In addition to the state school curriculum, teaching was enriched by four to five hours of scholastic philosophy per week and a similar number of hours of pedagogy. The pedagogical issues were based on the preventive method of Fr. Jan Bosko. At the beginning of 1937, the Inspectorial Delegate for Education, Fr. Ignacy Antonowicz

asked the Poznań Superintendent's Office to issue a license to run a classical high school. The reply of the Board of Trustees on 22 May was positive. At the same time, the same Board of Trustees was asked for permission to create in the school year 1937/1938 the seventh grade of the old type of grammar school. This was due to the need to reform secondary education (ASIK, A 1199. Marszałki).

The middle school in Marszałki, and later the high school, was very popular with young people. In the years 1931–1939 there were 465 pupils. In those years, out of 210 pupils admitted to the matriculation examination by the pedagogical board, 204 passed the matriculation examination (APP, Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego w Poznańskim Poznaniu).

Gymnasium in Ostrzeszów

In Ostrzeszów, in the province of Poznań, during the partitions there were two common schools: an Evangelical school for Polish and German children and a Catholic school for Polish children, as well as a grammar school and a vocational school. The most serious problem in 1918 was the re-Polonization of society and the organization of new school structures. Therefore, the town authorities decided to close the religious schools and replace them with a single seven-class comprehensive school and a Polonised grammar school (Ślósarczyk 1960–1969, vol. II, p. 360). The grammar school developed very dynamically. Every year a new class was created. In the 1924/1925 school year there were already eight classes, but the school did not yet have full state rights. The Ostrzeszów grammar school was granted state school rights in the school year 1925/1926 (ASIK, A 1078. Ostrzeszów).

Due to the increasing number of pupils in both the primary and the junior high school, the municipal authorities decided to build two new school buildings. Earlier, a promise of material aid was obtained from the School District Board of Education in Poznań. Within a few years, the primary school building was built and equipped. The middle school building was in a worse situation. This was due to the following factors: the economic crisis, lower subsidies from the municipality, and the debt incurred. In the school year 1928/1929, the school's financial shortfall amounted to 40,523 zlotys. In order to save the school, the municipal authorities started talks with the Salesian Society (ASIK, A 10. Ostrzeszów). After signing an agreement, the Salesians bought the building of the gymnasium for 60,000 zlotys. They also undertook, among other things, to finish the building, create a boarding school, keep the current headmaster in his job and pay off the financial obligations. On 1 September 1932, the Co-educational Men's Junior High School was officially abolished and the Salesian Fathers' Private Co-educational Junior High School (*Prywatne Koedukacyjne Gimnazjum Księża Salezjanów im. Kazimierza Wielkiego*) was established. The new name of the school was changed to the name of Casimir the Great. At the same time, the school was granted state rights (ASIK, A 1069. Ostrzeszów).

The centre in Ostrzeszów had an important educational, cultural, religious, and patriotic function (the youth of the Secondary School in Ostrzeszów donated a machine gun to the army in 1938; see p. 175). The school year 1939/1940 started with over 250 pupils. Obtaining full state rights for both schools proves that the Salesian Society ran the school competently (ASIK, A 1069, Ostrzeszów). The establishment ranked high on the list of didactic and educational establishments in Wielkopolska (APP, Kuratorium of the Poznań School District in Poznań).

Gymnasium in Lviv

On the recommendation of Archbishop Bolesław Twardowski, a church was built in the Upper Lyczaków district of Lviv under the name of Matka Boska Ostrobramska as a tribute to the regaining of independence and the victorious battles of 1918–1920. In 1936 the Ordinary gave it to the Salesians with a request to build a crafts and science center for the youth of Lviv next to it (Świda 1984, p. 180).

In the same year, the Salesian care was entrusted to the Salesians Abrahamowicz Educational Institution. Its founder was Dawid Abrahamowicz (Encyklopedia Powszechna 1973, p. 6). Before his death, he created a foundation (the Dawid and Antonina of the Suchodolski Abrahamowicz Family Foundation), to which he donated his property. The foundation's task was to create a school for the sons of the impoverished Polish gentry of the Roman and Armenian rite and for poor but talented youth. The construction of the establishment began in July 1928. The center officially opened on 1 September 1930. Its pupils attended schools in the area. Their behavior created many problems in these schools. This situation led the Foundation's Board of Directors to approach the Salesians with an offer to donate the work to them. The corresponding contract was signed on 28 May 1936 (ASIK, A 92). The institution was also given a new name, Abrahamovich Educational Institution Run by the Society of the Salesian Fathers (*Zakład Wychowawczy im. Abrahamowiczów prowadzony przez Towarzystwo Ks. Ks. Salezjanów*; see Nowa salezjańska placówka we Lwowie 1936, p. 230). The Educational Institution of the Abrahamowicz family was changed to the new name of the Abrahamowicz Society. In connection with this event, Archbishop Bolesław Twardowski wrote: "Since, as experience has shown so far, the work of the Salesians produces beautiful characters in young people, we feel great joy that the Salesian priests have taken over the management of the facility of the Abrahamowicz Foundation in Lviv (Nowa salezjańska placówka wychowawcza we Lwowie, p. 230). They wish to establish a new religious house there according to the principles of the Constitutions of St. Jan. The new community will be established in the new St. Jan Bosko Convent" (ASIK, A 3).

From the beginning, a great deal of effort was made to bring some order to the establishment and eliminate the sources of educational problems. The abandonment of the boarding house as well as the different timetables and

school classes weakened the educational influence on the students of the institution and made it difficult to manage. In view of this situation, the inspectorial supervisor asked the Lviv School District Superintendent's Office to allow the opening of a gymnasium in the institution. At the same time, the curatorial authorities approved the statutes of the private general secondary school and gave the school the name of the Salesian Society's Private Gymnasium for Men (*Prywatne Gimnazjum Męskie Towarzystwa Salezjańskiego*). The school officially began its activities on 1 September 1937 (ASIK, T. Lwów).

After regaining independence in 1918, Poland began the long process of rebuilding its state structures. The legacy of the three partitions made this process very difficult. The Salesian Society, together with the whole society, actively joined in the creation of the missing school and care structures. Until 1918, the Salesians could only exercise their charisma within the Austrian partition. One of the first activities of the Society after 1918 was the opening of general schools, most of which were established in the 1920s. Some of them faced many problems, such as the lack of properly prepared staff or financial challenges. Despite many difficulties, they enjoyed a rather good reputation in Polish society, making it easier for many Polish young people to obtain secondary education.

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