

Educational Presence of Polish Salesians in Vilnius in the Years 1924-1945: Overview of Main Topics

Wychowawcza obecność polskich salezjanów w Wilnie 1924-1945. Zarys problematyki

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Abstract: The Salesians came to Vilnius in 1924 and took over coeducational care facilities run by the pralate Fr. Karol Lubianiec. The first principal of the monastic house, Fr. Wojciech Balawajder, resigned from the coeducational character of these benevolent institutions. Salesians working with boys stayed in the facility in Dobrej Rady Street and served in the Church of Divine Providence. Girls were relocated to Stefańska Street near the railway station. In 1928 the Church of Saint Stephen was made available to use by Salesians and a separate monastic house was established next to it. Priests and clergymen ran oratory, taught religion at schools, visited prisons, studied at Stefan Batory University (now Vilnius University). During World War II priests ran limited pastoral work and were engaged in ministrative and educational activities during secret meetings. During Lithuanian, Soviet and German occupation Salesians were removed from the facility in Dobrej Rady Street and interned in Lithuanian Salesian houses. After World War II, the majority of Polish Salesians left Vilnius and the Vilnius region and moved to Poland.

Keywords: Vilnius, Salesians, vocational schools, pastoral work

Abstrakt: Salezianie przybyli do Wilna w 1924 r. i przejęli do obsługi koedukacyjne placówki opiekuńcze prowadzone przez ks. prałata Karola Lubiańca. Pierwszy dyrektor domu zakonnego, ks. dr Wojciech Balawajder zlikwidował koedukacyjny charakter tych dzieł dobroczynnych. Salezianie z chłopcami pozostali przy ul. Dobrej Rady i dodatkowo obsługiwali kościół Opatrzności Bożej. Dziewczęta umieszczono przy ul. Stefańskiej w pobliżu dworca kolejowego. W 1928 r. salezjanom oddano do użytku kościół św. Stefana, przy którym powstał osobny dom zakonny. Księża i klerycy prowadzili oratorium, uczyli religii w szkołach, pełnili posługę w więzieniach, studiowali na Uniwersytecie Stefana Batoryego. W czasie drugiej wojny światowej zakonnicy prowadzili ograniczoną działalność duszpasterską i angażowali się w nauczanie na tajnych kompletach. Podczas okupacji litewskiej, sowieckiej i niemieckiej salezianie zostali usunięci z placówki przy ul. Dobrej Rady i byli internowani w domach salezjanów litewskich. Po drugiej wojnie światowej większość polskich salezjanów wróciła z Wilna i z Wileńszczyzny do Polski.

Słowa kluczowe: Wilno, salezianie, szkoły salezjańskie, duszpasterstwo



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IN LIEU OF AN INTRODUCTION. SITUATION OF MALE ORDERS ON THE THRESHOLD OF POLISH INDEPENDENCE

The powers that conducted Poland's partition, i.e., Russia, Prussia and Austria systematically destroyed monastic life in the annexed lands. It was by way of exception that a German monastery belonging to the Franciscan Bernardines survived until 1919 in Bronisze Nowe in the Archdiocese of Gniezno on the territory the former Prussian partition (*Elenchus* 1864; Zieliński 1969, 77; Pest 2004, 402). In the lands incorporated into the Russian Empire, one male order of Conventual Franciscans barely survived until 1900 in Grodno in the Vilnius diocese (Mandziuk 1987-1988, 186). By the time Poland regained its independence in 1918, only five male monasteries survived in the Kingdom of Poland: the Pauline Order in Częstochowa, the Bernardines in Koło, the Capuchins in Nowe Miasto, the Carmelites in Obory, and the Reformati in Włocławek (Szteinke 1998, 15). Galicia provided relatively more favourable conditions for monastic life. Article 28 of the concordat concluded on August 18, 1855, between Emperor Franz Joseph I and the Holy See granted to religious orders and congregations freedom, independent management, community life, dependence on superiors general in Rome, and the possibility of establishing new monasteries in dioceses with the consent of bishops and in agreement with civil authorities (Włodarczyk 1986, 149-151; Urban 1966, 419; Zieliński 1983, 366). Long-established religious orders conducted limited activity on the territories of Galicia, and at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, there appeared there communities of new religious congregations transplanted from Western European countries (Jabłońska-Deptuła 1965, 1685). In the interwar period, Galicia was a kind of reservoir of religious priests who were sent from this area to Poland which was at that time under reconstruction.¹

1. BEGINNINGS OF SALESIAN INSTITUTIONS IN GALICIA AND IN THE REBORN POLAND

The first Salesian monastic religious institution was organized by Blessed Fr. Bronisław Markiewicz in 1892 in Miejsce, later renamed Miejsce Piastowe (Przemyśl diocese). After five years, however, Fr. Markiewicz parted ways with the Salesian Society, and therefore the Salesians in Poland consider as their mother house Oświęcim, where they arrived in August 1898, reconstructed the ruined former Dominican church and monastery, and organized a thriving care and educational centre for boys. Pioneers of the newly established Salesian institutions, e.g. in Daszawa, Przemyśl, Różanystok, etc., came from Oświęcim (Żurek 2010, 90-98). After Poland regained its independence in 1918, the Salesians initiated their

¹ One of first orders of the new formation were the Redemptorists (archdiocese of Lviv) who arrived in Mościska in 1883. At the end of the 19th century, the Salesians and Salvatorians settled in the Kraków diocese, and in the interwar period the Missionaries of La Salette, Christian Brothers and Pallottines (Nocuń 1998, 9-12; Kiełbasa 1975, 124-129; Świda 1984, 53-54, 57-58; Pietrzykowski 2020, 91).

activity in Kraków (2) and Kielce, to move north and east in the following year. The next three educational and pastoral centres were established in Warsaw in Powiśle, Aleksandrów Kujawski (Kuyavia-Kalisz diocese) and Różanystok (Vilnius diocese). Before the Salesians arrived in Vilnius in 1924, members of the Salesian Society had already been present in the Vilnius diocese since 1921, apart from Różanystok, in Dworzec near Słonim (Piętnastolecie 1937, 257-259; Pietrzykowski 2007, 372-375).

2. CIRCUMSTANCES OF TAKING UP THE YOUTH MISSION IN VILNIUS

The Salesians owe their arrival in Vilnius and the establishment of two monastic houses to the personal involvement of pralate Fr. Karol Lubianiec (Krahel 2020, 262-265; Paszkiewicz 1983, 10-12). This zealous priest and ardent patriot, despite his engagement in work with the seminary alumni, saw the poverty and needs of the inhabitants of Vilnius and tried to help them. In 1905, with the support of the local community, he bought a plot of land in the Wilcza Łąpa suburb and began organizing a shelter there. In 1907, he founded the Society of the House of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the parish of St. Anne (*Catalogus* 1931, 32). By 1913, he had built a small neo-Gothic Church of Divine Providence in Dobrej Rady Street. Father Lubianiec's care institution comprised four owned buildings as well as leased premises. The above-mentioned shelter facilities housed about 500 young people (1918), including about 300 children under the age of 12. Fr. Lubianiec founded a municipal school and workshops, where girls and boys could learn a profession (Dom 1926, 20-22; Krahel 2020, 263). In 1921, Fr. Lubianiec took over the management of the second charitable and educational institution in Vilnius, the "Temperance and Work" Association (orig. "Powściągliwość i Praca"). Its founder was Father Napoleon Dyakowski, rector of the Church of Saint Stephen in Stefańska Street near the railway station, chaplain of the Polish army, murdered by the Bolsheviks in August or September 1920 (Falkowski 1946, 30). The charity institution in Stefańska Street, operating by the Church of Saint Stephen, was legalized in 1907, and a coeducational boarding house for poor youth as well as craft workshops were established in the building erected on the church premises (*Historia s.l.s.a.*).

Fr. Lubianiec, proposed handing over these care and educational institutions to the Salesian Society with the view to ensuring their stability and development. The Bishop of Vilnius, Blessed Jerzy Matulewicz [Matulaitis] (1871-1927), although reluctantly, approved this plan, but he reserved the Church of Saint Stephen for the pastoral care of Lithuanians. Negotiations with the Salesians regarding their taking over the aforementioned youth institutions started at the beginning of 1922. For this purpose, Fr. Inspector Piotr Tirone (Zerbino 1969, 271; Świda 1990, 94-129; Zimniak 1990, 295-346) with Fr. Antoni Kotarski (1873-1953), administrative director came to Vilnius (Długolecki and Świda 1976, 354-355).

3. CARE AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITY IN DOBREJ RADY STRET

After conducting a site inspection, the religious superiors of the order decided to reorganize the charitable facilities. Lack of properly qualified personnel postponed the arrival of the Salesians in Vilnius until August 15, 1924. The first religious fraternity, headed by the director, Fr. Wojciech Balawajder (1890-1947), consisted of four priests: Andrzej Kałużny, Jan Pietrzak, Stanisław Ziętara, two coadjutors (friars): Wawrzyniec Gładki, Adolf Zdunek and cleric Jan Podkul (ASIW, vol. Balawajder; Chronicle 1945; Ricaldone 1947, 1-4; Książd 1947, 115-118; *Elenco* 1925, 87). As the first step, the Salesians quite radically ended the coeducational character of the institution. They took care of the boys and entrusted the girls to the care of the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco (the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians). On September 1, 1924, the Salesian Sisters came to Vilnius and took over a charitable institution – the “Charity and Work” Association (orig. “Dobroczynność i Praca”) in Stefańska Street. Elimination of the coeducational system also influenced the new division of workshops. The Charitable Society of the House of the Sacred Heart of Jesus handed over to the institution operating by the Church of Saint Stephen the workshops of embroidery, hosiery, underwear and ironing. The Salesians also resigned from running the branches in Konarskiego Street and Wielka Pohulanka Street, and the pupils were moved to the house in Dobrej Rady Street. By the decision of the District Court of Vilnius of 21 January 1935, the Salesian Society was granted property rights (ASIW, Dobrej Rady: Kronika 1925, 136-138; Niewęglowski 2011, 297-298).

The first Salesian director, Fr. W. Balawajder, divided boys into two age groups, i.e., the older boys were sent to a vocational school, and the younger to the municipal Primary School No. 30, headed by Tadeusz Żelnio. From the beginning of their activity in Vilnius, the Salesians had to overcome many difficulties related not only to the reorganization of charitable and educational institutions. There were serious shortages and needs as regards fuel, food and clothing for the excessive number of pupils. Many difficulties were also caused by previous benefactors, who, after the change of management and the departure of Fr. Lubianiec, became creditors and demanded the return of the sums allegedly donated earlier. An additional and unforeseen experience was also the fire of the altar in the Sisters’ chapel, brought under control by Fr. Stanisław Ziętara SDB (Książd 1947, 116).

The Salesian management reorganized the school in Dobrej Rady Street. Out of the existing craft workshops, i.e., carpentry, locksmithing, tailoring, shoemaking, musical instrument making, goldsmithing, bronzing, the Salesians left only two departments, i.e., shoemaking and carpentry, and on their basis organized the School of Crafts. The new youth institution was treated as a quite prestigious one by the superiors, which was evidenced by designating Vilnius as the place of visit by the Superior General, Blessed Fr. Filip Rinaldi, who arrived in this city on October 5, 1925, accompanied by Fr. Inspector P. Tirone.

Despite the visible poverty, the institution of the Polish Salesians after a year of hard work had achievements they could be proud of. Among occasional

celebrations, it is worth noticing the assembly of former students organized on December 27-29, 1929, by the director, Fr. Alojzy Golubski. The School of Crafts had three departments, i.e., shoemaking, carpentry and locksmithing. It educated and supported 240 boys in total, including a group of orphans attending the primary school (ASIW Wizyty 1925; Kronika 1925, 137; Świda 1978, 1938; *Pierwszy* 1930, 5-6; Świda 1984, 125). In 1928, 105 students – all of them boarders – studied at the school of crafts, and 12 graduated the care and educational institution.

The available data show a systematic growth of the Salesian care and educational works in Vilnius. The school's development was acknowledged by the Board of Education, which confirmed it by granting the school an allowance of 3,000 PLN (LCVA F 172 Ap 1B 4061 Kuratorium do Towarzystwa Salezjańskiego w Polsce 5 III 1933). In 1935, the Salesians in Dobrej Rady Street took care of around 180 students learning the profession and 86 orphans who attended the primary school. Over the years, the number of boys learning the shoemaking profession decreased. In the 1930/1931 school year, there were only 18 of them. The shoemaking department was probably liquidated before 1936 due to the lack of candidates interested in learning this profession. The Salesian guide from 1936 contains no mention of the shoemaking department at the School of Crafts in Vilnius (LCVA F172 Ap B11 4590, Wielkiewicz do Kuratorium 15 I 1934; Żurek 1996, 190). However, the carpentry department operated and developed until World War II. In the 1930/1931 school year, 31 boys learned the carpentry profession. The carpentry school was quite attractive in the Vilnius community, it maintained a high standard, enjoyed general recognition, and was granted the rights of a state school. The institution's source of income was the fee of 20 PLN per month paid by a part of the students, as well as social welfare benefits and donations from benefactors. This fee was rather symbolic than exorbitant.² In 1936, Fr. Inspector S. Pływaczyk submitted to the Board of Education an application to open a Private Carpentry Gymnasium of the Salesian Society in Vilnius. However, this project was not implemented (LCVA F 172 Ap B9 5725, Pływaczyk do Kuratorium 15 VI 1936).

Due to the incomplete documentation on the first Salesian institution in Vilnius, it is difficult to determine why the directors of this charitable institution changed so often. It is worth noting here that the director of the house at the same time held the position of rector of the Church of Divine Providence. After a year's stay in Vilnius and after Fr. W. Balawajder had been relocated to Warsaw, the next two local superiors, i.e., Fr. Michał Bulowski and Fr. Alojzy Golubski held this office for only three years, and Fr. Wojciech Kuczewski for four years. Fr. Stanisław Sebastyański and Fr. Stanisław Dylong were school directors and rectors of the church for two years (ASIK Golubski; ASIW Kuczewski; Cofałka 1950, 1-3; Kopczyński 1993, 31; Żurek 1998, 15-27; Pietrzykowski 2015, 134-135).

At the beginning of September 1939, the care and educational facility employed 5 priests, 7 coadjutors and 5 clerics, who were in charge of 156 students.

² At the same time, the tuition fee for the Craft School in Jaciążek was PLN 35 (J. Ślósarczyk 1960, 421; J. Pietrzykowski 2005, 49).

The acting director, Fr. S. Dylong, was to be replaced by Fr. Jan Romanowicz, who was the director of the orphanage in Lutomiersk near Łódź. Due to war operations and the uncertain educational future under the occupation, he could not come to his new destination. In the meantime, in October 1939, Fr. Dylong left for parish work in the Pińsk diocese. The local Salesians, meeting on 13 October, elected Fr. Stanisław Toporek, head of the Carpentry School, as acting director (ASIW Dobrej Rady, personel, Kronika 1939; Ślósarczyk 1960, 86).

Board of the religious house of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the youth institution in Vilnius:

years	director	prefect (administrator)	counsellor (school manager)	catechist responsible for health and religious life)
1924/1925	W. Balawajder	J. Pietrzak	S. Ziętara	–
1925/1926	M. Bulowski	J. Pietrzak	S. Ziętara	–
1926/1927	M. Bulowski	J. Kurdziel	W. Pływaczyk	J. Romanowicz
1927/1928	M. Bulowski	M. Kazimierczak	T. Budnikowski	J. Romanowicz
1928/1929	A. Golubski	J. Kapusta		L. Witkowski
1929/1930	A. Golubski	P. Cyranek	P. Cyranek	F. Miśka
1930/1931	A. Golubski	–	J. Błaszczak	W. Mnich
1931/1932	W. Kuczewski	–	J. Błaszczak	E. Słodczyk
1932/1933	W. Kuczewski	–	J. Błaszczak	C. Świątek
1933/1934	W. Kuczewski	–	J. Wielkiewicz	C. Świątek
1934/1935	W. Kuczewski	–	J. Wielkiewicz	M. Mielczarek
1935/1936	S. Sebastyański	J. Wielkiewicz	–	W. Wiczorek M. Smętek
1936/1937	S. Sebastyański	–	–	W. Raducha M. Smętek
1937/1938	S. Dylong	–	–	W. Raducha S. Toporek
1938/1939	S. Dylong	–	–	W. Raducha S. Toporek

Source: *Elenco Generale 1925-1939*; *Z wileńskiego Grodu 1932*, 198-199; *Żurek 1996*, 189-190.

4. CARE AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION DURING WORLD WAR II

The Third Reich and the Soviet Union shared the spoils of the Second Polish Republic, as confirmed by the so-called Ribbentrop-Molotov friendship treaty of

September 28, 1939. The eastern aggressor took over the areas east of the Bug, San, Narew and Pisa, apart from the Suwałki district. On October 27, 1939, the Soviets handed over Vilnius to Lithuania, with a district of an area of 6,880 km², inhabited by 549,000 people, including 321.7 thousand Poles, 31.3 thousand Lithuanians, 107.6 thousand Jews, 75.2 thousand Belarusians. In June 1940, the Soviets took power there. On July 21 of the same year, the Vilnius region became part of the proclaimed Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. After driving out the Soviet troops and the occupation of the eastern areas of the Second Polish Republic by the Germans, the District of Lithuania was incorporated to the Reich Commissariat of Eastland based in Riga (Głowacki 1998, 106-108; Tomaszewski 2001, 37-46, 676-68).

5. SALESIAN PASTORAL CARE IN STEFAŃSKA STREET IN VILNIUS

As mentioned above, in September 1924, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians took over the care of girls living in the care facility in Stefańska Street. From March 1922, rector of the Saint Stephen Church, intended for Lithuanians, was a diocesan priest Wincenty Taszkunis, to whom the Salesians paid an annual rent for the lease of the plot where the orphanage buildings were located (ASIW Wilno Stefańska, *Inventarz* 1922, 1928; Paszkiewicz 1983, 18-19; Świda 1978, 37-38; Kalisz 2021, 109-110). The Salesian sisters took over from the Committee of the “Temperance and Work” Association all charitable institutions as well as financial obligations towards this church and the Vilnius Magistrate. Unable to use the nearest church, the Salesians set up a temporary chapel in the main building, which was consecrated by the Bishop of Vilnius and was used by the nuns and students until 1928. Every day it was served by a priest coming from the distant Salesian facility at Dobre j Rady Street (ASIW Wilno-Stefańska; Świda 1978, 37-38).

Blessed Bishop of Vilnius J. Matulewicz did not hand over the Saint Stephen Church to the Salesian Society but left it at the disposal of the Lithuanians. After his resignation from the management of the diocese (July 14, 1925), his successor, Metropolitan Archbishop of Vilnius, Romuald Jałbrzykowski (1876-1955), only after the intervention on April 28, 1926, by the Apostolic Nuncio to Poland, Archbishop Wawrzyniec Lauri, by decree of July 17, 1928, handed over the temple and the rectory to the Salesians (ASIW Wilno-Stefańska, *Lubianiec*, *Głos*, 1-8). The first director of the house and rector of the Church of Saint Stephen was priest Jakub Łęgosz, and the monastic community consisted of five fraters. The local superior ran an oratory (a type of occasional community centre) for approximately 60-80 boys from the nearby area, and at the same time was a prison chaplain and a religion teacher at the Salesian Sisters’ vocational school and at the railway school. Two priests served as chaplains to the Salesian sisters in Vilnius and Laurow (Tirone 1954b, 17-18; Kant 2012, 237-246). In the years 1931-1934, the next local superior was Fr. Jan Romanowicz, followed by Fr. Wojciech Śmiłowski. This monastic house of St. Stephen Oratory erected on January 13, 1931, N. 210, by the Superior General, Blessed Fr. F. Rinaldi, was also inhabited by priests and

clerics who studied at the Stefan Batory University until December 14, 1939. After the university was taken over by the Lithuanians and renamed as the University of Vilnius, Salesian clerics studied theology at the Archdiocesan Seminary in Vilnius until March 3, 1942, and then in several places during secret classes (ASIW Dekret, Romanowicz; Romanowicz 1993, 1-26; Jubileusz 1928, 153; Rokita 1954; Tirone 195a, 80-81).

From 1938, director and rector of the Saint Stephen Church was priest Franciszek Cofalka. Additionally, as a prefect, he taught religion at the Mechanical School in Kopanica and at the Philomath's School for Girls and, as a chaplain, served the prison at Bednarska street. Before the outbreak of World War II, the religious fraternity consisted of six priests, two clerics and one coadjutor. Despite problems with the Lithuanians, Russians and Germans, the church was open almost until the end of the occupation. As a result of the war, the church building was damaged in July 1944 during the German bombing of Vilnius. Restored to use, it was destroyed again on January 12, 1945, due to an explosion of ammunition wagons at the railway station. The priests continued to conduct pastoral work in the small home chapel until they left for Poland in 1945 (ASIW Cofalka; Bienkowski 1989, 1-6).

6. ATTEMPT AT ASSESSMENT

From 1924, Salesians in Dobrej Rady Street in Vilnius apart from continuing the work of care initiated by Fr. Lubianiec, also developed their institution in organizational, educational and pastoral terms. Due to the shortness of time, the management of the Salesian School of Crafts did not manage to launch the Private Junior Secondary School of Carpentry of the Salesian Society in Vilnius. In the second monastic house located next to the Church of Saint Stephen, the fraters provided their service at the church, taught religion in schools and helped the Salesian sisters carry out a charitable facility for girls. The above-mentioned youth centres on the Neris River, as well as other Salesian facilities remaining beyond the eastern border of the post-war Poland, were liquidated. The former Polish and Lithuanian Salesian institutions operating in the last century are still waiting for a more detailed study.

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