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DIOCESAN HISTORICAL ARCHIVES IN POLAND. THE PROCESS OF FORMATION

Introduction

The term “historical archive” in this case means an archive as a specialized institution established for collecting, preserving, describing, long-term storing archival materials, and making them available¹. In church law this term appeared only in the Code of Canon Law of 1983. However, the process of organizing church historical archives in Poland had already begun much earlier, in the inter-war years of the twentieth century. In spite of this, the Polish church archives are overdue in this regard, because the first historical archives were established in the West at the end of the eighteenth century, so more than two hundred years ago. Various restrictions on the activities of the Catholic Church in the Polish territories under occupation were not conducive to making such initiatives.

Reorganization or liquidation of ecclesiastical institutions and offices during the partitions of Poland required archiving the documents produced before the partitions. However, that situation did not provide the impetus to create separate church historical archives. The records of liquidated offices and institutions were mostly placed in other ecclesiastical institutions, where they were stored with current records. Historians did not frequently have access to them; those records were mainly used by passionate historians coming from the circles of the clergy. Some ideas for the establishment of modern archives (a new type) appeared in ecclesiastical circles at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but they were not implemented then.

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¹ Vide *Polski słownik archiwalny*, ed. W. Maciejewska, Warsaw 1974, p. 19. B. Ryszewski defines the term “historical archive” as an archival fonds, a group of archival fonds or a collection created as a product of the activities of institutions which are no longer existent. He proposed the introduction of a historical archive level as one of the elements in the structure of the fonds of the archive which store archival materials, B. Ryszewski, *Problemy komputeryzacji archiwów*, Toruń 1994, p. 20.

The process of formation of diocesan historical archives began in the interwar period and continues up to the present, with a break for the years of World War II. These archives have been formed over three periods:

1. interwar years,
2. period from the end of World War II until the political transformation of the Polish state in 1989,
3. period from the early nineties of the twentieth century until now.

The interwar period

The years of the Second Polish Republic were extremely important for the further development of the archives of the Catholic Church in Poland, as it was the beginning of developing their modern forms. To describe those changes, a known archivist of Przemyśl Rev. Jan Kwolek, used the term “professional organization of archives”.

When Poland regained independence in 1918, church archives were treated more often than in the period before - as research centres, and thus as a workplace for historians². However, without the creation of a specialized institution through which church archival materials could be available for research, it would be difficult to dream about using them freely. There was no such possibility as long as the documentation remained in the diocesan curia along with current records, for which specially appointed archivists were responsible, or in the case of their absence – chancellors of the curia³. While organizing and cataloguing current records in the diocesan curia, archivists took account of their administrative role; making them available for research was not taken into consideration.

The desire for changes in the Polish archival studies of the Church in the interwar period is best reflected by Rev. Jan Kwolek's words “in the reborn homeland we would also like to have revived church archives, we want to reorganize them and revive research movement in them for the good of the Church and homeland”⁴. The importance of the reform of church archives was stressed by Kaz-

² Both during conventions of historians and lecturers of the Church history in theological seminaries, the issue under discussion was research on the history of the Church in Poland and the teaching of this subject in seminaries. The discussions and conclusions focused on the questions related to the archival theory and practice. It was recommended that archival studies should be introduced to ratio studiorum in theological seminaries, the position of archivist should be established in each diocesan curia, archival materials should be described and inventories prepared, the oldest parish records should be transferred to diocesan archives and instructions should be published, vide *Pamiętnik Czwartego Zjazdu w Kielcach 20 IV – 22 IV 1927 roku*, Kielce 1927, p. 178; *Pamiętnik IV Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Poznaniu 6-8 grudnia 1925*, volume 2: *Protokoły*, ed. K. Tyszkowski, Lwów 1927, p. 105; J. Umiński, *Uchwały IV Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Poznaniu*, „Miesięcznik Pastorski Płocki”, 21 (1926) no 12, p. 451.

³ The main task of the chancellor of the diocesan curia „is to preserve curia's records stored in an archive, to describe them chronologically and to prepare the register of them” F. Bączkiewicz, *Prawo kanoniczne. Podręcznik dla duchowieństwa*, volume 1, Opole 1957, p. 533.

⁴ J. Kwolek, *Archiwa – przeszłości skarbnice*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie”, 21 (1935) volume 36, p. 528.

imierz Konarski, the author of the first Polish archival studies textbook⁵: “it is very important for the Church, because this action will facilitate the arrangement and proper evaluation of a huge section of its wealth; and it has no less importance for secular archival studies, as it leads to the creation of the dense network of care facilities for archives in our country, which results in the rise of general archival culture in Poland”⁶. As far as the reform is concerned, diocesan archives were ahead of monastic ones. Those who were active in this field in the interwar period devoted their first presentations exclusively to diocesan archives, then - as if willing to make amends for that omission – referred to all the archives of the Catholic Church in Poland.

Kazimierz Kaczmarczyk, the director of the National Archive in Poznań began discussion on the reform of church archives in Poland in the interwar period. The Fourth General Congress of the Polish Historians in Poznań in 1925 was a good opportunity for that action. Kaczmarczyk gave the presentation under the title *Organizing diocesan archives*⁷. It was all the easier to raise the question of the modern organization of church archives at the national forum by Kaczmarczyk, as a month before the congress of historians, Poland’s first historical archive of the Church was founded in Poznań.

The question raised by Kazimierz Kaczmarczyk was handled by the archivist of Przemyśl, Rev. Jan Kwolek. Among the clergy, he became the most vigorous proponent of the idea of organizing historical archives of the Church. His article entitled *Professional organization of diocesan archives*, stating his programme, was published in the “Archeion” in 1928⁸, and then it was reprinted twice in other magazines.

To familiarize a wider group of archivists, historians, the diocesan clergy with the issues concerning the functioning of the institutions that store ecclesiastical archival materials, it was necessary to start popularizing those questions. Those issues were raised at the meetings of academic teachers of the history of the Church, in seminaries, conferences of historians, and at deanery conferences. Numerous publications appeared both in national magazines (“Archeion”, “Ateneum Kapłańskie”), as well as diocesan magazines. Several articles devoted to the parish office and registry were published in the latter ones⁹.

⁵ K. Konarski, *Nowożytna archiwistyka polska i jej zadania*, Warszawa 1929.

⁶ K. Konarski, *Z archiwistyki kościelnej*. *Ateneum Kapłańskie*, „Archeion”, 15 (1937-1939) p. 127.

⁷ K. Kaczmarczyk, *Organizowanie archiwów diecezjalnych*, in: *Pamiętnik IV Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Poznaniu 6-8 grudnia 1925 r.*, volume 1: *Referaty*, Lwów 1925, pp. 1-7. This paper in a slightly shorter form (*W sprawie archiwów diecezjalnych*) was presented two years later in the official publication of the Diocese of Łódź „Wiadomości Diecezji Łódzkiej”, 7 (1927) pp. 42-46.

⁸ „Archeion”, volume 4 (1928) pp. 15-35. The same article (expanded) under the title *Naukowa organizacja archiwów kościelnych* appeared in two more magazines – „Nasza Myśl Teologiczna”, 1930, pp. 113-149; „Przegląd Teologiczny”, volume 11 (1930) pp. 15-35.

⁹ Vide M. Dębowska, *Stan badań nad archiwami parafialnymi w Polsce*, ABMK, 75 (2001) p. 14.

The basic achievement of the church archival studies in the interwar was to initiate the reorganization in church archives – separating historical records from current ones, and storing them in a modern institution which guaranteed the fulfilment of the basic tasks assigned to these types of places (preservation, long-term storage, collection, description and making archival materials available). Those changes concerned mainly the diocesan archives; the archives of religious orders did not participate in that action yet.

Apart from the organizational and popularising achievements, nothing can be said about the contribution of the church archivists to the theoretical framework. That situation resulted primarily from a lack of clergy people who would be prepared in the field of archival studies.

After 1925, there existed 21 dioceses in the Second Polish Republic; only six of them established historical archives. The first one was the Archdiocesan Archive in Poznań (1925); next, in Przemyśl (1927), Płock (February 1928), Pelplin (April 1928), Łódź (1937) and Kielce (1938).

It should be added that Archdiocesan Archive in Wrocław, functioning within the current Poland's borders, was outside Polish territory in the interwar period. It is now the oldest and one of the richest diocesan archives in Poland. It was reorganized by transferring archival materials to a separate building for diocesan collections (it was built in the years 1894-1896 during the reign of Jerzy Kopp). The archive collection was placed on the first floor of that building. The archive was opened on 1 July 1896. Outside the Second Polish Republic, there also remained the present Dioceses of Warmia and Gdańsk; historical archives were created there after World War II.

The post-war period (to 1989)

Vigorous activities in the field of church archival studies, conducted in the second half of the 1930s, were interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. In the post-war years, activities in the field of organizing church historical archives were intensified. According to Hieronim E. Wyczawski, catastrophic consequences of the Second World War for archives proved more than enough that there could no longer be a delay in preserving the collections which had survived the ravages of war and making them available to researchers¹⁰. Under the rule of the invaders – German and Soviet ones – during the Second World War, there was significant dispersion or even destruction of the Polish heritage, including archival materials. Their protection, therefore, became a primary task after the war.

In the post-war period, we should pay attention to several important events connected with the creation and functioning of diocesan historical archives.

One of the most important events was establishing, in 1956, the Institute for Church Archives, Libraries and Museums (ABMK) with its own magazine – „Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne” (the first issue appeared in 1960). Until the political changes in Poland in 1989, it was the only research centre where

¹⁰ H. E. Wyczawski, *Polskie archiwa kościelne*, in: *Księga tysiąclecia katolicyzmu w Polsce*, part 2, Lublin 1969, pp. 92-93.

all nationwide initiatives undertaken by archives were concentrated. Work with this centre gave the opportunity to influence any of church archival solutions in Poland, insofar as it was allowed by church authorities and political conditions in which the Catholic University, with the Institute ABMK as part of it, functioned. There were restrictions, for example, concerning free official contacts with archivists from state institutions. A leading figure associated with the Institute ABMK, was Rev. Stanisław Librowski (an organizer and director of the Diocesan Archive in Włocławek, the director of the auxiliary sciences of church history department at the Institute of the History of the Church at the Catholic University of Lublin, an employee at the Institute ABMK). It seems that Rev. Librowski is mainly remembered thanks to his work in the field of church archives in Poland by promoting the idea of creating them as independent institutions where archival materials could be preserved and made available to researchers¹¹. That idea was taken over by him as the legacy of the interwar period and creatively developed mainly in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century. As editor of the semi-annual „Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne”, he promoted those ideas in its pages. Rev. Librowski claimed that diocesan bishop should issue three decrees which would determine the existence of church historical archives and create them as “legal and research organization”¹². The foundation document, issued by the diocesan bishop, setting up an archive as a new church institution ought to be the basic legal act. The other ones - the statute and regulations which should also contain rules concerning the organization of work in the newly established archives. Rev. Librowski maintained that without the foundation document, the statute and regulations, an archive is just a pile of documents¹³.

Rev. Librowski popularized the idea of creating church archives in the pages of his semi-annual, where most works on church archives were published. Compared with the period before the war, publications written by Librowski and others did not introduce new theoretical findings into the discussion on creating historical archives, but they provided the impetus and encouragement to continue the action started before the war. Pre-war assumptions were mainly developed and adapted to the new post-war conditions. Those were primarily practical guidelines for activities aimed at establishing historical archive in the diocese and organizing care of archival materials¹⁴.

¹¹ Rev. S. Librowski „compared an archive to heaven, for which manuscripts are longing, breaking out of pulgatory-repository of current records”, A.J. Szejnke, *Moje wspomnienia o ks. profesorze Stanisławie Librowskim*, „Studia Włocławskie”, volume 10 (2007) p. 155.

¹² S. Librowski, *Projekt statutu i regulaminu archiwum diecezjalnego*, Lublin 1960, p. 3 (copy of the semi-annual „Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne”, volume 1 (1959/1960) no. 2, pp. 3-10).

¹³ S. Librowski, *Stan i potrzeby archiwów kościelnych oraz program pracy na najbliższy okres*, Lublin 1959, pp. 4-5 (copy of the semi-annual „Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne”, volume. 1 (1959/1960) no. 1, pp. 20-33).

¹⁴ About Rev. S. Librowski's achievements in the field of church archival studies vide M. Dębowska, *Wkład Księdza Profesora Stanisława Librowskiego w rozwój archiwistyki kościelnej w Polsce*, in: *Ksiądz Stanisław Librowski – archiwista, historyk Kościoła, dydaktyk*, ed. W. W. Żurek, D. Kiper, Lublin 2015, pp. 11-31.

The action promoting the formation of church archives as an independent institution undertaken by, among others, Rev. Librowski was confirmed by a regulation in the new Code of Canon Law of 1983 recommending that diocesan bishops should create “historical archives” in their dioceses¹⁵. That regulation of ecclesiastical law was another important event in the process of creating diocesan historical archives. The Code recommendations were introduced in Poland after 1989.

In the Polish People Republic there was practically no official cooperation with the state archival service. For several difficult decades after the war, the Catholic Church was concerned about their archival materials; they feared the possibility of appropriating the materials by the communist state. Those concerns even increased following *The act on national archival records and archives* of 14 July 1983¹⁶. Church archivists saw that act as a threat to the archival materials produced over the centuries by various institutions of the Catholic Church. At the conference of the directors of diocesan archives, organized by the Institute ABMK on 27-28 November 1984, the participants pondered about the steps that should be taken to avert the dangers that might arise for church archives after bringing that new law into force. Certain decisions were made then, but they couldn't come into force due to the opposition from the Polish Episcopate¹⁷.

In the period from the end of the war until 1989, the following diocesan historical archives were established: in Włocławek (1946), Tarnów (1958), Gniezno (1960), Warsaw (1960), Drohiczyn (1970), Częstochowa (70s), Białystok (1980), Opole (1986). In the post-war years, they were also organized in other dioceses (Lublin, Łomża, Olsztyn, Sandomierz, Siedlce). It is difficult, however, to pinpoint the date of their creation. Apart from the centres mentioned above, in Cracow there is a rich historical archive of the Archdiocesan Curia (the Archive of the Metropolitan Curia). The same city is also home to the archival materials of the former Archdiocese of Lviv (Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak Archive)¹⁸.

The modern period (after 1989)

This period coincides with the years of political transformation and the building of democratic structures of the Polish state.

At that time (1992) the territorial structures of the Catholic Church in Poland were reorganised; several new dioceses were created. The authorities of the new dioceses, complying with the regulations of the Code of Canon Law, established their own historical archives and - in contrast to the older dioceses – made no mis-

¹⁵ Article by A. Weiss (*Archiwa kościelne w „Codex iuris canonici” papieża Jana Pawła II*, „Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne”, 31 (1984) no. 4, pp. 115-124) was one of the first and – so far – the few voices on the subject.

¹⁶ This law is still in effect.

¹⁷ M. Dębowska, *Ośrodek Archiwów, Bibliotek i Muzeów Kościelnych Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II 1956-2006*, Lublin 2006, pp. 93-94.

¹⁸ M. Dębowska, *Archiwa Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce. Informator*, Kielce 2002, pp. 25-120.

takes in their creation, proclaiming an act of the erection of an archive and giving a new institution statutes and regulations¹⁹.

The possibility of raising funds from the sources outside the church allows creating new buildings, modernizing older ones and adapting archive premises to the requirements of these types of institutions.

The contact between state and church archives is no longer restricted; mutual prejudices have disappeared – the relevant state bodies explicitly declare the autonomy of church archives.

Nowadays, almost all dioceses in Poland have their own archives (the Diocese of Radom is in the group of a few which do not have them), which store archival materials produced by institutions and offices operating throughout the existence of a given territorial unit of the Catholic Church²⁰.

Summary

In the literature on historical archives of the Catholic Church in Poland there is no scholarly monograph devoted to them. The only textbook is the one written by H.E. Wyczawski, *Przygotowanie do studiów w archiwach kościelnych (Preparing for studies in church archives)*²¹.

The publications, appearing after the war, did not present any theoretical findings which could be applied in church archival studies (it refers to developing the theoretical decisions on creating archival fonds, their names etc.), but they certainly provided the impetus and encouragement to continue the action which was initiated before the war. The program developed in the interwar period was adjusted to the new conditions; emphasis was put on practical guidelines for activities related to the founding and functioning of a historical archive in the diocese.

key words: Catholic Church in Poland, archives, diocesan archives, historical archives

¹⁹ Vide M. Różański, *Archiwa kościelne po 1989 r. Zarys problematyki*, in: H.E. Wyczawski, *Przygotowanie do studiów w archiwach kościelnych*, ed. 2, revised and enlarged, ed. T. Moskał, A. K. Sitnik, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska 2013, pp. 468-491.

²⁰ The list of diocesan archives in Poland (in 2014) made by K. Dowgiało, *Wykaz archiwów diecezjalnych Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego w Polsce*, „Archiva Ecclesiastica”, 7 (2014) no 7, pp. 125-138.

²¹ First edition: Kalwaria Zebrzydowska 1989; second edition, revised and enlarged, ed. T. Moskał and A.K. Sitnik, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska 2013.

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