

## Antoni Herkulan Wróbel OFM (1934–2023)

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On December 27, 2023, Antoni Herkulan Wróbel OFM passed away in Argentina. With his death, Polish historiography lost an important researcher of Polish settlement history and Polish pastoral care in Argentina, and the Polish community in Argentina lost a deserving priest.

Antoni (his secular name) Wróbel was born on March 8, 1934, in Wierzychowska, near Janów Lubelski, Poland. His family (parents Zofia and Jan and seven children) was very poor. His mother raised the children, while his father worked as a carter in a landowner's estate. The family's material situation worsened with the onset of the German occupation in 1939. The Wróbel family's condition improved somewhat after the war ended, thanks to the agrarian reform.

At the age of 7, Antoni began his education in primary school in September 1941. He completed it in 1948, and the thought of entering a seminary became increasingly present in his mind. To realize this dream, he began studying at a Small Franciscan Seminary in Wrocław in the fall of 1949 (the school was located in Nysa from 1950–1951).

In 1951, Antoni entered the novitiate of the Bernardine Fathers in Leżajsk. He took his first vows on August 31, 1952. From 1952 to 1956, he studied at the Seminary of the Bernardine Fathers in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. On February 6, 1952, he took perpetual vows and adopted the religious name Herkulan. In the following years, until 1959, he continued his studies in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, where he was also ordained a priest on June 26, 1960.

Later, besides a year of study at the Pastoral Institute in Kraków, Herkulan served as a priest and taught religion in primary school. In 1961, Providence connected him with history – he was not accepted at the Faculty of Earth Sciences at Jagiellonian University, which led him to pursue historical studies at the Catholic University of Lublin. He completed his studies in Lublin in 1964, but without taking the master's exam.

Herkulan Wróbel positively responded to an invitation to go on a mission to Argentina, where a Polish community had existed since the late 19th century. Polish parishes and individual clergymen played an extremely important role in the integration and nurturing of the Catholic religion and Polish identity. After difficulties in obtaining a passport, he arrived in Argentina by sea on December 2, 1966, accompanied by Friar Jerzy Łakomiak. Upon arrival, the clergymen were welcomed by Father Łucjan Łuszczki, rector of the Polish Catholic Mission in Argentina. Herkulan Wróbel began his priestly ministry at the Polish Catholic Center in Martin Coronado. The time after his arrival was also devoted to intensive study of the Spanish language. Having dealt with scouting during his school years, he worked as a chaplain and lecturer at camps for the Polish scouting movement.

In 1971, Herkulan was transferred to Rosario, where, in addition to his priestly work, he taught children (from Polish and mixed families) the Polish language. He became socially active in the Frederick Chopin Society and the “Dom Polski” Society in Rosario. Already in Rosario, he became engaged in historical and journalistic work, writing numerous articles about Polish pastoral care in Argentina. By 1978, he had published 90 articles on this topic, as well as on contemporary issues. His works appeared in periodicals such as *Miesięcznik Franciszkański*, *Głos Polski*, and *Bóg i Ojczyzna*.

The next pastoral location in Father Herkulan’s life was Saladillo, where he also served pastoral care to Argentinians. In 1980, he returned to Martin Coronado. In 1983, he became the superior of the local monastery. During this time, he also served in San José and Llavallol. In San José, with the help of the faithful and civil authorities, he built a new church dedicated to St. Maximilian Kolbe. He continuously prepared historical and journalistic works.

In January 1994, Herkulan Wróbel passed the master’s exam at the Catholic University of Lublin. A colleague from his student days, Father Professor Józef Swatek, also encouraged him to write a doctoral dissertation. After returning to Argentina, the historian began preparing his thesis, constantly conducting research in Polish and Argentine archives. On March 1, 1999, at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology, Herkulan Wróbel defended his doctoral thesis titled “The History of Polish Pastoral Care in Argentina from 1897 to 1997,” earning a doctorate in theology with a specialization in the history of the Church.

Earlier, in 1996, Wróbel received a nomination to the important and responsible position of rector of the Polish Catholic Mission in Argentina, organizing numerous church and Polish community events. In 2001, he was again appointed rector of the PMK (a position he held until 2006).

Throughout his life, the Franciscan published over 300 works (including several books) of popular-scientific, academic, and journalistic nature on the history of Polish

settlement in Argentina and the local Polish pastoral care. He also gathered new materials on these topics, which became the basis for establishing an archive in Martin Coronado. The knowledge he gained was presented at numerous conferences and scientific symposia in Poland and abroad. He collaborated with Polish scientific societies and was a member of Argentine scientific institutions, including the Junta de Historia Eclesiastica Argentina and the Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos.

For his contributions to pastoral and social work, he was awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta (1997) and the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta (2002).

He passed away on December 27, 2023, and the funeral ceremonies took place on December 30 in Martin Coronado.

*Requiescat in pace.*