

Reports, forum

The Person and the Challenges
Volume 14 (2024) Number 1, p. 315–319
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.14119>

Kazimierz Panuś

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9604-2920>

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland

One Hundred Years of the Polish Theological Society

The Polish Theological Society is one of the oldest scientific societies operating in Poland. It was established by professors of the Faculty of Theology of the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv on February 23, 1924. The patron of the Society is the saint and professor, Jan Kanty. The first president was Fr. Prof. Kazimierz Wais (1865–1934) who was a prominent representative of the Lviv University community. The first general secretary of the Society was Fr. Dr. Aleksy Klawek (1890–1969). After the organization had been approved by the Polish Episcopate, regional chapters of the society were established throughout the country, namely in Poznań, Tarnów and Przemyśl in 1924, Kielce in 1925, Lublin and Warsaw in 1926, Vilnius, Pelplin and Płock in 1927, Włocławek 1928, Kraków, Częstochowa, Kielce, Łuck and Sandomierz between 1931 and 1932, and Łódź and Pinsk after 1933.

The main aim of the Society was to revive the scientific movement that had died out during the partitions, to nurture the development of theological sciences in Poland, and to develop an interest in theological disciplines among the clergy. To achieve this aim, members of the Society gave cyclical lectures and published works, and a library also emerged. In addition, the professors of the theological faculties of the following universities established a strong cooperation: the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv, the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius, the University of Warsaw and the newly- established Catholic University of Lublin.

The scientific journal of the Polish Theological Society was the quarterly *Theology Review*; in 1931, it was renamed *Collectanea Theologica*. It published dissertations in English, French, German and Italian, and foreign-language summaries were added to the Polish articles. The editor-in-chief of the quarterly at that time was Fr. Teofil Długosz. An information bulletin, *Theology Movement*, was added to each issue of *Theology Review* and later *Collectanea Theologica*. *Theology Movement* contained information on the state of theology at that time, and by 1939, twenty volumes of the periodical had been published. The publication of the series, *Our Theological Thought*, also began; this was to contain materials from the congresses of the Polish Theological Society. Two volumes were published in Lviv in 1930 and in Warsaw in 1935. In 1935, the Society organized a scientific expedition to the Holy Land for fifty four of its members. From 1927 until the outbreak of World War II, the presidents of the Polish Theological Society were the professors Fr. Kazimierz Wais and Fr. Szczepan Szydelski. The office of general secretary was held by Fr. Alexis Klawek.

The Polish Theological Society played an important role, as it organized the nationwide scientific congresses of Polish theologians. The first of these congresses took place in Lviv on April 11 and 12, 1928, under the honorary patronage of the Metropolitan Archbishop of Lviv of the Latin rite Bolesław Twardowski. Andrzej Szeptycki, the Archbishop of Lviv of the Greek Catholic rite, and Józef Teodorowicz, of the Armenian rite, also participated in the congress, which also hosted around seventy priests from all over Poland. The inaugural lecture on *Augustinism and Thomism in Christian Thought* was delivered by Fr. Prof. Konstanty Michalski (1879–1947), who was Rector of the Jagiellonian University. Further sessions were held in five areas: philosophical, dogmatic, biblical, historical and liturgical. On the second day of the conference, an introductory lecture, entitled *The Task of Theology in Poland*, was delivered by Fr. Prof. Henryk Likowski (1876–1932), a historian from the University of Warsaw. The congress decided to publish a Polish Catholic encyclopedia covering all theological sciences, to conduct a wide exchange of books and teaching aids between universities, and to inform foreign theological centres about the works of Polish theologians.

In the interwar period, the main board of the Polish Theological Society organized another three such meetings of its members: April 11–12, 1928 in Lviv, August 18–20, 1933 in Warsaw and August 31–September 1, 1938 in Kraków (the latter jointly with the Association of Theological Institutes in Poland). The post-war congress of the Polish Theological Society coincided with the 550th anniversary of the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Theology and the

25th -anniversary of the Polish Theological Society also played an important role. It took place in Krakow from 6 to 8 April, 1948. The Seventh Congress of Polish Theologians, which took place on September 12–15, 2004 in Lublin, was also strongly connected to these congresses. It was entitled: *The Church in Public Life. Polish and European Theology Towards New Challenges*.

During the terrible years of the war, 1939–1945, many members of the Polish Theological Society died. After the war, during the time of the Polish People's Republic (1945–1989), the Church suffered further persecution which also affected the Polish Theological Society. In 1946, the general secretary, Fr. Aleksy Klawek, and the president of the Krakow branch, Fr. Prof. Władysław Wicher (1888–1969), organized a nationwide convention of the Polish Theological Society in Lublin, during which a merger with the Association of Polish Theological Institutions took place. This is how the organization was established and it adopted the name of the Society of Polish Theologians named after St. Jan Kanty. The organization was based in Warsaw. Fr. Ignacy Grabowski, professor at the University of Warsaw, and his deputy, Fr. Alexy Klawek, were elected Chairmen of the Board. Despite many efforts, the Society of Polish Theologians was not approved by the state authorities, with only Krakow receiving recognition. On November 12, 1946, it was registered as the Polish Theological Society in Krakow and so began the Krakow period in the history of the Society.

In the second half of the 20th century, the presidents of the Polish Theological Society were professors: Władysław Wicher (1946–1956), Eugeniusz Florkowski (1956–1957), Kazimierz Klósak (1957–1958), Hieronim Wyczawski (1959–1960), Władysław Smereka (1960–1960 1962 and 1966–1973), Stanisław Grzybek (1962–1966), Bolesław Przybyszewski (1973–1978), Jerzy Chmiel (1978–1987), Kazimierz Hoła (1987–1988), Jan Wal (1988–1990, 1991–1996) and Tomasz Jelonek (1990–1991). Since 1996, Fr. Prof. Kazimierz Panuś has held this post. On February 28, 2023, he was re-elected president for a further three-year term (2023–2026).

The following people became well known for their active scientific activity in the Polish Theological Society at that time: Fr. Card. Karol Wojtyła, who in 1974 (in line with the pre-war tradition), was awarded the title of honorary member. Others who distinguished themselves were Fr. Ignacy Różycki, Andrzej Bober SJ, Kazimierz Drzymała SJ, Cyprian Jan Wichrowicz OP, Fr. Tadeusz Wojciechowski, Fr. Jan Kowalski and Fr. Bolesław Przybyszewski. A source of pride is the fact that the Polish Theological Society published two important books about the future Pope: *Person and Deed* (Kraków 1969) and *At the*

Foundation of Renewal. A Study on the Implementation of Vatican II (Kraków 1972). These teachings took place mainly at monthly meetings of members and at meetings of specialist sections, which were attended on equal terms by ordinary, supporting and honorary members of the Society.

Publishing activities have not been forgotten either. In 1949, the magazine *Collectanea Theologica* resumed publication. After the liquidation of the Faculty of Theology at the Jagiellonian University in 1954, the periodical was taken over by Warsaw. As a result, in Krakow in 1948, Fr. Aleksy Klawek founded the bimonthly *Biblical and Liturgical Movement* and ran it with great commitment until 1954. This journal, now published as a quarterly, is the official journal of the Polish Theological Society. It also publishes the President's annual reports on the Society's activities. Between 1969–1993, the Polish Theological Society also published the annual *Analecta Cracoviensia*, which in 1993, was transferred to the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow.

After the socio-political changes in Poland in 1989, work started on changing the statute of the Polish Theological Society from the previous one of 1946, which had been imposed by the communist authorities and had significantly limited the activities of the Society. Finally, on April 7, 2004, the chairman of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Józef Michalik, issued a decree stating that, in accordance with the applicable Code of Canon Law, the Polish Theological Society in Krakow was now a public association of the faithful, that is, a legal Church entity. The current statute of the Society, which was approved by the Polish Bishops' Conference on May 1, 2004, was adapted to this canonical situation. Furthermore, the Society was granted legal status in the Republic of Poland by the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration. The new statute extends the activities of the Society throughout the country and recognizes secular persons as full members. Before this, they could only participate in the work of the Society as supporting members. The authorities of the Society are elected by the General Meeting for a period of three years. Currently, the Polish Theological Society uses the amended statute which was approved by the Polish Bishops' Conference on March 12, 2019 and, as of June 30, 2023, has 956 members. Within its framework, there are 16 specialist sections in Krakow and 17 branches throughout Poland: in Katowice, Przemyśl, Częstochowa, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Tarnów, Tuchów, Rzeszów, Kielce, Sandomierz, Bielsko-Biała, Radom, Sosnowiec, Szczecin, Toruń, Włocławek, Pelplin and Elbląg.

In carrying out its statutory objectives, the Polish Theological Society has conducted several research programs. The first of them was to proliferate the

knowledge of Polish saints and blessed. The program entitled “*Felix Saeculum Cracoviae*” – *Krakow’s Saints of the 15th Century*, showed that in the history of Poland, there was a time called *The Blessed Century (felix saeculum)*. This referred to Krakow and the six saintly men living at that time between 1390 and 1490. They were: Jan Kanty, Szymon from Lipnica, Stanisław from Kazimierz, Izajasz Boner, Michał Giedroyc and Świętosław the Silent. The continuation of this program was the presentation of the saints and blessed associated with Krakow at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Brother Albert and Sister Bernardyna Jabłońska, mother Angela Truszkowska, Aniela Salawa and Sister Faustyna Kowalska were active in the town near Wawel at that time, and have since been beatified. The subsequent programs concerned the issues of the holiness of the laity, sacral art, forgiveness and reconciliation, and *Via Pulchritudinis* – biblical themes in Polish literature and culture. In recent years, research issues have focused on the topic: *Christians of Tomorrow. Hopes and fears*. This is closely related to the civilizational and cultural changes currently taking place in Europe, the war in Ukraine and the crisis in the Church. The fruits of these programs are presented in scientific conferences and publications published by the UNUM Publishing House of the Polish Theological Society. This itself is included in the list of publishing houses of the Ministry of Education and Science, as publishing reviewed scientific monographs both printed and online, through open access via the Institutional Repository of the Polish Theological Society. The UNUM Publishing House, run for many years by director Sebastian Wojnowski, publishes among others, *Sermons in Polish culture. Editions of Thematic Collections*, one of the most important series in the Polish humanities of the 21st century, financed by the National Program for the Development of Humanities. It is also worth emphasizing that the Polish Theological Society in Krakow was one of the main initiators of establishing the Committee of Theological Sciences at the Polish Academy of Sciences in December 2002.

As we can see, it is clear that the Polish Theological Society, the heir to the great traditions of several generations of scholars, undertakes new initiatives and tries to serve the Eternal Truth and pass this on to people today.