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BONIFACY MIĄZEK, *ZAPISKI AUTOBIOGRAFICZNE*, OPRAC. PIOTR OBRĄCZKA, WYDAWNICTWO GENS, KIELCE 2021, SS. 197

BONIFACY MIĄZEK, *AUTOBIOGRAPHIC NOTES*, ELABORATED BY PIOTR OBRĄCZKA, GENS PUBLISHING HOUSE, KIELCE 2021, PP. 197

Over four years have passed since May 24, 2018, when the author of this review encountered Fr. Professor Bonifacy Miązek. He had not anticipated his demise just a few months afterward. With even greater interest, he took advantage of the opportunity to read the autobiography compiled from interviews with Fr. B. Miązek.

The study *Autobiographical Notes* consists of two parts. The first contains the *Introduction* (pp. 7–10) and the presentation of the person and work of Fr. B. Miązek, entitled *Father Professor Bonifacy Miązek* (pp. 11–38). The second one entitled *The autobiographical notes* contains eight chronologically ordered chapters: *About childhood* (pp. 41–71); *High school years* (pp. 72–99); *Sandomierz studies* (pp. 100–116); *In exile* (pp. 117–133); *First Visit to Poland* (1984) (pp. 134–135); *Return to Poland* (2008) (pp. 136–145); *Return to Austria* (2012) (pp. 146–152); *On poetry and poets* (pp. 153–187). The whole was closed with a list of 13 interviews entitled *Bibliography*. Interviews with Bonifacy Miązek (pp. 188–191) and *Index of Names* (pp. 192–197).

Although Fr. B. Miązek, persuaded by his friends, decided to write an autobiography, he did not complete this project. This was done on his behalf by Piotr Obrączka (1941–), a retired professor at the University of Opole, using interviews conducted with Fr. B. Miązek. The repetitive themes were a problem. The recurring themes in them proved to be a challenge.

It was also necessary to linguistically standardize them, yet in a way that preserved the original flavor of Fr. B. Miązek's expressions.

Fr. Bonifacy Miązek was born on March 27, 1935 in Kolonia Szczerbacka in a poor peasant family. She recalls: “My parents were poor. The soil in my homeland was never fertile, only potatoes and rye were successful. To make ends meet, the villagers were forced to work additionally in nearby towns, such as Końskie, Skarżysko, or even in Radom. My father worked in Stara Góra, near Stąporków, in an iron ore mine” (p. 100). Fr. B. Miązek helped on the farm from early childhood: “As I remember, we almost always had two cows and a heifer, two or three pigs (fortunately, these were kept in the pigsty), some hens, a dog, a cat, the livestock was managed by my mother. I had to herd cows. Before a peasant child learns to mow a meadow or sow rye, he starts his social career in a barn” (p. 65).

It is noteworthy that, reflecting on the challenging years of his childhood and youth, Fr. B. Miązek is not lamenting. Despite the dramatic war and post-war events, he accepted all hardships with „peasant” patience. He emphasizes the experience of happiness in the form of good teachers he met in primary and secondary school, as well as professors in the seminary in Sandomierz, including Fr. Wincenty Granat, whom he calls „one of the most outstanding Polish dogmatists” (p. 105).

That doesn't mean he didn't have problems. He recalls four years of education at the State Pedagogical High School in Końskie, where „secular” teachers were trained, which he assesses as: „Complicated, soulless and even hostile for people with dull hearing to the Moscow chimes. On the other hand, it was for many (...) a true “school of life”, a source of youthful enthusiasm, a foundation of well-understood solidarity and friendship” (p. 72).

There are two moments in the autobiography when Fr. B. Miązek complains about life's hardships. First, he refers to the unstable everyday life of the vicar: “I was ordained a priest in 1959. The first vicarage was in Zakrzewo near Radom. (...) And then again difficult years in the first vicariates, frequent transfers from place to place. Difficult to get acquainted with the sociological topography of the new workplace. Here I have to add problems with the state administration, with the whole communist hammer hanging over a man, which could strike at any moment” (pp. 115–116).

Definitely more difficult experiences were related to the beginning of pastoral work in Vienna, where he fled in 1965, fearing that he would be arrested, because he made contact with the Parisian “Kultura”. He took advantage of a trip for priests to Rome, organized in mid-October 1965 by PAX circles, where the Second Vatican Council was in progress.

On the advice of Fr. Walenty Wójcik (1914–1990), auxiliary bishop of Sandomierz, asked for asylum in Vienna. After spending the night in one of the Viennese boarding houses, he left and asked the parish priest for help. He mentions, now sounding exotic, that they spoke in Latin. He was accommodated in the retirement priests' house at 38 Ungargasse, where he stayed until December, learning German. He became a vicar in a parish located in the 20th district, and then served as a chaplain at the Steinhof Psychiatric and Lung Hospital in Vienna. Later, he helped pastorally in the church in the 15th district on Reindorfsgasse, to “stay” for a longer time in the 16th district in the Neulerchenfeld parish.

The theme of chaplaincy is interesting. In the Catholic Church in the West, unpopular pastoral tasks are willingly entrusted to immigrant clergy, which makes their fate similar to that of compatriots who perform jobs avoided by residents of the country of settlement. Fr. B. Miązek dramatically recalls: “Those were the hardest years of my life. Then I encountered the immensity of human suffering, I looked every day at people who were lonely, humiliated, forgotten by their families. Every day I touched their despair. It was then that I approached human poverty and understood the metaphysics of human suffering. And from there, for the first time in my priestly life, I left broken... Sometimes at night I was woken up several times by phone calls - I had to rush to the sick. After such nights, my eyes closed from exhaustion. Added to this was the despondency of human misery. I had contact with people suffering from schizophrenia, various psychoses and manias, alcoholics, and also – in the pulmonary ward – with tuberculosis patients. Often with young people dying of this disease. So I visited, consoled, wrote letters. However, these conditions were not conducive to studying, especially since my then superior looked very reluctantly at the fact that his chaplain spends every morning at the university” (pp. 127–128).

The aforementioned studies of Fr. B. Miązek began in 1967 at the Institute of Slavic Studies at the University of Vienna. He completed his doctorate under the supervision of professor Günther Wytrzens (1922–1991) from Orłowa in Cieszyn Silesia. The scientific scholarship turned out to be a significant facilitation. The study indicates that he received them thanks to the support of Professor Josef Hamm (1905–1986), a Slavicist with Croatian roots. In the conversation mentioned at the beginning of the review, Fr. B. Miązek referred to Adam Zieliński (1929–2010), a well-known businessman and writer in Vienna, who helped him obtain a scholarship.

The defense of the doctoral dissertation begins the academic activity of Fr. B. Miązek in Viennese Slavic studies, which lasted until his retirement in 2005. Writing about the Institute of Slavic Studies, perhaps not fully consciously, but it is emphasized that an

important element of it was and still is Polish studies. It turns out otherwise. Fr. B. Miązek points out (which was not included in the *Notes...*) that there were only 50-80 students per 1,000 students of the institute studying Polish philology . Indirectly, the lack of greater interest in Polish studies is confirmed when he states: “When (...) I started lecturing on Polish literature at the Institute of Slavic Studies at the University of Vienna, I found myself in an extremely difficult situation. Difficult because there were no synthetic studies of contemporary Polish literature in German, and I had lectures on the literature of the interwar period. (...) In this situation, I had to try my hand. I started to prepare the lectures on my own” (pp. 19–20).

Fr. B. Miązek appears as a successful man who „fully deserves the title of an authentic ambassador of Polish culture abroad” (p. 33). Author of numerous scientific studies, promoter of 14 doctoral theses and 24 master's theses, as well as a poet who in his works takes up a wide range of themes, including the difficult fate of a foreigner. The originality of his person is combined with the experience typical of an emigrant who misses his homeland and is convinced that he will return to it. Despite dissuasion from friends, Fr. B. Miązek decided to go to Poland in 2008. Although he emphasizes that it was different, it was a return marked by bittersweet feelings. The appearance of the home pages significantly differed from the images stored in memory: „In Kolonia Szczerbacka, where in 1945 there were 5 farms of the Miązek family –

today there is none. The village is also dying. Immediately after the war, it had over 120 peasant farms, now [2015 – A.R.] there are only 6 of them. The once arable fields and surrounding meadows are increasingly aggressively taken over by the forest. Old people go to the parish cemetery, young people flee to cities. Our family is also scattered around the world” (p. 54).

Fr. B. Miązek was disturbed by the polarization of Polish political life, within which there was no room for respect for the Church. Elders were also not respected, but this, as he notes, is also a problem in Vienna. Fr. B. Miązek recalls that he was well received by priests, e.g. St. Nicholas in Końskie renovated a flat for him. However, “between the lines” one can read that as a pensioner he did not receive a “reduced rate” and was more intensively involved in pastoral duties. Sam points to another source of activity: “I get up almost every day at 5 am (only Sunday is kinder to me), I go to bed around 11 am at night. I read and write. How long this treadmill will last I have no idea, but I have to do it, as in Vienna, because I am still being asked for articles and reviews. Of course, I am happy with such “demands”. Apparently my work has some value and is useful to people. And that should make you happy” (p. 145).

Problems with his legs made Fr. B. Miązek decided to return to Vienna, hoping for better health care there. He was given the opportunity to live in the convent in Breitenfurt in exchange for celebrating mass for the nuns and church services. The author of this review, during the visit of Fr. B. Miązek pointed out that the offered housing conditions were not particularly comfortable. Fr. B. Miązek complained about the local nuns with whom he could not find a common language. He died on October 17, 2018 in a Vienna hospital. In accordance with his will, he was buried in his family parish at the cemetery in Ruski Bród, near the grave of his parents and brother.

Fr. Bonifacy Miązek is a highly original figure, distinguished for intellectual life in Austria and Poland. At the same time, he is a sad figure, especially when one considers his old age, in which there was room for loneliness reinforced by the conviction that after more than four decades the Austrian land became his land, but not entirely. He recalls: “Truthfully, I must confess (...) that I know only Polish well enough to be able to freely express myself in it both in colloquial speech and in literary texts. I have never written any poems in German, although I have written texts of a scientific or popular science nature” (p. 164).