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LEON ROGALSKI, S.J.
PORTRAIT OF A POLISH
MIGRANT CHAPLAIN
AS DEPICTED
in his letters
FROM AUSTRALIA

Translated by Ewa Pałka

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INTRODUCTION

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One hundred and fifty years ago, on 20 March 1870, a 40-year-old Polish priest set foot on Australian soil in Melbourne, marking the end of the period of his dynamic life devoted to pastoral care in continental Europe and the beginning of a new period in pioneering conditions of the still impenetrable Southern Land, a period filled with hope, unpredictable challenges, and unexpected difficulties. He came to the remotest – from a central European perspective – corner of the globe not because of a mid-life crisis, nor in search of exciting adventures among exotic landscapes and animals, nor even because of the curiosity of a researcher exploring new territories on the edges of

the known world. He came to Australia perfectly aware that he would never leave, with a clearly defined purpose: to provide pastoral care to Australian migrants who spoke Polish and prayed in Polish. Fortunately, some of the letters he wrote to his religious superiors and relatives in Poland survived. This correspondence gives us a unique opportunity to glimpse the beginnings of pastoral care offered to Australian migrants through the eyes of its pioneer, initiator and executor.

Reverende i Chrysto Tater
Najbardziej mi Ojciec i M. Dobrodziej
A list ostatni oraz za przesłanie kilku wzmiankowanego
wielce Dziękuję, lecz niestety! Dla wielkiej ilości polaków
mianowicie młodych i dzieci nie wystarcza ta ilość
tek przesłanych tak że jestliby można nie tylko w darze
nawet za oznaczoną sumę praktycznych książek do
bżeństwa lub szkół parafialnych przetracił przez
kt. J. P. Weithofera ks. Supercora hexideny Wiednia
jako pośredem z Krakowa przesłano, żeby wielką wdzięczność
należąca należała sumę rozłożono - czyło do Krakowa
o lub gdzie indziej. Żałuję mi się że do tego najdalej
czyby byłby Sam wielce pożyteczny Dobrodziej Józef
Bernsdorf do którego z Wiednia pisałem i odpuszczeniem
niem, a którego serdecznie pozdrawiam i podziwiam
od takichże potaków tak starych jak młodych jak naj
przejmującej rasyłem. P. Bog wiech nam szczerze
nagradza za Jego prośbę a słabe serce.
Oraz P. Jaworskiemu i P. Autorce swojej
dziękuję, jako że innym dobrodziejom i księżom (za
serdecznie podziękowanie o takichże wielce po
żących potaków osiadać: a szczerze pozdrawiam
jest dzieło do Kaborstwa ks. Gofina z niżej
polkie przytłumione i pomnożone ^{województwa} najnowe wyda

Patrz w moje szuflady skrytości,
Ot własne jej wiersze
Gorące, najszczęsze
O wiecznej dla ciebie miłości!“

22. Grudnia 1870 r.

Maurycy hr. Dzieduszycki.

Z Missyi.

W drugim poszycie naszego pisma, mówiąc o missyach w Australii, przyrzekliśmy Czytelnikom naszym, podawać im wiadomości, jakie ztamtąd od czasu do czasu obiecano nam nadsyłać. Atoli rychlej daleko, aniżeli o tem myśleliśmy, zamieszczamy poniżej nadesłany nam łaskawie ztamtąd list. Jest on pisany przez księdza Leona Rogalskiego, zostającego w Australii dla duchownej obsługi biednych polskich emigrantów, pisany do Jego brata Szanownego księdza Proboszcza z Krasna (Althülte) na Bukowinie. Sądzymy, że czytelnicy Przeglądu z przyjemnością go odczytają, raz, że pochodzi od misyonarza Polaka w tak dalekich zostającego krajach; powtóre, że o polskich zamieszkałych tam rodzinach wieść niesie; wreszcie, że autor listu wielu zapewnie pomiędzy naszymi czytelnikami liczy swoich dobrych znajomych i kolegów.

Sevenhill in South-Australia 8 listopada 1870.

Drogi Bracie!

Otóż i rok temu właśnie, jak podług rozporządzenia moich przełożonych udałem się do Wiednia, gdzie w kaplicy św. Stanisława Kostki z gorącym nabożeństwem odprawilem mszę św. polecając w niej Panu Bogu siebie, Was moi drodzy, znajomych moich i wszystkich Polaków, poczem wraz z moimi towarzyszami podróży (jeden kapłan i jeden brat T. J.) w daleką puściłem się drogę. Po przebyciu Niemiec, Belgii, po chwilowem niemal zatrzymaniu się w Londynie, przybyliśmy do portowego miasta Liwerpolu. Skutkiem jednak zmiany klimatu i wilgotnego w onczas w Anglii powietrza dostałem bólu zębów i nadzwyczajnej ciężkości w głowie, tak że zupełnie prawie chory wsiałem na okręt. Długa podróż dokuczyła mi do reszty nie mało — przez cały czas nie opuszczała mnie zwykła choroba morska, zawrót głowy i brak apetytu. Straszne burze rzucały naszym okrętem jak

CORRESPONDENCE

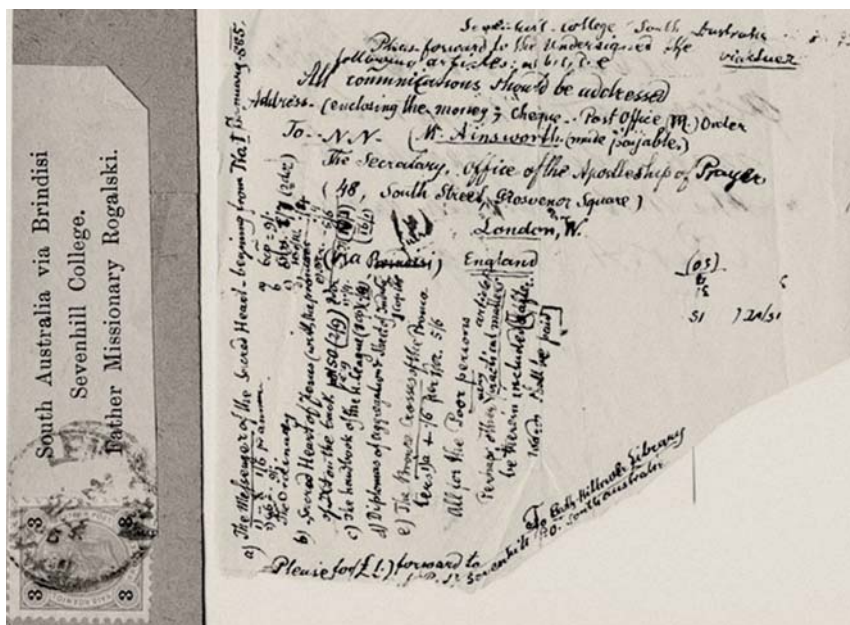
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Twenty extant letters written by Fr. Rogalski in the period between 1870 and 1896 contain many interesting details about various forms and methods of his Australian apostolate. Half of them survived only as manuscripts and are kept in the Archives of the Southern Poland Province of the Society of Jesus in Krakow. The other half consists of letters known only from their printed versions published in Jesuit Galician magazines: the “Misje Katolickie” [“Catholic Missions”], the “Przegląd Lwowski” [“Lviv Review”], and periodicals for priests: the “Wiadomości Kościelne” [“Church News”] and the “Bonus Pastor”. It is also worth noting that, for example, his letter from 12 March 1892 virtually “circled the globe”: after it

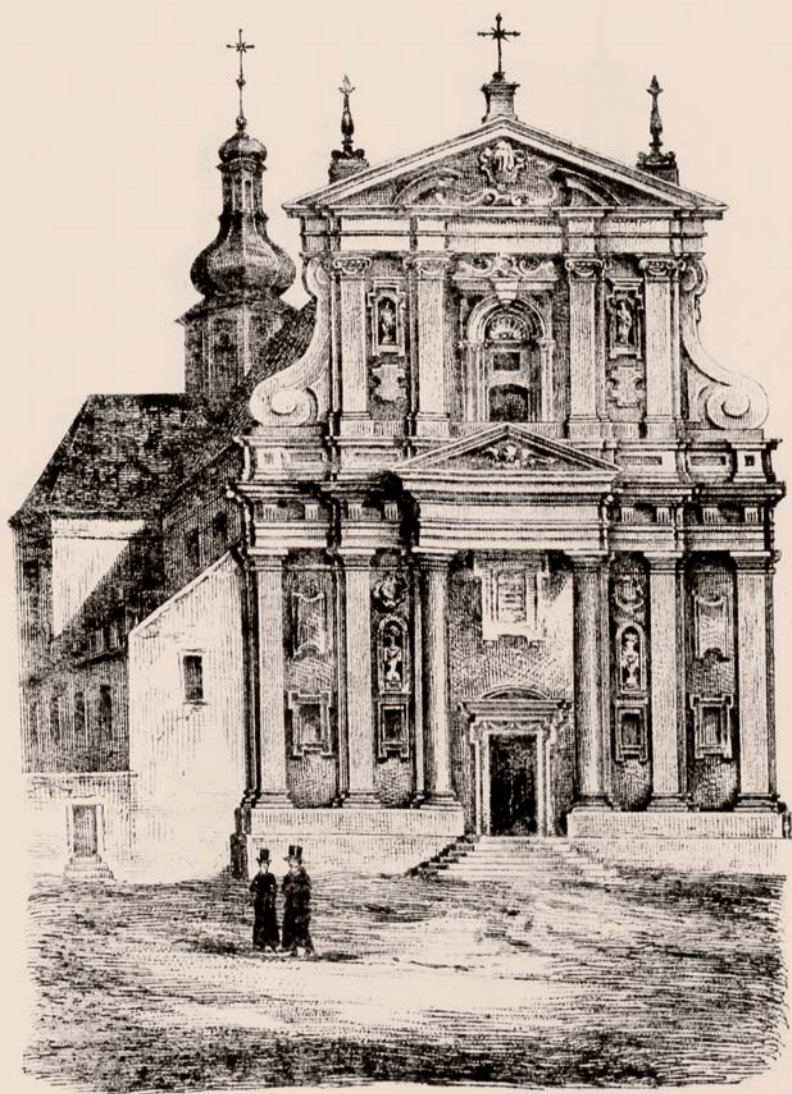
appeared in the June issue of the “Misje Katolickie” printed in Krakow, it was published in the “Wiarus” [“Veteran”] magazine printed in Winona, Minnesota, at the end of June, and then reprinted in the July issue of the “Przegląd Emigracyjny” [“Review of the Polish Emigration”] in Lviv.

The addressees of Fr. Rogalski's letters were people from his closest family, including his brother, Fr. Jan, the priests with whom he had studied and worked in the diocese of Lviv, and the Jesuits – the superiors of the Province, including the socius Fr. Wilhelm Merkel (1827–1891), Fr. Józef Hołubowicz (1835–1887), who was the editor of the “Misje

[illegible]



Katolickie”, Fr. Władysław Czencz (1850–1922), and Fr. Marcin Czermiński (1860–1931). Fr. Leon was fully aware that he did not write for one reader only, leaving it up to his addressees to decide how to spread the information included in his letters. It is worth mentioning here that – in order to commemorate the centenary of Fr. Rogalski’s death – the “Tygodnik Polski” [“Polish Weekly”] from Melbourne published a series of occasional articles containing a selection of 8 letters written by the Polish migrant chaplain, prepared for publication by the author of this book.



Kościół Seminarii
(r. kat.)

Leon Rogalski was born on 8 April 1830 into an impoverished noble family who lived in the village of Kupieńczyce in the district of Ternopil.¹ Two of the five sons of Stefan Alojzy and Katarzyna, née Rosenthal, decided to devote their lives to God: Jan, the eldest, became a diocesan priest and initially served as assistant priest in Ternopil, while Leon, the fourth son, attended a Jesuit high school and lived in its boarding house in Ternopil. When the Jesuits were exiled from the Austrian Empire in 1848,

¹ L. Grzebień, *Rogalski Leon*, in: *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 31, Kraków–Wrocław–Warszawa 1988–1989, pp. 413–415; A.P. Bieś, *Rogalski Leon*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 17, Lublin 2012, col. 215–216.

the Year of Revolutions, Leon's parents sent him to a school in Lviv. After obtaining his baccalaureate in 1851, he followed in the footsteps of his older brother and entered the seminary. For four years he studied theology at the University of Lviv and was ordained priest on 24 August 1855. He started his pastoral service as assistant priest and catechist in Skala-Podilska and then was transferred to Lviv to St. Nicholas' Church.

On 1 May 1859, after the breakout of the Second Italian War of Independence, Father Leon became a military chaplain and was sent to north-eastern Italy. For some months he took care of wounded soldiers in field hospitals and aid stations near Vicenza with great dedication and patience. Contemporary reports speak of him spending sleepless nights at the bedside of the dying. In November 1859, after Austria lost the war, he returned to his duties in Lviv.²

Greatly influenced by his wartime experiences, he gradually reached the decision to devote himself more radically to God by entering

² Cf. *O. Leon Rogalski zmarły w Sevenhill*, "Nasze Wiadomości" 1906, vol. 2, no. 1(8), pp. 100–102.

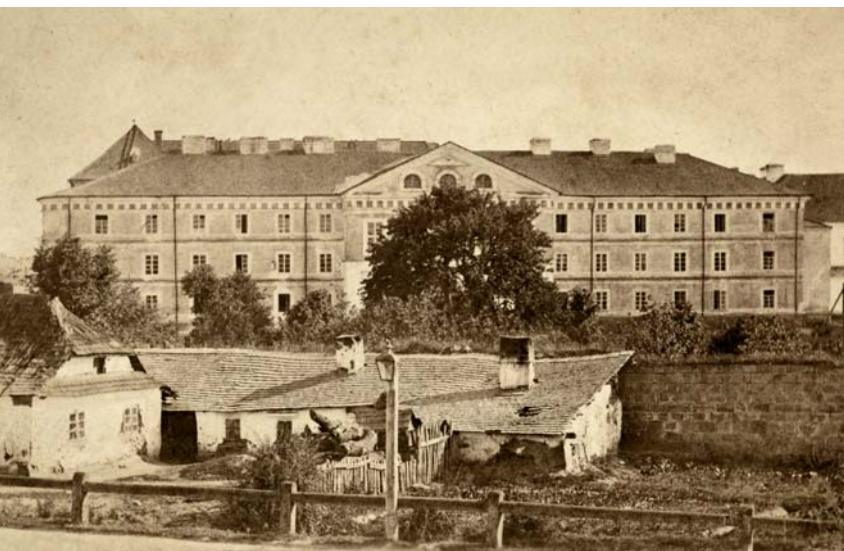
religious life. On 9 November 1861, with the permission and blessing of the Archbishop of Lviv, Leon Rogalski entered the Jesuit novitiate in Stara Wieś near Brzozów. At that time, the dean of the college and novice master was Fr. Kasper Szczepkowski (1823–1899), a highly respected priest, efficient administrator and spiritual director.³ Fr. Henryk Jackowski (1834–1905), a young diocesan priest from Pomerania, who was later to become an outstanding figure in the Galician Province, entered the novitiate at the same time as Fr. Rogalski.⁴ Both priests, who became role models for their much younger confreres, participated as novices in parish retreats called “folk missions”, which helped them perfect their preaching skills under the guidance of experienced retreat

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³ A.P. Bieś, *Szczepkowski Kasper*, in: *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 47, Warszawa–Kraków 2011, pp. 384–385.

⁴ K. Leń, *Działalność społeczna Henryka Jackowskiego SJ, rektora starowiejskiego i prowincjała galicyjskiego 1871–1887*, in: *Jezuicka ars historica*, eds. M. Inglot, S. Obirek, Kraków 2001, pp. 311–322; A. Sternicki, *Henryk Jackowski, inicjator odnowy religijnej i społecznej Kościoła w Galicji*, Kraków 2006.



masters. Before he came to Australia, Fr. Leon took part in at least six such folk missions in Galicia.

At the end of the two-year novitiate, Fr. Rogalski was sent to Ternopil, where he professed his first religious vows – obedience, poverty and chastity – and for a year expanded his theological knowledge while helping in the church as a preacher. He then left for Innsbruck, where for the next two years he studied dogmatic theology at the local university. Having returned to the province, he worked in Ternopil, Stara Wieś (where he became a parish administrator, prefect

of the church and custodian of the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy) and in Łańcut. He was a gifted preacher and related easily to people.

By this time, the Austrian provincial was seeking a pastor for Poles in Australia where in 1848 the Province had begun a mission. Initially, in response to the formal request issued in 1866 by the Austrian provincial, Fr. George Patiss (1814–1902), the Galician provincial, Fr. Kasper Szczepkowski, decided to send to Australia another folk missionary, 50-year-old Fr. Michał Śliwowski (1819–1889). But when ill health prevented him from going, Fr. Szczepkowski presented three other candidates to the Order's General, Peter Beckx (1795–1877): Fr. Stanisław Kusiacki (1834–1907), Fr. Antoni Lenz (1823–1888), and Fr. Leon Rogalski. Since Kusiacki was in poor health and Fr. Lenz, a Bohemian, did not speak Polish well, Fr. Beckx appointed Fr. Rogalski, whose merits were already well documented.⁵

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⁵ L. Grzebień, A.P. Bieś, W. Słowik, *Jezuici polscy w Australii. Południowa Australia 1870–1906. Wiktoria 1950–2012*, Kraków 2012, pp. 14–15.

The decision to send Fr. Rogalski to Australia greatly upset his parishioners in Łańcut. They were so anxious to have their popular priest stay with them that – at the beginning of September 1869 – they sent a petition to the provincial superior, writing:

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When the news reached us, humble parishioners of Łańcut, that Reverend Leon Rogalski was to be forever removed from the parish of Łańcut and sent somewhere far away, we were deeply saddened (...) we humbly ask that this same Reverend Rogalski be allowed to stay at the parish of Łańcut! For, in the present time, a priest like Father Leon Rogalski is most needed: deeply zealous for the Lord's glory and our salvation, combining patience and gentleness, and able to touch our hearts with his words.⁶

The petition did not change the General's decision, and indeed it may even have strengthened the superiors' conviction that their decision

⁶ The Archives of the Southern Poland Province of the Society of Jesus in Krakow [Archiwum Prowincji Polski Południowej Towarzystwa Jezusowego w Krakowie] (hereinafter ATJKr) 1168 II, no. 109.

was correct in entrusting responsibility for this mission to the right person.

