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Archbishop Edward Kisiel: The “Primary Catechist” of the Diocese

The late Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Białystok, Edward Kisiel, was born in Jundziłło in 1918. Through his pastoral activity, he established catechesis within the archdiocese and, consequently, was closely connected with the catechists and the catechetical milieu of the local Church. Although 25 years have passed since Archbishop Kisiel's death, his memory is still very much alive among catechists and his students and pupils. As a priest because of God's providence and the express decision of Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski and his successors to the episcopal seat in Białystok; as bishop named by Pope Paul VI; and as an archbishop appointed by John Paul II, Archbishop Edward Kisiel dedicated his entire life to fervently ensuring that he preached the Gospel as the Good News about Jesus Christ. He expressed this mission in his episcopal motto “Evangelizare misit me [Sent to preach the Gospel].” The following article discusses the history of catechesis in Białystok and provides an overview of the years that Fr. Edward Kisiel served pastorally, initially as bishop and then as the first metropolitan archbishop of Białystok. From the moment that he received his episcopal consecration and took possession of the diocese, the Church entrusted him with the task to lead, direct, and properly coordinate the provision of catechesis within his diocese; to foster and sustain sincere catechetical fervor; and to ensure that a living and fruitful faith was cultivated in the people entrusted to his care.

Key words: Edward Kisiel, mission to proclaim the Gospel, parish and school catechesis, catechetical ministry, catechists, catechized, intellectual and spiritual formation, catechist's personality, catechesis for adults, history of catechesis.

Introduction

The year 2018 is particularly important in the history of Poland because it marks the 100-year anniversary of Polish Independence. As such, it gives Poles many opportunities to consider Poland's history anew. By recalling the past and appreciating the present, we can look toward the future with hope. The year 2018 is also particularly important to the Church in Białystok and marks significant moments in its history due to two dates connected to the life of one person: the 100th anniversary of Archbishop Edward Kisiel's birth in Jundziłłowo as well as the 25th anniversary of his death in Białystok. As a priest, catechist, archdiocesan inspector of religious education, and later bishop, Archbishop Edward Kisiel was a valued figure throughout the post-war period in the history of his local Church. He is remembered among many as the one who, during the difficult period of communist rule in Poland, devoted himself to organizing religious education in schools and erecting structures and facilities for personnel so that catechesis could be provided in parishes.¹ Archbishop Kisiel dedicated his entire life to laying the foundations so that catechesis could be provided in the Archdiocese of Białystok. For this reason, he is spoken of as "*beatus vir* [a holy man]" among the archdiocesan catechetical milieu. The anniversaries of Archbishop Edward Kisiel's birth and death are ideal occasions to provide a portrait of this man, catechist, and the first metropolitan archbishop of Białystok, who, by the power of the office that he held for 18 years, exercised the highest authority in leading, directing, and properly coordinating catechesis within the archdiocese during a time that was neither simple nor easy due to the implementation of martial law in Poland in 1981.²

Responsibility for Catechesis

The Church's conciliar and post-conciliar documents on catechesis attribute the role of primary catechist in the local community to the

¹ Por. H. Konopka, *Apel Sztokholmski instrumentem walki władz Komunistycznych*, in: *W malej salce... Katechizacja na Białostocczyźnie w okresie PRL*, ed. A. Szot, Białystok 2014, pg. 36.

² See W. F. Wilczewski, *Biskup Edward Kisiel wobec przemian społeczno-politycznych na Białostocczyźnie w początku lat 80. XX wieku*, RTK, vol. XII/2, 2013, pgs. 33-43.

diocesan bishop.³ In his post-synodal apostolic adhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, John Paul II points out that the bishops’ first obligation is to teach because they are the primary catechists, and they must not “let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to [any] other care whatever in any way.”⁴ Encouraging his brothers in the episcopate to choose competent and trustworthy assistants, John Paul II emphasizes that the bishops’ “principal role will be to bring about and maintain in your Churches a real passion for catechesis, a passion embodied in a pertinent and effective organization, putting into operation the necessary personnel, means and equipment, and also financial resources.”⁵ The pope had no doubts that, “if catechesis is done well in your local Churches, everything else will be easier to do,” and that local churches will flourish “because catechesis is given in them as the Lord wishes.” In the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the Congregation for the Clergy defined the bishops’ specific tasks when speaking about their responsibility to foster catechesis. The bishop’s tasks include: ensuring “*effective priority* for an active and fruitful catechesis in his Church;” faithfully transmitting the Gospel and exercising “vigilance with regard to the authenticity of the faith;” guaranteeing the quality of catechetical texts and instruments; “bring[ing] about and maintain[ing]... a real passion for catechesis;” ensuring “*that catechists are adequately prepared for their task;*” and establishing “an articulated, coherent and global programme in the Diocese.”⁶

Archbishop Kisiel’s Legacy

Bishop Edward Kisiel fulfilled his role of principal catechist in an ideal way, and he was prepared well to do so. Before all else, from the first years of his priesthood, he fervently taught the faith, and catechesis was both his priority and favorite form of pastoral service.⁷ In 1957, he became responsible for the catechesis that was being implemented throughout the entire archdiocese by fulfilling the inspectorate of

³ See Paul VI, *Christus Dominus*, 14; John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 63; Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 222; Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory*, 123.

⁴ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 63

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Por. *General Directory for Catechesis*, 223.

⁷ See E. Młyńska, *Ksiądz Arcybiskup Edward Kisiel jako katecheta*, WKAB 21(1993) no. 1, pgs. 41-48.

religious education.⁸ In this role, he created his own catechetical model, which was taught at school for a few years and then in parishes. He had a clear vision for his work, which included ensuring that the necessary infrastructure was in place to provide children and youth with basic religious formation. He summarized his activity in the form of a report entitled “Catechesis in the Archdiocese of Białystok, 1944-1974.”⁹ His catechetical involvement *seemingly ceased* when the Holy See appointed him the bishop of the Diocese of Białystok in 1976,¹⁰ which was a time when dynamic changes were taking place due to the influence of conciliar theological thought on Polish catechesis. The prefect of the schools in Białystok as well as the inspector for religious education then took on the ordinary’s responsibility for catechesis. Bishop Kisiel’s episcopal motto “*Evangelizare misit me* [Sent to preach the Gospel],” however, conveyed that he intended to continue his mission to preach the Word of God and exemplify through his own behavior an evangelical way of life.

Bishop Kisiel simultaneously enriched the archdiocese with new forms of catechetical activities and concern for those activities that were already in place. When he completed his service as the inspector of religious education within the diocese, diocesan catechesis included preschool and school-aged children as well as youth. Thanks to Fr. Kisiel, separate classes were offered for youth who had to work and go to school, and he saw to it that parents as well as priests, religious sisters, and the laity were provided pedagogical and catechetical instruction. He also saw to it that archdiocesan and deanery catechetical conferences were organized, and he ensured that the deanery inspectors supervised catechesis within their respective deaneries. These inspectors made up a team that planned work, systematically inspected religious education programs, reported what they found during their inspections, and brought forth problems and issues that needed to be solved. In addition, a catechetical council was established and made up of members of the laity, religious, and lay catechists. The diocese adopted a catechetical curriculum that was created for primary and

⁸ See E. Młyńska, *Ksiądz Edward Kisiel – wizytator katechetyczny w Archidiecezji w Białymstoku*, in: *W małej salce... Katechizacja na Białostocczyźnie w okresie PRL*, op. cit., pgs. 105-122.

⁹ E. Kisiel, *Katechizacja w Archidiecezji w Białymstoku w latach 1944-1974*, Białystok 1974, mps, located in the Catechetical Archive in Białystok.

¹⁰ Fr. Edward Kisiel, PhD, was nominated Apostolic Administrator of Białystok on May 3, 1976 and consecrated bishop on June 27, 1976. Por. J. Bujonek, *Kronika Archidiecezji w Białymstoku*, in: *Spis kościołów i duchowieństwa Archidiecezji w Białymstoku*, Białystok 1979, pgs. 66-67.

secondary school students in 1971 and approved by the Polish Conference of Catholic Bishops. This curriculum provided students with catechetical textbooks.¹¹

Catechetics

The Word of God

The new ways in which Bishop Kisiel served as the primary catechist included writing pastoral letters and giving homilies and speeches. The bishop did not hold back from sharing his pastoral insight with the faithful entrusted to his care. He readily spoke at liturgical gatherings and occasional religious meetings. He treated all of these forms of service as a means to catechize to such a degree that all of his preaching undoubtedly had a catechetical dimension. Whenever he preached the pastoral Word, he did so in a concise, clear, and systematic way. He carefully chose what he was going to teach, he demonstrated by example how to behave, and he ended his statements by encouraging his listeners to act in accordance with known truths. The pastoral messages that he addressed to all of the members of his diocese primarily reflected his concern for catechesis, its different forms, and how it was implemented throughout the diocese. Usually, he wrote these addresses at the beginning and end of the catechetical year. He prepared messages that required pastoral insight for other events as well, such as, for example, the unsettling occurrences that were taking place in Polish education, which threatened the appropriate upbringing of the new generation.¹²

Bishop Kisiel spoke directly to children and youth during Masses celebrated for them. Usually he invited the students to the pro-cathedral for the annual Novena to Our Lady. It was also the bishop's tradition to celebrate the Holy Mass for the first communicants in the city of Białystok on Children's Day at the parish of St. Roch. When visiting parishes, he frequently met with those who were going to receive the sacrament of Confirmation, and he addressed his homilies or the final announcements to them. He also invited the students who were to take the *Matura* exam during their final year of high school to participate in a special Mass at the end of their studies, and he would gather many people together for the beginning and the end of the academic year. In this way, Bishop Edward sought occasions to embrace the younger generation to his pastoral heart and help them grow in their faith through the Word and the sacraments.

¹¹ E. Kisiel, op. cit., pgs. 10-42.

¹² Por. J. Bujonek, *Kronika Archidiecezji w Białymstoku*, op. cit., pgs. 41-85.

Catechesis within Parishes

Archbishop Edward emphasized the importance of providing systematic catechesis in parishes. In addition to ensuring that religion was taught once again in Polish schools in 1990, he also took on new challenges. Whether catechesis was offered in schools or parishes, he strove to ensure that all children and youth were catechized. Archbishop Kisiel was open to the trend of post-conciliar renewal; therefore, he promoted kerygmatic catechesis, the curriculum and textbooks for which were prepared by the community of catechists under the direction of Prof. Jan Charytański, SJ. The archbishop was also personally interested in providing students with helpful catechetical aids. In order to provide uniform and consistent catechesis to children preparing for their First Holy Communion as well as youth preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation, he put together the so-called “Small Catechism.” Because of its clear layout, content that is consistent with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and its simple and communicative language, this little work has remained one of the most valuable resources for catechists in the Archdiocese of Białystok to this day. As the shepherd of the church in Białystok, Archbishop Kisiel promoted the theme of First Communion during diocesan conferences in order to develop the appropriate curriculum according to which catechists could prepare children to receive their First Holy Communion. Every year, he conferred the sacrament of Confirmation on the children enrolled in the higher grades of primary school. He also reminded priests to begin and end the school year with Masses for the school children and youth. He also blessed the children before the holidays began.

Catechesis and Pastoral Care

Archbishop Kisiel’s style of service combined pastoral work and catechesis. In fact, everything that took place in the archdiocese was organically connected to catechesis. In addition to regular pastoral activities such as the Novena to Our Lady of Mercy, the archbishop included among his pastoral activities occasional diocesan events such as the 50th Anniversary of the Coronation of the image of Our Lady of Ostra Brama, the Coronation of the image of Our Lady of Różanostok, the 500th Anniversary of the Death of St. Kazimierz, the Coronation of the image of Our Lady in Krypno, the 600th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Diocese of Vilnius, the 400th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Archdiocesan Major Seminary, the Eucharistic

Congress, and the papal visit of John Paul II. The entire archdiocese participated in these events.¹³ Moreover, within the archdiocese, the beatification processes of now Bl. Michael Sopocko and the Bl. Mother Bolesława Lament were opened and the work of First Synod of the Archdiocese of Białystok has endured. For these reasons, in his pastoral letters, Archbishop Kisiel encouraged parents, children, youth, and catechists to organize these celebrations, spiritually prepare for them, and actively participate in them.

The Bishop’s Collaborators

When he took on the role of ordinary bishop of the Archdiocese of Białystok, Edward Kisiel continued to ensure that catechesis was carried out well within his local Church. To this end, he invited Fr. Józef Grygotowicz, a doctoral student in pastoral theology at the Catholic University of Lublin and a member of the Movement of Light and Life, to collaborate with him in the work of catechesis.¹⁴ He wanted Fr. Grygotowicz to implement his experience working with youth in the Movement of Light and Life within the diocese. In particular, the bishop liked how the Movement took advantage of vacation to provide spiritual formation to children and youth. Moreover, Fr. Józef Grygotowicz was also an experienced catechist who had studied the issue of First Communion. Therefore, Archbishop Kisiel asked him to run the Department of Catechesis and appointed him the Archdiocesan Inspector of Religious Education. From then on, the new inspector coordinated all of the work involving catechesis in the archdiocese in the name of the ordinary bishop. He was tasked with monitoring changes in religious education staff; overseeing the work of the priest, religious, and lay catechists; procuring textbooks and catechetical materials for the diocese; and organizing the catechists’ ongoing formation.¹⁵ The deanery inspectors, who were responsible for supervising the work of the catechists, collaborated with the diocesan inspector. In 1985, Elżbieta Młyńska joined their group. She was a doctoral student at the Catholic University of Lublin who Archbishop Kisiel appointed

¹³ See T. Krahel, *Arcybiskup Edward Kisiel (1916-1993)*, in: *Arcybiskup Edward Kisiel, pierwszy metropolita białostocki*, ed. T. Krahel, Białystok 1994, pgs. 35-41.

¹⁴ See E. Młyńska, *Grygotowicz Józef*, in: *Słownik katechetów polskich XX wieku*, ed. R. Czekalski, Warsaw 2002, pgs. 67-68.

¹⁵ Por. E. Młyńska (ed.), *Kapłan mądry sercem. Rozmowa z księdzem Józefem Grygotowiczem z okazji jubileuszu 50-lecia kapłaństwa*, Białystok 2010, pgs. 93-184.

as the Archdiocesan Inspector of Lay and Religious Catechists.¹⁶ The bishop himself directed the inspectors' meetings, and by listening to their reports, considering the problems about which they spoke, and drawing conclusions, the bishop acquired an ability to discern that made it possible for him to make the right decisions and realistically plan the catechetical work that needed to be carried out.

The Formation of Catechists

An issue that was very dear to Bishop Kisiel was the theological and catechetical formation of adults with the hope that they would serve as catechists in parishes. In this regard, in 1978 he established the Studium, for which he himself compiled the *ratio studiorum* and to which he invited the seminary professors to teach courses. The Studium, which was a private school connected with the Church fulfilled the requirements for forming catechists, even after the task of providing religious education returned to schools. In 1993, the Archdiocesan Studium for Higher Catechetical Studies was formed within the Archdiocesan Theological Collegium and constituted the foundation for the establishment of the academic entity known as the Theological Studium of Białystok, the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Warsaw, Joanneum. Thanks to Archbishop Kisiel's support, the Catechetical Studium in Vilnius was also established.¹⁷ With regard to priests, they were prepared to provide catechesis through their lectures and exercises during their seminary studies and thoroughly trained at catechetical days, diocesan conferences, as well as at the Diocesan Center for Conciliar Formation.

Bishop Kisiel was convinced that a catechist's personality determined the effectiveness of catechesis. Therefore, he expected that catechists primarily be witnesses to the faith and that they exude love to those around them in order to draw their students to Christ. For this reason, he blessed many of the Department of Catechesis' initiatives, which aimed to develop catechists' interior life. For example, catechists and participants in the Studium met in small groups for Bible study and monthly days of reflection, and they went on pilgrimages together and participated in retreats led by the Oasis Movement during their vacations.

¹⁶ J. Grygotowicz, *Elżbieta Młyńska*, in: *Słownik katechetyków*, op. cit., pgs. 163-167.

¹⁷ Ł. Kalisz, *20-lecie Studium Teologii w Białymstoku*, Białystok 2013, pgs. 13-18.

Archdiocesan Catechetical Days

Archbishop Kisiel nurtured and supported the catechetical training and formation of his catechists through their participation in Archdiocesan Catechetical Days, which he himself began. Usually, these meetings were held right before a new catechetical year commenced. During these gatherings, the Eucharist was celebrated and invited guests came and gave talks. All of the catechists anticipated this event because it was, before all else, an opportunity for them to meet with the shepherd of their diocese, pray with the catechetical community, encounter new ideas and thought in catechesis, share their experiences, and hear about current events, and be renewed in their desire to work. Catechists and individuals who promoted post-conciliar change were invited to give the talks on catechetical days and point out the directions in which catechesis should develop. These meetings made it possible for catechists to become aware of national trends taking place in catechetical renewal and to face new challenges. Archbishop Kisiel organized similar meetings for annual liturgical feasts. For example, he began to invite lay and religious catechists to the so-called Christmas and Easter conferences, which had formerly be open only to the clergy. These conferences were similar to the Archdiocesan Catechetical Days,¹⁸ and they were well attended.

National Conferences

Continuing his tradition of having the diocesan inspector present at national catechetical conferences organized by the Polish Bishops' Commission for Catechesis, Bishop Edward delegated Fr. Józef Grygotowicz as his successor. These conferences addressed current issues pertaining to catechesis in Poland and indicated courses of action that needed to be taken. The bishop listened carefully to the information that his delegate passed on to him and carefully implemented the Polish Bishops' Commission's recommendations. After religious education was being taught in schools once again, the nationwide conferences then began to include not only the bishop's delegate inspector, but also other delegates appointed by the archbishop such as catechists and laypeople. Bishop Edward willingly sent a team comprised of a few people to represent the diocese. These meetings between the diocesan inspectors and catechists from throughout Poland made it possible for them to establish direct contact with each other, build relationships,

¹⁸ B. Sułkowska, *Formacja katechetów w latach 1974-1993*, Master's thesis, Papal Faculty of Theology in Warsaw, 1998, MS, pgs. 78-105.

create opportunities to collaborate, and compare what they experienced in their respective dioceses and academic centers throughout Poland. As a result, catechists became aware of the nationwide issues that were being discussed at these national forums and were able to address these challenges on an ongoing basis. They also shared current affairs pertaining to catechesis and the conference proceedings with the entire group of catechists during a diocesan forum held after the national conferences. A fruit of the National Catechetical Conference, which took place in Radom in 1992, was the monthly publication of “Na drogach katechezy [On the Catechetical Path]” that came about through the initiative of catechists who had participated in the conference. This magazine was published by the Department of Catechesis and became a means for people in the archdiocese to exchange thoughts and experiences pertaining to catechesis. Archbishop Kisiel joyfully blessed this work.

Collaborating with the Laity

Bishop Kisiel readily collaborated with the laity. He treated the work that the female catechists who were trained in Vilnius and remained in Białystok after the war with much respect. Their good pedagogical and catechetical preparation as well as spiritual formation distinguished them, and the bishop greatly appreciated that they were very cultured. The bishop also valued the work of the female graduates of the Catholic Institute of Wrocław, which was founded by Fr. Józef Wojtukiewicz, since these women were prepared perfectly from both a substantive and methodological point of view.¹⁹ These women promoted a didactic trend in catechesis; they introduced the practice of observing the so-called “white week” after children received their First Holy Communion; and they developed catechesis for preschoolers and families.²⁰ In 1981, Archbishop Kisiel invited Elżbieta Młyńska to work in the Archdiocesan Catechetical Studium by giving lectures and catechetical training as well as providing formation for students and religious and lay catechists.²¹ With Bishop Edward’s consent, many laypeople collaborated with the inspector of religious education in the Department of Catechesis. Some of these individuals did office work,

¹⁹ Por. B. Rozen, *Działalność katechetyczna ks. Józefa Wojtukiewicza w latach 1937-1989*, Olsztyn 1999, pgs. 47-50.

²⁰ E. Młyńska, *Nasi długoletni katecheci*, “Na drogach katechezy” 1993, no. 3(7), pg. 4.

²¹ J. Grygotowicz, *Młyńska Elżbieta*, in: *Słownik katechetyków*, op. cit., pg. 163.

while others served in the Center for Catechetical Assistance, which had been organized by the Department of Catechesis, while still others edited the catechetical periodical.²²

Archbishop Edward valued the laity’s involvement and sacrifice in educating children and youth. Thanks to his efforts, Genowefa Giza from Dąbrowa Białostocka was honored with the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice cross in 1978 for the many years that she dedicated to teaching and serving children during their vacation retreats.²³ On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Studium, Archbishop Kisiel honored many of the lay and religious catechists by bestowing on them the distinction of the ordinary bishop.²⁴

Catechesis for Adults

The archbishop did not limit his catechetical ministry to children and youth. Rather, he perceived the need for adult catechesis due to the fact that new problems that need to be resolved in light of the Gospel arise as man develops. It was here that he saw the need for catechesis. Initially, he indicated that catechesis should take place through: “lectures, homilies, pastoral letters, books and publications, as well as Holy Scripture.”²⁵ He, however, welcomed new challenges and, in response to the Catholic University in Lille’s invitation, he sent Inspector Elżbieta Młyńska to France for a yearlong course biblical catechesis for adults in 1990. He is the only bishop in Poland to respond to such an invitation. Since then, the Archdiocese of Białystok has cooperated closely in an exchange program with France. Through this exchange program among animators who promote the Mess’AJE’s model of catechesis²⁶ and through the visit of Fr. Jacques Bernard, who created this model and gave lectures at the Archdiocesan Catechetical

²² E. Młyńska, *Wczoraj i dziś Wydziału Katechetycznego*, “Na drogach katechezy” 1996, no. 10(50), pgs. 8-9.

²³ J. Bujonek, *Kronika Archidiecezji*, op. cit., pg. 80.

²⁴ M. Młyńska, *Nasi długoletni katecheci*, op. cit., pg. 4.

²⁵ E. Kisiel, *O roli i znaczeniu katechizacji w czasach współczesnych*, WKAB 14 (1988), no. 3, pg. 44.

²⁶ E. Młyńska, *Metoda biblijnej katechezy dorosłych*, in: *Katechizacja różnymi metodami*, ed. M. Majewski, Cracow 1994, pgs. 55-66; E. Młyńska, *Biblia w katechezie dorosłych w ujęciu Jacquesa Bernarda*, in: *Studia Katechetyczne (Volume 8): Kerygma Biblia Katecheza*, ed. R. Czekalski, Warsaw 2012, pgs. 321-343; E. Młyńska, *Painting Françoise Bürtz at the confluence of modernity and sacrum*, RTK, vol. XVI/3, 2017, pgs. 237-259.

Days in 1992, adult catechesis began within the diocese. This work has continued to today and has been very spiritually fruitful. It is also one of the very few ways in which the Church's call for catechesis for adults is realized in Poland.

House for Catechesis

Within the diocese, Archbishop Kisiel established the House for Catechesis, which is located at ul. Nowa 34. In 1981, the archbishop designated this building to be used by those who work in the Department of Catechesis as well as a place where catechists can meet for formation and students of the Catechetical Studium can hear lectures. As such, the House for Catechesis has been extremely helpful in the work of catechesis. When no other options were available, didactic and formation courses took place at the House for Catechesis. Moreover, guests who visited the diocese to attend to catechetical matters, especially lecturers, were able to stay in the home. Sometimes bishops who visited the diocese to attend diocesan celebrations have stayed there. And the home has been a place where methodological formation of the students of the Studium and working catechists, especially the laity, has taken place. The students and catechists were brought together through the initiative of Fr. Józef Grygotowicz who, while coordinating the catechists' work, also served as the director of the Catechetical Studium. Both students and catechists met at the house on Ul. Nowa for Bible studies, monthly days of reflection and the Eucharist, and occasional celebrations.²⁷

His Presence within the Sheepfold

The Archbishop of Białystok liked to meet with the catechized and catechists on different occasions. Many of these meetings have been mentioned above. On the occasion of his name day or observed jubilees, the archbishop warmly welcomed the delegations of the catechized that came to wish him well. In addition, he often spent time with students during nativity plays, competitions, and school events organized at parish academies. He also made a special effort to meet with catechists. To this end, Archbishop Kisiel always led the diocesan meetings, readily came to the catechetical conferences held throughout the year, and visited retreatants. On their part, catechists visited the archbishop on feast days and his name day and wished him

²⁷ E. Młyńska, *Kapłan mądry sercem*, op. cit., pgs. 161-163, 171-182.

well. These meetings had a familial atmosphere, and during them, lay catechists and religious sisters could express their affection for their archbishop, talk, sing, present a symbolic gift, and, at the same time, hear an encouraging word. Archbishop Kisiel’s manner was one of evangelical simplicity. For example, he refused to let others buy him gifts. When he visited catechists at the meetings organized by the Oasis Movement in Bobrówka, he also insisted on simple meals and he satiated himself by eating curdled milk and potatoes.

In his encounters with catechists, the archbishop was kind, open, and respectful toward them. And, although his position as a priest and archbishop was a dignified one, he was a social man among whom others felt comfortable, well, and safe. As a pastor, he showed fatherly care to everyone.²⁸

Conclusion

Archbishop Edward Kisiel played a very special role in the history of the Church in Białystok. When considering his catechetical achievements throughout the 18 years that he served pastorally within the archdiocese, it is possible to say that he was responsible for bringing catechesis from “provisional” state to full “maturity,” and he passed on this work to his successors. Archbishop Kisiel actively lived out his episcopal motto “*Evangelizare misit me* [Sent to preach the Gospel]” by catechizing until his final days and being an example of faith, hope, and love to others. The witness of his evangelical involvement reached its peak when he offered his suffering for the holiness of priests, many of whom were catechists. His example of catechetical work has left an indelible mark on the structures, forms, and traditions that are still carried out and evident in the local Church. When this remarkable man passed away 25 years ago after much suffering and illness, the catechetical community within the archdiocese was convinced that a man of great faith, high culture, and fatherly goodness—their bishop and catechist—had departed from them. As the first metropolitan archbishop of Białystok, his remains rest in the crypt of the archcathedral of Białystok. Considering the boundless and generous way in which Archbishop Edward Kisiel devoted his entire life to the Church during difficult times, there is no doubt that this shepherd who served the people of Podlasie will one day be counted among the blessed in Heaven.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, pgs. 154-156.

KSIĄDZ ARCYBISKUP EDWARD KISIEL JAKO „PIERWSZY KATECHETA” W DIECEZJI

Catechetics

W 1918 roku w Jundziłowie przyszedł na świat Edward Kisiel, późniejszy kapłan i Arcybiskup Metropolita Białostocki. Poprzez swoją działalność duszpasterską kreował rzeczywistość katechetyczną, stąd też był mocno związany ze środowiskiem katechetów Kościoła białostockiego. Pomimo, iż mija 25 lat od Jego śmierci pozostaje On w żywej pamięci katechetów, katechetów oraz swoich uczniów i wychowanków. Ksiądz abp Edward Kisiel, jako kapłan, z woli Opatrzności Bożej, wyrażonej decyzjami abp. Romualda Jałbrzykowskiego i jego następców na stolicy biskupiej w Białymstoku, następnie jako biskup mianowany przez papieża Pawła VI i Metropolita Białostocki powołany przez Jana Pawła II, całe swoje życie poświęcił gorliwemu zatroskaniu o głoszenie Ewangelii jako Dobrej Nowiny o Jezusie Chrystusie. Wyraził to w swoim biskupim zawołaniu *Evangelizare misit me*. Niniejszy artykuł wpisuje się w nurt zagadnień związanych z historią katechezy i jest próbą panoramicznego spojrzenia na lata pasterskiej posługi biskupa, a następnie arcybiskupa Edwarda Kisiel, pierwszego Metropolity Białostockiego, któremu z chwilą święceń biskupich i objęcia diecezji Kościół powierzył zadanie prowadzenia, kierowania, właściwego koordynowania katechezy w diecezji oraz podtrzymywania w niej szczerego zapału katechetycznego oraz dbania o rozwój żywej i owocnej wiary powierzonego ludu.

Słowa kluczowe: Edward Kisiel, misja głoszenia słowa, katecheza parafialna i szkolna, duszpasterstwo katechetyczne, katecheci i katechizowani, formacja intelektualna i duchowa, osobowość katechety, katecheza dorosłych, historia katechezy.

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