

A stylized black and white graphic of a globe, showing the continents of Europe and Africa. The globe is partially obscured by the text 'STUDIA GEOHISTORICA'.

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Spis treści • Contents

Tradycje geografii historycznej • Traditions of historical geography

Stanisław Arnold

Geografia historyczna, jej zadania i metody (Wstęp)

(uwagi wstępne: Tomasz Siewierski, opracowanie: Marcin Morawiec) 7

Jan Śniadecki

O Mappie Krajowej

(uwagi wstępne: Beata Konopska, opracowanie: Michał Bąk, Beata Konopska) 20

Artykuły • Articles and theses

Tomasz Związek, Tomasz Panecki

Osadnictwo ołęderskie w badaniach nad rekonstrukcją szesnastowiecznego zalesienia
na przykładzie okolic Nowego Tomysła

The Usage of 18th c. Dutch-type Settlement in the Context of Afforestation Reconstruction

for Early Modern Times on the Example of Nowy Tomysł Vicinities 29

Kamil Nieścioruk

Z problematyki kartograficznej wizualizacji danych historycznych
na przykładzie zachodniogalicyskich cmentarzy wojennych

Cartographic Visualisation of Historical Data

on the Example of the Western Galicia War Cemeteries 63

Zbigniew Babik

W obronie kartografii. Polemika wokół lokalizacji i identyfikacji jezior luboskich

In Defense of Cartography. A Polemic over Localization and Identification of Lubosz Lakes 79

Alexey A. Frolov

Creating Large-Scale Historical Maps in Russian Historiography (20th–21st Centuries).

Methodical Approaches

Tworzenie wielkoskalowych map historycznych w rosyjskiej historiografii XX i XXI w.

Aspekty metodyczne 94

Ewelina Siemianowska

O przewłokach raz jeszcze

Once more on the Subject of Portages 115

Henryk Rutkowski

Granica mazowiecko-litewska między Wizną a Grodnem z 1358 r.

The Mazovian-Lithuanian Border between Wizna and Grodno from 1358 140

Elżbieta Kowalczyk-Heyman

Średniowieczne i wczesnonowoczesne młyny ziemi liwskiej (Młyny na Czerwonce)
Medieval and Early Modern Times Mills of the Liw Area (Mills on the River Czerwonka) 156

Agata Mirek

Female Orders and Congregations in Poland in the 19th and 20th Centuries
Zakony żeńskie na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku 176

Piotr Eberhardt

Polskie Imperium Słowiańskie według map Stanisława Wendekera z 1939 r.
i Konfederacji Narodu z 1941 r.
The Polish Slavonic Empire according to the Maps of Stanisław Wendeker of 1939
and the Confederation of the Nation of 1941 190

Atlas Fontium

Atlas Fontium
(Marek Stoń) 201

Ewa Kobylińska

Admisje notarialne w diecezji płockiej u schyłku średniowiecza
Admissions of Notaries Public in the Diocese of Płock in the Late Middle Ages 204

Recenzje i omówienia • Reviews and discussions

O rzece i wodzie w życiu codziennym człowieka średniowiecza, red. S. Moździoch, K. Chrzan,
Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, Ośrodek Badań nad Kulturą Późnego Antyku
i Wczesnego Średniowiecza, Wrocław 2015 (Spotkania Bytomskie VIII)
(Rafał Kubicki) 223

Urszula Sowina: Water, Towns and People. Polish Lands against a European Background
until the Mid-16th Century, Frankfurt am Main 2016
(Katalin Szende) 226

Archeologie a letecké laserové skenování krajiny / Archaeology and Airborne Laser Scanning
of the Landscape, ed. M. Gojda, J. John i in., Plzeň 2013
(Grzegorz Szalast) 234

Joanna Plit: Krajobrazy kulturowe Polski i ich przemiany, Instytut Geografii i Przestrzennego
Zagospodarowania im. Stanisława Leszczyckiego PAN, Warszawa 2016 (Prace Geograficzne, 253)
(Jan A. Wendt) 240

Edward Brooke-Hitching: The Phantom Atlas. The Greatest Myths, Lies and Blunders on Maps,
SIMON & Schuster, London i in. 2016
(Lucyna Szaniawska) 243

Słownik wsi śląskich w średniowieczu, vol. 1: Powiat lubiński, red. Dominik Nowakowski, authors: Dagmara Adamska, Agnieszka Latocha, Dominik Nowakowski, Aleksander Paroń, Marcin Siehankiewicz, Robert Sikorski, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, Ośrodek Badań nad Kulturą Późnego Antyku i Wczesnego Średniowiecza, Wrocław 2014
(Joachim Stephan) 249

Bożena Degórska: Transformacja krajobrazu wschodnich Kujaw w kontekście zmian użytkowania ziemi i osadnictwa (1770–1970), Instytut Geografii i Przestrzennego Zagospodarowania PAN, Warszawa 2016
(Urszula Myga-Piątek) 252

Janusz Szyszka: Formowanie i organizacja dóbr monarszych w ziemi lwowskiej od połowy XIV do początku XVI wieku, Instytut Historii im. Tadeusza Manteuffla Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Societas Vistulana, Kraków 2016 (Maiestas – Potestas – Communitas, 5)
(Bohdan Smereka) 260

Komunikaty i sprawozdania • Communiqués and reports

Interdyscyplinarne Seminarium Naukowe „Młyny wodne w dorzeczu dolnej Wisły od początku XIX do początku XXI wieku” – Toruń, 26 maja 2017 r.
(Dariusz Brykała) 275

Konferencja naukowa „Współczesne badania geograficzno-historyczne krajobrazu kulturowego” – Łódź, 22–23 czerwca 2017 r.
(Łukasz Musiaka) 277

„Kartografia wojskowa krajów Młodszej Europy XVI–XX wieku”. XXX Ogólnopolska Konferencja Historyków Kartografii – Toruń–Grudziądz, 13–15 października 2016 r.
(Jerzy Ostrowski) 282

II międzynarodowa interdyscyplinarna konferencja naukowa z cyklu „Wieś Zaginiona” pt. „Wieś miniona, lecz obecna: ślady dawnych wsi i ich badania” – Chorzów, 16–17 listopada 2016 r.
(Jarosław Suproniuk) 287

XX Międzynarodowa i Ogólnopolska Konferencja Onomastyczna „Onomastyka – Neohumanistyka – Nauki Społeczne” – Kraków, 21–23 września 2016 r.
(Michał Gochna) 295

39. Ogólnopolska Konferencja Kartograficzna „Wizualizacja kartograficzna w nauce i praktyce” – Zwierzyniec, 26–28 września 2016 r.
(Kamil Nieścioruk) 297

Tematyka historii kartografii na konferencji kartograficznej w Zwierzyncu w dniach 26–28 września 2016 r.
(Lucyna Szaniawska) 299

Spis treści

Seminarium „Historia środowiskowa. Teoria i praktyka” – Warszawa, 23 listopada 2017 r. (Michał Słomski)	304
--	-----

Pro memoria

Andrzej Tomczak (1922–2017)	307
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* * *

Instrukcja dla autorów • Guidelines for Authors	309
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Female Orders and Congregations in Poland in the 19th and 20th Centuries*

Agata Mirek

1. New Forms of Female Religious Life in the Second Half of the 19th Century

The beginnings of the new female religious movement should be seen within a strong nineteenth-century current of women's religious activation. In Polish territories, it had an additional justification in women's unique social and moral position. Poland had never been a strong order-creating centre.¹ Until the 16th century, there were no domestic, Polish order-creating initiatives, whereas until the middle of the 19th century, they were only sporadic.² Religious communities appearing in the Polish lands throughout the centuries were usually transplanted from Western Europe. The situation changed at the turn of the 1860s, when the number of active congregations rocketed.³ Thanks to new religious movements in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, altogether over 42 domestic female religious communities were founded in the Polish lands and 14 communities came from abroad. Eight congregations were established in the territories belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire,⁴ 2 congregations – in the Prussian partition zone,⁵ 4 religious

communities in Silesia,⁶ whereas 26 monastic institutes were established under the Russian rule.⁷ On the Polish initiative at that time, 6 female congregations were founded abroad and later settled in Galicia. In the same period, 8 female congregations came to the Polish territories from Western Europe. The social demand for nuns' work, particularly in hospitals, among poor children and among young people, was great, whereas the help from the occupant authorities was minimal. Thanks to the new congregations established in 1860–1905, in spite of the dissolution restrictions, the total number of nuns increased twentyfold, compared with the state in 1864.⁸

A considerable part of the nineteenth-century female religious movement was concentrated in the Austrian partition zone. Charity work was taken up by the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Albertines, the Seraphite Sisters, the Benedictine Oblates and the Servants (of the Eastern rite). Educational activity was devotedly taken up by the Felicians, the Servant Sisters of Stara Wieś and Dębica, the Dominican Sisters, the Sisters of the Heart of Jesus, as well as the congregations settled there but initiated by Poles in Rome – the Sisters

* The article is the author's abridged version of the text published in Polish in 2007 in the book: A. Mirek, *Atlas żeńskiego ruchu zakonnego na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX w.*, Lublin 2007.

¹ E. Jabłońska-Deptuła, *W dobre wiosny ludów i powstania styczniowego*, in: *Chrześcijaństwo w Polsce. Zarys przemian 966–1945*, red. J. Kłoczowski, Lublin 1980, p. 239.

² Eadem, *Zakony i zgromadzenia zakonne w Polsce w XIX i XX w.*, "Znak", 17, 1965.

³ Eadem, *W dobre*, p. 239.

⁴ Servant Sisters of Stara Wieś, Servant Sisters of Dębica, Sisters of Divine Providence, Benedictine Oblates, Albertines, Sisters of the Heart of Jesus, Sisters of St. Joseph, and Ukrainian Sisters of St. Joseph (of the Byzantine rite).

⁵ Servant Sisters of Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), Good Shepherd Sisters.

⁶ Elizabethan Sisters, Servant Sisters of Silesia, Marian Sisters, Sisters of St. Hedwig.

⁷ Felician Sisters, Capuchin Sisters, Seraphite Sisters, Sisters of Holy Angels, Nativitanki Sisters, and 21 non-habited orders: Sisters Messengers, Maid-servants, Sisters of St. Martha, Sisters of the Ill, Sisters of the Paralysed, Franciscan Sisters of the Suffering, Vestiarki Sisters, Servants of Jesus, Sisters of the Heart of Jesus, Sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus, Honoratki Sisters, Reparation Sisters, Adorers of Propitiation, Sisters of Mariae Vitae, Helpers of the Holy Souls, Daughters of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Women of the Gospel, Congregational Tertiaries, Consoling Sisters, Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

⁸ S. Wilk, *Państwowe kasaty zakonów i klasztorów*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 8: *Język – Kino*, red. A. Bednarek i in., Lublin 2000, col. 938.

of the Immaculate Conception, the Sisters of Nazareth and the Sisters of the Resurrection. Educational work was also undertaken by the congregations which arrived in Galicia from Western Europe – the Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union, the Sisters of the Sacré-Cœur, and the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. A difficult task of taking care of morally endangered girls was undertaken by the nuns from the congregation of Divine Providence.

In Silesia and the lands of the Prussian partition zone, despite the occupant's denationalising oppression, numerous Polish order-creating initiatives appeared, which were carried out by the clergy and lay people. Of particular interest was the initiative of Blessed Edmund Bojanowski, the founder of the congregation of the Servant Sisters who mainly devoted themselves to educational work and care taking. This kind of service was also taken up by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, transplanted to Silesia and the Prussian Partition, as well as the Franciscan Sisters of Orlik. Congregations referring to the Franciscan traditions appeared in Silesia, among mixed Polish-German population, where they took up charity work, particularly care of the ill. Among those communities were the Elizabethan Sisters as well as the congregations from the West, the Borromean Sisters and the Franciscan Nursing Hospital Sisters. The Sisters of Mary Immaculate and the Sisters of St. Hedwig, the congregations established in that area, operated in the environments of high moral danger. A similar profile of apostolic work was undertaken by the congregation of the Good Shepherd Sisters, newly established in Greater Poland.

In the Russian partition zone after 1863, the oppression of the orders took on unprecedented dimensions as the Tsarist authorities aimed at the Russification of all Poles and the complete eradication of Catholicism. What was an incredible

phenomenon on a global scale was the activity of Blessed Honorat Koźmiński, a Capuchin deeply engaged in the nineteenth-century movement of religious revival. He initiated 26 hidden non-habited religious congregations which followed the Franciscan rule. Honorat organised congregations for particular social and professional groups in order to answer the religious, moral and material demands of the society. Non-habited nuns took up work in rural parishes and worked in factories, which was an extremely innovative activity for religious people. They fulfilled a new model of the religious life, greatly differing from the previous one.⁹

The female religious movement in the 19th century was aimed at active social service. The programme of organic work concerning the social education of children and young people as well as the care of abandoned and disabled people was taken by small groups of nuns who lived among the local people and devotedly performed their tasks.¹⁰ The open or hidden activity of the orders in that period embraced a wide range of educational and caretaking work, including the catechisation of children, the running of nurseries and of good, although few, secondary schools, various forms of care and charity work, hospitals, poorhouses, orphanages, press and book printing. The tasks which female orders performed can be grouped into a few main currents. These were: caretaking work (25 congregations),¹¹

⁹ Cf. G. Bartoszewski, *Bł. Honorat Koźmiński jako twórca nowej formy życia zakonnego w Polsce i jej aktualność*, in: *Błogosławiony Honorat Koźmiński. Pokłosie beatyfikacji*, red. G. Bartoszewski, R. Prejs, Warszawa 1993; M. Mazurek, M. Wójcik, *Honorackie zgromadzenia bezhabitowe w latach 1874–1914 w Królestwie Polskim i Cesarstwie Rosyjskim*, in: *Materiały do historii zgromadzeń zakonnych na ziemiach polskich w XIX i początku XX wieku*, oprac. H. Dylągowa i in., Lublin 1976.

¹⁰ E. Jabłońska-Deptuła, *Szkice z dziejów formowania się polskich kongregacji żeńskich oraz ich programu społecznego w XIX w.*, "Roczniki Humanistyczne", 12 (2), 1964.

¹¹ Servant Sisters of Stara Wieś, Servant Sisters of Greater Poland, Servant Sisters of Dębica, Silesian Sisters Servants, Felician Sisters, Dominican Sisters, Sisters of Holy Angels, Nativitanki Sisters, Sisters of the Heart of Jesus, Byzantine-Ukrainian Sisters of St. Joseph, Carmelite Sisters Messengers of the Holy Spirit, Servants of Jesus, non-habited Sister Servants

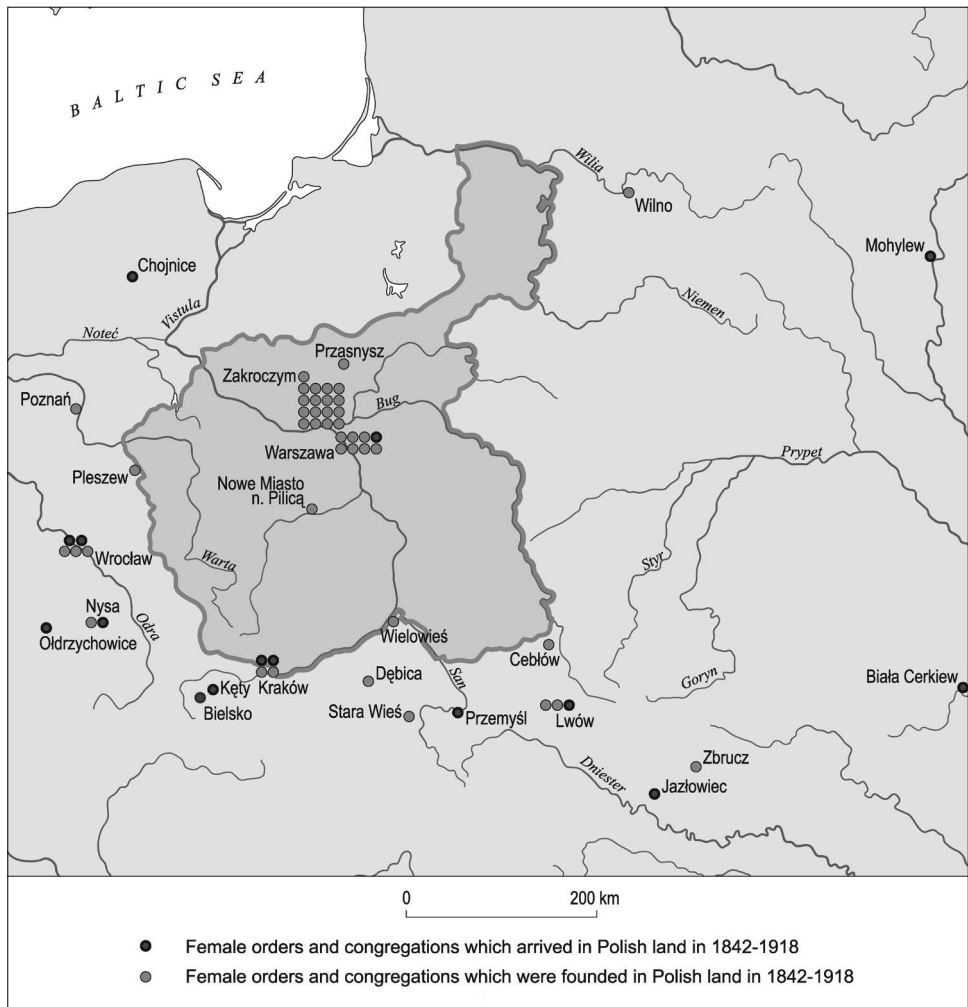


Fig. 1. Female orders and congregations which arrived in or were founded in Polish land in 1842–1918.

Source: the author's own analysis

care taking and charity (2 congregations),¹² charity (15 communities),¹³ work with girls and women in a moral danger

(6 congregations),¹⁴ and work within the Church, the liturgical and parish apostolate (3 communities).¹⁵ Contemplative orders make a separate group in this classification – in that period, 2 new communities appeared on Polish lands.¹⁶ Women's numerous order-creating initiatives were a novelty in the nineteenth-century religious movement: Bl. Kolumba Białecka

of the Heart of Jesus, Sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus, Daughters of Mary Immaculate, Consoling Sisters, Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary, Sisters of Nazareth, Sisters of the Resurrection, Sisters of the Sacré-Cœur, Sisters of Notre Dame, Franciscan Sisters of Orlik, Daughters of Divine Charity, Oblate Sisters.

¹² Women of the Gospel, Congregational Tertiaries.

¹³ Elizabethan Sisters, Benedictine Oblates, Seraphite Sisters, Byzantine-Ukrainian Sisters of St. Joseph, Albertines, Maidservants, Sisters of St. Martha, Sisters of the Ill, Sisters of the Paralysed, Franciscan Sisters of the Suffering, Helpers of the Holy Souls, Daughters of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, Borromean Sisters, Franciscan Nursing Hospital Sisters, Byzantine-Ukrainian Servants.

¹⁴ Sisters of Mary Immaculate, Sisters of Divine Providence, Sisters of St. Hedwig, Good Shepherd Sisters, Daughters of Our Lady Mother of Mercy, Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

¹⁵ Vestiarki Sisters, Sisters of Mariae Vitae, Sisters of the Reparation.

¹⁶ Capuchin Sisters, Adorers of Propitiation.

(Dominican Sisters), Bl. Bernardyna Jabłońska (Albertines), Bl. Maria Karłowska (*Good Shepherd Sisters*), Bl. Angela Truskowska (Felicians), Bl. Marcelina Darowska (Sisters of the Immaculate Conception), Bl. Franciszka Siedliska (Sisters of Nazareth), Bl. Bolesława Lament (*Missionaries of the Holy Family*).

2. Orders and Congregations in the Second Republic

A considerable progress in the development of the female religious life on Polish lands was brought by the interwar period (1918–1939). After the regaining of independence in 1918, the monastic movement in Poland drew from the heritage of various initiatives undertaken in three partition zones where congregations had been founded independently but with similar aims.¹⁷ In spite of numerous efforts to establish religious houses in the whole country, there were considerable disproportions between particular dioceses, with a particular advantage of post-Galician dioceses and those of Upper Silesia. Southern and western dioceses traditionally also remained the main recruitment base for orders.¹⁸ Altogether in the period of 1918–1939 on Polish lands there were 26 new religious congregations, 17 of Polish origin¹⁹ and 9 congregations from Western Europe.²⁰ The nuns' activity was mainly focused on these social needs that were not sufficiently satisfied by the state, self-government

or social institutions.²¹ The total number of female congregations in the Second Commonwealth, together with the newly founded ones, amounted to 84 with over 20,000 sisters who were located in about 2300 places. The greatest number of sisters was in the congregations founded before 1914.²²

New congregations were engaged in the apostolic work of various types. Ten communities took up educational and caretaking work as their main apostolic task. Four communities combined educational work with charity work: the Sisters of the Soul of Christ, the Little Sisters of St. Theresa and the congregation that came to Poland, the Sisters of the Holy Family. Charity work as the main apostolic task was performed by three congregations founded in Silesia: the Sisters of the Divine Heart of Jesus and the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, who came from Austria, as well as the Italian community of the Don Orione Sisters. Female religious congregations also took up new activities, e.g. the publishing activity of the Polish Sisters of Loreto, and the missionary and ecumenical apostolate, realised by the Dominican Missionaries, founded in the Second Commonwealth, and the Franciscan Missionaries who came to Poland. On the initiative of Poles staying abroad, two missionary congregations were founded, which in the interwar period settled in Poland: the Missionaries of the Holy Family and the Claverian Sisters. In that period, communities which actively participated in the parish ministry and the cooperation with priests also appeared. These were two Polish congregations: the Sisters of Bethany and of the Daughters of St. Francis, as well as two congregations of Italian origin: the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master and the Pallotine Sisters.

¹⁷ B. Kumor, *Historia Kościoła*, t. 8: *Czasy współczesne 1914–1992*, Lublin 1995, p. 109.

¹⁸ J. Kłoczowski, *Dzieje chrześcijaństwa polskiego*, t. 2, Paryż 1991, p. 133.

¹⁹ Congregations of Polish origin were: Missionary Benedictines, Servants of the Cross, Passionists, Ursuline Sisters of the Agonising Heart of Jesus, Carmelite Sisters of the Child Jesus, Sisters of Common Work, Eucharist Sisters, Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Teresian Sisters, Sisters of Bethany, Daughters of St. Francis, Sisters of Loreto, Sisters of the Divine Heart of Jesus, Dominican Missionary Sisters of Jesus, Little Sisters of St. Theresa, Sisters of the Soul of Christ.

²⁰ Among foreign congregations settled in Poland, were: Salesian Sisters, Sister Disciples of the Divine Master, Pallotine Sisters, Franciscan Missionaries, Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Don Orione Sisters, Claverian Sisters, Missionaries of the Holy Family.

²¹ J. Kłoczowski, *Dzieje*, p. 81–83.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 132–135.



Fig. 2. Female orders and congregations which arrived in or were founded in Poland in 1918–1939.

Source: the author's own analysis

The activity of the nuns in that period was mainly concentrated on the education of children and young people and on charity work. The female monastic movement then was aimed at active social service. In particular, the nuns' activity embraced a wide range of educational work, including nurseries for children, catechisation, running secondary schools at a high level, as well as dormitories and

boarding houses. Nuns ran about 40% of all kindergartens in the country (722 out of 1859 in 1937), dozens of boarding houses and schools for the youth, including 50 secondary schools and 12 teaching schools.

Female orders took up caretaking and charity work as well as the care of the disabled. Nuns also ran about 250 hospitals and about 150 special institutions. Nuns

also took up publishing, not only of books but also of ten periodicals for children and young people.²³ What was significant was the fact that nuns lived among people and somehow in front of people.²⁴ The orders organised their houses, aiming at the fulfilment of a broadly understood goal of these congregations.²⁵ What proves a high spiritual level of the initiators and founders of the female monastic life in that period is the fact that two whole sisters Urszula and Maria Teresa Ledóchowski were beatified, and currently the beatification processes of other founders are in progress, e.g. of Elżbieta Czacka (Franciscan Servants of the Cross), Józefa Hałacińska (Passionist Sisters), Zofia Tajber (Sisters of the Soul of Christ) and Janina Kierocińska (Carmelite Sisters of the Child Jesus).

At the turn of the 21st century, the most numerous congregations were the Sisters of Charity, the Servant Sisters of Stara Wieś, and the Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary. In over 20 congregations, the number of nuns did not exceed 100 members. Nuns were present in every diocese of Poland. The greatest number of nuns was found in the dioceses of Lviv, Cracow, Warsaw, Gniezno-Poznań, Silesia and Przemyśl. The smallest number of nuns worked in the dioceses of Podlasie, Łomża, and Sandomierz.²⁶

3. Monastic Life during the Second World War and the Occupation

The development of monastic communities, new vocations and apostolic activity were severely limited during the Nazi occupation. The war led to serious changes in the geography of religious houses and,

what followed, nuns' great migration. Monastic life became disorganised and dependent on the policy of the occupants in various occupant regions. Particularly in the western territories, hundreds of religious houses were closed, nuns were dispersed and the official activity was limited.²⁷ Apostolic education-related work was considerably limited. Nonetheless, nuns took up secret teaching; in order to revive and maintain the national spirit and patriotic attitudes, they celebrated national anniversaries. Wherever even a small group of nuns settled, they immediately took up work according to the urgent social demands. They made efforts to maintain the biological existence of the nation. They ran hundreds of orphanages, kindergartens, nurseries, homes for the elderly and for the terminally ill as well as hospitals and medical institutions. These places were run in the most difficult conditions, frequently without any auxiliary facilities. Moreover, nuns helped the Jewish population and displaced people.²⁸ For all orders, this was a period of martyrdom.²⁹ In the territories incorporated into the Reich at the beginning of 1941, the nuns from dissolved convents were moved to a special labour camp in Bojanów near Rawicz. Altogether, over 615 nuns from 25 congregations were interned in the camp.³⁰ Of the total number of nuns' personal losses in Poland during the Second World War, 289 nuns died.³¹ Nuns at that time gave examples of heroic acts of love for God and the neighbour. The testimony of their lives reinforced their authority and meaning in

²³ The titles of the periodicals published by female orders in 1937: "Echo z Afryki", "Murzynek", "Dziś i Jutro", "Mały Świątek", "Dzwonek św. Olafa", "Oregodniczek", "Echo Krucjaty Eucharystycznej", "Wiadomości o Straży Honorowej".

²⁴ J. Kłoczowski, *Dzieje*, p. 135.

²⁵ *Kościół i religijność Polaków 1945–1990*, red. W. Zdaniewicz, T. Zembrzowski, Warszawa 2000, p. 211.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 210.

²⁷ K. Dębowska, *Fenomen życia zakonnego żeńskiego na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, in: *140 lat służebniczek na Śląsku. Materiały z sympozjum, 9.09.2006, Leśnica Opolska*, Wrocław 2006, p. 28.

²⁸ Cf. T.A. Frącek, *Siostry Rodziny Maryi z pomocą dzieciom polskim i żydowskim w Międzyzlesiu i Aninie*, Warszawa 2006; A. Miłek, *Wkład bezhabituowanych zgromadzeń zakonnych w ratowanie Żydów w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej*, in: *Śladami Świętych*, red. A. Derdziuk, Lublin 2007, p. 649–658.

²⁹ *Kościół i religijność*, p. 211.

³⁰ J. Kłoczowski, *Dzieje*, p. 161.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 163.

the society, which was significant for the establishment of religious communities in the society of the post-war period.³²

4. Religious Life in the Polish People's Republic

Communist Poland did not spare any afflictions or persecutions to the female religious life, although no dissolution took place, unlike in other countries of people's democracy.³³ After the war ended, all congregations began to rebuild their houses and their work. Communities had a difficult way to go in that period as, due to the so-called repatriations, they lost their frequently century-old property; they were deprived of their churches, convents, orphanages, hospitals and care homes. Altogether, the losses of female orders in the Eastern Borderlands of Poland amounted to 400 convents and religious houses. Even the whole monastic provinces were moved. The Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary were made to leave 108 houses out of 160 monastic institutions they possessed. Due to the shift of the eastern border, the Servant Sisters of Stara Wieś lost 120 religious houses.³⁴ At the appeal of the bishops, nuns started work in the Regained Territories and in the areas formerly belonging to the Reich, and there they built their religious life anew.³⁵

When the concordat was broken by the Communist authorities in Poland, Roman Catholic monastic orders and congregations lost the legal basis for their activity. The authorities' attitude to orders was not defined by legal acts but by the assumptions of the Marxist philosophy. In the first years after the war, monastic communities, with the approval from the authorities, reactivated the liquidated

institutions and established new ones.³⁶ Nuns' engagement in hospitals as well as their work in educational and caretaking institutions was beneficial for the authorities since they themselves could not meet the social demands in this field.

The state authorities made use of the legal loophole which was created after the breaking of the concordat and the policy of *fait accompli* was carried out.³⁷ The decree of 5 August 1949 on the change of the provisions of the act on associations questioned the legal basis of the existence of monastic orders and congregations and religious associations.³⁸ Under the threat of the dissolution and ban on activity, the monastic superiors were ordered to submit requests to have their legal status regulated.³⁹ The decree allowed the state authorities to thoroughly inspect the internal life of monastic communities both in the personal and property spheres. The new Communist state law became in fact one of the main instruments in the process of blackmailing the orders. The fight against nuns was carried out by means of various methods. Its aim was to limit the nuns' possibilities of work and thus to decrease their influence on society. The authorities saw the greatest danger from nuns in their contacts with children and young people. That is why, first of all, in the first phase of the fight against nuns, schools run by nuns were closed, educational and caretaking institutions and hospitals were nationalised, nuns were even forbidden to teach religion at schools.⁴⁰ A unique method of fighting against nuns was used in the voivodeships of Wrocław, Opole, and Katowice, where the so called

³² *Ibidem*, p. 174.

³³ Cf. E. Kaczmarek, *Dlaczego przeszkadzały? Polityka władz partyjnych i rządowych wobec żeńskich zgromadzeń zakonnych w Polsce w latach 1945–1956*, Warszawa 2007.

³⁴ T. Fraćek, *Rodzina Maryji*, in: *Zakony św. Franciszka w Polsce w latach 1772–1970*, red. J.R. Bar, Warszawa 1978, p. 69.

³⁵ B. Kumor, *Historia*, p. 505.

³⁶ A. Mirek, *Ustawa o przejęciu dóbr „martwej ręki” – zamach na życie zakonne w Polsce?*, „Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne”, 36 (1), 2003, p. 168–79.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 168–179.

³⁸ „Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej”, 45 (335), 1949.

³⁹ Polish Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw, Office for Denominations, sign. 21/208, Department IV female orders. Registration of orders.

⁴⁰ Cf. B. Gromada, *Szkoły siostr nazaretanek w okresie Polski Ludowej*, Lublin 2000.



Fig. 3. Female orders and congregations which arrived in or were founded in Poland in 1918–1939.

Source: the author's own analysis

X-2 action was carried out as a result of which 8 labour camps were created for nuns in 1954–1956.⁴¹ The Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, in one of his pastoral letters defined the decision of the state authorities as “the hurricane of lawlessness” which went across Poland. The regime activities resulted in the deep changes in the life of monastic congregations. This was a dramatic moment as the majority of orders were suddenly deprived

of the possibility to fulfil their charismas. Monastic institutions faced a threat of losing their independence due to the specificity of their activities. When losing their apostolic work, nuns in the whole country massively went to work in parishes as religion teachers, organists, sacristans or guardians for the ill. They also took up household jobs in the curias, houses of bishops and retired priests, in seminaries, and in monasteries.⁴² Nuns were allowed to work in the institutions which demanded a lot

⁴¹ The labour camps for nuns were created in cloisters in the following towns: Dębowa Łąka, Stadniki, Staniątka (2), Kobylin, Gostyń and Wieliczka, Otorowo. Cf. *Represje wobec zakonów w PRL. Obozy pracy dla zakonnicy (1954–1956)*, red. A. Mirek, Lublin 2005.

⁴² K. Dębowska, *Życie zakonne w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej dziś*, in: *Śladami świętych*.

of devotion and labour, such as nursing homes for children and young people with special needs or nursing homes for the elderly. The service for those in need in those institutions was given within the Association of Lay Catholics "Caritas," which remained controlled by the state. Taking care of the spiritual specificity was the only way for the communities to preserve their own identities. The establishment of new religious houses was completely dependent on the state authorities. All acts of lawlessness were aimed at limiting the property of the orders, on the one hand, and at minimising the influence of the nuns on society, on the other.⁴³

Until 1964, female congregations were deprived of 215 places of worship; 35 secondary schools were closed as well as 39 primary schools, 327 kindergartens, 53 boarding houses, 117 children's homes, 52 homes for the elderly, 63 hospitals; 7326 nuns became jobless; 658 non-household buildings and 155 outbuildings were taken away.⁴⁴

What integrated religious congregations was their solidary participation in experiencing great events in the life of the Church such as the Second Vatican Council during which both prayer and the so-called council deeds were undertaken; the celebration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland; the election of Cardinal Wojtyła to Pope; as well as the subsequent independence attempts in Poland in 1956, 1970, 1976 and 1980.

The hostile conditions which were created for the religious life by the state authorities resulted in the decreasing dynamics of order creation in the Polish People's Republic. From 1945 to 1989, domestic initiatives in Poland led to the establish-

ment of 6 new monastic congregations, whereas 12 congregations came from abroad. Five of them worked in the parish ministry,⁴⁵ 3 congregations took up a new type of apostolate, namely formation activity,⁴⁶ 4 monastic institutes which arrived in Poland took up educational mission as their main task,⁴⁷ 3 communities devoted themselves to the charity service,⁴⁸ 1 institute led a missionary activity "ad gentes" – the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters. Among the communities which arrived in Poland there was one contemplative community⁴⁹ and one congregation led a publishing activity.⁵⁰

5. Consecrated Life in Poland after 1989

The breakthrough year of 1989, with the act regulating the relations between the state and the Church, enabled nuns to regain the works of art confiscated in the period of the Polish People's Republic. The 1990s and the beginning of a new century is the period of the return of the institutions taken by the Communist authorities to the lawful owners and of the strengthening of the female orders' activity. The orders do not perform the same work as before since, after 50 years, the priestly and charity needs in society have changed. Contrary to the Communist period, within the existing legal order, female monastic communities return to the work in accordance with their charisms. Phenomenal for the Polish consecrated life of the turn of the century is a great engagement of the institutes in external activities. They include religion teaching at schools, support for priests in parishes,

⁴³ A. Mirek, *Ustawa*, p. 168–179; eadem, *Świadectwo trwania polskich zakonnic w systemie totalitarnym PRL, na przykładzie Zgromadzenia Córek Maryi Niepokalanej*, "Summarius Societatis Scientiarum Catholicae Universitatis Lublinensis Ioannis Pauli II", 34, 2005, p. 157–169.

⁴⁴ W. Zdaniewicz, *Zgromadzenia zakonne w Polsce*, in: *Kościół i religijność*, p. 221.

⁴⁵ Sister Disciples of the Cross, Dominican Sisters of Our Lady of the Rosary, Missionary Sisters of Christ the King, Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Knight Sisters of the Immaculata.

⁴⁶ Sisters of Entrust, Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary.

⁴⁷ Carmelite Missionary Sisters, Capuchin Sisters, Carmelite Sisters, Adorers.

⁴⁸ Daughters of St. Camillus, Missionaries of Charity, Sisters of Merciful Jesus.

⁴⁹ Carmodule Nuns.

⁵⁰ Daughters of St. Paul.

service in seminaries and hospitals. Polish nuns also run kindergartens and nursing homes, help in running retreat houses and homes for retired priests, they work in libraries and diocesan curias. In Polish society, nuns' selfless work gains recognition and the need for this work is still unsatisfied. Over 40 female institutes of consecrated life focus on education. Female secondary schools run by nuns enjoy great renown in entire Poland. The incredible activity of female congregations is worth emphasising – within three years after lower secondary schools were introduced in the Polish educational system nuns established 26 of them. In the period 2000–2004, the number of social deeds performed by female communities increased from 1000 to 1800. This forced congregations to take care of nuns' education. The number of nuns with tertiary education has increased since 1989. On average, circa 20% of nuns have higher education. Only in 2000, 239 nuns attended full-time studies whereas 1972 nuns took extramural and evening studies. 257 nuns studied in colleges while 271 nuns gained secondary education.⁵¹ Gaining education is becoming an essential factor of the general formation in female congregations as it visibly leads to the increase of a nun's prestige and social status.

Nuns are present in all dioceses of Poland but the distribution of nuns and their institutions is highly uneven. The greatest number of nuns work in the dioceses of Cracow, Warsaw, Poznań, Wrocław and Przemyśl. There are fewer nuns in the dioceses established after the Second World War, namely in the dioceses of Drohiczyn, Elbląg, Ełk, Zamość and Sosnowiec.

In the last half-century there has been a considerable development of female contemplative congregations which have never been a strong element of the Polish

Catholic tradition, so the significance of this visibly increasing current in the last period should be emphasised.

Against pessimistic predictions, the number of nuns in Poland is not decreasing and amounts to over 20,000. Their provenance is changing. The number of nuns in the congregations existing in Poland for years is decreasing but this phenomenon is balanced by the vocations to a few dozens of new institutes which have come to Poland in recent years. A great number of vocations is typical of Poland, which is an attractive country for the new institutes of the consecrated life. That is why they establish their institutions in Poland, counting on new members. In the last years, over 50 new institutes of consecrated life opened their houses in Poland, e.g. such a world-known congregation as Mother Teresa of Calcutta's Missionaries of Charity. New native institutes also appear, e.g. the Sisters of Entrust or the Sisters of St. Queen Hedwig of Wawel. The analysis of a number of members in particular institutes in recent years shows a decreasing tendency although this is not a rapid process. It is worth mentioning that the decreasing tendency does not apply to contemplative orders, e.g. the number of the Discalced Carmelites increased in recent years from 406 to 501 nuns.

In the period 1989–1996, 31 religious congregations came to Poland. Ten of them started educational activity,⁵² 8 took up charity,⁵³ 5 – missionary and ecumenical activity,⁵⁴ 1 – Christian formation,⁵⁵ 3 – education of morally endangered

⁵² Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, School Missionary Sisters, Piarist Sisters, Daughters of St. Francis of Florence, Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Calvarians, Sisters Teachers of St. Dorothy, Franciscan School Sisters, Ursuline Sisters of Gaudino, Scalabrinians.

⁵³ Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Hospital Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Baptistines, Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo, Sister Servants of the Visitation, Franciscan Sisters of St. Clare, Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Sisters Minor.

⁵⁴ White Sisters, Missionary Sisters of St. Anthony Mary Claret, Claretian Sisters, Bridgettines, Canossians.

⁵⁵ Carmelite Missionary Sisters.

⁵¹ The Conference of Major Superiors of Female Religious Orders in Poland Archive, Statistical data from 2000.

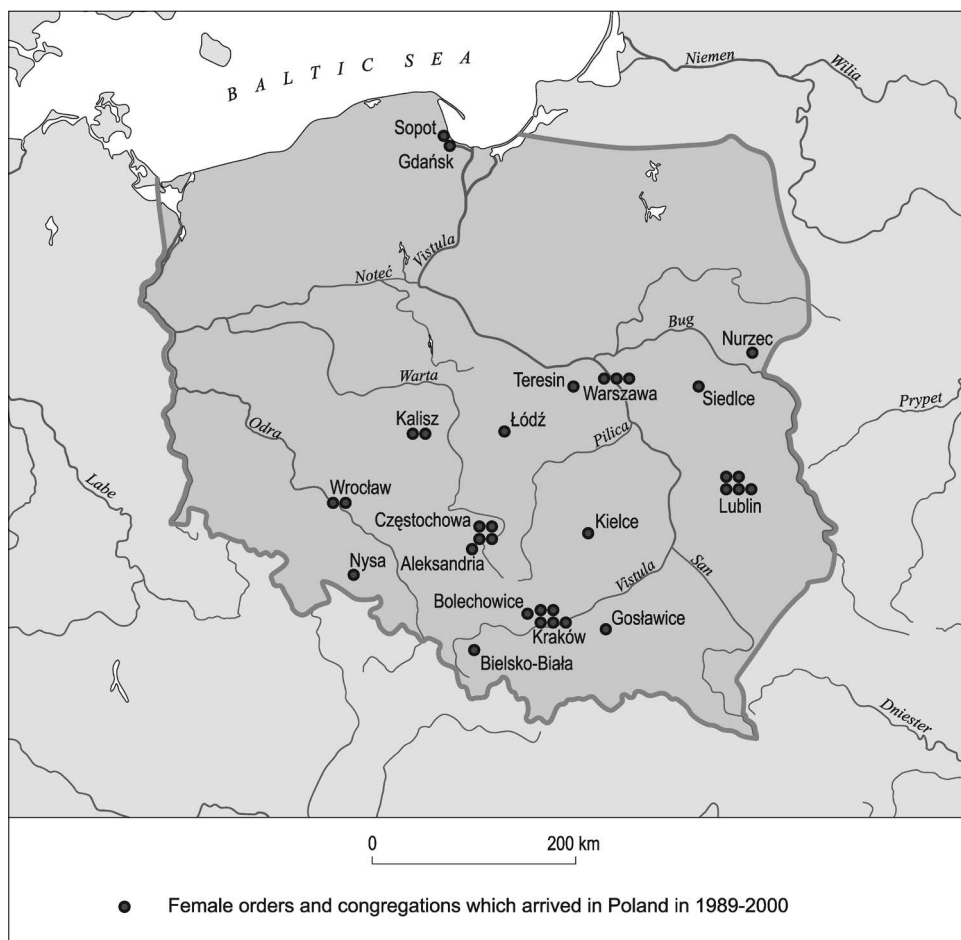


Fig. 4. Female orders and congregations which arrived in Poland in 1989–2000.
Source: the author's own analysis

girls,⁵⁶ 3 congregations were of contemplative character⁵⁷ and 1 took up parish ministry.⁵⁸

In 2000, there were 149 female institutes of consecrated life in Poland, including 14 enclosed orders. Altogether there were 266,039 Polish nuns, 1188 of them in the novitiate. The average age is 45. The most numerous orders are the Servant Sisters of Stara Wieś (1280), the Elizabethan Sis-

ters (1273), and the Sisters of Charity (1095). Out of 2570 Polish nuns working on missions and abroad, most come from the congregations of the Servant Sisters of Stara Wieś (146), the Franciscan Missionaries (122), the Sisters of Nazareth (116), the Elizabethan Sisters (105), the Sisters of the Heart of Jesus (96), and the Grey Ursulines (92). The greatest number of female congregations took up service to the neighbours as their main goal. Widely understood mercy is the main aim of almost 50 institutes. Nearly 30 communities focus on apostolic work and evangelisation as their main tasks.

⁵⁶ Passionist Sisters, Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Hearts, Capuchin Tertiary Sisters.

⁵⁷ Sisters of the Holy Redeemer, Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters, Poor Sisters of St. Claire.

⁵⁸ Daughters of Mary.

The distribution of the houses of the female religious communities in Poland is quite uneven. Most nuns work in the archdioceses of Cracow (2628), Warsaw (2317) and Poznań (1413). The smallest number of nuns work in the northern and eastern dioceses of Drohiczyn (98), Elbląg (118) and Zamość-Lubaczów (141).

Monastic life, which is an alternative form of life in the Church, enables monastic people to create a different "world" in the world, through the vows of the evangelical counsels and the testimony of life.⁵⁹ Throughout the recent centuries, political and social conditions have played a decisive role for the dynamics of the development of female religious communities on Polish lands. A servant attitude of female religious congregations has enormously contributed to the development of Polish society and the Church in Poland. The above analysis of the history of the monastic life indicates a certain rule that the civilisation crisis creates new forms of monastic and evangelical life. Some congregations disappear, others adjust to the new times which demand a new perception from monastic communities. A different mentality of the world and different values demand different forms of monastic life. Adaptation of the orders to the new conditions is moving in the right direction. The orders improve their spiritual formation, have new vocations and more actively return to the fulfilment of their goals and tasks, in the spirit of their own charismas. They also take up new tasks of greater help for people in need and the work in the East.⁶⁰

The confrontation with the modern world is easier for female orders and congregations as their perpetual aim for centuries is God. Apostolic orders and congregations which live and work in the world and are adjusted to the modern sensitivity, in order to find new forms, need a solid spirituality since without it they may lose their identity and their specific manner of presence in the world.

Conclusion

The female religious movement has been observed as dynamically developing since the late 19th century and it is characterised by great mobility. If such a need or circumstances arose, small institutions were created and liquidated to be moved to other places. Since the second half of the 19th century, the variety and versatility of the functions served in the Church and society by nuns as well as the ability to adjust to new situations and needs has been one of the most characteristic features of the activity of the female religious movement. The time of the war and the occupation may provide a great example of such attitudes and forms of action. Putting the service of religious communities into some characteristic types of activity, which may be noted is the versatility of undertaken work, results from nuns' strong relations with society and their response to the needs of local societies. In general, it might be stated that the female religious movement takes practical action in various spheres of social life, i.e. in education, upbringing, caretaking and charity. ■

⁵⁹ S.M. Schneiders, *Życie zakonne w przyszłości*, "Biuletyn Konferencji Wyższych Przełożonych Żeńskich Zgromadzeń Zakonnych", 24, 2005.

⁶⁰ W. Zdaniewicz, *Zgromadzenia*, p. 221.

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Zakony żeńskie na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku

Streszczenie

W drugiej połowie XIX w. na ziemiach polskich doszło do prawdziwej eksplozji rodzimych inicjatyw zakonotwórczych. Społeczne zapotrzebowanie na pracę siostr zakonnych – zwłaszcza w szpitalnictwie oraz służbie wśród ubogich, dzieci i młodzieży – były wielkie. Wraz z odzyskaniem przez Polskę niepodległości żeński ruch zakonny skierowany został ku aktywnej służbie społecznej. Zakonnice podejmowały szeroki zakres pracy oświatowo-wychowawczej, od ochronek dla dzieci poprzez katechizację po prezentujące wysoki poziom szkoły średnie, bursy i internaty. Dynamiczny rozwój życia zakonnego przerwała druga wojna światowa, przyczyniając się do jego dezorganizacji i spadku liczby zakonnice. Znacznie ograniczona została wówczas działalność apostołska siostr związana z oświatą, w związku z czym wspólnoty zaangażowały się w różne dziedziny pracy charytatywnej. Do głównych działań zakonnice należały wtedy: pomoc przesiedleńcom, prowadzenie kuchni dla ubogich i opieka nad sierotami. Udręk i szyskan nie oszczędziła żeńskiemu życiu zakonnemu Polska Ludowa. Choć w od-

różnieniu od innych krajów demokracji ludowej nie doszło tu do kasaty zakonów, to jednak po roku 1949 komunistyczne władze rozpoczęły systematyczną likwidację prowadzonych przez siostry placówek. W pierwszej kolejności zamykano szkoły i przedszkola oraz wszelkiego typu zakłady opiekuńczo-wychowawcze, a następnie szpitale i dzieła charytatywne. Utraciwszy własne organizacje, zakonnice zaczęły masowo działać w ramach jednostek administracyjnych Kościoła i jego instytucji, jak: parafie, kuria biskupia, dom księży emerytów itp. W III Rzeczypospolitej żeńskie wspólnoty zakonne podjęły pracę zgodnie ze swoimi charyzmatami. Po roku 1989 obserwujemy nowe zjawisko: przybywanie do Polski przedstawicielek żeńskich wspólnot z Europy Zachodniej, które obok pełnionych dzieł apostołskich mają charakter wspólnot animacji powołań i domów formacyjnych. Dla dynamiki rozwoju żeńskich zakonów na ziemiach polskich w ciągu minionych dwóch wieków najbardziej istotne znaczenie miały warunki polityczne i społeczne. ■

Słowa kluczowe: Kościół katolicki, zakony żeńskie, zakonnice

Keywords: Catholic Church, women monastic orders, nuns

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