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The Genesis and Evolution of Non-Collegiate Canon Chapters at the Cathedral Chapter in Vilnius (1388-1945) and in Białystok (1945-1993)

This study discusses one of the aspects of the history of the cathedral chapter in Vilnius and its continuation in the post-war period in Białystok. It directly concerns the circumstances of the formation and development of the canonry outside the strict chapter body, i.e. the functions of coadjutors and honorary canons in general. This issue has so far been neglected in historiography. The capitular body in Vilnius in the pre-partition period consisted of six prelates and twelve canons. The function of a non-collegiate coadjutor appeared for the first time in the 17th century. It reached its peak in the 18th century. During the partitions, as a result of the gradual reduction of prelate and canon offices by the tsarist authorities, temporary coadjutors began to be established, and as repressions against the Catholic Church increased – honorary coadjutors and honorary canons. The current constitutional and organizational shape of the chapter is mainly the result of the continuous evolution of the offices and dignities throughout the nineteenth century, in response to the dynamic changes in the partitioner's policy towards the Church and the needs generated by them.

Key words: Church, Vilnius, chapter, canon, coadjutor.

Introduction

Research and reflection on the history of cathedral chapters in Poland have borne quite abundant fruit in the form of monographic studies as well as studies on the selected aspects of the functioning of

canon corporations. This includes both extensive works in the form of standalone publications, as well as specialized articles published in journals or in collective works¹. Therefore, this issue is quite well studied in historiography. The authors usually expertly discuss the system and organization of chapters, their personal composition and activity, especially at the diocesan level, not ignoring the role they played in the ecclesiastical and state arena, fulfilling their statutory duties. This does not change the fact that in such a wide spectrum of issues, there are areas that seem to be marginalized or go unnoticed. These include the subject of canons, who did not constitute a strict body of the chapter, who were not introduced to it by appointment, but rather acquired the dignity and title of a canon, fulfilled their duties and used the acquired privileges. Over several centuries their position in the capitular corporation changed and evolved, depending on the needs and external conditions, often imposed by non-ecclesial factors, depending on the political situation of the country, which during the partitions and communist rule in Poland saw the secular authorities interfering in the internal structures of the Church. The fact of the existence and activity of non-collegiate canons cannot be omitted also because it was from this group that many collegiate members were drawn. In many cases, the position of a non-collegiate canon was the first step towards a brilliant clerical career, crowned with a bishop's mitre. A look at the historiography of the cathedral chapter in Vilnius, and since 1945 in Białystok, confirms that the above observations are not without merit, on the contrary – they find justification here.

Coadjutors with succession rights

When analysing the genesis of the office and dignity of an honorary canon, one should go back a long way, as far as the Council of Trent. The Council empowered cathedral chapters, making them a *de facto* co-managing body of the diocese. The granting of such prerogatives to the chapters resulted from the negative experiences of the beginnings of Reformation, when Catholic bishops, converting to Protestantism, took entire dioceses with them. In order for the chapters to become an effective means of counteracting these practices, they had to be well

¹ Despite a rich historiography on the history of Polish chapters, there is no synthetic summary of the state of research. In this context, Józef Szymański's publication is all the more valuable: Szymański J., *Piętnaście lat badań nad dziejami polskich kapituł katedralnych i kolegiackich 1945-1960*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego", 5 (1962), no. 1, pp. 89-115, which is trying to partially fill this gap.

organized and operate efficiently. Provisions ensuring the continuity of their operations were to serve this purpose. One of them was the statutes regarding coadjutor canons.

The structure and organization of the Vilnius Cathedral Chapter were shaped continuously from 1388 to 1520 (over approx. 130 years), i.e. until the approval of the first chapter statutes by the Holy See². The foundations of the system and organization of the chapter formed at that time did not change until mid-nineteenth century. However, attempts were made to improve this model, including by introducing coadjutors with the right of succession³.

Specific rules concerning chapter coadjutors were given by the Council of Trent. These rules declare that the so-called supporting canons (*canonici coadiutores*) with the right of succession were appointed by the Holy See at the request of the interested member of the chapter. The basic reason for the assisted canons (*canonici coadiuti*) to apply for a coadjutor was old age, illness, or other objective reasons that prevented or made it difficult for them to perform their duties, especially liturgical activities. Therefore, the Council of Trent introduced detailed provisions regarding the substitute function of a coadjutor. It also established their legal position. It was stated that supporting canons do not take part in chapter sessions, even in the absence of their *coadiuti*, they do not have the right to vote, and they are not allowed to hold solemn services in the cathedral⁴.

The records of the Vilnius Cathedral Chapter place the introduction of the first coadjutor canon *cum futura successsione* (*cum iure successionis*) under the date of 28 December 1618. An interesting piece of information was recorded there. It shows that "... with the official admission of the Shepherd, with the approval of His Majesty, as well as papal confirmation, Fr. Łukasz Górnicki was installed as a coadjutor to prelate Paweł Górnicki" (pol. *...za urzędową admissją J.O. Pasterza, z aprobatą J. Królewskiej Mości, jako też papieskim potwierdzeniem dokonano instalacji ks. Łukasza Górnickiego jako koadiutora prałata Pawła Górnickiego*). An eloquent mention was also made in the description of this fact: "The Chapter, being sons of obedience, felt obliged to

² W. Pawlikowska-Butterwick, L. Jovaiša, *Vilniaus ir žemaičių katedrų Kapitulų statutai*, Vilnius 2015, pp. 128-131.

³ T. Kasabula, *Kanonicy koadiutorzy w kapitule katedralnej wileńskiej*, "Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej", 4 (2005), pp. 111-127.

⁴ *Sessio XXII: De reformatione*, no. 5, 37, *Sessio XXIV: De reformatione*, no. 79-91, in: *Canones et decreta Concilii Tridentini ex editione romana a. 1834 repetiti*, Lipsiae 1853; *Statuta capitularia Ecclesiae Cathedralis Cracoviensis*, ed. I. Polkowski, Cracoviae 1884, pp. 118-119, 280.

submit to the letter of the Holy See received with due respect. However, at the same time, it is still stipulated that in the event of the death of his *coadiuti*, the coadjutor will become a true canon and will fulfil all capitular duties by himself.” (pol. *Kapituła będąc synami posłuszeństwa, na odebraną z powinnym poszanowaniem pismo Stolicy Apostolskiej, czuła się być do uległości w tym obowiązana. Wszakże przy tym nadal sobie zastrzega, że na przypadek zgonu swego koadiuta, tenże koadiutor prawdziwym już kanonikiem zostanie i wszystkie powinności kapitulne sam przez się spełniać będzie*)⁵.

The tone of this note may raise certain suspicions, confirmed by the later state of affairs. Above all, the wording related to the reception of the letter from the Holy See is surprising here. There are no words of gratitude for the act of nomination, but the subordination of the chapter to Rome’s decision is strongly emphasized. Emphasizing such an attitude leads us to believe that this nomination, which was a precedent at that time, was not to the chapter’s liking, as it introduced a significant change to the practice of performing substitute service in the cathedral by another group, namely cathedral vicars. These vicars, and there could be as many of them as there were members of the chapter, received certain benefits and small remuneration from “their” canon for their upkeep. They replaced the members of the chapter in the burdensome choral recitation of the breviary and in the performance of other services established by the provisions of the vicarial statute of 1560⁶ confirmed and supplemented by Bishop Abraham Woyna in 1653⁷. Whereas, the introduction of a coadjutor canons to the chapter, although it did not reduce the personal income of the *coadiuti*, did not give them the opportunity to make them dependent, as was the case with cathedral vicars. It was probably not insignificant that the chapter was reluctant to see interference in the personnel matters by anyone other than those holding the right of patronage. The monarch issued nominations for most of the chapter dignities in Vilnius and he was also reluctant to share this right with anyone, including, and perhaps especially with the Holy See, which was trying to interfere in the personal composition of the chapters by creating these expectatives. The pope’s pushing for greater influence

⁵ Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius (hereinafter referred to as LLAS), ref. no. f43-216, Acta Capituli Vilmensis (hereinafter referred to as ACV), vol. 8, pp. 354-354 v.

⁶ LLAS, ref. f43-211, ACV, vol. 3, pp. 257-257 v.

⁷ LLAS, ref. f43-221, ACV, vol. 13, pp. 257-257 v.; J. Kurczewski, *Kościół zamkowy czyli katedra wileńska*, vol. 2, Wilno 1910, pp. 52-53.

on the appointment of ecclesiastical offices, including the composition of capitular colleges through their own appointments, was one of the features defining the policy of the Holy See and a determinant of relations between the state and the Church in Western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The function of the coadjutor canon, which required papal consent expressed in a bull containing the expectative, was exactly that kind of entry point, allowing papal candidates to be brought into the chapters⁸.

It is therefore not surprising that the members of the Vilnius Cathedral Chapter intentionally did not support this precedent introducing a coadjutor canon into the Chapter.

History
of the Church

The issue of coadjutor canons appeared on the agenda of chapter sessions again only after 150 years, in 1766, and this time it fell on the fertile ground of the changing mentality of the members of the chapter. It is clear from a note included in the minutes of the winter session of February 1766 that those present at the meeting adopted a resolution that henceforth every prelate and canon, burdened by age or illness, or for any other reasons allowed by ecclesiastical law, could choose a candidate for a coadjutor. The choice had to take into account all the criteria that would be required from a candidate for the current canon position (a nobleman, in good standing, educated, etc.) The selected candidate should have received an appointment from the holder of the right of patronage for the given canon position (a king, a bishop, a chapter). After these conditions had been met, an official letter was sent to the Holy See asking for a papal commission. In the practice of the Vilnius Chapter, coadjutors *cum iure successionis* were always sought, because only this clause allowed the coadjutor to take the place of the *coadiuti* after his death or promotion. This request was always included. A coadjutor nominated through a papal bull had to go through a "trial" established by the chapter statutes for current canons. However, he only acquired full rights after completing a five-month novitiate⁹.

From 1766 to 1795, 28 effective trials for coadjutor *cum futura successionis* were completed. Some insights can be gleaned from this list. First of all, it must be said that the vast majority of coadjutors took the place of their *coadiuti* after their death. Only a few assumed the expected dignity earlier, namely after their patron left the chapter or by taking the place of another, deceased canon, who at that time did not have a

⁸ T. Kasabuła, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

⁹ J. Kurczewski, *Biskupstwo wileńskie od jego założenia aż do dni obecnych*, Wilno 1912, p. 124; idem, *Kościół zamkowy*, vol. 3, Wilno 1916, p. 437.

coadjutor. Two died before the promotion. They waited to attain the position of a current canon from several months to almost 30 years. Tomasz Puzyna waited the longest, as he only finally became a canon after 28 years as a coadjutor, after the death of his brother, a canon and a suffragan bishop of Vilnius, Nicodemus.

All permanent coadjutors, like their *coadiuti*, were noblemen. A few were even titular magnates. Among them were as many as 10 future bishops, one of whom, Stanisław Bohusz Siestrzeńcewicz, reached the highest rank in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the tsarist Russia, becoming the Metropolitan Archbishop of Mogilev and the president of the Saint Petersburg Roman Catholic Theological Academy. Three of the former coadjutors were appointed bishop ordinaries, two in the diocese of Vilnius (Jan Nepomucen Kossakowski and Hieronim Stroynowski) and one (Jakub Dederko) in the diocese of Minsk. Six served as auxiliary bishops, suffragans (Toczyłowski, Łopaciński, Nikodem Puzyna, Wołczacki, Houwalt, Pilchowski)¹⁰.

The last permanent coadjutor in the Vilnius Cathedral Chapter was appointed in 1795, a few months after the third partition of Poland, which put almost the entire Vilnius diocese under the control of the tsars¹¹.

Temporary coadjutors

In the changed political reality, the powers and tasks of Catholic ecclesiastical institutions were severely limited, and their activities were subject to state control. The *placet regium* on official contacts with the Holy See imposed by Catherine II and maintained by her successors was particularly burdensome. As a result of these decisions it became impossible to send requests to Rome for papal commissions for coadjutors¹². Meanwhile, the need for substitute liturgical functions in the cathedral continued to exist and became more and more visible, as the number of cathedral vicars also decreased as a result of the reduction in salaries. In these circumstances, the bishop appointed to the diocese by Tsar Alexander I, Hieronim Stroynowski, guided by suggestions contained in canon law textbooks, approved,

¹⁰ K. Kułakowski, *Z dziejów Kapituły Katedralnej Wileńskiej*, "Wiadomości Kościelne Archidiecezji w Białymstoku", 13 (1987), no. 2, p. 24.

¹¹ LLAS, ref. f43-244, ACV, vol. 34, p. 47.

¹² A. Boudou, *Stolica Święta a Rosja. Stosunki dyplomatyczne między nimi w XIX stuleciu*, vol. 1, Kraków 1928, p. 23; J. Wysocki, *Kościół katolicki w zaborze rosyjskim w latach 1772-1815*, in: *Historia Kościoła w Polsce*, ed. B. Kumor, Z. Obertyński, vol. 2, part 1, Warszawa-Poznań 1979, p. 177.

after introducing amendments, the Chapter's draft on the introduction of the position of a temporal coadjutor (*coadiutor temporalis*), even before his preconization¹³.

It should be emphasized that the concept of a "temporary coadjutor" can and has been understood only in a sense analogous to the concept of a coadjutor in the proper sense, i.e. a permanent coadjutor. The difference was that permanent coadjutors, legally introduced into the church administration as prospectives, were appointed by the Holy See, while temporary ones were appointed by the Metropolitan of Mogilev and approved by the Bishop of Vilnius. The legal status of temporary coadjutors was therefore sanctioned only by the head of the diocese. Temporary Coadjutors appointed in this way did not have the right of succession, some would not even have a permanent relationship with a specific current canon. Whereas the current canon (increasingly referred to as the real canon) could have even two or more temporary coadjutors if he had the ability to maintain them. The upkeep of temporary coadjutors was not the responsibility of the chapter as a corporation and did not come from its common possessions, but only from a part of the remuneration due to actual canons for performing liturgical services. A temporary coadjutor canon received a salary averaging 25% of canonical remuneration. Temporary coadjutor canons were entitled to certain privileges, which should strictly belong to papal prospectives. They also caused this office and dignity to be seen as quite attractive. Therefore, they had the right to wear a rochet and a black mantelletta and a canon's cross, they could participate in chapter sessions, although in a purely advisory capacity, they could sit in the choir stalls. However, they lost all these rights and privileges with the death of their principal. They were only left with the right of priority in applying for the vacancy among the current members of the chapter¹⁴. Few exercised this right, as the practice of co-opting temporary coadjutors lasted for less than 10 years and ended with the

¹³ LLAS, ref. f43-249, ACV, vol. 39, pp. 83, 97. This project was prepared at the behest of the chapter by canon Antoni Kruszewski, a former Jesuit, a lawyer by education, who held the office of an auditor of the court office of Bishop Ignacy Massalski after the dissolution of the Society. It is possible that when preparing the commissioned text of the project, he suggested a comment taken from the then popular textbook study by P.J. Riegger, where the author makes the following comment: "quod si vero ipsorum (episcoporum et praelatorum) ecclesiae Roma longius distent, episcopus cum adsensu capituli vel duae ipsius partes, coadiutorem decernunt". P.J. Riegger, *Institutionum iurisprudentiae ecclesiasticae*, vol. 3, no. 3, Viennae 1780, p. 96.

¹⁴ J. Kurczewski, *Kościół zamkowy*, vol. 3, Wilno 1916, pp. 423, 424, 426, 428, 435, 437; A. Lipnicki, *Historia Wileńskiego Katedralnego Kościoła*, 1888 [manuscript

death of Bishop Stroynowski on 5 August 1815. In total, it resulted in 16 nominations for temporary coadjutors¹⁵.

Abandoning the practice of appointing temporary coadjutors and the decreasing number of members of the chapter, who, after the cessation of papal prospectives, were appointed by the tsar and approved by the Minister of Education of the Russian Empire, made it increasingly difficult to properly hold services in the cathedral. The decision of Tsar Nicholas I, validated by the order of 13 January 1843, to reduce the number of canons from the previous twelve to only three was extremely harmful to the functioning of the chapter as a corporation¹⁶.

Honorary coadjutors

Things were getting worse. In order to put matters of God's service in order, Bishop Wacław Żyliński (1846-1858), referring to the provisions of the Council of Trent (Session XXII, *De reformatione*), established in 1849 six canons called "honorary coadjutors" (Polish *koadiutor honoralny*). This was a completely new solution, unprecedented in the history of the Vilnius Chapter, but necessitated by the situation and the most rational under the circumstances. It was analogous to the institution of the canon coadjutor from the pre-partition period. The members of the chapter established in this way, more and more often referred to as honorary canons, were assigned certain duties and privileges. They were obliged to participate in solemn services in the cathedral, in processions, and in "anniversaries and tabular days" (Polish *w aniwersarzach i tabelnych dniach*). It was their duty to assist the bishop at the sedilia as honorary deacons and, if need be, to stand in for the archdeacon, especially outside the cathedral. Their privileges included wearing a rochet and a black mantelletta in the cathedral (the actual members of the chapter wore togas), took a place in the second row of the canon stalls, and in the absence of a real canon they celebrated vespers and singing mass at the canon altar in the cathedral¹⁷.

in: Library of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Krakow, ref. 1232.], p. 121 nn.

¹⁵ LLAS, ref. f43-249-255, ACV, vols. 39-45, passim.

¹⁶ This reduction concerned all chapters in the Russian Empire. Only the Metropolitan Chapter of Mogilev retained four canons. B. Kumor, *Ustrój i organizacja Kościoła polskiego w okresie niewoli narodowej 1772-1918*, Kraków 1980, p. 306.

¹⁷ J. Kurczewski, *Kościół zamkowy*, vol. 3, pp. 490-491.

Honorary canons

The appointment of these “honorary coadjutors” to the Vilnius Chapter in 1849 later simply called honorary canons, gave rise *ex traditione* to the introduction of the so-called honorary canons *de numero clauso* in the statute of the Chapter of the Vilnius Metropolitan Basilica in 1928. They had broader powers than the *extra numerum* honorary canons mentioned in that statute, whose number was not specified¹⁸.

However, before this happened, even before the promulgation of the statutes, Bishop Jerzy Matulewicz appointed new members of the chapter in 1924, whom he no longer called “honorary coadjutors” but rather “honorary canons”. With them, the number of honorary canons reached exactly 20¹⁹.

History
of the Church

An important change in the structure and composition of the metropolitan chapter came after Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski took over the Archdiocese of Vilnius in 1926 (on 8 September). The archbishop increased its membership to 12 members, adding three new canons, so that from 1926 the Vilnius Chapter had six prelates and six canons. Following this decision, on 1 November that year, the archbishop appointed four collegiate canons to vacancies, a week later he increased the size of the chapter by introducing three honorary canons to it, and in October 1927 he increased the number of honorary canons by six more. Thus, the request for the statute to be approved, dated 12 May 1928 was signed by all the members of the chapter, six prelates and six canons. The new statute was adopted by the Vilnius Chapter at the general session on 9 May 1928. Archbishop Jałbrzykowski approved them on 27 October 1928²⁰.

Although the statutes of the Chapter of the Vilnius Metropolitan Basilica approved by Archbishop Jałbrzykowski introduced two honorary canons, distinguished by the additional term *de numero participantium* and *extra numerum*, for several years these terms were not commonly used and the distinction was not recognised. It appeared in general circulation only after its publication in the 1932 schematic. The names of *de numero* honorary canons listed therein, it can be seen that Archbishop Jałbrzykowski elevated to this dignity only those clergymen who had previously been honorary canons in Vilnius. There were six

¹⁸ *Statuta Capituli Basilicae Metropolitanae Vilnensis*, Vilnae 1928, p. 54nn; *Catalogus Ecclesiarum et cleri archidioecesis Vilnensis pro anno Domini 1928*, Vilnae 1928.

¹⁹ *Catalogus Ecclesiarum et cleri archidioecesis Vilnensis pro anno Domini 1927*, Vilnae 1927.

²⁰ *Statuta*, 1928.

of them, because according to the new statute, they could make up at most half of the members²¹.

The distinction of *de numero* honorary canons gave them the privilege of precedence over other honorary canons and the right to wear a canons cross and a ring with a non-precious stone. However, they could not have any purple accessories at the black cassock, so no purple stripes, buttons, or lining. Their duties included assisting the archbishop during ceremonial celebrations as honorary deacons²².

When the archbishop raised six honorary canons to a higher rank for the first time in 1932, 17 priests remained as *extra numerum* honorary canons. Their number was not increased until the outbreak of World War II, despite the fact that five of them died during that time²³. At the outbreak of the war in 1939, all positions of prelate, collegiate canon, and *de numero* canon were manned. This number was supplemented by 13 *extra numerum*²⁴ canons.

The turmoil of war wreaked havoc in the chapter, so that in 1945 the college was severely understaffed. Of the 13 *extra numerum* honorary canons, only eight survived the war²⁵.

When Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski was expelled from Vilnius in July 1945 and had to leave the borders of the Soviet Union, the Vilnius Chapter did the right thing and in 1945 none of its members left the position assigned to them, none exercised repatriation rights, all remained at the cathedral, both prelates and canons, as well as all honorary canons who were working in the Vilnius region at that time. The only exception was canon Władysław Suszyński, who, hiding from Germans during the war, had earlier found himself in the Białystok region and at the beginning of 1945 was staying in his hometown of Janów. He was the first representative of the chapter who found himself in a part of the Vilnius archdiocese which remained within the borders of the post-war Poland, apart from two honorary canons who permanently resided in the Białystok region. These were Białystok parish priests, Father Adam Abramowicz of St. Roch's parish and Father Aleksander Chodyko, the dean of the Białystok deanery. It was

²¹ *Catalogus Ecclesiarum et cleri archidioecesis Vilnensis pro anno Domini 1932*, Vilnae 1932.

²² *Statuta*, 1928.

²³ Cf. *Catalogus*, 1932 i *Catalogus Ecclesiarum et cleri archidioecesis Vilnensis pro anno Domini 1939*, Vilnae 1939.

²⁴ *Catalogus*, 1939.

²⁵ J. Pankiewicz, *Kapituła Bazyliki Metropolitalnej Wileńskiej w Białymstoku*, "Wiadomości Kościelne Archidiecezji w Białymstoku", 13 (1987), no. 2, p. 98.

not until 1946 that canon priest Antoni Cichoński came to Białystok from his long wanderings in the north and in August of the following year, after imprisonment and staying in the Komi Republic, canon Adam Sawicki made his way to Białystok. On 30 August 1947, Archbishop Jałbrzykowski elevated these two to the dignity of prelates²⁶, partially supplementing the composition of the chapter. In 1947, it had six prelates, four of whom remained in Vilnius, and three collegiate canons. One of them (Fr. W. Suszyński) came to Poland, the other two remained beyond the eastern border. These three clergymen (two prelates and one canon) constituted Archbishop Jałbrzykowski's closest advisory council in Białystok immediately after his arrival. Although there were vacancies in the chapter, the archbishop, while staying in Białystok, appointed only one clergyman as its official member. This was Father Stanisław Czyżewski, appointed on 25 September 1949. This four-men body constituted the metropolitan chapter in Białystok for many years, until 1968²⁷.

Meanwhile, the members of the chapter remaining in the Vilnius region, who were elderly, were gradually dying out. In 1964, on Good Friday, 27 March, prelate Lucjan Chalecki, the last member of the Chapter of the Vilnius Metropolitan Basilica, died in the vicarage in Maišiagala at the age of 90. He had stayed in the Vilnius region throughout his life²⁸. From then on, all the members of the Vilnius Chapter were in the part of the archdiocese remaining within the borders of Poland.

Although Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski only raised Fr. Czyżewski to the dignity of collegiate canon, he nominated several particularly meritorious clergymen as honorary canons: four *de numero* and four *extra numerum*²⁹. The Ordinary of the Vilnius Archdiocese, Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski, died on 19 June 1955.

His successors, who were administering the part of the Archdiocese of Vilnius remaining within the borders of Poland, appointed members of the chapter on the basis of the powers of the Holy See, granted

²⁶ Archidiecezjalne Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne w Białymstoku 1945-1980, ed. E. Ozorowski, Białystok 1980, pp. 26-27.

²⁷ S. Czyżewski, Ks. Dr Romuald Jałbrzykowski arcybiskup metropolita wileński. Wspomnienia [typescript in: Archdiocesan Archives in Białystok], p. 311.

²⁸ J. Pankiewicz, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

²⁹ *Kalendarium liturgicum pro A.D. (...) 1948*, Białystok 1947; S. Czyżewski, op. cit., pp. 311-312.

only to the petitioner (*oratori*) through the intermediation of Primate Stefan Wyszyński³⁰.

After the reorganization of the structures of the Catholic Church in Poland under the bull *Totus tuus Poloniae populus* of 25 March 1992, the Białystok Metropolitan Chapter adopted a new statute on 8 December that year, approved by Archbishop Edward Kisiel on 14 February 1993. The introduction to this document states that the chapter “refers to heritage of the Vilnius Chapter, erected on 12 March 1388 [...], and considers its history, tradition, and customs to be its own”³¹. Compared to a similar document from 1928, the Statute of 1993 did not introduce any changes in the structure of the chapter. In addition to six prelates and six collegiate canons, it still consisted of six *de numero* honorary canons (equivalents of the former “honorary coadjutors”) and a certain, not strictly defined number of *extra numerum* honorary canons. As the statute was being approved, all the positions of prelate and canon were manned.

Instead of a conclusion

Outlining the six-hundred-year history of the cathedral chapter in Vilnius and several decades of its continuation in Białystok leads to conclusions that, in a broad sense, they are topical and applicable to the study of the past of the chapters in Polish lands in general. Against this background, we can clearly see areas of study that are under-appreciated and marginalized. A cursory look at the history of corporations of canons may make the impression that a seemingly insignificant aspect, such as the fact that they have the rank of a canon, but do not strictly belong to the capitular body, does not require more attention. Meanwhile, a broader view of the past reality related to the history of the chapter, if not completely overturns this belief, at least makes it subject to verification. The author of this text can only hope that by touching on the seemingly marginal issues topical in the case of the Vilnius Chapter, he can motivate others involved in discovering the past of the chapters to also reach for the periphery of the fundamental problem in order to obtain a clearer picture of the whole and a fuller understanding of its essence.

³⁰ A. Kakareko, *Kapituła katedralna przy farze białostockiej*, in: *Bazylika katedralna w Białymstoku*, ed. T. Krahel, Białystok 2005, pp. 242-244.

³¹ *Statuty Białostockiej Kapituły Metropolitalnej*, Białystok 1995, p. 1. This statement has never been officially challenged or treated as a usurpation, especially since the Vilnius Cathedral Chapter was not established in the archdiocese restored in Lithuania in 1991.

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