

MICHAŁ BIAŁKOWSKI, *Wokół Soboru Watykańskiego II. Studia i szkice* [Around the Second Vatican Council: Studies and Sketches], Toruń: MARGRAFSEN Publishing House in Bydgoszcz 2016, p. 172.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/rt.2017.64.4-9en>

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) holds a special place in the history of the Catholic Church. Many observers and analysts of ecclesial life are convinced that the decision to convene the Council, the proceedings of the Council and the final decisions made during the Council sessions were exceptional, if not the most important in the 20th century. The context of Pope John XXIII's convocation of all Catholic bishops to the Vatican was special. After World War II, which was an anthropological catastrophe, not only the West but also other parts of the globe were divided into two fighting camps: the capitalist camp and the communist camp. The louder shouts and appeals were made on various peaceful manifestations: "No more war!" the more preparations were made to the next war, especially in the Moscow's area of influence. In the 1960s, numerous cultural changes took place. Human societies seemed to experience a civilizational acceleration. Hence, it became necessary to "modernize" the mission of the Church, and sensitize all believers – clergy and laity – to their new mission and tasks in the changing world.

Today, the provisions of the Second Vatican Council and its teaching still require a response, even though it has been more than 50 years since the closure of the Council sessions. The tasks assigned by the Council to the universal Church and particular Churches, communities of the faithful – pastors and individual Catholics remain still valid.

In the context of the above, very general information about the Council and its message, one should mention the *Studia Soborowe* [Studies on the Second Vatican Council] collection which is a unique, original, "monumental" and "dignified" publication of Polish theological literature. It consists of three books with a total of 2,223 pages, not including photographs without pagination in each volume), edited by Michał Białkowski. These are: *Studia Soborowe. Historia i nauczanie Vaticanum II* [Studies on the History and Teaching of the Second Vatican Council], vol. I, Toruń 2013; *Studia Soborowe. Historia i recepcja Vaticanum II* [Studies on the History and Reception of the Second Vatican Council], vol. II, part 1, Toruń 2014; and *Studia Soborowe, Historia i recepcja Vaticanum II* [Studies on the History and Reception of the Second Vatican Council], vol. II, part 2, Toruń 2015.

Michał Białkowski, historian and political scientist, adjunct of the Chair of History of Diplomacy at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, is the inspirer and publisher of *Studia Soborowe*. Undoubtedly, he is today one of the greatest promoters of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in Poland. It is worth noting that he is a lay person, a husband, a father, a Catholic deeply involved in the life of the Church in Poland. He does not hold a formal theology diploma. Instead, he can be considered as a theologian by cognitive passion and unquestionable competence. This is "said" both in the above works, which have been reviewed many times, as well as in his other books on the Second

Vatican Council, such as *Wokół Soboru Watykańskiego II. Studia i szkice* [Around the Second Vatican Council. Studies and Sketches] (Toruń 2015), and *Radość i nadzieja, smutek i trwoga... Sobór Watykański II z perspektywy półwiecza* [Joy and Hope, Sadness and Fear ... The Second Vatican Council Over the Past Half-Century] (Toruń 2016).

The book *Wokół Soboru Watykańskiego II* was printed in a polygraphic form by the MAGRAFSEN Publishing House in Bydgoszcz (the original note on the editorial page: “Wydawca / Realizacja poligraficzna”). The scientific reviewers of the work were: prof. dr hab. Jacek Bartyzel (UMK), prof. dr hab. Krzysztof Kowalczyk (US) and Fr. dr hab. Robert Skrzypczak (PWTW). Such a serious cast of reviewers of the book, which is, in fact, not very long, as it has only 172 pages, ensured a high quality of the review.

In the Introduction, the author emphasizes that “the book is a compilation of studies and sketches that have already been published – from 2013 to 2015 – within the prestigious scientific series «Studia Soborowe.» For the purposes of this edition, however, all texts have been re-developed, significantly expanded, supplemented and updated” (p. 11). This is very important information that shows Białkowski’s creative dynamism. He does not conclude his analysis of the issue, but he “re-examines” it to introduce new, significant, deeper lines of inquiry.

The work consists of the following parts: *Introduction*, four chapters, *Bibliographic Note, Note about the Author*. Chapter I, *Sobór Watykański II – geneza, okoliczności zwołania, uczestnicy i przebieg obrad* [Vatican Council II – Genesis, Circumstances of Convocation, Participants and Proceedings], is the longest chapter in the book (it has 86 pages). It begins with the *Introduction*, followed by the section *Podstawowe źródła i literatura do historii Soboru Watykańskiego II* [Basic Sources and Literature for the History of the Second Vatican Council].

Białkowski very clearly and professionally made not only the presentation, but also the evaluation of source materials regarding the Second Vatican Council and the literature of the subject. This fragment is a kind of *vademecum* – a handbook on scientific information. In the next section (which has not been marked with a number, similarly to other sections), *Geneza Soboru Watykańskiego II* [Genesis of the Second Vatican Council], the author points to the revival of biblical studies. Biblical studies began to develop in the 19th century, first in the circle of Protestantism. This fact was significant for Catholic initiatives related to Bible studies, which began to emerged before the Council.

Usually, the Council is associated with great changes in the liturgy. There is, however, no common knowledge of the liturgical renewal that coincided with the Council or anticipated it. By assumption, the Council was to be, and in fact was, ecumenical. The term “ecumenical” was used in one of the official names of the assembly of bishops from the particular Churches of the world – the Ecumenical Vatican Council II – which emphasized the universal dimension of the Church. The Church is present in the *ecumen*, that is, “all over the world,” wherever there are people who, regardless of culture, religion or belief, are of increasing concern to the Church. The ecumenical movement in the strict sense, initiated in the circle of Protestant ecclesial communities at the beginning of the 20th century, was also important at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. Białkowski refers to the *Nouvelle Théologie*. Finally, he carries out a pre-conciliatory assessment of the pontificate of Pius XII.

In the next item of Chapter I, *Początek pontyfikatu Jana XXIII, okoliczności i przygotowania do zwołania Soboru Watykańskiego II* [Beginning of the Pontificate of John XXIII, Circumstances and Preparations for Convening the Second Vatican Council], Białkowski refers to Pope John XXIII, who called the Council, being inspired by the Holy Spirit and moved by the events of the 20th century. He describes the so-called Council’s pre-conduction phase (between May 1959 and June 1960) and the preparatory phase (between June 1960 and June 1962). In the section *Struktura, organizacja pracy, uczestnicy Soboru* [Structure, Organization of Work, Participants of the Council], he focuses on particular issues mentioned in the title. He also pays attention to the

“Polish presence at the Council.” In the next part (*Przebieg obrad Soboru Watykańskiego II* [The Proceedings of the Second Vatican Council]), he presents the agenda of the proceedings, as follows: from 1st session (held between October and December 1962) to 4th session (held between September and December 1965). At the same time, he notes the major problems generated by the traditionalist-conservative and reformist-liberal parties. He concludes with giving the reader the *Key* to learn the history of the Council.

The above-mentioned item from Chapter I, *Polska obecność na Soborze* [Polish Presence at the Council], turned out to be an “introduction” to Chapter II, *Biskup chełmiński Kazimierz Józef Kowalski na Soborze Watykańskim II* [Bishop of Chełmno Kazimierz Józef Kowalski at the Second Vatican Council]. In this part, Białkowski describes the bishop who took over the administration of the diocese in 1946, in the times of war trauma, carrying many difficult, even dramatic challenges related to the new political and civilization situation in Poland. A soldier and priest, a research and teaching worker, the Bishop of Chełmno was perfectly prepared for the task entrusted to him by the Pope to administer one of the largest dioceses in Poland. In 1959, he inaugurated a diocesan synod, which was in a sense the “announcement” of both the Council and the related liturgical renewal. The author introduces the involvement of Bishop K.J. Kowalski during the particular Council sessions: I (1962), II (1963), III (1964) and IV (1965). Kowalski was involved in both the conciliar renewal and the post-Conciliar reform of the Catholic Church.

Chapter III, *Aktualność przesłania Soboru Watykańskiego II w nauczaniu papieża i praktyce synodalnej Kościoła* [The Relevance of the Message of the Second Vatican Council in the Teaching of Popes and the Church’s Synodal Practice], is a continuation of the last section of Chapter II, *Odnowa posoborowa* [Post-Conciliar Renewal]. The sections of the chapter, in which Białkowski analyzes the teaching of subsequent popes, symbolically reflect the specificity of their thoughts. The mission of Paul VI was the implementation of the conciliatory renewal. The words of John Paul II, followed up by his concrete acts, were an expression of his constant remembrance of the Council. In turn, the teaching of Benedict XVI was marked by concern for the proper hermeneutics of the Council. Białkowski concludes with an original reflection on the new Latin American perspective of the Council’s challenges.

The subject of the fourth and final chapter of the book was “anticipated” by the last section of Chapter III. In Chapter IV, *Kościół papieża Franciszka – pomiędzy wizją a rzeczywistością* [The Church of Pope Francis – Between Vision and Reality], Białkowski focuses on the issue specific to the pontificate of Pope Francis, which was also emphasized and analyzed by other popes and by particular episcopates of the universal Church. The general formulations given prove the continuing validity of the ecclesial mission: a Church of and for the poor; a persecuted, missionary, evangelizing Church is a Church concerned about every human being without exception. When discussing the persecution of the Church, Białkowski points to the oppression it experiences in Iraq and Syria. These countries are of concern to the Pope, who appeals and prays for averting hatred in these regions of Asia, which may have an impact on the fate of humanity.

It is worth taking note of the recipients of the book. This is best expressed by the author himself: “I address this publication not only to lay people, but also to priests, consecrated persons and seminarians. I address it particularly to the inhabitants of the former Chełmno region, today the faithful of the dioceses of Toruń, Pelplin and the Archdiocese of Gdańsk. I draw your attention to the figure of Bishop Kazimierz Józef Kowalski, a great patriot, courageous soldier, eminent scholar, zealous priest and good bishop. Writing an article on the 56th shepherd of the Chełmno Church, and then delivering it in the form of a lecture for seminarians of the Major Seminary in Pelplin, I have repeatedly experienced that the memory of Bishop Kazimierz Józef Kowalski is grateful and vivid” (pp. 11-12).

I remember my first pilgrimage to Pelplin, where in 1972 I crossed the threshold of one of the most beautiful Polish cathedrals. At that time I experienced not only the beauty and “dignity,” but

also the mystery of the Gothic cathedral temple. The day of my visit to Pelplin was the day of the death of Bishop Kazimierz Józef Kowalski. It is difficult today, after 45 years, to describe what I felt then. I certainly felt that his death was not the death of the Church. Pelplin Cathedral remained standing!

This cathedral being the “heart of the diocese” where I was born (Grudziądz), as well as the diocese itself, were strengthened by the witness of the life of the Shepherd who guided the Chełmno Church in very difficult times. He prepared it for the Council reforms and implemented them, especially regarding changes in the liturgy, initiation of family counseling centers and pastoral care of families. He also strengthened the academic pastoral work in those cities of the diocese where there were higher education institutions (Toruń, Gdynia).

Wokół Soboru Watykańskiego II, which is a medium-sized book, as already said, has been very carefully prepared in both substantive and formal (technical) terms. As it is terse, it provides a lot of important information. Its subtitle, *Studia i szkice* [Studies and Sketches], points to the need for further exploration of the phenomenon of Vaticanum II and composing – based on “sketches” – refined, full “images” of the Church, called to serve God and people, in keeping with the challenges of the given time.

Białkowski concludes that “today, half a century after the end of the Second Vatican Council, the vision of a community, servant and open Church, complemented by its fourth attribute – of a missionary Church – is more valid than ever” (p. 84).

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The preparation of the English version of *Roczniki Teologiczne* (Annals of Theology) no. 4 and its publication in electronic databases was financed under contract no. 753/P-DUN/2017 from the resources of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for the popularization of science.

JAN WALKUSZ, *Sekcja Historii Kościoła w Polsce 1964-2014* [Section of History of the Church in Poland 1964-2014], Lublin-Pelplin: Bernardinum 2016, pp. 342 + 2 unnumbered.

DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/rt.2017.64.4-10en>

In my opinion, the publication of this book should not be a surprise not only for local historians, but also for church historians in general, as Jan Walkusz’s interests and research on teaching, or on the history of the Church in Poland, are coherent. Five years ago, he published a work on this subject, devoted to the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin cadre of church historians (*Rola i miejsce Instytutu Historii Kościoła KUL w historiografii* [The Role and Place of the Institute of Church History in Historiography], ed. J. Walkusz, Lublin 2011, pp. 212), where, after graduating in this field, he has been working for nearly 30 years (in a reviewed book, this is described in the context of his biography, see pp. 274-275). This book is in a sense a continuation,