

VARIA

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THE CULT OF ST. ADALBERT IN THE DIOCESE OF EŁK (1992–2022)*

Introduction

Efforts to have Adalbert raised to the altar began as early as 997, the year of his martyrdom. Two years later (999), he was canonized by Pope Sylvester II, which undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of the saint's cult in Poland, as well as in other countries¹.

The rise of the cult of St. Adalbert in Europe was significantly influenced by the so-called *Vita prior*, which begins with the words “Est locus in partibus Germaniae (There is a country in the lands of Germania)”. It was then that the figure of St. Adalbert gained a fair degree of popularity in Bohemia, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Dalmatia. In Germany and beyond, Emperor Otto III, a bosom friend of the saint played a significant role in propagating the worship of St. Adalbert, having endowed numerous churches with relics he had received from Bolesław the Brave. In Bohemia, the cult began in a curious fashion, namely, with the theft and removal of St. Adalbert's relics from Gniezno by Duke Břetislav of Bohemia in 1038. Initially, it was observed by the clergy associated with the cathedral of Prague and the Benedictine monks of Břevnov. It was not until the latter half of the thirteenth century that it started to spread, becoming well-established throughout the country in the following century. In Hungary, where, according to tradition, St. Adalbert was said to have carried out missionary activity, his cult was alive from the outset. St. Adalbert is the patron of the metropolitan cathedral in Esztergom and a number of other churches, while a formula dedicated to St. Adalbert may be found in the earliest liturgical books.

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¹J. Nastalska-Wiśnicka, *Św. Wojciech*, entry in *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, vol. 20, Lublin 2014, col. 837–840.

The cult of St. Adalbert reached Zagreb towards the end of the eleventh century from Esztergom. In Dalmatia, it spread in the metropolises of Split and Zadar².

In the state established by the Teutonic order (thirteenth – fifteenth century), the cult of the bishop-martyr was popularized not only by legends and prayers but, above all, by the translation of the earliest biography (*Vita prior*) into German, made in verse by the Teutonic Knight Nikolai Jeroschin. In 1124, a bishopric was founded in honor of St. Adalbert, with its seat in Lubosz, in the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Gniezno. Simultaneously, the cult of the saint was brought to Western Pomerania by the mission of the Brandenburg Bishop St. Otto, which set out in 1124 from the tomb of St. Adalbert in Gniezno. The first Christian church to be erected in Szczecin, on a hill of pagan worship, was dedicated to St. Adalbert; the same designation was given to the first church on the island of Wolin, also built on the site of a former pagan cult. In Poland, the leading centers of the cult of St. Adalbert besides Gniezno were to be found at the first Benedictine monasteries and the churches in Poznań, Kalisz, Krakow and Płock, which received the bishop's relics from Duke Bolesław the Brave and his successors. Priests and monks affirmed their veneration of St. Adalbert in their sermons, often using colorful and lofty descriptions of his life³.

Regarding the earliest historical sources, an account in the oldest Polish chronicle attests to the enduring cult of the patron in Poland, stating that on the eve of the cathedral's consecration in 1097, St. Adalbert appearing as an armed rider on a grey horse saved a town from a Pomeranian raid. A new element was introduced into the observances in the first half of the twelfth century. Specifically, some of the relics of St. Adalbert were found during the reconstruction of the cathedral. To commemorate their translation, the feast of *Translatio sancti Adalberti* would be celebrated at the Cathedral of Gniezno on 20 October; later on, it would come to be observed in the entire Polish Church. From that time onwards, the worship of St. Adalbert thrived throughout the Middle Ages, setting the keynote of the nation's spiritual life, while the Church itself attached great importance to the cult. In the late thirteenth century, the Archbishop of Gniezno, Jakub Świnka, decreed that "the story of St. Adalbert be in writing in all the churches of our province, whether cathedral or monastic and that it should be used and sung by all". Accordingly, twice a year on the day of St. Adalbert's death (23 April) and on the feast of the *Translatio sancti Adalberti* (20 October) the life and miracles of St. Adalbert were read out in Polish churches⁴.

The cult of St. Adalbert as a patron saint of local churches declined somewhat towards the end of the sixteenth century in the wake of the Reformation. It flourished again in the late nineteenth century, culminating in the celebrations of the 900th and 950th anniversary of his martyrdom⁵. Moreover, with the nineteenth-century partitions and national oppression under Prussian rule (which

² Ibidem, col. 838–839.

³ J. Fried, *Święty Wojciech i Polska*, Przemysł 2001.

⁴ W. Danielski, *Z dziejów kultu liturgicznego św. Wojciecha na ziemiach polskich. Święta ku czci św. Wojciecha*, „Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne” 1967, issue 4, pp. 100–108.

⁵ J. Nastalska-Wiśnicka, *Św. Wojciech*, col. 839.

also sought to eradicate indigenous religious practice as part of Kulturkampf), Gniezno, the cathedral church and the tomb of St. Adalbert epitomized Polishness and Catholicism, while the pilgrimages to Gniezno especially in 1897, on the 900th anniversary of his death became acts of both religious and national significance⁶.

The millennium of the martyrdom of St. Adalbert was celebrated with special grandeur, culminating with the visitation of the saint's tomb by the Holy Father John Paul II on 3 June 1997⁷.

In the Diocese of Elk, established by Pope John Paul II in 1992, St. Adalbert also receives due veneration. The aim of this paper is to outline the most important forms of the cult in the Mazury–Suwałki–Augustów diocese in 1992–2022, i.e. over the first three decades of its existence. To date, this issue has not aroused much interest among researchers.

Patron of the diocese and ecclesiastical institutions

Since the very beginning, St. Adalbert has been a secondary patron saint of the Diocese of Elk, and his feast day is celebrated, as in the whole Church, on 23 April. The decree of 25 March 1992, signed by Archbishop Józef Kowalczyk, the Apostolic Nuncio to Poland, reads thus: “His Holiness John Paul II has decreed that as of 25 March 1992, St. Adalbert and St. Bruno of Querfurt are to be the secondary Patrons of the Diocese of Elk”⁸. The patron saint of the Diocese of Elk is clearly designated, but there is no information about the relevant ecclesiastical authority's document that provided the grounds for this communique. Let us add that the prerogative to issue such decrees rests with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Such a document, together with a papal brief, was promulgated only on 7 October 1993. The congregation's decree states as follows: “Hac oblata occasione Summus Pontifex benigne confirmavit electionem BEATAE MARIAE VIRGINIS SUB TITULO <MATER ECCLESIAE> in Patronam principalem et SANCTI ADALBERTI, episcopi et martyris in Patronum secundarium apud Deum dioecesis Liccanensis, cuius Episcopus Excellentissimus Dominus Adalbertus Ziemia electionem ipsam praesentaverat”⁹. [In this situation, the Holy Father graciously approved the

⁶ J. Strzelczyk, *Apostołowie Europy*, Warsaw 1997, p. 208; A. Szymoszyn, *Bohater religijny w świętej przestrzeni. Kult św. Wojciecha na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Przemyśl 2010.

⁷ *Dziedzictwo kultu św. Wojciecha*, Lublin 1998; *Kanonizacja św. Wojciecha i dziedzictwo jego kultu*, Lublin 2001.

⁸ Episcopal Curia of Elk, Decree of Archbishop Józef Kowalczyk of 25 March 1992 [same: *Dekret o ustanowieniu i określeniu granic nowych diecezji i prowincji kościelnych w Polsce oraz przynależności metropolitarnej poszczególnych diecezji*, „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1992, no. 1, pp. 23–24].

⁹ *Breve apostolskie dotyczące patronów diecezji definitywnie ustanowionych i zatwierdzonych przez Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1993, no. 2(4), pp. 3; *Dekret Kongregacji dpp. Kultu i Dyscypliny Sakramentów dotyczący patronów diecezji elckiej definitywnie ustanowionych i zatwierdzonych przez Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1993, no. 2(4), pp. 4.

election of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, as the primary patron saint and of St. Adalbert, bishop and martyr, as the secondary patron saint, by the power of God, of the Diocese of Ełk, whose election Bishop Wojciech Ziemia had solicited – transl. by this author]. This gives rise to a rather complex situation in formal-legal terms. While St. Adalbert is mentioned both in the letter of 25 March 1992 and in the other two documents of 7 October 1993, St. Bruno of Querfurt is not mentioned in the final ordinances of the Holy See. Consequently, St. Bruno of Querfurt cannot be recognized as a patron saint in the Diocese of Ełk since such was the final decision of the Holy See, which, incidentally, issued its documents at the request of the first Bishop of Ełk, Wojciech Ziemia.

As far as St. Adalbert is concerned, the reason for choosing him as the patron saint of the Diocese of Ełk is the missionary aspect, though not exclusively. He carried out his duties in the Prussian lands and, therefore, also on the territory of the present-day Diocese of Ełk. In addition, this is where he shed blood for the faith. His martyrdom and canonization undoubtedly influenced the founding of the Archbishopric of Gniezno, an ecclesiastical center which was independent of Germany, its powerful neighbor, and the Church there. In the year 1000, Emperor Otto III came to Gniezno, where Adalbert's body had been laid to rest, and called Bolesław the Brave his "friend and ally", placed the imperial diadem on his head and offered him the spear of St. Maurice in a token of recognition of the Polish state in the world at the time. It is also interesting to note that this was the first canonization in the history of the Church to have been proclaimed by the Pope. Previously, such acts had been performed by local bishops. By raising St. Adalbert to the altar, Poland came to be recognized on the scene of Christian Europe and simultaneously obtained a patron and intercessor before God¹⁰. St. Adalbert became the principal patron saint of Poland alongside Our Lady Queen of Poland (feast day on 3 May) and St. Stanisław the Bishop and Martyr (feast day on 8 May). St. Adalbert is one of the most popular saints¹¹.

Even though St. Adalbert became the patron of the Diocese of Ełk, there are few undertakings or diocese-wide institutions dedicated to the saint. In fact, Adalbertinum Diocesan Publishers is the only such establishment among the central institutions. The publishing house was organized in 2006 by Rev. Wojciech Guzewicz (name, logotype, obtaining ISBN and ISSN numbers, launch of monographic publications the first scholarly volume to come out was a postdoctoral dissertation entitled *The Catholic Social Movement in the Diocese of Łomża in the Interwar Period*, published in May 2006 and scientific journals, with the first issue of *Studia Ełckie* released in autumn 2006). However, the publishing house would not be registered with the district court despite the original intention of the organizer because less than six months following the founding decree of the undertaking, Bishop Jerzy Mazur incorporated it into the structures of the Centre for Administration and Pastoral Work and entrusted

¹⁰ See K. Śmigiel, *Współczesny kult św. Wojciecha w Polsce*, in: *Przeszłość natchnieniem dla teraźniejszości. Sympozjum historyczne i świętowojeckowe. Ełk, 20–22 kwietnia 1994 roku*, ed. K. Brzostek et al., Ełk 1996, pp. 307–316.

¹¹ J. Nastalska-Wiśnicka, *Św. Wojciech*, col. 837–840.

its management to the director of the latter, Sr. Blanka Szymańska OSB. Nevertheless, it was already a thoroughly established institution with a certain name or even a brand with which a range of scholarly works and initiatives could be associated. How significant and far-reaching a step the establishment of the publishing house was at the time is evinced by the fact that in 2019 Adalbertinum Diocesan Publishers received a high score (80 pts) for scientific monographs in the ranking of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Among other things, it met two very important criteria, i.e. the period of active publishing exceeded the minimum of 10 years while at least several of its publications (in line with tested methodological standards, inclusive of publishing reviews) had received international scholarly recognition¹².

Dedications of parishes and churches

The cult of St. Adalbert in the Diocese of Elk is reflected in the dedication of three churches and parishes to the saint. It needs to be noted that two were dedicated before 1992 as part of other structures of ecclesiastical administration (Rydzewo in the Diocese of Sejny or Augustów, and Elk in the Diocese of Warmia); yet another in Suwałki was dedicated already in the Diocese of Elk (in Suwałki).

Without doubt, the most important of the three locations is the parish and church of St. Adalbert the Bishop and Martyr in Elk. Following the establishment of the Diocese of Elk (25 March 1992), the Holy Father John Paul II elevated the church to the rank of a cathedral, and it is there that the sole relic of the saint in the diocese is to be found. The relic was placed in a statue of the saint, which had been founded by young priests in 1980 in the Diocese of Warmia. At that time, the statue was taken to Jasna Góra and, after the national celebrations of the Queen of Poland (3 May), it returned to the Diocese of Warmia to visit individual parishes and churches¹³. When its peregrination was completed, the figure was installed in the “small church” in Elk¹⁴. On 23 April 1993, the relics of the saint conveyed from Gniezno were placed in the chest area of the represented figure¹⁵. At present, the statue stands in the cathedral by one of the side altars (on the eastern side). However, it is displayed at the main altar on the feast days of the saint, as well as during the annual processions from the Church of the Sacred Heart to the cathedral during celebrations in honor of St. Adalbert.

The cathedral church itself was built in 1893–1895 with the aid from the Society of St. Boniface and St. Adalbert, which supported Catholic centers in the diaspora in Warmia and Masuria (in canonical terms, St. Adalbert’s parish

¹² See W. Guzewicz, *Wkład duchowieństwa diecezji elckiej w rozwój intelektualny Polski i regionu (Część 2: Stopnie i tytuły oraz czasopisma naukowe)*, „Studia Elckie” 20(2018), no. 3, pp. 323.

¹³ *Słowa Prymasa Polski Józefa Glempa wygłoszone w czasie ingresu biskupa elckiego*, „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1992, no. 1, pp. 53.

¹⁴ This is what the later cathedral of the Diocese of Elk used to be called.

¹⁵ K. Śmigiel, *Współczesny kult św. Wojciecha w Polsce*, pp. 311.

in Elk was founded on 31 March 1871)¹⁶. The temple was consecrated by Bishop Edward Herrmann on 19 August 1903. It is an unplastered edifice of red brick with a steep-pitched roof covered with copper sheeting. The roof truss was made of wood. The church is 47 m long, 17 m wide and 11 m high (the height of the tower is 21 m). The usable area of the church is 720 m², while the cubic volume reaches 7,920 m³. The temple can accommodate approximately 1,500 people. Between 1993 and 1999, the church underwent major renovation (spanning architecture and interior design) so as to adapt the temple to its new function of a cathedral church¹⁷.

In the center of the church is the main altar, a neo-Gothic wooden feature dating from the late nineteenth century. The ornamentation of the altarpiece, measuring 320 by 380 cm, draws on the scene of the Eucharist. It stands on the stone altar table, which in turn is decorated with a relief of the Lamb. The entire altar is surmounted by a sculpture of Jesus Crucified. The post-conciliar altar and the adjacent pulpit are made of marble. The walls of the presbytery are lined with canon stalls, with the bishop's chair among them. Apart from the main altar, the church has two side altars, also in neo-Gothic style, with one dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the other to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. All altars in the church date from 1903. Other noteworthy features in the temple include a pulpit and a chalice-shaped baptismal font from the early twentieth century. The pulpit, mounted on the first pillar separating the left side aisle, was crafted in neo-Gothic style by Joachim Skibowski. The 18-voice organ in the choir was made by the Terletzky company of Königsberg¹⁸.

Standing next to the cathedral is the Chapel of St. John Paul II, built as a gift in gratitude for his life, pontificate and being among the people of Elk in June 1999. It is a place of perpetual adoration of the Holy Sacrament and a burial place for the bishops of Elk (with several crypts already built there). The cornerstone was blessed by Bishop Jerzy Mazur on 9 October 2011, and construction of the chapel began the same year, to be completed in 2014 (consecration). The chapel was designed by engineer Andrzej Chwalibóg, while the appearance of its interior was conceived by the well-known sculptor Professor Wincenty Kućma¹⁹.

¹⁶ It is well worth noting that a parish church belonging to the Reszel deanery existed in Elk as early as 1472. As everywhere in Masuria, the Lutheran denomination was introduced in Elk following the Reformation, whose later consolidation should be attributed to the famous minister Jan Malecki (Jan of Sącz). It was not until the nineteenth century that Catholicism gained a larger number of adherents there. Until 1853, the Catholics were looked after by priests from Święta Lipka. On 22 May 1853, Bishop Józef A. Geritz consecrated a pastoral post there, and on 15 October 1854, Rev. Franciszek Thiedig consecrated the chapel of St Adalbert. This outpost (station) was located on a plot of land in contemporary Kilińskiego Street, on the site where the remains of the Catholic cemetery can be found today. A. Kopiczko, *Dzieje miasta i parafii Elk w średniowieczu (do 1525 r.)*, in: *Przeszłość natchnieniem dla teraźniejszości. Sympozjum historyczne i świętowojeckowe Elk, 20–22 kwietnia 1994 r.*, ed. K. Brzostek et al., Elk 1996, pp. 63–74.

¹⁷ J. Obłąk, *Kult św. Wojciecha w diecezji warmińskiej*, „Studia Warmińskie” 1966, vol. 3, pp. 17.

¹⁸ W. Guzewicz, *Kościół i parafia ziemi elckiej*, Elk 2008, pp. 83–89.

¹⁹ W. Bitowski, *Parafia pw. św. Wojciecha w Elku w latach 1992–2017. Studium administracyjno-historyczne*, Elk 2021 [typescript, Library of the University of Warmia and Mazury].

The earliest church and parish to be dedicated to St. Adalbert is located in Rydzewo Rajgrodzkie in the present-day Diocese of Elk. It was established in the early nineteenth century as a filial church (1810)²⁰, though a chapel, first attested in 1764, had existed in Rydzewo even before that. The latter building was demolished in 1865, and the still-standing wooden church was built in its place. It is a rectangular, single-nave church, 25 m long and 10 m wide, with the vault at a height of approximately 5 m. Such timber churches would be often built in the vast areas of the erstwhile Poland, becoming a characteristic feature in the architectural landscape of villages and towns²¹.

The main altar from the mid-nineteenth century is the centerpiece of the church. It is a wooden, architectural, single-tier piece with a finial. Its central panel features an effigy of Our Lady of Czestochowa, painted in oil on canvas. The picture is screened by a painting of St. Adalbert, also dating from the nineteenth century. The altarpiece is entirely marbled, while the columns and ornaments are gilded. A metal tabernacle is situated slightly below the paintings²².

In contrast, St. Adalbert's parish and church in Suwałki is the youngest religious site in the Diocese of Elk, having been created in the 1990s. First, in 1996, a plot of land was set aside there for the construction of a temple, whose construction ensued in 1999, along with the establishment of the rectorate (22 April)²³, and later parish (12 September)²⁴. The first Mass was celebrated in the newly built church as early as 11 September 1999. The church was solemnly consecrated by Bishop Jerzy Mazur on 29 September 2019.

The design of the church was developed by master engineer Jolanta Niemiec-Górnik from Suwałki and the work was contracted to the Construction, Manufacturing and Trading Company "Kera". The cornerstone of the temple was blessed by the Holy Father John Paul II during the pilgrimage to his homeland on 8 June 1999 in Elk. The church is built of brick, mostly plain and clinker, plastered (a number of external clinker brick elements); its shape resembles a fishing boat, with a tall, 36-meter-high tower (added in 2004) surmounted by a cross. In 2018, three bells named after St. John Paul II, St. Stanisław Kostka and St. Adalbert were blessed and hung in the church tower. The roof of the

²⁰ J. Malinowski, *Dzieje duszpasterstwa parafii Rydzewo w latach 1812–1925*, Łomża 1994 [typescript, Library of the Catholic University of Lublin].

²¹ A. Pieńkowski, *Trud dawnych pokoleń i współczesnych mieszkańców. Historia parafii w Rydzewie*, „Rajgrodzkie Echa” 2011, no. 3, pp. 22–23.

²² K.I. Studzińska, *Powstanie, organizacja i formy duszpasterstwa w parafii pw. św. Wojciecha w Rydzewie od czasu erekcji do roku 2002*, Elk 2004 [typescript, Library of the University of Warmia and Mazury]; A. Pieńkowski, *Zasoby Archiwum Parafialnego w Rydzewie k. Rajgrodu (XIX–XX w.)*, „Studia Elckie” 13(2011), pp. 141–154; Idem, *Filia Rydzewska w pierwszej połowie XIX w.*, „Rajgrodzkie Echa” 2011, no. 5, pp. 21.

²³ *Dekret biskupa elckiego erygujący rektorat pw. św. Wojciecha w Suwałkach*, „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1999, no. 1–2, pp. 46.

²⁴ *Dekret biskupa elckiego erygujący parafię przy kościele pw. św. Wojciecha w Suwałkach*, „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1999, no. 3–4, pp. 53.

tower is sloping, not unlike the gentle slope of a mountain. The church is 41 m long and 22 m wide.

The chancel is the focal point of the church. Its main wall has two arched stained-glass windows, with a cross with the figure of Christ Crucified (2017) between and a metal tabernacle underneath on a marble altar (bearing the IHS monogram). The post-conciliar altar (with the symbol of the Paschal Lamb) and the pulpit are also made of marble. There are two side altars in the church, rebuilt in 2017. The first features the images of the Merciful Jesus (center) as well as St. Faustyna and St. John Paul II, while Our Lady of Perpetual Help (center) and St. Adalbert and St. Bruno are depicted in the second. The church's cornerstone (blessed in Elk on 6 June 1999 by the Holy Father John Paul II) and a granite plaque commemorating the millennial anniversary of St. Adalbert's canonization may be found in the vestibule of the church²⁵.

Pastoral letters and homilies

Two special pastoral letters were dedicated to St. Adalbert in the Diocese of Elk. Both were written by Bishop Wojciech Ziemba. The first letter was inspired by the start of the peregrination of the relics of St. Adalbert in 1993. In his words to the faithful, the head of the church of Elk drew attention to four issues:

- a. Missions as a fundamental task of the Church,
- b. St. Adalbert as a missionary of the first millennium,
- c. St. Adalbert as patron of the new evangelization,
- d. St. Adalbert as patron of the Diocese of Elk.

This letter was read in all the churches and parishes of the Diocese of Elk on the Sunday prior to the visitation of St. Adalbert's relics, i.e. on 22 September 1993²⁶.

The second letter, on the other hand, was written in the context of the feasts of St. Adalbert in 1994. It was divided into two parts. Bearing in mind the Grand Novena preceding the Millennium of St. Adalbert's death in Poland, the Bishop of Elk devoted the first part to all major celebrations and events to be held in the diocese (symposium, peregrination, relics, etc.). In the second, the author drew on the theology of the saint's martyrdom and his patronage of the new evangelization. This first part of the letter was formulated as a communiqué, whereas the second took the form of an essay with theological deliberations²⁷. The passage in which the Bishop of Elk answers why St. Adalbert became the patron saint of the Diocese is particularly interesting. He observes, for instance, that "since the outset, St. Adalbert was a figure inscribed in the multiplicity

²⁵ See W. Guzewicz, *My i historia. Kościoły i parafie dekanatu pw. Ducha Świętego w Suwałkach*, Elk 2014, pp. 51–56.

²⁶ W. Ziemba, *List pasterski na rozpoczęcie peregrynacji św. Wojciecha w diecezji elckiej*, in: Idem, *W służbie Bogu bogatemu w miłosierdzie*, Elk 1997, pp. 81–85.

²⁷ Idem, *List pasterski biskupa elckiego na uroczystość św. Wojciecha*, „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1994, no. 1, pp. 32–35.

of cultures of contemporary Europe, both through his personal contacts and friendships (with St. Bruno, a German; Otto III, son of a Saxon and a Greek; Pope Sylvester, who was French; the Italian John Canaparius, and Polish King Bolesław the Brave) as well as through his ministry in Bohemia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Prussia”²⁸.

It may be worthwhile to note that in 1997, in connection with the nationwide celebrations of the millennial anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Adalbert, the Polish Bishops’ Conference issued a special letter to be read in all churches and parishes in the country. The Diocese of Elk also joined in the effort. The letter was read on the feast of St. Adalbert, i.e. 23 April²⁹.

Over the 30 years since the Diocese of Elk was established, priests from the diocese and beyond have been invited to deliver the word of God at the feast of St. Adalbert in Elk. Some of those homilies were subsequently published in diocesan periodicals, such as the *Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej, Martyria* and on the diocesan website (<https://diecezjaelk.pl/>). Those invited to share the word of God included Cardinal Józef Glemp, Primate of Poland (1994)³⁰, Archbishop Edmund Piszcz (1997)³¹, Archbishop Henryk Muszyński (2001)³², Bishop Romuald Kaminski (2006)³³, Rev. Prof. Wojciech Guzewicz (2008)³⁴, Rev. Dr Paweł Tarasiewicz (2022)³⁵.

During the most recent feast of St. Adalbert (2022), the homily was preached by Rev. Dr Paweł Tarasiewicz, spiritual father at the Higher Seminary of the Diocese of Elk. Beginning with a historical outline of St. Adalbert’s life, he observed that although “spurned during his lifetime, St. Adalbert became popular after his death. For when Bolesław the Brave recovered his relics, many people came forward to solicit them, who also wanted to venerate St. Adalbert as a patron saint. We are the heirs of our patron saint. We are those who venerate not only the material relics left behind but also the spiritual goods”.

He recalled that St. John Paul II counted St. Adalbert among those who steadfastly affirmed faith and propagated the Christian vision of man. This aspect was particularly underscored by Rev. Tarasiewicz: “Does anyone today believe in living the Gospel? Is this not the reason why fewer and fewer people go to Church? Fewer and fewer young people attend the catechesis? Isn’t it precisely the lack of such a faith, a simple faith, which would mean that the Gospel can be lived, that the Gospel is something very human, something necessary. St. Adalbert is the one who dissented from worshipping God with one’s lips alone. He opposed hypocrisy, which was so upsetting then and still upsets one today”.

²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 34–35.

²⁹ Polish Bishops’ Conference, *List Episkopatu Polski z racji jubileuszu 1000-lecia męczeńskiej śmierci świętego Wojciecha*, „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1997, no. 2–3, pp. 3–6.

³⁰ „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1994, no. 1, pp. 60–65.

³¹ „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1997, no. 2–3, pp. 48.

³² „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 2001, no. 1–2, pp. 67–68.

³³ „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 2006, no. 1, pp. 86.

³⁴ „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 2008, no. 1–2, pp. 59.

³⁵ „Martyria” 2022, no. 6, pp. 3.

Rev. Tarasiewicz stressed that St. Adalbert is a patron saint for our times. “He is a suggestion to us, to those who seek, on how to put a man together, to convince them that the Gospel is not beyond their strength, but it is in the Gospel that the chance lies. There are various interpretations of the seed that falls into the soil, dies, and produces a harvest. Perhaps that soil is not to be found on earth? Perhaps, in order to yield crops, you do not have to throw yourself into the ground and die there. Perhaps that soil for me, for you, for every human being, is God himself? Maybe I should fall into Him, die in Him, take root in Him, and put all my hope in Him so as to bear fruit together with Him. Whatever one may say about St. Adalbert, this interpretation appeals to me when I look at him, when I consider who he is, what he accomplishes, and what he teaches. He is the seed that fell into God as into the soil; therein, he lost himself because he knew he only stood to gain. Today, he looks at the fruits of his life, his death, and his trust in God, and he can only rejoice that despite all the hardship that surrounds us, we are constantly trying day by day to unite what is earthly, what is ours, what is human, with what is divine, evangelical. Because the Christian vision of man boils down to one simply living the Gospel every day”, Rev. Tarasiewicz explained³⁶.

The feast days of St. Adalbert and other events

Public veneration of St. Adalbert the Bishop and Martyr manifested in the peregrination of St. Adalbert’s relics in the Diocese of Ełk. It took place in two reliquaries: first, those were the relics and the statue of St. Adalbert from the Ełk Cathedral that toured the region; subsequently, it was the so-called casket brought specially for the occasion from Gniezno. The tour was announced by Bishop Wojciech Ziemia as early as the beginning of 1993. In *Letter to the Holy Father John Paul II*, he explained the reasons behind the undertaking: “in this manner, at the close of the second millennium of Christianity, we wish to awaken our zeal for evangelization following the example of our Holy Patrons. It will also be our diocesan preparation for the millennial jubilee of the martyrdom of St. Adalbert”³⁷. On 29 September 1993, the parish of Christ the Servant in Ełk became the first to receive the relics and the statue³⁸. The peregrination came to an end in the Cathedral in 1995 during the feast of St. Adalbert.

Shortly prior to the 1994 celebrations in Ełk, St. Adalbert’s relics, contained in the so-called casket brought specially for the occasion from Gniezno, went on tour again. It lasted several days, visiting only several centers of religious worship. Thus, on 16 April, the Gniezno relics were received by the parish of St. John the

³⁶ mr. Św. Wojciech – niechciany za życia, stał się rozchwytywany po śmierci, <<https://diecezjaelk.pl/2022/04/26/sw-wojciech-niehciany-za-zycia-stal-sie-rozchwytywany-po-smierci/>>, last access: 26.04.2022.

³⁷ „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Ełkiej” 1993, no. 2, pp. 58.

³⁸ Ibidem, pp. 98.

Baptist in Pisz, on 17 April by the parish of St. Bruno in Giżycko, on 18 April by the parish of the Most Holy Virgin Mary Mother of the Church in Gołdap, on 19 April by the parish of St. Alexander in Suwałki, on 20 April by the parish of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Augustów, and on 21 April by the parish of St. Adalbert the Bishop and Martyr in Elk (the cathedral)³⁹.

The church fairs held in Elk in honor of the bishop and martyr have played an important role in the cult of St. Adalbert in the Diocese. These celebrations gather not only cathedral parishioners but also draw pilgrims from across the diocese and beyond. They usually begin with vespers and a procession with the relics of St. Adalbert from the Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus to the Elk Cathedral. Mass is then offered, either at the Elk Cathedral or elsewhere (for example, during the first church fair in 1992, the Eucharist was celebrated at a field altar in the square near the cathedral)⁴⁰. Finally, a solemn blessing is usually given, and the kissing of the relics follows.

St. Adalbert's church fair on 23 April 1992 also witnessed the first installation of the Bishop of Elk, Wojciech Ziemia. After a solemn procession to the Elk Cathedral (from the Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus), the new bishop was installed on the bishop's throne by Cardinal Józef Glemp, the Primate of Poland, and Archbishop Edmund Piszcz, the Metropolitan of Warmia. The Mass was attended by such eminent figures as Archbishop Edmund Piszcz, Metropolitan of Warmia, Archbishop Edward Kisiel, Metropolitan of Białystok, Archbishop Władysław Ziółek, Metropolitan of Łódź, Bishop Juliusz Paetz, Bishop of Łomża, Bishop Andrzej Śliwiński, Bishop of Elbląg, and suffragan bishops: Julian Wojtkowski from Olsztyn, Edward Ozorowski from Białystok, Józef Wysocki from Elbląg, Waclaw Skomorucha from Siedlce, Roman Marcinkowski from Płock, Adam Ozimek from Radom and Jan Styrna from Tarnów⁴¹.

Another undertaking which contributed significantly to the popularity of the cult in the Diocese of Elk was a symposium dedicated to the history and figure of St. Adalbert, held in Elk on 20–22 April 1994. Interesting lectures on St. Adalbert were delivered by, e.g. Rev. Prof. Kazimierz Śmigiel of Gniezno (on the contemporary cult of St. Adalbert in Poland) and Rev. Prof. Marian Borzyszkowski from Olsztyn (concerning the Society of St. Adalbert in the Diocese of Warmia). The symposium yielded a post-conference volume published in 1996⁴². Those events offered a new look at the rich past of the Suwałki–Augustów–Mazury region and the enduringly relevant themes of the mission of St. Adalbert.

One more event relating to St. Adalbert in the Diocese of Elk is worth mentioning, namely the millennial of the martyrdom of St. Adalbert, which the Church of Elk celebrated on 23 April 1997. The anniversary included a formal session at the episcopal curia, award of papal decorations to the priests of the Diocese of Elk, St. Adalbert's Vespers in the Church of the Most Sacred Heart

³⁹ W. Ziemia, *List pasterski biskupa elckiego na uroczystość św. Wojciecha*, pp. 34.

⁴⁰ „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Elckiej” 1992, no. 1, pp. 51.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 52.

⁴² *Przeszłość natchnieniem dla teraźniejszości. Sympozjum historyczne i świętowojeickowe Elk, 20–22 kwietnia 1994 r.*, ed. K. Brzostek et al., Elk 1996, pp. 342.

of Jesus, as well as a procession and Mass in the cathedral square, presided over by Archbishop Edmund Piszcz⁴³.

Furthermore, the cult of St. Adalbert has been consistently promoted in every parish in the Diocese of Ełk. In most, it is confined to the celebration of the annual feast involving local parishioners. Still, a number of parishes and their priests have had more ambitious plans and ideas for celebrating the saint. For example, in 1994, the parish of Studzieniczna, which at the time hosted the relics of St. Adalbert, launched a seven-day St. Adalbert's Mission. In the autumn of that year, the parish of Biała Piska held commemorative events for the diocesan patron in all its schools (moderated by Rev. Wojciech Guzewicz)⁴⁴, while at the parish of St. Mary Magdalene in Mikaszówka St. Adalbert was dedicated the Advent retreat, led by Rev. Dr Czesław Oleksy of Łomża⁴⁵.

Conclusions

The cult of St. Adalbert has been known in Polish lands since 997, the year of his martyrdom for the faith, and it would see various forms throughout the centuries. In the Diocese of Ełk, established by Pope John Paul II in 1992, St. Adalbert also receives due veneration. Among other things, he is the patron saint of the diocese, as well as three churches and parishes (Rydzewo Rajgrodzkie, Ełk Cathedral, Suwałki), the Adalbertnum Diocesan Publishers operate under his name and intercession, while the 1990s saw a peregrination of the statue of St. Adalbert and his relics in all the parishes of the diocese. St. Adalbert is celebrated during dedicated annual events, attended by the congregation of Ełk, as well as the faithful from across the diocese and beyond. It may be argued that St. Adalbert is quite well known here, whereas the aforementioned initiatives are indicative of a lively cult, a profound social awareness and a unique hagiographic ideology in the Diocese of Ełk.

The first diocesan bishop of Ełk, Wojciech Ziemba, should be credited with the greatest contribution to fostering the cult of St. Adalbert in the Diocese. It was under his governance that a parish was organized and a church built in Suwałki, annual St. Adalbert services were introduced, relics of the saint were brought to the cathedral of Ełk (1993), and an international scientific symposium on the history of the lands of the Diocese of Ełk and St. Adalbert was held (1994), etc. It seems that Bishop Ziemba's commitment to this field was due to at least two factors. Firstly, Bishop Wojciech Ziemba came from the tradition of the Diocese of Warmia, where the worship of St. Adalbert was ardently cultivated. Secondly, he bore the name of the saint, which obliged him to honor the patron saint in his life. Divine Providence placed him at the helm of the newly created Diocese of Ełk. Hence, it is understandable that he used his time and office to propagate the cult of St. Adalbert in the region.

⁴³ „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Ełckiej” 1997, no. 2–3, pp. 48.

⁴⁴ *Akademie świętowojeckowe*, „Promyk Wiary” 1994, no. 1, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁵ „Kronika Urzędowa Diecezji Ełckiej” 1994, no. 3, pp. 88.

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THE CULT OF ST. ADALBERT IN THE DIOCESE OF EŁK (1992–2022)

SUMMARY

The article presents the most important forms of the cult of Saint Wojciech in the Ełk diocese, i.e. in the Masurian–Suwałki–Augustów region in the years 1992–2022.

There are, among others: patron of the diocese, three churches and parishes are dedicated to him (Rydzewo Rajgrodzkie, Ełk – cathedral, Suwałki), the Adalbertinum Diocesan Publishing House operates under his name and intercession, and in the 1990s the pilgrimage of the figure of St. Wojciech along with his relics in all parishes in the diocese. The annual events are the St. Wojciech celebrations, which attract the faithful not only from Ełk, but also from the entire diocese and from beyond its borders.

The greatest contributor to the development of worship in the Ełk diocese was its first diocesan bishop, Wojciech Ziamba. During his times, a parish was organized and it was decided to build a church in Suwałki, annual Saint Adalbert services were initiated, the saint's relics were brought to the Ełk cathedral (1993), and an international scientific symposium devoted to the history of the lands of the Ełk diocese and Saint Wojciech (1994) etc.

KEYWORDS: Cult of Saint Wojciech, Ełk diocese

