

DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCES OF THE PRIMATE OF POLAND AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE POLISH BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

ROZWÓJ KOMPETENCJI PRYMASA POLSKI I PRZEWODNICZĄCEGO KONFERENCJI EPISKOPATU POLSKI

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Abstract

The rights and privileges of the primates of Poland were considerable. Polish primates crowned Polish kings, blessed royal marriages, and presided over the funeral rites of Polish kings. They were the first senators of the Kingdom, and in the king's absence they acted as his governor and *interrex*. They had the right to convene the Sejm, Senate councils and order general mobilisation; they were members of governmental bodies, had precedence before princes and dukes, sat before cardinals, had a princely title and a coat of arms, and wore purple robes. A turning point for the hierarchy came with the new legislation of the universal Church. Canon 438 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law expressly regulates that, apart from the prerogative of honour, the primate no longer has any power of governance, unless otherwise stated for some of them by apostolic privilege or approved custom. Canon 452 prescribes the election of the president of the bishops' conference. Currently, Primate of Poland is an honorary title for the metropolitan archbishops of Gniezno. The privileges inherent in the functions of the primate are precedence during liturgical celebrations, a permanent place in the Permanent Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference, the right to wear purple and to have 30 tassels in his coat of arms.

Keywords: Primate of Poland, Polish Bishops' Conference, President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, hierarchical organisation of the Church

Abstrakt

Prawa i przywileje prymasów Polski były ogromne. Prymasi Polski dokonywali koronacji królów Polski, błogosławili małżeństwa królewskie, przewodniczyli obrzędowi pogrzebowym królów polskich. Byli pierwszymi senatorami królestwa, w trakcie nieobecności króla byli jego namiestnikami i pełnili funkcję *interrex*a. Posiadali prawo do zwoływania sejmów, rad senatu oraz pospolitego ruszenia, zasiadali w organach rządowych, mieli precedencję przed królewiczami i książętami, zasiadali przed kardynałami, posiadali tytuł książęcy, herb oraz nosili szatę purpurową. Przełom w hierarchii nastąpił wraz z nowym ustawodawstwem Kościoła powszechnego. Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego z 1983 r. w kan. 438 wprost reguluje, że oprócz prerogatywy honoru, prymas nie ma już żadnej władzy rządzenia, chyba że w odniesieniu do niektórych z nich stwierdzałoby się co innego na mocy przywileju apostolskiego albo zatwierdzonego zwyczaju, zaś w kan. 452 nakazuje wybrać przewodniczącego konferencji biskupów. Obecnie prymas Polski jest tytułem honorowym przysługującym arcybiskupom metropolitom gnieźnieńskim. Przywilejami wnikającymi z funkcji prymasa są: precedencja podczas uroczystości liturgicznych, stałe miejsce w Radzie Stałej Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, prawo do noszenia purpury oraz posiadania w herbie 30 chwostów.

Słowa kluczowe: Prymas Polski, Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, Przewodniczący Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, ustrój hierarchiczny kościoła

Introduction

This article presents the evolution of the hierarchical position and competences of primates of Poland, which along with the evolution of church law became decentralised. Now, the Primate of Poland holds an honorary position, and the remaining powers are vested in the Polish Bishops' Conference, headed by its president.

1. The origin of primacy in Poland

In Western Europe, during the early stages of the Church's organisation, there was a single patriarchate in Rome, which encompassed numerous local churches. In the fourth century, within the limits of this patriarchate arose the office of primate – first among equals. First, the primate's authority extended over several metropolia, then it typically covered local, national churches [Kumor 1983, 157-58].

The Catholic Church in Poland was fully organised when Pope Sylvester II crowned the efforts of Prince Bolesław I the Brave and erected an independent ecclesiastical organisation in 999 – the metropolis of Gniezno. Therefore, the archbishop metropolitan of Gniezno was considered the sole head of the entire Church in Poland, i.e. the primate of Poland. The application of this decision came in 1000, when during the Congress of Gniezno Emperor Otto III announced the creation of the first Polish metropolis comprising the territory of Bolesław the Brave's state of the time [Mielczarski 1993, 61-75]. The metropolis consisted of three suffragan dioceses of Kraków, Wrocław and Kołobrzeg [Wejman 2016, 2018]. As metropolitans, the archbishops of Gniezno were from the outset regarded as heads of the entire Church in Poland and as the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries.

In 1367, a second metropolis was erected in Halych. This being the case, there came the problem of hierarchical primacy in the Church. An attempt to resolve that was probably made already in 1414 at the provincial synod in Wieluń. There, the principle was laid down to give the metropolitan of Gniezno precedence over the metropolitan of Halych-Lviv, as the metropolitan seat was transferred from Halych to Lviv in 1412, in virtue of the seniority of Gniezno [Abraham 1904, 268]. The conferment of the title of Primate of Poland to the Metropolitan of Gniezno was confirmed shortly afterwards, during the Council of Constance in 1414-1418. During the council, Primate of Poland Mikołaj Trąba was invited to sit among primates, which at the time was tantamount to giving him this dignity. We have this information from the Polish historian Jan Długosz. Unfortunately, no written confirmation of the conferral has survived. It is noteworthy that Trąba's successors did not seek such a confirmation, either, which proves that their primacy was never disputed [Pietrzak 2011, 58].

The Holy See took nearly a century to confirm the title of primate of Poland for the metropolitan archbishops of Gniezno, and they did that, as it were, in passing. On 25 July 1515, at the request of Sigismund I the Old, Pope Leo X conferred on Jan Łaski the title of born legate (*legatus natus*) by his bull *Pro excellenti praeeminentia*¹ [Korytkowski 1888a, 120-22]. However, this act did not specify the scope of the primate's authority but placed the Lviv metropolis under the primate's and the legate's jurisdiction. The act also contains a vague statement that the scope of the primate of Poland's

¹ Leon X, *Pro excellenti praeeminentia*, Archdiocesan Archive of Gniezno, dipl. 625 (or).

competence is “that which other legates have, and especially of the Primate of England at Canterbury by law, privilege and custom” [Nowacki 1937, 651-52]. Poland was an exception in Europe with respect to the order in which those dignities were conferred. This is because usually the title of primate was given to hierarchs already holding the dignity of born legate. In contrast, Poland was the opposite case [Osuchowska 2012, 148].

2. Prerogatives of Polish primates

From 1025, monarchs were crowned by Polish primates. This privilege was retained despite the fact that from 1320 coronations were held in Kraków. The primate of Poland celebrated the coronation Mass, swore the king in, anointed him with holy oils, handed him the sword, the sceptre and the orb, put the crown on his head, and intoned the hymn *Te Deum* [Lengnich 1836, 89-94]. Importantly, primates of Poland performed coronations of the spouses of Polish kings [Pietrzak 2011, 60-62].

In the 14th century, primates began blessing the marriages of Polish kings. Researchers claim that it was the primate’s privilege to baptise the children of the royal couple [Przyboś 1984, 95-96]. Notably, from 1573 Polish kings could only marry on the advice of the Senate. Polish primates were senators and sometimes spoke out on that issue [Lengnich 1836, 184].

They presided over the funeral rites of the kings. This privilege became part of the ceremonial rules for royal funerals in Poland. Primates would lead the funeral procession, assisted by other bishops, celebrated the funeral rites, and delivered a sermon. Primates also presided over the funerals of queens [Rożek 1977, 58-95].

In the 14th century, the Royal Council was formed, which in the 16th century became the Senate. These bodies included the primates of Poland. The archbishop metropolitan of Gniezno sat to the right of the king; he was the first senator of the Kingdom, he spoke on behalf of the Senate and represented the Senate externally. Primates in Poland were referred to as princes of the Senate [Kromer 1977, 107] and even presidents of the Senate [Skrzetuski 1782, 153].

The arrival of the primate at the Sejm was a magnificent spectacle and followed a special ceremonial. Apostolic Nuncio Giulio Ruggieri wrote in 1565 that the metropolitan archbishops of Gniezno rode a thousand

horses to the Sejm.² The route led to the royal castle, where the primate visited the king, surrounded by his retinue. He was greeted on the first and last steps of the stairs by royal chamberlains and led to the last hallway, where he was in turn greeted by marshals of the Crown and Lithuania, and then led to the chamber where the king was waiting. Primate Krzysztof Szembek wrote in 1741 that the king received him ceremoniously as if he were a great imperial envoy, but with “greater distinction” [Skibiński 1913a, 670-73]. It should be noted that outside the Sejm, the primate’s arrivals and audiences with the king followed a less spectacular protocol, according to the ceremonial used for senators [Lengnich 1836, 239]. The Sejm was inaugurated with the Holy Mass, usually celebrated by the archbishop metropolitan of Gniezno, with occasional exceptions to this rule [Pietrzak 1996, 49-51]. When the primate entered the senatorial chamber, the king greeted him from his throne with his head uncovered, which he nodded slightly, and the senators rose from their chairs. Foreign deputies holding posts in Poland paid him visits [Skibiński 1913a, 15].

From the 15th century, primates in Poland had special responsibility for the state in the king’s absence. King Ladislaus Jagiello officially appointed Primate Mikołaj Kurowski royal governor. The archbishop metropolitan of Gniezno was granted the title *Vicarius Regni nostri Poloniae Generalis* for the duration of the war with the Teutonic Order in 1409-1411. The tradition of the primate substituting the king was continued by Cardinal Ferdynand Jagiellończyk [Korytkowski 1888a, 513, 787].

3. The primate of Poland as *interrex*

In 1575, Girolamo Lippomano, a Venetian envoy, wrote that the Polish primate was, as it were, a “royal governor” during an interregnum. In 1636, Apostolic Nuncio Onorato Visconti claimed that the primate had almost royal prerogatives, which he used during an interregnum. In 1670, Apostolic Nuncio Galeazzo Marescotii reported that during an interregnum the primate took the helm of the entire government [Dzięgielewski 2002, 43-44]. From 1573, the primate held the office of *interrex*, or head of state during each interregnum. During the convocation in Warsaw from January 6 to 29, 1573,

² *Relacje nuncjuszów apostolskich i innych osób o Polsce od roku 1548 do 1690*, edited by E. Rykaczewski, vol. 1, Berlin 1864, p. 163.

the Primate of Poland was acknowledged as *interrex* [Placa 1969, 28, 63]. During the Jagiellonian era, it happened that Polish primates convened electoral conventions and announced the election of kings. As *interrex*, the primate performed the following tasks: he announced the death of the king and the onset of an interregnum; after consultation with the senators, he appointed sejmiks and the Convocation Sejm; at the convocation (also at the electoral Sejm), he submitted the agenda; he appointed deputies from among the senators, received foreign deputies, and sent Polish deputies; during the election of a king, he pronounced the result of the vote by touring the electoral precinct on horseback, and if the election was unanimous, he nominated the king, whereupon he intoned *Te Deum*. He informed the king-elect of his election, he received the oath of *pacta conventa*. After the king's coronation, he handed over the Kingdom. Finally, at the coronation Sejm, he reported on the interregnum to respective estates [Lengnich 1836, 51, 73-75, 90, 97]. The primate made decisions independently or in consultation with the senators present. It was not until 1632 that the Convocation Sejm curtailed the primate's power as *interrex*. From that year, the primate would be assigned councillors from the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. This practice ended during a convocation of 1764 [Pietrzak 2011, 68-69].

The rules for the functioning of the state when governed by the primate as *interrex* were customary, often based on precedent, because a relevant constitution had not been enacted. During the 1763-1764 interregnum, the primate appointed secular and clerical officials, approved by the king. It should be emphasised that the most important prerogative of the *interrex* was to nominate the king. Historically, the king was appointed by other bishops [Korytkowski 1888a, 118].

At the end of the 17th century, during the interregnum, the throne of the primate was placed before the royal throne. At the 1696 Convocation Sejm, a canopy was installed over the primate's throne [Bużeński 1860, 181], which took place by way of exception because it was opposed by the nobility [Walewski, 50-51].

The primate of Poland was competent to initiate Sejms, convene meetings of the Senate and collect and promulgate its resolutions in the king's absence and during interregnum [Kromer 1977, 107]. Nowadays, historians discuss this scope of the primate's prerogatives [Pietrzak 2011, 74-75]. The unquestioned prerogative of the primate of Poland acting as *interrex* was to convene Senate councils and the Convocation Sejm

during an interregnum; it also happened from time to time that he summoned the nobility for an election [Walewski 1874, 74-75].

The primate of Poland, in the absence of the king, presided over the Senate and the Joint Chambers, but the floor was given by the crown marshal, just as he would if the king presided over the deliberations. During sessions, the primate was replaced by the highest-ranking senator [Uruszczak 1980, 169]. It occurred several times in Polish history that a general mobilisation was called by the primate of Poland. This happened in 1593, 1697 and 1764 [Korytkowski 1891, 337].

The primate was the guardian of the law. It is important to remember that at that time subjects enjoyed the right to resist a trespassing ruler. If the ruler behaved lawlessly, it belonged to the senators to admonish him, and as a last resort, the people could disobey him [Korytkowski 1888a, 126]. It was stipulated in the 1607 constitution that in a case like that, the primate was to admonish the king and, if the monarch would not listen, submit the matter to the Sejm [Lengnich 1836, 175]. Apostolic Nuncio Galeazzo Marescotti wrote that the primate had the power to remind the king of all that was important for the well-being of the Republic, for the exercise of laws and *pacta conventa*, and even to admonish the king if necessary [Ochmann-Staniszevska 2000, 251].

The 1764 constitution incorporated changes in the interpretation of the office of primate of Poland. This act treated the archbishop of Gniezno as an actual viceroy. Not only was the hierarch allowed to use the canopy, but those who challenged this distinction were intimidated. Feliks Szczęsny Czacki, the Deputy Crown Cup-Bearer, in his treatise *Mysli patriotyczne* argued that the primate should not only be *interrex*, but a viceroy, next to the king [Konopczyński 1966, 306-10].

In 1775, the primate sat on the Permanent Council [Karaskiewicz 2007, 229-30]. In 1776, the primate was the president of the Commission of National Education [Pietrzak 2011, 78]. Primates in Poland had precedence before royals and princes [Lengnich 1836, 233-34].

Innocent X, in his apostolic constitution *Militantis ecclesiae regimini* of 19 December 1644,³ bestowed on cardinals the dignity of princes

³ Innocentius PP. X, *Militantis Ecclesiae regimini* (19.12.1644), [https://la.wikisource.org/wiki/Militantis_Ecclesiae_\(Innocentius_X\)](https://la.wikisource.org/wiki/Militantis_Ecclesiae_(Innocentius_X)) [accessed: 03.05.2023].

of the blood, which was intended to ensure their proper rank in state precedence [Bączkowicz, Baron, and Stawinoga 1957, 446]. In Poland, cardinal's dignity was treated as alien and dangerous because it gave rise to disputes in state precedence and undermined the authority of the primate [Kawecki 2001, 484-85]. This problem was resolved at a general convention in Piotrków on 17 June 1451 by King Casimir Jagiellon, who issued the privilege *De praerogativis archiepiscopi gnesis et jure coronandi reges*. The provisions of the privilege were accepted by both the primate and the cardinal. It secured the rights and privileges of the archbishops of Gniezno, and "prerogatives of his hierarchical dignity" were secured for the cardinal [Korytkowski 1889, 413]. In order to avoid disputes between the cardinal and the primate, the principle of alternate participation in the Royal Council was introduced. The primate and the cardinal were obliged to come to the council meetings one at a time, when summoned by the king, and take the first seat in turn. For the future, bishops, including the primate, were barred from seeking or accepting the cardinal's hat without the permission of the king and the Royal Council, that is, the Senate. The cardinal's and primate's duty to come to sessions alternately and only when summoned by the king was still mentioned in the 1718 constitution [Idem 1888b, 228-30, 233-35]. By and large, Polish cardinals and primates avoided disputes over precedence, shunning simultaneous public appearances especially at the royal court, Senate councils and the Sejm. However, when it came to a joint presence at the Senate, the primate always took precedence. It occurred sometimes that some of the cardinals directly demanded precedence before the primates [Pietrzak 2011, 82-83].

In the 16th century, an apostolic nuncio was appointed in Poland. He enjoyed precedence before all foreign deputies. In its instructions to nuncios in Poland, the Holy See drew their attention to the high status of the primate in the Kingdom and his dignity of *legatus natus*. Therefore, they were required to show respect to the primate, to support him in work, and to act very carefully and prudently in protocol matters [Wojtyska 2002, 79]. Nuncios arriving in Poland were welcomed and received by the primates in their residences. The primate ranked higher than the nuncio, royal deputies or princes. The primate and the nuncio, however, preferred not to appear simultaneously [Lengnich 1836, 239].

From the time of Primate Uchański, the primates used the title of "First Prince" of the Kingdom. Primates enjoyed the privilege, modelled

on apostolic legates, of using a cross set on a long pole. They believed that their right to use the cross extended over the entire territory of the Kingdom and later the Republic. The right to use the cross was not given to primates nominees, who acquired it only after receiving a papal bull of approval. The cross was used in the presence of apostolic nuncios and cardinals, but not before a legate *a latere* [Czacki 1861, 331]. Primates used coats of arms, where the emblem displayed on the escutcheon indicated the pedigree, but all insignia surrounding it symbolised the ecclesiastical dignity [Weiss 1993, 729-36].

In the mid-18th century, primates were also given the privilege of donning purple robes and using the title ‘eminence,’ even if they were not cardinals. Following the example of monarchs and princes, they also maintained a large court that stayed wherever they resided. He also had the extraordinary right to use the cardinal title of eminence [Korytkowski 1888a, 125]. Interestingly, this custom has been preserved to this day. The privilege granted in 1749 by Benedict XIV was used by Archbishop Henryk Muszyński, Metropolitan of Gniezno, Primate of Poland.

The partitions of Poland surely affected the office of primate adversely. In the partition era, after the Second Partition, the primate, like all residents of Wielkopolska, became a citizen of Prussia. By decree in 1775, Prussian King Frederick William, considering that the title of Primate of Poland was a symbol of Polishness, forbade Archbishop Ignacy Krasicki to use the title of primate and granted him the title of prince instead [ibid., 138]. The Prussian government, after the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815, openly sought to abolish the archdiocese of the metropolis of Gniezno. The plan was to substitute it with a metropolis in Wrocław [Barańska 2008, 63]. Eventually, Pius VII, in his bull *De salute animarum* of 16 July 1821,⁴ elevated the bishopric of Poznań to the rank of archbishopric and united it by personal union with the archdiocese of Gniezno. From then on, both dioceses had one metropolitan archbishop [Hoffmann 1932, 43-44].

After Poland regained independence, a conflict of precedence emerged. In 1918, the country had two primates: Edmund Dalbor, Metropolitan Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań, Primate of Poland, and Aleksander Kakowski, Metropolitan Archbishop of Warsaw, Primate of the Kingdom

⁴ Pius PP. VII, *De salute animarum* (16.07.1821), “Gesetz-Sammlung für die Königlichen Preussischen Staaten” 12 (1821), p. 113-52.

of Poland [Zieliński 2007, 335-37]. The question was which archbishopric capital was to preserve the primate's legacy. The final decision was made by the Holy See, the Congregation for Extraordinary Causes of the Church by a decree of 5 February 1925,⁵ abolishing primate jurisdiction in Poland and retaining the title of Primate of Poland for the Metropolitan Archbishop of Gniezno and the title of Primate of the Kingdom of Poland for life only for Aleksander Kakowski [Fąka 1977, 123-24].

4. The bishops' conference

In the 18th century, meetings of bishops slowly began to take shape, evolving into the institution of bishops' conferences. The turning point for this institution was the Second Vatican Council [Szatafrowski 1984, 22]. Existing bishops' conferences were accorded the status of institutions governed by universal law, and bishops of countries where such conferences did not yet exist were required to establish them [Dyduch 1998, 63-64].

Poland's first official Bishops' Conference was held on 10-12 December 1918 in Warsaw, with the participation of bishops from all Partitions. The plenary meeting of the bishops in the independent homeland was convened by Aleksander Kakowski, Metropolitan Archbishop of Warsaw, Primate of the Kingdom of Poland. The session was presided over by Apostolic Visitor, Achille Ratti. Unfortunately, Edmund Dalbor, Metropolitan Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań, Primate of Poland did not attend, who was unable to come to Warsaw due to problems with transport communication links between Greater Poland and Warsaw [Hemperek 1977, 51].

Another meeting was held on March 12-14, 1919, in Warsaw. This meeting was also convened by Archbishop Kakowski and chaired by Ratii. This session was particularly significant because it was necessary to a position on church matters that were to be considered in the Parliament. In this meeting, the bishops started working on the rules of procedure for plenary meetings [Dyduch 2013, 4].

The third plenary meeting was called by Archbishop Dalbor, and took place on August 26-30, 1919, in Gniezno. The participants adopted the Rules of Procedure of the Polish Bishops' Conventions (*Regulamin Zjazdów Biskupów Polskich*). This act specified the participants, the subject matter

⁵ See the letter in this matter: Fąka 1977, 123-24.

and the procedure of meetings, and the character of the Polish Bishops' Conventions [Manzanares 1980, 46-47]. Based on the 1919 Rules, the official name of the bishops' meetings was Convention of Bishops of Poland (*Zjazd Biskupów Polski*) [Krasowski 1992, 33].

The importance of the Polish Bishops' Conference increased following the Concordat of 1925.⁶ A further increase in authority occurred during the period of the Polish People's Republic, both within the Church and in its relations with state authorities, as demonstrated by the appointment of the Joint Commission of the Polish Episcopate and the Government and the signing of agreements between them in 1950 and 1956 [Misztal 2011, 30-33].

In this connection, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński must be mentioned, who from 1948 to 1981 was Metropolitan Archbishop of Gniezno and Warsaw, Primate of Poland and President of the Polish Bishops' Conference. Under the 1969 Statute,⁷ the president of the conference was, by law, the Polish primate, and the plenary meeting did not elect him [Stępień 2019, 66]. Moreover, the Statute named the Primate of the Millennium as president of the Bishops' Conference. The next Statute (1987)⁸ did not feature such a provision [Banduła 2022, 19].

With Cardinal Wyszyński's death, the episcopal capitals of Gniezno and Warsaw became vacant. By Pope John Paul II's decision on 7 July 1981, Józef Glemp, Bishop of Warmia (who was still president of the Polish Bishops' Conference under the 1969 Statute) became the new archbishop of Warsaw and Gniezno. Cardinal Glemp was the last hierarch to combine the function of Primate of Poland and president of the Polish Bishops' Conference [Kindziuk 2019, 206-207].

⁶ Concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland, signed in Rome on 10 February 1925, Journal of Laws No. 72, item 501.

⁷ *Statutum Conferentiae Episcoporum Poloniae. Varsaviae* (13.02.1969), "Akta Konferencji Episkopatu Polski", ref. II 013100, p. 1-10.

⁸ *Decretum. Sacra Congregatio pro Episcopis. Poloniae de Statutorum Conferentiae Episcoporum recognitione* (10.10.1987), "Akta Konferencji Episkopatu Polski", ref. III 013100.

5. The president of the bishops' conference

The 1983 Code of Canon Law⁹ does not mention the office of primate, but in Canon 452 it orders that the president of the bishops' conference be elected [Krukowski 2005a, 322-23]. Moreover, Canon 438 provides explicitly that, apart from the prerogative of honour, the primate no longer has any power of governance, unless provided otherwise by apostolic privilege or approved custom [Krukowski 2005b, 303-304].

The current 2009 Statute of the Polish Bishops' Conference¹⁰ regulates that the Primate of Poland retains honorary precedence among the Polish bishops (Article 3), is a member of the Permanent Council and, along with the cardinals in charge of the dioceses, is effectively the only non-elected member of the Council (Article 22). The statute provides that the president and his deputy are elected from among the diocesan bishops by the plenary assembly for a term of five years. These functions can be exercised uninterruptedly for two consecutive terms (Article 26). The president's powers are to represent the Conference externally (Article 27), convene the Permanent Council, the Plenary Assembly and the Council of Diocesan Bishops, and preside over these meetings. Exceptionally and in special cases, the president invites other persons to meetings of the Conference, and having consulted the Presidium, submits reports and documents of plenary meetings and the Council of Diocesan Bishops to the Holy See through the Apostolic Nunciature (Article 28). Should the president be legally impeded, his function is taken over by the deputy chairman (Article 29).

Currently, Archbishop Wojciech Polak is the Metropolitan of Gniezno, Primate of Poland. He is the 90th Metropolitan Archbishop of Gniezno and 57th Primate of Poland. Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, Metropolitan of Poznań, presides over the Polish Bishops' Conference, while Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski, Metropolitan of Kraków, is the deputy president.

As a side note, the coats of arms of the aforementioned hierarchs feature 30 tassels for the Primate of Poland, arranged half by half and pyramidally

⁹ *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (25.01.1983), AAS 75 (1983), pars II, p. 1-317; English text available at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html [henceforth: CIC/83]; legal state as of 18 May 2022.

¹⁰ Polish Bishops' Conference, *Dekret* (25.08.2009), "Akta Konferencji Episkopatu Polski," ref. V 02-13-003-023.

on both sides of the escutcheon, and 20 tassels for the Metropolitan Archbishops of Poznań and Kraków. Cardinals, and since the 19th century also primates, are entitled to 30 tassels; bishops are assigned 12 tassels [Kitowicz 1950, 174].

Summary

In Europe, for centuries, no bishop had prerogatives as extensive as to the ones possessed by the Polish primate. This title was originally associated with the right to crown kings and jurisdictional supremacy in the Church in Poland, both over Gniezno and, in certain respects, also over Lviv. In the early 16th century, these powers were extended by the title and entitlements of *legatus natus*. The primate had the right to visit bishoprics and convene provincial (i.e., national) synods. He represented the entire Church in Poland externally, and was not lower in rank even to cardinals. He had the right to accept appeals from ecclesiastical courts throughout the Republic. He stood in for the king in his absence; he was the most important figure after the king; as a senator, he took the first place after the monarch and was not inferior even to the apostolic nuncio. At the Sejm of 1573, the primate was officially granted the office of *interrex*.

The consequences of the Partitions certainly struck at the office of primate, which was a symbol of the unity of the Church and Poland. Frederick William, King of Prussia, prohibited the Metropolitan Archbishop of Gniezno from using the title of Primate of Poland in 1795 and granted him the title of prince instead. Alexander I, Czar of Russia, obtained for the newly created archdiocese of the Warsaw metropolis in 1818 the title of Primate of the Kingdom of Poland. Following that event, there were two primates: the Primate of Poland and the Primate of the Kingdom of Poland. The Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs approved by decree the Archbishop of Gniezno as the Primate of Poland, and granted the Metropolitan Archbishop of Warsaw the title of Primate of the Kingdom of Poland for life. However, this decree abolished the primate's jurisdiction over other Polish dioceses, in which case, at the grass-roots level, conferences of bishops started to be formed within the Catholic Church, which was eventually regulated in the CIC/83.

Now, Primate of Poland is an honorary title held by the metropolitan archbishops of Gniezno. This role, however, has been radically curtailed

due to changes in the universal Church. No jurisdiction over other bishops or dioceses is vested in this title anymore. Privileges stemming from the primate's function include: precedence at liturgical ceremonies, a permanent seat on the Permanent Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference, the right to wear purple and have 30 tassels in his coat of arms.

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