

THE DATE OF ORIGATION OF THE CONGREGATION OF MARIAN FATHERS

Within the Church, new religious families were always coming into existence and continue to appear. The process of their establishment was usually long and complex. Sometimes entire decades went by, before a certain community living in accordance with Evangelical Counsels gained the consciousness of self and received Episcopal or Papal approval. The period of time that elapses between the date of the order's actual origination and the official recognition of this fact by the Church is probably the most important for the future religious family, because during this time the community forms its countenance, character, and charism. The boundaries of this period are usually marked by two dates: the date of founding of a congregation and the date of its approval by the Pope given in the form of a decree. The *Annuario Pontificio* provides both dates for each congregation existing under pontifical law: the date of its founding and the date of its approval (*fondazione e approvazione*). Frequently, it is difficult to establish precisely this first date. Many congregations cannot give an exact date of their coming into existence. It seems to fade away somewhere in the natural course of events and becomes only conventional. Immediate participants in the events related to the origination of an institute were not always aware of the fact that a new congregation was created. And later, when the realization of the importance of this fact came, nobody could remember exactly how it all happened, because nothing has been documented, recorded, lastingly preserved.

And how did it happen in the case of our Congregation? While reading Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski's biography, I could not resist the impression that the date of our Congregation's origination has been unjustifiably moved three years ahead. In my opinion, the Marians actually have existed since December 11, 1670, whereas a later date of our Congregation's founding has been commonly accepted, namely: October 24, 1673. What has happened on each day?

1. The true date: Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski's *Oblatio* on December 11, 1670

On December 11, 1670, Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski received dispensation from his religious vows and the oath of perseverance in the Piarists Order. The ceremony took place at the Piarists' residence in Kazimierz near Krakow, according to the form prescribed by the General Superior of the Piarists. However, immediately after the ceremony a totally unexpected event took place. In a subdued, but resonant voice Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski declared:

"In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified. Amen.

– I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczynski, by flesh son of Thomas from Podegrodzie, in the diocese of Cracow, being 40 years of age, offer and dedicate to Omnipotent God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to the Mother of God, always Virgin Mary conceived without original stain, my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, whole mind, whole spirit, interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing to myself, so that from now on I may thus become entirely a servant of the same Omnipotent God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

– Therefore, I promise to fervently serve Them in chastity to the end of my life, in this Society of the Marian Clerics of the Immaculate Conception (which I desire to found by the grace of God), and conform my morals to its laws, statutes and rites, and to never act, or permit or consent, not even indirectly, that these be in some way suppressed, or changed, or dispensed from, unless for a serious and legitimate necessity.

– Moreover I promise obedience, understood in a sound way, to the Most Holy Vicar of Jesus Christ and to his delegated authority, and to my all indirect and immediate Superiors, and I promise that I shall have nothing privately, but everything in common.

– I avow that I believe in whatever the Holy Roman Church believes and will successively teach to be believed, mostly indeed I avow that the Most Holy Mother of God Mary was conceived without original stain and I promise to propagate and defend her honor even by suffering the loss of my life. Thus may help me God and this Holy Gospel of God.¹

¹Note of the translator: The text of the *Oblatio* is translated here into English not from the Polish translation made by the author of the article, but from the original Latin, as it appears in: S. Papczynski, *Scripta Historica: Fontes Historiae Marianorum* 8, pp. 29-30. The same applies to the translation of other documents quoted in this article.

It is to be noted that the original Latin texts quoted by the author are given in the respective footnotes of the Polish edition of the article. In the present English edition these Latin original texts have been omitted in the footnotes.

2. *Oblatio* as the very first form of the Marian profession of vows

While reading the above text, one cannot resist the impression that this is simply Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski's religious profession of vows in the Society of Marian Fathers. As a matter of fact, all three Evangelical Counsels, namely: chastity, poverty, and obedience are mentioned there. It also speaks about a total and irrevocable offering made of oneself. In fact, the text represents a religious consecration. We have many reasons to believe that Fr. Stanislaus himself regarded this act in the same way. Along with the sublime and solemn form of this text, also its title, given to it by its author, points to the text's character of a consecration. It is an *oblatio*, meaning – an offering of oneself. The term *oblatio* signified making an offering. It was particularly related to offering made during the Holy Mass. It was also used in religious life to indicate and act, by which a religious was offering himself to the service of God. Even in present days many religious institutes bear the name of Oblates of a Saint who is a Patron of the religious family.

The following circumstances also attest to the fundamental significance of the *oblatio*:

– Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski performs this act out of his own free will and under the influence of Divine inspiration, as he states in his *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*: “Near the time of the dispensation [from the vows] the Divine Majesty suggested, that while [I was to be released] from these, in the same act I would freely bind myself to God by others; and I did it by an offering fetched out of my heart and made publicly, although in lower voice.”²;

– Immediately after making this *oblatio*, Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski intended to replace the black Piarist frock with a white Marian one. The frock was always regarded as a sign of religious consecration. The change of the frock would become to everyone a clear sign that Fr. Stanislaus belonged to a new religious institute. For reasons unknown, the ceremony of vestiture with the white frock did not take place. Probably the Bishop of Cracow did not give his consent. This caused a new conflict with the Piarists, because in the resulting situation Fr. St. Papczynski did not want to depose the Piarist habit, still worn by him, in spite of his earlier written promise to do so. This attitude, although troublesome for some of Fr. Stanislaus's biographers, seems to be entirely understandable, considering the fact, that Fr. Stanislaus could not possibly conceive to cease being a religious, even for a short while, and to return to the secular state as a diocesan priest. Hence, he stubbornly kept the habit, even though it was a black one. Around September 15, 1671, in Lubocza, Fr. St. Papczynski replaced it with the much-desired white habit, upon permission from the Apostolic Nuncio.⁴

– When Fr. S. Papczynski decided to accept its first candidate to the Congregation, cleric Stanislaus Krajewski, Superior of the hermits in the Korabiew Forest, he received from him an *oblatio*, the wording of which was almost identical with his own, and invested him with white habit. This act took place in Lubocza on July 4, 1673, that is before the Marian house in Korabiew Forest was founded. The remark made by Fr. Stanislaus after the first sentences of *oblatio* of Bro. Stanislaus Krajewski, has a capital importance: “...etc., as above in the form that I myself used and prescribed”⁵. From this we may conclude that Fr. Founder considered the *oblatio* to be generally binding form of consecration in the new Congregation.

– The *oblatio* is the oldest document directly related to the new Congregation dedicated to the Virgin Mary conceived without original stain. The second document, in chronological order, would be *Norma vitae* composed by Fr. Founder probably during his stay in Lubocza (1671-73)⁶. The third one – the agreement made between Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski and Stanislaus Krajewski on October 7, 1673⁷. The fourth – the protocol of the visitation of the Korabiew Forest hermitage performed by Bishop J. Swiecicki on October 24, 1673⁸, which is commonly considered a document indicating the beginning of the Congregation (but if rightfully so?).

Why is this date considered as the beginning of the new Congregation? What actually happened on that day?

² Ibid., p. 82.

³ Cf. *Positio*, pp. 216s.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 360.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 364.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 452.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 336ss

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 339ss

3. The accepted date: the visitation of the hermitage on October 24, 1673.

On October 24, 1673, Bishop Stanislaw Jacek Swiecicki arrived at the hermitage in Korabiew Forest to conduct a canonical visitation. At that time, three brother-hermits stayed in the hermitage along with Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski, who moved there a little less than a month before with the intention of founding the first Marian station. Two hermits did not belong to any religious institute and intended to join Fr. Papczynski's Congregation. The then Superior of the hermits, cleric Stanislaus Krajewski, was accepted to the Marians by Fr. St. Papczynski on July 4, 1673, in Lubocza, where he made his religious promises (*oblatio*) and received his white Marian habit.

The Bishop's visitation was very important for the future of the hermitage. The hermits had already resided in the Forest for more than ten years⁹. Their life, however, was far from exemplary: they did not take much time for prayer and work, but mainly were busy with collecting money among the residents of the neighboring villages. The Bishop, to whom the complaints against the hermits reached, intended to suppress the hermitage altogether, or to radically reform it at least. Fr. St. Papczynski's presence in the hermitage prompted the Bishop to choose the second option and it also made attaining of the visitation's goal easy. The Bishop appointed Fr. St. Papczynski Superior of the hermits, forbade them to roam in the neighborhood and bound them with observance of strict fasts, mortification, silence, prayer, and obedience to the prescripts of the Norm of Life and to the orders of the Superior.

This way the first Marian community was established. The protocol of the Bishop's visitation is an official act of the Church authority, which attests to the existence of "the hermitage of the B.V.M. conceived without stain" and concedes an approval for the "institute of the above-mentioned religious priest, Father Stanislaus."¹⁰ The protocol of the visitation also foresees an influx of candidates to the Congregation, an election of the Superior, when there are already at least 12 members with an active and passive voice, and threatens with severe punishments those who would lawlessly abandon "this Congregation of Marian Clerics." Thus, this was, in a way, the first approval of the Congregation on the diocesan level.

4. Episcopal and papal approval.

However, the visitation of the Korabiew Forest hermitage was not a formal approval of the new Congregation in the Church performed according to the requirements of the standing law of the time. It is eloquently supported by the fact that Fr. St. Papczynski was constantly seeking to obtain such an approval and received it in the form of a Bishop's decree issued on April 21, 1679¹¹. At that time the Marians already had two stations, both located within the Poznan diocese. To the Korabiew Forest hermitage they added another station – the Cenacle of the Lord in Gora Kalwaria, which Bp. St. Wierzbowski gave to them in 1677. However, the canonical installation of the Congregation of Marian Fathers under diocesan law did not provide sufficient security for this new religious community, because it made it very much subordinated to the local Ordinary. During the lifetime of Bishop St. Wierzbowski, who was benevolent to the Marians, the Congregation enjoyed his assured protection. However, after the death of their patron, a bishop less benevolent toward Marians took over, and the Congregation faced a threat of suppression, because of accusations brought up by its enemies, to whom the bishop was lending his ear.¹² Therefore it had become vital to obtain a papal approval. The story of how the approval was obtained is quite complicated and long; and the answer to the question, when the Marians finally became an Order of papal rights is not at all easy. Therefore, I purposely omit here the matter of establishing a date, which can be recognized as the end of the Congregation's founding process.¹³

5. The oldest tradition speaking of the Congregation's origin.

There has never been a doubt about Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski being the Founder of the Congregation. It seems that, from the beginning, the Marians were convinced that, upon leaving the Piarists, Fr. St. Papczynski immediately became a Marian or, in other words, that the Marians' origin goes back to 1670. The following are certain facts speaking to this effect.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 342ss

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 392ss

¹² *ibid.*, p. 504s

¹³ It would be difficult to recognize the Pope's letter of November 24, 1699, directed to the Nuncio in Poland, as a papal approval of the new Order. As a matter of fact, the letter states only the fact of the aggregation of the Congregation of Marians into the Order

In the oldest biography of Fr. Founder, written around 1705 by Fr. Mansueto Leporini, OFMRef., we read that Fr. St. Papczynski “*being obedient to Divine voice and to its admirable ordinance changed his first vocation, with the consent of the supreme Vicar of Christ, Clement X, and that of the General Superior. On Wednesday within the octave of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – December 10 [sic!], 1670, – he was dispensed from simple vows and the oath of perseverance by Fr. Michael of Visitation. In the very same time Fr. Stanislaus made a new offering to God and His Mother – oblatio, appropriate for his Congregation. He received a blessing from the above-named Father: “May God strengthen what He has done in you.”*”¹⁴ Further in the text M. Leporini mentions the bishop’s visitation of the Korabiew hermitage, during which the bishop “gave his approval to the new Institute.”¹⁵ In a similar way Fr. Casimir Wyszynski, presenting the Congregation’s beginnings, was convinced that Fr. St. Papczynski changed the religious institute, i.e. became a Marian immediately after leaving the Piarists.¹⁶

The Breve *Ex debito Pastoralis Officii* of March 10, 1786, which ratified the Marian Order, gives the year 1670 as the date of the Marians’ origination. The Breve sums up the report about the beginning of the Marians made by Fr. Norbert Golkowski, Procurator of the Congregation, as follows: “*...in the year 1670, with the approval of the Apostolic Nuncio of that time, the above-said Order or Congregation was established in the Kingdom of Poland by the Servant of God, Stanislaus Papczynski, for assisting the pastors and instructing the youth in the first principles of Faith and education. Afterwards it was aggregated to the Order of Friars Minor of St. Francis.*”¹⁷ It seems that in 17th century the Marians generally believed that the Congregation originated in 1670.

6. Change in the Marians’ cognizance of their own beginnings.

The change in the Marians’ cognizance of the beginnings of the Congregation supposedly took place after the renewal of the dying Order. In the Information for the Apostolic See about the Congregation of Marian Clerics of April 10, 1910, Fr. George Matulewicz wrote: “*A Congregation of Marian Clerics under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was founded by the Venerable Servant of God, Stanislaus Papczynski. He laid the foundations of this Congregation in the Korabiew Forest in 1679, with the consent of the Bishop of Poznan, Stefan Wierzbowski.*”¹⁸ The year 1679 is the date of the decree by which Bishop S. Wierzbowski installed the Congregation as a diocesan Institute.

The commentators maintain that Father Renovator wrote the above information, among others, on the basis of the above-named papal Breve of March 10, 1786.¹⁹ Strangely enough, Fr. G. Matulewicz did not repeat the date of the origin of the Congregation given in this Breve, but gave a completely different one. Fr. G. Matulewicz’s action will appear maybe more comprehensible, if we consider the fact that he had a solid juridical background and was for a certain time a lecturer of Canon Law at the seminary of Kielce. As an expert in Church law, he knew well that only acts of Church authority brought about legal effects in regards to the coming into existence of new religious congregations, while actions of private individuals remained only pious intentions, with no legal effects. Consequently, only the act of a lawful authority could bring about the initiation of the Marians, and such was the act of installation of the Congregation, issued by Bishop S. Wierzbowski. From the legal point of view, all actions, which preceded this act, were only expressions of Divine inspiration and intentions or simply a prudent preparation for the intended cause. On the other hand, ascribing real meaning to them could be easily recognized as usurpation, should the founder of the religious institute dare to act without obtaining prior permission and blessing from the Church authority.

of the Franciscans and consequences that follow from this fact. The letter carefully avoids using any wording that could possibly suggest that the Pope give his approval to the new Order. Should the Marians actually obtained the papal approval in 1699, then it would be certainly impossible for Bishop A. Rostkowski to suppress the Order in 1715. It transpires from this fact that at the beginning of the 17th century the Marians were still an Institute of diocesan rights.

¹⁴ Leporini M., *Vita Fundatoris*, n. 32, in: *Positio*, pp. 639s.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, n. 37, in: *Positio*, p. 641.

¹⁶ Cf. Wyszynski K., *Vita Ven. S.D. Stanislawi a Iesu Maria Papczynski*, n. 30, in: *Pisma o. Kazimierza od sw. Jozefa Wyszynskiego*, editors: W. Makos and Z. Proczek, Puszca Marianska 2002, pp. 683s.

¹⁷ Pius VI, “Breve Ex debito Pastoralis Officii”; in: *Constitutiones Congregationis CC. RR. Marianorum*, Romae, pag. 357n; “nempe Anno MDCLXX. a Servo Dei Stanislawo PAPCZYNSKI Ordo, seu Congregatio praefata in adiutorium Parochorum, et ad instruendam in primis Fidei, ac Literarum principiis Juventutem in Regno Poloniae approbante tunc existene Apostolico Nunzio fuerit instituta; subinde Ordini Fratrum Minorum S. Francisci fuit aggregata”.

¹⁸ Quoted after: *Odrodzenie Zgromadzenia Księży Marianów w latach 1909-1910 (dokumenty)*, edited by J. Bukowicz and T. Górski, Warsaw, 1995, p. 101.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 103, footnote 2.

Consequently, only the Church authority's decisions had a real meaning, whereas the actions of the founder himself had, on the whole, a secondary or minor meaning: they were an addition and implementation of decisions taken by the authority.

The same juridical principle was probably at the basis of the affirmations made by Fr. Stefan Sydry, author of the biography of the Founder. In the act performed by Fr. S. Papczynski on December 11, 1670 and in all that happened immediately after it, Fr. S. Sydry sees: "calling of the Lord to the new undertaking" and "preparatory operations"²⁰. In the oblatio of Fr. S. Papczynski Fr. Sydry does not perceive an act of self offering (as it results clearly from its contents), but an act by which the Congregation is offered, the act in which Fr. Founder Dedicated his Institute (the Congregation which he intended to found) to God and His Mother²¹. In my opinion such interpretation is very beautiful and sublime, but unfortunately not very faithful to the mind of Fr. Founder, who believed that by way of his oblatio he became at once a marian. Fr. S. Sydry did not follow however the opinion of Fr. Renovator in the question of determining the year 1679 as the date of the origin of the Congregation. He recognized October 24, 1673, as the date of the erection of the Congregation, which was the date of the Bishop's visitation that defined the character of the hermitage in the Korabiew Forest²². The Bishop's visitation, likewise as the subsequent installation decree of Bishop S. Wierzbowski, was the first act of the Church authority regarding the nascent Congregation. The protocol written after the visitation was the first official Church document which speaks about the new Congregation. The juridical principle affirming that only Church authority may found a new Congregation was kept also in this case, and the actions of Fr. S. Papczynski remained as if in a shadow. And thus it has remained until now. We celebrated the 300 Anniversary of the Congregation in 1973, and not in 1970. The commemorative book published on this occasion, which remains until now the fullest presentation of the Congregation, has the title: *Marians 1673-1973*.²³ In my opinion a more just title would be: *Marians 1670-1970* and the jubilee celebrations should rather have been celebrated three years earlier.

7. Conclusive remarks

Having considered the arguments or reasons known to me, I believe that we should return to the pristine and true date of the origination of the Marians, in accordance with the mind of the Founder and with the oldest tradition of the Congregation. The Marians take their beginning from the Oblatio of Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski made on December 11, 1670, in the Piarists' residence in Kazimierz near Cracow, and not from the Bishop's visitation in Puszcza Korabiewska (Korabiew Forest), which, however important for the nascent Congregation, was not the beginning, but only a stage on the way of its development.

I am aware that I lack competence for approaching the above problem in an expert way. Therefore, I refrained from giving footnotes and original text of the quoted documents.²⁴ I think, however, that anyone willing to check the sources, upon which I based my statements, will be able to do so easily, because I always provide the name of the source. I am not a historian, nor a canonist, nor a theologian of religious order life. Thus, I see the considerations and opinions presented above, even though they may be expressed in a categorical form, only as a formulation of a problem. I ask my confreres, who are better acquainted with this subject, to examine the question in an expert way and to present the results of their research. I shall be grateful for any comments, including critical ones. I recognize a very real possibility of my making a mistake, but not that it has been made by authorities, which I dared to criticize. Therefore I will listen attentively to the opinion of others. I hope that through our common effort we will be able to come to the truth about the beginning of the Congregation.

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Fr. Franciszek Smagorowicz, M.I.C.

²⁰ Sydry Stefan, *O. Stanislaw Papczynski and his work*, Warsaw 1937, pp. 68 and 72.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68s.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 80s, where he writes about the foundation of the Congregation of the Marians in 1673; but the canonical erection of the Congregation took place according to Fr. S. Sydry in 1679; cf. *ibid.*, p. 157.

²³ *Marianie 1673-1973*, ed. J. Bukowicz and T. Gorski, Rome 1975.

²⁴ In the final edition of the article I completed the lacking footnotes, following the advice given me by Fr. M. Piszczak, to make easier for the readers to find the quoted sources.