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Geography of religion as a field of research at the Jagiellonian University

Abstract: Geography as a field of research in Kraków first developed in the middle of the 19th century. The Faculty of Tourism at Jagiellonian University was the first to create a large program in pilgrimage research between 1936 and 1939.

The politics of the next five decades hampered the development of the program, with full-time studies beginning in the 1980s. The geography of religion program focused on research on the global nature of pilgrimages. Key research interests included historical and spatial issues and their effect on infrastructural, social, and economic changes at centers of religious worship as well as in surrounding regions and countries.

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Geography as a field of research in Kraków first developed in the middle of the 19th century. Large scale research in geography began after World War I and accelerated just prior to World War II. The Faculty of Tourism at Jagiellonian University was the first to create a large program in pilgrimage and research between 1936 and 1939. The research program was established and headed at the Geographic Institute of Jagiellonian University by Stanisław Leszczycki.

Issues and processes associated with the broadly defined research area of religion were of marginal interest to geographers doing research in the decades following World War II. There were a number of reasons for this; however, the main reason was the politics of the postwar era. Poland's National Office of the Censor scrupulously removed all references to religion found in research papers.

The antireligious stance of the Polish government eased by the middle 1980s. The Jagiellonian University used this window of opportunity to publish several papers on religion using research data collected over a number of years (Jackowski 1984, 1985).

The research faculty and doctoral students of the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management at Jagiellonian University have since published more than 200 papers on the geography of religion. Many of the papers have addressed the geography of pilgrimages and religious tourism. Most of the papers contributed

new knowledge to this field of research including new theories, systematic ways of identification and definition, and the placement of religious phenomena in the context of functional and spatial structures of towns and regions. Jagiellonian University became a national leader in geography research on religion as well as a respected contributor to international geography research on religion.

Geography of religion was taught by A. Jackowski alone until the early 1990s. He was assisted by students writing master's theses in the geography of religion and religious studies. The religion group has retained its members, although A. Jackowski formally retired in 2005. A number of other individuals have made contributions to the religion group over the years.

Nine individuals have earned a doctoral degree and two have earned a habilitation degree in the broadly defined field of geography of religion at Jagiellonian University since the late 1990s.

The early years of the geography of religion program focused on research on the global nature of pilgrimages. Key research interests included historical and spatial issues and their effect on infrastructural, social, and economic changes at centers of religious worship as well as in surrounding regions and countries. Other efforts in the late 1990s and thereafter focused on key research problems associated with the geography of pilgrimages. Research papers on pilgrimages were a novelty in Polish Geography and filled a gap in the world literature on pilgrimages and religious tourism. Many of the papers were widely read and cited in Poland and abroad.

Several key theoretical and applied works were completed starting in the late 1990s. The set of papers on pilgrimages and religious tourism in Poland is quite important and presents a contemporary picture of Polish pilgrimages, while making reference to a rich tradition of pilgrimages reaching pagan times. The papers focus on the effect of pilgrimages on Polish national identity – especially in times of national crisis (Jackowski, Soljan 2011: 81–89).

A characteristic feature of religion-oriented geography at Jagiellonian University is research on the history of pilgrimages and religious tourism in Poland. Many papers focus on changes in the geography of religious migration and centers of religious worship relative to historical and political changes in Poland.

One unique feature of our Institute is its commitment to research on the pilgrimages of John Paul II. The first part of our research effort produced a key monograph: "John Paul II – Pilgrim Among Pilgrims." The monograph was part of our *Peregrinus Cracoviensis* publication series (1997). It presented the

geography of the Polish Pope's worldwide travels and outlined the future Atlas of the Pilgrimages of John Paul II. The atlas was never published primarily due to financial reasons. The materials already collected were used in the Lexicon of the Pilgrimages of John Paul II (Jackowski, Sołjan, eds., 2005). Several other publications on the geography of the Pope's pilgrimages were also created.

As the communist government in Poland fell in 1989 and the perspective of European integration became increasingly real, it was decided to pursue research on pilgrimages and religious tourism in the context of European integration. This research has received a lot of interest abroad.

Another type of research pursued at Jagiellonian University is applied research, which relates holy sites and the natural environment as well as analyzes the religious function of pilgrimage centers, economic significance of religious tourism, link between holy sites and the urban fabric, pilgrimages in the Islamic world, pilgrimages in the Jewish world, pilgrimages of Polish Orthodox Christians, and the role of roadside crosses in Poland and in Europe (origin, types, pilgrimages). Other types of applied research included the geographic reach of the Devotion to St. Faustina and the Devotion to the Lord's Mercy as well as issues such as the Way of Saint James in Poland and in Europe and cartography associated with religious themes.

Other research projects concerned centers of religious worship and pilgrimage regions, especially Poland. The two most important sites of interest were Jasna Góra in the city of Częstochowa and Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. Paradoxically, neither internationally renowned site has been discussed in the research literature as a pilgrimage center until now.

The recently constructed Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy in Kraków – Łagiewniki was also studied. Today it is one of the most important pilgrimage centers in the world. Research materials were used to publish a large new monograph: "New Jewel in the Crown of Kraków" (Peregrinus Cracoviensis 2000, 2001). Copies of the English version (2001) were given to all visitors who came to see John Paul II in 2002. The English version was almost completely bought out by foreign institutions – mainly those from the United States. A number of other centers of religious worship in Poland and across the world were also studied.

Both research and teaching in the field of the geography of religion served as the basis for the creation of the Geography of Religion Department at Jagiellonian University in 1994. This was to be the only such department in Poland and one of the few in the world. The department acquired almost one thousand specialized domestic and foreign books for its new library. It also began to work towards the

creation of a center for iconographic documentation and film archives on the subject of broadly defined religious culture. The department also began to work on an archive of centers of religious worship in Poland and abroad.

The Department of the Geography of Religion has made attempts to integrate the Kraków academic community in the area of research on religion. The Pilgrimage Conference organized at the Institute helped fulfill that mission between 1994 and 2001. The purpose of the conference was to help local researchers exchange information on research projects in the area of religious culture, with a special focus on centers of worship and pilgrimage. The conference helped to integrate local research efforts and provided a forum for the presentation of research results. In addition to local researchers, guests from across Poland and from abroad also used the conference to present their work.

The periodical *Peregrinus Cracoviensis* was first published in 1995 and was geared towards interdisciplinary themes. It is the only periodical of this type in Poland and one of the few in the world dedicated to the broadly defined field of geography of religion. *Peregrinus Cracoviensis* focuses on pilgrimages across all religions on a global, national, regional, and local scale. John Paul II valued this publication highly. A total of 23 issues have been published by September 2013.

A number of monographs were published on selected sanctuaries and research issues. The issue on Kalwaria Zebrzydowska (*Peregrinus Cracoviensis* 1995) was read by John Paul II himself. The Pope signed and sent a special letter of thanks to the editors of *Peregrinus Cracoviensis*. The sixth issue of *Peregrinus Cracoviensis* (1998) was named the best publication in the field of geography in 1998 by the Head of the Polish Geographic Society. The second issue was used by the city of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska as part of its documentation sent to UNESCO in order to be considered for the designation of World Cultural Heritage Site. This designation was acquired in December 1999. The third issue of *Peregrinus Cracoviensis* (1996) was used by the Shrine of Jasna Góra in its attempt to gain a World Cultural Heritage Site designation. The matter is still being considered by UNESCO.

Peregrinus Cracoviensis is frequently cited in the Polish and international research literature and retains a large number of readers who comment on its content. It was clear from the beginning that research needs to be accompanied by promotional efforts, which would introduce the subject matter to a broad circle of readers. Promotional efforts were especially important in Poland, given the novel nature of the subject matter, and Poland's lack of publication history in this field of research.

In November and December of 1995, A. Jackowski held an exhibition in Częstochowa called "Polish Pilgrimages". The exhibition was part of the International Forum on Centers of Religious Worship (Jackowski 1995) and was organized by the City of Częstochowa and the Częstochowa Regional Museum. This was the first scientific exhibition of its kind in Poland. A number of maps, charts, and tables comparing pilgrimages in Poland with pilgrimages around the world were shown. Non-Christian pilgrimages were also included. The religious tourism sector was also analyzed for a number of centers of worship. The Shrine of Jasna Góra was a special focal point of the exhibition, which was attended by about one thousand visitors from Poland and abroad.

The Department of the Geography of Religion also helped organize the Częstochowa exhibition "The Polish Pilgrim" (Częstochowa 2000). The exhibition was organized on the one thousandth anniversary of pilgrimages in Poland (Jackowski, Soljan 2000) and was open throughout the pilgrimage season. A large number of pilgrims from Poland and abroad came to see the exhibition.

Another exhibition was held between February and May of 2007 at the Karol Wojtyła Museum in the Archdiocese of Kraków. The exhibition "Pilgrimages and sanctuaries on old postcards" was unique in nature and attracted many local residents and tourists. A. Jackowski presented elements of his collection. Entries in the exhibition's guestbook suggest that many individuals were not aware that religion is an area of interest among Polish geographers. The exhibition was also held at the Museum of Częstochowa.

We have attempted to promote the geography of religion as well as the geography of pilgrimages and religious tourism with various popular science publishing houses and other types of media. We have published a number of papers in regional and national magazines and given interviews on the radio and television. This also includes documentary films and pilgrimage fairs. All of these efforts helped inform the Polish general public about the various research issues associated with the geography of religion. While initially the term "geographer of religion" seemed somewhat exotic, this is no longer the case, at least in the news media.

It is worth mentioning that one faculty member of the Department of the Geography of Religion was honored with the Award of the City of Kraków in 2011 and the title of Honorary Professor of Jagiellonian University as well as given a honorary doctorate by the University of Presov in Slovakia for his work in the field of the geography of religion. All three events helped strengthen the field of geography of religion at Jagiellonian University.

Initially, we were alone in Poland in the new field of geography of religion. Today, a number of individuals working at all departments of geography in Poland are contributing to this field of research. Most of these researchers are quite young and feel drawn into this new field of inquiry. The Commission on the Geography of Religion at the Polish Geographic Society has an important role to play in the development of research in this field. We do hope that soon we will see new publications that will inspire future generations of geographers. This is one of the most interesting elements of doing science. It is quite clear that Jagiellonian University will remain active in the field of geography of religion. Jagiellonian University is open to passionate young scholars from across Poland and the world.

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