

ROCZNIK TOMISTYCZNY
5 (2016)

Profesorowi Mieczysławowi Gogaczowi
w dziewięćdziesięciolecie urodzin

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Professor Wojciech Falkowski - Sarmatian and gentleman

Professor Wojciech Falkowski died on April 9, 2015 in Ewell, Surrey. A Requiem Mass was said on April 24 in the Polish church of Christ the King in Balham attended by family and friends from Poland, Great Britain and Ireland. This beautiful mass was concelebrated by four priests from Poland and England presided over by the Rector of the Polish Catholic Mission Rev. Msgr Stefan Wylęzek. The sermon was delivered by Rev. Msgr Władysław Wyszowadzki. At the mass we bid farewell to an outstanding scholar, a talented psychiatrist, musician, painter, an active member of the Polish diaspora in London, the Rector of the Polish University Abroad and the president of the Polish Association of Medical Sciences, a man devoted to Polish scouting whose life was a true service to God and Poland. With the beau-

tiful music performed by members of the Falkowski family and friends in the background, we said goodbye to the remarkable representative of the Second “Great” political Emigration. We celebrated the life and the output of a remarkable citizen of the Second Republic, a man who combined the best qualities of an English gentleman and Polish Sarmatian – a true citizen of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth established in the sixteenth-century whose legacy lasts until the present day. We celebrated a man of strong spirit, extraordinary elegance, erudition, humor and generosity. Within a few weeks from the requiem mass the City Council of Krakow, Poland’s historical capital, commemorated the outstanding achievements of prof. Wojciech Falkowski with a minute of silence.

Wojciech Falkowski was born in the Second Republic of Poland on June 17, 1930 in Nowogródek (present day Belarus), a birthplace of Poland's great poet Adam Mickiewicz. When in the early 90's, Anne Applebaum, a columnist for *The Washington Post*, was traveling along the borderlands of former Polish Republic, presently Belarus, she had an opportunity to participate in a show of a Polish actress in Nowogródek, who read extensive excerpts from Mickiewicz's epic poem "Pan Tadeusz" (1834). She found herself in a post-Soviet town and she described her experience of listening to the poetry of Adam Mickiewicz in his birthplace in the book *Between East and West: The Frontier of Europe*. Being under the spell of the poetry and aware of the difficult history of the Nowogródek area, Applebaum concluded that on that day civilization had come back to those lands. This was also the land where Wojciech Falkowski spent in his early years. He also had warm memories of the nearby city of Vilnius, the former capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, one of the two capital cities of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic. Vilnius was in his heart all his life and he visited the city several times in the 90s, the last time he went with his wife Bernice MacManus Falkowska to his friends' wedding in 2004.

Lithuania and part of Belarus were occupied by the Soviets after September 17, 1939 invasion which was the second blow after the German invasion of September 1, 1939 and a direct consequence of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Wojciech had lost his father before the war, and in Febru-

ary 1940 with his mother and older sister he was deported to Siberia, about 1000 kilometers away from the city of Arkhangelsk. After two years in exile, living in extremely harsh conditions, he and his fellow deportees was released in 1941 on the basis of the amnesty that was part of the Sikorski-Maiski treaty. The adult civilian Poles were allowed to join the Polish army of General Anders and the young ones could at least find protection under the Polish Army.

Wojciech Falkowski, who was 17 at that time, recalled that moment: „When we finally got to the big Polish camp in Uzbekistan, we were put in military tents. There were Polish soldiers and officers in British uniforms, but with the Polish national emblem with the crowned eagle and the cross. There was also a Polish Catholic priest. Finally we could openly pray. All of this was unbelievable. Freedom was no longer a dream, it became the truest reality”. Despite the fact that Uzbekistan was part of the Soviet Union, Polish enclave of freedom had been created there.

Once the General Anders Army left the Soviet Union, Wojciech with her sister and mother stayed in Iran, where they met with great hospitality. Despite numerous hardships they encountered on their way out of the Soviet Union, the most important was that he had left the „inhuman land”. The Polish social and cultural life was organized in Iran: a Polish school, the library, public readings of Polish literature, free access to the radio, world news, violin concerts. Here Wojciech played with the famous bear Wojtek, his namesake and had a photo taken of him hugging the famous

bear-soldier. Wojciech joined the Polish scouts and was a scout all his life, bearing the cross scout in his jacket lapel. While in the UK he was a active supporter of the scouts and eventually joined the senior scouts group together with his friend dr Bogdan Szwarzak. Scouting was one of his life passions, not so much in terms of camping or hiking, but in terms of moral education and character formation that scouting offered with the key ideas of service to God and Poland.

After two years in Persia Poles were transported to different destinations in the world. Wojtek's family was sent to Tanzania in Africa. After a six-year stay in Africa they were sent to England as the so-called Displaced Persons (DPs) where they came in 1949 and lodged in the famous semi-circular bungalows which the American soldiers had left behind. From the very beginning of his stay in the UK, Wojciech noticed that the conversation with the British about the Soviet Russia made no sense and he realized very soon that the British completely disbelieved the horrors of Communism. This was partly due to the British media which painted a positive image of the Soviets as important allies in WWII. Wojtek remembered large photographs of „Uncle Stalin” on the covers of the weekend editions of the English newspapers. The English people quickly forgot that German planes flew on the Soviet petrol in the Battle of Britain.

On July 6, 1945 Western countries, including the United Kingdom, withdrew their recognition of the Polish government-in-exile, recognizing instead the Provisional Government of Nation-

al Unity controlled by the Soviet Union that was formed in Poland. Thus, the British ceased recognizing the Polish university diplomas. The Irish and Spanish government as well as the Vatican continued to recognize Polish authorities in exile, and Wojciech Falkowski decided to go to study in Dublin. In 1951 he began his medical studies at University College Dublin. It was the oldest Catholic university in the UK whose first rector was John Henry Newman. At UCD at that time Wojciech there were approximately 100 Polish students. Wojciech Falkowski was a chairman of the Polish Student Association which organized many cultural events, open concerts, lectures, hosted prominent Polish artists. They even invited the virtuoso pianist Artur Rubinstein to Dublin who was famous for starting his 1945 concert at the inauguration of the United Nations in San Francisco with Dąbrowski's Mazurka, a Polish national anthem, to emphasise the fact that Poland was not granted its representation in the United Nations.

Young Wojciech Falkowski appeared on the cover of „The Irish Times” in the 50s. The picture presents Wojciech in Dublin while talking about history of Poland in the candlelight.

In Dublin Wojciech met a beautiful Irish girl, Bernice McManus. The wedding ceremony was held in the Polish church Little Brompton Oratory in South Kensington, and the wedding party took place in what is now the oldest Polish Hearth Club. Wojciech and Bernice were a remarkable marriage, they have two sons, John - a London-based psychiatrist, and Damian - musician and

barrister. All the family is deeply devoted to Poland and its heritage.

Prof. Wojciech Falkowski specialized in psychiatry and worked in top London hospitals. In addition, he developed his artistic passions: musical one - piano under the guidance of prof. W. Mierzejewski and painting at the School of Painting of the famous prof. Marian Bohusz-Szyszko.

While pursuing his English academic career and while holding several public functions, he at the same time was a between, he the Rector of the Polish University Abroad (2002 – 2011). For many years, it was the only Polish university in exile and it played an important role among the Polish emigrants. Unfortunately, after 1989 Poland could not fully understand and acknowledge the achievements of the Polish London, including the achievement of PUNO. After many years of efforts, the Polish Parliament in 1998 finally passed a law under which the Polish State recognized all degrees granted by PUNO until 1990 after which it was transformed into educational charity. Looking for a new solutions, professor Wojciech Falkowski looked for cooperation with the leading Polish universities, especially with the University of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in Warsaw and the oldest Polish Alma Mater - the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. It was thanks to his great commitment that a number of cooperation agreements were signed, including the Jagiellonian University. In four years Falkowski organized many visits, led projects, many of them with the support of the Polish Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and the London-based Grabowski Foundation. He organized 9 conferences in Poland, in the Polish Cultural Centre POSK, in the Polish Hearth-Club and at University College London as well as in Cambridge. He organized three editions of postgraduate studies “Polish-British strategic partnership in the EU and NATO”, two editions of the studies under the guidance of prof. Władysław Miodunka (UJ) „Teaching Polish language and culture as the foreign language”, the first Polish dictation in the UK, summer schools for Polish immigrants and English teachers, secured grants for the British scholars working on Poland, the publication of three books on Poles in the UK, he supported the creation of the virtual map of the Polish London and the making of short films presenting Polish London after 1945.

Unfortunately, in July 2011, in the middle of the term, prof. Falkowski decided to resign from the leadership of PUNO. A few days later he had a stroke that caused paralysis of the right half of his body. Although he remained in the wheelchair for the last years, he kept his usual serenity and sense of humor. Being under the care of his beloved wife, he supported everybody who despite his illness maintained contact with him.

In prof. Wojciech Falkowski we honour a great Pole, a man of virtue and a true citizen of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic which prided itself in tolerance, openness and multiculturalism. We honour the man who considered Krakow and Vilnius his spiritual home.