

Invitation

Dear Friends!

Every encounter with history, architecture and works of Cistercian abbey at Łąd (read: Lond) marks the visitor with an unforgettable impression. This place powerfully astonishes with the beauty of the works of art collected throughout centuries. Their presence here results from faith and love of beauty of local benefactors, architects, builders, artists and inhabitants of the abbey: Cistercians, Capuchins, diocesan priests, Salesians, and members of the clergy held prisoners here during the World War II. As present administrators of the abbey, the Salesians express their hope, that this Internet site shall lead you to an adequate knowledge and profound experience of this spiritual place.

Salesians of Don Bosco

The History of the Abbey in Łąd

Łąd was already known in the eighth century as a fortified town, but the beginning of its quick development is dated to A.D. 1175 when Cistercians came here from Łekno monastery which was founded by the Altenberg abbey located near Cologne in Germany. The monastery at Łąd was officially established by a decree of prince Mieszko the Old. In 1191 the monastery was closed down, probably for economical reasons. However, the same Mieszko intervened in Citeaux, headquarters of the Cistercian General Chapter, and the monks returned to Łąd in 1193. At the end of the 12th century they started building a Romanesque church, which does not exist today.

While in the 13th century A.D. the place knew a steady and dynamic growth, the dynastic conflict related to the succession of Przemyśl the Second caused a substantial degradation of the monastery buildings. In the middle of the 14th century Wierzbicka from Paniewice, chief governor of Wielkopolska province, took care of the monastery. He managed to convince the king Casimirus the Great and Wielkopolska gentry to support generously the place. As a consequence of his protectorate, the monastery was rebuilt and enlarged.

In the 15th century the monastery knew a steady development and it owned 53 villages and 3 towns. In the first half of the 16th century, however, its growth was disturbed by religious conflicts related to Reformation and to the efforts to make monasteries strongholds of Polish culture and religion. There came a decree that demanded Polish abbots in Polish monasteries, while for several preceding centuries Łąd had been governed by Cistercians from Germany. Accused of supporting the Reformation, monks of German origin left Łąd in 1553, and went to the abbey in Henryków in Silesia.

Jan Wysocki (1560–1568) became the first Polish abbot. In the 17th century abbot Jan Zapolski (1644–1689) began to rebuild the church in a baroque style. The architects Tommaso Poncino, Jan Koński and Giorgio Catenazzi pulled down the Romanesque church and built what appears today to be the eastern part of the present church. A great protector of fine arts and an outstanding reformer of Polish Cistercian monasteries, Abbot Mikołaj Antoni

Łukomski (1697–1750) brought Łąd to the peak of its glory. During his rule in 1728 the Italian architect Pompeo Ferrari continued the restoration of the church in the baroque style. In the same time the monastery itself was rebuilt. The interior of the church and of the monastery was fashioned by painters Jerzy Wilhelm Neunherz, Adam Swach, F.L. Raedtke, by engravers and sculptors Bartłomiej Adrian, Ernst Broger and Jan Erntygeler, and by an organ-maker – Joseph Koegler. On July 21, 1743, the archbishop of Gniezno Antoni Szembek consecrated the newly rebuilt temple. The days of glory were finished when the monastery found itself under the Prussian rule. In 1796 the Prussians plundered the monastery buildings and confiscated its land. In 1819 when Łąd became part of the Polish kingdom that politically depended on Russia, archbishop of Warsaw Franciszek Skarbek-Malczewski yielded to the pressure of the Russian government and closed the place.

In 1822 count Waław Gutakowski became the owner of the Cistercian property. In order to save the monastery buildings from a complete ruin, he convinced Russian government to give the monastery over to the Capuchins. The new inhabitants of the monastery undertook the renovation of the church and monastery, which was possible thanks to substantial help of the inhabitants of Warsaw. In 1855 the work of restoration was over. Unfortunately, the fruitful and busy presence of the Capuchins in Łąd lasted only fourteen years. When the so-called January uprising against Russian rule broke out, they unambiguously supported it. They helped and hid in the monastery Fr. Maksymilian Tarejwo, the chaplain of the uprising. In April 1864 he was captured and executed by hanging in Konin, while the Capuchins were sent to Siberia. The Russian governor Berg closed down the monastery. In 1888 Aleksander Bereśniewicz, bishop of Włocławek, bought the monastery from the Russians and in 1890 erected a parish there. The parish was confided to the care of the diocesan priests.

In 1918 a search for a new administrator of the property began. Due to the activity of Rev. Franciszek Szczygłowski from Słupca, Stanisław Zdzitowiecki, bishop of Włocławek, confided the whole complex to the care of the Salesian Congregation. The Salesians set up a minor seminary there and undertook reconstruction works aimed at adapting the monastery building to the needs of the educational character of the place. The growing development of the seminary was halted by the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1939 the Nazis, who planned an extermination of the Polish nation, set up a transitory camp for Polish clergy who were later sent to concentration camps. Up to the end of 1941 there were 152 religious and diocesan priests held in the monastery, bishop Michał Kozal included. After the liquidation of the camp the cloister served as a Hitlerjugend base.

The Salesians returned to Łąd in 1945 and restarted the activity of the minor seminary. It lasted only up to 1952 when the persecutions of the communist government decided to close that institution. In order to avoid a takeover by the communists, the Salesians created in Łąd a regular theological seminary for the candidates to priesthood. In 2002 the seminary celebrated its 50th anniversary of constant activity.

The Seminary

The Higher Seminary of the Salesian Congregation is now the custodian of the post-Cistercian abbey at Łąd. Since 1952 the monastery serves the purpose of preparing young Salesians to priesthood and to educational work with young people in the spirit of saint John

Bosco in Polish parishes and schools and in missionary lands as well. During the fifty years of activity, almost six hundred seminarians studied and became priests here.

The seminary undertakes every possible effort to ensure to the seminarians the best possible conditions for their human development, for their in-depth study of the Salesian charisma, and for their spiritual growth. The intellectual preparation consists in six-year-long philosophical and theological studies. Alumni of the seminary conclude their studies with the acquisition of master of theology degree released by the Faculty of Theology of the Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw. The seminary closely cooperates with that Faculty.

Pastoral and educational character of the Salesian mission requires from the seminarians an adequate preparation. It includes a two-year long pastoral training in one of the houses of the Congregation together with the pastoral work with the young people organized in groups and religious movements at the seminary. One of the forms of pastoral activity is the play of the Passion of the Lord prepared and exhibited by the seminarians during Lent every year.

The religious community at the seminary takes great care to live and work in the spirit of a family, a factor greatly stressed by saint John Bosco. The Salesians deem it important to build serene and warm relationships within the community and with the neighboring social milieu. The daily schedule includes time for common prayer and individual meditation, for the celebration of the Holy Mass, Sacrament of Reconciliation and spiritual direction; for the courses, seminaries and personal study; for common recreation, sport, singing, physical work and rest.

The Church

At the end of the 12th century/beginning of the 13th, German Cistercians erect a Romanesque temple, enlarged in the second half of the 14th century thanks to the foundation of Wierzbietta from Paniewice. The church had probably only one nave with a transept containing two chapels in each lateral arm; then there was a presbytery with an apse. In the years 1651–1652 Tommaso Poncino disassembles almost completely the walls of the church. On the remaining Romanesque fundamentals, his successors, Giorgio Catenazzi and Jan Koński, erect the present nave of the presbytery and lateral arms of the transept separated one from the other by a cupola that rests on the wings.

In the middle of the 17th century the ceiling of the presbytery and transept was adorned with putti, ornaments, and shells, and with a rich stucco decoration containing variegated plant representations. The frieze that adorns finely profiled cornice is composed of similar elements. The frescoes incorporated into the rich stucco decoration cover the ceiling. The oldest ones, characteristic to mannerism, come from the second half of the 17th century and are located above the altar of the cross. They represent the passion of Christ: Jesus condemned to death, way of the cross, crucifixion, wailing over his dead body, resurrection and ascension into heaven. The same themes are repeated in the medals finely incorporated into the stucco decoration of the cornice. The author of the frescoes signed the paintings with his initials only: W.C.M.

In the polychromy of the small cupola the adoration of the Holy Trinity by the saints together with four evangelists in the supporting wings are considered to be Swach's first paintings executed in 1711. In the same time six scenes from the life of St. Bernard of

Clairvaux make part of the ornamentation of the south transept. They present the saint as a mystic, zealous Cistercian and an experienced diplomat. On the eastern wall of the transept, in an arcaded niche one can find the altar of St. Francis of Assisi which was originally dedicated to St. Benedict. It was founded in the second half of the 18th century by abbot Łukomski whose coat of arms may be seen in the stucco ornamentation. Above the altar one can see a painting of St. Scholastica. The central painting was made in 1852. The polychromy in the ceiling of the transept, painted by F. L. Raedtke in the first half of the 18th century, is linked to the theological and ascetic program visualized in the altars of this side of the church. Above the altar of the blessed Virgin Mary of Częstochowa there are three loci dedicated to the Marian cult: Blessed Virgin Mary as the patroness of the Cistercian order; Mary patroness of the monasteries; Mary patroness of lay people. The three remaining loci represent St. Ursula, virgin and martyr, as the patroness of good death; she assists the dying; in the center one finds foolish and wise virgins (Matt 25:1–13) who keep vigil to be ready to meet the Lord. The wooden altar of St. Ursula covers the furthest wall of the northern transept. It is composed of three levels and was made in 1720 by the artists responsible for the main altar. Its polychromy imitates the texture of marble. The relics of St. Ursula and her companions were brought from Cologne to Łąd in 1263 and incorporated into the base of this altar in special niches covered with glass.

At the eastern pillars of the nave there stand symmetrically located altars from the second half of the 18th century dedicated to saints and martyrs: St. Barbara, St. Florian, St. Sebastian, on one side, and St. Anthony, St. Adalbert, St. Stanislaus, on the other. The main altar dedicated to Our Lady Help of Christians was created in the workshop of Ernst Broger and Jan Erntygeler in Głogów, Silesia, in 1721.

In 1728–1730 Pompeo Ferrari built the main nave of the church and covered it with a 38 meter cupola based on pilasters which split it up into eight fields. For the next two years, a painter from Silesia, Jerzy Wilhelm Neunhertz, executed its polychromy with abbot Łukomski preparing the thematic plan. The latter imagined the cloister and church at Łąd as a *Domus Sapientiae*, House of Divine Wisdom. In a figurative manner, the frescoes of the main cupole depict this post-Tridentine vision of the Church triumphant over errors of heresy and evil thanks to the presence of Divine Wisdom. Inspired by the book of Proverbs 9:1–2, Łukomski presented the Church as the house of Wisdom built on seven columns identified by him as seven most eminent doctors of the Church. They were represented in the seven fields of the cupole: (clockwise) Jerome, George the Great, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, Augustin, Ambrose. The central fresco above the arcade depicts the allegory of the Church in the form of a triumphant gate through which the faithful enter the heaven guided by Divine Wisdom.

The organ

From the acoustic point of view, the main nave of the church in Łąd was the best place for the organ with twenty different voices built by master Joseph Kogler. The organ resounded for the first time on Christmas 1734. It enchants the listener not only with its sound but also with the beauty of its sculpted ornaments: delicate ivy leaves, angels playing instruments, king David and St. Cecile, patroness of music.

The Kogler's organ underwent several modifications and restorations. The biggest devastation of the instrument was wrought by the Prussians who stole all the pipes. Its

original plan and inner construction were, however, well preserved. The 2002 restoration brought the instrument to its previous Cistercian and baroque glory. The whole structure was restored, playing parts were reconstructed together with the bellows, and the voices were standardized to the same material and vocal criteria.

The Monastery

St. Jacob Oratory

St. Jacob Oratory is the most precious monument of the monastery. The polychromy of its interior (ca. A.D. 1372) bears witness to the 14th century expansion of the abbey. It commemorates persons and coat of arms of the benefactors together with the knightly atmosphere of the court at that time. The author of the frescoes is an anonymous Cistercian monk whose style is influenced by the artistic milieu of Cologne and by Bohemian miniature painting. The main scene of the composition is dedicated to the foundation of the monastery (south wall). The founder Wierzbicka and his family are kneeling down in the presence of St. Jacob, above them the artist placed the coat of arms of Niesobia that belongs to the family. The eagle of the Piast dynastic family symbolizes the authority of the king Casimirus the Great and his participation in the foundation of the monastery. The frieze that circumvents the walls of the Oratory contains coats of arms that belong to knightly families of Wielkopolska which also participated in the foundation. On the western wall one can see a biblical scene that represents the visit of the three Magi in Bethlehem. The scene is very realistic with some elements of royal court characteristics: the Virgin Mary is dressed in the vestments of a court lady. The frescoes of the Oratory are numbered among the most precious monuments of Polish medieval art.

The Abbot's Hall

The so-called Abbot's Hall is located on the first floor of the southern wing of the monastery. When the place was rebuilt in the baroque style, it functioned as a chapter-room. During the summer of 1722 Adam Swach made the frescoes in the Hall. The visitor is particularly struck by the great fresco that covers the whole surface of the ceiling. The artist needed only thirty four days to paint it.

In the center of that fresco Adam Swach painted a narrow gate that leads into heaven. On its western side Christ bears his cross and his followers proceed behind him. These are the people who courageously bear the cross of suffering and pain of everyday life and thus reach the joy of salvation. In the lower left corner of the fresco Swach, who was a Franciscan, represented St. Francis of Assisi with a cross, and then his auto-portrait. On the eastern part there come the allegories of Murder, Pride, Idolatry, Avarice, and Drunkenness. They do not bear the cross, and the abyss engulfs them before they reach the gate that leads to heaven.

The frieze below the ceiling of the Abbot's Hall is adorned with thirty five portraits of Ład abbots together with the portrait of Mieszko the Old. According to the project by Łukomski, the array of abbots represented in the frieze should commemorate the precedent rulers of the monastery and witness to the centuries-long history of the abbey.

