



## ***Teofil Bzowski as the Guardian of the Memory of the Ideals of the Chyrow Boarding School and its Graduates***

### **ABSTRACT**

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**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** The subject of the analysis carried out in this study includes the letters of T. Bzowski to his students.

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**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS:** On the basis of such analysis we shall try to answer the question: How did Bzowski reinforce the memory of the Chyrów school's ideals in his students? The analysis shall be carried out on the basis of the content of his letters.

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**THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION:** The memory of a school is created by a group of different people. It usually includes students-graduates, which – in a way – extend and transmit the school's ideals, but the group also includes teachers and tutors. This study shall focus on the teacher's memory of the Scientific and Educational Department of the Jesuit Fathers in Chyrów. It was an elite secondary school for boys. One of the most significant persons among the Chyrów school teachers was a Jesuit named Teofil Bzowski. Former *Chyrowiaks* wrote for that paper which reflected the school's rich activity and the histories of its students.

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**RESEARCH RESULTS:** The analysis shall make it possible to specify the system of values cherished by the authors of the letters. The knowledge gained from the analysis of the letters as ego-documents shall make it possible to not only reconstruct the picture of the school and its influence on the people connected with it, but also to recreate the spiritual atmosphere of a given historical period.

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**CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:** Analysing the source materials one may come to the conclusion that the letters exchanged between the teacher and former students are a tool used for maintaining the memory of the school and its ideals. The memory is created through intergenerational interactions (teacher-students).

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→ **KEYWORDS:** CHYROW, T. BZOWSKI, LETTERS, MEMORY, SCHOOL, TEACHER, STUDENTS

## Introduction

The memory of a school is created by a group of different people. It usually includes students-graduates, which – in a way – extend and transmit the school's ideals, but the group also includes teachers and tutors. This study shall focus on the teacher's memory of the Scientific and Educational Department of the Jesuit Fathers in Chyrow. To be more precise, the subject of the research upon which this work focuses is the memory of a school created and built on the basis of relations existing between generations: between the teacher and his students.

The memory of a school may be built on the basis of various documents that may be divided into two groups: formal papers (related to offices, institutions, administration units) and informal papers (personal, biographical ones) (Łuczewski & Łuczewska, 2012). The letters that constitute the basic source of research for this work belong to the group of informal documents.<sup>1</sup> The analysis of informal documents usually makes it possible to determine personal characteristics and may be used for analysing, describing and explaining social phenomena of a given historical period. The knowledge gained as a result of analysing letters as ego-documents (Szulakiewicz, 2013; Szulakiewicz, 2015) shall make it possible to reconstruct the image of the school and the force of its influence exerted on the students.

In order to analyse the phenomenon of the memory created in the relations between the teacher and his former students, first a brief description of the school shall be presented. Then, we shall characterise the people who create the memory and its sources. Finally, we will try to answer the questions: what is preserved; what do the teacher and his former students remember? What do they want to keep in their memory?

## Chyrow

The name "Chyrowiaks" refers to the graduates of the Scientific and Educational Department of the Jesuit Fathers in Chyrów. It was an elite secondary school for boys – mainly for the sons of the representatives of landed gentry, country's officials and entrepreneurs. The school was

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<sup>1</sup> In Polish books that refer to documents as biography sources such documents are named in different ways. Grzegorz Michalski, for example, uses the words: foreign materials and personal materials, and the latter category includes letters (Michalski, 2004). See also: Dróżka, 2014.

built in 1883-1885. It was designed with flourish. It included 327 rooms and its corridors, which were altogether 1980 metres long, were 3 metres wide (Niemiec, 1998). It could hold 400 students. Usually, from 60 to 80 Jesuits worked there, including about 30 professors and tutors. It is worth mentioning that the Department was very modern and equipped with all kinds of educational and scientific materials the level of which was often higher than that of the world's standards. Its students could use 9 sports fields, 3 tennis courts, 7 bowling alleys, a swimming pool, a gym with showers, recreation rooms, and billiard rooms. Recreation accessories also included bicycles, sledges, skis, ice skates, athletic equipment. In the north-western wing a theatre and cinema hall was located. It included 1000 seats for the audience as well as dressing-rooms for performers. Thus, apart from studying, the students could develop their hobbies and interests. The school had its theatre, orchestra, band, scouting troop, as well as special interest groups dedicated to tourism, amateur radio, meteorology, photography, religious knowledge and other subjects. The students' religious life was developed through units such as Sodality of Our Lady, Guardian Angel Congregation or the Skarga Circle. The total area of buildings and recreational fields occupied 40 hectares of land (Niemiec, 1998).

The essence of the Chyrów education was summarised within the slogan: *Deo, Patriae, Amicitiae* (to God, Homeland, Friendship) and the quality of fulfilling those ideals was higher than average. The Scientific and Educational Department in Chyrów had its "Chyrów Department Charter" and "Chyrów Department Curriculum." Both of these documents specified the objectives, methods and contents of the youth's education. They made the students aware of the fact that their objective of being in the school is obtaining education, as well as becoming good and honest members of families, the country and the Church, which requires a serious effort of their minds, hearts and will.

The Department was opened in 1886. It functioned for only 53 years. It was closed as a result of the war that broke out in September 1939. About 6170 students studied there and ca. 1260 of them passed the high school exams (Grzebień, Kochanowicz, & Niemiec, 2000).

## Teofil Bzowski

One of the most significant persons among the Chyrów school teachers was a Jesuit named Teofil Bzowski. In Chyrow he taught Polish grammar

and literature, Russian language and religious education in lower years, but in the memory of his students he was first of all a great tutor and counselor for the graduates (Grzebień, Kochanowicz, & Niemiec, 2000). The fact that he was highly respected is confirmed by the memories of former students (cf. Błaszkiwicz, 1993; Domański, 1990). On the 25th anniversary of the school, on 17th September 1911, he established the Association of Former *Chyrowiaks* and he led the association until his death. The association, which functioned under the slogan: *Deo Patriae Amicitiae*, had its own *Statute of Former Chyrowiaks* (Chyrow 1936). It included former students of the Department gathered into circles. In 1935 there were 6 circles (Warsaw, Lviv, Krakow, Poznan, Bydgoszcz and Chyrow) which included ca. 500 members. Every year general assembly was held and authorities of the Association were elected. After the Second World War mainly the circles in Krakow, Warsaw and London were functioning (Grzebień, 1997).

Bzowski was also the editor of the *Chyrów Quarterly* (from 1922 the name changed into the *Chyrów Review*) which became the official paper of the Association of Former *Chyrowiaks*. Former *Chyrowiaks*, as well as professors, prefects and graduates wrote for that paper which reflected the school's rich activity and the histories of its students. The magazines edited by Bzowski were to cherish the idea of friendship according to the slogan "Deo, Patriae, Amicitiae." Their objective was to encourage and maintain friendly relations and to make much younger *Chyrowiaks* familiar with elder *Chyrowiaks*, as a result of which everyone could become a part of this large group of friends (cf. Nasze Pisemko, *Z Chyrowa* [Our Paper, *From Chyrow*], No. 14, 1906).

After the occupation army invaded Chyrow in 1939, Bzowski moved to Krakow and then, in 1944, he went to Stara Wies near Brzozow, from where he stayed in touch with former *Chyrowiaks* who, as a result of the war, were scattered around the whole world. Bzowski supported them both spiritually and physically, sending parcels with useful things to those who needed them or helping people to find a job. Due to those contacts he knew very well what was happening to his former students during the war.

In 1949, fearing the possible influence of *Chyrowiaks* on the changes taking place in the country, the Security Service of the communist Poland started to repress Father Bzowski. Finally, they searched his place and took the letters he received from his former students. After the political changes of 1989, the access to those documents became possible and now they are kept at the Institute of National Remembrance – IPN (Warsaw).

## Characteristics of the sources

The analysis was carried out on the basis of the letters exchanged between Chyrowiaks and Teofil Bzowski. Thus, we shall analyse letters written by former Chyrow Department students, letters written by Teofil Bzowski to Chyrowiaks, as well as operational materials of the communist Poland Security Service related to Chyrowiaks and their letters.

By 1946 Bzowski had received from 280 Chyrowiaks more than 2000 letters and postcards to which he replied. A part of this correspondence – ca. 200 letters by Chyrowiaks to T. Bzowski, hand written in a beautiful Polish language, with full forms typical of the art of letter-writing, may be found in the archive of the IPN. The extant letters were sent to Bzowski with a varied frequency. Usually Chyrowiaks wrote to him once or twice a year. The letters were written between 1940-1949 (until the search carried out in July 1949). Later, for the sake of the Chyrowiaks' safety, Bzowski no longer kept the letters he received.

In order to facilitate the communication between Chyrowiaks, Bzowski initiated the creation of the magazine entitled "Deo – Patriae – Amicitiae." The paper was of a kind of a chronicle – the contents of each issue depended on the letters sent to Bzowski. The magazine was issued every month. Altogether 15 issues of the magazine were published.<sup>2</sup> In the paper Bzowski published fragments of the Chyrowiaks' letters and their abstracts. Also, he published his replies to some letters. Moreover, in the magazine he described what was happening to his former students during the war and he gave addresses so that Chyrowiaks could find and help each other. By 1946 88 Chyrowiaks or their widows had received financial support. Through the distribution of the magazine a large group of Chyrowiaks had access to the news. The first three issues of the magazine were published in 300 copies, but the fourth issue was published in 400 copies. Well-off Chyrowiaks sent their money in order to support the magazine publication.

## Source analysis

### Letters written by Chyrowiaks

Most often Chyrowiaks write about the warm, family atmosphere of the Chyrow school. They refer to the values acquired in Chyrow and they

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<sup>2</sup> In London a similar bulletin was published in 1967-1984.

mention teachers whose lessons are still important to them, irrespective of where the students are or what they do. They feel younger as they think about the Fathers and friends from school, and although many of those people are dead, they still live in their memory. In their hearts special interest group meetings, masses, or theatre plays in which they participated are refreshed. Chyrowiaks recall their recreational May trips and the high school exams. One of the students writes that he was moved by the fact that he was just an ordinary man, forgotten by all, and yet former Chyrowiaks found him and sent him some news (DPA, No. 4). Another Chyrowiak wrote that Chyrow is youth, joy, sun, friends and dreams. Another student writes:

I am not sure whether in the world there are many schools that were able to encourage such friendliness, such attachment to the school as Chyrow. It is amazing that after dozens of years from graduating from the school people stay in touch with it, that they write to their former teachers although they live in all parts of the world, and that in their mind they recall Chyrow affectionately, as if it was their family home. This is the fruit of the Jesuit Fathers' work (DPA, No. 5, p. 9).

In their letters Chyrowiaks describe their life and ask about the situation of their friends. On the basis of these letters we may say that Bzowski was their father figure; he was also a symbol of the Chyrow school and its ideals. For many students he was a person whom they could trust, on whom they could rely and who always supported them – that is how they recall him and that is how they still treat him. Chyrowiaks are grateful for the huge effort he makes in order to maintain the memory of the school through collecting news from former students and sharing them on the pages of his magazine. Bzowski's former students tell him about their problems and ask for help. Also, in their letters they ask him to publish not only facts about their lives but also more profound texts – something about the ideology of their friendship and the Association, about the school's educational concepts. One of Chyrowiaks wrote: "The Fathers formed our characters, fed our mind with knowledge and shaped our will according to the Catholic rules for Deo, Patriae, Amicitiae – this is a shield against all evil" (DPA, No. 6, p. 7). Some of the former students postulated the establishment of a new school that would function as a continuation of Chyrow. All Chyrowiaks finished their letters by sending greetings to the Jesuit Fathers and Friends.

## The magazine “Deo, Patriae, Amicitiae”

Today it is impossible to read the original letters written by Bzowski in reply to the letters received from Chyrowiaks. We can only access fragments or abstracts of those letters that he published in his magazine. In his letters Bzowski answered the questions concerning the lives of the Chyrow school graduates and informed Chyrowiaks about the difficult situation of some former students, which encouraged them to help each other. He published addresses so that Chyrowiaks could find and support one another.

Publishing the news received in the letters resulted in the increase in the number of letters, about which Bzowski writes in the 3rd issue (April 1947):

Dear Sirs, Dear Friends! Your numerous letters witness to your faith, your attachment to the Church, your gratitude for the Chyrow school. I would also like to express my gratitude to you for your cooperation and generosity which makes it possible to maintain our friendly contact and brotherly help. I come to the conclusion that good relations, friendship and brotherly love have given us more free correspondents than we could find in other magazines.

Bzowski's motivation for writing letters was to reinforce the memory of the Chyrow school ideals, as well as cherish friendship and Christian values.

If Chyrowiak meets another Chyrowiak and encourages him to talk or to give us his address or information about his job, this may contribute to keeping contact and maintaining friendly relation, and sometimes even to mutual support and help with doing or finding a job.

This objective has been achieved. As a result of the exchange of those letters, after eight years of being apart, almost 400 friends were found (along with their addresses). The fruit of Bzowski's work was that former students started to meet after the war, usually at the time of Christmas or Easter. Few of them are still alive.

## Documents of the Security Service (SB)

Chyrow was a Catholic school. The political changes that took place after the Second World War introduced a system that not only prohibited the existence of such educational institutions, but treated them as the “breeding ground” of the new system's enemies whom the country was

to destroy. Analysing the papers of the Security Service, we find out how the communist authorities perceived the Chyrow school. According to the SB officers, the school organised “meetings aiming at the creation of a strong clerical element whose task is to oppose the country’s government.” SB officers found Chyrowiaks particularly dangerous to the “new country” as they were people who internalised the values contained in the slogan “Deo, Patriae, Amicitiae,” which were characteristic to the Chyrow Department. Those people felt the need to cherish friendship (exchanging letters was their tool) and to support the fulfilment of the Chyrow ideal outside the school buildings. The values declared and cherished by Chyrowiaks were not in accordance with the ideology of the communist authorities which started to govern Poland after the war. The documents of the IPN include operational materials of SB that identify Chyrowiaks as Church supporters, capitalists, land owners, and enemies of socialism who deserve strong persecution. In the opinion of the security service, the letters were a tool used for reactivating (in an illegal manner) the Association of Former Chyrowiaks. The association’s concepts were exchanged between Chyrowiaks in Poland and abroad with the help of the magazine “Deo Patriae Amicitiae.” According to SB, such concepts could be used by foreign secret service who could also use them to create a secret service network. Moreover, the concepts could pervade all branches of the country’s economy. On the basis of such arguments SB conducted the search in Father Bzowski’s place and took all the letters he exchanged with his students.

## Summary

On the basis of the conducted analysis we may say that the memory of the Chyrow school was preserved by maintaining mutual relations between the teacher and his students through letter-writing. The below letter of T. Bzowski is a good example of a tool supporting the maintenance of that memory:

Dear Sirs, Dear Friends! Since, after 7 years, God’s Providence made it possible for you to personally meet and gather in order to tighten the bonds of your friendship loosened by the war, and to strengthen and refresh your souls and hearts with our saint slogan ‘Deo – Patriae – Amicitiae’ – I am with you and I am happy with your joy. Our friend PhD Bolesław Surówka has recently written: “Chyrow no longer exists and there are no Chyrow students – only Chyrowiaks.” Thus, our ideal of the Catholic and Polish education shall not perish since you, dear Men, shall raise your sons as

per the same principles according to which you were raised in Chyrow. Not long ago one of you wrote: "I have always dreamt about sending my sons to the Chyrow school, but I will not be able to fulfil my dream. Nevertheless, at the moment, my only wish is to raise my children in the same manner as You Fathers have raised me – on the basis of faith and love for my Country." Here is, Dear Sirs, the way and means of maintaining our tradition, our Catholic ideals which became the objective for one of you who regrets that the Chyrow school has been destroyed. The idea of Chyrow has not been and cannot be attached to the place only. The loss of fields and forests, buildings, libraries, scientific materials, rooms, etc. shall not be the total and most painful loss if Chyrowiaks, faithful to the slogan *Deo – Patriae – Amicitiae*, keep their Christian spirit, and zealously pass this spirit to new generations in their families. May your beautiful, noble and devoted friendship, which constantly joins younger and elder graduates, incessantly creates the great Chyrow Family guarded by the Queen of Poland – St. Mary and Her Husband St. Joseph – then Chyrow shall never perish!

Analysing the source materials one may come to the conclusion that the letters exchanged between the teacher and former students are a tool used for maintaining the memory of the school and its ideals. The memory is created through intergenerational interactions (teacher-students). What we see in those interactions is not only recalling the past, which mainly included pedagogical activities, but also referring to a kind of deposit of ideals and values in the present – in the student's contemporary life. Within such context we may consider whether it is only the memory, or perhaps also the witness. Remembering something is not permanent, and witness includes the world of values that are internalized, accepted, and adopted as one's own. We remember good, bad or neutral things, although eventually what we remember best is what involved our emotions (affective memory). Witness involves experiencing a given reality in a deep, internal manner, and adopting it. In my opinion the analysed letters exchanged between Chyrowiaks and Bzowski reflect both the memory and witness of the values and ideals that were acquired by the students during their stay in the Scientific and Educational Department of the Jesuit Fathers in Chyrow.

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