

# Berichte und Kommentare

## Ethno-Religious Studies by Professor Henryk Zimoń, SVD

(On his 70th Birthday)

Henryk Hoffmann

Professor Henryk Wincenty Zimoń, SVD, was born in Wodzisław Śląski, Poland, on May 4, 1940. In 2010, he celebrated his 70th birthday and the 45th anniversary of priesthood. The year 2010 marked also 42 years of his academic career that began with his first scholarly publication in 1968.<sup>1</sup>

His life has been that of a priest and professor of ethnology and religious studies. In the years 1947–1954, he attended elementary school, first in Wodzisław Śląski and then in nearby Wilchwy (now a section of the town). In the same town, in the years 1954–1958, he also completed his secondary education at the Silesian Insurrectionist Regiment Lyceum, and then went on to study philosophy and theology at the Missionary Seminary of the Society of the Divine Word (Societas Verbi Divini – SVD) in Pieniężno, from which he graduated in 1965.

On June 26, 1965, he received his priestly ordination from Bishop Tomasz Wilczyński (1903–1965), and then he pursued a major in ethnology, along with religious and Indian studies, at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, under the mentorship of Hugo Huber, SVD, the doyen of Swiss ethnology and African studies, and a renowned expert in the culture of the Krobo tribe of south-eastern

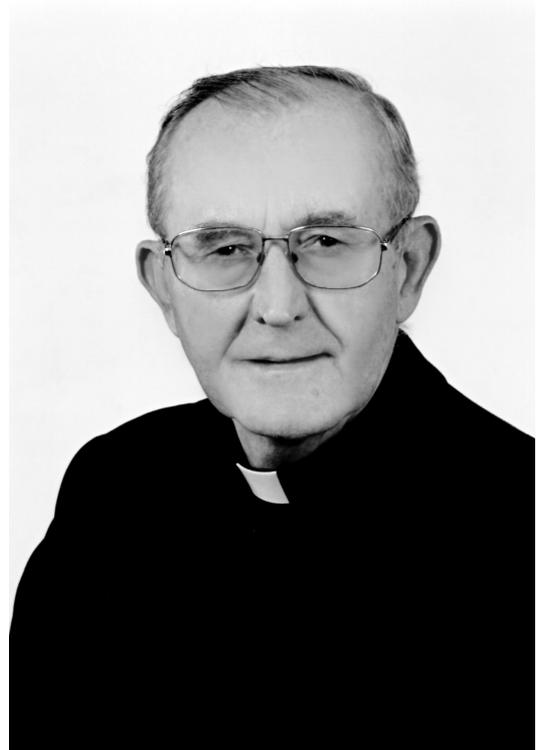


Fig. 1: Professor Henryk W. Zimoń, SVD

Ghana. In the course of his studies, Father Zimoń went to the island of Bukerebe in Tanzania, where he carried out his fieldwork among the Kerebe people from May to November 1968. This won him a master's degree (February 5, 1971) for the thesis "Zur Geschichte des Herrscher-Klans Abasiranga auf der Insel Bukerebe (Tanzania) bis 1895".<sup>2</sup>

The subject of the beliefs, and culture in general, of that African tribe was subsequently developed in his doctoral dissertation, "Die Regeniten auf der Insel Bukerebe (Tanzania)," defended on

1 All the biographic and bibliographic information in this article comes mainly from: Kość, Pietrzak, Zimoń (2008), pp. 241–272; Kupisiński, Grodź (2010) and Hoffmann (2010). See also the entry Zimoń Henryk. In: Religia. Encyklopedia PWN. vol. 9, T. Gadacz, B. Milerski (eds.). Warszawa 2003, p. 492. Also cf. <[http://svdgg.republika.pl/nowa/referat\\_misyjny/Neoprezbiterzy/1965\\_rok/1965\\_zimon\\_henryk.html](http://svdgg.republika.pl/nowa/referat_misyjny/Neoprezbiterzy/1965_rok/1965_zimon_henryk.html)> [01. 10. 2010]; <[http://www.kul.pl/files/324/bibliografia/zim\\_h.pdf](http://www.kul.pl/files/324/bibliografia/zim_h.pdf)> [01. 10. 2010]; <<http://www.jedlownik.pl/parafia/www/opracowanie.pdf>> [01. 10. 2010].

2 The book was published under the title "Geschichte des Herrscher-Klans Abasiranga auf der Insel Bukerebe (Tanzania) bis 1895" – Zimoń (1971).

July 5, 1973, at the University of Fribourg. Before that however, from February to June 1971, Father Zimoń also pursued African studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His African studies and doctorate enabled him to obtain a scholarly and teaching position at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) in Poland. From the beginning of the academic year 1973 he has been working there as senior assistant at the Chair of History and Ethnology of Religion, Faculty of Theology. Promotions as well as rank and academic titles followed promptly. Since January 1, 1976, he has also worked a lecturer at the same Chair of History and Ethnology of Religion, Faculty of Theology. The Board of the Faculty, based on his scholarly output and his habilitation book, “Wilhelma Schmidta teoria monoteizmu pierwotnego i jej krytyka w wiedeńskiej szkole etnologicznej” [Wilhelm Schmidt’s Theory of Primitive Monotheism and its Criticism from the Vienna School of Ethnology] (Warsaw 1984) brought him the degree of habilitated doctor in theology and in the history and ethnology of religion, on May 26, 1983. In the next year (May 28, 1984), the degree was officially approved. Subsequently, in October 1985, he was appointed a docent at KUL, and on November 21, 1985, he became the head of the Chair of History and Ethnology of Religion and the director of the newly established (by him) specialization in religious studies at the Faculty of Theology, Catholic University of Lublin.

From July 1984 to January 1985, Professor Zimoń conducted extensive fieldwork among the Konkomba people in north-eastern Ghana. From then on his ethnological research would focus on the Konkomba people. Still, two years later, he traveled to India where he not only attended a conference in Pune,<sup>3</sup> devoted to the role of cultural anthropology in the inculturation of Gospel, but also visited many religious and cultural centers in central and northern India. He returned to Ghana (this time for a longer stay, from September 1, 1990, to August 31, 1991) to continue the inquiry into the culture and religion of the Konkomba.

After he had returned from Ghana (on March 1, 1992), he was appointed associate professor at the Catholic University of Lublin, and on April 21, 1994, he was awarded the title of professor of theology based on his scholarly achievements and the monograph, “Afrykańskie rytuały agrarne na przykładzie ludu Konkomba” [African Agrarian Rituals on the example of the Konkomba People] (Warszawa 1992).

Professor Henryk Zimoń is a member of many scientific societies and institutes, including: Anthropos Institute, Polish Ethnological Society, the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin Scholarly Association, Polish-African Society, Polish Society for the Study of Religions, Committee for Ethnological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Association of Fundamental Theologians in Poland, and Lublin Scientific Society. Likewise, he sits on several editorial boards, including those of *Roczniki Teologiczne* [Theological Annals], “Encyklopedia Katolicka” [Catholic Encyclopedia] (where, since 1984, he is responsible for the religious studies section). He is also the editor of the “*Studia Religio-logiczne*,” an important series for religious studies published (since 2000) by the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin Scholarly Association, and – since 2006 – of the series *Antropologia religii* [Anthropology of Religion] published by Nomos Publishers. Since 2005, he has been a member of the editorial board of the series “*Dialog Kultur i Religii*” [Dialogue of Cultures and Religions], published by the Center of Dialog between Cultures and Religions and the “*Verbinum*” editorial house. He contributed to such encyclopedic and lexicographic projects as “*Leksykon filozofii klasycznej*” [Lexicon of Classical Philosophy], J. Herbut (ed.); “*Leksykon teologii fundamentalnej*” [Lexicon of Fundamental Theology], M. Rusecki et al. (eds.); “*Religia. Encyklopedia PWN*,” T. Gadacz, B. Milerki (eds.); “*Etnografowie i ludoznawcy polscy. Sylwetki, szkice biograficzne*” [Polish Ethnographers and Folklore Researchers. Profiles and Biographical Notes], E. Fryś Pietraszkowa, A. Kowalska-Lewicka, A. Spiss (eds.); “*Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*” [Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy], A. Maryniarczyk (ed.); and “*Wielka Encyklopedia PWN*” [The Great Encyclopedia PWN], edited by J. Wojnowski.

To the above should be also added that – apart from his teaching at KUL – Father Zimoń lectured in ethnology of religion at the Faculty of Theology, Academy of Catholic Theology (now Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University) in Warsaw, in the academic year 1974/1975 (1st semester). At the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, he offered, from August 21, 1987 to February 11, 1988, a 30-hour lecture series entitled “*Rituals and Beliefs of African Peoples*,” which was followed by a month-long library research in Washington, DC. In the first term of the academic year 1993/1994, he taught a 15-hour-long series of lectures on African religions at the Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology, Marie Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin. Under a bilateral agreement between KUL and the Catholic

3 Zimoń (1988).

University of Leuven/Louvain, as a visiting professor, he gave a 26-hour series of lectures (November 6 to December 18, 2003) on traditional African religions to undergraduates in religious studies at the Faculty of Theology of that university. As a visiting professor, he also offered 28 hours of lectures at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, in Ukraine, entitled “Traditional African Religions in Comparative Study and Interreligious Dialog.”

Professor Zimoń’s research, encompasses different subfields of religious studies (especially ethnology of religion, history of religion, theory of religion, history and methodology of religious studies), and focuses on several central issues. The most important among them is ethnology, particularly the research concerning cultures, beliefs, and rituals of African peoples. His first book (an offshoot of his doctoral dissertation), “Regenriten auf Insel Bukerebe (Tanzania),” Freiburg, Switzerland, 1974, is one example of that field of research. The issue of pluvial rituals is also present in other works of Prof. Zimoń: “Regenmacher und Regenzeremonien in Uganda,”<sup>4</sup> “Zaklinacze deszczu i ceremonie sprowadzania deszczu na wyspie Bukerebe w Tanzanii (na podstawie etnograficznych badań terenowych w 1968 roku)” [Rainmakers and Rain-making Rituals on Bukerebe Island, Tanzania (based on 1968 ethnographic fieldwork)],<sup>5</sup> “Ceremonie sprowadzania deszczu na wyspie Bukerebe w Tanzanii” [Rain-making Ceremonies on Bukerebe Island, Tanzania],<sup>6</sup> “Refleksje z badań etnograficznych na wyspie Bukerebe w Tanzanii” [Reflections on an Ethnographic Research on Bukerebe Island, Tanzania].<sup>7</sup> Another important field of his study in Tanzania was the history of Abasiranga royal family. He addressed this subject in a number of works such as: “Z badań nad etnohistorią rodu królewskiego Abasiranga na wyspie Bukerebe w Tanzanii w XVII w.” [Studies in the Ethnohistory of Abasiranga Royal Family on Bukerebe Island, Tanzania],<sup>8</sup> and “Etnohistoria rodu królewskiego Abasiranga na wyspie Bukerebe w Tanzanii do połowy XVIII wieku” [Ethnohistory of Abasiranga Royal Family on Bukerebe Island, Tanzania until the mid-18th Century].<sup>9</sup>

Another major field of interest of Professor Zimoń has been the culture and beliefs of the Kon-

komba people living near Saboba in today’s Ghana. His bibliography contains more than 60 entries concerning the Konkomba, including many published in international journals or edited works. Next to David Tait (1912–1956) and Jean-Claude Froelich (1914–1972), he belongs to the world’s most renowned experts on the culture and beliefs of that African people. Zimoń’s research of the Konkomba concerns three groups of topics:

- 1) agrarian rituals (including harvest celebrations);
- 2) burial rituals;
- 3) witchcraft and magical practices of purification and divination (especially those involving secondary burials and witchcraft accusations);

Among many works of Professor Zimoń on the culture and beliefs of the Konkomba, particularly valuable are – apart from the mentioned “professorship” book “African Agrarian Rituals on the Example of the Konkomba People” – the monograph “Sakralność ziemi u ludu Konkomba z Afryki Zachodniej” [The Sacredness of the Earth among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana], Lublin 1998, and his recent “African Traditional Religions in the Perspective of Comparative Studies and Interreligious Dialogue,” Lublin 2010 (published in English).<sup>10</sup>

The fascination with African cultures led Professor Zimoń to write extensively about interreligious dialog and inculturation processes in the context of evangelization in that part of the world, with the hope that – regardless of purely scholarly aspects – his works will contribute to the reflection on evangelization.<sup>11</sup> To this purpose, Zimoń edited the following books: “Religie pozachrześcijańskie w procesie przemian” [Non-Christian Religions in the Process of Change], Warszawa 1990; “Kultury i religie Afryki a ewangelizacja,” [Africa’s Cultures and Religions, and Evangelization], Lublin 1995; “Dialog międzyreligijny” [Interreligious Dialog], Lublin 2004.

Another important subject Professor Zimoń deals with is folk culture. He also edited some important books on this topic “Z zagadnień etnologii i religioznawstwa,” [Selected Topics in Ethnology and Religion], Warszawa 1986; “Z badań nad religijnością ludową” [Studies in Folk Religiosity], Warszawa 1988, and (with Z. Kupisiński and S. Grodź) “Badania nad religiami Afryki oraz religijnością ludową Polski i Ukrainy” [Studies in Re-

4 Published in a commemorative book on the 100th anniversary of the birth of father Wilhelm Schmidt, SVD: *Anthropica. Gedenkschrift zum 100. Geburtstag von P. W. Schmidt ...* – Zimoń (1968).

5 Zimoń (1976).

6 Zimoń (1978a).

7 Zimoń (1987).

8 Zimoń (2002).

9 Zimoń (2006a).

10 A full list of works by H. Zimoń on the Konkomba may be found in literature and on websites cited in note 1. Mentioned here as examples are those published in the *Anthropos* – Zimoń (1989b, 2003a).

11 Zimoń (1992), p. 7.

ligions and Folk Religiosity of Africa, Poland and Ukraine], Lublin 2009).

Henryk Zimoń also authored more than 50 works on history and methodology of religious studies. Chief among them are of course his books: the above-mentioned habilitation dissertation “Wilhelm Schmidt’s Theory of Primitive Monotheism and its Criticism from the Viennese School of Ethnology” (Warsaw 1984) and its slightly altered monographic version titled “Monoteizm pierwotny. Teoria Wilhelma Schmidta i jej krytyka w wiedeńskiej szkole etnologicznej” [Primitive Monotheism. Wilhelm Schmidt’s Theory and its Criticism from the Viennese School of Ethnology], (Katowice 1989); with a corrected and expanded second edition (Lublin 2001). Another important publication in this field is “Działalność Instytutu Anthropolos w dziedzinie lingwistyki, etnologii i religioznawstwa” [The Work of the Anthropolos Institute in the Field of Linguistics, Ethnology, and Religious Studies], Pieniężno 1980. To this day this book remains the main source of knowledge about the Vienna school of culture-historical ethnology in Poland.

It is not possible to list all contributions of Father Zimoń concerning the Vienna school. Suffice it to mention that – apart from many articles and encyclopedic entries on Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954) and other proponents of the culture-historical school, such as Joseph Henninger (1906–1991),<sup>12</sup> Paul Schebesta (1887–1967)<sup>13</sup>, as well as the Anthropolos Institute<sup>14</sup> (of which he is a member), and the *Anthropolos* journal (published since 1906)<sup>15</sup> – he also devoted several works to his predecessor at the Chair of History and Ethnology of Religion, KUL, Father Teofil Chodzidło, SVD (1909–1979)<sup>16</sup> and to the history of that institution.<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly, Father Zimoń belongs to the narrow circle of experts on the Vienna culture-historical school (its tenets, methods, techniques, and research tools, its achievements and the controversies surrounding it), and the views on religion held by its many representatives, including its founder, Wilhelm Schmidt.

Father Zimoń’s scholarly output also includes analyses of views of famous anthropologists and comparative religion experts such as Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973)<sup>18</sup> and Mircea Eliade (1907–1986).<sup>19</sup> He reviewed many important sem-

inal works in contemporary religious studies, including Eric John Sharpe’s (1933–2000) “Comparative Religion. A History” (London 1975),<sup>20</sup> Cyrill Korvin-Krasinski’s (1905–1992) “Microcosmo e Macrocosmo nella Storia delle Religioni” (Milano 1973),<sup>21</sup> Ugo Bianchi’s (1922–1995) “The History of Religions” (Leiden 1977),<sup>22</sup> and wrote many reports from various congresses, conferences, and symposia, including the Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) in Lancaster in 1975,<sup>23</sup> in which he took part along with two other Poles, Zygmunt Poniatowski (1923–1994) and Witold Tyloch (1927–1990). He also reviewed materials from the previous, XII Congress of IAHR, held in Stockholm, in 1970.<sup>24</sup>

Although Father Zimoń is interested especially in beliefs of African peoples, he also researched and wrote on topics related to folk culture of Slavic peoples and to Buddhism. He has also frequently addressed topics in the field of theory of religion, especially the sources and function of religion, as well as particular aspects of religion, such as prayer,<sup>25</sup> and in the recently expanding field of “gender studies.”<sup>26</sup>

Zimoń’s extensive study of rituals is surely of the greatest importance. It should be stressed that – contrary to the recently growing (also in Poland) trend to draw only on currently fashionable theories (such as phenomenological, hermeneutic, structuralist, and now cognitivist approaches) – Professor Zimoń’s assertions are based on solid data from his own fieldwork. The corpus of those sources includes numerous (more than 230, often lasting two hours) interviews conducted among several Konkomba tribes with whom he had established rapport. Another important source of information was participant observation of dozens of rituals in different, often vastly separated villages. Many prayers from the observed rituals were tape-recorded. It is worth to mention that during his second fieldwork among the Konkomba he was able to observe such rituals as the installation to the office of the earth priest at the village of N-nalog; the sorghum harvest festival at Sobib village; rituals conducted in earth sanctuaries at Bwagbain and Gbadagbam villages; sacrifices offered at Nalongi and Kiteek villages; and a private ritual at the earth sanctuary at Puo Tindaando village – all of which he then subjected to

12 Zimoń (1978b).

13 Zimoń (1996b, 2003b).

14 Zimoń (1978c, 1980a).

15 Zimoń (1980b, 1980d, 1996a).

16 Zimoń (1979).

17 Zimoń (1980c, 1989–1990, 2009).

18 Zimoń (1975a, 1983).

19 Zimoń (2008).

20 Zimoń (1977a).

21 Zimoń (1977b).

22 Zimoń (1977c).

23 Zimoń (1975b).

24 Zimoń (1978d).

25 Zimoń (1996c).

26 Zimoń (2006b).

a detailed comparative, phenomenological, and semantic analysis and interpretation of ritual behavior. He consequently attempted to explain the symbolic meaning of acts, ritual gestures, and metaphoric expressions used in the respective celebrations.<sup>27</sup>

Professor Zimoń supervised 145 bachelor's and master's theses and 16 doctoral dissertations.<sup>28</sup> Here are the names of the authors and the titles of the dissertations, which also demonstrates the scope of research of Zimoń's students; Father Antoni Dudek, "Zwyczaj, obrzędy i wierzenia doroczne na ziemi pszczyńskiej" [Customs, Celebrations, and Beliefs in Pszczyna Area], 1986; Father Jan Perszon, "Zwyczaj, obrzędy i wierzenia doroczne w regionie wejherowskim" [Customs, Celebrations, and Beliefs in Wejcherowo Area], 1990; Krzysztof Gładkowski, "Koncepcja etnologii według Stanisława Poniatowskiego" [The Concept of Ethnology according to Stanisław Poniatowski], 1992; Adam Antoni Szafranski, "Problematyka religii i magii w Afryce w świetle badań brytyjskich antropologów społecznych" [Religion and Magic in Africa according to British Social Anthropologists], 1993; Father Krzysztof Niedałowski, "Maski rytualne Afryki Zachodniej na przykładzie wybranych ludów" [Ritual Masks of the Selected West African Peoples], 1994; Zdzisław Kupisiński SVD, "Zwyczaj, obrzędy i wierzenia od adwentu do Wielkanocy w regionie opoczyńskim" [From Advent to Easter: Customs, Celebrations, and Beliefs in Opoczno Region], 1994; Father Franciszek Jędrak, "Zwyczaj, obrzędy i wierzenia doroczne w dekanacie gorzowskim (diecezja opolska)" [Customs, Celebrations, and Beliefs in Gorzów Deanery], 2000; Józef Nowak, "Zwyczaj, obrzędy oraz wierzenia adwentowe i bożonarodzeniowe w regionie tomaszowskim na Zamojszczyźnie (diecezja zamojsko-lubaczowska)" [Advent and Christmas Customs, Celebrations, and Beliefs in Tomaszów Area, Zamość Region (Diocese of Zamość-Lubaczów)], 2002; Stanisław Grodz SVD, "Wybrane nurty afrykańskiej chrystologii na tle ich rodzimego kontekstu religijnego" [Selected Trends in African Christology vs. their Native Religious Context], 2003; Adam Waś, SVD, "Bracia Muzułmanie w Jordanii. Doktryna i organizacja bractwa na przełomie XX i XXI wieku" [The Muslims Brotherhood in Jordan. Its Doctrine and Organization at the Turn of the 21st Century], 2003; Father Grzegorz Wita, "Istoty nadnaturalne oraz ich rola w życiu moralnym i kulcie ludu Aszanti w Ghanie" [Supernatural Beings and their Role in the Morality and Religion of

the Ashanti], 2004; Kazimierz Szymczycha, SVD, "Dialog chrześcijaństwa z wartościami religijnymi bantuskiego ludu Jansi w Demokratycznej Republice Konga" [Interreligious Dialog with the Bantu Jansi People of the Democratic Republic of Congo], 2007; Robert Maszkowski, MIC, "Obraz Jezusa w Koranie i wczesnej tradycji muzułmańskiej na podstawie literatury niemieckojęzycznej" [The Image of Jesus in the Koran and in the Early Muslim Tradition in the Light of Professional Literature in German], 2008; Piotr Kulesza, "Muzyczna i piśmiennicza twórczość antychrześcijańska w polskiej kulturze punk i jej krytyka" [Anti-Christian Music and Writing of Polish Punk Culture and its Critique], 2008; Svitlana Snigurska, "Zwyczaj, obrzędy i wierzenia ludowe od adwentu do Wielkiej Nocy w regionie gródeckim /diecezja kamienieckopodolska – Ukraina" [Advent and Christmas Customs, Celebrations and Folk Beliefs in Gródek Region /Kamieniec Podolski Diocese, the Ukraine/], 2009; Father Mariusz Rucki, "Spotkanie buddyzmu z chrześcijaństwem w świetle angielskich publikacji Daiseta Teitara Suzukiego" [Zen Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Publications by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki], 2009. Additionally, Father Zimoń was the reader of several doctoral dissertations. He also frequently reviewed the scientific output of many candidates to habilitation or professorship in the areas of religious studies, ethnology, and theology.

Another field of Zimoń's interest is the didactic aspect of the study of religions.<sup>29</sup> Along with other scholars of religious phenomena, such as Zofia J. Zdybicka and Andrzej Bronk, he believes that empirical study of religions, and more precisely religious studies, should be complemented with philosophy of religion and theology of religion in order to fathom the "essence of religion". Without going into the controversial methodological and world-view dispute about the place of religious studies among sciences, it should be emphasized that among academic pursuits, professor Zimoń especially values genuine philological knowledge in historical analyses of religion, and in terms of ethnological research, first-hand contact with the studied culture. Furthermore, the first volume Zimoń edited in the series of "Religiological Studies" is the book "Religia w świecie współczesnym. Zarys problematyki religio logicznej" [Religion in the Contemporary World: A Compendium of Research Issues], Lub-

27 Zimoń (1998), pp. 14–18.

28 Zimoń (2009), pp. 12 f.

29 Zimoń (1985). Also cf. His lecture plan: *Zarys religioznawstwa* [An Outline of Religious Studies] (with literature and requirements): <<http://e.kul.lublin.pl/qlprzedmioty.html?op=7&id=1034>>.

lin 2000 (reprinted 2001). This work is now used as one of Poland's leading academic handbooks on world religions. It contains chapters on history of specific religions as well as on methodology of religious studies.<sup>30</sup> The educational and instructive value of that book has also been acknowledged in Ukraine, where it was published under the title "Religija w sučasnomu sviti. Materjali do kursu religieznawstwa" [Religion in the Contemporary World: A Reading List for the Course of Religious Studies] (Lwów 2007).

It is not easy to sum up the many years of research, teaching, and organizational efforts undertaken by a man of such wide-ranging interests and extensive scholarship. Some important accomplishments have been perhaps unintentionally omitted. Additional recognition should be given not only to the impressive number of books and articles published by Henryk Zimoń but also to their scientific importance. This, however, remains beyond the scope of this brief outline. It must be emphasized however that Father Zimoń's 70th birthday is not only an occasion to recapitulate his achievements and present the areas of his scholarly interest but also to express our confidence that his fruitful and beneficial work will continue.

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