

RIP: Abp Jozef Zycinski

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 10, 2011 | Distinctly Catholic

A friend in Warsaw has just emailed me the very sad news that Archbishop Jozef Zycinski of Lublin, Poland died today in Rome.

Zycinski was a stunning human being in every regard. He is most known, of course, for his many books. He was at home in a philosophy classroom as he was in a nuclear physics lab as he was in his cathedral. His mind was penetrating and it was fitting when Pope John Paul II named his compatriot to the see of Lublin, home of Poland's leading Catholic university in 1997.

His intellect was matched by his kindness. We first met when he was taking a sabbatical year at Catholic University here in Washington in the mid-1980s. He had become chummy with my uncle a decade earlier when my uncle did a Fulbright in Krakow. We stayed in touch over the years and in 2000 I brought my Dad to visit the land of his parents' birth and we stayed at the archiepiscopal palace in Lublin as Zycinski's guests. I recall a long dinner with lots of conversation and laughter, followed by drinks and more conversation. The next morning, he gave us a tour of his cathedral and took exceptional pride in the double pulpits in the nave. During the Reformation, Poland was one of the few places to enjoy religious liberty, and a second pulpit was set up so that Protestant and Catholic clergy could debate the issues of the day.

Just a fortnight ago, my uncle called and asked me to buy a new book Zycinski had just published with the CUA press. I was completely unsurprised by the news that Jozef had a new book out and had it on my list of must-reads.

This sad news is a grief for the whole Church, not just the church in Poland. The Church has lost a leading light, someone who could enter into dialogue with modern science in ways that left most of us scratching our heads. He has gone to the angels now, and therefore, for the first time, he is finding the answers to all the many questions he had, which made him such an engaging person to spend time with. One question did not detain him, however. Archbishop Zycinski had no doubt about what awaits us in death. His faith was as strong as his mind and his heart, and he knew that a merciful God was there to greet us on the other side of the abyss. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon him.

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