



## From Addiction to Conversion

The story of Brother Bogdan Janski, Founder of the Resurrectionists

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# The Dream of Theodore

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*"This must be proclaimed to a sinful world, and it is something a person is unable to find out by himself: God loves you."*

Brother Bogdan was born in Poland in 1807 and baptized as Theodore Ignatius Bogdan Janski. In the years before and during Theodore's childhood, his country was annexed, freed, and invaded again and, as is always the case, it was poor people like Theodore's family who bore the brunt of the collapse of nation and society. His family lost their land, and both food and clothes were hard to come by.

His father and mother separated when he was in elementary school, but Theodore grew up under the influence of religious teachers in his village who taught him to seek God and strive for holiness. His teachers recognized that he was smart and imaginative, and they made it possible for him to stay in school and even move on to further studies.

Before he left for the University of Warsaw, his mother wrote him a letter which he kept in his diary: *"Don't get into bad company; avoid those who would lead you into worldly and bad habits. Look for companions who have a good reputation . . ."* She also reminded him that he was just turning sixteen and that he would have to take responsibility for his own life in Warsaw because there would be no father or mother to guide him.

At the university, Theodore got his first taste of the secular world and soon rejected Christianity for materialism. Despite his mother's warning, Theodore made friends with a classmate who introduced him to drinking parties and brothels.

Theodore often met his friends for bouts of drinking and sex in the tombs beneath the floor level of the Carmelite Church in Warsaw. During one meeting, Theodore poured his drink into a human skull and served up a toast from it. Lifting his

# Bogdan Janski

gruesome cup, he cursed death and laughed at the thought of eternal life. Life was to be lived now and, since the fullness of pleasure was life's purpose, he entered passionately into the thrills of sensuality.

Just before he left his hometown for an appointment to the Department of Economics and Law at the University of Paris, he impulsively married a pregnant girlfriend named Alexandra. The son born to Theodore and Alexandra was not Theodore's, but he had married Alexandra to save her from embarrassment. Later, he would spill out his regret in his diary: *"A woman has deprived me of my greatness."* Much later he would admit that he had no one but himself to blame for his inability to reign in his emotions and impulses.



From time to time, he thought of Alexandra. He wrote her letters and, when he had it, sent her money, but the threat of war kept Alexandra and Bogdan apart. They would never see each other again, and he would never meet Alexandra's son.

In Paris, Theodore was attracted to student groups among the Polish refugees. Like him, these companions were poor, confused and unable to do anything positive about the political turmoil in their homeland. Now twenty, Theodore began to call himself "Bogdan," his less formal middle name.

With his new name, things began to change for Bogdan, but very slowly. He began to make a living by translating works from Polish to French, writing articles on economics, and tutoring high school students. He was becoming responsible.

# The Dream Takes Shape

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*"Help me to  
be able to  
help others on  
the road to  
salvation."*

Poland's great Romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, was one of the political refugees in Paris. His home had become a gathering place for young men like Bogdan. The poet was a strong believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ and attended Mass regularly. Under Mickiewicz's influence, Bogdan began to wonder if he could find God's grace once again.

After many years of avoiding Mass, he found himself wandering into churches to pray, though still drinking and roaming the nighttime streets of Paris. He found it more and more difficult to get up in the morning. Consequently, his research and teaching position at the university was in jeopardy. His diary recounts a daily struggle between sin and God's grace: *"Merciful God, support me with your grace. Complete within me this work of salvation, of reconciliation with you . . . . In you, O God, is all my hope."*

Soon he joined a study group of like-minded individuals. They went to Mass each Friday and then gathered to study sacred scripture at the house of Mickiewicz. Eager to apply the biblical message of salvation to their circumstances, they asked: What would happen if they began living like true disciples of Jesus? Is a regeneration of society based on Christian principles even possible?

In Acts 4:32-33 they found hope: *"The whole body of believers was united in heart and soul...everything was held in common, while the apostles bore witness with great power to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ."* A Christian social revolution might be possible, Bogdan thought. Society could be reborn, this time formed by the Gospel. The dream of Bogdan Janski began to take shape.

He realized that to begin a new life he had to seek forgiveness and healing through the sacrament of Confession. His grand ideas were still locked behind his sinful habits. So he and several others began to prepare for their confession, the first since they were children. Bogdan prayed with all his heart that God would free him from his sins of sensuality.

It took him a year of soul searching but, with the help and direction of the prior of a local Benedictine abbey, he confessed his sins and experienced a powerful conversion of life. He notes in his diary: *"Father Prior was dismayed and frightened by my confession. He called my conversion miraculous.... I received his blessing, my eyes filled with tears, and that is the way he left me. I fell on the ground in the form of a cross."*

Like a child, this man of great intellect had to learn basic Catholic devotions. He joyfully tells us that after his conversion *"I learned to recite the rosary."* And, he kept in contact with the Benedictines who taught him how pray with greater trust. He brought all his hopes and dreams to prayer.

Once Bogdan found God through Jesus Christ in the sacrament of Confession, nothing could stop him from telling others about his new life and the hope that it brought him. He began to speak to his companions about his dream for a new Christian society.

Peter Semenenko was the first to respond. A twenty-one year old from

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*"A truly religious person does not have to regret his past because it was a condition for his call."*



# Congregation of the

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*"Why did I  
return to the  
Catholic  
Faith?  
Because You,  
O God  
of mercy,  
wished me  
to do so.  
Your grace  
alone  
accomplished  
this, and not  
any of my  
reasoning,  
merits or  
works."*

a militant group of exiles, Peter had left the Church and joined a failed uprising in 1831 in Poland. He then escaped to Paris disillusioned and in danger of going to prison if he were caught. Bogdan took him in and began counseling the young man to return to the Faith and to make something of his life.

Bogdan led Peter to confession at the same monastery where he had been reconciled. Another young revolutionary, Jerome Kajsiewicz, also began to experience a new hope and he, too, joined Peter in receiving the sacrament of Confession. Now there were three converts, and a spiritual awakening began to occur among the exiles in Paris.

Bogdan's dream of a new life for himself and his friends became a reality when he rented a house in Paris and invited Peter and Jerome and several other men to live with him, just like the small group of early Christians mentioned in Acts.

On Ash Wednesday in 1836, four of these friends with Janski as "Elder Brother" formed a community of young men that became the inspiration for the Congregation of the Resurrection. Soon, two more men joined them. Brother Bogdan was twenty-nine years old when he formed his new community.

From the beginning the new community was apostolic. In his memoirs, Jerome wrote of those earliest days: *"We felt called by God to serve our brothers but (at first) only a few people believed in us.... (But) one cannot fall in love with the Lord, taste how sweet He is, and not at the same time, be inflamed with the holy desire to see others share this same happiness.... (And, so) we tried to help others to know and love Jesus...."*

# Resurrection

Bogdan again took to the streets of Paris, but this time it was to seek out poor exiles and to offer them the gift of hope, the same hope that had saved his life. He fed the hungry and sheltered the homeless with money he begged from some of the well-off exiles in Paris. His new brothers eagerly followed his example.

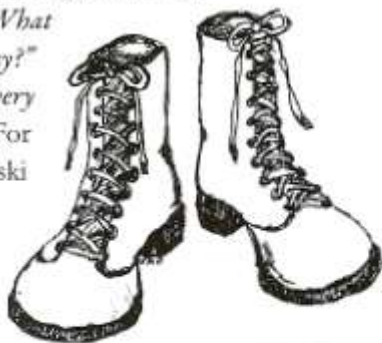
Bogdan, now known as the "Elder Brother" of the community, became a public penitent and developed an amazing patience and calm. A friend writes of him in those days: *"How many hardships he had to endure...how many evil things he had to listen to before he was able to convince this or that friend of his errors....and take them to Mass and finally lead them to the confessional."*

Jerome, Peter and the others watched and learned as Brother Bogdan showed the way: *"He sought out straying compatriots in all corners of the great city of Paris. For some he found food, and he assured the conversion of others by taking them into (our) house and going to great trouble to find money to feed a dozen or more people."*

He was seen in the streets in tattered work clothes while dealing with the poor. Someone saw the miserable condition of his shoes and bought him a new pair. The next day, the donor saw him wearing old worn-out shoes. *"What happened to the shoes I bought you yesterday?"* "Don't be angry," Bogdan answered, *"I met a very poor person and exchanged shoes with him."* For the poor immigrants of Paris, Bogdan Janski became an apostle of hope.

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*"May I spend my life laboring to erect a temple in which all of humanity will love and honor You. I want to live in the temple of the great God."*





# Endless Possibilities

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*"I continue to hear the anguished cry of those who have been treated unjustly... oppressed by exploitation, extreme poverty and lack of education."*

During the next few years, Bogdan intensified his mission to the poor of Paris. Soon the other brothers joined him in this work, and they divided up the poor sector of the city, each accepting responsibility to visit and assist the needy in his area.

Then Brother Bogdan began to cough. At first it was just annoying. With the cough came fatigue and weakness. When he began to cough up blood, he knew that he had little time left to do all the things he had hoped to do in his life. He had dreamed of little houses of brothers living together and forming a network of passionate Christians who would change the world. What would happen now?

He envisioned a transformation of society where the poor could find inns devoted to their care and hospitals that were not just places to go to die but to receive healing. His ideas and plans continued to develop: homes for invalids; Christian schools, even colleges and universities; print shops to produce Christian literature; lay societies to serve the poor as Jesus did. Under the inspiration of God's grace, Bogdan dreamt of a new world transformed by the Gospel. The possibilities were endless.

Meanwhile, Brother Bogdan continued to encourage his brothers, especially Jerome and Peter. When both of these young men felt a call to the priesthood, Brother Bogdan dissuaded them from leaving their group to join the Benedictines and, instead, introduced them to the idea of going to Rome to work and study. Soon, these two brothers

left for the eternal city while Brother Bogdan continued to maintain the community in Paris.

Brother Bogdan's ministry was to seek out those who needed him in the streets of Paris but, by 1838, he was feeling weaker. *"Last Saturday...I went to confession after a few days of illness related to the lungs."* He rallied after that but by spring of 1839 he was clearly failing: *(I am) poor in spirit, poor in health but with a never failing hope of improvement...and once again (I am) reconciled with the Lord."*

By late 1839, he was so sick that the brothers in Rome asked him to come there so they could take care of him. Brother Bogdan died in 1840 at Rome among his brothers when he was only thirty-three, too soon to see his community fulfill the dream of a new society formed and energized by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But at his death, surrounded by Peter and Jerome and the other brothers, Brother Bogdan was assured that his vision would live on.

And, indeed, the dream did not end with the death of Brother Bogdan. Today, in sixteen countries, the Congregation of the Resurrection works to establish the kingdom of God and to live out Brother Bogdan's dream of transformation of the individual and society.



# Rise from Darkness

## The Fathers and Brothers of the Resurrection

*You have read the story of our founder, Brother Bogdan Janski. We, the Congregation of the Resurrection, have dedicated our lives to his dream for the world.*

*Our message is simple and clear: we strive to help those who are struggling with sin and who feel powerless or dead inside. We tell them of God's love and grace freely available through belief and commitment to Jesus Christ. We help them rise up from the darkness of sin to live in the light of the Gospel.*

*Beyond bringing hope to the individual, we also have a unique way of looking at society. We know that the world can be a dark, sinful place and that there are many people who live in a culture of death. Wherever we Resurrectionists work, we endeavor to bring life. We offer a new way of living and promote a new society founded on the example of the Acts of the Apostles where the original community of Christians was united in heart and mind. Sharing the Eucharist binds us together and helps us form a new society in Jesus Christ. With all our hearts we strive for the resurrection of those dead in sin and despair.*

*We are faithful to the charism of our Elder Brother Bogdan, who illuminated his world with the light of Jesus Christ. We, the members of his Congregation, carry that light wherever we go. Brother Bogdan's dream is our dream, too.*

# Alleluia

## *A Prayer to Follow the Example of Brother Bogdan*

Lord Jesus Christ, in Your great love You called Brother Bogdan Janski to leave a life of sin and darkness and to found a community of men who would discover the hope of resurrection for themselves and the world.

You chose Brother Bogdan as a marvelous example of how true repentance leads to conversion and loving ministry to the poor. I want to follow his example and experience for myself Your healing grace. When I am down, lift me up Lord as You comforted and raised up Brother Bogdan.

Use me to help bring light to those in darkness and permit me to carry the message of life to those who live in the shadows of the culture of death. Through the intercession of Brother Bogdan assist with Your grace those addicted to alcohol and other drugs as well as those who sin against purity.

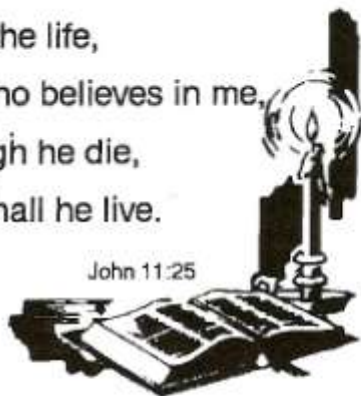
Grant also that one day we who embrace the spirit of Brother Bogdan, the Apostle of Hope, may celebrate his beatification for Your greater honor and glory. We ask all this through Christ Our Lord. Amen

## The Resurrectionist Prayer

O Risen Lord, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, make us faithful followers of the spirit of Your resurrection. Grant that we may be inwardly renewed, dying to ourselves in order that You may live in us. May our lives serve as signs of the transforming power of Your love. Use us as Your instruments for the renewal of society, bringing Your life and love to all and leading them to Your church. This we ask of You, Lord Jesus, living and reigning with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever. Amen

"I am the Resurrection  
and the life,  
he who believes in me,  
though he die,  
yet shall he live.

John 11:25



The Congregation of the Resurrection is a religious community in the Catholic Church which continues the work of Brother Bogdan and his original community. We are priests and brothers ministering in parishes, schools, retreat centers and health facilities throughout the world. We keep Brother Bogdan's dream alive.

# Contact

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