

Heavens Above: Giant Jesus Finally Finished

A controversial statue of Jesus in Poland, which is said to be the world's highest, has been completed after a series of delays.

The white landmark shows Christ wearing a golden crown with his arms outstretched, and provides competition for Rio's famous Christ the Redeemer tourist attraction in Brazil.

The new statue is 33 metres tall, one metre for every year that Jesus lived, according to its creator, local priest Reverend Sylwester Zawadzki.

He added that with the crown, it measures 36 metres, while a member of the construction team put the total figure at 51 metres if the mound it sits on is also included.

The statue rises above the western Polish plains in Swiebodzin. The town's mayor, Dariusz Bekisz, said it was now the world's tallest.

Christ the Redeemer is 39.6 metres tall, while another statue of Jesus, called Cristo de la Concordia, in Bolivia measures 40.4 metres.

A smiling Mr Zawadzki said: "I have never been as happy as I am today."

He said he felt he was called by Jesus to build the statue.

Mr Zawadzki, 78, told reporters: "This is the culmination of my life's work as a priest. I felt inspired to fulfil Jesus' will, and today I give thanks to him for allowing me to fulfil his will."

The project has taken five years.

Although it was not possible to verify the exact height of the new statue, there was no doubt that Christ the King, as the golden-crowned Polish statue is called, cuts an imposing sight.

But it has divided Poles and underlined the deep cultural divisions between a deeply Catholic population and an increasingly confident secular society - with many mocking the project as tacky.

It also faced numerous problems before it was finally completed.

A sceptical bishop halted the project at one point, and state officials also suspended it for a while, fearing the size made it unsafe.

More recently, an attempt to finally mount the figure had to be aborted because a crane was not powerful enough to lift the arms and shoulders - weighing 30 tonnes - onto the standing body.

A more powerful crane was brought in but further delays were caused this week by heavy winds.

Some locals think the statue will bring more visitors to the area, which others think is a waste of money.

"I don't understand. With all this money, we would have done better to build an elementary school," said Jarek, 41, from a nearby village.

A source close to the project said it had cost around a million euros (£870,000).