

Marek Chmielewski*

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland)

BLESSED MARCELINA DAROWSKA –
A NOTABLE EXAMPLE OF POLISH MYSTICISM
OF THE 19TH CENTURY**

Summary: Blessed Marcelina Darowska (1827–1911), founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, stands out from the numerous Polish mystics of the 19th century primarily because of her rich experience of mystical life and the original theory of mysticism (mystology) contained in her writings. She left a two-volume ascetic-mystical treatise, spiritual notes (“Diary”), many letters to spiritual directors and some sisters, as well as texts of retreats that she preached to students and various people. She created her own mystical language.

As an outstanding representative of 19th-century Polish mysticism, she stands out from other trends in mystical life, including: healthy patriotism, Marian piety with particular emphasis on the title of Mary Queen of Poland, apostolate in the education of girls and women, and the development of various forms of folk piety that strengthen National identity.

It had a wide impact on Polish, Belarusian and Ukrainian society, mainly through educational institutions for girls. She also maintained active contacts, including: with Saint archbishop Józef Bilczewski, Saint archbishop Szczęśny Feliński and other outstanding personalities of the spiritual and social life of those times.

Keywords: Marcelina Darowska, Polish mysticism, mystical language, theory of mysticism, mystology.

More than a thousand years of Poland’s history has been shaped almost from the beginning by the blessed and the saints who gave it its own spirituality. One particular form of Catholic spirituality is mysticism. Contrary to popular opinion, the essence of mysticism is not an extraordinary phenomena, often quite spectacular, which – in the language of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła – make ‘something happen to man’. Authentic Catholic mysticism is, in fact, about

* Address: fr. prof. dr habil. Marek Chmielewski, e-mail: cechaem@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-7566-5072.

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experiencing the presence of God within oneself and being united with Him. It is thus about the fact that, under the influence of God's action, "something happens in man" (Wojtyła, 1985, *passim*).

Although the Christian mystical experience is individual and rather imperceptible directly to those around it, it nevertheless affects the community of believers and society as a whole. In this sense, one can speak of mysticism as a kind of socio-cultural phenomenon. If we follow the lives, writings and works of mystics, it is not difficult to see that their activity takes place in a particular ecclesial and social environment, to whose influence they are subject. At the same time, they make their original contribution to this environment not only in the religious-spiritual dimension, but – depending on the situation – also in many dimensions of cultural and social life. Because of these interactions, it is possible to speak of the mysticism of individual nations (e.g. Polish mysticism, French mysticism, Dutch mysticism, etc.) and environments (e.g. monastic mysticism, priestly mysticism, etc.), as well as to periodize it in accordance with the changes in the life of individual cultures and the Church over time.

Almost from the first centuries of Christianity in Poland we have had persons endowed with a profound mystical life, whose influence makes it possible to speak of a specific Polish mysticism. Among them, the founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Blessed Marcelina Darowska, stands out in the second half of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century. Therefore, before presenting her mystical life and mystical doctrine, we will make a cursory historical review of Polish mystics in order to demonstrate the most specific features of Polish mysticism, which are also present in the life and writings of our author.

1. The characteristics of Polish mysticism

While characterising Polish mysticism, attention should first be paid to the distinction, which has functioned since the time of Jan Gerson († 1429), between experiential mysticism (*mystica practica seu experimentalis*) and study mysticism (*mystica speculativa*). The former is shared by *de facto* mystics who experience direct union with God. The latter involves all kinds of study of one's own or others' mystical experience, which is nowadays not infrequently referred to simply as mystology (Chmielewski, 2008, col. 1275–1277).

When speaking of Polish mysticism, we consider both types of mysticism, with the primary and leading one always being experiential mysticism, which is dominated by women, especially women religious. In the area of study mysticism monastic and diocesan clergy definitely predominate because of their appropriate

theological preparation. However, there are few cases of women who, when describing their mystical experiences, simultaneously subjected them to systematized theological reflection, thus combining experiential mysticism with study mysticism. Blessed Marcelina Darowska stands out in this respect.

Some authors, by analogy with Rhineland mysticism, which is important for European culture, speak of “Vistula-land” mysticism (Taranczewski, 2010, p. 15–30; Wolnikowski, 2018, p. 543–566)¹. However, this seems to be an excessively restrictive approach. For just as Rhineland mysticism, headed by Master Eckhart († 1328), John Tauler († 1361) and Blessed Henry Suzo († 1366), belongs to the wider area of German mysticism, so too Vistula-land mysticism is only part of the spiritual heritage of the Poles. The centuries-long tradition of Polish mysticism does not only include the flourishing centres of Kraków and Warsaw, but also Poznań, the former East Prussia, Vilnius, Volhynia and Podolia within the boundaries of present-day Ukraine, Silesia and the Subcarpathia.

Fr. Jerzy Misiurek of the Catholic University of Lublin and Fr. Stanisław Urbański of UKSW [Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw], scholars of the history and theology of Polish spirituality in the past and present territories of the Republic, divide it into six main periods, taking the 13th century as its beginning (Misiurek, 1996, p. 458–467; 2011, p. 334–344; Urbański, 2017; 2018, p. 509–527).

The first period from 13th to 16th century in the area of experiential mysticism is represented, among others, by blessed Dorothea of Montau († 1394). Noteworthy mysticologists of this period include her confessor John of Kwidzyn († 1417) of the Teutonic Order and the Cistercian theologian Jacob of Paradysium [Paradyż] († 1465), author of the work *On Mystical Theology*.

The second period of Polish mysticism, unanimously referred to as the “golden period”, is, set in the 17th century. It was then that the theology of mysticism flourished above all. Among several outstanding mysticologists the Krakow Franciscan Stefan Chryzostom Dobrosielski († 1676) stands out, who in his work *Summarium asceticae et mysticae theologiae* (Cracoviae 1645) was the first to distinguish between ascetical and mystical theology, a distinction that was reflected in later European mystology, including the works of Giovanni Battista Scaramelli SJ († 1752) (Pablo Maroto, 2001, p. 123). An author who combined deep mystical experience with theology practised at a high level was St. Stanislaus Papeczyński († 1701), founder of the first Polish male religious congregation of the Marians.

¹ Both authors, with the latter duplicating the thoughts of the former, base their characterisation of Vistula mysticism solely on the example of St. Brother Albert, St. Faustina Kowalska, Father Józef Tischner and St. John Paul II.

In addition to the prominent theorists of mysticism in the seventeenth-century Church in Poland, there were at least a few people whose mystical experience has been fairly well described. One of them is the Carmelite nun Teresa of Jesus – Marianna Marchocka († 1652), author of the first Polish mystical autobiography.

The next period of Polish mysticism encompasses the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. The best-known representative of experiential mysticism of this period is Tekla Raczyńska († 1790) of the Congregation of the Canons of the Holy Spirit de Saxia, while a noteworthy figure among mystologists is the Franciscan Franciszek Przyłęcki († 1794), author of a textbook entitled “Spiritual and Ascetic Theology” (Vilnius 1763).

The second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century until the outbreak of the First World War, is the fourth period of Polish mysticism particularly rich in both experiences of union with God and texts on mysticism. As concerns experiential mysticism, women dominate. Among the theologians of mysticism, mention should be made of one of Darowska’s spiritual directors, the Resurrectionist Peter Semenenko († 1886), whose work entitled “Mysticism” was published posthumously in Kraków in 1896.

The next period of Polish mysticism, falling in the inter-war period of the 20th century, also has its representatives both in the sphere of mystical experiences (for example, St Faustyna Kowalska † 1938) and mystical theology (represented by Fr. Aleksander Żychliński † 1945).

The most recent period of Polish mysticism covers the years after the Second World War at least until the end of the pontificate of Saint John Paul II († 2005), who is also considered a mystic (Zdybicka, 2009; 2012, p. 59–71). During this period, there is a blossoming of scholarly interest in mystical issues especially in academic centres such as the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and the Carmelite Institute of Spirituality in Krakow.

Each of these periods was characterised by different historical and socio-cultural circumstances. Therefore, each of them should be characterised separately. However, researchers into the history and theology of Catholic spirituality in Poland point to certain constants and common features of both experiential mysticism and study mysticism. Among these, Christocentrism, Marianism and charity have to be pointed out in the first place. However, a notable feature of Polish mysticism, especially in the last 150 years, is its patriotism. In a way, it is a buckle binding all its dimensions together.

It is an obvious thing that Christ is at the centre of the Christian mystical experience. For with Him the mystic unites himself and through Him enters into a personal relationship with the Divine Trinity, the Mother of God, the saints

and the angels. Mary, the saints and the angels not infrequently accompany this union with the one Spouse, which takes place in the "bottom of the soul" or, as other mystics (especially the Rhenish mystics, e.g. Meister Eckhart, and the Carmelite Doctors of the Church, e.g. Saint John of the Cross and Saint Theresa of Jesus) have written, in the "summit of the soul" (*Apex animae* or *Apex mentis*).

In the writings of Polish mystics, the Christocentrism of their experiences is expressed above all in the commemoration of the Saviour's Passion, and in later centuries in the cult of His Humanity and Sacred Heart². In the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in the study mysticism, doloristic themes are strongly intertwined with the then situation of partitioned Poland.

A second noteworthy feature of Polish mysticism is its living Marian context. In the mystical experience of almost all our mystics, Mary is always present in some way, who not only points to Christ and obliges us to be faithful to the message of salvation (cf. Jn 2:5), but presents herself as the Queen of Poland. Moreover, she gives hope for its rebirth and announces the triumph of the Polish nation and Church, provided Poland remains faithful to Christ³.

The experience of union with Christ always leads the mystic to love the Church and its members despite their sinfulness. In this sense, the merciful trait is universally present in Christian mystical experience. Thanks to St. Faustina Kowalska, Polish spirituality and mysticism received a new original dimension. While hitherto the natural consequence of the Christian mystical experience had been the performance of works of mercy, i.e. human mercy, St Faustina's "Diary" reveals a completely new space for this experience, which is God's mercy. The Faustian mysticism is a mysticism of God's mercy (Machniak, 2000, p. 81–97). This is a new quality against the background of the Rhineland or Hispanic mystical classics.

In all Polish mystics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a characteristic patriotic motif is present, which is expressed in fervent prayer and concern for the enslaved or endangered Homeland. Visions and messages concerning the future of the Fatherland and God's plans for it, accompanying the union with Christ and His Mother – the Queen of Poland, are not infrequent. A noteworthy feature of Polish mysticism, especially at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, is also a commitment to the spiritual and moral rebirth of the country through,

² We find this content in the works of Gertruda Mieszkówna, Kasper Drużbicki, St. Joseph Sebastian Pelczar or Rozalia Celak, among others. In the case of the latter, reverence for the Divine Heart is closely linked to the cult of Christ the King.

³ An example may be the words of Jesus from the "Diary" of St. Faustyna Kowalska: "I have a special love for Poland, and if she is obedient to My will, I shall raise her up in power and holiness. From Poland will come the spark that will prepare the world for My final coming" (Kowalska, 2020, p. 767, n. 1732).

among other things, the education of children and young people. A characteristic feature of Christian mysticism is the link between contemplation and action, deep immersion in God and extraordinary apostolic commitment, and sometimes readiness to die a martyr's death⁴.

All these characteristics of Polish mysticism are to be found in the writings of Bl. Marcelina Darowska.

2. The mystical life of Blessed Marcellina Darowska

Marcelina Kotowiczówna was born into a noble family in 1827 in Shulaki near Biała Cerkiew in what is now central Ukraine (more in: Sołtan, 1982; Jabłońska-Deptuła, 1996). Raised in a deeply patriotic atmosphere, already as a very young girl she carried within her a desire to do something significant for the good of the Fatherland (Chmielewski, 2022a, p. 167–184). In doing so, she showed great sensitivity to the beauty of nature and the needs of her fellow human beings. After only two years of school in Odessa, as a teenager she helped her father manage the estate. Sensing in herself a vocation to God's service, she did not want to marry. However, under pressure from her family, she married Karol Weryha-Darowski in 1848. The destination of their honeymoon was Jasna Góra, from where she brought the image of Our Lady that accompanied her throughout her life. How closely she bound her life to Mary in her Jasna Góra image is evidenced by the numerous references to mystical experiences of her presence, her several pilgrimages to Jasna Góra during the founding of subsequent monasteries, as well as the sacrifice of her life for the so-called Jasna Góra sacrilege (Chmielewski, 2007, p. 2010–223; 2010, p. 262–279).

Two children were born from the Danowski's marriage, which lasted less than two and a half years: Joseph and Caroline. After the sudden death of her husband and son, Marcelina decided to fulfil her youthful desire to follow the path of her vocation.

To recover from her sickness, she went first to Germany and then to Paris to join her elder sister, where, under the influence of Fr. Aleksander Jełowicki († 1877), one of the first Resurrectionists, she embarked on a path of intense spiritual development. At his suggestion, she went to Rome in the spring of 1854, where she joined the congregation founded by another of the Resurrectionists, Fr. Hieronymus Kajsiewicz († 1873) and Mother Josepha Karska († 1860).

⁴ One of many such examples are the martyrs of the Second World War: St. Maximilian Kolbe († 1941) and Blessed Marta Wołowska († 1942), an Immaculata Sister, executed in Slonim for helping Jews and partisans (Chmielewski, 2020–2021, p. 137–147; 2022b, *passim*).

In consequence, while making her first Ignatian retreat, she had her first conscious mystical experiences. Most of the content of these experiences related to the emerging religious congregation, which was to be primarily concerned with the education of girls for the rebirth of partitioned Poland. Soon after M. Karska's death, on the recommendation of Fr. Kajsiewicz, she took the initiative to create the congregation, to which she gave the name of the Immaculate Conception in connection with the dogma proclaimed by Blessed Pius IX on 8th December 1854. In the meantime, she travelled a few times between Rome and her family region for the sake of her daughter, left in the care of her parents.

Finally, in the summer of 1863, she moved the newly founded Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Jazłowiec in southern Podolia in the Austrian partition. There, in the first days of November of that year, the first institution for girls from noble families began its activities. They were soon joined by girls from peasant families. As a result of the dynamic growth of the Congregation in the following years, convents and educational institutions were founded in the Austrian partition: in Jarosław (1875) and Nowy Sącz (1897), in the Russian partition: in Niżniów (1883) and Słonim (1907), and in the Kingdom of Poland: in Szymanów near Sochaczew (1908).

The dynamic development of Bl. Marcelina's mystical life concurs with the time of the flourishing of the Congregation and the works it carried out⁵. Her sporadic experiences of the Lord's presence in her soul gave her more and more light of knowledge and the sweetness of love, as a result of which the first ecstatic states began to appear as early as the beginning of 1859. In the following years, she noted increasingly frequent and powerful mystical "touches", causing – as she put it – "frenzies of love" and "floods of the Holy Spirit". In a note of 21st September 1861, she informs her spiritual director, Fr. Kajsiewicz, that the Lord, calling her his Bride, "pierced her twice with his love, wounding her heart penetratingly"⁶. Two weeks later she experienced what, in the light of the descriptions we find in other mystics, can be called a mystical betrothal⁷. This was followed by an increase in ecstatic states and other supernatural experiences,

⁵ This process was described in detail in: Chmielewski, 2021.

⁶ Such an experience, described in detail by St. Teresa of Avila (*Life*, 29, 9–11; *Spiritual Reports*, 5, 17–18; *The Way of Perfection*, 2, 32), mystology calls *transverberation*.

⁷ In a note to Fr. Kajsiewicz dated 28 September, 1861, Darowska writes: "A gdy do komunii świętej przystępowałam, powiedział mi: »Zawrzyjmy sojusz wiecznego przymierza«. Zdaje mi się (dokładnie nie wiem), jakbym przysięgę Mu złożyła oddania Mu się, gotowości na wszystko, pragnienia we wszystkim wolę Jego spełniać. »Przyjmij pierścień zrzekowin naszych«. Byłam na zewnątrz niby zimna, przytomna, ale wewnątrz jak szalona" [‘And when I was taking Holy Communion, He said to me: ‘Let us make the alliance of the eternal covenant’. It seems to me (I do not know exactly) as if I pledged myself to Him, to be ready for everything, to want to do His will in everything. ‘Accept the ring of our betrothal’. I was outwardly seemingly cold, awake, but inwardly like crazy’ – Author's own translation].

which she described as “arrows of love”, “raptures”, “merging with the Lord”, “passing into His arms”, “merging with His will”, and so on. The precise descriptions she left of these states are qualified by the theology of mysticism as ecstatic union.

The description of her experiences during the Holy Thursday Triduum of 1864, which took place in the chapel at Jazłowiec, indicates that Blessed Marcelina underwent the so-called “mystical marriage”⁸. Usually this high state of union with God is complemented by the so-called passive purification of the spirit, which the Blessed underwent in successive years at least until 1890. It was an extremely difficult period for her, lasting more than 20 years. It was full of dramatic experiences of the so-called dark night of the soul or dark night of faith, but also of various external adversities, such as a deep crisis in her relationship with her daughter Caroline, accusations by the Resurrectionists of interfering in the organisation of their congregation, distrust of the clergy of Lviv as a result of a complaint by an alumnus expelled from the Jazłowiec institute for immoral behaviour, etc. All of these were accompanied by a hip injury and deteriorating health. However, she was strengthened in this spiritual trial by her frequent experience of union with the Holy Trinity, as evidenced by references in her autobiographical writings⁹.

The culmination of this difficult spiritual state for Darowska was the experience of habitual union with God, initiated by an experience which she

⁸ In a letter to Fr. Kajsiwicz of 5 April, 1864, the mystic writes: “Byłam, zdaje im się, w wielkim połączeniu z Jedynym moim, jakobym przeszła w Jego Człowieczeństwo z Bóstwem zjednoczonym (to mniej więcej trwało przez całe trzy dni), wszakże nic uczulego, wydatnego, wymownego po ludzku w sobie nie widziałam, a idąc za Panem do ciemnicy niesionym, nagle przeszłam w stan ujęćniej nadprzyrodzony: opuściłam wszystko, co mnie otaczało, świat ten, a ujęta i objęta cała Zbawicielem moim, byłam przez Niego przedstawiona Bogu Ojcu i Duchowi Świętemu jako oblubienica Jego i tam nastąpiły nasze zaślubiny przez zlanie się niepojęte w jedno duchowe, które stało się jakby pierścieniem cechującym związek na zewnątrz” [‘I was, it seems, in a great union with my Only One, as if I had passed into His Humanity with the Divinity united (this lasted more or less for the whole of three days); nevertheless, I did not see anything sensual, prominent, humanly expressive in myself, and following the Lord carried into the darkness, I suddenly passed into a supernatural state: I left all that surrounded me, this world, and, embraced and encompassed whole by my Saviour, I was presented by Him to God the Father and the Holy Spirit as His bride, and there our nuptials took place through an incomprehensible fusion into a spiritual one, which became like a ring that characterised the union outside’ – Autor’s own translation].

⁹ In a letter to Fr. Peter Semenenko of 19 June, 1867, he writes: “Tajemnica Trójcy Przenajświętszej: zupełna oddzielność trzech Osób Bożych w Jednym Bogu – troistość w jedności i Bóg cały, zupełny w każdej osobie. Przepaść wszechmocy i cudu...” [‘The mystery of the Trinity: the complete separateness of the three Divine Persons in the One God – trinity in unity and God whole, complete in each person. The abyss of omnipotence and wonder...’ – Autor’s own translation]. In turn, she reported to Fr. Kajsiwicz in a letter of 21 II 1970: “Po Komunii świętej znowu zostałam zanurzona w głębinach Bożych. Wszystkie przymioty Trójcy Przenajświętszej jakby się w jeden promień zlały, w jednym promieniu odbiły. To trwało jedną sekundę...” [‘After Holy Communion I was again immersed in the depths of God. All the attributes of the Holy Trinity seemed to merge into one ray, reflected in one ray. It lasted one second...’ – Autor’s own translation].

described in her “Diary” as follows: ‘On 7th June [1890] I was abiding in it [prayer – note M. Ch.] calmly and vividly in it, when suddenly a great brightness appeared before my soul and there stood before it the Lord Jesus, the same Lord Jesus that I had known before: penetrating, solemn and simple, like mist and sun, spirit and man, Lord and Bridegroom, and He said to my soul with an inexpressible sound that He was coming to me with the words that I had spoken and that He reminded me of these, and He asked me if I did not want to take them back? Oh no, no! I cry with all my being: I repeat them and give myself to all my crosses, as long as You, Lord, are with me in everything and make me faithful, so long as You promise me this. And there stood between us a *pacta conventa*, a mutual obligation. And it had the character, the stamp of a vow for eternity’¹⁰.

The mystical life of Blessed Marcellina, outlined briefly, bore fruit above all in terms of personal and religious-spiritual maturity. Her extraordinary activity and effectiveness of apostolic commitment in the Church had its source in her mystical experience. For the mystic, in uniting herself with Christ the Bridegroom of her soul, also loves the Church – His Mystical Body. While the expression of love for Christ is contemplation, the expression of love for the Church is apostolic commitment.

In the case of Blessed Marcellina, this was confirmed in the last years of her life. At the beginning of 1900, she received an eschatological vision from which it appeared that she would die in great suffering. This came true ten years later. When she learnt that at the end of October 1909 the crowns and votive offerings of the Jasna Gora Picture had been stolen, and that in July 1910 the Pauline friar Damazy Macoch († 1916), who was most probably a tsarist agent, had murdered his nephew in the Jasna Gora monastery, she called on her fellow sisters to expiate, and herself expressed her readiness to offer her life to make reparation for this sacrilege¹¹. This heroic act of hers was publicly confirmed by Archbishop

¹⁰ Original text: „7 czerwca [1890 r.] trwała w niej [modlitwie – przyp. M. Ch.] spokojnie a żywo, gdy nagle wielka jasność roztoczyła się przed duszą moją i stanął przed nią Pan Jezus, Ten Sam, dawniej mi znany: przenikający na wskroś, uroczysty i prosty: jakoby mgła i słońce, duch i człowiek, Pan i Oblubieniec, i rzekł mi w duszę niewymownym brzmieniem, iż przychodzi do mnie ze słowami, które wyrzekałam i te mi przypomniał – i pyta mnie, czy ich cofnąć nie chcę? O nie, nie! całą istotą moją wołam: powtarzam je i oddaję się na wszystkie krzyże, bylebyś Ty, Panie, we wszystkim był ze mną i wierną mnie uczynił, bylebyś mi to przyrzekł. I stanęło między nami *pacta conventa*, wzajemne zobowiązanie się. A miało ono charakter, piętno zaślubin na wieczność”.

¹¹ In a letter to Sister Filomena Nowowiejska (Jazłowiec, 13 October 1910), she reports: “...Nieszczęście Jasnogórskie to klęska, piorun w samo serce godzący, okropne! Oswoić się z tym nie można. Co za tryumf dla nieprzyjaciół, dla Moskali, socjalistów... Cóż dziwnego, że miłosierdzie Boże tych jeszcze nie pokonało, nie wyzwoliło narodu z świętokradztwa! [...] Przecięcie kontaktów duchowieństwa ze Stolicą Apostolską przez wieki, mieszanie się do seminarium, do zakonów, do praw kościelnych, nasyłanie kleryków zaprzędanych rządowi, szkoły bez Boga, wytworzyło społeczeństwo bez Boga, wszystko zatruło, zniżyło, pokalało. Nieszczęście, nieszczęście gorsze od Sybiru, katorgi, knutów i stryczka!

Joseph Teodorowicz († 1938) in his funeral eulogy over the Blessed's coffin: '...when like a bolt of lightning this terrible misfortune struck, the sacrilege of Częstochowa, which defiled the Church in Poland and the Fatherland, you [the Immaculata Sisters – note M. Ch.], visiting me, immediately said: »We are afraid that this will be Mother's undoing, she will not survive it.« And you were not mistaken: Mother, as she herself said, gave herself up for payment to God, and that sacrificing herself for this crime was the last sacrificial penny she still had to give on the altar of love of God and the Fatherland'¹².

At the beginning of November 1910, that is several days after her heroic act, she developed an illness that caused very severe pain due to the progressive paralysis of her body and finally led to her death on 5 January, 1911. The foundress of the Sisters of the Immaculata [Polish: Niepokalanki] was buried in the religious tomb in Jazłowiec. At the beginning of the 1950s the beatification process was initiated, which was concluded with her elevation to the glory of the altars by St John Paul II in Rome on 6 October 1996.

3. The Mystology of Bl. Marcelina Darowska

Prayer and contemplation are a characteristic manifestation of Catholic mysticism, as well as a profound experience of the direct Lord's presence in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. In the mystical life of Blessed Marceline Darowska there is also a distinct apostolic quality, which stems directly from her contemplative spirit. We can therefore speak of a particular type of apostolic mysticism in her case. This is evidenced, among other things, by the aforementioned institutions for the education of girls, for which she developed a personalistic method of education that was revolutionary for the time and which is still successfully applied in the Immaculata's schools today. It should be noted that the mystic had no specialist training in either pedagogy or theology.

Ból bólów!" [...The Jasna Góra misfortune is a calamity, a thunderbolt striking at the very heart, terrible! One cannot get used to it. What a triumph for the enemies, for the Muscovites, for the Socialists... What a wonder that the mercy of God has not yet overcome them, has not liberated the nation from sacrilege! [...] The cutting of the clergy's contacts with the Holy See over the centuries, the meddling with seminaries, with religious orders, with church laws, the sending of clerics sold out to the government, schools without God, has produced a society without God, has poisoned, lowered, defiled everything. A misfortune, a misfortune worse than Siberia, the katorga, the whip and the noose! The pain of pains!' – Autor's own translation].

¹² Original text: "I gdy jak grom uderzyło to straszne nieszczęście, świętokradztwo Częstochowskie, którym Kościół w Polsce i Ojczyzna zostały splugawione, Wyście, będąc u mnie zaraz, powiedziały: »Lękamy się, że to Matkę zgubi, Ona tego nie przeżyje«. Nie omyliłyście się: Matka, jak mówiła sama, podała się na wyplatę Bogu i to poświęcenie siebie za tę zbrodnię było ostatnim groszem ofiarnym, który jeszcze miała do oddania na ołtarzu miłości Boga i Ojczyzny" (Teodorowicz, 1911, p. 36).

Instead, she drew on her intuition and the difficult experience of raising her own daughter. Above all, however, the source of her knowledge of human and divine matters was her mystical experience, to which we have direct and indirect insight through the writings she left.

11163 of the Blessed's letters have been preserved. Among them, at least several hundred, addressed to spiritual directors, concern her spiritual life and her mystical experience, which she described in her autobiography entitled "Coś, co poprzedziło" [Something that preceded] (Darowska, 2008, p. 9–62), and especially in the "Diary", still in typescript, written irregularly between 1870 and 1909.

Among her many other writings, the two-part ascetic-mystical treatise that was posthumously entitled "Kartki" [The Sheets] (Darowska, 2017–2018, p. 13–71; 2019, p. 13–68) is particularly noteworthy. This work was written between 1872 and 1882, i.e. during the flourishing of her mystical life, and provides an indirect insight into her mystical experience. In it, the Blessed presents various ascetical and mystical issues. Although she does not refer to her own experiences there, the precision of the descriptions and the depth of the analyses allow us to guess that she bases them on her own mystical experience.

The first part of "The Sheets" concerns more ascetical issues related to the realisation of the vocation to religious life in the congregation she founded. This is evidenced by the titles of the individual chapters: I. On vocation; II. On retreat; III. On the novitiate; IV. On the vows; V. On the will; VI. On working on oneself; VII–VIII. On temptations; IX. On the spirit of the times and the relationship of the Congregation with the people; X. On the fraternal relationship; XI. On the Congregation's relationship with itself; XII. On the relationship with the children we educate; XIII. On the relationship with the world.

In the second part of her work, Blessed Marcellina deals explicitly with mystical themes, and to express them she creates her own language, partly modelled on St. Teresa of Jesus, whose writings she knew in French translation (Chmielewski, 1997, p. 189–203). She devotes a considerable amount of space to typical mystical experiences and paramystical phenomena. She also recognises the destructive role of Satan on the path to union with God. The whole of her mystological lecture is contained in 15 chapters: I. On the relationship of the soul to God; II. Pre-dawn and sunrise; III. Morning – or the spring of the inner life; IV. On the different paths of the soul; V–VI. On the succession of graces in the soul; VII. The touches of God; VIII. On inner lights; IX. On interior, spiritual feelings, and especially on the feeling of God's presence and God's atmosphere; X. On revelations; XI. On interior words and glimpses; XII. Visions, the spirit of prophecy, soul-reading; XIII. The frenzy of love – raptures (*ravisements*); XIV. On raptures (*extase*); XV. On the impartation

of the qualities of the Lord Jesus in the precipices of God and the permanent union.

In Blessed Marcellina's asceticism and mystology, personalistic and Christological assumptions are clearly discernible. This is evidenced, among other things, in her instructions to women educators, in which she demands that the individuality of each pupil be respected and that measures be adapted to the particular personality¹³. For each person is a unique and unrepeatable work of God's design, which must be respected. Each person is endowed with reason and free will, and has been given an immortal soul as the pledge of eternal life. For this reason, the educator must be equally concerned with the physical development of the child's body, the psychological development of the senses, the intellectual development of the mind and the spiritual development of the immortal soul.

In turn, Christ is the personal model in the process of upbringing and the point of reference for spiritual development. With him the mystic achieves full union through the so-called impartation of the qualities of the Lord Jesus. Upbringing, therefore, is not only assistance in cooperation with God's grace, but conformity to Christ, which the contemporary theology of spirituality calls Christ-formation (Urbański, 2009, p. 233–243). It is an effort to lead both the child and the adult to union with God, because – as Darowska writes in the introduction to the second part of “The Sheets” – ‘man created by God and for God, taking everything from God and depending on God, similar to God – he needs God. He is reflected in man's soul, and although after the fall of the first parents, through a veiled echo, sometimes unclear to itself, it senses Him, searches for Him and turns towards Him as if with the impulse of its nature. And relationship with God is the pledge of eternity, the basis of man's existence’¹⁴.

Not only in “The Sheets”, but also in her letters to spiritual directors and in her “Diary”, and partly also in her conferences and retreats preached to her pupils, Darowska's own original mystical terminology is perceptible, with which she attempts to express various spiritual states. The most characteristic terms she uses to describe mystical experiences include: “death to self”, “self-

¹³ “Każdy człowiek ma swoją indywidualność, swoją drogę, swój charakter, swoje zdolności, swój typ, swoje – że tak powiem – stanowisko moralne i materialne odbijające w nim myśl Bożą i ściśle zastosowane do przeznaczenia i zadania, jakie mu ta myśl, jedno z wolą Bożą tworząca, zakreśliła. Zatarcie charakteru, nie odpowiedzenie zdolnościom, zniszczenie indywidualności, typu – niepodążanie drogą swoją – jest niewiernością, jest rozminięciem się z przeznaczeniem, jest nieszczęściem” (Darowska, 2017–2018, p. 21).

¹⁴ Original text: “Człowiek stworzony przez Boga i dla Boga, od Boga wszystko biorący i zależny, Bogu podobny – Boga potrzebuje. On się w duszy jego odbija a jakkolwiek po upadku pierwszych rodziców, echem osłonięnym, dla samej niekiedy niejasnym, ona go przeczuwa, szuka i zwraca się ku Niemu jakby natury swej pędem. I stosunek z Bogiem zadatkami wieczności, podstawą istnienia człowieka” (Darowska, 2019, p. 16).

activity”, “nucleus of the soul”, “sign of grace”, “imagery of the Lord or the saints”, etc. She rarely specifies their content, so their meaning must be sought in a wider context. The key word that Blessed Marcellina relates to the highest forms of the spiritual life is affection, understood as a very clear intuition by which the mystic can ascertain the presence of God and His action in the soul.

The descriptions of contemplative prayer and its successive phases or degrees are interesting. Thus, the mystic writes about “prayer with the inflow of the Lord’s presence”, then of “prayer of immersion in the Blessed Sacrament”, then of “prayer of complete forgetfulness of self”. She also mentions the “prayer of union,” sometimes called the “prayer of tranquillity”. This is usually accompanied by an “inner state”, the highest form of which is the “state of rapture”. She also calls it a “supra-sensory state”. Other manifestations of it are: “a completely inner state” and “an internally frenzied state”. These experiences usually precede the mystical experience *sensu stricto*.

The foundress of the Immaculata Sisters describes the climactic mystical experience as “the self-presentation of the Lord”, with an associated “flood of His presence”, meaning that “a stream of grace pours into the heart”. He also writes of being “flooded with the Holy Spirit” and “flooded with the omnipotence of God”, and of the Lord “showering the heart with love” or “washing the heart with the abundance of God’s attributes” or “the virtue of His nature”. In addition to the sensation of being “flooded with the love” of God, she sometimes experienced being “joined” in it or “embraced” by it. “Flooding...” or “being sunk...”, for example in the mysteries of the Trinity, or “being sunk in the Lord”, “immersing oneself in the Lord” and “into His depth” clearly indicate the passive nature of this experience.

Darowska describes the transforming mystical union as “identification with the Lord”, that is, “an exchange of wills” or “a mutual flooding of the two beings”. She sometimes speaks of the “pouring of the Holy Spirit into the soul”, meaning a kind of “feeling of the influence of the Holy Spirit on the soul”.

When speaking of “communication” with the Lord, the foundress of the Immaculata Sisters uses more precise terms. Thus, it is about the moral “transformation” of the mystic into God, which takes place in the “apex of the soul”. According to her, He is “the soul of the soul, the life of life”. In her communion with God, the mystic distinguishes between a “deeper state of communion” and “union in love and the cross”. Significant is also the statement that union with God takes place “not in Him, but with Him and next to Him”.

The aforementioned “transformation of man” is accomplished by the fact that in the mystic’s soul “the heart of God is glowing red by His presence”. At this point, the soul “rests in the Lord”. It is accompanied by a “love of

God's will, frenzied but calm", different from the transitory "frenzy of love" that was there when the soul was "raptured by prayer" (Chmielewski, 1995, p. 400–402).

Based on these few examples, it can be concluded that Blessed Marcellina's mystical language is imbued with the spirit of Romanticism. This is confirmed by her excessive use of punctuation typical of that epoch (especially the ellipsis, the dash, the exclamation mark, etc.). It is a colourful and expressive language, although rather concise. An eminent and respected Dominican theologian and philosopher of the interwar period, Fr. Jacek Woroniecki, who is quoted by Sr. Benvenuta Tarnowska in her introduction to "The Sheets", commented on it. He stated that for the first time on Polish soil mystical graces were combined with a profound intellectual culture, which allowed Mother Marcellina to realise what was going on in her soul and to describe it with solid language. For the first time, the Polish language was used to convey the mysterious speech of God to man, to describe that communication of man with God in the greatest secrets of this soul, which is so difficult to put into human words (Darowska, 2019, p. 15).

* * *

Mystics can be looked upon like stars in a cloudless night sky. Even though their presence is obvious to each of us, they never cease to be a mystery. They all seem similar to each other, yet distant and inaccessible. Although their light is inconspicuous and pale, they nevertheless bring an indescribable atmosphere of longing for the infinite, which they seem to reach. For those who raise their heads towards the sky at night, the stars are just tiny shining points – a discreet adornment of the night. For astronomers, however, each star is a separate, unique cosmos: the beginning or axis of new universes and at the same time a revelation of the incomprehensible power of creation. Nor can one look at the stars without turning one's face upwards, towards heaven – towards God the Creator.

The same applies to mystics, who are like stars illuminating the darkness of everyday life. They are discreetly close, almost imperceptible. However, a closer look into the life of each of them reveals an extraordinary and unique spiritual wealth and beauty. Just as the stars used to be orientation points on an endless sea for the sailors, so the mystics are signposts for believers, marking a sure path to God across the ocean of life.

In the constellation of countless Polish saints, the blessed and mystics, one such brightly shining star in the sky of Polish spirituality is Blessed Marcelina Darowska. She left behind a huge number of writings, stored in the Archives of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception in Szymanów. For the purposes of the beatification process, they were typed in the 1950s in only four copies.

They comprise 25158 typewritten pages in 143 volumes. Apart from a small circle of scholars dealing with her mysticism, pedagogical system or concept of religious life, she is almost unknown. Perhaps a printed edition of her writings will reveal the entire extraordinary richness of her spiritual life and the depth of her ascetical, mystical, religious order forming and pedagogical thought, as well as her personal beauty. The Mystic of the Immaculata can be said to be an example of that “genius of woman” of which St. John Paul II wrote in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, bearing in mind the special innate sensitivity of woman to Christ and man.

In this lies the strength and extent of her ecclesial and social influence, which still awaits separate research. Indirectly, this influence is evidenced by the wide-ranging contacts she maintained with the leading personalities of her time, such as St. Archbishop Józef Bilczewski († 1923), St. Archbishop Szczęśny Feliński († 1895), Archbishop Józef Teodorowicz, the Servant of God Columba Białecka († 1887), foundress of the Dominican Sisters of Wielowieś near Tarnobrzeg or the Nobel Prize winner for literature Henryk Sienkiewicz († 1916).

Blessed Marcelina Darowska is thus one of the most prominent representatives of Polish experiential and study mysticism of the late 19th and early 20th century.

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Błogosławiona Marcelina Darowska – znamienity przykład mistyki polskiej XIX wieku

Streszczenie: Błogosławiona Marcelina Darowska (1827–1911), założycielka Zgromadzenia Sióstr Niepokalanego Poczęcia, wyróżnia się na tle licznych polskich mistyków XIX wieku przede wszystkim bogatym doświadczeniem życia mistycznego i oryginalną teorią mistycyzmu (mistologii) zawartą w jej pismach. Pozostawiła dwutomowy traktat ascetyczno-mistyczny, notatki duchowe („Pamiętnik”), wiele listów do kierowników duchowych i niektórych sióstr, a także teksty rekolekcji, które głosiła dla uczennic i różnych osób. Stworzyła własny język mistyczny.

Jako wybitna przedstawicielka XIX-wiecznej mistyki polskiej wyróżnia się na tle innych nurtów życia mistycznego, m.in.: zdrowym patriotyzmem, pobożnością maryjną ze szczególnym uwzględ-

nieniem tytułu Maryi Królowej Polski, apostołstwem w wychowaniu dziewcząt i kobiet oraz rozwojem różnych form pobożności ludowej wzmacniających tożsamość narodową.

Wywarła szeroki wpływ na społeczeństwo polskie, białoruskie i ukraińskie, głównie poprzez placówki edukacyjne dla dziewcząt. Utrzymywała także żywe kontakty, m.in. ze św. abp. Józefem Bilczewskim, św. abp. Szczęsnym Felińskim i innymi wybitnymi osobistościami życia duchowego i społecznego tamtych czasów.

Słowa kluczowe: Marcelina Darowska, mistyka polska, język mistyczny, teoria mistycyzmu, mistologia.

