

Dawid Galanciak*

Faculty of Theology

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland

BARBARA STANISŁAWA SAMULOWSKA
– THE WITNESS OF MARIAN APPARITIONS IN GIETRZWAŁD

Summary: The one hundred and fortieth anniversary of Marian apparitions in Gietrzwałd invites us to reflect upon Barbara Stanisława Samulowska's life and actions – the witness of those apparitions. This article shows all stages of her life: childhood, her life in Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy and her ministry in Guatemala. We also learn about the fruits of these events, Samulowska's spirituality and her relations with the clergy. The apparitions, which Samulowska witnessed deeply affected her life, the local community and many pilgrims coming to Gietrzwałd. Barbara Samulowska deserves the title of the Servant of God. The process of her canonization is currently at the stage of the Congregation for the Saints.

Keywords: private apparitions, Marian apparitions, Barbara Samulowska, Gietrzwałd, Sister of Mercy.

Introduction

The 140th anniversary of our Lady's apparitions in Gietrzwałd is an excellent opportunity to remind us of the content provided by Mary, as well as an opportunity to bring attention to the eyewitness of those events, Barbara Samulowska. As a child, she experienced the grace of private apparitions. This type of apparition is an aid in experiencing the mysteries of faith and it is nothing new in the history of the Church. There have been many private apparitions, and reports about them can also be found in the Bible. The frequency of their occurrence in the Apostolic age – the gift of prophecy, which the faithful had, the gift of languages and other grace through which they came to know the unseen – allows us to claim that the faithful of the original Church were accustomed to them.¹ Since then, the Church has dealt with this issue. Recognizing the spiritu-

* Address: Rev. dr Dawid Galanciak, Parafia św. Anny w Lubawie, e-mail: dawidgal@op.pl

¹ T. Pawluk, *Stosunek Kościoła do objawień prywatnych ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wydarzeń gietrzwałdzkich*, „Studia Warmińskie” vol. 14, 1977, p. 80.

al fruits of accepting the content of the apparitions, the Popes, through their teaching, contributed to promoting the apparitions which were experienced by the people chosen by God. The Church, however, was always cautious towards private apparitions, indicating that they are merely an aid to understand the mysteries of faith, and that the point of reference for the Church and believers is Jesus Christ, in whom happened the only, public and real apparition of God.

The time of apparitions in Gietrzwałd

The time of our Lady's apparitions in Gietrzwałd falls at a difficult period for the Roman Catholic Church due to the Prussian Protestant crackdown on Warmian independence during the fierce battle of Culture Kampf. It covers the days between June 27 and September 16, 1877. In those days, the apparitions of Our Lady took place every day in front of the church in Gietrzwałd – on a maple tree, to children while they were saying their Rosary beads. The language of communication between Our Lady and the children was the Polish language, the everyday language of the population of Gietrzwałd and the surrounding area. The apparitions which took place in Gietrzwałd in 1877 happened to four women. Among them were²: Justyna Szafryńska, Barbara Samulowska, Katarzyna Wieczorek and Elżbieta Bilitewska – at that time they were respectively 13, 12, 23 and 46 years old. It must be emphasized that the truthfulness of the visions was assigned only in case of Szafryńska and Samulowska. Though Wieczorek and Bilitewska claimed they had the visions of Our Lady and even St. Joseph, their visions differed from the other ones and their visions of the heaven and hell caused significant theological reservations. Katarzyna, feeling guilty, admitted that, along with Elżbieta, they had pretended to be in ecstatic states and agreed upon the version of testimony in front of the local parish priest.³ Thus, according to Bishop Jan Obłąk, who conducted a detailed analysis of the documentation connected with the apparitions, we can only seriously study the apparitions received by Szafryńska and Samulowska.⁴

² Cf. J. Jeremko, *Objawienia maryjne w Gietrzwałdzie. Ich funkcja religijna, społeczno-kulturowa i narodowa*, Kraków 2007, p. 80–87.

³ J. Roslan, *Sanktuarium Matki Bożej w Gietrzwałdzie*, Gietrzwałd 1994, p. 25–26.

⁴ J. Obłąk, *Objawienia Matki Boskiej w Gietrzwałdzie. Ich treść i autentyczność w opinii współczesnych (W stulecie objawień) 1877–1977*, „Studia Warmińskie” vol. 14, 1977, p. 16.

The biography of Barbara Samulowska

Barbara Samulowska was born on 21.01.1865 in the village of Woryty, located four kilometres from the site of the apparitions as a daughter of poor farmers Joseph and Caroline Barczewska, who also had two sons, Joseph and John. She was baptized in the parish church in Gietrzwałd the next day after her birth. Her godparents were: Andrew Barczewski and Gertrude Górska, relatives of Samulowska and also inhabitants of Woryty. As a 12 year-old girl she was a witness of Our Lady's apparitions in Gietrzwałd. Barbara Samulowska's contact with the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy begins with the end of the apparitions, which will be discussed in detail later in this article. She spent sixty-six years of her life in the calling. She died at the age of 85 on 6.12.1950 at 17.00 in the Main Hospital in Guatemala (city) where she served on missions for 54 years. Her earthly remains were laid in the tomb of the Sisters of Mercy in Guatemala – they were exhumed in 1979. Sister Samulowska today bears the title of the Servant of God. After the completion of the information process about the virtues of Sister Barbara at the Diocesan stage (it lasted from 2.02.2005 to 8.09.2006) the files were taken to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The childhood of Barbara Samulowska

The childhood of Barbara Samulowska in the preserved documentation is described in the following words: "If Justyna Szafrzyńska is the image of silence and even great slowness, then little Barbara is just the opposite. She runs continuously as a little Cossack or a spring lamb [...] Barbara probably does not walk, she just keeps hopping, and if you want to stop her, she barely turns, barely listens, she escapes and runs away. She seems to be an image of unrestrained freedom, an image of simplicity and nature. She is just a country girl from the part of the country which so far no one knew about."⁵ Joseph Gross, a man of social respect, residing in Woryty, hosted Barbara in his home for some time and gave a positive opinion about her. He testified about Samulowska: "She has been at my place for four weeks. During this time I have seen her as a child. In no way is she cunning, she should be rather called simple or naive. She plays with other children naturally and seems to be very childish. The teacher praises her especially for her great generosity. Her parents are righteous people, her mother is especially very modest and zealous in the service of God."⁶ Barbara was an energetic and considerate child, she was not distinctive among her peers.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 10. All quotations in the text are an private translation from Polish into English.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 31.

Attending German school, she mastered German without any problems, later also French and Spanish.

Barbara Samulowska and the time of apparitions

The first of the women who had a vision of the Mother of God was related to Barbara Samulowska – Justyna Szafrzyńska. While she was going back home after an exam that she had taken from the parish priest before her First Communion, along with her mother she was saying a prayer to the Angel of the Lord. At that time, on the maple tree growing in front of the church she saw a remarkable light and Madonna in a white robe. She gave the information about her vision to the parish priest, Father Weichsel and her friends, among whom was B. Samulowska, who had seen Mary since June 30. After 24 July, Mary appeared three times a day during the prayer of Rosary: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. In total, the visionaries had over 160 apparitions – during the course of which, upon the request of the parish priest and the faithful, Justyna and Barbara passed to Mary their requests and questions, and then the girls gave the parish priest a detailed description of their apparitions and the replies they heard.⁷

Both, at the time of the apparitions and afterwards, Barbara Samulowska surprised the people around her with remarkable modesty, generosity and childlike simplicity. Her behaviour was free of any cunning, pride, egoism or desire to please society. She behaved naturally, appropriately for her age and intellectual level, while fulfilling devout religious practices.⁸

Barbara Samulowska's test of faith

Satan, pretending to be the Mother of God, ordered Justyna Szafrzyńska to have visions at the home of a dressmaker Barbara Henning, whom she visited on the occasion of having her jacket sewn. Justyna told Barbara about it and persuaded her to go to the dressmaker with her. There, they felt tired and fell asleep. While sleeping, they saw a figure who seemed to be Our Lady and they heard the following: "From now on I will always appear here. Come here every day, even if the others say it is strictly prohibited". The children told the parish priest about this vision and he scolded them, ordering them to ask Our Lady whether they should do so or not during the apparitions by the maple tree. The

⁷ B. Tomczyk, S. Ryłko, *Śłużebnica Boża Siostra Barbara Samulowska wizjonerka z Gietrzwałdu i inne osoby obdarzone łaską objawień*, Kraków 2006, p. 25–26.

⁸ P. Rabczyński, *Sluga Boża siostra Barbara Stanisława Samulowska. Życie i działalność*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 2006, no. 146, f. 3, p. 556.

Mother of God told them: “Listen to the priest”, and about the vision at the dressmaker they heard: “That came from the devil.”⁹ The activity of Satan was also visible in the deceit of Katarzyna Wieczorek and Elżbieta Bilitewska, as well as during the equivocal visions which they both had. These visions concerned the Mother of God and St. Joseph. They took place in a variety of situations: after the service, on the field, on the way home, at their own home, in the vicarage and in the church. The consequence of those visions was fatigue, pain, sadness, doubt and reluctance to prayer or work. At the time of the vision which took place in the vicarage, the women frightened the others with their appearance. Moreover, the later behaviour of E. Bilitewska caused objections – she was arrogant and insulting towards the Gietrzwałd parish priest.¹⁰

The experience of meeting Our Lady at the time of the apparitions might raise in the human heart the temptation of feeling like someone special or taking advantage of this fact. Sister Samulowska was probably tempted in this field by Satan numerous times; however, she did not fall into temptation. Never did she flaunt the epiphanic experiences of her childhood. She carried them in her heart and guarded them as her most valuable treasure.¹¹ Whenever asked about this fact, she provided evasive answers.

The message of the apparitions in Gietrzwałd

During the apparitions, Mary constantly called for recitation of the Rosary: “I want you to recite the Rosary every day” or when She was asked about the sick she would say: “I wish them to recite the Rosary”. These answers were given to the questions children asked Mary at the time of their visions. The command of systematic prayer was the main message of the apparitions of Our Lady in Gietrzwałd.¹² The last words that were sent by the Mother of God to the women at the time of the apparitions referred to the earlier recommendations and stated: “Recite the Rosary devoutly”.

The message of the apparitions from Gietrzwałd was concisely described by Karol Wojtyła, according to whom “Mary in this place, called for human rights and the rights of the nation”¹³ Mary’s message does not contain any new

⁹ J. Roslan, *Sanktuarium Matki Bożej w Gietrzwałdzie*, p. 24–25.

¹⁰ T. Pawluk, *Stosunek Kościoła do objawień prywatnych*, p. 102–103.

¹¹ P. Rabczyński, *Sługa Boża siostra Barbara Stanisława Samulowska*, p. 558.

¹² J. Roslan, *Sanktuarium Matki Bożej w Gietrzwałdzie*, p. 16.

¹³ K. Wojtyła, «Ja zawsze będę przy was». *Kazanie kardynała Karola Wojtyły wygłoszone w Gietrzwałdzie 11 września 1977 r.*, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu. Materiały z sympozjum mariologicznego. Gietrzwałd, 13–15 września 2002 roku*, ed. J. Jezierski and others, Częstochowa–Gietrzwałd 2003, p. 162.

religious truths, it only recalls the essential requirements of the Gospel; it is also a call for respect and practice of the entire Gospel. These apparitions should be seen as a reminder of the obligations to conduct our lives according to Jesus Christ and the principles of the Church, and at the same time they were a call for the full Christian life, without simplifications or substitutes.¹⁴

The formation of Barbara Samulowska at the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy

After the end of the apparitions of Our Lady, Szafryńska and Samulowska were placed at the Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent à Paulo at St. John's unit in Lidzbark Warmiński until the order to leave the city which was issued to the Sisters by the Prussian authorities. From Lidzbark the visionaries went to the Sisters of Mercy to Chełmno on the Vistula River. There, they supplemented their education and devoted themselves to serving others. In 1878 they were directed to the St. Joseph's unit in Pelplin. It was there that Barbara Samulowska was characterized as a hardworking and clever student. Both the assistant bishop Jerzy Jeschke and sister visitor Balbina Hanke, issued a positive opinion about her. Barbara's behaviour, moral attitude, politeness, obedience and relationship with her peers were highly rated.¹⁵ The year 1883 is the beginning of Barbara's formation in the postulate of the Sisters of Mercy in Chełmno. Then, due to the continuous harassment of the Prussian authorities of her and Szafryńska, Samulowska went to Paris in January of 1884 where at Rue du Bac 140 street she began her novitiate. The director of the Paris seminar of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy made the following testimony about her: "For a few days I watched her carefully and I noticed that in the newcomer to our seminary occurs something unusual – supernatural – and one may have the feeling as if the Divine Master would commune with her. One day, while reading *the Annals of Children of Mary* about the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin in the Polish village of Gietrzwałd, I immediately understood the secret of this soul and everything that happens in it."¹⁶ A year after the start of the formation of the Paris seminary sister Samulowska took a job in a nursery at Marè Street. She was seen there as a sincere, passionate worker and devout nun. Barbara Samulowska took her vows together with Justyna Szafryńska on 2.02.1889, taking the name Stanisława.¹⁷ After eleven years in Paris (1884–1895) in 1895

¹⁴ J. Jezierski, *Znaczenie objawień gietrzwałdzkich*, w: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu*, p. 156–157.

¹⁵ J. Chłosta, *Barbara Samulowska – wizjonerka z Gietrzwałdu*, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu*, p. 50–51.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

¹⁷ Despite Samulowska using her religious name, I am using the name she received at baptism.

she was sent on a mission to serve the poor in Guatemala. There, her life ended. Joining the congregation, both B. Samulowska and J. Szafryńska fulfilled the request of the Mother of God, who, at the time of the apparitions, in reply to the question of whether to choose a religious life replied: “you should go to the monastery”.

The missionary stage in Sister Samulowska’s life

The last stage of Barbara Samulowska’s life is connected with Guatemala, where she arrived in 1895 and stayed until her death. There, she took over the duties of a teacher of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy and, as the director of seminary, she was responsible for the novitiate. She taught young aspiring nuns about the spirit of Evangelical love, apostolic zeal and the real love for the Blessed Virgin. She would often say to the sisters: “Let’s love Her, let us put our whole trust in Her. She will protect us and She will take care of us throughout our lives.”¹⁸ Such an attitude of Samulowska will make her students testify after the years: “She was very kind, friendly, helpful. She would call us, the postulants, «my tiny» as a proof of love. The sisters really loved her [...] She would listen to the poor. It was said that when she was a girl she had seen Our Lady, but she would never tell us about it. She would not even mention it. She loved the poor a lot; very often she would look for the best fruit and give it to them. She also prepared packages with clothes according to the age and size. She would help the poor workers and she would help the students of medicine to graduate.”¹⁹

In 1907, Sister Samulowska, due to her health condition and the need for a change of climate, took the duties of a servant sister at the hospital in Antiqua. There a great challenge was awaiting: the neglected property, the lack of funds and the difficulty in organizing the primary care for the sick. Thanks to her efforts, she managed to get help from the local authorities and provide the appropriate level of hospital work. Besides this, she took care of the ill in the area of the city and of children, whom she prepared in religious and spiritual terms for their First Holy Communion. For a short time, Samulowska would work at the hospital in Quezaltenango; however, she quickly returned to Antiqua, where she fell ill with life-threatening typhoid fever. Overcoming the disease, she went to the Main Hospital in Guatemala where she took up the post of the superior. It

¹⁸ B. Tomczyk, *Siostra Miłosierdzia Barbara Stanisława Samulowska († 1950). Wizjonerka z Gietrzwałdu*, „Studia Warmińskie” vol. 14, 1977, p. 138–139.

¹⁹ J. Chłosta, *Barbara Samulowska – wizjonerka z Gietrzwałdu*, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu*, p. 52.

was a difficult time, as earthquakes struck twice: on 24.12.1917 and on 3.01.1918. A consequence of the earthquakes was the destruction of the city and the hospital. At that time, Sister Samulowska was involved in building barracks for the sick.

In 1919, Samulowska received a nomination for the Assistant of the Province while still serving as the Superior of the Main Hospital. Among her duties was the formation of the sisters. Her attitude had a positive impact on the environment, both in the Congregation and in the hospital, where she introduced a sincere and friendly atmosphere.

Despite her stay in Guatemala, Sister Samulowska was associated with Poland, though the hostility of the German authorities kept her from returning to her homeland. She visited Chełmno in June 1923, where she met her relatives, but she was neither in Woryty nor in Gietrzwałd. She was in constant touch with her family via letters. Even though she was away from the family and country, she was affected by the first world war. She also experienced the hard times after the civil war in Guatemala, which took place in 1920, and led to the deprivation of necessary supplies for the hospital.

Another mission that was given to Sister Samulowska to accomplish was directing an orphanage in Guatemala. She accepted the new tasks with great love and respect with which she also endowed the orphaned babies. She returned to service at the Main Hospital in 1940. It was the most difficult period of her life. As a result of an acute conflict caused by the change of the Mayor and the administration of the hospital, the Sisters of Mercy were treated with disrespect; they were the object of slander and suspicions. Samulowska still wanted the sisters to serve in the hospital so she sent them to a secular school in order to obtain state diplomas. As a consequence of this fact, the nursing school founded by the Sisters of Mercy was turned into the secular school.²⁰

The last period of the life of Sister B. Samulowska was marked by disease, but also by the great love was given to her by the sisters. She died at the Main Hospital in Guatemala on December 6, 1950. She was buried in Guatemala. Sister Maria Auxiliadora Mora Umana, speaking of her death, made the following testimony about Sister Samulowska: "On 1 January, 1950, she became ill with facial cancer. Her illness was a true martyrdom. She went to the meeting with the One whom she missed after the apparitions in Gietrzwałd, to whom she entrusted her beautiful life, about whom she said: "The immaculately conceived is the ineffable beauty."²¹ The rest of the women whose names are mentioned in the context of the apparitions in Gietrzwałd were buried at the cemetery in

²⁰ B. Tomczyk, *Siostra Miłosierdzia Barbara Stanisława Samulowska († 1950)*, p. 140.

²¹ B. Tomczyk, S. Ryłko, *Służebnica Boża Siostra Barbara Samulowska*, p. 47.

Gietrzwałd (E. Bilitewska), in the tomb of Sisters of Mercy in Cracow (K. Wieczorek). J. Szafryńska after 14 years in the Congregations did not renew her vows for unknown reasons and she left it in 1897. It is known that she got married. The date of her death and the place of her burial are unknown.²²

The clergy and Barbara Samulowska

The parish priest of Gietrzwałd in the years 1869–1909, thus at the time of the Marian apparitions, was the priest Augustyn Weichsel (1830–1909). The Prussian authorities did not approve of his actions – he was harassed and held responsible for agitating for the Polish national movement in Warmia and for the promotion of the apparitions. The priority of his priestly activities was the implementation of the commands that had been provided by Our Lady in Gietrzwałd and the concern about deepening the religious – moral life of parishioners and pilgrims who came to Gietrzwałd.²³

The biography of the Father Weichsel shows him as a fierce and fearless defender and propagator of the worship of the Gietrzwałd Mother of God.²⁴ Despite this, the time of the apparitions is also marked with concern for, and sometimes with suspicion of, the content presented to him by the visionaries. At the time of the apparitions, Mary spoke directly about obedience towards priests: “everyone should listen to priests”, and that “if people pray eagerly, then the Church would not be persecuted, and orphaned parishes will receive priests”. In this spirit, also in accordance with the will of the parish priest in Gietrzwałd, B. Samulowska asked the Mother of God at the time of the apparitions questions that the priest had prepared. However, she did not demonstrate total obedience to the parish priest, so he, concerned about the discrepancy in an account of the vision of Szafryńska and Samulowska on 25.07.1877, categorically forbade them to publicly pray the Rosary. Pilgrims were ordered not to come to Gietrzwałd anymore. Hiding out of the way, Barbara Samulowska continued to pray the Rosary, in the course of which she heard from Mary: “People will believe even less, and you will suffer from even greater persecutions, but it will be for your good.”²⁵

Having learned from the German press about the apparitions in Gietrzwałd, the Bishop of Warmia Filip Krementz ordered an investigation of the case. To

²² K. Bielawny, *Gietrzwałd w 1877 roku*, in: *Oroędzie gietrzwałdzkie wczoraj i dziś*, ed. K. Parzych, Olsztyn 2005, p. 37.

²³ B. Tomczyk, S. Ryłko, *Ślužebnica Boża Siostra Barbara Samulowska*, p. 17.

²⁴ T. Pawluk, *Stosunek Kościoła do objawień prywatnych*, p. 97.

²⁵ J. Roslan, *Sanktuarium Matki Bożej w Gietrzwałdzie*, p. 22–23.

do so, the following priests were sent to the place of the apparitions: August Wunder, Augustine Kolberg from the *Hosianum* Seminary in Braniewo, Franciszek Hipler – a prominent theologian, and a member of the Polish Academy of Skills. The Bishop also received reports from the theological and doctor committees. The theological committee included Father Augustyn Karau, the dean of Olsztyn and Barczewo, and Father Edward Stock. The doctor committee included two Catholic and one Protestant doctors: Ditrich from Dobre Miasto, Poschmann from Orneta, and Sonntag from Olsztyn.²⁶ Both committees stated that both Szafryńska and Samulowska had true apparitions, received no material benefits despite the poverty in their family homes, and their behaviour at the time of the apparitions raised no objections. The case of the apparitions in Gietrzwałd was also studied personally by Bishop Kremenz himself, retaining a distant position towards the apparitions and the worship of the Mother of God from Gietrzwałd. The official position on this matter was taken by the Bishop of Warmia Joseph Drzazga in the decree of 11.09.1977. The Bishop of Warmia, referring to the events related to the apparitions received by Barbara Samulowska wrote in the Decree: “In this decree I hereby confirm the worship of the apparitions of Our Lady in Gietrzwałd as not opposing the faith or Christian morality, based on credible facts whose supernatural and holy nature cannot be excluded.”²⁷ Despite many wonders related to the apparitions, their authenticity was challenged by many German Catholic priests of the Diocese of Warmia. There was no problem with the priests of Polish origin who referred to the apparitions with enthusiasm. However, among the enthusiasts and protectors of Gietrzwałd apparitions were also the priests from Archdiocese of Gniezno and Poznań, the Chełmno Diocese and some priests from Silesia, Galicia and the Congress area.²⁸

These German priests had, with few exceptions, unfavourable attitudes toward the apparitions; others initially believed in their content, but later they changed their minds. Many priests disapproved of the actions of Father Weichsel, calling him a fantasist or an impostor. Those priests forbade the faithful to make pilgrimages to Gietrzwałd; they were hesitant in spreading the prayer of the Rosary, and they did not want to consecrate images featuring the Mother of God from Gietrzwałd. Following their priests, the faithful of German origin felt reluctant toward the apparitions and, hence, also the visionaries.²⁹

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 28–31.

²⁷ J. Drzazga, *Dekret Biskupa Warmińskiego z dnia 11.09.1977*, „Studia Warmińskie” vol. 14, 1977, p. 5.

²⁸ J. Obląk, *Sprawa polska ludności katolickiej na terenie diecezji warmińskiej w latach 1870–1914*, „Nasza Przeszłość” 1963, no. 18, p. 122.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 119–120.

Speaking about the attitude of the clergy to Barbara Samulowska, we also have to briefly mention the bishops of Warmia. The following bishops: Filip Krementz (1867–1885), Andrzej Thiel (1886–1908), Augustyn Bludau (1908–1930) maintained a cautious attitude towards the apparitions, and thus to the visionaries and also the sanctuary in Gietrzwałd. These bishops would not participate in any celebrations or pilgrimages to Gietrzwałd. Bishop Maxymilian Kaller (1930–1945) recognized Gietrzwałd as a place of pilgrimage and gave it the rank of diocesan shrine by the diocesan synod and organized pilgrimages to Gietrzwałd.³⁰ Bishop Tomasz Wilczyński (1956–1965) asked Pope Paul VI for his permission to crown the image of the Lady of Gietrzwałd, for which he obtained the Pope's consent. Bishop Joseph Drzazga (1972–1978) was already mentioned in this article. It is worth mentioning also Bishop John Obłąk (1982–1988), who popularized the knowledge about the past of Warmia, including the apparitions in Gietrzwałd. The successive Bishops of Warmia performed priestly services following the recognition of the veracity of the apparitions.

The fruits of the apparitions in Gietrzwałd

In accordance with the provision of the Bishop of Warmia Joseph Drzazga, Gietrzwałd as the place where the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary took place, increasingly became a popular pilgrimage destination. The consequence of this movement was the development of the prayer of the Rosary, which Mary called for at the time of the apparitions, the improvement of morals and the fact that many pilgrims have been heard in their prayers. Moreover, in the year 1878, Father Honorat Koźmiński under the influence of the apparitions in Gietrzwałd founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate. With the consent of the Holy See, the image of the Mother of God of Gietrzwałd was crowned, the Holy Mass and the breviary office were approved, a feast was added to the diocesan calendar and the sanctuary in Gietrzwałd was raised to the rank of a Minor Basilica.³¹ The request of the Mother of God, who said: "The brick Passion of Christ shall be exposed here and a statue of the Immaculate Conception shall be placed here was also fulfilled". The doubts concerning the Passion of Christ which Mary talked about were dispelled by Mary herself saying: "It is all the same, whether the cross or the chapel". The statue was ordered in Munich, a small chapel was built with the contributions of the faithful, for which the German authorities imposed a signi-

³⁰ M. Borzyszkowski, *Sanktuarium maryjne w Gietrzwałdzie w okresie międzywojennym (1921–1939)*, „*Studia Warmińskie*” vol. 14, 1977, p. 330–331.

³¹ J. Drzazga, *Dekret Biskupa Warmińskiego*, p. 5.

ficant penalty – it was the first repression for the parish priest and faithful, who were interrogated and frightened for this reason.³² The consequence of the Marian apparitions in Gietrzwałd was also the increased number of callings, especially to monastic orders. The external expression of the growth of religion in these lands was the funding of a number of roadside shrines by private individuals and also the building of small chapels by the landlords on their own premises. The custom of putting up chapels in Warmia is very old, but the explosion of their construction came at the turn of the 19th century. Most of these shrines were dedicated to the Mother of God.³³ The Marian apparitions witnessed by Barbara Samulowska became a turning point in the history of the worship of Our Lady of Gietrzwałd.³⁴

The spirituality of Sister Samulowska

The Bishop of Warmia Jan Obląk, in an extensive study of the apparitions in Gietrzwałd, cites the words of Karolina Samulowska – the mother of Barbara, who characterized her in terms of her spirituality as follows: “She was always gentle, cordial and polite. If her parents prayed or prayed novenas in different intentions for the Holy Father, the parish priest, for the sick, etc. Barbara always prayed eagerly and loudly.”³⁵

During one of the apparitions, J. Szafryńska asked the Mother of God whether she and B. Samulowska should come to pray the Rosary before the mass. In response, she heard that first of all one should “listen to the Holy Mass, and then pray the Rosary, since the former is more important”. The Holy Mass was also declared by Mary as a salvation for the deceased and a help in conversions. Samulowska herself, testifying before the committee appointed by Bishop Krementz, said about her spiritual life: “Before the arrival of the apparition I prayed the Rosary in peace, together with the crowd of people. And when the apparition began, I did not continue the Rosary, but soon I began to ask questions that I was asked. During the apparition I had no physical sensation and I did not notice that I had one as I was told later. Never before did I hear about any apparition. I neither heard nor saw similar images and no one encouraged me to do so. I did not feel any pride due to the received apparitions. When I come to pray here on the church square and I see many people gathered, it is

³² J. Roslan, *Sanktuarium Matki Bożej w Gietrzwałdzie*, p. 12.

³³ J. Jasiński, *Polityczna i religijna rola ośrodka gietrzwałdzkiego w latach 1877–1914*, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu*, p. 19.

³⁴ W. Nowak, *Historia obrazu i kultu Matki Boskiej Gietrzwałdzkiej*, „Studia Warmińskie” vol. 14, 1977, p. 123.

³⁵ J. Obląk, *Objawienia Matki Boskiej w Gietrzwałdzie*, p. 28.

totally indifferent to me. In my opinion, they do not have to come at all. Neither I nor my parents ever accepted any gift from the people, although at the beginning we were offered some gifts but we would always reject them.”³⁶

It is also worth quoting here the words of Sister Teresa Recamier. In one of her letters to her family she wrote about Sister Samulowska: “I sensed that this soul lives only with God, this strong love for the Immaculate Virgin permeates every action of the sister. Therefore, she has a very beneficial effect on everyone who meets her.”³⁷ This probably resulted from the monastic appeal that was carried out every day by all of the Sisters of Mercy: “The love of Crucified Christ compels us”. She also taught that to the sisters who were entrusted to her care in Guatemala, with a particular accent to the fact that she would set an example for them. During her stay in Guatemala, Sister Barbara Samulowska contributed significantly to the resumption and revitalization of the worship of the Crucified Saviour. In the hospital chapel, a life – size image of Crucified Christ was worshipped by the faithful. He was honoured as the marvel of Merciful Jesus. After the earthquake, which destroyed the Chapel, a new wooden Chapel was built due to an endeavour of Sister Samulowska where the Mass was celebrated every day. Later, thanks to the donations of the faithful, a beautiful Basilica was built, which became the destination of numerous pilgrimages.³⁸

Describing the spiritual plane of Sister Barbara, her ability to read the signs of times and the intentions of Divine Providence towards her in different situations should be emphasized. She was helped by her ability to listen to others, deeply entering into the spirit of others, openness to cooperation with the laity and organizational skills and virtues, which she developed with the grace of God. The moral attitude of Samulowska and the compliance of her acts with values were the best certificate of the credibility of Christianity to the people whom she met in her life.³⁹

Sister Samulowska during her missionary services, although not only at this time, was notable for her ardent devotion to the Blessed Virgin. She was an example of poverty, to which she also encouraged other sisters. Concerned about the sick and aware of the most important large shortfalls in supply, she would often kneel in the hospital chapel before the Blessed Sacrament and beg Jesus Christ for bread for people under her care.⁴⁰ It should also be noted that, despite the various difficulties, she lived a happy life. She proved it in one of her letters, when in 1938 she wrote: “I am always very happy in the service of God. I am

³⁶ B. Tomczyk, S. Ryłko, *Slużebnica Boża Siostra Barbara Samulowska*, p. 26–27.

³⁷ J. Chłosta, *Barbara Samulowska – wizjonerka z Gietrzwałdu*, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu*, p. 52.

³⁸ B. Tomczyk, *Siostra Miłosierdzia Barbara Stanisława Samulowska († 1950)*, p. 139.

³⁹ P. Rabczyński, *Sluga Boża siostra Barbara Stanisława Samulowska*, p. 561.

⁴⁰ B. Tomczyk, S. Ryłko, *Slużebnica Boża Siostra Barbara Samulowska*, p. 38.

very grateful to Jesus and the Blessed Mother for the sacred call of the Sisters of Mercy.”⁴¹

The excellent characteristics of the life of Sister Barbara Samulowska are contained in the testimony of one of the sisters, which is preserved in the archives in Gietrzwałd. It is a rather comprehensive speech, but very precious for the assessment of her life, we read there: “Every moment spent with her was for us a holiday; the greatest joy for us was the time she devoted to us. Everything in her was kindness, humility and simplicity as an expression of the good for God. The mercy of God could be seen in her, she was a saint. I believe that she is a Saint, and we should ask for her intercession. We, the postulants, were encouraged by her to tell her about our service to the sick, she wanted us to share our experiences with her; she would encourage us: “Tell me everything” – and she would always conclude saying: “Love God a lot and if you love Him your services will get better and better every day; your services depend on your love, you will love your vocation”. She was happy when she looked at us and she often said: “God will be the reward for you, if everything you do is for Him.”⁴²

The consequence of spiritual life maturity of sister Barbara was the good that she did following Jesus every day, wherever and to whomever He wanted to go. It enabled her throughout her whole life to reconcile her prayer and work, contemplation and action, and at the same time, protect her against excessive activism. In her prayers, she included everyone she served, especially the sick and the poor. This ultimately led to the fact that was called by the people she met “The Good Mother.”⁴³

Conclusion

The best commentary on the events from one hundred and forty years ago whose witness in Gietrzwałd was Barbara Samulowska are the words that John Paul II wrote in his letter to the Archbishop of Warmia. The Holy Father wrote then: “It seems that today, though there are the new times, much happier for Poland and the Poles, the words of Mary have not lost their significance. In the era of the openness to the world [...] they are still dedicated to taking care of the preservation of the Polish spirit in thoughts and action, Polish culture and Polish national identity [...] The words of Mary still raise the spirit of: «Do not fear...».

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 45.

⁴² J. Chłosta, *Barbara Samulowska – wizjonerka z Gietrzwałdu*, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu*, p. 53.

⁴³ K. Brzozowski, *Sluga Boża Siostra Barbara Samulowska – wizjonerka z Gietrzwałdu*, „*Salvatoris Mater*” 2009, no. 11, f. 1, p. 148.

They do not also cease to summon to the faith. Thus, only the one who puts oneself in the hands of Mary and her son, who will entrust oneself and one's affairs Her motherly love, who will throw oneself to her defence, will experience the consolation."⁴⁴ Barbara Samulowska did it throughout her whole life and she never experienced any disappointment, though her life was not easy – it is a testament of the implementation of those words which we can see with our eyes and an incentive to live in obedience to God. The life and activities of the Gietrzwałd visionary Barbara Samulowska calls for a broader study, which will probably be done on the occasion of the favourable opinion of the Congregation for the Saints.

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⁴⁴ Jan Paweł II, *List do Metropolity Warmińskiego arcybiskupa Edmunda Piszcza z okazji 125 rocznicy objawień w Gietrzwałdzie*, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu*, p. 167–168.

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Barbara Stanisława Samulowska – świadek objawień maryjnych w Gietrzwałdzie

Streszczenie: Sto czterdziesta rocznica objawień maryjnych w Gietrzwałdzie skłania do refleksji o życiu i działalności Barbary Samulowskiej – świadka tych objawień. W artykule opisano kolejne etapy jej życia: dzieciństwo, życie w Zgromadzeniu Sióstr Miłosierdzia i jej posługę w Gwatemali. Dowiadujemy się też o owocach tych wydarzeń, duchowości Samulowskiej i jej relacji do duchowieństwa. Objawienia, których Samulowska była świadkiem, głęboko wstrząsnęły jej życiem, a także lokalnej wspólnoty i wielu pielgrzymów przybywających do Gietrzwałdu. Barbara Samulowska otrzymała tytuł sługi Bożej. Aktualnie w Kongregacji ds. Świętych toczy się jej proces beatyfikacyjny.

Słowa kluczowe: prywatne objawienia, objawienia maryjne, Barbara Samulowska, Gietrzwałd, Siostry Miłosierdzia.