

R E V I E W S A N D D I S C U S S I O N S

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Saint Catherine of Alexandria in our Faith, Devotion, Theology and Art. Past and Present. A Universal and Regional Perspective [Święta Katarzyna Aleksandryjska w wierze, pobożności, teologii i sztuce—dawniej i dziś. Perspektywa uniwersalna i regionalna], ed. Jacek Jezierski, Katarzyna Parzych-Blakiewicz, Paweł Rabczyński, Olsztyn: Warmia Diocese Publishers, 2016, pp. 363.

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Saint Catherine is one of the most famous and distinguished figures in the history of Christianity. Over the centuries, she was and continues to be the patroness of many churches and the hero of many works of art and literature. She appears on coats of arms, is remembered in customs, the faithful have offered up countless prayers to her, and she has also been made the guardian of many professional groups. For centuries, this saint's name has enjoyed unceasing popularity, evident in many girls and women named Catherine, both in Poland and also in other countries beyond Europe. This saint was also honored by including her among the fourteen sacred helpers and is considered the most powerful among them. Yet, it may come as a surprise that the figure of St. Catherine is one of the most enigmatic in the history of hagiography; even her very existence is sometimes questioned, and a considerable number of documents, works and monuments related to her person have been plundered, destroyed or forgotten.

The legend states that Saint Catherine, a Christian woman and martyr for the faith, lived in the 3rd and 4th centuries, and was a well-educated person who stood up for oppressed Christians. She explained the falsehood of paganism and the truth of the Christian faith in the presence of the emperor and a large group of pagan philosophers. She was thrown into prison, experienced torture by being stretched on a wheel armed with daggers and suffered death by beheading with a sword. According to legend, the torture was stopped by the angels and milk flowed from her holy wounds. There is also a version that Catherine rejected the emperor's wedding proposal because her heart already belonged to Jesus. Her liturgical memory falls on November 25.

This review is based on the publication of a collective work. It is the culmination of an interdisciplinary seminar that took place in Warmia in 2015 and whose participants are representatives of various fields of education: historians, art historians, musicologists, literary scholars, cultural scholars, theologians and religious scholars. The link between the twenty-three authors and the contents of the publication creates the harmonious whole of the figure of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. The article by Rev. Paweł Rabczyński *Na czym polega doskonałość i świętość chrześcijanina?* [*What Perfection*

and *Sancity Means for a Christian*] (pp. 9–22) is introductory. The author explains what it is about and what the call to holiness requires. He emphasizes that holiness is given and at the same time is an assignment to every human being, and the universal call of all Christians is to be holy, since it is a call to perfect love. The examples of the saints are eloquent testimonies of this.

The remaining articles have been divided into five thematic blocks.

The first of them is entitled “The Biography and Historic Cult of Saint Catherine.” Katarzyna Parzych-Blakiewicz in her work *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, according to lexical sources (pp. 25–42), creates an outline of the saint’s biography, presenting her place in the Christian tradition. She explains the meaning of the name Catherine, introduces the most important facts about the saint’s life, mentions the surprisingly large number of professional, social groups and associations who have her as their patroness; she calls the theological icon of Saint Catherine “an image-book teaching about a deep Christian conscious.”

Bishop Jacek Jezierski (*Alexandria and its Church and Theological Traditions*, pp. 43–53) presents basic information about the population, location, economy and religion of the second largest city in Egypt, concentrating on Alexandria as an academic center, dividing it into the Christian and pre-Christian periods.

The topic of Rev. Bogdan W. Matysiak’s article *The Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai as a Sanctuary and Cultural Center* (pp. 55–66) is the saint’s resting place, which is also a well-known cultural center with emanating spirituality. The author describes Mount Sinai, which for centuries has been the symbol of three great religions, and relates the history of the monastery, paying attention to the smallest details regarding decorations and decor.

Fr. Mieczysław Celestyn Paczkowski, OFM, in his work *The Cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria on Mount Sinai* (pp. 67–84) attempts to obtain answers to the following questions: what the original cult of St. Catherine looked like and why it spread among the ascetic people living in the Sinai Desert. He compares the historical truths with the legendary messages and traditions as well as presents what the cult of the saint at the foot of Mount Sinai currently looks like.

The theme of Magdalena Lisecka’s article is *Catherine of Alexandria’s Cult in Bethlehem* (pp. 85–92). The author presents the history of the centuries-old relationship that started at Christ’s birthplace with the figure of St. Catherine since the twelfth century, when a sanctuary was built here in her name. At first, the Augustinians were in charge of this place, then the Franciscans. At that time, when the Latins were deprived of the opportunity to celebrate the liturgy in the basilica, they moved into this church. Till today, the sanctuary is visited by crowds of pilgrims.

The second thematic block is entitled *Religious and Cultural Manifestations of the Cult of Saint Catherine*. It starts with Rev. Bartłomiej Matczak’s article, *St. Catherine in the Liturgy of the Roman Church* (pp. 95–104). The author analyzes the extremely turbulent fate of the presence of St. Catherine in the Roman Martyrology, because there were doubts concerning the actual existence of this saint. A breakthrough occurred

when John Paul II visited her sanctuary on Mount Sinai with the desire to bring together the eastern and western Churches. The memory of the saint was restored to the Roman Missal on December 18, 2001.

Rev. Przemysław Nowak in his article *The “University” Catherine. The Saint of Alexandria at the Altar of the Former University Church in Ingolstadt* (pp. 105–116) and the history of the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, focusing on the work of Hans Mielich and his main altar depicting St. Catherine during her mystical marriage. On the back wall, there is a scene of the saint disputing with fifty pagan scholars. The painting is a work of art, but it also carries a theological and didactic message. St. Catherine was the patroness of the medieval art department of the University of Ingolstadt, and so she personified the ideal of Christian humanism.

Maria Piechocka-Kłós in her study on St. Catherine of Alexandria in Polish governmental heraldry (pp. 117–130) characterizes the history of Poland’s heraldry and notes that already in the middle ages, St. Catherine was counted among the most popular of saints. This is clearly reflected in the governmental heraldry’s full figure of the saint present in the coats of arms of five cities, four village municipalities, one county and three coats of arms refer to her person through attributes associated to her.

Eugeniusz Sakowicz in his article *Reflections on Saint Catherine the Patroness of Scholars, Theologians and Fashion Designers* (pp. 131–135) introduces the figure of St. Catherine based on the publications by E. Papaioannou and S. Negruzzo. He emphasizes the fact that she is the patron saint of the University of Sorbonne, but she is not a patroness of any sanctuary in Paris. For the French, St. Catherine is above all the patroness of young ladies and people associated with the world of fashion. According to the author, the saint proclaims an important message today: the university cannot serve modern trends and for faithfulness to the truth, we often have to pay a high price.

Part III of the work is entitled *Catherine in Artistic and Literary Works*. Grażyna Kobrzeniecka-Sikorska in her work on the cult and iconography of St. Catherine of Alexandria in the Eastern Christian Church (pp. 139–152) characterizes the importance of the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai and its contribution to the development of the cult. She also mentions other centers for the cult of the saint. The author presents in detail the iconography of the saint in Byzantine and post-Byzantine art, including a separate article devoted to the iconography of St. Catherine in Russian Orthodoxy. She also presents the saint’s contemporary icons.

Rev. Piotr Towarek undertakes the topic of St. Catherine of Alexandria in the Mass liturgy and oratory music (pp. 153–165). He presents selected works proving the influence of the Church’s liturgy and tradition on the rise and transformation of musical forms related to the cult of St. Catherine over the centuries. Most often, it was a mass or parts of the mass in honor of the saint (alleluia with verses, antiphones, motets) and the extra-liturgical oratory that was a much more extended form.

Marta Kowalczyk in her article *Saint Catherine of Alexandria and the Visions of Medieval Mystics, Saint Mechtilde from Magdeburg, Saint Gertrude the Great and Bl. Dorothy of Mąty* (pp. 167–178) analyzes three messages. *The Stream of Divine Light* of

Saint Mechtilde is a work in which we can see many similarities between the author and St. Catherine: spiritual strength, steadfastness, true faith and similar spiritual experiences; St. Gertrude in her *Harbinger* considers, among others, St. Catherine, whose wisdom and willingness to convert the weak in faith were the mystic's greatest assets; Bl. Dorothy of Mały was encouraged by the figure of St. Catherine to work on the conversion of sinners and ignite the fire of faith in people.

The topic of Anna Rzymska's work is *Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Polish Literature* (pp. 179–189). The author successfully traces the figure of St. Catherine in native literature. She is present in medieval works (*Homily for Saint Catherine's Day, A Song about St. Catherine*), the Renaissance (*Lives of the Saints* by Piotr Skarga), 19th century works (*The Vision of Saint Catherine* by Lange) and 20th century poetry (Katarzyna K. Iłakowiczówna, Katharin J.S. Pasierba), which testify to the saint's unending cult in Poland. Rev. Jan Roslan presents the figure of St. Catherine in *Żywoty świętych [Lives of the Saints]* by Rev. Piotr Skarga (pp. 191–196). The life of St. Catherine was written based on *Passio Catherinae* by Metafrastes and the work of *Surius De probatis Sanctorum histories*. The text written by Skarga is characterized by detailed descriptions of cruelty, which characterizes the lives of the saints written in the Middle Ages and at the same time emphasizes bravery, heroism and staying with Christ.

The fourth thematic block is entitled *Warmia's Saint Catherine*. It opens with an article on the *Patrocinia of St. Catherine* in the Diocese of Warmia (pp. 199–221). St. Catherine was the most popular of all woman saints, second only to Our Lady. Confirmation of this fact is the significant number of churches named after St. Catherine (until 1328, 96 churches and chapels, another two hundred in the next centuries).

Rev. Andrzej Kopiczko presents the source of the popularity of St. Catherine in Warmia in the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Catherine, Virgin and Martyr, and their founder, Blessed Regina Protmann. A significant role was also played by the sanctuary of St. Catherine of Alexandria in Braniewo. Sr. Janina Bosko RM in her article *The Iconography of Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Sacred Art in Warmia* (pp. 223–230) reviews the iconography of St. Catherine, analyzing her images on walls and altar paintings, her likenesses in figural sculpture and sacred goldsmithing. She notices the huge number of historic buildings in Warmia dedicated to St. Catherine.

The author emphasizes the validity of the saint's attitude, especially today in the 21st century, when the followers of Christ are still dying in defense of the faith. Rev. Tomasz Garwoliński in his work *Saint Catherine in the 15th and 16th Century Collections of the 'Hosianum' Library* (pp. 231–244) presents the 15th and 16th century collections of the 'Hosianum' Seminary Library of Warmia Metropolis in Olsztyn, where this portrait of St. Catherine was not discussed by the author in previous studies. It is characterized by fourteen liturgical books, the lives of the saints, collections of sermons, and also introduces the reader to twenty-one works on this subject. The work is enriched with photographs of fragments of the texts discussed.

The fourth part is crowned with the work of Janusz Hochleitner, *The Catherine Sisters and the Modern Heritage of Saint Catherine in the 16th–17th Centuries in Warmia*

(pp. 245–258). The woman's order of Saint Catherine in Braniewo was established in 1583 at the initiative of Bl. Regina. The presence of the main shrine in Braniewo, the Church of St. Catherine and the activities of the Jesuits influenced her activities. The goal of the congregation, which at that time was a real novelty in Catholicism, was the idea of apostolate among the sick and the education of girls. The influence of the religious congregation on the religious, social and cultural life of Warmia's inhabitants was and still is extremely important and necessary.

Part five is entitled *Saint Catherine a Church Patroness*. It begins with the work of Stanisław Kuprjaniuk, *The Parish Church of the Holy Virgin Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Ploskinia* (pp. 261–291). The author describes the history of one of the many churches in Warmia that bears the name St. Catherine of Alexandria, which is not an easy task, because a large part of the documentation burned or is missing. The parish church was built in the years 1340–1360, and the author introduces the reader to the details of its construction, describing the works of art that constitute its furnishings and the church's surroundings.

Rev. Jacek Maciej Wojtkowski discusses the subject of the Church of St. Catherine in Braniewo after 1945 with a passion, *From a 'Permanent Ruin' to a Shrine* (pp. 293–317). Devastations, robberies and the lack of regulated property rights of the post-German church property led the church to ruin, but in 1973, a decision was made to remove the debris, and after the Church regained it, the object qualified for reconstruction. Thanks to the efforts of Fr. T. Brandys, the shrine was faithfully rebuilt in the gothic style.

In 1998, the deanery's Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima was established in Braniewo, and in 2001, Pope John Paul II gave St. Catherine's Church the title "minor basilica." Rev. Jan Wiśniewski is the author of the only German-language article in this publication entitled *Die Kirchen der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien, Jungfrau und Märtyrerin, in der Diözese von Pomesanien im 17.–18. Jahrhundert* (Churches of St. Catherine of Alexandria, virgin and martyr, in the Pomeranian Diocese in the 17th and 18th centuries) (pp. 319–348).

In the Pomeranian Diocese, there were once five churches dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, and three medieval ones have survived to our times (Boręty, Dzierzgoń, Straszewo), while the other two fell in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The author concentrates his attention on the images of Our Lady, St. Catherine and other saints placed on sacred objects in the described churches. The history of the Church of St. Catherine of Alexandria in Arnau (Russian: Rodniki, Родники), near Kaliningrad, in the former Diocese of Sambia (pp. 349–361), was described by Rev. Krzysztof Bielawny. We can distinguish several periods in the Church's period taking into account its confessional affiliation: in the years 1320–1525, it belonged to the Roman Catholic Church; the next 420 years were the period of its Lutheran domination; after the Second World War, there was a series of barbaric attacks destroying the shrine. From 1960–1990, the church served as a granary. The political *Perestroika* enabled the reconstruction of the monument, which was completed thanks to the efforts of the German foundation Kuratorium Arnau. Since 2010, the church serves the Orthodox community, and a woman's monastery was also established here.

Although St. Catherine has been considered one of the most famous and significant figures of Christianity for centuries, the facts of her life, and even the existence of the saint, are still being questioned. Participants of the seminar, who are also the co-authors of the reviewed publication, received a difficult task. Yet the popularity of this saint and the interest of the recipients made us provide a lot of information about the life of St. Catherine, as well as the places, works of art or literature associated with her, and this turned out to be a priority. Paradoxically, a huge amount of data is not historically confirmed or even preserved. However, in the case of this saint, it is not facts but the message about God's love and goodness towards others that play a dominant role. People come closer to God through the saints, because they were also ordinary people who shaped their earthly lives according to the Christian ethos and proved that it is possible to witness to Christ in every place in the world and in every age.

Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Faith, Piety, Theology and Art in the Past and Present. The Universal and Regional Perspective consists of twenty-three articles, the first of which explains the issue of the call to sanctity, while the rest are divided into five thematic blocks, each presenting the reader with a slightly different perspective of the memory of St. Catherine. The authors give us a biographical and historical presentation of the foundations of the cult of this saint, as well as its characteristics in selected areas of culture and religion. We get to know how St. Catherine appeared in the pages of literature, iconography and musical compositions. The locations of the seminar work significantly influenced the subject of the last two parts of the publication on *Warmia's Saint Catherine and Saint Catherine's Church Patron*, which complement each other perfectly, and some of the articles could be included in both thematic blocks.

The book is a great source of knowledge about the saint's life. The authors thoroughly exhausted the subject and provided comprehensive information by referring to numerous sources of knowledge. The multidimensional character of the work makes it possible for specialists in such fields of education as theology, religious studies, literature, history, musicology, art history, cultural studies, architecture, etc. to use it. The publication, thanks to its precise explanations and understandable language, may also be an interesting proposal for a wider group of people interested in the person of St. Catherine, such as teachers (in particular, religion and history) as well as readers for whom Warmia is dear to their hearts and thoughts.

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