

REV. MICHAŁ DAMAZYN

## SECRETARIES AND APOSTLES OF THE MERCIFUL GOD

**A b s t r a c t.** Mercy of God, revered around the world today, not only is the fruit of visiting St. Sister Faustina Kowalska. God in the past centuries chose people who—listen His will—or transcribed His message communicated to them, or implemented specific tasks, proclaiming the Church and the world God’s mercy. Analysis of their life and ministry allows to notice the similarities between specific works of charity, but for the whole of God’s plan of leading the Church at the present time.

**Key words:** Divine Mercy; Sister Faustina Kowalska; Michał Sopoćko; Margaret Alacoque.

The last century was a period when the reborn cult of divine mercy bloomed. Some theologians even call the present time in the Church as an era of mercy. Commonly, it is believed that it happened largely through the Polish nun and mystic Faustina Kowalska from the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, who experiencing the visions of Jesus, delivered to the world that “the hour of mercy” has just passed which precedes the day of justice.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, every single man should address to that Mercy in an attempt to seek shelter for himself in his earthly living and the rescue at the hour of death (cf. Dz 965). The effect of those revelations is the spread of new forms of godliness.

However, closer examination shows that the opus mercy is much more magnificent than the spirituality alone emerged from the visions Saint Maria

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Rev. Michał DAMAZYN—Doctor of Theology, lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the Primate’s Institute of Christian Culture in Bydgoszcz; adress for correspondence—e-mail: [michaldamazyn@interia.pl](mailto:michaldamazyn@interia.pl)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Faustyna M. KOWALSKA, *Dzienniczek. Miłosierdzie w duszy mojej* [Divine Mercy in My Soul], 16<sup>th</sup> edition, Warszawa 2007, [called: Dz] 83, 1146.

Faustina (Kowalska). This Saint is like a stone in the whole mosaic of mercy—the picture of Himself, which God has been drawing over last centuries in the Church through the obedience of many lay brothers, clergy and consecrated. The renewed cult of divine mercy, spreading across the contemporary world, is not a fruit of one or more visionaries' writings being spread, but gradually revealed God's plan, which by leading his Church throughout the history, presently it gives Him remedy for rampant evil and sin as well as it gives the foundation for His renovation. Below an attempt to outline historical-theological elements of giving the humanity Godly plan and its realisation by the Church is presented.

## 1. PREPARATION

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century the popularisation of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus cult can be observed. Its beginnings date back to visions given to a nun from the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary—Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque—in 1673–1689.<sup>2</sup> Until then, this spirituality was based on adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and contemplation of Passion. Under the influence of those mystics visions there appeared an element of “redamantio” (reward), in other words “*longing for giving love for the Redeemer's Love, disregarded and abused (especially Holy Communion) by these, who should cherish more... (consecrated persons)*.”<sup>3</sup> The fruit of the afore mentioned visions includes also new forms of godliness: holy hour each night from Thursday to Friday (commemorating the prayer of Christ in olive garden), Holy Communion compensating first Fridays of month and the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus on Friday after the octave of feasts of the Most Holy Body

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<sup>2</sup> She is not the first woman to have influenced the progress of Christ's Heart cult. Living in the 13<sup>th</sup> century: Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Gertrude of Helfta, should also be mentioned here. Father M. Sopoćko in one of brochures dedicated to the cult of divine mercy wrote that there is in the Saint Gertrude's writings a prayer, dictated to him by Jesus, identical to the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, written in “Diary” of St. Faustina. Cf. Michał SOPOĆKO, *Miłosierdzie Boże nadzieją ludzkości* [Divine Mercy a Hope for Humanity] (Wrocław, 1948), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Dany DIDEBERG, “Wprowadzenie”, in *Wezwanie do miłości, czyli orędzie Najświętszego Serca Jezusa do świata* [A Call to Souls: Words of Our Lord from The Way of Divine Love] (Warszawa, 2010) [called: WdM], 10.

and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi).<sup>4</sup> According to these forms, the Saviour promised the worshippers of the Most Holy Heart many graces through Saint Margaret. This cult had quickly spread all over the world, with time becoming a dominant in the whole Church.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, the cult of Divine Mercy has also been present in modern times in the faith of the Church.<sup>6</sup> It can be clearly seen in communities of the consecrated life existing today, established in modern times, charismata of which was to follow this very attribute of God, although it was misinterpreted.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup> St. John of God has established a Hospitaller Order of the Brothers of Saint John of God<sup>8</sup> in Grenada, members of which had to follow compassionate and merciful Christ, healing every diseases and weaknesses.

In 1625 the Holy See finally legitimised the Congregation of the Mission Saint Vincent de Paul,<sup>9</sup> and after few years—its sisterhood.<sup>10</sup> The intention of these congregations is to worship Christ present in poor people. To preserve the charismata, members from both Vincentian congregations make additional, fourth vow: persistence in the ministrations of poor people.<sup>11</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were created lots of congregations that exist today, charismata of which is Divine Mercy. In 1815 Mary Aikenhead established the Religious Sisters of Charity in Ireland, whose monastic canons are based on the Saint Ignatius of Loyola spirituality. The special attribute of its members spirituality is ministrations of poor people, emphasised by the fourth vow: to serve the poor and the absolute trust in Divine Providence, coming from confidence that God gives us everything which is needed to serve the

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Saint Margaret starts to write about Christs Kingdom and about reigning of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. This term involves the care of building a Christian social order in the world. These optics made that pope Leon XIII in 1899 dedicated humanity to this Heart and Pius XI in 1925 established a Feast of Christ the King on last Sunday of the liturgical year. Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Divine Mercy worship has biblical roots both in Old and New Testament. It was always known in Church. However, the subject of discussion is recent history.

<sup>7</sup> It was established in 1540, legitimised by the pope Pius V in 1572.

<sup>8</sup> Ordo Hospitalitarius Sancti Joannis de Deo.

<sup>9</sup> Congregatio Missionis.

<sup>10</sup> Congregatio Puellarum Caritas Sancti Vincentii à Paulo.

<sup>11</sup> See B. ŁOZIŃSKI, *Leksykon zakonów w Polsce* [The Lexicon of Orders in Poland] (Warszawa, 1998), 328.

poor.<sup>12</sup> Fifteen years later, Catherine McAuley established in Dublin the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. Also this community's aim was to take care of the poor and the sick.<sup>13</sup>

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in German city of Trier the congregation of Hospitaller Brothers of Mary Benefactress (Barmherzigen Brüder von Maria-Hilf) was originated which lives according to the canon of Saint Augustine. Their charismata is to fulfil deeds of mercy to those who are sick and in pain.<sup>14</sup>

In 1836 the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary Our Lady of Perpetual Help from Schijndel was established in Holland (Congregatie van de Zusters van Liefde van Jezus en Maria, Moeder van Goede Bijstand te Schijndel). Its original goal was to serve others through fulfilling deeds of mercy in the spirit of "ora et labora". The community was engaged in diverse services, starting from education, through health care and aid to elders and orphans, to parochial and mission work.<sup>15</sup>

Mother Teresa Potocka, née Ewa Sułkowska, founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy<sup>16</sup> in Poland in 1862 with the aim to rescue girls and women needing help and moral renewal. One of its members was renowned nun Faustina Kowalska.

Religious congregations, having in mind showing mercy, were established also in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Italy, in 1826 pope Leon XII founded congregation of pious women,<sup>17</sup> "Ladies of Mercy" (currently: congregation of Hospitaller Sisters of Mercy<sup>18</sup>) making simple vows. Their charismata is to make deeds of mercy, especially to take care of sick people, according to the call included in the first Canon of their life: be with sick uniting with them in their suffering to support Jesus Christ suffering in limbs of His Mystic

<sup>12</sup> See [www.rscaritas.ie](http://www.rscaritas.ie), access 11.04.2014.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.sistersofmercy.ie>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>14</sup> Fratres Misericordiae Mariae Auxiliatricis. See <http://www.brueder-von-maria-hilf.de>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>15</sup> Currently, because of low number of vocations, community almost completely withdrew from apostolic activity. Nuns are focused on cooperation with charities and institutions, organising funds for aims, which in the past, for years, were realised by direct service in deeds of mercy. See <http://www.zustersvanliefde.nl>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>16</sup> Congregatio Sosorum Beatae Mariae Virginis a Misericordia. source: <http://www.faustyna.pl>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>17</sup> Initially allocated to Sancta Sanctorum hospital. Later on, nuns received an consent for work also in other medical agencies.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.siostryszpitalne.koszalin.opoka.org.pl>, access 11.04.2014.

Body.<sup>19</sup> Also in Italy, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, J.A. Orione established the Congregation of Small Missionaries of Mercy (Piccole Suore Missionarie della Carità). The Orionists, apart from three vows, make fourth one—the vow of love, which obligates them to show love through sacrifice of their life on leading the most separated people to God, and to know and cherish Christ, Holy Father and the Church.<sup>20</sup>

Almost all congregations that came to existence until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which in their spirituality have Divine Mercy, understood it as seeing Christ in those in need and it was shown in fulfilling deeds of mercy.

## 2. APOSTLES OF DIVINE MERCY IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in few places in Europe, information about persons appeared, who were experiencing the visions of Christ insisting on the renewal for the worship of Divine Mercy across the world.

One of them was Benigna Consolata Ferrero (1885–1916), a nun from the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary in Italian Como.<sup>21</sup> At Christ's wish, she was keeping a "Diary", where she was writing her spiritual experiences. For Jesus, she was His favourite child,<sup>22</sup> little secretary (cf. DzF 93–105) or apostle (cf. DzF 38,98,25), both of God's love (cf. DzF 14,15) and of Divine Mercy (cf. DzF 98).

Upon coming of age, she allegedly heard the following words from the Saviour: *I want you to be sacrificed distinctively for My Divine Heart for rescuing miserable sinners. [...] I'm telling you that in order to let know, through you, to many people about that thing: reliance is the key, opening treasures of My mercy* (DzF 242). Considering her vocation, she wrote that Christ wanted her to join the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary through which she will become an absolute tool of His mercy (cf. DzF 43). In this

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.consom.org>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>20</sup> Congregatio Sosorum Parvarum Missionariorum a Misericordia. See <http://www.orianistki.pl>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>21</sup> Ryszard UKLEJA, *Miłosierdzie Boże z pokolenia na pokolenie* [Mercy of God from Generation to Generation] (Wrocław, 1997), 159–160.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Żywot Sługi Bożej siostry Benigny Konsolaty Ferrero* [Life of the Servant of God Sister Benigna Konsolata Ferrero], 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Kraków, 1930) [called: DzF], 13.

mercy, she herself completely belonging to Jesus (cf. DzF 48) by fulfilling the canon of her congregation, has to devote her everyday life as a compensation for sinners.<sup>23</sup> By doing this, she will contribute to converting many people.<sup>24</sup> She had to become God's justice victim,<sup>25</sup> yet at the same time—as she had heard in July 1914—the *solace of My Love* (DzF 96).

In one of her notes in “Diary” Sister Benigna wrote Christ words, who has said her, that the world comes into abyss. That is why, God wants to rescue it. *I will hold him back*—she heard from the Saviour—in *this terrific run with countless regiments of magnanimous souls, which will fight under My command. I'm preparing a work of mercy. I want a complete renewal of society, but I desire it to be a deed of Love* (DzF 243). Christ was telling her also that His Heart is abandoned<sup>26</sup> which causes Him unmeasurable pain, therefore He is looking for people, who love Him truly.<sup>27</sup> Turning to His Heart may bring rescue.<sup>28</sup> During one of visions, Sister Benigna heard: *I am a God of all mercy and I don't desire anything so much, as I desire to be only merciful! Doors to My Mercy are wide open... doors of My Justice are locked and I open them only for that, who forces Me to do so. Myself, I will never open it. In one moment I can retrieve the whole souls past, if only it will deem Me as a God, namely, while it don't cut down My kindness by its mistrust; when it tightens not My Mercy by its sorrow; while it don't measure My Love by its love* (DzF 247).

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<sup>23</sup> *My Benigna, give me a soul! [...] By sacrifice. Yes, My Benigna, I want you to live in constant state of sacrifice.* DzF 93.

<sup>24</sup> *My betrothed, find for Me offerings, which would like to sacrifice themselves for the glory of My Heart. My Heart is full of mercy, not only for you, but also for all others.* DzF 50.

<sup>25</sup> *Yes, My Benigna, I want you to live in state of constant sacrifice. If you are not willing to it, therefore your state is not good. You always have to inflame this fire in your heart. Souls aren't being rescued if there's nothing done for them.* DzF 93.

<sup>26</sup> *My Heart is abandoned, but it don't ever abandon anybody.* DzF 244.

<sup>27</sup> *If you knew how painfully it is to love so strongly and not to be loved... I do not suffer... I don't stop calling for love, and there's nobody who gives me response... I am always looking for hearts, which love Me, but anyway so easily left Me, searching for happiness there, where it is not present.* DzF 245.

<sup>28</sup> *Know alone and say it to others, that for getting a thorough virtue, it's necessary to call for Christ's Heart. Who wants to save himself, let him only shelter to this blessed Ark, whence he will scrutinize to tempest and not feeling its concussions. My Betrothed! Point everyone to this shelter, which you have elected for eternal dwelling; show Me in this love, instructing all to come to Me.* DzF 50.

Sister Benigna also could be a part of Divine plan of saving the world. Jesus gave her the following task: *I want you to write down and preserve everything, which I will say to you. They will read it, when you already are in heaven* (DzF 39).

Another apostle of mercy in the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was nun Maria Josefa Menéndez from the Congregation of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Sacré Coeur. This Spanish nun, mystic and stigmatic was born on 4 February 1890 in Madrid and died in December 1923. Revelations given to her are the echo of those which were once given to Saint M. Alacoque, but also herald a great message of divine mercy, given to St. F. Kowalska (cf. WdM 12).

Several months after making perpetual vows, Christ had to appear before her and seal a covenant of love and mercy with her (cf. WdM 218). He called himself Mercy and Love (cf. WdM 24), Father of Mercy (cf. WdM 323). And he called her a dove (cf. WdM 20), nothingness (cf. WdM 278), sacrifice (cf. WdM 18) or victim (cf. WdM 41–42, 192) of God's love and mercy, bride of Divine Heart (cf. WdM 143, 322, 341). In one of her visions she would hear: *from time to time I desire people to hear a new call of love. Now, Josefa I want to make use of just you, little and flimsy creation. My only desire is a manifestation of love, mercy and forgiveness of My Heart to people. For this purpose, I have chosen you with your whole misery. [...] words and yearnings, which I convey through you, will awake fervour and prevent the bane of many people. They will also make, that everyone will know, that Mercy and Love of My Heart are endless.*<sup>29</sup>

She had two missions. The first one was her agreement to torment in order to compensate Jesus Heart for others sins<sup>30</sup> and plead divine mercy for them.<sup>31</sup> On 9 January 1921 she would hear from Christ: *Love, suffer,*

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<sup>29</sup> *Największa Miłość. Siostra Józefa Menendez świadek tej Miłości* [The Biggest Love. Sister Josefa Menendez witness that Love] (Kraków–Warszawa–Struga, 1988) [called: NM], 38.

<sup>30</sup> *So very the souls are insulting Me! But what is ripped My Heart the most, is the outlook, while they are stampeding headlong to their annihilation [...] Here is my sorrow: My Blood unavailingly overflowed for them! Let's go both to reward and fulfil Heavenly Father for so many insults that He suffers.* NM 234.

<sup>31</sup> *I am looking for love. I love the souls and I expect from them the answer of love. My Heart is wounded, because often instead of love I experience frigidity. Give Me the love, give Me souls! Connect your activities with My Heart! Abide with me, for I am always with you. Yes, I am same Love and I desire only love. Oh, if souls know, how I wait for them, full of mercy! I'm Love over Loves! Only forgiveness brings me the relief!* NM 307.

*be amenable. This way I will be able to realise My intentions in you* (NM 41). In another vision He added: *the one desire of My Heart is to lock you in It, seize you by love and then make that love and innocence the channel of mercy for the many souls who will be saved thanks to thy mediation* (NM 39).

During many revelations, Christ was invoking His Passion and Dying—pain, which results from human sin. He often told her about His suffering and wishing love, the holiest Heart,<sup>32</sup> which is also merciful.<sup>33</sup> That is why, nun J. Menendez was practicing these forms of piety, which originated from visions of Saint Margaret (cf. NM 15,46,279,356).

She was bearing stigmata on her body, and Jesus repeatedly was allowing her to take part in His Passion (cf. NM 45). In December 1920 she wrote: *because you are ready for torture, we are together suffering* (NM 45). At the end of March 1923 Jesus told her: *Put your hands into my hands and feet of yours under my feet, to unite to the depth of my pain, let thy limbs suffer with My* (NM 46). Because of the love of God, she passed through the experience of hell, and because of her intercession prayer for sinners—suffered torment of hell (cf. NM 209–216,637–647).

The second mission given to her by Jesus was to announce God's love and mercy to the world. Firstly, Jesus commanded her to write down everything which she had heard from Him.<sup>34</sup> He told her that He wants through her to convey to the world a new or more deepen message and thus become a rescue for every man. In the revelation from 24 February 1921 He described her role in these deeds in the following way: *world does not know My mercy, I want to use you, to the mercy be met. I desire you to be an apostle of My kindness and My mercy. I'll teach you, what does it mean, you forget about yourself* (NM 14,39). In December 1922 He added: *you are the echo of My voice* (NM 55). He also promised that He will make her living an

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<sup>32</sup> *My heart is not only the abyss of love, but also It is the abyss of mercy!* NM 331.

<sup>33</sup> *Fall down face to the ground and praise the Majesty of God, despised by the people. Make an act of reparation and repeat after Me: Oh God, infinitely holy! I adore You. I'm falling in humility before Your Face, and I ask You in the name of Thy Divine Son forgiveness for so many sinners who offend You! I offer You my life and I want to reward Him for so many ingratitude!* NM 357.

<sup>34</sup> *I desire you to write down and perpetuate everything, which I'm going to say to you. All this would be read, when you will already be in heaven. To use you are not inclining me your merits. I desire, so as people see, that My omnipotence uses the poor and miserable instruments.* NM 39. Cf. NM 56.



example of Divine Mercy (cf. NM 20). Her evangelisation was communicating those messages which she had heard from Christ.

Although, St. Josefa had already heard from Christ—just like as nun Benigna—about Divine Mercy, still the message given to her, is very strongly attached to expiatory element. On 11 June 1923 Christ would tell her: *Through the centuries I was revealing, in many ways, My Love to the people. I showed them, how the desire for their salvation absorbs Me. I made, that they met My Heart. It's cult has become a light sweeping the world. [...] Now I want more. Because if I please for love, I'm not waiting only for return of souls. I want them to believe in My mercy, to look forward to My kindness, not to doubt ever in My forgiveness* (NM 21).

The prayer spoken by Jesus, in which the praying man addresses the Holy Father with the request of acceptance to Body, Blood and Wounds of the Saviour as propitiation for sinners, deserves special attention because of its similarity to the text of Chaplet to Divine Mercy, dictated to Sister F. Kowalska.<sup>35</sup>

Currently, the beatification processes of both nuns mentioned above<sup>36</sup> are underway. The content of revelations given to them shows that they have a lot in common. Both visionaries grew from the Sacred Heart of Jesus and last in congregations living according to this spirituality. To both of them Jesus approaches with the same designation: secretary of God's love and mercy. From both of them Christ was expecting to become victims compensating others sins and spread the message to everyone. Both nun Benigna and nun Josefa many times heard that Jesus suffers, that His love is forgotten and wounding and His Heart demands the compensation and pure love. Nevertheless, next to the expiation dimension, in their writings there appears a motive, not only of the Most Holy, but also merciful Heart of Jesus, and that message is called the message of love and mercy.<sup>37</sup> Turning to that Divine Heart loving man and His mercy relieves God's wrath and pain and it also

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<sup>35</sup> Prayer dictated to her by Jesus on 26 September 1922: *Eternal Father, merciful Father! Take the Blood of Thy Son. Take His wounds. Take His Heart for these souls. [...] Eternal Father! Take the Blood of Thy Son...* NM 306.

<sup>36</sup> Beatification process of nun J. Menedez started in 1947, and of nun B. K. Ferrero—in 1925.

<sup>37</sup> "Ten Commandments of Mercy", which Jesus dictated to nun Benigna, starts with words: *Long live the sweetest Heart of Jesus, source of all mercy.* The sixth of them states: *when the soul crosses the threshold of mercy, it gets under the power of Love.* And the ninth that the greatest sinners are most beloved by divine mercy. Also Ten Commandments of reliance constitutes indications to give ourselves to God of love. DzF 208–210.

gives a man the grace of salvation. Since the world is doomed, every man without any exception should ask for God's mercy.

A remarkable role in saving the world—as written by both visionaries—was prophesied to the consecrated people. They, as said by Saint B. Ferrero, have to *become living monuments, praising His infinite mercy [...]* *These souls will shine as precious jewels and would be the crown of His divine mercy* (DzF 210–211). Also they, when they are unfaithful to Him, despite they are His possession, make Him—as said by Saint J. Menendez—even more suffer, because I love them more.<sup>38</sup> It is worth to reflect on Jesus leading His secretaries, who, according to their congregation charismata, were experiencing their apostleship.

The fullest, within the theological meaning, revelation of Divine Mercy at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, was without any doubt this, the one given to Sister Maria Faustina Kowalska (1905–1938) from the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. It was *like putting a dot above "i"*,<sup>39</sup> in reference to those, which were given to nuns Benigna and Josefa, as written in one of the first brochures her Vilnius confessor—Blessed Michał Sopoćko (1888–1975).

The Saviour called nun Faustina not only the *secretary of My mercy* (Dz 965. Cf. Dz 1275,1605), but also apostle (cf. Dz 1142,1588), instrument (cf. Dz 645), dispensary (cf. Dz 580), repository and intercessory (cf. Dz 438, 441,599), and also saint (cf. Dz 1571,1650). He was manifesting Himself as: *King of mercy* (Dz 83,88) who will soon come as the righteous Judge.<sup>40</sup>

Although, in writings of those Mystic there appears a theme of Jesus's Heart, which loves a man, still the term was often preceded by the term the most merciful (cf. Dz 218,1211,1213,1217,1219,1221,1489) or explained as the source of mercy (cf. Dz 85,177,300). It is the God's love, as noted by the Mystic, that has to appear in His mercy. She also wrote: *Mercy is a flower*

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<sup>38</sup> WdM 315. Christ also said: *I ardently desire, all chosen souls to got stuck in my look, without turning around anymore. Let among them will not be any mediocrity, which comes mostly from a false understanding of My love. No! Love my Heart is neither difficult nor hard, but sweet and easy!* (WdM 330). Another day He added: *I don't require from My souls any great things. I demand only love!* (WdM 322) He has indicated also on their mission in the world: *My chosen souls—brides, nuns and priests, let them teach poor souls, how much My Heart loves them* (WdM 323). From these, which pass away from their promises and vows, Jesus expects return to the life in grace (WdM 313).

<sup>39</sup> M. SOPOĆKO, *Miłosierdzie Boże nadzieją ludzkości*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 83. He called Himself as the Merciful Saviour (cf. Dz 1075) and taught that only God is the mercy (cf. Dz 383,950,1074,1273,1552,1574,1739,1751,1778).

of love; God is love, and mercy is his deed, in love He conceives, in mercy appears (Dz 651). It is the biggest virtue not only of Godly Son, but the entire Holy Trinity, which makes certain “newness” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century theology of mercy.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, Jesus demanded from His Secretary to learn further His love for sinning man, thus understanding more His mercy.<sup>42</sup> *Say that mercy is the greatest trait of God.*<sup>43</sup> *All deeds of My hands are crowned by mercy* (Dz 301). His vastness<sup>44</sup> has to bring to man’s attention that he always may turn from his sin which is an affront to God and turn to Him.<sup>45</sup> Christ told Sister Faustina that: *My Heart is fulfilled of great mercy for souls, and especially for poor sinners* (Dz 367), and in another revelation: *and any soul will find justification, until it turns with confidence to My mercy* (Dz 570). It is the only rescue for man and mankind, which, to rescue itself, should submerge in it (cf. Dz 206).

This Mystic was to become the one who leads the sinners to the torrent of grace (cf. Dz 206,1209,971) and through ministry whose truth about this Divine trait will be known to the entire world again (cf. Dz 687). Only he may recapture His stillness (cf. Dz 699). Jesus instructed sister Faustina: *Write these verses, My daughter, tell the world about My mercy, let entire mankind know unfathomable mercy of Mine. It’s a sign for the final times, after it will come the day of justice. While its time, let them have recourse to the source of My mercy; let them make use from the Blood and Water, which gushed forth for them* (Dz 848). The help for a man with unveiling and buttressing his confidence to God can be new forms of piety which the Saviour have wished for to practice. The cult of the merciful Jesus image

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<sup>41</sup> Sister Faustina writes: being immersed in the Godhead, I was united with the Three Divine Persons in such a way that as I was united with Jesus is both the Father and the Holy Spirit (Dz 1073, Cf. Dz 1121). This confirms that the mercy comes from *the Divine Trinity, the one merciful bosom* (Dz 522). In the litany of the Divine Mercy present in the “Diary”, she calls this divine quality flowing from the source of the mystery of the Holy Trinity (cf. Dz 949,1007).

<sup>42</sup> *Christ said to nun Faustina: My daughter, I desire that your heart was shaped along the lines of My Merciful Heart. You have to be filled with my mercy.* Dz 167. Cf. Dz 229.

<sup>43</sup> Priest M. Sopoćko developed the thought of Jesus and built his own definition of Divine Mercy. Cf. Michał SOPOĆKO, *Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1967), 13–14.

<sup>44</sup> The Saviour said Faustina about the sea (cf. Dz 178,718,1210,1214,1218) or abyss of mercy (cf. Dz 85,206,438,1146) which is unfathomable (cf. Dz 570,1059).

<sup>45</sup> Do not reject one sinner who seeks repentance for the Mystic is the greatest proof of His unfathomable mercy. Cf. Dz 1122.

(cf. Dz 47–49), establishing the Feast of Mercy in Guiding Sunday (cf. Dz 88,206,280,341), prayer by Chaplet of Divine Mercy (cf. Dz 687,754,811), litany and novena (cf. Dz 796) and the Hour of Mercy (cf. Dz 1572). Christ wished also to establish a new congregation, which charismata will be venerating, proclaiming and doing the mercy (cf. Dz 437–438, 664).

Just like to His two previous secretaries, Jesus also said to sister Faustina how much he suffers over infidelity of consecrated souls, and at the same urging them to renewal and improvement of life.<sup>46</sup>

Sister Faustina not immediately understood and accepted her mission in the deed of promoting Divine Mercy. Still, almost at the beginning of the “Diary” she wrote: *from today my own will does not exist*, she even crossed out these words (Dz 374), but for a long time she was still considering that she has to be active in giving this message to the biggest group as possible and accomplishing following wishes of Christ. Sometimes it was opposed by her Vilnius confessor which was reflected in their mutual correspondence.<sup>47</sup> Only at the end of her life she understood God’s will in this regard. She wrote: *my name is to be “sacrifice”* (Dz 135. Cf. Dz 923). And Christ told to her at that time: *My Daughter, what are you writing? —I answered: I write about You, Jesus, about Your latency in Holy Sacrament, about Your inconceivable love and mercy to the people. And said to me Jesus:—My most profound mystery secretary, know about, that you’re in exclusive Intimacy with Me, your task is to write down everything that I make known to you about My mercy, for the benefit of souls, which reading these things will sustain consolation and will take courage in coming near to Me. So I wish you to devote all your free moments to writing* (Dz 1693). Eventually, she withdrew from attempts to realise Christ’s demands. As an attempt she interpreted an attempt to leaving her own congregation and creating new (cf. Dz 1115–1117).

### 3. EXECUTORS OF THE MESSAGE OF GOD’S MERCY

From the perspective of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, it can be noticed that God rich in mercy has been announced to the world anew through other persons than those who have written His message.

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<sup>46</sup> The most painful wounds are caused in My Heart by infidelity of the souls, especially the ones I selected, the infidelity is the blade, which pierces my heart. Cf. Dz 367.

<sup>47</sup> *Listy świętej siostry Faustyny* [The Letters of Saint Faustina] (Kraków, 2005), 49–51, 99,129.

The first person, who should be mentioned, is the Blessed Michał Sopoćko, Vilnius confessor of Faustina Kowalska,<sup>48</sup> whom she called the apostle of divine mercy<sup>49</sup> in one of her letters.

Extraordinary spiritual experiences which he mentioned, spurred him to take an interest in Divine Mercy.<sup>50</sup> Finding confirmation of nun Faustina word's, from the teaching of the Church, allegedly coming from Jesus, he became more and more convinced to become an apostle of this cult, seeing a clear pastoral avail (cf. HC 252). After the imminent death of Sister Faustina (1938), it was priest Sopoćko who became a trustee of the revelation given to him.<sup>51</sup> Then, he wrote in his "Diary": *a conversation with her* [sister Faustina], *especially by reading her diary I deduced that the urges concern rather myself.*<sup>52</sup>

Exploring the effects of Divine Mercy in his life (cf. DzS 2. 54), he made them a foundation of his life of faith. Having become confident and aware of the role that God intended him to do, he then devoted all his life to accomplish His will, becoming a tireless preacher of God's mercy in the Church (cf. HC 245). Largely to the commitment and determination of the content of the apostolic revealed to Sister Faustina<sup>53</sup> is not forgotten and

<sup>48</sup> Mystic was supposed to know the father Sopoćko during one of visions (cf. Dz 53, 263). Jesus repeatedly taught her was to obey Him in all things (Dz 639,933,954), because *His eyes day and night [...] rests on Him* (Dz 86).

<sup>49</sup> *Listy świętej siostry Faustyny* [Saint Faustina's letters], 65.

<sup>50</sup> Henryk CIERESZKO, *Życie i działalność ks. Michała Sopoćki (1888–1975). Pełna biografia apostoła miłosierdzia Bożego* [Life and Activity of father. Michał Sopoćko (1888–1975). The complete biography of the apostle of God's mercy] (Kraków, 2006) [called: HC] 230–233.

<sup>51</sup> It should be recalled that the "Diary" written by Sister Faustina at the request of priest Sopoćko should not be treated as the only source of knowledge about the revelations she had. The first one was burned down in 1934 and recorded from memory at the request priest. Sopoćko. Part of the content of nun Faustina was conveyed verbally, during confession or spiritual direction. Some of them were in the writings of pr. Sopoćko. These statements are also to be regarded as a source of knowledge about the revelations she experienced this nun. HC253; [http://www.faustyna.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=314&Itemid=61](http://www.faustyna.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=314&Itemid=61), access 11.04.2014.

<sup>52</sup> Michał SOPOĆKO, *Dziennik* [The Diary], Białystok 2010, [called.: DzS], 2. 60.

<sup>53</sup> The content of personal revelation, which has received and wrote down nun Faustina, was transferred to this priest. The source of knowledge about him is not only carried out on his orders by nun F. Kowalska "Diary" which was partially burned, and then recreated. Also their common conversation, even during spiritual direction and the sacrament of confession should be considered as part of a personal revelation. Therefore, the proceedings (or omission) and the writings of priest Sopoćko, especially where straight points to sister Faustina, are the

the demands of Christ to the Church—realised. It is obvious that certain activities of a pastoral nature, to promote the cult of Divine Mercy was also taken up by sisters from Sister Faustina’s home congregation. With them, there was her Cracow confessor—Józef Andrasz SJ.

Father Sopoćko preached about Divine Mercy<sup>54</sup>; the first sermons during the lifetime of his penitent (cf. Dz 417,1072). From 1936 he had also been publishing articles and pamphlets on this matter (cf. DzS 2,52; HC 264, 479). He sought with the Church authorities, both in Poland<sup>55</sup> and in Vatican,<sup>56</sup> for permission to implement requests of Christ provided by Sister Faustina, although for a long time he did not reveal the true cause of his postulates. In 1948 he gave a speech at the congress of Theological Institutes entitled “The cult of the Heart of Jesus and the cult of Divine Mercy” which—in the opinion of his biographer, bishop H. Ciereszko—was an important event for the development of the cult of mercy (cf. HC 333). Father Sopoćko argued with the accusation that allegedly the piety of mercy competed or even denied the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus and pointed the complementarity of those two cults.<sup>57</sup> He was also involved in the building of the Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy in Vilnius.<sup>58</sup>

Also, with the efforts of this priest, during the life of sister Faustina and thanks to her instructions (cf. Dz 47,299,313,570), in 1934 a painting (now called Vilnius<sup>59</sup>) of Jesus King of Mercy (cf. Dz 88), commonly known as

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source of knowledge about the content of this revelation.

<sup>54</sup> In the spring and summer of 1940, in Vilnius Cathedral and suburban parishes, he gave a Passion sermon and conferences with the accent on divine mercy. Cf. HC 328. Some of them have been collected and published. Cf. Michał SOPOĆKO, *The Sermon on the mercy of God* (Białystok, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> More about this issue: HC 417–439.

<sup>56</sup> With the consent of the archbishop of Vilnius, he prepared a petition dated 20.10.1941 to the Pope with the request to establish the Feast of Divine Mercy in White Sunday. Cf. HC 331–332.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 479. This paper was published in: *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 49 (1948) 33–40; DzS 2, 92.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; DzS 2, 36. 53; HC 27–281.

<sup>59</sup> The cult of Divine Mercy as well as the image of the Merciful Jesus, which is called today “Kraków” or “Łagiewniki” painted by Adolf Hyła, was spread by the Sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy, to which belonged St. Faustina. Father Sopoćko saw it only in 1947 and—as noted in “Diary”—“I did not find the similarities image of Sister Faustina. A. Hyła did not respond to my remarks that it is not Saint Faustina’s image and made a lot (approx. 200) improper images (rays as ribbons or even the ropes directed toward the ground, when they should be directed to the viewer; eyes playfully staring at the viewer

“Divine Mercy image” was painted. Its creation was the fulfilment of Christ’s requests spoken to sister Faustina in Płock on 22 February 1931.<sup>60</sup> It was painted by the professor of Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, Eugeniusz Kazimirowski, and then it was first shown to the public at the initiative of Father Sopoćko in Ostra Brama on 26–28 April 1935,<sup>61</sup> during the Paschal Triduum ending the Jubilee Year of the Redemption (cf. DzS 2,51. Cf. Dz 417). On White Sunday 1937, father Sopoćko, with the consent of the archbishop of Vilnius, blessed the picture and hung it on the left side of the great altar in the church of St. Michael (cf. DzS 2,51), where for years it was publicly worshipped. Worshipers gathered in front of it in increasing numbers. Over time, they were making votive offerings in thanks for wishes answered. During the war, a copy of this picture was hung, among others, at the house gates and doors, believing that it will protect them from disaster lurking almost everywhere.<sup>62</sup> After the war, when leaving the Vilnius region, East Poles took with them the worship of the image and the cult of Divine Mercy.

Father Sopoćko also popularised new forms of piety which he found in her penitent’s “Diary”. The following were published: litany (cf. Dz 949), chaplet (cf. Dz 475–476) and novena<sup>63</sup> to the Divine Mercy (cf. HC 267) for the

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when they have to be directed downwards, the hand of blessing is too high as it should be at shoulder height; the whole figure is leaning like in dance, when it needs to be in the walking posture; background image to be dark, or it has to be against the door closed, because the image is supposed to represent Christ in when it came to the Apostles in the Upper Room and established the sacrament of penance (Jn 20: 19n), whereas Hyla made backgrounds different: flowers, meadow, mountains, sea, plants etc.). Reproductions of these images appeared in Rome, France, America and even Australia, as allegedly painted according the instructions of Sister Faustina. My protests were unsuccessful. DzS 2, 88—89111. After the war (1954.), on the initiative of father Sopoćko, there was organised a contest for the image of the merciful Jesus, called today “Kalisz” which was won by of L. Ślodziński. On 04.10.1954. Main Committee of the Polish Episcopate issued a ruling allowing the image to worship. Cf. DzS 2, 90; HC 424–426.

<sup>60</sup> Priest Sopoćko deciding to comply with this request of Christ to meet the insistence of his penitent, was guided not by the self-belief in the supernatural nature of the experience told by sister Faustina, but rather a personal curiosity. Cf. HC 253–254.

<sup>61</sup> It was the first Sunday after Easter, and thus the date of the planned feast of Divine Mercy. Cf. HC 259.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. O. ABRAMCZUK, *Magdalenki*, in Zygmunt ZIELIŃSKI (ed.), *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją 1939–1945. Metropolia wileńska i lwowska, zakony* [Religious life in Occupied Poland from 1939 to 1945. Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vilnius and Lvov, orders] (Warszawa, 1982), 876.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Dz 1209–1229. Christ promised to give all the graces of those who will recite the chaplet every day, for nine days before the Feast of Mercy. See Dz 796.

first time in mid-1937 (cf. Dz 1255, 1299). His enormous commitment, however, did not always translate to results achieved. He was instructed by Sister Faustina not to cease in his work, *even against surmount difficulties, even if it seemed that God does not want this, you cannot lose heart. Even if the judgment of the Church on the issue collapsed negative, you cannot lose heart* (DzS 2,60). These words after more than 20 years became prophetic.

At the end of November 1958, cardinal S. Wyszyński received decree (unpublished<sup>64</sup>) by the Congregation of the Holy Office which forbade to worship the cult of mercy according to visions of sister Faustina. Father M. Sopoćko was given the “Gravissimum monitum” (serious warning) and he was ordered to cease the defence and promotion of the cult (cf. HC 443). He surrendered to the will of the Church, although he did not feel released from the mission of promoting the cult. According to bishop H. Ciereszko, *he still was involved in the spread of worship, mainly through the work of the scientific justification for its values and needs, but also tirelessly turning to the church authorities about his acceptance* (HC 461). Since then, sister Faustina was nowhere to be found in his publications, basing on proclaiming the mercy of God in Holy Bible, Tradition and the Church’s liturgy.<sup>65</sup> He Continuously trusted to this mercy.

Father Sopoćko also contributed to the creation of the first community of the Order of Mercy which was demanded by Christ (cf. Dz 436–438,536,550, 585,664,765,1154). Her penitent gave him separate indication of his participation in the creation of this community. He was not meant to take the initiative, but had to be in this whole matter rather neutral and wait until God brings a *person from the world*, and the same work would start *from small things* (DzS 2,60).

Recently discovered writings of Helena Majewska (1902–1967), a sister of non-habit Congregation of the Sisters of the Angels, allow to explore her role in this work. Working in the thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Vilnius or

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<sup>64</sup> The official statement of the Congregation in this case was the “Notification”, which was published in March 1959. It was a softer version of that decree. It did not resolve the authenticity of the visions of nun Faustina. It did not raise the issue of holy charity, and only recommended to refrain from disseminating images and writings that show these forms of worship, which are taken from the revelations of Sister Faustina. Cf. DzS 2, 109; HC 441, 443.

<sup>65</sup> The decree was cancelled on 15 February 1978, less than three years after his death.



nearby Pryciuny, nun Helena from early childhood had been experiencing visions of Saints and Jesus<sup>66</sup> who called her the apostle of His mercy.<sup>67</sup>

Christ allegedly instructed her,<sup>68</sup> just as He did with the aforementioned Secretaries, to first herself fully trust in Divine Mercy (cf. DzM 17,20,27,57. 89,130,195–196), and then she should sacrifice herself for sinners.<sup>69</sup> Her understanding of Divine Mercy is the same as the one which results from the writings of sister Faustina—it is the greatest attribute of God (cf. DzM 42). Majewska had already practiced new forms of devotion to charity.<sup>70</sup> Christ dictated her the form of the mass designed for the feast of mercy (cf. DzM 28–29) and quite accurately explained the role of Poland in the salvation of the world (cf. DzM 35,93,121,142). He also mentioned that the Divine Mercy in its fullness is to be revealed to the world only when it is worshipped across the world (cf. DzM 3,25,58–64,92–93,130,190).

Still, Jesus wanted nun Helena to become a tool for spreading the cult to Himself in the world (cf. DzM 137; MW 28). She, expressing a joyful agreement on the plan of God, wrote in a memo: *I will adorn in the mercy of God here on earth and also somewhere at the gates of eternity* (DzM 80).

Obedient to the indications of Jesus, she went to his *father of charity in August 1940*, as she would call father M. Sopoćko.<sup>71</sup> Since then, he became her spiritual director, and she was a help in his apostolic commitment. In her “Diary” she repeatedly noted the recommendations and guidelines of Christ, which she conveyed to father Sopoćko, thus fulfilling Jesus’ request (cf. DzM 26, 40, 83, 147, 151, 172).

<sup>66</sup> *Since the dawn of my life, was my ideal, I longed for him, wanted and in Him everything I wanted, I found. H. Majewska, My Memories, [called: MW], in: Archives of the Sisters of the Angels, 2.*

<sup>67</sup> See Helena MAJEWSKA, *Diary*, [called: DzM], in: Archive of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Angels, 4. 13. He called her the martyr (See DzM 16), co-redemptrix (see DzM 46) and mother of souls (see 54 DzM).

<sup>68</sup> A characteristic feature of the catechesis given by Jesus is their similarity to those in Holy Bible. Cf. DzM 11–12,29,87,106,183.

<sup>69</sup> *Hela, I want you to give me your life in a heroic act as a ransom for the sins of the whole world.* DzM 83. Cf. DzM 19,46,54,152,180,193; MW 44.

<sup>70</sup> She prayed the chaplet (DzM 21,35), expressed veneration to the image of the merciful Jesus painted according to the indications of this mystic E. Kazimirowski (DzM 52,82–83,105, 116,172,176).

<sup>71</sup> Just like sister Faustina, she heard from Jesus to be absolutely obedient to Father Sopoćko (cf. DzM 53,57), as he filled the will of God in spreading the message of mercy. cf. DZM 4,15,65,73,163,185.

The most important mission to accomplish, was to help in organising a new religious congregation which was by mentioned St. F. Kowalska as a desire of Christ. Under date of 22 August 1941 nun Majewska wrote: *the God, giving me grace like that was late sister Faustina from the Congregation of the Sisters of the Magdalene, used me as an auxiliary tool, which is in agreement with the Father of mercy to help the one who will stand at the head of the newly organised Order of Mercy. My life should be hidden and unknown to anyone, so that my person does not cover those of sister Faustina in her special mission of mercy.*<sup>72</sup>

In mid-July 1940, she would heard from Jesus urgency directed to father Sopoćko that he already should begin to work on a new concertation.<sup>73</sup> A year later, Jadwiga Osińska (1914–1955), the graduate of Classical Philology of Vilnius University, came to Pryciun for personal retreat, where she worked with nun Majewska, helping in the texts in Latin.<sup>74</sup> Shortly afterwards, nun Helena heard further indication of Jesus: *Tell her [J. Osińska] to the fulfilment of my will she should not hesitate. I want to make her my founder of the beloved Order of the Divine Mercy. Let her prepare through prayer, sacrifice and deeper understanding of my truths of the holy faith. Let it be sure it's her, I call for this. It was the voice of the Lord Jesus, and so I have no doubt* (DzM 132). She shared her inspiration and reflections with the father Sopoćko. Although he never mentions the role in the formation of a new religious community played by this nun, the fact is that the records of the “Diary” are in line with his decisions.

Jadwiga Osińska on 15 October 1941 made (in the presence of sister H. Majewska, at the hands of priest M. Sopoćko) her first annual private

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<sup>72</sup> DzM 137. In several other places in “Diary” nun Majewska wrote, that her mission is either just to complement the work of sister Faustina (cf. DzM 71–72,176), or that Christ’s promises come true when the truth communicated to nun Faustina will be respected (cf. DzM 147), or that she feels admiration for the grace granted to Faustina (cf. DzM 40,137,168). Several times she confirms the words provided by sister F. Kowalska (cf. DzM 116,146,175).

<sup>73</sup> *In the morning, in the church, after receiving Holy Communion, the Lord Jesus said to me, to tell the father [priest Sopoćko] to start work on founding the new Order of the Divine Mercy now.* DZM 37.

<sup>74</sup> In memory of the J. Osińska, Sopoćko wrote: *Once p. Osińska told me that she intended to devote herself to the service of God only, but cannot find an order. [...] In July 1941, I have proposed sister Osińska a vacation with angelic sisters in Pryciuny, so under the supervision of sister Helena Majewska, she could get closer acquainted with them, and above all drawn to the exercises in devotion.* Michał SOPOĆKO, *Moje wspomnienie o Siostrze Jadwidze-Faustynie Osińskiej* [My memory of Sister Jadwiga-Faustina Osińska], in Białystok Archdiocese archive, LV 11.

vows in the chapel of the Ursuline Sisters in Vilnius, becoming the founder of the Order of Mercy (cf. DzM 162). She took the order name Faustina (cf. HC 343–344). Soon, five other women joined her: Izabela Naborowska, Ludmiła Roszko, Zofia Komorowska, Adela Alibekow and Jadwiga Malkiewicz.<sup>75</sup> In a short time, they formed the first community of the new Order of Mercy<sup>76</sup> called the Vilnius Six.<sup>77</sup>

Their first annual vows were made at the hands of father L. Żebrowski<sup>78</sup> on 11 April 1942 in Carmel, Vilnius, which was recorded in the local chronicle: *Here, the new Congregation of Divine Mercy has been founded when sister Faustina Kowalska and the first sisters made their vows* (HC 346). Nun Majewska presented its most accurate description (cf. DzM 175–176). It is significant that for the next 40 months at the time of hiding priest Sopoćko, the task of taking care of the Six, according to the will of the priest, has been put on the two sisters of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Angels: A. Gilewska and H. Majewska.<sup>79</sup>

After his return from hiding place to Vilnius in November 1944, the Six renewed their vows for the next year, making them the first time at the hands of their guardian, confirming the vision that Faustina Kowalska wrote in the “Diary”,<sup>80</sup> indicating that this demand of Christ was fulfilled.

The launched work of building the Order of Mercy was interrupted by repatriation. For father Sopoćko, the Six and thousands of Poles that meant resettlement. Naborowska, reporting on her farewell to mentioned angelic sisters in Vilnius in 1946, wrote in her “Diary”: *I learned today that Jesus clearly revealed His Will for our congregation to our Mother* [i.e. sister Majewska]. *He appeared several times and pointed us as the candidates for the new Assembly. That’s why Mother was our champion and our Father has*

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Michał SOPOĆKO, *Moje wspomnienie o Siostrze* [My Memory of Sister].

<sup>76</sup> The name of this community has changed. Father Sopoćko suggested to keep the name of the Congregation of the Servants (Handmaids) of Divine Mercy, as coming from sister Faustina. Cf. Michał SOPOĆKO, *List z dnia 02.02.1974 r.* [The letter dated 02.02.1974], in: Białystok Archdiocese archive, LX 6,1.

<sup>77</sup> Still, there has to be developed a full biography of each of the Vilnius Six. See Michał DAMAZYN, *Profesor Ludka. Życie i wiara* [Professor Ludka. Life and Faith] (Toruń, 2013); HC 344–345.

<sup>78</sup> At this time, for a few weeks, fr. Sopoćko was hiding before getting arrest in Czarny Bór.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. M. SOPOĆKO, *Moje wspomnienie o Siostrze* [My memory of Sister].

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Dz 613; Izabela NABOROWSKA, *Dziennik* [The Diary], in: Congregation of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus archive, 2, 107–108; HC 347.

entrusted to her “breeding chicks divine mercy”. Our father was her spiritual director and all the demands of the Lord Jesus were written in her diary.<sup>81</sup> This completes the help of sister Majewska in organising a new religious congregation, which was meeting demands of Christ. Since then, the community was developing without her presence and commitment. She worshiped Divine Mercy for the rest of her life. She kept in secrecy her participation in God’s work.

The first meeting of father Sopoćko with the Six after repatriation, in summer of 1948 in Myślibórz, was dramatic in its course, led to the division of the original community and the creation, with the consent of the priest, of two new communities existing to this day: habit-wearing religious Congregation of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus and the Institute of Divine Mercy, the secular community of consecrated life (cf. HC 510–517). This confirmed another vision of sister Faustina (cf. Dz 1155–1158). Both communities, grown from a single trunk, develop and operate today, calling, preaching and testifying Divine Mercy, but they do so in different apostolic circumstances.

Pope John Paul II had a huge and not to be underestimated part in spreading the spirituality of mercy. In Cracow, where he lived, studied, served as a priest and bishop, the cult of divine mercy somewhat in parallel was developing, foundations of which was the Łagiewniki sanctuary with the image of the merciful Jesus and the mortal remains of sister Faustina Kowalska. Karol Wojtyła himself often visited this place to pray.<sup>82</sup>

As soon as in the first years of his pontificate (1980), he had given to the Church an encyclical about Divine Mercy—“Dives in Misericordia”—sometimes called the Great Charter of Charity. In its eighth point he established its definition. Based on the observation that in the Saviour’s death there was a radical revelation of mercy, as love, which meets sin and death, which are sources of evil in the world today, he concludes, that the mercy of God (merciful love) is stronger than death and sin.<sup>83</sup> This is manifested also in his study over human poverty, moral misery, over every sinner, over every prodigal son, who forgives and restores it to the dignity of home master’s son.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup> I. NABOROWSKA, *Diary*, 2,153.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pozdrowienie końcowe po Mszy św. z okazji konsekracji świątyni Bożego Miłosierdzia w Krakowie-Łagiewnikach dnia 17 sierpnia 2002 r.* [Final greeting after Divine Mercy Shrine Holy Mass in Cracow-Łagiewniki of 17 August 2002].

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Waldemar SEREMAK, *Miłosierdzie Boże a nowa ewangelizacja*. Znaki czasu (Lublin, 2001), 119.

<sup>84</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in misericordia*, 5.

*So, citing John Paul II, it can be said—says prof. W. Seremak—the mercy of God, the appreciation of man by God, raising this man up bringing out goodness from man from all the forms of evil present in the man, which refers also to the world.*<sup>85</sup>

Such an approach to mercy, as noted by Pope, *is the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the power of His mission. This is how all of his disciples and followers understood and practiced mercy. It is an imperative to face this mercy and reveal it again.*<sup>86</sup> It is therefore necessary, according to John Paul II—contrary to the modern mind<sup>87</sup>—to spread and to remind to the man of today and to the world,<sup>88</sup> that God is the mercy,<sup>89</sup> because not only when a man, but also the whole of humanity, turn to the merciful God, they will be cleansed and renewed in their humanity. In the apostolic letter “Novo Millennio Ineunte” he taught: *Being God and man, Christ reveals us also the true face of man, “ fully reveals man to himself.”*<sup>90</sup>

This is what the pope has seen as an antidote to today’s dehumanisation of a man, for a genius in which the modern man believes made his existence torn away from God, *living as if He does not exist*<sup>91</sup> and *nothing is sacred anymore.*<sup>92</sup> Also, he wrote in the “Fides et Ratio” encyclical—*human lives increasingly in fear that his creations—naturally, not all and not the majority, but some, and it is these which contain a special as human ingenuity and entrepreneurship—they can be radically turned against man.*<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> W. SEREMAK, *Milosierdzie Boze*, 119.

<sup>86</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in misericordia*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>88</sup> *Open yourselves to God’s greatest gift, His love, which through the Cross of Christ appeared to the world as merciful one. Be ready to provide the rights of man. Help modern men and women to experience the merciful love of God! Let them in its splendour and warmth, will save humanity!* JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at Blonie Park on 18 August 2002*.

<sup>89</sup> *When we realise that the love that God has for us, does not stop in front of our sin or recoil before our offenses, but becomes even more attentive and generous; when we realize that it was a love to the passion and death of the Christ who consented to redeem us at the price of His own blood, then we exclaim in gratitude: “Yes, the Lord is rich in mercy” and finally say: “God is mercy”* JOHN PAUL II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 2.

<sup>90</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 23.

<sup>91</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 78.

<sup>92</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in misericordia*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et ratio*, 47.

In turning towards the mercy of God, John Paul II saw the remedy for the rampant evil and misfortune as well as the path of renewal of human dignity, humanity and the successful development of the world. In his book “Memory and Identity” he writes: *Revelation of Sister Faustina, focused on the mystery of Divine Mercy relates to the time before World War II. It was the time in which there were created and developed these ideologies of evil, i.e. nazism and communism. Sister Faustina became a spokeswoman for the message that the only truth, able to balance the evil of these ideologies is that God is Mercy—the truth about Merciful Christ.*<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, he postulated the need for renewal of human dignity. In 2002 he gave a speech in the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki of Cracow: *how badly today’s world needs God’s mercy! In every continent, from the depths of human suffering seems to rise a cry for mercy. Where hatred and the thirst for revenge dominate, where war brings suffering and death to the innocent, the need for the grace of mercy to settle human minds hearts and to bring peace. Where lack of respect for life and human dignity, the need for God’s merciful love, in whose light we see the inexpressible value of every human being. Mercy is needed to every injustice in the world will come to an end in the splendour of truth.*<sup>95</sup> Finding in one’s life the the merciful love of God heals a man, but it also leads towards another man, in which he is able to see his neighbour.

During the mentioned visit to Cracow in 2002 he taught: *When we realise this truth [God’s love to man], we realise that Christ’s call to mutual love similar to His love gives us all the same measure. We feel in some sense impelled us to use the gift of God’s merciful love themselves from day to day*

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<sup>94</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Pamięć i tożsamość* [Memory and Identity] (Kraków, 2005), 14. Pope Benedict XVI, however, in his homily on the Feast of Mercy in 2007 said the following words John Paul II: *He lived under two dictatorial regimes and in contact with poverty, shortages and violence deeply experienced the power of darkness that threaten the world in our times. Experienced but also no less intense, the presence of a God who opposes all its forces with a completely different and divine power: the power of mercy. Mercy puts limits of evil. In it is expressed entirely unique nature of God—His holiness, the power of truth and love [...] joined in the light of divine mercy, which apart from death and starting from God, tells us now in a completely new way. Trust—says—God’s mercy! Day after day they became men and women of God’s mercy! Mercy is the garment of light which the Lord gave us in Baptism. We cannot allow this light to be extinguished; on the contrary, it must grow within us every day and thus bring to the world the good news of God.* BENEDICT XVI, *Homilia z dnia 15 kwietnia 2007 r.* [Homily of 15.04.2007].

<sup>95</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homilia wygłoszona podczas poświęcenia bazyliki Miłosierdzia Bożego w Łagiewnikach w dniu 17 sierpnia 2002 r.* [Homily in Łagiewniki on 17 August 2002].

*gave their lives, making mercy towards the brothers. We realise that God, in showing us mercy, expects us to be the witnesses of mercy in today's world.*<sup>96</sup> That is why he begged for the imagination of mercy, charity of deeds, which will give the power to the charity of words.<sup>97</sup> He called to promote a spirituality of communion<sup>98</sup>, which is an imitation of God's mercy and starting from the internal church communion, by its nature aims at universal service.<sup>99</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century he pointed out: *mercy shown at the centre of Catholicism should now in some way flow back to the world through this sign, which has left an enduring legacy and remembrance of the communion experienced during the Anniversary.*<sup>100</sup>

According to John Paul II, a prayer asking God for mercy, with its preaching and showing should also be the constant practice of the Church. *At no time may the Church forget the prayer that is a cry for the mercy of God amid the many forms of evil which weigh upon humanity and threaten it. The more the human conscience loses its sense of the meaning of the words mercy and move away from God and the mystery of mercy, the more the Church has the right and duty to appeal to the God of mercy with loud cries.*<sup>101</sup>

Pope John Paul II entrusted the world to Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki Sanctuary of Divine Mercy on 17 August 2002 at Łagiewniki in Cracow. Then he prayed, saying: *God, merciful Father, [...] We entrust to you today the destiny of the world and of every human being. Bend down to us sinners, heal our weakness, conquer all evil, let all the inhabitants of the earth may experience your mercy. In You, the Triune God, we always find the source of hope.*<sup>102</sup>

Polish bishops, in a letter on the occasion of the VI Papal Day, reminded that *Pope John Paul II in all his teaching, was speaking of the man who is the way of the Church (cf. RH 14), showed a God who is rich in mercy, and the man who is our brother, and above all, a child of God the Creator and brother of Christ the Redeemer. This truth has concluded not only in word but also in all his relation to man. The peak of this was the meeting of John*

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<sup>96</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homilia wygłoszona podczas Mszy św. beatyfikacyjnej w dniu 18.08.2002 r.* [Homily in Łagiewniki on 18 August 2002].

<sup>97</sup> See JOHN PAUL II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 50.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>101</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in misericordia*, 15.

<sup>102</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *The act of entrusting the world to Divine Mercy of 17.08.2002.*

*Paul II with Ali Agca in prison, full of forgiving love.*<sup>103</sup> He was a witness of mercy which he tirelessly preached to the world through example of his life.

Saint John Paul II died on the eve of the feast of Divine Mercy established by himself, which has remained the last unfulfilled demand of Christ as written by sister Faustina Kowalska.<sup>104</sup> The Pope wrote in his last will: *I am asking everyone for forgiveness. I am also asking for prayer so that the mercy of God would appear greater than my weakness and unworthiness.*<sup>105</sup>

The persons and communities discussed briefly certainly are not all stones created by God in the contemporary mosaic of His mercy. They may be the noblest or most known to us. Certainly, however, we still are missing many. Especially, that this work is not yet completed.

Christ told St. Josefa Menendez that He has nine beloved souls (WdM 200). One of the secretaries of Jesus might also be Sister Mary Consolata Bertone (1903–1946) of the order of St Clare in Turin, whose beatification process began in 1995.<sup>106</sup> She was called the “comfort woman” in her religious community and she had also experienced visions of Jesus. After one of them she wrote down: *«Oh, I feel that one day God’s Heart, showing me the world, will tell me only sentence: “He trusted Me and believed Me!”—Yes, Jesus will make great things and I unite with the Blessed Virgin in thanksgiving singing the Magnificat in advance.*<sup>107</sup> By suffer and pure love, she was rewarding Jesus for the sins of others.

Also today there are many apostles of the message of Divine Mercy. Both persons and communities: the lay brothers and consecrated ones. New ones are founded all the time. In Toulon, France, there develops a clerical secular institute Missionaries of the Divine Mercy (Missionnaires de la Miséricorde Divi) currently acting under nearly diocesan law. Members of the community

<sup>103</sup> *Jan Paweł II - sługa miłosierdzia. List Episkopatu Polski na VI Dzień Papieski w Ojczyźnie w 2006 r.* [John Paul II—servant of Divine Mercy. Letter of the Polish Bishops’ Conference on VI Papal Day in home Church in 2006].

<sup>104</sup> John Paul II was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on the Feast of Divine Mercy in 2011.

<sup>105</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Will*.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. <http://www.kapucynkiostrow.pl/index.php/duchowosc/swieci/sl-b-maria-konsolata-betrone>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*



apart from spreading mercy, understand that their mission is new evangelisation, carried out especially among Muslims.<sup>108</sup>

It should be mentioned that many founders of other religious and secular institutes, although not making the mercy a charisma of the community founded by themselves, they either created its own concept<sup>109</sup> or their service to fellows is to be an imitation of a merciful God.<sup>110</sup> It is impossible today to name all communities, both formal and informal, and individual people in the Church that worship and proclaim Divine Mercy. It is already known and recalled worldwide.

Also, papal teaching about the mercy of God and the need for entrusting him did not end with the death of the Polish Pope. In the teaching of Benedict XVI this truth of our faith was also taken. On the Feast of the Divine Mercy in 2007, and his eightieth birthday, he said: *In the word “mercy” he [John Paul II] found the summarised and reinterpreted the whole mystery of the Redemption for our time.*<sup>111</sup> He deepened in the encyclical “Deus Caritas Est” the teaching of John Paul II encyclical on Divine Mercy.<sup>112</sup> He also published the encyclical “Spe Salvi” on Christian hope.

Pope Francis teaches also about the mercy of God, for example in his homily on the day of taking the Lateran Basilica on the Feast of Divine Mercy in 2013. After the “Angelus” prayer in June 2013, he said among other things: *Mercy of Jesus is not just a feeling. It is indeed a force that gives life, which raises man.*<sup>113</sup>

Since the death of sister Faustina less than a century expired, but the face of the Church changed very much. It is a mistake to argue that only this one mystic is at the genesis of spiritual renewal of mercy. As it was shown, there

<sup>108</sup> This community refers to the visions of St. Faustina Kowalska, blessed father Michal Sopoćko and teachings of John Paul II. Source: <http://misericordedivine.fr>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>109</sup> Blessed Maria Karłowska, founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence Shepherd. Source: <http://www.pasterki.diecezja.torun.pl>, access 11.04.2014.

<sup>110</sup> Bl. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity (Congregation Sororum Missionarium Caritatis). In addition to the three basic vows of poverty, obedience and chastity, they vow wholeheartedly the performed selfless service to the poorest of the poor.

<sup>111</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Homilia z dnia 15.02.2007 r.* [Homily of 15 February 2007].

<sup>112</sup> JOHN PAUL II, speaking of divine mercy fully revealed in Christ referred to the Semitic notions of love. In contrast, Benedict XVI focused his attention on Hellenic thought, that at a certain stage of development of faith has become a tool to express it. See [http://www.wacom2011.pl/benedykt\\_xvi.htm](http://www.wacom2011.pl/benedykt_xvi.htm), access 11.04.2014.

<sup>113</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Solemnity of “Angelus” of 9 June 2013.

were many individuals, even though the catalogue remains fully unrecognised and infinite. All of them were (are) only the tools in the hands of God who is rich in mercy, who thanks to their obedience to His Will leads His Church through the present day, continually renewing it.

Today it seems to be a prophetic word that a few days before the first vows of the Six, in April 1942, father Michał Sopoćko wrote to them from the hiding place: Hell trembles in its foundations towards this new and yet old word, which will soon will be heard all over the world! Bridle, the prince of hell, in your convulsive seizures for the end of your reign is nigh! [...] *Here, new apostles of Christ arise, whom they wanted to fight, forming a host of new servants and handmaids, which not only complement the masses closed in prison, tortured, deported and killed, but will create a new family of God, which will abbot the whole world with a strong plough of trust in the divine mercy—the slogan that will warm as it was cold, soften what was hard, revive what was brittle, light that was fading, mist which was dry, wake up what was sleeping, connect individuals, families, societies, nations and countries embrace true brotherly love of God and neighbour.*<sup>114</sup>

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## SEKRETARKI I APOSTOŁOWIE MIŁOSIERNEGO BOGA

### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Miłosierdzie Boże, które dziś na powrót zna i czci cały Kościół, nie jest epizodem w historii zbawienia zaistniałym przez widzenia św. Faustyny Kowalskiej, zostało rozpowszechnione dzięki posłudze św. Jana Pawła II. Przymiot ten, znany z lektury najwcześniejszych ksiąg Pisma Świętego, obecny był w nauczaniu Kościoła, jak i w praktyce duchowej przez wszystkie wieki. Niesłusznie także przeciwstawia się miłosierdzie Boże Jego miłości, przypomnianej przez widzenia św. Małgorzaty Alacoque. Tekst ten wykazuje ciągłość planu zbawienia, który od wieków i sukcesywnie realizuje Bóg przy pomocy wybranych przez siebie ludzi. Wskazuje na komplementarność “wielkich” objawień M. Alacoque i F. Kowalskiej, które zdeterminowały pobożność Kościoła oraz przywołuje niektóre z osób, powołanych do szczenia czci wobec Boga, który jest Miłością i Miłosierdziem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Miłosierdzie Boże; Siostra Faustyna Kowalska; Michał Sopoćko; Małgorzata Alacoque.