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MARY AS A MYSTICAL PARADISE.
A CONCEPT OF SYMBOLIC AND MYSTICAL MARIOLOGY
OF JACEK MAJEWSKI OP

A b s t r a c t. A demonstration of the 17th-century Mariology can be found in a book by Jacek Majewski, a Dominican monk, entitled *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* (“A Desert Made Into a Paradise”), which was published in Lublin in 1753. The author presents Mary as a mystical paradise indwelt by God and full of Divine gifts growing in her like the flowers and springs of the Paradise. J. Majewski’s treatise differs from contemporary works especially in terms of the language and line of argument. Although *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* is steeped in symbols, comparisons, allegories and spiritual meanings, it evades the arbitrariness of free associations. Each symbol and metaphor refer to Scripture and concern God’s true activity in human history. In order to fully appreciate the publication, we ought to bear in mind the existence of three levels of symbolism that we come across there: Biblical, mystical, which depicts God’s activity in the souls of both Mary and believers, and regional, which is connected to the town of Krasnobród.

Key words: Mary; Mariology; the Paradise; Immaculata; Mother of God.; Marian apparitions.

INTRODUCTION

In the 18th century Poland enjoyed a period of rapid development of theological literature, which reflected spiritual and theological trends of the age. Among the books published were not only books about devotion and preaching, but also treatises of systematic theology. A demonstration of the 17th-century Mariology can be found in a book by Jacek Majewski, a Dominican monk, entitled *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* (“A Desert Made into a Paradise”), which was published in Lublin in 1753.¹ It was not until the release

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¹ Jacek MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise] (Lublin, 2015; reprint of the 1753 edition).

of its reprint in 2015 that the book was finally made available to people outside the circle of the researches interested in the history of the shrine in Krasnobród in the Zamość region. Not only does the publication serve as a valuable theological work, but also as a significant historical source of information about the development of Marian devotion in Krasnobród. The author presents Mary as a mystical paradise indwelt by God and full of Divine gifts growing in her like the flowers and springs of the Paradise. Her arrival in Krasnobród transformed this abandoned desert into a paradise. Since the day of Our Lady's first apparition in 1640, Krasnobród has been a place of Her constant and special protection for the inhabitants and pilgrims, which has been proved by sundry miracles and graces, taking place even today. The author repeatedly stresses this continuous link between Mary and Krasnobród.

A present-day reader will undoubtedly be interested in a theological reasoning behind making a comparison between Mary and the Paradise, since we lack the understanding of the manner of thinking of the 17th and 18th centuries. It is worth noting that J. Majewski's treatise differs from contemporary works especially in terms of the language and line of argument. Although *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* is steeped in symbols, comparisons, allegories and spiritual meanings, it evades the arbitrariness of free associations found in the majority of poetic works. Each symbol and metaphor refer to Scripture and concern God's true activity in human history. Fr Majewski treats God and His work in the soul as a reality accessible to our experience, whose fruits in the form of man's good life can be seen with the naked eye. In order to fully appreciate the publication, we ought to bear in mind the existence of three levels of symbolism that we come across there: Biblical, mystical, which depicts God's activity in the souls of both Mary and believers, and regional, which is connected to the town of Krasnobród. Places and spatial objects are used by the author as symbols of the spiritual. For Fr Majewski, both the Srzeniawa river (currently known as the Wieprz) and the springs surrounding the chapel of the apparitions stand for the mercy and abundance of the Holy Spirit's activity in Mary, and—through Her—in the Desert of Krasnobród, which thanks to Her became a paradise.

1. MARY AS THE TRUE PARADISE

The idea of likening Mary to the Paradise might be found in many Christian authors' texts already in the ancient times. The times of Fr Jacek Majew-

ski were no exception as they saw the creation of an outstanding treatise written by St Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort titled *True Devotion to Mary*, which bears much resemblance as to its meaning, symbolism and line of argument to the work under scrutiny here. Nevertheless, Fr Majewski could not have known the work of the Frenchman because it would not be discovered until 1842 (Montfort died in 1716). Therefore, the uniqueness of the Dominican from Krasnoblód² should be all the more visible. Basing his theory on Scripture and the theological interpretation of Biblical symbolism found in Christian texts, he alone composed a theological and mystical image of Mary, who appeared in Krasnoblód, as a paradise for all who seek Her help.

In his opinion, the Paradise should be primarily understood mystically—just like the Kingdom of God—as a land of human souls that God dwells in, which is consequently filled with happiness and joy of life. What stems from this is an irrefutable claim that it was not God who expelled man from the Paradise, but it was rather man himself who deserted the joy of the Paradise—i.e. God—by sinning and heeding satan. The moment man “erased” God from his life, the earth ceased to be the Paradise. So as to prove that the Paradise is God’s work which however requires man’s consent, the author also recalls St Athanasius’s conviction that in the person of Mary “the Paradise was planted by the hand of the Lord.”³ In Biblical symbolism “the hand of the Lord” signifies the Holy Spirit-Creator, by the power of whom all spiritual and material works are made, and especially saints, who are the most beautiful vessels of the Spirit. What most people associate with the Paradise—joy, eternal life, the state of peace and joy—in fact occurred in the person of Mary under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Immaculate Mary became a paradise for the new Adam—Christ—and Her interior was filled with the scent of the Holy Spirit, which is more delightful than that of any flowers on earth.

Fr Majewski completes this evocative symbolism by comparing Christ to the Tree of Life, rooted in the Paradise, which illustrate not only the constant relation between Christ and Mary, but also the fact that all fruits of the redemption were earned by Christ and Mary alike. Christ, as the true Tree of

² It is known that Jacek Majewski lived in Lublin, where he worked as the lecturer of theology and philosophy. He must have stayed in Krasnoblód, but as for today it remains unknown when exactly. When *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* was published, Fr Patrycy Rossołowski was the prior in Krasnoblód.

³ Cf. J. MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise], 22.

Life, brings forth the fruits of eternal life, which for “the children of the new Adam” did not come to be until the Resurrection.⁴ Just as the earthly paradise stands for God’s dwelling place with man, so too the eternal Paradise means man’s dwelling place with God.

St Gregory the Miracle-Worker, whom Fr Majewski cites, calls Mary “the reasoning paradise.”⁵ What it comes down to is the fact that Mary was not a passive instrument, but she became the first true “place” of God’s supernatural activity since the times of the first Paradise because she consciously chose God as Her greatest and unique richness. Now, Mary, who with full obedience and trust in God agreed with His will, was endowed with an extraordinary gift of God Himself, who decided to dwell in Her. She is the *locus habitationis gloriae Dei*—the place where God’s glory dwells.⁶ In this way, Fr Majewski defies purely earthly and spatial imaginings of the true Paradise inhabited by man alone. In Majewski’s view, God is the main inhabitant of the Paradise, which is why Mary—“God’s hereditary paradise”⁷—is shown as the most perfect work of the Holy Spirit, the Right Hand of the Lord (*Dextera Domini*), where He gathered all the perfection.⁸ The paradise in question personifies prosperity, peace and happiness.

2. THE DESERT AS A PLACE PREPARED FOR GOD

Before Fr Majewski goes on to show how Krasnobród turned into a paradise, he helps the reader to grasp the situation man found himself in as an exile from the Paradise into the Desert of the World, “a tangled maze full of brushwood and thickets of worldly lawlessness from where it is hard to get to the heavenly Paradise.”⁹ The title itself—“A Desert Made Into a Paradise”—as the author points out in the Introduction, was born when he saw

⁴ Ibidem, 21.

⁵ Ibidem; Cf. Irena SASZKO, *Rozświetlona przez Światłość Trójstępczną. Relacja Theotokos do Osób Trójcy Przenajświętszej w tradycji liturgicznej Kościoła Prawosławnego* [Illuminated by the Triune Light. The Relation of the Theotokos to the Persons of the Holy Trinity in the Liturgical Tradition of the Orthodox Church] (Lublin, 2014), 204-209.

⁶ J. MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise], 4: *Wstęp* [Introduction].

⁷ Ibidem, 21.

⁸ Ibidem, 22; cf. Raniero CANTALAMESSA, *Maryja Zwierciadłem dla Kościoła* [Mary as the Mirror of the Church], trans. Janusz Królikowski (Warszawa, 1995), 40-42.

⁹ J. MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise], 2.

the town of Krasnobród hidden in the desert. The word “desert” derives from the verb “to desert”¹⁰ and thus evokes abandonment. What the Dominican monk tries to say here is that the path to the Paradise runs through the desert, which is fraught with dangers, poisonous snakes and other wild beasts. He likens the way through the desert to the forty-year-long wilderness wandering of the people of Israel to the Promised Land. The meaning of the desert is multi-level and may be understood in the following ways:

I. as a desert-like place through which runs the path to the Paradise;

I. as a perilous and uninhabited place full of various beasts like satan and sinners;

II. as Mary, who is a fertile and safe desert, for she is free from any cracks through which satan’s temptations may enter, yet She is filled with unconditional love for the Triune God;

II. as a metaphor for the Evangelical virtue of poverty, which consists in complete freedom from attachment to material things, which protects us from losing sight of the path to the Paradise.

Majewski’s work offers us numerous allusions to the theology of internal life. In particular, the image of the desert has spiritual overtones with reference to Mary’s virtues. The author affirms that “the Blessed Virgin is a desert because She deserted riches, caresses, grandeur and worldly praise, thinking them less than dung so as only to taken possession of Christ. O blissful Desert that blossom all the more and abound by abandoning.”¹¹ On the basis of Mary’s life, Fr Majewski explains how to become an internally blessed desert so that God may fill us with Himself completely. The major motif here is loving God above all things which He created for us. This freedom of God’s love is the source of exceptional joy for man. Christ described it in the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3). Through the fault of original sin, which boils down to turning one’s back on God, the earth turned into a desert that “brings forth briars and thorns.”¹² Thanks to the fact that Mary—unlike Adam and Eve—accepted God and the grace of motherhood, Her life became fertile. Mary’s life was fruitful because She gave birth to the Giver of Life, having Her part in the process of giving birth to men for God for all eternity.¹³ Thanks to Her, the earth is no longer a curse for man because Mary gave birth to the

¹⁰ Ibidem, 10.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem, 13.

¹³ Ibidem.

Redeemer who brought back the blessing for men and dwelt among them.¹⁴ Majewski believes that the presence of Mary in Krasnobród is a blessing for its inhabitants and pilgrims since the places where Mary appears will never fall short of God's blessing. Hence, he tells the pilgrims with conviction:

You know not where your bliss lies
 If like the world you seek paradise.
 Into a paradise the desert did bloom
 When Mary made there her miraculous room
 O Sons of Adam to the Paradise make haste
 For the gate awaits you, do not be disgraced!

3. THE FOUNT OF MERCY

The symbolism of the spring found in Chapter 10 is remarkably vivid as it shifts the emphasis from the place of apparitions in Krasnobród to the true spring in God, which thanks to Mary's soul may be found in all human souls. As Fr Majewski argues, being completely deified and living by God, Mary is a spring of countless graces for man. The author makes a reference to the Chapter 2 of Book of Genesis, where we read about a river that flowed through the Garden of Eden and was so plentiful that it split into four branches, which could then water the whole earth.¹⁵ He then moves on to mention the prophet Ezekiel's vision in which water flows from underneath the Temple (Ezek 47) and stands for God's unending blessing. According to Fr Majewski, the spring is a symbol of God's generosity and limitlessness of His graces, taking its form in mercy. Mary has been forever incorporated in the fertility of God Himself, becoming Mother of God's life for man. Since then, She has had her share in every single gift of God's life. Undoubtedly, this spring starts in God alone, which is why it is inexhaustible.¹⁶

It seems that the symbolism of the spring helps us understand the unbreakable bond of the life of grace that flows to man from both Christ and His Mother simultaneously. Majewski shows us that the moment Jesus was conceived in Mary's by the Holy Spirit, one of the springs "flowed into the other" and they have been one ever since.¹⁷ This is obviously the mystery

¹⁴ Ibidem, 14; R. CNATALAMESSA, *Maryja Zwierciadłem dla Kościoła* [Mary as the Mirror of the Church], 65-70.

¹⁵ J. MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise], 90.

¹⁶ I. SASZKO, *Rozświetlona przez Światłość Trójstoniczną* [Illuminated by the Triune Light], 205.

¹⁷ J. MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise], 91.

of the Holy Spirit, who united the hearts of Mary and Jesus, the lives of the Mother and the Son for ever. Making use of an image of the Krasnoblód spring which used to overflow with water, the Dominican wants to convince us that God does not stint on His graces—or rather His life—through the mediation of Mary, who is full of grace.¹⁸

Fr Majewski incorporates yet another image in order to convey the idea that just as a spring never ceases to give water, so too Mary may be called “the spring of mercy” as graces are granted through Her every day, constantly and with no limits. Thus, Fr J. Majewski proves that the miracles and graces that took place in the Desert of Krasnoblód are but a few examples of Mary’s goodness and tenderness¹⁹ and all who come to the Mother are given “golden graces” and “are healed.”²⁰

In the introductory dedication, the author turns to Mary, saying: “To this place, that is to you, o mystical Paradise, from which abundant grace flowed into the Desert of Krasnoblód.”²¹ These words deepen the symbolism of the spring even more. The person of the Mother of Mercy, who is the spring of Divine graces, is a mystical paradise, which is constantly changing the desert of Krasnoblód into a paradise. But for Her, Krasnoblód would be but a dry, waterless desert.

4. MARY FILLED WITH LIGHT SMITES THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS

Majewski pays a lot of attention to Mary’s power over satan and evil spirits and Her protection for the ones tempted by a demon. Quoting a number of Medieval authors, including Sts Bernard and Bonaventure, he claims that the name of Mary is powerful by itself when we call Her with faith. “Visible foes are less afraid of an opposing army of thousands than aerial powers are of the name of Mary, Her protection and example. They melt and disappear like wax near fire whenever they hear Her name be frequently called, uttered and imitated devoutly.”²²

¹⁸ Ibidem, 90-91; cf. Czesław S. BARTNIK, *Matka Boża* [Mother of God] (Lublin, 2012), 162-164.

¹⁹ J. MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise], 93.

²⁰ Ibidem, 97.

²¹ Ibidem, 5.

²² Ibidem, 26; cf. Czesław S. BARTNIK, *Matka Boża* [Mother of God], 315.

The context of this meditation is clear—the description of the Paradise from Genesis and the so-called Protevangelium (Gen 3:15), as well as the miraculous deliverance of the possessed Jakub Ruszczyk in the woods of Krasnobród.²³ However, pondering the case of the possession, the author does not enquire into its causes, but instead he focuses on the will of God who by means of the miracle of deliverance wishes to manifest His might and mercy to man, as well as the glory of the Mother of God.²⁴ Mary appeared there as the Queen of Angels and the Slayer of hell, sin and the devil.²⁵ What is more, the miracle occurred on the feast of Our Lady of Angels, on 5 August 1640. During the apparition Jakub heard the Mother of God's voice coming from a great light: "Place a statue here, for here the glory of my Son shall be celebrated. To prove it, let it be known to you that you have been set free from the devil."²⁶

Fr Jacek Majewski maintains that the extraordinary power of Mary over satan is the fruit of not only Her election as the Mother of the Saviour, but Her personal sanctity which radiates like light. The symbolism of light is of utmost importance to the author as it helps him outline Mary's holiness.²⁷ Since Mary is holy and immaculately conceived, or sinless, and Her aspirations have never opposed God's will, She is all light. "The beaming torch that illuminates the face of the earth, endowed with a mirror of golden light is all beautiful and all immaculate; She who gave the faithful the Sun that knows no end."²⁸ By virtue of being filled with the light of the Holy Spirit, Mary struck Lucifer with it, protecting the people of Krasnobród and its neighbouring area.²⁹ Fr J. Majewski does not fail to remind us here of Mary's recurring apparitions with a procession of angels, calling Her "the Morning Star."³⁰

²³ J. MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise], 27-30.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 28.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 31.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 30.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 34-36; cf. Andrzej A. NAPIÓRKOWSKI, *Maryja jest piękna* [Mary is Beautiful] (Kraków, 2016), 13-18.

²⁸ Cf. the translation of St John Damascene's hymn about the Mother of God: *Lucerna folgoris terre fines illustrans, omnino aureo lumine praedita, tota pulchra, et tota immaculata, que lucem occasu carentem fidelibus protulit*. Cf. J. MAJEWSKI, *Pustynia w Ray Zamieniona* [A Desert Made into a Paradise], 34.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 34-35.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 34.

We should also have in mind that Fr Majewski is far from being psychological about God's work in the soul, which is a common practice today. Writing about the substance of the soul, he means the true internal life and the permanence of the changes that take place in the soul under the influence of grace and sin alike. Speaking about spiritual activity, the man of today suggests the irrational, alongside thoughts and feelings. In Majewski's view, the consequences of what comes about in the substance of the soul is not less real than what takes place in the body. God's activity in Mary's soul encompasses Her whole person, transforming Her into the most beautiful creature. Thus, Mary as *tota pulchra* radiates from inside with the glow of God's Spirit. Using theological terms, we should say that Mary is like the icon of the Holy Spirit owing to the Divine beauty that dwells in Her.³¹

The event of the exorcism performed by Mary in Krasnobród on the severely possessed Jakub Ruszczyk intertwines with a general mystical vision of the Paradise and the desert. Fr Majewski calls "paradise" both Mary and Krasnobród, which is Her beloved place where She has remained with pleasure, granting innumerable graces and, above all, protecting it from evil. Thanks to numerous testimonies of miraculous Divine interventions, the author asserts that Krasnobród is a chosen place where God wishes to grant graces through Mary. "I have chosen, says the Lord, and dedicated this place so that my Name may stay here for ages, and my eyes and heart be found here."³² In order to emphasise the constancy of God's election of the place, the Dominican quotes the word of the patriarch Jacob: "How awesome is this shrine! This is nothing else but an abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven!" (Gen 28:17). God's visitation of Krasnobród ensures the blessing for future generations.³³

CONCLUSION

The Mariology of Fr Jacek Majewski, a 18th-century Dominican monk from Lublin, is both a spiritual and dogmatic treatise. Today, in the theological line of argument we tend to separate the mystical and symbolic layers, based on spiritual experience and aesthetic imagination, from theological

³¹ Cf. Bruno FORTE, *Maryja Ikona Tajemnicy. Zarys mariologii symboliczno-narracyjnej* [Mary as the Icon of the Mystery. An Outline of a Symbolic and Narrative Mariology], trans. B. Widła (Warszawa, 1999), 21-22.

³² *Ibidem*, 37.

³³ *Ibidem*, 28.

discourse due to distinct points of departure and different sources of knowledge. Majewski, however, supposes that what the Biblical revelation—universal as it is—and the present or local (Latin *locus*) experience of God's activity have in common is their origin; they come from the same Triune God and unveil His eternal plan. The unchanging points of this plan include foundational events (the Creation, Incarnation, Redemption, Descent of the Holy Spirit) and people (Christ, Mary). By the Incarnation, the plan of salvation was given its invariable Christological and Marian shape. Majewski meticulously reinterprets the local events in a universal sense. After all, God's activity has the same universal structure at a given time and place through the person of Mary. A present-day author would have certainly separated the historical part, which depicts dry facts of the history of the shrine of Krasnobród, from the theological one, comprising general doctrine. Fr Majewski treats the facts from the chronicles of the turn of the 17th century, which pertain to the miracles of healing and *Mariophanies*, as the time of salvation—*kairos*. This is why Majewski's allegorical and spiritual Mariology is free from the danger of the mythologisation of faith.

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MARYJA JAKO RAJ MISTYCZNY.
KONCEPCJA MARIOLOGII SYMBOLICZNEJ I MISTYCZNEJ
JACKA MAJEWSKIEGO OP

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

Artykuł prezentuje mariologię XVIII-wiecznego dominikanina z Lublina, o. Jacka Majewskiego. Ów wykład mariologii symboliczno-mistycznej znajdujemy w książce *Pustynia w Ray zamieniona*, opublikowanej w 1753 roku. Majewski ukazuje Maryję jako Raj mistyczny zamieszkiwany przez Boga i napełniony bogactwem Bożych darów na podobieństwo kwiatów i źródeł rajszych. Traktat o. J. Majewskiego różni się od dzisiejszych dzieł teologicznych zwłaszcza pod względem językowym i argumentacyjnym. *Pustynia w Ray zamieniona* jest pełna symboli, porównań, alegorii i duchowych sensów, ale nie ma w niej dowolności skojarzeń. Każdy symbol lub metafora ma swoje odniesienie biblijne i dotyczy rzeczywistego działania Boga w ludzkiej historii. Aby docenić w pełni wspomniane dzieło, należy pamiętać o istnieniu w nim trzech poziomów symbolizowania: symboliki biblijnej, symboliki mistycznej, opisującej aktywność Boga w duszy Maryi i ludzi wierzących, oraz symboliki związanej ze środowiskiem krasnobrodzkim.

Słowa kluczowe: Maryja; mariologia; Raj; Niepokalana; Matka Boża.