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THE IDEA OF DIVINE MERCY IN THE PRIVATE VISIONS OF S. FAUSTINA KOWALSKA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RECENT THEOLOGY

The personal experience of God in the life of Saint Sister Faustina Kowalska (1905–1938), very inner and difficult to define and describe, developed in a strict connection with the mystery of Divine Mercy. She became acquainted with this mystery during the long process of inner evolution and through the perception of the voice of God in her soul. God Himself revealed this great mystery, which expresses his attitude toward man and the world. The mystery of Divine Mercy, discovered by Sister Faustina in her mystical experience touched the inner life of the Holy Trinity, consisting in the love of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The truth of the Divine Mercy experienced by Sister Faustina and described in her *Diary*, had deep roots in her faith, in her sacramental life and in her prayer.

Sister Faustina's experience of faith, including also the experience of Divine Mercy, was rooted in the teaching of the Church and in the charisma of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. The Roman-Catholic theology before the Second Vatican Council spoke about the Divine Mercy pointing at the presence in the act of creation of the world and man, and in the salvation. The Divine Mercy was presented as a chance for a weak man in the front of the justice of God. The charisma of the Congregation – the second factor of the mystical experience of Sister Faustina – helped her to understand the truth of the Divine Mercy and to practice the devotion to God of Mercy.

The foundation of the mystical experience of Sister Faustina is rooted also in the sacraments and in her prayer. Prayer and sacramental life expressed her longing for God and the desire to reach Him. It helped her to discover the voice of God in her soul and to fulfill the mission entrusted to her by God towards the world. The prayer and sacraments gave her the possibility to find God of Mercy in the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ: in His terrestrial life, in

His passion, death and resurrection. To meet Jesus, who reveals the Divine Mercy in His death and resurrection was for Saint Faustina a decisive moment in her experience of God and in her mission to the world.

The Theological Formation of S. Faustina Kowalska

The most important influence on the theological experience of Sister Faustina Kowalska was, undoubtedly, that of her spiritual director, Father Michael Sopoćko, professor of the dogmatic theology at the University of Stefan Batory in Vilnius and the author of many publications on Divine Mercy¹. Sister Faustina read his pamphlet *Divine Mercy. Theological and practical Study*, published in Vilnius in 1936². When she became acquainted with his article on Divine Mercy published in *Tygodnik Wileński* (April 4th, 1937), she said that many expressions of M. Sopoćko conformed to the words of Jesus she had heard in her heart³. Sister Faustina, when she was in convent in Cracow, corresponded also with M. Sopoćko asking his opinion on the theological problems of Divine Mercy.

The problem of Divine Mercy, as the greatest attribute of God, appeared first in her inner dialogue with Jesus, when Sister Faustina asked the Lord, at the request of M. Sopoćko, about the meaning of the two rays on the image revealed to her, which she had to transmit to the world. She heard the voice of Jesus: "Proclaim that mercy is the greatest attribute of God" (D. 301). The same truth about Divine Mercy was present during the spiritual retreat in Vilnius from August 12 to 16, 1935, when Jesus spoke to her – as she herself says – through M. Ryczkowski, SI: "All the attributes of God, such as omnipotence and wisdom, serve to reveal to us the greatest of His attributes; namely, His goodness. God's goodness is the greatest of

¹ M. Sopoćko, *De Misericordia Dei deque Eiusdem festo instituendo*, Vilnius 1938; *Godzina święta i Nowenna o Miłosierdzie Boże nad światem* [The Holy Hour and the Novena about the Divine Mercy for the World], Poznań 1949; idem, *Król Miłosierdzia* [The King of Mercy], Poznań 1948; *Miłosierdzie Boże nadzieją ludzkości* [The Divine Mercy as a Hope for the Mankind], Wrocław 1948; *Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego* [The Mercy of God in His Deeds], London 1959; *O święto Najmiłosierniejszego Zbawiciela* [The Feast of the Most Merciful Savior], Poznań 1947; *Poznajemy Boga w Jego Miłosierdziu* [We know God in His Mercy], Poznań 1949.

² D. 675, note 365. *Divine Mercy in my Soul. The Diary of Sister M. Faustina Kowalska*, Stockbridge MA, 1987.

³ D. 1081–1082; Note 512.

God's attributes" (D. 458). Sister Faustina confirmed of the conformity the teaching of M. Ryczkowski with the words of Jesus on Divine Mercy: "Everything that Father said in the course of the meditation about the goodness of God, was exactly what Jesus had said to me concerning the Feast of Mercy" (D. 458). This accordance of the private revelation of Jesus with one of retreat preachers was for Sister Faustina a confirmation of the message of Divine Mercy. She heard her about Divine Mercy also from confessor. During a confession he tried to convince her that the mercy of God was His biggest attribute: "And he asked me, "Do you know that the mercy of the Lord is greater than all His works, that it is the crown of His works?" And I listened attentively to these words which the Lord was speaking through the mouth of the priest. Although I believe that it is always God who speaks through the lips of the priest in the confessional I experienced it in a special way on that occasion" (D. 637). In this way Sister Faustina matured to the understanding of the Mystery of God received in the inner experience.

Sister Faustina talked about her visions of Merciful Jesus and the message of Divine Mercy, which she had to transmit to the world, with the Archbishop of Vilnius Romuald Jałbrzykowski on January 8, 1936: "When I went to see the Archbishop [Jałbrzykowski], I told him that Jesus was asking me to pray for God's mercy upon the world and wished that a religious congregation which would entreat the mercy of God for the world would be founded. I asked his permission for all the Lord Jesus was demanding of me. Archbishop answered me in these words: "As for prayer, I give my permission and even encourage you, Sister, to pray as much as possible for the world and to beg God's mercy, as mercy is what we all need" (D. 585)⁴. The Archbishop Jałbrzykowski invited her to pray to Divine Mercy and confirmed the world needed it, but he remained very reserved about the private revelations of Merciful Jesus and the demand to found the new congregation and the new form of devotion. Nevertheless, Sister Faustina received a big support from her superior Mother Irena Krzyżanowska who, like M. Sopoćko, helped her to print the image of Merciful Jesus with the Chaplet of Divine Mercy⁵.

The *Diary* indicates the source of the doctrine of Divine Mercy: the inner inspiration, the private revelation given to Sister Faustina by Merciful Jesus and the contemporary theology of Divine Mercy found in the teaching of her spiritual directors and confessors.

⁴ Cf. D. 473, 479, 693.

⁵ D. 1299–1301, 1379, 1568; cf., note 84.

The Attribute of Divine Mercy in Theology

According to the Revelation, mercy is a special attribute of God that describes the relation of the Creator to creation, indicating His compassion and forgiveness as a sign of benevolence and love of God⁶. The Bible presents a variety of senses of mercy, but the first takes the idea of mercy as a sentiment of compassion and goodwill (Heb. *ra-hamim*, Latin *miser cordia*) which indicates goodness, kindness and love⁷. In the Holy Scripture mercy means also forgiveness (Heb. *hesed*, Greek *éleos*, Latin *pietas*) which unites two people and expresses the idea of fidelity. As the part of God mercy signifies benevolence and compassion and the attitude to be good. In the Book of Exodus, God of mercy and compassion (Ex 34,6) expresses His mercy helping His people in difficult situations, forgiving sins, forgetting prejudices, inviting to conversion⁸. In this way God shows love to His creatures and obligates man to the attitude of mercy⁹.

The full revelation of Divine Mercy was presented in the Incarnation of the Son of God and in the work of Salvation, which culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The mercy gained by Savior through the Sacrifice of His life means the freedom from sins and the peace of heart¹⁰. The Lord Jesus revealed in His life and in His teaching the true image of God's mercy, and reminded His disciples that their perfection consists in being merciful because the "Father is merciful" (Lc 6, 36).

The theology of Divine Mercy before Vatican II, presented by Fr. M. Sopoćko in his works, which influenced Saint Sister Faustina Kowalska, described the nature of God through His "attributes" or "perfections in themselves": simplicity, infinity, eternity, immutability. They define the substance of God as existence in itself in contra-

⁶ Cf. A. Darlapp, *Barmherzigkeit Gottes*, [in:] *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* [LThK], Bd. 1, Freiburg im Breisgau 1957, pp. 1251–1253; E. Salmann, *Barmherzigkeit* (II. *Systematisch-theologisch*), [in:] LThK, Bd. 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 1994, pp. 13–17; F. Staudinger, *Eleos*, [in:] *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum NT*, Bd. 1, Stuttgart 1980, pp. 1046–1056; J. Cambier SDB, X. Léon-Dufour SI, *Milosierdzie*, [in:] X. Léon-Dufour SI, *Słownik teologii biblijnej* [STB], Poznań 1990, pp. 478–483.

⁷ Gen 43, 30; 1 Kng 3, 26; Ps 103, 13; Ger 31, 20.

⁸ Ps 4, 2; 6, 3; 9, 14; 25, 16; 107, 1, 23; Ex 3, 7; Oz 1, 6; 4, 2; 6, 6; 11, 8; 9, 16; Ger 31, 20; Iz 49, 14; 58, 6–11; Ez 33, 11; 39, 25; Neh 9, 17; Jon 4, 2.

⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 5; Note 61.

¹⁰ Cf. Rom 1, 31; 1 Cor 7, 25; 2 Cor 1, 3; Ef 4, 32; 1 Tym 1, 13; 2 Tym 1, 2; 1 Pet 3, 8; Jc 5, 11; 1 Joh 3, 17.

distinction to creatures, which exist through God. Apart from the “perfection in itself”, theologians discern in God the “related perfections” present in the works of God: wisdom, kindness, providence, justice, and mercy. They are united with the interior faculties of God, which express the action of God toward man and the world. By analogy to the faculties of man the attributes of wisdom and providence are in God’s mind, but the attributes of kindness, justice and mercy are related to God’s will¹¹.

Theology defines these perfections also as virtues, because they describe the relation of God to man. The kindness of God imparts the good to man independently of the circumstances. Providence expresses the looking after of God over man so that he could reach the goal God indicated to him. The Divine justice means distributing the good according to the order established by God. The Divine mercy signifies the distribution of good by God to help man in his weaknesses and deficiencies. Mercy is this attribute of God from which “like from the lake flow out all goods, which man receives in this world, and in which God would like to be glorified in all eternity”¹².

M. Sopoćko understood the notion of mercy, according to St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, as a compassion in the front of misfortune. It contains two aspect of action: the “sensual affection or passion (*passio*)” and “moral virtue”¹³. Mercy as an affection is the natural reaction of the human psyche. It is an act of pity because of misfortune. Mercy as a moral virtue is reasonable compassion proper only to man and it is at the same time the good will to help. For Christians mercy is an expression of love of others. It contains free will of man, which is realised in acts toward neighbours and enemies. The mercy of God is not an affection or a moral virtue, which contains the sadness of compassion, because God as the highest being is not subject to emotion. It is an attribute of God and not the state of com-

¹¹ Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange OP, *Dieu. Son existence et sa nature*, Paris 1928; E. Salmann, *Barmherzigkeit*. Bd. 2: *Systematisch-theologisch*, [in:] LThK, Bd. 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 1994, pp. 13–17; M. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, Bd. 4, Freiburg im Braeisingau 1948, Nr. 264–271; M. Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik*, Bd. 1, München 1953, Nr. 574–576; W. Granat, *Milosierdzie jako przymiot Boga*, [in:] *Ewangelia milosierdzia*, ed. W. Granat, Poznań 1970, pp. 9–47.

¹² M. Sopoćko, *Milosierdzie Boga...*, p. 11; cf. Lc 6, 36.

¹³ S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I, q. 21, a. 3; cf. A. Słomkowski, *Milosierdzie Boże we wcieleniu i odkupieniu*, [in:] *Ewangelia milosierdzia...*, pp. 50–52; M. Sopoćko, *Milosierdzie Boga...*, p. 12.

passionable mind¹⁴. Mercy, with respect to God, presumes the compassion which does not exclude the immutability of God but is his source. On this ground theology affirms that mercy of God is infinite as an attribute of infinite nature of God and as a fruit of infinite love of God. The Mystery of Incarnation, which includes the infinite mercy of God, indicates that also in man mercy is infinite and has no limits, when man is totally open for this mystery¹⁵.

Following St. Augustine and S. Thomas Aquinas, M. Sopoćko underlines that Divine mercy is the “attribute of God’s act, given to human being to help him in his misery and in his deficiencies. It is His will to act the goodness for the people who suffer and are not able to help themselves”¹⁶. In this conception Divine Mercy as an act of God’s will is the cause of all His actions directed specially to the sinners. In God every act identifies with mercy revealing His will to redeem them from the slavery of sin¹⁷.

The difficulties to recognize the attributes of God are caused by the human mind, which is perplexed in the front of the mysteries of God. It is also a very big problem for the faculties of man to understand the mutual dependencies between the attributes of God, which are equal. The Revelation helps to comprehend the greatness of God in the History of Salvation. Theological reflection discovers the presence of God in His acts like creation of the world and the man, history of Israel and salvation of man from the slavery of sins through Jesus Christ. Mercy embraces goodwill of God, His generosity, providence and justice: “In other words, Divine Mercy is the reason of God’s actions outside the God’s Persons or is the source of every act of Creator”¹⁸. For this theology a special place of the revelation of Divine Mercy in the Bible are the Psalms. They use different synonyms to describe the great love of God to man: “pity”, “patience”, “grace”¹⁹. Being merciful God is waiting for man to glorify His mercy in the attitude of confidence and through the works of mercy²⁰.

¹⁴ S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 21, a. 3; cf. M. J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik...*, pp. 267–271.

¹⁵ Ibidem, pp. 267–271.

¹⁶ M. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boga*, p. 13; cf. S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 21, a.3; II–II, q. 30, a. 4 c.

¹⁷ Cf. Ps 85, 15; Ps 102, 8.

¹⁸ M. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boga...*, pp. 14–16.

¹⁹ Ps. 22, 6; 24, 10; 32, 18; 58, 11; 85, 15; 88, 3; 102, 8; 110, 4; 111, 4; 118, 64; 135, 1–26.

²⁰ M. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boga...*, pp. 15–16.

In the history of Christianity the Divine Mercy as a reason of God's action was the subject of the theological consideration by the Fathers of the Church: St. Augustine, S. John Chrysostome, S. Bernard from Clairvaux and St. Thomas Aquinas²¹. The theology of the time, recent to Sister Faustina, following the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, considered the mutual dependence of the attributes of God and marked out the Divine Mercy from among other kinds of God's perfection. Mercy, as an attribute of God, in whom is no difference, all his perfections are His substance. It is equal with justice, wisdom, goodness and providence. As a God's perfection characteristic of His action it is the highest attribute because it is communication of the highest Being with creation. It is the highest attribute, which reveals the strength of God, Creator and Redeemer: "Mercy considered in whom it is present, not every time is the highest attribute, but only when he who possesses this perfection is the highest Being. Nobody is equal to him, and nobody is over him. He who has somebody over him reveals better his perfection through the union of love with the superior being than through the removal of the deficiencies in the inferior being. Because of this reason by the people love is the highest virtue, which is the essence of their perfection. But God has nobody over Himself to submit in love. His highest attribute is mercy"²².

The theology before the Vatican II, indicating priority of the Divine Mercy among the attributes of God, maintained that justice considered as the "will to pay everybody, what is his due" is submitted to mercy²³. In God justice is a kind of free of reward or punishment. He is giving over the merits and punishing less than the guilt²⁴. FR. M. Sopoćko speaking about the superiority of the Divine Mercy over justice followed the theological position of S. Thomas Aquinas: „Whatever God is doing for the creatures, He is doing it according to the before determined order, which is justice. Because He accepted this order in a free way, and nobody imposed it on Him, then in the stabilization of this order we have to see the infinite Mercy of God, which every time suprases justice"²⁵.

²¹ M. J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, Bd. 4, Freiburg im Breisgau 1948, pp. 264–271.

²² M. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boga...*, p. 17; cf. S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II–II, q. 30, a. 4, c.

²³ M. J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik...*, pp. 264–271.

²⁴ Cf. 1 Cor 2, 9; 11, 32.

²⁵ M. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boga...*, p. 18; cf. S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 21, a. 4, c.

Similarly, Divine Mercy differs from love in this that love defines the relations in the Holy Trinity, but mercy reveals the relation of God to creature²⁶. Mercy is then the highest perfection of God, which is not different from disinterested love, and is called also as the “love toward misery”, or “merciful love”²⁷. M. Sopoćko underlines that God in His mercy, considered as a “merciful love”, created world and man, and donated him the gift to be the “son of God”. After sin He also promised him the salvation. In the Old Testament God revealed universality and power of mercy in the history of the chosen people. The full revelation of Divine Mercy is the Mystery of Incarnation and Redemption, which culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. M. Sopoćko discerns three works of Divine Mercy: creation and preservation of the world in existence, elevation of man to the supernatural state of life, redemption from the slavery of sins²⁸.

Mercy as the highest attribute of infinite and invariable God defines the relation of God to man acting against misery and misfortune of sinners. S. Thomas Aquinas maintains that “every work of God reveals mercy as a source of existence”²⁹. Human weakness is for God every time a special occasion to reveal His mercy as compassion and forgiveness of sins, which confirms omnipotence of God³⁰. Divine Mercy increases in regard of sinner as remission of sins and helps to change the weak human nature. The man is responding to the mercy of God through the attitude of confidence, which express the faith in God.

Theology of the period in which Sister Faustina Kowalska lived developed the idea of St. Augustine and S. Thomas Aquinas that Divine Mercy is the most perfect manifestation of the strength and goodness of God. It emphasized that God in His mercy is not only the beginning of all creation, but also that He derives good from evil: “God likes to derive supernatural good from a difficult situation. St. Augustine and S. Thomas Aquinas say that for God it is more laudable to make a just man from one sinner, than to create heaven and earth”³¹. Divine Mercy is conducting man to deep contrition and love.

²⁶ S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, a. 4.

²⁷ M. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boga...*, p. 18.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 20–23; M. Sopoćko understood the Divine Mercy as a “merciful love” and in this sense maintained that mercy is the cause of the creation of man and world. The Constitution *Dei Filius* of Vatican I ascertains that the creation is the work of love or of the goodness of God; cf. DS 3002.

²⁹ S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 21, a. 4.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, I, q. 25, a. 3, ad 3.

³¹ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Dieu. Son existence et sa nature...*, p. 458.

Theology before the Vatican II accentuated that mercy is a special kind of God's love for man, who suffers because of sin. Mercy expresses the "efficient will of God", which liberates man from his weaknesses and is the "compassion" of God, which makes Him close to man³². In this prospective the full expression of the Divine Mercy is the Mystery of Incarnation and Redemption revealed in the Person of the Son of God. The work of Christ in the Incarnation and Redemption regards first of all the situation of the sinner, who lost the dignity of a child of God. M. Sopoćko underlines that man created on the "image of God" was very close to God and participated in His life, liberty and harmony of the faculties submitted to the love of God³³. According to the scholastic theology expressed in the documents of the Council of Trient the original sin disturbed initial "justice and sanctity". The consequence of this situation was the lack of friendship with God and wrong inclination of human will to evil. The man deprived of the grace of God is not able to restore the friendship with God and the participation in the nature of God. The inclination to evil is the biggest disaster in the life of man and the cause of many troubles.

M. Sopoćko, following S. Thomas Aquinas, remembered, that the revelation of the Divine Mercy reached its climax in the Mystery of Incarnation and Redemption³⁴. It contains the truth of the union of human and divine nature in the Person of the Son of God. In the order of this mystery, God become man and man was elevated to the divine life. The infinite Divine Mercy expressed itself in the Mystery of Incarnation as a humiliation of the Son of God, who became similiary to man except the sin³⁵. M. Sopoćko in his work *The Mercy of God in His Deeds (Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego)* tried to show mercy in the life of Jesus: in the Annunciation, in the birth of the Son of God, in the choosing of the disciples, in the attitude toward sinners, sick people, the leprous, the blind, the deaf, in the evangelical councils and in the commandment to love enemies. Jesus revealed mercy in his teaching, in the parables and also in His life, in His death and resurrection: "Lord Jesus didn't cover up Divine Mercy in regard to the world, but showed it in the Mystery of Incarnation, in His private and public life, and specially in the Mystery of Redemption, dying on the cross for the sins of the world"³⁶.

³² M. S c h m a u s, *Katholische Dogmatik...*, p. 574.

³³ M. S o p o ć k o, *Miłosierdzie Boga...*, pp. 21–22.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 35–38.

³⁵ Cf. Flp 2, 6–8.

³⁶ M. S o p o ć k o, *Miłosierdzie Boże...*, p. 170.

The teaching about Divine Mercy appeared in the parables of Jesus about the prodigal son, the lost drachma and the lost sheep. M. Sopoćko, analyzing these parables noted that man has to open his heart to receive Divine Mercy. God in his mercy is the first who is giving his grace. He is like shepherd looking for the sheep. The attitude of God, merciful Father, towards the sinner is the announcement of the sacrament of reconciliation, which is a sacrament of mercy. The infinite mercy is also present in the sacrament of Eucharist, in which Jesus Christ is giving Himself for the sinners³⁷. The sacraments, gained by Jesus through the sacrifice of the cross and resurrection are the source of mercy: "The second action of priest is to dispense the sacraments, in which God continues the work of mercy to the end of the world. In the work of the Redemption of mankind God justifies all people"³⁸.

The Passion of Christ and His Resurrection revealed the Divinity of Jesus and at the same time showed how God gives mercy to man. God invites man to collaborate in the work of Divine Mercy. The theologians, contemporary with S. Sister Faustina Kowalska underline, that Jesus as the Highest Priest in the sacrifice of cross is giving His life for the salvation of man and bringing near mercy to the people. His Sacred Heart is a sign of infinite mercy, which in Christ is compassion and forgiveness. Based on this truth, M. Sopoćko affirms that every Christian in union with the Sacrifice of Jesus through prayer, sacraments, meditation of His Passion and through the sacrifice of his life can participate in Divine Mercy.

Theology contemporary with Sister Faustina Kowalska indicating Divine Mercy as the highest attribute of God determines the intellectual context for her experience of God. Theologians accentuated priority of mercy over other perfections of God, especially regarding justice and showed its presence in the history of man and world. They focused their analysis on the Mystery of Incarnation and Redemption, in which God revealed fullness of mercy. They underlined that death and resurrection of Jesus was the culmination of the revelation of Divine Mercy, and that man can collaborate with mercy through the participation in the sacrifice of Christ. Theological formation and charisma of the Congregation influenced in an essential way the faith of Sister Faustina and were important elements of her experience of God.

³⁷ Ibidem, pp. 170–176, 197–201.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 202.

The Idea of Divine Mercy in Private Revelation of Sister Faustina

The union of love with God was for Sister Faustina the principal base for the experience of the Mystery of Divine Mercy, which dominated her relation with Jesus and defined her mission to the world. A mystic from Cracow considered in her prayer the presence of God in the history of the world and man. She lived in her inner life the real love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, especially in His sufferings and death and she touched the greatest mystery of God, His mercy. She described her experience of Divine Mercy and the message of Merciful Jesus in *Diary – Divine Mercy in my Soul*. S. Sister Faustina Kowalska appealing to the theology of that time, to the charisma of the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy and to her personal experience, presented the living theology of mercy, completed by the private revelations and the mission to the world.

The richness of the Term “Mercy”

The Mystic from Cracow tried to describe Divine Mercy in many synonyms, which indicate the greatness of God: “an entire sea of My mercy” (D. 178), “Ocean of Your mercy” (D. 309, 718, 1210, 1214, 1218), “the bottomless ocean of divine mercy” (D. 654), “the abyss of My mercy” (D. 85, 206, 361, 438, 1146, 1666), “Depth of Mercy” (D. 1307), “the depths of My mercy” (D.1485), “the bottomless depth of My mercy” (D. 88), “My fathomless mercy” (D. 1059). These images define the infinity of mercy as the attribute of infinite God. It is impossible to fathom the mystery of Divine Mercy, as it is to get to the bottom of an ocean.

The next group of words qualifies the mercy of God as a source of all life: “a Fount of Mercy” (D. 309), “the fountain of mercy” (D. 1075, 1486), “the fountain of unfathomable mercy” (D. 1190, 1182), “the fount of My mercy” (D. 1209) “the spring of My mercy” (D. 206), “the Fount of Life” (D. 300), “the Fountain of Life” (D. 1485), “the bosom of Your mercy” (D. 1332). Mercy of God as a source of life is also unfathomable and has no end. It is unfailing source of love and goodness of God.

The universality of mercy, which is like love, radiating on every creature is underlined by the following terms: “the rays of mercy” (D. 1321), “the flames of mercy” (D. 50,177, 1074), “the cloak of Your mercy” (D. 1489), “the splendors of My mercy” (D. 1485), “the arms of My mercy” (D. 1541). Mercy embraces every man in the world.

For Sister Faustina mercy is identical with love of God as the fount of life. She used the synonyms: “Eternal Love, Depth of Mercy” (D. 1307), “God’s goodness” (D. 458, 1321), “infinite goodness” (D. 361), “unfathomable goodness” (D. 438), “everlasting love” (D. 1523), “torrents of Your love” (D. 1307), “living Fountain of all graces” (D. 1321). Divine Mercy is the source of goodness of God and all graces that man is receiving without the merits.

Mercy is like God: “infinite” (D. 697), “fathomless” (D. 1072), “unfathomable and inscrutable” (D. 1146), “inconceivable” (D. 699). The mystic from Cracow noted that the truth about the infinity of Divine Mercy is the foundation of faith. To know this truth surpasses the possibility of the human mind: “My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity” (D. 699). For Sister Faustina, the man can know Divine Mercy only through the meditation of the work of mercy in Jesus and through the participation in His sacrifice.

Holy Trinity as a Beginning of Mercy

The mystical experience of God led Sister Faustina to the knowledge of the mercy in the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. United with Jesus Christ, the Son of God in His sufferings, she entered in very deep relation with Divine Person: God the Father and the Holy Spirit. With many difficulties the Mystic from Cracow described with incredible precision her mystical experience of Divine Mercy in Holy Trinity.

Sister Faustina affirms that mercy “gushed forth from the Divine Trinity”, which is “one womb filled with love” of God (D. 522). The “bottomless depth of My mercy” (D. 88) has the beginning in the mutual love of the Divine Persons, who are the source of Divine Mercy: “Praise and glory be to You, O Holy Trinity, Eternal God. May the mercy springing from Your very bowels protect us from Your anger” (D. 1007). It embraces all creatures, which bear the “seal of mercy”. The Mystic from Cracow knew the love, as a foundation of the life in the Holy Trinity is also the source of mercy. Its beginning is the love of God the Father to God the Son, who sent the Holy Spirit.

Divine Mercy, the “greatest attribute” of God – wrote Sister Faustina – emerges from the “bosom” of God the Father, who is the

“Father of mercy”, the source and the beginning of love, life and luck (D. 949). From the fullness of mercy God the Father is sending His Son, who revealed Divine Mercy to the mankind: “God of great mercy, who deigned to send us Your only begotten Son as the greatest proof of Your fathomless love and mercy, You do not reject sinners; but in Your boundless mercy You have opened for them also Your treasures, treasures from which they can draw abundantly, not only justification, but also all the sanctity that a soul can attain” (D. 1122). Man experiences the mercy of God the Father through Jesus the Word Incarnate, in whom he recognizes the love of God.

The perception of Divine Mercy in the mystery of death and resurrection of Christ is possible only thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of love and mercy”:

O Divine Spirit, who pervade my whole being
And give me to know Your Divine Threefold Life,
Initiating me into Your Divine Essence,
Thus united to You, I will live a life without end. (D. 1411).

Divine Mercy Revealed in Christ

In the *Diary* of Sister Faustina Jesus Christ who reveals Divine Mercy to the world in His passion and resurrection is called: “King of Mercy” (D. 83, 88, 367), “Merciful Savior” (D. 1075), “Mercy Incarnate”, “God of mercy” (D. 1745), and His “merciful Heart” is considered as “Fount of Life” (D. 300), “Heart overflows with great mercy” (D. 367). She draws the knowledge of mercy revealed in Christ from the meditation of His sufferings and from the union with Him on the cross. The “most Merciful Jesus” was for her the “treasury” of all graces, from which came all good (D. 1213–1214).

Jesus “King of Mercy” opposed to the “just Judge” guided the Mystic from Cracow to the mystery of Divine Mercy present in the work of Salvation, which she meditates in the way of the cross. In the union with Jesus in His sufferings she entered deeper in the knowledge of mercy and discovered a great desire to glorify God in mercy: “Jesus, You know that I love suffering and want to drain the cup of suffering to the last drop; and yet, my nature experienced a slight shudder and fear. Quickly, however, my trust in the infinite mercy of God was awakened in all its force, and everything else had to give way before it, like a shadow retreating before the sun’s rays” (D. 697).

With the knowledge of mercy of God, she experienced peace and happiness in her soul.

In the mystical union with God, S. Faustina understood the greatness of mercy regarding the sinners: "When I see Jesus tormented, my heart is torn to pieces, and I think: what will become of sinners if they do not take advantage of the Passion of Jesus? In His Passion, I see a whole sea of mercy" (D. 948). She saw the Divine Mercy open for the sinners in the signs of the pierced side of Jesus and of His wounds. In the center of the mystical knowledge given by Jesus to Sister Faustina was the Sacred Heart: "From all My wounds, like from streams, mercy flows for souls, but the wound of My Heart is the fountain of unfathomable mercy. From this fountain spring all graces for souls. The flames of compassion burn Me" (D. 1190). In the inner experience the Mystic from Cracow discovered that in union with Jesus in His sufferings she knew the glorified and announced mercy of God to the world.

For Sister Faustina the principal space of the work of Divine Mercy is the soul of sinners. It brings them the justification and the possibility to change their life. In private revelations Jesus confirmed to Sister Faustina many times that mercy is directed to the sinners: "My Secretary, write that I am more generous toward sinners than toward the just. It was for their sake that I came down from heaven; it was for their sake that My Blood was spilled. Let them not fear to approach Me; they are most in need of My mercy" (D. 1275). Divine mercy sustains the existence of every man through the sacraments, in which God is giving the fruits of the death and resurrection.

The sacraments as a Source of Mercy

Sacrament of penance takes the first place among the sacraments mentioned by Sister Faustina Kowalska as a source of Divine Mercy. She remembered only the teaching of Jesus that in the confession happens the miracle of mercy to restore in the sinners the dignity of the child of God: "Tell souls where they are to look for solace; that is, in the Tribunal of Mercy [the Sacrament of Reconciliation]. There the greatest miracles take place [and] are incessantly repeated" (D. 1448). The Mystic from Cracow affirmed that in the sacrament of penance the sinner meets God of mercy and draws infinite graces of reconciliation with the instrument of trust.

Similarly, the Eucharist is in the mystical experience of Sister Faustina intended as a "throne of mercy", where Jesus is giving his

life in sacrifice for the world (D. 1602). In the Eucharist Jesus consoles the souls, strengthens them and gives them the joy of the union with God: "Here is the tabernacle of Your mercy, here is the remedy for all our ills. To You, O living spring of mercy, all souls are drawn; some like deer, thirsting for Your love, others to wash the wound of their sins, and still others, exhausted by life, to draw strength. You bestowed upon us eternal life; allowing Your most holy side to be opened, You opened an inexhaustible spring of mercy for us, giving us Your dearest possession, the Blood and Water from Your Heart" (D. 1747). The Sacrifice of the cross present in the Eucharist is for Sister Faustina a special place of the revelation of mercy, to which she invites all people.

The experience of Divine Mercy described in the *Diary* of Sister Faustina Kowalska has its source in the Holy Trinity revealing the love of God the Father as a infinite mercy, which He is giving without limits. Mercy becomes very near to man thanks to the mystery of Incarnation and Redemption of the Son of God. It is present in sacraments as a fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Holy Spirit through the gift of mercy is enlightening the mind and enflaming the heart to recognize the presence of God and to glorify Him.

Knowing the "greatest attribute of God", the Mystic from Cracow experienced its presence in her life and tried to transmit it to the world.

The Message of Divine Mercy and the Mission to the World

The mystical union with God recognized as the Father of mercy and special gifts received from Jesus accompanied in Sister Faustina Kowalska the mission to proclaim mercy to the world. She checked the message of Divine Mercy known from the personal experience and from the theological context in the personal contact with her confessors, with the superiors of the Congregation and with the authorities of the Church.

The idea of the message of Divine Mercy appeared in the first vision of Merciful Jesus on February 22, 1931 in Płock, five year after her entering the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy. Sister Faustina passed through just before the experience of *dark night of the senses and of the spirit*. In the spiritual sufferings she experienced the presence of God, who revealed to her the mystery of mercy in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The central place in the message of Divine

Mercy takes the truth about the “greatest attribute of God” approachable in the sacraments of penance and Eucharist. It contains first of all the invitation to open the heart to the sacraments in an attitude of trust, the principal condition and instrument to receive mercy from God. Jesus transmitted to Sister Faustina also the devotions to Divine Mercy: the veneration of the image of Divine Mercy as a sign of God’s mercy, the Feast of Divine Mercy, the Chaplet to Divine Mercy, the Hour of Mercy. The devotions, as secondary acts of cult of God, have sense only with the practice of the sacraments and with the attitude of trust, which express the inner relation of Christian to God.

The message of Divine Mercy present in the private visions of Merciful Jesus contains the image of resurrected Jesus with two rays: red and pale. Jesus, according to the private revelations of Sister Faustina, spoke to her about the mercy of God and obligated her to proclaim this truth in the whole world: “In the evening, when I was in my cell, I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand [was] raised in the gesture of blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast. From beneath the garment, slightly drawn aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale. In silence I kept my gaze fixed on the Lord; my soul was struck with awe, but also with great joy. After a while, Jesus said to me, “Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world” (D. 47).

The image of Mercy, according to the visions of Sister Faustina, has a double significance: to help to understand the mystery of mercy revealed in Jesus and to remind the faithful about the source of mercy – the sacraments. Jesus, in the inner voice explained to Sister Faustina, that the rays symbolized the graces which draw from the “bottom of Mercy”. The pale ray indicates water of Baptism and Penance, which makes man righteous. The red ray signifies the Blood of Christ and Eucharist, which is the spiritual life of man (D. 299). The image of Merciful Jesus, venerated like other images in the Catholic Church, has a function of the “vessel”, with which the people are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. The message regarding the image of Mercy has been repeated many times in the private revelations of Sister Faustina³⁹. It reminds us that the veneration of the image is only the point of departure for the devotion to Divine Mercy, which contains the attitude of trust, the approach to the sacraments and the deeds of mercy.

³⁹ Cf. D. 341, 414, 742.

The veneration of the image of Divine Mercy is connected with the Feast of Mercy celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Jesus asked Sister Faustina in private visions to celebrate this Feast and promised special graces for those who on this day approach the Sacrament of Penance, the Holy Communion and do deeds of mercy: "My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment" (D. 699, cf. D. 965, 998, 1109). According to M. I. Różycki this grace is similar to the grace of Baptism⁴⁰. The promises of Jesus in private revelations of Sister Faustina appeal to the universality of the Work of Salvation, which embrace all people to receive the fruits of the Sacrifice of Jesus.

An important place in the devotion to Divine Mercy belongs to special prayers to Divine Mercy: the Chaplet to Divine Mercy, the Novena to Divine Mercy and the prayer *O Blood and Water*. The Chaplet to Divine Mercy contains two forms of prayers: "Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world" (D. 476) – prayed on the Our Father beads and "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion have mercy on us and the whole world" (D. 476) – prayed on the Hail Mary beads of Rosary. The subject of the prayer is God the Father, called Father of Mercy, who sends His Son to reveal mercy in His Death and Resurrection. The prayer appeals to the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, who redeemed the world through the Sacrifice of the Cross. In this way the praying person, on the grounds of the universal priesthood of the faithful, is united with Christ, the Mediator between man and God. The prayer of Sister Faustina reminds the prayer of the Angel of Fatima⁴¹.

The Novena to Divine Mercy (D. 1209–1229) is the preparation to the Feast of Divine Mercy. Every day of Novena has a special intention and helps to bring different kind of people to God of mercy.

⁴⁰ I. Różycki, *Iudicium alterius theologi censoris scriptis eidem Servae Dei tributis*, [in:] *Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Cracovien. Beatificationis et Canonisationis Servae Dei Faustinae Kowalska Instituti Sororum B.M.V. a Misericordia (1905–1938)*, Romae 1980, pp. 428–430.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 434–436.

The prayer – “O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of Mercy for us, I trust in You” (D. 187) – indicates Jesus as a source of mercy open on the Cross. Sister Faustina wrote also other prayers, such as the Litany to Divine Mercy, in which she glorifies the Mercy of God.

The devotion to Divine Mercy helped Sister Faustina to experience the Mystery of God who revealed His Mercy in the Work of Salvation of Jesus Christ. It was also very important for a simple nun in the transmission of this truth of faith to the people. In the devotion she found the language to express the greatest attribute of God.

IDEA BOŻEGO MIŁOSIERDZIA W PRYWATNYCH WIZJACH ŚW. FAUSTYNY KOWALSKIEJ W KONTEKŚCIE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ TEOLOGII

Streszczenie

Pojęcie Bożego Miłosierdzia, jakie pojawia się w prywatnych wizjach św. Faustyny Kowalskiej (1905–1938), jest wyraźnie osadzone w kontekście teologii miłosierdzia czasów, w jakich żyła autorka *Dzienniczka*. Wielki wpływ na kształtowanie idei miłosierdzia u Mistyczki z Krakowa miał jej kierownik duchowy, ks. Michał Sopoćko, profesor dogmatyki na Uniwersytecie Stefana Batorego w Wilnie. Był on autorem licznych opracowań dotyczących Bożego Miłosierdzia, które zostały wydane książkowo po II wojnie światowej (por. *Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego*, Londyn 1959).

Siostra Faustyna słuchała również licznych konferencji na temat Bożego Miłosierdzia wygłaszanych przez konferencjonistów i rekolekcjonistów w Zgromadzeniu Matki Bożej Miłosierdzia. Podobnie jak ks. M. Sopoćko rozróżniali oni przymioty Boga albo doskonałości wsobne: prostota, czyli niezłożoność, nieskończoność, wieczność i niezmienność oraz doskonałości „odnośne”: mądrość, dobroć, opatrność, sprawiedliwość i miłosierdzie. W takim kontekście miłosierdzie jawiło się jako „największy” atrybut Boga, chociaż teologia miała świadomość, że w Bogu wszystkie przymioty są jednakowe. Jej poznanie tajemnicy Bożej było oparte na głębokim doświadczeniu wewnętrznym, w którym ważne miejsce odgrywało zjednoczenie z Chrystusem w cierpieniu oraz wewnętrzne natchnienia i wizje.

Mistyczka z Krakowa korzystała z tej teologii mówiąc o miłosierdziu, że jest ono „największym przymiotem Boga” w Trójcy Jedynej. Rozróżniała miłosierdzie Ojca, Syna i Ducha Świętego. Wskazywała na Ofiarę Chrystusa i Jego Zmartwychwstanie jako szczytowy moment objawienia miłosierdzia światu. Jednocześnie, w oparciu wewnętrzne doświadczenie, opisywała niezmierność Bożego Miłosierdzia odwołując się do poetyckich opisów: „ocean miłosierdzia”, „źródło miłosierdzia”, „głębia miłosierdzia”, „łono miłosierdzia”, „żywy źródło wszelkich łask”. Wielką pomocą w przekazywaniu tajemnicy miłosierdzia było dla Siostry Faustyny nabożeństwo do Bożego Miłosierdzia obejmujące kult obrazu Jezusa Miłosiernego, Święto Miłosierdzia, Koronka do Bożego Miłosierdzia.