
The author of this article chose to present the lives of two holy married women who lived in the middle ages in order to take part in the current debate on the status of the Christian family. Applying a historical analysis, the author drew on from his own source Ściecicy śięci i błogosławieni (Lublin-Sandomierz, 2002) and (Śvatí a blahoslavení laici (Olomouc, 2004).

Introduction

The central problem to be explored in this paper is the question whether marriage can be a way of achieving holiness and even a mystical union with Christ. It is a burning issue of our times, when the idea of the family as the fundamental cell of society is criticised and ridiculed. The chief aim of the research is to prove, on the basis of the lives of two mystics of Northern Europe, that the married life and the family can be a good way of becoming a saint. In order to provide sufficient evidence for the subject “Sanctity of Married Female Mystics from the North” the original acts and documents of the beatification and canonisation processes have been researched. Also, an analysis of the relevant literature has been carried out, with the focus on the sources regarding the lives of these two mothers of large families, St Bridget of Sweden, and Blessed Dorothy of Poland. Both Poland and Sweden are bound by a friendly relationship, and what is more, they are culturally and geographically close to Lithuania. The method applied in the research is mainly analytic and synthetic, that is, a method commonly used in studying history; additionally, dogmatic and legal methods were employed, typical for canon law studies. The arguments presented in the paper confirm that the family can be a natural environment for its members to achieve holiness and sanctity.
1. St Bridget of Sweden

St Bridget (1303–1373) was born in Sweden. The year 1344, when her husband died, was a turning point in her life. Until that year she was one of the most important female members of the court of Sweden and a distinguished figure in the political arena of her times. After her husband's death, her life transformed and she became known as the “Beloved of Christ” and the “Mystic of the North”.

1.1. Family background

She came from an aristocratic family, the daughter of Ingeborg of the Roman Catholic royal family of the Folkungar, which ruled Sweden between 1250 and 1363. Bridget’s parents gave her a solid Catholic upbringing and themselves made frequent pilgrimages, such as those to the tomb of St James in Santiago de Compostella or to the Holy Tomb. These journeys were very dangerous in those days, but were a common way of showing repentance for one’s sins. Bridget’s parents also made pilgrimages to the tomb of St Bridget in Kildare (Ireland) where they prayed for special graces for their daughter.

Bridget was born in June 1303 in the castle in Finstad. Her father, Birger, led a deeply religious life, receiving sacraments regularly and so his daughter grew up in the atmosphere of piety or even mysticism of a healthy Catholic family. From her early years she was attracted to mystical life. It was said that she had a special devotion to Our Lady, probably because her own mother died when Bridget was only eleven in 1314. She was then placed under the care of her aunt and godmother, Catherine (Katarina), who taught her how to live according to the requirements of her social status and the culture of those times. It was Catherine who taught her about the nature of motherhood and the teaching of the Church on unborn children, which probably laid the foundations of Bridget becoming a good mother and wife.

1.2. Wife and mother of eight

According to the custom of those days Bridget was married between the age of fourteen and sixteen years to Ulf Gudmarsson, son of the governor and provincial judge of Västergötland. We shall now refer to what Reginè Pernoud, a French authority on the Middle Ages and a great devotee of St Bridget, says about the life of this family.

Ulf served as an official at the Swedish court and together with Bridget they led an exemplary life of a Christian married couple. They had eight children: four boys and four girls – all very important to St Bridget and each of them played a special role in her growing to holiness. The four boys were: Charles, Birger, Benedict and Gudmar; the girls were as follows: Martha, Catherine, Ingeborg and Cecilia.

Cecilia made her presence known when the eldest girl, Martha, wanted to marry Singrid, a young aristocrat, who dishonoured his family name with theft, murder and other deeds of violence. St Bridget was very unhappy at the prospect of this marriage. One day, when she was in deep distress, she seemed to hear the child in her womb saying: “Dear
mother, do not let me die”. St Bridget understood that she must do everything she could to overcome her despair and depression to save the child who was soon to be born.

As usually happens, each child was different. Charles, the eldest, had a great imagination, good intentions and was easily excited, but lacked perseverance and his enthusiasm did not last long. His father loved him but Charles brought him a lot of heartache at times. Birger, by contrast, was prudent, sensible and diligent. Little is known about the other two boys, Benedict and Gudmar, who both died in childhood. Regarding the daughters, Martha knew her own mind, she was rather selfish, would tell people what to do, but would not take orders herself. Catherine was extremely beautiful and, endowed with many spiritual gifts, she became a contemplative type. Ingeborg had a less sparkling personality but she also attained great piety. It seems that Cecilia did not have a very strong personality.

After the birth of Cecilia, her last child, Bridget was offered a post at the court of King Magnus of Sweden. The twenty-year-old King, was marrying Bianca of Dampierre and needed a governess. He offered the post to Bridget whose husband had already performed duties in his court. Bridget took time to consider and prayed over this offer. Eventually she decided to accept it and moved into the King’s court. She was thirty-two and was celebrating her nineteenth wedding anniversary.

Bridget was deeply concerned for her children. Charles and Birger, continued their tuition with a home tutor. Benedict was sent to study in a Cistercian monastery in Alvastra, whilst the youngest son Gudmar stayed with his mother and attended St Nicholas’ school, probably situated near the royal palace in Stockholm. The eldest daughter was given away in marriage, Catherine and Ingeborg were sent to the convent of St Bernard in Risaberg whereas the youngest Cecilia was sent to a Dominican convent in Skeninge. It must be remembered that in Medieval Europe education for girls was nearly solely associated with convents. All, or nearly all, female convents organised and ran schools at the time.

Soon after Bridget had taken up her post at the court of King Magnus the young Gudmar died. Bridget and Ulf were struck with grief and asked the King permission to make a pilgrimage on foot to Frondheim, to the tomb of Saint King Olaf II of Norway, who is venerated to this day.

Their next pilgrimage in 1341 took them as far as the tomb of St James in Santiago de Compostella. On their way they stopped at the shrine of St Botvid, a missionary to Sweden in the 9th century. It was there that St Bridget received her first mystical message: “The Lord’s spirit will set your soul on fire”. The couple continued their pilgrimage via Cologne to Aquisgran and thence to Tarascona. They made their way to Sainte-Baume and went up the mountains to the grotto of St Mary Magdalene. Eventually they boarded a ship in Marseille and reached Spain by sea.

On the way back Ulf was taken ill. In Arras he felt that death was near, and promised the Lord to spend the rest of his days in a monastery, should God allow him to see his homeland and his children again. Indeed, after Ulf reached home the couple decided to separate officially and Ulf entered a Cistercian monastery at Alvastra. However, before their separation, the situation of the family changed: the two eldest sons got married,
Ingeborg decided to remain in the convent in Risenberg and entered the noviciate, while Catherine married Lord Eggert van Kyren, a young nobleman with whom she took a vow of celibacy. With the family all taken care of and settled, Ulf entered the monastery and spent three years there. He died in 1314 in Alvastra.

1.3. The woman of her times – in strive for holiness and justice

Charles’s villainous deeds were the source of great distress for Bridget. Her aim was to devote herself to a contemplative life, for which her marriage was just a preparation. Eventually Bridget decided to leave her position at the court in Stockholm. She condemned the King for bad practices and scandals at the court, for wasting money and burdening people with high taxes. To avoid paying high dues on the agricultural produce, the villagers ceased to cultivate the land. They also made counterfeit money. The King’s bad administration was bringing Sweden to ruin. The King took offence and was upset about Bridget’s reprimands but she had support from her friends and especially from the Bishop Aabo.

In 1346 Bridget founded the Order of St Saviour at Valdesten. It was supposed to hold sixty nuns and twenty-five monks, living in separate wings of the same convent. In those days double convents were not unusual, as the one already founded by St Bridget of Kildare. An approval for this initiative was given to St Bridget of Sweden by Pope Urban V on 5 July 1370.

Her mind and her heart were also troubled by the situation in the Church. Since 1342 Pope Clement VI (1342–1352) left Rome and moved to Avignon. He lived more in splendour than in piety. He had numerous palaces built and had many courtiers, but his lavish way of life was threatened by the epidemic of the black smallpox (Black Death) in 1348.

Bridget went to see Clement VI and begged him to change his way of life. The Pope received her well. In 1349 he decided to declare a Jubilee after the year 1300. This brought great numbers of pilgrims to Rome. Bridget would also have liked to go to Rome on a pilgrimage, Rome being the seat of the Popes, but she had to remain at home to look after her family who were financially dependent on her. She was worried about her two eldest children. Martha had lost her husband Sigrid who had been wounded during an attack on his castle in Falkenberg in 1346 and died soon afterwards. Bridget had the joy of seeing her son-in-law make peace with God and die as a Christian. Unfortunately Charles was under the influence of the King’s court and the carefree King Magnus. Like his father before him, Charles, was the court official, but he spent more time on enjoying himself than performing his duties. The country was on the verge of civil war and the epidemic was rife. Shortly after his wife Catherine died, he married Giselle Princess of Norway. Even though she was beautiful and very pious Charles was not faithful to her.

Bridget was happy to see her second son, Birger, live a much better life than his older brother. She was also happy that her second daughter Catherine, together with her husband, led a very saintly life practicing Christian virtues.

Eventually Bridget decided to go to Rome. She was accompanied by her fellow countrymen and yet she felt sad and lonely because she was remembering the pilgrimages
she had made with her husband Ulf eight years before. When she reached Rome she was given hospitality by Hugo of Beaufort, and received with much honour as she represented the Kingdom of Sweden. In Rome she met her daughter Catherine, which was a wonderful surprise to her. In fact, on her way to Rome Bridget had experienced mystical visions in which the Lord had promised her “a companion” whom she did not expect to encounter. Meeting her daughter was the fulfilment of that promise. It turned out that Catherine had also decided to make a pilgrimage to Rome. Her husband was not well and could not accompany her, but nonetheless encouraged her to go. Their stay in Italy stretched to twenty years. Catherine received news of her husband’s death shortly after reaching Rome. What made her particularly sad was the fact that she had not been at her husband’s side when he was dying. She also suffered a lot of trouble and temptations because now she was a widow, and being a very beautiful blond, Catherine was surrounded by Italian suitors. Her mother thought Catherine ought to marry again, but she decided to follow in her mother’s footsteps and made a vow to God.

They had been in Rome for fourteen years when Charles and Birger arrived with a pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Apostles. This was at the time when Pope Urban V (1362–1370) returned from Avignon to stay in Rome for a short while. So, all four of the family were in Rome and had an audience with the Pope, which was well documented. Urban V turned to Birger and said, “You are the true son of your mother”. Then he turned to Charles and said, “You are the son of this world”. On hearing these words St Bridget fell at the Pope’s feet and asked him “Holy Father, give absolution to my sons”. She also begged him not to leave Rome, but despite Bridget’s pleas and prayers, he did so. Charles and Birger also left, but they were to return to Rome in 1371.

In her mystical vision Bridget was told by Our Lord to go to the Holy Land. As her children wanted to join her in the pilgrimage they returned to Rome in the autumn of 1371 and together they set out on a pilgrimage.

Their first stop was in Naples, where they were received by Joan (Joanna) Queen of Naples. They stayed there longer than they had intended. This was because Charles and Queen Joan fell in love. They would spend all the time together and would not be parted. One day Joan announced publicly that they were going to be married. Bridget objected since her son was already married, but Joan would not be deterred and planned the wedding. But the Lord intervened and one day while some guests were expected for some special occasion Charles did not turn up. He was found later on in his chamber, weak and dumb, with his mother and sister at his side. Charles had fallen ill with the plague and died soon afterwards. Due to his mother’s prayers he died after making his peace with God. Queen Joan died tragically too, strangled by one of her lovers, Charles of Durazzo.

Bridget, Birger and Catherine continued on their pilgrimage which lasted one year. Catherine, who was later proclaimed a saint too, decided to enter the convent in Valshestena of which she soon became abbess. She had the joy of receiving her niece Ingegerd to the novitiate; it was the daughter of her elder sister Martha from her second marriage.

It was already mentioned that Bridget during her stay in Rome pleaded the Pope to leave Avignon and to return to the Holy City, the seat of Christianity. She begged the Pope to give up the “life of permanent scandal”, the rich court and to stop the political and
financial activities which took the place of holiness and reforms in the Church. Besides, it was well known that the Pope was under the influence and control of the King of France and the university in Paris. And the university claimed to hold the “Keys of Christianity”, as Jean de Meung put it. It was there that another shameful scandal took place, that is the Western Schism of 1378, which divided Christianity between two popes for over forty years until 1417.

Bridget died before the Schism actually took place, but her daughter Catherine saw its beginnings. Fortunately, during Catherine’s life the Pope Gregory XI (1370–1378) returned to Rome for good. We owe it to yet another holy woman, St Catherine, the daughter of a dyer from Sienna, a devout mystic, who in 1376 begged the Pope in Avignon to return to the traditional seat of the Papacy. She actually made the Pope promise her he would do so and he did.¹

St Bridget died on 23 July 1373. After imposing funeral services on 27 July 1373, her body remained in the house for many days, where crowds flocked to pay homage. On 2 December a triumphant procession set out to return her relics to her homeland. The journey included Ancona, Trieste, Austria, Moravia, Poland, Prussia and Gdańsk. After crossing the Baltic Sea, the relics reached Valdštejn on 4 April 1374.

1.4. Spirituality

St Bridget was considered a saint already during her lifetime. She devoted her life to piety and penance. People felt she had the gift of reading people’s hearts, the gift of prophecy and working of miracles. Pope Gregory XI, while still in Avignon, issued a papal bull on 13 November 1375, “Saepe a multis accepimus”, directed to the Swedish episcopate allowing the process of canonisation to begin. An investigation began into her life of holiness and miracles and it was continued by the next Pope Urban VI (1378–1389). Finally, after further investigations, Pope Boniface IX (1389–1404), declared her canonisation with the bull “Ab origine mundi” on 7 October 1391. At the same time, the antipope John XXIII (1410–1415) also declared Bridget a saint. Therefore Pope Martin V (1417–1431) confirmed her canonisation on 1 July 1419 in the bull “Excellentium principum”. Her cult spread throughout Sweden, Rome, Naples and in the Bridgettine Order. A special form of the cult was a Bridgettine rosary.

The main traits of St Bridget’s spirituality were the richness of her spiritual experience and her great diligence. Each day she spent on studying, prayer and writing. She studied Latin in detail and it was in Latin that she described her visions. Her religious life was centred on prayer, visiting churches and shrines to pay tribute to saints, to obtain indulgences and to pray for the conversion of sinners. She could remain in prayer for many hours and experience mystic visions, especially in places closely related to Christ, the Apostles and other saints. Apart from ardent prayers, she practised penances, especially on Fridays in memory of Christ’s Passion. In the Life of St Bridget there are numerous descriptions of her mortifications.

Apart from her private religious practises she was also actively involved in apostolic work in the field of politics and social issues. Her efforts to persuade the successive popes
to return to Rome from Avignon can only be compared to that of St Catherine of Sienna. She committed her life to acts of mercy; she called for liturgical renewal and the moral renewal of social customs, not only of ordinary people but also of kings and politicians. Her spiritual life abounds in visions and mystical revelations. She wrote them down in the “Revelations”. This work is a monumental work of mysticism and a great literary work.

Most of her biographers describe the traditional forms of devotion of her times that she practised, forms of devotion close to the spirituality of monastic life, such as pilgrimages to the holy places, fasting, vigils, long prayers. Little is mentioned about her motherhood, family life and raising her children in the Christian spirit. And in fact, these are the most essential characteristics of her spirituality if we want to understand her way of growing into holiness as a lay person who was deeply rooted in everyday life and the world of her times. Despite being a lay married person her involvement in the Church is reminiscent of the passage in the Vatican II documents about the “yeast”, the ferment which permeates the dough and causes it to rise. Her enthusiasm and involvement permeated the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.²

2. Blessed Dorothy of Montau

About the same time as St Bridget, there lived another mystic of the North, who sanctified her life in and through marriage: Blessed Dorothy of Montau (1347–1394). We have more information about her life and spirituality, because we have very reliable sources both in the Church’s official documents and the literature of well-known historians.³

2.1. A sensitive child

Dorothy was born on 25 January 1347, as the seventh child of Wilhelm and Agatha Schwartz. She was baptised on 6 February in the parish church which stands until this day in Montowy Wielkie in the then Prussia. She spent her childhood at home with her parents, brothers and sisters. She was the youngest girl in the family. Her mother was a very pious, hard-working woman who was a very demanding of herself and her children too. They were well-to-do, but that did not spoil Dorothy. Her home was a place of hard work and strong religious beliefs. Dorothy was affected by the home atmosphere and she wanted to imitate her mother both in piety, hard work and in a life of penance. Her sensitive heart and mind proved fertile soil for the Word of God. She took to heart the teachings of the parish priest. At that time priests encouraged people to live a life of penance. Dorothy liked to observe and listen to the pilgrims and penitents who often stayed in their home. She listened to their tales of hardships and learned from them many prayers and religious songs. She was impressed by the stories and legends she heard about hermits and people who chose to withdraw from the world and live in seclusion devoting their time to God. Dorothy loved the poor. As recorded in the documents of her canonisation (1404–1406), she would often reach inside the home chest to share with the poor generously. Not only did she give them gifts but she also helped to look after them, helped to serve them food, make their beds and heat water for them. Her father must have told
her oftentimes about his homeland, the Netherlands. It is not certain if Dorothy went to a church school, but the writer of her Life, J. Marienwerder, stated that she could read. Dorothy accompanied her parents on numerous pilgrimages. Probably the extraordinary spiritual atmosphere of these pilgrimages had a strong impact on Dorothy’s sensitive soul and she began to experience visions in her childhood. In her Life it is stated that already as a child she had direct contact with the suffering Christ. She had visions of Christ and talked to Him; she led a deeply mystical life of mental prayers on a high spiritual level. She made her first confession in Lent 1353 at the age of seven, but according to the custom of that time, she could not go to communion until she was ten in 1357. That year brought many changes into Dorothy’s life. It was the year her father died and the eldest brother became the head of the family. This same year her eldest sister got married, left home and Dorothy had to take over the responsibility of running the house. It was said that she carried out her duties with a smile and joy, always kind and eager to help. Possibly no one knew that she practiced penances and mortifications. Worn out by hard work and penances her constitution suffered and she was often forced to stay in bed. It is also recorded that she was good looking and of pleasant disposition, and a number of men wanted to marry her.

2.2. Difficult married life

Despite her love of virginity, Dorothy got married in October 1363; she felt that marriage would not interfere with her devotion to God. She was seventeen while her husband was nearly twenty years older than herself; he was an armourer who probably was also born in Montowy Wielkie. His name was Wojciech (Albert, Adalbert) and he had a workshop in Gdańsk. He was religious and good hearted, but also had a violent temper. After the wedding Wojciech took Dorothy to Gdańsk where they lived at Długa Street. Wojciech’s house was spacious, and so Dorothy had a large household to look after: the house, her husband’s workshop, the apprentices and servants. Her usual responsibilities included cooking, cleaning, sewing and mending clothes, doing the laundry and probably tending to cattle too. The following year, in 1364, their first daughter, Agatha, was born. They had five sons and four daughters. The children were growing up healthy, but eight children died in two successive epidemics. The eldest Agatha survived, probably because she was not in Gdańsk during the epidemics. We know that she married in 1381, but did not live long and died in 1404. Dorothy’s youngest daughter born in 1381, called Gertrude or Elizabeth, became a Benedictine nun in Chelmno. Dorothy wrote a letter to her and it is the only written document written by Blessed Dorothy that we still have today. We also know that Dorothy’s granddaughter, daughter of Agatha, became a Cistercian nun.

The death of their children must have been a real blow and a great loss. Perhaps that was why her husband set out on pilgrimages to Aquisgran and Rome. Dorothy had to stay to look after the house. She managed to combine her household duties with frequent visits to church long prayers and frequent penances. Going to church and praying was her greatest joy. She usually went to her parish church of St Mary in Gdańsk. She had many friends among the clergy. She often went to confession. Nicholas of Pszczółki, first
a Dominican and later a member of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, was her confessor and her spiritual director for many years. He recognised her holiness, he was a witness to her penances and knew of her mystical experiences. At her earnest request he allowed her to receive holy communion weekly. Her soul experienced apparitions and religious ecstasy. Guided by the Lord’s grace, Dorothy desired continual communion with God through prayer, mortification and meditation. Her husband did not understand her and complained that she neglected her household duties. He even beat her. Her husband’s companions did not understand her either. They may have been religious, but they liked to spend their spare time feasting. Dorothy had to be present at these parties and dress up to please her husband, but she never enjoyed it and thought of it as a waste of time. She enjoyed talking about God and shunned idle conversation about worldly matters. Because of her attitude she was subjected to vicious calumnies from other women, whom she called “fleshy”. She was accused of heresy and even mental illness. Nicholas, her confessor, knowing her soul, had defend her many times before her husband. However, though well-versed in theology, he himself could not always help Dorothy with her theological-mystical problems and would direct her to the more learned John Marienwerder.

Her husband was becoming more and more violent and would beat her until she bled. One day, he had beaten her very badly and Dorothy became so ill that she received the last rites. Wojciech called in the best doctors to save her for fear of being accused of killing her. After this incident he allowed her to go to church more often and to help the poor. The great family tragedies (the loss of their children in the epidemics of 1373 and 1382), as well as Dorothy’s unceasing prayer and exemplary life, made him receive the sacraments more often and control his temper. He was not a bad man, but he did not understand Dorothy’s spiritual life. After the death of their eight children Dorothy persuaded him to sell all they had in Gdańsk and to go on a pilgrimage to Aquisgran. During the pilgrimage Dorothy preferred spending time on her own in silence to being in the company of the chattering pilgrims. She had a deep desire for a quiet place for contemplation, away from Gdańsk and the gossiping neighbours and so, when they returned from their pilgrimage to Aquisgran, she tried to persuade her husband to leave Gdańsk and settle down in a place called Einsiedeln. However, they returned to Gdańsk. Dorothy continued her mortifications and spiritual practices with even greater fervour.

2.3. Longing for God amidst suffering

Her visions and ecstasies were even more frequent and she longed for a life of solitude where she could devote all her time to contemplation. It is not certain whether Dorothy was accused of heresy or whether it was sheer jealousy of her neighbours who threatened to take her to the church tribunal that eventually made her and Wojciech move to Einsiedeln (Finsterwalde) with their daughter. During their journey to their new home they were robbed. Her husband blamed Dorothy for that and beat her again. Dorothy patiently and uncomplainingly would bear her husband’s anger and resentment. Always kind and helpful she tried to alleviate the difficult situation. When they reached their destination they suffered many hardships, hunger, and unrest due to local warfare. But
the people amongst whom they lived soon recognised and started to appreciate Dorothy's good nature and patience. They pleaded her to stay with them permanently, but her husband would not allow it, and after about a year they returned to Gdańsk, where they built a house in the town's old quarter. Dorothy became less and less interested in the outside world and more and more drawn into a life of mysticism and contemplation. This greatly annoyed her ailing and ageing husband who beat her more often. It was a very difficult time for Dorothy. She cared Wojciech with great charity and tenderness, while he would pay her back with his bad-temper, lack of appreciation and mistrust. When he got better he took away the keys from her to prevent her, as he claimed, from giving away all their possessions to the poor. Dorothy's health began to fail, despite her relatively young age. She also suffered as a result of her contemplation of Christ's passion. Yet she never yielded to resignation or despair. Her strength was in God.

Despite her poor health she decided to make a pilgrimage on foot to Rome. The pilgrimage was lead by Nicolas of Pszczółki. Dorothy went on the pilgrimage not in search of adventure but in quest for a closer relationship with God and to obtain indulgences. The year 1390 was approaching and Pope Innocent IX declared it the Jubilee year. Only her deep religious motivation can explain the long hours spent on prayers and night vigils. She entered Rome barefooted to show her humility and give homage to Rome. The hardships she undertook caused her health to deteriorate and she spent seven weeks in hospital in Rome, suffering from hunger. But her spirits were high throughout her illness. Her strength of character and will are to be admired. When she was ready to return home her husband died in the spring of 1390. She returned to Gdańsk on 15 May 1390. She had no one close left there. Her youngest daughter Gertrude-Elizabeth entered the Benedictines in Chelmno. Dorothy's confessor, Nicolas of Pszczółki sent her again to the excellent theologian John of Kwidzyn for advice. He understood her well and encouraged her to continue on her chosen path. Dorothy returned to Gdańsk to put her affairs in order. Fifteen weeks later, in the spring of 1392, she moved to Kwidzyn for good.

Her stay in Kwidzyn was, without doubt, the time richest in spiritual experiences. She lodged in a tiny box-room that belonged to a poor widow, Catherine Mulner. She had given away all her worldly possessions to the poor and lived on charity, spending all her time in prayer in the Cathedral Church in Kwidzyn. She would go to confession every day and retell to her confessor all her visions. She was a simple, ordinary woman, not versed in theology and yet her insight into complicated theological problems was astounding. It was clear that her deep understanding of complicated theological issues must have had a supernatural source, as she would not have been able to learn it herself. Her confessor decided to record her revelations. He did not just use his own judgement but sought advice from other theologians, confronted them with the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Church Fathers. A well known theologian, John Reymann helped him to write down Dorothy's visions. Dorothy had long felt an urge to remove herself away from the world. She asked her confessor, humbly but firmly, for permission to be walled up in a cell adjoining the Cathedral. Her confessor was not as surprised by this request as we might be today, for it was a known custom practised in those times. It was considered a desire to spend one's last days in isolation, giving up one's freedom and the usual daily comforts
of life for God. She was given permission by the Bishop and on 2 May 1393, after special rites during which John of Kwidzyn preached, Dorothy was led in a procession into the cell and the entrance was bricked up. Her only contact with the world was a little window which looked onto the high altar. She decided to stay there until death. In her canonisation documents it is recorded that people used to come to her to ask her to intercede for them with God. She lived in the cell throughout the hard winter between 1393 and 1394 without any heating. Every day her confessor came to the window to hear her daily confession and to write down her revelations and visions. He also brought her Holy Communion. Christ was the only goal of her life in that harsh isolation. In mystical union with Christ she felt happy, praised God constantly, sang very often, gradually cutting off all her attachments with the worldly life. In her Life, John of Kwidzyn wrote: “I have never seen anyone work so hard for the good of this life, as she did for the afterlife”. In her walled-up cell she lived for over a year. Worn out by the Spartan conditions and the hard life of a wife and mother, she died on 25 June 1394.

2.4. Spirituality and the deeds of charity

What we know of Dorothy’s spirituality is based on the letter she wrote to her daughter who was a nun, and in the writings of her confessor John of Kwidzyn. The depths of her mystical soul are also presented in the canonisation documents of 1404–1406.

Among her religious practices the most noteworthy are: pilgrimages, fasting, vigils, prayers, contemplation, care for the sick and the poor, frequent – and later in her life – daily confessions, attending to the duties of her state of mother of nine children and the wife of an older man, and finally as a recluse.

Her faith was simple, her hope unwavering and her love of God and people fervent. She practised her faith since childhood, going to church frequently with her mother; she listened to the Word of God with great attention and humility. Her faith gave rise to the love of prayer, the desire of going to church and receiving Holy Communion. He faith was the source of her great trust in God in matters not only spiritual but also material; she believed that God would never leave her and would protect her from all harm, and would forgive her all her sins.

Her life’s dream was to reach Heaven. During sleepless nights she thought of the joys that awaited her in Heaven. For the Heavenly reward she toiled all her life fearlessly. She lived in constant hope of meeting Christ, who would forgive her all her sins.

In the documents of her canonisation it was said that her holiness had clearly showed in the love of God and of man. God was the greatest good and truth for her. For her loving God meant loving Christ. And next to Christ, who was closest to her heart, she loved Our Lady, constantly reciting the Hail Mary and visiting Marian shrines.

Her love of man was deeply rooted in her love of God. All her words and good deeds towards people were based on the desire to please God. She thought of herself as a fisher of souls for God. She prayed for those living and those who were dead. God was her love and she feared that her Love could be offended so she prayed for the offenders. She helped people in material ways too. Both in her parents’ house and in her own house she gave to
the poor of the best. Witnesses confirmed that she herself washed the feet of poor travelers, make beds for them in her house and tried her best to make them feel at home. She always found time to visit the sick, tend to the disabled and help the poor. That did not please her husband, who often accused her of negligence, but she persevered, loved him, prayed for him and looked after him too when he was ill.

She must have been sensible and sagacious since she was put in charge of running the household after her mother had died. However, her wisdom was directed primarily towards spiritual matters and therefore she always had her own confessor. Although always well-mannered and kind, she was also strong in resisting sin and admonishing other people. She had the grace of mystical vision. She practiced mortifications and suffered a lot but kept it all to herself. Today some of these practices would be objectionable, but we must remember that they were common and perfectly acceptable in the times of Blessed Dorothy.

Blessed Dorothy practiced the virtue of justice, towards God and people. For any help or good deed she was grateful and at least said a prayer as an act of gratitude. She was just in her judgements, could not bear lying and was brave in defending the poor and the hungry.

Blessed Dorothy was a woman of courage, bearing the trials of everyday life with great fortitude and joy. The witnesses of her holiness testified that she was patient, forbearing, prayed for the bad and ignorant, and always strove to change the bad into the good. She did not worry about her health or death. Her confessor wrote that her life had been “hard, bitter, painful, full of punishment and martyrdom”. Dorothy herself said, “My life, humanly judged, was inhuman”. She needed great fortitude to keep to the path she had chosen. Some priests even thought she was over pious or a heretic who ought to be burned at the stake. She persevered, however, and only towards the end of her life was reassured by her confessor, that she was doing the right thing and that her piety was not overzealous, but was healthy and in keeping with the times.

She always practised temperance by eating sparingly, avoiding meat and abstaining from alcohol at feasts.

According to the masters of spirituality humility is the basis of holiness. Her confessor testified that Dorothy’s humility was heroic all her life. She had no wish for any earthly honours or power. She wished to be obedient, serve people and thought of herself as a grave sinner. The root of her humility was the mystical union with God.

Dorothy practised obedience to her parents as a child and to her husband as a wife. She was not interested in having her own way. Although she was rich both in material goods and spiritual values and her attitude was one of spiritual poverty; she was not interested in amassing material goods. Her spirit of poverty reached its ideal when she gave away all her goods and became a recluse. As a recluse she did not accept anything without her confessor’s permission, not even food. She left no will because she had nothing to leave.

Throughout her life Dorothy kept chastity in accordance with the requirements of her status; she kept her virginal chastity until marriage and as a wife was faithful to her husband until death. In marriage she sought the fulfilment of God’s plans and not her own pleasure. Later, as a widow, she made a vow of chastity to God.
Dorothy’s beatification did not take place until 1976 and it was based on the long-standing cult showed towards her. As previously mentioned, documents were prepared between 1404 and 1406 as to her heroic virtues, that is the holiness of her life. Dorothy’s canonisation can now take place once there is proof of a miracle.

Conclusions

In his writings St Paul refers to the family as a “great mystery”. Vatican II calls the family the domestic church. The Church has always attached a great importance to the institution of marriage and family life, love between parents and love towards children. However, in this family model God is always given the first place. In contrast to the patriarchal model of the family of the ancient world, Christianity introduced emancipation of women and liberation of children. A considerable influence on the formation of family life was exerted by the Celtic, Nordic and Germanic cultures, in which the family was based on kinship of its members who lived together under the same roof around the same fire and sharing the same “bread and pot”. Régine Pernoud, a specialist on that era writes: “In this community [family] there is no longer a superior or a chief in the strict sense, although there is a leader. That role still belongs to the father but he is no longer the owner of the family. Grown up children take part in decision making. This was quite common because even in non-aristocratic families twelve year old girls and fourteen year old boys participated in decision making. The mother’s role was also very important. Vincent of Beauvais who lived in the second half of the 13th century states that the mother was not the husband’s mistress nor his servant, but his companion (‘socia’) who co-operated in the running of the family. In official documents there is mention of ‘co-queens’. There were documents issued by queens if marriage took place after coronation. In this feudal system there were many endowments made by fathers, mothers and also children, the legality of which was never questioned. James of Boussard quotes some documents in which six year old children are legal recipients of endowments made by their parents”.

Régine Pernoud adds that from the 14th century the Roman law began to influence the family again with its characteristic paternal domination. This continued until the 19th century and it is only in the 20th century that the family as an institution is returning to a more natural structure. According to Pernoud, the Church has always preached that the family is the fundamental cell of society. Since the Synod at Elvira, the Christian marriage, to quote St Paul, is a “great mystery”. Already one of the first councils of Arles (A.D. 314) and Ancyra (A.D. 314) discussed the nature of the family, not to mention the writings of the Church Fathers who formulated the principles of the Christian marriage. In the words of St Ambrose, the heads of the couple to be married were covered with a veil, just as is still done in the Orthodox Church. The synods up to the 12th century made many statements as to the indissolubility of the marriage. It was the response of the times, when a solid structure of marriage was indispensable to society. The Church has had a very great influence on marriage and family life. It is not surprising therefore that so many people achieved sanctity through marriage and in the family.”
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IŠTEKĖJUSIŲ ŠIAURIEČIŲ MOTEΡŲ MISTIKŲ ŠVENTUMAS: BRIGITA ŚVEDĖ IR DOROTĖJA IŠ MONTAU

S a n t r a u k a

Vatikano II Susirinkimo pastoracinėje konstitucijoje Gaudium et spes (31 skirsnys) skelbiama: „Pagrįstai galime manyti, jog žmonijos likimas atiduotas į rankas tiems, kurie vėlesnėms kartoms sugebės perduoti gyvenimo ir vilties motyvus.” Popiežius Benediktas XVI vizito į San Mariną 2011 m. birželio 9 d. metu taip pat teigė, jog dabartine socialiniam kontekstui šeimos sąvoka turi būti diskutuojama dėl jos nenuginčiamos svarbos.


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