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Turning Points in the Biography of Wanda Malczewska

Punkty zwrotne w biografii Wandy Malczewskiej

Abstract: The biography of Wanda Malczewska (1822–1896) fits well into the narrative of Polish spirituality in the second half of the 19th century. She was both a nurse and teacher, as well as an apostle and evangelist. Her life exemplified the ideal of a Christian woman who approached life as a service to God and others. At the age of 50, Wanda received the gift of mystical visions and the ability to prophesy future events, mainly concerning the destinies of Poland, Russia, and the Church. Her first vision occurred on 28 April 1872, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, at the church in Żytno.

During these visions, she participated directly in the Passion of Christ, which earned her the title of the 'Polish Anne Catherine Emmerich.' The emotional states into which Wanda entered were shaped by her difficult life: her painful personal experiences, the historical turbulence of the January Uprising, severe illness, homelessness, and loneliness. These moments of crisis represent significant turning points in her biography, which influenced her spirituality and worldview. From the perspective of the philosophy of dialogue, particularly Martin Buber's concept of relational existence, these experiences can be understood as a means of building a personal relationship with Christ through mystical union. Wanda Malczewska had the courage to pursue her spiritual vocation, becoming both a visionary and a mystic.

Keywords: Wanda Malczewska, mysticism, faith, apostolate, Gospel, philosophy of dialogue.

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‘Love is responsibility of an I for a You’
Martin Buber¹

The life of Wanda Malczewska (1822–1896)² offers a captivating window into Polish spirituality in the latter half of the 19th century. Her story unfolds against a backdrop of vivid socio-cultural contrasts: the de-Christianisation of Europe—which had been progressing since the late 18th century and often reduced religion to sociological and cultural constructs—and a resurgence of religious fervour that sought to strengthen tradition and search for new expressions of ‘living’ faith in God.³ In the words of Tomáš Halik, Martin Buber observed that ‘the world we live in is deeply ambivalent and truly allows for both interpretations: atheistic and faith-based’.⁴ This duality provides a key to understanding Malczewska’s life and spiritual legacy.

Among her fervent supporters was Zofia Kossak, who advocated for her beatification.⁵ It is worth asking: what was it about Malczewska that inspired Kossak to champion the cause of this humble woman and lend her voice to the beatification process that began in 1927?⁶ For Kossak, the lives and deeds of saints

- 1 M. Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. W. Kaufmann, New York 1996, [no pagination], <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/martin-buber-i-and-thou?v=1619970582>, accessed: 17.01.2025.
- 2 G. Augustynik, *Miłość Boga i Ojczyzny okazana w czynach, czyli żywot świętobliwej Polki Panny Wandy Justyny Nepomuceny Malczewskiej, jej objawienia i przepowiednie dotyczące Kościoła i Polski*, Częstochowa 1922, this work has been reissued several times; A. Majewski, *Żywot świętobliwej Wandy Justyny Nepomuceny Malczewskiej: 1822–1896*, Warszawa 1931; W. Malczewska, *Wizje, przepowiednie, upomnienia dotyczące Kościoła i Polski*, eds. A. Majewski, Wrocław 2016; H. Rogowski, *Malczewska Wanda Justyna Nepomucena (1822–1896), sługa Boża*, in: *Hagiografia polska*, ed. R. Gustaw, vol. 2, Poznań–Warszawa 1972, pp. 60–67.
- 3 J. Misiurek, *Historia i teologia polskiej duchowości katolickiej*, vol. 2, Lublin 1998.
- 4 T. Halik, *Hurra, nie jestem Bogiem!*, tł. A. Babuchowski, eds. A. Klich, Warszawa 2013.
- 5 Z. Kossak dedicated an article to Malczewska: *Wspomnienie o Wandzie Malczewskiej*, „Wiara i Życie. Miesięcznik religijno-moralny dla inteligencji”, 1 (1926) pp. 13–17; 2 (1926) pp. 57–60.
- 6 The beatification process for Wanda Malczewska was halted due to the outbreak of the Second World War and only resumed in 1949. A significant milestone came in 2006 when Pope Benedict XVI announced the decision of the Congregation for

she wrote about—St. Stanislaus of Szczepanów (*Kielich krwi* [Chalice of Blood], *Zlecenie* [Commission], the essay *Boże motory* [God's Engines]), St. Stanislaus Kostka (*Z miłości* [Out of Love]), Kazimierz Korsak (*Suknia Dejaniry* [Dejanira's Dress]), Jan Sarkander of Skoczów (1922), Andrew Bobola, Josaphat Kuntsevych, and Brother Albert Chmielowski—were both manifestations of faith and testimonies to Christian cultural identity.⁷ In her novel *Z miłości*, Kossak celebrated not only the deep connection of these saints to Polish identity and culture but also the intertwining of their stories with a providentially interpreted history of Poland. In response to critics who accused her of portraying sanctity as 'reliquary-like', Kossak countered with these words:

We have every right to see saints as human beings, to strip away the mask of naive medieval piety that hagiographers once cloaked them in. That mask has too often turned saints into little more than reliquaries—ancient, venerated, and respectable, but distant. This should not be so! Saints are still alive and relevant today. Their influence has not waned, and their

the Causes of Saints. The process had originally been initiated in 1927, when a special beatification commission, led by Bishop Kazimierz Tomczak in the Diocese of Łódź, was established to conduct the informative phase. However, the Nazi occupation and the communist era posed major obstacles.

Notably, the records containing testimony from 25 eyewitnesses were lost but eventually rediscovered in 1962. By 1957, the diocesan phase of the process was completed, and on 29 April of that year, the documentation was sent to Rome. References to Malczewska's life and cause are found in works by S. Czermińska, including *Wanda Malczewska (1822–1879)*, published in *Nasza Przyszłość* 38 (1927) pp. 166–167, and *Malczewska Wanda*, in *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 19, ed. E. Rostworowski, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1974, pp. 272–273.

Today, the beatification process has reached its final stage. Since 24 June 1997, Fr Krzysztof Nykiel has served as the postulator. On 21 February 2006, the Holy See issued a decree recognising Wanda Malczewska's heroic virtues, granting her the title of "Venerable Servant of God." Z. Tracz, *Przebieg procesu beatyfikacyjnego Czcigodnej Sługi Bożej Wandy Malczewskiej na podstawie Positio Super Virtutibus oraz Relatio et vota Congressus Peculiaris Super Virtutibus*, „Wiadomości Archidiecezjalne Łódzkie”, 4 (2008) pp. 281–287.

7 M. J. Olszewska discusses this topic extensively in: *Tajemnice świętości (Z miłości, Błogosławiona wino, Suknia Dejaniry)*, in: eadem, *Drogi nadziei. Polska proza historyczna z lat 1876–1939 wobec kryzysu kultury*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 383–392.

intercessory power has not diminished. But to appreciate this, we must truly understand them. There is no dishonour in taking a saint out of their gilded niche to see them as our brother.⁸

Zofia Kossak's work sought to present saints as relatable figures in a manner consistent with the Catholic Church's revised hagiographic methodology, as advocated in the teachings of Father Jacek Woroniecki, who urged a critical eye when reading historical sources, particularly medieval legends. Woroniecki warned against overly idealising saints and instead encouraged linking their holiness with their everyday struggles. The life of Wanda Malczewska beautifully illustrates this connection between sanctity and the ordinary. At first glance, her story may seem unremarkable as it lacks the dramatic, transformative events akin to St Paul's dramatic conversions or encounters with renowned figures of history. Let us briefly summarise her biography, which has been meticulously documented in connection with the ongoing beatification process.⁹ My goal is not to unearth new facts about Wanda's life or contest established findings but rather to place her within a historical context, a cause that Zofia Kossak ardently supported.

Born in Radom in a tenement at 155 Warszawska Street,¹⁰ Wanda Malczewska was baptised in the town's parish church on May 22, 1822. Eight years later, on May 22, 1830, she celebrated her First Holy Communion in the same church. Life in Wanda's family home was modest. Her father, Stanisław (1798–1848), who descended from the Sandomierz branch of the family, worked as a clerk in the Radom Sub-prefecture Office and later in the Sandomierz Province Commission. Her mother, Maria Julia née Żurawska (1793–1831), stood out

8 Z. Kossak, *Czy licentia poetica?*, in: *Zofia Kossak na emigracji*, eds. M. Pałaszewska, Warszawa 1998, p. 337.

9 E. K. Czaczkowska, *Wanda Malczewska (1822–1896). Widziała mękę Pańską i odrodzenie Polski*, in: eadem, *Mistyczki. Historie kobiet wybranych*, Kraków 2019, pp. 193–265; E. Orzechowska, *Droga do niepodległości Polski Wandy Malczewskiej*, pp. 1–28, https://www.psp14.radom.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Droga_do_niepodleglosci.pdf, accessed: 1.04.2023.

10 A. Majewski, *Wanda w domu rodzicielskim*, in: W. Malczewska, *Wizje, przepowiednie, upomnienia dotyczące Kościoła i Polski*, pp. 25–38.

for her devout faith, which she passed on to her children. Wanda received her education at home, as her parents could not afford formal schooling for her. Tragedy soon struck the family: first, her younger sister passed away, followed by her mother and brother Marcin. After his wife's death, Stanisław remarried Karolina Bukowiecka, who brought the Prędocinek estate as her dowry. Despite an improvement in their financial status, Wanda's relationship with her step-mother remained fraught.

Her fortunes shifted several years later when her widowed aunt, Konstancja Siemieńska, took her under her wing. Wanda found refuge in Klimontów¹¹ in the Dąbrowa Basin and later moved with the family to a palace in Zagórze. After the January Uprising, the financial hardships forced the Siemieńskis to sell their estate and move to the Austrian partition, leading Wanda to live with her aunt Magdalena Kochanowska in Kraków. Upon the Siemieńskis' return, they settled in Wilkoszewice, and from 1870 to 1884, in Żytno. After the deaths of Jacek Siemieński in 1872 and of Konstancja Siemieńska soon after, Wanda was taken in by Jadwiga Łopatto, the enlightened, energetic, and courageous prioress of the Dominican convent at St. Anna near Przyrów, about 20 km from Żytno, where she lived peacefully until Jadwiga's passing in 1891. Unable to remain at the convent, Wanda moved to Lubiec, where Jacek Siemieński's son managed an estate, and was later offered shelter by Fr. Tomasz Świnarski at the rectory in Parzno. She died there of pneumonia in 1896, surrounded by an aura of sanctity. Initially buried in the local cemetery, her remains were transferred in 1923 to the crypt beneath the main altar of a new church. As she had wished, she now rests close to the tabernacle.

Wanda Malczewska's long life was defined by momentous and often painful turning points that shaped her story. She endured the devastating loss of her mother, the breakdown of her family in its aftermath, the bleak loneliness of orphanhood, and the struggles of abject poverty and homelessness. Her existence was precariously sustained by the goodwill of relatives, leaving her to drift on the margins of the social class into which she was born. This liminal status, caught between social strata, stripped her of a clear identity. Her fortune changed with the support of her aunt and her cousin, Jacek Siemieński. Jacek

11 Ibidem, pp. 39–56.

was an educated man, a social activist, a philanthropist and a patron of education and culture, whose passionate patriotism drove his purpose.¹² During the January Uprising, he served as commissioner for the Sandomierz province and was arrested and imprisoned in Radom. After his release, undeterred, he continued to work with the insurrectionary authorities. Disillusioned by constant disputes among the movement's leaders, Jacek temporarily left Poland for Vienna and Baden but returned in 1866. The family settled in Żytno, a place now perpetually bound with the history of Polish mysticism. Here, Jacek introduced Wanda to patriotic and charitable work, weaving her into a network of efforts that combined her faith with a deeper purpose.

During the January Uprising, Wanda, unlike her brother Julian, who opposed armed independence movements, dedicated herself with fervour to supporting the insurgents. She organised two hospitals and tended to the wounded, whether they were Polish or Russian. She prayed for the insurgents hanged in Zagórz and placed medallions around the necks of volunteers marching into battle. The martyrdom of her homeland became a defining experience and an intrinsic element of her spiritual biography.¹³ The emotional toll of the uprising's failure left Wanda severely ill; the trauma was so profound that she suffered a nervous breakdown. After recovering, she poured all her energy into serving others. Even before the January Uprising, Wanda had shown extraordinary sensitivity to human suffering.¹⁴ From a young age, she felt a strong duty to aid the less fortunate, as exemplified by her decision to forgo an expensive First Communion dress to send money to African missions instead.

12 J. Pezda, *Siemieński Jacek*, in: *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 37, ed. H. Markiewicz, Warszawa–Kraków 1996–1997, pp. 14–15.

13 A. Majewski, *Żywot świętobliwej Wandy Justyny Nepomuceny Malczewskiej*, pp. 42–44; E. Orzechowska, *Droga do niepodległości Polski Wandy Malczewskiej*, pp. 10–17. Roland Prejs outlined the lives of nineteen saints and blessed who were either actively involved in the January Uprising or witnessed its events: R. Prejs, „Następstwa żywotne” – święci i błogosławieni Kościoła katolickiego epoki powstania styczniowego, in: *Rok 1863 w kilku odsłonach*, ed. E. Niebelski, Lublin 2016, pp. 241–253; M. Bruchnańska, *Ciche bohaterki: udział kobiet w Powstaniu Styczniowym: (materiały)*, Miejsce Piastowe 1933.

14 E. Orzechowska, *Droga do niepodległości Polski Wandy Malczewskiej*, pp. 6–10.

With guidance from her cousin Jacek Siemieński, a medical student, she learned the basics of medicine and completed a paramedic course. Wanda pledged herself to wherever she felt her help was needed most, tending to the sick, mainly from peasant families, and caring for them with selfless dedication. She mediated family disputes, supported widows and their children, and promoted the moral and educational development of women by teaching them practical trades. Wanda even facilitated their entry into convents and personally escorted young women to Niżniów and Jazłowiec to meet Sister Marcelina Darowska and the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Her cousin Jacek founded a hospital, an elementary school, and a library. He imported textbooks, catechisms, and books such as *The History of Poland in 24 Scenes* by Kazimierz Góralczyk (the pseudonym of Władysław Ludwik Anczyc), which Wanda distributed among the rural population. Until the end of her life, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to teaching rural children to read and write, as well as educating them in Polish history and the catechism, undeterred by the occasional slights or unpleasantness from her pupils. She also led the children to church for adoration services and May devotions. Her service extended to sewing vestments and serving as a sacristan.

In her work, Wanda sought to teach the poorest members of society how to live with dignity. She had a rare ability to connect with the common people because she understood their mentality, their struggles, and their spiritual needs, and showed great sensitivity in embracing and elevating their religious traditions. Her grassroots efforts, inspired by Gospel teachings on love for one's neighbour, wove together Christian values and a deep sense of patriotism, combining love for God with service to her country. While her efforts may have seemed modest and, one might say, mundane, she approached them with heartfelt devotion to both God and her fellow human beings. For Wanda, this work was an act of patriotic and religious service, carried out with unshakable courage in the face of many difficulties.

Yet, despite her efforts to teach and care for the local population, she was never fully trusted by those she served. To the villagers, she remained the 'lady from the manor.' In addition, she was placed under police surveillance, as the Tsarist authorities grew increasingly wary of her influence among the peasantry. With her religious-patriotic visions becoming more frequent, they feared her efforts might spark unrest among the rural population. What set Wanda apart was her

humility, sincerity, and genuine empathy for others. Outwardly, she embodied the Grottesque ideal and wore mourning attire after the January Uprising for the rest of her life. Her attire was austere: plain black dresses with narrow cuffs and white trim, adorned only by a brooch carved by an exiled Siberian prisoner. Until her final days, Wanda remained unmarried and solitary, a stern, serious, and conscientious woman who held herself and others to high standards of duty. Her intense piety, however, often led her to be regarded as excessively devout.

Throughout her life, Malczewska maintained unwavering obedience to the Church's institutions. Yet, her spiritual church, if one might use such a term, was the evangelical church of the heart—poor, humble, and apostolic. Her faith never presented her with a conflict between belief in God and religious practice. Although she reportedly considered establishing a non-habited congregation, she ultimately did not pursue the idea, as she felt no vocation to the monastic life and did not join any of the existing orders.¹⁵ Malczewska did not find a spiritual guide among the priests she encountered, such as Fr Wojciech Olkowicz, Fr Grzegorz Augustynik, or Fr Świnarski. Even during her time living with the Dominican nuns, she received little spiritual support and often experienced distrust and resistance, from both the clergy and some of the sisters. She is believed to have joined the clandestine Stanisławite association, an offshoot of the suppressed Marian order, which was dedicated to promoting devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and prayers for souls in purgatory. This association likely included Fr Olkowicz, the parish priest of Żytno.¹⁶ Within the Stanisławites, Wanda adopted the name Maria Stanisława od św. Hostii (Mary Stanisława of the Holy Host).

15 E. K. Czackowska discusses this extensively in *Wanda Malczewska (1822–1896)*, pp. 208–213.

16 J. Bar (*Polskie zakony*, „Prawo Kanoniczne,” 1–4 [1961] pp. 436–437) argues that the Stanisławite association ‘was not canonically connected with the former Marian Order nor was it erected as a religious congregation, but as an ordinary association, without vows or religious structures.’ A note identifying the Stanisławites as a diocesan association of laypeople is included in J. Marecki, *Zakony w Polsce*, Kraków 2000, pp. 78–79. The Stanisławites operated clandestinely and did not join the renewed Marian Order in 1909. They became public in 1928, forming a diocesan association in the Diocese of Siedlce, which was dissolved in 1955. They also maintained a Third Order for lay members.

She drew her strength from unceasing, personal, and soulful prayer, participation in daily Mass, frequent reception of Holy Communion, weekly Saturday confession, regular adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and the recitation of the Rosary. Each day, she practiced inner penance—penance through the cross and suffering. As previously described, Wanda was a nurse and teacher, but more importantly, she was an apostle, an evangelist, and, an early forerunner of the modern lay catechist. She represents a spirituality rooted in unfaltering prayer, absolute trust in God, and tireless labour on behalf of others, especially the most vulnerable. Her evangelical life as an ‘unprofitable servant,’ as she referred to herself, bore witness to the idea that holiness can be found in the everyday—in humbly and courageously enduring hardships, patiently bearing the selfishness of those around her, and embracing the small, sad, or tedious aspects of life. She accepted all of life’s trials with humility. Among 19th-century Polish noblewomen, as documented in diaries from the period, many shared a similar ethos. These patriotic reformers advocated for ascetic lifestyles and committed themselves to national, social, and philanthropic causes. In this light, Malczewska emerges as a ‘silent heroine,’ the personification of Polish women in her era—quiet, humble, and often unrecognised in their heroism.¹⁷

Wanda Malczewska was distinguished not only by her charitable service to others but also by her extraordinary sense of personal connection with God. Gifted with mystical experiences and prophetic visions, she became known as the ‘Polish Anne Catherine Emmerich.’ People often remarked, ‘Lord, she’s a saint; she talks with God.’¹⁸ Wanda kept no spiritual diary and confided her revelations solely to her confessors. At the instruction of the bishop of the Kalisz-Kujawy diocese, Fr Wojciech Olkowicz, her parish priest, attempted to record her visions. However, much of her mystical experience was never documented, and some of the pencil-written notes that do survive have now faded and are barely legible. Fr Augustynik compiled the available accounts and notes into a volume entitled *Widzenia, przepowiednie, upomnienia* [Visions, Prophecies, and Warnings]. Despite its limited scope, this collection reveals much about Wanda’s spiritual life. Her visions were preceded by a series of shattering and

17 A. Majewski, *Żywot świętobliwej Wandy Justyny Nepomuceny Malczewskiej*, p. 49.

18 Ibidem, p. 50.

'transformative' events: the death of her mother, the breakdown of her family, orphanhood, vagrancy, homelessness, and the death of her fiancé on their wedding day. These tragedies, compounded by the deaths of her guardians, culminated in the overwhelming trauma of the January Uprising's defeat. The prolonged illness that followed ravaged her body for several years, leaving permanent marks. Her life, suffused with sorrow, reflected the words that Christ spoke to St Faustina Kowalska: 'There is no other path to heaven but the way of the cross.'¹⁹

From an early age, Wanda displayed extraordinary piety. Her role model was St Stanislaus Kostka. As a child, she would spend hours praying on her mother's kneeler and engage in lengthy conversations with her Guardian Angel and Christ. She remembered and described the day of her First Holy Communion, which she received at a relatively young age, as follows:

Throughout the entire Holy Mass, I wept tears of humility, and I wasn't alone—my parents and the household staff attending the Mass also shed tears. When the parish priest opened the Tabernacle and exposed the ciborium holding the Blessed Sacrament, an extraordinary brilliance filled my sight. It felt as though the entire church was ablaze, and we were all enveloped in flames that did not consume us. Surrounding me were choirs of Holy Angels, and the Blessed Mother adjusted the wreath on my head. As the parish priest placed the Blessed Host into my mouth, I was overcome by an indescribable sweetness. Then I heard a voice, just as I had once heard while adorning the cross: 'From this moment, you are Mine. You will live long in the world, but not for the world—only for Me. Neither worldly pleasures, nor illness, nor poverty will separate you from Me. Just as I had no place to call My own, no place to lay My head, neither will you. You will close your eyes among strangers, and there your bones will rest.' In the depths of my soul, I answered Jesus: 'Lord, as long as I have You, I will be happy, even if everyone abandons me and every misfortune befalls me. I promise and vow to You, my Jesus, that I will remain Yours for all eternity.'²⁰

19 F. Kowalska, *Dzienniczek*, 1487, https://www.truechristianity.info/pl/books/dzienniczek_sw_siostry_faustyny_kowalskiej/dzienniczek_sw_siostry_faustyny_kowalskiej_05.php, accessed: 1.04.2023.

20 Ibidem.

Wanda's conversations with Jesus became a regular part of her life, prompting her, even as a child, to dedicate herself entirely to Him. In her heart, she silently vowed a life of chastity. By 1871, Wanda began an intense spiritual routine, centred on daily Mass, Holy Communion, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, and Marian devotions in May. Spiritually, she applied herself to emulating Christ, following the principle of *kenosis*—the self-emptying described by Meister Eckhart: 'Only one who is equal to "nothing" is equal to God.'²¹ Accepting suffering as a unique spiritual gift, Wanda embraced it as part of her divine calling. At the age of fifty, she was granted the gift of mystical visions and the ability to prophesy future events, predominantly concerning the fate of her homeland and the Church.²² Her first vision occurred on 28 April 1872, during Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Easter at the church in Żytno. After the Elevation, she heard Christ speak: 'The grace of vision I give you is for the benefit of others. Let the truth of your visions show the attitude of your prayer and the sincerity of your heart.'²³

According to records left by Fr Augustynik from 1871 to 1878, Wanda experienced mystical phenomena as often as five or six times a month. In the early years, she remained fully conscious during these moments, but as the years passed, she would enter states of ecstasy. These visions often took place at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Żytno, during Mass, long hours of Eucharistic adoration, or at her residence—be it the palace, the convent, or the rectory. Family members, parishioners, priests, nuns, and occasional guests bore witness to these events. Over time, however, the frequency of her visions began to wane. Malczewska's visions were accompanied by spiritual suffering, intimately connected to the Paschal Mystery, which allowed her to partake in Christ's Passion.²⁴ In 1872, as foretold by Jesus, she endured spiritual and

21 A. Majewski, *Żywot świętobliwej Wandy Justyny Nepomuceny Malczewskiej*, p. 75.

22 From a theological perspective, issues related to Malczewska's visions have been thoroughly analysed in the context of her beatification process. See A. Majewski, *Objawienia Boskie*, in: W. Malczewska, *Wizje, przepowiednie, upomnienia dotyczące Kościoła i Polski*, p. 121.

23 G. Augustynik, *Miłość Boga i Ojczyzny okazana w czynach*, p. 118.

24 *Widzenia Wielkopostne 1872 r.*, in: W. Malczewska, *Wizje, przepowiednie, upomnienia dotyczące Kościoła i Polski*, pp. 57–105.

physical torment on every Friday of Lent, culminating on Good Friday. From morning until the afternoon, she felt an intense spiritual anguish, marked by the absence of Christ's presence during Mass. Between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m., this anguish gave way to acute physical pain—sharp aches in her heart, head, hands, and feet. Witnesses, including Fr Olkiewicz, recounted that she would collapse and lie motionless on her back, stretched out as though dead. By 5:00 p.m., she would regain consciousness and resume her daily tasks.

Her visions unfolded as vivid encounters with Christ's Passion: she was present at the Last Supper, joined the vigil in the Garden of Gethsemane, witnessed the scourging, and stood before Pilate during Christ's condemnation. She accompanied Christ as He carried the Cross, saw Him meet His Sorrowful Mother, and finally witnessed His crucifixion and death. She saw Judas' betrayal and listened to Jesus' teachings on the sanctity of the priesthood. Through these experiences of co-suffering, Wanda participated in Christ's Passion, alongside Mary and the apostles. Her visions are permeated with the mysticism of the Cross which conveys the redemptive purpose of suffering. On 18 May 1872, the eve of Pentecost, she described how 'her spirit was carried into infinity.' In this moment of mystical rapture, she beheld Christ in His full Majesty, alongside Mary, angels, and saints, including many Polish saints. She also experienced 'a vision of the Holy Spirit as flames' and an encounter with the Holy Trinity. These experiences granted her a supernatural discernment of the mysteries of the faith.²⁵

Wanda Malczewska heard both internal and external voices, bore hidden stigmata, and was gifted with extraordinary abilities: she could discern the spiritual state of living souls, remained unharmed by fire, and instinctively understood Latin despite never having learned it. Her visions brought her into a deep, loving union with God—a connection described by St Augustine as a state transcending the senses, known as 'ecstasy'²⁶ or a 'visio spiritualis.'²⁷ In this state, one enters into the depths of divine Mystery. In such moments, 'He becomes the soul of your soul, the intimacy within, the light of your being, the ultimate

25 E. K. Czackowska, *Wanda Malczewska (1822–1896)*, p. 225.

26 Ibidem, p. 230.

27 Ibidem, p. 233.

closeness. God becomes the I of your self.²⁸ This profound connection, signifying the full and constant presence of the Creator within the human soul, transcends words and defies the boundaries of human language.²⁹ Wanda, whose patriotic commitment began with remarkable fervour in childhood,³⁰ also received visions about the future destinies of Poland and Russia,³¹ which drew the ire and concern of the Tsarist authorities. The nature of Wanda's visions was captured in the memoirs of Franciszka Siemieńska:

In 1875, the Siemieński manor in Żytno, near Radomsko, was stormed by Russian gendarmes. Jacek Siemieński, a hero of the January Uprising and a fervent patriot, had been dead for three years, so the raid was not aimed at him. Instead, the Tsarist emissaries had come to disperse the crowds gathering three times a week during Lent to witness the visions of Miss Wanda Malczewska, a relative of the Siemieński family. Their orders were to warn her against providing further cause for such gatherings. When the gendarmes arrived, the manor was teeming with people. Peasants filled the yard and hallways, the local gentry lined the staircase, and the Siemieński family and their guests waited upstairs. In one of the upstairs rooms, Wanda lay on a bed, detached from her senses and body, deep in a mystical trance. News of her visions had reached the Tsarist offices in Radom, and from there, made its way to Warsaw. The Russians were less alarmed by the religious content of Wanda's visions than by **her prophecies of Poland's eventual independence**. She declared that God had revealed the end of the occupation and the restoration of Polish freedom. This message, passed from person to person, brought hope and strength to a nation that had been denied its sovereignty for over a century. To the Russians, however, it was a potential spark for rebellion.

28 T. Halik, *Hurra, nie jestem Bogiem!*, p. 50.

29 There is extensive literature on this subject, for example: M. Górnicki, *Mistycyzm*, in: *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej*, ed. M. Chmielewski, Lublin–Kraków 2002, pp. 532–532; B. McGinn, *Augustyn – Ojciec założyciel*, in: idem, *Obecność Boga. Historia mistyki zachodniochrześcijańskiej*, trans. T. Dekert, vol. 1: *Fundamenty mistyki (do V w.)*, Kraków 2009, p. 331.

30 A. Majewski, *Żywot świątobliwej Wandy Justyny Nepomuceny Malczewskiej: 1822–1896*, pp. 45–50.

31 *Przepowiednie z objawień Wandy J. Malczewskiej*, „Rycerz Niepokalanej”, 10 (1923) pp. 151; A. Majewski, *Objawienia Boskie*, pp. 8–25.

As locals prayed and waited for Wanda's next prophetic revelation, the gendarmes threatened her with exile to Siberia to silence her. Yet, when one of the officers ascended the stairs and saw her in a state of ecstatic rapture, he fell to his knees and crossed himself repeatedly, bowing in awe at the sight before him.³²

According to Franciszka Siemieńska's later accounts, no one from the manor or the village informed on Wanda to the Tsarist authorities, which spared her from arrest and deportation to Siberia—a very real danger for someone engaged in such activities. Still, the looming threat forced her into hiding on numerous occasions. Siemieńska's memoirs also recount Wanda's visions as recurring with regularity. On the second Friday of Lent in 1872, Wanda described seeing Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, who said to her: 'Your homeland and the Church within it will gain the long-desired freedom through bloody toil and fraternal unity.'³³ A little over a year later, on 15 August 1873, after Vespers, Wanda stood before the altar of Our Lady and once again heard a heavenly message:

Today's celebration will soon become your national holiday, symbolising triumph for the Polish people, for on this day you will achieve a resounding victory over the enemies who seek your annihilation. You must observe this holiday with great solemnity. Cherish my sanctuary at Jasna Góra with particular devotion. Let it stand as a reminder of the blessings you have received from God through my intercession and those you will continue to receive, provided you remain steadfast in the holy Catholic faith, uphold Christian virtues, and cultivate true love of the homeland founded on unity and fraternity among all classes of the nation.³⁴

32 S. Czermińska OSU, *Wanda Malczewska (1822–1896)*, „*Nasza Przeszłość*”, 38 (1972) pp. 146–147.

33 *Spełniają się proroctwa nt. Polski dane sł. B. Wandzie Malczewskiej*, <https://www.frona.pl/a/spelniaja-sie-proroctwa-nt-polski-dane-sl-b-wandzie-malczewskiej-1,89813.html>, accessed: 1.04.2023.

34 W. Malczewska, *Wizje, przepowiednie, upomnienia dotyczące Kościoła i Polski*, p. 112.

The prophecy of Mary, later invoked during the Bolshevik invasion of Poland and the Battle of Warsaw in 1920, was affirmed by Christ's words to Wanda on 5 October 1873: 'I have raised the cross among you as a symbol of faith, triumph, and glory. I have given unto you My Mother as your Protector, so wherefore do you fear? Why is your trust so feeble? Remember, Mary, My Mother, can intercede for you in all things.'³⁵ On Christmas Day 1873, during an afternoon adoration as the congregation sang carols, Wanda had a vision of the Virgin Mary cradling the Infant Jesus, surrounded by St Joseph and angels. At Mary's feet knelt a group of Polish saints and holy figures, singing: 'Our Queen among the Cherubim, hear the humble song of Polish sons, which rises to Your throne and pleads for the freedom of our homeland.'³⁶ As they sang, Wanda noticed Mary leaning towards Jesus and speaking with Him. Then Mary turned to the singers: 'I love Poland, for it is My kingdom. I will not abandon you, and My Son will not let you perish. Just a little more suffering and you will regain your freedom.'³⁷

On the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January 1877, during the votive Mass at the end of the first Gospel, Wanda had another vision. She saw Christ as a child, standing on a bright cloud, holding a globe illuminated by a brilliant star. Etched on the globe were various countries, including Poland, restored to its rightful borders with access to the Baltic Sea, and the words 'Mary's Kingdom.' At Christ's feet knelt representatives of many nations and Polish monarchs—Mieszko I and his wife Dąbrowka, Władysław Jagiełło with Jadwiga, Kunegunda with Bolesław, and Jan III Sobieski—each celebrated for their role in spreading Christianity and supporting Poland's Christian mission during their reigns. They personified the myth of Poland as the bulwark of Christendom defending Europe against threats from beyond. Wanda's visions also carried warnings for Poles. On the fifth Friday of Lent in 1872, she saw the Saviour carrying the Cross to Calvary, warning her of the dangers that Poland might face after regaining its independence.

35 Ibidem.

36 Ibidem.

37 Ibidem, p. 115.

Tumultuous times are approaching. Your homeland will be free from the oppression of external enemies, but it will come under threat from internal adversaries. They will set their sights on the nation's youth, and insist that religion has no place in education and can be replaced by secular teachings. They will decry practices such as confession and other religious observances, as well as the Church's oversight of schools, claiming that these stifle young minds. They will seek to remove crosses and religious images from classrooms, ostensibly to avoid offending Jewish communities. By eroding faith among the younger generation, they will attempt to sow irreligion throughout the nation. Should the people succumb to this influence and abandon their faith, the hard-won freedom of their homeland will slip from their grasp.³⁸

On the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1896, she had a vision of Jesus delivering a similarly cautionary admonition. Mary, too, exhorted the Polish people to cast off their bondage to the sins of the past: petty rivalries, idleness, class selfishness, quarrelsomeness, and anarchy. Among the most striking of Wanda's visions are those foretelling the future of Russia, which she saw as an empire of evil. In one vision, dated 14 November 1893, she beheld St Josaphat and the persecuted Uniates, along with a prophecy of God's judgment on Russia and its eventual collapse. Jesus proclaimed:

The day of My Justice draws near. The one who commanded your slaughter shall not hold power much longer. His children and grandchildren will meet a disgraceful end, murdered by his own subjects—enemies of My Cross—and his legacy will be ripped to pieces. Your brothers who gave their lives defending the faith, forgiving their enemies as they fell, have already found their reward in Heaven. You who yet walk among the living, hold fast to your faith and strengthen others in theirs, so you will one day share in the glory of your martyred brothers.³⁹

In another vision, Wanda heard these words: 'Russia will crumble, but monasteries will withstand the storm. Russia will face divine punishment for the blood it has spilled, blood that cries out for vengeance to Heaven. Terri-

38 Ibidem.

39 Ibidem.

ble calamities will befall Poland, but they will not crush her.’⁴⁰ The destruction of Russia is foretold to be final.

The intertwining of religious and patriotic themes in Malczewska’s visions is particularly significant as they unite Christ’s Passion with the suffering of Poles under the partitions. For her, religion becomes a national treasure, as it shapes the collective identity of the people while binding them to enduring values rooted in shared traditions. This also connects Poles to the universal community of the Catholic Church. Wanda’s visions invoke the messianic themes of Polish Romanticism, especially Adam Mickiewicz’s *Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage*,⁴¹ which draw on Old Testament imagery of the ‘Pilgrim People of God.’ This messianic vision parallels the Passion and Resurrection of Christ with Poland’s partitions and its struggle for independence. Her visions also feature admonitions from Christ and Mary, urging Poles to persevere on the path to holiness, repent, and cleanse the nation’s soul of the sins that have brought its downfall. Malczewska argues that Poland’s future freedom and sovereignty hinge on humility and faithfulness to God. In response to Christ’s warning—‘Let the nation not turn this freedom into lawlessness’⁴²—Wanda composed the following prayer:

Poland, my homeland, fall to your knees before the Lord, who foretells your freedom. Give thanks to Him and love Him with all your heart. Remain faithful to the Church, the Bride of Christ, and to your Mother, who gave you life and raised you. Stand firmly by the Church, protect its God-given rights, and oppose any decrees by schismatic, heretical, or Jewish-Masonic regimes that seek to curtail its freedom or bring about its destruction.⁴³

Malczewska believed that the freedom and strength of the Polish state were inseparable from the liberty of faith and the authority of the Catholic Church. Among the most remarkable and personal aspects of her story

40 Ibidem.

41 E. K. Czackowska, *Wanda Malczewska (1822–1896)*, p. 252.

42 W. Malczewska, *Wizje, przepowiednie, upomnienia dotyczące Kościoła i Polski*, p. 68.

43 *Spełniają się proroctwa nt. Polski dane sł. B. Wandzie Malczewskiej.*

is her bond with her nephew, Jacek Malczewski, who visited Żytno and witnessed her visions. During these visits, Jacek formed a close spiritual bond with her. In the fateful year of 1872, amid an especially intense period of Wanda's visions, Jacek painted an image of the Virgin Mary for her. Before this image, Wanda prayed earnestly that her nephew 'would never use his talent to harm souls or the homeland, as so many painters, sculptors, and novelists do with their shameless works, corrupting countless souls and leading them to damnation.'⁴⁴ Malczewska later received a vision in which the Virgin Mary promised her that Jacek would become 'a celebrated painter whose work would be guided by a purely religious, national, and historical spirit.'⁴⁵ Not long after, Malczewski fulfilled this vision, creating the patriotic triptych *Law, Homeland, Art* in a style imbued with mysticism and idealism. His works often featured recurring thematic cycles, rendered in various variations, with Christological motifs and death symbolism becoming central to his oeuvre. After his death, Malczewski was laid to rest in the Crypt of the Distinguished at Skalka, dressed in the habit of a Franciscan tertiary.

It is worth taking a deeper look at the life and legacy of Wanda Malczewska. Some might dismiss her emotional states and mystical experiences as caused by illness, prolonged weakness, depression, or nervous breakdowns. Antoni Kępiński discusses extraordinary experiences that transcend psychological endurance and pragmatic idealism in his work *Schizophrenia*. However, Malczewska's visions acquire an entirely different significance when viewed not through the lens of illness or socio-cultural, institutional religion, but as an expression of 'living' faith—a deeply personal relationship with God, which manifests as an internal dialogue in which He becomes a tangible, incarnated presence that exists beyond the bounds of individual consciousness.

Such dialogue is dynamic, akin to processes of constant transformation. It is subjective, relational, and flows from personal freedom rather than compulsion, thus enabling the individual to offer to God that which is most precious. In this sense, faith is born out of love for God and others. It arises from personal freedom, not societal or cultural coercion, and manifests as a sacrificial offer-

44 Ibidem.

45 Ibidem.

ing to God. Therefore, faith is neither a projection of psychological states nor an expression of fanaticism or exaltation, but, in St Augustine's terms, a journey into the depths of the soul, granting the courage to enter the profound Mystery. Looking inward, we gain the courage to enter the Mystery of the divine and discover within ourselves the divine image—the sacred *Thou*. Through this, we find a path leading from the surface to the depths of the soul: from *I* to *Thou*, from image to archetype, and from symbols to meaning. St Augustine described this as the path of love.⁴⁶ The journey toward God 'leads through the self, further and deeper.'⁴⁷

Wanda walked this path of faith directed towards an eschatological goal.⁴⁸ Living genuinely in the spirit of the Gospel, she remained true to her faith regardless of the growing secularisation or the political, social, and cultural forces of her time. Her life shows that God can only be truly experienced through a personal, prayerful relationship by someone fully free and aware. This inner dialogical nature of Wanda's mystical experiences deserves attention. These visions were governed by their own communicative structure, which can be interpreted through modern dialogical philosophy as represented by Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, and Gabriel Marcel. These thinkers, working from the premise that 'all actual life is encounter,'⁴⁹ offer a framework for understanding such experiences. Buber reflections capture this idea, 'in every You we address the eternal You,' and, 'The You-sense that cannot be satiated until it finds the infinite You.'⁵⁰

Malczewska represents a form of religiosity that forges a spiritual bond stronger than familial, national, or social ties—one that proves resilient against the tides of de-Christianisation. For her, Christianity was the faith of the poor, the oppressed, the rejected, and the sick, expressed through acts of mercy and compassion. The courage to live such a life, as Wanda's example shows, comes from faith in a 'living' God—a personal and deeply intimate

46 T. Halik, *Hurra, nie jestem Bogiem!*, p. 45.

47 Ibidem, p. 52.

48 Ibidem, p. 61.

49 M. Buber, *I and Thou*.

50 Ibidem.

relationship with the Creator. Her biography, punctuated by transformative turning points, is far more than a typical hagiographic tale. It is a 'living' witness to the power of human freedom, autonomy, and the courage to pause and stand in the light of Truth.

Streszczenie: Biografia Wandy Malczewskiej (1822–1896) dobrze wpisuje się w historię polskiej duchowości drugiej połowy XIX w. Była lekarką i nauczycielką, jak również apostołką, ewangelizatorką. Swą postawą w sposób idealny realizowała wzorce kobiety chrześcijańskiej, która życie traktuje w kategoriach służby Bogu i bliźnim. W wieku pięćdziesięciu lat Wanda otrzymała dar widzeń mistycznych i prorokowania przyszłych wydarzeń, dotyczących głównie losów Polski, Rosji i Kościoła. Pierwsze widzenie miało miejsce 28 kwietnia 1872 r. w czwartą niedzielę Wielkanocy, w kościele w Żytnie. W czasie widzeń bezpośrednio uczestniczyła w męce Pańskiej. Dlatego została nazwana polską Anną Katarzyną Emmerich. Stany emocjonalne, w które popadała, były wynikiem trudnych, bolesnych doświadczeń życiowych, wydarzeń historycznych takich jak powstanie styczniowe, ciężkiej choroby i bezdomności w połączeniu z samotnością. Można uznać je za szczególnie „punkty zwrotne” w jej biografii, które wpłynęły na jej postawę wobec życia i duchowość, a tę z perspektywy filozofii dialogu, zwłaszcza koncepcji Martina Bubera, należy potraktować jako budowanie osobistej relacji z Chrystusem w mistycznym zespoleniu. Wanda Malczewska miała odwagę pójść własną ścieżką życiową – drogą powołania duchowego i stać się wizjonerką oraz mistyczką.

Słowa kluczowe: Wanda Malczewska, mistyka, wiara, apostołstwo, Ewangelia, filozofia dialogu.

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