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Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz: Patroness of Polish Teachers

Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz – patronka polskich nauczycieli

Abstract: Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz (1906–1945) was announced as the patroness of Polish teachers in 2022. She graduated from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She was a Polish teacher, poet and social activist in the interwar and war periods. As a teacher, she paid attention to the patriotic education and cultural, moral and spiritual values of her students. From childhood, she belonged to the Sodality of Our Lady, where she developed spiritually and intellectually and gave lectures. She was passionate about literature, music and theatre art; she also travelled and admired the beauty of nature. She broke off an engagement, entrusting her life and love to God. Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, she organized a makeshift school. During the war, she worked as a ‘travelling’ teacher in the underground education network, organized weekly literary Wednesdays, actively participated in retreats and days of recollection, wrote poems and short stories, and prayed every day. She was one of the first to volunteer as an emissary in a forced labour camp in the Third Reich, where she performed an educational and apostolic mission, taking care of the cultural, spiritual, moral and patriotic development of Polish workers. In 1944, she was arrested, subjected to barbaric torture and sentenced to death. On Good Friday 1945, she was selected for the gas chamber and died a day later.

Keywords: Natalia Tułasiewicz, teacher, Polish teacher, poetess.

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The 20th century was a time of many discoveries in science and technology, but also of many manifestations of evil and injustice. In the papal bull *Incarnationismysterium*, announcing the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, Pope John Paul II wrote:

This century now drawing to a close has known very many martyrs, especially because of Nazism, Communism, and racial or tribal conflicts. People from every sector of society have suffered for their faith, paying with their blood for their fidelity to Christ and the Church, or courageously facing interminable years of imprisonment and privations of every kind because they refused to yield to an ideology which had become a pitiless dictatorial regime.¹

A year later, on 13 June 1999, during his apostolic visit to Poland, in Warsaw, the Holy Father beatified 108 martyrs from the period of World War II. Among the beatified, four groups were bishops, diocesan clergy, monastic clergy and lay faithful. Natalia Tułasiewicz, one of only two laywomen, was included in the last group.² This article aims to present the life of Natalia Tułasiewicz, the patroness of Polish teachers, who demonstrated heroic faith and fulfilled her teaching mission until the end. The text uses the method of document analysis. The considerations are divided into three parts. The first presents the figure of Tułasiewicz; the second describes her professional work in the pre-war years, during the war and in exile and her missionary activity in the Third Reich; and the third, contemporary activities commemorating Tułasiewicz.

Biographical Sketch

Natalia Tułasiewicz was born in Rzeszów on 9 April 1906 and a month later was baptized in the Rzeszów parish church. Her parents were Adam

- 1 John Paul II, *The Mystery of the Incarnation: Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (Incarnationismysterium)*, Boston 1999, p. 27.
- 2 Z. Rzeszut, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz*, series: *Męczennicy 1939–1945*, vol. 38, Włocławek 2001, pp. 4–5; T. Kaczmarek, *Obraz świadectw 108 błogosławionych męczenników*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie”, 135 (2000) issue 1(548), pp. 44–58; K. Berkan, *Perła polskiej ziemi: Natalia Tułasiewicz (1906–1945)*, Niepokalanów 1999, pp. 39–53.

Tułasiewicz (1837–1940) and Natalia Amalia née Bromnik (1876–1948). She was the second of six children.³ Natalia's father was a civil servant, a tax inspector and while in Austrian service, he was seconded to various customs posts in the Lesser Poland (Małopolska) province, which was then under Austrian rule. He was a deeply religious person and belonged to the Sodality of Our Lady.⁴ He came from a family in which patriotic traditions were strongly promoted by his uncle Wincenty and brother Władysław. Adam's father, Józef, was a teacher at a Kraków grammar school,⁵ his brothers pursued higher education and his sister, Florencja, was a teacher. Natalia's mother, on the other hand, came from a family of Oświęcim townspeople, ran the household and took care of the children.⁶

The family environment in which Natalia grew up was characterized by piety and patriotism. Her parents created an atmosphere of sacrificial love, mutual respect, personal culture and mutual care for their children. All these qualities accompanied their daughter in her adult life and transformed into values that influenced her way of life and work. In her letters and journalistic

- 3 Natalia had three sisters: Maria (1904–1927), Zofia (1907–1995) and Halina (1911–1982) and two brothers: Tadeusz (1908–1980) and Józef (1913–1989). Maria, the oldest of the siblings, died of pulmonary tuberculosis in 1927. B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, in: N. Tułasiewicz, *Być poetką życia. Zapiski z lat 1938–1943*, Poznań 2020, pp. 6, 11.
- 4 The Sodality of Our Lady, also known as the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is a Catholic association of lay people that focused on the cult of the Mother of God as well as charity, social, educational and patriotic activities in Galicia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The basic idea of the Sodality was to work for both God and country. A. Puszka, *Sodalitje Mariańskie na ziemiach polskich wobec wojny i odzyskania niepodległości w 1918 r.*, „Teki Komisji Historycznej Towarzystwa Naukowego KUL”, 15 (2018) pp. 45, 47.
- 5 Józef Tułasiewicz (1841–1903) taught history and geography in grades 1a–3a at the St. Jack Gymnasium in Kraków. B. Lesiak-Przybył, *Dawne fotografie dotyczące życia i twórczości Jana Matejki w zbiorach Archiwum Narodowego w Krakowie*, „Rocznik Biblioteki Naukowej PAU i PAN w Krakowie”, 67 (2022) pp. 83, DOI: 10.4467/2544050ORBN.22.007.17362; E. Krasieński, *Arnold Szyfman na krakowskim trakcie*, in: *Antrepreneur. księga ofiarowana profesorowi Janowi Michalikowi w 70. rocznicę urodzin*, ed. J. Popiel, Kraków 2009, p. 571.
- 6 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, p. 7–8; I. Jazukiewicz, *Personalistyczne i społeczne aspekty nauczycielstwa Natalii Tułasiewicz–w poszukiwaniu inspiracji dla współczesności*, „Biografistyka Pedagogiczna”, 7 (2022) issue 1, p. 313, DOI: 10.36578/bp.2022.07.10.

notes, she often emphasized the importance of harmony, tenderness, kindness, openness and family warmth.⁷

Natalia was an intelligent, sensitive and bold child. She was a good conversationalist, which is why she was called 'wise Niusia.' She achieved very good results in school. Her interests focused on literature, music and painting. She was eager to care for her younger siblings. When she was six years old, she stayed in hospital with her three-and-a-half-year-old brother, Tadeusz and when she was 12, she took musical instrument lessons together with him,⁸ took care of his homework and helped him with household chores. Natalia was a child of delicate build from birth and struggled with tuberculosis, which first affected her skin, then her lymph glands and lungs. As a result, as a six-year-old girl, she underwent surgery in a Kraków hospital to improve and strengthen her health and then went to a health resort in Rabka. These events showed that, despite difficult experiences, the girl was resourceful, found her way around a new environment very well and also persistently opposed various adversities.⁹

In 1912, Tułasiewicz began her education at the primary school in Kęty Śląskie and then continued it at the Poor Clares Convent School and the 1st Girls' Gymnasium in Kraków,¹⁰ where she was perceived as an intelligent, brilliant, ambitious, hard-working, diligent and serious student. In addition, she showed great care for her close friend, who was unable to attend school every day for financial reasons. Natalia regularly sent her friend messages in which she included a detailed study plan, supported and encouraged her and also prayed for her. She developed her spiritual life in the Sodality of Our Lady, taking vows in 1920.¹¹

7 I. Jazukiewicz, *Personalistyczne i społeczne aspekty nauczycielstwa*, p. 314.

8 While Natalia took violin lessons, Tadeusz learned the cello and later became a professional cellist. N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt I od 17 stycznia 1938 do 31 grudnia 1939*, in: N. Tułasiewicz, *Być poetką życia*, p. 52.

9 A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga do miłości*, Poznań 2019, pp. 15–16; B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, pp. 7–8.

10 K. Szablak, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz (1906–1945)*, in: *Blask świadectwa: błogosławiona nauczycielka Natalia Tułasiewicz*, eds. B. Judkowiak, T. Marchwiak, S. Sławińska, K. Szablak, Bonami–Poznań 2013, p. 5.

11 A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, pp. 16–17.

In May 1921, the entire family moved to Poznań, where Natalia continued her education at the Ursuline Sisters' Gymnasium. However, due to the Tułasiewicz family's difficult financial situation, her father decided that his daughter would complete her compulsory schooling at a public school. The school's principal, Maria Waśkowska, did not agree with this and decided that Natalia would be exempted from all fees because 'she is the pearl and good spirit of the school.'¹² At the same time, the teenager attended a music seminar, where she perfected her violin playing.¹³ As the disease recurred, she had to undergo a lymph node operation after which she could not place the instrument under her chin. The girl endured this event bravely and humbly, getting involved in helping her lonely neighbour. Despite her health problems, she achieved very good results at school and obtained her high school certificate in 1926. She decided to study Polish philology and musicology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.¹⁴

During her studies, Natalia received very good exam results and was thus granted a scholarship which relieved her parents financially. She also began giving private tutoring.¹⁵ She continued to place great emphasis on her spiritual and intellectual development: she was passionate about literature and eagerly visited cinemas, theatres, exhibitions and concerts. She wrote about her development as follows:

I love books, just as I love music, theatre, just as I love nature. [...] music and books go together. Books regenerate me spiritually, [...] they constantly remind me that the spirit knows no fatigue, that fatigue only takes over the body... Music brings order to my spiritual life. It makes me aware of the unconscious, teaches me to distinguish important things from those

12 Z. Rzeszut, *Błogosławiona Natalia*, p. 14.

13 V. Rodek, *Uczenie się z biografii Innego—na przykładzie refleksji studentów pedagogiki: „Moje osobiste spotkanie z życiem i twórczością Natalii Tułasiewicz”*, „Biografistyka Pedagogiczna”, 7 (2022) issue 1, p. 291, DOI: 10.36578/bp.2022.07.17.

14 A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, pp. 17–18.

15 I. Jazukiewicz, *Codziennosc i heroiczność nauczycielstwa Natalii Tułasiewicz*, in: *Nauczyciel wobec wyzwań współczesności: ku przyszłości edukacji z bł. Natalią Tułasiewicz*, eds. K. Jawroska, J. Kowalczyk, K. J. Wawrzynów, Wrocław 2024, p. 197; I. Jazukiewicz, *Personalistyczne i społeczne aspekty nauczycielstwa*, p. 315.

less important, and diligently strives to ensure that my humanity does not shrink to the realm of intellect alone.¹⁶

She gave up her pleasures for the sake of other people and did not like to waste money on herself even though she attached great importance to aesthetics and elegance. Her studies were not a happy time because, in 1927, her older sister Maria died. In addition, it was found that Natalia's lungs were at risk of tuberculosis and her father was diagnosed with diabetes, which made it increasingly difficult for him to function.¹⁷

Another equally important event in Natalia's life was meeting and becoming involved with Janek Potoka. Although they had significantly different worldviews, they were quickly united by mutual love.¹⁸ During her student days, she was involved in the Polish Philology Students Association and the Sodality of Our Lady, where she gave presentations on spirituality and holiness in everyday life, and also willingly participated in poetry readings and lectures. Due to health problems, in the academic year 1928/1929, she was forced to take sick leave and was separated from her beloved Janek. She then went to Rabka, where she took a job as a teacher at the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth High School. The stay caused the relationship between Natalia and Janek to deteriorate. The couple had frequent arguments, misunderstandings and quarrels, which often made her cry. Her parents, who observed this, did not hide their indignation at the situation and subtly encouraged Natalia to end the relationship. This is what happened but Natalia quickly re-established contact with Janek and so she faced other, often new difficulties. This determination shows that the problems she encountered did not deter Natalia from action but encouraged her to overcome adversity and constantly make new efforts to cope with all challenges.¹⁹

16 N. Tułasiewicz, *Przeciw barbarzyństwu: listy, dzienniki, wspomnienia*, eds. D. Tułasiewicz, B. Judkowiak, Poznań 2013, p. 28; eadem, *Poprzez ziemię ukochałam niebo: fragmenty zapisków 1938–1943*, ed. D. Tułasiewicz, Poznań 2015, pp. 33–34.

17 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, pp. 10–11.

18 A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, p. 18.

19 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, pp. 11–12.

In 1931, Tułasiewicz completed her higher education, obtaining a certificate confirming the completion of all the required classes, which enabled her to defend her master's thesis²⁰ a year later, receiving a very good grade. In January 1932, Janek Potoka proposed to Natalia but two years later, she decided to end the relationship and left the ring she received in her parish church.²¹ She recalled these events as follows:

I gave the ten most beautiful years of my life entirely to Janek. I was 20 when I met him, 30 when I found out he was married and 28 when our engagement was broken off. A long and beautiful time—a period of storm and pressure. I do not regret anything in it and I thank God for everything.²²

Ultimately, Natalia decided to remain single and pursue her passions, entrusting her life and love to God. In her *Zapiski* [Notes], she wrote:

I would like to live a long life for the passion of creation, creation in all areas of life in which I could leave something valuable and new to myself. School, theatre, radio, the diary, work at a desk with inspiration drawn from the world, so many things attract me. [...] By voluntarily deciding [...] to be single, I must seek support in an institution whose moral power would give me the strength that women draw from marriage. I see this support in a religious order, but a secular one, because my destiny [...] is to be stuck in life, its conflicts and its variety. [...] I only want to be sure at the moment of my death that I had been walking the Lord's path, not my own, or rather that I had been pursuing my path towards God. [...] I want to be an apostle of love.²³

20 The subject of her master's thesis was Mickiewicz and music. Her supervisor was Professor Roman Pollak, who suggested that Natalia publish part of her work in the journal *Ruch Literacki* [Literary Movement]. Tułasiewicz's supervisor at the daily *Kurier Poznański* [Poznań Courier] emphasized that she was conscientious and one of the most outstanding Polish students at the university, who made many pioneering and valuable assumptions; *ibidem*, pp. 12–13.

21 A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, p. 18.

22 N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt I od 17 stycznia*, pp. 72–73.

23 *Taż*, *Zeszyt II od 25 lutego 1940 do 3 stycznia 1941*, in: *eadem*, *Być poetką życia*, pp. 208–209.

The environment in which Tułasiewicz was raised and grew up, the values passed on to her by her parents and loved ones, as well as the activities in which she was involved, played an important role in shaping her personality, the constant work on herself, intellectual and spiritual development and self-education, among others. The difficulties and challenges she had to face made her offer herself and her life to God more and more.²⁴

Professional Work as a Teacher, Social Activist and Poet

Natalia Tułasiewicz's professional life can be divided into three periods: the pre-war period (1933–August 1939); the years of war and wandering (September 1939–August 1943) and missionary work in the German territory (August 1943–March 1945). It is worth mentioning that her first teaching internship was as a student during a trip to Rabka,²⁵ where she taught nature and geography.²⁶

Having completed her studies, Tułasiewicz began working at the private coeducational St. Casimir Primary School in Poznań, whose motto was close to her: 'Serve God and the Homeland.'²⁷ From the very beginning, Natalia gained the sympathy of children thanks to her violin playing, while the school principal accepted her when she noticed the charm and intelligence with which she carried out lessons during the hours he visited her classes. In this institution, she was assigned a weekly, 25-hour teaching load. Among other things, she taught Polish, history and arithmetic in grade 3; drawing and singing in grade 5 and Polish, drawing and singing in grade 6. In her work, she was conscientious, diligent and systematic, as evidenced by the notebooks of Polish language lesson plans she kept.²⁸ In grade 6, she placed great emphasis on independ-

24 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, pp. 34–35.

25 K. Czarnecka, *O dążeniu do codziennej świętości. Refleksje na podstawie zapisków bł. Natalii Tułasiewicz*, in: „Wiódł mnie Pan...”: studia i świadectwa w 20. rocznicę beatyfikacji Natalii Tułasiewicz, red. J. Hadryś, B. Judkowiak, Poznań 2020, p. 47.

26 B. Judkowiak, „Przyjmij mnie na nowo do swej klasy” (nauczyciele „w szkole” błogosławionej Natalii), in: *Blask świadectwa: błogosławiona*, p. 13.

27 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, p. 13; I. Jazukiewicz, *Personalistyczne i społeczne aspekty nauczycielstwa*, p. 316.

28 She noted down in bullet points such aspects as: the topic and purpose of the lesson, forms of teaching, teaching methods and aids, the course of classes and exercises for students.

ent thinking and the ability to express one's position, which she formed using questions on demanding texts and open statements, as well as discussions on important and current topics. She carried out lessons in a flexible manner. For example, when she saw that students needed more time for a given exercise, she gave up a task that was planned for that lesson and often supplemented the sixth-grade programme with pieces intended for middle school students and assigned additional readings. The course of classes was varied as she often used different types of tasks and exercises alternately. In her teaching practice, she used 'timed' and creative exercises that contributed to the development of imagination and encouraged children to use various aids, such as albums, postcards, maps and newspaper clippings. She often analysed homework with students during lessons and referred them to the next topic. In addition to common dictations and public recitations of literary works from memory and talks, Natalia often used the method of discussing the plot when reading and interpreting texts. During memory tasks, students had freedom of choice; they could decide independently which of the poems they would memorize.²⁹ During pedagogical councils and meetings with parents, Tułasiewicz gave lectures on various topics.³⁰

The following year, the teacher placed great emphasis on reading with comprehension and enriched the textbook she used with additional content to extend and modernize the reading. She was assigned a male class so, in her classes, she used topics and films that were popular among boys, including

29 B. Judkowiak, „Przyjmij mnie na nowo do swej klasy”, pp. 14–19.

30 In 1934, she addressed parents about the cooperation of the family environment with the school environment, emphasizing that this cooperation should be based on religious, family, social, state education (shaping people of action) and the curriculum. In her speech, she warned that children should not only experience religious practices externally and that they should systematically and successively improve themselves internally, which is why she encouraged parents to have their children (who were in grade 3) receive the sacrament of first confession and the Holy Communion. She encouraged mutual cooperation between parents and educators, explaining that a child is a link of trust and understanding for them. She also appealed to them to make young people properly aware of the importance of Polish statehood, so that they would be able to honour what their fathers had achieved with blood and toil. Natalia also referred to educational work, which can be effectively carried out only when a teacher is properly educated and consciously follows the requirements of the day. Tamże, pp. 20–23.

inventions, aviation, scouting and sports. To encourage young people to read, she opened a class library. She prepared a newspaper wall, on which she presented current news to verify whether pupils were following the latest events on an ongoing basis. Her professional work was based not only on teaching; she also led a choir, wrote scripts and organized a theatre play, not forgetting about constant education.³¹ In 1935, she began working at the private Ursuline Sisters' Gymnasium in Poznań, which she had attended herself.³²

According to the rules in force at that time, to be able to teach in a secondary school, one had to pass a state exam, which was held at the university. Thus, in 1936, having met the requirements,³³ Natalia took an exam consisting of two parts: written and oral.³⁴ The committee awarded her very good grades in both parts. She also gained the right to membership in the Association of Secondary and Higher School Teachers. Having received the appropriate qualifications, she obtained a full-time teaching position at the Ursuline Sisters' Gymnasium. She liked the mission of the school because it combined the idea of aesthetic and ethical education. She often gave her students books, inserting witty rhymed descriptions in them, and also made entries in the diaries of her students, providing them with quotes from the Holy Scripture. It is worth emphasizing that she was a modest and responsible person who was able to admit her weaknesses.³⁵

In the pre-war period, Natalia led an active life. Aside from her professional work, she read a lot of literature, wrote poetry and verse (which she tried

31 Ibidem, pp. 24–27.

32 A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, p. 243.

33 To be eligible to take the state examination entitling a candidate to work in secondary schools, one had to have: two years of experience in a primary school, medical certificates, a reference from the education authority and a list of prepared readings. B. Judkowiak, „Przyjmij mnie na nowo do swej klasy”, p. 27.

34 The first stage involved writing a paper on one of three specific issues from pedagogy, general didactics or Polish language didactics. Tułasiewicz wrote a paper entitled ‘Szkoła a kino’ [School and Cinema]. The second stage—the oral part—included questions on the following areas: 1) educational psychology; 2) pedagogy, general didactics and history; 3) knowledge of school programmes and the organization of schooling, as well as 4) Polish philology didactics. Tamże.

35 Ibidem, p. 27–29; B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, pp. 14–16; I. Jazukiewicz, *Personalistyczne i społeczne aspekty nauczycielstwa*, p. 316.

to have published), played the violin, travelled (including to Norway and Italy), admired the beauty of the Polish landscape, went on a winter sports course for teachers, participated in retreat days and closed retreats organized by Maria Ursula of Jesus (1865–1939) and was constantly active in the sodality community. When other organizations (including the Association of Young Polish Women and the Nursing School) invited her to give a lecture, she never refused. She called herself a poet. What is more, she was involved in helping others, for example, by supporting them and giving advice in the face of existential and religious difficulties. She also supported her sisters financially, including by covering the costs of a trip to Italy, a wedding dress and an extended holiday. An extremely important moment in the young teacher's life was a two-week trip to Italy for the canonization ceremony of Blessed Andrew Bobola.³⁶ She wrote about this event as follows:

... a trip to Rome would do me good. I need great emotions—then I have no time to think about myself. Before I start working on the Holy Mass, I would like to feel up close how the heart of the Roman-Vatican Church beats. I would like to see the tomb of the holy poet—Francis of Assisi, my most beloved saint, in the splendour of spring flowers. I would like, oh how much I would like to go.³⁷

In the same year (1938), Natalia developed a project for a doctoral dissertation, collecting the necessary literature. She wanted to dedicate her work to Karol Hubert Rostworowski but the war prevented her from realizing these plans.³⁸

The second stage of Tułasiewicz's work was during World War II. Right after the war broke out, on 6 September 1939, she encouraged her neighbours, Barbara and Krystyna Jankowski, to organize an open, temporary school, where classes lasted from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Each woman taught an hour-long lesson. Natalia described the teaching in the following way:

36 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, p. 16.

37 N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt I od 17 stycznia*, p. 56.

38 B. Judkowiak, „Przyjmij mnie na nowo do swej klasy”, pp. 31–32.

Today at ten o'clock, I 'opened' the school year and gavemy first lesson. ... After a short prayer, everyone talked about how to behave at home and on the street in the event of an alarm, follow hygiene regulations, not disturb parents at home and so on. Then I practised a quick descent to the basement in the event of an alarm ... The youngest pupils played on a blanket with colourful pictures, fourth-graders read and explained news about the historical development of the city of Poznań and sixth-graders learned sanitary regulations. Middleschoolers supervised kindergarten games. Every hour, there were regular breaks for food. Barbara had the second lesson (history, religion and arithmetic) and Krystyna the third with a geographical atlas for older students.³⁹

Due to the mass displacements that took place on 10 November 1939, the school was suspended and the entire Tułasiewicz family was deported to Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. On 31 January 1940,⁴⁰ Natalia left for Kraków, where Maria Woyczyńska gave her hospitality. In February, she began working at Aniela Starzewska's fiction reading room and then brought her family to Kraków. On 30 April 1940, she quit her job at the reading room and was hired as a 'travelling' teacher at the Secret Teaching Centre No. 1 located at the Ursuline Sisters' Convent, co-organized by Mother Benigna Józefa Suchoniówna. After her father's death, in August 1940, Natalia received her first job as a travelling teacher in Mszana Dolna. Her charges were the daughters of the pharmacist Fraś: Krysia and Maria. A year later, she started working in Witowice, near Nowy Sącz, in the manor of Edward and Irena Breza, teaching Polish to both Breza's daughter, Teresa and Edward's mother's pupil, Zofia Brynicka. Despite experiencing successive displacements, while in Kalina Wielka (near Miechów), she taught the daughters (Amelia and Aleksandra) of Antonina and Adolf Dąbski, the owners of the local manor. From September 1941, she carried out secret teaching in Kraków. From 21 January 1942, together with Woyczyńska, she organized weekly literary Wednesdays,⁴¹ during

39 N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt I od 17 stycznia*, p. 123.

40 Natalia Tułasiewicz wrote a detailed description of the deportation in her *Zapiskiof* 25 March 1940. N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt II od 25 lutego 1940*, pp. 150–157.

41 Tamże, s. 150–162, 180, N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt III od 12 stycznia 1941 do 25 lipca 1942*, pp. 258, 273; 346.

which they read books together, recited poems and held intensive discussions. In those difficult times, Natalia did not forget to say daily prayers, support her-loved ones, participate in retreats and days of recollection, go on trips, study literature and work on her literary development.⁴² She was involved in organizing sodality meetings, during which religious literature was discussed, carols and patriotic songs were sung and night adorations were held during Lent.⁴³ In her work, she placed great emphasis on patriotic education:

I will visit all my former students living in the Governorate. I want to talk to them, awaken in them a love of knowledge and help them with all my strength so that the war does not sterilize their sense of beauty and goodness. ... My daily work is arduous but beautiful, and my effort is joyful for me. Thanks to it, we have a chance to survive the war.⁴⁴

Under the circumstances of war, Tułasiewicz had to work individually with one student or in groups of several people. She acted as a companion guide, encouraging her pupils and showing them new possibilities. She compared her work to sculpting: 'I like such raw material. It is pliable, although seemingly resistant.'⁴⁵ Whenever any obstacles appeared, she did not give up; quite the contrary, they motivated her to become more involved.⁴⁶ She commented on her work: 'I have never regretted devoting myself to Polish philology studies, yet teaching, for all its beauty, exhausts you to the marrow.'⁴⁷

Natalia's intellectual, artistic and social aspirations made her join not only secret teaching but also the work of the underground political organization 'Zachód' [West], which sent trained volunteers to Germany to support Polish workers in forced labour camps. The work of the Polish envoys focused on caring for the patriotic, religious and moral life of the deportees. Tułasiewicz

42 A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, pp. 22–24.

43 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, p. 18.

44 N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt IV od 27 września 1942 do 18 sierpnia 1943*, pp. 382–383.

45 N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt II od 25 lutego 1940*, pp. 202–203.

46 B. Judkowiak, „Przyjmij mnie na nowo do swej klasy”, pp. 32–33.

47 N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt II od 25 lutego 1940*, p. 202.

volunteered for this mission. She kept all knowledge about the action absolutely secret because she was aware of the danger to which not only she but also her loved ones were exposed.⁴⁸ She first prepared for the undertaking in Warsaw.⁴⁹ Then she participated in special retreats organized in Laski. As she was a volunteer emissary, she could choose the place, yet the plenipotentiaries of the Polish government-in-exile in London delegated her to Hanover.⁵⁰

On 19 August 1943, Natalia reported to the Warsaw *Arbeitsamt* [employment agency] for departure to Hanover and on 22 August, she was subjected to further disinfection, bathing and medical check-ups near Berlin. Two days later, she arrived at barracks no. 1, located in the labour camp at the Günther-Wagner 'Pelikan' paper goods factory. Remembering the goals of her mission and taking into account her passion for teaching and education, she carried out educational, self-help, organizational, intelligence and political activities. For example, she recruited subsequent envoys on site and informed the Polish headquarters about the developments, conditions, atmosphere and war operations in the camp and the area. In addition, she carried out apostolic and pastoral work, including: providing moral care, discussing catechesis, providing support, as well as arranging prayers, services and 'barrack masses' with Holy Communion. She also composed songs to comfort hearts, wrote occasional short stories and even organized a joint Christmas Eve and Christmas wafer-breaking. Despite three-shift physical work, the need to obtain food, the constant danger of air raids and spending numerous nights in shelters, she successfully fulfilled the entrusted mission.⁵¹

In her missionary work, she did not forget about patriotic education: she read *Pan Tadeusz* [Poland's national epic by Adam Mickiewicz—translator's note], talked about ancient Greece, films and plays, organized Polish and German spelling lessons and gave talks on psychology, hygiene and how to prepare for marriage. She often preached the Gospel, willingly entered into discussions

48 A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, p. 24.

49 She had to participate in individual training consisting of several stages. Receiving a positive assessment meant moving on to the last stage—preparations, i.e., receiving the appropriate documents and taking the oath. B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, p. 20.

50 Ibidem.

51 Ibidem, pp. 22–23; A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, pp. 24–25.

during which she actively listened to other people's positions and made friends with envoys of other affiliations. She also organized the baptism of a child born in the camp and a collection of parcels for the sick.⁵²

On 29 April 1944, Tułasiewicz was arrested and then taken to Cologne, where she was subjected to cruel and barbaric torture. Despite the suffering she experienced, she did not betray anyone, praying constantly. On 28 September, she was sentenced to death and taken to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück, where she was given the number 75188 and placed in the so-called sick block. However, she did not remain inactive. Quite the opposite, she held services, recited poems, discussed books she had read, educated girls brought directly from the Warsaw Uprising and also planned her future. On 30 March 1945—Good Friday—she was selected for the gas chamber and on Holy Saturday, at the age of 39, she died a martyr's death.⁵³

Memory of the Blessed

The attitude, work, personality and spiritual life of Natalia Tułasiewicz fascinate and inspire contemporaries as confirmed by events organized to commemorate the blessed. She was chosen as the patroness of the Poznań branch of the Catholic Association of Educators, which organizes formation meetings entitled 'One of Us: Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz', among others. Educational institutions (non-public kindergartens, a public primary school, a middle school and a high school) have also been named after Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz.⁵⁴ To pay tribute to her, they organize many initiatives,⁵⁵ including assemblies, exhibitions, as well as art, poetry and music competitions, rallies, formation meetings and a forum for the exchange of ideas and professional

52 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, pp. 23–24; A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, pp. 25–26; B. Judkowiak, „Przyjmij mnie na nowo do swej klasy”, p. 34.

53 B. Judkowiak, *Wstęp*, pp. 24–26; A. Rzesoś, *Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz: droga*, pp. 26–27, 248.

54 K. Szablak, *Inspiracje Nataliańskie: „Co ze mnie żyć będzie w ludziach?”*, in: „Wiódł mnie Pan...”: studia, pp. 213–225; Publiczna Szkoła Podstawowa im. bł. Natalii Tułasiewicz, <https://szkoly.poznan.ksw.pl/>, accessed: 15.07.24.

55 Tamże, <https://szkoly.poznan.ksw.pl/>, accessed: 15.07.24.

experiences in the light of Blessed Natalia's idea of the path to holiness, and evenings of creativity. She was also chosen as the patroness by the Women's Ministry of the Archdiocese of Poznań⁵⁶ and the Workshops on the Way—the Nationwide Teachers' Pilgrimage, which brings together teachers from all over Poland, who annually make a pilgrimage on foot from Zielona Góra to Jasna Góra, improving their spiritual formation and pedagogical skills.⁵⁷

Another very important form of commemoration is the decree of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments of 19 January 2022, which approved 'Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz, Martyr, Patroness of God's Teachers in Poland.'⁵⁸ In the same year, Poznań officials chose her as the patroness of the roundabout at the intersection of Bobrzańska and Kurlandzka streets. On 9 May 2022, a commemorative plaque was ceremonially unveiled in Rzeszów, combined with the conference 'Be the Avant-Garde of Poland and the World: The Pedagogy of Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz.' Moreover, on 5 October 2023, a ceremonial presentation of a postcard with an image of Tułasiewicz took place at the Educational and Formation Centre of the Bydgoszcz Diocese.⁵⁹

Natalia's memory is also cultivated by scientific centres that organize conferences, symposia, seminars and exhibitions devoted to her life and work.⁶⁰ In turn,

56 Duszpasterstwo Kobiet Archidiecezji Poznańskiej, <https://kobieta.archpozn.pl/aktualnosci/nowe-logo,32>, accessed: 15.07.24.

57 Warsztaty w Drodze, <https://warsztatywdrodze.pl/o-pielgrzymce>, accessed: 15.07.24.

58 Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, <https://episkopat.pl/dekret-bl-natalia-tulasiewicz-patronka-nauczycieli-w-polsce/>, accessed: 15.07.24; J. Kowalczyk, *Pozwól się zainspirować—bł. Natalia Tułasiewicz wzorem dla nauczycieli*, in: *Nauczyciel wobec wyzwań*, p. 89.

59 Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz, <https://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/wydarzenie/>, accessed: 15.07.24.

60 The conferences were organized by, among others, the Adam Mickiewicz University: 'The Shining of Testimony. Blessed Teacher Natalia Tułasiewicz' (22 April 2006); 'From Baptism to the Joy of Life: On the 110th Anniversary of the Baptism of Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz' (7 May 2016); and the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław together with the Lower Silesian Teacher Training Centre in Wrocław: the National Pedagogical Conference 'The Teacher and the Challenges of Modern Times: Inspirations of Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz (1906–1945)' (23 November 2021 and 23 February 2022). On 31 March 2023, a national conference and exhibition entitled 'Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz, Patroness of Teachers in Poland' took place in Brzeg. Ibidem.

the Catholic Association of Educators and the Sybiraks Primary School in Nawie organized the National Literary Competition for Teachers under the slogan 'Write my life on...' in May 2023 to popularize the life's work of Blessed Natalia as a Polish teacher, educator, teacher, poet and emissary, honour her memory and show the teaching profession as a vocation and mission.⁶¹ Another undertaking was a film entitled *Błogosławiona* [Blessed], which premiered on 10 June 2023 at the Zamek Culture Centre in Poznań.⁶² There is also a website dedicated to Blessed Natalia, where current events and publications about her are posted.⁶³

Conclusions

The life of Natalia Tułasiewicz can be an example and inspiration for contemporary teachers, because living and working in the interwar and war periods, she matured as a person, teacher, poet, activist and martyr. She carried out her pedagogical work with passion, joy and heroism, demonstrating fidelity to the teaching mission and not forgetting about constant education. She was a modest and deeply religious person, a true patriot and altruist. She said: 'I am...only a human being, a flawed human being, but thanks to the graces that God has given me... I am...an angelic comfort to some people.'⁶⁴ Despite health problems and difficulties, she never stopped working and even voluntarily took on some tasks that risked her life, such as organizing teaching right after the outbreak of war. Although today, teachers do not have to struggle with such obstacles, they have to deal with many other threats, such as consumerism, addiction, aggression, violence, passivity, entitlement, the crisis of values and so on.⁶⁵ Students of pedagogy should learn about the life and

61 Dolnośląski Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli we Wrocławiu, <https://dodn.dolny-slask.pl/ogolnopolski-konkurs-literacki-pod-haslem-pisz-dalej-moje-zycie/>, accessed: 15.07.2024.

62 The film was also shown in Częstochowa, Skierniewice, Lublin, Kicin, Jasionka, Radom, Rzeszów, Wrocław, Nowy Sącz, Kraków, Płock, Pobiedziska, Warsaw, Białystok, Rokietnica, Krynica-Zdrój, Mszana Dolna, Zaborówiec and Szczecin, etc. Fundacja Rozwoju Miasta Poznania, https://frmp.pl/2023_film-blogoslawiona/, accessed: 15.07.24.

63 Błogosławiona Natalia Tułasiewicz, <https://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/>, accessed: 15.07.24.

64 N. Tułasiewicz, *Zeszyt III od 12 stycznia 1941 do 25 lipca 1942*, p. 258.

65 J. Kowalczyk, *Pozwól się zainspirować*, pp. 98–102.

work of Tułasiewicz, who was constantly developing and working on herself, proving that you can face various adversities and still win. By learning about the young educator's life, future teachers can be inspired to perform self-education and understand how important it is to use their virtues, advantages and professed values in the didactic and educational process, thanks to which every teacher can feel joy and satisfaction from their everyday social and professional tasks.

Streszczenie: Bł. Natalia Tułasiewicz (1906–1945) to ogłoszona w 2022 r. patronka polskich nauczycieli. Ukończyła studia na Uniwersytecie im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Była polonistką, poetką i społeczniką działającą w okresie międzywojennym i wojennym. Jako nauczycielka zwracała uwagę na wychowanie patriotyczne, wartości kulturowe, moralne i duchowe swoich wychowanków. Od dziecka należała do Sodalicii Mariańskiej, w której rozwijała się duchowo i intelektualnie oraz wygłaszała prelekcje. Pasjonowała się literaturą, muzyką, sztuką teatralną, podróżowała i podziwiała piękno przyrody. Zerwała zaręczyny, zawierając swoje życie i miłość Bogu. Tuż po wybuchu II wojny światowej zorganizowała szkołę prowizoryczną, zaś w czasie wojny i tułaczki podjęła pracę jako nauczycielka „wyjazdowa” w tajnym nauczaniu, organizowała cotygodniowe środy literackie, aktywnie uczestniczyła w rekolekcjach i dniach skupienia, pisała wiersze i nowele, a także oddawała się codziennej modlitwie. Jako jedna z pierwszych zgłosiła się jako emisariuszka na przymusowe roboty na tereny III Rzeszy, gdzie pełniła misję wychowawczo-apostolską, dbając o rozwój kulturowy, duchowy, moralny i patriotyczny polskich robotników. W 1944 r. została aresztowana, poddana barbarzyńskim torturom i skazana na śmierć. W Wielki Piątek 1945 r. została wyselekcjonowana do komory gazowej, a dzień później zmarła.

Słowa kluczowe: Natalia Tułasiewicz, nauczycielka, polonistka, poetka.

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