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Father Wrodarczyk OMI (1907-1943). Priest and Martyr²

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Abstract

The Second World War was one of the most dramatic periods in the history of Poland - also for the young Province of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. After the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 by Nazi Germany and Soviet allies on September 17, 1939, nine Oblate houses were under German occupation and five under Russian. One of the features of Soviet policy in the annexed territories was the use of ethnic tensions between Poles and other ethnic groups. Another dramatic one was the extermination of Poles by Ukrainian nationalists supported by the Nazis after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. One of the goals of the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Ukrainian nationalist groups OUN-B and UPA was eradication of the Roman Catholic clergy. Seventeen priests and religious were killed in the

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² This article is part of a larger French study "Père Ludwik Wrodarczyk OMI, prêtre et martyr (1907-1943)" on the occasion of the conference on "Oblation and Martyrdom", organized by the General Service of Oblate Studies, in agreement with the General Postulation OMI and the Mediterranean Province OMI, in Pozuelo (Spain), on May 4-5, 2019.

Lutsk diocese. One of them was Fr. Ludwik Wrodarczyk OMI parish priest of the Okopów parish in Volhynia. His beatification process began in May 2016 in Lutsk.

Keywords: Martyrdom, Missionaries Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMI), Volinia, Ukrainian nationalism, Second World War.

Streszczenie

Druga wojna światowa była jednym z najbardziej dramatycznych okresów w historii Polski – również dla młodej Prowincji Misjonarzy Oblatów Maryi Niepokalanej. Po inwazji na Polskę 1 września 1939 roku przez hitlerowskie Niemcy i sowieckich sojuszników 17 września 1939, dziewięć domów obłackich znalazło się pod okupacją niemiecką, a pięć pod okupacją rosyjską. Jedną z cech sowieckiej polityki na terytoriach anektowanych było wykorzystywanie napięć etnicznych między Polakami a innymi grupami etnicznymi. Kolejnym dramatycznym wydarzeniem była eksterminacja Polaków przez ukraińskich nacjonalistów, popierana przez nazistów po niemieckiej inwazji na Związek Radziecki w 1941 roku. Jednym z celów czystki etnicznej przeprowadzonej przez ukraińskie ugrupowania nacjonalistyczne OUN-B i UPA była likwidacja duchowieństwa rzymskokatolickiego. W diecezji łuckiej zginęło 17 księży i zakonników. Jednym z nich był ks. Ludwik Wrodarczyk OMI, proboszcz parafii Okopów na Wołyniu. Jego proces beatyfikacyjny rozpoczął się w maju 2016 roku w Łucku.

Słowa kluczowe: Męczeństwo, Misjonarze Oblat Maryi Niepokalanej (OMI), Wołyń, nacjonalizm ukraiński, II wojna światowa.

Introduction

The Second World War was one of the most dramatic periods in the history of Poland and in particular for the young Polish Province of the Missionaries Oblate of Mary Immaculate. In the year of the founding, 13 June 1925, it counted only ten priests, nineteen brothers and nine scholastics. During the next fourteen years, before the tragic September of 1939, the personnel of the Province had increased seven times, reaching three hundred oblates. Before the Second World War Poland had a minor seminary at Lubliniec with more than two hundred students, a novitiate at Markowice with an average of twenty novices, two major seminaries, one at Krobia (philosophy) and the other at Obra (theology) with the attendance of more than 100 seminarians.

After the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 by Nazi Germany and the Soviet allies on 17 September 1939, Poland became divided between the two aggressor States on the basis of what was

established by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a treaty of non-aggression with a secret clause for the partition of Poland and the Baltic states. Nine houses of the Oblates were located under German occupation and five under Russian.

Under German and Russian occupation

Germany annexed 91,902 km², where ten million people lived (territories of Pomerania, Silesia, and Greater Poland with seven principal oblate houses). In Central Poland the so-called General Government was created consisting of further 95,742 km² with twelve million citizens. Here are located two sanctuaries managed by the oblates: Holy Cross and Kodeń. The Soviet Union on the other hand occupied 202,069 km² inhabited by over thirteen million persons (Davies, 1986, p. 437).

After the partition of Poland in 1939 between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, a large part of the ethnically Polish territory ended up under the control of Germany, while the areas annexed by the USSR contained ethnically diverse peoples, with one territory subdivided in different areas, only a few of which had a non-Polish majority (like the Ukrainians to the south) (Głowacki, 1997, p. 21-28).

The eastern parts of Poland were divided into three zones from north to south. In the northern part, in the provinces (voivodeships) of Białystok, Vilnius and Nowogródek, the Poles were the majority. In the central part, in Polesia and Volinia, there was a Polish minority that was confronted with a peasantry predominantly orthodox of Byelorussian language. In the south there resided a Ukrainian majority belonging to the Byzantine rite of the Greek-Catholic Church, except in a few areas where the number of Poles equalled them, especially in the cities and towards the western part. Jews formed the principal minority in urban areas. However, the Poles belonging to the Catholic Church were the largest ethnic group in the territories annexed by the Soviets (Ciesielski i in., 2002, p. 18).

Ukrainian nationalism

One of the characteristic elements of Soviet politics in the annexed territories was an exploitation of the ethnic tensions from the past between the Poles and other ethnic groups, pushing and encouraging violence against Polish citizens, calling the minorities "to correct the errors that they had suffered during twenty years of Polish rule" (Dzwonkowski,

2005, p. 139). Pre-war Poland was exposed as a capitalist state based on the exploitation of the working classes and of ethnic minorities. As a justification for the dismemberment of the nation, Soviet propaganda supported the bad treatment undergone by non-Poles. Very often Soviet officials encouraged them to carry out homicides and rapes. The extent of the deaths caused by the terror inspired by the Soviets remains unknown. Another chapter, dramatic and painful, was the extermination of the Poles by the Ukrainian nationalists, encouraged by the Nazis after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.

Blessed Gregory Chomyszyn, Bishop of Stanisławów of the Eastern Rite, had called back to mind attention to the danger of a nationalism "perverted" as an anti-Christian ideology, ready to poison the atmosphere of the national life: "this inexact nationalism, poisonous and damaging, became the new religion for us, like the materialism of the Bolsheviks. «Ukraine is above all» – is the dogma of our nationalism. The questions of faith, the Church and religion don't have any significance to all the people, or they have been moved to second place, tolerated only because of tradition or habit. All that is national is considered sacred, precious and necessary, and the questions of faith, the Church, and religion are considered useless, non-productive, and backward. Therefore, one sees this strangeness, rudeness, unpopularity, and also the hostile attitude towards whatever action to all that breathes the spirit of the religious [...]. The clergy is for us only so important, if it offers material sacrifice for the national objectives, directs the persons in the networks of national activists – above all during elections – and satisfies in a reliable way their orders" (Chomyszyn, 2008, p. 17).

The bishop prophetically drew attention to the dangerous characteristics of the ethical nihilism, as well as to hatred inherent in the ideology of nationalism, that has in the recent past led to the terrible genocide in the Borderlands. In connection with this, he warned his faithful: "Nationalism has begun to assume in us the characteristics of a pagan spirit, because it introduces the pagan ethic of hate, the order to hate all those who have a different nationality and even to refuse to help them and to show pity in their adversity. That is contrary to the Christian ethic since Christ commanded with His word and His example to love one's neighbours and not only one's friends and his family but also personal enemies and persons of a foreign nationality." Afterwards, the hierarch warned: "But not only the pagan spirit has begun to breathe our Ukrainian nationalism. Worse still, the signs of a kind of Satanism have appeared in the background of Ukrainian nationalism" (Chomyszyn, 2008, p. 25).

In his work *Dwa Królestwa* (Two Kingdoms), the Blessed Gregorio underlines "Our hesitation is the heresy of nationalism. This heresy is the severest and most dangerous heresy in our time. It had possessed the mind and the heart of almost all the nations on earth. It has caused an almost complete spiritual deviation. It puts nationalism above everything, even above God, above the church, above the laws of God. Christ is no longer considered as the king of all the peoples. He is disregarded or simply denied. The effects of this heresy are terrible. The nations groan under the yoke, punish themselves, hate each other and become devastated. This heresy of nationalism had possessed even our nation and it became almost idolatry. «Nation above every other thing» and when we put the name of God in second place it seems to exempt God: «Nation and God». We have put our truth above the truth of God, that is, as the Apostle Paul says: «We have exchanged truth for a lie» (Rom 1,25). For us only the national conscience counts. In the name of this conscience, the principle is proclaimed that all the means, even those unethical, are allowed when it has to do with the good of the nation and the construction of the state. The Church must serve politics, and faith and religion have to support its services. Whoever thinks differently, whoever is opposed to this is considered as an enemy of the nation" (Chomyszyn, 2017, p. 405).

Persecution of Roman Catholic clergy

One of the goals of this ethnic cleansing conducted by groups of Ukrainian nationalists OUN-B and UPA was the elimination of the Roman Catholic clergy. With the homicides of Polish priests and the destruction of the temples of the Latin rite they wanted to break the Polish spirit of resistance. A total of thirty-five priests of the Archdiocese of Lvov died in the years 1939 – 1945, and another sixteen underwent various incidents of harassment and suffering. In the diocese of Łuck seventeen priests and religious were killed. One of them was Father Ludwik Wrodarczyk, OMI³, first parish priest of Okopy in Volinia. His process of beatification was started officially in May 2016 in Łuck.

³ All the data concerning the Servant of God Father Ludwik Wrodarczyk, OMI, come from the documentation from the process of beatification started in May 2016.

Ludwik Wrodarczyk – youth and vocation

The parents of Ludwik Wrodarczyk, Karol and Justyna Wrodarczyk, were married on 13 July 1903. His father was not only a peasant but also worked in the mines. In the marriage of Karol and Justyna thirteen children were born, among whom nine survived infancy. Ludwik was born at Radzionków near Bytom, in Upper Silesia, on 25 August 1907, as the second born.

From infancy, he received a good basis for living in the faith, supported by the example of his pious parents and the parish of St. Adalbert in Radzionków from which many priestly and religious vocations emerged. With time, also in the heart of Ludwik germinated a calling to religious and priestly life. From his large family up to today, God has called to His service ten priests and two religious sisters. Already as a child he was exceptionally serious, pious, and even-tempered. After school, he often went to the parish church and remained there for a long prayer. In an outburst of sincerity, he confided once to his friend Franciszek Bączkiewicz that he had the desire that his life would strengthen the Kingdom of God.

In 1921, he chose the future course of his life. He confessed to his father that he wanted to become a priest. The calling to religious life is a gift of the love of God. The young Ludwik accepted this gift and felt a special grace on him. In the letters to his family, he wrote that the grace of the divine call is the greatest grace after baptism (Obra, 5.03.1930, ACB, Folder: *Literrae*). His heart was full of desire to do the will of God, dedicating himself to serve God and the people. After having left the family house, in the first letter to the family, the young Ludwik asked, “pray that I can reach the objective to which I aspire” (Krotoszyn, 30.04.1922, ACB, Folder: *Literrae*). The content of these words is included in all the subsequent letters up to the last.

At the age of fourteen years old, he chose the Congregation of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and entered the Minor Seminary. Afterwards he was at the Minor Seminary in Krotoszyn, in Wielkopolska (1921-22), in Lubliniec in Silesia (1923-24) and in Krobia, also in Wielkopolska (1924-26). He was one of the 160 juniors that were preparing for the secondary school leaving examination. In June 1926, he passed the secondary school diploma and subsequently on 14 August 1926, he began his novitiate at Markowice near Inowrocław, concluding with the presentation of his first religious profession on 15 August 1927.

He called the time of his novitiate "beautiful" and "blessed". He felt enormous grace in this moment. He wanted the time of his novitiate to live on in such a way "to make oneself holy following the example of our Saviour on this narrow and thorny path that Jesus Christ has travelled over for all his life [...]" (Markowice, 14.11.1926, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). From the beginning, he felt himself Oblate, the son of Mary. He thanked God for the calling. In a letter to his family, he wrote "And I can feel myself being included among them, what happiness for me and for you! Let's rejoice and praise the Lord for this!" (Obra, 1.02.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

Theological formation

After the novitiate, he continued his philosophical and theological studies at the Greater Seminary of the oblates at Obra. At the beginning of his stay at the seminary, he encountered difficulties. A little after the beginning of the academic year, he suddenly took ill and had to undergo treatment in the hospital. The superiors decided that because of his bad health he had to interrupt his studies in the seminary and undergo further treatment at his family's home. On 6 November 1927, Ludwik Wrodarczyk returned to his family's house in Radzionków. After treatment for a year, he resumed his studies at Obra on 16 July 1928. He always stressed that it had been his joy to be the son of Mary, an oblate of Mary Immaculate. When, after the break caused by the illness, he returned again to the monastery, he wrote to his parents "I am happy because I am here, where I wanted to return again" (Obra, 10.10.1928, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). Another time he confessed, "I am glad to be here, I feel very happy [...]" (Obra, 24.11.1929, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

Year after year, going through the phases of training, he was waiting for the moment of his religious vows with impatience. For Father Ludwik, religious vows were a means "to dedicate yourself to God for ever, to receive the special protection of the Mother, Most Holy Mary, and to be able to carry the cross on his heart henceforth" (Obra, 5.03.1930, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). He wrote that joy and love had embraced his heart just at the thought of this great event (Obra, 1.02.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). On the day of his perpetual vows, 15 August 1930, he took as the motto of life the words "In You, I trust; I will not disgrace myself for ever" (Obra, 26.08.1930, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

In Obra he gave a very beautiful example of religious and missionary life. Father Antoni Grzesik, OMI, his peer, gave evidence

about him "I admired his deep faith that he brought from his family's home and his determination. I know him as an unpretentious and humble man. He was indulgent, friendly, internally very well made. He was considered a great ascetic". Perhaps this severe style of life damaged his health and caused a break in his studies. He wanted to be a good son, a loving brother, faithful Oblate up to the end, "a worthy son of Mary", a priest that took care of the salvation of the souls. In order to be a good priest, he understood that much humility, purity, and holiness are necessary. He prayed for these virtues through prayers to Eucharistic Jesus, to the Holy Communion and to the devotion to Mary and St Joseph.

Priesthood

He was ordained priest at Obra on Saturday 10 June 1933 by the hand of Bishop Dymek, and three days later, he celebrated his first Holy Mass in the parish church dedicated to St Adalbert in Radzionków. Afterwards he returned to Obra for another year to finish his studies.

To be a priest for Father Ludwik meant to work in the vineyard of the Lord, "to proclaim the name of Jesus and of Mary to all, especially to the most abandoned" (Obra, 19.08.1928, ACB, Folder: Literae). The priest should be a "«doctor of the souls», who must show the true, narrow and dangerous path", to show "how to follow this path, in order not to go outside of the road, how they should strive to enter into eternal happiness" (Krobia, 29.11.1925, ACB, Folder: Literae). The task of the priest is also that of "reinforcing and comforting people, to encourage them to be faithful" (Krobia, s.d., 1926, ACB, Folder: Literae).

Father Ludwik felt that the responsibility arising from the gift of the priesthood encompassed his value, his dignity, and his duty. For him, to be a priest meant to be "another Christ" (Krobia, s.d., 1926, ACB, Folder: Literae). He called Jesus his "Teacher" (Krobia, 29.11.1925, ACB, Folder: Literae). He wanted to serve Him and become like Him through thoughts, actions and participation in His sufferings (Obra, 19.04.1930, ACB, Folder: Literae).

On 5 August 1934 the young priest was sent to his first place of work in Kodeń nad Bugiem, at the sanctuary of the Queen of Podlasie. In August of 1934 he wrote his family "I am under the protection of our powerful Mother of Kodeń. Here I will be a vice parish priest, treasurer, and teacher of religion at school. There will be a lot of work,

but God and the Mother of God Kodeńska will help me to carry out well my job". Father Ludwik found in Mary a loving mother, teacher of faith, love, loyalty and service. She shows it like a model of "beauty and purity" (Obra, 12.06.1929, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). The position of Mary, faithful and persistent, drew him to the ideal of a life dedicated exclusively to God.

During the day, he had so many activities that at times he found only in the evening time for a meal, which was for him both lunch and dinner. But he had always found the time for prayer. He spent the remainder of the day in prayer and alone with Eucharistic Jesus.

Eucharistic Jesus was for him the object of the highest adoration. He called Him "the prisoner of love" (Obra, 25.05.1930, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*), the most precious treasure and friend. Passing near a church or chapel, Father Ludwik stopped for a long moment and worshipped Eucharistic Jesus. He wrote his family that he would never pass by a church indifferently because Jesus wants our presence, and in the gift of thankfulness, he repays many favours (Krobia, 7.04.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*; Obra, 1.02.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). He described the time spent in worship as "happy moments" (Markowice, 14.11.1926, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

Worship of the Most Holy Sacrament and frequent receiving of Holy Communion led him to a deep union with Christ. He encouraged his family to invite Jesus into their hearts as often as possible. He wasn't able to imagine living the holy days, birthdays and name days without being able to take Holy Communion (Obra, 23.06.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*; Obra, 27.09.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). "Just as we nourish our body many times a day, the soul must be nourished through Holy Communion so that it does not weaken and shrivel up" (Obra, 1.02.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

He stressed that if we have Jesus in our heart, we can do anything, nothing will be too difficult for us, He will help us in everything (Obra, 1.06.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). When difficulties arise, only in front of the tabernacle do we find comfort. He feels a constant love that gives him strength for faithful service, all the way to sacrificing himself.

At the centre of his life, he put Eucharistic Jesus, who was his strength and wisdom. Free from the vanity of the world and avid in his love for Jesus Christ, he wished to become like Him in his thoughts, words, desires, and actions (Obra, 19.04.1930, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). He proclaimed Jesus the "Lord and King of his life, mind, willpower, and heart" (Obra, 5.03.1930, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

In spite of his young age, he was a priest very well internally trained, diligent, mortified, and at the same time very cheerful. After two years of work at Kodeń, he was transferred to Markowice near Inowrocław, another Marian sanctuary in which the novitiate of the Polish Province of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate was located. He was named treasurer of a religious house but Father Ludwik was also for the novices a living example of the realisation of religious life. For his brothers he was an example of priestly and religious holiness.

At the side of the superior and master of the novitiate, the blessed Father Józef Cebula⁴, he spent two years (1937-39), witnessing with kindness, sensitivity, simplicity, humility, and diligence. One of the brothers of that community said of him, "Father Wrodarczyk was a great man, priest, treasurer, and religious" (Brother Józef Jarmuż OMI, ACB, Folder: Testimonium). His personality can be characterised as gentle, cheerful, and joyous. His cheerfulness and joy arose from the faith in the love of God and from the acceptance of His will. He stressed that only this attitude allows us to understand all that God does is the best for our welfare (Obra, 21.06.1931, ACB, Folder: Litterae). He wrote in letters to his family that the true "joy comes from a clean conscience", from Jesus, with whom we unite ourselves in the Eucharist (Obra, 17.02.1932, ACB, Folder: Litterae; Obra, 10.04.1933, ACB, Folder: Litterae). During Advent, he summoned the joy of the fact that Jesus was coming to us, to live in the midst of us, in order to show us how to live, to suffer, how to work, how to find God – the true eternal joy (Obra, 17.02.1932, ACB, Folder: Litterae).

During the holy days of Easter, he stressed that the reason of the joy was Christ risen who gave us eternal life! Every Christian should exert himself to make Christ the King in every human heart and in society, and when that happens then all humanity will be happy (Obra, 3.07.1932, ACB, Folder: Litterae). "Let us enjoy His victory because it is the guarantee of our resurrection (Markowice, 15.04.1938, ACB, Folder: Litterae). Let us rejoice because Jesus has brought true peace and joy on earth that only He can give". An important reason for the joy is the sacrament of penance in which all can find heart's peace (Markowice, 15.04.1938, ACB, Folder: Litterae).

For Father Ludwik, the joy came first of all from the experience of the presence of God. It is a spiritual joy connected with faith, hope and love. It is not a transitory joy but it is a permanent spiritual attitude, an attitude of a serene and pure heart.

⁴ Beatified on June 13, 1999, in a group of 108 martyrs of II World War.

Administrator of the parish Okopy

At the eve of the Second World War, on 17 August 1939, the then Provincial, Father Bronisław Wilkowski OMI together with his Provincial Council nominated Father Ludwik Wrodarczyk as administrator of the parish Okopy, just created near Rokitno, in the diocese of Lutsk, in the district of Sarny in Volinia, situated only two kilometres from the Polish-Russian border. Father Antoni Matura⁵ and Brother Karol Dziemba, OMI, were supposed to work together with him.

Okopy Parish was separated from the Parish of Rokitno in 1939 and included three villages Okopy, Dołhań and Borowe Budki and partially Kolonia Natreba, all with Polish majority. These villages were surrounded by big Ukrainian villages: Kisorycze, Karpilówka and Borowe. The parish had about a thousand faithful and had a church constructed out of wood in 1934 as a branch church of the parish of Rokitno. The parish priest of Rokitno, twenty kilometres from Okopy, only occasionally celebrated the Holy Mass in the affiliated church in Okopy. Sometimes an army chaplain from the Border Guards came. On the other days, the faithful prayed alone without a priest.

In 1939 in the diocese of Łuck about thirty new parishes were founded, some new priests were ordained, but not one of them was sent to Okopy. With the consent of the ordinary of the diocese of Łuck, Adolf Szelażek, this parish was entrusted to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Two priests and a religious brother were supposed to work there. At Okopy Father Wrodarczyk arrived on the eve of the break out of the war – 29 August 1939. This zone of eastern Poland was very backward in development: there was an unimaginable poverty and hunger, a lack of basic hygiene – all this often caused bacterial epidemics. People suffered from headaches and abdominal pains, and they had scabies, smallpox, ulcers and lice. Mortality was very high, especially at the end of the winter season, when principal products often were lacking. Healthiness only existed in the cities; in this case, the closest doctor worked in Równie, twenty kilometres away. The only doctors in the area were charlatans, various faith healers and witch doctors, and so called “wise grandmothers” who attended births.

Father Ludwik from the beginning realised that beyond his priestly ministry and religious comfort he had to help them with the illnesses and poverty and conduct educational and training activities.

⁵ He never arrived at Okopy. After the beginning of the war, Father Matura remained at Obra where he was arrested 6 January 1940 and then imprisoned in the concentration camps at Güssen and at Dachau.

He was active in the treatment of people with medicinal herbs. The parish supported and helped persons who were poor, sick, disabled and invalid. He brought the local population to such a level of appreciation of personal hygiene that the annual epidemic of dysentery began to disappear. Beyond personal treatment, he taught the population about herbal medicine and prevention of illnesses. Also at times during sermons, he reminded the parishioners about the problems of daily life, advising to drink only boiled water. He imported seeds from Greater Poland and Pomerania, introduced planting rotation, grew medicinal herbs, vegetables, grain, and potatoes.

The period of four years of pastoral work at Okopy was the most beautiful and meaningful period of the life and mission of Father Wrodarczyk. With all his zeal as priest and missionary, he began to organise parish life. He wanted to infuse his compassion and kindness in the hearts of the poor Catholics who lived on the eastern borders of Poland. He understood that the soul has the value of the precious Blood of Jesus because He wanted to shed His blood to save even one single soul. Knowing that eternal salvation of every soul depends on how a person lives, and that innumerable souls are sunk in the darkness of mistakes and crime, He wanted missionaries to be able to reach them and carry them to the light of faith. In the letters, he encouraged his family to pray for the missions, for the missionaries and for the pagans, and he asked sacrifices for them. He wrote "to support the mission – it is to open sky to those who sit in the night and in the pitch dark of death. It is also an act of compassion towards the body and the soul for the poor pagans" (Krobia, 1.05.1926, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). As Oblate of Mary Immaculate, he desired "that the Kingdom of God expand" (Krobia, 7.02.1926, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). He himself wanted to be "a worthy priest, a religious missionary and a zealous pious person, in a way to be able to work well and fruitfully in the vineyard of the Lord, and however possible, to bring more souls to God" (Markowice, 14.11.1926, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

Human promotion

The pastoral activity of Father Ludwik was special and not limited only to the altar, confessional or pulpit. His priesthood was on one side "extraordinary" and on the other "ordinary". For the people of Volinia, he became "everything for everyone" to win everyone for Christ – as St Paul wrote (1Cor 9,22). He was a priest, a pastor, and a doctor for all.

Father Ludwik was ready at any moment of the day or night to go to the sick with a remedy or the sacrament of Last Rites. Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, Catholics and non-Catholics – all looked to him for help. Furthermore, Father Wrodarczyk began to visit personally the sick in their houses as a doctor for their spirit and their body. He brought various types of infusions, ointments, and drinks to the sick. The reputation of the priest-physician reached the region's borders. Thus under the windows of the rectory one saw poor carts on which lay patients of every place of origin brought there for the last help. He didn't refuse to help anyone. He went to whoever had need of him.

He had a great respect for every human being. In his letters one feels the spirit of simplicity and kindness, compassion, patience and goodness. His attitude was very noble, certainly due to the integrity of his character, shaped by the influence of his parents, but especially with the co-operation of the grace of God.

His parishioners remember him as a true priest who took care of the poor, didn't attend to his comforts and led a conscientious monastic life. They say that he won over all the inhabitants of the parish and of the surrounding villages with general sympathy as a modest priest, very devout, with a high personal culture. He was open to all. Born in Silesia he learned quickly the local dialect – a blend of Polish, Russian and indeterminate words – used both by Poles and by Ukrainians. He earned great recognition and general respect in the local society. He won over the Orthodox population who, not having a church, began to participate in the Catholic celebrations. Out of respect for them, Father Wrodarczyk often ended his sermons written in Polish with some phrases in Ruthenian earning much respect among the Orthodox.

He was a doctor, a teacher, and a priest who saved the sick and helped the poor. When, because of a crop failure, hunger was widespread in 1942, the weakened bodies were attacked by dysentery, typhus, and other diseases of malnourished persons. People died in mass. At that time the priest-herbalist was the only salvation for this poor population (Janik, 1970, p. 90-91; Januszewska, ACB, Folder: Testimonium)⁶.

⁶ A most beautiful testimony on his ministry was given by eyewitnesses, his parishioners at Okopów. "In mid November I became ill with dysentery and I remained in bed for several weeks. I was very ill and no one knew how it would end if not with the help of Father Ludwik Wrodarczyk, who took care of me and provided me the necessary medicines. His devotion had no limits. He gave me medicines and injections and instructed my parents on how to act with me. He was ready to help at any moment of the day and night [...]. Father Wrodarczyk was

At the same time he was worried about deepening their faith and he tried heroically to hasten with priestly service also in the lands of the ex-Soviet Union. At Okopy there took place baptisms of masses of persons from the then Russian-Polish border. He baptised adults who for decades endured religious persecution unleashed after the Bolshevik Revolution. Many persons from the Soviet Union visited the church at Okopy. They came particularly to the Midnight Mass in 1941. Many of them saw for the first time a priest and a service so solemn. In the spring of 1942 he reached Zhytomyr and Kiev. According to witnesses, during a missionary trip of two months did he alone baptise several thousands and gave about 500 sick the sacraments.

Pastoral work

The parish of Okopy was full of religious life. Crowds of faithful, coming from the Soviet border, were full of joy that after so many years of Communist persecution they were able to profess publicly their own faith and join in the sacraments. The witnesses spoke of mass conversions, pilgrimages and extraordinary universal joy. For the indulgence of St John the Baptist in 1943 a great pilgrimage took place from the zones behind Zbrucz and brought together the pilgrims in all the surrounding parishes. Around six thousand persons (!) received the sacrament of Confirmation in that day and more than nine million believers joined in Holy Communion.

In 1941, in spite of the war and the occupation under way, Father Ludwik preached a retreat at Klesów, parish of Don Antoni Chomicki, who described him as follows: "The speaker was weak, but something spoke through him. I remained astonished how he handled all this. He was very modest and humble. Other priests, when they came and preached, didn't listen to confessions but he heard almost all their confessions! He was a good confessor. We all came willingly to have confessions heard by him. These people felt his holiness. When he preached a retreat, some sacred spirit, some spiritual energy spoke through him. In him one felt a saint and a good priest. He was a saint: preacher, missionary, and confessor".

a very good and extraordinary man. He accepted everyone. It made no difference whether this one a Pole or that one a Ukrainian. He treated all in the same way. He always said «There is only one God for everyone and we all must live in harmony ». A Ukrainian boy became ill. Father Wrodarczyk went five kilometers in order to visit him and take care of him there. He walked on foot five kilometers".

The presence of the cross of Christ is indispensable in the apostolic life of the disciples of the Saviour. This is the measure of the love with which Father Ludwik wanted to love sinners (Obra, 1.02.1931, ACB, Folder: Literrae; Obra, 17.02.1932, ACB, Folder: Literrae).

Seeing among the people a frigidity, an indifference, an ingratitude and a contempt for the salvation work of Jesus, for His grace and His love, he wanted to repay Jesus for all these sins and for those who didn't want to understand the suffering and the love of Christ (Markowice, 7.04.1939, ACB, Folder: Literrae). He wanted that "those who are indifferent and far from Jesus would continue to burn with the fire of love for Him and would taste how sweet is the Lord for those who love Him" (Markowice, 7.04.1939, ACB, Folder: Literrae). The time of Advent and Lent were special moments for Father Ludwik in order to help the souls that were cold. At times he called it the "atonement to Jesus, for those who not only are not receiving Jesus in their hearts, but who hold him in contempt" (Obra, 17.02.1932, ACB, Folder: Literrae). The first shape of compensation was Holy Communion, that he practised and encouraged also his family to do.

Moreover, daily work and the troubles and difficulties of the day were for him the possibility of a sacrifice for the conversion of the souls and for their salvation (Obra, 17.02.1932, ACB, Folder: Literrae). We need "to do the work for the glory of God and the salvation of the souls" (Kodeń, 12.07.1934, ACB, Folder: Literrae).

The love of God and the carrying out of His holy will were in the fore. It was the greatest desire and goal of his life. He felt the presence of a loving God and His love in his life. He wrote that we live in order to love God with a warm and strong love "how so much we are able to love! The heart serves us in order to love, and what else is more worthy of the love of God?!" (Obra, 27.09.1931, ACB, Folder: Literrae).

The experience of love requires reciprocation, and it is open to the community. Father Ludwik wanted to grow in love. However, he wanted this love not only for himself but also for his family and religious community. As a means to develop this virtue, he advised confession and frequent Holy Communion because these sacraments are a place of immense grace and a special encounter with Christ - Love. In a letter to his family, he wrote, "So that we can show Him our love, we proceed with holy confession and Holy Communion, and He will ignite again more deeply the love in our hearts for Him, and we will love Him and He will love us! In such case, what will we have greater need of?!" (Obra, 27.09.1931, ACB, Folder: Literrae).

For him, love was an inspiring principle throughout life. He repeated many times: God should be loved and you must take care to have Him loved by others. You must grow in love and you cause this love to grow ever more. Only Love gives strength to look for and pursue the Will of God, "if we love Jesus, we will follow his commandments (Obra, 29.03.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

His love showed itself above all in his constant readiness to carry out the work that God laid out. He dedicated himself with zeal to his religious duties, to prayer and to work. During his studies, he prepared for the examinations with care. Then, in pastoral work, he was completely devoted to parish matters (Kodeń, 19.1.1935, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

He underlined that these sacrifices must be made with a "happy heart" (Obra, 21.06.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). He believed that the sacrifice to God could be done not only with the difficulties that we confront but he encouraged to make a voluntary sacrifice renouncing good things "God has created all for man, [...] but not only to use it, but at times to carry out a sacrifice to God with these good things" (Obra, 21.06.1931, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*).

As a young priest, he was greeted by the difficult situation of the war, by hatred between persons and frequent encounter with death. It was the moment of a special call to fulfil the commandment of love and give one's life for friends (John 15.13). It was obvious for Father Ludwik that one cannot imitate Christ without helping Him carry His cross and participating in His sufferings (Markowice, 14.11.1926, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). Because of his nature, full of courtesy and kindness, he tried, if possible, to come to the needy with help. He furnished medical aid to the sick but the most important for him was the spiritual help: Holy Mass, sacraments, anointing of the sick, conversations. In a letter to his sister, he wrote "There are many sick everywhere and I pray for them that God can give them patience and the moribund a happy death. That they would profit from these sufferings for their souls and cry out for many blessings for many others" (Okopy, 25.07.1942, ACB, Folder: *Litterae*). He understood that suffering has a value and it is salvific, sanctifying, and apostolic.

Only he who alone has experienced the love of God can give it to others and can see the needs of others. This is possible only in the Holy Spirit, which gives strength and power, the capability of love. It opens man in order to receive the love of God and to carry it to others. For Father Ludwik, to be a priest and a religious does not mean to look after one's own salvation, but it means to live in close communion with

God in order to receive His love, to grow in it, to reciprocate and take care of the salvation of souls.

Saving the Jews

In Okopy – as Leon Żur bears witness to – there took place very many baptisms of persons coming from the former Polish – Russian border. Adults who hid their faith because of religious persecutions that threatened them were baptised. At the house of Father Ludwik, they helped and hid Jewish fugitives. In November 1939, he agreed to take on a young Jew, Benedykt Halicz, as organist in order to hide him from the Germans. When in August 1942 “the action” of liquidating the ghetto of Rokitno began, he hid in the parsonage and then fed in the forest the Jews and among others were the brothers Samuel and Alexander Levin, who after the war presented in Israel in 2000 a request to assign to him a medal “Just among the nations of the world” which Yad Vashem conferred on 3 August 2000 to the provincial of the Polish Province.

A man of prayer

Father Ludwik divided his time between work and adoration of the Lord Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament. Witnesses cite “The source of the strength and energy of his spirit and of a so complete activity was a deep union with Eucharistic Jesus. His preferred place was the altar and the tabernacle, in front of which he spent many hours day and night”.

St Paul exclaimed “Rejoice always, pray without interruption, give thanks in everything: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1Th 5,16-18). Father Ludwik reflected this attitude in his life. Above all, he loved to be with Eucharistic Jesus. After worship, he used to wait for another with eagerness (Obra, 29.03.1931, ACB, Folder: Literrae). He stressed that it is necessary constantly to pray and not to stop, to ask God and Mary for help and protection. In the letters to his family he asked constantly for prayers for him and he promised to pray for them on his part (Obra, 1.02.1931, ACB, Folder: Literrae).

The very important moments in his daily life were the Holy Mass, the Holy Communion and the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. He encouraged us to receive the sacraments often because God supports those who have trust in him (Obra, 23.03.1932, ACB, Folder: Literrae). Encounters with Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion

were for Ludwik a source of comfort, peace, joy, trust, feelings of inner grace and love, emotional communion with God. He felt a great desire to receive often the Holy Communion.

Love that drew from the Eucharist was fruitful in his life and it manifested itself in his desire to do the will of God, always and everywhere (Obra, 21.06.1931, ACB, Folder: Literrae). With all his heart he wanted to be devoted to God, he wanted to live in this way "to please only Him" (Obra, 27.09.1931, ACB, Folder: Literrae). The recognition and obedience to the will of God is a safe path that consists in the difficult process of reading the signs of the times, courage and generosity in taking decisions and resisting temptations. Nevertheless, one should not concentrate on difficulties and on temporal things. Because "all material things pass and heaven waits for us to see God face to face which will never end" (Obra, 19.05.1932, ACB, Folder: Literrae).

In letters he constantly repeated "I ask you to pray for all of us to have fulfilled the will of God" (Okopy, 26.05.1943, ACB, Folder: Literrae). Prayer gave him enthusiasm and desire to do the will of God. He experienced that prayer requires a great effort, but at the same time he saw its surprising fruits, he saw it as a measure that reveals broader horizons, clear objectives in life and access to the Light. The prayer of Father Ludwik was thanksgiving, devotion, prayer, worship, contemplation and listening.

Because of his own disgraces or disgraces that afflicted the people, he had the habit of going to church where he continued to worship for many hours and often for the entire night. For hours, he remained stretched out on the ground in front of the altar. He celebrated special masses and prayed for a reversal of miseries that fell on the people. It was thus in September of 1939, when the war broke out, and in the winter of 1940 when the Poles were deported to Siberia. He was this way in periods of drought or excessive rains and when epidemics of different diseases or hunger became widespread. And he was this way the night of attack at three Polish villages in his parish.

Baptism of blood

Already from the spring of 1943, many individuals and entire families were killed and several farms were burned near Okopy. The Polish population went into the forest at night carrying with them what was necessary and often also cattle. It happened that only the parish priest of Okopy remained in the village. Twice the attack of a Ukrainian band

against Polish villagers was pushed back. The third and most tragic attack came on the night between 6 and 7 December 1943. The Russian-German front was already approaching.

The evening of 6 December 1943, Father Ludwik wrote scores for the parish choir for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. When he finished, he asked his oblate brother, Karol, to pray the Litanies of Loreto with him. Then, as if he sensed what was about to happen, he bid the brother farewell and left the rectory. He said goodbye to him, kissed him, hugged him in a fatherly way and said "Remain with God, brother. Love the Holy Mother. We take on the will of God. I will go into the church; I cannot leave the Holy Sacrament". He kneeled in the church and then prostrated in front of the altar praying. Many times various persons, like his brother Karol, were urging him to flee into the forest. He realised that sooner or later the Ukrainian nationalists were also able to come to the rectory but he didn't want to quit. He was convinced that his place was in the church and among the faithful and nothing bad would happen to him since he showed goodness to all. His hour arrived and he accepted consciously everything that was bound to come.

Father Ludwik had a very strong trust in the care of the providence of God towards him and his family, on his territory and in the whole world "God guards and supports those who give their trust in Him" (Obra, 23.03.1932, ACB, Folder: *Literrae*), he used often to say. Trust in the providence of God is the fruit of living faith and of true love. In letters, he wrote, "Often we do not know why God acts this way or does not act this way with us. But He knows why, and this is sufficient; in every case everything is for our good and for our eternal happiness" (Obra, 9.05.1931, ACB, Folder: *Literrae*). In his documents we don't find the least trace of doubt in the supernatural care but there are countless tests of humble submission to the will of God, waiting for what the omnipotence of God sends to us.

At 10:00 PM the bands of Ukrainians set fire to the first houses of Okopy, Dołhan, and Budki Borowskie. Persons in search of a refuge fled into the forest. If someone was encountered, he was bound to die. They killed men, women and children. Everything that could be useful was loaded onto carts. The soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army (in Ukrainian, Українська Повстанська Армія, Ukrainśka Povstans'ka Armija - UPA) was responsible for the raid in the church of Okopy.

When they came, they found Father Ludwik stretched out in front of the altar. They began to torture him. A sign of this was a collar

covered in blood, afterwards discovered by parishioners on the steps of the altar, the buttons of the cassock were scattered on the floor.

Only two women tried to hinder the kidnapping of the parish priest, eighteen-year-old Weronika Kozińska and ninety-year-old Łucja Skurzyńska. Both were killed with an incredible cruelty: they cut off their breasts, pulled out their eyes and left the bodies at the church entrance. In front of the door, they left bundles of straw wanting to set fire also to the church. Father Ludwik begged nevertheless not to do this because "it is easier to find a new parish priest than construct a new church".

They robbed the church and the sacristy. They raided the tabernacle and profaned the altar. The day after people collected the hosts scattered on the floor. They loaded the robes and liturgical vessels onto the cart that was waiting in front of the church and sent them to the village Karpilówka, 7 km away, where the staff of the UPA was located.

Father Wrodarczyk was brought there, tied and attached to a sledge. Afterwards on the road from Okopy to Karpilówka, the people found blood and parts of his clothes on the snow - a collar and a sleeve. It was the sole case of the abduction of a Pole alive from the place of the massacre. Probably, for him, as priest, a different, more refined and cruel path to death was devised.

One of the parishioners, Bronisław Janik, who knew Father Wrodarczyk in person, describes the last phase of his journey as martyr in his book entitled *An Extraordinary Testimony of Faith in Volinia from 1939 to 1943*:

"After having carried away the priest by car from Karpilówka to the Pałka peat-bogs, located near the Rokitno-Moczulanka line's narrow-gauge railway, he was stripped naked and subjected to inhuman tortures. Pricking with bayonets and needles and roasting his legs with hot iron didn't achieve the desired effect. The priest was still alive. Enraged the persecutors proceeded to more brutal tortures. Seeing his inevitable death, the martyr asked his torturers permission to pray. They magnanimously allowed him to. On his knees on the mossy ground, the priest prayed at length. After having finished, he said, «I am ready». Twelve Ukrainian girls put Father Ludwik down on the ground and tied him to the trunk of a tree. Then in cold blood, they began to cut his body with a saw. Cut in half, giving still signs of life, he was put on his feet and tied again to an adjacent tree, where, from a distance of a few meters, they opened rifle fire. Father Ludwik Wrodarczyk was dead. After having dug out the ditch and thrown the body inside, the criminals covered the head of their victim with a sack

of dirty straw. The tomb covered with sand was covered again with grass and various snapped branches. In such circumstances, the first and last parish priest of the parish of Okopy, oblate missionary Father Ludwik Wrodarczyk, brought to an end his young, barely thirty-five year life dedicated to God and to the Church”.

His body has never been found. Eyewitnesses point out that Father Ludwik Wrodarczyk was buried behind the barn in possession of a Ukrainian peasant. He, in turn, after the invasion of the Soviet army, fearing the possible consequences, shifted the body in the spring of 1944 further away into a swampier zone.

Conclusion

Where first there was the village of Okopy, today there are fields. All the buildings of the Polish population in Okopy were burned in the tragic night of 6 / 7 December 1943 when Okopy, Dołhań and Budki Borowskie were attacked by Ukrainian nationalists from the gang of Taras Bulba. Besides a few houses inhabited by Ukrainians, the parish church in wood dedicated to St. John the Baptist was saved. There, the village residents, who before the pogrom were able to flee into the forest, deposited the bodies of their murdered relatives and neighbours the day after the massacre. This church was burned down only after the war in 1948.

Until now the only witness of the events of those times has remained the cemetery founded by Father Wrodarczyk in September 1939 where he had buried the first victims of the invasion of the Russian troops in Poland on 17 September and where the tombs of all the persons killed during that tragic night of 6 December 1943 are presently located. Missing only is the tomb of Father Ludwik. Thanks to the efforts of the Ukrainian population, there has been constructed a monument to the murdered Poles – among whom the first and last parish priest of Okopy, Father Ludwik Wrodarczyk, OMI.

Skrót

ACB *Archivum Causae Beatificationis seu Declarationis Martyrii
P. Ludovici Wrodarczyk OMI in Odium Fidei*

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