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The Spirituality of Otto of Bamberg

DUCHOWOŚĆ OTTONA Z BAMBERGU

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie duchowości Ottona z Bambergu. Cel ten został zrealizowany w czterech etapach, które odpowiadają poszczególnym częściom pracy. Najpierw ukazano podstawy duchowości Ottona z Bambergu, które stanowią akt stworzenia człowieka przez Boga na jego obraz i podobieństwo oraz jego odkupienie. Najpełniejszym aktem odpowiedzi na to Boże obdarowywanie może być ze strony człowieka tylko pokorne przyjęcie tego aktu. Najgłębszym jego wyrazem będzie pokorna służba wobec Boga i bliźnich. Ugruntowana w ten sposób duchowość może dopiero przyjąć różne formy wyrazu. W życiu Ottona z Bambergu formy te były rozmaite. Jedną z nich było jego bezgraniczne posłuszeństwo Kościołowi (z jednej strony wyrażane wiernością papieżowi, a z drugiej lojalnością wobec władzy świeckiej), innym zaś razem było jego gorliwe pełnienie posługi biskupiej i misyjnej, okazywanej chociażby w postaci regularnego głoszenia im Ewangelii czy wspierania ich w uposażeniu miejsc kultu oraz w niesieniu pomocy najbardziej potrzebującym, a jeszcze innym razem w poszanowaniu zwyczajów i kultury ludzi ewangelizowanych. Całość stosowania duchowości dopełnia używanie przez Ottona z Bambergu odpowiednich środków duchownych. Zaliczał do nich: modlitwę, ascezę i życie sakramentalne. Dzięki stosowaniu tych środków wzrastał duchowo i pogłębiał swoją więź z Chrystusem, stanowiąc dla następnych pokoleń wzór pogłębionej osobistej duchowości.

Słowa kluczowe: duchowość, biskup, misjonarz, apostoł Pomorzan, sługa Chrystusa

Introduction

2024 marks the 900th anniversary of Bishop Otto of Bamberg's evangelisation mission in Pomerania. This event is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the work of this shepherd and missionary, to reveal the scope and depth of his mission in his time and to explain the value of the mission to the present generations because

of its contributions to contemporary achievements in archaeological, historical and theological sciences.

Otto of Bamberg and his mission in Pomerania have received much attention over the years, as reflected in various publications. It is not possible to list them all in this work. Therefore, to illustrate the wide interest of researchers in the figure of Otto of Bamberg, it is enough to include a few of them; however, in order not to disturb the substantive side of the submission, they will be included in a footnote.¹ These publications present the life and work of Otto of Bamberg from various points of view, starting from biographical ones, moving into cultural perspectives that show the socio-political and church-state conditions of his time, to perspectives that celebrate his missionary achievements, and ending with critical perspectives on the development of his cult. Within the scholarship, however, the matter of Otto of Bamberg's spiritual life did not come out directly. Therefore, this dimension of his life is the focus of this submission. Its main goal will be to present the spirituality of Otto of Bamberg. To begin, it is important to define what spirituality is in its essence.

In the context of contemporary achievements in the field of theological and spiritual sciences, spirituality is defined as a relationship between man and God. In its essence, it boils down to the way a person behaves towards God. Man's spirituality is nothing else than his relation to God. In its understanding, it would seem that man becomes the primary subject of the relationship, but as a result, it was God who first met him in the work of the incarnation of the Son of God and the work of His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary and thus testified that God is the basis of human spirituality. Therefore, the spirituality of man has the character

1 These publications include, in order of surname: Biermann F., *Bischof Otto von Bamberg in Pommern – die Missionsreisen und ihre Wirkung im archaologischen Bild*, in: idem, F. Ruchhoft (eds.), *Bischof Otton von Bamberg in Pommern*, Bonn 2017, pp. 97–148; Bojar-Fijałkowski G., Święty Otton z Bambergu, Warszawa 1986; Chorzępa M., *Od Ottona do Erazma*, "Prezbiterium" 6–8 (1974), pp. 34–45; Dziewulski W., *Przebieg i metody misji św. Ottona z Bambergu w latach 1124–1128*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Stowarzyszenia PAX" 4 (1974), pp. 38–47; Fabiańczyk L., *Apostoł Pomorza*, Szczecin 2001; Fenrych P., Święty Otton. Biskup, misjonarz, Europejczyk, Szczecin 2004; Liman K., *Dialog Herborda. Ze studiów historycznoliterackich nad biografią łacińską XII wieku*, Poznań 1975; Rębkowski M., Rosik S. (eds.), *Biskup Otton z Bambergu i jego świat*, Wrocław 2018; Rosik S., *Conversio gentis Pomeranorum. Studium świadectwa o wydarzeniach (XII)*, Wrocław 2010; Rymar E., Święta Studnia, czyli misyjne dzieło patrona Pyrzyce św. Ottona biskupa bamberskiego i pamięć o nim poprzez wieki, Pyrzyce 2006; Strzelczyk J., *Otton z Bambergu jako biskup Rzeszy*, in: M. Rębkowski, S. Rosik (eds.), *Biskup Otton z Bambergu i jego świat*, Wrocław 2018, pp. 109–117; Szulist W., Święty Otton z Bambergu, in: J.R. Bar (ed.), *Polscy święci*, Vol. 5, Warszawa 1985, pp. 11–27; Wejman G. (ed.), Święty Otton z Bambergu – Ewangelizator Pomorza. Jego kult do czasów współczesnych, Szczecin 2004; idem, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu w przestrzeni pomorskiego Kościoła*, Szczecin 2021; Zientara B., *Polityczne i kościelne związki Pomorza Zachodniego z Polską za Bolesława Krzywoustego*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 61 (1970) 2, pp. 192–232.

of a personal relationship in which God meets him, and he responds with personal commitment.

The definition of spirituality indicated above sets the direction for looking at the spiritual life of Otto of Bamberg. In order to know the depth of Otto of Bamberg's life, one should look at his personal relationship with God according to this modern definition of spirituality. This paper outlines the nature of his relationship with God in four parts.

In the first of these parts, the basis of Otto of Bamberg's spirituality will be presented. This foundation is God's constant giving of Himself to man. Having created man in His own image (Gen 1:27), He constantly communicates His nature to man through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the man who wants to lead a spiritual life must be aware of the way God shares Himself with man. This understanding guided Otto of Bamberg.

The second part of this presentation examines man's response to this divine communication. Man's acceptance of this divine action can only produce humility. This humility becomes the foundation of man's personal relationship with God and his subsequent spiritual development. Humility was a staple of Otto of Bamberg's life. Therefore, in this second section, the analysis will convey an approximation of Otto's understanding of humility and the way he expressed it.

Spirituality is always expressed in specific attitudes and actions. Therefore, the third part of the reflection will show the range of forms in which Otto of Bamberg expressed his spirituality. These forms include faithfulness to the Church, proper administration of church property, pastoral concern for the spiritual life of the faithful, sensitivity to those in need and openness to evangelisation.

In order for a man to deepen his spirituality, he must take appropriate actions in this regard, which in the theological and spiritual language are referred to as means. The theology of spirituality includes prayer, asceticism and sacramental life among these means. Therefore, the fourth part of this presentation will illustrate how Otto of Bamberg used these means to develop his spirituality.

1. God's giving – the basis of Otto of Bamberg's spirituality

A Latin maxim says that action follows being (*agere sequitur esse*). Adapting these words to spirituality, it must be said that spirituality, as a human activity, grows from a specific foundation. This foundation for Otto's spirituality was God's endowment. He understood this as the giving of God both in the act of creation and in the act of redemption in Christ. Although biographers do not write directly about his awareness of having received God's endowment, this does not mean that Otto did not believe in God's gift. To justify such a hypothesis, it is worth recalling

a fundamental principle that relates to the spiritual development of man: external attitude always reveals internal values.

Biographers mention that Otto was very pious even though he did not pursue solitude or constant nights in prayer. According to their descriptions, he also maintained deep fellowship in dialogue with God, as exemplified by his prayers said over the corpse of a woman, for the release of a prisoner from Pomeranian captivity, and in the church in Szczecin for two days while waiting for death. The attitude that others saw in Otto indicates, according to the above-mentioned principle, the inner richness of his relationship with God. His piety demonstrated in his prayer life would not have been possible if he had not been aware that God had been giving him grace from the moment of creation. Otto adored God for the act of creation, which was manifested in his love of nature; at the same time, he was amazed at the sublimity of his own dignity and that of every human being.

Otto's attitude towards God was influenced by the formation he received from his family home. His parents, Otto and Adelajda,² who belonged to a distinguished Swabian family and powerful European nobility, led a very pious lifestyle.³ Their piety was expressed, above all, in the love of God and the boundless trust in His providence. Biographers report that they lived simple lives filled with integrity and nobility.⁴ As parents, they instilled this spiritual background in their children, Otto, Liutfrid, Lentfrid and their half-brother Frederick.⁵ They taught their children that it is God who extends His care over the whole world and every human being from the moment of creation. Within this context, one can assume that from early in his life, Otto was aware of his own dignity as God's creation. In his life, this awareness took the form of a vocation. This vocation was defined by his sense of the source of his existence, his love for this source and his desire to be in communication with the source. Otto saw God not only as the source and goal of life but also as a person who cared for His own and guaranteed their growth.

Otto was not only aware of the personal relationship with God that resulted from the act of creation, but he also had a deep sense of being a child of God. Although his biographers do not directly indicate this feeling, their references to his evangelising activity, in which he emphasised the power of the Christian God versus the powerlessness of pagan gods and the value of baptism as the source of God's life, indirectly

2 Otto's parents were buried in the church in Albuch (now Bach). See E. Rymar, *Święta Studnia, czyli misyjne dzieło patrona Pyrzyc...*, p. 9.

3 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 33.

4 See. K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 100.

5 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 34.

point to Otto's understanding of God's endowment in Christ.⁶ We can conclude that Otto was convinced of the disinterested action of God towards every man because of Otto's evangelistic work. At the same time, he was convinced of the elevation of this man that allowed one to participate in God's intra-trinitarian life. For Otto, the gift of childhood was God's gift, that is, an act that exceeded the requirements of his human nature, although it did not violate it in any way.

But he also knew that the supernatural life that God gives to man is based on man's natural abilities. That is why he believed that the deeper a man remains in the circle of God's sanctifying presence, the more he will develop spiritually. He saw the source of this divine life exclusively in Christ. It was He who, in the mystery of redemption, merited it for man and gave it to him in the sacrament of baptism. Thus, Otto, with his teaching and attitude, pointed to the Christocentric dimension of man's spiritual life. It can be said that he showed that only in Christ can man achieve personal fulfilment in humanity. In this regard, Otto agrees with the message of St. Irenaeus, later referred to in Pope John Paul II's book, "that the glory of God is man fully alive."⁷

2. Otto of Bamberg's response to God's giving

To God's self-giving, expressed in the act of creation and then in the act of redemption by Christ, Otto responded with an attitude of humility. By humility, he meant true and heartfelt approval of God and submission to him.⁸ And in this regard, Otto situates his understanding of humility in the line of St. Paul the Apostle, who saw man as a person endowed by God to such an extent that he cannot attribute anything to himself, which he expressed in the words: "What have you that you have not received? And if you have received it, why do you boast as though you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Humility, from the point of view of modern etymology, means man's submission to God.⁹ Otto's understanding of humility carries two essential elements: man's love for God and his dependence on God. In this context, the first element of humility depends on man's recognition of his relationship with the Creator. This recognition, of course, cannot be limited to emotional enthusiasm; rather, it is a volitional acceptance of himself as God's creation and a consequent readiness to serve Him.

6 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 114.

7 See Jan Paweł II, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, Kraków 2005, pp. 32–33.

8 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 107.

9 See M.F. Lacan, *Pokora*, w: X. Leon-Dufour (ed.), *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, trans. K. Romaniuk, Poznań 1990, p. 699.

The second element concerns taking specific attitudes towards other people. In this aspect, humility requires building sincere and deep relationships with people, which Otto's biographers called the so-called "active humility."¹⁰

This first element of humility, a man's recognition of his relationship with God, was best expressed by Otto in his deep gratitude to Him, which he showed in measurable gestures. For instance, he begged to be allowed to refuse the episcopal dignity by falling into tears and placing a ring and crosier at the feet of Pope Paschal II, confessing his unworthiness. He further demonstrated humility by walking barefoot in the snow, resulting in illness, as he entered Bamberg cathedral.¹¹

Further, Otto expressed the second element of humility in his active support for others through acts of selfless service. He ministered to the religious brothers at the table and at the altar, carried the decomposing corpse of a woman, and buried the dead in the years of famine.¹² Otto also expressed his humility in this functional and social dimension in the form of offering gifts to the Pomeranians and Warciśław during the mission. He provided liturgical equipment (missals, chalices, liturgical vestments, altars, relics, bells)¹³ for newly built churches. Church dignities did not make Otto proud; however, they did bring him universal recognition and due respect, and Otto took advantage of episcopal and missionary wealth for the sake of the mission. Radical poverty, as seen in the lives of Bernard Spaniard or Norbert of Xanten, was alien to him during evangelisation. Otto performed his tasks with proper missionary equipment, such as a large retinue, which included Polish clergy, translators and servants, as well as guides assigned by Warciśław.¹⁴ Otto treated this episcopal wealth and missionary equipment not as a means to make his life easier during the mission, but as a tool for the mission's effective implementation. And in this respect, Otto's attitude of humility is revealed.

In sum, Otto's life of humility created a balance between not overestimating himself and embracing his dignity. In this way, Otto showed that there was no grovelling in humility; instead, humility was revealed by a man's standing in the truth about himself as a creature of God and the joy of being a servant of Jesus Christ. Humility understood and experienced by man in this way produced spiritual conduct. In Otto's life, humility was expressed both in his boundless love for Christ

10 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 107.

11 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 48.

12 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 107.

13 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 48; K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 107; S. Rosik, *Conversio gentis Pomeranorum...*, pp. 235–236.

14 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 108.

and in his readiness to show support to his neighbours in the form of preaching the Gospel to them or materially supporting them in various needs. Realising humility in this way, Otto showed that only such a path man could please God and achieve everlasting happiness.

3. Forms of expression of the spirituality of Otto of Bamberg

Human spirituality, in practice, takes different forms of expression. In a word, man expresses it in appropriate attitudes. This regularity was also present in the life and work of Otto of Bamberg. He expressed his spirituality with the right attitudes. The breadth and depth of these attitudes covered all areas of his priestly, episcopal and missionary ministry, and of his human, socio-cultural and diplomatic commitment. As a priest, and later as a bishop of Bamberg and a missionary of Pomerania, he emphasised his spirituality in full devotion to the service for the glory of God and in sacrificial, almost limitless, dedication to people by leading them to salvation. On the other hand, as a man, equal in dignity with others, he expressed his spirituality by respecting the value of each person and by readily seeking to remedy their shortcomings. Being a humanist, Otto manifested his spirituality in this respect in his deep concern that people create friendly relations in communities and society. He also encouraged them to respect the cultural goods and customs of these communities. In the aspect of diplomatic relations, he expressed his spirituality in the first place in fidelity to the Church, the deepest expression of which was his boundless obedience to the Pope, specifically Paschal II, and then in the search for appropriate ways and means to build correct relations between the church and secular authorities.

The above-mentioned forms of expression of Otto of Bamberg's spirituality require, from the methodological point of view, a detailed description. These forms will be presented according to the four dimensions indicated above.

From an early age, Otto showed a desire to faithfully serve God and bring as many people as possible to Him. Even as a priest, he was a promoter of monastic life and a zealous advocate of monastic discipline. The motive for such an attitude on his part towards monasticism was the desire to promote the worship of God. He wanted people to know Christ more deeply and to live His gospel. He also had frequent contact with the Bamberg Benedictine monastery, which he humbly served and for which he had a special love.¹⁵

15 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, pp. 49–50; K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, pp. 111–112.

Later, as bishop of Bamberg, he served God's cause with no less dedication and commitment, caring for the spiritual development of people. His spiritual concern for them, described by his biographers as *cura animarum*, began in Germany, where he undertook the challenge of renewing the religious life of the faithful by preaching and sacrificial sacramental service. His spiritual concern for people reached its apogee in his evangelising missionary expeditions to Pomerania. The basis of his first missionary expedition, which took place in the years 1124–1125, was rooted neither in his personal interests nor in the inspirations of the Bamberg monastic milieu, but in the simple invitation of the Polish prince Bolesław III Wrymouth with whom he had a personal relationship. This leads to a very important conclusion that Otto was not as interested in building personal glory and pleasing the ruler as he was in extending Christ's reign on earth and promoting the salvation of people.¹⁶ Although he undertook this mission at the invitation of the prince, in practice, he carried it out in an evangelical spirit, announcing to people the truth about God's mercy shown in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, sacramentally present in every Eucharist, and encouraging them to trust Him.

Otto made his second missionary expedition in 1128. Although it was a result of an invitation from the Pomeranian Duke Warcisław I, he undertook it out of love for the new Church. Some of his biographers believe, though, that the reason for his undertaking this mission was the apostasy of the inhabitants of Wolin and Szczecin. Whatever the reason for Otto's second mission, it shows that he had a deep love for God and a will to show people that only in Him could they find happiness.¹⁷ His actions confirmed that his deepest desire was to lead people to God. In this way, Otto proved to be a credible servant of Christ in the mission of evangelisation.

In his mission among the Pomeranians, Otto's method was preaching in the form of catechesis, in which he emphasised God's love for people and the saving nature of belonging to Christ and His Church. In his missionary activity, he did not refer to the sword or violence, but he used persuasion and dialogue with the inhabitants of the villages and towns of Pomerania. When these dialogues or encouragements failed, he tried other tactics. In the face of the Wolinians who had not accepted his teachings earlier, he offered fifty talents of silver for the corroded sword of Caesar. However, his offer was refused. And then, in a tone of irony, he made them aware of where they hoped for their safety. Otto's proposal to buy a spear, which did not materialise, shows the great attachment of the Wolinians to riches. The proposal also

¹⁶ See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 113.

¹⁷ See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 51.

showed Otto as a prudent negotiator who tried to make good use of the so-called mammon for the salvation of souls.¹⁸ Of course, in his teaching, Otto rebuked and admonished the incorrigible people. He believed that his admonitions were supported by God's intervention, as exemplified by the death of a woman working on Sunday in Kamień Pomorski, the burning of crops of those working on St. Lawrence, the death of a farmer working on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the punishment of a priest as a multitude of pagans attempted to take his life.¹⁹

Otto's missionary method, based on zealous teaching and catechesis, supported by persuasion and dialogue in situations of resistance from some communities of towns and villages in Pomerania, was strengthened by his appeals to secular authority. In the face of the Wolinians, who put up strong resistance to his mission, he threatened the intervention of the Polish ruler. He acted in a similar style towards the inhabitants of Wołogoszcz, but ultimately Duke Warcisław I did not decide to use his power against them. On the other hand, when his mission failed to bring results to the inhabitants of Szczecin, he appealed to Bolesław III Wrymouth to intervene.²⁰

Otto was aware that the condition for lasting evangelisation would be, first, the removal of pagan temples and idols so that there would be no return to their worship. Second, he was deeply convinced of the need to strengthen the structures of the Christian religion in these places. Therefore, he used such tactics that during the mission. Makeshift temples were erected and provided with liturgical equipment, and priests were left with them, so that the faithful could consecrate their conversion, and then they, already converted, would be able to oppose the pagans. His methods were successful. The converts removed pagan idols and destroyed their temples. It must be admitted that in this respect, Otto behaved very rationally and mercifully because he ordered the sacrifices and loot deposited in pagan temples to be distributed to the poorest inhabitants, and he ordered for the cult statues, such as horse from Szczecin, to be sold and the value of its sale to be allocated to the poor. He also ordered to send the statue of Trzyglaw to Pope Callixt II. Otto was also very fair to people who professed Christianity. He practised a far-reaching gentleness by including many in the church, including Duke Warcisław I and his linemen, Domośław and his wife, along with some inhabitants of Wolin and apostates (Pomeranians baptised during the first expedition).

18 See S. Rosik, *Conversio gentis Pomeranorum...*, pp. 245–246.

19 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, pp. 51–52.

20 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 114.

Rather than dismissing the apostates from the Church, he allowed them to remain by asking them to perform penance and laying his hands on them.²¹

These facts show that Otto conducted his mission in Pomerania very prudently and focused on including the Pomeranians in a relationship of love with Christ so that they might be members of His Church. Leading people to God through teaching and sacramental ministry was not the only expression of Otto's spirituality. Another of his manifestations was his sensitivity to those in need.

He expressed his attitude of mercy towards his neighbours in various ways. In the years of famine around 1125, he helped the poor, those abandoned by the Bamberg diocese and many from other parts of Germany, distributing bread to those in need and sickles to those who were working at the beginning of the harvest. Another time, he showed his attitude of mercy on the road by redeeming prisoners from captivity. He was also able, despite criticism, to offer a paralytic a very valuable bed cover, and on another occasion, he ordered an expensive fish to send to the poor during Lent.²² In his mercy, he considered how he could get rid of his own expensive fur for the sake of the poor. He was known throughout Bamberg for his merciful care for the poor, widows and orphans and those afflicted with incurable diseases. He financially supported poorhouses throughout the Bamberg diocese. In turn, living frugally and restricting meals and clothing, Otto was motivated by his desire to aid the poor from the episcopal income.²³

The examples of Otto's attitude of mercy indicate his social sensitivity and readiness to deal with the greatest ills and needs of his neighbours. He was by no means indifferent to human shortcomings; on the contrary, he was always able to notice them and react accordingly. He did all this with extraordinary delicacy and in the spirit of respect for the human dignity of every person in need of help. He offered support to the poor in such a way that they would not feel humiliated but respected. He provided each help to the poor in a spirit of sensitivity to their feelings.

Otto also expressed his spirituality by encouraging others to form friendly relations with each other and respect cultural goods and customs in given communities. His humanism was at the root of his concern for building fraternal relations between people. In his life, it was expressed, as biographers indicate, in many natural and moral virtues (fidelity, justice, diligence, honesty, gentleness, kindness, patience, generosity, prudence, goodness, purity of morals, modesty and shyness).

21 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 52.

22 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, pp. 109–110.

23 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 49.

Guided by such virtues, Otto's humanity was a testimony to others; it mobilised them to acquire such attitudes. It was not so much with words that he encouraged people to grow in humanity and create brotherly relationships with each other, but through his example, he showed them that caring for human formation and building interpersonal bonds has extraordinary social value. Thanks to Otto's attitude, people not only cared about personal development but also considered it an honour to know him, including people such as Bela II and the Polish prince Bolesław III Wrymouth. Even more, all people loved him, and he became everything to them all.²⁴ In this way, Otto made his attitude that of the Apostle of Nations, St. Paul, who himself confessed that he became all things to all men in order to win at least some to Christ. This greatness and greatness of Otto can be proved by the terms used by biographers to express his conduct: a man of God, servant of God, teacher, preacher, apostle, reverend father, spiritual father or venerable Otto. He has also been compared to St. Joseph, the protector of Jesus Christ.²⁵

Otto not only cared about shaping people's fraternal and communal relations, but he also encouraged them to be sensitive and respect the traditions and customs of local communities. In this regard, a valuable testimony about him was left by the Monk of Prüfening, who wrote the following:

Good for everyone, better for his own, the best for himself, he also cared about the progress of others and received from them a reward worthy of his effort. Finally, he left his homeland and went to Poland. He stayed there for some time and not only got to know the customs of this people, but also learned the language so thoroughly that if anyone heard him speaking a barbaric language, he would not have thought that he was dealing with a German [...]. So prudent and faithful, he wanted to pay his fellow servants out of the talent he had received. So he devoted himself to the education of the boys and thus gained the support of mortal life in a foreign land. And this service he carried out as a diligent worker, also taking care that the boys whom he educated would get rid of boyish frivolity.²⁶

According to the testimony of this monk, Otto was able to recognise the culture and customs of the people among whom he stayed and thus influenced his listeners and believers to develop the same attitude. Leading a spiritual life, filled with virtues, Otto opened up spaces for the faithful to build personal relations between them and mutual respect for their native customs and thus gained their trust. This is evidenced in the writing of the previously mentioned Monk of Prüfening, who wrote the following in the work *Vita Priefligensis*:

24 See *ibidem*, pp. 46–47.

25 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 97.

26 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 46.

In this way, he won the hearts of all intelligent people, so that even the bishops of that country, who heard about the fame of the young man, sincerely loved him and admired in him not only his speech, excellent memory, sharpness of mind, greatness of knowledge, but also elegance of manners. And so he began to help and serve these bishops, both in domestic and foreign affairs and thus took not least a place among their confidants. And when he stayed with them longer, he also found favor with the ruler of this people [Władysław Herman – G.W.]. And since he served all conscientiously and faithfully, he received benefices from them as a reward for his labors. But although he seemed to have plenty of good things in a foreign land and prospered well, he did not fail to return to his homeland and visit his own people.²⁷

In light of the above testimonies, it must be stated that Otto, thanks to his humanism, filled with virtues, effectively influenced the attitudes of people towards each other and the creation of personal relationships between them. He was also able to appreciate the customs and culture of these people. In this way, his spirituality demonstrated the idea of *being with people and for people*.

The last form of Otto's spirituality was his faithful service to the Church, and his dedication to the cooperation between Church and secular authorities.

Otto was not only a zealous missionary, which was particularly expressed in his contemporaries' description of him as the Apostle of Pomerania,²⁸ but he was also a faithful and obedient servant of the Church. He showed his faithfulness and obedience to the church, in particular when he accepted the investiture at the hands of Pope Paschal II. In 1103, he was appointed Bishop of Bamberg by Emperor Henry IV. Ruthard of Mainz refused to recognise this appointment. Then Otto, distrusting the investiture given to him by the secular ruler, made its acceptance conditional on the pope's decision. He waited almost three years for his episcopal consecration. At the end of 1105, he received confirmation from the pope and finally, in May 1106, he was ordained a bishop by Pope Paschal II and took over the diocese of Bamberg. This situation showed Otto's loyalty to the secular ruler as well as his faithfulness and devotion to the pope and the Church.²⁹

Otto's concern for the Church, and specifically for the Diocese of Bamberg, was not stereotypical if we compare it with the ambitions of other bishops, such as Bishop Albert of Trier or Archbishop Konrad of Salzburg. They tried to secure territorial gains and power in the Reich by means of struggle or tried to defend the church by violating the laws of God and men. Otto was free from such ambitions and actions. All acquisitions for the diocese were acquired by purchase, not by force.

²⁷ See *ibidem*.

²⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 50.

²⁹ See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 118.

He exercised his episcopal power, or any pursuit of rights, through dialogue, not by means of arms. He was a peace-loving man; for example, he collected arrowheads, instruments of death, and ordered for them to be made into hooks useful for covering the roof of the monastery of St. Michael. Another time, he skilfully acted as a mediator in negotiations between the angry Duke Bolesław III Wrymouth and the Pomeranians.³⁰ As a bishop, Otto built not only churches and monasteries but also castles and strongholds. He had only one motivation for doing this. By building castles or even buying strongholds, such as Albuinestein, he wanted to ensure the safety of people and defend the surrounding church property, and at the same time, he wanted to arouse doubts and fear in his enemies.³¹ In a word, he proved to be an obedient son of the Church and an energetic steward of Church goods in his diocese.

Otto's attitude towards the secular rulers, whom he faithfully served and who were friends with him, acquired a special eloquence in the era of conflict between secular and priestly authorities. His attitude in this regard was characterised by the evangelical message of giving to God what is divine and to Caesar what is Caesar's (Mk 12:17). In no way did he go so far as to cooperate politically with the secular authorities, although he was recognised by them. For instance, they entrusted him with the supervision of the construction of the cathedral in Speyer. Otto also prayed the psalms with Emperor Henry IV and enjoyed favour with the Polish princes Bolesław III Wrymouth and Władysław Herman.³²

The conducted analysis allows one to conclude that Otto's spirituality was characterised by zeal in carrying out episcopal and missionary service, his openness to those in need of help, delicacy and respect for people's customs and culture and boundless obedience to the Church and loyalty to secular authority.

4. Measures used by Otto from Bamberg in the development of personal spirituality

According to the contemporary achievements of spiritual theology, the spiritual development of man is conditioned by the use of appropriate spiritual means. Contemporary theology of spirituality includes prayer, asceticism, sacramental life and spiritual direction.³³ In Otto's time, there was no such division of spiritual

30 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, pp. 52–53; K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, pp. 119–120.

31 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 118.

32 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 53; K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 119.

33 See H. Wejman, *Współpraca człowieka z miłosiernym Bogiem*, Kraków 2001, pp. 107–122, 155–179; A. Słomkowski, *Teologia życia duchowego*, Ząbki 2000, pp. 185–255; J. Gogola, *Teologia komunii z Bogiem*, Kraków 2000.

resources. However, a deeper analysis of biographical records shows that Otto used three of them in his life – prayer, asceticism, which in his time was referred to as mortification, and sacramental life, specifically living the Eucharist and experiencing the sacrament of penance. Methodological considerations dictate that in the next stage of reflection, the nature and value of these spiritual means in the development of Otto's spirituality should be presented.

The value of the first means, prayer, resulted, in Otto's understanding, from its nature. Since he perceived the essence of prayer as a dialogue with Christ, his love for Him grew as it intensified. In this context, the principle was revealed in his life that the more intense the prayer, the deeper the degree of love towards the Beloved. It was Otto who set an example of such an intense dialogue with Christ. He dialogued with Him in different ways; that is, he used different forms of prayer. At one time, he spontaneously asked Christ for those in need. At another time, he glorified God with the words of the psalms that he recited together with Emperor Henry IV. In another instance, he held spiritual exercises in the church, such as adoring the Blessed Sacrament and leading meditation, as was the case during his waiting for death.³⁴ Running such various forms of prayer, he indicated that prayer is the source of spiritual growth of each priest and the effectiveness of his ministry to the faithful. Through prayer, a priest, or any other person, gains spiritual strength to faithfully persevere in his vocation and God's support in personal action. As his prayer contact with Christ deepened, he grew in devotion to God, and at the same time, increased his self-sacrificial actions, which resulted in his effective missionary activity. This readiness to devote oneself to God and self-sacrifice results from man's awareness of his own subjectivity. And this is what he discovers most during prayer. Otto's dedication to God and his sacrificial missionary activity for people, who were often part of his prayers, is elaborated upon centuries later in the thought of Pope John Paul II. In his book, *Przekroczyć próg nadziei* (*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*), the pope wrote that, in prayer, the human "I" by turning to the divine "You" confirms itself most as a subject, that is, it discovers itself in the authenticity of its dignity and its freedom, and thus becomes capable of limitless trust in God and sacrificial actions towards people.³⁵

In the context of the pope's statement, we can say, in retrospect, that Otto found in prayer, as a personal relationship with Christ, a source of self-affirmation and a desire to submit to the gracious influence of God. For him, prayer was what gave

34 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 106; G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 53.

35 See Jan Paweł II, *Przekroczyć próg nadziei*, Lublin 1994, pp. 33–35.

all his joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments the perspective of God's mercy, and at the same time, stimulated in him a feeling of respect for God and himself.³⁶

For Otto, prayer was not only a way to glorify God and a means of affirming himself as a child of God, but it was also a tool to create merciful relationships with people. In Otto's life, his relationship with Christ, expressed in prayer, did not limit Otto to a bond with Christ alone, but it motivated Otto with readiness to accept and support those in need. It must be said that the deeper Otto conducted a dialogue with Christ, the more open he became to his fellow men. The confirmation of this assumption can be seen in the fruits of his charitable and missionary activity. His acts of mercy toward the most needy, his sensitivity to the suffering, and the courageous conduct of the mission in Pomerania, despite sometimes serious obstacles, testify not so much to his organisational skills, but to his spiritual sensitivity and wisdom, gained only through prayer. Such difficult undertakings can only be handled by a man of prayer, the one who remains in a personal relationship with Christ. At this point, it is impossible not to recall the teaching of John Paul II, who, although he did not direct them specifically to Otto's mission, but to contemporary families of the 20th century, nevertheless included in them the essence of the message expressed above, which has a timeless dimension. In the exhortation *Familiaris consortio* on the mission and spirituality of the family, he wrote: "The effective participation of the family in the life and mission of the Church in the world is proportional to the fidelity and intensity of prayer. [...] From it flows its fruitfulness in the service of human progress" (FC 62). In the context of these words, it must be said that Otto's episcopal and missionary activity flowed from the intensity of his prayer, although his biographers do not directly indicate this. However, based on contemporary scientific achievements in the field of theology of spirituality, it becomes legitimate to put forward such a hypothesis.

To sum up this part of the reflection, it must be stated that Otto's prayer life, as a conversation with Christ, aroused his sensitivity to the voice of conscience and stimulated him to verify his intentions and actions in light of it. Through this, he grew in wisdom, which he perceived as the ability to stand for the good in the perspective of the highest goal, which is eternal happiness. He was aware, however, that simplicity of heart leads to wisdom, which is most fully revealed in limitless abandonment to God, and this is what prayer leads to. That is why he put a strong emphasis on deepening personal bonds with Christ, which was expressed in prayer. Thanks to his devotion to prayer, he was able to achieve the perspective

³⁶ See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 107.

of the proper hierarchy of values, in which he was guided by the highest spiritual values; for this reason, he provided extensive and intensive help to those in need. His sense of responsibility and conscientiousness also testify to his prayerful formation and deep bond with Christ.

The second spiritual means used by Otto in the development of his spirituality was asceticism. Although neither he nor his contemporaries used this concept, their understanding of mortification contained the same reality. The practice involved taking up various limitations in the physical and spiritual spheres in order to achieve higher human and religious perfection. Otto undertook various forms of mortification. He was no stranger to whippings of his own body, modesty in clothing, restraint in eating or conscientiousness in preparing pastoral service (sermons, catechism). Using these forms of mortification, one can say in modern language that he was conducting a kind of spiritual training in order to deepen his relationship with Christ and, at the same time, to help those most in need.³⁷ His mortifications always had a double character. On the one hand, he was concerned with his own improvement, and on the other hand, he was guided by the love of his neighbour. Otto did not undertake mortifications for the sake of mortifications, but always for the sake of being even more united with Christ and in order to support his neighbours in need with the goods he had saved.

The cited facts indicate that the fruitfulness of Otto's evangelising mission resulted not only from his pastoral commitment and diplomatic efforts but also from his ascetic lifestyle. Thus, he leaves a message for the priests of the modern era that if they want to have a pastoral influence on the faithful, they must lead an ascetic lifestyle.

The last of the means that Otto used to deepen his spirituality was the sacramental life. For Otto, the sacramental life included the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance. It was in these sacraments that he saw strength and growth in spiritual development. Although biographers do not directly reveal the value of both sacraments in Otto's spirituality, they indirectly indicate that they were extremely important to him and were of fundamental importance in his spiritual progress. Therefore, it is necessary to recall certain decisions and attitudes of Otto to make this assumption credible.

Otto promoted the monastic life. He supported with all his strength the founding of new monasteries so that they would promote the worship of God. Worship of God among the faithful would not be complete if it was limited to the preaching of the word of God. Sacramental ministry was needed in this regard. Thus, since

³⁷ See *ibidem*, pp. 110–111.

Otto emphasised the creation of monasteries to promote the cult of God, he could not fail to see the value of celebrating the sacrament of the Eucharist and penance.³⁸

In his missionary practice, Otto not only erected makeshift temples but also provided them with liturgical tools so that the sacraments could be celebrated there by the priests he sent to serve there. By directing specific liturgical paraments to a given community of believers gathered at a church and leaving priests there to serve them in this matter, Otto testified to the value he placed in the sacraments, specifically the Eucharist and penance, as a means of spiritual development for humans.³⁹

According to his biographers, Otto was deeply concerned about the renewal of religious life, both in Germany and in Pomerania. And for this reason, it can be concluded that his spiritual care was not limited only to the evangelisation of the faithful but also included the sacramental life among them. Since he baptised people, then he could not help celebrating the sacrament of the Eucharist or penance for them.⁴⁰

There is one more mention of how Otto in Szczecin, waiting for his death, held spiritual exercises in the church for two days. It can be assumed that during these exercises, he not only prayed but also celebrated the Eucharist, seeing it as a source of spiritual power.⁴¹

The cited facts show, indirectly, that Otto saw the value of the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance in the process of his spiritual development. The first of these sacraments, the Eucharist, was for him a sign of love for God and neighbour. He perceived the Eucharist as the offering of Christ to the Father for the salvation of people. Therefore, the deeper he entered into the dynamics of Christ's offering to the Father, through prayerful concentration during the celebration of the Eucharist, the more he liberated himself from self-love. The more he looked reflectively at his own intentions, decisions and behaviour in everyday life, the more he felt the transformation of his life.

The Eucharist allowed Otto to discover his vocation to be in communion not only with God but also with people. He correctly understood Christ's act of washing the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 13:2-15). He was aware that in this gesture, Christ set an example of selflessness for others. He knew well that the celebration of the Eucharist or the participation of the faithful in it cannot

38 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 50.

39 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, pp. 110–111.

40 See G. Wejman, *Biskup Otton z Bambergu...*, p. 50.

41 See K. Liman, *Dialog Herborda...*, p. 106.

fail to turn into active love of neighbour. Christ Himself indicated this truth in His words addressed to the apostles: "I have given you an example" (Jn 13:15). That is why Otto was able to pass in his life from contemplating the Eucharist to its imitation. He was well aware that it is impossible to fully communicate with the Eucharistic Christ if one is not ready to accept every person with whom Christ has identified because of the Incarnation. And that is why he believed that participation in the Eucharist would take on its full dimension when it turned into active and zealous service on his part towards his neighbours. The numerous acts of mercy shown by Otto to those in need testify to his deep experience of the Eucharist and his readiness to act in its spirit towards his fellow men.

The sacrament of penance was no less important than the Eucharist in Otto's spiritual development. He perceived it as an instrument of God's mercy towards man and, at the same time, a source of his transformation and power for his zealous action in the future. For Otto, the sacrament of penance was a means to grow in a loving relationship with Christ. He believed that when a person repentantly confesses his sins before a priest and shows readiness to make amends for them, he is engulfed by God's mercy and gains the strength to act even more sacrificially to bring glory to God and support another person in need.

The analysis of source materials shows a clear conclusion that Otto, by taking these three spiritual means in his life – prayer, asceticism and sacramental life grew in a personal relationship with Christ and, as a result, faithfully served Him in building His kingdom among people and them.

Conclusions

The main goal of this paper was to present the spirituality of Otto of Bamberg. The implementation of such a goal required the recognition of previous research on Otto's life and missionary activity while taking into account the latest scholarship in the theological and spiritual fields. The result of such a defined scope of research was the structure of the submission, which depended upon the contemporary perception that spirituality is a relationship between man and God.

According to this synthesis of research, the basis of Otto of Bamberg's spirituality was revealed. His spirituality rested in the truth that God communicates Himself in the act of man's creation and redemption. It was in the act of creation that God called man into existence in his image and likeness, and when man disobeyed God, God provided redemption by giving His only-begotten Son, who, assuming a human body, became a man and sacrificed Himself on the cross of Calvary, reconciling the same people with God. Thanks to the educational work of his parents, who emphasised God's care over man, and then thanks to his personal reflection on

the functioning of the world and noticing the spiritual wealth offered to people in the sacraments, Otto recognised God's care and gracious reign over him and the whole world. Therefore, he concluded that the deeper he abided in the circle of His sanctifying presence, the more he would develop spiritually.

Sticking to the contemporary definition of spirituality as a personal relationship between man and God, the next research step in revealing the spirituality of Otto of Bamberg was the presentation of his response to this divine communication. He expressed, in the deepest way, an attitude that recognised God's action in his life. His attitude of appreciation took the form of humility. The analysis of the source material showed that Otto perceived humility, on the one hand, as a readiness to serve God, resulting from the fact that God created him, and on the other one, as sacrificial service to another human being. He demonstrated these two aspects of humility by giving himself to Christ and being guided by Christ's values in his everyday life, and also in his readiness to support his neighbours by preaching the gospel to them or materially supporting their various needs. By living in humility this way, Otto revealed his spirituality and that only on this path can man spiritually develop.

Spirituality, a way of being a human, cannot fail to adopt specific forms of expression. This was also the case in the life of Otto of Bamberg, which was the subject of scholarly reflection in the third part of the submission. Otto, as historical data shows, expressed his spirituality in various dimensions: in boundless obedience to the church and fidelity to the pope; loyalty to the secular authorities; zealous performance of episcopal and missionary service, in the form of regular preaching of the Gospel or furnishing places of worship; helping those most in need and respecting the customs and culture of evangelised people. Acting in these ways, he showed that spirituality is not an extraordinary activity of man, but a very ordinary and specific behaviour in everyday life towards God and neighbours.

In order for spirituality to be realised by man in this way, it is necessary to use appropriate spiritual means. Theology of spirituality includes prayer, asceticism and sacramental life. Otto used these means in his life, as the analysis of the source material showed. He deepened his bond with Christ and became a model to others through his deep prayer life, as evidenced by his personal prayers and those recited with the emperor, his self-sacrificing asceticism in the form of various mortifications and his implementation of the sacraments, the Eucharist and penance, in his personal life.

The conducted analysis shows a clear conclusion that Otto of Bamberg led a deep spiritual life and was a devoted servant of Christ.

Translated by Magdalena Rejman-Zientek

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THE SPIRITUALITY OF OTTO OF BAMBERG

Summary

The aim of this presentation was to show the spirituality of Otto of Bamberg. This project was carried out in four stages, which correspond to the different parts of the presentation. In the first place, the foundations of the spirituality of Otto of Bamberg are presented, which are the act of creating man by God in His image and likeness and God's redemption of man. The most complete act of responding to this gift of God can only be a humble acceptance of this act on the part of man. Its deepest expression will be humble service to God and neighbours. A spirituality established in this way can only take on various forms of expression. These varied forms in the life of Otto of Bamberg included the following: his boundless obedience to the Church expressed as his fidelity to the pope; loyalty to secular authority; his zealous episcopal and missionary ministry, manifested in the regular proclamation of the Gospel or in his support through subsidising the places of worship; his helping those most in need and his respecting the customs and culture of evangelised people. The whole concept of spirituality is completed by the use of appropriate spiritual means by Otto of Bamberg. He included among them prayer, asceticism and sacramental life. Thanks to the use of these measures, he grew spiritually and deepened his relationship with Christ, providing a model of spirituality for the next generations.

Keywords: spirituality, bishop, missionary, apostle of the sea coast, servant of the Christ

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