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Theological and Empirical Cognition in Discovering the Living Eucharistic Presence. The Example of Sokółka¹

Eucharist is the sacrament of the real presence of Christ in His essential sign among people. His mystical presence is confirmed with Eucharistic miracles. Miracles, however, require interpretation. And before the interpretation is introduced, the miracles require empirical confirmation. The Eucharistic miracle of Sokółka was confirmed by the research conducted by two pathologists who independently examined it and by the opinion of the a theological commission. As a consequence of the engagement of the scientists, the arguments of the empirical and theological sciences converged. The analyses contained in this article, which contribute to discovering God's presence among His people, describe the value of theological and empirical cognition.

Key words: miracle, empirical cognition, theological cognition, Sokółka, Eucharist.

Since the beginning of time, man has been wondering about the issue of cognition. Cognition has led and is still leading to acquiring

¹ The Eucharistic miracle in Sokółka – it is a supernatural event which regards the transfiguration of a piece of the Host into a piece of the human heart. It took place in October 2008 and was made public by the then Archbishop Prof. Edward Ozorowski; it was announced to the public in October 2011. The fact of transfiguration was recognised by two professors – pathologists from the Medical University of Białystok who independently examined it and confirmed its material contents and issued a statement that “the given material (...) turns out to be the cardiac muscle tissue, or, at least among all the live tissue of the body, it resembles this tissue the most”. In Sokółka there have been numerous physical and spiritual healings since that event. People believe that Eucharistic Jesus acts there in a miraculous way.

knowledge. Intuitive, intellectual, mystical cognition, as the process accompanying gaining information, improves the quality of knowledge and of convictions on a certain subject. The level of intellectual cognition enables elaboration on the content which regards the theological sciences. The interpretation of empirical content requires knowledge and experience. The verification of information on the basis of theological science requires different criteria than the information with regard to empirical science. However, the source of the research of the empirical and theological sciences lies in the mystery of the Eucharist. From the point of view of faith, the most important sacrament which regards the real presence of Christ, Who is present in the form of bread and wine, introduced in the dimension of the supernatural circumstances, in the face of the empirical science, is the sign confirmed by the physical reality.

The Eucharist, according to the Council of Trent and its *Decree Concerning The Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist* (1551), is: “the august sacrament of the holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things”². Theological cognition contributes to the acceptance of this truth. It happens that this verification can be experienced in the “miraculous Eucharistic phenomena” which transgress the laws of nature and which become the determinant of the belief that the living presence of Christ in the Eucharist can also be confirmed materially.

At the beginning of 21st century in Poland, one of the places where a miraculous phenomenon took place, confirming the real presence of Christ’s Body and Blood in the forms of bread and wine after the consecration of the Host, was Sokółka. The Eucharistic miracle revived the need for reflection on this relation: cognition – reality, as it concerns a life-giving sacrament in which God is present. The aim of this analysis is to familiarise with the arguments in favour of the Eucharistic, sacramental and material presence of Jesus Christ on the basis of the epistemological theological and empirical criteria on the example of the event in Sokółka.

² The Council of Trent, *Decree Concerning The Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist*, in: A. Baron, H. Pietras eds, *Dokumenty Soborów Powszechnych. Latin and Polish texts*, vol. IV, Kraków 2004, pp. 445-456, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct13.html> (date of access: 24.11.2024).

The real sacramental presence

The Greek way of thinking in the first centuries of Christianity contributed to the formation of terminology which matches the ontological and sacred presence of Christ in the Eucharist. According to Aleksander Gerken: “the Liturgy of the Holy Eucharist is the presence of the Jesus’s sacrifice of His life, which brings life to the world (John), expiation for our sins (synoptic Gospels), a new unattainable community between God and the people of the new covenant (Luke and Paul), condoning (Matthew)”³. It appeared as a historical act of God despite the fact that the Eucharistic presence is timeless. The common basic comments about the Eucharist in the New Testament contain information about the embodying of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. He chose such a way of permanent presence in the world in the mystery signs of the sacraments. Christ’s embodying is possible only due to God’s power which enables it. As the Church, as the sacrament of salvation, is present in the Holy Spirit as a community of salvation; the Eucharist, as the sacramental sign, unites with Christ Whose presence guarantees leading to the realization of salvation through the mystical uniting with Him in the Eucharist. The sacramental nature of the Eucharist enables the experience of closeness of God, which goes beyond the space and time. Through His Eucharistic presence, God partially saves each individual and does not let His power be limited to the historical boundaries of an era. The Eucharistic presence of Christ transgresses the temporal dimension of time and space and enables abiding in God to everyone who participates in the Eucharist and who receives this sacrament. Christ’s presence in the bread and wine in the historical and salvific perspective means the personal union with Him. He is present here in the Eucharist but not fully present because His full presence will only be possible in the eschatological dimension. Christ’s presence influences the ontological salvific dimension of everyone who receives the Holy Communion.

The Greek Fathers of the Church underlined the real and the hidden dimension of Christ’s presence while the Latin Church Fathers, whose interests were more speculative, expressed this presence as a sign and a source of strength in the ethical life of a Christian as well as in the realization of the unity of the communities of the faithful meant as a community with Christ and the community of Christians⁴.

³ A. Gerken, *Teologia Eucharystii*, Warszawa 1977, p. 57.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 91.

Both ways of interpretation of Christ's presence in the Eucharist are present also in the contemporary mentality of man.

Historical conditions

A miracle is a supernatural event of religious nature, which is the sign of God (transcendence), aimed at man (immanence). It means a factual action of God, through which God particularly realizes the history of salvation and announces His salvific will to man who is creating his own history of life and co-creating the history of the human community⁵.

On October 12, 2008 the priest who was ministering the Holy Communion in the parish church of Saint Anthony in Sokółka dropped a piece of the Communicant from the pyx. He picked it up and placed it in the *vasculum* by the tabernacle. After the Holy Mass, he transferred the content of the *vasculum* to a vessel in the safe in the vestry. On October 19, 2008 after opening the safe, the submerged piece of the Communicant had a stain which looked like blood. Because it concerned the Holy Eucharist the metropolitan Archbishop of Białystok ordered to approach the matter with the utmost care, without making it public. After a few days, on October 29, 2008, the vessel with the piece of the Communicant was transferred to the tabernacle in the chapel in the parish. On the next day, October 30, the piece of the Communicant was taken out of water and placed on the corporal in the tabernacle⁶.

In order to get to know the supernatural nature of the phenomenon, Bishop Ozorowski ordered to subject it to laboratory tests. On January 7, 2009 a sample was taken from the piece of the Communicant which was then independently examined by two professors specialists pathologists from the Medical University of Białystok. The examination was commissioned to Prof. Maria Sobaniec-Łotowska from the Academic Centre for Pathomorphological and Genetic-Molecular Diagnostics at the University of Białystok; in January 2009 in the presence of, among others, the chancellor of the curia and the parish priest, she collected samples from the material embedded in the piece of the Communicant. The additional expertise was commissioned to Prof. Stanisław Sulkowski. At the end of January the expertises were ready and they were sent to the curia. The conclusions from the expertises

⁵ R. Łukaszyk, *Cud*, in: R. Łukaszyk, L. Bieńkowski, F. Gryglewicz (ed.), *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 3, Lublin 1979, pp. 642-643

⁶ A. Kakareko, *Komunikat Kurii Metropolitalnej Białostockiej w sprawie zjawisk eucharystycznych w Sokółce*, in: S. Urbański, S. Budzyński (ed.), *Sokółka i inne cuda eucharystyczne nie tylko w Polsce*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 27-28.

were consistent and very surprising – the structure of the examined piece of the Communicant turned out to be identical with the tissue of the human heart muscle of a man in agony; the structure of the muscle fibre and the structure of the bread were strongly connected in a way which precluded their connection due to any external act⁷. On March 30, 2009 an Ecclesial Committee was appointed to examine the “alleged Eucharistic miracle” in Sokółka and after completing the task, the committee issued an opinion with regard to the authenticity of the phenomenon. The Committee concluded that the piece of the Host, the sample of which was collected for the expertise, is the same piece which was transferred from the vestry to the tabernacle in the chapel in the parsonage. No external interference was found⁸.

On October 14, 2009 a formal notice was announced which was signed by the Chancellor of the Białystok Curia.

For three years the piece of the Communicant which we now call a Particle of the Body of the Lord could only be visited upon and adored by very few people, mainly priests. But with time Sokółka became more and more famous. Archbishop Ozorowski decided to expose this piece of the Sacramental Bread to the public. On Sunday October 2, 2011 a ceremonious Holy Mass took place at the end of which the Particle of the Body of the Lord was exhibited⁹. Then it was transferred with the Holy Sacrament to the Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary in the Collegiate Church in Sokółka. Since then the faithful have been able to adore Lord Jesus also in this Eucharistic sign. Sokółka is visited by pilgrims from all continents, among them there are cardinals, bishops,

⁷ A. Kakareko, *Komunikat Kurii Metropolitalnej Białostockiej w sprawie zjawisk eucharystycznych w Sokółce*, p. 28.

⁸ S. Budzyński, *Część I, Cud w Sokółce*, in: S. Urbański, S. Budzyński (ed.), *Sokółka i inne cuda eucharystyczne nie tylko w Polsce*, Warszawa 2013, p. 38.

⁹ In his homily recognising the miracle in Sokółka, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Białystok Edward Ozorowski taught: “The Western Church, in Her attempt to cognitively explain the fact that during the Holy Mass the bread transforms into the Body of Christ and the wine becomes His Blood, used the distinction into the substance and ephemera. (...) the Council of Trent solemnly announced that by the power of the words of Christ expressed by the priest over the bread, its substance is transformed but its ephemera remain unchanged. The Council called this transformation transfiguration which we translate into Polish as transubstantiation. The man sees bread and wine, while he confesses his faith into the Body and Blood of Christ. It is the mystery of the Christ’s presence in the sacrament of the altar (...) However, it happened in the history that the substance of Christ’s Body or of His Blood was recognised by the human senses. Such was the case in Sokółka”. E. Ozorowski, *Homilia uznająca cud w Sokółce*, in: S. Urbański, S. Budzyński (ed.), *Sokółka i inne cuda eucharystyczne nie tylko w Polsce*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 23-24.

priests and nuns as well as numerous laymen – there have been around a million pilgrims for the past few years.

Due to the fame gained by Sokółka as a place of the cult of the Eucharist, on Maundy Thursday 2009, Archbishop Ozorowski established the College of the Holy Sacrament and he elevated the church in Sokółka to the rank of the Collegiate Church. As the culmination of all these decisions, the Archbishop founded a sanctuary called the Sanctuary of the Holy Sacrament. It took place on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord in 2017.

Media repercussions

The message of the exceptional Eucharistic event which took place in October 2008 in St. Anthony's Church in Sokółka, was released to the press in 2009.

"Kurier Poranny" posted an article which informed: "the prosecutor is verifying the miracle in Sokółka. Where does the heart come from – does it come from a murder?"¹⁰.

The newspaper "Super Express" published an article *Cud w Sokółce to oszustwo* [The Miracle in Sokółka Is a Fraud]. The article contained an interview with doctor Paweł Grześkowiak from Zakład Profilaktyki Zakażeń i Zakażeń Szpitalnych Narodowego Instytutu Leków [the Department of Prevention of Infections and Hospital Infections of the National Institute of Medicines]. "It is not a miracle, it is pure biology", indicated professor. He explained that the presence bacteria of *serratia marcescens* is the reason for the red colour of the piece of the Communicant¹¹.

The comments were also posted by Polskie Stowarzyszenie Racjonalistów [Polish Rationalists Association]. They posted on the forums: "As a live heart muscle tissue was found, it means that a murder must have been committed and it is necessary to immediately start to look for the body"¹². They filed a report to the prosecutor. However, after some time

¹⁰ A. Chomicz, *Prokurator sprawdza cud w Sokółce*, <https://poranny.pl/prokurator-sprawdza-cud-w-sokolce-skad-wzielo-sie-serce-i-czy-nie-pochodzi-z-zabojstwa/ar/5251090> (date of access: 24.11.2024).

¹¹ B. Stasiak, T. Matuszkiewicz, *Cud w Sokółce to oszustwo?*, <https://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/cud-w-sokoce-to-oszustwo-aa-G2o6-EMv7-X3ds.html> (date of access: 24.11.2024).

¹² Polskie Stowarzyszenie Racjonalistów, *Doniesienie do prokuratury w związku z tzw. cudem w Sokółce*, *Doniesienie do prokuratury w związku z tzw. cudem w Sokółce* – Racjonalista (date of access: 24.11.2024).

the District Prosecutor's Office in Sokółka remitted the investigation, announcing that no evidence had been found of committing murder.

The Head of the Department of Medical Patomorphology, Professor Lech Chyczewski also questioned the results presented in the report of the scientists, accusing his colleagues of "illegal procedures"¹³.

In 2015 one of the journalists of "Gazeta Wyborcza" published his book called *Białystok Biała siła, czarna pamięć* [Białystok the White Power, the Black Memory]. The author presented the capital of Podlasie as a city inhabited by people with anti-Semitic views and hooligan behaviours and he devoted one of the chapters of his publication to the Eucharistic event in Sokółka. He ridiculed the reality of the phenomenon in the Sanctuary of Sokółka¹⁴.

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Father Benedykt J. Huculak OFM in his article in the magazine "Polonia Christiana" published an article called: *Cud w Sokółce – odpowiedź na znieważenie* [The Miracle in Sokółka – a Response to the Insult]. The theologian wrote that the miracle which took place in Sokółka was "a response to desecrating the Sacred Host by the local priest"¹⁵. According to him the desecration happened because of the priest's carelessness as he dropped the Communicant at the step of the altar. The dogmatist refers to the documents of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and he indicates that the dropped piece of the Communicant should have been picked up with reverence and immediately consumed and not put into a vessel which serves to wash the fingers.

The author indicated two mistakes, the first one, according to him, was placing the piece of the Communicant into an improper vessel, and the second consisted in the fact that the piece of the Communicant was put into a vessel in order to dissolve and such a procedure can only be used in case of a piece of the Communicant which was poisoned and not one that was dropped. Especially that, strictly speaking, it was dropped at a step of the altar and not on the ground¹⁶.

¹³ The opinion of Prof. Lech Chyczewski was cited in the Polish press, cf. B. Stasiak, T. Matuszkiewicz, *Cud w Sokółce to oszustwo?*, <https://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/cud-w-sokoce-to-oszustwo-aa-G2o6-EMv7-X3ds.html> (date of access: 24.11.2024), but also abroad. Cf. F. Serafini, *Sokółka* (2008), in: F. Serafini, *Un cardiologo visita Gesù. I miracoli eucaristici alla prova della scienza*, Bologna 2018, p. 79.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Kącki, *Białystok. Biała siła, czarna pamięć*, Białystok 2015.

¹⁵ B.J. Huculak, *Cud w Sokółce to odpowiedź na znieważenie*, <https://sacerdoshyacinthus.com/2016/02/17/o-dr-hab-benedykt-jacek-huculak-ofm-cud-w-sokolce-to-odpowiedz-na-zniewazenie/> (date of access: 24.11.2024).

¹⁶ Ibidem.

Individual fruits

Since that time when the media informed about the Eucharistic event in Sokółka (October 2009) until now, the Church of Sokółka has witnessed the bodily healings often supported by medical records, and spiritual healings.

Krystyna Oloffson, a Polish woman who has lived in Sweden for 30 years, testified:

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In Spring 2009 I was diagnosed with a serious disease. It started with the pain near my pancreas, the pain increased, and since August the pain was so severe that I could not eat, it hurt a lot. This part of my body was so swollen and sore that I could not sleep at night. I hid the problem from my children because I thought it was pancreatic cancer, and, as I was already 68, I thought that the doctors would not be able to help me due to my age¹⁷.

Further on she stated that she had been diagnosed with colorectal cancer. The doctors suggested a surgery in order to immediately remove the lump on the intestine. In May 2009, when Krystyna got to know about the unusual event in the sanctuary of Sokółka, she went on a pilgrimage, she commissioned a Holy Mass asking for the restoration of health. She was also praying to Jesus present in the Holy Sacrament in this intention. She described her emotions of that moment in the following way:

I have never before prayed so fervently for myself. I was tired but I still trusted Christ, I fell asleep after midnight. When I woke up in the morning, I thanked God for that night. I felt such trust in Jesus Christ that I did not want to even think about the surgery. I thought to myself: let the will of God be done¹⁸.

The further recounting of the story indicates that a few days after the night full of prayer and after the total submission to God's will, the pain subsided. She was subjected to further examination. It turned out that there was no lump on the intestine, there was only some calcification. She wrote: "I am fully convinced that it was miraculous healing. I can't express my gratitude to Jesus. I pray, I cry out of joy: Thank you Jesus Christ that I received such a great grace, me – so unworthy"¹⁹.

¹⁷ Apostołka Bożego Miłosierdzia, *Nigdy tak się nie modliłam*, in: S. Gniedziejko (ed.), *Świadectwa łask. Eucharystyczne wydarzenia w Sokółce 2*, Sokółka-Warszawa 2013, p. 8.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 9.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

In August 2011 in Karcze near Sokółka, there was a tragic accident in the landfill. One of the workers (a citizen of Sokółka) was pulled by a machine which compacted and pressed the garbage. “My brother was probably picked up by the loading machine with a pile of trash and was thrown into the separator. He was pulled along the whole separator. He was noticed on a conveyor belt which was transmitting the garbage for bailing” – this is the report of the brother of the victim – the garbage dump worker who had the accident²⁰. His skull was crashed to a serious degree. When he was brought to hospital, the doctors thought he would not make it through. One day after the tragic event, a Mass was celebrated in the intention of the dying man, and his family was praying in the chapel at the rectory where there was a Piece of the Body of the Lord. The healing power of Jesus’s love was instantaneous – a miracle happened: the patient with the crushed head was cured. A week after the accident the patient was awakened and he regained consciousness. The only remaining results of the accident were the loss of an eye and headaches. The medical documentation of this recovery is deposited in the archive of the parish. “My brother and our family have no doubts – the Piece of the Body of the Lord saved his life” – these are the words of testimony of the healed man’s brother written down after this miraculous event²¹.

A professor, conductor and choirmaster of the Podlasie Choir and Philharmonic testified that during the celebration of relocation of the Holy Sacrament she was miraculously healed. In June 2011 the growing pain of the stomach made her visit a doctor. After the necessary medical gastrological examination, the doctors diagnosed her with “stomach polyps, dispersal of over 100 active polyps..., possible neoplastic change, especially that it is hereditary”²². The doctors’ reviews were divided. Some suggested cutting out a piece of the stomach, others – putting the surgery off as the surgery was the last resort. “Since that moment I started to fervently pray to God asking for health, apologising Him for all my weaknesses, sins and the lack of humility”²³.

Professor, apart from the professional preparation of the choir, was preparing herself spiritually: “I went to confession, I cleansed my conscience and my soul from sins (...). And then it happened... During a

²⁰ *Pewność wiary*, in: S. Gniedziejko (ed.), *Świadectwa łask. Eucharystyczne wydarzenia w Sokółce 2*, Sokółka–Warszawa 2013, p. 10.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²² V. Bielecka, *Przebudzenie...powrót*, in: S. Gniedziejko (ed.), *Hostia pełna łask. Eucharystyczne wydarzenia w Sokółce 3*, Sokółka–Warszawa 2015, p. 17.

²³ *Ibidem*.

solemn Mass, I was praying full of repent, with tears in my eyes, I was begging Jesus – real and present in the Holy Sacrament, for forgiveness of all of my infirmities, and I asked Him for the grace of healing. I trusted God²⁴. During another visit to the doctor (on October 13, 2011) the doctor, while reading the test results, using the nonmedical terminology, addressed the patient: „Viola – it is a miracle...!”. The pieces of polyps collected for testing revealed no sign of any neoplastic changes²⁵. (The further examination conducted on January 31, 2013 confirmed the same). The patient sent the whole medical documentation with her testimony to the Collegiate Church in Sokółka.

Many married couples make pilgrimages to the Collegiate Church in Sokółka in order to ask for the gift of motherhood, gazing at the Piece of the Body of the. One of the pilgrimages was of a young married couple from Elk, who had been unsuccessfully trying to conceive a child. The doctors were powerless, they were not able to help. The young couple decided to seek help in the Sokółka Sanctuary. Their trustfulness to God and their request for a child was heard. In Autumn of 2012 the woman conceived a child, however, their faith was put to the test because in December the child died in the mother's womb. The young couple did not lose their faith. “We entrusted our concerns to God and to the Mother of God... Once again we went on a pilgrimage to Sokółka” – wrote the mother of the lost child. The strong faith of the spouses brought the desired results. In September 2013 their second child was conceived. Again, it was a high-risk pregnancy, many difficulties and complications appeared. However, also this time, the faith of the future parents and of their friends who prayed for them, brought miraculous results. “I want to share the good news. On April 17, 2014 I gave birth to a healthy daughter– Lena. Lord Jesus and God's Mother can make wonders” – these words come from a letter written by the couple to the parson of the Collegiate Church in Sokółka.

The transcendent nature of the empirical sign

Eucharist as a sacrament effectively implements and provides God's grace which it embodies. The transubstantiation of the Eucharist which takes place during the celebration is impossible to grasp with the senses. The senses can detect words and signs which indicate the transformation but the result of the transubstantiation remains beyond the sensory perception. The Sacrament of the Eucharist effectively

²⁴ V. Bielecka, *Przebudzenie...powrót*, 18.

²⁵ Ibidem.

involves man into the communion with Christ and is an efficient tool which helps on the way to the realization of salvation²⁶.

Every Eucharist is a miracle, it is transcendent in nature and it is imposed to the sensory cognition. The miracle of the Eucharist is a particular type of a miracle which refers to the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and treats Him as the transcendent and factitive reason in the materialised form. It reflects the scene when after Resurrection Jesus allows His Apostles to experience His presence, during the Eucharist He allows the faithful to see Him and to empirically experience His presence. In Sokółka we can macroscopically (without the use of any specialised tools) see the incredible phenomenon: the myocardial tissue which was inseparably combined with the remaining delicate edge of the piece of the white Sacramental Bread. The act of faith was confirmed by the sensory experience. The nature of this miracle was explained by Archbishop Edward Ozorowski in his homily delivered on October 2, 2011:

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Although in every place where the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, the Eucharistic miracle takes place, however, the miracle was doubled in Sokółka. The miracle of faith was strengthened by the empirical miracle. A new hope for the world is born in Sokółka. God is present among His people²⁷.

The Eucharistic miracle, through its literalness, helps us to more fully realize the realness and the meaning of the Sacramental transubstantiation which takes place at the altar during every consecration.

The event from Sokółka does not contradict the faith of the Church but it confirms it. The Church professes that after the words of consecration, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread is transformed into the Body of Christ, and the wine into His Blood. What is more, it constitutes a challenge for the ministers of the Eucharist distributed the Body of the Lord with faith and mindfully and for the faithful – to receive the Body of the Lord reverently²⁸.

It is a necessary condition because the Church lives on the Eucharist. The Eucharist is Her source and aim. In the Eucharist Jesus gives

²⁶ E. Ozorowski, *Eucharystia w nauce i praktyce Kościoła Katolickiego*, Poznań 1990, p. 203.

²⁷ E. Ozorowski, *Homilia uznająca cud w Sokółce*, in: S. Urbański, S. Budzyński (ed.), *Sokółka i inne cuda eucharystyczne nie tylko w Polsce*, Warszawa 2013, p. 25.

²⁸ A. Kakareko, *Komunikat Kurii Metropolitalnej Białostockiej w sprawie zjawisk eucharystycznych w Sokółce*, in: S. Urbański, S. Budzyński (ed.), *Sokółka i inne cuda eucharystyczne nie tylko w Polsce*, Warszawa 2013, p. 28.

His Body to humanity as nourishment. We eat His Body and drink His Blood because Jesus Himself invites us for His feast and, what is more, He conditions our salvation on the participation in this feast. At the Last Supper He said: “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (J 6,53).

The Church has always encouraged the faithful to receive the Holy Communion. The Fathers of the Council of Trent from XVI century expressed their request for all the faithful to receive the Holy Communion at every Holy Mass in which they participate in not only the spiritual way through the desire to receive It but also in a physical act – sacramentally²⁹. This practice was confirmed by the Congregation of the Council who in December 1905 ruled that

the frequent and even everyday practice of receiving the Holy Communion, as the realization of Christ’s and of the Church’s desire, should be permitted for all the faithful of every status or profession to such an extent that the approach to the Lord’s Table would never be forbidden to anyone who is in a state of sanctifying grace and who receives the Holy Communion with a simple and pious heart, that is with good intentions³⁰.

In Sokółka Christ Himself reminded that He is truly present in the Eucharist and He wants to be received.

In the humble sign of bread and wine, transformed into His Body and His Blood, Christ is standing before us as our power and our viaticum, He feeds us with His Body enabling us to giving our testimony: “My Lord and my God”³¹.

Even if the reason experiences its own limitation in the face of this Mystery, the heart enlightened by the grace from the Holy Spirit knows perfectly well what attitude to assume being immersed into the adoration of the endless Love.

Consequently, Archbishop Edward Ozorowski, the metropolitan bishop of Białystok, in his homily delivered in Sokółka during the ceremony of transferring of the Piece of the Lord’s Body to the Chapel of exposure of the Blessed Sacrament, used the terms: “double Eucharistic miracle”, “the miracle of faith” and “the empirical miracle”. He said: “Although in every place where the Eucharist is celebrated,

²⁹ Por. *Uchwała św. Kongregacji Soboru Trydenckiego o codziennej Komunii św.*, http://msza.net/i/om11_6.html (date of access: 12.12.2024).

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ John Paul II, *Encyklika Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Rzym 14.07.2003, <https://www.frona.pl/a/jan-pawel-ii-o-eucharystii-to-skarb-kosciola,142502.html> (date of access: 12.12.2024).

the Eucharistic miracle is taking place, the miracle in Sokółka was doubled. The miracle of faith was strengthened with the empirical miracle.”³². Archbishop Edward Ozorowski uses the terms such as: “the Eucharistic miracle” although he also repeats such terms as: “the Eucharistic event” or “a Piece of the Lord’s Body”³³. His interpretation has become so common that if anyone mentions the event in Sokółka, they often use the terms: “the Eucharistic miracle”, “the Eucharistic event” or “a Piece of the Lord’s Body”, repeating the phrases of the Archbishop theologian of Białystok. His interpretation is qualitative and not quantitative. A piece remains in relation to the whole but in its essence it is identical with the whole. Therefore, objections of theologians seem unjustified when they ask: How to understand the second term: as “a Piece of the Lord’s Body” or as “a Holy Piece of Jesus’s Body”? what does it mean “a Piece of the Sacramental Bread” if even the crumbs of the Eucharistic Bread are called by the Church “The Body of the Lord”, and not “Pieces of the Body”³⁴ Pieces of the consecrated Host are the parts of the Lord’s Body” in the partial sense, not in the essence.

In his teaching Archbishop Edward Ozorowski stressed that “it is a cult so the potential grace bestowed on the faithful will verify this supernatural phenomenon. If, thanks to the revelation the faith, the people will be strengthened and so will be the cult of the Blessed Sacrament, we will be able to regard it to be a real miracle. If these events change the hearts and souls of people, which as I hear, is already taking place, the decision of the Holy See will not be necessary”³⁵. He also added: “There will be no need for the further scientific research. If we are dealing with a piece of the Body of Christ, it would not be proper to conduct any further research because of the worship which we should have for the Body”³⁶. He also argues:

I will remind of Moses who met God in a burning bush; God told him to take off his sandals because he was walking on the holy land. We as well in case of the Sacramental Bread from Sokółka are dealing with

³² E. Ozorowski, *Homilia uznająca cud w Sokółce*, p. 25.

³³ Ibidem, pp. 21-26.

³⁴ K.Z. Wiśniewski, *Cuda eucharystyczne. Badanie teologiczne*, in: I. Chłopkowska (ed.), *Bóg przemówił w Legnicy*, Kraków 2017, p. 166.

³⁵ E. Ozorowski, *Ten cud odmieni nasze życie*, <https://www.fakt.pl/wydarzenia/polska/arcybiskup-ozorowski-ten-cud-odmieni-nasze-dusze/4f2c130> (date of access: 12.12.2024).

³⁶ Ibidem.

holiness which we must fully respect. It was, after all, consecrated Host³⁷.

Further on:

The truth of the Eucharist is contained in believing Christ that what we see as the bread, is in fact His Body and what is contained in the chalice as the wine, is His Blood. It happened in history that *the substance of Christ's Body or of His Blood became available for the human senses*. So was the case in Sokółka³⁸.

Dogmatic
Theology

The conclusion is as follows: "Therefore, what was Christ's Body in the event in Sokółka, still remains it now but in a different way"³⁹. Archbishop Ozorowski effectively teaches:

[The results of the examination] empirically confirm what we assume by evangelical faith. The experience of faith allows for the natural experience but is not reduced to it. A man who acknowledges the Eucharist addresses Christ: "I can only believe in Your teaching that You are present in the form of the bread". The identity of the body is not limited to the cells which it consists of. Otherwise the transplants would not be possible. It is the person who confirms the identity of the body. This was the case of Jesus when He appeared to His disciples after resurrection. They saw Him in His own body which was transformed and divinized, free from not subjected to physical laws. Deification does not abolish identity⁴⁰.

On December 25, 2013 a similar event took place in Legnica. And although the process was similar to the one in Białystok, new concepts appear to describe the miraculous Eucharistic sign. In Legnica on July 2, 2016 the Reliquaries of the Eucharistic miracle were exhibited and installed. In his book *Bóg przemówił w Legnicy* [God Spoke in Legnica] Rev. Krzysztof Zenon Wiśniewski – a theologian from Legnica wrote:

For the faithful whose faith in the Eucharist is well-established, it is evident that the extraordinary events called miracles indicate only one chosen aspect of the mystery of the Eucharist, which, due to certain reasons which are known mainly to God, required highlighting. Miracles expose a certain important dimension of the mystery, but do

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ E. Ozorowski, *Homilia uznająca cud w Sokółce*, p. 24.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 24.

not contain the whole mystery. Whereas the sacrament reflects the whole mystery of Jesus Christ⁴¹.

Further on:

Being aware of the truth about the Eucharist, we notice essential differences between what we profess about the presence of the Lord's Body in the Sacred Host, and what we notice looking at the result of the supernatural transformation of the Lord's Body into a part of the human body. Realizing these differences helps us get to know and acknowledge the real meaning of this particular sign given by God⁴².

Dogmatic
Theology

The distinction made by the theologian from Legnica contains the expression:

(...) we cannot identify Lord's Body Which is indeed present in the Sacred Host with a piece of the human body which was miraculously created by God because of the need for a sign. A body which is created as a result of a miracle is not the same Body as the One substantially present in the Sacred Host. Imagining and holding on the belief that during the Holy Communion we receive what we saw in the supernatural phenomenon would result in the confusion in our faith. Therefore Eucharistic miracles should not be interpreted in the category "the appearance of the Lord's Body". That would be very confusing. It is necessary to seek to understand the miracle in the category "the sign", because indeed there is a lot of evidence that, God "significantly" interfered there⁴³.

And although the theologian from Legnica used a proper distinction between the Lord's Body present in the consecrated Host and the Eucharistic miracle, referring to it as "the relic of the Lord's Body" seems to be suggesting that we are dealing with the reality long gone which has left a sign while the miracle is an ongoing, dynamic reality. The man praying before the miraculous Eucharistic phenomenon, is standing in front of God as if he was praying in front of an icon which is the window to Him. Therefore, we can call it the mystical closeness.

An attempt to obtain theological confidence that the theologian from Legnica wrote about refers to the arguments *sub ratione homini* and not, as he indicated in his final conclusion *sub ratione Dei*.

⁴¹ K.Z. Wiśniewski, *Cuda eucharystyczne w świetle wiary w Eucharystię*, in: I. Chłopkowska (ed.), *Bóg przemówił w Legnicy*, Kraków 2017, p. 136.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 137.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 139.

Conclusion

Summarising the analysis on the Eucharistic miracle from Sokółka, we should remain aware of the fact of participation in the mystery of God's action among us. Both the empirical and theological cognition contribute to its apprehension. However, we must remember that a miracle is only partially the empirical reality. Its nature lies elsewhere. It is performed by the power of the free-will decision of God and, as a sign, it leads to the acquisition of the man's reasonable approval of the truth which He revealed to us through the miracle. Any possible man-made terminology created in the process of the miracle exploration does not exhaust its full meaning as the appearing reality transcends the possibility of expression of the human language. Mainly, it is important that the theological cognition would lead to justification of the empirical cognition of a miracle because it is contained within the category of revelation and it results from it. It is also approved of in the light of faith although the external arguments in favour of its authenticity result from the empirical cognition, in this very case – from medical sciences. First and foremost, a miracle consists in transcendental quality with regard to the reality which is experienced through the senses.

Summing up, we are facing the necessity to understand and to translate into the concepts understandable for us the Mystery which cannot be fully grasped by means of human mind, neither to be properly expressed by means of the concepts available to us. The Eucharistic miracle leads man to the sphere of mysticism and the best possible attitude which we can assume is gratefulness for the gift and the humility for the Giver.

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