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Blessed Dorothea of Montau – a European-format mystic in the Pomesan Cathedral

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Słowa kluczowe: Dorota z Małtów, rekluza, mistyka, stygmaty, profetyzm, Hildegarda z Bingen, Katarzyna ze Sieny, Gertruda Wielka, Juliana z Norwich, Mechtlyda z Magdeburga

Introduction

An increasing number of people are interested in spirituality-related matters, and consequently mystics themselves. Considering the mystics from the medieval era, some have gained popularity even out of Europe, for example St. Catherine of Siena, St. Bridget of Sweden, recluse St. Julian of Norwich and, almost unknown in Poland, Margery Kempe. All of these saint-considered and esteemed mystics lived at the same time as patron of Prussia, Pomerania and Diocese of Elbląg – Blessed Dorothea of Montau. Furthermore Blessed Dorothea of Montau experienced identical or similar spiritual experiences to the aforementioned holy women and other great Christian mystics. With the benefit of passing centuries and taking into account these great figures of Christian spirituality, the experiences of Blessed Dorothea do not seem to be unnatural, strange and disturbing, yet in the medieval Danzig or Kwidzyn, they were considered as extraordinary, impressive or unsettling. For this reason this work will present the mystical experiences of Blessed Dorothea which in view

of their similarity with spiritual experiences of other women and men put her in the group of prominent Christian mystics.

It should be noted here that due to the similarity of Blessed Dorothea of Montau's mystical experiences with those of other great medieval mystics, a matter often raised during symposiums and meetings of medievalists and spirituality experts is the reason that may have deprived this Pomesan mystic of the attention and place she rightfully deserves in the pantheon of great mystics of her era, who are almost unanimously mentioned by many European researchers... without Dorothea. Why is that so? Most respondents claim that they are not familiar with her or have heard of her but do not have access to the medieval writings authored by the mystic's confessor, Jan of Kwidzyn (1343–1417). Polish-speaking researchers are fortunate that *Vita* of Blessed Dorothea, writings describing her mystical experiences, and the records of the canonization process of this Pomesan recluse have been translated from Latin into Polish by bishop Julian Wojtkowski in the early XXI century. This is how the language barrier influencing the availability and dissemination of written sources about the mystic's spiritual experiences over the centuries has been limited. Another factor that contributed to the insufficient attention given to the revelations of Blessed Dorothea of Montau was the fact that the canonization process, initiated in 1404, continued for so long that her official recognition as a saint did not occur until 1976, several centuries later. The centuries-long proceedings were influenced by both geopolitical and cultural changes. The group of significant factors includes the defeat of the Teutonic Order at the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, with all its consequences, the Prussian Homage of 1525, and the conversion to Lutheranism of both the then-bishop of Pomesania, Erhard von Queis (who acted as a protestant bishop from 1526), and the Grand Master Albrecht Hohenzollern. This resulted in the transformation of the Teutonic Prussia into the Duchy of Prussia, a vassal of the Kingdom of Poland. These geopolitical changes entailed an essential drop of the influence of the Teutonic Knights, whom Blessed Dorothea was connected to and upon whom she was entirely dependent while residing as a recluse in a hermitage located within their part of the cathedral in Kwidzyn. Furthermore, when the diocese and its bishop converted to Lutheranism, priorities shifted, and the authorities were no longer eager to promote knowledge about the mystic whose cult posed an urgent issue in the face of confessional changes. A pivotal event was desecration of Blessed Dorothea's tomb in 1544, which aimed to put an end to the prohibited pilgrimages to her earthly remains. Despite these efforts, the memory of the Pomesan mystic has endured until today, so have

writings that reveal her spiritual experiences. It is worth familiarizing oneself with these writings to discover the depth of God's love that engulfed Blessed Dorothea of Montau through the plethora of her spiritual experiences, much like many other great mystics of the medieval period.

1. Mystical paths to God who is the Love

The Bible holds that man was created in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). The order of the world according to God's plan, as presented in the Bible, especially in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, rests on two commandments of love. In the chapter 22 of the Gospel, Jesus Christ tells the Pharisees which commandment is the greatest, summarizing at the same time the duties of man towards God and neighbor. It reads as follows: 'You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is similar: You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself. The whole Law and the Prophets rely on these two commandments' (Matthew 22:34–40).

These two commandments reiterated by Jesus give the answer to love, to which humanity is called through its actions, intentions of the heart, and prayer.¹ In shaping a good heart, spirit, and making progress in the development of humanity, virtues such as prudence, justice, temperance, and courage prove helpful. Blessed Dorothea of Montau (1347–1394) entered the path of self-improvement and self-work in accordance with God's plan, presented in the Bible, very early in life, when she was a child. However, life is life, not everything went smoothly and exactly as the mystic wished. It is not always possible to perfectly decipher the God's will. Signs happen to be unclear and ambiguous at times. Uncertainty and doubt may arise. Mistakes can be made, or one's own will and goals can take precedence over what fate brings. This happened to Blessed Dorothea too, but it by no means diminishes her holiness. It in fact demonstrates that she was a human being, just like anyone else, grappling with life while striving for spiritual perfection, achieving the fullness of love, harmony with God, and happiness in eternal life. In contemporary terms, it can be said that Blessed Dorothea of Montau did her utmost to be the best version of herself in various ways. She was an understanding and patient wife, she endeavored to take care of her children, she dealt with her mystical experiences to the best of her knowledge and understanding, and she pursued her own goals in a way that seemed right to her, even though it wasn't always so...

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Poznań 1995, p. 2083.

When one compares the experiences and spiritual life of Blessed Dorothea of Montau to other well-known and eminent figures in the Church of the medieval period, it becomes clear that she was an unique woman and mystic. Some of the notable individuals from that time are St. Bridget of Sweden (1303–1373) and St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), mystics from Helfta, such as St. Mechtilde (1241–1298/1299) and Gertrude of Hackeborn (1232–1292), as well as St. Gertrude the Great (1256–1302) and St. Mechtilde of Magdeburg (born in around 1207). Additionally, there were recluses like Blessed Eve of Liège (died in around 1265) and St. Julian of Norwich (1342–1416). Deep devotion and reverence for the Holy Sacrament was propagated by St. Juliana of Cornillon (born in 1193), a friend to the recluse Eve, who dwelt near the cathedral in Liège. It was largely due to St. Juliana of Cornillon that the Church now celebrates the Feast of Corpus Christi, also known as the Body and Blood of Christ, annually. This feast was officially established by Pope Urban IV in 1264. The devotion to the Eucharist within the Teutonic Order, where Blessed Dorothy resided, was introduced in 1292 by Grand Master Conrad II von Feuchtwangen (d. 1296). Thanks to his efforts, the practice of adoring the Holy Sacrament spread throughout the areas under the rule of the Teutonic Knights.

In order to better understand Blessed Dorothea's spiritual experiences, it is important to focus on the concept of mysticism itself and realize that in the Christian tradition it is rooted in the Bible, with special regard to the old-testament *Song of Solomon* [also referred to as the Cantic of Canticles]. This book – *Song of Solomon* – provides inspiration, comparisons, and descriptions used in the so-called bridal mysticism. Blessed Dorothea of Montau and her confessor, Jan of Kwidzyn, employed such a terminology and imagery to convey the message arising from her spiritual experiences. The language of symbols, comparisons, and metaphors, while allowing for multiple interpretations, is indispensable in this context because, as worth emphasizing, mysticism deals with explaining a reality that is not accessible through direct knowledge. The possibility of mystical knowledge is alluded to in the promise of the Savior, who, in the Gospel of John, says as follows: 'The one who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I too shall love them and show myself to them' (John 14:21). Having got acquainted with the experiences of Blessed Dorothea of Montau and other mystics, one gets the impression that God revealed Himself to them. He did so in diverse ways, although common experiences can be found among many mystics. In this regard, the mystical experiences and daily practices from the period before Blessed Dorothea entered reclusion bear the most similarities to the forms of life cultivated by St. Catherine of Siena. Considering

this tertiary Dominican, who lived nearly concurrently with Blessed Dorothea of Montau, extreme fasting, flagellation, penitential use of a chain with nails, and the cutting of beautiful hair were common. She also served lepers, spent a significant amount of time in the church, engaged in conversations almost exclusively with her confessor, and had elaborate prayer practices. However, what stands out most prominently in her life are her experiences of ecstatic visions, stigmata in the form of bloody rays received around 1375, and mystical espousal with Christ in 1367. These experiences solidified her awareness of her spiritual union with Jesus as her Divine Spouse. Similarly to Blessed Dorothea, St. Catherine faced difficulties due to accusations and suspicions of heresy from representatives of the Church who did not understand such spiritual experiences and mystical encounters. Accusations were brought against her, much like the charges against Blessed Dorothea. The official responsible for these accusations was Henryk vom Stein. These accusations stemmed from an incident in which, due to her mystical experiences, Dorothea was unable to move and remained in the church during the consecration of the Eucharist from 17 until 22 July 1391. As a result of these events, individuals hostile to her accused her of heresy, which carried the penalty of death by burning at the stake.² As a consequence, the accusations led the parish priest Rose, a canon law doctor educated in Vienna, to prohibit Nicholas von Hohenstein (1350–1420), a respected figure in Danzig and the confessor of the mystic, from giving the Holy Communion to Dorothea every Sunday, starting from 23 July 1391. In defense of his penitent, Nicholas von Hohenstein cited the similar experiences of St. Bridget of Sweden, whose body was transported by sea from Rome to Sweden by children in 1374, as an example. During that time, with the consent of Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen, the sarcophagus containing the body of St. Bridget was placed in the St. Mary's Church, where Dorothea of Montau participated in the celebrations prepared for this occasion. Then the sarcophagus with St. Bridget's body was placed in the chapel of St. Mary Magdalene, located near St. Catherine's Church, under the care of the penitents known as Magdalenes, and stayed there for about two weeks. This event deeply moved the people of Danzig and resulted in the establishment of the brotherhood of St. Bridget and the Brigittine monastery in Danzig in 1396. St. Bridget also fascinated Dorothea, who, during her contemplation and later conversations with her confessor in Kwidzyn, referred to the religious matters addressed in the writings of this Swedish mystic.

² Mistrz Jan z Kwidzyna, *Żywot Doroty z Mątów (:Vita)*, transl. J. Wojtkowski, Lublin 2011, III, 26.

The accusations against Dorothea were probably withdrawn, dismissed, or no longer pursued. This is evidenced by the fact that on 14 September 1391, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, she was allowed to receive Holy Communion. Following these events, Nicholas von Hohenstein advised Dorothea to seek guidance for her difficulties and doubts from an expert in spiritual and theological matters, Master Jan of Kwidzyn. During the earlier proceedings, Master Jan had already provided an opinion that allowed her to resume receiving the Eucharist. This is how Dorothea's journey towards spiritual direction under the guidance of Jan of Kwidzyn commenced. He explained her revelations and compared them with Holy Scripture and contemporary theological teachings. Thanks to the work of Jan of Kwidzyn, the spiritual experiences of Blessed Dorothea of Montau were recorded, placing her among the great mystics of the Church.

It's worth noting that some mystics of the medieval period, as part of their penitential practices that influenced their spirituality, used a hairshirt. It also applied to Blessed Dorothea, as well as St. Gertrude the Great, Mechtilde of Hackeborn, the aforementioned St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Angela of Foligno (1248/1249–1309). These penitential practices were intended to prepare the mystics for a certain mental detachment from material and bodily concerns.

The documents of the canonization process show that Blessed Dorothea of Montau was gifted at inner vision and direct revelations, often communicated through inner speech of the soul. One of the significant experiences that opened Dorothea to further spiritual development was described as the 'exchange of hearts'. This event occurred when she was 39 years old, probably on 21 January 1385, during her prayer before the altar of the Virgin Mary in St. Mary's Church in Danzig.³ This experience is reminiscent of the description found in the Book of Ezekiel in which God speaks through the prophet, saying as follows: 'I shall give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them. I shall remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh' (Ezekiel 11:19). These words reveal God's plan, according to which His chosen people, throughout history, would undergo a mystical experience known in spirituality as the exchange of hearts.

Based on the sources available to researchers, especially the '*Vita Lutgardis Virgine*', it is evident that St. Lutgardis of Tongeren (1182–1246) was one of the first mystics to describe the experience of the 'exchange of hearts'. According to numerous medieval writings, another saint who had the experience of resting

³ *Vita*, III, 1b.

her soul on Christ's breast for repose and relaxation, with His Heart often placed against her soul, was St. Mechthild of Hackeborn. The spiritual experience of 'exchange of hearts' was also part of the life of St. Gertrude the Great. For her, the 'exchange of hearts' meant making the Heart of Jesus the center of her life. This involved, seeking to align her decisions with the intentions of Jesus, considering how He would act in a given situation, showing mercy, kindness, and attentiveness. In a sense, she surrendered and entrusted her will to divine guidance.

This spiritual experience became part of Blessed Dorothea of Montau's life when she was praying in St. Mary's Church in Danzig. As recorded by Jan of Kwidzyn: 'Jesus, her miraculous lover, took her old heart and replaced it with a new and fervently burning heart (*Vita*, III, 1b)⁴. The result of this union was the forgetting of all external matters, enlightenment of the mind, spiritually sensory knowledge of the kiss and embrace of the soul by Christ, clear hearing of the voice of the Lord speaking within and sometimes externally, seeing and contemplating sacred mysteries, and sudden instruction on how the saints lived holy lives in this world.'⁵ This spiritual experience, typical of bridal mysticism and drawing symbolic patterns from the biblical *Song of Songs*, allowed Blessed Dorothea and other mystics to become more 'immersed in God'. The spiritual fruits of this mystical experience include a deeper love for God, union with Him, a clear knowledge of God as if 'face to face', and perceiving people and the world from the perspective of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Similar to St. Mechthild of Hackeborn and St. Gertrude the Great, Blessed Dorothea of Montau often experienced visions during the Eucharist. These visions were typically connected to the liturgical calendar and the order of celebrations throughout the year. According to surviving accounts, it sometimes happened that Jesus Christ appeared to St. Gertrude the Great in a more imaginative form so that other people could understand it, 'through these seemingly painted images, readers are led to taste within themselves the hidden manna, in which there can be no admixture of any sensory images, and only the one who consumes it continually feels their hunger.'⁶ This method of conveying or 'painting' visions with words can also be found in the writings of St. Bridget of Sweden, for example when she metaphorically explains the

⁴ *Vita*, III, 1b.

⁵ *Vita*, III, 1e.

⁶ Mechtlyda von Hackeborn, *Zwierciadło duchownej laski* (:Herald), transl. J. Gawath, Lwów 1645, II, 24, 1.

presence of the Bridegroom in the form of bread⁷ and clarifies why Christ the Lord is the judge of the living and the dead.⁸ Similarly, Blessed Dorothea of Montau, using the language of comparisons, attempts to illuminate the mystery of the incarnation during visions that coincide with Christmas, by relating them to human and maternal everyday activities.⁹

Many mystics share the spiritual experience of mystical espousal. For those unfamiliar with the themes and vocabulary of *Song of Songs* and the subtleties of theology and spirituality, the term 'mystical espousal' often evokes entirely misplaced, erroneous, or even absurd associations. However, the spiritual experience of espousal in the bridal mysticism is a metaphorical description of the relationship between God and the soul. The roots of this term can be traced back to the Book of Isaiah: 'For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your Builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you' (Isaiah 62:5). It can be said that on 16 September 1393, God entered into a covenant with Blessed Dorothea in such a symbolic manner, so that the fulfillment of her soul would bring joy to the heart of God.

Similar mystical experiences of spiritual espousal can be found in the lives of Saint Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Saint Mechtilde of Hackeborn, Saint Gertrude the Great, and Saint Bridget of Sweden. In 1369 Saint Catherine of Siena, a Dominican tertiary, and Saint Mechtilde of Magdeburg, a Beguine, also experienced such mystical espousal. Their profound conviction of the natural belonging of humanity to God, based on the belief that the soul, which came forth from the Heart of God, should return to Him, contributed to the further development of the doctrine of human dignity, created in the likeness of God, and the flourishing of bridal mysticism.¹⁰ The pinnacle of this theology is the most perfect union of the human soul with God, which transforms the individual. In such a mystical union, ecstatic love plays a significant role in leading the soul towards God and forming the foundation of the relationship with Him. This kind of union is emotional and awakens the awareness of the presence of Divine Persons in the soul. According to the descriptions of Saint John of the Cross (1542–1591), the experience of espousal occurs after a long process of purification and adequate preparation of the soul, in which

⁷ Brygida Szwedzka, *Revelationes caelestes, czyli Skarby niebieskich tajemnic to jest Księgi Objawienia Niebieskiego Świętej Matki Brygidy Szwedzkiej* (:Revelations), Gdańsk 1658, 2nd ed., Zamość 1698, I, 47.

⁸ *Revelations*, I, 15.

⁹ *Księga o świętach Mistrza Jana z Kwidzyna. Objawienia błogosławionej Doroty z Mątów* (:Book of Feasts), transl. J. Wojtkowski, Olsztyn 2013, 12; 14; 16.

¹⁰ Mechtylda z Magdeburga, *Strumień Światła Boskości* (:The Flowing Light of the Godhead), t. 1–2, introduction and transl. P.J. Nowak, Kraków 2004, I, 44; V, 22.

light struggles with darkness. Typically, this experience involves a complete cessation of the activity of the faculties of imagination, intellect, and will to free the senses from concerns and desires tied to the material world. God, who first creates complete emptiness and silence in the soul; passive purification involves painful trials that detach it from created things; God's action received by the individual in a passive manner is called the 'night', a time of spiritual darkness and powerlessness through which the soul must pass (J. Machniak, *Spiritual Espousal*). According to John of the Cross, the moment of spiritual espousal represents the perfect state of spiritual life, the development of virtues and gifts, culminating in the highest degree of love for God and the closest union with the Holy Trinity (*The Living Flame of Love*, stanza 2; *The Spiritual Canticle*, Part III, stanza 22n).¹¹ What distinguishes spiritual espousal (spiritual marriage) from spiritual betrothals is the duration of the union, which has consequences for its effects. In the case of betrothals, the soul temporarily rejoices in the union, while in espousal, this joy is almost continuous. Transforming union leads to an increase in the soul's love for God, His care, which removes opportunities for sin and gives the soul the strength to overcome sins, preserving it forever from mortal sin and almost always from voluntary venial sin.¹² Moreover the soul completely forgets itself, feeling a great desire for suffering, following the example of Jesus Christ. It is characterized by immense love for neighbors, can unite virtues that seemingly exclude each other, such as justice and mercy, simplicity of the dove and the prudence of the serpent, contemplative life with practical sensibility. An essential fact related to transforming union is that it is a complete gift from God – the soul cannot attain it through its own efforts. The experience itself is difficult to express in words, although, like St. John of the Cross, Blessed Honorat Koźmiński, Saint Vincent Palotti, and Saint Padre Pio also attempted to describe their experiences of spiritual espousal later on. However, what can be observed when studying these descriptions and is common to all men and women who have experienced spiritual espousal is undoubtedly a profound internal transformation resulting in a 'divine-minded' life.

Similar to the aforementioned mystics, in accordance with the canons of mystical espousal, the language used to convey the spiritual experiences of Blessed Dorothea of Montau is filled with allegories, symbols, and numerous references to the biblical *Song of Songs* that states the following: 'You have

¹¹ Jan od Krzyża, *Żywy płomień miłości*, <https://www.karmel.pl/zywy-plomien-milosci-2/> (accessed 28.06.2023).

¹² R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Trzy okresy życia wewnętrznego wstępem do życia w niebie* (:*The Three Ages of the Interior Life*), transl. T. Landy, Niepokalanów 2014, p. 842.

ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace' (*Song of Songs* 4:9). The very same book also states: 'You are all beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you' (*Song of Songs* 4:7), which can be directly related to one of the mystical fruits of espousal: freedom and preservation from wrongdoing (sin). The words from *Song of Songs* mentioned here in relation to the relationship between God and the soul also indicate the perfection that the Creator sees and desires to see in human beings, His creation. They also point to God's desire to establish a personal, intimate, and confidential relationship. Paradoxically, few people today are willing to embark on the path of such a relationship with God, to open themselves up to Him and before Him in this way. To strip oneself and reveal one's true self, a pure soul. A soul whose essence and quintessence is pure love. And that is what God desires. He wants to see people as they truly are, in truth. The desire for a close, intimate, and confidential relationship is also evident in the words from the Gospel of Matthew: 'But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (Matthew 6:6).

Mystics who have managed to establish such an intimate relationship with God, often in silence and seclusion, almost 'face to face' like Moses (Exodus 33:7, 11a; compare 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Psalm 105:4), often have the task of bearing witness to their experiences through their writings, in order to draw other people closer to God – the Bridegroom of their souls. History shows that if a mystic was unable to record their visions themselves, there was always someone else who would do it. Most of the experiences of St. Mechtilde of Hackeborn are known through the accounts made by her pupil, also a mystic, St. Gertrude the Great. Information about the spiritual experiences of Blessed Dorothea of Montau is available thanks to the reports of her confessor, Jan of Kwidzyn, who described them in works such as the *Vita*, *Book of the Feasts*, and *Seven Lilies*.

The mysticism of spiritual espousal employs the terms *Bridegroom* and *Bride* drawn from *Song of Songs* to illustrate the relationship between the soul and God. All these efforts and experiences are meant to reveal the power of love. The author of the book writes as follows: 'Great waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned' (*Song of Solomon* 8:7). This also happened to many mystics, individuals who loved God above anything else. They entrusted their lives to God, gave away their wealth, and in return received contempt, misunderstanding, accusations of heresy, and even mental

illnesses or mockery from people. Blessed Dorothea of Montau experienced this, as did Saint Catherine of Siena, and many others who placed God at the center of their lives. Many of them were even referred to as 'God's fools'.

The prophetic gift is another aspect that places Blessed Dorothea of Montau in the group of great mystics of the Middle Ages. In the present era, we encounter various fortune-tellers and seers predicting the future in different ways. This no longer surprises or excites many people, although few are probably aware that there are criteria by which a given prophecy can be recognized in the light of Christian doctrine as coming from God or not. According to theological teachings, a mystic receives individual visions to enrich their inner life and the lives of others or as prophecies announcing future events. The authenticity of revelations is judged based on their content and their impact on the recipient and their surroundings (discernment of spirits). A true prophet is called to proclaim (from the Greek 'profemi'), which is just and true in the eyes of God. Therefore, mystical messages often contain requests for specific actions, which, from a broader point of view, reveal a salutary or eschatological dimension. For example, in *the Book of Revelations* of Saint Bridget of Sweden, numerous visions contain prophecies about the fall of kings, calls for the Pope to return from Avignon to Rome, and the demand for the proclamation of the jubilee year in 1350 by Pope Clement VI (1342–1352), exhortations for rulers to repent, warnings, criticism of the activities of the Teutonic Order, and the announcement of its downfall. A similar critique of the improper conduct of the Teutonic Order representatives can be observed in the case of Blessed Dorothea of Montau who predicted her own death, events saving the Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen, the downfall of the Order, and the death of the Grand Master Konrad Wallenrode, whose tormented soul was seen in hell after his death on 20 August 1393.¹³ The gift of prophecy was also possessed by the medieval Benedictine scholar, Saint Hildegard of Bingen.

According to the texts left by her confessor and the canonization process records, Blessed Dorothea of Montau also had stigmata. Stigmata, which are wounds that appear in the places corresponding to the wounds of Christ on the forehead, hands, feet, and side, were also experienced by Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren, Saint Mechtilde of Hackeborn, Saint Angela of Foligno, and many other mystics such as Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/1182–1226), Saint Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510), Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), and Saint John of the Cross (1542–1591). Stigmata in the form of bloody rays, reminiscent of the redemptive offering of the Son of God, also appeared to Saint Catherine

¹³ *The Book of Feasts*, p. 125–126; *Vita* 7,9 c.

of Siena and Saint Gertrude the Great. Therefore, it can be said that Blessed Dorothea of Montau had similar or related spiritual experiences to other great mystics of the Church. However, from the perspective of subsequent centuries, her spiritual experiences do not seem unnatural, strange, or unsettling compared to those of other prominent Christian spiritual figures. In medieval Danzig or Kwidzyn, her experiences would have certainly been considered extraordinary, arousing admiration in some and concern in others. This is evident in the fact that crowds rushed to the recluse, mother Dorothea, for advice and prayers for healing when she was already enclosed in her hermitage within Kwidzyn Cathedral. Additionally, the process of heresy brought against the mystic in Danzig is another indicator. While living in Danzig, Dorothea was known to the people as a devout citizen fulfilling the roles of a wife and mother. However, her decision to wall herself up as a recluse within the walls of the hermitage in Kwidzyn Cathedral was surprising and even shocking. It caused great astonishment, and her own mother was reportedly alarmed by this decision.¹⁴ This is evident from the words of Agata, who received various reports after her daughter had been locked in the anchorhold. Agata 'was greatly troubled by this because she did not understand the mystery of the matter or the will of the Lord. Therefore, she would often say with tears when told about it, 'Oh, what great transgression has she committed, or what immense guilt, to have caused her self-enclosure? She has brought shame upon me. For it is usually said that only very great sinners are accustomed to be enclosed.'¹⁵ The lack of understanding for Dorothea's decision to choose the anchorhold as a form of spiritual fulfillment fortunately did not make the mystic unhappy. On the contrary, the silence and twilight of the hermitage facilitated further inner development until she experienced mystical betrothal and a perfect synchronization of her soul with God. It's worth noting that in the late Middle Ages, in western Europe, the life of anchorites attracted many women and men. Mary Wellesley states that in the XII century, there were around 100 anchorites of both sexes in England. However, from XIII to XV century, this number rose to reach 200. In 1320 there were as many as 230 anchorites in Rome alone. It must be stressed that the number of women choosing seclusion was 2–3 times greater than that of men.¹⁶ It's likely that in Rome, where Blessed Dorothea stayed due to the Year of Grace declared by the Pope in 1390, the

¹⁴ *Akta procesu kanonizacyjnego Doroty z Matów od 1394 do 1521 (:Process)*, transl. J. Wojtkowski, Olsztyn 2014, p. 188.

¹⁵ *Vita*, V, 8 i.

¹⁶ M. Wellesley, *The Life of the anchoress*, <https://www.bl.uk/medieval-literature/articles/the-life-of-the-anchoress> (accessed 16.05.2022).

mystic from Danzig, who was on a pilgrimage, could get better acquainted with the realities of anchorite life. This is especially true considering that she had already familiarized herself with the lives of hermits, particularly the Carthusians, during her earlier stay in Finsterwalde (Einsiedeln), where she and her husband had resided for about a year and a half (from 12 October 1385 to around 25 March 1387), as mentioned by her confessor Jan of Kwidzyn.¹⁷ Thanks to his meticulous records, we know that Blessed Dorothea arrived in Rome on 18 October 1389, and stayed there until Easter, which fell on 3 April 1390.

The entrance of anchorites into their anchorholds was preceded by a suitable formation, which aimed to assess the candidate's suitability for a life of seclusion. The formation and operation of anchorholds were governed by *Rules* approved by the Church. During Blessed Dorothea's time, three documents were the most widespread and rooted in the Rule of St. Benedict. These were as follows: *De institutione inclusarum* (The Institution of Recluses). This work, written in Latin around 1162 by St. Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167), referred to the 'Regula Solitariorum' (*Rule for Solitaries*) from IX century, authored by Grimlaico (Grimlaicus or Grimlaic), a priest and recluse, and 'Ancrene Wisse' (Anchoresses' Guide). This Middle English text, dating to around 1200, provided guidance. 'The Form of Living' and 'Incendium Amoris' (Fire of Love). These texts, authored by the English hermit and mystic Richard Rolle (c. 1300–1349), were intended for his penitent, the recluse Margaret Kirkby (c. 1322–1391/1394) from Ravensworth in North Yorkshire, England. Another work on contemplation and mystical experiences that gained popularity in the late Middle Ages was *Cloud of Unknowing*, likely written in England between 1350 and 1380. The author of this work is unknown, but it has been translated and published in various countries, including Poland.¹⁸

The recalled works and their popularity beyond the medieval era clearly indicate that the life and functioning of anchorites, including Blessed Dorothea of Montau, were subject to specific rules. *Ancrene Wisse*, like *De institutione inclusarum* by St. Aelred, clearly distinguishes between the lives of hermit anchorites who, seeking desert spaces far from populated areas, could change their location, and recluses, who created a 'desert' within their own hearts and were tied to one place of seclusion, typically a cell connected to a church or

¹⁷ *Vita*, III, 9, q; III, 10, k.

¹⁸ Most recently: *Cloud of unknowing and other works*, transl. W. Ostrowski, Warsaw 1988; *Cloud of unknowing*, translated from French by P. Rostworowski, Tyniec 2003; *Cloud of unknowing*, translated from English by W. Unolt, with an introduction by W. Giertych OP, Poznań 2015.

built within it. This was associated with their role within the diocesan and parish community. According to the Latin etymology of the word ‘anchora’, meaning anchor, they were seen as spiritually ‘anchoring’ the community in God, with whom they were believed to have a special relationship and connection. This was one of the reasons why hermitages were often established in cathedrals – the ‘mother’ churches of dioceses, which were also the spiritual centers of the local community. Dorothea of Montau herself professed that the Lord commanded her to pray for the unity of the Church, the Pope, bishops, earthly rulers, canons, those living with her, benefactors, the sick and dying, all souls, the poor, for rain and good weather, thereby showing obedience to the requirements of the *Rule (Vita Latina, V, 24. For: Acta Sanctorum, p. 546)*. The Chapter 12 of Book V reads as follows: ‘Beg me that those who come here may obtain something good and amend their ways. And if the canons of this church are to be sanctified by you, you should have them often in your memory and care greatly for them. However, you have come to this place not only for the sake of the canons who are now present and alive, but also for the sake of those who have already passed away, and those who will come in the future. Not just for them, namely, the canons, but for everyone, laypeople and priests, men and women, who have given their alms to this place, or whose bodies are buried here, hoping to partake in the blessings and prayers that take place and will take place in this place.’¹⁹

Blessed Dorothea felt responsible for the town of Kwidzyn and its inhabitants in a special way, as expressed in the words found in *Vita Latina*: ‘I am so concerned about human sins that I do not know quickly what to say, and people who live in Kwidzyn trouble me even more. It seems to me that I should be the guardian of this whole city.’²⁰ It is worth stressing at this point that the way Blessed Dorothea operated in the hermitage in Kwidzyn was most similar to the functioning of the well-known and respected English mystic and recluse, St. Julian of Norwich (around 1342–1429). Although she was not officially canonized, she is mentioned and quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 313, and Pope Benedict XVI devoted a catechesis to her on 1 December 2010.²¹

According to the surviving accounts, the strength to counsel troubled people who came to her, listen, and provide spiritual comfort to those in need

¹⁹ *Vita, V, 12 b, h; Compare V, 23 n; V, 24 c–d.*

²⁰ *Vita Latina, V, 24. Cf. V, 9 and 12. For: Acta Sanctorum, p. 546.*

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Julian of Norwich. Catechesis*, 1 December 2010, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20101201.html (accessed 13.05.2022).

was found by St. Julian in each of the three windows recommended by the *Rule* for anchoresses. ‘The first opened onto the church, and through it, she could hear Mass and receive the sacraments. The second opened onto the room in the depth of the house, from where her meals, necessary to sustain her body, were presumably served. The third was this small window that gave her the opportunity to offer her support to the world. (...) This window discreetly made her accessible to them [those who came for spiritual support – ed.]’²²

Blessed Dorothea, much like Julian of Norwich, had contact with people through a window who came to her with various matters. The Book V of her *Vita* says as follows: ‘In the cell in front of the lower window, through which your food and drink will be brought, and where people will talk, have a wooden partition to open when necessary. Place an image of My crucifixion in it, so that everyone who comes may think that this anchorhold is a house of saints. For it is a good sign where I stand at the entrance! When you are in the anchorhold, do not give your hand to anyone to accept money as a gift, or touch another hand without permission from your Confessor. Every time you do such a thing without permission, you must confess it. Nor should you desire to converse with many. Anchorites who desire to converse with many usually do so in order to receive something from them because they are greedy, and very few are those who trust Me fully. Since you have fully trusted Me, I want to provide for you what is necessary. The less in conversation and in any other way you receive comfort from creatures, the more you will be comforted by Me. And even if no one comforts you among people, I could and would still keep you in the anchorhold as well as in eternal life. Live, therefore, in a holy way, die to transitory things, and strive earnestly for eternal ones, and desire magnanimously to achieve them. For I, with bright light, enlighten you, showing you the eternal, more precious than the transitory. When I do this, you are so strongly drawn to Me that you fear the transitory goods rather than love them, and you are more distressed by them than joyful, and you should possess nothing on earth. For spiritual good, which you seem to have, is Mine, not yours. However, earthly or bodily good belongs to creatures and is only lent to you for sparse use.’²³ In fact this is how we can summarize the guidelines found in the *Rules* for anchoresses, who, as recluses, spiritually ‘anchored’ communities, cities, and churches they lived in. It can be inferred

²² F. Cancelli, ‘A Spiritual Help Center ‘ante litteram’. Ferdinando Cancelli on Julian of Norwich”, in: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 2015, no. 11, p. 60–61. The writings of St. Julian have been published in Polish – *Wszystko będzie dobrze. Objawienia Juliany z Norwich*, Krakow 2020. The original title of St. Julian’s work is *The Revelations of Divine Love*.

²³ *Vita*, V, 6 a–d.

that this particular service of anchoresses must have been taken quite seriously by the Teutonic Knights, as after the death of Blessed Dorothea of Montau, they granted permission for another recluse to operate within the Kwidzyn Cathedral. Her name was Elizabeth, and as a recluse, she fervently called for resistance against the victorious forces of King Władysław Jagiełło in 1410 and supported Henryk von Plauen's efforts for further war.²⁴ This information is provided in the records of the canonization process of Blessed Dorothea, which, unfortunately, do not provide precise descriptions or the location of the room where the recluse Elizabeth resided.

It is worth mentioning that information about the three windows in the cell of Blessed Dorothea indicates that the Teutonic Order included the recommendations from the *Rules* for recluses. Their existence and functions were frequently mentioned by Dorothea's mystical confessor, Jan of Kwidzyn. In the Book V, he wrote: 'Moreover, if someone were to ask you: Do you have enough light and air? – you should reply: I have enough of both. There are three windows here, and if there were only one for light and air, it would be sufficient for me. But these three windows are not without significance. They symbolize the three Persons in the Trinity, which I know are here, and if I have them, I will lack nothing'²⁵ In another passage, he mentioned: '...until the fourth day (5 May 1393), she did not desire refreshing air, the sight of the sky, or the sun. She did not even look to see if the window to the church was open or closed. The Lord then told her to close it and look at the sky through the opposite window.'²⁶

Certain similarities can be drawn between Blessed Dorothea and Saint Juliana regarding the fate of the hermitages where they lived out their lives. Unfortunately the hermitage of Saint Juliana in Norwich was destroyed along with the church during World War II. Although it has been rebuilt in a modern form, it no longer looks like it used to and serves primarily as a historical and tourist attraction. There is also much uncertainty surrounding the hermitage of Blessed Dorothea in Montau because during the conflicts of 1478–1479, amidst the siege of Kwidzyn by Polish forces during the so-called 'priests war', the vaulting of the lower part of the presbytery (crypt) collapsed and was not rebuilt. In subsequent centuries, the cathedral underwent renovations, making it difficult to identify the room that served as the recluse's cell. Currently, the room located at the base of the southern tower of the cathedral, as indicated

²⁴ *Process*, p. 201 [146]; S. Kwiatkowski, *The Piety of Dorothea of Montau and the Social Environment*, p. 68.

²⁵ *Vita*, V, 8 f.

²⁶ *Vita*, V, 8 b–c.

during the Dorothea's Symposium in Kwidzyn on 25 June 2022 by Marta Kowalczyk, seems to have the most arguments and alignment with descriptions provided by Jan of Kwidzyn, information from *Acta Sanctorum*, and the *Rules* for recluses. Although a similar room exists at the base of the northern tower, and both have external windows that do not serve defensive purposes but are intended to provide light to the discussed rooms, there are distinctive brick patterns around the window openings. During an inspection on 9 June 2023, Bernard Jesionowski noticed that only the southern room had an interior corridor allowing a view of the altar, as reported by Dorothea's confessor in his writings.²⁷ On the northern side, there is an annex that rules out the possibility of a window facing the church and the altar positioned between the mystic's cell and the church. Regardless of further research findings, it is certain that it was in Blessed Dorothea's hermitage that she experienced spiritual growth and reached the heights of mystical experiences. During her time in the hermitage, Dorothea was accompanied by an unceasing longing for Holy Communion and physical death, which would enable her complete union with Jesus, the Bridegroom of her soul.

Blessed Dorothea died on 25 June 1394, before sunset. She had prepared herself earlier, arranging her veils and clothing for her burial. Her funeral took place on 28 June 1394. She was buried in the Pomesan Cathedral in Kwidzyn. As opposed to Saint Juliana of Norwich, whose grave remains in perfect condition to this day, the burial site of Pomesan recluse was destroyed during the Reformation, and to this day, the grave of Blessed Dorothea and her remains have not been found, despite ongoing research and archaeological efforts. The canonization process was initiated by Pope Boniface IX with a bull dated 18 March 1404. It began in Kwidzyn on 24 June 1404, and *Vita* of Blessed Dorothea,²⁸ written by Jan of Kwidzyn, confirmed the existence of stigmata on her forehead, hands, feet, and side. She already possessed these stigmata during her marriage when she lived in Danzig. Stigmata, wounds that appear in the same places as the wounds of the Son of God, were also experienced by saints such as Saint Ludgarda of Tongeren, Saint Mechtild of Hackeborn, Saint Angela of Foligno, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Gertrude the Great, and many other mystics. Similarly, like those saints, numerous people attested to the multitude of miracles and healings that occurred through her intercession. In total, between 23–24 June 1404 and 10 February 1406, as part of the

²⁷ *Vita*, V, 38 f.

²⁸ *Vita*, II, 24 a.

canonization process, 257 witnesses were examined, all of whom affirmed the exceptional life and sanctity of Dorothea.

Speaking of the witnesses who provided testimony in the infirmary of the Kwidzyn Cathedral Chapter Castle, there was a diverse cross-section of the society from Danzig, Kwidzyn, Elbląg, and the broader regions of Pomerania, Żuławy, the Włocławek diocese, as well as the former Prussian dioceses, including Pomesania, Warmia, Chełmno, and Sambia. The elevation of Dorothea of Montau to the altars took place on 14 October 1975 by way of a decree confirming the existence of an ancient cult. This aligns with the guidelines of Pope Urban VIII concerning Servants of God whose cult dates back to before 1534. These guidelines were outlined in the decree of 13 March 1625, and the apostolic constitution *Caelestis Hierusalem cives* of 5 July 1634. According to these decrees, it was permitted to maintain public veneration for those deceased individuals who received reverence as saints 'from time immemorial' or were venerated with the knowledge and tolerance of the Apostolic See or local ordinaries. However, this veneration must have had its origins at least 100 years before the issuance of the constitution *Caelestis Hierusalem cives*, that is before 1534, a date considered 'from time immemorial' by Pope Urban VIII. This was indeed the case for blessed Dorothea of Montau, and thanks to numerous documents, the continuity of her cult could be proven. This procedure was also applied to other mystics, such as the sisters Gertrude and Mechtilde of Hackeborn.

The declaration from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints regarding blessed Dorothea was confirmed and deemed legally binding by Pope Paul VI on 9 January 1976. In light of this, special Dorothea-themed celebrations took place on 13 March 1976, in Kwidzyn, Olsztyn, and Frombork. On 12 December of the same year, thanksgiving celebrations were held at the Oliwa Cathedral in Danzig. On the occasion of Dorothea's inclusion among the ranks of saints and blessed, special ceremonies were also organized at the Pomesan Cathedral in Kwidzyn on 13 January 1977. Her rich spiritual experiences, as demonstrated in this study, are not unlike the mystical experiences of other Christian mystics widely known in Europe. Therefore it is important to continue reminding the world about the Pomesan mystic, Blessed Dorothea of Montau, and her place among the great Christian mystics.

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Summary
Blessed Dorothea of Montau – a Europe-renowned mystic
in the Pomesanian cathedral

The elaborate shows the blessed Dorothea of Montau's mystic experiences that in view of similarity of her experiences with spiritual experiences of other women and men from the Middle Ages make her belong to the group of prominent Christian mystics.

In view of the lack of proper attention given to this mystic and recluse, the need for greater promotion of knowledge of spiritual experiences of engagements, espousals, prophetic visions and stigmata that the blessed Dorothea of Montau experienced has been highlighted.

Streszczenie
Bł. Dorota z Mątów – mistyczka formatu europejskiego
w pomezańskiej katedrze

W opracowaniu przedstawiono doświadczenia mistyczne bł. Doroty z Mątów, które za sprawą zbieżności jej przeżyć z przeżyciami duchowymi innych kobiet i mężczyzn epoki średniowiecza sytuują ją w gronie wybitnych mistyczek chrześcijańskich.

W związku z dającym się zauważyć brakiem odpowiedniej atencji należynej tej mistyczce i rekluzie wskazano na konieczność większej promocji wiedzy o doświadczeniach duchowych zaręczyn, zaślubin, wizji i widzeń profetycznych oraz stygmatów będących udziałem bł. Doroty z Mątów.