

The spiritual motherhood in the light of the writings of Saint Urszula Ledóchowska

Macierzyństwo duchowe w świetle pism Świętej Urszuli Ledóchowskiej

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Abstract: Ursula Ledóchowska addresses the issue of the Christian vocation and tasks of women on many occasions and in various aspects, pointing to Mary as a model to follow. St Ursula's writings contain a broad vision of the spiritual motherhood, encompassing mothers in the family, all lay women and religious sisters completely dedicated to God. Every Christian woman is called to spiritual motherhood, to guide and support people in their path to God; her mission is the apostolate of quiet, serene love, the apostolate of prayer and the apostolate of sacrifice in the image of Christ. A special task of the mother in the family is to care for the development of the faith of her children. The essence of a nun's spiritual motherhood is to lead others to Christ by His bride totally devoted to the Holy Trinity.

Keywords: spiritual motherhood; Urszula Ledóchowska; Christian spirituality; religious life

Abstrakt: Urszula Ledóchowska wielokrotnie i w różnych aspektach podejmuje temat chrześcijańskiego powołania i zadań kobiety, wskazując na Maryję jako na wzór do naśladowania. W pismach św. Urszuli zawarta jest szeroka wizja macierzyństwa duchowego, obejmująca zarówno matki w rodzinie, wszystkie kobiety świeckie, jak i siostry zakonne całkowicie oddane na własność Bogu. Każda chrześcijańska kobieta powołana jest do macierzyństwa duchowego, do prowadzenia i wspierania osób w ich drodze do Boga; jej misją jest apostołstwo: cichej, pogodnej miłości, modlitwy i ofiary na wzór Chrystusa. Szczególnym zadaniem matki w rodzinie jest troska o rozwój

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wiary jej dzieci. Istotą macierzyństwa duchowego siostry zakonnej jest prowadzenie innych do Chrystusa przez Jego oblubienicę całkowicie oddaną Trójcy Świętej.

Słowa kluczowe: macierzyństwo duchowe; Urszula Ledóchowska; duchowość chrześcijańska; życie zakonne

Introduction

The spiritual motherhood is the vocation and mission of a woman in the Church, fulfilled on the example of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, called by Christ to be a mother to all people (see Jn 19:25–27). The specificity of spiritual motherhood can be precisely understood by reading it in the light of the teaching of the Church, especially after the Second Vatican Council. First of all, it should be noted that St. Ursula Ledóchowska (1865–1939), the founder of the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus, in her numerous letters — addressed to nuns and lay people — does not use the expression ‘spiritual motherhood’ directly. Saint Ursula, however, writes and speaks exhaustively about the Christian vocation and tasks of a lay woman, a mother in the family and a religious sister, pointing to Mary as a role model. Moreover, she sees herself as a spiritual mother for the nuns from the founded Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus. The saint directly expresses this in her *Testament* addressed to them when, referring to her spiritual daughters, she uses the phrase: ‘my children’, and writes about herself: ‘mother’ or ‘matuchna’¹. Thus, it is worth asking: Can you find an understanding of the vocation of a spiritual mother when reading and analyzing the writings of St. Ursula? Is it possible to characterize the specificity of spiritual motherhood in the light of these works? The purpose of this article, therefore, is to examine how, in her writings, St. Ursula Ledóchowska outlines the vocation of a woman (both a lay person and a nun) to spiritual motherhood.

1. The spiritual motherhood of a lay woman and mother in the family

Motherhood is the main vocation of a woman. Referring to human nature, it should be recalled that motherhood is rooted in the biological plane and appeals to family life. Being a mother in the natural sense is fundamental and irreplaceable. However, motherhood (and fatherhood) is not limited to a biological function, to the procreation of life, but goes much deeper². In her apostolic activity,

¹ See, e.g. U. Ledóchowska, *Pisma zakonne*, Pniewy 2000, p. 9.

² In the book *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, Karol Wojtyła writes, “Fatherhood and motherhood in the world of people is a mark of special spiritual perfection. It always consists in some kind

St. Ursula repeatedly addresses Christian women and mothers, showing them what function and vocation they have to fulfill. In her lectures, she emphasizes the responsibility that rests on a mother for the proper upbringing of her children, including the duty to care for children's development in faith. She turns to mothers with the question, 'O dear ladies, providing your child with riches, honors, all the pleasures of the world — have you given much?'³. And she states, with her typical realism, 'Nothing, nothing! A little smoke that will go up into the air and die there'⁴. In this context, St. Ursula notes that the most important thing is to lead a child to God, to a living relationship with Him, 'God must be given to a child from the very first moment of its existence. In this little creature, opening its eyes to the light of day, there is a soul that came from God and is destined to return to God. For the homeland of the soul is God'⁵. According to Ursula Ledóchowska, a mother's vocation is not limited only to natural tasks, limited in the sensual and visible world, but reaches the supernatural aspect.

This, Christian mothers, is your task: to educate the soul of the child. Saints are brought up on the lap of the holy mother. [...] Both you and your children have a more important task than to eat well, dress beautifully and have fun. As long as you are concerned with this fundamental truth that every human being, a child or an adult, lives to know God, love, serve Him and thus go to heaven — then you will be able to raise your child for God from the very first moment of life⁶

– states St. Ursula. As a special time in the life of the family, especially in the life of faith of both the mother and the child, Mother Ledóchowska indicates the stage when the child is preparing to receive the First Holy Communion. Ursula reminds mothers of their important spiritual role. She shows them the

of 'giving birth' in a spiritual sense, in shaping souls" (K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, Lublin 2001, p. 232). The father and mother, who gave their children biological life, have the task of completing their parenthood with spiritual fatherhood and motherhood through upbringing. Furthermore, as John Paul II affirms, 'from the very beginning motherhood includes a special opening to a new person: this is precisely the woman's lot' (John Paul II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, Vatican 1988, No. 18); it is related to the personal structure of femininity along with the personal dimension of the gift. John Paul II also points out that usually a woman is more focused on a specific person than a man, and motherhood develops this ability even more. See Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, No. 18.

³ U. Ledóchowska, *Atmosfera domu podczas przygotowania dziecka do pierwszej Komunii świętej*, in: *Odrodzenie jest możliwe*, ed. B. Bejze, Warszawa 1988, p. 81.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Eadem, *Na kolanach świętej matki wychowują się święci*. A lecture given at the Catholic Congress, Warszawa 30.08.1926, in: eadem, *Kobieta apostołką Eucharystii*, Częstochowa 2005, p. 49.

irreplaceable importance of the mother's faith in accompanying the child when 'the life of God begins to develop in the heart of the child, the life of the child in the Heart of God'⁷. She notes that it is not enough to perform religious practices only out of habit — it is necessary to have living faith and live it every day. The condition of a child's good preparation for the First Holy Communion is the living faith of his mother — faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist; faith, which is the decision to be with Jesus; faith that encompasses all existence and all aspects of life.

Saint Ursula calls the Christian mother 'the priestess of the hearth' and 'the visible guardian angel of the child's soul'; it indicates that the mother's task is to watch over the soul of the child⁸ entrusted to her by God. Directing words to mothers, she shows them what atmosphere should prevail in a family home where one lives and breathes faith. She points out that every Christian mother has the special and important task of creating an atmosphere of faith at home. She emphasizes the role of common prayer with a child and the effort put into its upbringing and shaping its character⁹. According to Mother Ursula, consistent faithfulness to God and efforts to strengthen faith make a woman an apostle of God in the family, and also in wider circles — in society. The saint asks, 'Catholic woman, do you understand that it is your duty to protect your husband's soul from evil influences, from unbelief, from infidelity [...], the soul of children from the temptations of youth, from immorality, from materialism, from apostasy from God?'¹⁰. The prayer of the wife and mother in the family has a significant impact and at the same time constitutes her spiritual motherhood.

Mother Ursula points to the essential importance of believing in God and giving Him the first place. Nurturing living faith in everyday matters and events, as well as fulfilling the obligations arising from the sacrament of baptism, are fundamental issues addressed by Mother Ledóchowska in her lectures given to women. The priority in the spiritual life of every Christian is to find time for God. Saint Ursula addresses women in a lecture delivered during the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress in Łódź on June 30, 1928, 'My ladies, let us be believers, and then, above all, let us have time for Jesus — after all, the blessing in our works, in our undertakings depends on Him, without His grace we can do nothing — or let us be unbelievers, and we will be less responsible for our complete unbelief than for our indifferent faith'¹¹. Mother Ursula warns women against living a car-

⁷ U. Ledóchowska, *Atmosfera domu podczas przygotowania dziecka do pierwszej Komunii świętej*, p. 81.

⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 86.

⁹ See *ibidem*, pp. 81–86.

¹⁰ U. Ledóchowska, *Apostolstwo eucharystyczne kobiety*. A lecture given during the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress, Łódź, 30.06.1928, in: *eadem*, *Kobieta apostołką Eucharystii*, p. 43.

¹¹ *Eadem*, *Apostolstwo eucharystyczne kobiety*, p. 40.

icature of faith, which she describes, giving an example of the following attitude, ‘When sickness, fear, danger — then get on your knees [...] and usually I do not care about Jesus!’¹². With these words, she exposes the often encountered lack of intimacy with God.

Saint Ursula sees a woman’s spiritual influence extending beyond her own family as well. Every Christian woman is called to spiritual motherhood, to guide and support people on their way to God, whose mission is the apostolate of quiet, serene love, the apostolate of prayer and the apostolate of sacrifice, modeled on the love, prayer and sacrifice of the Divine Prisoner in the tabernacle, Christ in the Blessed Sacrament¹³. Mother Ledóchowska encourages women to bring love wherever they are present, which will enable them to gain strength at the foot of the tabernacle. Looking for strength in Jesus, one can turn life into love and overcome all difficulties in the life of a mother, a wife, a woman involved in work. ‘After each prayer at the foot of the Eucharist, you will bring home a little of the Eucharistic atmosphere, the healthy breath of God that sanctifies and purifies’¹⁴, says St. Ursula. According to her, prayer is true apostolate, it is the heart of spiritual motherhood. Moreover, the woman is called to the apostolate of the victim. ‘Imitating Jesus in the tabernacle, be an apostle of sacrifice!’¹⁵ — calls Mother Ledóchowska, pointing out at the same time that this is undoubtedly the most important and most difficult apostolate¹⁶. ‘Being a victim — oh, it’s not easy. It means to renounce one’s ‘I’, to take upon oneself a life of constant self-sacrifice for others, to take upon oneself — with a smile on one’s lips — daily crosses, to develop in oneself, out of love for Jesus, love of suffering’¹⁷. Saint Ursula does not promote suffering, but she strongly emphasizes that love, which is drawn from Christ, especially present in the Blessed Sacrament, is always at the basis of prayer and sacrifice. She writes, ‘Love Jesus in the tabernacle, and you will become an apostle of prayer, love, sacrifice, and you will carry out the Eucharistic apostolate in the most wonderful way in your family, in your surroundings, in the environment in which you live by God’s will’¹⁸. The quoted words of Ursula Ledóchowska can be considered as a synthetic approach and the essence of the spiritual motherhood of lay women.

¹² Ibidem; see also: Z. Pałubska, *Macierzyństwo duchowe w Kościele katolickim*, „Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej” 6 (2007), pp. 100–102.

¹³ See U. Ledóchowska, *Apostolstwo eucharystyczne kobiety*, p. 42.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 43.

¹⁵ Ibidem; see also: M. Pagacz, *Eucharystia jako ofiara w pismach św. Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, „Polonia Sacra” 4 (2020), pp. 179–184.

¹⁶ See U. Ledóchowska, *Apostolstwo eucharystyczne kobiety*, p. 44.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem, pp. 45–46.

Readings and suggestive tips left by St. Ursula clearly show how Mother Ledóchowska cares for Polish women, giving them advice on spiritual development, supporting them in social, marital and motherhood tasks. Thus, she defines the specificity of spiritual motherhood, which in the case of a mother in the family means, above all, watching over the development of her children in faith. Moreover, every woman is called to spiritual motherhood, which consists in the apostolate of love, prayer and sacrifice, rooted in Christ and having its source in the Eucharist. It is worth emphasizing that by putting effort into the spiritual formation of Christian women, wives and mothers, St. Ursula's example shows what it means to fulfill the mission of a spiritual mother towards others, caring above all about shaping their life of faith and accompanying people on their way to God.

2. The spiritual motherhood of a nun

Among the numerous letters written by Mother Ledóchowska, there are also those addressed directly to the nuns belonging to the Congregation founded by her. In these works, St. Ursula characterizes among others spirituality of the Ursuline of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus and indicates the attitudes that the sisters should have towards people. She repeatedly emphasizes the call to lead others to Christ, to care for the salvation of every human being. According to Mother Ledóchowska, genuine love for God finds a real reflection in relationships with fellow human beings. A religious person who recognizes the love of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus is filled with the desire to respond in a definite way to this incomprehensible love of God. It is from this experience that spiritual motherhood grows, the specificity of which can be read from the descriptions and reflections of St. Ursula talking about the spirit of the apostolate. In addition, the founder of the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus especially recommends her spiritual daughters to imitate Mary. It reminds us that Mary is the Mother — not only the Mother of Christ, but the Mother of every human being, because the Savior, departing from this world, gave her as a Mother to the beloved disciple, and in Him — to everyone who wants to accept her¹⁹.

Mother Ledóchowska in the *Meditations* draws the sisters' attention to their true identity and vocation. She writes, 'I am the property of the Divine Heart of Jesus and I do not belong to myself, because Christ bought me at a great price (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). I must not think otherwise — I am the property of the

¹⁹ See U. Ledóchowska, *Rozmyślenia dla Sióstr Urszulanek Serca Jezusa Konającego*, vol. 1, Pniewy 2000, pp. 373–374.

Heart of Jesus²⁰. The relationship of belonging to Christ entails — according to St. Ursula — specific consequences: it indicates that man is not created for himself, he is not destined to fulfill his egoistic preferences, but is to fulfill the will of the Lord God. The author of the *Meditations* writes down the words that express the resolution, ‘I will not seek my own satisfaction or my will, but the satisfaction of Jesus and His holy will’²¹. Thus, St. Ursula presents the foundation of the nun’s spiritual motherhood, which is a bond with Christ and total dedication to Him in religious consecration.

Saint Ursula indicates that those who remain close to the Heart of the Agonizing Jesus pass from contemplation to acts of love for one’s fellow human being. Therefore, she urges the sisters, ‘May the holy fire of love of souls smolder in your hearts. To save souls, to lead souls to Jesus, to let them know the infinite goodness of the Heart of Jesus — this is the ideal for which we have to sacrifice ourselves’²². These words express the essence of spiritual motherhood and, at the same time, the spirit of apostolate²³. Saint Ursula instructs the sisters to embrace their fellow human beings with love, especially those most in need and the weakest. She encourages you to be full of sacrifice, not looking at your ‘I’, and following the example of the Heart of Jesus, to become a real, burnt sacrifice²⁴. Genuine love for people springs from the desire for Christ to be known and loved by all. The Savior wants souls who would love Him, on whom He could pour out graces²⁵. Therefore, according to the founder of the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus, directing human hearts towards the Divine Heart and helping them discover His immense love is the basic feature of spiritual motherhood. At the basis of all actions, initiatives and acts of mercy is a spiritual and maternal desire to lead others to the Savior, so that they can experience the fullness of Life.

In the *Meditations*, St. Ursula writes down words that clearly show what a spiritual mother lives and breathes, and what aspirations permeate her, ‘Whoever loves God, wants to encourage others to love God. If anyone, then above all, a religious soul should try to draw souls to Jesus through the power of love

²⁰ Eadem, *Rozmyślania dla Sióstr Urszulanek Serca Jezusa Konającego*, vol. 2, Pniewy 2000, pp. 56–57.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Eadem, *Pisma zakonne*, p. 63.

²³ Similarly, St. John Paul II, writing about motherhood ‘according to the Spirit’, notes that spousal love for Christ ‘includes a special readiness to transfer it to all who are within its sphere of action’. Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, No. 21.

²⁴ See U. Ledóchowska, *Rozmyślania dla Sióstr Urszulanek Serca Jezusa Konającego*, vol. 2, p. 89.

²⁵ See M. Pagacz, *Tajemnica Serca Jezusa Konającego źródłem apostołstwa według św. Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, „Polonia Sacra” 1 (2021), pp. 190–193.

and become an apostle not so much by word as by example, kindness, cordiality, prayer, and perhaps above all serenity²⁶. Making efforts so that other people discover the goodness of Christ and love Him is an expression of spiritual motherhood and at the same time a credible testimony of love for the Savior'. The author of the *Meditations* recommends the sisters to ask themselves the following questions in prayer, 'Do I mean that the souls entrusted to me, the souls of those with whom I deal, love God more and more, get to know Him better and work more and more zealously on themselves? Do I pray for these souls? Do I ask God for their progress in virtue and try to be a good example to them?'²⁷. Saint Ursula shows that a true lover of God is imbued with the desire that God be loved and glorified by all.

The spiritual motherhood of a religious sister is manifested in many ways — these include: prayer, suffering and penance, the testimony of a life devoted to God, all acts of love and service towards others, work and the apostolate of a smile. In the *Meditations*, St. Ursula writes, 'I am to be an apostle, and I can be one — through work, through love of the fellow human being, through kindness, through serenity. This is true apostolate, which sometimes works more than words. Let this holy fire of zeal for the salvation of souls burn in my heart as well'²⁸. A man who loves God and wants to lead others to Him uses all life situations, words spoken, actions taken and all experiences in which he participates. In addition, the founder of the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus reminds her spiritual daughters that their whole life is — through active love and penance — a way to compensate the Savior's Heart for their own and other people's sins²⁹.

Saint Ursula repeatedly stresses the importance of imitating Mary in religious life. She points out that 'the best devotion to Mary is to be a meek, faithful, humble servant of the Lord, following her example'³⁰. She expects her spiritual daughters to, imitating the Mother of the Saviour, become spiritual mothers for others through love and service. True love is revealed in deed³¹ — the life of the

²⁶ U. Ledóchowska, *Rozmyślenia dla Sióstr Urszulanek Serca Jezusa Konającego*, vol. 1, p. 87.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 165.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 365. 'Here is one of the true signs of our love for Christ: the spirit of apostolate – the desire for everyone to love Jesus more and more, to know Him better and better' (*ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 164).

²⁹ See M. Pagacz, *Tajemnica Serca Jezusa Konającego źródłem apostolstwa według św. Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, p. 192.

³⁰ U. Ledóchowska, *Pisma zakonne*, p. 41; see M. Pagacz, „Fiat, magnificat i służba”. *Podstawy duchowości maryjnej w pismach św. Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, „Studia Gdańskie” 48 (2021), pp. 114–116.

³¹ See U. Ledóchowska, *Rozmyślenia dla Sióstr Urszulanek Serca Jezusa Konającego*, vol. 2, p. 253.

Blessed Mother confirms this truth in a very clear way. Saint Ursula emphasizes the features that are to characterize the love of the fellow human being: the spirit of service, goodness, helpfulness, understanding, politeness, kindness³².

The author of the *Meditations* shows the sisters an example of the attitude of the Savior's Mother during the wedding in Cana of Galilee (see John 2:1–11). Mary is the one who sees needs and shortages, is able to sense people's anxieties and is sensitive to others. According to St. Ursula, it is worth learning from the Mother of God the delicacy of feelings that makes her guess sufferings, cares and pains of the human heart. Mary does not think about herself, she can notice a problematic situation and make efforts to save others from embarrassment. Saint Ursula draws a conclusion from this, which is an indication for every believer, and especially for a nun who wants to be a spiritual mother for people: imitating the Mother of God in her service requires forgetting about oneself in order to be able to feel what can cause others pain, trouble or annoyance. Those who are occupied with themselves and think only of themselves have their eyes closed to the needs, concerns and sufferings of others³³. The mother of the Lord teaches spiritual motherhood most fully — she shows how to live for others, seek their happiness and sacrifice for them, and how to lead everyone to Christ. Saint Ursula prays:

O Mary, teach me to live for others, to seek their happiness, to sacrifice myself for them. I want to live, work and suffer for others, not for myself. Let it cost as much as it wants, as long as others are well with me, as long as I can be a bright ray for them, spreading holy joy and God's happiness around me. The Lord Jesus, to give us happiness, dies in torment, Mary dies for us at the foot of the cross in silent pain, becoming the Co-redemptrix of the human race, and I should live for myself, rot in vile selfishness, egoism? Oh no, Mother, let it cost as much as it wants, following your example I will try to forget myself to live for others³⁴.

These words of prayer express the desire to learn spiritual motherhood from Mary.

The author of the *Meditations*, meditating on the events that took place on Calvary, points out that Mary's maternal mission is fully revealed anew under the

³² See eadem, *Pisma zakonne*, pp. 114–119.

³³ See eadem, *Rozmyślenia dla Sióstr Urszulanek Serca Jezusa Konającego*, vol. 1, pp. 171–173; M. Pagacz, „Fiat, magnificat i służba”. *Podstawy duchowości maryjnej w pismach św. Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, p. 115; K. Kowalik, *Maryja wzorem posłuszeństwa i służby według św. Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, in: *Polka w Europie. Święta Urszula Ledóchowska*, eds. M. Chmielewski, Z. Zdybicka, M. Ziółkowska, Lublin 2005, p. 57.

³⁴ U. Ledóchowska, *Rozmyślenia dla Sióstr Urszulanek Serca Jezusa Konającego*, vol. 1, p. 174.

Cross of her Son³⁵. At this moment, the Mother of God accepts the commitment to care for the salvation of every human being. Saint Ursula recommends her spiritual daughters to imitate Mary in this aspect. She commands the sisters to always try to lead others to Christ, to let others know the infinite goodness of the Heart of Jesus³⁶. They are to become spiritual mothers in imitation of the Blessed Mother³⁷.

3. Upbringing, teaching and care for integral human development as an expression of spiritual motherhood

According to St. Ursula, a special opportunity to express spiritual motherhood — especially for the sisters of the Congregation founded by her, but also for lay women — is the care for the integral development of another person, the upbringing and teaching of children and youth³⁸. ‘Educating souls for God — this is the most beautiful vocation!’³⁹ — states St. Ursula. It is worth noting that Mother Ledóchowska is a great educator, an undoubted authority in the field of education, as well as the creator of a new pedagogical vision⁴⁰. She was primarily

³⁵ “Mary understood the will of her divine Son. From now on, she will have as many children as there are people in the world until the end of the world; she will become the Mother of the poor sons of Eve, poor pilgrims in this vale of tears. How painful these words must have been for Mary’s heart in that terrible moment when Jesus was saying goodbye to her. He left this world, and in His place He left us, poor, miserable earthworms, to His Mother. What an exchange! But the Holy Mother and this will of her Divine Son has one answer in her soul: *Fiat*, ‘let it be done to me according to your word’. And she assumes the duties of a Mother towards each soul, she will pray for each of them, because she would like to bring them all to her Divine Son to the kingdom of heaven” (ibidem, pp. 373–374).

³⁶ See eadem, *Pisma zakonne*, p. 63.

³⁷ It is worth noting that today, Pope Francis draws attention to consecrated persons on the fundamental importance of spiritual motherhood or fatherhood. Francis warns, ‘When a priest is not the father of his community, when a nun is not the mother of all those with whom she works, they become sad. That’s the problem. Therefore, I say to you: the source of sadness in pastoral life is precisely the lack of fatherhood and motherhood, which results from the wrong living of this consecration, which should lead us to [spiritual] fruitfulness’. Franciszek, Meeting with seminarians and novices: *Wiarygodni i konsekwentni*, 06.07.2013, ‘L’Osservatore Romano’ Polish edition 8–9 (2013), p. 42.

³⁸ Similarly, John Paul II notes that the spiritual motherhood of consecrated women can take many forms of care for people, especially those most in need (the sick, the disabled, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children and youth, prisoners, etc.). See Jan Paweł II, *List apostołski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, No. 21.

³⁹ U. Ledóchowska, *Wychowanie dzieci dla Boga i dla społeczeństwa*. A lecture given at a teacher training course, Poznań, 21.09.1926, in: eadem, *Kobieta apostołką Eucharystii*, p. 58.

⁴⁰ Based on the writings of Urszula Ledóchowska, a specific pedagogical model can be built. See K. Olbrycht, *Zarys systemu wychowania Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, Ząbki 2002.

a practitioner, but she also had a lot of theoretical knowledge and intuition. Her pedagogical approach was constituted by: the model of upbringing taken from home, contacts with the pedagogy of the 20th century and — above all — by her personal vocation, unique personality, which made her interact with herself, her intimacy with Christ⁴¹.

Raising and teaching children and young people, especially girls and young women, is therefore an area very close to St. Ursula, in whom she sees the possibility of responding to Christ's desire and love. Similarly, the special mission of the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus — the proclamation of Christ and the love of His Heart — is carried out primarily through the upbringing and teaching of children and youth, as well as service to the most needy and disadvantaged. In this way, the vocation to spiritual motherhood is expressed. Mother Ledóchowska addresses the tutors:

Our God and Lord has chosen us, present here, for educational work. He entrusted us with children who may have never experienced maternal caresses, homeless children who, unfortunately, have already seen and heard the worst things. He, the Divine Friend of children, entrusts these children to us, so that we, above all, direct them to heaven, so that they grow up to be brave people who spread — each in his environment — the glory of God, the truly Christian spirit⁴².

The calling of the educator — according to St. Ursula — is not only limited to the profession or social role, but is an important expression of spiritual motherhood.

'It is a great task — to educate for God!⁴³ — points out St. Ursula. In her writings, she indicates how she perceives this mission. She states that there are two tasks in the work of upbringing: 'first — raising children for God, for the heavenly homeland. The second is the upbringing of children for society — for the earthly homeland'⁴⁴. Mother Ursula has a coherent concept of upbringing resulting from the love of Christ and the Christian vision of man. She cares about the comprehensive and integral development of children and youth; she perceives upbringing in many aspects — she writes about upbringing: religious, mental, moral, social, patriotic, aesthetic, physical and health one⁴⁵. Education is therefore a concern for the development of humanity on various levels, which is given meaning and direction by the perspective of God's love⁴⁶. According to St. Ur-

⁴¹ See *ibidem*, pp. 11–20.

⁴² U. Ledóchowska, *Wychowanie dzieci dla Boga i dla społeczeństwa*, p. 57.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ See K. Olbrycht, *Zarys systemu wychowania Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, pp. 28–46.

⁴⁶ See Z.J. Zdybicka, „Geniusz kobiecy”, in: *Polka w Europie. Święta Urszula Ledóchowska*, p. 89.

sula, educational activities towards young people consist largely in stimulating reflection on the purpose and meaning of one's own life received from the Creator, in development, in effort amidst joys and hardships, and then in creatively inspiring young people to their own, active work on themselves, to conscious directing one's life.

It is also worth emphasizing that St. Ursula attitude to the young man was a specific realization of her charism as a spiritual mother. Ursula Ledóchowska set high expectations for her pupils, and above all for herself. She repeated that an example would often do more than the loftiest sermons. She mainly used the possibility of personal influence — personal testimony, combining the method of example with the method of verbal and situational action⁴⁷. In the light of memories left by students about St. Ursula, 'mother's simple words sunk strangely deep into the soul [...] and the insight of her gaze was sometimes terrifying, but also captivating'⁴⁸. What particularly attracted young people to Ursula's mother, what made her respected and trusted, was her great simplicity and directness, undisturbed serenity, rare inner harmony and strong love, as well as authentic, full and competent involvement in what she did. She never forced religious practices, nor did she measure everyone with her human measure, but with great understanding she adapted to each person, to their stage of maturity and spiritual development. Young people were impressed by the fact that she was not scandalized by small, superficial things. She had an individual — simple and maternal — approach to each young person; in relationships she was full of natural simplicity, which made her very trustworthy. She knew life and was able to intuitively sense many human needs, which meant that her advice and indications were perceived by her pupils as accurate and convincing. Most often she appealed not to changeable and unreliable feelings, but to rational premises. She explained the doubts presented to her by the young people with kindness, she was not scandalized by evil. Saint Ursula had time for each student; each had the impression that their mother was especially kind to them⁴⁹.

In the educational field, St. Ursula knew how to see the signs of the times and was ready for new evangelization projects. In 1906, she opened the first dormitory for female students in Poland run by nuns. Furthermore, she took care of each of the students individually, supporting them in personal dilemmas of life on the path of faith. She also had the ability to spiritually reach individual students and win over those who were most reluctant towards the nuns⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ See K. Olbrycht, *Zarys systemu wychowania Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, pp. 47–73.

⁴⁸ *Miłość krzyża się nie lęka. Listy Julii Ledóchowskiej – bł. Urszuli i wspomnienia o niej*, ed. A.T. Szafraniec, Warszawa 1991, p. 255.

⁴⁹ See *ibidem*, pp. 252–256.

⁵⁰ See Z.J. Zdybicka, *Otworzyć serce. Apostolstwo matki Urszuli Ledóchowskiej*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 136–142.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the writings of St. Ursula Ledóchowska contain a broad vision of spiritual motherhood, including both mothers in the family, all lay women, as well as nuns who are completely devoted to God. An important expression of spiritual motherhood is the mission of education and teaching. Elements of a similarly understood vocation to spiritual motherhood can also be found in the lives of many other holy women and in the writings left by them⁵¹. The category of spiritual motherhood also applies to the Servant of God, Jadwiga Zamoyska, who fulfills the Catholic vocations of wife and mother in the family. Being a woman of deep faith, she combined love for God with love for her fellow human being, caring for the upbringing and teaching of the young generation. She had in particular the good of Christian women in mind, helped them in shaping their personalities and taught them social work for the good of the Church and Homeland. A special expression of her spiritual motherhood was her involvement in the field of Catholic education. In her activities, Jadwiga Zamoyska — as an authentic spiritual mother — was able to support comprehensive human development, taking into account primarily Christian values⁵².

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⁵¹ See i.e. Z. Pałubska, *Macierzyństwo duchowe w Kościele katolickim*, pp. 115–117.

⁵² See J. Zamoyska, *O wychowaniu*, Lublin 2019; *Służebnica Boża Jadwiga z Działyńskich Zamoyska mówi do nas*, ed. W. Chałupka, Kórnik 2013; J. Zamoyska, *Wspomnienia*, ed. M. Czapska, Londyn 1961, pp. 281–391.

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