



**IN THE BIBLICAL
SCHOOL
OF MERCY**

Rev. Henryk Wejman

Wydawnictwo *Misericordia*

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SCHOOL OF MERCY

PART I



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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, on which the constant grip of violence and hatred leaves an imprint, man lives in fear and a sense that a dangerous threat is looming. He fears not just the outbreak of a nuclear conflict or a biological disaster. Above all he fears the great variety of manipulation techniques that may be used against himself by another man, who having a vast number of instruments of civilization at his disposal is in a position to limit his freedom, to make it impossible for him to declare his worldview or speak the truth and may even corrupt his conscience by stifling his sensitivity. Protecting himself against all these, he searches unceasingly for an escape from these dangers. At times he takes recourse to the law of interpersonal solidarity, at other times to the values of social justice. However, neither the one nor the other – as life's experience teaches – can guarantee him a sense of security. Therefore, neither of them can give him the assurance of inner peace. However, there is such a value – demonstrated by St. Faustina Kowalska in the previous century – that is able to heal all his fears and anxiety. It is divine mercy. *Humankind will not find peace* – she reminds us with the words of Christ spoken to her at one of His revelations – *until it turns to My mercy with trust* (Diary 300). A certain continuation of this thought may be found in an utterance of John

Paul II who, in his second encyclical published in 1980 – that is at the beginning of his pontificate – stated that *the need of these critical and difficult times impels me to draw attention once again in Christ to the countenance of ‘the Father of Mercies and God of all comfort’* (DM 1). The Pope’s words not only point out the source of peace for man but also reveal the way to attain it. If man desires to experience peace and serenity, he must turn toward the merciful God, whom Jesus Christ has revealed most fully. And so, Divine mercy, which is capable of liberating man from his fears and anxiety, needs to be understood and accepted by man just as it was revealed by Christ. Therefore man must, in a way, enter the school of Christ’s mercy, which is precisely the subject-matter of this work hereby presented. Its goal is to reveal, on the basis of Biblical data, the whole richness of the truth about God and man. Namely: the truth that portrays God in the most fascinating and enticing mystery of His mercy; the truth that shows man as so valuable that in order to save him, the Father of all mercy sent His Only Begotten Son – who is the Father’s mercy personified and who gave His life on the cross; the truth about man, who through the work of creation and redemption has been made capable of becoming perfect after the likeness of the Merciful Christ.

In the theological and spiritual literature of the last fifty years, the issue of mercy has quite often been addressed from various aspects beginning from the theological, liturgical and pastoral and ending with the ecumenical and eschatological. It suffices, for example, to name a few dense works, such as *Tajemnica miłosierdzia Bożego /The Mystery*

of *Divine Mercy*/ by Father Jacek Woroniecki (Kraków 1948), *Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego /God's Mercy in His Works/* in 4 volumes, by Rev. M. Sopoćko (vol. 1, London 1958, vol. 2, Paris 1961, vol. 3, Paris 1962, vol. 4, Paris 1967), *Ewangelia miłosierdzia /The Gospel of Mercy/*, ed. W. Granat (Poznań-Warsaw 1970), *Bo Jego miłosierdzie na wieki (Powołanie człowieka t. 2) /For His Mercy is Forever/* (Man's Vocation, vol. 2) ed. T. Bielski (Poznań-Warsaw 1972), *Dives in Misericordia. Tekst i komentarz /Dives in Misericordia. Text and Commentary/*, ed. S. Grzybek and M. Jaworski (Kraków 1981), *Miłosierdzie Boże. Zasadnicze rysy nabożeństwa do miłosierdzia Bożego /Divine Mercy. Fundamental Features of the Devotion to Divine Mercy/* by I. Różycki (Kraków 1982), *Dives in Misericordia. Tekst i komentarze /Dives in Misericordia. Text and Commentaries/* by S. Nagy (Lublin 1983), *Miłość miłosierna /Merciful Love/* ed. by J. Krucina (Wrocław 1985), *Wobec tajemnicy Bożego miłosierdzia /Confronted with the Mystery of Divine Mercy/* ed. by L. Balter (Poznań 1991), *Miłosierdzie Boże w Starym Testamencie /Divine Mercy in the Old Testament/* by S. Tułodziecki (Poznań 1992), *Biblijny traktat o miłosierdziu /A Biblical Treatise on God's Mercy/* by K. Romaniuk (Ząbki 1994), *W miłosierdziu miary nie masz /There Is No Measure in Mercy/* by L. Grygiel (Kielce 197), *Miłosierdzie Boże z pokolenia na pokolenie /God's Mercy From Generation to Generation/* by R. Ukleja (Wrocław 1997), *Miłosierdzie jako istotny element duchowości chrześcijańskiej /Mercy As An Important Element of Christian Spirituality/* by H. Wejman (Szczecin 1997), *Sekretarka miłosierdzia Bożego błogosławiona Siostra*

Faustyna Kowalska /Blessed Sister Faustina Kowalska – Secretary of God’s Mercy/ by W. Kluza (Katowice 1997), *Życie mistyczne błogosławionej Faustyny Kowalskiej /The Mystical Life of Blessed Sister Faustina Kowalska/* by S. Urbański (Warsaw 1997), *Zbawcza wartość duchowości miłosierdzia /The Salvific Value of the Spirituality of Mercy/* by H. Wejman (Poznań 1999), *Doświadczenie Boga w tajemnicy Jego miłosierdzia u bł. Siostry Faustyny Kowalskiej /Blessed Sister Faustina Kowalska and Her Experience of God in the Mystery of His Mercy/* by J. Machniak (Kraków 1999), *Bóg jest miłością. Misterium Ojcostwa Boga /God is Love. The Mystery of God’s Fatherhood/* by E. Ozorowski (Częstochowa 1999), *Poznanie Boga Ojca. Szkice z teologii biblijnej /Getting to Know God the Father. Reflections on Biblical Theology/*, vol. 1, J. Kudasiewicz (Kielce 2000), *Drogi i bezdroża miłosierdzia /Roads and Meanders of Mercy/* by J. Tischner (Kraków 2001), *Boża tajemnica miłosierdzia. Święta Faustyna i nabożeństwo do Miłosierdzia Bożego /The Divine Mystery of Mercy. Saint Faustina and the Devotion to God’s Mercy/* by A. Witko (Kraków 2002), *Misterium Bożego miłosierdzia w życiu i posłudze nadzwyczajnego szafarza Komunii świętej /The Mystery of Divine Mercy in the Life and Ministry of an Extraordinary Dispenser of the Holy Communion/* by S. Ropiak (Olsztyn 2003), *Oblicza miłosierdzia. Historyczne uwarunkowania rozwoju doktryny o miłosierdziu. Studium dzieł Tertuliana i św. Cypriana /Faces of Mercy. Historical Conditionings of the Development of the Doctrine of Mercy. A Study of the Works of Tertullian and St. Cyprian/* by L. Mateja (Kraków 2003), *Piękno i bogactwo miłosierdzia /*

The Beauty and Wealth of Mercy/ ed. by the Sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy (Kraków 2004).

Hitherto, however, no comprehensive study of biblical themes that touch on the mystery of Divine Mercy, which should [really] determine the style of man's merciful attitude, has ever been undertaken. And so, this is precisely the essential topic of this publication. It includes subjects from the Biblical Cycle of the third year Formation Program of the *Faustinum Association* of the Apostles of Divine Mercy. The focal point of this work is an attempt to answer foundational questions: How does man's attitude of mercy acquire its specific shape and expression? In other words, on what premise is the attitude of mercy based? In what does its essence consist? And what are the conditions that guarantee its development?

The basic sources used to answer the above questions was existing literature, which due to their abundance underwent a process of selection. The choice fell first of all on Biblical passages including its analysis. Vatican Council II documents and papal teaching came next as complementary sources. Quoted sources will be found clearly listed in the footnotes. When the quoted materials are from scripture, council documents and papal teaching, they will be cited within the main body of this present work using universally known abbreviations.

The goal and sources determine the method of study. What various authors have said on the topic of the nature of the merciful attitude of man is the point of departure of this analytical-synthetic reflection.

The structure of this study corresponds to the chronological sequence of the analyses undertaken. The first two chapters (1-2) present the premise for an attitude of mercy, which essentially is mercy experienced. In other words, it is that mercy which God shows man in the act of his creation and redemption by Jesus Christ. It is precisely the creative and redemptive act of God that explains man's ability to enter into a merciful dialogue with God and his neighbor. The following chapters (3-4) reveal the image of Mercy Incarnate, who is Jesus Christ. As He lives out mercy, for example, satisfying man's physical, intellectual and spiritual needs, not only does He make God visible in His mercy, but at the same time Jesus became for man the model of a merciful attitude.

All assessments and evaluation will be formulated and presented in the course of the analyses undertaken. Final results of this study, however, will be presented in the conclusion.

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS OF A DIALOGUE
WITH THE MERCIFUL GOD

God as a merciful Father was fully revealed by Jesus Christ. In this revelation, which He accomplished by His deeds and words, He addresses – as John Paul II puts it – *the people of God of the Old Covenant (...) [and their] experience of the mercy of God* (cf. DM 4). Therefore to unveil the face of the merciful Father, it is necessary to refer to the Old Testament history of Divine Mercy. The sphere of the previously mentioned reference (to the Old Testament) includes returning to the beginnings, that is, to the sources. These sources, in turn, bespeak of the merciful God's dialogue with all people and with each and every one individually. Hence, the scope of this reference to the beginnings encompasses God's mercy towards the people of the Old Testament world and their obligations towards Him and towards each other that flow from this relationship¹.

1 Cf. J. Homerski, *Dialog z Bogiem Miłosierdzia /Dialogue with the God of Mercy/, in: Dives in Misericordia. Tekst i komentarze /Dives in Misericordia. Text and Commentaries/*, (ed. S. Nagy), Lublin 1983, 57; M. Gillbert, *L'amore di Dio per la sua creatura*, in: *Parola Spirito e Vita* 10 (1984), 69-72.

1. God's Mercy Towards the People of the Old Testament

Contemplating the Old Testament word of God, it is hard not to notice that it constitutes a testimony to the mercy of God. Examples of His merciful activity can be seen in the history of the chosen people from the very beginning of their existence. It is precisely in this history that the inspired authors perceived indications of His mercy.

One such inspired author relates: *I have seen enough of the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I know their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow* (Ex. 3:7-8). The first sentence of the quoted text, on the one hand, exposes the motive that stands behind God's mercy, and on the other, underlines the people's attitude towards their own misery. The words: I have seen the miserable state of my people makes us surmise that God was not indifferent to the plight of His people, but that it was a matter of concern for Him to such an extent that it became, in a way, His own plight. This is borne out by the words: I know the way in which the Egyptians oppress them (Ex. 3:10). In the language of the Bible, to know something means to make it one's own². And thus not only did God take interest in the misery of the people, but it became the object

2 Cf. Rev. Leon-Dufour, *Znać /To Know/, in: Słownik Nowego Testamentu / Dictionary of the New Testament/, Poznań 1981, 703.*

of His compassion, that is, He felt their feelings³. However, it was not so much compassion that prompted Him to extend His mercy towards the people but His justice. It is this motive for God's mercy that the word *enough*, which in its essence encompasses the end of a certain situation, implies. In accordance with the account of the hagiographer – it was exactly for such mercy that the people had entreated, and God answered their prayers: *I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers.*

The same occurs in connection with the judges appointed in Israel: *When Yahweh appointed judges for them, Yahweh was with the judge and rescued them from the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived, for Yahweh felt pity for them as they groaned under the iron grip of their oppressors* (Jg 2:18). So God - as the hagiographer indicates - had compassion over the Israelites suffering in slavery, which expressed itself concretely in His raising up for them judges whose task was to sustain the spirit of freedom amongst the people.

Both examples, on the one hand, emphasize the gratuitous character of divine mercy, i.e. that it is granted to man

3 The inspired author renders this attitude of God's with the term *oiktirmon* - i.e. *compassionate or displaying sympathy*. This term, having its origin in the word *oiktos*, originally expressed a lament or sorrowful weeping over someone's misfortune or death, whereas in relation to God it expresses a delicate and friendly concern over the plight of the chosen nation, who have been plagued with the misfortunes of captivity. Cf. J. Kudasiewicz, *Miłosierdzie w ewangeliach* /*Mercy in the Gospels*/, in: *Dives in Misericordia. Tekst i komentarze* /*Dives in Misericordia. Texts and Commentaries*/, op.cit. 70; R. Bultmann, *Oiktirio*, in: *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (ed. G. Kittel), vol. V, Stuttgart 1965, 161-163.

by an act of His totally free and absolute decision but, on the other, point out that it is necessary that man desire it i.e. God is ready to grant the gift of mercy whenever man requests it of Him. We can infer from this that divine mercy is a manifestation of God's goodness being bestowed on man. Accordingly, man, a rational creature, should appreciate the value of this gift and consciously desire that it be granted to him⁴.

God accomplishes His assistance, which is undoubtedly a sign of His mercy, through Moses whom He calls to carry out this task. *I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt* (Ex. 3:10). It is of paramount significance that the call of Moses happens during the theophany in which God reveals His name (cf. Ex. 3:14). *But if they ask me what His name is – Moses asks God – what am I to tell them?...I AM has sent me to you – this is what you must say to the sons of Israel* (Ex. 3:13-14). God's act of disclosing His name to Moses is equivalent to His revealing Himself to him. It is so because a name identifies a person. Through the self-disclosure of His name, God asserts the fact of His presence, which abounds in goodness and thereby assures Moses that his mission would result successfully. Moses, on his part, should have trust in God and in this spirit undertake the mission he has been entrusted with. It is in this manner that God demonstrates His mercy, for

4 Cf. J. Homerski, *Miłosierdzie w księgach Starego Testamentu /Mercy in the Books of the Old Testament/, in: Miłosierdzie w postawie ludzkiej /Mercy in Man's Attitude/, Lublin 1989, 17.*

In today's world, on which the constant grip of violence and hatred leaves an imprint, man lives in fear and a sense that a dangerous threat is looming. He fears not just the outbreak of a nuclear conflict or a biological disaster. Above all he fears the great variety of manipulation techniques that may be used against himself by another man, who having a vast number of instruments of civilization at his disposal is in a position to limit his freedom, to make it impossible for him to declare his worldview or speak the truth and may even corrupt his conscience by stifling his sensitivity. Protecting himself against all these, he searches unceasingly for an escape from these dangers. At times he takes recourse to the law of interpersonal solidarity, at other times to the values of social justice. However, neither the one nor the other – as life's experience teaches – can guarantee him a sense of security. Therefore, neither of them can give him the assurance of inner peace. However, there is such a value – demonstrated by St. Faustina Kowalska in the previous century – that is able to heal all his fears and anxiety. It is divine mercy. *Humankind will not find peace* – she reminds us with the words of Christ spoken to her at one of His revelations – *until it turns to My mercy with trust* (Diary 300).



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