

MAŁGORZATA PABIS, *Spotkaliśmy Świętych. Współcześni męczennicy Chrystusa: bł. o. Zbigniew Strzałkowski OFM Conv. i bł. o. Michał Tomaszek OFM Conv.* [We Met the Saints: Contemporary Martyrs of Christ: Bl. Fr. Zbigniew Strzałkowski, OFM Conv and Bl. Fr. Michał Tomaszek OFM Conv], Cracow: RAFAEL Publishing House 2016, pp. 168.

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“The Church of the first millennium was born of the blood of the martyrs: “Sanguis martyrum – semen christianorum” [...] At the end of the second millennium, the Church has once again become a Church of martyrs. The persecutions of believers – priests, Religious and laity – has caused a great sowing of martyrdom in different parts of the world. [...] This witness must not be forgotten. [...] In our own century the martyrs have returned, many of them nameless, “unknown soldiers” as it were of God’s great cause.”<sup>1</sup> These words, coming from the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, reveal that each period of history brings new witnesses – martyrs who, bearing courageous witness to their faith, sacrifice their lives so that the faith of fellow believers can be further strengthened in their shed blood. From the very beginning of Christianity, people who gave their lives for faith in God and in defense of basic values were treated as the most faithful witnesses of religious convictions. Therefore, they have been a pillar of the Church for centuries as a model of unbounded devotion and trust in Jesus. Martyrdom is of great importance in perpetuating attitudes, cultural and religious patterns.

The files of the martyrs of the first centuries bear witness to peace and trust in God when the death sentence was considered to be a special grace of quick union with Christ. During twenty-one centuries of Christianity there were many saints and blessed who have been thankful to God for the gift of martyrdom. Without going back to antiquity, one can see that Jesus’ words: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28) are still valid. Dramatic persecution of the followers of Christ is still ongoing, and Christians continue to give their lives for faith.

On August 9, 1991, in northern Peru, two Polish Franciscan missionaries: Father Michał Tomaszek and Father Zbigniew Strzałkowski were brutally murdered by communist militias called the “Shining Path” (Sendero Luminoso). Their martyrdom became a testimony of bravery and total devotion to God, which was the reason for their beatification held on 5 December 2015. Many books about these “Peruvian martyrs”<sup>2</sup> have been published in recent years. However, the book *Spotkaliśmy Świętych. Współcześni męczennicy Chrystusa: bł. o. Zbigniew Strzałkowski OFM Conv. i bł. o. Michał Tomaszek OFM Conv.* [We met Saints. Contemporary Martyrs of Christ: Blessed Father Zbigniew Strzałkowski OFM Conv. and Blessed Father Michał Tomaszek, OFM Conv.] by Małgorzata Pabis appears to be the only novelty in this field. The well-known author, publishing articles and books on religious topics,<sup>3</sup> published a record of the memories of people

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 37.

<sup>2</sup> Among others: W. BAR, *Na krwawym szlaku*, Lublin 1999; W. BAR, *Studzy Boży Zbigniew Strzałkowski i Michał Tomaszek*, Cracow 2001; W. BAR, *Dialogi z Męczennikami*, Kraków 2011; Z. GOGOLA, *W peruwiańskie Andy z pokojem i dobrem*, Cracow 2001; J. BAR, J. WYSOCZAŃSKI, *Znak miłości w Peru. O życiu dwóch misjonarzy franciszkańskich i ich męczeństwie*, Cracow 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Małgorzata Pabis is the author of books such as: *Cuda świętej Rity patronki w sprawach najtrudniejszych* (Cracow 2012); *Maryja płacze na Ukrainie* (Cracow 2012); *Myrna Nazzour. Styg-*

who knew Father Zbigniew and Father Michał and witnessed their sanctity, rather than a biography of the “new” martyrs. This book was also enriched by their correspondence with the family and the superiors of the Order.

The reviewed publication is not divided into parts. However, twelve chapters can be distinguished (they are not numbered), two of which: *Współbracia* [Confreres] (pp. 88-113) and *Owoce życia* [Fruits of Life] (pp. 114-125), are divided into parts. On the front cover of the book, in addition to the full title, there is a picture of the Blessed. On the back cover of the book, the reader can find brief information about the martyrs and the book's features. The book includes the “title page” (pp. 1, 3), the “editorial foot” (page 4) and the quote from the letter of Father Michał Tomaszek (p. 5), followed by an appropriate *Introduction* (pp. 7-9). Małgorzata Pabis goes back to the beginning of August 1991, when the missionaries from the Cracow Province of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual (Franciscans) were killed in the town of Pariacoto in Peru. She emphasizes her tribute to the murdered Franciscans: “The years passed, and I tried to recall the figures of Polish martyrs in Peru every year, at least on the anniversary of their death” (p. 8). As we can see, the author was familiar with the history of the blessed when writing the book. Pabis described its features as follows: “This publication is not a biography of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew. [...] This book is not a complete set of testimonies, but a subjective choice. I tried to talk to people who were somehow close to them. I hope that everyone who reads this will look at the words of Christ from a different perspective: «Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell» (Matthew 10:28). Thus, the selection of testimonies and the author's objective were presented in a very clear way at the very beginning.

Chapter I, *Stąd wyszli* [Here's Where They Came From] (pp. 10-48), presents the memories of the blessed's families and the environment in which they were raised. The names of the family members were mentioned here. The text is rather concise. The first part of the chapter describes the figure of Father Michał Tomaszek (pp. 10-26), who was born and raised in Łękawica near Żywiec. His sister, whose testimony is presented, is still living in his family home. The reader can become acquainted with Father Michał's family background, his early years and the reasons of his decision to embrace the religious life. There is no lack of very personal testimonies that reveal the enormous suffering of Father Michał's family caused by his death, but also their great joy of his beatification. The author quotes from his letters to the family, sent from the seminary, during the first years of his priestly and religious ministry, and from the missionary institution (pp. 20-26). The second part of the chapter contains memories about Father Zbigniew Strzałkowski. To get the family testimonies, and above all, the testimony of Franciszka, Father Zbigniew's mother, Pabis went to his home town Zawada near Tarnów. Here his religious life is presented. The reader can get to know the personal drama of his mother, who mourned the death of her son. However, similarly to Marianna Popieluszko, mother of Blessed Father Jerzy Popieluszko, Franciszka Strzałkowska forgave the assassins of her son. The account of the sister and brother of Father Zbigniew Strzałkowski shows the zealous faith of the whole family, great piety of the parents and Christian upbringing of children, which resulted in a “great testimony” of their son. The vision of Father Zbigniew's family reveals the Marian spirituality of the region and the family itself. Again, seventeen fragments of Father Zbigniew's letters to his family were included in this part of the text (pp. 34-48). Between the first and the second chapter, we can find the so-called a colorful inserted data sheet (pp. 1-16), containing thirty-one photographs of life, priestly and missionary ministry, funeral, places of life and cult of Blessed Father Michał and Blessed Father

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*matyczka z Syrii, która spotkała Maryję* (Cracow 2015); *Jezu, ufam Tobie! Świadectwa* (Cracow 2015); *Żywy różaniec* (Cracow 2013); *Tajemnica szczęścia i św. Brygida Szwedzka* (Cracow 2013).

Zbigniew. Some photos are unique because they come from private family archives and have been made available to the readers of the book.

Chapter II, *Nasi Ojcowie byli dobrzy* [Our Fathers Were Good] (pp. 49-58), is a record in the form of an interview conducted by Pabis with Father Jarosław Wysoczański, the superior of fathers Michał and Zbigniew at the Franciscan unit in Pariacoto. Father Jarosław Wysoczański presents the then political situation that resulted in the formation of communist fighters, responsible for murdering Fathers Michał and Zbigniew. The title of the chapter is a quote by Father Jarosław. This is the testimony of common remembrance of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew' goodness and devotion (p. 54). Here, we can find a very personal reflection of Father Wysoczański, a longtime missionary responsible for missionary animation in the Franciscan order, on the sanctity of Father Michał and Father Zbigniew. Their attitude shows us that "our holiness is attained here and now, and in specific human relationships, focusing on those whom the Lord loves" (p. 55). The words of Father Jarosław reveal the feelings and emotions of the confreres of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew associated with the death of the blessed. This account is also a personal testimony of Father Jarosław on the sanctity and constant intercession of the "Franciscan missionaries."

Chapter III, *Pierwsze godziny* [First Hours] (pp. 59-69), is a record of the tragic memories of Father Szymon Chapiński. He was the only Franciscan to reach the hospital, where the bodies of Father Michał and Father Zbigniew were transported. He participated in their funeral. Chapter IV, *Przyjaciel* [Friend] (pp. 70-87), presents an account given by a friend of Blessed Father Michał, Father Ryszard Jarmuż (pp. 70-83). His relation is a description of Father Michał's life from the perspective of a colleague who was a part of his everyday life. Father Jarmuż emphasized the Marian piety of Father Michał. During the seminary years, he was responsible for the Immaculate Chapel and spread the Marian cult in a specific way. Furthermore, this chapter presents a testimony of Father Radosław Kramarski, a longtime superior from the Franciscan monastery in Rychwałd (pp. 83-87). Father Michał spent a lot of time there, and when he left for Peru, the local monks were given the opportunity to meet his family. This account is unique because it was dedicated to the mother of Father Michał. Mrs. Mieczysława Barbara Tomaszek was remembered as a simple, noble woman, dedicated, very spiritual and zealous, "with a clear Marian feature of spirituality" (p. 85), which Michał inherited.

Chapter V, *Współbracia* [Confreres] (pp. 88-113), was divided into five sections, with titles. The whole was preceded by a record of an account by Andrzej Zajac, rector of the Cracow Province of the Friars Minor Conventual. Dedication of Blessed Father Michał and Blessed Father Zbigniew will light up the hearts of young men preparing for priesthood. As the Rector claims, the example of "Cracow's Franciscans" shows that despite focusing on human limitations, "shortcomings, ultimately the point is not to fail in the most important moment of life, following the path our martyrs" (p. 89). The first section, *Są mi potrzebni* [I Need Them] (pp. 90-102), is an account given by Father Stanisław Glista, an oasis moderator who knew Fathers Michał and Zbigniew personally since the monastic novitiate. This section is divided into the following sub-chapters: *Michał* (pp. 90-93), *Zbyszek* (pp. 93-94), on the clerical period and various forms of seminary engagement of both fathers; *Pozostali* [Others] (pp. 94-95), on the circumstances of their murder and Father Glista's reaction to this message; and *Blagostawieni* [Blessed] (pp. 95-97), on the mystery of the "communion of saints."

The last subsection *Święci koledzy* [The Saint Colleagues] (pp. 97-102) is an attempt to present "the ordinariness of the life of the blessed." Father Stanisław shows the "fruits" of the martyrdom of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew. Shortly after their murder, the number of local callings in Peru increased, including the religious callings, and the mission has been experiencing heavy growth. The section *Na szlaku drogi krzyżowej* [On the Way of the Cross] (pp. 103-105) is a testimony of Father Stanisław Jaromim, who knew Father Zbigniew, as they both were members of the St. Francesco of Assisi Ecological Movement (REFA), founded during the seminary for-

mation the Blesseds. Father Zbigniew was deeply involved in the movement. The third section, *Kto się nimi zaopiekuje?* [Who Will Look After Them?] (pp. 105-109), is an interview with Father Piotr Kycia, who worked in the Secretariat for the Missions and knew Fathers Michał and Zbigniew. As described by Father Piotr, Father Michał worked mainly in the parish priesthood of children, while Father Zbigniew worked with the older youth and served the sick. The section *Patron* [Patron] (pp. 109-111) is an account given by Father Zbigniew Świerczek who studied with both fathers. According to him, they were “people of words, people who took seriously their religious life, Franciscans, who really wanted to know the ideal of St. Francis of Assisi, to live in accordance with it and to be those who preached the message of St. Francis” (p. 109). The last section, *Katecheta* [Catechist] (pp. 111-113), is the testimony of Father Jan Maria Szewek, whose catechist and deputy director in the Lower Franciscan Seminary in Legnica was Father Zbigniew. Father Zbigniew was a very demanding and just man who gained great authority among his charges. To show Father Zbigniew’s great involvement in the matters of the minor seminary, Pabis quotes another fragment of his letter to the family (pp. 112-113).

Chapter VI, *Owoce życia* [Fruits of Life] (pp. 114-125), comprises five sections. The section *Poszedł za ich przykładem* [He Followed Their Example] (pp. 114-117) is a testimony of the calling of Father Dariusz Mazurek, a Franciscan missionary working in Latin America. As he testifies, he recognized his life path as he found out about the martyrdom of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew. The next section, *Ojczulkowie* [Fathers] (pp. 118-120), in the form of an interview with Father Jacek Lisowski, a Franciscan working in Peru, presents the cult of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew and the current socio-political situation in Pariacoto. The section *Męczennicy na początku drogi* [Martyrs at the Beginning of their Path] (pp. 121-123) presents a testimony of Father Luis Antonio Meso Vocanegr, whose decision to join the convent of Conventual Franciscans was a result of the martyrdom of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew. The fourth section, *Powołany z Ukrainy* [Priest from Ukraine] (pp. 123-124), corresponds with the third section, as the author presents the witness of the calling of Father Edward Kawa. The last section of the chapter, *Znak* [Sign] (pp. 124-125), is an account given by Father Jacek Olszak from the diocese of Tarnów, who works in Peru. He says that the figures of the blesseds are more and more known in Peru and South America, and Pariacoto has been turned into a tourist destination.

Chapter VII, *Z księgi cudów i łask w Pariacoto* [The Book of Miracles and Graces in Pariacoto] (pp. 126-129), includes the testimonies from a memorial book in the parish church in Pariacoto. These are eleven notes of the faithful, who received the Lord’s graces thanks to the intercession of Blesseds. Chapter VII, *Oczyrna kobiet* [Through the Eyes of Women] (pp. 130-135), presents the reports of Elżbieta Szałańska (pp. 130-131), Agnieszka (pp. 131-132), Elza from Cracow (pp. 132-133), and Emilia Słabońska (pp. 134-135). Some of them knew Fathers Michał and Zbigniew personally, so their testimonies refer to the meetings with the blesseds. Other descriptions refer to the fascination with the life of “Peruvian martyrs” and their intercession with God.

Chapter VIII, *Tak widzą ich dzieci i młodzież* [That Is How They Were Perceived by the Children and Youth] (pp. 136-156), is an analysis of the mystery of life, martyrdom and sanctity of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew seen through the eyes of schoolchildren. While gaining the materials, the author was helped by Lucyna Rapała, the sister of the Marinonii Family, who served as a catechist in Cracow. Sister Lucyna knew the blesseds personally, so her testimony concerned their holy life manifested in openness to another human being and a selfless view of the world. By their life and love for God and others, “they connected continents to show that it was inappropriate and impossible to be silent for those who cried for God, freedom and truth.” (p. 137). In the school year 2015/2016, Sister Lucyna conducted many catechesis introducing the figures of the blesseds. The effects of her work in the form of short testimonies of children and youth, were included in this part of the book. The statements of students from the Primary School No.

10 and the Secondary School No. 1 in Cracow regarding the life, activity and martyrdom of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew were presented in the following sections: “4<sup>th</sup> Grade, elementary school”<sup>4</sup> (pp. 138-141), “5<sup>th</sup> Grade, elementary school”<sup>5</sup> (pp. 141-144), “6<sup>th</sup> Grade, elementary school”<sup>6</sup> (pp. 144-149), “7<sup>th</sup> Grade, junior high school”<sup>7</sup> (pp. 149-152), “8<sup>th</sup> Grade, junior high school”<sup>8</sup> (pp. 152-155), “9<sup>th</sup> Grade, junior high school”<sup>9</sup> (pp. 155-156).

As it is difficult to comment on a book that is a collection of testimonies, Chapter X, *Zamiast zakończenia* [Instead of Conclusion] (pp. 157-161), is a record of an interview with the Franciscan Provincial Father Jarosław Zachariasz. This conversation summarizes the book. Moreover, it is re-entering the way of the Cross, where the blessed’s family, friends, religion, death and sanctity are the stations of the Cross. According to Father Zachariasz, the lives of the blessed’s are an occasion for a modern man to reflect on “and perhaps even understand in a way the mystery of the communion of saints” (p. 160). The meetings with people contemporary to the “Peruvian martyrs” and their testimonies make us realize how amazing the mystery of holiness is. They are an opportunity to convince the reader that holiness is available for everyone.

In Chapter XI, *Podziękowania* [Acknowledgments] (p. 162), the author expresses her gratitude to those who contributed to the publication. Chapter XII, *Modlitwy i pieśni* [Prayers and Songs] (pp. 163-165), is a spiritual element of the book, as it includes prayers to the “Franciscan martyrs.” The book ends with a very useful *Bibliography* (p. 166) and *Contents* (p. 167). A special addition to the book is a CD / MP3 with a recording of songs devoted to the sacrifice of “Peruvian missionaries” performed by the “Borromeo” choir, which is a parish choir at the St. Karol Boromeusz Church in Wrocław. The supplement also includes a recording of letters written by Fathers Zbigniew and Michał, read by Jadwiga Skupnik.

The message of Blessed Fathers Michał Tomaszek and Zbigniew Strzałkowski, which is fairly presented in the reviewed book, is impressive. The cult of the Blessed’s has become very vivid and is constantly expanding. However, there are some drawbacks in the book that are extrinsic to the essence of the topic and the objective of the author. These are rather side motifs, or details. On page 68 in footnote 29 there is no date of access to the specified website. On pages 121-123, in the quotation by Father Luis Antonio Meso Vocanegr, there is no footnote that would refer to the source. As noted by Małgorzata Pabis, the testimony of Father Luis came from the “archive” collections (p. 121), so it would be valuable to put an exact footnote, as it is in other parts of the book. The relation starting from page 131 is unknown in some way, because there is no full name of its author (the author appears under the name: “Ms. Agnieszka” (p. 131)). If the author wanted to remain anonymous, it would be worth mentioning in the book, because possibly getting to the source of this testimony could be difficult. Again, there is no footnote. The same refers to the testimony of “Ms. Eliza from Cracow” (p. 133). Undoubtedly, the book has more advantages. These are: good and extensive research skills of the author, which are clearly visible; a lot of own, thoughtful conclusions; a compact composition and, above all, reaching the testimonies of lesser-known people who personally knew the blessed’s. Likewise, excerpts from the letters of Fathers Michał and Zbigniew are unique, because in other publications we do not find them, and here they prove the significance of the book and confirm its originality. The book is of special value, because the photographs attached let the reader get to know people, places and

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<sup>4</sup> 11 relations.

<sup>5</sup> 22 relations.

<sup>6</sup> 24 relations.

<sup>7</sup> 12 relations.

<sup>8</sup> 8 relations.

<sup>9</sup> 7 relations.

events even better. It should be stated with full certainty that Małgorzata Pabis achieved the objective she set herself in the *Introduction* (pp. 7-9) of the book.

To sum up, it should be noted that the book *Spotkaliśmy Świętych. Współcześni męczennicy Chrystusa: bł. o. Zbigniew Strzałkowski OFMConv. i bł. o. Michał Tomaszek OFM Conv.* by Małgorzata Pabis is an example of a good working technique and the ability to conduct research for sources, which was possible thanks to hard work. The book is a very good analysis. It has an attractive graphic design. The richness of its content encourages us to reflect on the lives of Blessed Father Zbigniew Strzałkowski and Blessed Father Michał Tomaszek. The book is worth recommending, because it helps to understand that personal holiness of a man is a result of reliable fulfillment of the duties of “ordinary” everyday life. The “Peruvian martyrs” benefited from the beauty of the created world. They performed their tasks as best they could. They received the holy sacraments, listened to the word of God, and shared it. Actually, they did nothing other than what is available to everyone. This made them mature enough to make the decisions, which resulted in their martyrdom and participation in the glory of heaven, and their blood became the seed of faith in Peru and worldwide.

*Grzegorz Kamil Szczecina*

*Institute of Church History and Patrology of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin*

*email: grzeszczecina@interia.pl*



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