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THE ABBESS MAGDALENA MORTĘSKA
– HER LIFE AND REFORMIST INITIATIVES AIMED
AT FEMALE EDUCATION
IN THE POST-TRIDENTINE ERA

Abstract. The paper presents a model of a medieval female education, which purpose was to prepare girls to the role of a wife and of a mother. Magdalena Mortęska, who was also educated in line with this model, lost her mother just as a few years old girl, and she was entrusted by her father under the tutelage of her aunt. This practice was very common and peculiar to the standards of that time. Magdalena's aunt raised her in a severe discipline, teaching her, in the first instance, how to be devout, diligent, resourceful and thrifty person, and she prepared her to the role of a housewife and of a mother. However, some of these lessons turned out to be fatal for her, since in her early age she lost her right eye while she was cooking a meal with kitchen servants. Magdalena did not wish to be a married woman, on the contrary, she wanted to join the Benedictine nunnery of Chełmno, and thereby she refused the will of her father. Thanks to her stubbornness and strong faith, she made her convent vows on the 4th of June, 1579, and a week later she became the abbess of the Benedictine convent of Chełmno. As the abbess she initiated the fundamental reform, which purpose was the re-reading and enforcing of the original monastic rules. The Reform of the convent of Chełmno was fundamental and all the solutions were prepared by the new generation of nuns, since the old generation had ceased. The interpretation of the Rule, worked out through many years of experiences, became the law, which has been practiced by its own legislators. With this interpretation the preservation of the identity of the convent was very significant. The Renaissance era, in which Magdalena Mortęska lived and acted, saw the new demand to spread education and culture among women. Conscious of that, the abbess took the challenge thereby the reformed congregation was provided the opportunity to educate females. Magdalena Mortęska extended this activity upon all emerging foundations, and moreover, her labor was innovative to that time. Her ef-

forts increased the number of centers associating female youth, and thanks to her pro-educational activity, she became the pioneer of females' development.

Key words: Magdalena Mortęska; convent education; female education; the post-Tridentine Monastic Reform; education; The Benedictine nuns of the Reform.

Reverting to the beginnings of the intellectual education of female youth in Poland, one cannot omit the Abbess of the Benedictine Convent of Chełmno, whose name was Magdalena Mortęska. Her merits and significance in Poland of the post-Tridentine era were enormous. The Abbess has reformed the convent congregation, thus the education of female youth of different social status became the essential function of convents, and she has provided wider access to learning to the young generation of females at the same time. It is worth noting that in Poland of the Medieval Era education of girls regarded three following areas: household, court and convent. Household education involved all the girls, irrespective of their social status as the family played the essential role in preparing girls for an adult life accordingly to the duties assigned to a female. It was the mother who took care after her children – both sons and daughters – nevertheless, when a son finished seventh year of age, he came under the tutelage of his father, while girls remained under the care of their mothers¹.

Girls of the lower social status were primarily accustomed to housekeeping and household works, albeit the education did not involve intellectual growth. Mothers acquainted their daughters with practices, prayers, housekeeping, and sometimes with catechetical issues, however, the intellectual background was marginalized. According to the opinion of Andrzej Glaber:

Men settled these things in such a way and they carefully prevent petticoats from learning letters and reading books, which is associated with proficiency and improvement of intellect – they do so, because of jealousy – as they fear to lose attention and to be surpassed by petticoats in intellect; striving to know a lot, they forbid petticoats to read wise letters, except prayers or litanies².

¹ D. ŻOŁĄDŹ-STRZELCZYK, *Dziecko w dawnej Polsce*, Poznań 2006, pp. 195-214; comp. B. JANOWSKA, *Wychowanie dziewcząt w średniowiecznej Polsce*, [in:] *Nauczanie w dawnych wiekach. Edukacja w średniowieczu i u progu ery nowożytnej: Polska na tle Europy*, ed. W. Iwańczak, K. Bracha, Kielce 1997, pp. 199-204.

² See. ANDRZEJ Z KOBYLINA [GLABER], *Gadki o skłonności członków człowieczych z Arys-totelesa i też inszych mędrców wybrane*, Kraków 1893, pp. 3-5: „Mężowie tak ustawili i pilno tego strzegą, aby białogłowy pisma się nie uczyły i ksiąg żadnych co się tyczy biegłości a wy-

Children of magnates were raised by governesses that usually came from abroad, while children of nobles were educated by a housekeeper, who taught them reading and sometimes writing in Polish, singing, embroidering or playing a musical instrument. Less wealthy noblemen and middle class members did not have an opportunity to educate their daughters due to the lack of the proper place³.

Monasteries were the first to meet the demand for education. Polish monastic schools, also the female ones, appeared in the second half of the twelfth century and their intensive development falls on the age later. Due to the monastic pro-social activity many monasteries were founded by the Dukes of the Piast dynasty; by their wives, daughters, duchesses and princesses, very view of which became nuns or held the highest convent positions⁴. Entrusting a girl to a nunnery did not determinate her fate at all. Of course some females – before their birth or shortly after – were entrusted to the convent by their parents. As very young girls they were put into a nunnery, dressed in a habit and introduced to the convent life⁵. After few years in a nunnery some of them decided to remain for various reasons: they feared of the outside world, which seemed unknown to them; they discovered a religious vocation or decided to respect the parental will. There were also teenage maidens who learned in the convent school, intending to become a nun. Other girls returned to the secular life after they finished the education and reached the age appropriate to conclude a marriage. It was consistent with the customs, since contemporary women had only two possibilities – to contract a marriage or to join a nunnery, and any other prospects for the future were not their privilege in that time⁶.

Convent schoolgirls lived next to nuns and the education of both was similar. The main emphasis was laid down on religious and moral education as well as on preparing a girl to the convent or to the secular life. Intellectual education was usually ignored as not necessary, which resulted from the common opinion whereby intellectual abilities of women were inferior to those of men. It was also associated with the different function assigned to females,

ćwiczenia rozumu nie czytały – to czynią z niejakiej zazdrości – przeto oni boją się swej sławy utracić aby białogłowy rozumem ich ni przechodziły, chcąc wiele umieć, bronią im czytania pisma głębokiego, chyba modlitw a paciorków”.

³ S. KOT, *Historia wychowania*, vol. I, Warszawa 1994, pp. 285-287.

⁴ J. KŁOCZOWSKI, *Wspólnoty zakonne w średniowiecznej Polsce*, Lublin 2010, pp. 187-190.

⁵ M. BORKOWSKA, *Wypadki oblacji po Soborze Trydenckim*, „Nasza Przeszłość” 103 (2005), p. 171.

⁶ M. BOGUĆKA, *Białogłowa w dawnej Polsce*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 153 and next.

which was reduced to bearing and upbringing of children. Therefore, female convent schools developed only those skills, which were useful to the role of an old-Polish wife and of a mother⁷. By the mid-sixteenth century education of young females remained the domain of convents and included the narrow group of girls deriving from the highest and the wealthiest social elites. Nunneries continued educational activity as it provided funds for their maintenance and ensured an inflow of new vocations. After the outbreak of the Reformation, the pro-Catholic education and the opportunity to strengthen the Catholic ideas among young girls became the additional value of the educational activities. In the second half of the sixteenth century the deepening crisis of the Catholic Church, embracing secular clergy and monasteries, as well as the threat of growing Reformation enforced the internal re-enactment of the Church. The Benedictine nuns of Chełmno also found themselves in a difficult situation. The chronicle of the convent records:

Afterwards, when the wretched heresies multiplied and donations ceased, they “nuns” began to weaken and fade, indulging in laziness; they turned to their properties, neglecting the common good; they did not make any efforts to save those “for the convent”; they did not admit to the convent anyone befitting. And finally, it came to such a misery, that only two nuns remained in the convent [...] One of those old-time and devout nuns left the prophecy, before she died: Leave this nunnery in a great misery, for it will rise again from the three assembled convents. And this prophecy was fulfilled: [...] Afterwards, God woke up Magdalena Mortęska from the village of Mortęgi⁸.

Magdalena Mortęska was born in 1554 in the village of Pokrzywno. She was the youngest child of Melchior Mortęski, a chamberlain of Chełmno, and of Elżbieta Kostrzanka from Sztemberk, who was a sister of the later bishop of

⁷ M. BORKOWSKA, *Życie codzienne polskich klasztorów żeńskich w XVII-XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 14-17; comp. EADEM, *Panny siostry w roli instytucji usługowej. Czego oczekiwało społeczeństwo od klasztoru żeńskiego w XVII i XVIII wieku*, [in:] *Klasztor w społeczeństwie średniowiecznym i nowożytnym*, ed. M. Derwich i A. Pobóg-Lenartowicz, Opole-Wrocław 1996, pp. 55-63.

⁸ See *Kronika benedyktynek chełmińskich*, Pelplin 1937, pp. 4-5: „Potem, gdy nieszczęsne herezje się rozmnożyły i jałmużna ustawała, słabiec i niszczyć poczęły, w próżnowanie się wdawszy, do prywat się swych udały, o pospolite dobro nic nie dbając, starania żadnego nie czyniły, aby te między sobą zatrzymały, do zakonu nikogo sposobnego przyjmować nie chciały. I przyszło za czasem do takiego spustoszenia, że tylko 2 panny zakonne zostały [...] Jedna panna z onych dawnych i starych panien bardzo świątobliwego żywota, umierając, to proctwo zostawiła: Spustoszenie spustoszeniem wielkim ten zakon, ale potem powstanie ze trzech zakonów zgromadzonych. Co się takim sposobem skutecznie wypełniło: [...] Za tym zbudził Pan Bóg pannę Magdalenę z Mortąg Mortęską”.

Chełmno, Piotr Kostka⁹. As a four-year-old girl, Magdalena lost her mother. Accordingly to the educational standards of that time, after death of Elżbieta, Mr. Mortęski sent his daughter on education outside the family home¹⁰. She was entrusted under the care of her aunt, Mrs. Wulkowska, a forewoman, while her two older sisters were sent to the Norbertine convent of Strzelno. Magdalena was raised in a strict discipline with emphasis on devotion, diligence, resourcefulness and thrift; and she was introduced to the role of a housewife and of a mother¹¹. This method of educating was usually implemented among children of noblemen, for the greatest importance was attached to propriety, moral principles, religious practice, customs and duties. Some parents ignored literacy to the extent that they even forbade their daughters intellectual education¹². The forewoman, Mrs. Wulkowska:

“she” taught the words of adoration to the Blessed Virgin Mary, bringing them back often; as this lady adores innocent little ones, particularly those, who sacrifice and give God their own virginity in their childhood¹³.

Moreover, she taught young Magdalena diligence which turned out to be disastrous for the little girl. While she was helping the service to prepare the meal, as “they were cooking in the kitchen veal feet for the guests, during a household feast”, she plucked her right eye out by accident¹⁴. At this time Magdalena wondered about joining the nunnery of Chełmno. When she was

⁹ F. JAROSZEWICZ, *Matka świętych Polska albo żywoty świętych błogosławionych, wielbionych, świątobliwych, pobożnych Polaków i Polek*, Kraków 1767, pp. 87-92; comp. K. GÓRSKI, *Mortęska Magdalena*, [in:] *Hagiografia polska. Słownik bio-hagiograficzny*, ed. R. Gustaw, vol. II, Poznań 1972, pp. 137-147; K. GÓRSKI, *Mortęska Magdalena*, [in:] *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XXII, no. 92, Wrocław 1977, pp. 6-8; *Mortęska Magdalena*, [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. XIII, Lublin 2010, pp. 316-317.

¹⁰ In case of mother's death, illness or inability, daughters were sent on education outside the family home to relatives or collaterals. Comp. A. SZYLAR, *Działalność wychowawczo-educacyjna żeńskich zgromadzeń zakonnych w Małopolsce w okresie potrydenckim do 1815 r.*, Kraków 2012, pp. 23-24.

¹¹ K. GÓRSKI, *Matka Mortęska*, Kraków 1971, pp. 10-11.

¹² The same was the case of Magdalena Mortęska, who was not permitted by her father to literacy, too. Comp. K. GÓRSKI, *M. Magdalena Mortęska i jej rola w reformie trydenckiej w Polsce*, „Nasza Przyszłość” 34 (1971), p. 133.

¹³ See S. BRZECHFFA, *Żywot świątobliwej Magdaleny Mortęskiej napisany przez ks. Stanisława Brzechffę TJ, a teraz na nowo do druku podany przez X. G. Pobłockiego*, Pelplin 1880, p. 8: „uczyla i nabożeństwa do najświętszej Matki Bożej, często jej na pamięć przywodząc, jako się ta panna w niewinnych dziatkach, a w tych osobliwie, które w dzieciństwie ofiarują i oddają Bogu panieństwo swoje, kocha”.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 10: „gdy w domowej zabawie nóżki cielece do kuchni dla gości gotowały”.

twelve or thirteen years old she made the secret vow of chastity. Her father decided to bring her home and while she was passing through Chełmno, she told her father's servant, that she would not die, until she is a nun. Her father wished to give Magdalena and his two older daughters in marriage, however she did not agree to¹⁵. To break her obstinance:

“he” took her often with him, albeit not of her own accord, to relatives and friends for weddings and puns; and he showed a great kindness towards the guests, who courted her favor; he treated them generously; quelling in her the Holy Spirit and vocation, and showing the other way of life to chose, he prepared her at great expense¹⁶.

These efforts proved to be ineffective as Magdalena still insisted on her intention to join the convent. In this situation Melchior Mortęski ordered her to stay at the manor in the village of Mortęgi. She lived there with the forewoman and six servants, and she was not allowed to meet with men. The forewoman had to prevent anyone from lending her books and she was also to prevent Magdalena from learning literacy. Both of these plans failed, because a financial clerk taught Magdalena letters and one of her father's courtiers brought her the postil of Jakub Wujek, purchased on a market¹⁷. Considering the determined will of his daughter, Melchior Mortęski allowed her to join the nunnery, however, not the one in the ruined town of Chełmno. Obviously he loved her very much, since he wanted to give her a generously equipped house in Toruń, so that she could have her own property, as it was in the case of the convents, in which the common life had ceased. If she had accepted his will, she would have lived a prosperous life in the unreformed nunnery, but she did not agree to. Instead of this, she decided to join the convent of Chełmno. The nunnery was completely ruined at that time. The city council and the local nobility deprived the convent of all goods and property, while the townspeople laid in wait for the opportune moment to take over the building. The last Benedictine nuns had already died and the nunnery remained under the tutelage of a Poor Clare named Zofia Izbieńska, and of a few other Poor Clare and

¹⁵ K. GÓRSKI, *M. Magdalena Mortęska i jej rola*, p. 132.

¹⁶ See S. BRZECHFFA, *Żywot świątobliwej Magdaleny Mortęskiej*, p. 15: „brał ją ze sobą często, acz poniewolnie do powinnych i przyjaciół swoich na wesela i krotchwile; ku temu gościom, którzy się o nią starali, w domu swoim chęć wielką pokazywał, częstował ich hojnie i pannę, tłumiąc w niej Ducha Bożego i drogę zamięłowania świata pokazując, kosztem wielkim stroił”.

¹⁷ K. GÓRSKI, *Od religijności do mistyki: zarys dziejów życia wewnętrznego w Polsce. Część pierwsza 966-1795*, Lublin 1962, p. 72.

Bernardine nuns, who were summoned on purpose by a bishop of Poznań. The nunnery was overwhelmed by poverty and its buildings were ruined¹⁸. During the Advent of 1578 Magdalena's father allowed her to attend the Rorate Masses in the neighboring town of Lubawa. He also let her stay for a few days at the nunnery of Chełmno¹⁹. Taking the opportunity, she came to the convent with two noble maidens and one maid-servant; and moreover, she was hiding before the householders that she intended to join the nunnery. Her female companions also decided to remain at the convent and finally all the maidens entered the nunnery on the 21st of December 1578. After discovering that his daughter did not come back home for Christmas, Melchior Mortęski burned with anger: he threatened the convent with revenge and disinherited his stubborn daughter. Her sister, whose married name was Weiherowa, tried to convince Magdalena to come back home, but when she saw her dressed in a habit: she "cried, moaned and mourned exceedingly for a few days; she could not eat or sleep". After long disputes and attempts to bring the daughter out from the convent, Melchior Mortęski finally accepted her will. Soon after, Magdalena demonstrated her resourcefulness and organizing skills. In order to improve the situation of the nunnery in Chełmno, she entered into the agreement with her brother named Ludwik: she decided to relinquish her maternal assets in his favor, in return for regaining her dresses and clothes, which she had sold to raise money for the current needs of the nunnery. Magdalena waived her annual payout of 300 florins to 100 florins; she adapted her velvet dresses for chasubles and sold her other belongings and jewelry. Afterwards she raised enough money to pay the debts of the convent and to purchase some food for the rest of the nuns²⁰. The existence in the convent of Chełmno was not effortless: deserted cubicles and cloisters with flying owls; famine and lack of all things; and moreover a presence of a severe sister named Izbieńska. However,

¹⁸ K. GÓRSKI, *Zarys dziejów duchowości w Polsce*, Kraków 1986, p. 97.

¹⁹ In „The Life of Magdalena”, written after Her Heath by S. Brzechffa, we find different explanation: „Przeto przed wigilią Narodzenia Pańskiego bacząc, że ojca o pozwolenie daremna rzecz była prosić, tylko z trzema służebnymi swemi czas upatrzywszy zmówiła się i w rzeczy, jakoby do Lubawy na roraty jechać miała, mimo wiadomość ojcowską wyjechawszy z domu, zaraz do Chełmna kazała i śpieszno z miejsca woźnica jechał, upominała”. See. S. Brzechffa, *Żywot świątobliwej Magdaleny Mortęskiej*, p. 23. The translation of the quote: “Thus, before the Christmas Eve, as she was convinced that it would be futile to ask her father for permission, she arranged together with her three servants at the place and time; she supposedly was to attend the Rorate Masses in the town of Lubawa; despite of the paternal message, she left the house and she immediately ordered to take the direction to Chełmno, and so the carter quickly moved on as she admonished him”.

²⁰ *Kronika benedyktynek chełmińskich*, pp. 7, 9.

Magdalena accepted all these humiliations willingly. Once, she found among some old remains the original Benedictine Rule written in German; and also the Rule of the former nuns, decorated with sword crest; and the sackcloth – all these things she kept later as relics. During the novitiate she visited her father with a view to convince him that her decision was irrevocable²¹. On the 4th of June 1579, she took the convent vows and a week later the bishop, Piotr Kostka, confirmed her as the Abbes of the convent of Chełmno²². The Abbess Magdalena Mortęska took an attempt to reform the convent of the Benedictine nuns. She analyzed and interpreted the original Rule of St Benedict, and with the support of the Jesuits she adapted the Rule to the provisions of the Council of Trent, accordingly to the conditions of that time. The convent chronicle records:

We considered some rules difficult to follow in these lands, for example, not to eat meat and not to use bedding or other things, for which dispensation we had to seek as we thought it would bring greater spiritual benefits²³.

She implemented into force the reinterpreted original rules and rejected the issues contrary to the spirit of the Tridentine Reform, and she tried to preserve the specificity, identity and spirituality of the convent at the same time²⁴. Together with other nuns she removed the first chapter of the Benedictine Rule “On four types of monks” as an outdated description of the monastic life. She rejected chapters 8-18 on choral prayer as it was no longer current due to the adoption of the Roman breviary. Chapter 56 “On abbot table” was also considered as impractical; chapter 62 “On the monastic priests” was modified into the declaration on chaplains and confessors as it became redundant in the convent. She also changed masculine into feminine within the entire text and she added the formative instruction – “The order of the novitiate”. The most problematic question was the enclosure. The reformers declared what follows:

We know that according to the Church provisions and due to the liability of femaleness, none of the nuns should not walk outside or set out from the convent. However sometimes urgent and sudden matters call in this kingdom, so the nuns must leave the enclo-

²¹ K. GÓRSKI, *Zarys dziejów duchowości*, p. 98.

²² *Kronika benedyktynek chełmińskich*, p. 8.

²³ As above, p. 81: „żeśmy w regule widziały rzeczy niektóre w tych krajach do zachowania trudne, jako nie jeść mięsa i pościółki nie używać i inne rzeczy, na cochyśmy się o dyspensacja starać musiały, upatrując w tym większe pożytki duchowe”.

²⁴ M. BORKOWSKA, *Zakony żeńskie w Polsce w epoce nowożytnej*, Lublin 2010, pp. 138-143.

sure due to legal matters; to supervise the property of the convent [...] or due to many other significant reasons²⁵.

The nuns of Chełmno were not able to obey the entire post-Tridentine law of the enclosure, so they consciously left it out. The nuns established the provisions accordingly to the Council whereby the question of the enclosure was put in the hands of bishops and so the declaration required the permission of the Ordinary Bishop to “leave the convent for rightful reasons”.

The declaration together with the reformed Rule was confirmed in 1605 by the bishop and in 1609 by the papal nuncio. In 1616 it was approved by the papal decree of Praise. However, we must underline that the Benedictine nuns of Chełmno did not intend to change the Rule; they wanted to obey it and this explains numerous explanations and practical applications²⁶. The renovated community of the convent became the congregation of Chełmno, composed of about twenty monasteries, which were united by the same carefully established and obeyed provisions and practices, and which preserved the idea of the congregation throughout the unitary formation²⁷.

The reform of the convent in Chełmno was fundamental. All solutions were implemented by the new generation of nuns, since all convent sisters of the former tradition had died. The new generation has not encountered any old Benedictine nun, who could introduce the young nuns into the tradition of the convent. Their only guidance was the Rule of St Benedict as well as the new law established at the Council of Trent:

We could not learn any information: neither from the convent life, nor from the nuns and even not from the letters, since any written rule did not remain; but then in the

²⁵ See *Reguła Świętego Ojca Benedykta z łacińskiego przetłumaczona, y z Reformacya Porządków, Chełmińskiego, Toruńskiego, Nieświeskiego, y inszych wszystkich w Królestwie Polskim tejże Reformacyey y Reguły S. Benedykta, które teraz są y na potym zjednoczone będą, Klasztorów Panieńskich*, Kraków 1606, p. 90: „Wiemy, iż wedle rozkazania kościelnego i z samej przystojności panieńskiej pći, żadnej się z klasztoru wychodzić ani wyjeżdżać nie godzi. Jednak iż w tym królestwie wielkie i gwałtowne potrzeby wyciągają, że zakonnice w osobach swych do prawa, także i dla dozoru majątności klasztornych [...] i inszych przyczyn wiele ważnych z zamknięcia klasztornego wyjeżdżać muszą”.

²⁶ M. BORKOWSKA, *Zakony żeńskie w Polsce*, p. 143.

²⁷ M. BORKOWSKA, *Słownik mniszek benedyktyńskich w Polsce*, Tyniec 1989, pp. 18-19. The scheme of the raised foundations presents as follows: appointed from Chełmno – Toruń, Żarnowiec, Nieśwież, Bysławek, Poznań, Jarosław, Sandomierz, Sierpc; appointed from Toruń – Drohiczyn, Radom, Łomża, Grudziądz; appointed from Nieśwież – Wilno, Kowno, Mińsk, Smoleńsk, Orsza; appointed from Jarosławie – Przemyśl; appointed from Wilno: Kroże; founded independently, they accepted the observances of Chełmno: Lwów.

empty convent dwellings cleared of ashes and rubble, a very old Rule was found, written in Latin; however, at the very beginning, when we lacked any help from chaplains and from any others, we could not figure it out or compile properly to our needs; we understood little only with the help of God; and we used some advice and information given by religious people; and we practiced that in our true hearts, diligently²⁸.

Thanks to the support of the bishops and due to the legal and theological guidance of the Jesuits, the reformed Rule was finally recorded, confirmed and released in print²⁹. The interpretation of the Rule, which was compiled throughout these years of attempts, became the law practiced by its own legislators. It was not the question of devotion to the archaic rule, manifested in a literal interpretation of text, regardless of different circumstances and conditions; it was a creative passion that needed to be understood within the actual conditions. This interpretation required to preserve the identity of the convent³⁰. The Renaissance – the era, in which Magdalena Mortęska lived and acted – saw the new demand to spread the education and the culture among women. Conscious of that, Magdalena took the challenge and gave the reformed congregation the opportunity to educate females. She extended this activity upon all foundations and her efforts turned out to be pioneering to that time. Thereby, she multiplied the educational centers for young females and she became the pioneer of the female education. Next to the center of the Benedictine nuns in Chełmno, only one educational congregation was founded – the Presentine nuns in Cracow – albeit its activity was limited only to the area of the city. Following the example of the Benedictine nuns, convents began to found new schools, although on a minor scale³¹. The convent education of young females was commonly practiced in the Middle Ages, however, since the sixteenth century it was completely limited by the provisions of the Coun-

²⁸ See *Reguła Świętego Oycy Benedykta z łacińskiego przetłumaczona, y z Reformacya Porządków, Chełmińskiego, Toruńskiego, Nieświejskiego, y inszych wszystkich w Królestwie Polskim tejże Reformacyey y Reguły S. Benedykta, które teraz są y na potym zjednoczone będą, Klasztorów Panięskich*, Kraków 1606, Introduction: „Życia zakonnego nie tylko od ludzi abo zakonnic, ale ani z pisania żadnego wiadomości wzięćemy nie mogły, gdyż i reguły pisanej nie było, aż potem w pustych mieszkaniach klasztornych, gdy je z prochów i gruzów uprzątano, pisana łacińska, barzo stara jest należona; dla czego się na pierwszych początkach, kiedyśmy i kapłanów i inszych pomocy niedostatek cierpieły, wedle potrzeby ani zrozumieć, ani sporządzić nie mogły; tylko za pomocą Pańską, cokolwiekeśmy z niej zrozumiały, i od po-bożnych rady i nauki wedle niej ułapiły, tegośmy się w prostym sercu pilnie ćwiczyły”.

²⁹ *Reguła Świętego Oycy Benedykta*.

³⁰ M. BORKOWSKA, *Zakony żeńskie w Polsce*, p. 141.

³¹ K. GÓRSKI, *M. Magdalena Mortęska i jej rola*, p. 145.

cil of Trent³². The enclosure – the ban on leaving monasteries and convents by monks and nuns as well as the ban on receiving guests – was accepted by the Council as the bedrock of the monastic reform. Referring to the common principle that the female chastity depends on marriage or on convent, the Council justified the enclosure as the protection of the endangered female purity. The enclosure provided the ban on leaving a convent by a nun, excluding the exceptional circumstances or situations dangerous to health or life, such like fires and epidemics. The exceptional situation was understood as the necessity to leave a convent to settle legal matters resulting from the feudal duty. The responsibility for the adherence to the enclosure rested upon local bishops³³. In practice, restricted rules prevented schoolgirls to enter the enclosure, while nuns were not allowed to leave it. There was a risk that if these provisions had been implemented, the female education would have ceased, given the fact that the convent schools were the only teaching centers in that time. Nevertheless, the demand proved to be stronger than the law and convent schools survived. In this situation the diocesan bishops had to settle the law, which could enable convents to continue educational activity and to preserve the Church provisions at the same time. The requirements of the enclosure were modified to the extent that schoolgirls were allowed to live in a convent, however, separately from most of the nuns. They were allowed to live in the convent for their own safety, but in the section available only for the appointed teaching nuns called “the mistresses of secular maidens”³⁴.

Mother Magdalena Mortęska took the firm stance on this issue:

Secular schoolgirls shall be taught only by designated mistresses; and this is, by the grace of God, the protection of religious from secular, that the former do not associate with the latter, although the secular ones stay „here” for learning longer than year; and what a greater diligence in terms of enclosure could they have, since they do not meet

³² A. KARPIŃSKI, *Kobieta w mieście polskim w drugiej połowie XVI i XVII wieku*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 285-291.

³³ *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych 1511-1870*, vol. IV, ed. A. Baron, H. Pietras, Kraków 2005, pp. 789-791.

³⁴ M. BORKOWSKA, *Zakony żeńskie w Polsce*, pp. 255-256. She uses this term in her spiritual testament called „Waleta”, where she directs the request to the convent nuns: „ochrona wasza z domowymi świeckimi, z którymi i po kilka lat pod jednym dachem mieszkując nie tylko popolitowania z nimi żadnego, ale ani znajomości z nimi, tak z twarzy, jako i z imienia”. The translation from Old-Polish: “to your own protection – as it was so far – you shall not associate with the secular residents of the convent, with whom you are to live under the same roof even for a view years, and you shall not familiarize with them, neither by a face, nor by a name”. See more: W. HENELOWA, *Waleta Matki Mortęskiej*, „Nasza Przeszłość” 105 (2006), p. 275.

nor recognize those, with whom they live under the same roof. And that some of them nuns must leave „the enclosure”: a convent-keeper, as the elder one, to fulfill her duties of receiving and giving out; a mistresses to teach children; a porter-nun to fulfill duties of closing and opening the door; however, they have the permission of the Holy Father to do so, and by virtue of this carefully given provision, adapting to the customs of the local lands, they deal with their own matters and they have to teach so many children, not only for their salutary good, which is by the grace of God manifested in this teaching, but also with a view to multiply the convent goods³⁵.

Next to the enclosure, the other significant matters raised at the Council of Trent were the vows of poverty. The new provisions clearly defined that “none of monks or nuns shall keep or hold any real or movable property”³⁶. Thus far, nuns taught schoolgirls individually and they were rewarded by disciples’ parents, however, this practice was considered as the source of private income³⁷. The new provisions clearly defined that possessing a private property in case of nuns was unacceptable:

Thus, if one is caught or found possessing a property against these rules, one shall be deprived of active and passive voting rights and punished properly to the rule and to the provisions of the order, to which the one belongs³⁸.

This provision is also included in the reformed Rule of Chełmno:

Any gifts or souvenirs, even the slightest one, shall not be taken nor possessed without the permission of the Abbess; the provision of the Rule must be obeyed. Nuns shall not

³⁵ See *Kronika benedyktynek chełmińskich*, p. 138: „Do świeckich zaś panien mistrzynie tylko na to obrane uczyć ich chodzą, i taka jest za łaską Bożą ochrona zakonnych od świeckich, że się ani znają, choć dłużej niż rok na nauce drugie mieszkają, a jakąż proszę większą ścisłość w zawarciu nad tę mieć mogą, że się z tymi, co w jednym domu mieszkają, zgoła nigdy nie widują, ani znają. A że niektóre wychylić się muszą, jako starsza, dla spraw szafarki, dla obierania i wydawania, mistrzynie dla uczenia dzieci, portulanka dla zawierania i odtwierania, jednak i to czynią z pozwolenia Ojca św., przez tę komisję, przysposabiając się zwyczajom tutejszych krajów, uważnie daną, kędy się sobie o wszystko starają i dziełek tak wiele na naukę przyjmować muszą, nie tylko dla dobra ich zbawiennego, jakie z łaski Bożej jest w tym ćwiczeniu dziełek, ale też i dla pomnożenia dobra zakonnego”.

³⁶ See *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*, p. 785: „żaden zakonnik czy zakonnica nie może posiadać ani zachowywać żadnych dóbr nieruchomości bądź ruchomych”.

³⁷ M. BORKOWSKA, *Życie codzienne polskich klasztorów żeńskich*, p. 61.

³⁸ See *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*, p. 787: „Gdyby zaś ktoś posiadający własność wbrew tym zasadom został na tym przyłapany, albo gdyby komuś to udowodniono, ten zostanie pozbawiony na dwa lata czynnego i biernego prawa głosu, a także będzie ukarany zgodnie z zasadami swej reguły i z konstytucjami swego zakonu”.

receive to the convent anyone new for learning without the permission of the Abbess, nor send anyone out from the convent³⁹.

The significant role in establishing of the post-Council modifications played the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits supported the ideas of the humanistic education, and without a doubt, they influenced on the renewal of the female orders. Due to the Jesuits' educational background and proficiency in legal matters, nuns considered them as experts and advisors in legal and theological questions. Moreover, the noble colleges led by the Jesuits became the organizational pattern for the convent schools⁴⁰. After joining almost empty nunnery in 1578, the Abbess of the Benedictine convent of Chełmno realized how necessary the cooperation with the Jesuits was:

in the Year of 1587, only one Nun of the aforementioned Order of St Benedict left in the Convent of Chełmno; and when all the Nuns had died, the Heretics plundered the Convent of Toruń; all privileges and all the goods were taken away by the Heretics. The aforementioned convents were led to such a wretched state⁴¹.

The reform related to the enclosure; organization of everyday matters; religious practices; and intellectual growth. The Abbess Magdalena Mortęska emphasized the value of intellect and knowledge, which expressed primarily in the formation of intellect. She believed that the willingness to learn remains as long as there is knowledge⁴². Thus, it is not surprising that she appreciated the role of educational activity. Even though this activity was only the marginal part of the convent community, it constituted the important matter, which negligence could deprive young females of any educational opportunities. Schools as such had little significance for the convent, because girls were taught only by appointed nuns and the rest of them were not allowed to con-

³⁹ See *Reguła Świętego Ojca Benedykta*, Chapter 65, p. 139: „Podarunków y upominków, by też najmniejszych, bez wiadomości Ksieni nie brać, abo sobie nie przywłaszczuć, pomnąc na wyraźne przykazanie Reguły. Bez tegoż pozwolenia Ksieni, na naukę do klasztoru żadnej nieprzyimować: także y z klasztoru nigdzie niewysyłać”.

⁴⁰ K. PUCHOWSKI, *Jezuickie kolegia szlacheckie Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów. Studium z dziejów edukacji elit*, Gdańsk 2007, pp. 24 and next; M. BEDNARZ, *Jezuici a religijność polska (1564-1594)*, „Nasza Przeszłość” 20 (1964), pp. 158 and next.

⁴¹ See CLEMENS PP. VIII, *List Exekucyi*, [in:] *Reguła Świętego Ojca Benedykta*, p. 1: „w Roku 1587 w Klasztorze Chełmieńskim jedna tylko Panna przerzeczonego Zakonu S. Benedykta została, a Toruński Klasztor, gdy wymarły wszystkie Zakonnice, od Heretyków spustoszony był, y Przywileje wszystkie pobrano: y wszystkie dobra w moc Heretyków wzięte były. Do tego tedy godnego oplakania stanu przerzeczone klasztory przyszły”.

⁴² M. BORKOWSKA, *Słownik mniszek benedyktyńskich*, p. 20.

tact with the disciples. However “the mistresses of secular maidens” found difficult to look after the girls, teach them and fulfill their own duties at the same time. Everyday life of the convent involved a daily liturgy, although the traditional order of the liturgy did not involve teaching. In addition, all nuns were obliged to participate in other convent activities⁴³. The pro-educational part of the convent buildings had to be arranged as a separate enclosure within the enclosure: it had its own chapel, a dining room and a garden. Laypeople were not allowed to enter the area, and even families visiting schoolgirls were ordered to meet them only in the convent parlor. These restrictions resulted not only from the monastic provisions, but also from safety. The convent was responsible for disciples, however, there were some kidnapping attempts ventured by admirers of female beauty and dowry. In 1613 the relatives tried to abduct the girls named Anna and Halszka Ostromęckie from the convent of Toruń. They failed, but another attempt ventured by Aleksander Bąkowski proved to be successful⁴⁴. A convent school of that time can be compared to a contemporary boarding school. Convent schools enlisted noble or middle-class girls between their seventh to fourteenth year of life, and approved only healthy and agile daughters of “honest parents”⁴⁵. The convent of Chełmno received “certain maidens from Greater Poland, named Dzierżanowskie”; and moreover, “Mrs. Magdalena Włodkiewiczowa from Lithuania brought her two daughters for learning”⁴⁶. The number of disciples hesitated from a few to several, while this number reached over twenty in the convents of the major towns. The schedule of the day of nuns was similar to the schedule of novices, excluding convent prayers and except that disciples were not woken up at night and they could enjoy entertainment time⁴⁷. Schoolgirls had a separate chapel and a garden as a place for recreation. The purposes of the admission of disciples as well as the duties of the mistress were determined by the convent provisions:

⁴³ M. BORKOWSKA, *Zakony żeńskie w Polsce*, pp. 263-264.

⁴⁴ M. BORKOWSKA, *Życie codzienne polskich klasztorów żeńskich*, p. 60.

⁴⁵ A. SZYLAR, *Działalność oświatowa benedyktynek sandomierskich w latach 1616-1865*, Lublin 2002, p. 149.

⁴⁶ *Kronika benedyktynek chełmińskich*, pp. 23, 35.

⁴⁷ M. BORKOWSKA, *Życie codzienne polskich klasztorów żeńskich*, pp. 61-62.

also secular maidens live in the convent to learn and to practice, but they live in the lower and separate part of the building; they do not associate with the nuns, and they have only two convent mistresses, who stay with them all the time⁴⁸.

The convent school was not founded in the framework of the first phase of the convent formation; its purpose was to create the Catholic elite of women. The educational instruction of the Benedictine nuns of Chełmno includes the following provision: „Secular maidens entrusted to the convent school by their parents shall be taught and respected, as we order in the name of God, so as to anyone from the outside world could see that they were raised and educated in the convent”⁴⁹. Sometimes a schoolgirl decided to join the convent, albeit such instances were rare and difficult to settle. Familiarity with the convent life attracted those with religious vocation and discouraged those without it⁵⁰. The instruction clearly defined: “one should be called to the convent by God, not by people”⁵¹.

Novices remained under the tutelage of the designated nun called “the mistress of secular maidens”. Sometimes she was assisted by another nun, however, the rest of the nuns were not allowed to familiarize with the school-girls⁵². Only a well-qualified nun could become responsible for education of young females. It was precisely defined by the Rule. The mistress of secular maidens was expected to be prudential, conscientious, reasonable, faithful to God, and to the convent. She was ought to ensure the prosperity to her disciples, without neglecting her own spiritual good. Therefore, the same as the rest of the nuns she was obliged to fulfill all duties including contemplations and all necessary prayers. She was ought to keep only a reasonable contact with laypeople, properly to the convent provisions and to the commands of the

⁴⁸ See *Sprawa o Reformacji Klasztoru Chełmińskiego Przewielebnych P.P. Benedyktynek [...] podana a przez Jednego kapelana i natenczas spowiednika niniejszego 1618 w Chełmnie mieszkającego [ks. Wojciecha Pakoszewica] z samych oryginalnych aktów i listów pieczętowanymi zebrana*, Poznań 1618, p. [11]: „mieszkają też panny świeckie w klasztorze dla nauki i ćwiczenia, jednak na dole i osobno, niepospolitują nigdy z zakonnicami, którym tylko za mistrzynie dają dwie panny zakonne i te przy nich zawsze przebywają”.

⁴⁹ *Reguła Świętego Ojca Benedykta*, Chapter 65, p. 139: „Panien świeckich, które rodzicy na naukę oddają, tak uczyć i szanować w Panu Bogu rozkazujemy, żeby i na świecie po nich znać było, że się w klasztorze chowały i ćwiczyły”.

⁵⁰ M. BORKOWSKA, *Zakony żeńskie w Polsce*, pp. 256-257.

⁵¹ See *Reguła Świętego Ojca Benedykta*, Chapter 65, p. 136: „nie od ludzi, ale od Boga wezwania do zakonu potrzeba”.

⁵² W. ROZYNKOWSKI, *Starania ksieni Magdaleny Mortęskiej o rozwój szkolnictwa katolickiego*, „Nasza Przeszłość” 117 (2012), p. 143.

Abbess⁵³. Schoolgirls usually derived from noble families and much fewer of them were daughters of burghers.

The program of the convent education originally included reading, writing, counting, catechetical lessons, music, manual works and finally preparing for the Christian life⁵⁴. The Benedictine nuns taught Latin, contrary to the popular opinion that this language was not proper for women. The nuns did not use uniform and specialty textbooks for teaching; they employed the books from the convent library, however, knowledge acquired by schoolgirls was not very extensive⁵⁵. Girls were also trained in physical work in order to prepare themselves to housekeeping. The education program was improved and modified continually. At the end of the eighteenth century convent schools introduced lessons of history, geography and French. It should be mentioned that the scope of the learning as well as the list of the subjects depended to a large extent on the actual teaching line-up: on individual skills and predispositions of the appointed teachers and also on the local customs and demands⁵⁶. The convent education was to form characters of disciples by religious education, by participating in divine service, by learning and recreation, by strictly controlled obedience to the provisions, by implementing of denunciatory activities, by rivalry, and finally by penalties and rewards, nevertheless, such restrictive educational system disturbed the contact with parents⁵⁷.

The schoolwork in the Benedictine convent lasted from five to six hours a day and it included education and teaching. Each day was filled with activities with a view to eliminate idleness – every hour was carefully organized and fulfilled. The girls woke up at five in the morning and they dressed up in half an hour. They went in pairs to the Church for the morning prayers and they attended the Holy Mass. Afterwards, they returned to their rooms and within the quarter of an hour they began lessons, which lasted until nine in the morning. After a half-hour pause for breakfast they continued the lessons until eleven in the morning. After lunch they enjoyed a recreation time and at half past twelve they went back to the schoolwork and finished their lessons at sixteenth in the afternoon. They went to the school chapel to recite one of the litanies and later they could enjoy a free time until supper. After that, they had a time for a quiet recreation and at half past eighteen they prayed again. They were given a time

⁵³ *Reguła Świętego Ojca Benedykta*, Chapter 65, pp. 134-135.

⁵⁴ M. BORKOWSKA, *Słownik mniszek benedyktyńskich*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ A. SZYLAR, *Działalność oświatowa benedyktynek sandomierskich*, p. 93.

⁵⁶ M. BORKOWSKA, *Zakony żeńskie w Polsce*, p. 259.

⁵⁷ A. SZYLAR, *Działalność oświatowa benedyktynek sandomierskich*, p. 53.

for examination of conscience and for evening prayer, and afterwards, they were dismissed for the night rest⁵⁸. The religious education was implemented throughout theological conversations between secular maidens and the mistress. Girls were also accustomed to examine their consciences frequently, to confess, and to receive the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. They received the Sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist every month and attended the Holy Mass, every day. On Sundays, they listened to the preaching and attended the longer divine services, which took about two or three hours a day. They also attended the retreat. Girls learned the principles of the faith. Convent mistresses persuaded them about the importance of constant praying; of harmony with God, people and themselves; as well as about the necessity of strong resistance to temptations. The education included good manners manifesting in natural demeanor, in reduction of rapid, loud and inarticulate manner of speaking; in calm fulfillment of duties, in ability to deal with difficulties and in keeping serenity of heart⁵⁹. The main care was focused on the education that would be useful to the world, not to the convent. If a girl displayed her will to join the convent, mistresses were obliged to discourage her. They had to suggest the maiden that the only possibility for her was to join the female Choir of Converse. It was a test to verify the vocation of disciples⁶⁰. Schoolgirls were accustomed to tidiness as it is seen in the letter written by one of the fathers:

My Merciful Lady Abbess. "We wish You" health and all the best. My daughter, Miss Sophie, urgently asked me, if she could stay for a while by Your side, Your Reverence, at the convent in Chełmno; I let her after all, for I heard about the great tidiness that is kept in Your convent under Your rule and due to Your honesty, Your Reverence Lady Abbess MM"⁶¹.

Girls learned housekeeping and proper attitude by servicing in a boarding school. They were accustomed to tidiness and cleanliness. During their duty

⁵⁸ *Reguła Świętego Oycy Benedykta*, Chapter 65, pp. 141-142.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 142-144; comp. A. SZYLAR, *Działalność oświatowa benedyktynek sandomierskich*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ K. GÓRSKI, *Zarys dziejów duchowości*, pp. 115-116; comp. *Reguła Świętego Oycy Benedykta*, Chapter 65, p. 137.

⁶¹ See *List kasztelana Sierakowskiego do sieni Mortęskiej z 1580 r.*, [in:] J. FANKIDEJSKI, *Klasztory żeńskie w dzisiejszej diecezji chełmińskiej*, Pelplin 1883, p. 107: „Miłościwa Panno. Zdrowia i wszego dobrego. Córka moja panna Zofia pilnie mię o to prosiła, aby mogła czas niejaki zamieszkać przy Waszej Wielebności w klasztorze chełmińskim; czego ja jej chętnie rad pozwolił, mając pewną wiadomość o wielkim porządku w tym tam klasztorze za zwierzchnością i uczciwymi sprawami Waszej Wielebności MM. Panny”.

hours they cleaned up, stoked and carried water with a view to prepare themselves for an adult life. They were admonished to take care of personal hygiene and to keep their personal effects in order. They were accustomed to physical and service works like cleaning up, carrying water and wood, stoking, preparing beds, laundering clothes and underwear. They performed these works under the supervision of the mistresses, who assigned each girl different duties, every month. Each girl performed her duties in a designated place and she could not change it without permission. Girls usually punctured the silence by reciting prayers⁶². The convent school formed the moral attitude of disciples by teaching them obedience, modesty, piety, mutual respect and care⁶³. Under the influence of the Jesuits the convent school introduced denunciation. Designated girls were ordered to inform the mistress about potential offenses committed by other disciples. The Rule, which was established in the spirit of the post-Council reform, laid emphasis on sufficient education of nuns – they were obliged to acquire Polish and Latin literacy within one year of the novitiate, otherwise, they were not approved for their profession. By the virtue of the provisions, convents were prohibited to admit ill-perceptive individuals, since such ones were usually believed to suffer from mental diseases⁶⁴. In order to improve their own knowledge and intellectual skills, nuns had to read together ascetic books during meals and to write meditations. From the beginning of the convent life a mistress was obliged to accustom novices to such method of self-improving. It was believed that writing develops thinking skills. The Rule urged to found schools and convent dormitories to educate secular maidens. Well-prepared nuns were able to meet the requirements of the new Rule in terms of education of young females⁶⁵. The Abbess Magdalena Mortęska founded the convent congregation to develop the education of women by improving their moral attitude, manners, literacy, counting skills and manual works. She intended to create a new type of a female that would be devoted and conscious of her Catholic faith; strong and soulful; fluent in religious issues and in arguing her own reasons; a female with a quite reliable education to that time; a skillful housekeeper and a mother who would raise her children in the tradition of the Catholic Church⁶⁶. The Benedictine nuns of the reform of Chełmno, as well as their Abbess, relied on

⁶² A. SZYLAR, *Działalność oświatowa benedyktynek sandomierskich*, p. 92.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ K. GÓRSKI, *Matka Mortęska*, pp. 68-71.

⁶⁵ M. BORKOWSKA, *Panny siostry w świecie sarmackim*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 307-308.

⁶⁶ A. SZYLAR, *Działalność oświatowa benedyktynek sandomierskich*, p. 59.

common sense, logic, consequence and loyalty. Among laypeople of their homeland they popularized the spiritual and intellectual attitude of women, who were capable of logical deliberating, discussing, putting and explaining thesis⁶⁷. Certainly, these educational efforts implemented for the good of society turned out to be beneficial also to the Church alone. The convent developed the elite of women who became wives and mothers educating their children in the spirit of the Catholic faith. The role of the convents schools in eradicating the Reformation is comparable to the role of the Jesuitical schools, except that the former had the less impact⁶⁸. We can cite the words of K. Górski:

Just as the Jesuits ensured to a large degree the triumph of the Tridentine Reform in Poland by education of male youth of noble and middle class, the Benedictine nuns achieved the same by education of young females⁶⁹.

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⁶⁷ K. GÓRSKI, *Od religijności do mistyki*, p. 73.

⁶⁸ A. SZYLAR, *Działalność wychowawczo-edukacyjna żeńskich zgromadzeń zakonnych*, p. 44.

⁶⁹ K. GÓRSKI, *M. Magdalena Mortęska*, p. 145: „tak jak jezuita przez wychowanie młodzieży męskiej pochodzącej ze szlachty i mieszczaństwa zapewnili w dużej mierze triumf reformy trydenckiej w Polsce, tego samego dokonały benedyktyńki na polu wychowania kobiet”.

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MAGDALENA MORTĘSKA
– REFORMATORKA EDUKACJI DZIEWCZĄT
W OKRESIE POTRYDENCKIM

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje średniowieczny model wychowania dziewcząt, w którym to główny nacisk kładziono na przygotowanie do roli żony i matki. W taki sposób została wychowana również Magdalena Mortęska, która w wieku zaledwie kilku lat straciła matkę i została oddana przez ojca na wychowanie do ciotki. Było to zjawisko powszechne i zgodne z ówczesnymi zwyczajami. Ciotka wychowywała ją w sposób surowy, ucząc przede wszystkim pobożności, pracowitości, zaradności i gospodarności, przygotowując do roli przyszłej pani domu i matki. Uczyla ją również pracowitości, co dla małej zbyt dziewczynki okazało się zgubne, bo pomagając służbie w przygotowaniu posiłku, wykuła sobie prawe oko. Magdalena nie chciała jednak wyjść za mąż, ale wstąpić do chełmińskiego klasztoru benedyktynek, co było zdecydowanie przeciwnie

woli jej ojca. Dzięki wytrwałości i silnej wierze 4 czerwca 1579 r. złożyła śluby zakonne, a tydzień później została ksienią chełmińskich benedyktynek. Zapoczątkowała gruntowną reformę, polegającą na odczytaniu na nowo pierwotnych reguł i wprowadzeniu ich w życie. Reforma klasztoru w Chełmnie miała charakter fundamentalny, a wszelkie rozwiązania były tworzone przez nowe pokolenie mniszek, ponieważ zakonnice starej tradycji wymarły. Wypracowana przez lata eksperymentów interpretacja reguły stała się prawem doświadczonej na samych prawodawcach. Przy tej interpretacji bardzo istotna była troska o zachowanie tożsamości zakonu. Epoka renesansu, w której żyła i działała Mortęska, niosła nową potrzebę – promocję oświaty i kultury wśród kobiet. Świadoma tego podjęła wyzwanie i zreformowanej kongregacji stworzyła możliwość wychowania i edukacji dziewcząt. Rozszerzyła tę działalność na wszystkie zakładane fundacje i było to działanie prekursorskie jak na ówczesne czasy. W ten sposób mnożyła ośrodki skupiające młodzież żeńską, a przez akcję powszechnego kształcenia stała się pionierką wychowania kobiet.

Słowa kluczowe: Magdalena Mortęska; edukacja klasztorna; żeńska edukacja; potrydencka reforma zakonna; edukacja; reforma siostr benedyktynek.