

Patriotic Upbringing of Women According to the Idea of the Blessed Marcelina Darowska as Preparation for the Fight for the Independence of the Republic of Poland

Anna Haratyk / e-mail: anna.haratyk@uwr.edu.pl
Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław, Poland

Haratyk A. (2019). Patriotic Upbringing of Women According to the Idea of the Blessed Marcelina Darowska as Preparation for the Fight for the Independence of the Republic of Poland. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*, 11/1, 60–69.
<https://doi.org/10.5817/cphpj-2019-007>

From the second half of the 19th century the educational system in Polish lands became a method of fighting for independence and preparation for life in free fatherland. Patriotic and civic upbringing would also include girls who, as wives, mothers, guardians of the homes, and social activists were to be responsible for the future of Poland. One of the educational systems aimed to form wise, reliable, honest, sensible, realistic Polish Christian women, capable of making sacrifices for the good of the fatherland, was developed and implemented by Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska, founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. The institution for girls established in Jazłowiec became a model not only for the institutions subsequently founded by the Congregation, but also to the entirety of the Polish society. It became a great example of responsible education and preparation of Polish women for independence.

Key words: upbringing of girls; patriotic and civic upbringing; fight for Polish independence; Blessed Marcelina Darowska; Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

During the era of the Partitions of Poland the Polish society would constantly struggle to regain independence. The ways were numerous and not limited to battlefields and firearms. What the struggle consisted in was also the formation of civic, patriotic, and national attitudes, which was achieved through, among others, literature, art – paintings, music, songs, etc. One of the most effective methods leading to the regaining of independence was certainly upbringing, because it was thanks to it that national awareness and pride were formed, which would give one the strength to pursue liberation. Upbringing work was aimed to consciously form the young generations of Poles and to prepare them to live in free Poland. Girls were increasingly frequently included in these efforts, because it was they who, as mothers, wives, and grandmothers, would constitute the pillar of upbringing at home. It was required of them, in spite of their limited civil rights, to be aware, to

have a consistent worldview, and moral stance. One of the ideas of the upbringing of girls was created and implemented by the Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (1827–1911), a co-founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (Zgromadzenie Sióstr Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny, hence informally termed “niepokalanki” in Polish), and a founder of educational institutions for girls.

Anna Darowska had a long way to go to overcome the obstacles which prevented her from joining a monastery and taking the eternal vows. As a very young woman who had lost her husband and a little son she had to manage the family estate and the upbringing of her underage daughter, as well as provide for her and secure her future; she would also face strong opposition from her family who would disapprove of her choice to devote the rest of her life to God. Eventually she publicly took the eternal vows as late as 1861, assuming also supervision of the congregation which, according to the original ideas of its founders, Father Hieronim Kajsiewicz, Mother Józefa Karska, and Marcelina Darowska, was to not only serve the Church, but also Poland. The monastery life of Darowska was constantly accompanied by her conviction that “Poland will exist, but only when the society is reborn, and for this happen it is required that family be based on God. And the family shall be as the woman is.”¹

In the attempt to form Polish women and their families she decided that the congregation founded in Rome need not function abroad but rather in the Polish lands, which is why Jazłowiec, a small town in the Austrian-occupied region, in Podole in Galitia, was assumed as the permanent seat of the Sisters in 1863. The congregation acquired a beautifully located yet severely devastated palace of the Koniecpolski family, constructed in the 17th century.²

Love of the fatherland, as M. Darowska recalled, was a feeling which used to accompany her since her earliest childhood.³ She was greatly affected by the fall of Poland: “The Polish problem is like a stone unto my heart, (...) never for a single

¹ Sister Mother Ewa of God's Grace (2009). *Nauczycielka życia. W hołdzie wdzięczności bł. Matce Marcelinie Darowskiej* [A teacher of life. In a tribute of gratitude to the Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska], Szymanów, p. 10.

² The property, along with the town, was occupied by the Turks in 1672. Impoverished and destroyed, it was liberated by the armies of the king John III Sobieski, and since 1747 the prince Stanisław Poniatowski, father of the king Stanisław August Poniatowski, was its owner. The new owner enlarged the palace, placed the coats of arms of the Poniatowski family (“Ciołek”) and the Czartoryski family (“Pogoń”) at the front, and from the side of the park placed the slogan “HONESTUS RUMOR ALTERUM EST PATRIMONIUM” – “Good fame is second heritage.” The last owner (half of the 19th century), baron Krzysztof Błażejowski, would only use the place occasionally (balls, hunting), leading to its even greater ruin and neglect. *Jazłowiec i jego dzieje* [Jazłowiec and its history] compiled by the Sister Mother Anuncjata of the Holy Trinity, <http://www.niepokalanki.pl/old/index.php?op=sanktuaria&pop=0301>.

³ Sister Mother Ewa of God's Grace (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

moment do I cease to suffer the wounds of this Country.”⁴ She understood fatherland through the perspective of space as well as the people whom she would seek to help. Loving the country, she would also try to work as best as she could on the farm, first by the side of her father Jana Kotowicz, and then by her husband Karol Darowski.⁵

As the superior of the congregation she would make sure that the sisters believed that it was their calling to not only serve God and the Church, but also to work for the good of Poland, which was to regain its independence in the future thanks to their sisters stance, dedication, and bringing girls up to be good mothers and wives, serving the Church and the fatherland, and be open to the needs of the society.⁶ In order to achieve this aim girls needed to be treated, from their earliest age, as intelligent women, “able to express independent, well-thought-out views, to form their families and environments in the spirit of Christian values.”⁷

Among the traits which she would value the highest in women and which she would instil in her subordinates were the purity of heart and mind, faithfulness, studiousness, clear thinking, realistic approach to the world, resourcefulness, sensibility, and readiness to make sacrifices.⁸ Such mothers and wives, according to Darowska, Poland needed to escape the enslavement of the occupants and to rebuild its independence.

The most effective way of the education of Polish Christian women was the education and upbringing programme introduced in the institution in Jazłowiec. The pillar of the programme was the teaching of religion, the mother tongue, and history. M. Darowska would value greatly the teaching of Polish which, as she claimed, was the mirror of the soul and the character of the Polish nation, as well as an expression of God’s will.⁹ She attached enormous importance to the level and the quality of the mother tongue. If this issue was neglected, she stated, one’s ability to take action was decreased, because words inspired action and expressed feelings, which is why taking care of the native language was completely justified.¹⁰ The teaching of the mother tongue was a fundamental task not only for the school,

⁴ *Zawsze będę z wami. Myśli i modlitwy Błogosławionej Matki Marceliny Darowskiej* [I will always be with you. The thoughts and prayers of the Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska], compiled by Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of God, Kosyra – Cieślak A., Szymczak R. (2008), Szymanów, p. 46.

⁵ Even tough in her youth she desired to bind her life to God, she followed the will of her father, got married, and had two children. Her family happiness was put to an end only three years later, when she became a widow, left with little children and the estate which she was alone to manage. Sister Mother Ewa of God’s Grace (2009), *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁹ Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997). *Wychowanie to dzieło miłości. System pedagogiczny bł. Marceliny Darowskiej* [Upbringing is a work of love. The pedagogical system of the Blessed Marcelina Darowska], Szymanów, p. 92.

¹⁰ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 55.

but the family as well, because the family was the environment in which children could be in touch with correct, beautiful Polish, and learn to respect the language. It was, therefore, required that care be taken to keep the language pure, to eliminate foreign borrowings, and to make certain that prayers at home were always said in Polish. Darowska believed that speaking Polish was particularly important in contacts with children.¹¹ She would emphasise that through beautiful language children automatically learn to know and love all that which is Polish. Because of this special approach to the teaching of Polish the learning of this language enjoyed a position of importance in the curricula of the schools ran by the Sisters second only to religion classes.

This did not imply that teaching foreign languages was neglected. It was underlined, nevertheless, that foreign languages ought never to replace the mother tongue in situations of communication. Darowska would warn that while learning foreign languages one should not use them at home in order not to create an alien environment around children, which could impede the formation of their national identities.¹²

In the formation of national identities and patriotic stances one of the most important roles was played, according to Darowska, by female history teachers.¹³ She would address the past with respect, being fully aware of the integrity of the work of subsequent generations.¹⁴ What happened in the past could not be changed, but it could be learned from and the mistakes made by one's ancestors could be corrected. The essential task of history teachers was, therefore, not to only to teach about the facts and events, but also to present their causes, specifics, and importance, so that the students were able to evaluate, judge, and differentiate between good and evil. The past of a nation can be evaluated, but it cannot be rejected, because it cannot be altered. It is possible and it is recommended to draw conclusions for a better future. It is worth it to use national history to show young people that which is beautiful and make them aware of the public responsibility for the fate of the country.¹⁵

Regardless of the history lessons, in the teachings addressed to the students they were made aware of the tragic situation of the country, awakening, at the same time, their hope in the freedom from enslavement and victory.¹⁶ She would emphasise at the same time that although Poland could not be found on the maps

¹¹ Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 84–85.

¹² *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, pp. 55–58.

¹³ Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 92

¹⁴ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹⁵ Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 93

¹⁶ Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *Cztery pogadanki rekolekcyjne 1904 rok* [Four retreatal conversations for 1904], Szymanów, p. 18.

of Europe God did not allow the world to forget about it, thanks to great Poles achieving international success in various branches of science, in literature, art, defence of the Church, etc. Because of them the Polish spirit was constantly reborn, and it was the duty of every Christian woman to fight for this spirit at home and in her immediate environment.

These views present a link between religious, patriotic, and civic upbringing. Being a good, honest, and just citizen was perceived by Darowska as the fulfilment of God's will and a path to salvation. In the process of upbringing children and youth were made to understand that they are a part of their country and they ought to always be dedicated to it with all their hearts and spirits, and indeed all their lives.¹⁷

While teaching to comprehend the notion of the fatherland two sides of the issue were being presented – the material, physical side, which is the land, the towns and cities and villages, and the spiritual, moral side, that is, the nationality.¹⁸ What was understood as nationality was the combination of a number of elements such as faith, God's truth, the spirit and the mentality of a nation, that is, the language, the literature, and the customs.¹⁹ Impairing any of these factors meant harm done to the nation itself.²⁰ Who loves one's fatherland, she would say, respects it, supports it, defends it, and helps it to develop. This can be done by defending the faith, the language, and the traditions.²¹ She called the fatherland "Mother" and that was how she would justify the necessity to take care of her, building a relationship with her, protecting her and nurturing that which is worthy in her and to love her.²² Nationality understood as faith, God's truth, language, and literature, and a character unique to the nation, the traditions, were to be taken care of and respected in order not to allow their downfall and destruction.²³ Darowska would maintain that the characters of nations resulted from God's will. It was one's duty to God to preserve one's nationality and its particular elements, to pass it on to the next generation, while at the same time trying to eliminate that which is faulty and improper.²⁴

She saw faith as the foundation and the internal strength of every nation.²⁵ The loss of faith, turning away from God, and failure to submit to his would become a source of weakness of the nation and lead to its decline.²⁶

¹⁷ Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 94

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁹ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 47.

²⁰ Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 86.

²¹ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²² Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²³ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Vast damage, Darowska stated, was the introduction and the dissemination of “foreignness”, because it was destructive to national identity. She would harshly criticise those Poles who left the country in dire straits, only to enjoy better life abroad, and who, upon their return, would present a condescending attitude towards national values and the language.²⁷ The foreign, especially Western European cultures Darowska would define as a threat to the formation of national identity and maintenance of the continuity of the Polish nation, which was because they were attractive, tempting, and much more interesting than the Polish culture suffering under foreign occupation. Their influence lay in their attractiveness, which cunningly led to the erosion of the national identity of Poles.²⁸ It needs to be emphasised that in all things one ought to keep sense and moderation, which is what she would repeatedly point out to the sisters working as teachers and guardians in the institutions led by the congregation.²⁹

Upbringing ought to be adjusted to the needs of the native country of the students, which is why “Polish girls are to be brought up to be Polish, German girls to be German, and French girls to be French.”³⁰ She encouraged girls to cherish the traditions of old, to organise days of celebrations according to old customs, because, as she claimed: “Each of our old customs has its thought, its secret of Christian beauty. The homemaker, the woman, the Polish woman is to be their guardian.”³¹

Darowska would not mince words when criticising the mothers who, instead of bringing their children up in the patriotic spirit, hired governesses from abroad, believing that this emphasised a higher social position of the family, and allowed the children to be better prepared for life and more open to the world.³² She maintained that since God created us Polish we cannot educate our children in any other spirit, knowledge, or culture.

Teaching love for the fatherland needs to begin in the earliest years of life, that is, in the family.³³ She believed strongly in the power and the impact of Polish families. Their reconstruction appeared to her as an undeniable guarantee of the change of the country’s circumstances and the regaining of independence.³⁴

The work connected with raising the country from ruin thanks to families ought to, according to Darowska, be carried out gradually by educating girls who

²⁷ Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 86.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³¹ Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

³² Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³³ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

are to be future mothers. They need to be taught to be resourceful and thrifty, and to be aware that their efforts in homemaking will contribute to the improvement of the economic condition of the entire country. Their stance is to also influence the views and the actions of “shallow, unthinking, materialist, and weak spirit of men.”³⁵ The future of Poland was to depend on, first and foremost, how the children are brought up, and what roles and values they are taught.³⁶ In the privacy of their homes women were, thus, not only to educate their sons to be righteous citizens and their daughters to be active, aware citizens, but also, if need be, to motivate their husbands to be more active.

Among the faults of Polish people which Darowska would point out and which she would attempt to eliminate in her students was stubbornness leading to conflict and quarrel, and disorderliness. She would draw the girls’ attention to the necessity to maintain order and harmony in their homes.³⁷

In the process of upbringing she would constantly make the girls aware that they are equal with men, that they are a part of the nation, and that they are responsible for its fate. They could not, therefore, remain indifferent to the fate of the fatherland.³⁸ Polish women had a calling to serve the Church, the family, and the society. They ought to be righteous Catholics, good wives and mothers, caretakers of the poor and orphans, and support such institutions as schools and day care centres, in which children from the poorest and the lowest social strata could receive education.³⁹

Yet another area in which women could fight for the improvement of the situation of the country was social work. Darowska treated social work as an actual duty of all women.⁴⁰

In the conversation “On our aim and task” Darowska emphasised that it was the duty of all women to take care of not only their own good and happiness, but also for the good and the happiness of the entire society “so that in it you are not nobodies, not parasites, but partners.”⁴¹ She hoped that as Poles the girls would achieve a lot for the good of the country when using sense in their actions. At the same time she would convince her students that their contribution to the regaining of independence would be substantial.⁴² In the Christian families which they were to establish she saw a new strength for Poland, and in the women she saw a power

³⁵ Sister Grażyna of the Intercession of the Mother of the Holiest Virgin Mary (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 90.

³⁶ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59. On the disorderliness as a Polish fault cf.: Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³⁸ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴¹ Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

affecting the form and the attitudes of the society. What was of enormous importance was that the spiritual development would turn into real action, so that all would not end with merely new ideas, with imagining great works, but that the dedication would turn into action and effective work.⁴³

Being aware of the fact that in a single institution in Jazłowiec it was not possible to educate sufficient numbers of enlightened women fighting for Polish independence, M. Darowska would establish secondary and elementary schools in other towns and cities, including Jarosław, Niżniów, Nowy Sącz, Słonim, Komorów, or Szymanów. A particular gift from the congregation and its superior for Poland and their compatriots was the school in Niżniów. It was a free boarding school for 33 girls whose fathers had died defending the fatherland or had been persecuted for their participation in uprisings, and whose properties had been confiscated because of their work for independent Poland.⁴⁴ Darowska's aim was to use the institution in Niżniów to train future teachers – wise, mature, well-educated, and fully aware of their influence on society. Their education would commence at the age of 6 in Niżniów and go on for 9 years, subsequently it would be continued in Jazłowiec, and finally be completed with an exam in Lwów.⁴⁵ Darowska's idea was that the patriotically educated teachers, with properly formed worldviews and systems of values, would over the roles of the governesses from Western Europe, who were hugely popular at the time. What may serve as proof of Darowska's great dedication to the formation of Polish national awareness is the fact that the educational work was carried out not only in Galitia, where it could develop relatively freely because of the autonomy enjoyed within the Austrian-Hungarian empire, but also in the lands occupied by Russia, where it was the policy of Tsarist government to consistently destroy Polish national identity and the Catholic faith. In 1906, the sisters sent by her to Słonim began their semi-secret work with children and youth.⁴⁶ Yet another stage in the educational work among Polish children in the lands occupied and indoctrinated by Russia were the efforts undertaken in Komorów, and subsequently in Szymanów, in the vicinity of Warsaw.

However, it was not only necessary to prepare the girls from the so-called good homes to fight for independence. The rural population was also to play a major role, and thus they were also to be enlightened and educated to fight for freedom and to live in an independent country. That is why at the institution in Jazłowiec a free elementary school was founded for the children from the surrounding areas.

⁴³ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁴⁴ *Sister Mother Ewa of God's Grace* (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16. The delegated sisters assumed control of a declining monastery of the Benedictine order and they would officially function as members of that order, because the Tsarist government would not have allowed the appearance of a new congregation of the Roman Catholic Church.

The aim of the school was to prevent backwardness of the rural communities and preparation for the work for the fatherland. Apart from religion, which Darowska would teach herself, reading and writing classes, Polish history, calculations in the four basic mathematical operations, the system of weights and measurements, and handicraft were included in the teaching programme of the school.⁴⁷ Apart from the raising of intellectual level of the population in the vicinity, the education prepared girls for social work in their communities. In order to make the circle of the persons involved in education as broad as possible children from Catholic as well as Orthodox families, and Polish as well as Ruthenian families were all admitted. Similar elementary schools were active also with other institutions for girls ran by the Sisters.

As it would be frequently mentioned by Darowska, the short period of family life was to be of enormous assistance in the subsequent teaching of girls and allowed her to teach how to be a good wife, mother, and homemaker working for her household as well as the fatherland. Thanks to the co-founded and managed Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary she not only realised her mission of serving God, but also her childhood ambition of helping Poland. She could skilfully combine love of God and love of the fatherland, and that was the way of thinking which was instilled in the students of the schools ran by the congregation. The goal which would illuminate her way and drive her to overcome all obstacles was “work in the country for its Christian revival by educating the young generation.”⁴⁸ She believed that none of the faithful wishing to obey God’s commandments and seeking salvation and holiness could remain indifferent to the problems of the fatherland.⁴⁹ She would convince people to make sacrifices with even a touch of insanity, with great burning passion, regardless of the efforts, suffering, and sacrifice which often had to be made in the service of the fatherland. However, one ought not only to undertake such impulsive actions, because what was also important for the country were prayers, work, and honest life. What was also essential was the teaching of respect for the country, which was not only to be admired for its advantages and victories, but also respected regardless of the faults and the mistakes of the past. The latter ought to be understood, humbly accepted, and used to draw wise conclusions for the future from.⁵⁰

The fact that Darowska was able to fill the hearts and minds of her students with hope for an improvement in the fate of Poland, thus motivating them to act, was crucial to the effectiveness of the education process.⁵¹ She was persistent in

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁸ Jabłońska-Deptuła E. (2010). *Marcelina Darowska Niepokalanka 1827–1911*, Lublin, p. 60.

⁴⁹ Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁵⁰ *Zawsze będę z wami...* (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 62.

telling the students that they were to believe in the rebirth of Poland, because no enemy was capable of breaking the country down. What is more, she would claim that if God did not wish that Poland was saved, he would not have allowed the Congregation to be established, and he would not have allowed it to initiate its work in the country to educate Christian Poles.⁵²

M. Darowska would share her teachings not only with her students, but also with graduates, for whom she organised reunions and retreats. Her views gained full recognition and acceptance of the archbishop Józef Weber who, when allowing the retreatal teachings of the Congregation to be printed stated that if all the students fully abided by the rules presented to them “everything would look different in this country of ours.”⁵³

The upbringing work of Darowska was appreciated also by the representatives of the Polish nation whose voice could be heard by the general public. One of the was the writer Henryk Sienkiewicz who in his letter to the Mother Superior wrote: “You have taught them to love God, the land of their fathers, to worship all that is great, noble, yet unfortunate, which is why the great, yet unfortunate nation has appraised you. Allow me, as well, to bow my head over your achievements and pay you due tribute for your work, so long and so crucial for our society and so blessed in its results.”⁵⁴ These voices confirm the propriety of the assumed path and the idea of educating Polish women to be responsible for their country and to be prepared to fight for its independence.

⁵² Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁵³ *List abp Józefa Webera do M. M. Darowskiej zezwalający na druk nauk rekolekcyjnych* [The letter of archbishop Józef Weber to Mother M. Darowska allowing the printing of retreatal teachings], [in:] Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *List Henryka Sienkiewicza do Matki Marceliny Darowskiej z okazji Jej Jubileuszu* [The letter of Henryk Sienkiewicz to Mother Marcelina Darowska on her anniversary], [in:] Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 6.