

Trust as the Foundation of the Spirituality of Mercy according to Michael Sopocko

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to show that Father Michael Sopocko, in his writings, presented the virtue of trust as the basis of the spirituality of mercy. This author, now blessed of the Catholic Church, was the first to carry out the mission of extending the devotion to Divine Mercy in the form given by Jesus to Sister Faustina. He elaborated on this theologically and pastorally. One might say that he built the foundation of the spirituality of mercy of modern times. The article shows how Sopocko understood the essence of the virtue of trust and what qualities he attributed to it, as well as how he perceived the importance of this virtue in Christian life and what role he attributed to it in the devotion to Divine Mercy. The author in question grounded his analyses on the virtue of trust primarily in the Word of God, which he frequently referred to. He also referred in some of his writings to the issue of the new forms of devotion to Divine Mercy and, in their context, showed trust as the foundation of the spirituality of mercy. The article uses the method of analysing the writings of Michael Sopocko with commentaries. The result of this analysis is the conclusion that the virtue of trust is not only an indispensable element of a properly understood spirituality of mercy, without which this spirituality would be incomplete and skewed, but is in fact the basis of this spirituality and gives it its proper direction.

Keywords: trust, Divine Mercy, Michael Sopocko, Michał Sopoćko, spirituality of mercy

Father Prof. Michael Sopocko (born 1 November 1888, died 15 February 1975, beatified 28 September 2008) was the heir and at the same time the implementer of the mission entrusted by Jesus Christ to St Faustina Kowalska.¹ This mission was about proclaiming the truth of Divine Mercy to the world, new forms of worship associated with this “attribute in God”² and active mercy towards fellow human beings. These truths are not new to the Church, but rather reminded and renewed. Faced with the difficulties he encountered in spreading this devotion, Father Professor elaborated theologically on the issue of Divine Mercy, while at the same time

¹ Sister Faustina Kowalska (*Diary*, no. 53) wrote this about him as her confessor: “But the goodness of Jesus is infinite; He had promised me visible help here on earth, and a little while later I received it in Vilnius, in the person of Father Sopocko. I had already known him before coming to Vilnius, thanks to an interior vision. One day I saw him in our chapel between the altar and the confessional and suddenly heard a voice in my soul say «This is the visible help for you on earth. He will help you carry out My will on earth.» These words show that Sopocko was regarded by the Sister as a spiritual director, chosen for her by Jesus. She entrusted all spiritual matters to him and followed his guidance in her life.

² It is an expression that the Blessed uses in his writings. It is less present in contemporary theology. However, in the studies of Father Sopocko, for whom showing mercy as the greatest attribute of God was one of the aims of his academic work, this very term is crucial.

building up the structure of a spirituality that particularly emphasises this attribute in God, that is, a spirituality of mercy. A significant element of this spirituality is trust. The Blessed based his scientific studies primarily on the Bible and the teachings of the Church. Nevertheless, his writings were also influenced by the revelations experienced by Sister Faustina. Christ, during these visions, spoke many times to his Secretary about the great importance in the spiritual life of an attitude of trust in a merciful God. Father Sopoćko talked to the Sister, read her notes and was himself convinced of the validity of this thought. The Professor's most important works on the subject of Divine Mercy are a four-volume work entitled *The Mercy of God in His Works*, several other short works, and dozens of articles.³ In his main work, he did not refer to the revelations associated with Sister Faustina. He did so with a view to the 1959 decision of the Holy Office.⁴ Instead, he referred to the person of St Faustina and her notes in the few articles that had been written previously.

The purpose of this article is to show, based on the Blessed's writings, that, according to him, the virtue of trust is the basis of a properly understood spirituality of mercy. All its other elements, such as the various forms of the devotion to the merciful God, the works of mercy, will be as fruitful and correctly understood and experienced as long as an attitude of trust is at their basis. The studies produced by Father Sopoćko contain original approaches and definitions of the virtue of trust. This originality lies in the characteristic phrases and comparisons, and the position he ascribes to the virtue of trust in the spiritual life, especially in the spirituality of mercy. The extensive literature on Divine Mercy by Sopoćko, whether of a scholarly, retreat or private nature, is not widely known or sufficiently developed theologically. Previous studies have focused mainly on the person of Father Sopoćko himself (works by Bishop Henryk Ciereszko, Father Stanisław Strzelecki). There are also individual studies by various authors, presenting some selected aspect from Father Sopoćko's writings, most often the attribute of the Divine Mercy. The trust, on the other hand, is addressed occasionally and not holistically. Hence, the aim of the article is to systematically frame the virtue of trust and bring out its existential specificity. For this reason, the article uses the method of philological analysis, and an intuitive insight into Sopoćko's thought, tracing his thought with a critical commentary. The results of the scientific research carried out are presented in the conclusion of the article.

³ For a full bibliography of Father Sopoćko's works, see: Ciereszko, *Życie i działalność*, 611–619.

⁴ Father Sopoćko faced many obstacles in promoting the devotion to Divine Mercy; the issue was not sufficiently developed. As a result, there has been a lot of misunderstanding about the correct comprehension of the whole idea. Therefore, the Church authorities opposed the introduction of this devotion into the life of the Church. The proof was the decision of the Holy Office of 19 November 1958 announced on 6 March 1959. It prohibited the promotion of the devotion to Divine Mercy in the form presented by Sister Faustina. Cf. Ciereszko, *Życie i działalność*, 440–443.

Firstly, the article shows how Sopoćko understands the virtue of trust and what characteristics he defines it by. Next, the effects of this virtue in the spiritual life are presented. The final section shows the role of the virtue of trust in the worship of Divine Mercy.

1. The Essence of Trust

Sopoćko calls trust “a tribute to the Divine Mercy”⁵ and explains it as follows: “whoever expects help from God confesses that He is all-powerful and good, that He can and wants to show us this help, that He is above all merciful.”⁶ According to him, “trust is the rest of our mind immersed in the constant thought of the presence of an all-powerful merciful God, conceived as Father and Saviour rather than as Lord.”⁷ The term “rest of one’s mind” points to the closeness of the relationship between man and God, peace and security. It even suggests some kind of deeper connection with the Creator.

Trust in itself is defined by Sopoćko as “expecting someone’s help.”⁸ In his studies, he also distinguishes the issue of natural and supernatural trust. Natural trust is when we expect help from people, supernatural one is when we look for help in God.⁹ In his studies, the Blessed refers to the Word of God to explain how the essence of trust is to be understood. Among other things, he quotes the words of the psalmist: “Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we have hoped in thee.” (Ps 32:22), commenting that trust in God is the measure by which we receive mercy from Him.¹⁰

The professor shows the relationship between trust and other virtues. He writes that trust flows from faith, enhances hope and love. The virtues of hope and trust are close to each other, and are therefore sometimes confused. He explains

⁵ Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 191.

⁶ Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 191; cf. Sopoćko, “Najsukuteczniejszy motyw ufności,” 328; Sopoćko, *Doskonalsłość a ufność*, 52.

⁷ Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 2.

⁸ Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 189; cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 24; Sopoćko, *Godzina święta*, 99; Sopoćko, *O święto Najmiłosierdniejszego Zbawiciela*, 16; Sopoćko, “Odpowiedź nasza,” 20; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 1; Sopoćko, “Potrzeba ufności,” 136; Sopoćko, “Skutki ufności,” 132; Sopoćko, *Poznajmy Boga*, 26; Szałkowska, *Tajemnica Miłosierdzia*, 113–114.

⁹ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 189; Sopoćko, “Odpowiedź nasza,” 21; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 1; Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 24.

¹⁰ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 189; In Sister Faustina’s *Diary* (no. 1578) we find such a record: “The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is – trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive. Souls that trust boundlessly are a great comfort to Me, because I pour all the treasures of My graces into them. I rejoice that they ask for much, because it is My desire to give much, very much. On the other hand, I am sad when souls ask for little, when they narrow their hearts.” This is one example showing the influence his penitent had on Sopoćko’s views.

the relationship between the two by stating that “the object of hope is God himself, and the object of trust is God’s promise to give us the help we need.”¹¹ The virtue of hope is the pursuit of future good, that is, of eternal happiness, which man can only attain by the mercy of God. The virtue of trust is a source of power to overcome difficulties and fears for one’s own salvation and that of one’s neighbour.¹²

Trust is also part of the virtue of fortitude; it strengthens the will and makes it resilient to any adversity. It gives the will the power to overcome any fear, the serenity and readiness to accept all that God gives.¹³ It is also indispensable in the virtue of magnanimity, when God calls individual people to lofty and difficult acts. Trust in God’s help and mercy is a support in overcoming the obstacles associated with them.¹⁴

Sopoćko writes that natural trust is the expectation of help from people. Such trust, though necessary, is nevertheless limited and imperfect, as imperfect as man is.¹⁵ The only one who does not fail is God and therefore one can place complete trust in Him. The main basis for trust in the Creator is His mercy. In proving his assumptions, the Professor cites examples from the Bible showing that those who put their trust in the Lord overcame all adversity and were victorious.¹⁶ He draws particular attention to the merciful words and actions of Jesus presented in the New Testament. They form the basis for complete trust in the goodness of God.¹⁷ Other Gospel passages, including the pericope recounting Peter’s walking on the lake, are also examples. Jesus reached out his hand to the drowning disciple and said: “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” (Matt 14:31b). To the other Apostles, fearful in the storm, he said: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” (Mark 6:50).¹⁸ The encouragement to trust was also heard by the Disciples at the Last Supper. Christ then announced to

¹¹ Sopoćko, “Skutki ufności,” 136.

¹² Cf. Sopoćko, “Ufność kapłana,” 299.

¹³ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 189; Sopoćko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 13; Sopoćko, “Ufność kapłana,” 299; Sopoćko, “Miłosierdzie Boże a ufność,” 2; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 1; Sopoćko, “Odpowiedź nasza,” 20; see Molinie, *Oddać się miłosierdziu*, 48.

¹⁴ Cf. Sopoćko, “Ufność kapłana,” 230.

¹⁵ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 189; Sopoćko, *Godzina święta*, 99; Sopoćko, “Skutki ufności,” 132; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 1; Sopoćko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 13; Sopoćko, *Poznajmy Boga*, 13. Here, Father Sopoćko (*The Mercy of God*, IV, 24) referred to events in Polish history, including the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, “during which the besieged made heroic efforts, expecting the promised help. But human help is unreliable, promises uncertain and covenants very often treacherous. By contrast, supernatural trust in God never fails.”

¹⁶ The victorious battle between David and Goliath (cf. 1 Kgs 17:45); and the psalms Ps 41:6; 45:3; 31:10; 32:18 and others were given as examples. Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 189–190; Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 24–25; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 1; Sopoćko, *Poznajmy Boga*, 24–25; Sopoćko, *Zrzeszenia chrześcijańskie*, 14.

¹⁷ “He says – «I am the good shepherd» and this one title should awaken in everyone’s heart boundless trust” (Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 190); cf. Sopoćko, “Miłosierdzie Boże ufającym Jemu,” 17–18; Sopoćko, “Najsukuteczniejszy motyw ufności,” 327; Sopoćko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 13; Sopoćko, *Poznajmy Boga*, 25; Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boże względem grzeszników*, 11; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 1–2.

¹⁸ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 25; Sopoćko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 13; Sopoćko, “Odpowiedź nasza,” 21; Sopoćko, “Potrzeba ufności,” 136; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 2.

them the suffering that would befall them and, at the same time, pointed to the trust that would enable them to overcome the burden of this pain: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).¹⁹

Blessed Michael is not only a theologian, but also a priest. Therefore, it must be taken into account that, on the one hand, he is keen to develop scientifically the attribute of mercy in God and, consequently, also the subject of trust. On the other hand, as a preacher, he writes his books and articles in a pastoral manner. An example of this is the understanding of trust, which stems from the “image of God” that the believer carries within himself. Sopoćko starts from the assertion that a relationship of trust between man and God is only possible with a proper knowledge of God. Any erroneous perception of the Creator as a punishing Judge, or creating in oneself an image of Him in the image and likeness of sinful man, leads to the construction of inappropriate references, not allowing a loving and trusting approach of man to his Father.²⁰ Being foster children of God, in practice we often do not follow this vocation.²¹ A proper knowledge of God, in which there is room for trust in His mercy, leads to holiness, and “the concept of God is the key to holiness.”²² There is a correlation between man’s trusting attitude towards God and the mercy shown to him by the Creator. Sopoćko puts it in a short statement: “trust pierces the heavens and returns from there with blessing.”²³

The professor believes that trust is not just about passively expecting help from God. One cannot rely solely on people, but neither must one despise them. One should “expect help from God while making a personal effort.”²⁴

To explain the essence of trust, Father Sopoćko uses comparisons. One is the symbol of an anchor. Just as dropping an anchor is, in the event of a storm, a rescue from shipwreck, so trusting in the mercy of God is such an anchor in

¹⁹ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 190; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 2.

²⁰ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 191–192; Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boże jedyna nadzieja ludzkości*, 11.

²¹ Sopoćko (*The Mercy of God*, III, 192) explains his views as follows: “God’s sonship is only a name, and in deeds we do not show childlike trust towards such a good Father.”

²² Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 191; cf. Sopoćko, *Doskonałość a ufność*, 52–53; Sopoćko, “Najskuteczniejszy motyw ufności,” 327; “Trust shows that God is a merciful Father” (Sopoćko, “Skutki ufności,” 136).

²³ Sopoćko, “Potrzeba ufności,” 137; cf. Sopoćko, “Najskuteczniejszy motyw ufności,” 327; cf. Sopoćko, “Potrzeba ufności,” 137; Kruszevska, *Pozwól mojemu miłosierdziu*, 66–67; Sopoćko (*The Mercy of God*, III, 200) also uses figurative comparisons of a more pastoral nature, such as: “Trust, then, can be compared to a chain hanging from heaven to which we attach our souls. The hand of God lifts this chain up and takes those who cling tighter to it. He who grasps firmly will get to heaven, but he who is effeminate and weakly or does not grasp and hold firmly at all will fall ignominiously inescapably into the depths of the abyss. Let us therefore grasp this chain during prayer [...]. Let us trust in God in temporal and eternal needs, in sufferings, dangers, abandonments. Let us trust even when it seems to us that God has abandoned us, when He refuses to comfort us, when He does not listen to us, when He weighs us down with a heavy cross. It is then that one must trust God the most, for this is the time of trial, the time of experience through which every soul must pass”; see Kosicki, *Ufność i miłosierdzie*, 71.

²⁴ Sopoćko, “Odpowiedź nasza,” 22.

the spiritual life.²⁵ Lack of trust is like a dark cloud that is a barrier to the rays of the sun so that they cannot illuminate and warm the earth. Likewise, all the gifts and graces of a merciful God will not penetrate a person's soul if he or she does place the obstacle of lack of trust.²⁶

Blessed Michael Sopoćko also outlines the causes and consequences of the lack of trust in God. He identifies self-love distorting the true image of God as the greatest obstacle to the spiritual life. For the sake of man, the Creator allows a certain amount of suffering, which this man often refuses to accept and, full of self-love, desires the satisfaction of all his desires. When he does not receive this, he sinks into sadness, discouragement and moves away from God. In this case, a renewed act of trust in a merciful God is helpful.²⁷ The above statements, are largely preachy. This is due to the fact that the Father Sopoćko aims not only to elaborate the subject dogmatically, but also to present it from the pastoral side, for the spiritual benefit of the readers.²⁸

The cause for the lack of trust, according to Sopoćko, is also due to the problems of the time. He first mentioned man's increasing trust in his own strength, wisdom, inventions and all worldly goods.²⁹

The second cause is sin and human weakness. Being imperfect himself, man also attributes imperfection to God, creating an image of the Creator in the likeness of creation. Such views detract from the glory of God and are detrimental to man himself.³⁰

25 "The anchor is a symbol of trust. Often the soul – like a ship at sea in a storm – loses everything that constitutes its strength, beauty and value, the mast of faith is shattered, the rudder of love is broken, and all the possessions of good deeds are covered by billows [...]. But the soul is not lost if it catches on the anchor of trust in the all-powerful Divine Mercy." (Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 25); St Faustina used a similar symbol in her *Diary* (no. 283): "I want to love You As no human soul has ever loved You before; and although I am utterly miserable and small, I have, nevertheless, cast the anchor of my trust deep down into the abyss of Your mercy, O my God and Creator!"

26 Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 26; Sopoćko, "Miłosierdzie Boże względem grzeszników," 481.

27 Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 192–193; "Trust is an encouragement and a reassurance always reconcilable with all the calamities and trials of life [...]. It detaches us from ourselves, weak and miserable, to fill us with new strength. Nothing facilitates the fulfilment of hard tasks more than trust". (Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 2); Wygalałak, "Ojcowie Apostolscy," 170–171.

28 Raising a subject of lack of trust, the Professor, for pastoral purposes, quotes the words of St Faustina in one of his articles, and since he does so extremely rarely, it follows that he considered them important. "But he who trusts not in God but in himself [...] places obstacles to Divine Mercy, as the Lord Jesus said to Sister Faustina: «Tell souls not to place within their own hearts obstacles to My mercy, which so greatly wants to act within them. My mercy works in all those hearts which open their doors to it. Both the sinner and the righteous person have need of My mercy. Conversion, as well as perseverance, is a grace of My mercy. The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is – trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive»" (Sopoćko, "Skutki ufności," 133).

29 Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 198; Sopoćko, "Skutki ufności," 133.

30 Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 200; Sopoćko, "Najszybszy motyw ufności," 327; Sopoćko, *Precz z nieufnością*, 27–28; "We imagine a God who is changeable, moody like us, harsh and troubled like us, etc. Well, by thinking and acting in this way, we insult God and do ourselves a great disservice." (Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 200).

Lack of trust in the Creator is also born out of seeing Him only as a harsh, just Judge. Because of this, people live in a fear that does not allow a proper, loving and trusting relationship with the Father to develop. They then have no warmth towards God, which does not allow them to trust Him as a merciful Father.³¹

Another cause of the lack of trust is badly experienced remorse. Sopoćko states that “the magnitude of our past sins should not take away our trust despite the burden of these sins, which is great, greater than we imagine. For by them, we have risen up against the Most High Lord, we have grieved the Holy Spirit, we have crucified Christ anew, we have defiled His Blood – but a hundred times greater is the Divine Mercy.”³² In this context, he also raises the subject of despair, showing that it is a sin against the Holy Spirit, closing off the way for acts of the grace of God.³³

Looking at the problem of the lack of trust in modern times, it seems that its causes are only partly the same. Man still firmly believes in his own abilities and the power of technology. However, he does not see God as a strict judge, tends to disregard His laws and commandments, and often does not believe in His existence at all. The contemporary signs of the times that threaten faith, hope and trust were pointed out by Pope John Paul II in his teaching. Among his many documents, the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, dedicated to the Divine Mercy, is an example. There, he cites the widespread progress of science and technology, social injustice, sin and human weakness as phenomena characteristic of his era. All of this raises anxiety and can be a cause of lack of trust towards God (cf. *DiM* 10–14). Pope Francis also repeatedly identifies the problems of the modern world in his documents. He states, among other things, that the cause of sadness, helplessness and confusion can be attributed to enormous developments in the field of technology, which people are unable to keep up with, and to social and economic injustice, especially affecting the poorest (cf. *EG* 52).

³¹ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 199–200.

³² Sopoćko, *Precz z nieufnością*, 23.

³³ Sopoćko (*Precz z nieufnością*, 24) writes on the subject of despair as follows: “True, the sin is too great to be forgiven, it is all the greater because from it come other sins, closing the way to the Heart of God, drying up the source of His grace. But such a sin is not the one we committed in the past, which we often think about, but the one we commit now, and such a sin is our lack of trust and perhaps even despair for salvation. That’s right! Lack of trust and despair is the sin against the Holy Spirit, and as long as one indulges in it, this sin becomes irremediable, because it closes the way for the act of God’s grace.” Cf. Sopoćko, *Precz z zuchwalstwem*, 28; Szałkowska, *Tajemnica Miłosierdzia*, 127–128.

2. Attributes of Trust

Sopocko elaborates on the attributes that perfect trust should have based on Scripture, citing mainly the words of the psalms.³⁴ He writes that it is to be, above all, supernatural, complete, pure, strong and persevering.³⁵ The first attribute of perfect trust is its supernaturalness. This means that trust flows from God's grace and is based on God. The sin is overconfidence, relying only on one's own abilities, talents, prudence. God, in the face of such an attitude, may withdraw His help and thus reveal man's weakness and vulnerability.³⁶ Such trust in oneself puts up a dam that does not allow Divine Mercy to act in the human soul.³⁷ Thus, one can see that the Professor was in favour of maintaining a balance between using human abilities and relying on God's action.³⁸

Another attribute of trust is perseverance and inner strength. They help to guard against pettiness and audacity in the spiritual life. In the case of pettiness, a person loses the courage to act in a good way and falls into evil. Audacity, on the other hand, leads to sin by recklessly exposing oneself to temptation, counting only on God's action without one's own effort.³⁹ It is also wrong to take on tasks that are beyond a person's strength and to which he or she has not been called by God.⁴⁰ Here Father Sopocko warns against a presumptuous and irresponsible trust in Divine Mercy, calling it a sin against the Holy Spirit. It consists of deliberately breaking God's and the Church's commandments with the hope that, after all, the good God will forgive it all. The same happens when a person puts himself in danger of committing a sin, assuming that God in his mercy will protect him from that sin.⁴¹

A properly formed trust should be combined with the fear of God. This fear is born in man as a result of knowing his weaknesses.⁴² The professor writes about four types of fear: slavish, servant, incipient and filial. In the first case, man fears sin

³⁴ For example: Ps 2:12; 117:9; 110:10; 146:11; 119:5. Cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 193–196; Sopocko, "Ufność a bojaźń Pańska," 320.

³⁵ Cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 193; Sopocko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 15; Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 29; Sopocko, "Uroczystość Trzech Króli," 394; Sopocko, "Odpowiedź nasza," 21; Sopocko, *O ufności*, 5; Sopocko, *Godzina święta*, 60; Szalkowska, *Tajemnica Miłosierdzia*, 113–118.

³⁶ Cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 193; Sopocko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 15; Sopocko, "Odpowiedź nasza," 22.

³⁷ Cf. Sopocko, "Skutki ufności," 133; Here Father Sopocko (cf. *The Mercy of God*, III, 194) referred to examples from the Bible, to Saul and Solomon, who ended badly because they trusted too much in themselves.

³⁸ "Trusting in God, we do not rely only on human means, for in this world the greatest forces and treasures will not help unless God himself supports, strengthens, comforts, teaches and guards. While it is necessary to choose the means we consider necessary, we must not rely on them alone, but place all our trust in God." (Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 194); cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 27–28.

³⁹ Cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 194; Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 26, 28–29; Sopocko, "Odpowiedź nasza," 22.

⁴⁰ Cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 29; Sopocko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 16; Sopocko, "Odpowiedź nasza," 22.

⁴¹ Cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 18–29.

⁴² Cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 195; Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 29; Sopocko, *Godzina święta*, 101; Sopocko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 16; "For our sake, trust should be combined with fear, which is the result

because of the punishment that may befall him from God. In the second, he does not want to offend his Creator with a sin that might deprive him of heaven. Such fear already has some connection with faith and trust, and is sufficient to be included in the Sacrament of Penance. Another type of fear the Blessed calls incipient due to the fact that, alongside the fear of punishment and the marks of trust, there is the beginning of the love of God. Filial fear, the most perfect one, consists in man's fear of offending the Father in heaven because of his love for Him. Such fear is a gift of the Holy Spirit, prompting man to humble himself before God. It is combined with perfect contrition, which takes away sins outside the Sacrament of Penance in the absence of the possibility of entering into it. This fear stimulates the greatest reverence towards God, love and boundless trust in Divine Mercy. Father Sopoćko points out that trust bears fruit when it is combined with any of the last three types of fear mentioned. In his spiritual development, however, the Christian should strive for filial fear.⁴³ Christian trust has two essential features: it is unwavering because of Divine Mercy and combined with fear, because of man's weakness.⁴⁴ Fear combined with trust becomes humility and courage. Trust, on the other hand, in conjunction with fear, is strong and humble,⁴⁵ "so trust by fearing, and fear by trusting."⁴⁶

The virtue of trust is also linked to repentance and conversion, "to each of us a moment of mercy is appointed, a moment of rising from sin and doing penance. Woe to the soul that is unaware of this time of mercy."⁴⁷ Trusting in the goodness of God without renouncing sin is called delusion by Father Sopoćko. Such an attitude brings punishment upon man because Divine Mercy is not the same as impunity. We see that the Blessed warned against overconfidence that excludes penance. For such an attitude leads to sin against the Holy Spirit, and "to sin with trust in Divine Mercy is the greatest misfortune."⁴⁸

In the sources analysed, it is also stated that trust should be combined with a longing for the life to come in union with Jesus, in his Kingdom, for seeing the promises of God and thus be an impulse to work and offer oneself completely to God. However,

of knowing our wretchedness. Without this fear, trust becomes conceit, fear without trust becomes pettiness" (Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 5–6).

⁴³ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 195; Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 29–30; Sopoćko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 16–17; Sopoćko, "Ufność a bojaźń Pańska," 320–322; Sopoćko, *O święto Miłosierdzia Bożego*, 9–11.

⁴⁴ Cf. Sopoćko, "Ufność a bojaźń Pańska," 322.

⁴⁵ Cf. Sopoćko, "Ufność a bojaźń Pańska," 322; Father Sopoćko (*The Mercy of God*, III, 195) used here, as in many other places, an analogy between the truth concerning the spiritual life and the surrounding world: "For a sailing boat to sail, it needs the wind and a certain weight to submerge it in the water so that it does not capsize. So we too need the wind of trust and the weight of fear. Without trust we fall into frigidity, with fearlessness we crash against the rock of conceit"; cf. Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 5–6.

⁴⁶ Sopoćko, "Ufność a bojaźń Pańska," 322.

⁴⁷ Sopoćko, "Odpowiedź nasza," 23; cf. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boże względem grzeszników*, 6; Sopoćko, "Ufność a pokuta," 324; Szalkowska, *Tajemnica Miłosierdzia*, 125–126.

⁴⁸ Sopoćko, "Wykonało się," 13; cf. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boże. Studium*, 18–19.

even this trusting longing is to be in accordance with God's will, full of humility and based on repentance and self-development.⁴⁹

The professor also writes about the connection that exists between trust in a merciful God and mercy towards people. These considerations can be found in the letters he addressed to the members of the newly formed religious congregation.⁵⁰ However, his notes can be used for the spiritual growth of every Christian, not just the consecrated person. According to Father Sopoćko's thought, a properly understood trust in a merciful God assumes active mercy. He himself puts it in the following words: "He who trusts in a merciful God does not remain a passive mere recipient of favours, but will endeavour to perform acts of mercy."⁵¹ He also writes to the sisters that one way of performing acts of mercy is to call people, especially those who are suffering, to trust in the mercy of God. The new motto to be adopted by this emerging congregation: "Jesus, I trust in you" is compared by Father Sopoćko to a plough that should plough through the whole of the pain filled world, thus becoming a solace and a cure for it.⁵² The above statements show that Sopoćko does not limit the attitude of trust only to man's relationship with God, but also implies an openness and sensitivity to the spiritual well-being of others. The above statements are part of the tradition of the Church's teaching, where an attitude of mercy towards our neighbour is strongly emphasised alongside all forms of worship towards God.⁵³

3. Effects of Trust

In creating a systematic description of the virtue of trust, the Professor also points out its effects in the Christian life. It is based on the word of God, which is typical for his way of writing.⁵⁴ The first effect of trust is that it brings glory to the Creator Himself. "Nothing brings God's omnipotence so much glory as that God makes omnipotent those who trust in Him."⁵⁵ This omnipotence of people of which he writes stems from the very existence of an attitude of trust. In contrast, the creature's

⁴⁹ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 196; Sopoćko, *O ufności*, 6; Sopoćko, *Terapia smutku*, 3.

⁵⁰ Letters from Czarny Bór addressed to the first members of the congregation of which Father Sopoćko was the founder. Currently, the Congregation of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus.

⁵¹ Sopoćko, "Miłosierdzie Boże ufającym Jemu," 20.

⁵² Cf. Sopoćko, "Wykonało się," 10.

⁵³ This is exemplified by the papal teaching of recent years: John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, no. 14; Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 187–196; Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, nos. 10, 12.

⁵⁴ Such a passage is, for example, Jer 17:7–8, which in the translation cited by Father Sopoćko begins with the words: "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose trust the Lord is..."

⁵⁵ Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 193.

boundless trust in the Creator is an affirmation of His Omnipotence, which multiplies God's glory.⁵⁶

The subsequent effects of trust, although linked to the glorification of God, are already more about the person himself. Trust gives the strength and fortitude needed to overcome life's difficulties. Sopoćko uses his typical wording here, calling this virtue "a tribute to Divine Mercy, which mutually gives the trusting person the strength and fortitude to overcome the greatest difficulties."⁵⁷ So the consequence of trusting in a merciful God are the graces needed to overcome obstacles and difficulties. It is real trust that removes sadness, despondency and is the cause of joy even in the most difficult times of life.⁵⁸

A consequence of an attitude of trust is also the particular kind of consolation that a person experiences at the moment of departure from this world. It is a difficult and painful moment, and it is often at this time that lack of trust and despair creep into the soul. Encouragement is then needed for the dying person to place their trust in the mercy of God.⁵⁹

According to the Blessed, trust ensures eternal reward. It is linked to sorrow for sins, which is in turn a prerequisite for justification. Justification, on the other hand, can be obtained both in the Sacrament of Penance and through perfect contrition combined with a determination to receive the Sacrament of Penance as soon as possible. The Professor concludes his considerations by stating that "no one would have aroused perfect contrition if he had not had trust in Divine Mercy."⁶⁰

According to the Blessed, trust paves the way for the other virtues. He cites in his writings a short story. "There is a legend of how all the virtues decided to leave the earth, stained by numerous misdeeds, decided to return to the heavenly homeland. When they approached the heavenly gates, the doorkeeper let all of them in except trust, so that on earth the poor people would not fall into despair amid so many temptations and sufferings. In view of this, trust had to return, and with it all the other virtues returned too."⁶¹ This legend is evidence of Sopoćko's pastoral writing

⁵⁶ Sister Faustina wrote a similar thought in her *Diary* (no. 548): "My daughter [...] Your duty will be to trust completely in My goodness, and My duty will be to give you all you need. I am making Myself dependent upon your trust."

⁵⁷ Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 197; cf. Sopoćko, "Odpowiedź nasza," 22; Sopoćko, "Ufność a Miłosierdzie Boże," 189–190; Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 26.

⁵⁸ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 198; Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 26; Sopoćko, *Godzina święta*, 100; Sopoćko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 14–15; Sopoćko, "Skutki ufności," 133–134; "Joy is one of our greatest needs. What light is to a plant, air to an animal, and water to a fish, so is joy to man. It is the ozone for bodily, spiritual and supernatural life – it is a balm, soothing wounds, it is an invaluable social factor. Well, trust in Divine Mercy is the source of such joy, for it lifts up the tormented soul and makes the cross of life lighter and more pleasant" (Sopoćko, "Skutki ufności," 133).

⁵⁹ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 199–200; Sopoćko, "Skutki ufności," 134–144.

⁶⁰ Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 27; cf. Sopoćko, *Wielbijmy Boga*, 14.

⁶¹ Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 198.

style and, at the same time, a confirmation that in his theological thought the virtue of trust is the basis of human spiritual development.

Heroic trust can lead to extraordinary events in the spiritual life. The professor puts this thought in an original way, stating that “trust works miracles because it has God’s omnipotence at its service.”⁶² He gives as examples the miracles worked by God through Moses (cf. Exod 4:16), the healing of the lame man by the Apostles John and Peter (cf. Acts 3:7), and other passages from the Bible.⁶³ The above statement can be interpreted as referring to man’s personal, very deep relationship with God, where the basis is selfless trust. It is trust that causes God to act with extraordinary generosity.

As a fruit of trust, Father Sopoćko also mentions inner peace, the source of which can only be God.⁶⁴ He uses biblical imagery here. “Just as a child peacefully falls asleep in its mother’s arms, fearing nothing, so the soul that trusts in Divine Mercy always remains balanced, fearing nothing, because it knows that sooner a mother forgets her child than God those who trust in Him. This is why Christ the Lord, appearing to the Apostles after the Resurrection, greeted them with the words: *Peace be with you*, for they trusted in him greatly.”⁶⁵ Sopoćko here shows the Son of God as revealing the Father. Just as an attitude of trust in the Father creates peace, so the Disciples receive the gift of peace from Christ on the basis of trust in Him. We find similar thoughts in the teaching of John Paul II, for example in the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, where Christ is the one who reveals the mercy of the Father (cf. *DiM* 1).

The above issue of the effects of trust is partly pastoral in nature. This is how Father Sopoćko described them. Indeed, one of the aims of his study was to demonstrate the fundamental importance of trust in Christian spirituality and to encourage believers to adopt this attitude.

4. Trust and the Devotion to Divine Mercy

A separate topic in Father Sopoćko’s writings is the trust described in the context of the revelations of the merciful Jesus to Sister Faustina. This issue is present in articles written prior to the *Notification* on the devotion to Divine Mercy.

Among other things, the professor emphasises in his writings the event in the Cenacle when Christ appeared to the Apostles and encouraged them to remain in peace

⁶² Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 198.

⁶³ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 26- 27; Sopoćko, *Godzina święta*, 101.

⁶⁴ Cf. Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 198; Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 26; Sopoćko, “Skutki ufności,” 134.

⁶⁵ Sopoćko, “Skutki ufności,” 134.

and trust. This description refers to the image of the merciful Saviour (known today as the “Jesus, I trust in you” painting). “The well-known Image of the Divine Mercy shows us Jesus at that very moment of his appearance to the Apostles in the Cenacle, on the evening of the Resurrection, and whoever venerates this image and trusts in the Saviour will experience unbroken peace.”⁶⁶ It can be seen here that the Professor embeds the devotion to Divine Mercy in the Bible.

The Blessed also writes about trust in the context of the motto: “Jesus, I trust in you.” This was probably inspired by Christ’s revelations to Sister Faustina.⁶⁷ The considerations for this motto are of a different nature to the views on trust described above. Those referred largely to God the Father; in these, the centre is Jesus.

Sopocko derives the truthfulness of the invocation “Jesus, I trust in you!” from Scripture: “Immediately he spoke to them and said, «Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid»” (Mark 6:50; cf. Matt 9:2; John 16:33).⁶⁸ Drawing on the Word of God, he concludes that the most trustworthy is Jesus Christ – God-man. “It is a Safe Guide that is «the Way and the Truth and the Life». He has already led more than one generation to the goal He has indicated, and He will lead safely anyone who trusts in Him endlessly.”⁶⁹

In the act of “Jesus, I trust in you!” Father Sopocko sees salvation for everyone, especially for the sinner. He writes that particular trust in Divine Mercy is needed by those who experience inner turmoil and suffering because of their sinful past and the resulting remorse.⁷⁰ In this act, he also sees help and defence for the temptations to come. He writes that when one is overwhelmed by temptation, it is important to remain calm and firmly say “Jesus, I trust in you!”⁷¹

⁶⁶ Sopocko, “Skutki ufności,” 134; cf. Sopocko, *The Mercy of God*, IV, 26; Sopocko proved the theological correctness of the image by referring to the biblical description of the scene from the Cenacle (John 20:19–23). He showed that Jesus in this image looks as he did when he entered the Cenacle.

⁶⁷ In one of these revelations, the Saviour instructed the painting of the now world-famous image with the inscription “Jesus, I trust in you!”. Sister Faustina (*Diary*, no. 47) wrote: “In the evening, when I was in my cell, I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand [was] raised in the gesture of blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast. From beneath the garment, slightly drawn aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale [...]. After a while, Jesus said to me, «Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You»; cf. Sopocko, “Miłosierdzie Boże względem grzeszników,” 483; Sopocko, *Miłosierdzie Boże źródłem radości*, 11.

⁶⁸ “Because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, «Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid»” (Mark 6:50).

⁶⁹ Sopocko, “Jezu, ufam Tobie!,” 131, cf. 132; Sopocko, *Terapia smutku*, 13.

⁷⁰ In his writings, Sopocko often gives pastoral advice. Among other things, in the context of excessive remorse, he writes: “It is here that it is necessary, at the very beginning, to remove all doubts, to overcome within oneself fears and anxiety as the most dangerous temptations, to overcome with this superior act «Jesus, I trust in You»” (Sopocko, “Wykonało się,” 11); cf. Sopocko, “Miłosierdzie Boże źródłem prawdziwej radości,” 162–163.

⁷¹ Cf. Sopocko, “Wykonało się,” 14.

The Blessed's writings contain elements from his personal life, showing his trust in God. In one of his letters to the Sisters of the congregation he founded, he confessed:

I trust firmly that all the actions of my life will be found in eternity except the sinful ones which Jesus annihilated in the Sacrament of Penance and will forgive them, as he forgave the sinful life of Magdalene, the denial of Peter, the perverse persecution of Saul of Tarsus, as he forgave Augustine, as long as I repent as they did. The last stone of the evil that has already passed should be for me the foundation stone for the new edifice of holiness "Jesus, I trust in you!"⁷²

When analysing Father Sopoćko's writings on trust, it is important to remember the aim he set for himself. He intended to elaborate the issue theologically, but also to show its pastoral significance. Hence, there are many expressions, descriptions and examples intended to serve the spiritual development of the reader. From the analysis of his writings presented above, it is clear that:

1. He bases his considerations on trust on the Word of God, which he analyses.
2. His studies are rooted in traditional theology, and their novelty lies in incorporating this traditional thought into the development of the devotion to Divine Mercy and giving it an existential form.
3. He emphasises that the object of trust is Divine Mercy, and it is this virtue that is the basis of a well-understood spirituality of mercy.
4. He proves that trust is the essence of the devotion to Divine Mercy.
5. He enumerates and elaborates the qualities of trust. Such elaborations are lacking in the theological literature.
6. His writings were inspired by the spiritual experiences of Sister Faustina. As a continuator of her mission, he was responsible for the scientific elaboration of the topic of Divine Mercy. However, he could not refer directly to the revelations of Jesus to his penitent, as their credibility had not yet been recognised by the Church. All this posed a considerable difficulty for him.

Father Sopoćko's thought is not only part of traditional theology and Church teaching but is also reflected in contemporary teaching. John Paul II writes about trust

⁷² Sopoćko, "Wykonało się," 11; In several other places the Blessed also wrote about trust, giving his deliberations a personal touch: "When sickness strikes me, or disability strikes me: Jesus, I trust in You! When slander taints me and saturates me with bitterness: Jesus, I trust in You! When friends abandon me and hurt me in speech and deed: Jesus, I trust in You!" (Sopoćko, *The Mercy of God*, III, 196); cf. Sopoćko, "Jezu, ufam Tobie!," 132.

in his documents, placing the human Redeemer at the centre, as the one in whom one can place hope (cf. *RH* 1). Benedict XVI presents this thought in *Spe Salvi*, emphasising that “Man’s great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—God who has loved us and who continues to love us «to the end»” (SS 27). Pope Francis, on the other hand, addresses the issue of trust in God in the exhortation *Christus Vivit*, writing in it of the great love of the Creator, in whom it is worth trusting: “you can find security in the embrace of your heavenly Father, of the God who first gave you life and continues to give it to you at every moment” (CHV 113). As can be seen, this topic is always relevant and developed in Church documents.

Looking at Father Sopoćko’s rich, multi-faceted literature, topics still worthy of scholarly study seem to be those related to, among other things, new forms of the devotion to Divine Mercy: the Image of the Divine Mercy and Divine Mercy Sunday, as well as the issue of suffering.

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