

ARCHIVE

The article on the social function of the cult of Isidore 'the Ploughman' in seventeenth-century Poland penned by Janusz Tazbir, one of the most outstanding researchers of the modern history of Poland, was first published in the periodical *Przegląd Historyczny* in 1955, and has ever since been one of the major, and classical, scholarly texts on the policies employed by Polish Counter-Reformation with respect to peasants. The name of the author, the historian who to a significant extent has formed the framework for modern interpretations of the cultural history of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, has certainly contributed to the article's significance and popularity. Moreover, the text is itself an outstanding instance of an aptly chosen exemplification that becomes the basis for explaining a large-scale and highly important phenomenon. The English version provided below is not the first appearance of the essay in this periodical. In 1969, *Acta Poloniae Historica* published Tazbir's article entitled 'Die gesellschaftlichen Funktionen des Kultus des heiligen Isidor des Pflügers in Polen' (APH 20 [1969], 120–37). Its German title basically renders the original Polish title but the text we find below it is, in fact, different. The author has repeatedly dealt with the figure of Saint Isidore of Madrid and his last publication related to Isidore apparently came out in 2001.¹

Coming back to the year 1955 and the circumstances in which the study on the social function of the cult of St. Isidore the Ploughman was written and published. The author had just successfully submitted his PhD thesis (the degree was then actually called, in the Soviet-inspired manner, 'Candidate of Sciences'). Polish historiography was undergoing Stalinisation; the communist authorities intensely implemented a historical policy which was meant to rearrange the people's ideas of their own history. The Renaissance fell victim to this process: regarded as 'progressive', the period was promoted as one of

¹ Apart from the article published in APH, the following studies need being mentioned: 'Kult św. Izydora w Europie', *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce*, xiv (1969), 89–99; English translation: 'The Cult of St Isidore the Farmer in Europe', in Bronisław Geremek and Antoni Mączak (eds.), *Poland at the 14th International Congress of Historical Sciences in San Francisco. Studies in Comparative History* (Wrocław, 1975), 99–111; 'Kult św. Izydora', in Janusz Tazbir, *Arianie i katolicy* (Warszawa, 1972), 203–37; 'Święty Izydor w sztuce polskiej', in Andrzej Rottermund (ed.), *Artes Atque Humaniora. Studia Stanisłao Mossakowski sexagenario dicata* (Warszawa, 1989), 223–9, and, 'Kult św. Izydora w XVII i XVIII wieku', in Janusz Tazbir, *Prace wybrane*, iv: *Studia nad kulturą staropolską* (Kraków, 2001), 39–83.

the historical justifications for the taking over of power by the communists. The Polish Brethren (so called Arians), a small Protestant community which developed in Poland in the latter half of the sixteenth and the former half of the seventeenth century, were the most ill-treated because of it. Their radical political and social views (inferred from the Gospel, in any case) incited the period's historical propaganda into recognising them as, almost, the forerunners of the communist movement. The year 1953 was announced the Year of Copernicus and the Year of the Renaissance: historians were expected to join the celebrations by preparing appropriate publications and taking part in a series of conferences.

Given the circumstances, it was by no means easy to practice early modern history in Poland without referring, in one way or another, to the officially developed Marxist narrative. The Tazbir article is not fully clear of such influence – as is apparent in the specific redaction of the text, with the word 'Saint' preceding Isidore's name appearing merely once. The research problem being dealt with is formulated somewhat perversely, though: with all the progressive accomplishments of Polish Renaissance, why did they suffer a defeat in the clash against the 'Jesuit reactionaries'? And, why did the latter, without much effort, won support among the 'people's masses' that, theoretically, should have become the beneficiaries of the progressive Renaissance thought? Tazbir looks out for the replies in the skilful Counter-Reformation propaganda targeted at various estate (i.e. social-class) groups and matched to their sensitivity. As an example of the functioning of such propaganda, the author has chosen the largest – and the most tacit – social group, namely peasants. As a basis of his considerations, he uses an opusculum by Pauline friar Andrzej Gołdonowski entitled *Krótkie zebranie świętobliwego żywota s. Isidora Rolnika z Madryki* [A brief collection of the saintly lives of S. Isidore the farmer of Madrid], printed in 1629, assuming that it communicated the Counter-Reformation doctrine and a social programme tailored to the needs of Polish peasants. The programme would boil down to the commandment of working diligently for the landlord and avoiding opposing him (even if he appears bad or unfair), for which merits the peasant was to receive a prize in the afterlife – the clear and obvious condition being cultivation of one's piousness, as appropriate. Such a programme would be transmitted to the peasants by the Church; the latter was, in fact, the only bringing-up institution in the countryside, which apart from sermons and instructions from the priest made use of instruments such as religious confraternities. Tazbir outlines this vision quite broadly, perceiving the propaganda behind St. Isidore as a tool in the class warfare and assessing, pretty exaggeratedly, the cult's popularity in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Poland. Popular culture was, likewise, described by him in overly simple terms

(but in line with the Marxist science): namely, as a mirror (which only at times was distorting) of the propaganda targeted at the common folk.

With the evident traces of ideological determinants that ruled the historical sciences in Poland in the mid-1950s, Tazbir's later approaches to the cult of St. Isidore – though always using the Goldonowski booklet as a fundamental source – produced attenuated opinions and judgements. The author tended to use more sources and records, and made references to the cult's role elsewhere in Europe. The latter issue was tackled in the article published in the 1969 edition of the annual *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* and in its English version from 1975 (see note). The German translation of the 1955 article, issued in APH also in 1969, was significantly revised – with the introductory considerations on how Counter-Reformation propaganda affected the social affairs in early modern Poland-Lithuania removed (among other items), and references to the situation in other European countries enriched. A similar presentation of the topic can be found in *Arianie i katolicy*, a collection of Tazbir's studies published in 1972. Tazbir continued afterwards to seek information on the cult, with a remarkable aftermath. In 1989, an article came out on effigies of St. Isidore; finally, 2001 saw the publication of his most complete study on the Saint, as part of the multivolume edition of his selected writings. The study basically synthesises, or perhaps compiles, all the threads touched upon in Tazbir's previous studies, articles and essays on the cult. In line with the evolution of the author's work, the core thread was finely weaved into the history of Old-Polish culture and approached in a broad historical perspective reaching as far as the very modern time – the 1980's decade.

Why, then, the earliest version of Tazbir's study on St. Isidore should be worth reminding – the one that is not the most complete, its zealous application of Marxist interpretive patterns being rather deplorable? One reason is of historiographic nature. The article is doubtlessly a peculiar monument of Polish historiography of its time, combining the classical research technique with the topics and interpretations forming a sign of the times. The major incentive, however, is the fact that it was the version which has for years influenced those Polish historians who dealt with the history of popular religion or the social history of the Catholic Church in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Let alone those researchers of the cult of St. Isidore who were merely forced to polemicize against the extremely influential interpretation proposed by the outstanding historian. There is yet another reason why the original version is worth recalling. In the face of the recurring discussion on the responsibility of the socio-political system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for the situation, prospects and later fate of peasants, the 'suppressed majority'

of early-modern Polish society, one rather easily spots that there is something worthy of note in the interpretation originally proposed by Tazbir, and later on toned down in his subsequent articles on the cult of St. Isidore. What we mean by this is the description of the ways in which the religion ideologically underpinned a system that made economic exploitation a guarantee for its success – and, moreover, the ascertainment that the religious framework met the demands, or addressed the needs, of those subject to exploitation. Tazbir’s assessment of the extent of the cult of St. Isidore and the popularity of Goldonowski’s book can be disputed. In fact, it can be doubted whether there functioned any cohesive peasantry-oriented propagandist policy pursued by Counter-Reformation in a structured way. It should however be admitted that Janusz Tazbir has perfectly described what has later on been termed dominant discourse.

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Janusz Tazbir

**THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF THE CULT
OF ISIDORE 'THE PLOUGHMAN'
IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY POLAND**

Contrary to appearances, the Catholic reaction ranks among the least investigated periods in the history of feudal Poland. True, numerous monographs have been published dealing with the trend's leading paladins and proponents (with Piotr Skarga in the lead), along with small contributions dispersed in many a periodical magazine, or, mostly fragmentary, individual source editions. However, the bourgeois science has not resolved – a task impossible for it – the issue of a cultural regression appearing in the seventeenth century, which was vital to the period. There have been no attempts, either (except for some single exceptions), to show the methods and tactics of the reactionists' warfare. Lastly, restricted by its class-bound nature, the bourgeois science has proved unable to shed appropriate light on the socioeconomic background of the regress occurring across the areas of life – political, cultural, and social.

The research postulates proposed as part of the summarised conclusions of the Session on Polish Renaissance held in 1953 strongly emphasised the necessity to address these problems. The point is to show the struggle waged by the Polish Renaissance, its decline and, finally, the origins of the defeat incurred in a clash against the retrograde social and cultural forces. The era of progress would not recede without struggle – and so the Counter-Reformation had to run a long-lasting planned and perfidious action that referred to a variety of estate-related factors and groupings, before it came to a victorious end.

The progressive roots of research in the Counter-Reformation period might certainly be derived from Polish Enlightenment science (Hugo Kołłątaj); its fully scientific genealogy is probably derivable from S. Czarnowski's known (yet hitherto not translated into Polish)

treatise *La réaction catholique en Pologne à la fin du XVI siècle et au début du XVII siècle*.¹

Czarnowski was one of the first to have associated the victory of the Catholic reaction with the arrangement of the period's social forces.

The epoch's research issues is stupendously complex and hard to tackle – enough to extend over years of effort shared by historiographers as well as historians of literature, or philosophy. There are numerous reasons behind this, a major one being the far-reaching versatility of the reactionists' activities – an overly characteristic trait indeed. Thus, they would penetrate into all the classes and estates, create extremely diverse forms of finding outlets for religious as well as political and social energy, and extend far and wide the apparatus of propaganda and impact on the largest possible masses. The Protestant camp could never use a comparable versatility of so rich measures of influence, not even in its heyday.

Given the present state of research – now that we are gathering material for a future synthetic elaboration – it is hard to venture a broader description of the period in question. Even the marking of certain important moments and methods of Counter-Reformation actions can only indicate the crucial research issue which is, at present, doubtlessly disputable and calls for a series of preparatory labours – chiefly, material-related ones.

The previous researchers of the period have focused on the fact that from the outset of its offensive, the Catholic reaction redeveloped certain former, clearly mediaeval, forms of rituals, observances, and ecclesial propaganda. Forty-hour church services (re)appeared, along with flagellators – the latter after a long absence, now owing mainly to the Jesuits.² Reinstated were numerous fraternities or confraternities in urban areas (we will dwell more on this aspect below). Latin resumed its former position. Ascetic pamphlets became dominant in religious literature again.³

¹ It was a paper delivered in 1933 at the International Historical Congress in Warsaw and subsequently published in: (i) *La Pologne au VII Congrès International des Sciences Historiques*, ii (Warszawa, 1933), 287–310; and, (ii) Stefan Czarnowski, *Spółczesność i kultura. Prace z socjologii i historii kultury* (Warszawa, 1939), 374–97; plus, as a separate offprint.

² Fryderyk Szembek, *Gratis plebański ...* (Poznań, 1627), 455; Józef Muczkowski, *Bractwa jezuickie i akademickie w Krakowie* (Kraków, 1845), 80–1.

³ Cf. Aleksander Brückner, *Dzieje kultury polskiej*, ii (Warszawa, 1939), 475 ff.

It has to be stressed, however, that the partial recurrence of old forms of influence was not limited to a formal revival of the organisational activity of certain religious or ceremonial institutions. It has already been remarked that the ecclesial art and interior decorations (paintings, sculptures) clearly demonstrate an influence of the rigorous decisions of the Council of Trent that subjected the ideological contents of works of art to the purposes of Counter-Reformation propaganda.⁴ The same is true for the essence of the fraternities' activities and the contents of sermons delivered and literary works published. A completely new, qualitatively distinct content was poured into all this, which was mainly (though not completely) founded upon the slogan of ruthless combat against Protestantism, at every section of life. Literature and religious service, music and painting were all meant to excite religious zeal or incite hatred toward Protestantism. Catholicism blended into the content of the nobility's daily life. Ostentatiously manifested, their piety conceals class-related interests of noblemen comprised in their support for Counter-Reformation. On the one hand, the Church tells the exploited masses to obey; on the other, it ensures abundant profits to those lieges who form the ranks of its top hierarchy.

In parallel, often contrary to the unbiased intentions of theologians, the Catholic social doctrine in the West became offering concepts that make it adapted, to some extent, to the current needs – that is, reconciled with the new capitalist elements of production (to mention, as an example, the group of Jesuit ideologues led by Luis de Molina).⁵

Clearly, the situation in Poland was completely different: there, the Catholicism patronised the victory of regressive forms of the feudal system, supporting them with its authority and excusing with use of a Bible-based social doctrine. Yet, also there a compromise becomes clearly evident between the mediaeval ideas of attitude toward usury and value of money, on the one hand, and the needs of then-current economy (as in Martinus Smigletius/Marcin Śmiglecki, for instance),

⁴ Studies on this subject-matter are numerous, to mention: Emile Malé, *L'art religieux après le concile de Trente* (s.l., 1932); Werner Weisbach, *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation* (Berlin, 1921); Walter Weibel, *Jesuitismus and Barockskulptur* (Strasburg, 1909); and others.

⁵ Cf. Franz Borkenau, *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild. Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie der Manufakturperiode* (Stuttgart, 1934), esp. 215 ff.

on the other.⁶ This particular issue forms one of the further research postulates for our work on the socioeconomic ideology of Polish Counter-Reformation.

Among the most popular forms of Counter-Reformation propaganda, *lives of the saints* figured prominently in the realm of religious literature. Inherently connected with the cult of the saints – the practice highly mocked by all the factions in the Reformation movement – the *lives* regained their former position in the heat of the battle against the movement. Adapted to the current expedient needs through capable itemisation and emphasis on the relevant miracles within the old biographical canon, or by way of express piece of teaching crowning the argument, they defended the truths of faith, and berated the heretics' errors. One classical example is the *Żywoty świętych* [Lives of the Saints] compiled by Piotr Skarga: reissued several times, the collection had (according to K. Estreicher) as many as sixteen editions between 1579 and the late eighteenth century.⁷ The Skarga book moreover proved record-breaking in terms of readership: apart from noblemen's manors or burghers' tenement-houses, it successfully paved the way for itself to peasants' huts as well, and enjoyed in these circles as a *sui generis* substitute novel, awakening curiosity with its plot and its background, whilst the characters portrayed triggered compassion.

Skarga's *Żywoty*⁸ offer a series of lives of saints, oftentimes copied after the old patterns, which is followed by "the teaching [of the saint in question] opposing [that of] the heretics of to-day"⁹ and defending the moments that had come under the most severe attack in the Catholic liturgy, dogmas, rite, and observances – these including pilgrimages,¹⁰ the value of the Holy Mass¹¹ and of the baptism of

⁶ Cf. Adam Szelągowski, *Pieniądz i przewrót cen w XVI i XVII wieku w Polsce* (Lwów, 1902), 24–9, 226.

⁷ Karol Estreicher, *Bibliografia polska*, xxviii (Kraków, 1930), 160–7.

⁸ Quoted after the most recent [as of publication date hereof, 1955] edition compiled in the 1930s by Cracow-based Jesuit Friars: Piotr Skarga, *Żywoty świętych Starego i Nowego Zakonu*, i (Kraków, 1933) (incl. [feast days in] January, February, March); ii (Kraków, 1934) (incl. April, May, June); iii (Kraków, 1933) (incl. July, August, September); iv (Kraków, 1936) (incl. October, November, December).

⁹ *Ibidem*, i, 37, 38, 55, 56, 65, 82, 107, 110, 137, 152, 179, 189, 227, 240, 250, 445, 547; ii, 37, 46, 82, 114, 144, 220, 283, 297, 341; iii, 76, 339, 395, 503, 584; iv, 218, 313, 330, 331, 370, 402.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, i, 37.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, i, 56.

children,¹² orders and celibacy¹³ – and attacking the contrary theses and arguments of Protestant polemicists.¹⁴

As was the case with the religious painting,¹⁵ Skarga's and other versions of *lives of the saints* comprised, to a large extent, a vivid updating tendency, ever since reinstated by the Counter-Reformation. In individual cases, they strove not only for arousal of devotion and mystical sentiments but also for using them as an instrument of sorting out the Reformation currents of the time. Such updating trend went at times pretty far.¹⁶

Thus, for instance, in the life-histories of the last martyr saints – namely, the Jesuits executed in England in the sixteenth century – when defending them against the charge of meddling in secular politics and stirring up the people against the queen, Skarga consistently pursues his apology of the Society of Jesus, in its entirety, wherever possible.¹⁷ This is vibrantly expressed in the story he tells about a dying nobleman who right before his death heard a voice from heaven, "Where is he who sideth with the Jesuits?", and thereby avoided death without confession, for only an Orthodox pope was nearby.¹⁸

The significance of the *lives of the saints* is not limited to their topical contribution to the struggle against the heathen. As they have always been, also in that period the *lives* were outlook-related discourse contributions – religious, yes, but social as well. It is based on the *lives* that we can learn about the mediaeval-inspired Counter-Reformation structural ideals.

"Further more, the other lives of Saints are usefull, in great part, for one estate: the royall for the royall, the priestly for the priestly, and the sæcular for the sæcular", thus Skarga wrote in the introduction to his *Żywoty*.¹⁹ And indeed, it is through these *lives* that

¹² *Ibidem*, i, 82.

¹³ *Ibidem*, i, 152; not to mention the acting in defence of the cult of saints and the related problems (relics, miracles).

¹⁴ Cf., for instance, the attack on the Arian [i.e. Polish Socinians'] dogmatics: *ibidem*, i, 180; iv, 330–1.

¹⁵ Cf. the article by Władysław Tomkiewicz, 'Aktualizm i aktualizacja w polskim malarstwie XVII w.', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, xiii (1951).

¹⁶ Cf. *Pierwsza Konferencja Metodologiczna Historyków Polskich*, i (Warszawa, 1953), 460.

¹⁷ Cf. Skarga, *Żywoty świętych*, iv, 503 ff.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, iii, 485–6.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, i, 18.

Counter-Reformation creates a model of life for every estate, which is basically different for the propertied strata and for the exploited and the most indigent – and even within this general framework it unfolds in consideration of the estate-related specificities and wealth inequalities.

Hence, the moneyed ought to “have the wealthes but scorn them, abound with delightes, never becoming smeared ...”. What the indigent must not do is display “haughtiness in povertie, covetous thought in medicancie, bounteous pleasure in austeritie”.²⁰ Skarga models a pattern of ‘rich man’ who appropriately uses his property, recommending with particular arduousness the dispensation of alms and supporting of the Church and the poor.²¹ “Oh, may thou induce your selfe to offer alms, and thus be certain of youre reward and recompense, in this world and in the othere”, the author of *Kazania sejmowe* [Eight Sermons Before the Sejm] exhorts,²² addressing also the clergymen to whom he gives the Saint Bishops Hilarius and Stanislaus as an example.²³ Yet, Skarga remarks as follows: “Thou be straight and strict whilst doing justice, as the lawes compell you, and thereby thou exercise [i.e. organise] your subjects, never bending towards the right or the left, and never thou repell complaintes of the poore ere the truthe appeareth.”²⁴ As we can see, he would demand not much from those propertied: some well-repayable mercy, and justice compliant with the existing laws, which are to the benefit of the political system. Servants and slaves should face far higher demands.

Among the models to follow in their lives, Skarga puts forth St. Paulinus, who voluntarily sold himself to his lord as a slave and loyally served him.²⁵ A certain converted niggard did a like thing. Sold on his own consent to slavery, he would “serve ... his Lord very loyally and usefully”, for which his lord “wanted ... oftentimes to render him released owing to the greate virtue of his, but he would not want this. And Peter did indeed display in this service his greate patience, for his companions, seeing his lord gracious upon him, offered him severe wrongs, aspersions, and outrages, and slapped his face

²⁰ *Ibidem*, i, 103.

²¹ *Ibidem*, i, 116, 132–4, 194, 202–3; ii, 286.

²² *Ibidem*, i, p. 214.

²³ Skarga, *Zywoty świętych*, i, 108 ff.; ii, 264–5.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, iii, 375.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, ii, 579.

frequently.”²⁶ As it follows, servants and slaves ought to patently endure their destiny.

The wide impact of such *lives of the saints* doubtlessly compelled the clergy circles to attach special attention to this form of religious, and also social, propaganda. Clearly, the more relevant the saint's living conditions with respect to those of the addressees of his life story, the more powerful the impact.

The estate-related pattern of living formulated by Polish Counter-Reformation was expressed not only through such biographies of the saints or blessed: it was characteristically reflected in the funeral sermons or posthumous panegyrics, demonstrating, through the figures of the deceased, the ideal pattern of life of a magnate, nobleman, burgher, or learned man.

The dominant feature emphasised for all the estates was, obviously, piety and religiousness, attachment to the Church and religion. This attitude was recommended to magnates²⁷ and imposed on the nobility, claiming that “the Roman Catholicke faith to arduously deffend is the nobleman's prime gem”, whilst “The second noble gem is the lust for multiplying the glorie of God, generositie for churches, revering the clerick estate”, and taking care “never to let the sacerdotall tythe be left at his home”.²⁸

With regards to political relations, both magnates and nobility were told to “stay faithfull to the king their Lorde”.²⁹ In the realm of social relations, the existing arrangement of class forces was completely approved, the magnates being expected to “live with every one benignely and unrestrainedly, as with their brethren”³⁰ – which meant, to formally persist in loyalty. Nobles were recommended not to overly hold down their peasants and not to make them thoroughly

²⁶ *Ibidem*, i, 205.

²⁷ Cf. Bonawentura Czarliński, *Wizerunk xiążęcia katholicznego to jest kazanie na pogrzebie Jaśnie Oświeconego Xiążęcia Jego Mości Janusza Korybuta na Zbarażu Wiśniowieckiego* (Lublin, [1637]), C_{III}–C_{IV}.

²⁸ Mateusz Bembus, *Wizerunek szlachcica prawdziwego w kazaniu na pogrzebie Wielmożnego Pana Jego Mci Pana Andrzeia Bobole ...* (Wilno, 1629), B₂–B₃; Michał Kuncewicz, *Dobry a pobożny ziemianin ... przy pogrzebnym oddaniu ziemi ciała zmarłego sławnej pamięci P. Stanisława z Wypych Wypyskiego* (Warszawa, 1640), D₃, F; Hieronim Powodowski, *Żywot pobożnych i świętobliwych cnot człowieka szlachetnego Tomasza Zielińskiego* (Poznań, 1622), 7–9; etc.

²⁹ Czarliński, *Wizerunk xiążęcia*, C_{III}.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, B_{III}.

emaciated through excessive taxation and labours, since, at the end of the day, such conduct was not part of the masters' own interest.³¹ The defence, enforced in a top-down manner due to class considerations (amelioration of the system in order to render it persistent), became at times, when pursued by some regular Catholic activists and authors, thoroughly unexpectedly filled with extraordinarily bitter aspects of criticism aimed at the prevalent relations – an area that calls for further detailed study.³²

The nobles were shown a model nobleman's life “so that the people of the noble natyon in this Cm'wth [Commonwealth] may follow its effigie and pattern, and imitating the same one in his godliness and rightwisenness may embellish their owne nobilitie.”³³ Scholars were told stories of the life and works of John Cantius [Kanty], “so that those foreign may allso notice how laborious the academic's dutie is; and for the people of this estate, for to penetrate through them selves in their obligation”.³⁴ Jesuit students were tempted by the monastic journey of St. Stanislaus Kostka of Rostkowo, who, initially, “holding this world in contempt ... entered the order of the holy Name of Jesus, where, submitting to obœdience, at the kitchen, first of all, in chastitie and penurie, he trailled his meagre Jesus”,³⁵ and later on became worshiped the world over. Jan Brożek, his contemporary, mocked at those methods, describing “this bloating of the chyldish hearts with a future fame[:] ‘Thou shalt afterwardees bee the apostle to the New Worlde, thou shalt bee a saint, they shall paint you with rays coming-out of the head’”.³⁶ And yet, the methods proved at least partly successful.

³¹ Bembus, *Wizerunek szlachcica*, B₄; Powodowski, *Żywot pobożnych*, 16.

³² Cf., for example, the anonymous print entitled *Stacye żołnierskie, abo w wyciąganiu ich z dóbr kościelnych potrzebne przestrogi ... krótko spisane przez jedną osobę duchowną* (Kraków, 1636), which tells us that the lords compel their serfs to “labour like some kine, beating, tormenting, harassing, immuring and famishing in the gaol, and burying them alive into earth. What ever best thing the serf hath, is taken from him; what ever beauteous, *prostitutum* ...” (F_v, F₄).

³³ Bembus, *Wizerunek szlachcica*, A₂; Kuncewicz, *Dobry a pobożny ziemianin*, states in the conclusion that “this incidentall sermon may bee [of use] for various other funerall sermons: doe indolge in it salubriously, reader dear, scorn our labour not, and commend this deceased person to God the Lord.”

³⁴ Adam Opatowiusz, *Żywot i cuda wielebnego Jana Kantego ...* (Kraków, 1632), 39.

³⁵ Krzysztofh Chodkiewicz, *Błogosławiony Stanisław Kostka z Rostkowa Societatis Jesu ...* (Kraków, 1606), 13.

³⁶ Jan Brożek, *Gratis* (BPP, no. 82; Kraków, 1929), 7 (reprinted from a 1625 edition).

Since peasants formed the largest stratum in the feudal system, the building of an estate-based model of life and conduct could not neglect the peasantry. The serfs, who worked for and to the benefit of their lord, were necessarily shown a peasant of the same sort who in exchange for his patient worldly labour received his award in heaven. The need for such a model obviously increased in inverse proportion to the peasant's possible dissatisfaction with the social relations prevalent in his country, the heavenly reward becoming the only good attainable by him; in certain situations, the latter would have been his only restraint, preventing him from rebelling. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, Poland saw clear symptoms of economic regression coming out in the farm-and-villein relations³⁷ – a phenomenon that without a doubt attests to an advancing regress of the prevalent system. Symptoms of exacerbating class struggle in the countryside proliferated at that time. Initially indolent and contumacious in working off the serfdom, the peasants became more and more often initiating armed rebellious acts. The Ukrainian lands within the territory of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had already been through the anti-feudal peasant revolts led by Krzysztof Kosiński and Severyn Nalyvaiko. Given these socioeconomic circumstances, of special significance was propagation of the cult of those saints who had spent all their lives in poverty and hardship, ending up exalted in the afterlife. Apart from the already existing cult of the biblical Lazarus, triumphant over the wealthy man who despised him when alive, Saint Alexius was worshiped – a man who patiently suffered the earthly persecutions and lived a beggarly life at the court of his father. Beginning with the 1630s, veneration for Isidore called 'the Ploughman', similar in its societal message, joined those other cults.

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As we can learn from the Bollandist Society's *Acta Sanctorum*, Isidore was a Spanish peasant who lived in the late eleventh and early twelfth century (c. 1070 to 1130). He spent his lifetime working on his lord's farm. The lord, Juan (Ivan) de Vargas, eventually made him administrator of the estate he owned, in recognition of his diligent

³⁷ Cf. an interesting article by Stanisław Śreniowski, 'Oznaki regresu ekonomicznego w ustroju folwarczno-pańszczyźnianym w Polsce od schyłku XVI w.', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxi, 2 (1954), 165–6.

and conscientious work. Isidore lived a modest and frugal life, earnestly fulfilling his duties and turning his free moments into prayer. Together with his life Maria Tor[r]ib[i]a, supported the indigent and the needy throughout his lifetime. The cult of Isidore the Ploughman started at the end of the thirteenth century, and became a mass phenomenon by the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Isidore was beatified in 1619 on request of Philip III of Spain, and three years later, on 12 March 1622, sainted by Pope Gregory XV, owing to the endeavours of Philip IV.³⁸

On that same day, alongside with the commonly worshiped Isidore, canonised were the leading active members of the Catholic Church who had rendered it considerable service by struggling for the victory of Counter-Reformation. All of them lived in the sixteenth century and thus their canonisation, completed not long after their deaths, clearly had a political-propagandist tint to it. Save for Francis Xavier (lived 1506–52), who propagated Catholic religion in Asia and was known as the ‘Apostle of the Indies’, all of them had once (by a strange but nowise random coincidence) founded new monastic orders that quite conspicuously supported the Catholic reaction in its battle against the Reformation movement.³⁹ Those officially deemed saints included Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Jesuit Order, and Philip Neri (1515–95), the originator of the Congregation of the Oratory which strove to deepen the piety and attract possibly largest hosts of laics into the space of influence. One more newly-canonised saint was Theresa of Jesús [*resp.* Theresa of Ávila] (1515–85 [actually, d. 1582]), the merited reformer of the Carmelite orders, who (as L. Pastor, a Catholic historian of the Church, puts it) because of her reform “of the Carmelite Order, which she imbued with a new genius ... parallels ... with the great sixteenth-century founders of orders and truly ranks equal with them”.⁴⁰

³⁸ For biographic details concerning Isidore, see: *Acta Sanctorum*, iii (Paris and Rome, 1866), 509–46; Johann Evangelist Stadler (ed.), *Vollständiges Heiligenlexikon*, iii: [I]K–L (Augsburg, 1869), 77; Michael Buchberger (ed.), *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, v (Freiburg [im] Breisgau, 1933), 625; of the Polish sources: Fr. [Michał] Nowodworski (ed.), *Encyklopedia kościelna*, viii (Warszawa, 1876), 345; or, recently, Bp. Karol Radoński, *Święci i błogosławieni Kościoła katolickiego. Encyklopedia hagiograficzna* (Warszawa, [1948]), 193.

³⁹ Cf. Ludwig von Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste*, xiii, 1 (Freiburg, 1928), 94.

⁴⁰ Ludwig von Pastor, *Katolicki reformatorzy. Ignacy z Loyoli – Teresa od Jezusa – Filip Nereusz – Karol Boromeusz* (Kraków, 1924), 94. For more on the importance of

The other, and highly important, reason that incited Gregory XV to canonise the four Spanish saints (and one Italian, Philip Neri) was the regard for a good relationship with Spain, a thing the Pope extremely cared about on the verge of the then-commencing Thirty Years' War. Once, however, those actively engaged in the struggle against Protestants (which, after all, went on at the time in Germany and Bohemia) were to be sainted, a saint as popular in Spain as Isidore the Ploughman could not have been neglected. Philip III revered Isidore deeply and believed he had once been healed of a long and heavy illness due to Isidore's relics.

Let us remark that, in any case, it was Isidore's canonisation that was celebrated the most solemnly of all the four. A great verse tournament was held on the occasion in Madrid, attended by more than twenty most illustrious Spanish poets. Suffice it to say that Lope de Vega was awarded the first prize for two pieces portraying Isidore's childhood and youth years;⁴¹ the great Calderón was ranked second.

Vega's Isidore play was ceremoniously produced in Madrid: the king and his entire court could admire a skilful staging of one of the miracles the saint reportedly worked in his life – namely, scenes of two angels doing the ploughing for him why he is immersed in prayer.⁴² Isidore was announced patron of the Spanish capital (and then on, also of León and Saragossa) and, in parallel, a recognised official patron of peasants.⁴³ His cult swiftly penetrated into Italy and Germany.

Visible in the preceding centuries, the mass scale of the saint's cult intensified in the seventeenth century. Isidore's life taught how to disregard temporal hardships, promising, in exchange for their patient bearing, a posthumous compensation in Heaven and, possibly, exaltation above the persecutors in the aura of holiness. This social function of the cult gained in importance as the situation of Spanish peasants deteriorated. In contrast to their Polish counterparts, Spanish peasants did not have to do *corvée* and were

these particular saints, cf. also Max Heimbucher, *Die Orden und Kongregationen der katholischen Kirche*, ii (Paderborn, 1934), 71, 144, 562–4.

⁴¹ Lope de Vega devoted his poem *El Isidro* to Isidore in as early as 1599, followed afterwards by a number of stage plays, cf. *Diccionario Enciclopédica Salvat*, vii (Barcelona 1942), 181.

⁴² *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX-e siècle. Larousse*, ix (Paris, 1873), 807.

⁴³ Nowodworski (ed.), *Encyklopedia kościelna*, viii, 345.

at liberty to move from one place to another. Yet, they did have to pay enormous rents and taxes to the ruling seigniors, the king, the Church, and local landowners. Along with the overall crisis affecting the Spanish economy – agriculture being an inherent part of it – these financial encumbrances led to a thorough impoverishment of the countryside and emaciation of the peasantry. In a strife to relieve themselves of the obligations imposed upon them, they rose up to struggle against the governing feudal class. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the struggle was growing increasingly militant – with the focal point in Catalonia where one of the powerful peasant revolts occurred in the years 1620–1.⁴⁴

* * *

It is most characteristic that the year marked by the five canonisations (1622) saw the publication of an opuscle by the Rev. Andrzej Gołdonowski⁴⁵ entitled *A brief collection of the saintly lives of S. Isidore the farmer of Madrid*,⁴⁶ *S. Ignatius Loiola, founder Societatis Iesu, S. Francis Xavier, the professor with this same order, S. Theresa the founder of the Carmelite Disscalced Friars and the maidens of this same order, S. Philipp Ne[r]i founder Congregationis Oratori Romani, newly-canonised by Gregory XVth in Rome at the church of Peter [the] S.[aint] at the Vatican on the 12th day of March Year of the Lord 1622 ...*⁴⁷ This tiny booklet, comprising six

⁴⁴ Rafael Altamira-y-Crevea, *Istoriya Ispanii* [a Russian translation of *idem, Historia de España y de la Civilización Española*, i–iv, (Barcelona, 1900–11)], ii, (Moskva, 1951), 130. For more on the disastrous situation of the peasants and condition of agriculture in the period concerned, cf. also 130, 221–5.

⁴⁵ Estreicher (*Bibliografia polska*, xvii [Kraków, 1899], 215), gives two versions of this surname: Goldonowski/Gołdonowski. We use the latter version, following the one featured on the book's cover.

⁴⁶ *Madryka* was a contemporary Polish equivalent of the geographical name of Madrid. It was where Isidore lived, as did his lord Juan (Ivan) de Vargas whose estate Isidore administered.

⁴⁷ The work (full orig. title: *Krotkie zebranie świętobliwych żywotów. S. Isidora Rolniká z Madryki. S. Ignacego Loiole Fundatora Societatis Iesu. S. Franciszka Xawiera wyznawce tegoz zakonu. S. Teresy Fundatorki Oycow Carmelitow Bossych, y Pánien tegoz zakonu. S. Philippa Nei fundatora Congregationis Oratorii Romani. // Nowo Kànonizowanych przez Grzegorza XV. w Rzymie, w Kościele Piotra S. nà Wàtykànie dnia 12. Màrcá. Roku Páńskiego, 1622. // Ná počieche ludži nabožnych z Processu Kànonizácycyey wypisáne. // W Iarostawiu, Roku 1622)* was published in Jarosław. According to Estreicher (*Bibliografia polska*, xvii, 172–3), it was reissued (within 1622) “in Poznań, at the printing-house of Jan Rossowski”.

unnumbered leaves, opens with a very short *life* of Isidor, comprised in two pages.

On the reverse side of the title page, one finds a *Poem on the saints canonised in this year*:

<i>Spojrzy w kościele pięć ci planet wystawili</i>	Behold, five planets expos'd at church : largesse
<i>Być co świeżego z nieba w smutny czas rosily</i>	Bedew'd upon thou, fresh yield in thy dystress;
<i>Wasza Isidor perła o szczęśni Kmiotkowie</i>	To ye Serfs blissfull a pearl is given forth,
<i>Już mu pokłon hiszpańscy dają monar- chowię ...</i>	The Spannish monarchs now bowe to Isidore.

which is followed by a mention of the other freshly canonised saints. So, again, we can see the Spanish farmer portrayed at a prominent place.

Seven years afterwards, the same author pens, at Cracow, a larger version of Isidore the Ploughman's biography, now entitled *A brief assemblée of the saintly life of S. Isidore the Agriculturist of Madrid[,] named in the register of saint ones by Gregory XV of h.[oly] memory*, and thus forming a separate edition. The 'biographical section' forms, as it were, an introduction to the core argument of this booklet, since the title further reads "... whereto Attached are brief teachings, or duties, of every Christian Husband-man".⁴⁸

The second edition was reportedly kept at the Library in Dzików [today, within Tarnobrzeg], whose collection has recently been taken over by the Warsaw-based National Library (*Biblioteka Narodowa* [hereinafter: BN]); yet, the Poznań edition is missing since it cannot be traced in BN's collection. We have used the Jarosław edition, presently a unique item at the Cracow Czartoryski Library (*Biblioteka Czartoryskich* [hereinafter: BCz], ref. no. 28307 I).

⁴⁸ *Krótkie zebranie świętobliwego żywota s. Isidora Rolnika z Madryki. Od ś. pamięci Grzegorza XV. między święte wpisane* (Kraków, 1629). Some copies of this particular edition are kept at the Warsaw University Library (*Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego*, ref. no. 4g. 14.2.75), the BCz (ref. no. 28665.I), the BN (ref. no. XVII.3.12), and the Cracow Jagiellonian Library (*Biblioteka Jagiellońska* [hereinafter: BJ], ref. no. 36788.I). The first two of the mentioned copies are preserved in a very good condition, clean, with no side notes whatsoever. The BN copy has underlined items and summaries of the author's major thoughts added on the margin. The BJ copy, on which the reader (and, probably, its owner) has made characteristic remarks and addenda, is the most interesting of them. We will revisit the addenda in the core text hereof and notes attached.

Now, let us try and analyse, first of all, the ideological content of the *life* in its both versions; subsequently, we will focus on the teachings for 'Christian husbandmen' containing the work's essential class content.

So, it is most characteristic that the author of the two life-histories emphasises throughout that Isidore was a serf who performs his corvée obligations. All the miracles that were worked in connection with this individual, taken over from the Spanish canon, are well embedded in the concrete realities of everyday life of Polish villein-dominated countryside. The miracles have strictly to do with another issue – the great piousness of Isidore, who would “never take to the plough, or to a labour of any sorte in the field, with out having first [gone] to the church and listened to the holy mass”.⁴⁹ “And this is what we did not only when going to doe his work but also when doing the dutie for his lord’s.”⁵⁰ Obviously, a conflict was inevitable between fulfilling his duties towards God, the Church and his own soul and working off the daily duty.

How is the conflict resolved, then, in Gołdonowski's account of Isidore's life-history, which in this aspect follows the Spanish model? As we can read there, when Isidore “was accused by the othere neighbors before the Lord that he walked out later after the otheres the labour to doe, pretending him that he hath not donne the lordly duty efficiently, they admonished him for him to recognise and experience this. The Lord admonished Isidore before hand, who enunciated him selfe to him suppli[c]antly and saith that the time had consumed ere he walked out for the labour hath never caused him ommission or detriment, what so ever, in the labour. And when hiss neighbors, that is co-labourers or co-ploughmen, insisted againe, thereafter he [i.e., the lord], once upon a time, sat himselfe down so that he should learne one thing certaine and see it with his owne eye. So out he walketh unto the soil, ready to give Isidore a severe punishment, if onely hee see what hee hath been told, and the late departing to upbraid.” At that point, he saw two angels doing the ploughing for Isidore, and Isidore himself “betwixt them ... who having worked all that, disappeared very quickly.” At seeing which the lord recognised his guilt and requested Isidore to “remitt his wrath”.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, A_{4v}; *Krótkie zebranie świątobliwych żywotów*, A₂.

⁵⁰ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, B.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*; *Krótkie zebranie świątobliwych żywotów*, A₂.

As can be seen, the direct intervention of supernatural forces prevented a collision from occurring between the duties owed with regard to God and the feudal lord, also preventing the incurrence of any harm by the latter.

Another miracle worked by Isidore consisted in finding for his lord a little spring pouring out water during a gnawing swelter. The spring spurted out miraculously as the saint hit his stick against the ground.⁵² Another miracle shows God rescuing a donkey, whom Isidore left alone to go to church to pray, from getting eaten by a wolf. The two subsequent miracles show God replenishing the saint's food so he could feed an indigent man, and reimbursing Isidore the wheat he had distributed among doves as a charity act.⁵³

As is evident, then, those miracles were part of everyday life and helped fulfil regular duties, enabling to practice mercy with limited means at one's disposal. Along with practicing great piety, the life-history in question places an extremely strong emphasis on the necessity to bring up children in such spirit from their earliest years. As we can read, Isidore's parents "guided him to learning of the loving of God the Lord and serving the very same one, and thereafter instructed him in the husbandery works, domestick duties and agriculturall exercise, admonishing him before hand allways that he never abstaine from God the Lord, commence all his laboures with him, that it bee better for them [i.e., him] to abandon every thinge rather than he should neglect God the Lord, ever."⁵⁴ This outstandingly class-bound educational ideal is clearly confirmed by Gołdonowski as he writes that Isidore's parents never sent him "to any sæcular teachings, and this, seemingly, for the sake of pennurie, for teachings not allways have a redeeming effect but indeed to many of those wrongely absorbing them shall they become a severer condemnation and the reason to recount and reckon more from the benefactions received."⁵⁵

The "short teachings or devoires of Christian husband-men, particularly, simple plough-men"⁵⁶ offer a model of life for, primarily, any

⁵² *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, Bv; *Krótkie zebranie świętobliwych żywotów*, A₂v.

⁵³ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, B₂; *Krótkie zebranie świętobliwych żywotów*, A₂v.

⁵⁴ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, A₄v.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Encyklopedia kościelna*, vi (Warszawa, 1875), 278, has it that these teachings were "often reprinted by Polish eighteenth-century calendars". However, Estreicher

villein and are strictly interrelated with the preceding *life* of Isidore the Ploughman.

As Gołdonowski states, although God the Lord enjoined all the descendants of “our first father” to work, “the ones the most subservient to this be the misserable yet happy ploughmen. Thenceforth, so that they may have sweet vantage of the bitter labour of their hands, hereat with the earthely labour in this worlde and thereafter whilst reposing from it in Heaven, I have contrived to place before their eyes, by cause of Isidore the saint, the usefull teachings so they may imitate them, whereunder they will inquest what they ought to hold in their home-stead according to the Christian obligation.”⁵⁷

Among these teachings, each comprising a number of ‘devoirs’, the ‘eighth devoir’ is the most interesting one, and offers a starting point for analysis of the text under discussion. The matter is described as “To the suzeraintie, this being established by God, and to his lordes owes he integritie, be loyall and obœdient with humilitie.”

As we can read further on, “Quitt the discourses, and hear ye the Apostle *ad Rom.* [i.e. Letter of St. Paul to the Romans] whereat he clearely teacheth ye to respecte the suzeraintie and obœdience to the Lords with these words: [‘]Every soule shall bee subjected to the superior power, for authoritie superior cometh not onely from God, whereas what cometh from God:[’] and thereafter, [‘]and he who opposeth acquireth condemnation for him selfe, because they propounde the fear of a bad cause and not of a good one. Art thou then willing not to be afraid of suzeraintie? Doe act rightly and thou shall be commended by them: he who acteth wrongly bee the Servant of God and the revenger upon the wrath of God.[’] These words are significant without an exposition, as thine righteousness be due towards thy suzeraintie,[:] oh how great is the sin of those who give their obligation to the Lordes not ...”⁵⁸

This being the case, an obvious question occurred: Why a system of relationships where some govern, whilst the others are due to work for them, should ever exist? As is attested by the developments of the time, this was the question the peasants asked themselves with increasing

remarks: “I have found no such reprints in none” (*idem, Bibliografia polska*, xvii, 172); our own research has found no such item, either.

⁵⁷ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, B₄.

⁵⁸ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, E₄.

frequency, rebelling against the established order. Gołdonowski takes this aspect into account and thus finds as follows: "Thou quethe: There is no need for the superior lords, elder ones, to bee in this world, it bee good for all to be alike. My replie is, this is nought good: and therefore, God the Lord hath sapiently given prioritie to uss betwixt all the things, ones above the otheres and established them as-if governours. Hee is foremost in heaven and in the earth above all the creatures: hee hath positioned the sun amidst the planets, fire amidst the elements, carbuncle-stone amidst precious jewells, gold amidst the metals, ceddar-wood amidst the trees, Delphine [i.e. dolphin] amidst the fish, Lion amidst the animals, eagle amidst the birds." "And even in hell it selfe", the good hagiographer continues, "there allso without an elder is nought. And amidst the people there are various superiores, according to the various prevalencies and commandings: thus, the king bee different, the father bee different, the head-guildsman bee different, the lord with his subjectes bee different. And God the Lord wanteth that there bee varietie betwixt the estates, not all be kinges, lordes, superiores, of which the sin⁵⁹ is to us a considerable cause."⁶⁰

Having thus given excuse to the existing social inequality and the entire serfdom system, on the grounds of the will of God and the miserable effects of the original sin, Gołdonowski would not wave aside what was a too-far-fetched exploitation, excessive cruelty, and appalling oppression even in terms of the prevalent system. How should the peasants, then, respond to the ever-severer serfdom, burdens and encumbrances, to the cruel and unearned corporeal punishments?

Benedykt Herbest, a sixteenth-century Jesuit, had proposed a resolution to this question: as he wrote in 1566, referring to the authority of St. Paul, should the subjects "have done unkindely or excitatively towards their lordes, there is the reason for God to punishe them, as transgressours of his wille, and if complying as appropriate with

⁵⁹ According to the Church's teachings, the *original sin* was committed in Paradise by Adam and Eve; the Catholic theology puts forth the original sin as the primary cause of all evil. If not for the sin, another contemporary author states, "there would have bene an elder who wouldst have run the government amidst free peopel, whilst there would have bene no Lorde, nor servant or subject" (Andrzej Radawiecki, *Prawy szlachcic w kazaniu na pogrzebie ... Pana Andrzeja ze Żmigroda Stadnickiego* [Kraków, 1632], p. 14).

⁶⁰ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, E₄r-v.

them they be suffering constriction, may they keep forbearance, for God dost know what every bodie needeth as salutary for him.”⁶¹

This consolation, rather cynical in the mundane perspective, is complemented by Gołdonowski with an even more sombre picture: “Thou request me whether thou must bee obœdient to evill lords, or not,⁶² and I replie with Saint Paul that obœdient is owed to such ones allso. Thou may not be a lord and then thou must have a Lord above thee”. Then he adds, “and shouldst thou divert thy self to another, what [= how] might one know whether thou may encounter a worse one then”.⁶³

In support of his argument, the author gives an example of a rustic woman who prayed for the health of a monarch “who was a maligne and austere tyrant upon his subjects”. Asked why, she replied that this had been the third ruler within her remembrance, each having proved himself worse than the one before him; “and therefore I permanently request God for him so that we may have no crueller one afterwardes”.⁶⁴

“And thus, this being translated into our [argument], wee need at times to be forewarned, so that avoiding the frying-pan wee fall into the fire not, acquiring a worse lord after a bad one, for you need some time to be lenient to a bad one so as to retreat from the worse.”⁶⁵ Such a prospect was nothing to be pleased about – and, it perfectly renders the realities of the time: the peasant could not expect to have a ‘more righteous’ lord or better conditions of living and working. Instead, he could only have his fortune deteriorated.

This state of affairs could only be contested in either of the two ways: by struggle for improved living conditions that could be wielded in a variety of ways – armed struggle included; or, through patiently enduring the oppression in a hope for heavenly reward and assistance from supernatural forces.

⁶¹ Benedykt Herbest, *Náuká Práwego Chrzcścijanina* (Kraków, 1566), 291.

⁶² The BJ copy features an annotation to this question which reads “very wanted a question”.

⁶³ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, E₁v. This phrase might be explained, at a push, in terms of a warning against desertion which does not pay back since it may all appear to be even worse elsewhere.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, F. The BN copy has an annotation at this point: “NB [nota bene] request God [the] L.[ord] for the malignant, so they be worse not after those”.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

Expectedly, the Rev. Gołdonowski advises to follow the latter path: "And thou ask me where to go in thy oppression, since there is no bodie to make justice of oure Lordes⁶⁶ – and I repplie: if this is so, cry unto God the Lord and God the Lord shall hear thy voice, as Eccles. [iastes] testifieth,[:] the voice of the poore penetrateth the heaven and hee shall depart not untill hee be heard[:] this is what one saint sayeth as well. When a penurious man suffereth repression from a mightier one, to cry dareth he not, and oppose may he not: and yet doth God glance upon his teares and his unjust vexation and prepareth his revenge."⁶⁷

An anonymous seventeenth-century reader of the opusculum did not feel satisfied with the conclusion placed at such an early point of the author's clarification of the possible doubts shared by the oppressed strata with respect to the existing social system and its divine approval. The copy kept at the Jagiellonian Library contains the following annotation placed after the recently quoted author's words: "A third question is needed there; if it becomes to request God the L.[ord] for revenge because of harm done, &c., *Item* and if it becomes [i.e. then, does it become] to enjoy the revenge made by God for the harms done, or not?"⁶⁸

As we can see, the anonymous reader, perhaps a clergyman, wanted to counteract the very thought of a revenge – be it through intermediation of God – which might have arisen amongst members of the exploited classes.

The subjects' duties are directly followed in the teaching by the lords' duties towards their subjects – an interesting and characteristic complementation of the former. As Gołdonowski states, apparently impartially, "as the serfe ought, what ever he hath unjustly and unsatisfactorily worked, to work it off according to his conscience, so should the Lord, in what ever hee hath unrightfully extracted from his serfs, willy-nilly necessarilie reward".⁶⁹ This enunciation essentially expresses full approval of the prevalent social relations and reprehension for their breach on either side. Its impartiality appears bogus once we become aware of the serf's duties and obligations, charges

⁶⁶ The BJ copy has an annotation here: "the second very wanted question".

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, Fr–v.

⁶⁸ BJ copy, ref. no. 36788.I, Fv.

⁶⁹ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, BJ copy, E₄.

and encumbrances in the period concerned – all of them being deemed natural by the author, and the rights and privileges of the landowner which Gołdonowski judges as justifiable. Also the other instructions for liege lords are in a similar vein. The author poses minimal requirements for them, and it is ultimately part of their own interest to fulfil them. Thus, the landowner is expected to “protect him selfe of [i.e. refrain from] contriving torments and punishing, for such contrivance of a new torment hath some thing cruell and tyrannous to it and might oftentimes spoill the very best case.”⁷⁰ It is not seemly for them to “punish unjustely ... or much more so, to murder”;⁷¹ they ought to “bee seduced [i.e. carried away] by affects not, whether in punishing or in any othere thing else”,⁷² but “in punishing and judgement some times treat with mercie.”⁷³

A majority of these teachings deal with methods of punishing, with only the twelfth section stating that there is a need to “have regard upon orphans, widowes, impecunious, aggrieved, and decrepite”.⁷⁴ They are striking not only with their major focus on ‘punishment’ – being nothing else than forms and methods of suppression of anti-feudal peasant resistance. Characteristic is also considerable openness in posing the issue in question, and the clear and unconditional granting the lords with the right to punishment: severe punishment, to be sure.

“Thou wilt ask me now”, Gołdonowski continues, “how shouldst thou deal, whether gratiously or severelly, with thy serfes: I replie: the serfes, gratiously and severelly should be treated, gratiously[,] for a state endures better when governed by beneficiality rather than severitie and sternness ... and severelly should the serfes be dealt, particularly where kindness canne doe nothing.”⁷⁵

In exhorting to avoid excessive oppression of peasants, sixteenth-century Catholic polemicists did not tackle the problem as pessimistically as Gołdonowski does when arguing that it refers to “restive and hard-necked serfes[,]not benignant to their lordes, although good they

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, F_{3v}.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, F_{4r}.

⁷² *Ibidem*, F_{4v}.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, G.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, F_{3r-v}.

are, who [= the serfs] are like savage animals, when thou be lenient towards them, they become wanton, disobœdient and wayward."

"And thus doth the replie conclude, it occurreth to gratioſly handle the kind and severelly the wicked ones, it being necessarie to watch where grace be diſſpensed, and where discipline be compounded with mercie. This needeth being knowne,[:] where the lord employeth severitie over the wicked ſerfe, nowiſſe doth hee divert from kindneſſe or from gratioſneſſe, for this is indicated by God and naturall law."⁷⁶

What is more, citing the Old Testament and St. Jerome, he fully approves of killing 'wicked' serfs, in compliance with the law!⁷⁷ One can clearly infer in what ways the experiences of the then-ongoing class struggle fought by 'wilful, disobedient and defiant' peasants affected the exacerbated views of a Catholic ideologue, his ever more ruthless expression of the rules of enslaving the peasants, with the Church's authority employed to support these rules.

Those unsusceptible who rebelled against the prevalent relations were subject to severe punishments, death penalty included, and threatened with a prospect of eternal hell after death. However, those patient ones who quietly worked off their serfdom and obeyed even to the cruellest lords had to be offered something. They needed being reinforced in the belief that mundane suffering was insignificant, rendered indifferent to inimical and 'recalcitrant' instigations, and shown the prospect for a great career – one of them being used as an example.

On the reverse side of the Gołdonowski booklet's cover one finds an etching showing Isidore praying and being helped out in the ploughing by an angel. The saint is portrayed wearing an attire of Polish seventeenth-century villager; a trident pitchfork and flails, emblems of farmer's labour, are placed on the ground.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, F₃v.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, F₄. Gołdonowski recommends to control and discipline the servants, and to severely punish them, also to richer landlords and craftsmen, exhorting "that the serfes be certaine that there bee discipline above them, for where ever they would not be certaine of the discipline above them, they would grow haughtie, become stubborn pieces of dung, [whereas] punishment teacheth how to work, as oure Poles say: The birch-rod maketh the child witty and arduous, and so doth oak-staff to the vellein." He furthermore advises to "endeavour that an apprentice refractory and stubborn never iddle,[:] for as a hackney iddling at a gate-house kicks and bites whilst in furie, so the ſervant unruly, ill, disobœdient will be ſpoiled by iddling and will bee far worſe than he initially was." (*ibidem*, Lv, L₂).

There is a little poem below the picture which reads:

<i>DLa postępków pobożnych</i>	ISIODOR	FOR sake of his deeds devout, Saint
	<i>Święty</i>	ISIOCORE,
<i>Będać prostym Oraczem, do niebá iest</i>		A coarse Plough-man ere he, now beehind
	<i>wzięty.</i>	Heav'n's door.
<i>Boiaźń Boża, przy pracy, táć go</i>		Fear of God, whilst labouring : this led
	<i>prowadziłá,</i>	him forth,
<i>Do páłaców niebieskich, prosta sieżka</i>		To heav'nly palaces he'th found a straight
	<i>była.</i>	swath.
<i>Z niego sie uczcie : że BOG nikiem nie</i>		Thus ye learn thy lesson : GOD preju-
	<i>brakuie,</i>	diceth nonne,
<i>Lecz kázdemu da niebo, kto ie zástuguie.</i>		Heaven shall he give to all whose dutie's
		donne.

“God prejudiceth nonne”: this comment is subsequently followed up as the author finds that “in every nation doth God allmighty have those who serve him and love him dearely ... Look at the othere estates, ducall, noble, wealthy, indigent, maidenly, widowe's, matrimoniall, of which so many without number swarmed towards heaven in various ways.”⁷⁸ This fictitious equality – the one with respect to God, in the afterworld – works here as a compensation for the earthly inequality. But what Gołdonowski promises to Catholic serfs or subjects is something more than the posthumous equalisation with their lords and persecutors: he foretells them a posthumous triumph, elevation above the terrene ruling strata.

“It needs being seen”, argues he, “that through your paucity, scarceness, you should expect æternall happiness not. The holy fathers equate those who are in miserable importance amidst the world to

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, A₃. Elsewhere, Gołdonowski states as follows: “Man ordinary must needs know, foremost, that God the Lord pursueth exertion of the same sorte towards us all, he maketh endeavours for the indigent and for the rich alike, for the meanest and for the worthiest amidst the Worlde... with God the Lord, a king, Duke, Lord, && [= etc.], is of equall significance as a beggar, ploughman, serfling, &&.” (*ibidem*, p. C₂). The BJ copy has an annotation following the word *serfling* [Pol.: *kmiotek*] reading “farm-house peasant [Pol.: *zagrodnik*, i.e. farmer with little land who had to hire himself out to feed his family], cottage-peasant [Pol.: *chalupnik*, i.e. landless peasant], tenant-peasant [Pol.: *komornik*; here, the diminutive *komorniczek* is used] and those that oftentimes wallow in manure in a grande citie or some where by the wall.”

Christ. Whence it cometh [i.e. follows] that they shall enjoy a great glorie in the Heavenly kingdom. Such are the poore plough-men who will not bee said what a rich man will otherwise bee said, that he hath received much good in his life-time and therefore thou art under annoyance, but they shall hear together with Lazarus: thou have been imbued with many a miserie in the world, it needeth that thou incurre refreshment in heaven."⁷⁹

"Let uss look", he writes elsewhere, "at the mean estate, the world of needie innocencies, wherein how manie God the Lord hath of his beloved ones, who might enunciate? Of whom presently the world and we know not, untill in the heavenly realm wee be acquainted with them and wee shall say: "Those are they whom wee some other time had in ridicule, oh how now are they considered amidst monarches and kings not, but amidst the saints and God's chosen ones."

Great is the prize they have won, "for their services so short and temporall, eternall reward have they received unto their soule and bodie, for to those who have been disdained with the world ... monarchs, great landed-lorde" shall bow and revere, "requesting their intercession with God the Lord, those whom their kinsmen barely knew whilst alive, those very ones God the Lord showeth to all the sites wherever the sun illumineeth with its brightness."⁸⁰

It is clear that Gołdonowski teaches at this point how to be satisfied with the condition shared by the readers of his booklet. Addressing "simple men, and particularly, plough-men, husband-men, and handicraftsmen",⁸¹ he explains in particular to the former that they are supposed to be content with their work, which is honourable and sought-for.⁸² However, it is not its societal usefulness, as one would put it today, that is prominent about the labour they do – as opposed to the fact that God "prefers indigent simple men to wise and rich ones, seeking no thing in them but fear of the world. This is what Isidor the s.[aint] experienced, simple man and poor a serfling, pleasing how ever to God and people, whose commemoration is in the benediction for ever."⁸³ What is more, the grace of God stems from the lifestyle of such 'simples'.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, C₂v.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, A₃v.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, final leaf s.fol.

⁸² *Ibidem*, four final leaves s.fol. ('On the dignitie of plough-man').

⁸³ *Ibidem*, A₃v.

“On how many means the needy people doe have to acquire their heavenly reward, as long as they bee willing to emploie them”, Gołdonowski comments, and gives the following grounds: “for their sins they might incurr purgatorie here. Moreover, they may deem it to bee their luck that God the Lord did not give them what the others hath acquired hell through and doe acquire it, and did gave what it is very easie to acquire heaven through. And shouldst thou say that I rather be in happiness than in this condition, I replie, this is impossible that every body bee in identicall happiness. Such is the Lordly will ... by offering him [= the Lord] the works, efforts, vexations [and] poverties let uss wonder and believe that hee prejudiceth none, and pursueth the same endeavour with respect to every body.”⁸⁴

It is highly characteristic that it is never mentioned in these instructions, referring to Isidore’s life-history, that for his fruitful and self-denying work he was rewarded already in his mundane life by exaltation to the position of administrator of his lord’s estate. Instead, the issue is focused on in terms of heavenly prize. Such omission of the biographical fact clearly demonstrates that Catholic moralists in the then-prevalent social situation could offer Polish peasants no consoling prospect in their lifetime.

The most sacrificial and hard work performed as a serf, when combined with observance of the Church’s teachings, offered the peasant the right to enter heaven, never offering any views for even a minimal improvement in the worldly fortune. A perspective for a social advancement (of a certain sort), once experienced by Isidore, was not to be shared by the Polish readers of his biography, which is reflected in the author’s commentary.

Hard and hopeless, in the earthly account, serfdom labour served as a path to sainthood after death:⁸⁵ such was the basic class

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, C₃.

⁸⁵ Such was the ‘Polish path to sainthood’ that was experienced also by one nobleman of the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, the Blessed Kazimierz Korsak. Unrecognised, he once voluntarily “offered himself to his own serf as a hired-hand ... and he assumed all the labours, be it the heaviest ones. He would go to the manor recurrently to do the serfage, and there, unrecognised, he would incur coarsest bruises from beating, reprehension and contempt not spared by the manorial people. And it so occurred that the sister herself [i.e. his own sister] ordered that she be placed above him, which he all accepted through unbeatable patience and silence due to the love for God. He endured seven years at that village upon such labours and exercises and demonstrated over himself something more

content of Fr. Gołdonowski's teachings which clearly stated that the lot of Polish peasants is a thread of nightmares and self-denials – a lifetime's 'purgatory'.

Along the lines of these arguments, feudal oppression and exploitation is no more a necessary evil but turns into a condition essential to acquire sempiternal happiness. No more a punishment, it becomes a commendation the Lord intends to reward his chosen ones with. Rebelling against the prevalent relationships and aspiring for better living conditions apparently means diminishing one's opportunity for heaven, if not (by overtly rebelling) completely blighting the chance to ever get there.

This is how exploitation as part of the manorial control system was excused and sanctified in terms of divine authority, thus exceedingly supporting the authority and ruling power of class of liege lords. Only a hope for a compensation after death could have made a peasant strong enough to bear the sufferings and repression during his lifetime; otherwise, having to abide such a system would have been groundlessly nonsensical.

Hence, the cult of Isidore the Ploughman was not only fed by the clergy and secular feudal lords exerting top-down pressure: to an extent, it resulted also from the expectations of its addressees – the ever-more-severely exploited peasants. Not all of them, and not always, could or even wanted to mutiny. Still, all had to suffer the common social harm. The life of Isidore offered a justification for it, and explained the reasons behind the miseries occurring, interpreting their seed in terms of the need to deserve eternal salvation. Thereby, the cult of the saint fulfilled what might be described as social demand; one may go as far as arguing that if Isidore the Ploughman had not been canonised, another poor hardworking peasant would have been made the object of a cult.⁸⁶

It is doubtless that intensified piety of peasants and their unshaken belief in the authority of the clergy and the Church, in the truth of the ecclesial teachings, was part of the interest of not only the

than s.[aint] Alexius the Roman." See Florian Jaroszewicz, *Matka świętych Polska* (Niemieckie Piekary, 1850; reprinted from a 1767 edition), Pt. 1, 146.

⁸⁶ The question how and to what extent the cult of saint working hard throughout their lifetime and achieving salvation through their work informed a special ennoblement of the work, with increased respect for the latter shared by wide masses, remains a separate issue worth of dedicated research.

clergymen but also of secular feudal lords. Consequently, Gołdonowski advises that lords “lead their serfs to God the Lord and exercise them in fear of God”, naming it their “foremost dutie”.⁸⁷ Apart from obedience to their lord, peasants are recommended, in turn, to “give the tythes equitably”⁸⁸ and hold “the clerical persons in honestie”.⁸⁹ Gołdonowski continually reminds in his opuscle of the need to observe piety and devotion, proposing Isidore the Ploughman, with his education into a saintly man and his continuous religious practices, as a model for the peasants to follow. What he recommends to his readers is “venerate the holie dayes, observe the fasts and satisfie the other ecclesiall duties”;⁹⁰ examine one’s conscience genuinely, pray oftentimes and attend confession on a regular basis. Peasants are encouraged to pursue intensive religious practices not only under the promise of attaining sempiternal happiness but also under the threat of posthumous punishment. His considerations mould God into a grand feudal lord, referring time and again to the social relationships prevalent at the time in Poland’s villein countryside.

With every “simple plough-men” being supposed to “fear God, foremost and above all”, this being put forth as their primary obligation, in his intent to render the fear ‘accessible’ to the peasants, Gołdonowski advises: “may the simple man make for him selfe a comparison of this Lord against the Lord of his, on whose ground hee siteth. And so, if hee bee afraid of offending the worldly Lord for sake of the worldly goods or worldly punishment, hee must needs fear insulting æternall God far more, for sake of æternall goods and æternall punishment.”⁹¹ “If there is some body, like you, wretched plough-men, who need no teacher [to teach you] how ye shouldst fear God, for this is what ye might be taught by the fear of mundane lords alone, of whom afraid you are, and have to receive punishment with any trifle, whether ye like it or not, if ye doe this thus and for such sake to thy worldly Lordes, oh how incomparably to the sempiternal and heavenly lord [*sic*] ye owe youre awe, obœdience, patience. And thus ye doe endeavour so that after the purgatorie that you have in your life from the hard

⁸⁷ *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, F₂.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, D₃.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, E₂v.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, D₃.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, B₄v.

laboure, continuall slaverie, affliction from the lords and meagre life, ye acquire hell not after youre death.”⁹²

Thus, religious practices were meant to fill the peasant's time while not doing his work, leaving no room for rebellious ideas or actions. Again, Isidore the Ploughman was offered as a model to follow: he “mortified his flesh with fasting, disciplines, hairs [i.e. hair-shirts] and othere macerations, with continuall labour of which he never willed to be free, save for holie days, and the time he was spending praying. He bewared of idleness like some infectious venome, knowing that all the evil stemmed from it.”⁹³

Pious and hardworking peasant who humbly works off his duties as a serf: such was the ideal proposed to peasants and impersonated by Isidore the Ploughman, for Counter-Reformation ideologues to imitate.

Fulfilment of this model was not based solely on one's individual intentions and good will of the individual, since also in this particular respect did the Church make use of, among other things, some well-tested instruments used by the clergy to impact the wide public – namely, religious (con)fraternities.

Fraternalities experienced a very significant revival in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Apart from the earlier existing (or rather, vegetating) ones, now vibrant with a new life, new associations began emerging, for the first time ever in Poland, formed of urban dwellers – from adults to old men, also joined by females. Formally religious and charity-oriented, they turned into opportune tools with which to mould the public at large in the spirit of what the Catholic reaction found useful. The reactionaries used fraternities to settle their accounts with the heretics (primarily, the Arians), who were systematically pushed out of the cities.⁹⁴ Fraternalities moreover drew Catholics into the rhythm of the Church's life and forced them not to confine themselves to attend a Sunday service once in a week. Frequent

⁹² *Ibidem*, Cv.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, B₂.

⁹⁴ “Not only did the religious confraternities more strongly connect the nation's mass, sedate in its faith, with the Church, but also, through the prayer introduced for eradication of heresy, arouse ever-lasting repugnance towards it; with respect to the apostate brothers, they would instigate the ardour of hatred in the zealous hearts, which now-and-then erupted with fierce flame of persecution”: so wrote nineteenth-century historian Józef Muczkowski (*idem*, *Bractwa jezuickie i akademickie*, 2) of this particular area of the associations' activity.

meetings, jointly requested and heard, demonstrative participation in processions and solemn church celebrations all made them cohesive corporations being, partly, *sui generis* political associations permeated with the idea of religious intolerance and confessional fanaticism. Individual fraternities conducted philanthropic actions which won over the most indigent populace strata for the 'good' Church. Their donations and handouts, microscopic compared to the actual needs, helped to some degree discharge the class conflicts occurring (and heaving).

This daily penny philanthropy alleviated the rich men's remorse at a rather small expense. The supported poor were offered an illusion that they knew where to resort in their misery: thus, a myth of a supportive religious community was created – one where the property-based differences were but a superficial and temporary differentiation existing by the will of God.⁹⁵

Initially part of urban landscape, (con)fraternities began penetrating into the countryside, extending their actions and reach to peasants. The sixteenth century sees the fraternities fight against Protestant influential in rural areas. In the subsequent century, with the winning Counter-Reformation, what is left for them to do is pursue the mission of deepening the devoutness and religiosity, which implies obedience and submission to the prevalent social relationships.

In the countryside (as well as in urban environment) these associations offered an organised way of passing one's free time, in seemly fashion and under the custody of clergymen; otherwise, individual members of the exploited class could have spent their leisure hours in an utterly inappropriate way.

"Handicraftsmen and serf-peasants", as we find in Fr. Nowodwor-ski's *Encyclopaedia of the Church* ('Confraternity' entry), "moreover importantly benefited from confraternities in that on the feast days they would arrive in the morning and in the afternoon at church in order to say the chaplets and other confraternal prayers, this keeping them at the temple during their leisure hours, which they would have otherwise wasted at the inn ..." (or, let us add, attending rebellious conspiracies).⁹⁶ "Furthermore", we read on, "once accustomed in

⁹⁵ Gołdonowski's urge to offer alms and practise philanthropy seems not coincidental at all (cf. *Krótkie zebranie żywota*, G₂ ff.); the motif constantly reappears in a number of works by the period's Catholic moralists.

⁹⁶ See the apt commentary by Zbigniew Ćwiek, in *Pierwsza Konferencja Metodologiczna*, i, 509, whereby the intensified collective religious practices of peasants on

the confraternity into worship-practising, they would croon religious songs amidst their work, thus revivifying their faith that made them conscientious in the fulfilment of the obligations of their estate ...".⁹⁷

In 1626, four years after Isidore the Ploughman was canonised, Pope Urban VIII established a confraternity under the saint's invocation. By the 1630s, the association proliferated into the territory of Poland.

From 18 October onwards, the Pope granted numerous indulgences to the Confraternity of St. Isidore the Ploughman affiliated to the Więclawice parish in the district (*powiat*) of Miechów.⁹⁸ The Voivodeship of Poznań was another such area, with St. Isidore confraternities functioning at the parish church in the village of Niepart (district of Krobia) since 1654,⁹⁹ and at the parish church of Zaniemyśl (district of Środa), established in 1667.¹⁰⁰ Other such bodies operated in the *powiat* of Sochaczew, at the localities of Kaski¹⁰¹ and Młodzieszyn.¹⁰² Of the cities where the organisation functioned, let us mention Rogoźno, district of Oborniki,¹⁰³ or Nowe Miasto on the Warta,¹⁰⁴ for example.

The surviving status of the Confraternity, dating to the middle of the eighteenth century, is entitled *The Statutes, Duties, and Orders of the Confraternity of S. Isidore the Ploughman*.¹⁰⁵ The housekeeping directives¹⁰⁶

their leisure days was of benefit to feudal lords as they could have control over their subjects and could prevent their convening to contrive rebellious machinations. It was a means against 'assnations', 'gatherings' and 'plotting' (*ibidem*).

⁹⁷ *Encyklopedia kościelna*, ii (Warszawa, 1873), 554.

⁹⁸ Jan Wiśniewski, *Dekanat miechowski* (Radom, 1917), 252.

⁹⁹ Józef Łukaszewicz, *Krótki opis historyczny kościołów parochialnych ... w dawnej diecezji poznańskiej*, ii (Poznań, 1859), 92.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, i (Poznań, 1858), 328.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, iii (Poznań, 1863), 304.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, iii, 307–8.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, i, 400.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, ii, 202.

¹⁰⁵ *Ustawy, powinności i porządki bractwa s. Isidora Oracza*. According to Estreicher (*Bibliografia polska*, xviii [Kraków, 1901], 705), copies of these statutes (specifying no date or place of publication) are kept at the BCz and the Poznań Library of the Poznań Society of Friends of Sciences (*Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk* [PTPN]). For the purpose of this study, I have used a copy (dated 1645) from the BN collection.

¹⁰⁶ The instructions are contained in two separately numbered sections, the first detailing the duties and obligations of members (12 items in total) and the second, the Confraternity's organisational structure (7 items).

are followed, at the booklet's end, by a brief biography of Isidore, which partly repeats the description compiled by Gołdonowski in 1622¹⁰⁷ and comprises no new elements in respect of the issues covered herein so far.

What are the Confraternity members' duties, then, according to the *Statutes*? The main and recurring thread is the need to pursue intense and extremely devout religious practices. Frequent prayers are referred to in points 1, 3, 5 and 11; regular confession, at determined days, is covered in point 4. Members ought to say their prayers for various intentions, among them those "for eradication of heretics and elevation of the h.[oly] universal Church" – that is, prayers intended to arouse religious fanaticism and attachment to Catholicism – standing out. Apart from this, one of the opening points (no. 3) instructs to "pray for the h.[oly] father the Pope, for your bishop, also for the king, for your lord or lease-holder".¹⁰⁸ The rules of Catholicism have it that one may by no means wish ill to anybody but always wish them well whenever praying for somebody. Such positive attitude towards the feudal hierarchy, clerical as well as secular, and the need to be absolutely submitted to it, is expressly emphasised in point five of the *Statutes*, ordaining that "With heart sincere and willingness, affection, reverence, obedience and the obligatory levies shall be offered to the clerical and the secular authority superior, not as to human persons but as to God, the Lord, having no regard to their life-conduct, be it evil or good."¹⁰⁹

As we can see, this item as if comprises the quintessence of the Rev. Gołdonowski's extensive considerations as reported hereinabove. Strikingly enough, with so concise a wording (in this particular item and in the style used throughout the document), the compiler(s) did not forget to mention the obligation to succumb to bad lords as well. It is evident, then, that as the exploitation grew and assumed increasingly parasitic and ruthless forms, the problem gained in significance.

The *Statutes* attach high importance to what it calls 'assignments' [Pol.: *schacki*; present-day spelling, *schadzki*], that is, Confraternity members' assemblies. These were either public – these "shall be

¹⁰⁷ Łukasiewicz's *Krótki opis historyczny*, (i, Introduction, li–lvi) where the statute is reprinted, though with certain errors, skips the account of Isidore's life.

¹⁰⁸ *Ustawy, powinności i porządki*, A₃v.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, A₂v.

held four times in the year", or private, arranged "as the time, need, and judgment of the elder ones may require".¹¹⁰ At public assemblies the attending members were supposed to be preoccupied with "spiritual teachings, reading the confraternal statutes and orders, admonishing the transgressors, deliberating upon those defficient, depositing the alms for retrieval of the poor and fullfillment of the confraternall needs."¹¹¹ Thus, evidently, the association pursued charitable activities, to some degree. Rather than using its own permanent and adequately considerable fund of disposable monies, though, it primarily based upon the good will of its members.

In its section detailing the Confraternity's organisational structure, item 5 clearly stipulates that "gathering and saving the moneys shall be voluntary, and this for a certain thing which ever should seem desired by all or a larger portion of the attending Brethren, [while] gathering and saving excessive moneys, begging for the confraternal needs, accounts, or fancifull prevalencies, shall not be what this Confraternity, having been established for simple and hard-working people, is meant to engage with."¹¹²

This stipulation might have been rooted in a fear of financial abuse that was inevitable when it came to collecting and keeping such sums of money. However, another explanation seems more plausible: the 'simple and hard-working people' (peasants, above all) did not quite have the resources to make up such a 'mutual assistance fund' with. Whoever could and was willing to donate, he (or she) would have done it individually. Any larger financial resource might only have been owed to the "begging for the confraternal needs" – an option that would have been inconvenient and burdensome for the liege lords and the clergymen.

In their entirety, the *Statutes* are permeated with a considerable cult for Isidore the Ploughman, the Confraternity's patron. Individual phrasings recommend frequent prayers to the saint, the moral prescriptions they contain urge to imitate his life. Hence, Isidore becomes an intercessor between the 'simple ploughmen' and God; an ambassador, as it were, of the peasant cause in the afterlife.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, [9]: the concept (and, indeed, its name alone) suggested a clear opposition to 'assignments' held to meet rebellious goals, as complained about by the period's sources.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, [9]–[10].

¹¹² *Ibidem*, [10].

* * *

Following the above remarks, which exhaust the core topic of this study, yet another question arises: how broadly spread the cult of Isidore the Ploughman was amidst the most indigent strata of the population, particularly the rural people? Did it penetrate as far and deep as the everyday life of peasants, or did it perhaps remain limited to a few booklets that have largely passed unnoticed?

As we have already remarked, two of these booklets – the copy of Isidore's life-history kept at the National Library in Warsaw and the one of Cracow's Jagiellonian Library – feature outstandingly characteristic remarks and complementing comments on their margins, attesting that they have been diligently read and used. The type of the remarks – summarising, extracting and complementing the basic portions of the author's moral teachings – allows for the supposition that that the booklets were once owned by some clergymen who sought and itemised in this way the content for their sermons.

But Isidore the Ploughman entered the church space not only by means of teachings delivered at the pulpit. The above-discussed statutes of the Confraternity named after the saint instruct to say a prayer in front of the Ploughman's altar or icon every time the member visits a church.¹¹³ This instruction unambiguously indicates that there were altars and paintings devoted to St. Isidore, which testifies to his cult getting expanded. That such images existed is confirmed by the period's inventories of art monuments. Paintings featuring Isidore the Ploughman were in most cases made part of a separate altar or even placed in special shrines dedicated to him. The most preferred motif featured Isidore praying and having two angels doing the ploughing for him, using his oxen. Paintings of this sort began appearing in the former half of the seventeenth century, and became increasingly numerous towards the end of the eighteenth. The fragmentary data available enable to name a few localities in the Voivodeships of Cracow and Łódź where such paintings survive till this day. In the district of Miechów, such specimens can be found at the churches in Więclawice (first half of the seventeenth century) and Wysocice.¹¹⁴ There are several *powiats* within Łódź Voivodeship where such images can be

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, A₃v.

¹¹⁴ *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce, i: Województwo krakowskie*, 8: *Powiat miechowski* (Warszawa, 1953), 42 and 45.

encountered – as, for example, at the church in Cieszęcin, district of Wieluń, as part of a late-Baroque eighteenth-century altar,¹¹⁵ and in a special chapel at the cemetery adjacent to the church in Bąków Poduchowny, district of Łowicz; the latter painting was made in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.¹¹⁶ In the *powiat* of Łask, at the church in Marzenin one meets a painting showing Isidore the Ploughman, which dates to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The church in Mikołajewice, in the same district, possesses a late-Baroque procession float with images of Saint Isidore and Saint Joseph on it, which means that they were carried around during solemn processions.¹¹⁷ The local painters usually attired the Spanish ploughman in a Polish garment, thereby evidently giving the image a local colouring.

Apart from churches, the images might have been widespread also in peasant huts, since the *Statutes* told the Confraternity members to keep at their homes, “at the principal place, an image of Lord Jesus crucified, of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, and there might be one of Isidore the saint ...”.¹¹⁸ As for peasants, woodcuts must have been meant rather than not oil paintings, as a peasant customer could not have afforded the latter.

Only a small share of the folk woodcuts has survived, and of those extant not all have yet been examined by art historians.¹¹⁹ The former collection of the Pawlikowski Library and the Lubomirski Museum of Lwów/Lviv included a woodcut showing St. Isidore praying, which is reproduced in Władysław Skoczylas's study on Polish folk woodcut.¹²⁰ Completed in the middle of the nineteenth century, the collection contained items that dated back to much earlier a time – mostly, the eighteenth century.¹²¹ The woodcut featuring Isidore the Ploughman

¹¹⁵ *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce, ii: Województwo łódzkie, 12: Powiat wieluński* (Warszawa, 1954), 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, ii, 5: *Powiat łowicki* (Warszawa, 1953), 7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, ii, 3: *Powiat łaski* (Warszawa, 1953), 9–10.

¹¹⁸ *Ustawy, powinności i porządki, A₃r.*

¹¹⁹ Cf. Ksawery Piwocki, *Drzeworyt ludowy w Polsce* (Warszawa, 1934), 19.

¹²⁰ Władysław Skoczylas, *Drzeworyt ludowy w Polsce* (Warszawa, s.d.). Woodcut no. 30, size of the original 36 x 39 cm, author unknown. The caption reads 'Effigy of S.[aint'] Ysidore' (Pawl. no. 1251/27). For a description of the woodcut, cf. Piwocki, *Drzeworyt ludowy*, 63.

¹²¹ Cf. Piwocki, *Drzeworyt ludowy*, 23–4.

characteristically coincides with the etching in the Gołdonowski book, which is dated 1629, this pointing to an even earlier provenance. In both cases the saint is shown kneeling, in front of a shrine (in Gołdonowski) or a crucifix (in the woodcut); he holds a rosary in his hand, and there are rays hitting upon his head. There is an angel, visible at a distance, ploughing with Isidore's oxen – as in Gołdonowski, or two angels doing the job, as in the woodcut. There is a slight difference visible in the Ploughman's attire, which is stylised in both cases as a Polish folk costume, as in the woodcut he wears a doublet whereas in the booklet figure he has a traditional peasant overcoat (*sukmana*) on. Both pictures show him wear a pair of high boots and a bag by his belt. The background, in Gołdonowski, is composed of grazing sheep, a harrow laying on the ground, and a village further away; the woodcut shows us a church and trees. This comparison would make us hypothesise that the woodcutter drew the motifs from the booklet, which would be indicative of the latter's popularity. Woodcuts featuring Isidore the Ploughman were probably in colour;¹²² the preserved one is probably one of the once-existing many.

Another token of the popularity of the cult is the dissemination of the name Isidore (Izydor) in the seventeenth century, not only amongst peasants.¹²³ The proliferation of confraternities testifies, again, to how popular their patron's cult must have been.

Songs about Isidore the Ploughman appearing in nineteenth-century records arguably follow up the earlier pieces dedicated to the patron of farmers,¹²⁴ which might have been lost, recorded nowhere else apart from some songbooks that were destroyed by endless reading and rereading. The cult paved its way also to common people's astronomical concepts: close to the Scutum Sobiescianum constellation, the plough and harrow of St. Isidore was spotted, whereas the three largest [i.e. brightest] stars in the constellation of Orion, forming a line [otherwise known as Orion's Belt], were referred to as 'St. Isidore's scythers'.¹²⁵

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ Jan S. Bystróż, *Księga imion w Polsce używanych* (Warszawa, 1938), 210.

¹²⁴ Cf., as an example, the song collections: *Śpiewnik powszechny i domowy* (Częstochowa, 1887), 584–5 (*Pieśń o świętym Izydorze Rolniku* [A Song on St. Isidore the Agriculturist]); *Nowy śpiewnik polski* (Bochum, 1898), 338–40 (*Pieśń o św. Izydorze Oraczu* [A Song on St. Isidore the Ploughman]).

¹²⁵ These concepts relate to the following folk legend: When famine and pestilence had once exterminated the people, Isidore the Ploughman saved a handful of people



Fig. 1. Krótkie zebranie świętobliwego żywota s. Isidora Rolnika z Madryki ... przez X. Andrzeja Goldonowskiego [A brief assemble of the saintly life of S. Isidore the Agriculturist of Madrid ... by the Rev. Andrzej Goldonowski] (Kraków, 1629)

How deep roots the cult struck in the consciousness of the common people is testified by the proverbs related to the Spanish ploughman and collected by Adalberg. The most characteristic of them goes:

(mainly, children) from death by feeding the cattle and doing the farm-work, helped to this end by two workers who, in reward, were placed in heaven as 'St. Isidore's scythers'. Cf. E.K., 'Gwiazdy i grzyby w wierzeniach ludu', *Lud*, i (1895), 172. We have learned of this interesting contribution from an article by Aleksander Gieysztor, 'Problematyka ideologiczna Drzwi Gnieźnieńskich', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxii, 1 (Warszawa, 1955), 145.



Fig. 2. Władysław Skoczylas, *Drzeworyt ludowy w Polsce* (Warszawa, s.d.)

“Isidore with oxen ploughs, thy request with grace is dows’d” (*Święty Izydor wołkami orze, a kto go prosi, to mu pomoże*), and so testifies to the belief in efficient assistance from the agriculturist patron. The other two: “Cometh Saint Isidore’s, pantry hath nought in store” (*Na Izydora pusta komora*) and “St. Isidore’s, the storks shall all soar” (*Na św. Izydora na bociana pora*) attest that the memory of his feast¹²⁶ in the agricultural and nature-oriented calendar of Polish villagers.¹²⁷

Shrines amidst fields in present-day Polish landscape often appear to shelter figurines of Isidore whose provenance is clearly folk, with dates of making hard to establish today.

¹²⁶ In Poland, the feast day of St. Isidore the Ploughman is 10 May, the date outside Poland being 15 May (and thus is he named in the *Acta Sanctorum*).

¹²⁷ Samuel Adalberg, *Księga przysłów, przypowieści i wyrażeń przysłowiowych polskich* (Warszawa, 1889–94), 177 and 180.

The cult, which began in the first half of the seventeenth century,¹²⁸ underwent a broader development in the subsequent centuries, as attested by the contemporary publications.

Most of them come from the nineteenth century, as of which the Estreicher *Bibliography* mentions fourteen items related to the cult, this list certainly being far from the real number of the issues.¹²⁹ With time, the Spanish ploughman gained more and more Polish traits. A painting was made in the nineteenth century showing Isidore wearing a Cracow *sukmana*, immersed in praying, with a traditional red Cracow hat.¹³⁰ The figure of Isidore was modernised also in another direction, since we can read in his biography published in 1911 by the Rev. Jan Szmyt about an incident that was unknown to Gołdonowski: namely, when Vargas's servants demanded "upon their lord that he alter the fare and increase the merits, Isidore would have remained at the table all alone" never willing to hear anything of the sort. What is more, he pummelled them with ardent words and urged them not to commit such unfairness with respect to the good lord. These words produced the desired effect and all the servants came to good terms with their manorial lord."¹³¹

¹²⁸ Apart from the items used for the purpose of this study, Estreicher mentions in his bibliography (as far as the seventeenth century is concerned) the book by Aleksander Maciej Rudzki, *Bractwo ś. Izydora do Polski wprowadzone* (Kraków, 1681), cf. Estreicher, *Bibliografia polska*, xxvi (Kraków, 1915), 474, but indicates no library in its context. Our own search through all the larger libraries within Poland has ended up in no result; it is possible that the book had perished in the nineteenth century. Of the relevant handwritten material, at the Wrocław Ossolineum (Ossoliński National Institute [*Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich*]) we came across a list of indulgences and graces "admitted by the h.[oly] father Gregory, to the chaplets, rosaries, images, holly pictures, crosses, tablets consecrated upon request of the procurators for the canonisation of SS. Isidore, Ignatius, Xaver, Theresa and Phillip in the year 1622, the 12 day of March" (MS. 1150, l. 93). This seventeenth-century manuscript written in a single hand, makes no new contribution to the topic under discussion.

¹²⁹ Karol Estreicher, *Bibliografia polska XIX stulecia*, ii (Kraków, 1874), 176 (and the relevant reference marks).

¹³⁰ Wiśniewski, *Dekanat miechowski*, 176.

¹³¹ Jan Szmyt, *Św. Izydor (oracz)* (Tarnów, 1911), 17. The last published *life* of Isidore targeted at the common reader, which is known to us, was issued in Byelorussian in the Latin alphabet by the Rev. Piotr Tatarynowicz, *Święty Izydar Chleborob* (Wilno, 1929). Also this work emphasises that Vargas's hired hands ceased rebelling under Isidore's influence (*ibidem*, 14).

As we can thus see, a twelfth-century Spanish peasant has grown to become a vanquisher of farmers' strikes in the twentieth century. Such a use of his authority does, after all, perfectly match the class function fulfilled by the 'Saint Ploughman's' cult in the centuries seventeenth and eighteenth.

The posthumous 'career' of the Spanish ploughman offered peasants a hope for a better fortune after the death, at the very least, allowing to better and more bearably endure the current exploitation and oppression, proposed the prospect of posthumous everlasting elevation in the aura of sanctity above the terrestrial lords – the persecutors and tyrants. The cult of Isidore became an appeal against oppression, an escape in poverty, a stronghold amidst misery.

The ruling strata took advantage of the cult in subjugating their peasants, dragging them off from the current class struggle and keeping them in obedience. They were supposed to neglect the mundane life and focus on the future life – and, consequently, respect the Church and its teachings endorsing the feudal system.

trans. Tristan Korecki

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