



PIOTR SKARGA'S IDEA OF CHARITY IN THE WORK FOR THE POOR OF THE KRAKOW CHARITABLE SOCIETY IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES (SELECTED CONTEXTS)

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ABSTRACT

The idea of mercy initiated by Piotr Skarga, reflected in the Archconfraternity of Mercy, founded in Vilnius in 1583 and moved to Krakow a year later, had a significant influence on the formation, organisation and functioning of the Krakow Charitable Society in 1816.

His aim, in line with the ideas of mercy, was to help the poor living on the streets of Krakow, begging at the doors of churches or at the city gates. To this end, a Shelter for the Poor was founded in Krakow in 1830, which became a home not only for the old and crippled but also for poor orphans.

The principles of the House of Refuge were based on the tenets of Piotr Skarga's idea of mercy: the provision of assistance to any poor person who was unable to provide for himself or herself because of illness, disability or old age. Respect for every poor person was obligatory, and the support given to them was seen as a sure path to salvation. According to Piotr Skarga's recommendations, the implementation of works of mercy should take various forms, taking into account specific human needs such as shelter, food, clothing, work, or, in the case of children, proper upbringing and education, in order to save them from the poverty suffered by their parents.

KEYWORDS: Poverty, Works of Mercy, Orphan Children, Shelter Home for the Poor, Piotr Skarga, Archconfraternity of Mercy, Social Exclusion, Begging, Education of Orphans, Krakow Charitable Society, Initial School for Orphans

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of helping the poor in Krakow, taken from the thought of Piotr Skarga, inspired from the very beginning the founding of a new organisation with similar activities, while taking into account the changed social, economic and political conditions.

The first meeting of the Archconfraternity of Mercy took place on 27 October 1588 at the Jesuit Brethren's House at St Barbara's Church in Krakow.¹ On the following day, the basic principles of the functioning of the Archconfraternity were adopted—seven points outlining the obligations of the Brethren, according to the writings of Piotr Skarga. These included religious obligations, offerings to the poor, various ministries to the poor, and service to prisoners and to the sick poor. On 4 November of the same year, a very important position in the service of the poor was created—that of Visitor, whose task was to check the needs of the poor reported to the Brotherhood. In order to better fulfil this duty, in view of the large number of poor people reported, four Visitors were appointed.²

In the organisation of the Krakow Charitable Society, one can see, among other things, a structure similar to that of the Archconfraternity of Mercy. The first meeting places of the members were also at St Barbara's Church in Krakow. This church became the place where services were held, as well as where members of the Krakow Charitable Society collected donations for the poor.³ In the 19th century, the great call to spread the idea of mercy according to Piotr Skarga's concept was hampered by limited funds in comparison with the needs of the poorest part of society. This was addressed primarily through the voluntary offerings of donors from Krakow and other neighbouring localities. The need to help the poor arose from the fact that their numbers were steadily increasing as a result of the migration of the poor from villages near Krakow to the city in search of a better life.⁴

After the collapse of the Krakow Uprising, the economic situation in the Polish lands of the Austrian partition deteriorated considerably. In 1847, a tragic situation arose in agriculture, which caused multitudes of peasants to seek an improvement in their living conditions in Krakow, but in reality they were afflicted by poverty there, often leading to death. All efforts on the part of social aid were unable to meet the needs of the poorest inhabitants of Krakow. Despite the fact that the Committee for the Feeding of the Poor, in

¹ Hipolit Aldobrandini, nuncjusz papieski, zatwierdza, pod powagą Stolicy Apostolskiej, Bractwo Miłosierdzia Bogarodzicy w Krakowie oraz jego statut, ref. doc. Pop. 43, Perg. 690.

² Statut Arcybractwa Miłosierdzia i Banku Pobożnego w Krakowie, art. 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Materiały do historii Arcybractwa 1814–1930, Działalność Arcybractwa i Banku Pobożnego 1584–1960, Protokoły z posiedzeń, ref. AMB 42.

1848, was already serving meals to around 1,300 poor people, it can be concluded that this was insufficient aid.

The catastrophic housing situation of Krakow's poorest is illustrated by the 1,500 families without their own home, or approximately 500 homeless people.⁵ In addition, events such as the fire of 1850 and the cholera epidemic that struck Krakow in 1855 added to the city's plight.⁶ The first of these tragic events deprived a considerable number of already poor inhabitants of their homes, as many as 160 tenement houses in the inner-city area were burnt down, not counting the wooden houses in the suburbs.⁷

2. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The research on the above problem used the method of archival research and analysis of historical documents, carrying out both qualitative and quantitative studies. In order to fully illustrate the wide-ranging activities undertaken by the Krakow Charitable Society, and taking into account the not always satisfactory amount of extant source material concerning the issues investigated, a comparative analysis was also undertaken with other charitable societies operating at the time in the areas of the Russian or Prussian partition. The study of the above problem was based on all available sources, both manuscript and printed. The primary sources of information on the activities of the Krakow Charitable Society were the materials preserved in the National Archives in Krakow, the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, the State Archives in Lublin, the State Archives in Poznań, and the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv in Vienna.⁸

⁵ Hechel, F. 1950. *Kraków i Ziemia krakowska w okresie Wiosny Ludów*, p. 26; see also: Nowak, B. 2012. *Elementy pracy socjalnej w działalności wychowawczej i dydaktycznej Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, p. 68.

⁶ Demel, J. 1951. *Stosunki gospodarcze i społeczne Krakowa w latach 1846–1853*, p. 79; Nowak, B. 2015. *Działalność dobroczynna Arcybractwa Miłosierdzia i Towarzystwa św. Wincencego a Paulo w Krakowie w XIX i na początku XX wieku w świetle statutów, ordynacji i sprawozdań*, p. 9.

⁷ Nowak, B. 2012. *Elementy pracy socjalnej w działalności wychowawczej i dydaktycznej Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, p. 78.

⁸ Towarzystwo Dobroczynne Krakowskie collection no. 547; Parafia św. Anny w Krakowie, collection no. 138; Parafia św. Anny w Krakowie, collection no. 139; Parafia Najświętszej Marii Panny w Krakowie, collection no. 329; Akta Departamentu Spraw Wewnętrznych i Policji 1815–1853, collection no. 200, ref. WMK; Akta Urzędu Stanu Cywilnego w Krakowie, Księga Rejestrowa, Krakow 1873–1896; Archikonfraternita Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny 1833–1916, collection no. 1354; Cech chirurgów i cyrulików w Krakowie, Kazimierzu i Kleparzu, collection no. 131, ref. 29/131/AD/DD; Cech kowali w Krakowie oraz kowali i stolarzy w Kazimierzu 1579–1882, cat. no. 149; Cech piekarzy w Krakowie 1442–1945, cat. no. 168; Cech stolarzy i bednarzy w Krakowie 1518–1945, cat. no. 182; Cech szewców

Sources relating to both the Archconfraternity of Mercy in Krakow and the Krakow Charitable Society, preserved in monastic archives such as the Archives of the Albertine Friars in Krakow⁹ and the Archives of the Carmelite Fathers in Krakow, were also analysed.¹⁰

Printed sources have also become an important resource for research into the ideas of Piotr Skarga in the activities of the Krakow Charitable Society, among which the *Yearbooks of the Krakow Charitable Society* and *Organisation and Laws of the Krakow Charitable Society* are of great importance.¹¹

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Caring for the Poor*

The basic aim of establishing the Archconfraternity of Mercy according to the ideas of Piotr Skarga was set out in the Statutes and Ordinances. This refers to a document of 1588 authored by him:

The Archconfraternity of Mercy under the invocation of the Mother of God at the Church of St Barbara in Krakow, established by X. Piotr Skarga T.J., forms, together with the Archconfraternity of Mercy and the Pious Bank joined to it in 1857, a single charitable institution under the name of the Archconfraternity of Mercy and the Pious Bank...¹²

w Krakowie, Kazimierzu i Kleparzu 1563–1925, collection no. 184, ref. AD/DD; Cechy kuśnierzy w Krakowie, Kazimierzu i Kleparzu 1432–1862, collection no. 154, ref. AD/DD; Dzienniki przedłożone przez Senat Wojewódzki i Radę Administracyjną 1815–1853, collection no. 200, ref. VI; Instytucje dobroczynne, zbiór pozostałości zbiorów 1789–1938, collection no. 559; Akta Generalnej Rady Opieki Szpitalnej 1811–1906, collection no. 224; Akta administracyjne i fundusze Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego w mieście Kalisz, vol. 1 1825–1872, ref. 9; Materiały organizacyjne Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego w Lublinie 1815–1955, statuty, regulaminy, protokoły zebrań, materiały dotyczące zbiorów (1861–1951), akta dotyczące domów opieki i zakładów (1855–1952) [in:] Towarzystwo Dobroczynne w Lublinie, collection no. 35/601/0; Akta dotyczące funduszu wojewódzkiego dla biednych sierot w Poznaniu (1896–1928), [in:] Starostwo Powiatowe w Wągrowcu, collection no. 92/305/0/4/8.

⁹ Regulamin schroniska dla bezdomnych w Krakowie oraz statut schroniska dla chłopców Braci Albertynów.

¹⁰ Akta i protokoły kapituł prowincjalnych i posiedzeń definitorium, akta dotyczące spraw jurysdykcyjnych, kontakty z innymi zakonami, listy kurii generalnej, kopie i rejestry pism dotyczących prowincji małopolskiej, litewskiej, galicyjskiej i polskiej z lat 1682–1937, ref. A169/ AKKr 103.

¹¹ Rocznik Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego za lata: 1839, 1845, 1850, 1852, 1860, 1862, 1863, 1865, 1870, 1875, 1880, 1890.

¹² Statut Arcybractwa Miłosierdzia i Banku Pobożnego w Krakowie, art. 1.

On 29 October 1816, on the initiative of Count Stanisław Wodzicki, president of the governing Senate of the Republic at the time, the first proclamation was issued by a committee authorised to take action to unite the small hospitals existing in Krakow and caring for the poor. As a result, a new charity organisation was to be established under the name of the Krakow Charitable Society.¹³ The established society was to relieve the suffering of the poor, the crippled and the infirm by enabling them to lead a different kind of life than that of begging. According to the views of the founders, they were to earn their own daily sustenance by the kind of work they were able to do, appropriate to their state of health. The rest of the cost of living was to come from the Society's funds, which were to provide significant support for the poor.

To this end, it was decided to divide the poor into the following groups:

- the poor willing and able to work, for whom employment would have to be found,
- the crippled unable to work due to a health condition,
- elderly, infirm people who would only be able to work to a limited extent and would therefore need support,
- children of beggars unable to support themselves,
- the physically and mentally ill who should be treated in hospitals,
- prisoners and children of prisoners.¹⁴

As in the Archconfraternity of Mercy, where, in line with Skarga's idea of complaint, a General Council headed it, the same Council took over the leadership of the Krakow Charitable Society. In both cases, its main task was to deal with the most difficult cases of the poor, with the power to set up special committees to advise on the most challenging situations concerning the poor.¹⁵ The proceedings of the Charitable Society were open and accessible to the community. As at the Archconfraternity of Mercy, the regular items of business included the reading of the number of dependent poor of the Charitable Society, the state of the coffers, the remarks of the vetters, reports, letters sent to the Society, and motions to improve the condition of the poor.¹⁶

Along with the reception of each poor person, his or her documentation was carefully checked, which had to include the following certificates: from the parish, from the head of the municipality, from the local police, and from at least two citizens. The documentation also required a birth certificate and the poor person's own statement about his or her state of poverty.¹⁷

¹³ Odezwa Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego do mieszkańców miasta Krakowa.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Statuty, zarządzenia Krakowskiego Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego, ref. 209, para. 7, 8, 39.

¹⁶ Sprawozdania z działalności Krakowskiego Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego na terenie objętym działalnością Rady Wyższej w Krakowie, ref. TśW6; Statuty, zarządzenia Krakowskiego Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego, ref. 209, para. 7, 8, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48.

¹⁷ Rocznik Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego za rok 1845; Dzienniki przedłożone

In line with Piotr Skarga's ideas, proper management of funds was extremely important in caring for the poor. At the Krakow Charitable Society, this was handled by a specially established Economic Department.¹⁸ It was in charge of feeding the poor, providing them with clothing, as well as taking care of the proper condition of the movable property belonging to the Society. It was responsible for supplying the Shelter House with the necessary crockery, utensils and fuel. Its tasks also included inspecting the state of the food intended for the poor, which should be 'healthy, cheap, decent and sufficient'. It sought the cheapest possible opportunities to purchase bedding, clothing and footwear. Its duties also included keeping an inventory of crockery, utensils, various stores, including stocks of essential materials. In the event of illness in one of the wards, the Housekeeping Department had to send the sick person to St Lazarus Hospital or another hospital, according to the doctor's recommendation. It was also responsible for allocating rooms for individual poor according to their age, sex, health and general ability.¹⁹

Piotr Skarga attributed an important role to the work that every poor person should do in order to free themselves from the 'misery of life'.²⁰ The Department of Industry and Labour was responsible for finding work for the poor who could work, taking into account their state of health.²¹ Its duties included purchasing the materials and tools necessary for the work, as well as inspecting the work being done by the poor and encouraging them to treat their tasks properly. At the same time, the workers were motivated by rewarding those who performed their duties in an exemplary manner.

3.2. *Works of mercy towards the sick*

An important aspect of the activities of the Krakow Charitable Society was to minister to the sick, reflecting the assumptions of Piotr Skarga. The Society's instructions devoted considerable attention to providing proper care for the sick. Thus, in consultation with the Department of Health, the General Council allocated two separate rooms for an infirmary where elderly people suffering

przez Senat Wojewódzki i Radę Administracyjną 1815–1853, collection no. 200, ref. VI; Instytucje dobroczynne, zbiór pozostałości zbiorów 1789–1938, collection no. 559; Stowarzyszenie Sług św. Zyty, ref. 359.

¹⁸ *Organizacja i ustawy Stowarzyszenia Dobroczynnego*, Krakow 1817, ref. TD 111; see also: Nowak, B. 2012. *Elementy pracy socjalnej w działalności wychowawczej i dydaktycznej Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, p. 115.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Materiały do historii Arcybractwa 1814–1930, Działalność Arcybractwa i Banku Pobożnego 1584–1960, Protokoły z posiedzeń, ref. AMB 42.

²¹ *Organizacja i ustawy Stowarzyszenia Dobroczynnego*, Krakow 1817, ref. TD 111; Rocznik Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego za lata: 1850, 1852.

from bedridden illness or infirmity could stay. One room was to be for men and the other for women. A sick person would be placed in the infirmary only on the basis of a doctor's decision, who was also to decide when a person could leave the infirmary.²²

The sick placed in the infirmary were to be under the full care of a designated sister, who was to ensure that the sick followed the doctor's orders; sisters were not allowed to administer medicines that had not been prescribed by the doctor. The sister in charge of the infirmary was obliged to report on the number of patients and their state of health.²³ The sisters were also responsible for the proper feeding of the sick and for organising visits to them, since it was recognised that implementing the idea of mercy among the sick was one of the important tasks of a Christian.²⁴

In caring for the sick, great importance was attached to the health of the orphaned children entrusted to the Society. If necessary, efforts were made to place them in St Ludwig's Hospital, where members of the Krakow Charitable Society were among the doctors. This was a modern hospital, adequately equipped and staffed with qualified medical personnel to treat children.²⁵

Table 1. Children of the Krakow Charitable Society referred for treatment to St Ludwig's Hospital in the second half of the 19th century (selected cases)

Year	Child	Reasons for hospitalisation	Commentary
1887	Margaret, 3 years old	pneumonia	The child remained in hospital for a month.
1887	John, 4 years old	tuberculosis	The child remained in hospital for two months.
1887	Eve, 5 years old	tuberculosis	The child remained in hospital for two months.
1887	Clemens, 5 years old	breathing difficulties, cyanosis	The child remained in hospital for 2 months, then was referred to a therapeutic colony in Zakopane.
1888	Louis, 3 years old	High fever, persistent cough	Child died after a week of hospital treatment.

²² *Organizacja i ustawy Stowarzyszenia Dobroczynnego*, Krakow 1817, ref. TD 111; Nowak, B. 2012. *Elementy pracy socjalnej w działalności wychowawczej i dydaktycznej Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, p. 110.

²³ *Ibid.*; Akta miasta Krakowa, Zgromadzenie Przedstawicieli Wolnego, Niepodległego i Neutralnego Miasta Krakowa, 4 January 1822, ref. 209; por. również: Akta i protokoły kapituł prowincjalnych i posiedzeń definitorium, akta dotyczące spraw jurysdykcyjnych, kontakty z innymi zakonami, listy kurii generalnej, kopie i rejestry pism dotyczących prowincji małopolskiej, litewskiej, galicyjskiej i polskiej z lat 1682–1937, ref. A169/AKKr 103.

²⁴ Archikonfraternita Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny 1833–1916, collection no. 1354; Nowak, B. 2012. *Elementy pracy socjalnej w działalności wychowawczej i dydaktycznej Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, p. 115.

²⁵ Jakubowski, M. L. 1901. *Kronika szpitala św. Ludwika dla dzieci w Krakowie: okres 25 lat, od r. 1876 do r. 1900*.

Year	Child	Reasons for hospitalisation	Commentary
1888	Peter, 3 years old	Frostbite as a result of prolonged exposure to the cold, the child was found on the street and taken to an orphanage.	Child died after two days in hospital.
1888	Henri, 5 years old	Abdominal pain causing increasing pain in the child	Child returned to the Orphanage after two weeks of treatment in hospital. The child will soon be placed in foster care.
1888	Paul, 6 years old	Child suddenly lost consciousness	The next day the child died.
1889	Barbara, 5 years old	Child was hit by a horse-drawn carriage	The child died the same day in hospital.
1889	Marie, 7 years old	tuberculosis	The child remained in hospital for 2 months, then was referred to a therapeutic colony in Rabka.
1890	Beatrice, 6 years old	tuberculosis	Child died after three weeks of treatment.
1891	Adalbert, 7 years old	tuberculosis	Child died after 8 days in hospital.
1892	Christian, 8 years old	tuberculosis	The child remained in hospital for 2 months, then was referred to a therapeutic colony in Rabka.
1893	Theodore, 6 years old	arthritis	The child was treated in hospital for 3 months and then returned to the Orphanage.
1893	Lucia, 4 years old	pneumonia	The child was treated in hospital, then placed with a foster family.
1894	Anna, 8 years old	The child was rescued from the river where it had been thrown by its mother, who, along with the child, was under the care of the Krakow Charitable Society	The child remained for observation in hospital for 4 days and then returned to the Orphanage. His mother was arrested.
1895	? Forms of assistance	pertussis	Child died after a week in hospital.
1895	? 9 years old	Meningitis	Child died the next day in hospital.
1895	Clementine, 10 years old	Hand and face burns while working in the kitchen of a children's home.	The child stayed five weeks in hospital, then returned to the Orphanage.

Own research based on the following sources: *Rocznik Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego* za rok 1880; *Towarzystwo św. Józefa w Krakowie*, ref. 270; *Akta Departamentu Spraw Wewnętrznych i Policji 1816–1848, 1857–1916*, ref. 38; *Spis chłopców i dziewcząt pozostających na wychowaniu w Zakładzie Towarzystwa Dobroczynności 1870–1926*, ref. TD 270; Jakubowski, M. L. *Kronika szpitala św. Ludwika dla dzieci w Krakowie: okres 25 lat, od r. 1876 do r. 1900.*; *Księga sierot zostających pod opieką Towarzystwa Dobroczynności Krakowskiego z fundacji dra Tomasza Kitowskiego z lat 1885–1893*, ref. TD 294.

One important task in the implementation of the works of mercy, according to Piotr Skarga's ideas, was the care of illegitimate children.²⁶

After the foundation of the Krakow Charitable Society in 1816, the care of illegitimate children became one of the Society's main responsibilities.

3.3. Preventing social exclusion of poor orphaned children through foster care

Piotr Skarga was convinced that the proper upbringing of the younger generation would enable them to find their rightful place in society and serve God and the Homeland responsibly.²⁷ This message became an important guiding principle in the implementation of works of mercy by the Krakow Charitable Society.

Taking charge of poor orphans, the Society sought to provide them with the best possible upbringing in the spirit of Christian values, as well as in accordance with modern pedagogical trends.²⁸

The Charitable Society worked closely with the police directorate in caring for the children of the poor. The living conditions of the youngest poor were a concern for both the government and the Krakow police.²⁹ In line with Piotr Skarga's ideas of mercy, it was decided to establish a Home for the Protection of Young Children.

Thanks to the efforts of the General Council of the Krakow Charitable Society, modern educational and medical approaches were taken into account when organising the home for orphans. Hence, among other measures, the Medical Department was instructed to thoroughly examine all orphans to assess their health, adjust appropriate food rations, and determine optimal conditions for study and work to support their proper development.³⁰

²⁶ Materiały do historii Arcybractwa 1814–1930, Działalność Arcybractwa i Banku Pobożnego 1584–1960, Protokoły z posiedzeń, ref. AMB 42.

²⁷ Ibid.; Statuty, zarządzenia Krakowskiego Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego, ref. 209, para. 7, 8, 39, 40, 41.

²⁸ Rocznik Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego za rok 1835.

²⁹ In the 1839 Yearbook of the Krakow Charitable Society we read that the police directorate, in view of the fact that "the children of the poorest class of workmen and servants, or co-orphans, poor, unable to have affectionate and caring care of themselves...as a tool for runaway begging used for a bad life can very easily become accustomed to a bad life". So it was decided to take these children off the streets. Initially, they were placed in a workhouse, but it was soon realised that this was not the right place for them, so they were placed in the care of the Charitable Society, which undertook to support them with adequate funds. [in:] Rocznik Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego za rok 1839.

³⁰ Lista dzieci pozostających pod opieką Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego (X 1852–XII 1853), ref. TD 153; Lista dzieci pozostających pod opieką Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego (I 1854–XI 1855), ref. TD 155; Lista dzieci pozostających pod opieką Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego (XII 1883–XI 1887), ref. TD 158; see also: Nowak, B. 2012. *Elementy pracy socjalnej w działalności wychowawczej i dydaktycznej Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego w XIX i na*

A significant contribution to the upkeep of these children came from the fund of the late Dr Tomasz Kitowski, who by his will of 30 September 1877 bequeathed to the Society 25,000 zlotys in 5% pledge notes of the Land Credit Society in Lviv for the upbringing of children up to the age of four. In accordance with the Society's stipulations, this period was later extended to the age of fourteen with the consent of the executor of the will. The proceeds of this fund were intended to support orphans born in hospital who had lost both parents, as well as children of poor mothers, usually servants, and of unknown fathers. Over time, in order to meet the enormous demand for this type of care, children of unknown fathers were accepted regardless of whether they were born in hospital. The children were entrusted to village women for upbringing, supervised by two designated members of the Krakow Charitable Society, who were responsible for overseeing their care and feeding.

The fund's proceeds were used for the upbringing and upkeep of the children up to the age of four, after which they were to come under the care of the Society, the orphanage, or private individuals. Should any children be found to be in harm's way, the Society had the authority to change their guardian.³¹

Many children were placed with foster families through the work of the Krakow Charitable Society, and their upbringing was regularly monitored to ensure proper care.³²

3.4. Implementation of works of mercy in prisons

The ministry of mercy to prisoners was one of the important demands of mercy on the road to salvation, as Piotr Skarga repeatedly proclaimed.³³ He taught that it was the duty of the friars to "visit the hospital and prison every week, bring alms there, exhort patience and other Christian virtues, stand at the doors of the Church of St John the Baptist."³⁴

początku XX wieku, p. 195.

³¹ Nowak, B. 2012. *Elementy pracy socjalnej w działalności wychowawczej i dydaktycznej Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, 204; Foundation records of the 33rd orphan chamber named after Dr Tomasz Kitowski in the Shelter House of the Charitable Society in Krakow [in:] *Rocznik Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego za rok 1884*, pp. 88–89.

³² *Rocznik Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego Krakowskiego za lata: 1885, 1887, 1890*.

³³ Protokół obrad na posiedzeniach Arcybractwa Miłosierdzia i Banku Pobożnego, 1816–1823, ref. AMB 47.

³⁴ Statut Arcybractwa Miłosierdzia i Banku Pobożnego w Krakowie, art. 8.

Table 2. The ministry of mercy in prisons carried out by members of the Krakow Charitable Society in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (selected contexts)

Year	Age of the convicted	Forms of assistance	Commentary
1885	Man, 21 years old	Provision of warm clothing for winter, correspondence paper, prayer book.	Support was also provided to the inmate's family, the arrears of rent for the flat were paid and fuel was regularly provided.
1886	Man, 23 years old	Learning to read and write	Through the efforts of the Krakow Charitable Society, he received the assistance of a lawyer.
1887	Woman, 25 years	Learning to read and write, buying medicine during illness. Material assistance for the inmate's family, including 2 children, Support for the treatment of a child with tuberculosis.	After serving two years, she returned to her family and, through the efforts of the Krakow Charitable Society, was given a position as a maid.
1888	Woman, 27 years	She received help with eye treatment and the purchase of the necessary medication.	Thanks to the legal aid she obtained, she returned to her family home two months early before the end of her prison sentence.
1890	Woman, 19 years old	Assisting with the birth of the baby, providing baby clothes and necessary items for the care of the newborn. Teaching the young mother how to care for her newborn.	The child was placed with a foster family for the duration of the mother's prison sentence (10 months).
1905	Man, 30 years old	Preparation for baptism, for communion. Supporting the inmate's sick mother, buying medication and paying for medical appointments.	
1908	Man, 20 years old	Learning the craft of shoemaking under the guidance of a member of the Krakow Shoemaking Society.	After serving his prison sentence, the man found employment in the shoemaking craft.
1912	Man, 20 years old	Learning to read and write, assistance in finding employment while still in prison.	

Own research based on sources: Księga fundacyjna dra Kitowskiego, ref. TD 309; Edukacja więźniów za rok 1899, ref. 29/440/108; Szkoła więzienna i zatrudnienie więźniów, ref. 29/440/107; Akta Wydziału Spraw Wewnętrznych i Policji, collection no. 87, ref. WMK 209; Towarzystwo św. Józefa na rzecz Opieki nad Dziewczętami, ref. 421; Sprawozdania z działalności Krakowskiego Towarzystwa Dobroczynnego na terenie objętym działalnością Rady Wyższej w Krakowie, ref. TśW6; Akta personalne kobiet i dziewcząt Zakładu Dobroczynności 1830–1890, ref. TD 419.

In line with these guidelines, members of the Krakow Charitable Society regularly visited detainees, providing both material and spiritual support. Many detainees had committed crimes as a result of the poverty they experienced. It was therefore the duty of the Society's members to help by providing clothes, warm garments during the winter, necessary medicines, or by finding rented accommodation for imprisoned persons to prevent them from becoming homeless after serving their sentence.³⁵

Activities for inmates also addressed their spiritual needs, including preparation for the sacraments such as baptism or communion. To this end, designated members of the Society (excluding women) taught detainees the basics of catechism, but only at the request of the detainee or their family.

A very important task in the implementation of works of mercy towards prisoners was to assist them with their education. This included learning to read and write, as well as training to prepare for a trade under the guidance of a craftsman.³⁶

4. DISCUSSION

The idea of pursuing mercy in accordance with the thought of Piotr Skarga played a significant role in the organisation and functioning of the Krakow Charitable Society.

In line with the teaching of Skarga, assistance was extended to a wide range of poor people, who were not only in difficult life circumstances but also faced moral challenges; among this group were marginalized women as well as prisoners. Despite earlier declarations that the Society was not in a position to help children due to a lack of suitable premises and financial resources, the dire situation of orphans compelled the Society to take up the challenge and create a safe place for children to grow and develop—an Orphans' Home with a primary school.

In its activities, the Krakow Charitable Society drew many models from the Archconfraternity of Mercy of Piotr Skarga, collaborating with it in caring for the poor, including the elderly and crippled, seeking shelter for them, supporting them with hospital treatment, and organising housing for the homeless poor who sought to build independent lives through honest work.

What is particularly noteworthy is that the implementation of works of mercy according to Piotr Skarga's ideas was undertaken by a lay organisation, founded by laypeople sensitive to the suffering of others. They made many efforts in organising the Society, raising funds for the poor, finding premises,

³⁵ Szkoła więzienna i zatrudnienie więźniów; Edukacja więźniów za rok 1899.

³⁶ Ibid.

obtaining permission from the authorities—even to use rooms at Wawel Castle for a time—and finding shelter for their charges in the monasteries of the Dominican and Carmelite Fathers, among others.

Activities were organised to meet the needs of individual poor people, aiming not only to provide immediate help through almsgiving but also long-term assistance. In an unprecedented approach to the implementation of works of mercy, efforts were made to activate the poor: those who could work were helped to find employment, while those who could but did not want to work were educated in vocational activation, raising awareness of the great value of work in human life.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The problem presented above, based on archival research, indicated the need to extend investigations to other, as yet unexplored, areas of charity in the 19th and early 20th centuries, in which the idea of charity according to Piotr Skarga might also be reflected. It is worth noting, for example, the activities of St Louis Hospital, the St Zita Servants' Association, which aimed to help servants, and initiatives taken in the prisons of the time.

In each of these research areas, there is a considerable scarcity of sources, or significant gaps in the surviving documentation, which considerably hinders the progress of research. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise the need to extend research in this field by analysing monastic and parish sources.

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