

# Why Marians Wear the White Habit

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**WHY MARIANS WEAR  
THE WHITE HABIT**





*In memory of  
Fr. Vincent Sękowski, MIC (1840–1911),  
the last general of the dying Order.  
A man of deep faith, great courage,  
and undying hope without whose  
consent there would have been  
no rebirth of the Marians.*



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**Paweł Naumowicz, MIC, STD**  
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MARIAN  
HERITAGE  
STOCKBRIDGE, MA, USA

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# PREFACE

Dear Confrères:

Greetings in Christ! In 2023, our General Chapter approved the possibility of our wearing our Marian Habit once again. This decision was then ratified by the Holy See. Wearing the habit had been the practice in the Congregation for 238 years. We then did not wear the habit initially because of persecution for over 100 years. As we become accustomed to this new reality in the Congregation, it is helpful to continue to contemplate the theological significance of our white habit.

I present to you two documents which can facilitate our reflections. The first, by Fr. Paweł Naumowicz, MIC, was first written 15 years ago to accompany a survey distributed in the Congregation at that time about the white habit, among other questions. Fr. Paweł has since updated his article. In it, he writes about the history and the theology of the religious habit in the consecrated life. He then explores the history of the white habit in our Congregation as well as its absence. In a new section, he writes about the Congregation's returning to its roots, reminding us of the decisions made in the last two years and reflecting on the current practice of wearing the habit in the Congregation. He leaves us with some questions to explore as each of us ponders our choices regarding the white habit.

The second article is written by Fr. Bogusław Gil, MIC. He offers us a fascinating exploration of the theological significance of the color white. He looks at the importance of that color for our Founder. St. Stanislaus had worn the

black habit of the Piarist Fathers for many years. When he was released from that Congregation and offered his *Oblatio* to the Heavenly Father on December 11, 1670, he wanted to immediately be clothed in a white habit. The new habit would be very similar in design to the Piarist habit except for the color white. However, he was not permitted to immediately take on the white habit. He had to wait until September 15, 1671 to do so. Our Founder chose this color since it symbolized the Immaculate Conception. In *Norma vitæ* IV, § 4, St. Stanislaus stated that the attire of the Congregation “should be white in color, in honor of the shining with whiteness Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God.” Fr. Bogusław eloquently elaborates on this theme by exploring the mystery of the Immaculate Conception in light of the Resurrection. Both articles are worthy of our reflection.

As I wrote in my Circular Letter following the General Chapter in 2023, for our Founder, the white habit was an essential sign of our identity because it was a symbol of the Immaculate Conception. Blessed Archbishop George, our Renovator, had different views on the habit in the course of his lifetime. He was ready to don it at first as he stated in a letter to General Vincent Sękowski on September 8/9, 1908, but it was not possible because of the religious persecution at that time. In his *Spiritual Journal* on October 27, 1910, he wrote that in order to restore all things in Christ, “we should make use of any lawful and worthy means available to us: the cassock of the priest or the habit of the religious or, if need be, the clothes of the layman.” However, later in his life, when the possibility arose, he thought it inopportune to return to the habit in light of the world situation at the time.

In almost every General Chapter since the Renovation, the question of returning to the habit was discussed.

We have given the Congregation the possibility of wearing it again in a time in Church history when the Church is encouraging religious to wear their habit (VC, 25) because of its witness value. In that Circular Letter, I wrote, “We can’t expect instant unity during a time of change and transition. Let us respect one another and the choices of individual religious. The Lord calls each of us on a unique path to holiness. Let us also respect the last one hundred years of our history and all those who joined a community that did not wear its religious habit during that time. Let us not judge one another or let any divisions come between us.”

I believe that the Lord has been blessing our Congregation as a result of this decision of the Chapter. Let’s continue to be patient and open to one another as the will of the Lord unfolds for us. The Lord is always inviting us to a deeper reflection on our vocation. May these articles facilitate such a reflection. God bless you!

*Joseph G. Roesch, MIC*  
Superior General



# MARIAN GARB

Paweł Naumowicz, MIC, STD



# MARIAN GARB<sup>1</sup>

## 1. History and Theology of Garb (or the lack thereof) in the Consecrated Life

### 1.1. History of Garb (or the lack of thereof) in the Consecrated Life

The first ascetics who went to live in the desert considered nakedness a reference to Eden, where the first people, created in the image and likeness of God, did not know shame because of their nakedness. An ascetic who longed for perfection and union with God regarded every sort of attire as something of sin and unnecessary. Among many such examples, let's name two: St. Maria of Egypt and St. Onuphrius whose only cover was his ankle-length beard. People wishing to dedicate themselves totally to Christ also wanted to imitate Him in everything, especially in His Passion on the Cross. For this reason, St. Hieronymus stated in his letter to Rusticus that it was *necessary to imitate in nakedness the naked Christ*. Complete poverty and the stripping away of everything included the garments as well.<sup>2</sup>

Probably out of modesty, as well as out of regard for other people, in reality the hermits rarely remained naked. The first anachorites and hermits dressed as they liked, without standing out from among people of the region. Virgins dedicated to God in a rite of religious consecration received a veil that was just like the one given in the rite of marriage.

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<sup>1</sup> In writing this document, materials which had been prepared by Brother Andrew Mączyński, MIC, Fr. Wojciech Skóra, MIC, and Fr. Krzysztof Trojan, MIC, were used. We warmly thank them.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Giancarlo Rocca Ed., *La Sostanza dell'Effimero. Gli abiti degli Ordini religiosi in Occidente*, Edizioni Paoline, Roma 2000, pp. 7-8.

However, beginning with the Rule of Saint Pacomius († 348), the habit starts to signify the formal beginning of a life dedicated to God. It was a garb closely resembling the dress of Egyptian peasants – a linen sleeveless tunic, girdled with either a linen or leather belt. Instead of a cloak, there was a goatskin covering their shoulders and a *koukoulion* – a headdress bearing the insignia of their monastery which was the only element of the identification of the membership of the monks and the nuns. From that time on, the habit becomes an external sign of a particular way of life lived *for the Kingdom of Heaven*; it becomes a sign of consecration by and for God, as well as a membership in a religious community.

Beginning with the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, a new type of religious order emerged – that of the Clerics Regular (Theatines, Barnabites, Jesuits, Marians, etc), the members of which made themselves similar to the Canons Regular in some measure, in adapting their lifestyle to the demands of an active apostolate. For this reason, they often omitted the communal recitation of the Breviary (although the Marians kept on communally reciting the Office). Furthermore, they did not wear habits, typical for monks; instead, they wore garb modeled after the attire of the diocesan clergy<sup>3</sup> with some modifications for purposes of identification. The Marians, as the last Order of the Clerics Regular, took on, as an exception, a white habit, because they attributed great significance to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM. Similarly, the Camillians, another Order of Clerics Regular, placed a sizeable red cross on their garb as their special mark.

In the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and especially the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, other religious congregations emerged, which dedicated

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<sup>3</sup> M. Daniluk, K. Klauza, *Podręczna encyklopedia instytucji życia konsekrowanego*, Lublin 1994, p. 163.

themselves to the ministry of education and healthcare. In order to more effectively accomplish their specific apostolates, they abandoned their strict cloistered way of life, while their members, instead of professing solemn vows, made simple ones, or even a pledge. Male congregations greatly resembled the religious orders of the Clerics Regular. There are religious congregations that have retained their individual, original garb (e.g. the “White” Congregation of the Priests the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Redemptorists). However, as their attire, the majority accepted the dress of the diocesan clergy (a cassock, belt, biretta, sometimes a pelerine [small cape] and a skullcap), or just part of that, sometimes making slight modifications. Thus, there were a large number of congregations for which the belted cassock became their habit (e.g., the Paulists, the Michaelists) or a cassock without a belt (The Society of Christ for Polish Immigrants). There are also congregations that replaced the belt with a rope (e.g., the “Black” Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Salvatorians). Congregations of a missionary character wore the missionary cross over the cassock as an element of their attire (e.g., Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Missionaries of the Most Holy Family). Wherever this attire was understood as the habit, it was worn by priest and brothers alike. In non-habit-wearing congregations (e.g., the Salesians and the Marianists), the seminarians and clergy wear the cassock generally accepted in the region, while the brothers wear lay dress and lead a clandestine lifestyle (e.g., the Salesian Brothers are addressed as “Mister” and bear a title of coadjutor).

As a result of persecution of the religious Orders after the French Revolution, as well as in the face of other historic circumstances (e.g., the annihilation of religious Orders), some Orders and Congregations replaced their

habits with the attire of the diocesan clergy. Also, new non-habit-wearing congregations sprang up. At first, the Holy See did not recognize the religious character of such communities because they did not make solemn vows or lead a cloistered life. In 1900, on the authority of the Apostolic Constitution *Conditae a Christo*, Pope Leo XIII granted final approval to the religious character of the congregations with simple vows. The *Normae*, published the following year by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Religious, made those congregations equal in rights to the orders with solemn vows.

From the time of the Second Vatican Council, the Church's norms have been relaxed as to the manner of wearing the habit, especially by the male congregations. According to paragraph 17 of the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae caritatis*, "the religious habit [is] an external mark of consecration to God;" it must be characterized by simplicity, modesty, poverty, and esthetics, as well as to "be suited to the circumstances of time and place and to the needs of the ministry involved."<sup>4</sup> This opened the door for various changes in the form of ecclesiastical garb, especially of the female institutes. Outlandish, expensive, and impractical habits were replaced with a habit more consistent with the attire of modern culture, which caused many congregations to now have garbs similar in form and coloring. Some institutes abandoned the habit altogether, replacing it with an external sign (such as a crucifix, a medal, etc.) In many male institutes of the consecrated life, the habit was replaced for daily use by the so-called *clergyman* [attire] or just a shirt with a religious collar.

At the meeting of the pre-Chapter Committee in Rome on December 9, 2009, Fr. Waldemar Barszcz, TOR,

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<sup>4</sup> PC, 17.

a longtime official of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, stated that many of the religious orders that had obtained permission after the Second Vatican Council to dispense with their habit, subsequently petitioned the Congregation for its return. They recognized the fact that the absence of the habit did not bring them closer to the lay people, nor did it help in evangelization; instead, it lessened the sense of the religious identity and unity with the Congregation in many of their members and sped up the departure of some. Father Barszcz also pointed out that all newly-emerging congregations take on a habit, and usually a strict one, too. According to him, a great desire for the habit today has become apparent in many parts of the world, both among the religious (especially the young ones) and among the associated laity.<sup>5</sup> In *The Rule of Life of the Monastic Communities of Jerusalem* – one of the new forms of consecrated life – its founder, Pierre Marie Delfieux, placed the teaching on the habit in the chapter entitled “In the Heart of a City.” It is a good example of the modern way of looking at the religious habit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) commissioned the University of Georgetown to conduct a survey in the U.S. The results indicate that more and more American consecrated persons of both sexes belong to the elderly age group. Ninety-one per cent of the sisters and 75 per cent of the brothers are 60 and older. The crisis of vocations particularly hurt the communities that abandoned the habit and the elements of the communal life. As it transpired from the survey, two-thirds of the new brothers and sisters have chosen communities in which the habit is either worn always or during pastoral work and prayers. The survey embraced 62,250 brothers and sisters. (Source: KAI – [Polish] Catholic Information Agency).

<sup>6</sup> “Wear your religious habit so that you live out and manifest your presence in the world and to keep your distance – as God’s property separated from the world. Always and everywhere, even outside of Christianity, monks and nuns possessed robes, which they wore in prayer and which gave witness to their poverty; these robes also signified their consecration, their eternal and total belonging to God, the simplicity of life and unity of feelings. It is the same for you. Love those symbols of unity with the Fathers and their spiritual message, which you also undertake today in your own way, both old and new. However,

The Code of Canon Law of 1983 annulled the division of vows into solemn and simple, and consequently the difference between religious orders and congregations. From the formal point of view, the communities are now divided into institutes of consecrated life (with includes both religious and lay institutes) and societies of apostolic life. With the Church's approval, our Father Renovator brought the Marians from being a habit-wearing order of clerics regular (*ordo clericorum regularium*) with solemn vows to a non-habit-wearing congregation

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do not wish to be more of a monk than other monks, and when you go to work like they do, wear lay clothes, if it is necessary and permitted by the Community. Otherwise, wear your habit that was given to you.

“Also, believe — as they do in the East — that the habit shapes a monk. But also remember — as they say in the West — that the habit alone makes no one a monk. ‘Dwell’ in your habit. It reminds us, monks and nuns, that we are consecrated people.

“Just like you wear your koukoulion to celebrate the liturgy, so in your monastic habit you celebrate the liturgy of refectory, cell, chapter, monastery. Your entire life is a liturgy, thus proclaim through it your union with Christ and the fact that you belong to Him entirely and eternally: that you have been simply acquired! Yes, we are sold to Him! Sold for the price of love!

“As a nun, you are the bride of Christ. As a monk, you are the disciple of Christ. All of you, who were baptized in Christ, are clothed in Christ. ‘You are My witnesses — which has been decided by the Lord — and My servants, whom I chose.’ If you can wear your habit without embarrassment and complaint, it will lead you to freedom, it will conduct you into the kenosis of the cross and become the way to its glory.

“Be not afraid that you may distress someone: joy finds expression in a glance. Do not feel sorry for becoming anonymous: God calls you to become His witness.

“Fear not that you may stir things up: both the believer and non-believer expect from you the courage of faith, expressed joyfully and silently by this sign. If you are scorned, remember that Christ was scorned before you [...] Learn to be free!

“You did not choose your habit, but you received it: it opens you to the way of poverty and humility. It was given to you: it opens you to obedience. Do not attribute to it more meaning than it has, but remember that it is a test of your sacrifices, for which the monastic life calls you, and which, in turn, will give you strength. Some day God will demand of you, like He did of Abraham, to not only abandon everything and walk in His presence, but to offer Him your Isaac. In fighting sin, you did not yet draw blood!” Pierre Marie Delfieux, *Źródło na pustyni miast*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 132-133.

(*congregatio*) with simple vows. In this way, he incorporated us into the ranks of the apostolic congregations of a clandestine lifestyle.

## **1.2. Theology and the *Magisterium Ecclesiae* in Regard to Garb (or its Lack Thereof)**

To define the dress of persons dedicated to God, the Western Church uses the word “habit.” The tradition finds its source in two Latin definitions: *habitus*, or “clothes, dress, attire;” and *habito, habitare* – meaning “dwelling, to dwell.” The theology of the habit was built along these two lines. Basically, the habit looked similar to the outfit worn by the poor of the time. Then, new elements of identification began to appear such as a scapular or a skullcap. Throughout the centuries – along with the emerging of new forms of the consecrated life – a process of creating entirely different attires for individual congregations was set in motion. If there was no difference in color, then the garb differed from one another by the cut or by some specific attributes. The habit of a male institute usually was comprised of a tunic, a belt or a rope, a scapular, and a hood. Most frequently, they used fabrics of black, brown, white, sky-blue, or gray.

The habit was a sign of consecration to God and membership in a religious community. Habits were a way for consecrated persons to mutually demonstrate that they were brothers and sisters, while to the outside world that they belonged to the same community. By the special look of their habit, the founders wished to express the most important spiritual or apostolic feature of the newly created community. Thus, the habit began to appear not only as an identification of a particular institute, but also as a carrier of these religious orders’ charism.

The word “habit” is also derived from the Latin *habito*, *habitare* meaning “to dwell.” From the moment of taking on the habit, a consecrated person was clothed in a special “dwelling” in which he would remain until death. The monastery was his outer, material, earthly dwelling, because the superiors had the right to transfer him to a different house. Instead, a habit was with him always, regardless of wherever Divine Providence would take him. The habit does not separate from the world created by God. It only cuts off the world deformed by sin that gave itself into the slavery of demons. The habit is to lead to the departure from this world in a spiritual sense; meaning, to leave behind the covetousness of the body and eyes and this life’s conceit. According to the tradition of the consecrated life and the spiritual heritage of the Church, the religious order members are advised to kiss the habit respectfully and gratefully as their miraculous dwelling, in which they may reside, alone with their beloved Lord, while waiting for the “white garments” of eternal happiness in the House of the Father.

The habit as a sign marking the consecrated people was introduced at the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries. In time, it became the attire of all monks and nuns, while the Apostolic See ensured through special decrees that it would be worn. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, a strong movement arose for consecrated persons to become more involved in the apostolate and the life of the world. At that time, the majority of Orders of the Clerics Regular decided that their priests should not differ in attire from the diocesan clergy, and the religious brothers, from the laity. After the French Revolution and in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, male and female congregations sprung up that did not externally manifest their association with the consecrated life in any way. Most frequently, this was a result of the necessity to

function during times of persecution of the religious life. Among others examples, there were numerous female congregations without a habit founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Blessed Honorat Koźmiński. Their goal was to imitate the clandestine life of the Holy Family of Nazareth and to cooperate with God in sanctifying human labor. According to this Blessed Capuchin, the consecrated person leading a clandestine lifestyle had the opportunity to following Christ Himself who lived most of His life clandestinely,<sup>7</sup> as well as Mary, “*who served God completely hidden from the world, and although she surpassed all the nuns of the world in perfection, she did not differ from the people of her walk in life by some special attire, secluded dwelling, occupations or relations with others.*”<sup>8</sup> Blessed Honorat did not consider the hidden form of life as revolutionary, but he regarded it as recourse to the very heart of Christianity – the Gospels, and as a return to the early centuries of the Church’s existence.<sup>9</sup> The absence of the external manifestation of the religious consecration was supposed, on the one hand, to unite monks and nuns with Christ hidden in Nazareth and Most Blessed Sacrament; on the other hand, it was to help them penetrate various social strata with the work of evangelization. In this respect, monks and nuns were to distinguish themselves not by their attire but by their charity, their way of life, their trust in God, and their dedication to people.

A separate form of the consecrated life (though not the religious life) without a habit is found in the secular

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. Baran, P. Piasecki, *Polskie szkoły duchowości w tysiącletniej historii narodu*, In: *Duchowość przełomu wieków*, Ed. M. Szymula, S. Urbański, Warszawa 2000, p. 95-96.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from Fr. D. Olszewski, The Historical and religious context of the renewal of the Marian Order (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Cent.) at: [http://www.jubileusz.marianie.pl/files/Olszewski\\_kontekst.pdf](http://www.jubileusz.marianie.pl/files/Olszewski_kontekst.pdf) [print out of December 30, 2009], p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Baran, Piasecki, *Polskie szkoły*, p. 92.

institutes. According to their specific character, those institutes ensure their effective presence in the world. Members of those institutes make vows to follow the evangelical counsels and to run an apostolate that unites their consecration with their lay status. They strive to imbue the world with the spirit of the Gospels and to convert it from within through their active participation in many paths of life: professional, family, social, political, etc. They live in the world as lay people or clergy, but do not lead a community life.

The Code of Canon Law of 1983 obligates religious institutes' members to wear an ecclesiastical garb as a sign of consecration and witness of religious poverty.<sup>10</sup> The Code repeats the *leitmotif* of the Second Vatican Council's principle in regards to the habit: it must express the spirit of poverty and simplicity. The teaching on the habit as a sign of consecration remains fundamental. "Clerical religious of an institute which does not have a proper habit are to wear clerical dress according to the norm of canon 284."<sup>11</sup> In turn, the said canon states: "Clerics are to wear suitable ecclesiastical garb according to the norms issued by the conference of bishops and according to legitimate local customs."<sup>12</sup>

A third theological element regarding the habit (in addition to the above-mentioned sign of consecration and manifestation of evangelical poverty) was introduced by Pope St. John Paul II in his exhortation *Vita consecrata*: that of membership. "Since the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership in a particular Religious family, I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly

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<sup>10</sup> "Religious are to wear the habit of the institute, made according to the norm of proper law, as a sign of their consecration and as a witness of poverty." Can. 669 §1.

<sup>11</sup> CL, Can. 669 §2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Can. 284.

recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit, suitably adapted to the conditions of time and place. Where valid reasons of their apostolate call for it, Religious, in conformity with the norms of their Institute, may also dress in a simple and modest manner, with an appropriate symbol, in such a way that their consecration is recognizable.”<sup>13</sup> We note that the Pope mitigated the requirement of wearing the habit when this is called for by “valid reasons of their apostolate.”

Unlike the Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, in his exhortation, the Holy Father speaks about the matter of attire for members of such communities that do not have an ecclesiastical garb: “Institutes which from their origin or by provision of their Constitutions do not have a specific habit should ensure that the dress of their members corresponds in dignity and simplicity to the nature of their vocation.”<sup>14</sup>

The placement of the passage on the garb within the subchapter entitled *Witnesses to Christ in the world* and its closely surrounding context seems to be important here. The Holy Father pointed out that consecrated people need to give witness by their lifestyle, which “too must clearly show the ideal which they profess, and thus present itself as a living sign of God and as an eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, witness through the manner of dress assumes the original witness by the evangelical way of life. John Paul II adds: “The Church must always seek *to make her presence visible in everyday life*, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs. In this regard, the Church has a right to expect a

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<sup>13</sup> VC, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

## 2. History of the White Habit in the Congregation of the Marian Fathers<sup>17</sup>

### 2.1. St. Stanislaus Papczyński

[...] in following the Divine inspiration, in consultation with the most prominent theologians, and with the permission from the Episcopal See in Krakow and Poznan, I took on the white habit in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM, and wearing this habit, I went without delay to give my obedience and docility to the Most Worthy and Most Reverend Archbishop Ranucci, the Apostolic Nuncio to Poland. I received his blessing and a commendation and approval for my intentions of founding this little Congregation.<sup>18</sup>

Thus St. Fr. Stanislaus described, in his testament of 1701, the circumstances in which he was vested with the white Marian habit. He took it on shortly after obtaining an indult of dispensation from the Piarist Order.<sup>19</sup>

The reactions were various from those around St. Stanislaus to the fact that he traded the black Piarist habit for a white one. He would note in his *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*: “Although many people were astounded seeing that I had become white [clad] instead of black,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Por. Andrzej Mączyński, *Geneza habitu mariańskiego. Krótkie studium historyczne*, Rzym – Stockbridge 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, p. 1495, pt. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, p. 1495, pt. 3.

[some of them] even sang in the vein of the Poet: ‘Suddenly a swan, which had only just been raven...’ However, the Divine Majesty has so directed that they showed joy in view of this change. They praised the intention and wished the best of success. Among others were the Apostolic Nuncio himself, a certain bishop, and some well known nuns. Still, there were people who looked upon me as if I were crazy; some even persecuted me because those beginnings had to be based absolutely on suffering.”<sup>20</sup>

In Chapter IV (points four and five) of his *Rule of Life* (*Norma vitæ*) completed in 1672<sup>21</sup>, the Marian Founder gives details as to the attire that he has chosen for the members of his Institute as well as providing justification for the white color. These points read:

4. Because softness of garment incites not only pride, but also lust, you, as hermits, will wear clothing from the most simple, rougher and thicker material: You will wear a habit stretching to the ankles – not one which trails the ground, or shows the ankles too much – and a short mantle reaching to the knees, and a shirt from coarse linen or some other stinging material. All of these will be white in color, in honor of the pure Conception of our Lady, and the greatest cleanliness of them should be observed, because dirty poverty can please no one.

5. The brother-workers will have to wear a different habit from the priests: a habit reaching

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<sup>20</sup> Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, p. 1460, pt. 8. Fr. Casimir Krzyzanowski, MIC, specifies this report by adding that the ceremony took place before the miraculous image of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, at the Karski’s family chapel in Lubocza, most probably on September 15, 1671. *Ibid*, footnote 247.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote 261.

to the ankles, of grey color, and a mantle without a collar. (By worker are understood those who in choir cannot perform the Office of the Dead and devotions with the others in the Latin language.)”<sup>22</sup>

Father Papczyński was convinced that the type and color of the habit were revealed to him by God.<sup>23</sup> We know that, except for the color, St. Stanislaus’s habit was similar to the one worn by the Piarist Fathers of the time.<sup>24</sup> In his Doctoral thesis, Fr. S. Sydry relates that the ceremony of taking the habit by a novice included vesting him with the scapular, habit, belt (depending on the period of the Order’s history, it could have been either a white belt or a Franciscan rope), the chaplet of the 10 virtues, a cloak and a biretta; he was also given a crucifix.<sup>25</sup> Somewhere else in the text, he mentions that the original custom of

<sup>22</sup> Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 58-59.

<sup>23</sup> In the above-quoted *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*, Blessed Fr. Papczyński wrote: “I allowed the hermit [John of the Immaculate Conception, lay name – Stanislaus Krajewski – note of the author] to clothe himself in the habit of my style (which I accepted from Divine Providence) and I presented him, thus clothed, in the holy Nunciature as my companion, having, however, accepted from him first the [act of] dedication to the Society of the Immaculate Conception.” Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, p. 1463, pt. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Fr. Jędrzej Kitowicz († 1804), Polish historian and memoirist, thus described the Marian attire: “The cut of their dress is the same as the Piarists had before: it is a full dress reaching the ground, with sewn-up front, complemented by a short knee-length cloak, and was white in color.” J. Kitowicz, “Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III [texts from the collections of the Virtual Library of the Polish Literature of the Institute of Polish Philology UG: [http://f.polska.pl/files/154/122/88Opis\\_obyczajow.pdf](http://f.polska.pl/files/154/122/88Opis_obyczajow.pdf), 30.12.2009], p. 91. The Piarists do not have any detailed description or drawings of their habit from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, except for the portrait from the same century, of the Venerable Gliceriusz Landirani († 1612), a Piarist candidate for the honors of the altar. Very important for us is the oldest (as it is generally believed) portrait of Father Founder from the Skórzec monastery painted during his lifetime. By comparing these two paintings, it is quite easy to notice similarities in cut between the attire of these two monks.

<sup>25</sup> S. Sydry, *Zgromadzenie Księży Marianów w XVIII wieku*. In: S. Sydry, J. Totoraitis, *Zgromadzenie Księży Marianów od założenia do odnowienia*, Puszcza Mariańska 2004, p. 80.

wearing the cloak, abandoned with the passing of time and left to individual choice, was made mandatory again in 1780. As for headgear, he speaks of a black skullcap and a simple black hat.<sup>26</sup>

To Father Papczyński, the color of the habit was of utmost importance as it was supposed to manifest the Congregation's supreme mystery – the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. This transpires from the Father Founder's testament of 1701, in which he specifically emphasized the importance of three matters: the habit, the Order's title, and the veneration of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>27</sup> In his *Life* of Fr. Founder, the Servant of God Casimir Wyszyński also gives us a strong testimony about the weight St. Stanislaus Papczyński attributed to the habit's white color. The habit was to be unblemished *and white as an expression of the inner chastity of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM*.<sup>28</sup> In his letter to the Congregation of Franciscans of 1691, by which Fr. Stanislaus petitioned for the incorporation of

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>27</sup> "Should Fr. Joachim be re-appointed with the Fathers' consent as the coadjutor, then I put an obligation on him [under the threat] of God's Final Judgment, not to change anything in the habit and the Order's title nor even dare to thwart the devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary." Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, p. 1499, pt. 15.

<sup>28</sup> "When the Venerable Servant of God Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary noticed that Fr. Joachim of St. Ann and Br. Anthony wore white hats brought back from Rome while the entire Congregation was wearing the black ones, he inquired about the reason for this novelty. Father Joachim responded that the white hat was better coordinated with the white habit. The Servant of God retorted that there was no connection between the hat and the habit. For it is essential for the habit to be unblemished and white as an expression of the inner chastity of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM. Meanwhile, the hat was an accessory that may be used or not. For this reason he said: 'Father Joachim, I beg you, as I have done so many times before, not to change anything in this Congregation of the Immaculate Conception. For it is not I but God Himself who raised it up in the Church, and thus it should always remain, without any novelties.'" In: Z. Proczek, MIC, *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów; wybór pism o Kazimierza Wyszyńskiego*, Warszawa-Stockbridge, 2004, p. 125-126.

the Marians into the Order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, he specified his wish for the Marians to retain their white habit and the goal of saving the souls of the faithful departed.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.2. The 18<sup>th</sup> Century

In 1699, the Marians received *The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the BVM*. Chapter 10 dealt with the manner in which the persons living by this rule should be clothed.<sup>30</sup> *The Rule* obligated the Marians to wear a white-colored habit and introduced two additional elements: The cord of St. Francis and the prayer beads of the Chaplet of the Ten Virtues of the BVM. When professing vows on *The Rule*, Father Founder inserted in his act of religious profession, which he personally wrote, a stipulation stating that he would preserve this rule “in everything that does not contradict the regulations of our religious Institute.”<sup>31</sup> It seems that his stipulation became the reason, that the immediate followers of Fr. Papczyński’s work did not feel obliged to abide strictly and immediately by all the norms that *The Rule* provided for the Marian habit. It particularly concerned the differences as to the attire, which St. Stanislaus chose for the religious brothers. It was not until the General Chapter, celebrated in Goźlin in 1722, that the same white

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *List do Zakonu Braci Mniejszych*, in: St. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, p. 1484.

<sup>30</sup> “[...] souls dedicated to God must conform, in actions and in habit, to their Spouse, Christ, and His Virgin Mother so that both Mother and Son may shine through their clothes and habits, namely: by the gray of their undergarments, the white of their outer garments, the black of their prayer beads and the red of the Scapular of the Immaculate Conception’s ribbons worn under the outer garments, to which Scapular must be attached the image of the Mother of God, adorned in blue. In addition, they shall wear in a conspicuous manner, the cord of St. Francis along with the 10 black prayer beads or 10 *Hail Marys* in memory of the 10 virtues of the same Virgin.” *Regula Ordinis B.V.Mariae* in: *Regra dos Religiosos Marianos*, Lisboa, 1757, p. 226.

<sup>31</sup> Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, p. 1503-1504.

habit with the Franciscan rope as a belt was introduced for all the Marians.<sup>32</sup> This would be reflected in the *Statuta Patrum Marianorum*, published a year later.<sup>33</sup>

In his foreword to *The Morning Star*, which also introduced the readers into the history of the Marian Order, the Servant of God, Venerable Fr. Casimir of St. Joseph Wyszynski (1700-1755) described the habit worn by the Marians in his times: "Our Order, wishing to externally reinforce devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, took on the white habit, under which the religious wear a white scapular with either an embroidered or embossed image of Mary's Immaculate Conception; the scapular is adorned with blue color. They carry attached to their belt, a decade or the 10 black prayer beads that symbolize the 10 Evangelical Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. W. Makoś, MIC. *Decreta – Orinationes Capitulum Congregationinumque Generalium M.I.C. 1702-1999*, Puszca Mariańska, 2001, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> "In order to give witness to the spiritual radiance of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, all our clothes must be made out of simple cloth, white in color. We must strive in all conscience to keep them clean for dirty poverty won't please anyone. The quality of the cloth and its uniformity must be observed by all. The Franciscan cord shall be worn by each one of us as the belt." *Statuta Patrum Marianorum Ordinis B.V.Mariae in: Regra dos Religiosos Marianos*, Lisboa, 1757, p. 264.

<sup>34</sup> Z. Proczek MIC, *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów; wybór pism o Kazimierza Wyszynskiego*, Warszawa – Stockbridge 2004, p. 35. Cf. also: *Objaśnienie z Informacją o zakonie OO. Maryanów, Zebrania Niepokalanego Poczęcia Maryi*, in: *Uwiedomienie o sukience albo szkaplerzu Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny, który się rozdaje wszelkiego stanu ludziom przez WW. OO. Maryanów*, Berdyczów 1773 (reprint from 2001), p. 22.

As to the scapular, the privilege of investing it on lay people was granted to Fr. Wyszynski for three years by the General of the Theatine Fathers, with the obligation to renew it every three years. On September 11, 1789, the Apostolic See accorded this privilege to the Marians with an opportunity of renewing it. During the periods of partitions of the Republic of Poland, the Marians lost this privilege because their contacts with Rome had been made difficult for them. It was not until September 15, 1841, that a Marian, Fr. Jan Dziewulski, serving as a chaplain to the Czartoryskis family, was able to obtain for the Marians anew, the right to bless and to place the scapular and the chaplet, with the consent of the local bishops – [the same] privileges as the Theatine Fathers had.

Having gone to Portugal with the intention of planting the Marian Order there, Fr. Wyszyński entered a curious note in his *Diary* regarding the color of the Marian habit and the special theological message, which this color was supposed to convey: “[...] When we arrived in Lisbon, we first had a great dispute regarding the habit. The already formed monks of the Immaculate Conception, had taken on a white habit and a sky-blue cloak. By carrying on a great dispute about it, we managed to convince everyone that the white habit and white cloak were more appropriate.”<sup>35</sup> Undoubtedly, very important to us is the *Testimony* about Fr. Wyszyński, written in 1757 by his disciple, the witness to his life and the one who continued his work in Portugal – Fr. Alexis Fisher: “[...] When the end of Father’s life was already near, his sons lamented his leaving this new religious institute, not yet completely stabilized. [Father Casimir] called them to himself and admonished them, saying that they should not lose their spirit, but they should preserve their habit and their religious discipline. The Virgin [Mary] herself is the Foundress of this cause. Thus, she won’t abandon anyone who would devoutly and continuously wear the habit of her Immaculate Conception.”<sup>36</sup>

Following the example of their Founder, consecutive generations of Marianists treated the white habit with great respect. Great care was taken to preserve the uniformity of the habit throughout the Congregation along with its conformity to the original form, as well as to keep the habit, and the other elements of the Marian garb, in compliance with the requirements of simplicity and monastic poverty. Instructions regarding the Marian habit were issued in

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<sup>35</sup> Z. Proczek MIC, *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa*, p. 410.

<sup>36</sup> Z. Proczek MIC, *Najstarsze świadectwa o Słudze Bożym o. Kazimierzu Wyszyńskim*, Warszawa – Stockbridge 2005, p. 73-74.

numerous decrees of the General Chapters in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>37</sup> These instructions were directed at eradicating repeated attempts, contradictory to the vow of poverty, not of changing the habit but of its embellishment by using more expensive fabric and adding various accessories. We'll quote only two fragments of the Chapters' ruling:

The form of the habit must be preserved intact by all priests and brothers in accordance with the old custom; it is not permitted to introduce any novelty under the penalty of disobedience.<sup>38</sup>

Recommending a strict uniformity of our garb, both outer and inner, and insisting on its preservation, we decide that [...] all religious order members, regardless of their rank and office, if they consider themselves true Marians, must use inside [the monastery?] gray or white clothes and modest black hats, not white or refined ones.<sup>39</sup>

Speaking about the history of the Marian habit and its alterations, it is impossible to leave out Fr. John Raymond Nowicki, the Superior General from 1776-1788. During his time in office, the Marians not only reached the apogee of their growth, but they also began an inner reform and began broadly opening themselves to running schools

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<sup>37</sup> Compare the decisions of the following Chapters: Skórczec of 1744, Korabiewo of 1747, Raśna of 1757, Raśna of 1766, Korabiewo of 1770, Mariampole of 1776, Korabiewo of 1780, Korabiewo of 1785, Raśna of 1788, Raśna of 1793. Information may be found in: W. Makoś, *Decreta – Ordinationes Capitulumque Generalium M.I.C. 1702-1999*, Puszcza Mariańska 2001, p. 164 pt. 6; p. 192, pt. 20; p. 196, pt. 2; p. 281, pt. 19; p. 337 pt. 3; p. 352, pt. 16; p. 395, pt. 10; p. 424, pt. 11; p. 424, pt. 18; p. 473, pt. 19; p. 496, pt. 1; p. 496 p.1;p. 497, pt. 23.

<sup>38</sup> *Decisions of the 1757 General Chapter celebrated in Raśna*, in: W. Makoś, *Decreta*, p. 281, pt. 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Decisions of the General Chapter celebrated in Raśna on September 12-19, 1788, and presided over by Very Rev. Stanislaus Mogien, S.T.L., Superior General, which were prescribed to the Marian Clerics Regular under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM*, in: W. Makoś, *Decreta*, p. 281 pt. 19.

at their monasteries and conducting parish missions. The Marian deliverance from the restrictive legal dependency on the Franciscans brought about, among other things, a need for revising the religious laws, including the elimination from them of such elements that used to emphasize this dependency (e.g., the obligatory (until that time) use of the Franciscan cord to belt the habit). Following the Decree of the Order's General Council of October 1, 1780, Father General Nowicki issued a special letter to all confrères on December 12, 1781, in which he announced the alterations made in the manner of clothing of the Marian religious and called for its uniformity.<sup>40</sup>

Consequently, the mention of the cord of St. Francis, until that time obligatory for the Marians, disappears from *The Rule of the Ten Virtues*, which was published in Polish in Vilnius in 1791, along with the new edition of the Marian *Constitutions*<sup>41</sup>: "(...) In addition, may they

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<sup>40</sup> "[...] I remind you the first point of the Decrees passed by the General Council in its session on October 1, 1780, at St. Michael Monastery in Korabiew, which point states that, in conjunction with our original constitutions, all members of our Order (*religiosi*) shall not girdle themselves with a cord (*horda*), but with a cincture made out of woollen fabric (*cingulo ex lana aut filis*) but not out of silk (*ex serico*).

[...] "Thus, so that everyone is able to preserve the uniformity (*uniformitas*) and not to disobey holy poverty, let everyone wear a cincture three or about three-fingers (*semitrium*) wide, about six of five-ell (*ulnarum*) long and without any floral or other decoration; let it be made out of well-woven smooth fabric (of dice pattern, *alearum*). On each end, it is to be finished with small (short) fringe, which should not be extended or extravagant (as has already happened in the past). The girdling goes from right to left. The beads of the Chaplet of the 10 virtues of the BVM (*beneplacitorum* BVM) are to be appended (*appensa* — to hang from). We order the fulfillment and upholding of this regulation in absolute terms. Poised and concentrated on the inside, you'll be strong on the outside in everything that is important for religious life. Thus, may all local superiors make sure that the uniformity of clothing is being preserved, and may the religious under their care and supervision be thus cinctured. We won't have one man cinctured this way, and the other — differently, in his own manner. All of us must present ourselves uniformly to the outsiders." In: Makoś, *Decreta*, p. 427.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Reguła Zakonu Księży Marianów Pod Tytułem Niepokalanego Poczęcia Błogosławionej O Naśladowaniu Dziesięciu Cnót Jey Upodobanych; Konstytucje*

wear, appended in a conspicuous manner at their cincture, 10 black prayer beads or 10 *Hail Marys* in honor of the 10 virtues of the Most Pure Virgin.”<sup>42</sup> Another important detail, officially introduced as an obligatory part of the Marian attire under Fr. R. Nowicki’s generalate, was the white cloak, which Father Founder himself used to wear, and which was also worn later, but not always and not by everyone.<sup>43</sup>

During the generalate of Fr. Nowicki, an interesting motion was made for the Marians to take on black attire, generally used by the diocesan clergy, but keeping possibly the white cincture.<sup>44</sup> Father Thaddeus Białowieski, a Marian, attended the General Chapter of 1782 as the delegate of the Livonian Bishop Joseph Casimir Kossakowski (1738-1794). Through the mediation of his delegate, the Bishop informed the Chapter as to the reforms, which in his opinion were necessary for the Order in order to survive and to adapt to the new conditions. Among other things, he advocated giving support for the National Committee of Education, establishing and running parish schools at the

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*Apostolskie Dla Zakonu Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najswiętszej Maryi Panny Kleryków Regularnych Marianów Pod Regułą Dziesięciu Cnót Teyże Maryi*, Wilno 1791.

<sup>42</sup> Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma Zebrane*, Warszawa 2007, p. 1542.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. S. Sydry, *Organizacja Zgromadzenia Księży Marianów w XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 1930, p. 80. “Wanting to uphold this old and glorious custom of wearing the white cloak introduced by the Venerable Founder himself, the same General Council decided and enacted for [the white cloak] to be purchased and worn by all our religious and that no one from among the religious so much as thought of appearing or dared to present himself without one, especially amongst more distinguished persons or in towns. Decrees of the General Council held at the Korabiew Monastery under the Patronage of St. Michael the Archangel and presided over by Very Rev. Fr. Raymond Nowicki, S.T.L., Superior and General Visitator of the Order of Marian Clerics Regular under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM. Enacted on September 29 and 30 of 1780 and on October 1<sup>st</sup>, and made known to all Confrères and monasteries.” In: Makoś, p. 424 pt. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Sydry, *Organizacja Zgromadzenia*, p. 81; J. Kosmowski, MIC, *Marianie w latach 1787-1864*, Warszawa – Lublin 2004, pp. 25-26, 203.

Marian residences, conducting missions in parishes for the peasants, and conducting spiritual retreats at the Marian houses. In return for accepting his recommendations, the Bishop promised the Marians three main post-Jesuit residences located in his diocese. However, he made a condition for the habit to be changed to the black one, with possibly keeping the white cincture. In addition, he confirmed his expectations and promises in a separate letter.<sup>45</sup> On September 29, 1782, Fr. Nowicki wrote back stating that he considered organizing mission and parish schools his most important task. He would have agreed to the proposal in regards to the habit, “should the matter be exclusively within his power. Having received the approval for his Institutum along with its Rule, the Instigator of our Order had also had the white habit given to him, which he received from the hands of the Nuncio, and for this reason I cannot change it *sine assensu Sedis Apostolicae*.”<sup>46</sup>

Descriptions of the Marians’ attire from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century differ slightly in details, and it would be difficult today to uncover the cause of these differences. It may be helpful here to refer to iconographic sources, showing the white Marians of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, 18 of which sources were preserved until modern times. We only have to add that the Marian religious attire was com-

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<sup>45</sup> “Provided even that you would keep intact all rules and the cut of the garb, it would’ve been my most important wish, above all other circumstances, not to deviate from the black color of the garb of the clergy, which the general public has already accepted and is very used to, keeping, if possible, only the white cincture. Is it conceivable to admit that the superficial color should influence the spirit of the law? Thus, I do not find any importance reason in it, especially not for my diocese, located among the dissidents.” Bishop Kossakowski to Father General Raymond Nowicki, September 1782. Its copies are preserved at the General Archives in Rome and at the Provincial Archives in Warsaw.

<sup>46</sup> Letter of Fr. Raymond Nowicki to Bishop Kossakowski of September 29, 1782. Its copies are preserved at the General Archives in Rome and at the Provincial Archives in Warsaw.

pleted with a headgear in the form of a black biretta and a black skullcap.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.3. Nineteenth Century

In spite of the readiness to change the color of the Marian habit expressed by Fr. General Nowicki, this idea was not entertained during the next century, as we can assume from existing documents. Only incidentally difficult circumstances of these times forced the superiors to slightly deviate from the generally accepted rule. One such incident is related by Fr. Sydry: “The schismatic government on the part of Poland that was detached during the first partition put a ban on entering religious orders as soon as 1832. For this reason, Fr. General Placid Czubernatowicz allowed Deacon Onufry Szyrwid to wear the black cassock of the lay clergy so he wouldn’t give away that he was a religious.”<sup>48</sup>

Aside from the above-mentioned example, we should probably assume that the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Marians remained faithful to their religious garb, although at times some might have been living outside the community. Eleven still existing photographs can prove this assumption. Based on those photographs and a drawing from 1848, as well as considering other 19<sup>th</sup> Century iconographic sources showing the Marian habit, we may attempt to re-create with considerable precision the special style of the habit at the time when it became no longer legally binding. It is also possible to re-create the chaplet of the 10 Virtues of the BVM that the Marians wore on their habit. One such chaplet that survived to our times was found near the Church of Our Lord’s Cenacle at Marianki in Góra Kalwaria; in all probability, the chaplet belonged

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Sydry, *Organizacja Zgromadzenia*, p. 80, and also the iconographical material from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries preserved in Balsamão and in Poland.

<sup>48</sup> Sydry, *Czcigodny Sługa Boży*, p. 287.

to Fr. General Thaddeus Białowieski (1750-1832), who was buried there.<sup>49</sup>

#### 2.4. Twentieth Century, before the Renovation

With the coming into existence of the annulment decree of 1864, it seemed that the Congregation would slowly and naturally die out along with its remaining professed members. Father Vincenty Sękowski, then the only remaining Marian, was contacted by Fr. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, who expressed his desire in writing to join the Congregation. In his letter of September 8-9, 1908, sent from St. Petersburg, our Blessed Father Renovator declared that, apart from him, there were other people willing to *put on the Marian habit*.<sup>50</sup> Blessed George counted firstly on the legal re-opening of the Mariampole monastery. Shortly after, his hopes proved to be futile and it was necessary to *renew the Marians, even though clandestinely, if no other way exists*.<sup>51</sup> For this reason, in his letter to Pope Pius X of July 20, 1909, Fr. General Sękowski asked permission for the Marians to lead the religious life without any of its external signs or the religious habit.<sup>52</sup> The same petition, supported

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<sup>49</sup> As verbally reported by Fr. Jan Kosmowski, MIC.

<sup>50</sup> "While staying in Mariampole, I begged you, Dear Father, not to stop your endeavors towards obtaining the authorities' consent for opening the monastery. I was doing so for my own sake as well as for the sake of several of my friends. For a long time now I feel the desire for a more perfect way of life. [...] Now, when our country enjoys greater freedom, when religious orders begin returning to life, I would like to fulfill this desire, and I would particularly like to enter the Congregation of the Marians. I talked this over with one of my friends; he would enter at once, too, along with me. We are almost certain that two more of our friends also would wish to put on the Marian habit. I am convinced that some of our students would follow us later." J. Bukowicz, T. Górski, *Odrodzenie Zgromadzenia Księżki Marianów w latach 1909-1910 (dokumenty)*, Warszawa 1995, p. 51-52.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>52</sup> "Since everyone is convinced that some centers of religious life are absolutely necessary in our parts of the world, and also because there are candidates who

by description of the conditions of religious life in the Russian-partitioned territories, was re-submitted by Fr. Matulewicz in his letter of July 30, 1909, to José Cardinal Vives y Tuto, OFM Cap, the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious.<sup>53</sup> The Apostolic See acceded to these requests and on November 28, 1910, ratified the reformed Congregation of Marian Fathers along with its new Constitutions. Thus a new chapter of the Marians' history was opened.

### **3. The History of the Absence of the Religious Garb in the Renewed Congregation of Marian Fathers**

#### **3.1. Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz**

Undoubtedly, the clandestine character of the renewed Marian community determined the type of attire – the cassock of the diocesan clergy to be worn by the clerics

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wished to enter the Congregation for a long time, upon conscientiously consider the matter, we concluded that – should there be no other way because of the official bans – it ought to be permitted to the Congregation of Marian Fathers, with the consent of the Apostolic See, to lead its life without any external manifestation of our vocation. For this reason and in consideration of the obstacles experienced in our path of religious life, I ask the Apostolic See to give us a dispensation from wearing the religious habit.” Bukowicz, Górski, *Odrodzenie Zgromadzenia*, p. 68.

<sup>53</sup> I. Civil authorities of the Russian Empire annulled all religious orders and congregations. Also the Congregation of Marian Fathers was from 1864 and still is forbidden to receive novices. In this way, the Congregation of Marian Fathers will shortly totally cease to exist, unless, disregarding completely the official ban, it continues to accept novices and to lead the religious life without manifesting it as much as possible before the civil authorities. The proof of the possibility to lead such a life in Russia is given by other religious congregations, which are successfully growing there and are very helpful to the Church. For this reason, the Congregation of Marian Fathers humbly requests permission to continue its existence in complete defiance of the vile civil laws but abiding solely by the laws of the Church – our holy Mother – without manifesting as much as possible before the civil authorities its religious nature. II. [...] In view of the above, we humbly request: 1) that the Apostolic See kindly gives us its dispensation from wearing the religious habit.” Bukowicz, Górski, *Odrodzenie Zgromadzenia*, p. 74.

(in the spirit of the existing canon law, everyone with minor orders and tonsure belonged to this group, thus their name – clerici); while the lay brothers would wear laymen’s clothes. In his letter to Fr. Bučys (of August 6, 1909), Fr. Renovator reported that the Holy Father supported the idea of a non-habit-wearing congregation as proper for the existing times, while the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, Cardinal Vives y Tutto was to allegedly suggest that the Marians dress like all other priests.<sup>54</sup> The situation of the Catholic Church in the partitioned territories was well known to the Apostolic See along with the widely increasing number of congregations without habits there.

Thus, the first constitutions of the renewed Congregation stated that the members should not differ in clothing from other people of the same station in life and age; however, they must make sure that their attire is adjusted to their assignments and occupations as well as marked by simplicity and modesty.<sup>55</sup> Blessed George further developed this thought in his *Journal*: “We do not intend to differ from other people either by our clothes or in other externals. Our priests will wear the same clothing as that worn by serious, pious priests in whatever country we happen to live and work. Occasions may arise when it is advisable for our priests to wear secular clothes so that they may work more effectively for the glory of God. Similarly, lay

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<sup>54</sup> “The first matter I addressed in my conversation was the desire to save the Marian Order. The answer I got was this: the right is on our side: as long as at least one member remains he has the full right to preserve the congregation. Then he said: what do you have to wear the habits for? Dress like all other priests. Later on, I learned that the Holy Father supported religious orders not wearing habits. He thinks them to be very useful in the present times. Bukowicz, Górski, *Odrodzenie Zgromadzenia*, p. 80-81.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Institutum Fratrum Marianorum sub titulo Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae*, Petropoli 1910, cap. V, p. 24.

brothers would dress much the same as good Catholics of the same class and occupation as they are engaged in.”<sup>56</sup>

The absence of external features which would single out the Marians was meant to save them from pride and conceit, while promoting working quietly and spreading the glory of God.<sup>57</sup> Religious brothers were supposed to be valuable assistants to the priests, and their goal was to “be committed to proclaim Christ by word and example, to work, and to do battle for the glory of God, the salvation of souls, and the good of the Church.”<sup>58</sup> Father Renovator advocated a good education for the lay brothers (either in some field of learning or in a trade) and good formation. Particularly helpful was to be the absence of their ecclesiastical garb: “In their war against the Church, the atheists have already influenced considerable numbers of people to avoid priests. Now they tend to regard the priestly cassock with suspicion, are full of hostility toward the clergy, and will not listen to anything a priest has to say. Because of this situation, wherever and whenever possible, priests must change their clerical attire for secular clothes so that they may go and preach Christ among those who are suspicious of clerical garb. But even here, the priest must be careful because this may not always be a good thing to do. In that case, a lay brother can take the place of the priest.”<sup>59</sup>

Thus, the Congregation was meant to offer a formation of a very “flexible” character, able to influence people

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<sup>56</sup> Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, Translated and Edited by Sister Ann Mikaila, MVS, Stockbridge, 2003, p. 70.

<sup>57</sup> “It is not always wise to advertise what we plan to do or what we are already doing. All too often pride and self-love appear when our efforts succeed. [...] But if the glory of God does not demand that we draw attention to our work, it is better to work quietly. When there is a lot of noise, it is more difficult to work peacefully and one does not accomplish as much.” Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>58</sup> Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, p. 64.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

who distanced themselves from the Church and weren't seeking any contacts with her. The absence of the habit was supposed to be of great help.

At a certain point, the events of the First World War afforded the Marians the possibility to come out of "hiding." Along with this, certain Congregation members began thinking about going back to the old habit. In his memoirs, Fr. J. Vaišnora recalled what has happened at the Marians' return to Mariampole. Although "people in these parts were good Catholics and eagerly awaited the return of the Marians, they turned their backs on the newcomers, deeming them "false" Marians, because they were not dressed like the priests they remembered."<sup>60</sup> Father Vaišnora regarded such occurrences as the reason for the Marians' dilemmas. In 1921, Fr. F. Bučys made an attempt to convince Fr. Renovator to bringing back the former Marian religious garb. His main argument was a desire to differ from the diocesan clergy and the habit's usefulness for the Marians teaching parish missions.<sup>61</sup> In his written response, Blessed George gave a powerful message about the absence of habits among the Marians: "As to the return of the habit, I have thought a lot, consulted with the others, and pondered the matter before God. I am decidedly against its return. I am convinced that the growth of our Congregation would be considerably much slower, if not altogether halted as soon as we start wearing them. For

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<sup>60</sup> J. Vaišnora, "On the Marian Attire," Translated by F. Smagorowicz, in "Immaculata" 24 (1987) No. 6-7, p. 107. This Lithuanian historian also related: "One hears the story about an incident that happened in the United States to the first Marians in this land. A certain pastor invited them to deliver parish missions. He often repeated to his parishioners beforehand that the white Marians would be coming, the memory of whom was still very much alive among many [immigrants]. Yet, they saw two priests arriving in cassocks. The pastor was surprised and didn't know what to do, how to save face before the people. And thus, these two priests had to wear some provisory white garments in order to pass for white Marians before the assembly." Ibid., p. 107-108.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

those teaching parish missions in America or Lithuania, it is quite sufficient to have the following external features: 1) to wear a stole to hear confessions, but without the surplice; 2) sermons may also be delivered without surplice; 3) during missions, it is opportune to have a crucifix, which has indulgences attached to it, and to bless the people with it after each sermon, making the sign of the cross; 4) priests may wear cinctures, as it is customary abroad. [...] After prayer and in consultation with knowledgeable people, I am decidedly against wearing the habit by our lay brothers. Although our little lay brothers don't have habits, we have much more of them compared to the Orders dressed in habits. Better, let us strive to demonstrate that we are religious through the true spirit of Christ, through the religious spirit, through piety, learning, diligence, self-sacrifice, and dedication to God and the Church, as well as to the people."<sup>62</sup> In the properly understood idea of the absence of habits, Father Renovator saw the source of God's blessing for the Marians.

What has been said earlier has the character of private correspondence. However, the dispute regarding our possible going back to the habit had also a public character and was brought forth during the so-called Chapter of Gdańsk in 1923, among others. At this Chapter, Fr. J. Kazakas motioned to introduce the habit for the brothers, thus expressing the wish of the brothers from our community in Chicago. Allegedly, Father General responded negatively, and – according to Fr. S. Matulis' report – *all of the priest members of the Chapter agreed with him*.<sup>63</sup> The very same priest members of the Chapter stated in a special

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<sup>62</sup> Bł. Jerzy Matulewicz, *Pisma wybrane*, red. J. Bukowicz, T. Górski, Warszawa 1988, p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> S. Matulis, *Marianie za błogosławionego Jerzego Matulaitisa-Matulewicza*, Transl. R. Piętka, Warszawa-Lublin 2008, p. 249; cf. T. Górski, *Błogosławiony Jerzy Matulewicz*, Warszawa 2005, p. 350.

decree: “As to the habit, the directives of our Constitutions ratified by Pope Pius X remain in force. The following provisions have been added: a) while proclaiming missions, our priests use the missionary crucifix and the stole, but no surplice; b) in churches under our care, our priests are not obliged to wear a surplice while hearing confessions; c) if circumstances of the place call for it, priests and seminarians of our Congregation should put a black cincture over their cassocks.”<sup>64</sup> The above regulations emphasized that in a way the ecclesiastical garb was to replace the monastic one for priests, while brothers remained without one.

### 3.2. Constitutions of 1930

A few years after the Chapter of Gdańsk, already after the Blessed Renovator’s demise, the Constitutions were altered in view of the need for adapting them to the new Code of Canon Law (1917). The new laws of 1930 specified that the clerics were to wear ecclesiastical attire proper to the established local customs, while the brothers – lay clothes appropriate for their duties. They re-instated the obligation of wearing modest and simple attire, *in decent condition*, and emphasized its conformity to the spirit of poverty.<sup>65</sup>

We should mention here, that the majority of religious communities have associated the beginning of the novitiate or the professing of first vows with the taking on of the garb proper to the individual institute by the novice or the newly-professed member. The Marians solved this problem in a respective directive of the first Constitutions of the renewed Congregation, which states that upon

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted after J. Vaišnora, *O ubiorze*, p. 109.

<sup>65</sup> See: *Constitutiones Congregationis Clericorum Regularium Marianorum sub titulo Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae*, Romae 1930, cap. I, art. III, p. 12.

entering the novitiate, the candidate receives a medal with the image of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus on one side, and the Immaculate Conception of the BVM on the other; but while making the first profession, they receive a simple crucifix.<sup>66</sup> This medal represented a form of the scapular of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM in reference to the old Marian tradition.<sup>67</sup> Being presented with a crucifix at the ceremony of first or perpetual religious profession was a custom generally accepted by many religious orders. The subsequent Marian laws of 1930 have added to the custom of presenting the novice with the medal during the liturgical rite of entrance into the novitiate, with the custom of also giving a copy of our Constitutions.<sup>68</sup> Vesting the seminarians with cassocks usually took place in their first year at the seminary.

Here we must recall that the custom of the Marian priests and seminarians to dress in the ecclesiastical garb of an individual country or region of their service to the Church, made it easier for the Marians of the Eastern Rite, for whom it was only natural to accept the Byzantine monastic garb both in Harbin (Manchuria) and other locations.

### 3.3. Until 2023

Mindful of the regulations of universal law, the Constitutions of the Congregation of Marian Fathers of 1986 instruct: “The members do not wear any religious habit. Clerics are to wear ecclesiastical garb according to the

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<sup>66</sup> *Institutum*, cap. V, p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> In 1910, Pope Pius X decreed that all approved scapulars may be replaced with a scapular medal bearing the image of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus on one side and Our Lady on the other. Thus, we are to understand that the Blue Scapular of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM, received by the Marians, took on the same form.

<sup>68</sup> *Constitutiones*, cap. IV, art. I, p. 53.

norms issued by the Episcopal Conference and in accord with legitimate local customs; others are to wear clothing that is suited to the performance of each one's duties and occupations and conforms to the customs approved by the provincial statutes. In keeping with the spirit of poverty, the dress of all the members should be simple and modest, but becoming."<sup>69</sup> The matter of dress is treated also by a paragraph of our Directory dedicated to penance and mortification: "The attire and furniture of the living quarters of each of the members should be adapted to their occupations, preserving, however, a modesty which is proper to those who 'have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires'" (Gal 5:24).<sup>70</sup>

As a rule, the Marian priests dress the same way as the diocesan clergy of the given region. Thus, it may be a cassock, a business suit with a shirt and clerical collar, a jacket with a small cross, a crucifix worn over everyday clothes, white alb with a cincture, etc. The religious brothers' dress varies according to place, functions and individual preferences of the wearer approved by his superiors. The dress of the religious brothers is defined by the *Statutes*, but they may sometimes differ considerably depending upon the entity within the Congregation. For example, all brothers in the United States are vested at an appointed time and wear clothes similar to those of the priests, but their clerical collar has a triangular incision in the middle. In Poland, brothers who express the wish or consent take on the ecclesiastic garb with permission from the Provincial Superior and his council for the time of carrying out their functions that call for such an attire (e.g., a sacristan at the Licheń Shrine).<sup>71</sup> Every now and then, voices are raised

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<sup>69</sup> C, 15.

<sup>70</sup> D, 55.

<sup>71</sup> *Statutes, Decrees, and Recommendations of the Divine Providence Province of*

during General Chapters calling for our return to the habit or, at least for pastoral reasons, dressing our lay brothers in ecclesiastical garb in a given region.<sup>72</sup>

#### 4. Return to the roots

With the new Constitutions approved by the Apostolic See in 1986, the Marian Fathers did not cease their search for a deeper understanding of the charism and spirituality of their Founder and their own Congregation, including matters related to their attire. A significant source of inspiration for ongoing exploration and reflection came from the beatification and canonization of St. Stanislaus in 2007 and 2016, as well as the publication of all his writings in Polish and English at the start of the 21st century, with some fragments also available in other languages. Undoubtedly, God Himself inspired our studies and discussions at various levels, more or less formal (from private conversations to conventions and provincial and general chapters). These efforts led to a variety of publications and symposia, and ultimately resulted in decrees from chapters and higher superiors, bringing about changes in our legislation, rituals, and prayers, as well as impacting every aspect and level of life.

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*the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, Warszawa, 2008, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Throughout the years, there were many proposals submitted to the Chapters to introduce the habit for our lay brothers (and not only for them). Before the General Convention of 1996, some lay brothers of the Polish Province made a check mark at the entry of the poll stating: "all brothers should wear religious garb." See: K. Biel, *Miejsce braci zakonnych we wspólnocie marianów*, In: *Życie braterskie w doświadczeniu wspólnot mariańskich. Acta Conventus Generalis – 1996*, red. A. Mączyński, K. Pek, Rzym-Warszawa 1997, p. 171.

## 4.1. General Chapter of 2011

After the beatification of the Founder, there was an increasing awareness that he chose the white habit and forbade its change under the threat of divine judgment, primarily because of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. There is no doubt that the Blessed Renovator rescued our Order from demise, in part by reorganizing the structures of the Congregation and abolishing the habit. This change was driven by historical and political circumstances, but the lack of a religious garb was also intended to ease the functioning and growth of the Congregation, helping everyone — especially the brothers — connect with those who were distant from the Church. The Blessed Renovator later acknowledged that the lack of habits was more suitable at that time for the apostolate and the growth of the Congregation. He emphasized that whether in priestly attire, in a habit, or in everyday clothing, we should always and everywhere act in the service of Christ and the Church.<sup>73</sup> In the current practice of the Church (see *VC* 25), for the sake of a greater good, any religious may remove their habit and present themselves in secular attire. Thus, the ideals of Blessed George can be pursued today in both habitless and habit-wearing communities.

During the beatification of the Founder and the Church's encouragement for religious institutes to return

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<sup>73</sup> On October 27, 1910, Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz noted in his *Journal*: "May all our thoughts, desires, and longings be directed toward that one goal: to bring Christ everywhere, to restore all things in His Spirit, to glorify the name of the Catholic Church in every place. In order to achieve this, we should make use of any lawful and worthy means available to us: the cassock of the priest or the habit of the religious or, if need be, the clothes of the layman; we can use every trade, profession, every field of learning or labor—and even our own blood—everything that is good and created by God can be used, if need be, for the greater glory of God and for the good of the Church." Blessed G. Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, pp. 45-46.

to the original charismatic visions of their founders, many Marian priests have either found or deepened their filial connection with Father Stanislaus, rediscovering the beauty of the charism of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As a result, more and more Marian priests have expressed the need and desire to return to the white habit or another, for the following reasons: 1. as a sign of religious consecration for both priests and brothers (not just the consecration from the sacrament of priesthood); 2. to affirm our identity, shaped by the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; 3. as a symbol of the unity of the entire Congregation; 4. to maintain a connection with the Founder and a commitment to the original charism of the Congregation. The Magisterium of the Church strongly encourages consecrated persons today to give a clear witness to their belonging to Christ and to a specific institute, also through religious attire. It appears that today's world is also looking for clear and visible testimony from religious, including through their choice of attire.

Those in favor of continuing the practice introduced by Blessed Father George argued that the garb is not the sole sign of a religious person's consecration and identity. These are also expressed through trust in God and dedication to Christ; a life of chastity; active love for God, the needy, and the poor; faithfulness to the Church and the Congregation; obedience to the Church and superiors; solidarity with the poor and efforts on their behalf, a witness of both personal and communal poverty; a life of prayer; community living (striving for unity and reconciliation); a lifestyle and actions that reflect their calling; and a communal apostolate aligned with the Congregation's charism, among other things. Advocates of the Marian non-habit tradition argued that: 1. Blessed Father George's

discernment had previously been affirmed by the Church; 2. this approach enabled the Marians to work effectively and fruitfully across all areas of the Church and the world; 3. in some parts of the world, wearing a habit is entirely impractical or irrelevant; 4. introducing a habit (whether white or black) could, in their view, lead to division within the Congregation.

Prior to the 2011 General Chapter, a survey was distributed to all Marians, focusing primarily on questions about their charism and identity, consecrated and communal life, apostolate, formation, priorities, and any open-ended suggestions. 71% of the Marians who received the survey responded with at least one answer. In response to the question about the potential introduction of religious attire (from the section on charism), 41% of those who returned the completed survey were in favor, while 46% were opposed. Different ideas were proposed regarding the potential design of a Marian habit. At the same time, many brothers acknowledged that the beatification of the Founder had strengthened their sense of identity, belonging, and mission. It also brought new challenges and responsibilities for the Congregation and its members.

At the 2011 Chapter, among its various resolutions, two key documents were presented to the Congregation: “Priorities for the Congregation 2011-2017” and “Message to All the Members of the Congregation.” The priorities outlined for the Marians included: 1. Embracing the call to holiness; 2. Deepening theological reflection on their charism; 3. Incorporating the charism into apostolic works; 4. Fostering new vocations; and 5. Enhancing both initial and ongoing formation. An action plan was proposed for each of the priorities. The Chapter’s “Message” pointed to the *kairos* moment for the Congregation, marked by the

beatification of the Founder and the 100th anniversary of its renewal by Blessed Father Renovator. The document also highlighted the significance of the Marians rediscovering and embracing St. Stanislaus Papczyński as their spiritual father and founder. The rediscovery of the continuity, relevance, and beauty of the Marian path, as well as their unique charism centered on the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, were emphasized. We are called to deepen our understanding of this charism, to promote it, to live it fully, and to discover within it the source and center, the joy, and the distinctive character of our vocation and mission.

The section of the Constitutions addressing Marian attire (formerly point 15, from 2011 point 16) stated that “The confrères do not wear a specific religious habit,” while also noting that “Religious brothers may wear clerical attire similar to that of the clergy.” The Chapter issued Decree No. 3 to the Superior General, instructing the formation of a Commission on the Constitutions and Directory, tasked with revising these documents and proposing necessary amendments. The 2011 Chapter in its entirety — its preparation, proceedings, final documents, and the subsequent work of the Commission on the Constitutions and Directory — served as a profound source of inspiration and a foundation for deepening Marian identity and spirituality, while also shaping a mission rooted in the charism and attuned to the signs of the times.

#### **4.2. The General Chapters of 2017 and 2023**

The 2017 General Chapter embarked on the revision of the Constitutions and Directory, drawing upon the documents prepared by the Commission for changes to the Constitutions and Directory, along with proposals submitted by members from across the Congregation.

The primary changes focused on the first section of the Constitutions and Directory, titled “The Patrimony and Spirituality of the Congregation.” Various points were extensively reorganized and rewritten, with new ones introduced, all aimed at highlighting the central role of the Immaculate Conception in the identity, spirituality, and mission of the Marians within the structure and content of this section. For the first time, a section on the Immaculate Conception as the core of the charism was introduced, positioned as the second point. Meanwhile, the provision regarding the Marian habit remained unchanged from the 2011 text, despite the Commission on the Constitutions and Directory having suggested specific revisions to restore the white habit. The Chapter upheld the practice of non-habituality but introduced a new Point 8 in the Directory, titled “Protection of the Patrimony,” which is worth quoting in full: “The white habit, which our Holy Father Founder wore in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, belongs, among other things, to the inalienable spiritual patrimony of our Congregation.” However, in the newly added Point 7 of the Directory, “Some Marks of Identity,” no reference was made to any specific Marian attire.

It is undeniable that in the 21st century, there has been a steady increase in the number of Marians who desire not just any religious habit but specifically the white habit as a symbol of their identity and mission. By the 2023 General Chapter, at least several proposals had been submitted advocating for the restoration of the white habit within the Congregation. Certain proposals were signed by many confrères. However, a significant number of Marians were firmly opposed, not only to wearing the white habit themselves but also to allowing others the option of wearing it. The discussions during

the Chapter were lively, but the confrères were determined to find a compromise — one that would permit those who desired to wear the white habit to do so, without imposing it on those who preferred to follow the current practice. In the end, the text of Point 17 in the Constitutions, “Attire of the Confrères,” was amended, while Point 8 in the Directory, now titled “Principles Regarding the Solemn Garb” (formerly “Protection of the Patrimony”), was entirely reworked. Both provisions are worth quoting in their entirety:

### **The Constitutions 17. Attire of the Confrères**

“The white habit, which by divine inspiration our Holy Father Founder wore in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the solemn garb of the confrères. Daily and in the usual way, clerics may wear ecclesiastical garb according to the norms issued by the Episcopal Conference of the country where they are present. Religious brothers may wear ecclesiastical garb in the manner of the clerics according to the norms of law. In keeping with the spirit of poverty, the attire of all the confrères should be simple and modest.”

*CIC 284, 669 §2; NV, IV,4: Second Testament; Fundatio Domus Recollectionis; D 8*

### **Directory 8, Principles Regarding the Solemn Garb**

“The white habit, which our Holy Father Founder wore in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, belongs, among other things, to the inalienable spiritual patrimony of our Congregation. Normally, it is received during Patrimony and Spirituality of the Congregation 185 perpetual vows. It consists of a simple white cassock with a fascia. The design of the habit and the time and manner of its reception in particular jurisdictions is

confirmed by the Superior General with the consent of his Council. The confrères are encouraged to wear it at least on the following days:

- 1) January 27, Feast of Blessed Abp. George, the Renovator;
- 2) May 18, Solemnity of St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, the Founder;
- 3) August 29, Anniversary of the Renovation of the Congregation;
- 4) September 17, Anniversary of the passing to eternal life of the holy Father Founder;
- 5) November 2, Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed;
- 6) November 5, Memorial of All the Deceased of our Congregation;
- 7) December 8, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary;
- 8) December 11, Anniversary of the Founding of the Congregation.”

To avoid any unrest over the introduction of the option to wear the white habit, the Chapter issued a special declaration concerning the use of formal attire within the Congregation. The declaration makes it clear that no one is obliged to wear the white habit, while allowing its use based on personal preference. This means that a confrere may choose never to wear the white habit or, conversely, to wear it at all times. The practice has been entrusted entirely to the individual discretion of the confrères.

The capitular Marian Fathers and Brothers made these decisions in a spirit of trust, confident that the reintroduction of the white habit as formal attire would further highlight the continuity of our Congregation, its

identity and spirituality, its charism and mission—from its origins to the present day.

Each Marian's personal freedom to decide when to wear formal attire reflects the mutual love among brothers and respect for the history of the past century of our Congregation. During that time, the Marians, initially forced by political circumstances, ceased wearing the religious habit and adopted the attire of diocesan clergy. There is a profound belief that the option to wear the white habit will provide an opportunity to deepen our identity and to carry out our mission with renewed fervor.

### **4.3. The Current Practice**

The Superior General, Fr. Joseph Roesch MIC, in his Circular Letter issued after the 2023 General Chapter, dated June 29, 2023 (Prot. n. 149/2023), wrote:

The declaration, which the Chapter approved, calls the white habit an external sign of our religious consecration and of our charism: the essence of which is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The white habit has now become the solemn garb of the confrères which we can wear at our discretion. We are encouraged to wear it on important days for the Congregation. No one has to wear the habit.

On July 25, 2023, the Superior General, Fr. Joseph Roesch MIC, issued a decree regarding the white habit (Prot. n. 154/2023), stating that:

The solemn garb of the Marians is a simple white cassock, similar in design to the cassocks of diocesan clergy with a closed collar and no external buttons, sewn in at the bottom. The fascia, about

12 cm wide, made of white rayon or the same as the habit material, can be finished with simple tassels.

The rite for blessing the habit remains the same as the one used in the Congregation until its renewal in 1909.

By mid-2025, it is clear that most jurisdictions and the majority of brothers in the Congregation have embraced the white habit, though its use varies. Some wear it on special occasions, others wear it frequently, and some never take it off. However, there are also brothers who have not adopted the habit and, for now, do not plan to do so. It does not seem that this introduces any new division within the Congregation. Even before 2023, there were Marians who always dressed in secular clothing, some who wore a small cross, and others who wore a clerical shirt with a collar or a cassock. Some wore these consistently, others for pastoral duties, and still others only on occasion.

Clerical attire can sometimes elicit respect and kindness from people, or conversely, dislike and hostility, often directed at the priesthood itself. The white habit, however, prompts questions about the identity and mission of the religious who wear it. It is worth noting that, at least in Poland, laypeople, consecrated persons, and clergy — especially those visiting our oldest establishments (Puszcza Mariańska, Góra Kalwaria, Mariańskie Porzecze) — have warmly welcomed the return of the white habit. They clearly associate it with our Founder, our charism, and our tradition. Many find great joy in this symbol. Meanwhile, those who, after Father Matulaitis-Matulewicz's reform, denied the continuity of the Marians established by Father Papczyński, seem to have run out of momentum to sustain their arguments and actions.

It is certainly worth each of us, as Marians, reflecting on these questions: What does the white Marian habit

symbolize, and why was it so important to our Founder? Why do I wear the white habit — or why do I choose not to? What message do I send to others when I appear and serve in the white habit, a cassock, a clerical shirt with a collar, or secular clothing? What does my attire communicate? What identity am I embodying? What mission am I carrying out? And what more can I do to align myself more faithfully with the founding charism of our religious community?



**THE WHITENESS OF THE HABIT  
OF ST. STANISLAUS PAPCZYŃSKI  
IN THE LIGHT OF THE THEOLOGY  
OF THE MYSTERY OF THE  
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

Bogusław Gil, MIC, STD



## Introduction

When two people sit down to play chess, the question usually asked is: Which color would you like to play? Their choice between white and black usually comes down to personal taste or sometimes even superstition. Occasionally, the decision might also be influenced by current trends or the players' mood at the moment. Someone used to prefer black, but with white being in vogue now, they'll opt for the white pieces and pawns. That's how it can be, and it likely happens in chess. The same may apply to fashion in clothing and home decor.

Yet, the choice to embrace or decline the white habit, which was restored for the Marians by the 2023 General Chapter, should not be driven by personal taste, fashion trends, or even individual piety. The wearing of a religious habit, or choosing not to, has always carried significant meaning,<sup>1</sup> and it continues to do so even in today's largely secularized world, which nonetheless remains able to recognize Christian values and symbols. Pope St. John Paul II addressed this topic almost thirty years ago in his post-synodal exhortation on the consecrated life. Highlighting the missionary and evangelistic essence of this Christian lifestyle, which stems directly from Christ's Paschal Mystery, the Pope instructs:

Consecrated persons will be missionaries above all by continually deepening their awareness of having been called and chosen by God, to whom they must therefore direct and offer everything

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<sup>1</sup> It primarily concerns the outward manifestation of a complete dedication to God, affiliation with a particular religious order, the embrace of evangelical poverty, and the public testimony to Christ, a role to which those in consecrated life are uniquely called within the Church and the broader world. See: P. Naumowicz, *Mariański strój*, Rzym-Warszawa 2010, pp. 7-10, in <[http://\(MarianskiStroj.pdf\)](http://(MarianskiStroj.pdf))>, February 14, 2025.

that they are and have, freeing themselves from the obstacles which could hinder the totality of their response. In this way they will become *true signs of Christ in the world*. Their lifestyle too must clearly show the ideal which they profess and thus present itself as a living sign of God and as an eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel. The Church must always seek to *make her presence visible in everyday life*, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs. In this regard the Church has a right to expect a significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ. Since the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership in a particular religious family, I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit...<sup>2</sup>

While the Marians may adhere to the clerical dress code set by the local Bishops' Conference in their daily lives, as of 2023, the white habit — adopted by our Father and Founder “in honor of the shining with whiteness Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God” (*Norma Vitæ*, IV, § 4)<sup>3</sup> — serves as the formal clothing for the confrères and a symbol of their Marian identity. Thus, its importance and meaning need to be explored anew and reflected upon as a sign and symbol.

Given that Fr. Paweł Naumowicz's work on the Marian clothing, referenced above, was published in 2010 and

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<sup>2</sup> St. John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, no. 25, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation, March 25, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> This is my own literal translation of this sentence. It differs from the official English translation which is more free and less precise.

adequately covers the significance, history, and theology of the religious habit, it's now pertinent to focus primarily on the issue of its color. It is generally known that “when Fr. Papczyński put on the white habit on September 15, 1671 [...]), he did so intend to promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception [...]. Others acknowledged that the white habit represented the *candorem Immaculatae Conceptionis* (‘radiance of the Immaculate Conception’).”<sup>4</sup> Before exploring the relationship between the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and the color white, it's worthwhile to consider the significance of “whiteness” in culture and within Christianity, which stems from Biblical Tradition.

### The Cultural Significance of White

White is categorized among the achromatic colors, which means it lacks any specific color dominance. This brightest hue comes from the blending of the three primary colors: green, red, and blue. White is the color of light that, when passed through a prism, disperses into the colors of the rainbow. Thus, as a blend of three colors, white represents completeness and the synthesis of distinct elements.<sup>5</sup> In this light, the Founder's words about the “radiance of the Immaculate Conception” of the Mother of God, mentioned earlier, carry significant weight. We'll come back to this point later.

As the color of pure light, white symbolizes the renewal of life, particularly in its spiritual aspect. In terms of meaning, white is similar to gold, and like gold,

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<sup>4</sup> K. Krzyżanowski, footnote 3, in: Św. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma zebrane*, PROMIC, Warszawa 2016, pp. 48-49.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. Bonar, *Biel w liturgii – symboliką i kontekst kulturowy*, in: A. Sielepin J. Superson (ed.), *Szata liturgiczna*, Uniwersytet Jana Pawła II, Kraków 2016, p. 111.

it embodies both color and light. White also expresses transcendence. As the embodiment of full light, it can represent both a beginning and an end.<sup>6</sup>

Within European culture, where the Congregation of Marian Fathers originated and where we primarily focus our discussion on whiteness, this color is most often a symbol of purity and innocence. White is chiefly the color associated with the Risen Christ, Immaculate Mary, angels, apostles, and saints. For Christians, within this broad European cultural context, white typically evokes notions of moral purity, goodness, innocence, and justice. Yet, in other cultures, the associations can be quite different. For the ancient Egyptians, this color was associated with death, infertility, and calamity. It was linked to the desert, which perpetually posed a threat to human existence.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, in China and Vietnam, white is seen as the color of mourning, which is why the Chinese wear it at funerals. Vietnamese people, including baptized Catholics, adorn their heads with white sashes during the solemn events of mourning and funerals for their deceased.

It's worth noting that in places where the Christian faith, or rather, European civilization, has influenced the indigenous culture, white has also come to symbolize celebration and rest. A prime example is Rwanda, where our Congregation has been active since 1984. In fact, in the Rwandan language, Sunday — *ku cyumweru* — translates to the “Day of Whiteness,” or to be dressed in white. The missionary work of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Africa, known colloquially as the White Fathers for their traditional white cassocks, had a profound impact on

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. K. Jurek, *Znaczenie symboliczne i funkcje koloru w kulturze*, in: *Kultura-Media-Teologia* 6 (2011), p. 76, the whole article: pp. 68-80.

the formation of the Church and the Rwandan state. The white of their missionary garb certainly had a substantial influence in forming the Christian identity of the local people whom they baptized. Color, indeed, plays a crucial role in shaping both the individual and collective identities of people.<sup>8</sup> Choosing or changing a color often serves to define or highlight one's identity. At its core, color holds symbolic meaning. It conveys a code that can impact, if not a person's conscious mind, then certainly their subconscious, thereby affecting their reactions and choices.

To distinguish themselves from the Benedictines, particularly those from Cluny who wore black, the Cistercians chose the white habit, harking back to the original Benedictine tradition. Although St. Benedict did not designate a specific color for the monks' attire in his rule, the prevailing practice during his era involved using simple, undyed wool or linen, which tended to be more white than black. As time passed, the initial practical reasons were overshadowed by the symbolism associated with the colors mentioned above. The medieval debate between St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a key figure in the Cistercian reform, and Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny, aptly illustrates this. St. Bernard charged Peter with wearing the devil's colors. In response, he argued that black represents moderation and humility, whereas wearing white, the color of Christ as well as celebration and purity, signifies great pride.<sup>9</sup> In truth, the debate wasn't about the colors themselves, but rather about the lifestyle of the Black and White monks and their adherence to the Founder's Rule. The proponents of the Cistercian reform criticized the Cluniac black monks for straying from the monastic ideal of poverty, forsaking manual labor, and

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<sup>8</sup> See: *Ibidem*, pp. 71-73.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. B. Bonar, *Biel w liturgii*, op. cit., p. 117.

taking on Church titles and benefices. The white habit of the Cistercians was intended to symbolize a spirit of renewal and a return to the foundational ethos of St. Benedict and the monastic Fathers, living wholly for and with the Christ who emptied himself.<sup>10</sup>

It's hard not to notice a parallel with our Founder's situation, who, for reasons similar to those of the Cistercians breaking away from the Cluniac Benedictines, departed from the Piarists and adopted the white habit to honor the Immaculate Conception of Mary. He himself notes that "surprise overcame many who saw that I went from being [dressed in] black to white" (*FDR* 8). While the whiteness of his habit was primarily and most importantly to honor the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, St. Stanislaus Papczyński's yearning for the renewal of religious life and his commitment to the original Piarist rule, particularly the evangelical poverty cherished by the founder of the Congregation of the Pious Schools, were also mirrored in his transition from black to white.

## **The Significance of White in the Bible**

Since ancient times, white has held significant importance in the religion revealed through the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. Although we will review them from this perspective rather briefly, it will be adequate for our considerations. Simultaneously, it should be noted that white held an equally significant role in various pagan cults and superstitions as it did in religions rooted in Biblical tradition. White was especially sought after for the coloring of animals used to symbolize different gods. For

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<sup>10</sup> See. *I Cistercensi*, Storia dell'Ordine cistercense, in: <

instance, the bull, representing the Babylonian weather deity Adad, was meant to be shown in white, and into the emerging city of Rome, the heavens gods were also to be carried on white animals. In ancient Mesopotamia, Ahura Mazda, the benevolent and supreme deity, was associated with this color and was also known as the “white lord.” Greek priests donned white garments, as did the so-called Manichaean elect. Thus, because white was linked to everything sacred and divine, it eventually became a symbol of moral purity and perfection.<sup>11</sup> This is how it came to be viewed in European culture, as previously mentioned.

In the context of the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, among the three colors most commonly stated (white, black, and red), white stands out as the most important.<sup>12</sup> Beginning with the negatively-viewed whiteness associated with leprosy, which appears in numerous Old Testament passages (notably Ex 4:6; Lev 13:2-27; Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:27), through the beauty of the morning’s whiteness (1 Sam 14:36) or the cloud and the throne of the Ancient of Days (Rev 14:14; 20:11), it’s particularly important to focus on the whiteness of clothing, as this is what the color white most frequently symbolizes in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. The white garments mentioned in the Bible might naturally remind us of our religious habit, whose whiteness is similarly inspired by them. This pertains to the “white as snow” attire of the Ancient of Days described in the Book of Daniel (7:9), as well as the counsel from the wise man in the Book of Ecclesiastes, who advises: “At all times, dress in white and keep your head well anointed

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. M. Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych*, Pallotinum, Poznań 1989, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> See: K. Romaniuk, *Biblijne źródła „białości” Niedzieli Białej*, in: *Niedziela Warszawska* 17 (2003), in: *Biblijne źródła “białości” Niedzieli Białej* in: *Niedziela.pl*, March 11, 2025

with oil” (Eccl 9:8). The white of these garments symbolizes primarily justice and innocence, yet it also signifies the Ancient of Days as the origin of these qualities. It is He who cleanses, pardoning the sins and faults of His people. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow” (Is 1:18).

In the New Testament, white garments will mainly symbolize the Risen Christ, who, through His Paschal Mystery, passes from this world to the Father (cf. Jn 13:1-4). As a prelude to this mystery of the Lord, the Transfiguration scene depicts Him in garments “dazzling as light” (Mt 17:2). This whiteness is so dazzling that no earthly fuller could ever imitate it (cf. Mk 9:3; Lk 9:29). As the Conqueror of death, hell, and Satan arises from the tomb on the third day at dawn, the clothing of the angel announcing this Good News at the empty tomb is “white as snow” (Mt 28:3). Likewise, the young man discovered by the women inside the Lord’s empty tomb is dressed in a white robe (cf. Mk 16:5). In the depiction of the Ascension, two men clad in white garments approach the disciples and announce the Lord’s return in glory (cf. Acts 1:10-11).

Yet, the Book of Revelation contains the most allusions to the symbolism of white garments. The one who possesses the seven spirits of God declares that those who have kept their garments spotless will walk with Him in white. “Anyone who proves victorious will be dressed (...) in white robes” (cf. Rev 3:1-5). The members of the church in Laodicea who weaken in faith are advised to purchase white garments for themselves, so they can “hide their shameful nakedness” (Rev 3:18). The elders seated on the 24 thrones in Heaven were all “dressed in white robes” (Rev 4:4). And upon the Lamb opening the fifth of the seven seals, His followers, who were destined

to die, were given white garments (Rev 6:11). In the first liturgical reading for the Feast of All Saints, we hear: “After that I saw that there was a huge number, impossible for anyone to count (...) dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands” (Rev 7:9). The white color of their garments is referenced again a little later, where the reason for this whiteness is explained: “These are the people who have been through the great trial; they have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb”. (Rev 7:14).

### **White: The Color of Christ’s Passover**

The passages mentioned above suggest that, in the Bible, not all instances of white are the same. From the negative association of leprosy’s whiteness, we progress to *the whiteness of the Resurrection’s garments*. Indeed, in the New Testament, this color is primarily linked to the Mystery of Christ’s Passover. As noted before, the reference to the whiteness of Jesus’s garments emerges only within the context of the Transfiguration scene, serving as an announcement and preparation for the disciples to engage with the Lord’s Paschal Mystery. Biblical scholar, Bishop Romaniuk asserts that “we arrive at the connections the Bible illustrates between white — whiteness and the process of moral transformation. (...) Those dressed in white are people who ‘have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb’ (Rev 7:14), meaning they have been purified of their sins.”<sup>13</sup> This purification, however, is not just a symbolic ritual of sprinkling with hyssop, so that the repentant sinner may become clean and whiter than snow (cf. Ps 51:9), but it is the spiritual reality of a *new creation*,

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

the result of the divinization of the nature of the person who sincerely believes in Christ. The eternal Word of God, through the Incarnation, unites with every human being and guides those who believe in Him to the fulness of salvation found in the mystery of His Passover.

However, this Passover is not merely a singular event, a historical fact now in the past; it is foremost an eschatological reality of salvation that exists in the Crucified and Risen Christ, who, as the Paschal Lamb, will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over Him, and as the Risen One, He lives eternally within the mystery of His redemptive death. The Cross on which the Crucified One hangs, present in every Christian home, symbolizes this profound mystery. The Resurrection is beyond the reach of physical sight. We only see the Crucified One. Yet, faith enables us to go beyond the barrier of death and to experience the true presence of the Risen One. Therefore, one can *meet* Him in this Mystery of His Passover within the Church, particularly through the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. A genuine encounter with Him results in a transformation of the heart and lifestyle. This is known as conversion (*metanoia*), which allows Christ to become our Passover (cf. 1 Cor 5:7), and our new way of living becomes our Passover with Christ.

Before the 4th century, when some Christian communities began to distinguish between the various salvific events<sup>14</sup> that constitute the Mystery of Christ's Passover,

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<sup>14</sup> "At the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries a historical perspective on the events associated with Christ began to emerge. As a result, different facets of the salvific work began to be examined as distinct, unconnected events. The theology that was developing and being articulated through the liturgy during that period gradually started to drift from a comprehensive view of the paschal mystery. Leo the Great (d. 461) already celebrated separate feasts dedicated to one specific event. Over time, the notion of Christ's Passover started to be equated solely with His resurrection. The concept of redemption started to be viewed through the lens of atonement, and the understanding that redemption encompasses all salvific

the Church contemplated and lived this Mystery as a united whole. In the liturgy, which from the very beginning of the existence of the community of believers in Christ was the source and summit of their Christian life, this was expressed through a preference for the color white.

The early Christians, much like in other aspects, did not directly follow Old Testament patterns regarding liturgical colors, but while keeping those in mind, they primarily favored the color white. (...) This is evident from Clement of Alexandria, who advises the faithful against wearing garments of various colors (...). The above view undoubtedly prevailed among the largest circles of the first Christians, and for this reason, it can be assumed in advance that the clergy usually wore white liturgical garments.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, white, associated from the very beginning with the Risen Christ and the reality of the paschal renewal of humanity and the world, became a symbol of the Church celebrating the Paschal Mystery both liturgically and through a new way of living. While the phrase “Paschal Mystery” emerges only with St. Justin Martyr and Melito of Sardis (who died in 167 and 180 A.D., respectively), the events of Christ’s Passion and glorification, considered as a single, indivisible salvific entity that this term comprehends, have been part of the Church’s Tradition from the

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events, not merely the passion and death, began to diminish. During the era of post-Tridentine polemical theology, soteriology placed an even greater emphasis on concepts of atonement and merit, overshadowing the salvific role of the resurrection and ascension. This situation continued in Western Christianity up until the 20th century, when a “return to the sources” and ecumenical engagements led to a gradual resurgence of a holistic understanding of the paschal mystery.” A. Wańka, „*Misterium Paschalne Chrystusa*” *Pojęcie dawne i nowe*, in: *Szczecińskie Studia Kościelne* 1 [1991], pp. 60-61.

<sup>15</sup> A. J. Nowowiejski, *Wykład liturgji Kościoła katolickiego*, vol. II, Druk. F. Czerwińskiego, Warszawa 1902, p. 86-87.

very beginning. Usually, they are discussed in relation to Baptism. This is particularly demonstrated by the Letters of St. Paul. For example, let's cite a passage from the Letter to the Romans, where the Apostle of the Gentiles states:

You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death. So by our baptism into his death, we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so we shall be by a resurrection like his; realizing that our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin. Someone who has died, of course, no longer has to answer for sin (Rom. 6, 3-7).

This freedom from sin and the old way of life, as well as purification in the Blood of the Lamb, was always expressed through the whiteness of the baptismal garment, from which the Second Sunday of Easter, called White Sunday, also took its name. "Upon emerging from the baptismal font, neophytes put on a garment, but it was not the same one they wore when approaching the sacrament. The garment had to be new, white, and shining, symbolizing the new life that started with their baptism."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the white garment of the neophytes has always symbolized a new life in Christ and with Christ from the beginning. For the Christians in ancient Rome, the significance was even more profound, as it was customary to wear white on one's birthday. Thus, the day of Baptism was perceived, even by pagans observing the

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<sup>16</sup> A. Grzywa, *Symbolika szaty w starożytnych obrzędach katechumenalnych i chrzcielnych*, in: *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 13 (2000), p. 284.

white garments of the neophytes from the outside, as a day of new birth, *dies natalis*.

Wearing white garments for seven consecutive days, up to the second Sunday of Easter (as Baptism was given only during the Easter Vigil liturgy), powerfully highlighted the eschatological aspect of Christian faith and life. In this way, the 4th-century Syriac theologian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, addressed the newly baptized, saying: “As you emerge from the water, you don a radiant garment: it symbolizes the future world — bright and shining, into which you have been ushered. However, once you achieve resurrection and are clothed in immortality and incorruptibility, you will no longer require this garment. You need it now, though, because you have not yet received these gifts in actuality but only as signs and symbols, a preview of the happiness to come.”<sup>17</sup>

St. John Chrysostom, in explaining the mystery of the first week following Baptism to the neophytes, describes it as a symbol of the entire Christian life, stating:

This spiritual wedding is drawing to an end. Be watchful, therefore! Just as in a physical marriage, all wedding festivities last seven days; so too have we celebrated our spiritual marriage for the same duration at the mystical table full of gifts. What am I saying? — for seven days? If you stay watchful, the celebration will endure eternally. Simply maintain your garment unblemished and radiant. By doing so, you will encourage the Bridegroom to love you even more deeply, and despite the passage of time, you will preserve your radiance and brightness.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Teodor z Mopsuestii, *Homilia XIV*, cit. per A. Grzywa, *Symbolika szaty w starożytnych obrzędach...*, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Chryzostom, *Katecheza 6*, 25-26, in: Idem, *Katechezy chrzcielne, homilie*

The fact that this was not about external appearance or the aesthetic elements of the garment, which should symbolize the spiritual reality of conversion, is demonstrated by the following words of the holy bishop:

Do not behave like those who, adorned in a magnificent garment and walking through the marketplace, are solely concerned with preventing a single drop of mud from staining it, though the soul would suffer no harm from this; after all, it's just a garment that can be eaten by worms, worn out by time, and if it becomes dirty, it can easily be washed in water. However, if — God forbid — the soul were to be tainted, whether by word or by thoughts arising in the heart, it would fall victim to great misfortune.<sup>19</sup>

With the day of their Baptism in mind, Christians ought to protect the brilliance of their garment, ensuring it is not sullied by the old way of life they have forsaken for the Crucified and Risen Christ.

### **The Immaculate Conception of Mary, Shining with the Whiteness of Christ's Passover**

When our Father and Founder, St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, ordered his spiritual sons that their attire “should be white in color, in honor of the shining with whiteness Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God”<sup>20</sup> (*Norma vitæ*, IV, § 4), he was referring to both the outwardly visible purity of the religious garment<sup>21</sup> and,

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*katechetyczne do tych, którzy mają być oświeceni oraz do neofitów*, U źródeł katechumenatu 1, trans. W. Kania, Kerygma, Lublin 1993, pp. 95–96.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 23, p. 95.

<sup>20</sup> St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, PROMIC, Stockbridge 2022, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> „(...) dirty poverty can please no one.” (*Ibidem*).

most importantly, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother, illuminated by the whiteness of Christ's Passover. The habit, which he took on "by divine inspiration" (*FDR* 14),<sup>22</sup> was intended from the very beginning to symbolize this Mystery and serve as one of the most concrete ways to honor and spread it. It's hard not to notice the link between the white color of this habit and the whiteness of the baptismal garment. The white habit of our Father and Founder, being "in honor of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady," connects to the whiteness of the paschal garments discussed earlier. The Immaculate Conception of Mary and the Paschal Mystery of Christ are essentially linked. This represents a cause-and-effect connection. This is already apparent in the 1854 dogmatic definition, which clearly states that, *the most Blessed Virgin Mary, (...) in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, (...) was preserved free from all stain of original sin*. Thus, the whiteness that shines from the Immaculate Conception of Mary is fundamentally the whiteness of Christ's Passover. The merits referred to in the dogmatic formula are the Mystery of His kenosis and exaltation, which is perhaps most eloquently expressed in the early Christian hymn found in the Letter to the Philippians (2:6-11).

The Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, as a result and the initial fruit of the paschal renewal achieved by the Savior and existing within Him, vividly and paradigmatically illustrates the true essence of human salvation in the Crucified and Risen Christ, who is *our Passover*. It teaches us that salvation cannot be earned through what is often called personal righteousness and piety, as it is a pure gift of God's grace. This gift can only be accepted or rejected. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, cit., s. 1297.

condemned (cf. Mk 16:16). Faith is, therefore, the essential response of man, including Mary, to the gift of God's redeeming grace. St. Paul states that "all have sinned and are deprived of God's glory, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23-24). Mary, although the first part of this statement does not apply to her, "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from Him." (*Lumen gentium* [LG] 55). "Redeemed by reason of the merits of her Son and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God, by which account she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit" (LG 53).

Thus, the redemption that the Virgin Mother receives is real in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Paschal Lamb, who, as the Risen One, lives eternally and has the power to save those who draw near to God through Him (cf. Heb 7:25). Mary, then, is the first person redeemed through the Paschal Mystery of the Son and participates in the Trinitarian life of God according to the measure of the gift of the *fullness of grace* (cf. Lk 1:29). By agreeing through faith to the Incarnation of the Word, she "gave to the world Him who is Life itself and who renews all things, and she was enriched by God with the gifts which befit such a role. It is no wonder therefore that the usage prevailed among the Fathers whereby they called the mother of God entirely holy and free from all stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature" (LG 56).

The whiteness with which the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God radiates, according to our Father Stanislaus, symbolizes this new creation in her. This is a symbol of the Paschal Christ, the New Adam, from whom Mary, the New Eve, receives new life in the order of grace,

thus becoming the “Daughter of Her Son.”<sup>23</sup> United with Him by a “close and indissoluble tie,” which is the Holy Spirit Himself, the uncreated Immaculate Conception (as referred to by St. Maximilian Kolbe),<sup>24</sup> Mary can proclaim alongside St. Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me.” (Gal 2:19-20). Filled with the grace of the Spirit to a degree that neither St. Paul nor any other creature in Heaven or on earth can match, Mary revealed herself to Bernadette Soubirous on March 25, 1858, not merely as the immaculately conceived but as the Immaculate Conception itself.

The young visionary from Lourdes sees her adorned in a white dress, cinched with a blue sash, and wearing a white veil. Nearly thirty years earlier, in 1830, St. Catherine Labouré beheld the Immaculate One in a vision, receiving the message of the Miraculous Medal, and she too was clad in a silk robe with a veil the hue of white dawn. The white color of the Immaculate Virgin Mother’s garments is less about Her own hue and more a symbol of Him from whom

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<sup>23</sup> “In the mystery of Christ, she is present even ‘before the creation of the world,’ as the one whom the Father ‘has chosen’ as Mother of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way Mary is united to Christ, and similarly she is eternally loved in this ‘beloved Son,’ this Son who is of one being with the Father, in whom is concentrated all the ‘glory of grace.’ At the same time, she is and remains perfectly open to this ‘gift from above’ (cf. Jas. 1:17). As the Council teaches, Mary ‘stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from him.’ [...] Consequently, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, Mary receives life from him to whom she herself, in the order of earthly generation, gave life as a mother. The liturgy does not hesitate to call her ‘mother of her Creator’ and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of St. Bernard: ‘daughter of your Son.’ And since Mary receives this ‘new life’ with a fullness corresponding to the Son’s love for the Mother and thus corresponding to the dignity of the divine motherhood, the angel at the Annunciation calls her ‘full of grace.’” John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 8 and 10, Encyclical of March 25, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> See: M. Kolbe, *Wybór pism*, ed. J. Bar, Warszawa 1973, 370/597–598.

she derives her *original innocence*. Christ the Lord, as the Eternal Word of God Incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is her Son, yet simultaneously, her Immaculate Origin. He is before all things, and in Him, all things find their existence. He is the Head of the body, which is the Church, and He is the Beginning. The first-born over all creation (cf. Col 1:15-20). This includes His Mother as well.

The Immaculate life of Mary, symbolized by the brilliantly-white color of her dress and veil, should be seen as a synthesis of two graces: the gift of her immaculate beginning and the grace of her glorious end.<sup>25</sup> Both of these graces are Christ, the Son of God, in the Mystery of His Passover, through which God the Father renews humanity and the world, not through Adam, but through Christ (cf. Rom 15:22-26). Mary, created in Christ and for Christ, is the Immaculate Conception because, as John Paul II teaches, “in the mystery of Christ she is present even ‘before the creation of the world.’” “Embracing God’s salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption.” (LG 56). She is the Immaculate Conception because she never broke the *close and indissoluble tie* that unites her with the Son. She never saddened the Holy Spirit by whom she was filled and sealed (cf. Eph 4:30). Maintaining a perfect bond with Christ, the Virgin Mother “advanced in the pilgrimage of faith” (LG 58) and stood at the foot of the Cross not without God’s decree (cf. *ibidem*), “consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had

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<sup>25</sup> See: J. Ratzinger, *La Figlia di Sion*. La devozione a Maria nella Chiesa, Jaca Book, Milano 2005, pp. 59-68; M. G. Masciarelli, *Il segno della donna*. Maria nella teologia di Joseph Ratzinger, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2007, pp. 17-18; A. Stagliano, *Madre di Dio*. La mariologia personalistica di Joseph Ratzinger, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2010, pp. 47-49.

brought forth” (*ibidem*). She was actively present in the Cenacle alongside the Apostles “by her prayers imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation. Finally, the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all guilt of original sin, on the completion of her earthly sojourn, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords (cf. Rev 19:16) and the conqueror of sin and death.” (LG 59).

The Immaculate Conception of Mary, shining with the whiteness of Christ’s Passover, reaches its completion in her Assumption, yet it also serves as a sign and symbol of the Church, which the Immaculate Virgin Mary typically represents and of which she is the Mother. “Taken up to Heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and cultics, until they are led into the happiness of their true home.” (LG 62).

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, established by St. Stanislaus Papczyński to serve this salvific Mystery, pray daily with the words: ***May the Virgin Mary’s Immaculate Conception, be our salvation and our protection!*** They also have the white habit of Father Stanislaus, radiant with the whiteness of the Resurrection. The Immaculate Conception, therefore, is the Risen Christ dwelling in Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the mystery of the Virgin Mother’s salvation through the Paschal Christ, whose clothing is so dazzlingly white that no launderer on earth could make it so (cf. Mk 9:3). After all, no one can save themselves or pay God the ransom

required for their own soul (cf. Ps 49:8-10). The grace of salvation, which in the life of Mary and every believer signifies hostility towards the Ancient Serpent and his deeds (cf. Gen 3:15), leads to a *rebirth through water and the Spirit* (cf. Jn 3:5), in order to be molded into the likeness of the Son of God (cf. Rom 8:29). Those who do not seek to justify themselves but embrace the freely given grace of salvation through faith are adorned with glory, similar to the woman clothed with the sun and the moon beneath her feet (see Rev 12:1). This glory of the Resurrection is the attire of Christ and Mary. Therefore, the Marians are to dress themselves in such a manner as Jesus and His Mother.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Rule of the Ten Evangelical Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Chapter 10, Marian Press, Stockbridge 2023, p. 66.

## Conclusion

The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, shining with whiteness, as the paschal identity of Mary, is primarily a soteriological reality rooted in the Mystery of Christ's Passover. It represents the most complete summary of the Catholic doctrine on grace and salvation.<sup>27</sup> It directly points us to Him who is the salvation and Savior of humanity and the world — the Lord Jesus Christ, Crucified and Risen, with whom the Virgin Mother is united by a “close and indissoluble tie.” Therefore, the whiteness of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, symbolized by the white Marian habit, is the whiteness of Christ's Passover.

It is highly noteworthy that during the era of Father Stanislaus Papczyński, when a vigorous campaign in favor of the Immaculate Conception was under way in the Catholic regions of Europe, particularly in Spain, to promote its dogmatization, many Franciscans, who, like Father Papczyński, had vowed to defend this truth even to the point of shedding blood, put on a blue habit as a symbol and color associated with Mary.<sup>28</sup> Yet, our Founder never referred to this practice, which he likely would have known about. Whenever he speaks about the Marian habit, which he considers one of the most crucial symbols of serving the mystery of the Immaculate Conception within his Congregation, he distinctly highlights its white color. This is especially pronounced in the Second Testament, where, reflecting on his life as he approaches his imminent transition to the Lord, Father Stanislaus will state:

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<sup>27</sup> See: J. Ratzinger, *La Figlia di Sion*. La devozione a Maria nella Chiesa, op. cit., p. 68, footnote 10.

<sup>28</sup> See: [http://\(I colori dell'abito francescano e la storia del saio di San Francesco – Frati Francescani Immacolata – Global Website\)](http://(I colori dell'abito francescano e la storia del saio di San Francesco – Frati Francescani Immacolata – Global Website), 2025.03.07), 2025.03.07.

Having been dispensed from the oath of perseverance in the Congregation of Pious Schools by the authority of the brief of Clement X, having rejected the ecclesiastical benefices and prelatures which were offered me by two of my patron bishops (Trzebicki of Kraków and Gembicki of Płock), by divine inspiration, on the counsel of the most distinguished theologians and with the consent of the episcopal sees of Krakow and Poznań, *I assumed the white habit in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M., and, [dressed] in it, presented myself to express my obedience and submission without delay to the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Lord Archbishop Ranucci, the Apostolic Nuncio in Poland. (...) Father Joachim of St. Ann, elected as my coadjutor (...) I declare to be [my] successor as well, obliging his conscience, by the severe judgment of God, to be as strict as possible in ensuring that the religious Rule imprinted by God be observed. (...) If Fr. Joachim, by consent of the fathers, be again confirmed as coadjutor, then I oblige him, by the awful judgment of God, that he would not innovate anything in regard to the habit I have prescribed, or to the name of the Order; nor may he dare to impiously abolish the veneration of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary which we — quite unworthy — offer to Her Majesty through the recitation of the small Office of the Immaculate Conception and the entirety of the Rosary.* Similarly, as to introducing the use of “burning alcohol” [vodka], let him be aware that this [drink] is forbidden to

him and to all, because that drink, by the hidden mercy of God, is foreign to our Congregation.<sup>29</sup>

Our Father and Founder mentions the white habit first here, even before the name of the Congregation. Therefore, there can be no doubt that, being bestowed upon the Marian Community in honor of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, it forms an integral part of the *divine vision of the Congregation* from its beginning, a vision that was imprinted into the heart and soul of our Father Stanislaus. The journey to understanding and embracing this habit cannot be driven by fleeting trends or a mere liking for the color white, but rather through a personal, filial connection with the Founder Father and a yearning to serve the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, following his example. This desire is a gift from the Holy Spirit to those who sincerely dedicate their lives to Christ and the Church. *Pro Christo et Ecclesia!*

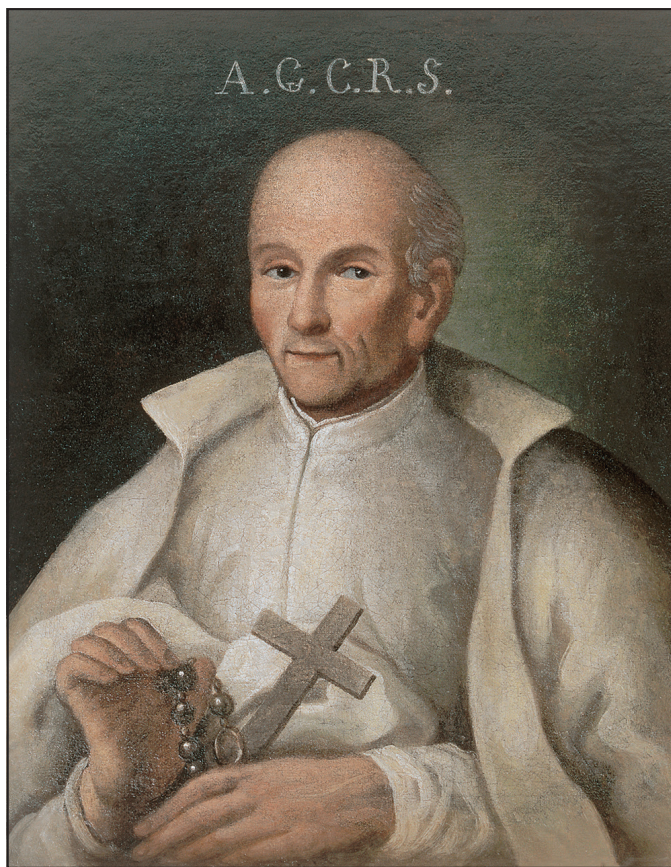
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<sup>29</sup> St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, op. cit., pp. 935, 937, 939.



**SELECTION OF PRESERVED  
ICONOGRAPHY OF THE MARIANS  
PRIOR TO THE RENEWAL**





Saint Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński  
(1631–1701). Painting by an unknown artist from  
the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Marian Fathers' monastery in Skórzec, Poland.  
This is the oldest surviving image of St. Stanislaus.



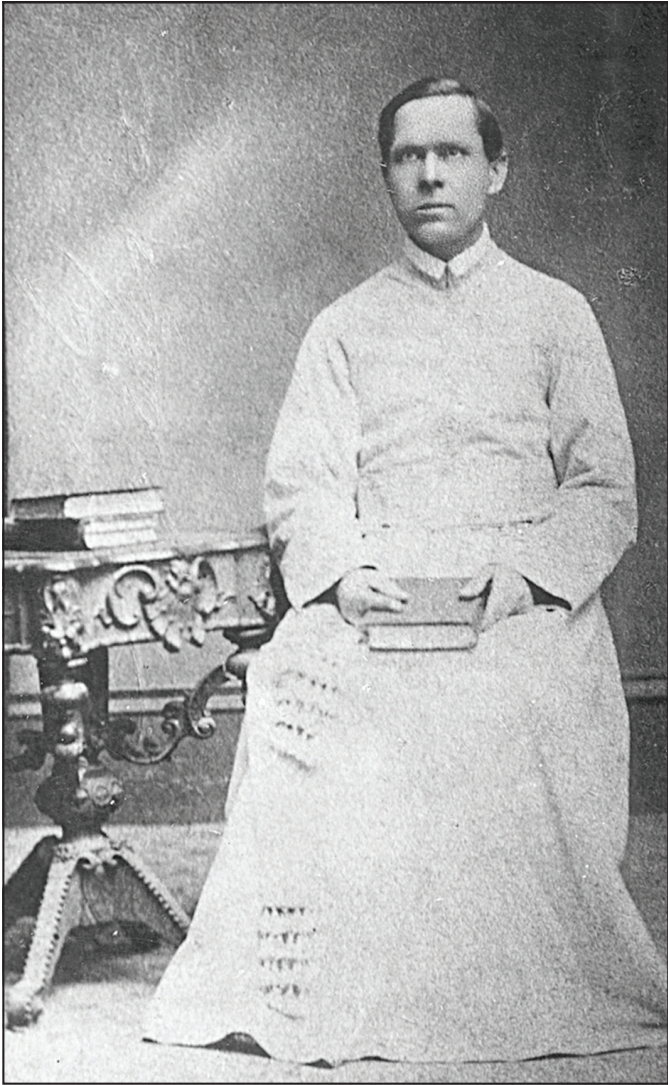
Venerable Servant of God  
Fr. Casimir of St. Joseph Wyszyński (1700–1755).  
Painting from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,  
attributed to Fr. John Niezabitowski, MIC (1744–1804).  
Marian Fathers' monastery in Goźlin, Poland.



Father John Raymond Nowicki, MIC (1736–1806).  
Painting from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,  
attributed to Fr. John Niezabitowski, MIC (1744–1804).  
Marian Fathers' monastery in Gozlin, Poland.



Father Casimir Pestynek, MIC (1828–1893).  
Photo from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
Marian Fathers' Provincial Archives in Warsaw, Poland.



Father Andrew Strupiński, MIC (1829–1892).  
Photo from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
Marian Fathers' Provincial Archives in Warsaw, Poland.



Father George Czesnas, MIC (1835–1892),  
who baptized the little George Boleslaus Matulaitis  
in the church of Marijampole on April 20, 1871.  
Photo from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
Marian Fathers' Provincial Archives in Warsaw, Poland.



Father Andrew Jurewicz, MIC (1823–1908).  
Photo from either the second half of the  
19<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.  
Marian Fathers' Provincial Archives in Warsaw, Poland.







**Father Paweł Ryszard Naumowicz, MIC**, entered the Marians in 1990, after his studies at the Gdańsk University of Technology. He was ordained a priest in 1997, and has served as vocation director, prefect of seminarians, and provincial superior for the Congregation of the Marian Fathers in Poland. He completed his philosophical-theological studies at the Catholic University of Lublin. He obtained his doctorate in sacred theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, focusing on the spirituality of St. Stanislaus Papczyński

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**Father Bogusław Janusz Gil, MIC**, entered the Marians in 1993, was ordained a priest in 2000, and has been working in Vietnam since 2015. He completed his philosophical-theological studies at the Catholic University of Lublin, defending his master's thesis on "Deification (*theosis*) in the Writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian" under the guidance of Prof. Waław Hryniewicz, OMI. After seven years of missionary work in Africa (Cameroon, Rwanda), he began his studies in Mariology at the Pontifical Faculty of

Theology "Marianum" in Rome. In 2014, he obtained a doctorate in dogmatic theology with a specialization in Mariology. He is the author of scholarly works on Mariology, mainly focusing on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception.

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MARIAN  
HERITAGE

STOCKBRIDGE, MA, USA

2025

