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## Bede the Venerable in Polish Religious Prose of the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to introduce Bede the Venerable as a role model present in Polish religious prose of the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The sources under discussion are mainly collections of the lives of saints. The profile of Bede, shown as a perfect Benedictine monk, scholar and priest, is inspired by the earliest biographical Anglo-Saxon sources (e.g. Bede's autobiography and Cuthbert's letter concerning his death). Polish hagiography, following the directions of the Trent Council, aims at emphasising Bede's qualities required from the clergy at that time – in-depth spiritual life, thorough knowledge, respect towards authorities, and teaching skills.

**Keywords:** Bede the Venerable, role model, religious prose, hagiography, sources

The programme of religious revival formulated after the Council of Trent assumed a thorough formation of persons combining their spiritual life with activities oriented towards others – serving as a personal example, serving with one's knowledge or serving by diligently fulfilling one's duties.<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive education, the ability to conduct spiritual exercises and teach others, being open towards other people – these were main features to shape and define the clergy at that time. The *Decree Concerning Reformation*, developed during the twenty-third session of the Council of Trent, was predominantly devoted to the formation of future priests. Canon 4 of this document prohibited, among other things, admission to the first tonsure of illiterate persons.<sup>2</sup> Minor orders shall receive candidates with at least the ability to understand Latin,<sup>3</sup> and while advancing through the next stages of education – according to the Council's decree – “their worthiness

<sup>1</sup> J. Kłoczowski, *Od pustelni do wspólnoty. Grupy zakonne w wielkich religiach świata*, Warszawa: “Czytelnik,” 1987, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> “None shall be initiated by the first tonsure, who have not received the sacrament of Confirmation, and who have not been taught the rudiments of the faith; and who do not know how to read and write.” See: T.A. Buckley, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Oxford: George Routledge and Co., 1851, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> See: canon 11, *ibid.*, p. 168.

of life and greater learning may increase.<sup>4</sup> Worthy of presbyterate were those who, among other criteria, demonstrated sufficient skills, verified during the canonical examination.<sup>5</sup> In order to ensure proper conditions for spiritual formation, the Council defined the forms and principles of establishing seminaries (colleges) for clerks, teaching the principles of religion and ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>6</sup> Candidates from the age of twelve who had literacy skills were granted admission.<sup>7</sup> The curriculum included, among others, grammar, singing, the study of the Bible and church books, preaching and administering the sacraments, as well as other areas of knowledge (e.g. accounting).<sup>8</sup> A thoroughly educated clergy was to play a fundamental role in the doctrinal and moral process of shaping the consciousness of the faithful.

During the twenty-fifth session of the Council issues relating to the discipline of monastic life were discussed. The formulated *Decree Concerning Regulars and Nuns* urged members of monastic communities to subject their lives to the requirements of the rule which they professed and to faithfully observe evangelical precepts and other norms in accordance with the character of a given congregation.<sup>9</sup> This recommendation resulted from the unsatisfactory discipline of secluded religious life. Common phenomena included violation of vows as a result of arbitrary interpretation of monastic regulations, contacts with lay people leading to the spread of unwanted messages and poor observance of rules, as well as intra-community divisions and insubordination.<sup>10</sup> In view of frequent acts of disobedience, the reforms were aiming at restoring the rules, such as that prohibiting persons to leave the monastery without permission, or leave the convents, even under the pretext of meeting the order authorities.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the officially formulated directives mentioned above, an important element of the renewal process was the literature which demonstrated models of appropriate attitudes and encouraged their emulation.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> "Those who have piously and faithfully conducted themselves in their preceding functions, and are admitted to the order of priesthood [...], but who, by a careful previous examination, have also been approved to be competent to teach the people those things which it is necessary for all to know unto salvation." See: canon 14, *ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> See: canon 18, *ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> "And into this college shall be received such as are at least twelve years old, born in lawful wedlock, and who know how to read and write competently, and whose disposition and inclination afford a hope that they will always serve in the ecclesiastical ministries." See: *ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Decree Concerning Regulars and Nuns*, chapter 1, *ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> E.E. Wróbel CSFN, *Życie religijne i zakonne w Polsce na przełomie XVI i XVII wieku*, [in:] *Cztery wieki Karmelitów Bosych w Polsce (1605–2005)*, edited by A. Ruszała OCD, Kraków: Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne Karmelitów Bosych, Wydawnictwo Karmelitów Bosych, 2005, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Decree Concerning Regulars and Nuns*, chapter 5, p. 219.

The collections of lives of saints at that time abounded in biographies of learned priests and Doctors of the Church, presented as role models, as well as authorities quoted as part of the adopted strategy to fight heresy. One such role model was a monk faithfully following the monastic rules and spending his whole life within the monastery. The hagiographic collection of Piotr Skarga (*Żywoty świętych* [Lives of the Saints]), representative of the period of time and popularised in numerous editions, mentions many such figures, e.g. the saints: Ambrose, Augustine, Bonaventure, Benedict and others. In this collection, they perform the function of transmitters of moral patterns, as well as examples of commitment to spreading the truths of the faith negated by religious dissenters.

One such figure, fully meeting the above requirements was Bede the Venerable, repeatedly mentioned in Polish religious literature of the 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Born in 678, on the lands belonging to the Benedictine abbey in Wearmouth, England, at the age of seven he was sent as an oblate to the superior of the monastery, Benedict Biscop. Three years later he went to Jarrow together with the founder of the new monastery, Ceolfrith. There he remained until his death, ordained a deacon and then a priest. In addition to performing monastic duties, he was engaged in intense scientific and didactic work, as well as reading. He died, considered a saint, on May 25 or 26, 735. Bede's abundant literary legacy includes exegetical and homiletic writings, historiography (the most famous work in this field is *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*), hagiography, works in the field of philology (the issue of tropes, metrics and spelling) and in the discipline of *computus*. The scholar also became famous as the author of poetry, especially hymns, as well as prayers. The respect he commanded during his lifetime is evidenced by the opinion issued by the Synod of Aachen in 836, and by the epithet *Venerabilis* (Venerable) which he received perhaps during his stay in the monastery or soon after his death.<sup>12</sup> In the Middle Ages, Bede was placed on a par with the saints: Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose and Isidore, and in 1899 Pope Leo XIII declared him a Doctor of the Church. Until today, Bede remains – sometimes referred to as *praeceptor Angliae* – the most prominent representative of the Church of the early Middle Ages in the British Isles.<sup>13</sup>

The figure of the English Benedictine monk and his writings were – since the Middle Ages – a source of inspiration for the old Polish religious literature. Fragments of Bede's texts were used, for example, in apocryphal

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<sup>12</sup> The genesis of this epithet is explained, in part at least, by the legend according to which the sculptor working on Bede's sarcophagus spent a lot of time thinking about what inscription he could engrave on the tombstone. But then he was miraculously helped by an angel who, in the absence of the artist, placed the adjective *Venerabilis* right next to the name of the deceased. The grave of the scholar is in Durham cathedral, to the south of Jarrow (north-east England). See: D. Delap, *Celtic Saints*, Norwich: Pitkin Guides, 2003, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> See: H. Fros, F. Sowa, *Księga imion i świętych*, Vol. 1, Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2004, pp. 387–390 and 398.

literature,<sup>14</sup> vision literature,<sup>15</sup> preaching,<sup>16</sup> hagiography,<sup>17</sup> historiography,<sup>18</sup> as well as in polemical literature.<sup>19</sup>

The reception of the scholar's legacy in Old Polish and Enlightenment culture is an interesting issue which, thus far, has only been partially researched.<sup>20</sup> Detailed studies are required on the issue of the domination of specific themes and motifs of Bede's works in individual genres of early Polish literature, the ways of conveying the author's message to the reader (in the form of quotes, paraphrases or translations), or the frequency of referring to particular works, characters, and events. The figure of this Anglo-Saxon historiographer also functioned as a parenetic model, especially in the works of ecclesiastical historiography, as well as biographies of saints, sometimes also in preaching. The basic elements defining this model shall be the subject of further parts of the present paper.

The preserved early medieval sources are the material basis of the information about Bede present in early Polish prose. First of all, there is an autobiographical note placed at the end of *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, including a list of all the historiographer's works arranged thematically. The concise text of the biography offers few details, mentioning only the most important situations, events and persons from his life: his place of birth (signalled only generally, without providing a specific place), the fact of being sent to the monastery for education at the age of seven, the figures of the clergymen – Bede's superiors and caretakers (abbots Benedict

<sup>14</sup> The impact of Bede's writings on the content of *Rozmyślanie przemyskie* is mentioned for instance by Teresa Michałowska. See: *Średniowiecze*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995, p. 600.

<sup>15</sup> See: J. Sokolski, *Staropolskie zaświaty. Obraz piekła, czyśćca i nieba w renesansowej i barokowej literaturze polskiej wobec tradycji średniowiecznej*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994, and J. Sokolski, *Pielgrzymi do piekła i raju. Świat średniowiecznych łacińskich wizji eschatologicznych*, Vol. 1, Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> See: Peregryn z Opola, *Kazania „de tempore” i „de sanctis”*, translated by J. Mrukówna, edited by J. Wolny, Kraków-Opole: Papieska Akademia Teologiczna. Wydział Historii Kościoła, Uniwersytet Polski. Wydział Teologiczny, 2001; P. Skarga, *Kazania na niedziele i święta całego roku. Druga część*, Lwów: nakładem Księgarni Gubrynowicza i Schmidta, 1848, p. 303, P. Skarga, *Kazania na niedziele i święta całego roku. Trzecia część*, Lwów: nakładem Księgarni Gubrynowicza i Schmidta, 1898, p. 127; F. Birkowski, "Głos krwie B. Jana Sarkandra, męczennika morawskiego..." in: F. Birkowski, *Kazania obozowe o Bogarodzicy*, n. d., s. l., p. 52; A. Szyrma, *Dni skarbowe od skarbu wiecznego Króla należące ...* Wilno: Drukarnia Akademicka Societatis Jesu, 1719, pp. 170, 285 and the following pages.

<sup>17</sup> See: references to Bede's writings in *Żywoty świętych* by Piotr Skarga in peritext (the so-called spiritual fodder), for instance "Nauka wielbnego Bedy o tych artykułach, którym się sprzeciwiają dzisiejsi heretycy," in: P. Skarga, *Żywoty świętych Starego i Nowego Zakonu na każdy dzień przez cały rok*, Kraków: Drukarnia Andrzeja Piotrkowczyka, 1615, p. 966.

<sup>18</sup> In *Roczne dzieje kościelne* by Piotr Skarga the author refers to the events described in *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by Bede (the author's note).

<sup>19</sup> See: footnote 17.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance works by J. Sokolski on the reception of vision literature in Old Poland (including the Drythelm's vision described by Bede) – footnote 15.

Biscop and Ceolfrith, Bishop John of Beverly), types of activities performed in the monastery (observance of the monastic rule, meditation on the Holy Scripture, singing, studying, teaching, writing), the moments of ordination (as deacon and priest), scholarly activities from after being ordained up to the age of 59.<sup>21</sup> It all concluded with the writer's personal prayer addressed to God as the source of all knowledge, expressing the desire to unite with Him in the future life.<sup>22</sup> Elements of autobiography are also included in Bede's letter addressed to Bishop Ecgbert of York,<sup>23</sup> evidencing, among other things, the scholar's preaching in familiar monasteries, and that he experienced periodic difficulties in contacts caused by his illness.<sup>24</sup> The text also familiarises the reader with Bede's attitude towards the idea of conveying the truths of the faith to the uneducated people in their mother tongue, as well as his views on the bishop's duties.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The text of the autobiography reads as follows: "I, Bede, have written, who am servant of Christ and priest in the monastery of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, that is [first] at Wearmouth, [then] in Jarrow. I was born on land, which is private property of this monastery. When I was seven years old, by the care of my kindred I was given over to be brought up and trained by the venerable abbot Benedict [Biscop], and afterwards by Ceolfrith. And I spent the whole time of my life afterwards in the precincts of the monastery; and I gave all zeal to study and meditate on Holy Scripture. And while observing regular discipline, with the daily charge of singing in church, it was ever sweet and delightful to me to study, teach or write. And then in the nineteenth year of my life, I took deacon's orders and became a priest at thirty, in both cases at the ministrations of the venerable bishop John [of Beverly], at the bidding and direction of abbot Ceolfrith. From the time that I entered the priesthood till the 59th year of my life, for my own needs and those of my friends I have written and composed these books out of the works of venerable fathers, and I have also added thereto, conformably to the sense and spiritual interpretation. [...] [enumeration of Bede's works]. See: *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, translated by Th. Miller, Publications Old English Series, Cambridge, Ontario, 1999, pp. 212–214.

<sup>22</sup> "And now I pray thee, our good Saviour, that you will mercifully grant me to drink in sweetly the words of thy wisdom, that you will also graciously grant that I may at last come to thee, the fount of all wisdom and appear for ever before thy face." See: *ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>23</sup> Ecgbert, a relative of the king of Northumbria, Ceolwulf, a student and a friend of Bede's, an archbishop of York. He died in 766. Bede's letter about bishop's duties was composed in 733.

<sup>24</sup> *Epistula ad Egbertum episcopum*, see: <https://tenthmedieval.wordpress.com/2010/03/18/from-the-sources-v-bedes-letter-to-egbert/> (accessed 20.07.2019).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*: "And in setting forth such preaching to the people, I consider it above every other thing important, that you should endeavour to implant deeply in the memory of all men the Catholic faith which is contained in the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer as it is taught us in the Holy Gospel. And, indeed, there is no doubt that those who have studied the Latin language will be found to know these well; but the vulgar, that is, those who know only their own language, must be made to say them and repeat them over and over again in their own tongue. This must be done not only in the case of laymen, who are still in the life of the world, but with the clergy or monks, who are without a knowledge of the Latin tongue. For thus every congregation of the faithful will learn in what manner they ought to show their faith, and with what steadfastness of belief they should arm and fortify themselves against the assaults of unclean spirits: and thus every choir of those who pray to God will learn what they ought especially to ask for from the Divine Mercy. Wherefore, also, I have

The next category of the sources is the accounts about the scholar written by people around him. The encyclopaedist of Jarrow did not have his own biographer in his time. The scattered information contained within the existing documents does not present a full picture of the life of the future Doctor of the Church.<sup>26</sup> The only surviving letter addressed to Bede from his friend Acca, the bishop of Hexham,<sup>27</sup> indirectly informs the reader about the critical attitude of the Benedictine monk regarding his own writing technique (his writing again about issues previously discussed by other authors).<sup>28</sup> An interesting account is the one about Bede's death, written by the Benedictine monk Cuthbert. However, not many facts are known about this figure; it is certain that he was a disciple of Bede's, the abbot of Jarrow and an eyewitness of the last days of his master.<sup>29</sup> The account is included in Cuthbert's letter (*Epistula Cuthberti de obitu Bedae*) addressed to his friend Cuthwin, also Bede's disciple.<sup>30</sup> The document is of significant historical value, confirming the fact that in the 8<sup>th</sup> century people used to pray and celebrate masses for the deceased, and certain customs were preserved in the monasteries, e.g. giving small gifts to the confreres.<sup>31</sup> Extensive parts of the letter contain details of the last period of Bede's life. Cuthbert records the duration of Bede's last illness,<sup>32</sup> its main symptoms,<sup>33</sup> as well as the scholar's activity in the days preceding his death.<sup>34</sup> The circumstances of

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myself often given English translations of both these, namely, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, to uneducated priests."

<sup>26</sup> See: *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Acca, who died in 740, came from Northumbria. He is the protagonist of an extensive chapter of the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by Bede. The historiographer of Jarrow calls him "a man of great energy, admirable in the eyes of God and people," he emphasises his merits in the field of sacral architecture and attention to the decor of temples, the reforms of liturgical singing and the creation of a "rich and magnificent library." Acca was a friend of Bede's and he provided him with materials and information later used in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and other works, which was always referenced. By asking the scholar many questions and encouraging him to write, he was a great inspirer of his work. Bede dedicated several of his works to him. See: *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> To Bede's doubts Acca reacts as follows: "[...] Do not think that you do not have to repeat what the greatest minds have already worked on. It is not a futile job after an excellent work by the great man [Ambrose], when one describes the same thing, but in a different and brief manner, or when one feels less learned when one produces a weaker work. You are afraid that writing new works would be considered as a criticism of the earlier works [...]. Therefore, my reply is as follows: 'Nothing can be said that has not been said before.'" See: *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> Cuthbert writes: "[...] celebrate masses and say prayers for our God's beloved father and teacher, Bede." See: *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> "Two weeks before the Lord's Resurrection, he was taken ill." See: *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> "His breath was very fast, but he could hardly feel any pain." See: *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> "He spent the remaining days of his life in joy, thanking God Almighty during the day and at night [...]. He would lecture us, his students, every day, and for the rest of the day he would sing psalms [...]. He would spend the whole night joyfully among the prayers and giving thanks to God [...]. He hummed the sentences of Saint Paul the Apostle: »It is a fearful

the scholar's descent are recorded with all the most important facts: day of the week and time of day, symptoms preceding his death, last actions and words, the moment and the place of death.<sup>35</sup> The structure of the text indicates that the author had a parenetic goal, i.e. to present the ideal of a priest and monk, perfectly prepared for his final meeting with God, filling up the remaining moments of his life with his vocation-related activities such as work, prayer reflection, singing, service for the community.

The texts discussed above (except for the letter of Acca and a letter to Egbert) were used in Old Polish biographies of Bede, the most notable of which are the biographies included in *Żywoty Świętych*<sup>36</sup> and *Roczne dzieje kościelne* [Year by year history of the Church]<sup>37</sup> by Piotr Skarga. The Jesuit also refers to the collection of biographies of the outstanding figures of the Order of Saint Benedict and the hagiographic collection of Laurentius Surius.<sup>38</sup> The practice of reaching *ad fontes* was in line with the requirements of

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thing to fall into the hands of the living God« (Hebrews 10.31) and many other sentences from the Holy Scriptures, with which he admonished us [...]. In addition, in these days, apart from the lectures he gave us every day, and besides singing the psalms, he tried to write two memorable works, i.e. translate the Gospel of Saint John into our language, for the benefit of the Church, [...], and to collect some extracts from the books of Bishop Isidore, saying: 'I don't want my boys to read a lie or to work to no purpose after I am gone.'" See: *ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

<sup>35</sup> "When the Wednesday morning dawned, he commanded us to write down urgently what we started. We were doing it until three o'clock. At three o'clock we were holding processions with the relics of saints, as required by the custom of this day. One of us stayed with him and said: 'There is one more chapter lacking in the book that you dictated, but it seems bothersome to ask you for more.' However, he replied: 'It is not, take a quill, sharpen it and write quickly' [...]. At nine o'clock he said to me: 'I have a few treasures in my box, i.e. peppercorns, handkerchiefs and incense. Run quickly and fetch the priests of our monastery, and I will share among them such little presents as God has given me.' [...]. When they gathered together, he begged them and each of them separately, that masses and prayers be urgently said for him. Everyone was crying and weeping, especially because of the words he said, as they thought that they would soon not see his face in this world any more [...]. On the other hand, they were glad because of the following words: 'It is time, if my Creator decides so, that I were freed from the flesh and went to Him who had shaped me from nothingness [...]. I have lived long, and the gracious Judge has directed my life well. My time is now close' [...]. Saying these and many other words for our benefit, he thus spent his last day until the evening. The aforementioned disciple, named Wilberch, added: 'There is still one sentence, dear master, which is not written down.' He said: 'Write it down quickly.' After a moment, the disciple said: 'There; now it is written down.' He said, 'Good. You have spoken the truth; it is finished. Take my head in thy hands for it much delights me to sit opposite any holy place where I used to pray, that so sitting I may call upon my Father.' And so on the floor of his cell, singing *Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit*, he let out the last breath. [...] All who heard or saw the death of our father Bede claimed that they had never seen any other monk who would end his life with such piety and peace. For [...] until his soul was in the flesh, he sang *Glory to the Father* and other songs for the glory of God, and he did not cease to thank God with his arms outstretched" [...]. See: *ibid.*, pp. 116–117.

<sup>36</sup> See: P. Skarga, *Żywoty świętych...*, pp. 965–966.

<sup>37</sup> P. Skarga, *Roczne dzieje kościelne...*, Kraków: Drukarnia Andrzeja Piotrkowczyka, 1607, p. 796.

<sup>38</sup> "The life of the reverend Bede [...] written by Trithemius, abbot of Sponheim, lib. *De viris illustribus Ordinis S. Benedicti*, cap. 155. One of his disciples writes about his

the contemporary biography writing, recommending the use of historically confirmed documents and accounts of authorities referred to as *gravissimi et probatissimi*.<sup>39</sup> Literature popularising the figures of saints – a category of protagonists questioned by the representatives of the reformed religions – was to have a solid historical basis, justifying the credibility of each figure and their textual and material testimonies.<sup>40</sup>

The texts analysed for the purpose of this study are aimed at presenting a figure that combines the features of an ideal priest and scholar, as well as a model member of a monastic community. The elements of the mentioned texts co-create a portrait of a protagonist who undergoes, from a very young age, the process of constant intellectual development – “lifelong learning,”<sup>41</sup> with simultaneous progress in monastic virtues. This process continues until the final day of his life. The presentation of one of the greatest minds in the early Middle Ages’ Europe is based on emphasising his activities, carried out according to the Benedictine principle of *ora et labora*, making the protagonist a parenetic model of a perfectly organised clergyman, dividing his time between intense religious life and scholarly work.<sup>42</sup>

The fragments of *Roczne dzieje kościelne* by Skarga devoted to the scholar were selected on the basis of the autobiography and the account of Cuthbert of Jarrow. The biographical account is quoted under the date 731, in wording faithful to the original, i.e. in the first-person narration, in order to make the presented figure authentic. The main text is preceded by the author’s note explaining the circumstances of the text creation: “Reverend Bede here has finished his ecclesiastical history of the English people, and he marked the year 285, after the Angles entered Britain, and anno domini 731. He briefly recalls his life.”<sup>43</sup> The biographical note that follows is quoted only partially, omitting less important matters (e.g. the names of the spiritual directors of the historiographer), and emphasising facts which serve parenetic persuasion. Starting from the moment of joining the monastery in childhood – “at seven years of age, he is given to the monastery [...]”<sup>44</sup> – the protagonist spends in enclosure “his entire life”<sup>45</sup> following (as indirectly suggested by Skarga) two important principles: the

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work which he completed on his deathbed, the volume 7 of Surius.” See: P. Skarga, *Żywoty świętych ...*, p. 965.

<sup>39</sup> A. Ceccherelli, *Od Suriusa do Skargi. Studium porównawcze o “Żywotach świętych,”* translated by M. Niewójt, Izabelin: Świat Literacki, 2003, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42–43.

<sup>41</sup> P. Skarga, *Żywoty świętych...*, p. 965. All the quotations from the Polish sources have been translated by Karolina Puchała-Ladzińska, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>42</sup> These aspects of sanctity are signalled, among others, on the pages of *Roman Martyrology*, which, under the date of 27 May, mentions “the Venerable Bede, priest, confessor and doctor, renowned for sanctity and learning.” See: *Roman Martyrology*, Baltimore: John Murphy Company, 1916, p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> P. Skarga, *Roczne dzieje kościelne...*, p. 796.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

constancy of the place and not leaving the monastery without a compelling reason. There he devotes his time, above all, to the activities related to his vocation as a priest and monk: to the study of the Holy Scriptures, to the observance of the rules and to the practice of everyday singing in the choir. These activities, which the text treats as a priority, somehow overshadow his scholarly and didactic activities, not mentioned until later: “I devoted all my time in the monastery to the study of the Holy Bible, and while observing the rules of the order and daily singing in the church, I enjoyed learning, teaching others, and writing.”<sup>46</sup> The selection of the further key events of the biography, i.e. the diaconate and priesthood ordination, with a precise specification of these moments (at the age of 19 and 30, respectively) leaves no doubt as to the dominance of the religious element in the life of the protagonist: “At nineteen I became a deacon and at thirty a priest.”<sup>47</sup> The quoted biography is supplemented by a brief note of the works of the Fathers of the Church as a reading material – not only for personal reading, but also serving the whole community (“he wrote briefly about the works of the Fathers for the benefit of himself and others.”<sup>48</sup> The author declines to quote the list of Bede’s works from the autobiography, but he signals its existence (“He wrote numerous books”).<sup>49</sup> He does not, however, ignore the concluding autobiographical prayer to Jesus Christ – the source of wisdom and the essential point of reference for all activities of the saint.<sup>50</sup> This image is complemented by a fragment borrowed from Cuthbert’s account, and presenting Bede in the role of an man of prayer and a master, constantly taking care of God’s glory and the formation of the confreres, even at the expense of his own leisure time (“He never ceased to teach his disciples nor sing God’s glory, having got little sleep during the day and at night”).<sup>51</sup>

The fragment of the account on the subject of Bede’s death, following the analysed text, also emphasises the priority of the spiritual life of the monk from Jarrow. Cuthbert’s extensive description has been reduced to a short account in line with *ars moriendi*, stressing the religious aspect of the protagonist’s preparation for his final encounter with God. From the original account Skarga brings out examples of the most constructive behaviours, presenting the image of Bede as a person perfectly prepared for his own death: the scholar experiences the last moments of his life in a state of joy (“he was merry”),<sup>52</sup> constantly uttering thanksgiving prayers (“he thanked God day and night”),<sup>53</sup> singing appropriate fragments of the Bible, suitable for the situation (“He was singing the apostolic words: *it is a fearful thing to*

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

*fall into the hands of the living God*)<sup>54</sup> and he was reading and meditating on the Holy Bible (“singing and meditating the Bible,”<sup>55</sup> “Having read the fragments”).<sup>56</sup> The figure of the dying man was presented in a dynamic way, in the context of a monastic community, at the moment of imparting the last instructions (“Continue to study as my time has come”),<sup>57</sup> preserving the monastic customs (giving the confreres farewell gifts),<sup>58</sup> and ensuring that the appropriate rites are performed in this situation.<sup>59</sup> The description of the moment of death, quoted faithfully from Cuthbert’s account, serves to emphasise Bede’s total detachment from earthly matters: the scholar turns to the sacred space (asking for daily prayers), with his face directed to God, the moment of his descent is accompanied by a prayer of praise: “[...] and when he asked to be laid in front of the place where he was used to pray, saying, *Glory be to the Father and the Son ...* he gave up his ghost to the one who created him [...]”.<sup>60</sup>

Bede’s biogram included in *Żywoty świętych* by Skarga is a large text unit, encompassing the facts mentioned above, as well as those omitted in *Roczne dzieje kościelne*. Significantly extended information about the saint’s intellectual activity is provided with examples that help the reader realise the benefits of learning and also of its possible dangers, such as the harmfulness of an intense study for the clergyman’s essential internal progress. Reading books, perceived as a form of self-education, should not be a purely external practice, but it should be more profound and, consequently, lead to the development of appropriate attitudes, such as repentance. The attitude of the protagonist is a perfect example of such behaviour: “[...] while reading, he often felt very strong emotions which brought him the feeling of repentance, so while reading and teaching he was frequently shedding tears.”<sup>61</sup> An individual’s involvement in scholarly activity, comprehensive and covering also non-theological domains of knowledge (“and in secular sciences, he surpassed all the doctors in England. He wrote a lot and beautifully about liberal science”),<sup>62</sup> should not extinguish the spirit of prayer,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.: “And on the next day he said: ‘I have a few treasures in my box. I have peppercorns, handkerchiefs and incense; run quickly and fetch the priests of our monastery, and I will share among them such little presents as God has given me.’ The custom of giving gifts (called *xenia* or *eulogy*) was preserved in the monasteries of that time. A number of examples of this practice are cited by J. Mabillon in his work *Eulogium historicum Venerabilis Bedae*. The handkerchiefs (*oraria*) mentioned in Cuthbert’s letter were used to wipe the mouth. See. A. Bober, op. cit., p. 117, footnote 121.

<sup>59</sup> “He asked them to celebrate masses and say prayers for him.” See: P. Skarga, *Roczne dzieje kościelne...*, p. 796.

<sup>60</sup> See: *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> P. Skarga, *Żywoty świętych...*, p. 965.

and the possession of skills should be attributed only to the grace of God (“immediately after studying he devoted his time to prayer, knowing that people come to understand the Scriptures thanks to God’s grace rather than due to their own work”).<sup>63</sup> The knowledge acquired is – as the hagiographer suggests – an effective means of influencing the environment only when coupled with setting the example with one’s own life and with the practice of religious virtues, which should be treated as a priority above “scholarliness.” The result of the formation understood in this way is the spiritual progress of the disciples: “He had many disciples, whom, by his example and his teachings, he made passionate about the study of the Holy Bible. He turned them not so much into scholars, as into monks and saints. His company served as the best instruction of religiousness and integrity.”<sup>64</sup> The skills acquired are not to serve personal purposes, but the intellectual development of the community: “what he learned through reading and meditation, he imparted to others, without jealousy and with the love of the Holy Scripture.”<sup>65</sup> Skarga recognises the obvious “advantages” of such a conduct, seeing in them a source of spiritual benefits for the monks, by including a metatextual note and commenting on the existing shortcomings (“God, if only the monks could do all this with love, the monastic state would be a happy one”).<sup>66</sup> The central figure of the biography discussed is also a model of diligence (“No one has ever seen him idle”),<sup>67</sup> performing his duties even during his illness. The scene of the priest’s death, inspired largely by the letter of Cuthbert of Jarrow, is filled with details that co-create the image of a scholar who is, until the last moments, engaged in his activity, awaiting death with joy, dedicating his time to his favourite activities which he never left unfinished – the protagonist dies only after having dictated the last sentence of his work:

After much time spent reading and writing, and longing for his homeland, he suddenly felt infirm and spent seven weeks lying, praising God day and night with a happy heart, and thanking God every single hour left before joining the Lord, still [...] he read the lessons for each day and spent his last moments singing the Psalms, having only a little sleep at night. Soon after waking up, his lips were reading the lines of the Holy Bible, and he was singing, raising up his hands and giving thanks [...]. In this infirmity he completed two books [...], and translated the Gospel of Saint John into English [...]. And when Tuesday came before our Lord’s Ascension, he took grievously ill [...] but continued to teach, he joyfully taught and dictated all day [...] and spent that night praying. On Wednesday, he told us to write with all possible speed [...]. And one of us [...] said to him: “There is still a chapter left, had you not better rest for a while?” And he said: “Be quick with your writing for I shall not hold out much longer.” And so he did. And thus talking, he awaited the evening. And Wilbert said to him, “There is still one sentence, dear master, which is not written down.” And he said: “Write it down quickly.” After he finished, Wilbert then said: “There; now it is written

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

down.” And he replied: “Good. [...],<sup>68</sup> you have spoken the truth; it is finished. Take my head in thy hands for it much delights me to sit opposite any holy place where I used to pray” [...] and so turned to his altar [...] he breathed his last.<sup>69</sup>

The parenetic image of the scholar and the monk is complemented by the moral lesson following the main text, placing his literary legacy among the works particularly valid from the perspective of counter-Reformation propaganda. The briefly quoted *Nauka wielebnego Bedy o tych artykułach, którym się sprzeciwiają dzisiejsi heretycy* [“The teachings of Bede the Venerable on those articles, which contemporary heretics oppose”] refers the recipient to the works justifying the truths of the Catholic faith and dogmas: about the Holy Trinity, the sacraments (baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist), the Holy Communion in one form, the communion of saints, celibacy and clerical clothing, prayer and sacrifice for the dead.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine monk from the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, along with Augustine, Chrysostom and other Doctors of the Church acquires the rank of authority and spokesman of the views contested by Protestantism.

In the consciousness of the literary recipients of the Enlightenment period, the figure of Bede is present thanks to the reissuing of *Żywoty świętych* by Skarga (three editions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) and thanks to the practice of preaching; single references to the “holy doctor,” the outstanding representative of his order, can be found in the texts of sermons of various authors.<sup>71</sup> The story of the scholar who, by the power of his teachings, was able to move the stones of the temple, questioned by the Jesuit from Mazovia in his *Roczne dzieje kościelne*, regains its place in the preaching practice.<sup>72</sup> From the more extensive hagiographic texts, particularly noteworthy is the biography included in the collection of Carlo Massini and translated by Porfirij Skarbek-Vazhinski and, in its later edition, by Waclaw Sierakowski.<sup>73</sup> The biography, constructed on the basis of the above-mentioned sources and other texts (e.g. the previously mentioned letter of Bede addressed to bishop Ecgbert), is divided into five parts, each of which is devoted to a se-

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 966.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 965–966.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 966.

<sup>71</sup> See: M. Muchowski, *Chwała Świętych Pańskich uroczysta...*, Wilno: z Drukarni J.K.M. Sandomierskiej Collegium Societatis Jesu, 1747, here: “Kazanie na dzień św. Benedykta,” p. 62, A. Abramowicz, *Kazania niedzielne*, Wilno: w Drukarni J.K.M. Akad. Societatis Jesu, 1753, part 2, p. 147

<sup>72</sup> See: *ibid.*, p. 234: “I know that in the times of V. Bede the stones of the church had such senses that when the people fell asleep during sermons, the stones were listening for them and they could later say: *Amen Vener [abilis] Beda*.” The reliability of this information is disputed by Skarga in *Roczne dzieje kościelne ...*, p. 796: “The story about his sermon in front of the stones which supposedly called *Amen Reverend Bede*, remains uncertain.”

<sup>73</sup> *Zbiór dwójaki żywotów SS. Pańskich od bajecznych i wątpliwych powieści [...] przeczyszczony*, vol. 1–13, Wilno: Drukarnia OO. Bazylianów, 1786, further edition: *Historia kościelna, czyli zbiór żywotów świętych Pańskich...*, Vol. 1–13, Kraków: Drukarnia Akademii Krakowskiej, 1799–1800.

parate stage in Bede's life. From the text emerges a portrait of a protagonist "exceptionally well-mannered,"<sup>74</sup> "with best predispositions,"<sup>75</sup> endowed with attributes that perfectly predestine him to monastic life. An important role in the process of the formation of the young Benedictine monk is attributed to the abbot Ceolfrith – a figure omitted in the above-analysed texts, and here treated as the object of a separate reflection here.<sup>76</sup> The subsequent parts of the biography contain the description of a protagonist who devotes his time to reading and to scholarly work, without any detriment to spiritual exercises: "Monastic exercises and teachings were the only entertainment of Bede's, throughout the course of his life. However, he devoted much time to literature, as evidenced by the great number of works he wrote, and he did not avoid the choir practice nor any other duty imposed on him by the congregation."<sup>77</sup> From the autobiographical text the author takes over the facts about the intellectual activity of the scholar: "(he confesses himself) that his most pleasant tasks were studying, teaching and writing,"<sup>78</sup> adding a comment explaining its real motives: "He did not acquire knowledge for vanity or [...] to polish only the mind, but everything he did, he did for the greater glory of God and for a better understanding of the books of the Scriptures [...] his purpose in writing was not to boast in front of the scholars, but to be useful to the Church."<sup>79</sup> An important complementary element is the list of Bede's works which enumerates the most important titles<sup>80</sup> and – being a parenetic element, mentioned in the last paragraph of the text – a note about the compatibility of the English scholar's thought with the officially approved doctrine of the Fathers of the Church.<sup>81</sup>

A separate chapter of the biography is devoted, among other things, to an incident in 708, when the scholar became accused of heresy on the basis of the work *De Temporibus*. The incident took place at a feast with the bishop and monks from Jarrow. The narrator explains this event with the negative attitude of a participating monk, blinded by "jealousy or excessive officiousness."<sup>82</sup> The author contrasts this picture with the image of

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, Kraków 1800, p. 448.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> "Ceolfrith clothed him with a religious habit, thus stimulating him to strive for perfection with greater fervour, and marvelling at the abundant blessings that the Lord granted to this young man [...], he sent him, at the age of 19, [...] to Bishop John [...] to be ordained a deacon." See: *ibid.*, p. 449.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 450.

<sup>80</sup> "We have his treatises on grammar, mathematics, philosophy and other sciences. But the most important works of his are the following: the commentaries on the Scripture, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, as well as the history of his monastery, and *Martyrologium*." See: *ibid.*, p. 451.

<sup>81</sup> "In the commentaries on the Scripture, he follows in the footsteps of the Fathers of the Church so closely that in many places they seem to be rewritten word for word." See: *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

Bede, full of humility and gentleness, at the same time summarising the apologetic letter written as a result of the event.<sup>83</sup> He also emphasises the serving attitude of the Benedictine monk towards those who turned to him for advice, referring to the mentioned letter to Ecgbert.<sup>84</sup> The biographical part is completed with the description of the period preceding the historiographer's death and the moment of his descent – with reference to the facts known from Cuthbert's account.

It is also noteworthy that the author of the biography introduced at its end a paragraph containing moral lessons addressed to people who are in the process of education. The example of Bede is to illustrate the value of acquiring knowledge when it does not interfere with the duties of the priesthood and practices of piety. The goal of intellectual activity – as demonstrated by the English scholar's life – is to serve God and people. Basing on the authority of Saint Bernard, the author shows the dangers and benefits of the pursuit of knowledge: “to acquire knowledge and be a scholar one needs vanity; to obtain honours and titles one needs ambition; to accumulate wealth one needs gluttony, but to perfect oneself and serve others one needs love.”<sup>85</sup> He also points out to the benefits of studying the Bible the way that Bede did – a faithful recipient and a preacher of the content approved by the Church.<sup>86</sup>

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The figure of Bede the Venerable, like many other heroes of the British Isles present in early Polish literature, is now recognised mainly by specialists. In the period of time which is of interest to the present study he was known to a wide literary audience, largely due to his presence in the hagiographic literature, historiography and preaching. The way of presenting the protagonist – based on reliable historical sources – was aimed at constructing the model example of priest, monk and scholar, sanctifying himself by skilfully developing balance between spiritual life and scholarly activity. Thorough knowledge, perfect fulfilment of monastic duties, attitude

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<sup>83</sup> “Justifying oneself, Bede wrote a letter for his defence, in which one feels such a spirit of modesty and gentleness, that it convinces anyone that he had been seeking nothing but the truth and that he was disposed to give up all the opinions if they were to turn out erroneous.” See: *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> “Among ones who sought to benefit from the explanation of this [saint; author's note] was archbishop Ecgbert [...], he called Bede, according to the custom, to talk about religion and in order for them to encourage one another to desire heavenly things [...]. Unable to keep up with the word due to the illness, Bede wrote a letter to Ecgbert full of wisest remarks and advice regarding the interests of the diocese as well as his own.” See: *ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.

<sup>86</sup> “The most useful among all sciences is [studying; author's note] the Scripture, if only one follows the way of Bede's, that is: not modifying anything but just following the translation of the Fathers of the Church and the teaching of the Holy Church.” See: *ibid.*

of respect towards authorities, and the ability to impart knowledge and information to others – this is the fundamental set of features creating an ideal, compliant with the recommendations of the Council of Trent, which is still valid in the parenetic literature of the Enlightenment period.

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