


## Article

# Education as Integral Evangelization According to Blessed Marcelina Darowska (1827–1911)

Marek Chmielewski 

Faculty of Theology, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; cechaem@kul.pl

**Abstract:** Education, understood as the process of forming the human person in their integral dimensions—spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social—occupies a key place in the reflection on the evangelizing mission of the Church. This article presents education as a form of integral evangelization based on the thought and activity of the Polish religious sister and mystic Blessed Marcelina Darowska (1827–1911). The initial part outlines the development of the concept of “integral evangelization” in the teachings of the Catholic Church and its relation to personalist pedagogy. The following section presents the figure of Blessed Marcelina Darowska and her educational initiative, situated in the 19th-century socio-historical context of partitioned Poland. The main section of the analysis focuses on Darowska’s concept of education as the formation of the whole person, encompassing the discernment of talents, intellectual, religious, and social development, and preparation for responsible family and civic roles. It also considers to what extent this vision of education can be identified as an expression of integral evangelization in accordance with the criteria of contemporary Church teaching. This article further presents the development of Blessed Marcelina’s educational work and its impact on forming generations of women conscious of their identity. The conclusion offers a reflection on the relevance and potential of this educational method in the context of contemporary social and religious challenges, particularly in the work of new evangelization.

**Keywords:** Marcelina Darowska; integral evangelization; catholic education; female education; patriotism



Academic Editor: Carl-Mario Sultana

Received: 30 April 2025

Revised: 26 May 2025

Accepted: 27 May 2025

Published: 31 May 2025

**Citation:** Chmielewski, Marek. 2025. Education as Integral Evangelization According to Blessed Marcelina Darowska (1827–1911). *Religions* 16: 713. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16060713>

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## 1. Introduction

Education as the process of shaping the human person has always constituted one of the fundamental tasks of the Catholic Church, as emphasized by the Second Vatican Council in its Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis* (1965). There we read:

“True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of those societies of which, as a person, he is a member, and in whose responsibilities, as an adult, he will share. Children and young people are therefore to be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology, pedagogy and didactics, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual talents, so that they may gradually acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility in the proper formation of their own lives by constant effort and in the pursuit of true freedom [. . .]. Moreover, they should be prepared to take part actively in social life, so that having been properly equipped with the necessary and suitable means, they may engage effectively in various groups of the human community and, through dialogue with others, reveal their own

views and strive to promote the common good". (Second Vatican Council 1965, no. 1)

In contemporary theological and pastoral reflection, the need to return to a model of education that encompasses the whole person—spiritually, morally, intellectually, and socially, as emphasized by the Council's teaching—is increasingly stressed. This vision closely corresponds to the concept of integral evangelization, which, although terminologically established in the Church's teaching only in the second half of the 20th century, in reality reflects much earlier intuitions and practices, especially those developed by religious orders.

Within the context of this integral vision of education, the person and work of Blessed Marcelina Darowska (1827–1911) acquire special significance. She was a Polish religious sister, mystic, and founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her educational activity, rooted in the historical reality of partitioned Poland, was a response to the dramatic social and spiritual needs of a nation deprived of independence for 123 years.

In designing a model of girls' education aimed at forming women conscious of their identity as wives and citizens, Darowska implemented a vision of formation that embraced the entire human person—their intellectual abilities, moral virtues, spiritual maturity, and preparation for responsible societal roles.

The aim of this article is therefore to present education according to the concept of Blessed Marcelina Darowska as a form of integral evangelization, understood according to the contemporary criteria of Church teaching.

To this end, the origin and development of the concept of integral evangelization will first be presented, along with its connection to personalist pedagogy. Then, the figure of Blessed Marcelina Darowska and the socio-historical context in which she worked will be discussed. The core of the article will be an analysis of the concept of education in her thought and educational practice, including the question of whether her approach can be classified as integral evangelization. Finally, a reflection will be offered on the relevance of this educational method in light of contemporary challenges faced by education and evangelization.

## **2. Integral Evangelization—Origins, Development of the Concept, and Its Reference to Education**

The concept of integral evangelization expresses the conviction that the proclamation of the Good News should encompass the whole human person—all dimensions of one's personality and activity, and especially one's social life. Human development is only possible on the basis of interpersonal relationships.

In the Church's teaching, this idea developed gradually, responding to the changing cultural and social challenges of successive epochs. Although the term was shaped in the second half of the 20th century, its content-related roots go deep into the Christian tradition. It also has a biblical foundation. At the conclusion of His earthly ministry, Christ entrusts the missionary mandate to His disciples, saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations [...], teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19–20). These words indicate that the Church's mission includes not only proclaiming the Gospel but also teaching the observance of everything contained in Jesus' message, and thus the transformation of the entire life of the disciples. Jesus Himself combined the proclamation of the word with acts of love, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and forgiving sinners, whilst also proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God as both a spiritual and social reality (cf. Lk 4:18; Mt 11:5). In the same way, the early Church fulfilled its mission not only by proclaiming the kerygma but also by taking concrete actions for the benefit of

people and the local community. An example of this is the ministry of deacons appointed to care for the poor (cf. Acts 6:1–7) and the community of goods among the believers (cf. Acts 2:44–47). In later centuries, the Church’s evangelizing activity always included an intellectual–educational and charitable–social dimension.

Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament, repeatedly emphasizes the inseparable link between love of God and love of neighbor (cf. Mk 12:29–31), as well as between works of mercy and the authenticity of faith, which “is dead without works” (Jas 2:26). These selected biblical premises lead to the conclusion that the fullness of evangelization requires the transformation of the whole person in his or her relationship with God and with others (Marciniak 2024).

Over the centuries, the Catholic Church has developed an increasingly inclusive understanding of evangelization and the mission *ad gentes*. The Church Fathers taught about the importance of the witness of Christian life and love of neighbor for winning over believers. The Church’s charitable activity—from the ancient diaconies, through medieval religious orders establishing hospitals, schools, and universities, seeking new techniques of agriculture and animal husbandry, to modern-day Caritas—has always been understood as an essential part of the evangelizing mission.

### 2.1. *The Origins of the Concept of “Integral Evangelization”*

The first systematic formulation of the idea of integral evangelization is found in post-conciliar papal teaching. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975), Paul VI emphasized that evangelization is not limited to the transmission of doctrine but also includes personal, social, cultural, and structural transformation. According to the Pope, evangelization should embrace the entire life of the human person, bringing the Gospel into every dimension of human existence. It would not be complete “if it does not take into account the actual reciprocal interactions that continually occur between the Gospel and man’s concrete, personal and social life” (Paul VI 1975, no. 29). He further stated:

“The liberation which evangelization proclaims and strives to put into practice is not to be understood solely in terms of economic, political or social, or even doctrinal terms. It must encompass the whole human person in all dimensions and aspects, in his openness to something ‘absolute’, indeed to the Absolute, who is God”. (Paul VI 1975, no. 33)

John Paul II devoted much attention to the matter of integral evangelization. In the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (1990), he explained that the Church’s mission includes not only proclamation but also commitment to human development and the defense of human dignity (John Paul II 1990, nos. 11–20). In his view, integral evangelization connects the spiritual and temporal aspects of life, showing that salvation in Christ concerns both the soul and the daily realities of social life. He also warned against today’s temptation to “reduce Christianity to merely human wisdom, as if it were a form of knowledge about how to live well”. The Pope observed that “in a world heavily secularized, a ‘gradual secularization of salvation’ has occurred; people fight for humanity, but for a diminished humanity, reduced only to the horizontal dimension. Yet we know that Jesus came to bring total salvation, which embraces the whole person and all people, opening them to the marvelous horizons of divine sonship” (John Paul II 1990, no. 11; Rynio 2013).

Pope Francis has also devoted much attention to integral evangelization, particularly in the Church’s pastoral practice. Worth noting is his pronounced concern for people who are materially and spiritually poor or marginalized, as confirmed, for example, by his visit shortly before his death to the Roman prison “Regina Coeli”. To remind the Church that its mission is to care for all of the person’s needs, he proclaimed the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (8 December 2015–20 November 2016). Teaching during this Jubilee that “God’s

mercy is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality” (Francis 2015, no. 6), he called on Christians to rediscover the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (cf. Francis 2015, no. 15).

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), the Pope included a chapter entitled “The Social Dimension of Evangelization”, in which he directly stated:

“From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must find expression and develop in every work of evangelization”. (Francis 2013, no. 178)

On various occasions, he called upon every community and every believer to “abandon their own comfort and reach out to the peripheries” (Francis 2013, no. 20), bringing the light of the Gospel to the poor and the excluded (Marciniak 2024). He emphasized the inseparability of preaching and active charity. According to him, to evangelize is not only to proclaim the saving word but also “to care for the well-being of others” (Francis 2013, no. 178), to act for justice, peace, and the care of the most vulnerable.

In the same spirit, Pope Francis launched the *Global Compact on Education* in 2020—a worldwide initiative aimed at renewing the educational alliance and placing the human person at the center of all educational processes. Among the seven commitments outlined in his address of 15 October 2020, the first three are particularly relevant to the reflection undertaken here: (1) to place the human person at the center of every educational process, (2) to listen to the voices of children and young people, and (3) to promote the full participation of girls and young women in education. These priorities resonate strongly with the intuitions of Blessed Marcelina Darowska, who, already in the 19th century, sought to form women as conscious and responsible individuals with a central role in the transformation of society.

In this way, the idea of integral evangelization through education has been reaffirmed and developed further. The mission of the Church is to embrace every aspect of human life and to work toward the renewal of the world in Christ. Promoting justice, peace, and the integral development of the human person are inseparable elements of this mission.

## 2.2. Integral Evangelization in Theology

The development of reflection on integral evangelization was not limited to documents of the Church’s Magisterium. In the second half of the 20th century, many theologians, both Catholic and Evangelical, undertook efforts to deepen the understanding of the integrity of the Christian mission.

In Catholic theology, the liberation theology movement, which emerged in Latin America, made a significant contribution to the development of the idea of integral evangelization. Gustavo Gutiérrez pointed to the inseparable connection between salvation in Christ and the liberation of the human person from social injustice and poverty (Gutiérrez 1971). Similar insights were developed by Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino, who emphasized that authentic evangelization must also involve efforts to restore human dignity and to build just social structures (Boff 1985; Sobrino 1982).

At the same time, in the Protestant world—especially among Evangelical circles in Latin America—the concept of *integral mission* (*misión integral*) began to take shape. René Padilla and Samuel Escobar, during the Lausanne Congress (1974), drew attention to the necessity of linking the proclamation of the Gospel with social responsibility. The final document of this Congress, known as the *Lausanne Covenant*, clearly stated that evangelization and efforts for justice are integral aspects of the Church’s mission (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization 1974, no. 5).

The common denominator of these movements, despite denominational and theological differences, was the conviction that the Gospel concerns the whole human person

and that the Christian mission must address not only the relationship with God—strictly speaking, spirituality—but also one’s social, economic, and cultural situation.

These theological reflections on the integrity of evangelization opened new perspectives for understanding the Church’s mission, presenting it as deeply rooted in human and historical reality. They also became an inspiration for renewing the practice of Christian education and formation in the spirit of integral human development (Opiela 2017).

### 2.3. Integral Evangelization and Personalist Pedagogy

The understanding of integral evangelization as a Gospel-based process of forming the Christian in many aspects of life finds its natural extension in personalist pedagogy, which emphasizes the development of the person in spiritual–religious, moral, intellectual, and social dimensions. Its main representative was Emmanuel Mounier. Today, this direction is widely popular around the world.

Among the core categories in personalist pedagogy are the notions of *person* and *community*. This concept emphasizes, on the one hand, the uniqueness and individuality of the person (as singular and unrepeatable), and on the other, the person’s orientation toward society and community—highlighting their functioning within a collective.

The goal of personalist education is to enable the subject—the pupil—to assume responsibility for their own development. Consequently, personalist pedagogy includes the following fundamental areas of formation: physical, intellectual, moral, social, and religious. The relationship between educator (teacher) and pupil (student) is based on respect, understanding of personality, and cooperation, without imposing the teacher’s will. The pupil is regarded as the primary and essential agent of education, while the educator acts as a collaborator (Bagrowicz 2008).

This understanding of pedagogy is inspired by Christian personalism, developed among others by Jacques Maritain (Maritain 1943) and John Paul II. Christian personalism recognizes the human person as the subject of education, endowed with dignity and freedom. Therefore, education cannot be limited to the transmission of knowledge; it must also include the formation of conscience, the development of virtues, and preparation for responsible life within the family and society.

In this light, Christian education appears as a process of the “evangelization of the person” not only in the religious sense but also as the complete formation of the individual in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:27). Integral formation thus leads to the harmonious development of all human faculties in light of truth, goodness, and beauty, which have been revealed in Christ (Lorenc 2015; Kaczorowski 2023).

### 2.4. Reference to Education

The concept of integral evangelization is closely linked to education, which is understood as a service to the growth of the human person. As *Evangelii nuntiandi* states: “The person who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being, but is subject to the social, economic, political, and cultural conditions of his or her time” (Paul VI 1975, no. 29).

Education conducted in the spirit of integral evangelization should therefore take the following into account (Marek 2015):

- *Spiritual formation*, which involves initiation into the sacramental life and prayer, along with ascetical self-discipline;
- *Moral formation*, which primarily concerns the shaping of conscience and the education of responsibility for oneself and others;
- *Intellectual development*, which consists of acquiring knowledge in the light of natural and revealed truth;

– *Preparation for social life*, especially within the family, which should be expressed in a sensitivity to the common good, solidarity, and patriotism.

This model of education responds to the needs of the holistic development of the human person and the building of a society rooted in Christian values. Long before any personalist educational theories were developed, this very approach to guiding the young person—particularly girls and young women—was practically implemented by Blessed Marcelina Darowska, drawing inspiration primarily from her own experience as a mother and from mystical inspirations.

This retrospective application of the concept of integral evangelization to Darowska's work should not be seen as anachronistic, but rather as a hermeneutical key that enables contemporary readers to appreciate the prophetic dimension of her educational vision. While she did not use the term *integral evangelization*, her holistic approach to education aligns with many aspects of this modern concept which has been gradually developed by the Church through its Magisterium and educational practice.

A crucial point of reference in this development is the document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1988). This text emphasizes the unity of human and spiritual formation, the role of the educator as a witness to the faith, and the contribution of religious congregations to the identity of Catholic schools. The educational model proposed by Blessed Marcelina Darowska anticipated many of these insights—especially the integration of intellectual formation with moral and spiritual development.

### 3. The Life and Work of Blessed Marcelina Darowska (1827–1911)

Blessed Marcelina Darowska, née Kotowicz, was born on 16 January 1827, in Szulaki, Podolia, into a wealthy landed gentry family. Her youth was shaped by an atmosphere of deep patriotism and a lively Catholic faith, which from an early age formed her worldview and understanding of the human person's place in the history of the nation (Sołtan 1977; Sołtan 1982).

At the age of twenty-two, Marcelina married Karol Darowski. Although their marriage was happy, it lasted only three years. Her husband died suddenly from illness, leaving her a young widow with a two-year-old son, Józef, and a three-month-old daughter, Karolina. Soon after, another painful trial occurred: the death of her son in her arms. The loss of her loved ones in such a short period became for Marcelina a profound spiritual test, one that opened her heart to seek a new meaning in life through total dedication to God.

Following these dramatic events, Darowska first went to Nauheim in Switzerland for convalescence, then to Heidelberg in Germany, and from there, via Paris, to Rome. In 1857, influenced by her meeting with Fr. Hieronim Kajsiewicz, co-founder of the Resurrectionist Congregation, she joined the effort to establish a religious congregation while simultaneously undergoing deep mystical experiences. These experiences led her to develop her own original vision of religious life, tailored to the particular needs of the Polish nation under partition.

While in Nice, France, during a trip home to visit her elderly parents—who were caring for her young daughter—she experienced a supernatural illumination regarding the concept of the emerging religious congregation. She recorded this experience in the so-called *Nice Note*, dated 19 March 1859. In it, she expressed her deep conviction that the mission of the emerging congregation was not to work among Polish emigrants abroad, who had left the country due to repressive foreign rule, but rather to carry out comprehensive efforts aimed at halting emigration and laying the groundwork for the rebirth of the Polish homeland, which had been erased from the map of Europe.

Marcelina Darowska recognized that the fate of future generations of the Polish nation—persecuted after the November Uprising (1830–1831) and January Uprising (1863–1864)—depended on the conscious and responsible education of youth. She believed that it was, above all, women who would be the guarantors of Poland’s rebirth. She therefore undertook the task of educating girls, particularly from the upper social classes.

In 1861, she professed religious vows and began forming a new community, which soon adopted the name Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. From the beginning, the mission of this new religious institute was the integral education of young women.

In the summer of 1863, she opened the congregation’s first house in Jazłowiec, Podolia, then under Austrian partition—now part of southern Ukraine. Jazłowiec quickly became an important educational, spiritual, and cultural center. With the support of the bishops of the Archdiocese of Lviv, especially Archbishop Józef Bilczewski—now canonized—a dynamic expansion of Marcelina Darowska’s work began. During her lifetime, three institutions were established in the Austrian partition and three in the Russian partition, including one in central Poland—Szymanów, near Warsaw ([Jabłońska-Deptuła 1992](#)).

Blessed Marcelina Darowska died on 5 January 1911, in Jazłowiec, leaving behind a well-developed network of schools and religious houses in which her educational model is still practiced today. She outlined this model in numerous writings, which are currently being prepared for publication. These writings total approximately 25,000 typed pages. In addition to mystical texts, the majority are letters written to sisters, students, and individuals from the Polish ecclesiastical, political, and cultural elite of her time. Over 11,160 letters have been preserved.

Because of the mystical doctrine underlying her pedagogical concept, Darowska is considered one of the greatest Polish mystics, representing the Resurrectionist school of spirituality ([Urbański 1999](#)).

#### **4. Education According to the Concept of Blessed Marcelina Darowska as a Form of Integral Evangelization**

The educational concept of Blessed Marcelina Darowska arose from a deep conviction that the rebirth of the Polish nation, oppressed under the partitions, was possible only through the education of women. She left this task to her spiritual daughters in her testament, writing that the main mission of the congregation was educational work. This work consisted of:

“educating the woman to become a citizen of the Kingdom of God, which means educating her not only intellectually and externally, but above all morally—thus forming her into a truly Christian wife, mother, homemaker, and citizen of her country”. ([Darowska 2025](#))

In the integral education of women she saw the opportunity for a profound transformation of social life under the socio-political conditions in which Poland found itself during the partitions. She expressed this in the *Nice Note*, writing:

“So, to transform the world, we must begin with the transformation, the purification, the perfecting of women; by preparing for it women who know and love God—who love Him in His commandments, in their neighbors, and in the duties of their state; women who are wise and brave—gentle as doves, prudent as serpents—according to Holy Scripture (Mt 10:16). Such women are needed today—this is the mission of our congregation, assigned to it by the will of the eternal God”. ([Darowska 2025](#))

Her educational ideal was innovative in every respect. Education was not to be limited to superficial schooling but would encompass the entire young person—that is, their religious–spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social development—according to the deepest needs of both the individual and the nation.

#### 4.1. Four Educational Principles

In Darowska’s concept, education is based on four principles, which she articulated in the first part of her ascetical–mystical treatise *Kartki (Pages)*.

*The first principle* can be summarized in the statement that God is everything, and everything must lead to God; therefore, children must be taught to love Him.

“The first principle, on which all of education will rest, as on a pillar that holds the whole, is: God is everything—through everything to God. He is the goal; all that is given to us by Him is the way to heaven. We are Christians, Catholics”. (Darowska 2025)

For Marcelina Darowska and the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, God is the point of reference in all things. He should occupy the highest place in the lives of both educators and students. For the believer, everything finds its justification in God.

*The second principle* follows from the first. If nothing is accidental but rather willed by God, then belonging to a particular nation is also significant and linked to God’s plan for each person and each nation.

“The second principle is that God created us as Poles. Children should understand the obligations this entails; they should comprehend the mission of the nation—the divine intention contained within it; they should respect and love the means given by the Lord to fulfill it, namely the homeland and nationality. They should know that faith in the nation means God in the nation—means the blessing of the nation—means its strength; that without faith and fidelity to the Church, the divine intention in the nation is not fulfilled, and thus there is no reason for its existence. . .” (Darowska 2025)

According to the founder of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, patriotism stems from the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue and is a moral obligation for every baptized person. It is expressed not so much in emotional sentiment as in concrete actions for the common good and in the care for cultural heritage.

*The third principle* is fidelity to the duties of one’s state in life, understood as the expression of God’s will for each individual. Regarding this, Darowska writes:

“He who is faithful in small things will not fail in great ones. Children must be taught that it is a sin not to fulfill what is required of them, not to keep a promise, a resolution, a word, which obliges an honest person as if by an oath. Duties are guardrails on the road of life. He who does not hold to them and steps outside them will surely stray from the right path and not reach the goal. Unfaithfulness to one’s duties is unfaithfulness to God—loss of Him”. (Darowska 2025)

For Darowska, duties are not an end in themselves but a means to a greater end, a support on the journey. Each person must therefore learn their responsibilities appropriate to their age, status, and social role. For students (girls), the primary duty is study, as a meaningful preparation for service to society in adult life.

*The fourth principle* pertains to the intellectual sphere and involves the art of logical thinking and accountability for one’s expressed views.

“The fourth principle: to teach children to think and to be aware of what they do, think, and say, so that nothing be groundless or aimless—nothing contradictory within itself”. (Darowska 2025)

The founder of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception noted that lack of perseverance and thoughtlessness are national flaws of Poles and thus should be counteracted from the earliest stages of education. This is closely tied to the issue of truth and living according to it daily (Świerz 2014).

#### 4.2. Individualized Approach

Marcelina Darowska emphasized that education cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of knowledge or to narrowly understood catechesis, and even less so to the practical preparation of a young woman for marriage. The goal of her pedagogy was the formation of the person—the girl and young woman—primarily as a human being in her full internal truth, dignity, and capacity for responsible life in the family and in society. Her anthropological concept was based on biblical foundations, especially on the belief that by creating the human person in His image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27), God endowed them with dispositions corresponding to their vocation and mission in society. Therefore, discerning the natural predispositions of each girl—intellectual, moral–spiritual, and practical—was crucial in the educational process.

Darowska wished for every student to discover her talents and learn to develop them in the spirit of service to God, family, and nation. She was opposed to imposing top-down behavioral models but demanded from each student, as well as from her fellow sisters, responsibility for personal development (Rynio and Jaroszek 1993).

In Darowska’s educational system, an individualized pedagogical approach toward each student is particularly evident:

“Each person has their individuality, their character, their abilities, their type, their [. . .] moral and material standing, reflecting in them the thought of God and strictly corresponding to the purpose and mission assigned by that thought, and which is in accordance with God’s will. The obliteration of character, the failure to use one’s abilities, the destruction of individuality resulting from not following one’s own path is unfaithfulness, is a deviation from one’s destiny, is a misfortune. [. . .] Just as there are no two identical leaves on one tree, so there are no two identical souls on even the same path and in the same task”. (Darowska 2025)

Respecting the principle of individuality requires, on the one hand, the proper recognition of each person’s capabilities and limitations, and on the other, the application of suitable methods of supporting development, including a system of rewards and consequences. In this context, the role of the teacher emerges as that of a guide who accompanies the student on the path of development, supporting and helping her in shaping a mature personality.

#### 4.3. Fundamental Dimensions of Education

The educational system for girls proposed by Blessed Marcelina Darowska, which draws inspiration from her profound mystical life, has been the subject of numerous analyses and studies from the very beginning (Skórzewska 1911; Rokoszny 1928). Compared to nineteenth-century educational methods it stood out for its originality, which lay in the skillful integration of strongly emphasized religious–spiritual, moral, intellectual, and practical formation (Knop 2018; Majewska 2007; Urbański 2001).

Regarding spiritual formation, it is important to highlight that Darowska placed conscious experience of faith above all—education and self-education toward a living relationship with God through the sacraments, prayer, and ascetical effort. To this end, she personally conducted retreats for specific groups of students and sisters and also engaged

in individual spiritual direction. This practice was entirely novel at the time and thus was occasionally met with strong criticism from some members of the clergy.

In terms of moral formation, Darowska emphasized the shaping of an upright conscience through a love for truth and self-education in responsibility for oneself and others, thereby forming a noble character. A properly formed conscience—based on Gospel values and noble examples from among the nation’s outstanding figures—she regarded as the foundation of adult life, especially in marital and family relationships.

A hallmark of the schools operated by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception was their high intellectual standard, often confirmed by both state and Church authorities during official visits. Darowska considered the acquisition of solid general knowledge and the development of logical thinking in light of revealed truth as essential elements of the educational process. Contrary to contemporary stereotypes, she was convinced that women—regardless of the social functions they would later perform—should be well educated. In addition to an emphasis on the proper use of the Polish language and knowledge of Polish cultural heritage (literature, art, history, and geography), she placed great importance on the study of foreign languages. For this purpose, her institutions employed carefully selected teaching staff. Most teachers were religious sisters, but lay teachers—including foreigners—were also hired.

Training in social competence constituted one of the key dimensions of Darowska’s pedagogy. Its goal was to educate girls for responsible life within the family, society, and nation, with an emphasis on service to the common good. Various forms of practical activity were conducted, and the girls were involved in maintaining order and aesthetics within the school, boarding facilities, and their surroundings. Since the school and boarding facilities were typically architecturally connected to the convent, the students were partially integrated into the spiritual rhythm of the religious community—often resulting in new vocations to the congregation.

Marcelina Darowska interpreted the educational mission of her religious congregation in the context of Poland’s dramatic situation under foreign occupation. After the failed national uprisings, she saw the necessity of building the nation’s strength through the formation of strong, conscious, and responsible individuals. In particular, she highlighted the role of women as mothers, educators of future generations, and co-creators of the common good:

“The woman is the angel of family life, of the home—or its poison. Husband, children, servants—the whole household is a faithful reflection of her. Honest, God-fearing, gentle, and wise—everything around her is touched by the radiance of her spirit. All beauty attracts. Moral beauty—almost nothing can resist it: the bravest knight, the most cunning politician; the strength of the spirit—that is a true hero”. (Darowska 2025)

The educational concept developed by Blessed Marcelina Darowska combined the ideals of Romanticism—chief among them love of the homeland, heroic sacrifice, a deep experience of faith, and the affirmation of womanhood—with elements of Positivism, which emphasized hard work, solid education, and social responsibility. In this way, she created a harmonious synthesis that responded to the needs of her time.

In light of contemporary Church teaching, the educational activity of Blessed Marcelina Darowska fulfills the criteria of integral evangelization. It is not only inspired by Gospel principles but it also embraces the whole person in forming their conscience, developing intellectual abilities, preparing for life in society, and supporting spiritual growth in the Christian faith. It can therefore be stated that although the term “*integral evangelization*” was unknown to her, she intuitively fulfilled its assumptions in her educational work.

## 5. The Development of the Educational Work of Blessed Marcelina Darowska and the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception

After opening the first house in Jazłowiec in 1863, the educational work of Blessed Marcelina Darowska began to develop dynamically, responding to the contemporary needs of the Polish nation which had been deprived of independence. Recognizing the crucial role of women in the moral and social renewal of the nation, Darowska consistently built a network of educational institutions for girls, developing her activity both in terms of quality and quantity.

Qualitative development focused primarily on catechesis and deepened spiritual formation, as well as the improvement of pedagogical methods through the involvement of competent teachers and educators. Moreover, the Immaculate Conception schools were equipped with the latest educational tools, and their libraries stocked with current literary and scientific works—personally reviewed and approved by Darowska. This testifies to her deep concern for the intellectual quality of the education offered.

Quantitative development of Darowska's educational work consisted mainly in the establishment of new centers by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Jarosław (1863), Niżniów (1869), Nowy Sącz (1878), Słonim (1897), and Szymanów (1907). Other attempts were made to found educational institutions, but for mainly political reasons they could not be realized at the time. After Darowska's death, new institutions were established throughout Poland. Many of them have withstood the test of time and continue to operate today ([Kosyra-Cieślak and Szymczak 2007](#)).

This expansion was accompanied by a steadily growing number of students and graduates, which during the founder's lifetime was estimated at several thousand. Their social impact extended across various areas of life—from family life and the upbringing of future generations, to artistic and cultural activity, and civic-patriotic and religious engagement. Without a doubt, this had a tangible effect on raising the quality of social life, especially in the Austrian partition where the highest number of Immaculate Conception schools operated and relatively favorable political conditions prevailed ([Jabłońska-Deptuła 1992](#)).

Each of these institutions functioned not only as a school, but also as a center for spiritual and patriotic formation—and simply as a home. Girls, except for vacation and short holiday breaks at Christmas and Easter, lived in well-organized boarding houses with their own regulations aligned with the educational assumptions described above. A significant part of each day included common prayer, daily Mass, shared meals, and group homework sessions.

Immaculate Conception schools emphasized the holistic development of girls through their intellectual formation, moral training, spiritual-religious life, and preparation for responsible family and social roles. Thanks to this, graduates of these schools often went on to become important figures in social, cultural, and national life.

Darowska created a school model that not only transmitted knowledge but also formed moral elites—women capable of renewing society in the spirit of Christian and patriotic values. Through this extensive activity, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception played a significant role in shaping Polish national identity, especially during the difficult time of the partitions and the struggle to preserve national spirit ([Jabłońska-Deptuła 1992](#)).

## 6. The Originality and Relevance of Blessed Marcelina Darowska's Educational Method

The educational method of Blessed Marcelina Darowska stands out among other nineteenth-century educational concepts for its remarkable originality and depth. At a

time when women's education often focused solely on basic social skills and household management, Darowska proposed a vision of integral formation encompassing spirituality, intellect, morality, and social preparation (Możdżeń 2001).

At the center of her educational thought stood the human person, viewed as a unique whole created in the image of God. The aim of education was to bring out and develop all the potentialities of each girl, including her intellectual abilities, practical talents, moral virtues, and depth of spiritual life. The formative process presupposed the harmonious cooperation of grace and nature, reason and faith, self-discipline, and openness to others. One could say it was the formation of the "new man" (cf. Eph 2:15, 24) (Łobacz 2023).

Although Blessed Marcelina Darowska was unfamiliar with the term "*integral evangelization*", in light of contemporary theological reflection her educational work can clearly be regarded as an embodiment of this ideal. Her students were formed not only for personal holiness but also for active responsibility toward their families, society, and nation. Education was therefore deeply rooted in the Christian mission—bringing the Gospel into personal, family, and social life. As a result, some of the graduates joined the congregation and were marked by authentic holiness and a readiness for the highest sacrifices. This is confirmed by the martyrdom of several of them during the First and Second World Wars, the so-called "Volhynian massacre", or the rise in atheistic communism immediately after World War II. Two of them—Sister Ewa Noiszewska and Marta Kazimiera Wołowska—have been declared Blessed.

It is worth emphasizing that Darowska's educational method remains highly relevant in the face of today's educational and social challenges (Basak and Przybylska 2012). The Congregation still operates kindergartens and schools, now co-educational. In times of a crisis of values, weakened family ties, moral relativism, and a diminishing sense of responsibility for the common good, the model of integral education—which embraces all dimensions of the human person—emerges as a response to the deep needs of the twenty-first-century person (Łobacz 2014; Zapotoczny 2008).

Spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social formation—understood as an inseparable whole—remain key elements in the development of mature individuals capable of consciously living their faith, forming lasting family communities, and actively participating in social life at various levels.

However, in light of current discussions on global citizenship and inclusive education, it is important to critically evaluate certain elements of Darowska's vision. Her strong emphasis on national patriotism, while historically justified, can be complemented by the Church's present-day emphasis on universal solidarity and global responsibility, as articulated by Pope Francis in the apostolic exhortation *Fratelli tutti* (2020). The call to educate for a sense of common humanity does not negate love for one's country but rather deepens it by fostering a broader commitment to peace and justice in the global community.

Furthermore, Darowska's view of women's education—often framed within the traditional roles of wife, homemaker, and mother—requires a nuanced reinterpretation. While she affirmed the dignity and importance of these roles, many contemporary Catholic women in Poland and across Europe increasingly define themselves beyond this framework. Recent sociological research indicates that young, educated, and devout Catholic women strive to integrate their faith with professional and civic engagement (Rejowska 2023). In accordance with the spirit of her time, Darowska understood women's social involvement primarily through the performance of their familial roles. Nevertheless, through comprehensive intellectual and practical education and deep religious formation she prepared her students for a broader responsibility for the shape of social and, to some extent, political life.

The pupils of the Immaculate Conception schools could grow to feel like confident citizens of the world. The educational legacy of Blessed Marcelina Darowska can thus inspire young women not only to embrace traditional vocations but also to pursue contemporary expressions of female identity within the Church and society, as well as responsibility for the world.

The originality of Blessed Marcelina Darowska's method was based on a deep intuition regarding the integrity of the person and on combining patriotic, spiritual, and educational ideals into a coherent educational concept. Her system is also an alternative to today's trends of education based solely on competence, detached from axiological formation. It remains therefore very relevant and is an invitation to rediscover Christian education as a form of evangelization—a transformation of the heart and mind in the spirit of the Gospel (Osial 2011).

## 7. Conclusions

Education according to the concept of Blessed Marcelina Darowska proves to be an extraordinarily innovative and profound form of integral evangelization, even though—as mentioned—Darowska herself was unfamiliar with this term in its later theological sense. Her method, based on a holistic approach to the human person, embraced spiritual life, morality, intellectual development, preparation for social and family life, and responsibility for the homeland. In her view, education became a path of integral personal development—of life in truth, love, and responsibility.

An analysis of Blessed Marcelina Darowska's work reveals that the fundamental principles of integral evangelization—later expressed in Church Magisterial documents—were realized in her educational intuition. The contemporary world, facing a crisis of values and the need to renew family and social life, has much to learn from this educational method—one based on the harmony of grace and nature, faith and reason, and heart and practical action. These are precisely the goals set by modern integral evangelization.

Pope Francis speaks of the Marian style of the Church's evangelizing activity, referring to the feminine delicacy and tenderness fully revealed in Mary. Those engaged in the work of the new evangelization are called to imitate her (Francis 2015, no. 288). For over 150 years, the religious congregation founded by Blessed Marcelina Darowska—dedicated to the Mother of God—has been quietly yet effectively carrying out evangelizing work through the education of youth in this very Marian style. In doing so, it fulfills the Pope's appeal "that the joy of the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our world" (Francis 2015, no. 288).

The legacy of Blessed Marcelina Darowska remains both relevant and inspiring. Her vision of education as a comprehensive work of human formation appears as a response to the deepest needs of the modern person and a call to rediscover education as a path of integral evangelization.

**Funding:** The publication is co-financed by the Polish state budget under the program of the Minister of Education and Science called "National Program for the Development of the Humanities", project number NPRH/DN/SP/0127/2023/12. Funding amount: PLN 1,038,912.00; total value of the project: PLN 1,038,912.00.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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