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Christian figures in Polish classical philosophy and postsecularism

Abstract. *The present article is an attempt to outline selected Christian inspirations in two different philosophies – Polish classical philosophy and post-secular thought. This first trend was inspired primarily by the new reading of Thomism through the prism of Aristotle’s thoughts. Within this system, attempts were made to defend realistic metaphysics and Christian beliefs, such as being a person and having an immortal soul. The second part refers to contemporary post-secular thought, with neo-Marxist orientation. Although the followers of this philosophy do not agree with the main dogmas of Christianity, they express their fascination with some of the figures of Christianity – such as St. Paul.*

Keywords: *Christianity, Thomism, postsecularism, st. Paul*

The Lublin school, also known as the Polish school of classical philosophy, was established in the 1950s. It was located in the Catholic University of Lublin, which in terms of the philosophical map of Poland at that time, was in a strong opposition to the Marxist orthodox ideas developing in other centres. The main founders and animators of the Lublin school were Stefan Świeżawski (1907-2004) and Mieczysław Krąpiec (1921-2008). They had many students and followers.¹

¹ *Lubelska Szkoła Filozoficzna*, <http://ptta.pl/lsf/index.php?id=program&lang=pl> [30.12.2014]

The philosophical foundations of this community lied in classic Greek-Latin philosophy. The metaphysical programme proposed by the thinkers of this milieu had its roots in the old Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.

Philosophica anthropology was also created on these foundations. As a result, representatives of the Lublin school were critical of contemporary philosophy and culture. According to Stefan Świeżawski we can say that comprehensive, profound and fully philosophical human theory of this kind cannot be provided by either empirical science, materialism or positivism, scepticism, or even the philosophy of ideas or philosophy of self. Only the philosophy of being, or to be more clear: metaphysics, is the foundation on which philosophical anthropology can be based. The approach above shows that there is a strong conviction that philosophical anthropology and metaphysics are closely linked. According to the representatives of the Lublin school, this link, as well as the concept of the human person derived from classical philosophy of existence are necessary to avoid the so-called anthropological error, which has also become one of the subjects of reflection of Lublin philosophers.²

The philosophical anthropology of the Lublin school, although in its basic assumptions it is a secular thought, undoubtedly also has religious roots in Christian theological anthropology. The Book of Genesis reads: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."³ Links between philosophical anthropology and religion were described in more detail by Zofia Zdybicka⁴, another representative of the Lublin school.

However, the main concept that binds classical anthropology is the reference to Aristotle's Hylomorphism (later continued by St. Thomas Aquinas). Matter and form, or as in the case of humans, body and soul are closely connected. This is clear in the writings of the Stagyrte: "We are in the habit of recognizing, as one determinate kind of what is, substance, and that in several senses, (a) in the sense of matter or that which in itself is not 'a this,' and (b) in the sense of form or essence, which is that precisely in virtue of which a thing is called 'a this,' and thirdly (c) in the sense of that which is compounded of both (a) and (b). [...] Hence the soul must be a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it."⁵ Aristotelian thought was later taken up by Thomas Aquinas, who adapted it to the needs of the Christian culture.

² See A. Maryniarczyk, K. Stepień, *Błąd antropologiczny* [The anthropological error], Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, Lublin 2003.

³ *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu*, M. Peter, M. Wolniewicz (eds.), Rdz 1,27, Wydawnictwo Święty Wojciech, Warszawa 2009 [The Book of Genesis 1:27, http://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/genesis/documents/bible_genesis_en.html].

⁴ See Z. Zdybicka, *Człowiek i religia. Zarys filozofii religii* [Human beings and religion. An outline of philosophy of religion], Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin 1984.

⁵ Arystoteles, *O duszy*, 411b, księga druga, in Arystoteles. *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1992 [Aristotle, *On the soul*, book II, 411b, transl. quoted after J.A. Smith, source <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.2.ii.html>, 5.02.2019].

A cultural curiosity in the development of anthropological Christian thought is that it decided to adapt more elements from the teachings of Aristotle than his teacher Plato. Plato, through Saint Augustine, had a greater influence on the development of Christian anthropology in the first millennium (which was then much more dualistic and Gnostic⁶), but in the second millennium Thomas Aquinas turned towards adapting Aristotle's legacy. Despite this paradigm shift, anthropological Christian culture still has not fully adapted to this "novelty" – in the Roman Catholic religion there are still some paragnostical tendencies hostile to the body and matter that interpret the relationship between the soul and the body in much more dualistic than hylomorphic terms. The unpopularity of Thomism was pointed out by the doyen of the Lublin school itself – Świeżawski. He said that the history of modern European philosophy presents Thomism as one of the many more or less worrying currents of the whole flood of "second Scholasticism" works, a current that generally has no impact on all those views that really formed the mindset of man of the Renaissance, Baroque or Enlightenment. He also pointed out that the astonishingly humanistic and "modern" philosophical theory of human person developed by Thomas did not find any resonance in the modern era and was not able to fathom "life," it was able only to a minimal degree to influence Catholic asceticism.⁷ Świeżawski also noticed that too often the philosophies of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas are aligned and made similar, while there are quite a lot of serious differences between them, obliterated by scholastic traditions.⁸

Aristotle understood the notion of God the Prime Mover differently – according to him, God was involved in the necessary and deterministic networks of dependencies, being the purposeful cause of the world (St. Aquinas places more emphasis on the Absolute as the primary cause). When it comes to anthropology – Aristotle was not ready to acknowledge the immortality of the individual human soul. If we elaborate on his hylomorphic interpretation – just as the body cannot function without the presence of the soul, the soul cannot exist without matter. There was also the Renaissance Post-Aristotelian tradition, where most commentators interpreted Aristotelian philosophy of the human person in a definitely somatic and materialistic way.⁹ However, Stagyrte himself was not fully coherent in this philosophy – for example, he allowed the immortal (but probably supra-individual) onticity of active reason.¹⁰

⁶ See A. Jocz, *Mistyka a gnoza w myśli chrześcijańskiej (od I do XVII w.): rozważania wokół kategorii Boga, świata i człowieka* [Mysticism and gnosis in Christian thought (from the first to the seventeenth century): reflections around the categories of God, the world and man], Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, Poznań 1995.

⁷ S. Świeżawski, *O przyczynach niepowodzenia tomizmu*, in S. Świeżawski, *Rozum i tajemnica* [Reason and mystery], Znak, Kraków 1960, p. 194

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

⁹ See Z. Drozdowicz, *Filozofia włoska w epoce odrodzenia* [Italian renaissance philosophy], Wydawnictwo WNS UAM, Poznań 2004.

¹⁰ "Since in every class of things, as in nature as a whole, we find two factors involved, (1) a matter which is potentially all the particulars included in the class, (2) a cause which is

According to the Lublin group, the human soul is therefore an *entelechia*, a factor that revives the human body. It is also responsible for various acts of the human individual: intellectual cognition, volitional acts or love.¹¹ Krąpiec's philosophical anthropology also takes into account the behavioural dimension of human existence. The human being seen from an extraspectic and external perspective is a *homo faber*, a manufacturer of tools and technical culture. According to the author, it is also possible to find reasonableness and purposefulness – attributes of the human being, because man-made tools develop throughout human history to such an extent that they nowadays largely make up the human instrumental and cultural environment: roads, cities, factories, houses, etc. The tools created in this context appear to be intentionally composed of various parts, that create a system of necessary relations within the tool, being a deliberate coupling of multiplicity for the unity in action. A human being creating this system of tools is an entity that gets to know the internal system of relations in the tool. Learning about these relations supposes that a person creating these tools understands this system, and thus uses rational cognition, which is necessary to know and produce the tool.¹² The development of technical sciences in modernity was also a subject of reflection for Stanisław Świeżawski, who was mentioned earlier.¹³ While supporting the development of technical sciences, he warns against their domination over humans, who have lost the metaphysical sense of synthesis and ethics.

Another element in philosophical anthropology of the Lublin school is its attachment to the personalistic trend. The human being is seen here as a social being, in the spirit of Aristotle. However, the anthropological complement here consists in the fact that a human being is also a person, a personal being. Although he is strongly connected with various entities through social relations (family, nation, state, etc.), in itself, as a person, he is an entirety in its highest form. In other words, a human person is a sovereign to such communities and, according to Krąpiec, he is an even stronger form of existence than these social systems of relations.¹⁴

productive in the sense that it makes them all [...], these distinct elements must likewise be found within the soul. [...] Mind in this sense of it is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity [...] When mind is set free from its present conditions it appears as just what it is and nothing more: this alone is immortal and eternal (we do not, however, remember its former activity because, while mind in this sense is impassible, mind as passive is destructible), and without it nothing thinks."⁹ Arystoteles, *O duszy*, Księga Trzecia, 430a, [Aristotle, *On the soul, book III 430a*, translation after J.A. Smith, source: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.3.iii.html>]

¹¹ M. Krąpiec, S. Kamiński, *Antropologia filozoficzna* [Philosophical anthropology], in M. Krąpiec (ed.), *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii* [Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy], vol. 1, Lublin 2000, p. 253.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 252.

¹³ S. Świeżawski, *Byt. Zagadnienia metafizyki tomistycznej* [The being. Questions of Thomistic metaphysics], Lublin 1948, p. 333.

¹⁴ M. Krąpiec, S. Kamiński, *Antropologia filozoficzna...*, [Philosophical anthropology] p. 256.

The conclusion that emerges from these considerations is the act of personal death of an individual. The philosophical anthropology of the Lublin school, as a part of the intellectual Christian tradition, emphasizes the reflection proposed by Thomas Aquinas: “but it is impossible for a form to be separated from itself; and therefore it is impossible for a subsistent form to cease to exist.”¹⁵ The thanatology of this philosophy of human persons is therefore optimistic and spiritualistic. It is also expressed in the human inability to grasp the individual good and the desire to find the general good, which, according to the Lublin school, is only found once death is on the horizon. “Death in this sense is the fulfilment of the natural desire of the human will, for only at this point can a total confrontation of human desires, love and decisions with concrete and infinite good take place.”¹⁶

Christian culture from a post-secular perspective on the example of St. Paul

Until his conversion, Saul is biographically someone who could interest non-believing intellectuals. Jan Kanty Pytel guesses what a shock the first encounter with St. Peter must have been for Paul.¹⁷ After all, the former was completely ignorant, did not know Greek, had no idea about cultural problems in the “big world.” We can therefore risk the thesis that Paul was the first Christian intellectual.

French Marxist Alain Badiou argued why the work of St. Paul was important to him. First of all, Badiou notes that Paul’s epistles were written earlier than the synoptic gospel, or the Gospel of John, which was written last. The work of the Apostle to the Nations is therefore the oldest, and in this sense, the most appealing to a sceptical intellectual. Paul is the pioneer in creating Christian doctrine.¹⁸

Moreover, the content of these letters is closer to the post-enlightenment mind of Badiou. There is not much said about Jesus Christ’s miracles and healings. Except for one, the greatest miracle – Christ’s resurrection. This is the only supernatural event proclaimed by Paul. In this sense, this co-creator of the Church is acceptable from the point of view of atheistic sensitivity.

Slavoj Žižek Žižek shares this view. For the Slovenian philosopher, Paul is even indifferent to the earlier life of Jesus, his teachings and parables. In this apostle’s writings there is no fairy tale element, there is a pure, partly rational proposal of

¹⁵ Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, I, q. 75, a. 6 [The Summa Theologica, I q.75, a. 6, translated after Fathers of the English Dominican Province, <https://dhsprory.org/thomas/summa/FP/FP075.html#FPQ75OUTP1>, 5.02.2019].

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 257.

¹⁷ J. Kanty Pytel, *Szawel z Tarsu* [Saul of Tarsus], Wydział Teologiczny UAM, Poznań 2010, p. 28.

¹⁸ A. Badiou, *Święty Paweł. Ustanowienie uniwersalizmu* [Saint Paul. Establishment of universalism], Wyd. Krytyki Politycznej, Kraków 2007, p. 42.

Christian doctrine with which one can discuss and even be inspired by it.¹⁹ Moreover, Žižek has a certain respect for Paul, since he is able to honestly locate his moment of pure faith, which is absolutely irrational, but has reasonable consequences for further life. Žižek, recalling the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, reads the following quote as a kind of and open and courageous clownery. When Paul says: “I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. [...] Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”²⁰, Žižek understands his words as an attempt to shorten the distance between humans and God. The distant God of the Jews in a sense becomes closer and more internalised. For atheistic sensitivity, in a sense, a God who allows madness is a more human and closer, though still non-existent.

Neither Badiou nor Žižek recognise the authenticity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the former it is a myth, for the latter a kind of psychoanalytic game of unconsciousness. What then remains positive for them in the teachings of Paul?

For Alain Badiou, St. Paul is a thinker who created an interesting thought construction. At the heart of his teachings is undoubtedly the concrete event of Jesus’ overcoming death. Leaving aside the historical nature of this moment (and this is what Badiou does, presenting a judgement on the truthfulness of this most important kerygma for Christianity), it has other interesting consequences for Badiou. In his writings, Paul justifies the existence of a subject in this particular event. Thus all other external conditions disappear. This creates a situation in which it is no longer necessary to identify with a particular nation (Jews, Greeks), or a particular gender. Moreover, the social class to which we belong does not matter either.²¹ What is only important is how we as subjects respond to the only significant event that, according to Paul, took place. Although the French intellectual ignores the religious importance of resurrection, he is concerned with the emancipatory implications of the Apostle’s teachings. In this reading, Paul appears to be the first fighter, truly fighting all discrimination and differences, in the name of his subjective truth.

In Žižek’s case, Paul’s teachings can also be read as a great separation from the past. For a Marxist, “cutting off” is a term derived from Lacan, but it is unnecessary to examine the exact meaning of the term on psychoanalytic grounds. What is important is that the Apostle, as a former Pharisee, radically broke with his old way of life, with his doctrinal obedience to the Law. Instead of observing the Jewish orthodoxy of rules and customs, Paul proposes *agape*, universal fraternal love.

¹⁹ S. Žižek, *Kukła i karzeł. Perwersyjny rdzeń chrześcijaństwa* [The puppet and the dwarf. The perverse core of Christianity], Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, Bydgoszcz 2006, p. 29 [quote after: The Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians <http://biblescripture.net/2Corinthians.html>, 5.02.2019].

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 126.

²¹ A. Badiou, *Święty Paweł...* [Saint Paul...], p. 25.

According to Žižek, this also leads to a separation not only from a specific national community, as in Badiou, but also from one's own biographical and subjective past. The Slovenian intellectual interprets another fragment of Paul's letters: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."²² The symbolic death of the old order and the old past is something that is also close to the leftist axiology.

Do Badiou and Žižek agree on everything? There are some differences in their approach to some elements of Paul's theology. Badiou is more atheistic than Žižek, because he more often explicitly proclaims that there is no God and that it is therefore necessary to accept the consequences of this fact. He writes that since there is no unity within the existing Absolute, it is necessary to come to terms with the infinite multitude in the world. Accordingly, there is no final foundation and we will not find any certain truth beyond the multitude of discourses.²³

And yet, Badiou in his analysis of specific parts of Paul's doctrine is at times more orthodox than Žižek, less inclined to manifest open atheism, hiding this position behind the jargon of Lacanian psychoanalysis. For example, the French philosopher does not oppose the consequences of the "gratuitousness of salvation" in Paul's writings. The condition for salvation is not good deeds, but spreading the word about the event, the belief that an absolutely breakthrough moment in the history of mankind has taken place. Although Badiou does not believe in this truth, he admits it is logic in terms of a structured argument.²⁴ He is a kind of atheist who recognizes the right to internal order in a given orthodoxy and dogmatism. He would not have a problem with the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI, who also confirms in his authority the question of "the gratuitousness of salvation" and the need for grace in the life of a Christian.²⁵

Meanwhile, Žižek, who writes more about Christianity, is more inclined to look for non-orthodox components in Paul's thought. With sincere authenticity, he explores the meanders of how Adam – the first man – is understood in the teachings of the apostle. For did Christ save mankind in the end (legalistically), abolishing Adam's state of sin, or must we personally participate in his salvation, accepting it as if individually?²⁶ Žižek is inclined to the second, more Protestant answer. In

²² S. Žižek, *Kruchy Absolut, czyli dlaczego walczyć o chrześcijańskie dziedzictwo* [The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?], Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Kraków 2009, pp. 134-135 [source of translation: <http://biblescripture.net/2Corinthians.html>, 5.02.2019].

²³ A. Badiou, *Etyka. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* [Ethics. Political Criticism Guide], Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2009, pp. 42-43.

²⁴ A. Badiou, *Święty Paweł...* [St. Paul...], p. 85.

²⁵ Benedykt XVI, *Paweł Apostoł Narodów, Święty Paweł*, Częstochowa 2008, p. 30.

²⁶ S. Žižek, *Kruchy Absolut...* [Fragile Absolute...], p. 139.

this sense, he asks another profound theological question: did Christ's death buy out the freedom of humans and thus ultimately abolish the slavery inherent to the human condition?²⁷ In this sense Žižek is also at odds with Catholic orthodoxy, which tones down these revolutionary ideas, proving that Paul, although he proclaimed the abolition of slavery, also called for the acceptance of the existing social order in his time.²⁸

In Christian orthodoxy, reading St. Paul's letters without acknowledging the event of Jesus' resurrection is difficult to accept. With all the exegetic potential, it is difficult to argue with the following passage of the Apostle's teachings: "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised. and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain."²⁹ However, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek show that perhaps St. Paul was wrong here. Even if Christ did not rise from the dead, his life and works of the apostles still make sense. In this way, once again, after Leszek Kolakowski and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, we can see how intellectual and inquisitive secular tradition sees some aspects of Christian teachings that were not noticed or that were forgotten by the universal Church in its tradition.

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²⁷ S. Žižek, *O wierze* [On faith], Wydawnictwo Aletheia, Warszawa 2008, p. 28.

²⁸ J. Kanty Pytel, *Szawel... [Saul...]*, p. 93.

²⁹ 1 List do Koryntian 15,13-14 [First letter to the Corinthians 15,13-14, source: <http://biblescripture.net/1Corinthians.html>, 5.02.2019].

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