

Religious and Cultural Potential of Protestantism in Catholic Poland

The Reformation caused not only revolution in the way of interpreting the main message of Christianity, namely the salvation together with inseparable problem of free justification based on the fundamental principles: sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), sola gratia (Grace alone), sola fide (Faith alone), solus Christus (Christ alone), but also created a new way of understanding the Church with characteristic, more radical than in the Roman Catholic Church, distinction between its spiritual and earthly dimension. Furthermore, the Reformation also had influence on the form of the contemporary model of society and a new political culture, for instance, parliamentary model, change in the lifestyle, attitude to work, freedom of speech and political freedom. According to Casanova, Protestantism is one of four factors that led to the secularisation. The remaining three factors are emergence of the modern state, capitalism and science¹.

Apart from that, in the history of Poland there are numerous examples of significant influence of the widely understood Protestant tradition on forming specific conditions for coexistence of the Christian denominations, as well as political, social and cultural view of the country although, as Janusz Tazbir emphasises, “not before the end of the previous century (here: 19th century) people started to bring back the cultural contributions of the Polish Reformation”².

However, the dominant position of the Catholic Church in our country, very often causes difficulties in an appropriate and objective revealing of this multidimensional influence. Due to the fact that there are significantly more Catholics in Poland than Protestants, as well as there are numerous unresolved disputes between them from the past, it is very difficult for the two denominations to communicate.

¹ Por. Casanova, *Religie publiczne w nowoczesnym świecie*, Kraków 2005, p. 56.

² *Łyżka dziegciu w ekumenicznym miodzie*, Warszawa 2004, p. 85.

The religious, social and cultural potential that can be found in the doctrine, as well as *praxis* of the Churches with Protestant tradition, demands both to be discovered in a broader aspect, and, despite of difficulties and contradictions, deserves to be used in a more practical way, so that our society could function in a better and harmonious way.

“(…) New Religious Movements have especially displayed a social phenomenon which goes far beyond them, i.e. the phenomenon of expansion of religiousness on a large-scale which starts to be more and more coherent with the modern culture of an individual”³. The above statement about the contemporary role of religion and religiousness promoted by the New Religious Movements may look as if we are dealing with something completely new and hitherto unknown. However, that is not true. In many ways, this situation is similar to the beginnings of the Reformation when at the time of deep crisis the vision of the Church created by Luther turned out to be a modern view of a harmonious institution with political structure. Apart from that, it promised more care for an individual in his/her personal relation to God simultaneously not allowing for a conflict in social and organisational dimension, which was left to the secular authority.

The Reformation found favourable conditions in our country although according to some historians, for example, Tazbir and Kłoczowski, after temporary rise, it eventually fizzled out. Tomasz Węclawski talks about this in an interview published in the magazine titled *Europa* supplemented in the newspaper *Dziennik*. Already at the beginning of the interview concerning the role of Catholicism towards Polishness, the theologian from Poznań refers to the Reformation which in his opinion is a horizon from the perspective of which this question should be considered. According to Węclawski, “(…) there must have been such moments which, if only their influence was more effective, would organise the relation of the Polishness and Poles perhaps not as much to the Catholicism, but rather to Christianity. This kind of moment was, for instance, the end of the 16th century. However, it turned out that the attempt to conduct a reformation in Poland did not succeed because it was too weak (…). Węclawski believes that the reason for this can be found two centuries earlier at the end of the 14th century somewhere at the time when Kazimierz Wielki and the Jagiellon dynasty began to reign. I presume that when in Europe there was religious turmoil, in Poland there was only fight with the king, and perhaps that was the reason for the fact that later adoption of the Reformation was also only pragmatic. Something was missing; something did not happen. If in the century that preceded the Reformation some significant problems or challenge for the religious awareness of the Poles had occurred, the further history would have probably been different. Meanwhile, it seems that such a moment of real religious experience, similar to the Hussite movement in Bohemia, did not happen at that time. After a short reformation

³ Ibidem.

incident everything collapsed and then started a sequence of events that during the reign of the Saxons and the partitions preserved peculiar relationship between the Catholicism and the Polishness, which from the perspective of Poland was undoubtedly very important, but for the Catholicism not very significant. Poland did not matter for the Catholicism”⁴.

“Catholic” Face of Poland

As it has already been said, Catholicism is the dominant religion in Poland and has got significant influence on social, political and cultural life in our country. This position has been additionally strengthened by the historical, although very often overidealized and presented from only one perspective, role of the Roman Catholic Church in maintaining, saving and preserving the Polishness which at the same time selfishly ignored the contribution of infidels on this area. There is no point and need to expatiate more on this subject. I would rather like to concentrate on certain current signs indicating crisis in the Catholic Christianity, and as a matter of fact on one which according to me is not mentioned very often and which perhaps is crucial and have influence on other symptoms. What I mean is the lack of challenges for the religious awareness of the Polish people who have been identifying themselves with the Roman Catholic Church both in the past and at present, as well as lack of a real religious experience which in the past reckoning ineffectively tried to enlighten and meet the Protestantism.

This has accumulated in the relationship between Catholicism and Polishness which lacks harmony and balance because the Polishness prevails over the Catholicism and results in the fact that the religious aspect remains undervalued. It looks like a paradox because in the current Church dominate worship, piety, divine service and ritual, however, this is only an illusion, since the religious aspect, although strongly emphasised, does not perform the role that it should. It is some kind of colouring, background, envelope simply an excuse to multilateral and at the same time one-way, top, influence of the hierarchy on the believers. Consequently, the potential included in the Catholic message which refers to experience has not been yet satisfactorily used. The outstanding and developed organisation of the Church guarantees that it will function efficiently, however, it is not based on the religious experience, but on the strength of the structure which reaches as far as the conscience of a believer is concerned. Therefore, we could and still can observe in Poland rather institutional conflict of interests in the political and social aspects between the Church and the country rather than resistance of the world, inscribed in the nature of the Christianity, toward the Kingdom of the Christ which is “not of this world.”

⁴ *Europa. Tygodnik idei* (supplement to the newspaper *Dziennik*), No. 16 as of the 19th April 2008, p. 3.

Potential of the Protestantism New Vision of the Church

According to Luther, “The Church is a community of believers and not a hierarchy of positions”⁵. The Roman Catholic Church has been strengthening its impacts by improvement and consolidation of its structures independent of the state and secular authority, whereas, the national Protestant Churches entrusted themselves to a state. None of the forms of coexistence stood the test, however, as a consequence of the Reformation, the political structure and authorities underwent desecularisation which was extremely important and probably beneficial for the social orders at those days”⁶. Due to the fact that the Reformation led to division of Christianity in the countries which had to face the Religious pluralism, in fact it contributed to secularisation of politics and changed it into autonomous space, while by secularisation of the religious authority, the Protestantism facilitated desecularisation of the political authority and contributed to strengthening a will that would be controlled and validated by a nation”⁷.

The organisational structure of the Protestant Church is functional and distinctly separated from the spiritual dimension as opposed to the Roman Catholic Church where its basic, undemocratic, structure is part of the Church’s nature. For this reason, the

⁵ J. Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej*, Warszawa 2003, p. 58.

⁶ “The role of the Protestant Reformation can be analysed from three different perspectives. The most analysts will agree at least with the statement that the role of the Reformation was rather destructive. Undermining the claims to unity, sanctity, universality and apostolicity of the Church, which from that time was compelled to use the definition ‘Roman Catholic’ in order to be distinguished from other rival Christian Churches, the Reformation destroyed the system of the Western Christianity at the same time enabling something else to appear. Ravaging the old organic system, the Reformation caused, perhaps unintentionally, release of the secular domains from religious control. At some higher level, the Protestantism can be considered not only as ‘caustic substance’ which clears a foreground for something new, but also as a religious superstructure of a new order, religion of bourgeois modernity, religious ideology which at the times when ideological and class battles were still fought in a religious disguise, it served legitimisation of increasing role of the middle class and new entrepreneurial social classes, was conducive to formation of modern sovereign state in opposition to universal Christian monarchy and accompanied the triumph of new science over Christian scholasticism. Furthermore, there is also opinion according to which the Protestantism, especially the one that Weber called ‘ascetic Protestantism’, not only gave religious authorisation to the processes that were already taking place, but also the Protestantism itself inspired them and directed them in a special way by introducing new religious rules and new secular ethics. The Protestantism perceived in such a way was not only the main force of secularisation, but even a form of internal religious secularisation, the mean thanks to which the religious contents took institutionalised and secular form, at the same time entirely nullifying the division into religious and secular,” Casanova, pp. 50-52.

⁷ J.-P. Willaime, w: F. Lenoir, Y. Tardan-Masquelier (ed.), *Encyklopedia Religii Świata*, t. 2: *Zagadnienia problemowe*, Warszawa 2002, p. 2087.

Protestant Churches are more flexible, sensitive and open to cultural and political changes of the contemporary societies⁸. “Luther’s fight with *Romana tyrannis*, a Roman dictatorship, freed the faith from its institutional frames put on it in the Middle Ages and created from the faith the matter of conscience of an individual that is equal to God”⁹.

A New Vision of the Authority in Church; Separation of a Person From a Position

“The beginning of the Protestantism is connected with criticism of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages presented by Luther, and the question of the truth considered as superior to the unity of the Church. Rejection of any earthly intercession in the matter of salvation enables to make the Church visible and its law the subject of human law (*iure humano*). This implies rejection of the sacramental understanding of a church function which is a ministry and not ‘ordo’, as well as rejection of the hierarchy that is based on the Law of God, the historical apostolic succession” (Waldenfels, 366). According to Luther, “The Church is a community of believers and not a hierarchy of positions.” The Roman Catholic Church has been strengthening its impacts by improvement and consolidation of its structures independent of the state and secular authority, whereas, the national Protestant Churches entrusted themselves to a state. None of the forms of coexistence stood the test, however, as a consequence of the Reformation, the political structure and authorities underwent desacralisation which was extremely important and probably beneficial for the social orders at those days”¹⁰. Due to the fact that the Reformation led to

⁸ “The prophetic message of all Protestant reformers is the supremacy of God over everything which took form of serious attack, a protest similar to those carried out by prophets from the Old Testament, against practices and teaching of the Roman Catholic Church which, according to them, veiled the biggest power of God presenting itself as a perfect commune and usurp the right to God’s authority. They believe that when in the Church doctrine of inerrancy, sacramental acts, dogmatic statements, the highest institutions, objects of the sacred art. and philosophical beliefs appear to be ultimate and absolute, then we deal with a sign of idolatry which should be criticised and combat. On the other hand, the Protestant message encouraged believers to be faithful and give reliable testimony (*pro-testari* = publicly declare) of the truth of the God’s saving grace. Various reformers developed these thesis taking different paths. Nowadays, many Protestants are proud of multiplicity of ways to express oneself that originated during the Reformation. In the next chapters, special attention was paid to fixed internal attitudes and means of expression which are characteristic of the Protestant creed and manner of behaviour.” L.E. Sullivan, *Protestantyzm* (from the series: *Religie Ludzkości*), Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2001, ZYSK I S-KA WYDAWNICTWO, Poznań 2001, p. 7.

⁹ J. Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej*, Warszawa 2003, p. 58. Por. M. Luter, *O wolności chrześcijańskiej*, translation W. Niemczyk, w: L. Szczucki (ed.), *Myśl filozoficzno-religijna Reformacji XVI wieku*, Warszawa 1972, p. 40.

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a Roman dictatorship, freed the faith from its institutional frames put on it in the Middle Ages and creating from the faith the matter of conscience of an individual that is equal to God”¹³. This kind of view of the Church remains a challenge for the religious awareness because it does not create from the Church an omnipotent institution which tries to control the lives of its believers in every possible sphere. I have a feeling that in Poland prevails the theological view of the Church as a sacrament of salvation, however, it concerns only a small group of the clergymen and theologians, and it does not result in consciousness of being the Church, but rather conviction of being in a Church. This results in deconcentration and passivity of believers, as well as preserves the division into the shepherds and fold.

The Protestant clergymen hold their positions, but they do not own them. “When calling into question the legal validity of the papacy and announcing the priesthood of all believers, the Protestant Reformation struck serious blow to the clerical authority and it advanced the development toward a modern democratic state. Due to some of its aspects and factors that derive mostly from Calvinism and Baptism Churches, the Protestantism contributed to development of the democracy”¹⁴. The Protestantism, by calling into question the legal validity of the papacy and announcing the priesthood of all believers, inspired a model of the modern democratic state.

A New Doctrine and Religiousness (Its Biblical Sources and Concentration on an Individual)

“As Lucien Febvre rightly observed, in reality Luther did not accused ‘the Church of his time that it lives in a wrong way’ because he was not so naive, but that ‘it believes in a wrong way’”¹⁵. “The new vision of a religious community constituted prefiguration of perceiving the society as community of free and equal people who are guided in their behaviour by their own conscience and not with respect to these or other authorities. In other words, the Reformation is an important chapter in the history of the European individualism”¹⁶. The Catholic objectivization of the faith against the Protestant subjectivism of the faith¹⁷.

¹³ J. Szacki, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Por. M. Luter, *O wolności chrześcijańskiej*, translation W. Niemczyk, w: L. Szczucki (ed.), *Myśl filozoficzno-religijna Reformacji XVI wieku*, Warszawa 1972, p. 40.

¹⁴ J.-P. Willaime, w: F. Lenoir, Y. Tardan-Masquelier (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 2087.

¹⁵ G. Bedouelle OP, *Kościół w dziejach* (z serii: AMATECA. Podręczniki teologii katolickiej, 14), translation Aldona Fabiś, Poznań 1994, pp. 124-125.

¹⁶ J. Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej*, Warszawa 2003, p. 59.

¹⁷ Por. E. Drewermann, *Kler. Psychodram ideału*, Gdynia 2002, pp. 602-603.

Experience Against the System of Doctrine of the Faith

Nowadays, this important contribution of Luther and Protestantism is being realised anew. Thanks to that Luther did not absolutized the dogmatic (intellectual) aspect of the faith, but put emphasis on individual experience. "(...) At the beginning of the modern era, both a turn to the nature and to an individual became impossible to ignore postulates towards any form of religious life that would try to aspire to immanent reliability. Even though in paintings and religious symbols we can mostly find the 'Catholic' objectivization of Christianity, the most complete knowledge about the subjectivism of the faith is characteristic of the Protestantism."

The Protestantism made an anthropological turn in the Christian doctrine because it offered a version of Christianity that is not afraid of the world. It would be useful for the Polish society to promote a model of Christianity that does not worry about lack of institutional foundation. Of course, the fear concerning the future of Christianity, especially in the institutionalised version or as Waldenfels writes Christianity without the Church, as well as the question about the meaning of the piety, tradition and testimony of the Christian lifestyle in some post-Christian world seem to be entirely understandable. Nevertheless, to carry on the idea of Waldenfels, the Protestantism remains some sort of ecumenical and ecclesiastical community of the future, a necessary and crucial ferment" (page 366).

Summary/Conclusion

"(...) The cultural influence of the Protestantism was paradoxical because it conduced to the secularisation of Christianity, especially to its declericalization, and by giving value to the earthly power the Reformation spiritualized the worldliness. Therefore, there is an effort to preserve the religious obligation of the political power, however, simultaneously emphasising that religion is independent of any political power"¹⁸.

"(...) It is commonly known that apart from testifying, one of the most important functions of the religion, underlined by Henri Desroche, is contestation and creation of counter models of the society. Numerous examples of this can be found especially in Latin America. Religion served there as a machine that started social protests that led to utopia and which can be very strongly induced by religiosity"¹⁹.

¹⁸ J.-P. Willaime, w: F. Lenoir, Y. Tardan-Masquelier (ed.), *op. cit.*

¹⁹ D. Hervieu-Léger, *Wprowadzenie*, w: F. Lenoir, Y. Tardan-Masquelier (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 2063-2064.

“At the beginning of the modern era, both the turn to the nature and to an individual became impossible to ignore postulates towards any form of religious life that would try to aspire to immanent reliability. Even though in paintings and religious symbols we can mostly find the ‘Catholic’ objectivization of the Christianity, the most complete knowledge about the subjectivism of the faith is characteristic of the Protestantism. These two surfaces, objectivism of paintings and existential subjectivism are inseparable and mutually dependent, similarly as myth and history, as unawareness and awareness, as well as ID and EGO. Therefore, their separation and, what is more, their connection with two denominations, which resulted from the policy of the Church, dramatically proves that we cannot in our western Christianity form such an integral humanity which would constitute a synthesis full of tensions of the previously established structures of unawareness, as well as fears and hopes that characterise individual consciousness”²⁰.

Max Weber proved that (...) the modern epoch is an epoch that became “indifferent to gods and prophets”²¹. Moreover, Durkheim wrote that “if there is truth that through the history became unquestionable, it is that religion starts to play smaller and smaller part in the social life. At first, religion includes everything that is connected with society and religion, therefore, these two words become synonymous. Later, the political, economic and scientific functions start to release from the religious function; they form themselves separately and become increasingly more secular. If it is possible to say like that, God who initially took part in all human relations, starts to gradually withdraw from them. He abandons the human world and their disputes, however, He still predominates over this world from high and far place...”²²

²⁰ E. Drewermann, pp. 602-603.

²¹ J.-P. Willaime, w: F. Lenoir, Y. Tardan-Masquelier (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 2087, p. 2065.

²² E. Durkheim, *O podziale pracy społecznej*, Warszawa 1999, p. 217.