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Zygmunt Krasiński and the Resurrectionists on Polish Politics and the Revolution

Zygmunt Krasiński e i Resurrezionisti sul Tema della politica Polacca e la rivoluzione

L'articolo analizza le analogie tra il pensiero politico di Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859), poeta romantico, e la riflessione sulla politica dei più importanti rappresentanti della Congregazione della Risurrezione di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo. L'autore del testo evidenzia come Krasiński apprezzasse molto il lavoro pastorale e nazionale dei Resurrezionisti, riponendo in loro grande fiducia. Mantenne con loro una regolare corrispondenza (con Padre Aleksander Jełowicki e Padre Hieronim Kajsiwicz), dalla quale emersero significative analogie tra la riflessione sul tema della politica esposta dal poeta e dai succitati ecclesiastici. Sia Krasiński che i Resurrezionisti consideravano la religione cattolica il fondamento della polesità intesa come comunione di spirito e cultura. Mantenere questa comunità rimanendo fedeli all'identità cattolica della nazione polacca era, sottolineavano all'unisono sia Krasiński che i Resurrezionisti, una *conditio sine qua non* affinché la nazione polacca potesse riconquistare l'indipendenza politica. Su questa strada, tuttavia, vi era una seria minaccia rappresentata dalla rivoluzione. Come

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sottolinea l'autore della „Commedia non divina”, la rivoluzione minacciò la Polonia sia da Occidente (tramite le correnti radicali che si ispiravano all'eredità anticristiana della Rivoluzione francese) sia da Oriente (tramite la Russia, intesa come un'insurrezione rivoluzionaria istituzionalizzata). Questo modo di interpretare la minaccia rivoluzionaria era condiviso dai Resurrezionisti, destinatari delle lettere del poeta.

Parole chiave: Zygmunt Krasiński, Aleksander Jełowicki, Hieronim Kajsiewicz, Resurrezionisti, Cattolicesimo, Grande Emigrazione Polacca, ordini religiosi.

Słowa kluczowe: Zygmunt Krasiński, Aleksander Jełowicki, Hieronim Kajsiewicz, zmartwychwstańcy, katolicyzm, Wielka Emigracja, zakony.

Keywords: Zygmunt Krasiński, Aleksander Jełowicki, Hieronim Kajsiewicz, the Resurrectionists, Catholicism, the Great Polish Emigration, religious orders.

This is a Catholic who (like most people of his age) dwells on various doubts, who wishes to explain and reasonably justify his doubts as well as his beliefs; who explains and develops various articles of faith in his own way, not always in harmony with the teachings of the Church; who continues to believe in the highest destiny of the Church and seeks the fulfillment of these destinies, and the more he desires that fulfillment, the higher he comprehends that destiny, the more difficult, the more impatiently he endures the pettiness and weaknesses of the people in the Church. [...] The disagreement with the Church, for what it is, comes from secular and political matters, and to these alone it applies; his faith is more thorough and tempered within him, more based on reasoning and turned into conviction, than in the vast majority of laymen, whether of the 16th or 19th century.¹

In this manner, Zygmunt Krasiński's "religious concepts" were described over a century ago by Stanisław Tarnowski. In his opus magnum, devoted to the life and works of the author of "The Un-divine Comedy," the Cracow scholar also quoted the words of Piotr Semenenko of 1839, shortly after meet-

1 S. Tarnowski, *Zygmunt Krasiński*, vol II, Kraków 1912, pp. 409, 411.

ing the bard in Rome: “he [Krasiński – GK] seems to have no faith at all, or even more than just appears.”² Tarnowski commented on the opinion of the prominent resurrectionist with the words: “he was wrong, there was more of it [the Catholic faith – GK] there than it seemed.”³

Krasiński’s biographer, meticulously distinguishing between “secular and political matters” from strictly dogmatic issues in the approach of the author of *Irydion* to Catholicism, expressing his polemic against the strict opinion of the future member of the Resurrectionist Congregation, was absolutely right. Zygmunt Krasiński affirmed the role of religion as the only one which “unites truly broken and disturbed people, because it is the most common idea of the most contradictory facts! – and the only one that, by becoming mutual to them, can bind them together into one organism!”⁴

He saw particular virtues in Catholicism, because it alone “binding nations among tribes, and institutions hierarchies, diversities, and moods in nations; therefore, ordering the rich to have mercy and love, and the poor to have love and faith in the afterlife, it does not allow the world to deteriorate into just two sides fighting over a piece of bread or a piece of cloth, or a piece of gold.”⁵ Catholicism prevents social and cultural animosity from growing into a form of “animal strife”, which omits “no higher organism”, and at the end of which will be “no universal, undifferentiated church – but evil! A church of bodies and lusts of those ruling this body.” Rescue from such a scenario of events should be sought in “the Catholic spirit, in a strange way able to bind everything together, and bind these unions with a knot of love, that is, to bring harmony.”⁶

Catholicism, as Krasiński emphasized, required not only to be professed, but also “knowledge of how to do it.”⁷ One had to comprehend how to apply

2 Ibid., p. 406.

3 Ibid.

4 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Stanisław Małachowski, 17/03/1846*, in: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Stanisława Małachowskiego*, ed. Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1979, pp. 116–117.

5 Ibid., pp. 258–259.

6 Ibid., p. 259.

7 “But what would you do with people who are constantly telling you about Catholicism, but do not know it themselves? Immortality of detached, pure thought has never been, nor is in Catholicism, rather with the Protestants” (*Letter from Zyg-*

the “binding” qualities of Catholicism to the political, social, and cultural reality in which the Polish nation found itself in the 19th century. It is not the scope of this article to consider in detail the issue of “Catholicism and Polish independence” in Krasiński’s thinking. However, it should be stressed that this issue cannot be properly presented without taking into account what, for the bard, was the origin of his reflections: the purpose of Poland’s history. As he wrote in one of his letters, Poland “should stand up to all hell and against all hell, I say, because although it is one thing, it comes in very different shapes and deceives people’s eyes, and its various forms derive from whether it is concentrated in one Gengis-Khan figure, or whether, after it disappears, it spills over the crowd, and after the mass imagines the Gengis-Khan tradition and the eastern world lurking in the west. Poland did not perish, because it would save and salvage the world. If would not save and salvage the world, overcoming hell of any kind, it would perish. Whoever would easternize Poland entirely, de-westernize it completely, it will doom it.”⁸

The *sine qua non* condition for the Polish nation to fulfill this historical calling was to remain faithful to the Catholic religion. Thanks to Catholicism, Poland remains above “the abyss of the pantheistic sea of Panslavism.” “Only Catholicism shields her from those deep, deadly waves. If not for it, her body would already be crashing in them and slowly melting down into the depths.”⁹

Poles are threatened not only by the “Gengis-Khan tradition” embodied in “Moscow-self-imposed” radicalism. “Slaughter of the spirit”, is far more dangerous than the “slaughter of the body” brought upon us by the invaders (the destruction of the Polish state at the end of the 18th century) is also prepared by “crowd-radical” radicalism coming from Western Europe and understood by the poet as a reference to the anti-Catholic tradition of the French Rev-

munt Krasiński Bronisław Trentowski, 14/09/1847, in: Z. Krasiński, Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego, Edwarda Jaroszyńskiego, Bronisława Trentowskiego, ed. Z. Sudolski, vol. 2, Warszawa 1988, p. 109).

8 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to August Cieszkowski, 16/04/1848, in: Z. Krasiński, Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego, Edwarda Jaroszyńskiego, Bronisława Trentowskiego, ed. Z. Sudolski, vol. 1, Warszawa 1988, p. 341.*

9 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Bronisław Trentowski, 9/02/1858, in: Z. Krasiński, Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego, vol. 2, p. 258.*

olution.¹⁰ The latter radicalism found a growing circle of sympathizers among the Polish political and cultural elite, which was dominated by “screamers, monkeys of the year 93, pedants, choreographers of theatrical mimicry of murder and slaughter for the future. In other words, the devil’s spawn “from the hell of stupidity.”¹¹

The Polish nation must therefore walk between the Scylla of Moscow despotism and the Charybdis of revolution, although, as would become clear in his correspondence with the Resurrectionists, the poet would express his deep conviction that the two extremes were two sides of one coin (of revolution). The condition for the transition is loyalty to Catholicism, which is “the inner spark that constitutes the soul of the Motherland.” If we succumb to the temptation to surrender to this “spark”, to which Polish patriots in the 19th century who converted to Islam succumbed, in order to gain greater opportunities to carry out independence activism in Ottoman Turkey (the formation of Polish legions), we will commit “the nonsense of nonsense.” One cannot “trample the motherland’s religion with one’s feet” in order to “make the body of the motherland grow, to expand or regain its borders.”¹² Independence – yes, but not at any cost. “*Per nefas* no one is resurrected, but everyone is descended into nothingness. Resurrection is the moral result of acting continuously *per fas*! As for the individual, so for the nation.”¹³

The pursuit of political independence must not make us morally inferior, or worse, lead us to lose the most important goal of human existence – eternal salvation. The pursuit of independence must ennoble us. Only growth in individual holiness can lead us to freedom, both in individual and national sense.¹⁴

- 10 G. Kucharczyk, *Myśl polityczna Zygmunta Krasińskiego*, Poznań 1995, p. 55. O „rzezi ducha” see: *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Stanisław Małachowski, 19/03/1846*, in: *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 11 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Bronisław Trentowski, 4/01/1847*, in: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego*, vol. 2, p. 80.
- 12 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to gen. Władysław Zamoyski, 29/01/1851*, in: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do różnych adresatów*, ed. Z. Sudolski, vol. 2, Warszawa 1991, p. 78.
- 13 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Stanisław Egbert Koźmian, 4/12/1851*, in: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Koźmianów*, ed. Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1977, p. 247.
- 14 The bard advised his friend August Cieszkowski: „Remember, there is only one piece of advice for this, be pure within yourself and holy, as a goal, as an intention,

Therefore, writes Krasiński, there is a need for a “national holiness” that knows that “Christhood in politics and history is no different than in religion,” makes one disown “muddy measures” on the road to independence, and instead encourages to “forgive resentments and harms, to lift oneself higher than vengeance, to bring measure to the world.” He advises “not to disorganize others, but to organize oneself – in other words, to become, in the midst of the turmoil of the European world, the highest moral nobility, therefore, a power”; a power that will make “both Moscow and the Red Republic crumble against us.”¹⁵

Zygmunt Krasiński personally knew the founders of the Congregation of the Resurrection. The evidence of this is his correspondence with Priests Aleksander Jełowicki and Hieronim Kajsiewicz. He knew and valued them. He held in particular esteem the latter clergyman, considering him “the bravest, most sincere, most cordial” of all Resurrectionists, who “is broad-minded and deep-hearted in spirit.”¹⁶ He praised his preaching abilities (“Polish heart and Polish speech, of Skarga”) and the possibility of talking to him not only about strictly religious topics, but also those “concerning Poplars [Poland].” At Father Kajsiewicz’s house the poet used to make confessions, and a special evidence of the bard’s trust in the priest was the instruction he left nearly five years before his death requesting that the very member of the Congregation of the Resurrection would review his works to see if there was “anything heretical” in them (if such a thing was found, the poet ordered to destroy the fragments questioned by Father Kajsiewicz).¹⁷

as an act of love for God and people. This will raise you ahead of yourself from the abyss, as I am no longer talking about citadels, I am talking about your own inner abysses.” *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to August Cieszkowski, 2/03/1848*, in: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego*, vol. 2, p. 326.

- 15 *Letters from Zygmunt Krasiński to Jerzy Lubomirski, 26/07/1848 and 13/10/1848*, in: Idem., *Listy do Jerzego Lubomirskiego*, ed. Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1965, pp. 489–490, 503.
- 16 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Jerzy Lubomirski, 20–25/04/1854*, in: Ibid., p. 602. See: J. Bystrzycki, *Krasiński a Kajsiewicz*, Kraków 1912.
- 17 The poet was specifically referring to the „The Last” poem. Krasiński wrote to Jerzy Lubomirski in April 1854 in this regard: „If the feeling that guided its invention is fulfilled, and among the traces, if you find anything heretical, throw it away.” Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Jerzego Lubomirskiego*, pp. 601–602. The Resurrec-

Not only affiliations originating from personal acquaintances with prominent Resurrectionists connected the poet with the congregation. The program publicized by Krasiński to aspire to “national holiness” as a necessary path to national independence perfectly harmonized with what the most prominent representatives of the Resurrectionist congregation (Aleksander Jełowicki, Hieronim Kajsiewicz, Piotr Semenenko) and his “spiritual father” Bogdan Jański advocated in their writings and homilies. The latter stressed that “through Catholicism alone, that is, through the improvement of life, through religious life, without any use of revolutionary means, our homeland can be saved.”¹⁸

The same thought shines through in the words of Father Aleksander Jełowicki from the beginning of the January Uprising about the “troublemaking youth”: “They do not pray, and yet, as they say, they care about the Homeland. If these sinful Poles care about Poland, why don’t they want to make a sacrifice for her that is to anticipate any other sacrifice, a sacrifice of their sins? They do not understand, or do not want to understand, that without this sacrifice all others will be of little use.”¹⁹ After all, only “to those who seek the Kingdom of God, will also be given the Kingdom of Poland.”²⁰

Father H. Kajsiewicz encouraged “God’s patriotism” or “love of the homeland in God” in 1843 in his sermon (later published) “*O trojakim życiu i trojakim patriotyzmie* [On the Threefold Life and Threefold Patriotism]. Krasiński’s observation that Catholicism has a unique ability to «bind», echoes in Father Semenenko’s words that «the place of the motherland in the soul is replaced by the Church, not that the motherland should lose anything from it, or even less should the soul be rugged, but that the motherland enters the Church, and the Church embraces

tionist Fathers, through the mouth of Father P. Semenenko, took this instruction of the poet seriously, demanding (unsuccessfully) after his death from the bard’s heirs not to publish his „Treaty on the Trinity in God and the Trinity in Man” as „leading to pantheism, or omnibenevolence, and especially to autotheism, or self-deity, the main error of German philosophy.” In this situation, the publication of this work, argued Father Semenenko, „would be an injustice done to the noble deceased,” „the highest injustice, a cruel unmercy.” Cit. per M. Zdziechowski, *Wizya Krasińskiego: ze studyów nad literaturą i filozofią polską*, Kraków 1912, pp. 75–76.

18 Cit. per B. Szlachta, *Ład, Kościół, Naród*, Kraków 1996, p. 38.

19 A. Jełowicki, *Cztery kazania narodowe*, Lipsk 1864, p. 4.

20 Ibid., p. 23.

the motherland and hugs it to her bosom.»²¹ As Father Jełowicki said, “the faith that represents the life of the Polish nationality is only the apostolic, Catholic, Roman faith, and so much that not only our people, but also the neighboring nations, for the honor and glory of our nation, call the Catholic faith the Polish faith.” Therefore, “the truly Polish faith is the Catholic faith, hence Polish government and Polish politics should be truly Catholic.”²²

Krasiński was also connected with the Resurrectionists in his views on the problem of the revolution. The poet had no doubt that “revolutions in the social order are monstrosities” and are “the disease of humanity, not its salvation”. Every revolutionary, the author of the “Un-divine Comedy” underlined, makes the same mistake of not accepting that “it is impossible to form the Kingdom of God out of cattle in the earthly world, and whoever dreams of it as not a goal, but of a tomorrow-ready reality, only reaches the kingdom of Satan.”²³

Father Kajsiewicz in 1849 in his “Sermon on the National Spirit and the Revolutionary Spirit” warned his compatriots against expecting anything positive from “foreign social revolutions,” pointing out that from these imported coups nothing else “but greater evil” could be expected.²⁴

The correspondence of “Irydion’s” author with Father Jełowicki and Father Kajsiewicz can be treated as a mini-study on the revolution. In a letter addressed to the former, the poet gives a brief description of the revolutionary situation (“the epoch of antichrists”) defined by “all human absolutisms, whether Moscow-self-imposed or mass-radical.”²⁵ He made a similar analysis of the revolutionary danger in his correspondence with Father Kajsiewicz.²⁶

21 Cit. per W. Feldman, *Dzieje polskiej myśli politycznej w okresie porozbiorowym*, vol. 1, Warszawa [s.a.], p. 215.

22 A. Jełowicki, *Cztery kazania narodowe*, p. 27.

23 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Stanisław Małachowski, 3/04/1846*, in: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Stanisława Małachowskiego*, p. 142. More widely on the question of revolution in the thought of Krasiński, see: G. Kucharczyk, *Myśl polityczna Zygmunta Krasińskiego*, Poznań 1995, pp. 43–55.

24 H. Kajsiewicz, *O duchu rewolucyjnym*, p. 126.

25 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Aleksander Jełowicki, 26/12/1848*, in: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do różnych adresatów*, vol. 2, p. 226.

26 “Terrible absolutism is on its way to the world! It will be followed by terrible demagogy! Everywhere blood, oppression, tyranny and lie.” *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Hieronim Kajsiewicz, 22/08/1849*, in: *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Over time, the poet recognized other “hellish alliances” leading to widespread revolutionary upheavals. In 1852, he shared with Father Kajsiewicz his conviction about the alliance of German Protestantism with the “Eastern Church,” or rather, with “the secular authorities [the Tsar – GK] on the basis of which this Church is built! This power will not refuse to help. It will attract the German sects to its ranks, punish them and lead them against Rome!”²⁷

As a matter of fact, the main vehicle of revolutionary upheaval was tsarist Russia. The conflict between “Moscow and the Reds” was only apparent, because, as the poet convinced Father Jełowicki in 1849, both Moscow and the radical social and political currents seek to “soil and criminalize the cause of order and the cause of freedom.”²⁸ The system of Russian autocracy was an institutionalized revolution. This thought, so characteristic of Krasiński’s perspective on Russia, was clearly echoed in his correspondence with the Resurrectionists. The fundamental “feature of the Moscow character,” as Krasiński aimed to convince Semenenko in 1856, “is that just as others are ashamed of the bad, they [Russians] are ashamed of the good. If they commit something good, it immediately seems to them that they have betrayed their tradition, that they have betrayed themselves and the mysterium of the state.”²⁹

Yet the “mysterium” of the Russian state is the revolution and the desire to “export” it. The poet did not believe in Russia’s good intentions after it lost the Crimean War. He did not expect that under the rule of the new Tsar Alexander II, Russia would turn from a “robber” into a civilized state. On the contrary. He predicted that Russia would face a bloody revolution similar to the one that had befallen France in 1789, and that the new Tsar would certainly not cease to consider himself “the heir to the Mongolian harshness.”³⁰

The different emanations of revolutionary danger observed in nineteenth-century Europe, however, were the result of another revolution that took place on the Old Continent at the end of the 18th century. The Pandora’s box turned out to be the Partitions of Poland. “The partition of Poland

27 Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Hieronim Kajsiewicz, 1/08/1852, in: *Ibid.*, p. 258.

28 Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Aleksander Jełowicki, 13/08/1849, in: *Ibid.*, p. 228.

29 Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Hieronim Kajsiewicz, 12/09/1856, in: *Ibid.*, p. 264.

30 Letters from Zygmunt Krasiński to Hieronim Kajsiewicz, 11 and 12/09/1856, in: *Ibid.*, pp. 261, 264.

was the desocialization of European society”³¹ Krasiński wrote to Father Kajsiewicz in 1856. Therefore, the reconstruction of the Polish state will be the opposite of the revolution. It will restore “the carnal balance of Europe” and fulfill “the relentless moral necessity”. Only the independent Poland is able to diverge the revolutionary cataclysm carried by “human absolutism” away from our continent.³²

A similar diagnosis of revolutionary processes can be found in the writings of the Resurrectionists. The partitions of Poland “clearly showed that there is neither law nor justice in politics anymore, and that strength alone means everything”, and that the “lesson” of this “the people learned all too well and all too quickly.”³³ One recalls Krasiński’s words that “Nicholas and communism are one and the same thing, communism will come out of Nicholas as Nicholas will come out of communism”, while reading Father Kajsiewicz’s diagnosis that “in France, in Germany, they are chattering about communism, in Russia they are putting it into practice.”³⁴

Abstract: The article examines the similarities between the political thought of Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859), a romantic poet, and the reflection on the politics of the most prominent representatives of the Congregation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The author of the paper emphasizes how Krasiński greatly appreciated the pastoral and national work of the Resurrectionists, having great confidence in them. He carried on a regular correspondence with them (with Father A. Jełowicki and Father H. Kajsiewicz), from which emerged significant similarities between the reflection on the subject of politics exposed by the poet and the aforementioned clergymen. Both

31 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Hieronim Kajsiewicz, 12/09/1856*, in: *Ibid.*, p. 265.

32 *Letter from Zygmunt Krasiński to Aleksander Jełowicki, 26/12/1848*, in: *Ibid.*, p. 226.

33 H. Kajsiewicz, *Kazanie o duchu narodowym i duchu rewolucyjnym*, in: *Idem, O duchu rewolucyjnym*, p. 110.

34 The Polish clergyman was referring to the structure of Russian society, in which the peasantry, „and that is half of Russia, also shows communist inclinations.” *Idem, Papieżstwo i sprawa rzymska z punktu widzenia petersburskiego przez dyplomatę rosyjskiego*, in: *idem, O duchu rewolucyjnym*, pp. 145–146. Quoted words of Z. Krasiński on the relations of Tsar Nicolas I with communism can be found in the poet’s *Letter to Bronisław Trentowski dating back to 10/03/1849*, in: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego*, vol. 2, p. 177.

Krasiński and the Resurrectionists considered the Catholic religion to be the foundation of Polishness understood as a community of spirit and culture. Preserving this community while remaining faithful to the Catholic identity of the Polish nation was, stressed jointly by both Krasiński and the Resurrectionists, a *sine qua non* for the Polish nation to regain political independence. On this path, however, there was a serious threat posed by the revolution. As the author of "Undivine Comedy" points out, the revolution threatened Poland both from the West (through radical currents inspired by the anti-Christian legacy of the French Revolution) and from the East (through Russia, understood as an institutionalized revolutionary insurrection). This way of interpreting the revolutionary danger was shared by the Resurrectionists, the recipients of the poet's letters.

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