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THE TAMING OF IRRELIGION. ESSAY ON THE ABUSE OF THE NON-SACRED IDEA

Abstract: I am going to outline the problem of the disintegration of the Latin hierarchical opposition *religio/irreligio*, showing the taming process of irreligion in the (post)modern culture. This marginal phenomenon – situated by ancient Romans in the domain of negativity – is a reactive cultural trend perceptible only in context. According to modern sociology, irreligion is an attitude towards religion which is not a complete rejection of belief (disbelief), but rather a selective lack of belief – unbelief. How did it come about, is it possible today to consider the hypothesis that the above-mentioned opposition functions as an operational unit, generating contemporary sociomorphism – often unconsciously, within the framework of antagonistic cooperation? In this view irreligion is not only a contamination of the source of the Latin tradition (*religio*), but it is subject to demarginalization and adopted as a tool of controlling religion – as its negative or its undesired, unwanted assistant in the realization of its soteriological mission. I would argue that the increasingly numerous and less and less surprising micro-provocations of the *irregulares* – some of which were presented during the Brussels exhibition of *Irreligia/ Irreligion* (2001/2002) – although often intended to be iconoclastic (lately in a soft version), have targeted only the idolatrous and imperial dimension of religion. Therefore, they cannot desecrate the revealed faith.

Keywords: blasphemy – irreligion – religion without religion – offending religious feelings – unbelief.

Religion is accompanied by irreligion as rationalism is by irrationalism. This does not mean that religion should be hastily identified with rationalism and irreligion with irrationalism. It is rather a question of the tension that the Latin prefix *ir-* introduces into our life. With its negative connotations, it may signal confrontation (as in the case of Przemysław Kwiek, creating a painting from the series *The Vanguard paints lilacs* in his garden in Łomianki during

the Corpus Christi procession in 2000 in remembrance of the irreligious Francesco Goya and his *Village Procession*). It is the fundamental tension between the center religion aspires to be, and a margin that it must produce, e.g. in the form of irreligious art, especially from the time of Goya, Füssli, or Blake. The prefix *ir-* can also bring to mind Derrida's attitude to religion, rooted in Emmanuel Levinas' concept of "a relation without relation". In deconstructivism we cannot speak about a rigid distinction between the center and margins, because this opposition was reversed and turned into an optical figure (an op-position). According to this heretical hermeneutics, irreligion – as a dangerous supplement of religion – cannot be removed from its religious source. Irreligion – which naturally presupposes religion – is a richer concept, at least in its sense of non-sacral creation (as when Hubert Czerepok requested a holy mass in the intention of the success of his 2000 exhibition, and then he filmed this mass and exhibited the film in a gallery in order to create an ironic margin of the Catholic belief¹). This provocative and embarrassing richness of *ir-/religion* may originate merely from its secondary nature – as only a linguistic and historical corollary of religion. While the older idea of religion seems to function independently over centuries in language and social practice – as a word coming from the mouth of God, determining the meaning of life, *irreligion* cannot function in this way, because it is a syncategorematic term and a relative concept. Irreligion is a reactive phenomenon, a trend of culture perceptible only in context. However, and this is a spectacular evidence of the thaumaturgic power of modern philosophy, irreligion – although perceived negatively – attempts to establish itself in the domain of positivity as a sociomorphic ideal.

THE OPPOSITION *RELIGIO* / *IRRELIGIO*

If someone demands a clear concept of irreligion, let him first give a precise definition of religion. Even if he provides a definition, based on the official dogmas or – worse – on his own convictions, it would be impossible to draw the clear boundaries of the concept, because the number of possible irreligious aberrations is as large as in the case of any other non-prototypical behaviours. *Error immensus est* – and the irreligious act, with all its erratic ways, and its culmination in blasphemy as the supreme manifestation of the non-sacred idea seems to be a most enigmatic, incomprehensible phenomenon.

¹ K. Piotrowski, *The Promises of Unism, Zonism, Contextualism, and (Dia)Critical Art. Some Aspects of Performativity in Polish Art (1923-2008)*, "Art Inquiry" 2012, no. 14, p. 140.

It does not have to be equated with impiety – a total negation or a hostility towards religion, but it can be an arrogance of spirit – some hidden diversion, sometimes a perverse tendency for disobedience or defiance. It can also involve all the ailments mentioned by Clement of Alexandria as sources of heresy: *agnoia* or *amathia* (lack of knowledge), *oiesis* (basing oneself on suppositions), *doxosophia* (apparent wisdom) and *pseudonymos gnosis* (presumptive gnosis). In our times, postmodernism – promoting various marginalia – has created its own specific version of irreligion, which takes the form of the denigration of religion, which supposedly has always been a contaminated source.

Thus before we define irreligion, let us consider the nature of religion. It is necessary to go back to the Latin word *religio*: “Rome and religion” – wrote Tadeusz Zieliński “have been bound together for centuries in a mysterious affinity. It was not without reason that the same word *religio*, adopted in all civilized languages and irreplaceable by an expression of indigenous origin, was created in Rome. Religion is not synonymous with faith, conviction, or piety, it is a mysterious chain ‘binding’ us (*religans*) to something above us, whatever it might be”². *Religio* originated as a contract – a template for the future rules of international co-existence. The cities later forming the Roman empire reached an agreement not to wage wars, and to recognize each other’s gods; they would subsequently also adopt other deities, including the Hellenic and the Oriental ones. This contractual bond was modeled on the one within a family. *Religio* gravitated towards familial affinities, developing by an adoption, within the framework of the imperial conquest, of this chain binding the *religans* of the Roman Empire (the Latin term *imperium* denoting the authority of the highest military, civil, and religious officials in the country: dictators, consuls and praetors, and later Caesars). Therefore, *religio* is associated with the power of the *imperium* and of the authorities commanding and setting rules. According to Cicero, *religio* is attention to customs and laws. How should one understand it in a country without an empire, that is without power, order (*imperium*)? The Latin word *religio* is also related to *pietas*, which means a sense of duty, piety, fear of God, and respect for power, parents, family, or for something above us. *Pietas* also means love, especially familial love, and all its variants, such as paternal or filial. Later *pietas* would also denote attachment, friendship, and even patriotism. These correspond with other meanings of *pietas*, such as submissiveness and respect, piety, justice, goodness, mercy, and grace.

² T. Zieliński, *Rzym i jego religia. Studium z cyklu: Współzawodnicy chrześcijaństwa*, Wyd. Z. Pomarański i S-ka, Zamość 1920, p. 3.

By contrast, in the Latin vocabulary the term *irreligio* denoted godlessness and unscrupulousness. To behave in an irreligious way means to commit sacrilege, to utter blasphemy or to act without due respect, i.e. to break the bond. Maurillo Adriani³ thus pointed out that *irreligio* is related to *impietas*: disrespect, lese-majeste, impiety, iniquity, knavery, roguery, and even crime. In others words, irreligion is neglect of religion (as in the ancient Rome, described by Ortega y Gasset), which – paradoxically – may co-exist with the state of institutional hypertrophy (Ludwig Feuerbach noted in his historiography of religious beliefs that the ancient Romans even had a god of fertilizer). This allows us to understand the crisis of religion at the time when people tried to deify all acts of nature, balancing between personification (the Hellenes) and desubstantialization (multiplying divine attributes) – as described by Tadeusz Zieliński, who studied the agrarian origins of the Roman religion. A further consequence of this process was the deification of humans – for example of Caesar Augustus. Such faith is easy to abandon, especially when his successors turned out to be cruel or crazy. Isn't it better and safer to honor some abstract concepts – Pietas or Fortune – or to become a stoic?

In its literal and original sense, irreligion refers in the Latin vocabulary to all kinds of anti-social activities stemming from wildness, haughtiness or perversion (the love of cunning, sin, error, and revolt). It has been situated in the domain of negativity. With the expansion of Christian civilization that disseminated the understanding of *vera religio* doctrine (St. Augustine), and thus the term of *irreligio*, the concept gained universality, becoming a descriptive tool in the analysis of other beliefs and cults in the world.

Any new definition of the opposition religion/irreligion cannot disregard those Roman origins. Irreligion is thus understood as – as Adriani has it – as pre-religion, anti-religion, para-religion or de-religion etc. This shows how difficult it is to grasp its historical variables, its many contextual meanings. All these terms attempt to explain irreligion (more or less explicitly) as a kind of transgression against the binding religion. The explanation of its genesis and its functioning always refers to the rules of the dominant religion, flouted by the *irregulares*. The manifestations of irreligion include not only the explicitly hostile attitudes to religion or the open declarations of refusal to serve God, but also the negligence of religious practices. The Roman Catholic Church has inherited this imperial tradition of the Latin *religio*, for centuries producing irreligious margins.

³ M. Adriani, *L'irreligione. Note sulla morfologia del non-sacro*, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze 1958.

THE OPPOSITION OF *REGULARITAS*/IRREGULARITAS

In the Roman Catholic Church, culturally the closest to us, the duality of religion and irreligion is easy to pin down. It is worth mentioning here the opposition of *regularitas* and *irregularitas*, which is fundamental for the history of this Church, because these categories regulate the conditions of the accession to priesthood⁴. Religion – which has to function efficiently as an institution – must inevitably assume irreligion and recognize it, excluding the *irregulares*. The Church as a *regularitas* thus systematically deals with the *irregularitas*. In the canon law the term *irregularitas* refers to the inability to take the holy orders. Since the beginning of the Church, councils and synods have been carefully specifying the ideal of the *regularitas*. *Irregularitas* – a legal term coined as late as the 12th century by Pope Innocent III – defines the features that exclude a given individual from priesthood by natural or divine law. In Poland it was rendered as *bezkapłaństwo* (priesthood-lessness), *niezrządność* (non-orderliness), and *nieprawidłowość* (irregularity). It is a term containing the meaning of Latin *incapucitas*, referring to those unable to receive the holy orders. In those times the Church included in that category all those whose occupation did not deserve respect: mountebanks, clowns, innkeepers, butchers, tormentors, usurers, and suchlike – all the ignoble people branded with the *defectus famae* (apparently it was forgotten that Matthew was called by Jesus of Nazareth to be one of the Twelve Disciples despite the fact that the profession of a publican was perhaps the most hated and despised by the Jews). One can easily point out the types and oddities characteristic of that specific group which could not hope for the respect of the ecclesiastical and secular powers, offering entertainment to the potentates, but more often causing trouble. The awareness of those facts belonged to the canon of the encyclopaedic education which for centuries manifested its revolutionary and anticlerical bias. The common people were aware – Waław Berent wrote in *The Living Stones: The Minstrel's Story* [*Żywe kamienie: opowieści rybalt*], 1918] that the mountebanks could be controlled neither by the King, nor by the Church. Many groups of the *irregulares* can be enumerated here. It is enough to realize that they are all those committing the crime of apostasy from faith (“apostasy proper”), bringing obstacles upon the faithful and leading them to a schism connected with heresy. Many of the mentioned defects disappear or can be removed, and some of them require the dispensation of the Head of the Church who is guided by its good.

⁴ *Irregularitas*, in: *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna Ilustrowana*, ed. J. Alexandrowicz, J. Banzemer, S. Sikorski, Warszawa 1903, vol. 31-32, pp. 136-138.

Although religion provides many benefits and has played a special creative role in the history of mankind, in the social practice it has also produced a number of negative effects – some margins that seem to be strange and incomprehensible in a temporal perspective. Today, although there are no slaves and other categories of *irregulares*, and it is possible e.g. for an educated actor-comedian to become a priest, some groups may still regard themselves as victims of the oppressive *regularitas*. Currently, the Church is grappling with the problem of homosexuality. One of the many questions arising in this context is whether homosexual (wo)men can be ordained to the priesthood, or whether, for the good of the institution, the Church should rather refuse to grant this privilege to them, especially when they are not passive homosexuals? (This type of clerical transgression was suggested in the film by Jacek Markiewicz, with Paweł Althamer as the camera operator, in which a naked man adored the figure of Christ on a Gothic crucifix, fraudulently used in the National Museum in Warsaw. This was possible because the old lady – the custodian who watched over the filmmakers – dropped off to sleep).

Just as in the case of *irregularitas*, the modern times have also brought a change in the interpretation of blasphemy as the most serious manifestation of irreligion. Many contemporary behaviours would be considered blasphemous in the original understanding of this term. Blasphemers included those who had lost their faith, except those who believed otherwise. Blasphemy resulted in a dismissal from offices, an exclusion from the clerical state or excommunication. Pope Gregory IX included blasphemy among the crimes against the church and introduced various penalties and public penances. A blasphemer had to stand for seven Sundays during the Holy Mass at the gate of the temple, to fast on bread and water for seven Fridays; moreover, he had to feed the poorest during the period of penance or to carry out other tasks ordered by the bishop. In the case of opposition, the penalty of interdict was applied and the law deprived the offender of an ecclesiastical funeral.

The secular authority – upon the request by the affected Church – also imposed penalties on the blasphemers. In the 14th and 15th centuries these penalties were stringent and varied. Thus the punished man lost his nobility, and the plebeians were disciplined by imprisonment or by ridicule (e.g. by *mitra infamiae* – the pointed hats we can still see in the paintings of Goya), and in the case of reoffending, by life imprisonment or being sent to the galleys. The blasphemers might have been also deprived of offices, benefits, and dignity. Every witness of blasphemy was obliged to report this type of crime within three days. Strict corporal and financial penalties were extended to those who did not fulfill this obligation. In 1566 Pope Pius V introduced

the penalty of exile for the representatives of the higher classes, and the punishment of flogging and tongue puncturing for the plebeians. Clerics were less cruelly punished – they were disrobed or sent to the galleys. The civil authorities – protecting their own interests and the public status of the ecclesiastical authority – was particularly cruel. The canon law stamped its own imprint on the secular law until the 18th century. Many corporal punishments for blasphemy – originating in the ecclesiastical law – proliferated in the secular jurisdiction: apart from the death penalty, the most popular included the piercing or cutting out the tongue and/or lips, public flogging, pillory, prison, galleys, exile, and the derogatory penalties, sometimes financial punishments or others – depending on the inventiveness of the judge.

Learning about the formation of the Freemasonry since 1717, and its diversity in terms of social, professional, national, religious or ideological status, one can better understand the motives of the blasphemers' rebellion against the restrictions imposed on people by the dogmatic militant Church and the monarchy. Freemasonry, with its rites, somewhat resembles religion, but in its free thinking, its constant testing of reason against the mysterious (hermetic) tradition and the constantly changing political scene, the Masonry – especially the fairly secularized and irregular Grand Orient de France – was a vanguard of the cultural process that the Church condemns as irreligion. The Vatican maintains this stance despite some attempts at a dialogue with the Freemasonry in the 1980s. Currently the prohibition on belonging to the Masonry, confirmed by Pope John Paul II after the unproductive talks, is still in force. It is mainly due to the Freemasonry that religion and irreligion entered a new phase of development after the French Revolution, which ultimately undercut the previous feudal power of the Church, and rejected completely the spectre of the religious tribunal. It was possible for the American Constitution to refer to God as a guarantor of men's equality and their unconditional rights. But God had already to function in the secular culture as the Supreme Being without the Church, and – as postulated by Kant – within the limits of reason alone.

Today, an increasing number of people are regarded as irreligious (even in the Church, as for example in Poland the famous priest Wojciech Lemański, who contests the official bioethics of the Catholic Church), or simply neglect their religious practices, and the theists have to begin a dialogue with the atheists instead of murdering or stigmatizing them. This is a sign of wisdom, but also of real powerlessness and the aporia of the ecclesiastical power which the Church is now reluctant to use. During the 20th century many priests suffered terrible persecution at the hands of godless men, especially in the Soviet Union, in Mexico, and in Spain, as every action has to cause a reaction. We have also witnessed at least two centuries of the development

of new global, irreligious status quo that continues to erupt in various tensions and conflicts. Irreligion has been probably permanently built into the axiological system and into the economy of the western civilization, and it is difficult to understand this culture without it. The hierarchical Church also has its own internal problems, arguing about the meaning of the third secret of Fatima, or the peculiar credo of some theologians. They recommend acting in the public sphere as if God did not exist, because any manifestation of faith endangers the social consensus. This regulative impiety – in the style of Kantian perpetual peace – is even more visible if we will compare our lazy, obese, conciliatory civilization of the West – where offending religious beliefs and feelings is hardly ever punished – with the Islamic civilization that hasn't yet interiorized irreligion to such an extent, and which does not tolerate irreligious disbelief (or non-belief), excluding it from its restrictive system of Sharia law. This undemocratic civilization is hostile to the hypothesis that irreligion can be tamed, as it now is in Europe – “an old people's home” (to quote Peter Sloterdijk's ironic term), free from religious anger.

How did it come to this? Is it possible to consider the hypothesis that the opposition of religion and irreligion functions currently as an operational unit generating contemporary sociomorphism – often unconsciously, within the framework of antagonistic cooperation?

THE MODERNIZATION OF IRRELIGION

However, under the influence of the Enlightenment and the positivist critique of religion, irreligion was also occasionally regarded as a positive force. Undoubtedly, positive irreligion is a 19th century invention that resulted from the Darwinian or Spencerian doctrine of evolution and Comte's sociology, used to explain the phenomenon of religion. Later, under the pressure of criticism from – inter alia – mechanistic materialism, it came to be viewed as an outlook on life, almost a new absolute. Modern life dictated a new form of social organization. Irreligion – especially irreligious philosophy and art – would be in some of its manifestations a “mole's work” (to mention the favorite phrase of Nietzsche) for an intensification of the plasticity of life, just the same as it was in his criticism of Christianity. Nietzsche was a singer of the irreligious teaching of Zarathustra. At the end of his conscious life he identified with Christ-Dionysus before he succumbed to madness and numbness. This figure is an extremely suggestive personification of what is rational and irrational in religion. But it can also be seen as a figure of what is static and ecstatic, passive and active, conservative or reproductive (ritual),

and what is destructive-orgiastic in religion, until its radical privatization and individualization, and ultimately annihilation. According to Hegel, who initiated the modern belief in the unification of the different aspects of the Spirit, the development of our self-consciousness will lead in time to the demise of specific religions in the liberal society. That would be a realization of its moral and practical potential. The various religions, including the Christian denominations, respecting each other (today the main condition for interreligious dialogue and ecumenism), will be subject to disorganization and will ultimately disappear into a new, pure religion – an irreligion, as Jean-Marie Guyau proclaimed in his book *L'irreligion de l'avenir* (1887)⁵. He belonged to the group of modern irreligious philosophers and poets. Guyau was one of the first to consider religion from the point of view of the discipline which was later to become sociology. The sociologism of Guyau, who did not disregard the previous – especially psychological – theories, identified religion with the tendency to associate, stretched over the whole of existence – *supernatural vinculum* must be, in fact, one of the conditions of *vinculi naturalis*⁶. This need for association and for solidarity, for a bond between all reasonable and unreasonable, terrestrial and extraterrestrial, bodily and spiritual beings, is the most important source of Guyau's sociomorphism and a purpose of ir-/religion. A man – by nature – bears this need in himself. Guyau saw it even in dogs that are also religious in this sense, if they show signs of submission and friendship to their masters. The fully developed, evolutionarily advanced, and complete religions must respect each other and seek opportunities for the further integration of humanity – with nature, animals, and extraterrestrial beings, if they exist.

According to this idea of necessary progress, therefore, all dogmatic religions would be gradually marginalized, because they will eventually fall into the state of anomy, that is, nefariousness or lawlessness. Anomy (the Greek term *anomos* – lawless) was considered by the Judeo-Christian tradition as one of the synonyms of sin – refusal to obey the law or a state of mind caused by the violation of the divine law (*hamartia*). Guyau, who understood irreligion in a new way, saw the evidence of progress also in anomy. Gradually sliding into anomy, i.e. neglecting or attenuating the dogmas which introduced ritual differences and barriers between people in favor of their renewed status of hypotheses or ideas, religions evolve toward the full realization of their general economy. According to that approach which foregrounds the elements of will and evolution, religions are more or less

⁵ J.M. Guyau, *L'Irreligion de l'avenir: étude sociologique*, Félix Alcan, Paris 1887.

⁶ A. Fouillée, *Moralność, sztuka i religia podług M. Guyau*, transl. J. K. Potocki, Nakładem redakcji "Głosu", Warszawa 1894, pp. 146-172.

irresistibly driven by the will to associate under the pressure of spontaneous life, with no restraints of religious phantasms. Regarded for centuries by all kinds of tribunals as a subversive orientation and prosecuted as a crime, in Guyau's view irreligion started to acquire new meaning as the goal of the sociomorphic evolution of all religions. Religion frees itself from its dogmas after a passage through various stages of consciousness, whose manifestations are pantheism, metaphysics, science, ethics, and modern social thought. The aim of the religious economy would be – paradoxically – a conversion of dogmatic religion into one new, clean and non-dogmatic religion – in an irreligion of the future that will finally allow the fulfillment of the ideal of love and solidarity on earth. Various hypotheses would arise in place of previously central dogmas, and faith will be replaced by the constructive doubts of science that would make possible new irreligious miracles.

According to Guyau – the French Nietzsche – we will be able to develop spiritually and at the same time to overcome the religious anomie by distancing ourselves from the prevailing religions, in particular by means of art. He recognized the awareness of intensive and expansive life, of sympathy and cosmic love which repeals the primacy of law, as a common element of religion, morality (without sanctions) and art. In his thought these areas interpenetrate each other, though art has obtained a supreme position: “What will remain some day of our various religious beliefs? Perhaps not a lot. But when we ask, what will remain of the fine arts, music, painting, and especially of that art uniting all the others – of poetry, it will be possible to answer clearly: everything, at least everything that is best in them, deep and – let's say it again – serious”⁷. Art has obtained such a high rank, because like any other human activity it would be free from all dogmas or juridical sanctions. Thus art would be able to enhance sympathetic solidarity between people. Guyau talked about “a holy stigma of beauty”. This independence of art allows it to bind closely with the only true morality and religion – with irreligion. If art is able to free itself from the egoism of creative individuals, it will serve a higher art – that of social life, extending its love onto the whole of nature and in this way constituting as if a new religion. According to Guyau, the still prevailing – although weakening – religions are a necessary link in the development of irreligious life. An echo of this view, namely the ideas of the secularization of culture, the disappearance of religion, and the formation of some economic, moral or scientific alternative can be found in the writings of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim – the fathers of the sociology of religion.

So much for the modern project of irreligion – optimistic, and almost already realized, at least in some areas of the postmodern Europe. Mean-

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

while, it should be noted that although irreligion liberates us from the stagnant and burdensome religious practice, which has become antisocial and life-threatening, sometimes it engages in too far-reaching and blind criticism, thus walking in the footsteps of the slowly weakened or combated religion. Irreligion can show a strong tendency for re-restrictive ritualization and institutionalization, trying to re-socialize people and create an irreligious or atheistic society – equally dogmatic and hostile to any innovation. The ritual behavior inherited from religion cannot simply disappear, but may be reproduced in the form of a new empire, such as that created by the *irregulares* in the Soviet Union and the Third Reich (Zofia Kulik has gone so far in her criticism, comparing the Church with the totalitarian ideologies, that she found a symmetry of their symbolic structures). This also applies to the irreligious behavior of the avant-garde – to the blasphemy of the Futurists, the Dadaists, and the Surrealists. Their attacks on Christianity were eagerly repeated, and thus this anticlerical art became a substitute for religious ritual. Guyau warned us not only of religious bigotry, but also of anti-religious fanaticism. Unfortunately, in the 20th century many artists succumbed to the temptation of Christianophobia (for example, El Lissitzky wanted to destroy the Eastern Orthodox Church because it served the Russian tsars). However, Guyau was not militantly anticlerical. He mentioned a monk encountered in the street, who seemed like a missionary communicating with almost the whole world. The French philosopher recognized him as his primary helper in spreading irreligion since it assumes a prior religious stage of consciousness. In the modern sense irreligion is primarily an apogee of a self-conscious, full, and unrestricted life, overpowered by the unrestrained Eros. Although in this life – interpreted as irreligious – one can encounter manifestations of both commonly understood good and evil, these categories are already a different kind of poetic concepts, forming an inscrutable blend within the all-encompassing cosmic love (in the sculpture of Zbigniew Libera – *Christus ist mein Leben* from 1990, he has quoted the famous sentence *Arbeit macht frei*). As Odo Marquard puts it, we can talk here about the “de-evilization” of evil (*Malitätsboniesierung, Entübelung der Übel, Gutmachung der Übel* – in Polish *bonizacja zła*)⁸. Evil is no longer considered theologically and personified as Satan or presented as sin, but in the new irreligious way it is dissolved in the whole of nature and in all of Being, that is as such completely justified in its structural injustice (Christian antisemitism as irreligious, nihilistic antisemitism in Libera’s work). This is the result of the modern drive towards radical unification (to recall the well-known German ambivalent word *Versöhnung*) and its postmodern deconstruction.

⁸ Fr. J. Babiński, *Irreligia*, p. 37.

THE PROJECT OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF IRRELIGION

Thus far, no one has written a full history of irreligion or properly systematized the structure of this phenomenon. It was only in the late 1960s when the weakening of faith and the institutionalized religion in the West gave rise to the development of the new field of the sociology of irreligion, venturing a claim that the sociology of religion neglects irreligion as an important aspect of social life. Academic research on irreligion can help us better understand religion in general⁹.

Irreligion cannot be ignored, because it is a permanent element of culture, manifesting itself with varying degrees of intensity, always remaining in contact with religion, to which it reacts. Thus in the sociological perspective these categories cannot be recognized as two poles of a dichotomous division. Irreligion has been defined as an attitude which does not so much deny the object of faith (God), but rather puts into doubt the foundations of the religious doctrine (dogmas) to which individuals are culturally related. Therefore N. Jay Demerath defines irreligion as unbelief¹⁰. It is an attitude towards religion which is not a complete rejection of belief (a disbelief), but rather a selective lack of belief. Irreligion is an unbelief in the selected components of an elementary religious doctrine (in some commandments, dogmas, rituals, mores or moral precepts), i.e. more or less – in the essential components of the religious doctrine specific to the person who remains culturally bound with it. This condition must be met to talk about irreligion; we do not exhibit an irreligious attitude when we criticize any dogmas of a foreign religion from the point of view of our doctrine. Irreligious attitude – as a reactive act – is a contextual phenomenon, very dynamic and difficult to measure, since it may be hidden in the religious environment (even among the clergy), and amplified in the groups of ostentatious unbelievers. Therefore, it can be interpreted as atheism or the basis of irreligion¹¹. In both cases we are dealing with a masquerade that impedes the adequate comprehension of the phenomenon.

An interesting complement to these considerations are the proposals of Colin Campbell, who has accepted the methodology of Demerath and has

⁹ *Socjologia religii. Wybór tekstów*, ed. Fr. Adamski, Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, Kraków 1983, pp. 353-373.

¹⁰ J.N. Demerath, *Program and Prologomena for a Sociology of Irreligion*, in: *Actes de la Xe Conférence Internationale. Types, dimensions et mesure de la religiosité*. Rome 11-20 VIII 1969, Conference Internationale de Sociologie Religieuse, Rome 1969, pp. 157-175; idem, *Program i prologomena socjologii irreligii*, in: *Socjologia religii*, ed. Fr. Adamski, transl. B. Leś, pp. 362-373.

¹¹ Fr. J. Babiński, *Irreligia*, Wydawnictwo "Bernardinum" Sp. z o. o., Pelplin 2010, p. 11.

rejected the attempts to construct an ahistorical, abstract definition of irreligion made by Charles Glock, inferring the origins of modern irreligiosity from the European and American subculture of the secularist movements in the 19th and the 20th centuries, born out of the opposition to authoritarianism and the lack of humanism of the prevailing religion¹². Campbell has presented the whole range of this reactive current, including irreligion in an extreme (ideal) form which wants to get rid of religion (irreligious eliminationism) or to replace it with something else (irreligious substitutionism). In the present essay irreligion, not necessarily identical with atheism, is understood in such a sociological manner.

It is worth using this sociological concept of irreligion, because it conceals in itself the ancient intuition, focusing on the Latin prefix *ir-*, neither reducing irreligiosity to the domain of negativity nor essentializing it, but rather considering it historically as a dynamic process, inspired also by the concept of *l'irreligion de l'avenir* of Guyau. Thus constructed, the concept of irreligion allows us to test this non-sacral sphere of culture. This forms the theoretical background of the so-called "affair" of *Irreligia /Irreligion*, i.e. the reception of the exhibition I prepared in 2001.

THE CASE OF *IRRELIGION* – ON THE MARGIN OF POLISH CULTURE

The exhibition *Irreligion. The morphology of the non-sacred in 20th century Polish art* (Atelier 340 Museum in Brussels, 2001/2002) provoked many violent reactions (see the selected bibliography). Many people decided to air their views about this irreligious act of the Polish artists – not only artists and critics, but also journalists, the highest dignitaries of the Polish and Belgian Church, the influential right-wing and left-wing politicians in the Polish parliament and government. Finally, the office of the public prosecutor began to study the case to establish whether the exhibition offended religious feelings (however, the charge was dismissed). But I was forced by the director of the National Museum in Warsaw to resign from the post of curator of Ksawery Dunikowski's Museum of Sculpture (a department of the National Museum)

¹² C. Campbell, *An Approach to the Conceptualisation of Irreligion and Irreligiosity*, in: *Religion et religiosité, athéisme et non croyance dans les sociétés industrielles et urbanisées. Actes de la XIe Conférence Internationale de Sociologie Religieuse*, Opatija, 20-24 September 1971, Lille: Edition CISR, Lille 1971, pp. 486-501; *idem*, *Propozycja konceptualizacji pojęcia 'irreligia' i 'irreligijności'*, in: *Socjologia religii*, ed. Fr. Adamski, transl. W. Kurdziel, pp. 353-361.

because – though a graduate of the Catholic University of Lublin and a practising Catholic – I was the “blasphemous curator” of this scandalous exhibition and the “irresponsible collaborator” of Wodek Majewski – the director of the Atelier 340 Museum.

Nearly two years earlier, in 2000, I had received – from Majewski – a proposal to prepare an exhibition which would show the most important trends in Polish contemporary art. During its preparation we found that many of the artists were highly interested in the issues of religion. This interest itself was not striking, but what surprised us was their critical attitude towards the Church. The exhibition – shown at the Atelier 340 Museum, inside the functioning temple of Notre Dame de Lourdes and the desecralized church of Saint Nicolas, and in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville in Brussels between October 2001 to January 2002, presented the works of over forty Polish artists working in the 20th century.

The exhibition, entitled *Irreligion* – after the title of the above-mentioned dissertation of Adriani – was part of the Polish contribution to the Brussels event called *EUROPALIA* (2001/2002). During the press conference at the Hôtel de Ville de Bruxelles in October 2001, I emphasized specially in relation to Demerath and Campbell that irreligion does not necessarily mean atheism or radical hostility towards religion. This reservation was not gladly accepted by some militant artists (especially Joanna Rajkowska, who – although she showed a montage of self-portrait in the disguise of Pope John Paul II blessing Andy Warhol at the St. Peter's Square in Rome – did not want to be connected in any way with religion). Those artists fulfilled the definition of pure antireligious irreligiosity. However, most of the artists participating in this sociological test seemed areligious, that is they did not openly manifest their hostility to religion, simply accepting its relativistic, contextual definition by sociologists. Moreover, the event was open not only to the *irregulares*, but also to such artists as Zbigniew Warpechowski, who have declared a deep attachment to the Catholic orthodoxy. Although this artist had created some non-canonical works, he did not direct the sting of his criticism against religion, but just towards irreligion. His attitude is similar to mine. Warpechowski took part in the exhibition, selected – like the others – in an arduous process, and after we obtained his agreement (not all the artists we approached were willing to give it – Jerzy Bereś, also a non-canonical artist, but a strong believer – simply refused to take part in the godless undertaking). Anyway, it would be impossible to make a precise measurement of the religious piety or irreligious impiety of the artists who took the challenge. It would be difficult to test their consciences, to measure the intensity of their legitimate or pathological anger, to claim that it was hateful hostility, ignorance, cynicism, or mental carelessness that manifested itself in

their disrespect towards religion – for example, in the style of the absurdist parodies of the Łódź Kaliska group. This was not about buffoonery, but about the thaumaturgical effect of naming and rediscovering a strong current in Polish art – hitherto overlooked or marginalized by mainstream researchers – rooted in the great heterodoxy of the Romantics, though associated today with the nihilistic game of blasphemy. I had hoped then that this exhibition would be balanced and non-militant, and that it would revive religious experience in art and would allow for the better understanding of this margin of art in the historical perspective, showing the transformation of irreligious symbolic aggression, as well as the systemic non-artistic roots of irreligion in the Communist, Fascist, nationalist, and humanist ideologies.

The exhibition evidenced the worldview transformation in the most important current of historical and contemporary Polish art. Let me only mention here the Poznań group Bunt [Rebellion]¹³, the neo-pagan drawings and sculptures of Stanisław Szukalski, Leon Chwistek's novel *Pałace Boga* [*The Palaces of God*], the prints and paintings of Wojciech Linke from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s, the irreligious pop-surrealism of Władysław Hasior, the so-called expression of the 1980s and the paintings of the Warsaw Grupa (including Paweł Kowalewski, Jarosław Modzelewski, Marek Sobczyk, and Ryszard Wozniak), followed by the postmodern turn and the birth of democracy after 1989, and the appearance of the so called critical (or diacritical) art. *Irreligion* was received – especially in the leftist media – as a manifestation of the weakening of the institutional forms of religiosity. It was certainly a symptom of the birth in Poland of the occidental phenomenon of “new tribalism” (the term of Michel Maffesoli). Leszek Knaflewski described the collision of these trends as *The Catholic-Cola* (2001). On the other hand, the exhibition revealed the main problem of the European project, which basically promotes secular values, if not irreligion, and the displacement of the Church from the public sphere. The message of *Irreligion* was a big shock and provoked violent reactions. In any case, nobody ignored its importance, whether in Belgium, or especially in Poland.

Within a couple of weeks after its opening, the exhibition was presented in the media as a great scandal, originally in the newspaper *Nasza Polska* [Our Poland]¹⁴. This interpretation was the result of an alarming letter from the Polish diaspora in Brussels to the media representing the views of the Polish Catholic right, especially Liga Polskich Rodzin [The League of Polish Families] – a nationalist conservative political party. A letter from Poland to

¹³ K. Piotrowski, *Irreligia Buntu. Geneza i morfologia poznańskiej apostazji*, in: *BUNT. Ekspresjonizm poznański 1917-1925*, ed. G. Hałasa, A. Salamon, Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, Poznań 2004, pp. 119-139.

¹⁴ A. Echolette, *Bluźnierczy 'artyści'*, “Nasza Polska” 2001, no. 44, p. 3.

the Polish diaspora in Belgium urged it to send the irreligious works to Poland, where they will be “shown in our Parliament, and dealt with as they deserve”. The negative reactions were inspired in Poland by the Paulinian monks from Jasna Góra¹⁵. The monks objected especially to Adam Rzepecki’s work *The Black Madonna of Częstochowa with moustache* (à la Duchamp) – after an alarmist article illustrated with the copy of Rzepecki’s work in the above mentioned newspaper *Nasza Polska*. It was a very superficial critique. The Paulinian monks prepared an official protest and sent it to President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the Minister of Culture Andrzej Celiński, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, and to Cardinal Józef Glemp – the Primate of Poland.

The exhibition was commented upon not only by artists and art critics, but also by journalists, by the highest dignitaries of Polish and Belgian Church (for example, Cardinal Józef Glemp, who condemned it¹⁶, and more Cardinal Godfried Danneels – the Primate of Belgium, who showed more understanding, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, resigning from all possible involvement of the Church authority in people’s religious beliefs, i.e. from any repression against the blasphemers¹⁷). Some Catholic groups sent many protests to Ferdynand Ruszczyc – director of the National Museum in Warsaw, to me, and also to the public prosecutor’s office. Those hysterical reactions and accusations were dangerous for me, because I was an employee of the National Museum, an institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. In response to that criticism I received moral support from people and groups including, among others, some Walloon Masons.

In Poland, the domain of religious or irreligious pathology, showed by the artists of *Irreligion*, is vast and diverse. We must remember, considering some of the above-mentioned facts, that after the collapse of the irreligious Communism, since the beginning of the 1990s the Church has gained considerable political power in Poland. This spurred Polish critical art to propose a revisionist history of Christianity. The privileged position of the Church in our society began to be questioned in that period of democracy. Many people resented the “dirty dance” or “crazy orgy” between the Polish politicians and the Church, and the fact that a Catholic bishop is still a general of the Polish army (Polish artists have a special parson too). This situation generates a fundamental conflict, and the attempts of the Catholic

¹⁵ Fr. M. Lubelski, *Profanacja w Brukseli*, “Niedziela” 2001, no. 46, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Prymas Polski w stolicy Unii Europejskiej. Niech nie będzie unią manekinów!*, “Nasz Dziennik” 2001, 20 XI, p. 7; *Prymas potępił ‘Irreligię’*. *Kultura w skrócie*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2001, 19 XI.

¹⁷ G. Danneels, *‘De Kerk is geen democratie. Daar moet ik toch geen tekeningetje bij maken?’ Humo sprak met kardinaal Danneels*, “Humo – Brussel” 2002, no 3206/08, pp. 17-18.

Church to regain its influence over the Polish society (and the official institutions of art), provokes the transgression of critical art, and highlights the opposition between the traditional mainstream view of the Church as the foundation of Polish independence (combated especially by Robert Rumas in his critique of the patriotic slogan God – Honour – Homeland) and the creative innovations of the margin. Thus irreligious art loosens and weakens the social bond, which can have positive consequences, according to Nietzsche's perverse or subversive aphorism *Veredelung durch Entartung* [Ennoblement through degeneration].

The negative reactions (I cannot quote all the reviews here) showed that our exhibition did give people an opportunity to express their hostile attitude to Catholicism, in the political climate of the outgoing right-wing government. Therefore, many politicians and officials spoke out and the prosecutors got an additional job of examining the possibility of our offending the religious feelings of the believers¹⁸. I was summoned to the prosecutor's office in autumn 2001 in order to give an explanation (though not to be formally interrogated), due to the numerous accusations that I had committed an offence as a curator, and to the intervention of the members of the The League of Polish Families, monitoring our case from the start. During that (rather unofficial) conversation with the prosecutor, I learned that today the public prosecutor's office has a much greater problem with the citizens who feel offended by some work of art than with those who are accused of offending religious feelings. It is due to the former that paragraph 196 in the Polish Penal Code still exists. The paragraph did not quite fit the above-mentioned conflict between irreligious art and religious convictions, as it referred to the people who – for example – broke into temples or disturbed order there. However, the Flemish Catholics, offended by being reminded of their war collaboration with Hitler by the work *Black Box* (2000) by Kijewski and Kocur, associating the cross with a swastika, which was shown in the porch of the Notre Dame de Lourdes – brought their case before the Court against the Brussels parson Marc Scheerens, who hosted in his church the irreligious art from Poland¹⁹; it made his life unpleasant to such an extent that he had to leave this parish.

The exhibition was even discussed in parliament, involving the highest authorities of the state, the minister of foreign affairs, and – as has been already mentioned – the Polish ambassador in Brussels, who was forced to

¹⁸ JD [D. Jarecka], *Zadzwonili z prokuratury. Losy kontrowersyjnej wystawy 'Irreligia' w Brukseli*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2001, 22 XI.

¹⁹ J. Soetemans, *'In Romeinse kerken hangt ook nankt'. Pastoor stelt kerk open voor expo en schaarsgekleed modedefilé*, "Het Nieuwsblad – Groot-Bijgaarden" 2002, 30 I; "De Standaard – Groot-Bijgaarden" 2002, 30 I.

intervene. He demanded the removal of the scandalous works from the exhibition. This resembles to some extent the case of Cubism, discussed a century ago in the French parliament. Thus, that exhibition was regarded, in accordance with the tradition of the official Church, as blasphemy – as devilish arrogance of pride (*pompa diaboli*), and not just a cultural fact that tackled the various weaknesses of Polish religiosity.

During the exhibition, I tried to defend my idea of *Irreligion* as a research project in the mass media not only against many attacks from the Church and the Catholic right, but also against the jealousy and incompetence of some Polish art historians. Ultimately, the exhibition, which ended on 3 February 2002, was very successful, and the Belgian (*Le Soir* and others), and especially the Polish liberal press had reacted massively, sometimes very positively.

At that time, after the judgment in the trial of Dorota Nieznalska, I wrote a critical essay published on her website – *Irreligion before and after Nieznalska's trial*, in which I criticized the conservatism of the Polish Church and the opportunism or conformism of the politicians, journalists, and art historians. I also did that in my other texts and the many lectures I gave about *Irreligia*. It was my act of parrhesia (if my defense or defiance were truly parrhesiastic reactions). However, in the current democratic, radically irreligious milieu, the parrhesiastic ethos seems more and more without content and serious consequence, since the freedom of speech is ensured by the law rather than having to be fought for in a dangerous struggle. The highly juridicalized world leads to a safe global system – to the paradoxical state of parrhesia without parrhesia.

THE TAMING OF IRRELIGION

The philosopher Zbigniew Kazmierczak has noted that “offending religious feelings” does not only consist in the actions of the blasphemers, but is facilitated by the identity crisis of the insulted believers, who – in the face of a difference in views – do not feel confident in their faith and react emotionally or aggressively to the perceived danger²⁰. His diagnosis does not seem fully to explain the phenomenon, because its psychological mechanism does not apply to fanatical reactions, for example in Islam, where it is difficult to observe this type of crisis of faith, more typical of the pluralistic European identity, weakened by skepticism. Strong faith, sincere and natural,

²⁰ Z. Kaźmierczak, *Dwa główne powody nietolerancji*, “Zeszyty Politologiczne” 2002, no. 4, pp. 96-109.

immunized to irreligious diaphoresis, is more determined to take oppressive action that requires sacrificing oneself, and above all, gives one an alibi in the form of a sense of moral righteousness and expected reward. The difference here springs not from a different cultural context, but rather from a universal mechanism in which religion – identifying itself through the dogmas founded on revelation or as an institution based on canon law – must perceive, recognize, and exclude irreligion as its opposite. This is a result of the concretization of every act of will, even when it happens to be good. As poststructuralists have demonstrated, each performative act of the formalization of power is a diacritical, self-differentiating system generating system anomalies or margins. Therefore, it goes beyond the Nietzschean view on the genealogy of resentment.

The modern liberation from religion may be combined with the postmodern radicalization of the irreligious motif in Derrida's displacement of nominal *religio*. The limits of deconstruction are visible in Derrida's reflections on religion, whose discourse – self-resistant and disunited – is based on the belief in the existence of pure, saintly, peaceful life, and the conviction that religion, in its messianic hope, but also its boldness, wants to appropriate this life and subject it to regulating control or oppression by its institutions. Religion is a mechanism that prevents the sedimentation and kenosis of life, while – as we know from history – using cruel repression, causing suffering and death, paradoxically to protect life in the name of justice and love. Deconstruction cannot prevent this, and it locates each return of religion or social need for discipline in the open structure of Vattimo's "trace of the trace". However, Derrida had to quote Genet: "One of the questions that I will not avoid is the question of religion"²¹.

Why was the question of religion in the mid-1990s so important for Derrida? Perhaps because religion wanted to regain what it had lost during the period of modernity, not only in the Communist countries. Religion and theology – as Stefan Morawski has pointed out, mainly in relation to the theology of Hans Kung – are trying to exploit postmodernism²². What would religion gain due to that poisoning of its source by deconstruction – due to its dissection, taking apart, stratification or transgression, which would however never amount to its abolition (overcoming), if not its breath, some necessary periodic aphasia, preceding any voice? Is deconstruction – which does not want to be a word or a concept in the traditional sense, that denies all positivity and orthodoxy – able to jeopardize the religion we know intimately

²¹ J. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge". In J. Derrida and G. Vattimo (eds.), *Religion*. Transl. D. Webb. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 1-78.

²² St. Morawski, *Niewdzięczne rysowanie mapy... O postmodernie(izmie) i kryzysie kultury*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu, Toruń 1999, pp. 90.

from faith or from reason? Or can deconstruction only re-duplicate religion, drag themselves behind it with their irreligion – “a religion without religion”, as John Caputo has interpreted the thought of Derrida?²³

“We are not far from Rome, but we are no longer in Rome” – he said with some relief, but perhaps looking over his shoulder in that direction, towards one of the main sources of violence. He made an attempt to make up for any overpowering religions known by name, especially Christianity, with his morality rooted in the Kantian practical philosophy and with his project of perpetual peace, and thus his program of life without religious violence – as if God did not exist. Still, he does not ignore the messianic voice, only demanding justice, and proposing to replace religion by “messianism without messiah”. That liberation – which can be related to Derrida’s replacement of specific *religio* by abstraction, by the “desert of deserts” and “place of places”, i.e. the nameless Platonic *chora* which “will never have entered religion and will never permit itself to be sacralized, sanctified, humanized, theologized, cultivated, historicized”²⁴ – should above all be spiritual, but, if necessary, should not hesitate to take recourse in physical violence. Caputo has commented rightly that deconstruction must assume as possibility what is “undeconstructible”, because it is not given, it is not known, and it is not predictable²⁵. Such “religion without religion”, which emphasizes *diákrisis* vs. *synagogé*, contests Heidegger’s interpretation of the Greek words *dike* and *adikia* by privileging the German word *Versammlung* or *versammeln*; but faith in or desire for justice, sacrifice, hospitality, and a completely different future cannot be deconstructed, even if we were to break up with religion, to suspend for a moment our religious affiliation, which might be regarded as the very cradle of the most authentic faith and the most original sacredness. According to Derrida, “One must in any case take into account, if possible in an areligious or even irreligious manner, what religion at present might *be*, as well as what is *said* and *done*, what *is happening* at this very moment, in the world, in history, *in its name*”²⁶. In this proposal irreligion is not only perceived as an indelible, imperial contamination of its source – the Latin tradition (*religio*), but is subjected to demarginalization and given the task of controlling religion – as if it were its negative condition or an undesired, unwanted assistant in the realization of its soteriological mission.

²³ J.D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1997.

²⁴ J. Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge”, p. 58.

²⁵ *Deconstruction in a Nutshell. A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. J.D. Caputo, Fordham University Press, New York 1997, p. 128.

²⁶ J. Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge”.

* * *

I would like to end this text about the taming of irreligion with a personal axiological reflection. It was an interesting experience – as if an opening up of religion to irreligion – for me to be invited in 2012 by the members of the Institute of Cultural Knowledge of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw to cooperate on the research project *Locus Theologicus in Visual Culture*. That adventure resulted in two articles. One of them was published²⁷, while the other – though it was well received during the oral presentation was ultimately not included in the publication, as probably too controversial for the Catholic University and the diocesan publishing house. I have shown in it, among other issues, the long historical process of the taming of irreligion, whose direct, tangible evidence is e.g. the Enlightenment dichotomy of the canon law and secular law, and the distinction between blasphemy and the so-called “offending of religious feelings”, whose penalization is becoming increasingly rare. Not only are the punishments milder, but there are also some demands for the right to public blasphemy as a response to the claims of religion and its attempts to return to the status quo from before the Enlightenment²⁸. The Church – with its message of ecumenism and its dialogic openness to other voices, including the recognition of the ambivalent role of “God’s men of violence”, postulated by Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical on the Redeemer of Men (*Redemptor Hominis*, 1979) – seems to view irreligion not only as a sin, but also as an inevitable shadow of an earthly institution. The Church must listen to the voice of its opponents, without losing its own identity. However, that openness is not obvious to some priests, who would not be ready yet to accept the process of taming irreligion. Particularly when it is suggested to them that they are also responsible for this process as the participants of a research project involving a presentation on irreligion in the context of discussing visual theology.

On the basis of my experience as a philosopher and curator of art, I now believe that many contemporary artists do not fully understand the seriousness of the provocations in which they are taking part²⁹. They seem to be repeating recklessly Francis Picabia’s concept of “Jesus Christus als Hoch-

²⁷ K. Piotrowski, *O rozkwicie i upadku kultu gracji. Śmiałość vs świętość – tymotejski motyw rzeźby*, ed. K. Flader, D. Jaszewska, W. Kawecki, B. Klocek di Biasso, E. Mazur, N. Mojżyn, J.S. Wojciechowski, M. Wrześniak, D. Żukowska-Gardzińska, Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne i Drukarnia w Sandomierzu, Warszawa 2013, pp. 217-251.

²⁸ *Blasphèmes et libertés*, ed. P. Darteville, P. Denis, J. Robyn, ed., Les Éditions du Cerf, Espace de Libertés, Paris 1993.

²⁹ K. Piotrowski, *Prawda prowokacji (o dziejowej misji irreligii)*, in: *Artystów gry z kulturą*, ed. A. Kisielewski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok 2008, pp. 91-109.

stapler” (1920), while that provocative title hides nothing significant in the religious (biblical, exegetical, theological or historical) sense. They usually use this type of challenging provocations to irritate rather than asking about their existential context, reading them through the prism of limited, *ad hoc* ideologies, if not just marketing strategies and carefree nihilism. Their aesthetic, momentary life serves – instrumentally – as a generator of symbolic aggression against religion. While they have no shortage of wit, the provocateurs suffer most often from a dwarfism of *ingenium argutans*, being unable to properly compose a broader-reaching provocation. The pragmatic bias of their irreligious acts cannot be excused even by the most humanistic and moral intent that they sometimes declare. And it is not difficult phenomenologically to demonstrate that the super-provocations – the miraculous manifestations of religious thaumaturgy available to the believers – exceed the modern or postmodern horizon of the irreligious culture described above. The ever more numerous but increasingly more banal micro-provocations of the *irregulares* – such as the images presented at the Brussels exhibition, which, although they are often intended to be iconoclastic (lately in a soft version) – attack only the idolatrous and imperial dimension of religion. Just as Johannes Baader’s attack on the mercantile dimension of religion – to recall his crazy idea of *Christus GMBH* (1917) – they cannot profane the iconic aspect of religious faith. I am thinking about the distinction between idol and icon made by Jean-Luc Marion, and about his concept of the saturated phenomenon (*le phénomène saturé*). The *irregulares* are not able to destroy the seductive potential of revealed religion. These relatively poor in their aesthetic endowment and offering defiant provocations of irreligious art make it difficult for the propagators of irreligion – the group in which I also include myself – to break out of this idolatrous circle towards the deep thaumaturgy of the icon. Therefore, our provocations occur as if not always in sync with the much more powerful, radical provocations of saturated phenomena, experienced daily by the contemporary world. We are completely helpless in the face of the thaumatic experience of religion and its irreligious shadow: the miraculous and crazy love of God for man, powering not only religion, but also irreligion as an ambivalent evil.

It would be some sort of contradiction if we could come to know evil (or Evil) as such, if it (or It) did not put marginal irreligion perversely in the place of religion, if it allowed for the dilution of the concept of evil in handy, multilingual terms of misguidance (*šegāgāh*), defilement (*miasma*), impurity (*tume’āh*), wickedness (*’āwōn*), negligence (*’āwel, hātā’āh, parabasis*), fornication (*zenūt*), disobedience (*masija*), rebellion (*pešā’*), sin (*hatit, saghira, kabira, paraptoma, peccatum originale* or *naturale*), anomy and lawlessness (*hamartia*), in a coherent interpretation of disbelief (*kufir*) or infidelity

(*ma'al*), of idolatry (*szrak*), godlessness (*reše'*, *asebeia*, *irreligio*, *impietas*) or injustice (*adikia*). It would be strange if evil (or Evil) did not proliferate in this terminological excess, if it yielded to condensation in the artful metaphor of the "flowers of evil"³⁰, allowing one to look upon it, contemplate it, and experience it with delight (just to mention the show of the fashion designer Arkadius in the Brussels church of Notre Dame de Lourdes in 2002 during the finissage of *Irreligia*). If it could be deconstructed and deferred, and, in the process, prevented from causing more evil. It is an undeniable fact that a lack of knowledge, not to say ignorance, about such fundamental concept as evil is yet another evil. Is this not what evil (or Evil) is all about? From a different perspective, this seems to be a sophistic multiplication of evil (or Evil), providing the illusion of hope that we have gained even partial control over it.

This is similar to the situation of irreligion in the 19th century, when it enjoyed positive interpretation as a result of the historical process of progressive social anomie. Irreligion has begun to lose its ancient negative qualification as a sinister, sociomorphic ideal, and it must be conceived as a hypothetical operational element in the process of salvation (if Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled some conditions of the sociological definition of irreligion), or just as a secular tool that controls and checks the totalitarian tendencies of religion (a "messianism without messiah" and a "religion without religion"). And finally, isn't irreligion a difficult gift of God? Or to put it in another way, aren't some particular strategies of taming irreligion, some abuses of the concept of the non-sacred, present in western thought for more than two centuries, also a sign of the search for intimacy with evil (or Evil) in its most intelligent forms? Isn't this question a taming of irreligion?

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³⁰ K. Piotrowski, Złorzeczenie sztuki / The Cursing of Art, in: Marek Wasilewski, Hubert Czerepok – Kwiaty zła / The Flowers of Evil, Galeria Miejska „Arsenal”, Poznań 2010.

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**OSWAJANIE IRRELIGII. ESEJ O NADUŻYCIU IDEI NIE-SACRUM
(streszczenie)**

Zamierzam zarysować problem dezintegracji łacińskiej, hierarchicznej opozycji *religio/irreligio*, ukazując proces osławiania irreligii w (post)modernistycznej kulturze. To marginalne zjawisko – lokalizowane dotychczas w domenie negatywności bytu – jest reaktywnym i pojmowalnym tylko kontekstualnie dążeniem kultury. Zgodnie z modernistyczną socjologią, irreligia jest taką postawą wobec religii, która nie jest pełnym odrzuceniem wiary (*disbelief*), lecz okazuje się raczej selektywną niewiarą (*unbelief*). Jak to się stało, że jest dziś możliwe rozpatrywanie hipotezy, iż wspomniana wyżej opozycja funkcjonuje obecnie jako operacyjna całość, generując razem – często nieświadomie, w ramach antagonistycznej kooperacji – współczesny socjomorfizm? W tej propozycji irreligia jest poskramiana nie tylko jako nieusuwalne, imperialne skażenie łacińskiej tradycji (*religio*), lecz jest poddana demarginalizacji i postrzegana jako sposób kontroli religii – jakby negatywny warunek czy niezaskazana, nieoczekiwana pomoc w realizacji jej soteriologicznej misji. Uważam, że coraz liczniejsze i mniej zaskakujące mikroprovokacje *irregulares* – częściowo zaprezentowane na brukselskiej wystawie *Irreligia* (2001/2002) – chociaż często chcą być ikonoklastyczne (ostatnio w wersji *soft*), uderzają tylko w idola-tryczny wymiar religii. Dlatego nie mogą one zbecześcić ikonicznego sensu objawionej wiary.

Słowa kluczowe: bluźnierstwo – bonizacja zła – brak wiary, – irreligia – obraza uczuć religijnych – religia bez religii.