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Philosophy of History in Poland in the Context of Thomistic Thinking

Summary: Philosophy of history practiced in the early modern period and nowadays in Poland appears to be one of the principal trends of Polish philosophical thinking. This thought encompasses various themes and is anchored in realism and Thomistic personalism. Polish representatives of philosophy of history do not disregard theology of history and perceive Christian faith as a historical reality. Therefore apart from philosophy of history they develop theology of history where the understanding of the past of your own nation is a crucial element. In this context the thought of Thomas Aquinas inspires to view history from the philosophical and theological perspective.

Franciszek Sawicki, Franciszek Manthey and Czesław Bartnik in their research answer the question about the sense of time and history and the significance of historical processes. They originate from the school of traditional Thomism but they also have a thorough knowledge of modern philosophy. Thanks to them we may speak of philosophy of history in Poland which deserves reflection and which is the source of the thought of St. John Paul II. Among them the reflection of Franciszek Sawicki deserves special attention. For Sawicki, Thomism is important as a value which organises his own presentation of the problem. It is, by no means, the repetition of the old tradition as Sawicki frequently refers to the modern thought.

The question about the reference of Polish philosophy of history to Thomism is principally realized through personalist references and building social ethic based on philosophy and theology of nation where solidarity and participation are dominant. The abovementioned philosophers, F. Sawicki in particular, focus on the question about man in their reflection on history. For all of them it is Christianity that demonstrates the right form for references among people, the discovery of truth, moral and social activity as well as social and supernatural life, human autonomy and its relation to God.

Keywords: Polish philosophy, philosophy of history, thomism, personalism, Polish messianism

1. General outline and characteristics of philosophy of history in Poland

Philosophy of history practiced in the early modern period and nowadays in Poland appears to be one of the principal trends of Polish philosophical thinking. This thought is very broad and encompasses various themes. However, it might be observed that it is anchored in realism and Thomistic personalism. Despite various influences, Thomas Aquinas has remained the main inspiration of philosophical thinking in Poland. Also Polish representatives of philosophy of history are not associated with Hegelianism, as it is commonly thought, since they do not reduce all the philosophical questions to historiosophical themes but through combining their thought with the truth about human being offer a new vision of history from the perspective of real choices of man, which proves to be decisive for the history of mankind. Polish representatives of philosophy of history do not disregard theology of history and they perceive Christian faith as a historical reality.

Polish representatives of philosophy of history and theology of history and their works are: F. Sawicki, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, 1920 [Polish edition *Filozofia dziejów*, 1974]; *Der Kreislauf und das Todesschicksal der Kulturen* [Polish edition *Ruch cykliczny i śmierć kultur*, 1974]; F. Manthey, *Filozofowie polskiego mesjanizmu*, 1938 [German edition *Polnische Messianismus*, 1962]; *Heimat und Heilsgeschichte*, 1963]; F. Koneczny, *Polskie Logos a Ethos. Roztrząsanie o znaczeniu i celu Polski*, 1921; *On the Plurality of Civilisations*, 1962; W. Granat, *U podstaw humanizmu chrześcijańskiego*, 1976; *Wincenty Granat, Edward Kopeć, Jezus Chrystus. Historia i tajemnica*, 1988; Cz. Bartnik, *Problem historii uniwersalnej w teilhardyzmie*, 1972; *Teologia historii według Leona Wielkiego*, 1972; *Teologia historii*, 1999; J. Tischner, *Etyka a historia. Wykłady 1981-1983; Etyka solidarności* 1981; S. Swieżawski, *Człowiek i tajemnica*, 1978; *Przebłyki nadchodzącej epoki*, 1998; S. Wyszynski, *Idącym w przyszłość*, 1986; *Czas to miłość. Ojczyzna*, 2001; John Paul II, Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, 1985, Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 2003.

Despite the variety of themes, the most characteristic feature of Polish representatives of modern philosophy of history is their relation to Christian faith. Therefore many of them practice theology of history. An important aspect is the reference to the world of philosophy of culture, civilisation and nation where the manner of understanding history influences the understanding of reality and ethics developed in the Christian concept of the common good. In Poland, the ethos of history has been shaped by the virtue of solidarity (cf. J. Tischner). Philosophy of history documents economic and political life which influences the general philosophy of human life. It is not limited, however, to the enumeration of negative levels of economic, political and cultural phenomena, but presents positive elements in a difficult process of progress and development. When ‘hope for the future is dying’ we must regain it through a spirit of trust and advance towards a new growth (cf. John Paul II). A horizon of hope reaches further than here and now. The Christian vision of history has a moral and social significance. According to Polish historiosophy, there exists “a way of combining

history with eternity” (F. Sawicki). A Christian knows that the kingdom of God “is not of this world” (J 18:36) but starts here on earth. In history, determinism or civilisational fatalism which would negate the possibility of an individual’s free choice are not binding rules. People by their nature are not ascribed to a particular civilisation (cf. F. Koneczny). Philosophy of history is the philosophy of historical “becoming” and as such could be described as the “metaphysics of history.” The themes which interest Polish philosophers of history in this respect are studies on factors (causes), rules and meaning of history. When they concentrate on research and presentation of results of objective becoming then philosophy of history reveals itself as a study on the rules of historical knowledge. In this form it becomes the “logic of history” (cf. F. Sawicki).

An important aspect of the Polish philosophy of history is to understand the history of the Polish nation. The works of Polish representatives of philosophy of history reveal strong religious elements influenced by dramatic past of the Polish nation. Its characteristic feature is Polish messianism which bears a strong resemblance to the Russian concept of messianism represented by Vladimir Soloviev. The dominant idea is the redemption of mankind through the realisation of a more perfect epoch of the real Kingdom on earth with Poland having a great task to fulfil. Thus, the theology of the nation (S. Wyszynski, Cz. Bartnik) has been shaped in relation to the biblical ideas. The nation in the Polish philosophy of history appears as a natural community associated with people, family and ancestry. It constitutes the family of families, a great human body which is a collective figure and a basic social structure deserving love, respect, service and sacrifice. This concept of a nation in the likeness of man is a being which develops, grows and is faced with a choice between right and wrong.

In the Polish philosophy of history, the aim of history of all world nations, particular civilisations as well as historical significance of culture and education are not ignored. The ability to purposeful action can be cultivated. Also, the influence of grace on the faithful does not take away their ability to decide about themselves and make choices. The Christian leaven functions in the world as a regulator and initiator of social life (W. Koneczny).

Taking into consideration the aforementioned points of reference, Thomas Aquinas’ thought has not only a historical significance but also serves as an inspiration to view the past from a philosophical and theological perspective. The questions of Polish philosophers and theologians help to look once again at the thought of Aquinas. It does not mean, however, that contemporary historical issues are introduced to Thomas Aquinas’ thinking. Modern philosophy of history allows to discover what Thomas himself thought about the world and history. A proper interpretation of history does not belittle the history of mankind in its timeless dimension. It is necessary to preserve remarkable history in our memory as it remains the principle explaining our own existence. At the same time, it is possible to understand again the historicity of “the principle of hope”: *homo viator*. A significant element present in Aquinas’ theology of history is a cyclical interpretation of the world and history in which the events are included in “the wheel of time”: “from God through the world and through Christ to God.” The Polish philosophy of history emphasises its anthropological source and the significance of history

which means that it is in its essence the metaphysics of human event. In this respect, it is identical with Thomas' thought for whom the function of principles is fulfilled by a personal being. In both the Polish philosophy of history and Thomas' thought the sense of historical existence of man cannot be disconnected from the salvation of man. The question arises what the future of man is. The coming of Christ is an absolute event and the centre of human history in its historicity. It is Christ who gives meaning to the past, present and future. Christ gives in to history, but at the same time He subjects history to Himself. After Christ, the next caesura of time is not expected. Such a reference influences the Christian understanding of other religions and civilisations.

A search within philosophy of history relying on Thomas Aquinas' thought appears to be extremely valuable. It does not concern the history of thought, but the thought on history which helps to understand the meaning of transformations in the domain of men and their existence. Thomas teaches philosophers of history how to distinguish between what is known thanks to God's Revelation and what is known thanks to research in the area of historical studies. Many contemporaries understand history as governed by some deterministic rules. In this quest a non-religious note associated with certain attempts to exert control over human future might be detected. The openness of Aquinas' thought encourages Polish representatives of philosophy of history to combine empirical observations with a proper position of human persons and their individual rational and volitive prerogatives.

2. Philosophy of history in Poland in light of Thomistic thinking

What is the meaning of time and history and the significance of historical processes? The answer to this question, which is very similar to the thought of Aquinas, appears in the works of three Polish philosophers and theologians, namely Franciszek

Sawicki¹, Franciszek Manthey² and Czesław Bartnik³. They originate from the school of traditional Thomism, have a thorough knowledge of modern philosophy and creatively introduce the tradition of Polish thinking into their historiosophical studies. Since Poland is the place where the tradition of Western thought meets the concepts of the European East, the central geographical situation of Poland has influenced greatly the shape of their philosophical thinking. F. Sawicki is *par excellence* the “philosopher of the frontier.” He was born in Poland during the partitions, became a professor of philosophy and theology in Pelplin (near Gdańsk), imbued with German culture, also during his studies in Freiburg im Breisgau where he familiarised himself with modern German philosophy. Franciszek Manthey, an expert on the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas and modern Polish philosophy also associated with the academic circle of Pelplin. He took part in the research of the Lvov-Warsaw School preparing his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Professor Kazimierz Twardowski. Czesław Bartnik (born in 1927), a professor of the Catholic University of Lublin, develops philosophy and theology of the nation which is the continuation of the concept of Polish messianism in the context of modern personalistic and social philosophy.

Undoubtedly, thanks to Sawicki, Manthey and Bartnik Polish historical thought deserves academic attention. The thought of John Paul II originates from this tra-

¹ Franciszek Sawicki (1877-1952) a philosopher of the academic circle in Pelplin which is sometimes called the “Athens of the North” thanks to professor Sawicki’s stay and research there. He was ordained to the priesthood on April 1, 1900. After his brief stay in Gdańsk he started theological studies at the University of Freiburg where he worked on his doctorate under the supervision of Prof. C. Braig. After receiving a doctorate he returned to Pelplin where he was appointed professor of philosophy, dogmatics and apologetics. He lectured in Pelplin until his death. During Nazi occupation he was the only priest in Pelplin. Sawicki published his research in Polish and German. He was invited to give open lectures both in Poland and Germany. He was also a visiting professor at Warsaw University and the president of Theological Section of Toruń Scientific Society. In 1952 he received an honorary doctorate from the Catholic University of Lublin. He is a representative of Thomistic personalism in Poland and a philosopher of history. Sawicki focused not only on overcoming theoretical difficulties of philosophical nature, but also on developing wisdom of life. He confronted the results of his research with the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Plato, Aristotle and modern philosophers. He tried to show the value of the Christian vision of life and the world.

² Franciszek Manthey (1904-1971) a philosopher associated with Lvov University (modern-day Ukraine) due to his studies. In 1927 he worked on his doctorate under the supervision of Prof. K. Twardowski, the founder of the Lvov-Warsaw School of logic. He wrote his doctorate on the philosophy of language of St. Thomas Aquinas. Later, he was associated with Pelplin and Hildesheim in Germany. Manthey’s academic interests revolve mainly around philosophy of religion, history and anthropology of culture.

³ Czesław Bartnik (born in 1927) younger than F. Sawicki and F. Manthey professor of the Catholic University of Lublin. He was under the influence of Karol Wojtyła, who was a professor of ethics in Lublin, and therefore his thought includes many elements of ethical personalism of Karol Wojtyła as well as a similar approach to theological and historical thinking. He is also a successor of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s philosophy and theology of the nation. Eighty dissertations have been devoted to Bartnik’s academic output in theology and philosophy. His most important works include *Dogmatyka Katolicka* (two volumes – Lublin 1999-2003), which is frequently described as the Polish *Summa Theologiae*, *Personalizm* (Lublin 1995), *Hermeneutyka personalistyczna* (Lublin 1994), *Filozofia historii* (Lublin 2013) and many others.

dition, although F. Sawicki is anchored in the tradition of German philosophy due to his studies. It is surprising how F. Sawicki specifies the terms of the philosophy of history in his *Geschichtsphilosophie* (Kempten 1920, third edition in 1923). The text was originally written in German, published also in Italian as *La filozofia della storia* (Firenze 1925, trans. G. Pagnini), and in Polish as *Filozofia dziejów* (Gdynia 1974, trans. K. Górski), with the final chapter entitled *Ruch cykliczny i śmierć kultur* (*Cyclical Movement and the Death of Cultures*). The research of Sawicki and other philosophers of history in Poland originates from the tradition of “the mystery of man.” He constructs a separate and greater natural subject of philosophy. After WWII, which brought about enormous cultural and social transformations in Poland, the revival of the Polish nation gains in Sawicki’s study *Filozofia dziejów* (*Philosophy of History*) a position of an independent philosophical discipline, which is a great impulse for modern historical thinking in Poland, understood *as per ultimas causas in lumine rationis*. This entire area of thought might be described as “historiology,” which is characterised by previously absent philosophical thinking. Sawicki refers to Augustinianism, the dynamic Thomism (against the static Thomism) and existentialism. He develops the trend of the dynamic Thomism through taking into consideration historiosophical implications. This is his great contribution which results in the development of studies in the field of philosophy of culture and modern philosophy of the nation undertaken by Cz. Bartnik. It is surprising how the personalistic feature in philosophy of history is emphasised. F. Sawicki is certain of this aspect but leaves other questions open. In this way, his concept indicates the limits with which philosophy of history should function. Although he is aware of the constraints of his discourse he considers the main line of his thought as certain, in agreement with the questions presented through tradition, especially Augustinian-Thomistic. Sawicki created the dynamic Thomism and initiated studies on both St. Augustine and Thomas jointly at the time when researchers did not concentrate on Augustinianism in Aquinas’ philosophy. In Thomas’ works Sawicki observes a certain system which frees the concept of St. Augustine and the historiographic tradition associated with him from the secondary concepts. For Sawicki, Thomism is important as a value which organises his own presentation of the problem. It is, by no means, the repetition of the old tradition as Sawicki frequently refers to the modern thought. Also the questions he poses are formulated in the perspective of modern German philosophy of history.

F. Sawicki as a representative of philosophy of history does not answer all the detailed questions which nowadays pervade in philosophy of history, especially so popular “apocalyptic” concepts. His aim is to demonstrate the framework in which philosophy of history should function and develop. He is a link with the thinking, according to the Thomistic tradition, which is not interested in a detailed casuistry, but in the interpretation of the general meaning of time and history.”⁴ It is inscribed

⁴ Cf. M. Mróz, *Księżdzka Franciszka Sawickiego filozofia osobowości*, in: F. Sawicki, *Ideal osobowości*, Toruń 2009, pp. 11-70.

in the Thomistic metahistorical manner of thinking, leaving the Romantic trend of Polish messianism to his follower Franciszek Manthey. It was Manthey who wrote *Dzieje myśli filozoficznej w Polsce w czasach nowszych* and *Polscy myśliciele* (Miesięcznik Diecezji Chełmińskiej, Pelplin 1931), published in German as *Die Philosophie des polnischen Messinismus* (Bonn 1958). Thanks to Sawicki, philosophy of history in Poland is linked with historisophical thought of western Europe displaying the characteristic ethical and theological features. In philosophy of history in Poland, theology and ethics are not supplements but foundations of this type of thinking. The primacy of spiritual dimension is particularly strong in Polish philosophical thought.

3. Historical factors in philosophy of history in Poland

First and foremost, the reflections on history of philosophy drawing attention to the spatial and temporal existence of man pose questions about him as a source of history.

According to F. Sawicki and other philosophers of history in Poland, man is a direct cause and a proper substrate of history. There exist other factors which have impact on the course of history, but they “exert influence through inducing man to action”⁵. “An acting subject is always a human being”⁶. Sawicki also ascertains that “in social communities any form of activity originating from individuals as a collective is not a superior and uniform self”⁷. He further asserts that groups are not a substantiative units and therefore discussion on the collective will or awareness is only a discussion on an “empty hypostasis,”⁸ as it is impossible to prove the existence of a common spiritual substance. It is an individual and an individual human soul who interpret human history. Undoubtedly, the “greatness and activity” of the power of each soul is different, but special spiritual skills and talents with the highest level of their manifestation defined as genius create works which are worthy of imitation and open new ways of social life. The first such skill is an in-depth analysis of thought thanks to the analytic mind and the other is the construction of new systems of thought thanks to the synthetic mind. According to F. Sawicki, such thinkers as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas or Immanuel Kant combined those two talents to the greatest degree. Such individual faculties are partly inborn and partly a result of education and self-education. Man cannot reshape his soul in order to recreate its vital strength but he can master his faculties through practice and weaken them through idleness or squandering of talents being involved in illusory projects for himself and the community.

As individuality constitutes a clear factor of history it is natural to search for inner structure in functioning of brilliant individuals to detect the principles of the inner

⁵ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, trans. K. Górski, Gdynia 1974, p. 52.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

human “mechanics of spirit”. Sawicki acknowledges psychological research devoted to those individual manifestations of human greatness and power of spirit but clearly claims that the world of geniuses is the “world for themselves.” Recognised “mechanics of spirit” must leave the room for the free will and together with repeated proper actions preserve individual features of a soul. There is always something mysterious in the life and essence of a person, something which remains specifically individual and personal.

Man in history reveals himself not only as an individual for himself but also as someone, a person linked with other individuals creating their own communities of thought and action. Society and community are the groups of people connected through common beliefs and dispositions. New elements are created through mutual outer links of given individuals (shared living space, territory or land) on the one hand, and through awareness of belonging to a bigger community, on the other hand. Historically, a nation is the most important of all social communities which are fairly uniform in action⁹. According to F. Sawicki, the concept of nation is used in a double meaning. From a political point of view, it is understood as the inhabitants of a given country with state ties or a thought about such a bond, with common characteristics attributed to them, such as customs and culture, regardless of the fact whether they are politically united or not. For Sawicki, however, more important is the other designation of nation “understood as a human community fused by fate from more or less homogenous or at least assimilable elements in one cultural and linguistic unity”¹⁰. Thus, a nation is not created through a political unity, but strives for it and has the right to achieve it. When a nation is designated as a psychological unity we might speak of the “soul of a nation” where common way of thinking, feeling and wanting is important. Undoubtedly, a nation is not a uniform structure with all the individuals possessing the same qualities. Apart from common features there exists a great variety of talents, views and inclinations. For F. Sawicki it is clear that the personality depends, to a great extent, on the community and society, especially in a historical success of their lives. Many have bitterly experienced how powerless brilliant ideas and the most noble intentions might be when there is no reaction in their own nation. Despite the entire social dependence an individual preserves an autonomous and, in some respects, dominant position in history. He originates from his epoch, but follows his own path¹¹.

Man is the only subject of historical process but since he undergoes strange influences in his decisions other factors also delineate indirectly the course of history. Firstly, it is nature, namely the material world surrounding man. It has a far-reaching historical significance as the favourable and unfavourable, stimulating and limiting influences originate from it. This influence primarily concerns the sensory side of human nature, but it can be also observed on higher levels of spiritual life as for man

⁹ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 57.

¹⁰ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 57.

¹¹ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 66.

the latter one rises above the sensory life. This interdependence is clearly visible in human cognition and not only in sensory perception and imagination but also in thinking. If we analyse the characteristic features of a given country it is necessary to take into consideration such factors as a geographical situation and form of landscape, namely the entire richness of external conditions.

Cultural environment is also crucial, namely the notion of culture and its significance for the individual human development. The word culture denotes here as much as care, cultivation and ennoblement. Cultural environment is created as a result of human activity and depends on it to a certain extent. Religion which leads a human soul to the unity with the highest good and the most noble perfection also belongs to this domain. Therefore religion is the culmination of spiritual culture and is intrinsically linked with moral life. Religious ideas are also the final principles of awareness of moral duties and rights since religion in its essence is closer to ethics than science although the primary stimuli to start scientific research stem from religion. In the course of its development science has made particular branches of knowledge independent, nevertheless, religion is still a point of departure. It concerns, first of all, introducing stimuli, which is the role of philosophy. Also art owes its beginnings and flourishing to religious ideas. Similarly, religion exerts its influence on economic, social and political life through its connections and moral ideas. The thought about eternal life has a major significance in economic domain as it restrains the unquenchable quest for material wealth and is the main source of just human relations. Religion also serves the life of the state through influencing the rulers and the governed.

The most elementary and natural form of social relations is the family. It has the fundamental significance for human life¹². "It is the principle of reproduction, supporting and multiplying human race and as a rule, it is the first place where spiritual, moral and religious life is born. Therefore the family exerts a silent but permanent and profound influence on history"¹³.

In a spiritual domain, the Church is the most complete and proper organisation as much as the state in a secular domain. As the teaching authority, the Church preaches religious and moral truths and through missions spreads them to the nonbelievers. The teaching activity of the Church is complemented by a formative and educational role.

For philosophers of history in Poland an important question is whether transcendental forces act in history and whether the divine world reaches our world and influences people. A historian primarily tries to establish basic historical facts, nevertheless, it is necessary to take into consideration divine causality in history. It is possible to encounter particular supernatural events, such as incidents which demand the explanation of supernatural cause as any natural interpretation is not sufficient. The *Weltanschauung* of the researcher plays an important role when passing judgments whether there exists some form of causality in history beyond man. Naturalism

¹² F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 129.

¹³ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 130.

entirely negates Divine Providence as the nature is the final cause of explanation of the universe. However, naturalism cannot satisfy a deeper thought. Even if it is impossible to prove that we have a direct intervention of God in history man should not concentrate on nature as the creation bears the mark of finiteness, conditionality and contingency. “Wisdom can never act without purpose, but if it is revealed in a creature devoid of reason it will remember about a rational being and will give it a satisfying aim in life, will equip it sufficiently in this respect and will influence its development”¹⁴. Historical facts widely confirm this conviction which stems from the faith in God.

4. Reflection on the rules and meaning of history

The emphasis on the existence of Divine Providence and its role in history demonstrates that philosophers of history in Poland indicate that natural factors do not explain the final causes and that the Higher Being, namely God, regulates the course of the history of man and the world. It is not pantheism because God and the world are not the same in their essence, but important forces and rules of particular things are the expression of divine intervention. This vision is in keeping with a Thomistic thought on ordered divine rule. It is not determinism, but the inclusion of the freedom of human will into the plan of God the Creator. Also human psyche is subordinated to certain principles but it is the will where decisions are taken and an important moment of freedom is marked. Any form of necessity is relative here and has its limits in human freedom. F. Sawicki observes that in the Middle Ages the most important elements were tradition and authority, but human greatness and individuality were also underlined, which was visible in giving characteristic names to eminent personages, such as Richard the Lionheart, Bolesław I the Brave, Thomas Aquinas – the “Doctor Angelicus”. “People understood individual features and appreciated them”¹⁵. In modern history an individual continuously strives to open up a free way, but frequently is lost in determinism and deprived of individuality. “Relations in practical life demonstrate in many respects a hostile tendency to the aspirations of an individual”¹⁶. If there exist permanent rights and rules of becoming in history and there are also common principles referring to the development in political, economic and cultural life where one may observe far-reaching analogies, it cannot be expected with all certainty that these rules function in complete harmony.

Philosophers of history in Poland emphasise that becoming in history is subordinated to a higher thought governed by Divine wisdom. However, it is firmly stressed that people understood as mankind have their own tasks to fulfil in history. God indicates the way which should be chosen by his creatures through essential dispositions of their own nature and the situation in which people are placed. If man is

¹⁴ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 157.

¹⁵ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 175.

¹⁶ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 176.

substantially different from other creatures in the world and justifies his dignity by possessing spiritual powers, the role of history must be viewed as the development of spiritual life. It is said that the ideas of truth, good and beauty are the directions of existence of the activity of spirit. A historical task of man is to develop towards the world of ideas, to fill his life and environment with it as well as to shape “the kingdom of culture, reason, spirit which might be at the same time the kingdom of the true freedom and noble humanness”¹⁷.

5. Cyclical movement and the death of cultures

From today’s point of view philosophers of history in Poland are concerned with the theme of cyclical movement in history and the death of cultures¹⁸. The question of the “decline of the West” presented in the study of Oswald Spengler¹⁹ is still relevant. It is emphasised that there are numerous elements in the essence of human culture which by their nature influence culture leading to its final decline and elimination. Even within the development of culture there are certain moments which suppress and degrade spiritual culture. It is, most of all, “self-limitation of spiritual life” as all the goods and achievements are the limitations of spirit slowing down independent development because man becomes somehow a hostage and slave of his own works that he is not able to control. The other irreversible result of the development of culture is a growing differentiation and fragmentation of spiritual life, progressing division of labour and specialisation which takes away the psychical content of work. Philosophers of history in Poland do not claim that these facts lead to the conclusion that the course of history is a pure necessity and each culture irrevocably undergoes decline. In history there is always ample room for human action and freedom. It is also possible to oppose the fossilisation of life in its forms. Everywhere the instances of decline are accompanied by the possibilities of internal renewal of activity in the life of nations not only through the decline of the old order and creation of a new one, but also through the renewal of culture. Therefore dramatic pessimism and resignation should not take place as, in reality, hope and effort of rebuilding are the imperatives. Despite serious dangers, the modern “decline of the West,” in which Poland participates, may bring promising changes, a new will to live and strengthened new life itself. It does not guarantee that the necessity of the death of Western culture is removed. Spiritual culture of Christianity survived the collapse of the ancient culture and in the same way it may survive the present fall of Western culture. This great heritage is a value in itself and has its own significance. Therefore it is not ultimately endangered with a total decline, but open to life, truth and good in

¹⁷ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 189.

¹⁸ Cf. *Filozofia dziejów*, pp. 263-277.

¹⁹ O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, vol. 1, Wien 1918, vol. 2, Munchen 1922; Polish edition: *Zmierzch Zachodu. Zarys morfologii historii uniwersalnej*, trans. przedmowa Józef Marzęcki, Warszawa 2001.

order to become the world civilisation.

6. The idea of progress and overcoming hopelessness in the world

In his *Philosophy of History* F. Sawicki proved that the idea of progress and perfection appeared in Christian thought. The idea of progress is possible when history is viewed as the unity, namely the history of mankind, and not as different histories which become the central preoccupations of man. Sawicki observes that “the ancient thought does not create a fully uniform historiosophical system which would subordinate history to one governing idea and indicate its realisation in facts. Even the speculative power of Greek spirit fails in this respect. There are no essential premises for such far-reaching philosophy of history”²⁰. It is Christianity that changes fundamentally the relation of man to history and progress. In particular, the process of history is presented as the revelation of Divine wisdom which has a uniformed aim and leads to it despite all the faults resulting from human weakness and malice. The final aim is the realisation of the Kingdom of God. The basic rule of progress in Christianity is love of God. In fact, this vision of history is not individualistic, but directed to community. According to it, sin is conceived as the disruption of the unity of mankind and division, whereas redemption is the restoration of the lost unity in which it is possible to regard a man as a member of a definite blessed community of saints. This true life is still to attain and the Church is viewed as the community in preparation for the “new Jerusalem”, the holy city, the community in which the foundations are laid for a new land and new heaven. Sawicki notes that “from the fact that all people by their nature are unity and able to influence each other on earth as they are driven in this direction, it is possible to argue that God appointed a common task for all the mankind”²¹.

Again, it is important to view man as a personal being. Personal freedom and responsibility associated with right reason (*recta ratio*) and the power of religion are able to initiate the breakthrough. In *Philosophy of history*, Franciszek Sawicki notes that “the dignity of person is elevated over non-personal goods. They are only means, whereas the person is an end in itself. If there are non-personal goods which we view with reverence it is associated with the fact that we see personal life above them. Even the ideals of truth, good and beauty are not able to rule over man if they are not based on the existence of personal God as the essence of truth, good and beauty so that ultimately it is not the non-personal world of goods but the absolute person that rules over created spirits through those goods”²². The authentic “being” of man inspired by hope surpasses the kingdom of objects and facts and participates in the process of progress offered by God. God of hope is God who is alive and not “logical”. He is for a man-person an absolute witness and a final reference. In such

²⁰ F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

²² F. Sawicki, *Filozofia dziejów*, p. 194.

an encounter man becomes a person as it is his historical way to hope open to the horizon of eternal love”²³.

The providential rule of God is reflected in development, progress and human action. F. Sawicki in *Osobowość chrześcijańska (Human Personality)* comments: “God is the highest and final aim of human life, not because he is the Lord and Creator, but because he is the incarnation of eternal values”²⁴. However, God is frequently viewed as an enemy of freedom and greatness of human spirit and progress. Only “man without God, a godless person, may be free and great and thus be a god. This is the reason why Nietzsche and other thinkers proclaimed the ‘death’ of God and opened the path to the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche’s atheism is a reflection of the spirit of the time. Gradually, as a result of a general crisis of modern culture and spirit, a new reaction in the form of a turn to religion has appeared. The most eminent thinkers demonstrate that religion is not an obstacle in life but it can enrich it and become an integral condition of real spiritual life”²⁵. Man as a social being and a member of community cooperates for the common good. F. Sawicki explains further this personalistic character of human activity in favour of progress, saying: “however, man in those organisations [state, church] does not cease to be a person, thus he is not only a member, but the unity, an independent centre of life with the right to self-determination as long as this right is not limited due to the common good. In some respects, man surpasses in his value and dignity social organisation of which he is a member. These organisations are not an end in itself as a person is but they serve personal life of their members. This also refers to the state and the Church”²⁶. Ethics of hope retains this personalistic feature as the whole. Neither technical achievements nor growth and progress in creating new institutions or organisations, even charities, are the measure of integral development, but the realism of human personal being and human thought which remain in a proper relation of personal bonds. The criterion of judgement which gives the authentic hope is founded on personal relations between God and man and among people Those who wish to proclaim the coming of a better society cannot forget the argument in favour of the fact that a direct relation of mutual references and bonds undergoes transformation. A “new man”, an “ideal of personality” based on “the most personal of personalities” (“*osobowość najosobistsza*”)²⁷, Jesus Christ, as Sawicki observes, is not a utopia. The hope of being like Christ is not a pure future, but a real possibility even now on earth. Thus, the hope to develop towards being a “personality” is not a pure expectation for something unreal. The ethics of hope built in this manner is not separated from social life. Those who serve society in the best way are people who favour the values of spirit, “highly

²³ Cf. W. Giertych OP, *Moralność dziejów*, in: *Fides et ratio*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 283-480.

²⁴ F. Sawicki, *Osobowość chrześcijańska*, Kraków 1947, pp. 49-50.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 51.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 41.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 61.

ideal personalities²⁸ [...] Through serving other people man does not lose, but gains in his personal life”²⁹. Thus, the ethics of hope rightly indicates God, who is a person, as the source of its authenticity. It is also important that the greatness of human vocation to progress is located above the autonomous individual life and does not limit itself to development in a private sphere. The vision of God who as a person desires our relation reminds us of the principal truth of Christian message, namely the eternal life in the unity with God who is the eternal personification of all values in communion with the saints. It is necessary to admit that also heaven has its own history and development as heaven will be somehow complete when the whole of mankind reaches the personal fulfilment. Also saints, those sacred personalities, are waiting for us to reach the ultimate happiness together. Christ as “the most personal of personalities” does not wish to be in His final glory without His people, without those who are becoming or will become the “sacred personalities” in the end times. God is the communion (*communio*) of persons. The task has been set by God in hope of being fulfilled by us so that we can become persons, full persons, able to be in communion. Christian hope and vocation to development lead us to become, like God, the communion with other persons. This is our heaven, our community with God in the Holy Trinity in communion with saints, our authentic human family.

7. The theology of the nation overcome by the form of Polish Romantic messianism

In the nineteenth century Polish philosophy of history was characterised by strong religious elements which resulted from the dramatic fate of the Polish nation, such as the Partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795 conducted by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria, national uprisings, especially the Kościuszko Insurrection in 1794, the November Uprising in 1830, the January Uprising in 1863, deportations to the Russian Empire (Siberia), forced conscription of Poles to the Russian army, especially those who were involved in the fight for Polish independence, the so-called Great Emigration of the first half of the nineteenth century, mostly to Paris, great hopes to regain independence associated with the Napoleonic Wars and the fight with Russification and Germanisation of the Polish nation during the Partitions (1772-1918).

The expression of it is Polish messianism similar to the Russian one, but with a different background. The central question for Russian messianism was overcoming science, tradition and criticism born out of German idealism, which was hostile to faith. When a critical mind isolated particular powers of soul and divided mankind, the only possible solution for Russian messianism was to turn to faith and to the intuition of the common sense. It was the old faith of the Russian nation and the Orthodox Church which were chosen to lead. Thus for the representatives of Rus-

²⁸ Ibid. p. 43.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 46.

sian messianism, for example Vladimir Soloviev, the most important task of history is the realisation of theandrim, i.e. every man must be incorporated into the life of God, the renewal of the Orthodox Church which should possess a divine element and the introduction of theocracy in Russia, which would establish the Kingdom of God.

Polish messianism which flourished in the nineteenth century, between the November and January Uprising, is a specifically Polish philosophy with a tendency of creating speculative metaphysical systems, on the one hand, and transforming the world through philosophy, on the other hand³⁰. The Polish nation supposedly originating from the ancient Sarmatians was to play a special role in the history of the world. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the bulwark of Christianity was supposed to be the refuge of freedom and the granary of Europe³¹. This idea has been presented in *Psalmodya polska* by Wespazjan Kochowski (1633-1700). Polish messianism strongly refers to the biblical stylisation anchored in Judeo-Christian tradition and alludes to the vision of crucified Jesus, the Messiah, (Slavs, Poland) who is to save and unite sinners (other European nations). For Józef Hoene-Wroński (1776-1853) who introduced the notion of messianism to Polish philosophy, a messiah who would lead mankind to the epoch of happiness was in fact philosophy. Relying on Kant Wroński creates a system of "absolute" philosophy which elevates man from the earthly to the eternal things and introduces an epoch of pure reason. For other thinkers of Polish messianism the fate of Poland acquires a deeper significance for the whole mankind. Sufferings of Poland are a penance not only for the sins of the nation but also other countries in the same way as the resurrection of Poland would be a beginning of a new era. The most eminent representative of this type of messianism was August Cieszkowski (1814-1894). According to his messianistic concept, the Polish nation is called to rebuilt modern social and moral reality (the so-called philosophy of the nation). Cieszkowski stressed the role of the Catholic Church and a significant world-transforming mission of the Slavs, predicting the coming of the era of the Holy Spirit. His most important ideas are included in the works: *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie (Prolegomena to a Historiosophy)* (1838), *Gott und Palingenesie (God and Palingenesis)* (1842), *Ojciec nasz (Our Father)* (1848-1906, four volumes). Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859) was Cieszkowski's friend and remained influenced by his philosophy. The ethos of the Romantic national liberation movement resulted in numerous literary works where suffering, frustration and despair were transformed into a message similar to Christian ethics which supplemented with a messianist thought became an ardent call for the evangelical love. A well-known figure of the time was Andrzej Towiański (1799-1878)³². His ideas were

³⁰ F. Manthey, *Dzieje myśli filozoficznej w Polsce w czasach nowszych*, „Miesięcznik Diecezji Chełmińskiej” (1931), pp. 142-154; 195-203; 280-298.

³¹ Cf. F. Manthey, *Heimat und Heilsgeschichte. Versuch einer biblischen Theologie der Heimat*, Hildesheim 1963.

³² F. Manthey, *Polscy myśliciele. Andrzej Towiański*, „Miesięcznik Diecezji Chełmińskiej” (1931), pp. 417-423.

a mixture of mysticism and concrete political postulates referred directly to the situation in Europe and the fate of Poland and Poles. Towianism proclaimed the need for an authentic imitation of Christ, seeing a political enemy as a fellow human being. Therefore Towiański was accused of the lack of patriotism. The followers of Towiański had a special reverence to Napoleon because, according to them, he initiated the democratisation of the world. However, he betrayed his ideas and they believed to be chosen to continue his mission. One of the principal tenets of Towianism is the conviction that the missions of particular nations, especially Poland, are included in the historical process. In Paris, Towiański managed to gain the support of the greatest Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855)³³ who became the main populariser of messianism for a wider readership (Cf. *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego, The Books of the Polish People and of the Polish Pilgrimage*). Although Józef Hoene-Wroński is regarded as the creator of Polish messianism as historiosophical movement it was Mickiewicz who popularised this concept and combined it with the elements of national history and religious mysticism. It was Mickiewicz's formulations of the rules of messianism in *The Books of the Polish People and of the Polish Pilgrimage* which allowed the readers in Germany, Italy, Ireland, Ukraine and Hungary clearly see and interpret Polish freedom and revolutionary mottos. This program, more than any other literary trend, was the foundation of the vision of Polish martyrdom and salvific role of Poland, which was regarded as the harbinger of the freedom of nations: "Poland as the Christ of nations." It is necessary to mention other representatives of Polish messianism, especially Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849)³⁴ who apart from messianism focused on mysticism and milleniaristic theories. The system of philosophical messianism of Karol Libelt (1807-1875) resembles intuitionism of Henri Bergson where philosophy based on Hegelianism does not privilege logos, but the phenomenon of reason which "feels" more. Thus, his philosophy is also called the philosophy of reason. Bronisław Trentowski (1808-1869) developed his own concept of messianism. He wrote a study entitled *Wiarą słowiańska, czyli etyka piastująca wszechświat (The Slavic Faith, or the Ethics that governs the Universe)* (1847) where he maintained that Slavic gods are the representation of God worshiped by Christians. According to Franciszek Manthey, Józef Gołuchowski (1797-1858), a Polish aristocrat and conservatist, who was active in Austria and Józef Kremer (1806-1875) regarded as the precursor of psychology in Poland are also members of this movement.

Thus, Polish messianism is the incarnation of the Romantic thought with mystical postulates and theories about human destiny and the role of Poland in the history of the universe. It is important to remember that messianist theories were born in a special period of Polish history, in one of the most dramatic stages in the history

³³ F. Manthey, *Polscy myśliciele. Adam Mickiewicz*, „Miesięcznik Diecezji Chełmińskiej” (1931), pp. 739-761.

³⁴ F. Manthey, *Polscy myśliciele. Juliusz Słowacki*, „Miesięcznik Diecezji Chełmińskiej” (1931), pp. 609-619.

of the nation. They might be accused of being illusory and lacking in practicality or even having a wrong approach to theological interpretation of the Bible. It is obvious that nowadays they might be perceived as too narrow and exaggerated. Today, many deprecate this Romantic heritage believing that in our times collective elevation of the spirit through messianist truths is unnecessary or even harmful.

Philosophy of history in Poland represented by Franciszek Manthey and Czesław Bartnik seems to refer to the philosophy and theology of the nation to overcome a negative perception of Polish messianism. Manthey perceives “philosophy and theology of the nation”³⁵ as an answer to the problems of contemporary world. The development of this type of philosophy may lead to the renewal of the spirit in societies as such and in spite of appearances opposes nationalism and particularism. Czesław Bartnik shares this belief viewing a nation as a great family, the family of families³⁶. The word nation (in Polish *naród*) denotes “giving birth to many” and indicates common ancestry. The word “fatherland” (in Polish *ojczyzna*) has similar connotations referring to “father” (*ojciec*) or “motherland” to “mother” (*matka*). A nation is a community of persons linked with each other not only through the external bonds but also, most importantly, through spiritual ties, as a nation is, most of all, a community of spiritual nature. Bartnik observes that a nation is a natural community, given by God and this results in serious consequences. It is a primary community in comparison to other established communities. Christ sent his disciples to the nations: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... (Mt 28:19); “[F]orgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Lk 24:47); “All the nations will be assembled before” Jesus the King” (Mt 25:31, cf. Ps 96,10.13; Rev 21:26). From the beginning, Christianity supported the formation of nations and elevated them to the higher spiritual level. It is especially visible in the history of Europe. A nation, like man, was the way of the Church. Reflections on the nation by the personalist philosophy reveal that it retains personal connotations, possesses its own awareness, aims and role in the divine plan. It is possible to change a citizenship, but it is impossible to change a belonging to a given nation. The fact of being a member of a given national family results in the duty of love for your own nation, namely in authentic patriotism. The love of your own country is a foundation and duty of everyone, being the reverse of love to all people, also members of your own family. The love of your own country stems from a Christian principle of the “order of love” (*ordo amoris*) developed by the Fathers of the Church and scholastics, including St. Thomas Aquinas. What applies today to the nation and mutual personal relations, in the past referred to the traditional virtue of justice and related to it the virtue of patriotism³⁷. It becomes the clarification of a truly human approach

³⁵ Cf. F. Manthey, *Naród w Kościele Powszechnym*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 49/54 (1957), pp. 168-178.

³⁶ Cf. Cz. Bartnik, *Przegląd głównych zagadnień współczesnej katolickiej teologii historii*, Ateneum Kapłańskie, 49/54 (1957), pp. 179-187.

³⁷ Cf. M. Mróz, *Cnota patriotyzmu. Znaczenie pojęcia cnoty dla budowania postaw obywatelskich*,

creating a balance between cosmopolitanism and nationalism and as a “section” of the virtue of justice is a part of positive human action which serves the common good of the entire national community. Justice refers to others and is ad *altrium* thus those members of the community who recognise *bonum civile* of the nation are characterised by kind regard for others, namely the love of the neighbour. The family and also nation as the family of families offers man more possibilities to act and does not limit him. The good of others is treated as a pattern of behaviour. The notions of participation and solidarity which have received a great prominence in the last years are important. The concept of solidarity among people has always been present in the Christian thought and although not always described in this manner constitutes one of the most vital terms in Catholic social teaching. The foundation of solidarity is a natural consequence of the fact that man exists and acts not alone, but with other people, firstly, for the family, later for the nation and state and finally globally for the mankind. Within the framework of various communities this activity is channelled to serve the common good. Solidarity denotes readiness to undertake and realise duties in a given community in reference to the common good of a given *polis*. This orientation for the common good should be well-understood because participation requires personal responsibility as an essential condition of human freedom. These concepts are the foundation of Polish solidarity and the teaching of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and John Paul II.

8. Thomism in the Polish philosophy of history

The question about references to Thomism in the Polish philosophy of history is generally realised through relations to personalism and the construction of social ethics based on philosophy and theology of the nation. Solidarity and participation are dominant principles in this respect. It is not surprising that man is at the centre of all creative studies of the Polish philosophy of history. The question of man marks most of the investigations of Polish philosophers of history, especially the thought of Sawicki³⁸. For all of them, it is Christianity that presents the right form of human relations, discovery of truth, moral and social activity, earthly and eternal life and also human autonomy and the relation with God. In contrary to secular humanism it opposes the vision of man as the only centre and the highest value, which finds its expression in theories of anthropocentric liberalism. The Christian thought of Polish philosophy of history is open to the reality of God and views it as the source of human dignity, life in national community and human family. The dependence on God does not bear any traces of diminishing human dignity. Therefore it is not a radical theocentrism where only God matters, whereas man and society do not count at all. Even if the interpretations do not directly refer to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,

in: J. Miluska, *Wymiary patriotyzmu i nacjonalizmu. Studia interdyscyplinarne*, Koszalin 2009, pp. 29-45.

³⁸ Cz. Bartnik, *Franciszek Sawicki jako historyk*, Lublin 1992.

his influence is fundamental. The specifics of practised philosophy is based on the creation of a uniform program of realistic reflection relying on metaphysics, anthropology and ethics³⁹. It creates an opportunity to view philosophy in the perspective of wisdom where the questions about the ultimate sense of human existence and the model of philosophy which enables man and community to develop their personality are still relevant. These investigations suggest a broadly-understood integration of explanatory philosophy seen as wisdom and philosophy of the axiological nature which refers in its content to the sense of human life. In these cases the most important is truth, which is the highest value in philosophy.

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³⁹ Cf. Max Seckler, *Das Heil in der Geschichte. Geschichtstheologisches Denken bei Thomas von Aquin*, München 1964, Polish trans. *Zbawienie w historii. Teologia w nauce św. Tomasza z Akwinu*, trans. by W. Szymona OP, Kraków 2015.

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Polska filozofia dziejów w świetle myślenia tomistycznego

Streszczenie: Filozofia historii uprawiana w czasach nowożytnych i współcześnie w Polsce jawi się jako jeden z podstawowych nurtów polskiego myślenia filozoficznego. Obejmuje ona różne wątki i jest zakotwiczona w realizmie i personalizmie o zabarwieniu tomistycznym. Polscy reprezentanci filozofii historii nie abstrahują od teologii historii, a wiarę chrześcijańską widzą jako rzeczywistość historyczną, dlatego obok filozofii historii rozwijają teologię historii, gdzie ważnym elementem jest zrozumienie dziejów własnego narodu. W tym kontekście myśl Tomasza z Akwinu inspirowane jest przez widzenie na dzieje z punktu widzenia filozofii i teologii.

Franciszek Sawicki, Franciszek Manthey oraz Czesław Bartnik w swojej twórczości odpowiadają na pytanie o sens czasu i historii oraz o znaczenie procesów historycznych. Wychodzą ze szkoły tomizmu tradycyjnego, dobrze znając filozofię współczesną. Dzięki nim możemy mówić o polskiej myśli historycznej, która zasługuje na przemyślenie i z której wypłynęła myśl św. Jana Pawła II. Wśród nich na szczególną uwagę zasługują przemyślenia Franciszka Sawickiego, dla którego tomizm stanowi wartość dyscyplinującą własne przedstawienie problemu, przez co nie powtarza on jedynie dawnych tradycji, a w sposób uporządkowany sięga do myśli jak najbardziej współczesnej.

Pytanie o odniesienie polskiej myśli filozofii historii do tomizmu zasadniczo realizuje się poprzez odniesienie personalistyczne i budowanie etyki społecznej na gruncie filozofii i teologii narodu, gdzie dominuje zasada solidarności i uczestnictwa. Wspomniani twórcy, a zwłaszcza F. Sawicki, wiele dróg swoich dociekań budują wokół pytania o człowieka. Dla wszystkich to chrześcijaństwo prezentuje właściwą formę: odniesień między ludzkich, odkrywania prawdy oraz działalności moralnej i społecznej, życia społecznego i nadprzyrodzonego oraz autonomii człowieka i jego związku z Bogiem.

Słowa kluczowe: filozofia polska, filozofia dziejów, tomizm, personalizm, mesjanizm polski