

*Justyna Kurczak*

### CIESZKOWSKI ON THE MISSION OF THE SLAVIC PEOPLES

The author of *Ojcie nasz* (The Lord's Prayer) was neither a typical national messianist nor a dedicated Slavophile. In his *opus magnum* we find no vision of Slavs, or Poles, as the only just people and the chosen nation, elected by God to perform the soteriological mission of redeemers of sinful mankind. And yet the author of the original conception of God's Kingdom on Earth was not indifferent to the Slavic cause, to the history of the Slavic peoples seen in general historical perspective, to their contribution towards the future of human kind, and their presence in European consciousness. This is testified by various comments concerning Slavic peoples and their common tradition found in his notes by researchers. In his notes on Germans, for instance, he observed that „the Germans are becoming interested in the obscure Slavic lands, long ignored and neglected even more than China” (Jan Garewicz – the translator – notes that it is difficult to say whether it is a quotation or a comment).<sup>1</sup> In *Apoftegmata do filozofii historii* (*Apophthegmata to the philosophy of history*), written about 1842 as a sketch for his not yet published *Ojcie nasz*, he put down several comments concerning particular historical nations followed by a slightly larger fragment on the Slavs heralding respective chapters of the future work. It deserves being quoted in full:

The Slavic peoples are the representatives of the future history of the Christian world. They are not the absolute element of the future world, as it would comprise the whole mankind, yet they herald it. That splendid tribe has not had yet a history becoming of its importance; therefore, it must have it in the future. Sociality (*Sittlichkeit*) is composed of three moments: **Poland** – corresponds to antiquity. The classical spirit, objectivity.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena do historiozofii. Bóg i palingeneza oraz mniejsze pisma filozoficzne*, ed. J. Garewicz, A. Walicki, Warszawa 1972, p. 298.

*Bohemia* – corresponds to Christianity. Overcoming Germanism, centre of Protestantism later suppressed, subjectivity.

*Russia* – properly corresponds to the future. The synthesis of two other moments; therefore hardly historical so far but now valiantly rising.<sup>2</sup>

Both content and form of this laconic note being a modification of Hegelian historiosophic scheme are puzzling; its second part was – to the best of my knowledge – never expounded. Were it so that Cieszkowski's fascination with the great potentials of Russia, noticed after its victory over Napoleon, was not permanent? Or maybe it was unsuitable for the constitutional model for the times of the coming „fulfilment of peoples”, for his dreamt of „union of all nations”, the true „church of mankind”. Cieszkowski did not recognise the „society of societies” of the United States of America as the figure of this perfect organisation either.

For what are the United States of the New World in comparison to the union and fraternity of the two nations, once strange to one another (sc. Lithuanians and Poles), who freely and willingly, without renouncing anything or imposing anything on the other, merged in one great commonwealth? Such fraternity makes both hegemony and secession impossible.<sup>3</sup>

As it may be seen, Cieszkowski shared the opinion of the romantic thinkers, who idealised the Polish-Lithuanian union as a perfectly designed and executed (until a certain moment) constitutional solution, an exception in the world of Hobbesian „relative natural state”, where not only individuals but also nations were ruled by the maxim *populus populo lupus*.<sup>4</sup> The future fulfilment of God's Kingdom on Earth will require something opposite – the „socialisation of societies” – a move from the legal regulation of interpersonal and international coexistence, often implemented through the law of the stronger, to the moral one, excluding all forms of violence.

Future form of the Kingdom and the chances of its realisation were hinged on the role of Slavic peoples in shaping the future and, consequently, on their character, described by Cieszkowski in *Ojciec nasz*. He showed there those qualities, mentioned by the specialists and lovers of Slavic culture, which – according to him – predestined those nations to take the role of a leader of mankind in forming a new, post-Christian epoch of history. The end to the first epoch – antiquity – was put by barbarous nations alien to its principles; evolutionary transition to the third one will be possible – according to the philosopher – thanks to those, who are able to overcome the discord of the second one and start the period of great peace, to

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted in: *700 lat myśli polskiej. Filozofia i myśl społeczna w latach 1831–1864*, ed. A. Walicki, A. Sikora, J. Garewicz, Warszawa 1977, p. 338–339.

<sup>3</sup> A. Cieszkowski, *Ojciec nasz*, Poznań 1922, vol. 3, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 66.

substitute an olive branch for the proverbial sword of Christ.<sup>5</sup> They could not be non-Christian, since the transition is not to be directed against Christianity as such but actually in its name. Transition from antiquity to Christianity necessitated negation of one by the other (hence its tumultuous character); transition to the epoch prophesied by the author, on the contrary, requires multilateral mediation, which seems to be the vocation of the representatives of the strong and populous tribe inhabiting many lands but with no adequate place in history so far. It is excessively humiliated and at the same time it is reserved by Providence for some future ends. This previously unexpected role of the Slavs had been discovered by Herder – Cieszkowski repeats it after the Slavophiles – in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1792); Cieszkowski reprints almost all of Herder's *Slavenkapitel* in an appendix to his *Ojczyzna nasza*.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the barbarians, who had destroyed the Roman Empire, the Slavs are characterised by strong, immutable commitment to Christian civilisation, and a tendency accept rather than to fight foreign influence. In some respect they are closer to the ancient peoples than to those which entered history in the Middle Ages and so, like the Celts, they could be threatened by the destruction of modern world. They shall not meet the fate of the Celts, however, as the time which comes is the time of „association” and „mediation”, which will complete the union of new and old peoples, thus reviving the human kind.

The transformation of the world expected by Cieszkowski and his epoch could not be, in his opinion, wrought by the nations which used to live of hunting and warfare having worldly possessions in disdain, who used to declare love of their neighbours and respect of the human law, actually enslaving other people and changing public freedom into private wantonness.<sup>7</sup> The task of reconciliation calls for people who are free by their nature, valiant, yet not molesting their neighbours, who are helpful „even **against** their own profits”, who are able to transform „the until now **private** Christian love into a **public** one”.<sup>8</sup> Fulfilment of the last condition, saturation of politics with ethics would be the embodiment of one of the most important postulates of Polish messianists.

According to Cieszkowski, the ethos of freedom, characteristic for the Slavic peoples and manifested in their humanitarian treatment of prisoners of war (changed only after centuries due to their mistreatment by other

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 144–145.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 212–215. In a comment on Herder's view, Cieszkowski reproaches Schloetzer, a well-known specialist on Slavic prehistory, for neglecting the historical importance of Slavic peoples, living on vast expanses of Europe close to other nations (*cf. ibidem*, note on, p. 145).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 146.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 147.

peoples), predisposes them to take lead in the fight for personal and social independence. Following the Slavophiles he claims that historical evidence (e.g. Mauritius Strategus<sup>9</sup>) shows that ancient Slavs knew no slavery in classical sense and even serfdom was milder in their lands than elsewhere in the West. However, when they abandoned their primitive forms of government, they fell into „devilish slavery” becoming its synonym for other Europeans (cf. Latin words *slavus* and *sclavus*). Yet, according to the Bible, the ones, who are humiliated most, are the ones, who will triumph in the end, i.e. the ones, who will redeem the political sins of the world. This historical vocation is best justified by the oldest, pre-historic past of the Slavs; its elements were preserved over the centuries owing to their peripheral role in universal history which has not become ready for the fulfilment of the social ideal, represented so far in its elementary form by the Slavic peoples.

The picture of Slavic society in the pagan times was reconstructed by Cieszkowski, schematically of course, with the help of the sources frequently cited before by the Slavophiles: the scant and fragmentary evidence of Greek and Byzantine authors, (like the before mentioned Mauritius Strategus, Constantinus Porphyrogenetus, and Procopius of Caesarea), the medieval chroniclers from Germany (Thietmar, Helmhold, Adam of Bremen) and Slavic countries (Nestor, Kosmas, Boguchwał, Mateusz Cholewa, Długosz), and the opinions of such specialists in „Slavic antiquities” as Šafařík, Kopitar, Palacky, W. A. Maciejowski, or Lelewel. The imposing list of writers, whose opinions were quoted in the chapter *Zadatki powołania historycznego Słowiańszczyzny (The marks of historical vocation of the Slavic peoples)*<sup>10</sup>, testifies to Cieszkowski’s good orientation in the subject. Arguments over specific issues he came to know on the way do not prevent him from forming a more or less uniform vision of the Slavic peoples. It serves not only to prove the proposition that Slavs had never been „wild mob” (the opinion argued against earlier by Surowiecki, Chodakowski, Rakowiecki and Lelewel) but also to show that their actions had always been inspired by „public spirit”, which was necessary for both proper and just execution of power and for conflictless social co-operation. Our ancestors – he stresses – governed themselves in democratic commons, freely electing people to all offices throughout the history (which is testified by elections in the Commonwealth of Poland). Having recently experienced both anarchy and despotism in their extremes, our compatriots are becoming aware of the need to „moderate” both freedom and order, as mutually dependent.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150–164.

Other features of the Slavs, which according to Cieszkowski were decisive for their „vocation of peace”, were: the tendency for their quarrels to end up in agreement, their magnanimity even for criminals, lack of cruelty, revenge, or tortures. For centuries they did not form regular army and the young generation’s tribute of blood (often mindlessly spilt in other nations) was substituted by the „labour tax” – an obligation to contribute freely towards the benefit of the whole society, which was an anticipation of modern „forms of public works organisation”. They did not accept certain medieval institutions, yet even without the feudal knighthood they did not lack chivalry or nobility, nor did they lack democratic citizen’s virtues – even without their own „middle class”. Cieszkowski’s belief is based on such an interpretation of Poland’s pre-partition history, which allows him to compare Polish gentry with the citizens of Athenian *polis* rather than with western aristocracy. He looks at the Polish gentry’s democracy through the eyes of Lelewel, who was certain that it was a continuation of the primitive Slavic communal rule. The Slavs – says Cieszkowski – with their „naturally democratic gentry” and „naturally social people”<sup>11</sup> were building their social life with the feeling of unity, solidarity, and community being the basis for *co-operation, co-participation, and self-government* – essential qualities of modern societies, serving all of its members (e.g. fighting poverty)<sup>12</sup>. What is more, those principles were observed both in family and national relations – and so at the level of the state they facilitated formation of stable international relations – free unions – which were the prefiguration of the „holy covenant of peoples” in the oncoming epoch of Christian brotherhood and „sociality”.<sup>13</sup> The lack of clear-cut division between the religious and political functions in the early government of Slavs was – according to Cieszkowski, who cited here dubious sources and hypotheses<sup>14</sup> – an argument for the opinion that even in pre-historic times they had implemented the ideal of a State-Church, escaping the danger of intolerance. In his *Ojczyzna nasza*, Cieszkowski writes that even later we can see authentic moral community espousing freedom of opinion thrive in the times „collapsing under the worse-than-inquisition burden of jesuitism” and practise tolerance of, for instance, numerous followers of Judaism. The fundament of that behaviour was the inborn religiousness of the Slavs, who truly deserved the name of „religious tribe” (given to them by Mickiewicz) – the tribe loving the world and its creator Światowit (Świętowit), the lesser gods and demons, and deeply believing in „the influence of invisible spirits on the visible world”, which was accepted to be an important element of Slavic

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 159.

consciousness, especially by Mickiewicz and Libelt. *Nota bene*, it was the Slavic religiousness (referring specifically to Poles), together with other virtues praised by early 19th century writers, that had made them pretendents to the role of an efficient factor in creating God's Kingdom on Earth, also in the eyes of Mickiewicz<sup>15</sup>. Slavs were the „religious tribe” also to a friend of Cieszkowski's, Zygmunt Krasiński, who distinguished them from the Germans – the philosophical tribe – and the French – the political tribe.

Cieszkowski, whose characteristics of Slavic religion seems to follow the so-called *interpretatio christiana*, believed that Christianisation of the Slavs could have proceeded completely peacefully were it not for the expansive actions of the clergy and German rulers, trying to subject of the newly christened countries to their rule. Thus he shared the common Slavophile opinion amplifying the belief in the deep faith of the ancestors with his references to those manifestations of Poles' religious zeal, which were received with contempt by the rational and laicised West, e.g. naming Our Lady the Queen of Polish Crown.

Cast upon the background of selectively apologetic view of Slavic past in *Ojczyzna nasza* the fragment referring to Slavs' later misfortunes looks fairly modest; according to Cieszkowski they were not so much historical errors as the „decline of virtues” caused by internal and external (oppression by the aliens) causes. The decline, however, was reversible, otherwise it would not be possible for them to fulfil the mission of the naturally hard-working, pious and serene (exceptionally virtuous) peoples. The present enslavement of the Slavs makes them brethren of all suffering peoples and – argues Cieszkowski – they deserve the fulfilment of the prophecies of both Old and New Testament, i.e. the solace of Great Peace. They will be resurrected „for the salvation of the world, which has turned pagan again” and for the „forgiving of the trespasses amongst the nations”. Foretelling those things the philosopher calls for liberation of all Slavs, for a historic action in which they could help all those who had lost their rights and protect them from getting lost in the post-revolutionary times. Both tone and content of Cieszkowski's appeal are – by no means accidentally – close to the invocations from the final parts of *Posłanie do braci wygnañców* (*A message to the expelled brethren*) by Brodziński or *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (*Books of Polish nation and pilgrims*) by Mickiewicz. Unlike those two however, Cieszkowski does not draw an apocalyptic picture of the „universal war of peoples” or a dramatic shift; instead he proposes a long, laborious journey of a „God's collaborator”, who works for the better future in every day toil.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura słowiańska*, [in:] *Dziela*, wyd. narodowe, Warszawa 1953, vol. 10, p. 300–301; vol. 11, p. 196.

Faithful to the principle of „drop-by-drop progress” (according to Trentowski’s expression), Cieszkowski dreams about reintegration of a global Commonwealth (not a single state but a religious, political and social unity of people<sup>16</sup>) that would be implemented in a peaceful, gradual way of mutual co-operation of nations – „co-entitled, universally redeemed and saved”.<sup>17</sup> Though equal with other nations our compatriots deserve a special merit, however – says the Christian philosopher of history, following other polonocentric authors – for their lack of national egoism, hegemonistic tendencies, their defence of Christian values and European civilisation.<sup>18</sup> He does not share the opinion of his friend Krasieński that in this „demonic age” all attempts by „elder brethren of nations” who renounce violence cannot liberate the world from evil<sup>19</sup>, as it would destroy his theodicy of history. In *Ojcie nasz* the happy end of history, complete implementation of good is sought for by Cieszkowski as something that will probably happen rather than what must be forced upon history; he looks for concrete premises of the change in the right direction, also among the technical innovations of the 19th century. He does not escape either utopism or mythologisation of the past, its ideologisation and aesthetisation, when he finds the „seeds of historical succession of peoples”, he wrote about already in *Prolegomena*<sup>20</sup>, in the „internal history” of „good old ancestors”, in the legend of a peaceful, trustworthy, and patient people that was created by his predecessors.

For neither of them was the providential sense of history of the Slavs doubtful, since they all needed it in the face of national defeat and sharp contrast between the present and the past. They idealised the past to liberate themselves from the feeling of inability and defeat, to destroy – mentally at least – the moral-political order they could not accept. Thus history was becoming more a subject of faith than of knowledge. In their yearning for the moral ideal the Slavophiles and messianists created such constructs in philosophy of history which could legitimise it. Strong echoes of those actions can be seen in the writings of the author of *Ojcie nasz*; there, however, they were included in an original non-dichotomic scheme of philosophy of history, where eschatology is joined with the „progressive heretic’s” wish that the future raise no fears, be it led only by the skilful hand of God or by the infirm hand of man.<sup>21</sup> Modern historical vocation of Slavs does not exclude vocations of other nations<sup>22</sup>, so there is no

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A. Cieszkowski, *Ojcie nasz*, vol. 3, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Listy Z. Krasieńskiego do A. Cieszkowskiego*, Kraków–Warszawa 1912, vol. 1, p. 258.

<sup>20</sup> A. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena do historiozofii*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. a letter to Michelet contained *ibidem*, p. 336–344.

question of exclusivism in the messianist conception of Cieszkowski.<sup>23</sup> He did not put the Slavs against other nations, since he saw the future, in accordance with his antifatalist and generally procapitalist orientation, as an end for everyone.

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#### CIESZKOWSKI O POSŁANNICTWIE SŁOWIAN

August Cieszkowski nie był typowym narodowym mesjanistą czy polskim słowianofilem. Niemniej w zapowiadanej w *Ojcie nasz* trzeciej epoce dziejów wyznaczył Słowianom szczególną, przywódczą rolę, z racji ich licznych zalet, historycznego niespełnienia, atrakcyjnej siły słowiańskiego charakteru i „pochopności do czynu”, a także dlatego, że Królestwo Boże na ziemi, w którym nastąpiłoby zwycięstwo dobra nad złem, uetyczenie polityki i „uspołecznienie społeczeństw”, wymagało – jego zdaniem – predyspozycji moralno-polityczno-religijnych, posiadanych np. przez Polaków. Przywołał utopijną wizję prahistorycznej Słowiańszczyzny, stworzoną przez miłośników i badaczy Słowian, a z dziejów późniejszych wyeksponował wątek wolnościowo-pokojowo-demokratyczny ze względu na wartości, które uznał za godne urzeczywistnienia w przybliżanej wspólnym trudem wszystkich narodów przyszłości.

<sup>22</sup> A. Cieszkowski, *Ojcie nasz*, vol. 2, p. 26–27.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. A. Walicki, *August Cieszkowski*, [in:] *Polska myśl filozoficzna i społeczna*, vol. 1: (1831–1863), Warszawa 1973, p. 440.