

PETR HUSÁK (BRNO)
ORCID: 0000-0001-9319-1405

Polish sources of inspiration in the cultural work of Czech Catholic Modernists at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The example of the Catholic priest Emanuel Masák (1883–1964)

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka i religia, katolicki modernizm, polscy pisarze, inspiracje kulturalne, Emanuel Masák, Marian Zdziechowski, Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński

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Abstract: This study looks at the Czech Catholic Modernism and its attempts to renew the Church. An attempt has been made to highlight the fact that the sources of inspiration came not only from Western Europe but that Czech Catholic priests were also influenced by Polish culture.

Introduction

Although the Czech Catholic Modernism has been substantially covered in numerous studies and monographs¹ there remain many interesting areas which have not yet

¹ Among them at least two works by Pavel Marek: P. Marek, *České schisma. Příspěvek k dějinám reformního hnutí katolického duchovenstva v letech 1917–1924*, Rosice u Brna 2000. Also: *Církevní krize na počátku první Československé republiky (1918–1924)*, Brno

been subjected to close scrutiny. One of these concerns the level, content and origin of the Czech Catholic Modernist movement's sources of inspiration from other cultural environments. While in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, national traits and local solutions emerged during the secularization of the Czech society (negatively affecting some of the clergy and gradually also laymen), the fact remains that members of the Modernist movement looked to other countries for inspiration for reforms and cultural activities. This response was only natural. In the late 19th century, there was an omnipresent desire in Europe to revive the Church and reform theological education as well as the lives of the clergy and the Churchgoers. At the centre of the debate was the need to change the Church's relationship with the modern world, evaluate the progress made in science, and come to terms with the obvious transformations in the society, including the end of feudal ties and farming as the prevalent form of earning a living. The Church also had to contend with the widespread changes to different forms of coexistence as a result of industrialization and urbanization.

In different European countries, priests, theologians and, to a lesser extent, lay activists searched for different ways to bring the message of the Church to modern people, and Czech Catholic Modernists were keen to profit from their experience. They not only looked for inspiration from theological works but also from art and literature. The objective of this article is to show that the theological and cultural influences did not come only from Western Europe (from German, French, Italian or English-speaking sources) but that much of the Catholic Modernists' inspiration came from Polish culture and the life of the Polish Church. However, the reformist and Modernist movements were not as institutionalized or coherent there as they were in the Czech lands or elsewhere in Europe². In addition to French (Alfred

2005; also: *Živý odkaz modernismu. Sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní konference, pořádané Husitskou teologickou fakultou Univerzity Karlovy v pražském Karolinu dne 29. listopadu 2002*, eds. Z. Kučera, J. Kořalka, J.B. Lášek, Brno 2003; *Modernismus. Historie nebo výzva? Studie ke genezi českého katolického modernismu*, eds. Z. Kučera, J.B. Lášek, Brno 2002; *Od Katolické moderny k českému církevnímu rozkolu. Nástin života a díla Emila Dlouhého-Pokorného (1867–1936), kněze, politika a žurnalisty*, eds. P. Marek, V. Červený, J. Lach, Rosice u Brna 2000; M. Schulze Wessel, "Der Priester soll Bürger werden" – *Priesterzölibat und bürgerliche Geschlechterordnung in Böhmen bzw. Tschechoslowakei*, [in:] *Zwischen Kriegen. Nationen, Nationalismen und Geschlechterverhältnisse in Mittel- und Osteuropa 1918–1939*, hrsg. v. J. Gehmacher, E. Harvey, S. Kemlein, Osnabrück 2004, pp. 275–287.

² M. Rogalski, *Marian Zdziechowski a Katolická moderna. Na tropie związków polskiego i czeskiego modernizmu katolickiego*, *Studia z Historii Filozofii* 5 (2014) 1, p. 102. Text online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/szhf.2014.007> [downloaded on 25 VIII 2016].

Loisy), German (Herman Schell, Albert Ehrhard), English (John Ireland, John Lancaster Spalding) and Italian (Antonio Rosmini) theological writers, the publications of the Czech Catholic Modernists included highly unorthodox artists like Paul Verlaine and Charles Baudelaire, the controversial French poets, and Antonio Fogazzaro, an Italian novelist, poet and playwright. There were also artistic and ecclesiastical ideas coming from Polish territories. I would like to focus on this influence, in particular its influence on Emanuel Masák (1883–1964), a Catholic priest, for a simple reason: even though he was not the only Czech Catholic Modernist interested in Poland,³ his interest was the most systematic and long-term. While other figures attempted to reflect on the situation in Poland, Masák deserves special attention because of his literary-academic approach which enabled him to avoid a predominantly factual and positivistic approach of the time. Instead, he focused in a modern way on issues which today are perceived as parts of the methodology of the history of mentality, or cultural history in general. Masák's interest did not result solely in literary and historical studies. He also tried to use inspiration from Poland for his pastoral work and for new evangelization of the changing Czech society.

This study also aims at drawing on other surveys of the Czech-Polish cultural exchanges, specifically Michał Rogalski's study on how Marian Zdziechowski's works were received by the Czech Catholic Modernists,⁴ and a book by Krystyna Kardyni-Pelikánová on Polish studies in the Czech lands where Emanuel Masák's work is presented in a four-page subchapter⁵. However, first I would like to clarify one key concept used in this paper: a Modernist and a Modernist priest. Most frequently, it is used here in a broader, neutral meaning to describe people in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries who studied reformist ideas, promoted the need to revive the Church and the congregations and who sought to adapt the Christian mission to respect the reality faced by a modern society. When I use the term in a different sense, I specifically make a note of it.

³ The term "Poland" in the historic contexts before 1918 means Polish territories or the Polish cultural environment in general as the Polish state was established after 1918.

⁴ M. Rogalski, *Marian Zdziechowski*.

⁵ K. Kardyni-Pelikánová, *Uwiedzeni przez polską literaturę. Czeska polonistyka literacka*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 226–230.

The tradition of Modernism in Bohemia and Moravia

In the second half of the 19th century, the position of the Catholic Church in the liberalizing Czech society was by no means concrete; the secularization process was evident in the cities, gradually seeping also to rural areas. The speed of the process varied from one region to another. A comparison of Bohemia and Moravia leads to a conclusion that the secularizing trends were slower in Moravia than in Bohemia. Even here, though, the developments led to pressure exerted on the priests and congregations as the Czech national movement began to define itself in opposition not only to the Habsburg monarchy but also to the Church. Catholicism was identified with the Church hierarchy which often consisted of aristocrats of German origin and loyal to the monarchy. Consequently, the Church was viewed as a foreign element.

The lower clergy of Czech origin was inconsistent in how to deal with the situation which finally led to tensions in relations with the hierarchy. For example, Paul de Huyn, Bishop of Brno from 1904 to 1916, was notorious for his attitude towards Czech culture and some priests in particular. The clergy also highlighted the fact that the Church was no longer capable of translating its mission to modern church-goers. The “culprits” included the obscure nature of the liturgy in Latin, the unsatisfactory standing of lay believers and the inability to reach out to youth and the intelligentsia⁶. Many priests complained that education in the seminaries did not prepare them sufficiently for the objections of modern science against religion. These problems, ignored over a long time, resulted in many priests losing their vocation while the Catholic camp was accompanied by religious formalism and significant spiritual passivity⁷.

The “Katolická moderna” (Catholic Modernism) movement provided a platform for attempts of reforms. At first, several younger priests tried to adopt new approaches through artistic work. They were determined not to focus solely on defending the Catholic orthodoxy but rather on discovering the values held by modern works of art, and finding art which could inspire Christians who fell out with the Church. The movement’s activities first centred on the “Nový život” (New Life) magazine

⁶ J. Svítel-Kárník, *Proč se inteligence odvrací od církve*, Nový život (Nový Jičín) 1899, pp. 271–272.

⁷ P. Marek, *České schisma. Příspěvek k dějinám reformního hnutí katolického duchovenstva v letech 1917–1924*, Rosice u Brna 2000, p. 15.

but they soon surpassed the narrowly defined artistic programme to discuss Church reforms. The establishment of clerical associations is evidence of the reformist mood beginning to enjoy broader appeal; it was a professional platform for classifying questions concerning the Church and the clergy's material requirements, the relationship between the lower clergy and the hierarchy, reforms in theological studies and the monastic life as well as the liturgy in the national vernacular, the selection of bishops. There were even discussions of voluntary celibacy. The first association was established in Prague in 1902 and was markedly reformist from the beginning. It was followed by the Association of Catholic Clergy of the Brno Diocese (*Jednota katolických duchovních diecése brněnské*) established by priests in Brno in 1906.

The development of the reform movement differed across the dioceses. This comes out clearly in the course of a comparison of the development of the clerical associations in Prague and Brno. Unlike its counterpart in Prague, the Brno association was much more conservative and was under strict supervision of the Bishop of Brno. For this reason it survived the prohibition of professional clerical associations in 1907 and the difficult period of anti-Modernist campaigns initiated by the *Pascendi Dominici gregis* encyclical in which Pope Pius X condemned Modernism as a dangerous heresy. Therefore, the priests in the Brno diocese could continue to discuss important questions about the life of the Church in their "Věstník Jednoty katolických duchovních diecése brněnské" (*Gazette of the Association of Catholic Clergy of the Brno Diocese*). The "Věstník" could, therefore, offer a platform for expressing ideas of reforms, the improvement of the pastoral situation and the attitudes of the Church authorities, albeit in a restricted, subdued and very careful manner. Due to the more restrained rhetoric, the discussions on the new pastoral challenges was continued until 1918 when the desire for Church reform intensified. This was reflected in numerous articles, for example on the form and methods of religious instruction at schools. The existing methods where the instructors were restricted to interpreting the catechism through the traditional model of questions and responses was criticised. An alternative was emphasising the role of the Scriptures. At the same time, debates took place on the sensitive issue of the relationship between faith and modern science, reflected in requests for the so-called historical-critical method of biblical exegesis and calls for a more broad-minded and less literal interpretation of certain biblical passages, for example, the creation of the world⁸.

⁸ For example: K. Haňávka, *Vědy přírodní a bible ve škole*, *Věstník Jednoty katolických duchovních diecése brněnské* (Brno) 1908–1909, p. 6.

One of the regular contributors to the “Věstník” was Emanuel Masák, a catechist from Židenice community in Brno. He mainly participated in discussions on priests’ relationships with the youth and the intelligentsia in general. He highlighted the complex relationship between the catechists and some progressive-thinking teachers who openly criticized the Church and its teachings for obscurantism. Masák was aware that in the atmosphere of the “culture war”, pastoral work in secondary schools in particular had become extremely problematic and priests often found themselves out of their depth, both surprised by and unprepared for this fierce competitive struggle. It comes as no surprise that in a majority of cases they failed. Many of them were incapable of adequately grasping the gravity of the situation. They referred to older social models where there was little doubt about the role of the priest or the teachings of the Church. Therefore, Masák repeatedly warned that the traditional approach to the catechism and self-righteous moralizing “leads only to straying – from the catechists and from religion in general”⁹ and that it was, therefore, necessary to embark on new and unexplored pastoral paths. He did not only publish his reformist views in this professional journal. As a student of divinity, he also published in “Nový život”, a Catholic Modernist journal, and later, as a young priest, he contributed to several periodicals edited by the Modernists. His tone was mainly moderate and he concentrated on questions concerning the catechism as well as art and literature, from which he drew the greatest inspiration.

Emanuel Masák, a moderate Modernist and cultural inspiration from Poland

An analysis of the content of “Nový život”, the Catholic Modernists’ most important magazine suggests that several important representatives of the movement were interested in life in Polish territories. Among the interested parties was priest Karel Dostál-Lutinov (1871–1923), a leading figure of Catholic Modernism who wrote articles on Polish romanticism, specifically on poet Adam Mickiewicz¹⁰ and Stanisław Wyspiański, a painter, graphic artist, playwright and poet, a representative of Polish symbolism and expressionism¹¹. Josef Svítal-Kárník (1870–1958), a Catholic intellectual, poet, writer and physician, also expressed regular interest in

⁹ E. Masák, *Náboženství na pokračovacích školách průmyslových*, ibidem, p. 169.

¹⁰ K. Dostál-Lutinov, *Adam Mickiewicz*, „Nový život“ (Nový Jičín) 1898, p. 177–178.

¹¹ Idem, *Stanisław Wyspiański*, ibidem, pp. 165–166.

Polish culture¹². There were also articles published in “Nový život” which examine the works of novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz, poet and playwright Lucjan Rydel, writer Kazimierz Tetmajer, and others.

However, special attention was given to Marian Zdziechowski (1861–1938), a historian of ideas and literature, a philosopher and journalist or, to be more precise, to his reformist treatise *Pestis perniciosissima* (1905) in which he examined the sensitive issue of the Church authority and the role of conscience in a Christian’s life. In other works he discussed the relationship between Catholicism and art and the conflict between faith and modern philosophy. His treatises, translated by Josef Vraštil,¹³ were mainly published in “Nový život”. As a second-year student reading divinity, Emanuel Masák also made an attempt to translate *Pestis perniciosissima*. However, before he managed to complete it, Vraštil who was a more experienced translator, produced his version. However, this does not change the fact that Marian Zdziechowski’s work accompanied Masák’s budding interest in Polish culture which led him to reading and being inspired by “Nový život”, along with the ideal of Slavonic reciprocity nourished by the “Sušil” tradition.

Emanuel Masák was born on Christmas Day 1883 in Lazinov near Letovice, in a family of millers. He found vocation for priesthood as a young man in secondary school; he was encouraged in his choice by his mother. He was a gifted and sensitive student with a talent for working with people. Consequently, he started to show an interest in the Czech Catholic Modernists’s attempts at reforms even before his final exams in 1903. At a young age, he was attracted by the idea of the Church opening its gates to a modern society, inspiring all the social strata through its message of salvation as well as the beauty of art. This was the reason of his attraction to “Nový život” when he was a pupil and then as a student of divinity in Brno. Then he entered the world of Catholic culture and the “turmoil of various debates and conflicts concerning personal as well as literary, social and ecclesiastical reforms”¹⁴. He also published his first poems in “Nový život”¹⁵. His early sympathy with Modernism is reflected in his correspondence and extensive literary activities to which he devoted himself with unflagging zeal during his seminary years, as well as the lectures he gave as an activist

¹² For example: J. Svítíl-Kárník, *Po četbě Sienkiewiczova Quo vadis*, ibidem, 1899, p. 216.

¹³ An example of a translation by Vraštil is: M. Zdziechowski, *Intellektualismus a moralismus*, ibidem, 1905, pp. 50–54.

¹⁴ E. Masák, „Nový život“ v brněnském alumnátě, Museum (Brno) 1927/1928, p. 93.

¹⁵ Idem, *Modrý květ*, Nový život (Nový Jičín) 1904, p. 312.

in Růže Sušilova, a divinity association, during his second year of theology studies. A case in point is a lecture entitled “Modern directions in Czech literature” where Masák praised the artists of Catholic Modernism and even managed to go beyond an art-science approach and carefully touched upon the reforms where he rejected the Church’s closed attitude towards modern trends:

we have made mistakes over the past decades: religious seclusion did not lead to a lively enough interest in the general progress of the period, and indeed stood against it, closed behind innumerable locks, and its art – completely isolated, not brought to life by the new fervour and ideas, shrivelling in constant, gradual stagnation¹⁶.

Of importance is his courage to produce these theories based on reading the aforementioned work by Marian Zdziechowski to whom he explicitly referred to, and he also added his regret that Czech culture lacked a combination of romanticism and religious fervour as was typical of Polish culture and artists like Adam Mickiewicz, Zygmunt Krasiński and Juliusz Słowacki¹⁷.

His interest, however, in the Polish sources of inspiration went much further until it became methodical and systematic. Masák formed a Polish circle with his fellow students of divinity, some of whom were of Polish origin¹⁸, perfected his command of Polish, studied the poetry of Eliza Orzeszkowa and the educational texts of Stanisław Karpowicz. He developed a particular fondness for reading the Polish messianic doctrine and romantics¹⁹. He made contact with Polish students and priests at traditional annual divinity gatherings at Velehrad, with whom he also corresponded²⁰. In 1906 he even entered correspondence with Marian Zdziechowski²¹ whose writings he used when working on an article for the theological jour-

¹⁶ Idem, *Vzpomínkové záznamy II. Záznamy z let bohosloví (1903–1907)*. A manuscript in a private archive of the Krmíček family, p. 12. In the Czech original: „[...] v posledních desetiletích staly se u nás chyby: náboženská ustraněnost nebrala dosti živého zájmu na všeobecném pokroku doby, ba stavěla se proti němu, uzavírala se na steré zámky, a její umění, zcela izolované, neživené novými vzněty a ideami, uvadalo ve stálé, postupné stagnaci”.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 12b.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 38.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 17.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 39.

²¹ Archive of the Moravian Museum, Emanuel Masák collection, correspondence, Letter from Marian Zdziechowski to Emanuel Masák from 25 VI 1906.

nal “Museum” entitled “The Polish Messianic Doctrine. In memory of A. Mickiewicz”²².

However, Masák did not only follow literature; he was also able to delve into the debates and discussions held by Polish ecclesiastical representatives, scholars and writers on the need for pastoral work in the modern era, which he subsequently communicated to the readers of “Museum”. Among these articles was “On the tasks and needs of the Catholic Church today” where he once more focused on Zdziechowski’s ideas. Some of them he translated, paraphrased or quoted directly, even if it may have come across as very controversial:

Professor Zdziechowski believes that the clergy has to bring the intelligentsia back into the Church; [...] he regrets the deep abyss which has opened up between the clergy and the intelligentsia. He sees the reason for this in clericalism which, in his opinion, stands for ‘identifying the interests of the Church with the interests of the clergy’. A priest should not feel that he is only an official of the Catholic Church: great, holy and widespread, but at the same time a member of the nation and society in which he lives²³.

It seems that in the first years of Masák’s preparations for becoming a priest in the Brno school of divinity offered substantial room for intellectual development. This is demonstrated by the attendance of the school’s regent, Antonín Adamec, at the above-mentioned lecture delivered by Masák on “Modern directions in Czech literature”. However, the anti-Modernist campaign of 1907 put an end to it, affected “Nový život” magazine in its wake. It was no longer published, the heads of the seminary forbade the students of divinity to subscribe to the Catholic Modernist journal. This was a great blow to Emanuel Masák who saw “Nový život” as a platform for inspiring priests and encouraging pastoral work which was more in the spirit of modern times. The young student’s desire to bring the Church closer to the world clashed with the hard reality of the seminary. In spite of the stifling atmosphere which prevailed in the Church following the issuing of the *Pascendi Dominici gre-*

²² E. Masák, *Polští mesianisté. Památce smrti A. Mickiewicze*, Museum (Brno) 1906, pp. 70–85, 131–140, 181–191.

²³ Idem, *O dnešních úlohách a potřebách katolické církve*, Museum (Brno) 1907, p. 103. In the Czech original: „Prof. Zdziechowski myslí, že se má kněžstvo starati o to, by přivedlo zpět k církvi inteligenci; [...] lituje hluboké propasti, jaká se utvořila mezi duchovenstvem a inteligencí. Příčinu toho vidí v klerikalismu, a klerikalismus je dle něho ‚stotožňování zájmů církve se zájmy kléru‘. Kněz nesmí se cítiti jedině úředníkem veliké, po celém světě rozšířené sv. katolické církve, nýbrž zároveň členem národa a společnosti, ve které žije“.

gis encyclical, just before his ordination Masák struck up acquaintance with Vilém Bitnar (1874–1948), an organiser of the Catholic press. In their correspondence, he described the tense situation at the Brno school: of divinity: “Unfortunately, our freedom here has been greatly curtailed – as is probably the case in all seminaries; this year we were forbidden from reading or subscribing to ‘Nový život’ [...] or anything else which might be linked to the so-called Catholic Modernism, which for some time has been regarded unfavourably”²⁴. However, he would not allow the difficulties, prohibitions and obstacles to dishearten him. Therefore, he discussed with Bitnar the idea of establishing a journal called “Meditace” which would feed on the success and mission of “Nový život”. He enthusiastically offered to cooperate as a student of divinity, and shortly afterwards, as a young chaplain²⁵. He published his poetry in “Meditace” and wrote stimulating articles on art and literature, once again focusing on Poland in his translations and references to new books.

In particular, he focused on Polish journals “Życie”, “Chimera” and “Słowo i Czyn”. He was especially attracted to the latter which was very similar to what he himself had experienced in his attempts to reform the Church, when the activities of reformist priests were condemned across-the-board for being “Modernist” (defined in a narrow sense of the word as heretical) and therefore dangerous:

Immediately in the first edition, in an article “Moderniści i Antymoderniści”, the author [priest Stanisław Miłkowski – P.H.] complains about a phenomenon which is very common here: that they search for Modernism – [...] often from personal hatred or from excessive zeal and ultra-conservatism – where it does not exist – and they left this mark also on all reasonable, progressive efforts which are completely in accordance with the basis of Catholicism – to the great joy of free thinkers²⁶.

²⁴ LA PNP, Vilém Bitnar collection, Emanuel Masák to Vilém Bitnar, sg. 12/73, Inv. No. 5828, Letter from 2 V 1907. In the Czech original: „Bohužel jest tu naše volnost dosti omezena – jako asi ve všech seminářích; letos právě bylo nám zakázáno čísti a odebírat i, Nový život‘ [...] a také na vše, co se s ním a s t. zv. Kat. Modernou zdá souviseti, hledí se od nějaké doby nepřívětivě“.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ E. Masák, *Z literatury polské*, Meditace (Prague) 1910, p. 177. In the Czech original: „Hned v 1. čísle v článku ‚Moderniści i Antymoderniści‘ stěžuje si [autor článku kněz Stanisław Miłkowski – P.H.] na zjev, který jest i u nás dosti častým: že se hledá modernismus – [...] často z osobního záští nebo z přílišné horlivosti a ultrakonzervatismu – tam, kde ho vůbec není – vtiskuje se ta známka i všem snahám rozumně pokrokovým, stojícím úplně na základě katolickém – k veliké radosti volných myslitelů“.

Masák went on to notice that the strained atmosphere of mistrust and mutual suspicion of “Modernism” also resulted in some Polish inspirational and talented writers and artists finally beginning to stop reflecting on the challenges of the modern age in relation to religion, the Catholic faith and the Church. He cited the case of Lutosławski. Masák did not deny that Wincenty Lutosławski’s (1863–1954) religious thinking provoked controversy but he was open-minded towards him and appreciated religious ideas which aroused interest amongst the young and the intelligentsia. He was also enthusiastic about the Eleusis academic society, which he felt could inspire Czech students in a modified form²⁷. Masák regretted, however, that,

like in our country, in Poland there are also many people who recognise nothing more important than the search for heresy in the works of Catholic writers and accusing them of Modernism... These attacks finally resulted in what all the persecution of the freethinkers could not accomplish: Professor Lutosławski has given up writing on religion and focused solely on philosophy²⁸.

Meanwhile, as an evangelizing intellectual, he could have served as an example for others: “during a period of fanatical atheism, a scholarly thinker dared to talk about philosophy and the Church, about miracles and sanctity,” he could have become “a missionary of the faith, particularly amongst laymen...”²⁹.

Masák also used Polish experiences to defend the activities of the Czech Catholic Modernists, albeit unsuccessfully. Despite the fact that “Meditace” focused mainly on the cultural aspects of the ecclesiastical renewal and not on the demands for ecclesiastical reform, it did not stifle suspicion of heresy. This periodical was banned by the Church in 1911. For many years, Masák refused to believe that the Church was capable of such “great injustice”³⁰. He hoped that the ban, imposed at the request of Paul de Huyn, the Bishop of Brno, would be quickly lifted. He hoped in

²⁷ Idem, *Eleusis*, Studentská Hlídka (Prague) 1910, pp. 164–166.

²⁸ Idem, *Náboženské credo W. Lutosławského*, *Meditace* (Prague) 1910, p. 459. In the Czech original: „Jako u nás, neznají ani v Polsku mnozí nic důležitějšího, než hledati v pracích katolických spisovatelů herese a viniti je z modernismu... Tyto útoky konečně dokázaly, čeho nedovedla všechna pronásledování se strany volnomyšlenkářské: prof. Lutosławski vzdává se své činnosti na poli náboženském a věnuje se pouze svým pracím filosofickým”.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 462. In the Czech original: [Přitom jako evangelizující intelektuál mohl být příkladem pro ostatní]: „učeny myslitel osmělil se v době fanatického ateismu mluvíti filosoficky o církvi, o zázracích, svátostech“, [mohl se stát] „misionářem víry zvláště mezi laiky...”

³⁰ LA PNP, Vilém Bitnar collection, Emanuel Masák to Vilém Bitnar, sg. 12/73, Inv. No. 5828, Letter from 28 VI 1911.

vain. Considering the emphasis placed by Emanuel Masák on literature as a tool for pastoral work, it does not come as a surprise that he took the ban on “Meditace” so badly. It was not a personal whim or hobby. Each new edition of the journal provided a new stimulus to his creative and pastoral work carried out first of all as a chaplain in several Moravian parishes and then as a catechist in Židenice community in Brno³¹. Interestingly, this disappointment did not distract him from his work. It seems that he could not accept the fact that there was no room in the Church for the progressive Catholic Modernist view of art and culture in general. In the meantime, he continued to analyse sources of Polish cultural inspiration in similar magazines: “Hlídka”, “Obrození”, “Hlídka literární a umělecká”, “Nový obzor” and “Archa”. He presented authors and artists who had been his favourites in the past (Eliza Orzeszkowa, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Lucjan Rydel), whilst adding new ones (Cyprian Kamil Norwid). However, his interest revolved mainly around Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849). Masák wrote several long essays dedicated to them (published first in “Meditace” and subsequently in other journals), and in 1918 he published them collectively under the title *K branám věčnosti* (To the Gates of Eternity).

His essays on the Polish romantic poets are of even greater value because he studied their works as well as their correspondence and other available sources. He attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the artists’ social and intellectual background and thus enter into their “world of ideas”³². The question remains what approach he took towards these Polish artists, why he focused on them so much and why he chose them as an example to the Czech people.

Masák was determined to prevent resentment against the Church and priests. On the contrary, he wanted priesthood to enjoy the same social prestige that it had in the 19th century; it would shape cultural and religious events and unite the different classes in the national community gathered around the altar of Slavonic worship. He acknowledged the fact that in the 20th century, the priest was not the only leader of cultural life and would have to cooperate with teachers and other local intellectuals including mayors, activists in local societies and representatives of political parties. He believed, however, that religion should be the major binder of the society as was the case of the priest and the Church. However, if the Church was to try to follow

³¹ Ibidem. Letter from [9 X] 1907.

³² E. Masák, *K branám věčnosti. Náboženské touhy v životě a díle Julia Słowackého a Zikmunda Krasińského*, Olomouc 1918, p. 13.

this traditional model, and if the ideal of the priest as a social binder was to remain intact, Masák saw no other way but boldly reaching out to the modern society. In his essays and other works, he confided to the readers that as a priest, he would never rest over the question of “how to save lost souls”³³, how to make the Church more socially just, more national and democratic³⁴, and how to “unite two opposing worlds and bring them together on an increasingly divergent path”³⁵ – i.e., the world of traditional believers and those who were growing indifferent to the message of Christianity.

This was why he was attracted by the ideas emerging from Catholic Modernism and why he looked to Poland for inspiration. Polish artists (Kraśiński and Słowacki) were examples of an honest, emotional and passionate search for the truth and higher values of God himself. His attraction was not hindered by the fact that this activity often crossed the limits of orthodox Catholicism. Masák did not refute or even find fault with it, as he found himself in agreement with this search. Moreover, it represented the ideal of uniting the Christian faith and national thinking. He used the artists’ testimonies to communicate with the Czech society that it was possible to provisionally reject the faith and the Church, to disagree with the dogmas, to sharply criticize the papal policies, condemn the poor treatment of the Slavonic nations and their aspirations, reject priests’ misdemeanours and look for your own faith in your own way. However, all this was to be within an honest search for the truth which finally provides a deeper knowledge of God. Therefore, despite all the institutional mistakes made by the Church and the personal doubts, it was possible to be an honest person, a patriot, a citizen, a Christian and a Catholic, all at the same time. In his book, Masák created a considerably free and tolerant space for understanding other people’s searches. He was convinced that the Polish artists represented “an image of man in the throes of desire for God, for the supreme Ideal of all truth, goodness and beauty,” an image which would be close to the “soul of modern man”³⁶.

Notably, these essays were published as a collection in the turbulent year of 1918, and so made an interesting, albeit now forgotten, contribution to the discussion on how to live a Christian life in the 20th century, and which form the Church should assume in the new Czechoslovak Republic. Naturally, he wanted to address not only

³³ Idem, *Šimon Stylita*, Prague 1929, p. 114.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 78.

³⁵ Ibidem, s. 102.

³⁶ Idem, *K branám věčnosti*, Olomouc 1918, pp. 8–9.

his fellow believers but a wider public in general. For this reason he used a poem by Juliusz Słowacki to give his fellow citizens an alternative view of the papacy and Rome, as a negative view of Rome was one of the flagships of the Czech national movement, which by 1918 escalated to open hatred. In his book, Masák even indicated a certain understanding for the complaints about some elements of Rome's ecclesiastical policies. He made an attempt to say, between the lines (as was the case with Słowacki) that neither the criticism of the Church or the faith were seen by Czechs as "against Rome, against the clergy and the 'saints'"³⁷ but against the human misdemeanours of the specific believers and the historical form of the office of the Roman pontiff. This was the reason why, together with Słowacki, he dreamt of a different pope, a "Slavonic" pope, fearless in defending the rights of Slavs and "renewing the spirit's reign in the world, exorcising the interiors of Churches, clearly revealing God, inspiring love and saving the world"³⁸.

The Polish writers and the argument over the legacy of Catholic Modernism after 1918

There was no room for similar discussions and openness in the upheaval after 1918. The moderate approach of Masák (and many other priests) was caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, he was silenced by a harsh anti-clerical campaign and, on the other, he was overwhelmed by the fervent demands of the reform movement which developed among priests. All the old tensions resurfaced with renewed force. During the turbulent days in October 1918, priests may have tried to show that they grasped the uniqueness of the moment, that they were standing "in line with the nation",³⁹ and that they had been an irreplaceable part of the Czech national revival throughout the whole of the 19th century. However, their position in the new national state was by no means clear. The war atrocities and the experience of mass slaughter left permanent psychological scars in the nation. The pre-war, anti-clerically inclined section of the society was now supported by the post-war relativism of values. It is hardly surprising that a strong wave of anti-Catholicism emerged soon after the foundation of the national state.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 123.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ *Projev Jednoty duchovenské k českému národu dne 17. října 1918*, *Věstník* (Brno) 1918, p. 75.

With renewed energy, the clergy began to form professional associations (ecclesiastical unions) to discuss the necessary reforms. However, they were unsuccessful in introducing any fundamental changes. The turning point came in January 1920 when a radical wing of the *Jednota katolického duchovenstva* (Union of Catholic Clergy) in Prague (the so-called Reformist Clergy Club) called for an emergency assembly during which an agreement was made to leave the Catholic Church and form a new national Church. As a result, some priests left the Catholic Church and formed the Czechoslovak Church. Afterwards, there was an acrimonious atmosphere of mutual recrimination amongst the clergy over the issue of who was most to blame for the schism which eventually led to a ban on any discussions of reforms. Until the mid-1920s, the case of Czech Modernism and the priests' reform movement was generally considered closed. Nevertheless, polemics occasionally appeared in the Catholic media on the legacy of the priestly reforms and the Catholic Modernist movement.

Emanuel Masák was involved in one of these polemics in 1924 when he clashed with Jan Strakoš, a young, ultramontane and conservative priest and journalist for "Život" magazine. Masák was not impressed with Strakoš's article "On 'Catholic Modernism'" (*Za 'Katolickou Modernou'*) where he called Czech Modernists heretics whose works had to be condemned: "Which is why the young generation, aware of this infinite affliction of the soul [...], is ashamed to the depth of its soul to speak of following in this tradition, and treads a distinctive, dramatically opposite path [...]"⁴⁰. It is interesting to note that Jan Strakoš reproached Czech Catholic Modernists for being interested in all the German heretics, at the same time overlooking giants like Chesterton, Claudel, Hello, Bloy, as well as Norwid, Krasiński and Słowacki. Therefore, three Polish artists were included into the group of authors of interest for their voice on the need of reforming the Church. However, they were writers whose works were studied carefully by none other than Emanuel Masák, a moderate Modernist. In "Hlídka" journal he did not hesitate to scold Strakoš for being wrong and reminded him of his own studies and translations in "Meditace" where he had carefully studied all the three writers. What is more, he also attempted to communicate to Strakoš and the young generation of Catholic academics centred around "Život" the need for a more detailed study and evaluation of the older traditions, including Catholic Modernism. This meant that he was still certain that Mod-

⁴⁰ J. Strakoš, *Za „Katolickou Modernou“*, *Život* (Prague) 1924, p. 153. In the Czech original: „Proto mladá generace vědoma těchto neskonalých pohrom ducha [...], hanbí se do duše mluvit o navazování na tuto tradici a jde diametrálně cestou jinou, svéráznou [...].“

ernism was an interesting enough source of inspiration, at least on a cultural level, for the new generation of priests, intellectuals and artists⁴¹. Even if it was necessary to set aside demands for ecclesiastical reforms like the use of the Czech language in the liturgy, it would still be possible to support and promote the contribution of Catholic Modernism to art.

In the charged ecclesiastical atmosphere following the abolition of the reform movement, he attempted to express this new *modus vivendi* through “Archa”, an older journal which he started to edit in 1924. He believed it would be possible to create a printed platform (à la revue “Meditace”) used by old Modernists and talented young authors of any ecclesiastical-ideological persuasion. To Masák, it was not only about the concept of a single journal but also about an outlook on life and relationships within the Church, through which supporters of different ideas on how to spread the Christian message would be able to live side by side. However, he was unsuccessful as he was unable to attract collaborators who would have been enthusiastic enough about his project and his vision. Therefore, he continued to work for several journals even though they remained on the periphery of artistic life, at the same time focusing on his demanding pastoral work in Brno-Židenice.

Conclusions

In conclusion, I would like to offer some brief theses. Firstly, although it might appear that the vision of the Catholic Modernist priests – i.e. the vision of a Church receptive to the modern world – eventually proved unsuccessful and that the efforts of priests like Emanuel Masák and others were in vain after 1918, this is not exactly the case. Emanuel Masák died on 24 September 1964, at a time when the Second Vatican Council ushered in a new era for the Catholic Church, in many ways meeting the demands of the Czech reformist priests. However, an even more important fact is that the reform discussions helped to educate a new generation of clergy willing to look for new ways to reach out to the Czech public, the youth and the intelligentsia. In the 1930s, they spread inspirational forms of pastoral work which were of special attraction to the youth and liturgical movements. Academic societies played a key role in these movements i.e. societies very similar to those which Masák imagined back in 1910 by referring to the Polish Eleusis society. Although

⁴¹ E. Masák, *Mladá katolická generace a „Katolická moderna“*, Hlídka (Brno) 1924, pp. 34–35.

Romano Guardini's German student movement was the main source of inspiration for the Czech youth, it dated back to the time before WWI and the Polish influences covered by Masák in "Studentská hlídka".

Secondly, the fact that Masák was determined to avoid being restricted to his own country is impressive. He sought examples and experiences from elsewhere, studied them carefully and discovered ways to employ them in his own pastoral work or other cultural activities.

Thirdly, the message from Masák's lifelong interest in Polish culture which has stood the test of time, was his conscious attempt to develop Czech-Polish connections in order to improve the relationship between the two Slavic nations. He saw this task as his personal contribution to the improvement of the two countries' geopolitical security. This made it all the harder when he experienced the post-Munich events of autumn 1938 and the territories lost to Nazi Germany, as well as the territorial conflicts between Czechoslovakia and Poland⁴². With hindsight, this event only confirmed and reinforced the value of the ideal of good neighbourly relations as the basis for political and international security of the two countries.

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Petr Husák M.A., Ph.D.

Historický ústav

Filozofická fakulta

Masarykovy univerzity

Adres do korespondencji: Těšany 138

664 54 (Czech Republic)

e-mail: petr.husak@seznam.cz

Summary

This study looks at Czech Catholic Modernism and its attempts to renew the life of the Church, which Czech Catholic priests and believers looked for inspiration for

⁴² Idem, *Vzpomínkové záznamy V. Záznamy z let 1932–1944*. Manuscript from the private archive of the Krmíček family, p. 112.

from theology, as well as art and literature at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. An attempt has been made to highlight the fact that theological and cultural sources of inspiration not only came from Western Europe (from German, French, Italian or Anglo-American linguistic and cultural sources), but that the Catholic Modernists were also greatly influenced by Polish culture. One of the most important Catholic Modernists was the priest Emanuel Masák (1883–1964), and this study focuses on his ties to Polish culture.

Translated from the Czech by: Graeme Dibble