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Religion and Radical Politics. From the Hussite Wars to Balaclava-Clad Virgin Mary

Abstract: The essence of radical movements is always an idea, for which people are willing to die. In the context of political emancipation religion might be such an idea. The connection between religion and radical movements is usually based on dialectics with the official interpretation of dogmas. Revolutionists claim that the official dogmatic theology is a “heresy” and they offer the true confession of faith instead. This article analyses the way religion serves as the basis for revolutionary movements, how it is engaged in a specific interpretation of the world. The analysis is grounded on three examples: the Czech Hussites, a conspiracy led by Father Piotr Ściegienny as well as religion in the Zapatista Movement. The aim of this paper is to present the way in which religion becomes the basis for a radical worldview.

Keywords: religion, radical movements, radical politics, politics

The research on revolutionary movements, especially the ones based on mass mobilization, leads to the conclusion that the moment they appear is tantamount to the appearance of a “politics of ideas” characteristic of them. A politics of ideas denotes accepting a set of ideological forms in a mass movement. These forms enable the movement to create its own ways of perceiving reality, for example formalizing the enemy as well as such that present the conditions in which the ideal of social harmony will be achieved (utopia). An example of such a politics of ideas might be the 19th-century communism. It indicates in the form of research how one should notice in social reality what is unwanted in this reality, for example the existence of social classes and their fight. After setting such a concept in motion, the individuals becoming familiar with the communist movement will assess the social reality from the angle of the class struggle. This ideology indicates how

to conceptualize the opponent in the form of an enemy, which conditions to use to distinguish him or her and hence such an enemy is the predatory class. However, it suggests the vision of the future in the form of a solution, when both the unwanted conditions of social reality and their perpetrators – exploiters – will disappear. Exploitation and poverty will disappear, the conditions of secular paradise will come true, exactly what the form of the future utopia assumes.

In communist concepts, connecting the ideological projects with the Enlightenment and industrial transformations of Western society in the 19th and 20th century was of immense importance. Revolutionary ideologies directed towards the intelligentsia and the urban proletariat referred to the idea of social progress, were based on the fundamental dimension of education and cultivating knowledge¹. In social imagination of the 19th and 20th century the ideology of development, social and cultural evolution played a crucial role. Revolutionary concepts, let us call them “modernist”, referred to the developed (from the perspective of these representations) forms of culture (for example European culture). The axis between civilization and culture is useful in the understanding of this phenomenon, where civilization is interpreted as a higher stage of the development of culture. In these concepts there is the assumption that a human being as such possesses culture, but only in certain fields did it undergo evolution towards the higher stage – civilization². Social utopias in the 19th century were created exactly with reference to such an understanding of civilization³. Building utopia resulted from the conviction that it is created from the viewpoint of the development of civilization. Hence the specification and division of social areas are clearly present in these concepts. In these utopias, for example, the separation of religion and politics is instinctive, which is evidently the consequence of the Enlightenment tendencies. Thus the concepts of radical politics are connected with the concepts of the reason and rational development.

I would like to present in this article that in the case of radical politics referring to the rural areas, the politics of ideas is constructed and based on other patterns, going beyond the division: culture-civilization. Peasant concepts of radical politics not so much refer to a kind of presumed postmodern unity, as they show that the division into postmodernist and modernist (or even postmodern) concepts is not necessarily accurate. Radical peasant policies simply show that the idea of politics

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¹ J. Rancière, *Proletarian Night: Worker's Dream in Ninetieth Century France*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1989.

² W. J. Burszta, *Antropologia kultury. Tematy, teorie, interpretacje*, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 1998, pp. 25-26.

³ Even concepts of “primitive” utopias do not depart from that, for example, the ideology of Russian populism. In this ideology, modern civilization is understood as “oppression” and within it there is a turn towards premodernist rural communes, cf. A. Walicki, *Rosyjska filozofia i myśl społeczna. Od oświecenia do marksizmu*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1972, pp. 332-335; A. Etting, *Internal Colonisation: Russia's Imperial Experience*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

as rational, negotiated activity is significant to the political activity only to a limited extent. The factors, which might be described as going beyond the division into the rational and the irrational, are much more significant. These factors include the affective practices, combining imagination, myth, folklore, art as well as religious beliefs. Hence I refer to the foundation of radical politics as the “affective politics of ideas”.

In this article I will attempt to present the importance of non-Enlightenment elements in politics, going beyond the division into what is rational. It concerns pondering over the way in which the subject of radical politics emerges. First of all, however: how do factors such as religious beliefs influence the affective politics of ideas? The answer to these questions is the appearance of a specific affective politics of hope, that is such a narrative and story (about these peasants, their own stories), in which they recognize reality, as the “unwanted”. Moreover, they start creating future in which colloquially speaking they would feel better, which might be more significant.

The function of affective politics of hope might be fulfilled by religion in certain conditions. In this article I will provide an analysis of chosen examples of radical revolutionary movements, for which the fundamental basis were religious beliefs. In this paper I will refer to historical movements as well as more contemporary ones. By using these studies I will attempt to show that what I defined as the affective politics of hope is necessary for the liberation, emancipation movements to appear. My assumption is to prove that radical political movements, but not only, must be based on the idea strengthened by emotional involvement, which might result from religious beliefs, from connecting religion and politics. Such a politics of hope manifests itself in the revolutionary folklore, that is in the whole collection of slogans, views, notions, texts, manifestos, posters, songs, the entire visual sphere and everything which is the means of conveying this specific form.

My analysis will be based on three instances of radical political movements, grounded on religion. In this article I would like to analyse the ideology of the Hussite radicals in the Czech Kingdom, the so-called Taborites. My aim is also to analyse the activity of the radical Polish priest from the 19th century, fighting for emancipating peasantry from serfdom – Rev. Piotr Ściegienny. The third area of my examination will be the syncretism of folk religions, theology of liberation and radical politics in the Zapatista movement in Mexico.

Truth will prevail!

In the area of the present Czech Republic a number of conflicts referred to as the “Hussite Wars” took place between 1419 and 1434. This conflict was caused by the news of burning Jan Hus at the stake, who was a theologian in Prague, opposing

corruption and the betrayal of its mission by the Catholic Church. Hus *inter alia* supported the heresy of John Wycliffe, very popular in the Czech Kingdom.

At the same time Christian Western Europe experienced the so-called Western Schism, during which even three popes functioned simultaneously. One of them – antipope John XXIII – announced indulgences in the Czech Kingdom (payable)⁴, from which he wanted to finance a crusade against Ladislaus the Magnanimous (King of Naples), supporting the rival of John XXIII, another pope Gregory XII. These indulgences and the whole situation of a fight for influence, were strongly condemned by Jan Hus, who in addition quite mercilessly used the thoughts of the heretic Wycliffe. In order to handle this situation, Sigismund of Luxembourg convened the famous Council of Constance, when all religious doubts were to be explained. Jan Hus was also called in to the council, who received a guarantee of safety from Sigismund. However, contrary to promises, Hus was executed for heresy on 6th July 1414. Sigismund led to condemning Hus as a heretic and sent a letter to the Czech Kingdom threatening all followers of Hus and Wycliffe. In response to executing Hus and the attitude of Sigismund of Luxembourg, disturbances broke out in the Czech Kingdom, which soon turned to religious war.

Not only the international situation influenced what happened in the Czech Kingdom. In the 14th century, in reaction to changes which concerned practically whole Europe (depopulation caused by the Black Death, the fall in the value of currency), the House of Luxembourg tried to consolidate their power and secure property in the Czech Kingdom. On the one hand, they pursued a policy weakening the developing craft industry, on the other hand, debilitating the old noble families. The system, similarly to other European countries, clearly leaned towards absolutism. The royal authorities introduced, for example, the *berna* tax, which burdened feudal lords, but was paid by peasants. This tax was relatively high, since it amounted to half a *grzywna* per each *lan*⁵. Lowering the prestige of the gentry as well as control over craft resulted in a growing social opposition to the royal power⁶. This objection found an outlet in the religious conflict. A pro-Protestant movement, launched after the death of Hus, first of all was based on the objection to unlimited power of secular sovereigns and the power of the Church. However, not the course of the conflict itself is significant here, but how the radical section of the Hussites was shaped, that is the Taborites.

František Šmahel indicated anxiety as the main reason for the revolutionary and reformatory upheaval. The anxiety was connected with the returning epidemics of the Black Death (1357-1363, 1369-1371, 1380, 1390 and directly before the wars 1413-1415), the schismatic frenzy and the conflicts of the high and mighty. All this

⁴ Cf. F. Šmahel, *Husitská Revoluce*, vol. I, Univerzita Karlova, Prague 1993, p. 220.

⁵ E. Maleczyńska, *Ruch husycki w Czechach i w Polsce*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1959, p. 92

⁶ F. Šmahel, *Husitská Revoluce*, op. cit., pp. 220-223.

made people to look for a permanent ideological support. Religion could be such a support, but the divided institutional Church having mundane fights was not suited for this purpose. Moreover, the institutional Church consisted of representatives of noble families, the interests of which were often in conflict with the interests of normal people⁷. All these trouble spots in the Czech Kingdom led to the outbreak the "Hussite Revolution". Why do we speak of a revolution? Because the fundamental aim of the events was a change in the existing order.

In 1413 Jan Hus formed some sort of project of social change. It was to be based on 4 principles:

- obedience to God's law;
- disagreement with the power of the Antichrist (personified in all Church authorities – M. R.'s note);
- reform of greedy priesthood;
- harmony of social states⁸.

Four Articles of Prague from 1420, which became the basis for the Hussite movement, presented the general and fairly mild conditions of Hus in the form of a radical social programme. This specific manifesto included:

- freedom to preach the word of God;
- administering communion under both kinds;
- the Church is to be poor and deprived of power over the laity;
- punishment for mortal sins⁹.

The main axis of the discussion is religion. The ideological construction of the Hussite Revolution was against the "institutionalization of faith", especially against grabbing it in the same way as political sovereignty was grabbed: available only to few (what is interesting, the points of the "freedom to preach the word of God" and "depriving the Church of secular power" forecast the Enlightenment). The Hussite ideology was based on the change in the attitude of the Church to earthly matters and "regaining" faith. In terms of social programme the Hussites formed many different groups and as a result of a specific consensus they proposed rather "righteous feudalism", which was to derive from the strict observance of the religious neighbourly love¹⁰. The radical fraction of the Hussites, that is the Taborites, was built on this foundation.

In terms of economy, the Hussite Revolution was rather moderate as a whole, although radical religious postulates made it possible to spread also other radical ideologies. Since 1419 Czech peasants in great numbers formed communities led by agitators and folk preachers, establishing them in the vicinity of the mountains and giving them Biblical names. The extreme trend of the Hussites took on its name

⁷ F. Šmahel, *Husitská Revoluce*, vol. II, Univerzita Karlova, Prague 1993, p. 24.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 95

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 114.

from Tabor, near Bechyne¹¹. The patroness Anna of Mochov from Sezimovo Ústí under the influence of religious Hussite trends agreed to an unhindered freedom to preach the word of God on her land by various kinds of reformers, religious fanatics. Those radicals cruised around villages and preached sometimes very extreme views, inspired for instance by the Cathars, regarded as heretics or the millenarianist movements. Radical ideology developed and spread due to the network of itinerant preachers, so it reached beyond the formal practices of direct contact and oral traditions. In this town the Hussite radicals driven out of Prague hid when the revolution began to make its way towards reformism and agreement.

The main axis of the Taborite ideology was religion, of course, and the return to the roots of faith. From this axis radical economic demands were generated logically. A point of departure for the Taborites were millenarianist and heretic concepts, circulating twenty-four hours after the "Black Death" around Europe. The inevitability of death and the end was propagated in them, the arrival of the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ was expected. However, these concepts were rather pessimistic, serving as an outlet for extreme feelings, they called and tamed fears connected with the demise of the Church, the Black Death, the crisis of feudalism. The crucial moment in the Taborite movement was when these concepts were reformulated into a positive social programme: the programme of abolishing the feudal system and the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. A rather small number of documents connected with the Taborists survived. The majority of facts are known indirectly. One of the main sources of knowledge about the ideology of the Taborites is *Život kněží tábořských* by Jan Přebem, although it is a polemic work, critical of the Taborites. In this publication, as Robert Kalivoda claims, you might notice that mainly under the influence of Jan Čapek occurs a transition from pessimistic, millenarianist feelings to creating an anti-feudal radical ideology¹². One of the popular prophecies stated: "In that time there will not be on earth any human reign or rule, nor allegiance, all serfdom will cease (...) everyone will be equal, brothers and sisters (...) Sons of God will strangle the throats of kings (...) kings, princes, prelates will disappear..."¹³.

The ideological model of the Taborites did not differ from other prophetic eschatological constructs. In sermons and speeches the end of the world, a catastrophe was predicted, which would change the face of the world, and not, as in other millenarianist movements, annihilate it. It was predicted that in 1420 a destruction of the existing order will occur, when Jesus Christ will descend to earth and condemn sinners. After that time only the chosen ones would remain on earth. The chosen ones are those who live in accordance with the rules inspired by God, while all

¹¹ E. Maleczyńska, *Ruch husycki...*, op. cit., p. 374.

¹² R. Kalivoda, *Husitská ideologie*, Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, Prague 1961, p. 337.

¹³ As cited in: E. Maleczyńska, *Ruch husycki...*, op. cit., p. 372.

others will be lost. They were to abandon their possessions and gather with others, in utopian communes in the region of the Czech mountains as the planned descendance of Christ on earth was to occur exactly in the Czech Kingdom¹⁴. The Taborites rejected passive anticipation of Him in favour of a peasant uprising. Christ was to descend as a strict judge and avenger, so it was necessary to prepare for His arrival through armed riots against those who were regarded as betraying His will. "In this time of vengeance the Taborite brothers are God's hosts sent to eradicate all evil and corruption from the Kingdom of Christ and [to root out] the evil ones from among the good ones in God's Church"¹⁵.

Two terms were used in history to denote the described cases. The Hussite Wars or the Hussite Revolution. Although we might have doubts as to the notion of a "revolution", in the case of creating peasant communes and anti-feudal battles, there are no doubts about the radical Hussite trend. First of all, in the Taborite ideology the feudal social hierarchy is depicted as an aberration. The way and purpose of this social change was defined thus: "the abolition of kings and prelates to establish God's order". The Taborites presented this order as something unwanted. Generally, in the case of peasant rebellions it is not so obvious. Most commonly, these rebellions fought against not the order as such but against an especially unliked lord, the excessive burden or they tried to gain some sort of alleviation, for example of serfdom¹⁶. This is what peasant rebellions looked like until the 19th century in the Polish lands. The Taborites, through references to religion, created a radical political project, which threatened the status quo, questioned it. It is religious imagination itself which became the basis for the political imagination. Together both of them made it possible to overstep the feudal order to challenge it. In the process the Taborite ideology created an utopian vision of the arrival of the Kingdom of God where all would be equal before Christ. It would be possibly the first utopian and revolutionary version of the "affective politics of ideas" in the history of Europe.

A conspiracy led by Rev. Ściegienny

In the 19th century the region of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, Kielce and Lublin was a part of the Kingdom of Poland, joined with the Russian Empire by a personal union. In this area, similarly to other Russian territories, the postfeudal system of slave work – serfdom remained. It meant that peasants had to work for free for a given number of days per week in farm fields, which belonged to the owner of the village. Moreover, this system assumed that peasants had no right to leave the village without the master's permission, the judiciary was dependent on the master,

¹⁴ S. Bylina, *Hussitica – studia*, Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2007, pp. 77-80.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 80.

¹⁶ J.C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasants Resistance*, Yale University Press, New Heaven – London 1985, pp. 29-30.

peasants had to buy a specific amount of alcohol produced in the master's distillery. This system was analogous to the system of slavery in American plantations in some respects, although there were major differences. The main fact is tying peasants to the land and forcing them to slave labour.

Peasant rebellions in the 19th century occurred more and more frequently in the area of Poland. Their aim was usually resistance to serfdom. However, rarely did those movements come up with a political programme, the aim of which would be the abolition of serfdom¹⁷. The radical intelligentsia was only being formed in Poland due to quite serious relationships with the upper classes, it approached the issue of granting freehold to peasants rather carefully. The echoes of the French Revolution reached the areas of Poland very slowly. In 1811 peasants themselves abolished serfdom in the area of Upper Silesia. Serious revolts began to break out, especially in the period of the Spring of Nations, while the best-known rebellion among them was initiated by Jakub Szela in Galicia, also known as the "Galician Slaughter". In the land of the Kingdom of Poland a similar revolt was planned by Rev. Piotr Ściegienny. He created a radical political ideology based on his own interpretation of the Gospel. For Ściegienny the Gospel became the basis for creating radical politics and a radical political imagination, which exceeded the social reality of the times of serfdom¹⁸.

The activity of the revolutionary priest begins in the mid-1930s. He started preparations for a popular uprising back then by forming a network of his followers. These activists were disguised, for example as the wandering beggars (*dziady*), but also as the wandering artisans, who walked from village to village to spread propaganda. This propaganda used folk forms of spreading knowledge, that is folklore and folk tales. The basis for this radical politics were to be the writings prepared by Ściegienny, first of all the so-called *Golden Booklet, that is the history of the human race* (*Złota książeczka, czyli historia rodu ludzkiego*) as well as *The Letter of the Holy Father Pope Gregory sent from Rome to farmers and craftsmen* (*List ojca świętego Grzegorza papieża do rolników i rzemieślników z Rzymu przesłany*). Ściegienny wanted every peasant who could read and write to get acquainted with the texts and copy them as well as forward them to another trusted people. Although both books have slightly different meaning, their sense is very similar. They were to convince peasants that the world can exist without serfdom.

In the so-called *Golden Booklet* Ściegienny outlines an alternative history of the world. Its aim is to oppose the popular conviction that serfdom is the manifestation of some sort of divine order. Instead, Ściegienny indicates that serfdom is an aberration, disturbance of the peace, a brutal and political entrance into the divine

¹⁷ S. Kieniewicz, *Ruch chłopski w Galicji w 1846 roku*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1951, pp. 51-60.

¹⁸ P. Kuligowski, *Miecz Chrystusa. Chrześcijańskie inspiracje polskiego socjalizmu sprzed powstania styczniowego*, „Ogrody Nauk i Sztuk”, no. 2, 2012, pp. 54-55.

order (of God and working people) by the third additional element – kings, the gentry – which has to be abolished to return to the “golden times”. According to the Booklet: “There was no peasant, no burgess, no priest, no lord, no nobleman, no king among them, all were equal, farmers and craftsmen. Neither of them worked for another, everyone should support themselves by their own work”¹⁹.

In turn, *The Letter of the Holy Father Pope Gregory sent from Rome to farmers and craftsmen* uses quite a popular form of folklore, that is forged letters, sent to the people. Those letters, written by God, Jesus Christ or the Mother of God, found in the fields and addressed directly to the people, were quite a popular form of folklore still in the 19th century²⁰. Such letters encouraged saying prayers, warned against drunkenness, persuaded to be more religious, popularizing them gave indulgences, while reading them cured diseases. This form of folklore was connected also with the so-called “chain letters”, that is the letters which were allegedly written by a some sort of higher authority, for example by a French institute, and which you should popularize a certain number of times. Ignoring the instruction threatened with bringing misfortune²¹.

Piotr Ściegienny used this form and forged a letter written by Pope Gregory XVI to the Polish people. Using the authority of the Pope was to convince religious peasants *inter alia* to abolish serfdom. The letter begins with an invocation, from which we find out that everyone who reads this letter 5 times and listens to it 5 times will be given indulgence for 15 years. Then “the Pope” addresses the people thus: “I, Pope Gregory, whom you call the Holy Father, the successor to Saint Peter, when learning about your, my dearly beloved, poverty and misfortune, which you suffer on the part of national clerks and masters, have undertaken enlightening you on the orders of God Himself and getting you out of extreme poverty and slavery and show you the path to true happiness”²².

In the religious form, spreading the letter to a given number of people caused the absolution of sins. “Heavenly letters” were not approved by the Church, although by creating the impression of contact with the divinity (or another holy place), they seemed real to people. The case with the “letter from the Pope” is similar. The religious authority is to confirm the significance, relevance and, what is the most important, the authenticity of words contained within about the necessity to abolish serfdom. In heavenly letters and similar apocryphal prayers it was indicated that

¹⁹ *Złota książeczka, czyli historia rodu ludzkiego*, in: Piotr Ściegienny. *Ewangelia i rewolucja. Wybór pism*. A. Sikora (ed.), Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1981, p. 6

²⁰ This form is called a “heavenly letter”. M. Zowczak, *Biblia ludowa. Interpretacje wątków biblijnych w kulturze ludowej*, Fundacja Na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, Wrocław 2000, p. 400.

²¹ J.S. Bystroń, *Tematy, które mi odradzano. Pisma etnograficzne rozproszone*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1980, pp. 58-59.

²² *List ojca świętego Grzegorza papieża do rolników i rzemieślników z Rzymu przesłany*, in: Piotr Ściegienny. *Ewangelia i rewolucja. Wybór pism*, A. Sikora (ed), Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1981, p. 42.

they need to be learned by heart and passed on. This would cause the remission of sins. The "letter from the Pope" makes use of these folk channels of spreading information in an original way. As an unrecognized form, the letters passed on rather remained in secret. Using this feature was to protect the political letter from the officials.

Similarly to folk fortune-telling and superstitions, which filled religious formulas in folk culture, in the same way religion fills radical politics in Ściegienny's letter. Religious "heavenly letters" and "chain letters" spread by repeating them and sending out a specific number of copies²³. The letters themselves indicated that by following the recommendation of sending them out would be equal to receiving absolution, acquiring a fortune, happiness, while ignoring them would lead to some sort of tragedy. In Ściegienny's letter we are dealing with a similar indication, although here it is translated into the language of politics. The popularization of the letter might lead to the abolition of serfdom (happiness, indulgence), while ignoring it would bring unhappiness (remaining in slavery). The contents of the letter quite explicitly connect salvation with social and political revolution: "God, the creator of heaven and earth, shall not bless you unless you leave monarchs and masters and start living in peace with yourselves. You shall live in misery and poverty if you listen to kings and masters"²⁴. What is more, not only serfdom is to be abolished with its help, but even an ordinary remission of sins is assured: "Listen! I, Pope Gregory, in the name of a living God, grant 40 days of indulgence to everyone who will read this letter to another person or who will listen to it attentively"²⁵.

Ściegienny's politics only became a part of the structure of religious imagination in order to support politics. First of all, it combined political imagination, folk magic tales, peasant ways to popularize folklore and the emotions which accompanied all these elements.

Votan Zapata and balaclava-clad Virgin Mary

In the context of people's Zapatista uprising, which broke out on 1st January 1994, two threads are important. The first one concerns the exhaustion of the Mexican political system in the late 1980s, in which one party – the IRP (the Institutional Revolutionary Party) – wields power. The second one concerned the transformations in the world economy and the popularization of neoliberal ideology²⁶. The IRP ruled for a long period of time, *inter alia* with the use of the policy of subsidizing public services as well as economic protectionism. It fit into the general post-war trend in

²³ Cf. J.S. Bystron, *Tematy...*, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 65,

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 67.

²⁶ These changes include adjusting the economies of individual countries to the American "free market" model, sometimes defined as "structural adjustment".

Keynesian thought, in which the redistribution and economically active state were to be a remedy for the social problems of capitalism. The worldwide collapse of politics understood in such a way took place together with the crisis of the 1970s. The only economic school, which suggested how to resolve a deadlock, was the school of radical liberalism – the so-called Chicago School. These economists not only suggested specific economic solutions (preventing inflation, rigid fiscal policy), but also the entire social philosophy (the primacy of everything private over what is social or state-owned).

Mexico in the 1980s was hit by a creeping crisis, also defined as the “Lost Decade”²⁷. The economic growth was at a very low level, problems with the international debt repayment appeared alongside high inflation. These difficulties were attempted to be resolved by using methods proposed by the “neoliberal international”. The economic crisis led to political crisis and the ruling IRP experienced structural problems connected with a radical loss of support. As a result, in order to hold power in some regions it had to resort to rigging the elections and providing itself with security by the army. At the same time the opposition National Action Party (PAN), licensed for about 30 years, gained strength. It was a right-wing party, additionally strengthened in the 1980s by young neoliberal technocrats²⁸. Carlos Salinas, running for president as the IRP candidate reached an agreement with this part of the PAN and recognized the victory of the party in one of the states in 1989. On the rising tide of agreement the role of the Churches was legitimized, the relations with the Vatican were renewed. Owing to this, Salinas won support in federal Congress to introduce the package of neoliberal reforms.

State enterprises as well as public services were privatized, domestic and international trade were liberalized (signing the NAFTA pact) as well as farming was reformed²⁹. The last two reforms are vital for the discussion. Signing the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) pact partially eliminated tariffs and quantitative restrictions for regular trade flows, reduced the limitations on foreign investments. As a result of signing this pact the entrepreneurs from the USA built factories close to the border with Mexico (the so-called Maquiladoras), using low-cost Mexican labour, where employment was supported only to some extent. Another important change was the privatization of farming. Since the times of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) the institution of *ejidos* had existed, that is the communal land used by rural communities for agriculture. Article 27 of the Constitution guaranteed the independence of *ejidos* as well as made it impossible to privatize them. When this Article was removed from the Constitution in 1991, land was available for “free

²⁷ G. Márquez, *Od wyeksploatowanego autorytaryzmu do kruchej demokracji*, in: *Nowa historia Meksyku*, E. Velásquez García et al. (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2016, p. 731.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 734.

²⁹ Cf. C.A. Aguirre Rojas, *Ameryka Łacińska na rozdrożu*, translated by Z.M. Kowalewski, Książka i Prasa, Warszawa 2008, pp. 24-28.

circulation", which in practice dispossessed many people living off the land and sometimes even made it impossible for them to survive from the material point of view³⁰. Although all these changes prevented inflation in the initial period and showed promising economic results, in many places they led to social decline. It especially affected persons earning their living as farmers in underdeveloped regions of indigenous communities.

On the day when the NAFTA pact came into effect, this event was overshadowed by the outbreak of a revolution in the state of Chiapas. The revolution was incited by the revolutionary guerrilla group, which was established in the 1980s, called Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional – EZLN (the Zapatista Army of National Liberation). At the beginning of January the guerrillas attacked government administrations in the main cities of the region – San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Altamirano, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, Chanal. Contrary to many revolutionary movements preceding it, the Zapatistas (from the name of the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata) abandoned the project of seizing power, in favour of creating a new political culture and civil structure of the autonomy of the region. The Zapatista movement demands, fulfilled in the autonomous areas, extended from the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, state reforms³¹ and developing a new model of the nation to radical anti-capitalism³².

However, let us put aside the discussion on the autonomy in Chiapas, which has successfully lasted until this very day, as well as the deliberations on the importance or not of the revolution. I would like to present how the Zapatistas and local communities involve the Catholic religion and tribal beliefs in building their own radical politics, but also in uniting indigenous communities and other inhabitants of the region. Religion and traditional beliefs are specially valued here. The majority of the inhabitants of the state of Chiapas, especially rural communities, are illiterate. Connecting the religious issue with the political one is for them in principle the only possibility to participate in politics. The concepts exceeding, for instance, their self-interest are available to them only from the angle of religion (community – the concept of the Holy Spirit). By reversing this issue, it might be said that politics itself and politicalness, due to the lack of the notion of universal thinking (on account of the lack of education) might appear only from the angle of religion, which is the only form of such universalistic thought.

One of the greatest examples, showing how this combination works, is the legend of Votán Zapata told by old Antonio. This story makes use of the theme of folk

³⁰ G. Márquez, *Od wyeksploatowanego autorytaryzmu...*, pp. 735-736.

³¹ In 2018 there was the presidential election in Mexico. One of the candidates came from the Chiapas region – María de Jesús Patricia Martínez Marichuy. She is a symbolic candidate, representing the indigenous communities and it is no coincidence that she is a woman. Cf. https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/9kqbqd/the-feminist-indigenous-candidate-running-for-president-of-mexico [retrieved on 17.01.2018].

³² C.A. Aguirre Rojas, *Ameryka Łacińska...*, op. cit., p. 35.

sage and the formula of the folklore fairy tale. It refers to the alleged meeting between a still young back then EZLN guerrilla forces and the old Antonio, when the guerrilla fighters wanted to explain it to him who Zapata was. In an open letter to the intelligentsia of the cities, Marcos – one of the leaders of the guerrillas and their later spokesman – explains the origin of Votán Zapata. In the mid-1980s, Marcos together with the unit met old Antonio in one of a mountain villages, which belonged to him. Back then there were rumours that they are common bandits, so he asked him to introduce himself and his unit. Old Antonio was not familiar with it, so Marcos began to tell him the story of Emiliano Zapata, which ended with: “and this is exactly who Zapata is”. Whereupon the old Antonio replied that it is not Zapata and began telling the story: “A long time ago, when the first gods were making the world, and they were still rolling around in the night, they spoke of two gods who were Ik`ol and Votán. They were two as one. If you turned over one, you would see the other, and vice versa. They were opposites. One was the light, like morning in May on the river. The other was dark, like a cold night or a cave. They were the same... But they couldn’t walk. “What will we do?” asked the two. “Life is sad because we are in this state”. “Let’s walk” said one. “How?” said the other. “To where?” asked one. And they saw that they could move a little bit, if they first asked how and then asked where... First one popped his head out and then the other, and they moved around a little bit. And they realized that if one moved first, and then the other, that they could indeed move, and they reached agreement so that one could move and then the other, and they began to move and then no one remembered who was the first to move because they were so happy that they were moving. “What does it matter who moved first if we are moving?” said the two gods who were one, and they laughed, and their first agreement was to dance, and they danced... Later, when they got tired of dancing and they were deciding what to do next, they saw that their first question of “How do we move?” was answered by the response, “together but separated and in agreement”³³. After telling this story, Marcos asked, but who is Zapata? And Antonio replied: “You already learnt that in order to find things out and to move forward, you have to ask”³⁴. And this is Zapata.

This story shows how political thinking is transformed into mythological, parareligious thinking. It supposes that each divinity has his or her property and identity, but only together and through asking each other questions, can they move and go forward. The universality in politics is based here on exceeding a particular perspective, e.g. a tribe or a unit. The tale presumes that the tribe, personified as one of the gods, will even exceed its own perspective in favour of uniting with

³³S. Lynn, *Zapata Lives! Histories And Cultural Politics In Southern Mexico*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2002, p. 161.

³⁴ Ibidem.

others, because only in this way can it “move forward”. Therefore, this story translates the tribal individuality and provides a way of universalist thinking. What is interesting, such gods never existed in the Tzeltal mythology, and this story was invented as a whole by Marcos exactly as a parareligious myth, which is to consolidate tribes.

In the 16th century the Mother of God revealed Herself to Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin on the outskirts of the city of Mexico. This event was the beginning of the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe with her characteristic image. The meaning of the image and the cult are for the indigenous and Indian communities the symbols of including them in the Christian community together with Saint Juan Diego, who had the revelation. In the Zapatista autonomy, the Catholic Church plays a substantial role. From 1959 to 1999 Samuel Ruiz Garcia, a Catholic priest, was the bishop of Chiapas. As I learnt from the conversation with Michael Löwy, who conducted research in Chiapas and repeatedly spoke with the bishop, after having experienced poverty and exclusion, the clergyman became an ardent follower of liberation theology³⁵. It was a current of radical Christian theology of anti-capitalist nature, linking the dogmatics of the Church with the Marxist criticism³⁶. The radical Christian theology had two dimensions. The first one included communities of the poor and indigenous peoples in the field of Christian care and thought³⁷. In Mexico communities of indigenous peoples very often have no right to join the national community, hence the dimension of the gesture of including them by the Church has profound significance. However, liberation theology also indicated a fight for a just division of goods.

In the Zapatista autonomy, the thread of including indigenous communities in the Catholic community has a dimension of radical politics. Virgin Mary of Guadalupe is a symbol of this. She revealed Herself to an indigenous person, so she is the symbol of acknowledging them as Christians. In addition, in the Zapatista autonomy this image is enhanced by joining the picture of the Mother of God of Guadalupe with a characteristic Zapatista balaclava. This balaclava became quite an accidental symbol of the Zapatistas after the uprising, when the deputy commander Marcos added symbolic meaning to this part of the guerrilla kit. From that moment the public appearance of the Zapatista community members might be recognized by covering their face. Symbolically, it means that the Zapatistas are a unity, a nameless community of equals. In the Chiapas region the image of the Mother of God of Guadalupe appears with a balaclava-covered face. Therefore, this symbol joins three significant elements: the symbolism of the Mother

³⁵ On the basis of a private conversation with Michael Löwy.

³⁶ M. Löwy, *The War of Gods. Religion and Politics in Latin America*, Verso, London – New York 1996, pp. 66-67.

³⁷ Cf. L. Martínez Andrade, *Ameryka Łacińska. Religia bez odkupienia*, translated by Z.M. Kowalewski, Książka i Prasa, Warszawa 2012, pp. 142-145.

of God of Guadalupe, liberation theology and the Zapatista communities. Although this symbol might seem iconoclastic, its very nature builds a specific sense of identity, using visual means to this end³⁸. It combines elements of a religious and political vision of the world. For indigenous communities it also plays an important role in building identity between them, which exceeds particularist divisions, e.g. tribal ones. Hence the symbol of the covered face of Virgin Mary. Although it seems iconoclastic, it is the expression of the local syncretism and exceeding the vision of politics, in which there is a separation of what is rational and what is irrational.

Conclusion

It is a cliché to say that radical political movements need an idea, which will be their basis of the vision of the world. Such an understanding of an idea will serve as a symbolic frame, through which this world is perceived. In the case of the discussed political movements, their main component was religion. In the radical Hussite movement, it was connected with the vision of the second coming of Christ, before whose eyes all were to be equal. Christ became the symbol of a future world, while the present world, according to the Taborists, is an insult for the divine work of creation, which needs to be mended. In the movement of Rev. Ściegienny, the authority of the Church and the Bible tradition were as if to snap peasants out of their apathy as well as gave them a guarantee that the abolition of serfdom was not only a pipe dream, but it was supported by religion and the Pope. In a letter to Polish peasants the Pope “says” that serfdom is wrong, which was introduced when he (that is, the Church) “was not looking”. However, the peasants were given to understand that serfdom was an insult to the divine order of the world. The Zapatistas as if join those two threads. The message of the Catholic equality serves them as a confirmation of the rightness of their approach to reality. The way the community is organized is to be based on the divine order of equality.

The analysis of the politicalness of religion in the mentioned movements, without assessing either these movements or this application of religion, makes it possible to show that politicalness and politics are not always based on the faculty of reason, cool calculation. These movements show that it is quite the contrary, that political activity also requires emotional involvement, something that goes beyond the bounds of the rational mind. What separates the rational from the irrational does not apply here and so instead of juxtaposing the “logic and emotions”, I wanted to show that in the case of politics, they unite into one phenomenon, defined by me as the “affective politics of ideas”.

³⁸ This image is available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/yaxchibonam/207443648> as well as at: <https://www.pinterest.com.mx/ceciliapasquel/abajo-y-a-la-izquierda/> [retrieved on 17.01.2017].