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Between Ideology and Utopia. Recent Discussions on John Paul II's Theology of the Nation¹

ABSTRACT

In my book *Liturgia dziejów* [The Liturgy of History] I proposed an interpretation of the thought of John Paul II in terms of Polish messianism. The book sparked many interesting discussions. In this article, I attempt to address some doubts about my interpretation of John Paul II's theology of the nation. First, I clear up certain misunderstandings related to the ontological status of the nation. Then, I defend the necessary political dimension of Christianity. Finally, I point out the essentially utopian nature of Polish messianism. I aim to show that – contrary to the suggestions of some critics – a properly understood theology of the nation of John Paul II does not lead to the subordination of religion to politics; just the opposite, it provides criteria for Christian evaluation for any political order.

KEYWORDS

John Paul II, Messianism, theology of the nation, political theology

1 I am deeply indebted to Professors Fr. Jan Szczurek and Fr. Jarosław Kupczak OP for the organization of the conference on my book at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, and to Professor Fr. Robert J. Woźniak for his invitation to “Theological Research.” I am also grateful to Katarzyna Popowicz and Artur Rosman for helping me in preparation of the English version of this paper. Finally, I would like to thank my neighbor, Mr. Jacek, for generously providing me with a room in which I could write in peace during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Peter Hebblethwaite, John Paul II's bitter critic, once wondered in a "National Catholic Reporter" piece about the sources of the Polish pope's resistance to women's ordination. He came to the conclusion that the main cause of his stubbornness is the sense of mission that he inherited from his intellectual formation in Polish Romanticism:

From childhood he had known by heart a poem of Roman Slowacki [...] which predicted that in the twentieth century a Slav pope would arise, who [...] would stand up there on the battlements and heroically confront the world. He interpreted his election as pope [...] as the confirmation that through him Poland had a special mission [...] The first Slav pope believes that he has a special mission to teach the West about true values, especially about the redemptive and mystical value of suffering.²

Everything in the above is obviously confused. First, the poem about the Slav pope was not written by someone named Roman, but by Juliusz Słowacki, great Polish poet.³ Second, there is no evidence that the young Karol Wojtyła memorized this poem; actually, the poem only became more widely known after John Paul II's election to the papacy.⁴ Third, what matters in the poem is not that some Slav will become pope, but rather that the Slavic nations will stand at the head of a coming rebirth of Christianity.⁵ Fourth, and finally, it would be quite difficult to derive opposition to discussing women's ordination merely from the pope's sense of mission; after all, in an alternate

2 P. Hebblethwaite, *Slav pope gripped by messianic mission: he sees self spared to teach values to West*, "National Catholic Reporter" June 17, 1994, p. 8.

3 See J. Słowacki, *Amid Discord God Strikes*, transl. L. Krzyżanowski, "The Polish Review" 24 (1979) no. 2, p. 5–6.; cf. S. Kolbuszewski, *Autograf wiersza Słowackiego „Pośród niesnasków,”* in: S. Kolbuszewski, *Romantyzm i modernizm. Studia o literaturze i kulturze*, Katowice 1959, p. 215–235.

4 See K. Łozińska, *Więc oto idzie papież słowiański... Romantyczne tło mitycznego wizerunku Jana Pawła II*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Etnograficzne" 27 (1990) p. 37–46.

5 See M. Masłowski, *Słowiański papież. Stosunek romantyków do Kościoła*, "Znak" 661 (2010), p. 71–87.

reality, John Paul II might have felt a mission towards liberal reforms of the Church. Yet, it is undeniable that despite these confusions Heblethwaite hit upon something essential that escaped many other commentators, both foreign and Polish. The Polish cultural context, which immensely shaped the pope's thinking is indispensable to understanding the pontificate of John Paul II. This is particularly the case with the understudied influence of the messianic Polish Romantic tradition, which is intimately bound with Poland's complicated history, and, for this reason, widely misunderstood, especially outside of Poland.

Polish messianism does not enjoy a good reputation. This rather bizarre doctrine came into existence in the milieu of Polish emigres. Primarily, it was an answer to successive Polish political failures. It combined a deep religiosity, an ardent patriotism, social engagement, and, one has to admit, a whole lot of resentment towards Western societies. Romantic messianism profoundly deepened Polish spirituality developed national identity, and strengthened social solidarity. At the same time, it was accused of heresy, a lack of political realism, and striving towards a bloody social revolution. It inspired the most outstanding Polish poets and philosophers, but also justified historical failures, led to a cult of suffering, and elicited a perverse superiority complex. It gave the Church the Ressurrectionist Congregation, but also inspired Andrzej Towiański's sects. Even Poles still have trouble understanding and accepting this ambivalent heritage. The word "messianism" has for many years functioned as an insult. Because of this, even those who accept this heritage prefer not to mention the word. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why many Polish commentators who champion John Paul II were quite unwilling to take up this connection with this embarrassing tradition. For many years we were a little afraid of what the world would say when it discovers that the Polish pope developed the ideas of suspect messianists. As a result, in the main, mostly foreign commentators, who were not involved in Polish identity debates, spoke of John Paul II's connection with the Polish Romantic tradition,⁶ and,

6 G. H. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II. Origins of His Thought and Action*, New York 1981; R. Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła. The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*, Grand Rapids 1997; A. Riccardi, *Giovanni Paolo II. La biografia*, Cinisello Balsamo 2014.

of those many were critics of the pope, who saw his ties with messianism as compromising him.⁷ Hebblethwaite was both one and the other.

In my book *Liturgia dziejów. Jan Paweł II i polski mesjanizm* [The Liturgy of History: John Paul II and Polish Messianism] I tried to go beyond these limited options.⁸ I attempted to show just how much the tradition of Polish messianism influenced Karol Wojtyła's thought and simultaneously argued that we owe to it the most valuable elements of John Paul II's pontificate. Hebblethwaite suggested that Polish messianism influenced the personality and behavior of the pope, whereas I concentrated rather on how it influenced his thought. I tried to show how the most important intuitions of Polish messianism were developed and universalized by John Paul II. Polish messianism consists of three independent but interrelated ideas: a vision of humanity's cooperation with God in the work of building up the Kingdom of God on earth, a religious explanation of collective suffering's meaning in history, and a theological interpretation of the existence of nations. All these ideas, which I call "millenarism," "missionism" and "passionism," might be found both in early literary works of Karol Wojtyła, and in mature theological teaching of John Paul II. The first of these ideas was developed in his social doctrine, especially in theology of work; the second was developed in the pope's theology of suffering; the third became the backbone of John Paul II's theology of the nation. In this way, the main three elements of Polish messianism were included unexpectedly, after many years, in the universal heritage of Christianity.

7 H. Herrmann, *Papst Wojtyła: Der Heilige Narr*, Reinbek 1983; T. Bartoś, *Jan Paweł II. Analiza krytyczna*, Warszawa 2008.

8 P. Rojek, *Liturgia dziejów. Jan Paweł II i polski mesjanizm*, Kraków 2016; two chapters of this book has been already translated into English: *John Paul II and the Polish Messianism. Introduction to the Liturgy of History*, "Theological Research" 7 (2019), p. 9–27; *Our Slavic Pope: The Mission of Slavs according to John Paul II*, in: *Alexei Khomiakov: The Mystery of Sobornost'*, ed. A. Mrówczyński-Van Allen, T. Obolevitch, P. Rojek, Eugene 2019, p. 229–245; one chapter has been also translated into Czech: *Integrální mesianismus*, transl. J. Mlejnek, in: *Panbičkáři. Odkud se vzal Polák-katolík?*, ed. M. Ruczaj, L. Skraba, Brno 2016, p. 73–123, and reprinted as *Polský mesianismus*, "Impulz" 3–4 (2016), p. 38–77; also, a Spanish translation of the whole book is currently being prepared.

I am very glad of the discussions that have stemmed from my book. Philosophers and literary scholars have commented on it many times,⁹ not only in Poland, but also abroad.¹⁰ Quite surprisingly, even the Polish popular media, from the liberal “Tygodnik Powszechny”¹¹ to the conservative “Nasz Dziennik,”¹² have shown interest in this rather scholarly book. I am very pleased that I could discuss the book in many places, especially, in almost all Polish institutions that deal with the heritage of John Paul II, in Krakow (The John Paul II Centre, Karol Wojtyła’s Institute), Warsaw (The Centre for the Thought of John Paul II), Lublin (The John Paul II Institute), and Rome (The Centre for Documentation and Research of the Pontificate of John Paul II). Finally, in the fall of 2018, the Institute of Dogmatic Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow organized a special conference devoted to my book. Several representative voices from these discussions appear in this issue of “Theological Research.” Marcin Suskiewicz’s text was first published in Polish as a review of my book, Massimiliano Siginifredi’s paper was presented at a discussion in Rome, and the articles by Professors Michał Masłowski and Andrzej Wawrzynowicz were prepared for the conference at Pontifical University of John Paul II.

In this paper, I would like to briefly comment on these contributions. I fully accept Marcin Suskiewicz’s important suggestion that the vision of God’s kingdom that I discuss should be placed not only after history, but also above it. As he writes, “God is not only our future, but also, as it were, gives a metaphysical ‘depth’ or ‘height’ to every individual moment of time. And His Kingdom, similarly, is not only in the future,

9 See in particular P. Rzewuski, *Jan Paweł II jako polski mesjanista*, “Kronos” 4 (2017), p. 297–305; K. Koehler, *Mesjanistyczna koncepcja Jana Pawła II w ujęciu Pawła Rojka*, in: *Prawa człowieka, prawa narodów*, red. Z. Zarębianka, Kraków 2018, p. 109–116; W. Setlak, *Mesjanizm według Jana Pawła II albo Paweł Rojek wypełnia luki*, “Topos” 6 (2017), p. 118–121; J. Krystek, *Neomesjanizm, czyli rozpacz i semantyka*, “Czas Kultury” 2 (2020), p. 149–156.

10 A. Mrówczyński-Van Allen, *P. Rojek, Liturgia dziejów*, “Scripta Theologica” 50 (2018) no. 1, p. 191–194; E. Tverdislova, *Pol’skoe messianstvo: kak religioznaia ideaia iz natsional’noi stanovitsia ideologicheskoi*, “Chasha” 3 (2018), p. 105–116.

11 P. Rojek, *Świat to nie poczekalnia. Rozmawiał Marcin Müller*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” November 16, 2017, p. 14–17.

12 C. Bartnik, *Dziejowe posłannictwo Polski*, “Nasz Dziennik” September 16–17, 2017, p. 12–14.

but also somewhere ‘above’ the history.”¹³ In this way, one can see the significance of the entire historical process, and not only of its final result. In turn, Massimiliano Signifredi rightly points out that the theology of collective suffering of John Paul II, which I analyze in the book, should be supplemented with the individual dimension. “The theme of martyrdom – he notices – was central to the spirituality of the Polish Pope.”¹⁴ In particular, John Paul II recognized the possibility of substitutionary suffering and believed that many people from his entourage, as it were, suffered for him. The pope himself suggested that it was the case of the seminary student Andrzej Zachuta, mentioned in my book, Wanda Póltawska, a friend of the pope, or Cardinals Marian Jaworski and Andrzej Maria Deskur. In this paper, however, I will deal exclusively with fundamental worries concerning my interpretation of papal missionism, and especially of his theology of the nation. It was this idea of my book that turned out to be the most controversial one. The theology of the nation is openly criticized by Michał Masłowski, and indirectly also by Massimiliano Signifredi, who refers to Polish discussions on this subject. Presumably, a certain suspicion towards the theology of the nation stems from the fear that it may lead somehow to subordinating religion to politics. I hope that I could show here that John Paul II’s theology of the nation, if properly understood, does not entail such a risk. Quite contrary, it provides criteria for Christian evaluation for any political regime.

ONTOLOGY OF THE NATION

The fundamental problem of the theology of the nation is the ontological status of a nation. It is so, because the very idea of the theology of the nation may suggest that a nation is an entity beyond and above the individual persons who belong to it. This understanding, however, seems to imply a kind of hypostatization a nation, which, in turn, may lead not only to false theology but also to wrong politics. The problem is particularly highlighted by Michał Masłowski:

¹³ M. Suskiewicz, *Messianism and Modernity: Commentary to Paweł Rojek’s Liturgy of History*, “Theological Research” 7 (2019), p. 66.

¹⁴ M. Signifredi, *Visione messianica e realismo della storia in Giovanni Paolo II*, “Theological Research” 7 (2019), p. 79.

In my opinion, the most important problem is not the general view on Christianity as a kind of messianism [...], but the personalistic vision of a nation as a “person,” which I do not find in John Paul II. [...] It is now strongly pronounced in the discourse of the Church in Poland, and sometimes results in the exclusion of foreigners and minorities from the community.¹⁵

Similar objections to my interpretation of the papal theology of the nation have been raised by many other commentators, in particular by Fr. Andrzej Draguła and Fr. Alfred Wierzbicki, both related to “Więź” magazine, whom Massimiliano Signifredi refers in his paper.¹⁶

I think that this objection results from a misunderstanding. My term “a personalistic concept of the nation”¹⁷ was not intended to mean that the nation is a distinct collective person; on the contrary, it was supposed to indicate that the nation essentially comes down to a number of persons related to each other in some ways. The misunderstanding is probably due to the fact that there is actually a certain current of the theology of the nation in Poland, developed by the late Fr. Czesław Bartnik and his followers, which really assumes some kind of personal status of the nation. In my book, however, I insisted that the theology of the nation of John Paul II does not contain such a controversial claim. I wrote that the pope was accepting

a personalistic concept of the nation, according to which a nation is nothing more than a whole made up of persons, but which can, nevertheless, constitute the identity of its parts. The pope’s view is much weaker and therefore less controversial than the theories developed in the Polish school of the theology of the nation of Fr. Czesław Bartnik.¹⁸

15 M. Masłowski, *Jean-Paul II: messianisme ou universalisme éthique?*, “Theological Research” 7 (2019), p. 94; see also M. Masłowski, *Polska na krzyżu*, in: *Mickiewicz. Wieszcz i przewodnik*, red. A. Fabianowski, E. Hoffmann-Piotrowska, Warszawa 2019, p. 250–252.

16 M. Signifredi, *Visione messianica*, op. cit., p. 72.

17 P. Rojek, *Liturgia dziejów*, op. cit., p. 141, 143, 190–193.

18 P. Rojek, *Liturgia dziejów*, op. cit., p. 141.

At any rate, my intentions were clearly understood by Marcin Suskiewicz, who emphasized that “Wojtyła’s missionism seems more personalist, and thus more in line with current sociological tendencies, than essentialist theology of the nation of the Polish theologian Czesław Bartnik.”¹⁹ Moreover, in my book I referred to Fr. Grzegorz Strzelczyk, who criticized the theory of the nation in the version of Fr. Bartnik. Strzelczyk pointed out that “theologians of the nation sometimes balance on a very thin ridge between personification and hypostatization.”²⁰ For Strzelczyk personification is merely metaphorical, whereas hypostatization is literal understanding of the nation as a person. He also warned about the possible dangers of the hypostatization of nation. “For it is impossible to realize any project according to the will of the nation-hypostasis, except by referring to the intuition-enlightenment of a specific person or persons.”²¹ I fully share these doubts. However, they do not concern the theology of the nation of John Paul II since it does neither imply nor presuppose any hypostatization of nation.

So, then, what is a nation according to John Paul II? To answer this question I will analyse an objection raised by Fr. Alfred Wierzbicki, who also criticized my interpretation of the papal theology of the nation. He writes:

Undoubtedly, the influence of the tradition of Polish messianism on the philosophy and theology of the nation of John Paul II is significant. He believes, like the messianists of the nineteenth century, that the nation is a bearer of Christian values. But in his thinking about the nation, by no means is the messianic historiosophy in the foreground, because it has been integrated with personalism [...]. *The nation is understood as a community of persons; therefore its subjectivity [podmiotowość] is relative and anchored in the subjectivity of the person(s).*²²

19 M. Suskiewicz, *Messianism and Modernity*, op. cit. p. 63.

20 G. Strzelczyk, *Kłopoty z teologią narodu*, “Więź” 1 (2016), p. 40.

21 G. Strzelczyk, *Kłopoty z teologią narodu*, op. cit., p. 41–42; cf. an interesting defence of the theology of the nation: J. Gałkowski, *Naród i Objawienie. Spór o status teologii narodu*, in: *Spółczesność teologiczna. Polska teologia narodu 1966–2016*, red. P. Rojek, Kraków 2016, p. 175–194.

22 A. M. Wierzbicki, *Krucze dziedzictwo. Jan Paweł II od nowa*, Warszawa 2018, p. 153; my italics.

(As we can see, Fr. Wierzbicki without any hesitation joins the category of the nation with personalism, unsuspecting that it can be considered as a suggestion that the nation is a distinct person). Again, it seems to me that his objection is based on a misunderstanding. In fact, in my book, I proposed a very similar interpretation of the theology of the nation of John Paul II. The italicized words in the above quote perfectly develop Wojtyła's claim, cited by me in *Liturgia dziejów*, that a nation "exists through persons, through individuals." I suggested that it means that the nation is not "some substantial being, something beyond and above individuals, but an accidental unity of many individual persons."²³ Moreover, since relation is one of the Aristotelian accidents, the unity of the nation may therefore be thought as made by relationships between persons, and thus the nation indeed appears as a relative unity, in a strict ontological sense. In other words, the "subjectivity of the nation," as Fr. Wierzbicki wrote, might be really thought as "relative" and therefore ultimately "anchored in the subjectivity of persons."

Elsewhere I tried to investigate the inspirations of Karol Wojtyła's ontology of the nation.²⁴ It seems almost certain that its primary source were the lectures on Catholic social ethics by Fr. Jan Piwowarczyk, whose script the young Fr. Wojtyła used it in his classes. In the recently published lectures of Wojtyła, the passages on the ontology of the nation are almost an exact paraphrase of Piwowarczyk's formulations.²⁵ Piwowarczyk, in turn, mainly drew on the excellent treatise on the nation and the state by Fr. Jacek Woroniecki OP, published in Latin in 1926.²⁶ So, eventually, it turns out that the papal ontology of the nation has really strong Thomistic foundations.

23 P. Rojek, *Liturgia dziejów*, op. cit., p. 143.

24 P. Rojek, *Everything You Know About John Paul II's Early Lectures on CST Is Wrong*, "Church Life Journal" May 12, 2020, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/everything-you-know-about-john-paul-iis-early-writings-on-cst-is-wrong/> (12.05.2020).

25 J. Piwowarczyk, *Katolicka etyka społeczna*, t. 1, Londyn 1960, p. 247, 59; K. Wojtyła, *Katolicka etyka społeczna*, Lublin 2018, p. 163–164, 98.

26 H. Woroniecki, *Quaestio disputata de natione et statu civili*, "Divus Thomas" 29 (1926) p. 25–54; Polish translation: J. Woroniecki, *O narodzie i państwie*, przeł. R. Maliszewski, Lublin 2004.

NATION AND POLITICS

There is a more serious objection that can be raised against my interpretation of the theology of the nation of John Paul II. It concerns not so much the ontological status of the nation, but rather the very idea of the political aspect of Christianity. Such an objection was raised by Fr. Andrzej Draguła:

The Church has spoken many times about the building of the Kingdom of God, which is “not of this world,” about the saving role of suffering, and about the mission of the faithful in the world, not only at the last Council, but also in the Catechism. The originality of Rojek’s project – and this is what arouses my greatest resistance – consists in making the nation, and not a believer or the community of the Church, the subject who performs the actions covered in these three concepts. Consequently, Rojek turns this postulate into a social and political project.²⁷

In other words, according to Fr. Draguła, the subjects of royal, priestly, and prophetic missions, which roughly correspond to millenarism, passionism and missionism, are individual Christians and the community of the Church, but not nations, which in fact build economic, political, and cultural institutions. Moreover, the Christian transformation of social reality can only be done only from the bottom up, through the conversion of individual persons, and not top-down, by transforming institutions. “A theologian – continues Fr. Draguła – sees a chance and salvation in the transformation of a particular man, who will transform the economic, cultural, political, and other structures when entering them.”²⁸

First of all, I do not think that we should so sharply oppose the universal Church and particular nations. Particular nations can be considered as parts of the universal Messianic People of God. In my book, I referred to the arguments of Sr. Emilia Ehrlich, an Ursuline scholar who collaborated with John Paul II.²⁹ As she wrote,

27 A. Draguła, *Teologia narodu bez teologii*, “Więź” 3 (2017), p. 231.

28 A. Draguła, *Teologia narodu bez teologii*, op. cit., p. 231.

29 P. Rojek, *Liturgia dziejów*, op. cit., p. 88.

The Council [...] speaks of the “Messianic People,” with all the People of God in mind, whereas the Poles speak of their people as messianic. Is this justified? Yes, because if we can speak of the “Church which is in Poland” as an integral part of the Universal Church, similarly Poles who belong to the Church in Poland are an integral part of the People of God.³⁰

It seems to me that this idea can also be developed in another way. Just as from the theological point of view, the universal Church is virtually identical with humanity, a particular Church in each country can be regarded as virtually identical with a given nation. From the theological point of view, the Polish nation would be therefore in fact the Church in Poland. Since the Church, as the messianic people, undoubtedly is a collective subject of its messianic tasks, so the proper parts of the Church existing in individual countries are such subjects too.

However, the latter part of Fr. Draguła’s criticism seems to be even more important, since it concerns the crucial dilemma of the Christian activity in the world. It is also independent of the previous point. Even if it turns out that nations do not have theological agency, there is always the community of the Church, which realizes Christ’s messianic functions on earth. But how should the transformation of the world be carried out? Should it be limited only to converting individual persons, or should it also aim at transforming impersonal institutions? These days, this question is particularly important in Poland, where we are witnessing a fierce dispute over the relationship between the teaching of the Church and the state law. I am convinced that the personalistic ontology of John Paul II, outlined above, may help answer this question.

As I indicated, John Paul II did not suggest that the nation is a distinct reality beyond and above individual persons. Yet, this does not mean, that, in his opinion, the nation can be reduced to a mere aggregate of persons. The nation, as reminded us Fr. Draguła, has relative subjectivity. That is, as I tried to develop his idea here, a nation is a collection of persons related in a special way. That who we are is, at least partially, constituted by the relations into which we enter. Hence, we are at least partly determined by the behavior of other people, both those

³⁰ E. Ehrlich, *Remarks on Some Aspects of Messianism*, transl. by K. Popowicz, “Theological Research” 7 (2019), p. 48.

who live with us and those who lived before us. In particular, we are shaped by the generally accepted ways of conduct, that is institutions in a broad sense, established by previous generations. John Paul II revealed in this respect a very deep sociological intuition. Our beliefs, feelings, and actions are at least partially conditioned by the social environment, which, though itself a result of the actions of people from the past, for us, is taken for granted. As I pointed out in my book, this highly realistic view became in the social teaching of John Paul II the basis for the theory of a “structural sin.”³¹

However, such a dialectical concept of the nation leads to an integral vision of politics. Of course, if we want to change reality, we must, first of all, determine the attitudes of individual persons. This action is necessary but not sufficient, because all people, even saints, operate within an imposed institutional framework that may, in the long run, prevent the full realization of their good will. The transformation of the world must, therefore, start with individual people, but must also lead to the transformation of institutions. Only in this way can the “structures of sin” be weakened. Hence, just as there is no possibility of the merely “top-down” sanctification of the world through institutions, so, in the long run, there can be no question of a “bottom-up” transformation through merely individual conversions. Therefore, contrary to Fr. Draguła suggestion, building the Kingdom of God on earth is essentially not only a spiritual but also a social and political project. I believe that such an integral perspective helps avoid both of the extremes that predominate contemporary discussions on the political commitment of Christians, also in Poland.

BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA

It think that the doubts regarding the papal theology of the nation to a great extent result from concerns about the situation of the Church in Poland. It seems to me that critics fear that emphasizing this particular point of John Paul II’s teaching may be regarded as some form of justification for the dangerous relationship between the Church and the state in contemporary Poland. This brings me to the last problem

31 P. Rojek, *Liturgia dziejów*, op. cit., p. 239–240.

which I would like to raise here, namely to the various ways of papal messianism may function in the public sphere.

This problem was perfectly presented by Michał Masłowski in his paper *Crucified Poland* [*Polska na krzyżu*], published in Polish, in which he refers to my book.³² He points out that messianism can function in society either as a utopia or as an ideology. Masłowski understands utopia – following Paul Ricoeur – as an inspiration to changes, and ideology as a legitimization of the existing order.³³ Masłowski states,

There are many indications that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Polish messianism has turned from a utopia, which is a dynamic call to transform the world, into an ideology: a static image of the traditional world, celebrating sacrifices and martyrdom, glorifying its uniqueness – and paradoxically – its failures.³⁴

The emergence of messianic ideas in the discourse of the Polish authorities in recent years is clear evidence of this process. The ruling party eagerly refers to the social role of Catholicism, relates to the idea of Poland as an *antemurale Christianitatis*, and celebrates national martyrology. One can certainly notice elements of millenarianism, missionism and passionism in this discourse. It was this political instrumentalization of messianic ideas that, according to Masłowski, was to be the reason for a raging statement of the remarkable historian of Polish literature, late Maria Janion, who confessed in a famous letter to the Polish Congress of Culture in 2016: “I sincerely hate Polish messianism.”³⁵ As Masłowski explains, “It was not about the same messianism that Mickiewicz and the great Romantics preached. It was not about a dynamic utopia, but about a static ideology of tradition: uncreative and stereotypical.”³⁶

Michał Masłowski has never expressed it directly, but he seems to suggest that my book may somehow support this dangerous tendency of ideologizing messianism. To remind, the Polish authorities

32 M. Masłowski, *Polska na krzyżu*, op. cit., p. 245–249.

33 P. Ricoeur, *L'idéologie et l'utopie*, Paris 1997.

34 M. Masłowski, *Polska na krzyżu*, op. cit., p. 245.

35 M. Janion, *List do Kongresu Kultury*, in: *Spór o mesjanizm*, red. A. Wawrzynowicz, t. 2: *Recepcja krytyczna*, cz. 2, Warszawa 2017, p. 211.

36 M. Masłowski, *Polska na krzyżu*, op. cit., p. 249.

eagerly refer to the heritage of John Paul II. My thesis that the Polish pope was the fullest embodiment of Polish messianism may, therefore, seem to support the current Polish state ideology. What is worse, my book – the fact about which critics tactfully keep silent – was the result of a scientific project related to the celebration of the 1050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland in 2016, so it was ultimately the result of cooperation between the state and the Church.

I regret that I did not pay attention to Ricoeur's distinction between utopia and ideology earlier, because I would gladly have used it. I fully agree with Masłowski's diagnosis that Polish messianism can function either as utopia or as ideology. Moreover, I also agree with him that as regards the question of which of these two tendencies will prevail, it "much depends on the exegetes and how the emphasis is placed."³⁷ That was exactly my point. In the conclusion of my book, I wrote:

There is no doubt that messianism has returned to the contemporary Polish intellectual discussions, literature, politics, and common thinking. Now it is only necessary to ensure that it returns in its entirety, and not only as a justification of our defeats and our sense of superiority, criticized by Janion, but also as a powerful positive project of transforming the world.³⁸

If I were to indicate the political intentions of my book, I would exactly point to an attempt to redefine messianism that would restore its active, critical, and radical character. Now I understand better that my goal was, in fact, in Ricoeur's language, to restore its utopian function. The vision of God's kingdom on earth should always be an inspiration for further development and not a legitimization of the already existing regime.

If Polish messianism is thought as essentially utopian, then it is easy to answer another objection raised by Michał Masłowski, concerning my suggestion that the vision of John Paul II was supposed to be a "third way" between communism and liberal democracy.³⁹ Masłowski warned against using the pope's thought to justify such projects. However, if – as suggested by Masłowski himself – Polish messianism is truly

37 M. Masłowski, *Polska na krzyżu*, op. cit., p. 254.

38 P. Rojek, *Liturgia dziejów*, op. cit., p. 283.

39 M. Masłowski, *Jean-Paul II*, op. cit., p. 98–101.

utopian and not ideological, it will always stand beyond the existing divisions. The “third way” of John Paul II was not some specific political doctrine, but rather a way up, revealing the limits of all social, political, and economic systems. Therefore, the vision of John Paul II could serve as a criterion for the assessment of all political systems, including those, which openly refer to the Catholic social teaching and erect huge monuments to Polish pope.

CONCLUSION

In his commentary on my *Liturgia dziejów* Massimiliano Signifredi quotes the Polish communist activist, Kazimierz Kąkol, who during the meeting of the ministers for religious affairs of socialist countries in 1979 was warning his colleagues against the “messianic concept of Christian pan-Slavism” of John Paul II.⁴⁰ Clearly, the communist official, just like the British Jesuit quoted at the beginning of this article, easily noticed a connection between the Polish pope and Polish messianism. Yet, for decades, this relationship was being ignored by Polish commentators. Hence, we have lots of works that analyze John Paul II in comparison to scholastic philosophy, Spanish mysticism, German phenomenology, French humanism, Italian personalism or the Jewish philosophy of dialogue, but we are still lacking the analyses of John Paul II in perhaps the most natural context for him – the context of Polish Romantic messianism.

However, in recent years, this has finally started to change. It seems symbolic to me that Andrzej Wawrzynowicz, at the end of his fundamental anthology of Polish messianism, published in 2015, included the texts of Karol Wojtyła.⁴¹ This clearly indicates that Polish historians of ideas are starting to regard him as a full-fledged messianist. It seems no less significant that Krzysztof Dybciak, in his monumental anthology of texts on Karol Wojtyła’s literary works, published in 2019, included at its end an excerpt from my *Liturgy of History*.⁴² This seems

40 M. Signifredi, *Visione messianica*, op. cit., p. 82–83.

41 *Spór o mesjanizm*, red. A. Wawrzynowicz, t. 1: *Rozwój idei*, Warszawa 2015, p. 485–488.

42 *Pisarstwo Karola Wojtyły – Jana Pawła II w oczach krytyków i uczonych*, red. K. Dybciak, Warszawa 2019, p. 745–755.

to mean that the messianic interpretation is slowly gaining acceptance also among experts in the heritage of John Paul II.

The rediscovery of the messianic inspirations of John Paul II is not only of historical importance. As I tried to show in the book, it allows us to disclose the hidden dimensions of his heritage, which are important not only for Poland but also for the whole world. However, Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen, when discussing my book in the Spanish journal "Scripta Theologica," complained that this universal dimension was not further elaborated on.

Unfortunately, the landscape presented by Paweł Rojek is limited only to the Polish academic, cultural, and social context. The problem consists not so much in imposing limits on the universal meaning of the Polish pope's messianism (which in itself seems to be a disturbing contradiction), but primarily in the fact that it is a symptom of a limited awareness of the value of the received legacy.⁴³

Well, for now I can only try to justify myself by the fact that my book was written primarily to unravel the relationships between John Paul II and Polish messianism for ourselves in Poland. Only when we understand our own heritage will we be able to share it with others. However, I hope that my interpretation of John Paul II in terms of Polish messianism may serve as an inspiration both for broader comparative studies and deeper systematic analyzes. In particular, I think it would be very important to compare Polish messianism with Russian religious philosophy, German political theology, Latin American liberation theology, and British Radical Orthodoxy, because all these trends, as well as Polish messianism, were trying to formulate a new theological interpretation of modern man, society and history. However, ultimately, the most important are systematic questions that these currents pose about the relationships between God and man, religion and politics, salvation and liberation, Christianity and modernity. In my book, I tried to show that in these great discussions one should also take into account the somewhat forgotten tradition of Polish messianism, which so spectacularly flashed in the works of John Paul II.

43 A. Mrówczyński-Van Allen, *P. Rojek*, "Liturgia dziejów," "Scripta Theologica" 50 (2018) no. 1, p. 194.

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