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**LESZEK KOŁAKOWSKI ON RELIGION**

The evolution of Leszek Kolakowski's views on religion, although widely known, has not received due explication. And it is a fascinating matter: starting from a passionate criticism of religion and all forms of religious life, Kolakowski eventually became one of the staunchest defenders of Christianity. This is especially surprising if we take into account the fact that he never converted to Christianity, and remained a non-believer until the end of his life. So how do we understand the apologetic turn in his philosophical work? This is the question we pose, and to which we will try to give a satisfactory answer.

**Critical period.** A critical attitude toward religion characterized Kolakowski from an early age. The family home played a major role in the formation of his early views. His father Jerzy Juliusz Kołakowski, an atheist, raised his son with a leftist spirit – anti-religious and anti-church. Enlightenment ideas, treating religion as an intellectual error, became so firmly entrenched in the mind of young Leszek Kolakowski that he openly and determinedly opposed all forms of religious life. This led to the fact that at the age of nine, in 1936, he was expelled from an elementary school in Łódź, Poland, after he told his teacher that he was *a religious none*. In turn, in later years, he refused to attend school religion classes. Remarkably, however, although he fervently opposed religion, he diligently studied *Scripture* and Christian dogmatics – in keeping with the saying "know your enemy." In 1944, he had many conversations about religion with Tadeusz Kordy, a doctor of philosophy and a fervent believing Catholic, who, in preparation for the the "little baccalaureate" taught the seventeen-year-old Kolakowski Latin and French. Irena Kordysz, Tadeusz's wife, recalls that "Leszek [Kolakowski - M. P.]

had a very good memory, he knew all the *Holy Scriptures* well enough to fight him [the husband - M.P.]<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, despite his critical attitude towards religion, he could not be accused of ignorance in relation to religious issues.

In the same year, Kolakowski's attitude toward religion began to change slowly under the influence of reading *The Communist Manifesto*. He still remained critical, however, in addition to intellectual error, he began to see in religion a moral error. As a result of his fascination with Marxist thought, he began to apply for admission to the Polish Workers' Party, to which he was finally enrolled on February 27, 1946. Even then, however, his knowledge of Marxism, despite his infatuation with it, remained quite weak. It was only in college, in contact with solid academic craftsmanship, that his Marxist critical thought began to take concrete shape. However, it increasingly moved away from Marxian orthodoxy, where religion was seen as *the opium of the people*, and leaned strongly toward the Stalinist critique of religion as the *opium for the people*. We finally find the culmination of these critical intellectual efforts by Kolakovsky in two of his early writings, which were very well received by Communist ideologues at the time - *Sketches on Catholic Philosophy* (1955) and *Lectures on Middle Ages Philosophy* (1956). We will also take these books as the basis for analyzing Kolakowski's mature critique of religion.

**Church.** The blade of Kolakowski's criticism strikes at both the very essence of religion and religious institutions. In particular, Kolakowski's attention is focused on the Catholic Roman Church; the problem of the very essence of human religiosity appears on the margins of his main considerations. For him, the superstition of religious theses was a fact over which he passed. He was more concerned with how these theses function in the public sphere. The rationale for this approach can be found in the fact that Kolakowski saw religious dogma only as a mystified reflection of particular aspirations or class claims, and not as the real metaphysical beliefs of people associated with the Church. The Church institution itself, therefore, appeared to him as an instrument of exploitation of

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<sup>1</sup> W. Chudoba: *Leszek Kolakowski. Chronicle of life and work*, Warsaw 2014, p. 30.

masses, preying on some form of fear of social life. There can be no question of the existence of any religious need inherent to man, which would demand satisfaction – the source of religion is just fear. If its source is eradicated, religion will also disappear. Kolakowski seems to have no doubt that the people in charge of the Church were very well aware of this. If anyone really believed in religious dogmatics, it was always the small and uneducated, and rarely those who were in charge of the religion in question. Thus, any theological disputes on the grounds of a given religion should be read as little more than a smokescreen for the real interests of the ruling classes, in particular the reassertion of their superior power over the working class.

In the history of the Catholic Church, this becomes clearly evident where it has dealt with heresies of various kinds. Combating them was important to it only insofar as heretical claims interfered with the justification of its earthly, secular authority over people; in other cases, heretics were more or less tolerated in the bosom of the Church (some even, such as Master Eckhart or Eriugena, who departed from Church orthodoxy, were, in time, drafted into the ranks of great Christian thinkers). Thus, for example, the question of the substantiality of the person of Christ was an important issue for the Church, and heresies such as Arianism were fiercely fought against. In Kolakowski's view, however, this had little to do with serious theological disputation and more to do with administrative and social matters; by denying the divine aspect of Jesus one would be denying the divine supremacy of the Church, established by Jesus himself, over people. This dogma had one task – to sanctify the institution of the Church as a divine creation, nothing more. The metaphysical aspect of these types of disputes was nothing more than a smokescreen grenade obscuring to the masses the real goals of the Church authorities – these were the ultimate subordination of all secular power to the Church.

And so the sanctioning of the slave system, the absolute subordination of the people to the "tyranny of capital" lying in the hands of the bourgeois classes of the clergy, was to be one of the most important tasks of the early Church, if only to suppress any revolutionary sentiment. In turn, the way

for this was to be such an exegesis of religious revealed truths as to support the thesis of the need for absolute subordination of the people to ecclesiastical authority. This tendency is already evident, according to Kolakowski, at the very foundation of the formation of institutionalized Christianity. A clear example is *the Apostolic Epistles*, about which he wrote:

The letters of the Apostle Paul, edited around the middle of the second century, are a characteristic document depicting the mood of early Christianity. They call on the oppressed population to obey the authorities, and treat slavery as a device in accordance with divine injunctions<sup>2</sup>.

The Church further took such a liking to the slave system – in which it found it easiest to realize its absolutist inclinations – that in the third century, when slavery began to die down, not wanting to get rid of it completely and thus lose its supreme power over the masses, it took the first steps toward constructing the beginnings of a feudal system that was to give the people the illusion of abolishing slavery. However, although he eventually abandoned his overt support of European slavery, creating the mirage of freedom in the feudal system, he still openly sanctioned colonial slavery.

This political activity of the Church eventually led to the realization of its greatest dream – actual theocratic rule in the fifth to ninth centuries. Kolakowski calls this time "the ideal of Christian civilization"<sup>3</sup>, as a period of absolute subordination of the sciences to theology, and society to the Church. He wrote about the ecclesiastical institution of that time:

As the best organized, centralized political force, the Church was an extremely momentous factor in the political unification of the emerging feudal monarchies, in which bishops and abbots in subordinate territories exercised almost unlimited power<sup>4</sup>.

For Kolakowski, this period represented the moment of the greatest intellectual decline of Western culture, when almost all philosophical and scientific thinking developed within and succumbed to religion. In this he also saw the second greatest sin of Christianity,

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<sup>2</sup>L. Kolakowski: *Lectures on Medieval Philosophy*, Warsaw 1956, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 40 n.

after the exploitation and oppression of the masses by the Church – the suppression of scientific development and the ideological enslavement of any progressive movement.

**"Praise of Ignorance."** Christian philosophy – particularly of the medieval period, when it was most influential – arose, according to Kolakowski, from the great cultural catastrophe that was the collapse of ancient culture. It drove Western civilization into centuries of darkness, when human superstition stifled any possibility of further scientific progress.

Kolakowski's conflict with Christian doctrine itself, rather than with the Church institution, ran along the lines of opposition between naturalism and anti-naturalism. For Kolakowski, as a materialist, any anti-naturalist theses propounded by Christianity were most simply incomprehensible. Christian philosophy appeared to him as a system of knowledge rivalling scientific cognition. And since anti-naturalistic claims are not provable in the same way as scientific claims, he necessarily understood them, like the Enlightenment, as idle superstition. When, on the other hand, he encountered the theses of Church ideologues that the truths of faith should not be required to be substantiated in the same way as scientific claims, he treated this as Christian "praise of ignorance," opposing all progressive thought. What's more, he not only rebuked Christianity for – unjustified, in his opinion – making theses in competition with scientific ones, but also for contempt with regard to all so-called "earthly activities," including earthly knowledge, i.e., that detached from Revelation. A certain important aspect for Kolakowski's philosophical work of the critical period is outlined here. Well, it should be clear that since he attributed to the whole of Christian orthodoxy such features, he had to link it unequivocally with the Gnostic tradition, understood as deprecating corporeality. If so, then his hostility, as an outspoken materialist, to Christian metaphysics should come as no surprise.

Identifying Catholic orthodoxy with Gnosticism is obviously wrong and unjust to Catholicism. While Gnostic theses have at times appeared in the history of Christian thought, they can hardly be said to have taken root in it for good, let alone to dominate all orthodoxy. However, this was the interpretation that Kolakowski clung to. In turn, he blamed such a direction of the main ideological line of Christianity primarily on St. Augustine, towards whom he remained hostile to the end of his life. In *Lectures on Medieval Philosophy*, he wrote:

In his struggle against the materialist traditions of ancient culture and the rationalist tendencies of popular heresies, Augustine constructed the first elaborate system of Christian philosophy that divinely justified slavery and exploitation, fostered contempt for life and the world, disbelief in human powers and capabilities, and stripped man of everything that constitutes the value of life in favor of a vision of imaginary earthly blessings<sup>5</sup>.

Here, too, an important feature of Kolakowski's philosophy comes to the fore, which, by the way, never disappeared from his thought for good – the belief in man and his ability to control his own life; he rejected the idea of fate, against which man remains powerless. On this point, moreover, he cut himself off not only from St. Augustine, who made human fate dependent on the judgments of grace, but also from Marx himself, who by no means believed in any such activism – human fate was largely dependent on situations and historical changes beyond the individual's control.

The other pillar of Christian doctrine hated by Kolakowski at the time, besides St. Augustine, was St. Thomas Aquinas, whom he fought with equal fervor. He placed all the blame on these two fathers of the philosophical foundation of Christian dogmatics for the departure of the Western world from the progressive, materialist tradition of the ancient era and driving it into an era of barbaric superstition. First, St. Augustine distorted the achievements of Plato's thought, then St. Thomas Aquinas was called upon by the Dominican order to Christianly reinterpret Aristotelianism, which, as a progressive doctrine, Kolakowski writes, was gaining increasing influence in Europe. However, while Augustinianism only touched on doctrine, Thomism was also intended to serve the Church as a pseudo-scientific tool – in the form of *Thomistic realism* - to subordinate the entire secular output of scientific thought to religion. Kolakowski even wrote that:

In this whole, of which Thomistic realism is a part, Thomism is the direct defender of the darkest obscurantism, the direct apologist of all of mental backwardness and an instrument of direct struggle of the most backward social forces against the ideology of the revolutionary movement<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

The appropriation of science by Thomism had two aims. First, in view of the creative and progressive philosophical and scientific thought that was born in the countries of Asia Minor and Central Asia in the seventh century and from there migrated to Europe<sup>7</sup>, it was to subordinate all scientific pursuits to the supremacy of religion. Secondly, this pseudo-nationalist - as Kolakowski wrote - attempt to justify Christian thought was to give the ecclesiastical feudal superstructure ideological material to oppose all revolutionary-progressive movements. This "praise of ignorance," the subordination of all scholarly efforts to the ideological pressure of religion, led, according to Kolakowski, to both the mental and cultural regression that prevailed in medieval Europe. The picture of Christianity and the Catholic Church that Kolakowski outlines is intended to make it clear that Christianity, with all its achievements, was and is an ideological and social force strongly opposed to all manifestations of rational, materialistic thinking; for this it also deserves full condemnation.

However, justice must be done to Kolakowski that, contrary to the established Enlightenment and Marxist model, he did not reject the entire body of Christian thought; on the contrary, to some ideas he seemed to already have a clearly positive attitude (though perhaps only because they did not immediately find recognition in the Church).

Marxist and Enlightenment historiography has taken to treating the thought-trajectory of the Middle Ages as a period characterized by the superstition of all philosophical inquiry (they were, after all, all born of religious superstition); as a period completely appropriated and dominated by the ideology of the Catholic Church. Kolakowski blatantly

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<sup>6</sup> L. Kołakowski, *On the so-called Thomistic Realism* [in:] tegoż, *Szkice o filozofii katolickiej*, Warsaw 1955, p. 145.

<sup>7</sup> Kolakowski gave all the credit for the actual revival of progressive (materialist) thought in Europe to the philosophy that originated in the regions of Asia Minor and Central Asia. He did not even allow the thought that something of value could have been born in the bosom of the Church; if anything, it was next to and against it.

dissociates himself from such an interpretation, arguing that the entire philosophy of the time cannot be treated as "useless nonsense"<sup>8</sup>. For it is possible to find traces of praiseworthy movements in the Christian tradition. Another thing is that the justification for this praise was to be, in his opinion, the presence of progressive voices in these movements, referring to the ancient tradition of materialism, focusing on the justification of scientific cognition, free from the supremacy of theology. Kolakowski distinguishes three such movements of the "progressive Middle Ages", which were to pave the way for the return of ancient materialism and the separation of secular and spiritual matters, and which stood in opposition to the then dominant Thomistic scholasticism: 1) Latin Averroism; 2) the Oxford School (Grosseteste, Bacon); 3) Scotism. He spoke in good terms especially of William Ockham, at the head of the so-called *Renaissance of Nominalism*, a movement he regarded as the most progressive, momentous philosophical fact of the 16th century. It is significant that he viewed these movements precisely as progressive by virtue of the fact that they developed not with the Church, but against the Church, that is, against the Gnostic interpretation, with which, as we said earlier, he seemed to identify the entire Christian orthodox tradition. Kolakowski is extremely critical of Christianity, such as when he writes:

The entire history of medieval philosophy shows innumerable testimonies of the role of the Roman Church, hostile to culture and hostile to man, which for almost the entire course of its existence was a brake on mental progress, a spreader of darkness, intellectual and moral barbarism, a persecutor of scientific thought, an instrument of mental and social oppression of man. All mental progress in the Middle Ages was made in defiance of the church and with its fierce resistance<sup>9</sup>.

When reading these words, however, it should be kept in mind that Kolakowski did not despise all those associated with the Christian tradition; there were also those worthy of commemoration and respect. Thus, while he was unequivocally critical of the political activities of the Roman Church and the orthodox – in his opinion – Gnostic tradition, he had a kindly attitude, as it were, to certain manifestations of thoughts

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<sup>8</sup> L. Kolakowski: *Lectures...*, ed. cited, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 131 n.



that grew out of Christianity; although he himself tried to make these manifestations as independent from Christianity as possible.

***Opium for the People.*** In the writings of the critical period, Kolakowski's attention was directed primarily to religious forms, particularly Christianity; if he made any philosophical remarks about the essence of religion, they appeared on the margins of his main considerations.

Several points, however, are not debatable. He undoubtedly viewed religion as an irrational phenomenon, hostile to the scientific world view. This led him to the conclusion of absolute religious contempt for the earthly, temporal world, which, as a materialist, he could not accept. For looking to any supernatural forms led, in his view, to regression both mentally and morally. To the mental, because we then do not give due weight to earthly cognition, of which science is the guardian; to the moral, because we present our actual problems to ourselves in a distorted form.

On the latter issue, he clashed with Father Joseph Maria Bochenski, on the occasion of his 1950 book *Der Sowjetrussische dialektische Materialismus*. In his review of *Science before the Court of the Dark Ages*, he condemned Bocheński for fabricating Christian metaphysical justifications for the Church and imperialist rule, as long as he could keep the working class from fighting for freedom. When Bochenski writes, for example, about the "eastern (Russian) spirit," that Marxism is its product and something peculiar only to it, and completely incompatible with the mindset and character of the "western spirit," Kolakowski ridicules him as an under-educated (because he does not understand Marxism), hypocritical (because he uses such fantastic terms with no real reference, such as "western/eastern spirit") papal functionary (who is at the service of bourgeois principals). He even mocks him and his views by writing:

There is no conflict between imperialism and socialism - there is only a conflict between "the West" and "the East." There is no conflict between the beleaguered, vanquished bourgeoisie and the working class - there is only a conflict between the "Western spirit" and the "Eastern spirit." Any eulogist of capitalist order is by no means a debased hounder of his U.S. patrons, but is a defender of the "Western culture";

every gendarme, policeman and provocateur, paid by the bourgeois government, stands guard over the "Western cultural tradition"<sup>10</sup>.

Leaving the conflict with Bochenski aside, one can see here a certain constant tendency of Kolakowski not only towards imperialism (of which the Catholic Church was a part), but also towards religion itself. For just as Bochenski replaces the real problem on the line of socialism-imperialism with an East-West problem, so religion replaces real problems with some other, fantastic ones that have no relation to the actual situation of man in the world. The same applies, for example, to the question of the existence of God. Man, the actual lord of nature, is replaced in religion by God, the lord of the world and man, to whom the latter is supposed to be subject. The purpose of these metaphysical illusions is always one – to keep the masses in obedience, nothing more. Added this, of course, was Kolakowski's hostility to any form of theism, so all claims that restrained man's creative powers in some way were fought by him.

For Kolakowski, it was only true materialist philosophy that exposed this misrepresentation, this folly of impostors preying on human fear and darkness; only it revealed in religious myths their political basis. For him, religion was so *the opium of the people*, stemming from human weaknesses to understand what their socially fatal predicament consists of, but also *the opium for the people*, with the help of which the possessing classes carry out their ruthless policy of exploitation based on human superstition. This non-uniformity of argumentation distances Kolakowski from Marx's orthodoxy and creates a certain schism in his critical theory. For it is not entirely clear whether this hypocrisy of the real social situation has its origins in human nature itself, as Marx just wanted, or whether it is merely a superstition injected into people "from the outside." Kolakowski tried to defend both theses, although it is clear from his writings that he tended to lean toward the latter, Stalinist interpretation of religion.

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<sup>10</sup> L. Kolakowski: *Science before the court of the Dark Ages*, in his: *Sketches...*, ed. cit. p. 218.

**APOLOGETIC PERIOD.** Kolakowski's attitude to religion changes decisively in 1965<sup>11</sup>, for this is the year of the publication of the article *Jesus Christ – Prophet and Reformer* and the book that is often written about as *the magnum opus* of his philosophical work, *Religious Consciousness and the Ecclesiastical Bond*.

In the aforementioned book, Kolakowski for the first time expresses his departure from Stalinist criticism of religion. For he stops treating religion instrumentally, as a tool of political exploitation that preys on human superstition, and instead places religiosity itself in a series of autonomous human needs – all religious ideas are responses to relatively autonomous religious needs. This means that social religious activities, i.e., actions in accordance with religious ideas, are directed at nothing other than satisfying these very real, irresistibly imposing religious needs. Otherwise, for example, the social activities of war, the purpose of which is not to satisfy some autonomous need for war lying in human nature; the purpose of war lies outside of it, hence we will say that the activities of war have an instrumental dimension. Kolakowski admits:

Religion is no less "real" than the social conflicts through which it is explained. If it is one of the forms in which these conflicts organize themselves, it is only because religious needs exist in the social consciousness as its field of autonomous.<sup>12</sup>

What exactly these needs are, what their source is, Kolakowski does not explain; however, it should be noted that when writing about them, he usually juxtaposes them in one line with the need, or sense of sanctity. In the book itself he does not elaborate further on this problem – for it is not the main topic of the book – but it does appear later in his work.

*Religious Consciousness* itself is a work on the history of religion rather than a proper treatise on the philosophy of religion. In it, Kolakowski focuses primarily on the problem of the so-called Second Reformation in the seventeenth century. It concerned religious movements, originating in the Lutheranism, Calvinism and Zwinglianism, which turned against the Protestant Church. In doing so, Kolakowski focuses only on those factions he writes about that embodied the ideal of *non-denominational Christianity*:

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<sup>11</sup> We take the year 1965 here, of course, by agreement, since the change in Kolakowski's approach to religion itself must have matured over time probably over the course of several years. We do not settle this here, however, and treat 1965 as a watershed moment in, one might say, Kolakowski's official philosophical work.

<sup>12</sup> L. Kolakowski, *Religious Consciousness and the Church Bond*, Warsaw 1997, p. 38.

I am referring to those religious ideas which, in their radical variety, presuppose a permanent antagonism between the basic values of Christianity and the ecclesiastical community, at least one that claims to be the visible transmitter of invisible goods and God's graces, and which, in the face of religious life organized around any confessional formulas, rituals and sacraments, count lump sum to the tainted world of nature<sup>13</sup>.

While the mere fact of the existence of such religious movements is not particularly relevant to our considerations, Kolakowski's interest in these movements already is. "Non-denominational Christianity," after all, is nothing more than the idea of Christianity without the Church, without communal aspects. It is significant that Kolakowski argues his motivation for dealing with this issue on the grounds that the ideal of irreligious, individual religiosity is something important, as it "represents the actual realization of the phenomenon of religiosity in a relatively purified form"<sup>14</sup>. So while his first apologetic inclinations allow him to look at religion, or the existence of an autonomous religious need, with a favorable eye, what he still has left from his critical period is an aversion to the Church. Seemingly following the example of the mystics, he encloses human religious life in a single, individualized consciousness; institutional religion, as a communal organization, appears to him as a by-product, something superfluous, without which proper religious life can do without.

**Jesus.** A definite change in Kolakowski's front towards Christianity can be seen in, published the same year as *Consciousness*, the article *Jesus Christ - Prophet and Reformer*. The remarks made there are later elaborated in the book *Jesus Ridiculed*, published after his death and written in the 1980s, which is also the strongest apologia for Christianity that Kolakowski ever embarked on. It may come as a surprise that the author did not bother to publish it during his lifetime. Our role, however, is not to inquire as to why this happened; we will rather treat it as an integral part of his philosophical work.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

Like his fellow student Marian Przełęcki<sup>15</sup>, Kolakowski sees the essence of Christianity in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. In *Jesus Christ*, he distinguishes five reformatory rules vis-à-vis Judaism, which took root in Western culture and became an integral part of it over time. They can be divided into three moral and two metaphysical rules, respectively.

**1) The primacy of love over law.** Kolakowski sees the transition from *the Old* to *the New Testament*, the highlight of which is the *Sermon on the Mount*, as an apologia for the act of love, which is the root of Christian transformation of the world. Christianity teaches trust as the superior form of human coexistence; where there is trust, contract becomes superfluous. Through the opposition of contractual and trust-based relationships, Christianity has ingrained in Western culture an image of human relations based on selfless love of neighbor.

**2) Abolition of violence between people.** This pacifist demand is a direct consequence of the first point. The Gospel message of Jesus, is to move away from violence to love. *The Sermon on the Mount*, by its content, cannot spawn a fanatic, and it is the constitution of Christianity. Fanaticism can, of course, appear on the ground of Christianity, but it will not arise directly from the Gospel teaching, as, for example, happens in Islam, where the *Koran* in its very content calls for active struggle. The evangelical idea, on the other hand, is the idea of turning the other cheek and forgiving the oppressors. The question immediately arises, did Kolakowski forget about the Crusades, the Inquisition and the persecution of pagans? No, he was very much aware of these historical manifestations of fanaticism that grew out of Christianity, but he saw their source outside of religious doctrine. These fanatical inclinations arose largely from the claims of certain social groups to possess absolute truth. This, by the way, is not a thing peculiar to religions; it applies to all worldview disputes. Even for the most peaceful, noble cause, people are capable of shedding the blood of others.

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<sup>15</sup> See M. Przełęcki: *Chrześcijaństwo niewierzących*, Warsaw 1989.

Henry Elzenberg realized this when he wrote "All my life I have perhaps underestimated differences and opposites in worldview as a source of enmity between people ... in the course of time I have had to recognize that differences in worldviews are, today as in the days of the religious wars, the source of perhaps the deepest hatreds in the world"<sup>16</sup>. Kolakowski was also aware of this.

**3) A break with the idea of a chosen people.** The essence of this message was Jesus' departure from the conviction, rooted in Judaic tradition, of the special role in world history of the members of that religion as one nation. Into Western culture this Christian idea entered in the form of the thesis that there are no nations chosen, or distinguished by either God or history, in such a way that they can exercise supreme authority, for whatever reason, over other nations; all humanity forms one people. Kolakowski, however, does not see in this postulate at all a call for Christianity to engage in ecumenical activity that would eventually lead to the religious unification of all mankind. On the contrary, it is desirable to proclaim the ideal of tolerance, but without giving away its own identity. Indeed, this point overlaps with the second, to the extent that it encourages the renunciation of violence in favor of the worldwide brotherhood of all people.

**4) The existence of something higher than human life.** Jesus teaches that there are two types of non-monetary values – temporal values and "higher" values. While temporal values are easy to define, as referring to the satisfaction of human biological needs, "higher" values, as Kolakowski understands them, pose problems. Undoubtedly, these are values that we pursue for their own sake, non-instrumentally, not for life. The question arises, however, whether they should be understood, as the Gnostics did, as the only values worth satisfying and realizing, which is connected with turning away from temporal values as irrelevant, or as the thesis that it is impossible to reduce all values realized by man to the natural dimension.

The message about the existence of two kinds of goods connects for Kolakowski closely with the Christian apocalyptic vision of the world. The world,

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<sup>16</sup> H. Elzenberg: *The Trouble with Existence. Aphorisms in the order of time*, Cracow 1994, p. 422.

in which we live, along with everything it contains, is heading to an inevitable end, but there is something – beyond this temporal plane – that is not lost. In particular, our individual lives are heading to an inevitable end. And here is Jesus' message: in the face of the transient and finite nature of everything around us, all earthly goods are secondary and relative (they are not goods in themselves). Kolakowski's stance on the essence of this message seems at times ambiguous, especially given his earlier critical-period identification of Christian orthodoxy with the Gnostic tradition. It seems, however, that what ultimately dominates his conviction is not a contempt for worldly goods, but rather for putting them in their proper place; that is, against the greed for these goods and the upward spiral of worldly needs. Without going into the problem further, however, we can understand Jesus' message on this point in a minimalist way, which is also in unquestionable agreement with how Kolakowski understands it, as a postulate that there are values that stand higher in the hierarchy than human, biological life.

**5) About man's "lost position" in temporary life.** In its essence, this message has taken root in Western culture as a belief in the incurable, structural frailty of human nature. Kolakowski, however, postulates that it cannot be interpreted in a way that would justify a spirit of resignation in the face of fate, and exhort one to acquiesce to the conditions found. Here again a nod to the Augustinian theory of predestination can be seen. Evangelical Christianity, in his view, reconciled life activism with an awareness of the misery of existence, in contrast to *the Old Testament*. Kolakowski saw this compromise as follows:

For one can strive strenuously and one can struggle endlessly to change everything that can be changed in the conditions of human existence, and at the same time know that the absolute is unattainable, that a certain organic frailty of human existence is not repairable, that a fundamental infirmity associated with human finitude itself is present in us<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> L. Kolakowski, *Jesus Christ - prophet and reformer*, in his *Praise of the Inconsistency 1*, Warsaw 1989, p. 11.

One thing is irrevocable - the fact that our individual, temporal lives are heading to an inevitable end. However, the shape of our lives is our own responsibility. Kolakowski saw the Christian ideal in an *Erasmian*, not *Augustinian*, attitude. It was unacceptable to him that the whole of human life depended on God's grace (or, more broadly, fate) – man may be in a pitiable position, but it is up to him alone to be able to rise from this state. Kolakowski trusted in man's natural abilities.

In the 1980s, in *Jesus Mocked*, he added two more points to this list, which, in juxtaposition with the five cited above, are meant to constitute *the corpus* of the Gospel message of Jesus, and by extension Christianity in general.

**6) On the substantiality of evil.** The most momentous, and at once the most incompatible with Kolakowski's earlier views, the Enlightenment, Marxist and Stalinist criticism of religion, Jesus' message – evil exists and is in us, not around us. The author thus dissociated himself from a vision of the world in which evil is identified with the improper arrangement of society. This issue began to plague Kolakowski even before his work entered an explicitly apologetic track. As early as 1961, he wrote:

The devil is perhaps the greatest contribution of Central Asian civilization to world culture<sup>18</sup>.

However, it was only in Christian anthropology that he saw the genius of this message, which placed the responsibility for evil on man. Various institutions, organizations of social life, doctrines may be evil, but the personal root of this evil is in us; the devil dwells in human nature. Christianity introduced into Western culture a personal responsibility for evil, an acknowledgement of one's own guilt, rather than placing it on a world that is evil toward us, or on a world that is badly arranged. In clashing with the contemporary dominant ideological line of Western civilization, this is also the most sensitive point of Jesus' message, and the one most often mocked. Kolakowski notes that the ideological push of today's secularized society is so strong,

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<sup>18</sup> L. Kolakowski: *O pożytkach diabła*, in: tegoż: *Pochwała niekonsekwencji* 3. Warsaw 1989, p. 7.



that even the clergy, in their attempts to adapt Christianity to the new, progressive times, are departing from Jesus' teaching. In a magnificent passage, both literarily and philosophically, from *Conversations with the Devil*, he speaks through the mouth of the *devil*:

I sometimes visit churches, listen to sermons, listen carefully, without smiling, calmly. It is rare, increasingly rare, for a preacher any kind, even a poor village pastor, to remember me at the pulpit. Neither in the pulpit, nor in the confessional, nor elsewhere. And what do you say? He is ashamed! Yes, he is ashamed in the simplest way. He is ignorant, they will say, a simpleton, he believes in fairy tales, he does not keep up with the spirit of the times, which, after all, cannot bypass the Church. (...) Why do you gentlemen avoid me? Are you afraid of the mockery of unbelievers, afraid that you will be ripped off in cabarets? Since when the faith fear the ridicule of pagans and heretics? What path are you on? If you deviate from the foundations of faith for fear of ridicule, where will you end up? If the devil today, God will inevitably fall prey to your trepidation tomorrow. Gentlemen, you have allowed yourselves to be possessed by the idol of modernity, which fears ultimate things and conceals from you the very possibility of them<sup>19</sup>.

Since 1965, when the book was published, Kolakowski's words have lost nothing of their validity – the West forgets about the devil; it is ashamed to talk about him. It is the society, after all, and the system that is responsible for the dire situation of man and all the misfortunes that befall him. The notion that evil can be a real force, working through us and having its roots in us is seen as childish. If I think that I am sinning, that evil is in me, then I should go to a psychoanalyst for therapy, he will let me get rid of these delusions; I am the victim here! And that someone acts in a vile way, they will say that he did not know about the evil, he thought that he did nothing wrong, because it benefited him to do just that. We will show him that he can achieve the same benefits by other means, and he will no longer be a scoundrel. And that he killed his own family? After all, there is no evil in him, it's just some fancy substitute name for what is actually happening to him – he had a difficult childhood, trauma; he is mentally ill, we should sympathize with him, treat him, and not say that he is evil.

Without the thesis of the substantiality of evil, there is no Christianity for Kolakowski. When he laments the decline, the decay of Western civilization, he blames it mainly on society's departure from belief in evil. Forgetting the devil is the same as forgetting Jesus. Any

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<sup>19</sup> L. Kolakowski: *Conversations with diabetes*. Warsaw 1965, p. 54 n.

secular, modernist attempts to deviate from this doctrine, Kolakowski criticizes, because they actually lead to an attempt to liberate oneself from sin and guilt; they cast the responsibility for evil on the evil arrangement of the world. A modern man is a man free from guilt.

The question arises, of course, how did Kolakowski understand evil? Well, his hostile attitude to Augustine's theory of predestination and his Erasmian stance, he must have seen the devil in physical, not moral evil. His unwavering belief in the human possibility of improving one's earthly situation is incompatible with the thesis of moral corruption of the human spirit. Kolakowski hesitates; on the one hand he wants to locate evil in human nature, on the other he disagrees with the thesis that man sometimes can do nothing with evil, that he is destined for damnation (using Augustinian terminology). However, his Erasmian-Pelagian attitude ultimately triumphs – he blames man for evil, but does not accept the doctrine of the possibility of irreversible corruption of the human will by evil; human nature is capable of overcoming sin.

**7) On the need to separate *the sacred* and *the profane*.** For Kolakowski, Christianity as we know it today is the result of a "painful compromise between Athens and Jerusalem,"<sup>20</sup> a compromise between science and faith, secular and spiritual values. Jesus' message was not to subjugate the world to the tyranny of the *sacrum*, but rather – in the words of "render to God what is divine, to the emperor what is imperial" – to maintain a balance between secular and spiritual power. These are two equally legal, though different in nature, orders. Moreover, Kolakowski argues – contrary to what he wrote during the critical period – that Christian civilization, throughout its history, has indeed succeeded in this regard. Contrary to what people hostile to Christianity scare contemporary society with, theocracy has never been a problem in the Western world, for it finds no support in doctrine. It's different in the Muslim world, where the menace of theocratic rule is real and firmly rooted in the *Quran*; there the idea of separation never took root. We mean here, of course, theocracy understood as the takeover by religion of all secular affairs, including the unlimited ability to legislate, rather than

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<sup>20</sup> L. Kolakowski: *If there is no God...*, transl. T. Baszniak, M. Panufnik. London 1987, p. 40.

what is referred to in the public debate as a theocracy, that is, looking to religion for certain, morally contentious, social issues that need to be regulated. Today, if any party in power admits to the Christian tradition, the voice is immediately raised that we are facing the rule of theocracy, the rule of the Church. For a Christian MP will legislate according to his Christian conscience. After all, there can be no talk of real theocratic rule here, it is a complete confusion of concepts. The church, after all, has no secular-administrative coercive power to interfere in state law, nor does it have veto power in public affairs - it only has spiritual power. Legally, after all, it does not prohibit anyone from abortion or euthanasia, it can at most condemn it.

This is also where the intellectual genius of Christianity reveals itself, having instilled in our culture the conviction that both the *sacrum* and *profane* realms are inevitable, that getting rid of one of them is not desirable. They should hold each other in check. For it is a different thing to decide what is morally right and wrong from what is desirable to maintain social order.

Kolakowski does not stop there, however; he further argues that the complete annihilation of one of these orders is simply not possible. If we try to remove *the sacred* from the social sphere, then, in a natural way, secular goals begin to ascribe to themselves its characteristics. The idea of, for example, eternal salvation, such as that preached by Christianity, would begin to be replaced by some earthly, secular utopian fantasies, as was the case with Marxism, or as is evident in the anti-religious scientism, where science begins to ascribe pseudo-sacred aspects to itself (e.g. salvation by overcoming death, assuring people of earthly immortality). Secular ideologies are transforming into caricatured cults of a religious nature. And this is because the human need for religion, inherent in our nature, abhors a vacuum. Any attempt to remove religion from the world leads, in fact, to the emergence of new, often distorted, because to religion in the traditional sense hostile, pseudo-sacred religious forms. This, however, leads Kolakowski to an important general thesis, namely, that religion in its essence is indestructible. Hence he concludes that religious faith is a permanent component of human culture, it belongs to the foundations of our existence. Thus, as long as man exists, religion will exist.

The same is also true in the *profane* sphere. Although there have been and continue to be attempts to realize theocratic rule, in which all social life would be subordinated to revealed truths, the human intellect will never accept this. For this would imply a situation such that nothing earthly has any ontological importance, and all our efforts in life are directed at some kind of "higher" reality. The rejection of all earthly goods and matters as irrelevant defies common sense. Individual examples of people realizing this postulate (the complete abandonment of the *profane* sphere) do, of course, exist (e.g., some mystics, rejecting all earthly reality as something evil and worthy of being worshipped), just as there are also non-religious people (nihilists), but never would the complete abandonment of the sphere of the *sacred* or *profane* be truly reflected on a social scale.

These seven highlighted points of the Gospel message of Jesus give us a better insight into understanding in what sense Kolakowski considers himself a Christian. When he writes about being attached to the Christian tradition, he should be understood to mean that he accepts the nature of Jesus as its core. If this is so, then adherence to Christianity, as Kolakowski conceived it, can be characterized in the form of the following conjunction:

X is a Christian  $\leftrightarrow$  X accepts that: 1) trust is more primordial than law; 2) the evangelical postulate of love of neighbor is an indicator of moral behavior; 3) one should, as far as possible, renounce violence for the sake of world peace; 4) there are values higher than human biological life 5) the end of individual life is an irrevocable fact; 6) evil really exists and the responsibility for it falls on man; 7) both the sphere of *the sacred* and *the profane* are inevitable in social life.

But is the acceptance of these seven points enough for someone to be said to be a Christian in the proper sense? For this Kolakowski does not give a clear answer. He himself feels Christian through his attachment to the tradition, the essence of which is precisely these demands. However, when asked in a conversation with Fr. Jan Andrzej Kloczowski about "who is a Christian?" he gives an evasive answer:

"that's something you have to ask the priests, they know better"<sup>21</sup>.

This change in Kolakowski's individual attitude toward Christianity is also accompanied by a change in his perception of the role of Christianity in the formation of European culture. During the Stalinist period, he viewed it as a religion hostile to the proper roots of European civilization, which he placed fully in progressive ancient culture. Christianity was a force that burst our civilization from within, leading it to a slow decline, both intellectually and morally. Here, meanwhile, we encounter the opposite thesis; in Christianity Kolakowski sees the spiritual core of Western civilization.

The use of the term "core" is not accidental. This is because Kolakowski argued that Europe's departure from its Christian heritage (the message of Jesus) is a symptom of decay, the path to the ultimate collapse of the civilization of the Western world. He wrote plainly:

Who can assess the role that Christianity - insofar as it has survived in the form of an actual faith or remnants of moral principles - now plays in European civilization, providing it with some degree of endurance? (...) But common sense - which very often, though not always, turns out to be right - leaves no doubt: there is a close and reciprocal connection between the oblivion of the Christian tradition and what we deplore and what we know all too well as symptoms of the disease of our civilization<sup>22</sup>.

One thing, at least, is undeniable: this "close and reciprocal relationship" that Kolakowski mentions attests to the fact that without Christianity there can be no European civilization. The death of Christianity in culture means the death of the civilization of which we are heirs. Kolakowski's final stand on the side of Christianity was mainly due to his strong attachment to the Christian tradition, constituting the foundation of the culture of which he felt a part.

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<sup>21</sup> See Z. Mentzel: *Kolakowski: In principle, I am a Christian*. "Gazeta Wyborcza" 27. 09. 2008.

<sup>22</sup> L. Kolakowski: *Jesus ridiculed. Apologetic and skeptical essays*, transl. D. Zańko. Cracow 2014, p. 30.

**Science.** The aforementioned compromise between Athens and Jerusalem, the world of science and the world of faith, provided Christian culture with the ability to mutually reconcile its intellectual drives with its roots located in faith. For Kolakowski, this is a unique phenomenon in the religious history of humanity. For it gave Western civilization the scientific and technological drive to conquer the natural world. No other civilization was capable of doing this. All this was due to the unambiguous distinction between knowledge based on scientific cognition and knowledge based on faith; without abolishing the legitimacy of either. Science, philosophy may have been in subordination to theology, but Christianity never sought to fully abolish them.

This separation not only provided the impetus for progress within Christian civilization, but also ensured its permanence, according to Kolakowski. If Christianity had blurred the distinction between the act of faith and intellectual acceptance, it would inevitably have disintegrated.

The actual separation of the order of faith from the order of knowledge, moreover, was not just an astonishing historical fact for Kolakowski, but also constituted an extremely important philosophical thesis. With the writing of *The Presence of Myth* in 1966, although the book lived to be published in 1972, his attitude to religious theses changes, and he no longer treats them, according to the Enlightenment tradition, as an error of reason. Like Schopenhauer, Kolakowski-apologist argues that religious truths and scientific truths belong to two different, non-malleable areas.

Religious theses cannot be tested with a scientific apparatus. After all, it is impossible to prove Christian truths the way we prove, for example, that the vector sum of the momenta of all the elements of an isolated system is constant, or that the sum of the interior angles of a triangle is 180 degrees. Religious theses, according to Kolakowski, are not subject to rationalization – contrary to what Przełęcki, for example, wrote – so they should not be considered from such an angle. On the other hand, being a man of science, that is, believing in the certainty of scientific cognition does not exclude religious faith at all; they do not contradict each other. Thus, for example, on the question of belief in the existence of God, a thoroughly religious thesis, Kolakowski argues:

There is nothing in science that prevents a physicist from believing in God, and his belief may even find a psychological underpinning in reflecting on the intricate machinery of Nature; but he has no basis for treating his belief as an explanatory hypothesis in the scientific sense of the word, much less as the logical conclusion of a physical theory<sup>23</sup>.

The essence of religious faith is not cognition, it is an uncalculated trust. Confidence that, despite various adversities and the apparent absurd of our temporal life, it has some latent eschatological meaning. It is not to be reckoned with, in turn, in the sense that we do not expect to know and explain this sense with certainty. In religion we accept this proposal even if we would have the opportunity to see for ourselves its truth, and even if we had some reason to doubt its existence. Faith is an act of unwavering moral and metaphysical commitment to the meaningfulness of one's own actions and one's own existence, not an act of intellectual acceptance of certain sentences as true and justified.

Kolakowski therefore criticizes the scientistic cult of science and all forms of the idea of a rational religion, that is, one in which we accept a few basic truths that can somehow be rationally justified; while we reject the remaining issues, intricate and mysterious, as lying outside the legitimate interests of our mind. Such was the project of 17th century deists, as well as contemporary Christian modernists. These were attempts to tear down the barrier between all the religions of the world and work out their rational core. The ideal of abolishing all religious feuds and eradicating what is superstitious from religion, which thinks of itself as an instrument of tolerance, leads, according to Kolakowski, in only one direction – towards a new religiosity, a reign of intolerant fanatical rationalism. This one, in turn, is far more dangerous, Kolakowski writes, than any forms of traditional religions known to us. For it lacks any brake on the appropriation of all knowledge and the subordination of it to secular ideology.

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<sup>23</sup> L. Kolakowski: *If...*, ed. cited, p. 45.

Any such attempt is always naturally ideocratic. The brake on Christian theocratic inclinations was a strong awareness of the incapacity of human reason to fathom all the mysteries of faith. Meanwhile, secular ideologies always come out with infallible programs of a perfect world and a conviction of absolute infallibility (they are, after all, based on so-called "certain knowledge"), which "is a much surer way to justify violence"<sup>24</sup>. It was no different with communist ideology, which now appeared to Kolakowski as a pseudo-sacred religious movement characterized by all that traditional religions are characterized by – the need for fidelity to a *creed*, a strong hierarchical structure and a claim to adjudicate what is true and false, what is good and what is evil<sup>25</sup>.

**The essence of religion.** For someone who devoted the bulk of his philosophical work to the issue of religion, we find relatively few assertions in Kolakowski's work regarding the very essence of religion. He constantly circles around this issue without attempting to settle it definitively. In the introduction to *If God Doesn't Exist...* he admits outright that he feels:

Any definition of religion must be arbitrary to some degree, and though we try our hardest to match the actual use of the word in everyday speech, many people will feel that our definition covers too much or too little, or sins in both ways<sup>26</sup>.

While he sometimes manages to single out some constitutive issues for religion, he shuns any attempt to define it unambiguously. This conviction accompanied him until his death. At the end of his life he adds:

Well, then, that there are no solutions here that we can put into a precise formula. And thank God! The impossibility of putting religious life in general, into some very precise formula, it's probably just the way it's supposed to be, and that's that<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> L. Kolakowski: *Heresy*. Kraków 2010, p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> L. Kolakowski: *If...*, ed. cited, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> See *Is religion headed for disappearance?* - Kolakowski's conversation with Fr. Jan Andrzej Klocowski as part of the *Conversations with the Master* series of television programs. Oxford, August 2007.



Thus, if we want to know what, for Kolakowski, lay beneath the phenomenon of religiosity, the only thing we can rely on are the individual remarks scattered throughout his writings. It cannot be said, however, that Kolakowski himself ever aspired to construct a systematized philosophy of religion, that is, a theory that says what religion in its essence is.

There is no doubt, however, that he always associated human religious life with some undefined sense of "sacredness" (*sacrum*). According to him, it is something common to all faiths, and at the same time something that cannot be reduced to religious doctrine. As he rightly points out, *the sacrum* cannot be equated with faith in a personal God, and thus with faith in an individual life after death, of which this God would be the guarantor. Kolakowski argues that there is no strong logical or empirical rationale for calling only systems with the idea of a personal God religions, and others, such as Buddhism – often seen only as a "way of life," a moral wisdom – not. He says this:

I know that *the New Testament* and *the Dhammapadam* [the Buddha's collection of moral teachings] cannot be reduced to some common doctrine. And yet we feel that both one and the other is something incredibly important to our lives, if we take it seriously<sup>28</sup>.

To be a religious man does not at all mean to believe in a personal God; to be a religious man means to have a sense of "sacredness," that is, to recognize the sacred order. And the most befitting characteristic of Kolakowski's *sacrum* would be to juxtapose it with a sensitivity to good and evil. It is a belief in the existence of some divine order of the world, an objective world of values. This kind of faith is only capable of giving meaning to our lives in the face of the transience of all earthly matters. A community of faith is a community of feeling that our earthly actions and our temporal life, in which we stand at a loss because it is headed for an irrevocable end, have a deeper eschatological meaning.

However, while he often referred to the doctrinal community with distaste, hence, among other things, his idea of "non-denominational religiosity" as a purified form of religiosity, it cannot be said that Kolakowski,

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<sup>28</sup> See Z. Mentzel: *Kolakowski...*, ed. cit.

as was the case with Elzenberg, leaned toward religious individualism; not in the full sense of the word. Although he ran away from the Church, he was drawn to community of some sort. Particularly if we consider two of his statements - in *If God Is Not There...* we read: "I consider the act of worship<sup>29</sup> to be indelible and essential to any description of a religious phenomenon"<sup>30</sup>, while in his conversation with Kloczowski he states: "ritual [for religion - M. P.] is necessary"<sup>31</sup>. Internal, communal forms are essential for human religious life; without them no religion has ever existed, and, as Kolakowski states, none can exist. For even if the doctrinal content is incomprehensible to someone, and thus unable to fully satisfy someone's need to give meaning to life, this meaning can be provided by ritual itself – certain communal activities directed at taming death. In the dispute between religious individualism and its necessarily social character, Kolakowski finally opted for the latter. Even if he initially had inclinations toward individualism, his last statements seem to testify that he regarded religion always as a matter of some kind of community - a community of faith that life and the world have meaning.

**Kolakowski's religiosity.** Czesław Miłosz, referring to Kolakowski's work, once stated that he had an "abstruse [style], as if he wanted to defend access to his deeper thoughts"<sup>32</sup>. What kind of religiosity characterized Kolakowski – it is difficult to say; he himself ran away, shunned the subject and avoided clear declarations on the issue. For him, the essence of religious life was a combination of at least two things – apocalyptic consciousness (man's peculiar fear of passing, different from the animal fear of death) and a sense of "holiness." Truly, it can probably be presumed that - for Kolakowski - *the sacrum* is that which, in religion, sanctifies life, that is, gives it meaning. At least, this is how

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<sup>29</sup> In doing so, he points out that worship is something socially determined, not an individual matter.

<sup>30</sup> L. Kolakowski: *If...*, ed. cited, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> See *Does religion...*, broadcast cited.

<sup>32</sup> See M. Grochowska: *It would be better if he were. Kolakowski towards Christianity and God*. "Gazeta Wyborcza" (30. 10. 2012).

Kolakowski's position was understood by Marian Przełęcki, who admits in an interview:

We [Przełęcki and Kołakowski - M. P.] differed on the question of moral conviction. I believe in moral intuition, which tells a person what is good and what is bad. Leszek believed that this intuition is effective, when it is based on some kind of faith. He linked a sense of the meaning of life to metaphysical faith, among other religious beliefs. I argued that the sense of life is independent of faith. It is possible to believe that the world is meaningless, and at the same time believe that one's own life has meaning. He felt that since everything perishes in the end, it is difficult to say that life had meaning<sup>33</sup>.

The question of Kolakowski's religiosity, on the grounds of his own thought, would be a question of what gave his own life meaning; what did he himself believe could be opposed to death?

Well, if we look at Kolakowski's analysis of the Jesus' message and declaration of a sense of belonging to the Christian tradition, there is no doubt that Christianity, in his opinion, projects values and presents them to man in a satisfactory and convincing way. If, on the other hand, it is assumed that the collection of these values constituted *the sacrum* for him, then their realization should be what gave his life meaning. However, he himself admitted, as Przełęcki points out, that for this belief in Christian values to be effective, it must be grounded in Christian metaphysics. This, on the other hand, Kolakowski did not share.

The problem, however, is that Kolakowski's argumentation in this regard is unconvincing. The right should probably be given, in this dispute, to Przełęcki. For there are those who reject Christian metaphysics, but accept the set of values developed within this religion. An example would be Stanislaw Lem, who did not believe in either a personal God or an individual life after death, but at the same time accepted *the Decalogue* and adhered to its precepts. Metaphysical faith is not, contrary to what Kolakowski thought, a necessary condition for the effectiveness of moral intuition, based on this faith. So what can be said about Kolakowski's eschatology? It can be divided into two types: 1. infinitist, involving the hope for some form of individual afterlife - the meaning of our life is then coupled with the "second life" that awaits us; 2. Finitist, focusing on our lives here and now, because something more powerful than the individual will continue after individual death.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Christian hopes must be counted as part of both eschatologies: they include 1) individual immortality, 2) resurrection of souls and bodies of the saved, but also 3) realization of God's glory. Of these three, the first two are classified as infinitist eschatology, while the third is classified as finitist. Kolakowski rejected the first two - for he opposed the theistic thesis, which is inextricably linked to the hope of individual posthumous life; without God, individual immortality cannot be thought of. Finitist hope, however, he shared; he believed in the realization of God's glory (point four of the message of Jesus). Although he did not share Christian metaphysics, he claimed that the realization of Christian values was something more sublime and powerful than caring for biological life. In this sense, it can also be said that his eschatology was, in part, coincident with Christian eschatology. Contrary to his own views, there is no contradiction here. Hence, if we refer to his characterization of religiosity as a communal sense that human life has a deeper meaning, we can, without falling into inconsistency, say that he belonged to the Christian community, since it was the Christian set of values that he put against death. The statement of Charles Taylor, who in 2003, when asked about Kolakowski's philosophy, characterized it as a position of "close and sympathetic observer of the Christian faith – without ultimately taking sides"<sup>34</sup>, seems to be correct. In light of our discussion above, however, this thesis requires clarification. Indeed, Kolakowski did not fully take the side of the Christian faith, because he remained an atheist – he never became a believing person, in the traditional sense – but he placed unshakable trust in divine world order and Christian values. In this sense, too, we can speak of Kolakowski's religiosity as Christian religiosity.

His attitude toward the Catholic Church as an institution, however, remained ambivalent to the end. For he valued it, as a guardian of

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<sup>34</sup> See Kolakowski's interview for *the Journal* (published in *Europa* magazine) of 21. 03. 2008.

Christian tradition, but at the same time he believed that not everything "sticks" in the doctrine formulated by the Church and not by Jesus himself<sup>35</sup>. As an example, he cited, among other things, the condemnation of abortion treatments (under the sanction of hell) as part of a historically formulated doctrine that he did not share – there is nothing in the *Decalogue* or *the Sermon on the Mount* on this subject. In this, too, one can see the return of the notion of "non-denominational Christianity" as Kolakowski's proper attitude toward Christianity; an attachment to the teachings of Jesus, but no longer an attachment to the Church itself. His project was an attempt to "remove" Jesus from the Church, to separate his person and contribution to European culture from Church dogma. On the other hand, he supported Church pedagogical activity, but only insofar as it had a Jesuit-Pelagian dimension, that is, insofar as the Church cut itself off from Augustinianism. In 1995, in his vote on the new edition of *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*,<sup>36</sup> he delights in the fact that it represents a major step toward the Church's eventual liberation from Augustinianism. Thus, it was fine with the Church for Kolakowski as long as the Church shared and affirmed his Erasmian stance. And given the strong anti-Augustinian tendencies of Catholic theology at the end of the XX century and in the beginnings of XXI century, his attitude toward the Church in the late years of his life remained rather positive. Let the cross placed on his grave attest to Kolakowski's benevolence and strong attachment to Christianity; him, who never took a definitive stand for the Christian God and Church. After all, the symbol says: I will not all die - in the Christian sense.

### Summary

Leszek Kolakowski's views on religion, while widely known, have not yet seen an adequate explanation. The main purpose of the article is to show how Kolakowski's thoughts have evolved over time and what led this fierce critic of religion to become one of the most ardent advocates of Christianity.

**Key words:** atheism, Christianity, Leszek Kolakowski, philosophical anthropology, religion.

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<sup>35</sup> See *Does religion...*, broadcast cited.

<sup>36</sup> See L. Kolakowski: *Layman over "Catechism" gets smart*. "Gazeta Wyborcza" (18- 29. 03. 1995).