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THE TRADITIONS OF RATIONALISM, SECULARISM AND FREE THINKING IN POLAND

The concepts that I am to analyse - how they have been understood throughout the history in Poland – remain fundamental in determining certain types of attitudes and behaviour of citizens. They occur in a variety of philosophical, literary and theological contexts. It may be surprising, therefore, that contemporary Poles do not seem interested in them and scientific literature in Poland pays little attention nor reflection to the subject.

If we recognise that rationality means respecting the reason in public activity, at work, in shaping social life, and rejecting whatever views and practical directives stand out as inconsistent with reason... If we admit that secularism is the desire to remove various areas of social life, such as science, politics or art from under the influence of religion... If we believe that humanism means the recognition of the superiority of man as a supposed end to all undertaken actions and the rejection of any attitudes positioning him as a means to achieve political, social or any other aims, we must be sure that these concepts should be of particular interest to the public. Those notions provide support for essential values of the social life, such as dignity, equality and freedom. All the more reason for them to be popularised in a country the founding fathers of which stated, in the preamble of the Constitution, that: “We, the Polish Nation – all citizens of the Republic, Both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, As well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources, Equal in rights and obligations towards the common good – Poland, Beholden to our ancestors for their labours, their struggle for independence achieved at great sacrifice, for our culture rooted in the Christian heritage of the Nation and in universal human values...”¹

These values should be made universally known and acknowledged but somehow they are not. They should be promoted even more intensely if we really wish to build Poland as a sovereign democratic state of law in a common Europe based on equality of all people, on respect for the dignity of every human being and the freedom of the individual as the highest values.

¹ *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r.*, “Dz. U.”, 1997, no. 78, pos. 483.

For Polish men and women, these notions should not have a harsh sound of a political novelty imported from abroad, like they were absent in the centuries-old heritage of Polish social thought and citizenship. On the contrary. This is why before tackling on a present situation and seeking answers as to why the Third Republic does not fully meet our expectations, I will try to trace traditions of humanism, rationalism and secularism in Poland over the centuries. Of course, such overview can only be brief and, probably, simplified but it seems necessary for understanding the actuality of Polish public life.

The Catholicism and the origins of Polish statehood

Contrary to popular accounts, the baptism of Poland in the Catholic rite, undertaken by Polish king Mieszko I in 966, was not an act of institution of the Polish state. The Polish state already existed as a political entity; it was well established and able to defend its borders and interests. Mieszko I took a political decision to protect the country against expansion of neighbours who used “spreading the faith” as an ideological justification for conquest.

In the Middle Ages, Christianity was the fundament of the developing world. The medieval Polish elite who obtained their education in state and church matters on famous universities throughout Europe aimed at joining the process of its construction. In the 14th century, the first university on Polish soil was established in Kraków (1364). Even before that, in the 13th century, the Poles started to participate in the culture of medieval Europe by creating new and progressive ideas. They took part in famous disputes on reason and experience or on secular science. One of the most important debates concerned “the multiplicity of truths” (or duality of the truth). The stake of the debate was to separate science from theology, so that human knowledge was able to develop free from dogmas or crippling ecclesiastical authority. The multiplicity in question referred to separation of the truth of the religion (faith) from truths of the science.

An outstanding representative of this current of thought was a Polish philosopher, physicist and mathematician Wittelon (1225-1280 – dates uncertain). He was the first widely-known Polish scholar, who signed his works with words “in terra nostra, scilicet Polonia” – “of our land, that is Poland”. He became famous as author of a work on optics and physiology of vision entitled *Perspectivorumlibridecem* which he completed around 1273. The treaty did not go out of print for a few hundred years after his death, and it was read, among others, by Leonardo da Vinci, Copernicus and Johannes Kepler.

The theory of ‘multiplicity of truths’ and hence the quest for rationalism were developed by scholars of the Krakow University, such as Benedykt Hesse and Paweł of Worczyn (the first half of the 15th century).²

² S. Opara, *Z postępowych tradycji polskiej myśli społecznej*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 9-10.

At the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, Mateusz of Cracow was active – a scholar whose work, “The practices of the Roman Curia” was an important voice in mainstream criticism of the Church undertaken by many contemporary European thinkers. Mateusz called for a fight against abuses of the ecclesiastical authority, he criticised simony (selling offices), as well as an excessive enrichment of the clergy. At the same time, he called for democratisation of the Church and laid out foundations of conciliarism (theory of superiority of the synod over the pope). Above all he was keen to build a humanist vision of the Church as a community of equals.

His contemporary, another Polish philosopher Paweł Włodkowic, author of the *Treatise on the authority of the pope and the emperor in relation to the infidels* and of the work *The Order of the Teutonic Knights and the war of Poles against those men*, stated that “faith can not be forced” (*Fides ex necessitate esse non debet*). This notion perpetuated deep humanism and shed more light at tolerance as the base of medieval worldview. He also was a vehement opponent to any attacks on non-Christian peoples and nations as illegal and immoral, thusly opposing the doctrine of “crusades” that remained a commonplace in the Middle Ages. His “discovery”, which was shocking to his contemporaries, was that only purely defensive wars were “just” and all aggressive wars were to be condemned.³

Grzegorz of Sanok - a 15th-century polish rationalist wearing Archbishop's robes – recognised religion primarily as a tool of governance, a basis of social bonds and a foundation of laws. He criticised the influence of theology on natural sciences. In philosophy, he alluded to materialistic beliefs of Epicurus. He also criticised “scholasticism“, back then still “the queen of sciences”, as “a delirium in broad daylight”.

Nicolaus Copernicus, Polish scientist and astronomer, achieved a legitimate scientific coup that entailed an ideological revolution in European culture, as well as smashing the bases of scholasticism and rejecting the authority of the Church as a source of truth about the world. His research and mathematical findings, i.e. experience and reason underlying the later-called Copernican theory, confirmed the humanist faith in man and in the power of the man’s intellect, and strengthened the need to release science from religious dogma.

Humanism and rationalism were at the basis of works of Polish poets and thinkers of the Renaissance – Jan Kochanowski, Jan Ostroróg and Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski. The work of Frycz-Modrzewski, *De republicaemendanda*, was translated into numerous national languages and became a basic reference in the theory of the constitutional state where the king’s power rested on the will of the people expressed in the universal election. Frycz-Modrzewski’s humanism was primarily expressed through an innovative postulate of equality before the law, regardless of one’s social origin, as well as in condemning aggression wars. To ensure success of the reform Modrzewskicalled for creation of a secular public education system, separate from the

³ Ibidem, p. 11.

Church and subject to state supervision. The program of such universal education should address the need for empirical knowledge and useful skills.⁴

The revolt against the misuse of religion and authority of the Church was reflected in ideas of the European Reformation. In Poland, the most significant current of the Reformation was a group of the Polish Brothers (the Arians). They studied and popularized works by Galileo, Kepler, Descartes, Francis Bacon. The Polish Brothers' ideas developed from the assumption that "the reason is the supreme religion" and that "only the common reason can decide the meaning of the words of God".

The Arians proclaimed radical social ideas - community ownership and the principle of ownership of just products of one's own work. They denounced economic and social inequality and acknowledged that Christians should have neither servants nor serfs.

Counter-Reformation, the foundations of which were best expressed in a famous saying of Sigismund III Vasa's, a king who did not understand neither Poland nor Polish people and who based his power on subordinating the state to the Church (to be exact, to the order of Jesuits): "Let rather the Republic die, let you and me die as well, if only faith suffers no harm" – inhibited the development of Polish science and culture.

There is no way to account here, in such a short presentation, the complicated history of Poland of that time. We cannot, however, ignore another Polish thinker – Kazimierz Łyszczyński, author of the treatise *De non existentia Dei*, in which he argued that god is a human invention, and the truth is something one should learn from nature. For this he was sentenced to death. Today, the Polish rationalist movement takes him as its patron.

The ideas of the European Enlightenment: rationalism, humanism, empiricism and utilitarianism were supplanted on Polish soil by reformers who tried to amend the situation in the decaying republic. Szymon Konarski argued that the cause of the collapse of Polish is not a "corruption of morals", but bad laws. He had opposed the *liberum veto* and saw the salvation of the state in the repair of public education, once and for all released from subordination to the Church. It was Konarski who created the Collegium Nobilium – a school with program covering the latest achievements of the European thought (Descartes and John Locke, among many others).

The intellectuals from the Stanisławian era put exceptional efforts in reforming the state, should this be through the Constitution of 3 May or through a systemic reform of education reform. Two names in particular should not be overlooked: Hugo Kołłątaj and Stanisław Staszic, who also created the Society of the Friends of the Sciences.⁵ Polish Enlightenment was decidedly a secular formation. The scholars and thinkers introduced in Poland a religious education which was subject to scientific rigour. Its program rejected traditions of Jesuit education. Instead, it established secular formation. Without efforts of such figures as Staszic or Kołłątaj, without creation of

⁴ Ibidem, p. 13.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 15.

the National Commission for Education - the first Polish Ministry of Education which built a network of secular schools and introduced modern education in the spirit of the Enlightenment and rationality to the Polish youth - it would be far more difficult for Poland and Polish nation to survive the partitions period: more than a century of non-existence of the state.

Freethinking and secularity in Poland reborn

Polish freethinking was born at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The imminent role in this process was played by the positivists – Adam Mahrburg (1855-1918) and Alexander Świątochowski (1849-1938), the neo-romanticists – Stanislaw Przybyszewski (1868-1927) and Tadeusz Micinski (1875-1919), as well as the Marxists – Ludwik Krzywicki (1852-1941) and Julian Marchlewski (1866-1925).

The first organisation of freethinkers was the Polish League of Free Thought – Polska Liga Wolnej Myśli – established in France. Its ideological declaration stated: “The task of the Polish League of Free Thought is to precede and to complement the achievements of democracy through strict criticism and freedom of research, through an intellectual attack onto the strongholds of conservative and clerical concepts that, thanks to our special conditions, continue to thrive up to this day.”⁶ The League published its own press organs (in Paris, the “Pantheon”, in Warsaw, “The Independent Thinker”), where it promoted the ideas of freethinking.

In December 1907, the League activists held the National Congress of the Polish Freethinking. Aleksander Niemojewski said in his opening speech: “We demand secular birth certificates, secular marriages, secular divorces, secular funerals and a secular way to swear at the court to tell the truth [...] Freethinking does not know violence. It operates with purely mental means, it persuades and educates. To us will belong the future, we will trace the route for the future world.”⁷

The Congress established the Association of Polish Freethinkers, outlining the objectives of the movement: “1. The Polish free thinkers gathered on December 8, 1907 in Warsaw, agree that the future of our organisation should remain non-political. 2. The hereby gathered freethinkers claim that they have nothing to do with Freemasonry, the organisation based on the principle of a closed community and secrecy, whereas the free thought occurs openly, can be subjected to any public scrutiny and keeps no secrets. 3. Freethinkers demand restoring into force of the articles 165 and 194 of the Napoleon Code of the Kingdom of Poland (regarding civil marriages). 4. Although today the Freethinking is present all around the globe, tactical directives cannot come from abroad; any organisation must adapt to local conditions.”⁸ The Association was abolished by the Tsarist authorities two years later.

⁶ L. Pelka, *Z tradycji polskiego ruchu laickiego. W walce o myśl wolną – kulturę świecką*, www.racjonalista.pl/kk.php/s,4824/k,2 [2.10.2015].

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

After regaining independence in the 1920s, two freethinking organisations were brought to life: the Association of Polish Freethinkers (*Stowarzyszenie Wolnomyślicieli Polskich*, SWP, 1920-1928) and the Polish Association of Free Thought (*Polski Związek Myśli Wolnej – PZMW*, 1927-1936). The First National Congress of the SWP (in 1922) set out some basic objectives and directives of the organisation: “The SWP takes up a decisive struggle against all kinds of religious coercion and requests: a) legal recognition of the lack of religious beliefs, b) complete removal of religion from the state schools, c) separation of the Church and the State”.

The chairman of the SWP was Jan Baudouin de Courtenay. The board of the organisation consisted of, among others: S. Guzicki, J. Hempel, D. Jablonski, J. Landau, M. Lubecki and M. Wawrzeński. SWP combated for implementing a program of secularisation of social life in independent Poland in the spirit of liberal-democratic transformation. This program met with opposition activists parts, recognising the need to give the association the nature of the left-atheist. Conflict of these trends led to a division in two currents: the liberalfreethinkers (the Baudouinians) and left-leaning atheists (the Hempelists).

In 1926 SWP adhered to the International of Proletarian Freethinkers. Two years later the Association was suspended through an administrative decision and dissolved. The SWP publishing work included: the “*WolnaMyśl*” (“Free Thought”) monthly (1922-1928), edited by R. Minkiewicz (1922-1925), J. Baudouin de Courtenay (1925) and Z. Mierzyński (1925-1928); the “*Myśl*” (“Thought”) magazine (1927-1928), the “*Wolnomyśliciel*” (“The Free Thinker”) monthly, published in Lublin (1926-1928) and the “*Antyklerykał*” (“Anticlerical”) biweekly based in Łódź (1926-1928).

After leaving the SWP, the liberal-freethinking activists established the Polish Association of Free Thought (*Polski Związek Myśli Wolnej*, PZMW). Around that time the Association started its own publishing work: the “*Życie Wolne*” (“A Free Life”) monthly (1927-1928), edited by R. Minkiewicz and the “*Polski Wolnomyśliciel*” (“The Polish Freethinker”) – monthly and then biweekly (1928-1935), edited by Teofil Jaśkiewicz (Henryk Wroński).

The first National Congress of PZWM (29-30.12.1929) adopted a program of basic secularisation of public life, including ‘the removal of religious education from the school and the liberation of education and teachers from the supremacy of the clergy’, setting up cemeteries for non-believers and introducing vital records held by national administration. The Congress elected a chairman – Zygmunt Radliński (1874-1941) and an Executive Board – T. Jaśkiewicz, T. Kotarbinski, J. Landau, S. Radliński, J. Sołtyk, K. Sterling and L. Śledziński.

In June of 1930, PZWM organised in Warsaw the so-called Circle of Intellectuals, the reins of which were taken by Tadeusz Kotarbiński. The main objective of this institution was to “deepen the theoretical bases of free thought and creating a centre around which to gather intellectuals–freethinkers from around the country”. The Circle published its own monthly, “*Racjonalista*” (“The Rationalist”), edited by J. Landau.

After the abolishment of the Association of Polish Freethinkers its activists joined the PZMW, introducing left-atheistic tendencies, as reflected in program discussions at subsequent assemblies of the organisation. In 1934, the left-leaning trend clearly won within the PZMW. The Congress resolution stated: "The 4th National Congress of the Polish Association of the Free Thought declares that the freethinking movement, in solidarity with emancipatory aspirations of broad sections of peasants, workers and white-collar professionals, will support the struggle of the proletariat against fascism as a current which constitutes a denial of freedom and aims at destruction of our noblest achievements to sustain the villainous capitalist system throughout medieval methods."⁹

At the beginning of 1936 the Association was abolished. PZWM legacy consists primarily of publications: "A Free-Thinker's Calendar 1935-1936", "Wolnomyśliciel Polski", the already mentioned "Racjonalista", "Błyski Wolnomyślicielskie" ("The Freethinker's Flashes" – a biweekly (1933-1936) and a Pomeranian monthly – "Pioneer".

After the war, in 1946, some of the members tried to reactivate the banned organisation. Activists from former PZMW (T. Jaśkiewicz, J. Kobyłecki, R. Kryspin, K. Rusinek et al.) established the Association of Free Thinkers in Poland and began issuing periodical "The Voice of the Free" including an anticlerical insert "Zerwikaptur". The Association's activity ended with a decision of its abolishment issued by the administrative authorities of the PRL.

Freethinking and secularity in the People's Republic of Poland

PRL was supposed to be a consistently secular state and to guarantee its citizens the freedom of conscience and religion. Between 1945 and 1950 address records as well as personal and official acts were gradually secularised, i.e. any formal record of one's confession was abolished. Compulsory religious education in schools was abolished, the courts introduced secular oaths and secular vital records were established.

The Sejm's Legislative Decree of 5 August 1949 on protection of the freedom of conscience and confession¹⁰ established legal protection of the freedom of conscience and confession - citizens obtained protection of their freedom of conscience and confession but this freedom could not be used for any purposes hostile to the political system or to the state. The decree provided protection against religion-based discrimination and, at the same time, prohibited refusing any rite (for example, a funeral) on basis of one's views, confession or social or political activities. The decree banned "religious strives" and, at the same time, "any defamation of objects and places serving to perform religious rites". All religions and denominations were to be treated equally.

⁹ See: L. Pełka, *Z tradycji polskiego ruchu laickiego*, op. cit.

¹⁰ *Dekret Sejmu Ustawodawczego z 5 sierpnia 1949 r. o ochronie wolności sumienia i wyznania*, "Dz. U.", 1949, no. 45, pos. 334.

1949 saw amending of a pre-war law on public gatherings. It was obligatory to apply for the right to host public events outside the churches (pilgrimages).¹¹ The Act of 20 March 1950 “on the acquisition by the state of the dead-hand property, the guarantee for parish priests to own farms and the establishment of the Church Fund” hit economic foundations of functioning of the Church.¹²

The Constitution of 1952 in Art. 69 and 70 stated that the Church is separated from the state and while it confirmed equality of all before the law, it guaranteed the freedom of confession and conscience, prohibited any discrimination on grounds of one’s beliefs or lack thereof. Constitutional freedoms were limited through a ban on their abuse for purposes “harmful to the interest of the People’s Republic”.¹³ The Constitution of 1952 did not contain affirmative references to God which were present in the Constitution of March 1921 and the Constitution of April 1935.

After the Stalinist period ended in 1955, during which, along all other social conflicts arising from abuses of state authorities, also the struggle with the Catholic Church exacerbated (processes against priests, arrest of the primate), the Church and the government reopened talks. In 1956, the “normalisation of relations” agreement was reached within the framework of the Joint Commission of representatives of the government and the episcopate. The document stated: “During the talks, the representatives of the Government stressed the readiness to remove obstacles that occurred in the previous period regarding the enjoyment of the principle of full freedom of religious life...” and representatives of the episcopate “expressed their full support for the measures taken by the Government towards strengthening and development of the People’s Republic of Poland, to focus the efforts of all citizens in consistent work for the good of the country, the scrupulous observance of the laws of People’s Republic of Poland and the exercise of the citizens’ duties towards the state”.¹⁴

Conflicts, obviously, persisted. The main field of the struggle were the women’s rights - as the law on birth control permitting abortion “for social reasons” passed in 1956, when also took place an awareness campaign and started the production of contraceptives. Other areas of conflicts remained the secularity of public institutions such as hospitals and, above all, the secular character of public schools. The principle of secularity of schools and education was guaranteed by the law “on education and upbringing” of 1961. Teaching of religion was allowed only outside the schools, as private practices organised by religious institutions and churches. This teaching was subjected to administrative supervision of the state - in order to ensure sanitary conditions appropriate for children and young people, but also to establish that the teaching of religion did not serve as an excuse for anti-state activities.

¹¹ *Ustawa o zgromadzeniach publicznych*, “Dz. U.”, 1949, no. 49, pos. 369.

¹² *Ustawa z dnia 20 marca 1950 roku o przejęciu przez państwo dóbr martwej ręki, poręczeniu proboszczom posiadania gospodarstw rolnych i utworzeniu Funduszu Kościelnego*, “Dz. U.”, 1950, no. 9, pos. 87.

¹³ *Konstytucja Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej uchwalona przez Sejm Ustawodawczy w dniu 22 lipca 1952*, “Dz. U.”, 1952, no. 33, pos. 232.

¹⁴ E. Syzdek, *Socjalistyczna perspektywa laicyzacji*, Warszawa 1967, p. 48.

In 1961 the law on cemeteries was adopted, guaranteeing the possibility of setting up communal cemeteries while preserving the existence of religious cemeteries. The law introduced an obligation to make the religious cemetery – if there were no communal cemetery – available for burials of non-religious persons, without restrictions (also regarding a funeral ceremony, for example, a red-flags funeral).

At the end of 1956 was created the Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (Stowarzyszenie Ateistów i Wolnomyślicieli, SAIW) which, in its ideological declaration, stated, “We are the inheritors and continuators of the rationalist and humanist movement, which for centuries paved the way through backwardness, superstition and dogmatism. We refer in particular to the tradition of Polish freethinking, tradition parallel to the struggle for the ideals of humanism and universal emancipation of human beings [...]. We refer to the idea represented by the Polish thinkers of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, to the atheism of Kazimierz Łyszczyński’s, to the ideas proclaimed by Nałkowski and Radliński, Niemojewski and Hempel [...], to the militant anti-clericalism of peasants and proletarians [...]. Our aim is the realization of universal humanitarian ethics, to free that ethics from non-human precepts. We promote cognitive optimism and confidence in the power of reason. We will promote a philosophical culture of and interests in the religions of the world [...]. We aim to complete the separation of the Churches of all denominations from the state, for a total secularisation of social institutions, and above all schools [...].”¹⁵ In the same year the Association for Secular School (Towarzystwo Szkoły Świeckiej, TSS) was created, as an expression of resistance against religion classes returning into public schools.

In 1969, a merge of the two above-mentioned secularist organisations, TSS and SAIW, established the Society for Promotion of the Secular Culture (Towarzystwo Krzewienia Kultury Świeckiej, TKKS). In 1977, the Council of Ministers recognised TKKS as a public-benefit association.¹⁶

From its creation up until 1989, various phases of activity of the Society reflected the complexity of the contemporary life of the country. The forging ideological component of the movement acknowledged changes taking place in Poland and in the world, in Polish society, in the state of its consciousness. The ideas formed a three-pillar program: humanism, rationalism and secular culture. The Society sought to build a positive program, for which the reference point was a human being and his possibility of self-realisation in dignity on Earth, among the people. In the Society were present the greatest Polish freethinkers, such as professor Tadeusz M. Jaroszewski, professor Witold Tyloch, professor Jan Szmyd, professor Maria Szyszkowska, professor Adam Łopatka, professor Jerzy J. Wiatr, Zdzisław Słowik, Michał Horoszewicz, Eleonora Syzdek and many others.

¹⁵ See: L. Pełka, *Z tradycji polskiego ruchu laickiego*, op. cit.

¹⁶ *Ustawa z dnia 23 lutego 1991 r. o uznaniu za nieważne orzeczeń wydanych wobec osób represjonowanych za działalność na rzecz niepodległego bytu Państwa Polskiego*, “Dz. U.”, 1977, no. 34, pos. 149.

A great merit of the secular movement from the People's Republic of Poland era was the popularisation of the ideas of secularism and secular culture, as well as providing knowledge about different religions and promoting religious studies. Through magazines such as "Argumenty" ("Arguments"), "Zeszyty Argumentów" ("Notebooks of Arguments", in 1968 renamed as "Człowieki Światopogląd", "A Man and a Worldview"), "Fakty i Myśli" ("Facts and Thoughts"), "Edukacja" ("Education"), "Rocznik Wolnej Myśli" ("The Free Thought Yearbook") and especially the "Euhemer – Przegląd Religioznawczy" ("Euhemerus – Review of Religious Studies"), the Society stimulated interest of the public in multiplicity of religious systems. The views and sides were discussed, critical analyses made and results of research on various world views were presented. The discussion also covered the multiplicity of aspects of secular culture – the Society argued that the secular culture should envisage a substantial and critical assessment of its own cultural heritage, "and to include, in the process of selection and reinterpretation of tradition, the sacral tradition that, in a nebula of mythology and religious symbolism, sometimes hides amazing human contributions".

In the PRL era, a great importance was also attached to promote the secular culture and its rituals, as well as to deepen the social understanding the importance of symbols and rituals. It was understood that the rites perform an important task of uniting people around a symbolism, evoke certain emotions and give shape to individual and group attitudes and moral standings. Of which we nowadays see proof in the exacerbating dispute over crosses in public offices and the clergy participating in national celebrations. The communist authorities recognised that the secular state maintained its rituals free of any religious influence and that freedom of conscience and confession should manifest itself in the freedom of religious practices taking place exclusively in religious institutions and in private space.

This process was described by Eleonora Syzdek as follows: "The process of creating a secular, socialist culture does not mean therefore the liquidation of customs and rituals in general, but the de-sacralisation of lifestyle and ritual forms of interpersonal relations. This process includes both the reduction of old, outdated forms of rituals and customs, as well as the acceptance of already existing forms and creation of new forms of expression adequate to contemporary sensibilities."¹⁷

To this aim, new secular holidays were established: national holidays – 1 May, 22 July (the Constitution Day), the anniversary of the October Revolution; social and familial holidays – Children's Day, Mother's Day, Women's Day; industry holidays – Day of the Miner, Shipyard Worker, the Citizens' Militia's Feast, etc.; local holidays – for example, the anniversary of the liberation of Warsaw; and generic festivities – Days of Education and Culture. Those celebrations, both anniversaries and celebrations of the state, were completely secularised. Some religious holidays remained free from work- Christmas, New Year, Easter and Corpus Christi; yet the state was trying to render them increasingly secular - as private festivities to celebrate the life of the

¹⁷ E. Syzdek, *Socjalistyczna perspektywa laicyzacji*, op. cit.

family. Attempts were also made to provide secular rites for weddings and child-naming, up until then the celebrations mostly associated with religion.

Conflicts between the authorities and the society regained force every few years. Political conditions and the power of the Catholic Church, especially after the election of the Polish Pope Karol Wojtyła, were such that they allowed for “permanent opposition to the authorities” of the state. They also created barriers preventing rooting of the secular worldview within broad mass of the population.

A certain “melding” of concepts occurred: on one hand, a chain of “secular – coming from the state – imposed”, on the other hand, “opposition-libertarian-Catholic” (where the “Catholic” part was interpreted loosely as “close to the Church, recognising its position, especially in the sphere of values”). This melding proved to be one of the reasons for retreat from secularism after 1989, when the the social system in Poland changed and power passed into hands of the then opposition. In that moment, the secularism has become a pursuit of this part of the citizens who want real freedom and equality. The Third Republic, despite constitutional guarantees of civil and social rights, does not promote and consistently fails to fulfil its promises of either secularism or freedom of conscience. A sequent generation of Polish freethinkers has already entered the battle to change this situation.

What we can see today is that what remains the most devastating for a human being and for humanist values – i.e. hypocrisy, selfishness, cowardice and blind submission to any authority - gains the support from both the Catholic Church in Poland and the Polish rulers. This foretells, unfortunately, a long fightahead of us.

Abstract**THE TRADITIONS OF RATIONALISM, SECULARISM
AND FREE THINKING IN POLAND**

The tradition of humanist thought and tsecularism have been present in Poland for many centuries. As early as in the 13th century, the Polish soil was home to the first free-thinkers (Vittelon). The attitude has proven vivid and persisted for following centuries. In the 19th and 20th centuries, associations and circles started forming around secular postulates. Publishing and educational activities flourished. After the World War 2, the principle of secularism and interdiction of confession-based discrimination were introduced into the legal system of the People's Republic of Poland. A universal state-based administration system was established. The transformation period kept certain legal solutions which are present in the Polish Constitution of 1997. However, semantical merging of opposing qualities, "imposed secularism of the state" vs. "catholic freedom-fighters", undermine many achievements of the secular movement.

Keywords: secularism, rationalism, humanism, religion, confession, tradition, history of ideas, law, bill, constitution, religious freedom

Abstrakt**RACJONALIZM, LAICYZM, WOLNOMYŚLICIELSTWO POLSKIE
– TRADYCJA**

Polska myśl humanistyczna i idea świeckości państwa mają długą tradycję. Pierwsi wolnomyśliciele tworzyli na ziemiach polskich już w XIII w. (Wittelon), a zapoczątkowana przez nich postawa okazała się żywotna przez kolejne stulecia. W XIX i XX w. wokół myśli racjonalistycznej zaczęły się formować towarzystwa i koła, które prowadziły intensywną działalność edukacyjną i wydawniczą. Po II wojnie światowej zaczęto wprowadzać zasadę świeckości oraz zakaz dyskryminacji ze względów wyznaniowych do systemu prawnego, wprowadzono również uniwersalny świecki system administracyjny. Okres transformacji zachował pewne rozwiązania formalne, wyraźnie obecne np. w Konstytucji z 1997 r., ale odziedziczone po latach 80. zbitki pojęciowe: z jednej strony, "laicki-państwowy-narzucony", a z drugiej – "opozycyjny-wolnościowy-katolik" postawiły pod znakiem zapytania część zdobyczy ruchu na rzecz świeckości.

Słowa kluczowe: świeckość, racjonalizm, humanizm, religia, wyznanie, tradycja, historia idei, ustawa, konstytucja, wolność wyznania

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