

# The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*Project Review*

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Since its beginnings, Polish history and culture is inherently intertwined with Christian religion, perhaps even more so than it is the case in many other European countries, where, in the current-day era, the processes of secularisation seem to have gotten further and developed quicker than in Poland. Because of that, history of Christian thought in Poland can certainly be considered as a subject worthy of extensive scientific research, being both rich in valuable academic content as well as inspiring for our current pursuits in the matters undertaken by Christian thinkers. This is especially true when it comes to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period of time marked in Poland not only by the horror of two world wars, but also, in the second half of the century, by prolonged state of being dominated by the Soviet Union as well as declared adherence to communist ideology. It was in this period that Christianity and Christian philosophy fulfilled immensely important role in Polish society that was to create the possibility of independent thinking and critique of official state world-view. It was in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the time of Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL), that Christian philosophy in Poland distinctively proved itself to be of huge cultural importance in this country, as it can be said that it was an important factor that paved the way to the ultimate fall of communism there.

The better, then, that in recent years there could have been found a number of researchers, in Poland and abroad, interested in not only studying this topic, but also popularising it. The chief enterprise undertaken by those people in this domain is, without a doubt, a project titled simply *The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* that had been carried out at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow in cooperation with 14 other universities in Poland and with Pontifical Lateran Univer-

sity in Rome. This project, whose main achievement is a series of 13 books on Polish Christian philosophers and a *Companion to Polish Christian Philosophy of the 20th and 21st Centuries*, has been carried through in the years 2016-2020 and has been coordinated by Rev. dr hab. Maciej Bała, prof. UKSW, who was the project manager and editor of the book series, as well as dr hab. Piotr Stanisław Mazur, prof. Ignatianum, who was the substantial work coordinator. The team behind the project included 61 people in total, the majority of whom represented Polish universities from such academic centres like Warsaw, Krakow, Lublin, Wrocław, Poznań or Katowice. The efforts of their work can be accessed by webpage <https://pchph.ignatianum.edu.pl> that exists both in Polish and in English language version. The publisher of the book series was the Ignatianum University Press and the project itself has been financed by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education within the framework of the programme “The monuments of Polish philosophical, theological and social thought of the 20th and 21st centuries”.

This review is concerned with the general scope of the project in question and its main premise. My aim is to present and evaluate the project from wholistic perspective with connection to its importance for deepening scientific knowledge on Polish Christian philosophy and popularising it, not to review the content of the published books. Each of the publications in the *Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century* book series can and, indeed, should be reviewed individually, so as to further propagate the discussion on this topic that the authors of the publications concern themselves with.

I will start by referring the main aim of the project, which is, unsurprisingly, to commemorate the greatest achievements of Polish Christian philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to increase general awareness of this topic both in Poland and outside of its borders. The authors are focusing especially on those achievements so as not to fall into the trap of simple chronicle-writing. They are also fully aware of the ambiguity of the very notion of the term “Christian philosophy” that was so widely discussed by Christian and non-Christian philosophers over the decades. This, as well as other premises, is clearly explained in the introduction to the *Companion to Polish Christian Philosophy of the 20th and 21st Centuries*, where the authors state that the term “Christian philosophy” they use in the sense of a kind of “research tradition”, concept coined by Larry Laudan to name scientific meta-theories. They see in Christian philosophy both source of typical philosophical problems and questions that can be answered from the perspective of any given school of thought and a kind of personal inspiration that influences works of some researchers on psychological level. It is not, by any means, an understanding regulated by rigid definitions, but it could not have possibly been so when the source material, Polish Christian thought from no less than 100 years, is as pluralised as it is, and the perspective itself as focused on cultural and social aspects of the matter.

If anything can be considered a main premise and methodological “focal point” of this project that would be the closest to such rigid definition, it is the notion of a distinguished Christian thinker, a greatly skilled individual who have influenced not only their respective field of research, but also their institutional environment (colleagues and students), or even the very society. Such individuals are the main focus of this project and to them all the described philosophical achievements are attributed. Such a view of the matter in question has, of course, both good and bad sides, or so can be argued. But even if singling out those extraordinary persons must necessarily exclude some other important thinkers, of which the authors are fully aware, and even if it can lead to putting the emphasis on particular philosophical positions rather than wider view of the matter, it also has some undeniable advantages. One of the more interesting ones is presenting not only knowledge on Christian philosophy in Poland, but also some highly respectable role models – persons who strived for both scientific and moral values in the repressive, dangerous circumstances of the philosophical monopoly of communism as official state world-view. Seeing the researchers discussed as such role models brings us, once again, to the visibly stressed by the authors matter of the social influence of the works of those researchers.

What is particularly interesting here is the choice of the 13 authors whose lives and ideas are presented in the form of the book series. To choose 13 Polish Christian thinkers is to exclude all others, so such choice must be made with very clear criteria and deep awareness of this subject. Fortunately, the authors of the project chose not only some obvious personalities – thinkers well known outside Poland, like Józef Tischner, Feliks Koneczny or Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec, or even globally, like Karol Wojtyła, pope John Paul II – but also relatively unknown, like Piotr Lenartowicz, Zofia Zdybicka or Kazimierz Klosowski. This selection can be, as it seems to me, treated like a cross-section of the presented subject, that reveals to the reader all kinds of important Polish Christian thinkers, from the ones that could have been considered famous in their own times to the ones that influenced their environments on local level. Those 13 persons even represent different generations of Polish scholars, from the ones born as early as in 19<sup>th</sup> century (Feliks Koneczny, Jacek Woroniecki), through the ones born in the second and third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tadeusz Ślipko, Karol Wojtyła, Zofia Zdybicka), to the ones born as late as in 1950's (Kazimierz Klosowski).

The philosophers presented in this project make up, indeed, a diverse group when it comes to their own ideas and philosophical views. While Mieczysław Gogacz, Kazimierz Kłósak or Jacek Woroniecki can all be linked with some form of Thomism, Tischner was its well-known opponent. Zofia Zdybicka focused on the field of the philosophy of religion, Feliks Koneczny wrote famous historical and historiosophical studies, Piotr Lenartowicz pursued the philosophy of the animate nature and Stanisław Kamiński studied methodology and meta-philosophy. Mieczysław Alber Krąpiec developed his own original system of philosophy concentrated around the

reality that is available to us in our cognition. Tadeusz Styczeń and Tadeusz Ślipko were both great ethicists and Karol Wojtyła had his influence on philosophical anthropology among many other things. Finally, Kazimierz Klosowski, who continues to be, sadly, the least known of them, tended to, interestingly enough, philosophy of biology and bioethics. All this plurality had to be accounted for in a project with such wide scope, and authors of the project dealt with it accordingly by assigning some limitations on how those thinkers were described in the books. Namely, they proposed the following order that was to be maintained in the books: firstly, the biography and bibliography of the thinker; secondly: the sources of their philosophical inspirations; thirdly: the way of understanding philosophy preferred by them; fourthly: the problems studied by them and the answers to them that they proposed; fifthly: a dictionary of terms used by them and finally sixthly: the polemics and discussions that they participated in. Short biographic entries on all those philosophers can also be found on the project's webpage, as means of absolutely basic introduction to the subject of the project.

A separate paragraph must be devoted to the fourteenth and final publication in the book series, which is the *Companion to Polish Christian Philosophy of the 20th and 21st Centuries*. This book differs greatly from the thirteen ones focused on single thinkers, as its ambition is to look at the matter at hand from different, more inclusive perspective. This is a testimony to the sagacity of the authors of the project, as it is in this way that they can compensate for all the other thinkers that could not have been added to the group mentioned above. At the same time they can also propose something to such a reader that is a beginner in this subject and would like to firstly find out about the general state of Polish Christian philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century before gaining knowledge on specific thinkers like Tischer or Krąpiec. Because of that this publication is not in any means an all-encompassing compendium of the subject, but rather an introductory textbook, and an exemplary one at that. The book is clearly organised into chapters that are focused, one after the other, on twelve sub-disciplines of philosophy in which Polish Christian thinkers had any contribution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is: logic and methodology of science, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of nature, philosophical anthropology, ethics, axiology, aesthetics and philosophy of art, philosophy of God and religion, social philosophy, philosophy of culture and, lastly, history of philosophy. All chapters follow, in turn, a clear order in their content: firstly, the overview of how given subdiscipline came to be in this context; secondly, the presentation of the most important currents and schools of thought or individual thinkers that are relevant to given subdiscipline; thirdly, an account of the debates and polemics undertaken in this subdiscipline and finally fourthly: the current state of this subdiscipline in this context. All this factors into a publication that can be seen as very fine introduction to the subject of Polish Christian philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The project that is being reviewed here cannot be viewed differently, as it seems to me, than as important and immensely rich in content contribution to commemoration of, deeper reflection on and popularisation of Polish Christian philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The work done within the scope of this project is in itself truly impressive, but it seems even more impressive when we will take into consideration that the entirety of this research is available both in Polish, and, what is by far more important for popularisation of this subject abroad, in English. And it does not stop there, as all this is also available free of charge or artificial technological constraints. All of 14 books can be read at and downloaded from the project webpage (<https://pchph.ignatianum.edu.pl>). That fact constitutes important contribution into the open access base of scientific research, that have just been expanded to the topic of Polish Christian philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is a laudable contribution to a laudable cause, and because of that one can only hope that this project will find some form of continuation, especially since the authors themselves seem to be eager to do further work – find new ideas, describe the thoughts of researchers previously unknown and propagate values both scientific and moral. Those are, after all, ones of many goals of scientific studies.