



THE POLISH
CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY
IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Zofia Józefa Zdybicka

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I.

ZOFIA JÓZEFA ZYBICKA USJK:
PERSON AND WORK

INTRODUCTION

The following book assumes a panoramic overview. Here, we intend to present the life and works of Zofia Józefa Zdybicka, by placing them within the background of the post-war history of Poland and on the horizon of the achievements of Polish philosophy with its well-established 800-year-old tradition, which can be traced back to the times of Vitello, a scholar considered to be the first naturalist, mathematician and philosopher of the pre-university period in Poland.¹ The authors of the book take particular notice of the situation of European (and, in broader strokes, global) philosophy at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries, as it significantly affected the location and the impact of metaphysical realism, as proposed by Zdybicka, currently marginalised beyond solely scientific disputes regarding the issues that exhibit the actual significance to the entirety of mankind.

The authors of the book associate the view represented by Zofia Zdybicka with the phenomenon of existential Thomism that primarily draws upon the metaphysical and anthropological ideas of Thomas Aquinas. The Lublin scholar postulates that philosophy exercises its potential only when it brings one as close as possible, in the strictest manner, to actual reality, the existence of which is independent of human thought and human language. Additionally, the scholar opposes the existence of certain ideal or purely potential realms. The world simply exists, and its particular beings-objects exercise their essence and existence due to substantial forms independent of people.

¹ Cf. J. Skoczyński and J. Woleński, *Historia filozofii polskiej* (Kraków, 2010), pp. 24–27.

Therefore, ontological pluralism, the cognitive receptiveness of the human mind, the correspondent understanding of truth, accepting the theist view of the world and life, including the sources from the Christian revelation within the framework of philosophical speculation, the emphasis on participation as an ontological bond between man and God, directing attention towards the relation between religion and matters of death, the appreciation of the culture-making role of Christianity in the history of the West—all of the above factors present in Zdybicka's thought allow to include her among the prominent Polish Thomists alongside Stefan Świeżawski, Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec OP, Jerzy Kalinowski, Stanisław Kamiński, and, in a slightly different manner, Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II.

However, essentially, the authors intend to highlight the involvement of the Lublin scholar regarding probably the most significant issues, i.e. those related to religion directing human experience towards that which enables the fulfilment of all potentialities placed by the Creator within human nature and, eventually, transgressing these potentialities, when—as expressed in the theological aspect—man will be overwhelmed with the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*). In this state of salvation, his cognitive potential will surely surpass that attributed to the human being.

Obviously, Zdybicka draws a line between the realm of philosophical explanations and demonstrations, and the language of theological distinctions, however, she assumes that it is impossible to properly solve the problem of the final truth regarding man and God simply by one's own means. Therefore, one should consider the "aid" of God himself, who, in a way, complements the human cognitive potential with the light of Divine wisdom. The above does not refer to answering the question regarding which god is the God of Christians—Zeus, Hermes, Dionysus or Zarathustra—as it is none of the above. Zdybicka recalls God, to whom no polytheist prays. It is, to a degree, a God of the philosophers, to whom one may pray, contrary to Martin Heidegger's mockery, and who speaks to man; however, this concept of God was profoundly reconstructed by the Christian faith.

In short, as perfectly presented by Joseph Ratzinger,² this God appears in faith as a God of men, who is not only the thought of thought,

² J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo*, trans. Z. Włodkowska (Kraków, 1994), pp. 132–138.

or according to Aristotle, the eternal mathematics of the universe, but an *agape*, the power of creative love. This God is the “Fire” that Pascal experienced during that night when, on a piece of paper which he later wore sewn into his jacket, he wrote the following words: “Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob” and “not of the philosophers and the scholars.” In this manner, the God of the philosophers is entirely different from how philosophers invented Him, however He does not negate the knowledge they achieved: that He is actually known, but only when one realises, while being the essential Truth and the basis of all being, He is simultaneously the God of faith and the God of men, whom men should address with love. The relation between man and God is permeated by love, which should be considered as *proprium* of the Bible.

That is why the Biblical God acts in history. He reveals Himself to men, coming to their aid at a time of their oppression. Additionally, he always remains free. He allows no one to dispose of him. However, he is prepared to do the unexpected. The God of the Koran, however, will not take such a risk. He remains outside the boundaries of history. He wishes to be recognised and worshipped as One God, in His greatness and majesty as a Creator, a Lawgiver and a Judge. In consequence, Islam will not be able to accept the revelation of God in Jesus Christ any more.

Zdybicka is aware of the fact that, for many contemporaries, this personal aspect of the Absolute is the most difficult to accept. However, if Christians accept the primacy of the Logos, the faith in the reality of the creating thought that precedes all and maintains the world in its existence, then God cannot be—contrary to the opinion of the still-influential Heidegger³—an anonymous, indeterminate conscience, but freedom, love and a person. Such principles served Zdybicka as the basis for her philosophical, and, in narrower terms, religious proposals, particularly ones focused on explaining the natural acts of religion, attributed to men on the basis of their spontaneous experience. The authors of this book present the particular phases leading to her philosophical—i.e. final—explanation of the fact that religion, as actually experienced by men, is already on the level of common sense knowledge, in a variety of cultural contexts.

³ Heidegger presented himself as a relentless opponent of the relations between philosophy and theology. According to him, where the voices of revelation appear, human reasoning goes silent. Therefore, theologians should treat philosophy as “Paul’s foolishness.” See M. Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. W. McNeill (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 287–288.

We intend to indicate the enormous erudition of the Author, her profound knowledge of philosophical literature, ranging from ancient to contemporary sources. Despite the fact that the author is well grounded in the classical understanding of philosophy, she does not disregard the achievements of other types of philosophical discourse, including the efforts of phenomenology or of the philosophy of dialogue. The author is occupied with issues that have troubled human culture for centuries, as well as those that appeared along with the modern development of science, technology, politics, law and medicine. Precisely what we have in mind is an assortment of issues including the expansion of globalisation, multiculturalism, secularism, and ethnic minorities; therefore, issues regarding immigration and refugees, tolerance, indifference often expanded to its limits, matters of upbringing and so-called political correctness.

On behalf of the Lublin philosopher, we hope that Christianity, supported by philosophical and theological truth, brings salvation, by inviting us to undertake the effort of earning salvation. The decisiveness of the aforementioned does not result in ceasing our efforts of searching. We remain on a certain path. It is not a path leading through a wasteland, but the Earth, where God cares for his creations. Proposals, suspicious in regard to truth, posed by many (however, not all) representatives of contemporary culture do not overshadow this joyful message, which inspires us with the spirit of peace.

Perhaps, some of these contemporaries fear the void of the universe, some are unable to deal with the Divine-shaped void that fills their consciousness, some focus on the love of other people, creating secular forms of spirituality that provide them with intuitive insights and ecstasies acquired via peculiar intellectual and spiritual exercise, while others await the coming of a universal human justice that would bring the feeling of final fulfilment.

However, the majority wish to remain within the framework of evangelical life, not for the purpose of living in a museum, but to discover the greatest part of the legacy that protects men from a demiurgic temptation which distorts the pursuit of progress, instructing them to forget about their limitations and weaknesses.⁴ Zofia Józefa Zdybicka

⁴ Cf. J. Sochoń, *Religia w projekcie postmodernistycznym* (Lublin, 2012), pp. 303–306; M. Bock-Côté, *Multikulturalizm jako religia polityczna*, trans. M. Chojnowski (Warszawa, 2017), p. 308.

is among such people, as her philosophical accomplishments indicate that we shall finally find happiness, with truth, particularly the one revealed by the Creator of all, being the sole path leading to this happiness. Post-modern difficulties are of little significance here, however, they enforce a more confession-oriented reflection, and increase—paradoxically—the need to affirm the actual reality that allows an existence worthy of a man who accepts his own irremovable relationship with God. We wish to express our joy that the effort undertaken by the scholar will not go in vain, as many of her successors have commented and creatively expanded on the realistic model of philosophy, as well as its related means of participation in culture.