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THE JESUITS AND POLISH SARMATIANISM

The road into Poland was not easy for the Society of Jesus. Although there were some Polish bishops, such as Stanisław Hozjusz [Stanislaus Hosius] and the successor to his See of Varmia, Marcin Kromer [Martinus Cromerus], who took steps to induce the authorities at Rome to allow the Jesuits to come and establish themselves in Poland-Lithuania, seeing the Order as an effective auxiliary agency for the practical implementation of the reforms passed at the Council of Trent, their efforts were isolated attempts which failed to find sympathy with even the rest of the bishops of Poland, not to speak of other social groups.

In fact the very first contacts with Poland experienced by Jesuits who happened to be accompanying papal legates to that country turned out to be overtly unfavourable. In 1555 Alonso Salmeron was unsuccessful in securing an audience with King Sigismundus Augustus. He did not manage to initiate any pastoral work, either, and was made to feel unwanted. Eventually falling ill, after two months he left for Vilnius [Wilno] and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and complained in a letter to Ignatius Loyola not only against Polish beer, which he couldn't stomach, but also that he had been put off by the general lack of interest in the notion of bringing the Jesuits to the Commonwealth of Poland. His memorandum delayed the coming of the Jesuits to Poland by well-nigh a decade.¹ A few years later the luck of Peter Canisius would prove no better, for all his personal charm and in spite of the fact

¹ B. Natoński, *Początki i rozwój Towarzystwa Jezusowego w Polsce, 1564-1580* [Origins and Growth of the Society of Jesus in Poland, 1564-1580], In: J. Brodrick, *Powstanie i rozwój Towarzystwa Jezusowego* [Origins and Growth of the Society of Jesus] Vol. 1, Kraków, 1969, p. 414-476.

that he had made friends with a considerable number of people in Poland. His reminiscences of Poland and the Polish people would always be affectionate, and he dreamed of being able to return to that country: „If my superiors were to allow it I would be glad to stay in Poland for the rest of my life.”²

At any rate, even if we accept 1564 as the year in which the Society of Jesus eventually came to Poland and settled, we have to admit that it came as it were through a back door, to Braniewo, a town on the country's northernmost extremities, and even there for the next few years the future of that house would be subject to speculation.³

There could be no question of the founding of a house, college, not to speak of a university at Cracow, the capital. The causes of this lay not only with the consistent opposition to any such project on the part of the University of Cracow,⁴ but also in the indifference of the local bishop and the royal Court.⁵

So how did it happen that just two decades later, following the death of Sigismundus Augustus and the unfortunate episode with Henri de Valois the Jesuits started to play such an important, if not crucial role not only in the religious affairs of this Commonwealth of Many Peoples, but also in its political life? Why was it that the Fathers of the Society of Jesus turned out to be such handy partners in Stephen Bathory's religious policy, and later also for the monarchs of the Vasa dynasty, starting from the long reign of Sigismundus III (1587-1632), traditionally considered a „friend of the Jesuits”?

Not only the Court now showed a definite interest in the newly settled Order. Soon the Jesuits were enjoying the reputation of confessors and advisers not only in spiritual matters throughout the courts of the aristocracy, while the gentry was eager to entrust their scions into their care for a Jesuit education⁶. The sons of townsfolk and

² *Epistolae*, Vol. 2, p. 358 & 361.

³ J. Korewa, *Z dziejów diecezji warmińskiej w XVI w. Geneza braniewskiego Hosianum. Przyczynek do dziejów zespolenia Warmii z Rzeczpospolitą* [From the 16th-Century History of the Diocese of Varmia. The Origins of Braniewo College. A Note to the History of the Union of Varmia with the Polish Commonwealth], Poznań, 1965.

⁴ B. Natoński, *Jezuici a Uniwersytet Krakowski w XVI w.* [The Jesuits and the University of Cracow in the 16th century], In: *Studia z historii jezuitów* [Studies in the History of the Jesuits], Kraków, 1983.

⁵ J. Paszenda, *Cztery wieki jezuitów w Krakowie* [The Jesuits' Four Centuries in Cracow], In: *Studia z historii jezuitów* [Studies in the History of the Jesuits], Kraków, 1983.

⁶ A laconic remark by S. Bystron formulates the general characteristics of the religious orders in Poland: „Thus the *szlachta* would drink with the Bernardinians [Franciscans of the Strict Observance]; learn the precepts of the ascetic life from the Carmelites; but send

even peasants attended the Jesuit schools. The latter social class made keen congregations listening to popular preaching not only in Polish, but also Lithuanian, Latvian, and probably also Ruthenian throughout the Commonwealth's vast expanses of territory.

The Vilnian Academy founded by Stephen Bathory in 1579 would for the ensuing centuries serve as a genuine fountainhead propagating the culture of the West whilst at the same time cherishing and developing the local traditions in the Humanities and the Sciences: it was truly a bridge between East and West. Poland's involvement in the affairs of Orthodox Eastern Europe came to fruition in 1596 in the Union of Brest, which established communion with Rome for a very substantial part of Polish and Lithuanian subjects who worshipped in the Eastern rite. Although this Union has been variously assessed, it cannot be denied that it was the starting-point for many culture-forming, or even civilisational, processes persisting until the present day.⁷

In this short contribution it would be impossible to answer all the questions calling for detailed study. My aim is merely to draw attention to certain cultural processes in which the Order became engaged, no matter whether deliberately or without full awareness of its participation. What I have in mind here is the phenomenon which is conventionally known as the Sarmatianisation of Polish Catholicism. The concept was first used by Janusz Tazbir,⁸ the historian who has probably contributed most to the examination of the Jesuits' rather paradoxical position in the history of Polish culture. Tazbir sees this issue as a particularly interesting subject of study.⁹

their children to the Jesuit schools, and seek the counsel of the Jesuits in the most serious matters", *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce. Wiek XVI-XVIII* [The History of Manners in Old Poland: The 16th-18th Centuries], Warszawa, 1932, p. 347.

⁷ Cf. The opinion of A. Naumow: „In consequence of the contracting of this Union, which was really a series of separate acts of submission to the Pope's authority, and repudiation of the submitter's position prior to Union, there was a split in the Ruthenian/Russian Orthodox culture in the ontological, soteriological, and ecclesiological aspects." *Przemiany w ruskiej kulturze unitów* [Transformations in the Ruthenian Uniate Culture], In „*Krakowskie Zeszyty Ukrainoznawcze*”, Vol. V-VI, 1997, p.143

⁸ *Sarmatyzacja katolicyzmu w XVII wieku* [The Sarmatianisation of Polish Catholicism in the 17th Century]. In: *Wiek XVII – Kontrreformacja – Barok. Prace z historii kultury* [The Seventeenth Century, the Counter-Reformation, and the Baroque: Papers on the History of Culture], ed. J. Pelc, Wrocław, 1970, p.7-37.

⁹ „What I believe is more interesting than the question of the Jesuits' influence on Polish society is the question of the 'Sarmatianisation' of the Order's members, and the price which the Jesuits paid for this." *Jezuici między Rzeczpospolitą a Rzymem* [The Jesuits between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Rome]. In: *Szkice z dziejów papieżstwa* [Sketches from the History of the Papacy], Warszawa, 1989, p. 75.

In the opinion of Janusz Tazbir the Jesuits succumbed to this process,¹⁰ while the contribution that they on their part made to it, according to him, was the working out of a theological justification for the ideas of the state and its structure held by the majority of the *szlachta* (Polish gentry), a structure in which, it seems, they themselves felt more and more at home with the passing years. It is no surprise, then, that Tazbir's final conclusion is quite unambiguous: „In the Polish Jesuits' balance of accounts for work accomplished in the 17th century it would be hard to overlook the sad fact that ultimately the 'ribald pate' of Sarmatianism had the upper hand over the Society's cultural élite.”¹¹

Is that „sad fact” really the final balance of accounts for the Jesuit presence in Polish culture? This was one of the questions which the contributors to an academic conference on the relations between the Jesuits and Polish culture, held in 1991 in Cracow, tried to answer¹²; or, more precisely, the academic conference provided an opportunity for the formulation of research postulates, rather than for the putting forward of final conclusions.

Between the Familiar and the Foreign

When in 1606 Mikołaj Zebrzydowski's army of mutineers (who considered themselves to be *rokoszanie*, a social group exercising their time-honoured privilege to withdraw their loyalty from a bad monarch) called for the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania,¹³ one of the grounds on which they based their demand was the foreign provenience of the Jesuit Order, and hence also its connections with foreign powers (what they meant were the Courts of the Habsburgs) and its activities counter to the interests of the Polish State (here they meant Jesuit support for the King's endeavours to increase his power). Piotr Skarga voiced his reservations and critical remarks in *Próba zakonu Societatis Jesu* (The Trial of the Society of

¹⁰ „The Jesuits did not withstand the process of the Sarmatianisation of Polish Catholicism, either, and the movement reached its apogee at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. By this term I mean the adaptation of religious concepts, views of the past, and ideas in eschatology to the political and constitutional structure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; and their combination with the folklore and local tradition of history.” *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹² *Jezuici a kultura polska* [The Jesuits and Polish Culture], eds. L. Grzebień & S. Obirek, Kraków, 1993.

¹³ J. Czubek, *Pisma polityczne z czasów Rokoszu Zebrzydowskiego* [Political Writings from the Times of Zebrzydowski's Rebellion], Vols. I-II, Kraków, 1916-1918, *passim*.

Jesus).¹⁴ Were the Jesuits really an alien element? This was certainly true of them in 1564, when they first arrived to settle in Poland-Lithuania. The first Provincials were foreigners, too, which is quite understandable. Up to 1608 they were all Italians and Spaniards.¹⁵

But other high-ranking offices in both Provinces, Poland and Lithuania, were held by local men who had joined the Order, and they were distinctly encouraged in this by the foreigners, who understood the importance of national pride.¹⁶

Another interesting point is the evolution that took place within the Order in Poland as regards representation of the various estates in Polish and Lithuanian society. In the initial period members of the townsfolk and peasants formed the overwhelming majority, and individuals from the gentry (*szlachta*) were few and far between. This is what Lorenzo Maggio, Provincial of Austria, wrote about the situation to General Francisco Borgia: „It is significant how surprised those Polish lords are when they learn about a gentleman entering the Jesuit Order.”¹⁷ Two years later the same Maggio was admitting in another letter to the General that membership of the gentle estate gave a better opportunity for pastoral work since „nobility and gentle birth were valued [in Poland] above all else, and considered exceptional.”¹⁸ This is easy to understand if we remember that in the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania at that time even differences of religion and political adherence were subordinate to the feeling of solidarity within the given social estate.¹⁹ As Dzięgielewski stresses, „differences of religion were only one of the factors, and at that only rarely, determining individual political preferences.”²⁰ The same may be said of social life: here differences of religion had no effect at all even on the bonds of friend-

¹⁴ Kraków, 1607.

¹⁵ S. Obirek, *Jezuici w Rzeczypospolitej obojga narodów 1564-1668* [The Jesuits of the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania, 1564-1668], Kraków, 1996, p. 107.

¹⁶ „When in 1585 the candidacy was proposed of Garcias Alabiano for the office of rector of the Vilnian Academy, this Italian, who was highly knowledgeable on the situation in Poland explained to the General of the Order that the successful candidate should not only be a man who had received an all-round education, but was also a Pole, never a foreigner.”

¹⁷ Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) in Rome, Germ. 149 f. 250v.

¹⁸ ARSI, Germ. 151 f. 161.

¹⁹ „The onslaughts launched by the Counter-Reformation were not powerful enough as an incentive which could make the [Polish] Church dignitaries sacrifice their heterodox friends and relatives and moreover expose the country to the danger of civil war.” J. Dzięgielewski, *Izba poselska w systemie władzy w Rzeczypospolitej w czasach Władysława IV* [The House of Deputies in the System of Government under Vladislaus IV], Warszawa, 1992, p. 73.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

ship. A particularly telling instance of this occurred at Nieśwież, seat of the Radziwiłłs of Lithuania. The Jesuits presented the Lord Hetman, Christopher II Radziwiłł, who was the leader of the Calvinists, with the gift of a tame bear; while he reciprocated by endowing their College with numerous generous tokens of his bounty.²¹

At any rate in the first, and as J. Błoński claims, most interesting generation of Jesuits,²² plebeians were in the clear majority.²³ Gradually the Jesuits accommodated themselves so much to the ways of the Polish *szlachta* that astonished Visitors from Rome spared no words of censure.²⁴ The most serious accusation concerned the inclination to consume excessive amounts of alcohol. This is what General Vitelleschi wrote in 1638 to both the Lithuanian and Polish Provincials: „Since I am frequently receiving reports of overeating and excessive drinking by ours throughout the province, I therefore order what I have already commanded for other provinces, that in the information submitted by such as seek appointment to an office it should be clearly stated whether the candidate for a superior post has not been noted to have an inclination for revelry and carousing either in the house or when away.”²⁵ In 1642 the Visitor from Rome, Fabrizio Banfi, a future Provincial in Poland, wrote an ordination concerning „moderation in drinking”. There would be much more of this style of admonition to be encountered. Their purpose was not just a curb on drunkenness; it was also a question of counteracting the ubiquitous lifestyle. Let us refer to a letter of 1646 from General V. Caraffa to the Rector of the Jesuit College at Lwów, „our people shall not attend any dinners whatsoever at the houses of strangers. [...] All dining and supping at the houses of

²¹ J. Seredyka writes about this in a fascinating article, *Z dziejów tolerancji religijnej na Litwie za panowania Zygmunta III* [Some Episodes from the History of Religious Toleration in Lithuania under Sigismundus III]: „Thus, at the very crest of the Counter-Reformation and religious conflict, the leader of the Calvinists of Lithuania received a gift from one of the chief centres of the ideology which was hostile to him. The gift consisted of a bear, a pair of cranes, and a quantity of plums, and there was an assurance that prayers would be offered up every day for his well-being; while he reciprocated by sending the Jesuits of Nieśwież a subvention; he ordered a ‘counterfeit’ to be painted by the College’s artist; and he had paper bought at his expense for the pupils of Nieśwież College, surely well aware of the fact that it would be used to practise the composition of their future disquisitions against the heretics.” In: „Sprawozdania OTPN” Series A No. 10, p. 107.

²² *Mikołaj Sęp-Szarzyński a początki polskiego baroku* [Mikołaj Sęp-Szarzyński and the Beginnings of the Polish Baroque], Kraków, 1967, p. 31

²³ „In the Order’s initial period of work its chief exponents were of plebeian and local origin.” S. Obirek, *Jezuici*, op.cit., p. 108.

²⁴ S. Załęski, *Jezuici w Polsce* [The Jesuits in Poland], Vol. II, Lwów, 1901, p. 569-576.

²⁵ S. Załęski, op. cit., p. 571.

relatives, or visits to lordly mansions or gardens shall be strictly prohibited [...] We should cut ourselves free of the students' dinners held for the occasion of public debates and demonstrations of the academic skills."²⁶

The irritating vices in the character of the Polish *szlachta* seemed not to spare the Jesuits, either. Already in 1614 General C. Acquaviva was calling the attention of the Visitor, J. Argenti, to this: „Somewhat of vanity has been observed in our people in Poland of gentle stock, and hence also haughtiness, such that at the slightest offence they come out to the fore with their gentle birth, comparing themselves with others and regarding themselves as better.”²⁷ It is not surprising that this special importance of gentle origins in public life was conducive to a tendency to emulate the gentle estate, which also met with censure. In 1634 Provincial M. Hincza admonished the rectors of the colleges that some of the masters who were not of gentle birth had assumed gentlemen's surnames and were using gentlefolk's surnames for their students, too, which smacked of vanity and had to be stopped; instead, they should be using their former names.²⁸ The rectors themselves had earned a reprimand from Provincial Sczytnicki in 1648 for pursuing a lifestyle that was totally out of line with the community life that was expected by the Order. They would leave the house too frequently and without just cause on social calls or to visit relatives; they spent considerable sums on four-horse carriages and bursary singers who would accompany them; they were mindful of their own needs but not so sensitive to the needs of others.²⁹

Such warnings and reprimands were an expression of the continuous effort being made to counteract the bad side of Old Polish social conduct, to which the Jesuits, now more and more frequently recruited from among the gentry, were susceptible. The Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania had its own highly idiosyncratic type of religious feeling and public worship, which bore a substantial impact on the type of pastoral work the Jesuits became involved in in that country.

An anonymous Jesuit memorandum from the close of the 16th century described the inhabitants of Cracow in the following manner: „Talia sunt Polonorum et maxime huius civitatis ingenia, quae cantu ad templum pertrahuntur” (Such is the mentality of this people, and especially of the population of this city, that it is the singing that draws

²⁶ S. Załęski, *op.cit.*, p. 572

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 573.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 574.

them into church); „Silentium Societatis nostrae iste populus non potest capere” (This people can’t comprehend our Society’s silence); and „Se populus huius civitatis non putat praecepto Ecclesiae satisfacere, nisi cantatum audiat sacrum” (The inhabitants of this city do not consider themselves to have fulfilled the prescription of the Church unless they attend a Mass [divine service] which is sung).³⁰ No wonder then, that even if in 1594 General Acquaviva had banned the use of church organs, already by 1608 he was permitting their re-introduction, and that by the mid-seventeenth century whole orchestras had become a ubiquitous phenomenon throughout the Jesuit churches in Poland.³¹

The same may be said of the gradual elaboration of liturgical ceremony, which was clearly heading in the direction of the pomp and circumstance of secular celebrations, such as triumphal arches, profuse dialogues, processions, illuminations, and firework displays.³²

Problems over Sarmatianism

Sarmatianism is still a perennial subject of interest for Polish academics, and little wonder if we accept the view of Tadeusz Ulewicz, that „Sarmatianism was one of the fundamental, and also one of the most complex concepts from the entire history of the Polish culture in olden times; effectively it was a synonym for the manners and the spiritual and intellectual culture of the Commonwealth of the Polish *Szlachta* from the close of the 16th century right up to the time of the Partitions [late 18th century].”³³ As a cultural phenomenon Sarmatianism flourished at a time which also witnessed the dynamic growth of the Jesuit Order in Poland. Thus there are good grounds to pose the question what the connections were, if any, between the Jesuits and Sarmatianism. It is much more difficult to give a satisfactory answer if we take into account the fact that we are only at the beginning of research into the old literature bequeathed us by Jesuit writers like Kasper Druzbicki, Mikołaj Łęczycki, or even if we consider the intrigu-

³⁰ ARSI Pol. 72. f. 5.

³¹ J. Paszenda, *Kościół św. Barbary w Krakowie z domem zakonnym księży jezuitów. Historia i architektura*. [The Church of St. Barbara, Cracow, and the Jesuit House: History and Architecture], Kraków 1985, passim.

³² Incidentally these trends involved the whole of Polish Catholicism not only the Jesuits, but in their case there was the additional need to persuade the authorities at Rome. Contacts with Rome, first of all through the Polish Jesuits attending General Congregations and the reception in Poland of the ensuing documents, are a separate and extremely interesting question, but one which must remain open here.

³³ *Sarmatyzm* [Sarmatianism], in: *Literatura Polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny* [Polish Literature: An Encyclopaedic Guide], Warszawa, 1985, Vol. II, s. 336.

ing literary phenomenon of the poetic writings of Józef Baka. Even the place of Jesuits as prominent in Polish letters as Piotr Skarga, Jakub Wujek, or Franciszek Bohomolec has still not been fully established. While it is true that the fullest manifestation of the Sarmatian culture is to be found in the work of writers like Waław Potocki, Wespazjan Kochowski, or Jan Chryzostom Pasek (cf. Ulewicz), nevertheless the profuse writings of the Jesuits constitute an important supplement to this. Even a casual perusal of the pages of the Polish Jesuit Encyclopaedia, *Encyklopedia wiedzy o jezuitach na ziemiach Polski i Litwy 1564-1995* (Kraków 1996), suggests that there are probably many surprises lying in store for the researchers of the subject.

I am convinced that the problems with Sarmatianism and its very complex links with the Jesuits are only just beginning. The successful projects which have been undertaken by a variety of periodicals dedicated to Sarmatianism and the Baroque provide encouragement for the continuation of this quest.³⁴

³⁴ No. 4 of the quarterly *Ogród* (20) 1994 provides a kind of summary of this work.