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CUES OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY POLISH LITERATURE

Abstract. The article seeks answers to following questions: Can literature get by without spirituality? Does the spirituality in our literature have Christian form? Having this as its aim, the article portrays understanding of the term “spirituality” in Theology as well as the need to work out an understanding of this particular term in Humanities. The article states that this has to be done in a form of a dialog with the Theology of the Spirituality. Presented literal analyses of particular texts are an attempt to characterize some references to Christian spirituality that exist in Polish literature.

Key words: spirituality; Christian spirituality; post-1989 literature; sacrum; relationship with God; Theology of the Spirituality.

John Paul II, speaking on June 2, 1980 at the headquarters of UNESCO, drew attention to the relationship between culture and the experience of national and Christian identity of Europe. The current pace of life and changes taking place in the modern world, social changes, new trends in culture¹ make people face questions about the preservation of this identity. Literature as a manifestation of cultural life—also of a modern day—can be treated as a kind of a “seismograph” recording the life of the people of today; literature is still a mirror that strolls through the ravines of the present turn of the century. How is the spiritual dimension of human life reflected in this mirror? Is there a place for Christian spirituality in it? A greater time distance may be needed to study this issue thoroughly. It deserves a more thorough study than an outline prepared at the time when the literary period in question is only in the nascent stage.

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¹ See on transformations in twentieth century culture that preceded the reality in which human-kind lives today: Grzegorz GÓRNY, “Krótki esej o poezji XX wieku [A short essay on 20th century poetry],” in IDEM, *Demon południa* [Demon of the south] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo FRONDA, 2008), 187–201.

PROBLEMS WITH METHODOLOGY

The issue of the spiritual dimension of contemporary literature is a sign of a wider phenomenon, which are various manifestations of spirituality in culture, and there are many such manifestations in literary life after 1989 considered by many to be a kind of a caesura.² “Changes in culture after 1989 put literature—again, paradoxically—in a difficult situation. The abolition of censorship for the press, radio and television meant the possibility and the right to talk about everything, the transmission of truth and untruth, guesswork and mystification.”³ This freedom of speech, however, is a challenge for both writers and readers, which is confirmed by the statement of the literary scholar: “After totalitarianism, after the supremacy of ‘the only right ideologies’, so important in the history of the 20th century, there is a democratic, multithreaded culture, full of contradictions, opposite ideological attitudes, dispersed and alternative. Everyone in it, the ‘recipients’, its participant, and the creator will have to choose independently.”⁴

This choice also determines the shape of the literature of the breakthrough period. Jerzy Jastrzębski writes about its features, noting that in the 1980s Polish literature entered a state of chronic crisis and ceased to be “a tool serving the national cause, a reservoir of historical memory, a mainstay of values.”⁵ Similarly, Rafał Grupiński and Izolda Kiec diagnose the situation of contemporary literature, paying attention to avoiding “the trash of myths and imaginations” and its unwillingness to assume patriotic, “collective responsibilities.”⁶ The new directions of the development of literary life and the emergence of “spiritual space” in the 1980s are also

² See the discussion on this issue presented by Poznań researchers: Przemysław CZAPLIŃSKI and Piotr ŚLIWIŃSKI, *Literatura polska 1976–1999. Przewodnik po prozie i poezji* [Polish literature 1976–1999: Guide to prose and poetry] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000), 208–16.

³ Stanisław BURKOT, *Literatura polska w latach 1986–1995* [Polish literature in the years 1986–1995] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne, 1997), 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵ Jerzy JASTRZĘBSKI, “‘Literatura weszła w stan przewlekłego kryzysu...’ Ankieta ‘NaGłosu.’ Koniec lat osiemdziesiątych [‘Literature has entered a state of chronic crisis.’ Questionnaire of ‘NaGłos.’ The end of the eighties],” *NaGłos* 1990, no. 1: 66.

⁶ “This is where the story of the new literature begins. The story of how it began to emerge from the yoke of the patriotic stereotype, national symbolism. How nurturing the obtained freedom, it created its own world from it, bypassing the trash of used myths and imaginations. How it provocatively called itself unwanted, separate, barbarian, that nobody would require anything from it in the name of collective duties [...]. The effect of this sudden need to radically cut off from the immediate past was the breaking of the main threads of the latest tradition in the mid-1980s.” Rafał GRUPIŃSKI and Izolda KIEC, *Niebawem spadnie błoto, czyli kilka uwag o literaturze nieprzyjemnej* [The mud will fall soon, that is a few remarks about unpleasant literature] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo OBSERWATOR, 1997), 10. The quoted passage is entitled “New Literature.”

described by Jan Błoński,⁷ who answers the questions of editors of *NaGłos*: “What happened to culture in a rapidly changing reality? What were the most significant (and most characteristic) features of the spiritual, intellectual and artistic life of these years? Did they create any forms of participation in the spiritual space?”⁸ There is no confessional element to the recurring adjective “spiritual.” Rather, it means the product of the human mind, the manifestation of its internal horizons, the world of desires, aspirations and imaginations. It does not explicitly refer to man's reference to the sacred. However, this reference is possible.

Writing about spirituality (and sacrum) in his literary study, Wojciech Kudyba notes that the category of spirituality, which is now more and more frequently appearing in literary studies, is treated very widely, and the term “spirituality” does not have the status of a scientific term, because—so far—in Polish literary studies it has not been clearly defined. It has not been assigned a strict scope of meaning.⁹ The previous works of researchers who write about the presence of religious subjects in literary works testify to interdisciplinary research in this field. Krzysztof Dybciak refers to the work of sociologists, writing about the poetry of Karol Wojtyła.¹⁰ Dorota Heck uses the philosophical meaning of the term “spirituality” and presents it as a non-material aspect of human existence.¹¹ She claims that “in the contemporary Polish literature there is an original form of spirituality that opposes nihilism.”¹² In the article “Rzeczywistości i duch(owość) w nowej poezji na przykładzie twórczości pokolenia ‘bruLionu’ [Reality and spirit(uality) in the new poetry on the example of the “bruLion” generation's works]” Zofia Zarębianka refers to the religious studies of Mircea Eliade.¹³

⁷ Jan BŁOŃSKI, “‘Rok 1989 jest równie ważny co 1918...’ Ankieta ‘NaGłosu.’ Koniec lat osiemdziesiątych [‘The year 1989 is as important as 1918...’ Questionnaire of ‘NaGłos.’ The end of the eighties],” *NaGłos* 1990, no. 1: 60-61.

⁸ REDAKCJA [“NAGŁOSU”]. “Questionnaire of ‘NaGłos.’ The end of the eighties],” *NaGłos* 1990, no. 1: 59.

⁹ Wojciech KUDYBA, “Sacrum i ‘duchowość’ w polskich badaniach literackich [Sacrum and ‘spirituality’ in Polish literary studies],” *Religious and Sacred Poetry: An International Quarterly of Religion, Culture and Education* 2013, no. 1: 69–70.

¹⁰ Krzysztof DYBCIAK, *Semantyka ojczyzny i narodu w poezji Karola Wojtyły—Droga w trzecie tysiąclecie* [Semantics of the homeland and nation in the poetry of Karol Wojtyła: Road in the third millennium], in: IDEM, *Trudne spotkanie. Literatura polska XX wieku wobec religii* [Difficult meeting: Polish literature of the twentieth century considering religion] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo ARCA-NA, 2005), 218–229.

¹¹ Dorota HECK, *Bez znaku, bez śladu, bez pamięci. W kręgu problemów duchowości we współczesnej literaturze polskiej* [No sign, no trace, no memory. Among the problems of spirituality in contemporary Polish literature], Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004, 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ I refer to the article published in: Zofia ZARĘBIANKA, *Czytanie sacrum* [Reading of sacrum] (Kraków, Rzym: Instytut Wydawniczy MAXIMUM, 2008), 88–98.

Mirosława Ołdakowska-Kuflowa writes about psychological aspects,¹⁴ drawing attention to the spiritual dimension of characters of contemporary novels that continue the current of the “Catholic” novel. Wojciech Kudyba notices the danger of blurring the meaning of the word “spirituality” due to its use (or misuse?) by the representatives of the New Age movement and suggests that literary scholars should consider its theological meaning. This meaning could prove to be an important area of inspiration for literature research. The author justifies his position by saying that in theology, “not only a broad but also a subtle and precise way of understanding the concept was developed long time ago.”¹⁵

The representatives of spiritual theology provide many definitions explaining the meaning of the term “spirituality” and “spiritual life” from different perspectives.¹⁶ Christian theologians agree that the term “spirituality” implies a relationship with God, which is possible “through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.” (see Romans 5:5). The author of one of the definitions of Christian spirituality states that it is a “part of cultural life in its highest form, it is the blossom of the development of humanity in the most noble direction, which is connected with the personal absolute Value.”¹⁷ Another theologian also emphasizes the cultural aspect of spirituality, drawing attention to the different ways of expressing faith in a given time and, I think, one could add, and space; understood also in the geographic sense.¹⁸ Speaking of spiritual life, it is worth noting that it is dynamic: there is room for searching, wandering, even for sin or imperfection; there is also room for experiencing spiritual struggles, as well as for mystical experience.¹⁹

¹⁴ M. OŁDAKOWSKA-KUFLOWA, “‘Instalacja Idziego’ Jerzego Sosnowskiego na tle nowej generacji powieści ‘katolickiej’ [‘Installation of Idzi’ by Jerzy Sosnowski against the background of the new generation of the ‘Catholic’ novel],” in: *Sacrum na nowo poszukiwane. O literaturze polskiej po 1989 roku* [Sacrum re-searched: About Polish literature after 1989], ed. Mirosława Ołdakowska-Kuflowa and Lech Giemza (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2015), 183–214.

¹⁵ W. KUDYBA, *Sacrum i “duchowość” w polskich badaniach literackich*, p. 71.

¹⁶ See Marek CHMIELEWSKI, “Duchowość [Spirituality],” w: *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej* [Lexicon of Catholic spirituality], ed. Marek Chmielewski (Lublin, Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2002), 226–32; Jerzy Wiśław GOGOLA, *Teologia komunii z Bogiem* [Theology of communion with God] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo OO. Karmelitów Bosych, 2001), 17–21; Stanisław WITEK, *Teologia życia duchowego* [Theology of spiritual life] (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1986), 12–16.

¹⁷ S. WITEK, *Teologia życia duchowego*, 15.

¹⁸ “This term means the ways by which a believer or a group of believers expresses their faith at a particular time.” Lisa CREMASCHI, “Duchowość [Spirituality],” in: *Encyklopedia chrześcijaństwa. Historia i współczesność. 2000 lat nadziei* [Encyclopedia of Christianity: History and present day — 2000 years of hope], Kielce: Jedność, 2000, p. 181.

¹⁹ J.W. GOGOLA, *Teologia komunii z Bogiem*, 23–7; [IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA.] *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. Translated by Fr. Elder Mullan, S.I. New York: Kenedy & Sons, 1914; [Faustina KOWALSKA,] *St. Faustina Kowalska Diary — Divine Mercy in My Soul* (Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2005).

The essence of Christian spirituality is the development of a relationship with God and concern for its constant deepening. Spiritual theology is relatively new, having emerged from moral theology, which to this day deals with issues of human attitudes and deeds and examines them in the light of the Bible and Tradition. In my opinion, the above theological context suggests two research problems that will be the subject of this article: what traces of references to God, who is close to man, can be found in contemporary literature? (The aspect closer to spiritual theology); How do the authors of literary works present the condition of modern man as a searching, doubting or erratic creature? (The aspect closer to moral theology). The attempts to answer these questions will be presented in the next two paragraphs of the article.

2. TRACES OF SPIRITUALITY IN LITERATURE. A FAMILIAR GOD: A SIMPLE WAY

In the work of many authors God is shown as someone present in human life, someone who offers support for man, is a source of sense and hope. In many works the relationship between man and God is visible both in the content plan and in the way of expression. There are many authors, such as Adam Ziemianin, who clearly refer to the prayer structures. In his work, as noted by Zbigniew Anders, one can find poems-prayers, poems of sighs—like the so-called *actus iaculatoriae* prayers, personal monologues addressed to God, and paraphrases of church texts.²⁰ Another literary scholar also presents Ziemianin and analyzes his poem with the significant title of “Antyfony do szuflady” [Antiphon to the drawer] (from the book *Pod jednym dachem* [Under one roof]), beginning with the following words:

O my drawer
Full of grace
Though burdened under the great weight of venial sins.

The title “Antiphon,” taken from the liturgy, as well as the paraphrase of the apostrophe of the known prayer, refer to the sacred sphere.²¹ This reference is

²⁰ Zbigniew ANDERS, “Mitologie Adama Ziemianina [Mythologies of Adam Ziemianin],” in *Inna literatura? Dwudziestolecie 1989-2009* [Another literature? Twenty years of 1989-2009], part II, ed. Zbigniew Anders and Janusz Pasterski (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2010), 69.

²¹ M. BARAN, “Poetycka kategoria czasu w poezji Adama Ziemianina [Poetic time category in Adam Ziemianin’s poetry],” in *Inna literatura? Dwudziestolecie 1989-2009*, part II, 83.

deepened by the expressive word play: “burdened under the great weight of venial sins,” which also has religious connotations. Similarly, the analysis of further verses leads to the conclusion that the presented relation between man and God is visible not only in the way of expressing, but also in the content plan. Concluding his reflections, Ziemiański says: “the drawer becomes a link between three temporal phases: the past, present and future, as well as between external, historical and internal time.”²² In-depth interpretation allows the reader to conclude that the time Ziemiański presents is a holy time—*kairos*, because the lyrical subject indirectly indicates the presence and action of God in the presented reality.

The nature of the relationship between man and God is also signaled in contemporary works through allusions, quotations, symbols and also the axiological sphere.²³ The novel *Poczwarka* [Worm] by Dorota Terakowska is interesting in this respect, interpreted in the biblical and soteriological context. The names of parents: Adam and Eve and the rhythm of the seven days of creation (invoked through quotations from the Book of Genesis), and the last “eighth” day intertwine with the rhythm of modern family life. The visible pace of life and pursuit of a career (Adam is the president of an American IT company, Eve is a manager in a Japanese company) illustrate the immaturity of two adult people when their child, Marysia, is born. She is a girl with Down’s syndrome, to whom Daddy refers using the impersonal pronoun: “it.” Terakowska raises important existential and axiological questions that are clarified by the perspective of the faith of a sick girl who can overcome her own frailties.²⁴ In Terakowska’s novel, the Bible plays an important role in the structure of the work and is the basic criterion for the moral evaluation of the characters’ behavior.²⁵

The motifs drawn from the Holy Bible are more clearly present in other works, the action of which moves the reader back to biblical times and makes it possible to see how the characters could shape their relationship with God, living in the times of Jesus,²⁶ as well as in the Old and New Testament times.²⁷ These narra-

²² Ibid.

²³ Piotr NOWACZYŃSKI, “O badaniach nad literaturą religijną w KUL [On research on religious literature in KUL],” in: *Religia a literatura w publikacjach KUL 1918-1993* [Religion and literature in the KUL publications 1918-1993], ed. Jan Gotfryd et al. (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1996), 17.

²⁴ Wiesława TOMASZEWSKA, “Bóg stworzenia i Bóg zmartwychwstania. Modalność doświadczenia Boga w powieści Doroty Terakowskiej *Poczwarka* [God of creation and God of resurrection: Modality of God’s experience in Dorota Terakowska’s novel *Worm*]”, in *Sacrum na nowo poszukiwane*, 215–36.

²⁵ Mirosława OŁDAKOWSKA-KUFWŁOWA, *Sacrum w literaturze po 1989 roku* [Sacrum in literature after 1989], *Polonistyka* 2014, no. 7: 7.

²⁶ Jadwiga STABIŃSKA, *Prorokini Anna. Powieść biblijna* [The Prophetess Anna: Biblical novel] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2012); Andrzej TURCZYŃSKI, *Jawnogrzeźnica i Pan* [Wanton and

tions, as Tomasz Garbol emphasizes, are held in the convention of apocrypha.²⁸ The Bible is also a book that essay authors have brought to readers. These statements reveal the wisdom of Jewish teachers²⁹ and present profiles of biblical women.³⁰ All these works, referring to the books of the Old and New Testaments, ask the reader questions about the development of his faith and may lead to making a careful reading of the Bible and concern for deepening friendship with God and His saints in the dimension of *communio sanctorum*.

In modern literature there is a current of prose, where the characters are priests. These books also address, inter alia, the subject of the development of spiritual life. Mirosława Ołdakowska-Kuflowa, in an article on the presence of sacred topics in literature,³¹ first presents the triptych of Jan Grzegorzczak,³² and then the novels of six other authors.³³ Summarizing her reflections, Ołdakowska-Kuflowa touches

Lord] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo W DRODZE, 2009); Grzegorz KĘDZIORA, *Podążając za Panem* [Following the Lord], Warszawa: Warszawska Firma Wydawnicza, 2010.

²⁷ Jacek SIEPSIAK, *Między deszczem a rynną. Dylematy postaci biblijnych* [Between rain and gutter: Dilemmas of biblical characters], Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2010.

²⁸ Tomasz GARBOL, *Otwórz się. Kilka refleksji o literaturze i chrześcijaństwie* [Open. Some reflections on literature and Christianity], *Ethos* 29 (2016), no. 3: 172.

²⁹ Paweł ŚPIEWAK, *Księga nad Księgami. Midrasze* [Book of Books. Midrashes] (Kraków: ZNAK, 2004); IDEM, *Pięć ksiąg Tory. Komentarze* [Five Torah books. Comments] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012).

³⁰ Elżbieta ADAMIAK, *Kobiety w Biblii. Stary Testament* [Women in the Bible. Old Testament] (Kraków: ZNAK, 2006); EADEM, *Kobiety w Biblii. Nowy Testament* [Women in the Bible. New Testament] (Kraków: Biblioteka WIĘZI, 2010).

³¹ M. OŁDAKOWSKA-KUFLOWA, *Sacrum w literaturze po 1989 roku*, 5–8.

³² Jan GRZEGORCZYK, *Adieu. Przypadki księdza Grosera* [Adieu. Father Groser's cases], Poznań: Wydawnictwo W DRODZE, 2003); IDEM, *Trufle. Nowe przypadki księdza Grosera* [Truffles. New Father Groser's cases], Poznań: Wydawnictwo W DRODZE, 2004; *Cudze pole. Przypadki księdza Grosera* [Else's field. Father Groser's cases], Poznań: Wydawnictwo ZYSK I S-KA, Wydawnictwo W DRODZE, 2007.

³³ Kazimierz Braun in his book *Dzień świadectwa* [Day of Witness] presents a priest who is fascinated by the figure of John Paul II and his priestly spirituality; Piotr Kobza in his book *Polskie rekolekcje* [Polish Retreat] presents the figure of an employee of the Vatican Curia, who became a bishop of a poor diocese and describes a fruitful clash of two worlds: traditional religiosity of the inhabitants of Eastern Poland and unconventional methods of evangelization of the shepherd of the diocese; Maciej Grabski, as the author of two novels: *Ksiądz Rafał* [Fr. Rafael] and *Ksiądz Rafał. Niespokojne czasy* [Fr. Rafael. The Troubled Times] presents the parish priest of a small rural parish, who tries not only to take care of the spiritual life of his parishioners. Szczepan Twardoch in the grotesque novel *Epifania wikarego Trzaski* [Vicar Trzaska's Epiphany] analyzes the process of a priest subjected to demonic temptation. Despite the grotesque poetics adopted, the theme of fidelity to the priestly vocation is treated with all seriousness; Marcin Wroński is the author of the crime story *Officium secretum. Pies Pański* [Officium Secretum. The Lord's Dog], in which the main character Dr. Marek Gliński, a member of the Dominican Order, is a brilliant detective, with a specific spirituality and black marks on his early life during the communist era. Jarosław Naliwajko SJ in the novel *Zero* [Zero] tackles the

upon the problem of spirituality, and hence the relation to God, which determines the shape of her references to her neighbor: “In all works the priest’s faith, the type of spiritual attitude he presents, his relations with his superiors and ordinary people, both believers and non-believers, are shown as important. The priest is interesting to the writers, and it can be presumed that also to the readers, precisely because he is a priest: someone different, situated—at least that is the intention—closer to the sacred sphere than the average person; bearing greater responsibility for his own relationship with God and for bringing the invisible to others.”³⁴ These words can certainly be also referred to the book of a Dominican, the author of short stories showing the everyday life of religious (priests), their struggles and choices—not only those made in the light of grace.³⁵

In addition to prose about priests, there is also prose written by priests, which can also be analyzed from the perspective of the accounts of God presented in it, for example by reading a collection of the stories by Fr. Józef Lach entitled *Mimo drzwi zamkniętych* [Though the doors were locked].³⁶ The current of “priestly poetry” is continued³⁷ under the patronage of Fr. Jan Twardowski. His poems, small prose forms are a testimony of seeking his spiritual path not only through references to St. Francis of Assisi,³⁸ but also to St. Therese of Lisieux.³⁹ The author of the new monograph on Jan Twardowski described the spirituality of “Jan of the ladybug” in 10 thematic circles, placed in 10 chapters of the book: sensitivity to the world of nature and perception of it in the perspective of faith; human corporeality as a difficult but valuable reality; the world of human relationships and the suffering of loneliness; an experience of pain that reveals human sensitivity; category of childhood [also of God’s childhood]; the place of women in the Church; Christian hope in the perspective of God’s Mercy; experience of the night of faith; the sanctity of weekdays; easement of poetry. For Fr. Jan Twardowski, all these issues are an opportunity to meet God and deepen

problems of the priest-monk who, due to the unresolved problems of the family home, is experiencing a constant crisis of vocation.

³⁴ M. OŁDAKOWSKA-KUFLÓWA, *Sacrum w literaturze po 1989 roku*, p. 7.

³⁵ K. POPLAWSKI OP, *Oczko. Miniatury (anty)klerykalne* [Eyelet. (Anti)clerical Thumbnails] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo W DRODZE, 2015).

³⁶ Józef LACH, *Mimo drzwi zamkniętych* [Though the doors were locked] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo DEHON, 2014).

³⁷ After 1989, the authors who continue to publish their poems are Janusz Artur Ihnatowicz, Janusz Adam Kobierski, Waclaw Oszejca, Janusz Opaliński, Jerzy Szymik, and Alfred Wierzbicki.

³⁸ Andrzej SULIKOWSKI, “*Serce czyste...*” *Świat poetycki ks. Jana Twardowskiego* [“A pure heart ...” Poetic world of Fr. Jan Twardowski] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo GAUDIUM, 2004).

³⁹ Alicja MAZAN-MAZURKIEWICZ, *Liryka ks. Jana Twardowskiego. Spotkanie ze św. Teresą z Lisieux* [Fr. Jan Twardowski’ lyric. Meeting with St. Therese of Lisieux] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014).

the relationship with Him, which Twardowski recognized as the most important relationship in his life.⁴⁰

I think that Bożena Chrzastowska's words can be referred to the literature showing the importance of Christian spirituality: "A literary work 'saves and heals the soul' [...]. It supports humanity, seeks good, raises hope, seeks God in relations between people—empathy, truth, respect for the Other."⁴¹

3. TRACES OF SPIRITUALITY IN LITERATURE. A DISTANT GOD: COMPLEXITIES AND COMPLICATIONS

Among the authors of contemporary literature are those who doubt, err, and seek. There are poems in which the author speaks on behalf of those who contest, deny, or profane the sacred reality.⁴² There are works depicting the feeling of emptiness, senselessness, indicating the peculiar experience of the abyss that discovers God through his lack.⁴³ These phenomena can be observed on the example of lyrical texts.

Piotr Cieleśz writes in a very direct way about his path from atheism, through internal breakthrough to the experience of a close friendship with God. His texts—in the opinion of Wojciech Kudyba—"are part of the long tradition of 'life writing' [...] from his texts written from the mid-1980s until today, not only the portrait of the epoch, but also the image of internal experiences, falling within the broadly understood spirituality, emerges."⁴⁴ Following Kudyba, I choose three fragments of the poetic record of the spiritual path of Cieleśz:

my grandmother, stiepanida szymonowna, believes in god
in my grandfather and in her grandchildren
so that I am afraid to tell her "babushka I'm an atheist."⁴⁵

This poem, written in 1989, reflects the truth about how Cieleśz perceived himself and his relatives: strong family ties, simplicity of grandmother's faith, respect for her religious beliefs, diametrically different from his attitude towards

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 28-278.

⁴¹ Bożena CHRZĄSTOWSKA, "Mówić 'językiem aniołów' [To speak 'the language of angels'],"
Polonistyka 2014, no. 7: 13.

⁴² Zofia ZARĘBIANKA, "De(kon)strukcja sacrum? [De(con)struction of the sacred?]," in Z. ZARĘBIANKA, *Czytanie sacrum*, 107.

⁴³ P. NOWACZYŃSKI, *O badaniach nad literaturą religijną w KUL*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Wojciech KUDYBA, "Piotr Cieleśz. Nawrócony [Piotr Cieleśz. Converted]," in: IDEM, *Generacja źle obecna* [Badly present generation] (Sopot: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sopotu, 2014), 84.

⁴⁵ Quoted after: *ibid.*, 85

God. The literary testimony of a breakthrough in his attitude towards God is the work entitled “Długo mnie u Ciebie nie było” [I Have Not Been With You For a Long Time], published in 2006, has signaled a change in the perspective of perceiving himself and God. This confession of a lyrical subject can be identified with the confession of the poet. Kudyba, referring to this poem, draws attention to its tale character and emphasizes its settlement nature. He sticks with the grammatical form of past tense and concludes that it is a prove of temporal and mental distance.⁴⁶ Over the years, the relationship between Cieleśz and God deepens. There is a tone of familiarity in his poems. His religious zeal and trust in God increases, whom he also sees as a great ally in the fight against the demon:

I praise you, Jesus,
everyday,
even when the devil whispers in my ear
before I go to bed
“hang yourself Peter
in the bathroom on the radiator hang yourself
your life is meaningless”
and I hardly repel
these terrible words.⁴⁷

According to Kudyba, this is an example of demonization of Cieleśz’s disease (depressive-delusional syndrome). For Cieleśz, the fight against the disease is a fight against the devil.⁴⁸ However, an authentic struggle with the forces of darkness is also possible.⁴⁹

Another author who experiences suffering is Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki. His poems address the issues of faith, unbelief, sin, enslavement, but also repentance and human cry to God.⁵⁰ The lyrical subject of his poems is looking for God, experiencing the emptiness of homoerotic relationships and the pain of the disease—schizophrenia (*Nenia i inne wiersze* [Nenia and other poems], book I “III”)—this is how one can understand a fragment of the poem *Szpital św. Klary* [St. Clare’s Hospital] (*Nenia i inne wiersze*, book II, “LXXV”).

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 88, 93.

⁴⁷ P. CIELESZ, “chwałę [sic!] Cię Jezu”; quoted after: ibid., 92–93.

⁴⁸ W. KUDYBA, “Piotr Cieleśz. Nawrócony,” 91, 94.

⁴⁹ Human openness to a demon can be a reason for mental illness. An example is a teenager who, due to listening to satanic music, fell ill with schizophrenia. This remark was possible thanks to Fr. Edmund Szaniawski, M.I.C., who for served as an exorcist for 11 years.

⁵⁰ Jakub PACZEŚNIAK, “Ta ciemność teraz i ta ciemność po tem [sic!] (czyli o rzeczach nie do pogodzenia w poezji Eugeniusza Tkaczyszyna-Dyckiego) [This darkness now and this darkness after [sic]] (i.e., things can not be reconciled in the poetry of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki),” in “jesień już Panie a ja nie mam domu”. *Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki i krytycy* [“autumn yet, Lord, and I have no home.” Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki and critics], ed. Grzegorz Jankowicz (Kraków: Stowarzyszenie Na Rzecz Kultury Krakowa „Krakowska Alternatywa”, 2001), 39–41.

in pure things, let your home be
 and in abominable things, my dying
 [...]
 such a great dying in uncleanness,
 that if I was to rise from the dead,
 it would be through human dirt⁵¹

The metaphors of homosexuality, understood as a disease and traces of male erotic relationships seen as a sin or even a crime, are scattered in Dycki's poetry. However, this difficult experience is a cry for salvation. It becomes an opportunity to stand before God who is full of mercy:

praised be Jesus Christ, who suffers
 from the hands of blasphemers and does not send death onto them⁵²

Wiesław Felski argues that the image of God is not so unambiguous, quoting fragments of works that could be regarded as blasphemous. Here's one of them:

O Lord, I did not run away,
 I did not abandon This house.
 O Good Shepherd, only a wolf got his teeth into me⁵³

Here, we can see an unspeakable complaint that the Good Shepherd did not ensure safety to a man who was close to Him, we can see a tone of grudge or accusation. But it is also possible—as Wiesław Felski suggests, accepting the conclusions of Zofia Zarębianka—to recognize that the passing of such “judgments about the blasphemous nature of works is too hasty. The poetry of this generation still needs its own criteria and its own methodological workshop.”⁵⁴

*

This new workshop is still waiting to be developed. Criteria for examining the manifestations of spirituality require detailed analysis. Actions are even more needed because—as Bożena Chrzastowska writes—“in the circle of scholars there is a kind of ‘political correctness’—the consent to the inevitability of progressing unbelief, to the silence of religiousness in culture, which is often

⁵¹ Eugeniusz TKACZYSZYN-DYCKI, “Szpital św. Klary (Nenia i inne wiersze,” book II, “LXXV”); quoted after: J. PACZEŚNIAK, “Ta ciemność teraz i ta ciemność po tem [sic!],” 40.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵³ E. TKACZYSZYN-DYCKI, “Panie ja nie odbiegłem”; quoted after: Wiesław FELSKI, “Wybrane aspekty liryki religijnej w twórczości poetów debiutujących po 1989 roku [Selected aspects of religious lyric in the works of poets debuting after 1989],” in *Inna literatura?*, Part II: *Dwudziestolecie 1989-2009*, 155.

⁵⁴ W. FELSKI, “Wybrane aspekty liryki religijnej,” 166-167.

interpreted as a manifestation of conservatism.”⁵⁵ However, further search for traces of Christian spirituality in literature may prove to be very useful for maintaining cultural continuity. It can oppose tendencies to yield to fashion to promote spirituality associated with the New Age trend, a spirituality in which man replaces God. It may also turn out that in the era of commercialization of culture and promoting the left-liberal tendencies, literature becomes a “distorting mirror,” which Stendhal did not mention ... It is worth considering what kind of spirituality is reflected by the growing popularity of *fantasy* literature and the presence of magical realism. The literature may reveal what man is nourished by, who has lost the path leading him to god (with a small ‘g’). It will show how he fills such a void, creating a “sacrum without God.” I think it is worth reflecting on these (and similar) research problems in search of the truth about the condition of the man of the beginning of our century.

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⁵⁵ B. CHRZAŚTOWSKA, “Mówić ‘językiem aniołów’,” 9. The author adds in the footnote: “It happens that regardless of the worldview, the researcher equipped with the knowledge of religion, of the Bible and philosophical contexts, interprets literature against the above-mentioned (in)correctness,” footnote no. 2 on p. 14.

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