The theological utopia of Ludwik Królikowski

Daniele STASI

Abstract: In this paper the author aims to present some aspects of Królikowski’s political thought with regard to his biography. The first part of the paper concerns Królikowski’s life, and in particular his vicissitudes and efforts to realize a form of community inspired by Christian values. In the second part his conception of history and social order in which private property and the traditional model of family must be replaced by a communist organization of collective life, are highlighted. The Polish utopian thinker rejects every kind of political and religious institution derived from the past and could represent an obstacle to the construction of a prefect theological order.

Keywords: Socialism, Christianity, Political theology of order.

From Poland to France

The political thought of the young Królikowski was inspired by the conditions of the working people and the rebirth of the Polish nation. Two events marked Królikowski’s conscience: the end of feudalism in Poland and the loss of national sovereignty. Socialism represents for him a chance both to realize the national rebirth and put an end to the privileges that, by the way, had marked and weakened the Rzeczpospolita. The liberation of the nation was by him identified thereafter with the liberation of the working people. In short: the cause of nation is the cause of working people.

In 1842, the first book of Polska Chrystusowa (Poland of Christ) was published in Paris by Ludwik Królikowski for an edition of “Księgarnia Sławiańska”. In this collection of articles the author declares himself the holder of Jesus Christ’s testament, the legitimate interpreter of the Gospel message and announcer of the near triumph of the Kingdom of God on earth. This collection of essays aims to affirm a new model of social order that eliminates the gap between the individual conscience and the ‘cowardly and insignificant’ world in which every man is living. Królikowski is the prophet of this new order; the new authentic Messiah of human lineage.
Ludwik Królikowski was born on the 16th of August in 1799 at Piotrkowic near Kielce. As the son of a small property owner, he received an education inspired by Christian values. As he was a kid, he attended the school of the religious congregation of Holy Bernard. After high school he moved to Warsaw, where he joined the faculty of “building and metrology” at the University of Warsaw. Within a short time, he abandoned his initial studies and became a student of the faculty of “administration” or faculty of law. In this faculty, Królikowski was noted for being a talented student. He was crowned with a university prize and had a strong desire to combine his legal education with a rigorous practice of Christian principles.

The Gospel message was read by Królikowski as an announcement of liberation that must be accompanied by emancipation efforts of every man. Królikowski also identified efforts of individual emancipation with the collective efforts of Polish people to realize the independence of their nation from “occupants”. This young student of law became quite popular in Warsaw’s cultural environments. Many patriots and intellectuals were inspired by Królikowski’s speeches, mostly characterized by true passion and brilliance, hope for the future and for their country, under the rule of strangers.

In 1827 Królikowski completed his law studies and moved to Paris where he was reacquainted with his friend and countryman Bogdan Jański, who was ‘the first Pole who accepted the principles of socialism in the Saint-Simon version” and became one of the most prominent followers of Saint-Simon’s social philosophy. In Paris, Królikowski met several supporters of Saint-Simon-philosophy with whom he discussed a new form of Christianity connected to a new form of organization of society in which private property would be ultimately replaced by social ownership.

In 1831 he returned to Poland and participated in the November revolt. After the collapse of the Kingdom of Poland, about 30,000 participants in the revolt sought refuge in the West. Królikowski moved to Krakow where he was suspected by political authorities of conspiracy. His ideas were gaining an unexpected popularity that put police and government authorities on alert. This thinker, who posed as the new messiah, stuffed his speeches and articles with promises concerning the building of a communitarian and national order. The idea that inequalities had to disappear and be replaced for the Kingdom of God on earth, made him seem, in this context, a dangerous agitator rather than a generous and probably naive dreamer. Królikowski, in a short time, came to be accused of conspiracy. He was expelled from the city, and having failed to find employment, he emigrated to Paris in the spring of 1839, with more dependents than he had during his previous French experience, a wife and two
children. The years spent in Poland were not characterized only by the activity of an inspired publicist who was taken very seriously by police authorities. In those years he had written *List apostolski z Warszawy* (*Apostolic Letter from Warsaw*) *Ksiąg narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (*Books of the nation and Polish pilgrimage*) and *Westchnienie pobożne za dynastię Czartoryskich w Polsce* (*Pious devotion in favor of the Polish dynasty of Czartoryski*) in which the exaltation of the dynasty of Czartoryski is just an excuse to expose the proper utopian-religious conception. In France Królikowski was able to develop political conceptions in collaboration with the “Patriotic Association”, whose official periodical was the ‘Gazeta Polska’ (*Polish Gazette*), in which he wrote several articles, trying to establish himself in the role of the new apostle and prophet of the “social Christianity”.

After this stay in France and experience with the “Patriotic Association”, his utopian profile, one may say, had now reached maturity. He was looking at ways to put into practice his beliefs and ideas that developed around the desire to realize the divine order on earth, or at least his interpretations and conception of the divine order. According to Królikowski, the realization of a Christian utopia had to be made through the elimination of social injustice, i.e. through the collectivization of the means of production. The conflict between good and bad coincides with the struggle between working people and aristocracy or, in other words, with the struggle of classes in order to realize the socialism. Apart from the form of property in this new order, he believed that every nation must affirm its particular features and identity within a organization that nations themselves create. The Królikowski conception of social order reflects two fundamental aspects of the history of political thought in the nineteenth century: socialism and national sovereignty of a country, in particular, Poland. As Kuligowski wrote

Certainly, it is generally recognized that the 1830’s marked the early career of “socialism” in the Polish language, its concepts not yet understood as a comprehensive political proposal. It was more the attitude of opposition to individualism and selfishness, and therefore the same as altruism or collectivism.

For Królikowski, socialism was ‘politics most sublime’ or ‘republicanism of the most perfect type’. Socialism was identified with a form of humanism, a moral tension to a collective order in which every man could live in harmony and happiness with others. In his mystical theory, socialism was intended to be implemented radically. In the name of brotherhood, despite the moderate crowd of democratic and the moderate wing of the Polish left, was Królikowski affirmed the necessity to eliminate private property.
Vocation and expertise as a reformer

In France, he approached the community “Hawr” in the Normandy region. The community, which was an association of Polish patriots, published the periodical ‘Zjednoczenie’14 in which circulated ideas of Polish independence and discussed new cultural currents that crossed Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. The motto of the community was to ‘socialize all through all and for all’.15 After a period of successful collaboration, Królikowski left ‘Zjednoczenie’ and walked away from the community. His theoretical proposals were judged “exaggerated” by other members of community who were focusing on economic and political issues instead of mystical apostolic aspirations which characterized the Królikowski’s personality. Many of members of community shared Lelwel’s opinion that the constant references to Christ, the mystical tone of the Królikowski’s articles and his effort to create a kingdom that belongs clearly to another world gave a sad picture of the periodical.16

The disappointment caused by divergence within the patriots community had an important effect on Królikowski’s thought. He decided to devote himself to writing a work that he supposed would contain an organic project outlining a future society and the ways to achieve it. Although he remained anchored in his conviction that he was fulfilling a mission that transcended the limits of political reality, he realized that he had to confront himself with practical issues such as the rule and organization of a new political community.

Between 1843 and 1846 in piece-meal fashion, was published Polska Chrystusowa which is probably the most important political work of Królikowski thanks to which he attained great popularity. In 1841, Królikowski became a collaborator with Cabet’s journal ‘Le Populaire’.17 Of those years, in addition to intense theoretical and journalistic work, his friendship with Cabet should be mentioned. The ideas of the French thinker, contained in his novel Voyage en Icarie, inspired Królikowski to actively take part in establishing Ikaria, a communist society. In fact, Królikowski took the first steps towards the foundation of Ikaria in the purchase of one million acres of land in Texas in 1847.18

In 1848, the exodus of the future “Icarians”, about 400,000 people, began from France to Texas.19 Królikowski chose to remain in France, where he became virtually the representative plenipotentiary of the emigrant community in America, a sort of ambassador of a utopian community.20 Because of this organization of the Icarian community, French judicial powers prosecuted Cabet and his Polish friend for taking advantage of disabled persons. The trial was held against Cabet in absentia because he had set up home in Texas. Cabet’s companion had an unexpected outcome. Królikowski
defended himself passionately claiming the merits of the Icarian association, its democratic structure and humanitarian purpose. The judges remitted the sentence and in fact exonerated the Polish intellectual from charges, as opposed to Cabet. After the verdict, Królikowski continued for a time as Cabet’s vicar and continued his activities on French soil in favor of the Icarian movement. However the divergences between the two reformers increased. As wrote Bock:

Indeed Królikowski’s approach to social problems is in many respects more akin to libertarian socialism than to the totalitarian communism of Cabet; and after the latter’s return from America a serious disagreement developed between communism and individual liberty.21

Królikowski finally abandoned the Icarian movement although he continued to take an interest in the way the Icarians attempted to build a perfect society on earth. In 1867 he published Do panslawistów. Pogłos z odwiedzin niby-słowańskich w Moskwie w 1867 roku (To panslavists. Eco’s visit of Slavonic in Moscow in 1867) in which he declared himself to be against any kind of pan-slavism.22

After careful thought about the ideas of social justice, the realization of the divine plan on earth and after describing himself as a true apostle of the new order; having spent his intellectual energy and his modest amount of money in an attempt to put into practice his theory, with the support of other social reformers, Królikowski measured himself directly with the question of independence of the Polish nation and its geopolitical role in the context of central and Eastern Europe. He reflected upon the independence of Poland from the point of view of his utopian theory. The opportunity to take an in-depth interest in this national question was offered to him by the declaration of the Bishop of Krakow,23 who, referring to the encyclical Cum primum, in which he reiterated his personal loyalty and that of Polish Catholics towards the temporal authority, namely Russia and the other occupying powers. Królikowski accused the bishop of being in contrast with the spirit of the Gospel and the message of Jesus Christ.

It was this last dispute or quarrel with a church, that he believed, cared neither for the fate of the Polish nation, nor the cause of those who bear the weight of permanent social injustice. Only a new form of society could finally solve the problem of State independence and that of injustice among humans. In 1877 Królikowski moved to New York where he was stricken with paralysis. Under the care of his daughter, he continued as a social apostle as much as he could, until his death which probably occurred in 1881.24

Historia magistra non est

Królikowski’s work as revolutionary thinker and polemicist
evolved around the idea that it is essential to eliminate the duality that exists between the earthly and the heavenly societies. The Christian religion is interpreted by the Polish thinker radically: it is essentially civil religion, or, if you will, political theology. The mystical character of his reflections attests an authentic vocation to the apostolate. A vocation which he realized with consistency and passion throughout rough biographical events. In the book, of which Królikowski is author of the notes, Dziesięć obrazów z wyprawy do Polski (Ten paintings from the expedition to Poland) we can read the following passage: ‘The great day…the old earth and the old heaven will pass away, general…and destroying by fire every old mistake and any old lie […] a new heaven and a new earth where justice lies will show yourself.’

Only a God exists and only one can be the truth by which may establish both the principles of human co-existence and the conditions for the realization of collective happiness. The existence of God implies a metaphysical difference by which to judge human behavior. This difference between true and false accompanies the choice of good or evil. The world is divided in this respect between those who accept and bind their own personal story to Christian truth and those who shun it. Those who, as he wrote in an article published in the journal ‘Zbratnienie’: ‘do not recognize any king, power, lord or master […] and live in dignity and freedom as the children of the Lord. […] And those who live by liars, thieves, profiteers, swindlers and tyrants’. Tertium non datur between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

Królikowski writes in Polska Chrystusowa that for the situation of the world benefit only the obscurantist and the privileged castes, who may not keep up that way if not through lies, injustice, violence, fear, murder that always accompanies the prostration and the misery of the working people everywhere. Get away once and for all from pagan routes in which over the centuries the people have sought in vain their own salvation.

The fake routes, which produce injustice and immoral behavior, coincide with paganism, understood by him as the opposite of what is authentic. No middle way exists between affirmation of truth and paganism, between justice and damage, between light and darkness, between liberation and oppression. No concession to evolutionary hypotheses or ideas of progress and social emancipation in history. The truth exists, and it is necessary to affirm it without temporizing and compromising with the past.

History in Królikowski’s thought is a tragic mistake, an eclipse of the truth. Those that care about the truth and justice must deny the present world and build a new one in which the Reason of God triumphs. One reason, of course, has never appeared in history. We can expect no progress.
Politics between Ideas and Forms. Evolution of Utopian Paradigms

and no real change towards the realization of the ideals of social justice from the natural sequence of historical facts. Only by obeying the prophecy that claims an ardent adherence to the will of God we can “reform” the world and interrupt the necessary course of events. The prophecy is the “dam” that stops the story and its injustices. It can be said that Królikowski was a visionary and social reformer rather than a philosopher or a theorist of a new theodicy. He writes: ‘In the same way that no life can be found in a corpse, much less find a model for the living […] you cannot even find inspiration in the past which has died forever.’

Poland, which in its aspirations for independence refers to a distant past, ends up giving credit to an illusory state of happiness and primitive autonomy which in fact, is realized only a strong distinction between the exploited and the exploiters. A representation of a State’s independence, and in general, of patriotism, connected to the past is considered by Królikowski to be impossible for two reasons, first: it would be based on the history of the graves, the defeats and what is dead forever. Second, in a representation of this type only the privileged class would take advantage. The patriotism based on history plays only the role in propagating the fear and insecurity that reigns in every primitive condition prior to the advent of a new society. The true Polish patriot is one who does not claim a return to the past or that glorifies the national tradition or the national habits and defects, but one who claims truth and justice which is given by God himself, through the Gospel and Christ. A homeland without the kingdom of God and his justice ends up being a land of arrogance in which dominate the selfishness and the contempt of foreigners.

The concept of nation unconnected with deep social reforms in a socialistic sense seemed to author of Polska Chrystusowa nothing more than a false and dangerous illusion. Królikowski does not see any power or earthly political institution able to connect the divine plan and the earthly world; the order of God and man’s order. The correct and unparan meaning of Gospel must rule mankind, without mediation or compromise. The idea of humanity must substitute the idea of the nation. The history and the “false patriotism” from this point of view, are nothing more than a ‘schism against Being’, harmful ideas without affirmation towards the only Truth and the only Order.

Where then can mankind find the instrument for the realization of the Truth? Referring to Luke the Evangelist, Królikowski writes: ‘The church of Christ and the kingdom of God is not here or anywhere else, but in ourselves’. In the human spirit lives the truth, accessible to everyone. The truth lies not in the hypothetical “I”, but in man as a subject of community capable of Christian love.
As opposed to those who considered science the high road for the realization of happiness for all mankind, this Polish thinker states: ‘Science without virtue is like a double-edged sword in the hands of a man possessed. Science and skills, not consecrated to God […] become the instrument of vanity, pride and lust of Satan’.32 Only through a love of neighbor every man is able to feel and recognize the voice of conscience.

**Anticlericalism and theology of political order**

The ‘organ of pure truth is the conscience’.33 The church willed by God is the community. A community that has as its reason for existence not the interests and selfishness of individuals, but religious truth. Religious truth absorbs every aspect of individual and collective life. True wisdom is identified with virtue, true science with morals. Life becomes “modlitwe” (prayer); it is, according to the etymology of the Polish term, a way to affirm a model, a practice.34 The man is “praying” when he tends to the Absolute and when he lives only in terms of God.

Every man finds his identity in the community, in the projection of his conscience and his feelings in a collective entity of which he is part. Which social system is the most suitable with respect to the realization of the divine plan? Which organization of economy and laws allows man to expand his most authentic feelings? Królikowski has no doubts: socialism is essentially the true Christianity which should be practiced in an effort to realize the kingdom of God and justice on earth.35 The last wall that separated the radicalism of the Polish thinker from the total and irremediable distancing from the traditional church is broken. For him the church has no right to exist as an institution mediating between man and his fellow man, and between heaven and earth. Each mediation is a fake, useless tinsel good at hiding the interests of the caste of chaplains, priests, pastors, bishops, and so it goes.36 The only true church is the church of the people, of a people who do not need dogmas, but, if anything, an organization of production of resources that do not distract from the mission of loving. The church is not an institution, but a being of the evangelical spirit in the consciences and then consequently in the actions of each.

History and culture are condemned. Christ is only a witness, albeit large, of the message of God. The reason that the Good has not triumphed is the lack of a true prophet able to support the assertion of the Kingdom of God on earth and of making himself a manifestation of change. All, in the thought of Królikowski, leads to a “romantic” vision of politics. A utopian vision of which he is, you might say, the center. A social order as a projection of good feelings. A political system in which each one is called to adhere
Politics between Ideas and Forms. Evolution of Utopian Paradigms

to the common good as, in a way similar to Rousseau, an outcome of feeling.

The utopia of Królikowski is realized in the new socialist church, an alternative to the traditional, where there are no priests and chaplains and ‘all govern everything’. A church where there is no private property or even traditional family. In the fictional society of Królikowski, called ‘Zjednoczenie’ (Unification) every brother joins evangelically with ten other brothers [...] that form a family. Ten families form a procession; ten parades form an assembly; ten meetings a community; ten community training; ten formations a parish; ten parishes a nation; ten nations a tribe, ten tribes a general power.

Although in this organization every family is free to profess their faith in the way they like, there is no social space for modern individual rights, including of course property, from which originates, according to the author of Polska Chrystusowa, only selfishness and unhappiness.

The general power uses to perform its tasks of coordination of the community the administration and some “agents” grouped in the “public service” which are divided into two sub-groups: the ‘spiritual service’ and ‘exemplary service’. The first subgroup has to answer to questions regarding the apostolate and spiritual education. The second group is to look after the security and the economy, which, beyond the love between brothers, are obviously fundamental functions of the new society. The agents for the various offices are chosen among the families on a rotational basis. While there are security administration problems, in this new society ‘codes because they are contrary to the letter of the Gospel’ do not exist. Every man was obligated to take a part in defense of this new society until ‘The King of God in the pagan world will be realized’. The two highest officials of Królikowski’s utopian society had to be servus servorum and for their exercise did not receive any material benefit. Królikowski states ‘In Zjednoczenie everyone is apostle, worker and soldier’ and there are no differences or hierarchies between man and women.

The socialist utopia of Królikowski has the task of translating into reality that the only law is the law written in everyone’s heart by the Lord. As Kuligowski wrote, the vision of Królikowski ‘was in some sense the culmination of efforts of the first generation of Polish Socialists, whose dominant paradigm was among other things evangelical fellowship coupled with the rejection of the institutional Church’. Socialism, although declined by the Polish thinker characteristically, was for Królikowski’s generation the new “ideal tool” or a conceptual discovery to reform the Christian doctrine.

Królikowski never had a way to make, even if only on a small scale, the communist society he had described. The desire to assert his
prophecy which marked his whole life, classifies him as a thinker who occupies a rightful place in the pantheon of Polish thinkers among nineteenth century utopians. His political heresy, both towards utopian socialists and essentially towards the “Messianists” of Polish independence, could be understood as a rejection to the Reason of the moderns based on the feeling and the reasons of the heart. The Reason of moderns was abandoned by Królikowski in favour of a civil religion, an abstract political and reformist theology that would put an end to the offenses committed by history to people and realized an order that men had never seen.

Notes

3 Ibidem.
5 The synthesis between some principles of the Christian religion and the “messianic thought” is a recurring theme in the history political ideas of the nineteenth century in Poland. See: A. Walicki, *Mesjanizm Adama Mickiewicza w perspektywie porównawczej*, IBL, Warsaw, 2006.
11 Ibid., p. 212.
15 Ibid., p. 136.
Politics between Ideas and Forms. Evolution of Utopian Paradigms

ed. by A. Sikora, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw, 1980, p. X.
17 A. Sikora, Emigracyjny socjalizm utopijny, cit., p. 132.
18 Ibid., p. 137.
19 Ibidem.
21 Ibid., p. 161.
23 Id., Emigracyjny socjalizm utopijny, cit., p. 135.
24 Ibidem.
28 Id., “Polska Chrystusowa”, cit., p. 236, quoted in A. Sikora, Krolikowski, czyli szaleństwa konsekwencji, cit., p. 31.
30 A. Sikora, Emigracyjny socjalizm utopijny, cit., p. 139.
32 Id., “Polska Chrystusowa”, cit., p. 254, quoted in A. Sikora, Krolikowski, czyli szaleństwa konsekwencji, cit., p. 57.
34 A. Sikora, Emigracyjny socjalizm utopijny, cit., p. 140.
35 Ibid., p. 141.
37 J. Turowski, Utopia społeczna Ludwika Królikowskiego 1799-1878, cit., pp. 212-16.
38 L. Królikowski, “Polska Chrystusowa”, cit., p. 331, quoted in A. Sikora, Krolikowski, czyli szaleństwa konsekwencji, cit., p. 68.
39 Id., Wizje społecznego świata. Pisma wybrane, ed. by A. Sikora, cit., p. 57.
40 Ibid., p. 340.
41 Ibid., p. 362.
42 P. Kuligowski, Królestwo Boże na ziemi. Wokół sporu Ludwika Królikowskiego i Jana Czyńskiego, cit., p. 84.
43 L. Królikowski, Wizje społecznego świata. Pisma wybrane, ed. by A. Sikora, cit., p. 54.
Bibliography


CHODŻKO M., Dziesięć obrazów z wyprawy do Polski, Malde i Renou, Paris, 1841.


IDEM, Do panславistów. Pogłos z odwiedzin niphy-slówiańskich w Moskwie, Drukarnia J. Kossobudzkiego, Zurich, 1874.


