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Marian Zdziechowski's work *On Cruelty* (1928–1938). Between past and present

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Abstract

The following article begins with my recollection of the only academic conference on Zdziechowski that was organised still under the communist regime in the autumn of 1984 at the Jagiellonian University and ends with a description of the discussion on the genesis and power of evil, with the participation of Czesław Miłosz and Leszek Kołakowski, which was triggered in Poland immediately after the publication of the last edition of *On Cruelty* in 1993. On Cruelty was first published in 1928 in the journal *Przegląd Współczesny* [Contemporary Review] in Krakow, a second time in 1938 in the volume of articles *In the Face of the End*, Krakow 1938, and a third – and so far last – time also in Krakow in 1993. *On Cruelty*, published three times but so far only in Polish, has never been thoroughly analysed or even discussed, which is why this article focuses on discussing it and related questions about the origins and nature of evil, mainly in Europe and Asia, from the earliest times to the present. Zdziechowski was particularly outraged when the cruelty he condemned was justified by religion, especially Christianity (Catholic and Protestant). From these condemnations, he described the activities of the Inquisition, the witch trials, cruelty to animals, and – in the introduction – the "psychology of cruelty." At the same time, however, he meticulously listed the names of those political and spiritual leaders in Europe and Asia, theologians and thinkers, who, over many centuries, up to the present day, have resolutely spoken out against evil, including cruelty, within and outside the Church. A separate and important issue is Zdziechowski's attitude to Tsarist Russia and Bolshevism, as outlined in his work On Cruelty. On the one hand, he pointed out that at least two rulers of Russia before 1917 – Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great – had made major contributions to the history of cruelty in Europe and Asia. But Bolshevism, which Zdziechowski condemned in the strongest terms, was in his eyes not a continuation of pre-1917 Russian despotism, but emanated from the depths of Asia.

Keywords Marian Zdziechowski · Psychology of cruelty · Asian roots of cruelty · Cruelty in antiquity and in Greek and Roman regimes · Cruelty in Catholic and

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Introduction – a recollection of a forgotten academic conference on Marian Zdziechowski at the Jagiellonian University in the autumn of 1984

The only academic conference on Marian Zdziechowski (1861–1938) in communist Poland was held at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków from the 19th to the 21st of November 1984 and bore the very general title "Marian Zdziechowski (1861–1938)." This very vague title was obviously the result of a desire to lull the vigilance of the communist censors of the time, who were reluctant to allow any information about the vast anti-communist part of Zdziechowski's philosophical and journalistic output to enter the public awareness. Also, it was no coincidence since the first two Polish post-war monographs on Zdziechowski, published a year or two before the Kraków conference, could not honestly discuss the fundamental problem of "Zdziechowski on Bolshevism" either (Burzacka 1982; Skoczyński 1983).

Participants in this conference of almost forty years ago came exclusively from Poland, but, importantly, from a number of major national academic centres (Kraków, Warszawa, Wrocław). They tackled the problem of Zdziechowski's attitude to more or less specific issues, such as his understanding of the thought of Alexander Herzen, Vladimir Solovyov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Stanisław Brzozowski, Czech literature, and South Slavic literature, just to name a few. The panel also included more or less general themes such as historiosophy and eschatology in Zdziechowski's thought in the context of his "metaphysics of catastrophe," his highly approving attitude to Polish–Ukrainian cooperation, or his understanding of the person and deeds of Napoleon III in the context of Karl Marx's well-known works on the French emperor (Zaczyński 1986, pp. 64–74; Białokozowicz 1999, pp. 238, 242). One of the participants at that 1984 symposium, Stanisław Stomma (1908–2005), who served as Marian Zdziechowski's personal secretary in Vilnius between 1933 and 1936, expressed his joy in his speech in the following way:

> I must confess that I have watched the program of the current session with real emotion. As many as three days devoted to the subject of Marian Zdziechowski. So many detailed issues and such a large list of speakers. What is new is the fact that so many people have taken an interest in Marian Zdziechowski's work, that they are studying it. Until, say, fifteen years ago, I was not aware that anyone from the young Polish generation, i.e. the post-war generation, had taken up Zdziechowski. I had every reason to believe that the name was unknown, forgotten. And here we are, with so many young names on the conference program. What a big change. (Zaczyński 1986, p. 34)

However, I myself, as one of the then-young participants in that memorable conference, held in the presence of a huge audience in the auditorium of Collegium Novum at the Jagiellonian University, remembered something else from Stanisław Stomma's presence. The former secretary of Marian Zdziechowski in Vilnius, who

was almost half a century older than me, approached me after my lecture with a clear accusation, formulated in more or less these words: "Since the Jagiellonian University allows you to organize a conference about the writer and thinker who is basically banned in communist Poland, you really should not be delivering tirades against the Soviet Union from the stand of the university auditorium."

The point is that in my speech – dedicated to Zdziechowski's understanding of the apocalyptic thought of the great Russian writer and philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) – I quoted a very incisive passage from Zdziechowski, who believed that Russian Bolshevism (which he condemned of course), was an ominous realisation of the principle of Asian "Pan-Mongolism," which Solovyov warned against:

> The whole of Asia is in a state of revolt [...], and Red Russia is leading the dance [...]. In a word, Pan-Asia, with Soviet Moscow at its head, is not an illusion, it is an almost accomplished fact, this Genghis Khan rushes into Europe. It matters less who will lead the march: some Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky or someone else. The vision, the last word of Solovyov's creative and prophetic thought, the last "shouting," as he expressed himself, indication and warning is becoming a reality in our times. (Zdziechowski 1934, p. 156; cf. Przebinda 1993, p. 75)

Zdziechowski's warning, formulated – following Solovyov's *A Short Story of the Anti-Christ* (1899–1900) – in a volume of essays under the telling title *From St Petersburg to Leningrad* (*Od Petersburga do Leningrada*, 1934), resounded, as we can see, still very ominously and dangerously in the auditorium of Jagiellonian University in November 1984. Of course, none of the participants at that conference, which took place while Konstantin Chernenko (1911–1985) was still in power in the USSR, could have imagined in their wildest dreams that less than a year later Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–2022) would appear on the scene and that the problems of communism, about which Marian Zdziechowski had spoken so vividly before the Second World War, would soon become the subject of public discussion in the Soviet Union itself, unhindered by censorship.

In the Soviet Union, during the first years of Gorbachev's perestroika (1985–1988), political censorship with regard to works and writers hitherto banned was very clearly weakened. Today, however, hardly anyone remembers that the situation in the communist People's Republic of Poland in the period 1985–1988 was much worse in this respect than in the Soviet Union. This was, let us admit it, a very bizarre period in the history of Eastern Europe, in which the surprising course of events in the USSR far surpassed the level of the mentality of the political rulers and political censors in communist Poland at the time. When I myself returned from Paris in February 1987 with a suitcase of Russian and Polish books banned in the People's Republic of Poland – including Zdziechowski's work *The Phantom of the Future* (*Widmo przyszłości*), published in Switzerland in 1983 (the first edition had appeared posthumously in Vilnius in 1939) – the Customs Office at Warsaw's "Okęcie" airport confiscated all this book baggage, accusing all these publications of being both "anti-Soviet and anti-Polish." When, after a year and a half, in September 1988, I succeeded in winning a case against the Main Customs Office before the Supreme Administrative Court, the Court – ordering the Office to return to me all publications without exception –

stressed that the Main Customs Office had not taken into account the great political changes that had taken place in the USSR during Gorbachev's perestroika (Przebinda 1988, p. 4).

However, before similar fundamental changes took place in the People's Republic of Poland, censorship still managed to forbid the publication of the book of materials from the aforementioned Kraków conference on Zdziechowski in 1984, so that the authors often decided to publish their texts in so-called "secondary circulation," i.e., illegally, beyond the reach of the censors (Mitzner 1986; Raźny 1986; Prokop 1985). Others, like myself, had to wait eleven years for an official university publication (Przebinda 1993). This, however, was no longer due solely to the obstacles posed by censorship, but, especially after 1989, to the fact that interest in Zdziechowski had broadened to such an extent that the readers then wished above all to interact with his historiosophic works, especially those that treated communism – which was literally dying before our eyes – in a catastrophic and apocalyptic spirit.[1]

On Cruelty as a reaction to *My Attitude to the Church* by Baudouin de Courtenay

Zdziechowski's booklet, *On Cruelty* was originally published in 1928 in the form of a three-part article in the Kraków social and literary monthly *Przegląd Współczesny* (Zdziechowski 1928), and ten years later in the volume of articles *In the Face of the End* (*W obliczu końca*, Kraków 1938). 1928 also saw the publication of a booklet edition of this essay (Zdziechowski 1928a), while the first post-war edition of *On Cruelty* appeared fifty-five years later, in a Poland liberated from Communism (Zdziechowski 1993).

It is interesting to note that the author of the short introduction to the 1993 publication was still the same Stanisław Stomma, who emphasised at the beginning that the piece *On Cruelty* was written in a very short time, under the influence of a "literary eruption" (Stomma 1993, pp. 5–6). This eruption was triggered by the fact of the apostasy from the Catholic Church of an eminent Polish linguist, a highly regarded professor at the University of Warszawa Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929).

Jan Baudouin de Courtenay sent Marian Zdziechowski his book published in 1927, entitled *My Attitude to the Church* (*Mój stosunek do Kościoła*), where – two years before his death – he described (in the context of religion and the Church) a huge part of his long life, spent successively in Radzymin and Warsaw under Russian rule, Prague, then belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Jena, Berlin and Leipzig in the Kingdom of Prussia, Kazan and Dorpat, then in the Russian Empire (now Tartu in Estonia), Kraków under Austrian rule, St Petersburg, Lublin and finally Warsaw in Poland, independent after 1918. Baudouin de Courtenay recalled there that he had received a traditional Catholic upbringing at home – thanks to his deeply religious mother (Baudouin de Courtenay 1927, p. 14), and that he made his first confession on 8 September 1855, "on the day of the taking of Sevastopol by the allies" (Baudouin

[1] In 2008, a second conference on Zdziechowski was held at the Jagiellonian University, this time on the 70th anniversary of his death (Wołodźko 2008).

de Courtenay 1927, p. 16), that is France and England in agreement with Turkey during the Crimean War against Russia. Surprisingly, his last confession in life took place just six years later, in 1861, because it was then that his severe religious doubts started to emerge, the causes of which Baudouin de Courtenay discusses in the book sent to Zdziechowski as follows:

> It was already at the Preparatory School for university (1861–1862) that my serious religious doubts began. Gradually, I drifted further and further away. This was influenced firstly by observing the behaviour of the clergy, who were primarily concerned with power and domination, exploitation and profiteering, and secondly by the religious tradition itself, imposed on believers, which was contrary to reason and a sense of justice.
> After graduating from the university, at the age of 21, I no longer believed not only in papal "infallibility" and in the "Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary," not only in the immortality of the soul, but even in a religious God; I had become, as they say, an "atheist" or "godless," and I have not ceased to be so. (Baudouin de Courtenay 1927, pp. 21–22)

Thus, the author of *My Attitude to the Church* described his break with religion as first resulting from a growing sense of alienation from the Polish Catholic Church, also in the face of its militant anti-Semitism, and ultimately leading to his rejection of the idea of any God. That is why he wrote (in the spirit of Ludwig Feuerbach, though without quoting him) that for him "God is completely unnecessary," that "the God or gods hitherto could be nothing other than human beings, human beings enlarged and extended to enormous proportions, but always only human beings." Convinced that "the anthropomorphism inherent in human thought endows God with body and soul, in the likeness of man and man alone," Baudouin de Courtenay concluded that "accepting God as a scientific hypothesis does not advance our true knowledge of the universe any further" and he added – which must have particularly moved Zdziechowski – that "emotionally he does not need God either," given the presence of the enormous power of evil in today's world:

> I see so much evil in the world, so much injustice, so many atrocities, that I cannot put the responsibility for all these abominations on a just, but also a benevolent and merciful Father. To blame the Creator and Providence for the sins committed by the human beast is very convenient, but at the same time thoughtless and immoral. [. . .] To pray to such an incomprehensible being, infinite in all directions, to treat it as familiar, to suppose that this something, which fills and embraces the whole world, is nowhere and never, i.e. in space and time, neither beginning nor end, that this something can be interested in the miserable human worm on the globe, that it can become like him, is also a symptom of a mad, monstrous, truly human megalomania. (Baudouin de Courtenay 1927, pp. 33–34)

The book *My Attitude to the Church* is full of descriptions of specific evils committed by humans on those weaker than them, and the author quotes, for example, a shocking passage from the novel *The Story of Sin* [Dzieje grzechu, 1908] by Stefan Żeromski, about a mother who drowned her newborn child in a toilet. It is significant

that Baudouin de Courtenay refrains from making accusations against this unfortunate mother acting in an outburst of passion, focusing instead on the "theological" and intrinsically inhuman consequence of this act, namely the fact that the Catholic Church condemns such unbaptised children "to eternal torment," that is, to "eternal damnation":

> Infants who die without baptism are condemned to eternal damnation on a par with "pagans" and all non-Catholics. Is this consistent with the justice inherent in a Creator made in the image and likeness of man? This is the kind of criminal justice that the wretched and filthy beast of man commands his benevolent Father to administer. (Baudouin de Courtenay 1927, p. 41)

As for Zdziechowski, in his work *On Cruelty* – written, as already mentioned, in a burst of inspiration after reading the book *My Attitude to the Church* sent to him by the author – he referred directly to Baudouin de Courtenay only twice but at very important moments. The first time was when he recalled the Polish linguist's description of the horrific vivisection of a dog performed by its owner, the renowned Russian physiologist and pathologist, Professor Viktor Pashutin (1845–1901). Baudouin de Courtenay writes here, with bitter irony, that Pashutin, the Rector of the Imperial Medical and Surgical Academy in St Petersburg, had told him in detail how – "wishing to investigate experimentally the soul of a dog" – he subjected it to the most horrible torments for this purpose:

> So he bought a dog and tamed it; the dog clung to him and licked his hands. Then Pashutin poured boiling water over the dog. The dog's skin came off, but the dog licked at its tormentor's hands. Then Pashutin doused the dog with boiling water a second time. Imagine the agony of the dog [. . .]! And yet the dog continued to lick the priest of science's hand. Once again the dog was doused with boiling water, but this time it could not stand it any longer and died. As long as it lived, however, it licked its master's hand. It was "faithful as a dog till death." (Baudouin de Courtenay 1927, pp. 42–43)

Zdziechowski, who, like Baudouin de Courtenay, was an uncompromising opponent of animal vivisection, quotes this passage from *My Attitude to the Church* in the chapter "Man and Animal" of his book *On Cruelty* (Zdziechowski 1938, pp. 349–350). However, both Polish thinkers saw this problem of man's relationship to animals in a much wider, metaphysical context, even relating to belief or disbelief in the existence of a Creator. While Baudouin de Courtenay, like Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, "returned the ticket" to God and the Church for the suffering of both children and "our lesser brothers," i.e., animals, Zdziechowski – in solidarity with Baudouin de Courtenay in this ethical despair – presented his metaphysical position in a completely different way:

> In a word, there is too much cruelty, abomination, and evil in the world to be able, according to the author, to blame all this abomination on God, on God's providence; so "God is quite unnecessary," neither the mind nor the heart needs him. The author came to this conviction when he was young, 60 years ago; today, at the end of his life, he has asked to be removed from the list of followers

> of the Catholic Church. The authorities granted his request and he received an identity card without revealing his religion.
> Professor Baudouin de Courtenay was kind enough to send me his thesis. I thanked him and replied that I agreed with much of what it said, but that I had come to a different conclusion, dictated by Galileo's "e pur si muove." Although my "e pur si muove" is not based on science but on the needs of the heart, it is nevertheless strong. Reflecting on the question of religion has always led me, and continues to lead me, to the conclusion that faith is an attack on reason; that what is happening in the world testifies too loudly, and cries out against God. Stronger than all this, however, is the longing for an eternal, absolute beauty, whose radiance is our consolation and encouragement in life; desire for eternal things, desire of God, in whom our longing finds an outlet, becomes the foundation of faith. Religion, on the other hand, cannot be conceived without a religious community, without the Church, and the Church without common prayer and worship. (Zdziechowski 1938, pp. 350–351)

In *On Cruelty*, Zdziechowski does not enter into a fundamental discussion with Baudouin de Courtenay on the question of the existence or non-existence of God, pointing out that this is already "a field of theology" and at the same time recommending to readers interested in this fundamental question his most important work, *Pessimism, Romanticism and the Foundations of Christianity* (*Pesymizm, romantyzm i podstawy chrześcijaństwa*), published at the beginning of the First World War (1915). In this pre-war work, Zdziechowski adopted the principle of the Swiss, French-writing thinker Charles Secrétan (1815–1895) that "the world is irrational" and "God is a miracle" (Zdziechowski 1915, vol. I, motto in French on the title page). Now, in *On Cruelty*, first published in 1928, he recalls in this context, in Latin, the words of the Psalmist, "Quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Domini" ("When shall I come and appear before God"), and concludes the essay with a single sentence: "In this cry of the Psalmist are summed up the anxieties of a soul tormented by mortality. Before His face, we shall understand the essence hidden in the absurdity of being" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 351).[2]

Cruelty in Asia and Europe – from ancient times through the middle ages to modern times

The essay *On Cruelty* begins with a self-quote by Zdziechowski, from his work *Pessimism, Romanticism and the Foundations of Christianity*, already mentioned here, referring to Arthur Schopenhauer's reflection on cruelty: "If someone," I said years ago in my dissection of Schopenhauer's philosophy, "wrote a history of cruelty, that is, a history of the abominations of man, and if this abomination was able to be presented in all its nakedness, would not such a book evoke in many an impression

[2]This reference, after the Vulgate, to the Psalmist in full reads thus: "Sitivit anima mea ad Deum fortem, vivum; quando veniam, et apparebo ante faciem Dei?" which in the King James Bible is in turn translated as follows: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalms 42:2).

of horror, fright, disgust bordering on madness?" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 298. Cf. Zdziechowski 1992, vol. 1, p. 187). Zdziechowski rejected the "not profound optimism" of Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), who described the world as "the best of all possible worlds" (*le meilleur des mondes possibles*) (Zdziechowski 1992, vol. 1, p. 187), and, giving an outline of the power of cruelty in human history, he drew on the contemporary work of René Guyon *The Cruelty* (*La Cruauté*, Paris 1927), and Franz Helbing's massive four-volume work *History of torture in criminal proceedings of all times and peoples* (*Die Tortur, Geschichte der Folter im Kriminalverfahren aller Zeiten und Völker*, Berlin 1926).

Zdziechowski's reflections on the presence of "torture" in "cruelty" are thought provoking, both in historical and contemporary terms. The Polish thinker derives "torture," following Helbing and Guyon's considerations, from Asia – especially from Assyria, Egypt and India, and proves, exemplifying it with terrible examples, that "the Indians showed in torturing the defenceless the same subtlety, which characterizes them in the field of metaphysical questions and in grammatical studies." At the same time, Zdziechowski emphasises that "against the background of this cruelty, the teaching of the Buddha, full of infinite compassion for all that lives and suffers, appears in a new light" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 302). This "new light" in which Zdziechowski proposed to evaluate Buddhism in an ethical sense was, of course, the Polish thinker's unchanging admiration and respect for the Buddha's life teachings, already expressed many times before in Zdziechowski's other works, in particular, *Pessimism, Romanticism and the Foundations of Christianity*:

> Buddhism, preoccupied with the enormity of universal suffering and embracing the whole of humanity with the warmth of pity, still had this superiority in common with Brahmanism in that it extended its pity to all that lives and suffers, to the whole animal world, from which Judaism and Christianity, by raping nature, had torn Europe away. (Zdziechowski 1992, vol. 1, p. 191)

Referring briefly but emphatically to Judaism, Zdziechowski insists that while cruelty was certainly present in that religion ("the Mosaic law was harsh: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, blood for blood," "the inhabitants of conquered towns and settlements, even Jewish towns, were put to death if they denied Jehovah and served foreign gods"), we find no "traces of torture" there. Also, in the next paragraph, dedicated to this issue, Zdziechowski moves, only seemingly unexpectedly, from the time of Moses and his successors to the years of Alexander II's reign in Tsarist Russia (1855–1881). Therefore, Zdziechowski writes, in Judaism "criminals sentenced to death were stoned or hanged, for lesser offences they were whipped," but "not more than forty lashes," because "the lawmakers of Israel did not imagine that the human body could withstand even a thousand blows with a club," and he concludes with bitterness not only as a Christian but also as a Polish patriot: "But the Russian tsars knew this, and rushing *skwoź stroj*[3] guilty soldiers or insurgent Poles, covered with

[3] *Skwoz' stroj* (Russian) – "drive through the ranks." The punishment of a soldier of the tsarist army, when the soldiers, lined up in two rows, beat with sticks, spitzruten, etc., the one walking between these rows. Such inhuman punishments were also applied by the tsarist authorities to detainees in penal colonies as late as the time of Nicholas II (1825–1855), as described in *The House of the Dead* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, who was imprisoned in those days after 1848: "Five hundred, one thousand, and even one thousand five hundred

sticks or picks until the flesh had turned into one big bloody wound, was a common punishment that was only abolished by Alexander II" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 303).

Based on the works of Helbing and Guyon mentioned above, but also on his own knowledge in this field, Zdziechowski does not limit the history and practice of torture to Asia, but seriously states that this inhuman practice migrated from Asia to Europe and that the "disciples proved to be worthy masters." It is significant that, probably due to a lack of sources, he did not quote real facts from ancient Greek history, but referred to certain Greek myths, apparently treating them as derivatives of cruel reality:

> Prometheus chained to a rock, Martius, whose skin Apollo tears off, "Dejanira's burning shirt," the bed of Procrustes, the king [of Lapiths – G. P.] named Ixion, whom Zeus, king of gods and men, cast into hell and condemned to the eternal torment of entanglement in the wheel because he desired his wife Hera, the shepherd Melanthias, whom the wise and experienced Odysseus cut off his nose and ears, then cut off his arms and legs. (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 303)

Such mythological references were not the result of Zdziechowski's desire to impress upon the reader the cruelty of the gods and men of ancient Greece but were a prelude to the final statement that human culture and aesthetic education alone are not a sufficient basis for protecting people from concrete, historical evil. In this context, the author of *On Cruelty* writes that, contrary to the dreams of the German poet and thinker Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), who called for religion to be replaced by human aesthetic education, "a sense of beauty, unfortunately, does not offer ultimate protection against depravity" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 303).

It was not only the culture of ancient Greece that failed to confront evil effectively, so did the civilization of ancient Rome, which, like that of Greece, was based on slavery. A slave was a thing, not a person, and could be sadistically tortured and mercilessly killed without facing any punishment. In this respect, as Zdziechowski writes, Rome even surpassed Greece. He refers to the testimony of antic poet Martialis, who described how, in one of Rome's popular spectacles, a real man was nailed to an equally real cross, "wild animals tore his body apart and the spectators enjoyed the sight of the pieces falling from the body": "To ease his conscience, Martialis adds that this condemned man must have committed some serious crime, perhaps he was a patricide or an arsonist" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 304).[4]

strokes with the stick are administered at once. But if it is two or three thousand the punishment is divided into two or three doses." In the intervals between "doses," the unfortunate prisoner would be brought to a "fit state" in the prison infirmary, but would usually still die at the next execution. Dostoyevsky described the case of the captive Orloff, one of many who did not survive the second half of several thousand bestial blows (Dostoïeffsky 1911, pp. 226–227. Cf. Dostoyevskiy 2015, pp. 169–170).

[4]Zdziechowski quotes this drastic description from Helbing, while we can now state – thanks to the recent Polish translation of Martialis' *Epigrams* – that this Roman poet, writing in the second half of the second century AD, was describing the case of the real Laureolus, nailed to the cross and eaten alive by a Caledonian bear. By comparing the condemned man to Prometheus chained to a rock in the Caucasus, the Roman poet emphasised the "reality of this cross" (*non falsa pendens in cruce*). According to the Polish authors of the commentary – and this remark is completely in line with Zdziechowski's thesis, perhaps even unknown to them – Martialis treated this reality of the cross with a kind of Roman pride: "One would be free to see in this reference a sense of peculiar pride (or peculiarly understood admiration) that what the Greek myth

Zdziechowski is convinced that torture only appeared in the West with the transfer of Roman law to Western Europe – first by the pagan Ostrogoths, Visigoths and Franks, and later by the Christian German emperors, who introduced the Roman law into their country. The self-conception of the Christian German rulers as "legitimate successors of the Caesars" was, in Zdziechowski's view, an obvious fiction, but at the same time, he bitterly emphasised that these German emperors had followed in the footsteps of the Roman Caesars and that torture had therefore become "an inseparable part of the criminal process' in the West" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 304).

Cruelty in Catholic and Protestant Europe

It must be stressed that the existence of close links between torture and historical Christianity was the greatest possible tragedy for the Polish thinker. Zdziechowski expressed this in the two central chapters of his book – *On The Inquisition* and *The Trials of Witches*. That is why, at the very beginning, he emphasises that the Inquisition had not come into being until the thirteenth century, and that before that time a different spirit and different views prevailed in the Church: "It was understood that with the coming of the Savior, the severity of the Mosaic law, which punished those who deviated from God with cruel death, ceased to apply. This idea was justified by Origen in his treatise *Contra Celsum*" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 305).

At the same time, Zdziechowski meticulously lists the names of many famous churchmen, mainly from the West, but also from the East, who, following in the footsteps of Lactantius from the third century after Christ, asked: "What do truth and violence, justice and cruelty have in common? If you defend religion with martyrdom and blood, you do not defend it, you only slander it." In Zdziechowski's reflections, this group of Christians, faithful to the Gospel, included St Cyprian (third century), who preached that heretics should only be punished with the "spiritual sword," i.e. exclusion from the Church, St Hilary and St Ambrose in the West (both fourth century), and St John Chrysostom in Byzantium (fourth and early fifth century). At the same time, after the conversion of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine to Christianity, his successors – no longer acting as persecutors of Christians but as their protectors – began to use the real sword, not a spiritual one, against the "enemies of the Church" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 305). Citing the work of the Catholic priest Elphège Vacandard *Inquisition* (*L'Inquisition*, Paris 1912), Zdziechowski emphasises that from the sixth to the eleventh century religious persecution is hardly heard of, and Pope Nicholas I the Great (c. 858–867) in a letter to the Bulgarians strongly condemned torture as "a thing that neither divine nor human law can permit" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 306). However, from the eleventh century onwards, when the otherwise very dangerous Catharism (actually a new form of the earlier dualistic Manichaean heresy) began to spread, heretics were burned at the stake in many places, even though there were no Inquisition tribunals yet. Such tribunals, as Zdziechowski points out, were officially established under Pope Gregory IX (1227–1241).[5]

only tells has been made real here: The Romans thus prove to be better than the Greeks, they always go one step further, they transcend the conventionality of Greek stagings" (Marcjalis 2015, pp. 87–88).

[5]The Inquisition was officially established in 1231, and the last execution – which Zdziechowski does not mention – took place almost 600 years later in Spain, in Valencia, where the schoolteacher Cayetano

Following Vacandard, Zdziechowski is indignant at the approving attitude of St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) towards the death penalty for heretics, but he was particularly outraged by the Inquisition's reference to perverse parables from the Gospels, such as that of the vine that, having withered, was thrown into the fire (John 15:6). Thus, the Saviour was treated as the first grand inquisitor, but this was not the end of the process of searching for "heavenly ancestors" to justify the bloody trials of heretics with biblical stories:

> But wouldn't it be better to go even further and make the Lord God the first inquisitor? This was done by Don Luis de Paramo,[6] who, in his treatise on the progress and usefulness of the "holy" Inquisition, proved that the condemnation of Adam and Eve to expulsion from Paradise followed a strictly inquisitorial procedure. For God did not summon the serpent and did not allow the guilty to confer with the wily tempter. (Zdziechowski 1938, pp. 306–308)

It is therefore not surprising – given all that Zdziechowski quotes from Vacandard above – that the inquisitors, observing the tortured, recited the Psalm *Miserere*, and that the number of psalms recited determined, in their eyes, the degree of torture (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 311). For the author of *On Cruelty*, however, such "blasphemy" was identical with "satanism," impossible to explain in human terms, but testifying to the power of the Darkness: "I cannot explain this perversion of religion in human, earthly terms. I explain it metaphysically – by the power of Darkness storming the temples of Christianity and by the possession of those who succumbed to that power and led the ecclesiastical community in its name" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 313).

Finally, Zdziechowski states emphatically that religious persecution was not the specialty of the Catholics alone, for the Protestants did the same thing after them, but the burning of Servetus by Calvin in Geneva (1553) could not be the slightest excuse for Thomas Torquemada, the great inquisitor in Spain at the end of the fifteenth century (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 312).

The section *The Trials of Witches* is the longest in *On Cruelty* and would certainly merit a separate discussion, as Zdziechowski immediately points out that in the history of trials of "witches and sorcerers," the vast majority of those tortured were women, ten for every man (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 313). It all started again "in the terrible thirteenth century," when the infamous Pope Alexander IV promulgated a bull in 1257 authorizing inquisitors to interfere in the trials of "witches." Among similar papal documents, Zdziechowski also mentions the 1484 Bull of Innocent VIII, which ordered the extermination of "people of both sexes who forget the salvation of their souls," "who have sexual relations with devils" and "who harm people by bringing

Rippol (b. 1778) was garroted (strangled with an iron collar) in 1826 "for supposedly teaching Deist ideas" (Law 2011, p. 23). The first Pope to ask forgiveness on behalf of the Catholic Church for the Inquisitions was John Paul II (1978–2005). A contemporary researcher of this Pope's biography wrote in the very first sentence of his monograph: "Paul II had a passion for apologies; he said sorry to Jews, Galileo, women, the victims of the Inquisition, Muslims slaughtered by the Crusaders and almost everyone else who has suffered at the hands of the Catholic Church in its long and not always glorious history" (Stourton 2006, p. 1).

[6]Luis de Páramo (1545–1608) was a priest and inquisitor from Toledo.

diseases and crop failures upon them." To "eradicate the plague," the Pope established the Inquisition in Germany and appointed two theology professors, Heinrich Institor and Jacob Sprenger, to head it. Both of them, writes Zdziechowski, "set to work with the German method," beginning with the writing of the voluminous *Malleus malaficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*): "It was considered a *liber sanctissimus* [holy book – G. P.]; according to this manual, the judges were henceforth able to satisfy their sadistic urges for almost three centuries" (Zdziechowski, pp. 317–319). During the Thirty Years' War, 1618–1648, the Catholic Bishop of Würzburg ordered that the burning of the condemned should take place every Tuesday and Thursday and that no fewer than 15 people should be burned each time. Among the victims were priests, children, two sons, the daughter and wife of the senator of Stolzeburg and – as Zdziechowski, 300 years later, particularly emphasises – "the most beautiful girl in Würzburg, Gobel Babelin," burnt in 1631 at the age of nineteen. King James I (1567–1625), son of Mary Stuart, the learned and devout Catholic theologian on the throne, was also a fanatical persecutor of sorcerers and witches (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 322).

However, it was not only the popes and the Catholic clergy, or the Catholic kings who were directly or indirectly involved in the execution of innocent people, but also the Protestants, led by the aforementioned Calvin, whom Zdziechowski even calls "Ivan the Terrible of the Reformation." In the Protestant Netherlands, 64 people were burned or hanged in the town of Bresmond in a single month in 1613 (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 323). Referring to the Polish poet Julian Tuwim's (1894–1853) book *Polish Witchcraft and Devils and Sorcery Extracts* (*Czary i czarty polskie oraz wypisy czarnoksięskie*, Warszawa 1924), Zdziechowski points out that the scourge of witchcraft trials has unfortunately not passed Poland by. Also, he quotes one such macabre paragraph after Tuwim, who, in turn, refers to the work of the Rev. Seweryn Gamalski *Clerical Cautions to Judges, Investigators and Instigators of Witches* (*Przestrogi duchownego sędziom, inwestygatorom y instygatorom*, Poznań 1742):

> In Poland the same demoniacal mania prevailed as in Germany, to the point where the natural causes of phenomena seemed to have ceased to exist, and all evil was attributed to the arts of witchcraft. The silliest rumour was sufficient grounds for suspicion, imprisonment, prosecution and torture. The torture was more or less the same as in other countries. In the same way, the hands were twisted backward, broken out of their joints, then twisted back again, which was supposed to be more painful than the torture itself, repeated until the third time with breaks of several days. Boiling oil was poured down the throat, people were lubricated with sulfour and burning tar. Spanish shoes with teeth on the inside shaped like a saw were also in use; they were squeezed, crushing and crippling the legs. Anyone who could withstand all this and would not admit anything was considered diabolical and condemned to the stake. (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 331)

Also, as late as 1775, a Polish noblewoman named Stokowska tortured 14 women from her village, whom she suspected of witchcraft, and had them burned at the stake near Wieluń.[7] This ultimately led to King Stanislaw August's successful initiative to

[7]To be fair, however, some historians doubt the story, attributing it to the nineteenth-century forger Konstantin Majeranowski.

outlaw torture (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 332), and Zdziechowski diligently searches for such people in earlier centuries in Europe who opposed this most monstrous superstition and demonstrated "enlightened humanism in matters of witchcraft" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 324). These included the humanist philosopher Michel de Montaigne and the Roman Catholic theologian Pierre Charron (both in sixteenth-century France), three Jesuits in seventeenth-century Germany – Adam Tanner, Paul Laymann[8] and Friedrich von Spee – followed by the German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried von Leibniz (1646–1716) and the French Catholic orator and thinker Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 324–325). Among Protestants, the German theologian Johann Meyfart (1590–1642), the German pastor Johann Greve (Grevius, 1584–1622) and, after them, the Dutch pastor Balthasar Bekker (1634–1698) were the most vocal in their condemnation of the trials of "sorcerers" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 325). In Poland, a voice was raised against such superstition and cruelty by the Rev. Jan Bohomolec in his two-volume treatise *The Devil in His Form* (Diabeł w swojej postaci, 1772–1777).

At one point in his work *On Cruelty*, Marian Zdziechowski expresses his joy that the attack of the forces of evil on the Church and humanity "has been repulsed forever" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 313), but even so, the most poignant passages in his work on atrocities are still the other two. The first is the *cri de coeur* of Rebecca Lemp from Nördlingen, who was accused of "witchcraft" and burned at the stake. In 1590 she wrote to her husband, children and mother from prison: "Why does God allow all this, why does God refuse to listen to your innocent Rebekah?" Zdziechowski himself states that "God was deaf," and in another place he himself asks, referring to Michelet, who was very close to him: "Do you feel how the sky was black and fallen, how it crushed the head of a man with its weight! Where shall we look for help, for salvation, when God has left the world?" (Zdziechowski 1938, pp. 326, 321).

Russia and the USSR in *On Cruelty* – with other works by Zdziechowski from the 1920s and 1930s in the background

At first glance, Zdziechowski's essay seems to treat the USSR as a continuation of Tsarist Russia, citing its most cruel rulers – Ivan the Terrible (1533–1584) and Peter the Great (1689–1725) – as indisputable examples. Zdziechowski's essay begins with a description of his visit to the Tretyakov Gallery – during his first stay in Moscow in April 1904 – where he paid particular attention to "paintings from the life and reign of Ivan the Terrible and Peter, whom the Russians call the Great." All these pictures, some better, some worse, revived in the Polish thinker, on the eve of the first Russian Revolution, "the Russian past in its darkest epochs and moments," "as if the spirit of Russian history had descended upon him and led him into some mysterious, dark, terrible distance."

In his conclusion, Zdziechowski referred to the years of early Bolshevism, still in the Lenin era: "Can the same not be said about Lenin, did he not create an epoch in Russia, has his name not marked the beginning of an era? [. . .] Bolshevism constitutes an organized cruelty." Also, he emphasised in original terms, with reference to

[8] Zdziechowski gives the names of both in error as "Leymann" and "Tenner" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 324).

the present and the future, the links between Bolshevism and the methods of Peter the Great's rule. "To my friends, the Russians, I say that they will not throw off the yoke of Bolshevism until they curse the memory of Peter and free themselves from the spell of violence, violence which they see in cruelty" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 299).

With an exquisite knowledge of modern and contemporary Russian spiritual culture, Zdziechowski was deeply astonished that the criminal Tsar Ivan the Terrible was glorified "by one of Russia's noblest writers, [Konstantin] Kavelin" (1815–1885), "in the name of democratic doctrine," "as a deserving slayer of princes and boyars." Zdziechowski asks rhetorically about the state of mind of this highly respected Russian historian of Occidentalism: "Do these words not prove that the great historian [i.e., Kavelin] was in a state of hypnosis when he wrote them, and lost his conscience and moral sense at that time?" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 299). However, what particularly offended Zdziechowski was that two of the great men of Russia whom he respected – the historian Sergey Solovyov (1820–1879) and his son Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) – regarded Tsar Peter as a supernatural being. Sergey Solovyov wrote: "And only our Christianity and the proximity of Peter to our times can be explained by the fact that we do not worship this demigod and that the deeds of this Hercules have not taken on mythological proportions in our imagination." In a similar vein, Vladimir Solovyov – "a great and holy thinker," as Marian Zdziechowski wrote – found in Peter's Europeanising fantasies "moral superiority," "the good of the nation," "an inspired act of breaking with the archaic past" (Zdziechowski 1928a, n. 74, pp. 456–457).

Vladimir Solovyov appears a few more times in *On Cruelty*, including at a crucial moment when Zdziechowski recalls the Russian thinker's bitterly ironic thoughts on the Inquisition: "Heretics – these are the words of Vladimir Solovyov – were previously accustomed to the eternal fires of hell by burning in the earthly fires of the Inquisition!" "In the so-called Holy Inquisition – wrote this great thinker, who was devoted with all his soul to the universal Church – we have the condensed expression of all that is evil in the Church, the personification of the Satanic element in the souls of her servants" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 312).[9]

In *On Cruelty*, Zdziechowski invokes Leo Tolstoy in a very positive context, not only as a vegetarian, in the chapter "On Animals,"– along with the aforementioned Vladimir Solovyov, Percy Shelley (1792–1822) and Richard Wagner (1813–1883) (Zdziechowski 1938, pp. 347–348) – but also in the section "The Inquisition" as a great opponent of this "benevolent institution" – in the name of humanistic mercy, in line with the Gospel message:

> "If one thinks," wrote Leo Tolstoy in *The Resurrection*, "that anything, even for a single moment and in a single exceptional case, can be more important than feelings of love, of compassion, of humanity, then there is no crime that

[9]Solovyov, in his text *On the Decline of the Medieval Worldview* (in 1891), wrote about the "habituation" of heretics by earthly fire to the "fire of hell" (Cf. Przebinda 2022, p. 283). Zdziechowski adds shortly before, following Vacandard, that the burning of heretics also had a strictly material dimension, serving to enrich the persecutors, both the inquisitors and the kings, who always exercised "benevolent care over the inquisitorial tribunals." As early as 1315, the inquisitor Eymeric complained "that there were fewer and fewer rich heretics" and "that the future of the benevolent institution was therefore uncertain" (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 311).

> could not be committed against human beings without feeling guilty about it." – These are the most beautiful words ever spoken, the most profound expression of the spirit of the Gospel since the days of St Paul. (Zdziechowski 1938, pp. 335–336)

However, let us return to the strictly Russian space and to the fundamental question already raised above: did Zdziechowski, in his work *On Cruelty*, perceive similarities or rather differences between the tsarist system and Bolshevism? I will also argue – on the basis of only two but very significant differences between the first and second editions of the essay (in 1928 and 1938, respectively) – that his view on this issue evolved significantly. The passages I have just quoted about Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great as the forerunners of Lenin, and the opinion that "Bolshevism constitutes an organized cruelty" with a large admixture of "Russianness," were present only in the first edition, and disappeared without a trace from the second – no doubt by Zdziechowski's will. In practice, this meant that in the early Bolshevik years, i.e., during Lenin's reign and for some years after his death, Zdziechowski saw a clear link between the Russia of the tsars and the Russia of the commissars, but in the years of growing Stalinism (after 1928) he no longer exposed these links. To sum up, Stalinism, even compared to Leninism, was such a terrible "organized cruelty" that Zdziechowski was already beginning to see its roots not in Tsarist Russia but very deep in Asia. I myself emphasised this in 1984 at the above-mentioned Krakow conference on Zdziechowski, for which I had just been severely reprimanded by Stanisław Stomma.

The last edition of *On Cruelty* during Zdziechowski's lifetime appeared in 1938 in the author's collection *Facing the End*, which also included a shocking study "Red Terror" that we can treat today as the last chapter of *On Cruelty*. On the one hand, Zdziechowski describes the Bolsheviks' most horrific atrocities, citing the memoirs of the white generals Peter Wrangel and Anton Denikin, while on the other he argues that "the Russian people did not stand the great test of the first months of the revolution and surrendered to the Bolsheviks almost without a fight." For Zdziechowski, the proof of this was the anti-Bolshevik White Movement led by Denikin and Wrangel (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 46). However, it is not in the cruelty of torture that Zdziechowski sees the deepest essence of Bolshevism, which distinguishes it from anything that has gone before in history, but in its intimidating ability to turn hitherto fearless people "into beings who glorify their executioners":

> We are faced here with a phenomenon unprecedented in history, with a mysterious form of terror that surpasses everything we have heard and can imagine in terms of human cruelty and atrocity. I refer to the trial of the Sixteen in Moscow [in 1936 – G. P.]. The accused, especially Zinoviev and Kamenev, were the leading representatives of Bolshevism, Lenin's closest comrades; like him, they were the oppressors of a trampled Russia, and in the name of their hateful utopias, they have not hesitated to try anything, even the bloodiest experiment. Still in the time of the Tsars, they had bravely gone after their goal and were not deterred by extermination or death! And now, before the Soviet court, they had reached the limits of wickedness, if there are limits to wickedness; not only did they take upon themselves everything that their accuser had

> publicly accused them of, but they tried to outdo him, in a way, by portraying themselves as despicable traitors to the "great, incomparable" Stalin; they spat on themselves and glorified Stalin by going to their deaths. What had led them to such a denial of human dignity and ultimate debasement we do not know. The French Revolution, the bloodiest and ugliest of all that had come before it, knew no such ways. (Zdziechowski 1938, p. 83)

The question of the mature Zdziechowski's attitude to Bolshevism[10] was best explored a dozen years ago by a Polish contemporary scholar, Witold Wasilewski, who aptly emphasised that Zdziechowski differed fundamentally in this respect from the Kiev-born Russian thinker Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), who sought the deep roots of communism "in Russian maximalism and the contradictions of the Russian soul," constantly striving towards utopian goals. According to Berdyaev, it all stemmed from the "space syndrome," as the "gap between the brutal power of the state and the anarchic element of the nation" forced the political authorities to sacrifice their people on the altar of the state in order to conquer vast territories (Wasilewski 2005, p. 182). Zdziechowski, for his part, although in the 1920s he still saw threads connecting Bolshevism with the policies of some of the rulers of Tsarist Russia, even then did not go so far as to say that communism emerged from Russian history as a necessity. Already at that time, in his book *Europe, Russia, Asia* (1923), he wrote about "Russian Bolshevism and Polish semi-Bolshevism" (Zdziechowski 1923, p. 191), and in the sketch "On the Psychology of Bolshevism," published in the same volume, he mercilessly criticised such Western European writers as Romain Roland, Henri Barbuse and Anatole France for their pro-Bolshevik sympathies. The latter, described with bitter irony as "a quiet, good old man, white as a pigeon," was even accused by Zdziechowski of "enjoying Russia's torment" (Zdziechowski 1923, p. 199). It is still the same Bolshevism that Zdziechowski sometimes refers to as "a democratic idea carried to the point of absurdity," but that he sees mainly – following Fyodor Dostoevsky and the contemporary Russian writer in exile, Dmitri Merezhkovsky (1865–1941) – as having satanic characteristics:

> Russia, wrote Merezhkovsky, [...] paraphrasing a well-known passage from Dostoevsky, has been stretched out on the cross and the Bolsheviks are nailing her to it, and the innocent little girl of Europe is looking at and eating pineapple compote. [...] Evil spirits have entered Russia and possessed her, then possessed all mankind, and like the swarms of swine in the Gospel, they are driving the possessed straight ahead and falling into the sea. (Zdziechowski 1923, pp. 198–199)

[10]Zdziechowski addressed this issue in a series of essays entitled *From St Petersburg to Leningrad* (*Od Petersburga do Leningrada*), published in Vilnius in 1934. The second Polish edition of this book was published in Kraków in 2009, with the introduction by Jan Skoczyński entitled "Marian Zdziechowski as an opponent of Bolshevism" (Marian Zdziechowski – przeciwnik bolszewizmu) Skoczyński writes, on the one hand, that Zdziechowski was an exception in pre-war Poland, where many people were sympathetic to "the Soviet experiment." On the other hand, contemporary scholars rightly point out the differences in the treatment of the subject between Zdziechowski and the Polish historian Jan Kucharzewski, author of *From White Tsardom to Red* (*Od białego caratu do czerwonego*, Warszawa 1923–1935), who emphasised the similarities between the Russia of the tsars and the Bolshevik USSR (Skoczyński 2009, p. VII). The abridged English version of the latter work published after the war, with its distinctive title, *The Origins of Modern Russia*, emphasises just such a "continuity of succession" (Kucharzewski 1948).

In the title sketch of his last book, *The Phantom of the Future*, he had already written bluntly about the satanic face of Bolshevism, claiming that it was "an anti-religion that drives man from the heights of humanity into the abyss of degeneracy" and that "the aim of Bolshevism is to fight against God, against the idea of God, to eradicate it completely from the soul of man" (Zdziechowski 1939, pp. 228–229). Thus, Zdziechowski warned his readers from beyond the grave (he had died in Vilnius on 5 October 1938) that "into this abyss has fallen Soviet Russia, and behind Russia, with the increasing speed of a thrown stone, old Europe":

> The fantom of the future haunts me day and night. A black cloud full of thunderbolts is rushing towards us from the nearest east, from Minsk and Kiev, from Smolensk and Moscow; what will happen, I ask, if one day we are all suddenly in the grip of the Red Terror, not necessarily Moscow's, we will also find new Dzerzhinskis among us? (Zdziechowski 1938, pp. 229, 231)

In the same year, 1938, Zdziechowski expressed his gratitude to Pope Pius XII for the encyclical *Divini redemeptoris. On Atheistic Communism*, published on 19 March 1937, but he did not say a word about the fact that five days earlier the same Pope had published the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (*With Deep Anxiety*), condemning Nazism. Zdziechowski himself, in his work Napoleon III (written as late as 1931), had posed the dramatic question of what course Germany would take in the face of the growing power of Bolshevism:

> Who will prevail in Germany? The traitors and servants of the Soviets, or those who, awakening the noblest elements of a nation capable of titanic flights of spirit, wish to lead it to great destinies along the path of Christian politics, the only true politics [. . .] for which the perishing world is crying out. (Zdziechowski 1931, p. 259)

Zdziechowski had written these words before Hitler came to power, but we must add that his opinion of Nazism was always extremely negative, right up to the end of his life. He presented this issue more fully in 1935 in his article "Germany. A Psychological Sketch" (Zdziechowski 1935).

Zdziechowski in the eyes of Miłosz – the unchanging power of evil in history and the fate of the individual human being

As late as 1933, Marian Zdziechowski himself insisted that "everything he writes is out of time" and even "at open war with time." Referring to the Battle of Sedan, lost by the French during the war with Prussia (1870–1871), and its tragic consequences for Europe, he wrote:

> After the battle of Sedan, morality was suspended, and today it has been definitively banished from the sphere of politics. This is why the publicist, even if he is in agreement with morality, feels obliged to declare as emphatically as possible that he definitively rejects all moral principles and that, in his opinion, he is guided solely by the interests of the state or the nation. However, I myself believe that intelligence is needed to understand the interests of the state or the

> nation, and there is no intelligence without at least a modicum of moral sense. (Zdziechowski 1933, p. 1)

A student of Zdziechowski's in the 1930s in Vilnius was Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004), a great Polish poet and thinker, awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980. In his 1943 essay "Religiousness of Zdziechowski" ("Religijność Zdziechowskiego"), written during the war in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, Miłosz recalled that the eschatological and moralistic vision of the old professor and rector of the University of Vilnius "was at odds with the aspirations of the young, who saw salvation in the very currents that the professor considered to be the work of Satan, and who saw what for Zdziechowski was a dark night as "'the radiant face of the dawning day'." The Polish youth of the time "clung to nationalism and communism" because "nationalism derived its slogans from the supposedly unshakable laws of biological struggle, while communism reduced the whole question of truth to economically motivated changes." This is why Zdziechowski's pre-war warnings against communism and nationalism were regarded by Miłosz and his contemporaries as "something pathetically mad" (Miłosz 1974, pp. 240, 251).

The wartime essay "Religiousness of Zdziechowski" was republished in 1996 in Miłosz's book *Legends of Modernity*, where the "legends" of the title actually mean "illusions" or even "illnesses," often rooted in an unjustified religious and historic optimism, so alien to Zdziechowski, and in a joyful belief in an immediate bright future for Poland and Europe:

> After 1918, there was in Poland a widespread optimistic belief in a lasting peace under the wings of the League of Nations, in the grandeur of the slogan of self-determination [of nations – G. P.], in social reform, in Pan-Europe, in the power of technology, and in democracy. [. . .] I imagine Zdziechowski walking through the streets of Vilnius, reading from the baroque clouds, as always in this city, the tragedies of a mad and doomed humanity, while next to him the orchestra of a student ball is still playing the tango. (Miłosz 1974, pp. 242, 243)

In that essay, written eighty years ago, Miłosz recalled the heated dispute between Marian Zdziechowski and Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, discussed at length at the beginning of the present article, which was reflected in the former's essay *On Cruelty*. At the same time, Miłosz stressed Zdziechowski's merits in the process of creating a "modernist Catholicism" as a religion of the heart, highly sensitive to the evils of the world, and, at the same time, always critical of the optimistic doctrine of the rationality of the world propounded by St Thomas Aquinas and assumed by the Catholic Church for many centuries. For both Zdziechowski and Miłosz, this meant a fatal retreat from metaphysics – in favour of "political and social conclusions," which in pre-war Poland even had fascist overtones:

> The neo-Thomistic Catholicism espoused by certain literary and political circles in the interwar period went hand in hand with a widespread aversion to vague reflections on the nature of being, a retreat from metaphysics. It corresponded to the need to grasp reality on earth – even the religious question began with problems about the organization of earthly life, the relationship of the individual to the collective, and so on. Especially in Poland, where religiosity

> rarely comes from the inner life, but often from political longings, this process reached a high intensity. Most Catholics who promote St Thomas justified their Catholicism by political and social conclusions, by a vision of a new Middle Ages that can only be realized on the basis of a Catholic worldview. [. . .] It is no wonder that these Catholics associated Thomas with ideas borrowed from fascism – because deep down, without realizing it, they took Catholicism as yet another fiction, convenient for the purposes of political construction. (Miłosz 1974, pp. 246, 251)

Later, Miłosz would refer to Zdziechowski twice more in his own work. The first such reference was made in 1993, after reading an article by Jagiellonian University professor Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska (1926–2016), inspired by a new edition in Kraków of Zdziechowski's essay *On Cruelty*. Her text was entitled "Against Cruelty" ("Przeciw okrucieństwu") and began with the observation that "Zdziechowski had already mentioned the atrocities of the Russian Revolution, the 'bloody Lenin', the exploits of the Cheka, but he had not yet known the whole of hell, although like few others he had sensed it" (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 2011, p. 8). However, in her polemic with Zdziechowski, Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska wrote that evil is not only a product of human beings, but is firmly rooted "in the essence of the world" (with which Zdziechowski would certainly agree), and in no way excludes animals (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 2011, p. 8). Miłosz responded with the poem "To Mrs. Professor in Defence of My Cat's Honour and Not Only" ("Do Pani Profesor w obronie honoru kota i nie tylko"), in which he argued that human moral categories should not be applied to animals and nature. At the same time, the poet presented his Manichean view of the origin of evil, which was also close to Zdziechowski's:

> Nature devouring, nature devoured,
> Butchery day and night smoking with blood.
> And who created it? Was it the good Lord?
> Yes, undoubtedly, they are innocent,
> Spiders, mantises, sharks, pythons.
> We are the only ones who say: cruelty.
> (Miłosz 2001a, p. 631. Cf. Miłosz 1994, pp. 58–59)

Miłosz, who – like Zdziechowski – wrote with bitter irony about St Augustine's understanding of evil as the "absence of good" (*amisio boni*), placed his ultimate hope – also identical with Zdziechowski – in the "human God" of Christianity:

> Our consciousness and our conscience
> Alone in the pale anthill of galaxies
> Put their hope in a humane God
>
> Who cannot but feel and think,
> Who is kindred to us by his warmth and movement,
> For we are, as he told us, similar to Him.
>
> Yet if it is so, then He takes pity
> On every mauled mouse, every wounded bird.
> Then the universe for him is like a Crucifixion.
> (Miłosz 2001a, pp. 631–632. Cf. Miłosz 1994, p. 59)

What is striking in the above passage is that Miłosz associates the "human God" not only with the person of Jesus Christ, but also with the God of the Old Testament, as the One who created man in His image and likeness (in the poem – "For we are, as He told us, similar to Him"). At the same time, through the discursive language of his poem, the poet emphasises that man is the only being in the anthill of the cosmos who has been endowed by the Creator with consciousness and conscience. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, on the other hand, unlike Miłosz, was convinced that non-human nature also possesses a certain kind of consciousness, and from this point of view she spoke of "animal cruelty," arguing not only with Miłosz but also with Zdziechowski:

> For it is not, as Zdziechowski writes, that among animals only the cat manifests sadism by tormenting its prey. All of nature is cruel: carnivorous plants that lure flies; an insect that lays its eggs in the body of a living but immobile caterpillar so that its offspring will have fresh meat; a praying mantis that eats its mate; bacteria that multiply in living human and animal flesh, and so on. I remember when I was a child, our cat would bring home a half-dead mole for her little kittens to play with; the mole was not eaten, it was just used for cruel play. (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 2011, p. 8)

Miłosz responded to this panpsychism of the Krakow professor, who attributed consciousness to animals and consistently accused them of cruelty, with a slightly ironic beginning to his poem, with such a direct turn to the author:

> My valiant helper, a small-sized tiger
> Sleeps sweetly on my desk, by the computer,
> Unaware that you insult his tribe.
>
> Cats play with a mouse or with a half-dead mole.
> You are wrong, though: it's not out of cruelty.
> They simply like a thing that moves.
>
> For, after all, we know that only consciousness
> Can for a moment move into the Other,
> Empathize with the pain and panic of a mouse.
>
> And such as cats are, all of Nature is.
> Indifferent, alas, to the good and the evil.
> Quite a problem for us, I am afraid.
> (Miłosz 2001a, p. 631. Cf. Miłosz 1994, p. 58)

However, these passages were not just the poet's intellectual playthings, but his deep reflection – also rooted in Zdziechowski's thought – on the genesis of evil and its dark power in history. It was no coincidence that Miłosz invited two other Polish thinkers, Leszek Kołakowski (1927–2009) and Jan Andrzej Kłoczowski (b. 1937), to contribute to the volume of his poetry in which the poem "To Mrs. Professor in Defense of My Cat's Honor and Not Only" appeared for the first time.

A discussion of the attitudes of these two thinkers towards evil and God's attitude towards evil would require a separate in-depth study; here we will limit ourselves

to two or three reflections. Kołakowski believed that the questions "Why evil?" or "Where does evil come from?" never had "good answers," and that he himself was glad that he "did not come to be a priest: and that he had "no obligation to explain these things to other people." He does, however, partly attempt to formulate such an answer, following to a considerable extent in the footsteps of Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, without, however, quoting him directly. Kołakowski himself claims that everything theologians have been saying about evil for centuries is already contained in the biblical *Book of Job*. Here Satan, "with the express consent of God," "persecutes Job with all kinds of misery and pain: all ten of his children killed, all his possessions lost, painful and terrible illnesses." God, of course, knows that Job is a pious and righteous man, so He does not punish him, but "plays with Job." Afterwards, God returns all the good things to Job, and he has ten children again, but Kołakowski sadly points out: "Dostoyevsky, not without reason, asks: could Job have forgotten these ten dead? What do you mean, new children come in place of the dead and it is good?" (Kołakowski 1994, pp. 61, 62, 64).[11]

Meanwhile, the Dominican priest Jan Andrzej Kłoczowski argues the opposite: "It is not God who plays with Job, as Leszek Kołakowski wrote, but God who became Job, as Carl Gustav Jung wrote. And I especially appreciate the latter for this one sentence" (Kłoczowski 1994, p. 66).

It should be emphasised once again that all these fundamental questions of theodicy, the genesis of evil and suffering, were raised by the two contemporary Polish thinkers in connection with the 1993 republication of Zdziechowski's essay *On Cruelty* in Kraków.

As for Miłosz, in 2000 he published a poem, or rather a poetic mini-treatise, entitled simply "Zdziechowski." Here, Miłosz, almost ninety years old then, remembers Zdziechowski from his pre-war days in Vilnius as "a philosopher of despair who doubted the goodness of creation." He also mentions him as someone who "might have received Vladimir Soloviev in his mansion[12] and listened to what he would say about the reconciliation of Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox Church." The poet adds, in keeping with the spirit of the two thinkers, Polish and Russian, that "they might have discussed as well whether the ducks on the estate pond could attain salvation" and "whether an ant or a fly has been redeemed" (Miłosz 2001b, p. 714). All in all, the most dramatic question that Miłosz asks is again the question of the origin of evil: "Who established on this earth the law of torment for living creatures?" Also, the following quotation from Zdziechowski's *Pessimism, Romanticism and the Foundations of Christianity* is woven into the poetical text: "And with the years, as I moved further and further into life and the world, I realized more and more clearly

[11]This is the question posed by the *starets* Zosima in Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*: "God raises Job again, gives him wealth again. Many years pass by, and he has other children and loves them. But how could he love those new ones when those first children are no more, when he has lost them?" (Dostoyevsky 1900, p. 348).

[12]This is obvious licentia poetica; Zdziechowski, of course, never received Solovyov at his estate near Minsk. Instead, he met him twice in 1889, once in a lecture hall in St Petersburg, and later compared him to Jesus Christ in appearance and passion for teaching (Zdziechowski 1927, pp. 19–20). Immediately afterwards, Zdziechowski visited the Russian thinker in person at the Evropeyskaya Hotel in St Petersburg and was proud to learn that he had just read his book, *The Psychology of the Slavic Tribe*, published in Russian, and even praised it (Zdziechowski 1934, pp. 111–112; Obolevich 2015, p. 32).

and painfully that this world, considered as a whole, is disorder and unreason, not, as we have been taught, the work of reason: it did not come from the hand of God" (Miłosz 2001b, pp. 714–715).

Miłosz also sees in Zdziechowski's thought, which is still relevant for the Polish poet on the threshold of the twenty-first century, a tension between a belief in the devilishness of the world ("Although he, a professor, could not openly say that he believed in the devil's world") and a miraculous belief in the existence of a good God. Again, Miłosz used a quote from *Pessimism, Romanticism, and the Foundations of Christianity:*

> "There is no God – nature and history unanimously proclaim it. But that voice is submerged by the harmony of psalms and hymns, by an avowal coming from the depth of the human spirit, that the soul of man without God is like 'earth without water'. God is. Yet the fact of God's existence is beyond the grasp of thought preoccupied with the external world. *Le monde est irrationnel. Dieu est un miracle*." (Miłosz 2001b, p. 715)

Thus, not only "despair," but also the desire for a "miracle" (cf. Banowska 2012, pp. 39–56). Miłosz, however, did not fail to write in his lyrical apostrophe to Zdziechowski: "You died just in time, your friends whispered, shaking their heads: 'He was lucky"' (Miłosz 2001, p. 716). The poet obviously had in mind all the atrocities that had befallen Europe and the world after 1939, first and foremost the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and Stalin's USSR. In another of his post-war works, "A Treatise on Poetry" ("Traktat poetycki," 1957), Miłosz invoked the prophecies of Marshal Józef Piłsudski (d. 1935), who had died three years before Zdziechowski:

> For years Pilsudski paced in the Belvedere.
> He could never believe in permanence.
> And would say again: "They will attack us."
> Who? He pointed to the East, the West.
> "I've stopped the wheel of history a moment."
> (Miłosz 2001, p. 117)

Twenty years after Miłosz's death, this cruel "wheel of history" is once again turning through Eastern Europe, and in the context of the war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, another of Zdziechowski's texts takes on a new meaning. This is an article from 1938 "Ukraine and Russia. On Bohdan Lepki's trilogy" ("Ukraina a Rosja. Trylogia Bohdana Łepkiego"), published during the thinker's lifetime in the Vilnius periodical *Słowo* (*Word*) and posthumously (1939) in the aforementioned volume *Spectre of the Future*, which not only the author himself considered prophetic.

Declarations

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