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POLISH MESSIANISM.

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POLISH Messianism is a very peculiar intellectual, spiritual, literary and religious movement, created in Poland by several great men between 1830-1850. It is not the school of a single master, but the spontaneous expression of a national spirit.

It includes: (1) a Conception of Life and Being different from all preceding philosophies; (2) a Religious Attitude, leading to the conciliation of Protestants and Catholics and to the reunion of all Christians in one truly Universal Church, in order to convert all Pagans and to establish the religious unity of mankind; (3) a Transformation of Social and Economic Relations in the sense of peaceful collaboration of labour, capital and genius, in order to ensure general well-being and a highly accelerated production of wealth, so that all the needs of all men could be satisfied; (4) a Transformation of Political Relations, leading to lasting peace between national states organized as members of a regenerated mankind.

The chief Polish Messianists may be divided into several groups, which are independent from each other. They are as follows:

1. The first writer who used the term Messianism to denote his philosophy, was J. M. Wroński (1778-1853). He spent more than fifty years in France, from 1800, and wrote many works in French, publishing them chiefly in Paris. He devoted all his life to a philosophy, based on two fundamental experiences, which he called '*autocréation*' and '*découverte de l'absolu*,' and which may be characterized as the experimental individual discovery of Self

and of God, giving absolute certainty concerning the freedom and immortality of the soul and the Providential direction of human life. Wronski wrote many mathematical and philosophical works, among which the most important is *Messianisme, ou Réforme absolue du Savoir humain* (3 vols., Paris, 1847). Many French works of W. are to be found in the British Museum library.

2. After him the greatest philosopher of Messianism was August Cieszkowski (1817-1894), whose chief work, *Our Father*, is a philosophical interpretation of the Lord's Prayer. This work, after the publication of the first volume in 1847, remained in manuscript until after the author's death, when vols. ii-iv. were published by his son (1899-1906). Cieszkowski's philosophy has been introduced to Western readers in an excellent dissertation for the degree of doctor by Adam Zóltowski (München, 1904), under the title: *Graf Cieszkowski's Philosophie der Tat*. An abridged translation of C.'s *Our Father* was published by W. J. Rose (London, 1919) under the title: *The Desire of all Nations* (The Student Christian Movement).

3. Under his influence the great thinker and poet Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859) wrote his many poems. He also, like W. and C., announces a new era in the history of mankind, and the practical realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.

4. In a totally different way the same message was given by Andrzej Towiański (1799-1878), a great mystic, who from 1841 had a great influence on many of his countrymen in Paris and later on, until his death, in Switzerland. He influenced his disciples through private conversations, and transformed the life of many Poles and also of some Italians. His very interesting biography was published by Tancredi Canonico (Roma, 1895), and later by W. Szerlecka in French, under the title *Un Saint des Temps modernes* (3 vols., Paris, 1912-1917).

5. Towiański influenced the great poets Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849) and Seweryn Goszczyński (1801-1876). Their works contain many glimpses of a regenerated mankind, many prophecies partially fulfilled.

6. Another group of Messianists is formed by the eminent philosophers Karol Libelt (1807-1875), Józef Kremer (1806-1875), Bronisław Trentowski (1808-1869) and Józef Gołuchowski (1797-1858). They have written several works in German besides their many works in Polish; therefore their chief thoughts are accessible to Western readers.

7. In more recent times Messianism is also represented by

poets, such as Cyprian Norwid (1821-1883) and Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907), and by thinkers such as Stan. Szczepanowski (1846-1900) and Wojciech Dzierżycki (1848-1909). The only English book which introduces Messianism to Western readers is *The World of Souls* of W. Lutosławski (London, Allen & Unwin, 1924). Another book of the same author, on *Pre-existence and Reincarnation*, will be published by the same firm this year.

The writers quoted above agree on the chief points, but none among them has given a complete outline of the doctrine of Messianism. This doctrine can, however, easily be formulated, as it is a consistent conception of existence, with practical applications to economic, political, religious and educational problems. An attempt at such a synthetic exposition has been made in German, in vol. v. (pp. 299-335) of the 12th ed. of Ueberweg's *History of Philosophy* (Berlin, 1928, E. S. Mittler). The following article is the first endeavour to give a short account of the essential doctrine of Messianism to the English reading public.

There is a logical development in the succession of different conceptions of existence. The earliest philosophers were materialists. To them the object of sensations, matter, was the only truly existing reality. Materialism remains even now the view of life of perhaps the majority of mankind. But when materialism reached the form of atomism, sensations were transformed into general ideas, such as space, time, force, energy, matter.

Thus out of materialism a higher conception of existence arose, which claims that the object of thought, ideas, are the only reality. Those who consider ideas as more real than matter and the explanation of matter, are called idealists.

Between materialism and idealism there has been a conflict lasting for more than two thousand years in Europe, and perhaps for a much longer period in India.

Materialists and idealists are two opposed types of thinkers, existing to-day in the 20th century as they did twenty-four centuries ago. Their polemics and discussions fill the history of philosophy.

There is a third view, which endeavours to effect a conciliation of extremes ; this is upheld by men in whom feeling and emotion prevail over thought and sensation. This third great conception of existence is called pantheism.

All these three views of existence were born in Greece, and were expressed by such representative philosophers as Democritus, Plato and Parmenides. They agree in one affirmation : that there is something which truly exists and is indestructible. This for the materialist is matter, for the idealist ideas, and for the pantheist the unity of the universe. They also agree in their negation of the three dogmas of every religion : freedom, immortality and God.

A fourth conception was formed by those who found in their consciousness the power of will predominating over sensations, ideas and emotions. They distinguished spirit from matter and thought, and looked upon the world as consisting of souls or spirits. This view has been called spiritualism by the French, whose philosophers, from Descartes in the 17th century to Renouvier at the beginning of the 20th century, have been chiefly spiritualists.

Spiritualism means a philosophy of the spirit or of spirits, and must be distinguished from spiritism, which is not a philosophy, but a practice of necromancy or invocation of spirits. Both spiritualism and spiritism came to England from France ; but the terms have been confounded, so that in the press, in lectures and books we often find the term spiritualism used to denote spiritism. This confusion should be avoided, as most spiritists are materialists and have not the slightest idea of spiritualism as a philosophy. A true spiritualist knows the reality of the spirit by his own consciousness of Self, and does not imagine that any apparition of

material ghosts could increase or deepen that knowledge. Manifestations of ghosts are sought by materialists, who are in search of sensations and believe only in what they can see or touch.

Spiritualism, as the philosophy of the spirit or immaterial and invisible reality, has arisen in France and is characteristic of French national thought. It is the natural philosophy of all those who by training of the will have discovered themselves to be real beings, different from everything else. The spiritualist discovers that he is a free immortal being; he notices the inequality of beings and infers the rational existence of a highest being or God.

But it takes a long development to reach the immediate experimental knowledge of God. Consciousness of will reveals to the individual his own Self, and as he becomes aware of his own real existence, he discovers also in his consciousness the vestiges of some higher reality, above himself; this is generally called inspiration, as coming from a higher Spirit. The highest stage of inspiration is called ecstasy and leads to the experimental discovery of God, which transforms spiritualism into mysticism.

Mysticism is the fifth great conception of Life and Being. The mystic finds in his consciousness inspiration and ecstasy to be the chief reality, and considers sensations, ideas, emotions, even will-power, as subordinate to this highest experience.

The whole history of philosophy is contained within these five chief conceptions of existence. All philosophers known from the most remote antiquity up to our own times are either materialists, idealists, pantheists, spiritualists or mystics.

In this progress of human thought from materialism to mysticism we notice two great attempts at a conciliation or synthesis of opposites.

In pantheism the age-long evolution of materialism

and idealism is brought to a higher unity, and the apparently irreducible contrast is merged into that unity. Thus pantheism is the final outcome of the long struggle between idealism and materialism, the first great synthesis of the whole intellectual life of the Greeks.

Pantheism, together with its original elements idealism and materialism, may be called monism, and this Pagan monism is the expression of a longing for unity of the all, natural to the human spirit as long as the individual true existence of the Self is not yet discovered.

Spiritualism is a reaction against every monism ; it is a pluralism, which is as essentially Christian as monism is Pagan ; and on a higher level we notice the same conflict and contrast which existed between idealism and materialism.

The spiritualist, as the man of will, is opposed to the pantheist as the man of emotion. A higher synthesis is thus required in order to conciliate these extremes, and it is found in mysticism. Mysticism acknowledges the unity of the universe felt by pantheists. But in the experience of ecstasy the difference between Creator and creature clearly persists, and man, the creature, remains aware of that individual separateness, despite the intimacy of the union with his Creator. This separateness or independence of the Self has been the chief dogma of spiritualism.

Mysticism is thus the second synthesis of the whole preceding development of human thought in the quest of reality. It conciliates pantheism, which was the first synthesis of materialism and idealism, with spiritualism, which appeared as a reaction against pantheism.

Idealism was a reaction against materialism ; spiritualism was in a similar sense a reaction against pantheism. In both cases the opposites were reconciled.

But there remains a third opposition and contrast between human will and divine grace, between the man of strong personal ambition and the servant of God, between spiritualism and mysticism. The mystic lives in *another* world. The spiritualist acts in *this* world. A final reconciliation and synthesis is needed. This is given by Polish Messianism, through an experience which contains the spiritualist's discovery of the soul and the mystic's discovery of God as indispensable elements.

This third great spiritual experience is the discovery of the *true nation* through a peculiar inspiration called the national consciousness.

The mystic uses mystical intuition for the immediate knowledge of the highest Being. But if a mystic applies this same intuition to his fellow men, he discovers the essential kinds of human spirits, the various choirs formed by the harmony of individuals of the same kind, and having a common inspiration as to the task to be fulfilled, or as to a national mission entrusted to them by God.

A true nation is a group of spirits having a mission to fulfil in the life of mankind. Such a messianic conception of the nation is totally different from the use of the word 'nation' in common speech, where it denotes a people or a race or the citizens of a state.

The biological unity between people of the same origin is material, just as is the political unity between citizens of the same state. These links are created by a common cause, which has produced a race or a state. The link between individuals forming a *true nation* is spiritual; it is the national consciousness of a mission or a common aim, in conformity with the highest inspiration.

The unity of a true nation is intermediate between the unity of Self and the unity of God. In the

consciousness of a mission God is revealed, since a true mission can only be made manifest through divine inspiration. But at the same time the fulfilment of a mission requires the concordant activity of free spirits, aware of their freedom and of their voluntary sacrifice of every selfish desire that would prevent the harmony and unity of the group. Thus in national consciousness the full awareness of the individual as a real being is combined with the wider awareness of God who is the source of inspiration.

Such a conception of a nation, as a group of spirits with a common aim or mission, limits the number of nations to those who are true organs of God in the life of mankind. As the body of a single human being cannot have an indefinite number of limbs, so also mankind can only be served by a limited number of nations. Each true nation is formed by the assimilation of many different ethnographic elements. Thus the English nation has been formed of Celts, Romans, Angles, Saxons, Normans, and the French nation of Celts, Romans, Franks, Burgundians, Goths.

A large number of different peoples or races has to be transformed through national consciousness into a small number of true nations, each entrusted by Providence with a mission. These missions, as given by God, must agree among themselves, and the crystallization of nations out of the mass of races and peoples leads to a lasting peace on earth. Each nation will have a national territory prepared by Providence for the fulfilment of its national task, and will therefore not desire to conquer other countries. But it takes a very long time to ascertain what the divinely appointed frontiers are, within which a national life may grow.

Christianity has been so far introduced into the life of individuals by the example given in the individual

life of Christ. Political and social relations remain Pagan ; and in order to convert nations a whole nation is needed to be a Messiah of nations.

Such a Nation-Christ would introduce Christianity into its own social relations and then into the political relations with other nations. Polish Messianists have believed that Poland would become the Messiah of nations. But the truth of Messianism, as the final outcome of human thought seeking to understand reality, does not depend on its acceptance by the nation which has received this revelation. Christianity was revealed to the Jews in Palestine ; but they did not accept it, and Christianity became a Roman religion. Thus it might happen that Polish Messianism, revealed to the Poles and rejected by them, would be accepted by another nation. A competition between nations is open for the introduction of the Christian spirit into social and political life. Whatever nation achieves it, will become the Messiah and Saviour of Humanity, under the inspiration coming from the same Christ whom the Christians worship as their Lord and God.

This explanation of the place of Messianism in the logical development of the successive conceptions of existence leads to practical consequences in economic and political life. It also shows that Messianism is not an arbitrary invention of a small remote nation, but the contribution of that nation to the intellectual life of mankind, at a moment when this contribution is the logical outcome of the preceding development.

The general acceptance of Messianism cannot be the result of any kind of propaganda. If the claim of the great Polish Messianists, that they bring into the life of mankind a new and valuable revelation, is just, this revelation will act in an immediate way in many individual souls all over the earth, until every human

being will regard his individual life as a contribution to the mission of his nation. Then only will the realization of Messianist ideals become possible.

We may ask, whether such a transformation of the traditional material links which exist between individuals, and are caused by their common origin, into that new kind of spiritual links, which unite individuals of different origin into nations, each entrusted with a Providential mission, would lead us towards that perfection of human life which we call the Kingdom of God on earth. Is it necessary to divide mankind into nations, instead of abolishing what is now called national differences and insisting on the universal fraternity of men as children of one God?

Such a nationalism seems to lead, as does imperialism, to strife, hate and war. But this is true of false nationalism only, which is chiefly exemplified by two great historical failures: Pangermanism and Panslavism.

These doctrines, invented by the despotic governments which partitioned and oppressed Poland, are in every respect totally different from Messianism. According to Messianism the mission of every true nation is to serve other nations, and not to rule over them. A true nation unites many races in voluntary assimilation, as happened for centuries in Poland, in evident contrast with the Germanization and Russification recommended by Pangermanists and Panslavists. A true nation is the home of liberty, as Poland was when the Unitarians settled at Raków and printed there their publications to avoid the persecution which threatened them everywhere else. Also the Jews, persecuted everywhere, found in Poland not only liberty but special privileges.

The unity of mankind cannot be achieved otherwise than by certain instruments, or organs, which are the true nations. The awakening of national consciousness in individuals produces under divine guidance such nations in a regenerated mankind. Perfect

unity cannot arise in a homogeneous mass, until this rough mass becomes an organized whole consisting of definite members, like every other organism.

The first appearance of a spiritual unity formed out of individuals widely differing from each other was the creation of the universal Church. But the link between individuals in the Church consists in their relation to God, expressed in creed and ritual. This is not the whole life of the individual.

It is only in union with many individuals of the same kind that the fullness of life can be manifested; and this is the true national life, not as it is known now, but as it will become possible when the fire of national consciousness abolishes selfishness in all individuals and nations, so that everyone will devote all his energies to serve his nation, and through that nation the whole of humanity.

This fire of national consciousness will also abolish class distinctions and class warfare. All classes will become aware of a common aim; no competition between capital and labour will spoil social peace, since everyone will understand that neither capital nor labour is the real source of wealth. Capital is sterile without labour; but labour is equally unproductive without the genius of the inventor and the organiser. It is the inspiration of genius that is the true source of wealth; and if everyone understands this, the production of wealth can be immensely accelerated, until the needs of all will be easily satisfied.

The life of an individual in constant mystical union with others, who by their innate qualities are fit to be his most intimate friends, increases creative power, as we see whenever a group of friends lives closely together and with the same ideal. Friendship, sympathy, understanding exalt the creative power, and produce a spiritual atmosphere in which the spirit

thrives. A true nation permanently produces such an atmosphere for all its members, and enables them to make heroic efforts in the pursuit of universal happiness. Such a national life requires the realization of the highest ideal in our earthly life,—the progressive transformation of the earth into a part of heaven. The difference between this and the other life will be gradually overcome and this life shaped after the pattern of the other life.

The chief metaphysical dogma of Messianism is palingenesis, consisting in the certainty of pre-existence and in the fixed determination to reincarnate. The Polish doctrine of palingenesis is independent from any tradition either of Greece or India, or from similar tendencies in French spiritism. It is the result chiefly of the discovery of the true nation as a metaphysical reality and of the new experience of national consciousness, illuminating every detail of earthly life with the glamour of eternity.

National consciousness refers to the objective existence in this life of the eternal reality of a great mission or ideal. The full realization of this ideal is impossible in a single life. If I love Poland with all my soul and if I wish to devote all my energies to Poland, not to the actual Poland as it is now, but to the Poland of my fairest dreams, a nation living an infinitely happy life of constant creative effort, helping all other nations towards the same happiness,—then I shall have enough to do for æons on this earth.

The Poland I love is a finite country between the rivers Oder and Dniepr, inhabited by my friends, whose company I need for all eternity. We shall therefore, when our bodies are worn out, build new bodies of a similar shape, in which we shall recognize each other in successive incarnations. These new bodies, improved in each incarnation, will become

increasingly useful and efficient instruments for carrying out every plan once formed.

Every failure in life will become a motive for renewed efforts in another life. This refers to love as well as to friendship. The woman loved in one life and grown old in a decrepit body will be born again young and more beautiful than she has ever been, virtuous and innocent. There are infinite degrees of intimate union and mutual penetration of souls between lovers. It is impossible to experience them all in a single incarnation. Many lives are needed to become thoroughly familiar with the nearest soul. There are many common experiences which are delightful and fascinating. Of all this infinite wealth of love-experience each couple of lovers knows only a small part. Whatever bliss they have felt together may be increased. But for that experience we need our bodies, since we love both the soul and the body of the beloved. Therefore we must return to this life many times, until we have penetrated all the mysteries of love.

There is a higher happiness in moral perfection or sanctity; here again the narrow limits of one single life are quite insufficient. The stages leading from the condition of those who cannot abstain from sin, to the happy perfection of one who cannot sin at all, require more than one life to be experienced. And when the summit is reached, when the 'working of miracles' begins, there is so much to do, that a saint who loves his nation will give up his own eternal bliss in heaven in order to work steadily at inducting heaven for all on earth.

In order to do this we also need genius. Genius is rarely united with sanctity; but the ideal of Messianism is a generation of saints who would be at the same time men of genius. To reach this perfection even more lives are necessary than to achieve simple

sanctity. And as individual perfection rises, the difficulty increases of raising all others to the level attained by the privileged individual. Thus human life, which appears to us now chiefly as a succession of individual failures, would become more and more an opportunity for the most splendid victories of the spirit over the flesh.

Mystics have usually represented the other life as totally different from this life, and they have grown less and less interested in all that belongs to this life. Messianists love this life and they wish to improve it by introducing into every material detail the beauty of spiritual perfection. Messianism is a mysticism which utilizes the very widest experience of the other life in this our earthly human life, in order to make it happy and perfect.

This Messianic happiness and perfection cannot easily be expressed in words before it is translated into acts. This explains why Messianism was created chiefly by poets and endorsed by thinkers interpreting inspiration. The reality of the new experience of national consciousness cannot be made manifest by words or arguments to those who have not experienced it. Words can only proclaim that such a sublime reality exists, that it works already in many souls and that it will transform human life according to the promise contained in the Lord's Prayer.

Millions of Christians are praying for the Kingdom of God, for the fulfilment of God's will on earth as in heaven; and from Poland comes the happy news that these prayers, continued for nineteen centuries, begin at last to have an effect, producing a new kind of everlasting happiness in some souls.

Among all objects of passionate love the true nation is the greatest, since it includes everything else. The love of a life-partner and of the children

born of a perfectly happy marriage is one aspect of the love of our nation, since we cannot imagine a better use for their energies than in perfecting national life. The love of truth and beauty is also included in complete and perfect national life, since this implies the discovery of every truth and the creation of every beauty.

That each human spirit belongs by nature to a particular choir and can best fulfil its destiny in that choir; that the number of such choirs is limited; and that all races and peoples are only rough material for the final constitution of mankind into such true nations;—this is the most important message given to mankind by Polish Messianism. But it can be understood and accepted only by those who have a personal experience of such an intimate union with a choir of essentially friendly spirits. This message will be welcome to them as it is an objective justification of their deepest and strongest feelings, which are condemned and ridiculed as selfish by all those who do not share them.

Now there has been from the earliest times a conflict between the monism of ancient philosophers and the pluralism of ancient religions. This conflict continues in the modern world as the opposition of a shallow and superficial internationalism, engineered by mere intelligence without any genuine inspiration, and the warm creative life of true nations which by the fulfilment of their missions lead to a higher unity of mankind.

This true nationalism differs from soulless imperialism, as spiritualism from spiritism, as freedom from universal slavery. In the struggle between Christianity and materialistic soulless and godless Socialism, Polish Messianism appears as the latest succour of Christianity, not only against modern premature internationalism,

but also against the two great religions of Buddhism and Islam, which are the most serious rivals of Christianity.

Messianism has been called a philosophy of action ; and indeed it has more immediate applications to practical life than have the great philosophies which have preceded Polish national thought : materialism, idealism, pantheism, spiritualism and mysticism. The Messianist is a mystic who takes a most active part in the material organization of life. He is more often a leader of industry or a working man, an artist or an educator, than a mere theorist, a thinker or a writer.

Messianism penetrates the practice of life, and it will take a very long time before the philosophy of Messianism is worked out in detail like the Greek philosophies of materialism, idealism and pantheism, or the French philosophy of spiritualism have been. English readers may, however, find the Messianist doctrine of the soul and of sexual life expressed in English by a Polish Messianist, in *The World of Souls*.¹

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¹ This book was welcomed by George Sampson in the *Weekly Westminster* (March 8, 1924), in an article called 'The Soul comes Back,' which proves, as do many other reviews of the same volume in other English papers, that Polish Messianism may be made accessible in English, and that the peculiar experience of the great Polish Messianists of a century ago is not at all limited to Poles, but is becoming familiar to numbers of English readers. This last supposition has been verified by many letters written by the readers of *The World of Souls* to the author. In his recent visit to England the author had the opportunity of meeting his new friends and of answering their questions. He is also ready to answer inquiries from the readers of the above, as this is the most efficient method of increasing the number of those who desire to prepare what has been called by Messianists 'the great transformation.'