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Historicist and historical religious studies

Historical references in the reflection on religions and religiosities have such a long tradition that it is difficult to imagine religious studies without them. Of course, in this context history has been referenced in various ways and for different purposes. Thus, many times the same historical facts are used to argue for or against specific beliefs and practices, while yet another group of scholars may hold them irrelevant. It is impossible to present, in this relatively short discussion, the very broad spectrum of ways in which studies on religion employ historical facts. This is not the aim of this paper. In this paper, I will rather attempt to discern and draw a borderline between historicist and historical reflections in religious studies, which I consider as two completely different types of reflection. Each of the types is also intrinsically diverse.

Historicist religious studies

Historicism is here used in line with Karl R. Popper's understanding of the term, which he discussed, among other works, in *The Open Society and its Enemies*¹. Popper connects historicism first and foremost with the doctrines of Plato, Hegel and Marx. These doctrines differ in more than one respect. What they do have in common, however, is such a description and explanation of the history of mankind which implies that its scenario had been written by an external force (whether from this world or another is less relevant). The quintessential fact remains that the scenario cannot be changed, even if its end is known and is a source of fear or anxiety. In short, the hallmark of all historicist doctrines

¹ In his introduction to the book, K. R. Popper states that his work attempts “to contribute to our understanding of totalitarianism and of the significance of the perennial fight against it. It further tries to examine the application of the critical and rational methods of science to the problems of the open society. It analyses the principles of democratic social reconstruction (...). And it tries to clear away some of the obstacles impeding a rational approach to the problems of social reconstruction. It does so by criticizing those social philosophies which are responsible for the widespread prejudice against the possibilities of democratic reform. The most powerful of these reactionary philosophies is one which I have called *historicism*”. See K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. I, London 1947, p. 1-2.

is the common belief in the 'inexorable laws of historical destiny'. Popper criticised such an understanding of historicism in *The Poverty of Historicism*². In this work, he tries to prove that "historicism is a poor method, a method which does not bear any fruit", and that the various scenarios presented by historicists do not rely on objective knowledge³.

In the *Aftermath of The Open Society and its Enemies*, Popper points to the existence of theistic and Christian historicism. In his discussion of this specific form of historicism, Popper claims that "[w]ith Hegel, it looks upon history as a stage, or rather, as a kind of lengthy Shakespearian play; and the audience conceive either the 'great historical personalities', or mankind in the abstract, as the heroes of the play. Then they ask, 'Who has written this play?' And they think that they give a pious answer when they reply, 'God'. But they are mistaken. Their answer is pure blasphemy, for the play was written not by God, but, under the supervision of generals and dictators, by the professors of history". One can infer from the discussion that by "the professors of history" Popper means renowned Christian theologians, whereas "generals and dictators" are in fact those hierarchs and Church superiors who oversee the conscience and reflections of the faithful, strengthening their belief that "God reveals Himself and His judgement in history". According to Popper, "to maintain that God reveals Himself in what is usually called 'history', in the history of international crime and of mass murder, is indeed blasphemy; for what really happens within the realm of human lives is hardly ever touched upon by this cruel and at the same time childish affair. The life of the forgotten, of the unknown individual man; his sorrows and his joys, his suffering and death, this is the real content of human experience down the ages. If that could be told by history, then I should certainly not say that it is blasphemy to see the finger of God in it. But such a history does not and cannot exist; and all the history which exists, our history of the Great and Powerful, is at best a shallow comedy"⁴. It is worth noticing that while criticising theistic historicism, Popper seeks the support of Karl Barth, a protestant theologian. Thus, he shows that among the "professors of history" identifying themselves with Christianity, there are also those who raise *votum separatum* with regard to the type of historicism supported and popularized by the "generals and dictators" of the Church⁵.

² In the *Introduction* Popper summarises his arguments against historicism. He criticises such a perspective on social life based on the following premises: "1. The course of human history is strongly influenced by the growth of human knowledge (...). 2. We cannot predict by rational or scientific methods, the future growth of our scientific knowledge (...). 3. We cannot, therefore, predict the future course of human history. 4. (...) There can be no scientific theory of historical development serving as a basis for historical prediction. 5. The fundamental aim of historicist methods (...) is therefore misconceived; and historicism collapses". See K. R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London 2002, p. xi-xii.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁴ "[I]t is the opera buffa played by the powers behind reality (comparable to Homer's opera buffa of the Olympian powers behind the scene of human struggles). It is what one of our worst instincts, the idolatrous worship of power, of success, has led us to believe to be real". See K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. II, London 1947, p. 258-259.

⁵ K. R. Popper explains the reference to 'the professors of history' in the following way: "My intention in quoting Barth is to show that it is not only my 'rationalist' or 'humanist' point of view from which the worship

K. R. Popper's depiction of Christian "professors of history" is in general reflecting the actual voices of some Christian theologians belonging to this very group, such as Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, the authors of the *Concise Theological Dictionary*. Many entries in this dictionary include references to history. In each case the authors conclude that, in general, the wheels of history are turned by God's will. They all head towards the end that has already been scripted by God. This end is referred to by various names, which also have their historical meanings and justifications. Rahner and Vorgrimler's explanations of *revelation* imply that in the earthly reality, including the history of mankind, what is superior reveals itself through the self-transcendence of what is inferior. Both constitute equally true and real sides of one miracle: revelation and history⁶. Further explanations can be found among other in the entries devoted to *general revelation* (Christian tradition assumes that the first people did not possess the clear, conceptual and reflective understanding of God's revelation provided in the official and public *history of salvation*. This history means that God in his grace extends his universal will of salvation to the history of mankind as a whole and in it presents all people with *salvation*. His Grace and justification were indeed revealed to humanity in a historical and concrete way).

Such a perspective on history, implies or demands that Jesus Christ be presented as a historical figure. He is depicted thus by the authors of the *Concise Theological Dictionary*. The historical existence, life, death and resurrection, as well as what Jesus spoke about himself are historically proven by the four Gospels, the apostles' letters, and evidence from early-Christian and non-Christian sources (Flavius Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, Talmud)⁷. However, maybe He should also, or even first and foremost, be depicted as a suprahistorical person i.e. as the Son of God, who remains with God the Father in an absolutely unique relation. This relation is reserved only for Him and off limits to other humans⁸. The case of people in His more and less immediate surroundings is similar; His family becomes the holy family; the apostles stop being simple fishermen

of historical success appears as incompatible with the spirit of Christianity. What matters to Christianity is not the historical deeds of the powerful Roman conquerors but (to use a phrase of Kierkegaard's) 'what a few fishermen have given the world'" (ibidem, p. 345).

⁶ According to Rahner and Vorgrimler this view can be juxtaposed from two perspectives. The first one is intrinsicism – a type of modernism that perceives revelation as nothing else but the development of a religious need, which is an immanent necessity in the story of mankind. Intrinsicism objectifies this need in its most diverse forms in the history of different religions. Its pure objectifications are gradually realised in Judaism and Christianity. The second, extrinsicism, views revelation as God's external intervention, in which He addresses people through prophets giving them truths that would otherwise be inaccessible and providing them with moral (and other) guidelines. See K. Rahner, H. Vorgrimler, *Mały słownik teologiczny [Concise Theological Dictionary]*, Warsaw 1987, p. 282.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 157.

⁸ According to Rahner, and Vorgrimler Jesus Christ is the supreme form of creation; as a member of humanity he is its Lord and its Head – a link between God and his creation. If he cannot be conceived in his humanity without the world as his surroundings, in his reality God's will, directed towards the world in general, in a real and final sense was reflected in the historical concreteness in the world (ibidem, p. 162).

and turn into saints, just as all others are ready to pay (and paying) the highest price for the canonization of their faith and their Church.

The authors of the *Concise Theological Dictionary*, writing from the religious point of view and for religious purposes, are obviously entitled to such a perspective and to remain silent about facts that could contradict their laudation of the faith, which they believe in along with all the others, who perceive such literature as a stronghold for their conscience and thought. Their peace might be shattered, however, not only by the views of K. R. Popper or Karl Barth, but also by those historians who point to significant differences between the Gospels and the ambiguity of non-Christian sources, e.g. a Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, the author of *Antiquitates*, or the Roman writers mentioned in the entry devoted to *Jesus Christ* (they call Christian beliefs a 'superstition', 'an old-wives' tale' or 'a criminal religion')⁹.

Clearly, writing from the religious perspective, historians also evaluate the sources critically and point to existing ambiguities, or even significant differences in issues fundamental for Christianity. This approach may be illustrated by Wilfrid J. Harrington's *Key to the Bible* – a work highly appreciated not only by Christian readers. The author, among other things, makes it clear that the early Church understood the term *evangelion*, not as a book describing the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, but as good news of the redemption offered by the Messiah, the mission of redemption. When, in the 2nd century, the meaning of *evangelion* shifted to a written Gospel, the written word was still believed to fulfil the missionary purposes and served the same goal as the spoken word i.e. to awake and strengthen the faith. Harrington claims further that an evangelist is at the same time a preacher, supported by the entire authority of the living Church, for which he speaks. His work is kerygmatic in that it heralds Jesus Christ. An evangelist's task is not to write the biography of Jesus; his intentions remain purely kerygmatic and theological¹⁰.

This distinction between Jesus from the kerygmatic perspective (prophetic) and the historical one, is today acknowledged by different churches of Christ¹¹. It is true that such

⁹ "We are mostly interested in three fragments of *Antiquitates* (...) The fragments devoted to John the Baptist and Jacob do not raise any particular doubts and are usually believed to be authentic. (...) The piece of information about Jesus and Christians, however, which is most crucial for us has been questioned for a long time..." See J. Keller, *Chrześcijaństwo pierwotne [Original Christianity]*, in: *Zarys dziejów religii [Outline of religious history]*, collective work, Warsaw 1988, p. 580 ff. The cited author provides five reasons why the information about Jesus and Christians is questioned and believed to be (also by a few Christian historians) "added to Joseph's work by a Christian copyist at the turn of the 3rd and the 4th century".

¹⁰ See W. J. Harrington, *Klucz do Biblii [Key to the Bible, Polish edition]*, Warsaw 2000, p. 359 ff.

¹¹ "This problem might be approached from the following perspective: Can our Gospels be traced back to Jesus of Nazareth, His Words and His deeds, or to the initial community of believers. Does the image of Jesus in the Gospels reflect historical reality or was it created by the initial community? (...) This distinction was applied to Jesus long ago (12th century). Jesus was viewed from the historical perspective and as he was depicted by the Apostles, or as a historical and legendary figure, or as a historical or mythical figure. In light of the above, the image of Jesus presented in the Gospels is not so much based on history, but on legends or myths. Today the problem is approached from another perspective: Jesus, the historical person, lived and was active in Nazareth, while Jesus whom the initial community believed in is viewed as an idealised figure. (...)

a distinction was introduced relatively long ago, but a longer time span was indispensable for the Christian conscience and thought, to handle facts that are difficult to question. More than once do the Gospels depict Jesus of Nazareth, his words and his deeds, in a completely different way, and their authors based the relations to a certain extent (according to some) or entirely (as believed by others) on second-hand accounts¹². These facts were in the 17th and 18th century so difficult to reconcile with the Christian conscience and thought that the authors who discovered them refrained from presenting their views publicly. Such was the case of Hermann Samuel Reimerus (1694-1768), the author of *Apologia or Defense for the Rational Reverers of God*. He was not seeking publicity. On the contrary, he could rather be described as a steady and peaceful professor teaching Eastern languages at the gymnasium in Hamburg, his hometown¹³. Nothing could prove his reluctance to receive publicity or recognition better than the fact that he decided not to share the work of his life (written over 20 years) with his contemporaries. Were it not for Gotthold. E. Lessing, who stumbled on his manuscript, nobody would have ever learned about the professor's discoveries. But even he was not bold enough to publish the entire work of Reimerus; only in part was it released in 1774 under the title *Fragments by an Anonymous Writer* in his *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*. The Church felt indignant at the book. The Christian perspective on its inception and main figures was defended, among others, by Pastor Melchior Goeze. Regardless of what one could have said about the pastor, the words written by Reimerus were severe. Having conducted a philological analysis of the Bible, Reimerus questioned the grounds not only of Christianity but also of the older faith i.e. Judaism. The analysis leads to the conclusion that the sacred word is not so sacred (as it is full of contradiction and ambiguity) and that the biblical prophets resemble common people in more than one respect (such as their inclination towards vengeance). Reimerus showed also the human dimension of the relationship between

There is also a different approach: historic and kerygmatic i.e. Christ of the apostles' kerygma. (...) Finally, according to yet another formula, we can distinguish between Jesus, as documented by history, and Christ, as perceived by the Gospels. The latter was created by the initial Church and the evangelists, and is not a faithful image of the historical figure. All these distinctions point to the fact that Christ (the object of faith) depicted in the Gospels is not the same as the historical figure of Jesus born and active in Palestine". See Rev. J. Kudasiwicz, *The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith*, Lublin 1987, p. 5 ff [translation mine].

¹² W. J. According to Harrington, the apostles and first preachers stand between Christ and the evangelists. He believes that the first three Gospels i.e. St. Matthew's, St. Mark's and St. Luke's are closely related and only St. John follows his own path. He also reminds us that the tradition of the initial Church is unanimous and that St. Matthew was one of the Twelve Apostles and wrote it in Aramaic. Still, the Gospel of St. Matthew found in the New Testament was written in Greek, and it had not been translated. The relationship between the Aramaic version and the later Gospel remains unclear. See W. J. Harrington, *Klucz do Biblii [Key to the Bible, Polish edition]*, op. cit., p. 370 ff. J. Keller argues that apocryphal texts, including Gospels were written in a later period (after the death of Jesus of Nazareth) most of which date back to the 2nd century and reflect the perception of Jesus that dominated in many Christian communities of that time. J. Keller, *Original Christianity*, op. cit., p. 584.

¹³ "He authored highly valued books devoted to the defence of natural religion and the criticism of atheism: he argued in particular that only the wisdom of the Supreme Being may explain the marvellous organisation of the kingdom of insects". See P. Hazard, *Mysł europejska w XVIII wieku. Od Monteskiusza do Lessinga [European thought in the 18th century: From Montesquieu to Lessing]*, Warsaw 1972, p. 374 ff.

Christ and his disciples, which he believed to be based on the “captivation of the mind for religious purposes”.

In the same period, a few other authors were not only inclined to recognize these discoveries as historical facts, but also complemented them with others, even more difficult to reconcile with the Christian conscience and thought. One of them, Johann Christian Edelman, a theologian educated at the University of Jena, perceives original Christianity in a way which was rather revolutionary for a person with his education. He presents his arguments in *Moses with Uncovered Face* (1740). The work takes the form of a dialogue between two main characters impersonating the Christian ignorance and the enlightened reason. Their debate focuses not only on the contradictions, ambiguities and absurdities found in the Bible, but also on the embellishments made by different translators. The enlightened reason plays the main role in the debate and forces his opponent to be silent or only mildly argue with his views. The force of his arguments makes them impossible to counter, e.g. he claims that the original apostles' words are long lost and only fragmentary copies have remained, which do not resemble one another.

Voltaire may be considered a classic representative of this 'literature of historical facts', who made the Christian conscience and the thought regarding Christianity and other religions uncomfortable, among others in his *Essay on the Customs*. In this book, he reviews a spectrum of peoples' histories, starting from the Jews and ending with the French under Louis IV. Discussing his work, René Pomeau comments that the author pays special attention to such revolutionary events as the beginnings of Christianity, the crusades, colonial conquests and the reformation. Although in close-up the history of mankind is dominated by a combination of crime and fear, in total, judging from a broader perspective, humanity has advanced substantially. Voltaire believes that the human being, savage in nature, possesses certain values, which can save him from a very animalistic behaviour...¹⁴. These values, however, are not associated with Christianity or Christian spirituality, as Voltaire saw these two as actually major causes of the combination of crime and fear. Neither does he relate them to the *Bible*, which he views as a historical document, but the facts presented in it bewilder the enlightened reason, rather than encourage it to follow its general guidelines¹⁵. It is also worth noting that starting from Calvin, Voltaire sees the history of France as anything but the history of madmen. He has even depicted this story in *La Henriade*, i.e. the history of religious wars, which took place in France in the second half of the 16th century. It must be stressed, however, that all Voltaire's works discussed here are not viewed here as historical but as historicist sources and that this particular approach was aimed as a retort to Christian historicism (the former seeks to criticize whatever is praised by the latter). Similar is the

¹⁴ See R. Pomeau, *Voltaire (1694-1778)*, in: *Literatura francuska*, praca zbiorowa [*French literature*, collective work], vol. I, Warsaw 1974, p. 613.

¹⁵ “Voltaire plays with the eccentricities of Pentateuch, such as eating manure by Ezekiel (upon God's order), love affairs of Dinah at the age of six, or Sara, who at the age of 75 is desired by Fharaoh, or at the age of 90 by the king of Gerar” (ibidem, p. 614).

case of other authors, whose main goal was to show how different religions may be blamed for the world's evil (and evil only).

Historical religious studies

Historical religious studies have so many faces that presenting their comprehensive typology would not only be difficult, but also boring. They all share common characteristics, but there are countless such features and any attempt to determine the most important common denominator would spark endless discussions. At the turn of the 19th and the 20th century, this difficulty was reflected in polemical debates between different schools of history, e.g. the Marxist School or Annales School (named after *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* edited by M. L. Bloch and L. Febvre). The two schools had the same answer to the question: who 'scripts' the history of humanity? The representatives of both, in general agreed that people do. There was no accord, however, as to who those people were and why they and not others should be considered the main 'scriptwriters'. The answers had a bearing on another dilemma: what do 'the professors of history' do and how should they complete their tasks? This was confirmed by *The Historians's craft* by M. Bloch¹⁶ and by those Marxist historians who criticized Bloch's work (e.g. for misunderstanding the role that the economic factor or production play in determining social relations), at the same time referring to the historic role of the working class and the mandate they received to speak in its name.

A historian, including a historian specializing in religion and religiosity, needs to tackle the problems briefly discussed above, which clearly show that this kind of study is far more complex than K. R. Popper suggests in his critical approach to historicism. One may agree with his belief that history is scripted and shaped by people on earth, who experience diverse troubles, and even with the view that the script and the way it is played out is rarely 'Great and Powerful', but rather usual and prosaic, which makes

¹⁶ Bloch explains that "[h]ere, as elsewhere, it is change that the historian seeks to grasp. But in the film he is examining, only the last frame remains perfectly clear. In order to reconstruct the faded features of the others, it behoves him first to unwind the spool in the opposite direction". See M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, New York 1953, p. 71. It seems that not only 'unwinding the spool' may pose a problem. It is also difficult to reconstruct the actual events, keep track, describe and explain them. After all, in formulating their opinions the 'professors of history' rely on the sources, which answer only 'skilfully formulated questions'. The 'professors' must also remember that their task is completed once the gathered material is explained. That is also what distinguishes them from judges, who issue sentences. It does not follow that a historian cannot or should not judge. If we understand Bloch correctly, it is important to be aware of the difference between establishing and explaining facts, and evaluating them so that judgements do not replace explanations. See J. Topolski, *Marxizm i historia [Marxism and History]*, Warsaw 1977, p. 236 ff. To be clear, Topolski does not deem Bloch a Marxist. To be a Marxist, a historian must argue for and apply class theory. Bloch was an advocate of a progressive and rationalist evaluation system, with overtones of class theory, quite similar to the Marxist approach, e.g. in the field of agrarian history (ibidem, p. 238).

us indifferent to it. It is, however, crucial not to be indifferent to what historians examine and describe. One of their tasks is to present past events in a way that could intrigue all those people who are not passionate about history. Historians should not embellish these facts excessively. If a story needs colouring, it still must be credible, historically viable. One way, or another, the 'professors of history' play an important role. Not only them, but also all those representatives of social sciences and other humanities who place historical events in the limelight.

These professors are expected not only to know the historical facts (and not confuse them with historic events), but also to make clear historical generalisations, from which everyone would be able to infer what was at the beginning, where it evolved and how, even if the participants of the events were not fully aware of their aims or expected completely different outcomes from the ones actually achieved. It is, however, completely normal and natural that whatever happened and is happening is perceived differently by the participants and external observers, such as 'the professors of history', and that the meanings associated with these events by both groups are radically different. This, in a way, answers Popper's claim that history makes no sense. This concludes the general remarks.

Historical research relies on one's awareness of two issues: what a historian may and should do, as well as what this job involves in practice. I will now present examples from the history of Christianity, whereby the Christian conscience of the historians seems to coincide with such a perspective on human history, which understands it as a work created for the people by the people. The work *History of the Popes* by Leopold Ranke, a professor at the University of Berlin, may serve well as an illustration. The foreword to the Polish edition reads that Ranke preached a programmatic objectivism. He formulated a directive, which for a long time used to be compulsory for the historians in Germany and across Europe. According to this directive, the role of history was to judge about the past, and teach contemporaries for the benefit of the future generations. Ranke's work, did not pursue such ambitious goals, as it was only aimed to tell the true story¹⁷. The author of the foreword reminds also that Ranke used the directive to respond to his adversaries, while the supporters of Hegel accused him of a pedantic attention to details, the lack of a broader perspective or appropriate criteria, narrow-mindedness, etc. And yet, his work became prominent not only in Germany. It must be noted that the book was published in the middle of the 19th century, at a time when the first anticlerical voices had only just started to emerge in Western Europe (the anticlerical wave reached its peak at the end of the century). The book was warmly received not only among anticlerical

¹⁷ "History should be an empirical science and establish facts after a critical analysis of the sources. A historian should observe historic events and attempt to understand them while assuming a neutral, indifferent approach. He should disregard any other goals, such as utilitarian, educational or moral, but be guided only by the need of cognition" [translation mine]. See M. H. Serejski, *Wstęp do wydania polskiego [Foreword to the Polish edition]*, in: L. von Ranke, *Dzieje papieżstwa w XVI-XIX wieku [History of the Popes: Their Church and State]*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1974, p. 8 ff.

readers, but also in a few circles related to the Church (e.g. J. Dollinger a well-known catholic historian was very impressed).

It would be difficult to disagree that the book is very meticulous, or that the author provides so many details that the reader might wonder: who and what does it help? But it cannot be said that it lacks a guiding principle or references to general history. Indeed, they are mentioned already in the preface to the *History of the Popes*. A short report on the collection of sources (and a review of their historical validity) are followed by the remarks on nepotism among contemporary rulers, including the Church hierarchs and generalizing statements that a Catholic “would enter on the subject in a spirit very different from [his]. By indulging in expressions of personal veneration, or, perhaps, in the present state of opinion, of personal hatred, he would give to his work a peculiar, and no doubt, more brilliant colouring; (...). In these respects a Protestant, a North German [i.e. someone like Ranke, Z. D.] cannot be expected to compete with him. He regards the papal power with feelings of more indifference; and must, from the first, renounce that warmth of expression which arises from partiality or hostility; and which might, perhaps, produce a certain impression in Europe”. Another generalisation, which appears later, refers not to the approach applied by the historian, but to the object of his interest, i.e. the papal power. According to Leopold van Ranke “as the history of the world has varied; as one nation or another has gained the ascendancy; as the fabric of social life has been disturbed; so also has the papal power been affected: its maxims, its objects, and its pretensions have undergone essential changes; and its influence, above all, has been subjected to the greatest variations”¹⁸. The general aim of the book is to present these transformations against their historical backdrop. Both are approached as historic events and are very strongly related to historical facts, thus not allowing the reader to doubt that no extra-terrestrial powers were involved.

Ranke’s depictions of Popes, among other things, contribute to this effect. It is not only that the Popes varied in their mental and moral capacity, but they also first analysed the worldly events and made decisions which could have and frequently did strengthen their position. For example, when discussing Pope Gregory I (his pontificate stretched from 590 to 604) Ranke reports: “[i]t chanced that certain Anglo-Saxons, being exposed for sale in the slave-market of Rome, attracted the attention of Pope Gregory the Great; he at once resolved that Christianity should be preached to the nation whence these beautiful captives had been taken”¹⁹. Alexander VI (1492-1503) may serve as another example. Even historians writing from the perspective of the Catholic Church do not depict him as great²⁰.

¹⁸ See L. von Ranke, *History of the Popes: Their Church and State*, New York 1901, p. XII.

¹⁹ “Never, perhaps, was the resolution adopted by any pope whence results more important ensued: together with the doctrines of Christianity a veneration for Rome and for the Holy See, such as had never before existed in any nation, found place among the Germanic Britons” (ibidem, p. 12).

²⁰ Rev. Marian Banaszak depicts him as a strong personality, who led a life of a grand master, not trying to cloud it with hypocrisy. As a Pope, he viewed himself first and foremost as a monarch, but was much more tolerant towards his people than his predecessors. He reorganized the finances of the Papal State and lowered

It would be also very difficult to find any traces of greatness in the way he was presented by Ranke, who perceived him as a person whose great object “through his whole life was to gratify his inclination for pleasure, his ambition and his love of ease. (...) His only care was to seize on all means that might aid him to increase his power, and advance the wealth and dignity of his sons: on no other subject did he ever seriously bestow a thought”²¹. The history of the papacy presented by Ranke is not entirely bleak. There are popes, like Leo X (1513-1521), who was a great intellectual, a humanist and a patron of the arts and sciences. According to Ranke, Leo “was a passionate lover of music” and used to hum “the airs that were performed”. He was also “full of kindness and ready sympathies”²². In this great historical panorama, which the *History of the Popes* undoubtedly is, dark pages intertwine with the bright ones much more frequently.

The Crusades are an important chapter in the history of Christianity. The way they are depicted and assessed may also function as an indicator pointing to the differences between the historicist and historical approach. The latter is, in my opinion, represented by Steven Runciman – the author of *A History of the Crusades* (first published in 1951). In his introductory note, the author expresses the belief “that the supreme duty of the historian is to write history, that is to say, to attempt to record in one sweeping sequence the greater events and movements that have swayed the destinies of man. The writer rash enough to make the attempt should not be criticized for his ambition, however much he may deserve censure for the inadequacy of his equipment or the inanity of his results”²³. These words are fully understandable, when we take into account the scale of the undertaking, related difficulties and the risk of offending religious feelings, as the described events are viewed as an integral element of the act of salvation. It is true that the author is related to the Christian tradition, but it is the protestant one. The protestant tradition differs from the Catholic, not only with respect to the type of historical sensitivity, but also the tendency to forgive the mistakes of the previous generations.

This is also clearly visible when we compare the presentation and evaluation of the crusades by the catholic and protestant historians. The author of *Historia Kościoła katolickiego* [History of the Catholic Church], already cited in this paper, admits that the

taxes despite the debts made by Pope Innocent VIII. See Rev. M. Banaszak, *Historia Kościoła katolickiego* [History of the Catholic Church], vol. 2, Warsaw 1987, p. 315 ff.

²¹ See L. von Ranke, *History of the Popes: Their Church and State*, New York 1901, p. 38. Ranke calls one of his sons, Caesar Borgia a ‘virtuoso in crime’ and reminds that such popes as Alexander VI made Luther believe that the pope was “preparing the way for antichrist, and labouring for the interest of Satan, rather than the kingdom of God” (ibidem, p. 38).

²² “It is true that he [Leo X] did not always attend the pontifical proprieties. He would sometimes leave Rome – to the despair of his master of ceremonies – not only without surplice, but (...) what is worst of all, even with boots on his feet!” (ibidem, p. 52). A more reserved approach in the assessment of Leo X was demonstrated by Rev. Marian Banaszak, who in his book *Historii Kościoła katolickiego* [History of the Catholic Church] under the entry devoted to Leo X notes: “unsuccessful council”; and explains that he was selected to be the head of the Holy See mostly due to his skilful actions in the realm of politics and science and not the Church. His interest in the council was not taken into account at all, as he demonstrated none (ibidem, p. 322).

²³ See S. Runciman, *Dzieje wypraw krzyżowych*, Warszawa 1997, p. 13.

dramatic events stretching over two centuries (12th and 13th) did not help to unify the East and the West, neither in the area of politics nor the church – on the contrary, the divide was even deeper. They did have a theological justification (relating to the theory of the two swords used by St. Peter to defend Christ, and the theory of the two lights created by God: the sun and the moon), a missionary justification (the secular sword was introduced not only against the Muslims, but also against the pagans), a cultural justification (the Church-driven Western culture has developed so fast that it could leave the Byzantine and Arab culture far behind), a historic-social justification (the Tomb of Christ was constantly endangered by the Muslims, while the crusader states were like a magnet for the Western knights) and others²⁴.

Steven Runciman differently presents the circumstances which led to and surrounded individual crusades. Already in the first chapter of his extensive work he doubts that the Muslims posed any danger to the Tomb of Christ and Christian pilgrims heading in that direction. It is true that in the lifetime of the Prophet Mohamad the doctrine of the sword was 'unashamedly' applied. The sword struck, however, first "at the provinces of the Roman Empire", and once the Prophet was dead, at the Persians, Jews and other infidels²⁵. The title of the second Chapter of the book is intriguing: *The rein of Antichrist*. The chapter shows that Christians "accepted with good grace" the reign of the Arabs, as the Arabs "like the Persians before them, were prepared to accept religious minorities, provided that they were People of the Book"²⁶. Two general conclusions follow from this chapter: 1. "[g]ood Christians were happier under infidel rule" 2. in the first centuries of Christianity, it was the eastern Christians who played the dominant role, not the western, thus "[t]he eastern Christians were more nearly interested in the renascence of Byzantine power"²⁷.

The III chapter of the book is devoted to "The Pilgrims of Christ" and their pilgrimages, among other things, to the Tomb of Christ. The picture sketched in this chapter indicates that practically until the end of the 11th century, the Arabs never seriously

²⁴ See Rev. M. Banaszak, *Historia Kościoła katolickiego [History of the Catholic Church]*, op. cit., p. 151 ff.

²⁵ "By the year 700 Roman Africa was in the hands of the Arabs. Eleven years later they occupied Spain. In the year 717 their empire stretched from the Pyrenees to central India and their warriors were hammering at the walls of Constantinople". See S. Runciman, *Dzieje wypraw krzyżowych [A History of the Crusades]*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1997, p. 30.

²⁶ "The Christians, together with the Zoroastrians and the Jews, became *dhimmis*, or protected peoples, whose freedom of worship was guaranteed by the payment of the *jizya*, (...). Each sect was treated as a *milet*, a semi-autonomous community within the state, each under its religious leader who was responsible for its good behaviour to the Caliph's government. (...) The Christians had therefore no cause to regret the triumph of Islam. Despite an occasional brief bout of persecution and despite a few humiliating regulations, they were better off than they had been under the Christian Emperors" (ibidem, p. 32 ff).

²⁷ Runciman concludes the Chapter as follows: "[i]n the middle of the eleventh century the lot of the Christians in Palestine had seldom been so pleasant. The Moslem authorities were lenient; the Emperor was watchful of their interests. Trade was prospering and increasing with the Christian countries overseas. And never before had Jerusalem enjoyed so plentifully the sympathy and the wealth that were brought to it by pilgrims from the West" (ibidem, p. 46).

hindered pilgrimages, and “[s]o long as the pilgrims were orderly they could count on hospitable treatment from the peasants of the Empire”. Thus “[t]hroughout the eleventh century till its last two decades, an unending stream of travellers poured eastward, sometimes travelling in parties numbering thousands, men and women of every age and every class, ready, in that leisurely age, to spend a year or more on the voyage”²⁸. The motives for pilgrimages were of course as diverse, as the pilgrims heading to the Tomb of Christ – from average mortals to kings. For example, “the half-Danish Swein Godwinsson set out with a body of Englishmen in 1051 to expiate a murder, but died of exposure in the Anatolian mountains next autumn”²⁹.

Chapter IV entitled: *Towards disaster*, has been introduced with an excerpt from the *Book of Job: In prosperity the destroyer shall come*. Although one cannot say that this chapter identifies the *destroyer* with the pilgrims from the West, it is true that the forces destroying the peace and wellbeing of the eastern people include some travellers from the West, such as “large numbers of Norman adventurers from northern France, pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem”, or Pope Leo IX, who in the summer of 1053 “set out southward with an army of Germans and Italians, proclaiming that this was a holy war”. The conflict between the Western and the Eastern Empire and between the theologians of the Eastern and Western church (which deepened the divide) had an impact on the entire situation. It was not the Christians who gained the most, but the Muslims, such as “the first great Moslem Turk, Mahmud the Ghaznavid, who during the first decades of the eleventh century built up a great empire stretching from Ispahan to Bokhara and Lahore”. The “confusion in the East” was the reason why, although “[t]he pilgrim traffic had never entirely ceased, (...) the journey was now very difficult” and dangerous.

Book two of this publication bears the title: *The preaching of the crusade* and includes, among other things, a detailed historical analysis of the ‘sword theory’, or as it was put by Rev. M. Banaszak, “the theory of two swords”. Already in the first paragraphs, Runcimen, questions this theory claiming that Christianity is “the religion of peace”, about which “the earlier Christian Fathers had no doubts”, but the Eastern Church had a negative opinion in this matter. When Eastern governors, such as Basil II, launched a quest “against the Bulgars to recover imperial provinces”, the Church believed that “[p]eaceful methods were always preferable, even if they involved tortuous diplomacy or the payment of money”³⁰. Also, in the West there were a few governors and theologians who condemned wars and feared the sole thought of solving conflicts with a ‘sword’ (such as Bruno of Querfurt, who “had been outraged by the wars waged by the emperors of his time against

²⁸ “But the success of the pilgrimage depended on two conditions: first, that life in Palestine should be orderly enough for the defenceless traveller to move and worship in safety; and secondly, that the way should be kept open and cheap” (ibidem, p. 56).

²⁹ “He had gone barefoot because of his sins. Lagman Gudrodsson, Norse king of Man, who had slain his brother, sought a similar pardon from God” (ibidem, p. 54).

³⁰ “To western historians, accustomed to admire martial valour, the actions of many Byzantine statesmen appear cowardly or sly; but the motive was usually a genuine desire to avoid bloodshed” (ibidem, p. 85).

fellow-Christians"). But at the turn of the 10th and 11th century it was common and theologically justified to speak not only of the 'holy peace', but also of the 'holy war', "By the close of the eleventh century the idea of the holy war had thus been carried into practice" assuming the shape of the, so called, people's crusade. Although it was initiated by a monk, Peter the Hermit, its promoter and protector was the Pope, supported by the hierarchs from the Western Church³¹.

The approach of Steven Runcimen and Karl R. Popper converge at least in the case of the crusades – the most dramatic chapter in the history of the Western Church. The fact that they both present, evaluate, and justify the crusades positively, stems from the cult of power and constitutes in itself a glorification of power. It is not extraterrestrial, but purely human, guided by earthly needs, ambitions and desires. Such conclusions may be made based on the historical facts and history written by those professors, who distance themselves from the Roman-Catholic perspective.

³¹ "Christian knights and soldiers were encouraged by the authorities of the Church to leave their petty quarrels and to journey to the frontiers of Christendom to fight against the infidel. To reward them for their service they might take possession of the lands that they reconquered, and they received spiritual benefits. (...) The Papacy was taking over the direction of the holy wars. It often launched them and often named the commander. The land that was conquered had to be held under ultimate Papal suzerainty" (ibidem, p. 93).