

“...actually speaking, this man converted me”: Jerzy Liebert, Brzozowski, and the Question of a Modern Religious Poetry

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Whatever one thinks of the last years and months of the life and work of Stanisław Brzozowski, one facet is perfectly clear: he did not consider his growing proximity to Catholicism a ‘conversion’. In a letter from 1909 he wrote, “Nie jest to żadne nawrócenie: sądzę, że nigdy nie zrywałem związku z Kościołem jako żywym zrzeszeniem duchów.”¹ (This is not at all a conversion: I think that I never broke with the Church as a living association of spirits.)

As Andrzej Walicki points out, Brzozowski had indeed used the term *kościół* as early as 1903, though denoting not so much the Catholic Church, but a kind of organic community to be built by mankind.² It can be said without exaggeration that there had always been an “ecclesiastical” dimension in Brzozowski’s thought, even in his Marxist period (1904–1908). However, the argument against the idea of undergoing a conversion, the anxiety of becoming a genuine “convert” takes another course in the *Pamiętnik* (Diary), the diary Brzozowski wrote from the end of 1910 until his death in April 1911. On December 10, he noted, “Staraj się żyć modlitwą, a nie polemiką i przeciwstawieniem. Siła ginie w tym targu i nie rodzi się pewne światło” (Try to live by prayer and not by polemics and opposition. The force dies in that struggle and light will not be born).³ And a few pages later: “Religia twoja nie powinna być nawróceniem. Strzeż się, strzeż się tego [...] błędu” (Your religion must not be a conversion. Beware, beware of

1 Letter to Witold Klinger from April 27, 1909. Brzozowski, *Listy*, vol. 2, 134.

2 Andrzej Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski – drogi myśli* [Stanisław Brzozowski—paths of thought] (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 281.

3 Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 9.

this [...] fault).⁴ That is to say, that to “live by polemics and opposition” would be as mistaken as to be religious in a *converted* way. Agata Bielik-Robson understands this careful avoiding of a rupture as “another conversion,” as an all-integrating conversion without loss⁵ (of one’s own intellectual biography), which she calls a “highly creative and almost heretical misreading” of the Church’s teaching.⁶

The arguments against conversion mentioned by Walicki and Bielik-Robson also imply a third one: Brzozowski cannot but have fundamental troubles with the transcendence or supernatural character of the Christian truth, because truth, according to Brzozowski, is always actually *made* by mankind, and never already given (revealed) and “known.”⁷ So, even if Brzozowski came to the conclusion that man needs transcendence, it remained for him, in Walicki’s words, a “postulate” in the Kantian sense of the word, and Catholicism as a whole a “possibility.”⁸ Interestingly, Walicki’s and Bielik-Robson’s arguments had been anticipated by Leszek Kołakowski, when he called Brzozowski’s Catholicism a “receptive container for cultural continuity”⁹ and when he concluded that the philosopher’s “longing for a non-historical absolute” stands “on the threshold of hesitation not fully overcome.”¹⁰

4 Ibid., 12.

5 Agata Bielik-Robson, “Another conversion. Stanisław Brzozowski’s ‘diary’ as an early instance of the post-secular turn to religion,” *Studies in East European Thought* 63 (2011): 280 and passim.

6 Ibid., 291.

7 Walicki speaks of a “primacy of acting over knowledge” in Brzozowski. Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski – drogi myśli*, 317. On late Brzozowski’s critical remarks on Saint Thomas Aquinas’s intellectualism under the auspices of (Catholic) modernism (Maurice Blondel, Alfred Loisy, George Tyrrell as well as—in Brzozowski’s reading—Cardinal Newman) see Tomasz Lewandowski, “Młodopolskie spotkania z modernizmem katolickim” [Young Polish encounters with catholic modernism], in *Spotkania młodopolskie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo “Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne”, 2005), 38f., 44.

8 Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski – drogi myśli*, 308, 317.

9 Leszek Kołakowski, “Miejsce filozofowania Stanisława Brzozowskiego” [The place of Stanisław Brzozowski’s philosophizing], in *Pochwała niekonsekwencji. Pisma rozproszone z lat 1955–1968* (London: Puls, 1989), 173.

10 Ibid.

Brzozowski's Conversional Energy According to Blüth, Liebert, and Wajngold/Gołębiowska

Despite all these ambiguities and explicit reservations Brzozowski became a model of conversion to *other* intellectuals. The literary scholar Rafał Blüth (1891–1939), himself a convert from Judaism to Christianity, a co-founder of the Catholic journal *Verbum* (1934–1939), described the paradox of Brzozowski as a convert *malgré lui* in his article “Stanisław Brzozowski jako wychowawca” (“Stanisław Brzozowski as Educator,” 1938) as follows:

What we, the readers of his [Brzozowski's] writing and confessions, know can be summarized by the affirmation that Brzozowski was fully aware of the path toward conversion that he had taken. However, intellectual sincerity does not allow us to consider Brzozowski as a Catholic writer with a completely formed worldview... A Catholic must be shocked to the very end by Brzozowski's conception of truth by which he, as an extreme anti-rationalist, excluded elements of intellect and knowledge. Hence Catholic intellectuals, those who had always confessed this worldview as well as those who had come to the Truth of Catholicism by different ways, and even those who were awakened and compelled to it by Brzozowski, are *attached to him most deeply by the last moment of his life—and maybe by his death*.¹¹

For Blüth, as later for Walicki, the criterion to measure Brzozowski's (unrealized) conversion is his “anti-intellectual” notion of truth. Yet Blüth introduces another criterion, which is a plausible explanation of the philosopher's attractiveness to young intellectuals: his suffering arising from social isolation and illness in his last years, the “full awareness” of his turn to religion during this phase, and, most importantly, the receipt of the last rites in the hour of his death.¹² That is to say that, regardless of the ambiguity of his own conversion,

11 Rafał M. Blüth, “Stanisław Brzozowski jako wychowawca” [Stanisław Brzozowski as educator] in *Pisma literackie*, ed. Piotr Nowaczyński (Kraków: Znak, 1984), 322 (emphasis in the orig.).

12 Cf. Anna Brzozowska, “Wspomnienie o Stanisławie Brzozowskim” [Remembering Stanisław Brzozowski], *Twórczość* 216 (1963): 51, and recently Maciej Urbanowski, “Droga do Rzymu: Newman Stanisława Brzozowskiego” [The way to Rome: Stanisław Brzozowski's Newman], in *Konstellacje Stanisława Brzozowskiego*, ed. Urszula Kowalczyk et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012), 367. For an account of Catholic—and particularly Rafał Blüth's—views on Brzozowski in the 1930s cf. Marian Stępień, *Spór o spuściznę po Stanisławie Brzozowskim w*

Brzozowski—"by the last moment of his life"—bears witness to the longing for salvation. Thereby he releases, as I would put it, an "energy" that galvanizes the conversion of others.

Now when it comes to the case of the poet Jerzy Liebert (1904–1931), can we say, using Blüth's words, that reading Brzozowski "awakened and compelled" him to Catholicism? Liebert's own answer to this question is an unambiguous yes. He expressed it in 1927 in a letter to Maria Leszczyńska, a married woman with whom he had a relationship following the decision of his friend Bronisława/Agnieszka/Miriam Wajngold, later known as Sister Maria Gołębiowska, to enter the convent.¹³ The letter to Leszczyńska has been quoted again and again and has become inevitably a commonplace of Liebert scholarship. Nevertheless, I will quote it here at length, given that it is the poet's most detailed account of his view of Brzozowski. Liebert starts by explaining his early fascination with Nietzsche, and then goes on:

After Nietzsche at some point I took up Brzozowski. And actually speaking, this man converted me. Thanks to him I for the first time became attentive to the essential importance of Catholicism, to its eternal, universal meaning. I was reading Brzozowski's books from the period when he was still fighting with the Church. He did not lead me himself but drew my attention to Cardinal Newman, to the latter's *A Grammar of Assent*. I read this book, there was a lot I did not understand, but I also understood a lot. Brzozowski had written an introduction to it, and thus Newman actually gave him a new birth.

Later, after my conversion, I returned sometimes to Brzozowski, up to the present day he remains for me the most compelling read. How often I was driven up the wall when reading his understanding of Catholicism. Only now, recently, his *Diaries* fell into my hands. I knew before that Brzozowski had expressly come closer to the Church, he already believed though without yet acknowledging it, but the *Diaries*, written in the most difficult period of his life, really showed me the great spirit of Brzozowski. I do not know whether anyone else could be found in Poland who has come to Catholicism in such a sincere and at the same time critical way.¹⁴

latach 1918–1939 [The controversy about Stanisław Brzozowski's legacy in the years 1918–1939] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976), 82–86.

- 13 On Sister Maria cf. Stefan Frankiewicz, *Nie stracić wiary w Watykanie. Ze Stefanem Frankiewiczem rozmawia Cezary Gawrys* [Not to lose faith in the Vatican: Stefan Frankiewicz in conversation with Cezary Gawrys] (Warszawa: Biblioteka "Więzi", 2014), 39f.

- 14 Letter from September 4, 1927, in: Jerzy Liebert, *Pisma zebrane* [Collected works], ed. Stefan Frankiewicz, vol. 2 of *Listy* (Warszawa: Biblioteka "Więzi", 1976), 425. Brzozowski's Newman edition is an anthology of different writings of the English

Let me take a closer look at this statement. Brzozowski, Liebert writes, “converted” him by drawing his attention to the universality of the Church, even through his early writings (here, Liebert may have in mind the contradictory statements on Catholicism in *Legenda Młodej Polski—The Legend of Modern Poland*).¹⁵ As a reason for conversion, this seems to be a surprisingly superficial point. But the abundant use of expressions in the root of *wrócić*- (turn) as “nawrócił,” “nawrócenie” as well as “po raz pierwszy zwróciłem uwagę” (I for the first time became attentive) and “[n]ie doprowadził mnie sam, ale zwrócił uwagę” (he has not lead me himself but drew my attention) show that the conversional “energy” of Brzozowski, for Liebert, is actually linked with the emphasis on the notion of Church. As a matter of fact, such emphasis also lies at the center of Brzozowski’s introduction to John Henry Newman. The *Pamiętnik*, this highly intimate document, was only belatedly to confirm the authenticity and rightness—if we take his letter as a factual account at all—of Brzozowski’s “awakening” him to the Church.

Newman is mentioned numerous times in Liebert’s letters to Agnieszka Wajngold,¹⁶ but we know almost nothing about his Brzozowski readings and the existential role they played, according to the abovementioned letter to Maria Leszczyńska. And this uncertainty is all the more problematic since in his correspondence Liebert is admittedly trying to convert Leszczyńska, a fairly decadent, disillusioned agnostic. Thus the way he speaks of Brzozowski might be at least partly an attempt to offer her an intellectually attractive model for *her* conversion. Yet there is another account of the same event left by Sister Maria (the former Agnieszka Wajngold). In a text from 1976 addressed to her fellow sisters

Convert (see note 29). What attracted Brzozowski most in Newman was, as Walicki puts it, the “particular connection of a skeptical anti-intellectualism and historicism with a personalist and anti-relativist tendency, which finds the source of certainty in the most individual depths of the personality.” Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski – drogi myśli*, 309f. Crucial in this regard is Newman’s notion of the “illative sense,” developed in *A Grammar of Assent* (1870) to characterize the individual’s access to universal truth, whereas Brzozowski would see first of all the anti-intellectual potential of this “illative sense.” *Ibid.*, 310.

15 See Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski – drogi myśli*, 290.

16 Examples include: “Lately I haven’t read anything besides Newman, but I do read him in the evening and there is a growing closeness between us” (October 13, 1925). And: “I read little, but systematically. [...] I’m starting to get Newman better and better.” (February 3, 1926) Jerzy Liebert, *Listy do Agnieszki* [Letters to Agnieszka], ed. Stefan Frankiewicz (Warszawa: Biblioteka “Więzi”, 2002), 185, 339.

she describes her reading of Brzozowski's Newman essay with Jerzy Liebert in 1924.¹⁷ She writes:

[...] this was a book with the title *A Grammar of Assent*—a collection of writings of Cardinal Newman who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism and later became a cardinal of the Catholic Church. There was a foreword by Stanisław Brzozowski in which he is searching: searching for God, searching for Catholicism. We read that foreword and began to read the book. For me, this was probably the most important moment of my life. I suddenly understood that there is a supernatural world, that besides this world we see there is an invisible, inconceivable but living world, and that in this world there is Christ. And that Christ is something more than a man. Although I could not yet say that he was God, but [realized for myself] that He is someone more than a man. I remember this feeling, for me this was as if a curtain had been pulled back, as if before me there opened a completely other, new world.

And besides that I came to know that there is the Church. I ask you, Sisters, to think about this: I had read so many books, the life of the Lord Jesus and several legends on Christ, but never could I put it all together for myself. I think this was a great grace the hugeness of which I could not embrace afterwards. When it comes to Jerzy Liebert he descended from a Catholic family, but Catholic in a superficial, traditional way; he was baptized, had had the First Holy Communion, went to confession from time to time at school—but all this was not vital at all. [...] And suddenly all this awakened in him. Completely, as if it had been asleep...

Thus we simultaneously found ourselves in another world.¹⁸

Unfortunately, the problem of the singularity—and marginality—of Liebert's letter to Leszczyńska is not solved by Sister Miriam's account; on the contrary. What if it had been written only after she had read the 1927 letter (accessible to her through the editor of Liebert's *Collected Works*, Stefan Frankiewicz, and published in the same year, 1976), and under its "influence"?¹⁹ Regardless of this uncertainty it is useful to compare the two statements. As we see, Sister Miriam chooses even stronger words when describing the Brzozowski experience: "For me, this was probably the most important moment of my life." Thus the factor of

17 For details of their friendship and impossible love see Frankiewicz, *Nie stracić wiary w Watykanie*, 29f.

18 Maria Gołębiowska, "Tak się zaczęło..." [This is how it started] in *Ludzie Lasek*, ed. Tadeusz Mazowiecki (Warszawa: Biblioteka "Więzi", 1987), 499.

19 In a personal letter (November 13, 2014) Stefan Frankiewicz confirmed to me that Sister Maria knew Liebert's letters to Leszczyńska before Frankiewicz published the *Collected Works* in 1976.

being “awakened and compelled” (Blüth) is present here, too. The major difference in contrast to Liebert’s letter concerns the supernatural, and particularly the divine nature of Christ. Since we know that the supernatural is what Brzozowski develops the least in his Newman introduction, and that Christ is virtually absent in his *Pamiętnik*, Sister Maria’s emphasis on Brzozowski rather than on the former Anglican “Protestant” Newman may be surprising. And even more so if we take into consideration that a “confirming” encounter with the *Pamiętnik* seems to be lacking in *her* experience. However, what unifies the two texts is the central place in them accorded to the Church. Even the awakening of Liebert’s conventional Polish Catholicism, according to Sister Maria, is an effect of Brzozowski’s insistence on the necessity of a universal Church—very much as in Liebert’s own letter.

Liebert’s “Christianity by decision” in View of Brzozowski’s Hesitation

Thus, one can say that Brzozowski, a thinker who, as Bielik-Robson puts it, carefully avoided Pauline metanoia,²⁰ became a model for the conversion of those two young intellectuals. One could denote Liebert’s and Wajngold’s religion with the German term *Entscheidungschristentum*, i.e., a stance of faith no longer rooted in traditions, but in the personal experience of and *decision* for grace. If we call such an emphasis on experience “mystical,” one could even apply Karl Rahner’s famous dictum to the case of Liebert and Wajngold, “the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not be [a Christian] at all.”²¹ About this Christianity of experience, Liebert wrote to his—religiously less fervent—friend Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, “if one knows what Divine grace in life is, if one receives it daily [i.e., the Eucharist], one starts believing in wonders. Intellect, will, the heart are powerless as long as God does not illuminate them. Believe me, my dear, I experienced this for myself. Things most painful, heavy and horrible begin to settle down.”²² However, *the* paradigmatic text in this matter is Liebert’s best known poem, “Jeździec” (The Rider, 1926). It is a confession of an earthly “soldier” who tried to escape from his “heavenly Rider,” but then was captured by him irreversibly. I quote the poem in its entirety:

20 Bielik-Robson, “Another conversion,” 291.

21 For different references of the sentence in Rahner’s works cf. Albert Raffelt and Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Karl Rahner* (München: C. H. Beck, 1997), 124.

22 Letter from March 27, 1926. Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 2, 398.

Uciekałem przed Tobą w popłochu,
Chciałem zmylić, oszukać Ciebie –
Lecz co dnia kolana uparte
Zostawiały ślady na niebie.

Dogoniłeś mnie, Jeźdźcze niebieski,
Stratowałeś, stanąłeś na mnie.
Ległem zbity, łaską podcięty,
Jak dym, gdy wicher go nagnie.

Nie mam słów, by spod Ciebie się podnieść,
Coraz cięższa staje się mowa.
Czyżby słowa utracić trzeba,
By jak duszę odzyskać słowa?

Czyli trzeba aż przejść przez siebie,
Twoim słowom siebie zawierzyć –
Jeśli trzeba, to tratuj do dna,
Jestem tylko twoim żołnierzem.

Jedno wiem, i innych objawień
Nie potrzeba oczom i uszom –
Uczyniwszy na wieki wybór,
W każdej chwili wybierać muszę.²³

I ran away from You, panic-stricken,
I wanted to mislead, to cheat You—
But stubbornly my knees, day after day,
Left traces on the sky.

You caught me, heavenly Rider,
You knocked me down, you trampled on me.
I lay beaten, drunken from grace,
Like smoke, scattered by a tempest.

I have no words to rise from under your feet,
Speaking becomes all the harder.
Does one need to lose one's words,
In order to find them like a soul?

23 Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 1, 157.

Or must one first go through oneself,
 Entrust oneself to Your words—
 If necessary, trample me to the ground,
 I am merely your soldier.

One thing I know, and other revelations
 My eyes and ears do not need—
 Having made forever a choice,
 In each moment I must choose.

“Jeździec” connects the all but gentle capture by the “Rider’s” grace with the soldier’s voluntary *assent* to it—a “choice” (wybór), which turns out to be a commitment to be constantly renewed, in each moment. Thus, on the one hand, grace is frightening and even violent in this allegorical poem; on the other hand, the soldier confesses that besides his *choice* (for grace) he needs no other “revelations” (objawień). A conscious, personal choice as revelation—such a daring connection of a strong devotion and self-confidence is highly typical of John Henry Newman, especially in his *Apologia pro vita sua* (1864).²⁴ However, it does not seem to have anything in common with Brzozowski’s hesitating religiosity. The association by the young critic Jan Kott of Liebert’s “Jeździec” with Saint Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus²⁵ is certainly justified and underlines a clear distance from the author of the *Pamiętnik*. For Brzozowski a Paulinian mortification of the past, as we have seen, would have been a “mistake” to be assiduously avoided. In this sense, Liebert’s (and Wajngold’s) conversion is anything but an imitation of Brzozowski’s; rather one could call it a

24 Cf. for instance the following passage from a letter (1844), which Newman quotes in his *Apologia*: “Certainly, I have always contended that obedience even to an erring conscience was the way to gain light, and that it mattered not where a man began, so that he began on what came to hand, and in faith; and that anything might become a divine method of Truth; that to the pure all things are pure, and have a self-correcting virtue and a power of germinating. And though I have no right at all to assume that this mercy is granted to me, yet the fact that a person in my situation may have it granted to him, seems to me to remove the perplexity which my change of opinion may occasion.” John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua, being a reply to a pamphlet entitled “What, then, does Dr. Newman mean?”* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864), 333.

25 Jan Kott, “Katolicyzm liryki Lieberta” [Catholicism in Liebert’s poetry], *Przegląd Współczesny* 155 (1935): 433.

completion of the philosopher's "possible" Catholicism (Walicki) or "other conversion" to it (Bielik-Robson).²⁶

The attractiveness to Liebert of Brzozowski's religious quest, then, would be precisely its obvious incompleteness which leaves space for his *own* decision. This outlook would be in perfect accordance with what Józef Czapski wrote in 1928 about Brzozowski's significance—not only in religious matters—for young intellectuals: "Each of his [Brzozowski's] pages contains precious seeds. Our generation's task is to bring these grains to fruit. We must continue the construction undertaken by Brzozowski."²⁷ To carry Brzozowski's conversion "to an end" is one way of fulfilling the task Czapski formulates here.

The Word and the Church: Brzozowski's Mediality and Liebert's "Fulfillment"

But is it all as clear as that? Is it not possible that Liebert is, at least partly, closer to Brzozowski than it would seem? In order to answer this question I propose to take a look at some aspects of Liebert's writings through the prism of Brzozowski's introduction to Newman as well as the *Pamiętnik* and, finally, via the Russian religious philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev (for whom Liebert had a remarkable predilection). Let me first return to the very notion of the Church. In a letter to Wajngold from 1925 Liebert points out, "that Catholicism is not just another tiny idea, [...] but the idea that *this is life, our most simple life*."²⁸ The view that the Church is not something abstract but "life itself" is one of the central concerns of Brzozowski's Newman essay. There the philosopher writes: "nie jest on [Kościół] dziełem myśli, rozumu, dogodności: to wszystko – *dzieła życia, a Kościół jest samym życiem, jako tworzeniem wiecznej prawdy i realności*" (the Church is not a matter of thought, reason, convenience: all that is a matter of life and the Church is life in itself, as the creation of eternal truth and reality).²⁹ Similarly, in *Pamiętnik* he notes: "Newman uważał Kościół za *sumę* życia ludzkości, z niego brało źródło wszystko, co jest życiem, wszystko co jest człowiekiem" (Newman considered the *Church* to be the *sum* of the life of humanity,

26 Bielik-Robson, "Another conversion," 291.

27 Józef Czapski, "O towarzystwo im. Stanisława Brzozowskiego" [On the Stanisław Brzozowski Association], *Wiadomości Literackie* 28 (1928): 1.

28 Letter from July 26, 1925. Liebert, *Listy do Agnieszki*, 287 (emphasis mine, Ch. Z.).

29 Stanisław Brzozowski, "John Henry Newman," in John H. Newman, *Przyświadczenia wiary*, ed. Stanisław Brzozowski (Lwów: Księgarnia Polska B. Połonieckiego / Warszawa: E. Wende i Ska, 1915), 23 (emphasis in the orig.).

it is the source of everything that is life, everything that is human).³⁰ And a few months later, shortly before his death, Brzozowski wrote his famous words: “Katolicyzm jest nieuchronny. Nieuchronnym, w samej idei człowieka zakorze-nionym faktem jest kościół. Człowiek jest niezrozumiałą zagadką bez kościoła. Życie ludzkie jest szyderstwem i igraszką, jeżeli kościoła nie ma” (Catholicism is inevitable. The Church is an inevitable fact that is rooted in the very idea of man. Without the Church, man is an unresolvable riddle. Human life is a scoff and a plaything if the Church does not exist).³¹ Besides the idea that the Church is the only real key to human life,³² obviously shared by Liebert, the young poet follows the philosopher in extending this very idea to language and particularly to literature. Brzozowski, lamenting the superficial approach to religion in Polish culture, intends to transform Catholicism, as he puts it, into a “medium ekspres-yi i wypowiedzenia” (medium of expression and utterance).³³ I will come back to this aspect below. Let me first note that, implicitly, a similar concept underlies another famous poem by Liebert, “Kościół wojujący” (The Church Militant, 1925). Here (in stanzas 3 and 4), the Church is addressed as a form-giving power to anything human. Before the interference of the Church not only is the sky “empty” (“puste,” second stanza), but also words are unable to clearly distin-guish between different realities, and the human heart is distracted:

Jeszcze słowa niespokojne
Dzielią ziemi brud od piękna,
Nam jak miecze się nie skruszą
I w pacierzu nie uklękną.

Jeszcze serce wykąpane
W dreszczach słodkich firmamentu,
Jest jak miasto pod gwiazdami
Pełne gwaru i zamętu.³⁴

Still unquiet words
Separate the earth’s dirt from beauty,

30 Entry of December 31, 1910. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 71 (emphasis in the orig.).

31 Entry of April 5, 1911, *ibid.*, 190.

32 Brzozowski also writes that outside the Church there are only “facts of description,” whereas within it they become “facts of experience.” Brzozowski, “John Henry New-man,” 20.

33 *Ibid.*, 26.

34 Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 2, 212.

Like swords we can't crush them
And in prayer they don't kneel.

Still our heart is immersed
In shivers of the sweet firmament,
It is like a town under starlight
Full of chattering and chaos.

But then the restless chattering falls silent and the heart is transformed. It becomes somehow “ecclesiastical” or at least a kind of image of the Church (in its earthly state as “*Ecclesia Militans*”):

Lecz już wznosi się wyniosłe
Obnażone i milczące,
I pokorne i żarliwe
Niby kościół wojujący.³⁵

But then it rises up sublime
Naked and silent,
And humble and ardent
As if [it were] the Church militant.

Although Liebert implies in his letter to Maria Leszczyńska quoted above that he became acquainted with the *Pamiętnik* only in 1927 (two years after “*Kościół wojujący*”), one cannot fail to recall here Brzozowski's remark about Newman's writings as a hermeneutical key to poetry: “nie sądzę, aby dostępne dla mnie były ciche, głębokie, oceaniczne i międzygwiazdne regiony poezji. Wszystko to zawdzięczam Newmanowi” (I do not think that the calm, deep, oceanic and interstellar regions of poetry are accessible to me. I owe all this to Newman).³⁶ Brzozowski speaks also of a “pewne powinowactwo ze spokojem, tak całkowicie jej [duszy] dotąd obce”³⁷ (a certain kinship with calm hitherto so alien to her [his soul]), that he owes to Newman. In the same entry Brzozowski confesses he believes “in a calm transformation at the bottom of the soul” (w cichą przemianę na dnie duszy).³⁸ And the entry ends with the words: “Nic nie mogę napisać więcej – już przemaga znużenie i przesłania jasność. Teraz mogłyby już

35 Ibid.

36 Entry of February 12, 1911. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 167.

37 Ibid., 166.

38 Ibid., 169.

tu być *tylko słowa*” (I cannot write more—fatigue is overcoming me and obscured the clarity. Now there could be *only words* here).³⁹ Is this anxiety about the superficiality of “mere words” not the same as Liebert’s anxiety in the face of language reduced to its sound, language *emptied*?

Brzozowski, as we see, hopes to attain a certain “kinship with calm” thanks to Newman—this modern ecclesiastical voice—as a literary/cultural “medium,” or “preparing.”⁴⁰ That is why he presents Newman’s thought to the Polish public “jako wytwór jego organizacji, indywidualności, nie troszcząc się o zasadność lub bezzasadność tych lub innych jego sposobów widzenia, *traktując myśl i duszę jako kwestię stylu*” (as the result of his organization, of his individuality, not caring about the foundation or the groundlessness of his specific ways of seeing things, *treating his thoughts and his soul as matters of style*).⁴¹ Liebert’s search for an ecclesiastical grounding of language seems to be quite different from Brzozowski’s project of a Newmanian “mediality” and “stylistics.” Liebert seeks less a medium for the (poetic) word than its *fulfillment*, and even salvation, by the Spirit. While Brzozowski constantly emphasizes the need for “creating” and “building” (*wytwarzać* and *zbudować*) the truth, which would *be* the Church,⁴² Liebert appeals to the Spirit to *bless* his poetic gift by grace. This is the theme of the poem “Veni Sancte Spiritus” (1930). In a letter to his friend Rafał Blüth, Liebert justifies his modern version of the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* to some critics (including Blüth himself, who had suspected Liebert of a poetic “heresy”):

Not in the feeling of his own power, as some *critics* put it mistakenly, but in the feeling of complete lack the poet asks the Holy Spirit to send him a sign and grace, because without those the poet’s poetry and he himself will be like an empty cross on which Christ is absent, so that, transferred to the sphere of poetry, it will be sound, form—devoid of life,

39 Ibid. (emphasis mine, Ch. Z.).

40 Cf. Brzozowski, “John Henry Newman,” 44: “Newman może stać się przygotowaniem do rozumienia bardzo bliskich nam i tak nadużywanych przez nas dzieł własnej naszej twórczości” (Newman can become a preparation for us to understand the works of our own creation).

41 Ibid., 74 (emphasis mine, Ch. Z.).

42 On the strong link between Brzozowski’s “philosophy of labor” and the notion of truth and action in Catholic modernism (Blondel, Loisy) cf. Lewandowski, “Młodo-polskie spotkania z modernizmem katolickim,” 42–45; and Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski – drogi myśli*, 291.

content, a mere conventional symbol, behind which could hide quietism, spiritual consumerism, a mystical, so to say, ruse.⁴³

Liebert's self-commentary is actually but a translation of the poem into prose. Here is the first stanza of Liebert's "Veni Sancte Spiritus":

Nie – iżbym niemoc krył, czuł w sercu lęk,
Gdy chcę, byś na mnie, gołąb – spadł.
Lecz byś wypełnił sobą kształt,
Gdy tu udziałem moim dźwięk.⁴⁴

It is not to hide weakness, what my heart was anxious about,
When I ask, dove, that—you descend on me.
But that you yourself fill shape,
My part being only sound.

In a very general way, the philosopher Charles Taylor has described the longing for *fullness*—and therefore the overcoming of a feeling of emptiness—as a central concern of religiosity in the "secular age."⁴⁵ And I would say that such a longing, in this general way, is shared by Brzozowski and Liebert. However, Liebert's concept of *fulfilling* (wypełnienie)⁴⁶ is more specific. It is about breathing life into *religious poetry* within modernity, a task seemingly unrealistic.⁴⁷ I

43 Letter of July 20, 1930. Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 2, 432f. (emphasis in the orig.).

44 Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 1, 213.

45 Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass./London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 5: "We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worthwhile, more admirable, more what it should be. This is perhaps a place of power: we often experience this as deeply moving, as inspiring. Perhaps this sense of fullness is something we just catch glimpses of from afar off; we have the powerful intuition of what fullness would be, were we to be in that condition, e.g., of peace or wholeness; or able to act on that level, of integrity or generosity or abandonment of self-forgetfulness. But sometimes there will be moments of experienced fullness, of joy and fulfillment, where we feel ourselves there."

46 Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 2, 432.

47 For a detailed account of Liebert's place within the tradition of Polish religious poetry and his high ambitions of renewing it see Piotr Nowaczyński, "O miejscu Lieberta w

think that Jan Kott makes an essential point when writing about the “catholicity” of Liebert’s poetry, comparing it with religious features in the poems of the members of *Skamander* Julian Tuwim, Kazimierz Wierzyński, and Jan Lechoń (whose inspirations are easily recognizable in Liebert’s early poems). Kott writes,

God [in Tuwim, Wierzyński, Lechoń] is just a symbol, a metaphor not defined by all-embracing love or a metaphysical fear of life.

Liebert is extraordinary by virtue of his Catholicism, in the sense of a theological accordance with dogmatics and even with Catholic mysticism, by his poetical experience of the inner struggle for the Kingdom of this and not of this world.⁴⁸

In a way, Kott gets Liebert better than the “tracker of subtle heresies”⁴⁹ Blüth. The danger of Liebert’s poetry, as he himself understands it, is not that it runs the risk of not conforming to the Church’s teaching, but that it would remain a conditional symbol and the cross empty, i.e., a poetic religiosity of *clichés*. Whether Liebert had in mind the “metaphorical” God of the *Skamander* poets or his own—quite numerous—religious verses *before* the moment of his conversion is perhaps not so important. What is crucial is the basic model: that already as a high school student he found a poetic *form* and would now, following his conversion, let it be “fulfilled.” Hence the poet’s prayer to the Holy Spirit to “send him a sign and grace.”⁵⁰ A similar reconstruction of Liebert’s path seems to inform the *Skamandrist* Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz’s obituary notice for Liebert in 1931:

Liebert’s version of Christian faith is first of all Catholicism and as such it represents an absolutely particular stance within our highly uncatholic poetry. But this is not the most important point. What is striking is above all the atmosphere of this religiosity, which is

polskiej liryce religijnej” [On Liebert’s place in Polish religious poetry], *Znak* 208 (1971).

48 Kott, “Katolicyzm liryki Lieberta,” 430.

49 From the above-quoted letter to Blüth: Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 2, 432.

50 In his short foreword to Liebert’s third collection of poems, *Kołysanka jodłowa* (Pine Forest Lullaby, 1932), Kazimierz Wierzyński writes: “He was *filled* by religiosity like a saint.” Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 1, 183 (emphasis mine, Ch. Z.). This may be just a conventional formula, however, it goes well with Liebert’s fulfillment model of the poem “Veni Sancte Spiritus.”

highly individual, but at the same time it reflects currents and aspirations of a specific era and a specific group.⁵¹

While Brzozowski wanted to turn (Newmanian) Catholicism into a universal cultural “medium,” Liebert seeks to transform *himself*, the poet and his poetic mastery, into a living, not “conventional” medium of Catholic content.⁵²

But a conversion also involves serious problems. Curiously, it intensifies the awareness of a potential multiplicity of persons within the convert. In a letter to Wajngold from 1925, shortly after both converted, Liebert writes how the “man” in him threatens the “poet”: “my heart is longing for universal (i.e., Catholic) poetry as if it were for bread. Lately, I have changed quite a lot, especially in regards to poetry: *the man has overtaken the poet*, and now, when I simply want to write, he is lacking the means. The poet, as it turned out, walked more freely.”⁵³ The attempt to harmonize the different paces of the “man” and the “poet” becomes a salient motive in Liebert’s letters. In 1926 he describes how the poet prevents him from drawing near to Christ, “though, I am a poet and I have no intention to deny him. But today I grasp within me that I could not see the Lord Jesus a day earlier, that I am *merely turning around Him, not getting closer even for one step*.”⁵⁴ Then, a little later, Liebert seems to overcome the

51 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, “O postawie duchowej Jerzego Lieberta” [On Jerzy Liebert’s spiritual stance], *Wiadomości Literackie* 40 (1931): 3. However, by “tendencies of his time and aspirations of a certain group” Iwaszkiewicz may connote less the *Ska-mandrist*’s poetics than Fr. Władysław Kornilowicz’s religious circle “Kółko” (Circle) and the Laski milieu. Iwaszkiewicz is not unambiguous here.

52 Interestingly, Liebert could use here French Cardinal Henri Bremond’s (whose writings had also been a connecting item between Newman and Brzozowski) specific, mystically transformed notion of “pure poetry” as described in his *La poésie pure* (1926). See Stefan Frankiewicz, Introduction to *Pisma zebrane*, by Jerzy Liebert, vol. 1, 45, and *Nie stracić wiary w Watykanie*, 27f. It is again Jan Kott who has well seen the possible impact of Bremond’s notion—be it on Liebert’s poetry itself or its reception: “His [Liebert’s] work could be one of the not numerous proofs of Fr. Bremond’s beautiful yet hardly verifiable thesis of the unity of the poetic and the mystical experience, of poetry-as-prayer and [the thesis] that ‘tout poème doit son caractère proprement poétique à la présence, au rayonnement, à l’action transformante et unifiante d’une réalité mystérieuse que nous appelons: poésie pure’.” Kott, “Katolicyzm liryki Lieberta,” 435.

53 Letter from July 22, 1925. Liebert, *Listy do Agnieszki*, 282 (emphasis mine, Ch. Z.).

54 Letter from March 12, 1926. *Ibid.*, 374 (emphasis mine, Ch. Z.).

problem of multiplication within the self. He proposes to re-center and unify the human person by an act of will. In a letter to Iwaszkiewicz he writes,

[...] my dear friend, today we are all suffering from the, let's say, "multitude" of selves. From behind every act, from behind every thought there are many Jaroslaws or Jureks crawling out, but don't tell me, for I wouldn't believe that anymore, that it is impossible to get a man out of this game of hide and seek. And it is that man whom we have to put in the center.⁵⁵

But once man is "put" back into the center, what happens to the poet and his "steps"? Liebert does not speak about that. But one can assume that once the conversion of the poet has succeeded, the poet is now a part of the man. A month later Liebert specifies this solution in a letter to Wajngold, with recourse to the "step" imagery: "Now I know one thing—the Lord Jesus is going with me. And nobody, no force can change the rhythm of the pace I'm moving to."⁵⁶ The extension of the simple metaphor of "walking" to *rhythm*, I would argue, can be read here as an allusion to the rhythm of poetry. If this is so, it shows once again that, for Liebert, unlike for Brzozowski, Catholicism is not the "medium" of poetry. On the contrary, poetry, its rhythm, is to become a proper medium of *Catholicism* within a modernist context.

So far, I have not discussed Liebert's possible indebtedness, as a literary critic, to Brzozowski. However, Liebert's activity as a critic in the second half of the 1920s, mainly for the journal *Wiadomości Literackie* (Literary News), is anything but marginal and should not be underestimated.⁵⁷ For the topic of the "converted artist" it is all the more relevant that Liebert often integrates into his reviews reflections that concern himself as a poet. Thus he developed his concept of the *habitus poetycki*, i.e., of the poet's "strict responsibility [...] for each written word," in a review of a collection of poems.⁵⁸ He probably owes the term

55 Letter from March 27, 1926. Liebert, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 2, 398.

56 Letter from April 23, 1926. Liebert, *Listy do Agnieszki*, 396.

57 For an overview see Anna M. Szczepan-Wojnarska, "Z ogniem będziesz się żenił". *Doświadczenie transcendencji w życiu i twórczości Jerzego Lieberta* ["You will marry fire." The experience of transcendence in Jerzy Liebert's life and works] (Kraków: Universitas, 2003), 83–93.

58 Liebert, "Zakonspirowany romantyk [Stefan Napierski: *Ziemia wolna*, 1930]" [A conspirative romantic. Stefan Napierski: *Free Land*, 1930]. *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 1, 593. Interestingly, "fullness" (pełnia) is a part of the concept, too: "The poetical *habitus*! It decides if poetry will be a mere reflection of the lightly sketched contours of the idea or the thing; it decides of the acuteness and the *fullness* of visions which, re-

“habitus” to Jacques Maritain’s *Art et scolastique* (1920).⁵⁹ Moreover, responsibility, in connection with consciousness, had been an essential category of Brzozowski’s essay on Newman. It is not surprising, then, that Frankiewicz refers to Brzozowski in order to characterize Liebert’s approach to literary criticism.⁶⁰ Whether Liebert ever attained the degree of radicality of the great critic of the 1900s could be, of course, questioned. What is clear is that Liebert’s proximity to Brzozowski is certainly not typical in a *Skamandrit* context. Jan Lechoń’s devastating statement with regard to Brzozowski is well known: “He [Brzozowski] was fantastically blind to what in literature is art, he was to it [literature] a Savonarola and Torquemada; he did not explain it to people, he did not teach it, but converted [nawracał] it to his permanently changing beliefs and heresies.”⁶¹ Interestingly enough, Lechoń accuses Brzozowski—who avoided his own conversion—of having *converted* literary texts according to his own needs instead of making them accessible to readers. Regardless of the polemical tone of Lechoń’s remark, it reflects very precisely Brzozowski’s idea of “medializing” Newman. On the other hand, in quite the opposite way, Liebert, in his criticism (consisting mainly of poetry reviews), tries less to “convert” the volumes he discusses than to *measure* them according to the conversion he has already undergone. As much as faith can only increase “through a certain inner and spir-

ardless of the time and tendencies witness most clearly the poet’s force.” Ibid. (the first emphasis in the orig., the second is mine—Ch. Z.).

59 Jacques Maritain, *Art et scolastique* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1965), 66–70, the section “Règles et *habitus*.” Cf. Frankiewicz, Introduction, 47f.

60 Citing the following paradigmatic sentence from *Współczesna krytyka literacka w Polsce* [Contemporary literary criticism in Poland]: “Rozumie się i ocenia tylko to, co było etapem naszej własnej pracy” (One understands and appreciates only what has been a stage of one’s own work). Frankiewicz, Introduction, 52.

61 Jan Lechoń, “Prawda poety a prawda krytyka” [The truth of the poet and the truth of the critic], *Wiadomości Literackie* 6 (1924): 1. For a quite different view, cf. Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, Iwaszkiewicz’s wife, who joined the Łaski milieu together with Jerzy Liebert. When reading Brzozowski’s *Legenda Młodej Polski*, she writes in her Notebook on September 1st, 1923: “Reading this pages, full of an almost phantastic enthusiasm, involuntarily I am comparing that all the time with our present psychology and the idea that there are few, very few amidst us, the present Young Poland, people that could fall in Love with something, believe in something, hate something so passionately and despise something in such a way.” Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki i wspomnienia* [Diaries and memories], ed. Paweł Kądziała (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2000), 55.

itual power of grace” (Liebert citing Newman in a letter to Wajngold),⁶² the poetic word has to be first of all an “external act”⁶³ (Liebert’s expression in a review of Anatol Stern) susceptible of becoming an “inner” one—of being fulfilled. For this reason Michał Sprusiński could speak of an “apostolic approach to art” in Liebert’s literary criticism,⁶⁴ which he could not have done in the case of Brzozowski, simply because for Brzozowski the potential “conversions” of literature have no fixed end. They do not recognize a unique conversion as a point of reference.

A New “Style” of Christianity? From Brzozowski to Berdiaev and back to Liebert

If Liebert and Brzozowski, in their very closeness, remain always somehow opposed to each other, they seem to share, however, a crucial (anti-)modern topos: the topos of “another” light, an anti-rationalist enlightenment *after* the Enlightenment. Instead of a conclusion, I would like to sketch this ideological/rhetorical aspect and then come back once again to the notion of the Church. The source I would like to use here is the small book *The New Middle Ages* by the Russian émigré religious philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev (1874–1948), containing three essays: “The New Middle Ages,” “Thoughts on the Russian Revolution,” and “Democracy, Socialism, and Theocracy,” published in 1924 in Berlin.⁶⁵ Liebert had lived and attended school in Moscow from 1915 to 1918⁶⁶ and knew Russian quite well. In 1926 he mentions in several letters to Wajngold that he has undertaken a translation of Berdiaev’s “very good book.”⁶⁷ Although the translation went well, he would never finish it. When referring to the first of Berdiaev’s three essays and comparing some passages from it with Brzozowski’s

62 Letter of September 16, 1925. Liebert, *Listy do Agnieszki*, 152.

63 Liebert, “Bieg do bieguna [Anatol Stern: *Poezje*, 1927]” [The run to the runner. Anatol Stern: *Poems*, 1927], *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 1, 557.

64 “Asking a lot from himself, he demanded maximalism also from others, a serious, nay, even apostolic attitude towards art.” Michał Sprusiński, “Jerzego Lieberta ‘siła fatalna’” [Jerzy Liebert’s ‘fatal force’], *Twórczość* 6 (1977): 109.

65 Nikolai Berdiaev, *Novoe srednevekov’e: Razmyshlenie o sud’be Rossii i Evropy* (Berlin: Obelisk, 1924). An English translation was published nine years later under a different title: Nicholas Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time*, trans. Donald Atwater (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933).

66 Frankiewicz, Introduction, 9f.

67 Cf. the letter from March 15, 1926. Liebert, *Listy do Agnieszki*, 376.

essay on Newman, my argument remains to a certain extent hypothetical (in assuming Liebert's basic conformity with Berdyaev's thought). However, regarding Berdyaev and Brzozowski it may be recalled that the Russian thinker had been a Marxist in his early years.⁶⁸ This fact is relevant when it comes to comparing their respective ideas on labor and their new notions of the Church.

Newman's life and work, according to Brzozowski, gives off a specific "light." A light that not only enlightens but also brings an almost corporeal *warmth*.⁶⁹ Berdyaev's imagined upcoming era of a cosmic "dawn"—the "new middle age"—closing the era of "bright" individualism, though it has a completely different face, includes a specific atmospheric "warming" as well. Berdyaev writes:

All these forms lose the sharpness of their outlines in the twilight of modern history: man's atmosphere is now universal and cosmic, he meets the mystery of life and finds himself facing God. He was chained to individualism by forms which cut him off from other men and from the world at large. Now he moves towards generality, an epoch of universality and collectivity. He no longer believes that he was self-sufficient and could look after himself from the moment that he had rationalist thought, secular morality, Law, Liberalism, Democracy and Parliaments.⁷⁰

The strong aspect of "collectivism" in Berdyaev's rather predictable cultural criticism is very clearly incommensurable with Newman's individualistic approach to universality—and to his self-conscious "brightness."⁷¹ However, as

68 Cf. Frederick C. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Search Press Ltd/University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 372, 374. One should also mention that Brzozowski was familiar with the volume *Problemy idealizma* (Problems of Idealism, 1902), containing seminal Russian philosophers' critical answers to (their own former) Marxism. Among the essays there was Berdyaev's contribution: "Ėticheskaia problema v svete filosofskogo realizma," in *Problemy idealizma. Sbornik statei*, ed. P. I. Novgorodtsev (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo psikhologicheskogo obshchestva, 1902) (Trans.: "The Ethical Problem in the Light of Philosophical Idealism," in *Problems of Idealism. Essays in Russian Social Philosophy*, trans., ed. and intr. R. A. Poole (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003). Cf. Walicki, *Stanislaw Brzozowski – drogi myśli*, 39.

69 Brzozowski, "John Henry Newman," 39.

70 Nicholas Berdyaev, "The New Middle Ages," in: Nicholas Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time*, 86f.

71 See Newman's famous words he said to his servant when, during a journey in Italy in 1833, he got ill and supposedly was to die soon: "I shall not die, for I have not sinned

Brzozowski writes in *Pamiętnik*, “Newman jest egotystą, ale *nie* jest nigdy sam, nie chce być sam, każde jego zdanie ma korzenie, sięgające głęboko w myśl poprzedzającą go”⁷² (Newman is an egotist, but he is never alone, he does not want to be alone, every phrase he writes has its roots that go deep into the thoughts which preceded it). Brzozowski is very careful about pointing out how Newman manages to establish an “organic” contact between his “loneliness” and universalism (i.e., Catholicism). In his introduction Brzozowski writes:

[...] wie on [Newman], jak ustala się związek z powszechnością poprzez samotność indywidualnej duszy, był on po *tamtej* stronie logiki i wyrażającego się w mowie rozumu, wie on, co dzieje się, gdy gaśnie to światło i wie, jak się je roznieca. Zna głębsze źródła światła i nie podaje nam nigdzie samej teorii, lecz wyłącznie i jedynie wspomnienia i przykład własnej praktyki – daje nam on we wszystkim, co mówi, pełną i konkretną prawdę rzeczy przeżytych, doskonale i spokojnie poznanych.⁷³

[Newman] knows how to establish a link with commonality through the loneliness of the individual soul; he was beyond the logic that is expressed in the language of reason; he knows what happens when the light goes out and how it is stirred up. He knows the deeper sources of light and never gives us any theory, but rather and exclusively memories and the example of his own practice—in everything that he says he gives us the full and definite truth of lived experience, a truth that was perfectly and calmly perceived.

The “light” of Newman’s Christian knowledge, according to Brzozowski, is immune to rationalism inasmuch as he had already experienced its irrational, hidden side and its “deeper roots.” In this mixture of a bright and a peculiarly darkened light Brzozowski’s Newman is not that far removed from Berdiaev’s idea of a new ecclesiastical universality. In Brzozowski’s words, “Kościół nie jest instytucją ludzką, ‘*establishment*’” (“The Church is not a human institution, not an ‘*establishment*’”),⁷⁴ but a force that would penetrate everything and render culture “cosmic.” It is exactly at this point that in Berdiaev’s dark neo-medieval vision (not free of sympathies for Italian fascism⁷⁵) a “transforming” light starts to shine. What makes such an unexpected “other” enlightenment possible

against light, I have not sinned against light.” Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, 99. Brzozowski refers to this passage in his essay (Brzozowski, “John Henry Newman,” 52).

72 Entry of January 15, 1911. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 125 (emphasis in the orig.).

73 Brzozowski, “John Henry Newman,” 53 (emphasis in the orig.).

74 Ibid., 22 (emphasis and English in the orig.).

75 Cf. Berdiaev, “The New Middle Ages,” 89f.

is the new role of the “religious intelligentsia,” as the Russian philosopher puts it. He writes:

The Church is cosmic by her nature and contains within herself the fullness of Being; she is the universe baptized. This ought to be a living and practical truth instead of just a theoretical and abstract doctrine; and the *Church must pass from the period in which the sanctuary has predominated to a period of transfiguration of the cosmic fullness of life*. Modern religion has become merely a department of culture, with a special place reserved for it—a very small one. It must again become *all*, the force which transfigures and irradiates the whole of life from within; its spiritual energy must be set free to renew the face of the earth.

Christianity has reached a stage in which the intelligentsia will play an increasingly important part [...]. The “people” are being led away from faith by atheistic propaganda and by Socialism; but the “intellectuals” are coming back to it. And that is changing the style of Christianity.⁷⁶

Berdiaev doesn’t specify this new, elitist, not (yet) popular “style” of Christianity. If it is, quite evidently, not the individual universalism of Newman, is it, then, something like the late Brzozowski’s all-integrating concept of Catholicism? Or is it akin to what I have called Jerzy Liebert’s “Christianity by decision”? I am not able to answer this question here. But what is surely interesting is that Berdiaev links the new cosmic universality with “labor” and “creativity” (*trud* and *tvorchestvo*)⁷⁷ just as Brzozowski does with regard to Catholicism and the cultural activity of *zbudować* and *wytwarzać* (“to build” and “to create”).

Berdiaev imagines even a “particular sort of monastic life in the world.”⁷⁸ Such a secular monastic life is to a certain extent common to Newman, Brzozowski,⁷⁹ Berdiaev—and Liebert. The question is whether Liebert’s condition following his conversion (“drunken from grace”) has much to do with Brzozowski’s “to build” and “to create” or Berdiaev’s “labor” and “creativity.” As I have tried to show in this chapter, his Catholicism is clearly of another kind. I would phrase it as follows: Brzozowski (and possibly Berdiaev) showed Liebert an “energetic” form of the Church. But as a converted poet he would himself *fill* this form.

76 Berdiaev, “The New Middle Ages,” 108f. (changed; emphasis mine, Ch. Z.).

77 “The principle of work, spiritual and material, will be found at the root of future societies: not, as in Socialism, of work of which the goodness or badness does not matter, but of work considered qualitatively.” Berdiaev, “New Middle Ages,” 115.

78 Berdiaev, “The New Middle Ages,” 116.

79 See Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 446f.

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