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## A Polish Weininger? The Case of Julian Unszlicht (1883–1953)

The case of Julian Unszlicht, an activist of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (*Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy*, SDKPiL), and a subsequent activist of the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS), the author of perhaps the most infamous Polish anti-Semitic (above all anti-Litvak) pamphlets, and later on a Catholic priest, columnist and finally a victim of the Holocaust, seems interesting for various reasons.<sup>1</sup> For his biography like a lens focuses the identity transgression dilemmas faced by Polish Jews who chose the Polish national identity and for whom this Polishness was connected with Catholicism. The path chosen by Julian Unszlicht was even bumpier, not devoid of dramatic turns, and simultaneously closely intertwined with the fate of Polish Jews at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unszlicht's biography is also highly symptomatic of the history of the Polish Catholic Church and of its attitude toward the so-called "Jewish question."

Most reconstructable data on his home and early youth come from him or from the accounts left by his close relatives. Unszlicht's memoirs written in the 1920s, marked by the act of conversion to Catholicism and the subsequent ordination, read: "I was born on 18 January 1883 near Mława. My father Henryk died during the war in 1915. My mother Michalina, née Luksemburg, had lived in Warsaw almost all her life! Our family was officially registered with the Jewish community, but there was no devotion to Judaism in our family, in which the spirit of Polishness pervaded. Moreover we, the children, were taught the Catholic faith by our Polish nannies! To this day I remember, [that] I ran in the streets of Warsaw to kiss the hands of priests, how I used to take off my hat before the cross, how naively I used to say my prayers in various churches. Hence, I found myself in a false situation: in the Pankiewicz School in Żłota Street I was, obviously, registered as a Jew, but I was attracted to Catholicism, and I was happy when I could attend catechism classes, and then I would listen so attentively that it attracted the attention of the priest conducting the lesson. But nobody wanted to take care of the child. Because of religious

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Dr Dariusz Libionka for his valuable comments, suggestions and information.

indifference in my family, books against faith fell into my hands, including Draper's dangerous *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*. My naive faith, not based on any rational foundations, began to stagger... Consequently, I became an extreme atheist and materialist."<sup>2</sup>

The young Warsaw intellectual's family did not so much make him open to searching for religion, as it marked him with a strong patriotic identity. For the Unszlichts, as for many Polish Jews who at that time embarked on a path of assimilation, such a formative role was played by the memory of a family member engaged in patriotic activity. In the Unszlicht family (Julian's first cousin was Józef Unszlicht, 1879–1937, a subsequent prominent SDKPiL activist, high-ranking official and communist activist in the Soviet Union and finally a victim of the Stalinist purges) uncle Maksymilian Unszlicht enjoyed utmost respect. He was a student of Warsaw University, who for his participation in the demonstrations against the forced conscription of 1863 and his involvement in the independence movement was deported by the tsarist authorities to Siberia, where he disappeared without a trace.<sup>3</sup> The youth of Julian Unszlicht, who very early on affiliated himself with the radical – mostly socialist – intelligentsia milieu, did not diverge much from the youth of his peers.

Not much can be said about his intellectual interests at that time. In his biographical notes he remarked not only on reading John William Draper but also Charles Darwin, Aldous Huxley, Herbert Spencer, Hippolyte Taine, Wilhelm Wundt and a number of other popular authors at that time, whose works bordered on natural science and psychology. The lack of leftist or, to speak bluntly, Marxist literature could be baffling in view of his subsequent political choices. But even this should not be a surprise. For progressive youth read, first and foremost, the available, usually legal, literature in the field of applied sciences. It is easy to find a common denominator of these ideological initiations: the conviction that the world is governed by cruel laws of nature.

A high-school graduate, in 1910 young Julian became a student of the Polytechnic Institute, which was then transformed into the Warsaw University of Technology. He studied civil engineering, but he did not graduate. His school contacts, his

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<sup>2</sup> Biblioteka Polska w Paryżu [Polish Library in Paris] (later: BPwP), Julian Unszlicht, *Chrześcijaństwo; Prace i notatki; Od wojującego niedowiarka do kapłaństwa Chrystusowego*; (1929), p. 1. Long fragments of his diary, memoirs and other biographical materials, including Unszlicht's correspondence, are part of his un-catalogued legacy stored in the Polish Library in Paris, Acc. 5433. I used these materials thanks to the scholarship I was awarded by the Stanisław Lam Fund.

<sup>3</sup> Maksymilian Unszlicht's life as characteristic of the generation of Warsaw Jews of the 1860s is described in Agnieszka Jagodzińska, *Pomiędzy. Akulturacja Żydów warszawskich w drugiej połowie XIX wieku* (Wrocław, 2008), 45–46. Cf. also: *Żydzi a powstanie styczniowe. Materiały i dokumenty*, ed. and prepared for printing by A. Eisenbach, D. Fajnhauz, A. Wein (Warsaw, 1963), 72–73, 210–211; *Żydzi bojownicy o niepodległość Polski. Ilustrowana monografia w opracowaniu zbiorowym*, ed. N. Getter, R.J. Schall, Z. Schipper (Lwów, 1939), 64.

considerable aptitude for being a social activist and his willingness to change unjust social relations, led him to the Polish students' circles affiliated with the National Democratic Party. Later on, he explained this choice in terms of a chain of circumstances: "Being a Pole, despite the pressure on the part of Jews, I joined the Union [of Polish Youth - G.K.] (*Zjednoczenie Młodzieży Polskiej*), just like a few other Poles of Jewish origin. However, at the same time I stressed my uncompromising socialist stance toward the National Democratic Party at the very start."

The period preceding the revolution of 1905 brought a rapid acceleration in Julian Unszticht's life. In 1904, when he was on a political trip to Galicia, he was arrested and was detained in prison in Cracow, from where he managed to escape. At that time he gained a much higher position in the organization. During his stay in Cracow he was still in contact with prominent Polish Social Democratic activists (Feliks Dzierżyński, Karol Radek, Józef Fürstenberg-Hanecki and Adolf Warski, among others). At that time he was already a member of the Warsaw SDKPiL organization. In his unpublished memoir he described that period of his activity as follows: "Every single fibre of my soul was gravitating toward the PPS, which wanted to build an independent Republic of Poland, which was to be a stepping stone to a gradual introduction of a socialist political system... Providence resolved otherwise. I joined the so-called 'Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania,' whose character I was not entirely familiar with, and which, at that time, presented PPS in a bad light due to the latter's stance on the Kasprzak Case...<sup>4</sup> I was expelled from the PPS, and because I felt the need for socialist-revolutionary activity, I joined the SD [*Stronnictwo Demokratyczne*, the Democratic Party]. I did not realize that I - a far-flung Polish outpost - was entering the main organization of militant Jewish nationalism fighting with Poland, and hiding its true face under socialist platitudes."<sup>5</sup>

Although, significantly, Unszticht passed it over in silence, it might have been that his joining the Social Democrats was strongly influenced by the example of the above-mentioned older cousin Józef, who, having joined the Social Democrats (around 1900), momentarily began to climb the organizational ladder (he was known under the pseudonym "Jurowski") and gradually came to be one of the leaders of the Warsaw party circles. Despite their increasing political differences, the two cousins were in constant contact with each other both at that time and later.

After his escape from the Cracow jail, Julian Unszticht went for the first time to France, where he briefly assumed the position of the head of the Foreign Department of the French section of the SDKPiL. He returned to Poland soon after

<sup>4</sup> Marcin Kasprzak (1860-1905), a legendary activist of the Polish worker's movement, among others, one of the founders of II Proletariat, later on also of the PPS in the Prussian partition and of the SDKPiL. He was famous for his bravura and courage. In PPS circles he was suspected of cooperating with the tsarist Okhrana. The so-called Kasprzak case caused the relations between the main currents of the Polish socialist movement to deteriorate. Apprehended by the tsarist police, Kasprzak was hanged in the Warsaw Citadel.

<sup>5</sup> BPwP, J. Unszticht, *Chrześcijaństwo*, p. 10.

the outbreak of the 1905 revolution and following the tsarist amnesty. The years 1906–1907 marked his most intensive activity in the SD. There is much to suggest that his subsequent extensive anti-Semitic views, which had personal foundations, date back to that period. Unszlicht's later writings may suggest that his aversion to Jews could have developed on the basis of his dislike of the Litvaks. He opposed the fact that immigrants from the eastern part of the tsarist empire, who in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also came to the Kingdom of Poland, were present in political life. The murky issue of the Litvaks, heavily laden with stereotypes, has never been thoroughly discussed in Polish literature. However, even with the present state of research, it can be said that the so-called Litvaks met with a cold, if not hostile, welcome from the majority of assimilated Polish Jews. Their image preserved in diaries and publications of the period is equally negative.<sup>6</sup> We might even venture the thesis that this anti-Litvak stereotype leaked into the Polish anti-Semitic rhetoric directly from the intra-Jewish debates. Litvaks became the symbol of Asian anti-culture to Polish Jews, just like the *Ostjuden* came to symbolize it in the eyes of the German-Jewish elites.

Litvaks became the leitmotif of Julian Unszlicht's early journalistic career. In a way, he recognized the "Litvak threat" within Polish socialism as a result of his contacts with Leon Jogiches a.k.a. "Jan Tyszka" (1867–1919) – as one might say, a personification of a Litvak, and a prominent SDKPiL activist. According to Unszlicht's writings, he discovered the "truly uncontrollable hatred of Poland," by which the leaders of the Social Democrats were allegedly guided, much earlier. But it was the contact with "Tyszka" that occasioned a breakthrough in his outlook on the world. In one of his essays he was to reveal: "But the activity of this 'Tyszka' puzzled me the most. He posed as a Polish nobleman, although he spoke some awful Polish-Russian-German jargon. All SD leaders listened to him unconditionally, but still this carrot-top's behavior made me smell a rat. Eventually, in 1905 I went to Paris and it was there that I found out from some old Polish SD activists that this 'Tyszka' was not even a Polish Jew, but a Litvak who had been expelled from the Russian Social Democratic organization as an alleged agent provocateur. Moreover, he then became a member of the Polish SD by simply buying the membership for money from a shady source, because of which the Russians did not want to accept it, and finally Rosa Luxemburg became his 'wife,' which gave him a decisive position in the party, which he used to get rid of inconvenient Poles... and to make 'Social Democracy' acquire a bitterly anti-Polish character... Thinking that anti-Polishness of the SD was only a fleeting phenomenon, I attempted to Polonize it. I started to be in opposition to 'Tyszka' and I organized 'Worker's Solidarity' (*Solidarność Robotnicza*) together with K[azimierz] Zalewski."<sup>7</sup> We might suspect

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<sup>6</sup> See K.T. Toeplitz, *Rodzina Toeplitzów. Książka mojego ojca* (Warsaw, 2004), 19. Particularly informative here is the journalism of *Izraelita*, which resumed operations after 1910 and which was edited by professed supporters of assimilation.

<sup>7</sup> BPwP, J. Unszlicht, *Chrześcijaństwo*, pp. 8–9.

that Unszticht's activity was also a different unveiling of the conflicts within Social Democracy.<sup>8</sup>

Without going into details of those debates, we can note that at the end of 1908 Unszticht became closer to the pro-independence current of the socialist movement. Not insignificantly, he immediately found himself in the middle of a heated argument within Polish socialism. The polemic, going on for years between the pro-independence milieus and the leftist current of the socialist movement, had its numerous, dramatic unveilings interrupted by rapid volte-faces of certain activists and even groups, but at that time the seemingly sober arguments shifted onto a different level.<sup>9</sup>

Anti-Semitism, which became visible in pro-independence socialist milieus, became one of the instruments in the propaganda war against left-wing currents. Leon Wasilewski, one of the key ideologues of the Polish Socialist Party-Revolutionary Fraction (*PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna*), later on wrote that anti-Semitic impulses had been spreading on a massive scale among PPS members. Both "lewita" – a supporter of the Polish Socialist Party-The Left (*PPS-Lewica*) – and "Social-Litvakism" (*socjalitwactwo*), Jewish Nationalism in a socialist disguise, entered the party jargon.<sup>10</sup>

Julian Unszticht began his journalistic career in *Przedświt*, an opinion-forming Cracow newspaper of the Polish Socialist Party-Revolutionary Fraction, in which, under a pseudonym ("W. Sedecki") he published a series of his articles incriminating the "Jewish nationalism" of the SDKPiL.<sup>11</sup> The accusations became more serious

<sup>8</sup> The controversy surrounding the autocratic leadership of SDKPiL has been widely discussed in the literature. Recently, the inside story of those discussions was vividly recalled in the memoirs of Stefan and Witold Leder, *Czerwona nić. Ze wspomnień i prac rodziny Lederów* (Warsaw, 2005), 46–47.

<sup>9</sup> More on the conflict between SDKPiL and PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna in A. Kochański, *Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy w latach 1907–1910 (Problemy polityczne i ideologiczne)* (Warsaw, 1971), 237, 316–334 and T. Ładyka, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Frakcja Rewolucyjna) w latach 1906–1914* (Warsaw, 1972).

<sup>10</sup> L. Wasilewski, *Słowniczek gwary partyjnej w Królestwie Polskim, Nadbitka. Materiały i Prace Komisji Umiejętności w Krakowie*, vol. 5 (Cracow, 1912), 377, 386. Cf. also the account of Stanisław Stempowski, who was affiliated with the PPS: "Predatory Litvakism, then Zionism, i.e. the fanatic 'Jewish National Democratic Party' destroyed all the accomplishments of assimilation... and it stirred up two savage nationalistic fanaticisms. Ours and theirs. They bought whole streets of houses and squares, they built tenements in the worst taste imaginable, they spoke only Russian, because they knew no Polish, and with the sole fact of their existence they contributed to the city's Russification... Poles became irritated by the conspicuously unceremonious behavior of the newcomers, who did not care about the fact that they were walking on cobblestones which had been stained so many times by the martyrs' blood of the conquered nation. (S. Stempowski, *Pamiętniki* [Wrocław, 1953]), 222–223.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. W. Sedecki (J. Unszticht), "Czego nie wiemy o naszej S-D," *Przedświt* 1 (1910): 23–31; idem, "Niec o ideologii socjal-litwactwa," *Przedświt* 2 (1910): 79–83; idem, "Niec o ideologii socjal-litwactwa," *Przedświt* 3 (1910): 149–155; idem, "Z psychologii socjal-litwactwa," *Przedświt* 4 (1910): 230–236, idem, "Socjal-litwactwo w rewolucji," *Przedświt* 7–8 (1910):

with each issue, and their author bandied more serious political arguments, dragging the names of the organization heads through the mire. Their satirical, often defamatory, tone was striking even in comparison with the then anti-Semitic and nationalistic journalism. Unszlicht published the articles in the form of a separate brochure with a few voices of criticism.

As a matter of fact, "W. Sedecki's" defamatory output might be reduced to a few of the gravest accusations. Firstly, SDKPiL was not a class organization but a manifestation of Jewish ethnic chauvinism. Secondly, what the author feverishly tried to prove, the Social Democratic circles supporting Rosa Luxemburg were a camouflaged product of the Jewish bourgeoisie. Leaving aside the absurdity of these two accusations, we need to remember that "W. Sedecki" accused the SD leaders ("Litvak Targowica") of provoking violence on the part of the partitioners, and of their barely concealed willingness to subjugate the Polish nation and subject it to the Jews, which was the fabric of the subsequent brochure entitled *O pogromy ludu polskiego* (1912). Admittedly, accusing the SDKPiL of organizing pogroms of Polish workers – the articles were based on accounts Unszlicht allegedly heard – in the context of the actual massacres of Jews conducted in the wake of the 1905 revolution had to sound particularly mean. "W. Sedecki's" sketches met with an enormous response from Polish public opinion. Despite the fact that initially the publications were printed in *Przedświt*, they were later reprinted also in *Naprzód* from Cracow and the Berlin *Gazeta Robotnicza*, as well as in other socialist newspapers home and abroad, and they triggered quite an agitation, especially within progressive circles. The nationalist and clerical press began quoting them constantly and ardently.

Unszlicht's pamphlets are a classical product of Polish anti-Semitic rhetoric of that period. Even though they stood out in terms of aggressiveness among other publications of that type, they did not significantly depart from the vein of journalism of those times. The atmosphere of intensified dread of the "Litvak swarm" reached its climax among left-wing milieus in late fall 1910, when the attacks on SDKPiL spread from the domestic press and reached international socialist circles.<sup>12</sup> After the press campaign in all three partitions and among Polish emigrants, the author of *Socjal-litwactwo w Polsce* gained some recognition, especially among Warsaw opinion-forming circles. The fact that he was accepted as a member of the Society of Polish Writers and Journalists (Towarzystwo Literatów i Dziennikarzy Polskich),

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458–465. These texts collected and supplemented with reprints of texts from mostly *Mysł Niepodległa* and *Goniec Wieczorny* were published in the following brochure: W. Sedecki, *Socjal-litwactwo w Polsce (Z teorii i praktyki „Socjaldemokracji Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy)* (Cracow, 1911). For the response to these articles see: A. Kocharński, *Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy*, 321.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. G. Haupt, P. Korzec, "Les Socialistes et la comapagne antisémite en Pologne en 1910: un épisode inédit," *Revue du Nord. Revue historique trimestrielle* 225 (April–June 1975): 185–195.

in the autumn of 1912, might testify to this.<sup>13</sup> However, this reputation of his was becoming increasingly ambiguous.

After the rapid acceleration during 1910–1912, Unszlicht disappeared from public life. Already in 1912 he returned to Paris in order to continue his public activity there, yet his figure began to arouse more and more controversy, especially among the progressives. The articles published in Andrzej Niemojewski's *Mysł Niepodległa* did bring him some publicity, but they brought him into conflict with pro-independence milieus, which Niemojewski regularly defamed in his weekly. Unszlicht's publications in the right-wing press connected with the National Democratic Fronda (among others in *Goniec Poranny/Wieczorny*) were badly received by the left. On the other hand, his connections with the Association of the Polish Progressive and Pro-Independence Youth "Filarecja" (*Stowarzyszenie Młodzieży Polskiej Postępowo-Niepodległościowej "Filarecja"*), affiliated with the Revolutionary Fraction, and whose Paris delegate to the 1910 founding convention in Liège he was, did not last long either.<sup>14</sup> Radical anti-Semitism expressed in an intense fashion, strengthened by personal dislike, began to arouse confusion even among earlier allies. Bolesław Prus' stance might be regarded here as a characteristic one. At first, in Unszlicht's articles the writer found confirmation of his suspicions about increasing Jewish nationalism, only to later completely dissociate himself from the radical views of "Sedecki."<sup>15</sup> For Unszlicht, the balance of his ardent engagement in the anti-Semitic campaign of the years preceding the outbreak of World War I was not unambiguous.

After the scandal Unszlicht felt alienated from the Polish milieus and subjected to some kind of ostracism. It would not be a great exaggeration to say that another important breakthrough in his life, which led him to the Catholic Church, took place at that very moment. A substantial fragment of his memoirs should be quoted here: "The fight with Jewishness [*sic!*] over the soul of the Polish nation was a turning point in my life. Beginning this fight I felt that I would subject myself to violent persecutions and that particularly the Jews and the so-called *szabes-goje* (Christians at Jewish services) would attack my Jewish origin. While I was fighting certain Jewish organizations for their anti-Polish activity (but certainly not because of their racial qualities, since I considered the whole issue as a strictly political one), the Jews, powerless against the facts I revealed, began attacking me as the 'rotten Jew' with all Semitic impetus. This was how they described me in their pamphlets and presented me on the scene . . . I was expelled from the progressive-socialist milieu, which was docilely submitting itself to Jewish influences, and I was denied the right to Polishness. Any kike publicly deriding the misfortunes of Poland had the right to profess

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Pismo Towarzystwo Literatów i Dziennikarzy Polskich z dnia 8.09.1912 do Juliana Unszlichta o zaliczeniu go w poczet członków Towarzystwa poczynając od dnia 1.09.1912* (BPwP, Materiały Juliana Unszlichta [Julian Unszlicht's materials], no pagination).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. T. Ładyka, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Fracja Rewolucyjna)*, 211.

<sup>15</sup> Prus' stance is recounted in Agnieszka Friedrich, *Bolesław Prus wobec kwestii żydowskiej* (Wrocław, 2008), 231.

himself a Pole when it was convenient for him, and I did not have such a right, because I had become a ‘rotten Jew’ for having defended the Polish nation against Jewish machinations! A great spiritual dilemma began: I could not give up on my attachment to Poland, and I was not allowed to be a Pole, because the progressive and socialist Poles regarded me as some Jewish black sheep ‘reviling his origin and fouling his nest’ – a striking proof that they did not regard Jews as Poles, but nevertheless they were listening to them!, for they became Jewishized under their influence. On the other hand, nationalist and Catholic Poles, in my opinion, should have seen me in the light the Jews portrayed me in and turned away from me with dread. Branded by Israel as ‘a rotten Jew and provocateur’ who must be avoided, I lived alienated for a few years in Paris. I could feel that I was somehow cursed due to my origin, but I could not comprehend why.”<sup>16</sup>

In May 1912 Unszlicht converted to Catholicism in the Polish Mission in Paris. This period of his life brings the biggest number of biographical gaps. Some premises indicate that the decision to convert did not so much spring from religious impulses as constitute a continuation of his activity on the political arena. Since no other accounts are available, we can only refer to detailed passages from his memoir: “Not believing in either God or the existence of the soul, I could not understand that one could suffer so much for a reason so purely physical, as I understood the issue of the race from which I originated. In such circumstances suicide seemed the only logical solution,<sup>17</sup> since I could not come to terms with the thought that anybody could drag my name through the mire due to my origin, and could deny me my right to Polishness, and that I had to endure it in silence, although I did not feel guilty in the slightest. On the contrary, I considered fighting the Jewish action my duty but only because it was directed against the Polish cause. And it was for this reason that I decided to bring my action persistently to an end, and to shoot myself only afterwards, so that everybody would know that I had been right and that I was taking my own life only because I could not live while being excluded from society due to my origin, and not due to my imaginary fault with the chosen people. . . . The suffering due to my origin has for the first time in my life turned my attention to the matter of Jewishness. I knew that there was something negative about my origin and I began to look for a reason . . . . Finally, I thought I had found it: the Jews ardently attack Christ, instead of being proud of him on account of the fact that civilized nations worship him so . . . I could not bear the thought that my scientific scepticism toward Christ could be equated with the Talmudic hatred the Jews felt towards him. And so in order to protest against it publicly, and simultaneously cut the last threads connecting me with Israel, and to unite myself

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<sup>16</sup> BPwP, J. Unszlicht, *Chrześcijaństwo*, 12–14.

<sup>17</sup> “One of my Polish acquaintances at that time told me: ‘Weininger knew what Jewishness was, so he shot himself; and you have no other choice left either.’ These words seemed awful to me but I was outraged that Polish origin alone, not affirmed by any dedicated activity in favor of Polish affairs, made one better than me. I did feel, however, that some fate was lingering over me and I did not reply.”

with Poland forever, I decided to convert to Catholicism, since Catholicism was the religion of Poland. . . . At that time the aim of my efforts was to de-Jewishize socialism.”<sup>18</sup> According to Unszlicht’s memoirs and diary, these Weininger-like dilemmas continued to haunt him.

From then on, Julian Unszlicht would also use his second name, Maksymilian. In the years preceding the outbreak of the war he continued his studies in Paris, but he did not complete them. From his writings and notes taken while reading books (among others the works of Andrzej Niemojewski and Iza Moszczeńska, Werner Sombart and Otto Weininger) that survived in his legacy, it appears that at that time he was working on a new thesis of a journalistic nature entitled *Przyczynek do kwestii żydowskiej w Polsce* [An Introduction to the Jewish Issue in Poland]. He never finished it.

With the outbreak of the war in 1914, Unszlicht volunteered for the French Army. He fought in Pomerania and Silesia, where he was taken captive in July 1915, and where he lived to see the end of the war turmoil. The immediate post-war period, which he spent in France, and where he returned, is also quite difficult to reconstruct. The only thing that seems certain is that at that time he really entered the Catholic world. The immediate post-war years were a period of Unszlicht’s preparations for the holy orders, which were crowned by his ordination on 13 July 1924 in Paris.

Both Unszlicht’s social and journalistic activity after his becoming a priest gained substantial recognition within Catholic circles, among both the hierarchy and the conservative milieu. Father Unszlicht perfectly filled the need for a “good” Jew – one of the key figures of anti-Jewish rhetoric widespread among Catholic circles. “Coming from the Jewish stock,” he was also a credible witness of “Semitic” ignobility – a witness revealing the heretofore allegedly concealed true face of the Jews. The priest-convert’s attitude was particularly well received in conservative clergy circles, in which as late as in the 1920s the thought of converting Polish Jews to Catholicism was still alive. Cardinal August Hlond himself put forward such an initiative. His letter to Father Unszlicht reads: “With such a large Hebrew population living within the borders of our Republic, I am convinced that, with respect to it, Poland has been earmarked for a momentous mission. On my last journey I discussed this issue in Rome and Germany and now I am looking for an appropriate form this great act of converting the Jews should be given. An act of this kind will necessarily have to avoid fighting with the Jewish element as such, while it has to pave the way for Christ by a skilful approach to its psychology. I presume that anybody who undertakes to organize any practical steps in this direction would eagerly take advantage of your experiences and readiness.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> BPwP, J. Unszlicht, *Od wolnomyślnego ateisty do chrześcijaństwa Chrystusowego*, pp. 14–18.

<sup>19</sup> *List Prymasa Polski Augusta Hlonda*, L.cz. 260/28. Poz., Poznań, Ostrów Tumski, 20 March 1928, p. 2; BPwP, Materiały Juliana Unszlichta, no pagination.

The extensive surviving correspondence with French clergy representatives, as well as with Vatican dignitaries and personages, might suggest that, as far as possible evangelization missions among Polish Jews were concerned, these circles also pinned certain hopes on Julian Unszlicht's engagement, experience and personal attributes. These impulses finally reached the Polish Church as well. Moreover, before Father Unszlicht undertook ministry among Polish farmhands, he had been sending many innovative projects not only to the Vatican, but also to his diocesan bishop. He pointed out the need of the clergy's active involvement in community work, he called for systematic education of priests, and he also reminded about the role of formation in preserving the Catholic doctrine. At the same time, he loyally abided by the social teachings of the Church.

In the late 1920s the priest convert's position began to strengthen among the Polish Diaspora in France. Directly involved in its community work, Father Unszlicht began to establish contacts with newspapers and Catholic milieus in Poland. From 1927 he regularly cooperated with the opinion-forming *Ateneum Kapłańskie* published in Włocławek. In the 1930s his articles appeared regularly in *Homo Dei* bimonthly published in Tuchowo by the Redemptorists, and also in *Gazeta Kościelna* edited by Father Franciszek Błotnicki, who was an influential figure in Church circles. Unszlicht's interventional publications, including letters to the editor, could be found in other church newspapers, particularly in *Głos Narodu*, which was representative of the Cracow Curia. At the turn of the 1920s and 1930s Father Julian Unszlicht was already a well-known and recognized figure in the Polish Church. But first and foremost, the priest-convert was active in Polish émigré circles. For his public contributions he was decorated by the Polish President with the Cross of Independence, and in France with the Volunteer Combatant Cross.

In the background of his public-journalistic activity, Father Julian Unszlicht was trying to fulfil his personal mission by bringing his family members (particularly his mother Michalina), living in Poland, into the bosom of the Catholic Church. Supported by his sister Anna, also actively engaged in missionary work among the Jews, he proved quite successful. His two brothers and the other sister were baptized.

In the 1930s together with the anti-Semitic views spreading in the whole of society, and also in the Polish Church, the atmosphere among Jewish converts began to change, which indirectly had a negative influence on Father Unszlicht. He began to be attacked in the French Polish press as early as in the 1920s, but at that time they were something like a reflection of "W. Sedecki's" earlier activities. What is characteristic, the libels published in the Polish language socialist press (among others in *Prawo Ludu*) had a clearly anti-Semitic character. But the French Church regularly provided its priest with support in the person of a local bishop from Meaux who supervised Unszlicht's ministry.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. the press cuttings, among others the article from *Prawo Ludu* (1928): Świętoszek, "Sznur rodzimych perełek," in BPWP, Materiały Juliana Unszlichta. Ibidem, many anonymous letters (no pagination).

Later on, the incriminations began flowing from Poland and from the circles ideologically close to Unszlicht. The most infamous were perhaps the speeches made by Father Marian Wiśniewski, the editor of *Primo Christo* – a paper published by the Marian Fathers, which began to lean toward fascism in the mid 1930s.<sup>21</sup> Unszlicht also became the object of the attacks of virulently anti-Semitic *Samoobrona Narodu* – the paper which was the continuation of the *Rozwój* weekly. For the new generation of clergy and left-wing activists, the priest-convert's presence in the Catholic press was no longer obvious. If pressed, "the young" were ready to regard baptism as the seal of Polishness, but they would do that on various conditions. These conditions *de facto* resulted in the converts' exclusion from the Catholic community. Even in *Gazeta Kościelna* Father Błotnicki, who published Father Unszlicht's articles and often assisted him personally, wrote: "We can and we should oppose German racism, but we must admit that between the Aryans and the Jews there is a spiritual chasm (moral and intellectual), and even physical. We should admit that there is something physical which repels us from Jews, like the white man is repelled from the Negro, who not only has a different skin colour but also a different 'smell.' All of this makes real assimilation difficult or even impossible (with very few exceptions)."<sup>22</sup>

This tension between the missionary mission of Catholicism and the radicalization of anti-Semitic rhetoric, coupled with racist stances, was evident in the Church journalism of the 1930s. A good example of this atmosphere might be found in the introduction written by the Redemptorist priest Father Kazimierz Smoroński to Unszlicht's brochure, which was a summary of Joseph Lebreton's (TJ) *Życie i Nauka Jezusa Chrystusa* [The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ]. Smoroński wrote: "Father J. Unszlicht's work has one momentous feature which gives it a unique value, and it is the in-depth analysis of the Jewish psyche. . . . As we belong to a different tribe, it is difficult for us to penetrate the secrets of the Jewish soul in order to accurately assess Jesus' contemporaries' behavior on this basis. . . . Being an Israelite, the author does not have such a difficulty. He profusely draws on his knowledge of the Jewish psyche and whenever he has a chance, he points out the Jewish perfidy toward Jesus Christ, and he explains the mysteries of the Jews' blindness, and explicitly emphasizes the tragedy of this unfortunate nation. . . . For us Poles, Father J. Unszlicht's work is of great practical value, and it can be of great service for us in terms of assessing the Jewish question. For thanks to it we will better understand the Jewish

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<sup>21</sup> The atmosphere of this controversy surrounding Father Unszlicht and converts in general was described in D. Pałka, *Kościół katolicki wobec Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej* (Cracow, 2006), 312–313; R. Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism. Poland, 1933–1939* (Reading, 1994) [Polish edition *Kościół katolicki w Polsce w latach 1933–1939*, trans. W. Turopolski, foreword S. Obirek SJ (Cracow, 2004), 273–274]. Thanks to Dariusz Libionka I also used his unpublished essay on the attitude of Catholic circles toward Jews and the Jewish question in the Second Polish Republic.

<sup>22</sup> Ks. [Father] F. Błotnicki, "Sprawa żydowska w Polsce," *Gazeta Kościelna*, 37, (11 September 1938), 580.

soul, our duties toward Jews and the way of dealing with them in compliance with Catholic faith and ethics.”<sup>23</sup>

Father Unszlicht continued publishing and his activity in Polish émigré milieus in France. He strongly believed that Polish folk Catholicism had a mission to fulfil in the history of the world. Admittedly, thanks to his proselytizing ardour he kept winning over supporters even within the anti-Semitic church circles. The Niepokalanów Franciscans informed him in a letter: “We are interested in all countries, for we have divided the whole globe into thirty-three spheres. A separate group of brethren prays for each sphere every day. We want to win over the entire world for Virgin Mary as fast as possible. At first, we shall embrace all souls with prayer, and then we shall praise to them the direct glory of Virgin Mary. We hold dear the souls of our Compatriots in France as well the French themselves. We hope that you, Very Reverend Father, will not be surprised by our importunity, but will send many details of our missionary work and encourage our even more ardent missionary work.”<sup>24</sup> Unszlicht’s articles often triggered discussions, such as at the time when he severely criticized the stance of Poznań clergy representatives living on missions in France.<sup>25</sup>

The late period of Father Unszlicht’s journalistic activity in the Catholic press was dominated by three themes. Its most important element remained missionary work among Polish farmhands in France, and also outside its borders when he was on his numerous foreign journeys. It was this activity that he devoted his time and indefatigable energy to. The belief that the Polish and the French Church shared a mission of re-Christianization and evangelization of Europe had a major impact on his activity at that time. This theme frequently appeared in his articles, in which he ardently advocated it.<sup>26</sup> Yet the key issue of the Jewish presence and role in the world still appeared in Father Unszlicht’s texts.

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<sup>23</sup> K. Smoroński CSSR, *Wstęp do Życie i nauka Jezusa Chrystusa w zarysie. Według dzieła francuskiego O.J. Lebretona T.J.*, written and published by ks. [Father] J. Unszlicht (Tuchów, 1934), 7–8.

<sup>24</sup> Administracja Rycerza Niepokalanej, OO. Franciszkanów, Rycerz Teresin Soch., Niepokalanów, 17 July 1933 (BPwP, Materiały Juliana Unszlichta, no pagination).

<sup>25</sup> Ks. [Father] J. Unszlicht, “Kler francuski wobec misji polskiej,” *Gazeta Kościelna* 37, 11 September 1937, 578–580. Cf. ks. [Father] Dr J. Olszewski, “Reforma Misji Polskiej we Francji,” *Gazeta Kościelna* 44, 30 October 1938. In a fierce reply not devoid of personal accents, the author wrote e.g.: “But I do not understand the author’s situation. . . Why would an Aryan Pole be more distant to a French Aryan than. . .,” 694. The suspension points in the article, which were perhaps an editorial intervention of Father Błotnicki, involved a barely concealed allusion to the priest-convert’s origin. Later on Błotnicki explained to Unszlicht in a private letter: “I published Father Dr Olszewski’s article after having cut and softened it [*sic!*], because he announced that otherwise he would publish it in *Przegląd [Katolicki]*. What is more, the author is embittered because I ‘mangled the article’ beyond recognition and I stripped it of its pithiness.” BPwP, Materiały Juliana Unszlichta, List ks. Franciszka Błotnickiego, Lwów, 29 XII 1938, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the series of articles by Father J. Unszlicht: J. Unszlicht, “Współczesny racjonalizm francuski wobec osoby Chrystusa,” *Gazeta Kościelna* 41, October–November 1936, 41–45; idem, “Czy misje są potrzebne?,” *Gazeta Kościelna* 34, 20 August 1939, 35, 27 August 1939.

His case is a good example of the traps the anti-Semitic converts of Jewish origin fell into in the atmosphere of growing anti-Semitism. Although Father Unszlicht rejected overt racism, he never broke free of the political thinking schemata of Catholicism of the 1930s. What is more, he too radicalized his stance with respect to the Jewish question, just as most of Catholic opinion did at that time. He was always in the first ranks of the frontline against “Jewish Bolshevism.” In the 1930s in his thinking there even appeared an element of anti-Semitic millenarism.<sup>27</sup> Later on, however, when overtly racist voices appeared in the public debate, Father Unszlicht’s views seemed to have frozen.<sup>28</sup> He had neither renounced the title of “Catholic priest of the Jewish nation,” which many advised him to do, nor changed his stigmatizing surname. Although his stance on the conversion of Jews to Catholicism became more rigid, he did not take a racist stand. In a famous letter published in *Głosu Narodu* he reminded: “What about the converts? If the Polish community despises and excludes them – as the racists advocate – it will deny its Catholic character by hampering their religious practices, and consequently it will hamper the salvation of their souls . . . Polish society shall follow the teachings of the Church, and not of the racists, who in fact contradict our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>29</sup> Simultaneously, during his missionary travels in Spain, torn by the civil war, he expressed his approval of Franco’s regime.<sup>30</sup> He divided the contemporary world into Christian and anti-Christian, in which “Jewishness” was an ominous causative factor. For him this conflict was of a final dimension. In one of the articles he even wrote that: “Today’s Jewish crisis in Poland reminds us only of God’s verdict on Jewry for killing our Lord, the one sentencing them to wandering around the world. No force can reverse the sentence; individual conversions of Jews will not change the complexion of things.”<sup>31</sup> On other occasions he repeatedly and concisely called the Jews the “living monument of God’s punishment.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ks. [Father] J. Unszlicht, “O bestji apokaliptycznej. Wolna interpretacja rozdziału XIII-go objawienia św. Jana,” *Gazeta Kościelna* 19, 12 May 1935, where he wrote: “This lethally wounded head which was then healed as if it denoted Jewry, which until recently seemed insignificant . . . and which played a decisive role in the Bolshevik Revolution and gave it a character implacably hateful toward Christianity.” (p. 220).

<sup>28</sup> The characteristic debates on the Aryanness of Christ were going on in autumn of 1937 in *Wieczór Warszawski* and *Merkuryusz Polski Ordynaryjny*, which was close to the reformatory right-wing circles. Cf. the articles by Stanisław Kobyłański, “Czy Chrystus był Żydem?,” *Merkuryusz Polski Ordynaryjny* 43, 7 November 1937, 1334–1337; ks. [Father] Ignacy Charszewski, “Czy Chrystus był Żydem,” *ibidem*, 47, 5 December 1937, 1463–1465; ks. [Father] Stanisław Piotr Maciątek, “List do redakcji,” *ibidem*, 1465–1466.

<sup>29</sup> Ks. [Father] J. Unszlicht, “Jeszcze w sprawie ‘przechrztów’,” *Głos Narodu* 170, 23 June 1937, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the series of reports from Spain entitled “*Arriba Espana! Z pielgrzymek francuskich do narodowej Hiszpanii*” published in *Gazeta Kościelna* and which was published at the turn of 1938 and 1939.

<sup>31</sup> Ks. [Father] J. Unszlicht, “Żydzi i chrześcijanie,” *Gazeta Kościelna* 26, 27 June 1937, 318.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in: R. Modras, *Kościół katolicki w Polsce*, 274.

A representative fragment of this abundant journalism which can be found in the Lvov *Gazeta Kościelna* and the Włocławek *Ateneum Kapłańskie* of 1935–1939 shows the cul-de-sac in which anti-Semitism built on religious premises found itself.

The outbreak of war interrupted Father Unszlicht's various activities and added a morbid epilogue to his pre-war activity. Unszlicht himself did survive the German occupation. Beginning in October 1940 (i.e. when the racist acts became effective) he was hiding from the Germans in various parts of France, particularly in the "free zone", where Vichy France was later established. He survived by hiding in a few missionary congregations. But most of his family stayed in occupied Poland. His mother, who was over eighty, and one of his sisters were shot dead in the street in August 1944 after the two women left their hideout during the Warsaw Uprising. His two brothers died in the uprising. As for his closest family, only his other sister, Anna, survived. After the war Father Julian Unszlicht tried to resume his activity. He continued taking care of Polish emigrants and running missions abroad. He also renewed his contacts with the Catholic press in Poland and later he maintained extensive correspondence with his sister Anna and her family, who stayed in Poland. He died in France in 1953.

Putting aside all cultural differences, was Julian Unszlicht a Polish Otto Weininger? An intellectual whose personal drama caused by denying his own ethnic background led to tragedy? Julian Unszlicht's story is perhaps not as dramatic or spectacular at the personal level as the case of the University of Vienna graduate who converted to Catholicism, the 23-year-old Doctor of Philosophy who committed suicide after having written a famous, misogynistic and at the same time anti-Semitic book entitled *Sex and Character*.

Julian Unszlicht's journalism obviously cannot be directly compared with Weininger's quasi-philosophical treatise of the self-hatred speech genre. "W. Sedecki's" pamphlets written before World War I actually resemble Jerzy Robert Nowak's contemporary publications. His essays are chaotic, ridden with contradictions and paradoxes, and seasoned with personal resentment. The similarities between the two might be of a different nature. Unszlicht's case is more intriguing as a phenomenon of a certain medium by means of which a community with an aversion to the Jews expresses and publicizes its fears and dislikes. The hero of this sketch himself very early discovered these affinities by choice with the tragic Viennese.

The voice of a Jew who publicly repeats the opinions of anti-Semites is in turn a highly prized commodity in anti-Semitic rhetoric and thus there is always demand for it. Already Father Ignacy Charszewski, a Jew-hater well known in church circles, wrote that Unszlicht "has single-handedly forced his way through the wire entanglements of his nation's anti-Christ prejudice."<sup>33</sup> Scrupulously selected fragments of

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<sup>33</sup> Ks. [Father] I. Charszewski, "Czemu 'swoi' Go nie przyjęli," *Pro Christo* 7-8 (1935): 24-25, quoted in: D. Pałka, *Kościół katolicki wobec Żydów*, 313.

Unszlicht's biography are in the permanent repertoire of Polish breviaries of hate – from Feliks Koneczny through Jędrzej Giertych to the above-mentioned Jerzy R. Nowak, only to recall the best-known cases. What are important for the historical debate are not so much Unszlicht's opinions as the voices of prominent intellectuals occasioned by his enunciations.

Both Unszlicht and Weininger are, above all, examples of re-rationalized self-hatred, combined with the need to find a place in society and – ultimately – a rooted identity. Perhaps every culture has such Weiningers as it deserves.

Translated by *Anna Brzostowska* and *Jerzy Giebułtowski*

### **Abstract**

The life of Julian Unszlicht (1883–1953) illustrates the case and process of the assimilation of Polish Jews. However, Unszlicht's case is special as it shows that holding anti-Semitic views, which were to be a ticket to a Catholic society, guaranteed neither putting roots down permanently nor gaining a new identity. The biography of a priest-convert allows a closer look at the processes of effacement and convergence of anti-Jewish rhetoric. The modern one, of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, with Catholic anti-Judaism, was constantly excused with religious reasons and, at the same time, it often spread to ethnic-racial mental grounds. Contrary to common definitions and distinctions, those two ways of thinking perfectly complemented and strengthened one other, each being sustained by the other's reasoning. The Holocaust added a tragic note to the complex story of the priest-convert.

### **Key words**

progressive anti-Semitism, the Catholic Church, the Jewish question, self-hatred rhetoric

