

# D. MEREZHKOVSKY'S CIVIL MISSION IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC IN 1919-1920-TH: MEDIA AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

*Mykola Rashkevych*<sup>1</sup>

---

## Abstract

*The article discusses the issue of how Dmitry Merezhkovsky thinks about Polish Republic new religious consciousness, appearances of anti-bolshevists. Researches are based on the analysis of publications in periodicals of Polish Republic. The main issue is religious messianism of Russian and Polish peoples.*

**Key words:** messianism, missionism, journalism, nations, communism.

---

In 1920, the Russian publicist, religious philosopher and interpreter Dmytry Merezhkovsky speaking with correspondent of Vilna (Vilnius) newspaper “Nasz kraj” Eu- geniusz Świerczewski expressed prophetic symbolic maxim: “Russia is extremely feminine; however she has never had a husband. She was raped by Tatars, Tsars, and Bolshevists. The only possible husband Russia could be Poland – but Poland looks too weak nowadays” [Świerczewski, 1920].

The founder of the “new religious consciousness” did not say a word about Europe as a possible spouse or any Slavic country. However, a century afterwards his opinion could be interpreted only in context of European ambitions of Russia and Poland. The former one, as it is known, is still being raped by oligarchs headed by Putin, and the later one deliberately connected its own fate with the Old world. The forced seizure of Ukrainian Donbass and Crimea performed by the troops of the Russian Federation actually copies the aggression of Lenin’s RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) of the Lithuanian, Belarusian and Polish territories in the twenties of the twentieth century. Therefore historians and intellectuals with national persuasion are frankly sorry about the weak efficiency of D. Merezhkovsky’s publicist performances of the first period of emigration regarding the immediate offensive of Józef Piłsudski’s army on the bolshevists’ unstable positions, and concerning support of German and French armed formations for Polish army. Young II Rzeczpospolita (1919-1939), which although endeavored to recover in historical borders of I Rzeczpospolita, but there was the lack of human and military resources to “suppress the red devil in its own covert”, did not become the bridge between the civilized Europe and half-wild Russia. The bloody consequences of the Bolshevists expansion to the West in the twentieth century allowed thousands of Polish and Russian intellectuals to reconsider the radical position of D.

Merezhkovsky, however even the USA did not dare to “suppress the devil” after the finishing the Second World War.

Why wasn't Merezhkovsky attended at once? As the emigrant activity of the ethnic Ukrainian, his wife Zinaida Gippius and Russian religious-public figure Dmitry Vladimirovich Filosofov from the very beginning were saturated with the creative inspiration and publicity. After arriving in the ethnic Belorussia, trio began from the reason, why they escaped from Russia – talking to influential people, in the articles, lectures and reports they were persuading “the closer” Europe in the necessity of the decisive fighting against bolshevism. The arrival of Merezhkovsky spouses to Belorussian capital became the event for Russian community, and Vilnius (the city separated with fronts from the cultural metropolis) immediately caught up such desired democratic ideas. At the beginning of 1920 the newspaper “Kurier Wileński” (eng. Vilna courier) solemnly announced about the arrival of «famous writers and literary groups». In the article Merezhkovsky in Minsk it was told that the publicist had had the prolonged conversation with commander of operational group of forces in Minsk district and with Piłsudski's comrade-in-arms general Lucjan Żeligowski, planned to lecture about the life in Soviet Russia (Merezhkovsky is preparing for the Western Europe a great report about bolshevism) [Kurier Wileński, 1920]. Four days later the newspaper published article about the literary evening of Merezhkovsky, Gippius and Filosofov in Minsk theatre. Also there were twelve articles dedicated to Russian writers and passages from Filosofov's publicism and Gippius's essay.

There was not a smaller resonance of dissidents' arrival in Minsk. The local press abounded with the prices like “glorious Russian public figures”, “triumvirate of Russian spiritual life” etc. Nevertheless the solid stereotype of the younger brother among Belarusian (and Latvians to a lesser extent) and relatively small number of Polish population made Merezhkovsky look for better understanding in the other towns in the Second Polish Republic: at first in Lithuania, and finally in Warsaw. Thus, in 1998, at the National Archives of Belarus the full set of the newspaper “Minski courier” with still unknown numbers of 1920 was researched for the first time – scientists and historians were extremely surprised by the abrupt change of the political course of prorussian edition and they comprehended the real reasons of such, soon (less than in a month) Dmytry Merezhkovsky's leaving the town. Indeed, even the simple comparing newspaper information to Zinaida Gippius's memories may cause a kind of “stereo effect” and emphasizes the falsity of Russia-borderlands. Here is a characteristic of the newspaper: “Among a lot of people, who were enforcing to our hotel to Merezhkovsky, the editor of the local Russian newspaper some Azovsky, was not the last one. He is a Moscow Pole, small reporter, who travelled a lot all over the world. All the time of Bolshevism he was in Bolshevik newspaper, possibly he was spying for Poles (but he could on occasion do the opposite). He contrived at once how the famous literators' arrival (especially Merezhkovsky) would be beneficial for him. He decided to use him, he attempted him to publish various interviews and his own article about Merezhkovsky – ridiculous enough, for instance «A bastard and hard as titanium» (Lenin and Merezhkovsky). We realized everything well and were laughing at his rude servility. But even without this we grown wild and starved without «The word», infected by the RSFSR, would go to the brownish-yellow pages of his scant «Courier messenger». It is so anti-bolshevists nowadays, what else is needed?” [Gippius, 1991].

As it turned out soon the main things were lacked: there were no understanding and support. No-polish audience was disappointed not with a literature character of writers' speeches (everybody expected from wide Russian soul some hedonistic enjoyment, instead of that they heard the cruelest reality), they were upset with destructive criticism of the Soviet authorities and Polish apology caused undisguised irritation. Poles, on the contrary, were pleased for high estimation of their nation's historical role, for Poland recognition of the right of borders before its historical allocations for Merezh-

hkovsky demonstrating perfect awareness with Mickiewicz creations etc. Diametrically opposite positions of the recipients were a decent brake for the started case. Despite the permanent success the vast majority didn't believe in possible Russia revival and forming Russian-Polish Union.

There are many reasons to claim that the publicist free and its altruistic ideologist in particular miscounted strategically. The mistake, in our opinion, was made by emigrants still in Saint-Petersburg and it consisted in misconnection of mutually exclusive concepts – Polish and Russian messianism. The point is that Polish national elite in the environment of the Slavic world states also perceived its own geopolitical uniqueness. In 1832 Adam Mickiewicz (Lithuanian by birth) in the third part of *Dziady* and in *Księgi Narodu Polskiego i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* set forward the doctrine of property “polish messianism”, according to which all the sufferings of poet's home land were related to special historical vocation nation-martyr – “Christ of Nations”. The poet for a long time was in exile in Russia, so he deeply filled hostility to the imperial way of organizing power, even though with religious impurities (still orthodox, not the catholic ones) into the descendants' consciousness. The phenomenon of polish emigration in 30<sup>th</sup>-40<sup>th</sup> of XIX century became an important event of pan-European value-form Paris to Moscow. Exactly in France polish messianism emerged; and in Russia it was approved as a comprehensive belief in polish soul and in Eucharistic meaning of its obligatory vocation. Therefore, the polish messianism could become the source of the real enthusiasm and the Universal phenomenon only in that case if it was realized in the religious channel and had nothing similar in the world.

The fact is that it really had some and what is more - according to the naïve call of Merezhkovsky – it had to save the other one – East Slavic. Both Polish and Russian, also Jewish nations with all their ethno type and historical dissimilarities, have something in common in spiritual dimension. Any other nation, except the Jewish one, has never thought and told about itself that it is God's chosen nation, and any other nation, except the Russians, has never told about itself it is so close to God. Jews, Poles and Russians have the same keen sense of eschatological messianism, which should be distinguished from the historical missionism. Missionism is nation's feeling of the personal historical mission, attempts to realize some national vocation in the world. It is limited with the chronological frameworks. But messianism on the contrary heads far away from the national history limits to the future, right to the end of the world [Poliszczuk, 1998]. All famous kinds of missionism (such as Greek missionism, state and legal superiority of Romans, nationalistic messianism of Germans and democracy are among Americans) usually have applied character. And only Russians, Poles and Jews as the basis of historical self-awareness have messianism belief – the faith in Messiah, the Universal Savior, the confidence in the final prevailing of the Kingdom of Heaven, which would come after Messiah's advent.

Mickiewicz's ideas about the sacred appointment of Polish pilgrimage and special role of nation-martyr regularly engaged into acute confrontation with Dostoyevsky's ideas about Russian God-relatively vocation, that pretended to exclusive closeness to Christ (the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*). They had existed mutedly before, however these ideas immediately stood on the agenda as soon as D. Merezhkovsky began talking about God-relatively nation, release from devil-bolshevists bands.

Polish intellectuals in Belorussia and Lithuania were rather interested in weakening geopolitical neighbor (Russia recently outlived the revolution and still was in the state of Civil war), so by covering with pretended concern about freedom-loving views of “East thinkers”, they were looking for permanent benefits for strengthening its own messianist “brand”. Devotees of spiritual values (Merezhkovsky, Gippius and Filosofov) knew about mentality features of literate polish population, albeit for some reasons they weren't ready for the sly questions of the local journalists. For example, publisher of Vilna newspaper “Nasz Kraj” Juliusz Sumorok during the interview suddenly stunned

interlocutors: “Why don’t such numerous intelligentsia show signs of life – Why in so- ciety, which mostly consists of bolshevists’ opponent, there is no even small reaction against Lenin’s power. In Poland the stronger oppression was the stricter-thinking seg- ments of the population reacted at it. For a few years we had to live clandestinely, how- ever during this time we were preparing disobedience center, which nowadays provided result in armed acquisition of the Motherland integrity” [Nasz Kraj, 1920].

Confused by the interviewer’s position Merezhkovsky wasn’t able to answer Su- morok’s reproach and only opportune Dmitry Filosofov’s interruption discharge the at- mosphere in editorial office.

The editor of the newspaper “Nasz Kraj”, Vasyl Karazim Kharkiv National Univer- sity alumnus Eugeniusz Świerczewski in the article *Merezhkovsky’s mission* threatened with understanding to the efforts of “a great patriot and ruthenium artist” to persuade Poland to conclude an alliance with revived Russia against Bolsheviks. He compared the publicist with Mickiewicz, who at his time also presented “honor of the nation and independence of its spirit, bound with bands of Moscow despotism” in emigration. Nev- ertheless he also strongly didn’t perceive the “mystical theories about Russian Mes- sianism” and reflections about the kinship of two Slavic nations. “The blood sea which was spilled by Poland in battling with Russia still hasn’t even dried up. If, as Merezh- kovsky endeavored, Russia today is Christ of Nations that means Christ hasn’t passed the purgatory yet and still hasn’t expiated guilt completely”. The editor reminded wisely to the whole Russian intelligentsia that it had failed the voting in the Council the project of self-government in Poland in 1915, but now as its most consistent representative it wanted to get some help from its recently hostile neighbor. The conclusion is the following one: political and religious Russian-Polish Union is a dream, “the music of the far future”, and three centuries of difficult relationship are the painful experienced reality [Świerczewski, 1920].

The professor of Philosophy of Vilnius University, named after Stefan Batory Win- centy Lutosławski saw even hate to the native nation in Merezhkovsky’s view. He was a preacher of peculiar nationalistic futurology with russophobic and partly anti-Semitic direction, the scientist analyzed lections of his Slavic Congener in the article *Supple- ment to polish messianism*. As a quite original addition to “Russian exclusivity dog- ma” he called “Merezhkovsky’s genius opinion that «together with Poland, Christ of Nations, there were crucified two nations-robbers”. One of them would appear to be aware and would be saved – as it was predicted by Mickiewicz in «Dziady». According to these hopes two «sacred» nations must reborn on the imperial ruins: the first one is saved Russian and the second one is risen Polish. For Lutoslavsky this seemed to be disagreeably in pictures of Russia disintegration (shown by native Ukrainian) he saw traditional Russian self-spitting made by «the greatest moscovite». Merezhkovsky nev- er lost hope that his nationals «rid themselves of bolshevists’ contagion and establish Christ’s power in their country». And in case if his nation followed him in real, Poles would recognize a prophet in a great writer, would build monuments for him and would accept him into the kingdom of God, «realization of which on the Earth was our national necessity” - contemptly resumed the Pole [Lutosławski, 1920].

A large proportion of irony in speeches of representatives of one of the “messio- nism nations” emphasized the low effectiveness of publicist word of Merezhkovsky, Gippius and Filosofov. Even emigrants’ recognition of Polish right to borders of 1772 and numerous publications on pages of Warsaw newspaper “Svoboda” (“The red devil”, “The cock’s scream”, “The crown of thorns”, “The triple lie”) didn’t become an impe- tus to activation the cooperation in fighting against the common enemy. When Poland signed peace treaty with Russia, that meant the end of “russian case”, the three left to Paris. D. Merezhkovsky considered emigration to be as kind of messianism activity, and believed he was spiritual companion for Russians in exile. In Warsaw and Paris Merezhkovsky worked with the same inspiration as in the homeland. For example, since

1924 till 1939 he published a lot of artistic and publicist texts: novels *Birth of the Gods: Tutankhamun in Crete*, *The Messiah*, *The Mystery of three. Egypt and Babylon*, *Napoleon*, *researches Jesus unknow*, *The secret of the West: Atlantis - Europe*, *Dante*, *Francisk Assisi*. Certainly the author was a difficult person nonetheless sobriety and sharpness of thought always differentiated him among the other. In the foreword to *The secret of the West*, interpreting Russia as the Atlantis of new history, Merezhkovsky more clearly than the others predicted the beginner of the new war. Perhaps, he called “russian exiles” as people “with stripped skin” and “barometers of European military weather” in a bit too pathetic way. But the publicist is one of them too and the course of history is clear for him: “On the lower floor there is a powder cellar fascism, on the upper floor there is a soviet explosives laboratory; Europe is in the middle in the travail: it wants to birth peace, but is producing the war” [Merezhkovsky, 1930].

“Russian communism is an adventure, which worked because of the war in the lowest point of imperial weakening; it can’t live under «The sun of European peace». Having melted it will move to Europe”. Maybe for radically oriented coevals these words may seem to be skeptical enough, but not for those ones who are familiar with the course of the new history in particular with socialist occupation the Poland and crimes of Stalin’s regime against its population. It is remarkable, the Polish emigration of the second part of XX century rethought Merezhkovsky’s valuable views and gathered in its proclamation national Polish idea with natiosophie doctrines with Russian origin. Over four decades it was managing syntheses of its own religious ideals and deep self-termination of Slavic spirit, and finally it got the conclusion that the religious missionism is not an obstacle for collective democracy (European Union).

## References

- GIPPIUS, Z. (1991). *Zywyje lyca. Wspomynania. Tbylisy: Merany*.
- LUTOSŁAWSKI, W. (1920). *Uzupełnienie polskiego mesjanizmu (Z powodu odczytu Merezkowskiego)* [in:] *Dziennik Wileński*, nr. 50, 2 march.
- MEREZHKOVSKEY, D. (1930). *Tajna zapada: Atlantyda-Europa*, Belgrad.
- MEREZHKOVSKEY, D. (1920) *Merezhkovsky w Mynske* [in:] *Kurier Wileński*.
- Merezhkovsky i Filozof o polozhenyy w Sowdepyy* [in:] *Nasz kraj*.
- MICKIEWICZ, A. (1968). *Dziady*. Moskwa, Hudozestwenaja lyteratura.
- POLISZCZUK, W. (1998). *Kulturologia*, Moskwa, Gardaryky.
- KURIER WILEŃSKI (1920) *Priezd w Wylnu russkyh pisatelej*. *Kurier Wileński*, 24 febr.
- ŚWIERCZEWSKI, E. (1920). *Misja Merezkowskiego* [in:] *Nasz Kraj*, 3 march.