



THE POLISH
CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY
IN THE 20TH CENTURY

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I.

TADEUSZ ŚLIPKO SJ:
PERSON AND WORK

BIOGRAPHY

In the last days of his life, Tadeusz Ślipko reminisced about Lvov, affectionately reciting a long poem about the loss of his mother city. These simple and most deeply rooted symbols: family home, mother, city, opened and closed all of the periods of his long life as a student, monastic, teacher, scholar, researcher. They opened up a new world before the young man, while at the same time closing the city gates of Lvov behind him forever. Ślipko never returned to his city, yet kept it alive in his memories, poems, and anecdotes.

Tadeusz Ślipko was born on January 18, 1918 in Stratyn, the former district of Rohatyn. His father, Jan Ślipko, was a local police commander, and his mother, whom he remembered as an exceptionally brave woman, took care of the children. In 1923, after his father's sudden death, Tadeusz moved with his mother and sisters Janina and Maria to Horodok, his parents' hometown. It was there that he went to primary school and then to King Władysław Jagiełło Humanities High School. At that time, Horodok was inhabited not only by Poles, but also by Ukrainians, Jews and those of German, Austrian or Hungarian descent. Thus, he reminisced about growing up in a "multinational, multicultural and multid denominational environment."¹

In 1936, he passed the secondary school examinations, and a year later began geological studies at the John Casimir University in Lvov Department of Mathematics and Natural Sciences. It soon turned

¹ "Wspomnienia kresowe. Z Tadeuszem Ślipko, filozofem i etykiem, rozmawia Józef Augustyn SJ," *Życie Duchowe* 62 (2010), <http://www.zycie-duchowe.pl/art-8584.wspomnienia-kresowe.htm> (accessed: November 23, 2017).

out, however, that this was not a good choice, and in 1938 he moved to the Department of Humanities, choosing Polish philology and history as his major. He studied under the guidance of Professor Juliusz Kleiner and Professor Witold Taszycki. He also attended lectures in philosophy by Professor Roman Ingarden and Professor Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz.

His studies were interrupted by the outbreak of war. "My whole world collapsed," he later said. "For me, this was the end. I wanted to be somewhere else, away from what was going on around me. And I imagined that such a place far away from the world ... was a monastery."²

On October 12, 1939, he was accepted by Fr. Włodzimierz Kopopka to join the novitiate in Stara Wieś, where he had been referred by the Jesuits of Saint Barbara Church in Krakow. Ślipko saw this moment as a transformational one in his life. His monastic formation was largely influenced by Fr. Jan Bratek, who remembered him as a "truly spiritual person." After two years of the novitiate, Ślipko began a three-year course of studies at the Faculty of Philosophy run by the Society of Jesus, which had been transferred to Nowy Sącz because of the war. In that period, the teacher who most significantly influenced his education was Fr. Władysław Markucki. Ślipko remembered him for his extraordinary ability to precisely capture that which was essential. In the years 1944–1948, Ślipko studied at the Bobolanum Faculty of Theology, where he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Theology and Philosophy. On June 29, 1947, he was ordained a priest by Bishop Franciszek Barda at Our Lady Basilica in Stara Wieś. He made his final vows ten years later, on February 2, 1957 in Krakow.

In 1948, as part of the effort to reconstruct the Society of Jesus in Krakow after the war, he was assigned to educational work, teaching social ethics at the Faculty of Philosophy. "I realized that in order to do this properly, I first had to complete a programme of studies in this direction myself," he recalled years later. He therefore began studies at the Faculty of Theology at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. As his earlier theological studies were recognized and acknowledged, in order to begin doctoral studies he only had to write and defend a master's thesis. He prepared a dissertation on the right to defend a society against the arbitrary rule of a tyrant based on the writings

² Ibidem.

of Francisco Suárez and was conferred the title of Master of Theology in social ethics. At the same Faculty, in 1952, based on a dissertation entitled “The Principle of Subsidiarity,” he was awarded the title of Doctor of Theology. The formal supervisor of his thesis was Professor Władysław Wicher, but his actual promoter was Fr. Jan Piwowarczyk, the founder and editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Powszechny*. The dissertation was never published due to state censorship.

At the same time, Ślipko also studied sociology at the Jagiellonian University, in the Faculty of Humanities. He chose this degree in order to expand and develop his philosophical studies. As Ślipko repeatedly emphasized, if philosophy is to be done properly, it needs the support of empirical sciences, particularly sociology and psychology. He completed his studies in 1952 by defending his MA thesis entitled “Rozwój narzędzi rolniczych i ich wpływ na świadomość społeczną mieszkańców małopolskiej wsi Golcowa” [“The Development of Agricultural Tools and Their Impact on the Social Awareness of the Inhabitants of the Village of Golcowa in Little Poland”]. The supervisor of his thesis was Professor Kazimierz Dobrowolski. Looking back on his student years, Ślipko said that “the studying conditions in post-war Poland were very poor. We did not even have chairs in the lecture halls. We sat on planks and boards,”³ he recalled.

While studying he also continued his didactic work, lecturing on general and detailed ethics from 1953, as well as giving classes in social ethics. In that period, he also taught ethics at Higher Theological Seminaries run by the Pauline and the Franciscan Fathers. Between the years 1957–1963, he worked as a Dean at the Jesuit Society Faculty of Philosophy. In 1963, he began his didactic work at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Krakow (now The Pontifical University of John Paul II), where he worked until 1988.

In 1965, he was employed as an assistant professor at the Department of Ethics at the Faculty of Christian Philosophy of the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw (now Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University), where he obtained his *habilitation* in 1967 after defending a thesis entitled “Zagadnienie godziwej obrony sekretu” [“The Equitable Defence of Secrets”]. Its reviewers were Professor Stanisław Olejnik, Professor Władysław Poplatek, and Professor Władysław Strzeszewski. Soon after his habilitation, he was appointed Docent

³ Ibidem.

and Chair of the Department of Ethics. In 1973, he obtained the academic title of associate professor, and in 1982 became a full professor. While working at the Academy of Catholic Theology, he combined didactic work with the duties of Department Chair and the function of an Associate Dean, and in the years 1977–1981 worked as the Dean of the Faculty of Christian Philosophy. He retired in September 1988, but continued his academic work, which included publications, participation in the meetings of a discussion group called “Myśl dla Polski” [“Thought For Poland”], and was invited by the Silesian University of Technology as a guest speaker to meetings dedicated to ethical and social problems in ecology.

He supervised 40 MA theses and 4 doctoral dissertations. He wrote more than 20 reviews of doctoral theses, 3 reviews of habilitation theses, and evaluated the academic achievements of 10 academics applying for the title of an associate and full professor.

Ślipko was the author of 13 books and more than 200 articles, essays and reviews. His most important works include: *Zagadnienie godziwej obrony sekretu* [*Equitable Defence of Secrets*] (1968) (reprinted in 2009 as *Godziwa obrona sekretu: zagadnienia* [*Equitable Defence of Secrets: Issues*]); *Etyczny problem samobójstwa* [*The Ethical Problem of Suicide*] (1970, reprinted: 2008); *Etos chrześcijański: Zarys etyki ogólnej* [*The Christian Ethos: An Outline of General Ethics*] (1974; 2nd amended and extended edition: *Zarys etyki ogólnej* [*An Outline of General Ethics*] 1984; 3rd extended edition: 2002; 4th edition: 2004; 5th edition: 2009); *Życie i płeć człowieka: Przedmałżeńska etyka seksualna. Etyczny problem samobójstwa* [*Human Life and Sex: Premarital Sexual Ethics. The Ethical Problem of Suicide*] (1978); *Zarys etyki szczegółowej* [*An Outline of Detailed Ethics*], vol. 1: *Etyka osobowa* [*Personal Ethics*], vol. 2: *Etyka społeczna* [*Social Ethics*] (1982; 2nd extended edition: 2005); *Granice życia. Dylematy współczesnej bioetyki* [*The Borders of Life: Dilemmas of Contemporary Bioethics*] (1988; 2nd extended edition: 1994); *Za czy przeciw życiu? Pokłosie dyskusji (Problem aborcji)* [*For or Against Life? The Aftermath of Discussions (The Problem of Abortion)*] (1992); *Rozdroża ekologii* [*The Crossroads of Ecology*] (1999) (co-authored by: A. Zwoliński; T. Ślipko is also the author of Part 1: *Ekologiczna doktryna Kościoła* [*The Ecological Doctrine of the Church*]); *Kara śmierci z teologicznego i filozoficznego punktu widzenia* [*Death Penalty from the Theological and Philosophical Point of View*] (2000; reprinted: 2002); *9 dylematów etycznych* [*Nine Ethical Dilemmas*] (2009); *Aborcja. Spojrzenie filozoficzne*,

teologiczne, historyczne i prawne [Abortion: A Philosophical, Theological, Historical and Legal Perspective] (2010) (co-authored by: M. Starowieyski, A. Muszala); *Historia etyki w zarysie [The History of Ethics: An Outline]* (2010); *Spacerem po etyce [Sauntering Across Ethics]* (2010); *Kara śmierci. Za czy przeciw [Death Penalty: For or Against]* (2010); *Bioetyka. Najważniejsze problemy [Bioethics. Main Problems]* (2012); *Przedmażeń-ska etyka seksualna [Premarital Sexual Ethics]* (2012).

The authority he enjoyed in the academic community was testified to by the Gold Cross of Merit he was awarded in 1973, and the Order of Polonia Restituta Knight's Cross in 1979. In 1987, he received the title of a Meritorious Teacher of People's Republic of Poland. It is also worth noting that, during the 20th Catholic Publishers Fair, he was honored with the FENIKS 2014 Grand Award. The Award Committee took note of his "impressive scientific, didactic and organizational achievements, particularly during a time requiring a fragile compromise between authorities of the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw and representatives of the People's Republic of Poland; redeveloping the concept of Christian ethics referring to the achievements of Thomism, personalism and rational methods; as well as reliability, diligence, unpretentiousness and kindness in interpersonal relationships and research work."⁴

Ślipko is generally believed to be one of the most outstanding representatives of Thomist-oriented ethics. In his scientific work, he investigated systemic approaches to Christian ethics and presented his findings in three extensive studies: *An Outline of General Ethics* and two volumes of *An Outline of Detailed Ethics: Personalist Ethics* and *Social Ethics*. Their originality consists in that the basic presentation of Thomist ethics has been methodologically modified and extended in terms of its subject matter. One of his most important contributions was that he sought ways of combining the experience of morality and its theoretical description in his ethics. To do this, he referred to basic moral facts, which he believed to include: the pursuit of goals, conscious experience of values, obligations, and acts of conscience. While remaining faithful to the traditional sources of Thomist ethics, Ślipko performed its original modification and reinterpretation in view of contemporary developments in the socio-political situation and the

⁴ "Nagroda FENIKS 2014 dla ks. prof. Tadeusza Ślipki," <https://wfch.uksw.edu.pl/node/1072> (accessed: November 23, 2017).

findings of empirical sciences. The solutions examined in Ślipko's Christian ethics have their ultimate substantiation in an absolute and objective moral order. His ethics is theist, spiritualist and personalist, while at the same time being linked to moral experience.

In tandem with his work on a systemic approach to Christian ethics, he investigated detailed moral problems. He is the author of original solutions to the problem of moral substantiation of the defense of secrets. He also analyzed the problem of death penalty and suicide from the ethical point of view, and developed sexual ethics; in the last period of his academic work he also investigated bioethical problems, including the ethics of natural environment.

The third area of his studies involved discussion with the views of Marxist philosophers. Due to the contemporary social and political situation, Ślipko studied and analyzed Marxist concepts of morality. He discussed his findings in a monograph entitled *Marksistowska doktryna moralności* [*The Marxist Doctrine of Morality*], never published in print due to a prohibition imposed by state censorship.

Tadeusz Ślipko died on May 1, 2015 at the age of 97, having been the teacher and educator of several generations of ethicists and theologians.⁵

⁵ E. Podrez, "Ksiądz Profesor Tadeusz Ślipko – życie i działalność," *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 40, no. 1 (2004), pp. 11–23; J. Koszteyn, "In memoriam Tadeusz Ślipko SJ (1918–2015)," *Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum* 21, no. 1 (2015), pp. 93–97; J. Bremer, "Ks. Prof. dr hab. Tadeusz Tomasz Ślipko," in *Życie etycznie – życie etyką. Prace dedykowane Ks. Prof. Tadeuszowi Ślipko SJ z okazji 90-lecia urodzin*, ed. R. Janusz (Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna Ignatianum; Wydawnictwo WAM, 2009), pp. 9–15; "Wywiad przeprowadzony z ks. prof. Tadeuszem Ślipko w dniu 19.12.2011 roku przez studentów IFiS," An interview by K. Sawczak, M. Farganus, P. Duchliński, <http://www.pte.hekko.pl/wywiady> (accessed: October 28, 2017).