



Christianity of non-believers by Marian Przełęcki: on the universal meaning of mercy

Chrześcijaństwo niewierzących według Mariana Przełęckiego
– o uniwersalnym znaczeniu miłosierdzia¹

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Abstract: Among the many reasons for departing from faith in God is a peculiar intellectual formation, which presupposes the acceptance only of such beliefs that meet the conditions of intersubjective verifiability and communicability. The text is a reminder of the thoughts of Marian Przełęcki, who, due to his rationalism, chose the path of agnosticism, but identified with the ethical aspect of Christian faith. It includes a presentation of the philosopher's views on faith, the rationality of religious beliefs, and presents a conception of Christianity of non-believers built in relation to Christian ethics, along with a critical commentary.

Keywords: faith, rationality, charity, Christianity of non-believers

Abstrakt: Wśród wielu powodów odchodzenia od wiary w Boga znajduje się swoista formacja intelektualna, zakładająca przyjmowanie jedynie takich przekonań, które spełniają warunki intersubiektywnej sprawdzalności i komunikatywności. Tekst stanowi przypomnienie myśli Mariana Przełęckiego, który z racji na swój racjonalizm wybrał drogę agnostycyzmu, jednak utożsamiał się z etycznym aspektem chrześcijańskiej wiary. Zawiera w sobie prezentację poglądów filozofa dotyczących wiary, racjonalności przekonań religijnych, oraz przedstawia zbudowaną w odniesieniu do chrześcijańskiej etyki koncepcję chrześcijaństwa niewierzących wraz z krytycznym komentarzem.

Słowa kluczowe: wiara, racjonalność, miłość bliźniego, chrześcijaństwo niewierzących

Introduction

There are many reasons for people to move away from faith in God (after: Jasiński, 2021, Marianski, 2016) in a Christian-rooted Europe (after: Warzeszak, 2021). For some, this decision stems from disillusionment with the Church as an institution, struggling with all sorts of problems (after: Ziemiński, 2014). For others, this has a more personal dimension that stems from experiencing a psychological crisis (after: Nowosielski, 2012). Doubt of this kind can originate here both in the personality of an individual, but also in the external circumstances in which they find themselves, such as confronting the cruelty of war. However, there are also people whose path to rejecting belief in God

leads through a specific intellectual formation, contact with science in the broadest sense of the term and the procedures it uses to prove the truth of assertions made. Marian Przełęcki can be included among such people. This philosopher was born on 23 May 1923 in Katowice, and died on 9 August 2013 in Otwock. He began his philosophical studies immediately after the war, studying under eminent representatives of the Lviv-Warsaw School, especially Janina Kotarbińska, who appointed him as an assistant. From 1952 until his retirement, Marian Przełęcki was an employee of the Department of Logic at the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw.

¹ Artykuł w języku polskim: <https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2022-4-Rojek.pdf>

As he progressed through the academic ranks up to the title of full professor, which he received in 1986, he focused his research mainly on the issues of formal logic and the methodology of sciences. With time, the philosopher's area of interest also included axiological issues, taken up by him in various scientific articles, which later made up three publications in this field: "O rozumności i dobroci" (On Reason and Goodness) in 2002, "Intuicje moralne" (Moral Intuitions) in 2005, and "Horyzonty metafizyki" (Horizons of Metaphysics) in 2007 (after: Brożek, 2019). Axiological issues also became the warp for the book "W poszukiwaniu najwyższych wartości – Rozmowy międzypokoleniowe" (In Search of Highest Values – Intergenerational Conversations), which is a scientific dialogue between Marian Przełęcki and two subsequent generations of philosophers, represented by Jacek Jadacki and Anna Brożek.

On the question of faith, Marian Przełęcki declared plainly, *It is reason, not feeling, that prevents me from believing in religious truths. My departure from religion had at its root neither a youthful rebellion against a 'merciless' God, nor any aversion to religion or the Church as socially 'harmful' forces and institutions. I do not believe in religious truths simply because I do not find sufficient rationale to accept them. The source of my disbelief is my rationalism* (Przełęcki, 2002a, p. 105-106). On the other hand, however, reflections on the issue of faith in its broadest sense constitute a significant part of his scientific output. What is more, Przełęcki greatly valued Christian ethics, seeing the universal value of the idea of loving thy neighbour and making it the best guidepost for action both for those who believe in God and those who do not. Works of mercy of all kinds, on the other hand, is a matter to which both John Paul II and Benedict XVI wanted to draw the attention of the faithful, and the latter wrote, *Caritas-agape transcends the boundaries of the Church; the parable of the Good Samaritan remains the criterion of measure, it imposes the universality of a love that is directed towards the needy person met 'by chance', whoever he may be* (Benedict XVI 2006, p. 33). We also may be tempted to say that loving thy neighbour is the leitmotif of Pope Francis' teaching (after: Sawa, 2018). Hence, by recalling the figure of Marian Przełęcki and his idea of the Christianity

of non-believers, this text aims to show that loving thy neighbour can become a platform to meet each other, to start a dialogue, but also to begin some joint action for people who believe, experience moments of doubt or deny the existence of God.

1. Faith

In analysing the concept of faith itself, Ryszard Kleszcz points out that three meanings of the term can be identified. In the narrowest sense, it refers directly to specific religious beliefs. In a slightly broader sense, faith can be understood in the context of all beliefs with metaphysical content. In its broadest sense, on the other hand, the term faith is used with reference to all beliefs that we accept as true despite the impossibility of proving them (Kleszcz, 2007, p. 83-84). Relating these distinctions to the views held by Marian Przełęcki, we can see that faith in the strictest sense was not something he believed in. He took an agnostic stance on the issue, believing that *the agnostic position does not provide the basis for such psychic attitudes as trust in fate or assent to existence. But neither does it lead to attitudes to the contrary – resentment of fate, hatred of the world, rebellion against existence. Such attitudes presuppose a certain understanding of the world, a clear vision of its hidden meaning or meaninglessness, an evaluation of the world as a whole. Someone who condemns the world elevates himself above the world, treats the world as an ill-managed farmstead. If they see the world as a mystery, it becomes impossible for them to evaluate the world as a whole and thus to condemn it; wrongly – to resent the world, to malign it. Agnostic attitude is about modesty and humility towards the great mystery that is, in his eyes, the totality of existence. It is thus an attitude far from complacency and obstinacy, an attitude of goodwill and openness towards everything that reaches our mind and heart from the unlimited world* (Przełęcki, 2005a, p. 135). We can notice here that the attitude represented by the philosopher is rather conservative, leaving space for full religious commitment. On the other hand, however, it is a kind of suspension, depriving the possibility of experiencing certain states, e.g. trust in fate, which for many

people are very valuable experiences that translate into their functioning in everyday life. Marian Przełęcki's agnosticism becomes clearer when we look at his attitude towards faith understood more broadly, as a set of certain metaphysical beliefs. On this issue, he wrote as follows, *Instead of a sense of God's presence in the world I nourish something like a sense of the 'divinity' of this world itself, but a 'divinity' identified not with goodness but with the extraordinary beauty of this world. This corresponds, incidentally, to a certain metaphysical concept present in the history of philosophy – the concept that allows Plato to use the idea of the Good and the idea of Beauty interchangeably, and great artists to speak of saving the world through beauty* (Przełęcki, 2005b, p. 78). This kind of belief seems rather surprising, especially in the context of Marian Przełęcki's hierarchy of values – the good was ranked very high. On the other hand, the philosopher's stance towards faith (which he rejected) in the broadest sense is not controversial because of his intellectual formation in the spirit of the Lviv-Warsaw School, and therefore his programmatic anti-irrationalism.²

2. Rationality

Marian Przełęcki believed that there was no reason for religious beliefs and attitudes to be covered by a special 'immunity', forcing anyone to refrain from assessing them in terms of rationality. He attempted to confront this problem by clarifying the concept of rationality, which he considered ambiguous. In the context of religious belief, he considered it legitimate to distinguish between 'logical rationality', referring to thinking, and 'pragmatic rationality', being anchored in action. In this dichotomy, he emphasised that while in the case of logically rational beliefs their recognisability is seen as gradual, proportional to the strength of the arguments justifying a given judgment, pragmatic rationality has a bivalent form, relativized by the valuation made by the acting sub-

ject. Przełęcki believed that the criterion of practical rationality often turns out to be superior to logical rationality and that this was the situation we were dealing with in relation to certain religious beliefs, which, although logically irrational, were accepted by people because these beliefs could translate into concrete behaviour (Przełęcki, 2002b). Considering that two types of justification can be distinguished (direct and indirect) he made an attempt to assess the logical rationality of religious beliefs. He believed that claims postulated by religion, if scientific standards were imposed on them, would never be able to demonstrate their rationality. Therefore, inspired by the views of W. Stróżewski, who had proposed to use specific methods of cognition for problems inaccessible to scientific cognition (Stróżewski, 1983), Przełęcki considered other types of experience than those allowed in science, as well as methods of inference. He noted that when it comes to religious experience, it can be understood broadly (as a particular kind of metaphysical experience) or narrowly (as referring to a particular belief system, such as Christianity). And it is religious experience understood strictly that is problematic in the philosopher's view – as he believed that *it does not in fact appear that the content of this type of experience can be given in any direct experience. It is rather the result of a more or less conscious interpretation of what is directly given. This interpretation is always based on a certain system of preconceived religious beliefs. This includes specifically religious mystical experiences. Mystical "union" with Christ can only take place in those who already believe in the divinity of Christ*³. Consequently, religious experiences in the strict sense of the term cannot constitute – by their very nature – a direct justification of religious beliefs, since they themselves presuppose such beliefs (Przełęcki, 2002b, p. 93).

As a result, Przełęcki assumes that only religious experiences understood in a broader sense can provide justification for faith, but again treated in general terms, and not as dogmas of a particular religion.

2 He assumed that assertions should only be accepted if there has been sufficient justification for them. This rationale should meet the conditions of intersubjective communicability and testability, and therefore cannot appeal to realms beyond empirical experience such as intuition or metaphysical experience.

3 A similar problem of interpreting particular experiences is pointed out, for example, by John Wisdom, who used the metaphor of a garden and the presence of a gardener in it (Wisdom, 1997).

Indirect justification, on the other hand, even with the great relaxation of the criteria that science imposes on such procedures, seems inconclusive to the philosopher, because it is built on notoriously vague concepts. So, he denied the conclusion that beliefs (understood in a dogmatic sense) could have any logical rationality. He believed that the degree of certainty with which religious theses are accepted – and if true faith is in question, the degree is very high – is inadequate to the degree of their justification. The situation is different with pragmatic rationality, which is supported by the ‘fruits of faith’ postulated by William James (James, 2001, p. 260-291) or the sense of meaning of one’s own life and the surrounding world provided by faith, as pointed out by Leszek Kołakowski (Kołakowski, 1990, p. 147). The pragmatic rationality depends on the system of values represented by a particular acting subject. According to Przełęcki, we have two options in this respect: either adhering to a dignified ethics, in which the main value is the dignity of a human as a rational being, where accepting insufficiently justified reasons is something reprehensible, or opting for an altruistic ethics, in which these ‘fruits of faith’ make the religious convictions behind them pragmatically rational.

On the question of the ‘fruits of faith’, Przełęcki postulated dividing them into those experienced exclusively by a believer and that have eudaimonistic value, and those whose beneficiaries become other people and that have moral value. He believed that religious faith was not a necessary condition for doing good. He believed that *the proper source of morality is a kind of intuitive moral cognition, free of any religious assumptions* (Przełęcki, 2002b, p. 103). According to the philosopher, the connection between religious beliefs and specific moral attitudes should be assessed on an individual basis. He saw that there were many examples of people whose nurturing of such faith helped them to behave properly, especially in situations that required sacrifice and difficult renunciations – people whose belief in the providential nature of fate or an emotional relationship with Christ allowed them to overcome egoism. He believed that in such situations, on the basis of the altruistic ethics with

which he identified himself, the good that grows out of (or is supported by) faith is more important than the integrity of thought.

3. Christianity of non-believers

Marian Przełęcki presented his ethical concept for the first time in 1969 in the pages of the *Więź* magazine in the article “Chrześcijaństwo niewierzących” (The Christianity of non-believers). His aim was to present the position of non-believers to whom the ideas of Christianity, in some respects, seem close. To explicate his point of view, he schematically divided Christian thought into two parts: metaphysical and ethical. The former, as explained earlier, he did not accept, while he considered the latter to be the closest to his moral intuitions. He was convinced that a morally good act was undertaken out of concern for the good of others, often at the expense of one’s own well-being or convenience, and that this was the message contained in the pages of Scripture. In the Christian moral ideal, Przełęcki also perceived threads that he was inclined to treat as deformations of the original teaching flowing from Christ’s message. He regarded as such all ideas emphasising the pursuit of one’s own perfection, preferring the contemplative life to involvement in the affairs of this world. He believed that they were expressions of disguised selfishness. He wrote, *An old peasant woman, toiling and hustling in constant concern for her loved ones, a workers’ activist, sparing no effort in the struggle against social injustice – these two are certainly closer to the Christian ideal than an intellectual experiencing sublime metaphysical states and subtle moral emotions in the silence of his studio* (Przełęcki, 2005a, p. 138).

The philosopher advocated the morality founded on the two ideas of ‘altruism’ and ‘universalism’, which he explained as follows, *An act is morally good if it is an altruistic act, i.e. motivated by concern for the welfare of others. This altruistic attitude is supposed to be fully universal: it is supposed to include all human beings (or even all sentient beings), allowing no exceptions. According to this concept, the ultimate motive*

for a morally good act is always our concern for others or, to use the language of the Gospel, neighbourly love (Przełęcki, 2002c, p. 142).

Marian Przełęcki believed that caring for others is expressed, first and foremost, in giving help in times of need and protecting fellow human beings from evil. His interest in affairs of others was based on compassion. Also, indirectly in response to the teachings of Christ, he regarded any moral judgement as an unnecessary (and even undesirable) factor. He saw it as an expression of latent perfectionist motivations and an attitude of superiority towards others. He believed that help inspired by the pursuit of one's own moral perfection was sometimes perceived by its beneficiaries as humiliating. Therefore, the philosopher believed that a true moralist should, in line with the Gospel message, refrain from moral judgement and look at others with compassion and mercy. He was also quick to add, however, that effective help provided to one's neighbour is based not only on love but also on wisdom. Hence, he advocated supplementing the characteristics of a person concerned for the welfare of others with qualities of reason such as common sense, intelligence, and knowledge (Przełęcki, 2002c).

It seems reasonable at this point to delve into the source of such maximalist ethical convictions of Marian Przełęcki, since we already know that it was not the faith in God that was behind them. The philosopher's moral intuitions were founded on his individual anthropological assumptions. Firstly, he was deeply convinced of the potential of each and every human being to do good (Przełęcki, 2009). On the other hand, however, in human beings he did not see strength and causal power but rather weakness and fragility in relation to the surrounding world. These shortcomings, in his view, make it necessary for us to support each other in our struggle with the reality around us. In doing so, he believed that it was comprehensively described in Christ's teaching: *I am not in a privileged position compared to others. My good is not more important than anyone else's. There is no moral reason why I should do something for my own good rather than for someone else's, or why I should live for myself rather than for others. The fact that it hurts you and not me is, from a moral*

point of view, something incidental and irrelevant. Why should I protect myself from suffering rather than protecting you? If I feel differently, if I put myself in a position of distinction, if I treat my own well-being as a goal of my actions, I succumb to a naïve illusion of perspective that magnifies something that happens to be closer (Przełęcki, 2005a, p. 136).

Returning to the ethical concept outlined by Marian Przełęcki, it is worth mentioning his attempts to find an answer to the question of how to counteract evil experienced by our neighbour. Such an attempt was expressed, for instance, in "Protest przeciw krzywdzie czy pomoc krzywdzonemu?" (Protest against harm or help for victim?). Przełęcki noted that when encountering the harm of another human being, we can react to it in two ways: by protesting against it and by helping actively. The first option raised a number of doubts in his mind. Reacting in protest made him think of an ostentatious expression of indignation, motivated by a desire to show one's own moral superiority. It was associated with an apparent action, essentially limited to an act of verbal disapproval. He did not exclude the possibility that behind the protest against injustice there might also be a genuine concern for the well-being of one's neighbour – a conviction that by manifesting our opposition, we would put an end to the evil in progress (or trigger some aid-focused procedures). He believed, however, that this type of action contradicts evangelical altruism, which requires care both for the victim as well as for the perpetrator of the wicked act. The philosopher was aware that the 'love thy enemy' slogan failed to appeal to everyone, and that many people preferred to follow the principles of justice. However, he was firmly convinced that it was the path of mercy that proved more effective. He criticised those who believed that by demonstrating their opposition they were helping to prevent evil in a global sense. He believed that such behaviour gave a sense of deceptive moral comfort that absolved them from active involvement in providing help. Przełęcki held the conviction that a vast area of evil that profoundly exposes the ineffectiveness of acts of protest and moral condemnation is physical violence of all kinds. He asserted, *In relation to physical evil, the proper attitude seems to be that of help (when some help is*

feasible), and the underlying attitude of compassion (when nothing can be done any more). Sympathy with all those who suffer, solidarity in the face of common misfortune – this is our human response to the cruelty of the world (Przełęcki, 2002d, p. 167). Generally depreciating acts of verbal opposition, however, he admitted that there also were situations in which such a reaction to evil seemed appropriate. This is the case when we encounter a person proclaiming morally reprehensible views. In this context, we have the right to express our protest, but it should be a criticism aimed at persuading that person to change their wrong beliefs, not at condemning them as a human being.

4. Weaknesses in the idea of Christianity of non-believers

The reception of the Christian moral ideal presented by Marian Przełęcki appears to be a position that raises numerous doubts in many respects. The distinction made by the philosopher for the purposes of his concept of the Christianity of non-believers between the ethical and the metaphysical spheres can be questioned. Christ's teaching, devoid of divine legitimacy, makes evangelical morality one of numerous proposals for a decent life. To use the jargon of contemporary marketing, we might say that this is a hardly competitive offer due to its maximalist nature – this is an alternative that only people with a very high level of empathy will be willing to adopt. The lack of a metaphysical context deprives Christian ethics of a very important argument for its acceptance. Max Scheler believed that the goal of religion is to achieve salvation (Scheler, 2005), and many Christian thinkers have emphasised (and still today point to) the relevance of striving for one's own moral perfection⁴. In this context Marian Przełęcki's approach, which perceived any

perfectionist premise in terms of a distortion of the original Gospel teaching, should be regarded as an over-reaching interpretation of Christ's message. There is also a problem of a different nature – namely, how to identify the intentions that actually guide our actions. After all, action motivated by concern for the welfare of others does not preclude the possibility of simultaneous self-improvement. The philosopher was aware of this difficulty, and replied, *The boundary between proper moral motivation and perfectionist motivation – so vital from an ethical point of view – is certainly blurred, and the distinction itself (despite appearances) is not easy to grasp. When I help someone, do I do so out of concern for their welfare, or rather out of concern for my own moral level? Ultimately, not only in the first but also in the second case, I want to help them and I believe that they should be helped. At the same time, not only in the second case, but also in the first, I can be fully aware that by helping, I am performing a morally good act, I am acting as a good person. It is a question of what motivates me to act, or, after all, why I do it; or perhaps – what element in this motivation prevails, what element plays a decisive role in it, as we rarely deal with uniform motivation* (Przełęcki, 2005c, p. 163-164).

This explanation seems to largely settle the question of determining the intention of our actions. However, the trouble remains in situations when it is difficult to identify the dominant motivation. Przełęcki focused on the motives for morally good actions, which a human is aware of, and are the result of an individual's choice. However, it can be assumed that in addition to such motives, our actions are also determined by certain unconscious intentions. Social psychologists, in an attempt to explain altruistic behaviour among humans, sometimes refer to evolutionist concepts, and claim that humans care for their loved ones in order to ensure the survival of their genes (Aronson, Wilson, Akert,

4 Marian Przełęcki's reflection addresses the phenomenon of religion in two contexts: the role it plays in determining the meaning of human life, and the ethical indications contained in its message. This perspective does not reflect all the meanings that can be attributed to religion. In a holistic way, the functions of religion as a psychosocial and cultural phenomenon are attempted to be defined in research conducted by psychologists and sociologists of religion. Psychologists speak of its role: compensatory, integrative, worldview, educational-regulatory, therapeutic, existential, prophetic and cultural-aesthetic (Zych, 2012, p. 49-52). On the level of sociological inquiry, emphasis is placed on its integrative role, as in Emil Durkheim's concept (Kehrer, 2006), or, as in Max Weber's inquiry, on its motivational function (Załęcki, 2003).

2006, p. 302). This raises the question of whether a parent who is concerned for the well-being of their child is really motivated by altruistic intentions, or whether they may be acting instinctively, so that their behaviour cannot be qualified in moral terms at all. This example shows that the possibility of latent, unconscious motives makes it considerably more difficult to assess how much genuine concern for the welfare of others is to be found in our actions. Such a conclusion entails the impossibility of a proper moral evaluation of our conduct.

Another accusation that can be formulated against Marian Przełęcki's views is the philosopher's excessive focus on the motivation of morally right actions, and the complete depreciation of the evaluation of these actions from the perspective of their consequences. We might be tempted to say that for Przełęcki, this aspect seemed completely irrelevant. This concept reveals its unconvincing side when we remember that Przełęcki thought that the good of our neighbour is what we subjectively consider it do be (Przełęcki, 2005a, p. 136). There is no need to refer to any theories of the social sciences in this matter, but it is enough to refer to everyday experience to see the risk of such a point of view. There is a saying in Polish: *Hell is paved with good intentions*, which accurately hits on the weakness of moral valuation based solely on the motivations of the acting subject. Sometimes, out of concern for others, we cause them greater harm than if we had not reacted at all. Especially when we identify the good of another person on the basis of what we think is best for that person, as Przełęcki wanted. The surrounding reality abounds with all sorts of examples of such situations. They range from low-impact incidents in family relationships, where a parent tries to save a child from a bad mark by doing difficult maths homework for them, to more serious threats, such as excessively helping the elderly in their everyday chores, leading to their gradual frailty and alienation. There are also examples of actions with tragic consequences, such as the recent case of parents who, out of misconceived concern for their child's health, took advice from a folk healer – the consequence being the girl's death. The conviction that altruistic motivation

together with a subjective understanding of other people's well-being sometimes leads to disastrous consequences can also be exemplified by the scale of social or even global problems. These include, for instance, certain ways of helping socially excluded people. Giving an alcoholic money to live on, instead of saving the person, makes his addiction even worse. On a global scale, examples are provided by certain interferences of the international community in the internal affairs of an independent country, which aggravate the conflicts taking place there and sometimes cause long-term destabilisation of the situation in the region. Marian Przełęcki, defending the validity of the moral valuation of an act based on the motivation of the perpetrator, emphasised that in addition to 'loving thy neighbour', wisdom is also necessary. In the context of this claim, the examples mentioned above provoke the question: do they testify to some deficiency of qualities of mind or knowledge? Or are they the result of a wrong balance between the reasons of the heart and the reasons of the brain? However, defining a morally good act from the point of view of its effect does not seem to be the right solution for Marian Przełęcki's ethical concept – for two reasons. Firstly, it would significantly complicate it and obscure its message. Secondly, by taking a particular action, not only of a helpful nature, we can, however, anticipate its effects only to a certain extent. There are many situations in which the chance of success of our efforts seems slim – and yet we are deeply convinced that it is worth trying. On the other hand, there may always be circumstances that come our way that we could not foresee, skewing our almost certain chance of success. A more legitimate addition to the philosopher's ethical idea would therefore be to better delineate the good of the other, defining it in a more objective way, less dependent on our personal notions.

Marian Przełęcki saw in Christian thought the source of the idea of the equality of all human beings in relation to one another; the rationale for not considering oneself as someone with a distinguished position that requires interpersonal solidarity. The philosopher was right about this, but he overlooked one very important aspect of

the Christian message. The “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” commandment must be seen in the wider context of the personal relationships outlined in the pages of the Gospels – the link to God as one of childhood, and to human beings – as one of fraternity. Marian Przełęcki’s reception of Christian morality seems to move seamlessly from an awareness of the equality and similarity of all human beings, through the experience of compassion, to action motivated by neighbourly love. In doing so, he loses the explanation of where this love actually comes from. He implies the assumption that we must arouse this feeling in ourselves through reason:

1. I love myself.
2. I am just like other people.
3. Consequently, I have to give love to other people.

Obviously, this immediately provokes to question the first premise and to identify a whole range of individuals who clearly do not have such positive feelings towards each other. The shift from sympathy to love, which the philosopher seems to repeat, also sounds unauthorised. The fact that we approach another person’s situation with empathy does not at all mean that we are motivated by love when caring for them – we may just as well act under the influence of pity lined with the conviction of our own moral superiority. A proper justification of Christian ethics requires an appeal to the space of metaphysical assumptions, which Przełęcki unfortunately consistently rejected. In the light of these beliefs, every human being appears as a beloved child of God, created in His likeness and as such predisposed to love. In this context, love of others is a kind of primordial feeling, arising from the fraternal or sisterly bond that unites us with others.

Conclusion

While introducing the profile of Marian Przełęcki, an agnostic enchanted by the beauty of the evangelical moral message, we should also mention the philosopher’s attitude to the very person of Christ. Being faithful to his convictions, Marian Przełęcki saw in Jesus only his humanity. He saw him as a historical figure, shaped by a specific cultural circle and forced to function within a specific reality. On the other hand, he perceived Jesus as an exceptional person for his time, bringing a revolutionary change from an order founded on the principles of justice to a world founded on love towards others, requiring to forgive others and to give up all hatred. Przełęcki admired Christ for his consistency, his uncanny ability to be there for other people, and his willingness to sacrifice his own life (Przełęcki, 2002e). The philosopher’s attitude towards the key figure of Christianity is a perfect example that, despite the lack of faith, it is not only possible to relate to the evangelical teaching with respect, but also to find in there some content that is close to one’s own moral intuitions. Obviously, as demonstrated in the text, the agnostic reception of Christian ethics raises numerous objections, but, on the other hand, it offers hope for dialogue. It shows that the neighbourly love commandment can become a meeting point between believers and those who have never had faith or who have lost it as a result of various events. R. Kleszcz, who analysed the concept of religion, has pointed to its four components: a system of beliefs, attitudes towards God, a system of behaviour expressed in specific religious practices, and a moral code (Kleszcz, 2021). The non-believer’s concept of Christianity shows that when elements one, two and three are missing, neighbourly love can still remain a guidepost on the paths of our lives, and an inspiration to do good.

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