

Robert K. ZAWADZKI

Uniwersytet Jana Długosza w Częstochowie

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6964-1736>

HELLENISM AND JUDAISM **TADEUSZ ZIELIŃSKI'S (1859–1944) REFLECTIONS** **ON THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY**

Robert K. Zawadzki examines the representation of Hellenism and Judaism in the religious studies of Tadeusz Zieliński, one of Poland's foremost scholars of antiquity. The relationship, contacts and dealings between the representatives of the two cultures provided Zieliński with fertile ground for articulating his ideas about the origins of Christianity. By examining these conclusions, the author of this article shows how Zieliński constructed a specific image of Judaism in line with the aims and assumptions of his own work, while at the same time creating a vision of Hellenism as the real and true source of Christianity. In this article the author also proposes that Zieliński's work should not be viewed from the perspective of contemporary religious studies, but rather as an excellent source for the history of Polish science. After all, the book is a testament not only to the author's views, but also to the era.

HELLÉNISME ET JUDAÏSME. RÉFLEXIONS DE TADEUSZ ZIELIŃSKI (1859–1944) **SUR LES ORIGINES DU CHRISTIANISME**

Robert K. Zawadzki examine la représentation de l'hellénisme et du judaïsme dans les études religieuses de Tadeusz Zieliński, l'un des plus grands spécialistes polonais de l'Antiquité. Les relations, les contacts et les échanges entre les représentants des deux cultures ont fourni à Zieliński un terrain fertile pour articuler ses idées sur les origines du christianisme. En examinant ces conclusions, l'auteur de l'article montre comment Zieliński a construit une image spécifique du judaïsme en accord avec les objectifs et les hypothèses de son propre travail, tout en créant une vision de l'hellénisme comme la source réelle et véritable du christianisme. Dans son article, l'auteur de l'article propose également que l'œuvre de Zieliński ne soit pas considérée du point de vue des études religieuses contemporaines, mais plutôt comme une excellente source



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pour l'histoire de la science polonaise. Après tout, le livre témoigne non seulement des opinions de l'auteur, mais aussi de l'époque.

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Mots-clés: Tadeusz Zieliński, hellénisme, judaïsme, christianisme, religion

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Tadeusz Zieliński¹, one of Poland's most eminent philologists, wrote extensively and was both admired and criticised. No one who came into contact with his publications could pass them by indifferently. His religious studies are undoubtedly among the pearls of his oeuvre. Full of scientific creativity, originality and imagination, they remain an indispensable foundation of Polish religious studies to this day. They are referenced in all scholarly works on the religions of the ancient world and are widely read, as evidenced by the constant reprinting of Zieliński's books and their rapid disappearance from bookshop shelves.

Zieliński's talents as a religious scholar were evident in his impressive and erudite comparative study, *Hellenism and Judaism* (Zieliński 1927). Despite the reservations of critics², the work was warmly received by readers³, and it is this book that I would like to briefly discuss in this article. Today, scholars regard *Hellenism and Judaism* as an outdated dissertation⁴. While this is undoubtedly true, I believe it would be a mistake to seek detailed, timeless religious knowledge from this work. *Hellenism and Judaism* captures Zieliński's views and literary style. From today's perspective, it is not a textbook on Greek and Hebrew religion, but rather an expression of Zieliński's views on these beliefs, supported by the literary evidence available at the time. For this reason, I believe that the scholar's work should primarily be viewed as an excellent source for the history of Polish science today. One could also interpret *Hellenism and Judaism* as a kind of artefact. For this reason, any criticism or disapproval by today's scholars seems unnecessary for the work to be properly received. The work is a coherent blend of the scholar's intellectual and emotional vision, and the internal logic of the arguments and interpretation of facts is presented directly to the reader. This ability to intrigue,

¹ About Tadeusz Zieliński, his life, works, memories of his students: Luria 1959: 401–409; Plezia 1991: 12–13; Biernacki 1970: 411; Morkowicz-Olczakowa 1959: 431–432; Kumaniecki, *Tadeusz Zieliński* 1959: 8–9; Srebrny 1959: 401; Parandowski 1957: 3–12; Parandowski 1971: 5–13; Winniczuk 1972: 357–374; Krzyżanowski 1972: 5–14; Krawczuk 1989: 8–9.

² An attempt at a critique of Zieliński's research method is made by Dzielska 1991: 277–296. See also: Gordziałkowski 2000: 15; Gillmeister 2011: 275–288; Gillmeister 2015.

³ The work has recently been reissued. This was in 2021. The book is no longer available in bookshops.

⁴ Even in the interwar period, Zieliński's work, particularly his religious studies, sparked controversy and debate. For an echo of these disputes, see: Szydelski 1928:1–16; Teodorowicz 1936; Stein 1935: 509–518.

surprise and stimulate the reader is testament to Zieliński's talent as a writer. All of this makes his book a very interesting read that stimulates discussion and debate. It is from this point of view that I would like to examine this work.

The expression "Hellenism and Judaism" in the title of this sketch is therefore taken from the title of that famous book. It is an excellent phrase that immediately highlights the relationship between these two important concepts. Hellenism⁵ and Judaism are concepts that synthetically and at the same time analytically accumulate a series of circumstances, aspects and cultural suggestions – that these are types of culture that are somehow opposed to each other, with their own characteristics, mutually exclusive, phenomena with rich traditions, phenomena that, on the one hand, had rich traditions and, on the other hand, competed with each other, phenomena which alluded to the ideals and concepts of both the Greeks and the Jews, phenomena which offered important and distant perspectives to the people of the time, especially to the followers of the then emerging new Christian religion, phenomena which aroused both interest and repulsion. In short, these were landmark phenomena, exceptional phenomena, when, after the death of Alexander the Great, two cultural levels, two points of view and visions met and overlapped, when a dialectical conflict and a synthesis of opposites in the fields of religion, philosophy and lifestyle came face to face with the third force, Christianity⁶. Such a phenomenon has probably only occurred once in history – the Greek and Jewish civilisations developed separately for centuries, only to suddenly meet and play a decisive role in the development of European culture⁷.

Tadeusz Zieliński believed that this encounter between the Greeks and the followers of Yahweh revealed certain important regularities over time. It turned out that the new faith, the doctrine of Christ, was accepted by Hellenism and rejected by Judaism, to such an extent that "the borders of Christianity in the 4th-5th centuries CE were more or less the borders of the Roman Empire – except for Judaea" (Zieliński 1927: 2). This fact proves that "there was no psychological continuity between Judaism and Christianity and that, on the contrary, such continuity existed between Hellenism on the one hand and Christianity on the other" (Zieliński 1927: 3). Zieliński argued that the religion of the Hellenes prepared the mind better to accept Christianity than Judaism, and that "the true ancient order of our Christianity is the religion of the Hellenes" (Zieliński 1927: 3)⁸. This was because the cultural development of the Greco-Roman world was moving in one direction, towards one goal, towards one culmination, which was the adoption of Christianity (Zieliński 1927: 3)⁹.

⁵ On the current understanding of the term: Mrugalski 2021: 639–657.

⁶ On this subject, see also: Esler 2002: 5–25; Peters 1972; Jeffers 1999; Musiał 2001; Johnson 2009.

⁷ However, it is possible that some form of contact between Greece and the Levant had already existed. See on this subject: Canfora 1995; Collins, Sterling 2001; Gruen 2005: 264–279; Ambar-Amnon, Kloner 2007: 1–22; Eshel 2007: 116–124; Bremmer 2008; Thompson, Wajdenbaum 2014.

⁸ See also: Jaeger 1997. For today's perspective on this issue, see: Marksches 2012.

⁹ On the expansion of Christianity see: Dunn 2009.

Zieliński usually eschewed a strictly scientific methodology, even in theoretical works, unless it served to present his theses in an understandable way and was difficult for the reader to grasp. And in this case, too, he felt that in order to assess the specificity and uniqueness of Judaism and the teachings of Christ, it was necessary to look at both phenomena with the eyes of a Hellenist and to feel, as it were, on one's own skin, the attractiveness or unattractiveness of each of the two religions and the possibilities they brought with them. In order to feel the uniqueness of this encounter between Hellenism and Judaism, one had to experience it, and experience it with authentic, emotional involvement, which Zieliński expresses throughout his book, especially in its final parts, where he takes on, as it were, the Hellenic soul and formulates his statement in the first person singular. In other words, like a Hellene of antiquity, though not a Greek by birth, he personally tried to examine Judaism and consider what Hellenism might have found attractive in it and what ultimately repelled him from Judaism. For the fact is that Hellenism viewed Judaism with suspicion, in a negative way, as something bizarre, not at all suited to the religious needs of the people of that time. In contrast, their positive reactions and responses to Christ's teachings were often marked by enthusiasm and fervour¹⁰ for such suggestions in Jewish culture as the scrupulous observance of the Sabbath or the vision of a vengeful and punishing God. To discourage people from believing in God, to scare them away with a multitude of paragraphs, was not a sign of the attractiveness of the religion. Christ's teaching, on the other hand, from the very beginning conveyed a different message, one that was neither repulsive nor overwhelming. Why? Because Christianity was not an ossified and anachronistic project, it was, according to Zieliński, a proposal reminiscent of Hellenistic ideas of beauty, goodness and truth, expressed even in the universal Greek language (koine) of that era.

Reflecting on the reasons for the success of Christianity and the rejection of Judaism by Hellenism, the scholar considers, among other things, the image of God in both cultures, questions of goodness, beauty and truth, and the position of the Saviour – the Messiah. Of course, these are not all the issues that Zieliński discussed. However, these are the few issues that we feel are important and significant enough to be explored in this strictly limited outline.

The image of God

As far as the image of God is concerned, Zieliński argues that the monotheistic Jewish formula proclaiming that God is One did not make much of an impression on the Hellenistic soul. What the scholar was referring to were the philosophical

¹⁰ Of course, the pagan world was not always enthusiastic about Christianity. The persecutions are evidence of this. For the various aspects of this reluctance, see: Kręciđło 2010: 282–291.

systems that promoted the vision of God – the Absolute as an entity existing independently of others, without a cause – present in the teachings of Greek thinkers¹¹, beginning with Xenophanes, through the Stoics and Plato¹² to Aristotle (Zieliński 1927: 43). Although the Greek people were polytheists, the inhabitants of Athens, Antioch or Alexandria prayed to their own gods¹³, when they came into contact with Jewish culture they had nothing against Yahweh. In fact, they were willing to worship and even pray to Him, showing due respect and demonstrating an attitude that is now called tolerance. This was in contrast to the behaviour of the followers of Judaism, who did not recognise any other gods and considered worshipping them to be the gravest sin, worthy of death penalty. Thus, when it came to dealing with other people's beliefs, there was no commonality or similarity between the representatives of Hellenism and Judaism, but the very opposite. Judaic prejudice or a kind of xenophobia is an attitude that is new to the Greeks, it is a behaviour that is incomprehensible, in which threats and punishments are the usual methods of dealing with people, and fear is a factor that influences their actions, whereas Hellenism, although it retained some guiding principles, whether religious in its relations with the gods or in human relations, was by definition a kind of open culture, because it was multifaceted, as Plato's famous statement teaches: "Truth alone is sufficient reward for the one who possesses it, an erroneous opinion by itself a sufficient punishment for the one who shares it" (Zieliński 1927: 44) – man here was not an intimidated being, but a free thinker, a seeker.

As an aside, Zieliński pointed out that, contrary to popular belief, the terms monotheism and polytheism, which are known to refer to the belief in one or many gods, were not mutually exclusive opposites for the philosophically educated Greek. The common denominator for the meaning of these terms was metaphysics. This can be explained by considering the concepts of time and space. For example, the question of the number of higher beings may only make sense in the material, temporal world, where the laws of time and space apply. In the metaphysical realms where the Godhead resides, beyond time and space, the categories of number simply do not exist. It follows that it was a mistake to contrast monotheism with polytheism. Zieliński believed that the identification of the words "God" and "gods" was a living tendency even among the uneducated Hellenes, and claimed that this was a conviction based more on inner experience, on "premonition", than on philosophical speculation, and that the assumptions of Jewish monotheism were therefore superfluous to the Greeks (Zieliński 1927: 46).

Zieliński thus drew attention to the fact that, according to the Greek philosophers, the Godhead did not reside in the normal temporal order, but beyond time

¹¹ See on this topic: Martin 2002: 53–79.

¹² See: Podbielski 2005: 597–611.

¹³ For more on the knowledge of the gods among the Greeks, see: Lengauer 1994: 44–77.

and space, i.e. precisely in the realm of metaphysics. The most important feature of this concept was to overcome the anthropomorphism of the gods that had dominated the popular imagination for several hundred years. Until then, higher beings had been portrayed in a human way – the deity had all the attributes of a human being, even his faults and weaknesses. Judaism was no different. In the Old Testament, God is depicted as an enlarged human being, with a face, a back, walking, standing, strolling through the Garden of Eden, angry, with his right arm outstretched – just as Michelangelo painted him in the fresco in the Sistine Chapel. It was at the time of the encounter between Judaism and Hellenism that efforts began to remove this overly anthropomorphic conception of the God-head (Zieliński 1927: 49). In Judaism, these efforts and attempts were generally expressed by forbidding the pronunciation of the word Yahweh, the “terrible name”, and replacing it with the word “Adonai”, i.e. “Lord” (more precisely: my Lord). The Greek public knew this term as “kyrios” and it was also used by professing Christians when addressing their Saviour. Of course, it should not be thought that the concept proclaiming that God does not have a human form (anthropomorphos) dealt a fatal and final blow to anthropomorphism. The deity was still imagined in a human way, especially in art, but the metaphysical representation of the Supreme Being was once and for all introduced into European culture in place of naive anthropomorphism. According to Zieliński, we owe this to Hellenism.

Other issues remained problematic, concerning the nature of the Deity, more general and more psychologically and sociologically complex, while at the same time being personal phenomena, related to the question of God’s care for the individual and the whole nation. Here Judaism developed immeasurably the idea of Yahweh – the living God, the protector of the chosen people, or even their spouse. To see Yahweh as caring only for Israel, guiding it along a path to success and perfection, consisting in the strict observance of the commandments contained in the Torah, was essentially to have the Lord God for one’s exclusive use. In addition, pagans had a special place in this idea: either they were to be exterminated by God’s command (the Canaanites), or they became an instrument of punishment for Israel’s sins (Babylon), or they acted as saviours for that people (the Persians under Cyrus) (Zieliński 1927: 54). The instrumental role of other nations, their servile and auxiliary function, also testifies to this personal relationship between God and “his” community. Here, according to Zieliński, the love of the Most High went so far that it is difficult not to succumb to the charm of such a vision. For here is Isaiah quoting the words of God who said (43:5): “You are dear in my sight, you have acquired value, and I love you”. Here is the same prophet urging attention to this passage (54:10): “For the mountains will be removed and the hills will be made to tremble, but my love will not depart from you”. In Zieliński’s view, the Hellenists may have demonstrated something similar to the followers of Judaism by presenting these beautiful images of a loving Yahweh.

They too identified the deity with protection, as did, for example, Jeremiah's contemporary, the Athenian legislator, founder of democracy and poet, Solon (Fr. 4, ed. West):

And our city will never perish from the judgments of Zeus,
The judgment of the immortal gods will never overthrow it in the night:
Pallas Athena guards it, the great daughter of the parent.
Her holy, protecting hand forever shields our city.

Writers from the time of the Persian Wars did not underestimate divine protection and care, as Euripides did when he called upon the same Athena to console his people after the defeat at Syracuse (Zieliński 1927: 54). The universality of such motifs of a deity caring for his community gave Zieliński an alibi to draw this parallel – the Greeks understood the Jews very well, for their gods cared for them in the same way that Yahweh cared for Israel.

These parallels, however, are not to be taken at face value. The famous slogan "Israel the people of Yahweh, Yahweh the God of Israel" prompted Zieliński to make an important point – Israel's usurpation of the exclusive right to the Lord God needed to be reviewed here. Zieliński points to the universalistic nature of Greek religion – the universalism being that Zeus was seen as a supranational god. Unlike Yahweh, who cared only for Israel, the ruler of Olympus extended his protection to all nations.

This was, of course, the conviction of the Greeks, not only of literary importance, but also religious and ideological *par excellence* (Zieliński 1927: 230). Their concrete suggestions and proposals went very far indeed – they were not only concerned with Hellenistic culture itself but were precisely reminiscent of the Christian concept of God, His providence, the relationship between Him and other peoples, which embraced all people and not just one nation. And where did the proposals of Judaism lead? Could the representatives of Hellenistic culture, by accepting the superior role of Israel, have accepted the vision of Yahweh who, in the message of the prophet Isaiah (49:6), commanded them to bow down before the Jews and lick the dust from their feet? Did not the image of a God called Abba, created by the teaching of Christ¹⁴, find its counterpart in the mythology of the Greeks and Romans? The latter certainly had no such dilemma, as the vigorous development of Christianity in the first centuries attests. The God of the Christians, Lord and ruler of the world and at the same time the merciful protector of all peoples, thus overshadowed the Yahweh of Israel and defined the idea of a Supreme Being for centuries to come. He defined it not only because he was worshipped as such by the Church. He defined, first and foremost, because He became the God of every human being, regardless of origin or colour. The universal and good God of the Christians proved attractive to many who had grown up in the Hellenistic civilisation.

¹⁴ Isaiah (64, 7) already depicts a certain fatherly image of God. See on this subject: Szymik 2020: 485–502.

Categories of good, truth and beauty

Had the question of the attributes of the Godhead been left to the judgement of the Greeks and Romans, they would probably not have accepted Israel's vision of Yahweh and would have continued to believe in their own gods. The point is that the Hellenistic audience wanted not only to see God as an absolute power, but also to glorify Him in some way, or at least to respect Him. To this end, the concepts of goodness, beauty and truth attributed to the deity, so well established in the religious consciousness of the society of that civilisation at that time, supported by several centuries of tradition and philosophy, where they reigned almost indivisibly, and finally by literary works, represented by poetry in particular and the poems of Pindar in particular, were perfectly suited.

For the average Greek or Roman who wished to worship a deity, the notion of the good was therefore an ideal opportunity – the deity manifests itself in the good, the deity is the cause of the good and only the good (Zieliński 1927: 77). This was the message of Greek culture from the very beginning, in the *Iliad*, in the *Odyssey*, and in the teaching of Plato, who in his *Republic* (2, 380 a)¹⁵ opposes all messages attributing immorality and wickedness to the gods. All this, according to Zieliński, meant that the religiously sensitive Greek, after such preparation and teaching, experienced a kind of shock when he read certain passages from Deuteronomy (7, 2) containing divine decrees. To order the murder of the ancient inhabitants of Canaan, to slaughter them completely, not even sparing women and children, meant to the Greek that Yahweh could not be good. The cruelty was attributed to God in this passage of the Bible, the crime was committed at his command! The Greek audience was used to other images, and this kind of role for Yahweh did not suit them at all – hence the great success of the God of the Christians, in whom the Hellenes saw familiar ideas, in whom the element of goodness, radiating its power over the whole world and every human being, was an integral part of the nature of this Supreme Being. In view of this, the Greek public respected such a God or at least accepted him.

Thus, if belief in God depended on the value of his attributes, the concept of the good would never have lost its importance for the Greeks, nor would it have been sufficient, since the Hellenistic public also valued another category, that of truth. At the same time, this notion, in the context of the description of the attributes of the divine, is frequently found in the work of poets such as Pindar¹⁶, Callimachus and Theocritus, for whom the ideas of God and truth were inseparable (Zieliński 1927: 96–97). In this way, the belief that God is truth and that there is a God in truth paradoxically contributed to the flourishing of another field, that of manticism, or divination and prophecy. The Greeks loved

¹⁵ See an interesting study on this topic: MacDonald 1994.

¹⁶ See: Komornicka 1979.

to visit oracles and advise their gods on various matters¹⁷. They also had their soothsayers and visionaries in the persons of Tiresias, Amphiaraus, Melampus, Orpheus, Kalchas, and in historical times Hesiod, Epimenides, Pythagoras and Empedocles were considered such clairvoyants. Thus, the belief in the truthfulness of the deity and those who spoke in his name prevailed everywhere, and the Greeks combined this belief with another dogma which spoke of the love of God for the human race.

Judaism also arose with the idea of proclaiming that “God is truth” (Lev 23: 19). Again, there were proclaimers of divine truth, called prophets¹⁸. Prophesying resulted, among other things, from the awareness that God spoke the truth, and later this awareness was verified by the test of time, which confirmed the truth or falsity of a given prophecy. In this way, it was possible to determine which prophet was truthful – based on whether his prophecy came true. Not all prophets were successful. The most tragic of these was Jeremiah, who, inspired by Yahweh, prophesied Judah’s doom at the hands of the Assyrians and Scythians (Jer 4:5-6; 6: 22-30; 50:1-5) – but none of these prophecies came true (Jer 17:15). King Josiah reigned in peace and prosperity. These events, like all the others, were related to Yahweh’s decision – he wanted to change his mind and show mercy to Israel, and at the same time the prophet was ridiculed – he became a laughing stock, everyone “reviled” him (Jer 20:7).

For the Greeks, of course, these were not edifying images, for they gave the image of Yahweh a certain fickleness, an inconstancy, which was also experienced by the prophet Jonah, protagonist of the beautiful story of the inhabitants of Nineveh, who were converted to the Lord under the influence of his prophecies. At one point, the man even became angry with Yahweh (Jon 4: 1) because the Creator had “relieved him from the misery he had decided to bring” (Jon 3: 10). God’s mutability was not, of course, an end in itself; it was the result of the mercy with which the Supreme Being is always guided in His dealings. Nevertheless, the Greeks, who saw in God above all an iron consistency, may have experienced dissonance. They may have felt misled when Yahweh was presented to them as the terrible and threatening Lord of Horeb, who at the same time showed mercy to the wicked and ridiculed his prophet by sending a worm to bite the ivy that protected his head from being scorched (Jon 4: 1). The Greek audience, brought up on the serious texts of Plato and Aristotle, could not have found in such a God any consistency, any logical continuity of action, and could have felt disappointed and insulted in their intelligence, hence the rejection of Yahweh, hence the turn to the God of the Christians, who had always and consistently shown himself to be good, merciful and true.

¹⁷ Of course, it is difficult for us today to assess the extent of the Oracle’s popularity in the Greek world. See this topic for more information: Johnston 2008; Dillon 2017.

¹⁸ For more information on the role of the prophet in Israel and biblical imagery in the context of today’s scholarly findings, see: Nissinen, Seow, Ritner 2003; Matthews 2012.

So, if the categories of good and truth defined the qualities of a supreme being, the Greeks would probably have readily accepted such qualities in a deity. And history shows that this was often indeed the case. But in the realm of Hellenistic culture, these two great ideas were not enough to fully characterise the attributes of God. That is why Zieliński points to another principle that was important for the religiosity of those people: that the Godhead is manifested in beauty (Zieliński 1927: 116). Thus, the scholar immediately draws attention to two phenomena – the beauty of nature and the beauty of art.

The beauty of nature becomes a sign of God's presence, for God reveals himself in the beauty of nature, as Ovid poetically puts it:

The trees there hum green above the current of the refreshing stream.
When you see it, you say to yourself: a god does indeed live here.

The reverence for nature here stems from the full awareness that beauty comes from God. An awareness that first awakens in the minds of the creators and then, as new, successful works appear, gradually becomes the property of the general public. In this way, beauty is also inextricably linked to art, to the field of artistic activity – an aspect that Zieliński strongly emphasises. The Greeks were the first to believe that divinity manifests itself in beautiful art, that works of art should please, that they can and should be admired.

These observations are not very revelatory, of course, but they are worth remembering because they immediately point to the differences between Hellenistic and Judaic culture, which Zieliński emphasises particularly strongly. In this civilisation, enjoyment of the beauty of nature could not be an end in itself; in fact, it appears only once in the Bible – in Psalm 19, which begins with the words: “The heavens declare the glory of the Lord, the heavens declare the work of his hands”¹⁹. The beautiful description of the sun “coming out like a bridegroom from his chamber” (v. 6) is the result of a desire to give glory to God, to whom the whole world is subject. But even this famous piece, according to scholars, is the consequence of Hellenistic influences, of their inspiration (Zieliński 1927: 117). The followers of Judaism did not usually pay attention to the beauty of nature. And not paying attention to it led to another consequence – all the beauty of nature is expressed through art, all the charm, enchantment, grace delights not only the artist but also the viewer of his work. In this area, Judaism's opposition was very strong and emblematic. This was because, as is well known, Judaism forbade idolatry, according to the principle “Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them” (Zieliński 1927: 119). Judaism was all about serving Yahweh and studying the Torah and saw nothing beautiful in the images of these Baals, Chanos, Dagon and Zeus.

¹⁹ For more on the Greek influence in the Psalms and the controversy today over the dating of the Psalms, see: Weiser 1962; Ross 2012.

Thus, once we accept as a fact that in Judaism the maintenance of loyalty to Yahweh was often achieved through a complete, radical negation of art, it is easy to see this fundamental difference between this cultural circle and Hellenism. The Hellenes were idolaters to the Judeans, bowing down to the products of “their own hands”, while the Judeans were blind to the Hellenes, unable to see the divinity where it appeared to them – the Hellenes (Zieliński 1927: 123). Agreement was impossible; each faith demanded the rejection of the other. Rejection, that is, the abandonment of an important area of human artistic activity. History has shown that this did not happen. A new religion arose, which understood art in its own way, working with its own artistic means and themes, and in no way rejecting the great Greco-Roman tradition.

The figure of the Saviour – the Messiah

The nascent Christian community had a special relationship with Hellenistic culture in general, finding in it many other common features, while Judaism itself – in Zieliński's view – did not fully correspond to it, even though both religions contained similar and even identical ideas, such as the idea of the Saviour mentioned in the introduction. Even in Greek religion, where the origins of faith were not as hermetic and inaccessible to outside influences as in Judaism, there was this idea of a Saviour²⁰, originating in mythology and propagated by great writers such as Hesiod, Aeschylus or Virgil. Zieliński stresses that this Saviour appeared here in two forms – as a God made man and as a man made God (Zieliński 1927: 230). For obvious reasons, no Christian could ignore such an idea, since it corresponded in the most general way to the person of Christ²¹.

Here, for example, the figure of Apollo, the son of God, fights the great dragon born of the earth, which threatens his mother Latona and the state of his father Zeus²². The persecution of the mother by the dragon is one of the most famous images of Greek religion and may have inspired the author of the Apocalypse of St John (chapter 12)²³. However, there was a crime in this killing of the

²⁰ For more information on the concept of “Soter” in the Greek tradition, including its evolution and reinterpretations within the imperial cult, see: Hengel 1995.

²¹ For other such Christian interpretations of pagan myths, *cf.* Rahner 1984; West 2008.

²² In Greek tradition, the figure of the Saviour could be played by a god or a hero, such as Apollo, Heracles or Aesculapius, and took on various forms and functions. These patterns may have coincided with the earliest Christian depictions of Jesus. See the following for more information on this topic: Edelstein 1945; Litwa 2014.

²³ This theme is discussed elsewhere by Zieliński 1971. The origin and importance of the theme of the hero battling the dragon are much more complex, particularly given that this theme appears in both Near Eastern and Old Testament traditions. For more information on this topic, see: Day 1985; Ogden 2013.

monster that required atonement. So, Apollo renounced his divinity and became human. For a whole year he served as a slave to King Admetus and then, having atoned for his crime, he returned to Olympus and, as the saviour of his father's state, took his seat "at the right hand of Zeus", as the Greek poet Callimachus so beautifully put it.

The attitude of the divine son evoked here, expressed in the symbol of Apollo, also took the form of another hero, Heracles, who, being a man, became a god. The will of mortal man decided to change the semantics of the Heracles motif. He became not only the symbol of the saviour of mankind from various monsters and horrors, but also the example of a man persecuted by his enemies and at the same time immaculately conceived. His mother, Alcmena, was a woman "the purest of the pure". Married to Amphitryon, she refused his love and only yielded to Zeus when he, having taken the form of her husband, pursued her. At the end of his life, Heracles took part in an expedition against the giants and became a god himself, residing on Mount Olympus and marrying the goddess of youth, Hebe.

So, there were many attributes in these two heroes of Greek mythology that resembled those of Christ. It seems that for many people brought up in Hellenistic culture this may have had important implications. Understanding the metaphor of Apollo and Heracles may sometimes have made it easier to understand the purpose of the mission of Mary's son.

Was such an understanding of the Saviour's mission also present in Judaism? It might seem that the prophet Isaiah's presentation (42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53) of the figure of the suffering and good-doing servant of Yahweh signifies the universal acceptance in Israel of just such a type of Saviour – the Messiah. According to Zieliński, however, the Jews of that time did not have such a Saviour in mind. The political conditions in which the followers of Judaism found themselves at that time determined their desires and aspirations. The idea was that the Saviour would be someone who would change these conditions, someone who would become a political leader. After another loss of independence at the hands of the Romans, Israel's hopes were focused on a powerful liberator, akin to the commander of an army that would destroy all the enemies of the chosen people. Unfortunately, an overly literal perception of the role of such a leader led to various dreamers claiming and being recognised by others as the Messiah, against which Israel experienced further disasters and tragedies in the form of lost uprisings and revolts. Jewish Messianism is therefore the vision of a Messiah who is the King of his people, whose kingdom is Palestine, whose capital is Jerusalem and whose tabernacle is Zion (Zieliński 1927: 236). Of course, this belief was built on the message of the Bible – the Messiah is the son of David (Is 11:1-9), who was king of Israel. To associate the figure of the Messiah with kingship over Israel was to identify the Saviour exclusively with the chosen people. This is why Zieliński believed that such a vision of the Messiah – a figure not so much religious as political, carrying out the nationalist mission of the people of Israel – was

unacceptable to someone who had grown up in Hellenistic culture and who had read the words of Virgil (*Ec.* 4)²⁴, who wrote of the Saviour as *cara deum suboles*, *magnum Iovis incrementum*. For such a person, the figure of Christ was simply closer than the Messiah expected by Judaism.

Conclusion

Tadeusz Zieliński, in keeping with the message of his book, proves at every point his main thesis about the fundamental influence of Hellenism on Christianity – according to which the true “Old Order” of Christianity is not Judaism but Greco-Roman culture. This thesis is admirably formulated and supported – with a wealth of evidence. There is only one gap – Zielinski completely omits the sphere of the *sacrum*, which Christianity owed to Judaism. What the scholar proposes is in fact an equation of the religion of Yahweh with the religion of Zeus (Zieliński 1927: 123), an erudite comparison of the two civilisations which testifies to the superiority of Hellenism over Judaism and the vital importance of the former factor for the rise of Christianity. Although we emphasised in the introduction that it would be wrong to judge Zielinski's concepts and thoughts on religious studies solely based on today's knowledge, the limited scope of the subject matter discussed may be inadequate for today's reader. Zielinski seems to overlook an important point – the new faith cannot be sufficiently explained by its references to the Hellenistic heritage alone, nor even by pointing out the consequences of the influences exerted on it by ancient philosophy, the work of brilliant thinkers. In order to understand the origins of Christianity, it is not enough to show its convergences and analogies with the culture of the Greeks and Romans, it is necessary to go even deeper, precisely into the realm of the sacred and morality. Zieliński consciously and deliberately disregards these spheres (Zieliński 1927: 2) because, as he has repeatedly emphasised, he did not want his studies to venture into the realm of theology²⁵. This self-imposed limitation nevertheless made “Hellenism and Judaism” a revelation in terms of the

²⁴ See on this work: Cytowska, Szelest 1990: 74–79; McGill 2007: 173–193; Ziółkowski, Putnam 2008.

²⁵ However, if Christianity found its adherents, it was not only because it had similarities with Hellenistic culture, but also thanks to the adoption of certain religious guidelines originating in Judaism, which, of course, seems to have been no less important an impulse for the genesis of Christianity than Hellenism. The Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) or the biblical models of personalities (Job, David, etc.), which are completely omitted from the thesis, are, as is well known, also the foundations of Christianity and of European culture as a whole. Zielinski should not be accused of this. According to scholars, the Decalogue did not have universal value in the Hebrew Bible; it only acquired such value secondarily. By definition, it referred to the Hebrew community rather than to relations with entities external to it. See the following article for more information Hoffman 2011: 32–49.

scholar's specific interpretations that stimulate thought and debate, rather than his timeless statements. The depiction of Greek and Hebrew religion is not merely the product of meticulous scholarly research, but also an expression of Zieliński's spontaneous and personal perspectives. Moreover, it refers to the social conditions of the time, from which no individual, not even a scholar, can easily free themselves. "Hellenism and Judaism" is therefore a testament to Zieliński's views and the times in which he lived. The book's success was assured from the first edition, and it is interesting to consider the reasons for its popularity.

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Prof. dr hab. Robert K. Zawadzki – is a researcher of ancient, literary motifs and the way they shaped and continue to shape the Polish and European cultural tradition. One focus of his research is the ancient novel, but he has also strong interests in the Old-Polish literature as well as the Neo-Latin literature. His current research interests concern the output of Jan of Głogów, Wawrzyniec (Laurentius) Korwin, Maciej of Miechów, Jan of Stobnica, a little bit forgotten writers, representatives of the Polish medieval and renaissance cosmography, geography and history.

e-mail: r.zawadzki@ujd.edu.pl