

Marta Cichocka (UNIwersytet Szczeciński)
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1529-469X>

“The Unresolvable Question”: The Jews in Aleksander Świętochowski’s Journalism

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SUMMARY

Aleksander Świętochowski was a prominent Polish thinker, journalist and writer. One of the topics he dealt with throughout his professional activity (1867–1938) was the so-called “Jewish question”. The purpose of this article is to present his analyses, reflections and views related to the functioning of that minority among the Polish majority in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, as well as after the Republic regained its independence. His attitude to the issue was not fixed, it rather evolved with changing social, economic and political conditions. Considering the choices of all extremes to be wrong, he claimed that he was never a philo or anti-Semite. He remained critical of both Jews and Poles, and tried to assess reality objectively. Among other things, the author of the text attempts to answer the following question: to what extent did Świętochowski succeed, and to what extent did the perspective of a Polish patriot dominate his view of the matter? Undoubtedly, it can be considered that Aleksander Świętochowski’s evolving thoughts on the subject reflected the dilemmas of many Poles, and some of the dilemmas remain relevant today.

KEYWORDS: anti-Semitism, the Congress Kingdom of Poland, the Second Polish Republic, “The Apostle of Truth”, the Warsaw positivism.

STRESZCZENIE

Nierozwiązywalna kwestia. Żydzi w publicystyce Aleksandra Świętochowskiego

Aleksander Świętochowski był wybitnym polskim intelektualistą, publicystą i literatem. Jednym z tematów, którymi zajmował się przez cały okres aktywności zawodowej (1867–1938), była tzw. kwestia żydowska. Celem artykułu stało się zaprezentowanie drogi jego analiz, refleksji i poglądów związanych z funkcjonowaniem tej mniejszości wśród polskiej większości w okresie istnienia Królestwa Polskiego, jak i po odzyskaniu przez Rzeczpospolitą niepodległości. Jego postawa nie była pod tym względem stała, ewoluowała wraz ze zmieniającymi się warunkami

społecznymi, gospodarczymi i politycznymi. Sam twierdził, że nie był nigdy ani filo-, ani antysemitą, uznając wybory wszelkich skrajności za błędne. Pozostawał krytyczny zarówno wobec Żydów, jak i Polaków, starał się obiektywnie oceniać rzeczywistość. Na ile mu się to udawało, a na ile perspektywa polskiego patrioty zdominowała jego punkt widzenia sprawy? Między innymi próbę odpowiedzi na to pytanie podjęła autorka tekstu. Niewątpliwie uznać można, że wędrówka myśli Aleksandra Świętochowskiego w tym temacie odzwierciedlała rozterki wielu Polaków, a część dylematów pozostaje aktualna do dziś.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: antysemityzm, Królestwo Polskie, II Rzeczpospolita, Poseł Prawdy, pozytywizm warszawski.

“That’s why I defended the Jews fifty years ago, when they wanted to be Poles, and that’s why I don’t defend them today, when they want to be Jews, the enemies of the Poles.”

Introduction

The Jews appeared in Poland in the Middle Ages and from the beginning they were an isolated group, legally, linguistically and culturally distinct. There were many reasons for maintaining such a state of affairs¹. As the ratio of the Jews to the Polish population increased, the consequences of that isolation were to prove tragic.

To this day, the so-called Jewish question in Poland and around the world arouses a lot of emotions, to many people it is a mystery, an obscurity – it remains unresolvable. It is therefore worth recalling the opinion on this subject, or rather its evolution, of one of the authorities and intellectuals of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as the title character of this text.

Aleksander Świętochowski was a journalist, writer and social activist, who lived from 1849 to 1938. He began his creative career under the Russian partition at the age of 18, was 56 when the revolution of 1905 broke out, lived to see his homeland regain its independence, and died just before the outbreak of the Second World War as an old man. He had a chance to observe and comment

¹ *Małżeństwo z rozsądku? Żydzi w społeczeństwie dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, red. M. Wodziński, A. Michałowska-Mycielska, Wrocław 2007 for the period immediately preceding the period discussed in the text, the turn of the 18th and 19th century see: M. Wodziński, *Władze Królestwa Polskiego wobec chasydyzmu. Z dziejów stosunków politycznych*, Wrocław 2008.

in his newspaper articles on the world, and especially on his compatriots at crucial historic moments and at the time of the formation of the Polish national character.

Before the Warsaw Pogrom

Aleksander Świętochowski’s first serious public statement on the so-called Jewish question appeared in “Przegląd Tygodniowy” (“The Weekly Review”) in 1876. Although, he took it up regularly until 1938, it still remained unresolved for him.

Świętochowski was part of the movement known as the Warsaw positivism. Thus, many views characteristic of that circle can be attributed to him. However, it needs to be remembered that the circle was marked, among other things, by independence of thought, which makes it impossible to fully unify its members. What they had in common was their stance towards the Jews especially until 1881, when a pogrom against members of the minority occurred in the capital of Poland.

In the 1870s, the issue remained on the sidelines of the positivists’ interests. They referred to it infrequently, always in the spirit of the need to assimilate minorities while retaining only religious distinctiveness, and only when called upon to do so by the public opinion or the capital’s press. However, they did not have a coherent and consistent plan of action, and shared with their readers only loose thoughts on the subject². Perhaps “the young” also lacked knowledge about the situation of the Jewish population, which they were not particularly interested in³.

The Jews were also among the positivists and since the movement was small in number their participation became important. They were assimilated, enlightened Israelis, often wealthy who financially supported the initiatives of “the young”. Transferring their own experiences of direct acquaintances and friendships with the Jews onto the general public, the positivists drew simple conclusion. Educated Jews abandoned their religion and tradition, which was in their view backward, and supported rather progressive than conservative movements.

² M. Iwańska, *Prasa pozytywistów warszawskich wobec Żydów i kwestii żydowskiej*, Łódź 2006, pp. 22–23.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

Thus, they became, in the opinion of the positivists, very useful to the interests of Poland, as advocates of development in the broadest sense. Therefore, from their perspective, the Jews should be educated together with the Polish youth, to whom they would become similar and voluntarily, as a result of enlightenment, give up their “outdated customs and harmful cultural distinctiveness”. Aleksander Świętochowski, already in *Dumania pesymisty* (“Reflections of a Pessimist”) strongly expressed his view, to which he remained faithful, that while maintaining separateness, compatible coexistence side by side of two such different cultures as Polish and Jewish would not be possible⁴.

His compatriots faced such challenges as defending themselves against Germanization and Russification, fighting censorship and repression, instilling the national consciousness in peasants, recovering from the defeats of the national liberation struggles, rebuilding the economy and culture, and finally, regaining independence. In the face of those ambitions, the Jewish question did not matter much; in any case, he wanted it to cease to exist for the Poles, because it distracted them from more important agendas and indeed it grew into a serious problem, while it should not be such. The Jewish intelligentsia he knew was assimilated, and Świętochowski compared other Israelis merely to a pustule on the weak and seriously ill body of the nation⁵.

Positivism was the way to achieve the aforementioned goals, the hetman of this movement, as Aleksander Świętochowski was called, seemed to be full of faith in the necessity, but also the possibility, of changing the mentality of his compatriots from conservative to progressive. Like “the young”, he wanted, to point out concrete ways to peaceful development and strengthening of the nation, which was not only necessary to survive, but also to prepare the nation to take responsibility for independence when it came. Therefore, his solution to the Jewish issue was a simple one. The Israeli should assimilate through equality, education and thanks to the strength of Polish culture⁶.

⁴ A. Świętochowski, *Dumania pesymisty*, “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1876, nr 45, pp. 509–512.

⁵ A. Świętochowski, *Nie tędy*, “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1877, nr 7, pp. 73–75.

⁶ Many criticised the idea promoted by “The Apostle of Truth” that the Jews should be educated on an equal footing with the Poles. It was claimed that it would lead to an even more dangerous advantage for the former over the latter. The journalist answered this in simple terms. He agreed that this would be very possible, but it would not necessitate the need to abandon the idea but to increase ambition and commitment on the part of the Poles, just as it should happen in economic competition with the Jews. He believed that healthy competition in every field leads to progress; A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1882, nr 27, pp. 322–323.

Knowing that his idea was not new, he referred to Stanislaw Staszic and Tadeusz Czacki, in particular, he fully agreed with the views of those two and considered them still relevant⁷. At the same time, in the absence of any real influence of the press on the partitioner’s legislation and the organization of education in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, the constant fruitless returns to such a “repugnant subject” did not give him any satisfaction⁸. However, he advised editors to foster tolerant attitudes, since indifference or escalating resentment toward minorities could, in his view, only harm the Polish cause.

When addressing the topic of the Jews, he drew the attention of the readers to more important matters, such as the peasants question. He often juxtaposed the two subjects, considering it a common and highly undesirable feature to isolate them from the rest of the social and economic processes⁹. Świętochowski believed that as long as peasants and the Jews are treated as other groups, separate from the social organism, the problems would remain insoluble¹⁰. He ridiculed his countrymen’s prejudices and intolerance, attributing them to a lack of enlightenment and argued that if the Polish lands were inhabited by Chinese instead of Jews, the aversion to them would be identical, because it would be similarly conditioned by the still-existing tribal rivalry between peoples¹¹.

In his early texts related, but not only, to the Jewish issue the future “Apostole of Truth”¹² tried to remain objective. He showed the vices of both Jews and Poles, often recognising that they were common to both nations. Admiring the Jewish intelligentsia, which in his view, unlike the Poles, was free from religious restrictions and bold in its views, he categorically refused to apply the same approach to all Jews, as if they were a monolith. Additionally Świętochowski underlined that Jewish elite had trust in scientific innovations, severely

⁷ A. Świętochowski, *Nierozwiązalna kwestia I i II*, “Nowiny” 1878, nr 113, pp. 1–2, and 114, pp. 1–2, also see: *idem*, *Żyd w karczmie i Żyd w szkole*, “Prawda” 1881, nr 48, pp. 565–566.

⁸ A. Świętochowski, *Nie tędy*, “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1877, nr 7, pp. 73–75.

⁹ The positivists, following Hubert Spencer and August Comte, treated society as an internally differentiated whole, composed of complementary parts. They treated the Jews as an inseparable, though distinctive, element of Polish society, which could and should have a positive impact on the whole, improving the functioning of the whole organism.

¹⁰ A. Świętochowski, *Nierozwiązalna kwestia II*, “Nowiny” 1878, nr 114, pp. 1–2, and later: *idem*, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1886, nr 41, pp. 488–489.

¹¹ A. Świętochowski, *Żydowskie złoto*, “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1877, nr 48, pp. 550–552.

¹² In the first issue of the magazine “Prawda” (“The Truth”), which was owned, founded and edited by Aleksander Świętochowski, he began in 1881 to publish a series of texts entitled “Liberum veto”, which he signed as “The Apostole of Truth”. These columns appeared for 22 years and had an overwhelming influence on the public opinion.

criticised the past and did not connect nationality with religion nor was guided by what was appropriate¹³. He pointed out that, without Jewish contribution, many cultural societies serving the Polish cause and general progress would have ceased to exist.

From the Pogrom to the 1905 Revolution

The early 1880s were difficult not only for the Polish Jews. At that time, the rise in anti-Semitic sentiments, going hand in hand with the development of nationalism, was observed throughout Europe. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, an anti-Jewish movement led by Wilhelm Marr (biological anti-Semitism) and Adolf Stöcker (religious anti-Semitism) developed in Prussia, unhindered by the authorities. In 1881, street demonstrations, attacks on Jews and the vandalism of their shops took place in Prussia¹⁴. Almost immediately, German anti-Semites found followers in Austria and among Hungarians. In France, anti-Semitism reached its apogee (brief but bloody) in the 1890s. In the 1880s, four pan-European conventions of anti-Semites were held in Germany (1881 in Dresden, 1883 in Chemnitz, 1886 in Kassel and in 1889 in Bochum)¹⁵.

On the territory of Russia, the roots of anti-Semitism went back to Byzantine anti-Judaism (the fear of Jews stemmed from the writings of the Orthodox Church fathers mainly John Chrysostom). Russians saw in the Talmud the sources of moral corruption and hatred of the Gentiles¹⁶. In contrast to the other partitioners, there was no political anti-Semitism in Russia (due to the absence of political parties in the country), but the ideology spread among the society through the press and the security apparatus. From the 1870s onward, along the lines of Western anti-Semitic propaganda, the anti-Jewish press additionally accused the Jews of capitalism, nihilism and radicalism. Unexpectedly, March 12, 1881 turned out to become an important date in the history of Russian anti-

¹³ A. Świętochowski, *Żydowskie złoto*, "Przegląd Tygodniowy" 1877, nr 48, pp. 550–552.

¹⁴ A. Cała, *Żyd – wróg odwieczny? Antysemityzm w Polsce i jego źródła*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 143–152.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 154–164.

¹⁶ A. Świętochowski also referred to the themes present in the Russian press: *idem*, *Pierwotne źródło*, "Humanista Polski" 1914, nr 1, pp. 5–6; *idem*, *Liberum veto. Do Pana M. Kohna w Lublinie*, "Gazeta Warszawska" 1924, nr 218, pp. 1–2.

Semitism. On that day, there was a successful assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander II, in which a Jewish woman participated, but she did not kill the ruler. Then, all the hatred of Russian society against the Israelites found an outlet in revenge. The assassination became a pretext for attacks on the Jewish minority, which met with the tacit approval and passivity of the state authorities. Beginning in April, pogroms against the Jewish population took place in 260 Russian towns. The wave continued until 1884. As researchers show, those were spontaneous revolts, un-inspired by authorities¹⁷. From May 3, 1882 to 1915, in the Russian Empire, the Jews were subject to special laws called May laws. According to them, the settlement of that minority was restricted, they were forbidden to live in the countryside, about one million people were expelled from major cities in Russia, freedom of economic activity was limited, *numerus clausus* was applied in education and other restrictions were imposed on the Israelites. The consequence of the pogroms and the May laws was the mass emigration of the Jews from Russia mainly to the Congress Kingdom of Poland, where, contrary to the rest of the Empire, more tolerant legislation, introduced deliberately by a tsarist decree in 1862, was still in operation¹⁸. As a result, the Jews willingly settled in the former Polish territories, further disintegrating that already noticeably divided society. The Russian authorities were eager to stir up Polish anti-Semitism and supported Jewish separatism, knowing that by doing so they were weakening the nation they ultimately planned to Russify.

In 1903, the “Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion” an anti-Semitic pamphlet describing a plan for Jewish domination of the world, was published in the St. Petersburg’s press. It was allegedly written in 1897 during the First World Zionist Congress. The purpose of that fabrication, most likely carried out by the Russian secret police, was to arouse hatred and even greater fear of the Jewish domination. After the 1905 Revolution, black sotnias, which, following the French model, were composed of former soldiers, were officially active in Russia. Using their press and anti-Semitic militias, they triggered pogroms in 1905–1906¹⁹.

Russian and German anti-Semitism started to radiate into the Polish territory. It fell on fertile ground because since the 1880s the proportion of residents of

¹⁷ A. Cała, *Żyd – wróg odwieczny?*, p. 168.

¹⁸ The Litvaks, as that population was referred to by the Poles, were treated as a camouflaged tool of the Russification policy. The Poles were concerned about their trade ties with Russia. A. Świętochowski condemned the Litvaks for what he considered their negative influence on Polish Jews and Polish society; *idem*, *Jedyny środek*, “Kultura Polska” 1909, nr 12, pp. 1–3.

¹⁹ A. Cała, *Żyd – wróg odwieczny?*, pp. 165–172.

the Mosaic faith in relation to the mostly Catholic Polish population began to increase significantly²⁰.

The atmosphere of the 1880s forced a change in attitude toward the Jewish question also among positivists. It shifted from being marginal to important and fashionable, which led to publication of countless articles on minorities. The views of “the young” remained constant, they condemned the pogroms, appealed for peace and amicable coexistence between the two nations, and expressed concern about the possible escalation of the conflict, which would shatter the social order, already unstable under conditions of captivity.

The Polish press reacted to pogroms in Russia, reporting on their regularity in accordance with the rhythm of the religious calendar. The most frequent incidents of this type occurred during Shrovetide and Easter. Aleksander Świątochowski was visibly more disturbed by those assaults than other observers of social life, and from then on he was far from downplaying them. He returned repeatedly on such occasions to his appeals for the education of the Jews and the need for their equal rights²¹. In his view, the society did not even have the chance to treat that minority with respect, because it did not enjoy it from the state authorities. It was “handicapped” by the restrictions imposed by the law in terms of owning property or being able to choose an occupation. Although the differences between the Poles and the Jews were smaller in the Congress Kingdom than between that minority and the Russians in the rest of the Empire, even there the system made the Israelites pariahs. The example set by the authorities was, therefore, often reproduced by simple people, who saw on a daily basis that they were dealing with an “inferior category” of citizens because they were treated worse by the government.

At the time of Kyiv (so outside the borders of the Kingdom of Poland) pogrom Aleksander Świątochowski also drew his readers’ attention to the economic losses resulting from such situations. In addition, he strongly emphasized that Polish press generally remained averse to the Jews and mentioned them only out of obligation. Simultaneously, he wondered why, despite the social hatred towards that minority, pogroms did not occur in the Congress Kingdom, where the concentration of the Jews was greater than in Russia. On the one hand,

²⁰ Since 1883, the anti-Semitic magazine “Rola” began to be published in Warsaw, enjoying great popularity and shaping the views and attitudes of Poles towards their Jewish fellow citizens; M. Domagalska, *Zatrute ziarno. Proza antysemitcka na łamach “Roli” (1883–1912)*, Warszawa 2015.

²¹ Among others: A. Świątochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1884, nr 44, p. 523.

he believed that it was due to police control, while on the other he attributed that state of affairs to the specificity of the Polish national character. Unlike the partitioners, he saw in his compatriots a calm disposition and dignity in behavior, thanks to which they were able to restrain the urge for forceful solutions. In the Polish lands, in the face of pogroms, even anti-Semitic periodicals called for fraternization between the two sides. The attitude of the Poles, according to the author, deserved appreciation from the Jews, who should assimilate more readily as a result. He also hurled accusations against the Jewish intelligentsia, who, in his view, as already assimilated, should be involved in helping unenlightened Israelites to do the same. That was to be made possible by eliminating the separateness of Jewish schools and cultural institutions and by changing the law. Meanwhile, the editors of Jewish newspapers were negligent, and the problem, according to Świątochowski was urgent. “The Apostle of Truth” feared that the hatred of the Jews, suppressed by his compatriots, would explode, inspired by the example set by the partitioning states and fueled by domestic anti-Semites²².

In the article *Zmienione pytanie* (“Changed Question”) the author proposed, in opposition to what was mainly done in the capital’s press, to consider not – who carried out pogroms against the Jews – but what led to them²³. He stated that in addition to religious and racial prejudices, it was also the ideology of socialism, in which the enemy of the working people were the exploiters, the possessors, the capitalists, and that group was often represented by the Jews. In view of the fact that, in addition to the workers, socialism also had adherents among the intelligentsia, the trend seemed to Świątochowski to be particularly dangerous for the Israelis. It was mainly because they dominated trade, the stock market and industry, sectors in which workers wanted to fight to improve their livelihoods. The Jews, therefore, became their natural enemy. They were not only “foreign”, but it was easy to identify them with exploitation and abuse²⁴.

²² A. Świątochowski, *Przypomniany obowiązek*, “Prawda” 1881, nr 21, pp. 241–242.

²³ For anti-Jewish revolts in 1877, 1878 see: S. Wiech, *Ludność żydowska Królestwa Polskiego w świetle raportów żandarmerii (1866–1896)*, in: *Ortodoksja. Emancypacja. Asymilacja. Studia z dziejów ludności żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich w okresie rozbiorów*, red. K. Zieliński, M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, Lublin 2003, pp. 127–128. For incidents of 1881–1882 see: H. Bałabuch, *Zajścia antyżydowskie w 1881 i 1882 na Lubelszczyźnie w ujęciu władz gubernialnych*, “Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego” 1993, nr 3–4, pp. 24–34; *idem*, *The Causes and the Course the of Anti-Jewish Events in Warsaw in December 1881*, “Studia Humanistyczno-Społeczne” 2014, t. 8, pp. 39–57.

²⁴ Similarly in: A. Świątochowski, *Nowoczesny dopływ antysemityzmu*, “Prawda” 1883, nr 32, pp. 373–374.

The cultural and religious distinctiveness that the Russian Jews retained from Russians accommodated the situation where the former easily became victims of the popularity of socialism in the country. “The Apostle of Truth” believed that the public security authorities would suppress the people’s outbursts of hatred, but that arrests and punishments would not eradicate the causes of the masses’ behavior. He predicted that acts of aggression against the Jews would occur with increasing frequency, no longer only on religious and racial grounds, but also on social grounds. Therefore, he advised the Israelis to adapt to the conditions in the country and seek employment outside the store, exchange office or the inn. In those professions they often, as the author pointed out, actually cheated and so drew upon themselves the hatred of the majority. Świątochowski knew that the Jews, to whom the appeal should be addressed, would not even hear it, but he hoped that their elites would learn from it and guide their unable to read in Polish brethren. Thus, he concluded that while he had so far called for cultural and national assimilation, now, he additionally called for socio-economic one²⁵. That was because the Poles, he wrote, saw the Jews as, among others, the ones who made them addicted to alcohol. After all, it was the Israelites who most often owned the inns and taverns. Świątochowski believed that more restrictive laws in this regard would not help, because this minority was resourceful and greedy, so they would continue the trade just camouflaging themselves more effectively. “The Apostle of Truth” once again returned to the necessity of educating Jewish children together with the Polish ones. He ended his text with the words: “An educated Jew will stay away from the inn”²⁶. At the same time, with sarcasm, he repeated after the anti-Semites the “flaws” and accusations against the Jews²⁷. Admitting that he himself didn’t love them either, he added with characteristic bite and knowing that he was directing his words mainly to Catholics, that only Jesus Christ was capable of that kind of love. To make matters worse, Świątochowski openly confessed that he disliked Jews just as much as the children of Loyola²⁸.

²⁵ A. Świątochowski, *Zmienione pytanie*, “Prawda” 1881, nr 22, pp. 253–255.

²⁶ A. Świątochowski, *Żyd w karczmie i Żyd w szkole*.

²⁷ In his publications, Świątochowski repeatedly criticized ungrounded attacks on the Jews launched by the press or citizens, who hurled absurd accusations at Israelis simply because of their origin. In such situations, he came to their defense, often ridiculing the lack of logic in the behaviour of the slanderers. See: *idem*, *Idea słowiańska w hipotece*, “Prawda” 1882, nr 41, pp. 481–482; *idem*, *Nowoczesny dopływ antysemityzmu*; *idem*, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1892, nr 11, pp. 129–130.

²⁸ A. Świątochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1892, nr 11, pp. 129–130.

In December 1881, over Christmas, a pogrom occurred in Warsaw. Świętochowski, proud of himself, recalled in “Prawda” (“The Truth”) that he had predicted such developments after the pogroms in Russia. With great satisfaction, he cited his warnings and fears that the Poles, who had been gentle until then, would eventually also erupt in aggression against the Jews, in whom they saw a threat to themselves. In the face of those disturbing incidents, he threatened that the Poles were no different from other European nations. Contrary to press reports, the impossible became possible, and the nation which was supposed to resist the outbursts of anti-Semitism also turned out to be prone to them²⁹. According to the author, resentment towards the Jews among the masses of common Polish people was either fueled by the press or was accepted because of its indifference. The writers of the same journals, whether anti-Semitic or neutral, were unable to propose a solution to the Jewish question, inciting acts of intolerance or simply failing to condemn them. In the face of the pogrom, on the other hand, suddenly all the newspapers condemned the aggression with one voice and equally unanimously agreed that thieves, rascals or criminals were to blame, that the victims were few and the whole episode could be forgotten. Świętochowski was of a different opinion³⁰. First and foremost, he believed that journalists and editors should develop an unequivocal position on the issue of minorities. Either identify themselves on the side of the anti-Semites who approve pogroms and the expulsion of the Jews, or on the side of the progressivists who promote assimilation and equality. The tentative position of most magazines only maintained, in his opinion, the current state of gradually increasing antagonism and isolation of the nation within the nation³¹. The public might have felt confused by the opinions of the elite, which at times condemned the Jews and warned of the dangers threatening the Poles, while at others, they changed the views and urged brotherhood. Aleksander Świętochowski also criticized the attitude

²⁹ A. Świętochowski made an intuitive assessment of the situation, which to this day is a challenge, although the analysis is backed by scientific research: M. Winiewski, *Analiza przemocy kolektywnej z perspektywy psychologii społecznej. Próba interpretacji*, in: *Przemoc antyżydowska i konteksty akcji pogromowych na ziemiach polskich w XX wieku*, red. K. Zieliński, K. Kijek, Lublin 2016, pp. 47–64.

³⁰ He confirmed his opinion in: A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1882, nr 1, pp. 9–10.

³¹ To find what opinions about the pogroms were presented by other, the then contemporary writers see: A. Friedrich, *Inteligencja polska wobec pogromu warszawskiego*, in: *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, t. 3., *Historiografia, polityka, recepcja społeczna (do 1939 roku)*, red. K. Kijek, A. Markowski, K. Zieliński, Warszawa 2019, pp. 167–184.

of the Jewish editors of “Israelite” journal, who, in his opinion, “terrorized by the fanatical mob” of the Jews, remained silent on matters of assimilation because most of their readers did not want it. They reminded themselves of the need to eliminate their distinctiveness only in the face of tragedy. Although he admitted that the attacks of December 25–27 were dictated mainly by a desire to rob and were carried out by thieves³², he was still convinced that that act of hatred could find followers³³. Consequently, “The Apostle of Truth” asked the Jews to treat the pogroms as a warning. Economic success could not bring them fulfillment when, at the same time, they still faced the threat of death and persecution from their hosts. In the author’s opinion the only solution to this state of affairs was, to give up one’s cultural, linguistic distinctiveness, and leave only religious one³⁴.

Aleksander Świętochowski also analyzed the situation prevailing on the territories of Poland’s partitioning powers in an attempt to create reluctance among his compatriots to follow the patterns of anti-Semitism flowing from there. In the article *Trzy wiry* (“Three Whirlwinds”). Reporting that the Germans had been leading the movement for several years, he cited the figure of the leading German anti-Semite, Stöcker, who received approval for his activities from authorities, namely Prince Bismarck. Świętochowski gave an account of a congress of anti-Semites held in 1882 in Dresden, and cited its resolutions which generally called for the persecution of the “hated element”. However, it was in the German territories that the Jews assimilated most effectively. The situation was different in Austria or Russia.

In those countries, conflicts and divisions were more visible. While in Germany the law was on the side of the Jews, in Russia the government was officially against the minority. As reported in “Prawda” (“Truth”), the suppression of pogroms there was dictated by the need for social peace, rather than concern for the fate of the Israelis who were inconvenient to the authorities. Pogroms and, above all,

³² In the work edited by L. Motzkin and published in 1910 it was already stated that the pogrom was not inspired by the Russians; *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, t. 3, p. 47. This claim is confirmed by the studies of A. Markowski, who shows that the rumor of the alleged robbery background of the pogrom was also untrue. According to the researcher, its origins should be seen in the growing anti-Semitic sentiments among the Polish population at the time, which were economically motivated and fueled by xenophobic propaganda; *idem*, *Pogrom warszawski 1881*, in: *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, t. 2, *Studia przypadków (do 1939 roku)*, red. K. Kijek, A. Markowski, K. Zieliński, Warszawa 2019, s. 67–85.

³³ A. Świętochowski, *Bez złudzeń*, “Prawda” 1881, nr 53, pp. 625–627.

³⁴ A. Świętochowski, *Wymowna przestroga*, “Prawda” 1881, nr 19, pp. 219–220.

the subsequent emigration of the Jews, proved to be the most effective way of resolving the Jewish question in the Russian Empire. Discussing the situation in Austria, Świętochowski cited, among other things, one of the parliamentary projects, whose author saw the possibility of solving the Jewish question through education and equality, which would eradicate differences³⁵.

In one part of his series *Walka o byt* (“A Struggle for Survival”), Aleksander Świętochowski considered the Jewish question from the perspective of its impact on Polish affairs. He pointed out to the lack of integration among his own people, who, faced with division, found it all the more difficult to accept the “strangers”. From this point of view, the Jews, or rather the hatred of them, constituted a unifying element, uniting the divided Polish nation³⁶.

However, Aleksander Świętochowski opposed the exclusion of non-Catholics from the ranks of citizens, considering that principle as utterly ridiculous. He understood that in the Poznań region, religion was an important factor in maintaining Polish national identity, but objected to extending that principle to the right to call only those who were Catholic Poles. He warned that such a restriction would greatly impoverish the nation, especially because of the exclusion of the Jews, who as a result might support the partitioner. He threatened that the rejection of this minority by his compatriots would result in their Germanization or Russification³⁷.

The Jewish, “The Apostle of Truth” reminded, not only gave outstanding people to the world (there he mentioned the names of Heine, Börny, Mendelson), but above all they survived despite persecution and constant humiliation for many centuries. They showed perseverance and should be held up as an example to all nations that do not want to perish³⁸.

Świętochowski regarded Polish anti-Semitism, as represented by the magazine “Rola” (“Soil”) as a mania that seeks a scapegoat for all the misfortunes crushing the nation. “The Apostle of Truth” tried to avoid any polemics with Jan Jeleński, the

³⁵ A. Świętochowski, *Trzy wiry*, “Prawda” 1882, nr 38, pp. 446–447.

³⁶ A. Cała points out the differences between Polish and Western European anti-Semitism. The latter stemmed from a sense of superiority and contempt for the Jews, the former from fear and xenophobia. She claims that Poles needed the Jews to build their own identity “If at that time the Jews had been taken away from Poland, many of the Poles would not have known who they really were”. The imaginary arguments for anti-Semitism said more about Poles than about Jews; *eadem*, *Żyd – wróg odwieczny?*, p. 292.

³⁷ A. Świętochowski, *Walka o byt*, cz. 3: *Klasyfikacja wyznaniowa*, “Prawda” 1883, nr 4, pp. 37–38.

³⁸ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1883, nr 37, pp. 441–442.

editor of "Rola", ostentatiously ignoring him. However, in several texts he referred, always critically, to Jeleński's opinions. Świętochowski skilfully demonstrated that Jeleński's arguments against the Israelis were based on lies and fact manipulation and such practices had their source in German anti-Semitism. That obviously did not mean that the Jews were without flaws or that they should not be publicly criticized, but according to Świętochowski, no one could do so objectively and fairly³⁹. That was the reason why all disputes around the "Jewish question" led to nothing. Additionally, he was of the opinion that the Jews themselves were used to scorn and condemnation, but not to criticism. They reacted violently to criticism and demanded that justice be done, making constructive discussion of their problems futile⁴⁰. In the end, the author recognised only their own prophets as effective judges of the vices of the Jewish people⁴¹.

Świętochowski was well aware that the press would not change the attitudes of the masses towards the Jews. It had no significant role in that matter but it was different with the law. Only a change in legislation could bring an evolution in social relations. Complaints about exploitation by the Jews were of no use as long as it was legal. Appealing to the conscience of an Israelite was naive, because, he wrote, under capitalism conscience is like an unruly child that is thrown out of the door if it gets in the way. He advised against counting on the sentiments of the Jews, only on law that should protect the worker and that depended on the partitioner.

In response to the article entitled *Antysemityzm* ("Anti-Semitism") by Teodor T. Jeż⁴², "The Apostle of Truth" wrote *Niezbyteczny komentarz* ("Not an unnecessary comment"). In the text, he agreed that the Jews differ from Aryans in physiognomy and character. The latter, in the case of the Israelites, he labelled as a mercantile. It was supposed to be unbearable for agricultural nations such as Germans, Hungarians and Slavs. On the other hand, accepted and even valued by trade nations such as: the English, French and Italians. The lack of scruples in business, the acceptance of fraud, deceit and exploitation were the qualities with which merchants, and therefore often in the Polish lands, the Jews, were identified.

³⁹ A. Świętochowski, *Apostołowie kłamstwa*, "Prawda" 1885, nr 27, p. 313, also in: *idem*, *Antysemityzm*, "Prawda" 1897, nr 14, pp. 163–164

⁴⁰ A. Świętochowski, *Antysemityzm*, "Prawda" 1897, nr 14, pp. 163–164.

⁴¹ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto*, "Prawda" 1883, nr 47, p. 562.

⁴² Zygmunt Miłkowski, alias Teodor Tomasz Jeż (1824–1915) – novelist, publicist, social and political activist, emissary of the Polish Democratic Society in the Balkans, Istanbul and Galicia. He organized military aid abroad for the January Uprising and after 1863 became an independence activist in exile, co-founder and president of the Polish League.

Świętochowski joined in that generalization, but on the other hand pointed out that the Israelites were characterized by extreme attitudes. He saw among them wicked people, looking only for profit but also enlightened and good people ready to make the greatest sacrifice for the cause in which they believed, for the well-being of the general public. In the text, he divided the Jews into swindlers and people of exemplary integrity, rarely or never adopting attitudes in between. He compared anti-Semites to socialists, and accused them of fighting against capital, but only the Jewish capital, which was, in turn, to fall into the hands of Christian exploiters after the Jewish minority would be eliminated. According to the author, such a path would lead nowhere. Aleksander Świętochowski believed that religious anti-Semitism could be destroyed by education, anthropological anti-Semitism by racial mixing, and economic anti-Semitism by the clash between labour and capital, without artificially adding more parties to the conflict, which would only create confusion and chaos and confuse the truth⁴³.

In 1890 Świętochowski made another serious attempt to understand "the Jewish question". In his article "Patenting Citizens" "Patentowanie obywateli" ("Patenting Citizens") he derived anti-Semitism from the natural tribal instincts of dividing people into "their own" and "outsiders." In such a world, "us" are allowed everything, "them" much less. He showed that in the contemporary period, those primordial desires for separation were revived among the Germans, as expressed in terms such as *Polenhetze*, *Kulturkampf* or *Judenhetze*. The example set by the Germans radiated further, infecting Poles, among others, with such a way of thinking. The Jewish minority had lived among the Poles in relative harmony for centuries and a significant number of them managed to assimilate. Świętochowski considered it reckless to waste that heritage by succumbing to the fashion of anti-Semitism, and saw in that process more thoughtlessness than ill-will on the part of the Polish majority. In particular, he deplored the refusal of the right to Polish citizenship to the Jewish intelligentsia, who felt part of the nation and was needed by it. Świętochowski appealed to the editors of the anti-Semitic press to stop such attacks as they could bring a great deal of harm to the Polish cause. He warned of the responsibility those journalists who stirred up mutual hatred and division, as in his view, it could only lead to harmful consequences⁴⁴.

When the idea of voluntary and organized emigration of the Jews from the Polish lands appeared, Świętochowski supported it. He did not believe in the success of that move, as there was no suitable place for the new settlement

⁴³ A. Świętochowski, *Niezbyteczny komentarz*, "Prawda" 1883, nr 44, pp. 518–519.

⁴⁴ A. Świętochowski, *Patentowanie obywateli*, "Prawda" 1890, nr 1, pp. 1–2.

of the Israelites, but he considered the solution itself to be appropriate. The main argument was that there were too many Jews living among the Poles. They remained unassimilated, which could be the cause of constant conflicts. Świętochowski, therefore, believed that some of them – the most resistant to integration – should leave⁴⁵. In popular opinion, they were the poorest and uneducated people, resorting to fraud and living immorally. They arrived in the Congress Kingdom, mainly after the pogroms, in Russia seeking refuge there and increasing an already numerous and inconvenient minority⁴⁶. At the same time, Świętochowski argued that neither America nor Western Europe wanted them, even the least anti-Semitic England feared an increase in the number of the Jews in the country. The issue was, not the emigration of intelligentsia or economic elite that would easily assimilate, but of people in need of support and wishing to preserve their cultural distinctiveness. Aleksander Świętochowski was certain that it was impossible for the masses of the Israelites to remain in so inhospitable to them Russian Empire, simply for existential reasons. Sooner or later, extreme poverty was, in his opinion, going to force them to leave⁴⁷. In later texts, he returned to the Jewish emigration project, the main proponent and sponsor of which was to be the Jewish philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch. He always wished him success in carrying out his plans and announced the imminent great migration of the people of Israel⁴⁸.

In 1897, once again, Aleksander Świętochowski unequivocally and strongly dissociated himself from the idea of anti-Semitism, which was alien to his values. He considered the movement that treats all Jews as enemies, simply because of their cultural “otherness” as absurd. Blaming the growing hatred of that minority on the poor social and economic situation, he urged that if there were Jews engaged in exploitation and fraud, that should be exposed and combated. Świętochowski postulated: “if there are, and there are, vices, transgressions, dark side to the Israelites, why should the world of reason and impartial morality remain silent about them? This would be a strange privilege, not used by any social element anywhere, and for us it would be a particularly pernicious privilege”⁴⁹. Świętochowski tried to find the golden mean between racial, religious

⁴⁵ For more on the solutions of the Jewish question see: Th.R. Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antysemitism. The “Jewish Question” in Poland. 1850–1914*, Illinois 2006.

⁴⁶ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1890, nr 40, p. 477.

⁴⁷ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1891, nr 20, pp. 237–238.

⁴⁸ A. Świętochowski, *Przedsięwzięcie Hirscha*, “Prawda” 1891, nr 33, pp. 385–386.

⁴⁹ A. Świętochowski, *Antysemityzm*, “Prawda” 1897, nr 14, pp. 163–164.

or slanderous anti-Semitism and constructive, honest criticism of the Jews, the kind that all nations had to face for their faults. He continued to lament that the circle of “Israelite” remained so touchy about “defending” their nation, such behaviour he invariably called obsessive⁵⁰.

In the View of the Changes Initiated by the Revolution

Świętochowski, for whom the fate of workers had always been an extremely important issue, linking him ideologically with socialists, supported the 1905 revolution. In his texts he urged for strikes, and attempted to unify the society around the concerns and rights of the working people. However, he seems to have dreamed of a bloodless revolution, without destruction and economic losses. When he witnessed violence, banditry, chaos, he began to condemn the uprising as irresponsible, inhumane, selfish, too forceful. The revolution had put him at odds with the socialists, whom he had always considered utopian but noble, now he definitely lost faith in that quality.

According to Ludwik Krzywicki, after 1905, Świętochowski was confused and did not know who to stand for, he was completely lost in the new convoluted reality⁵¹. From the beginning of the 20th century, his attitude towards the Jews also began to evolve.

The revolution resulted in a political revival, in the Russian Empire, and therefore in the Kingdom of Poland. Public life was liberated from the shackles of censorship and there was a substantial increase in social activity. Not only the Poles, but also the Jews benefited the changes. While the pogroms did not yet cause a change in the views of the Polish intelligentsia on the Jewish question, they did cause an evolution in the thinking of the assimilated Israelites. That was the case with the Russian Jew, Leon Pinsker, who faced with, in his view, bankruptcy of the idea of assimilation, changed his attitude from a supporter to an activist in the Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) movement, which promoted Jewish settlement in Palestine.

He urged his brethren to rebuild their national consciousness, wrote about self-emancipation, which was the only thing that would prove to be

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Compare: A. Tyszka, *Dylematy Posła Prawdy. Publicystyka Świętochowskiego w okresie rewolucji 1905–1907*, in: *Aleksander Świętochowski. Obrazy kultury polskiej*, red. K. Stępnik, M. Gabryś, Lublin 2011, p. 107.

permanent⁵². Another important activist, in the proces of building Jewish identity, was the socialist Chaim Żyłowski. He wished to separate nationality from religion, considering the latter as a manifestation of backwardness. He saw language and culture to be the basis of modern nationalism⁵³. Szymon Dubnow, another Jewish thinkers, tried to merge tradition with modernity. Condemning the idea of assimilation, since its goal was the denationalization of the Jews, he promoted the struggle for national autonomy, that is, independent Jewish self-government that would determine the development of their education, culture and charitable organizations. In other areas, the Jews were to participate on equal footing with the rest of citizens in the political life of the country they inhabited⁵⁴.

In 1906, when the pogrom against the Jews took place in Białystok, Aleksander Świętochowski, recalled that, when the information reached him, he felt shame and trepidation. He was only relieved by the next piece of news stating that the perpetrators were Russian hooligans. Proud that his compatriots had not joined in the slaughter, he saw in that the timeless merit of socialist values. He singled out, in particular, the activity of the members of Polish Socialist Party and Proletariat, who, according to his account, instilled among simple peasants and workers the ideas of tolerance, brotherhood and friendship among working people. The Poles even tried to help the victims, but were prevented by the Russian army. In any case, Świętochowski considered the noble socialist values of the pre-revolutionary era as valuable to society and was pleased that they were rooted so deeply⁵⁵. He concluded one of the articles with words of appreciation:

⁵² L. Pinsker, *Autoemanzipation. Mahnruf an seine Stamessgenossen von einem russischen Juden*, Wien 1903.

⁵³ Ch. Żyłowski, *List żydowskiego socjalisty*, 1906, tłum. z jidysz A. Geller, New York 1917–1919; *idem*, *Nacjonalizm dawniej i dziś*, [b.m.] 1915.

⁵⁴ S. Dubnow, *List o dawnym i nowym żydostwie, 1897–1906*, tłum. z jidysz A. Geller, Meksyk 1959.

⁵⁵ Aleksander Świętochowski's interpretation of the Białystok pogrom was, as we now know, incorrect. Both in terms of its causes and perpetrators. Whether that was a deliberate effort on the part of the author to create a particular effect in the reader, or an error resulting from ignorance – it is difficult to say. Contemporary researchers indicate that the cause of the pogrom was the Jews' aspiration to equal access to work with Poles and anti-Semitic sentiments, and that the perpetrators were residents of Białystok and the surrounding area, as well as the military (from the second day); A. Markowski, *Przemoc antyżydowska i wyobrażenia społeczne. Pogrom białostocki 1906 roku*, Warszawa 2018.

this nation, despite the fact that, like any other, it carries in its bosom still alive relics of darkness, and despite the fact that it is exposed to all the evil influences of social turmoil, will not be turned into a pack of wild animals, this nation has earned its eminence in a thousand years of development, and today with good, right demands of its partitioner: give me independence, for I am worthy of freedom, and slavery is unworthy of me⁵⁶.

In a 1909 text, “The Apostle of Truth” lamented that part of the Jewish intelligentsia supported the Conservative, Catholic movement of nobility. He called those Israelis liars, double-dealers and profiteers, qualities that were to be proven during a Duma elections. He believed that the only chance for the Jews to truly liberate themselves was to become involved in the progressive movement and renounce the shackles of the relics of their own culture. Progressivism was supposed to “ennoble them, make them equal, make them citizens, make them reject their Jewishness, humanize them and Polish them”⁵⁷.

Aleksander Świętochowski supported the Jews as long as they did not harm Polish interest, or even favoured it. At times, when he saw that Jewish interests were to be pursued at the expense of Polish ones he radically opposed it. He challenged the Jewish journalist Bronisław Grosser, whom he responded in his article published in the magazine “Wiedza” (“Knowledge”). Grosser proclaimed the bankruptcy of the idea of assimilation and, moreover, promoted the need for the Poles to accept the separateness of the Jews. Świętochowski’s interpretation of Grosser’s words was narrowed down to the conclusion that the Polish lands were the homeland of the Poles and the Jews alike, and therefore the language of the minority should have the same status as Polish. The response of “The Apostle of Truth” to that was, as always, straightforward. It was not possible, in his view, to claim the bankruptcy of the idea of assimilation when there was no Polish government which was the only body that had the power to accomplish assimilation legally and educationally. Apart from that, in Świętochowski opinion, it was preposterous to demand land precisely from the Poles, who:

have soaked it with blood and tears, who have cherished their nationality to the point of ecstasy, who have suffered and struggled for a hundred years for their humiliated and wronged language, these Poles are expected to renounce their love, their memories, their dreams, the whole affectionate net of their hearts, recognize themselves as the owners of half of their home and call their homeland Polish-Jewish!

⁵⁶ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto. Wobec pogromu*, “Prawda” 1906, nr 25, p. 305.

⁵⁷ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto. Zzydźiały postęp*, “Prawda” 1909, nr 3, pp. 5–6.

He concluded that such ideas could be voiced only by a person who did not belong to any nation and was not familiar with the characteristic feelings of that nation. While Grosser predicted an imminent confrontation between the two sides if the Poles did not change their attitude, Świętochowski was certain that it would mean a definite defeat for the Jews⁵⁸.

For “The Apostle of Truth” purity of language was an essential issue. It was language that determined identity and patriotism of the community. He wrote that the language in which one thinks generates attachment to the nationality that speaks it. Świętochowski further maintained that nobody could feel so free and at ease in proclaiming views in a foreign language, even perfectly mastered, as in the one in which they had been raised. Caring for the development of the language was, for him, from the perspective of culture and the nation’s chance of survival, a matter of primary importance⁵⁹. Therefore, it was clear that he, the master of words, could not accept the equality of any language in the Polish lands other than his native one. He also considered the Jews’ abandonment of their “jargon” in favour of Polish as the basis for assimilation.

Aleksander Świętochowski saw that the growth of anti-Semitism among his compatriots progressed in proportion to the development of Jewish nationalism⁶⁰. That trend was also noticeable among representatives of the Polish progressive movement, hitherto supportive towards the Israelites. It was due to increasingly bold and indiscriminate attacks on the host culture. “The Apostle of Truth” was extremely critical of those attitudes and predicted the enormous damage they would bring to the Polish-Jewish relations. Therefore, he appealed, in advance, that the hatred of Poles should not fall on innocent Jews, who had no part in those militant moods of their compatriots⁶¹. He remained faithful to his criticism of Jewish nationalism and any other nationalism with Polish in the first place.

The journalist repeatedly stressed that the Jews would not have the courage to speak out in Germany, France or England against their landlords, but on the Polish soil they did, because the nation considering itself the owner of the land was weak. With the influx of unassimilated Jews from Russia and the growth of their separatist aspirations, the Jewish problem became really serious, in the

⁵⁸ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto. Unia polsko-żydowska*, “Prawda” 1910, nr 10, pp. 7–8.

⁵⁹ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Prawda” 1883, nr 19, pp. 224–225.

⁶⁰ A. Świętochowski, *Pokłosie*, “Kultura Polska” 1910, nr 5, pp. 3–5. It is most likely that Świętochowski became more closely acquainted with the issue of Zionism thanks to the discussions with Ludwik Gumpłowicz, conducted during a visit to Vienna; M. Brykalska, *Aleksander Świętochowski*, t. 2, Warszawa 1987, p. 32.

⁶¹ A. Świętochowski, *Pokłosie*, “Kultura Polska” 1910, nr 10, pp. 3–5.

writer’s opinion. For him, a Pole was anyone who considered himself a Pole, regardless of origin or religion. However, most of incoming Jews did not even think of integrating with the majority, they wanted to maintain their separateness and win autonomy. Świętochowski blamed those desires on the ignorance of uneducated people. Throughout their history, in his opinion, the Israelites did not comprehend patriotism; they were driven only by the need to survive. Trying to understand the behaviour of that minority, Świętochowski also disagreed with the diagnosis of the bankruptcy of the idea of assimilation. Pointing out to the fact that it was a difficult and long-lasting process, he additionally explained that it was also inhibited by a great influx of the Jews from the depths of the Russian Empire to the Congress Kingdom, which the Polish nation was unable to efficiently absorb⁶². However, he consoled his readers that “the Vistula will not become the Jordan River, only its waters will be polluted for some time by tributaries of Zionism and the channels of Jewish fabrication”⁶³.

In one of the issues of “Kultura Polska” (“Polish Culture”), Świętochowski compared the numbers of the Jews in each country to show that nowhere there was such an accumulation of them as in the Kingdom of Poland; moreover, he found that disparity appalling. Reporting that in the cities the Jews constituted up to 85% of inhabitants, while in general they made up 14% of the total population of the Congress Poland, he defended Polish politicians seeking to suppress the influence of minorities on municipal governments and asked rhetorically, was there a country in Europe that would entrust the management of one of its cities to a Jewish minority? In 1912, parliamentary elections to the Duma in Warsaw were won by a candidate supported by Jewish nationalists by an advantage of 47 : 33 over the votes of Poles. Świętochowski perceived that result as a clear warning, henceforth, in his opinion, Polish society could no longer “underestimate this enemy and fail to insure against his invasion. Jewish nationalism is not only strong by a great mass, but it is bold, defiant, openly hostile”⁶⁴. He regretted that in the election the “Jewish candidate” was also supported by already assimilated Israelis, believing that they made a mistake with unforeseeable but certainly negative consequences. Świętochowski found the selection of an “accidental” candidate from the Polish Socialist Party-Left as a deputy from Warsaw, instead of the Polish-backed Jan Kucharzewski, only

⁶² Naukowe spojrzenie na koncepcje asymilacji zob.: Th.R. Weeks, *Poles, Jews and Russians: The Death of the Ideal of Assimilation on the Kingdom of Poland*, “Polin” 12 (1999), pp. 242–256.

⁶³ A. Świętochowski, *Pokłosie*, “Kultura Polska” 1911, nr 1, pp. 3–5.

⁶⁴ A. Świętochowski, *Objawy*, “Kultura Polska” 1912, nr 11, pp. 1–2.

because the latter refused to pledge to defend equal rights for the Jews in the future local government as an act:

of extreme vulgarity, which only liberationists, disfigured by long slavery and unable to either judge the brutality of their bullet or feel the pain of the wound inflicted, could have earned. Only those people could have committed such unprecedented nonsense, that being extreme nationalists and capitalists, they offered a mandate to the opponent of nationalism and capitalism, who will spit on them at every opportunity, but they do not worry about it, because he will annoy the Poles. [...] The assimilationists failed to assess the importance of this moment, and the nationalists urgently disregarded it⁶⁵.

From then on, Świętochowski began to see the Jews as competitors, opponents, enemies, whom he claimed to have noticed too late, but it was good that they emerged from the darkness, because now he saw them clearly. At the same time, the journalist, who understood and shared his countrymen's agitation, did not cease to call for the preservation of common sense and against falling into "fanatical, wild anti-Semitism". Finally, he urged: "We will remain as we were: a humane nation that recognises as its righteous sons all sincere Poles without distinction of origin or religion"⁶⁶.

The War and the Interwar Period – a Turning Point in the Views of "The Apostle of Truth"

As late as 1912, Aleksander Świętochowski appealed that the Jews, "patriots of foreign descent," who, unlike many "real" Poles, not only proclaimed love of the homeland, but with their work and selfless commitment proved it, should be appreciated⁶⁷. On the other hand, the article *Żydo-Polska* ("Jewish-Poland"), published in "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" ("Weekly Illustrated") in 1913, is considered to mark a breakthrough in his views towards the Jewish question. The author began by reflecting on what had happened to create such a radical division between Poles and Jews. At that time, it was not only a small group of anti-Semites, but all groups of all social classes who wanted and sought liberation from dependence on them. He considered that the aforementioned behavior of Jewish nationalists

⁶⁵ A. Świętochowski, *Pokłosie. O Żydach*, "Kultura Polska" 1912, nr 12, pp. 5–8.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ A. Świętochowski, *Pokłosie*, "Kultura Polska" 1912, nr 3, pp. 3–4.

during the election of the Duma deputy from Warsaw (1912) triggered those animosities, but the ground had been prepared with the influx of the Jews from Russia into the Congress Kingdom (especially since 1881). Świątochowski was horrified by their numbers, he also deplored the "quality" of the settlers, perceiving them as a foreign, hostile to the Poles element, striving for separation, for a new partition of Poland. The author considered it a natural and necessary reaction to defend compatriots from that danger, stating "we could have been torn apart by great predators, but after all, we will not let the worms to forage on us". He tried to prove that the Jewish mentality was alien to all of Western Europe, as it was devoid of patriotic feelings and ties to historical tradition. He recalled that during the 1905 revolution, Jewish socialists "insulted nothing so much as the Polish patriots and the Polish national emblems". Further he argued:

As long as there was a number of Jews in our country, surpassing the assimilation possibilities and the means of our society, but not threatening it with a Pompeian disaster; as long as these Jews were either responsible Poles or a dark crowd of Asians with no desire to rule – then anti-Semitism did not get rooted in the general public opinion; but when these Jews grew to an enormous mass, when they began to insist on equal right to the Polish land; when they proclaimed themselves a separate nation; when they demanded "absolute equality" even for their artificial clusters in the cities and even for their latest settlers; when they tried to impose on us their ideology, which was devoid of all patriotic feelings – society reacted violently in defense. Understanding the importance of economic interests, which were at the forefront of it, I believe that fierce reaction was far more strongly influenced by moral motifs, by the offensive-militant attitude of Semitism. Looking again and again at our humiliation and inertia, it disregarded our strength and defensive capacity⁶⁸.

Świątochowski recalled that the Jews, in their apologies and protests, slandered and defamed the Poles and, through their correspondents abroad, tarnished their image in Europe with lies. The massive attack on Poles by Jewish nationalists forced the majority to unite against the minority. On the other hand, even assimilated Jews sided with the nationalists. Świątochowski asked rhetorically, "What will come of this war?". He had no doubt that its cost would be borne by those who had caused it. However, in that text, increasingly radical in tone, he did not give up his views "despite all this, the work of converting this foreign element into a native one should not be abandoned [...]. Anthropological anti-Semitism is not to be justified by moral, humane or national considerations [...] they too want to exist, they too have

⁶⁸ A. Świątochowski, *Żydo-Polska*, "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" 1913, nr 8, p. 142.

their tragedy...”⁶⁹. He encouraged compassion for Jews, but stated unequivocally that Poles rightly dream of Poland, not a Jewish-Poland.

Once again, Aleksander Świętochowski, analysed the state of the Polish cause in the article *Polskość bezpartyjna* (“Non-partisan Polishness”). He considered the behaviour of his compatriots to be determined by their struggle for existence, which in turn was conditioned by three facts: the powerlessness generated by prolonged slavery; disappointment with the Russian authorities in the area of legislation; the stance taken by Jewish nationalists⁷⁰. Facing such conditions, the Poles united across party lines so, as Świętochowski stressed, the threat from the Jews united a fractured nation⁷¹.

During the Great War, “The Apostle of Truth” worked mainly on *Historia polskich chłopów* (“The History of the Polish Peasants”). Meanwhile, the Jewish question remained unresolved, overshadowed for the time being by other issues. In the face of armed conflict, anti-Semitism was temporarily subdued to allow for the recruitment of Jews into the army. It returned with a vengeance with the army’s first failures at the front. Between 1914 and 1918, a disproportionate number of civilians were killed among the Israelis, who became the scapegoats of the belligerents. After the war, in the newly revived Second Polish Republic, the problem of minority relations in Polish society also began to escalate.

According to Samuel Sandler, evidence of Świętochowski’s deepening anti-Semitism in the interwar period was to be found in his cooperation with “Gazeta Warszawska” (“Warsaw Gazette”), “Myśla Narodowa” (“National Thought”) and “Straightforward” “Prosto z Mostu” (“Straight Out”)⁷². Others claimed that after Poland regained its independence and he became disillusioned with it, Świętochowski simply criticized everything and everyone⁷³.

“The Apostle of Truth” admitted that he wrote to anti-Semitic nationalistic newspapers, because they were the only ones that gave him relative freedom

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ Świętochowski’s attitude towards the Danish literary historian of Jewish descent, Jørgen Brandes, could be the best example of his views. He knew Brandes personally and defended him against anti-Semitic attacks. However, he stopped writing favourably about him when the latter supported the imposition of a minority treaty on Poland at the 1919 Paris conference; M. Brykalska, *Aleksander Świętochowski*, t. 1, Warszawa 1987, p. 388.

⁷¹ A. Świętochowski, *Polskość bezpartyjna*, “Humanista Polski” 1914, nr 2, pp. 1–2.

⁷² S. Sandler, *Wstęp*, in: A. Świętochowski, *Wspomnienia*, Wrocław – Kraków – Warszawa 1966, p. XIII.

⁷³ W. Kubacki, *Wstęp*, in: A. Świętochowski, *Pisma wybrane*, t. 1, *Obrazki powieściowe*, Warszawa 1951, p. 5; M. Brykalska, *Aleksander Świętochowski*, t. 2, p. 365.

of expression. That was because in the interwar period, Świątochowski was in opposition to those in power, especially to the Sanation, which he hated, and which he blamed for the poor state of the country and could not forgive the censorship that had persecuted him since the partitions. Above all, he equated national sovereignty and independence with freedom of speech, and the reality of the Second Polish Republic, in this regard, brought him great disappointment. However, he maintained consistently that he did not agree with all the views of his new employers, including anti-Semitism, and even regretted the necessity of that collaboration, which he finally ended in 1929.

In an article of 1924, Aleksander Świątochowski responded to allegations that his views on the Jewish question had changed. He maintained that he remained constant in his professed values: "I have always been, am and will always be a friend of honest people and upright citizens regardless of their tribal lineage, but I have always been, am and will always be an enemy of the enemies of my people"⁷⁴. In his view, the Jews, by their numbers and their negative attitude towards the Poles, became a threat, of course, he excluded from that number Polish patriots of Jewish origin. He argued in the text that the Israelites, taking their moral teachings from the Old Testament or Talmud, had developed the worst traits that the rest of Europe never possessed or had long since abandoned. They included propensity for and praise of deception, cruelty, a desire to exterminate other nations and a desire to take over the world. Świątochowski even went so far as to claim that the civilized world was divided into the Arians or Greeks and the Jews, and that the two groups had nothing in common, that one of them had to leave or perish. He had no doubt that all Europeans were anti-Semitic towards the unassimilated Jews, that no one wanted to accept them into their homeland, and that they had therefore settled in Poland, which was politically and culturally the weakest. His country, he claimed, would also deal with them, removing their excesses and imposing obedience on the rest. Furthermore, Poland would incapacitate the Jews and prevent any hostile activity against itself⁷⁵.

In 1929, Świątochowski recalled that after the Great War, it became obvious that the Jews had shifted from the attitude of indifference or friendliness to the position of enemies of Poland. They were prompted by their links with

⁷⁴ Even in his *Memoirs of My Thought*, written in the 1930s, Świątochowski recalled with tenderness and respect his Jewish friend Józef Natanson, whom he valued for his sincere patriotism, the aim of which was not publicity and fame, but quiet and humble service; A. Świątochowski, *Wspomnienia*, p. 182.

⁷⁵ A. Świątochowski, *Liberum veto. Do Pana M. Kohna w Lublinie*.

the Germans, “whom they had served during the war with aid, intrigue and espionage”, then strengthened in that attitude by the protection extended by the minority treaty and the concessions of the Polish governments, which, in order to win them over, gave the Jews financial support. Such actions, according to the writer, encouraged the Jewish minority “to declare clearly, without any pretence, that they have the right to the Polish land on an equal footing with the Poles and that they want to co-govern Poland as a distinct nation and at the same time form their own self-governing state within the Polish state”⁷⁶. The author considered the defence against that phenomenon as natural and necessary. The fight was fierce because of the importance of the cause for the Poles. Aleksander Świętochowski warned the Jews that they had miscalculated, that their numbers and influence in the world were insufficient. He boldly proclaimed that the slanders they were spreading against the Poles, the campaign in the press all over Europe based on hate propaganda, lies and slander, the manipulation of the banks and the stock exchange, were all too little for the Polish nation, which had survived a long and terrible captivity, to surrender to that “anonymous superpower” if it did not surrender to the three real political and military powers. He started criticising almost all the Jews (consistently excluding the assimilated) for the old Jewish spirit of dishonesty, superstition and backwardness. He felt that the Israelites lacked the ability to be self-critical, in that, all the nations he knew were able to be harsh with each other, but not the Jews, who only saw in others the sins against their nation⁷⁷.

Once again, a year before he died, at the age of 88, he wondered whether it was possible for such different elements as Polish and Jewish to live side by side in harmony united by the only point of contact – business. He concluded that it was not, that neither encouragement nor reprimand would make it so. What’s more, Świętochowski did not agree that Hitlerism should be blamed for the outbreak of anti-Semitism in independent Poland; it was, in his view, only an encouragement, a pretext. The atmosphere was created by the Jews with their numbers and growing anti-Polish nationalism. However, he regarded the programme of Polish anti-Semites to expel Jews from Poland as barbaric, totally unworkable but not hypocritical.

“The anti-Semites use violent means that offend the elementary principles of law and morality, but they know and say clearly what they want”. On the other hand, the defenders of the Jews did not have a plan of action, apart from accusations against ideological opponents, they did not offer a solution. He concluded that the anti-Semites were doing their revolution, and that revolution was never the

⁷⁶ A. Świętochowski, *Liberum veto*, “Myśl Narodowa” 1929, nr 27, p. 58.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

domain of polite and benevolent people, so they too committed despicable acts. However, their violence, all taken together, was nothing compared to the pogrom of St Bartholomew's night or the expulsion of the Moors out of Spain.

It is impossible not to quote one of the last public statements made by the famous Aleksander Świątochowski on a subject which, like many Poles, preoccupied him throughout his life:

The Jews and their defenders will hurl abuse, insults and curses at anti-Semitism. They will paint in vivid images hideous deeds of anti-Semites and remind the Polish society of the entire catechism of religious commandments and the code of civic duties, but this hurricane of words will not stop the fight. Because it will be impossible.

So is there no solution to the agonising conundrum?

If the answer to this question is not to be Hitlerian, dictated by any fanaticism, racial or religious, in general evil and stupid, but by reason and honesty, all Semites, who are cultured people and true Poles as we have known them and we have known many, must be excluded from it.

Moreover Świątochowski warned that:

The Jewish issue is not exclusively Polish, it is international, and it should be resolved on this wider basis. If this does not happen, it will be a constantly smoking and often erupting volcano of hatred in places where there is a large Jewish concentration, which will not be flooded and extinguished by the most abundant streams of accusatory or defensive phraseology. Only the very naive can be deceived by this hope⁷⁸.

Conclusion

It seems that the example of Aleksander Świątochowski can be taken as a model representing the attitude of many Poles towards the Jewish minority. The journalist led the reader through a long evolution of his thoughts and views on the Jews and their relationship with his fellow countrymen. The reflections of that eminent intellectual always seemed logical and pertinent, and yet he was searching rather than finding ready-made answers. The journey of his thoughts goes from lofty ideals of tolerance, through a hard clash with reality, to helplessness and inability to find a rational solution to the so-called Jewish problem. His final appeal to

⁷⁸ A. Świątochowski, *Antysemityzm*, "Wiadomości Literackie" 1937, nr 16, p. 3.

a shared European and global responsibility for the fate of the Israelites was a cry in the wilderness; only the tragedy of the Holocaust and the Second World War forced political decision-making elite to introduce significant changes improving the position of the Jews, including the creation of their independent state in 1948.

A study of Aleksander Świętochowski's views on the Jewish question shows how complex it was. How theory did not go hand in hand with practice, desires and ideals with social realities. At the same time, however, "The Apostle of Truth" was an exception, or rather a rarity. He never adopted the attitude of an extreme philo or anti-Semite. He was never violent against the Jews, nor did he incite violence towards them. Recognising the weaknesses characteristic for the representatives of that minority, he never generalised it or treated it as a monolith. As in all things, he saw shades of grey and consciously distanced himself from either extremely negative or positive attitudes, considering both to be wrong and dangerous.

His style, whether he was writing about the Poles, Germans or Jews, could be described as critical and hard-hitting but he was perhaps harshest on his compatriots, for whom he cared most. Świętochowski analysed the behaviour of minorities in a blunt and unforgiving way and paying no heed to political correctness was often forced to clarify his opinions when he was misunderstood. Being convinced of his cause, he never backed down. As a journalist he wanted to provoke and participate in public debate, so he was happy to stir up controversy. However, it does not seem that he ever did so out of fanaticism or phobia.

Analysing Świętochowski's work and citing the authority of his biographer, Maria Brykalska, one should consider J. St. Mill's book *On Liberty* as the bible for "The Apostle of Truth". The author of this treatise completely convinced him – as he himself admitted⁷⁹. Świętochowski was particularly committed to the idea of individual freedom and tolerance. The latter applied not only to the Jews⁸⁰, but also to Ukrainians⁸¹ or Germans⁸², to the emancipation of women, peasants and workers, and to openness to religious and philosophical differences⁸³. In general, in the public life, he did not tolerate only two things: stupidity and laziness. Although he agreed with Mill's arguments in theory,

⁷⁹ A. Świętochowski, *Wspomnienia*, pp. 232–233.

⁸⁰ It was not only in his journalism that he popularised the idea of tolerance towards the Jews but also in his short stories e.g. "Chawa Rubin" of 1879.

⁸¹ M. Brykalska, *Aleksander Świętochowski jako wydawca i redaktor "Prawdy" (1881–1900)*, "Rocznik Historii Czasopiśmiennictwa Polskiego" 1972, 11/3, p. 366.

⁸² Among others the short story entitled *Karl Krug* of 1879.

⁸³ A. Świętochowski, *O prawach człowieka i obywatela. O prawach mniejszości*, Warszawa 1907; *idem*, *Równouprawnienie wyznań i płci*, "Przegląd Tygodniowy" 1874, nr 8, pp. 61–62.

he found it difficult to imagine how those enlightened ideas could be put into practice⁸⁴. Świętochowski regarded both women and peasants as unprepared for equality, however, he thought that the latter should be allowed to govern, having received education first. Equally ambiguous and contradictory was his attitude to ethnic minorities.

According to Aleksander Świętochowski, those were equal rights and professional success that changed a person into a citizen. Cohesion of the nation, on the other hand, was provided by language. Most Jews only fulfilled the second condition. “The Apostle of Truth” did not see their professional activity, which was mainly economic, as a threat; on the contrary, he saw competition in trade as the only chance for its development which, he believed, the Poles so desperately needed.

Apart from Aleksander Świętochowski, a development of views on the Jewish question could be observed, at the turn of the century, in the works of, among others, Andrzej Niemojewski, Kazimierz Ehrenberg, Adolf Nowaczyński or Iza Moszczyńska, as well as Eliza Orzeszkowa⁸⁵ and Bolesław Prus⁸⁶. For each of them the change was different and its intensity varied. Among the positivists, it is claimed that the most radical change of views was that of “The Apostle of Truth”⁸⁷. It is worth remembering, however, that among the intellectuals of that era there were also those who remained faithful to the ideas of tolerance and did not change their position towards the Jews despite the change in their social and political attitudes, considering the idea itself to be universal⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ W. Waclawczyk, *Prawa człowieka w publicystyce Aleksandra Świętochowskiego*, “Doctrina. Studia społeczno-polityczne” 2010, nr 7, p. 172.

⁸⁵ Eliza Orzeszkowa, however, in her unfinished work “O nacjonalizmie żydowskim”, written just before her death, returned to the idea of assimilation as a real chance for the reconciliation of the Polish and Jewish peoples. As Jerzy Jedlicki noted, her text was “emblematic of the mentality of the “progressives”, who did not value popular attachment to cultural traditions and religious rituals and were not prepared to accept either a multinational state or a civilisation of many cultures”; J. Jedlicki, *Intelektualiści oporni wobec fali antysemityzmu (Królestwo Polskie w latach 1912–1914)*, in: *Kwestia żydowska w XIX wieku. Spory o tożsamość Polaków*, red. G. Borkowska, M. Rudkowska, Warszawa 2004, p. 467.

⁸⁶ See also: F. Guesnet, *Der Fremde als Nachbar. Polnische Positionen zur jüdischen Präsenz Texte seit 1800*, Frankfurt am Main 2009.

⁸⁷ Among Warsaw daily newspapers, “New Gazette” (“Nowa Gazeta”) remained faithful to the idea of assimilation and equal rights for the Jews, among intellectuals, Teresa Lubińska, Stefania Sempołowska, Ludomi Grendyszyński, Leo Belmont, Józef Lange, and Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, among socialists: Julian Marchlewski, Róża Luksenburg and Marian Bielecki; J. Jedlicki, *Intelektualiści*, pp. 463–476.

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O autorce:

dr Marta Cichocka – historyk, pracownik Instytutu Historycznego Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego.

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e-mail: marta.cichocka@usz.edu.pl