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THE REVEREND PROFESSOR ALEKSY KLAWEK
(1890—1969)

A characterization of his scientific method

1. *Home and school*

The schoolteacher's family will automatically convey to its members certain values, for example: respect for learning, interest in books, a methodical approach to work and a realization of the constant need to educate oneself. All this rapidly bears fruit in children of school age, and will subsequently help particularly gifted individuals to focus their own personal, deeper interests. This was exactly the case in the life of Aleksy Klawek, one of the six children of Ignacy, a teacher from Rogoźno Wielkopolskie. The local classical gymnasium, organized with typical German thoroughness, developed in the young Aleksy considerable talents in the humanities, particularly languages. He mastered to a high degree three classical languages: Latin, Greek and Hebrew. As for modern languages, he acquired English and French. And since all classes were conducted in the German language it is clear that the young Klawek, on his matriculation in December 1908, was already well prepared to undertake linguistic studies. Despite the fact that his path would follow an ostensibly quite different course (in that he chose theology), in principle he was to become above all a linguist-philologist.

2. *Higher Education*

The Seminary in Poznań brought Aleksy Klawek into contact with Professor Władysław Hozakowski, one of the leading Polish biblical scholars of the period. Prof. Hozakowski helped to sharpen

the critical faculties and independent mind of his talented student, who was soon to be selected by the Seminary authorities for further specialist studies abroad. After graduation (15. 2. 1913) and a brief pastoral assignment the Rev. Klawek commenced further biblical studies in Münster, Westfalen. Here his activities were supervised above all by Professor Max Meinertz, who trained his student as a specialist in the New Testament. This is directly reflected in the subject of his doctoral dissertation: *Das Gebet zu Jesus. Seine Berechtigung und Übung nach den Schriften des Neuen Testaments*. Although finished in 1917, the thesis was not published until 1921 (in Münster, in the series „Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen“).

After receiving his doctoral degree, the Rev. Klawek spends some time engaged in additional research under O. Bardenhewer in Munich; he also attends lectures by the well known evangelical exegete A. Harnack in Berlin. Above all, however, he now cooperates with Professors J. Nikel and J. Sickenberger from Wrocław (Breslau). During this period his postdoctoral dissertation (Habilitation) slowly takes shape: „A study on the childhood of Jesus in the Gospel according to Saint Luke”. Only the first part of this theses was published, in 1921, bearing the title: *The Bethlehem Night. History or legend? In defence of the credibility of Luke 2, 1—20*” (publication by the St. Wojciech Bookshop, Poznań).

3. Methodology of A. Klawek's doctoral and postdoctoral theses.

There is an old legal adage which says: „Distingue tempora, et concordabis iura”. This maxim is also appropriate to both of the above mentioned works by A. Klawek. As we know, the first two decades of the XX century (like the entire second half of the XIX century) practised without reservation the apologetic method in Catholic theology. Since, on the one hand, the increasing number of historical or archeological discoveries and on the other hand biblical exegesis (conducted in an extreme form by evangelist and liberal circles) often undermined the traditional teaching of the Church, its representatives — both official and academic — undertook its defence. Every writer who did not unequivocally represent traditional doctrine was automatically suspected of unorthodox

views, thus becoming a potential adversary. Such labels as „heretic”, „liberal”, „rationalist”, „enemy of the Church” were applied at every opportunity.

To a certain extent Father Aleksy also succumbed to this trend in religious writing. Undoubtedly he was influenced in this respect by the supervisor of his doctoral dissertation, then by the views which dominated the works of the Wrocław (Breslau) biblical scholars. Thus in the „Introduction” to his thesis A. Klawek states that he was inspired to write on this particular subject by „apologetic motives”¹; and in *The Bethlehem Night* he mentions that the main chapter „contains a defence of the credibility of Luke 2. For I thought that this matter would interest wider circles both among theologians and non-theologians”². Further on we read here that „the truth of Christian teaching, based on several verses of the Gospels according to St Matthew (1:18) and St Luke (1:34, 35), is the main subject of attacks by liberal criticism”³, thus it is necessary to defend it.

This statement of the apologetic motives underlying both dissertations by A. Klawek does not of course detract from their value; for the author does not by any means restrict himself to this method. Nor does he engage in some academic demagoguery, dismissing the arguments of his ideological opponents with shallow, generalized arguments. Indeed, his alleged adversaries — whom he always treats seriously — indirectly provide him with an indispensable link in his quest for new arguments, deepening his understanding of difficult or controversial problems. In this respect A. Klawek is not impressed either by the great name or the dignity of the university office held by a given author, but only by the strength of the arguments he employs. For apart from apologist tendencies

¹ Cf. *Das Gebet zu Jesus. Seine Berechtigung und Übung nach den Schriften des Neuen Testaments. Eine biblisch-theologische Studie* von A. Klawek, Münster i. W. 1921, Verlag der Aschendorfschen Verlagsbuchhandlung (= Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, Hrsg. M. Meinertz, Bd. VI, H. 5), p. 1.

² *Noc Betlejemską. Historia czy legenda? Obrona wiarygodności Łk 2, 1—20*, Poznań—Warszawa 1921, Księgarnia św. Wojciecha (= Sprawy Biblijne 2), p. 5.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

he is also motivated by „historical interests concerning the beginnings of the Christian religion”⁴, and even by „liturgical interests”⁵.

Calmly, without exaggerated apprehension or artificial „dodges”, Professor A. Klawek deals with his chosen problem in „*The Prayer to Jesus*”. With complete frankness and clarity he explains the reproaches made by Orygenes, as well as by the Socinians and many Protestants, against the prayer, of which Jesus is claimed to be the subject. In support of this claim he presents the following arguments: 1) As He is identified with the Father in the Gospels, Jesus provides the basis for such a prayer; 2) the earliest Christian communities already knew the prayer to Jesus; 3) St Paul is the worshipper of Jesus; 4) the remaining books of the New Testament bear witness to a Jesus cult (cf. eg. 2 Jn 9; Rev. 5, 13; Acts 9, 14, 21). Summing up his evidence — based on biblical (and partly non-biblical, eg. the Apocrypha, the Fathers of the Church) materials — the author expresses the conviction that the main factor in a commentary on the relevant question is the acceptance or non-acceptance of the divinity of Christ. Ultimately it is this which decides in which way the various scholars will interpret the relevant texts; unfortunately, they sometimes allow themselves to stretch the meaning considerably, so that it tallies with their philosophical premises⁶.

It is worth noting here that during the 1920's the role of oral tradition — which exerted such a decisive influence on the literary form of the synoptic Gospels — was not yet fully appreciated. At the same time there was a tendency to give an extremely literal interpretation both to the words of Jesus himself, as recorded in the New Testament „ipsissima verba”, and to quotations from the Old Testament mentioned in the New. Thus in those days exegetes were confronted by a difficult task, when attempting to introduce certain nuances of meaning in order to replace literalism with the idea itself, as intended by the hagiographer. Here are two examples of the efforts made by A. Klawek: a) the word „Kyrios” is ambiguous, because although it most frequently

⁴ *Das Gebet* ..., p. 1.

⁵ *Loco cit.*

⁶ *Noc betlejemaska*, p. 12.

defines God the Father, it may also refer only to Jesus (e.g. Jn. 4, 15)⁷; b) the concept of *hyios theou* represents a different messianic aspect in the Old and New Testaments⁸.

Most instructive, from the point of view of methodology, is the study on the „*Bethlehem Night*”. The author engages a numerous selection of scholars, representing various camps, in a constant discussion concerning the historical truth of the account in Luke 2, 1—20. Nor does he restrict his arguments to stressing the point, that the divergences existing between the accounts by Matthew and Luke are the result of different personal and literary concepts on the part of the authors, as well as of the fact that the two gospels were addressed to different audiences⁹. Following the arguments of his opponents very closely, even accepting some of their observations as correct, he nevertheless convincingly demonstrates the weakness of their evidence, as far as the Old Testament quotations contained in the New Testament are concerned. Thus, for example, he writes: „Since prophecies constituted generally known apologetic criteria, for almost all the details (in the accounts of the childhood of Jesus) corresponding verses from the Old Testament were sought. In other words: facts from the Gospels had chronological priority, and so it was these which influenced the manner of exegetizing the Books of the Old Testament... This method could be used, because at that time it was generally accepted practice to allegorize the Holy Bible, both among Jews and Christians”¹⁰. In this way our Professor explains, that it was not the Bethlehem quotation by Micah 5, 1 which caused the Christians to think of the birth of Christ as having taken place here, but the other way round: the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem reminded the Evangelist of the text by Micah. This text, taken in itself, does not necessarily place emphasis on the location of the Messiah's birthplace, but rather on his descent from the line of Dawid (which originated from Bethlehem).

The comparative history of religion, so fashionable at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries, was fond of seeking the sources of

⁷ *Das Gebet* ..., p. 87.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 54 f.

¹⁰ *Noc betlejemaska*, p. 16.

Christianity in the religions of Babylon, Persia or India¹¹. Undeterred by the inaccuracy and uncertainty, which specialists knew to beset the dating of these foreign texts, Professor A. Klawek drew upon them in his own research, together with their exponents. It transpires, however, during the course of his calm reasoning and precise comparative analysis, that possible influences of Mithraism, Buddhism, the cult of the Caesars, Egyptian myths, Adonis cult or finally astral mythology are insufficient motivation for an attempt at undermining the originality of the Gospels. The unpretentious, almost „dry” Gospel accounts are far removed from the esoteric ambiguity of the above mentioned texts, not to mention the improbability of their having influenced the poor, backward and rather isolated Palestinian province.

It is well known that even to this day a considerable difficulty, from the exegetic point of view, is presented by the account in Luke of the „first census, conducted during the reign of Quirinius in Syria” (Luke 2, 2). The problem is that we know of the Roman censuses from the years 28 and 8 B.C.; but during the period from 10 to 4 B.C. the legate of Syria was Sentius Saturninus, not Quirinius (*Antiq.* 18, 1, 1; *Bell.* 2, 8, 1). Does this mean that St Luke made a mistake? Professor A. Klawek discusses the existence of this problem with great clarity. He notes, however, with caution that in view of the lack of exact extra-biblical sources it is not possible to deny a priori the account by Luke. He adds that in the future we may expect to discover some new text, which will clarify the matter. Moreover, in a footnote (on page 56) he draws attention to the fact that according to an inscription from the Temple of Men-Askaênos in Antioch, Septimus Quirinius received the title of Duumvir of Antioch. This text probably originates from the year 8 B.C., when Quirinius commenced his war with the Homonads. Thus if Quirinius is present in the East circa 8 B.C., then his participation in the census of the years 6 B.C. (the presumed birthdate of Jesus) is not out of the question. — Indeed, this viewpoint still retains its validity as a historical hypothesis today. According to the hypothesis, the census was begun by Saturninus — but completed by Quirinius.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 27 f.

To do this he did not have to be a legate, as the title of hegemonos (Luke 2, 21) signified a leader during time of war, who had the right to collect taxes and organize a census¹².

4. The „Exegetic School” of Professor A. Klawek.

The title above may sound a little pompous, and appears to be inaccurate. For no one has yet ever written about such a „school”; nor can one point to any „followers”. The title thus refers only to the method of scholarly research, which Professor A. Klawek developed as a lecturer (at the University of Lwów 1923—1939, and then in Cracow 1945—1966), patiently passing it on to his doctoral candidates.

Above all, he entirely abandoned the apologetic method, although this was still employed by many foreign (e.g. F. Ceuppens, J. Prado, P. Heinisch) and Polish (e.g. J. Kruszyński, O. Smoroński) biblical scholars. He considered that this method concerned only dogmatists or fundamentalist theologians, but not exegetes. The true vocation of the exegete is the discussion and determination of biblical texts, as well as the extraction of their basic meaning. In this field only grammatical-linguistic, archeological and historical realia are important. By following this path Prof. A. Klawek embraced the ideal of the „small scale”, working on relatively minor problems of scholarship. Great studies did not suit him, especially those of the textbook type which by definition aspire to sweeping syntheses, thus simplifying many issues. For this reason — despite fact that he was rich in ideas, continually inspiring new scholarly journals, symposiums and publications — he himself preferred to concentrate on small texts, submitting them to subtle linguistic analysis.

Naturally, his main field of study was based on the textual sources. His excellent knowledge of Oriental languages (including Syrian and Accadian) enabled him to conduct his own independent

¹² Cf. [M. Wolniewicz, commentary to Lk 2, 1—5 in:] *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu*, ed. by M. Peter and M. Wolniewicz, (= The Poznań Bible), Vol. III, *Nowy Testament*, Poznań 1975, pp. 154 f.

research, free from outside influence. Of course, this kind of work is extremely time-consuming, requiring considerable self-sacrifice. Indeed, the life style of the Professor was almost ascetic; neither the furniture in his flat, nor his clothing and diet would impress a connoisseur of contemporary consumer society. Yet the joy A. Klawek derived from even modest scholarly achievements compensated for everything. With a characteristic gleam in his eyes, he would share his discoveries with former or present students, who so often — and with such pleasure — visited his little flat, where they sought that unique atmosphere of authentic scholarly research.

During the first years of his professorship A. Klawek still followed his interest in the New Testament. Hence his articles antititled: *The name of Jesis in the light of biblical philology* (1925)¹³, *The significance of the word catalim in Luke 2, 7* (1925)¹⁴; *Philological remarks on the name of Mary* (1926)¹⁵. Later, on his appointment to the Chair of Old Testament Studies in Lwów, he concentrates his research interests in this field. He becomes particularly concerned with the Psalms, which at that time were studied mainly by non-catholic scholars. Prof. A. Klawek does not hesitate to make use of the findings or stronger hypotheses of these scholars. Such exploitation of „alien” exegesis was then still quite exceptional among catholic theologians, showing A. Klawek to be a precursor of biblical oecumenism. Giving new values in this way to the literary-critical method, as well as to so-called *Gattungsforschung*, the Professor does not nevertheless neglect the theological content of the relevant texts. His short commentaries — usually just a few pages long — on the various Psalms, originally published in the „Collectanea Theologica” („Przegląd Teologiczny”) —

¹³ *Imię Jezus w świetle filologii biblijnej*, Sprawozdania Towarzystwa Naukowego we Lwowie (= STNL) 5 (1925), pp. 3 f.

¹⁴ *Znaczenie słowa „katalyma” u Łuk. 2, 7*, Przegląd Teologiczny 6 (1925), pp. 87—89. Cf. French summary in: *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 14 (1925), p. 419.

¹⁵ *Uwagi filologiczne o imieniu „Maryja”*, Przegląd Teologiczny 7 (1926), pp. 434—436. Cf. French summary in: *RScPhilt* 16 (1927), pp. 276 f.

Ps 110 in 1929¹⁶ and 1930¹⁷, Ps 51 in 1933¹⁸, then after the Second World War in the „Biblical and Liturgical Journal” („Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny” — here he discussed approximately 40 Psalms), constitute miniature models of exegetic and biblical scholarship. At the same time they are distinguished by their excellent yet colloquial Polish style.

Prof. A. Klawek attached great importance to scientific integrity. With particular vehemence he would condemn all vestiges of plagiarism, which in a country poor in foreign literature (during the period after both I and II World Wars) found their way into the works of many a writer. In his numerous reviews, published in both Polish and foreign periodicals, the Professor pays close attention to whether a given work is original and independent, and to whether it significantly contributes to the development of biblical studies. At the same time, however, he is a benevolent censor, readily offering praise, encouragement, congratulations even. It was precisely this approach which gave his students the courage to write. He appreciated the difficulty and also the great importance of their first steps, that initial tentative research which a competent teacher should approve and stimulate.

A particularly distinct feature in the writing of A. Klawek was his hostility towards — as he put it — „quotation mania” (excessive reliance on even the most insignificant works of other authors). He was fond of saying: „If you do not have the courage to speak your own mind, without constantly relying on the authority of others, then you clearly have no mind of your own. And if you have’nt, why do you write and repeat the thoughts of others authors?”

Towards the end of his life, probably as he felt his strength ebb, Professor A. Klawek rather unexpectedly turned from writing analytical studies to synthetic articles in the field of hermeneutics and biblical theology. Presumably he felt the need to leave behind,

¹⁶ *O Psalmie 110* (109), Przegląd Teologiczny 10 (1929), pp. 154—156.

¹⁷ Cf. a review of L. Durr, *Psalm 110 im Lichte der neueren altorientalischen Forschung*, Münster i. W. 1929, [in:] Przegląd Teologiczny 10 (1929), pp. 339—241.

¹⁸ *Nowa interpretacja psalmu 51*, STNL 13 (1933), pp. 56 f.

from his rich experience, his personal creed as a biblical theologian. It should be mentioned here that he surprised Polish theological opinion with the broad scope of his vision, and with his knowledge of other, non-biblical areas of theology. Particularly noteworthy are the following articles (in Polish) ¹⁹:

The New Structure of Contemporary Theology — RBL 18 (1965), pp. 2—14

A view of the works of Polish Theologians in the XX century, RBL 19 (1966), pp. 131—143

The Meaning of the Constitution „Dei Verbum”, Znak 19 (1967), no. 2, pp. 159—176

The Freedom of Research in Contemporary Theology, Tygodnik Powszechny 21 (1967) no. 20, pp. 1, 5

The Controversy over Original Sin, Znak 19 (1967), no. 10, pp. 1378—1396

Contemporary Interpretation of the Books of the Old Testament, RBL 22 (1969), pp. 185—199.

From the author

I did not know Professor A. Klawek personally until 1950. Although he had already reached the age of 60, he emanated the energy and optimism of a 40-year-old. He literally infected us young students with his passion for research, his all-consuming love of learning and his constant quest for contacts with other scholars — and books — from literally all over the world. He read rapidly, then immediately „circulated” the new text, believing that only a well-worn book can prove its worth.

¹⁹ The bibliography of A. Klawek was published by Z. J. Kapera in the special issue of the Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny (= RBL): „Ks. Aleksy Klawek 1890—1969. Wspomnienia przyjaciół, kolegów i uczniów. Z Teki pośmiertnej. Bibliografia”, RBL 23 (1970), No. 6, pp. 257—336. It enumerates 321 items published by A. Klawek and 21 items about Prof. Klawek. Cf. Z. J. Kapera, *Bibliografia prac księdza Aleksego Klawka (1890—1969), profesora UJK i UJ*, RBL 23 (1970), pp. 319—336. A supplementary bibliography enumerates 8 items published by A. Klawek and 41 items about him. Cf. RBL 33 (1980), pp. 227—232. [Ed.]

There was only one thing at that time which A. Klawek no longer treated with enthusiasm: international congresses of Bible specialists. After the war he did not attend a single conference of this type. Perhaps he was afraid of wasting time and energy? Whatever the reason, this was certainly a great pity, as he above all had the potential to make the name of Polish biblical studies known in the world, thanks to his knowledge of foreign languages.

In 1969 Polish religious scholarship lost an eminent man, a great intellect, an experienced editor and publisher of ancient Eastern literature, mainly biblical. It will not be easy to replace him in the pantheon of Polish learning

Ave, pia anima!