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Grzegorz Bachanek

Saint Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński and the problems of the Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation

Гжегож Баханек

Святий Зигмунт Щенсний Фелінський та проблеми польсько-українського примирення

На прикладі діяльності Варшавського римо-католицького архієпископа Зигмунта Щенсного Фелінського (1822-1895) розкривається історія польсько-українських відносин. З огляду на складність цих стосунків, висвітлюється біографія, діяльність і вчення Архієпископа, а також його місія направлена на примирення двох народів. Показана допомога переслідуваним у Російській імперії уніатам, зокрема прохання у Папи Римського про призначення греко-католицького Єпископа для таких регіонів, як Холм і Підляшся, а також відкриття у Римі окремого русинського коледжу для навчання уніатського духовенства.

Особлива увага приділяється останньому періоду життя Зигмунта Фелінського у 1883–1895 роках, який він присвятив пастирській роботі серед українців та поляків на Тернопільщині, намагаючись відродити не тільки релігійне життя регіону, але й соціальний, культурний і економічний розвиток обох народів. Зокрема, показано його особливу роль у відкритті польсько-українських шкіл.

Ключові слова: Зигмунт Щенсний Фелінський, архієпископ, примирення, польсько-українські відносини, братство народів, патріотизм, Уніатська церква

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On example of activities of archbishop of Warsaw Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński (1822-1895) the history of Poland-Ukraine relations is shown. Taking into account these complicated relationships, biography, work and teachings of the archbishop, his mission focused on reconciliation of two nations are highlighted. His help to the persecuted in the Russian Empire Uniats is exposed, such as request to the Pope to assign the Greek Catholic bishop for Chelm Land and Podlachia and opening in Rome of separate Ruthenian college for training Uniate clergy.

Particular attention is paid to the last period of life of Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński, in the years 1883–1895, which he dedicated to the pastoral work among the Ukrainians and the Poles in Ternopil region. His efforts to revive their religious life, to inspire their social activity, cultural and economic development are shown. Establishing of Polish-Ukrainian schools, striving for the unity and the reconciliation of both nations are presented.

Keywords: Feliński Zygmunt Szczęśny, archbishop, reconciliation, Polish-Ukrainian relations, brotherhood of nations, patriotism, Uniate church

The Polish-Ukrainian relations have a difficult history of conflicts. However, there exists also a history of mutual cooperation, interaction and assistance. Undoubtedly, with reference to the problems of those complicated relations it is worth mentioning the biography, activity and teachings of the archbishop of Warsaw Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński (1822–1895). His commitment to the mission of the reconciliation of the two nations seems authentic and profound.

The future bishop was born in Voiutyn in Volhynia (present-day Ukraine), near the town of Lutsk in a Polish Catholic family, in an environment in which the cultures, languages and traditions of many nations crossed paths [1, p. 9] It is with Ukraine that the childhood and youth of Feliński, his first friendships, his process of forming a mature personality and his path to sanctity are linked. It is there that he acquires knowledge in a parochial school and in a secondary school, receives his First Communion (Berestechko) and Confirmation (Lutsk), undertakes work after having completed his studies (Sokolovka) and enters the diocesan seminary (Zhytomyr). It is also there that the tombs of his parents are located.

When mentioning the kindness extended to him by his protector Zenon Brzozowski and his friend Franciszek Krassowski, the young Feliński writes: «...our hearts and even our Ukrainian heads are better than those filtered Western brains, which are only too pleased to throw the entire burden onto other people, without any desire to make the smallest sacrifice themselves» [2, p. 238]. These words indicate the sense of a certain Ukrainian identity in Feliński, who, of course, feels a Pole, but he also feels an inhabitant of Ukraine, understood as a certain region, his little homeland. He evaluates the so perceived Ukrainian identity very positively, contrasting the local solidarity, generosity and readiness to help with the individualism and egoism of the inhabitants of the Western Europe.

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Feliński emphasizes that, as a child living in Voiutyn with his parents, he more frequently attended Holy Masses celebrated in the Eastern rite in the church of the Basilian monks in the nearby village of Bialostok than in his remote Roman Catholic parish church in Skurch. He refers to that fact in order to indicate very good relations of both Catholic rites at that time: «both Catholic rites lived in such perfect harmony that the Roman Catholics attended the Uniate churches and the Uniates attended the Roman Catholic churches, whichever was closer» [3, p. 47].

Having completed studies in Moscow and in Paris, Feliński became involved in the mission of helping the exiles to Siberia, which mission had been initiated by Ksawera Grocholska née Brzozowska. The participants in the mission managed to find, among others, several dozen Uniate priests exiled deep into Russia, who lived in extreme poverty, solitude and often without any possibility of receiving sacraments. They had been contacted by mail, kept in touch with and aided [4, p. 283–289].

While working in Saint Petersburg, Feliński became friends with Konstanty Łubieński, who courageously defended the rights of the Uniates against the archbishop of Mohylev, Waclaw Żyliński, who had earlier been forced by Tzar Alexander II to release a decree banning the so-called «ex-Uniates» from receiving sacraments. The two friends elaborated a memorial to the bishop on that matter [3, p. 435–438] Feliński reminded the seminarians of the Spiritual Academy in St. Petersburg about the obligation to maintain the brotherly unity with the Uniates and to grant them sacraments, contrary to the inhumane decisions of the Tsar, as well as to support the prosecuted [5, p. 35; 46; 64].

As the archbishop of Warsaw he presented the difficult situation of the Uniates to the Pope and asked for the appointment of bishops for them [6, p. 208] He also advocated the rights and privileges of the Uniate clergy. Appreciating those efforts, on 4 June 1863 the priests of the Uniate rite took part in the main Corpus Christi procession. The archbishop at the head of the procession entered the Basilican church. There, in front of a large altar, the Gospel was sung in the Latin language and in the Slav language and a benediction with the Blessed Sacrament was given. Ignacy Polkowski believes that Feliński's activity in defence of the persecuted Uniates and his efforts towards the reconciliation of the Catholics of

both rites played a major role in the decision of the Russian authorities to expel the bishop from Warsaw [7, p. 215–216].

On his return from the exile, Feliński would meet with Uniates, support them materially, do his best to know their problems and, as far as possible, come to their aid. He presented Pope Leo XIII with a request to appoint an Uniate bishop for the regions of Chelm and Podlachia and to establish in Rome a separate Ruthenian college for educating the Uniate clergy [8, p. 18].

Archbishop Feliński spent the last years of his life in Dz'vinyachka. He arrived at a poor locality, situated far from major cities in the Eastern Galicia, on the territory of the Tarnopolskie voivodship. The village was inhabited mostly by Ruthenians, but also by Poles and Jews.

Feliński worked in Dz'vinyachka as a chaplain in a chapel belonging to a local manor house. He observed the problems of the inhabitants, their material poverty, deficiencies in religious education, alcoholism, discords between neighbours, ethnic conflicts. He was approachable to everyone. His modest dwellings and clothes, as well as frequent fasting won him the respect of the local people.

Feliński began his pastoral activity in Dz'vinyachka by organizing Parish Missions, which were attended by both the Poles and the Ruthenians. Everyday Holy Masses were celebrated for them in both rites. On Sundays and on festive days he celebrated the liturgy, served the parishioners with great devotion in the Sacrament of Penance, visited the sick and he also organized a group of altar servers from among older youth. He also initiated living rosary circles and the brotherhood of the holy scapular, to which he accepted children, youth and adults. He became a spiritual leader of the Third Order of Saint Francis. Thanks to the pastoral activity of its bishop, Dz'vinyachka became a centre of religious life, visited also by people arriving there from distant places. The chapel belonging to the manor house appeared to be too small, therefore, in 1894 Feliński started to build a new church at his own expense [9, p. 389–408].

The pastoral activity of Feliński in the final period of his life was not limited to Dz'vinyachka. The traces of his work may be found, among others, in Chernivitsi, Melnitsa or Lviv [9, p. 415–417].

According to the inhabitants of Dz'vinyachka, in the period of the activity of Zygmunt Feliński a significant economic growth took place

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in that previously poor and backward village. The bishop inspired people to work hard, stay sober, save up and be honest. He supported materially the poor. He advocated fair and regular remuneration for workers. He co-organized not only the teaching of reading and writing, but also the possibility of providing vocational training for the youth [9, p. 409] It seems that through the reinforcement of faith the local community experienced moral revival, the restoration of the work ethos and the creation of the social capital of trust, which made possible the fruitful cooperation of the inhabitants.

In his pastoral work Feliński dedicated a lot of attention to the question of the language. In one of his letters he emphasizes that the knowledge of the language of the local Ruthenian people enables a priest to give sermons in that language and that it is a prerequisite of the pastoral work [10].

In 1884 in Chernivitsi Archbishop Feliński founded a socio-educational centre and entrusted it to the care of the Sisters of the Family of Mary [9, p. 421] In one of his letters he expresses joy that in that boarding school there live and study more than forty girls. Polish, German and Ruthenian girls cooperate in complete unity [11].

In Dz'vinyachka, near the end of his life, Zygmunt Szczęsny Feliński established a school for the Polish and Ukrainian children. It was a People's School, the first one in the history of that village. It was opened in 1885. Also education for older youth was organized at the same school in order to make it possible for the young people to learn to read and write. At the beginning of its activity the school was located in a building donated for that purpose by the owner of Dz'vinyachka, Count Marcin Kęszycki. However, in 1892 the bishop erected at his own expense a new large school building. The school was run by the Sisters of the Family of Mary. The bishop himself taught there and visited classes. For the last three years of his life he devoutly fulfilled the function of the head of the local school council. Through that school the bishop wanted to build the mutual trust of the Poles and the Ruthenians. He wanted the children to learn both languages and, without losing their national identity, to grow up in the respect for both nationalities and cultures [9, p. 409–413] In one of his letters Feliński praises father Tomaszewski for his commitment to the matters of the People's School, for his knowledge of the Ukrainian

language in which he conducts classes and for the ability to cooperate with Uniate priests [12] Feliński writes about the school in Dz'vinyachka with pride: «where Polish and Ruthenian children, in perfect unity, all learn both languages, although for the Ruthenians the language of instruction is Ruthenian and for the Poles – Polish» [11].

The educational activity of Bishop Feliński was his answer to the dramatic situation of the people living in rural areas at that time. In 1880 nearly 14% of the inhabitants of Galicia could not read and write [13, p. 140] Thanks to the work of social activists the education in Galicia developed significantly. In 1914 as many as over 6 thousand elementary schools existed there, attended by 86% of all the children [3, p. 126].

In his epic poem *Prakseda. Legenda z teki Anhellego* [Praxedis. A Legend from Anhelli's Collection] Feliński makes a reference to the *Legenda Poczajowska* [Pochayiv Legend] [14, p. 17] For the entire centuries the people of Volhynia and Galicia sang songs full of gratitude to Holy Mary, recognizing in the saving of the monastery during the invasion of the Turkish-Tatar army in 1675 a sign of her protection.

Feliński refers to the legend, nurtured by the Ukrainian people, about twelve sleeping brothers, whose relics are deposited in the Kiev Lavra. In the legend about the twelve pious brothers, who were bricklayers and attempted to build a magnificent bell tower for God, he notices a valuable lesson about the meaning of humility in the life of the Christians. When vanity and the desire to win human appreciation appear, the effort of a human being ceases to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God [15, p. 136–138].

In his *Memoirs* Feliński presents stories which he encountered during his childhood, regarding the well-known figures of the Ukrainian population of that time. One of them was Ustim Jakimowicz Karmeluk (1787–1835), a Ukrainian peasant, who repeatedly defied authorities, was captured many times, but always managed to escape his persecutors. Feliński tells a story about how Karmeluk helped a poor widow who was unable to pay the taxes imposed on her by the Tsarist government [3, p. 66–69] The issue of the Ukrainian inspirations in the Polish literature is developed more broadly by A. Baron [16, p. 113–119].

According to Feliński, an important role in the mission of the Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation may be played by religious orders. In a letter

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to the future Blessed Mother Marcelina Darowska he shares his joy about the fact that in the order of the Family of Mary there appeared the first Ruthenian candidate, very attached to her nationality and remaining faithful to the rite of the Uniate church [17] He is also glad that as many as three Polish women in the order, who study to become teachers, speak well the Ruthenian language [11] The bishop builds a monastery in Dz'vinyachka for the Sisters of the Family of Mary close to the Uniate church, so that the Ukrainian children attending the school and the kindergarten at the monastery could easily participate in the Holy Masses in their own rite [18] The bishop plans to establish in Dz'vinyachka not only the principal house and the house for the novitiate candidates to the Sisters of the Family of Mary, but also a school in which the sisters would acquire skills necessary in order to work in People's Schools as teachers speaking both the Polish and the Ruthenian language [19].

In a particular manner he encourages the Felician sisters working in Galicia to oppose to the attempts to divide the two kindred nations. Through the spirit of sacrifice the wounds may heal and the contending parties may reconcile. Thanks to the humble work of the sisters, the unity and cooperation may be transferred from schools and nurseries to peasants' cabins and to manor houses. According to Feliński, the true and lasting reconciliation will not be effected through the activity in the field of politics but thanks to the sincere and selfless love derived from faith. It may be accomplished not from the top down but from the bottom up. A religious order, by accepting into its ranks Ruthenian girls from the Uniate church, may become an example of the unity in Christ, an example of respecting national differences [20].

Under the responsibility of Archbishop Feliński the Sisters of the Family of Mary in Dz'vinyachka took up educational, formative and charitable work in the Polish and Ukrainian environment. Not only did they teach at the school, but they also took care of pre-school children, conducted organizations for youth, relieved the sick and the poor. That activity was conducted while respecting the language, culture and customs of both nations [9, p. 422].

Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński is a Polish patriot. His love for his homeland is permeated by the Christian faith. Therefore, he rejects not only hatred and revenge, but also the striving of one nation for ruling over

the world or the national selfishness. His love towards his homeland is linked with the desire that the relations between nations be permeated by the Gospel and based on the principle of brotherhood. In his opinion, the will to conquer other nations and to erase their national identities results from paganism, whereas Christianity calls for the solidarity between nations.

In particular, Feliński calls for the brotherhood and the solidarity between the Poles and the Ruthenians. If the situation of the Ruthenians in Galicia depends to some extent on the Poles, because of their strong position in the domestic Parliament and in the autonomous institutions, then it is the Poles who should be the first to extend a helping hand to the Ruthenians and to support them in the development of their own culture and their national aspirations. They should also abandon the intention to polonize the Ruthenians and they should respect the gift of the national identity and culture which the Ruthenians had received from God.

In the works of Feliński there appears an idea of a confederation of free nations, which, thanks to being united, would be capable of independently existing, developing and defending themselves against powerful neighbours: Russia, Austria and Turkey. And the idea here would not be to return simply to the historic Polish-Lithuanian union, but to build a confederation which would not be based on the principles of the former rule but on those of equality, common interests and brotherhood. Its basis should not be the concept of the common Slav origin, but the concept of the Catholic faith, as the foundation of the solidarity of the peoples [21, p. 91–93].

Feliński strongly encourages the Poles to voluntarily and decisively resign from the historical claims to ruling over the Ruthenians and to invite the Ruthenians to create a federation based on the principles of equality. The removing of the threats of the Polish hegemony could favour the development of the Catholicism in Ukraine, and the Catholicism, by its nature, supports national cultures and separate liturgical rites. Such a kindred union may become an example and an encouragement also for other nations which cannot secure themselves an independent state existence [21, p. 30–33].

Feliński's call for the brotherhood of nations and for social solidarity became particularly valid in the face of the phenomenon of taking

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advantage of the Polish-Ukrainian tensions by Russia and Austria. The two partitionist states would stifle any attempts at resistance and revolts not only with direct repressions towards the particular people, but also through fuelling animosities at the social, faith-related and national levels [22, p. 43–47].

The voice of the Saint, calling for the reconciliation of Poland and Ukraine, seems valid also today.

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