



Christianity as the Basis of Wincenty Lutosławski's “Polish Yoga”

Agata Świerzowska  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7696-1631>

Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations
Jagiellonian University in Kraków
e-mail: agata.swierzowska@uj.edu.pl

Abstract

The article is an attempt to show the importance of Christianity in the reinterpretation of the Indian yoga tradition, in order to include it in a new (Polish) cultural context. Christianity allowed transformation of this culturally alien concept in such a way that it ceased to be seen as something foreign and exotic, and started to be treated as a Polish discipline – in a way specifically addressing the needs and conditions of the Polish nation. The article focusses on the approach to yoga proposed by Wincenty Lutosławski, the author of the first “Polish yoga” handbook, although other interpretations are also referred to, in order to demonstrate the widest possible approach to this discipline.

Keywords: Wincenty Lutosławski, yoga, Christianity, esotericism, messianism

Słowa kluczowe: Wincenty Lutosławski, joga, chrześcijaństwo, ezoteryka, mesjanizm

Although the title of this article focusses on the “Polish yoga” created and popularised by Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954), its analysis concerns a considerably wider issue – the meaning of the Christian tradition in the reinterpretation of Indian yoga, in order to include it in a new (Polish) cultural context. From the very beginning (from the mid-19th century) of the presence of Indian yoga in the Polish cultural context, it was almost always interpreted via a Christian perspective. However, in this case Christianity was understood in a very unorthodox sense – usually through various esoteric traditions (mainly Theosophy and Anthroposophy, but also Rosicrucianism and Martinism). These varied approaches to Christianity shared a perennialist character – in this interpretation, Christianity was treated as one of the many forms of eternal (original) wisdom being manifested. Such an understanding of Christianity was particularly useful for the interpretation of yoga, usually shown by esotericists

as a spiritual path originating in India – a land more mythical than real, which was supposed to be the fount or treasury of this eternal wisdom, bringing emancipation and a new order.

Christianity became one of the main pillars of the domestication¹ of yoga in Poland. The term “domestication” is understood as a type of translation which is more directed towards a specific culture to which it is being introduced, rather than towards keeping its original, unchanged meaning and integrity. Yoga, as the new element, through the process of domestication, not only began to be expressed in a new language, but its key ideas and concepts also began to be redefined, as they were agreed upon in a new cultural context. Due to these changes – and this is the essential issue – yoga could and did become, a realistic option, one that could be accepted, adopted and become part of the everyday life of a Polish person, without them abandoning their Christian tradition or Polish identity. The domestication process of yoga in Poland took place very smoothly, in my opinion, because the idea had already been subject to reinterpretation – mainly through Theosophy,² thanks to which it became even more open to the subsequent changes. Following Arjun Appadurai,³ we can state that yoga, in this new version, became a “soft cultural form,” which allows for a “relatively easy separation of embodied performance from meaning and value, and relatively successful transformation at each level,” and thanks to this, could easily experience “indigenisation.” This process can be seen very clearly in the Polish vision of yoga, based on Christianity. When removed from its original cultural contexts, via Theosophical interpretations, and by placing it into a Christian framework, as well as into Polish historical and cultural conditions, yoga gained a new meaning and new functions, which Polish esotericists expressed via their narratives on the fall and re-birth of Poland, and through this, of all mankind.

The Christianisation of yoga allowed Polish esotericists interested in this spiritual path to achieve several aims. Most importantly, it allowed them to show various paths of yoga as “their own,” that is, in accordance with the Christian norms and values which were also recognised as being Polish. It even allowed for their propagation, showing their deeper meaning, and what is particularly significant, putting them into everyday practice. Thus, Jan Starża-Dzierżbicki (1883–1939), one of the most respected astrologers of the inter-war period, who was also an admirer of Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886),⁴ emphasised that concentration was the key to the prac-

¹ In a loose way this refers to the category of “domestication” (as opposed to “exoticisation”) as a translation strategy, which consists of various techniques aiming at bringing the reader closer to the translated (foreign) text, in order for the reader to understand the text in a similar way to the reader of the original. This often involves losing some of the closeness to the original text. Cf. L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility – A History of Translation*, London 1995.

² In Poland, yoga started to spread in the last decade of the 19th century. It arrived with an entire complex of Theosophical ideas. For further details refer to A. Świerżowska *Joga w Polsce od końca XIX wieku do 1939 roku: konteksty ezoteryczne i interpretacje*, Kraków 2019.

³ A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, London 2005, p. 90.

⁴ Within the Polish esoteric milieu Ramakrishna was seen as a perfect, archetypal yogi. For further details refer to A. Świerżowska, *Ramakrishna – radżajogin i mesjasz. Obraz bengalskiego mistyka w polskiej literaturze ezoterycznej okresu międzywojennego*, [in:] I. Trzcńska, A. Świerżowska (ed.),

tice of yoga as taught by the Bengali mystic. The aim of yoga, as taught by Paramahansa, was the search for the unity of the human soul with that of God, or becoming closer to God via each person's true path. Starża-Dzierżbicki⁵ referred to the following words of the mystic, in order to summarise the essence of yoga: "Each person should follow their own religion: the Christian should follow Christianity, the Mahometan should follow Islam, etc. For Indians the path of the Aryan rishis is the best."⁶ From this, Starża-Dzierżbicki developed the belief that in their essence, the efforts of true yogis run in the same direction as those who see the Gospels as being the "best handbook of fundamental yoga,"⁷ and Ramakrishna himself, whom the astrologer, alongside the Bengali's biographers, placed on a level with Christ, and perceived him as the Messiah, was to be the best proof of this. The direction of these efforts – those of the yogis and those who took the path shown by the Gospels – was described thus by the biblical words "The kingdom of God is within you."⁸ Another esoteric of the inter-war years, a doctor from Lviv, Eugeniusz Polończyk (1863–1932), stated that yoga is not, as commonly believed, a system of exercises, but rather an ancient knowledge which could change the fate of mankind. Looking at reality in the light of this knowledge, and acting in accordance with it, was to be the "practice" of yoga. Polończyk described this light and its three rays in a significant way – that of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,⁹ which clearly shows the intentions of this esotericist. He also directly stated that "The Gospel is the true yoga."¹⁰ Józef Chobot (1875–1942), a publisher of esoteric magazines and social activist, believed that the path which can bring perfection to Europe, and to the whole Western world, is that of karma yoga. In his opinion, this path was the most natural for the inhabitants of this part of the world, as it is the same as the teachings of Christ. Chobot underlined that pursuing the "path of thorns" shown by Jesus, that of work, responsibility and love, is also the realisation of the ideals of karma yoga. Both paths – those of Christianity and karma yoga – came from one and the same source – the belief that man in his nature is a god, and has the power to create his very self. Chobot wrote:

The path of this hardship and work was considered and described by the philosophy of the East and was named karma yoga. And in this field the philosophy of the East and of the West, Christianity and Buddhism, come together, because as both of these worlds proclaim – we are both Gods and the creators of our very selves!¹¹

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⁵ J. Starża-Dzierżbicki, *Radza jogi Ramakriszna: z dziejów buddyzmu i okultyzmu indyjskiego*, Warszawa 1923, p. 112.

⁶ All translations from Polish – A.Ś.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁸ Cf. Lk. 17, 20–21; "[...] the Kingdom of God is within you."

⁹ E. Polończyk, *Czem jest Yoga?*, Lwów 1921, p. 4.

¹⁰ E. Polończyk, *Prawda o yodze i naukach tajemnych*, Warszawa 1932, p. 7.

¹¹ J. Chobot, *Słowo od wydawcy*, [in:] Swami Wiwekananda, *Karma-Joga. Filozofia pracy i obowiązku*, trans. K. Chobot, Katowice 1923, p. 5.

Finally, the Polish esotericists became convinced that Christianity is the yoga of the West. This was the opinion of Kazimierz Chodkiewicz (1892–1980), a Theosophist and follower of parapsychology, who emphasised that a full understanding of the yoga of the West contains

the simple Christian catechism, a collection of suitably selected, clearly presented and sublime moral teachings. It is the system of bhakti and karma yoga, and if one lives by these teachings every day, it will lead us into spiritual worlds, and directs us within them as safely as the yogis of the East lead their followers on the Holy Path.¹²

Such a yoga was acceptable to a person of the West, and as Chodkiewicz mentioned, it was also a safe discipline. This last issue should be paid attention to, as in esoteric circles a lively discussion was underway on the topic of whether yoga is the correct path – a safe and beneficial one – for the people of the Western world. This problem significantly goes beyond the framework of the present article, but we can notice that the esotericists' discussion revolved around the supposed dangers of practicing hatha yoga, and the benefits of practicing raja yoga,¹³ karma yoga or bhakti yoga. On every occasion, however, it was emphasised that the foundation of the practice of yoga should be Christianity. This was to guarantee the safety of a Westerner embarking on the path of yoga.

Using Christianity as the basis for interpreting yoga created another possibility: incorporating Indian tradition into Western cultural reality. However, as pointed out by the Theosophist Jadwiga Marcinowska (1872–1943), this could only take place at the moment when Christianity brought a breath of new life to lifeless Indian thought. In Marcinowska's opinion, without such a connection, the spiritual and philosophical traditions of India were under threat of dying out. The cause of this situation was assumed to be the extremely individualistic nature of yoga and the entire Indian philosophy. Although it had been successful in India, giving its inhabitants hope of finding within themselves "an eternal and holy message," at the same time this quality had become the cause of its ossification, and had often led to much degeneration. It had also led to its "paralysis," and excluded "any factor of striving or movement," and had "annihilated the life impulse."¹⁴ Marcinowska indicated that the next step in the development of Indian thought must be its socialisation, in other words, its loss of its individual character and its becoming open to broad social perspectives. She believed that this could only come about on a Christian basis. Only such a connection could on the one hand guarantee the continuing evolution of Eastern thinking, and on the other create the possibility of connecting it to the spiritual traditions of the West. For this reason Marcinowska proposed creating a great religious-philosophical synthesis, which would connect the values and spiritual practices developed in India with the Christian tradition.

¹² K. Chodkiewicz, *Pierwsze kroki w nowoczesnej jodze*, Poznań, p. 10–11.

¹³ Cf., for example A. Świerzowska, *Dlaczego Józef Świtkowski deprecjonuje hatha jogę? Obraz hatha jogi i jego źródła w poglądach polskiego jogina-ezoteryka*, [in:] *Studia ezoteryczne. Wątki polskie*, I. Trzczińska, A. Świerzowska, K.M. Hess (ed.), Kraków 2015, pp. 150–165.

¹⁴ J. Marcinowska, *Wartości twórcze religijnej myśli polskiej: filozofia indyjska, chrześcijaństwo, Polska, Hoene-Wroński, Słowacki, Mickiewicz, Trentowski, Cieszkowski, Krasiński, Libelt*, Warszawa 1922, pp. 92–93.

Regarding the last of the aims of the Polish esotericists, Christianity with its concept of the fall of man, the saviour and salvation, allowed for the connection of the idea of yoga to the Polish historical, patriotic and national narrative, an important element of which was Messianic philosophy. Within this context, thanks to the over-interpretation of yoga through the perspective of Christianity, this path could become a strategy of renewal (moral, spiritual, physical) for every Pole, and for the entire Polish nation. Messianic-revival themes regularly accompanied Polish visions of yoga of the interwar period, and they were often intertwined with historical motifs (in particular the partition of Poland, the nationalist independence uprisings, regaining independence);¹⁵ they were also linked to contemporary political events which had an influence on the history of the country, such as the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920) and the Treaty of Riga (1921). As an illustration, let us take one more look at Chobot's views on karma yoga. The esotericist believed this path to be not only effective, but also universal, as it could be pursued by anyone. Each person could, and in fact should, undertake such a task. Its aim was to be personal development, but understood in a specific way: "personal freedom – that of our inner 'Self,'" but only in order to "create a living type and example of a renewed, reborn and spiritual person, so that we can truly become a Nation – a Servant of God, Executors and Constructors of God's Kingdom on Earth." According to Chobot, in this way, by undertaking selfless works and by carrying out one's duties, a person fulfils three aims: repaying their debt to God and their brethren, cleansing themselves of selfishness and lust, and forming final union with God, in other words discovering their own Self. Józef Chobot called this entire process the "Way of the Cross," "Golgotha," and "a crucifixion, journey to hell and then a resurrection," which each person must go through alone.¹⁶ Although in this quoted passage Chobot does not draw the analogy to the Passion any further, taking into consideration his other statements, it can surely be interpreted as a belief commonly held by Polish esotericists that Poland's rebirth would only be possible as the result of its earlier, complete disintegration (usually understood as the partitions). Polończyk also placed yoga within the context of Poland's historical mission. The esotericist firmly believed that implementing yoga into the practices of everyday life would bring about a complete transformation of a person. According to Polończyk's vision, such a yogi would be "the realization of the figure of 'the eternal man' of Adam Mickiewicz, but not a figure collapsing under the weight of troubles and experiences, but one already strong, conscious, fighting death and suffering."¹⁷ The skills achieved thanks to this transformation would be used not

¹⁵ Poland disappeared from the map of Europe for over one hundred years, as a result of three partitions (1772, 1793, 1795). The territory of Poland was divided between the Habsburg Monarchy of Austria, the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia. Poland regained its independence after the First World War, in 1918.

¹⁶ J. Chobot, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ E. Polończyk, *Czem jest Yoga?...*, *op. cit.*, p. 10. This is a clear reference to the drama *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) by Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1885) recognised as one of the Polish Bards, and one of the most important propagators of Polish messianic philosophy. Here Polończyk recalls Gustaw-Konrad, the main character of *Dziady*. He is a romantic lover transformed into a hero prepared to struggle for the freedom of his nation, even if it means sacrificing his own life.

for a person's own aims, but for the good of others. This would realise the main goal of yoga, which is to "raise people who desire to create joy for millions and to suffer for millions."¹⁸ Finally, the practice of yoga was to lead to the transformation of all mankind, and "begin the age of the Spirit of Truth, which all mankind will develop in itself, and which will 'liberate it,'"¹⁹

The three aforementioned possible interpretations arising from using Christianity as the basis for understanding yoga were used by almost all Polish esotericists writing about this spiritual discipline. However, they did so while leaving yoga in the realm of ideas. Yoga was described, it was indicated how it could be understood and what advantages its practice could bring – in other words its potential was noticed, but it remained unused. It is worth noticing that all of the figures mentioned above, and also many others writing about this spiritual discipline, treated it as something "external," rather than something "of their own." None of those esotericists wrote about practicing yoga or experiencing it; it was only a certain vision, an imagined construct, suspended in a hereto unspecified time-space. A yoga overinterpreted in the Christian spirit finally moved from the sphere of ideas, imaginings and narration into the sphere of practice – and hence underwent full domestication – thanks to Lutosławski.²⁰ This philosopher, an expert on Plato, the creator of the Polish national philosophy and also a tireless social activist, developed a full system of yoga based on his own experience. It had fully developed theoretical and practical parts²¹ and Lutosławski tried to popularise it in 1909 by publishing a textbook entitled *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia. Według dawnych aryjskich tradycji oraz własnych swoich doświadczeń podaje do użytku rodaków Wincenty Lutosławski* ("The Development of the Power of Will Through the Psychophysical Exercises According to the Ancient Aryan Traditions and His Own Experiences Given for the Use of His Compatriots")²² and also teaching this practice to the members of the Religious and Patriotic Association "Eleusis," which he had founded. Lutosławski's vision contained all of the aforementioned themes and motifs, and it can be seen as the pinnacle of the solely theoretical interpretations of yoga before that time.

Lutosławski called the method of practice which he had created simply "Polish yoga" and treated it as different from Indian yoga. Indian yoga was assumed to

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 3. Essentially, he would therefore have to have a godly power. This is another clear reference to the aforementioned *Dziady* and to one particular part of this drama, "Wielka Improwizacja" ("Great Improvisation"), during which Konrad demands from God a strength which would allow him to bring happiness to every person and to the entire nation. Here we see the vision of the Polish nation as the Messiah among nations, who will sacrifice himself in order to liberate others. Cf. also ft. 40.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p.13.

²⁰ The second person to popularise yoga, rather later than Lutosławski, was the parapsychologist Józef Świtkowski (1876–1942). In 1923 he published the textbook *Radza Joga Nowoczesna. Wstęp w Światy nadzmysłowe (Modern Raja Yoga. How to Enter the Higher Worlds)*. His vision of yoga is also a Christian one, although this is because Świtkowski's interpretation of yoga remains fully dependent on the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925).

²¹ Cf., e.g.: A. Świerżowska, *Esoteric Influences in Wincenty Lutosławski's Programme of National Improvement. Prolegomena*, "The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture" 2015, no 13 (1), pp. 147–173.

²² W. Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia. Według dawnych aryjskich tradycji oraz własnych swoich doświadczeń podaje do użytku rodaków*, Warszawa–Kraków 1909.

have arisen “thanks to the relative stability of the physical conditions on the southern slope of the Himalaya mountains,” and its task was “to transform individuals and to provide them with untroubled peace, and therefore, an immunity to any atmospheric changes.” However, Lutosławski strongly emphasised that Poles needed a different type of yoga. This is precisely what he wanted to develop and perfect in “psycho-physical workshops of a new type.” According to Lutosławski, this yoga had to be different from Indian yoga, for the reason that “we [Poles – A.Ś.] are embodied spirits and must act not only on bodies through our spirit, but also protect our body from physical influences which hamper our spiritual journey.”²³ The yoga as described in *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* was to be such a “Polish yoga” which could be practiced safely and effectively by Poles. And emerging from that, in Lutosławski’s opinion – as will be further explained here – in essence this yoga was to be suitable and useful only for the Polish people.

The vision of Lutosławski’s yoga – as far as its inspirations or structure are concerned – is complex, and as I have indicated above, has been analysed in other articles. In this part of the paper I will focus solely on the meaning and role of Christianity in the interpretation of the yoga created by the Polish philosopher. In essence – and Lutosławski pointed to this himself – it was precisely Christianity that was the foundation of the new interpretation of this fragment of Indian tradition, and this caused yoga to come to be useful for the Polish nation. Even in the introduction to *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* Lutosławski emphasised that he decided to write his own textbook of yoga (rather than translate one already on the market), partly because many of the popular books on the subject had been prepared by people who were against, or even virulently against, Christianity, and who wanted to replace it with an “ancient Aryan religion.”²⁴

For the sake of clarity, however, it should be noted that Lutosławski – like all the esotericists mentioned above – knew the tradition of yoga, which had already been included in the context of Western esotericism. For Lutosławski, the main sources of information about yoga were Swami Vivekananda’s *Raja yoga* (1896) and Yogi Ramacharaka’s *Hatha Yoga. Or the Yogi Philosophy of Physical Wellbeing* (1904) and *Science of Breath. A Complete Manual of the Oriental Breathing Philosophy* (1905),²⁵ so the works that have permanently set the direction of esoteric interpretations of yoga, mainly in the spirit of Theosophy, the New Thought Movement and Harmonialism, which interpenetrate one another. The question of how Lutosławski

²³ W. Lutosławski, *Ludzkość odrodzona. Wizje przyszłości*, Kraków 1910, p. 248–249.

²⁴ W. Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5

²⁵ Lutosławski greatly valued both authors, especially Ramacharaka, for his practical tips. The knowledge that the latter was not a yogi apparently did not bother him. He learned about this from Vivekananda’s pupil – Swami Abhedananda (1866–1939) with whom exchanged letters. Abhedananda informed him: “I have never met Ramacharaka, but I know that he is an Irish man Mr. Atkinson by nature. He is not a yogi. His books will not help you much” (Unpublished letter of Swami Abhedananda to Wincenty Lutosławski, October 16, 1905; Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU w Krakowie, korespondencja W. Lutosławskiego [Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU)] in Kraków, W. Lutosławski’s correspondence; further referred to as: W. Lutosławski’s correspondence, AN PAN i PAU], K III-155).

approached Christianity, which he used as a way of adapting yoga to the needs of the (Catholic) Polish nation, remains somewhat more complex and requires separate analysis. On the one hand, Lutosławski – and this was extremely important to him – declared himself a “faithful son of the church.” This attachment to the dogmas of the Catholic Church in their pure form can also be seen in *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...*, especially in the third edition of this book. On the other hand, the philosopher was convinced that it is possible to understand some Christian doctrinal truths in the light of other religions, or include their elements in Christian tradition (it applies primarily to reincarnation, in which Lutosławski not only deeply believed, but also held a conviction that his faith was in no way contrary to the Catholic doctrine).²⁶ Hence, the Polish philosopher presents a clear bent towards esoteric, heterodox thinking about Christianity, as it was in the case of the above-mentioned Polish esotericists of that time. With a high degree of certainty, it can be assumed that in the period when *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* was created, Lutosławski was more inclined towards this kind of perception of Christianity.

In his interpretation of yoga, Lutosławski used Christianity in several ways. First and foremost, he showed that this tradition can be reconciled with the “heritage of our Aryan predecessors.”²⁷ In *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...*, he directly expressed a belief that yoga is the heritage of our forefathers, so it naturally belongs to the Slavic peoples, hence also to Poland, and it not only could but even should be adopted by every member of the Polish nation and treated as a work routine which can be applied in everyday life. In such an interpretation, yoga was not “foreign” but rather “ours,” and therefore, it should become a part of Christianity. The philosopher noticed a certain difficulty when it came to forming a simple synthesis of the “Aryan spirit” with the “Semitic religion,” so he emphasised that each of them should be applied in the “appropriate sphere.”²⁸ According to Lutosławski, the Semitic tradition showed the way to “acquire and apply mercy [of God – A.Ś.] with the help of humility,”²⁹ whereas the Aryan tradition (yoga) “teaches the development of one’s own power, without any supernatural assistance.”³⁰ The “Aryan spirit” should, therefore, be used in all situations where a person’s independent action is needed.

²⁶ Lutosławski kept seeking confirmation that his belief in reincarnation did not conflict with the Catholic doctrine, as this conviction was and the object of criticism, and the philosopher was accused of abandoning the teachings of the Catholic Church. Lutosławski maintained, however, that these allegations were unfounded and claimed that he had consulted his views with Cardinal Desire Joseph Mercier (1851–1926) who assured him that the way he understood metempsychosis was acceptable. Cf. W. Lutosławski, *Metafizyka*, Drozdowo 2004, p. 80, also unpublished correspondence of W. Lutosławski and Desire Joseph Mercier between 1906–1924, particularly a letter dated December 15, 1924; W. Lutosławski’s correspondence, AN PAN i PAU, K III-155. See also J. Lutosławska, *Wspomnienie o moim Ojcu*, [in:] *Filozofia i mistyka Wincentego Lutosławskiego*, R. Zaborowski (ed.), Warszawa 2000, pp. 17–20 and W. Bartoń, *Czy Lutosławski był katolikiem*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 1958, no. 2, p. 7, here also an attempt to answer the relatively frequently asked question of whether Lutosławski was a Catholic.

²⁷ W. Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

Yoga, in his opinion, should replace any passive waiting for divine intervention. This “Aryan spirit” perfectly complemented Lutosławski’s belief in the need to actively approach God’s mercy, which cannot be bought by “any offering, nor even by any sacrifices or heroic actions,”³¹ although all such actions can, without a doubt, prepare a person to receive it. According to the philosopher, the most significant aspect was “using one’s own will,” “using one’s own knowledge”³² in the course of action, which was to open a person to receive mercy. Thanks to this active attitude, one would receive even more. Lutosławski wrote:

This mercy will flow over us even more generously, the more we use our own will, our own knowledge, in order to prepare ourselves for this incalculable, undeserved, incomprehensible mercy [...]. The scope of these efforts should be recognised, these efforts which depend on our will, and should be widened gradually, the more we do here ourselves, the greater supernatural help we will experience.³³

In Lutosławski’s vision, man is not just a passive receiver, but should fight for mercy, and should earn it by an always active attitude. The exercises suggested in *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* are to help him stand firmly on his own two feet, in order to be ready for mercy, to be able to make use of it in a determined and strong way, to be able to use it in the right way. Only this combination of mercy and a strong will made by practicing yoga could, according to Lutosławski, bring the desired, positive outcome: the person strengthened by the workings of mercy would by their own will be able to change themselves and their own situation. Lutosławski emphasised:

It is good when following a lack of strength, one can gain mercy and rise from powerlessness, instead of waiting for the next relentless sufferings, leading to a natural reaction. But when we feel strength thanks to mercy, why constantly beg for more, when even Christ demands that we help ourselves and multiply the treasures gained by mercy, at the same time avoiding doubts as well as pride.³⁴

However, the philosopher strongly emphasised that these exercises can never be treated as a mechanical (or magical) method for gaining mercy. Such thinking was blasphemous to him, and he declared that people believing in such a thing “usually did not receive mercy.”³⁵

So, it can be clearly seen that adding yoga (the “Aryan heritage”) to the context of the Christian tradition, was intended to make it far more effective. Such a reinterpreted yoga equipped a person with two types of strength: the strength of one’s own will and the power of godly mercy. What is more, in its new version, the practice of yoga could cease to serve only individuals, as in India, but could bring benefits to a whole society. It is Lutosławski’s interesting observation of the details and differences in

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. XX.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. XX.

social relations in Poland and in India, which decided, in his opinion, about the different applications of yoga practices and their varying characters. In Poland, the philosopher declared, we are dealing with a constant direction of the consciousness towards our brethren and their needs. “Our worldview,” wrote Lutosławski, “places on us continual responsibilities towards our brethren, and does not encourage solitude,”³⁶ this means that “as a result of the endless desire to support others, there is such a distraction of thoughts and feelings that finally despite the best intentions one has nothing left to serve others, as we have nothing left ourselves.”³⁷ Indians, on the other hand, “prefer to use all of their energy to move forward individually, rather than to carry others,”³⁸ which led, in Lutosławski’s opinion, to a breakdown of social cohesion (the varna system), and this weakened the entire nation and eventually led to its colonial enslavement. Therefore, the condition that was necessary for the yoga practice to fit into a suitable place in the cultural reality of the West, and for it to meet the needs of its inhabitants, was to include it in the Christian worldview. The change in the character of the practices and in its influence on those practicing, as a result of this operation, can clearly be seen in the example of the understanding of the yamas and niyamas. As Lutosławski wrote, “They set a high moral standard for those who aim for an acceleration of natural progress in psychic development.”³⁹ According to him, the Indians demand “a person of high moral perfection,” the execution of various exercises in order to master the body and mind, whereas “we [the Christian Polish nation – A.Ś.] demand action, direct services, rendered to our brethren, service to society.”⁴⁰

The socialisation of yoga by interpreting it using a Christian key allowed Lutosławski to make this practice into a national discipline, “Polish yoga.” Adding yoga to a Christian context was in a sense natural, dictated by the Christian nature of the Polish nation. The philosopher emphasised that “We [Poles – A.Ś] can achieve a satisfactory victory over the weakness of the body through the strength of the will, only in Christianity, and within Christianity in the Catholic Church.”⁴¹ The Poles also, supposedly, had an “intuitive knowledge of Christian ethics,”⁴² and needed only an effective tool which would extract this subconscious intuition, and would allow it to be applied in the life of society. Yoga as it was described in *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* was to be exactly such a “Polish yoga,” which Lutosławski wanted to further develop and spread, not only in Poland. Leaving for the United States in 1907, Lutosławski planned to communicate the information about Poland, its history, the Polish national spirit and Poland’s historic mission to the Americans as fully as possible. Therefore, he also spoke about “Polish yoga.”

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 152.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 6 and 7.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. XXIII.

⁴² W. Jaworski, *Wincentego Lutosławskiego filozofia religii*, [in:] “Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Górniczo-Hutniczej im. Stanisława Staszica,” 1985, no. 1008, p. 84.

He saw it as his own personal duty, as “a sacred battle.”⁴³ In one of his letters to his daughter Izabela Lutosławska (1889–1972) he wrote:

[...] lectures about Poland are only a preliminary skirmish. It is more important to show the power of the Polish spirit in action [...]. Well, the main battle in which my Polish spirit challenges America to a duel is the application of this Polish yoga on American students [...]. If it works, I will do more for Poland than all the lectures.⁴⁴

In another of his letters Lutosławski enthusiastically communicated that the Americans had invited him to an annual congress of philosophy. He wrote, “At this meeting they want me to say something about Polish philosophy and about ‘Polish yoga,’ which I am creating with such difficulty.”⁴⁵ However, in the end Lutosławski ceased his “missionary work” in America – his plan had not worked. In a letter to William James (1842–1910), who helped him during his American stay, Lutosławski mentioned “Polish yoga” again, but here he underlined that this system would work best in Poland. He wrote:

As to this work among your country men here, it can be done by my disciples. Polish yoga is not for Americans, **I do better to spread it among the Poles of Poland who are prepared to receive it by race, language, and the sufferings of generations.** There it will spread, there is my real field, there I am needed, loved, esteemed.⁴⁶

The next step which was intended to mesh together yoga with Christian tradition, but in my opinion, just the same as the other two methods described previously, and having a practical character, was Lutosławski’s inclusion of the chosen Christian practices and themes within the system of yoga that he had created. Most importantly, Lutosławski placed significant emphasis on the role of prayer. However, in the path he created, he joined it to breathing exercises, having decided that such a combination is the most effective, especially for Catholics:

For Catholics, one of the most effective exercises of this type is rhythmic prayer, made up of two phrases – invocation and petition, e.g. “Jesus enlighten me, Mary save us from temptation, God help us,” etc. While inhaling air in our thoughts, we have the invocation, and while exhaling we have the petition, and thus concentrating our imagination and will on the invocation and petition, we can pray for hours, as we walk on an even path.⁴⁷

Before sleep it is very good to direct one’s thoughts towards a regularly repeated prayer, in two words: “Christ enlighten,” rhythmically pronouncing in one’s thoughts “Christ” while inhaling, and “enlighten” while exhaling. Falling asleep with such a prayer on one’s lips ensures illuminating dreams similar to those of Father Peter in Forefathers’ Eve.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁴ Unpublished letter of W. Lutosławski to I. Lutosławska, 14 October 1907; W. Lutosławski’s correspondence, AN PAN i PAU, K III-155.

⁴⁵ Unpublished letter of W. Lutosławski to I. Lutosławska, 21 November 1907; AN PAN i PAU, W. Lutosławski’s correspondence, K III-155.

⁴⁶ Unpublished letter of W. Lutosławski to W. James, 22 November 1907, AN PAN i PAU, W. Lutosławski’s correspondence, K III-155. Bold added.

⁴⁷ W. Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 62, This refers to “Widzenie księdza Piotra” (“Vision of Father Peter”) from the third part of *Dziady* in which Mickiewicz presents the essence of his messianic ideas. In his vision Father

In such a way a Pole and a Catholic should also fight their flaws and weaknesses – in other words – should perfect themselves in a moral sense. One should apply breathing exercises combined with prayer in order to, e.g. “Inhale weakness, exhale anger. Inhale the love of silence, exhale the habit of gossip. Inhale speaking the truth, exhale lies. Inhale faith, exhale lack of faith.”⁴⁹

The second significant element Lutosławski included in his system of yoga was the figure of Jesus Christ. The Polish philosopher, of course, saw God in him, and Christ maintains such an identity in Lutosławski’s vision of yoga, although he also gave him additional competencies, for Jesus became a master and spiritual guide (guru). One can assume that in this way Lutosławski was referring to the postulates of Swami Vivekanda, whose *Raja Yoga*⁵⁰ was one of the main inspirations of the Polish philosopher. In writing his textbook Lutosławski wanted to persuade all those interested in adopting their own practice of yoga that a guide on this path is absolutely necessary, and experiments carried out without the supervision of an experienced teacher could bring great harm.⁵¹ This was one of the issues strongly emphasised by Vivekananda. In Lutosławski’s opinion, for any Christian embarking on the practices described in *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* the best guide is “Christ hidden within the Eucharist.” It is he who will safely lead anyone who starts the exercises “with the pure intention of increasing those strengths needed to serve others,”⁵² and who will also protect those practicing from any evil spirits, which the Indian yogis constantly had to deal with.⁵³

In Lutosławski’s interpretation of yoga there are many other, smaller themes, which were intended to give the practice a Christian character. At this point it is worth mentioning one more aspect, which is often applied by those interested in alternative traditions and dealing with yoga, namely, showing that the effects of practicing yoga are the same, or very similar to those experienced by the Christian saints: “All of these miracles attributed to the Indian Yogis, are also known to us from the histories

Peter sees Poland as a suffering Jesus Christ. Particular elements of the Passion correspond to the events from the history of the Polish nation. Herod’s judgement corresponds to exile to Siberia of Poles who acted against the Russian occupier, and Pontius Pilate washing his hands corresponds to France, which remained neutral in relation to the efforts of Polish uprisings. In this vision, Christ’s Cross is made up of three invaders, and the soldier piercing Jesus’ side is Russian. It is here, in Father Peter’s vision that Poland appears as Christ among Nations – a martyred Poland will be resurrected, just as Jesus was, and its suffering will not be in vain, as it will have been sacrificed in order to save all of sinful Europe.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 38–39.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Yoga Philosophy. Lectures Delivered in New York, Winter of 1895–6 by the Swami Vivekananda on Raja Yoga or Conquering the Internal Nature also Patanjali’s Yoga Aphorisms, with Commentaries*, London–New York–Bombay 1896. For more on the significance of this text on the spread of yoga in the West see E. De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga. Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, London, New York 2005.

⁵¹ In the third edition of *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* the philosopher emphasised that he believed the dissemination of the practices described in the book to be dangerous, as without the guidance of a competent person they were harmful: “I have realised how difficult it is to keep a sensible measure in this matter, and how easily the desire to gain health and strength can lead to abuses.” Cf. W. Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia*, Wilno 1923, p. III).

⁵² W. Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia*, Wilno 1923, p. III.

⁵³ W. Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

of the Saints of the Catholic Church.”⁵⁴ As proof, the philosopher referred to the following saints: Ann Catherine Emmerich, Catherine of Sienna and Theresa.⁵⁵ According to Lutosławski the difference between the saints and the yogis was only that yogis see the results of their practices as purely due to their own efforts, whereas the saints, although they were also undertaking various disciplinary actions, viewed the results of these as the result of God’s mercy.

The practice of yoga placed in a Christian context was, therefore, in the opinion of Lutosławski, both safe and effective for Polish people as Christians and Catholics. The philosopher believed that those weakened by “numerous moral shocks leading to a frightening loss of strength in individuals, and even in whole social groups”⁵⁶ should use all possible means and methods, which (like yoga) had already been tried out, and their effectiveness had been confirmed by the experience of other nations.⁵⁷ All of this would be in order to rise again after the fall, and in the end regain independence. An additional goal, over even a longer term, partly realised by the vision of yoga presented in *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...*, was the challenge placed by him before the reborn Poland: “The joining together of the experiences of the East with the later revelations applied by the Saints of the Western Church is a new task for the nation, which for centuries connected the East with the West.”⁵⁸

The textbook *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* and the ideas expressed within it were met with approval, as the first two editions of the book (in 1909 and 1910) sold so fast that the philosopher was asked to prepare a third edition (which he did in 1923). Without a doubt Lutosławski, at least to a certain extent, managed to realise his aim to make yoga accepted and treated by those practicing it as their own effective way of organising their everyday life. This can be seen in the rich correspondence into which Lutosławski entered with people starting to practice and searching for additional information, or sharing their experiences with him. However, this does not mean that Lutosławski’s “Polish yoga” was adopted completely uncritically. Quite the opposite, he was criticised, and interestingly, these opinions were not about his actual reaching for the tradition of yoga, but often about the way in which he used Christianity to adapt yoga to the needs and expectations of Polish people, and the place of Christianity within the whole system. He was accused that his visions of practical yoga had taken the place of God, who de facto ceased to be needed since a yogi could achieve all possible virtues and realise the Christian moral ideal, by their own effort.⁵⁹

In time, Lutosławski’s own views also underwent a change and he withdrew from propagating yoga. He even added three chapters to the third edition of *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia...* This change was a condition which

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 152.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 12 and 173.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

⁵⁹ Cf. J. Urban, *Katolicyzm eleuzyński* (I), “Przegląd Powszechny” 1910, vol. 27, pp. 302–327; J. Urban, *Katolicyzm eleuzyński* (II), “Przegląd Powszechny” 1910, vol. 27, pp. 30–45.

Lutosławski imposed on his publisher, and upon which he based his permission to publish the book.⁶⁰ These chapters were given significant titles: “Fasts,” “Prayer” and “In the Service of God.” They place a strong emphasis on deepening one’s spiritual life by developing an individual relationship with God. In the introduction to this edition, Lutosławski clearly underlined that these are precisely the three elements: fasting, prayer and service to God, and not the earlier described yoga practices, which are the most important, the most effective, and essentially the single most appropriate ones for every Polish person. Elsewhere he added that although yoga exercises had a certain value and were undoubtedly an effective way of mastering the impulsiveness of the body and mind, thereby making a person more sensitive to what God was communicating, there was no reason for a Christian to make use of them since “the mystic literature of Europe contains many guidelines on this subject,” and “Christian mysticism responds to these same eternal needs of human nature as Indian yoga.”⁶¹ Since a Christian is independent from a guru or teacher, and may autonomously seek God, this is the Christian’s strong advantage over the yogi.⁶²

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⁶⁰ W. Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia*, Wilno 1923, pp. VI–VII.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

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