


*Barbara Olech**Institute of Cultural Studies, University of Białystok*

DOI: 10.15290/rtk.2019.18.07

 0000-0002-9813-5661

Selected Aspects of Józef Wittlin's Franciscanism

This article shows the role that St. Francis of Assisi played in the life and writings of Józef Wittlin whose works complement each other and constitute a coherent and consistent body of thought that clearly presents the Franciscan concepts of *fraternitas* and *minoritas*.

Key words: Józef Wittlin, St. Francis, Franciscanism, the Bible, Odyssey, *minoritas*, *fraternitas*.

St. Francis of Assisi is undoubtedly the most beloved saint of the Catholic Church. Believers and non-believers have venerated him for centuries. The values promoted by the Saint of Assisi—love, joy, peace, goodness—are universal. In a letter commemorating the 800th birthday of St. Francis, Pope John Paul II wrote:

Instead of weakening over time, interest in this figure became stronger, became deeply ingrained in people's mind, and spread. People love and admire this holy man because they see in him the perfect—and certainly admirable—realization of what they desire but do not achieve in their own lives: joy, freedom, peace, harmony, and reconciliation between people and among the things of this world.¹

During the 19th and 20th centuries, works were written that manifest in a particularly vivid way a renewed interest in and interpretations of the person and life of St. Francis.² Not only members of the Church

¹ John Paul II, *List na zakończenie jubileuszu osiemsetlecia urodzin św. Franciszka* [Letter at the conclusion of the eight hundredth anniversary of the birth of Saint Francis], Poznań, "Studia Franciszkańskie," 1984, no. 1, p. 33.

² The discovery of Sts. Francis and Clare's remains on December 12, 1818 and August 30, 1850, respectively contributed to this interest. See: A. Gemelli, *Franciszkanizm* [Franciscanism], trans. W. J. Surmacz, Warsaw 1988.

were interested in the Poverello of Assisi, so too were writers, painters, sculptors—believers and non-believers alike, who left behind works that made an indelible mark in the history of Franciscanism. As a result, the figure of Saint Francis and his teachings began to play a more prominent role in the *sacrum* and *profanum* at this time. What was once a religious phenomenon had also become a cultural phenomenon.

Among the many Polish artists fascinated by the Poverello of Assisi,³ Józef Wittlin⁴ deserves special attention. The author of *Salt of the Earth* grew up in Lviv where Franciscanism developed as a literary movement. At that time, two famed men and great personalities—Edward Porębowicz⁵ and Leopold Staff⁶—played a crucial role in shaping thought on St. Francis. Before Wittlin made his first trip to Italy in 1925-1926, before he saw captivating Assisi for the first time, and before he formally entered the Catholic Church,⁷ he had already immersed

³ For more on this topic, see: M. Kasprzyk, *Święty Franciszek w literaturze polskiej* [*Saint Francis in Polish literature*], ed. Calvarianum, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska 1993; A. Bednarek, *Franciszek z Asyżu wśród humanistów. Z dziejów recepcji postaci w XIX i XX wieku* [*Francis of Assisi among humanists. From the history of the reception of characters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*], ed. Calvarianum, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska 1986; *Dzieło świętego Franciszka z Asyżu. Projekcja w kulturze i duchowości polskiej XIX i XX wieku* [*The Work of Saint Francis of Assisi: Projection on Polish Culture and Spirituality of the 19th and 20th Centuries*], eds. D. Kielak, J. Odziemkowski, J. Zbudniewek, Warsaw 2004.

⁴ Józef Wittlin (1896-1976) was a Polish poet, writer, and translator. He lived abroad from 1939 until his death. He collaborated with Radio Free Europe, which resumed publication in Poland in the 1970s. His most renowned work is *Salt of the Earth* (1935), which has been translated into several languages. In 1939, Wittlin was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature for this novel.

⁵ Porębowicz wrote about the need to return to the Franciscan ideals in 1899. He saw Saint Francis as “an infinitely serene and bright phenomenon” and “an apostle of love and kindness.” See: E. Porębowicz, *Św. Franciszek z Asyżu* [*Saint Francis of Assisi*], Warsaw 1899, pgs. 3, 6.

⁶ In the preface of his translation of *The Flowers of Saint Francis*, Staff emphasized that St. Francis advocated for a return to evangelical values, meaning a life of humility, purity, and poverty along with joy and a love for the created world. The book was published in 1910 and was the subject of lively discussion.

⁷ Wittlin was baptized at the age of 57 in New York. In a letter to Roman Brandstaetter dated December 30, 1959, he wrote: “And so I wanted to see Assisi as a Catholic. From 1925-1926 I was not yet Catholic. Since I dared to make my confession of [faith in Catholicism], I will tell you that I received the name Francis Maria at my Baptism (in New York). But I use these names neither in the ‘world’ nor—heaven forbid—in ‘literature.’ Please, pray for me in Assisi at the grave of St. Francis.” R. Zajączkowski, *Korespondencja między Józefem Wittlinem i Romanem Brandstaetterem* [*Correspondence between Józef Wittlin and Roman Brandstaetter*], “Tematy i Konteksty” 2012, no. 2, pg. 160.

himself into an environment of Franciscan spirituality by listening to Porębowicz's lectures at the University of Lviv, reading his book, and translating Staff's *Flowers* and poetry as well as Kasprowicz and Ruffer's poems.

Wittlin's experience of World War I and battles that took place in Lviv were turning points in his life. During the war, Wittlin spent two years in the army as a private and a cadet. He also contracted scarlet fever, spent a long time recovering in a hospital, and served as an interpreter for Italian prisoners—all of which lead him to take on an ethical approach to life.⁸ It is no accident, then, that the fundamental ideas that Wittlin weaves throughout his writings are: the paralysis of war, an opposition to evil, personalism, and an eschatological view of human existence. Because of these themes, all of Wittlin's writings complement each other and constitute a coherent body of work that is consistent in thought and Franciscan in spirit, especially in its expression of the resounding concepts of *fraternitas* and *minoritas*.

When writing throughout his life, Wittlin did so *in articulo mortis*. He believed that "being on the brink of death can [...] intensify and refine a song, fill it with transcendental intensity and irradiate it." He emphasized that one should write as if one's life would end after completing the creative process. In this way and according to Wittlin, words, thoughts, sentences, and artistic concepts become "a posthumous [death] mask [...] created throughout one's life."⁹ Wittlin's responsibility toward the word brings us closer to a Franciscan theology of the word.¹⁰ Perhaps this is why he wrote relatively little and then modified and perfected the pieces that he already written (e.g., he prepared three different translations of the *Odyssey*, composed three

⁸ Difficult experiences can help man convert and seek God. This was the case for Saint Francis, whose internal transformation took place during the war between Assisi and Perugia in 1202 when he was captured by the enemy, imprisoned, and became ill. Porębowicz refers to it when writing about Tomasz's relationship with Celano. Wittlin, who had read Porębowicz's book, felt that it was analogous with his situation in life. See: E. Porębowicz, *op. cit.*, pg. 25.

⁹ *The posthumous* essay is Wittlin's commentary on his own writing practices. See: J. Wittlin, *Pisma pośmiertne i inne eseje [Posthumous Letters and Other Essays]*, Warsaw 1991, pgs. 22-23.

¹⁰ J. le Goff writes: "The word is essentially a sermon. For Francis, it revealed the words of Jesus Christ, which are also the words of the Father and the words of the Holy Spirit, meaning spirit and life (*1 Letter to the Faithful*). In his *2 Letter to the Clergy*, Francis ascribes to Jesus' words a meaning that is nothing less than "Body" and "Blood." Therefore, a Franciscan theology of the word exists." J. le Goff, *Święty Franciszek z Asyżu [Saint Francis of Assisi]*, trans. J. Guze, Warsaw 2001, pg. 172.

modified versions of *Hymns*, and wrote *Salt of the Earth*—the first novel of his unfinished trilogy entitled *Tale of a Patient Infantryman*—over the course of ten years. Peace, truth, and love are basic elements of Franciscan spirituality¹¹ and components of Wittlin’s work.¹²

The *Bible* and Homer’s *Odyssey* serve as Wittlin’s main reference points within the religious and cultural consciousness he creates. In 1924, his translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*, which he had worked on for eight years and for which he had waited two years to be published, was printed in Polish. The book contains an important introduction that Wittlin wrote in 1922 and in which he presents his value system as well as the cultural and religious contexts in which he lived. In the introduction, Wittlin juxtaposes Homer’s work and the *Bible* because he saw that religiousness was their common creative basis. Wittlin emphasizes that, within both the *Bible* and Homer’s *Odyssey*,¹³ the perfection of the world created by God lies in the significance of each of its elements as well as in the importance and equality of every person. Wittlin’s emphasis on his interpretation of the epic and the Book of Genesis reveals his longing for a world of values. According to Wittlin, each of us is Odysseus in our search for harmony, love, and brotherhood. Wittlin’s topos of wandering is connected with the need to make existence a reality by immersing it in the sacred. Abraham who completely entrusted himself to God on Mount Moriah appears in his reflection. Wittlin postulates that Abraham’s attitude is one of trust. In this way, Wittlin longs to return to a lost simplicity, religiousness, naiveté of experiencing the world, and—above all—the “primal love of everything that [lies dormant] in the depths of the soul.”¹⁴ Wittlin goes on to combine ancient tradition with Christianity by recalling the figure of Saint Francis—“the last Greek and evangelical in one person” who was “conceived within the spirit of a great religious epic.”¹⁵ In

¹¹ St. Bonaventure specified the elements of Franciscan spirituality based on the thoughts and writings of Saint Francis. See: L. Iriarte, OFM Cap, *Historia franciszkanizm [History of Franciscanism]*, Cracow, 1998, pgs. 131-142.

¹² Wojciech Ligęza believes that it is as if Wittlin’s writing implements “a gradual medieval, arrangement of images and issues.” See: W. Ligęza, “Józef Wittlin’s Poetry in exile,” in: *Between Lviv, New York, and Ulysses’ Ithaca: Józef Wittlin – Poet, Essayist, Novelist*. Edited by A. Frajlich, New York-Torun, 2001, pg. 102.

¹³ Homer, *Odyseja [The Odyssey]*, translated from Greek and preceded by a preface by J. Wittlin. The story about Homer was written by R. Ganszyniec, Lwów (Lviv) 1924.

¹⁴ Wittlin’s Introduction to Homer’s *Odyssey*, op. cit., pg. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 17.

short, the *Odyssey* is a fusion of Poetry and Truth.¹⁶ In the third edition of Wittlin's translation of the *Odyssey* (1957) he wrote an extensive introduction in which he upheld his youthful opinions and cites the Swiss Jesuit Hugo Rahner,¹⁷ who confirmed Wittlin's early intuitions:

Homer is sacred to us in the deepest sense. This blind bard, who was guided by poetic genius, touched the correct form of the truth with trembling hands; for us, therefore, he is the forerunner of the incarnate Word.¹⁸

The *Bible*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and St. Francis are, therefore, the keys to understanding the writer's creative approach.¹⁹ In a letter to Kazimiera Żuławska in 1921, Wittlin wrote:

Currently, I am seriously considering being baptized and joining the Franciscans after I finish the *Odyssey* and a few minor works. I would like to become a preacher; I have a vocation to be one. I feel that I could change something in the world not with books but with the living word and good but unrelenting deeds. Although unpleasant, proclaiming the truth by preaching is the most fruitful and the only way.²⁰

In this sense, the ideal way of life according to Wittlin would be to follow faithfully in St. Francis' footsteps and focus on one's actual word and deeds.

Wittlin's youthful hymns²¹ also evoke a system of evangelical values and place human existence within a teleological understanding of the world. The hero of the *Odyssey* is a common, simple man

¹⁶ Wittlin's thought coincides with J. le Goff statement: "In addition to the great honor bestowed on the historian, still one final favor—a priceless gift—is granted: the poetry by which Saint Francis lived and the legend that he became after his death are so much a part of his person, his life, and his actions that Poetry and Truth meld together in him." J. le Goff, *op. cit.*, pg. 30.

¹⁷ Wittlin cites the following work: H. Rahner, *Griechische Mythen in christlicher Deutung*, Rhein-Verlag, Zürich 1945.

¹⁸ Homer, "Translator's Preface," in: *Odyseja [Odyssey]*, trans. J. Wittlin, 3rd Edition, London: "Veritas," 1957, pg. 33.

¹⁹ Franciscan formulas appear in the sketch: "Gracious Readers! Brothers and Sisters! Don not tell me that it is not like this [for you]! Each of you is Odysseus, and this is the story of your wandering!" Elsewhere he writes: "Oh, brothers and sisters! Homer's homeland is a Painful Longing." See: Homer, *Odyseja [Odyssey]*, ed. I, *op. cit.*

²⁰ From Wittlin's letter to Kazimiera Żuławska written on May 1, 1921 from Lviv. See: J. Wittlin, *Listy [Letters]*, wstęp i opracowanie [introduction and first edition] ed. T. Januszewski, Warsaw 1996, pg. 23.

²¹ J. Wittlin, *Hymny [Hymns]*, Poznań 1920. Poems from this volume—some of which have been completely changed—are in: J. Wittlin, *Poezje*, Warsaw 1978.

(Franciscan *minoritas*) who is entangled in the chaos of war. Like St. Francis, Wittlin focuses on the poverty of the world. For Wittlin, the fate of every human person is of value in itself. The expression “*fraternitas*” orders interpersonal relationships and enables man to enter into contact with God. Not reason but faith is to lead man to renew morality. When the wanderer stands before God like Abraham did on Mount Moriah, he overcomes the anxiety and fear that are part of his earthly journey (which, for Wittlin, is a modified *Odyssean* topos). The coexistence of two metaphorical orders—mountains and wandering—determines human existence. The collision of the vertical order (mountains, God) with the horizontal (wandering, man) gives rise to the sign of the cross and imparts an eschatological dimension to reality. References to Mount Moriah and Golgotha are, therefore, significant in Wittlin’s works,²² especially in the poems “Trwoga przed śmiercią [Fear of Death],” “Grzebanie wroga [Burying the Enemy],” “Hymn o łyżce zupy [Song About a Spoonful of Soup],” “Tęsknota za przyjacielem [Longing for a Friend],” and “Do przeciwnika [To an Opponent]” whose meaning is very moving. Although Wittlin does not include any direct references to St. Francis in these poems, his message is consistent with Franciscan spirituality. Like St. Francis, the heroes of these poems yearn for peace, love, and brotherhood. In “Grzebanie wroga [Burying the Enemy],” wartime reality is contrasted with heavenly happiness, in which all hierarchy is lost. On the same plane are the wise and the stupid, the rich and the poor, enemies and friends, people of different states, professions, denominations, nationalities, and even animals (“these little brothers”). All, however, are equal not in an earthly sense (as Saint Francis believed) but in God’s plan of salvation.²³ Like St. Francis, Wittlin’s hero travels the world with a beggar’s staff to awaken hardened human hearts.

Wittlin divided *The Poems* into three parts: a selection from *Hymny* [*Hymns*], *Casual Poems*, and *Essences*.

²² Specifically, the two poems: “Trwoga przed śmiercią [Fear of Death]” and “Ból drzewa [The Tree’s Pain].”

²³ Le Goff writes: “Saint Francis combines different approaches to describing society according to various categories: religious status, age, sex, power, fortune, profession, and nationality. Not only does he use frameworks often found in Christian ideology, which is opposed to socio-professional structures and dividing society into classes that result in class struggle, in order to better ideologically govern a society that he divides up at his own discretion, but also (and above all) he wants society to be considered a group of categories devoid of any hierarchy (from a spiritual point of view) and (in recognition of and respect for the Church) social classes that are equal in the plan of salvation. And, if the

In later editions of *Hymns*, the poem “Psalm”—a song of praise in honor of God the Universal—appears. This poem unifies the collection, emphasizes Wittlin’s belief in the teleological order of the world, and affirms its harmony. “Psalm” refers to St. Francis’ “Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon.” In Wittlin’s letter to Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, he includes the poem “Psalm” with the inscription, “A Psalm for the 700th anniversary of the death of the creator of ‘Cantico del Sole.’”²⁴

Sergiusz Sterna-Wachowiak notes that naïve Franciscanism and heroic Franciscanism coexist side-by-side in Wittlin’s work.²⁵ This distinction is clear when reading *Salt of the Earth* and passages of the book about St. Francis that Wittlin was planning to write.²⁶ In “Wiadomości Literackie [Literary News],”²⁷ which Wittlin wrote in 1928, he said that, in order to understand and convey the phenomenon of St. Francis, it is not sufficient to simply “be familiar with this most powerful figure of the Christian Middle Ages,” look through documents, or read the Scriptures. Instead, “multiple perspectives” are necessary to testify to the truth. One must understand what came before it, the tradition surrounding it, as well as the dynamic distance between word and deed. According to Wittlin, this Franciscan concept is “eternal and [becomes] more relevant every day.” Wittlin’s book about the Poverello of Assisi was not meant to be just another conventional biography (many of which were written in the 1920s to commemorate the 700th jubilee of St. Francis’ death), but rather a collection of essays that convey what is remarkable about St. Francis: the ideal of humanity. Modern biographies or hagiographies, which rely not only on documents and testimonies about the saint but also allow the authors to digress freely, primarily reveal an author’s subjective point of view. Wittlin’s book,

privileged are to be found, then they will be discovered among the afflicted of the earth.” J. le Goff, *op. cit.*, pg. 113.

²⁴ In his dedication, Wittlin wrote the following: “Dear Janina and Ludwik Morstin, I most sincerely gift you this work in deep gratitude for lending me such a wonderful opportunity to interpret this ‘shameless’ work – Józef Wittlin (Muezzin). Pławowice, June 13, 1928.” J. Wittlin, *Letters*, *op. cit.*, pg. 39. “The Psalm” was written in 1922-1926. It is also worth mentioning here that the first edition of *Hymns* (1920) included the poem “The Hymn of all Hymns,” which conveys an attitude of complete trust in God as well as Franciscan humility and trust. This particular poem was not included in the final edition.

²⁵ S. Sterna-Wachowiak, “Góra Moria,” *Przegląd Powszechny*, no. 1, 1987.

²⁶ Preserved passages can be found in: J. Wittlin, *Pisma pośmiertne i inne eseje* [*Posthumous Letters and Other Essays*], Warsaw, 1991, pgs. 55-101.

²⁷ J. Wittlin, “Józef Wittlin o sobie [Józef Wittlin about himself],” in: *Eseje rozproszone* [*Distributed Essays*], Warsaw, 1995, pgs. 180-182.

however, was born from—as he says—jealousy of and a longing for the hero who set out to “repair the human soul centuries ago.”²⁸ In addition, Wittlin wanted to contrast the intellectual geniuses of the present day with the “geniuses of the heart and sacrifice” who arose from the culture of the Middle Ages.²⁹ Wittlin deliberately wrote about the moment of St. Francis’ conversion, which took place in silence, humility, and loneliness, where it is possible to hear the voice of the Creator. Wittlin emphasized that Saint Francis found God when he was “alone, in a holy place—in himself.”³⁰ Descending into oneself is to soar to the heights—to God, and this is how Wittlin understood how man triumphs. In addition, Wittlin points out in his writings that true prayer is prayer of the heart.³¹ Man must first experience the horror of life, the meaninglessness of earthly existence, and the aimless search for illusory values before finding his true support in the divine order. Openness to supernatural values, meaning living the Gospel, is necessary in order to perceive the world teleologically.

It took Wittlin ten years to write *Salt of the Earth*,³² which was to be his “living testimony of the war that the simplest soldiers—the very people whom Jesus, St. Francis, and Gandhi sought out—had witnessed, fought in, and suffered from.”³³ Wittlin considered the simple to be the evangelical salt of the earth. In his works, he touches “the wounds of Christ, the stigmata of Saint Francis, and the great wound inflicted on humanity by the war.”³⁴ It would be a mistake to try to find in the protagonist of *Salt of the Earth*, Peter Niewiadomski, direct references to Franciscanism. For, these kinds of parallels are interpreted

²⁸ J. Wittlin, *Fragment przedmowy [Fragment of the Preface]*, in: *idem, Pisma pośmiertne ... (Posthumous Letters...)*, op. cit., pg. 57.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 57.

³⁰ J. Wittlin, *Onawróceniu św. Franciszka [On the conversion of St. Francis]*, *ibid*, pg. 93.

³¹ Wittlin writes: “Even though he had participated often in church devotions, Francis had never truly prayed until now. He grew up not understanding why the living pray to dead images. It was not until he was in the grotto of Bevglie that he understood that God is invisible and, because He has no body, everyone who wants to behold Him can do so anywhere.” *Ibid*, p. 94.

³² Although dated 1936, the novel was published in 1935. During the interwar period, four editions of the work were published. See: J. Wittlin, *Powieść o cierpliwym piechurze. Część I: Sól ziemi [A novel about a patient walker. Part I: Salt of the Earth]*, Warsaw, 1936.

³³ “Józef Wittlin o sobie [Józef Wittlin about himself],” in: J. Wittlin, *Eseje rozproszone [Distributed Essays]*, op. cit., p. 181.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 181.

here, and understood on the higher levels of a work's meaning. Wittlin conceived *Niewiadomski* in such a way that his behavior discredits the existing order and exposes the hypocritical mechanism of a culture that is yoked to the service of evil. This illiterate peasant sees and feels more than other people, asks basic questions about human existence, calls to mind lost values, and, thus, promotes the union between man and the universe.³⁵ The author admits that "Peter is a potential poet,"³⁶ and, consequently, a master of the medium through which we come to know basic truths. "His alleged stupidity exists only in the eyes of those who are truly stupid."³⁷ Needless to say, in order to interpret and understand the meaning and message of *Salt of the Earth*, one simply need refer to the Gospel of Matthew.³⁸

For Wittlin, St. Francis is an eternal living symbol of a man's struggle with his shortcomings. Thanks to him, we have a longing for order and harmony in ourselves and in the world. Both essays from the series *Święty Franciszek z Asyżu* [*Saint Francis of Assisi*], and the poems with the same motif "Skrucha w Asyżu [Contrition in Assisi]" (1925), "Święty Franciszek i biedni Żydzi [Saint Francis and the Poor Jews]" (1932), and "Lament barana ofiarnego [The Lament of the Sacrificial Lamb]" (1968) describe the Poverello of Assisi as an advocate of peace, love, and good silent witness for contemporaneity. His presence determines the axiological order. Wandering in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi is a journey to the source and depths of the human soul (descent), to the merciful God (ascent), and through the world (horizontal).

Józef Wittlin's literary works, essays, and letters form a coherent image of his spiritual formation, which took place in the shadow of the *Bible* and *Odyssey* as well as under the explicit patronage of St. Francis, who shaped his Wittlin's own consciousness:

³⁵ Elżbieta Kosakowska believes that the tragedy of war in the novel is that spiritual values are replaced by purely material concepts. See: E. Kosakowska, "The War as a Myth: An Analysis of a Development of Religious Imagery in Joseph Wittlin's *Salt of the Earth*," in: *Between Lviv, New York, and Ulysses' Ithaca ...*, op. cit., pgs. 61-72.

³⁶ Wittlin's words to Maria Morska (pseudonym Mariusz Dawn). M. Dawn, "Rozmowa z Józefem Wittlinem [Conversation with Józef Wittlin]," *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 6, 1936.

³⁷ "O *Soli ziemi* [On *Salt of the Earth*]," in: J. Wittlin, *Pisma pośmiertne... [Posthumous Letters ...]*, op. cit., pg. 353.

³⁸ "You are the salt of the earth. If the salt loses its taste, then with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under foot" (5:13).

A misanthrope and loner becomes a friend of mankind and of all creation. Someone [who lives among the dead] becomes an inspired apostle of life. He, who was saddened by the land, saddened by the vineyards and olives of the Spoleto valley, becomes a bard of the earth by virtue of heaven. Francis had to go to heaven during his lifetime like Odysseus journeyed to hell during his in order to accept the infallible route of his earthly journey there. And Francis received from God those ciphers that would help him to interpret the text of the world clearly throughout his life.³⁹

Throughout his own life, Wittlin strove to interpret the world using Franciscan categories. His contemporaries saw him as a charismatic observer of reality, a loner, and a wanderer on the paths of faith. He incorporated the ideas of *minoritas* and *fraternitas* into his life and, in a sense, was an exile long before he left Poland in 1939. In this regard, he wrote:

Exile can exist not only for political reasons. The notion of *exilium* refers not only to a certain space or to some place on earth. There is also an exile that is an escape from an era—a voluntary departure from one's own time.⁴⁰

Removing oneself from the time in which one lives is to follow St. Francis' approach. In 1936, Maria Morska described Wittlin in the following way:

Wittlin is different even from his fellow poets. They are lay people, while he is strangely monastic. He would look beautiful in a habit. He is pale with the pallor of the prophets, his eyes are deep and burning, and his hands are white, as if created for a pulpit. Wittlin is a scholar in church matters, and reliable information radiates from each of his statements. At the same time, he is wonderfully funny.⁴¹

In 1962, Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa wrote:

[H]e is first and foremost a man with a heart of gold, a good man. We are banal, which everyone is indifferent to, and make statements that everyone disregards. [...] Wittlin [on the other hand] has always been

³⁹ "O nawróceniu św. Franciszka [On the conversion of Saint Francis]," in: J. Wittlin, *Pisma pośmiertne...* (*Posthumous Letters ...*), op. cit., p. 95.

⁴⁰ "Przemówienie z okazji wyboru do niemieckiej Akademii Literatury [Speech on the occasion of the election to the German Academy of Literature]," delivered in May 1971, in: J. Wittlin, *Eseje rozproszone* (*Distributed Essays*), op. cit., p. 163.

⁴¹ M. Dawn, op. cit.

said to have a “Franciscan soul.” And, indeed, so it is. This is still the case: Wittlin took the name Francis at his baptism.⁴²

In an interview that she gave in August 2019, Wittlin's daughter Elżbieta Wittlin-Lipton shared that this view of Wittlin was common:

My father always showed solidarity with the poorest [of the poor], which is why some people believe that he had leftist views. Above all, however, he venerated St. Francis, who was his moral guide and someone to whom he could relate.⁴³

Given Wittlin's fate, which harmoniously corresponded with his work, it is clear that St. Francis introduced him to the Catholic Church.

Bibliography:

1. Bednarek A., *Franciszek z Asyżu wśród humanistów. Z dziejów recepcji postaci w XIX i XX wieku*, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska: Calvarianum 1986.
2. Frajlich A., ed. *Between Lvov, New York and Ulysses' Ithaca. Józef Wittlin –Poet, Essayist, Novelist*, New York-Torun 2001.
3. Gemelli A., *Franciszkanizm*, translated by W. J. Surmacz, Warsaw 1988.
4. Homer, *Odyseja*, translated by J. Wittlin, 3rd Edition, London: Veritas, 1957.
5. Homer, *Odyseja*, translated and introduction by J. Wittlin, Lviv: Wyd. H. Altenberga, 1924.
6. Iriarte L., *Historia franciszkanizmu*, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Serafin 1998.
7. John Paul II, “List na zakończenie jubileuszu osiemsetlecia urodzin św. Franciszka,” *Studia Franciszkańskie*, No. 1, 1984.
8. Kasprzyk M., *Święty Franciszek w literaturze polskiej*, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska: Calvarianum 1993.
9. Kielak D., Odziemkowski J., Zbudniewek J., eds. *Dzieło świętego Franciszka z Asyżu. Projekcja w kulturze i duchowości polskiej XIX i XX wieku*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Wyszyńskiego 2004.
10. Le Goff J., *Święty Franciszek z Asyżu*, edited by Joanna Guze, Wydawnictwo “Czytelnik,” Warsaw 2001.
11. Ligęza W., Wocław W. S., eds. *Etapy Józefa Wittlina*, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2014.
12. Porębowicz E., *Św. Franciszek z Asyżu*, Warsaw 1899.
13. Staff L., *Kwiatki świętego Franciszka z Asyżu*, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Zielona Sowa 2003.
14. Starowieyska-Morstinowa Z., *Ci, których spotykałam*, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Znak 1962.
15. Sterna-Wachowiak S., “Góra Moria.” *Przegląd Powszechny*, No. 1, 1987.

⁴² Z. Starowieyska-Morstinowa, *Ci, których spotykałam [Those I Met]*, Cracow 1962, pgs. 87-88.

⁴³ J. Frydryszak, “Ojciec wyjeżdżał tylko na chwilę. Rozmowa z Elżbietą Wittlin-Lipton [Father left only for a moment. Interview with Elżbieta Wittlin-Lipton],” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 3-4, 2019, pgs. 26-27.

16. Wittlin J., *Sól ziemi*, edited by E. Wiegandt, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1991.
17. Wittlin J., *Listy*, edited by T. Januszewski, Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza 1996.
18. Wittlin J., *Pisma pośmiertne i inne eseje*, edited by J. Zieliński. Warsaw: Biblioteka "Więzi" 1991.
19. Wittlin J., *Eseje rozproszone*, edited by P. Kądziała. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Książkowe Twój STYL 1995.
20. Wittlin J., *Hymny*, Poznań: Nakładem "Zdroju" 1920.
21. Wittlin J., *Poezje*, Warsaw: PIW 1978.
22. Wittlin-Lipton E., *Z dnia na dzień. Reportaż z modą w tle z czasów zawieruchy*, przełożyła L. MacMillan, Toruń: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Archiwum Emigracji 2012.
23. Yurieff Z., *Józef Wittlin*, edited by M. Szczubińska. Izabelin: Świat Literacki 1997.
24. Zajączkowski R., "Korespondencja między Józefem Wittlinem i Romanem Brandstaetterem," *Tematy i Konteksty*, No. 2, 2012.