

Master Thesis

Mariavitism: Mystical, Social, National *A Polish Religious Answer to the Challenges of Modernity*

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Introduction

At the turn of the 19th century began what could be regarded as the most interesting genuinely Polish religious movement, Mariavitism. In 1893, Maria Franciszka Kozłowska, a Franciscan nun from a secret order, received a revelation: she saw the corruption of the church, God's plan of its revival and was given his promise of mercy for the perishing world. A new religious order, the Mariavites, was to carry out the revival by cultivating mystical sensibility, which was believed to have disappeared from the church, along with the virtues of humility and renunciation of material goods in a society, so Maria Franciszka was convinced, ailed by greed and all manner of decay. Following conflict with Polish bishops and Rome, the Mariavites set up their own church and continued their mission, at the apex of their activity having as many as two hundred thousand followers. Until Kozłowska's death they have not introduced many theological reforms, but later, when bishop Jan Maria Kowalski became the unquestioned leader of the community, produced a unique theology, thoroughly mystical, full of apocalyptic expectation and messianic sentiments. Kowalski drew from many sources: Polish romantic poets, German theosophists like Boehme and Russian sects to Catholic modernism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The Mariavites became also, for example, the first major church of the broadly conceived Catholic tradition to ordain women as priests and bishops (preceded only by the highly unorthodox and small *Ecclesia Gnostica*). Never before has the Polish culture produced a more unique religious idea able to capture the minds of so many clergy and laity and inspire a large-scale revival (and it was the only schism in Roman Catholicism in Poland after the 16th century). No movement born on the Polish soil has also aroused that much controversy: from its beginnings, Mariavites were accused of all kinds of perversions and crimes, from national disloyalty to sexual misconduct.

As a result of the bold, perhaps even radical reforms of Kowalski, there occurred a schism in the church. Most of the clergy and faithful joined the more conservative faction which restored the doctrine of Maria Franciszka's times. A smaller group led by Kowalski established the Catholic Church of the Mariavites, the so called Felicjanów¹ brunch, and continued to follow the direction he defined.

Mariavitism, though inspired by (alleged) revelations, didn't come to being out of thin air. It is the thesis of this paper that it was in fact yet another answer to the challenges and new ideas of modernity: along modernism in Western European fashion, Socialist and nationalist

¹ Name of the village where the church had a large estate.

ideas and movements. Some of those ideas and attitudes it incorporated, some it rejected. Yet the mixture that ensued was indeed unique and had great potential. The main problem this thesis takes up is thus what stood behind the (initial) success of Mariavitism and how this relates to other reform movements in Polish Catholicism. By success is understood in the first place the efficiency of mission, gathering a large following in a relatively short period of time².

The thesis claims that Mariavitism owes its success to three features of its message and activities which addressed three developments characteristic of modernity. First, it was *socially oriented* – strived to alleviate poverty and exclusion, condemned greedy priests and the institutional church, which, in popular perception provided pastoral care in the first place for factory bosses and landowners, and disregarded the needs of the growing working class. Second, it was *national* (though not nationalists), and national sentiments were awakened in the course of the 19th century and ceased to be the domain of nobility and intelligentsia. And third, it was *mystical*³. It may seem paradoxical, but a return to mysticism, and a more emotional and personal faith, is indeed a feature of modernity, even among the so call western “modernists”.

Although arguably important and unique, Mariavitism is largely unknown beyond Poland. Literature on it is scarce and apart from a book by Peterkiewicz written in the seventies, *The Third Adam*⁴, and an article in French from the sixties by Appolis, *Une Église des derniers temps: l'Église Mariavite*⁵, there are basically no other reliable sources available in western European languages. Since the publication of those two, many studies have been published in Polish, new facts discovered and the sources they drew from subjected to further historical scrutiny. Peterkiewicz, though undeniably a skilled author, was not a historian, theologian nor religious scholar and his work lacks a critical apparatus⁶. Appolis’ sources are very limited, on the other hand, as he didn’t speak Polish, and in his article there are even many factual errors⁷. This paper will therefore use predominately source material and Polish literature published in the 1990s and 2000s to present an up-to-date and, to the extent possible, impartial outline of the history of Mariavitism.

² This sociological assessment is of course but one possibility of approaching the “success” of a religious organization. Its members may adopt another viewpoint and define success in a completely different way.

³ The thesis uses the term “mystical”, because this is how Mariavites like to speak about their spirituality, but the meaning conveyed by it sometimes verges on “pietism” or “intense personal devotion”.

⁴ Peterkiewicz J., *The Third Adam*, (Oxford 1975).

⁵ Appolis E., “Une Église des derniers temps: l'Église Mariavite”, *Archives de sociologie des religions* 10 (1965).

⁶ See for example the review by Nowak C.N. in *The Catholic Historical Review* 64 (1978), p. 712.

⁷ Like for example the date of Maria Franciszka’s death, which he wrote occurred in 1922 instead of 1921, or the description of the nature of the relationship between the church and the order following the schism, etc.

First the historical and social background of the movement will be described, with particular attention paid to the situation of the Catholic Church. Then will be presented the development of the movement and the establishment of the Church of the Mariavites. Finally, after an outline of Mariavite theology and the schism, other reform tendencies in the Church will be presented to illustrate the unique combination Mariavitism was.

All translations from Polish are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

1. Mariavitism: a Revival Movement

In this chapter will be presented the origin of the movement, its development into a full-fledged church after conflict with the Roman Catholic hierarchy, its subsequent crisis following the death of its founder and schism.

1.1 The religious field in Congress Poland at the end of the 19th century

Poland (or, properly, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), after three so called partitions in the 18th century, the final one in 1793, ceased to exist as an independent polity as it was divided between three regional superpowers, the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and German empires, to regain independent existence only in the aftermath of World War I, in 1918, as the (so called “second”) Republic of Poland. Earlier, especially in its golden age, the 15th and 16th centuries, it was a significant local military and political power marked by religious tolerance and a unique political system of Noble’s Democracy and elective monarchy⁸. This started to change rapidly already in the 17th century when military conflicts and internal disorder weakened the country significantly, and external threats from Protestant Swedes, Orthodox Ukrainian Cossacks and the Russian Empire resulted in the ruling elite adopting a strictly Catholic policy in the spirit of counterreformation. Citizens of other faiths were excluded from the political process unless they converted, and tolerant policy towards even controversial religious communities, like the Unitarians, was abandoned. At the same time, the political system became obsolete and its weaknesses, like the *liberum veto*⁹, were greatly abused. A climate of clientelism developed and there was no strong political centre to ensure unity and consistence of policy in the face of neighboring powers gaining in strength. Attempts at reforms, most notably the Constitution of May 3 adopted in 1791, and generally the rule of the enlightened monarch, Stanislaw August Poniatowski, the last Polish (elected) king, could not make up for centuries of neglect and errors, even though as such they are interesting and now constitute landmarks in national history. Also the Napoleonic wars, in which Poles invested great hope, did not change the situation, as their only effect was the short-lived Duchy of Warsaw. Following the Napoleonic period, the Congress of Vienna established three semi-independent political entities in what used to be Poland, namely the

⁸ In practice, about eight to twelve percent of society were considered citizens with political rights, which is of course far short of the standards defining modern democracy, but much more than was the case for example in Great Britain, proud of its democratic traditions, until about 1860

⁹ From a certain point in history every participant of the Sejm, the lower house of Polish parliament, could block any decision, which resulted in long-lasting paralyses of the working of this body.

Grand Duchy of Poznan (in the Prussian part), the Free City of Krakow (in the Austro-Hungarian part) and the Kingdom of Poland (in the Russian part). The first two were incorporated into the respective states in the aftermath of the People's Spring, and the Kingdom of Poland was incorporated into Russia even earlier, in 1831, as retaliation for the November Uprising. Second major uprising broke out on Russian territory in 1864 – the January Uprising – and in its result the policy of the Russian Empire became stricter, many freedoms, including religious freedoms, were lifted, and the so called cultural russification intensified. In effect, in the 19th century Poland existed only as a cultural unity, imagined rather than actual, in the minds of a part of the society: the messianic romantics from the first half of the century, the modern nationalists from the end of the second half of the century, carried by the wave of nationalistic ideas that had gained such prominence in Europe in the 19th century, and leftist parties seeking independence from the powers of the *status quo*. When Mariavitism was being born, at the turn of the centuries, this situation had obtained for over a hundred years and forms, together with the spiritual climate of the 19th century, the framework for analyzing the movement, indispensable for understanding its peculiarities and the course of its history.

In the context of the development of Mariavitism, it is of course the situation of the church that is most important. Two most prominent aspects of the religious landscape of Poland may be singled out that impacted on the complex interplay of the Catholic Church, the Russian state, the Polish independent state and the Mariavite movement to the greatest degree: first, the general state of religion and church at the end of the 19th century and the degree to which it was satisfying, or failing to satisfy, the needs of society; second, the relation of the church with nationalistic sentiments and the strife for independence on the one hand and with the Russian state on the other.

Polish society in the 19th century was in majority Catholic and, at least statistically, engaged in the life of the church, as 90% of the (Catholic) population went to church on a more or less regular basis¹⁰. Popular religiosity was dominant, however, and religious socialization and education were rather superficial and deficient. The majority didn't understand Latin, the liturgical language at that time, and the doctrine, too, was largely unknown. In fact, it is even reported that a substantial number of the faithful didn't know basic daily prayers like the Lord's Prayer¹¹. People were drawn to places of religious

¹⁰ Kłoczowski J., *Chrześcijaństwo i historia* (Kraków 1990), p. 263.

¹¹ Olszewski D., *Przemiany społeczno-religijne w Królestwie Polskim w pierwszej połowie XIX w.*, Lublin (1984), p. 220.

significance by a need to experience “miraculous” phenomena, which resulted in various shrines and other locations of cult being more popular than church services and many regular church practices being replaced by different forms of superstitions, many inherited from the land’s pagan past. The church was trying, of course, to influence the quality of religious life and increase religious awareness by means of preaching, liturgical life and catechization, but the greatest obstacle to a large-scale success of these attempts can be said to have lied in the quality of pastoral work itself, the preparation and involvement of the clergy. The average clergyman was rather poorly educated, which was however not entirely the fault of the church as objective circumstances, above all restrictions imposed by the Russian government, made education more difficult and costly. Moreover, in the eyes of the faithful, argues Podgórski, the moral life of clergy was much deficient as they often cared mostly for material goods rather than actual work on their own religious life and that of their flock¹². In effect of the repressions following the January Uprising, the only higher education institution of the church was located in Sankt Petersburg (the Roman Catholic Spiritual Academy) and the possibilities of providing clergy with thorough formation were thus greatly diminished. The fees for religious services were very high, and if the parish was poor, services were celebrated only on big feasts, sometimes as rarely as on Christmas and Easter¹³ alone. In many rural areas the faithful were thus deprived of regular pastoral care for most of the year. Conflict among clergy was not rare as financial matters were often subject to disputes between parish priests and their assistant priests. Olszewski concluded his discussion of the state of the church in 19th century Poland with the assertion that as a consequence of the aforementioned phenomena priests lost much of their authority if not authority at all¹⁴.

The situation, difficult in any case because of the baggage of history and the political circumstances, was worsened by the blooming of industry, which occurred especially in the second half of the 19th century, and the social and cultural changes it brought. The population of cities grew rapidly as many migrated from poor rural areas in search for work. An iconic example is here the city of Łódź, sometimes referred to as “Polish Manchester”, later an important centre of Mariavitism, which from a settlement of 40 000 in 1872 grew to a city of 687 000 in 1909¹⁵. The existent network of parishes in cities proved by no means sufficient to accommodate the increase in population and as a result newcomers were left without any

¹² Podgórski R., *Religijność wiernych Kościoła Starokatolickiego Mariawitów. Studium Historyczno-Socjologiczne*, (Kraków 1998), p. 18.

¹³ Stopniak F., *Kościół na Lubelszczyźnie i Podlasiu na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, (Warszawa 1975), p. 158.

¹⁴ Olszewski D., op. cit., p. 226.

¹⁵ Podgórski R., op.cit., p. 19.

pastoral care or access to organized church life. The parish of Holy Cross in Łódź, often cited as an example, had 142,000 people under its charge and only 6 priests, and it was not an exception: there were 6,400 people per parish in the entire diocese of Warsaw and the biggest Warsaw parish counted 82,000 members¹⁶. Most of the priests that came to work in the cities were relatively old, in any case born before the January Uprising, and came from rural areas (transfer to a city was seen as a promotion or reward for faithful service to the church). The problem was that work in the growing cities required much energy, creativity and openness to experimentation with new types of pastoral/spiritual care. Those priest, having worked in villages, were not accustomed to such work (it was customary that the people came to the priest, not the other way around), and, being often advanced in age, simply couldn't meet its demands. It was actually more common for poor inhabitants of large cities to affiliate with Socialist parties and movements than with the church¹⁷, because those understood the needs of the working class (and often used a quasi-religious rhetoric to draw people to themselves – they spoke of building a “Kingdom of God on Earth”, and while the church claimed to be the Kingdom, the people didn't see any consolation in this spiritual claim).

Furthermore, the traditionally patriarchal society of Poland began to change, later but in accordance with western trends, as women started to demand equality of rights, for example in education, and met, understandably, with no or little support on the part of the church. As the Mariavite Sister Maria Adela points out, this had an impact on the reception of Mariavitism:

The anti-feministic elements were (and still are) obvious in the anti-Mariavite actions. The Roman [Catholic] Church, as an organization ruled by men, couldn't come to terms with the fact that right and acknowledged claims about the corruption of clergy were proclaimed by a woman. In the whole anti-Mariavite action echoed the complex of a man deprived of the privilege to lead. This aspect played also an important role in the legal proceedings of the Mariavite movement before the church authorities.¹⁸

Apart from trying to improve the quality of catechization, liturgical life and pastoral care, or at least declaring such actions, which proved rather unsuccessful (due to objective

¹⁶ Porter B., “Marking the Boundaries of the Faith: Catholic Modernism and the Radical Right in Early Twentieth Century Poland”, in Grossman E.M., ed., *Studies in Language, Literature and Cultural Mythology in Poland: Investigating “the Other”* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 3.

¹⁷ See „Czy katolik może być socjalistą?”, *Powściągliwość i Praca* 8 (1906), p. 62.

¹⁸ Mames T.D., *Mysteria Mysticorum. Szkice z duchowości i historii mariawitów*, Kraków (2009), p. 101.

circumstances and neglect on the part of the hierarchy)¹⁹, the church responded to the situation with setting up a significant number of religious orders, most of them female, even when it was prohibited as a result of the January Uprising. They worked among the poor and in the big cities, manufactured goods and provide care, as well as tried to improve the quality of religious and spiritual life. This was very much in line with development in the West as late 19th century witnessed an unprecedented growth and multiplication of female religious orders. This played a very important role in the beginnings of Mariavitism as will be described later on.

1.2 Establishment of the Order

Feliksa Magdalena Kozłowska, the founder of Mariavitism affectionately referred to as “Mateczka”, was born on 27 May 1862 in Wieliczna near Wegrowo, Poland, to a family of Roman Catholic nobility. Her father died in the January Uprising and she was brought up by her mother Anna, her grandmother Jakubina and her mother’s second husband Seweryn Pulaski, who was related to general Casimir Pulaski. Feliksa received thorough education. As a child she had private tutors, then went to the boarding school for girls of countess Skarbek, a renowned institution at the time, and later to the women secondary school in Warsaw. She had a fluent command of Russian, English and French, and after graduating took up the position of home tutor herself. It was early that she felt a desire to join a monastic order. This was difficult, however, because after the January Uprising the Russian government prohibited Roman Catholic religious orders in the Kingdom of Poland from accepting new candidates, as well as the establishment of new ones. It was religious orders, however, that offered an alternative to the poor state of church life in Poland and they flourished, with popular support, regardless of the repressions. A man of special significance for their development was Fr. Honorat Kozłowski, a Capuchin, later declared blessed by the Roman Catholic Church. Feliksa Kozłowska managed to join one of the “secret” congregations²⁰ that he set up, where she took care of the sick, and later became the supervisor of the network of sacred orders. Thus in 1883 she became a Franciscan nun, and four years later, in Plock, she founded, with Fr. Honorat’s blessing, St. Mother Clara Order of Poor Sisters. As a nun she chose the names of Maria Franciszka. It was also then that she began to be called “Mateczka”, since it was how superiors of female congregations were addressed in 19th century Poland (this title is a

¹⁹ Olszewski D., op. cit., p. 240.

²⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, „congregation” is used in the sense of a religious order.

diminutive of "mother", a very affectionate address. In the literature, for example in Petrykiewicz's *Third Adam*, it is often mistakenly translated as "Little Mother", the proper translation, capturing the sense of the phrase, being rather "dear/beloved mother").

On 2 August 1893 she experienced what not only changed her own life but also initiated the movement that came to be known as Mariavitism. This is how she described it:

In the year 93, on August 2nd, after hearing the Holy Mass and receiving the Holy Communion, I was suddenly taken away from my senses and placed before the Divine Majesty. Unimaginable light overtook my soul and it was then showed to me: the general corruption of the world, and the end times; then the moral decay among clergy and the sins the Priests commit. I saw God's Justice aimed at punishing the world and his Mercy giving the perishing world, as the last means of rescue, the Veneration of the Most Blessed Sacrament and the help of Mary. After a moment of silence, the Lord spoke: "As a means of spreading this Veneration, I wish that a Congregation of Priests be established under the name of the Mariavites."²¹

In the revelations Maria Franciszka received the poor moral condition of Polish clergy was criticized, and especially their complete lack of interest and competence in spiritual, mystical matters. They were accused of vanity, impurity, drunkenness, promiscuity and gambling²². To reform and revive the life of the church and heal the sins of its clergy, she founded the Order of Mariavite Priests as she was commanded in the revelations²³. The community was to follow the first rule of St. Francis of Assisi²⁴. The name I usually explained as deriving from the Latin *Mariae Vita* (Imitans), (Imitating) the life of Mary. The emphasis on imitation is

²¹ Kozłowska F.M.F., *Objawienia Dzieła Miłosierdzia Bożego 1893-1918* (Kraków 1995), p. 10.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²³ "Ich will, das es zur Verbreitung dieser Verehrung einer Ordensverbindung der Priester unter dem Namen der MARIAVITEN gebe; ihr Wahlspruch sei: Alles zur größerer Ehre Gottes und zur Ehre der Allerseligsten Jungfrau Maria. Sie werden unter der Obhut der Allerseligsten Gottesmutter von der immerwährenden Hilfe bleiben, weil die Anstrengungen gegen Gott und die Kirche unaufhörlich sind, so ist die immerwährende Hilfe Marias nötig! - Für jetzt übergebe ich dieses Werk in deine Hände.- Du sollst Führerin und Mutter sein. - Dir vertraue ich diesen Priester an. Du wirst ihn leiten und führen wie ich will und sagen werde. Nun gehe und lese die auf dem heutigen Tage fallende Lebensbeschreibung des Heiligen. - Wie der hl. Franziskus am Tage der Muttergottes von den Engeln eine große Gnade Gottes für die Menschen erhalten hatte, so wurde auch dir die große Barmherzigkeit Gottes für die Welt am Tage der Gottesmutter von den Engeln angekündigt; dieser Tag soll der Anfang der Gründung der Mariaviten sein.", Kubacki J., "Einige Bemerkungen zur Entwicklung des Mariavitismus zwischen 1893 und 1935", unpublished, paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Old Catholic History workgroup, (Haarlem 2007), p. 1.

²⁴ The first rule referred to in Mateczka's times in fact to the first order (one of three), and only later Mariavite theologians associated it with the first historical rule of St. Francis, believed to have been dictated to him by Christ himself in 1209/10. First Mariavite *Rules* were written according to the historical rules from 1223/53, though substantially modified. For a discussion see Rudnicki K.M.P., "O regułach franciszkańskich i zakonie mariawickim", *Praca nad Sobą* 24 (2002).

very important and it will be elaborated on later in the section about Mariavite theology. But in the first place it was a revelation of divine mercy, which was to be gained by means of imploring adoration (propitiation for the sins of others, above all of priests) and a reform of the corrupted ways of clergy. That is why the revelations, and the Mariavite movement sometimes too, are referred to as the Work of Great Mercy. This will not be taken up in this thesis, but it is nonetheless interesting to note that the revelation of God's mercy Maria Franciszka received preceded that of Faustyna Kowalska, and, to a large degree, contained the same message.

Podgórski claimed that the order was illegal from its establishment or in the very least that its status was unregulated since Maria Franciszka, under the impression of the revelations, didn't obtain formal consent of the hierarchy²⁵. However, she received the blessing of Fr. Honorat – as he was Mateczka's spiritual father, she confessed everything to him and asked his advice on every matter²⁶ – and the order subsequently operated as all other secret communities. It was only later that it was officially declared illegal and condemned by the church.

The first members of the order were Felicjan Strumiłło, the supervisor of the seminary in Płock, referred to in the Mariavite tradition as “the first Mariavite”, who died soon thereafter but managed to bring the news of the revelations to other priests: Kazimierz Przyjemski, professor at the seminary in Płock; Jakub Roman Próchniewski, professor of church history at the seminary in Lublin; Jan Michał Kowalski and Leon Gołębiowski, both graduates of the Spiritual Academy in Petersburg. Mariavitism didn't start thus as a popular movement but first attracted the elites of clergy. Even when it gained much popularity and grew to attract a large following, the Lutheran minister Arthur Rhode wrote after visiting Poland and spending some time among the Mariavites:

... die mariavitischen Priester waren die Blüte der römischen Geistlichkeit Polens, sowohl religiös wie auch moralisch und intellektuell. Über die Hälfte von ihnen hatte ausser der üblichen Seminarerziehung auch noch die höhere Ausbildung in Petersburg, Rom oder auf anderen Akademien erhalten.”²⁷

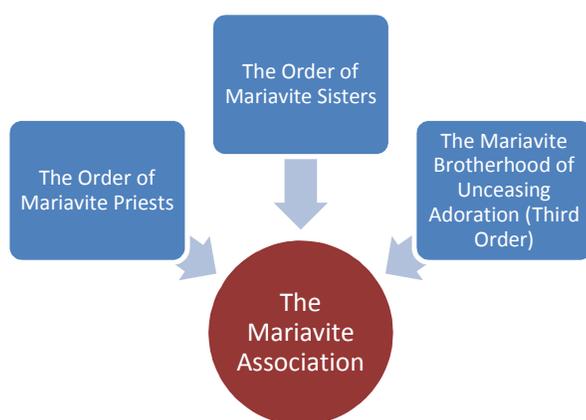
Structures of the order, with three provinces, were designed by Mateczka and her close cooperators in 1902. In the first phase of their activity, the movement was warmly received in

²⁵ Podgórski, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁶ Fr. Honorat thought that the revelations were imagined by Kozłowska, but allowed that she follows what they command her, because he couldn't see in them anything not in conformity with the Roman Catholic doctrine.

²⁷ Rhode A., *Bei den Mariaviten. Eindrücke von einer neuen romfreien katholischen Kirche*, (Berlin 1911), p. 12.

the church and the following it attracted, as well as its visibly positive impact on clergy, for whom it became a moral exemplar, were welcomed. With no opposition from the church, great enthusiasm among the members for work with and for the people, complete renunciation of any remuneration for spiritual services and a cult of poverty, Mariavitism attracted many people, so that in 1903 Felicja Kozłowska set up, besides the Order of Mariavite Priests and the Order of Mariavite Sisters (previously St. Mother Clara Order of Poor Sisters) also the Mariavite Brotherhood of Unceasing Adoration. Together they formed the Mariavite Association, which reflected the organization of the community founded by St. Francis. The Association defined its aims simply as living out the Gospel by following the example of Mary of Nazareth, and the primary devotional means employed by it were the Eucharistic adoration and the cult of the Mother of God of Perpetual Help. The emblem of the order(s)



depicted a monstrance with a glowing host surrendered by two kneeling angels. Around it stretched the inscription “May all the earth adore and implore thee”.

Illustration 1 Structure of the Mariavite movement in its initial years

1.3 An independent church

In January of 1903 Mariavite leaders, Franciszka Kozłowska, Gołębiewski, Próchniewski and Kowalski, decided to formalize the order. The revelations and an outline of the history of Mariavitism were handed to archbishop Chościak-Popiel and bishops Jaczewski and Szembek. The first two refused to accept them, but bishop Szembek agreed and the Mariavites hoped that he would help them to obtain the approval of Rome. They didn't realize, however, that the opinion about them among Catholic hierarchy had changed drastically by that time, because the scale of their activity grew and it became difficult to control by the bishops (who feared both an independent movement within the church and the possible reaction of the Russian government) and by Fr. Honorat, who also started to have

doubts about the nature of the revelation²⁸. Bishop Chościak-Popiel, in a document issued in 1903, accused the Mariavites of disobedience and an excessive cult of the Mother of God of Perpetual Help, and prohibited some of their practices (like burning more than one lamp before the Blessed Sacrament and organizing night adorations)²⁹. The status of the revelations was also controversial and the trust which Mariavites invested in them highly criticized by the hierarchy. Finally, Bishop Chościak-Popiel summed up his objections to Mariavite activities, writing “they attempt to reform their ranks [the clergy, Ł.L.] and society on their own, while reform should of course come from the heights of the Seat of Peter”³⁰.

Having realized that coming to terms with Polish hierarchy would be impossible, the Mariavites decided to send a delegation to Rome to seek papal approval directly. Maria Franciszka received a revelation where she was informed that the attempts to have the Order approved would be futile, but that the work of a profound reform of the church had to, and would be, carried out nonetheless³¹. On 13 August 1903 the delegation handed gifts and a manuscript with the history of the Order to pope Pius X along with a Latin translation of the revelations and a petition to approve the Order. As the case was not decided immediately, the delegation remained in Rome awaiting the result of its appeal. In the meantime, in 1904, Maria Franciszka finished writing down the rules for the Association of Perpetual Adoration, and they too were sent to the Vatican. In December of the same year the Mariavites were informed that the Holy Office decreed that the Order be dissolved. The revelations were deemed to be hallucinations and Maria Franciszka was prohibited from having anything to do with Mariavitism and especially spiritual guidance of priests. She did sign the declaration the Holy Office demanded of her and presented it to the Bishop of Płock, saying that “otherwise I would offend God and subject myself to church punishments”³². The Mariavites decided hence to obey by the rulings of the church, but sent Paweł Skolimowski to Rome to intercede

²⁸ Podgórski R., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁰ Olszewski D., *Mariawityzm – początki i rozwój*, (Więź 1986);

³¹ “On the octave of the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (1903) Lord Jesus showed me the glory the Saints give to Him in Heaven and said: “I wish that people on the earth give me such Glory in the Most Blessed Sacrament, joining the Saints; so that the earth may become a reflection of heaven.” Then Lord Jesus let me know that the Inquisition will reject the history of the Mariavites presented to the Holy Father – and said: “They won’t believe in supernatural things, because their faith is dead”; he also explained to me that the only reason I was given the order to go to Rome was to learn about the present state of the church. Then Lord Jesus commanded that of the people who are under my leadership be created “The Catholic, which means universal, Union of Perpetual Imploring Adoration”, which is to be led by the Mariavite Priests; he taught me how that Union should be organized and commended that I write the rule of life (regulations) for all its members and give it to the Holy Father. Finally, he said: ‘Do not worry; even if everyone were to turn against you, I will accomplish my work, for my church needs a reform at its very foundation.’, Kozłowska F.M.F., *Objawienia Dzieła Miłosierdzia Bożego 1893-1918* (Kraków 1995), p. 20.

³² Rybak S., *Mariawityzm – studium historyczne*, (Warszawa 1992), p. 37.

with the pope as they were convinced that the negative attitude of the Vatican was a result of bishop Szembek's visit there in July of 1904. The pope expressed his satisfaction with Mariavites' obedience and assured them of his sympathy and that he would examine their case and himself rule on it. Encouraged by what they thought was a warm reception, the Mariavites resumed their activities and operated in contact with Maria Franciszka. Their hopes related to the pope proved futile and their disobedience was punished by the suspension of many important priests in 1905 and, what turned out to be decisive, Michał Kowalski in 1906. At the same time many Mariavite priests were moved from their parishes and the bishops disseminated warnings against them, so that the Mariavites considered themselves persecuted (real persecution in fact ensued as Mariavites often fell victim to mob violence fueled by pamphlets published by Roman Catholic clergy and lay authors). Further attempts to convince the Vatican were not successful, like for example sending a delegation of three peasants who complained to the pope that

we have so many bad priests. They, spending time on playing cards, drunkenness and promiscuity, tyrannize and deprive the poor people of everything. They get away with their crimes. Despite appeals to the spiritual authorities, we cannot get rid of them, and they are taking away from us those priests who are for us true fathers³³.

Devotional practices associated with the Mariavites were finally prohibited and, eventually, the pope promulgated the encyclical *Tribus circiter*. It was read from the pulpits in Polish churches on 12 April 1906 and thus was the decree of the Holy Office confirmed. In the face of continuing Mariavite disobedience, a new decree was issued in December of that year, stating that Jan M. Michał Kowalski and Felicja M. Franciszka Kozłowska were "by name and personally subject to major excommunication and wear the burden of all punishments that fall on those publicly condemned"³⁴ (interestingly, Franciszka Kozłowska was the first woman in history to be personally excommunicated by the Roman Holy Office). All priests were given the ultimatum of either leaving the Order or being suspended, and the faithful likewise were warned that belonging to the Mariavite community would be punished with excommunication. 31 December 1906 thus saw the final parting of the ways of Mariavitism and the Roman Catholic Church.

In the new situation, it was crucial to gain a legal status and to cooperate with a church of the widely understood Catholic tradition so as to be able to ordain priests and, possibly,

³³ Mazur K., *Mariawityzm w Polsce*, (Kraków 1991), p. 28.

³⁴ *Mariawita* 6 (1963), p. 12.

bishops. Together with Maria Franciszka and Jan Kowalski, 44 000 thousand people and 33 priests left the Catholic Church, as well as all the Mariavite sisters. The name of the Catholic Church of the Mariavites was accepted and Jan Kowalski became the leader of the community, with Maria Franciszka as its spiritual leader. In November 1906 the Russian government recognized the Mariavites as a “religious sect”. From that time on the Mariavites could establish parishes and build churches to celebrate their services. Three years later the statues of the Mariavite parishes were ratified by the government and they gained relative independence.

An important aspect of the history of Mariavitism is the national question and the role the Roman Catholic Church played in the struggle for independence. Churches were often places where national culture was cultivated and national sentiments ignited. It was also the reason why church attendance remained relatively high despite poor religious education and awareness among the population. The lower clergy were often engaged in a range of activities related to education and culture, and sometimes even military struggle, inspired by nationalistic sentiments. Catholicism became, after the turn that occurred in Poland already in the 17th century, closely associated with nationality. Surrendered by Protestant Germans and Orthodox Russians, the two main adversaries in popular perception, Poles became attached to their Catholic identity. The situation was much more complex, however, which is often neglected in many historical studies published in Poland, and especially by contemporary nationalists. Namely, the Vatican and Polish hierarchy were never supportive towards Polish independence before it actually became possible when the *status quo* established in Vienna was destroyed in the aftermath of World War I. The Vatican was more afraid of secular forces that threatened the traditional way the world was organized, like socialism, and was ready to ally even with regimes of other faiths as long as they acted as guardians of the established order. This is why the Catholic Church, and domestic hierarchy, never lent their support to the uprisings or other forms of open defiance of “legitimate” governments. This displeased many in Poland and made the authority of the church decline a lot. However, the Roman Catholic Church had its own problems with the Russian Empire, especially after the January Uprising, and later, when the Mariavites were approved by the government, they were often accused of having been played by or having collaborated with the Russian government against the Roman Catholic Church and true Polish patriots³⁵. That was one of the themes of propaganda

³⁵ “Where propaganda of Russian orthodoxy could be of no avail, as in central Poland, the Russian government gave willing support to a local sect, like the Mariavites in the first decades of this century, in order to deprive the

directed against them in post 1918 Poland. This problem requires a much more profound examination than can be conducted in this paper, but a few things should be noted. First, the Russian state had no clear interest in supporting the Mariavites against Roman Catholicism as the hierarchy was willing to cooperate and rejected all revolutionary notions, while the Mariavites were greatly inspired by romantic poets like Mickiewicz and Słowacki, who did take active part in and promoted the struggle for national independence. Perhaps Russia wanted to dent the religious monolith that the Roman Catholic Church was, but it is by no means certain. Second, associating the Roman Catholic Church of that time with nationalistic sentiments is not justified as it was rather legitimist sentiments that inspired it. Third, one of the main reasons why the Mariavites wanted to be formally approved by the government, which they managed to do in 1906, was to be able to build new churches in villages where whole parishes or an overwhelming majority of their members left the Roman Catholic Church after Mariavite leaders had been excommunicated. If they had substantial support from the authorities, they would most probably receive the property of those parishes, which didn't happen³⁶.

The functioning of the parishes depended in the first place on parish councils (comprising representatives of the faithful) with the rector elected and responsible before the council. In 1910 Jan Kowalski was appointed the administrator of Mariavite parishes and in 1912 the Mariavites were awarded the status of a fully-fledged independent religious organization. What concerns its internal organization, the church didn't adopt the Roman Catholic division into dioceses and deaneries, but instead organized itself in provinces, custodies, parishes and filials. In 1907 the General Chapter of the Association made Jan Kowalski the General Vicar and adopted first reforms. Namely, the services of the church were to be celebrated in Polish and priests could be ordained, "like the Apostles", without prior seminary education. Attempts to reach an agreement with the Orthodox or Roman Catholic Churches, in order to be able to ordain priests and have episcopal oversight, proved futile. With the help of the Russian general Kirjejew, an amateur theologian engaged in the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, the Mariavites became members of the Union of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches. Kowalski was consecrated a bishop by the archbishop of Utrecht Gerardus Gul in 1909 and two other bishops were consecrated in 1910. The church changed its name to the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites.

nation of the stronghold which adherence to Roman Catholicism constituted.", Dyboski R., "The religious element in Polish national life", *The Sewanee Review* 31 (1923), p. 390.

³⁶ See Mames T.D., *op. cit.*, Kraków (2009), p. 155.

Significantly for the history of the Mariavites, the church as such was needed for the *Order* to survive – it was a necessary framework for a certain *form of spirituality* to develop and function, but it was never the goal in itself. As a result, it was never clearly defined where the *Order* ended and the church began, so to speak, and *vice versa*. The territorial organization of the church was for example, as was already said, copied from the *Order*. This led to much confusion and has not been clarified until this day. Another important thing is a shift that occurred in the organization of the church. At the beginning, its system was collegial. The General Chapter was the highest organ of the church, comprising bishops, priests and two lay delegates from every parish. The parishes too were governed collegially by a council, which elected the rector and disposed of the property of the parish. All adult faithful, regardless of gender, could be elected to the council and to the Chapter. After the death of Maria Franciszka in 1921, this and many other aspects of the church began to change substantially towards an episcopal-synodal model. The chapter comprised then only the archbishop (as the bishop of Płock began to be titled after the church left the Union of Utrecht in 1924), the custodians and two general vicars. The laity were excluded from it and retained influence only on the parish level.

1.4 Mariavite theology, doctrine and social activity

The development of Mariavite theology can be divided into three most important periods. Those are: the time until Mateczka's death in 1921; the reforms of Archbishop Kowalski until the schism of 1935; and the conservative reforms and stagnation after 1935 up to today. These paper doesn't deal with the development of Mariavitism after 1939, but the most important traits of Mariavite theology in the second half of the 20th century were defined very soon after the schism.

1.4.1 Theology and doctrine until Mateczka's death

Konrad Rudnicki, probably the most interesting and prolific contemporary Mariavite theologian, and at the same time a renowned astronomer, thus elaborates on the name of the movement:

The name “Mariavitism” comes from the Latin “*Mariae vita*” and signifies the necessity to imitate the life of the Mother of God, or – if one prefers to call her like that – Mary of Nazareth. This imitation of her life is important in the time of God’s Mercy not only for the chosen ones: monks, ascetics, priests, but for all the people of God.³⁷

In the literature, it is usually Marian devotion that is emphasized as characteristic for the movement. Although there is no doubt that it is important, as the invocation of the Mother of God of Perpetual Succor was commended already in the revelations, it is by no means of primary significance for Mariavitism. Of devotional practices, it is rather the “imploring adoration”, meant to appease God for the sins and offences of the world and the clergy, that stands out, and the Marian element consists in the adoption of a



Illustration 2 Maria Feliksa Kozłowska, *Mateczka*. Mariavite devotional representation.

certain way of life. Popular Marian religiosity certainly found its expression in Mariavitism, which can be easily observed in every Mariavite church with its icons, paintings, sculptures, songs, hymns and prayers devoted to Mary, yet it is the following, the imitation of her life, that provides the basic inspiration for Mariavite spirituality, as Fr. Rudnicki points out. This is very interesting indeed, and testifies to the uniqueness of Mariavitism, because the 19th century saw an unprecedented flourishing of Marian devotion and among well-known revelations of that time there are very few of Christ and dozens of Mary (Lourdes and Fatima are but the best known examples)³⁸. The Mariavites are unique in that *Christ* commanded them (they believe) in the first place not to *worship* but to *follow* Mary. Although Mariavitism undeniably had a strong Marian element, which the name itself indicates, its spirituality was different – Mary was in the first place an example and only then an active subject to whom appeal should be made. There were Marian apparitions in Poland too, for example in 1877 in Gierzwald, which became a pilgrimage destination, and Częstochowa, the location of the “miraculous image” of the Black Madonna attracted still more pilgrims, but Mariavites did

³⁷ Rudnicki K.M.P., “Naśladować Maryję”, *Mariawita* 1-3 (2010), p. 7.

³⁸ For an overview of Marian apparitions after 1830 see for example Maunder Ch. J., *Apparitions Of The Virgin Mary in Modern European Roman Catholicism* (From 1830), 1993.

not have their own Marian shrines nor did they organize mass pilgrimages to the national ones. In this they differentiated themselves from the popular religion of the time, even though today, paradoxically, they are often believed to be the example *par excellence* of popular religion (in the first place because they preserved many devotional forms now unpopular in Roman Catholicism and live mostly in rural areas). Mariavite spirituality is often described as Marian and it is suggested that it entailed in the first place a cult of Mary. For example, Porter writes: “She [Mateczka] was to do so by creating “a congregation of priests under the name of the Mariavites whose purpose would be to spread “the veneration of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, ...for as endeavors against God and the Church are perpetuated, so perpetual is the need of Mary’s help”³⁹. This is only partially true, for Mariavites were commended to popularize the veneration of Mary but only, as it were, on the second place. The first place was occupied by *Eucharistic adoration*, which was focused on Christ *directly*. This tendency to reduce the movement to Marian spirituality doesn’t do justice to it, for it obscures the fact that it actually stood out as christocentric against the background of 19th century Catholic spirituality (with its overflow of Marian apparitions, development of Marian devotions, growing number of order devoted to Mary, etc.).

What is also visible in the quoted fragment is that this spirituality was to be practiced by everyone. In Mariavitism the monastic spirit of the Franciscan tradition was to permeate the life of the whole community, which even formally was included in the order (the Third Order or Brotherhood). The inclusion of the faithful into the life of the church and treating them with more trust and respect is a notable feature of Mariavitism, especially in its early years, before Kowalski concentrated almost all power in his hands. Real power in parishes belonged to the councils and laity had voting rights in the Chapter. The liturgy was celebrated in the vernacular to ensure fuller participation of the faithful and many educational facilities, along with various welfare establishments, were set up. This openness towards the people, rejection of papal authority and clericalism of the Roman Catholic Church characteristic for that time for a more democratic model of church governance and liturgical adjustments are the most important reforms made during the life of Mateczka. Doctrinally, the church aligned its teaching with that of the Old Catholic Churches, that is accepted the teachings of the seven ecumenical councils and rejected later Roman Catholic dogmas. Even if in practice it expressed belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and most Mariavites until today

³⁹ Porter B., “Marking the Boundaries of the Faith: Catholic Modernism and the Radical Right in Early Twentieth Century Poland”, in Grossman E.M., ed., *Studies in Language, Literature and Cultural Mythology in Poland: Investigating “the Other”* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 670.

consider it a part of their beliefs, it is not obligatory nor does it have the status of dogma. Also the revelations of Mateczka, though of foundational importance, have never been accepted as doctrine during her life, and she insisted that her person not be venerated or glorified.

Mariavitism was a prayer movement, a revival of mystical spirituality and the spirit of humility and poverty characteristic for the Franciscan tradition, and not an intellectual, theological current like for example German Old Catholicism.

1.4.2 Social activity

When Mateczka was dying, Mariavitism had from 160 000 to 200 000 followers and operated:

1 Vorgymnasium, 45 Kindergärten, 3 Analphabetenkurse, 14 Bibliotheken,
32 Handwerksbetriebe, 4 Waisenhäuser, 13 Altersheime, 4 Ambulatorien,
10 Freiküchen für Arme, 7 Bäckereien, 3 Sparkassen, 2 Feuerwehreinheiten,
48 Kinder-, Jugend- und Frauenhilfswerke.⁴⁰

The engagement of the movement in the life of society went far beyond missionary activity and the promotion of certain devotional practices. Work was very highly esteemed and the Mariavite ethos managed to combine mysticism with dedication to welfare and



Illustration 3 Mariavite sisters with children

charity, a very potent mix. Until this day “sister Mariavites”, when the only Mariavite sister left lives in France, are remembered for their devoted work among the poor, especially in urban areas like Łódź, and manufacturing certain goods, in the first place, interestingly, bedspreads and quilts. It might be argued that the popularity Mariavitism enjoyed, especially

⁴⁰ Kubacki J., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

in its early years, resulted from the spirit of poverty and humility cultivated by its clergy. However, this, by itself, is not enough to produce broad social involvement. Dissatisfaction of the people with Roman Catholic clergy could have brought them to the Mariavites, who openly and harshly criticized fellow clergy, but it doesn't explain either the extent of support given to the movement nor its policy to work on the social plane. Pastoral omissions and neglect of large groups of the faithful called for intensified involvement on the part of the clergy and only this could make it trustworthy in the eyes of the people. Apart from this, the spirituality of the order comes from the tradition in which Mateczka lived and worked, that is from the small secret orders which performed many practical tasks. After the establishment of Mariavitism this didn't affect nuns only but started to shape the life of the whole movement and then church. Additionally, most of the clergy that joined the movement in the early years were well educated and sought, in the new atmosphere of more equality, to promote education among the poor and marginalized. Indeed, Mariavites had many schools and other establishments where education was provided; in its magazines, including magazines for children and youth, published educational sections to help people make up for lack of formal education and where they advanced new ideas. A very interesting example is the connection of the Mariavite movement to the Esperantist movement. As is well-known, Esperanto is the most widely spoken constructed language. It was created by L.L. Zamenhof (1859-1917), a Jewish doctor and linguist publishing at the beginning of his work on Esperanto under the pseudonym Doktoro Esperanto (which translates as *Doctor who hopes*)⁴¹. Many Mariavites became very involved in the Esperantist movement (*the Address Book of Polish Esperantists* from 1931, for example, lists 34 Mariavite priests and only 28 Roman Catholic Priests, though the latter were, of course, incomparably more numerous⁴²). In 1931, because of great interest showed by Mariavites in Esperanto, the Mariavite Esperantist League (*Mariavita Esperantista Ligo*) was established. One can point at a few reasons why the idea of an international language appealed so much to Mariavites. On the one hand, they recognized in it elements of their own reformist mindset, a similar dream of a better future and a better society. Thus in *Templariusz* (the Templar, Mariavite magazine for children and youth) we read: *Esperanto is a linguistic ideal, the most wonderful symbol of universal revival in all aspects of social life*⁴³. This demonstrates also that Mariavites had a broad interest in reforms of various kinds and a revival going beyond the purely religious sphere. On the other hand

⁴¹ For more information on Esperanto see for example Janton P., *Esperanto. Language, Literature, Community*, (New York 1993).

⁴² Tempeczyk K., "Mariawityzm a esperanto", in *Praca nad Sobą* 28 (2003), p. 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

they hoped that Esperanto may help them to spread the idea of their movement, which they ardently believed was universal, in the wider world. The clergy intended to introduce Esperanto as the second language known by all the faithful and concentrated their efforts, naturally, on the education of the youth. The organization *Juna Esperantisto Mariavito* (Young Mariavite Esperantist) was established in Leszno in 1929 and *Mariavita Junularo* (Mariavite Youth) in Plock by the Temple of Mercy and Charity. In *Templariusz* they published also a periodical course of Esperanto meant for people from poor areas to acquire basic knowledge of the language. Interestingly, the first Mass celebrated in Esperanto in Poland was Mariavite (in 1959 during the 44th Congress of Esperantists), and Mateczka's complete revelations and other writings were translated into the language.

1.4.3 Kowalski's reforms and the schism

The theological turn in the life of the church came when bishop Kowalski, later archbishop, became the sole spiritual leader of the community after Mateczka's death⁴⁴. He was even titled "the leader"⁴⁵. There was no one with a personality strong enough to counter his radical opinions or question his intuitions and ideas. His authority was even reflected in the law of the church as the "church commandments" proclaimed that everyone was obliged to "listen to the archbishop in everything"⁴⁶. He was influenced by many sources. On the one hand from orthodox Christianity and the pietistic religiosity of his time, on the other from national poets like Słowacki and Mickiewicz, Western theological developments (both in the Roman Catholic Church and the Old Catholic Churches), and, which is very probable but at this stage of research undocumented, from certain esoteric movements like for example Martinism. The idea that unites his theology, religious and social thought is that of the Kingdom of God on Earth,



Illustration 4 The Temple of Mercy and Charity, designed by Mariavite priests and built in 1911-1914, one of very few examples of English neo-Gothic in Poland.

⁴⁴ The death as such was also understood in a mystical manner by Mateczka and the Mariavites. Namely, she suffered from cancer and refused treatment, seeing her suffering as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The anniversary of her death is commemorated in the Mariavite tradition as the day of Mateczka's sacrifice.

⁴⁵ *Królestwo Boże na Ziemi* 3 (1930), p. 21.

⁴⁶ Kowalski J., *Rytuał maryawicki wraz z katechizmem*, (Plock 1926), p. 55.

which, he believed, should be realized through Mariavitism on the whole earth. This he also combined with the conviction of Poland's special significance in history, exemplified for instance in Słowacki's prophecy that "Poland will be everywhere"⁴⁷. In 1924 he predicted a world catastrophe and announced that in order to survive and enter the glory of the Kingdom the faithful should write down their names in the so called Book of Life, which was on display in the Temple of Mercy and Charity, built a decade earlier, the centre of Mariavite life in Płock. In the same year he announced also that priests may marry Mariavite sisters and that those were "mystical marriages", resulting not of temptations but the desire of sanctity. Children born in those marriages were not brought up by their parents, who had to give up parental rights. Instead, they were raised by Mariavite sisters in the monastery in Płock. It is believed that Kowalski considered children born in those marriages to be without original sin, and Peterkiewicz, among others, presents this as a fact. Rudnicki, however, points out that Kowalski still wanted to baptize those children, which means that he didn't believe in their immaculacy. Be it as it may, the idea of the "mystical marriages" proved to be very controversial among Mariavites and many left the church in protest against what they believed was immoral⁴⁸.

Kowalski developed also the veneration of Mateczka, which began soon after and even before her death, as a saint, and, indeed, even more than that. Mateczka, who in the course of her mystical experiences lived through the mystical death, or the dark night of the soul, was, as it were, spiritually resurrected, cleansed of all earthly temptations, and entered into a union with Christ, became his bride (in the Catholic Church of the Mariavites she is usually referred to as the *Bride of Christ* now). This was known during the life of Mateczka, but she insisted that her person didn't deserve any special veneration and the path that she went should in fact be followed by all people. As all people should live like Mary, all should strive to enter a mystical union with Christ. This was anticipated in Mateczka, but she was essentially not unique in this regard. But as it more often happens in the development of religious movements, the founder, at first just a model and example, was elevated above ordinary mortals and from the object of the action of God's grace became a semi-autonomous agent. Namely, in the course of Kowalski's theological development, Mateczka became very closely associated with the Holy Spirit, to the point of being considered his incarnation (this idea was fully expressed only at the end of Kowalski's life and later by Bishop Rafael Wojciechowski, the leader of the Catholic Church of the Mariavites after Izabela Wilucka's death).

⁴⁷ Podgórski R., *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Rybak S., *Mariawityzm – studium historyczne*, (Warszawa 1992), p. 50.

Another important and controversial reform was the introduction of woman priesthood. In 1929 Kowalski ordained 12 sisters to the priesthood and consecrated his wife, Izabela Wiłucka, as an “archpriestess” (archbishop). From 1929 to 1935 138 sisters were ordained⁴⁹. In 1930 Kowalski abolished individual confession and proclaimed that Roman Catholic Mass offering was no longer valid, but not generally, as is claimed in most literature, but valid *ex opere operato*, because of the power of the sacrament of priesthood and the words of institution: the validity of the offering depended on the moral state of the priest and the faith of the gathered faithful (it is unclear whether these conditions were cumulative or disjunctive).

The reforms were very controversial in the church and society at large, and became the subject of gossip and a popular topic for tabloid press. Furthermore, Mariavites were accused of various crimes, most grievous of which were sexual in nature. The most important incident was the so called Płock trial when Kowalski was charged with sexual abuse of three sisters and three minors. He was sentenced to three years in prison in 1931, but it is disputed whether evidence was sufficient to rule that he was guilty of the charge⁵⁰ and impartiality of the court is, probably rightly, questioned. However, opposition was mounting in the church and soon, in 1934, open rebel against the archbishop was imminent. It was led by bishops

Bucholc and Feldman, and the Chapter gathered in January 1935 overthrew Kowalski, who moved with his followers to Felicjanów and created there a competing branch of Mariavitism, the Catholic Church of the Mariavites, claiming of course to be the legitimate successor of Mateczka. The Chapter in Płock decided to return to the doctrinal state from before the death of Maria Franciszka. Interestingly, the new Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites did not consider the ordinations of women to be invalid but only suspended the sisters in their priestly functions. As a result of the schism it is reported that 30% of the faithful left Mariavitism



Illustration 5 Archbishop Beatrix Szulgowicz distributing communion in the Catholic Church of the Mariavites (1980s)

⁴⁹ Podgórski R., *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁵⁰ Rybak S., *op. cit.*, (Warszawa 1992), p. 125

altogether. About 40 000 thousand remained in the Old Catholic Church⁵¹. A serious blow for the church, it wasn't lethal as some see it: "Nonetheless, the Mariavites never quite developed the critical mass needed to form a genuine alternative to Roman Catholicism, and ... the movement had faded away, disappearing as quickly as it had emerged"⁵².

As Mariavitism was subjected to public antagonism and negative propaganda of the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish authorities, it developed a mentality of a closed persecuted group, which cooled off its missionary zeal and objectively decreased its missionary potential. These two factors influenced each other, of course, as Kowalski's vision of the Kingdom of God on Earth, which was to be realized through Mariavitism, and especially the idea of the Book of Life, only accentuated the mentality of a closed group, perhaps simply sectarian mentality. But the fact remains that it was in the first place the strong, apodictic personality of Kowalski that contributed to the decline of Mariavitism. There was no one in the church to oppose him and he claimed the sole right to interpret the legacy of Mateczka. In the end, after the schism, Mariavites became afraid of theological creativity and since then have not changed almost anything in the liturgy, theology and law of the church, which now do require a reform to make them more attractive to younger generations who don't understand the peculiarities of 19th century spirituality. A confrontation with modern western theology is also needed, but it seems that there is presently no one, perhaps save for Daniel Mames and Konrad Rudnicki, who could do it. It is certain, however, that if things don't change, if Mariavitism doesn't become more open to new ideas and initiatives of laity and doesn't reform its internal organization to return to the democratic ideas of its first years, it will continue to decline. The Felicjanów branch, likewise, is constantly diminishing and, some claim, cultivating a sectarian mentality.



Illustration 6 Archbishop M.J.M. Kowalski

⁵¹ Mames T.D., *Mysteria Mysticorum. Szkice z duchowości i historii mariawitów*, Kraków (2009), p. 210.

⁵² Porter B., "Catholicism, Ethno-Catholicism, and the Catholic Church in Modern Poland", report for National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (2004), p. 10.

2 Other reform movements in Poland and their relation to Mariavitism

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was a difficult time for the church. It considered itself in the defensive against modern ideologies, which, it was believed, attacked both from the outside (fierce struggle with anticlericalism which was going on, among other places, within the two arguably most important Catholic nations, France and Italy is a good example) and from the inside. In Italy the church lost secular power and was confined to the small Vatican, faced suppression of some religious orders, abolishment of ecclesiastical courts, lost control on marriage and its importance with regard to charity declined as many tasks it used to perform were overtaken by the state. In France a large proportion of the urban population and a still greater proportion of the intelligentsia became less involved in or simply left the church. As many were afraid that the church was losing ground to secularism and was not able to respond to the challenges of modernity appropriately, in the first place with regard to changes in economy and the progressing pauperization of the rapidly growing population of cities, but also new critical ideas applied to the Christian message and sources, various remedies were proposed. The conservative stance of the church elite strived to consolidate the ranks in the church and prevent new ideas from penetrating it. Popes were condemning the modern world in its various manifestations (for example in Encyclicals like *Mirari Vos* and *Quanta Cura*). Even Pope Leo XIII, who arguably attempted to reconcile the church with modernity to some degree, above all by his Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, where he endorsed the establishment of Catholic trade unions and thus a more modern approach to poverty and the ills of industrialization and capitalism, contributed to final consolidation of the church in the conservative camp as he advocated the return to scholasticism, the rigid and speculative Neo-Thomism, which finally became the theological stronghold where the hierarchy took refuge. Many bolder Catholic theologians left the church already after the First Vatican Council (1868), where the dogma of papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction was proclaimed, the symbolic peak of the trend to centralize the church and orientate it still more on the Vatican⁵³, to form new churches (the so called Second Wave of Old Catholicism). Old Catholics came in the first place from Germany, but also from the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland. This weakened the liberal or progressive circles within the Roman Catholic Church, but didn't eradicate them. They became the object of merciless campaign to cleanse the church from "modernism. The

⁵³ Although it was accomplished by people who perceived themselves as conservative or even reactionary, a very modern development.

multifaceted phenomenon of “modernism” cannot be addressed in a very detailed way in this paper. Suffice it to say that the term “modernism” is not precise and may refer to a range of phenomena. It is employed here as a series of responses to the perceived crisis of the church in modernity by a range of liberal theologians who explored Biblical criticism, new philosophical currents and argued for clearer distinction between reason and faith (Thomism insists that faith is perfectly reconcilable with reason and that reason should be able to demonstrate the truth of its precepts) and that no stage in the development of the church and its doctrine is final. Yet in literature it may be employed otherwise, for example as responses to the dangers of modernity *in general*⁵⁴. To convey the latter sense this paper uses the term “reform/ism”.

Among groups advocating reform one can also point at those concerned above all with the plight of the working classes who either wanted to cooperate with Socialists or advanced similar reforms to counter their influence. The flourishing of new monastic movements too manifests a change going on in the church. It is from it, at least in part, that Mariavitism was born as its founder was a nun from such a new order.

Poland was removed from the scene where most of the controversies took place and where the debate and battle was fiercest, just like it had been behind developments in Western Europe in all areas of culture for a long time, and, for instance, the Old Catholic controversy didn't affect it at all (until the establishment of the Polish National Catholic Church and, later, the Polish Catholic Church, which belonged to the so called Third Wave of Old Catholicism). Yet, especially later in the 19th and 20th centuries, some ideas did penetrate to Poland and gained proponents, and yet others were genuine products of the Polish culture – among them Mariavitism. Porter argues that

In the years surrounding the turn of the century, many Polish Catholics groped for new, innovative ways to reconfigure the boundaries of their conceptual universe. Nearly every Catholic intellectual and nearly every member of the hierarchy was convinced that some sort of tinkering with the limits of orthodoxy was needed if the Church was to survive in the twentieth century. Contrary to appearances (and in some cases even to self-perception) this was just as true for the disciplinary

⁵⁴ See Porter B., “Marking the Boundaries of the Faith: Catholic Modernism and the Radical Right in Early Twentieth Century Poland”, in Grossman E.M., ed., *Studies in Language, Literature and Cultural Mythology in Poland: Investigating “the Other”* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

bishops as it was for the most radical of the reformist clergy. In all cases, the issue was how far and in what direction one could go in accommodating novelty. One way or another, a reconfigured model of Polish Catholicism was going to emerge.⁵⁵

Indeed, change was about to happen and many held their own view how it should happen or how catastrophe could be avoided. The liberal visions arguably gained less popularity than in the West and Polish internal debate as such didn't influence the debate there. But Porter is right to emphasize that it were not only the liberals who advocated reform. Also conservatives recognized that time was ripe for some sort of change, that the functioning of the church was far from perfect and that it might lose a lot if it didn't accommodate itself in some way to new circumstances. And apart from liberals and conservatives one could point at mystical revival ideas, which could be argued to form a distinctive category. Thus three movements/tendencies will be examined: Christian Socialism exemplified by Szech, the conservative tendency to tie the church to the national movement and (extreme) right wing parties, and mystical revival movements, and then their similarities and differences with Mariavitism will be discussed.

2.1 Antoni Szech's Christian Socialism

Father Izyfor Wysłuch, publishing and best known under the name of Antoni Szech, came forth with a radical conception of reform of Catholic theology and, in the first place, practice. His point of departure, too, was the crisis of the church and his fear that "if we continue on in this way and the Grace of God does not intervene in a peculiar manner, we will lose utterly"⁵⁶ Szech's dominant concern was the injustice of the modern industrial world and the exploitation of the workers. He deemed the actions of the church to prevent violence and exploitation of the weakest and most fragile in society not enough to address the real dimension of the problem. For him Socialism "arose from a consciousness based on the principles of Christ's Gospel"⁵⁷ He believed that it was the mission of the priests to protect the interests of the people, the oppressed and marginalized. Eventually Szech was excommunicated and later abandoned the church altogether. The hierarchy didn't reject him because of his concern for the poor, however, or because he worked to construct a social

⁵⁵ Porter B., "Marking the Boundaries of the Faith: Catholic Modernism and the Radical Right in Early Twentieth Century Poland", *op.cit.*, p. 270.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

movement (there were others who did that to some extent and remained within the church, even among the bishops), but because he “combined Catholic social action with an assault on the institutions of the church itself, and placed blame on the clergy and on Rome’s doctrinal teachings”⁵⁸ His vision of the world resembled very much the Socialist ideas and this, too, displeased and alarmed the conservative hierarchy greatly. It was one thing to take care of the poor in order to counterweight godless Socialism and quite another to adopt the language of the enemy and praise him for his efforts, even if one continued to criticize some of his ideas or actions. Szech dreamed that the church stopped “pushing mankind backwards” and “transformed itself into the guide of humanity”⁵⁹. Some of Szech’s ideas resemble also Western modernism – he believed that reason and faith were autonomous realms, that faith didn’t depend only on rational arguments. Open defiance of the scholastic assumptions was also a grief violation of the doctrine of the church as it was then perceived by most of the bishops. Propaganda against him was widespread and soon he was severely completely compromised in the eyes of many people, and became an object of hatred and mockery, regarded as a traitor of the fatherland and called a Jew and a mason (one of the heaviest invectives at that time).

2.2 Alliance with nationalists

Contrary to prevailing belief in Poland and abroad, the church has not always supported national movements, which was already mentioned at the beginning of the thesis. Both the Catholic narrative of Polish history and the alliance between the church and nationalists are a rather new development. Today the chief popular myth or ideal construct in and about Polish culture is that of the “Polak-katolik”, “Catholic Pole”, as if Polishness were inseparable from Roman Catholicism⁶⁰. The beginnings of this idea lie in the 17th century when wars with neighbours of other faiths brought about great distrust to those who professed them at home. Protestants, Lutherans and Reformed Christians, Arians and Orthodox Christians, who had formed a substantial part of Polish society and significantly influenced its cultural development, lost traditional privileges and the narrative of tolerance and openness, which the Commonwealth would up to that point cultivate, slowly changed into an identity constructed upon the Catholic faith in its counterreformation guise (marked by symbolic gestures like the

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 275

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 277.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 278.

offering of the land to the Blessed Virgin and her proclamation as the Queen of Poland, something that was as much a symbol of trust in divine protection as it signified disregard or even hostility to Protestants). This was strengthened during the partitions, as the Catholic church was one of the most important places where Polish language and culture were cultivated, and an institution uniting the dismembered country, if only in the imagination of the people. It was finally cemented in the independent Polish state created after the First World War and after the Second World War when Polish society became basically homogenous and Catholicism gained unprecedented hegemony as well as took upon itself the role of the chief opponent of real socialism (even though relations between the socialist state and the church were in fact better than is commonly believed).

However, in the 19th century, which saw Poland in partitions and nonexistent as an independent political entity, the church didn't champion the fight for national liberation. It took a loyalist position, that is maintained that the people owes its legitimate monarch due honour and obedience⁶¹. It didn't support insurrections officially and a rather small part of the clergy took active part in them. As a big landowner ruled by upper classes of society⁶², from which most of the bishops and priests came, and facing diminishing capacity to control popular religion and increasing estrangement of rapidly growing city populations, the church was indeed in a difficult position. As liberal reforms were not taken seriously by the hierarchy (except as a threat), some other way had to be devised to blow new life into the church and strengthen its bond with the people. An alliance with a social force, or creation of a social force, was indispensable, for the traditional approaches and practices were failing in the face of industrialization, urbanization and other challenges of modernity, but the church demanded to be accepted on its own terms, that is not as a temporal institution, one among many, but as it envisaged itself – supernatural and universal, elevated above the mundane (this was one of the most important points in the modernist controversy, in fact). This proved to be possible

⁶¹ The pope, for example, reacted to the November Uprising of 1830 with the Encyclical *Cum Primum*, emphasizing that: “The fallacy of their [the rebels’] thought must be refuted courageously everywhere with the words of divine scripture and the testimony of Church tradition. From these most pure fountains (from which the Catholic clergy ought to draw the plan of their lives and the material for their sermons to the people) *We are taught most clearly that the obedience which men are obliged to render to the authorities established by God is an absolute precept which no one can violate* [italics by L.L.], except if by chance something is commanded which runs counter to the laws of God or of the Church.”, Gregory XVI, *Cum Primum*, (1832), par. 3. A similar call was issued by Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Caritatis* from 1898.

⁶² Blobaum observes, for instance: “The Church viewed all strikes, industrial and agrarian, as violations of divinely sanctioned property rights as well as of the seventh and tenth commandments. Yet the vehemence with which it greeted strikes by farm laborers, unquestionably the most impoverished segment of the entire population, can only be explained by the noble origins of the vast majority of the Polish clergy”, Blobaum R., “The Revolution of 1905-1907 and the Crisis of Polish Catholicism”, in *Slavic Review* 47 (1988), p. 675.

with but one camp – the nationalists, and then only after initial enmity and years of negotiating concessions.

In the course of the 19th century nationalists were no more or just slightly more religious than the social left, according to Porter who analyzed the development of relations between the church and the nationalistic right⁶³. Some of them even demonstrated anticlerical sentiments. Generally, the climate among Polish intelligentsia was rather apathetic to religion and the church. It began to change only at the turn of the century when both camps recognized an ally in each other, which led to a transformation of policy on both sides. Eventually nationalists changed to encompass the religious narrative and the church took a more nationalistic course, never to abandon it altogether until today, even if its endorsement of radical right groups became less obvious (this is true for the hierarchy, but not for the whole church – there is still a strong faction in Polish Catholicism, indeed perhaps the most outspoken one, usually associated with the circles of *Radio Maryja*, that openly supports even radical nationalistic postulates). The motto “Bóg, Honor, Ojczyzna” (God, Honour, Fatherland) became equally accepted among nationalists and Catholics, and the groups, to a large degree, merged. And thus the stereotype/myth of “Polak katolik” was finally confirmed for good in the popular consciousness, even though prominent figures of the interwar Polish state were not Catholic, including Marshal Jozef Pulsudski, honored as the father of independence, and religious minorities still formed a significant part of the population of interbellum Poland.

The alliance between nationalists, in the first place represented by *Endecja* (Narodowa Demokracja; National Democracy) and its leader Roman Dmowski, and the church took some time to build. Initially both sides looked at the each other with much distrust and even enmity. Catholics criticized nationalists for putting national egoism above the Christian spirit of universal charity and defining their ethics solely on the basis of national interest. In the 19th century the church criticized also the harsh anti-Semitism popular in nationalistic circles. But above all the church couldn't accept the nationalistic postulate that it was only a national institution that should be controlled by the nation and allowed independence only with regard to strictly religious matters. Furthermore, nationalists, initially, put much more weight to national allegiance than denomination and advocated solidarity founded upon national identification rather than religion: only later was religion included in the very essence of how the Polish nation was defined. It was unacceptable for the church that a Polish Protestant were

⁶³ See Porter B., “Marking the Boundaries of the Faith: Catholic Modernism and the Radical Right in Early Twentieth Century Poland”, *op.cit.*

to be treated more like a neighbor than a German Catholic. As much as both the church and nationalists waged war against “liberal and modern foes”, that is in the first place the Jews (those that didn’t show sufficient national allegiance in case of nationalists), Socialists and Masonry, the favourite enemy in conservative circles of that time, much stood between them, and some Catholic authors emphasized that the Spencerian rhetoric of “struggle for survival” is unacceptable for a Christian and that the violence to which nationalists sometimes called should be replaced by Christian charity. Even if the enemies were the same, methods postulated in struggle against them differed significantly. At the beginning of the 20th century, especially during the Revolution of 1905-07 and the years immediately following it, nationalism and populism, along socialism and, to some degree, Mariavitism, were considered by the institutional church to be the worst enemies. The traditional grip the church had on rural population was weakened by the years of Russian persecution (banishment of orders, closure of cloisters, limited education possibilities, some degree of isolation from Rome and other European Catholics) and a general stagnation prevailed in it. Peasantry, usually indifferent to the national struggle⁶⁴, was being ignited by the new nationalist movement (national sentiments were up to that time located rather in the upper classes of society, the nobility and intelligentsia):

The Church also began to lose ground in the countryside to the competing ideologies of nationalism and populism. Lulled to sleep by its ancient position of unquestioned authority in the villages and the traditional indifference of the peasantry to national issues, the Church was caught off guard by the awakening of national consciousness among rural inhabitants during the revolution [of 1905-1907]. As a consequence, the village clergy exercised little influence on the movement in the communes for local selfgovernment and the polonization of rural institutions...⁶⁵

The church was sometimes portrayed by the nationalists if not simply as a traitor of the national cause then as seeking too many compromises with the foreign government and propagating doctrines that were dangerous for the national interest (charity that discouraged

⁶⁴ The 19th century brought a revolution in the consciousness of societies, which originated, depending on the concept one accepts, either from the rise of nations as such, or from the birth of nationalism as a formalized aspiration to grant nations political status and create nation states. The national liberation and independence movements, which derived from this, spread almost across the entire Europe, and the idea itself started to have impact on the way people were thinking, so that they started to define their identifications according to it, if only following the elites at first.

⁶⁵ Blobaum R., “The Revolution of 1905-1907 and the Crisis of Polish Catholicism”, in *Slavic Review* 47 (1988), p. 674.

from the use of violence in “legitimate” fight for national good against the oppressors of the nation). Some nationalists, however, were making appeal to Catholicism already during the revolution, but this was usually rejected by the church, because it was limited to the role of a national institution, the locus of national identity (which it necessarily had become because Russian repressions inhibited the functioning of other institutions that usually reproduce identity, like schools and universities, cultural associations, etc.). The church recognized of course that it played some role in the national life and many clergy supported in one way or another the preservation of Polish culture. It was unacceptable, however, that the primarily supernatural goals of the church be subordinated to the struggle for national powers. Nationalists were being accused of paganism and pantheism and “integral nationalism” was condemned, though never proclaimed a heresy as was the case with socialism.

Soon after the First World War nationalists began to change some elements of their doctrine to gain more support from the church and the church realized that nationalism, which had gained much support from the people and can be a counterweight for socialism, may be a good ally. Finally Dmowski, the leader of *Endecja*, wrote in 1927, expressing the general belief among nationalists:

Catholicism is not a supplement to Polishness, giving it a certain color; rather, it penetrates to the essence of [Polishness], and to a considerable extent constitutes that essence. To try to separate Catholicism from Polishness, to tear off the nation from religion and from the Church, is to destroy the very essence of the nation.⁶⁶

The development of nationalism marked an important change in society and, consequently, also in the church. When it recognized that cooperation with other mass movements of the time is not possible, be it socialists or liberals, it chose to use the potential of the nationalistic movement, and in popular consciousness Catholicism became married for good with national identity.

2.3 A Mystical revival

Modernity is usually associated above all with political and economic phenomena: the birth of mass movement, a degree of democratization and liberalization, new unified national states, industrialization and urbanization. Individualization of social life, of choices and identities, is something is perhaps more a characteristic of advanced modernity, but it

⁶⁶ Dmowski R., *Kościół, naród, i państwo*, (Instytut Romana Dmowskiego 1985), p. 21.

occurred, to a degree, from the very beginning of the modern era, even as the Protestant reformation started promoting a more personal type of faith, one founded more on the conscience and devotional practices of the individual (and his own experience of faith, which was especially manifest in later movements, pietism or Methodism). The religious experience was, as it were, internalized. Also in the 19th century, and during the so called modernist controversy, this aspect of modernity did come to the fore:

While the outcome of Bossuet's controversy with Fénelon was to discredit mysticism for the next two centuries within Roman Catholicism, mysticism did not disappear. Within the Church, however, mystics were left to their spiritual directors, and the study of their experiences to a restricted circle of specialist theologians. Outside Catholicism, mysticism tended to be identified with abnormality or assimilated to the occult. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the occurrence of a revival of interest in mystical phenomena, this state of affairs began to change.⁶⁷

It should be remarked that this was not a struggle of medievalism and modernism, as the conflict is often referred to. Yes, the Catholic Church became a centralized organization based upon formal philosophy and legalism, it was hostile to popular participation in the church, power was concentrated in it in the hand of the elites and it was fighting all aspects of liberal modernity. But modernity was not only liberal. This is often neglected, but the very "reactionary" conservatism was, in fact, very modern. Neo-Scholasticism was not the original philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas and the centralized church of Vaticanum Primum was not the medieval church from before the Council of Trent. One modern tendency, incorporating literary criticism, new philosophical currents and a more personal, experiential and emotional vision of faith was countered by another type of modernity. Or, to put this differently, both camps – the modernists and the Vatican – were reacting to the same situation: a crisis of the church in changing times. They differed in their strategies but departed from the same starting point: their desire to preserve and protect the faith. Ultramontanists were not the only ones to look into the past for inspiration and thus producing a unique combination of old and modern ideas. Modernists, too, did this as they recognized that the people need a more personal, emotional type of faith; indeed: a more mystical type of faith, and felt this need within themselves. The Mariavites didn't share the conviction of Western European modernists that

⁶⁷ Portier W., Talar C.J.T., "The Mystical Element of the Modernist Crisis", Talar C.J.T., ed., *Modernists and Mystics* (The Catholic University of America Press 2009), p. 25.

the church should accommodate biblical criticism or some new trends in philosophy. Neither was it their primary concern to reflect on the church in an academically sociological manner. They did, however, question the sanctity of the institution and the absolute leadership of clergy and hierarchy, and recognized the need to depart from a dry philosophy towards a more personal and emotional type of devotion. It is difficult to speak of a direct link between the thought of Western modernists and Mariavites as Mariavite reformers, though well educated for Polish circumstances, didn't have access to newest trends in Western thought and couldn't share in their academic endeavors. It was rather a similar social situation and general climate of the times that pushed both into a more or less similar direction.

The church was grappling with traditional popular religion, hungry for miracles, magic-like ceremonies and wondrous shrines, with the flourishing of Marian devotions and many Marian apparitions. Some of this, especially in Poland, was a remnant of old, pre-Christian past, but some of it resulted from new needs and sensibilities awakened in modernity.

The Mariavites are very often interpreted as a mystical movement, perhaps even a mystical sect. And they themselves see their mission in terms of a mystical awakening – Daniel Mames, for example, the author of one of the newest monographs about the history of the movement, gave his book the subtitle “*Mysteria Mysticorum*” and mysticism forms the leading thread in his narrative. But this mysticism brought with itself a more personal type of religiosity and, more important, a fervent engagement in the life of society and even some political matters. The traditional Franciscan spirituality combined with the impulse of the revelations and the social and economic needs in the world around brought about this unique type of religious commitment. It was, as Portier and Tyler observe, quoted above, in line with a general revival of interest in mysticism.

Instead of conclusion: The success of Mariavitism

The success of Mariavitism was conditioned by a few factors. This thesis sought to present them in a broader framework of the challenges and transformations of modernity. From this perspective, Mariavitism can be described as combining three elements which define the social climate in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th: a) a commitment to alleviating poverty, exclusion and marginalization inherited (in Poland) from earlier agrarian system of the ownership of peasants and brought about by modernity; a widespread social action; b) the national sentiment in its spirituality; c) accent on personal and emotional religious experience, call upon direct supernatural sources (mysticism).

Industrialization and urbanization caused an unprecedented growth of urban population to which the church couldn't, or didn't want, to provide sufficient pastoral care, often neglecting the needs of the working class and its plight. In its fight against socialism, it very often simply condemned those who protested against exploitation, because this was seen as an attack on private property. Many clergy were moreover not qualified to discharge pastoral duties in the new circumstances. A small number of religious orders devoted to work among the poor was not enough to counter the general perception that the church failed in the new situation. More and more people would join socialist movements, attracted in part by their quasi-religious rhetoric, their promises of "a Kingdom of God on Earth", as those people were mostly still sensible to religious associations and language. In these circumstances, even from the church itself, there were heard voices to embrace a socialist agenda or in favor of an alliance with socialists to achieve the most pressing goals – an example is Antoni Szech and his Christian Socialism. This, however, met ardent opposition in the church and the movement never gained many proponents and eventually died out. The Mariavites, though they never embraced an openly socialist agenda but emphasized the need for reform, went to work among the people and abundantly used the rhetoric of the Kingdom of God on Earth. This enabled them to channel some of those religious people who would otherwise join socialist movements.

When the nationalistic movement began it was rather hostile to the church, or at least to how the church imagined its role. It put emphasis on other values and despised the hierarchy's loyalism. Only later did the situation change. In the new independent state nationalists and Catholics formed an alliance and Catholicism would more and more clearly become an inseparable element of Polish identity. This was so because national sentiments had been

awakened in more strata of society than ever before and they had to be incorporated by the church or it would have found itself in a very risky position against a new religion of *the nation* and against all other traditionally hostile forces – socialism and liberalism. The Mariavites were never nationalists, but they drew abundantly from national cultural inheritance and national romanticism – a different phenomenon than modern Spencerian nationalism but capable of accommodating the same patriotic feelings. The Mariavites read and revered Polish romantic poets, spoke about Messianism and, moreover, were a uniquely Polish phenomena and used the vernacular in their liturgy. This aspect of Mariavitism, too, was *of* and *for* that era.

Finally, the Mariavites were mystical. They promoted a personal faith and called upon the supernatural origin of their movement, thus appealing to the revived interest in the mystical which late modernity witnessed. They gave the people new devotional practices or reformed their customary forms, freed them from the strict moral guidance of the priests as individual confession was abolished as an obligation, and spoke a lot about following the mystical path by oneself.

Later, when the Catholic Church successfully accommodated nationalism and started to regain its grip on rural and working class population, and when the Mariavites were shaken by schism and their missionary and mystical zeal was weakened by the negative experiences with Kowalski's radicalism, Mariavitism started to decline. The final blow came after the Second World War when the socialist government nationalized all charity establishments of the Mariavite Churches. Its creative theology was replaced by conservatism stagnation, social activity disappeared and the church limited itself to pure devotion, and national motives were no longer of any value given the predominance of nationalism in the Catholic Church, Mariavitism faced a serious crisis from which it has never recovered. Thus far.

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