

## Did Secularization among Peasants in the Kingdom of Poland Accelerate in the Period 1906-1912? Peasants, Anticlericalism, and Religious Discourse under the Late Russian Imperial Regime

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### ABSTRACT

The Kingdom of Poland and its Catholic Church were in trouble in the last years of Russian imperial rule. Three of the Church's major problems, the Mariavites, the anticlerical weekly *Zaranie*, and the Macoch affair in the Jasna Góra sanctuary, are objects of deliberation in this article. These calamities accelerated a widescale process of secularization in the rural peasant population of Russian Poland. Questions are posed regarding the role of Russian imperial rule in the Kingdom in launching this secularization process. Other factors, such as rising levels of literacy and reading habits, could also have played a role. The text concentrates on the peasantry as the largest social group in the Kingdom, referencing ego documents (letters and memoirs) written by members of this social stratum as primary sources.

**KEYWORDS:** Catholic Church, peasants, Kingdom of Poland, Jasna Góra, Mariavites

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The author has declared that no conflicts of interest exist.

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## Introduction

According to a popular stereotype, Polish society throughout its history has been staunchly Catholic. With this opinion in mind, one might be surprised to read the transcript of a sermon given by archbishop Aleksander Kakowski of Warsaw during his ingress to Saint John's Cathedral in 1913, where he laments the worrying situation in the Kingdom of Poland:

"I deplore the fact that living faith has been replaced by indifference, that brotherly love is dying out [...] that lawsuits, squabbles and quarrels combined with perjury are not uncommon phenomena, that on Sundays and holidays worship is abandoned with a light heart, that fasts are regarded as a problem, while drunkenness and intemperance are becoming popular."<sup>1</sup>

Even if there is a large dose of exaggeration in Kakowski's statement, which was aimed at spurring efforts of moral improvement among his listeners, it clearly points to some genuine difficulties. Indeed, not only the Kingdom in general but also its Catholic Church was in trouble in the last years of Russian imperial rule. Three of the Church's problems will be the objects of deliberation in this article. The first was the appearance of a local schismatic movement, Mariavitism, which attracted numerous adherents, especially among the peasantry and industrial workers. The second was the popular anticlerical weekly *Zaranie* (Dawn), which commenced publication in 1907. Third, in 1910 a popular scandal broke out; it became public knowledge that a Pauline monk from the Jasna Góra monastery (the most important pilgrimage site for Poles) was guilty of a series of highly immoral acts. All these calamities between 1906 and 1912 brought about—and this is the article's main thesis—an acceleration of secularization in rural areas of the Kingdom of Poland. While some anticlerical notions can be traced to a much earlier time—notions usually associated with criticism of the clergy's wrongdoings at a local level<sup>2</sup>—I will argue that only at this time did sufficient prerequisites appear to catalyze the process of secularization as a deeply rooted and enduring social phenomenon in the rural villages of the Kingdom of Poland. Moreover, questions will also be posed regarding the role of Russian imperial rule in the Kingdom in launching this secularization process. Also, other factors, such as rising levels of literacy and reading habits, could have played a role.

When looking at widespread historical social tendencies in Poland, the peasantry ought to be placed front and center. They made up the vast majority of

<sup>1</sup> Orędzie J. E. Arcybiskupa warszawskiego D-ra Aleksandra Kakowskiego do wiernych Archidiecezji w dniu ingresu do Katedry Metropolitalnej św. Jana w Warszawie [Message of His Eminence the Archbishop of Warsaw Dr Aleksander Kakowski to the faithful of the Archdiocese on the Day of the Ingress to the Metropolitan Cathedral of St. John in Warsaw], in: *Przegląd Katolicki* 38 (1913), p. 597.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance: TOMASZ WIŚLICZ: Chłopski antyklerykalizm w szlacheckiej Rzeczypospolitej [Peasant Anticlericalism in the Nobles' Republic], in: AGNIESZKA BARTOSZEWICZ, ANDRZEJ KARPIŃSKI et al. (eds.): *Z historii kultury staropolskiej: Studia ofiarowane Urszuli Augustyniak*, Warszawa 2020, pp. 287–294.

the population of the Polish lands in the nineteenth and earlier centuries. Thus, no real social shift could occur without this class. The peasants were also widely regarded as the most conservative and religious social stratum, so the discovery of evidence that secularization processes were taking place in rural villages substantively strengthens the argument that the entirety of society was affected. We know for a fact that some city dwellers and members of the nobility were failing to meet basic religious standards prior to the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Geographically, this article focuses on the Kingdom of Poland (or Russian Poland, as it is sometimes called in English-language literature). The Kingdom was—both in geographic and demographic terms—the largest part of the ethnically Polish lands in the nineteenth century.

A historian dealing with the nineteenth-century Polish peasantry is in an exceptionally comfortable situation. The scarcity of primary sources often troubles researchers interested in the lower classes. Widely known schools of thought such as Subaltern Studies were founded to give a voice to those without their own historical documents.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the Polish peasants, however, such problems are largely (but not utterly) nonexistent. In fact, we find thousands of well-preserved peasant ego documents, including letters and memoirs, concerning the long nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> While the abundance of sources obviously presents a significant methodological challenge, it gives researchers direct insights into the peasants' lives and thoughts in their own words. These texts form the base of this article's analysis.

First, rising levels of literacy and improving material wealth among villagers enabled the emergence of a stable market for press and publications specifically catering to the Kingdom's peasant class. The two most prominent publications among them were the moderate and pro-Church (and later national-democratic) *Gazeta Świąteczna* (Holiday Gazette, 1881–1939), and the radical, anticlerical *Zaranie* (1907–1915). Despite the vast ideological differences between these two journals and their audiences, the producers of both shared a desire to engage in conversations with their readers and encouraged their audience to write letters to the editors. Examples of this correspondence were published in special sections; while *Gazeta Świąteczna* released the letters without much editor-

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<sup>3</sup> DANIEL OLSZEWSKI: *Kultura i życie religijne społeczeństwa polskiego w XIX wieku* [Religious Culture and Life of Polish Society in the Nineteenth Century], Lublin 2014, especially pp. 411–415.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g.: RANAJIT GUHA: *The Prose of Counter-Insurgency*, in: RANAJIT GUHA, GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK (eds.): *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York 1988, pp. 45–84.

<sup>5</sup> For the sake of brevity, I allow myself not to elaborate on these sources here. I have discussed those concerning the Kingdom of Poland in another paper: ŁUKASZ KOZUCHOWSKI: *Egodokumenty (listy i pamiętniki) chłopów Królestwa Polskiego i chłopskich migrantów zeń jako źródła historyczne (1864–1914)* [Ego Documents (Letters and Memoirs) of Peasants from the Kingdom of Poland and Peasant Migrants from it as Historical Sources (1864–1914)], in: *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 130 (2023), pp. 829–859.

ial intervention, *Zaranie* sometimes distorted the original messages.<sup>6</sup> William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki presented some of the unpublished letters from the editorial offices of both papers in their classic sociological monograph *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*.<sup>7</sup> One archive has preserved other original letters to *Zaranie*, making it possible to examine original letters written by peasants alongside the printed and edited versions. However, this archive is the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow, thus presently inaccessible.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the abundance of such materials, the history of peasant religiosity has not constituted an object of frequent historiographical inquiry. Both in Poland and elsewhere, the letters and memoirs are seldom referenced in the literature.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, by giving a voice to those who often remain silent on the pages of history books, this article aims to advance our understanding of the peasantry by illuminating one issue of critical importance regarding personal identity and sociability, namely, their practice and experience of religion. In analyzing the overlooked matter of secularization, which has been the subject of heated debate for decades, it will show what this process may have looked like in a place outside the United States and Western Europe, the geographic centers that have dominated this discussion.<sup>10</sup> This text therefore joins the literature that has begun to tackle the topic from a non-Western point of view. Finally, by studying the impact of literacy and imperialism on the religiosity of

<sup>6</sup> MARIA KLAWE-MAZUROWA: Listy chłopów do Prasy dla wsi w latach 1875–1895 jako źródło historyczne [Letters of Peasants to the Village-Addressed Press in 1875–1895 as a Historical Source], in: Przegląd Polonijny 4 (1983), pp. 35–40, here p. 38; MARIA KRISAŃ: Listy do gazety *Zaranie* z lat 1909–1915 [Letters to the Journal *Zaranie* in 1909–1915], in: *Dzieje Najnowsze* 30 (1998), 4, pp. 21–28.

<sup>7</sup> WILLIAM THOMAS, FLORIAN ZNANIECKI: *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group*. Vol. 4: Disorganization and Reorganization in Poland, Boston 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Probably the only person who has managed to compare the original and published letters to *Zaranie* is Maria Kriśań. See especially: KRISAŃ, Listy, and MARIA KRISAŃ: Chłopi wobec zmian cywilizacyjnych w Królestwie Polskim w drugiej połowie XIX – początku XX wieku [Peasants in the Face of the Civilizational Changes in the Kingdom of Poland from the Second Half of the Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century], Warszawa 2008, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, notable works on peasant religiosity, including: CHRIS CHULOS: *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861–1917*, DeKalb, IL 2003. However, the Polish context is mostly ignored in the international debate, for no sufficient reason. For secondary literature concerning the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see especially, apart from Kriśań, the works by Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, e.g.: WŁODZIMIERZ MĘDRZECKI: *Młodzież wiejska na ziemiach Polski Centralnej 1864–1939: Procesy socjalizacji* [Rural Youth in the Lands of Central Poland 1864–1939: Processes of Socialization], Warszawa 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Cf.: FRANÇOIS GAUTHIER: (What Is Left of) Secularization? Debate on Jörg Stolz's Article on Secularization Theories in the 21st Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problem, in: *Social Compass* 67 (2020), 2, pp. 309–314, here p. 312.

subalterns, the article helps to reveal which factors enabled secularization in the Kingdom and contributes more broadly to the general ongoing debate in the social sciences and social history studies. It also aims to broaden our understanding of imperial regimes' influence on subaltern societies.

I use sociological theses on secularization to examine the letters and memoirs. Inspired by Kocku von Stuckrad's approach, I primarily investigate the religious discourse as a signifier of socioreligious change.<sup>11</sup> As Norman Fairclough points out, "Changes in the wider social reality commonly begin as, and are 'driven by,' changes in discourse which are operationalized [...] in them."<sup>12</sup> The secularization process itself also has to be defined for this article. Following Mark Chaves, I state that "secularization is most productively understood not as declining religion, but as the declining scope of religious authority."<sup>13</sup> While none of the events studied in this text suggest a broader outflux of the faithful from any religion in general, this approach permits us nonetheless to identify notions of societal change in the Kingdom. It allows us to see the weakened position of the clergy in the public discourse of the peasantry, reflecting important social changes. In other words, this article does not investigate such indicators of religiosity as liturgy attendance or participation in pilgrimages but concentrates on the authority of the religious leaders as a variable. Before the main part of this text is presented, a brief overview of the situation of the Catholic Church in Russian Poland will be sketched.

### The Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Poland after the January Uprising (1863)

After the January Uprising (1863/64) the Russian government killed, exiled, and imprisoned numerous priests, including bishops, seeing them as a vanguard of the anti-tsarist revolt. Most cloisters were closed and their and parishes' property was confiscated, usually for the benefit of Russian elites. The activities of the ecclesiastical hierarchy were also severely restricted, i.e., no visits to the diocese were permitted without hard-to-obtain permission, nor was independent contact between bishops, even within the Kingdom. Pastoral letters were largely forbidden. State approval was required for each and every nomination for all ecclesiastical posts, acceptance to seminaries, and even transfers between parishes, resulting in decades-long vacancies in most dioceses. At a time of mass migration and urbanization, erecting a new church capable of housing the rapidly increasing number of parishioners was usually impossible; even carrying out minor construction work required an official's approval.

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<sup>11</sup> KOCKU VON STUCKRAD: *Discursive Study of Religion: From States of the Mind to Communication and Action*, in: *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15 (2003), pp. 255–271.

<sup>12</sup> NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH: *Language and Power*, London—New York 2015, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> MARK CHAVES: *Secularization as Declining Religious Authority*, in: *Social Forces* 72 (1994), 3, pp. 749–774, here p. 749.

Freedom of worship was also out of the question, and distributing the sacraments to the sick in hospitals was even restricted. Russian was to be used in some of the public Catholic prayers and was required in Church documents, correspondence, and as a part of seminaries' curricula. Anything perceived by Russians as disloyalty of the clergy towards the state provoked threats of even more radical persecution. A lion's share of the Church's property was confiscated by the state for its own use, and the clergy became fully dependent on the state's frugal subsidies. All this inflicted severe damage to the religious life of the Kingdom, from the level of education of both the clergy and the faithful to such prosaic matters as the issuance of a marriage certificate.<sup>14</sup> Nicholas II's April Manifesto of 1905, which slightly relaxed the state's religious policy, must have been a beacon of hope for Polish Catholics, even in the midst of the 1905 Revolution that was then ravaging the Russian Empire, including the Kingdom. Later, the manifesto was followed by further, yet generally not radical, loosening of the state's religious policies.<sup>15</sup> But, as we will see, further troubles started right after that. The first shot at the Church's social position was fired in 1906 when the separation of the Mariavite movement from the Catholic Church became definitive.

### The Mariavite Schism

The story of the Mariavite movement is inextricably linked to the biography of one person, Feliksa Kozłowska, often referred to as "Mateczka" (a cordial but diminutive form of the word for "mother") by her followers. Noble by birth, she spent her adolescence in Warsaw. She received a relatively good high school education and decided to become a nun. However, this proved impossible because, after the fall of the January Uprising, the Russians largely suppressed regular monastic life. One Catholic priest, Honorat Koźmiński, tried to circumvent such repressions by creating a substitute for those who felt drawn to a religious vocation. Disregarding the government's objections, he set up several secret religious organizations. Kozłowska would later become a supe-

<sup>14</sup> For a brief English-language account of the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Poland after the January Uprising and during the 1905 Revolution, see: ROBERT E. BLOBAUM: *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907*, Ithaca—London 1995, pp. 235–259; there are some minor mistakes, such as the statement that bishops could not issue any pastoral letters, cf.: ROLAND PREJS: *Administracja diecezjalna w Królestwie Polskim w latach 1864–1918: Studium prozopograficzne* [Diocesan Administration in the Kingdom of Poland in the Years 1864–1918: A Prosopographical Study], Lublin 2012, pp. 292–293.

<sup>15</sup> BLOBAUM, *Rewolucja*, p. 250. Importantly, some authors argue that the Church's situation in the Russian Empire improved only insignificantly after 1905, see: KRZYSZTOF LEWAŃSKI: *Kościół rzymskokatolicki a władze carskie w Królestwie Polskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku* [The Roman Catholic Church and the Tsarist Authorities in the Kingdom of Poland at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries], Gdańsk 2008, p. 20.

rior of one of them, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Poor of Saint Mother Clare.<sup>16</sup>

A crucial moment in both her own life and the Mariavite movement came in 1893. According to Kozłowska's writings, on 2 August, she had the first in a series of apparitions that called her to found a group of priests living according to the example of the life of the Blessed Mary (*Mariae vitam imitans*). She embarked on this mission without consulting either the Church or government authorities. She managed to attract a few priests. When Catholic bishops of the Kingdom first came to know unofficially about the activity of Kozłowska's clerical order, they were not enthusiastic. Given the fact that those priests had not informed the authorities about the initiative at a time when Russians were attacking the unity of the Catholic Church and its communities, it is not surprising that rumors about a secret group of presbyters with unknown objectives rang alarm bells. Moreover, those priests had already engaged in verbal conflicts with their colleagues. Koźmiński himself wrote to his superiors in 1902 about the "suspicious apparitions" of Kozłowska. Only in 1903, i.e., after ten years of activity, did the Mariavite priests officially inform their bishops in Warsaw, Lublin, and Płock about their congregation.<sup>17</sup>

Church authorities began an in-depth inquiry into the activities of the Mariavite order, including the reliability of Kozłowska's purported apparitions. After a series of lower-level decisions criticizing "Mateczka" and her theological theses as irreconcilable with Catholicism, on 5 April 1906, Pope Pius X himself issued an encyclical *Tribus circiter* that explicitly named Kozłowska's apparitions as false and ordered the Mariavites to adhere to the Catholic magisterium, obey their bishops, and disband.<sup>18</sup> Together with some of her priestly supporters, including her now co-leader Jan Kowalski, Kozłowska objected, and they were consequently excommunicated later that same year.<sup>19</sup> A separate religious community now came into being. It quickly gained the recognition of imperial authorities (already in 1906) and attained full legal status in 1912. Evidentially, the Mariavite movement pleased the Russians who wanted to instrumentalize it to undermine Catholicism in the Kingdom.<sup>20</sup> While it remained a minor group among the Kingdom's population (the estimates vary from around 60,000 to 160,000 adherents, mostly peasants and factory workers), there were enough

<sup>16</sup> For an account of Kozłowska's life before 1893, see: ARTUR GÓRECKI: *Mariawici i Mariawityzm—Narodziny i pierwsze lata istnienia* [Mariavites and Mariavitism—Its Birth and the First Years of Its Existence], Warszawa 2011, pp. 35–45.

<sup>17</sup> GÓRECKI, pp. 46–72.

<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the encyclical and its context and consequences, see: *ibid.*, esp. pp. 109–166. The official text of the document (in the original Latin and its English translation) is available at [http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_05041906\\_tribus-circiter.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_05041906_tribus-circiter.html) (2024-12-03).

<sup>19</sup> GÓRECKI, p. 160.

<sup>20</sup> For a description of relations between the Mariavites and the Russian imperial regime, see: *ibid.*, pp. 187–211, and PAUL WERTH: *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia*, Oxford 2014, pp. 100–102.

followers by the first decade of the twentieth century to make this religious movement at least noticeable.<sup>21</sup>

To better understand the societal impact of the Mariavites, one has to look at the broader socioreligious context of the events. There was significant discontent with the Catholic clergy among at least some of the faithful, including peasants. Many of the priests were regarded—I do not intend to engage here in a debate over the truth of such accusations—as failing to live up to their vocation. Among many issues, the question of finances was a burning one—peasants would often complain that the clergy demanded too much money for religious services. Some of the priests also neglected their pastoral duties.<sup>22</sup> The Revolution of 1905 in the Russian Empire, which only heightened the social tensions and therefore must be considered when analyzing the birth of Mariavism, certainly did not help to solve these problems peacefully. Anticlerical rhetoric quickly became a part of the Mariavite priests' activity, even before their split with Rome. Thanks to their frugal way of life and numerous pastoral initiatives, peasants often regarded them as morally superior to some other members of the regular Roman clergy. The Mariavites also were known for their social activity, which included spreading populist slogans. For some time, many of the faithful probably did not fully distinguish between the “regular” and Mariavite presbyters but simply followed their local parish priest or any priest who made a good impression on them. They thought of the Church in very local terms and welcomed those priests who met their expectations.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the Mariavites may have offered the first broad social platform to express discontent with Catholic clergy in the Kingdom of Poland.

Peasant anticlericalism was nothing new in the Polish lands.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, this attitude included criticism of those priests who failed to live up to Catholic moral standards; with sporadic exceptions, this never turned into an attack on the Catholic religion itself. What Mariavism did do, however, was transform what had previously always been at most a local disagreement between parishioners and their local priest into a socially interconnected and, therefore stable, social movement. The Mariavites themselves included priests, of course, but they vocally criticized the Catholic clergy (it seems incorrectly in some of the cases<sup>25</sup>), which became part of the wider public discourse in the Kingdom.

<sup>21</sup> For an estimate of the Mariavite population and its dynamics between 1906 and 1912, see: GÓRECKI, p. 214.

<sup>22</sup> The most informed study on this topic is: FRANCISZEK STOPNIAK: *Kościół na Lubelszczyźnie i Podlasiu na przełomie XIX i XX wieku* [The Church in the Lublin Region and Podlasie at the Turn from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century], Warszawa 1975. It is based on a thorough investigation of the archives of the Lublin diocese, where the Mariavite movement was very strong.

<sup>23</sup> GÓRECKI, pp. 128–133.

<sup>24</sup> WIŚLICZ.

<sup>25</sup> GÓRECKI, p. 106.



Although all of the peasant letters from 1906 that I describe below were written by Catholics, all of them clearly exhibit a high level of tension among the faithful. For instance, some Uniates made use of their authority as those who suffered persecutions and openly sided with the Catholic Church:

“Our teachers,<sup>26</sup> not only with words, but with whips, imprisonment, by making us pay contributions,<sup>27</sup> and through other means, wanted to [make us] break away from the Church, but we withstood everything with God’s help. [...] For this, no one can describe or comprehend our joy. [...] Today the whole world looks up to us, former Uniates, as an example, and even those who persecuted us admit to us that we sacredly defended our faith. So, dear brothers, we speak to you and admonish you: whoever among you who feels they are a follower of Felicja Kozłowska, wake up from your blindness, return to the true and salutary path; do not believe those gold-tongued preachers who assure you of salvation under the rule and brotherhood arranged by Kozłowska; do not be mistaken. [...] Beware the fact that the Mariavite priests are leading you to heaven via a high ladder that stands over a bottomless abyss.”<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, some of these letters written by Catholic peasants indirectly acknowledged the fact that the Mariavite priests led an exceptionally humble life (implying that other members of the clergy were perhaps not so modest); others harshly criticized the Mariavites.<sup>29</sup>

The Mariavites also made skillful use of their confessional press. In 1909, Kozłowska’s second-in-command, Jan Kowalski, issued a pastoral letter, later reprinted in the periodical *Maryawita* (“Mariavite” in a different, more old-fashioned spelling). Kowalski stated that there “is hardly any settlement in our country in which [Mariavitism] would not be preached. For where our feet have not managed to reach, there the magazine published by us, ‘Maryawita,’ evangelizes.”<sup>30</sup> Even if there was some degree of exaggeration in such a statement, it clearly indicates the role of the press in the life of the new religious community (the absence of relevant ego-documents of the Mariavite faithful prevents me from being able to elaborate on this topic). This makes them similar to another heterodox movement that separated from the Catholic Church, Lutheranism. Scholars have often described Martin Luther as a master in using printed texts to create an intentional social image and attribute the popularity (and mass distribution) of his teachings in part to the invention of the printing press short-

<sup>26</sup> Ironically for “Russians.”

<sup>27</sup> Fines for not fulfilling religious obligations at Orthodox shrines.

<sup>28</sup> S. OSIPIAK, J. PYTLUK, J. GMITRZUK, M. TOMCZUK i wszyscy mieszkańcy wsi Gródka: Głos byłych unitów do ludu w obłądnie mankietników będącego [The Voice of the Former Uniates to the People in the Madness of Mariavitism], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1906), 1329, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> W. T.: Parafia Sobienie Jeziory [Parish of Sobienie Jeziory], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1906), 1335, p. 4; K. K.: W parafji Kadzidle [In the Parish Kadzidle], *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> JAN KOWALSKI: List o. Jana Marii Michała biskupa mariawitów [Letter of Father Jan Maria Michał, the Bishop of the Mariavites], in: *Maryawita: Czciiciel Przenajświętszego Sakramentu* from 1910-01-20, p. 44.

ly before his conflict with Rome.<sup>31</sup> Not only in its heterodoxy but also in the ways it disseminated its ideas, Mariavitism proved to be a kind of Polish reformation.

Importantly, the Mariavites were the very first to breach the longstanding uniformity of peasant religious life in the Kingdom. For the entire nineteenth century, Catholicism was in fact the only religious path open to peasants. Obviously, a number of other religious groups were also active in rural regions, but none of them attracted a significant number of voluntary converts (if any at all). For instance, there were numerous Jews in the villages and towns of the Kingdom, but Judaism was always a religion that people were born into, rather than one to which they converted. Due to the schism created by Kozłowska and her followers, Catholicism became an object of heated debate—and sometimes even violence—in the Kingdom.<sup>32</sup> As notable sociologists of religion, such as Titus Hjelm, have upheld, this religious pluralism is one of the factors that drives secularization: “Somewhat paradoxically, then, the faith is strongest when it is invisible. It is invisible because it is unquestioned. Pluralism creates doubt and doubt creates decline of faith.”<sup>33</sup> Steve Bruce presents an understanding of the schisms as a sign of secularization.<sup>34</sup> Whether people liked it or not, the pluralism and questioning of the clergy’s authority that the Mariavite schism portended brought a real, not theoretical, challenge to the Catholic clergy’s authority in Russian Poland. And when it came to anticlericalism, the Mariavites quickly found themselves a helper—a new newspaper that specifically targeted a peasant readership.

### *Zaranie* Appears

The struggle of elites to find a common language with the people is a perennial problem—the educated and wealthy wish to attract the masses to their ideas. The history of the Kingdom of Poland is no exception to this rule. During the turmoil of the 1905 Revolution, the rural and urban masses clearly proved their socio-political agency and usefulness to various ideologies. In 1907, a group of

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g.: ALLYSON F. CREASMAN: Martin Luther and the Printing Press, in: DAVID M. WHITFORD (ed.): *Martin Luther in Context*, Cambridge 2018, pp. 108–115.

<sup>32</sup> A description of one of the battles stemming from the Catholic-Mariavite conflict is given in a letter by a peasant A. WIELĄŻEK: *Z pod Węgorwa gubernji siedleckiej* [From the Region of Węgrów, Siedlce Governorate], in: *Gazeta Święteczna* (1906), 1313, pp. 3–4; see also: GÓRECKI, Mariawici, pp. 128–129.

<sup>33</sup> TITUS HJELM: Secularization, in: GEORGE D. CHYSSIDES, AMY R. WHITEHEAD (eds.): *Contested Concepts in the Study of Religion*, London 2022, paragraph 3, loc. 337.3 (e-book); while Hjelm defines secularization slightly differently than Chaves (as “a process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance,” paragraph 1, loc. 332.0), this does not practically affect my argument.

<sup>34</sup> STEVE BRUCE: Secularization, in: *Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, loc. 1428.7 (e-book).

liberals in the Kingdom (with significant ties to freemasonry) decided to form a new political movement that aimed to attract the largest social group in the country, the peasantry, to their cause. One means to reach the peasantry was a new periodical dedicated to influencing public opinion in rural areas. The weekly *Zaranie* thus came into being. It was the very first anticlerical newspaper in the Kingdom dedicated to a broad rural audience.<sup>35</sup>

*Zaranie* quickly became more than just a periodical. It birthed a whole social movement, called *ruch zaraniarski*. While the liberal-leaning editors could not fully impose their views on the peasants, they could promote negative attitudes toward the clergy. As Claire Gheeraert-Graffeulle and Geraldine Vaughan point out, “in Catholic countries of Europe, anti-Catholicism could thrive in the form of anticlericalism.”<sup>36</sup> The followers of the new periodical felt a strong bond with the editors and each other, a bond that survived for many years in some cases.<sup>37</sup> But it seems that *Zaranie* aimed to influence social opinion rather than give voice to the peasants. This resulted in cases in which published letters to the editors on the newspaper’s pages were significantly distorted.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, maybe to gain readers’ trust, the newspaper lied to its recipients that its editor-in-chief was a good Catholic, while in fact he was an active freemason.<sup>39</sup> The weekly’s popularity was never as high as that of *Gazeta Świąteczna*—in 1904 *Świąteczna* had around 13,000 subscribers (with a tendency for a sharp rise up to 30,000 in 1914), while in 1911 *Zaranie* had around 5,000 (though the

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<sup>35</sup> BARBARA PETROZOLIN-SKOWROŃSKA: Problem genezy “Zarania” (w świetle listu Aleksandra Świętochowskiego do Aleksandra Lednickiego z 11 listopada 1907 roku) [The Problem of the Genesis of “Zarania” (in the Light of Aleksander Świętochowski’s Letter to Aleksander Lednicki from 11 November 1907)], in: *Roczniki Dziejów Ruchu Ludowego* 10 (1968), pp. 516–521. On the history of *Zaranie*, see, e.g.: WŁADYSŁAW PIĄTKOWSKI: *Dzieje ruchu zaraniarskiego* [The History of the *Zaranie* Movement], Warszawa 1956. Notably, Piątkowski’s book, written in the midst of Polish Stalinism, praises *Zaranie* without much critical reflection.

<sup>36</sup> CLAIRE GHEERAERT-GRAFFEUILLE, GERALDINE VAUGHAN: The Catholic “Other,” in: CLAIRE GHEERAERT-GRAFFEUILLE, GERALDINE VAUGHAN (eds.): *Anti-Catholicism in: Britain and Ireland 1600–2000*, paragraph 5, loc. 15.7 (e-book).

<sup>37</sup> Many of the memoirs written in the 1930s by the followers of *Zaranie* available in the Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw contain impassioned mentions of the editors of the newspaper and other readers; see: *Pamiętniki i Wspomnienia “Zaraniarzy”* [Memoirs and Recollections of *Zaranie* Activists], in: *Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN)* [Archives of Modern Records], Warsaw, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa w Warszawie, sign. 2/2617/0/-/151.

<sup>38</sup> KRISAŃ, *Listy*, pp. 26–27; KRISAŃ, *Chłopi*, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> JAN BORKOWSKI: Kilka uwag o “Siewbie,” “Zaraniu” i ruchu ludowym [A Few Remarks on “Siewba,” “Zaranie,” and the Peasant Movement], in: *Dzieje Najnowsze* (1972), 3, pp. 69–80, here p. 69; on *Zaranie*’s claims that Malinowski was a good Catholic: JÓZEF SZAFLIK: *O rząd chłopskich dusz* [On the Rule over the Peasant Souls], Warszawa 1976, pp. 288–289.

real readership of the newspapers was much broader than merely subscribers).<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the paper's ideas, including its anticlericalism, were met with approval by some peasants. The periodical published numerous accounts of the clergy's (supposed) wrongdoings and referred to priests harshly. It is difficult to say whether those accusations were based on real facts, and the unavailability of the manuscripts of *Zaranie*'s correspondence stored in Moscow prevents us from being able to definitively answer this question. Regardless of the accuracy of the published materials, for my purposes, it is sufficient to demonstrate that the topic of the clergy's sins—real or fictive—appeared widely in popular discourse among the Catholic communities. *Zaranie* clearly both uncovered and boosted some anticlerical tendencies already present in the countryside. It was a solid institutional support to those who wished to express their discontent with the priests more broadly. Importantly, both the editors and readers of *Zaranie* did not, at least nominally, reject Catholicism itself. In the case of *Zaranie* and its peasant readers, the problem was an internal one within the Church.

Due to this stance, a fierce dispute broke out between the paper's anticlerical supporters (called *zaraniarze*) and its opponents, including the clergy, the *Gazeta Świąteczna*, and its readers. The bishops wrote pastoral letters prohibiting the reading of the radical newspaper.<sup>41</sup> Many memoirs of *Zaranie*'s sympathizers mention the local priests' struggles to discourage their parishioners from reading the weekly.<sup>42</sup> Particularly touching is a letter in which a Uniate describes how the law of 1905 had given him hope that he would finally be

<sup>40</sup> This made *Gazeta Świąteczna* second only to *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* (18,000 subscribers in 1904) when it came to readership in the Kingdom. Compared to the overall population of the Kingdom these numbers may seem low, but one copy of a newspaper would often be read by numerous readers or even aloud at common gatherings. WITOLD STANKIEWICZ: *Czasopiśmiennictwo ludowe w Królestwie Polskim 1905–1914* [Peasant-addressed Press in the Kingdom of Poland 1905–1914], Warszawa 1957, p. 53, and ZENON KMIECIK: *Czasopiśmiennictwo ludowe w Królestwie Polskim (1866–1914)* [Peasant-addressed Press in the Kingdom of Poland (1866–1914)], in: *Rocznik Historii Czasopiśmiennictwa Polskiego* (1975), 14/2–3, pp. 143–274, here pp. 265–266; KRISAN, Chłopi, p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> An example of a pastoral letter against *Zaranie*: AUGUSTYN ŁOŚIŃSKI: List pasterski J. E. Biskupa Augustyna Łosińskiego z powodu zakazu Gazety “Zarania” [Pastoral Letter of H. E. Bishop Augustyn Łosiński on the Reason for Banning the Newspaper “Zaranie”], Warszawa 1911; some reactions to Łosiński's letter: K. RZYMSKI et al.: *Naprawienie błędu* [Fixing the Error], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1911), 1613, p. 2; FRANCISZEK CZARNOTA et al.: *Ze wsi Szarbi pod Proszowicami w Gubernji Kieleckiej* [From the Village Szarbie near Proszowice in the Kielce Governorate], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1912), 1629, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Biblioteka Szkoły Głównej Handlowej w Warszawie [Library of the Warsaw School of Economics], Archiwum IGS: *Pamiętniki wiejskich działaczy społecznych—niewydane* [Archives of the Institute of Social Economy: Memoirs of Rural Social Activists—Unpublished], sign. ZS.AR.444, no. 114, p. 2; *Pamiętniki i wspomnienia “Zaraniarzy,”* in: AAN, Towarzystwo Pamiętnikarstwa Polskiego, sign. 2/2617/0/-/151, no. 18, pp. 4–5.

allowed to formally reunite with Catholicism, but he goes on to express his frustration and disappointment with the clergy's behavior, which appears to have led him to support *Zaranie*.<sup>43</sup>

While it is obvious that there was a clear shift in public discourse concerning the Church's authority among the readers of *Zaranie*, what was happening simultaneously in the more moderate *Gazeta Świąteczna* is no less interesting. Whether it liked it or not, the *Gazeta Świąteczna* had to refer at least partially to the accusations against the clergy raised elsewhere. Some readers admitted that "priests are human beings and therefore can and do have their faults, because they are not saints or angels. And yet even the saints, as long as they lived on earth, were not free from shortcomings. Each of us is human, and each of us errs, because that is what humans do."<sup>44</sup>

Another author mentioned that a former monk who had left the priesthood and declared apostasy, Izidor Wysłouch (also known as Antoni Szech), was among the supporters of *Zaranie*.<sup>45</sup> The presence of a person who had rejected his faith among the collaborators of *Zaranie* cast a shadow on its reputation among many of the villagers. It is hard to imagine such explicit statements about the faults of priests appearing in the *Gazeta Świąteczna* at an earlier time.

Recent studies concerning the interplay between the media and the Church have pointed out the role of newspapers not only in publicizing facts about the (supposed) wrongdoings of priests but also in influencing public opinion on such matters. At least to some extent, the basic characteristics of some media from this time—such as the tendency to scandalize and the suggestiveness of the published materials—may also be attributed to *Zaranie* and enable us to draw some parallels. Joanna Paszenda and Michał Mateusz Rogoż suggest that the way the media covered the clergy's recent misdeeds "may have contributed to the decline of the Church's cultural, religious and political authority in Poland"; this assertion easily fits into the definition of secularization in this article.<sup>46</sup> Other historians have found similar phenomena.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the role of *Zaranie* in not only giving a voice to the peasants but also predominantly in helping them to form opinions and thus accelerating secularization should not be underestimated.

<sup>43</sup> THOMAS/ZNANIECKI, vol. 2: Primary-group Organization, Boston 1918, pp. 1292–1296.

<sup>44</sup> JULIAN CZYŻEWSKI: [untitled letter], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1910), 1527, pp. 7–8.

<sup>45</sup> JAN AMBROZIAK: Gdzie prawda: Głos z pod wiejskiej strzechy [Where Lies the Truth?: A Voice from under the Village Thatch], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1910), 1559, p. 2; cf.: JOACHIM ŚLIWA: "Z żarów nad Nilem w ogień rewolucji nad Wisłą": Izidor Kajetan Wysłouch (1869–1937) i jego działalność społeczna [From the Heats by the Nile to the Fire of Revolution by the Vistula: Izidor Kajetan Wysłouch (1869–1937) and his Social Activity], in: *Rocznik Biblioteki Naukowej PAU i PAN w Krakowie* 65 (2020), pp. 105–113, here p. 110.

<sup>46</sup> JOANNA PASZENDA, MICHAŁ MATEUSZ ROGOŻ: Masking or Unmasking the Evil? Polish Opinion-Forming Weeklies vis-à-vis the Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, in: *Religions* 14 (2023), 2, pp. 1–32, here p. 25, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020141>.

<sup>47</sup> BRIAN PORTER-SZÜCS: *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity and Poland*, Oxford 2010, p. 21.

As we have seen, during the first decade of the twentieth century, cracks in a uniformly positive image of the clergy on the pages of the peasant-addressed press had begun to appear. Those cracks had the potential to turn into something even bigger if the circumstances were favorable. Probably the worst thing that could then occur to further undermine the Catholic hierarchy's authority was a full-blown scandal involving clergy that would fuel both the Mariavite's and *Zaranie*'s rhetoric. It was not long in coming.

### The Macoch Affair in Częstochowa

The second volume of Thomas and Znaniecki's monumental work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* contains numerous private letters written by peasants. One of them contains the following passage:

"My beloved Lucia and Staś: First I must inform you, my dear ones, about a very sad accident which has occurred in that miraculous place, Jasna Góra. That scoundrel and murderer, the Paulinist Damazy Macoch, together with his cronies, disgraced the miraculous image of the Holy Mother and robbed it of jewels and costly adornments. Moreover, they have, for a long time now, been engaging in revelry in their cloister-cells, and this year in July they committed a murder in this holy place. It is impossible to describe the feeling of oppression that has prevailed in the country. [...] But thanks to God, the main criminal and his associates have now been caught, and justice will measure out a merited punishment to them."<sup>48</sup>

What is intriguing here is that this author, who uses a great deal of religious rhetoric, uses very harsh words when speaking of a Catholic priest. But what actually did occur in that most important Polish sanctuary in Jasna Góra?

To understand the situation, a broader picture of the local Pauline monks' community at that time is needed. The monastery of Jasna Góra was founded in the fourteenth century in the city of Częstochowa. It became an extremely popular pilgrimage site and was famous for the miracles that had reportedly happened there. Hundreds of thousands of faithful traveled there every year. In 1910, for example, there were 707,242 visitors (roughly 7.5 percent of the Kingdom's population at that time).<sup>49</sup> The most well-known part of the monastery is the chapel containing an image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, before which the visitors pray. Jasna Góra is an important place in Polish history; it was a place where pilgrims from throughout the Polish lands came together, regardless of state borders, and thus played a significant role in the national imagination. Along with the rest of the Catholic Church in Poland, it was subjected to repressive measures by the Russians after the fall of the January Up-

<sup>48</sup> THOMAS/ZNANIECKI, vol. 1: Primary-group Organization, Boston 1918, p. 630; the letter was not written by a *sensu stricto* peasant, but Thomas and Znaniecki considered the author to represent well some of the peasantry's attitudes.

<sup>49</sup> JAN PERSZON: Pilgrimages in Times of Trial: The Pilgrimage Movement and Sanctuaries in Polish Lands in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century, in: ANTÓN M. PAZOS (ed.): Nineteenth-Century European Pilgrimages: A New Golden Age, London 2020, (e-book), section "The Russian Partition."

rising. A military garrison was set up in the cloister buildings to prevent any unwanted activity. While the monastery itself managed to survive and was not forcibly disbanded by the government as many others were, the imperial regime intruded on its life a great deal. Not only did the acceptance of a candidate to join the Pauline Order now require state approval—and such permission was hardly ever granted—but the Russian government now also took the prerogative to decide whether a prior could expel a monk or not. This led to paradoxical situations, as in 1912 when five novitiates were to be expelled, but the authorities ordered them to stay a few months longer—not without negative effects on the cloister's life. There was also strict control of the monastery's finances and surveillance of its pilgrimages. If the government found it suitable, the monks were further repressed, including being sentenced to exile in Siberia. Those who stayed were closely invigilated by the state's secret police. This short account of repressions is by no means exhaustive.<sup>50</sup>

In 1909, an ominous event took place: jewels and adornments were stolen from the Chapel of the Miraculous Image at Jasna Góra. Such an intrusion into the innermost sanctum of this important and famous holy place caused widespread shock and public outcry. Some soon associated the theft with the perpetrators of further events in Jasna Góra, especially Damazy Macoch.<sup>51</sup>

Before joining the monastery, Macoch had worked as a secretary in local self-government (*samorząd gminny*). He tried to become a diocesan priest but was deemed to be of “poor intellect” and thus did not qualify for holy orders. Conversely, his admittance to Jasna Góra was very quick; he became a monk with full rights after just four months. This fact may be explained by his (alleged) status as a secret collaborator of Okhrana, the Russian imperial secret police, which intended to infiltrate the monastery.<sup>52</sup> Macoch and a few other monks lived an amoral life at the monastery, stole offerings given by the pilgrims, and spent it on alcohol and other luxuries. The former secretary also found himself a mistress. To give himself an excuse to meet with her, he arranged for her to marry his own brother Waław. Given Damazy's improper behavior, which his superiors must have at least partially discovered, he was removed from his duties in the monastic community and began looking for another place to live. But before he managed to move out, the theft took place.

The official version, as later recorded by a Russian court, is as follows: After a quarrel with Waław in the cloister, Damazy Macoch killed his brother, threw his body in a river, left Częstochowa, and later attempted to flee the empire. Two other monks helped him to cover up the crime. All three plus Damazy's mistress and two other suspects were caught and formally accused before the court, but the authorities interfered with the investigation. The first police officer who tried to investigate the crime was arrested under suspicion of political

<sup>50</sup> SZCZEPAN ZACHARIASZ JABŁOŃSKI: *Jasna Góra: Ośrodek kultu maryjnego 1864–1914* [Jasna Góra: A Center of Marian Worship 1864–1914], Lublin 1984, pp. 29–40.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>52</sup> Numerous texts on Macoch mention that he collaborated with Okhrana, but I have failed to find an explicit and adequate justification for such a claim.

offenses. Similarly, the first procurer was removed from participation in the court's proceedings, and numerous pages were removed from the indictment he had prepared. The judge, Volkov, did not allow any questions that could possibly uncover Macoch's relations with Okhrana. It took a surprisingly long time for the court to reach a verdict, given that the guilt of the perpetrators was obvious from the beginning. When one of the Jasna Góra monks, Pius Przeździecki, pointed out the intrusions of the Russians into the life of the monastic community during the proceedings, the authorities sentenced him to exile in Siberia for five years. Finally, it turned out that, before his death, Wacław had threatened Damazy, saying he would reveal some secret. While it could have been the affair with his mistress, it could also have been his relations with the Russian secret police.<sup>53</sup> Obviously, the Okhrana did not instruct Damazy Macoch to kill his relatives; rather, it seems that this unwise agent whom the Russians had intentionally installed in Jasna Góra to undermine the Kingdom's Catholicism had simply broken off the government's leash. During the trial, Macoch also claimed that he was responsible for the robbery of 1909. Also, the Catholic Church quickly punished him and his associates with ecclesiastical measures, which were publicly announced.<sup>54</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the crime in Jasna Góra sent shockwaves through Polish society. It was impossible to turn a blind eye to the fact that such a hideous crime had been committed by one of the priestly guardians of the most sacred place for Polish Catholics. The editors of the Mariavite press and *Zaranie* used the Macoch affair to speak out against the Catholic clergy.<sup>55</sup> The abovementioned *Zaranie*-supporting Uniate wrote:

"The people of Podlasie [a region with a high population of Uniates] wept with tears of blood when some monster, some godless man, stole the miraculous image of God's Mother in Częstochowa. Every one of us has been there. [...] Where else could the poor Uniate shed his stream of tears if not there? He took his last penny

<sup>53</sup> Due to the scarcity of academic writings on the subject, I base my description of the basic facts of Macoch's affair on a non-academic book: TADEUSZ DYNIEWSKI: *Zbrodnia, zdrada, kara: Pitaval Śląski* [Crime, Treason, Punishment: The Silesian Pitaval], Katowice 1986, pp. 5–20. Some parts of the narrative were supplemented by: JABŁOŃSKI, pp. 40–42; JANUSZ ZBUDNIEWEK: *Jasna Góra na przełomie XIX i XX wieku* [Jasna Góra at the Turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries], in: *Kościół w Polsce: Dzieje i Kultura* 2 (2003), pp. 11–127, here pp. 120–123; PREJS, p. 334.

<sup>54</sup> ST. W.: *Nieszczęście na Jasnej Górze* [Tragedy at Jasna Góra], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1910), 1550, p. 2; *Zakończenie nieszczęsnej sprawy Macocha* [Ending the Unfortunate Case of Macoch], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1914), 1722, pp. 3–4; notably, *Zaranie* seemingly did not inform its readers about the final ecclesiastical punishments given to Macoch and other perpetrators.

<sup>55</sup> *Zbrodnia na Jasnej Górze* [A Crime against Jasna Góra], in: *Wiadomości Mariawickie* (1910), 80, pp. 633–636; MAKSYMILIAN MALINOWSKI: *Rozważmy to i poweźmy naukę!* [Let's Consider This and Learn from It!], in: *Zaranie* (1910), 42, pp. 843–845. On *Zaranie*'s reaction to the affair, see: TADEUSZ KRAWCZAK: *Elementy Jasnogórskie w radykalnej prasie ludowej* [Jasna Góra Motives in the Radical Populist Press], in: *Studia Claramontana* 24 (2006), pp. 51–62.



with him, a bag of black bread biscuits, a water-pitcher; he suffered hunger and cold and terror, but for 30 years he went every year to Jasna Góra [in defiance of the Russian government]. Nobody guessed who that criminal could be. When the Holy Father offered new crowns, and when we heard of it from our prelate in the church, 1,000 pilgrims went to the crowning-ceremony. The stripped image was shown to us; we could not look at it without indignation and tears. Who are you who has dared to do this? And then the telegram brought the news that Father Damazy Machoch was the author of this crime, that he was the bold man.”<sup>56</sup>

A later part of the letter makes the affair a departing point to express dissatisfaction with the clergy.

Meanwhile, letters sent to the *Gazeta Świąteczna* argued against the wide anticlerical rhetoric of other media, while staunchly criticizing the murderer and admitting that he was a priest. There must have been a great deal of astonishment among the readers of *Gazeta Świąteczna* since one author mentioned that “some did not want to believe that a priest could commit such a crime.”<sup>57</sup> Clearly, the public image of the clergy had been shaken not only among the anticlerical adherents of *Zaranie* but also among the more moderate peasant population.

### Possible Reasons for Secularization

The findings of this article raise a significant question about the role of Russian colonial rule in the Kingdom of Poland (or of imperial regimes more generally) in launching and steering processes of secularization.<sup>58</sup> In fact, all three of the cases described above could not have reached their full potential without at least the tacit support of the Russian government.<sup>59</sup> After a short period of skep-

<sup>56</sup> THOMAS/ZNANIECKI, vol. 2, p. 1293. The first remark in square brackets in the quote is by me, the second by Znaniecki and Thomas.

<sup>57</sup> WŁOŚCIANIN: Co czynić? [What to Do?], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1910), 1553, p. 1; for a similar letter, see also: *ibid.*, 1552, pp. 3–4, though the content casts doubt about its potential peasant authorship, and the signature “Kujawianka” (roughly: woman from Kujawy region) does not help to resolve this question.

<sup>58</sup> I am aware of the fact that there is an ongoing debate on whether Imperial Russia may be regarded as a colonial power in relation to East Central Europe. In my opinion, Russia fulfills each and every rational prerequisite for being regarded so. EWA THOMPSON: It Is Colonialism after All: Some Epistemological Remarks, in: *Teksty Drugie* (2014), 1, pp. 67–81, explicitly discusses Soviet Russia and the Polish People’s Republic, but her arguments may be applied *mutatis mutandis* also the case of the tsarist Russian Empire vs Kingdom of Poland.

<sup>59</sup> While one could argue that even in the last decade of Russian imperial rule in the Kingdom there were numerous Polish officials working for the government, it has to be pointed out that they occupied mostly the lower, non-decisive posts, so their (mostly) Catholic positions could not alter the general Russifying and anti-Catholic direction of the authorities; cf.: ANDRZEJ CHWALBA: *Polacy w służbie Moskali* [Poles in Service of the Russians], Warszawa 1999, p. 90.

ticism, the Kingdom's administration came to support the Mariavites, seeing them as a tool for undermining the Catholic Church.<sup>60</sup> It would have been quite easy for the administration to thwart *Zaranie* with or without proper justification, but that happened only in 1915 when the newspaper was judged to be an unignorable threat, not to the Church but to the Russian regime itself. The question of repressing *Zaranie* was on the table of the tsarist political police already in 1912, but the authorities, seemingly sympathizing with the anti-clerical weekly, decided to investigate the clergy's reaction to its publications instead. The Macoch affair is the strongest argument here: The perpetrator himself probably was a collaborator of the imperial secret police, who may have quickly climbed the ladder of a monastic career due to official pressure on his community. His and the other criminals' immoral behavior was related to a general loosening of monastic discipline, which would probably not have been possible without the severe measures imposed on the Church after the January Insurrection. The trial utterly omitted his (alleged) role as an agent of Okhrana and instead condemned him only for the commonly known crimes. Additionally, in 1912 the Russian authorities, while discussing the affair, expressed a conviction that the Mariavites and *Zaranie* had undermined the clergy's authority and the Macoch affair only deepened this crisis—and took measures against the clergy, not its challengers.<sup>61</sup> It is arguably unlikely that any of these events would have happened without the at least secondary, and sometimes even primary, involvement of the Russian imperial government.<sup>62</sup>

There remains the question of defining anticlerical tendencies present in the Kingdom even before 1906, but due to the events described here, these attitudes attained a stronger position in the discourse. In opposition to common forms of anticlericalism, the peasants' criticism of the priests was not an element of a broader, consciously anti-Catholic propaganda but rather stemmed from what was regarded as proper Catholic ideals. This is not to suggest that the peasants' criticisms were in fact fully orthodox, but it cannot be denied that they based their attitudes on what they believed to be true faith while at least nominally rejecting anything contrary. I propose to call this form of anticlericalism "internal anticlericalism," as opposed to "external anticlericalism," i.e., opinions upheld by those who do not identify with (or on some other terms are not part of) the Church.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> WERTH, pp. 100–102; GÓRECKI, pp. 204–206.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> It could also be useful to consider the role of the Russian Orthodoxy in the described process, especially as its functioning was inextricably linked to the ruling regime. However, as the question of Catholic-Orthodox relations in the Kingdom have developed a separate, significant body of literature, it seems that to elaborate on this would require a separate text. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for turning my attention to this question.

<sup>63</sup> The notion that there were elements of anticlericalism in the religious life of Polish peasants is by no means new (see: WIŚLICZ); however, I have not come across any attempts to operationalize it for the use of more advanced historical and sociological ana-

Why did the abovementioned processes begin when they did and not earlier or later? After all, as has been mentioned, a degree of dissatisfaction with the clergy, the driver of secularization in this period, was nothing new among the peasant population in 1906. It seems that the revolutionary upheaval which started in 1905 played a major role by shaking up social life on all levels.<sup>64</sup> In the case of Mariavitism, the personal qualities of the founders and the Russian repressions of the Church offer one key. The establishment of *Zaranie* also echoed the ideas of the revolution, benefiting from the activization of broader political circles. But there is one crucial factor that explains the publicity of the Mariavites and both the *Zaranie* and the Macoch affairs—rising levels of literacy. British cultural anthropologist Jack Goody has pointed to the importance of written texts in forming consistent movements in his classic study *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*.<sup>65</sup> Egon Vielrose's estimates suggest that there was a significant rise in literacy levels among the population of the whole Russian-ruled Polish lands in the decades preceding 1905.<sup>66</sup> This was in large part thanks to the merits of the first editor of *Gazeta Świąteczna*, Konrad Prószyński. Not only did he develop the first widely successful media enterprise aimed at the Kingdom's peasant population, thereby fostering a custom of regular reading among the members of this social stratum, but he also supported their general educational aspirations. While the fully Russified and poorly developed state education system could not make peasants literate in their mother tongue, Prószyński's bestselling and award-winning primer was very effective in helping villagers learn the alphabet.<sup>67</sup> The *Gazeta Świąteczna* and its editor's primer created a social habit of reading among some peasant circles.<sup>68</sup> As village society started moving from an oral tradition towards liter-

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lyses as proposed here. On the ambiguity of the term „anticlericalism,” see: TOMAS BUBIK, DAVID VACLAVIK, ATKO REMMEL: Nonreligion in the CEE Region: Some Remarks, in: TOMAS BUBIK, DAVID VACLAVIK et al. (eds.): *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe*, London—New York, 2020, par. 12, loc. 1155.1 (e-book).

<sup>64</sup> This has been pointed out by, among others: GÓRECKI, p. 108.

<sup>65</sup> Cf.: JACK GOODY: *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*, Cambridge et al. 1987, p. 133.

<sup>66</sup> While the overall level of literacy (not only in villages) grew by only 6.4 points (from 12.6 % to 19.0 %) between 1827 and 1867, in the next 44 years (1867 to 1911), it jumped 30.5 points (to 49.5 %); given that copies of journals would sometimes be read aloud for those who could not read themselves, we can presume that a vast majority of peasants in the Kingdom were potential recipients of the newspapers' content (cf.: KRISAŃ, *Chłopi*, pp. 45, 55); notably, Vielrose provides estimates for the Russian partition in general, not only the Kingdom, implying a further margin of error (however, there are no such models on the Kingdom itself); see: EGON VIELROSE: Szacunek analfabetyzmu w zabiorze rosyjskim [Estimation of Illiteracy in the Russian Partition], in: *Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski* 9 (1976), pp. 3–16, here p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> KRISAŃ, *Chłopi*, pp. 26–27.

<sup>68</sup> Some peasant memoirs give evidence to the fact that, paradoxically, *Gazeta Świąteczna* paved the way for *Zaranie* by creating a habit of reading newspapers; see: *Pamiętniki Chłopów* [Peasant's Memoirs], vol. I, Warszawa 1935, p. 408.

acy as a mode of culture, the phenomenon of local public opinion came into being in rural areas.<sup>69</sup> Paradoxically, the moderate pro-Catholic *Gazeta Świąteczna* played a crucial role in the events described, by creating the necessary prerequisites for both the Mariavite and *Zaranie* movements, which took an explicitly contrary stance to its own.

## Conclusion

In 1913, one of the correspondents of *Gazeta Świąteczna* wrote:

“Pay no heed to the idle talk of those who left for the city a few years ago and come back to the village to visit. They have lost their faith and therefore mock those who have it and those who respect priests. I do not repeat their blasphemies [...], but when one says: ‘Did the priest talk to God that I should listen to him?’ Then I answer him: ‘Even if the priest was the greatest sinner, even if he walks the road to hell, he leads us by the hand to heaven. The priest speaks with his mouth, but with the words of God, and that is why you should listen to his teaching.’”<sup>70</sup>

It is hard to determine who “those who left for the city” were. Were they peasants agitated by the Mariavites, who had numerous followers in big industrial centers? Or maybe readers of *Zaranie* (some of them were brought up in the countryside, but later moved to urban areas)? Socialists?<sup>71</sup> Or someone else? Maybe a general negative stereotype of cities played a role. Regardless of their real identity, the radicalism of the quote is staggering. The claim that an ordinary priest is infallible in his teachings and should be always obeyed is far beyond Catholic orthodoxy, but it may as well be interpreted as an exaggerated allusion to Jesus’s words: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.”<sup>72</sup> What is more important to the objectives of this article is the notion here that the clergy could have faults. It is hard to imagine that a moderate pro-Catholic newspaper would have printed a letter containing suggestions about presbyters on “the road to hell” and being “the greatest sinners” before 1906.<sup>73</sup> Such a change in the public discourse represented a gigantic societal shift for the Kingdom.

<sup>69</sup> KRISAŃ, Chłopi, pp. 17–66, examines reading habits of the peasantry.

<sup>70</sup> P. H.: Z Dworszowic Kościelnych w Powiecie Radomskim Guberni Piotrkowskiej [From Dworszowice Kościelne in the Radom County of the Piotrków Governorate], in: *Gazeta Świąteczna* (1913), 1691, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> The possible influence of socialist agitation on the secularization of peasant societies is not discussed in this article, as such leftist movements had a limited impact in rural areas of the Kingdom.

<sup>72</sup> Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 23, verses 1–3; New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition.

<sup>73</sup> A comprehensive investigation of the letters of *Gazeta Świąteczna* from the very beginning of its existence (1881), and also in corpuses of peasant letters, found no text written

In this article, we have seen three great challenges posed to the Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Poland under the late Russian imperial regime: first, the appearance of two unprecedented movements that criticized the Church, namely, the Mariavites and *Zaranie*. Up until this point, disputes with Church authorities usually took the form of local conflicts between priests and their parishioners; only in the former case did the formation of a separate religious community follow.<sup>74</sup> Later, the Macoch affair provided additional fuel for those two social phenomena with their anticlerical rhetoric and probably cemented their position in society. All this created a significant discursive shift: Anticlerical rhetoric became more advanced and interconnected between various local communities and gained institutional support. What followed was a kind of disenchantment in the public image of the clergy, even in moderate peasant circles. While the bishops' and presbyters' authority was explicitly undermined only by the Mariavites and *Zaranie*, a redefinition of who the priest is also occurred elsewhere, as shown in the correspondence with *Gazeta Świąteczna*. In other words: the process of secularization, here understood as the decline of the clergy's authority among the peasants in the Kingdom of Poland, gained momentum in 1906 with the schism of the Mariavites, quickly supported by the appearance of *Zaranie* and by the Macoch affair.<sup>75</sup> These three phenomena significantly undermined the image of the Catholic clergy in society. While I do not agree with those sociologists who see secularization as a deterministic, snowballing phenomenon that cannot be significantly amended once launched, it is hard to imagine that the shockwaves that struck the religious life of the Kingdom and its inhabitants would have simply dissipated in the months and years that followed the described events.<sup>76</sup>

Undoubtedly, the inquiry into the phenomena described above may require further development.<sup>77</sup> The main thesis of this text may be better supported or

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before 1906 even close to P. H. (as in footnote 70) in terms of harshness of criticism towards the clergy.

<sup>74</sup> KRISAŃ, *Chłopi*, pp. 95–96.

<sup>75</sup> Previous literature has noted a decline in people's trust of the clergy among the peasant population at the turn of the twentieth century, but such remarks are short and only mention this phenomenon in connection with radical peasant movements; cf.: HELENA BRODOWSKA: *Chłopi o sobie i Polsce: Rozwój świadomości społeczno-narodowej* [Peasants about Themselves and Poland: The Development of Socio-National Consciousness], Warszawa 1967, p. 218; EDWARD PIETRASZEK: *Władza i autorytety w społeczności wiejskiej* [Power and Authority in the Rural Community], in: MARIA BIERNACKA, BRONISŁAWA KOPCZYŃSKA-JAWORSKA et al. (eds.): *Etnografia Polski: Przemiany kultury ludowej*, Wrocław 1976, pp. 521–533, here p. 530.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. MARCUS MOBERG: *Religion, Discourse and Society: Towards a Discursive Sociology of Religion*, Abdington 2022 (e-book), section "Secondary-level reflection," par. 5, loc. 248.8.

<sup>77</sup> For instance, the role of the National Democratic movement in the processes of secularization may be worth inquiring into. In general, the rhetoric of the Polish nationalist was linked to Catholicism, even though many of the key activists were personally irreligious at the time. Thus, there was a certain measure of distrust between the Church

redefined (if needed) after consultation with archival records and other sources that are currently inaccessible. It would also be interesting to compare these cases to the behavior of other societies at the same time, not only in other parts of partitioned Poland (especially Galicia) but also in other parts of Europe and the world. All this may lead us to a better understanding, both of social dynamics in Russian Poland under the late imperial rule but also, more generally, of the functioning of socioreligious processes and the roots of their changes.

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hierarchy and the nationalists, but for now it is unclear whether this tension was somehow channeled towards the faithful residing in rural areas. I am grateful to one of my anonymous reviewers for turning my attention to this question.

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