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The Slavic Pope?

Jan Maria Michał Kowalski and the Mariavites



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As far as we know, Archbishop Ján Maria Michał Kowalski (1871–1942), the longtime leader of the Polish (Old) Catholic Mariavite Church claimed much spiritual power, even a kind of Messiah-status, but that he never explicitly claimed the papacy. Still, bishops in the Mariavite core group, at least from the mid-1920s, asserted that the Roman pontiff was not the true pope anymore, that the Holy See had moved from Rome to the Mariavite centre in Plock, and that Kowalski was the long-awaited ‘Slavic Pope’, that Polish nationalist authors had written about: a liberator and a benevolent religious leader.

The founder of the Mariavites was Sister Feliksa Maria Franciszka Kozłowska (1862–1921), often called Little Mother (*Mateczka*). She claimed to receive divine revelations–‘understandings’–from 1893 onwards, and the interpretation of them played a significant role in the development of the Mariavite doctrine, both before and after her death. Posthumously many followers believed Little Mother to be divine, and Archbishop Kowalski had an almost sacred status, even during his life. Claiming ‘understandings’, too, he introduced drastic doctrinal changes throughout the 1920s. Still, Kowalski’s autocratic rule and the unorthodox doctrinal development led to a schism in 1935, when only a small minority of the faithful remained with him.

Though there are Mariavites abroad–some lineages of succession accepted by the mother church, others not–Mariavitism is a very Polish religion. For those who know the Polish language, which I, unfortunately, do not, primary sources are abundant, including books and journals, published by the church. Thus for linguistic reasons, I have had to recourse secondary literature. Still, with the

help of a native speaker, I have had the chance to study some essential texts, translated from the original language.¹

Similarly, there is little research on Mariavitism in other languages than Polish. However, one of the first monographs at all was Jerzy Peterkiewicz's *The Third Adam* (1975), which has a clear focus on Kowalski's role. Though published by an academic press, it is difficult to define the book's genre, and it is somewhat speculative and psychologizing. Still, Peterkiewicz was able to do something nobody else has done. He interviewed Mariavite clergy who had clear memories of Kowalski and the church in the 1920s and 1930s, not least the so-called 'mystical marriages,' i.e., sexual relations between male and female members of the order. He also made a thorough study of written primary sources, both manuscript and printed. In short, despite a somewhat sensationalist orientation, it is a significant contribution.²

A decade before Peterkiewicz, in 1965, French sociologist Emile Appolis published a brief, useful overview of the church's history and beliefs, "Une Église des derniers temps: l'Église Mariavite," which is mainly based on secondary sources and much later French Mariavite literature. It also deals with later developments and other Mariavite groups. A recent, much more specialised article is Zbigniew Łagosz's "Mariavites and the Occult" (2013), which critically assesses the purported influences of the Polish church from and on a wide plethora of Western esoteric groups.³

¹ I am most grateful to PhD candidate Angelika Drigo at Uppsala University for translating two very important texts, published in the Mariavite journal *Mariawicka Myśl Narodowa* in 1924. Both articles deal with the papal issue.

² Peterkiewicz 1975.

³ Appolis 1965 and Łagosz 2013.

A few newer studies focus on social history and the role of the Mariavites in a broader context. One is Yedida Sharona Kanfer's impressive PhD dissertation "Łódź: Industry, Religion, and Nationalism in Russian Poland, 1880–1914", which includes a chapter on the rapid growth of Mariavitism among industrial workers in Łódź around 1905. In a very recent PhD dissertation "Migration to the Self: Education, Political Economy, and Religious Authority in Polish Communities", Kathleen Wroblewski dedicates a chapter to the role of Mariavites and the Polish National Catholic Church in Polish immigrant communities in the United States.⁴

Among recent historically oriented monographs in Polish, one could mention three crucial works: Stanisław Rybak's *Mariawityzm. Dzieje i współczesność* (2011) [Mariavitism: History and Present], Artur Górecki's *Mariawici i mariawityzm: narodziny i pierwsze lata istnienia* (2011) [Mariavites and Mariavitism: Birth and Early Years], and Tomasz Dariusz Mames's *Oświata mariawitów w latach 1906–1935* (2016) [Mariavite Education in the years 1906–1935].⁵

Institutional and Doctrinal Development

Before the Polish independence in 1918, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was divided between the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and German empires. The area, which would become Mariavite heartland: Mazovia and cities like Łódź, Lublin and Płock, was part of the Russian empire. Having crushed the Revolt

⁴ Kanfer 2011 and Wroblewski 2018.

⁵ Rybak 2011, Górecki 2011, and Mames 2016, cf. Rybak 1992 and Górecki 2006.

of 1863, the Russians strengthened their control over the Polish areas, and the Roman Catholic Church was counteracted and could only function semi clandestinely.⁶

The founder of the Mariavites, Feliksa Kozłowska, was born in 1862 in a small town close to Warsaw. She belonged to the lower nobility and received a thorough education at home, speaking several languages fluently. At a young age, she joined one of the hidden Catholic tertiary communities in Warsaw, founded by Capuchin priest Honorat Koźmiński (1829–1916). Her religious name was Sister Maria Francisca, and in 1886, she came to Płock, where she started another clandestine community: the Congregation of the Poor Sisters of the Holy Mother Clare, which adhered to the strict First Rule of Saint Clare. The institution particularly attracted groups of female factory workers; Płock was a textile production centre.⁷

Beginning in 1893, Kozłowska claimed to receive a series of heavenly messages, ‘understandings.’ They contained harsh criticism of the moral standards of the Roman Catholic Clergy and humanity’s sinfulness at large. According to the messages, the only remedy was to form a priestly congregation principally dedicated to propagating the Adoration of the Eucharist and the devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. The group should be called Mariavites, *Mariawici*, as they should emulate Virgin’s ‘secret life’ (cf. Lat. *vita*), her ordinary humble existence. Though the adoration as the sacramental Christ was a centre of the cult, it was a Mariocentric spirituality. It was influenced by the writings of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673–1716), who in his *Traité*

⁶ Kanfer 2011: 278–282

⁷ Peterkiewicz 1975: 7–13, Kanfer 2011: 282–288 and Rybak 2011: 6–9.

de la vraie devotion a la Sainte Vierge propagated the inseparability between Christ and the Virgin and the need of total consecration to Mary as a way to Christ; an example of Mariological maximalism.⁸

In the late 1890s as the revelations to Kozłowska became known outside the community, a growing number of priests gathered around her, and women took vows and joined the community. One could note that many of the priests who became members of the association were young and well educated. Most had studied in both at the seminary in Warsaw and at the Catholic Academy in St. Petersburg; some even in Rome. In the year 1900, the 29-year-old parish priest Ján Kowalski encountered Kozłowska for the first time. He became convinced of the veracity of the revelations and described the process as a thorough conversion. Kowalski's Mariavite full religious name became Ján Maria Michał. He had been ordained a priest three years before, after studies Warsaw and St. Petersburg, and quickly became a central actor in the congregation, seeing Kozłowska/Little Mother as a mediatrix between heaven and earth.⁹

At this time, the Mariavites perceived themselves as an integral part of the Roman Catholic Church, and many of the priests were still active in ordinary parish work. Still, the congregation had no formal ecclesiastical status, but the members took private vows and was considered a pious association. Around the turn of the century, the Mariavites sought official recognition from the Polish Roman Catholic bishops and the Holy See, and Little Mother wrote down a final version of the heavenly messages. The Polish episcopate was very reluctant, if

⁸ Peterkiewichz 1975: 7–13 and Rybak 2011.

⁹ Peterkiewicz 1975: 18–35, Kanfer 2011: 288–292 and Rybak 2011: 9–11.

not downright hostile, and in 1903, Little Mother and a group of Mariavite priests travelled to Rome to meet Pope Leo XIII (sed. 1878–1903) and present their case. However, on their way to Rome, they were informed that the elderly pontiff had died, and they had to wait several weeks for an audience with his successor, Pius X (sed. 1903–1914). In the meantime, the group elected Kowalski as the Minister General of the Association of Mariavite priests.¹⁰

Having returned from Rome, Little Mother established the Order of Perpetual Adoration, which gathered the four Mariavite branches: priests, sisters, tertiaries and brotherhoods, and appointed Kowalski as the leader of the whole Union, too. Though Little Mother had a special charismatic status as the ‘voice-box of Heaven,’ Kowalski had the most significant formal power, as the leading cleric.¹¹

The response the Mariavites eventually received from Rome was exactly the opposite of what they had hoped for. In 1904, the Holy Office condemned Kozłowska’s revelations as delusions and hallucinations and ordered the leaders to dissolve the congregation. All former adherents should subject themselves to the authority of the local bishops. Some did, but many remained in the group.¹² Thus in 1906, Pius X issued the encyclical, *Tribus circiter*, in which he condemned the Mariavites in very harsh terms. Not mincing matters, he called them a ‘pseudo-monastic society’ who as ‘enemies of the Church ... asserted that she [the Roman Catholic Church] has fallen from truth and justice, and hence has been abandoned by the Holy Spirit and that to themselves alone, the

¹⁰ Peterkiewicz 1975: 31–38. For a detailed study on the conflict between the Mariavites, the Polish Roman Catholic bishops and the Roman authorities, see Rybak 2011: 9–36.

¹¹ Rybak 2011: 9–36.

¹² Kanfer 2011: 288-292, cf. the quotation from the Holy Office’s declaration in Pius X 1906.

Mariavite priests was it divinely given to instruct the faithful in true piety.’ On December 31, 1906, the Polish bishops announced that the Holy Office had excommunicated Kozłowska and Kowalski and declared them *vitandi*, whom every Catholic should avoid. It was the harshest possible ecclesiastical sanction.¹³

Together with Pope Pius X’s fear of all ‘modernism’, including national Catholicism, a crucial explanation for the severe Roman reaction against the Polish movement was its sheer size. During the first years of the century, the Mariavites grew exponentially. They had access to 70 parish churches, where affiliated priests now said the Mass in the vernacular. Moreover, they had more than 100,000 followers, maybe as many as 150,000. The faithful lived both in the countryside and in urban areas, and especially popular among female factory workers in cities such as Łódź, Warsaw, Lublin and Płock. In some locations, whole parishes converted to Mariavitism. The church also existed in a few places in Lithuania and to some extent among Polish immigrants in the United States. The recipe for success was probably the mixture between anticlericalism, Mariocentrism and a nationalist reaction towards the growing Russification policy.¹⁴

In 1905, the Tsar signed a Decree of Religious Toleration that radically improved the situation for the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, as well as for other religious groups. After the excommunication and the break with Rome in 1906, the Mariavites founded a separate church that eventually became an officially recognised entity: Kościół Katolickiego Mariawitów (the Catholic

¹³ Pius X 1906. For a study of the process, see Rybak 2011: 9–36.

¹⁴ Kanfer 2011: 293-318, cf. Wroblewski 2018.

Mariavite Church).¹⁵ Not surprisingly, the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Mariavites were dismal, and on some occasions, the conflicts gave rise to violent outbursts and fights over church buildings. Still, the newly acquired religious freedom meant that the Polish Catholic hierarchy could call in groups Polish speaking priests from abroad, especially from Austrian Galicia went to the Mariavite heartlands and managed to re-convert large groups, not least in Łódź.¹⁶

As a separate church, the Mariavites needed bishops with apostolic succession to ordain priests of their own, and assisted by four other bishops in 1909, the Old Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht Gerard Gul (1847–1920) consecrated Kowalski bishop. Later, the Old Catholics consecrated a few other bishops for the Mariavites, and Kowalski was co-consecrator.¹⁷

As a separate religious group, the Mariavites were not allowed to use the Roman Catholic parish churches anymore, but with their newly acquired legal personality, they could build and own churches. The building activity was frantic in a few years they constructed dozens of church buildings of their own, which they usually referred to as temples. In 1914, they could inaugurate their cathedral in Plock: the Temple of Mercy and Charity, which constituted the spiritual centre of the church, a kind of Mariavite Vatican.¹⁸ Apart from the building of temples and convents, they established schools and libraries as well as social institutions such as hospitals and orphanages.¹⁹

¹⁵ Kanfer 2011: 293–311.

¹⁶ Kanfer 2011: 278–281, cf. Rybak 2011: 37–43.

¹⁷ Peterkiewicz 1975: 39–45, cf. Appolis 1965: 59.

¹⁸ Peterkiewicz 1975: 35–51.

¹⁹ Mames 2016.

After the World War, in 1918, Poland became an independent republic. The death tolls of the war, the persecution of the faithful and an invigorated Roman Catholic mission activity meant that Mariavite membership had decreased. By 1921, they had one archbishop, three bishops, 30 priests, 244 sisters, 57 lay brothers, and around 42,000 faithful.²⁰

At that time, Little Mother became terminally ill, and she died in August 1921. After her demise, Kowalski became the sole leader, and in the decade that followed, he changed the church's doctrines at a rapid pace. With the alterations, Mariavitism became increasingly different not only from Roman Catholicism but also from mainstream Old Catholicism. In the 1920s and 1930s, Archbishop Kowalski published frenetically. The most central work was *Dzieło Wielkiego Miłosierdzia*, [The Work of Great Mercy; 1922] a more than 500-page book that had the status of Sacred Scripture. It included the revelations to Little Mother and other documentation by her, edited and commented by the Archbishop. A much-extended version of the book appeared in 1929, which included Kowalski's revised interpretations of the texts and testimonies from bishops and nuns; supporting his changes. The latter edition was only available to the members of the religious order.²¹

Apart from *The Work of Great Mercy*, the church printed prayer books breviaries, translations of the Old and New Testament with commentaries, as well as a separate volume on the Book of Revelation, all prepared by Kowalski, who also translated Dante's *Divina Commedia* into Polish. The Mariavites also issued several more or less long-lived journals including *Marywicka Mysl*

²⁰ Rybak 2011: 51.

²¹ Peterkiewicz 1975: 234.

Narodowa (Mariavite National Thought) 1924–1925 and *Królestwo Boze na ziemi* (The Kingdom of God on Earth) 1927–1939. Kowalski also wrote a long series of pastoral letters.²²

The published material but also manuscript sources, and interviews made by Jerzy Peterkiewicz give evidence of quite dramatic doctrinal changes during Kowalski's time as the sole leader. He mainly based the new teachings on interpretations of the revelations to Little Mother but above all the continuous 'understandings' that he claimed to receive. However, he was also involved in biblical exegesis, and interpretation of texts by church fathers and Polish national-romantic literature from the first half of the nineteenth century, in particular, the works of the so-called Three Bards: Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859).²³

In the early 1920s, Archbishop Kowalski decreed that the faithful could receive the Eucharist under the two species and that children could receive it immediately after the baptism. He abolished the mandatory clerical celibacy, auricular confession, fasts, and the blessing of water, oils, foods, and objects. Kowalski also wrote new prayers and liturgies, developing a much-simplified Mass Order that could be celebrated in private homes, too.²⁴

In Kowalski's teachings, Little Mother received an increasingly elevated position. Eventually, she became part of the Trinity. Kowalski claimed that the Virgin Mary was the incarnation of God the Father and that Little Mother was

²² For a bibliography, see Peterkiewicz 1975: 233–234.

²³ Peterkiewicz 1975: 57–74

²⁴ Rybak 1996.

the Holy Spirit and the Bride of Christ. He also concluded that *he* was an incarnation of the Archangel Michael or even of God the Father.²⁵

Another very dramatic alteration was Kowalski's introduction of the infamous 'mystical marriages' in 1921. The first marriages between clerics and nuns were formalised in 1922, and the practice was made public two years later. The unions could be polygamous, and Kowalski arranged them and had six formal wives himself. He claimed that sexual relations between clergy and nuns did not constitute a break of the vow of chastity and that children born out of these relations would be born without the stain of original sin; in total, some forty children were born and raised in the convents. All these changes took place in an apocalyptic setting; Kowalski announced that the End Time had come and that the world would perish in 1924.

According to Little Mother, four bishops constituted the 'pillars' of the Mariavite church. Apart from Kowalski, they were Roman Maria Jakub Próchniewski (1872–1954), Wacław Maria Bartłomiej Przysiecki (1878–1961) and Klemens Maria Filip Feldman (1885–1971). Kowalski and this core group and their nun-wives formed the church of the elect referred to as the Johannine Church of Love and the Philadelphic Church of Love.²⁶ Nevertheless, the whole group was still officially known as the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites; the Johannine Church was a kind of *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, a small church within the church, which was intended for the elect.

The public announcement of the 'mystical marriages' and other doctrinal alterations led to a break with the Utrecht Union of the Old Catholic Churches.

²⁵ Lagosz 2013: 257.

²⁶ Peterkiewicz 1975: 86.

In 1926, several Mariavite representatives tried to establish contacts with Orthodox and Oriental churches instead. They made a long journey to Belgrade, Sofia, Constantinople, and Alexandria, and Jerusalem, but nothing came out of the contact attempts, They also tried to reconcile with the Roman Catholic Church, but to no avail, as they did not want to change their teaching and above all not submit to papal authority.²⁷

The reports about the sexual activities in the convents also led to a trial against Kowaliski in 1928. He was charged with rape of both underage girls and adult women. After a lengthy trial, the court sentenced the archbishop to two years and eight months in prison. Still, it would take many years before he had to serve his sentence.²⁸

After the trial and following a new ‘understanding’ in 1929, Kowalski decreed that he would ordain and consecrate women and on March 28 that year, he ordained the first group of twelve women. However, they were not referred to as priests but priestesses (*kaplanski*). Of the ordained women, he consecrated the Mother Superior who also was his main wife, Antonia Maria Izabela Wilucka (1890–1946) as archpriestess (*arcykapłanka*), in practice a bishop, and in the years that followed, he would ordain many other sisters.²⁹

It is thus entirely clear that Kowalski held the supreme power in the Mariavite church. Apart from the formal titles of General Minister and Archbishop, the adherents referred to him as ‘Our Leader’, ‘Commander,’ and

²⁷ Rybak 2011: 54.

²⁸ Peterkiewicz 1975: 75–118.

²⁹ Peterkiewicz 1975: 138–155, cf. Appolis 1965: 60.

‘God-like Michal’. In short, he had at least a semi-divine status, and his writings together with those of Little Mother had equal status to the Bible.³⁰

A Mariavite Pope?

At least from 1924 onwards, there were claims in official Mariavite publications that the Roman pope was not a true pontiff and that Kowalski was the ‘Slavic Pope’ prophesized in a poem by Juliusz Słowacki’s from the mid-nineteenth-century . Officially, Kowalski himself did not make any papal claims, but some of his closest men did, even if their writings are somewhat obscure.³¹

The first official claims that the Holy See had moved from Rome to Plock and that Kowalski was the true pope appeared in two articles in a 1924 issue of the journal *Mariawicka Myśl Narodowa*. In the first article, “Przeniesienie Stolicy Apostolskiej” [The Transfer of the Apostolic See], Bishop Maria Jakub argued that the Roman Holy See was vacant. The opposition the Mariavites experienced from Pius X, was a sign that he was not the rightful successor of St. Peter. The bishop thus saw Leo XIII as the last true Roman pope, while his successor was an antipope. Part of the argument was that Pope Leo had died when the Mariavite representatives were on their way to Rome in 1903 and that they had to wait until the election of Pius before they could present their case.

In the article, Bishop Jakub Maria recounts that in 1903, while in Italy, waiting for the papal audience, Kowalski celebrated a Mass in memory of Pope Leo. On that occasion, Little Mother was said to have received an apparition,

³⁰ Pieterkiewicz 1975: 156

³¹ To date, the best analysis of the papal issue is Górecki 2006: 7.

which she did not public at the time. According to later testimonies, and referring to Kowalski, Christ said: “This is the righteous heir to the Holy See and My Vicar. This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” The last part of the revelation is a quotation from Matthew 3:17, where the Holy Ghost speaks to Jesus following his baptism.³² From this passage, the identification of Kowalski with the Vicar of Christ seems clear.

In his article about the Holy See, Bishop Maria Jakub, therefore, concluded that the election of Kowalski as the General Minister on August 6, 1903, actually constituted the election of a new true pope, a conclave, though it was unknown to them at the time. Moreover, in 1918, Little Mother claimed that the Holy Spirit had left the Roman Catholic Church and its sacraments were thus devoid of any value.³³ Consequently, the bishop writes that the Roman era of the Catholic was over and Plock was the new centre of the true church.

With the establishment of the Temple of Mercy and Love in the city of Plock, a new papacy was established, that is, the Holy See was moved from Rome to Poland, to the Temple of Mercy and Love, and the Monastery of the Mariavite Sisters of the Continuous Adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament. There, Jesus Himself founded His Capital, and from it, he rules the world and directs the whole Church; and Father Michael, presently the Archbishop of the Mariavites, is his mortal instrument for the fulfilment of his Most Holy Will.³⁴

³² [Próchniewski] 1924: 1–6.

³³ Pieterkiewicz 1975: 65–67.

³⁴ [Próchniewski] 1924: 6

Another part of the argument for Kowalski's papal status is found in a second article in the same issue of *Mariawicka Myśl Narodowa*, titled "Papież Słowiański" [The Slavic Pope]. The text is unsigned, but it is probable that the editor, Bishop Maria Bartłomiej, wrote it. The concept came from Juliusz Słowacki's 1848 poem "Słowiański Papież" [Our Slavic Pope] in which the poet contrasts the bellicose Roman popes with the benevolent and peaceful Slavic (i.e., Polish) pope.³⁵

God's bell the Conclave's petty strife has stilled:
Its mighty tone
Brings news of Slavic hope fulfilled –
The Papal Throne!
Pope who will not – Italian-like – take fright
At sabre-thrust
But, brave as God himself, stand and give fight:
His world – but dust!
- - -
To bear our load – this world by God designed –
That power we need:
Our Slavic Pope, brother to all mankind,
Is there to lead!

With balm from all the world, our souls' torment
Is soothed by him;
About his flower-decked throne a regiment
Of cherubim.
Love he dispenses as great powers today
Distribute arms;
With sacramental power, his sole array,
The world he charms!
- - -
Among the nations, with a brother's love,

³⁵ [Przysiecki?] 1924: 6–11.

He spreads the word:
Man must, to reach his final goal above,
Brave fire and sword.
The sacramental power of realms untold
His willing slave;
Power that the soul of man may yet behold
Before the grave!³⁶

The author of the article in *Mariawicka Myśl Narodowa* also argues that Kowalski was the Slavic pope through an interpretation of national author Adam Mickiewicz's obscure prophesy about the number 44. In his poetic drama *Dziady* [Forefathers, 1822], Mickiewicz lets of the characters, the priest Piotr, foresee the arrival of a 'reviver of the nation' who will liberate Poland from the Russian yoke. In his drama, Mickiewicz cryptically states that the reviver was 'The Son of a foreign mother, in his blood old heroes, and his name will be forty and four.'

In the article in the Mariavite journal, the episcopal author claims that this saviour of the Poles has arrived with Kowalski by using numerology as proof: the numeric values of each of the words Michał, Filii, Mariae represent the number 44. With this line of argumentation, he explicitly called the archbishop 'a true governor or Vicar of Christ.'³⁷

The article contains many fragments and quotations of Polish poems, which tell us about the arrival of the Slavic Pope, who will save not only the Polish people but also the whole world. The three 'fallen crowns' that the author mentions are the German, Austrian and Russian empires, which had dominated

³⁶ Słowacki 1848.

³⁷ [Przysiecki?] 1924: 6.

Poland for a long period. In this situation, Kowalski was a tool in the hands of Christ, to liberate both the Poles and the Catholics at large. Bishop Maria Bartłomiej writes:

Michael leads a wondrous fight to bring the Kingdom of God to earth; he is the resurrection of Poland, the Vicar of Christ. - - - He is not guided by his reason but by the Lord Jesus himself. He has three faces because he performs various functions: he is a priest, a teacher and a king. He stands on three crowns but is without a crown. He has no secular or spiritual power, that is removed from the people, and yet he will strengthen his Church. He will support the papal tiara, that is he will overthrow the papal power which, until now, has ruled over Poland and the world through three fallen powers.³⁸

Though the authors of the two articles are rather clear about the archbishop's papal status, no known source indicates that Kowalski used the papal title. Still, as the supreme leader, Kowalski did not oppose it in any way, either, and as he had assumed a semi-divine position, the papal issue was probably subordinate. Still, there are indirect claims of his. Speaking of the Mariavite hierarchy, Kowalski wrote about 'bishops as slow instruments of God's Will, whereas the popes have direct access to power from God.' That passage can be interpreted indirect defence for the need of papal power.³⁹

The two articles in *Mariawicka Myśl Narodowa* appeared within weeks of the break between the Mariavites and the Old Catholic Utrecht union. The Old Catholics argued that the Mariavite Church had developed in a way that made their association impossible. On his side, Kowalski did certainly not contradict their assertions but clearly stated that the Mariavites, the Temple in Płock and

³⁸ [Przysiecki?] 1924: 6–11

³⁹ [Próchniewski] 1924: 5.

he as their supreme leader, had a unique role in the salvation history and that God had an extraordinary presence in the Mariavite church that could not be compared to other groups. He stated that ‘Christ, who is present in the Blessed Sacrament as Supreme King, Shepherd, and Teacher of the Church, sits on His throne in the Mariavite Temple in Płock.’ Kowalski claimed that the break with Utrecht pleasing to God the current situation, stating that ‘though Little Mother told me to maintain relations with the Old Catholics, apparently it must be different.’⁴⁰ In this context, it is possible to argue that the papal claims of his closest men were an attempt to sanction doctrinal changes with the help of a higher authority.

The year before the journal articles were printed, in 1923, Kowalski published the book *Główne podstawy Maryawityzmu objawione w Apokalipsie i zapowiedziane w dziełach myślicieli polskich i wieszczów narodu polskiego* [The Fundamentals of Mariavitism Revealed in the Apocalypse and Announced in the Works of Polish Thinkers and Poets]. In the book, Kowalski presented the coming of the Slavic Pope, and he asserted that several Polish nineteenth-century authors, including the Three Bards, had been inspired by the Holy Spirit and prophesized about the future of Poland’s and the Mariavites’ role in the End-time. However, in the book, he defended a kind of collective papacy, not that *he* was the pope.⁴¹

Time has come when a people and not a man exercise the papacy. - - - The Mariavite people understood that no spiritual force animated this specter, that it was concealed under its phraseology, its nothingness and its ignominy, and they

⁴⁰ Przysiecki?] 1924: 12.

⁴¹ Peterkiewiz 1975: 57–74.

despised it [the papacy] as an illusion, as a nightmare that stifled the spirit of our people and gnawed at his heart. - - - If the word of the Lord Jesus that there will be only one sheepfold and one shepherd, will be realised it will be through Poland. Through it, from all nations will come a single Christian people, over whom will reign the King of all, Christ - - - And the Lord will reign in Poland, from Poland, and through Poland - - - Our people, who have suffered the most for justice, must be the first to meet love.⁴²

Though the papal theme is not prevalent in Mariavite sources and not treated in any coherent way, in a 1930 issue of the journal *Królestwo Boże na Ziemi*, [God's Kingdom on Earth], Bishop Maria Jakub once again explicitly asserted that Kowalski was 'the rightful successor on the Holy See and the Vicar of Christ.'⁴³

Still, Kowalski's autocratic claims met increasing opposition even from his episcopal colleagues. Eventually, in 1935, a general meeting of the church forced him to step down from the office and leave Płock for Felcjanów, a big Mariavite monastery compound located about 20 kilometres outside the town. The absolute majority of the adherents, probably more than 75 per cent left Kowalski's flock and accepted Bishop Klemens Maria Filip Feldman as the new leader. None of the other bishops joined him and only three male priests. Still,

⁴² Apud Appolis 1965: 58–59. My translation from French. "Les temps sont arrivés où c'est un peuple et non plus un homme qui exercera la papauté" 'Le peuple mariavite, a compris qu'aucune force spirituelle n'animait ce spectre, qu'il dissimulait sous sa phrasbologie son néant et son ignominie, et il l'a méprisé comme une illusion, comme un cauchemar qui étouffait l'esprit de notre Peuple et rongait son cœur.' 'Si doit se réaliser la parole du Seigneur Jesus qu'il n'y aura plus qu'une seule bergerie et qu'un seul pasteur, ce sera par la Pologne. Par elle, de toutes les nations sortira un Peuple chrétien unique, sur lequel règnera le Roi de tous, le Christ ... Et le Seigneur régnera en Pologne, de la Pologne et par la Pologne.' 'Notre peuple, qui a le plus souffert pour la justice, doit le premier arriver à l'amour'

⁴³ *Królestwo Boże na Ziemi* 1930

as many as 80 nuns followed him to Felcjanów, most of whom were ordained priestesses or deaconesses.⁴⁴

From this time on, the group adhering to Kowalski was called the Catholic Mariavite Church, while the much bigger group that remained in Płock was called the Old Catholic Mariavite Church. As Kowalski left, the latter church denounced all the works that the archbishop published after Little Mother's death, and all his doctrinal statements, including the ordination of women.

In 1936, shortly after settling in the Felcjanów, and eight years after the verdict Kowalski had to serve his prison sentence. He was released in early 1938, but his time as a free man was brief. After the German invasion of Poland, Gestapo soon arrested him as an enemy of the regime. In 1941, the Nazis brought him to the Dachau concentration camp, and on May 18, 1942, he was murdered at the Hartheim death clinic near Linz.⁴⁵

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⁴⁴ Peterkiewicz 1975: 156–175, cf. Górecki 2006.

⁴⁵ Peterkiewicz 1975: 156–184.

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