



Sławomir GOŁĘBIOWSKI:
W obronie własnej tożsamości
[Defending the Identity]
Płock: Wydawnictwo Kościoła Starokatolickiego
Mariawitów, 2024

For over 100 years, the topic of the Mariavites has been electrifying various church circles, especially since the initial reform movement transformed into a separate Church without subordination to the Bishop of Rome. Today, this heritage is represented in Poland by the Old Catholic Mariavite Church and the Mariavite Catholic Church. The issue is still relevant, as there are many stereotypes, insinuations and even lies and mockery. In this regard, it is necessary to note the fact that an important publication on the history and practice of the Mariavite movement, especially the person of Sister Feliksa Maria Franciszka Kozłowska, known as Mateczka, and Archbishop Jan Maria Michał Kowalski, the first Minister General of the Congregation of Mariavite Priests, has appeared on the Polish market. It is a book by Sławomir Gołębiowski entitled *W obronie własnej tożsamości* (Defending the Identity), published by the Old Catholic Mariavite Church in Poland in 2024. The author of the publication is not a theologian, but a member of this Church, engaged in researching the Mariavite cause.

The context of the presented book is four publications that appeared in 2019—2024. The first publication is a book by Ewa K. Czaczkowska entitled *Mistyczki. Historie kobiet wybranych* ([Female mystics. Histories of Elected Women], Wydawnictwo Znak 2019). The second is a text by Andrzej Kanse entitled *Funkcje prasy wyznaniowej. Studium na przykładzie*

mariawitów ([Functions of Denominational Press. A Study Based on the Example of the Mariavites], Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Mazowieckiej w Płock 2020). The third publication is a book by Andrzej Dwojnych and Rafał Łętocha entitled *W stronę Królestwa Bożego na ziemi. Myśl społeczno-polityczna mariawitów polskich* ([Towards the Kingdom of God on Earth. The Socio-Political Thought of the Polish Mariavites], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2021), and the fourth is *Trzeci Adam. Opowieść o mariawitach* (The Third Adam. A Story of Mariavites), by Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (Wydawnictwo Iskry 2024).

Sławomir Gołębiowski's publication consists of a "From the Publisher" section, an introduction entitled "Author to the Readers," and four chapters. The author draws attention to the difficulties associated with the study of Mariavitism, with the prevailing stereotypes, prejudices, historical inaccuracies (lies). The publication must be classified as popular ecclesial history, especially due to the author's sometimes casual manner of expression.¹

The first chapter (pp. 13—61) is entitled "Maria Franciszka Kozłowska wśród kobiet wybranych" (Maria Franciszka Kozłowska among the Chosen Women). The basis for the text is the already mentioned book by Ewa K. Czackowska *Mistyczki. Historie kobiet wybranych*. At the outset, the author attempts to explain the essence of mysticism as extrasensory, direct communication between the Man and God, which culminates in mystical union and mystical ecstasy. A special form of this union, according to the theology of mysticism, is mystical marriage. The importance of the issue of language should also be noted: the language of the described Wanda Boniszewska, Alicja Lenczewska, and Wanda Malczewska is simple in expression. Kozłowska's language is different: orderly and logical. In the case of the first three mystics, Ewa Czackowska also notes the possibility of third-party interference in the text of their messages, but she remains very tolerant here. It is completely different in the case of Mateczka — the author strongly reproduces the widespread theses about the falsification of the revelations by the Mariavites, which finds no ample justification.

Gołębiowski then presents some facts from the work of the Mixed Committee for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Old Catholic Mariavite Church. He reveals the intricate history of the Mariavite reform and the reaction of the Church, especially the Bishop of Płock and the Holy See. The author highlights the falsified picture of reality, such as the claim that the bishops knew nothing about the hidden congregations of the Mariavite Priests and the Mariavite Sisters (arising

¹ S. GOŁĘBIOWSKI: *W obronie własnej tożsamości*. Płock 2024, p. 11.

from the so-called Honrat Koźmiński movement), as well as the fairness of the ongoing trials, especially against Maria Franciszka. The key issue is the forgery of Mateczka's main work — *Dzieła Wielkiego Miłosierdzia*. The Catholic side blames the Mariavites (including a publication by Rev. Prof. Henryk Seweryniak). Gołębiowski shows the unfoundedness of such a claim, articulating the argument that it was Bishop Szembek of Płock and representatives of the diocesan curia in Płock who committed the crime of falsifying the text of Maria Franciszka, which contributed to its condemnation, and which was connected with Bishop Szembek's clear dislike of the Mariavites and his declaration of a final end to the Mariavite cause. The author justifies his thesis in a very concrete way, also analyzing the correspondence of the Mariavites with Rome, as well as the social anti-Mariavite campaign developed in the early 20th century.

The most interesting part of this chapter is the logical and factual demonstration of the numerous errors, and even reproduced falsehoods, in Ewa Czackowska's book. Among them are the following: the claim that Feliksa Kozłowska graduated from high school without a passing an examination (when, meanwhile, girls were not allowed in the Russian partition to take the high school diploma examination and study); the emphasis on her character: firmness and stubbornness, when in the meantime such traits were not befitting of women (the author presents this issue in clearly biased way without seeing the good of these leadership qualities); the thread about the sisters' purchase of property for the convent and the future Temple of Mercy and Charity (when in the meantime it was Feliksa Kozłowska herself who purchased the land); the assertion that at the first revelation Mateczka "lost her senses" (while the text of the revelation states "I was detached from my senses," which means detachment or removal, not atrophy or loss); the assertion that the most important thing for Kozłowska was the establishment of a religious congregation (when, in fact, the goal was to rectify the life and ministry of the clergy and restore reverence for the Blessed Sacrament and the Mother of God), the claim that Maria Franciszka is similar to the Mother of God and that she was freed from the passions (when, meanwhile, in the texts of Mateczka there is the statement "seek your resemblance in the Most Holy Mother," where she does not equate herself with Mary, and the phrase about being freed from the passions does not imply sinlessness, as is clearly shown in various mystical texts unquestioned by Catholic theology); the claim that Kozłowska and the priest Felicjan Strumiłło confessed to each other (when it was a matter of mutual confiding and strengthening, not performing the Sacrament of Penance); the claim that Rev. Jan Kowalski was appointed by Kozłowska as the head of the Mariavite movement (when, in fact, he became the Minister General of the hidden

Congregation of Mariavite Priests); mixing the terms “synod” and “chapter”; claiming that Rev. Kowalski ordered the collection of information about the immoral (promiscuous) lives of some Roman Catholic priests, when he himself entered into marriage in 1922 with the superior of the Mariavites Antonina M. Izabela Wiłucka (while the Mariavites collected information in 1905 about priests living in cohabitation, and Kowalski married Wiłucka in 1922, in accordance with the law, after the Old Catholic Mariavite Church abolished compulsory celibacy of clergy); the claim that five people were killed at the hands of the Mariavites in Stryków (when it was an attack by a militia composed of Roman Catholics on the Mariavites, and the latter defended themselves); claiming that the Mariavite monastery was like a brothel because Kozłowska “communed with priests” (when, in fact, no testimonies confirm this, and the Old Polish verb ‘to commune’ simply means trusting relations); pointing out that Mateczka appeared in bishop’s attire (when referring to a doctored photograph in which Kozłowska looks like an Orthodox nun); attempting to disavow the positive opinion on the content of Kozłowska’s revelations, which was prepared by Roman Catholic Rev. Wojciech Różyk. The final conclusion is that Ewa Czackowska’s publication is not impartial, so it is characterized by bias, and the biography is written according to a pre-conceived thesis.

The second chapter (pp. 63—88) entitled “Uwagi do książki Andrzeja Kansego” (Comments on Andrzej Kanse’s book) (professor at the Mazovian Public University in Płock) presents a polemic against the book *Funkcje prasy wyznaniowej. Studium na przykładzie mariawitów*. Sławomir Gołębiowski lists among the numerous errors in the discussed publication by Kanse: inaccurate use of terminology from canon and denominational law; confusion of facts and people; lack of precision in the scope of work; claiming that the Mariavite sisters made their living from sewing clothing for the clergy, while they were engaged in embroidery, weaving, tailoring, hosiery, sewing liturgical vestments; claiming that a Mariavite house was established in Lublin (while the sisters cooperated with the Lublin Charity Society); omitting information about the charitable activities of the Mariavites during the Russo-Japanese War and World War I; claiming that Bishop Szembek asked the Vatican to dissolve the Mariavite congregations (when, in fact, the congregations had no formal approval); claiming that after 1906 (separation from the Roman Church) the Mariavites had no superior authority (when, in fact, the General Chapter of the Mariavite Congregation of Priests appointed Rev. Kowalski as the representative of the Mariavite parishes to the authorities; the claim that the Mariavite bishops were decorated by the tsarist authorities (when, in the meantime, during the audience, everyone admitted had to have orders; therefore,

Roman Catholic clergy, including bishops, had orders); the claim that the Mariavites were supported by the tsar (when, in the meantime, this was a narrative reproduced in Poland without any justification, similarly, the unfounded allegation of Mariavite sympathy for the Germans; accusing the Mariavites of riots in Leszno (when, in the meantime, they were the victims); describing the altar in Kozłowska's cell (when, in fact, the altar was not built until 1965); claiming that Bishop Kowalski decided who should be given the episcopal sacra (when, in the meantime, it was the Chapter that decided); the claim that the Mariavites succumbed to tsarist censorship and published the dates of tsarist court holidays (when, in the meantime, this was common practice in the Russian partition); the claim that publishing activities were hampered after 1914 by the impoverishment of the Church (when, in fact, the Mariavites were never wealthy, and during the war they donated money to help the needy); the claim that the Mariavites cooperated with the authorities, including the communist authorities (while all religious associations undertook some form of cooperation); the claim of the existence of the Mariavite paramilitary organization "Strzelec" (when, in fact, it was a nationwide and non-Mariavite organization); the testimony that the nun Jadwiga Pełczyńska replaced two priests in priestly ministry (A. Kansy, however, did not point out that for a short period the Mariavites ordained women priests); the claim that Bishop Kowalski was Mateczka's successor (when, meanwhile, Kowalski was not the superior of the nuns); the reproduction of accusations against Bishop Kowalski of lewd acts (when, meanwhile, Kansy mixed up trial records with court records, and the reproduction of false accusations of inciting the public, interference with the biblical text; at the same time, according to Gołębiowski, there is a reasonable suspicion of the real involvement of the Płock curia in the organization of the trial); the claim that the Mariavites incited the workers to revolt (when, meanwhile, Mariavite journalism was not accepted by Roman Catholics); an assessment of the Mariavite reform in 1935 that is inconsistent with the facts; the claim that the Mariavites were dependent on communist power (meanwhile, it should be remembered that in 1956 a decree on organizing and filling church positions came out); the claim that the social programme of the Mariavites coincided with the ideas of the Polish United Workers' Party (yet this programme was forged at the turn of the 20th century); the claim that after 1945 relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Old Catholic Mariavite Church were correct (meanwhile, these relations were not); the claim that the Mariavites did not have major publishing initiatives (meanwhile, it was the state authorities that hindered it). The author's conclusion is harsh: errors disqualify the publication. The challenge for further research is to juxtapose the devastating opinion of

Stanisław Gołębiowski with the positive assessment of Andrzej Kanse's publication by Rev. Henryk Seweryniak.²

The third chapter (pp. 89—140) is entitled “Rozważania z książką *W stronę Królestwa Bożego na ziemi w tle*” (Discourses with the Book *W stronę Królestwa Bożego na ziemi* [Towards the Kingdom of God on Earth] as the Background). It is a polemic against the interdisciplinary publication by Andrzej Dwojnych and Rafał Łętocha. The author notes that it is not insignificant that the publication was written in the Kraków environment, which, in his opinion, is not friendly to religious minority communities, as well as the noted difficulty of objectively reporting on anti-Roman Catholic Church movements. The first sentence of the polemic is the author's disagreement with the claim that the Mariavite movement arose before the revelations that the Mariavites believed Feliksa Kozłowska had. It was the revelations contained in the *Dzieło Wielkiego Miłosierdzia* that were central to the Mariavite reformation. It is impossible to analyze and evaluate the Mariavite movement without reference to the revelations, as well as other writings of the Foundress (*Życie Duchowne*, *Trzydniowe rekolekcje*, letters). In this sense, Mateczka had leadership functions, but in a moral sense, towards priests and seculars. She required obedience from the nuns in accordance with the legislation of the congregation. The author points out that it is necessary to take into account the works of Mateczka, but also of Mariavite authors, especially Archbishop M. Michał Kowalski and Bishop M. Jakub Próchniewski. This work is erroneously attributed by Dwojnych and Łętocha to Kowalski. This postulate is important, as all later writing grows from this root. Another omission of the book *W stronę Królestwa Bożego na ziemi. Myśl społeczno-polityczna mariawitów polskich* is also the lack of an in-depth analysis of the influence of Franciscan spirituality on Mariavite spirituality, after all, Mariavitism is embedded in the ideas of St. Francis of Assisi, especially the need for evangelical renewal, the emphasis on the importance of the Eucharist and the ability to properly read inner inspirations. In the same way, an in-depth study of the Rev. Honorat Koźmiński religious orders movement (hidden religious congregations approved by the Church authorities) is necessary, since this is the second important context for Mariavite spirituality (the author refers to the publications of Sister Maria Werner and Rev. Daniel Olszewski).

Another controversial issue is the question of mysticism and messianism. The author points out that it is necessary to properly read mystical

² H. SEWERYNIAK: “Recenzja: Andrzej Kansy, *Funkcje prasy wyznaniowej. Studium na przykładzie mariawitów*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Mazowieckiej Uczelni Publicznej w Płocku, Płock 2020, ss. 428.” *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 29/2 (2021), pp. 313—323.

texts, including those of the Mariavites. At the same time, it is important to recognize the influence of the work of Andrzej Towiański (he played a great role in shaping Kowalski's mysticism), as well as the legacy of Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński, and Cyprian Kamil Norwid.

Gołębiowski also denies the accusations against the Mariavites reproduced by Dwojnych and Łętocha: of collaboration with socialists, Nazis, communists, of being an orgiastic sect, and of a lack of knowledge about them among Roman Catholic bishops (which is not true, since the bishops valued the Mariavite priests). At the same time, it is wrong to equate the interests of the state and the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and to justify the axiomatic identity of *Polak-katolik* (Polish therefore Catholic). It is also necessary in the evaluation of Mariavitism to distinguish between the existence since 1935 of two currents: the Płock and Felician, diverging on many doctrinal and practical issues.

An important aspect is also the social issue. It is unjustified to attribute to the Mariavites these issues as crucial. Social involvement was important, but it was due to the primacy of spirituality. Mariavites organized farms and taught parishioners a profession, economics. They also bought houses, but not to make money, but so that harassed faithful would have housing. Doing charity was also essential. Without these contexts, an assessment of the Mariavites' actions will be distorted.

Among other inaccuracies and errors in Dwojnych and Łętocha's work, Sławomir Gołębiowski points out the following: mental shortcuts regarding the village of Felicjanów; omission of the importance of the priests responsible for the Mariavite publications, Jan Rżysko, Stefan Góra and Piotr Maciejec; insufficient explanation of the issue of the Mariavite pogroms; accusations of sympathy for the tsar, which was to be expressed in prayer for the late Georgi Skalon, the Russian governor (when, meanwhile, prayer is the duty of Christians); the claim that Mateczka wanted close contacts with Anglicans (while she merely gave a general assessment of the possibility of bringing the Churches, including Anglicans, closer together; the authors also failed to take into account the fact that the Mariavites belonged to the Union of Utrecht during Mateczka's lifetime, and that activities crucial to ecumenism could not be carried out by any Church on its own); the allegation that the Mariavites underestimated Poland's concordat with the Vatican in 1925 (when, in fact, the Mariavites and some other communities were opposed to this international contract, especially in the context of the failure to observe the provisions, for instance, subordination of part of the Polish lands to the Diocese of Wrocław); accusations of anti-Semitism (when, meanwhile, the Mariavites defended the Jews, cooperated with them, and Archbishop Kowalski used

the assistance of the Rabbi of Płock in translating the Bible); accusations of collaboration with the communist government in Poland; claims of convergence of the views of the Mariavites and the National Democrats (when, meanwhile, the Mariavites did not seek to have power); mixing spirituality and politics, which was alien to Mariavite practice. On the other hand, among the research challenges, the author points out: a multidimensional study of the personality and activities of Archbishop Kowalski, including the trial for lewd acts; clarification of the question of the Eastern Rite in Mariavitism.

The conclusion is one: leaving aside the fact of errors, inaccuracies and abbreviations in the book by Andrzej Dwojnych and Rafał Łętocha, the author concludes that their work does not meet the requirements of an interdisciplinary work. In view of this, a theologian, historian, philosopher, lawyer and economist should “sit down together to describe Mariavitism, especially its history.”³

Finally, the fourth chapter (pp. 141—202) entitled “Trzeci Adam” [The Third Adam]. This part of Gołębiowski’s publication is a polemic with Jerzy Pietrkiewicz’s book entitled *Trzeci Adam. Opowieść o maria-witach*, published by Wydawnictwo Iskry in 2024 (the original version was published in 1975 under the original name of Peterkiewicz, under the title *Trzeci Adam*). The author first shows the figure of Pietrkiewicz/Peterkiewicz, which significantly affects the evaluation of his published book. However, it is crucial to show errors and inaccuracies. Among them are the following: mistakes in photographs captions, which evokes a negative assessment of the Mariavites; referring to Mariavitism as shamanism; claiming that Towiański shared metempsychosis with Kowalski (when, meanwhile, they were active in different centuries); referring to the servant brothers and sisters as workers; describing the Mariavites as characterized by wickedness (without further explanation); claiming that Mateczka was at the head of the Church; basing the assessment of Mariavitism on the statement of one anonymous former Mariavite nun; overlooking the social activities of Mateczka and the Mariavites; mocking the fact that Mateczka was a champion of spiritual life for many; claiming that Mateczka and Kowalski sustained carnal relations; misrepresenting attacks on the Mariavites; unsubstantiated claim that the Mariavites had parishes in Silesia (meanwhile, they could only have in the Russian partition); claiming that the Mariavites practiced polygamy; misinterpreting the concept of the bride of Christ, attributed to Mateczka; an erroneous assessment of Towiański’s work; an abbreviated and biased presentation of the issue of Kowalski’s abolition of celibacy; maintaining that the Mariavite movement

³ S. GOŁĘBIOWSKI: *W obronie własnej tożsamości*. Płock 2024, p. 140.

was criminal in nature; an unreliable presentation of the issue of Kowalski's trial; an erroneous enumeration of Kowalski's reforms; and considering the Mariavite liturgy to be a masquerade. The main problem is that Pietrkiewicz positioned his work as a literary fiction, but he did not mention this verbatim in the book, which misleads readers.

In the final words of the publication, the author refers to the afterword in *Trzeci Adam*, written by academic staff members of the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw, Mirosław Michalski and Borys Przedpełski: rightly demonstrating the unfoundedness of documenting the work; wrongly attributing the use of monastic names by priests to secular authorities; wrongly calling synods chapters; claiming that Kowalski became Mateczka's successor; evaluating the chief bishops without giving its criteria.

In conclusion, Sławomir Gołębiowski's book *W obronie własnej tożsamości* is a valuable publication in the field of research on Mariavitism, but also on the religious (church) situation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The book's strengths are: demonstrating linguistic errors; unmasking false interpretations of the facts that occurred in history; pointing out the depth of Mariavite ideas; indicating areas for further historical, legal and theological research; providing a Mariavite perspective on past events; indicating broader horizons for the formation of Mariavite thought (Franciscanism, mysticism, Towianism, messianism). A weakness is the sometimes-casual language, characterized by a journalistic style, but this does not take away from the book's scientific value. Taking everything into account, we must boldly state that Gołębiowski's publication inspires further research and debunks an unfavourable or suspicious view of the Mariavites even today. It provokes theologians and historians to familiarize themselves with *Dzieło Wielkiego Miłosierdzia*, and perhaps even, contrary to the Vatican's assessment of Mateczka and Mariavitism to date, to a new analysis of the work, especially in the context of post-conciliar reforms in the Roman Catholic Church, but also the settling of doctrine and practice of the Old Catholic Mariavite Church. Scholarly and Christian honesty seem to demand it.

Przemysław Sawa

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5634-3078>