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# The Model of Religious Education in the French Province of the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites and in the Community of the Church of Sainte-Marie in Mont-Saint-Aignan

## ABSTRACT

The subject of the research is the model of religious education in the French Province of the Old Catholic Mariavites and in the Community of Sainte-Marie in Mont-Saint-Aignan. The research objective is to characterize the main areas of religious education of these religious communities; that is, pastoral counselling, liturgy and catechization. The research procedure was carried out using a set of pedagogical and theological research methods: interview (with the clergy), active (participant) observation, analysis of documents, and the historical-comparative method. The model of religious education, developed in these two independently existing Churches in France, indicates the response of Christian communities to religious needs in a secularized society. Through pastoral counselling, the recipients of which are not only members of these communities, but also Muslims, Jews, Hindus, agnostics or atheists, these communities have become known as places of spiritual support. A complementary element of counselling is catechization, and both these elements are aimed at introducing these people into liturgical life. However, it is not a closed model, focused on proselytizing, but rather an open one, aiming at restoring hope in the secular and atheistic society.

## KEYWORDS

Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites – Province of France, Sainte-Marie Church in Mont-Saint-Aignan, immigration, religious education in France, ecumenism, pastoral theology

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Religious education is integrally connected with the mission of each Christian denomination. In France, which aims at being a secular country, catechesis and religious education are not present in public schools<sup>1</sup>. Each denomination organises education and religious upbringing on its own. A very interesting model of religious education is present in the practice of two minority denominations in France: the Old Catholic Mariavite Church<sup>2</sup> (with the bishop's seat in Paris) and the Old Catholic Community of Sainte-Marie Church in Mont-Saint-Aignan. Both Churches, referring to the Old Catholic tradition and doctrine<sup>3</sup>, worked out a similar model of pastoral activity. Not only did it refer to working with individuals, but also with the whole families.

Such activity is based on three pillars: *accueil* (pastoral counselling), liturgy and catechesis. The first contact with the parish usually takes place through the counselling office that provides spiritual support which is particularly important for the immigrants from the former French colonies, former Portugal colonies and Africa, as well as for other members of the secularized (sic!) French society. Another stage is invitation to participate in the liturgy, and then in the catechesis (in case of the ones who have not received the sacrament of baptism or confirmation).

In the French society, which is so varied in terms of nationalities, ethnic groups, religious and cultural minorities, the problem of

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<sup>1</sup> Except for those regions of France in which concordat is valid.

<sup>2</sup> Among numerous books concerning the Mariavite Church, the ones that appeared within the last four years are worth mentioning: S. Gołębiowski, *W poszukiwaniu prawdy... Sądowe procesy arcybiskupa Jana M. Michała Kowalskiego*, Felicjanów 2014; H. Seweryniak, *Święte Oficjum a mariawici*, Płock 2014; M.M.F. Szymkiewicz, R.P. Kozłowski, K. Mazur, *Dwie Sobótki – wspólna historia. W sto dziesiątą rocznicę samodzielności konfesyjnej mariawityzmu*, Nowa Sobótka 2016; T.D. Mames, *Oświata mariawitów w latach 1909–1935*, Warszawa–Bellerive-sur-Allier 2016; A. Le Bec, *Miséricorde et Amour. L'Église Mariavite*, Paris 2017.

<sup>3</sup> The Old Catholic Church and its origins, see: W. Wysoczański, *Polski nurt starokatolicyzmu*, Warszawa 1977; U. Küry, *Kościół Starokatolicki. Historia, nauka, dążenia*, Warszawa 1996; D.J. Schoon, *Van bisschoppelijke Cleresie tot Oud-Katholieke Kerk. Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Nederland in de 19de eeuw*, Uitgeverij 2004; B. Przedpeński, *Odśrodkowe tendencje reformistyczne Kościoła Rzymskokatolickiego krajów języka niemieckiego w XVIII i XIX stuleciu*, Warsaw 2013.

the best model of religious education and *de facto* Christianization of Christians (often in the first generation) often starts with the preparation of families for the sacramental life (in marriages that are mixed in terms of denominations or religions). In this perspective, the axiological consistency between religious education/ upbringing and family education seems to be a sensitive issue in the process of building the Christian identity of the faithful.

## Education

The contemporary scholars, who no longer believe that education only includes the organisation of the process of teaching-learning in educational establishments, declare that “education is a planned process of learning, and each unplanned studying cannot be perceived as education”<sup>4</sup>. Applying such concept, not only with reference to school education, makes it possible to go beyond the time frames limited by the school curriculum and include all non-school forms of education, including those that are not formal and refer to people at various ages.

In this context, religious or catechetical education – both in and outside schools – is an integral part of the individual’s activity, irrespective of his/her age. Religious education is the one in which the teaching-learning process aims at building and reinforcing the individual’s reference to transcendence in the spiritual-physical sphere. An important assumption is the thesis on the existence of spiritual beings or, at least, spiritual space that is qualitatively different than the physical world, which is subject – at the level of elementary particles – to the law of physics adopted as valid. Thus, on the one hand, the spiritual world is not subject to scientific tools, and – on the other hand – it is integrally connected with the material world, constituting one universe of the man, other living creatures, as well as inanimate nature and what is between the two worlds.

In the perspective of Christianity in general, and the Old Catholic Churches - which derive their tradition from the Roman Catholic Church heritage - in particular, there are three main objectives

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<sup>4</sup> M. Muszyński, *Edukacja i uczenie się – wokół pojęć*, “Rocznik Andragogiczny” 2014, vol. 21, p. 81.

of religious education: catechization, activation of an individual in the community's liturgical life (including, due to the sacraments, the Christian initiation), and – through the previous two objectives – preparation of the individual for the conscious participation in the life of the parish and the Church as a whole. This way, the Church can fulfil its mission (the missionary aspect of the Church) entrusted to her by Christ. The mission includes effective proclamation of the Gospel, due to which members of all the nations become the Saviour's disciples, as well as the celebration of holy sacraments, through which God's grace can act in the world. In the soteriological aspect, the Church leads the community of Christians towards Christ and eternal life, through which she can also bring salvation closer to the whole humanity<sup>5</sup>.

For almost 130 years of the existence of Old Catholic communities, particular Churches elaborated their own forms of religious education, dependent on the doctrinal assumptions or the area of activity. Such forms evolved in the history of the Old Catholic Church, and ecumenical contacts, especially among the Churches that belong to the Union of Utrecht, had an influence on their pastoral activity, including religious education.

Good examples of Old Catholic communities which have applied an effective model of religious education are two French Old Catholic Churches: the Sainte Marie Church with the bishop's seat in Mont-Saint-Aignan near Rouen, in Normandy, and the French province of the Old Catholic Mariavite Church with the bishop's seat in Paris. Interestingly, these Churches were created in different times, developed independently of each other, and use different liturgical rites, yet they have worked out a similar model of religious education based on a similar kind of spirituality.

### Mariavites in Paris and the Old Catholic Community in Mont-Saint-Aignan

The Old Catholic Mariavite Church was canonically erected in France in 1997. At that time, the bishops of the Catholic and

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<sup>5</sup> See *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, Poznań 1994, pp. 12–13, no. 4–10.

Apostolic Church in Paris and Tours were included in the jurisdiction of Płock. It was the result of the French bishops' several dozen years of attempts to achieve full communion with the Mariavites whom they perceived as their mother Church. Bishop Grateau was consecrated by the Mariavite bishop of Hungary - Thamas Fehervary<sup>6</sup> who had emigrated to France. Since, at that time, bishop Fehervary did not have the mandate of the Płock jurisdiction, he started his independent activity, founding independent Catholic communities. This way, the apostolic succession of the present supervisor of the French Province of the Mariavites – bishop M. André Le Bec, comes from the Mariavite bishops in Poland.

The Paris Mariavite parish was created in 1972, although the Mariavites had been acting in France since 1911<sup>7</sup>. On the Sunday of the Good Shepherd, in 1972, the first chapel of St. Mary was consecrated at rue des Renaudes in the XVII district of Paris. Two years later, the place of worship was moved to the IV district of the city, in which the chapel with the same name was consecrated (7 Aubriot Street). Since the supervisor of the community and its consecrator – bishop Gerard Grateau, had the apostolic succession in the Mariavite line, they aimed at unification with the Old Catholic Mariavite Church in Poland. In 1981, the community's bishops started cooperation with the Old Catholic Mariavite Church<sup>8</sup>. In 1988, the Office in charge of Religious Denominations approved the French community as a member of the Church. The official canonical erection of the province took place in July 1989, and bishop A. Le Bec was appointed as its supervisor. Due to the fact that the community was split into two parts, the buildings at 47 Échiquier Street (the X district of Paris) were bought and redecored in order to make the church as well as offices and catechetical rooms. The consecration of the new St. Mary the Mother of God Parish took place in 1998<sup>9</sup>. At present (2018), in the French Province, one bishop, three priests, a monk and

<sup>6</sup> A. Le Bec, *Miséricorde et Amour*, op. cit., p. 223. *Sub conditione* consecration was held in Warsaw on 1st October 1993. See: *ibidem*, pp. 223–224.

<sup>7</sup> A. Le Bec, *Miséricorde et Amour*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 220–221.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 272; J.-F. Mayer, *Le vieux-catholicisme en France après Hyacinthe Loyson. Aperçu à travers le Catholique français (1891–1915)*, "Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift (Berne)" 1983, vol 73, no. 1, pp. 42–43.

a nun are performing their ministry. The number of believers is about 13 000 people. The Mariavite Church in Paris extends its influence to the continental France and overseas territories.

The independent Catholic Community of St. Mary was founded by a Benedictine monk - Maurice Cantor, who, in 1964, left the Catholic Church to protest against the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council. Contrary to the representatives of integralism, father Cantor believed that the Church should be open to the ones who are looking for God, but, at the same time, she should be faithful to the old liturgical rite which explicates the truths of the Catholic faith. Fr. Cantor wrote: "Christ did not come for the righteous, but for the sinners. He did not come to condemn, but to save us (...). We are all brothers in Jesus Christ, and God is Father to everyone, with no exceptions. God's love has no limits! There are no limits for the Church of St. Mary... Good News is proclaimed to everyone..."<sup>10</sup>. Such openness of that Church community is declared by its priests: "legalism, judging, elitism, integralism – any divisions contradict the true, apostolic pastoral ministry. Our Lord has already said this: *And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them* (Lk 11:46)<sup>11</sup>. Also, we hope that the Church shall gradually free herself from the burden of the monarchical institution, which is sometimes perceived as anarchonistic, and which escalated throughout the ages. We should restore the simplicity of the Gospel, the whole richness of Christ's unlimited mercy, and we have to reject all kinds of exclusions"<sup>12</sup>. At present (2018), the Community has two bishops, five priests and one permanent deacon. It is estimated that almost 20 000 believers, who live in Normandy and neighbouring departments, are connected with the parish.

Thus, what both communities have in common, is the jurisdictional independence of the Roman Catholicism, the vision of an inclusive Church with the maintenance of traditional forms of worship, the practical ecumenism, and being apolitical. We can see clearly that

<sup>10</sup> M. Cantor, *L'Église Sainte Marie. Paroisse sans frontières*, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2005, p. 11 (the author's own translation).

<sup>11</sup> In the original text the author wrongly noted that the quotation comes from verse 40. Ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, pp. 8–9 (the author's own translation).

both the French Mariavites (who adopted the liturgical heritage of the Second Vatican Council), and the Old Catholics from Mont-Saint-Aignan (who refer to the Trent liturgical tradition) are on two opposite poles among the French communities that are independent of Rome. The latter include all kinds of sedevacantist groups as well as the Society of St. Pius X connected with the extreme right wing<sup>13</sup>.

## Legal context

An important element specifying the frames of the activity of both Old Catholic communities is their legal status and its consequences. In the French Republic, religious associations can obtain the legal status of *Association Cultuelle*, i. e. the Cult Association, on the basis of the act of 1st July 1901 or 9th December 1905<sup>14</sup>. With reference to the Roman Catholic Church, particular dioceses obtain their legal personality after they register as Diocesan Associations in accordance with the act of 1925<sup>15</sup>, or – in case of Alsace and Lorraine – the concordat of 1801<sup>16</sup>. Separate regulations specify the situation of religious associations in the Island of Reunion, Martinique, Guadelupe and French Guyana. Apart from Alsace and Lorraine, the state can control religious associations in an unlimited manner<sup>17</sup>. The Church buildings erected before 1905 are the property of the state, and religious associations can rent them if they use them. The employees, i. e. the clergy or administrative workers, work in the association as paid

<sup>13</sup> See J.-O. Boudon, *Religion et politique en France depuis 1789*, Paris 2007, pp. 208–209.

<sup>14</sup> J. Volf, *Le droit des cultes*, Paris 2005, pp. 31–37. See E. Poulat, *Aux carrefours stratégiques de l'Église de France: XXe siècle de France*, Paris 2009, pp. 51–59.

<sup>15</sup> See the dissolution of cult associations: P. Viudès, *Le patrimoine des associations „en sommeil”*, “Juris Associations” 2017, no. 566 of 15th October, pp. 34–36.

<sup>16</sup> J. Wiślicki, *Konkordat. Studium prawne*, Lublin 1926, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> See, e. g. the latest changes concerning financial control: E. Delfosse, *Votre association est-elle bien préparée?*, “Juris Associations” 2018, no. 573 of 15th February, pp. 38–40.

or voluntary employees, and there are specific regulations related to such work (it also refers to the salaries)<sup>18</sup>.

The Old Catholic Mariavite Church functions according to the act on the Cult Associations (*Association Cultuelle*) of 9th December 1905 and the decree of 16th March 1906. In compliance with those regulations, the Church can only carry out a religious activity, i. e. celebrate the liturgy according to its own rite<sup>19</sup>, organise catecheses or conduct other kinds of religious activities. Such activities do not include charitable actions, educational activity (such as establishing schools and other kinds of educational institutions), cultural or publishing enterprises. In order to carry out charitable or strictly educational activity, one has to establish a separate association that would be able to rent a building and pay the employees' salaries. According to the act of 1905, a cult association cannot organise concerts in churches, even if it is the owner of the church. It is possible to rent a building in order to organise a cultural event. In such a case, the association and the organiser have to conclude an agreement in which they should specify the cost of rental, property insurance, rental time and other conditions.

In 1972, while establishing an independent Catholic parish in Paris, bishop André Le Bec acted on the basis of the act of 1905 and registered it as a cult association named "The Catholic and Apostolic Church of Paris". After 1989, i. e. after including the French establishment into the structure of the Old Catholic Mariavite Church, the name of the association was not changed. The reason included high costs related to the complicated administrative procedure<sup>20</sup>. However, the statute of the association was changed, so that, in the official documents, the name: French Province and Diocese of France of the Old Catholic Mariavite Church, could be used<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> See M. Gire, M. Mezzetta, *Entre bénévolat et salariat...*, "Juris Associations" 2018, no. 573 of 15 February, pp. 41–42.

<sup>19</sup> See T.D. Mames, *Wybrane zagadnienia obrzędów celebracji Eucharystii w Prowinjii Francuskiej Kościoła Starokatolickiego Mariawitów*, "Studia Religio-logica" 2009, no. 42, pp. 109–117.

<sup>20</sup> Information obtained from bishop A. Le Bec.

<sup>21</sup> The name is present in the official register of the French Republic, according to the announcement of 12th June 1999, no. 19990024. After: <http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr> [access: 05.10.2018]. More on the French Province



The community of St. Mary Church of Mont-Saint-Aignan has been functioning on the basis of the act of 1901<sup>22</sup>. The subject of its activity is “proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating and public practicing of the Catholic Gallican Rite, as well as full and partial financing of the costs and requirements of that cult and various activities that may be related to the cult”<sup>23</sup>.

There is a certain parallel between the establishment of the Mariavite church in Paris and the Old Catholic community in Mont-Saint-Aignan, and new monastic communities of the Roman Catholic Church that were created in France after the II Vatican Council. According to Frédéric Lenoir, the latter were not planned or opened as the fruit of the hierarchy’s reflection, but they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. They were not created *ex nihilo*, but “all of them have been born and developing within the womb of the tradition of the Church and in the communion with different members of God’s People”<sup>24</sup>. This thesis corresponds with the remarks of the sociologists of religion such as David Voas and Alasdair Crockett. On the basis of the research of Grace Davie, they came to the conclusion that “except for a small percentage of atheists, Europe still remains religious. The participation in religious ceremonies is low and decreasing, but people are still looking – in religion and in the Church – for the answers to the basic questions or support in difficult situations, such as accidents or catastrophes”<sup>25</sup>. However, on the other hand, the Europeans’ faith is growing away from the Christian cosmology; it becomes syncretistic and vague”<sup>26</sup>. These findings are significant, because France – as

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of the Mariavites, see: A. Le Bec, *Miséricorde et Amour*, op. cit., T.D. Mames, *Mysteria Mysticorum*, op. cit., pp. 57–60.

<sup>22</sup> The community is officially registered as the Cult Association of the Catholic Gallican Church of Normandy. Quoted after: <http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr> [access 05.10.2018].

<sup>23</sup> Announcement no. 1679 in: “Journal officiel” 1999, no. 26 of 26 June, p. 2882. Quoted after: <http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr> [access: 05.10.2018]. The author’s own translation.

<sup>24</sup> F. Lenoir, *Les communautés nouvelles*, Paris 1988, p. 35 (the author’s own translation).

<sup>25</sup> S. Mandes, *Miejsce religii w społeczeństwie. W poszukiwaniu nowego programu badawczego socjologii religii*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 221–222.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 222.

a secular country, does not affirm its citizens' religious space although they are truly looking for religiousness or spirituality.

The French Mariavites, just like the Old Catholic community from Mont-Saint-Aignan, help both the Christians and non-Christians. As for the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, they reject the dogma on the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, in theology and pastoral ministry they articulate the primacy of love and mercy over the law, and they acknowledge the revelations and spirituality of St. Maria Franciszka Kozłowska<sup>27</sup>. In the sacramental practice, apart from the hearing confession, they practice common confession, they accept remarriages of the divorced, and they do not require obligatory celibacy of their priests. Thus, in theological terms, they are located between Roman Catholicism and Old Catholicism of the Union of Utrecht: they acknowledge Filioque, they particularly worship Eucharist and Mary the Mother of God, they do not accept woman-priests and they are against any liturgical forms of blessing for homosexual pairs<sup>28</sup>. Both communities – one functioning within the capital of the country, i. e. Paris, and the other in the suburbs of Rouen, the capital of Normandy, have elaborated a similar model of religious education. It is based on three interconnected pastoral activities. They include: *accueil* (pastoral counselling), liturgy and catechization.

### *Accueil*

The word *accueil* is a French noun describing *acceptance or reception*, but it may also mean a *hotel reception*, an *office* (e.g. a parish office), or simply a place in which people's affairs are dealt with. The French verb *accueillir* means *to accept/receive*<sup>29</sup>. Thus, *accueil* suggests two important aspects: waiting for an applicant/inquirer and giving them information or support. In the ecclesial perspective, we can wonder whether waiting for the recipients of pastoral activity is the opposite to Christ's command: "Go and make disciples of all nations".

<sup>27</sup> F.M.F. Kozłowska, *Objawienia Dzieła Miłosierdzia Bożego 1893–1918*, Kraków 1995.

<sup>28</sup> On the doctrine of both communities, see: A. Le Bec, *Miséricorde et Amour*, op. cit., pp. 47–51; M. Cantor, *Église Sainte Marie*, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> E. g. *Dictionnaire universel de poche*, ed. M. Maurin, Paris 1993, p. 5.

Christ does not say: “stay and wait”, but: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28,19-20). With reference to Christianity in France, the words from the Gospel of Matthew should be approached in a figurative manner. In the country in which religiousness is a private issue, and Christianity was covered (or covered itself) with the idea of secularization, to go and make people disciples means – first of all – to give Christ back the lost sheep, or – second – to lead to Him those that do not belong to His sheepfold. Those who are at the peripheries of Christianity or do not identify with the faith are the first recipients of *accueil*. To go and make people Christ’s disciples means to meet the needs of the lost and the hurt. It is not psychotherapy, but a kind of spiritual therapy in which Christ is the doctor and the priest helps the man find the way to the Saviour<sup>30</sup>.

Thus, apart from the readiness to provide spiritual counselling, there is a special kind of listening to people called pastoral listening (*écoute pastorale*). It is not an ordinary act of listening, i. e. the acoustic reception of the sounds made by the interlocutor, but rather an activity of the heart according to the prayer of King Solomon: “give your servant a discerning heart” (1 Kings 3:9)<sup>31</sup>. Pastoral listening and *accueil* are performed in the name of the Church, and people who carry out those ministries are called to perform them due to the fact that they had received the sacrament of priesthood or took monastic vows. Here is what father Papin, a theoretician of *accueil*, says to the people who work in pastoral counselling: “you have been given a disposition, a mission to do this. It is a responsibility (...) because you are representing the community that gave you the mission”<sup>32</sup>. It is related to showing people a community that is close or open to the

<sup>30</sup> See J.C. Larchet, *Terapia chorób duchowych*, Hajnówka 2013, pp. 245–264.

<sup>31</sup> *La dimension pastorale de l'accueil. Texte de l'exposé du Père [Henri] Papin, le 21 octobre dernier, lors de la réunion de formation des 7 équipes d'accueil de la paroisse, le 21 octobre 2015*, manuscript, the collection of the Mariavite Parish of St. Marie in Paris, pp. 10–11 (the author’s own translation).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 8–9 (the author’s own translation).

problems of others. Another important aspect is showing one's faith to others and announcing the Gospel<sup>33</sup>.

All the priests working in *accueil* emphasize the fact that, first of all, the people coming to them just want to be heard. Such a need results from the weakening of deep relations within families, among friends and neighbours, as many people only wish to be heard and blessed. During such a pastoral meeting, the priest does not judge the person – he just listens and prays with/over the person who needs it. This way, *accueil* becomes the ministry of the Church which gives the world love and mercy. The issue of family problems, spiritual dilemmas, and looking for the meaning of life in the face of tragedies or difficulties related to cultural differences (in case of foreigners), are frequent topics discussed by the people who want to be heard<sup>34</sup>. Also, *accueil* often includes talking about the parents' sensitivity to the religious life of their children. During such talks, the priest instructs the parents as for the religious formation of their children; also, during the meetings, the parents often register their kids as the new participants of catecheses.

While in the Roman Catholic Church such ministry is one of the ways to fulfill the pastoral ministry according to the slogan: "presence, reception, listening"<sup>35</sup>, the Mariavites and the community from Normandy perceive *accueil* as their special charism. In other words, the pastoral ministry and working in the counselling office is the foundation for other forms of their activity. According to one of the theoreticians of this issue, *accueil* is a process, or a way to faith, hope and love<sup>36</sup>. In the pastoral dimension, its meaning is threefold: "counselling in the parish is inseparable from the life of the Church. Thus, all the baptized are responsible according to the grace they had received, actively participating in building the Body of Christ"<sup>37</sup>. The author calls the field of this activity the area of the activity of God's grace, which provides the foundation for creating the apostolate of

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, pp. 9–10.

<sup>34</sup> The existential and psychological sources of religiousness, see A.A. Zych, *Pomiędzy wiarą a zwątpieniem. Wprowadzenie do psychologii religii*, Kraków 2012, pp. 32–49.

<sup>35</sup> B. Podvin, *L'accueil paroissial*, Paris 1997, p. 51 (the author's own translation).

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, pp. 53–54.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 58 (the author's own translation).

the community<sup>38</sup>. This way, due to spiritual counselling, the priestly service is shown in the community and for the community.

In Mont-Saint-Aignan, *accueil* starts from welcoming the person in the office in which a secretary writes down their name, surname and place of residence. Then, the person is given the name of the priest whom they shall be talking to. Before the meeting begins, the person is waiting in the waiting room. The *accueil* consists of three elements. First, the priest is listening to the reason why the person came. Such reasons may include the request for prayer for someone's health, problems with renting a flat, family difficulties, etc. After about 10 minutes, the priest stands close to the person, puts his hand on/over their head and prays over them for a few moments. The prayer ends with the words: "through Christ Our Lord". Then, the priest recommends saying a prayer, or participating in a novena or in an Eucharist celebrated for a given intention. Novenas for the intentions of *accueil* start every Sunday, and – during the day – Holy Masses are celebrated (in the morning and in the evening) for the intentions of people coming to the pastoral counselling office<sup>39</sup>.

Among the recipients of spiritual counselling in the community of Mont-Saint-Aignan, the following types can be distinguished: believers practising their faith who need the priest's prayer; believers who do not pray but look for prayer; the lost; people who do not believe in God and feel helpless<sup>40</sup>. The latter type – with their determination – can be compared to the sick woman described in Mark 5:25-29.

In the Mariavite parish in Paris, the scheme of receiving people in the counselling office looks a bit different. Not only do people coming to the church need prayer, but they also want spiritual accompanying or even guidance. The emphasis on such accompanying results in the necessity to devote more time to talking (and not just listening, like in the case of the community from Mont-Saint-Aignan. It is assumed that during a 30-minute talk with a priest, a given person shall receive spiritual guidance and prayer. After the prayer, the priest usually offers another meeting in the counselling office (e. g. after the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> Report of Fr. Marc-Antoine Pottin of 20.08.2018.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

surgery, a job interview, or simply after some time, e. g. two or three weeks) to discuss the situation again or to talk about possible changes that have taken place.

## Liturgy

The second pillar of religious education is liturgy. The people who are coming to be heard are advised to take part in the charismatic service (Paris) or the Mass for the intentions of *accueil* (Mont-Saint-Aignan, Paris). The emphasis is placed on religious practices such as Holy Communion, reading the Bible, novenas, rosary, chaplet of the Divine Mercy, but also spontaneous prayer. Also, exorcisms are practiced, as well as Holy Masses with the sacrament of the anointment of the sick or with laying-on of hands and a special prayer for the health of the body, soul and spirit. Sometimes, when a participant of *accueil* is baptized, requests for the holy confession are made.

One of the Orthodox theologians, Jean-Claude Larchet, directly speaks about the therapeutic objective of the holy sacraments. He emphasizes that: “In His Person, Christ healed the human nature, and He gave it true – total and absolute – health. People can use the benefits He gave them in human nature recapitulated in Him, provided that they unify with Him”<sup>41</sup>. According to the Mariavites and the theologians of the community from Mont-Saint-Aignan, the closest unification of the man with Christ occurs in the Eucharist. Such belief results in encouraging people to participate in paraliturgical forms and in the liturgy.

In Paris, an important role is played by the charismatic service, which is based on the evangelical spirituality, yet has a specific Mariavite feature. If we take into account such features of the evangelical spirituality as the community of the Spirit, new worship and new mysticism, we shall come to the conclusion that for the Mariavites, the evangelical model of mysticism is, in a way, included in the essence of theology of that school of spirituality. Thus, in this approach, it is important to “get to know and experience God on a level that is difficult to express, but very intensive and clear to recognize. It results in a special bond with God which is not only religious, but also

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<sup>41</sup> J.C. Larchet, *Terapia chorób duchownych*, op. cit., p. 265.

very personal"<sup>42</sup>. However, such spirituality in the Mariavite version does not aim at deinstitutionalizing the Church or focusing only on experience. Such approach opposes the Pentecostal mysticism, which "is based on the statement that can be treated as the summary of the Pentecostal attitude: I believe because I experience. It means the primacy of experience over reflection"<sup>43</sup>. Thus, although some of its aspects are similar to those of the Pentecostal spirituality, the charismatic service always leads to the liturgy, and especially to the Eucharist and experiencing it in the community of believers.

In the community from Mont-Saint-Aignan, we can find the practice of the laying-on of the Gospel. It is practiced after the Mass and connected with the priest's prayer for healing the person on the head of whom the priest lays the stole while reading a fragment of the Gospel about healing. This practice is strictly connected with the Mass with healing prayers, which are spoken aloud by the faithful and the priest before reading the Gospel of the day. After the Gradual and reading of the intentions for which the liturgy is celebrated, the following litany for the sick is spoken: "God almighty, heal our sick who are so dear to us. God merciful, have mercy on those who suffer. God merciful, hear those who beg you. Holy Virgin, have mercy on us. Most Blessed Virgin, protect us. Saint Joseph, pray for us. Saint Benedict, pray for us. Saint Rita, pray for us. Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, pray for us"<sup>44</sup>. The Laying-on of Hands service in the Paris church has a similar meaning. It takes place during parish ceremonies – on the day of St. Benedict (21st March), St. Michael the Archangel (29th September) and St. Rita (1st November). It is connected with the prayer of the priests for healing the body, soul and spirit.

Both the Parisian charismatic service and the prayer for healing practiced in Mont-Saint-Aignan, go beyond schematic ministry and seem to be open to the spiritual needs of various recipients<sup>45</sup>. From the ecumenical and interreligious perspective, it seems to be the space

<sup>42</sup> P. Sawa, *Duchowość ewangelikalna – szansa dla ekumenizmu*, "Studia Oecumenica" 2016, no. 16, p. 266.

<sup>43</sup> A. Migda, *Mystycyzm pentekostalny w Polsce*, Kraków 2013, p. 368.

<sup>44</sup> *Missel de l'Église Sainte Marie*, Mont-Saint-Aignan 1981, p. 11 (the author's own translation).

<sup>45</sup> See M. Cantor, *Église Sainte Marie*, op. cit., pp. 42–44.

in which the members of different Christian denominations and other religions can discover and become aware of their relation with the personal God. Przemysław Sawa rightly notices that “broadly understood evangelical spirituality becomes a specific space of ecumenical unification of different Christian denominations, especially if we take into account that, on the practical and pastoral level, it already is real although sometimes the believers are not aware of it”<sup>46</sup>. It may be said that in both communities, the participation in paraliturgical services (including those of charismatic nature) and in the liturgy is characterised by emphasizing the personal and communal contact with God, experiencing God’s presence, the value of individual and common prayer, as well as looking for the answers to difficult questions through sacramental life.

### Catechization

The third element of religious education is catechization. Obviously, in both communities catechization includes the children and adolescents preparing for the reception of the First Communion or Confirmation. However, we would like to pay attention to the fact that the participants of *accueil* are mainly adults. That is why, those adults who had not been baptized or had not received the sacrament of Confirmation, are also included in the process of catechization. Also, the ones who are looking for faith are offered catechization as a tool of extending their religious knowledge. It is worth mentioning that most adults who participate in such catechization have accessed the community through *accueil*. Being rooted in a community starts from participating in different forms of services, and only then the decision on catechization preparing for the sacraments is made. This way, through the reception of the sacrament of baptism or confirmation in the community, the adults confirm their identification with the local Church.

In Paris, catechization is carried out in two age groups: for children, and for adolescents and adults. Two priests and a lay catechist are involved in the catechetical work. Catechetical classes are held

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<sup>46</sup> P. Sawa, *Duchowość ewangelikalna*, op. cit., p. 272.



once a week, on Saturdays, and they last 60 minutes<sup>47</sup>. People register for those classes during the *accueil* meetings. In Mont-Saint-Aignan both individual and group catechesis is practiced. Four priests and a lay catechist are responsible for the process of catechization. Each time, the catechized people (mainly children and adolescents) establish the date of the next catechesis with the priest or the catechist. Due to the fact that most participants attend various schools, such catecheses take place on Saturday afternoons, or on Sundays – before or after the Holy Mass. Additionally, once a month, the parents participate in the catechization with their children. In this context, what is important is the individual contact with the parents and the catechized children themselves, according to the model indicated by Christ Himself<sup>48</sup>. Individualization is also present in the catechetical practice of the Parisian parish. The children participate in the lesson conducted by the catechist, and, at the same time, the parents can extend their religious knowledge in catechetical groups for adults. A few times a year the catechesis is organized in mixed-age groups.

An important element in both Old Catholic communities is linking catechization, i. e. teaching about the truths of faith, with liturgy<sup>49</sup>. That is why, while being in the church, the children and their parents participate in a group catechesis, and then in the Eucharist which explains the catechism and includes participation in the bloodless offering of the Christ performed by the Church, as well as mystical participation in the “deposit of future glory”<sup>50</sup>. The model applied in teaching catechesis is, on the one hand, kerygmatic, and, on the other hand, dialogic. According to Danuta Wajsprych, “in compliance with this tradition, adjusted to the requirements of the times, the basic objective of catechization is announcing the Good News of salvation and shaping the conscious membership in the Church which

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<sup>47</sup> Information on catechization is given in an annual bulletin: “Église Catholique et Apostolique de Paris – Province de France de l’Église Vieille Catholique Mariavite de Pologne”, and in the website of the province [www.mariavite.eu](http://www.mariavite.eu).

<sup>48</sup> Report of Fr. M. A. Pottin.

<sup>49</sup> See the book for studying catechesis in the Community of the Church in Mont-Saint-Aignan: *Notre Père du Ciel*, Paris 1992.

<sup>50</sup> This expression is used to describe the Eucharist in the liturgy of the French Mariavites and the Community in Mont-Saint-Aignan.

is Christian and universal at the same time. In such an approach, a catechist is not a teacher of religious education, but rather a herald announcing salvation in Jesus Christ and he/she acts on behalf of the Church<sup>51</sup>. However, it is neither a confessional-catechumenal model nor a purely confessional-dialogic one, but a mixed - catechumenal and dialogic model. Wilhelm Schwendemann describes this idea properly, writing: “what constitutes Christianity is the pluralism flowing from faith – from the perspective of the Christianity, the variedness of faith is necessary, but it does not result in the claim for universality. Thus, the insight in one’s own certainty of faith is the condition for the possibility to acknowledge the certainty of the faith of the Other; however, both insights and certainties are subject to criticism from the perspective of the truth of Christ’s message. Therefore, in Christianity pluralism is rooted in the essence of the Church as the community of faith and teaching. The believers are joined in the community in which one’s own identity is not eliminated but reinforced. Such idea is the mix of radical pluralism with the concept of mutual respect and acceptance of differences”<sup>52</sup>. Openness, ecumenism and respect for the Other and “otherness” of each human being is the foundation of the pastoral counseling ministry, liturgy and catechization.

### Model of religious education in the secular society

Obviously, now we should ask two fundamental questions that determine the pedagogical and theological perspective of the issue we are discussing. First, are we really dealing with religious education and the model worked out (adopted) by the two above mentioned Old Catholic communities? Second – is such pastoral ministry a proselytism as compared to other Christian denominations opposing the ecumenical ideas? There is no doubt that, with reference to the followers of non-Christian religions (e. g. Judaism, Hinduism,

<sup>51</sup> D. Wajsprych, *Modele edukacji religijnej we współczesnej szkole*, “Forum Oświatowe” 2009, no. 2(41), p. 79.

<sup>52</sup> W. Schwendemann, *Edukacja religijna – pomost do dialogu między religiami. Refleksje z okazji 50. rocznicy śmierci Martina Bubera*, “Studia z Teorii Wychowania” 2016, vol. 7, no. 1(14), p. 83.

Islam), the carrier of evangelization is spiritual counseling or the encouragement to participate in paraliturgical services. In their approach to Christians, both communities emphasize the necessity to turn to Christ, and not to become a member of the Mariavite Church or the Mont-Saint-Aignan community. This way, a unique, truly ecumenical bond is created among the people who were given support (e. g. in the pastoral counseling office) and the Church. While describing the phenomenon of conversion, Elżbieta Hałas emphasizes that “the synergetic community is created in the course of symbolic interactions between the converting and converted ones, between the person who converts others and the expected converts, as well as between one convert and another – the converting person is trying to direct their actions or the converts are trying to do this themselves. Thus, the converts are told what to do and someone constantly helps them interpret the meaning of their actions”<sup>53</sup>. In this dimension, such interpretation is the element of accompanying someone in their process of turning towards Christ (and not towards a certain Church as an institution). We have to emphasize that, from the point of view of the convert, the process does not make him/her obliged to become a part of the community in Paris or Normandy. It is true that the people who were given spiritual support sometimes become the members of the Mariavite Church or the Sainte Marie community, but it is not a rule. Also, if a person joins one of those communities only temporarily, he/she is not criticised for it. Bishop M. Cantor directly wrote: “the institution of the Church has to serve the Mercy (...). For a Christian, and for the whole Church, the depth of evil is the fact that we are always below that love which, comparing to the love of God, is unconditional and endless”<sup>54</sup>. From the perspective of the Mariavites, the basis for the above approach is derived from the revelations of the founder – St. Maria Franciszka Kozłowska: “In the Holy Sacrament, in this Temple, Lord Jesus took over the power over the world and human souls, and took such power away from the priests who – instead of leading people to the love of God, attached them to themselves, and many of the priests led people to

<sup>53</sup> E. Hałas, *Konwersja. Perspektywa socjologiczna*, Warszawa 2007, p. 158.

<sup>54</sup> M. Cantor, *Sans limites...*, “Bulletin de la Chapelle Sainte Marie”, no. 109, December 1994, p. 5.

sin<sup>55</sup>. – Thus, the priests were only temporarily allowed to administer the Holy Sacraments and carry out the external management in the Church. – It also applies to our fathers [i. e. the Mariavite priests – T.D.M.]<sup>56</sup>.

Pastoral counselling, catechization and, finally, liturgy, lead to the numinotic experience. Following the notions of Rudolph Otto, we have to point out that what is particularly important is the emphasis on the element – e. g. *tremendum*, but, first of all, *majestas* and *fascinans*. “Rational ideas and notions, which are parallel to that irrational element of *fascinans* and schematize it, include love, mercy, compassion, and the willingness to provide support – all the natural elements of the general spiritual experience, but perceived as existing in a higher degree. However, although such elements are very important for experiencing religious happiness, they are not everything (...). Such happiness is something more – says Otto – something more than a natural state of hope, trust, and loving ecstasy, even the most intensive one”<sup>57</sup>.

In the age of various kinds of fundamentalisms, service and such approach to the Christian mission has the chance to reach a lot of people. On the other hand, such scholars as Bassam Tibi criticise the Christian ethics for the fact that, while speaking about loving others, it does not pay attention to loving oneself. In the multicultural society, dialogue based on love is something that may prevent the political fundamentalization of religion. However, “it is impossible to overcome the neo-absolutism of religious fundamentalists based on the love of others which negates itself”<sup>58</sup>. Also, some people claim that Christianity, including its French version, is helpless as compared to the idea of secularization and – *de facto* – atheisation of the society. The point is not that the Church should compete or negate what the secular culture offers, along with its secular, i. e., in a way, atheist worldview. Despite the attempts to create an atheist spirituality or

<sup>55</sup> See the Books of Ezechiel.

<sup>56</sup> *Notatki z Objawień Mateczki z Roku Jubileuszowego 1918*, paragraph 7, in: F. M. F. Kozłowska, *Objawienia Dzieła Miłosierdzia Bożego 1893–1918*, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>57</sup> R. Otto, *Świętość. Elementy irracjonalne w pojęciu bóstwa i ich stosunek do elementów racjonalnych*, Warszawa 1999, p. 44.

<sup>58</sup> B. Tibi, *Fundamentalizm religijny*, Warszawa 2001, p. 158.

coaching based on the spirituality and religion of the Far East, it turns out that secular spirituality seems to be one of the marketing offers in the spiritual French market. One of the French philosophers, André Comte-Sponville, wrote: “we have the right to religion and religiousness. We have to protect both of them (and even protect one of them through another, if necessary), and forbid both of them to impose themselves on people by force. This is what we call secularism which is the most valuable heritage of the Enlightenment”<sup>59</sup>. Comte-Sponville concluded that time is relative, and passing, including death, is an important point of atheist spirituality: it will only take the human being<sup>60</sup>. It means that spirituality – irrespective of its model (atheist or religious one) – is something important for people.

It is worth mentioning that the three above discussed elements of Old Catholic religious education are coherent. During *accueil*, dialogue with the priest helps to find the answers to important questions, which is opening to the direct action of Christ. During the services, the request for particular graces is articulated (for healing, finding a job, mending family relations, etc.), and thanks are given for the gifts received, through which the person’s personal and communal relation with God is reinforced. Finally, in the catechesis the relation with God is deepened: to know and love Him more (preparation for baptism, the individual and solemn Communion, *profession de foi*, confirmation and marriage) according to the principle of St. Thomas Aquinas – *nullum amatum nisi cognitum*.

The model of religious education, fulfilled in the Old Catholic communities – Mont-Saint-Aignan and the Mariavites in Paris, is Christocentric. The real presence of Christ, not only in the Eucharist, but also in the community of people, is the imperative to carry out the ministry of pastoral counseling. “Through Him, with Him and in Him”, the ministry that includes receiving people who need spiritual support and hearing, and through the experience of *charitas* – a community, becomes a tool of humanization, discovering (anew) the meaning of life, and appointing the participants of *accueil*<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> A. Comte-Sponville, *Duchowość ateistyczna. Wprowadzenie do duchowości bez Boga*, Warszawa 2011, p. 141.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 191.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. X. Thévenot, *Une éthique au risque de l'Évangile*, Paris 1993, pp. 86–91.

Accepting everyone, irrespective of their nationality and religion, is a specific ministry in the fulfilment of the command to become a witness of Love and Mercy. The personalism of pastoral counselling is reflected in the individualization of catechesis, but also in the inclusion of the family in the Christianisation of adult catechumens and children. However, on the other hand, through catechization and – in its course – explication of the liturgy in the light of the Bible, the catechized people are included in the community’s liturgical and social life. The openness of the model makes it possible for people to participate in it fully or partially. Taking part in spiritual counseling does not make a person obliged to participate in the catechization. It is similar with the participation in liturgical life – such participation does not mean that a person decided to join the community (although the person may do this). This way, both communities are ecumenically open.

The objective of religious education in both Old Catholic communities is to lead the hurting and the lost to Christ, and to restore hope through proclaiming God’s love and mercy to the world. In each of the elements of such education Christ is the One who acts – not the priest, who is only a tool of God’s intervention according to the principle that we should rather do mercy than talk about it. This way, we can make others the disciples of Christ. *Accueil*, liturgy and catechization are to provide self-formative materials to be a witness of Christ, make others His disciples, and to restore hope in the family, school, social institutions, and the work place, through “being on one’s way”. In a word – to efficiently evangelize people in the secularized and religiously diversified society. This task is not only important, but basic for the fulfillment of the mission of Christianity. Both communities see this mission in the slogan: “we are not against, but for” – for the secularized, dehumanized (terrorism, euthanasia, transplantation industry, suicides, abortion), relativised world (do such things as righteousness, honour, faith, hope, love exist?), in which a person is looking for the answers to fundamental and ultimate questions concerning their existence.

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