

The role of the religious crowd in the mass Catholic events: The Passion play and Nativity play in Warsaw

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Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to present crowd-type participation in mass religious events. Taking a Passion play and a Nativity play staged in Warsaw in 2012 as her examples, the author shows how a particular way of participating in sacral events is shaped and negotiated, and how it results in transforming a group of the faithful into a religious crowd having a common aim and sharing a common attitude. The author states that, in this case, the “religious crowd” is a different kind of community taking part in religious services as distinct from *communitas* or sacramental community described by anthropologists of religion. The crowd appears in very particular kinds of events due to crucial changes in Polish Catholicism and the constantly evolving spiritual needs and requirements of the contemporary faithful.

KEYWORDS: Passion play, Nativity play, religious crowd, religious experiences, Poland

Introduction

This article offers a summary of the research I conducted among practising Catholics during Catholic religious events in Poland over seven years (2006–2012). In the course of those years, I was observing people participating in those events, and I became increasingly convinced that they deserved a separate anthropological study – as participants; however, they should not be treated only as individuals coming to religious services with their own desires, wishes, problems, joys, etc.,¹ but as a religious crowd that acquires a special meaning, and also a particular quality, while participating in some sacral events. They deserve to be studied as a group of people not only sharing participation in a single service, but also sharing attitudes, beliefs and above all a unique role or an identification prescribed to them by the organisers of the event or by themselves. I am, however, not going to summarise and then analyse all cases of participation in religious services I

¹ I have already written such texts (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013, 2014), but they do not comprehend all aspects of participation in religious services.

investigated through the abovementioned seven years. Firstly, not all religious services permit crowd-like participation; secondly, I have chosen phenomena that are exemplary for this kind of participation in services. Hence, I am going to focus on two events from 2012, both taking place in Warsaw, namely on a Passion Play² and a Procession of the Three Kings.³

The subject of this article is to a certain extent rooted in Durkheim's studies on religion. Some of his observations on group religiosity are understood in terms of the physical presence of other people, when co-believers are felt sensually, and this circumstance changes the experiencing of the religious (Durkheim 1915), inspired me to focus attention on crowd-type participation in sacral events. Consequently, my considerations belong to the domain of the study of religious experiences and not to the sociology or psychology of the crowd. For the purpose of the study, I do not define "crowd" merely as a mass of people concentrated in the same place, at the same time, taking part in the same event; instead, I define it as a community bound together for a particular moment, with a particular aim, and also connected by general religious beliefs. It is a crowd constituted by people aware of forming the crowd not only because of the physical presence, and their own sensual perception, of others, but above all because of uniting with them in experiencing religious events.

My goal is to show that the crowd-type participation in sacral events is derived directly from the needs of the faithful. It does not occur during all religious services, but only during some, in the cases when additional aims and expectations are assumed for the event. It also concerns the believers' religious identity, since they shape and simultaneously express this identity through participation in a crowd (see Taylor 2003). In order to achieve those additional aims, rarely inscribed in liturgy itself, a religious event must reflect the needs of the faithful. This has become possible due to the changes in the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, since now laymen have greater influence on the character of religious events and also are responsible for the organisation of some of them (concerts of church music, youth meetings, mass prayers, vigils, etc.).

The article has one more purpose: I wish to show that some deeply explored and often criticised anthropological terms remain valid and have some interpretative power when used in the analysis of particular, very specific phenomena. It is exactly so with the case under research here, i.e. crowd-type participation in religious events, which I shall describe taking the categories of group experiences, liminality and *communitas* as my point of departure.

I will analyse phenomena that are very recent or ongoing; as is evident from various texts, current Polish religiosity differs significantly from that before the political transformation (see Borowik 2003; Zowczak 2008). After the fall of Communism, Polish Catholic religiosity passed through a process of particularly vigorous revival and has quite successfully conquered the public sphere. Presently, many religious events take place in

² See <http://www.misterium.eu/> (accessed on 10 March 2013).

³ In Poland, the personages who paid homage to Jesus Child are called Three Kings, not the Magi or Three Wise Men. See also <http://orszak.org/>, although the webpage is in Polish only (accessed on 10 March 2013).

main squares of cities, towns or villages, and so they occupy not only the sacral, but also the secular space. Those events are often attended by politicians or public persons, commented on in the media, reported in main news services, etc. In this sense, the process of de-privatisation of religion, to use Casanova's term (1994; also Hann 2000), is now in progress in Poland. Religious services, as well as their participants, are thus increasingly visible as active cultural actors; moreover, participation in those events becomes a method of self-expression (see Taylor 2003; Zowczak 2008) and reflects spiritual needs of the participants also by inviting the faithful to become a part of a religious crowd. It is the religious crowd that offers the faithful a very particular and eagerly awaited way of participating in a religious event; it opens to them a wide range of spiritual experiences. Additionally, I wish to emphasise that this range of experiences broadens when the whole event is located in the public sphere, e.g. in a place as unique and meaningful as Piłsudski Square (Plac Piłsudskiego) in Warsaw, where both services described herein took place.

The religious map of Warsaw – past and present

Warsaw is a highly specific place for mass religious events; it is a large city and although its public sphere is rarely dominated by sacral services, they are nevertheless present in it. Among such events are the so-called city processions, some mass prayers, held mostly to commemorate solemn occasions or to collectively celebrate dramatic or tragic events (recently the most distinctive were mourning prayers after the death of Pope John Paul II and after the plane crash in Smoleńsk in which President Lech Kaczyński died)⁴ or Holy Masses celebrated by the pope (the so-called Papal Masses); generally, however, Warsaw religious life belongs to the parochial, not to the city landscape. The above-mentioned exceptions, although rare, are significant, and they have some common and distinguishing features: they all are mass events; all are broadcast or at least announced and commented on by the media; all are geographically bounded, i.e. the majority of those mass religious events that take place in the city are confined to the vicinity of the Old Town and the Royal Route, to which the nearby Piłsudski Square belongs.⁵

Piłsudski Square itself cannot be called the heart of Warsaw, although it is located in the very centre of the city. It is a large space left empty after Warsaw was being rebuilt from ruins after the 2nd World War. In the Communist era, it was named Victory Square (Plac Zwycięstwa) to celebrate the Victory of the Soviet army, and after the fall of Communism was renamed in honour of the notable national leader Marshal Piłsudski. It was and remains the primary place for celebrating mass events of national, political and religious character. It is also, to a certain extent, a site of memory, to use Nora's term (1989), for Polish national identity. Papal Masses were celebrated there also

⁴ In 2010, the President of Poland Lech Kaczyński with his wife and dozens of other politicians and public persons died in a plane crash. The causes of the disaster are still discussed in the Polish media and on the political scene, since the whole event and its interpretations have become a political bone of contention. For the party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice), headed by Jarosław Kaczyński, the late president's twin brother, the plane crash is a symbol of ideological identification (Gliński, Wasilewski 2011).

⁵ Warsaw is a difficult place for organising mass religious events for from a very pragmatic reason: each such event requires closing streets in the city centre and this causes many traffic problems.

in Communist times by Pope John Paul II, and recently by Pope Benedict XVI. Due to those first masses, the square became a symbol of Polish Catholic and anti-Communist identity.⁶ Its national and patriotic significance is still present.

Currently, however, Piłsudski Square is the most strongly associated with Pope John Paul II (Klekot 2007: 4). His cult remains highly vigorous in Poland (see Żukowski 2009); he was (and is) a person who, at least symbolically, has a great significance in the Poles' fight with Communism. Many of his apostolic instructions (from various historical, and hence political, periods), quoted to this day in sermons, in Catholic press, etc., were in fact pronounced in Piłsudski Square. The Papal Cross (a plain stone cross nine metres tall), erected there after John Paul II's death, serves as a monument and a kind of shrine to him. It was central to the mourning ceremonies after his death (Zowczak 2008b), and flowers and candles are still put there on every anniversary of the event. The square, as has already been mentioned, is also associated with national and patriotic ideology. Apart from the national significance of Papal Masses, the place was named to commemorate Józef Piłsudski, one of most famous fighters for Polish independence towards the end of the period of Partitions,⁷ and later the head of state. Another national monument located in the square is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, erected in remembrance of unidentified Polish soldiers who fell on various battlefields fighting for their fatherland. National holidays, e.g. Independence Day (11th November) or Polish Army Day (15th September), are celebrated at this monument.

Symbolic meanings of the place evoked by celebrations observed there are indeed highly dense and complex; this is one of the reasons for which the square is a desired place for religious events. Its area is in some manner sacralised or, at least, it becomes sacralised for particular events, since its sacral character does not derive from any epiphany, as in Eliade's analyses of sacred places (1987), but from religious services being celebrated there. In this sense, its sacrality is performed by celebrations. Nowadays, all mass religious events that are planned to be organised in Warsaw sooner or later arrive at Piłsudski Square. Even if they were formerly celebrated in other parts of Warsaw, it is Piłsudski Square that is perceived as a natural environment for such services, and organisers of particular religious events plan to place their event there. Such was also the case of two events I am going to present.

Passion play and the Jerusalem crowd

The Passion Play staged in Warsaw in 2012 was shown in the evening, on Saturday two weeks before Easter. The actors performed scenes from the last days of Christ's life, from the entry to Jerusalem to Resurrection. The performance was addressed to adults rather than children, although some children were present. The atmosphere of the event was solemn and contemplative, except the last scenes: of Christ's Resurrection

⁶ This particular relation between Polish identity and Catholicism (Hall 2011), especially in Communist period, when every Catholic was supposed to be a patriot with anti-Communist beliefs, was often described as an exception to the world-wide processes of secularisation or privatisation of religion (Hervieu-Léger 2000; Casanova 1994; Taylor 2002)

⁷ From 1772 to 1918 Poland, did not exist as a state; it was divided between Austria, Prussia and Russia.

and the final ovation, when people finally could release the tension built up by watching Jesus suffering.

The Easter play taking place in Piłsudski Square has an interesting history. It is a performance prepared by a group of the faithful from Poznań, a large city in north-western Poland, who in 2012 brought their play to the capital for the second time. For the first time, their Easter play was staged in Warsaw at the Służew horse-racing track where, apart from horse racing, concerts of popular music or other mass cultural events are often staged. The track is, however, far from the city centre; this, the organisers thought, could have influenced the amount of viewers: around twenty thousand people participated in that Passion Play, which was less than the organisers expected. Therefore, they decided to change their venue, and they selected the aforementioned Piłsudski Square, i.e. the “natural” place for mass religious events. Their decision was, of course, motivated by many other factors than just encouraging more believers to participate in the Easter play. Above all, however, they wanted to stage their performance in a sacralised space, as they do in Poznań.

In Poznań, the Passion play was staged over a dozen times in the city’s Citadel, also called the Poznań Golgotha – a symbol of martyrdom of Polish soldiers fighting in several wars and uprisings – and each year around a hundred thousand people participated in the performance. Such attendance is extremely difficult to achieve in Warsaw; around thirty thousand came to see the Passion Play in 2012. However, staging this play in Piłsudski Square has one more critical aspect: the symbolic one. By being presented in this particular venue, the entire performance, from its very beginning, is strongly associated with the person of John Paul II. Every year, the play staged by the Poznań troupe has a different motto taken from his teachings; a year after his death, the character of the pope appeared in final scenes of the performance as one who walks away from this world together with Christ. Hence, to stage the play in Piłsudski’s Square, the place so strongly associated with John Paul II, was the performance organisers’ particular ambition.

Regardless of the place where the Passion play is staged (Poznań or Warsaw), its organisers put much effort into engaging the audience in the performance, yet their vision of the role of the viewers in the play is somehow different from the participants’ own view on this issue.⁸ In a Passion Play, the idea of engaging the audience into the performance is based on the process of blurring the boundary between actors and viewers: everyone should feel as a co-performer, a creator of the play (Schieffelin 1998; Palmer, Jankowiak 1996:). In order to do so, the organisers of the play wanted to impose on the audience the role of the Jerusalem crowd. This, however, did not meet with the approval of the audience members, since they perceived the role of the Jerusalem crowd as negative:

⁸ It is not the case of only this Passion Play, but of many similar Polish performances. I want to present the problem on this particular example, since the potential conflict deriving from different opinions – of the audience and of the Passion Play organisers – becomes even more evident when compared with another event staged in Piłsudski Square: the Procession of Three Kings, and the attitude of participants towards this second performance.

in their opinion, this crowd was hostile to Christ and agitated for His death⁹ (such was indeed, until recently, the teaching of the Church and despite efforts of the Second Vatican Council [1962–1965], the vision of Jewish crowd calling to crucify Jesus is still present in the Catholic imagination). This is not a role a faithful Christian is ready to accept easily.

People coming to the Passion Play want to be there together, they want to share their experiences, but they also want those experiences to be sublime, non-mundane. Turner wrote about liminality¹⁰ exactly as a part of the non-mundane, as belonging to the celebration time (Turner 1969). This is what happens during Passion Plays (and other religious events) – people enter liminal sphere, to feel the unique quality of the moment. The faithful attending Passion plays seek something a better, more solemn experience; in such a liminal moment they look for a better identity for themselves, they wish to “be closer to God”. Therefore, the negative identity of Christ’s traitors shouting from the crowd for His death is unacceptable to them. Thus, although the organisers of the Passion Play would like to stimulate the audience members to reflection by giving them a role of the Jerusalem crowd (which is only stereotypically a thoroughly evil one), this is not a role the audience are eager to take on in such a moment – even though Christ was crucified for people’s sins and in this sense everyone has contributed to it. During and after the performance, members of the audience do reflect on Christ’s death, and are also aware of their own sinfulness; however, for the duration of the Passion Play, when Christ’s history is taking place right before their eyes, and they become involved in it, they want to undertake a different role, they decide to participate in the event on a different condition; therefore, they choose a role that is, in their opinion, appropriate for them in the particular moment. They develop a pattern of *compassio Christi*: they do not co-suffer with Him as penitents would have done in previous ages, but with their presence at a Passion Play they express their will of accompanying Jesus in His last way and their need to be there with Him, to bear a testimony of their faith in this particular way.

Members of the audience want to accompany Christ on His way to Golgotha like Mary, Mary Magdalene and St John did. Those roles are, however, already taken by actors who enact those personages. Only the roles of anonymous Jerusalem crowd members are available, and those are not positive in the common opinion. Although, logically, in the crowd going to Golgotha there must have been some people feeling compassion for Christ and regretting that He had been sentenced to death (see the description of the Passion play staged in Wejherowo: *Droga...* 2007), the stereotypical image of the Jerusalem crowd is unequivocally evil. Moreover, the faithful coming to the performance, in contrast to the actors, participate in the whole performance as themselves: they do

⁹ The debate on the crowd’s role and crowd’s participation in a Passion play in Oberammergau can be cited as an example. There, however, the audience does not become a crowd in the sense described herein, since the border between the audience and the performers is sharp, as in classical theatre, but the stereotypical way of perceiving the Jerusalem crowd is very visible there: they are represented as a group of those who forced Pilate to condemn Christ and called for His crucifixion. In Oberammergau, this results in a fierce discussion on the play’s anti-Semitism (see Shapiro 2000; Friedman 1984).

¹⁰ To some degree I redefine liminality here, since I do not explore its social character as a state out of social structure (see Turner 1974), I see it above all as a state characteristic for some religious rites.

not change their names, do not become an enacted personage, they remain themselves – people who believe, who are sorry because of Christ’s death. They are people who want to manifest that they are good Christians, who accompany their God in the moment of His greatest pain. Therefore, while manifesting their faith, they are unable to become His enemies; they cannot condemn Him to death.¹¹

An Easter play is a moment of “being with Christ”, as the participants often put it, a period of compassion. Descriptions of Passion plays performed at Polish Calvaries¹² in the 1970s and 1980s mention the faithful who, while climbing up the Golgotha along with the actors, were wearing crowns made of twigs of thorn bushes and filling their pockets with stones to make their progress more difficult – all this in order to show their solidarity with Christ (Kubiak & Kubiak 1978; Nowacki 1960). Though such practices are not possible in Piłsudski Square, where everything is enacted on set stages, and the audience follows the actors only with their eyes instead of moving round the square, the idea of participating in the event is the same – to be among those who accompany Christ in His way to Golgotha and then enjoy His Resurrection.

It seems that the religious crowd must have a positive function in the entire event. The faithful want to co-create the performance, but on their conditions. They come to the Passion Play not to enact the role of a particular member of the Jerusalem crowd, but to be there themselves and to give proof of their own faith. In this lies a difference between Polish Passion Plays and those enacted in, for instance, Mexico. In Iztapalapa (a district of Mexico City), participation in the crowd is resolved in another way. There, participants constituting the Jerusalem crowd are divided into two groups – the “evil ones” calling for Christ’s death, and the “good ones”, despairing that He is going to die. They wear clothes of different colours and are prepared to take on a predetermined role before the play begins. They do not fight for their own identity in the performance, since, in order to make the whole event successful, they accept, as the actors do, roles distributed by the Passion Play organisers (Trexler 2003). Nevertheless, in the Polish cases described herein, when the faithful come to a religious event just as the faithful and not as actors, they want to be good Christians among other good Christians, and hence to symbolically accompany Christ to Golgotha, showing Him their compassion.

The Procession of Three (tens of thousands) Kings

Precisely such a possibility of expressing being a good Christian is offered to the faithful during the Procession of the Three Kings enacted in Warsaw around 6th January.¹³ This procession is a kind of Nativity play, which has been performed in the streets of Warsaw since 2009. Since 2011, it has had its final scene on Piłsudski Square; earlier the entire

¹¹ The viewers often question themselves about how they personally contributed to Christ’s death, but even if they acknowledge that their deeds did contribute to crucifixion, they do it privately, as a part of individual meditation on their lives (see Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013). However, in their opinion, the crowd has a different role.

¹² It is an architectural complex of chapels forming stages of Christ’s Passion, usually more developed than the mere stations of the Way of the Cross.

¹³ Since 2012, 6th January has been a national holiday and a day free of work, so in that year the Procession was for the first time enacted on 6th January precisely; earlier, it took place on the weekend before or after this date.

Procession passed through Warsaw's Old Town, which is nearby. The whole event starts with a prayer of the primate of Poland, who then leads the procession. In the procession, the Three Kings with their attendants walk first, and after them the people who come to see the performance. Several stages are erected on the path of the procession, and actors there enact scenes typical for Nativity plays: battles of devils with angels, the meeting of the Three Kings with King Herod, temptation of the Three Kings by devils, and at the end, the most important scene: the Kings' homage to Child Jesus.

Unlike a Passion Play, the Procession of the Three Kings takes place during the day and is addressed mostly to families with children. Less attention is paid to an exact re-enactment of biblical or historical reality than in the case of a Passion play; instead, the organisers emphasise the spectacular nature and the visibility of the event; for instance, in 2012, the King representing Asia rode a horse, the one representing Africa rode a camel, and the one representing Europe drove a Roman chariot. Child-actors in colourful costumes come as the first in the procession, since the whole event is organised by an association of Catholic schools, and pupils, their teachers and parents enact the Three Kings' attendants and guards. The character of the procession is joyful; it is not as solemn a sacral event as a Passion Play. Its participants chat, take photos of the actors as well as of themselves (which very rarely occurs during a Passion Play; there, audience members take photos of the event, but not of themselves). The Procession of the Three Kings is also a city attraction, so it gathers not only practising Catholics, but also non-believers who want to see the colourful procession, tourists, etc. Of the fifty-thousand audience, only a part participates in the entire event, since most viewers stand in one place waiting for the procession to pass by, in order to photograph it and then go home. The final scene of paying homage to Child Jesus, however, is viewed by thousands – not only those who had walked in the procession, but also by those waiting for its arrival in Piłsudski Square.

Despite the visible and obvious religious character of the event, not all participants view it in religious categories, some see it as merely children's theatre, although based on Catholic tradition. Some perceive it as a way of spending leisure time. Nonetheless all participants, believers and non-believers alike, eagerly take on the role prescribed for them by the organisers of the Procession. Some do it from deep religious conviction, others just for fun, but, in contrast to a Passion Play, they fully accept the role that the crowd has in this performance.

Organisers of the Procession of the Three Kings would like to engage as many people as they can into the event; however, they do not demand from the public such a reflective attitude as the organisers of Passion Plays do; quite the opposite, they want to introduce people into a cheerful mood, according to the character of this Church feast. To achieve this goal, volunteers distribute paper crowns (so that everyone coming to the event could become one of the Three Kings) and booklets with Christmas carols. Most members of the audience are happy to wear the crowns while walking in the procession, assuming, consciously or not, the role of the Three Kings trying to get to the new-born God in order to pay Him homage. Gathered in Piłsudski Square waiting for and then watching the final scene, the audience sings Christmas carols. The positive identity of a crowd member – firstly, of someone who goes to honour God, as a one of a thousand

Kings, secondly, of someone worshipping Him with singing – is fully accepted. Of course, the fact of being given something and the opportunity of taking home a few paper crowns and booklets with carols cannot be overlooked, since volunteers are always besieged by people wanting more crowns and more booklets; but to some participants, the fact of going in the Procession with other people wearing crowns and having fun because of a joyful religious feast is very important for spiritual reasons as well. Furthermore, although religious principles are not crucial to everyone, it is interesting that, during this particular event, a religious role is often readily accepted by non-believers or non-Christians. Many people who participate in this Catholic event recognise its religious character, but distance themselves from it in order to spend leisure time at one of the greatest street feasts in Warsaw. They, too, wear paper crowns and melt into the crowd of Kings going to honour Christ.

The crowd in religious events

It is interesting to analyse why identification with a crowd and acceptance of a role designated by it become an important way of experiencing religious events, and why the faithful have such an intense need of shared, collective experiences. In Polish popular religiosity, the Biblical verse ‘For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst’ (Matthew 18:20) is often quoted or paraphrased, recalled in order to justify the need for group prayer and group participation in services. Sometimes this Biblical pericope is referred to actually demonstrate the superiority of group prayer over individual one, but this application is rare and extreme. Usually, participation in group religious events is perceived as an obligation of each Catholic and a complement to individual prayer to which also each believer is obliged. However, in Catholicism, taking part in religious services together with other people is a testimony of belonging to the Church: the Church that gathers all the faithful, which is actually a community of the faithful.

The mass character of religious events in Piłsudski Square has become their distinctive feature. Papal Holy Masses gathered over a million people; other masses celebrated there were also attended by hundreds of thousands. When compared to those masses, the religious events described herein seem to be very modest, since they were attended by some thirty thousand (the Passion play) and fifty thousand people (the Procession of the Three Kings). They might be treated as mass events notwithstanding, although they seem small in comparison to other services taking place in Piłsudski Square. It is the religious crowd that makes those events lively and, crucially, it is the crowd (understood as a form of religious participation) to whom those events are addressed. Organisers of such events perceive their participants to be members of a community and prepare the whole performance in a way that enables people to become such a community. These religious services do not allow for an indefinite number of individual patterns of behaviour or of experiencing the event.¹⁴ On the contrary, their organisers, as well as

¹⁴ Some diversity of ritual behaviour of the faithful exists, of course, but the attitude which lies at the basis of those forms of behaviour is quite unified.

frequently the participants themselves, assume a kind of unification of experiences. They become, as Abrahams called this kind of shared group experiences, “typical” (1986), but their typicality depends strictly on the character and purpose of the event, since these typical experiences are both desired by the members of the religious crowd and prescribed for them by events’ organisers.

Nowadays, group forms of religious life offered by Polish Catholic Church are visible and vivid. Upon observing the specificity of religious events in Poland, it quickly becomes evident that their majority is organised for groups or even masses of the faithful. In addition, group experience deriving from participation in such event is evaluated at least as highly as individual contemplation. People coming to those services seek shared experiences above all. Even though they bring in their own worries or joys, by being there they express a strong need to have the opportunity to share their experiences with others, or at least to feel that those others have the same experience. Deciding to participate in a group or mass religious event, participants seek other people having the same beliefs, sharing, to some degree, the same life attitude, belonging to the large group of the faithful. Unlike a pilgrimage, when people go to sanctuary with their individual intentions, such event is not a moment for personal requests to saints and God regarding healing, help in daily matters or resolving problems, but a moment when the experience of sharing the event together is desired.

In the Catholic Church, those wishes are commonly realised within a particular kind of community. Between the faithful and God there exists a connection that Charles Taylor terms “sacramental”, and this sacramental bond is mediated by participation in a religious community (2002). This sacramental bond gives the believers a conviction that they all have something in common; that they all belong to the Church and are included in it by certain sacraments. In the Catholic Church, such a sense of bond with the other believers is theologically justified exactly by the idea of the Church. This bond is not only with the living faithful, but also with those who died and already are in Heaven. Assumptions of the Church as a community are realised, among others, in group religious events in which people participate being united by this article of faith. This religious basis not only enables people to share their experiences and gives them a feeling of experiencing something together, but also allows them to accept one group role in religious events, a role that is common to all. It gives the faithful a certain potential to become a crowd. The believers, although coming to those events with their individual problems, agree to be a community, to be a religious crowd and, moreover, they act as such.

I do not wish to state, however, that the mutual relations between the believers during such services exemplify the state which Victor Turner called *spontaneous communitas*¹⁵ – a harmonious ideal that binds each person in a religious excitation and engagement (Turner 1969, 1974). On the contrary: people jostle, often angrily, they want

¹⁵ Although Turner worked out the notion of *communitas* analysing pilgrimages, and I maintain that crowd-like participation is somehow different from a pilgrimage, since it does not include individual intentions and requests to God, *communitas* may be an aspect of participation in those two kinds of religious events. It is an ideal basis for constituting the crowd, but does not exhaust its definition. People feeling a certain unity and harmony (as in *communitas*), experiencing it, are somehow prepared to take on one, coherent role. There must be, however, the will to constitute the crowd and a possibility to do this in the role inscribed in sacral event’s character.

to take the most advantageous place to see the whole event, etc.¹⁶ However, I maintain that *communitas* is present in people's perception of how the ideal participation in a religious event should look. The faithful want to be understood by co-participants; they wish to be surrounded by people who may experience sacral events in the way they themselves experience it; they want to be a part of *communitas*. In many cases, this is not only the goal of the faithful who participate in religious events, but also of the organisers of those events, who wish to enable believers to experience those services as deeply and as harmoniously as possible.

To do this, the organisers attempt to engage people into the event in many ways, one of which is ascribing particular roles within religious crowd. Not only roles for event performers, but also for the audience are planned beforehand, although in general the border between the audience and performers might not be very sharp. At least the organisers of Passion plays want the audience to be co-performers, as they prescribe for the audience a particular crowd-type participation. In the course of many Catholic events, the attendees constitute a religious crowd and their role within this crowd is based on and framed by various *root paradigms*, as Turner called founding events during which the faithful were gathering around prophets, Christ or His disciples to listen to their teachings (see Turner, Turner 1978). Later, those events laid the foundation to rituals and religious services. A good example is the root paradigm of the Way of the Cross, when people participating in liturgical services resemble and to some degree enact all those who accompanied Christ going to Golgotha. The cases I wish to describe herein are based on detailed root paradigms forming particular events – namely the Way of the Cross and the homage paid by the Magi (the Three Kings in Polish idiom) to Jesus. In contemporary realisations of these root paradigms, the crowd has a highly particular role – it is not only intended and aimed at deepening the believers' faith, but also it should aid them in working out and shaping their religious identity.

To fully grasp the problem, it must be remembered that attending group religious services with other Church members is crucial for the believers' religious life. Group attendance not only confirms membership in the Church, but also fulfils the principles of faith and the Church commandments. Participation in mass religious events, when the number of people present is far larger than during a Sunday Holy Mass, gives such a confirmation an additional meaning. The number of people intensifies experiences, it makes the whole event even more solemn and more valuable to believers.¹⁷ In moments when the participants are not just a group of the faithful, they may become the religious crowd, united not only by taking part in one event and belonging to the same Church, but also by a strong conviction that the masses of people came to the service in the same purpose, with similar attitudes. In some cases, e.g. in the abovementioned religious events

¹⁶ For a critique of Turnerian concepts, to some degree justified, see Eade and Sallnow 1991 and also Deflem 1991. I contend, however, that when the notion of *communitas* is perceived as an aspect of experience and imagination, not social reality, it preserves its interpretative power (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2008, 2013).

¹⁷ Although I do not enter into the domain of the psychology of the crowd, I would like to mention a psychological study demonstrating that when the crowd in question is a crowd that receives a religious communication, apprehension of a message is much more efficient (Newton & Mann 1980).

in the Communist era, the purposes and attitude of the crowd exceeds religious goals, also embracing patriotic or political ones; in others, as in those described herein, they focus on religious aims.

It is necessary to make one restriction here. Not all religious events, also not all those mass events, are able to give the masses of the faithful the possibility of transformation into a religious crowd. In my opinion, all have this potential, and the potential for making new qualities is perceived by some scholars to be an intrinsic feature of rituals (Turner 1986; Lubaś 2003), but ultimately people constituting a religious crowd need to be offered some special basis of identification, different and exceeding the reasons ensuing from the everyday, usually repetitive practices that follow from the membership in the Church community. Bonds within the religious crowd are based on a particular (adjusted to the character of the event) kind of realisation of this Catholic – sacramental – community. People need an additional role (not only the role of a Church member) to become crowd members; they need individual, religious tasks to fulfil (tasks that were formerly fulfilled by persons taking part in events founding the particular root paradigm) – this enables them to be transformed into the religious crowd. This is also what constitutes the difference between a religious crowd and a sacramental community or *communitas*. Therefore, another important aspect is the understanding of the religious crowd not only as a mass of people participating in the same event, united only by being in the same place at the same moment (although these are indispensable conditions of analysis of their experiences; see Abrahams 1986), but united above all by a common aim, a common attitude and an agreement to enter into one role. The crowd forms itself for a particular religious event, in relation to its particular goals. The process of constituting the crowd may realise a root paradigm when the contemporary faithful assume roles of the ancient faithful, or it can be a combination of ritual behaviour with patriotic, political or other attitudes (e.g. of the right-wing Polish Catholics who, after the president's plane had crashed, came to the Holy Mass to honour their late political leader). A religious crowd is more than a loose group of believers, since it realises a single strategy of participation.

Changing character of participation in Catholic events in Poland

It is evident from the examples described above that voluntary identification with the crowd during religious events is crucial for a successful and appreciated participation in those services. In the case of Passion plays, the sophisticated role of the crowd invented by performance organisers was rejected by the faithful. Moreover, from their own initiative, they assumed a role that allowed them, in their opinion, to truly experience the play: to feel as if they were accompanying Christ in His way to Golgotha and not as if they were His executioners (see Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013). In the second example, that of the Procession of the Three Kings, the role of the crowd has been accepted by the faithful, but, perhaps surprisingly, not only by them: this is the case in which a particular role in a religious service has been accepted, more or less consciously as a religious one, also by non-believers and by members of other religions. In 2012, they all followed

the procession wearing paper crowns and singing Christmas carols, and although some did it only to have fun, this fun was derived directly from the religious context. In my opinion, such phenomena as those described above are a sign of ongoing changes in Polish Catholicism, and especially of changes in people's religious life and its forms (see Zowczak 2008). Nowadays, religion gives people much more opportunities for self-expression, organising not only their spiritual life, but also a way of spending their leisure time. At the same time, taking place in the public sphere, religious events have become to some degree open to non-believers.

These changes in religious life are caused by, among other factors, the faithful seeking answers to their various needs, beyond that fulfilled by pure liturgy, in the Church. This is the reason for the emergence of an additional calendar of religious events parallel to the liturgical one. It is not as fixed as the liturgical calendar but also abounds in events. It consists of certain events that could be called 'religious attractions': concerts of church music, religious youth camps, reunions, youth feasts, religious performances, etc. Some of those events now have a quite long tradition in Poland and are widely renowned; some gather even hundreds of thousands of the faithful. Thus, although people do not give up participation in liturgical services that are obligatory for every Catholic, it can be said that they definitely look for something more in their religious life; especially the young people eagerly participate in those events (Olechowska 2009). Therefore, those non-liturgical religious events have become increasingly popular: they answer the expectations of the faithful, but they also demonstrate that the Church is not the only institution that shapes religious life, since many of those religious attractions are organised by the laity.

At least the example of the Passion play described above clearly demonstrates that contemporary believers have their own view of their religious life and are ready to fulfil their needs, even when those needs stand in some conflict with the expectations of the representatives of Church institutions. Though this Easter performance is prepared by a group of laymen, it is organised under the auspices of Catholic Church institutions. The conflict here is not very visible or remarkable, however, and without my talking to both organisers and participants would have remained unnoticed by me, since it takes place mostly in the minds of the faithful. I am convinced that the organisers of this Easter play are not fully aware of the audience's standpoint; additionally, in this particular case, the resultant situation does not jeopardise the whole event, since the faithful find their way of participating and the organisers are glad that their efforts are appreciated. Even this implicit conflict reveals the contemporary Catholics' need of acquiring some autonomy in managing their religious life. They can accept an imposed way of experiencing religious events in liturgy, but in non-liturgical events they often seek contents that would meet their own religious sensitivities.¹⁸ In the case of this Passion play, the faithful want to be Christ's supporters; they realise the *root paradigm* established by Mary, Mary Magdalene and St John going along with Christ towards Golgotha. This is how they are preparing themselves for Easter: by taking a role of a member of a crowd who despairs because

¹⁸ Although the popularity of the so-called New Religious Movements, and of their services, in Polish Catholicism shows that the faithful seek some 'renewal' also in the area of liturgy (see Doktor 2003).

of Christ's death, and in this way taking a role of a pious Christian. A similar pattern of identification can be observed in the case of the Procession of the Three Kings. Here people also want to express their being good Christians who go with the Three Kings to welcome and honour the Child Jesus.

The calendar of these "additional" religious events is parallel to liturgy, and though those events are organised or controlled by Church institutions, they give the faithful more opportunities to express their own religiosity and also to participate in those events on their conditions. These events are adjusted to the expectations of the believers, to their vision of participation in religious events, also because many are organised by the faithful themselves. Currently, laymen negotiate the form of religious life with Church institutions. Contrary to observations of some scholars of European religiosity (e.g. Hervieu-Léger 2007), the faithful in Poland find their place in the Church, in cooperation with Church institutions. It can be said thus that the authority within the Church is shared.

Therefore, the crowd participating in a religious event is not only a recipient of a service organised and performed by a Church institution, but is also its creator and an active participant in it. In the case of two religious events described above, it is the crowd and its engagement that determines the success or failure of the performance,¹⁹ although, in the case of the Passion play, the success is dependent on the role of the crowd chosen by the audience, not organisers, since the event has to involve people. For the performance to be acknowledged as entirely successful, for the role of crowd fulfilled, and for the people to feel satisfaction from their participation in a religious event, the believers must recognise their experiences to be true.

Concluding remarks

Writing about the need of positive identification of the crowd in contemporary religious events, I do not assume that the contemporary faithful avoid complicated reflection, or that they seek in religion an attractive way of spending time and not a challenge for their attitudes towards life. That, of course, depends on both the particular individual and on the religious event which is to provoke reflection. Neither do I assume that the crowd must have only a positive role during a religious event, and all other propositions would always be rejected by believers. I only want to point out that the character of participation in Catholic religious events, as well as a form of those events, are constantly changing, and that the changes also concern group experiences and group participation in the religious services. Furthermore, I do not want to argue that it is only now that people constituting religious crowd can choose the character of their role in the event; however, I would like to draw attention to the fact that nowadays laymen have an increasing influence on religious events and on the Church itself. The faithful are even able to interfere in the character of the liturgy to some degree,²⁰ but it is the non-liturgical events that allow them

¹⁹ On failures in performances, see Howe 2000; Schieffelin 1996.

²⁰ In some churches, for example, before the Holy Mass, laymen present a kind of a theatrical performance or a pantomime presenting subject discussed in the sermon. Also, in some churches the Holy Mass is accompanied by a concert of a popular church music; I encountered such a custom during my research in Bydgoszcz Fordon.

to meet the need that they would not be able to fulfil when participating only in liturgical services: the need of publicly expressing their attitude of good Christians that forms their religious identity.

However, to fulfil such a need, the believer must be involved in the event, since this kind of participation in religious events very much depends on emotions and personal engagement. Thus, to use Spickard's expression (borrowed by him from Alfred Schutz, Spickard 1991), the faithful have to "tune in" to the event. It is the tuning in that makes it possible for the faithful to experience particular community – a community originated by those establishing *root paradigm* of the crowd-type kind of participation, and continued by our contemporaries. The process of tuning in, exactly like Turnerian *communitas*, concerns not only those living now, but also all people from the past who through the ages participated in similar religious events (Spickard 1991: 202; Turner 1974: 238). Such an understanding of the religious community agrees with the Catholic vision of the Church, and also strengthens links among crowd members who feel a special connection to those who established *root paradigm* for their crowd. This bond inside the crowd seems to be crucial to this kind of participation in religious events. It is absent from an ordinary Sunday Holy Mass²¹ (it may appear, however, on various anniversary Holy Masses etc.), but it emerged during the Papal Masses, where the crowd was defined by its particular role: people came there to manifest their patriotic-religious attitude together. The faithful coming to particular religious services assume the role ascribed to the crowd by event organisers, or they impose their own conception in order to shape their participation in the religious event and also in order to gain a feeling of unity with others in fulfilling particular religious task, i.e. expressing and forming their religious identity. It is a part of constructing their "trajectory of identity" (Giddens 1991), a role they choose and want to enact, i.e. a role that (thanks to this) becomes a part of their religious identity. This role has a positive aspect, is apprehended and thus has its outcome as part of the trajectory of religious identity.

Above all, I wished to demonstrate here the fact that we can currently observe many differences between the ways of engaging into religious events, nuances that decide on the character of participation in them. I also wished to show that broad concepts of liminality, *communitas*, sacramental bond, etc. can be fruitfully used to underline the particular quality of participation in religious events. However, digging deeper, some particularities can be distinguished, which tell us more about contemporary religious life, and, based on those types of group participation in religious events, a different kind of participation in sacral events: the crowd-type participation can be discerned.

²¹ Although the central moment of the Holy Mass, namely the communion, is based on a root paradigm of the Last Supper, it does not influence the faithful as efficiently, and it is also not as visible as root paradigms founding the two events described herein.

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POVZETEK

Osnovni namen članka je predstaviti sodelovanje skupinskega tipa sodelovanja v množičnih verskih dogodkih. Na primeru predstav križevega pota in rojstva Jezusa v Varšavi v letu 2012, avtorica pokaže, kako je določen način sodelovanja pri cerkvenih prireditvah plod oblikovanja in pogajanja ter kako sodelovanje povzroča preoblikovanje skupin verujočih v versko množico, ki ima skupni cilj in si deli skupna stališča. Avtorica navaja, da je "verska množica" v tem primeru drugačna vrsta skupnosti, ki sodeluje pri verskih obredih, za razliko od komun ali zakramentalnih skupnosti, kakršne opisujejo antropologi religije. Množica se pojavi v zelo posebnih vrstah dogodkov, ki so posledica bistvenih sprememb v poljskem katolicizmu in nenehno razvijajočih se duhovnih potrebe in zahtev sodobnih vernikov.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: predstava križevega pota, predstava rojstva Jezusa, verska množica, verske izkušnje, Poljska

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