



The Reflection of Social Conflicts in the Life of Parishes in the Suburbs of Paris

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1. Introduction

The beginnings of the sociological research in the parishes in France are connected especially with the person of Gabriel Le Bras recognised as the one who pioneered the sociology of the parish in the world. No wanting to diminish his impact on these studies, I would like to make reference to one Polish sociologist Francis Mirek who in 1928 published the book *The Social Elements of the Roman Catholic Parish* based on his own field research as well as on the sociographic works of the French authors. At this time, as he marked, apart from the pastoral analysis, it was possible already to find out some sociographic descriptions of the parishes, although they were not too numerous.

Taking into account the importance of this unit for the Catholic Church, and the social importance of this Church, Francis Mirek reckoned the serious lack of deeper sociological analysis of the parish. His study from 1928 was recognized as the pioneering work in this field in the book edited by two American sociologists, describing the beginning of the sociological research in the parishes, from 1951¹. In his study, Francis Mirek chose, among others, five parishes from the suburbs of Paris. These five parishes were the object of my research and analysis being the basis of this text.

The main purpose of the paper is to show the interaction between the social problems and conflicts occurring at the macro level (in this case: French society and Catholic Church in France) and the religious micro-

¹ C. J. Nuesse, Th. J. Harte, red. *The Sociology of the Parish* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1951).

structures such as Catholic parishes. Actually the analysis is focused on the transmission of the phenomena from the macro to the micro level and its transformation in the life of parishes. It is worth to quote here the words of Card. Basil Hume who in his well-known book *Towards a Civilization of Love* wrote: “It is not enough, however, to reflect on the parish in isolation from the world. The local church has to be seen in its setting within the secular community of which it is part, subject to the same social pressures and influences. A study of the parish has to take into account the world it has to evangelise. Its members are affected in so many ways by their neighbours. We cannot plan a pastoral strategy without consideration of the factors which are changing secular society today”².

2. Five parishes in the suburbs of Paris

The parishes which are the object of the study were chosen by Francis Mirek in a special way. For his analysis he needed these that were at this time *in statu nascendi* because his purpose was to find out the social elements of the parish which are necessary for its constitution, so that “a parish could be called the parish” (its essential elements). For this goal he took advantage of the method of the analytical induction of Florian Znaniecki, the best explained in the book *The Method of Sociology* from 1934, and especially one of its sorts – the genetic analysis.

All five parishes were placed in the close suburbs of Paris which are called “little crown” (*petite couronne*) or small ring which is composed of three departments: Hauts-de-Seine, Val-de-Marne and Seine-Saint-Denis (cf. Fig. 1). The socio-economic and political situation in these departments is very diverse. The richest is the first one placed on the West and the poorest is the last on the North-East of Paris.

² Hume G. B., *Towards a Civilization of Love: Being Church in Today's World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Religious, 1988), 150. And he continues: “Most of us will remember, for example, what the advent of television did to parish life. We know the effect on religious life of the movement for women's liberation. We experience the pastoral effects of that breakdown in marriage which has become an epidemic in western society. New technology in communication, the coming of the Age of Information, the introduction of microchip technology, advances in transport systems, population trends, all these are not simply secular or irrelevant to the study of the parish. They are likely to revolutionise our society, its social patterns and the world of work and leisure and will affect the way we experience life in our local church”.

Fig. 1. The little crown of Paris (*small ring, inner ring*)



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Petite_couronne.svg
(accessed 14.12.2016), Author : User:Mortadelo2005.

Three of the parishes come from the poorest department and well reflect many of problems afflicting the French society for decades. One parish comes from the first and one from the second department. Indeed, as it is in the case of the departments, the parishes are very diverse. Nevertheless, in all of them, Błąd tłumaczeniait is possible to distinguish some similar changes and the reflections of the macro-problems, however in different intensity and sometimes from a different perspective. The research was carried out for two years: from the beginning of 2015 till the end of 2016.

3. Methodological aspects

The exploration of these parishes and analysis based on the field research has some similarities with the revisits described by Micheal Burawoy in his text from 2003. However he described and classified the monographic research focused on one revisiting place, which is close to ethnography. Nevertheless, some considerations included in his analysis are also useful in this study. Following the footsteps of Francis Mirek, I explored five par-

ishes in Paris suburbs, and then needed to refer to the method of Florian Znaniecki and those who in fundamental premises continue his attitude. Many of similarities could be found in the grounded theory explained primarily by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in *Discovery of Grounded Theory* from 1967. Thus the qualitative methods were mainly used in this research.

It is important to clarify that the issue of social conflicts was not the leading one in the exploration of these few parishes, but some of these problems emerged during the research. The discovery of new problems and the formulation of new thesis during the research process are characteristic for the grounded theory approach. It helps to deeper and understand better the exploring reality and not to adjust the reality to the original assumptions. In this case, it was rather a detailing and developing of these assumptions because the main explored aspects of the parish life had a wider character.

One of these aspects was the interaction with the broader context, both secular and religious one. The analysis of the influence of two different orders is a specific feature of this type of research relating to parishes. The question of the interaction between the context and a microstructure, or rather the influence of the external conditionings on a system was explored by Max Gluckman who has initiated the so called extended case method developed by Michael Burawoy³. This approach aims to highlight how the processes that take place at macro level find their expression in microsystems. Thus, it underlines the interconnection of all social systems but especially points the influence of the external forces on the micro level groups. "External forces", it is the expression used by one of the protagonists of this method – Michael Burawoy instead of the word "context", which for him has too passive meaning. The importance of external influences on social phenomena and processes occurring at the micro level was analysed in different paradigms. The one that interests us the most is the critical realist approach of Margaret Archer and her morphogenetic analysis of the social phenomena that shows the transformation and mutation of all elements involved in social processes and underlines also the importance of human subject in it⁴.

The last theoretical reference in this text is related to the period of time that has elapsed since the first research of Francis Mirek. The analysed peri-

³ Burawoy M., "The Extended Case Method", *Sociological Theory*, 16, nr 1(1998): 4-33; id, *The extended case method: four countries, four decades, four great transformations, and one theoretical tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁴ Archer M. S., *Being human: the Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

od extends over 90 years and it is natural that it is difficult to find witnesses of its beginnings. For these reasons, it is helpful to refer to the concept of collective memory developed by Maurice Halbwachs and the methods and technics used in this kind of research⁵. On the other hand, the social conflicts are the processes that usually last for a longer time, which allows them to be identified and described later, in the course of their development.

The most important detailed methods and technics used in the research have, according to the purpose and theoretical references, the qualitative character. First of all, it was the observation, simple and natural one, from the outside, but the most frequently it was the participant observation. Then, I conducted the interviews: around fifty semi-structured qualitative interviews, some narrative interviews as well as free-form interviews and free chats. The interviewed persons were the leaders of the parish life and also the average members chosen by their accessibility and by using the snowball sampling, taking into account that in these quite small groups most of them know each another. Some free-form interviews were carried out with the persons met by accident. Another important mean to gather the data was the analysis of documents. These studies took place in different archives: parish, diocesan and urban, as well as in the libraries and thanks to the personal documents made available by parishioners. Moreover some references will be made to the exploration of the urban living space, monuments, streets, squares and so on.

The study has given a lot of empirical data which allowed distinguishing some similar phenomena in all parishes and also some particularities in them. The main chosen social conflicts are divided in five groups that will be described farther: class conflicts, political conflicts, disputes on migration and immigration, religious tensions and specifically Church-state tensions. Because of the limited dimension of this paper, only general lines of the analysis will be presented with some specific examples.

4. The class conflicts

The first problem, which gives the basis for explaining also some of the others, is the ongoing consequence of the conflict between the social classes in the French society. Despite the proclamation of the equality as the one of social principles, the class divisions have been very strongly fixed. Even if it does not find its expression in law regulations, it can be noticed in the customs, habits and in creating quite separate circles of relationships. To generalise, the only parish being on the West of Paris included more of the

⁵ Halbwachs M., *Spoleczne ramy pamięci* (Warszawa: PWN, 2008).

people from the upper class (aristocracy, bourgeoisie, entrepreneurs), in the rest of them the lower working class was and is in a great majority.

In the documents and also through the interviews it was easily possible to discover this kind of attitude in parish relationships. People well-off and boasting of their origin created rather distinct groups of relationships, but also often people from lower classes felt resentment and were reluctant towards them. Being together in the parish communities, they tried to keep the fundamental rules of human and Christian attitudes. For a long time it was also the problem of different relations of priests towards different classes. The example of that gives one of parishioners Monique Maunoury, she herself originated from the French bourgeoisie, who described with sadness good relations of the priest with upper class and his clear distance to workers and all from lower class⁶. The similar problems were to be observed especially in the first half of the 20th century.

The important changes in the Catholic Church of France and especially in Archdiocese of Paris took place in the middle of the century with a special project of evangelisation of the worker class. It was linked with the movement of worker-priests that started in the 40s of last century, in the development of which Card. E. Suhard, archbishop of Paris, played an important role⁷. However it doesn't mean that thereby the class differences were abolished. The movement of worker-priests has been developing quickly in particular in the suburbs of Paris, and in the four of five explored parishes. The coming of the "new" priests provoked however new tensions.

Abovementioned Monique Maunoury, after the 1968 was the witness to a radical change of attitude from the priest (another one) in her parish, who being engaged in the worker-priest movement was strongly attacking upper class. She, who had completely abandoned her comfortable life to live with the most deprived and to support them, was once again in opposition, this time towards different attitude of the new priest⁸. Her reactions, because of her personal authority among the people in the parish, had an important influence on softening of the extreme attitudes which provoked sharp social conflicts. The development of this movement,

⁶ Bergerat M.-C., Marin O., *Monique Maunoury. Une disciple de Charles Foucauld à Ivry* (Paris: Karthala, 2006).

⁷ Viet-Depaule N., red. *La Mission de Paris. Cinq prêtres-ouvriers insoumis témoignent* (Paris: Karthala, 2002); Cavalin T., Viet-Depaule N., *Une histoire de la Mission de France. La riposte missionnaire 1941-2002* (Paris: Karthala, 2007).

⁸ Bergerat, Marin, *Monique Maunoury. Une disciple de Charles Foucauld à Ivry, 197-201*.

that for many poor and deprived people was very important, was restrained also by the decision of the Holy See to stop an undesirable direction that the movement took.

5. The disputes on migrations and immigration

The problem of class differences was strengthened by the migration and immigration phenomena that have been developing since the beginning of 20th century. In the time when Francis Mirek was exploring the parishes, the suburbs of Paris were the place of a strong internal migration from the province – from different parts of France. Most of them came especially to find jobs in factories located in or around Paris.

The incoming people were strengthening the lower classes and the suburbs, especially in the north, east and partly in the south became the area of their domination. The upper classes dominating the city, started to concentrate their presence in the western suburbs, thereby today's socio-economic divisions have taken shape from.

These phenomena have led to another one linked with the immigration. Already in the 1920s a lot of immigrants came to France and in particular to Paris agglomeration. This phenomenon intensified then in the 1930s and later especially in the post-World War II period. It is still strong in France, which has one of the biggest immigrant communities in Europe.

The people usually came to these places where they could find cheaper accommodation and where there were fewer different requirements: actually in general to the same destinations as in the case of the internal migration. On the other hand, in places inhabited mainly by social elite, they were, for any reason, quickly harassed by the police and rejected. During this process of concentration of people from the lower classes in some parts of the agglomeration, other reasons also played a role. For example, one of the important issues was to connect families and find a group of friends, a support group at a new place. Consequently, it also led to the intensification of this concentration. For France, a sharp increase in the influx of immigrants and refugees to Europe in 2014-2015, was a significant increase in the ongoing waves of immigration, which provoked additional social tensions. The number of immigrants is estimated now for around six million people, according to the French Ministry of Interior Affairs (despite rather easy procedure of attributing citizenship).

Generally, immigrants were counted as the part of lower classes, especially those coming from developing countries. They often created separate spaces of life: residential blocks, groups of houses, neighbourhoods despite the official propaganda about the good integration of them into the

French society. In the parish life they have often been supported by various charitable organizations, which was an expression of Christian charity: they have been helped in finding location, jobs or in learning French, sometimes also with delivery of meals and clothing. The events related to the terrorist attacks of 2015-2016 have caused a shock in the society, including parishes. Generally, the hitherto prevailing policy of integration was blamed for that: too big inflows, too quick and too easy attribution of citizenship (even it is called at the same time “nationality”), weak integration of the immigrants and so on.

In the parishes, the priests organised special meeting to clarify the situation and make the parishioners aware of the sources of that and how to behave from that on to preserve the Christian logic of action. However the tensions were not easy to be relieved completely.

6. The political conflicts

The political conflicts are based to some extent on the class differences and the ethnic or cultural differences. The political situation in Paris suburbs is very specific. Since the 1920s, many municipalities (communities) have been dominated by populist movements, and above all by the Communists. In four out of five towns where the examined parishes are located, the municipal authorities came the most often from the communist party; in three towns they are still at power. Even in the last parliamentary elections of 2017 that brought such important change to the French political scene, they won once again (with the party of Jean-Luc Mélançon).

The Communists' dominance over the decades is reflected, for instance, in the numerous monuments, sculptures, commemorative plaques dedicated to the activists of this movement, in the names of streets, squares, schools or hospitals in these towns. It is easy to find such names as Marks, Lenin, Dzierzynski, Stalin or those of the local communist heroes like Maurice Thorez, Venice Gosnat, Pierre Semard and Paul Vaillant-Couturier.

The attitude of the Catholics towards the communist authorities in these towns has changed during the time: from treating them as the aggressors and enemies to searching for the common points of cooperation (e.g. helping the poor) or trying to evangelise them. In the same time, the attitude of many communist activists has also changed. They stopped the open attacks against the Christians and all believers. In two of the towns, the situation was a bit different: one, from the western suburbs, has never been under communist rule and in the other the tensions have remained quite vigorous until today.

Many factors and many people contributed to this significant change, but one of them, whose contribution was unique in this respect, must be mentioned. The life and works of Madeleine Delbr el have marked relations between Catholics and Communists not only in the suburbs of Paris, but also in the whole country. Her ideas are still alive because of the books that were many times reedited of which the best known is *Ville marxiste, terre de mission* from 1957 and also thanks to the association promoting her work and thoughts⁹.

However the political tensions were not limited only to the Catholic-communist relations. Another important aspect of the political issue was the rise in power of radically opposite populist movement, it means the nationalists. The rise was due to the increasing presence of immigrants that has transformed the social structure in the suburbs, which for many was difficult to accept. It started in 1980s and developed in particular after the Millennium year. In recent years the nationalists have been trying to attract the Catholics by softening a bit their own thesis and underlining some elements of social teaching of the Church in their program. Indeed, the terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016 helped additionally to convince some Catholics to their program, but generally they are still rather reluctant towards them.

7. Religious tensions

To the abovementioned aspects, another one should be added, related to religious differences, and especially to the increased presence of Muslims. Their inflow became considerable after the II World War relating to the need of the French economy for additional labour during the thirty years of fast increase. The present share of the Muslims in the total population is estimated for about 7,5% – 4,71 million¹⁰, but many analyses show the higher percentage (at least around 10%). The problem of fixing the number of people belonging to a particular religion in France derives from the law of 1978 prohibiting the administration and retention of data concerning ethnic origin or religion of individuals.

The French state has tried to introduce proper integration of this population, but the results are not entirely satisfactory and not only because of the attacks in the last two years. The perception of the Islam and its believ-

⁹ The importance of this person and her work for the Church and the whole society might be confirmed soon by the proclamation her to be blessed. Her case is now in Vatican.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050* (Washington: Pew-Templeton, 2015), <http://www.pewforum.org/>.

ers among the Catholic parishioners is very diverse and changing in the course of time. Priests representing the Church and those responsible for dialogue with Muslims have repeatedly tried to create a platform for understanding and cooperation, but most often without a specific fruit.

These actions could be observed in the explored parishes after the first attacks in 2015. The parishes organised the meetings also with municipalities to preserve the people from blaming the whole Muslim religion for all that. According to the research, the strongest reaction of the Catholics against the Islam took place after the direct attack and murder of the Catholic priest Jacques Hamel in July 2015¹¹.

Nevertheless some interviewed parishioners presented very open attitude towards the people from Muslim religion, underlying that they have good neighbours and even good friends among them. For them the situation that, at least in two of these towns, the Muslims are the biggest religious communities is not a problem. However there are also the people feeling more and more in danger while observing the changes in the towns and the changes in the whole country related to the significant and still increasing share of the Muslims in the society.

8. The Church-state tensions

The last issue to be addressed is the Church-state relations that were also the object of the study of Francis Mirek in 1920s. These relations in France have been very difficult for a long time since the Revolution at the end of 18th century. The turning point was the Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State passed by the parliament in 1905 that imposed very harsh rules on the Catholic Church and other confessions, imposing the principle of *laïcité* in the social life.

The document of the Bishops' Conference of France issued for the centenary of the Law on the Separation¹² described a difficult way for finding an acceptable consensus in the framework of these regulations. However, the main conclusion of the text was that the Church of France does not seek for an essential change of the law, but is trying to maintain what has been achieved and progressively resolve the new arising tensions in the same spirit. The one question that has been lasting since the very beginning but has been changing its scope is the interpretation and different under-

¹¹ IFOP, *Le rapport des catholiques à l'islam en France*, nr 140 (2016): 1-9, dostęp 17 grudnia, 2016, <http://www.ifop.com/>.

¹² Conférence des Évêques de France, *L'église catholique et la loi du 9 décembre 1905, cent ans après*, le 15 juin 2005, dostęp 22 czerwca, 2017, <http://www.eglise.catholique.fr/conference-des-eveques-de-france/>.

standing of the separation and laicity which has the character of ideological tension but also have a real impact on the character of the presence of the Church in the public life, which, according to the Catholics, still needs to be better elaborated.

Most of the interviewed people reckoned also that these relations have become more and more smooth, and they do not consider it should be changed because it gives them the possibility to practice their faith without problems. Generally, those belonging to the upper classes underline more some problems that are still unresolved or even sometimes contest completely the achieved consensus.

Tensions took place also in the relations at the local level: between the municipalities and the parishes, especially parish priests. The local public administration being responsible for realisation of the central decisions had in it some autonomy that allowed them for harder or softer application of the rules. Especially in the case of communist authorities, for a long time, the former attitude was the choice, which was the cause of serious local conflicts. The changes were connected for example with the transformation of the reciprocal attitudes of the ruling communists and the Catholics from the parishes what was described above.

Obviously, these tensions were not linked only to the communist party, but it was the problem of French “republican” attitude of the authorities which was and is characteristic for different political formations (at least for all the most important until now in France). In this regard much depended simply on the personalities of city mayors and priests in parishes

9. Conclusion

In the course of the realisation of the research, it was possible to observe that generally all important phenomena and processes of the wider society, so the conflicts as well, found a reflection in the life and relationships of the Catholics from the parishes in the suburbs of Paris. However, it was not a simple transmission, nor just a micro image of the broader reality. Being transferred to the life of the parishes, these tensions and conflicts were mitigated through the principles of the life of such communities like parishes, the important units of the Catholic Church. The same people who take part in the social life at different levels are at the same time the members of the parishes. They “import” all the problems of the wider society that they meet and then confront them in the life of a parish community. The process of confrontation and mitigation depends on their involvement in parish life. Moreover, it starts already in themselves because of hitherto

internalised principles and values that could be afterwards strengthened by others from the parish.

Finally, when they return to their social activities being formed in the parishes, the real interaction might be observed: they transpose better or worse the principals and the changed attitudes into their secular life. This interaction depends on their position in social life, involvement in parish life and personality. The best example of the mentioned above is Madeleine Delbr el and her important impact onto broader social life. The lack of one of the enumerated elements causes that this interaction could be invisible, and even it is difficult to observe a real mitigation of the social problems in the case of those who are not too much involved in parishes, do not feel strong affiliation to the parish. They feel more autonomous, which is characteristic for individualist society dominating the West of Europe, the consequence of which is also visible in the functioning of the parishes.

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The Reflection of Social Conflicts in the Life of Parishes in the Suburbs of Paris

SUMMARY

The parish is a fundamental community of the ecclesiastical organization but, being composed of people involved in social life, it also reflects relationships and processes that take place throughout the society. The present situation of parish life in the suburbs of Paris is marked by a long history of tensions and social conflicts which have so far reverberated in the interpersonal relationships of parishes. On the other hand, the principles of the functioning of such communities make a certain change in what happens in social life. Through the prism of explorations carried out in some parishes in the suburbs of Paris, this elaboration presents selected examples of interpersonal relations that have their cause in what is happening in the society at large by showing their mutations in life of parishes in the Paris suburbs. The analysis then highlights the impact of the wider cultural environment and its interaction with the internal structure of the community and the personal attitude of the individuals. This text is based on the empirical research carried out in some parishes (interviews, observation, and document analysis).

Keywords: parish, society, suburbs of Paris, inculturation

Konflikty społeczne w życiu parafialnym na przedmieściach Paryża

STRESZCZENIE

Parafia jest podstawową komórką organizacji Kościoła, ale, będąc złożona z ludzi, którzy uczestniczą w życiu społecznym, odzwierciedla również relacje i procesy zachodzące w całym społeczeństwie. Obecna sytuacja życia parafialnego na przedmieściach Paryża jest naznaczona długą historią napięć i konfliktów społecznych, które znalazły oddźwięk w międzyosobowych relacjach w parafiach. Z drugiej strony, zasady funkcjonowania wspólnot, jakimi są parafie, mają również pewien wpływ na to, co dzieje się w życiu społecznym. Przez pryzmat badań przeprowadzonych w kilku parafiach na przedmieściach Paryża opracowanie to przedstawia wybrane przykłady relacji międzyludzkich, które mają swoje źródło w życiu szerszej społeczności, pokazując ich zmiany w życiu parafii na przedmieściach Paryża. Przeprowadzona analiza ukazuje zatem wpływ szerszego środowiska kulturowego i jego interakcję z wewnętrzną

strukturą wspólnoty oraz osobistą postawą poszczególnych osób. Opracowanie opiera się na badaniach empirycznych przeprowadzonych w kilku parafiach (wywiady, obserwacja, analiza dokumentów).

Słowa kluczowe: parafia, społeczeństwo, przedmieścia Paryża, inkulturacja

