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Two Covenants in Folk Religiosity: Contaminations[1]

The issue I wish to address is the division between the Old and New Testaments in research concerning so-called parabiblical folklore or, more precisely, the burden of misrepresentation which, in my view, results from classifying ethnographic material according to this top-down binary division. The perspective of cultural anthropology, which is inseparably associated with the ethnographic method,[2] points comparative studies in the opposite direction. This perspective certainly differs from theological and philosophical perspectives, i.e., those "royal" domains that have long been concerned with the criticism of apocryphal or pseudo-canonical texts. It allows us to see that what seems to be a mistake or a primitive error from the perspective of an educated member of the elite is sometimes an adaptation of elite content in

[1] This paper is a revised version of my article published in Polish: Zowczak (2007).

[2] I understand the ethnographic method (following James Clifford) as a "dialectic of experience and interpretation" and approach it from a hermeneutic perspective (Clifford, 1983, pp. 127–128).

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accordance with the ethos of a different "grassroots" living religious culture that is practised in everyday life.

A specific form of parabiblical creativity, the apocryphon, is not, in my opinion, limited to written texts. It can be expressed in various cultural forms: in visual representation, ritual gesture, the dramaturgy of ordering an illness, or fortune telling. It arises on the borders, and anthropology grants special significance to borderland phenomena and liminal spaces, making it easier to perceive such traditional description units as culture, ethos, religion, or identity as dynamic, variable, and performative constructions. Taking into consideration the research perspective outlined above, I shall present my definition of apocrypha as a cultural phenomenon. I perceive them as a form of glocalisation: an expression of group or individual identity *vis-à-vis* the dominant canon of religious culture. This refers both to Christianity and Judaism, since these two religions defined their canons as a consequence of interaction with competing religious movements and cults, including with each other. Apocrypha differ from other cultural practices associated with identity because of their focus on the Bible or its currently binding interpretation. An apocryphon is thus a test of faith in the religious sense and promotes a concrete model of human existence by incorporating elements of the *orbis interior* of a particular social group into this model.

It follows from this understanding of the concept of apocrypha that they are complementary to a certain canon (they are, in the terminology devised by Michel de Certeau, a tactic *vis-à-vis* a canonical strategy); in a technical sense, they are based on paraphrasing and translating fragments of Holy Writ into another language and placing them in a new context. Since apocrypha are simultaneously a *mimesis* of the Bible[3] and occupy a marginalised position in relation to its official interpretations, they are a borderline category between biblical discourse and other religious and/or cultural discourses and serve as an intermediary between them. In other words, in the spirit of anthropology inspired by philosophical hermeneutics, one can say that apocrypha are the praxis of negotiating identities.

My goal will be to present a synthesis of the mechanisms of contamination (blending and permeation, extending as far as identification) by which events and characters from the two biblical Testaments become intermingled. This synthesis is based on a collection of texts derived from ethnographic research

[3] I use a term coined by Aleksander Naumow (1976).

conducted between 1989 and 2000 and representing a culture moulded along the borderline between Catholicism and Orthodoxy (Eastern Poland, Lithuania, Western Belarus and Central Ukraine).[4] The research was conducted not only in a religious and ethnic borderland (in Polish diasporas in the former USSR and amongst their neighbours), but also during the transitional period of political change, the fall of the imperial order and the opening of frontiers – circumstances to which we (I and successive student groups[5]) owed the amicable attitude and openness of our interlocutors. Due to the absence of "church religion" from the public life of the USSR and the marginalised situation of believers, direct transmission of "home faith" between the oldest and youngest generations predominated (cf. Dragadze, 1993). The characteristic feature of such a transmission was in-depth adaptation of biblical mythemes linked with local tradition and adapted to the conditions of existence in a particular community. On many occasions, narratives adapting the biblical message were structured around interpretative schemes and fossilised linguistic patterns of speech, such as those I discovered in earlier scattered records made by ethnographers from the second half of the 19th century. Fundamental sources of the narratives we recorded include devotional prints, prayer books, and books of canticles – as a rule dating from the early 20th century – whose texts make use of typological symbolism.[6] It is also possible to identify a "circular" transmission of oral tradition, whereby folk motifs borrowed from devotional literature and wandering beggars' songs are reincorporated into contemporary narratives.

[4] The material comprises records of more than 900 ethnographic interviews, more than half of which were recorded on audio tape. I discussed the results of this work in my monograph, Biblia ludowa. Interpretacje wątków biblijnych w kulturze ludowej (Zowczak, 2000), published in English as The Folk Bible of Central-Eastern Europe (Zowczak, 2019). The research of scholars who have worked on this subject, such as F. Badalanova, O. Belova, E. Boganeva and T. Valodzina, has concerned the culture of Eastern Orthodoxy, while my own work has focused mainly on Polish Roman Catholic communities.

[5] I conducted this research with students as part of the Ethnographic Laboratories at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw. These are compulsory two-year courses based on original research projects and involving at least four week-long periods of ethnographic fieldwork.

[6] Biblical typology is a system of symbolic relations between figures and events from the Old and New Testaments, based on the principle that the latter fulfils the promises of the former. A figurative model of typology was the so-called Biblia pauperum, devised by learned monks and comprising parallel scenes from three epochs in salvation history: nature (up to Moses), law (from Moses to Christ) and grace, i.e., the era of the New Covenant. Biblia pauperum became the basis for catechesis (cf. de Lubac, 1959).

Jewish tradition had a distinct impact on the biblical knowledge of our interlocutors, traces of which can be found in the narratives I analysed. These traces survived the Holocaust, which ravaged the areas in which we conducted our research. An excellent example of such an impact is the interpretation of the sin committed by Ham, which an interlocutor from the region of Wilno (Vilnius) explained as the castration of Noah, Ham's father. In doing so, he referred to the authority of his former Jewish neighbour and respectfully emphasised their knowledge of religious matters – a practice likewise followed by many other people we questioned regarding the Bible. Although such a statement does not itself constitute proof, I have not so far discovered a Christian apocryphon or folklore text that could be recognised as the source of such a notion. On the other hand, I found one in Jewish tradition – in two collections of myths and biblical legends.[7]

While, according to Aleksander Brückner, apocrypha in Polish, when understood as written texts, are predominantly New Testament apocrypha (Brückner, 1903, p. 113), the proportions are slightly different in my collection of material. Here, references to Old Testament events dominate and focus on patterns of miracles and tragedies described in the Book of Genesis and the Book of Exodus. On occasion, such narratives structure local history and merge into a mythologised history of the communities studied. These Christian communities identified themselves with the Chosen People, although, as a rule, they directly and consciously referred to a much more humble spatial symbolism: "we are here like in the garden of the Mother of God". This mythical lineage rests on two theses. Firstly, the Jews were the first nation on Earth chosen by God (together with all the advantages associated with this status, such as knowledge, cunning and wealth, but also conceit). Secondly, as some of our interlocutors said: "we originate from those Jews who were christened". At the same time, Jesus is the foremost figure in these narratives, taking precedence over God the Father and dominating through His activity. In the narratives analysed, the relationship between God the Father and God the Son resembles a phenomenon described by researchers of archaic mythologies: the Creator recedes from the world He created and is replaced by a cultural hero who may, but need not, be His Son (Eliade, 1993, pp. 129–132).

[7] The complete statements recorded in 1990 are reproduced in Zowczak (2019, p. 128). On the interpretation of the sin of Ham or Canaan as an act of castration, cf. Graves and Patai (1993, p. 125) and Bin Gorion Berdyczewski (1996, pp. 121–122).

In the collection of narratives I have characterised, God the Father, conceived as *Deus otiosus*, a distant and "passive" God, merges with the Son in accordance with a tendency described by Eliade as the "imperialism" of mythical figures. Dominant figures gradually take over an increasingly wide range of activities and symbols from the other figures. The boundary between these two members of the Holy Trinity becomes blurred, and the Lord Jesus emerges as a distinctive leading figure, a cultural hero of the local community.

My assessment of the inadequacy of the concept of "Old Testament apocrypha" is based on the above-mentioned collection of texts – ethnographic sources – and on a model of transformation constructed through their analysis. They testify to a *sui generis* chronology comprising three interconnected symbolic cycles: the cycle of annual Church holidays commemorates events from the life of Jesus and Mary as well as several holy patrons; the cycle of human life is reduced to its social dimension, with moments of transition (i.e., baptism, marriage and burial) referring symbolically to holy tradition; the vegetation cycle is inherently connected with economic rituals within the context of agricultural praxis. The reciprocal projection of these three cycles onto one another makes it possible to generate meaning for each tiny particle of the surrounding world. An essential instrument of such projection, lucidly illustrated by Czesław Hernas through the example of 17th- and 18th-century carols, was the semantic characteristic of folk poetics, developed in ritual narratives not only through formal means but also *via* sociological parallelism. Researchers described these effects evaluatively, in rationalised language, as religious "ethnocentrism", "sociomorphism", "ritualism", "utilitarianism", etc. Nonetheless, these religious-sociological parallels, as Hernas established, could not be reduced to identification or metaphor, nor did they identify Heaven with Earth or compare them holistically. They were "solely a juxtaposition based on simple or denied analogy, and a deeper psychological justification not formulated separately but precisely contained in the shape of parallels" (Hernas, 1965, p. 123). They made it possible to seek "new truths on the border of folk consciousness and a system of religious assertions" (Hernas, 1965, p. 124).

I shall now present the main tendencies in the transformation of biblical figures and events in the aforementioned collection of narratives in relation to the symbolism of time, space and folk anthropology (i.e., narratives about the origin and diversity of humans). These tendencies provide insight into the mechanisms of apocryphal narratives that combine the events and

characters of both Covenants. The structure of time within these narratives is a synthesis of cyclical and linear measures. The cyclical measure is composed of the three aforementioned mutually intertwined cycles and overlaps with the linear tripartite structure of the successive epochs of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, which form a continuum of human *worlds* (Polish: *światy*)[8] separated by cataclysms. Each successive *world* (Polish: *świat*) is, however, less perfect, more sinful, and more distant from the original state of paradisiacal coexistence between humanity and the Creator (analogously to drifting apart or the process of ageing and losing strength). In the language of our interlocutors, the *world* is a concept related to an era or an aeon: it simultaneously refers to the human race inhabiting that time and space. A cataclysm (flood, fire or pestilence) plays a purifying role in relation to a world depraved and stained by human sins. Here we may discern an analogy between such purification of the world and the fate of the soul: it is purified by the water of baptism, purged by the fire of purgatory and, after penance, returns to Earth in a new body. According to this conception, as the *world* grows older, time becomes shorter, and this means an ever-shorter year, day and minute. Hence, human life too is progressively shorter and people become smaller, weaker and less comely. The only controversy concerns the mind and its role: people are becoming more and more cunning but, at the same time, more wicked (this is connected with the perception of knowledge, particularly technical knowledge – more a gift from the Devil than from God – as well as its juxtaposition with inspired knowledge stemming from divine revelation, at times identified with the Bible and accessible only to prophets and other chosen ones).

The distinct meta-structure underlying the contamination of the two Covenants is defined by the symbolism of the opposing figures of Adam and Jesus (New Adam) and Eve and Mary (New Eve). These figures link both Testaments in accordance with the typological order. Jesus is thus contaminated with Adam when He assumes the role of the first man (in connection with the cyclical transformation of worlds, the first man appears in each world and proves to be the same person). By way of contrast, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is never contaminated with Eve and the two are always counterposed. Although both figures are linked by the same attributes (apple, serpent and tree), these attributes take on diametrically opposed meanings depending on

[8] Italics indicate formulations used by interlocutors.

which figure they accompany. In turn, the Tree of Knowledge (sin) in Paradise, together with the opposing Cross of the Saviour (i.e., the Tree of Life), forms the second, less vividly represented meta-structure of the analysed narratives. The Tree of Life grows out of the Tree of Death, and a continuum emerges between the cursed and holy trees, involving, at times, blending and even identification (Zowczak, 2019, p. 314). This structure is expressed both through the cyclical symbolism of vegetation and, as in a ritual order, through the transformation of the chaining of Satan (and the flourishing of life) or the chaining of God to the Tree of the Cross at a time when the world is drawing nearer to the boundary of death. These two meta-structures – typological and cosmic axis – create symbolic frames for linking and mixing the figures and events of both Covenants.

Let us now take a closer look at some of the more distinctive examples of Jesus assuming God the Father's role of domination.

1. **Jesus frequently appears as the Creator of the world** in cosmogonic legends in which He co-creates the world with the Devil. Their activities take the form of struggle, rivalry or, at any rate, interaction, all three of which recur in the scene of Jesus descending "to Hell" after the Crucifixion. This mytheme is present in the apocryphal *Zstąpienie do otchłani* / *Descent into the Abyss* (Starowieyski, 1986, pp. 449, 459). A combination of these two narrative structures is presented in a tale from Podole (Podolia), recorded at the end of the last century.

> Just when the Lord Jesus created, the Lord God created… wished to create more land, because water was everywhere. He sent the Devil. And the Devil said that he would be his helper in all things. And he wanted to be given the right to all land. So as to be more important than God. So Jesus sent him to the bottom of the sea: "Bring sand from the sea, we shall sow it and there will be more soil". He went. Jesus said to the Devil: "But say: By God's will". The Devil went and said: "By my will". He came back empty-handed. Once again [Jesus – M.Z.] orders: "Go". He [the Devil – M.Z.] went once again and said: "By my will". Not by God's will. He came back empty-handed although he had scooped up some sand there. And the third time he did not say "By God's will" but thought it – and brought some soil under his claws [from the bottom of the sea – M.Z.]. The Lord Jesus […] sowed that soil and there was as much water as dry soil.
>
> The Lord Jesus lay down to sleep next to the sea. The Devil said: "I shall drown him. And I shall rule". They lay down – with the Lord Jesus facing the sea and the Devil in a dry place; when the Devil woke up, he said: "I shall turn him over". […] It was dry behind Jesus, there was no sea, while behind the Devil there was

> water everywhere. So he once again stepped over to the other side of the Lord Jesus and looked around: it was dry but there was also water.[9] The Lord Jesus said: "No, no, no. It is not you who shall be ruling but me, and you shall not drown me" […].
>
> And he [the Devil – M.Z.] deceived people until the Lord Jesus rose from the dead and came to Hell so as to lead out those souls that begged for God's mercy. He [the Devil – M.Z.] prepared a chair with chains so that when the Lord Jesus arrived, even with a cross, he [the Devil – M.Z.] would say: "Sit". He would sit and the chain would trap him. And he [the Devil – M.Z.] would rule. Because how can one free oneself from chains? But he [the Lord Jesus – M.Z.] said: "No. You sit and I will see whether one sits comfortably". And he [the Devil – M.Z.] did not think that the chains would trap him so well. "Go ahead, sit down on this chair". The chains hooked him and that was that. And he will sit there until Judgement Day when the Lord Jesus will finally set him free… wherever will he go? To eternity – or once again to deceive people? (Bedrykowce (Bedrykivtsi), Khmelnytskyi Oblast, Ukraine. Tape recording by Joanna Kusy and Joanna Musiatewicz, 1999)

The scene of the Descent into the Abyss, presented in an icon depicting the Resurrection of Christ, in a liturgical drama (Мирон, 1896), and in devotional prints circulating among the communities we studied (*Płacz i narzekanie Ojców Świętych*, 1910),[10] was apparently incorporated into the cosmogonic myth functioning in the Slavic world as a subsequent act in the struggle between God/Jesus and the Devil/Satan/Lucifer. The Devil's attempts to drown Jesus at the beginning of the world and to imprison Him on a throne of steel after His descent into Hell end with the imprisonment of the Devil, who falls into his own trap. Enclosed in Hell as if in a grave, chained to an iron chair or tied to a post, he is to await the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgement. Both were feared at the end of each annual cycle: every Easter and every turn of winter and spring. Lucifer attempts to free himself from the chain imprisoning him: he gnaws or saws at it, assisted by human sins. An Easter oration from the region of Wilno announced a joyous finale in which Satan is chained anew: "The accursed Lucifer jumps at the end of his chain. Help us, oh God, to last through this year and live to see the next, with small miseries, with great consolations" (Vilnius District, Lithuania, 1991).

[9] Cf. Tomicki (1980, p. 53), Formowanie ziemi [Formation of the Earth], variant b: "attempt to drown God; the Devil carries Him to the four corners of the world – the earth expands" (p. 58); similarly Zowczak (2019, p. 67).

[10] On the impact of this apocryphon on the narratives of contemporary interlocutors, see Zowczak (2003, pp. 63–64).

The chain binding Lucifer becomes whole again at the crucial moment when the Easter ritual is completed by the faithful or the priest. Depending on local tradition, the ritual that upheld the further existence of the world involved assorted elements of customary practice or liturgy. According to interlocutors from the region of Wilno and the voivodeship of Przemyśl (Poland), the breakthrough was marked by an old rite, once part of the liturgy of both Christian rites: a procession around a church, thrice repeated, at the time of the Resurrection (Badura, 1903) or around an Orthodox church at night – between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday – after which the priest knocked thrice with a key or a cross on the closed church doors, which were subsequently opened from the inside by the sexton. This rite resembles the scene of Christ's Descent into Hell in depictions of the Passion, in which He strikes the gate of Hell with a key (Smoleń, 1987, p. 110). In the stories of the Saviour's suffering and triumph, these events are linked by a symbolic prop – iron chains – with which He is shackled during the Passion. The tormentors lead Jesus on a chain – a symbol of the devilish trap that results in his crucifixion and death, although after His resurrection it is Satan who is enchained. The likeness of the humiliated Jesus at the pillar – a popular devotional and prayer image[11] – is replaced by that of Lucifer chained to a pillar in the interior of the Earth. The stone pillar becomes, through parallel semantics, an invariant of the Tree of the Cross, similarly to the Tree of Life in Paradise and the withered oak at the Lord's Sepulchre, which, according to a prophecy, is to blossom and produce fruit at the end of the world, thus heralding the Second Coming of the Messiah.[12] In turn, in the narratives of our interlocutors, Lucifer is replaced by the Impenitent Thief or, more often, by Judas:

> He kissed Jesus and betrayed him. That is why he is called Judas, because he betrayed Jesus. – And how did he die? – He died… They hung a chain round him. […] A thick, thick chain around his neck. And they say that when he's bitten through the chain, it'll be the end of the world. And when they sing Vesalyna at Easter[13], the [chain – M.Z.] will go back to how it was, and that's why he'll never bite through it and he'll hang and hang. That's Judas, the traitor. (Šalčininkai District, Lithuania, 1992)

[11] By way of example, such a vision is found in the apocryphal Slumber of the Blessed Virgin, both in its oldest Polish record from 1564 and in the version recorded in 1989 in the voivodeship of Przemyśl; cf. Bystroń (1980, p. 74) and Zowczak (2019, p. 335).

[12] E.g., in the so-called Prophecies of the Sybil; cf. Zowczak (2019, pp. 314–315).

[13] Vesalyna, Pol. Wesoły nam dzień dziś nastał (Happy day has come for us today). It is sung during the Resurrection procession.

The process of linking events from the beginning and the end of the world creates symbolic frames for the history of the world and its cyclical order, generating a holistic "total" vision in which "similar" figures and events of both Covenants/Testaments become mingled and assume each other's traits. This is probably an effect of the early translation of *The Gospel of Nicodemus* into Old Church Slavonic and its use in the Holy Saturday liturgy (Minczew, 2006, p. xix). The attribution of the creation of the world to Jesus is illustrated by an anecdote, cited by Aleksander Świętochowski, about the "irrational" phraseology of the piety of the gentry in the second half of the 17th century and during the Saxon reign: "When Massalski was getting married to Radziwiłłówna, the bishop, in order to assess before the wedding the religious knowledge of his relative, asked him: 'And who created the world?' 'The Lord Jesus', replied the newlywed without thinking" (as cited in Hernas, 1965, p. 102).

2. **Jesus is portrayed as the creator of human beings, as in the apocryphal South Slavic legend about the Sea of Galilee**.[14] Before creation is completed, He departs, abandoning the unfinished, defenceless human beings. The Devil takes advantage of this and harms the unfinished human beings: he pricks them, spits on them, or creates their sexual organs. Once again, therefore, the Devil appears as a co-creator, as he does in the creation of the world. In accordance with the principle of the gradual degradation of what is created, Eve, created after Adam, is less perfect. Narratives about original sin – at times interpreted as a sexual act[15] – reproduce the same pattern of the drama of creation: Adam abandons Eve, just as Jesus previously abandoned the people He had created, and then the Devil once again ruins God's creation (Zowczak, 2019, pp. 60–63). The typological relation (Adam/Jesus) thus undergoes transformation in the context of cyclically perceived time: the same structure returns in different symbolic forms (particularly in interpretations of the Book of Genesis)[16]. This mechanism is obviously linked with redundancy, which is

[14] "Then the Lord ascended to His Father in heaven for a soul for Adam" ("O Morzu Tyberiadzkim", 2006, pp. 6–8). Ryszard Tomicki (1980, p. 59) drew attention to the replacement of the Father by the Son in the texts of this legend.

[15] Between Adam and Eve or Eve and the Devil. We often encountered such an interpretation in south-eastern Poland during the 1990s.

[16] The mechanism was identified by Edmund Leach. His structural analysis, when applied to the Bible, appears to be overly arbitrary; however, owing to its preservation of the features of oral presentation, it at times produces interesting results. Cf. Leach (1969).

characteristic of oral transmission – a repetition of the same content in different ways. However, certain narratives, remaining relatively faithful to the Bible, stubbornly describe the creator as the Lord Jesus, who

> […] moulded them [people – M.Z.] out of mud. Then breathed life into them. Then he said: "Shall it be just one? How will it multiply?" He took a rib out of Adam and made a woman. A couple, so that they could multiply, and with the Paradise orchard so that… "All will be yours. You shall live without frailty and eat everything, but not from one of the apple trees." And the Devil tempted Eve and she took a bite. Thus, man has such a bump on his neck [Adam's apple – M.Z.]. This is, he says, a legacy for the descendants, demonstrating that Adam did not spit out the apple but ate it. This is why they sinned, and the Lord Jesus asked: "Why did you do that? Now you shall pay for your bread with your health, be punished until death with frailties, and your forehead shall be always covered in sweat from working. You shall work for your bread with your health and your hands." (Bedrykovici, Khmelnytskyi Oblast, Ukraine. Tape recording J. Musiatewicz, 1998)

3. **Jesus punishes people for their sins** not only in His future role as Judge, but also by means of cataclysms associated with the biblical flood or the destruction of Sodom. He destroys ears of grain, thus condemning all creatures to death by famine (in Lithuania, a dog and a cat plead that the tip of an old ear of grain be saved, hence the saying *a dog's lot*; in Poland the Mother of God stands up for pets, grabbing the tip of an ear of grain and saying to Jesus *leave at least as much as for a dog and a cat*). He sends down a flood on all sinners (in certain variants, He destroys ears of grain by means of a flood) and threatens with fire (in "Listy z nieba / Letters from Heaven"). The Pensive Christ, one of the most popular iconographic types in folk art, was regarded in different parts of Poland as Jesus pondering on the annihilation of people who drowned in a flood. He pities them and decides never again to punish people in this manner (cf. Genesis 8:21 and 9:11): "People have got such figures of Jesus, as he was after the flood. Jesus sat down and propped up his head with his hand, thinking, and decided not to punish people with more penalties because in the flood an awful lot of people perished" (Olędzki, 1971, p. 79, ft. 55).

Narratives in which the Pensive Christ "worries about Jerusalem" also draw on a dialogue between Abraham and Jehovah about the plight of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:23–33). Narrators combine elements of two Old Testament covenants – those of Noah and Abraham – to explain the Lord Jesus's concern. Their interpretation may also have been influenced

by *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, read as part of the Holy Week liturgy (Jeremiah 9:16–23). The Church recognises the lamentations as "the most suitable means for expressing the drama of the Lord's Passion – the enormity of the suffering of the Saviour" ("Wstęp do Lamentacji", 2003).

> Jesus sat brooding over Jerusalem. He could not forgive them; they were all sinners. They asked him, and he said that if they found fifty righteous men, he would forgive them, and they looked but didn't find any. "Give me ten." They didn't find ten, either. "Give me one." Not even one was to be found. And the Lord Jesus wiped out Jerusalem. (Voivodeship of Płock, 1989)[17]

4. **In aetiological legends about God/Jesus walking on Earth** in the company of St. Peter, the latter often replaces all twelve apostles but assumes, within the structure of the narrative, the role formerly occupied by the Devil, the imitator of the Creator and the thief of divine substance (this is particularly conspicuous in stories about mushrooms originating from pieces of cake stolen and eaten by St. Peter, which he then spat out; Zowczak, 2019, pp. 72, 274). Myths about God wandering the world as an old beggar become intermingled with canonical motifs from the Gospel. In many cases, Jesus and St. Peter undergo such a complete metamorphosis that it is difficult to recognise them. In a 19th-century Ukrainian legend, they are named *Mudrec* and *Chytrec* (the Wise and the Cunning). Here, Jesus appears as a physician, miracle worker and cultural hero, while St. Peter, like the protagonist's evil brother in the archaic myths analysed by Eleazar Meletinsky, is a demonic yet comical trickster who ineptly imitates or parodies the hero's deeds and inventions (Meletinsky, 2000, pp. 167–168). According to Jerzy Wasilewski, in the folk system of beliefs, this character represents the double symbolism of transition: from the ideal world to the real one, and from an immature and flippant pupil to a teacher-master. "This is simultaneously a contact point of the logic of the myth (beginnings, creations) and the ritual (initiation)" (Wasilewski, 2002, pp. 159–164).

Through their interactions, *Mudrec* and *Chytrec* (Ukrainian: the Wise and the Cunning) sanction the ethos of rural communities and determine the value assigned to elements of the world from the perspective of these communities.

[17] Similar interpretations of the depiction of the Pensive Christ as the "righteous judge of destruction", recorded in the voivodeship of Rzeszów, are cited by Kunczyńska-Iracka (1980).

> St. Peter was walking, and his feet and legs hurt, so he stole a horse. Our Lord met Peter and asked him: "Where did you get the horse?" "I bought it." Our Lord said: "Show me the witnesses." And a cuckoo and a crow were there. The cuckoo said: "Bought, bought." And all the time Our Lord knew that Peter had stolen it. He asked the crow. "Stolen, stolen." He called the crow to him and said: "You can crow all the year round, and the cuckoo will cuckoo only until St. Peter's day." (Švenčionys District, Lithuania, 1992; Zowczak, 2019, p. 104)[18]

The four examples presented above show Jesus as the Creator of the world, its harsh Judge and a cultural hero – "a second creator" who puts the already existing world in order, transforming it and its inhabitants by granting them characteristic features. The contamination of the two Testaments linked with these roles can be regarded as the result of the adaptation of biblical motifs to non-Christian beliefs in accordance with their cyclical organisation of time. The *worlds* of God the Father and God the Son overlap and are, in practice, inseparable from each other. According to Marlène Albert-Llorca, author of a monograph on European legends about the origin of plants and animals, the idea that Christ transformed creation is not at odds with the Christian message. Just as the new law completed the old, so the world created by God was transformed by Jesus (Albert-Llorca, 1991, p. 28). After all, this is not only the principle of biblical typology but also a fundamental principle of Christianity. Since researchers perceived time as linear and irreversible – contrasting the original creation of the world with legends about a second creation and a metamorphosis woven around the activity of Christ – they regarded the mixture of the two Covenants as the outcome of the narrators' ignorance. In the narratives I analysed, the Lord Jesus is the sole subject of motifs, beliefs and customs concerning the Nativity and Infancy as well as the Passion and Resurrection and hence is clearly distinguished from God the Father in His role as Redeemer and Son of Mary. In other cases, the intermingling of the two figures is striking. I shall now present examples of contamination that clearly result from the "flattening" of biblical typology, i.e., placing the type and the antitype on a single temporal level. In this instance, the cyclical character of time is of secondary significance, while the literal interpretation of similarities between the people and events of the two Covenants leads, in turn, to their intermingling.

[18] The bird responses in Polish imitate the voices of the cuckoo and the crow; "kupił" and "kradł" are onomatopoeic, and the meaning of this narrative derives from this wordplay (Zowczak, 2019, p. 104).

5. Events from the history of Moses and Jesus undergo contamination, particularly in the conflation of drowning with the Slaughter of the Innocents, and in the conflation of the Israelites' escape from Egypt with the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. We recorded numerous cases of this type of adaptation in Lithuania.

> When Jesus crossed the Red Sea, he waved his staff and the sea made way for him, and when they walked along that path between the waters, he waved his staff again and the waters returned, drowning those who were trying to catch him. (Šalčininkai District, Lithuania, 1991; Zowczak, 2019, p. 248)

Here Jesus replaces Moses in the episode of the miraculous parting of the waters during the escape of the Israelites from Egypt (Exodus 14:21–22). In a certain sense, this contamination is consistent with the structure of the Christian Bible, since the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea prefigures, in typological order, the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1–2). Other narratives identify the pharaoh from the Book of Exodus with Herod, who ordered the Slaughter of the Innocents (Matthew 2:16–18); Jesus and Moses thus take part in the same event.

> […] And then the Jewish king, but I don't know his name, thought of this: "Wait, cut out [kill – M.Z.] all the boys born over the last three years, even those who have just been born; it does not matter, all of them, force the mothers." And some Jew was going around, slashing, throwing their little heads against a wall. And Joseph was wakened by an angel who said: "Get up, Joseph, take Mary and Jesus and flee into Egypt." … And one more Jewess [had – M.Z.] Moses, a son, and he was two… She put him in a basket, like the ones we have today, put him in a basket, took him down to the river, turned around and ran away. She said: "If he drowns, he drowns, but I won't see him being taken from me." … Then only those two were left, Jesus and Moses. Only those two children from those three years. And when that Jewish king died, Our Lady returned to her own land. (Švenčionys District, Lithuania, 1991; Zowczak, 2019, p. 249).

Whereas in this story Moses was transposed into the Gospel of St. Matthew solely through the inclusion of the episode with the basket, other stories take his identity more fully into account. A description of the Nativity of Jesus is followed by the story of Moses:

> […] a woman had a son. This son gave the commandments on Mount Sinai. His name was Moses, and because she didn't want him to be killed, she made a basket, smeared it with tar, wrapped him up, put him in the basket and sent him out to sea. Moses

> sailed and sailed, somewhere to the other side, and there some woman found him. That is why he is called Moses. He survived and gave the Ten Commandments. And when was this? At the time when Jesus was born and that woman wanted to save her son from Herod. (Šalčininkai District, Lithuania, 1991; Zowczak, 2019, p. 249).

This interpretation – if it is to be treated as typological – is consistent with the Book of Exodus (1:22), according to which the pharaoh issued an order to the nation: "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile…". Jewish tradition explains that the reason for this ruling was the pharaoh's prophetic dream about Moses (Ginzberg, 1909, pp. 254–256).

I shall present two more examples of a narrative in which Jesus takes the place of Moses in an Old Testament episode:

> […] when they wanted to kill Jesus, Our Lady hid him in a basket. … When Our Lady and Joseph were in hiding, they sent Jesus out to sea in a basket because some Israelis or whoever wanted to kill him, that was how Jesus was saved. (Vilnius Region, Lithuania, 1991; Zowczak, 2019, p. 249)

> When Jesus was running away with Our Lady on a donkey across a river, he shook his stick and crossed the river, and the pharaohs, carts and horses, and a great army all drowned in its depths. Jesus crossed to the other side and all those who did not believe drowned. (Vilnius Region, Lithuania, 1991; Zowczak, 2019, pp. 249–250)[19]

The symbolic parallelism that leads to the contamination of motifs from the two Covenants is based on the following associations:

Pharaoh	Herod
the drowning of boys	the slaughter of boys
the departure of the Israelites from Egypt	the escape of the Holy Family to Egypt
Pharaoh's army	Herod's soldiers

It is worth noting that the protagonists of our narratives do not walk on water, as in the texts of the Gospels, but across water, along a path. Jesus walks on sand, just like Moses when "the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left" (Exodus 14:21–22). A similar event is described in the Book of Joshua: when the Israelites crossed the River Jordan, the waters "flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho" (Joshua 3:16).[20]

[19] The interlocutor added to the story a fragment of a canticle about Divine Providence.

[20] All biblical quotations are according to the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (*Bible: English Standard Version*, 2001).

6. **Mary of Nazareth as the Wisdom of God.** The last example concerns a Christian adaptation of an Old Testament text, the Hymn to Wisdom, in which wisdom is personified as a companion of the Creator (Proverbs 8:22–31). According to Alan Unterman, the wisdom celebrated in this book refers to the Torah, through which God created the world (Unterman, 1991, p. 498). Christian liturgy, on the other hand, applies the Hymn to the Mother of God as a "Seat of Wisdom".[21] From the 10th century onwards, it was read at Mass on the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. René Laurentin wrote that the intention was apparently to emphasise that the Divine figure whose birth was being celebrated originated in God's thought (Laurentin, 1989, p. 249). The Hymn reached folk culture in the form of a Marian song circulated in popular devotional publications. Here is a fragment from the 22-verse "Pieśń do Najświętszej Maryi Panny / Song to the Most Holy Virgin Mary", an adaptation of the above-mentioned fragment of the Book of Proverbs:

Before God created this earth,
I was already conceived.
There was no abyss yet,
And I was born.
Thou, our Mother,
Wast already chosen.
When Thou, God, didst lay the foundation
Of this earthly circle,
As Thou didst separate night from light,
And imposed a beautiful order,
I, Mary, worked with Him
Always in all things. …
When He established the air,
The sun, the moon and stars,
When He elevated the planets,
He gave me great power everywhere.
I, in every hour
Was always with the Lord, etc.

(*Nowa kantyczka*, 1904, pp. 267–277)

[21] For further discussion, see the commentary on Proverbs 8:22–31 ("Księga Przysłów: Mądrość zaleca samą siebie", 1984, p. 716).

In another religious *canticle*, issued by the same publisher in Wilno, we recognise another version of the biblical Hymn in the song "Zawitaj, Córko Ojca przedwiecznego / Welcome, Daughter of the Eternal Father":

> 'Ere the heavens stood in their formations,
> Or the seas sank within their shores,
> When the hills were by divine wisdom scorched,
> Thou wast with it! …
> 'Ere Adam the sinner stood on the left,
> In divine vision Thou alone stood on his right,
> Thou wast before ages innocently conceived,
> Holy Virgin!!
>
> (*Kantyczka*, 1915, pp. 288–289)

Therefore, an "apocryphon" created through the literal interpretation of an allegory is actually canonical. Thousands of pilgrims on their way to Calvary repeated this song's successive verses after their guide. Researchers cited a similar song (already a third version!) as evidence of the creative role ascribed to the Mother of God in folk religiosity (Olędzki, 1975, p. 235),[22] but neither older sources nor our narratives confirm such an interpretation. In none of the texts with which I am familiar does the Mother of God participate in the creation of the world. Rather, she assumes the role of a cultural protagonist who transforms the pre-existing world, just as Jesus does in aetiological legends. The structure of myths about the co-creation of the world by God and the Devil, as described above, is complete and leaves no room for another figure, because the Devil assumes a role that is perceived as feminine in the culture of the narrators. On the other hand, it is true that the most important figures in the folk pantheon have existed "from the beginning of the world", which results from their existence outside time. The narratives we collected, which are consistent with 19th-century sources, introduce Mary in the context of Lucifer's revolt, supposedly caused by God's command that he bow to Mary, whom he saw in a *vision*.

> After all, this Lucifer was the best angel, the one that knew the most. And when God showed him a woman in a vision, he was the first to rebel. Because he said

[22] The song was published by the Franciszek Orzeł and Son printing house in Frydek (Austrian Silesia); the year of publication is unknown. The same text is referred to by Ryszard Tomicki (1981, p. 42).

> to God, "No!" and found supporters and said that he would not serve. And who was this woman? Our Lady. (Šalčininkai District, Lithuania, 1991; Zowczak, 2019, pp. 76–77)

The place of the Mother of God both in the structure of folk beliefs and in the collection of narratives I have described is illustrated by a curious text from the "Krakowskie" volume by Oskar Kolberg, in the section dedicated to beliefs. According to this text, the Sun, the Moon and the stars reflect light from heaven or, more precisely, from the celestial palace in which God the Father sits on a throne and

> holds on his lap the Holy Virgin, the Immaculate Mother of God, and has in his hand the sceptre and the orb of the world. On the right side of God sits the Father, with the cross and the lamb of God, his son Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. Above them hovers in the heavenly brightness the Holy Ghost as a shining white dove. (Kolberg, 1962, pp. 21–22)

The vision of a miniaturised Mary as the daughter of God, sitting on the lap of the Father and incorporated into a hieratic image of the Holy Trinity, brings to mind the iconographic type of the Fatherhood. The image of the "Daughter of God" corresponds better to the narratives discussed here than does the role of co-creator of the world presented in the apocryphal songs. This image appears to define the mutual relationships between the figures in a manner analogous to the icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, in which Christ holds in His hands the spirit of the Mother of God, depicted as a swaddled newborn child or a little girl.

At this point, we should also mention more straightforward instances of contamination between figures from the two Covenants. Although less complex, their effects are consistent with those described above. These contaminations may arise from a shared name (e.g., the Patriarch Joseph and Joseph, the husband of Mary; Zowczak, 2019, p. 201), shared attributes (e.g., the Queen of Sheba and St. Helen of the Cross, both associated with the Tree of the Holy Cross; Zowczak, 2019, p. 180), or shared functions or patronage (e.g., the prophet Elijah and St. Peter, both associated with harvests and thunder; Zowczak, 2019, p. 275). The last type may also resemble the blending of the features of different characters in a ritual drama, where the same actor plays them in successive scenes. For example, in *Chodzenie z Abrahamem* ("Walking with Abraham", a Christmas folk play), Abraham and Joseph, the husband of Mary, both resemble father figures – old men with comical features (Zowczak, 2019, pp. 195–201).

The examples of contamination presented above demonstrate that interpretations of the Bible in our sources cannot be based on a division between the Old and New Testaments. On the other hand, an alternative basis for classification might be an aetiological division between aliens, outsiders, misfits and one's own people – the chosen ones. The lineage of every creature and every particle of the world can be woven into sacred history. Nonetheless, only by considering the interconnected structures of texts from both Covenants, together with midrashic legends and Jewish apocrypha as comparative material, is it possible to undertake a meaningful symbolic analysis of the collection of texts I have compiled, which I perceive as a living continuation of earlier traditions at the boundary between folk and elite culture.[23]

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[23] The topic of the folk bible has gained popularity in recent research, and one may find various attempts to engage with it. After my publication on the folk bible, a number of studies have appeared on the issues raised in this paper, including Badalanova (2008) and Badalanova Geller (2017), which propose different approaches and as such do not significantly change my interpretation of the collection of ethnographic materials presented here.

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Dwa Przymierza w religijności ludowej. Kontaminacje

Główna teza dotyczy kontaminacji postaci i zdarzeń dwóch biblijnych Przymierzy – Starego i Nowego Testamentu – w narracjach rozmówców, którzy znali Biblię przede wszystkim z bezpośredniego przekazu w rolniczej kulturze lokalnej. Można w nich dostrzec wpływy *biblia pauperum*, a także tradycji żydowskiej. W efekcie narracje inkulturowanej *biblii*

ludowej nie dają się uporządkować według struktury kanonicznego tekstu; można jednak zarysować jej inny, „oddolny" porządek. Moją tezę uzasadniam korzystając z materiałów etnograficznych zebranych w latach 1980–2000, prowadzonych głównie wśród osób wyznania rzymskokatolickiego, a także prawosławnego (od Polski centralnej poprzez wschodnią oraz skupiska Polaków w Litwie, Białorusi i Ukrainie, w społecznościach, które do czasu Holocaustu tworzyli także Żydzi).

Słowa kluczowe: apokryfy; tożsamość; przekaz ustny; tradycja biblijna; kultura religijna

Two covenants in folk religiosity: Contaminations

The main thesis of this paper concerns the contamination of characters and events from two biblical Covenants – the Old and New Testaments – in the narratives of interlocutors whose knowledge of the Bible came predominantly through direct transmission within local tradition. The influences of the *Biblia Pauperum*, which merges the two Covenants, and of Jewish tradition are also evident in these narratives. Consequently, the narratives of the inculturated *folk Bible* cannot be organised according to the structure of the canonical text, although a different, "grassroots" order can be outlined. I support my thesis using ethnographic material collected between 1980 and 2000, mainly among Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian communities in Central and Eastern Poland and Polish diaspora communities in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine – communities that, until the Holocaust, were also shaped by their Jewish populations.

Keywords: Apocrypha; identity; oral tradition; biblical tradition; religious culture

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