

CATHOLIC CHURCH AT THE CROSSROADS: THE POLISH CASE

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Abstract: *Poland and Poles are and have always been strongly attached to Catholicism. In the national tradition, we define ourselves as the „rampart (defensive wall) of Christianity,” securing Europe from the dominance of Islam (the Ottoman Empire).*

During the partition period, confession was the determinant of being a Pole. The Catholic Church was perceived as a mainstay of Polish national identity, the only institution where Polish language could be used. The church was similarly treated during the communist period, as well - it was the mainstay of patriotism, helped the illegal opposition, organized help for the persecuted.

No wonder that in the traditional social narrative the church was and still is treated as a national institution, and confession as an important (even dominant) component of national identity. Being a Catholic was a source of pride, after all we had the Polish Pope.

Why, then, the thesis that it is at a crossroads? I assume that it is determined by the present conditions and processes that take place on a global scale. Poland, which has been surprised by full churches, currently has the largest decline in dominicanes and communicantes in the whole world, despite the fact that most of the Poles declare themselves to be Catholics.

What decides about it? In my opinion, approaching Catholicism and its practices as a shelf in a supermarket - one chooses what is useful to him at a given moment. There is also another aspect of Church activity in Poland - political activity that expresses support for those parties that appeal to nationalism, traditional narrative to the role of the Church in the past and influencing the creation of the law, that religious dogmas/norms (Catholic) should be respected. This testifies to the weakness of the evangelizing and educational mission of the Church.

Keywords: *Catholic Church, evangelization, tradition, nationalism, politics.*

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Introduction

Poland and Poles have been strongly attached to Catholicism and to the Catholic Church. In this country being a Pole has meant to be Catholic. Religion has played very important role in the process of building up the Polish nation and national identity. Religion has also been treated as a source of social values and norms because it has been deeply rooted in traditionally oriented local communities.

Perhaps belonging to the Catholic Church was one bond between the lord and the peasant. Everything else divided them: political rights (the peasant had none), social distances – a state (class) structure with limits that are difficult to overcome, a way of life, even language. Only faith was common, although not throughout the Republic – in the east the peasantry was Orthodox.

The role of Catholicism was strengthened by the period of partition. Churches in the Russian and Prussian (German) partitions were the only public places where the Polish language (except liturgy, Latin) functioned. Religion also became a component of collective identity and allowed us to distinguish ourselves (outside the language) from the possessor. A similar function was performed by the Catholic Church and Catholicism during communism – it allowed you to find your “me”.

In the 20th century, especially in the period after World War II, Poland became a basically one-nation country, where Catholics made up about 90-95% of believers. The churches were full, participation in religious practices universal, the authority of the institution of the church and the clergy indisputable. The type of “folk religiosity” (Edward Ciupak’s term 1973), oriented towards participation in external practices, prevailed. Baptism, the first communion became celebrations tailored to the wedding.

It was a country with a large number of priestly and religious vocations. Being a priest meant having prestige, authority and material security. Having a priest, a monk or a nun in the family raised its prestige and respect in the neighborhood.

These tendencies to increased religiosity strengthened the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as pope in 1978 – he took the name of John Paul II. This has also strengthened national pride.

So where does the thesis about the church at a crossroads come from? Have the last few years changed so much? What processes and phenomena – in the church and outside the church – have determined this? I will try to answer these questions. The main thesis of my paper is the assumption that the crisis of the Catholic Church in Poland is resulting from: a. fear of changes in society that result in the adoption of a strategy of “besieged fortress”, b. conservatism and a kind of orthodoxy, especially in matters of doctrine and customs (Pope Francis is a heretic for many Polish bishops), c. involvement in politics, support for right-wing, conservative and nationalist groups, influencing not only the election results, but also legislation, d. covering up clergy violations, especially pedophile acts.

In the article I would like to look at, on the one hand, the history of the Polish Church, the sources of authority and prestige of the church and the problems of today’s church – signs of the crisis, its causes and its possibilities to overcome it.

Poles and the Catholic Church: A History

Christianity has more than 1,000 years of tradition in Poland. It is considered that the baptism of Prince Mieszko I, prince of the tribe of the Poles as a condition of marriage with the Czech princess Dobrava, was primarily a political act. On the one hand, he annulled the justification for the German's invasion of lands of the Slavs under the rule of Mieszko the First for the "conversion of the pagans". This gave him a sense of relative security. On the other hand, no less important, and perhaps even more important, was introducing Poles into the circle of Western European Christianity culture. This certainly meant a long process of civilization – the adoption of Christian institutions (dioceses, parishes, monasteries), the education system (parish, monastery, cathedral and finally university 1364), but also legal norms. It also meant increased contacts with Western European countries. It can be assumed that by the end of the 13th century Christianity, its institutions, and faith had taken root.

Starting from the second half of the 14th century, the process of developing a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious society begins in Poland. On the Polish territory under Casimir the Great, the Jews found refuge. Black and Red Ruthenia (today's Ukraine) have become the part of the Polish Crown. More importantly, the Catholic king (Casimir the Great) guaranteed Orthodox and Armenians respect for their religious customs and practices. For the formation of a multiethnic and multifaith society, perhaps the most important was the Polish-Lithuanian personal union (Union in Krewa 1385), in which the baptized Catholic Duke of Lithuania Jagiełło (Yogaiłła) became king of Polish. This meant another long process of ethnic, religious and cultural differentiation, intensified after the so-called Lublin Union (169), transforming the personal union into a real, political union and unifying the State body. The Republic of Both Nations was ended in 1795 with the third partition of Poland.

Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Jews, Armenians, Germans, Tatars lived side by side in the Republic, which meant that people of different Christian faiths lived together, as well as Jews and Muslims (Tatars). More importantly, they enjoyed relative religious freedom. The Warsaw Confederation – as defined by the resolution adopted in 1573 at the Warsaw Convocation Diet, which contains provisions on ensuring freedom of religion of nobility in the Republic – guaranteed unconditional and eternal peace between all those who differed in the faith, ensured equality with Catholics and state care, while prohibiting secular authorities from supporting the clergy in religious persecution. Although the Confederacy restricted religious freedom to nobility only, in practice it was also given to the townspeople of the royal cities.²

The validation of the principles of tolerance was a major achievement. Despite a certain generality, the Warsaw Confederation gave legal grounds for Polish Protestantism

² The Act of the Warsaw Confederation in religious matters decided and guaranteed: a. unconditional and perpetual peace between the "*dissidentes in religione*", b. not to initiate under any circumstances fights under the pretext of religion, c. nobility the right to impose one's religion on his subjects.

to be the first legal act in Europe to ensure religious tolerance. The Warsaw Confederation made 16th-century Poland a “heretic asylum” in Europe, and “stackless State” (Tazbir 1967) in today’s researchers opinion. The country provided shelter for followers of different faiths, fleeing the judgments of Catholic clerical courts and inquisition tribunals. The activities of foreign newcomers, e.g., as lecturers, writers or typographers, contributed significantly to the development of the culture of Polish Renaissance.

It is worth stressing out that this occurred when Western Europe was mired in religious wars, where protestants (France, the Netherlands, Spain) or Catholics (England in the time of Henry VIII and Elizabeth) were persecuted depending on who gained the power. Its apogee was the Thirty Years’ War.

This does not mean that the 16th and 17th centuries were a peaceful time for Poland. It was a period of war with Moscow, Sweden, the Tatars, the Turks, the Cossacks. Not without significance for the rooting of the conceptual compact pole-Catholic in Poland had the fact that the enemies in these wars were non-believer. In particular, the struggle with the Ottoman Empire (the Tatars subjected to it) was important for the self-definition of the 17th century Poland as the “rampart of Christianity”.

The Catholic Church took on special importance after Poland lost its independence and had its territory seized by three partitioners – Russia, Austria and Prussia (since 1871 the German Empire). Poles became subjects of three monarchs ruling multiethnic and multi-religious empires. Religion – belonging to the Catholic Church – became a distinguishing feature from the possessor, most often a public official. It is no wonder that the conceptual compact “Pole-Catholic” begun to function and, more importantly, it had stronger national connotations than religious ones. Religious practices – masses, church holidays – especially Christmas and Easter – the accompanying rites strengthened the sense of community, not only religious, but national. All the more so because parishes were formed around churches as organizations not only of a religious, but also cultural nature, bringing together lay people – young people and adults. This, consequently, became a kind of area of national self-organization, more importantly ignoring existing social (class) divisions. Thus, the Church became the mainstay of Polishness.

The period of communism was an intertwining period of conflict and relative peace, a kind of cohabitation. The Church has retained a certain margin of autonomy. The Constitution of 1952 (Constitution ... 1952) guaranteed citizens “freedom of conscience and religion” (Article 70), which also meant the possibility of participating in religious practices (no one must be forced not to take part in religious activities or rites. Nor must anyone be compelled to participate in the religious activities or rites of Article 70.)

This meant universal participation in religious practices, attending Sunday and Christmas masses, baptizing children, sending them to first communion, church weddings and religious funerals. They were often attended even by members of the Communist Party, officially declaring an atheist worldview. Significant for this “cohabitation” of communist power and the Catholic church was the State’s support for the maintenance of historical sacred buildings and the fact that between 1945 and 1988, 1803 new churches and chapels were built. It was not the State that financed them, but the faithful. They, too, were actively involved in construction and equipment work. The

building authorities had to give their consent in order for such a building to be built. This was not easy, of course, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, during periods of tension between state and ecclesiastical authorities³.

The indicator of “cohabitation” was also a certain margin of freedom for the functioning of movements and organizations related to the Church, for young people (oasis movement) and adults (e.g., Clubs of Catholic Intelligence), aid institutions (Caritas), secular publishing activities e.g. – *Znak*, *Więź*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Niedziela*, *Gość Niedzielny*, diocesan publishing houses. They were doubly dependent on the decision of the authorities – on the allocation of paper for printing the press and book publications and censorship.

There were religious, male and female orders, monastic and diocesan seminaries and, more importantly, no complaints about the lack of candidates. There was also Catholic and Christian education, at secondary and higher level – despite the liquidation in the late 1940s and early 1950s of theology faculties at Polish State universities – The Catholic University of Lublin (founded in 1918), the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Cracow, the Academy of Theology in Warsaw and the Academy of Christian Theology. Taking into account all these elements, it should be emphasized that this period saw the functioning of the Church not only in the private sphere, but also in the public sphere. This became very apparent after the election of Pope John Paul II (Cardinal Karol Wojtyła) and his pilgrimages to Poland (1979, 1983, 1987).

The Church held two more important functions. First, it assisted the emerging opposition by providing shelter and assistance to the persecuted, making its premises available for not entirely legal lectures and discussion meetings. Secondly, especially in and after martial law, it played the role of intermediary in the relations between the Communist government and the opposition – mainly Solidarity. This was particularly evident in the late 1980s, when the authorities of the Catholic Church favoured the initiative of an agreement between the communist authorities and the opposition in the form of a “Round Table”, where such an agreement was concluded. The Church’s side also participated in its deliberations (representatives of the Catholic and Augsburg Churches) as observers and mediators rather than as parties to the talks.

Undoubtedly, the Church and the organizations operating within it and on its outskirts to some extent filled what Stefan Nowak called a “sociological vacuum” – the absence of intermediate social structures between the micro and macro spheres. The micro sphere for Poles is mainly family and family ties. The macro sphere is the nation with which they identified and the sphere of state institutions, which they treated as foreign, imposed (cf. Nowak 1979). All this meant that the Church was constantly present in the lives of Poles even during communism.

Sources of the Church Authority

If we were to try to look for sources of authority of the Church in Poland, it would be necessary to refer to its historical role: political, social and cultural. Polish historiography

³ However, between 1982 and 1985, the state issued a compliant 1,376 churches (Newsweek).

of the origins of the Polish state connects with Mieszko, prince of the Polan tribe, who in 966 was baptized and married the Czech Princess Doubrava. Baptism was a political act, driving the Germans out as a pretext for invasions on the lands of the pagan Slavs. He also had cultural significance – he introduced Poland and Poles to the sphere of Latin civilization, with all the consequences – the adoption of the Latin alphabet, the Christian Latin rite, the introduction of religious orders to Polish lands, the creation of education, crowned by the founding by King Casimir the Great in Kraków in 1364. *Studium Generalae* (university).⁴

In a social sense, Christianity and Catholicism became a centre of identification in the following centuries. Consequently, the Church was regarded as a national institution and faith (religion) as an important and even dominant component of national identity. Being Catholic was a source of pride, especially after the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope (John Paul the Second).

The source of the Church's authority as an institution and clergy is also a specific Polish folk religiosity⁵. Its characteristics are: 1. focus on practices – participation in Sunday Mass, confession, participation in procession, pilgrimages, Catholic holidays, celebration of baptism, first communion, wedding, funeral, 2. low level of reflexivity over what it means to believe, to be a Christian, 3. trust in the Church and clergy; what the priest says as a representative of the Church is never called into question, 4. religiosity (faith) is a very important component of tradition as the regulator of human life (daily practices). Thus, belonging to the Catholic Church strengthened the sense of belonging to the national community, but also to the local community. It allowed us to distinguish ourselves from the "others", followers of other religions – Jews, Orthodox, "luthers" (Protestants), Muslims or non-believers.

However, there is still the property of Catholicism. It has its own state and a very extensive hierarchical structure. The faithful ("God's people") are at the very bottom. Its effect on the functioning of the entire structure is none or very negligible. The Church is not a democratic institution. Its functions are not chosen by co-religionists, but appointed by officers of the bureaucratic structure. It also affects the way of communication in the community with the "pulpit" model, a one-sided transmission and allocution according to Denis McQuail (2005). It consists in speaking to many recipients who are not able to provide feedback and, more importantly, are not expected to do so. This means a situation in which the clergy (Church) speaks, interprets the world, issues orders and expects only their acceptance and execution. This can be described as imposing authority. More importantly, it has become a common practice in the Catholic (Polish) Church, the norm governing relations between the faithful and the clergy. This means, in short, that in the folk version of Polish religiosity, the authority of the church could not be questioned.

⁴ Krakow University was created according to the Bologna model. It was renovated in 1400 in accordance with the Paris model, in which the chancellor of the university is held by the bishop. It is therefore an institution strongly associated with the church.

⁵ The term introduced into the Polish sociology of religion by E. Ciupak (1973).

The Polish Catholic Church Today

Today, the Church in Poland is a very influential institution. Its strength is rooted in the past (history) and social (folk) tradition image of religious and national institution. Its institutional authority is a consequence of being a national sanctuary in the past, both distant (period of partition) and recent (communism). Its importance today stems not only from the past, but also from the fact that 93.7% of the population declare themselves to be catholic believers (GUS 2019 p. 82).⁶

But that is not all. The Church in Poland has a very developed administrative structure. It consists of 14 metropolises (GUS 2017 p. 6), 41 dioceses, 1146 deaneries and 10263 parishes. The human resources of the Church include 30807 priests and 19386 nuns (GUS 2019 p. 82). There are 17,533 churches and chapels in Poland, and about 1,000 new ones are built each year (<https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1509302,1,kosciol-w-liczbach.read>)

The Church and its organizations are an area of engagement for lay Catholics. There are Catholic Intelligence Clubs, which are a kind of forum for meetings and discussions, as well as the Families of Radio Maryja organized by a radio station of the same name. Each parish has its own groups of committed parishioners, confessional parishioners (e.g., Rosary Roses), ministers (church service), youth oasis groups, choirs, or parish aid teams. According to ISK (Institute of Church Statistics) data, 8.5% of the Population of Poles declaring themselves Catholic are involved in activities related to the activity of the Church and its agencies.

The Church is involved in aid activities. This is done through *Caritas*, the largest charity in Poland, which is a charitable institution of the Episcopal Conference (caritas.pl/o-nas access: 20.01.2021). It has 41 diocesan branches, runs 1000 aid facilities and operates in Poland and beyond.

The strength of the Church is also determined by its commitment to educational activities. In Poland, the teaching of religion (catechesis) is conducted by public educational institutions from kindergartens to secondary schools. The school curriculum for religious lessons is designed for two lesson hours per week. The bishop (diocese) is responsible for the curriculum and selection of catechetical teachers, most often priests (14 418) and nuns, but also of lay catechist). However, the authorities running the school (local governments) bear the cost of employing catechetics. About 85% of elementary and high school students attend catechesis. Their percentage depends on the level of the school and the size of the village (the higher the level and the larger the village, the lower the percentage). To the age of majority, the decision to attend religious lessons (catechesis) is first made by the parents and later by the students themselves. It does not succumb to the fact that this is a very controversial issue. Even scholars and

⁶ These percentages look a little different when you consider data on people baptized in the Catholic ordinance. This is 85.63% of the total Population of Poles (GUS 2018). This percentage is close to declarations of membership of the Catholic Church (85.6%) kai report (ekai.pl: 20.01.2021)

publicists associated with the Church maintain that catechesis is inefficient, often has the opposite effect and does not increase participation in religious practices, acceptance of ecclesiastical norms (commandments), involvement in the activities of ecclesiastical organizations (cf. Mariański 1995).

An attention should be paid to Catholic education. The Church and its institutions (religious orders) run 567 schools (including 263 primary schools, 42 special schools, 136 high schools, 18 technicians and 8 art schools)⁷ and 69 higher education institutions, including 3 universities⁸.

No less important are the publishing activities (120 publishing houses) and Catholic media (300 magazine titles, 50 radio stations and 1 television station (<https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1509302,1,kosciol-w-liczbach.read>)). Of particular importance are *Radio Maryja*, *TV Trwam* and *Nasz Dziennik* related to Father Tadeusz Rydzyk and the conservative wing in the Church, referring in their transmissions not only to confessional issues (mass broadcasts, common prayers, pastoral talks), but also to political ones. These media are clearly right-wing and nationalist. They promote the image of a Pole Catholic, attached to the national and Catholic traditions, lasting in faith and immeasurably trusting the hierarchical church.

The Church, despite being a conservative institution, successfully uses the new media to communicate with the faithful and the surroundings of the Church. The Episcopal Conference, each diocese, religious house and the vast majority of parishes have their own websites. More importantly, they are professionally conducted and updated. They usually include an information section about the diocese itself, its activities and confessional activities – prayers, homilies, readings of the Gospel. Similarly, parish parties are organized. They contain useful information for the faithful about the order of services, current actions, groups operating in the parish, planned pilgrimages.

In addition to these pages, there are social networking sites (portals) that are spaces for discussion, for resolving doubts, but above all for evangelization activities. There are more than a dozen of them. The most popular are: Matthew, Opoka, Jesus, Apostle – Catholic Youth Service. There is also a YouTube channel of father Adam Szustak – Langust on the Palm Tree.

Two more issues are important for the characterisation of the Church's situation in Poland. The first is its economic status. It is not a poor institution. On the contrary, it owns land and real estate. But it also benefits from state support. It is a Church Fund, from which the social security of priests and nuns is mainly paid, depending on the financial year about 90 – 100 million PLN. Additional financial benefits of the Church include customs exemptions, reliefs, university subsidies, the maintenance of lecturers in seminaries, the salaries of catechist teachers in public kindergartens and schools, the salaries of chaplains in the military (131), police (19), fire brigades (16), border guards (10) and others, including those working in hospitals. In addition, ecclesiastical

⁷ Depending on the source, different numbers of catholic schools and universities are given – from 67,500 (KAI) to more than one million (Politics).

⁸ There are also theological faculties at 9 Polish universities.

institutions receive grants for specific projects – e.g. Youth Days, museums, etc. Again, depending on the financial year, these amounts are up to several billion zlotys (PLN).

Therefore, its location in the social space and the means of influence at its disposal render the Church a very influential institution. Its means of influence are not only traditional – pulpit, catechesis, confession and control over the daily practices of the faithful – it is also a place where children are baptized and enter the first communion, it is a home for the rich setting of weddings or for Catholic funerals in usually parish cemeteries. This is a tool for the clergy to exert influence, but also a source of income. These are opportunities for influence within local communities. In smaller localities – small towns, villages – the parish priest is an undisputed authority, using not only the Weberian traditional, but also charismatic (charisma of the church as an institution). It also (the Church) influences the decisions, practices, and daily behavior of members of the community. No wonder, then, that individual politicians and political groups are seeking its support, or at least neutrality. In return, the Church receives various reliefs and assistance, guaranteeing its independence from the State resulting not only from the Concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland of 1998, No. 51, item 318). A good example is the State-funded (budgets of individual ministries) Temple of Divine Providence in Warsaw (in the part considered a museum – the national pantheon), or the museum in Toruń.

It is worth noting that the Church is taking advantage of its position to influence the decisions of state authorities, e.g., legislation – particularly sensitive are the issues of admissibility of abortion, which the Church opposes in the name of doctrine.

The Polish Catholic Church at the Crossroads

In the previous paragraph, I characterized the current situation of the Catholic Church in Poland to indicate the sources of its authority and authority (in the Max Weber sense) at its disposal. It is difficult to find political organisations and groups that could match it in this area. However, the public discourse in the media (mainly the press and television) indicates that it is facing the problem of maintaining its existing credibility. I have already mentioned certain points above.

What arouses particular interest and criticism at the same time, not only of people outside the church, but also of Catholic columnists, is the Church's involvement in politics. Of course, believers, members of the Church's community have their own constitutional civil rights guaranteeing their active and passive participation in politics, especially elections – presidential, parliamentary and self-government. Clerics have the same rights if they are not restricted by canonic law. However, the problem is that the Church and its representatives (bishops, parish priests) support right-wing or even nationalist groups during election periods. Often mass sermons turn into election agitation, encouraging its participants to vote for specific candidates, or more generally – “a Catholic should vote for a Catholic”. The same tone dominates the Catholic media (press, radio, television), although exceptions can be found here – the magazines “Więź”,

“Znak”, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, which have a more liberal-democratic orientation, opt for mutual tolerance, respect for different views.

The allegations against the clergy also relate to their involvement on the part of nationalist organisations with a clear anti-Semitic, anti-European, anti-liberal and anti-democratic attitude. This does not mean that church authorities always tolerate or support such involvement. The case of former priest Jacek Międlar, who was removed from the clerical state proves this. However, these are not common cases.

Its attempt to influence the Episcopate on the legislation was not met with approval. I mentioned the issue of abortion early on – the Church mandates the protection of life from conception to natural death, which also means a lack of acceptance of euthanasia. Another issue is the problem of civil partnerships, particularly same-sex marriage, and the possibility for such couples to adopt children. The Church takes the view that marriage: (1) is a sacramental, inseparable, (2) union between a man and a woman whose primal function is (3) procreation (contraception, premarital and extramarital sex is unacceptable, it is a sin), and (4) raising children in the Catholic spirit. It tries to interfere with school programs by organizing parents’ opposition to sex education lessons, also pressing the educational authorities to abolish or very severely restrict or introduce mainly Catholic content into them and entrust them to teachers of this orientation (catechists, graduates of the fields of preparation for life in the family of Catholic universities).

In my opinion, the desire to introduce religious norms into state law (not all Poles are Catholics, and the law applies to everyone) is an indicator of the crisis of the process of evangelization and catechesis. Observance of the commandments is proposed to replace compliance with properly formulated (in the spirit of the commandments) norms of state law (criminal, as in the case of abortion or euthanasia), or civil law (divorce, same-sex marriage). Pressure is being exerted on gynecologists not to carry out prenatal examinations and abortions (they sign “conscience clauses” to justify refusals to perform tests and procedures). Similarly, pharmacists are pressured to restrict access to contraception. The Church is against extra-systemic (in vitro) fertilization.

As a result, the Church is increasingly being seen not as an institution that joins society, but as an institution that emphasizes divisions, or even divides them into reluctant or even hostile groups. This is to emphasize the attachment and importance of traditional values, rooted in the Church’s teaching, nationalist patriotism, reluctance to change and openness to others and Europe. It opposes two civilizations of “life” – Polish, Catholic, national, traditionally oriented – and “death” – non-Polish, European, cosmopolitan tolerant or areligious and modern, emphasizing the importance of liberalism and individualism.

All this collides with the social changes that have taken place in Poland as a result of the systemic transformation, the transition from authoritarian communism to a pluralistic and democratic system. The opening up to the world that culminated in Poland’s membership in the European Union was of no less importance. Poles have come into contact with something new, with a different culture, with different rules governing

social, economic and political life. Many went to study abroad, to Western Europe, the United States. Even more have found work and a new place to live in EU countries. This process also meant diffusion of cultural patterns, ways of thinking and different perceptions of the state-religion relationship and its institutions. They saw that the standard was separation of Church and State, tolerance for followers of other religions and dissenting views. They saw that democracy does not only mean the domination of the majority, but also respect and consideration for the rights of minorities. All the more so because modern communication media have introduced them to a globalised, market-oriented, consumption-oriented world.

The Church has found itself in a completely new situation. Its hierarchs and clergy were (and they still are) strongly conservative. They are a product of The Church of John Paul II. Nowadays, it is difficult for them to find themselves in the Church of Francis I with his social progression, openness to secularism, moving away from the present feudal institutional order. The faithful change (changed), especially the younger. They are better educated, have easy contact with the world, perceive the rules and norms of social life differently. They have their own needs and expectations, divergent from those proposed by the conservative-traditionalist model promoted by the Church.

Let us try to look at some of the phenomena which, in my opinion, are signs of the crisis of the modern Polish Church. I have written before about the limited evangelizing role of religious lessons (catechesis) in schools.

The second fact is participation in religious practices. Recall that 85.6% declare their membership of the Catholic Church. However, only 34% those are obliged⁹ to participate in Sunday mass, and 17-18% join communion (*comunicantes*). Of course, there are differences between dioceses. In those planted in south-eastern Poland (dioceses of Tarnów, Rzeszow, Przemyśl), the percentage of *dominantes* is much higher (above 55%), while in dioceses in western and north-western Poland, it is much lower (below 30%). The same is true of the percentage of *communicantes* (ASEiP 2020, p. 28). This means that the south-east of the country is more religious. This may be due to the fact that these are less urbanised and industrialised areas. It is also important that these are traditional communities in an area that is not very attractive to potential migrants.

Other determinants are important. Young people and residents of larger cities are much less likely to attend church on Sundays. In these categories, the percentage decreases of *dominantes* are pronounced. This means that the Church has a weaker impact on the generation of young city dwellers, necessarily better educated than the generation of parents and much better than the generation of grandparents.

According to analysts of the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church, there is a trend of a decrease in participation in Sunday Masses. Moreover, Poland is the country where this process occurs the fastest. The percentage of *communicantes* does not

⁹ According to *Dominantes*, the "obliged" methodology is for people over 7 years of age, but people who are sick, elderly with limited mobility are excluded from this collection. This generally accounts for 82% of the faithful. - <http://iskk.pl/badania/religijnosc/47-uncategorised/63-dominantes> access:

change significantly, which means that those attending Sunday Masses are more likely to enter holy communion. So those who practice do so less superficially.

For many years Poland was a country with a large number of vocations. These numbers increased especially during the pontification of John Paul II. Poland was then an “exporter” of clergy (priests and nuns). They worked in Western Europe, but also in Africa and Latin America. Today there is a decrease in vocations, there are fewer candidates for seminaries (diocesan and religious) and religious orders (male and female). Some seminars suspend activities because there are no takers. There are also those where the number of clerics is smaller than that of the lecturers. The consequence is also a decrease in the number of priests, religious brothers and nuns.

According to the data cited above, the Church has a problem with young people. It has its sources, on the one hand, in the conservatism of the Church and its politicisation and, on the other, in the means of communication. For the younger generation, the communication model is not allocution, typical of communication in the Church, where one-way communication dominates, but conversation or consultation (McQuail 2005), where two parties are involved in the process. More importantly, the younger generation are *digital natives*, with great digital competence, accustomed to using new media (Paul Levenson’s term 2010). This space is dominated by conversation and consultation.

This may seem contrary to the data on the Church’s activity on the Internet, but it is worth noting that websites – diocesan and parochial – are primarily informative in nature. They are a kind of bulletin boards. There is no room for dialogue there.

Catholic social networking sites (portals) are also message-oriented, although there are more opportunities for exchange of views. As a rule, you can pose a question, present your opinion. However, it is difficult to count on the other (ecclesiastical) side to be convinced. This side is always right. There is always justification in doctrine and Scripture. This interlocutor is to be convinced.

It is also worth noting the discrepancy between declarations: being Catholic and a church member, and accepting and upholding norms of ecclesial doctrine. Poles - Catholics according to various surveys accept: divorce, pre-marriage sex, contraception, prenatal testing, extraoral fertilization (in vitro), abortion (not unconditionally), and therefore reject what the church dictates. They have doubts about whether religious lessons (catechesis) should take place in schools or outside them, in parish halls. They believe that preventing abortion is not a legal norm in the form of criminal law and stand for sex education, the availability of contraception, assistance of women giving birth to children, i.e., funding for crèches and kindergartens giving them the opportunity to return to work, programmes to combat (reduce) domestic violence and state care for the disabled.

Poles – Catholics also do not accept a kind of cultural war with the so-called “gender ideology” and “LGBT ideology”, in which the Church – bishops, parish priests – is an active party. The gender discourse is a denial of the natural order, it is to impose a “leftist and feminist” vision of the world. It was Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski who used the term “rainbow plague” to refer to people with different sexual orientations, while the

current President of Poland in the election campaign became famous for the term “LGBT is not people, but ideology”. The effects are worrying. There are local governments that adopt resolutions that they are “LGBT-free”, perhaps unaware that this is strongly associated with the term “Juden freie Zone used by the Germans during World War II. For these local authorities, the consequences are unpleasant, as partner regions and cities from the European Union suspend or end cooperation, which also means financial losses – lack of funds for youth exchanges or withdrawal of the Norwegian Fund from the financing of regional projects in Podkarpacie.

No less important is the decline in trust in the Church. According to the CBOS survey, between March and December 2020 alone, there was an increase in negative ratings from 32% to 47%¹⁰. This means that more than half of those surveyed have a negative opinion of the Church’s activities, compared with 62% of respondents in March 2014 and only 29% negatively (Chrzczonowicz 2020). The reasons for this state, analysts (Khabasiński 2021, Chrzczonowicz 2021) see in the excessive involvement of the Church on the side of the ruling law and justice party, in the campaign against LGBT and gender and the criticism of the movements of environmental and climate defenders. No less important are the demonstrative affluence of the hierarchs and the Church, the opacity of its functioning and the evasion of legal responsibility. And they reinforce the reluctance to clergy revealed pedophile scandals and bishops’ inaction and slowness in cooperation with State law enforcement authorities (police and prosecutor’s office¹¹).

There is no doubt that the Polish catholic Church is going through a difficult period. I have already written about some of the symptoms of the crisis in which I have found myself. However, it is worth pointing to slightly more general processes. The situation of the church is undoubtedly influenced by the rapid processes of social change that are taking place in modern society. These are processes of globalisation and modernisation that change the positions of religions and religious institutions in society. On the one hand, we have the revitalisation of Orthodoxy in Russia, Ukraine and in the Balkans as a reaction to the imposed official atheism in the countries of the communist bloc, but also to appreciate religion as an important element of national identity. We are also dealing with the expansion of Islam and Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’. Islam plays an important role as an identity factor.

On the other hand, we are dealing with processes of secularisation, especially in the public sphere, which is regarded as a common space for followers of different religions and non-believers. The state and its institutions – e.g., the education system – should be world-neutral or simply secular as in France. Sociologists of religion do not agree on whether we are actually dealing with processes of secularization or rather with

¹⁰ The IBRIS survey for the Rzeczpospolita shows an even stronger decrease in trust in the Church to 39.5% (Khabasiński 2020) 41% of those surveyed in the quoted CBOS survey issues positive ratings to the Cauldrons.

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the search for other spiritualities. According to Janusz Mariański, there is a process of “creeping secularization” in Poland.

The second process that sociologists of religion write about is the process of privatization and individualization. Religion, the way it is professed and manifested, becomes a private matter. For this, the archaic, hierarchical structure of the Church is no longer needed. The need for one’s own spirituality can be realized beyond it.

Finally, the third process, which I believe is participation for the young. One can get the impression that they treat religion and religious institutions like a supermarket – they choose from them what suits them, at a reasonable price. Solemn wedding in the church at the price of participation in the preparation of nupturients, confession and financial costs – yes. Keeping the commandments – not necessarily. Systematic participation in practices also does not¹².

What Next?

Today, two trends are colliding in the Polish Church. The first is striving to preserve the *status quo* – to emphasize the hierarchical version of the Church with the domination of the clergy and to limit the layman in decision-making and tighten control over the faithful. The Church adopts the logic of a “besieged fortress” – it must defend itself against the attacks of “enemies” – emancipatory, feminist, gender and LGBT movements, left-wing groups demanding a reduction in the Church’s presence in public spaces (education, state and local celebrations), against a layman who wants to be more involved in decision-making processes in the Church. Proponents of this option call on the faithful to defend the Church.

The second is the trend for change in the Church. It insists on the primacy of the evangelizing function instead of interfering with state policy, opening up to new movements and new trends (such as the privatisation of religion), the involvement of the laity in the decision-making process, making the Church and its actions more transparent, changing the form of communication with the faithful with an emphasis on dialogue and, finally, making the Church an institution and a community. The Church is to unite, not to divide and exclude – from the community of believers, the national community.

This trend also emphasizes the need for a livelier theological debate within the Church, an attempt to answer the question of what it means to “believe” today, what forms evangelization should take in order to attract new believers. Perhaps it is also about the Church being more open to a changing world, seeing the problems that arise in it, taking a stand on the most important issues of the present – protecting the planet (climate, environment), limiting international expansion of profit-oriented, corporations, eliminating or at least reducing social inequalities, ensuring a dignified life for all people.

¹² This view falls within the so-called market theory of religion (economics of religion). However, I am not interested in the relationship between different faiths (religions), offers, the way *institutions are organized, the efficiency of sales managers* as in R. Finke and R. Stark (Crooked 2016), but approach to the same Church and the confession of its followers.

Which of these trends will prevail? Only God knows. But the Church is an institution with a long history. During its 2000 years of existence, it has demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing conditions generated by the external environment and to overcome internal crises.

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