

Religion and Politics in Contemporary Poland

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The mutual relationships between religion and politics have been subject to Comparative Religion studies in Poland both before 1990 and after the breakdown of the “real socialism”, and this period is often, but with great oversimplification, referred to as “Communism”. Prior to 1990, these studies were dominated by the issues encompassed under such titles as: “Confessional Policy of the People’s Republic of Poland”, and in particular the “State-Church Relations”. Moreover, there was an interest in the issue of the “Social Doctrine of the Church”, and after the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as the Pope, additional attention was given to the Pope’s social-political views expressed in the homilies preached in the context of numerous pilgrimages and in many Church documents (*e.g.* the encyclicals).

The Roman-Catholic Church in Poland was perceived then by the Polish Communist authorities as the main force opposing the Marxist ideology and the ruling Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) as it also often provided measurable support to various political groups that were, in fact, in opposition to the PZPR – including those that had liberal or leftist-lay character (*e.g.*, Workers Defense Committee – KOR) – and did not employ religious rhetoric although it was often a religious place (RI rooms or simply churches or chapels) which provided the venue where under the then prevailing conditions the representatives of the opposition groups could freely express their views.

In 1988, just a year before the downfall of the Iron Curtain and the transformation of the political system, some thirty Churches and denominations were registered in the People’s Republic of Poland (PRL) and it had remained about so (with only a little change) since late 1950’s. After the system transformation, in the 1990’s, there was a significant increase in the number of newly registered religious organizations¹.

A breakthrough in the internal policy and the relationships between the government of the People’s Republic of Poland and the Roman Catholic Church becomes evident during the years 1980 and 1981. The introduction of the Martial Law on December 13, 1981 and the liquidation of the Independent Self-

¹ A. Tokarczyk, *Trzydzieści wyznań*, Warszawa 1971; Z. Pasek, *Charakterystyka Kościołów i Związków religijnych zarejestrowanych w Polsce w latach 1988-1995*, „Nomos. Kwartalnik Religioznawczy” 1995, s. 5-18; M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, *Kościół i związki wyznaniowe w Polsce. Mały słownik*, Warszawa 2001; X. Хоффманн, З. Пасек, *Конфессиональная ситуация в Польше [в:] Взаимоотношения религиозных конфессий в многонациональном регионе*, Севастополь 2001, с. 148-154.

Governing Trade Union „Solidarity” (NSZZ „Solidarność”) brought about the liberalization of the State-Church relationship which was a peculiar paradox. It manifested itself in the government authorities’ permission to build new churches, in significant extension of publishing activity, etc. Despite this liberalization, the surveillance and persecution of activist priests and lay activists of the Church continued, a stunning example of which was the murder of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko in 1984 by the operatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ political police called at that time “the Security Service” (SB)².

It must be stressed that the above mentioned liberalization in the mid-1980’s was also beneficial for non-Catholic Christian denominations and various other religions (e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.). Emissaries of new religious movements began to come to Poland more frequently and in greater numbers during that period³.

After the fall of the “real socialism” in Poland, the legal status of religious organizations underwent a significant change. The earlier limitations and repression of the Roman-Catholic Church were treated by the first („non-communist” – elected in partially independent elections) government of Premier Tadeusz Mazowiecki as religious persecution. Accordingly, one of the priorities of that government was to make quick and radical changes in this area. The law on the freedom of conscience and worship of May 17, 1989, together with several subsequent modifications regulated, for the period of several years, the functioning of religious life in Poland and the mutual “State-Church” relations⁴. The law differentiated the treatment of various churches and faith communities. It provided that the relations between the State and the twelve largest (those with the longest history in Poland) churches and religious organizations would be governed by separate laws or government decrees. Other denominations were to be registered with the Bureau of Denominational Affairs (later, the Department for Denominational Affairs) of the Office of the Council of the Ministers, and currently the Department of Religious Denominations and National and Ethnic Minorities at the Ministry of the Interior and Administration.

From this time on, all churches and faith communities applying for registration were entered into the register. The Department of Religious Denominations required then only properly filled out registration application. The law provided that the registration application of a church or a religious association must include: (1) a written request for registration, (2) a charter, (3) a declaration of the principles of faith, and (4) signatures of 15 members (citizens

² Ibidem, s. 148.

³ T. Doktor, *Nowe ruchy religijne i parareligijne*, „Euhemer. Przegląd Religioznawczy” 1991, nr 4, s. 99-108; Z. Pawłowicz, *Kościół i sekty w Polsce*, Gdańsk 1992; K. Urban, *Mniejszości religijne w Polsce 1945-1991 (zarys statystyczny)*, Kraków 1994.

⁴ M. Pietrzak, *Prawo wyznaniowe*, Warszawa 1993; X. Хоффманн, З. Пасек, *Конфессиональная ситуация в Польше ...*, op. cit., s. 148.

of Poland). In the years 1989-91, all applying groups were routinely registered, without any special limitation or closer review, as a result of which there was uncontrolled increase in the number of various religious organizations.

This caused concern in the Roman-Catholic Church as well as among general public resulting in the 1997's legal change (new provisions became effective as of June 1, 1998). In addition to limitation of certain privileges, the number of citizens required for an application for registration of a religious organization was increased from 15 to 100.

As previously mentioned, the majority of the large and long-time established churches and religious associations (currently 15) have their own legislation; the remaining are registered on the list of churches and religious associations at the Department of Religious Denominations and National and Ethnic Minorities at the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. Currently, the list contains 160 organizations (with their number constantly changing as some are removed from the register and others – though not as frequently as before – added to it). It needs to be emphasized that Poland has numerous religious organizations which are not registered. It is difficult to estimate their number with certain degree of precision. These organizations function without any limitations; they benefit from the general protection by the law, however, they do not enjoy the privileges bestowed by formal registration. The relationship with the Roman-Catholic Church are regulated by an international agreement – the Concordat. Therefore, to sum up, Poland now has three forms of legal regulation of the relations between the State and religious denominations: (1) the Concordat, (2) Legislation, and (3) registration on the list of Department of Religious Denominations and National and Ethnic Minorities at the Ministry of the Interior and Administration⁵.

Despite a relatively large number of (albeit, for most part, not populous) denominational minorities in Poland, Poland is practically mono-confessional with the dominance of the Roman-Catholic Church. Research by various polling agencies and organizations employing various criteria indicates that more than 90 percent of the population declares membership in the Roman-Catholic Church.

The contemporary Polish Catholicism is characterized by great differentiation of socio-political and religious positions. Two of the main trends called the “Toruń Church” and the “Łagiewniki Church”, have been recognized – although more in the socio-political media activity than in reality.

The former, associated with the Redemptorist Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, has followers among the supporters and listeners of “Radio Maryja”, with its headquarters in Toruń. It is conservative, anti-liberal and nationalist. Once

⁵ K. Urban, *Z problematyki legalizacji nowych związków religijnych w Polsce w latach 1977-1997*, „Nomos. Kwartalnik Religioznawczy” 1998, nr 22/23, s. 87-106; X. Хоффманн, З. Пасек, *Конфессиональная ситуация в Польше ...*, op. cit., s. 149.

widespread, it is increasingly losing influence and becoming (especially after Poland's entry in the European Union) a relic of the past.

The Łagiewniki Church is, on the other hand, the continuation of those trends in the Polish Catholicism which were earlier referred to as an „Open Church”. They are identified currently with the Kraków Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz as the successor of the ideas of John Paul II and represented by the periodical „Tygodnik Powszechny” („Popular Weekly”) and the editing house ZNAK⁶.

Analyzing the relations between religion (the Roman-Catholic Church) and the politics in the post-communist period in Poland, one can observe interesting changes. The Church (the Gdańsk Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski was particularly involved here) in the period around the September 19, 1993 elections, clearly supported the centers of the Christian-National Union (ZChN), acting in coalition with other smaller parties as the Catholic Electoral Committee “Homeland”. In spite of the support, the Committee received only 6.37% of the votes and did not reach the electoral threshold (8%). Thus the votes were wasted. This was magnified by the fragmentation of the rightist parties as a result of which no seat in the Parliament (Sejm) was won despite a total of 20.76% of all votes (and thus more than the winning Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) which received 20.41% of the votes. This opened the way for the formation of the coalition government – SLD and the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) – which remained in power (in spite of various internal conflicts) until the following election. The fragmentation of the right also made it possible for the leftist (post-communist) candidate to defeat the legend of Solidarity, Lech Wałęsa, in the second round of voting of the presidential elections of 1995 by 51.7% to 49.3%. In the next presidential election in year 2000 A. Kwaśniewski won in the first run, getting 53.9% of votes.

Mindful of the experience with the political involvement in the first part of the 1990's, the hierarchy of the Roman-Catholic Church in Poland now is rather low key in commenting on the most important political events (e.g., elections). The broad coalition of the parties of the right called the Electoral Action Solidarity (AWS) did not receive such a clear support of the Church in spite of including Catholic Social Doctrine as the basis for the social policy in its electoral program. As a result of numerous internal divisions and failure to fulfill electoral promises, the representative of AWS (or of what remained of it) were not elected for the next term of the Sejm, which allowed the leftist coalition SLD – Work Union – to assume power in 2001 and together with the PSL form the government. As a result of numerous corruption scandals, the SLD fell apart and the next election was won by a small margin by Law and Justice (PiS) (26.99%) over the liberal Citizen Platform (PO) (24.14%). It was hoped (as both parties declared before the election) that a so called “great coalition” of PO-PiS would be

⁶ J. Gowin, *Kościół po komunizmie*, Kraków 1995; A. Szostkiewicz, *Dym kadzideł i bitewny pył*, „Polityka” 2007, nr 17/18, s. 38-39.

formed. Unfortunately, because of the differences (mostly personal as the program issues played a lesser role) among the leaders of both parties the formation of such a coalition did not come to pass. Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz was designated as the Prime Minister (temporarily, as it turned out), and he was replaced after seven months by Jarosław Kaczyński. Unable to come to an understanding with PO to form a stable parliamentary majority, PiS became associated with the ultra-Catholic and nationalist League of Polish Families (LPR) and populist Self-Defense – the last two parties considered “exotic” on the Polish political scene. The coalition with the latter was a great surprise as the leaders of PiS party often denied its possibility before the election.

The Roman-Catholic Church hierarchy in Poland tried to avoid clear involvement with any one of the sides, likely unwilling to repeat the mistake made in 1993. However, both PiS and LPR attempted to use the Radio Maryja for their immediate gain. Its listeners in large part represented the electorate of both parties and mostly supported the PiS candidate Lech Kaczyński in the presidential election. This occasioned a comment from the leaders of PO that the results of the election were determined by the so called “mohair berets”, a name given to the listeners of Radio Maryja, mainly elderly women with devotional and populist inclinations often resorting to nationalist rhetoric.

The situation after the election of 2005 appears very favorable for the Polish Church. After all, the power is in the hands of the coalition, the representatives of which declare the agreement of their personal convictions and political aims with the Social Doctrine of the Church. It is now, however, that the authority of the Church has been tattered more than at any time in the post-war history of Poland. Two years after the death of the Polish Pope, the Church is torn by the “battle for vetting” or screening which was caused (this must be surprising to the Church) in its own ranks by Fr. Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zalewski and some of the media people on the right. The Church always declared the willingness to conduct vetting among the clergy but it has always wanted to do it on its own, using the rigorous research by scholars familiar with the reality in communist Poland (both Church and outside scholars), without the atmosphere of attacks on particular priests and bishops, the most evident example of which was the scandal surrounding the ingress of the Warsaw Archbishop Stanisław Wielgus who was judged without a formal vetting process, solely on the basis of communists’ Security Service (SB) materials⁷.

The second – and perhaps the more important – experience of the Church is the current issue of “protection of life from conception to natural death”. This “pro-life” action was spearheaded by the LPR leader Roman Giertych whose party is quickly losing social support. This issue led to the division of the political right and caused a great concern among the Church hierarchy and among the faithful. Protection of life is one of the corner stones of the contemporary

⁷ Cf. A. Szostkiewicz, *op. cit.*, s. 38-39.

Teaching of the Church, the object of particular care of John Paul II. Any Catholic who expresses any doubts in this matter– even most justified – can be discredited as a traitor⁸.

The Church will certainly deal in the future with the issues presented here but its involvement in these political adventures (often unintentional) demonstrates the difficulty of separating the matter of the Church from the politics. The new development gives a unique opportunity to those who study the socio-political and religious changes taking place in the post-communist countries (including Poland) since the early 1990's. One can examine the stormy social, political and religious processes, if you will, *in statu nascendi*, posit predictions and quickly verify them.

The interrelations between religion and politics after the fall of Communism have been a subject of extensive research at the Institute of Religious Studies at the Jagiellonian University. One may already be tempted to compare earlier prognoses with today's reality. Such comparison would allow a conclusion that the black scenarios of Poland turning into a „confessional State” did not come to pass, while the Church (despite unquestionable growth of its influence on social life) is experiencing many challenges resulting from contemporary socio-political changes.

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⁸ Ibidem, s. 39.

Resumé

Náboženství a politika v současném Polsku

Vztahy náboženství a politiky byly v Polsku předmětem religionistických bádání jak před rokem 1990, tak i po pádu „reálného socialismu“ – často nazývaného také komunismem.

Římskokatolická církev v Polsku byla před rokem 1990 považována – skrze tehdejší vládní úřady – za hlavní zdroj odporu vůči marxistické ideologii a vládnoucí polské komunistické straně (PZPR). Často také projevovala podporu různým opozičním politickým uskupením – nevyjímaje ty, které měly liberální nebo dokonce i levicově laický charakter (např. Komitet Obrony Robotników – KOR) a neodvolávaly se na církevní rétoriku.

Současný polský katolicismus obsahuje velké množství rozrůzněných společensko-politických a náboženských postojů. Jeho dva hlavní proudy se zformovaly spíše ve společensko-politické publicistice než v každodenní realitě a jsou nazývané: „farnost torunská“ a „farnost langievická“. První z nich je konzervativní, antiliberální a národně demokratický a je spojován s redemptoristickým knězem Tedeuszem Rydzykem, který má v Polsku celou řadu okruhů příznivců i posluchačů „Rádia Marie“ („Radio Maryja“). Dříve byl tento proud početný, ale v posledních letech ztrácí čím dál tím vliv a stává se (zvláště po vstupu Polska do Evropské unie) svérázným skanzenem.

Farnost langievická měla být pokračováním těch proudů polského katolicismu, které dříve byly označovány jako „otevřená církev“. Je ztotožňován z krakovským metropolitou kardinálem Stanisławem Dziwiszem jako pokračovatelem idejí papeže Jana Pavla II a je reprezentován skrze časopis „Tygodnik Powszechny“ a také střediska ZNAK.

Situace po parlamentních volbách v roce 2005 se zdála být pro římskokatolickou církev velmi výhodná, neboť vlády se ujala koalice, jejíž představitelé deklarují shodu vlastních přesvědčení a politických cílů s učením církve. A právě v současnosti je autorita katolické církve podlomená tak jako nikdy v poválečné historii Polska, což je způsobeno především díky jejím zapletení se do sporů o lustrace a „ochranu života od doby početí do jeho přirozené smrti“. Pravicové strany hledající její oporu jí zatahují do politických sporů, přičemž etické otázky jsou ve skutečnosti jen záminkou.

Katolická církev si jistě v budoucnu poradí se zde uvedenými problémy, ale samotné její zaplétání se do politických avantýr (často proti jejím intencím) ukazuje, že je obtížné oddělit zájmy církve od běžné politiky. Pro badatele společensko-politických vztahů se v postkomunistických zemích (a současně i v Polsku) po změnách na počátku 90. let 20. století objevila jedinečná situace, ve které je možné bouřlivé společenské, politické i náboženské procesy sledovat jaksi ve stavu zrodu, tedy provádět různé prognózy a rychle je verifikovat.

Henryk Hoffmann, dr. hab., je členem katedry dějin náboženství Institutu religionistiky Jagellonské univerzity v Krakově. Specializuje se na teorii a dějiny náboženství a také na teorii a metodologii religionistiky. Je autorem více než 140 vědeckých prací a dvou knih: *Astralistyka. (Szkice z dziejów religioznawstwa polskiego)*, Krakov 1991 a také *Dzieje polskich badań religioznawczych 1873-1939*, Krakov 2004. První z nich je částečně upravenou verzí doktorské práce obhájené v roce 1985 pod názvem *Szkoła astralistyczna w religioznawstwie polskim*. Tato práce vyšla rovněž v ruštině: *Звезды и боги. Астрально-мифологическая школа в религиоведении*, Севастополь 2003. Druhá z knižních publikací byla předložena jako habilitační práce. Henryk Hoffmann je také autorem několika set hesel v různých encyklopediích, lexikonech a slovnících (populárních i odborných). Vedle toho publikoval několik desítek hesel v 9 dílné encyklopedii *Religia. Encyklopedia PWN*, Varšava 2001-2003. Je také šéfredaktorem religionistického časopisu „Nomos. Kwartalnik Religioznawczy” a členem redakční rady časopisu polské religionistické asociace (PTR) „Przegląd Religioznawczy” jakož i členem výkonného výboru asociace.