

# Religious Power as a Form of Political Power<sup>1</sup>

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Undoubtedly, the question of power is one of the most difficult and complex phenomena to analyze. For instance, in the opinion of M. Foucault, “the question of power, a question that no theoretical system – whether the philosophy of history or a general theory of society, or even a political theory – seems able to deal with.”<sup>2</sup> This question was present, both in social and political reality and in the social and political thought, from the very beginning of human civilization. The political and social spheres of life were strictly interconnected in the system of Greek *polis*. “The ancient *polis* combined both the social and political functions and can serve as the model and ideal concept of the so-called ‘civil society’.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps that is why the famous Aristotelian notion of *zoon politikon* is impossible to translate literary into any modern language. The political and socio-economic spheres of life were interconnected perhaps up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For instance:

While British and French troops were fighting Russians for the Crimea, the British allowed the Russian government to raise a loan on the London stock market, and the French invited the Russian government to participate in an international exhibition of industry and the arts. The ordinary way of business should not be interfered with, declared the British Foreign Secretary.<sup>4</sup>

This interconnection between different kinds of power changed dramatically during the First World War. The total character of the First World War was

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with M. Foucault, in: M. Foucault, *Power*, ed. J.D. Faubion, New York 2000, p.284.

<sup>3</sup> M. Żyromski, *legitimization. Between political sciences and sociology*, [in:] *Prawo – władza – suwerenność*, ed. R. Kozłowski, K. M. Cern, Poznań 2004, p.179.

<sup>4</sup> M. Mann, *The sources of social power, vol.II The rise of classes and nation-states, 1760 – 1914*, Cambridge University Press 1993, p.286 – 287.

expressed not only on the battlefields (for instance the poison gas was not used even during the Second World War) but at home, too. The enormous war propaganda (or even war hysteria) now looks quite silly. For instance, the British prohibited the word “hamburger” because it resembled the German city of Hamburg (the name of Salisbury steak had been promoted) and the Russians changed the name of Petersburg (because it sounded too German) into Petrograd.

Undoubtedly, the question of power is not only a complex one, but the notion itself is a multidimensional phenomenon. For instance, as already cited in this paper, Michael Mann introduced IEMP model of power. “My overall theory remains unchanged. Four sources of social power – ideological, economic, military and political – fundamentally determine the structure of societies.”<sup>5</sup> Of course, each of these four types of power very rarely exists in isolation from the other forms of power. And so, these four types of power should be treated rather in terms of the Weberian ideal type than as particular social and political realities. Besides, some other forms of power could be mentioned. For example, Foucault introduced the notion of “medical power”, especially important since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because “the doctor is qualified, the doctor knows the diseases.”<sup>6</sup> He also introduced a very interesting type of power - so-called “pastoral power”. In his opinion, this form of power was created in the ancient East (and especially among the Jews). “It is this type of power that was introduced into the West by Christianity and took an institutional form in the ecclesiastical pastorate.”<sup>7</sup> Besides, with the new century and the new millennium, a new type of power (or rather a kind of political power) has perhaps emerged, I mean the terrorist power.<sup>8</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> century began with the tragedy of the twin towers in New York on September 11th, 2001. Certainly, this was the most deadly act of terror in the history of mankind. Nevertheless, I think that from the political point of view an even more relevant one was the train bombing near Atocha train station in Madrid on March 11th, 2004. After September 11th, the most important features of American policy remained virtually the same. On the other hand “it can be assumed that the outcome of parliamentary elections in Spain was greatly influenced by this bomb attack near Atocha train station, which changed the preference of voters in favor of the socialist party, whose leaders promised the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq (this promise was fulfilled just one month

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<sup>5</sup> M. Mann, *The sources of social power, vol.II The rise of classes and nation-states, 1760 – 1914*, Cambridge University Press 1993, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> M. Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, [in:] M. Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. P. Reabinov, New York 1997, p.44.

<sup>7</sup> M. Foucault, *Security, territory and population*, [in:] M. Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. P. Reabinov, New York 1997, p.68.

<sup>8</sup> M. Żyromski, *Terroristic power. A new kind of political power ? [in :] Terrorism as a timeless actor on the international stage*, ed. S. Wojciechowski, Poznań 2005, p.31 – 37.

after the parliamentary victory of Jose Luis Zapatero).”<sup>9</sup> Of course, the problem of terrorism and the growing intensity of terrorist acts in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is too complex to be analyzed by the single factor only. Nevertheless, one of the main factors (together with political and economic ones) was certainly the religious factor. Undoubtedly, the fundamentalist groups could be discovered amongst any religions, but nowadays the Islamic fundamentalism proved itself to be the most dangerous and deadly.

In the already mentioned IEMP model of power, we cannot find religious power. In the opinion of Gianfranco Poggi, who devoted all his book to the analysis of different forms of power<sup>10</sup>, religious power can be viewed as a form of ideological power. The religious power is one of the oldest forms of power because it is deeply connected with human character. The “religious power rests in the individual’s need for a feeling of moral security, a sense of personal worth.”<sup>11</sup> Since the beginning of human civilization religion, and more generally beliefs in a supernatural order, has become an important part of the process of legitimization of power. “Where power is acquired and exercised according to justifiable rules and with evidence of consent, we call it rightful or legitimate.”<sup>12</sup> And so, religion formed an important part of the legitimacy (or of political formula to use Gaetano Mosca’s term<sup>13</sup>) of the first great empires created in the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. along great rivers (such as Egypt on the Nile). In the political and social system of these so-called “hydraulic societies”<sup>14</sup> the religious legitimacy certainly played a vital role. In Poggi’s opinion (who, however, in this context missed the vast *Imperium Romanum*) – “in the largest political units known to history – the great empires of Near Eastern and oriental antiquity – the whole institutional edifice always had massive, elaborate religious underpinnings.”<sup>15</sup>

During the classical antiquity (Greece and Rome), this religious legitimacy, as it seems, became less important. For instance, both in Roman Republic and in the Early Roman Empire, the priestly offices became simply part of the senatorial official career (*cursus honorum*).<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the Roman emperor fulfilled the role of the chief priest (*pontifex maximus*) which enabled the strict connection with the supernatural order. “Romans believed that military success resulted not from the leadership of any commander whatsoever, not from

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<sup>9</sup> M. Żyromski, *Terroristic power. A new kind of political power ?* [in:] Terrorism as a timeless actor on the international stage, ed. S.Wojciechowski, Poznań 2005, p.36.

<sup>10</sup> Gianfranco Poggi, *Forms of Power*, Cambridge 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Gianfranco Poggi, *Forms of Power*, Cambridge 2001, p.67.

<sup>12</sup> D. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, London 1991, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> M. Żyromski, *Gaetano Mosca. Twórca socjologicznej teorii elity*, Poznań 1996.

<sup>14</sup> K.A. Wittfogel, *Oriental despotism*, New Haven 1957.

<sup>15</sup> Gianfranco Poggi, *Forms of Power*, Cambridge 2001, p.76.

<sup>16</sup> M. Żyromski, *Urzędy kapłańskie jako wyznacznik statusu społecznego w starożytnym Rzymie*, [in:] *Religie w świecie starożytnym*, Toruń 1993, p.53 – 61.

the actions of any individual or group in the battlefield itself, but from the special relationship established between the gods and the relevant holder of *imperium et auspicium*.”<sup>17</sup> When the Emperor Diocletian fulfilled the task of reorganizing the Roman imperial administration (at the same time inaugurating the so-called late Roman Empire), he at the same time combined in his hands the supreme secular and religious power (“*dominus ac deus*”). This tradition of connection between the secular and religious power (or between the throne and the altar) was later introduced into the Byzantine Empire and into Russia (as the so-called “third Rome”).

On the other hand, in Western Europe (after the fall of Roman Empire in 476 A.D.) the feudal social and political system gradually developed. In the medieval society clergy became the first social order (in theory even above aristocracy). In practice, younger sons of princes or counts quite often became bishops. Nevertheless, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries the Church struggled with the state on the investiture and Saint Thomas wrote on the supremacy of church over state and of the Pope over king. Gradually, the popes (and many other church dignitaries) took some political and social functions of secular rulers.

Especially during the Renaissance, the popes fulfilled an important political (or even military) role. Moreover, many of them (for instance Julius II delle Rovere) acted as patrons of famous painters, architects or sculptors. Already Sixtus IV (Francesco della Rovere) “introduced his family as an instrument of power to create a political and personal dynasty.”<sup>18</sup> Many monuments (palaces, chapels) and entertainments testify to the growing political and social strength of della Rovere’s family. Sixtus IV appointed 34 cardinals, six of who were his nephews.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, thanks to his patronage, we can see the magnificent Sistine Chapel – “the legitimation of the absolute power of the Pope over the church”.<sup>20</sup> However, the same Julius II (or rather his image) can be taken as an example of the other side of the religious power. “In 1511, in rebellion against the imperious pope, the Bolognese destroyed Michelangelo’s 14 feet bronze statue of Julius II, which had been posted three years before, in a niche above the central portal of San Petronio. They melted it down to make a cannon.”<sup>21</sup> The model of patronage can be seen also in terms of the relation between secular and religious power. “From the 15<sup>th</sup> century on a pattern of patronage among great families had been set. A proper Renaissance prince built

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<sup>17</sup> C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, Berkeley 2000, p.284.

<sup>18</sup> L. Bauman, *Power and image: Della Rovere patronage in late quattrocento Rome*, Ann Arbor 1990, p.6.

<sup>19</sup> L. Bauman, *Power and image: Della Rovere patronage in late quattrocento Rome*, Ann Arbor 1990, p.27.

<sup>20</sup> L. Bauman, *Power and image: Della Rovere patronage in late quattrocento Rome*, Ann Arbor 1990, p.34.

<sup>21</sup> L. Martines, *Power and Imagination. City – states in Renaissance Italy*, New York 1980, p.244.

and decorated a palace, supported religious and scholarly circles, collected antiquities of varying type and quality and established or added to a family chapel in an important church.”<sup>22</sup>

Popes quite often used ancient forms of art to present their glory. For instance, in Subiaco in central Italy we can see the triumphal arch, honoring Pius VI, constructed from Istrian stone in 1789. “Cesare Brancadoro, the event’s official chronicler, explained that whereas the arches of the Caesars had been ‘emblems of vanity and splendor, presenting no other image than of palm funds tinted with the blood of the citizens’, its Christian descendant in Subiaco ‘announced trophies of charity, signs of love and palms of tranquility and joy.’”<sup>23</sup> Perhaps with some exaggeration, “in 1801 historian Francesco Becattini boasted that Pius VI had found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble.”<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, by the order of Pius VI two tall obelisks were erected in Rome: the Quirinal obelisk (in 1786) and the Sallustian obelisk at Trinita dei Monti (in 1789), which can be seen from the Piazza di Spagna. Certainly “Pius VI embraced visual arts as a matter of policy, not just taste. Like many ambitious rulers, he understood the power of appearances.”<sup>25</sup>

Even today the Church can give “religious legitimacy”<sup>26</sup> to political institutions of modern state. This is especially important in such societies as Irish or Polish, where the overwhelming majority of population is (to a major or lesser degree) connected with the Catholic religion and with the Church. Besides, when the state was absent (as in Poland during the partition from 1795 up to 1918), the Church fulfilled many state’s functions and (to a great extent) enabled to preserve Polish national identity. A similar situation in Ireland is still the reason of tensions (not acts of terror, I hope) between the Roman Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. During the communist rule in Poland the Church maintained its independent position and helped the people to live side by side with the communist (or, later on, with the socialist) state.

Undoubtedly, religious power can be treated and analyzed in many ways. There is the position of a church hierarchy, which is nowadays based more on authority than on power and economic means (as in the above mentioned examples of the Renaissance popes). The members of church hierarchy could influence the opinion or even political decisions of a quite large part of population. Besides, religious power can be analyzed in form of the influence

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<sup>22</sup> L. Bauman, *Power and image: Della Rovere patronage in late quattrocento Rome*, Ann Arbor 1990, p.173.

<sup>23</sup> J. Collins, *Papacy and politics in eighteen century Rome. Pius VI and the arts*, Cambridge 2004, p.45.

<sup>24</sup> J. Collins, *Papacy and politics in eighteen century Rome. Pius VI and the arts*, Cambridge 2004, p.193.

<sup>25</sup> J. Collins, *Papacy and politics in eighteen century Rome. Pius VI and the arts*, Cambridge 2004, p.290.

<sup>26</sup> Gianfranco Poggi, *Forms of Power*, Cambridge 2001, p.82.

upon public opinion (for instance the activity of the Radio Maria in Poland). To sum up, I think that all forms of power are (more or less closely) interconnected in the social and political system of a given society and state. In my opinion, it depends on a particular situation and on a given society (both modern and those existing in a distant historic past) whether religious power can be analyzed as a form of ideological power or as a form of political power.

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