

Church-State Relations in Poland after 2015

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Abstract

This paper presents some of the problems concerning the current relations between the state authorities and the ruling party and the institutional Church, with the primary objective to show the discrepancies from the normative assumptions. Another objective is to indicate the probability of the thesis that the current situation is a departure from the normative solutions adopted in Poland (which a majority of the public identify with the desired state) and also from the assumptions of the Catholic social teaching. On the one hand, the Church was for the most part engaged in politics on the side of one political camp, and on the other hand, the state does not maintain ideological neutrality and implements solutions proposed by the institutional Church irrespective of the views of the non-believers or even some of the believers. The basic sources used in the paper are media statements and also different sorts of documents. The basis for drawing conclusions will be an analysis of these statements and documents as well as the application of the interpretational approach that enables drawing conclusions concerning the views, preferences and motives of the people involved in an action.

Keywords: relations between the state and the Church in Poland, normative assumptions, Polish bishops statements, Church support for the PiS, rule of Law and Justice.

1 Introduction

The relations between the state and the Church in Poland were regulated on a bilateral basis as well as by an international agreement, i.e. the concordat. Without going into details, it can be considered that the normative assumptions adopted by the both parties provide for a separation between the state and the Church. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* clearly states that, 'The Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other' (*Gaudium* 1965: p. 76). And the Constitution of the Republic of Poland contains, inter alia, principles of impartiality of the public authorities in matters of religious, ideological and philosophical beliefs as well as the freedom to manifest them in public life as well as the principle of respect for their autonomy and the mutual independence of the state and churches and other religious organisations (*Constitution* 1997:Art.25,53). Furthermore, Polish bishops stated emphatically that, 'The Church remains a non-partisan community; it serves the good of the entire community of the nation and welcomes all people of good will. For this reason, it does not identify itself with any party, and no party is entitled to represent it' (*Kościół* 2012).

The political reality, however, departs from the standards referred to, and the institutional Church, mainly its hierarchy, exerts considerable influence on political decisions regardless of which party is in power. In order to understand the special position that the Catholic Church occupies in Poland, it is necessary to realise at least two facts. The first one is related to the characteristics of the Polish society in which secularisation processes are admittedly taking place but over 90% still declare themselves as believers (although the number of firm believers does not exceed 10% and the Sunday mass is only attended by less than 40% according to surveys conducted within the Church). This provides the institutional Church with considerable potential to influence the political awareness in the, which includes the shaping of voting preferences; furthermore, it provides a justification, referred to by the Church hierarchy, for influencing political decisions and the content of the law. The other fact is the role played by the Church in the history of Poland, primarily in the period of the communist rule during which the institutional Church, retaining relative independence, fulfilled the function of representing the national interests. To some extent, it played the role of the political opposition which could not act legitimately; and in the last decades of that period a large share of the clergy provided a protective umbrella for the opposition that acted illegitimately. Finally, the church hierarchy contributed to the organisation of the Round Table talks which constituted a sort of breakthrough in the process of the fall of the previous system. At the same time, it is essential to stress the active role of the Polish Pope, John Paul II, in this process as his election and pontificate also significantly contributed to the strengthening of the position of the Church in Poland.

The relations between the institutional Church and the ruling party have strengthened considerably in recent time i.e. since the 2015 elections. This paper presents some of the problems concerning the current relations between the state authorities and the ruling party and the institutional Church, with the primary objective to show the discrepancies from the normative assumptions. Another objective is to indicate the probability of the thesis that the current situation is a departure from the normative solutions adopted in Poland (which a majority of the public identify with the desired state) and also from the assumptions of the Catholic social teaching. On the one hand, the Church was for the most part engaged in politics on the side of one political camp, and on the other hand, the state does not maintain ideological neutrality and implements solutions proposed by the institutional Church irrespective of the views of the non-believers or even some of the believers.

This is, however, not an unchangeable state. In the relations between the state and the Church in the period discussed, two sub-periods can roughly be distinguished: the first one is a time of almost full support to the ruling party from the church hierarchy expressing their satisfaction with the results of the elections and expecting changes desired by the Church to take place in the policy of the state; the other one, commenced more or less in early 2017, is a time when representatives of the episcopate as well as some priests began to voice critical opinions on some of the actions taken by the PiS [*Law and Justice*]. Appreciating the positive aspects of this policy (above all in the field of family policy), some of the clergy began to voice objection to the ruling authorities' increasingly clear striving to change the system towards authoritarianism including the violation of the principle of the tripartite division of power. Among the reasons for discontent was also the disappointment due to the failure by the PiS to implement the bishops' fundamental demand, i.e. to introduce a total ban on abortion and moreover, other proposals, like e.g. the calls for receiving refugees.

The basic sources used in the paper are media statements and also different sorts of documents, all of which refer to the situation following the 2015 parliamentary elections. These will be mostly critical statements and thus, they cannot be considered to be representative of the entire spectrum of views. The basis for drawing conclusions will be an analysis of these statements and documents as well as the application of the interpretational approach that enables drawing conclusions concerning the views, preferences and motives of the people involved in an action.

2 Opinions concerning the state of the relation between the state and the Church

The authors of the statements criticised the behaviour of both parties; concerning the Church, it was chiefly for supporting the authorities which violated the constitution and for keeping silent about this issue; concerning the state authorities, it was for instrumental use of the Church in the political struggle. Several examples of such statements are presented below.

The following sentences provide some characteristic examples of such statements, *'To say that the PiS is supported by the Church is to say nothing. The vast majority of bishops keep silent about examples of breaking the law in Poland; they do not raise a cry when the PiS is destroying the judicial system, they do not care about the violation of the civil rights and their voice regarding the manifestations of antisemitism is more like soft squeaking than a lion's roar. It is no coincidence that PiS has strong support at places where the Church plays a major role in the life of the local community'* (Kalisz 2018).

Aleksander Hall¹ enumerated the issues where the Church should speak out and the consequences of its silence can be costly both for the Church and the Polish society. He included the trend in the systemic changes in the state and the manner of effecting them, disregarding the constitution and the law, introducing authoritarian changes restricting the citizens' freedom and challenging their dignity by forcing them to behave in a way inconsistent with their beliefs. Hall wrote, *'Wherever the dignity of the human person is concerned, the Church should not be silent. The policy pursued by the PiS leads to a dramatic division of the national community. The fact that Jarosław Kaczyński constantly contrasts Polish patriots with Poles "of a lesser sort"; that propaganda campaigns are being organised against the "elites" and selected social groups (recently against judges) should raise concern and objection of the Church as this turns the Poles against one another. ... I am deeply saddened by the fact that there are bishops and priests who use their authority to endorse the assassination thesis as if they were experts on aviation accidents'* (Hall 2017).

The institutional Church was trenchantly criticised for its attitude towards the authorities by Fr Ludwik Wiśniewski, a Dominican known for having supported the opposition activity under the previous system. Fr Wiśniewski formulated many critical arguments concerning the actions (or the lack thereof) of the Church towards the ruling party. His diagnosis of the resultant situation is extremely sharp, especially when he states that Christianity is dying before our eyes and that which is taking place is a parody of Christianity. Fr. Wiśniewski condemns the participation of the Church in the so-called 'Smolensk anniversaries' and its confirmation of the assassination thesis. With regard to the Holy Masses celebrated at the Warsaw Archcathedral he declared, *'These services often turn into political rallies and the sermons into attacks against the legitimate authorities at the time of the disaster. Someone has said, and I folly agree with this, that political masses are acts of idolatry...'*; and then, *'after each mass, a march takes place, interspersed with prayers (oh, how pathetic!); finally, there are speeches, often mocking the truth and always accusing the political opponents of falseness and plotting to conceal the truth. The clergymen present at the marches ridicule and profane religious acts (Fr Stanisław Malkowski's miserable exorcisms). ... It is highly commendable to put an end to exploiting the Eucharist for political purposes, morally ambiguous at that, because this is really idolatry'* (Ojciec 2016).

Also Fr Adam Boniecki² articulated his critical approach to that situation. In one of his utterances, Fr Boniecki stated blatantly, *'In the consciousness of many Catholics, Christians, in the public perception, the Church*

¹ Leader of the opposition Young Poland Movement in communist Poland, minister in Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government, former MP.

² Former Prior General of the Order of Marians, editor-in-chief of the *L'Osservatore Romano* (1979-1991) and *Tygodnik Powszechny* (1999-2011).

is today PiS-owned... The Church ceased to be the peacemaker in this country. It is a source of division. ... The Church should be such a voice that tell the nation when it enters a dangerous road. Therefore, it is dreadful, this binding of the Church with a party of some sort' (Ksiądz 2017).

Many people have spoken on the subject of the Church being exploited by the PiS politicians. A characteristic example might be the words of a Newsweek columnist who stated, *'For the PiS, the Church is a political tool that is intended to mobilise the believing voters. A community that is to manage emotions, primarily negative ones, i.e. seeking enemies, typically delusional and invented. An organisation that is to consecrate secular rituals, like the Smolensk mensiversaries or state-religious celebrations'* (Makowski 2016). The author then listed the benefits for the PiS resulting from the support on the part of the Church, among which he included the avoidance of big problems due to the idea to elevate nationalism and xenophobia, which had been introduced to the party's political agenda, to the rank of national pride as a result their sacralisation; the silence of the Church about violation of the rule of law and destroying people through defamation and insinuations; the helplessness among the bishops and priests watching as the PiS and Kaczyński sacralise the Smolensk disaster; the alliance of the PiS and the Church in building the mentality of a 'besieged stronghold' in the conviction that they have to defend Poland, the Church and the traditions against rotten Europe, liberalism and modernity. In return, the PiS government does the same things that all the governments of the Third Republic did, i.e. fulfils the financial wishes of the Church, and *'Kaczyński, as the undisputed chief of state, strokes the bishops' ego telling them that they are the only teachers of morality. ... This, as you might have guessed, makes the clergy rejoice and reinforces their belief that they have been called to teach, condemn and stigmatise, i.e. to do the three things that they are really the masters of'* (Makowski 2016).

The most explicit example of exploiting religion and the Church for political purposes might be the fact that politicians take part in religious celebrations and often deliver speeches that have very little in common with religion. Numerous representatives of the authorities have participated e.g. in the closing ceremony of the 27th pilgrimage of the Radio Maryja Family to the Jasna Góra Monastery. Among the participants were the Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and the ministers Mariusz Błaszczak, Joachim Brudziński, Zbigniew Ziobro, Marek Gróbarczyk, Jan Krzysztof Ardanowski, Witold Bańka and Andrzej Adamczyk as well as the minister at the Office of the President of the Republic of Poland Adam Kwiatkowski, and also Beata Kempa and Joanna Kopcińska from the Office of the Prime Minister. Furthermore, letters from Jarosław Kaczyński and Andrzej Duda were read out, full of praises for Fr Rydzyk's activity and his projects. The Prime Minister performed the act of entrusting the country to the Mother of God and criticised opponents of the government. All of this took place in the presence of over a hundred thousand people and therefore the politicians' speeches can be treated not only as homage to Fr Rydzyk but also as efforts to gain the support of the voters gathered outside the Jasna Góra Monastery (Pielgrzymka 2018).

Widespread coverage was given to the participation of the Prime Minister Morawiecki, a few ministers of his government and a lot of other PiS politicians in the celebrations of the 27th anniversary of the Radio Maryja. Their behaviour (joint singing of religious songs, joint dancing) was found unacceptable by many people, likewise the following words uttered by the Prime Minister, *'Oh, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, this my great plea, great cry: Have the whole nation in your care, even those who do not yet love Poland, for the time being, as much as we that are here do, as the whole Radio Maryja Family'* (Michalski 2018). At the same time, the writer reporting this event had no doubts that it was a manifestation of hypocrisy as the actual relations between Fr Rydzyk and Kaczyński and Morawiecki's political environment are completely different, *'painfully calculated and cynical'*, and Fr Rydzyk blackmails these politicians threatening that he might withdraw his support (Michalski 2018).

3 Increased diversity of views among bishops

The attitude to the ruling party and its policy is a differentiating factor for the Polish bishops; there is even talk of two warring factions within the authorities of the Polish Church (Pawlicka 2017). The PiS is, obviously, supported by the bishops who also support the Radio Maryja. One of those who do not hide their support is Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski (Vice-President of the Polish Episcopal Conference), occasionally referred to as the chaplain of the 'good change'. In 2016, on the anniversary of the Smolensk disaster, he stressed that *'the Smolensk lie still continues'* and he compared the assertions that it was not an assassination to distorting the truth of Jesus Christ's resurrection. *'Before people realised what had really happened; that Christ was raised from the dead; there had already appeared the lie and the money that was supposed to reinforce the power of that lie even more'*. During the Easter celebrations of 2018, he referred to the events from over two thousand years ago and compared the behaviour of present-day politicians with Pilate's behaviour saying that the present-day opposition, like Pilate in the past, succumbs to the pressure of *'the street and abroad'*. This is the prevailing rhetoric within the PiS, fashioned after that from the era of Gomułka (Makowski 2018). He compared the Smolensk counter-manifestations to the persecutions that priests suffered during the martial law period.

The support for the PiS is often accompanied by negative statements on the opposition. Among the trenchant critics of the opposition is Archbishop Sławoj Leszek Głódź, which is evidenced by a number of his utterances. During the Midnight Mass in 2017 he stated, inter alia, that *'the Polish matters will not be settled by either the street or the abroad, or a hand raised in Brussels and aimed against the ordinances in Poland ... or the*

applause for the decisions that negate the sovereignty of our legislation' (Arcybiskup 2017). 'The total opposition distorts democracy, becomes a caricature and sooner or later it is doomed to fail for the simple reason that negation gives rise to negation, it does not create anything new' ("Totalna 2017). 'This great good must not be foolishly exposed to danger; or weakened. Neither should one negate everything that is done by those who, after all, have been placed at the rudder of the body politic by the free will of the voters' (Słowo 2016).

In the course of the Easter celebrations in 2016, Archbishop Józef Michalik said, 'A new Targowica Confederation has emerged. They accuse Poland, mobilise foreign nations on the international scene to hate the Poles who had the courage to elect others and not them. An astonishing approach, this has not been the case for a long time. This is not those people's glory that they use the trust that a part of the nation put in them against the homeland (Lewkowicz 2016). During the pilgrimage of the Radio Maryja Family to the Jasna Góra Monastery in July 2018, Bishop Antoni Dydycz, in the presence of, inter alia, the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the PiS, sharply criticised the opposition saying, 'How can anyone fight against the democratically elected representatives of the nation! A big lie! It was just such bands and groups that struck against representatives of the nation; they were criminal, felonious, they were of fascist or communist origin' (Chrzczonowicz 2018).

Some Church dignitaries highly praised those at power. At a meeting of Beata Szydło with the Polish diaspora in America, Bishop Józef Wysocki said during the Mass that he was celebrating, 'Dear Prime Minister, I would like to say, well, this is off the liturgy, how much we all love you... We have received the President; this is a gift from God. We have received you a great gift, we have received all that is happening and we will be doing our best not to waste it... Thank you for undertaking this great task of this good change. This nation desires resurrection... And in order not to waste it, drear priests, we need to take God's word in hand. There is no other way' (Polonijny 2016).

As mentioned above, the attitude of some of the Church hierarchy to the ruling party has changed. This is evidenced by a number of statements, some of them by notable bishops. This is also suggested by the words of Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, the President of the Polish Episcopal Conference, who recalled the assumptions of the social teaching of the Church which provides for the necessity to maintain neutrality towards different political colours and warns against too strong links with and support for the ruling party. 'The Church', as the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* teaches, 'by reason of her universal mission, addressing her message to people of all political system, cannot identify herself with any particular political community... this would be a harmful distortion of the Church's mission. With regard to her task and competences, the Church must not be bound to any political system. She should abstain from joining any disputes in favour of this or that political community because this would turn people with other political beliefs away from the Church. She must not let any political parties use her as an instrument serving their own particular interests' (Przewodniczący 2018).

Archbishop Wojciech Polak, the Primate of Poland, in the presence of the President, the Prime Minister Szydło and the Speakers of both Chambers of the Parliament, stated at the Jasna Góra Monastery, 'We are supposed to respect the social order, and not to destroy it thoughtlessly for one or the other reason' (Prymas 2018). Also Fr Boniecki warned against the 'dismantling of the system'. And Fr Paweł Rytel-Andrianik, the spokesman of the Polish Episcopal Conference, addressed the problem of the growing political divisions and the necessity of a reaction on the part of the Church, 'The Church must not fail to notice that the public debate concerning the judicial system tends more and more to evolve into confrontation and conflict. The Poles have the right to demand it from the politicians that they be examples of caring for the common good, including appropriate language'. Fr Rytel-Andrianik also recalled the words of John Paul II, who in 1999 spoke to the MPs to make them more aware of the need for collaboration and joint efforts in favour of the good of the country, regardless of political affiliation (Kościół 2017).

The Bishop of Opole, Czaja, spoke in a similar manner indicating more explicitly where priests are politically involved. He warned against such attitudes stating, 'Some of the measures taken by the people from the PiS are unacceptable. While the PO [Civic Platform] trampled or sold certain values, I have the feeling that now some people from the PiS are trampling on human dignity and do not care at all what the individual thinks, what desires and needs they have, and above all, what rights they have. This is a signal to us, all of the people of the Church, that we must be prudent and careful not to be deceived. That we should not opt for favouring any political community or political programme and even more so, any political party' (Biskup 2016).

In the context of the support on the part of the rulers for the nationalist movements and tolerating declarations of a xenophobic or racist nature, the statements made by the Church concerning nationalism are very essential. In 2017 the Polish Episcopal Conference issued a document called 'The Christian shape of patriotism' in which it criticised in a clear and unambiguous manner attitudes and actions of a nationalist character, contrasting nationalism with real patriotism based on Christian love for all people (Chrześcijański 2017). The Primate,

Wojciech Polak, referring to the authorities' approach to the attitudes and declarations of a nationalist character, stated that, *'Acceptance for this type of thinking is not only inappropriate but explicitly heretical; this cannot be. This distracts from that which is the essence of Christianity'* (Stachowiak 2016). This statement leaves no doubt as to the opinion concerning the support or at least leniency among the people in power for nationalism.

4 Conclusion

When looking at the trends in the relations between the ruling party and the Church and taking account of some events, an attempt can be made to provide predictions concerning the future. The leaders of the PiS will be invariably interested in the support of the institutional Church and of the media controlled by Fr Tadeusz Rydzyk. Nevertheless, respecting the opinion of a considerable part of the public, they will be continually unwilling to implement the fundamental demand of the bishops, i.e. to introduce a total ban on abortion and also to prohibit in vitro fertilisation, or to receive refugees. This may lead to continued weakening of support from some of the hierarchy for the ruling party. Weakening does not mean lack of support as the PiS continues to be the party that provides the best guarantee for satisfying the interests of the Church. This support will still be given, primarily by some of the bishops who support Fr Rydzyk, but probably only as long as such support is given by Rydzyk himself; he has, however, been threatening recently that he might shift his support to a party that is being created at his initiative. This, in turn, seems to depend on whether government bodies will continue to provide funds for the projects conceived by this friar (the amount of subsidies granted until May 2018 is estimated at over PLN 80m); relevant announcements indicate that this will still be the case.

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