For centuries, relations between state and Church have developed under the influence of various factors: religious and state leaders, concrete decisions, political and legal regulations, religious composition of the society and the level of its religiosity, national identity and culture. In modern times this bilateral relation is shaped to a larger extent by institutionalised political actors – especially, political parties. In modern political systems different religious organisations have had to learn the logic of party politics characterised by their structures, policy programmes, ideologies, electoral and campaign strategies, if they want to influence power relations. In that sense they also become political actors.

The aim of this chapter is to explain the role of religion within the party system in Poland. The main focus will be given to the Polish Catholic Church (henceforward the Church) due to the fact that Poland is almost a homogenous society in terms of confession with around 92 percent of the population as Catholics. The Church is defined here as an entity wanting to influence the political system, with the full awareness that its basic role remains religious. That position is close to the argument of Carolyn Warner (2000). She classifies the Catholic Church as an interest group. In this context, the Church’s political subjectivity means it can act to realise its objectives and intentions and engage in power struggles. From the perspective of normative neo-institutionalism, the assumption is made that the Church exerts its influence on political parties in order to affect the legal acts, governmental decisions, the general shape of the party system, individual and collective behaviour of citizens and finally axiological orientation of the society. Our analysis is not limited to the Church’s goals and strategies but also includes characteristics of the Polish party system since 1989 and the responses of Polish society as a main transmitter of supports and demands between various political actors.

**Historical development of the political role of the Church**

As Sabrina Ramet (2017: 2) wrote in her book *The Catholic Church in Polish History: From 966 to Present*: ‘In the history of Poland, religion has always been political.’ Undoubtedly Catholicism holds a unique position in Poland, as it is symbolically and historically linked to the foundation of the Polish state, and so is the relationship between the Church and political groupings. From as long ago as the system of the Nobles’ Democracy (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), the Catholic Church has played a decisive role among political elites. It did not change the fact that
at that time Poland was a refuge for religious dissidents. In the period of partitions of the country (1795–1918), the Catholic faith along with linked literature served as the only depository of the collective memory, national culture and tradition. The institution of the Catholic Church was the only glue binding together a divided nation, a key exponent of the idea of reunification. As a result, as Casanova puts it, in ‘the 19th century, Catholicism, romantic nationalism and Slavic messianism contributed to the development of the new Polish civil religion’ (2005: 160).

Newly born inter-war Poland was a multi-religious entity with only about 60 percent of Catholics and visible Jewish, Protestant and Orthodox minorities. It wasn’t until the Communist People’s Republic was established after 1945, that Poland became almost exclusively Catholic (Dospial-Borysiak et al. 2018: 79–104). In post-war communist Poland, consolidation of the Polish–Roman Catholic bond became more evident. Due to religious homogeneity and public support the Church was the most important institution that was able to oppose the communist regime. However, as Stetkiewicz admits it is hard to estimate ‘whether a high level of churchgoing was a manifestation of religiosity or of objection to the imposed political system’ (2013: 5). The national religious mood was boosted when Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected pope in 1978. With the self-image of a national bulwark against communism, the Church involved itself in support of the resistance movement among workers in the 1970s and early 1980s, and offered protection to dissidents. Its position was unique as it played a role of mediator between the communist government and the opposition (Davies 2006). For example, in 1981 it was the government that wanted the Church to be involved in a dialogue with workers’ factions. The late 1980s collapse of the communist system led to a more profound role for the Church, when it acted as a form of safeguard during the roundtable talks shaping the new democratic political system.

The Catholic Church as a political actor after 1989

The Church’s influential role in upholding opposition views, its close links to the Solidarity movement, and its ability to reconcile factions brought it greater political influence in the post-communist era. According to Maciej Potz, the Church set itself clear goals: institutionalising its position within a non-separationist model of Church–state relations; securing the material basis of its existence; retaining influence on decision-makers in the new pluralistic political environment; and retaining its societal authority to speak out on public issues (2018: 139).

However, in one important sense, the previous visions and attitudes of the Church prevailed: it still perceived itself as a main depository of traditional national values, showed discontent with separation between Church and state, and although not officially also endorsed the idea of a homogenous Polish and Catholic community. In addition, it gained a new political role as supporter not only of some of the post-Solidarity political parties but also of individual politicians. As a result, the Polish Church became a proactive political player exercising its powers by taking a stance on economic, social and political issues per se or by acting as a voice of its political proponents.

The position of the Church cannot be simply ascribed to its historical role. New economic hardships and political instability and changeability in the 1990s made it the sole institution paying attention to those left outside the benefits of a newly progressive and liberal system. In the next decade individuals who suffered most from the post-communist transformation turned to parties referring to the national identity and Catholic values, gaining support of much of the clergy.

In the 1990s, the Church’s extraordinary position in public life was illustrated by both legal regulations and day-to-day practice. Church–state relations were mainly regulated by the
Constitution of 1997 which granted a high standard of religious liberty, separation of Church and state, and legal equality of all religious groups. There is however a direct link to God and religion providing preferential treatment of religion in general (meaning in practice, the Catholic Church): ‘Both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, as well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources’ (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland). With reference to Benyamin Neuberger’s typology, in Poland Church–state relations resembled the ‘endorsed Church model’ (1999: 67–82). However, critics, such as Ryszard Malajny, underline constitutional practice and see more of a confessional model in the relationship (2007). The Polish situation is a kind of compromise between respect for the traditions and beliefs of the majority of the society and tolerance towards other faiths, religions and churches. This compromise is not however easy to accomplish because in the model neither legal solutions nor the practice of state–Church relations are obvious and consistent. It is sometimes impossible to distinguish when symbolic recognition ends and state friendliness towards the Church begins.

This preferential model was introduced as long ago in 1990, when religion was reinstalled as a subject at public schools. The post-Solidarity parties dominating the Polish parliament agreed on returning expropriated properties, including both sacral and non-sacral buildings, to the Church. A favourable financial system was introduced with state subsidies covering religious instruction, funding of Catholic higher schools, and theological departments at state universities. Additionally, the state budget contributed to the construction of sacral buildings, social insurance fees for the clergy and the salaries of specialised chaplains. The Church gained a number of tax exemptions, such as non-taxable economic activity for cult and charity purposes, exemptions from property and legacy tax, and media concession fees. The collections from Catholics in church and fees for religious services such as baptism were not taxed (Stetkiewicz 2013: 7).

Moreover, the Church managed to prove its axiological supremacy in several spheres mostly connected with family life and sex. With the help of post-Solidarity parties, in 1993 new regulations on abortion were passed allowing it only with the exception of cases when pregnancy endangers the life or health of the mother, is the result of rape or incest, or when the foetus is seriously damaged. As will be explained later, signals from senior Church officials were sent to political parties that this compromise did not fulfil the Church’s demands. Due to the same kind of pressure regulations on partnerships – both heterosexual and gay – were not passed in Polish parliament due to their alleged threat to a model of traditional Catholic family.

Church strategies over the last three decades towards political parties took various forms and intensities. During 1990–1997, the Polish Church openly supported Catholic political parties and various candidates. For example, before the elections of 1991 the Episcopate issued a communication saying that the faithful should concentrate on a few civic committees representing values conforming with Christian ethics and Catholic social science. However, in some diocesan curiae the document was announced with an accompanying instruction to vote for specific parties: Catholic Electoral Action, Centre Civic Alliance, Peasants’ Agreement, Christian Democracy, Party of Christian Democrats (Kowalczyk 2012: 478).

Since the 1997 elections this strategy of open political support was generally dismissed by the Polish clergy (Zuba 2010: 119–127). The reason was ineffectiveness, as some of the Church’s favourite parties dramatically lost which could lead to a possible loss of credibility of the whole institution. As a result, instead of open campaigning the Church’s new strategy focused on general guidance and norm creation. In the Episcopate’s 2005 statement on parliamentary elections the bishops indicated the importance of the following values: respect to the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death; protection of the family and marriage as a permanent bond of woman and man; placing the common good above personal benefits or party
interests; avoiding the instrumental treatment of the Church in the electoral campaign (Oświadczenie Konferencji Episkopatu Polski 2005: 9).

A key aspect should be underlined: the Polish Church is not monolithic. Like most social, society-wide institutions, it has reactionary, conservative and liberal faces. On the more progressive side is the ‘Lagiewniki church’ with its magazine Tygodnik Powszechny. Conservatives draw inspiration from Radio Maryja (‘Radio Holy Virgin’), run by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. From a local radio station established in 1991 in Toruń, this priest has built a nationwide media concern consisting of a television station (Polish, Telewizja Trwam), a daily newspaper (Nasz Dziennik), a charity foundation and a college, as well as additional activities, including a geothermal company. Belonging to an independent Redemptorist Order Tadeusz Rydzyk can openly juggle with political arguments and moral imperatives. His programmes are characterised by xenophobia, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and nationalistic blends. The blame for most of Poland’s problems is given, variously, to privatisation, market economy, liberalism or the European Union.

Rydzyk’s high aspirations and use of rhetoric attractive to many, especially older voters, created a country-wide social movement, called the Radio Maryja Family. This group claims between 300,000 and 700,000 members, is politically conscious and keen on mobilisation and participation. This explains why the wide spectrum of right-wing political parties openly sought his acceptance and support: in the 1990s it was Christian National Union, Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland and Solidarity Electoral Action, then in the early 2000s, the League of Polish Families. Most recently, a special and unique bond has been created between the Catholic tycoon and the current conservative PiS government.

Axiological orientation of Polish political parties

From the late 1980s, the Polish party system evolved from fragmentation to institutionalisation at least in quantitative terms. Under conditions of often harsh economic transformation and the introduction of a new representative democracy, a magnitude of post-Solidarity parties appeared. Internal political problems within the pro-democracy camp resulted from different approaches to the pace of economic reforms, the relationship to the communist past and personal tensions between individual politicians. It should be mentioned that within the spectrum of centrist and rightist parties none openly distanced itself from the Catholic Church or faith more generally.

Post-communist parties took power in 1993. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – SLD (Democratic Left Allience) and Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL (Polish People’s Party) created a coalition based more on values of social protection than deeper axiological orientation. The SLD became a typical social-democratic party aiming at liberties and secular state and the PSL turned into a traditional, Catholic agrarian electorate party. After elections in 1997, power was retaken by the post-Solidarity camp with the first ever Protestant prime minister Jerzy Buzek (later the president of the European Parliament), and then in 2001 power came back to the left (see Figure 20.1).

Starting in 2005 the political focus of modern parliamentarism in Poland moved to the right. Two parties with anti-communist roots created in 2001 Platforma Obywatelska – PO (Civic Platform) and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS (Law and Justice) now dominate the Polish party system, with constant support of between 20 and 30 percent in both cases. New parties have emerged, such as the liberal Twój Ruch (2011) and Nowoczesna (2015) and the populist Kukiz’15 (2015). Yet, they are of marginal influence and often seem to disappear from the political landscape. In the most recent elections in 2015, five parties entered parliament: PiS – 38 percent, PO – 24 percent, Kukiz’15 – 9 percent,
Nowoczesna – 8 percent and PSL – 5 percent. For the first time in its modern history the Polish parliament – the Sejm – has no representatives of parties of visibly left orientation. Generally speaking the median Polish voter is conservative in terms of values and socially oriented in terms of economic outlook.

In a simplified way, it can be said that PiS was a party of the Catholic right and PO of the ‘liberal’, that is, non-faith-based, right. Electorates of both parties derived from the same post-Solidarity roots with only minor differences in frequency of participation in religious practices. With time, the process of crystallising the electorates of both parties took place and presently they became antagonistic groups. Both parties more and more clearly gathered around them various groups of voters. From the post-Solidarity nebula that previously existed mainly as an opposition to post-communist forces, there gradually appeared – metaphorically speaking – two Polands, differing in education, income level, place of residence, but also worldview, ideology and political attitudes (see Figure 20.2).

After the 2015 elections PiS along with two other conservative parties Solidarna Polska (Solidary Poland) and Polska Razem (Poland Together) formed a three-party coalition (Markowski 2016: 1311). For the first time since 1989 the winning party was given an opportunity to form a government without having to negotiate with possible coalition partners. The idea behind forming PiS is defined by the concept of ‘the Fourth Polish Republic’ advocating ousting all remnants of Poland’s communist past (people, organisations, names of places) and introducing a new moral model based on Catholic and national values. The party was created by twin brothers, Jarosław Kaczyński and Lech Kaczyński, and can be labelled variously Christian-Democratic, social-conservative, patriotic or national-conservative. Due to the party’s approach it attracted many people negatively touched by economic reforms. In effect, the electorate of PiS is religious, less educated, older, living in the countryside, slightly more often experiencing economic disappointment, but not politically passive – and interested in political life to the same extent as better educated PO supporters. The party represents the Polish Church’s stance on family and sex including abortion, euthanasia, gay rights, same-sex marriages or in-vitro fertilisation. It also stands
against ‘genderism’ seen as a threat to the traditional model of family. The PiS bonds with the Church are expected due to two reasons: axiological proximity and practical reasons – the support the party may get especially at grassroots level. This dual dependency is beneficial for both sides.

However, it should be underlined that the PiS leadership decided to tighten cooperation with the most conservative and independent branch of the Polish Church – Radio Maryja, created by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, which is used as a platform of communication between the government and its voters. Members of the government or members of parliament present their positions and plans on Radio Maryja sometimes before they are published on public media and participate in Radio’s ceremonies. Besides the sphere of mass communication Radio Maryja gets additional public funds for example for its geothermal heat station.

The official voice of the Polish Episcopate is silent on the PiS party. The Church hierarchy does not take a position on state reforms, such as a changing court system, and is indifferent to mass demonstrations organised to safeguard constitutional order. However, as a political actor it sends its demands to the government. In March 2016, the Polish Episcopate issued a communication demanding a full ban on abortion (Konfederacja Episkopatu Polski 2016). A law on restricting abortion passed in 1993, although one of the most restrictive in Europe, was a compromise supported by most Poles. A popular initiative endorsed by PiS on this issue provoked a wave of mass demonstration of not only pro-choice movements but also ordinary citizens, mostly women. In effect, the party’s leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, removed the issue from the agenda which simultaneously undermined its alliance with the Church. The typically political logic of bargain and exchange forced PiS to make different concessions, such as a partial ban on trade on Sundays and ending public funding to in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) introduced by the previous government.
The PO, the biggest competitor to PiS, although having the same roots clearly represents a different style of relations with the Church, which results from its electorate’s demands. PO voters are more often residents of large cities, people with higher or secondary education, who are more often well-off in material terms. Among PO sympathisers, a drop in the percentage of people who regularly practice religious activities is visible. The party lost its clearly right-wing character, and increasingly often it was chosen by voters with centrist and even left-wing views, which probably stems from the lack of political party alternatives for such people.

The PO, which managed to rule the country for two consecutive terms (2007–2015), reflects the liberal face of Polish urban society. It supports free-market, open economy, privatisation, entrepreneurship and integration with the European Union. During the years of European economic crisis Poland under its leadership remained a well-functioning and competitive economy and its founding father Donald Tusk became the president of the European Council.

In contrast to PiS, Platforma Obywatelska has its visible conservative and liberal wings. Liberals within the party especially would appreciate a more secular state but simultaneously party conservatives maintain close relations with the clergy. In effect during eight years in power PO didn’t open new fronts of conflict with the Catholic Church despite calls from voters and party members to liberalise anti-abortion law or remove crosses from public spaces. Those dissatisfied with this evident status quo strategy created a new liberal party, Twój Ruch. Simultaneously the Church did not accept the ‘Western’ lifestyle the party was apparently promoting. In effect, although the Catholic Church backed Polish membership in the European Union in 2004 it was afraid of a ‘Europeanisation’ of its traditional values. The PO also ignored the mobilising potential of Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, becoming his major enemy.

To a certain degree, the PO position was correlated with its coalition partner the Polish People’s Party, founded in May 1990, as a successor of the United Peasant Party representing the communists in the rural areas. The uniqueness of PSL derives from the fact that its history goes back to the nineteenth-century agrarian associations and to inter-war mainstream politics. Moreover, this is the only party that has managed to obtain seats in all elections since 1989. The axiological identification of PSL has evolved over two decades. Until the beginning of the twentieth century it was a left-wing party. After winning 132 seats in the Sejm in the 1993 election, the PSL formed a coalition with the post-communist SLD, and PSL leader Waldemar Pawlak became prime minister until 1995. After the victorious elections for the left in 2001, the party re-entered a coalition with the SLD, but withdrew in 2003. After the 2007 election, the PSL entered a coalition with the centre-right PO.

Ideologically the party has moved to some extent from a leftist to a rightist position. In terms of the economy, the PSL continues to support state interventionism and enhanced spending on public welfare. However, as a representative of conservative, rural voters it keeps close relations with local priests. The PSL generally opposes legalisation of euthanasia and abortion, registration of homosexual relationships, or the legalisation of so-called soft drugs, such as cannabis. It is in favour of accepting IVF within marriage, as well as supporting other methods of infertility treatment and the so-called conscience clause for doctors, maintaining religion lessons in schools and generally solutions included in the Concordat. Despite these highly conservative demands, starting from 2015 the party has gained a new face under the leadership of a young and proactive politician, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz.

During elections in 2015 voters dissatisfied with above-described well-established parties could choose Nowoczesna, a new liberal project in both economic and moral realms. Its programme called for improving the functioning of state administration and economic development based on
individual entrepreneurship and protection of private property, as well as on the construction of ‘modern patriotism’ and enhanced civil society, understood as a ‘community of freedom’. Nowoczesna was not anti-clerical in its rhetoric but underlined the need to create a truly secular state. It was also a party with a fairly distinct social profile: metropolitan, educated and well-off. The first supporters of Nowoczesna were people with higher education, residents of larger towns (cities with 500,000 or more population, but also between 20,000 and 99,999 people), aged 35–44 and those infrequently participating in religious practices. Interestingly, despite winning 7.6 percent in elections, the social capital of this party was easily lost by its leader Ryszard Petru after just two years (CBOS 2017a: 12). The voters of the party underlined the loss of credibility of its founding father, but also felt that the fight with the conservatives could be won by the larger but also more liberal PO.

The second newcomer to the Polish parliament of 2015–2019 was Kukiz’15 with 8.8 percent of votes. This right-wing party was created by the rock musician, Paweł Kukiz, calling for important constitutional changes, such as introducing a presidential model, and replacing proportional voting with a first-past-the-post formula. The party also proposed what it felt was a ‘patriotic’ national agenda based mainly on anti-immigrant rhetoric.

The most evident loser of the 2015 elections was the SLD, the biggest and oldest parliamentary left-wing party, which in 2001 won more than 41 percent of seats in the Polish Sejm. In July 2015 most left-oriented organisations – that is, SLD, Twój Ruch and Zieloni (The Greens) – created a wide alliance – the United Left – to contest the upcoming parliamentary elections. The coalition led by Barbara Nowacka received only 7.6 percent of the vote, below the 8 percent threshold, leaving all left parties without parliamentary representation. For the first time in history SLD was left without any parliamentary representation. This party was created in 1991 and can be named as successor to the communist party. The main support for SLD came from the middle-rank state sector employees, retired people, leftist union members and people with anti-clerical attitudes. When in power (1993–1997 and 2001–2005) it allowed and sometimes initiated more discussion on axiological issues like abortion or overrepresentation of religion in public space. It also refrained from ratifying the Concordat, granting numerous rights to the Church signed by the conservative government in 1993. On the other hand, the SLD also presented a strategy of not opening new areas of conflict with the clergy aimed at gaining its support or at least neutrality in the key issues for the alliance. In 1997, the SLD needed acceptance for a new constitution regulating state–Church relations and in 2003 backing during the European Union membership referendum. Starting from 2005 the SLD electorate started to diminish, choosing the right or new leftist projects.

One of the most interesting alternatives was Twój Ruch, created three months before the parliamentary elections of 2011. The party received 10 percent of the vote, reaching third place in the Sejm behind PO and PiS. This ‘new’ maverick not having any political processors made one of the best debuts for a party since the end of communism and undoubtedly it was a political beneficiary of discontent over the Polish Church.

This centre-left party can be in short described as mixing elements of social liberalism, libertarianism, populism and anti-clericalism combined with a strong pro-European stance and with heterogeneous economic views. Twój Ruch adopted the arguments of the so-called New Left aiming at improving civil rights and a truly secular state – but it was simultaneously akin to the so-called Pirate Parties in several other European countries, including Sweden. Twój Ruch was the only parliamentarian political party calling for the abolition of all aspects of a special position for the Polish Catholic Church. It was a proponent of equalising rights of all religious groups by terminating the Concordat, removing all religious symbols from public spaces, ending religious education in state schools and state subsidies of churches. It also advocated abortion liberalisation and same-sex marriages, highly sensitive among Polish clergy.
Besides covering topics more or less known in public discourse the party initiated the debate about LGBT rights, a topic which was neglected by both traditional parties and clergy. Robert Biedroń became the first openly gay member of the Sejm in Polish history. His political career carried on after 2014 within local government although not under the auspices of Twój Ruch. Furthermore, Anna Grodzka, the first ever transsexual MP in Europe, was elected from the party lists in 2011. This wide spectrum of economic and moral proposals aiming at young, liberal, pro-European and anti-clerical Poles failed to reach a wider audience. A controversial leader with slogans of legalising marijuana dissatisfied many ‘moderate’ voters and the party disappeared from the parliamentary scene in 2015 together with other leftist parties.

**The society: between the Church and political parties**

The analysis of the relationship between the Catholic Church in Poland and political parties must consider one more factor – society. The support and demands put forth by the Church towards politicians are only to a limited extent communicated as part of bilateral contacts. Most of the communication is directed towards the public, or more directly to the voters. They are the main transmitters of the Church’s vision in the political sphere and through the electoral act they legitimise or delegitimise the influence of religion on politics.

As shown by the systematic publications of the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS), after the death of John Paul II, Poles’ religiosity slowly but steadily weakened. Between 2005 and 2014, the percentage of people identifying themselves as non-believers rose from 4 percent to 8 percent, and the percentage of non-participants in religious practices increased from 9 percent to 13 percent. Still, the vast majority of Poles are believers (92 percent) and more or less regular practitioners – 87 percent (CBOS 2015a).

The number of regular practitioners among the voters of PiS was always higher than average. Over the last decade, the participation of believers and at least once-per-week religious practitioners in the PiS electorate ranged from 70 percent to 74 percent. In the entire population this percentage was between 51 and 62 percent. In case of PO the percentage of people participating in religious practices (at least once a week) dropped from 51 percent in 2005 to 42 percent in 2015. Simultaneously in the same period the percentage of unbelievers rose from 12 percent to 19 percent. Not surprisingly more than half of these who identified themselves with the left practised only sporadically or did not participate in religious practices at all. Still the vast majority consider themselves believers, including ‘deeply believing’ (CBOS 2017b).

However, it seems that religious factors are of minor importance in the context of voting. Regarding the most important conservative party, PiS, only 3 percent of respondents admitted that the decisive factor encouraging them to vote for this party was the fact that it implements the guidelines of the Catholic Church. Its general effectiveness and fighting poverty were far more important (36 percent and 15 percent, respectively). In case of the liberal PO and Nowoczesna problems of religion and the Church are not mentioned directly but a decisive number of supporters name simply ‘liberal values’ (PO – 10 percent, Nowoczesna – 15 percent). Even in the case of the left-wing SLD, freedom, equality, social justice and women’s rights are named as priorities ahead of separation of Church and state (CBOS 2018).

Simultaneously Poles ‘don’t mind’ (as written in the questionnaires) the Church presence in the public sphere. This includes: crosses in public buildings – 88 percent, the religious nature of military oaths – 85 percent, religious lessons in schools – 82 percent, participation of priests and bishops in state ceremonies – 80 percent, ordination by priests of places and public buildings – 76 percent of priests appearing on public TV – 74 percent. However, as for the Church’s position on the laws adopted by the Sejm or for priests telling people how to vote in elections,
the situation is inverse: the majority of respondents does not accept this, respectively 39 percent and 15 percent. In the majority of analysed socio-demographic groups, the attitude to the presence of religion and the Church in public life does not vary much. There are no significant differences of opinion in the context of gender, and only minor ones among age groups with the youngest (18–24 years) and the oldest (65 years and more) more accommodating in this respect. Only with residents of larger cities and people with higher education are the values of these indices much lower (CBOS 2015a).

In terms of worldviews, political beliefs and party preferences, there are clearer cleavages. The presence of religion and the Church in public life is favoured by the deeply religious, regularly participating in Catholic practices, right-wing voters, mostly supporters of PiS (including Solidarna Polska and Prawica Rzeczypospolitej) and the PSL. Non-believers and non-practising people of leftist beliefs and who tend to vote for Twój Ruch and the SLD are among those dissenting from a strong public role for the Church. PO and PSL supporters are also closer to the liberal than conservative option (CBOS 2011).

The above picture of the general acceptance of the presence of religion in the public sphere (but not in politics!) with its small diversity in terms of social and demographic criteria requires some nuancing. It applies to ‘soft’ wording questions – even if something ‘does not hurt’, it does not have to be a norm or be desired. For example, in 2013, nearly 90 percent of respondents were not offended by crosses in public buildings, but ‘only’ 62 percent decided that crosses ‘should’ hang in school classes or, in the case of the Polish parliament, 56 percent. Interestingly, the shift in attitudes starting from 1995 in all above-discussed categories is minor as all answers differ by less than 10 percent (CBOS 2018). One can say that over more than 20 years, opinions about the presence of the Church in public life, despite context-dependent fluctuations, remain fairly stable.

The general public also see the problems with which the Catholic Church in Poland is struggling. According to CBOS polls from 2013 the most important problem is paedophilia (43 percent), homosexuality (29 percent) and Church involvement in politics (28 percent) (CBOS 2013a: 2). The same year nearly half of the respondents (48 percent) declared that they would like the new Pope Francis to introduce some changes in teachings of the Church. Respondents named first and foremost liberalisation and modernisation of the Church, its greater openness to the world and changes in teaching regarding the family. The vast majority of the respondents (79 percent) were in favour of allowing IVF for infertile couples. At the same time almost three-quarters believe that the Church should agree to the use of contraception (72 percent) and in some situations allow termination of pregnancy (73 percent). The second most common group of statements referred to the need for change certain ecclesiastical customs and traditions, including above all the abolition of celibacy (59 percent of respondents) (CBOS 2013b).

Moreover, religion has become less institutionalised and more individualistic in Poland. In the years 2005–2014, the percentage of people declaring themselves believing and applying the Church’s norms fell from 66 percent to 39 percent, while those saying they believe ‘in their own way’ has increased from 32 percent to 52 percent. The conviction about the subjective character of ethical norms prevails in every socio-demographic group with the exception of those who attend Church several times a week (CBOS 2015b: 4).

Symptoms of ‘secularisation of morality’ are becoming more and more apparent in Poland, expressed by the fact that Poles feel religious rules to a lesser extent justify their moral principles and declare that moral views on many issues are incompatible with their religion. It is not uncommon for people who claim to be believers (and even ‘deeply believing’) and regular religious practitioners to leave good and bad decisions to their own conscience. Nevertheless,
moral principles proposed by the Catholic Church, although considered not very well suited to today’s reality and needing to be supplemented, in many areas still find recognition and acceptance – including among some who self-describe as non-believers and non-practitioners.

Conclusions

After 1989 Poland was re-established as a democratic, secular state ensuring religious liberty for all citizens. A newly pluralistic system opened up possibilities for political actors, including political parties as well as the Catholic Church, to cooperate and compete for axiological supremacy. The Polish Church entered this power struggle indicating that it would not remain a passive subject of the political system but rather to try to influence it. Goals that were set vis-à-vis political parties included expanding or merely retaining the status quo in terms of Church’s economic position, a presence in public sphere, and ability to shape the moral agenda.

Methods that the clergy used varied from direct lobbying for some right-wing or post-Solidarity parties (including grassroots mobilisation, writing letters) to indirectly pointing to rules that Catholic voters ‘should’ obey. This strategy of legitimisation or delegitimisation (including publicly praising and rebuking politicians, or the threat of excommunication) of candidates depended on time (more openly used in the 1990s) or level of activity (more frequent at the local level).

The Church’s strategies became more effective after 2005 when two centre-right parties, PO and PiS, dominated Poland’s political landscape. The ‘natural’ alliance was created with the latter perceived as a natural advocate of Catholic imperatives and Father Tadeusz Rydzyk with his media concern proved to be the party’s most dedicated proponent. Moreover, with the disappearance of left-wing parties from the Sejm in 2015 the realisation of the Church’s value-based goals like a full ban on abortion seemed to be easier than ever before.

Society, however, does not support evident forms of Church interference in politics or radical changes of its position in the social system. The analysed period, covering 30 years, indicates the conclusion that Polish society accepts only to a certain degree the existing model of Church–state relations. The mere presence of religious symbols, the Church and clergy in the public sphere is well-established in history and not offensive for the majority. Still, Poles do not accept the Church taking a stand on particular legislation or pointing to its preferred political candidates.

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