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Ecclesial Politology: in Search of an Adequate Perspective of Viewing the Church in Political Studies

Abstract: Transformations in the theoretical and methodological inventory of political science define the framework of reflections on the present state of studies on the institutionality of the Church. Analyses revealing the insufficiency of approaches proposed so far confirm the need for a more adequate perspective of research into its individual aspects. This perspective is created by the normative theological and philosophical content which defines the extent component of the concept of Church. Empirically derived descriptions of the individual elements making up this concept, on the other hand, performed within the domain of social sciences, add precision to its definition content-wise. A skillful combination of the two aspects of the concept of Church offers a more in-depth insight into the functioning of ecclesial institutions by emphasizing the supernatural element as a component of the social and political process.

Key words: ecclesial politology, Catholic Church, political science of religion, non-economic pressure group, political process

Abstrakt: Przeobrażenia teoretyczno-metodologicznego zaplecza nauki o polityce wyznaczają ramy refleksji nad stanem badań instytucjonalności Kościoła. Analizy niewystarczalności dotychczasowych ujęć potwierdzają konieczność wypracowania bardziej adekwatnej perspektywy badań jej poszczególnych aspektów. Perspektywę tę tworzą normatywne treści teologiczno-filozoficzne, definiujące zakresowy komponent pojęcia Kościoła. Z kolei empirycznie pogłębione opisy pojedynczych elementów tego pojęcia, dokonane w domenie nauk społecznych, doprecyzowują jego treściowy komponent. Umiejętne połączenie obydwu aspektów pojęcia omawianej instytucji umożliwia uzyskanie dogłębniejszego wglądu w funkcjonowanie instytucji eklezjalnych, dzięki uwydatnieniu pierwiastka nadprzyrodzonego jako składowej procesy społeczno-politycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: politologia eklezjalna, Kościół katolicki, politologia religii, nieekonomiczna grupa nacisku, proces polityczny

At the beginning of this century, the process of incorporating religious problems into politological studies has been considerably accelerated. Its growing pace should be understood not only as an expression of increased demand for a quantitative description of the phenomenon of religiousness, but also for an explanation of the increasing influence of religion on its neighboring segments of the society. The slow, albeit consistent shifting of religious problems from the peripheries of the research interests of political scientists towards their very center has been accompanied by a growing awareness of the need to enhance the theoretical and methodological resources of political science, so that exploration of the religious element as a component of the political process may become more reliable and scientifically accurate both in the cognitive and the pragmatic aspect.

This self-awareness is reflected in a cautious approach, currently coming to the foreground in scientific discourse, to the potential of scientific and positivistic epistemology of developing new theories.¹ It has determined both the genesis of the discipline of political science, and the trends in its subsequent development. This has been felt most fully under the influence of the theories of secularization developed since the sixth decade of the last century. They have contributed to popularizing a belief about the insignificance of the religious factor, whose role in inspiring culture was waning as it clashed with subsequent phases of the industrial society. And since this belief was also shared among political scientists, religious problems within this discipline became marginalized [cf. Bronk 2003: 215].

The process of restoring the significance of studies on the phenomenon of religion in political science should not be motivated by a way of thinking and valuating as simplistic as the one which has led to its becoming forsaken. It is therefore necessary to strive towards introducing religious problems into the very core of the theoretical and methodological reflection typical of this discipline. So that the emerging political science of religion may be an inherently consistent domain of research, transparent with respect to the findings of its related disciplines.

¹ While the religious element is now starting to be seen as an essential element of the political process, many scholars fail to see the inadequacy of the theoretical base which has been employed so far. Consequently, new narrations do not, in fact, depart from those prevailing when religion was considered a non-essential factor. For lack of space, only one reference can be provided here: cf. Ch. Z. Mooney, *The Public Clash of Private Values*, in: *id.* (ed.), *The Public Clash of Private Values: The Politics of Moral Policy*, Chatham House Publishers, New York, London, 2001, 3-18.

Consequently, the starting point of this study is the *status quo* of knowledge about religious problems in political science. Dynamic changes occurring within the theory of politics which determine the development of its individual sub-disciplines provides the proper background against which to place religious problems in the broader context of its theoretical and methodological base. Within this sub-discipline, a tendency has been observed not so much to consolidate the theory and unify its methodological profile, but rather to enhance its explanatory potential. This requires a synthesis, redefining the existing paradigms, of diverse conceptualizations which, while divided by their “genetic” diversity, are brought together by common points of interest in research. One of their integral parts is the process of defining interdisciplinary perspectives in studies [Jakubowski, Zamecki 2013: 119-122].

Further on in this study we will develop an adequate perspective of viewing the Church as a protagonist of the public scene. We will look at the specific nature of its social status, and its influence on the remaining actors. To this end, the Church needs to be depicted as an institution determined both by the transcendental dimension of religion and by the dimension limited to the horizon of the human nature of the persons who make it up.

The last part of this study will begin with analyses typical of the „traditional” research approach of political science which narrows down the essence of the institutional nature of the Church. We will then discuss selected issues in ecclesial theology. They will pave the way for a reinterpretation of the excessively reduced image of Church institutions in political studies. Finally, an attempt will be made at defining the concept of ecclesial politology as a tool for exploring the religious element in political studies.

1. Transformations of the Theoretical Framework and Methodological Perspectives in Political Science in the Aspect of Religious Problems

With a view to restoring religious problems to the main current of political studies, it is necessary to verify the existing paradigms of research into the phenomenon of religion (the meta-theoretical sphere); the descriptive and normative statements derived from these paradigms which provide the foundations for individual theories (the theoretical sphere); and the very structure of the research process, the sequence of steps in the procedure, and the employed instruments (the methodological sphere).

The above tasks involve an intra-disciplinary reflection on the theoretical and methodological *status quo* of political science. The pluralism of epistemological, theoretical and methodological views and orientations, inherent to its genesis and history, keeps deepening. Established traditions are being joined by new approaches. Often the objective difficulty becomes manifest of assigning individual perspectives to particular sub-disciplines of political or related sciences. This results from a relative freedom in combining theoretical content with the formal rules of various disciplines of science. And the study subject defined within the respective frameworks of each of these approaches goes beyond the traditional division of the field of study. This way, political science becomes an area of peculiar transformations. The growing distancing from theories and methodologies modelled on the ideals of natural sciences – the behavioral or the functional and systemic one – is accompanied by a belief in the need for research inspired by the achievements of humanistic and social sciences.

Among standpoints challenging the advisability of upholding an excessively idealized model of political science, with its inherent narrowing down of the object of study, there are representatives of historical institutionalism (1); cultural theories (2); the analytical theory (3); as well as critical and normative theories (4). According to critics, the process of defining the object of study in political science should be considerably expanded. Each of the perspectives listed above approaches this task in a different way.

In the case of (1), the subjective aspects of actors on the political stage are moved to the foreground. Satisfactory insight into their activities can only be achieved when they are studied jointly as a component of a broader historical and social process. The postulated way of viewing the studied phenomenon in the context of its direct and indirect environment enables capturing interactions between participants of the social exchange in the perspective of the influence of values and norms on the course of events under investigation. An additional benefit of the contextual approach is due appreciation of the contingent factor, which sometimes becomes the causal factor of the examined phenomenon. It does not always correspond to the linear model of development, however, which makes it more difficult to anticipate results in the field of influence due to factors which are otherwise considered as causative.

In the light of the perspective proper to (2), the significance of procedures reflecting the subjective specificity of participants in the studied social and

political process becomes more manifest. This becomes possible as the cultural context is taken into account, particularly its normative and axiological layer. It determines various (political/religious) identities, and leaves its mark on particular contexts of the studied processes, for example socio-economic, or cultural and religious ones.

In approach (3), the complexity of politological problems requires the development of a conceptual framework adequate for the object of study. It should always be built relying on an interdisciplinary combination of perspectives. So that first a set of concepts is defined which pave the way for capturing and explaining the essence of the studied phenomenon. Particular attention is paid here to a critical analysis of individual concepts. Abstract meanings which add precision to selected aspects of the studied object may considerably expand the explanatory capacity of a particular research procedure. This is achieved mainly through analyses of the genesis of individual expressions, and the evolution of content which broadens or narrows down the meaning of a particular concept depending on the context in which it is used.

Finally, perspective (4) raises the awareness of those aspects of the examined reality which are important from the social point of view. It is postulated that concrete social problems should be taken into account in politological studies. This means it is necessary to shorten the distance between political science as a reflection on the condition of the society and the society itself. Its representatives should be able to benefit from the explanations offered by political scientists, thus enriching their knowledge and worldview. Another important postulate in this approach is that of combining the theoretical perspectives which are believed to be the most useful within the chronological and spatial boundaries of a particular study area. This applies also to the use of notions derived from mutually contradictory perspectives. This postulate reflects the belief that even contradictory standpoints may supplement one another, which can be achieved when elements of contrary notional apparatuses yield to reciprocal penetration [cf. Jabłoński 2015: 15-18].

Summing up: there is a broad range of coherence between views held by representatives of similar standpoints. In the light of a perspective encompassing the whole of the discourse summarized here, excessively idealized ideals of scientificity, referring to positivist empiricism and rationalism, definitely lose their power of persuasion. The theories, models and methods which they inspired have detached political science too much from the reality it purports to investigate. This happens

mostly due to the “purifying” selection of facts and values, which has considerably reduced the range of aspects of the studied object which are taken into account. Consequently, a very dangerous tendency has spread, visible in the area of studies on religious phenomena. Research projects have not so much been the result of an effort to describe and explain real problems, but a reflection of hypotheses – those which could be formulated within a particular theory – and the test causality of the corresponding research method [cf. Zenderowski: 2014: 1551].

The critical attitude to empiricism which is now becoming manifest does not mean a deprecation of the very point of carrying out empirical studies. On the contrary, the postulated changes of the theoretical and methodological status of the discipline discussed here should be understood as an expression of concern about adjusting empirical studies to the specific nature of the social and political segment. More precisely, to the relationship, defining this specific nature, between elements of the factual and axionormative layer. The introduction of a valuating element into the theoretical framework of the research procedure weakens the predicative force of theories in political science, as it means giving up on attempts at explaining the studied phenomena by reference to the cause-and-effect relationships arranged along the line separating the independent from dependent variables. With an accurately captured hierarchy of relationships, transformations observed on the one side of the category of variables automatically cause corresponding changes on the other side, which can be reflected using statistical models. This unfortunate drawback of such a research approach is compensated, however, by the possibility of making an appropriately extensive and in-depth description of the study object. This possibility is expressed in the emphasis placed on the complexity of factors which together influence selected aspects of the studied reality, so that their description always situates the essence of the studied phenomenon in the broader context of the interdependencies and mutual influences which form its environment. In contrast to the criticized model of natural sciences, this new model is much more sophisticated. It appears, however, to be a better tool for the ultimate explanation of the examined phenomena, which often take the form of hierarchically ordered structures of an axiological and normative nature [Hajduk 2001: 220-222].

The above dynamics of transformations in the theory and practice of political studies undergo constant fluctuations. They are driven both by the increasing pace of changes within the social and political community, and by the permanent crisis of the scientific identity experienced by political scientists. This crisis is a result

of the alternating influences of paradigmatic models in the practice of science. It goes back to the beginnings of contemporary science, marked by the values of Enlightenment, and is expressed most fully in a commitment to keep improving the scientific repertory. The goal is to ensure that new embodiments of the general criteria of scientificity in concrete structures of research procedures enable a more in-depth analysis of the explored reality. In her criticism of certain aspects of this process, Barbara Krauz-Mozer, abstracting from strictly methodological problems, considers the theory of political science we are concerned with to be an insufficiently developed research tool, inadequate considering the fast transformation of the reality around us [Krauz-Mozer 2015: 5].

To endow this pessimistic assertion with an optimistic interpretation, it should be said that the theory discussed here, as Krauz-Mozer has admitted herself in fact, must not be understood as a set of solutions defined once and for all, in a “finished and closed form”. Rather, it is a collection of their constant redefinitions (modification of existing meanings, adaptation of novel ideas, development of pioneering perspectives, discovery of previously ignored aspects of the studied reality, creation of successively improved models). Such redefinition takes the form of a process described in source literature as continuous theorizing [ibid.].

The materialization of this process opens up a perspective of rethinking the issue of religious problems as the subject matter of studies in political science. Considering its subjective and objective determinants, as well as its characteristic complexity, it must be concluded that the empirical and rational model of science has proved to be an insufficient tool of research. Its characteristic conceptualization of religious problems has, as has already been mentioned, excessively reduced the meaning of the religious element as a component of social and political processes. This is due to the reduction, proper to the Enlightenment, of the phenomenon of religion to a strictly rational dimension. Another important limitation of the said paradigm is the consequence of applying the methodology – adequate to its requirements – of the research procedure. The essence of this approach is determined by the significance attached to empirical studies. They play the primary role first of all in the process of defining and setting the boundary conditions of a particular study object. Consequently, the development of political studies in the area of religious problems has been exposed to the limiting effect of excessive subordination to the rigors of natural sciences. This way, the research area has been systematically narrowed down to a set of empirically verifiable issues, theorems, normative directives and hypotheses.

The submission of religious problems to the requirements of this procedure has resulted in its secularization. It has become secularized in the sense that a relatively stable set of theories and methods, limited to those which could be empirically verified, has led to a distorted insight into the complexity of the phenomenon of religion. This distortion resulted from focusing on those aspects of the phenomenon which confirmed a previously assumed thesis; aspects which attested to the decline of the social significance of institutions representing religion and the real influence on the social and political process (in accordance with the paradigm of secularization). As a consequence, political scientists have been left helpless in confrontation with facts – the growing influence of the religious factor on the public forum which has been witnessed since the second half of the last century. It is described in source literature as a resurgence, and extends from the local dimension (Khomeini's revolution in Iran), through the regional one (the transformations initiated in Poland which ultimately led to the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe), to the global dimension (political Islam whose influence has been indisputable at least since the events of 9/11/01).

Summing up, it should be noted that in result of the community's self-reflection, the paradigmatic assumptions which are responsible for the marginalization of religious problems in political studies have been redefined. The new perspectives which are opening now make it possible to look at the phenomenon of religiousness in a broader context of multiple-layered factors influencing the political process. This expansion corresponds to a gradual departure from the scientific and positivistic ideals of science, whose application has led to an excessive formalization of its conceptual apparatus and research procedures. They have proved to be inadequate when applied to the subjective determinants of religious problems, and have led to an excessive reduction of the examined manifestations of religiousness; particularly to an excessive detachment of religious actors from the natural social context, failure to take into account elements which determine the nature of religious phenomena, underestimation of the influence of the transcendental element on the social and political process. These transformations of the theoretical and methodological status of political science bring political scientists closer to recovering the lost subjectivity of the religious element in their studies. One of the most important, due to its being the first, step which makes this possible is to redefine the subject matter of political studies. In the next part of this paper, an attempt will be made at suggesting relevant redefinitions, be it in a field narrowed down to the notion of the Church.

2. Creating a Perspective to Enable Defining the Church as the Study Object of Political Science

The basic difficulty in operationalizing the concept of the Church for use in political science is a resultant of general problems with capturing its essence in a definition. Even in the area of theological sciences, it is difficult to find someone who would dare present a definition of the Church in the form of a single, concise formula. It is even more difficult to find specialists who would accept such a formula as not falling into one-sidedness. So that it integrates all essentially relevant designates of the concept, i.e. denotations of its constitutive features. Consequently, theologians most often limit themselves to listing a set of descriptive and normative features. They emphasize only selected aspects of the multi-dimensional ecclesial reality, which derive their significance from the context delineated by the problems under investigation. A similar strategy was adopted during Vatican II. In order to eliminate the possibility of falling into the trap of oversimplification, for example by focusing excessively on one aspect at the cost of another, the idea of providing a single, conclusive definition at the starting point of ecclesiological documents was abandoned. Instead, a set of mutually complementary descriptions was used, borrowed from authors representing subsequent (Biblical, patristic, ecclesiological) stages in the development of the theological thought [Jarosz 2013: 29].

Since in the area of theological science, the way the concept of the Church is defined depends on the context of particular studies, it appears that an analogous approach should be adopted in political science. Thus, the definition of the concept of Church for use in political studies should be based on a skillful abstraction of its comprehensive reality from different aspects, always placed against the broader background of the Church's participation in the social and political process. This way of arriving at a definition capturing the object of study entails the need for generalizations. Which inevitably leads to reduction. Nevertheless, such generalizations are not the same as abstracting solely from empirically observable aspects of the ecclesial reality, along the line of attempts made during the rule of the empirical and scientific paradigm. Quite on the contrary, such efforts may also refer to elements of the supernatural stratum of the Church which are beyond sensory perception. Insight into this stratum becomes possible thanks to an analysis of the religious beliefs of the members of the ecclesial community included in a particular research procedure.

In view of the above, at the starting point the research procedure employed by political science should take into account the axiological and normative aspects

of the ecclesial reality. This applies to the ideological layer of the Church, its institutional and functional layer, as well as the broad range of social and cultural associations linking religion represented by the Church with the sphere of public and political life. It is therefore necessary to draw inspiration from the theological, philosophical, and humanistic reflection. This procedure cannot be identified, however, with mechanically transferring the conceptual apparatus of theology or its inherent methodological principles into the area of political science. It is necessary, therefore, to perform analyses aimed at transposing theological and philosophical meanings and senses so that the actual content of particular conceptualizations, e.g. theological ones, may find its equivalent in the content of the politological designates which denote them. Designates which satisfy the criterion of rationality proper to social sciences.

One advantage of such a starting point is precise determination of the extension of the concept of Church, i.e. the set of constitutive elements making up its structure. Its typical focus on the normative aspect prevents, however, the identification of features characteristic of the individual components of this structure. Consequently, in order to define the content of this concept it is necessary to provide another series of in-depth descriptions and explanations. As they refer to empirically observable properties of the individual parts of the structure, they may become the subject matter of descriptively-oriented studies. Wherefore the next phase of building a procedure of research into the complex ecclesial reality requires taking advantage of the potential of social sciences. Thanks to the instruments employed within their framework, it is possible to precisely determine the specific nature of a selected aspect of the Church structure, for example the institutional one. The insight thus arrived at into the multiple-layered reality of the concept of Church integrally combines elements of its supernatural superstructure with elements of its natural “base” [cf. Królikowska 2010: 65].

The primary feature of the Church as an object of politological studies is its teandric nature, i.e. the necessary and close relationship between its spiritual and temporal elements. The former expresses man’s vertical orientation towards transcendence and is understood by members of the community as man’s personal relationship with God. The latter fits within the horizon of interpersonal relationships; providing that such relationships are perceived by members of this community as indispensable for the formerly mentioned relationship between God and man to exist. A brief definition, which nevertheless captures the very essence of this relationship, may be formulated in reference to reflections

concerning the radically redefined moral authority of the Church. According to Johannes A. van der Ven, this redefinition has been accomplished in the early modern times under the influence of dramatic social and cultural transformations. In van der Ven's perspective, the Church is a human community which is becoming like other social institutions in the circumstances of the contemporary secularized – and, it should be added, globalizing – world. It is nevertheless distinguished from these institutions by its exceptional vision and mission [Ven 1997:18]. In other words, while the Church is a human community, it implements divine plans of salvation.

Summing up: the theological reflection referred to in the first part of this paragraph refers to the teandricity of the Church. It becomes manifest in the light of two perspectives. The first one refers to the concept of community, which means man's direct relationship with transcendence which may only exist within the community of the Church. The second one refers to the concept of community referring to the internal organization of ecclesial unification and its contacts with representatives of its environment [Baniak 2010: 7-8]. In accordance with the conclusions emerging from this juxtaposition, in order to define the Church as an object of political studies it is necessary to harmoniously combine its constitutive elements: the communal (supernatural) and social (natural) one. Therefore, processes employed to develop appropriate research procedures must include analyses of the normative aspects of the institutional nature of the Church. When they are taken into account, a point of reference is established for subsequent stages in the research procedure which, depending on the studied aspect of the ecclesial reality, are aimed at selecting the right set of instruments.

3. Substantive Implications of the Broadened Perspective in Defining the Concept of Church

The discussed perspective of viewing the Church as the subject matter of political studies has resulted from the conviction about the insufficiency of approaches employed so far. Due to their scientific and positivistic origins, they were not capable of providing comprehensive descriptions and explanations of the complex ecclesial reality. Consequently, the Church had been reduced to a pressure group. It became an actor single-mindedly committed to promoting certain rights and privileges; an exploiter of strategies and measures typically employed by similar organizations competing on the public forum. This picture oversimplifies the reality of the Church's involvement in the public sphere, however. First of all, it fails to take into account its many irreplaceable functions. Furthermore, one must

bear in mind that the praxeology of typically ecclesial activity is a much more sophisticated form of activity than the methods of social engineering employed by various pressure groups.

In order to confirm the legitimacy of the above arguments, a critical analysis will be carried out of Paul J. Fabrizio's study entitled: *Evolving Into Morality Politics: U. S. Catholic Bishops' Statements on U. S. Politics from 1792 to the Present* [id. 2001: 73 – 90]. The study is concerned with the evolution of the participation of Catholic bishops in the U.S.A. in influencing morality politics, and is based on an analysis of their pastoral letters. Its starting point is the conviction about the great power of ecclesial influence. It has been achieved through an evolutionary adaptation of the religious community headed by the bishops to the dynamics of change in its environment. In accordance with the thesis put forward in the study, Catholic bishops are a non-economic interest group. Due to their privileged position in the hierarchical structure of the Church, they have become part of the social and political establishment. They have achieved this status just like representatives of other pressure groups: the gradually increasing acceptance of their active presence on the public forum has contributed to an increase in the capital of social trust. This increase has subsequently been materialized by forming a system of political pressure.

The author of the study has adopted the method of historical analysis, focusing on the participation of the religious community headed by members of the American episcopate in the process of shaping moral politics. In accordance with this perspective, the management of influence exerted by the Church is a resultant of the evaluation of its social status earned by the bishops. Consequently, in the first phase of the institutionalization of the Catholic Church (about a hundred years after gaining independence), the bishops adopted the attitude of withdrawal and defense of their *status quo*. This was the consequence of a relatively low number of Catholics. Addressing the authorities and the society at large, the spiritual leaders of the Church tried to point out the role of Catholics in achieving prosperity. It was only in situations of locally demonstrated hostility, by referring to the religious roots of secular authority, that they called for respecting the freedom of practicing one's faith. A similarly defensive attitude was adopted with regard to the issue of property rights. The faithful were never addressed with appeals for active political participation.

The gradually growing social significance of Catholics which has become apparent since the beginning of the twentieth century began the second phase in the organization of the Church's morality politics. One of the major arguments for

legitimizing the increasing status of the local Church was its loyalty to the state, demonstrated during both World Wars. It was with a markedly increased assertiveness that the bishops began to influence morality politics, mainly by introducing references to Christian values and norms into the public debate. Nevertheless, lay Catholics were still not called upon to become politically engaged. General appeals were made instead, addressed to political decision-makers.

Finally, the third phase of full involvement in shaping morality politics was initiated with a negative reaction to the legalization of abortion. The immediate cause for the radical change in the bishops' participation in shaping morality politics was the Federal Supreme Court's ruling in *Roe v. Wade* (1973). It caused an unprecedented liberalization of anti-abortion regulations, which according to the Court's ruling had violated the right to privacy guaranteed by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Since such a radical change in legal regulations dealt a blow at the foundations of Christian morality, the bishops entered into an open conflict aimed at delegitimizing abortion. A large-scale, long-term campaign was launched. This was possible by taking advantage of the high social status of the Church. Using the capital of social trust, the bishops initiated a complex pressure system. The key role was assigned to the lay faithful. They began directly lobbying political decision-makers, and indirectly influencing members of various social groups through media campaigns, charity initiatives, and in particular by assistance provided to high-risk women. This phase culminated in the American episcopate transforming into a non-economic pressure group.

Summing up, it must be admitted that while similar analyses substantiate the thesis proposed in the discussed study, the picture of the Church community and of the bishops who lead it is essentially similar to that of communities and leaders of other social institutions, particularly organizations of the third sector. Therefore, the task taken up in the next part of this paper will be to expand this insight in order to recover the lost elements of the religious nature of the institution of the Church itself, and of its episcopate.

A particularly delicate issue is that of the nature of the ministry performed by bishops. When approaching this issue, it should be noted that even the term "ministry" situates the leadership activities performed by bishops in a typically religious sphere. The sphere of sapiential rather than instrumental rationality. Consequently, the "work" of the bishop should be understood as the resultant of the commitment, proper to the Church, to a system of interpersonal links and

connections, always established within the ecclesial network of relationships and bonds which is supposed to enable and systematically enhance communication with transcendence. Just like all other members of the community, a bishop is a beneficiary of the vertical communication – occurring within the inner life of the ecclesial community – between man and God [Ratzinger 2004: 49n]. This was emphatically expressed by Saint Augustine when he said: “for you, I am a bishop, with you, I am a Christian” (Sermon 340). The essential equality of all members of the Church highlighted here does not correspond to a separation between bishops and the faithful. Their jurisdiction is limited in many aspects by mechanisms which serve to ensure the community is oriented towards transcendence².

From the point of view of morality politics, an area in which the bishops’ power is limited by restraints of particular significance is the Church’s moral teaching. In accordance with the dialectics of the above-mentioned study, the college of bishops, remaining in unity with the Pope, has almost unlimited power to determine the content and extent of the moral teaching of the Church. This state of affairs is confirmed by relevant canons of the Church law, to which the author of the study referred when defining the essence and scope of a bishop’s ministry. The introduction of canonical regulations into the ecclesiological perspective to provide their substantiation somewhat complicates the situation, however. The structure of teleological knowledge is not a static collection of moral obligations passed on by tradition, defined by duly authorized persons who rationalize the content of that tradition. On the contrary, both theology and morality are spheres of a continuous search for such an interpretation of this tradition as to make sure that the unchangeable and timeless transcendental values stored in its repository are properly communicated in the religious message. A message which is sufficiently adequate in particular social and cultural conditions to ensure that the Church can freely fulfill its mission. Such interpretation is not so much a rationalization, therefore, but rather a revelationalization, i.e. a set of acts which reveal, “in the context of revealed truths, the natural knowledge about man and his reference to the Absolute” [Hajduk 2001: 223].

The process of arriving at definitions capturing principles which are morally obligatory in a particular place and time is very complex. All members of the

² The history of the Church provides numerous examples of a dangerous discontinuation of mechanisms limiting the bishops’ power. In the period analyzed here, however, excessive clericalization of relationships within the Church are definitely being abandoned (particularly since Vatican II).

Church community participate in this process. Not by way of a democratic majority, but of an asymmetrically shared responsibility oriented towards transcendence. The most important part of this structure is made up by two communities directly responsible for interpreting the sources of revelation, namely the bishops, acting in unity with the Pope, and theologians. Both, enjoying their respective autonomy, interact with one another so that the normative aspects of the bishops' teaching, focused around the whole of the experience faith of members of the ecclesial community, remain in an interactive exchange with descriptively oriented contents of theological studies, aimed at systematically deepening the understanding of truths of the faith and morality. The axis of tensions accompanying interactions between members of these two communities is balanced by the influence of a third community, that of the faithful. More precisely, the *sensus fidei* they provide verifies the assertions made by the two institutions by continuously referring the regulations they develop to the existential experience, or, in other words, by implementing the obligatory content of individual regulations in individual and social life. This structure represents a transmission belt, so to say, of defining moral obligation. While bishops play a very important role within this framework, other members of the Church community do not remain on the margins of the process of looking for optimum forms of giving witness. The described structure of multi-lateral communicative references considerably diminishes the bishops' alleged arbitrariness in making decisions of key importance from the moral point of view. Thus, they cannot be said to be a privileged elite furthering their own interests above the heads of the faithful. Rather, they are mediators whose overriding goal is to uphold the transcendental element in the horizon of interpersonal communication, maintain the inner unity of the Church community, and socialize religious faith. An indispensable part of this last element is internalization of moral principles by both the faithful and members of the external environment of the Church.

At this point, some critical comments should be made concerning the concept of moral politics adopted in the discussed study. It has been narrowed down to the political play between the advocates of competing worldviews, in which the key role is played by political power, as it creates compromise-based legal regulations [Mooney 2001: 3-5]. In the perspective of the Church, however, morality politics is but a narrow section of the broader phenomenon of morality. Its dominant part is the essentially autonomous space of man's conscience, standing on the threshold of politics, being the immanent capacity of human beings to distinguish between that which is morally right from that which is morally wrong. It is this sphere

of the autonomy of the conscience which is the area of the Church's particular engagement. Therefore, the depiction of officials representing the Church as players on the field of morality politics without making any reference to the orientation of the community they represent towards the special activity within the meta-political sphere is unjustified. Formation of the conscience is the object of day-to-day concern and diligent effort of members of the Church community, including bishops. And direct interventions in the shape of morality politics are made in emergency situations, when fundamental principles of universal ethics are violated.

Summing up: the ecclesiological content introduced above has considerably expanded the perspective of studying the Church as a participant of morality politics, thus weakening arguments for viewing bishops and the Church community they represent as a non-economic pressure group. This has confirmed the need to explain the ecclesial reality in reference to the mutual interaction between the natural and the supernatural element.

Conclusion

Ecclesial politology is a perspective of studying the Church as a participant of the political process. It stems from the inner transformation of the theoretical and methodological *status quo* of political science. The goal of ecclesial politology is to remedy the excessive formalization of existing research procedures. This is accomplished by systematically adding to its conceptual apparatus, in order to enable capturing the religious and spiritual element which escapes direct observation. The need to take into account the transcendental element as a component of the social and political process results from the fact that by leaving its mark on the institutional nature of the Church, it determines the specificity of influences generated within the ecclesial community on its environment.

The ambivalence resulting from the unification of the supernatural and natural elements present in the Church influences the inner complexity of ecclesial politology as a research tool. On the one hand, it is determined by a layer extending beyond that which is temporal; on the other, by being immersed in the reality of a particular place and time. Insight into the former makes it possible to take advantage of the normative reflection proper to theological, philosophical and humanistic sciences; insight into the latter – that of empirical social sciences. The employment of both perspectives is expressed at the first stage in formulating an operative definition of the concept of Church, which is always developed

in the context of a particular research problem. In the next stage, it consists in supplementing this insight by employing an empirical research method which makes it possible to articulate the content-based component of this definition.

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