

Sławomir Sowiński

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland

ORCID: 0000-0003-1324-121X

*Creative tension between religion
and politics, and epistemological
temptations to reduce it on the basis of
political science*

In memory of Prof. Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde

Abstract. The “Böckenförde paradox” may lead to the question: of modern political science can capture the value of the structural tension between religion and politics? In politics and the world of religion too, there is a tendency to reduce this tension, either by trying to identify politics with religion, or by completely separating them. In the epistemological dimension, the tendency to reduce this tension can also be seen in the sciences of politics, although it occurs to a different extent in functionalistic, institutional or historical approaches.

Keywords: Böckenförde, politics, political science of religion, religion

Abstrakt. Słynny „paradoks Böckenfördego” może prowadzić do pytania: czy współczesne nauki o polityce potrafią uchwycić wartość strukturalnego napięcia między religią a polityką? I w polityce, i w świecie religii dostrzec można tendencję do redukcji tego napięcia, albo poprzez próbę *utożsamiania* polityki z religią, albo poprzez ich całkowite *separowanie*. W wymiarze epistemologicznego tendencję do redukcji tego napięcia dostrzec można także w naukach o polityce, choć w różnych stopniu występuje ono w ujęciach: funkcjonalistycznym, instytucjonalnym, czy historycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: Böckenförde, polityka, politologia religii, religia

The recently deceased prominent German lawyer and constitutionalist Professor Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde reinforced our belief that the mutual relations between religion and politics, despite their longevity and various experiences, also

today in the post-secular era, are still alive, dynamic and open in nature, marked by possibly unresolved dilemmas to the end. Such a statement can be made, for example, on the basis of the famous “Böckenförde paradox”, according to which a libertarian democratic state of law must use axiological sources, which it cannot produce by itself¹, or his other accurate remark that in a democratic system the Churches can choose between a political and metapolitical mission, but cannot reliably fulfil them simultaneously².

However, it is worth considering whether contemporary social sciences, especially political science, have long been expressing their ambitions to explain – at least from a political point of view – the nature and significance of these relations, and if they have the appropriate competences and methodological instruments for doing so. In this context, the question of whether contemporary political science is able to see and properly assess the particular tension that arises between religion and politics seems interesting in this context. Or, for methodological or axiological reasons, do they tend naturally toward an epistemological – so to speak – reduction of this tension?

We wish to devote our considerations to this issue.

¹ Professor Böckenförde himself said of this paradox: “a liberal secularised state has a basis in something that it cannot guarantee on its own. There is a great risk here, which the state took on in wanting to take on and face the challenge of freedom. A state can exist as a liberal state only because the freedom it provides to its citizens will be regulated from within, because of the moral substance unit and unity of society.” [Böckenförde 1994: 120].

² As emphasised by Prof. Böckenförde, both roles (political or metapolitical) of the Church, from the point of view of the rules of a democratic state, are possible. However, the Church – without losing credibility – cannot combine both strategies and “use democracy until it reaches the majority, and in case of failure, withdraw to the position of natural law and point to its unique position” (Cf. the same, *Ethos of modern democracy and the Church*, [ibid.:42]. Interestingly, this awareness also took root in the social teaching of the Catholic Church in Poland. Chairman of the Polish Bishops’ Conference, Fr. Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, his solemn homily delivered during Holy Mass, on the 100th anniversary of Poland regaining independence, he summarised, among others, with the following statement: “The Church (...) has a duty to speak from metapolitical positions, reminding about norms, principles and ethical values which should guide the government in making decisions in this field. However, he cannot – if he does not want to lose his political credibility – change his form of involvement from political to metapolitical and vice versa, depending on what he considers at a given moment to be more favourable to him” [BP KEP 2018].

To make a meaningful approach, at the outset we outline the nature and political value of this particular tension that arises between religion and politics (point 1), as well as various tendencies or temptations to reduce it that arise in terms of political practice (point 2). However, in the main part of our considerations we wish to reflect on how much (point 3) and in what form (points 4 and 5) this reduction can come to the fore not so much in the dimension of political practice as in the epistemological area of analysis of the political process. We also want to consider the extent to which the tendency of this epistemological reduction is carried by some of the theoretical approaches present in political science, i.e. functionalism, institutionalism or a historical approach (point 6).

1. The tension between religion and politics and its value

Of course, not only Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde pointed out that democratic politics and religion (in any case, Christianity, which is our area of interest) remain and should be in a state of mismatch, endless dialogue, which in some dimension also remains a dispute.

This relation is also shaped by the formula of the “autonomy and cooperation” of the Church and the state which is very clearly present in the social teaching of the Catholic Church, at least since the Second Vatican Council. In this approach, it is emphasised that the independent Church and state, while maintaining their separateness and respecting the religious freedom of believers and non-believers, should cooperate for the common good³. Religion, while distancing itself from the direct political process (but also defending itself against attempts to privatise it) should protect its public and metapolitical status, thanks to which it can also indirectly influence the quality of the political process [Sowiński 2012]. Developing this perspective, Piotr Mazurkiewicz

³ Such a formula can be found, inter alia, in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, but also – interestingly – in the Polish Constitution of 1997. “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” of the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et Spes*) states: “The Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other. Yet both, under different titles, are devoted to the personal and social vocation of the same men. The more that both foster sounder cooperation between themselves with due consideration for the circumstances of time and place, the more effective will their service be exercised for the good of all” [Pastoral Constitution]. In turn, in Article 25 point 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997 states that “The relationship between the State and churches and other religious organizations shall be based on the principle of respect for their autonomy and the mutual independence of each in its own sphere, as well as on the principle of cooperation for the individual and the common good” [Constitution of the Republic of Poland].

speaks in this context about the “non-political politics of the Church”⁴, while Aniela Dylus points to the unique, specific role of the Church in a democratic society⁵. Father Maciej Zięba draws attention to the dangers of the ideologisation of religion and religious agnosticism [Zięba 1998: 94]. Piotr Burgoński describes the model of the “presence and natural tension” of the Church in the Polish public sphere [Burgoński 2013: 23], and author of these words analyses the topic of “the presence, otherness, transcendence” of the Church in the public sphere, which distances itself from both attempts at its politicisation and privatization [Sowiński 2012: 333-345].

The intuition that religions in modern democracy should seek their public path between their attempts to privatise them and the temptation of being dragged into the political game is of course more universal than the social teaching of the Catholic Church. In modern philosophical and social thought, it can be sought at least since de Tocqueville [1996] or Lord Acton [1995] for the reflection of even such contemporary outstanding thinkers as Jürgen Habermas [Teinert 2006], José Casanova [2005] or Leszek Kołakowski [1990].

Still, however, without developing this thought, we can generally say that in the belief here (and quite widely shared today), religion (and certainly modern Christianity) as well as contemporary democratic politics – for the good of both, accompanying each other – should also maintain their own diversity and autonomy. To put it briefly, here we mean a kind of pattern of tension between religion and politics, which – similarly to physical or biological systems – is born as a result of regularly interacting diversity. Voltages, which, leading to inevitable

⁴ As emphasised by this experienced researcher of the relationship between religion and politics, the Catholic Church, mobilising its faithful (and all people of good will) to public commitment, solidarity and responsibility, at the same time emphasised its identity different from the state. He writes, “Christianity, on the one hand, emphasizes the ethical dimension of political commitment, mobilizing the faithful to take political responsibility; on the other hand, it reminds of the inalienability in this world of the Church as an institution radically different from the state [Mazurkiewicz 2017: 252-253].

⁵ Analysing various models of the Church-state relationship, the author distances herself from the model of the “state” church, “blending in with politics”, “decreeing the truth”, “interest group”, resembling the association of the “horizontal” church, “democratised” church or “church” radically separated from the state.” Instead, he favours the model of a “free Church in a free state”, “moderately separated from the state, a Church that does not avoid “social involvement” or taking “substitute functions” in special situations, but in a democratic state, wants to be a “salt of the earth “and” mystical church” (Quotation marks come from the typology created by the author) [Dylus 2016: 415-434].

collisions, frictions, pressures or stresses, at the same time generate energy that can serve both phenomena within this special system.

Indeed it is this particular tension, its level, character (or lack thereof) that remains the main object of substantive interest in political sciences trying (in terms of what is politically) to explore and explain the specificity of the relationship between religion and politics, especially the influence of religion on public life, and thus indirectly, also on the political process.

Because it is thanks to this tension that, in a situation of natural democratic political conflict, fulfilling the community-forming function, religion can build and restore, as is politically necessary, the framework of a democratic community. It is thanks to this tension that religion can also have a corrective function towards the political process, by constantly invoking human dignity, freedom, solidarity or long-term responsibility towards future generations. Finally, thanks to this tension, also in the situation of a pluralistic society, publicly present (though politically autonomous) religion can convincingly perform a kind of critical function, reminding reliably, with its own eschatological realism, of the natural limitations and imperfections of any political action and the real danger of ideologising politics [Sowiński 2012: 333-345].

The tension we are talking about here, and actually the way it is regulated, also seems to be at the root of the diversity of political relations between Churches and countries in the European Union, which is increasingly studied today by political scientists. This can be seen in the perspective of the so-called “Church clause” (Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty), which protects quite different forms of such relations, consistent with the tradition and history of individual countries. In practice, this means the simultaneous recognition and respect of: French solutions, which since the time of the famous Act of 1905, in the spirit of *laïcité* treat religion as a private individual matter, Danish or Greek models, where the largest churches are *de facto* state-owned, or German, Italian, Spanish or Polish models, in which the autonomy and cooperation of the state and Churches is associated with the historical and cultural significance of religion, and these Churches perform a number of important social functions⁶.

⁶ A good compendium discussing various models of the state of the Church in the European Union is a collective work edited by Professor Gerhard Robbers, which in Polish appeared under the title *State and Church in the European Union* [Robbers 2007].

Last but not least, we finally notice that the lack of tension we refer to here opens the way to challenges or dangers closely watched today, and not only in political science, such as religious or secular fundamentalism, ideologisation or political instrumentalisation of religion [Grosfeld 2009; Gierycz 2009], “ethnicization of religion” [Zenderowski 2011] or “sacralisation of ethnos” [ibid.].

2. Tendencies to reduce tension between religion and politics.

Political dimension

Our last remark recalls an equally important question from the perspective of political science regarding what is the natural (in some sense) political temptation or tendency to reduce the tension we describe here.

When ascertaining and emphasizing the value of this structural tension between religion and politics, it must be remembered that this tension, like any influencing the elements or phenomena connected with it, exerts pressure on their internal processes and structures. In a situation where this pressure is particularly noticeable, the phenomenon of the political system may (react) by striving for one or another form of discharge or reduction of this tension. Translating this to the political dimension we are primarily interested in, we can see that the structural tension between religion and politics may give rise to political fear not only about the lasting conflict between the state and the Churches (or religious associations), but also about the functionality of the political system, and above all about the political sovereignty of his authority. Hence, a common tendency of traditional and modern political systems (and especially their power) is the desire to partially reduce or completely discharge the tension we indicate.

Such political tendencies can have a different character and range. Referring to the diversity of their character, we can generally say that the political tensions we cite can be reduced either by trying to sharply separate religion from politics towards the privatization of religion, or by identifying religion with politics, i.e. striving to close them. One of the best-known examples – a de facto-privatizing separation – seems to be the famous French Act of December 1905, sharply separating the state from the church in the Third Republic [Basdevant-Gaudemet 2007: 126-127]. In turn, numerous attempts to identify or even conclude religion with politics can be sought in a variety of circumstances and concepts such as ancient forms of the sacralization of

power⁷ or theocracy⁸, the Augsburg Peace of 1555 (with its guiding principle “*cuius regio eius religio*”), or the various varieties of civil religions⁹.

Although both of the political tendencies indicated here (separation and identification) seem to be moving in completely opposite directions (radical secularism of power or [quasi] theocratic rule), from the point of view we are interested in, their effect is similar. And it is precisely the reduction of tension between religion and politics that in consequence usually means dominating the specific mission of religion through ambitions or political goals. In both cases, similar effects may arise consisting in limiting or even levelling the above-mentioned metapolitical, community-forming, critical and correcting contribution of religion to the political process. In both cases, the risk of fundamentalism being born – in the former secular and in the latter religious – may increase.

Referring to the question of the second, and thus possible range of such political activities, raised above, we can equally generally note that both attempts to separate and identify religion and politics may take on a more structural dimension, involving appropriate institutional solutions¹⁰, inscribed in the very

⁷ An outstanding expert on Catholic social teaching, Cardinal Josef Höffner, as an example, mentions in this context, among others, the cult of the Syrian king Antioch, manifestations of the cult of some Roman emperors (Augustus, Domitian, Aurelian, Diocletian), and the cult of the Inca emperor. [Höffner 1999: 240].

⁸ The manifestations of theocracy are noticed by Cardinal Höffner, for example, in the thought of the political party of the Zealots active in Israel during the time of Christ or concepts, some theologians of the Middle Ages. Thomas, or already in the 16th century at Francisco de Vitoria [ibid.: 240-241].

⁹ It is worth recalling that intellectual and practical search for civil religion has been in progress since at least the time of Jean Jacques Rousseau. And although both researchers and followers of this concept have led to quite different (and distant from each other) conclusions, the essence is probably the desire to reduce the tension between civic and religious loyalty. For both the secular concept of civil religion, probably closer to the spirit of French republicanism, as well as concepts referring to traditional eschatological religions, closer to the republicanism of American founding fathers, in essence want to limit the tension to which citizens living simultaneously in two different, unadapted worlds are exposed, and loving at the same time two different homelands. Citizens loyal to both God's and earthly states at the same time [Węgrzecki 2016].

¹⁰ As some examples of such a feud of structural or systemic reduction of tension between religion and politics, one can cite the model of French separation, on the one hand, and the model of the state church on the other, in which – as, for example, in Greece or Denmark – the constitution The church, especially supported by the state. With all the doubts and discussions that these solutions may raise, both though, in completely different ways, settle many practical questions and doubts about the relationship between the state and the Church, thus reducing the tension indicated by us. However,

foundations of the political system, or a more tactical dimension, consisting in the current policy that this or that other authority may pursue towards this or that other religious entity, that this entity is politically instrumentalizing or disavowing¹¹, independently, and sometimes against the rules of religious freedom, which are inscribed in the operation of a democratic political system.

3. Tendencies to reduce tension between religion and politics.

Epistemological (political) dimension.

The political tendencies we recall to reduce tension between religion and politics, as well as their possible political consequences, are obviously nothing new in contemporary politics and so, as we have pointed out above, have already met with considerable, also critical, interest in the sciences of politics. Definitely less present in scientific reflection seems to be the epistemological, and not purely political, dimension of this issue. And this particular tension between religion and politics can be a problem not only for politicians but also for contemporary political scientists.

Basically, this problem lies in the fact that the political scientist, armed with his theoretical tools, encountering the phenomenon of religion on his scientific path (in the vicinity of politics), either may recognise that religion cannot be scientifically interested in non-political fact, or for the purposes of his research he may view religion as a phenomenon analogous to other political or even political phenomena in some respects. In the first case, religion and its meaning disappear from the research horizon altogether. In the second case, admittedly, religion remains on this horizon, although not as a phenomenon of a special eschatological genre, but as a social, public or political fact. In both cases, he may become familiar with the special role of religion in public (and indirectly political) life, and, as a consequence, ignore the tensions between religion and politics to which we have referred here, and thus also ignore the problem of its reduction and political consequences arising as a result. Therefore the issues – as we tried to show above – are quite significant for politics.

in both these cases – as is worth emphasizing – the importance of religious freedom is emphasized [Robbers 2007].

¹¹ Very interestingly in relation to the situation of contemporary Poland, he writes about Prof. Michał Gierycz [2009].

In short, the methodological problem we indicate here is that even if the tension between religion and politics actually occurs and affects the political process, or its reduction happens (with all its consequences), then the scientist – while guarding his political scientific skills – may sometimes underestimate it or even fail to see it at all.

Therefore, while later focusing mainly on this important epistemological and methodological issue, firstly we will try to take a closer look at it, tracking its various possible variants. Secondly, we will consider the possibility of its occurrence on the basis of several different theoretical approaches dominating political science. Thirdly, we will make a carefully attempt to outline a few recommendations that this epistemological problem in the field of political science helped to limit.

4. Epistemological reduction – separation variant

Epistemological reduction, as in the case of political reduction, in the field of political science can – as we have already noted above – take two main forms: *separation* or *substitution*.

Reduction through separation means removing religion (and its impact on political processes) outside the sphere of serious scientific reflection regarding the domain of political matters. Some of its manifestations may arise even on the basis of the high-profile – albeit more sociological than political – concepts of secularization of Peter Ludwik Berger [Berger 1997; Borowik 1997], Thomas Luckmann [2006], or Niklas Luhmann [2007]. Although in different respects they probably differ from each other, emphasising either the “liberation” (in their opinion) of the modernizing world from the influence of religion (Berger) or the “privatisation” of religion in the modern world (Luckmann and Luhmann), the common research consequence resulting from them, it may be concluded that religion is not an important and significant element in the public life of modern society today. Another example of such a possible separating reduction may be the simplistic and one-sided treatment of Popper’s popular concept of “open society” – especially its reading, which removes all traditional axiology, including religious beliefs, beyond the rational boundaries, and thus beyond parentheses, which modern science can sensibly and critically examine. Leszek Kołakowski [1990: 150-177], among others, wrote about dangerous illusions arising from this interpretation of Popper’s thoughts or friar Maciej Zięba [2011].

Relying on only two examples of such a possible reduction, however, we can cautiously assume that in modern political sciences, and especially among researchers of religion and politics, it is not very common. First of all, of course, this is because researchers of religious relations with politics about the presence of the former must be convinced by a definition. Secondly, also because even a political scientist who does not deal with the relationship between religion and politics on a daily basis, without taking into account the presence and significance of the former, will have considerable trouble with a meaningful explanation of many key contemporary political processes, such as the “third wave of democratization”, peaceful revolutions in Europe in 1989, or Poland’s accession to the European Union in the years 1997–2004.

An interesting issue and worth considering is the question about the possible causes of the epistemological reduction mentioned here. Much indicates that, apart from the aforementioned purely workshop-related political problem, which is to examine the “non-political politics” of religion, wider considerations may also be involved, as well as ideological (or ideological) matters. Without expanding on this, let us just mention that it can be a general problem of modern social sciences related to distrustful transcendence [Wysocki 2015], or even more broadly, the special legacy of enlightenment, which is a redefinition, or reduction of the concept of rationality, to the sole dimension of empirical knowledge, verified through experiments [Ratzinger 2005].

5. Epistemological reduction – substitution variant. The church as an interest group? civil society? Sector III? public sphere actor?

The problem of epistemological reduction that we are talking about here in political science is also in the form of an analogy or a kind of theoretical substitution. This substitution – as we have already mentioned above – means treating religious entities in scientific research as another, perhaps special, variety of a wider genre of political actors, which political science is used to dealing with on a daily basis.

In the more radical but definitely rarer variant, this type of reduction occurs there and when researchers or analysts of political life, for various reasons known to them, treat Churches or religious associations as participating in the political actors’ struggle for power, and even contrary to the self-declarations of the

interested parties themselves¹². Much more often the reduction here in political science is more subtle when researchers of the political process, realising the non-political nature of religious entities, situate them in a political area, treating them, for example, as a special kind of interest group, part of society civic, non-governmental institutions operating in the third sector, or other actors in the public sphere.

Each attempt at such epistemological analogies or substitutions has its substantive reasons and generally testifies to good self-awareness and intellectual effort, researchers who try to find a narrow theoretical path between respect for the “non-politics” of religious actors, and loyalty to their political science, which commands the use of proven theoretical approaches and research methods. Each of these research choices is therefore justified somehow. Everyone, however, carries the inevitable risk of epistemological reduction, i.e. not recognising or underestimating the differences and tension between religion and politics.

As regards treating religious institutions as peculiar “interest groups” or representatives of “civil society”, this problem is highlighted, among others, by Aniela Dylus, stressing the need for “indeterministic” explanation of the public status of religious actors and warning – in this context – against the temptation to reduce “social complexity to interests” or create a “deterministic model of society” [Dylus: 2005: 172; 2016: 415-434]. In the context of the epistemological situation of religious institutions in the so-called Third sector and treating them as social institutions, the theoretical problem indicated here is evoked, among others, by Tadeusz Kamiński. And although in his very interesting studies on this subject he presents a host of good reasons to accept such an epistemological procedure, at the same time he raises questions and doubts related to the choice of such [Kamiński 2012]. Finally, with regard to the epistemological qualification of churches as public sphere actors, this problem was highlighted by those who wrote these words [Sowiński 2018]. To further elaborate on this thread, let us not only notice that this kind of epistemological substitution, with all its advantages, carries the risk of reducing the theological teaching of the Church (concerning sin, forgiveness and redemption, Christian mercy) to a mere moral dimension. It tempts me to succumb to what Habermas calls “deliberative rationality” [ibid.:

¹² Examples of this kind of substitution can be sought in analyses (in my opinion much more journalistic than political science) of critics of the Catholic Church’s involvement in the public sphere of free Poland after 1989, who see various manifestations of this involvement in the struggle for power.

47-53]. It also creates problems arising from the need to translate the religious language into a secular language understood by all participants in the public sphere [ibid.].

As a result, we can say that such – epistemological – situating the Church in the public sphere, although revealing many, does not reveal all the religious reasons of the Church in socially important matters such as the dispute about spiritual vetting in Poland after 1989, a discussion about the legal protection of Sunday or the debate about the possibilities of political reconciliation and forgiveness. Therefore, in such a functionalist analytical approach, the question about the role of the Church in the public sphere seems much more justified than treating it as yet another typical actor [ibid.].

6. Functionalism, institutionalism and the historical approach (as well as their limitations) in studies of religion and politics

The epistemological and theoretical problem we are talking about here has a fairly universal dimension in political science, and every political scientist who tries to follow this narrow path between respect for the religious identity of the churches and loyalty to his scientific background must clash with it. Saying this, however, it can be seen that this problem – with varying intensity, with different consequences, and in any case in different ways – manifests itself on the basis of different theoretical approaches that political scientists used to take while studying politics and religion.

Furthermore, let us try to consider it on the basis of three selected and often (though not exclusively) in the study of religion and politics of practiced approaches: functionalism, institutionalism and the historical approach.

A functionalist approach derived from sociology or ethnography [Beyme 2005: 108] in political science research on religion and politics is used relatively often, for example among researchers of the Catholic Church's contribution to the processes of European integration, systemic transformations and democratization of the modern world. At the center of his theoretical perspective lies the question concerning the function of the examined element in the whole structure or system under scrutiny. Although in the sciences of politics it is sometimes referred to in a broader sense (*largo*), in the form of a metaphor for "political theatre" (political stage, backstage, actors, audiences, etc.), it appears more often in a narrower sense, questioning the functionality (or dysfunction) of individual elements in

relation to the entire system or political process, and therefore whether individual elements and their behavior are consistent with the objectives of the entire system or political process [ibid.: 111].

However, in order to elicit the tension between religion and politics that is of interest here, the functional perspective understood in this way should probably be slightly opened up so much towards the narrowly understood political system, but rather towards the broader political (or metapolitical) system, which in fact describes parliamentary democracy in the categories of public sphere, civil society, the third sector, or simply social life.

This approach or view (especially with the correction proposed here), from the point of view of political science, has many advantages in the case that interests us. It allows for a clear distinction between what is public and what is political, and thus, to capture the important fact that the tension between religion and politics often arises in the political public sphere, and often penetrates the political system indirectly. Thus, this approach is well suited, for example, for studying the relationship between religion and politics in the realities of modern democratic systems, which particularly emphasizes the need to separate religion from a direct political process.

However, this does not change the fact that it also carries the possibility, and even the aforementioned form of temptation and epistemological reduction, primarily in the substitution variant. Recalling the partial considerations already mentioned above, we can briefly note that in this approach – somewhat inevitably – treating religious entities in the same way as foundations, associations, educational or charitable institutions can lead not only to the omission of the religious identity of the former, but also, which is particularly important to us, to know their critical or corrective role. In other words, a functional approach, in a way necessarily, as a criterion for analysing the Church activities in the public sphere (and indirectly its impact on the political process) prefers the logic and axiology of this sphere, thus making it difficult to grasp the critical and corrective role of Churches towards the public sphere itself.

To use an example, in the axiology of the democratic public sphere, which is to control and correct the democratic political process, next to transparency, freedom or justice, stand values that Charles Taylor defines as secularism, apolitically and mathematically [Taylor 1996], or what Habermas recognizes as – mentioned above

– “deliberative rationality”¹³. Each of these values has its own philosophical and political justification, but each also raises questions and provokes debates, in which Churches also participate.

The corrective and critical contribution of Churches to the public (and indirectly political) sphere in such debates can remind us of the weakness but also human dignity in the context of the debate on openness and transparency, about the need for responsibility in the context of the discussion about freedom, about mercy in the context of the dispute about justice, about the human hunger for transcendence during debates about secularism, or about the value of objective truth when faced with the pressure of “deliberative rationality”. The point is, however, that this critical and corrective contribution is easily neglected or omitted, assessing it – which in this case seems to prefer a functional view – in the light of principles that are to be critically assessed or corrected.

In this sense, we can also repeat that the functional perspective does not unequivocally reveal – important for tension between religion and politics – the distinction between the Church’s role in the democratic public sphere of certain roles and the Church becoming her typical actor [Sowiński 2018: 47-53].

The institutional approach in the studies of religion and politics that interest us here is also used quite often, especially by researchers who focus on the shape of relations between the state and the Church (or Churches).

It can also be understood broadly or narrowly, depending on the definition – the key here – of the concept of the institutionalization of political life. In a broad sense, institutions can be understood in it “as temporal, factual and socially generalized expectations of behavior” [Beyme 2005: 90]. In the narrower sense, which is probably often used in the study of religion and politics, understanding institutions generally boils down to politically key formal and legal institutions

¹³ According to the German philosopher, this form of rationality is networked and communicative, and its source is “interactions between lawfully institutionalized will formation and culturally mobilized public spheres, which for their part are based on associations of civil society, remaining equidistant from the state and the economy” [Habermas 2009: 243]. Important seems that although this form of rationality protects what Habermas calls the “world of life” (public life), the forms of its communication “so regulate the course of discursive shaping of opinion and the will that its fallible results have a presumption of reason” [ibid.: 248]. In this sense, it is probably difficult for the Churches to accept this form of rationality uncritically.

(parliament, government, political parties, judicial institutions, media), or it simply focuses on the institution of the state, because on this ground, the state is treated – as Klaus von Beyme observes – “with special honor as an institution over institutions” [ibid.].

This institutional view of the relationship between religion and politics, which here most often takes on the nature of the relationship between the state and the Church, in an epistemological sense seems to have a number of advantages. Firstly, and probably most importantly for us, often focusing on the formal relations of the two institutions, it reveals not only a certain limited convergence of their goals (e.g. religious freedom), but also indelible differences between them, i.e. the state that we have referred to as *voltage*. It seems, therefore, that in this perspective one can clearly see the warning against the sacralization of political institutions, which Fr Prof. Tischner formulated in his time. He recalled: “The idea of God is the idea of the absolute. The state, government and law are relative. When the idea of the absolute contains an error, the other concepts also turn out to be wrong. Then the relative values are raised to the order of absolute values, and the absolute values disappear. This is because there is a mistake in thinking about the absolute that relative values are subject to absolutization. God is becoming a god.” [quote after: Makowski 2006]. Secondly, this approach reveals how the idea of a modern state emerges from the history of the intriguing process of cooperation (but also competition) of the institutions of the state and the Church – from the dispute about investing in the 10th century, through separating political thought from religious thought and the principles of Augsburg peace in the 16th century, to the contemporary processes of secularization of politics [Böckenförde 1994: 120; Starck 1997: 79–80]¹⁴. Thirdly, the advantage of this institutional approach also naturally seems to be the inherent possibility and inclination to comparative studies, i.e. comparing and topologizing various practiced models in relations between the Church and the state. And this, in turn, creates the possibility of creating a specific scale to

¹⁴ It is also worth recalling the thought of C. Schmitt according to whom, the concept of sovereignty, in a sense, can acquire a sense of sacred. Referring to “Leviathan” he wrote that German philosopher “Gisbert Beyerhaus and Karl Theodor Budderberg have shown that in the concept of sovereignty that is in force in the modern rule of law, the Calvinist concept of God is included in the secularized form together with the characteristic *legibus solutus* principle” [unbound by laws]. The most prominent English expert in this era of religious wars and time to shape concepts, John Neville even claims that the God of Calvinism is a Hobbesian Leviathan with omnipotence unlimited by law and conscience [Schmitt 2008:43].

measure the intensity of the voltage that interests us here. Fourthly and finally, in this approach, one can also examine relations with religion (or Churches) not only of the state, but also of other political institutions, such as at least political parties¹⁵ also creating comparisons and typologies here.

After all, however, this approach does not seem to be free from the temptation we indicate, or the tendency to reduce or familiarize tensions between religion and politics. In the variant that we have termed epistemological reduction by separation, this temptation may consist in acquainting oneself with the actual public (and indirectly political) significance of religion in the study of all those cases in which, for various reasons, the religious denominations actually affecting the social life of, are not institutionalized enough, and the Churches or religious associations that represent them are not formally institutional partners of the state without any legal and public status. In this sense, from a purely institutional perspective, it is difficult, for example, to fully show, the special tension between religion and politics in the People's Republic of Poland, which was of utmost importance both for the state-church relationship and for the functioning of the authoritarian state itself.

In the variant of epistemological reduction by substitution, the threat described here may consist in reducing the entire relationship between religion and politics (state and Churches) solely to the formal and legal dimension, with a key question in this regard about the legality of these or other actions. Then, however, from the research field of view one can very easily lose sight of a number of usually dynamic, cultural, social or political processes that occur permanently in the area between what is political and what is religious. Then, too, it is easy to overlook the growing or weakening of tension. Finally, focusing on legal and formal legality, it is much more difficult to grasp the key to political science's legitimacy of religion and politics in their mutual relations.

In other words, the institutional approach in researching the relationship between religion and politics, focusing on the procedures that these relations are to order, regulate or standardize in one way or another, may inevitably lose the perspective of difference, dispute and conflict. This is a perspective, which is an immanent part of the tension that interests us in this study.

¹⁵ An interesting example of such research in Polish literature is presented, among others Prof. Krzysztof Kowalczyk [2012].

Finally, let us briefly recall the historical approach used in political science, also called the historical-genetic. Its essence is a focus on political temporality and political change, which in consequence often leads to various periodization in the description of the political process, reconstructing its individual sequences, attempts to indicate breakthrough moments, or building cause-and-effect explanations [Beyme 2005: 80nn].

Setting aside the problem of methodological relations of this political science approach to historical sciences, we only notice that it is also used relatively often in the area of research on religion and politics, especially in monographs attempting to capture the dynamics of change within one country or political system [Deląg 2016]. And like in the case of functionalism or the institutional approach, it has – in the context we are interested in – its own advantages as well as limitations.

Among the advantages, one can point above all to some kind of methodological openness, which by focusing on the temporality of the studied process or political state, leaves the researcher a free hand in choosing the aspect of the changing reality to be studied. From this perspective, it is from the knowledge, experience and methodological imagination of the researcher that the design of the research and such a definition of its direct subject depends, as the tension between religion and politics may fully reveal. Secondly, it is also worth noting that the historical approach, like no other, allows us to grasp the fundamental question of political permanence or political change in political science. Thanks to this approach, we can make a non-trivial decision whether the tension between religion and politics is a natural state to which each political system somehow tends with the power of its own inertia, and which can only be mitigated or delayed. Or – as we suggested above – is it quite the opposite, and is the natural state that can only be corrected, mitigated or postponed (occurring on the side of religion, politics, or on the side of both these phenomena) the desire to reduce this tension by separation or identification?

Among the limitations and tendencies toward epistemological reduction, we can, first of all, indicate the possibility of some kind of axiological reduction. In short, the researchers of the history of a particular social or political being, consciously or not, sometimes make a certain methodological choice, focusing either on the dimension of durability and duration, or on trends to change. Sometimes, such a methodological choice takes the shape of an axiological one, either in the form of a traditional paradigm, where the value of the behavior or beliefs or institutions

becomes the permanent or unspeakable value, or in the form of the modernist paradigm, when the value itself becomes change itself, very often associated with the Enlightenment idea of modernity and progress. Such a traditional or modernist epistemological tendency, in the study of the relationship between religion and politics, may obscure the picture of both phenomenon and the actual relationship between them.

Secondly, in relation to religion and politics, it is also worth remembering that in each of these two special areas time runs in a different rhythm and generally different turning points, and the perception of history itself, are different. Hence, measuring religion and politics with one common historical measure and showing one common change, or in other words, putting them together in one time sequence presented in the research may slightly blur the picture of reality, influencing the failure to notice differences or tensions between religion and politics.

To use two examples only. In studies on the relationship of religion and politics in contemporary Poland, it is sometimes believed that because after 1989 (or 2004) the political system and social life underwent a profound transformation, Polish Catholicism and the Church present in Polish society should have undergone a similar transformation. The lack of such a transformation – in this approach – would give rise to unnecessary, dysfunctional conflicts between modern society and the “insufficiently modern Church”. It seems that this view, resulting precisely from the expectation of the convergence of direction and pace of change in the world of religion and politics, blurs the essence of the relationship between religion and politics.

Example two. We note that the fundamental changes that have taken place fairly extensively in the Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), are recognized in democratic public opinion as a manifestation of some modernization of the Church, or in any case its *aggiornamento* or opening to the surrounding world. However, the point is that the theological logic of the Council fathers says not so much (or not only) about the modernity of Christianity, but above all about its return to the evangelical sources, and therefore something that in the progressive and linear logic of contemporary politics is difficult to understand.

Finally, let us note that the historical approach we have cited here, in researching the relationship between religions, focusing on the possible diversity of these

relationships in time (changes or no changes) necessarily leaves less space to capture internal differences in the world of religion and the world policies that can significantly influence the tension we are interested in.

Conclusions. Towards a system of ideologically and methodologically open sentences¹⁶

Searching for a way to summarise our considerations, it seems difficult to indicate a simple solution of a kind of epistemological quadrature of the circle which is the study of the relationship between politics and religion, on the theoretical basis of political science. This does not mean, however, and our conclusions may lead to the idea that this methodological problem cannot be slightly offset by making politics a little more sensitive to the “non-political politics of religion”.

To put it briefly and generally, we can say that research on the relationship between religion and politics, so as not to lose the unique tension signalled by us from the cognitive horizon, should remain, above all, with all their scientific identity, a system of ideological and methodologically open sentences.

Ideological openness here means avoiding all paradigms evaluating a priori religious understanding of the world or rejecting the possibility of its rational analysis due to current cognitive capabilities. In short, this is primarily about avoiding the deterministic version of the secularization paradigm, in favor of what Margaret Archer and her related researchers call “critical realism”. As Artur Wysocki explains in an interesting study, it is a recommendation to adopt “ontological realism” and “epistemological relativism” as research paradigms, i.e. the initial assumption that being and its existence is something primary to the possibility of knowing it [Wysocki 2015]. In a similar, though slightly more philosophical vein, this postulate is also formulated by Cardinal Józef Ratzinger, dedicating to contemporary “my friends who don’t believe” Pascal’s advice that in a joint debate about the world around us, enlightenment, excluding religious consciousness, the establishment of *etsi Deus non daretur*, be replaced by a positive *veluti si Deus daretur* assumption open to the possibility of existence. Father Maciej Zięba also looks for a similar recommendation for epistemological openness in the philosophy of Karl Popper, citing at least the following words of the author of the concept of “Open Society”: “one must take the effort and risk of traveling,

¹⁶ In this context, the term “open sentence system” is used by the senior of the Warsaw school of Catholic Social Teaching, Rev. Prof. Helmut Juros, who uses it precisely in relation to the CST.

being provided only with an anthropological compass (...). We must move forward to what is unknown, uncertain and dangerous, using reason as a guide towards both – towards security and freedom” [Zięba 2011: 145]. We can also indicate her traces in the thoughts of Jürgen Habermas [Teinert 2006: 163-164].

In the case of religion and politics, this research attitude should mean accepting the possibility of the existence of God or the truth of the religious image of the world, regardless of whether we are able to verify it with the help of research tools available today.

The methodological openness which we want to recommend with our considerations means the theoretical effort in searching for a narrow and probably difficult to discover and travel, epistemological path which, remaining on the basis of political science, is to lead to the point of view from which – ultimately impossible to learn with the use of political tools – religion and the tension between it and politics can be seen best.

In an attempt to develop this general recommendation, we can firstly note that although such paths – as we mentioned at the beginning – already exist, the effort to discover enough of them still awaits political science. Especially since many of them are original, unique and adequate choice mainly in the area and research situation in which they arose.

Secondly, our cautious methodological statement appears to show that a conscious choice of theoretical approach is important in designing religion and policy research. From the three approaches we have cited as examples (functionalism, institutionalism and historical approach) one can cautiously notice that the historic approach seems to be the most epistemologically open within the aspect of the tension between religion and politics that we indicate. Nevertheless, the postulate of methodological diversification, i.e. a fully conscious and thoughtful supplementation of the selected (leading) research horizon with other horizons, seems to be a much more certain recommendation in this respect that results from our considerations, thanks to which one can look at the examined aspect of the relationship between religion and politics from different political perspectives, verifying and supplementing each other's perspectives.

Thirdly and finally, this results in a broader meta-theoretical recommendation, according to which more intimately understood political science has much more to

say about the intriguing relationship between religion and politics than narrowly understood political science. Without developing this thread and leaving aside a very interesting meta-theoretical dispute about the usefulness and weakness of each of these concepts of policy research, here we only note that, other sciences, such as history, sociology, psychology or theology can also help in perceiving the impact of religion on the politics that narrowly understood as political science. Therefore, similarly to Catholic social science, which bases its methodological structure on several scientific disciplines, e.g. sociology, economics, ethics or theology, also in political and religious studies, the metatheoretic formula of political science seems to be much more effective, which opens up to ordered and thoughtful use of various methods and points of view, from the political science formula that narrows the research perspective.

We began our deliberations by recalling the thoughts of Prof. Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde. Let us finish them with the following statement. The famous – mentioned at the beginning – “Böckenförde paradigm” seems to concern not only the subject of research which is religion and politics, but also carries with it an important methodological premise. Paraphrasing the thought of an eminent researcher, we can formulate it like this: political science, in research on religion and politics can preserve its research potential on the condition of its ideological and methodological openness to religious reality, which it cannot know and explain in detail.

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