"Unholy Alliance": Identification and prevention of ideological and religious frames between right-wing populism and christianity in Poland

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Abstract Since 2015, power in Poland has been exercised by the right-wing populist coalition, led by the socially conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party. The deconfliction mark of these governments became the "unholy alliance" with Christianity, which was a movement that used populist manipulation based on exacerbating social dichotomy, campaigning against the LGBT community, nationalism, xenophobia, attitudes of rejection, anti-pluralism and anti-establishment. In this context, the aim of this article is to theoretically analyse the ideological and religious frames between right-wing populism and Christianity in Poland. The considerations begin with the presentation of the theoretical background, that is, the relationship that exists between the populist "thin-core ideology" and Christianity within the framework of ideological appropriation of religion by populists. Furthermore, the author will make an attempt to decipher mutual influences and seek answers to the question: How did PiS "hijack" the Catholic Church in Poland? The next step will present a comparative identification of convergent and divergent frameworks between right-wing populists and the Catholic Church in Poland. Finally, the article will outline indications for the socio-pastoral prevention of populism and a summary of the main results.

Keywords Right-wing populism · Christianity · Catholic Church · Poland · Politics · Democracy

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1 Introduction

Since the United Right (*Zjednoczona Prawica*), led by the socially conservative Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*; PiS) party,[1] took power in Poland in 2015, scientific interest in the problem of right-wing populism[2] in this country (e.g., Beylin 2015; Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; Stępińska et al. 2017; Koszykowska 2018; Kotwas and Kubik 2019; Stanley and Cześnik 2019; Rogalewski 2020; Gwiazda 2021; Kurylo 2022) and its relationship with Christianity, and more precisely with the Catholic Church (e.g., Stanley 2016; Krotofil and Motak 2018; Modrzejewski 2017; Herbert 2019; Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik 2020; Szelewa 2021; Sitarz 2021; Chrostowski 2022b), has increased significantly. This situation is primarily related to the fact that PiS leaders have effectively built, and continue to increase, their political potential around the populist discourse associated with the "unholy alliance" with Christianity (Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jäger 2019; Chrostowski 2021b), whose primary task is to defend the religion and teaching of the Catholic Church, Christian tradition and culture, the Catholic family and conservative values, Polishness and patriotism (Kowalczyk 2015a, b).

Consequently, only what the right-wing rulers consider "Christian", "Catholic", and thus "Polish" and "patriotic" has become a determinant of the populist devaluation of people living and thinking differently. These are Muslim immigrants (Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski 2018; Cap 2018), the LGBT community and supporters of gender theory (Yermakova 2021; Mole et al. 2021; Korolczuk 2020; Korolczuk and Graff 2017) or people and institutions representing liberal political and ethical-moral views (Hall 2019; Csehi and Zgut 2020; Stambulski 2022). In this sense, to ensure effective influence on the minds and hearts of citizens, and to be able to construct a narrowly understood tradition, stability and identity (Courau et al. 2019; Lesch 2017, 2020; Chrostowski 2021b), right-wing populists in Poland, but also in many other European countries and around the world (Haynes 2020; Schwörer and Romero-Vidal 2020; Yilmaz and Morieson 2021), are constantly "hijacking" religion (Marzouki et al. 2016). Furthermore, this relationship of populism and religion is very complex and difficult to decipher so some researchers describe it as "religious populism" (Zúquete 2017; Mabille 2019; Herbst and Menne 2020; Chrostowski 2021b).

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[1] Detailed information about the history of the rising ideology and programme assumptions of the PiS party, can be found, among others, in publications by P. Borowiec and A. Tyszkiewicz (2021), A. Gwiazda (2021) and A. Folvarčný and L. Kopeček (2020).

[2] The scientific debate on populism in Poland is focused on its right-wing variety, because left-wing populism is a phenomenon of marginal importance (Przyłęcki 2012; Chrostowski 2022b). In this context, as M. Mikołajczyk notes, it should be remembered that the decomposition, fragmentation and disappearance of the Polish left is primarily related to the shrinking of the range of influence of social democratic parties, as well as the political environment itself identifying with left-wing ideas in Poland (Mikołajczyk 2015). Additionally, in Poland right-wing and left-wing views have mixed and, in many cases, overlap, which is related to the specificity of burdening Polish society with communism (more on this subject, e.g., Dzikowska and Sudra 2013; Przyłęcki 2012). This article therefore draws attention to the use of populist strategies by right-wing parties and organisations in Poland, which include Law and Justice, Kukiz'15 and also earlier the League of Polish Families and Self-Defence (Lipiński and Stępińska 2020a).

In this scientific-cognitive context, the aim of this article is to theoretically analyse the ideological and religious frames between the right-wing populism and Christianity in Poland. The author will start with the extended theoretical background that focuses on the relationship between the populist "thin-core ideology" and Christianity within the ideological appropriation of religion by populists. Next, the author will make an attempt to decipher mutual influences and seek answers to the question: How did PiS "hijack" the Catholic Church in Poland? Then, a comparative identification of convergent and divergent frameworks between right-wing populists and the Catholic Church and the Catholic Church in Poland will be presented. Lastly, the considerations will end with indications for the social-pastoral prevention of populism, followed by a summary of the most important conclusions.

2 Theoretical Background: Thin-Core Ideology of Populism and Christianity

Although many authors emphasise populism is a phenomenon that is difficult to define and imprecise (Lipiński and Stępińska 2020b; Tushnet 2019; Gidron and Bonikowski 2013; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Pauwels 2011; Przyłęcki 2004; Mény and Surel 2002; Taggart 2000), it should be noted that in recent years, the definition proposed by C. Mudde (2004) has gained recognition due to its ease of operationalisation and denotational clarity (Lipiński and Stępińska 2020b; Aslanidis 2016). In this definitional approach, populism is considered to be "a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004, p. 543).

Within the cited understanding of populism, six distinct but interrelated components of this phenomenon can be identified: 1. the existence of two homogeneous individuals: the people and the elite; 2. the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite; 3. the idea of popular sovereignty; 4. the positive assessment of the people and the negative assessment of the elite; 5. the affirmation of one's own culture and the exclusion of the "other"; and 6. the unity of the populist leader with the people (Chrostowski 2021b; Lipiński 2020; Aslanidis 2016; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015). The conceptualisation of populism based on these elements is constructed not only in the belief of the key role of the people in the populist discourse, but that it also constitutes a kind of selection tool within the framework of anti-elitism and exclusivism.[3] Accordingly, populists always stand on the side of the "good" people and position themselves against the "bad" elites who are detached from reality and the lives of ordinary citizens. Besides, they watch over the

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[3] It is also worth noting that, according to these assumptions, populism understood as a "thin-core ideology" can now occur in four different configurations, which depend on its references to the people, anti-elitism and exclusivism: 1. complete populism: a combination of all elements; 2. excluding populism—combining references to the people with the exclusion of external groups; 3. anti-elitist populism—combining references to the people with anti-establishment; 4. empty populism—only references to the people (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Lipiński and Stępińska 2020b).

homogeneity of the populist people at all costs, which is possible by excluding all of those who have any signs of "otherness", for example, ethnic, worldviews or religious differences. In effect, they stigmatise and exclude certain social categories defined as a threat or burden to the "good" and "true" people and present them as the cause and source of all negative phenomena in a given society (Lipiński and Stępińska 2020b; Jagers and Walgrave 2007).

The origins of the above definition of populism can be seen primarily in the morphological approach to the study of ideology developed by M. Freeden (1996, 1998, 2003, 2013), which distinguishes between "full" ideologies and ideologies with a "thin core" (Lipiński and Stępińska 2020b; Chrostowski 2021b). The "full" ideologies aim to answer all questions about the life of a given community and include, for example, conservatism, liberalism, and socialism. The "thin core" ideologies refer only partially to selected problems of socio-political life and cover just a small number of political concepts (Freeden 1998, p. 750; Gidron and Bonikowski 2013, p. 6; Lipiński and Stępińska 2020b, p. 9). Populism appears as a phenomenon devoid of holistic ideological projects (Betz 1994, p. 107) and is based on interaction with other ideologies (e.g., xenophobia, fundamentalism or nationalism), and always occurs in some combination with them (Chrostowski 2021b; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011; Stanley 2008).

Likewise, to interact with holistic ideological projects, populists try, as already noted in the introduction, to "hijack" religion for national and personal purposes (Marzouki et al. 2016). In Europe and the USA, this is particularly observed for Christianity (Haynes 2020; Schwörer and Romero-Vidal 2020), as a complex political game (Wiedemann 2016; Zúquete 2017; Palaver 2018), which entails the threat of violating the internal security of states in their cultural area (Sołtys 2015; more on this topic: Otis et al. 2013; Friedman and Randeria 2004).

In light of the above analysis, understanding the basis of the ideologisation of Christianity by right-wing populists is possible by becoming aware of the following three contexts in which the Christian religion functions in relation to populism (Rebenstorf 2018; Chrostowski 2021b):

a) *Theological-doctrinal context:* The Christian religious doctrine, which is built around the teaching of the love of God and neighbours (Mt 22: 36–40), contains three main catalysts for populist, antisocial and fascist attitudes: a) the doctrine of election, which assumes the division into persons belonging and not belonging to a given religious group; b) the doctrine of revelation and the associated claims to exclusivity for the possession of truth; and c) the question of theocracy or secularity of the state (Allport 1966; Rebenstorf 2018; Chrostowski 2021b, 2022b; Steinmann 2022).

b) *Socio-cultural context*: Religions adapt to the social, national, ethnic, or structural tensions taking place in a given country and society (Rebenstorf 2018; Chrostowski 2021b). Furthermore, it should be remembered that religious and populist doctrines clash deeply at the level of socio-cultural authoritarianism This is characterised by anti-pluralistic policies towards minorities (e.g., religious, sexual, ethnic), a conservative image of the family, rejection of gender mainstreaming, the fight against abortion, or the rhetoric of the ruthless "Law & Order" (Hidalgo and

Yendell 2019). In this sense, Christianity is reduced by populists to the role of a "defensive factor" against what is "different" and is thus relegated to the level of a purely cultural religion (Hidalgo and Yendell 2019; Hidalgo 2020; Chrostowski 2021b).

c) *Personality-psychological context*: This is about the level of importance of religion, as well as religious beliefs and practices in the personal lives of individuals (Rebenstorf 2018; Allport 1966; Allport and Ross 1967). In this context, as Batson and Stocks' (2005) study points out, extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity are not two poles of one dimension, but independent of each other, and there is even a third dimension of religiosity—quest religiosity (such people see their religion as a search for truth; Batson and Stocks 2005, p. 417). Furthermore, it is not only important how one believes (extrinsic, intrinsic, quest) but also what one believes (ibid., p. 424f). With regard to right-wing populism, it is worth noting the fact that people with extrinsic religiosity are passive towards religion and are characterised by a lack of connection between their declared religiosity and their daily attitudes. In addition, they isolate themselves from people who differ from them, remain prejudiced against them and are relatively intolerant of others. They conform to religious norms because of social obligations. Such people easily change their views, attitudes and are unstable. In the extroverted orientation of religiosity, God is treated as a means to satisfy one's own needs and does not occupy an important place in the value system (Dziedzic 2016; Mambo 2018; Wysocka 2019; Khorakian et al. 2020). Moreover, people with an extroverted religious orientation have no need for regular religious practices. Their moral life has little to do with public religion, and they view the church only as an influential institution (Allport and Ross 1967; Titov 2013). As part of this understanding, it is also worth bearing in mind that the existence of a link between populism and low, non-intermediate levels of religiosity is confirmed by numerous empirical studies (Siegers and Jedinger 2020; Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik 2020; Huber and Yendell 2019; Montgomery and Winter 2015). In addition, researchers also point to the fact that people with intrinsic religiosity (i.e., faith is a value in itself) may also be full of prejudice and strong rejection of certain groups, mainly homosexuals, feminists, but also members of other religions, various ethnic or social groups (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 2022; Carlson et al. 2019; Klein et al. 2018).

Right-wing populist parties, within each of the above-mentioned ideological contexts of the interaction between populism and Christianity, seek above all to appropriate Christian symbols, content, terms, beliefs, and values (Marzouki et al. 2016; Becker 2018). Moreover, a certain degree of religious homogeneity is intended to prevent the disintegration and assimilation of a nation, or to influence the process of building or reconstructing a nation in accordance with the implicit and implicitly accepted populist ideological principles (Molle 2018).

It should also be remembered that the sacralisation of policy also plays an important role in this respect (Rouhana and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2021). The aim of this phenomenon is to create a specific religious framework around political activity, for example: supporters of a given party are representatives of good, while opponents will identify themselves with evil; a political leader assumes the role of a charismatic

clergyman who leads the people to the "promised land" (Zúquete 2017; Mancini and Rosenfeld 2020; Chrostowski 2021b). The main purpose of sacralising politics in relation to right-wing populism is therefore to perpetuate existing antagonisms between "enemies", such as the establishment and "others" on the one hand and "real" people on the other hand, as well as to defend "authentic" norms or values and ensure the primacy of selected populist interest groups (Yabanci 2020). An important result of such action is also the strengthening of the performative side of right-wing populism, which is possible using rituals and myths aimed at displacing and replacing civic and democratic participation (Yabanci 2020; Moffitt 2016; Aslanidis 2016).

3 An Attempt to Decipher Mutual Influence: How did PiS "hijack" the Catholic Church in Poland?

The theoretical background outlined here reveals the complexity of the relationship that occurs between the thin-core ideology of populism and Christianity. This problem cannot in fact be reduced to the purely theoretical side and, consequently, it is necessary to try to answer the question: How did PiS "hijack" the Catholic Church in Poland?

The PiS party, like other conservatives in post-communist countries, has been forced by history, so to speak, to restore the traditional value system (Antoszewski 2009, p. 132; Kowalczyk 2015c, p. 175), which is also related to the political strategy they have chosen. Since the establishment of the PiS party in 2001 around Lech and Jarosław Kaczynski, the party intended to move the entire electorate over to the right (including national Catholics) and the centre-right diversity of political currents was emphasised accordingly. Then, in the years between 2005 and 2011, ideological ties with the social teaching of the Church and the Catholic clergy in Poland began to intensify. At that time, the values central to PiS became the state and the nation embedded in the independence, solidarity and Catholic traditions. The new moral order was to be built on the basis of a Christian and explicitly conservative canon of values (Sanecka Tyczynska 2011, p. 390; Kowalczyk 2015c, p. 176). Moreover, the defence of religion, tradition, patriotism and the family was considered one of the key challenges facing PiS, and the party itself began to appear as a defender and political depository of the teaching of the Catholic Church in Poland. Thus, the PiS party rejected the concept of worldview neutrality of the state, as it was considered a facade for axiological nihilism. Since then, the party's position towards the Church has oscillated (and continues to do so) between extremes, the best example of which is PiS's changing views on abortion, that is, from introducing a total ban on abortion to maintaining the existing compromise. This state of affairs is due to the fact that in the PiS party there are both "radicals", upholding the purity of Catholic doctrine, and representatives of the axiologically moderate group (Kowalczyk 2015c, p. 176–177).

In this context, it should also be noted that the attitude towards PiS in the Catholic Church in Poland is not uniform. On the one hand, there is a conservative wing within the Catholic Church in Poland that supports the actions of the conservative right-wing PiS party, and on the other, a liberal wing that supports the opposition

(Makowski 2006; Baniak 2011; Kobyliński 2017). In the public domain, there is talk in this regard of a conservative "Toruń-Church" centred, among others, around Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, "Radio Maryja" and "Telewizja Trwam" (e.g., Tronina 2020; Kałabunowska 2017), as well as a liberal "Łagiewniki-Church", which is "patronised" by, among others, Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, "Tygodnik Powszechny" and "open" Catholic reviews (e.g., Baniak 2011; Kusiak 2020). Indeed, as the prominent Polish sociologist J. Baniak notes, no one officially announced this division, and on the contrary, church and secular authorities initially denied its existence (Baniak 2011, p. 108).

This polarisation in the Church became particularly evident in 2010, that is, after the tragic death of 96 people, among them the then President of Poland Lech Kaczynski, in the Tu-154M plane crash in Smoleńsk (Russia) (Baniak 2011; Kolodziejczak 2015; Paluchowski and Podemski 2019). Shortly after this tragic news was made public, a large wooden cross was erected on the street in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw, which quickly became a political symbol (Krzemiński 2017, p. 50) and a sign of a determined effort to uncover the truth about the plane crash (Jaskułowski 2016, p. 80). Since then, PiS has effectively divided the Church and the people into two antagonistic groups, which is characteristic of populist actions, of fundamentalist defenders and staunch opponents of the placement of the cross in the typically secular space of the Polish state (Baniak 2011, p. 108). However, this division also had a relevant "hidden function", which was built on the basis of the "Smoleńsk myth"[4] and thus consisted of creating and strengthening a political formation (Paluchowski and Podemski 2019, pp. 254, 266). It was about assembling a community around values such as "Catholicism" and "Polishness", of which "truth" is particularly important. Repeatedly recurring in Jarosław Kaczynski's speeches, the idiom of "getting closer to the truth" played a mobilising role, initially for activities aimed at explaining the causes of the plane crash, and later for gaining power, maintaining and consolidating it (ibid.). An apt assessment of this phenomenon was made by the Polish economist, journalist and politician Waldemar Kuczyński, which is worth quoting here about Jarosław Kczyński:

> "The chairman of the Law and Justice party is full of emotions, and very bad ones, but they are emotions with a method (...). He is betting on mobilising a large part of society around this and directing it against the authorities, the current state and inferior Poles." (Kuczyński 2010)

What is more, the aforementioned "Toruń-Church" and especially the right-wing media centred around the right-wing electorate and the Catholic circles centred around "Radio Maryja" and "Telewizja Trwam" were also helpful in PiS's fight for

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[4] Myth, like the concept of populism itself, is not an unambiguous term in political theory, and there will probably never be a full consensus in science on its essence and relevance to modern societies. Simplifying, we can divide, following P. Przyłęcki (2013), myths into timeless myths of universal significance (e.g., myths of genesis, or myths of freedom, equality) and ad hoc myths, often created for the needs of the moment. These ad hoc myths include political myths, i.e., those that are functional in relation to the sociopolitical system, and include, among other things, aspects related to power and ways of legitimising it. In this sense, the myth of the Smolensk catastrophe was an attempt to build a populist people, and through its constant ritualisation it is mainly used in the political strategy of the PiS party (ibid., p. 213).

the hardline Catholic electorate (Puzio 2019, p. 43). They were most involved in both the presidential campaigns (2015 and 2020) and the subsequent parliamentary campaigns (2015 and 2019), assisting Andrzej Duda and the PiS party on their way to victory in the elections (Puzio 2019, p. 43).

PiS and the "defenders of the cross" clustered around this party use arguments and a vision of the world that build the identity of the "Toruń-Church" and "Radio Maryja", that is, the religious national identity to which Jarosław Kaczynski directly appeals (Rokicki 2012, p. 62). Indeed, as already mentioned, not all the hierarchy share such a position, but on the other hand, however, there are some characteristic elements that make the "hijacking" of the Catholic Church in Poland by the PiS party politically acceptable to the silent majority of "church people" (Leśniczak 2020, pp. 175–176):

- PiS declarations express ostentatious respect for the Church, fidelity to its teachings and equating Polish identity with Christianity itself (Hall 2017, p. 91; Leśniczak 2020, p. 175);
- the bishops and priests of the "Toruń-Church" did not limit their mission to the metapolitical level, but gave their support and recommendation to Jarosław Kaczynski's group (Hall 2017, p. 90; Leśniczak 2020, p. 175);
- most of the church hierarchs gathered around the "Toruń-Church" legitimise the politics of PiS, receiving legal and economic privileges in return (Nosowski 2015, p. 129–139; Zuber 2017, p. 153–160; p. Leśniczak 2020, p. 175);
- the position of the ultra-right-wing Redemptorist and director of "Radio Maryja" Tadeusz Rydzyk, who associates the conservative current of Catholicism with an attitude of defensive patriotism and nationalism, has strengthened significantly in the Catholic Church and PiS political circles in Poland (Leśniczak 2019, p. 279; 2020, p. 176);
- the Catholic Church in Poland after PiS seized power was assured that in matters of worldview, morals, as well as formal relations between the state and the Church, there would be no changes in the law incompatible with its teachings, and the preservation of a certain status quo ensured the Church's electoral support of PiS (Hall 2017, p. 91; Leśniczak 2020, p. 176).

4 Concretisation: Comparative Identification of Ideological and Religious Frames Between PiS and the Catholic Church in Poland

Based on the above analysis, it is worth pointing out here the three main and basic characteristics of the Polish cultural-social and political-ecclesiastical situation. These features are not only a concretisation of the problem of right-wing populism and its relations with the Church in Poland, but also indicate its legitimacy and timeliness:

a) The roots and specificity of the phenomenon of right-wing populism in Poland can be seen in history, culture or social conditions, but above all in association with Catholicism (Lipiński and Stępińska 2020a; Stępińska et al. 2017; Pankowski 2010). In this sense, Poland is a moderate quasi-religious state (Kowalczyk

2015b), the essence of which is a formally secular character with the real influence of the Catholic Church on public life and education (Żuk and Żuk 2019; Stanley and Stanley 2020; Szelewa 2021; Chrostowski 2021a, 2022a, b).

b) Since PiS took power, democracy in Poland (in light of the analyses of *Freedom House* and *The Economist*) has clearly departed from the standards of liberal democracy and is gradually moving towards a hybrid regime (the government puts pressure on the political opposition, there is harassment and pressure on journalists, the judiciary is not independent) and authoritarianism (Tyrała 2020; Chrostowski 2022b). In addition, there is a deepened "alliance of the throne and the altar" (Leśniczak 2020, p. 175), which translates into the fact that the institution of the church, in exchange for numerous legal and economic privileges, legitimises, often harmful in the socio-religious sense, the actions of the rulers in Poland (Leśniczak 2017, 2020; Zuber 2017; Hall 2017; Nosowski 2015).

c) After 2015, the mission of many Polish bishops and priests has taken on a distinctly political orientation, which affects the divergence of consumerist lifestyle patterns and the secularisation of culture, the weakening of religious practices, as well as aggressive anti-clericalism in the public space (Leśniczak 2020; Hall 2017). Additionally, the issue of the involvement of the Catholic Church in Poland in politics is badly assessed by 55% of Poles (Centre for Social Opinion Research 2019), which also translates into changes in their level of trust in the Church, which in 2010 amounted to about 50% and began to fall year by year, down to 42% in 2020, with 47% of Poles declaring a complete lack of trust in the Church (Catholic Information Agency 2021).

Bearing in mind the specificity of the Polish political and religious situation, but also the fact that right-wing populists are spectacularly successful where they manage to establish direct contact with the everyday life of "ordinary" people (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013), it is worth focusing here on what divides and unites right-wing populists and the Catholic Church in Poland, and thus make a comparative identification of the convergent and divergent frames of references in order to deepen understanding of the problem under discussion.

The following analysis cannot in any way be considered an exhaustive approach, since the holistic approach to this issue goes far beyond the scope of this article. In this regard, the content presented within the framework of the following three points should be seen much more as an attempt to identify the most important dependencies in regards to the challenges associated with right-wing populism in Poland.

4.1 Catholic "Polishness" as a Determinant of Belonging to the "True" People

As many as 91.9% of Poles identify today with Catholicism (Catholic Information Agency 2021). In the past, when Poland was often divided and oppressed by foreign powers, for example, in 1772–1918 by Russia, Austria-Hungary and Prussia, 1939–1945 by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, as well as from the end of World War II until 1989 by the communists (Herbert 2019), religion was of great importance to the Polish population (Morawska 1984; Borowik 2002). National identity and religious beliefs were and continue to remain connected with Polish history. The

dominance of Catholic values, which in fact are largely related to Polish identity (Müller and Neundorf 2012; Libiszowska-Żółtkowska 2015; Herbert 2019; Balcerzak 2020), are realised in the popular slogan "God, Honour, Homeland" (Koba 2020, p. 54). This state of things is clearly conducive to the fact that right-wing populists have been building their political power for years on the basis of the basic stereotypical "truth" that "all Poles are Catholics" (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013, p. 7).

In Poland, over the past few years, there has been a regular progression of the multifaceted "ideological thickening of populism" (Kotwas and Kubik 2019, p. 40), which could not develop so effectively without the religious factor enabling the increasing density of Polish public culture (ibid.). Among the most astonishing manifestations of populist density are at least two actions of a religious nature, which can be largely used to support the policies of right-wing populists. Firstly, this is about the prayer action "Rosary to the Borders" which took place on 7 October 2017 with the participation of 320 parish churches in 22 dioceses (Kotwas and Kubik 2019; Stachowska 2019). The second action was the "Poland Under the Cross" event, the central part of which occurred on 14 September 2019 and gathered about 60,000 participants (Stachowska 2019). In both cases, the mass religious rituals were not only aimed at nationalist protection of "Polishness" as the most important attribute of the "people" who defend their Catholic identity, but also expressed their readiness to undertake the mission of re-Christianising Europe in the face of the influx of Muslim refugees and the "hostile" policies of liberal elites (Kotwas and Kubik 2019). Such actions were a response to the outbreak of the migration crisis in 2015 in Europe. This clearly corresponded with the policy of multiplying the fear propagated by right-wing populists (Goździak and Márton 2018) and the attitude of Poles towards the admission of refugees. Research by the Centre for Social Opinion Research (2017) indicates that as many as 74% of surveyed Poles opposed the admission of refugees at that time, and for those respondents aged 18–24 it was as much as 87%.[5]

The symbolic sense of fear and threat caused by the announcement of the relocation of refugees from the Middle East and Africa within the European Union (EU) (Krzyżanowski 2020; Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski 2018; Visvizi 2017; Starnawski 2017) has contributed, in favour of right-wing populists, to strength-

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[5] Such a high level of opposition to the issue of accepting refugees coming mainly from Middle Eastern and African countries among Poles in 2017 was related to the ongoing relocation of refugees in the EU at that time from the earlier migration crisis, the source of which was the so-called Arab Spring and the conflicts that followed (in Syria, Lebanon, Libya, among others). Terrorist attacks in Europe carried out (or inspired) by ISIS also played a significant role in this regard. It is worth noting that in 2021, according to a Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) survey, the belief that migrants from the Middle East and Africa residing at the Polish-Belarusian border should be allowed to apply for asylum in Poland is expressed by only one-third of Poles (33%), while more than half are strongly opposed (52%) (CBOS 2017, 2021). In this context, it is important to remember that Poland is a relatively culturally homogeneous country, and the problem for Poles is not immigration per se, but who the immigrants are and what they are like. Indeed, immigrants from the same or culturally close area are much more positively perceived than immigrants from foreign cultures (Glowiak 2021). For example, the attitude of Poles toward granting asylum to Ukrainians from areas of armed conflict was quite different. More than half of the respondents in 2018, i.e., 56%, are in favour of accepting refugees from the neighboring country (ibid., p. 159–160).

ening the position of extremist nationalist-fundamentalist groups in Poland. These groups included the "All-Polish Youth" (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*)[6] (Łubiński 2016). As noted by D. Tronina:

> "Młodzież Wszechpolska is one of the main organisers of the annual Independence March held on November 11, which is known for attracting many far-right groups that do not suppress their ultranationalist or racist ideologies, chanting slogans such as 'Death to the enemies of the fatherland!' or 'Pure Poland, white Poland'." (Tronina 2020, p. 69)

A particular problem in this regard, however, is the fact that this extremist organisation is supported by some church actors, for example, the Catholic radio station "Radio Maryja" (e.g., Tronina 2020; Kałabunowska 2017; Kasprowicz 2015; Sroczyńska and Kochanowski 2014). Church authorities primarily facilitate the activities of "All-Polish Youth" by making resources such as communication networks and physical space available (Tronina 2020) and thus support the aggression of members of this organisation against minorities, for example, Muslims and left-wing elites (Tronina 2020; Meyer Resende and Hennig 2021).

The nationalist, exclusivist, xenophobic and, at the same time, populist approach to "Polishness" is clearly contrary to the official teaching of the Polish Bishops' Conference (2017) contained in the document entitled "The Christian Shape of Patriotism" (*Chrześcijański kształt patriotyzmu*). This document emphasises the value of shaping a model of hospitable patriotism in Polish culture, open to the richness and achievements of the whole and diverse European culture (Polish Bishops' Conference 2017, no. 4–6). Therefore, Polish bishops criticize the existence of national egoism and nationalism, which cultivates a sense of their own superiority and closure to other national communities and to the universal human community (Fiałkowski 2018; Gocko 2017). However, they also remain somehow "powerless" against the populist activities of the Catholic radio station "Radio Maryja" which for many years has been aggressively using anti-Muslim rhetoric (Wilczyńska and Wilczyński 2020; Narkowicz 2018; Bobako 2018). It continues to spread the radical belief among Poles that Muslims have only one goal that they want to achieve through violence or peaceful means, that is, to absorb Europe into Dar al-Islam[7] (Loredo 2021).

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[6] "All-Polish Youth" (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*) is an organisation that was reactivated in December 1989. Its sources can be seen in the previous formation work in the ranks of the organisation, which were founded and led by activists of the Polish Youth Union "Zet", founded in 1886, in whose ranks there were later leaders and ideologues of the National Movement in Poland: Zygmunt Balicki and Roman Dmowski (Łubiński 2016; Kulińska 2012). "One of the most important goals of 'Zet' was primarily to strive to rebuild a united and independent Polish State by awakening national aspirations in all layers of the Nation, strengthening faith in one's own strength and opposing class—socialist influences" (Łubiński 2016, p. 198).

[7] "The Hanafi scholar Kuhistani (d. 950/1544) characterises Dar al-Islam as any land under the power of a Muslim ruler. It is also defined as the land under the control of Islamic law" (Eris 2000, p. 5).

4.2 The Anti-Pluralistic and Authoritarian Need to Defend the Strict Principles of the Catholic Moral Order in a Democratic State

Another important and at the same time overreaching goal of the "unholy alliance" with Christianity in Poland (Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jäger 2019; Chrostowski 2021b), which connects right-wing populists with the Catholic Church, is to defend the strict principles of the moral order and the patriarchal model of the family, as well as attitudes expressed in the traditional roles performed by individuals (Lipiński and Stępińska 2020a; Pankowski 2010). What is more, the Catholic Church in Poland, after the takeover of power by PiS, get a promise that in matters of worldview and morals, there will be no changes in the law inconsistent with its teaching (Leśniczak 2020; Hall 2017). In this sense, the struggle for the rights of homosexual persons and the right to abortion should be considered as exemplary.

a) *The rights of homosexual persons*

The Catholic Church condemns homosexual acts as contrary to the natural law, morally wrong and internally disordered (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992, no. 2357–2359), "while in itself 'the inclination of a homosexual person' is not a sin, but a weaker or stronger propensity to do evil from a moral point of view" (Chrostowski 2022b, p. 53). In Poland, it is quite the opposite; LGBT people have become the symbol of the lack of morality and sinfulness, as well as the hostility of the ruling party and the Catholic Church itself towards the "others" (Cudak 2022; Bielska 2021; Yermakova 2021; Witkowski 2021). In this context, the statements of the Archbishop of Krakow and Vice-President of the Polish Episcopal Conference, Marek Jędraszewski, "that a 'rainbow plague' is afflicting the country" (Duffy 2019), as well as the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, that "they try to tell us that [LGBT] are people, but it is an ideology" and should be considered harmful (Tilles 2020). It should be remembered that the voice of Archbishop M. Jędraszewski, as a high representative of the Catholic Church in Poland, is not isolated in this respect. As P. Witkowski (2021) also emphasises, he was supported in this perception of homosexual people by, among others, the Council of Diocesan Bishops in Poland, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki (President of the Episcopal Conference Polish), Archbishop Wacław Depo (Bishop of the Diocese of Częstochowa), and Bishop Kazimierz Gurda (Bishop of the Diocese of Siedlce) (Witkowski 2021, p. 214–215). As a result, with the support of some bishops and in the name of defending tradition, the family and the overarching role of Catholic values, the PiS government during the last few years has more clearly intensified its statements against the LGBT community and its rights (ibid.; ILGA-Europe 2022).

b) *The right to abortion*

Another common point that connects virtually all lines of the Polish populist and extremist right with the teaching of the Catholic Church is the issue of a complete ban on abortion (Hall 2019; Yatsyk 2020; Witkowski 2021). The position of the Catholic Church on abortion is widely known (Borowik and Koralewska 2018) and

it clearly opposes the permissibility of abortion, which is defined as the killing of a child in the prenatal phase. Furthermore, only God is constructed and understood as the giver of life, deciding on its beginning and end (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992, no. 2270–2275; Polish Bishops' Conference 2013).

As part of the Catholic teaching on abortion, as mentioned by the sociologists of religion I. Borowik and I. Koralewska (2018), among Polish hierarchs and clergy the image of God dominates, which not only requires complete obedience and submission to his will, but also expects from believers the humility of the biblical Job in accepting divine judgements. Additionally, the bishops perceive Polish society as a "monolith" and thus require fidelity to Catholic principles in the process of creating law and making political decisions (Borowik and Koralewska 2018, p. 215–216). The widespread identification of Catholics, the Polish nation and Polish society as interchangeable terms (Borowik 2002) results in the fact that right-wing populist groups associated with the Catholic Church and its orthodoxy consider abortion as a return to Nazi eugenics. Those demanding the right to choose in this respect are equated with the characteristics of Bolshevism and Hitlerism (Witkowski 2021). Abortion is therefore not only a sin for right-wing populists, but also a tool for depopulating the Polish nation (ibid.).

As J. Wyleżałek (2020) notes, the dichotomous nature of divisions in relation to the rights of homosexual persons and the right to abortion in Poland, as well as the related social moods, cause the mutual resentment and emotional character of interpersonal relations to be initiated and supported more and more often by public figures. Political conflict is becoming the basis of social movements and activities,[8] as well as from the perspective of strategic political and populist actions, with a more and more clearly systemically "useful" effect every year. Incitement of conflicts, and above all those of a philosophical nature, prevents a proper interpretation of the sources of social divisions and an attempt to focus on the most important problems. This is used by various political groups and organisations in various versions of the political worldview struggle (Wyleżałek 2020).

4.3 Silent Consent to the Advanced "Dismantling" of Polish Democracy

Using the slogan "good change", with strong support from a part of society since 2015,[9] the populist PiS party has been implementing the "dismantling" of liberal democracy in Poland in a clearly non-liberal direction (Koba 2020). This has led to the development of a "neo-authoritarianism" (Gdula 2018) which is largely characterised by the populist resentment towards the elites and the escalation of hostility (Tyrała 2020, p. 21). In this context, the key influence on the destabilisation of democracy in Poland is the actions of the authorities, including the centralisation of power, politicisation of the media, government control over the justice system, unjust

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[8] At this point, it is worth pointing out the problem of mutual insult by provocation and polarisation of the vision of the world with religion in the background as new and increasing social phenomena in Poland (more on this topic: Leszczuk-Fiedziukiewicz 2021).

[9] In 2015, in the parliamentary elections in Poland, 37.6% of valid votes were cast for PiS (Kowalski 2018, p. 232), while in 2019 this was 43.6% (Wilczyński 2019).

decommunisation, attack on non-governmental organisations, as well as violations of parliamentary procedures (Chapman 2017; Tyrała 2020; Koba 2020; Bernhard 2021; Meyer Resende and Hennig 2021). Not without significance, it is also the negative influence of populist politics on the education system (Chrostowski 2022a; Szelewa 2021; Pilch 2020) including higher education (Kulas 2020; Kołaczkowski 2019). Against the background of these disputes, Poland began to create its image as a "carrier" of alternative and often anti-democratic values on the old continent (Wojtaszczyk 2018), which inexorably leads to a "collision course with the EU" as a community of values (Colyer 2021, p. 13).

Indeed, the ruling party in Poland cannot be deprived of merit for social programmes, such as the 500+ programme, setting an hourly minimum wage or raising the level of the lowest pensions (Polakowski et al. 2017, 2019; Betka 2019), which aroused the recognition of citizens and the Church itself. Much more surprising, however, is the silence of Polish bishops in the face of PiS's disregard for the constitution and the law (Hall 2017, p. 92; Leśniczak 2020, p. 176). As P. Kusiak (2020) explains, the second half of 2017 especially was marked by controversy in Poland related to laws changing the rules of the functioning of the justice system. At that time, many circles expected the Church to take an unequivocal position on this matter, that is, supporting or condemning the adopted legal solutions. Representatives of the Polish Episcopal Conference, however, avoided statements on the subject for a long time, and those that appeared can be described as clearly cautious, conservative and mainly calling for cross-party agreement and silencing emotions in public debate[10] (Kusiak 2020; see also: Gądecki 2017; Polak 2017; Rytel-Adrianik 2017). In the face of the silence of the Polish bishops, an article published in the Vatican daily newspaper "L'Osservatore Romano" (21.07.2022) was comprehensively echoed in the Polish media, in which it was clearly indicated that the Polish government adopted "a controversial reform of the justice system, which de facto abolishes the autonomy of the judiciary" (Kusiak 2020, p. 186; see also: KAI 2017).

On the other hand, it should also be noted that since the publication of the critical text mentioned above in the Vatican daily, strong statements in support of Polish President Andrzej Duda's veto of changes in the judiciary and calling for respect for the constitutional order, as well as changes within the "Polish order", or demands for reparations from Germany, have begun to appear among Polish bishops (see, among others, Krzyzak 2018; Kazimierczuk 2021). In this context, it is worth noting two statements in particular. First, the Polish Bishops' Committee for Contact with the German Bishops' Conference published an appeal on 8 September 2017, in which five Polish bishops, that is, Bishop Henryk Muszyński, Bishop Jan Kopiec, Archbishop Wiktor Skworc, Cardinal Kazimierz Nycz and Bishop Tadeusz Lityński, warn that the value of Polish-German reconciliation is easily lost by ill-considered decisions and even by too hastily spoken words. The bishops call for "prudent diplomacy", which should sustain the hard-won trust rather than nullify

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[10] For example, Archbishop S. Gądecki in his letter addressed to the President of the Republic of Poland of 24.07.2017 calls for an agreement to preserve the separation of powers, but at the same time acknowledges the need to reform the Polish judiciary, even against the will of (some) voters, provided that it is about achieving "decent" goals (Kusiak 2020, p. 185).

it by stirring up negative emotions (Polish Bishops' Committee for Contact with the German Bishops' Conference 2017). Secondly, a significant reverberation was gained from an interview by Bishop Jan Kopiec, the Ordinary of Gliwice, in which the hierarch admitted that a kind of sin of negligence on the part of the Church "is too much indulgence in the process of 'partyisation' of the state by one option" (Przeciszewski 2018).

Summarising the above comparative analysis, it should be noted that the leading structural element connecting right-wing populists and some circles of the Catholic Church in Poland is a kind of Manichaeism (Dylus 2019, p. 135). Such an approach to the world and man is clearly characterised by a black and white image and is associated primarily with fundamentalism and moral conservatism. People are divided into allies ("real" Poles) and enemies ("others", "elites"), who are always representatives of two dichotomous groups: people with "impeccable virtue" or people who can be described as "evil" and "immoral". In this context, the daily necessity of right-wing populists is to save what is "Polish" and "Christian" from liberal elites or crypto-communists. Consequently, "Catholic" Poland, the inability to make broadly understood compromises and alliances reigns, is something like a "besieged fortress", which must be constantly defended from the "dictatorship of relativism" and the destructive cultural tendencies coming from the liberal EU (Dylus 2019, p. 135–136; Hall 2017, p. 89–93).

5 Indications for the Social-Pastoral Prevention of Populism in Poland

The politics and actions of right-wing populists are related to the use of religion to achieve their own goals (Herbert 2019; Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik 2020; Szelewa 2021; Chrostowski 2022b). In addition, the entanglement of the Catholic Church in the politics of PiS and the associated lack of a sufficient and unambiguous response of church hierarchs to the destruction of the democratic order, dichotomies, collective fears and anxieties are related to the currently observed social changes in Polish society (Leśniczak 2020; Wyleżałek 2020; Dylus 2019; Hall 2017). This leads to the question of possible and future-oriented social-pastoral indications for the prevention of right-wing populism in Poland. The presented pastoral preventive indications are particularly relevant in the Polish context for at least two reasons. First, the Catholic Church in Poland, as a religious institution for as many as 91.9% of Poles (Catholic Information Agency 2021), has an enormous social impact and contributes to the consolidation of social capital (Sadłoń 2014). Moreover, the Church comes out—in conjunction with social indications—to address the tensions and dilemmas discussed above with regard to its entanglement in politics and the actions of right-wing populists. From the collective actors of the public sphere—such as the Church, but also universities, media and theatres—the democratic community expects political detachment, through which they can shape the invaluable metapolitical space of political culture, rationality and responsibility for democracy (Sowinski 2013/2014, p. 49).

In a methodological sense, it is primarily a matter of indicating the main paths of prevention and pointing to possible strategies for comprehensive action, which are an

aid to the setting of goals and their implementation in counteracting the "hijacking" of Christianity by right-wing populists. Therefore, the following guidelines cannot be understood as ready-made solutions that can be directly implemented in Polish reality, but should be seen as a starting point for an in-depth discussion, a driver and a kind of "signpost". The following three thesis present in this sense a general characterisation of the main indicative prerogatives for preventive actions:

1. *Ecclesiastical and state steps to disintegrate the destructive identification of the Catholic Church with right-wing populists and prevent further "alliance of the throne and the altar"*

In Poland, steps of an ecclesiastical and state nature should be taken to break the pernicious identification of the Catholic Church with right-wing populists or with the political parties governing the country, as well as to formally prevent the possibility of a rebirth of a strong alliance between church and state in the future (Leśniczak 2020; Dylus 2019; Hall 2017; Nosowski 2015).

To begin, the church hierarchy must move away from an attitude of passivity, silence and institutional conjuncturalism and stand courageously on the side of democratic values and thus condemn the abuses of right-wing populists (Kusiak 2020). The church must act in the same way as was done for extreme nationalist attitudes among Poles (Polish Bishops' Conference 2017). The right approach seems to be to follow the path set by the German bishops (Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 2019), and to set up a group of interreligious and ecumenical experts to prepare official instructions on the handling of right-wing populist tendencies in the Catholic Church. Such a document could help the faithful and clergy in talks and debates with right-wing populists in Poland, but it would also be a clear sign of opposition to the populist policy of hatred and contempt (Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 2019). In addition, a nationwide strategy should be developed for an effective solution to the issue of support for right-wing populists by individuals, institutions and organisations associated with the Catholic Church (Wysocka 2008; Kutyło 2010; Esser et al. 2017; Stępińska 2020).

Next, the state authorities must not only uphold the principles of democracy, but also respect the religious freedom of citizens, maintain neutrality in matters of worldview and be guided by the principle of respect for a pluralistic society (Steczkowski 2018). In this regard, it is necessary to renounce any attempt to give a privileged position to a particular religion. The principle of respect for the mutual autonomy and independence of each party in its own field and the principle of cooperation for respect for "human dignity" and the "common good" are also of fundamental importance (Steczkowski 2018; Stępień 2021). From the point of view of the philosophy of the state and the rule of law, both of the above concepts, that is, "human dignity" and "common good" constitute a certain, axiological ground for a democratic state governed by the rule of law. However, it should also be remembered that the legal order of the state, due to the existence of worldview pluralism, cannot duplicate any specific religious ethical-moral system (Steczkowski 2018). Otherwise, as A. Zoll observes, to give a single system of moral norms the status of a state law is to force those who do not accept that moral system to receive

it against their own conscience and the principles which guide them in their daily lives. Furthermore, it would lead to the enslavement of people subordinate to the legislator, which is a model characteristic of states accepting the fundamentalisms of totalitarian states (Zoll 2001, p. 64–65).

2. *Active support of the "culture of encounter" and the idea of sustainable development*

As Pope Francis notes:

"The only way for individuals, families and societies to grow, the only way for the life of peoples to progress, is via the culture of encounter, a culture in which all have something good to give and all can receive something good in return". (Francis 2013)

The "culture of encounter" must become a sign of opposition to the further politicisation of Catholicism, which has been practiced in Poland for many years, as well as contributing to the strengthening of the democratic structures of the state and improving the situation of marginalised groups (Obirek 2014). However, it will not be fully possible without the realisation of the idea of sustainable development, which is understood as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations General Assembly 1987, p. 43). In the face of the challenges of right-wing populism in the Polish, European and global perspective (Stockemer 2019; Moffitt 2016), sustainable development should be seen as a tool for not only changing lifestyles and attitudes, but also for rebuilding the human living environment on the basis of coexistence as friends and neighbours (Babicki 2021; Francis 2020).

3. *Maturing social and civic competences among citizens—children, young people and adults—based on actual scientific knowledge of the dangers of right-wing populism*

Democratic progress of Polish society based on the thoughts presented in the first and second thesis will not be possible without appropriate educational activities. As part of educational offers for adults (e.g., workshops, projects, discussion panels) and within school education (including religious education), an important element is to create an extra-curricular and inter-curricular path of critical education. It is also about developing individuals' social and civic competences based on factual, scientific knowledge about right-wing populism and related threats. As a result, the acquired knowledge will equip adults and students with the right information and competences to take a personal position on this phenomenon (Chrostowski 2021a, b, 2022a, b; Szelewa 2021; Estellés and Castellví 2020; Danner 2017, 2020). It should also be pointed out that various offers within the framework of educational activities can provide an opportunity to learn about the values of different cultures, support tolerance and peaceful coexistence, as well as eliminate the cultural, religious and social prejudices and dichotomies on which right-wing populists base their discourse (Jungkamp 2017; Chrostowski 2021a, 2022b). Additionally, education itself

in the face of the challenges of populism must be understood broadly as cognition, understanding and critical confrontation with the world, as well as a personal determination of one's own position and place in the world. The basic priority of education and all pedagogical activities is therefore not only to change the horizons of thought of a given individual, but even more to change themself (Chrostowski 2021a; Danner 2017).

4. *Multifaceted activation of civil society and promotion of pro-democracy political action*

In the face of the challenges posed by right-wing populism, one of the most distinctive features of the democratic system, which is the promotion of the idea of a participatory society, in which citizens collectively make decisions related to the functioning of their state, should gain significantly (Boguszewski 2018). First of all, the focus should be on strengthening political participation by promoting the following activities, for example, through projects, conferences or workshops (Marchlewska et al. 2022, p. 84): *strengthening pro-democracy cooperation* (broadening awareness that more can be done together, and strengthening both the motivation and ability to cooperate with others); *strengthening political knowledge* (building knowledge concerning both political facts, for example, about how the political system works and how right-wing populists operate, as well as the processes—how one can get involved and influence pro-democracy policies); *strengthening the sense of political competence* (it is necessary to strengthen the feeling in citizens that they have political competence, that they can deepen it, that everyone can gain the knowledge and skills needed to get involved in strengthening democracy); *strengthening pro-democracy attitudes towards politics* (politics should be understood as "playing to a common goal", and not just as competition and fighting for one's particular goals. Such an approach breaks the association of politics exclusively with political sides and conflicts effectively fuelled by right-wing populists. It also shows that politics can be interesting, can be an area for interaction and can bring people together); *strengthening pro-democracy participation* (this is about building individual skills in individuals aimed at boldly engaging in the political life of the country in the future).

6 Summary

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that not every person who stands up for the people, the Church and Catholic values in a pluralistic society is a right-wing populist. Subsequently, it is always the one, regardless of whether they are a qualified politician, church hierarch, clergyman or lay person, who, in the name of Catholic values, not only creates the image of the "other" (e.g., a follower of another religion, a representative of the LGBT community or a person with a different worldview) as a ruthless enemy. Such person also manipulates fear with the help of appropriate political tools and deepens the prevailing prejudices, social dichotomies, anti-establishment and anti-pluralism (Wysocka 2008).

A right-wing populist always reaches for religion to strengthen the ideology they present and, as a result, seek to politicise it or to subtly sacralise politics itself. Central in this regard are the various passions that underpin the formation of the political and national identities of citizens. Moreover, the expectations, desires and transcendent hope of "ordinary" people for a better future also play a significant role (Zúquete 2017), which become the basis for populist mobilisation based on the theological-doctrinal, socio-cultural and personality-psychological contexts of religion (Rebenstorf 2018; Chrostowski 2021b).

The dividing line between the ethnocentric, xenophobic and marginalising phenomena associated with right-wing populism and religion itself is fluid (Pickel 2018). This can be seen in the example of the current socio-political situation in Poland. Right-wing populists are manipulating the Christian message in favour of political mobilisation and thus the need to protect Poland and Europe from the "others" and the destruction that the liberal establishment and the supposed "anti-Polish", "anti-family", "anti-Christian" and "multi-culti" policy are trying to prepare. In this context, the Catholic Church in Poland, which should be a defender of the dignity and equality of people, as well as a voice critical of unjust and harmful actions of politicians, has adopted an attitude of submission, conformity and silence towards the actions of the PiS party. Some representatives of the church hierarchy, as well as institutions and organisations associated with the Catholic Church, actively support right-wing populists and thus legitimise their actions. Both Catholic "Polishness" as a determinant of belonging to the "true" people, the anti-pluralistic and authoritarian need to defend the strict principles of the Catholic moral order in a democratic state, as well as tacit consent to the advanced "dismantling" of Polish democracy, are somehow the main "faults" of the Catholic Church in Poland in relation to the destructive policy of right-wing populists.

"The alliance of the throne and the altar" in Poland today requires decisive social-pastoral preventive actions, which should include: *1. Ecclesiastical and state steps to disintegrate the destructive identification of the Catholic Church with right-wing populists and prevent further alliance of the throne and the altar; 2. Active support of the "culture of encounter" and the idea of sustainable development; 3. Maturing social and civic competences among citizens based on actual scientific knowledge of the dangers of right-wing populism; 4. Multifaceted activation of civil society and promotion of pro-democracy political action.*

Furthermore, in the future it is necessary to work particularly intensively to ensure the young generations of Poles understand that the strong dependence of the Catholic Church on politics and politics on the Catholic Church is in no way conducive to building a pluralistic society, and even—more frequently—leads to the destruction of the Church itself, as well as the gradual building of a denominational or totalitarian state, in which only one fundamentalist "option" is always right. In this sense, the "unholy alliance" with Christianity in Poland, becomes nothing more than a "religiously coloured" overture to neo-authoritarianism or totalitarianism.

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