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RADIO MARYJA AS AN EXAMPLE OF A CATHOLIC FUNDAMENTALIST ENVIRONMENT

Fundamentalism, regardless of the cultural field it concerns, is based on the conviction that certain laws or ideas are infallible and complete². It does not refer strictly to the content of professed values, but defines the attitude towards them³. Its presence is thus typical of all social movements that draw attention to the harmfulness of the modernization processes and refer to the superior role of tradition in social life⁴. The interpretation of fundamentalism is based on a particular set of truths, while their expression always consists of absolute obedience to the accepted dogmas. The conviction of a specific “revelation” of the professed values determines the treatment of all those who do not share them with distrust or even hostility⁵. Fundamentalists usually present an uncritical attitude towards the accepted principles, at the same time rejecting any form of alternative views⁶. This attitude gives rise to many dangers. One of them was pointed out by Stanisław Gałkowski in his book: “Fundamentalism, fanaticism is not a question of concrete beliefs but of the

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² S. Bruce, *Fundamentalizm*, tłum. S. Królak, Warszawa 2006, p. 22.

³ J. Gałkowski, *Barbarzyńcy i obywatele: myślenie polityczne wobec wartości*, Lublin 2012, p. 101.

⁴ S. Bruce, op. cit., p. 22–23.

⁵ J. Gałkowski, op. cit., p. 101.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 101.

role that already acknowledged beliefs play in our lives (...) In this sense, fundamentalism easily leads from disregarding other people's opinions to fighting those who proclaim them"⁷.

In his discussion of the cultural split between relativism and fundamentalism in the modern world, Andrzej Szahaj points to the features typical of fundamentalist circles, such as the monopolization of truth, the permanent multiplication of enemies and the negation of personal autonomy⁸. One of the important features highlighted by the author is also the omnipresent paternalism, aiming at the bailout of individuals in making independent political, worldview or moral choices⁹. Accordingly: "Each religious tradition can spawn individuals who place the spread of their religion and the pursuit of goals inspired by it above the norms of their own society"¹⁰.

Religious fundamentalism became a global political phenomenon in the late 20th century¹¹. The most frequently studied religious groups in this context are the followers of Islam and Protestant denominations. By contrast, their Catholic counterparts have received far less attention. The Catholic Church itself cannot be called a Catholic fundamentalist organization due to its global reach, but it should be noted that lack of proper supervision by the Holy See may lead to the emergence of local fundamentalist movements that refer directly to Catholic values¹². The best example of such a movement in Poland is the environment centered around Tadeusz Rydzyk.

From the available sources we know that the concept of fundamentalism within the Polish Catholic Church appeared relatively recently, namely in the 1980's¹³. In the 5th volume of the Catholic Encyclopedia published in 1989 one can find information that Catholic fundamental-

⁷ Ibidem, p. 102.

⁸ A. Szahaj, *Relatywizm i fundamentalizm*, Toruń 2008, p. 21.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 21.

¹⁰ S. Bruce, op. cit., p. 12.

¹¹ B. Tibi, *Fundamentalizm religijny*, Warszawa 1997, p. 23.

¹² R. Bäcker, *Nietradycyjna teoria polityki*, Toruń 2011, p. 187.

¹³ D. Motak, *Nowoczesność i fundamentalizm. Ruchy antymodernistyczne w chrześcijaństwie*, Kraków 2002, p. 121.

ism is close to traditionalism and “[...] gives rise to the attitude of rigorously preserving the basic truths of faith and Christian morality”¹⁴.

Wolfgang Beinert was one of the few to distinguish a set of features typical for Catholic fundamentalism. Thus he showed the specificity of piety typical for this particular religious group¹⁵. The author pointed out that its characteristic axis of activity is not based on taking care of spiritual development or nurturing faith, but on taking care of preserving its identity¹⁶. According to the author, the typical features of Catholic fundamentalist circles are: intransigence, isolationism, authoritarianism, dualism, reductionism and inability to enter into dialogue outside their own environment¹⁷.

The aim of this article is to characterize the fundamentalist environment concentrated around the Radio Maryja radio station. This also means an attempt to answer the question: with what methods and tools Tadeusz Rydzyk built the strongest Catholic fundamentalist movement not only in Poland, but also in Europe. In connection with the fact that in recent years we have been talking about an exceptionally strong politicization of religion or religionization of politics in the Polish public space, the manifestations of political activity of the environment under study deserve a special place in the considerations. Critical analysis of selected media speeches, documentary programs, or newspaper articles devoted to the environment of Radio Maryja and its leader, allowed us to expose specific features testifying to the fundamentalist or even fanatical character of the activities of this community

In order to define the features of religious fundamentalism among the listeners of Radio Maryja it was necessary to determine the specific character of the Polish Catholic Church, which is strongly connected with the national culture. Fundamentalism of thought characterizes not only the audience of Radio Maryja, but also the whole relationship between the state and the Catholic Church, on the basis of which Tadeusz Rydzyk built his empire. The relevant legal acts, such as the Constitution

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 121.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 169.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 169–170.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 170.

of 1997 or the previously signed Concordat, define the outline of the relations between the state and the Church, but do not specify their actual borders. This also translates into scientific attempts to interpret the problem of where these boundaries should run and whether in practical terms they exist at all¹⁸. Facing this challenge seems to be necessary especially now, when more and more often we speak of serious social problems within the Polish Church, and even of its deep crisis. The problem of pedophilia among the clergy, their cooperation with the security services or their above-average involvement in political rivalries raises many questions and controversies.

The media increasingly reveal crimes of pedophilia committed over the years by priests of the Polish Catholic Church. Specific cases show how the autonomous system of canon law under the Concordat has enabled Polish clergy not only to avoid criminal consequences for forbidden acts, but also to persist in their crimes for many years.

Disputes of a moral nature, which are often elements of electoral campaigns of particular political groups, show more strongly than ever fundamentalism as a phenomenon that has its expression in the defense of the Polish Catholic Church and its values. It is accompanied by an exceptionally strong clericalism, which is one of the main reasons for the occurrence in the Church space of a social phenomenon called the "besieged fortress syndrome". The role of catalyst for the aforementioned attitude is played in this case by the media, which are the transmitters of a particular narrative and perpetuate the image of the only "historical truth"¹⁹. In the context of the polarization of society into allies and enemies of the Catholic Church, the national media, state television and the media led by Tadeusz Rydzyk play a key role

As the reactions of the superiors of the Polish Church and the lower-ranking clergy to cases of pedophiles within the Church show, the uncompromising attitude is so strong that even an absolutely proven guilt is not believed. One such example was a case revealed by the media in

¹⁸ The Concordat document of July 28, 1993 does not specifically indicate what should be considered matters in which the Catholic Church is entitled to apply its own law. This inaccuracy can be seen, for example, in cases of pedophilia in the Church, accompanied by dilemmas about the primacy of secular law over Church law.

¹⁹ J. Ziółkowski, *Syndrom oblężonej twierdzy*, p. 125.

which a priest convicted of raping a deaf schoolgirl took part in public liturgy even though he should not have done so. The parish priest who was his superior said at the time: "The courts can also be wrong. I believe and trust fervently that in this case the court was also wrong"²⁰. The quoted statement shows how the specifics of the surrounding reality are conducive to the construction of religious fundamentalism. In a stronger way than ever, its manifestations can be seen in recent years, when under the rule of Law and Justice the so-called alliance of the throne and the altar has been exposed very loudly. It is worth noting that this phenomenon has a bilateral dimension because the hierarchs of the Catholic Church themselves have repeatedly expressed their public support for those in power. The memorable moment when Bishop Antoni Długosz compared the Prime Minister – Mateusz Morawiecki to the biblical evangelist, and considered the actions of the then the Minister of Health Łukasz Szumowski as: "an extension of the deeds of Jesus" indicates that certain politicians are even given divine attributes²¹. The thesis that the Church is privileged is also supported by the reality of the coronavirus pandemic in Poland. When ordinances were issued to close shopping malls, cinemas, theaters, and other cultural and sports centers, churches still remained open. When nationwide strikes began in October 2020 over attempts to tighten the constitutional right to abortion, the ruling party leader Jarosław Kaczyński issued an address calling for the defense of churches, which he said was tantamount to defending Polish identity²². At the head of this fight against imaginary threats to Polish identity and the Catholic Church is precisely Tadeusz Rydzyk, considered by many to be a symbol of the national-Catholic camp²³.

Radio Maryja started its activity as a local station in December 1991. When 3 years later it obtained the concession of National Broadcast-

²⁰ *asty//now, Skazany za seks z nastolatką ksiądz odprawiał msze. Proboszcz: wierzę, że sąd się pomylił*, www.tvn24.pl, 20.12.2020.

²¹ *M. Chrzczonowicz, Morawiecki jako ewangelista, Szumowski jako „przedłużenie czynów Jezusa”*. *Apel Jasnogórski*, www.oko.press, 21.12.2020.

²² *wka/ PAP, Kaczyński wzywał do „obrony kościołów”*. *Prokuratura odmówiła wszczęcia śledztwa*, www.polsatnews.pl, 21.12.2020.

²³ *P. Borecki, Prawo wyznaniowe w świetle Konstytucji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z 1997 roku*, Warszawa 2013 p. 128.

ing Council and became the national radio. The strong, zero-sum style of rhetoric quite quickly gained a wide audience, which to this day is referred to as the Radio Maryja Family. It is necessary to point out the strong communal character of the examined environment is built on the basis of the authority of its leader. The target group of his activities in this case were mainly the elderly and often sick people, which led to a rapid growth of the Radio Maryja Family over the last 29 years

Public fund-raisers were certainly an expression of the strong ties within the community, thanks to which the media in Toruń could not only function, but also grow. One of the most impressive was the collection of funds to save the failing Gdańsk Shipyard. The mobilization flowing from the radios at that time led to the collection of an enormous amount of money. It is estimated that the Social Committee to Save the Gdańsk Shipyard and the Shipbuilding Industry initiated by Tadeusz Rydzyk could have collected as much as 200 million PLN²⁴. However, the funds raised ultimately went to the sub-account of Radio Maryja rather than the shipyard, which was sold to EVIP Progress in 1998. Lack of transparency of the fundraising led to a media scandal. It resulted in filing appropriate notifications to the prosecutor's office. One of the initiators of the notification was Bronisław Jachym, a close associate of Lech Wałęsa: "I fulfill a social duty by notifying of a crime involving the misuse of large sums of money deposited in the subaccount of Radio Maryja for the shipyard"²⁵. However, all proceedings were successively discontinued²⁶.

From the available sources, it is known that Radio Maryja invested part of the funds from the collection in the listed company ESPEBEPE. In 2001, when the company's shares fell thirty times, the court declared it bankrupt²⁷. The direct expression of ruthless authoritarianism, based on the cult of the leader of Radio Maryja, remained also the position of the

²⁴ P. Głuchowski, J. Hołub, *Imperator. Sekrety Ojca Rydzyka*, Warszawa 2013, p. 128–129.

²⁵ M. Sandecki, S. Sowula, *Co zrobił o. Rydzyk z pieniędzmi na Stocznię*, www.wyborcza.pl, 28.12.2020.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 28.12.2020.

²⁷ P. Głuchowski, J. Hołub, *op. cit.*, p. 133–134.

interested parties themselves, who made donations to the Toruń radio station's sub-account. One of such people was the mother of a prominent politician of Solidarna Polska, Tadeusz Cymański. In one of the interviews, her position as a donor was quoted: "I trust in the wisdom of Father Director, who will use the donations for another purpose"²⁸. It was with such an attitude, based on a deep, unshakable conviction of the rightness of the actions of the director of the radio station, that thousands of people entrusted their savings to him.

Both dualism and reductionism in the perception of the world were reflected in the political activity of the environment studied, which was based on uncompromising, especially in ethical and moral issues. The moment when Radio Maryja entered directly into the game of political power was the support of Lech Walesa's presidential campaign in 1995. Despite the subsequent stormy relations, which were largely connected with the defeat of the supported candidate, the radio station from Torun began the process of transformation of the Radio Maryja Family into the electorate. Tadeusz Rydzyk began to be more and more politically bold in his statements. In 1996 he made the following public statement about the deputies who voted to liberalize abortion laws: "They should be shaved like the prostitutes who sinned and went with the Germans (...) And these should normally be stigmatized, because they are traitors to the nation"²⁹. Tadeusz Rydzyk has never faced consequences for publicly inciting a lynching, despite reporting the case to the prosecutor's office³⁰. At the same time, the clergyman's line of defense has taken on a strongly radical character. It involves not only the hard-line stance of politicians, such as Roman Giertych, who demanded the punishment of those who wanted to bring the Redemptorist to justice, describing him as: "a great Pole and shepherd of our family," but also the crowds of people who gathered outside the prosecutor's office building³¹. Numerous

²⁸ P. Głuchowski, Co ojciec Rydzyk zrobił z pieniędzmi na Stocznież?, www.wiadomosci.gazeta.pl, 29.12.2020.

²⁹ R. Stangreciak, *Czarno na białym: 29 lat bezkarności. Fenomen Ojca Tadeusza*, www.player.pl, 03.01.2021.

³⁰ Ibidem, 03.01.2021.

³¹ Ibidem, 03.01.2021.

demonstrations, threats and demands already indicated the uncompromising style of rhetoric from the Radio Maryja Family. The sympathizers of the radio station became closer to the right-wing circles.

Nevertheless, the time of the real expansion in the process of building the empire of "Father Director" fell on the period of SLD's government, i.e. in the years 2001–2005, when the non-public Higher School of Social and Media Culture in Toruń was established and 2 years later the licence was granted to the Catholic television station TRWAM. Piotr Głuchowski, the author of Tadeusz Rydzyk's biography, points out that at one point Radio Maryja became a kind of 'springboard to power'³². This is particularly evident at the local level. The once little-known deputy Anna Sobecka from Toruń was in the Polish Parliament for almost 23 years. The mayor of Toruń, Michał Zaleski, who has been actively involved in many of Radio Maryja's ventures and despite a rather perverse political past, is also an unprecedented figure on the national scale, holding office for the fifth term³³.

Isolationism and the accompanying rhetoric of hostility to dialogue outside one's own community certainly played a key role in strengthening bonds between members of the community. In the early years of the radio station's activity, the content of the broadcasts was characterized by stigmatization of communism. As the radio developed, mainly through the establishment of permanent cooperation with people of science and culture, the broadcasts began to take on a broader political meaning, and the mainstream was already focused on building hostility towards the Western world and capitalism³⁴. For 29 years of its activity, the practice of the media led by Tadeusz Rydzyk has been to constantly be 'against' someone or something. In the context of these considerations, this practice is certainly not surprising, as it results from the fundamentalist nature of the community gathered around the radio station. Nonetheless, this fundamentalism often went beyond any moral or ethical standards. This is evidenced by numerous statements of the invited guests, which were a sign of anti-Semitism. Such was the character of, among others,

³² Ibidem, 03.01.2021.

³³ M. Behrendt, *Toruń: Prezydent Michał Zaleski z poparciem ojca Rydzyka*, www.wyborcza.pl, 05.01.2021.

³⁴ I. Głuchowski, J. Hołub, op. cit., p. 137.

the statement of Professor Boguslaw Wolniewicz in 2009, who during one of the broadcasts said: "The intrusive pushing of Jewish culture and Jewish point of view that has been going on here for the last ten years, slightly counting, is becoming unbearable! (...) This pusillanimity, after all, must provoke reactions and objections, just like mine at the moment!"³⁵. Another example is the statements of Radio Maryja columnist Stanislaw Michalkiewicz, who even called Jewish organizations a "Holocaust enterprise"³⁶. Despite lawsuits to the public prosecutor's office, initiated on more than one occasion by the Media Ethics Council, as in most cases against Radio Maryja, this has not resulted in any serious consequences.

The inability to engage in a dialogue outside of one's own environment and the accompanying intransigence in this case far exceed any ethical or moral framework. The language of hatred, which was shocking for the public opinion, came also from the director of the radio station, who in 2007 publicly insulted the president Lech Kaczyński and his wife. He called the president an impostor who had given in to the Jewish lobby, and his wife a witch who should be euthanized³⁷.

Verbal aggression led in many cases to acts of physical violence on the part of the members of the Family of Radio Maryja. Its manifestations could be seen in 2010 during the protests connected with the decision to move the cross commemorating the Smolensk catastrophe from the Presidential Palace to the Loretto Chapel of St Anne's Church. Tadeusz Rydzik mobilized the crowds with his firm and uncompromising rhetoric. There were many acts of aggression, which had to be pacified by police units. In 2011 during the 15th pilgrimage of Radio Maryja Ewa Żarska, a journalist of the Polsat News channel, was severely beaten by one of the participants³⁸. Lack of real consequences connected with the destructive influence of the media from Toruń on the members of the Family of Radio Maryja undoubtedly strengthened their conviction

³⁵ J. Hołub, *W Radiu Maryja o judaizacji polski*, www.wyborcza.pl, 06.01.2021.

³⁶ J. Halczewicz-Pleskaczewski, *Powrót „przedsiębiorstwa Holocaustu”*, www.wiez.pl, 05.01.2021.

³⁷ M. Dzierżanowski, *O Rydzik o prezydentowej: czarownica, która powinna się poddać eutanazji*, www.wprost.pl, 07.01.2021.

³⁸ *Ekipa Polsat News zaatakowana przez fanatyka Radia Maryja (10.07.2011)*, www.youtube.com, 08.01.2021.

that the actions undertaken were right. Consequently, the words of the charismatic leader Tadeusz Rydzyk, for the last 29 years, have grown to the rank of dogmas, coming, in the listeners' opinion, from God Himself.

Many signs indicate that both the environment of Radio Maryja and the person of its founder are beyond any control of the Polish Episcopate and even the Vatican. When, in 2018, editor Monika Olejnik invited the previous Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek to talk, she asked about the impunity of the director of Radio Maryja and he said: "We have been saying for years that this empire is not intended for the good of the Church, or for the good of the people, only people who want to go out as world businessmen take advantage of it (...) The Episcopate turns to the Holy See, to the superiors. This is what it can do, after all there is no branch that would go and destroy this Radio Maryja"³⁹. Making an attempt to interpret the words of bp. Tadeusz Pieronek should be noted that they certainly had a broader context. For when talking about the destruction of Radio Maryja one should not have in mind strictly the building of the radio station, but above all a huge social movement, which at the same time is an integral part of the community of the Polish Catholic Church. Perhaps that is where the biggest problem lies.

In recent years, it has become apparent that the Toronto-based radio station is also controversial abroad. In 2020 Tadeusz Rydzyk was officially forbidden to celebrate masses in Canadian parishes. Radio Maryja was also completely banned from broadcasting there, the main reason being the Redemptorist's promotion of anti-Semitism and homophobia⁴⁰. In the same year, the American Simon Wiesenthal Center, which prosecutes Nazi criminals and combats hate speech, initiated procedures against Tadeusz Rydzyk and Radio Maryja, aimed at banning them from celebrating masses and organizing public collections among the Polish community in the United States⁴¹. Thomas Lukaszuk, a Polish-born former Canadian politician and the former Canadian Deputy Premier of

³⁹ M. Olejnik, „Kropka nad i” z dnia 8.10.2018, www.tvn24.pl, 09.01.2021.

⁴⁰ bas/sgo/, *Ojciec Rydzyk z zakazem odprawiania mszy w kanadyjskich parafiach. „Propagowanie antysemityzmu”*, www.polsatnews.pl, 10.01.2021.

⁴¹ D. Wysocka-Schnepf, *W USA też nie chcą kazać Rydzyka. Centrum Szymona Wiesenthala wszczyna procedury*, www.wyborcza.pl, 10.01.2021.

the Province of Alberta, pointed out in a public interview that: "The U.S. State Department in its official report declared Radio Maryja the most anti-Semitic radio station in all of Europe"⁴². In 2017: "An appeal to curb the political activities of Tadeusz Rydzyk" was signed by over 150,000 people. When the issue of collecting signatures gained momentum, then a group of defenders of Radio Maryja spoke out, along with strong support from Law and Justice politicians. There was even a petition in defense of the director of Radio Maryja, which was supported by a significant number of Polish hierarchs⁴³. One of them was the Metropolitan of Częstochowa, Wacław Depo, who described the appeals to sign the petition as a "diabolical affair"⁴⁴. Three years later, the petition was forwarded by Thomas Lukaszuk to the Holy See. The allegations formulated in it, show how much the lifestyle and rhetoric of Tadeusz Rydzyk, in the opinion of a large part of Polish society deviate from the teaching of the Catholic Church. The main conclusion of the document was as follows: "Tadeusz Rydzyk, a monk who uses Catholicism as a tool to gain money and power, is an example of the pathology present in the Polish Catholic Church"⁴⁵.

In the context of examples of isolationism, intransigence and strong reductionism towards the existing reality it seems necessary to point out that Radio Maryja considers its aim to be guarding the good of the Polish Catholic Church, even at any cost. During the broadcasts the issues concerning social problems were usually not raised. But when they did, it was only in the context of the rhetoric of 'continuous attacks on the Church'.

This tactic can be seen very clearly on the example of the crimes of paedophilia among the Polish clergy, which more and more often become the subject of numerous observations in the public space. The isolationism of Radio Maryja often manifests itself in an absurd nega-

⁴² Ojciec Rydzyk uznany za persona non grata w USA? „Zaprzestać rozpowszechniania mowy nienawiści”, www.wprost.pl, 11.01.2021.

⁴³ M. Podolski, Thomas Lukaszuk wystął papieżowi petycję ws. Rydzyka, www.onet.pl, 15.01.2021.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 15.01.2021.

⁴⁵ LG, Petycja ws. ojca Rydzyka trafi do papieża. „Robią z katolicyzmu dochodową parodię chrześcijaństwa”, www.wiadomości.gazeta.pl, 20.01.2021.

tion of the existing reality. The best example of this is Tadeusz Rydzyk's statement on December 5, 2020, who, in the presence of representatives of the Polish Episcopate and the Polish government headed by the Minister of Justice and the Ombudsman for Children, said the following about the rape of children by the clergy: "Let us not give in. The fact that a priest has sinned? Well he has sinned. And who doesn't have temptations? Let him show himself

Of course, one can wonder whether the words reducing child rape to a temptation or the silent attitude of people who should guard human dignity were more shocking. In this case, however, attention should be paid to the persistent distortion of an inconvenient reality at any cost.

Referring to the financial aspect of the activities of Radio Maryja it is worth noticing that till the present day the governmental criterion of distributing funds for the realization of many public investments remains unknown so far. However, it is known that the Torun-based Lux Veritatis Foundation is the beneficiary of a great number of them every year. In 2019, journalists of the OKO. press portal presented detailed calculations according to which entities supervised by Tadeusz Rydzyk, such as the Lux Veritatis foundation, the Higher School of Social and Media Culture and other companies, only since the beginning of the rule of Law and Justice have received at least 214.2 million PLN⁴⁶. The above amount indicates that Tadeusz Rydzyk's empire is in a phase of constant flourishing. The best example of this is the allocation of 60 million PLN at the end of 2020 for the construction of the John Paul II museum in Toruń, which is at the same time equivalent to 1/4 of the amount allocated by the Polish government for the so-called non-expiring expenditure in the health care sector, which in the reality of mass vaccination should be a priority area⁴⁷.

The above findings confirm the thesis that Radio Maryja constitutes one of the most significant Catholic fundamentalist environments not only in Poland but also in Europe. It is proved by concrete features that make it possible to identify the environment of Radio Maryja with Cath-

⁴⁶ B. Mikołajewska, *214.158.441 złotych z publicznych pieniędzy na „dzieła” o. Rydzyka [WYLICZENIE OKO.PRESS]*, www.oko.press, 21.01.2021.

⁴⁷ Ł. Karusta, *Czarno na białym: Przemilczane miliony dla ojca Rydzyka*, www.tvn24.pl, 25.01.2021.

olic religious fundamentalism. However, the presented manifestations of radical or even aggressive behaviour are more and more often criticized not only by laymen but also by the representatives of the Church itself. The powerlessness against Tadeusz Rydzyk's actions, which Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek once pointed out, shows that the community around him can be thought of as a fundamentalist sect. The rhetoric based on the vision of lurking dangers, with which a constant fight must be waged, causes that as soon as an enemy is defeated another one is quickly found. The constant taking of a stand against someone or something means that the zeal for full mobilization never wanes, and many irrational acts are justified by the fight for metaphysical goods. The atmosphere of authoritarianism, which Tadeusz Rydzyk has built around himself over the years, has nowadays given him such a strong position that he is above both Polish and canon law. Reading the biography of this charismatic leader it is not difficult to get the impression that he is a man full of contradictions. On the one hand, his rhetoric is characterized by a strong uncompromising attitude and unwillingness to enter into dialogue with people from outside his environment. On the other hand, he is extremely opportunistic, which has enabled Radio Maryja to develop dynamically regardless of the options of the government. But there is no doubt that the biggest expansion of the empire of the Redemptorist from Toruń took place under the rule of Law and Justice. The culmination of these relations, based on absolute impunity, is the reaction of the representatives of the Polish government, who having listened to Tadeusz Rydzyk's speech, calling a bishop convicted of covering up paedophilia a 'martyr for the faith' and paedophilia itself a 'temptation', eagerly applauded him⁴⁸.

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⁴⁸ M. Wojtczuk, *Rzecznik praw dziecka klaskał na mszy, na której Rydzyk usprawiedliwił pedofilię w Kościele. Postowie KO żądają jego odwołania*, www.warszawa.wyborcza.pl, 26.01.2021.

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Summary

The aim of this article was to define the fundamentalist character of the environment concentrated around Radio Maryja the radio station. In the course of consideration an attempt was made to answer the question about the tools and methods which Tadeusz Rydzyk as a charismatic leader used to build one of the biggest fundamentalist Catholic circles not only in Poland, but also in Europe. The author attempts to define the essence of fundamentalism in the ideological dimension, pointing to religion as a sphere of exceptional susceptibility to the formation of circles of this nature. In connection with the specificity of the Polish political scene and the exceptionally strong politicization of religion in recent years, the article also attempts to characterize the Polish social mentality as a phenomenon conducive to the development of religious fundamentalism. A critical analysis of media and political speeches, or press articles related to the activities of Radio Maryja, allowed at the same time to analyze the real consequences of uncritical acceptance of the ideological messages coming from the Torun radio station.

Keywords: Fundamentalism, Radio Maryja, Tadeusz Rydzyk, Polish Catholic Church