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The Social Role of the Priest as Perceived by Polish Youth. A Sociological Analysis

Abstract: With this article I show the perception shared by high school and university students in Poland concerning the role of the priest in the Church and society. The basis of these findings are the results of three sociological studies that I carried out in years 1983, 1998, and 2008, realized among 976 high school students and 414 university students in Kalisz, Poland. In the given 25 year period, the perception of the role of the religious priest in the Church and the parish, as well as his social role in a democratic state, underwent major changes. Both types of roles—religious and social—recognized by the audited youth differ significantly from their definition as given by the doctrine of the Catholic Church. The youth imagine the priest in these roles in a different way than the Church and concentrate their attention on those elements that have practical significance. Indicators of these changes are included in the statistical tables.

Keywords: Social role of a priest, awareness, secondary school students, university students, the Catholic Church

Introduction

This article includes the results of three of my personal sociological research studies carried out in 1983, 1998, and 2008, in a high school setting with students (976) and academic youth in Kalisz (414), in order to determine their attitudes towards the institutional priesthood.

The article is devoted to the presentation of the social role of the priest, as seen through the eyes of the young interviewees. This article addresses the following questions and issues: the role of the priest in sociological terms; the ministerial priesthood as the cornerstone and essence of the role of the priest in the Church; the features and implementation of this role and conflicts related to its fulfillment by priests; the scope of the role of the priest as perceived by the studied youth—his mediation in matters of religion; the mutual contact between youth in schools and universities and parish priests; the youth's need to have contact and relationships with priests in different life circumstances and situations; the youth's assessment of the social and political roles of priests in Poland during this period in history.

The role of a priest has many definitions and depends on the field of knowledge that deals with the problem of defining this role—theologians, sociologists of religion, and canon lawyers all define its nature and range of possibilities differently. Leo von

Deschwanden describes the role of the priest rather broadly and distinguishes two types: specific and diffusive. The specific role is associated with institutional religiosity and is characterized by a totality—it includes many role segments that the priest fulfills in religious and local groups. This role of the priest consists of the following functions: teacher of faith, celebrant of sacraments, head of the parish community, superior of a religious congregation, director of penitents' consciences, and counselor in temporal matters. The diffusive role, on the other hand, is associated with individual religiosity, often selective and subjective and as a result, innovative in its nature. This role includes various pastoral initiatives of the priest and contributes to the modernization of the methods and tools of his parochial activity, as well as the shaping of new forms of this activity. Emphasis is placed on the personal and individual pastoral care of the faithful. In this role, the priest has a chance to reach out with religious service to many individuals making up the parish community in order to help them solve difficult religious and moral dilemmas (Deschwanden 1968: 125–127; Deschwanden 1972: 395–397).

Institutional Priesthood as the Basis for the Role of a Priest in a Religious Group

The basis for the social role of a priest in a religious group is the institutional priesthood as a specific ecclesiastical office. Institutional priesthood can be interpreted from many perspectives, however in this analysis, its sociological understanding is important. Henri Spencer derives vocational priesthood from the origins of polytheistic religion, and points out that it originated as a result of the social division of activities within a wider social group with a religious character. In his view, the functions of the priest were originally associated with the functions of the sorcerer, exorcist, prophet, physician, magician, tribal leader, teacher, philosopher, etc. The coming into existence of a social hierarchy and the emergence of religious and magical activities in the cyclical process of specialization became a basis for the formation of a special and exclusive group of people who occupied themselves exclusively or almost exclusively with cultic activities, the aim of which were to multiply the glory of God (or a deity) (Spencer 1981: 34–35). Edward Ciupak adds that

(...) in the social division of labor, activities beyond productive labor fell to the priests, with the result that they became actively involved in the development of culture, science, and education. In Catholicism, priesthood is a professional institution satisfying two basic criteria: activity intended for others and activity based on prior preparation in the form of professional education and religious, spiritual, and moral formation (1965: 393).

Practically speaking, the cult over which the priest presides is institutionally exposed and distinguished from other products of culture. This fact requires theological knowledge and practical skills. He is therefore described as a set of social roles, historically conditioned and dependent on the current needs of the Church. The implementation of these roles is essential for the Church and its various structures, and

at the same time it is not indifferent to the priest himself and to the religious people living in a particular parish community.

The Nature, Components and Process of Implementing the Role of the Parish Priest

The social role of the priest is dependent on various factors, and above all, it is institutionalized and takes the form of specific patterns of action established in religious communities. The basis of its institutional nature in the past was both a product of the requirements of theology and ecclesiastical norms, as well as the requirements of local traditions and customs. The priest's role was in fact much more extensive than the way it is defined by the regulations of the Church. The priest's role underwent many changes over time and has evolved to such a degree and extent that the primary and secondary tasks that the priest performed in the religious group have merged. Descriptions of this evolution of the priest's role can be found in what are now classic works of sociology (Znaniński 1985: 14–15; Chałasiński 1958: 24–25), which call for attention to the essential scale and importance of this process to the role of the priest.

Therefore, it is the social and religious dimension of priesthood that is the source of the priest's social role, since it is this dimension that contains the priest's fundamental purpose, the religious position and extent of his hierarchically assigned competences, and the extent of his priestly authority in a parish as granted by diocesan bishop. On this basis, the priest acts formally ("officially") in a religious group, performs his own professional duties as well as religious and secular functions which make up his social role. These functions also determine the integrity of his role as a coherent whole. The variety of functions indicates the complexity and significance of the priest's social role and the parish as a basic structure of the institutional Church (Goddijn 1966: 207).

In sociological terms, the functions of the diocesan priest forming his primary role can be described in three general categories: 1) basic functions: liturgical and ritual, parish administration, charismatic and charitable, management of material goods and economic resources of the parish; 2) complementary functions: paraliturgical, social and economic, educational, cultural, recreation and leisure, parish management; 3) private functions: these vary and depend on the self-awareness and spiritual identity of the priest, on his attitude towards the tasks of priesthood and the priestly ethos. Furthermore, these functions are also dependent on the attitude of lay Catholics to the Church and the clergy, on the social status and living standards of the lay, their religious involvement, and the level of religious and secular morality (Pin: 81–83; Majka 1971: 176–183; Piwowarski 1971: 273–275; Mariański 1984: 134–135).

In practice, the social role of the priest and its daily realization depends on a combination of situations in a given country, the living conditions of the people and their attitude toward Church institutions and parish priests. Acceptance of priests and their practices differ widely in different environments; all the more so given the variety of social roles the priest has. Not all people accept this social role, while some acknowledge the social role and the tasks directly related to it in different ways. Such attitudes

affect the status of institutional priesthood and the social self-esteem of priests in a global society and in the parish community.

The Internal and External Conflict of the Social Role of the Priest

The priest is vulnerable to a mutual conflict—internal and external—of his social role in the Church. The internal conflict of the priest's role includes the following problems: 1) Assuming the position of a "bond" connecting the bishop with the faithful tends to minimize or reduce the value and importance of the priest's role, while overestimating the importance of superior authority or the role of the laity in the Church. An intermediary status creates a certain ambiguity of this role of the priest; 2) the institutional priesthood has certain characteristics similar to so-called liberal professions, as well as a bureaucratic work. This similarity significantly affects the process of realizing the role of the priest in a religious group and in the local community. The realization of the priest's social role in the church and secular environment is also a subject to external conflict when the priest performs everyday professional duties, as he then finds himself between two systems of norms and expectations that are mutually exclusive, or are contradictory. The priest must resolve this contradiction to his own advantage, although he knows that this task is very difficult. This conflict is caused by the necessity of combining the secular role with a religious one, which results from different positions the priest holds in a parish and in the secular group. In Poland, priests often take a secular role too far and are excessively involved in political activities, leading to criticism from lay Catholicism for neglecting their religious role, which is considered the fundamental role in their Church activity.

The image of the social role of the priest is a model image. This image results from an analysis of the normative system of the Catholic faith and the parish community system. When confronted with the life of a parish, this model contributes to a double conflict in the priest's roles. Consequently, only some parish priests fulfill these roles properly, while in other cases, their realization encounters resistance of both Church regulations and the expectations of the lay faithful. It is likely that only a percentage of parish priests fulfill their spiritual and professional duties according to a model of the priestly role which is currently binding in the Roman Catholic Church. As current sociological research indicates, this situation also occurs in Poland.

The Scope of the Role of Priest in the Images of the Young People

What is the image of the parish priest in the eyes of the high school and university students? What characteristics do they include in the structure of a priest's role? Are their perceptions of the role of the priest in accordance with the official description in the teaching of the Catholic Church? These questions produce a theoretical analysis of the religious and social roles of the priest. I asked my respondents these questions during all of my research studies, and will present their replies in the further analysis of the results.

Religious Mediation of the Priest in the Assessment of the Respondents

The sociological concept of the institutional priesthood assumes that the authority of the priest's office is based on objective premises and comes from religious functions that he fulfils in the Church. The Church reminds the faithful that the mediating role of the priest is required, so they have to take advantage of it in their religious life. In light of these assumptions, the question is whether Catholic Polish youth accept the necessity of the role of the priest in their personal religiosity, or if they instead regard it as useless?

Table 1

Youth recognition of the mediation role of the priest in the religiosity of people (in %)

The role of the Priest as a mediator	High school students			University students			Total	
	1983	1998	2008	1983	1998	2008	H. sch. S.	Un. Stud.
The role of the priest in the people's religiosity								
Necessary	62.9	54.7	42.3	51.3	40.6	35.6	53.3	42.5
Needed	11.5	11.9	10.5	14.5	10.9	10.2	11.3	11.9
Unnecessary	19.9	25.2	35.6	26.3	34.8	38.2	26.9	33.1
Unranked	3.1	5.2	7.3	4.9	10.2	12.0	5.2	9.0
No data available	2.6	3.0	4.2	3.0	3.5	4.0	3.3	3.5
The role of the priest in the personal religiosity of high school students and university students								
Necessary	53.2	46.6	40.2	37.4	35.7	32.4	46.6	35.3
Needed	12.6	12.4	11.8	9.6	10.2	9.8	12.3	9.8
Unnecessary	24.6	28.4	31.6	34.8	38.5	40.0	28.2	37.7
Unranked	7.0	10.0	12.4	15.2	12.1	13.8	9.8	13.7
No data available	2.6	2.6	4.0	3.0	3.5	4.0	3.1	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The study revealed that the surveyed high school and university students' attitudes towards this issue differ quite a bit, thus clearly setting them apart from the Church's doctrinal assumptions. The need for the mediating role of the priest in their religiousness and the pursuit of salvation was claimed as necessary or required by only 52.0% of all respondents, including 58.9% of high school and 45.1% of university students, whose proportion decreased in the assumed period of 25 years by 13.8% and 4.8%. At the same time, 32.9% of respondents, including 28.2% of high school and 37.7% of university students, stated clearly that the role of the priest as a mediator is clearly superfluous in their religion and their quest for eternal salvation, because they can themselves establish a relationship with God and care for their own salvation. The percentage of respondents manifesting this attitude towards this role of the priest increased throughout the period in both groups—among high school students by 7.0% and among university students by 5.2%. The remaining respondents did not address this issue—12.1% and 17.2% of all respondents.

Surveyed high school and university students look at the mediating role of the priest through the prism of different functions that he fulfils in the parish community

and the people's secular lives. These functions form the scope of the role of a priest, or decide on the scale of its competence in the parish. Which issues and problems do my respondents include in the scope of the mediating role of the priest?

Table 2

Youth recognitions of the functions constituting the role of the priest as a mediation (in %)

Mediation role of the Priest	High school students			University students			Total	
	1983	1998	2008	1983	1998	2008	H. sch. S.	Univ. S.
The functions constituting the role of the Priest as a mediator								
Religious function	17.6	20.4	21.4	16.8	21.4	28.4	19.8	22.2
Cult function	30.8	38.2	42.4	30.1	38.8	40.4	37.1	36.4
Moral function	12.6	13.7	12.4	16.0	17.3	18.2	12.9	17.2
Parish function	14.8	28.4	30.6	14.5	30.2	33.0	24.6	25.9
Charitable function	17.9	15.2	10.2	11.4	10.0	8.4	14.4	10.0
Sacramental function	19.9	26.8	32.6	19.6	30.2	38.8	26.4	29.5
The scope of the role of the Priest as a mediator—the type of cases								
Religious issues	41.0	58.2	60.9	44.0	60.8	64.9	53.4	56.6
Moral issues	30.2	15.8	10.0	20.0	10.3	8.8	18.8	13.0
Secular issues	10.4	6.4	6.2	10.2	8.4	7.4	7.6	8.7
Unranked	15.4	17.6	19.4	22.3	18.1	15.9	17.4	18.7
No data available	3.0	2.0	3.5	3.5	2.4	3.0	2.8	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Matters that respondents included in the scope of the mediating role of a priest can be summarized into three general groups: religious and church, religious and moral, and typically secular. The largest percentage of respondents were in favour of the first group of cases—in total they were appreciated by 55.0% of respondents, including 53.4% of high school and 56.6% of university students; during the study period, these declined by 19.9% and 20.9%. Respondents placed religious and moral matters in second place: these aspects met with the approval of 15.9% of the total respondents, including 18.8% of high school and 13.0% of university students, but during the study period interest in them declined in both groups by 20.0% and 11.2% respectively. Typically secular issues were included in the role of the priest by only a small percentage of respondents—averaging 8.0%, including 7.4% of high school and 8.7% of university students, and their percentage declined during the study period by 4.2% and 2.8%. The remaining high school (17.4%) and university students (18.7%) did not indicate any matter that might be part of the mediation role of the priest.

The Mutual Contact of the Respondents with Priests in Varying Circumstances

In sociological terms, it can be assumed that the mutual attitudes of young people and priests translate to the complex relationships and social contacts, which have the effect of creating closer bonds and ties. These contacts in the case of the young people I have worked with, are possible in different circumstances and situations:

in the parish of origin, during school catechesis and in formal or informal religious groups of which the priest takes care and control. This occurs in the priest's parish of residence during the youth's instruction in school, during the activities of university ministry, etc. Under these circumstances, there are real opportunities for youth to interact with priests, while at the same time creating an opportunity for priests to influence the religious, moral and secular attitudes and actions of youth. Which types of mutual contact with priests did the respondents indicate?

Table 3

Contact between respondents and Priests in various spaces (in %)

Mutual contact Youth with Priest	High school students			University students			Total	
	1983	1998	2008	1983	1998	2008	H. sch. S.	Univ. S.
Catechesis classes	74.2	64.9	60.4	35.8	43.0	35.7	65.9	32.2
Parish office	19.2	22.3	17.4	26.3	32.8	29.4	19.6	26.1
Religious cult—Mass	59.0	63.4	54.8	43.8	32.8	31.8	59.1	36.1
Spiritual exercises	31.7	49.4	37.2	21.2	30.4	24.4	39.4	25.3
Religious groups	34.0	39.9	36.4	24.8	28.8	21.7	36.8	25.1
Pilgrimage	18.6	24.6	20.6	27.4	30.5	25.4	21.3	29.1
Christmas carol visit	54.7	64.0	46.5	22.6	34.4	26.2	55.1	29.5
Pre-marriage courses	21.5	29.0	23.6	38.7	49.6	39.5	24.7	42.6
No data available	3.2	8.8	4.6	13.6	17.6	10.4	5.5	13.9

Respondents indicated, depending on group membership, various circumstances that facilitated their contact and affiliation with priests in the parish or at centres of student pastoral care ministries during this period. Among the many circumstances, eight things were indicated by both groups as most popular, although with different emphasis as to their importance. Catechesis classes in school were the occasions for meeting priests that were most frequently indicated by high school students (65.9%) and pastoral ministries centres by university students (43.5%). These circumstances indicated the primary locations for meeting with priests, totalling 49.0%, respectively. Respondents placed the church building in second place, where they met with priests during the Holy Mass and when receiving sacraments, which included 47.6% of respondents, meaning 59.1% of high school and 36.1% of university students. Third place went to the priest's annual Christmas carol visits to the family home by a total of 41.4% of respondents, including 55.1% of high school and 27.7% of university students. Pre-marriage courses were a good opportunity to test young people's frequent contact with priests, indicated by a total of 33.7% of respondents, including 24.7% of high school and 42.6% of university students. Youth retreats were circumstances placed in fifth place, indicated by a total 32.4% of respondents, including 39.4% of high school and 25.3% of university students.

Religious activities and church youth organizations were convenient circumstances for contact with priests for 31.0% of respondents, including 36.8% of high school students and 25.1% of university students. More than one in four respondents (25.2%) had the possibility of contacting a priest during the walking pilgrimage to Jasna Góra

in Częstochowa, as indicated by 21.3% of high school students and 29.1% of university students. Some respondents (24.5%) came in contact with the priest in the parish office, while arranging various matters related to their own religious or family problems, and this circumstance was indicated by 19.6% of high school students and 29.5% of university students. In addition, 25.2% of respondents, including 24.3% of high school students and 26.1% of university students mentioned other circumstances that facilitated their contact with priests. During entirety of the study, some circumstances were less favourable in terms of contact between respondents and priests, and others contributed to reinforcing the existing mutual bonds between the parties. High school students, in compare to university students, were more interested in contact with priests, thus pointing to different circumstances making such contacts possible.

The Need for a Personal Relationship Between the Respondents and Parish Priests

During each research period, I asked respondents whether they felt the need to establish and keep a personal relationship with parish priests as their ministers, teachers and religious educators or caregivers of youth groups in parishes and in other circumstances. Did informal and occasional contacts develop into lasting relationships between respondents and their priests?

Table 4

The need for a personal relationship between respondents and parish priests (in %)

Personal relationships Youth with priests	High school students			University students			Total	
	1983	1998	2008	1983	1998	2008	H. sch. S.	Univ. S.
The need lasting relationships with priests								
Regularly	14.8	13.4	12.4	13.6	12.7	9.4	13.5	11.0
Irregularly	22.3	19.6	12.7	16.7	20.5	22.4	18.2	19.8
Occasionally	18.7	17.4	18.8	18.1	12.0	6.9	18.3	12.3
Never	36.7	40.0	46.5	38.2	41.6	50.8	41.1	43.6
Unranked	4.0	5.4	4.6	7.4	8.0	6.0	4.7	7.1
No data available	3.5	4.2	5.0	6.0	4.5	4.5	4.2	5.2
The circumstances and reasons for relationships with priests								
Religious motifs	29.0	26.5	22.8	28.8	22.4	20.8	26.1	24.0
Secular reasons	8.6	14.6	16.6	14.0	24.4	19.0	13.3	19.1
Catechesis classes	30.5	26.4	24.7	18.8	18.6	17.8	27.2	18.4
Tours (excursions)	12.4	12.7	17.7	14.6	11.2	14.8	14.2	13.5
Moral reasons	12.1	10.2	8.6	10.4	10.2	17.1	10.3	12.7
Unranked	4.0	5.4	4.6	7.4	8.0	6.0	4.7	7.1
No data available	3.5	4.2	5.0	6.0	5.2	4.5	4.2	5.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The study found that 46.8% of respondents, including 50.0% of high school students and 43.1% of university students had noticed the need for establishing or maintaining a personal relationship with priests in different circumstances, although the frequency of this desire varies significantly. This need appeared frequently in 12.4%

of respondents, including 13.5% of high school and 11.0% of university students; irregularly among 19.0% (including 18.2% of high school and 19.8% of university students), and occasionally among 15.4% (including 18.3% of high school and 12.3% of university students). It has been a major tendency to observe irregular and occasional personal relationships with priests, comprising a total of 34.4%, including 36.5% of high school students and 32.1% of university students. Percentages of respondents in favour of these close ties decreased throughout the period in both groups among high school students (by 15.7%) and university students (by 23.4%). At the same time, up to 42.6% of respondents, including 41.1% of high school students and 43.6% of university students said they had never made, or did not seek to establish, direct ties with priests, since they did not feel such a need, or did not trust priests for a variety of reasons, including moral reasons. This percentage increased in both groups during the study period by 9.8% and 12.6% respectively.

Political Involvement of Priests in Poland in the Assessments of the Respondents

The attitude of the Poles towards the political involvement of priests, and more generally towards the entire institutional Church, has always been critical concerning Church influence on the voting preferences of citizens. The radicality of this criticism has intensified significantly since 1989 and continues to increase today. In the 1980s, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland was a strong political and moral opposition to the socialist state with its central and local government. Due to this, the Church retains Her own autonomy and independence when assessing political events that took place in the country. The moral evaluations of these events often turn into a severe critique of state power activity and the political system.

The political situation of the Church and the clergy changed significantly in the 1990s under the influence of political transformations in the country. At that time, the Church's protective barriers in society disappeared almost completely, but authorities could not agree with those changes. This type of "protective request" attitude toward the state is the current attitude in Poland, demanding separate privileges for the Catholic Church, the largest religious community in the country. Researchers indicate that a stable observation of the social rating of involvement of priests and the Church could be observed only after November of 1995 when the percentage of Catholics evaluating them critically decreased (*Wciórka 1998: 7; Wciórka 1999: 8*).¹ A similar situation was present in the early years of the first decade of the twenty-first century, even though the "front" of criticism towards the Church and clergy is gaining in strength scale under the new political and economic system (*Roguska 2004: 4-5*).

The political commitment of the parish priests intensified considerably in the second half of the twentieth century, when the hierarchy clearly interfered with the legislative activity of Poland's lower Parliament house and the Senate, and influenced

¹ CBOS [Social Opinion Research Centre] Report, BS/78/1999, Warszawa 1999; also CBOS Reports, 1998, no. 3, p. 7. The study reported that 56.3% of adult Poles were against this and 20.6% agreed that the Church should state Her opinions political matters.

important government decisions. Parish priests also tried to influence people's decisions in presidential and parliamentary elections as well in local councils elections. Consequently, Poles today protect parish priests less often, and increasingly criticize its excessive political involvement and interference in state affairs. Today, the position of the Church and clergy in Poland is morally overburdened due to the blurring of clear boundaries between the two institutions, and the overlapping of mutual competencies. Researchers are constantly arguing that Poles are concerned with this situation and perceive the Church's "entering into" state matters incorrectly. At the same time, they also ask if they are now "living in a church-state," or a "state-church"? Objectively speaking, Poles' fears seem justified, since the blurring of the boundaries between the Church and the democratic Polish state are becoming more evident, but this situation is not acceptable according to public opinion (Kwiatkowski 1989: 314–326; Kwiatkowski, Kościerza-Jaworska 1989: 96–118).

What are the respondents' attitudes towards the political commitment of the Church and priests in Poland? Are the assessments of the high school and university students surveyed during this period concerning this issue identical to the assessments of adult Poles, established in a number of sociological studies?

Table 5

Political commitment of Catholic priests in Poland (in %)

Political commitment of Catholic priests	High school students			University students			Total	
	1983	1998	2008	1983	1998	2008	H. sch. S.	Univ. S.
Excessive	23.7	38.4	47.5	33.6	37.4	52.7	36.5	14.0
Standard	20.4	13.0	10.7	17.4	14.0	10.4	14.7	14.0
Limited	10.9	10.6	8.7	10.9	15.1	8.3	10.1	11.4
Does not exist	36.8	30.5	24.6	30.6	25.0	20.6	30.6	25.4
Unranked	5.2	4.0	4.5	4.0	4.5	3.0	4.6	3.8
No data available	3.0	3.5	4.0	3.5	4.0	5.0	3.5	4.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The study found that 63.9% of respondents, including 61.3% of high school students and 66.6% of university students believe that there is an excessive politicization of the Church and priests in Poland. This percentage steadily grew in both groups during this period, by 10.9% and 9.5% for high school students and university students, respectively. It is worth noting that as many as 36.5% of high school students and 41.2% of university students spoke of the excessive politicization of Polish priests, and their percentage increased during the test period of 25 years by 23.8%, and 19.1%. In contrast, limited politicization practices were noted by only 10.8% of respondents, including 10.1% of high school and 11.4% of university students, and their percentage declined during this period by 2.2% and 2.6%. At the same time, 28.0% of respondents, including 30.6% of high school and 25.4% of university students openly claimed that they did not see any politicization in the Church—neither among bishops nor among parish priests—and expressed surprise that the "enemies" of the Church in Poland are "accusing" it of political engagement, which should be considered a lie.

The percentage of people not perceiving the political commitment among Polish priests declined between 1983 and 2008 in both groups: by 12.2% among high school students and university by 10.0% among university students. Most likely, these numbers correlated with those who were convinced of involvement of the Polish clergy in political issues and of their influence on the political preferences of lay Catholics in various environments, mostly parishes. The remaining respondents (8.1% and 8.0%) did not take a position on this issue (Badora 2004: 49–60).²

Respondents also answered the question of whether priests influenced the electoral preference of parishioners by indicating the person they should vote for in presidential, parliamentary and local government elections.

Table 6

The parish Priests' influence on the electoral preferences of Poles (in %)

Influencing priests on parishioners	High school students			University students			Total	
	1983	1998	2008	1983	1998	2008	H. sch. S.	Univ. S.
Influence during of the parliamentary and presidential elections								
During sermons	24.7	32.4	38.4	32.4	36.6	44.3	31.8	37.8
Persuasion	16.4	11.2	15.9	13.1	12.3	14.6	14.5	13.3
Speeches bishops	10.7	12.4	10.4	14.7	15.0	12.4	11.2	14.0
Catechesis classes	6.2	8.2	5.0	5.0	6.2	4.0	6.9	5.1
Parish office	8.0	9.2	7.2	7.2	7.0	6.2	7.5	6.8
No effect	30.4	22.6	24.6	24.6	18.4	15.0	24.1	19.3
No data available	3.6	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.5	3.5	4.0	3.7
Influence during the local elections								
During sermons	25.4	30.6	36.6	30.4	38.8	41.4	30.9	36.8
Persuasion	20.0	25.4	27.4	24.4	22.3	17.3	24.3	21.3
Catechesis classes	8.4	7.2	4.2	5.4	5.0	8.4	6.6	6.3
Parish office	9.2	8.4	7.3	10.4	8.2	9.2	8.3	9.3
No instruction	33.4	24.4	20.0	26.4	21.2	20.2	25.9	22.6
No data available	3.6	4.0	4.5	3.0	4.5	3.5	4.0	3.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The dominant percentage of respondents in both groups stated that many parish priests gave specific “instructions” to the faithful during the election campaign on election day, telling Catholics for whom they should cast their electoral votes. 75.0% of respondents are convinced that the Polish clergy intervene in election, including 71.9% of high school students and 77.0% of university students, and the percentage has increased during the study period (in 2008) for both groups, increasing to 10.1% and 9.1%, respectively. However, priests usually instruct the faithful in the following circumstances: Sunday sermons—34.8% (including 31.8% of high school students and 37.8% of university students), special agitations (persuasion)—13.9%

² B. Badora, 2004: 49–60. (Youth in middle and secondary schools expressed by 72.0% of its population, the idea that the Church should be separated entirely from the state, and 15.0% stated that the Church should influence state policy, while 12.0% was not able to take a position on this issue).

(including 14.5% and 13.3%), letters (speeches) from bishops read at Church—12.6% (including 11.2% and 14.0%), religious education (catechesis)—6.0% (including 6.9% and 5.1%), and at the parish office—7.2% (including 7.5% and 6.8%). The opposite view on this issue was presented by only 21.7% of respondents, including 24.1% of high school students and 19.3% of university students, stating that priests in their parishes were quite apolitical and encouraged faithful people to vote for the Church, or for members of the party that were “friendly” with the Church or priests. The percentage of these respondents decreased during the study period in both groups by 11.0% among high school students and 9.6% among university students—most of numbers probably joined the ranks of people confirming the impact of clergy on the voting preferences of the faithful. The same applies to priests influencing the faithful during local elections, where it is evident that as many as 71.8% of respondents spoke of such “pressures,” including 70.1% of high school students and 73.7% of university students, and this percentage grew during the period in both groups—by 12.5% and 5.7%, respectively. According to respondents, this impact is most strongly exerted during Sunday sermons and homilies at mass—a total of 33.9%, including 30.9% of high school students and 36.8% of university students, with special agitation propaganda in the local community—22.8%, including 24.3% of high school and 21.3% of university students. Meanwhile, 24.3% of respondents, including 25.9% of high school students and 22.6% of university students, did not notice the influence of priests on the faithful during local elections, a number which declined during the study period in both groups—by 13.4% and 6.2%, respectively (Baniak 2008: 127–129).³

From an objective point of view, the scale of this phenomenon in Poland is considered highly alarming, which consequently raises questions in a society, including among Catholics, about the true role of the Church in a democratic state and a civil society. Other researchers also write about the current level of politicization of the Church and clergy in Poland, including those professionally connected with its structures,⁴ pointing out that we should again normalize relations between the Church and State, making them autonomous in all respects concerning the social institutions.

Conclusion

To conclude, it should be stated that the Polish secondary school, high school and university students who were a part of this study generally accepted the religious and social roles of the priest in the parish and the local community, but to a great

³ J. Baniak 2008: 317–319, table 132. In my sociological research in 2008 Junior high respondents in Kalisz said that priests influence voters in parliamentary and presidential elections in such circumstances: sermons—26.2%; agitations—20.3%; letters from bishops—11.2%; religious education classes—7.8%. In turn, 29.2% said that priests did not affect the voting preferences of the faithful, including 32.4% of girls and 24.4% of boys students from rural areas and 25.1% of students from the city).

⁴ Religion. Polish Survey Codebook, 1992: 20–21. Poles asked in 1992 whether priests should try to influence how people vote in elections, gave the following replies: strongly agree—36.9%; agree—34.8%; I neither agree nor disagree—5.6%; I disagree—8.7%, strongly disagree—8.5%; hard to assess—4.4%, no response—1.4%.

degree did not interpret them in accordance with the doctrinal guidelines of the Catholic Church. The dominant percentage of the respondents reduces a priest to his religious and ecclesiastical matters, and eliminates him from the scope of civil and moral matters and problems. Many respondents believe that the Church should not expand the role of priests to include political affairs and entrance into areas of state competence. Also, a significant proportion of respondents do not accept the mediation of priests on their personal way to salvation, or, more generally speaking, into their religious life. People accepting the mediating role of priests in matters of salvation often justify their choice according to religious motives and the legitimacy of Church teaching.

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