

Personalization of the Media Image of the Catholic Church in the Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy: Analysis of Polish Weeklies (2018-2019)

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ABSTRACT

The paper reflects on the extent to which the personalization determines the press image of the Catholic Church in the context of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. **Scientific objective:** An attempt was made to indicate the relationship between the phenomenon of personalization and the image of the institution of the Catholic Church in Polish weeklies in the context of the pedophilia scandal among clergy. **Research methods:** The method of analyzing the press content supplemented with elements of hermeneutics. **Results and conclusions:** All analyzed press titles addressed the topic of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and presented the institution of the Catholic Church in the context of particular persons (pope, bishops, victims of abuse, perpetrators). In the left-liberal weekly and in *Do Rzeczy*, perpetrators' superiors were basically presented as not responding to cases of sexual abuse. The personalization process opens a variety of ways of interpreting the event that goes to the media agenda. It can determine both the positive and negative image of the Catholic Church, and can also be used as a tool to construct an unrepresentative narrative on the subject of sexual offenses by clergy, i.e. a narrative exaggerating or marginalizing the scale of abuse. **Cognitive value:** The research undertaken proves that the personalization is an important factor determining the image of the Catholic Church in the press.

KEYWORDS

Catholic Church, pedophilia, personalization, press image



Socio-political information broadcast by the Catholic Church play an important role in Polish public discourse (Markowski, 2019, pp. 113, 121–130; Pędziwiatr, 2018). Social sciences scholars analyze the messages sent by bishops and unequivocally state that it cannot be marginalized or ignored, although the assessment of the effectiveness of its impact on the life of an average citizen is varied and depends on the degree of credibility of the ecclesial institution and its level of social trust (Śmigiel, 2017). The identity and activity of the Church is subject to systematic assessment of public opinion and the media are an important factor. As Heidrun Abromeit (1989) notes, the Church's success in political life is largely a derivative of its social legitimacy. Discrediting this institution, e.g. through the media exposure of its representatives' crimes, will weaken the credibility of its messages and the effectiveness of its impact on the political system.

In Janusz Mariański's opinion, "the positive assessment of the social and religious activity of the Church, widespread in Polish society, begins to deteriorate a bit when it moves from the general plane of its activity to the plane of more specific matters related to everyday life. This does not mean that the Church has lost vitality and importance for social life, for building consensus, and for building collective consciousness. It remains an integral part of the nation's cultural heritage, an important component of its identity, and source of many noble social values, and an important partner on the Polish public scene" (Mariański, 2017b, p. 143). The Polish sociologist notes that the Church in Poland still enjoys high social trust, although the second decade of the 21st century is a clear decline in its social authority. The process is catalyzed by numerous controversies regarding lustration of the Church and moral scandals among clergy (Mariański, 2017a, p. 85). According to the Public Opinion Research Center's (CBOS) Report No. 93/2019, published in July 2019, the activity of the Catholic Church was positively assessed by 48% of respondents, and negatively by 38% (Feliksiak, 2019, p. 4). In turn, the report from the CBOS research No. 88/2019 presents public reactions to information about pedophilia among priests. A study conducted in June 2019 proves that the broadcast of Tomasz Sekielski's film, entitled "Tylko nie mów nikomu" [Eng. "Just Don't Tell Anyone"] has determined the evaluation of the activity of the Church significantly—51% of respondents considered the response of the Polish Church to disclosed information about sexual abuse as inappropriate (Głowacki, 2019, p. 2).

Theoretical Perspective

Referring to the research works of Krzysztof Kowalczyk (2014; 2017), Werner Böckenförde (1998), and Michael Ebertz (2014), the ecclesial institution was treated as an entity that is part of the political system, and Catholic clergy as political actors participating in the processes of political and social communication. This statement is legitimized by, among others Catholic social teaching that indicates and justifies the limits of the Church involvement in public affairs, as well as by empirical research on the involvement of an ecclesial institution in political campaigns (Dłuska, 2018, pp. 208–213; Rabiej, 2014; Modrzejewski, 2010; Leśniczak, 2017). The research approach presented, treating Catholic clergy as political actors, allows applying political science concepts of personalization to media studies' research on the ecclesial institutions. An attempt was made to indicate the relationship between the phenomenon of personalization and the image of the institution of the Catholic Church in Polish weeklies in the context of the pedophile scandal among clergy, which became an important issue in the media in 2018 and 2019 (Rashid & Barron, 2019; Rezmer-Płotka, 2019).

In social sciences, personalization is indicated as one of the effects of the mediatization of politics, or, more broadly, the mediatization of the public sphere (Karvonen, 2010; Kriesi,

2012; Langer & Sagarzazu, 2018). Personalization is a factor shaping the media image of people and institutions. As Dorota Piontek notes, “personalization means the perception of politics through the prism of particular people, not processes, and indicates a more important role of an individual than an institution” (Piontek, 2015, pp. 92–93). Also church policy, i.e. a policy in which clergy are involved, is basically seen through the prism of people (Piontek, 2015, p. 93). According to the researcher, important consequences of personalization for the media image of the Church are, among others greater clergy exposure on the media agenda, compared to the institution they represent; perception of the problems of the Church through the prism of the life history of a particular clergyman or leader of a church group, also mentioned by name. Individual representatives of the Church are becoming its “showcase”—the people shaping the image of the entire institution. This is a consequence of the wider process of individualization of social life. Another consequence of personalization in the context of undertaken research will be the perception of events taking place in the Church as a dispute, discussion, exchange of views between its leaders or journalists, opinion leaders or other persons cooperating with the media, especially with expressive, unambiguous views. The personalization process will also be expressed in the context of the individual statements of those involved in the discourse on the sexual abuse by clergy. From the point of view of personalization, the official position of the Church as a collective subject towards the problem of pedophilia among clergy is less important.

In the research undertaken, the term “image” was treated as “an image in the media” (Łączyński, 2009, p. 82). Therefore, it is not a public image, the study of which would require an analysis of image research, including, for example, stereotypes about clergy, clarifying the identity of the Church, or the Church’s broadly understood public relations activities (Wojcik, 2015, p. 43). In turn, the Author treats the concept of “personalization” as one of the dominant representative strategies adopted by the media (van Santen & van Zoonen, 2009, p. 7).

Research Methodology

In the research undertaken, the content analysis method was used. Reference was made to research works of Bernard Berelson (1952), Walery Pisarek (1983), Devi Prasad (2008), Roger Wimmer, and Joseph Dominick (2013, pp. 158–190). The analysis undertaken has been supplemented with a hermeneutic element that allows to understand the method of constructing the transmission of the message about the Church by individual press titles.

The research material consisted of texts published in printed versions of the most opinion-forming secular Polish weeklies: *Newsweek Polska*, *Polityka*, *Do Rzeczy*, *Sieci*, in which the topic of sexual abuse by clergy was addressed (Kurdupski, 2019). In the aforementioned press titles, church topics constitute an important thematic area, and the current press studies prove the duality of the texts on the Catholic Church in Poland—in *Newsweek Polska* and *Polityka*, the life of clergymen is exposed as incompatible with their identity, while in *Do Rzeczy* and *Sieci*—presenting clergymen as essentially living in accordance with their identity, but also not ignoring the priests who cause scandal. The analysis undertaken did not, however, take into account press texts published in the most important nationwide Catholic weeklies (*Niedziela* and *Gość Niedzielny*), which present the life of priests as free from defects, thus offering an inauthentic and unbelievable image of the clergy (Szulich-Kałuża, 2018, p. 73-78; Leśniczak, 2019b, pp. 251-282).

The texts selected for analysis contained one of the following keywords in any grammatical form: “Church,” “priest,” “religious,” “clergyman,” and at the same time one of the following: “abuse,” “pedophilia,” “minor,” and they referred to the issue of sexual abuse of minors by

priests. The unit of analysis (Prasad, 2008, p. 186) is one press text meeting the research criteria.¹ A code card was assigned to each text with the features indicated in the categorization key (Berelson, 1952, p. 147), according to which the Author analyzed individual publications. The scope of the analysis covered the period from January 1, 2018, to June 30, 2019. During this period, there is an increase in public interest in the issue of sexual abuse scandals (Paz López, 2019, pp. 6, 13-17; Moran, 2019; de Gaulmyn, 2018). In 2018-2019, media attention focused on, among others Theodore McCarrick's expulsion from the clergy, on the Vatican crisis connected with the letter of Archbishop Carlo Viganò, former nuncio in the US, to Pope Francis,² on the meetings of bishops with Pope Francis in the Vatican on February 21-24, 2019, regarding the fight against pedophilia (Meeting on ...). The discourse on the sexual abuse by clergy on the Polish public agenda is further intensified by the premiere of Wojciech Smarzowski's "Kler" [Eng. "Clergy"] and Sekielski's "Tylko nie mów nikomu" [Eng. "Just Don't Tell Anyone"] film (Leśniczak, 2019a; Godziński, 2019).

The aim of the analysis boils down to answering the following research questions: Is, in the context of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, the Church more prominently displayed in press publications as a community of the People of God without indicating its representatives, or the Church as particular persons ("The Face of the Church")? How were the perpetrators' superiors presented—whether as adopting an active, committed attitude aimed at punishing perpetrators of crimes, or as adopting a passive attitude, not responding to cases of abuse by clergy (as those who sweep the abuse under the rug)?

On the basis of the questions posed, a research statement was formulated consisting of three statements:

S1³: All analyzed press titles addressed the topic of abuse of minors by clergy, presenting the institution of the Church as particular persons (pope, bishops, victims of abuse, perpetrators).

S2⁴: In all the analyzed weeklies, the perpetrators' superiors were presented as not responding to cases of sexual abuse (as those who sweep the matters under the rug).

S3: The authors of all analyzed press titles presented church superiors as adopting an active, committed attitude aimed at punishing perpetrators of crimes.⁵

¹ In the analyzed period, the total number of press texts concerning the Catholic Church in four press titles was 271, while concerning the issue of sexual abuse of minors by clergy—106. The Author found the research sample obtained to be statistically significant. This attempt is large enough so that its reduction or enlargement by one or several press texts will not change the results significantly.

² Archbishop Viganò accused the pope of knowing about the abuses committed by McCarrick and thus accused the pope of covering up sexual crimes involving priests.

³ This category includes both listed and non-named persons. The S1 consists of two partial hypotheses: hypothesis 1: The presence of sexual abuse by clergy in texts, and hypothesis 0: Its absence.

⁴ The S2 and S3 are composed of two hypotheses. In each of them the hypothesis 0, indicating its disconfirmation, and hypothesis 1, indicating its confirmation, were put forward.

⁵ Presenting church superiors as passive people in press texts would contribute to the negative image of the Church. In turn, presenting hierarchs as people truly concerned about compliance with the principle of justice, and thus taking action to impose punishments on pedophile priests, would co-build a positive image of the Church as an institution that self-cleanses. The current press studies prove the polarization of the attitude of representatives of the Polish press in the context of building the image of the Catholic Church in Poland. Right-wing titles (*Do Rzeczy* and *Sieci*) generally present the Catholic Church in a positive tone, while liberal-left titles (*Newsweek Polska* and *Polityka*) in a negative tone. (Cf. Szulich-Kaluża, 2018, pp. 69–70, 73–78; Kokoszczyńska & Majewski, 2018; Leśniczak 2019a; Leśniczak, 2019b, pp. 240–243).

The research statement was formulated as follows: All analyzed press titles addressed the topic of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, presenting the institution of the Church as particular persons (pope, bishops, victims of abuse, perpetrators). In *Newsweek Polska* and *Polityka*, the perpetrators' superiors were generally presented as not responding to cases of sexual abuse, while the authors of publications in *Do Rzeczy* and in *Sieci* presented church superiors as adopting an active, committed attitude, aimed at punishing perpetrators of crimes. Personalization was used to build both the positive and negative media image of the Catholic Church.

The analysis is both quantitative and qualitative.

Categorization Key with Definitions

In order to verify research statements, a categorization key was prepared in which the following two features were specified: PROTAGONISTS and CHURCH SUPERIORS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT, while within the features—categories that are disjoint.⁶

I. Analyzed feature: PROTAGONISTS

Definition of the feature: Most important, key people appearing in the press together with their statements, life story, and attitude towards the issue of minors' abuses. It was assumed that the presence of protagonists is not accidental, because it has a significant impact on the image of the Catholic Church.

Categories within the feature and their definitions:

1. victims of abuse—persons who have suffered sexual abuse by clergy, irrespective of the place and time of the abuse and whether the perpetrator is alive or dead;
2. perpetrators of abuse—diocesan, religious clergy, and religious sisters who have committed the crime of sexual abuse;
3. perpetrators' superiors—pope, diocesan bishops, senior religious superiors, abbots, mothers of religious congregations;
4. journalist / opinion leaders—persons taking part in public discourse regarding the issue of minors' sexual abuse;
5. No protagonists—the text does not expose any of these persons, it only deals with sexual abuse by priests in general, and focuses on other issues, e.g. church documents, principles of law, etc.

II. Analyzed feature: CHURCH SUPERIORS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Definition of the feature—the way the press releases present the crisis management of the Church caused by abuses of minors, in particular the crisis management handled by the perpetrators' superiors.

Categories within the feature and their definitions:

1. support for victims—church superiors adopt an active, committed attitude aimed at punishing perpetrators of crimes;
2. support for perpetrators—church superiors adopt a passive attitude, do not react to cases of sexual abuse or sweep the crime under the rug;
3. support for victims and perpetrators—the press text notes two attitudes of church superiors—supporting victims and supporting perpetrators;

⁶ This means that the press text can be classified into only one category within the analyzed feature.

4. none of the above—the authors of press publications undertake to assess the attitude of church superiors towards cases of sexual abuse. The subject of juvenile offenses serves to address other issues.

The Results of Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

Table 1 presents the total number of press publications on the Catholic Church and the number of publications related to the issue of sexual abuse of minors, in %, from January 1, 2018, to June 30, 2019, in the four analyzed press titles.

Table 1. Publications about the Catholic Church and issues of sexual abuse

Press title / Category	Number of texts on the Catholic Church	Number of texts on the sexual abuse	Percentage of texts on abuse issues, in %
<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	57	24	42,1
<i>Polityka</i>	51	23	45,1
<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	82	25	30,5
<i>Sieci</i>	81	34	42
Total	271	106	39,1

Source: Own study

There were no significant differences between the percentage of texts on abuse issues in right-wing and liberal-left-wing press titles. It should be noted, however, that the issue of child sexual abuse in *Do Rzeczy* was addressed less frequently than in other analyzed press titles—30.5% of texts on pedophilia issues out of the total number of texts about the Catholic Church was noted in the above-mentioned weekly. In other weeklies, over 40% of publications related to the Church highlighted the problem of sexual abuse. The figures confirm the statement that the subject was not omitted in both the right-wing and liberal-left press.

Table 2 presents the number of publications in the analyzed press titles assigned to individual categories in the analyzed PROTAGONISTS feature, while Table 3 shows the percentage of texts classified in this feature.

Table 2. Analyzed feature: PROTAGONISTS—the number of publications assigned to individual categories

Press title / Category	Victims of abuse	Perpetrators of abuse	Perpetrators' superiors	Journalist / opinion leaders	No protagonists
<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	2	6	9	7	0
<i>Polityka</i>	0	6	4	12	1
<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	2	11	4	8	0
<i>Sieci</i>	0	2	4	28	0
Total	4	25	21	55	1

Source: Own study

Table 3. Analyzed feature: PROTAGONISTS—percentage of publications assigned to individual categories⁷

Press title / Category	Victims of abuse	Perpetrators of abuse	Perpetrators' superiors	Journalist / opinion leaders	No protagonists
<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	8,33	25	37,5	29,17	0
<i>Polityka</i>	0	26,09	17,39	52,17	4,35
<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	8	44	16	32	0
<i>Sieci</i>	0	5,89	11,76	82,35	0
Total	3,77	23,58	19,81	51,89	0,95

Source: Own study

Table 4 presents the number of publications assigned to individual categories in the analyzed feature: CHURCH SUPERIORS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT, while Table 5 presents the percentage of texts classified in this feature.

Table 4. Analyzed feature: CHURCH SUPERIORS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT—the number of publications assigned to individual categories

Press title / Category	Support for victims	Support for perpetrators	Support for victims and perpetrators	None of the above
<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	3	16	0	5
<i>Polityka</i>	1	11	4	7
<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	5	13	1	6
<i>Sieci</i>	2	4	2	26
Total	11	44	7	44

Source: Own study

Table 5. Analyzed feature: CHURCH SUPERIORS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT—percentage of publications assigned to individual categories

Press title / Category	Support for victims	Support for perpetrators	Support for victims and perpetrators	None of the above
<i>Newsweek Polska</i>	12,5	66,67	0	20,83
<i>Polityka</i>	4,35	47,83	17,39	30,43
<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	20	52	4	24
<i>Sieci</i>	5,89	11,76	5,89	76,46
Total	10,38	41,51	6,6	41,51

Source: Own study

⁷ The percentage of publications assigned to individual categories, in %, in a given press title was obtained by dividing the number of publications classified into a given category (Table 2) by the total number of texts on the issue of abuse in the analyzed press title (Table 1). The result obtained was multiplied by 100. The results in Table 5 were obtained analogously.

The Polish opinion-forming press presented the issue of sexual abuse of minors by clergy basically in the context of particular persons (pope, bishops, victims of abuse, perpetrators). In general, the “journalist / opinion leaders” category was the most numerous, it was present in 51.89% of analyzed publications as part of the PROTAGONISTS feature.⁸ Well-known journalists and people whose statements are considered important in public discourse spoke about pedophile priests. In the analyzed press titles, the following journalists / opinion leaders expressed their opinion most often: in *Do Rzeczy*—Tomasz Terlikowski, Paweł Lisicki, and Andrzej Kobyliński; in *Newsweek Polska*—Aleksandra Pawlicka and Cezary Michalski; in *Polityka*—Adam Szostkiewicz and Joanna Podgórska; in *Sieci*—Grzegorz Górny.⁹

In over 40% of the analyzed publications, the topic of sexual abuse of children was taken up in the context of perpetrators of abuse and their superiors (over 23% of the texts were classified in the category of “perpetrators of abuse,” nearly 20% of the texts in the category of “perpetrators’ superiors”).¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that 37.5% of *Newsweek Polska* publications were assigned to the category of “perpetrators’ superiors,” and 44% of *Do Rzeczy* publications to the category of “perpetrators of abuse.” *Sieci* offered readers a look at the issue of pedophilia essentially in the key of statements of editorial journalists and journalists cooperating with it—in more than 82% of all publications.¹¹ The smallest group of texts in the analyzed PROTAGONISTS feature were the publications belonging to the categories: “victims of abuse” (3.77%) and “no protagonists” (0.95%).¹² The results of the quantitative analysis prove the prominence of the Church in the context of hierarchs or opinion leaders.

In the analyzed feature—CHURCH SUPERIORS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT, the differences in the way church superiors were presented in crisis management caused by abuses of minors, were revealed. 66.67% of *Newsweek Polska* texts, 52% of *Do Rzeczy* texts, and 47.83% of *Polityka* texts were classified to the “support for perpetrators” category. In the case of *Sieci*, this indicator was at the level of 11.76%. The percentage of press texts assigned to the “support for victims” category did not exceed 20% in each of the press titles analyzed.

Based on the quantitative data, it can be stated that the left-liberal weeklies and *Do Rzeczy* blamed church superiors for sweeping the abuses under the rug. An important part of the press discourse revolves around the person of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, former Washington metropolitan, perpetrator of pedophile and homosexual crimes:

“It has been known for years that as a Bishop, Archbishop, and a Cardinal, McCarrick took clerics and young priests to his place, and it always happened that one of them lacked a bed, so he slept in the bed with the hierarch. (...) And this is the second element of the scandal that must not be forgotten. American Catholics, including younger priests and bishops, are angry because it turned out that the most nasty sex criminals, people who use the ordination and episcopal authority to make it reach the Vatican, or wring its neck even at the level of the Holy See.” (Terlikowski, 2018, p. 77; b.a., 2018a; b.a., 2018b; Górny, 2018d)

⁸ Cf. Table 3

⁹ Examples of publications of the following authors: Terlikowski, 2018; Terlikowski, 2019; Lisicki, 2018; Kobyliński, 2018a; Kobyliński 2019b; Pawlicka 2018b; Michalski, 2018; Szostkiewicz, 2018; Podgórska, 2018; Górny, 2018

¹⁰ Cf. Table 3

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

In the press discourse in the context of the American clergy scandal, the Archbishop was also marked. Carlo Viganò, a former nuncio in the United States who accused Pope Francis of covering up pedophilia crimes, in particular the lack of action against McCarrick, despite his knowledge, and therefore urged the pope to abdicate. Paweł Lisicki in the publication “Archbishop Viganò Appeals to Consciences,” recalled the content of the letter of the Italian hierarch to Pope Francis:

“The 78-year-old hierarch wrote that the issue of immoral, homosexual behavior of the American Cardinal Theodore McCarrick has been known to Pope Francis at least since March 2013, and yet the Holy Father did nothing. Not only did he not uphold the sanctions imposed on the Cardinal by Benedict, but he also made the American his chief adviser on church policy in the United States. (...) In June 2018, the Cardinal was publicly accused of pedophilia, the victim was to be a boy, an altar boy, and everything was to take place in 1971–1972. A commission specially appointed by the New York Archdiocese determined that the allegations against the Cardinal were true.” (Lisicki, 2019, p. 48; Górny, 2018e; Rokita, 2018)

In the context of the press image of the pedophile scandal in the Church, there appears the person of the founder of Christ’s Legionnaires—Marcial Maciej Degollado, a long-term perpetrator of sexual harassment of children and seminarians (Pawlicka, 2019b). There were also publications regarding known Polish clergy, perpetrators or suspects of abuse of minors—Father Eugeniusz Makulski, the builder of the sanctuary in Licheń; Father Franciszek Cybula, a chaplain of president Lech Wałęsa; Father Henryk Jankowski, a longtime priest of the parish of St. Brygida in Gdańsk and a chaplain of “Solidarity” (Cenckiewicz, 2019; Grochal, 2019; Świąchowicz, 2019; Majchrzak, 2019; Socha, 2019).

As important protagonists of press publications, the following popes should also be mentioned: John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. The press titles discussed the degree of their responsibility for the problem of minors’ abuse by clergy. In the context of the anecdote by Pope Francis of February 5, 2019, handed over to journalists aboard the aircraft returning to the Vatican from Abu Dhabi, there was a discussion in the Polish press about Wojtyła’s responsibility for his passive attitude towards pedophilia crimes in the Church:

“Five years after the canonization of John Paul II, the question returns whether a saint may be someone who has not opposed pedophilia in the Church. The question is provoked by Pope Francis himself.” (Pawlicka, 2019b, p. 20). “When the scandal broke out after the Boston Globe publication, John Paul II could not even call a spade a spade. Words such as pedophilia or crime did not cross his mind. He spoke of an abuse that by all standards is evil. There is no doubt that during his pontificate sexual scandals were concealed.” (Podgórska, 2018, p. 14; Szostkiewicz, 2018)

Pope Benedict XVI, who introduced new rules of canon criminal law regarding the crime of pedophilia, as well as through personnel decisions against clergymen who committed sexual offenses, including towards Father Marcial Maciel, was presented as a defender of victims (Pawlicka, 2019b). The press image of Pope Francis is ambivalent in the context of his attitude towards pedophiles in cassocks, incl. Fr. Karadima, bishop Zanchetta, and cardinal McCarrick. This is also demonstrated by the resignation of Marie Collins from cooperation with the papal commission for the protection of minors (Szostkiewicz, 2019, p. 51). Some of the press texts mentioned the names of the closest associates of the Polish Pope sweeping the pedophilia under the rug, preventing prosecution. Aleksandra Pawlicka in the publication *Cień* [Eng. *A Shadow*] (2019a), attributes the hiding of pedophiles to Cardinal Dziwisz:

“Before each audience [Cardinal Dziwisz] repeated that one should not tell the pope sad things that one must not bother him—says a Catholic journalist who has visited the pope many times. (...) He closed the doors on anyone who had something important to say to the Pope. He was the captain of darkness, ‘says Robert Mickens, a journalist at Vatican Radio and the editor-in-chief of the Catholic newspaper *La Croix*. (...) Did Bishop Dziwisz protect the Pope from knowing about pedophile scandals? My hypothesis is that while the closest collaborators of John Paul II knew about them well, he was not well informed—the author of *Sodoma* tells *Newsweek*.” (p. 13)

In press publications, there was also a description of the profiles and activities of Marek Liściński and Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus, representatives of the *Nie lękajcie się* Foundation [Eng. Don't Be Afraid Foundation], to which victims of pedophile clergymen came and who offered legal and psychological assistance (Podgórska, 2019).

In the case of 76% of the publications of *Sieci*, the topic of pedophilia did not serve directly to present the committed attitude of church superiors aimed at punishing perpetrators of crimes, nor to penalize their passive attitude. In the remaining press titles, the number of texts classified in the “none of the above” category oscillated in the range of 20-30%.¹³ This group included publications which, in relation to the topic of sexual abuse of children, took up other topics, including relationship between homosexuality and pedophilia; discussion on the purposefulness of producing “Clergy” and “Just Don't Tell Anyone” films (cleansing vs. discrediting the Church).

There was a different connection between homosexual orientation and pedophilia in the publication of right-wing and left-liberal titles. The weeklies *Polityka* and *Newsweek Polska* highlighted the lack of such a relationship:

“The second question concerns homosexuality. 80% of victims of pedophile priests are boys. In the secular world, the proportions are exactly the opposite. Pedophilia is obviously not related to orientation but to psychosexual immaturity. The clergy have easier access to boys and a greater guarantee that they will remain silent.” (Podgórska, 2018, p. 15; Dobrowolski, 2018)

On the other hand, *Sieci* and *Do Rzeczy* exposed the above connection. Grzegorz Górny, a columnist for the weekly, approves the position of conservative hierarchs pointing to homosexuality as the main cause of pedophilia:

“Just before the conference, two cardinals—Raymond Burke and Walter Brandmüller—appealed to the participants of the Vatican summit to break the silence around the homosexual mafia in the Church and stand in truth, acknowledging that homosexuality is the main cause of pedophile scandals in the Church.” (Górny, 2019b, p. 88)

Górny also claims the existence of a “lavender mafia” in the Vatican structures, which Pope Francis supports by entrusting responsible functions to homolobbyist hierarchs, including Cardinal Cupich, Cardinal Trujillo, and Cardinal Marx (Górny, 2019a; Kobyliński, 2019a; Górny, 2018a; Górny, 2018b).

The right-wing press justified the making of Smarzewski's and Sekielski's films with the intention of attacking the Church, attacking Polish identity, emphasizing the lack of objectivity of their creators in making the image of the Church and accusing it of deliberately silencing important facts from the lives of pedophile priests (including their cooperation with the Security

¹³ Cf. Table 5

Service) and unrepresentative selection of priests and complete omission of those of priests whose lives and activities confirm priesthood, and the use of pedophilia as a tool of the election campaign (Wildstein, 2019a; Wildstein, 2019b; Łysiak, 2019; Rokita, 2019; Nykiel, 2018b; Janecki, 2018; Skwieciński, 2018). In turn, the left-liberal press justified the creation of these films by the complicity of their creators in the process of cleansing the Church and in breaking the “conspiracy of silence” in the Church in Poland (Pawlicka, 2018a; Pawlicka, 2018b). The directors of the films also took the floor on the issue (Smarzowski, 2018; Sekielski, 2019).

Conclusions

The results of the analysis confirm the S1 and disconfirm the S2 and S3. All analyzed press titles addressed the topic of sexual abuse by clergy. In the analyzed period, the total number of texts on the issue amounted to 106 in the four analyzed weeklies against 271 publications referring to the broadly defined area of research on the Church. So over 40% of publications on the Catholic Church have addressed the problem of abuse of minors by clergy. In the left-liberal weekly and *Do Rzeczy*, perpetrators’ superiors were generally presented as not responding to cases of sexual abuse. About 48% of publications in *Polityka*, 52% publications of *Do Rzeczy*, and over 67% of publications in *Newsweek Polska* were classified to this category. In the case of *Sieci*, it was only 12%, which proves the small number of publications of this right-wing title, blaming the hierarchies of the Catholic Church with guilt for concealing pedophilia crimes. In this weekly, only about 6% of the publications presented the perpetrators’ superiors as adopting an active, committed attitude aimed at punishing perpetrators of crimes. The results of the analysis lead to the conclusion about the disconfirmation of the research statement.

In the context of the analysis undertaken, it should be noted that the personalization determined the press representations of the Catholic Church. A perpetrator, victim, church supervisor, and a publicist were exposed as key figures in the press discourse regarding child sexual abuse. These protagonists were usually presented by name and worldview. The analysis confirmed that clergymen with expressive views, actions, and decisions related to the analyzed issue enjoyed a much higher exposure in the press. Not without significance was also a high place in the church hierarchy of clergy involved in the crime of pedophilia (e.g. Cardinal Pell, Cardinal McCarrick, Father Jankowski) or the perpetrators’ superiors (e.g. popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis), and opinion leaders (including Archbishop Viganò).

The high level of presence of the topic on clerical pedophilia in the Polish press and linking it to the personalization can be explained by referring to the theory of communication sciences examining information selection criteria, including theory of Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge. Four cases of a combination of features of events with a special impact, which Norwegian media experts mentioned in their research, were present in press publications on pedophilia crime among clergy (elite people, big power conflict, struggle for power, scandals) (Harcup & O’Neill, 2001, pp. 262-274; Michalczyk, 2013, pp. 134). In the Polish press, the actions and statements of Pope Francis, Archbishop Viganò, Cardinal Pell and Cardinal McCarrick were constantly reported. More often, publication were written about pedophilia in the Vatican, the United States, and Poland (these are countries where the Catholic Church plays an important social and political role) than about abusive clerics in the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Lithuania. The Polish press wrote much more often about the negative activities of representatives of church elites than about such activities of ordinary, unknown priests (Father Jankowski—“Solidarity” chaplain, Father Cybula—a chaplain of president Wałęsa, Father Makulski—from the Sanctuary in Licheń). The pedophilia scandal was based on reporting negative actions of particular priests (it was not some speculative, abstract press discourse).

A press study analysis has shown that the personalization opens up a variety of ways of interpreting an event in the media. In other words, personalization can be used to build both a positive and negative media image of the Catholic Church. In over 76% of publications in *Sieci* the attitude of church superiors towards perpetrators of crimes was not undertaken. In the texts, however, significant criticism of those clergymen who approve homosexual attitudes in the hierarchical church was observed, the sincerity of Smarzowski's and Sekielski's brothers were questioned, whose films, according to the authors of *Sieci*, are part of the narrative attacking the Catholic Church, and the filmmakers were accused of skipping thread of cooperation between pedophile clergy and the Security Service (Nykiel, 2018b; Górny, 2018c; Górny, 2018a; Kobyliński, 2019a; Majchrzak, 2019). It is also worth mentioning the use of reframing by Polish right-wing weeklies, e.g. propagating the rework of a movie poster presenting the main actors of the "Clergy" film or a description of personal testimonies thanking priests for their dedicated service (Nykiel, 2018a).

Left-liberal weeklies used cases of pedophilia among clergy to create a narrative of the Catholic Church as an institution hiding pedophiles in their structures, without indicating the actual scale of abuse (Michalski, 2018).

Studies have shown that personalization is an important process that can be effectively used to build both a positive and negative image of the Catholic Church. It can also be used for instrumental construction of the narrative of sexual abuse by clergy.

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