


**Did Polish Bishops Support Andrzej Duda in the
Presidential Campaign in 2020? Analysis of
Institutional Messages of the Polish Episcopal
Conference**

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Abstract:

The aim of the article is to increase the cognitive value in the area of political communication of Polish bishops during the presidential campaign in Poland in 2020, in particular to answer the question whether the Polish Episcopal Conference supported President Andrzej Duda politically in his candidacy for re-election. The research applied the analysis and synthesis method supplemented with elements of hermeneutics. The Polish Episcopal Conference remained an entity not politically involved at the level of institutional communiqués and did not support any of the candidates applying for the office of President of the Republic of Poland in 2020. The issue for further political and media research remains that of complementary forms of communication of the ecclesial institution and the way of expressing one's own electoral preferences, for example through the Catholic media.

Keywords: Andrzej Duda, bishops, Polish Episcopal Conference, political communication, elections

Introduction

The Catholic Church in Poland plays an important role in public space after 1989, among others by taking a specific position in the area of current politics and ongoing election campaigns. Political scientists point out that the institutional Church can adopt potentially different strategies for political communication. For example, it can encourage society to participate in elections and referendums; it can legitimise the programmes and activities of political entities that respect Christian values and recommend a particular political party or politician to vote for. It can also discredit them because of the views they hold in opposition to the social teaching of the Church,

or because of the undermining of the legal and constitutional and informal position of the Church in the state and society (Kowalczyk 2014: 134). Research to date has shown that the ecclesial institution in Poland plays an important role in the above forms of communication and political participation, using its social position (Borowik 2017). As noted by Grzegorz Piwnicki (2017: 150-151), a compromise regarding the state-church relationship, which was formed in the 1990s, including "Religion in schools, a cross in the Sejm, a concordat, a very restrictive abortion law, generous financing of the Catholic Church by the state," Christian values "entered into key laws plus a statue of John Paul II in every commune", at the end of the second decade of the 21st century it is destroyed by PiS and some Catholic circles allied with it. After 2015, concerns should be raised regarding the relations between the state and the Church, such as: the decisive voice of religious associations in bioethical matters, the method of financing the church by the state, the overlapping of church and state orders, support of the Radical-National Camp by many Catholic clergy (Piwnicki 2017: 151-156).

The analysis undertaken was aimed at verifying the formal political support given by Polish bishops to Andrzej Duda in his application for the office of President of Poland in 2020. The aim of the article is to try to answer the following research questions. Did the Polish bishops give political support to the incumbent president Andrzej Duda in official institutional communications during the 2020 presidential campaign in Poland? Did they politically support the Law and Justice party, whose candidate was Duda, or did the other parties not be involved?

The publication, in the author's intention, is therefore to increase the cognitive value in the area of institutional political communication of Polish Catholic hierarchs during the election campaign in 2020. The temporal scope of the analysis covered the period between February 5, 2020 and July 10, 2020. The starting date is determined by the *Order of the Speaker of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 5 February 2020 on the Ordinance on the election of the President of the Republic of Poland*, based on which Elżbieta Witek indicated 10 May 2020 as the date of the presidential election (Journal of Laws 2020, 184). As a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the impossibility of holding the election on the above date (Resolution 129/2020), the Speaker of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland set a new election date of 28 June 2020 (Journal of Laws 2020, 988). Due to the fact that none of the candidates for President of the Republic of

Poland obtained the required majority in the first round¹, the second round of the elections held on 10 July 2020 selected their winner, the hitherto incumbent President Andrzej Duda². This is also the final date of the analysis.

Material and methods

The research material consisted of institutional communiqués of the Polish Bishops' Conference (KEP) published on its official website episkopat.pl and on the website of the Catholic Information Agency ekai.pl, as well as other official statements of bishops belonging to the Permanent Council³ and the Presidium of KEP⁴, which referred to the issue of the 2020 presidential elections and the camp of the *Zjednoczona Prawica* in power. The research sample included those messages of hierarchs that simultaneously met two criteria. First of all, they were created between February 5, 2020 and July 10, 2020, i.e. in the period immediately preceding the election. Secondly, the announcements noted the presence of at least one of the following keywords in any grammatical form: "elections", "president", "party", "Duda", "Morawiecki", "Law and Justice" and actually referring to the election.

The research sample included a total of 13 official announcements presented by the KEP or by individual bishops belonging to the Permanent Council of KEP and the Presidium of KEP. The analysis takes into account the position on the presidential election of the following hierarchs: card. Nycz, Archbishop Gądecki, Archbishop Jędraszewski, Bishop Miziński, Archbishop Budzik, Archbishop Skworc, Archbishop Ryś, Archbishop Polak and the press spokesman of the KEP, Fr. Rytel-Andrianik.

¹ Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski (43.5% and 30.46% of the votes in the first ballot) were entitled to stand for election again. Cf. PKW (2020a).

² Andrzej Duda received 51.03% of votes in the second round. Cf. PKW (2020b).

³ The Permanent Council of the KEP "may take a position on public matters when the good of the Church or the specific needs of the faithful, according to the opinion, at least presumed, of the members of the Conference" (KEP 2009, Article 23). During the 2020 presidential campaign the Permanent Council of KEP was composed of: Bishop Stanisław Budzik, Bishop Andrzej Czaja, Archbishop Sławoj Leszek Głódź, Archbishop Grzegorz Ryś, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski, Archbishop Józef Kupny, Bishop Artur Miziński, Card. Kazimierz Nycz, Archbishop Wojciech Polak, Archbishop Wiktor Skworc, Bishop Piotr Turzyński (KEP 2020b).

⁴ The Presidium of the KEP "may take a position on public matters when the good of the Church or the specific needs of the faithful so require, and it is not possible for the Permanent Council to intervene, in accordance with the opinion, at least presumed, of the members of the Conference" (KEP 2009, Article 31). During the 2020 presidential campaign the Presidium of the KEP was composed of: Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski, Bishop Artur Miziński (KEP 2020c).

It was assumed that Andrzej Duda is a candidate of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS), and so the analysis included those KEP communiqués which would possibly also refer to the policy of the Mateusz Morawiecki government. The study treated the possible positive assessment given to the PiS camp as approval of Andrzej Duda's actions. A negative assessment of the government's actions would be interpreted as a simultaneous criticism of the president's actions. The analysis also included statements made by bishops belonging to the Permanent Council and the Presidium of the KEP, published on the websites of dioceses in which they hold a pastoral function. The research applied the analysis and synthesis method supplemented with elements of hermeneutics.

The author has formulated the following research hypothesis. During the 2020 presidential campaign in Poland, Polish bishops did not give political support to the incumbent president Andrzej Duda in official institutional communications. The clergy remained formally a non-aligned party and did not politically support the Law and Justice party, whose candidate for the office of President of the Republic of Poland was Duda.

Results

KEP spokesperson, Rev. Paweł Rytel-Andrianik on 9 March 2020 reminded the basic principles of Catholic social teaching concerning the purpose of temples and the participation of Catholics in political life:

Temples and church rooms are not places where one can be politically agitated, hand out leaflets or hang posters or election banners. The Catholic Church is open to everyone and everyone can find themselves in it, as long as they do not exclude themselves from the community of believers by denying God's Revelation in Scripture and Church Tradition (...). It would not serve anyone to turn the church pulpit into a political pulpit. Such actions would be contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, in which we read the words of Jesus Christ: "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" (BP KEP 2020a).

He repeated the above position of the Polish bishops in the communiqué of 21.06.2020: The pulpit cannot serve any purpose other than proclaiming the Word of God, transmitting hope and teaching of the Catholic Church. (...) Catholics, of course, like other citizens, have the right to be actively involved in politics for the common good, but the churches are not the places where action can be taken. For more than two thousand years, Christians have been proclaiming the truth about God's love for every human being, regardless of his or her life situation. The Church does not exclude anyone from its community, but it also sets specific requirements for implementation, as indicated in the Decalogue, the Gospel and the social teaching of the Catholic Church, and confirmed by successive popes.

If there is a case of electoral agitation in a church or parish building, it must be considered reprehensible and incompatible with the Church's mission, which is to proclaim the Gospel to every person, regardless of political opinion. Temples are not places for politics, but, as Jesus Christ stressed, they are houses of prayer (BP KEP 2020b).

The President of KEP, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, in the face of the spreading epidemic of coronavirus, called in his appeal of 3 April 2020 for politicians to stop conducting an election campaign and reminded of the principle of the common good as the main criterion for assessing social life:

In the social teaching of the Catholic Church, the main criterion for assessing social life is the principle of the common good. (...) In the name of this principle, the Church fully supports the principles of security introduced during the pandemic by the Government in recent weeks and the encouragement to limit all contacts and stay at home. Moreover, the time of the fight against the coronavirus requires the suspension of political struggle. In a difficult situation involving a threat to human life and health, the fundamental concern should be the well-being of man, which the Church has always recalled. Therefore, in accordance with the position of the Council for Social Affairs of the Polish Episcopal Conference, I appeal to all groups and electoral committees to “limit and temporarily suspend all political rivalries” concerning the presidential elections. I encourage agreement over and above the divisions in this matter, which Poles have always been able to do in difficult moments for their homeland (Gądecki 2020a).

In turn, a few days before the second round of the presidential election, on 7 July 2020, the Secretary General of KEP, Bishop Artur Miziński, appealed to the Poles to participate in the decisive phase of the election, arguing that this is responsible for the democratic social order of the country:

Despite the difficulties related to the pandemic, in the spirit of responsibility for the fate of Poland and out of concern for the common good, I appeal to all those entitled, including those who, for various reasons, could not participate in the first round of the presidential election, to participate in the second round of voting. This will be a sign of our responsibility and maturity in shaping democratic social order in Poland (Miziński 2020).

The above communication of Archbishop Gądecki and Bishop Miziński did not contradict each other, but took into account the current recommendations of the Chief Sanitary Inspector and the recommendations of Minister of Health Łukasz Szumowski.

Bishop Miziński (2020) also made an appeal to politicians and journalists “to exchange views and report on them in a substantive, constructive and honest manner”, as well as show “respect for opponents, peace and common sense”.

On 28 April 2020, the Permanent Council of the Polish Episcopal Conference issued the word *Peace be to you, Poland! (St. John Paul II, 1983)*, in which it addressed the political tension related to the presidential election in the context of the time of the epidemic. In the period immediately preceding the originally planned elections, i.e. 10 May 2020, a conflict between the ruling camp and the opposition party concerning the possibility and possible date of holding them was noted (Radwan 2020). The hierarchs appealed to politicians for their responsibility for the common good that is Poland:

We wish those responsible for the governments of our country to be able to devise and implement the most appropriate mechanisms to overcome the epidemic soon. We recall that the *raison d'être* of any authority is the concern for the common good, which includes 'the whole of social conditions in which people can achieve their own perfection more fully and quickly

We therefore appeal to the consciences of those responsible for the common good of our homeland, both the people in power and the opposition, to reach a common position on the presidential elections in this extraordinary situation. We encourage dialogue between the parties to seek solutions which do not arouse legal doubts or suspicion not only of a violation of the constitutional order in force, but also of the principles of free and fair elections adopted in a democratic society. We ask that they - guided by the best will - should seek in their actions the common good, the expression of which is, today, the life, health and social existence of Poles, as well as broad social trust in the electoral procedures of a democratic state, which have been jointly developed over the years. In the difficult situation we are experiencing, we should take care and cultivate a mature democracy, protect the rule of law and build a culture of solidarity, also in the political sphere, despite differences (John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 65) KEP Permanent Council 2020).

The bishops recalled the “legitimate autonomy of the democratic order”, referring to point 47 of the encyclical *Centesimus annus*:

The Church has no mandate to participate in purely political disputes about the form or timing of elections, let alone to advocate this or that solution. The Church's mission in such a situation, however, is always, full of kindness, to remind people of the particular moral and political responsibility that lies with the political players.

The above mentioned word of the Permanent Council of the ECC of 28 April 2020 was quoted by Archbishop Gądecki in his homily delivered at Jasna Góra on 3 May 2020, by performing the *Act of Commitment of the Homeland* (Gądecki 2020b).

On the eve of the second round of the presidential election, 7.07.2020, the Deputy President of KEP, Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski, appealed to the faithful of the Archdiocese of Krakow to take part in the decisive phase of the election as many people as possible, and that the Krakow faithful, “in accordance with a properly formed conscience, should support this candidate for the office of President of the Republic of Poland, whose political programme is close to the social teachings of the Church due to the defence of the fundamental value of life and the traditionally understood institution of marriage and family, as well as concern for guaranteeing parents the right to raise their children” (Jędraszewski 2020).

Formally, the Deputy Chairman of the KEP did not indicate by name the person for whom the Catholic should vote. However, in the opinion of political commentators, including the editorial staff of *Więź*, the above statement of the hierarchy should be treated as a form of support for Andrzej Duda, taking into account that “*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* has made the world-view dispute (and attacks on LGBT people) a part of this year's presidential campaign” (Więź 2020b). The editorial staff of *Więź* noticed the convergence of the voice of Archbishop Jędraszewski's and the views of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*:

On the 18th of June, on the 71st anniversary of Lech Kaczyński's birthday, during a Mass at the Wawel Castle, attended by, among others, the President of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* Jarosław Kaczyński, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and the Speaker of the Sejm, Elżbieta Witek [Archbishop Jędraszewski] said that 'today, attempts are being made to take away our Polishness through a new, atheistic ideology which wants to build everything on the idol of sex. Homage is to be given to this idol by four-year-old children who have been properly instructed in kindergartens and taught masturbation there’ (Więź 2020b).

Apart from the above position of the Metropolitan of Krakow, no statements by Polish hierarchs have been recorded which would refer to the views or profiles of people who are candidates for the highest office in the country. In his statement to Radio Lublin on 28 June 2020, Archbishop Stanisław Budzik encouraged the faithful to take part in the elections:

No one is a lonely island. We are responsible for what is happening in our homeland,' he says in an interview with Radio Lublin - We, as representatives of the Church, often remind the faithful that it is the duty of every Catholic to consider in conscience who he wants to vote for and what values the candidates present. (...)

Therefore, we encourage everyone and we are glad that we have the opportunity to influence the shape of our country ([Radio Lublin 2020](#)).

In an interview with the President of the Catholic Information Agency, Marcin Preciszewski, Archbishop Grzegorz Ryś confirmed his position. He confirmed the position of Archbishop Gądecki concerning the indication of a new date for the presidential election in view of the impossibility of holding it on 10 May 2020:

What Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki has already said is actually all the Church can say on this subject. I can therefore reiterate, in favour of the President of our Episcopal Conference, that elections should be organised when the health and lives of citizens are not at risk and when they are accompanied by a guarantee of democratic conduct. This is the level of the common good and the resulting moral assessments. The dispute over whether it is to be in May or June, this year or two years from now, in one form or another, is already a 'real' policy dispute, and any statement we make would be interpreted in its terms ([KAI 2020](#)).

Card. Kazimierz Nycz assessed the specificity of the presidential campaign in 2020 in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. In the opinion of the Warsaw metropolitan, "politicians should take care of three things: the safety of people, the common good of Poland, so that the decisions of politicians do not contribute to its weakening, and the fundamental principles of a democratic state, starting with the Constitution, do not suffer" ([Więź 2020a](#)). The decision to go to the ballot box or to stay at home was left to the consciences of the believers.

The Primate of Poland, Archbishop Wojciech Polak, in an interview with Beata Lubecka from *Radio Zet*, on 6 April 2020, did not want to resolve political issues related to the planned elections on 10 May 2020, but only exposed the primacy of concern for the life and health of citizens:

"I believe that if there is a risk to life and health, we should not put either ourselves or others at risk," stressed the primate of Poland. Asked whether, however, if the elections on 10 May are held, he will take part in them, so that the Polish President answered: "I do not know; I will not put my life and health at risk: This is not about me personally, only about my life and health, but also about ensuring that others do not risk themselves, he added ([PAP 2020](#)).

During his annual pilgrimage to the sanctuary in Piekary Śląskie on 1 June 2020, Archbishop Wiktor Skworec pointed out that the situation of the pandemic should not dispense Catholics with the civic duty to participate in elections:

In his speech, he pointed out that the situation of a pandemic threat to the health and life of people is being imposed by the constitutional necessity of holding presidential elections, “which no one is allowed to torpedo”. “The mission of the Church is to encourage the preservation of social peace, participation in elections and a sober assessment of the moral qualifications of a candidate for the most important office of our country”, said Archbishop Skworc (Silesia24 2020).

The above mentioned statements of the official representatives of KEP prove that in institutional communiqués the Polish Episcopal Conference did not give political support to any of the candidates for the office of President of the Republic of Poland in 2020. The only exception to this was the statement of Archbishop Jędraszewski of 18 June 2020.

It is also worth noting that the statements of Polish bishops in the national Catholic press did not confirm their political commitment to any of the candidates. The analysis of the weeklies (*Gość Niedzielny*, *Niedziela*, *Idziemy*, *Przewodnik Katolicki*) during the prescribed research period proved the presence of the statements of only Archbishop Gądecki on the pages of *Gość Niedzielny*, which, however, did not go beyond the framework of the Church's Magisterium in the area of political communication. During the presidential campaign and in connection with the ongoing political dispute over the reform of the justice system, the above periodical recalled the content of the letter from the President of KEP to the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Jerzy Duszyński, in connection with the 'Forum for the Rule of Law', in which Archbishop Gądecki called on the politicians of various parties to the political dispute to adopt an attitude of dialogue for the construction of the common good (Łoziński 2020). In an interview entitled *A Time of Trial of Faith, Love and Solidarity*, given to the *Gość Niedzielny*, the Poznań Metropolitan noted that the criteria to be met by the President, as set out by the Permanent Council of the Bishops', “are not intended to identify a particular candidate, but rather to help each voter to make a personal choice. It is not enough for someone to belong to a grouping that I support, or to display qualities or a way of being that impresses me. The key to good choices is values” (Gądecki 2020c). The Hierarch also stressed that the Church's task is not to get involved in the current political struggle, but to help people come to salvation. It is in this key that the political distancing of the ecclesial institution, as declared by Archbishop Gądecki, should be seen. The weekly also recalled the Church's teaching on the criteria that should guide a Catholic in elections (Burgoński 2020).

Discussion

The Polish Episcopal Conference in its declaratory communiqués remained essentially an unaligned political entity during the 2020 presidential campaign. No direct content indicating that Andrzej Duda received the support of Polish bishops was noted. The clergy remained formally distanced from political competition throughout the presidential campaign. The analysis proved the veracity of the research hypothesis.

One of the significant reasons for this attitude are the negative consequences of the alliance of the throne and altar for a church institution, which was noted in the early 1990s, when KEP was an active political actor during the period of political transition that was taking place, and in just four years, the results of public opinion polls showed a rapid drop in positive ratings of the Church's activities from around 90% at the end of 1989 to 38% in 1993. In the longer term, when the bishops adopted a more distanced attitude towards social, political and economic issues, they regained a fairly high degree of public trust (Leśniczak 2020b). Most likely, the clergy remembered the above historical episode and their formal political distance can be e.g. justified by understanding the consequences of crossing the boundaries of the Church's Magisterium in the field of Catholic social teaching.

A survey conducted in February 2020 on the social trust of Poles in various institutions and organisations revealed a lower percentage of respondents trusting the Roman Catholic Church: in comparison with 2018, a decrease from 70% to 64% was recorded (Omyła-Rudzka 2020: 10). On the other hand, the public opinion polls from November 2019 concerning the place of the Church in the public space during the election campaign prove the growing conviction of citizens about the political involvement of an ecclesial institution: according to CBOS surveys in November 2011, 34% of respondents believed that “before the last parliamentary elections, the Catholic Church in Poland was involved on the side of some political parties”, in turn, in November 2019, the above percentage was 38%. As many as 95% among the respondents who are convinced that the Church is involved in the election campaign, believe that before the parliamentary elections in 2019 the Catholic Church was politically involved on the side of the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* party (compared to 89% of respondents participating in the CBOS survey in November 2019). It is worth noting, however, that the above assessment is related to the declared political views of respondents: the political involvement of the Church before the elections in 2019 was noticed by a majority of respondents with a left-wing orientation (66%)

and not participating in religious practices (57%) (Roguska 2019: 4-6). The above interference of the ecclesial institution was rarely noticed by people with right-wing orientation (27%) and people who take part in religious practices several times a week (16%). Beata Roguska (2019: 7) correctly sums up the results of the above research:

The more general the level of ratings for the political commitment of priests and the Church, the greater the role of political orientation in perceiving the attitude of the Church before elections. It is crucial for the perception of the Church's activity as an institution. Accusations made by left-wing supporters against the Church concerning her electoral commitment cannot, however, be explained only by prejudices and stereotypes. It seems that people who are ideologically distant from the right are more sensitive to any signals coming from the Church and priests that might testify to their involvement in the electoral campaign.

The results of this analysis may prove that the attitude of KEP has expressed the awareness of Polish bishops towards the possible consequences of their involvement in the political discourse of the polarised Polish society of the second decade of the 21st century.

The political and media research so far shows that after 2000, the Polish Catholic media clearly supported *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* party and the right-wing candidates for the office of president (Lech Kaczyński, Jarosław Kaczyński, Andrzej Duda), even if in institutional communiqués the hierarchs held positions consistent with Catholic social science (Topidi 2019; Dośpiał-Borysiak 2020; Leśniczak 2018; Leśniczak 2020a). The media, which are owned by Church institutions and in which the formal control over the broadcast content is exercised by a Church assistant, should be treated as the complementary voice of bishops. In the overall assessment of the political involvement of KEP in the presidential campaign of 2020, we cannot, therefore, overlook the content broadcast by the Catholic media, which is a complementary, although less formal, part of the political communication of Polish hierarchs.

The perception of the political communication of the Church as an institution by public opinion is carried out through the prism of parish communities, the degree of political involvement of pastors, but also the laity, even representatives of Catholic movements and associations, whose informal message, often at the local level, is sometimes perceived as the “voice of bishops”.

An accurate summary of the interpretation of the results of the analysis is the opinion of the esteemed Polish sociologist, Janusz Mariański (2017: 86, 88):

The experience of the post-communist period shows that churches fighting for power and social (and especially political) position destroy their moral credibility. It seems that finding the right position and role in a pluralistic society is still an untold lesson for the Catholic Church in Poland. (...) According to some sociologists, we are dealing in Polish society with clear manifestations of the politicisation of religion, and even with the widespread involvement of the clergy and church structures in political life. The Church, for her part, stresses that her mission is primarily religious, not political, and that she is joining the social order because of the implications that her religious mission has for worldly life.

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