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# The Polish Catholic Church on the life of Poles at the beginning of the millennium: A corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract:** The Catholic Church plays a vital role in Polish public life, strengthened only by the political change, which brought to power the right-wing conservative Law and Justice party. This role could be seen as a reflection of Poland's religious landscape. Yet, it is accepted only in restricted domains of life: while 61% of people accept the Church taking the stance in matters of morality, 55% disapprove of the Church voicing opinions about the Parliament's bills (CBOS 2013).

This study aims to analyse which of these domains are represented in the corpus of official documents of the Polish Catholic Church (241 000 words, 259 documents). To achieve this aim, the study, situated within the corpus-supported Critical Discourse Analysis paradigm (van Dijk 1993, Baker 2006), combines collocation and concordance analysis methods.

The findings reveal the presence of both religious and secular dimensions, although in different manners. The former has a rather individual character, whereas the latter concerns public life. Overall, the results support the view of the Polish Catholic Church as an administrator of values (Graff 2010) and point to the great self-involvement of the Church.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church in Poland, religion in Poland, Polish Catholicism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies

## Introduction

Mounting research points to the central role of the Catholic Church in political and social life in Poland (e.g. Graff 2010, Heinen & Portet 2010, Mandes 2020). The vast majority of Poles declare to be Catholic as there is an inherent relationship between national identity and Catholicism, i.e. the Church played an important role in the struggle for Poland's independence and (as a result) has considerable influence on the political scene. This is merely a fraction of the arguments confirming the social significance of the Catholic Church. However, arguments to the contrary have recently started to emerge

and take shape. These include the permanent social disapproval of political involvement on the part of Church officials, accompanied by the belief that the far-reaching influence on political life by this social group is unacceptable (Grabowska 2022b). Moreover, the vast majority of Poles perceive religion to be an aspect of their lives to be confined to the private sphere. This gives rise to the question how the institutionalised Polish Catholic Church positions itself toward Poles' lives. Does it restrict itself in its statements to guidelines concerning their religious and spiritual life? Does it take on the role of an authority in matters concerning the private lives of its believers? If speaking on social and political issues, what discursive identity does the Catholic church assume: a commentator explaining to the faithful the current social and political life from the perspective of faith and its dogmas? A critic who points out actions inconsistent with the morality adopted within the Catholic doctrine? An authority whose right is to require and impose certain actions in the secular domain? These broad questions have inspired the corpus-assisted analysis of official documents of the Polish Bishops' Conference presented in this paper.

### **Social and political role of the Polish Church**

Several metrics of religiousness indicate the fundamental role of Catholicism in Poland. According to the census from 2011, 96 per cent of people who answered the question about their religion chose the Roman Catholic faith (88 per cent of the total population) (GUS 2011). This trend is also confirmed by more recent data collected by the Public Opinion Research Centre (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, CBOS): 'Our systematic research shows that since the end of the nineties, more than 90 per cent of those surveyed (92 - 97 per cent) have invariably considered themselves as believers'<sup>1</sup> (Boguszewski 2017a) and mirrored in results of the International Social Survey Programme ISSP 2008 – Religion III 2008 (86 per cent) (ISSP Research Group 2018). Also, data on participation in services reflects such declarations. According to ISSP, nearly 35 per cent of Poles attend a service at least once a week (ISSP Research Group 2018). Also, data on participation in services reflects such declarations. According to data collected by the CBOS, nearly 40 per cent of Poles attend a service at least once a week (CBOS 2022), while observations carried out by the Institute of Catholic Church Statistics (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego, ISKK) put this percentage at the approximate level of 37 per cent (ISKK 2020). This puts Poland among other traditionally Catholic countries in Europe such as Ireland (87 per cent Catholics, 44 per cent attending at least once a week), Italy (89 per cent Catholics, 22 per cent attending) and Spain (75 per cent Catholics, 20 per cent attending) (ISSP Research Group, 2018). Life's landmark events' celebration also take the Catholic form: 98 per cent of children born in 2016 were baptised, 62 per cent of weddings in Poland were held in the Catholic Church<sup>2</sup>. As a result, Catholicism seems to be widespread in Poland at the level of declarations

<sup>1</sup> All translations from Polish publications and other Polish texts are provided by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Due to the Concordat from 1993 Church wedding is recognized by the state.

as well as religious practices, both in everyday life and on festive occasions. The commonness of declarations of faith may attribute the Church the legitimacy for statements about the lives of all Poles, not excluding ones outside this religious community. Furthermore, the commonness of religious practices can sanction statements concerning various spheres of their lives, not limited to spiritual or religious life.

The important role of Catholicism in the life of Poles is also evidenced by its connection with national identity. Over 80 per cent of Poles positively assess the impact of Polish baptism on both the Polish statehood and the Polish culture (Boguszewski 2016). This percentage varies only slightly throughout the political spectrum; therefore, we may assume that most Poles are satisfied with the fact that they live in a Catholic country. This is also reflected in the discursive construction of the Pole-Catholic identity. In communist times, it was one of the most important parts of the Catholic Church's self-characteristics (Kominek 2003). As Kominek (2003) puts it: "The result of this permanent connection [between nation and Catholicism, VK] was in the past the formula of the Pole-Catholic, which almost put these two concepts on a par with each other". The political transformation has not brought about any significant changes in this respect. Skowronek (2006) shows a similar connection between being Polish and being Catholic within a dataset of contemporary pastoral letters. Moreover, Makuchowska (2011) draws our attention to the strengthening of the image of non-Catholics as enemies of the nation, Christianity, and the Church after the political transformation of 1989. This clear discursive connection between national and religious identities may lead to discursive statements concerning the life of the nation, i.e. not only the private life of the faithful but also – more broadly – the social or political life in Poland.

The critical role of the Catholic Church in the post-war history of Poland is hardly questionable. During the communist era (1945-1989) its crucial position was recognised by all important social actors: the ruling communist party and the opposition. Moreover, the Church was well aware of this. Fighting against this powerful institution became one of the most important goals of the communist party, which was carried out by various means, beginning with anti-church propaganda, through surveillance of the clergy and Catholic activists, closing Catholic schools, to the detention and imprisonment of priests and monks. One of the most dramatic manifestations of the party's struggle with the Church was the arrest and detention of the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in 1955, and the brutal assassination of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko by Security Service agents in 1984 (Skowronek 2006). What is more, for members of the opposition, churches were often a place of refuge from the oppressive communist reality. It was there that they had the opportunity to express their anti-communist sentiments freely. Masses often turned into demonstrations of patriotism and national solidarity (Skowronek 2006). The analysis of Solidarity movement documents carried out by Kominek (2003) also presents the discursive dimension of this connection between Catholicism and patriotism: in these documents the Catholic Church and the Polish nation are seen as an undivided unity. Such historical conditions may reinforce the aforementioned tendency for the Church representatives to comment on social and political life in Poland, as well as indicate that they adopt the position of active authorities or critics rather than passive observers.

The political transformation of 1989 fundamentally changed the situation of the Catholic Church in Poland. On the one hand, it was allowed to organize public religious events on a large scale; it was also granted unrestricted symbolic rights to take a stand on social and political issues. On the other hand, the freedom of speech, which was part of the democratic transformation, made the Church a subject of open criticism (Kominek 2003). According to many researchers, these changes have not led to a weakening of the role of the Catholic Church in social and political life in Poland but even strengthened it. The Church has become present in the public space. This can be exemplified by, for instance, hanging Christian crosses in public places (including the Parliament), the presence of the Church's officials during the celebration of all important public holidays, religion taught in state-run schools and financed from the state budget or, finally, the inclusion of Christian values in the constitution (Graff 2010). The institution's political influence has also increased significantly: Heinen indicates that many political decisions are motivated by the politicians' fear of losing the support of, what they consider to be, the most numerous social group, the Catholics (Heinen & Portet 2010). Borowik (2002) describes the attempts of the Catholic Church to influence the results of elections and Graff (2003) suggests the debate on antiabortion law as an example of "the power of the Church to upset the democratic process itself, and the willingness of the political elite to give in to the pressure of clergy" (Graff 2003: 112). The scope of the Church's political impact is also reflected in legal solutions adopted in Poland, such as the criminalisation of abortion (Zielinska 2000; Owczarzak 2009) against the will of the majority of voters (Graff 2003), severe restrictions on family planning services (Mishtal & Dannefer 2010) or the Conscience Clause law allowing medical practitioners to refuse health services because of conscience-based objections (Mishtal 2009). The influence of the Church on education in Poland is also visible, among others, through religious education as part of the curriculum in Polish schools (Heinen 2010) and influence on the content of 'Preparation for Life in a Family' courses (Mishtal & Dannefer 2010; Heinen & Portet 2010; Pakuła et al. 2015).

### **Religion as a private matter**

High religious indicators are not accompanied by the acceptance of the Church's involvement in social and especially political life. The lack of acceptance remains as constant as declarations of faith or participation in religious practices. As early as by the end of the 1980s, more than half of Poles did not accept the Church's representatives' comments on political issues (Mariański 1993). The political transformation did not change this situation. At the beginning of the 1990s, the majority of Poles (61 per cent) supported the complete separation of the state and the Church (Mariański 1993), and nearly half declared that the Church should not influence socially important decisions concerning areas other than faith and religion (Mariański 1993). This lack of acceptance is even more evident when the Church attempts to exert direct influence on elections. In 2013, more than 4/5 (82 per cent) of Poles felt outraged by priests actively and publicly (also during services) supporting specific political parties. This percentage has also stayed

unchanged since the beginning of this millennium (Grabowska 2022b). The reluctance to listen to the Church's opinion on electoral issues is also reflected in the sphere of individual decisions: in the late 1990s, more than half of Poles (58 per cent) considered that a Catholic could vote for a non-believer candidate (Adamczuk 2001), while in 1995 and again in 2000, Aleksander Kwaśniewski openly declaring himself a non-believer was elected president. Given these statistical data, one can reasonably expect the Church to focus on the private sphere in the discursive construction of life.

Over the last two decades, the Church's involvement in political life in Poland has consistently been assessed as direct or even unacceptable. Thus, at the beginning of the 1990s, nearly two-thirds of Poles (64 per cent) noticed the influence of the Church on politics and politicians, assessing it as significant or decisive (Mariański 1993). The next decade does not substantially change this assessment: in 2001, two-thirds of Poles (66 per cent) still noticed the involvement of the Church in politics (Adamczuk 2001). Moreover, as early as in the early 1990s, more than 2/3 of Poles (67 per cent) considered the influence of the Church on public life in Poland as too far-reaching (Mariański 1993). The next decade witnessed only a slight change in this assessment since it decreased to 60 per cent in 2006 (Mariański 2011), and in 2007, nearly half of Poles (49.6 per cent) indicated that the influence of the Church on the life of the country should be less significant (Mariański 2011). Moreover, the political involvement of the Church is perceived not only as something uncalled for but even as one of the fundamental issues internal to the Church in Poland: in 2019, over 1/3 of Poles identified the involvement of the Church in politics as one of the main problems of the Church. It takes second place after the uncovered cases of paedophilia indicated by 60 per cent of the respondents (Głowacki 2019). Such a negative assessment of the Church's involvement in politics might suggest that its discourse will tend to avoid statements about social and, in particular, political life.

Not only do Poles oppose the Church to being involved in political life, but they also treat religion as a private sphere of their lives, reserved only for themselves or for the people closest to them. For example, conversations on religious matters are held only in the closest family circles: 43 per cent of Poles declare that they avoid such conversations at work or in educational settings, and 27 per cent even in conversations with friends (Zaręba 2010). Putting religion in the private sphere is also indicated by the belief that education in a state-run school should be based only on norms and values stemming from general humanism relying on common principles, and recognised both by believers and non-believers. Only one in six believes that it should be based on the ethics of the Catholic Church (Boguszewski 2017b). The privacy of religion among Polish Catholics is also reflected in the separation of moral norms from religiousness. Nearly 70 per cent of respondents are of the opinion that what good and evil should be primarily a personal matter for every human being, and only 15 per cent believe that this should be primarily dictated by God's laws (Boguszewski 2017b). As many as 1/3 of Poles do not accept the Church's statements on moral issues (Grabowska 2013). Catholic sexual morality, of which a large number of Catholics remain critical, seems to be a particularly sensitive area. At the same time, the Church's interference in the sphere of sexuality is considered to be overly extensive and intrusive (Baniak 2007). Such views of Polish

Catholics suggest that the discourse of the Catholic Church might focus only on the religious life of its followers.

The tension arising from the discussed research concerns the functioning of the Church in the social sphere. There is also a clear variation in the level of social acceptance of this role, due to the domains concerned. Moreover, there is no doubt that the Catholic Church is present in the religious life of Poles, as evidenced by the high rates of religious practice. However, its involvement in the private lives of Poles is perceived more ambiguously. On the one hand, they commemorate the most important events of their lives through religious celebrations (e.g. weddings). On the other hand, though, they object when the Church interferes in the sphere of their morality or sexual life. When it comes to social life, we are dealing with the acceptance of the broad presence of the Church in public life and a firm disagreement with its involvement in politics. From the perspective of this ambivalence, the question about the role of the Church per se in relation to these three domains is interesting. In this article, I will therefore focus on addressing the following research questions:

1. How does the Catholic Church position itself discursively in relation to the religious life of Poles?
2. How does the Catholic Church position itself discursively in relation to the private life of Poles?
3. How does the Catholic Church position itself discursively in relation to issues of social and political life in Poland?

These questions are approached from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), understood as “a form of academic inquiry which aims to achieve a better understanding of how societies work” (Baker & McEnery 2005). I consider the institutional Polish Catholic Church as a powerful agent within society. I aim to explore how its discourse legitimizes and reinforces this power and to understand in which domains of life this process occurs.

## **Methods and materials**

### **Corpus**

The corpus analysed in this study comprises all documents published on the website of the Polish Bishops' Conference (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, KEP). The choice of documents from this institution is based on the belief that they most accurately represent the official discourse of the institutional Catholic Church in Poland. The Polish Episcopal Commission is “a permanent institution established by the Holy See (..).” (KEP 2009), and its tasks include overseeing the religious and moral life of Catholics in the state, as well as maintaining proper relations between the Church and the State (KEP 2009). I, therefore, recognise this institution as representative of the Catholic Church in Poland as a whole and also speaks on its behalf. Such an approach to the selection of data can be defined, as Bednarek (2008) suggests, as a semi-automatic analysis of medium-size corpora, which limits the size of the corpus to a volume that allows a manual analysis

of its selected aspects. This permits the use of qualitative techniques and therefore a more complete reconstruction of the discourses under investigation.

The corpus analysed in this study is composed of all texts published between 02.05.1998 and 01.03.2013 in the 'Documents' section of the official website of the Polish Episcopal Conference ([www.episkopat.pl](http://www.episkopat.pl)). These documents were collected by means of Teleport Pro ver. 1.64, which downloaded all subpages with the address starting from [www.episkopat.pl/dokumenty/](http://www.episkopat.pl/dokumenty/). I then manually extracted the texts of individual documents from these downloaded documents. They were also manually cleared of their HTML codes and converted into .txt format and UTF-8 encoding files. This resulted in a corpus of 241 thousand words made up of 259 documents. Finally, the corpus was lemmatised by the use of PSI-Toolkit tools (Graliński et al. 2013) resulting in a corpus of 13,000 unique words.

### Analysis

The analysis was conducted in the following steps (described in detail below):

1. Identification of collocation for the term *life* (Polish: *życie*).
2. Analysis of semantic preference for the term *life*.
3. Analysis of concordances in a selected group of collocations:
  - a. Classification of concordance into one of two domains: religious or secular.
  - b. Classification of concordance due to communication activity: criticising, instructing, or describing.
  - c. Analysis of quantitative relations between domains and communication activities.
  - d. Qualitative analysis of concordance for selected types of communication activities.

In the first stage, collocations for the term *life* were identified. Here, collocation is understood as "more frequent than random co-occurrence of two words within a pre-defined range" (Gabrielatos & Baker 2008). Discourse analysts assume unconscious interference of diverse meanings related to the cumulative effect of previous contacts with a given word or a collocation (Gabrielatos & Baker 2008) and therefore use collocation analysis as a starting point for further, more in-depth analyses of corpus data (cf. e.g. Freake et al. 2010, Forchtner & Kølvråa 2012). This choice was dictated by the richness of the material studied (1176 occurrences of the term *life*), which required analysis at a more general level, allowing me to see general patterns, which led to more nuanced analyses. Collocations were identified using the AntConc program and MI statistics (Anthony 2014). The list of collocations was generated within the window of three words to the right and left of the term *life*. Statistical relevance was assessed with the t-test ( $\alpha < 0.005$ ) and five as a minimum number of co-occurrences.

After determining the list of collocations, I carried out an analysis of semantic preference, i.e. the tendency of a specific lexical unit to frequently co-occur with a series of units belonging to one semantic field (Salama 2011). Following this, I reconstructed thematic groups and ascribed individual collocations to them. I aimed to identify groups with an average level of generality so that they could preserve the specificity of the individual collocates while avoiding large fragmentation. The classification into thematic

groups was based on the collocates themselves, and only in cases of doubt did I refer to text usage. Function words were excluded from the analysis of semantic preference. After classifying the collocates into individual semantic groups, I carried out a quantitative analysis of interrelations within the groups, as well as between them.

The next stage was focused on the analysis of concordances for collocates related to secular life. This choice was dictated by the tension concerning the involvement of the Catholic Church in secular life in Poland. I expected that an in-depth analysis of the concordances of this particular group would allow me to reconstruct the position assumed by the Catholic Church regarding the lives of Poles. The first stage of the analysis was the classification of concordances into one of the two domains: secular or religious. Singling out such domains was also due to the tension between the high level of Poles' religiousness described above and their lack of acceptance of the Church's interference in secular life. When classifying concordances, I decided that only concordances of a clear religious nature should be included in the religious domain. In the second stage, I divided the same concordances according to the type of communication activity. I distinguished three types of such activity: Criticising, instructing, and describing. In this case, too, the distinction of such domains was dictated by the tension which was clearly expressed in the opinions of Poles: from frequent religious practices and acceptance of the presence of the Church in public space to aversion to opinions expressed by the Church on non-religious topics such as social life or sexual life. When categorising specific concordances, I employed linguistic markers to identify criticism and instruction. These included:

- Criticism: references to deficiency or excess (e.g. *lack of, too often*), expressions related to conveying fear (e.g. *our concern is*), and the use of negative adjectives (e.g. *unfriendly, unfavourable*).
- Instruction: use of imperatives, modal verbs (e.g. *must, may*), and verbs indicating the necessity of action (e.g. *need, expect, ought*).

I first sought criticism then instructing, and in the case of their absence, I considered a given example a description. Next, I analysed the quantitative relationships between domains and communication activities. At the final stage, the examples in which criticism or instructions were expressed were subjected to a further detailed analysis leading to the identification of the addressee of the criticism/instructing and their subject.

## Results

### Semantic preference

The term *life* in the examined corpus collocates with 246 words, 139 reaching the statistical significance of less than 0.005. After excluding function words (such as *and, in, to*) I retrieved a list of 73 collocates, which in total co-occurred 1588 times with the term *life*. These collocates were further analysed for semantic preference (Stubbs 2005). On this basis, I identified seven main semantic groups:

1. religion (*consecrated, eternal, society, priestly*),
2. secular life (*daily, matrimonial, personal, public*),
3. quality (*style, meaning, field, testimony*),
4. action (*save, introduce, defence, sacrifice*);
5. values (*dignity, value, truth, love*),
6. stage (*conception, death, day*),
7. subject (*human* (adj), *person, human* (n)).

All the examined collocations referred to the human being, which indicates a discursive construction of life as something exclusively concerning people. This is also confirmed by the collocates in the *subject* category. Life is also constructed as divided into stages, can be the subject of various activities from defence to sacrifice, and is also subject to evaluation in terms of its quality and with regard to certain values.

The quantitative distribution of the term *life* with collocates from each category is presented in Figure 1:

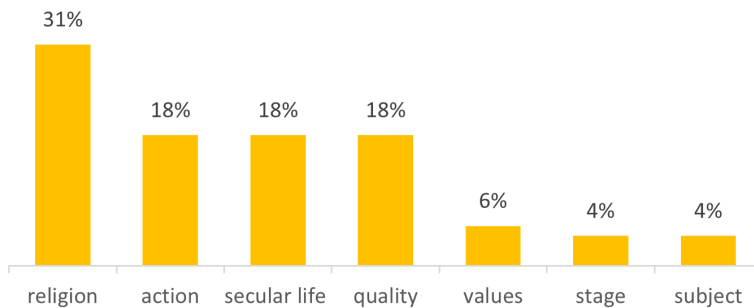


Figure 1: Semantic preference of term life

Slightly less than 1/3 of the examined cases refer to life in a religious context. This may point to the domination of the topic characteristic of the examined discourse, but it may also indicate that life is reduced to its religious character. A more comprehensive picture is provided here by dividing collocates from this category into two dimensions: institutional with examples such as *consecrated, association, priestly, institute, Church*, and spiritual (e.g. *eternal, vocation, holiness, spiritual, God, divine, faith*). The quantitative distribution of the collocates of term *life* in these dimensions is presented in Figure 2.

Collocates from the first category can be treated as indicators of the subject-specific to the discourse under investigation, while those from the second category can be seen as shifting focus to the religious dimension of life. The relatively equal distribution between both these dimensions does not permit to point to the domination of any of these dimensions. It is, however, worth noticing that in this discourse database, one in six occurrences of the term *life* is related to the institutional Church.

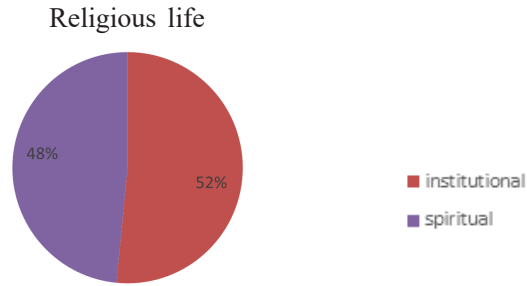


Figure 2: Distribution of the collocates of word life in institutional and spiritual dimensions

Another group is formed by collocates concerning secular life. This group includes both collocates referring to life in a very general way, such as *everyday* or *personal*, as well as those concerning family life (*family*, *marriage*) and those indicating interest in social life (*economic*, *political*, *public*). Their quantitative distribution is shown in Figure 3.

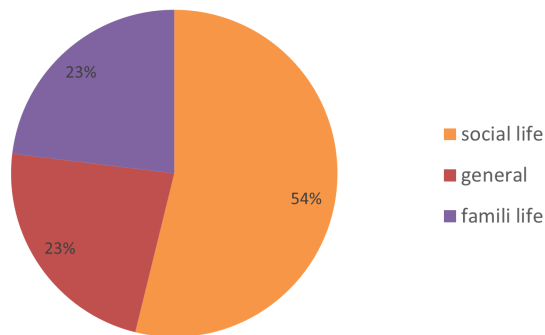


Figure 3: Distribution of collocates concerning secular life

It is worth noting that in more than half of the cases, the focus is on social or political life. This is particularly interesting given the previously discussed negative perception of the Church's involvement in the public sphere of Poles' lives. The analysis of the collocates alone, however, still has not allowed me to decide unambiguously whether it is rather explaining social life from a religious perspective or a direct involvement in this life and attempts to influence it. A clearer picture emerges from the concordance analysis for all the occurrences of term *life* with secular collocates.

In the discourse under study, secular life is mentioned both in its religious and non-religious context. In the first case, there are primarily indications of how the faithful should behave in public life e.g. *Let us be his witnesses at home, but also in public life. The world has the right to see Jesus' followers, who have met Him personally and live with Him every day in great intimacy*<sup>3</sup>. The emphasis is placed on bearing testimony to

<sup>3</sup> Due to linguistic differences, some translated examples may not include the word *life*. For the sake of clarity in the English translation, I prioritized fluency over strict word-for-word accuracy

one's faith and acting as a witness to it, which shifts the focus from the private to the public sphere.

It is striking that it is the latter, non-religious group that prevails in the official statements of the Polish Episcopate. The exact quantitative distribution of concordances is shown in Figure 4.

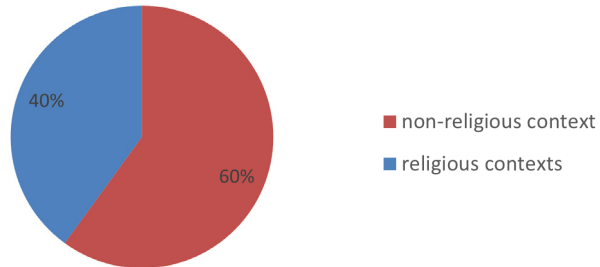


Figure 4: Distribution of contexts for secular life

In the attempts to answer the question how the Catholic Church positions itself in relation to the life of Poles, the way in which it talks about secular life is of vital importance. The passages quoted above suggest that not only does the Church describe or explain social life, but also criticises it or gives instructions concerning it. This assumption is confirmed by quantitative data (Figure 5).

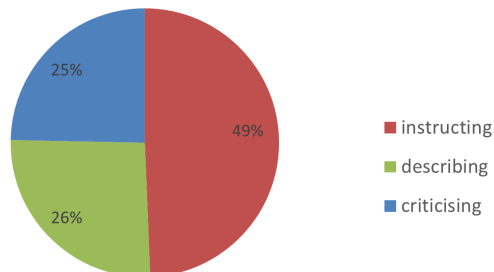


Figure 5: Distribution of communication activity

Nearly half of the statements analysed are various forms of instructions, ranging from strong imperatives (1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural, e.g., *Be witnesses of Love in social life!*) to more subtle advice (e.g., *It is worth considering what areas of our personal lives we can bring more order and clarity into*). Most of these instructions neither specify who is giving them nor identify the intended audience, thereby conveying a sense of universality (e.g., *There needs to be a deep understanding of the principle of Christian obedience throughout our social life*). Therefore, in statements about secular life, the attempts to influence the shape of that life definitely prevail (75 per cent). Only every fourth statement is of a descriptive nature (e.g. *in this way, the leaven of God's grace enters the great bygone cultural, economic, and political life in the world (..)*).

In the light of this prevalence of instructing and criticising statements, the question emerges: who is the subject of this criticism, who is the intended recipient of the instruc-

tions, and what exactly is the focus or object of both the criticism and the directives. Among the addressees of the criticism, I have distinguished six groups:

1. Politicians: *We therefore share the concern about the quality and style of political life in our country.*
2. Society at large: *We see many worrying manifestations of social life around us: egoism, greed, and rapacity.*
3. We: *In our professional and personal lives, we have too often behaved in such a way and made decisions as if we doubted that love should be the most important motive for our actions.*
4. Unspecified subject (unknown *they*): *We see a clear campaign, a whole strategy for eliminating God from the lives of nations, societies, and people's consciences.*
5. Social phenomena such as secularisation and alleged aggression against the family: *Undoubtedly, a huge challenge for religious people is the galloping secularisation processes, which attempt to reduce people solely to the material level and to relegate religion to the margins of social life or to confine it entirely to the private sphere.*
6. Others, such as families, young people, secularised people, you: *Our families are experiencing confusion and doubt about the fundamental meaning of marriage and family life.*

The quantitative distribution for the individual addressees of the criticism is shown in Figure 6.

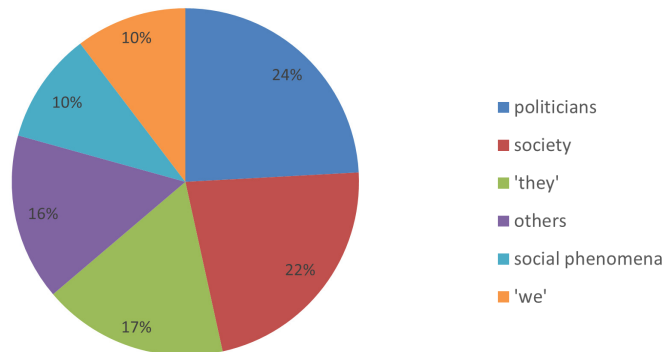


Figure 6: Distribution of criticism of different addressees

Every fourth criticism (14 out of 58) is directed at politicians. It concerns only the secular dimension of life, and it appears in statements with collocations classified as belonging to social life (the vast majority) and family life. The subjects of criticism are not directly related to the Church. Let us take the example of political culture (e.g. *using the structures of public life, and especially the institutions of the state for individual or group benefits, is a denial of properly understood politics*) or the social situation in Poland (e.g. *Given these painful phenomena in our social life, the question arises: are we helpless against evil?*). However, there is also criticism concerning the attitude of politicians towards the Church (e.g. *it is not uncommon for us to encounter manifestations of hostility towards Christ, His Gospel, and the Cross, as well as attempts to exclude the*

*Church from public life*). Thus, in the discourse under study, there is both the prospect of defending one's interests or position and of caring for the common good.

The next most frequent group (13 out of 58) comprises critical statements, which do not directly identify the addressee of the criticism, even though the criticism always concerns phenomena that feature a doer. In the following case, the criticism is more directly related to the religious sphere because it concerns the removal of religion from public life (e.g. *When anyone tries to remove Christ from public life and wants to build a Europe without Christ, it has to be said with truth and for the sake of Europe that it would be building on sand*). Without a clear indication of those responsible, the violation of "the right to life" is also criticised (e.g. *Bishops sympathise with communities, including the media, which consistently defend the inviolable right to life, even at the price of unjust accusations and sentences*).

As shown in Figure 6, every tenth critical statement is self-critical (6 out of 58). However, this is never a criticism of the representatives of the Church itself. The *we*-subject of these statements is always inclusive and concerns both speakers and listeners. This criticism appears in statements with collocates from the social field as well as those of a general nature. It concerns certain lifestyles (e.g. *The difficulties of everyday life meant that, although we were constantly experiencing many graces, our prayers were more often pleading than thankful*) as well as our attitude towards the family (e.g. *In social, economic, and cultural life, we allowed the family and its rights to be ignored*). Thus, here as well, what is being criticised is not directly related to religious practices or attitudes towards the Church pointing again to the discursive involvement of the Church in social life in Poland.

The target groups of the Church's instructions are not very different from the groups which are criticised:

1. We: *let us be His witnesses at home, but also in public life.*
2. Politicians: *We are concerned that those responsible for shaping our social and political life are guided by concern for the common good (...).*
3. The family: *Above all, it encourages us to see the presence of God in the everyday life of the family (...).*
4. Other groups such as members of church movements, employers, and representatives of certain professional groups such as teachers.
5. Not specified (...) *faith should have consequences for society in the wider sense.*

There is, however, a clear difference in the quantitative distribution of the instructions (Figure 7).

Slightly more than a third of the instructions are formulated in the first-person plural (*we*). As in the case of criticism, it is an inclusive *we*, concerning both speakers and listeners (in this case, however, there are two exceptions<sup>4</sup>).

Among the actions that are the subject of self-instructions, many are directly linked to religion. These include following Christ (e.g. *we are called to obey His calls and to follow Him in our personal and social lives*), witnessing to the faith with life (e.g. *we*

<sup>4</sup> (1) *they are waiting for the sacraments of which we are the ministers,* (2) *They await the testimony of our personal life, our faith.*

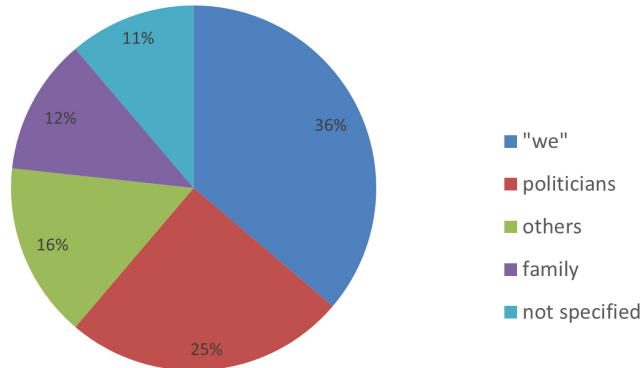


Figure 7: Distribution of instructions for different addressees

are called to be witness to the Gospel of salvation in our daily lives), with particular emphasis on witnessing in the public sphere (e.g. *Let us be His witnesses at home, but also in public life*). There are, however, also matters that are not directly related to the religious sphere, namely:

- the protection of “the unborn life” (*On the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we face common tasks: protecting life, marriage, and family*),
- specific actions related to the family (*This creates an opportunity for us to reflect on topics that are important for every Christian family, and also because of the nature of family life, important for every family*),
- attitudes in conformity with specific values (*An important task today is to develop the imagination of mercy, which allows us to see new opportunities for the realization of grace around us*).

Politicians are the second most frequent group of instruction addressees. Every fourth instruction appearing in the studied material addresses them. These instructions take only two forms:

- imposing standards (e.g. *The government should strengthen the position of families, and improve the level of health care for women and girls*),
- indicating expectations (e.g. *however, we expect people and institutions responsible for the shape of political, social, and economic life to take effective action*).

It is worth noticing that in both cases these are indirect forms of instructions. The thematic scope of these instructions is also different. While self-instructions were largely linked to religious life, instructions addressed to politicians have no link to religion. They relate to three main thematic areas: the defending of “the conceived life” (e.g. *an important task is to take action to promote the right to life of all conceived children, as well as effective family policies*), ensuring an appropriate standard of living for the citizens (e.g. *we expect people and institutions responsible for the shape of political, social and economic life to take effective action so that Poles can find decent conditions for work and life above all in their homeland*), as well as to acting by a specific catalogue of principles (not necessarily of religious nature) (e.g. *according to bishops, all aims of social and political life must be achieved using always morally good means*).

Every tenth instruction touched upon the family. These instructions adopt forms similar to self-instructions, such as suggestion<sup>5</sup>, imperative<sup>6</sup> and indicating the norms explicitly<sup>7</sup> and implicitly<sup>8</sup>. Thematically, however, issues related to religious life prevail here, such as the performance of certain religious practices (e.g. *Celebrating Sunday in the family may give rise to specific attitudes in the family's daily life*) or adopting a certain attitude towards God (e.g. *Above all, it encourages us to notice the presence of God in the everyday life of the family*). The only subject not related to religious life was participation in social life (*let us ask the question: how does every family participate in creating bonds of social life?*). Additionally, no guidance regarding family relationships<sup>9</sup> or the ways in which members should treat one another was observed.

### Discussion

In my research, I sought to investigate the position that the Catholic Church in Poland assumes with regard to the religious life of Poles, their private life, as well as social and political life. Based on the results presented above, three positions can be indicated:

1. a somewhat involved observer of the religious life of Poles
2. a religious guide in private life
3. an authority deeply engaged in social and political life.

The initial mode of self-positioning by the Catholic Church becomes apparent upon a preliminary analysis of collocational patterns: one in every six collocations has a religious character and refers to spirituality, which in the official discourse of a religious organisation can be considered relatively low. The Church's positioning of a somehow involved observer was also visible in the analysis of concordances concerning secular life: less than half of them relate to the religious dimension of this life. Only slightly more than a third of the instructions refer to the community of believers (the collective we). In this case, too, the emphasis is often placed on bearing witness to one's religiousness in the public sphere. In addition, only one in ten of the criticisms examined concerns members of the Church (the collective we). This criticism also does not directly concern religious practices or spirituality.

In relation to the private life of Poles, the Church takes the position of a guide in the religious dimension of this life. The instructions addressed to the family are mostly related to widely understood religious practices. Also, the focus of statements concerning everyday life is on the religious life. The fact that all statements about private life are instructions underlines the taking of the role of a guide.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. *Above all, he encourages the recognition of the presence of God in the everyday life of the family.*

<sup>6</sup> E.g. *We appeal to parents: be present in the life of children and young people.*

<sup>7</sup> E.g. *The vocation to be wife and husband, mother and father sets absolute limits to all professional and social involvement.*

<sup>8</sup> E.g. *The right form of celebrating can save and restore full dignity to family life.*

<sup>9</sup> With one exception for the relationship between parents and children: *we appeal to parents to be present in the lives of children and young people.*

The last position taken by the Church starts to be apparent at the level of the analysis of collocations: every fifth collocate concerns secular life, and half of the collocates related to secular life concern social and political life. This trend is also confirmed by the results of concordance analysis: 60 per cent of all statements with collocates classified as social are related to the secular dimension of life. Thus, when the Church's discourse tackles social life, these statements relate to its secular dimension and are devoid of references to religion or spirituality. The interest in political life, on the other hand, is indicated by the fact that one in four of the instructions analysed and one in four of the critical statements address politicians. Given the religious nature of the texts examined, which include pastoral letters read at mass instead of homilies, such a share of social issues and those not directly related to religion or spirituality seems significant. The fact that almost half of the statements produced about it are instructions and a quarter are criticism is proof of the Church positioning itself as an authority in this domain. Thus, the vast majority (74 per cent) of statements concerning social life are made from the standpoint of a superior, a position of a subject that has the right to instruct, criticise, and impose norms. This position can also be dubbed, as Graff (2010) puts it, a manager of the values.

Each of the above-mentioned tendencies is reflected in the views of Poles, as well as their attitudes towards religion and the Church. Low interest in the spiritual life and religious dimension of secular life is visible at a similar level of interest in these aspects of religion among Poles. Most Poles have a secular approach to religious holidays and rituals and do not understand their symbolism and meaning. This applies, for example, to a completely secular way of celebrating the sacrament of marriage, a lack of understanding of the symbolism of Easter celebrations, or a lack of understanding of the meaning of Confirmation rites declared by the confirmed themselves (Baniak 2007). The low level of interest in religiousness is also evident in the relatively low acceptance of Catholic dogmas; for example, as many as 14 per cent of Catholics do not believe in the dogma of eternal damnation (Zaręba 2010), and nearly half of Poles declare that they are believers, but in their way (Boguszewski 2009). The absence of religion in the secular life of Poles is manifested, for example, by a fairly widespread acceptance of practices rejected by the Church, such as the use of contraceptives (68 per cent consider it acceptable or conditionally acceptable), premarital sex (71 per cent), permanent living with an unmarried partner (55 per cent) (Zaręba 2010) or same-sex partnership (42 per cent) (Scovil 2021). In addition, when faced with moral dilemmas, Poles prefer to be guided by their conscience rather than by the Church's guidelines (Zaręba 2010), especially in the case of married and sexual life. The prevailing opinion is that the latter sphere in particular should depend solely on the spouses themselves (Baniak 2007). Summarising his research, Zaręba (2010) highlights the tendency for references to God in everyday matters to diminish, which can be interpreted as a direct reflection of the disinterest in the spiritual and religious dimensions of secular life, as evidenced in the discourse analysed.

Poles accept the Church's position as a guide to the religious dimension of private life. This is evidenced primarily by the high rates of religious practices described above. What is more, more than 50 per cent of Poles perceive Mass as the fulfilment of their

duty to the Church (Zareba 2010), which suggests that the Church is perceived as an institution to which the faithful are obliged to do something and which has the strength to impose this obligation. A similar way of seeing the Church and its authority is visible in the statements of parents of children who are about to have their Confirmation. They regard this sacrament as ‘yet another rite to be fulfilled if “such” is the Church’s wish.’ (Baniak 2007).

Poles’ attitude to the Church’s focus on social and political life is ambivalent. On the one hand, the acceptance of the presence of the Church in the public sphere is widespread and constant: more than three-quarters of Poles accept the participation of Church representatives in state ceremonies (81 per cent), the consecration of public places, and buildings (78 per cent), the appearance of priests in public television (74 per cent) or the religious nature of the military oath (83 per cent) (Grabowska 2015). Public life is therefore considered to be a sphere to which the Church has access, while this presence outrages only a small proportion of the population (about ten per cent). Therefore, at this level, the Church’s discourse remains consistent with the expectations and views of Poles. The perception of the Church’s influence on political life described above also remains consistent with this trend (66 per cent of Poles see the Church’s involvement in politics (Adamczuk 2001)). However, despite the discursive focus on this aspect of secular life, there is a lack of consent among Poles for the Church to interfere in political life: let us recall the data already quoted above more than half of Poles are outraged by Church representatives commenting the laws passed by the Sejm, 84 per cent do not accept that priests should tell their faithful how to vote in elections (Grabowska 2022b), and 37 per cent perceive engaging in politics as a problem faced by the Catholic Church in Poland (Głowacki 2019). Thus, while the focus on social life is not questioned and is accepted, the focus on political life is a tendency that arouses quite widespread opposition among Poles.

## Conclusion

However, some reservations must be made about these results. First, the evaluation of semantic prosody was based only on collocates, without analysing the context in which they occurred. In some cases, therefore, this may have led to a different classification from the one that would have been made after having studied that context. Nevertheless, I believe that these are individual cases that do not have a significant impact on the overall picture resulting from this analysis. Secondly, in a concordance analysis, I have focused solely on the collocates categorized as concerning secular life at the expense of examining statements about life in religious or value contexts. I assume that the tension outlined in the first part concerning the functioning of the Catholic Church in Poland primarily concerns its presence in social or public life, i.e. the area of secular life. Therefore, the analysis of this very area of discourse about life allows for the most adequate reconstruction of the position that the Catholic Church in Poland takes.

These findings demonstrate how the Catholic Church in Poland constructs and sustains its authority through its discursive practices. They also reveal that the positioning of the

Church in life in Poland aligns with the social situation and is against the will of the majority of Poles. However, recent years have brought some signs of change in this social situation. The large-scale protest against harsh anti-abortion law (November 2020) had strong anti-church and anticlerical dimensions. The number of men entering the priesthood is crumbling: from 725 starting their education in seminaries in 2015 (Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna 2022) to 338 in 2022 (Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna 2022). Also, the percentage of students attending school-thought religion declined from 93 percent in 2010 and 70 in 2018 to only 54 in 2021 (Grabowska 2022a). There is also a significant drop in the number of people seeing religiousness as an important value to be taught by the parents: from 29% in 2009 to 16% in 2022 (Bożewicz 2022). Therefore, the above-identified discourses may be used to question and challenge this unwanted positioning of the Catholic Church, thereby supporting social change.

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