
HISTORICAL DETERMINANTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLE-CATHOLIC IDENTITY

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Abstract

Dividing social reality into ‘our in-group’ and ‘strangers’ is one of the fundamental dimensions of human existence. In human communities, the methods and criteria for distinguishing our own kind from others are of a cultural nature. They form a complex of historically shaped social and cultural features that define the specificity of a given group and set symbolic boundaries between it and strangers. A group looks for what is typical, similar and analogical or different and specific, distinguishing it from other communities. Due to the complexity of cultural phenomena and the fact that man belongs to many different groups, there are many ways of self-representation and self-categorisation of man. The elements that will be considered constitutive for a given group are the result of a combination of historical events (traditions) and contingent elements. The formation of group identity signs is therefore often the result of accidental events. The aim of the article is to analyse the formation of one of the most important components of Polish national identity, which is the identification of belonging to the national community with practising Catholic religion.

Keywords: national, identity, Poland, Catholic, religion

1. Introduction

In the public space we often encounter a semantic blend ‘Pole-Catholic’ which shows the combination of the dimensions of national identity and religion. Its sources can be sought in the complicated trajectory of historical processes taking place in the areas that make up the Polish state. The state that did not exist when modern states were created in Europe because, as a result of the partitions, in the 18th century the Polish lands were divided by three culturally different empires: Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian. The consequence – particularly visible in the identity dimension – was the fact that the Polish national movement intertwined with the Catholic religion. The relation of Polishness with the Catholic Church is special, and so it is treated as a mainstay of Polishness, and Catholic faith, tradition and rituals as a basic element of group identity.

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The aim of the article is to analyse the formation of one of the most important components of Polish national identity, which is the identification of belonging to the national community with practising Catholic religion. One of the Polish twentieth-century religious leaders, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, claimed that nowhere else is the alliance of the Church and nation as strong as in Poland [1]. In the case of Poland, religious identity and national identity seem to be inextricably intertwined. In the generalising mode, one can speak of a model a Pole-Catholic. Research conducted in Poland in the period of the enlargement of the European Union indicated that religiosity was regarded by the vast majority of the population (70-80%) as a typical Polish feature [2, 3]. Although tests verifying to what extent religious belief is currently regarded as a criterion of national identification showed that only a quarter (26.6% of the sample of an adult population) clearly identifies a Pole with a Catholic, it should be noted that at the same time Poles attach great importance to the cultural heritage of their nation, recognising concern for its maintenance as a criterion for acknowledging someone as a Pole, and Catholic religion and customs belong to the key components of Polish identity [4].

2. The identity of a ‘Pole-Catholic’

Catholicism is more than just ‘the faith of ancestors’, in Polish culture it is a kind of cultural archetype, which identifies group identity that distinguishes Poles from other nations, and especially from the Orthodox ‘East’ [5]. Catholicism is therefore a matter of national identity. It is commonly held that since the earliest times, there has been a close relationship between religion and the ethnic community, because religion has shaped the axiological system of the community [6], however identifying a Pole with a Catholic is a more complex phenomenon than it may seem. The strong politicisation of religious identity cannot be explained by the large number of Catholics in society or by the fact that for centuries the Church in Poland has been a strong social and political institution. It is rather a phenomenon that is a combination of historical processes that in the nineteenth century took place in the area of the Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth which until the end of the eighteenth century was divided between three powers: tsarist Russia, Prussia and Austria. In the article, particular attention is paid to historical and contextual factors, which largely determined the identification of Polishness with the Catholic religion and ritual. It was an extremely important element in the history of Polish statehood. The Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth, spreading over large parts of Central and Eastern Europe, was a multi-denominational state inhabited by Catholics, the Orthodox, Uniates and Protestants. However, the nineteenth-century nation-forming processes caused a significant reduction of the Polish political community by identifying national affiliation with following Catholic religion. Faith turned out to be an important group-forming factor, and in many cases the choice of religion was at the same time a declaration of belonging to a nationality.

In the case of Poland, three elements were the most important for intertwining of national identity with religious denomination. First of all, these were some universal macro-level conditions characteristic of nation-building processes in Central and Eastern Europe. In the case of this area, the formation of nations was influenced not so much by the French tradition of Enlightenment thought with the concept of citizenship and political and historical community, but rather by German romantic tradition emphasising the dominant role of culture in the processes of the formation of the nation which is primarily a cultural and historical community. Secondly, historical circumstances connected with the loss of Poland's own statehood and the lack of political (institutional) frameworks for nation-building processes. The necessity to compete with emerging nationalism of other communities, and above all the rivalry with Russian ethno-nationalism and German *kulturkampf* were especially important here. This element seems immensely interesting from the point of view of Polish national identity. And thirdly, it is related to the part that the Catholic Church played in nation-building processes in Poland, which contributed to the consolidation of the belief that the Catholic Church was the basic institution (in the absence of its own statehood) that played a key role for the formation of Polish national identity and the survival of the Polish nation.

3. Nation-forming processes in Central and Eastern Europe

The creation of nations is the result of long-lasting historical processes, but in its present form nations and national ideologies are a relatively young phenomenon. An impulse for their formation became above all events taking place at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries associated with the modernisation processes caused by the French Revolution and the industrial revolution. It was the epoch described as modern that was a period of rapid development of nations and national ideologies (nationalisms). Analysing the relationship between religion and national identity, it should be remembered that in the case of Western European societies, the modernisation process was accompanied by the secularisation of society and the narrowing of the sacred sphere related to religion. In addition, the changes brought about by the industrial revolution caused spatial mobility of people and a sharp increase in migration from the countryside to the city. This meant that, abandoning the local community and the world of primitive groups and personal relationships, more and more people moved to the world of formal and material relations. In such a world, the elemental human need of belonging to one's own community which gave a sense of being rooted remained unsatisfied. The disintegration of old social ties and the limitation of the religious sphere of the sacred created an empty space and thus conditions for the formation of a new type of bond connecting members of a particular type of community – the nation. In the context of the history of Western Europe, nationalism was an ideology fulfilling the function of a social binder, which chronologically took place after religion and competed to take its place. Unlike religion, which corresponded to the order

of the feudal world, placing God in the centre of social loyalty, nationalism corresponded to the conditions of industrial capitalism, making the concept of the nation the main reference point for group loyalty [7].

In the case of Polish national identity, the link between religion and national ideology resulted from the specificity of nation-forming processes in Central Europe that were different from the historical tradition of Western Europe. Paradoxically, nation-forming processes in Central and Eastern Europe were influenced to the greatest extent by German experience. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the ideas of the nation were shaped throughout Europe by the events of the French Revolution, Germany was in a specific situation. In the Reich, there was basically only the unity of language (though divided into dialects), which was the language of common, highly developed literature. There were common cultural traditions, but there were no truly common political and historical traditions. The unrest associated with social, economic and political changes created a specific climate in which romantic ideas favouring mysticism and emotional engagement over rational analysis in the assessment of the situation gained more and more popularity. The sense of being at a loss and alienated, as well as disappointment with the provisions of the Vienna Congress, caused resort to 'higher values', centred around the concept of *volk*. In the atmosphere of romantic mysticism, the main area of interest of the emerging national movement became issues of national character, identity to a great extent inspired by the philosophy of culture and history of Johann Gottfried Herder, whose views were strongly related to the political fragmentation of contemporary Germany [8].

Herder regarded the nation as the most important human community, a shaped-in-history pre-political community of unique culture expressing itself in the language [9]. Herder's views, as well as those of other German thinkers of the Romantic age, were shaped in opposition to the French concepts of the nation (*demos*) as a civic community formed on two foundations: *ius soli* and *patria*. The concepts of the ethnic nation and the political nation show two different ways of shaping modern nations. Friedrich Meinecke drew attention to this in 1907 [10] dividing nations into cultural nations – based on cultural achievements and state nations – referring primarily to the history of politics and, above all, to the constitution. As a result of these two different traditions and historical contexts we can talk about territorial-civic and ethno-genealogical, or political and ethno-cultural nations. Regardless of the fact that in each nation the dimensions of politics and culture are interwoven and together they begin to determine the content of national consciousness, each of these threads appears with different intensity in different communities. Some perceive their nation in an inseparable connection with the state organisation, others see it in politically independent dimensions of ethnicity and culture [11]. Poland's 'path' to the formation of modern national identity is closely related to the Central European ethno-cultural tradition. As a result of the dominant tradition of German socio-political thought, as well as the lack of state institutional framework, cultural factors started to play the main role in the process of shaping national

consciousness. At the same time, it was to a large extent strengthened by contingent external conditions, and above all related to the pressure from Russian ethno-nationalism and the fight of the Prussian state with Catholicism (*kulturkampf*).

4. Russian ethno-nationalism and the ‘Polish cause’

Some of the most critical moments in Polish history were the so-called partitions and the loss of sovereign statehood. The lands that composed the Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth fell under the domination of Austria, Prussia and Russia. Most of the lands of the former Republic of Poland were seized by Russia. The Polish population became a minority in a foreign country, an often discriminated group. The connection of Polish national identity and Catholicism was the result of strong external pressure from the dominant nations. The religious dimension took on particular importance in the Russian partition, in which the tsarist authorities pursued a policy of Russification of the ‘non-Russian’ population, and where Orthodoxy played the central role in the state ideology. The policy of Russification driven by Russian ethno-nationalism mounted the resistance of the Polish population supported by the Catholic clergy. Thus, Catholicism became one of the main determinants of patriotism and Polishness, perpetuating itself in the stereotype of a Pole-Catholic.

Russian ethno-nationalism is itself an interesting example of using religion to pursue political interests and build a state community. At the beginning of the nineteenth century under the rule of Alexander I, tsarist Russia reached the height of its military and political power. At the same time, however, the country faced problems related to the processes of modernisation caused in Europe by the French and industrial revolutions. Along with social changes, development of industry, education and culture, tsarist authorities, gradually faced the problem of modernisation of the country and the creation of a single socio-political space. Loyalty to the throne and the tsar himself ceased to be a sufficient binder of the political system of the multi-ethnic empire. In tsarist Russia, question fundamental for all multi-ethnic states appeared. What is the basis for loyalty to the political community if the inhabiting groups and communities refer to other signs of cultural identity? Are nationalities living in the same state supposed to be its co-hosts, or are only guests more or less willingly seen by the predominant national majority? Should we aim to create a nation-state composed of citizens of different nationalities or to recognise the dominant cultural and ethnic nation as the sole owner?

The first signal pointing to the fact that the Russian political elite was beginning to comprehend the importance of the problem were the activities of the Minister of Education, Count Sergey Uvarov, the creator of the ideology of ‘official nationality’ expressed in the formula of ‘Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality’. The choice of Orthodoxy as one of the pillars of Russian statehood was dictated by both historical issues and problems related to the attempt to build a broad cultural and ethnic state community. From the point of view of

historical processes, Orthodoxy was one of the basic 'state-forming' factors of the Duchy of Moscow. In general, the Orthodox Church influenced the entire life of the majority of Balkan nations and Eastern Slavs. In practice, its activity was not limited to organising only a religious life. It also included various non-religious functions of great social, political and cultural importance. Orthodox religious worship among particular nations also fulfilled important integrating functions, influencing the formation of national self-awareness, giving sacred sanctions to rulers and in general to state authority. The Orthodox Church strengthened the institutions of the state and shaped the image of social and political life [12]. Its role in the state-forming process was particularly evident in the case of the Duchy of Moscow. The researcher of Russian history and culture, James Billington, even claimed that the support of the monasteries was an essential factor in the successful spread of Moscow's power to all of Russia. They united the country, inducing the people to overlook the unimportant feuds of the fragmentation period and to focus on higher ideals. The ideology of Moscow tsarism, which received its shape at the beginning of the sixteenth century, was entirely the work of monks [13]. Only thanks to the links with the Orthodox Church hierarchy, the Duchy of Moscow was able to gain an advantage over its competitors to power over Ruthenia – both other Ruthenian principalities headed by Tver and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – and to outline a programme of unification of all lands inhabited by Ruthenian Christians under its rule. The motif of 'gathering Ruthenian territories' became one of the fundamental political and ideological programmes underlying the first unification of Russia under the auspices of the Duchy of Moscow and later its expansion towards the west. The religious motif was particularly often used in political rivalry with the Polish Republic and was a permanent element of the Russian political tradition.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of nationalism, including the national revival of Ukrainians and, to a lesser extent, Belarusians. The ethno-national revival of Belarusians and Ukrainians forced the Russian elite to seek a universal state formula. The tsarist political elite had to face problems related to the development of the Belarusian and Ukrainian identities that could threaten the political cohesion of the state. The answer, which was proposed by the state elite, was the acknowledgment of the fact that the three Great Russian, Little Russian and Belarusian ethnicities come from a common ethno-cultural stem; they were united by common origin and common history, and by Orthodoxy as the most important binder of Eastern Slavdom. The idea of the common origin of Great, Little Russians and Belarusians was very functional. The 'fraternal' nations of eastern Slavs created a common powerful state which was an expression of their common strength and shared historical, linguistic and religious tradition.

At a certain stage in the development of Russian statehood, reference to Orthodoxy as the basic determinant of cultural and historical unity became, in the eyes of the elite, a very functional tool by means of which it was possible to pursue political interests. The Russian authorities used the tools available to

them to legitimise their internal policy (maintaining the cohesion of the empire) and to mobilise financial and human resources by referring to the idea of ‘the community of Eastern Slavs’. Thanks to this, Russian ethno-nationalism became not only a certain philosophical and political idea assuming cultural communion of all Slavs, but a specific geopolitical idea calling for the unification of Slavdom under the authority of Russia used by the tsarist authorities for political rivalry in the Central European space. In such a narrative a Pole-Catholic who was not only a traitor to Slavdom but also a ‘master and oppressor’ began to play the role of the ‘negative group’ of reference.

Particularly intense development of Russian nationalism took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time, two events shocked the Russian intelligentsia: the defeat in the Crimean war and the January Uprising. The Crimean War divulged the weakness of the state institutions, and the January Uprising revealed the difficulties resulting from the expansion of the Russian Empire and was perceived by the Russian socio-political elites as a threat to the cohesion of the state. Both of these events affected the socio-political situation in tsarist Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, including the process of shaping the Russian ethno-nationalist ideology. The wave of chauvinism, which accompanied the January Uprising and the defeat in the Crimean war, led to the evolution of Russian socio-political thought towards great-power nationalism. The mainstream of Russian national ideologies treated Roman Catholicism, regarded as the basis of the whole Western civilization, as a negative frame of reference. Roman Catholicism disrupted the unity of the universal Church, which became the first cause of the disharmonious, conflicting development of Western civilization. This development inevitably led to the revolution and to the triumph of soulless bourgeois individualism paving the way for ungodly socialism. In this approach, the essence of the ‘Russian idea’ became Orthodoxy – as uncontaminated universal Christianity, and at the same time as the most valuable cultural heritage of Russia and Slavdom. ‘Jesuit Poland’ was considered a traitor to Slavdom and a particularly dangerous enemy of Russia [14].

Russian national and political aspirations enforced the emergence of national identity among non-Russian subjects of the empire. The development of education contributed to the formation of the Russian intelligentsia, but the modernisation processes affected not only Russians living in the empire but also other ethnic groups. Communities threatened by Great Russian nationalism and the policy of Russification began to look for ways to defend themselves against the Russian version of ‘*kulturkampf*’. In a situation where tsarist Russia made the Orthodox Church the central point of the state ideology, the peoples threatened by Russian domination began to seek their own identity signs that were a specific exemplification of ‘identity of resistance’, was it Catholicism in the case of Poland, or Uniate rite in Ukraine, or Islam in the case of a vast majority of the Caucasian peoples (in the Caucasus Islam was largely a ‘anti-colonial’ reaction to the actions of the Russian-Georgian elite of the empire).

5. Prussian war with the Catholic Church (*kulturkampf*)

Similarly to Russian ethno-nationalism which for both Russians and Poles in the Russian partition made religion one of the basic elements of their national-state identity, Prussian Protestantism and its struggle against Catholicism (*kulturkampf*) were a combination of historical traditions and contingent factors related to the problems of internal politics after the unification of Germany. Just like in the Russian Empire, in Hohenzollern Germany, as a result of internal policy requirements, Catholicism became Polish 'identity of resistance' making the Catholic religion an important element of the national movement. At the same time, it should be emphasised that in the nationwide German context *kulturkampf* was not directly connected with the Polish issue. *Kulturkampf* was the result of overlapping cultural-institutional traditions of the Prussian state and problems connected with the process of the unification of Germany. *Kulturkampf* resulted mainly from the attitude of the Prussian state towards Catholicism as a threat to the stability and unity of the young German state, but in the Prussian partition the attack on the Catholic Church was simultaneously directed against the Polish language and culture. That is why the Polish interests and Catholicism combined. The identification of German-Prussian statehood with the Protestant tradition 'enforced' the identification of Polish identity with Catholicism.

Historically speaking, Prussian statehood was shaped in close connection with Protestantism and for a long period of time there was no room for other denominations and Churches. The Prussian duchy was a refuge for Protestants from all over Europe. On the other hand, Catholics were barely tolerated there, they were not admitted either to offices or to universities. During the Reformation, removing of all priests who would not accept the new principles of faith was assumed [15]. Breaking the monopoly of Protestantism in Prussia was taking place gradually with the connection of lands inhabited partly by Catholics (Silesian wars, partitions of Poland). The territorial expansion of Prussia in the eighteenth century brought large territorial gains to the Hohenzollerns with a population that was predominantly Catholic and Polish. The Prussian state, considering the acquired areas as an indispensable element of its political and economic existence, sought to ensure internal consolidation and external security. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Prussia's policy focused mainly on securing the supremacy among German states and rivalry with the Habsburg monarchy for primacy in Germany. At that time, nationality issues did not play a greater role, and internal policy was not focused on the elimination of the Polish element [16].

This situation changed, however, during the Spring of Nations, when nationality problems began to play an increasingly important role, the more so because the national movements born in Europe had an impact on Polish subjects of the Prussian king. Prussian policy towards Polish causes after 1830 became more and more actively negative with respect to Polish aspirations, which was the result of fears of the so-called Polish wave in Germany [17] but

also the effect of identifying the issue of German unity and security with Prussia and Protestantism as a 'German spirit'. That is why Polish nationality problems and the rivalry with the Catholic Church conducted under so-called *kulturkampf* coalesced.

It must be remembered that after the Congress of Vienna, the population of Prussia grew to about 15 million and it became a state with equal proportions of Protestant and Catholic inhabitants. To create a counterweight to the Catholic Church, Prussian King Frederick William III, as the 'supreme bishop' of the Protestant national Church, decided to combine two fundamental denominations: Evangelical-Augsburg (Lutheran) and Evangelical-Reformed (Calvinist) to strengthen the unity of the state and the position of Protestantism against Catholicism. Frederick Wilhelm III stressed that not interfering in the life of the Catholic Church was possible only if it did not disturb the Protestant character of the country [18]. Prussia was not only a state with a Protestant majority, but also its administration was controlled by Protestants. In the nineteenth-century atmosphere of ideological disputes about the unification of Germany and the strife between Prussia and Austria for political and military domination in the area of German states, views on the 'inseparable connection' between Protestantism and German nationality appeared in Prussia (Prussian theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher). It was emphasised that the aim of the Protestant Reformation was to achieve Germany's cultural and political unity. It was not possible to complete this process because of Rome's resistance and the final release from Rome was a condition for the success of the unification of the state and the German people (historian Leopold von Ranke). After the Congress of Vienna, Protestantism and the idea of creating a unified German state became strongly connected, this was related to the rivalry between Protestant Prussia and Catholic Austria that conjoined the problems of religion with German state identity.

The unification of Germany under the auspices of Prussia made the problem of the role and place of the Catholic Church in the German state particularly important for the Prussian political elites. A characteristic feature of Prussian conservatism was the conviction about the necessity of the absolute primacy of the state over the citizen, combined at the same time with the belief about the Protestant character of the Prussian state. German liberals, on the other hand, were supporters of a secular state with an anti-clerical attitude. They saw the guarantee of civil rights and freedoms in the existence of a strong state. For both these political trends, the Catholic Church was a centrifugal force that should be subordinated to the state. Moreover, due to the international situation, it was feared that the Catholic Church would act against the interests of the new state and demanded that it submit to the will of the authorities. Otto von Bismarck sought for the rapid unification of society and lands that became part of the Reich. The chancellor feared resistance of the Catholic Church. These fears were justified in so far as Catholicism found itself in a special situation during the construction of the Reich. The papacy was gradually losing its political position in Europe. The abolition of the Papal State deprived Pope Pius

IX of much of his authority. Striving to rebuild his position on the continent, Pius IX strongly opposed liberalism and secularisation of social life. He led to the convocation of the First Vatican Council, which adopted the dogma of infallibility of the Pope, acknowledging that he was the supreme jurisdictional power over the whole Church in matters of faith, customs and the leadership of the Church. Pius IX firmly resisted the vision of the 'Protestant Prussian state', which was to be spread over the entire Reich, defying the plans of the German chancellor seeking to make the Church dependent on state power.

Bismarck began an administrative fight with the Catholic clergy, called *kulturkampf*, leading to the enactment in 1871-1876 of laws and regulations directed against the clergy, depriving them of numerous rights and privileges. The main executor of *kulturkampf* policy was Adalbert Falk – the Minister of Culture and the drafter of the Church-political acts. *Kulturkampf* was supposed to be a means to the subordination of the Catholic Church, as was the case with the Protestant Church. The period of domination of *kulturkampf* policy was not long as it began to expire in the mid-80s, but its significance for German statehood was enormous. In the conditions of the unification processes of German states, the military victory over France and *kulturkampf* as a victory over Rome were symbols of the growing power of Germany, which after years of humiliation, under the aegis of Hohenzollern Prussia defeated its 'eternal' enemies and took its rightful place in Europe.

Protestantism became identified with German statehood, and Catholicism was treated as a threat to Germany's national unity. Due to the fact that the Polish population in Germany was in the vast majority of Roman Catholic denomination, the struggle against the Catholic Church was combined with the elimination of Polishness in a 'natural' way, the more so because the lands inhabited by the Polish population were entirely on the territory of Prussia, which made Protestantism one of the main elements of its state ideology. Thus, in the construction of the 'we' – 'they' opposition, the stereotypes of a 'German-Protestant' and a 'Pole-Catholic' were consolidated.

6. The role of Catholic Church in shaping Polish identity

Analysing the role of the Church institutions in shaping Polish national identity, it should be emphasised that it was primarily the lower clergy (especially in Silesia and Pomerania) that was involved in the national movement on the present Polish lands and played the most important role in shaping the Polish national movement. It should be highlighted, at the same time that the Church as an institution did not play an unequivocal role [19]. Generally speaking, the interests of the Vatican and the higher Church hierarchy did not always go hand in hand with the activities of the lower clergy, who were guided by the needs of the faithful to a greater extent. This was particularly visible during the *kulturkampf* period as well as the period of national uprisings, which took place in the area of the Russian partition.

The enormous significance of the lower Catholic clergy for the development of Polish national identity resulted from two basic phenomena. Firstly, it was related to the intertwining of religion with everyday rituals, such as saying prayers in Polish, singing church songs in this language both in church and at home. In addition – what is worth emphasising – Polish customs are inseparably connected with Catholic holidays: “Polish customs connected with religious holidays, Polish signs of religious worship, such as standards, flags, feretories, the atmosphere of the Polish Church, and finally the principles of the faith that arouse conviction about the settlement of earthly matters by impalpable spheres, i.e. by God (...)” [20]. The Church played an integrating role, which was possible because the liturgy was held in the Polish language, and the fact of persecuting the Church (or obstructing its activities) was particularly important, especially in the Russian partition.

Secondly, the success of the Polish national movement could only be guaranteed by mobilising social resources, i.e. those that covered all social strata. It turned out that as a result of the fact that the Catholic Church joined the national movement a sufficient critical mass was formed. It should be stressed that it was the involvement in this process mainly of the lower clergymen who, first of all, had a direct contact with lower social strata and, secondly and most importantly, were of Polish origin. The lower rank clergy knew Polish (as well as the official language), the language of the religious – Catholic group, which was the basis for the efficient fulfilment of the function of the priest. Miroslav Hroch emphasises the fact that the Catholic clergy could not regenerate, which implies that other members of the lower social classes could join its ranks, moreover “(...) it is necessary to distinguish the social (and political) role of the lower clergy and of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which stood by the side of the ruling classes wherever the religion it represented was a state religion” [21]. During national agitation, national discrimination was linked with religious discrimination of Catholics. The clergy played the greatest role in Silesia and Pomerania that is where the landed and intelligentsia tradition was much weaker. At the same time, it should also be noted that the progressing secularization of European states, and in particular the separation of secular power from religious power meant that the position of the Vatican on the international arena in the nineteenth century was not too strong, to which Prussia’s fight for a secular state largely contributed. That is why Prussian politicians often used the argument about the Vatican’s involvement in the Polish cause, despite the fact that it did not show much interest in the fate of Poland and Poles. Germany’s fight with the Church ended in the early 1880s, and by that time the Archbishop of Poznań had supported the rights of the Polish nation and opposed the policy of *kulturkampf*. It should be emphasised that Polish society was convinced that the Church as an institution protected its rights and advocated the defence of national values, which was in a sense identified with the defence of the principles of faith. The Prussian administration which disseminated the opinion about the role of Catholicism and the Catholic Church in defence of Polish nationality contributed to this conviction.

7. Conclusions

To put it simply, it can be said that Catholicism in Poland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was in a state of constant threat to nationality and religiosity, and at the same time was treated as asylum. Already in the eighteenth century, during the beginning of the struggles for independence, the Pole became a Pole-Catholic, and Catholicism became intertwined with Polishness and became one of the dimensions of identity. We can observe the same process also among Polish diaspora [22]. The Catholic Church became the mainstay of Polishness, and the Polish language started to play a decisive role. The Catholic Church has also played an important role – continuing it since the partitions of Poland – in maintaining the romantic and ethnic idea of the nation. The concept of a Pole-Catholic has been reinforced by emphasising the fact of persisting in Catholicism despite communism, a Pole-Catholic has become a synonym of resistance against the oppressive communist system. At that time the equation of religiosity (and more precisely Catholicism) and nationality (Polishness) solidified. Communism strengthened the sense of messianism, manifested in the sustained myth of Poland exceptionally hurt by such and no other trajectory of history: Poland exposed to particular harms (partitions, World War II, partition in Yalta, communism imposed by force), chosen as a martyr of Europe, having to play (some) special (though unspecified) role in history.

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