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Political science of religion in Poland – genesis and reception of a new subdiscipline

Nowadays, the influence of religion on shaping the collective consciousness of societies, their systems of axiology, and, consequently, the functioning of individual states is often underestimated. This also applies to the Western civilization, where secularization processes are taking place. Essentially, the West adheres to an axiology rooted in Christianity, even though institutional religion is becoming increasingly weaker. One of the first scholars to recognize the impact of religion on the formation of national psychology was Gustave Le Bon (Le Bon, 2024: 128-133). An extremely important achievement of Christian civilization is the emergence of individualism and the associated principles of tolerance, as well as the cultivation of democracy and the establishment of an international system for the protection of human rights. According to Marek Piechowiak, this system originates from both Christianity and the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (Piechowiak, 1999: 263-265). The contemporary discourse surrounding issues of sexual minorities also has its roots in Christianity. Opponents of tolerance often cite passages from the Old Testament, while its supporters, though not directly referring to religious arguments, base their views on the principles of individualism, freedom, and dignity, ultimately drawing upon Christian thought. This significant divergence stems from the internal contradictions within Christianity and, consequently, the axiological system of Europeans. These dissonances arose because Christianity has been eclectic from the very beginning. One could say that elements of Judaism, Neoplatonic philosophy, and local religious cults were forcibly combined with narratives about the life and teachings of Jesus (Perszon, 2012: 228-247).

The division into major world religions became the foundation for theories on civilizational circles. The first scholar to distinguish them was Polish historian and librarian, Feliks Koneczny (Zieliński, 2019: 289-303; Koneczny, 2005). The mature – and at the same time popular – form of this theory was developed by Samuel Huntington, who explained the conflict between the Islamic and Western civilizations (see: Huntington, 2005). In the history of Western political thought, which can be traced back to Plato, issues of religion and belief have been widely discussed. However, this should be regarded as a pre-scientific reflection of a philosophical nature. According to Piotr Mazurkie-

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wicz, Plato raised questions about the influence of beliefs on how wars were conducted and how individual *poleis* were governed. Notably, the scholar paid particular attention to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who advocated for the creation of a secular religion (Mazurkiewicz, 2018: 114-122). The consequence of this idea was the introduction of the Cult of Reason (Fr. *Culte de la Raison*) during the French Revolution (Ostrowski, 2012: 209-223). Next, Mazurkiewicz examined the influence of religion on the thought of Max Weber, Ernst W. Böckenförde, Gerhard Lohfink, Robert Spaemann, and John Paul II (Mazurkiewicz, 2018: 126-134). He pointed out that contemporary scholars of the political science of religion have many distinguished predecessors. On the other hand, the researchers and thinkers he mentioned are primarily philosophers, theologians, or sociologists. However, the author did not pay much attention to those political philosophers who advocated the instrumental use of religion for governing society. This was the case, for example, with Thomas More in *Utopia* (Dubel, 2007: 162-166). Karl Marx should also not be overlooked, as he viewed religion as a means by which governments and the ruling classes exerted influence over the proletariat. It functioned as the so-called opium of the masses. As society transitioned to socialism and later to communism, religion was expected to be progressively abandoned by increasingly broader segments of the population (Łagosz, 2018: 235-255). This concept influenced some intellectuals and scholars who, from the 1960s onward, began to believe that, with advancing secularization, religion no longer exerted significant social or political influence. It is evident, therefore, that before the emergence of the political science of religion, many thinkers engaged with issues of religion and politics. However, this does not mean that they can be classified as scholars of the political science of religion.

Politologists, in essence, recognized the influence of religion on the phenomena they studied quite late. In 1947, two countries were formed in the area of the former British India – the Islamic Pakistan and the Hindu India. At that time, the belief that religion did not exert an influence on political phenomena in the modern world proved to be illusory. Other processes that led to the return of religious issues to political science discussions include, for example, the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the influence of the Catholic Church on the collapse of communism in Central Europe. Thus, only 50 years after the establishment of the International Political Science Association (IPSA) in 1949, a separate section focusing on the study of religion's influence on political phenomena was created within this organization. It was only in 2006 that a section dedicated to religion was established within the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). This situation was a result of the ideological dogmatism in social sciences in the West, where religion was excluded as a factor influencing the shaping of human beliefs and, consequently, the functioning of states (Jevtić, 2019). One of the stimuli that unlocked broader scientific discussions about religion in social sciences was José Casanova's thesis that the secularization of contemporary societies is superficial (Casanova, 2005). The relationship between politics and religion has been analyzed in many

different countries, particularly concerning the influence of fundamentalists on government actions. The origins of such research can be traced back to the 1980s in Yugoslavia, where Miroljub Jevtić published his first works in Belgrade. He focused, among other things, on the influence of Islam on politics in countries where this religion predominates. He is regarded as the father of the political science of religion. He is also the founder of the *Politics and Religion Journal*, which was the first in the world to discuss the mutual interplay between these two spheres. Currently, the editorial board of this journal includes researchers from the USA and the United Kingdom, which gives it a global character and prevents it from being limited to Serbia or the Balkans region (*Editorial team*, 2025). In the first issue, published in 2007, Jevtić included an article titled *Political Science and Religion*. In it, he stated that the political science of religion is a relatively young field, although beliefs have influenced reflections on the state since the dawn of humanity (Jevtić, 2007). It was only at the end of the 20th century that political science, as an academic discipline, developed a range of research mechanisms and concepts that allow for a detailed analysis of the influence of religion on the functioning of states and their authorities. In the text, the researcher defines the political science of religion as an academic discipline aimed at determining the mutual relationships between politics and religion (Jevtić, 2009: 537). Terry C. Marsh perceives it in a similar way. In his opinion, the concept of political science of religion refers to the discipline whose subject is to define the influence of religion on political institutions, processes, ideologies, but also its impact on the conflicts that occur in particular societies, states, and international relations (Marsh, 2007). A detailed review of Western monographs and articles devoted to the role of religion in international relations was carried out by Anna M. Solarz, who distinguished two periods: the 1990s and the time after September 11, 2001. After the September attack, there was said to have been an ‘explosion’ of works addressing and describing the issue of religion in international relations (Solarz, 2017: 9-35).

One should consider whether discussions on the political science of religion might not have originated from scholars associated with a particular church or religious denomination. In the case of Poland, the most significant influence would be the activity of the Catholic Church (CC), especially during the period of the People’s Republic of Poland or after 1989. There are many aspects of this activity that can become the subject of political analysis (see: Anusz, 1994). It is also worth noting that according to the provisions of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Church authorities addressed their relationship with governments. Additionally, statements were made regarding social and economic life, which included the Catholic Church in the modern discourse on the direction of the world’s development. Above all, such statements were included in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* (Kanon, 1965.12.7). Religious reflection on the functioning of states, as well as society itself, was primarily expressed in papal encyclicals. John Paul II included such reflections in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* – on the responsibility of state authorities for implement-

ing social justice in the context of the dominance of a free-market economy (John Paul II, 1991). However, the Catholic Church has not developed its own distinctly scientific political reflection. Nevertheless, there are clergy scholars who do not shy away from such considerations. It is worth noting the work of Father Tadeusz Jarosz, in which the term *ecclesial political science* is used. The author's intention is to somewhat separate from the political science of religion a distinct field that covers issues limited to the relationships occurring between the Church and the political authorities of the state (Jarosz, 2019: 66-68). However, the use of this term is isolated, and it must be stated that clergy scholars have not created a separate subdiscipline to study the relationship between the Church and the state.

The beginnings of Polish political science of religion can be traced to the interwar period. At that time, Leon Halban – a professor of law in Lviv – studied the ideology of National Socialism. As one of few, he focused on the religious elements within it (Michalak, 2020: 220). In Poland, he is primarily known for rebuilding the historical community in post-war Lublin and for being an active researcher despite his serious illness (Mazurkiewicz, 1960: 331-332). Halban, in his text titled *Religion in the Third Reich*, stated that the National Socialist ideology has much in common with religious mythology. He noted that it was pragmatically used by the party leadership (Halban, 1936: 6). However, it was Bogumił Grott from the Jagiellonian University who first introduced the term *political science of religion* in Poland. The beginnings of his research date back to 1992-1993, making him one of the global pioneers in this field. He analyzed the religious elements in the ideology and actions of the National Democracy movement, as well as the entire far-right during the interwar period (Michalak, 2020: 220). He is the author of several publications, including *Obóz narodowy a katolicyzm* (The National Camp and Catholicism) (Grott, 1979), *Religia, cywilizacja, rozwój* (Religion, Civilization, Development) (Grott, 2003), *Nacjonalizm chrześcijański* (Christian Nationalism) (Grott, 1999), and *Katolicyzm w doktrynach ugrupowań narodowo-radykalnych do roku 1939* (Catholicism in the Doctrines of National-Radical Groups until 1939) (Grott, 1987). However, his work from 1993, *Religia, kościół, etyka w ideach i koncepcjach prawicy polskiej* (Religion, Church, Ethics in the Ideas and Concepts of the Polish Right), should be considered the most important. It is regarded as one of the first works in the field of political science of religion (Grott, 1993). In the collective work edited by Grott, concerning Polish nationalism, it was stated that, directly or indirectly, it is connected with religious beliefs. This applies not only to Polish nationalism but, in fact, to the majority of them, such as Russian, Japanese, and the Western Ukrainian OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) (Grott, 2010).

Kazimierz Urban was also associated with the Kraków academic circle, having lectured at the Kraków University of Economics. However, it is important to note that his work was primarily of a historical nature. He focused on the history of Polish Orthodoxy after 1945. At the university, he conducted studies aimed at exploring the history

of non-Catholic churches and religious communities (Michalak, 2020: 220). His most important work is *Kościół prawosławny w Polsce 1945-1970. Rys historyczny* (The Orthodox Church in Poland 1945-1970. A Historical Outline) (Urban, 1996; see also: Urban, 1992). It later became an inspiration for historians studying the history of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAKP), such as Piotr Gerent (Gerent, 2007) and Stefan Dudra (Dudra, 2004a; 2004b).

Ryszard Michalak stated that in the 1990s, a Polish political science of religion environment was shaped under the influence of Serbian researchers, led by Jevtić. The works of Claus-Ekkehard Bärtsch, affiliated with the University of Duisburg, also had an impact (Michalak, 2020: 220). In a sense, the works of the Polish pedagogue and philosopher, Bogdan Suchodolski, also influenced the political science of religion. He paid attention to issues related to the formation of cultural subconsciousness. Michalak also attributes significant influence to researchers such as:

- Karol S. Frycz (1910-1942) – one of the first Polish geopoliticians, associated with the All-Polish Youth, who was imprisoned during the Second World War in a concentration camp for his political activities;
- Carl Schmitt (1889-1985) – a German lawyer specializing in constitutional and international law, but also known for his research on the legal relations between the church and the state, as well as for developing the theoretical foundations of an authoritarian state;
- Eric Voegelin (1901-1985) – a philosopher who lived first in Austria and later in the USA, focused on studying the influence of religion on the shaping of history and the emergence of separate circles of civilization;
- Leon Halban (1883-1960) – the previously mentioned Polish historian of law, who primarily focused on canon law (Michalak, 2020: 221).

It is worth noting that Polish studies on the history of law inevitably had to rely, among other things, on religious doctrines and the influence of canon law (see: Uruszczak, 2021). However, in a broader context, these studies did not have a significant impact on the political science of religion. A key element were academic conferences. They allowed for the shaping of the subject of study and for individuals interested in the influence of beliefs on the functioning of the state, as well as what is understood by politics, to get to know each other. The first of these was a conference organized by the Institute of Religious Studies at the Jagiellonian University (UJ) titled *Religie i Kościoły wobec władzy i idei politycznych. Historia i współczesność* (Religions and Churches in Relation to Power and Political Ideas: History and Contemporary Issues). Two sessions were held – the first in February 1998 and the second in December 1999. Grott was heavily involved in organizing both, thereby exerting a significant influence on the development of this new subdiscipline. Representatives from many academic fields participated in both symposiums, including religious studies, political science, history, psychology, philosophy, sociology, philology, and law (Michalak, 2020: 221-222). Thus, from the very beginning, the

new subdiscipline began to take shape, which also assumed a multidisciplinary character. The post-conference publications became the literature that should be considered the first in the Polish academic environment in the field of political science of religion.

Kazimierz Banek, based on the topics addressed by Grott, formulated the scope within which the emerging political science of religion should oscillate. However, it is worth noting that Banek is a historian of the history of religions. He is the author of numerous works on this subject, such as *Historia religii. Religie niechrześcijańskie* (History of Religion. Non-Christian Religions) (Banek, 2007), *Religia w świecie człowieka* (Religion in the World of Man) (Banek, 2011). He proposed the following topics:

- the relationship between secular power and institutional (so-called sacerdotal) religions;
- the influence of prophets, reformers, and other well-known religious figures on the development of society and state institutions;
- the influence of institutional religious cults on state politics, the shaping of international relations, and society;
- the sacred functions of secular power;
- the political functions of diviners, oracles, and prophecies;
- the issue of religious wars;
- the building of states or international institutions based on shared religious beliefs;
- the influence of religion on the shaping of nationalisms;
- the influence of religious ideas and their axiological systems on political parties;
- the systems of relations between religious organizations and state institutions;
- addressing issues related to the development of theocratic states and the shaping of legal doctrines under the influence of religion (Banek, 2001: 18-23).

From the content of the article in which Banek presented his proposals, it can be inferred that he was unable to move beyond the boundaries of a historian's field of study. In his suggestions, he relied on examples from history, ranging from ancient to modern history. It can be stated that the attempt to define the subject matter of the political science of religion was made, in a sense, by analogy to the scope of the history discipline. By the way, it should be added that the history of religion as a separate subdiscipline began to take shape at the beginning of the 19th century, just like the entire modern historical reflection. However, it is continued in relation to contemporary events (for example: Śmierzchalski-Wachocz, 2006). Elements related to religion are also important in the context of the history of culture (for example: Topolska, 2002).

The political science of religion as a separate scientific subdiscipline was ultimately developed in the first decade of the 21st century. The leading role was played by the research community associated with the Jagiellonian University, who consistently used this term. A significant factor was a series of academic conferences dedicated to the issue of the influence of religion on the functioning of the state and politics. Michalak highlights the following conferences:

- *Społeczeństwo-Państwo-Kościół (1945-2000)* (Society-State-Church (1945-2000)) – University of Szczecin in 2000;
- *Religia a konserwatyzm* (Religion and Conservatism) – Cardinal Wyszyński University in 2003;
- *Religia-Polityka-Mniejszości narodowe* (Religion-Politics-National Minorities) – University of Zielona Góra in 2008 (Michalak, 2020: 223).

It should be noted that initially the conferences addressing the relationship between religion and the state were more historical than political in nature. In the second decade of the 21st century, meetings took place that emphasized the connection between religion and politics in their themes. In 2017, a symposium organized by the Institute of Political Science at the University of Zielona Góra took place in Łągow Lubuski (Gierycz, 2017: 142-144). In November of the same year, the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University organized a conference dedicated to the direct relationship between religion and politics (Rutkowska, Tylka, 2017: 145-151). Based on these two examples, it can be concluded that as a result of evolution, the research field of the political science of religion has become more precise.

It is worth adding that after 2000, in general political science works, issues related to the influence of religion on the functioning of states, its institutions, society, and politics were increasingly discussed. For example, in the work of Mariusz Gulczyński, dedicated to an overview of world political systems, religion is one of the factors that shaped some of them. Gulczyński mentions religion not only in the context of contemporary theocratic systems (such as Iran) but also as one of the elements contributing to the shaping of the East Asian paternalistic system (Gulczyński, 2004). Also, in the work of Gulczyński, written together with Ryszard Zaradny, on the political system of the Republic of Poland, issues related to religion were discussed in the context of its relationship to the worldview order (Gulczyński, Zaradny, 2000).

After 2014, and especially after 2022, many publications appeared concerning Russia and its foreign policy. Some of the authors highlight the use of institutional religion in the official ideology of the Kremlin (Budzisz, 2021: 325-329). The theme of faith appears in studies dedicated to national minorities. In Zbigniew Kucz's work, the system of beliefs is one of the paradigms influencing the formation of the self-identification of minorities (Kucz, 1997; 2022). Religion has become one of the topics at symposia addressing the history and contemporary issues of the Lemko people, as well as other parts of the Carpatho-Rusyn nation, organized since 2006 by the Institute of Political Science at the University of Zielona Góra (Dudra et al., 2007). At the same time, more specialized publications emerged. For instance, in 2013, Anna Siewierska-Chmaj published a work discussing the issues in the relations between Christianity and contemporary political ideas (Siewierska-Chmaj, 2013). There have also been works dedicated to churches and minority groups. For instance, Dudra writes about the Orthodox Church (Dudra, 2019), Maciej Strutyński addresses the Greek Catholic Church (Strutyński, 2019), while Micha-

lak focuses on the so-called Reformed Churches (Michalak, 2014). Collective works are also emerging that directly refer to the term political science of religion in their title, such as the publication edited by Maria Marczevska-Rytko and Dorota Maj (Marczevska-Rytko, Maj, 2018). The influence of religion on politics and the functioning of the state is also discussed during the education of students in political science programmes. The names of the courses vary depending on the university (Michalak, 2020: 223-224).

An exploratory study was conducted to assess the presence of topics related to the political science of religion in Polish literature. A total of 31 textbooks and monographs on political systems and international relations, published after 1989, were analyzed. Only six works were identified that addressed this subject, with the earliest mention of such content noted in 2000 (Gulczyński, 2000: 151-158, 162-167, 215-245; Gulczyński, 2004: 240-276, 277-324; Zaradny, 2000: 59; Antoszewski, 2006: 18-22; Antoszewski, Herbut, 2006: 28-31; Bajor et al., 2023: 70-87). The results obtained, which can be considered representative of the general trend in Polish political science, indicate that the issue of the relationship between religion and power has long remained on the margins of the national academic literature, although it is gradually gaining significance. As Lubomir Zyblikiewicz stated in 2023: "Compared to the text [from the textbook – note by A.P.-W.] from 2005, the changes are significant. The place and role of religion in international politics and in politics within individual societies have changed. Perhaps even more so, the interest in religion among researchers in the field of International Relations and more broadly – political sciences – has increased. The literature has expanded and reflects a greater diversity of perspectives" (Bajor et. al., 2023: 70).

It is worth noting two publications that were released in January 2025. These are popular science books, but the authors used research methods commonly applied in social sciences, while also fitting into the popular current trend of reportage-style storytelling from a female perspective. Both books share the common theme of women, Muslim women, for whom religion dictates the rhythm of their lives. The first is *Córki chmur. O kobietach z Sahary Zachodniej* (Daughters of the Clouds. On Women from Western Sahara) by Lena Khalid (Polish woman connected to Western Sahara), which presents the lives of Sahrawi women, their traditions, culture, relationships with others, as well as their political struggle for the liberation of their nation (Khalid, 2025). The second is *Wybrałam Allaha. Polki, które przeszły na Islam* (I Chose Allah. Polish Women Who Converted to Islam) by Danuta Awolusi (popular Polish writer), in which the author explores the lives of female converts in Poland, their stories, choices, and daily lives (Awolusi, 2025).

Thanks to this kind of publications, the topic of the influence of religion, not only on individuals but also on the apparatus of power, is becoming more widespread in public awareness, which may lead to further research, this time conducted with more complex, interdisciplinary methods.

In political science, the influence of religion on authorities and the functioning of states began to be studied very late. In sociology, history, and even law, this influence was already recognized in the 19th century. This was due to the belief that spirituality was becoming obsolete. This statement was accepted *ad hoc*, despite many events occurring on the international stage and within individual states indicating that religion still plays a significant role in politics. A good example of this is, for instance, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran or the influence of Islam on the division of former British India in 1947.

A key figure for this subdiscipline is Jevtić, who in the 1980s in Yugoslavia began studying the influence of Islam on politics. He also created the *Politics and Religion Journal*, regarded as the first journal dedicated to this type of topic. In Poland, the precursor of political science of religion was Grott, a researcher associated with the Institute of Religious Studies at the Jagiellonian University. One might get the impression that, in the beginning, this subdiscipline was closely related to historical studies. This is evidenced not only by the research postulates formulated by Banek but also by the titles of some publications. Authors do not focus solely on contemporary issues but also describe the past, typically with a cutoff point at 1945. It was only in the 21st century that political science of religion emerged as a distinct subdiscipline. A significant role was played by scientific conferences, especially those organized by the Jagiellonian University, the University of Zielona Góra, and the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University. After 2000, the topic of the influence of religion on politics was increasingly addressed in scientific papers, though it still remained rare in academic textbooks.

Currently, political science of religion is an interdisciplinary field of study that encompasses, among other things, the relationships between religious institutions and secular power, the influence of religion on nationalisms, political ideologies, and international relations. Its development intensified after 2010, and its importance is growing in the context of contemporary political events and religiously driven conflicts.

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Abstract: The political science of religion is a relatively young subdiscipline of political science that examines the relationship between religion and politics. Its development was delayed by the dominant secularization narrative in the West, which marginalized the impact of religion on the functioning of states and societies for a long time. However, events such as the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979) and the collapse of communism in Central Europe underscored the necessity of incorporating religious aspects into political science analyses. A key figure in this subdiscipline was Miroslub Jevtić, who was among the first to systematically study the influence of religion on politics and founded the *Politics and Religion Journal*.

In Poland, the pioneer of the political science of religion was Bogumił Grott, who in the 1990s analyzed the relationship between religion and political ideologies. Initially, this subdiscipline was closely linked to historical research, as reflected in the research agenda proposed by Kazimierz Banek

and in studies that covered broad historical contexts. Stefan Dudra and Ryszard Michalak also contributed to the development of this field by exploring the intersection of religion and politics in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe. It was not until the 21st century that the political science of religion emerged as an independent field of study, significantly shaped by academic conferences organized by the Jagiellonian University, the University of Zielona Góra, and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University.

Today, the political science of religion is an interdisciplinary research domain that analyzes the relationship between religious institutions and secular authorities, the impact of religion on nationalism, political ideologies, and international relations. Its relevance continues to grow in the context of contemporary religiously motivated conflicts and dynamic socio-political transformations.

Keywords: political science of religion, politology of religion, international relations, nationalism, democracy, religion

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