

Article

Folk Religion and the Idea of the Catholic Nation in Poland as an Intellectual and Pastoral Heritage of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński

Arkadiusz Modrzejewski *  and Jakub Potulski * 

Department of Political Science, University of Gdansk, 80-309 Gdansk, Poland

* Correspondence: arkadiusz.modrzejewski@ug.edu.pl (A.M.); jakub.potulski@ug.edu.pl (J.P.)

Abstract: In the article, we present Polish Catholicism as an example of folk religion. As a result of a complicated political history, the Catholic Church became not only the depositary of Christian faith and morality, but also the mainstay of Polish national identity, shaped during the partitions in opposition to Russian Orthodoxy and Prussian Protestantism. It was then that Polishness became a stereotypical synonym of Catholicism. The stereotype of a Pole—a Catholic was consolidated. In Poland, as a predominantly agricultural country, folk religiosity was shaped, appealing to the sphere of ideas and emotions of the rural population or of those of rural origin settled in urban centres. This form of piety was reinforced by Polish Romanticism with its folk preferences. Romanticism, although often inconsistent with Catholic dogmatics, took root in Catholic circles. Its legacy is the messianism present in the Polish collective consciousness, which is also dear to many Catholic thinkers and clergymen. Poland, tormented under partitions, plagued by numerous wars, national disasters, betrayals, and harm caused by neighbouring nations, became an allegory of Christ suffering on the cross. This suggestive image appealed to the mass imagination of Poles, and the Catholic Church became its transmitter. The contemporary face of the Catholic Church in Poland was formed in the times of so-called real socialism, when the Church and its hierarchy once again became defenders of traditional Polishness and Polish national identity, opposing atheisation and the construction of a new identity based on Soviet models. For over three decades, the leader of Polish Catholicism was Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, who became a promoter of folk piety, including, in particular, the Marian cult. Through the massive mobilisation of Polish Catholics united by common religious practices, he successfully prevented the secularisation of Polish society that affected other communist states. That is why, forty years after his death, Wyszyński can be considered the architect of contemporary Polish Catholicism with its dominant ritual form of piety and a nationalist trait.



Citation: Modrzejewski, Arkadiusz, and Jakub Potulski. 2022. Folk Religion and the Idea of the Catholic Nation in Poland as an Intellectual and Pastoral Heritage of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. *Religions* 13: 946. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100946>

Academic Editor: Monika Mazurek

Received: 30 August 2022

Accepted: 4 October 2022

Published: 10 October 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords: folk religion; Catholic Church in Poland; Catholic nation; Stefan Wyszyński

1. Introduction

Nowadays, there are fewer and fewer countries and societies that can be described as Catholic. We see secularisation trends, especially in Europe. They also affect societies, e.g., Spanish and Irish societies, which previously showed strong identification with Catholicism. These trends have also appeared in Polish society, although dilatorily. On the one hand, this is certainly the result of the waning moral authority of the Catholic clergy, which strengthens the outflow, especially of the younger generation, from the Church. On the other hand, it is a trend that is part of the modernisation processes that began in the Enlightenment epoch. It was then that, along with the idea of a secular nation-state, a secular religion was born, which can be also defined as a civic religion. Modern nationalism has always been based on religious sensitivity and even the most secularised nationalists have imitated traditional ritualistic practices and theological forms (Hayes 1960). Therefore, it is pointed out that contemporary nationalism is best understood as a “civic religion” with

its own “fully developed liturgy” capable of determining how people see the world and their place in it (Mosse 1993, pp. 1–2). This “secular religion” has taken over all the social functions of traditional religion. Firstly, it has created a global picture of the world satisfying the human need to fit everything we experience into a meaningful whole, and secondly, it has ensured the connection of individuals in a community in the situation of transition from traditional to modern society (Moscovici 1985, pp. 355–57). Modern “secular religions” have developed their own rituals that have retained the power to integrate people on behalf of communities other than the community of believers, such as a nation, a class, and other socially constructed categories.

In the case of national identities, however, the strength of the rituals integrating the greater part of society was dependent on free access to public space, which was fed and controlled by the state. In this sense, the modern state colonised public space, introducing rituals sanctifying the nation as the most common and significant community that defined the common good. National identity was shaped through participation in this type of ritual. In the case of Poland, these processes took on a specific dimension. The modern history of Poland hindered the development of any rituals in the public sphere, except those related to religion. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the concept of the nation as a dominant community was formed in Western countries, Poland was deprived of its statehood and thus had no chance to develop a modern understanding of its nationality. The sense of national identity was based on a separate language and religion, that is, on ethnicity and religion and not on a politically organised nation (Marody and Mandes 2005, p. 61).

Poland was divided between Protestant Prussia (Germany) and Orthodox Russia; hence, the Catholic religion became a natural place for locating and building national identity. The church, which remained relatively free from Germanisation and Russification, was an important place of ethnic and national rituals. As a result of Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* policy, the link between nationality, religion, and the Church became firmly established (cf. Trzeciakowski 1990). The anti-Enlightenment dimension of Polish national identity and folk religiosity was strengthened by the nineteenth-century domination of the “romantic ethos” in Polish culture, which is still an important component of the Polish national imagination. Hence, Polish Catholicism is largely based on folk piety, which stands in opposition not only to secular civic religion, but also to intellectually deepened religiosity. Folk religion is literal, with its cult of paintings and sculptures, its manifestation of religious emotions, and its ritualised prayers. In Poland, historical experiences led to a kind of symbiosis of folk Catholicism and national ideology. After the Second World War, it became an idea that competed with the attempts to secularise society and create a secular socialist nation such as that of Soviet Russia.

The leading figure of resistance against the new communist ideology imposed on the Poles was Stefan Wyszyński (1901–1981), the Primate of Poland from 1948 and a cardinal from 1953. He is called the Primate of the Millennium. During the period when he was the metropolitan of Warsaw and Gniezno, there was the jubilee of the millennium of Poland’s baptism (1966), described by the communist authorities as the jubilee of the millennium of Polish statehood. Wyszyński exerted a profound influence on the contemporary face of Polish Catholicism and the position of the Church in Polish society. He is certainly the second most prominent figure of the Catholic Church in Poland, after Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II (1920–2005). That is why it is worth looking at his literary and pastoral achievements, thanks to which it will be possible to understand the nature of Polish Catholicism and its strong rooting in Polish national identity.

The aim of our article is to present the folk religion and the related idea of the Catholic nation in Poland as Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s intellectual and pastoral legacy. We treat his achievements as a religious, socially committed writer and preacher in a rather synthetic way here. The primate’s statements, to which we refer, will serve as examples of his attitude and ideology. Although Wyszyński obtained a doctorate in theology, he was not an academic; however, he was not an obscurantist either. He was certainly an erudite thinker who mainly relied on his own intuition and experience, especially his pastoral

experience. He dealt with many socio-religious issues in a pastoral way, not as a theologian or an academic philosopher, but as a practitioner, one might say from the perspective of practical theology (Kowalczyk 2018, pp. 117–18). In his views, however, he was very coherent and consistent. The most essential of his literary and pastoral activities were the issues connected with the Marian cult, which is the common denominator for his concept of the Catholic nation and the promotion of ritual piety, which is a fundamental component of folk religion.

2. Polish Catholicism as *Folk Religion*—Theoretical Perspective

The category of folk religion excites considerable controversy and disputes among researchers of the phenomena related to religiosity. Since Don Yoder's classic attempt to define the term "folk religion" (Yoder 1974) and Leonard Primiano's appeal to abandon this term in favour of using the concept of "vernacular religion" (Primiano 1995), researchers still have not been able to reach an agreement on the legitimacy of its use in research in the sphere of religiosity. The attempts made by Marion Bowman, who in the early nineties supported Yoder's proposal and the rehabilitation of the term "folk religion" and then gradually withdrew from this idea in favour of supporting the term "vernacular religion", as proposed by Primiano, are characteristic of these disputes (cf. Bowman 2004). The disputes over the concept of folk religiosity are part of the broader methodological arguments related to the study of religion as a social phenomenon and the construction of an adequate conceptual framework. Zygmunt Bauman pointed out that any attempts to define religion make it difficult to understand the phenomenon under study because they hide as much as they reveal. Defining comes down to replacing one phenomenon that cannot be expressed in words with another that is equally inexpressible. Therefore, Bauman suggested that instead of focusing on building definitions, we should, rather, concentrate on how the social mechanisms that produced and replicated these phenomena worked or work (cf. Bauman 2000, pp. 277–83; Bauman 1997, pp. 165–85). Bauman's position seems to go too far, as it is impossible to explain social phenomena without building an adequate conceptual framework at the same time, but the fact is that researchers of the sphere of religiosity point out that it is arduous to talk about universal features of religion, which causes the difficulties in theorising on this subject (cf. Beckford 2003, p. 41).

Generally speaking, contemporary researchers dealing with the analysis of religion more and more often support the rejection of the concept of "folk religion", emphasising that it is a controversial category which is hard to define unequivocally and which generates methodological problems (cf. Kapáló 2013), mainly due to the difficulty in defining "folk" and "folk culture". One of the Polish researchers dealing with the issues of folk religiosity in his works wrote directly that this was a concept that was one of the most unclear in terms of its content and scope (cf. Piwowarski 1983, p. 6). Without entering into detailed discussions about the terminological and methodological disputes, it is worth paying attention to the fact that the use of the term "folk religiosity" forces researchers to organise religiosity dichotomously as "high" or "low"; "deep" or "shallow"; "spiritual" and "intellectual" or "magical". According to Don Yoder's classic definition, folk religiosity is seen primarily as an amalgam of the remains of conquered ("pagan") religions that became "superstitions", mixtures of competing religious traditions (syncretism) and popular (erroneous) interpretations and simplifications of official religions (Yoder 1974). Such dichotomies do not seem analytically useful as their application implies the a priori assumption that there is a gap between official or institutionalised religion and folk religiosity. It should be remembered, however, that any official religion, any theological dogma, can only succeed and take root in social life if it is linked to structures of action that are sustained by personal religious experience. Therefore, the elements of "folk religion" can become stabilised articulations and forms of behaviour and expression of religious experiences. This means that what was historically considered a folk religion, or even a transgressive practice, might later be accepted as an integral part of the canonised religion. Folk religion is characterised by continual negotiation with those forms of religion that are experienced as received

and holy. Practices usually classified as belonging to folk religion draw our attention to the relationship of religion with magic, worship, and charisma. They are distinguished by openness and change, and the participants of these practices are engaged in constant negotiations regarding their solidity and relevance. Therefore, the dichotomous thinking that presupposes a clear separation of folk religions from institutionalised forms of religion cannot refute criticism.

In the case of Polish religious culture, Yoder's "classic" distinction becomes interesting for interpretation as the forms of so-called folk religiosity were strongly supported by the "official" Church and its highest hierarchs. What is more, one can even venture to say that the practices described as "folk" were officially sanctioned, even becoming the core of official Polish Catholicism as the dominant practices of experiencing and participating in religion. The institutional and hierarchical church can assimilate and institutionalise and then propagate the folk element, reject it as heresy, or have an ambivalent position towards it. In most cases, the Polish institutional church supported and promoted folk elements. Therefore, the features attributed to "folk religiosity" do not remain in the past but become an important element strengthening certain elements of contemporary religiosity. Some Polish journalists interpret this tendency as a sign of the reconstruction of the religiosity that contains some of the features once attributed to folk religiosity by the placing of these features in contemporary contexts (cf. [Zowczak 2008](#)). Researchers who have analysed the phenomenon of Polish Catholicism have always paid attention to the "folk" character of religious culture in Poland, and for many decades, the dominant view in Polish literature on the subject was that in Polish religiosity the folk type predominates (cf. [Piwowarski 1996](#)).

In the Polish tradition of research on the phenomenon of Polish religiosity, Stefan Czarnowski's publications are considered to be classics (1879–1937). Czarnowski was the organiser of the first scientific institution in Poland dealing with religious studies. In his research on religiosity, Czarnowski referred to Emile Durkheim's methodological propositions. Czarnowski was convinced that the content of religious phenomena and religious life is variable in various societies. He believed that the causes of religious phenomena should not be sought in some general, universal human nature, but in the nature of the societies, and the changes in them are conditioned by social changes. The relativisation of religion to a specific social community found expression in the category of "religious life". According to Czarnowski, folk and rural Catholicism are characterised by the following features: (1) religious nationalism—"A Pole is a Catholic"; (2) the socio-national character of religious worship; (3) the fusion of religion with everyday life; (4) naive sensualism mixed with magical ritualism—especially visible in the cult of paintings of saints; (5) the need for social status being met by religion; (6) traditionalism and ritualism—the knowledge of dogmatic truths is not important but ritual and ceremonial behaviours are; and (7) the high authority of the clergy. According to Czarnowski, the rural religiosity dominating in Polish religious culture was characterised by a parish, local, or territorial community created on the basis of religious worship, ritualism of a magical nature, and sensualism based on the everyday events mixed with them. Religious sensualism "also appears very clearly in the veneration of the images of saintly figures, which for our people are more than images" ([Czarnowski 1956](#), p. 99), and of the paintings, relics, and objects considered to be sacred. Czarnowski wrote that in rural (folk) religiosity, the spiritual reality merges with the reality of everyday, personal, and collective life ([Czarnowski 1956](#), p.101).

Jan Maria Bocheński was equally as critical about the nature of Polish religious culture as Stefan Czarnowski. When analysing the phenomenon of Polish Catholicism, he drew attention to its seven basic features: being static, sentimentalism, anti-intellectualism, tolerance, community, militarism, and patriotism. The basic element of Bocheński's criticism of Polish Catholicism was the conviction that Polish Catholicism was "static" because it was usually adopted thoughtlessly in the form of a collection of moral prohibitions and ritual orders on the basis of tradition. Its followers ignore basic dogmatic and ethical truths in favour of fanatical beliefs ([Bocheński 1993](#), pp. 112–14.) This Dominican philosopher emphasised the fact that Polish Catholicism had not worked out an original

theological thought, and in many issues, Polish Catholics were merely imitators of the West, often limiting themselves to the mechanical and indiscriminate rewriting of foreign ideas. Therefore, Polish Catholicism lacks an intellectual elite and serious religious literature (Bocheński 1993, pp. 119–20). For Bocheński, this lack of serious Polish theology was a testimony to the anti-intellectualism that is a typical feature of Polish Catholicism.

It is not only Polish researchers who have tried to analyse the characteristic features of Polish religious culture. One of interesting researchers was José Casanova, who, analysing the specificity of Polish religiosity, claimed that the peculiarity of Polish Catholicism was the Counter-Reformation structure of the religious beliefs and practices. According to Casanova, the most important features of Polish Catholicism are: (1) the public, mass, and sacral-magic nature of the religious rites; (2) a strongly centralised and hierarchical structure of the clergy, at the top of which there is the primate as the interrex and head of the Polish Church, which indicates a strong connection between what is Catholic and what is national; (3) the socially significant position of the clergymen who are perceived by society as mediators between the sacred and the profane; and (4) the strong Marian cult with a clearly represented pilgrimage movement focused especially around the Jasna Góra sanctuary (Casanova 1994, pp. 92–113).

In the Polish literature on the subject, the vision of “Polish folk Catholicism” presented by Stefan Czarnecki became popular. Later works referring to this trend, for example by Ryszard Tomicki (1981, pp. 29–70) or by Ludwik Stomma (1986, pp. 204–32), copied Czarnecki’s approach, focusing primarily on the analysis of the characteristic features of Polish religious culture that can be observed within the image of traditional peasant culture in the Polish countryside at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. These time frames were extended until the mid-twentieth century, but the reference point was always the model of traditional peasant culture, referring to a specific historical period and to a specific geographical area.

Almost all the researchers emphasised that in its pure form, folk Catholicism was present in the traditional rural religiosity that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, classic Polish scientific texts devoted to so-called folk religiosity referred to ethnographic and folklore materials mainly from the nineteenth century, including, primarily, the works of Oskar Kolberg and other folk scholars. This means that the researchers most often limited the category of “folk” to one social class—peasants—or to cultural features characterising the inhabitants of the traditional countryside. In this rather narrow, and at the same time very popular, sense, it is the religiosity of the rural people as an almost independent community with specific structural and cultural traits. Since the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation led to the fact that in Poland, as well as in Europe more broadly, there is no longer a peasantry understood in this way; folk religiosity, as a conglomeration of specific attributes created in the processes of adapting universal religion to the specificity of the life of an isolated agricultural community, is mainly in the sphere of historical analyses. Thus, this model seems to be too simplified, imprecise, and insufficient for the analyses of contemporary Polish religious culture. The attempt to reconstruct the worldview of nineteenth-century peasants living in small, self-sufficient, and isolated rural communities is, rather, a description of a traditional community and a traditional worldview, i.e., a premodern reality that is hardly congruent with the modern world.

At first glance, the category of “folk religion” seems to be obsolete in the contemporary analyses of religiosity in Poland due to the disappearance of the traditional peasant communities. One might think that the typical “folk” features of religiosity, such as the external character or connection with the agrarian lifestyle, cannot guarantee the durability of faith in new structurally and culturally changed conditions. Most Polish researchers in the second half of the twentieth century primarily tracked the disappearance of this type of religiosity or the changes it underwent in the changing conditions (cf. Piwowarski 1971; Pawluczuk 1972; Mariański 1984). At the same time, however, there were also researchers who pointed to the fact that the traditional patterns of religiosity, assimilated

during socialisation, might have been transferred to cities as emigration centres along with other elements of rural culture. In the 1970s, Polish sociologist Edward Ciupak studied the manifestations of folk religiosity brought to the cities. He believed that the pattern of religiosity functioning within folk Catholicism could not only be transplanted onto a land, foreign due to its environmental distinctiveness, but it could also become an element of the cultural heritage inherited by the next generations (Ciupak 1973, p. 35). However, a strong current containing elements classically ascribed to folk religiosity can also be noticed within the framework of Polish religious culture today. Interestingly, often initiated by representatives of a religious institution, it receives a positive response from a large part of the people associated with the Polish Church. Therefore, an important question is why the attitudes characteristic of the pre-modern era became consolidated and survive the modernisation processes, including urbanisation and industrialisation.

In the context of explaining the phenomenon of Polish religiosity and the specificity of the religious culture, the category of “folk religion” still seems to be a helpful analytical tool. It can be useful for analysing and explaining some phenomena related to the characteristics of the culture of religiosity in Poland and to the peculiarity of the functioning of the very traditionalist Catholic Church in Poland. However, it does not have the dimension of a universal research category, and its application and definition depend on the adopted research goals. However, it should be understood in a specific way and used only in the analysis of a specific phenomenon. In the context of this article, it should be understood as a culture of religiosity characteristic for a “people”, an ethnos or a nation, and therefore consistent with a secular, although highly “sacred”, romantic nationalist ideology. In this connection, one should also look for the durability of the patterns of “folk religion” despite the processes of secularisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation.

3. Stefan Wyszyński's Pastoral and Intellectual Heritage and Its Influence on the Development of Folk Religion and Idea of the Catholic Nation in Poland

3.1. *The Concept of a Catholic Nation in Stefan Wyszyński's Social Thought*

Stefan Wyszyński defined the Polish nation primarily in religious terms, as organically related to the Catholic Church. For him, Catholicity was a constitutive element of Polishness. Poles as a national community were, in Wyszyński's terms, a “nation of the baptised”, which not only exists in the worldly reality, in *civitas mundi*, but also has an eschatological perspective, which places this nation in God's plan of salvation. In fact, the history of the Polish nation becomes part of the universal history of salvation (Lewandowski 1982, p. 24). Theologian Stanisław Dziekoński sees in Wyszyński's social and pastoral thought concerning the nation an ecclesiological perspective, thanks to which the (Polish) nation comes to be one of the subjects of the universal Church. The author concludes his considerations with the following statement: “the term [. . .] <<Church of the Nation>> should be seen as a new, original and theologically fertile ecclesiological category. In the <<Church of the Nation>> two realities: the Nation and the Church meet and enrich, even complement each other. The Church contributes to the nation such elements as: character, customs, mentality and history, receiving higher morality, spiritual direction, supernatural goods and salvation” (Dziekoński 2011, p. 151). The commonly known simplification “a Pole—a Catholic” appears very often in Stefan Wyszyński's literary and pastoral output, if not expressed directly, as in the speech devoted to the beginning of the pontificate of John Paul II (Wyszyński 2017, p. 70), then indirectly by referring to the religious attributes and metaphors of the nation, such as, in particular, Mary, Queen of Poland. In the aforementioned speech, Wyszyński expressed these rather stereotypical ideas about Polish immigrants: “All Poles who left their homeland—whether a long time ago, a hundred years ago, after the First World War, or after the Second World War—took with them the love of the mother tongue and of the Church. They departed with a picture of Our Lady of Częstochowa” (Wyszyński 2017, p. 71). This way of understanding the Polish nation as a Catholic nation is quite popular in Catholic circles, especially in the dramatic periods of Polish history; the reference to the Catholicism of Poles as an element

defining their national identity is treated as natural and in fact indisputable, especially by Catholic traditionalists who constitute the intellectual and the pastoral strength of the folk Church (Bartnik 2001). It results largely from the experience of suffering and attempts to erase, or at least neutralise, Polish identity and the accompanying ambition to have an independent state during the partitions. The Catholic Church in fact also became a defender of Polishness. The special position of the Catholic Church in Poland and its contribution to the creation of the national consciousness of Poles was strengthened in the era of communism. It was then that Stefan Wyszyński's vision of the nation mellowed. He was not only the head of the Catholic community in Poland, but also to some extent the spiritual leader of the nation, standing in opposition to state factors for most of the communist times. Referring to messianic concepts, though not to an exaggerated degree, as pointed out by Jerzy Lewandowski, the interpreter of Wyszyński's national thought (p. 25), and alluding primarily to folk piety, whose distinctive symbol, the central point, was the cult of Virgin Mary, especially the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, Queen of Poland, he linked the idea of national identity with folk Catholic piety (Warchoń 2017).

Wyszyński saw the nation as a community based primarily on culture. Therefore, in one of his speeches, he drew attention to the conflicts that arose between the Church and the state (the partitioning powers, although he probably meant the communist state, but he did not express it, so as not to expose himself to repressions or censorship interference), which in fact did not, or did very rarely, pertain to the nation (he always spelled it with a capital "N"), because the nation was imbued with an evangelical spirit. The proclaimers of the Good News were clergymen who symbiotically combined Catholic and national elements, and their sanction, the legitimisation to teach, had divine provenance. Therefore, sacralisation takes place here, but not so much of the nation itself, although we can extract this from the message of Cardinal Wyszyński, but of its educators, i.e., the clergymen, especially the hierarchs, who, through the mystery of the sacrament of priesthood, also become its spiritual guides and to a certain extent its creators, laying the spiritual foundations and outlining the spiritual framework of the nation as a community united by a supernatural bond, the sacramental symbol of which is the baptism received in 966. "The presence of the Catholic hierarchy in the life of the Nation,—he proclaimed in 1966, the jubilee year for Poland, is a blessing for the Nation. Through the supernatural powers it creates the unity of the Nation, through the supernatural bond it strengthens the natural bonds. It creates the unity of truth, thoughts, worldview and the religious and national culture that raises from it. It also creates peace, because the Nation united by one Baptism in one faith has the hallmarks and spirit of peace" (Wyszyński 1985, pp. 56–57). The words referring to one baptism and one faith are significant here. Of course, in the year of receiving baptism by the first historical ruler of Poland, Mieszko I, there was a united church community within the borders of Europe. However, in the following centuries there were successive schisms, which also had an impact on the religious divisions in Poland. Not referring to the complicated denominational relations that appeared in later centuries, Wyszyński seems to reinforce the myth of a Pole—a Catholic because in speaking of the hierarchy he implicitly pointed to the Catholic hierarchy. When he spoke of one baptism and one faith, he meant Catholic faith. The words he said during one of the so-called Jasna Góra Appeals in front of the painting of Our Lady of Częstochowa in 1961 are very meaningful: [Holy Mother—AM, JP], "take care of the Church in our homeland and make sure that God's glory will not disappear from our homeland. Protect us from the enemies of God. [. . .] You, Mary, are here to destroy all heresies and mistakes. Look at the terrible danger that threatens the purity of faith, the faithfulness of the people and priests, the danger that threatens the Christian customs of young people and the whole Nation [. . .]" (Wyszyński 1983, p. 22). Of course, the historical context of this statement is extremely clear. In this particular place, symbolic for Poland and the Catholic Church in Poland, and at the specific time, Cardinal Wyszyński did not allude to dissenters, but to atheistic Marxism, which became the official ideology of the Polish state after the Second World War. However, even in this short statement the understanding of the Polish nation as a Catholic community can

be heard. The reference, although only signalled, to the fight against heresies and errors, which certainly also included doctrinal ones, can in fact be read here as the narrowing of the understanding of Polishness to Catholicism and of the Polish nation to Catholics as believers of the only true faith. In another speech, he said, although also in the specific context of counteracting the effects of the act legalising abortion in Poland (1956), that the Catholic Church had become the sole defender of the nation's life. At this point, he consciously used the words that would not only point to the Catholic Church as the protector of the unborn, but also to describe the Church directly as "the defender of the life of the Nation" (Wyszyński 1988, p. 209), thus emphasising the organic or even symbiotic relationship between the Church and the nation. If a nation owes its specific identity, axiology, and culture to ties with the Church, the Church becomes a constitutive element of this nation. For Wyszyński, the erasure or denial of the Catholic religion and morality in the life of the nation is in fact a negation of the identity of the nation; an attempt to reformat the national consciousness is in fact inconsistent with the spirit of this nation. Hence, simplifying, when we say a "Pole", we say a "Catholic". Just like the Catholic Church in the past was responsible for building the Christian identity of the Polish nation and served as a space in which national culture could develop during the partitions and the Germanisation and Russification imposed by the partitioning states, similarly, in the communist times, when Wyszyński initially served as the bishop of Lublin, and later the Primate of Poland, the Catholic Church, in opposition to the new socialist national consciousness promoted by the authorities, strengthened the traditional vision of Polishness, of which Wyszyński was a promoter, ideologist, and animator. Therefore, he cast the Church in the role of the depositary and defender of the national tradition and culture. The Church was to react to any attempts to marginalise or depreciate the value of this tradition or culture, as well as to any attempts to deny the relationship between Polishness and Catholicism. Wyszyński firmly stated: "One must not create <<history without history>>; we cannot forget about the millennium of our native and Christian path ... one must not be silent, "when the native culture, its literature and art, its tried and tested Christian morality and the relationship of Poland with the Roman Church and the values of the Gospel, the Cross and supernatural powers brought to Poland are being marginalised in the education of the young generation. Our national dignity requires us to resist the presumptuousness with which everything that is Polish is neglected in favour of import so foreign to us" (Wyszyński 2017, p. 52).

Contrary to the institutions, including the state, the nation, which is a natural and organic community, according to Wyszyński, has its own dynamics of development and exhibits certain biological features. Due to its nature, it is similar to a family; in fact, it becomes a "family of families". And it was in the family that he saw the strength of the nation. The condition of the nation depended on the condition of the family. By strengthening the family, the nation is also strengthened. Moreover, in this aspect, it is an obvious allusion to the communist system. Families and the nation develop parallel to the structures of the state, which protects these natural communities, i.e., families and the nation, from the influence of an ideology alien to them, that is, inconsistent with their identity, as promoted by the (communist) state. Therefore, the protection of the nation, its Christian or even Catholic character, primarily means strengthening the family in its spiritual dimension. It is in the family that the intellectual formation of man takes place through socialisation processes; man's moral and intellectual or, more broadly, spiritual condition will depend on the shape of the family and its moral condition, which in turn translates into the condition of the entire national community composed of families (Struzik 2010, pp. 106–7). The above-mentioned Jerzy Lewandowski noticed that the concept of the nation that emerges from Wyszyński's pastoral theology does not fit in with collectivist ideologies. And although it is also far from the individualism characteristic of liberal doctrines, the national community in the ontological sense is only an accidental being, existing thanks to substantial individuals (Lewandowski 1982, p. 26). Wyszyński referred here indirectly to neo-Thomist personalism, very popular in Catholic circles in the pre- and post-war period, the most important centre of which in Poland was the Catholic

University of Lublin. We encounter a similar understanding of the nation or any community in Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II (Wojtyła 2018, p. 36; Piwowarczyk 1960, p. 52). In this understanding, an individual does not merge with the whole (collectivity), forming an ontic unity, he/she retains their ontic separateness and at the same time, as a subject, has his/her own mind and free will, thanks to which he/she can become a conscious participant in the life of the national community. He/she may also, in an act of free will, negate his/her identity and reject the community. However, in the moral sense, there is a bond between the nation and the individual which is also expressed in the individual's responsibility for the nation as well the nation's responsibility for the development of the individual, especially in the educational dimension (Dziekoński 2011, p. 153). That is why the family, in which the cultural, intellectual, and probably the most important moral formation takes place, remains so important to Wyszyński. Through this socialising agency, families co-create a nation as a family of families. However, this is not an asymmetric relationship. The nation, as well as the state and the Church, as educational forces, are to support the development of the family. Their role is auxiliary here (Lewicka 2021, p. 164).

3.2. *The Folk Dimension of Religion in the Pastoral Theology of Stefan Wyszyński*

Stefan Wyszyński's attitude can be described in a sense as anti-intellectual; in a sense because he himself was an educated and erudite man, which of course does not contradict his approach towards the intelligentsia or intellectuals, including those of the Church, to whom it is difficult to attribute atheistic tendencies. Even before the outbreak of the Second World War, he published a brochure entitled *Kultura bolszewizmu a inteligencja polska* [The Culture of Bolshevism and the Polish Intelligentsia], in which he accused the left-oriented intelligentsia of fascination with the atheistic culture created in the Soviet Union. In his considerations, he refers to examples of the pro-Bolshevik activity of some circles of the Polish intelligentsia in order to express the conviction that this was an activity planned by the Bolsheviks, aimed at creating a spy network in Poland, whose task would be primarily the fight against the Catholic Church and Christian faith. According to Wyszyński, this is the most effective method of taking over power: "Cultural influence on the intelligentsia is perhaps the most dangerous method of conquering the world; winning the minds leading the world, influencing them through its literary works, Bolshevism slowly, gradually and imperceptibly shapes the minds of citizens" (Wyszyński 1982, p. 5). This brochure shows two things. The first was the radical anti-communism of the future Primate of Poland, although after the Second World War his radicalism in this matter was much weaker and, as historian Rafał Łatka argues, the primate's attitude was characterised by ambivalence, which obviously does not mean that he favoured the communist ideology, but that he was willing to come to a compromise with communist power, bearing in mind the good of Poland and the Catholic Church in Poland (Łatka 2019, pp. 590–91). The second was distrust, sometimes turning into antagonism towards a social group in the West referred to as intellectuals and in Central and Eastern Europe usually as the intelligentsia. In his approach to the intelligentsia, one can find the sources of an anti-intellectual attitude and a support for mass folk Catholicism as a counterbalance to both secular and ecclesiastical intellectualism. And although during the communist period he supported initiatives related to the development of intellectual life in Poland and in the Catholic Church, he showed a rather restrained attitude towards the debates of intellectuals, focusing on promoting folk piety, which had a mass influence, as opposed to more intellectually sophisticated forms of faith and piety. To some extent, this approach of Cardinal Wyszyński to intellectual issues in the church is reflected in his words to priests that ordinary believers cannot be talked to about Christ in a very complicated way, because "Modern man simply does not have the ability to listen [...]", and therefore "We cannot dialogue with them—the primate proclaimed—only profess [...]" We must be extremely succinct, simple, even if we may deserve to be called simpletons and retarded people" (Wyszyński 1985, pp. 131–38).

Thus, the recipe for over-intellectualising was supposed to be, inter alia, the use of children's language, although, as the primate cautioned, not infantile language. Wyszyński's

position is not deprived of pedagogical reasons. His personalistic pedagogical thought, based on the Christian concept of the person, is sometimes highly appreciated by the theorists and philosophers of education (Rynio 2021; Śliwerski 2021). He wanted mainly to disseminate the religious message, especially among uneducated people, workers, and farmers (Tunak 2018, p. 36), who, after hard physical work, did not have time or strength for intellectual considerations or, often, the sufficient skills and competences, resulting from the lack of education. The masses were the strength of the folk Church; therefore, the shaping of religious and moral attitudes in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church should be adapted to the sensitivity, the level of education, and the skills of the mass audience, which Cardinal Wyszyński was aware of. He believed that the Polish nation was an agricultural nation, a peasant nation originating from the countryside. He had great respect for working soil because he himself came from a rural environment (Wyszyński 1984, p. 4). This had an impact on his pastoral strategy. He approached shaping the religious awareness of Polish Catholics in a way that was characteristic of the rural clergy, focusing on the ritual side of religiosity and the Marian cult, linking them with patriotism and not with in-depth spirituality and philosophical and theological considerations as Catholic intellectuals would like (Tunak 2018, p. 34).

The mass and folk Church also needed mass rituals and rites, common symbols integrating the community, shaping the collective imagination of the faithful (Sakowicz 2017, p. 121). Therefore, Cardinal Wyszyński was a promoter of religious events, such as pilgrimages, retreats, folk missions, the cult of holy images, national novenas or litanies, etc. They were also the response of the Catholic Church in Poland to specific state rituals (Labour Day parades, party rallies, demonstrations, etc.), in which communist and socialist figures and symbols hostile to the Church and religion were presented. After the Second World War, Poland, in a sense, became the arena of a clash between two antagonised forms of folk rituals, i.e., the religious (the Catholic Church) and, at least in principle, the atheist (the party and the state), which in fact took a para-religious form. Wyszyński was aware of the importance and significance of symbols in this cultural confrontation (Królikowska 2012, p. 145). Therefore, he focused his theological and pastoral efforts on strengthening the mass folk Church in Poland. His intention was to attract as many Poles as possible to the Church, thus minimising the effects of the atheisation of Polish society. The way to achieve it was not through a debate between Catholic and lay intellectuals, but by the promotion and strengthening of the collective religious imagination, based largely on religious symbols and emotions that drew strength from participation in mass religious events under the spiritual direction of the church hierarchy, including the primate himself. Folk religiosity makes a consecrated person, especially a priest or bishop, someone exceptional. This person becomes a teacher, a spiritual guide, a ceremonial master of religious mysteries. He is surrounded by an aura of mysticism, which often translates into elevating a clergyman to cult status. He becomes part of folk piety, not only as a participant or even a moderator, but also as its object. In the Catholic Church in Poland, at least two people had such a role during their lifetimes, i.e., Pope John Paul II and, to a lesser extent, Stefan Wyszyński, who led the Church from 1948 to 1981. Wyszyński was aware of his role, which he defined when he referred to himself as “the teacher of the nation in the Church” (Wyszyński 2017, p. 93). This teaching tone, the way he addressed the faithful, revealed a certain clerical condescension even though he was seen as a modest person. He even used to address academics just like children: “My beloved children!” (Wyszyński 1958, p. 1). A common formula was: “Beloved children of God, my children!”. This way of addressing was reserved for lay people, less often for the lower clergy and nuns. He always addressed dignitaries in an official manner, using proper titles. For example, during the celebration of the jubilee in Gniezno in 1966, during the opening of the scientific session, he used the following welcoming formula: “Your Excellency Archbishops [. . .], Your Excellency Bishops, Distinguished Clergy of the Archdiocese and Poland, Religious Superiors and Religious Clergy, Male and Female Monastic Families, Chancellors, Rectors of the Catholic University of Lublin and the Academy of Catholic Theology, Beloved Children of God, My

Children!" (Wyszyński 1996, p. 38). The manner of greeting and addressing the laity, also representing the Catholic intelligentsia, shows that he did not treat them as partners in dialogue. He felt rather like their father, caring and good-natured, but at the same time unapproachable to some extent. This was a sign not only of folk religiosity, but also of the *folk clericalism* so common in Poland.

3.3. Marian Cult as the Common Denominator of the Catholic Nation and Folk Piety

Both in Primate Wyszyński's social teaching on the concept of the Catholic nation and in pastoral theology, whose folk religiosity is the essence, the figure of Mary—the Holy Mother—is crucial. It results directly from his life experience as a man whose mother died when he was a child—we can find here analogies with the biography of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, as well as with a priest whose spiritual formation was based on the Marian cult. For Wyszyński, as for Wojtyła, Mary became a substitute for the lost mother, which is why he had such a strong emotional and spiritual relationship with her. This specific bond concerned not only the *real person* of the Mother of Christ, but also her representations in church art. In his *Zapiski więzienne* [*The Prison Notes*], Wyszyński recalled that already in his early youth he directed his feelings towards the images of Mary: "I was in awe of the beautiful statue of Our Lady standing in the church cemetery. Later, when I was already in Warsaw, in junior high school [...], I transferred my feelings to the statue of Our Lady of Passau, in Krakowskie Przedmieście" (Wyszyński 2001, p. 32). He celebrated his first mass in a special place for Catholics in Poland, i.e., in the chapel of the Pauline Monastery at Jasna Góra, where the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, Queen of Poland, is venerated, the so-called Black Madonna, which is a symbol of Catholic Polishness and the folk piety of Polish Catholics. This is where he was also consecrated as a bishop, and in the bishop's coat of arms, there was an image known from the Jasna Góra painting. It is not surprising then that the figure of the Mother of God is present in almost every public speech and publication by Cardinal Wyszyński. He was formed by Marian piety, and he practiced and spread this form of piety throughout his priestly life (Wyszyński 2001, p. 33).

Cardinal Wyszyński was convinced of a common relationship of Poles with the Mother of God because being a Pole means not only being a Catholic, but also a worshiper of the Mother of God, especially her image in Jasna Góra. It is visible not only among Poles living in the country, but also the emigrants, especially those settled in North America, where, as the Primate of the Millennium noted, there are many churches dedicated to Our Lady of Częstochowa, many people wear a medal with her image, and in many houses the replicas of this paintings can be found, and she is worshiped. In 1978, he stated: "In the consciousness of the Polish nation there is the mysterious power of love for the Mother of Christ, the Lady of Jasna Góra. The nation has always focused all its hopes on her, be it in the country or abroad. Wherever Poles live, Our Lady of Jasna Góra is with them and watches over their hearts" (Wyszyński 2017, p. 71). In the case of the cult of the Virgin Mary, especially in the form of her Jasna Góra image, we see the coupling of folk piety with the idea of the Catholic nation faithful to the Church, its hierarchy, but also its queen, who is the "Lady of Jasna Góra", and what she represents as the embodiment of certain values that are both Christian and national. The primate was convinced that "*God works in Poland through the Mother of Christ*" (Wyszyński 1980, p. 21). Wyszyński's idea for strengthening the influence of the Catholic Church in Polish society, as well as for religious education, was to promote the Marian cult. The highest expression of this cult was the Act of Commitment of Poland to the motherly slavery to Mary—for the freedom of the Church of 1966, the jubilee year of the millennium of the baptism of Poland—of which Wyszyński, as the Primate of Poland, was the co-author and signatory. This act contains words that can be unequivocally associated with Wyszyński's theology of the nation, for whom the temporal nation understood as a Catholic nation has an eschatological mission to accomplish, being in fact part of God's soteriological plan: "[...] Our best Mother and Queen of Poland, consider us Poles as a nation your own property, a tool in your hands for the Holy Church, to whom we owe the light of faith, the power of the Cross, spiritual unity and the peace of

God. Do what you want with us! We want to do everything you want, if only Poland can keep the pristine treasure of holy faith for all ages, and the Church in our homeland enjoy the freedom it deserves; if we [. . .] become the true help of the universal Church to build up the Body of Christ on earth! That is why we want to live as a Catholic nation from now on" (Wyszyński 2017, pp. 10–11).

4. Discussion

The interweaving of the spheres of "official" and "folk" religiosity in the Polish cultural reality has a political dimension to a large extent and is related primarily to the specificity of the nation-building processes taking place on the Polish lands in the nineteenth century, and the durability of the folk formula of Polish religiosity is primarily related to the role the Catholic religion played in the processes of shaping and strengthening Polish national identity.

It should be emphasised that when it comes to the position of the Catholic Church in Poland, it was special, and the case of the phenomenon of Polish religiosity is unique compared to other European countries. The dominant approach in sociological analyses of religiosity is the reference to secularisation, understood as a process in which sectors of society and culture break free from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. At the same time, it should be remembered that the supporters of the secularisation theory have always stressed that this phenomenon is present mainly in modern Western countries. Secularisation may take on a global character as the processes of modernisation and dissemination of Western culture accelerate (Berger 1967, pp. 147–72). It is therefore not a universal process, and it cannot be applied indiscriminately in the analysis of every society since the theory of secularisation applies primarily to Western European societies. Poland is a European country where religiosity and secularisation took different forms to those in the west. Eastern European societies remained separated from the western part of the continent for a long time and did not undergo the processes of modernisation and secularisation that took place in Western Europe. In the case of Poland, earlier historical processes, until the victory of the Counter-Reformation in 17th-century Poland, had their impact. In this approach, the Polish state and society did not undergo the Enlightenment modernisation, the effects of which have been visible to this day. A symbolic fact is that the period of the French Revolution, which was the catalyst for European modernisation, coincides with the fall of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (1795) and the division between the three partitioning states (cf. Żuk and Żuk 2019, pp. 191–92).

The intertwining of the historical and political circumstances largely contributed to the lack of socio-political modernisation following the Western European model. The Enlightenment movement was also present in Poland. Although it was never as aggressively anti-clerical as in the case of France, the representatives of the Polish Enlightenment strove to modernise both the Polish state and the Polish population in accordance with new socio-political models that conservatives perceived as unacceptably secularised. The control of the Church over education was weakened, a long list of anti-clerical satires appeared in the public space (paradoxically often written by representatives of the Church, such as, for example, Bishop Ignacy Krasicki), the lifestyle of social elites became more and more secularised, and the Church had to defend itself against attacks of progressive journalists wishing to popularise the ideas of the Enlightenment. Some Polish historians even wrote that during this period the ties between the Church and Polish society weakened considerably. All these processes, however, turned out to be of secondary importance in the formation of Polish religiosity because the central point of the Catholic narrative in Polish history became the era of partitions, when the Polish state lost its sovereignty and its territory was divided between three states: Tsarist Russia, Prussia, and Austria–Hungary.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Polish state ceased to exist, and its former lands were divided by three partitioning states: Tsarist Russia, Hohenzollern Prussia, and Habsburg Austria. The partitioning powers were perceived as hostile (which was reinforced by later uprisings and political repressions) and were also seen through the

prism of the dominant religion: tsarist Russia as an Orthodox empire and Prussia, and later Germany, as Protestant states. In the case of Prussia and Russia, the Catholic Church faced rivalry with Orthodoxy and Protestantism, and Polish society experienced Russification and Germanisation. Therefore, there was a unique interweaving of national identity and the religious denomination. The Catholic Church became a symbol of resistance to “strangers”, and the Catholic faith a symbol of Polishness. In the case of Catholic Austro-Hungary, the Polish minority enjoyed quite a lot of freedom and autonomy (much greater than in the other Polish territories). The situation of the crisis of Polishness repeated itself during the Second World War and then after its end, along with the installation of the communist power. In these conditions, the Catholic Church again had a special role to play in the protection of Polish national identity.

As a result of the historical circumstances, the Catholic Church in Poland achieved a special rank by fulfilling a unique social and political role. The institutions of the Catholic Church suddenly rose in importance because many national or nation-building structures could not function. Churches full of religious and national symbols played a crucial role in manifesting national identity in public space. At the same time, church institutions responded to various non-religious needs which, for various reasons, were not satisfied by the official institutions of the partitioning powers or the non-sovereign Polish state entities, such as that of the communist state built after the Second World War. This bound Poles to the Church and at the same time meant that in the times when the modern secular public sphere was taking shape in the independent nation states, the separation of the sacred and the profane dimensions of collective life was blurring in Poland.

Therefore, the Church as an institution played a key role in preserving national identity and in the struggle for independence. Researchers emphasise the ability of the Church to use the Polish language in its services and to maintain traditional folk practices. As many national customs were rooted in the Christian worship, their survival would not have been possible without the support received from the Church ([Jabłońska-Deptuła 1987](#), p. 84). In this way, Polish national consciousness became strongly associated with Catholic religious identity, which is noticed even by researchers from outside the Polish cultural circle, emphasising that in the period of lack of statehood, the Church was the only institution with a Polish character ([Bernhard 1993](#), p. 136).

Apart from historical and political events, the influence of the Romantic tradition and the peasant character of the Polish nation on the consolidation of the forms of religious life that are characteristic of folk religiosity should not be underestimated. Romanticism as a reaction to the Enlightenment was strongly associated with emphasising the role of myths, nature, and the sphere of spirituality. Contrary to various doctrinal tensions and contradictions, the romantic ethos also merged with the Catholic worldview, leading to the sacralisation of the national sacrifice. It is difficult to analyse Romanticism unequivocally due to its multi-threading and multi-trend character. Regardless of the disputes existing in the literature, many researchers of Polish culture stress the dominant role of the so-called romantic ethos in shaping Polish attitudes and ways of political thinking, including the forging of national identity. Maria Janion in particular drew attention to the domination of Romanticism in politics with the minor role of Positivism. Romanticism as a cultural and psychological formation arose in opposition to Enlightenment rationalism, which turned out to be politically ineffective in the historical conditions of the time. With time, it became the dominant cultural and mental factor of the historical process. Maria Janion pointed out that “during the almost two hundred years, from the post-partition era, to the martial law and the period after it, a fairly uniform style of culture, which I call symbolic-romantic, prevailed in Poland. Romanticism—as an all-encompassing style, concept and practice of culture—built primarily a sense of national identity and defended this identity. Therefore, it took on the features of a national spiritual gift” (cf. [Janion 1996](#), pp. 9–10). It also became a component of the Polish folk religion. It was present in Wyszyński’s pastoral thought and activity.

The main feature of political Romanticism was the emotional identification with the homeland. It generated the existence of specific community alternatives of the state: the nation understood as a grouping of political and cultural identification, the Roman Catholic Church as a quasi-state form of collective life, and finally the family as a centre of the political education of society and a transmitter of patriotism (Bodio 2001, p. 31), which we also see in Wyszyński's thought. In such a formula, it was difficult to find a place for politics as the art of managing state affairs, but it was perfectly combined with the shared experience of rituals and the features characteristic of "romantic religiosity", often referring to mysticism. As researchers point out, the attributes of romantic religiosity include, among others, emotionalism, and emotional religiosity is understood not as an irrational psychic function, but as an anthropological or existential constant, an irreducible aspect of nature, the person, and human existence. In addition, it is pantheistic religiosity, perceiving the Deity through Nature, the Universe, Totality. In Wyszyński's concept, this function is performed by Mary as a kind of Mother of the Nation. After all, the Romantics were well aware of the cultural nature of religion, which we also see in the attitude of the Primate of the Millennium (cf. Dopart 2013, p. 193).

As a result of the historical circumstances in which the Polish nation was formed, "folk religiosity" or "folk Catholicism" became one of the basic elements shaping the socio-religious attitudes of the Poles. Thus, it was an element of socio-political mobilisation, and as such, it played a functional role in building national identity, and consequently, was instrumentally used as a tool of political mobilisation. The 123-year period of the lack of its own statehood led to the consolidation of the cultural image of the Catholic Church as a defender of Polish national identity and culture. This image was even strengthened during the period of the political domination of the USSR and the existence of the communist state, in which atheisation was one of the elements of politics. The Catholic Church, as well as rituals related to Catholicism (baptisms, communions, participation in holy masses), and also in the mass dimension (pilgrimages, national novena), promoted by Primate Wyszyński, were then not only a testimony of religiousness, but also of resistance against oppressive power. Thus, they obtained double symbolism. The cultural identification of the Catholic Church with national identity hindered the processes of modernisation and the changes within the church itself and its relations with the state. Any attempt to undermine the position of the Catholic Church in social life was equated with an attack on "Polishness" and "national traditions".

5. Conclusions

Although, according to sociological research, Poland is currently one of the most quickly secularising societies in the West, which pertains primarily to the young people, many Poles still identify with the Catholic Church and assert regular participation in religious practices. In the CBOS survey from 2020, 47% of the respondents admitted regular religious practices (Bożewicz 2020, p. 4), and in the last census of 2021, as much as 87.6% of Polish society declared that it belonged to the Catholic Church. However, a significant decrease is visible. Ten years earlier, in a similar survey, 96% of Poles described themselves as Roman Catholics. In 1997–2007, regular religious practice remained at the level of 57–58%. Nevertheless, compared to other developed countries, including the Catholic ones, such as Spain, Italy, and Ireland, Polish society may appear to be religious (Stetkiewicz, p. 14). It is certainly a derivative of the complicated national history in which the Catholic Church played a key role not only as the guardian of faith and morals, but also the defender of Polish national identity and culture. This function of the Church was strengthened even in the communist period, in which Primate Stefan Wyszyński had unquestionable merits, promoting a mass folk form of piety and the idea of a Catholic nation. They were an effective form of resistance to the atheistic state and party indoctrination and the implementation of the idea of a secular socialist nation such as that in the Soviet Union (Arnold 2012, p. 228; Guzek 2019, p. 42). Due to the massiveness of the folk form of religiosity promoted by Wyszyński, especially the Marian cult, it was possible to consolidate Polish society, coming

predominantly from rural communities, against the communist authorities. The image of Our Lady of Czestochowa appealed more to the mass imagination of Poles than the portraits of Marxist ideologues and party dignitaries, and a Catholic priest had greater social authority than a party secretary or a state official. An iconic presentation of the resistance against the communist state was Lech Wałęsa, a co-founder of free trade unions and Solidarity, who to some extent personified folk Catholicism. During the most important events, he was photographed with the badge of Our Lady of Czestochowa pinned to the lapel of his jacket. The Catholic Church, whose leader for over three decades was Stefan Wyszyński, definitely won the struggle for “power” in Poland. His work was continued by Karol Wojtyła, who was elected Pope in 1978 and took the name of John Paul II. Although he came from other church circles, more intellectual ones, and was a university professor, he took over and developed the legacy of Primate Wyszyński, himself becoming a symbol of Polish folk Catholicism and an object of worship.

The contemporary Catholic Church in Poland was formed by Cardinal Wyszyński, and although more than forty years have passed since his death, his pastoral thought is present in Polish Catholicism, which is still based mainly on folk piety, sometimes even exceeding the dogmatic framework of the Catholic faith, as in the case of the supporters of the so-called enthronement of Jesus as the King of Poland (Salij 2013, p. 15). It is interesting that this type of piety is also present among the Polish diaspora, especially Poles and people of Polish origin in America (Jackson 2019, p. 156; Vickrey et al. 2019, p. 7). A completely different issue, for the analysis of which there is no room here, is the contemporary crisis of Polish Catholicism. However, a question must be asked here: to what extent did the strengthening of folk forms of piety, which is also related to a kind of folk clericalism and anti-intellectualism, contribute to the abuses and pathologies within the Polish Catholic Church? The church in the time of Primate Wyszyński was obviously not devoid of them. The communist security service was usually engaged in revealing moral scandals, also based on artificially prepared materials, which was to undermine the moral authority of the hierarchy and clergy among the faithful. However, the effect of these actions was rather meagre and did not translate into the massive departure of Poles from the Church. Today, however, the free media, which are not guided by the intentions of the communist security service, deal with the revealing of abuse and pathologies. In the face of all these scandals disclosed in the media, the authority of the Catholic Church in Poland has been seriously undermined. And here a doubt arises as to whether the power of mass popular Catholicism in the communist period, so effectively opposed to atheisation and the creation of a new form of Polish national identity, did not turn out to be a weakness in the period of the democratisation of the Polish state, because it also successfully covered up the intellectual and moral weakness of the Church’s people, especially the hierarchs and the clergy. If the answer is positive, then Primate Wyszyński with his anti-intellectual attitude, strengthening the clericalism among the Polish clergy and the faithful, would certainly be largely responsible for this state. A man of great format, who was and is an authority not only for traditionalist Catholics, but also for the Catholic and secular intelligentsia. However, the latter, recognising his merits in the fight against the communist regime, also see his anachronistic approach to cultural and religious issues. Adam Michnik, a leading Polish left-wing intellectual and anti-communist activist, portrayed the Primate of the Millennium as follows: “I spoke to Cardinal Wyszyński several times and I think that the term which the French used to call de Gaulle in his last years fits him—*The Great Anachronism*. The word *great* here does not refer to anachronism, but to the format of the human being. There were greatness and anachronism in him. The language the cardinal spoke was that of the past. [...] I dropped out completely when the primate wrote and talked about religion. His language became completely incomprehensible to me. It did not fit my need for religious reflection at all. I put away Cardinal Wyszyński’s writings and reached for the Gospel. It seemed much more instructive to me” (Michnik et al. 2019, p. 278).

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.M. and J.P.; methodology, A.M. and J.P.; formal analysis, A.M. and J.P.; writing—original draft preparation, A.M. (paragraphs: 1, 3, and 5) and J.P. (paragraphs: 1, 2, and 4); editing, A.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Arnold, Maik. 2012. How Does Religion Matter Today in Poland? Secularization in Europe and the ‘Causa Polonia Semper Fidelis’. In *Europe and America in the Mirror: Culture, Economy, and History*. Edited by Maik Arnold and Przemysław Łukasik. Warszawa: NOMOS, pp. 199–238.
- Bartnik, Czesław S. 2001. *Pedagogia narodowa Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego*. Lublin: Standruk.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 1997. *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*. Warszawa: Sic!
- Beckford, James. 2003. *Social Theory and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berger, Peter L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Doubleday and Company.
- Bernhard, Michael H. 1993. *The Origins of Democratisation in Poland: Workers, Intellectuals, and Oppositional Politics, 1976–1980*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bocheński, Jan Maria. 1993. Problem katolicyzmu w Polsce. In *Idem, Sens życia i inne eseje*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Philed.
- Bodio, Tadeusz. 2001. *Między romantyzmem i pragmatyzmem. Psychopolityczne aspekty transformacji w Polsce*. Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa.
- Bowman, Marion. 2004. Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion. In *Religion: Empirical Studies*. Edited by Steven J. Sutcliffe. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, pp. 3–18.
- Bożewicz, Marta. 2020. Religijność Polaków w ostatnich 20 latach. *Komunikat z badań CBOS* 63: 1–8.
- Casanova, José. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ciupak, Edward. 1973. *Katolicyzm ludowy w Polsce. Studia Socjologiczne*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
- Czarnowski, Stefan. 1956. Kultura religijna wiejskiego ludu polskiego. In *Idem, Studia z historii kultury*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, vol. 1, pp. 88–107.
- Dopart, Bogusław. 2013. *Polski romantyzm i wiek XIX. Zarysy, rekonesanse*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka.
- Dziekoński, Stanisław. 2011. Wychowanie społeczne w nauczaniu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego. *Studia Prymasowskie* 5: 137–54.
- Guzek, Damian. 2019. *Mediatizing Secular State. Media, Religion and Politics in Contemporary Poland*. Berlin: Peter Lang.
- Hayes, Carlton J. 1960. *Nationalism: A Religion*. New York: Macmillan.
- Jabłońska-Deptuła, Ewa. 1987. Czyż może historia popłynąć przeciw prądowi sumień? *Kościół-Religia-Patriotyzm, 1764–1864*. Paryż: Editions Spotkania.
- Jackson, David J. 2019. Polish Americans in Toledo, Ohio, USA: Ethnicity and Holiday Traditions. *European Journal of Transformation Studies* 2: 152–64.
- Janion, Maria. 1996. *Czy będziesz wiedział co przeżyłeś*. Warszawa: Sic!
- Kapaló, James A. 2013. Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 1: 3–18.
- Kowalczyk, Mirosław. 2018. Znaczenie i aktualność nauki Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego o podmiotowości narodu. *Teologia w Polsce* 2: 117–27.
- Królikowska, Anna. 2012. Idea narodu i religia a społeczeństwo obywatelskie. In *Religia i Kościół w społeczeństwie demokratycznym i obywatelskim w Polsce. Między losem a wyborem*. Edited by Józef Baniak. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, pp. 133–48.
- Łatka, Rafał. 2019. Czy Prymas Polski Stefan Wyszyński był antykomunistą? In *Antykomunizm Polaków w XX wieku*. Edited by Piotr Kardela and Karol Sacewicz. Białystok, Olsztyn and Warszawa: IPN, pp. 596–92.
- Lewandowski, Jerzy. 1982. *Naród w nauczaniu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego*. Warszawa: Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych.
- Lewicka, Monika. 2021. Rodzina w nauczaniu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego. Perspektywa pedagogiczna. *Studia pelplińskie* 55: 159–73. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mariański, Janusz. 1984. *Dynamika przemian religijności wiejskiej w rejonie płockim w warunkach industrializacji (1967–1976)*. Poznań and Warszawa: Zakład Socjologii Religii Stowarzyszenia Apostolstwa Katolickiego Pallotinum.
- Marody, Mirosława, and Sławomir Mandes. 2005. On Functions of Religion in Molding the National Identity of Poles. *International Journal of Sociology* 4: 49–68. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Michnik, Adam, Józef Tischner, and Jacek Żakowski. 2019. *Między Panem a Plebanem*. Warszawa: Agora.
- Moscovici, Serge. 1985. *The Age of Crowds. A Historical Treatise on Mass Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Mosse, George L. 1993. *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and the Western Nationalism*. Hanove: Brandeis University Press.
- Pawluczuk, Włodzimierz. 1972. *Światopogląd jednostki w warunkach rozpadu społeczności tradycyjnej*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Piowarczyk, Jan. 1960. *Katolicka etyka społeczna*. Tom I. Warszawa: Veritas.
- Piowarski, Władysław. 1971. *Religijność wiejska w warunkach urbanizacji. Studium socjologiczne*. Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski.
- Piowarski, Władysław. 1983. Wprowadzenie. In *Religijność ludowa. Ciągłość i zmiana*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, pp. 5–19.
- Piowarski, Władysław. 1996. Od „kościół ludu” do „kościół wyboru”. In *Od Kościoła ludu do Kościoła wyboru. Religia a przemiany społeczne w Polsce*. Edited by Irena Borowik and Witold Zdaniewicz. Kraków: Nomos, pp. 9–16.
- Primiano, Leonard N. 1995. Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife. *Western Folklore* 1: 37–56. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rynio, Alina. 2021. Społeczno-moralne przesłanie pedagogiczne kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego. *Polska Myśl Pedagogiczna* 7: 55–77. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Sakowicz, Eugeniusz. 2017. Pedagogiczny wymiar polskiej ludowej teologii i pobożności według Edmunda Bojanowskiego. Szkic do badań pedagogiczno-etnologiczno-religijnych. *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 4: 125–41. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Salij, Jacek. 2013. Pobożność ludowa w perspektywie katolickiej prawowierności. *Studia Gnesiensia* 27: 5–15.
- Śliwerski, Bogusław. 2021. Pedagogia Prymasa Tysiąclecia Stefana Wyszyńskiego. *Polska Myśl Pedagogiczna* 7: 19–35. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Stomma, Ludwik. 1986. *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX w.* Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX.
- Struzik, Zdzisław. 2010. „Rodzina Bogiem silna mocą swojego narodu”. Nauczanie o rodzinie kard. S. Wyszyńskiego. *Kultura—Media—Teologia* 3: 105–19.
- Tomicki, Ryszard. 1981. Religijność ludowa. In *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*. Edited by Maria Biernacka, Maria Frankowska and Wanda Paprocka. Warszawa: Ossolineum and Instytut Kultury Materialnej PAN, vol. 2, pp. 29–70.
- Trzeciakowski, Lech. 1990. *The Kulturkampf in Prussian Poland*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tunak, Marcin. 2018. Kryzys w Kościele? „Spór” Prymasa Wyszyńskiego i Jerzego Turowicza o wizję przemian soborowych w Kościele oraz formy „katolicyzmu”. *Our Europe. Ethnography—Ethnology—Anthropology of Culture* 7: 29–40.
- Vickrey, Renata, Ben Tyson, and Viviana Nicholas. 2019. Strategies for Promoting of Polish Identity in the Northeastern United States. *European Journal of Transformation Studies* 1: 6–18.
- Warchoń, Paweł. 2017. Teologio Polsko! Jaka byłeś? Jaka jesteś? Wybrane aspekty współczesnej teologii w Polsce. *Teologia w Polsce* 1: 83–106.
- Wojtyła, Karol. 2018. *Katolicka etyka społeczna*. Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 1958. *Jesteście potrzebne Narodowi i Kościołowi*. Częstochowa: Instytut Prymasowski Ślubów Narodu na Jasnej Górze.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 1980. *Wszystko postawiłem na Maryję*. Paris: Éditions du Dialogues.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 1982. *Kultura bolszewizmu a inteligencja polska*. Warszawa: CDN.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 1983. „Jestem przy Tobie . . . ” *Apele Jasnogórskie*. Struga Warszawska: Michalineum.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 1984. „Nie rzucim ziemi . . . ” (z przemówień do rolników). Warszawa: Kuria Metropolitarna Warszawska Wydział Duszpasterstwa.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 1985. *Idźcie i nauczajcie*. Warszawa: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 1988. *Ze Stolicy Prymasów*. Poznań: Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 1996. *Na szlaku Tysiąclecia. Wybór kazań*. Warszawa: Soli Deo.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 2001. *Zapiski więzienne*. Warszawa: Soli Deo.
- Wyszyński, Stefan. 2017. *Jedna jest Polska. Wybór z przemówień i kazań*. Warszawa: Soli Deo.
- Yoder, Douglas. 1974. Toward a Definition of Folk Religion. *Western Folklore* 1: 2–15. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Zowczak, Magdalena. 2008. Między tradycją a komercją. *Znak* 3: 31–44.
- Żuk, Piotr, and Paweł Żuk. 2019. Dangerous Liaisons Between the Catholic Church and the State: The Religious and Political Alliance of the Nationalist Right with the Conservative Church in Poland. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 2–3: 191–92.