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Gender issue on selected Catholic sites as a reflection of the division into two Churches in Poland

It appears that there is no more controversial and exciting issue than religion and sexuality within different beliefs and cultures, in both very conservative and laicized countries. Especially so in Poland — a country which is still perceived as deeply rooted in Catholicism and in which issues of sexuality acquire special shades of meaning. No other topics are the source of such strong social division among the Poles. Personal attitudes towards abortion, contraception, in vitro fertilization, homosexuality and particularly towards gender became the variables which define the moral and political identity of a person.

The goal of my research was to determine whether Catholic media discourse on widely-commented gender issues may be significant of a broader problem — the division of the Polish Church and Polish Catholic media into two Churches: one more liberal, the other more conservative. The analysis of contemporary Catholic media leads to the conclusion that they represent two different approaches to the role of the Church in Poland. This division is enhanced by the presence of clergy in the media, where the struggle for domination becomes more and more visible. The polarization between the more liberal and the more conservative Churches' narrations became even stronger after 1989.¹

Two Churches?

The division into the Poles and the “true” Poles, which is considered valid, has its roots far earlier than the era of father Tadeusz Rydzyk and his media empire. Before

¹ Z. Mach, ‘The Roman Catholic Church in Poland and the Dynamics of Social Identity in Polish Society’, 2000, p. 3. Available from http://www.humanityinaction.org/files/279_The_Roman_Catholic_Church_in_Poland_and_the_dynamics_of_social_Identity_in_polish_society.pdf [19 July 2014].

WWII, Catholic journalists also looked for a Semitic-Masonic conspiracy, which was supposed to be the result of overindulgent “Polish tolerance,” acceptance of “communist-pacifist-pornographic nonsense published by Jews.”² Again, in Catholic publishers’ eyes the world was black and white. On one side there were the “true” Poles — Catholics, on the other — Jews, Masons, communists, atheists, and pagans. The quality of Catholic press titles varied. As Andrzej Paczkowski observes, “The level of this mass was oscillating between »Przegląd Katolicki« edited by Pallotines and »Kultura« from Poznań, representing the best standards of press; and devotional, vulgar and chauvinistic titles published in some parishes and monasteries.”³

After WWII, the division in Poland was clear — those who were not Catholics were communists. People with more liberal opinions (but not very religious) could also belong to the Church side of the conflict. Discussion about different viewpoints on morality was temporarily suspended, because political issues seemed to be more important.

After the fall of a communist state, the Church became a “triumphant and extremely powerful institution. But it was not an institution with any practice in operating in a democratic, not to mention a post-modern, pluralistic society.”⁴ Changes of 1989 stimulated the process of creating a free market for media in Poland. The challenge was to implement the rules of Western capitalism ad hoc, without any experience. According to Mirosława Marody’s theory of the imitative character of establishing the media in the countries of Eastern Europe, the governments of the aforementioned countries imitated the Western patterns instead of letting the press emerge as a social initiative.⁵ The turning point in the development of Catholic broadcasting was the foundation of Radio Maryja by father Tadeusz Rydzyk in 1991.

The boundaries between the two Churches seem to be more visible since the declaration made by Jan Maria Rokita, a politician from Platforma Obywatelska, who after the retreat for PO members in Kraków in 2006, summoned them to unite around priests connected with the Łagiewniki sanctuary, to show that the Toruń Church is not the only one in Poland.⁶ He named Archbishop Stanisław Dziwisz the leader of the Łagiewniki Church⁷ (the headquarters of this Church are in the sanctuary in

² *Przegląd Katolicki* 77, 1939, p. 282 cited in R. Modras, ‘Polska katolicka albo nie-Polska’, *Studia Judaica* 3, 2000, no. 2(6), p. 245–269, transl. A. Łysiak. Available from: http://www.ipsir.uw.edu.pl/UserFiles/File/Katedra_Socjologii_Norm/TEKSTY/RModrasPolskaKatolicaAlboNiePolska.pdf [19 July 2014]. All translations from Polish are from the author.

³ A. Paczkowski, *Prasa polska 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1980.

⁴ Z. Mach, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵ J. Morawiecki, B. Jastrzębski, ‘O stosunkach złośsiedzkich. Z Adamem Szostkiewiczem — dziennikarzem „Polityki”, tłumaczem i publicystą — rozmawiają Bartosz Jastrzębski i Jędrzej Morawiecki.’ *E-znaczenia* [online] 2013. Available from: <http://www.e-znaczenia.pl/?p=823> [18 July 2014].

⁶ M. Dzierżanowski, T. Krzyżak, ‘Rozłam?’, *Wprost* [online] 2006. Available from: <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/86039/Rozlam/> [19 July 2014].

⁷ P. Milcarek, ‘Dzielenie Kościoła’, *Gość Niedzielny* [online] 2006. Available from: http://www.przednik-katolicki.pl/nr/wiara_i_kosciol/dzielenie_kosciola.html [19 July 2014].

Łagiewniki). Favouring this particular Church was an act of opposition against the Toruń Church led by Tadeusz Rydzyk and his media holding.

The more conservative Catholic media (*Gość Niedzielny*, *Fronda*, *Nasz Dziennik*, *Miłujcie się!*) are still indignant at the attempt of dividing the Church, which in fact should be apostolically united,⁸ but the statement of Jan Rokita was merely a public declaration of a problem which has existed in the Church for many years. His words were the official declaration of the clergy's involvement in politics as well as the declaration of "who takes which media." This black and white division separated the Church into the Toruń faction — associated with PiS, close-minded, conservative, supporting lustration, led by Radio Maryja — and the Łagiewniki faction — associated with PO, open-minded, more liberal, forward thinking, gathered around Józef Glemp, Tadeusz Pieronek, Józef Życiński and Tygodnik Powszechny.

To illustrate the characteristics of the Churches' leaders we can recall a quote from an interview with Jarosław Kaczyński, who said that "if all clergymen had views close to Życiński, we would have a similar level of secularization in Poland to the one in the Netherlands."⁹ Thus, in the eyes of the Toruń Church, priests supporting the Łagiewniki Church are too liberal and even leftist. Priest Kazimierz Sowa, the editor-in-chief of Religia.tv, claims that all the divisions and declarations do not reveal the truth about the Church, which actually is not that divided, but tries to find different ways of gaining audience.¹⁰

What currently makes these two factions different is their approach to the Smoleńsk tragedy which happened on April 10th, 2010.¹¹ This event divided Polish politics, media and eventually the whole society, into two factions: those who believe in the theory of assassination and those who treat this tragedy as just a tragic accident. The line of this "new" division is parallel to the previous one — dividing the society into PiS and PO voters, into Radio Maryja listeners and the rest,¹² finally into "pro- and anti-genderists."

Other issues which divide the Church are connected with morals. All Catholic media examined in this thesis represent a very similar approach to the Church's

⁸ K. Łęcki, 'Toruński? Łagiewnicki? W ostateczności po prostu apostolski', *Gość Niedzielny* [online]. Available from: <http://gosc.pl/doc/1865594.Toruński-Lagiewnicki-W-ostateczności-po-prostu-apostolski> [19 July 2014].

⁹ Ekai.pl, 'Bez kredytu dla polityków — rozmowa z abp Józefem Życińskim, metropolitą lubelskim' [online] 10 April 2006. Available from: http://system.ekai.pl/kair/?screen=depezsatekstowo&scr_depesza_id_depeszy=361973 [20 July 2014].

¹⁰ K. Sowa, 'Na śmierć kościoła łagiewnickiego', *Natemat.pl* [online] n.d. Available from: <http://szep-tynachorze.natemat.pl/10575,na-smierc-kosciola-lagiewnickiego> [20 July 2014].

¹¹ J. Baniak, *Kościół rzymskokatolicki i jego medialny obraz w demokratycznym społeczeństwie obywatelskim w Polsce w ujęciu i ocenach katolików świeckich*, [in:] *Religia i Kościół w społeczeństwie demokratycznym i obywatelskim w Polsce. Między losem a wyborem*, Poznań 2012, p. 62.

¹² A. Boniecki, 'Nasz posmoleński Kościół', *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 8 April 2014. Available from: <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wlasnym-glosem/nasz-posmoleński-kosciol/8d260> [20 July 2014].

acceptance (or rather lack thereof) towards abortion, in vitro fertilization, contraception, gender and other moral issues. These topics seem to be at the core of the Catholic discourse.¹³ However, the problem is not connected with real conflict (they agree on the basics), but with the narration — the question is whether all these issues should be discussed and explained to the people, or just accepted unconditionally.

Method

The goal of my research was to verify whether the discourse on gender in selected Catholic web portals does indeed reflect the division into two Churches in Poland. My research consisted of content analysis of four Catholic web portals: Fronda.pl, Tygodnik.onet.pl, Wiara.pl and Deon.pl. The first two of them represent portals with a politically involved profile, the rest focus strictly on faith and generally try not to relate this issue to politics. Other variables were popularity and the system of adding dates to the articles. These four portals are in top positions of the popularity ranking but the range of their popularity is wide — Fronda.pl had 260,000 unique users in 2013,¹⁴ Wiara.pl had 170,000 real users¹⁵ and Deon.pl was visited by more than 1 million real users Tygodnik.onet.pl reached 468,000 real users,¹⁶ but was not qualified as a Catholic web portal — it belonged to the category of information services. In order to limit the analyzed content, two months of publication were taken into consideration — December 2013 and January 2014. The additional criterion for choosing articles, besides their relation to gender issues, was their belonging to the special sections devoted to family and sexuality.

I want to verify the accuracy of the popular sentiment repeated by the media that the Polish Catholic scene is divided into two Churches representing extremely different approaches to religiosity and to gender. If the division exists, in what way is it decided? What determines more liberal and more conservative media: is it the language, the choice of experts, or the economic factor?

¹³ A. Szostkiewicz, 'Czyje jest ciało', *Polityka* [online] 1 October 2013. Available from: <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/15566923,1,cielesna-obsesje-kosciola.read> [19 July 2014].

¹⁴ S. Moryń, 'Portal Fronda.pl w czołówce serwisów informacyjnych', *Frona* [online] 3 December 2013. Available from: <http://www.frona.pl/a/portal-frondapl-w-czolowce-serwisow-informacyjnych,32434.html> [20 July 2014].

¹⁵ Social Club, *EvolutionMediaNet*, [pdf presentation]. Available from: <http://evolutionmedia.pl/files/socialclub2013.pdf> [20 July 2014].

¹⁶ T. Wojtas, 'Tygodniki zyskały w sieci. Wprost wyprzedził Newsweeka', *Wirtualne media* [online] 11 March 2013. Available from: <http://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/arttykul/tygodniki-zyskaly-w-sieci-wprost-wyprzedzil-newsweeka> [20 July 2014].

Genderists — who are they?

To depict the phenomenon of “the gender issue” in Polish media at the end of 2013, I will cite the results of the “Word of the Year 2013” plebiscite in which “gender” was the winner. The word was originally used for cultural and socially-based sexual identity but this meaning of gender, used in the academic circles of the humanities and social sciences, seems to have been blurred in the Polish media. The popularity of the word rapidly increased thanks to the letter of the Polish bishops from December 28th and was further spread by the rightist media campaign at the end of 2013. “The campaign was characterized by semantic simplifications or even calumnies which aroused a protest of the academia”¹⁷ (Jerzy Bartmiński, jury of the competition, UMCS). The word “gender” appeared in the media 17531 times (13371 on the Internet).¹⁸ The peak of its popularity was in December (almost 6000 times)¹⁹.

My research shows that the topic of gender was most often addressed by *Fronda.pl* and *Tygodnik.onet.pl*.

Fronda.pl investigated some regularity between the results of Global Gender Gap ranking and PISA ranks (a worldwide study assessing the level of 15-year-old pupils’ school performance in mathematics, science, and reading²⁰). Countries which have the smallest gender gap (Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) noted the biggest losses in the PISA ranking. Terlikowski quotes numbers from PISA without any explanation of the results and their relation to other factors. Neither does he comment on Norway which seems to be an exception to the rule that “genderism makes one stupid.”²¹ Terlikowski also calls queer an “even more stupid and screwed up ideology than gender.”²²

Terlikowski comments on a project of parity in the authorities, according to which 50% of the City Council members should consist of “women and persons with other sexual identity than men” (the author of the idea is Bogumił Kolmasiak from the Green Party). Terlikowski asks: “what are these people with an identity different than feminine or masculine? Where did Kolmasiak find these creatures?”²³.

¹⁷ <http://www.slowanaczasie.uw.edu.pl/?cat=29> [21 July 2014].

¹⁸ <http://tube.ad/blog/infografiki/gender-slowem-roku/> [21 July 2014].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Wikipedia, searched word: PISA. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programme_for_International_Student_Assessment [21 July 2014].

²¹ T. Terlikowski, ‘Genderyzm ogłupiał Magierowski w akcji’, *Fronda* [online] 5 December 2013. Available from: <http://www.fronda.pl/a/genderyzm-oglupia-magierowski-w-akcji,32491.html> [21 July 2014].

²² T. Terlikowski, ‘Ki diabeł? Kobiety i osoby o innej tożsamości płciowej niż mężczyźni’, *Fronda* [online] 7 December 2013. Available from: <http://www.fronda.pl/a/ki-diabel-kobiety-i-osoby-o-innej-tozsamosci-plciowej-niz-mezczyzni,32533.html> [21 July 2014].

²³ *Ibid.*

The supporters of “gender” are called Marxist-genderists “who want to have special privileges and do not let anyone criticize the scientific foundations of gender ideology.”²⁴ Terlikowski argues with the view of Krzysztof Podemski, who accuses the Church of beginning the gender affair in order to divert public opinion from pedophilia scandals in the Church.²⁵ He adds that “officers of the KBW [Internal Security Corps established by the Stalinist government] should come to his lecture and show him what tradition he refers to.”²⁶

Terlikowski quotes a letter written by the Polish Federation of Pro-Life Movements which claims that “it’s the traditional family that constitutes the bedrock of freedom and social order. Questioning the natural biological differences between women and men doesn’t lead to the equality of the sexes.”²⁷ He also supports the Polish bishops who, in their letter, ask the government to support the pro-family policies in Poland as well as to “stop all the activities which introduce gender ideology and especially not to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which is based on this ideology.”²⁸

The bishops’ doubts were expressed by many rightist politicians, such as Jarosław Gowin, who claimed that the Convention is against the Polish constitution and “there are some ideological layers, attempts at changing the definition of marriage in the Polish constitution.” “These propositions are completely against common sense, such as the one that aims at defining sex not according to biology but the so-called social roles.”²⁹ What exactly frightens the conservatives? Poland was the 26th country which signed the Convention in Turkey in May 2011. The Convention indicates that the problem of abuse has its origins in the conviction that the difference between the sexes is significant. The Convention states that overcoming this inequality and these stereotypes helps fight against the abuse. The conservatives argue that the issue of equality is a source of feminist ideology which endangers the traditional concept of family.³⁰ Polish bishops expressed their opposition to the Convention which delivers sexualization from the Western countries to Poland.

²⁴ T. Terlikowski, ‘Na uczelni nie ma miejsca dla krytyków gender, czyli marksizm-genderyzm w natarciu’, *Fronda* [online] 12 December 2013. Available from: <http://www.fronda.pl/a/na-uczelni-nie-ma-miejsca-dla-krytykow-gender-czyli-marksizm-genderyzm-w-natarciu,32648.html> [21 July 2014].

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Anon., ‘Brońmy małżeństwa i rodziny. To na nich opiera się wolność i ład społeczny!’, *Fronda* [online] 1 January 2014. Available from: <http://www.fronda.pl/a/bronmy-malzenstwa-i-rodziny-to-na-nich-opiera-sie-wolnosc-i-lad-spoeczny,33144.html> [21 July 2014].

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Anon., ‘Obróńcy życia: konwencja ws. przemocy wobec kobiet to konstytucja gender. Zagroza rodzinie’, *Gazeta Wyborcza* [online] 4 February 2014. Available from: http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,15398285,Obroncy_zycia__konwencja_ws__przemocy_wobec_kobiet.html [21 July 2014].

³⁰ Ibid.

Another letter of gratitude toward the bishops on *Fronda.pl* comes from the Catholic Women association. Catholic Women, as well as other rightist activists, identify gender as “experimenting, such as dressing a boy in a dress, which can have a negative influence on his psyche and cause irreversible trauma.”³¹ They understand gender as changing the sex whenever a person wants, but in the biological meaning of sexual identification. What is more, in their statement there is no division between the biological and the cultural.

There are no texts addressing the gender issue on *Wiara.pl* in the section devoted to family life. On *Deon.pl* there are only three texts which somehow refer to the issue in question.

The first of them includes a video of Wanda Póltawska talking about tenderness in marriage. At some point of this video, Póltawska says that God chooses the sex of a person and “that could be a saint man or a saint woman, there are no saint genders.”³²

In the text “Man will always be a child” analyzed earlier, the author interprets “Peter Pan,” which in her opinion is an allegory of femininity and masculinity. Masculinity is personified by Peter Pan, Mr. Darling, Pirates and Redskins. The femininity is “Wendy, her mother Mrs. Darling and — playing the role of a nanny — the loyal bitch Nana. This can suggest a risky thesis that female features, at least to some point, are somehow biologically programmed and instinctive.”³³ What is interesting, further on she adds that “the masculine features can appear only in the moment of contact with the feminine,”³⁴ which in a way introduces gender theory.

The last mentioning of gender issues on *Deon.pl* appears in a short article with the attached YouTube video: a fragment of Monty Python’s film. The actors play ancient thinkers who exaggerate political correctness by overusing the pronouns “his” and “her” in every sentence. One of them also decides to become a woman and dreams about having a child. The rest of them initially criticize him, but then attempt to be extremely tolerant. The video is a parody of the pressure of political correctness. A comment to the article says: “Gender is being discussed all the time. So intensively that some people are tired of it. Let’s look at gender in a more humorous way.”³⁵

³¹ T. Terlikowski, ‘Według gender za dyskryminację uważa się nazwanie człowieka kobietą, mężczyzną’, *Fronda* [online] 2 January 2014. Available from: <http://www.fronda.pl/a/wedlug-gender-za-dyskryminacje-uwaza-sie-nazwanie-czlowieka-kobieta-mezczyzna,33147.html> [21 July 2014].

³² W. Póltawska, ‘Przytul żonę, weź ją na kolana i całuj’, *Deon* [online] 22 January 2014. Available from: <http://www.deon.pl/inteligentne-życie/ona-i-on/art,403,przytul-zone-wez-ja-na-kolana-i-caluj.html> [19 July 2014].

³³ Z. Zarebianka, ‘Mężczyzna to wieczne dziecko’, *Deon* [online] 29 January 2014. Available from: <http://deon.pl/inteligentne-życie/psychologia-na-co-dzień/art,20,mezczyzna-to-wieczne-dziecko.html> [19 July 2014].

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Anon., ‘Gender według Monty Pythona’, *Deon* [online] 29 January 2014. Available from: <http://www.deon.pl/po-godzinach/michalki/art,211,gender-wedlug-monty-python.html> [21 July 2014].

Further on in the article, the author quotes the definition of gender from the conference titled “Gender in the eyes of specialists,” organized in order to find out if gender is an ideology and to gather the followers and opponents of “gender ideology.” The quoted definition says:

Gender is a social construct which defines a set of roles, expectations, stereotypes classified as masculine or feminine and which are built around biological features, says Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara, professor of the University of Warsaw and gender specialist. — The initiator of the first gender studies in the Middle-East European countries indicated that WHO defines gender as a term created for describing social roles, activities and attributes which the society sees as proper for men and women respectively.³⁶

In the text we find a link to another article titled “Is gender an ideology? Opinions of experts.” It is a report from the conference organized by KAI “Gender in the eyes of specialists.” The article generally explains what gender is; voice is given to the specialists. They emphasize that gender is a social science and that “changes in the family happen independently and gender only describes them.”³⁷ They also focus on the importance of gender roles in the society, which can be a source of violence, such as abuse of women.

The standpoint of the Church is represented by Bishop (later Archbishop) Wojciech Polak. He refers to the letter of Polish bishops which was the source of dissent and misunderstandings between the two sides of the conflict. He claims that “it was not about defending the Church, but about defending humans and society.” He also notices that the short form of the letter does not give the opportunity to analyze the problem of gender properly and that only a debate gives a chance to explain the arguments of both sides. He says that the interpretation of sexual orientation from the gender point of view cannot be the only one. He adds that it cannot lead to forming either national or international law.

Another point of view was represented by the president of the National Council of Lay Catholics, who claimed that “there are some people who want to rule my life, the life of my children and grandchildren without asking me. And then I start panicking because it reminds me of the time of Communism.”

The director of KAI Marcin Przeworski summed up the conference by stating that “the conference wasn’t a debate between the representatives of the Church and scientists, but a discussion of prominent experts from different scientific areas about a very important problem addressed in public debate.”³⁸ Małgorzata Kozłowska, editor-in-chief of *Znak* magazine provides an excellent summary:

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Anon., ‘Czy gender jest ideologią? Opinie specjalistów’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 23 January 2014. Available from: <http://www.deon.pl/religia/kosciol-i-swiat/z-zycia-kosciola/art,17317,czy-gender-jest-ideologia-opinie-specjalistow.html> [21 July 2014].

³⁸ Ibid.

We, Christians, face a great challenge — defining the values of our culture, which we introduce as Christians to the debate in which it is being considered what does it mean to be a woman and a man.³⁹

Gender was the most popular topic on *Tygodnik.onet.pl* — six articles were dedicated strictly to this issue in December–January. In the context of the gender affair in Poland, the portal used to add to the articles a category called “gender witch-hunt.” For *Tygodnik Powszechny*, the representative on gender and other sexual issues in general is priest Jacek Prusak — Jesuit, publicist and PhD of psychology. He refers to the very basic origins of gender studies from 1958 and presents all the facts connected with it. He claims that

results gathered throughout the years of research show that anatomy isn't a destination; and that we have to think in a new way about what sex is and what masculinity and femininity mean. Sex is not a simple metric variable, nor an individual characteristic, but rather a social category; cognitive, emotional and personal differences between men and women are small. Undoubtedly, gender needs a critical analysis, especially when it leaves the domain of the academia and becomes the “politics of sex”. [...] The analysis of “gender ideology” cannot be ideological itself which unfortunately happens often in the Polish Church. We are not sexless creatures with optional human forms, but we cannot identify the Biblical concept of creating a man and a woman with sexual stereotypes rising to the level of dogmas.⁴⁰

In another article Adam Boniecki comments on the controversial lecture of priest Paweł Bortkiewicz, Director of Ethics Center of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. 200 scientist had stood against this lecture, writing a letter as a form of protest. Some of them tried to explain the misunderstanding. For example, Professor Ewa Kraskowska, Director of the Gender Identity Center of UAM, wrote: “We research what it means to be a woman and a man in a specific social group; what it means to be an old woman, a girl, a poor man, whereas we are accused of the sexualization of babies and starting pedophilia in the Church.”⁴¹ Another author of the letter, Krzysztof Podemski, claims:

Gender theory states that differences between the sexes are not only determined by biology but to a large extent they are defined by culture. The Latino pattern of macho, Italian son depending on his mother, the Polish pattern of the Polish mother or the French femme fatale are cultural, not biological constructs. Rejecting gender means reducing human sexuality to biology. In such way of thinking we can see analogies to the very primitive version of Marxism, which reduced everything to economy.⁴²

Professor Roman Kubicki, ethicist, Director of the Philosophy Institute of UAM: “The model of family changes — in the opinion of some for the better, in the opinion of others for the worse. But blaming scientists for that can be compared to blaming the thermometer for low temperature.”

³⁹ Anon., ‘Czy gender jest ideologią?..’

⁴⁰ J. Prusak, ‘Być kobietą, być mężczyzną’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 12 December 2013. Available from: <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wiara/czym-jest-gender-a-czym-nie-jest/y4cbn> [21 July 2014].

⁴¹ A. Boniecki, ‘Gender w Dolinie Kościeliskiej’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 10 December 2013. Available from: <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/kraj/ks-adam-boniecki-o-gender/ntq8z> [21 July 2014].

⁴² Ibid.

The statement of the Church was represented by Archbishop Hoser, who claims that gender is a “modern anthropologic heresy,” because it “questions biological sex” and “breaks apart the elements of the complementariness of a man and a woman; breaks very important social relations and leads to the atomization of society.” Adam Boniecki summarizes the text with a conclusion that people of the Church were very sensitive about everything created by culture.

Before the war they were fighting against women wearing trousers. Even while skiing, women had to wear skirts. Rumor has it that one day Archbishop Sapieha was walking down the Kościeliska Valley when suddenly from the forest, with the crash of broken branches, burst out a girl on skis. She fell so rapidly that the speed put her upside down. Archbishop looked and muttered “maybe it’s good that they want to ski in trousers”. As we can see, the Church is able to correct its own statements.⁴³

Tygodnik Powszechny informs about the conference “Gender in the eyes of specialists,” but they emphasize that the group of specialists did not include priest Dariusz Oko, who is very well-known for his radical statements against gender.

The portal also refers to the previous debate organized by *Tygodnik Powszechny*. They quote Professor Fuszara, who wrote in *Tygodnik Powszechny* 50/2013 about two different theories concerning the origins of the whole “gender affair.”

The first of them is the idea of gender affair as a form of a classic backlash, which assumes that the new idea does not interest the public until it starts to change the reality. When the sex equality starts to be visible through women’s successes, influences politics and gathers women, becoming harder and harder to ignore, it causes backlash and elicits hate. The second explanation can be the fear of a chance for social change. In the past feminists were attacked [...]. Today many Catholic women refer to Catholicism of John Paul II, so it is difficult to attack the term “feminism.” Meanwhile the secret word “gender” has appeared...⁴⁴ [...] Those who didn’t dedicate any time to check what it means don’t understand it and are likely to absurdly attack gender. For example, they compare it to Nazism. Such attacks do not reveal any information; they are just an abusive etiquette, a way of discouraging people from it. For me — she added — people who are against feminism and gender are people who want to maintain the status quo. In fact, in discovering the inequality of the sexes there exists some potential for change. If we discover the difference in salaries, then this knowledge raises practical questions: why are women supposed to earn less and have a smaller income? Another question is, who makes use of it in the area of social politics.⁴⁵

Jacek Prusak also tries to find the origins of the gender affair and discovers that “the dispute about gender shows the attrition of two different ways of understanding the Bible and what comes next — two different ways of looking at the relations between religion and science.”⁴⁶ It is the attrition of people who treat the Bible as the “ultimate criterion of faith and morals,” who claim that “there are only two sexual

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Anon., ‘W Kościele o gender bez ks. Oko? Ta konferencja to przełom’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 17 January 2014. Available from: <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wiara/w-kosciele-o-gender-bez-ks-okota-konferencja-to-przelom/1ymxv> [21 July 2014].

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ J. Prusak, ‘Bóg stworzył tylko jedną płeć’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 16 January. Available from <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wiara/ks-jacek-prusak-bog-stworzyl-tylko-jedna-plec/feg8y> [21 July 2014].

identities (according to Gen.1, 26–27) and only one sexual orientation (heterosexuality).” Every theory which offends this statement is perceived as a threat to the traditional model of family. He also cites A. Thatcher who claimed that the historical analysis shows that throughout the majority of Christian history there was one sex — “a man” — and the differences between men and women were the result of the intensity of individual features, not categorical differences.⁴⁷

In this model, biological sex existed on a single continuum: from (better) man to (worse) woman; and between them there were many gradations referring to power, strength, virtue, status. Patriarchy was a system of perpetuating these inequalities. [...] If a man is made in the image of God then differences refer to the roles (gender) and not sex, because it is only one sex.⁴⁸

He also refers to treating the Bible as a “holy encyclopedia” which is often interpreted directly. But in the tradition there exist different ways of interpretation. He claims that

Christianity needs a theology of gender for at least two reasons. Firstly, in order not to take social stereotypes as “blessed truths” (e.g. Tm 2, 8–15). Secondly, to make proper use of the real blessed truths. Our fundamental identity is not determined by chromosomes XX or XY because in Christ we are one (Gal 3,28). [...] Christ’s body gathers bodies of all people and their identities. Please, let us not make an ideological category from the creation because natural law is not an “entity in itself” and the Bible is not a book of sciences about humans.⁴⁹

Zuzanna Radzik also tries to interpret the letter of the bishops about gender in a critical way. She accuses them of not using proper methodology and of not referring to any literature, not understanding the standards of sexual education stated by the WHO, and generally not understanding the foundations of gender theory. She also mocks such perspectives by citing a

blogger from Deon who claims that the figure of the elf in the second part of *The Hobbit* is a result of fighting gender and feminist influence. Teletubbies, Harry Potter, Hello Kitty — what other figures from pop culture should a Catholic be afraid of? Are we not becoming funny? — she asks.

Radzik calls on the clergy:

Instead of scaring people from the pulpit, say that the lack of partnerships in the family and the violence against women are sins. And instead of influencing politicians in order to give a multiplex to TV Trwam, do something to make sure that rape is punished immediately. [...] The Church is also a space of men who try to create a less patriarchal model of masculinity (indeed, they fight against their gender). Did you tell them in any letter that it’s really cool? Talk to us instead of appealing. Instead of representing conservative men in their fifties, represent us all together. Episcopate, come back to us! There are so many topics to talk about!⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ J. Prusak, ‘Bóg stworzył tylko jedną płeć’.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Z. Radzik, ‘List biskupów na temat gender: instrukcja obsługi’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 29 December 2013. Available from: <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wiara/list-biskupow-na-temat-gender-instrukcja-obslugi/qkh9z> [21 July 2014].

In another text, she notices that gender is indeed most often used by LGBT representatives because it “reflects their problems and demands. But Catholic theologians can also make use of it while thinking about men and women’s vocations.” She claims that gender is just another issue, after Masons and Jews, that frightens the Polish society, and the society “tries to defend itself from the Western civilization and its ideology as if we were in the past, the wall of Christianity in the time of Sobieski.”⁵¹

Conclusions

The gender affair reflects the division into two Churches that I discuss in my thesis. It also shows the political engagement and bias of the researched web portals. The Church portals remain preservative and are more open to discussion. Wiara.pl does not publish articles referring to gender issues (which reflects its mostly apolitical character, at least in the sections devoted to family issues), while Deon.pl tries to present all the views on the issue that were juxtaposed during the conference organized by Tygodnik Powszechny, which gives readers the opportunity to understand the basics of the conflict. The language of the discourse remains neutral and objective, in opposition to the lexical subjectivity of Fronda.pl and Tygodnik.onet.pl. The choice of different experts and openness in talking about sexuality by Deon goes against the statement of Igor Borkowski, who claims the Catholic journalists are those “who do not offer values that the readers look for — an integral and positive vision of the world which will show what, in the opinion of Catholics, is not presented in the media: altruistic ethical acts and moral correctness in the family and public life.”⁵² What may be surprising is that strictly Catholic web portals do not get heavily involved in politics, as opposed to Fronda.pl and Tygodnik.onet.pl, which consequently act on their (political) biases.

The greatest controversies circle around the gender-oriented rhetorics of Fronda.pl and Tygodnik.onet.pl, which represent two polarized ways of treating the problem of sexual identity. The gender affair appears to be complex. It seems that the main issues in this conflict stem from a misunderstanding concerning the basic assumptions of gender theory. Tygodnik.onet.pl treats the approach to gender as an indicator of how narrow-minded traditional Catholics are. Both portals quote the authorities who confirm their theories and accuse other media of a lack of objectivity.

⁵¹ Z. Radzik, ‘Przepis na wroga’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 5 December 2013. Available from: <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wiara/skad-sie-bierze-nagonka-na-gender-czyli-przepis-na-wroga/z8kkm> [21 July 2014].

⁵² I. Borkowski, A. Woźny, *W lustrze. Wizerunek mediów własny*, Wrocław 2002, p. 116.

The analysis of these Catholic web portals provides answers to a majority of the questions included in my article. The most complex one of them was whether the division of the Catholic media scene into two Churches really exists and in what ways it is reflected in the discourse on gender.

This thesis is in agreement with Marek Zając, a publicist from *Tygodnik Powszechny*, who claims that in terms of moral beliefs there are no divisions — Polish priests do not argue about them. „None among Polish hierarchs has opinions that could be called liberal. Our priests do not argue about such problems as the Eucharist for the divorced or contraception [...]”,⁵³ he claims. Therefore, he concludes that the only division lies in the way of talking to the people and working with them — the question is whether priests should keep the distance between themselves and the people, or try to be close to them and understand their problems.⁵⁴ In *Znak* magazine, Dominika Kozłowska claims that the open Church has ended, because the contemporary Church divides people into Catholics and non-Catholics, those who cried after John Paul II's death and those who did not;⁵⁵ following this idea — those who understand gender as a serious threat and those who do not support this idea.

Father Ksawery Knotz, well-known for popularizing the idea of Catholics' sexuality as full of joy and satisfaction, comments on this question by referring to his experience with the media. He claims that his views are targeted to both secular and Catholic media. The same views are too liberal or too conservative for the strongly polarized media. He blames the Catholic media for not being aware of the real needs of Catholics, who want to make love without feeling guilty and to feel the pleasure of tenderness. However, he also accuses the secular media of sensationalism, for instance when they ask him to say the word “orgasm” on air in order to gain bigger popularity. He argues that the media will not make money on talking about pure and happy love, but on discussing gender, in vitro fertilization and abortion issues. Knotz notices that the Catholic and secular media have a lot in common — there are no black and white divisions and they both tend to use various means to make money. He also notices that what is the same for both sides of the conflict about sexuality and morals is the image they hold of the Church, which is seen as an institution that forces people to have many children and that does not let them feel satisfaction from their sexual life.⁵⁶ This may be the reason for the current shape of the Catholic media discourse on such a topic as the gender affair.

⁵³ Anon., ‘Przed wyborami przewodniczącego KEP: Biskupi nie dzielą się już na »Kościół toruński« i »łagiewnicki«’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* [online] 14 March 2014. Available from: <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wiara/przed-wyborami-przewodniczacego-kep-biskupi-nie-dziela-sie-juz-na-kosciol-torunski-e/n15lm> [20 July 2014].

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ D. Kozłowska, ‘Kościół otwarty po 65 latach’, *Znak* [online], July 2011. Available from: <http://www miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/804/calosc/kosciol-otwarty-po-65-latach> [20 July 2014].

⁵⁶ K. Knotz, ‘Między wielkim erotomanem a wielkim eunuchem’, *Więź* [online] November–December 2011. Available from: <http://issuu.com/wiez/docs/wiez-2011-11-12> [20 July 2014], pp. 70–81.

Tematyka gender na wybranych portalach katolickich jako odzwierciedlenie linii podziału Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce

Streszczenie

Celem autorki artykułu było rozpoznanie, czy często poruszana tematyka gender może być oznaką podziału Kościoła i mediów katolickich na dwie frakcje: liberalną i konserwatywną. Badanie oparto na analizie treści publikowanych na czterech wiodących portalach katolickich: Fronda.pl, Tygodnik.onet.pl, Wiara.pl oraz Deon.pl. Przedmiotem sporu autorów katolickich okazuje się skrajnie różna interpretacja teorii gender. Analiza treści pozwala stwierdzić, że popularność tego tematu częściej podyktowana jest realizacją teorii użyteczności i zysku niż ilustracją realnych podziałów istniejących wewnątrz Kościoła, dotyczących odmiennych interpretacji kościelnych dogmatów.