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MIRA MARODY AND SLAWOMIR MANDES

On Functions of Religion in Molding the National Identity of Poles

ABSTRACT: *Poland is usually portrayed as a country with a low level of secularization, and Polish religiosity is treated as the core element of national identity. In this article, the first opinion is challenged on the basis that processes of secularization are operating in Poland. They can be traced first of all in the growing independence of individual religiosity from the institution of the Catholic Church. To explain the persistence of the high and stable percentage of believers, the authors analyze historical relations between religion and the formation of nationhood. They argue that the formation of nationhood in Europe was related to the growth of “secular rituals” that could not develop in Poland because of its prolonged lack of political sovereignty. The main thesis of the article is that religion was (and still is) the main source of collective rituals through which the national identity was formed and is sustained in Polish society. Therefore, the decreasing importance of religious identification for national identity will be dependent on the emergence of new, secular rituals. Poland’s accession to the European Union is likely to facilitate such a process.*

The conviction that religion is an important—if not the most important—element in the contemporary national identity of Poles belongs to the domain of those ideas that have hardly ever been contested. This is well supported by empirical data. A very high and long-term stable percentage of people declare themselves to be Catholics. This is reinforced by the results of statistical analyses showing that Polish data do not fit the expected pattern of behavior under conditions of enforced secularization (Muellemann 2004). Last but not least, this is supported by the declarations of many politicians for whom the religiosity of Polish society is

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not only a key feature of national identity but constitutes the uniqueness of Poles among the other nations of Europe (Jasińska-Kania and Marody 2004). Those politicians would eagerly attest to the findings formulated by researchers according to whom “Catholicism in Poland as a pledge of national identity has not only resisted the Communist attack on religion, but held the position of religion against secularism in general” (Muellemann 2004: 52; see also Pollack 2001: 141–43, 154–55).

Such a correspondence between political claims and scientific findings is slightly disturbing. This is not only because politicians usually appeal to stereotypes, clichés, and truisms in their declarations while social scientists are expected to challenge rather than support those elements of commonsense knowledge, but also because the results of deeper analyses of Polish religiosity challenge the absence of secularization processes in Poland (Mandes 2004; Marody 2004).

It is true that Polish society is characterized by an extremely high percentage of believers, but a high level of religiosity is neither unique nor specific to Poles. According to data from the European Values Study, a relatively high percentage of persons defining themselves as religious characterizes the majority of West European countries, and, in this respect, Poland is more similar to Western societies than to other postcommunist ones that were subjected to enforced secularization. Moreover, in terms of the percentage of people who declare belonging to a religious denomination, Poland occupies only fifth place among six European countries in which this indicator is higher than 90 percent (see Table 1). Furthermore, although many European nations (e.g., Germans, Finns, and Danes) have a high percentage of people who declare belonging to a religious denomination (76–90 percent), they have not declared that religion is a “pledge of their national identity.”

In other words, it is not enough to point to the high percentage of believers to conclude that religiosity is a part of national identity in Poland. On the other hand, this is a sufficient reason to ask about religion’s role in molding it.

Religion and National Identity

To understand contemporary relationships between religion and national identity one should remember that they reflect and are based on deeper changes in Western culture, changes that are rooted in modernization processes. By modernization we mean, following Berger, Berger, and Kellner, a historical process “by which the entity ‘modern society’ was originally created and by which it continues to be diffused” (1977: 15). This historical process of modernization has been responsible for both the emergence of the modern idea of nation and the changing character of religiosity in European societies.

The idea of nation emerged in the eighteenth century along with the French Revolution, and from the very beginning it was related to the state. It was the process of state formation and the rise of bureaucracy that gave birth to ideas of nationhood and nationality (Breuilly 1985; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992). The

Table 1

Basic Indicators of Individual Religiosity in the Most Religious Countries

	Poland	Romania	Malta	Greece	Iceland	Ireland
Declaring belonging to religious denomination	96	98	99	97	96	91
Participating in religious practices once a week or more often	59	25	83	14	3	65
Being a religious person	94	85	75	83	74	74
Believing in God	97	96	99	94	84	95
Believing in life after death	80	68	86	59	78	79
Believing in hell	66	71	81	53	17	53
Believing in heaven	80	75	88	59	59	85
Believing in sin	90	91	93	83	64	86
Believing in telepathy	40	66	34	49	61	42
Believing in reincarnation	25	28	12	23	41	23

Source: European Values Study, 1999.

importance of this fact becomes obvious when one recalls that in the eighteenth century most of the present states of Central Eastern Europe did not exist as independent political entities, and the rest (Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary) lost their independence soon thereafter. This did not stop the development of the idea of nationality in the region, but gave it a different direction from that of West Europe countries. The difference is sometimes described briefly by saying that in Western Europe states were creating nations whereas in Eastern Europe nations were creating states (see Janowsky 1945; Kohn 1945).

This dissimilarity of historical circumstances under which the idea of nationality was being formed had some important consequences. For example, Anthony Smith (1965, 1986) speaks about two different types of nationalism—civic and ethnic—that developed, correspondingly, in Western and Eastern Europe. Following him, Michel Ley points to the various effects of current developments:

Contemporary Europe is marked by two opposing trends: in the West the principle of national state has been increasingly buried as a result of rapid modernization and internationalization of the economy and society, while eastern societies after the break-up of real socialism have seen their future exactly in the principle of the sovereign national state. Thus, for different reasons, the two processes have brought about nationalism as a result. Nationalism in the West is a protest movement of socially endangered strata who suspect a loss of their status in the modernization process, while nationalism in Eastern Europe is successfully actuated by the postcommunist elites as a new legitimating ideol-

ogy. Therefore the specificity of the nationalist trend in the West is its “strata” character, while the eastern version carries the sign of a collective loss of identity. (Ley 1996: 10)

Although attractive, thanks to its simplicity, such a distinction does not reveal more specific differences in the formation of the “eastern version” of national identities. In fact, there are four separate models of nationalism in the region, and at least one of them is closely related to religion.

Ethnic nationalism in its purest form characterized nations that were under the rule of Turkey for centuries: Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Particularly significant is the case of Romania. Losing its sovereignty early and being dependent on Turkey and Greece, on the one hand, and on Hungary, on the other, it has built its national identity on mythologized ethnic genealogy. The myth of Roman descent and heritage of ancient Dacia as a feature that distinguishes Romanians from other nations was supported not only by the prewar right, but also strongly by the Ceausescu regime (see Boia 2003).

The process of formation of the Czech national identity presents a different model, one based on the idea of modernization. The leading ideologists of the Czech “national revival” (Palacki, Masaryk) held that the “wakening” of national identity should be realized by the development of education and industrialization (see Ducreux 2000). Promoting these two fundamental features of modernization was seen as the most effective way to achieve appropriate civic status within the Austrian Empire. It also served as legitimization for the feeling of superiority in relation to other nations in the empire.

This dual frame of reference for the formation of national identity was also present among Poles and Hungarians. It led, however, to the development of two different models of nationalism. The first model, “ethnic-defensive” ideology, defines national identity in biological terms and its preservation is seen as determined by a nation’s ability to mobilize all its forces to fight against a hostile environment (Kiss 1996). The second model has romantic origins (see Berlin 2001). In its extreme version, a nation is interpreted in terms of a sacred entity, and its history is interpreted in theological terms, according to which a given ethnic group has a special eschatological mission.¹ In a more moderate version of this model, a nation is regarded as having a mission of civilization with respect to neighboring, “nationally immature” societies and a mission as moral guide for the “degenerate” countries of Western Europe.

These two versions of “romantic nationalism” are related to religion in two ways. First, they appeal to traditional values of Christian civilization that should be preserved and propagated in the face of evil changes brought about by modernization. Second, they borrow religion’s specific language for building national identity in the absence of an independent state. This is stressed by Hajo Funke who points to the functional similarities of religion and nationalism: “They both integrate social groups in a supra-individual entity and make individual existence valuable;

both indicate to their adherents specific roles in their environment; both suggest the foundation of morality, the normative basis for people's life together, require from people a distinct responsibility, and propose a pattern for the imposition or forgiveness of guilt" (1991: 115).

There is, however, one important difference between religion and nationalism—the former is universal whereas the latter is always particular. Nationalism uses the universal language of religion to formulate particular claims. As a result, religion has paid all the costs of “national awakening” because nationalism not only manifests “its Ersatz-religious character” by appropriating this kind of universalistic language, but in so doing it also influences the content of religious faith “by stripping religion and religious symbols of their ‘primary meaning’ and by their functionalisation” (Merdjanova 2000: 249).

The borrowing of religious language by arising nationalism was not a phenomenon restricted to Eastern Europe. It was an inseparable part of broader trends related to modernization, which gave rise to various “secular religions.” According to Serge Moscovici, the idea of such secular religions “was one of the discoveries of the French Revolution, and Robespierre was the first to see them as a powerful way of regenerating a nation and an instrument enabling him to make Republic replace the monarchy completely. Secular celebrations of Reason and the Supreme Being crowned the discovery” (1985: 354–55). What secular religions have in common is that they propose a total view of the social world in which the individual is part of a larger collective—a nation, social class, political party, and so on. They are secular because they are developed in the political sphere of social life but their main function is the same as that of religion in traditional society: to create a feeling of collective identity and social cohesion.

The emergence of “secular religions” was one of the most important factors of modernization in transforming religious attitudes and the general status of religion in people's lives. Leading sociologists of religion (Berger 1967; Luckmann 1967; Wilson 1987) agree that the religiosity of contemporary Western societies was shaped by two basic processes of modernization. The first was the process of secularization. Its sources were in the functional differentiation of the public sphere and it was accompanied by the liberation of its particular domains from the institutional and axiological domination of religion. It not only reduced the position of religion in public life, but also fundamentally changed the rules underlying social behavior, promoting the transition from value-oriented to task-oriented rationality. The second process was individualization, which took place in all spheres of people's lives. Its consequence for individual religiosity was a retreat from institutionalized orthodoxy toward more selective and more “privatized” religious belief systems.

Secularization drove religion out of the public sphere and placed it in the private space, whereas individualization of religious beliefs “undermined the taken-for-granted status of religious meanings in individual consciousness. In the absence

of consistent and general social confirmation, religious definitions of reality have lost their quality of certainty, and instead, have become matters of choice" (Berger, Berger, and Kellner 1977: 77). Nation took over the place of religion, which had for centuries integrated believers against the "others" and by the same token was the basis for the most general collective identity. In the institutionalized sphere, the Church had to give way to the state as the main mediator between collective actors (Gauchet 1997). The public sphere "has come more and more to be dominated by civic creeds and ideologies with only vague religious content or sometimes no such content at all" (Berger, Berger, and Kellner 1977: 76).

At least this was so in Western Europe, and more specifically, in those of its regions where major ethnic groups were organized in independent states at the threshold of the modern era. In other regions, religion was able to preserve its specific function of integrating the collectivity and its special place in public life.² This hypothesis is supported by data from the European Values Study (Table 1). Six European countries that in 1999 had the highest percentage of believers seem completely different in all aspects except one—they were not independent for a long time or they lost their sovereignty at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³

Greece and Romania were part of the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth century until the Russo-Turkish Wars, when Greece (1832) and then Romania (1878) obtained recognition of their independence from the European powers. In the late fourteenth century, Iceland was passed by Norway to Denmark and it remained part of the Danish crown until June 17, 1944, when it was proclaimed an independent republic. The history of Ireland is marked by its dependence on England beginning in the twelfth century, when Pope Adrian IV granted overlordship of the island to Henry II of England. For the next 800 years Irish people fought for their independence. The Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 ended the Anglo-Irish War of 1919–21, establishing the Irish Free State of twenty-six counties within the British Commonwealth and recognizing the partition of the island into Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The cases of Malta and Poland differ somewhat. The modern history of Malta started in 1530 when the island was given to the Knights of the Order of St. John by the emperor Charles V. In 1798 it was taken over by Napoleon's army only to be seized by British forces two years later. England's reign ended in 1964, when Malta's independence was proclaimed, although Malta did not gain full sovereignty until 1974. Poland, in turn, was an independent kingdom until 1772, when it started being carved up by its neighbors: over twenty years, it became a part of Russia, Austria, and Prussia. For the next 123 years of partition, Poland disappeared from the map of Europe as an independent state. In 1918 it was restored as a sovereign state, which lasted until the Nazi occupation began in 1939. For forty-five years following World War II, Poland was forced to be under the communist regime.

Table 2

Distribution of Answers to Basic Indicators of Religiosity in Poland in 1990–1999

Religiosity indicator	1999	1990
1. I belong to a religious denomination	95.7	96.4
2. I am a religious person	91.8	89.6
3. I believe in the existence of a personal God	82.0	77.5
4. God is important in my life*	71.8	73.2
5. Religion gives me comfort and strength	74.9	71.6
6. There are moments of prayer, meditation, or contemplation in my life	84.8	85.3
7. I participate in religious practices once a week or more often	58.7	66.2
8. I think it is important to hold a religious service for:		
birth	95.4	93.8
marriage	93.2	94.9
death	94.4	92.5

Source: European Values Study, 1990, 1999.

*Percentage of people who chose 8, 9, or 10 on a ten-point scale ranging from “not at all important” (1) to “very important” (10).

While these six countries differ in history, their not being independent states at the time their national identities were forming has resulted in a common effect: it froze the percentage of believers at a level characteristic of traditional societies. This does not mean that they did not undergo secularization and individualization. The number of persons who declare belonging to a religious denomination is greater than the number of persons who say they participate in institutional practices, suggesting quite the opposite conclusion. To confirm this, a more detailed analysis of Poland is necessary.

The Changing Religiosity of Poles

The basic indicators of attitudes toward religious beliefs (see Table 2) suggests strong support by Poles of the hypothesis regarding the high religiosity of Polish society. Most Poles not only declare belonging to Catholicism but perceive themselves as religious persons, believe in a personal God, pray, and believe in the importance of religious service for birth, marriage, and death. The stability of their faith is demonstrated by the small number of changes in the distribution of answers between 1990 and 1999. Most of those changes were no greater than the

statistical error margin. The only indicator that dropped significantly during that time was participation in religious practices.

The latter finding is important because it suggests that the religiosity of Polish society has a more private, and not institutional, character. This is precisely what one would expect in the presence of individualization and secularization processes. The former (see Table 1) is reflected in the selective acceptance of beliefs belonging to prevailing Church dogma as well as in the acceptance of beliefs from systems of faith other than Christianity. It is also apparent that the countries with the highest religiosity percentages reveal a general pattern of answers that is characteristic of more secularized countries: the number of persons who declare belonging to a religious denomination is higher than the number of those who participate in institutional practices; the acceptance of particular religious beliefs is selective, with belief in God as the core of religiosity; and a quite large proportion of the respective populations accepts beliefs that do not belong to Christian dogma (e.g., belief in reincarnation or telepathy).

In various studies, secularization is usually identified with a low percentage of those who declare belonging to a religious denomination. It is obvious that in many countries this has caused people to become nonbelievers. However, as was mentioned above, secularization was rooted in changes in the public sphere rather than in individual relations to the institution of the Church. Thus, verification of the hypothesis about the presence or absence of secularization requires an analysis of attitudes toward the Church as an authority in domains other than religion. The European Values Study included several questions relevant to this issue (see Table 3).

As indicated in Table 3, the distribution of replies regarding whether the Church adequately addresses various problems is high in the case of Poland but it presents a pattern common to all the most religious countries: with the highest percentage of positive answers in the case of people's spiritual needs and the lowest percentage in the case of social problems facing the country today. It is even more important that between 1990 and 1999 in Poland there was a visible decrease in the percentage of people who chose positive answers to all four domains included in the question (see Figure 1), and the percentage of those who did not accept any of them doubled. Confidence in the Catholic Church, measured directly, is also rather moderate in Poland. Moreover, a comparison of data from 1990 and 1999 shows that confidence—both measured directly and indicated by acceptance of the Church's answers—has fallen considerably in the past ten years.

Moreover, answers to the questions about religious leaders in political life (labeled A, B, C, and D in Table 3) show an unexpected distribution for a country in which religion is supposed to be a part of national identity: Poland is distinguished from other countries by having the highest percentage of people who reject a possible influence of religious leaders on voting and government decisions. The corresponding answers in other religious countries of "secularized Western Europe" are considerably lower. Poland also has a very low percentage of people who belong to religious or church organizations.⁴

Table 3

Indicators of Attitudes Toward the Church

	Poland	Romania	Malta	Greece	Iceland	Ireland
The Church adequately addresses:						
People's spiritual needs	83	89	85	72	54	64
The problems of family life	64	78	75	44	45	27
The moral problems and needs of the individual	64	81	67	51	40	30
The social problems facing our country today	39	52	57	43	28	27
Having a great deal of confidence in the Church	33	48	50	29	13	21
Strongly agree with the opinion that:						
A. Politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office	7	25	11	29	3	4
B. Religious leaders shouldn't influence how people vote in elections	54	40	33	37	29	26
C. It would be better for (<i>name of country</i>) if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office	9	28	17	23	3	5
D. Religious leaders should not influence government decisions	49	39	24	28	22	22
Belonging to religious or church organizations	6	4	15	12	71	16

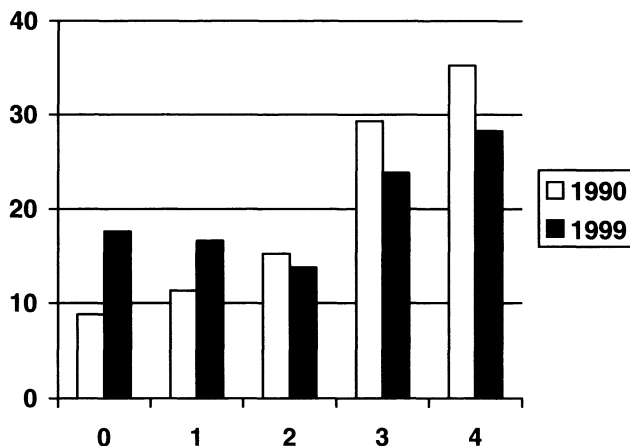
Source: European Values Study, 1999.

All of these data support the hypothesis of the presence of secularization in countries with the highest percentages of believers. They also give rise, however, to the questions of what kind of meaning such an individualized faith has for believers, how it motivates them to participate in religious practices, and in what way it influences the formation of their identity.

The Role of Religion in Molding the National Identity of Poles

The growing independence of individual religiosity from the institution of the Catholic Church is a rather paradoxical effect of the significant extension of the Church's institutional influence in Poland. During the past fifteen years, religious education was introduced in the public schools; a Vatican Concordat was signed giving the

Figure 1. Changes in the Distribution of People Who Chose from Zero to Four Positive Answers to the Question About Answers Given by the Church to Various Problems



Church jurisdiction over some areas that used to be the exclusive domain of the state; the Church's access to mass media has been facilitated through the emergence of new titles and broadcasting stations controlled by the Church and through the legal requirement of respect for Christian (i.e., Catholic) values in public media. The Church's representatives have become actively involved in political life, clearly expressing their support, or lack thereof, for specific parties and candidates, running for office in elections, and formulating the Church's position on issues such as Poland's joining the European Union. Thus, over the past fifteen years, religion that is institutionalized in the Catholic Church, has left churches and entered the public forum.

Poles did not greet this institutional expansion of the Church with enthusiasm. Nor has it stopped long-term secularization and individualization processes that have been transforming the religiosity of Polish society. During the ten years separating the two editions of the European Values Study in Poland, we have, first, noticed a decrease in acceptance of answers measuring individuals' religiosity. Second, religiosity has lost significance both as a precondition for a successful marriage and as a source of desirable values in raising children. Third, in the case of a majority of practices unequivocally condemned by the Church (divorce, abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, suicide), we note an increasing tendency to justify them. Moreover, this increasing permissiveness has nothing in common with moral relativism, as the percentage of respondents who accept the statement that "there are absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil. These always

apply to everyone, whatever the circumstances,” increased while the statistical correlation between this choice and individual religiosity disappeared.

So on one hand, we have evidence of a growing, stable presence of the Catholic Church in the public life of Poles and a very high percentage of persons who declare belonging to the Catholic Church and being religious. On the other hand, findings based on the analysis of attitudes and opinions demonstrate the secularization and individualization of Polish religiosity. Is it possible to make sense of these seemingly inconsistent data? There are also many more such inconsistencies. As was mentioned earlier, Poles consider the answers given by the Catholic Church to various problems of life to be adequate, but at the same time, they do not want religious leaders to influence political decisions in the country. A huge percentage of Poles claim that they attend Church services every week or even more often, but Church statistics (so-called *dominicantes*) indicate much lower numbers of attendees at mass (for 1999 the figures were 59 percent and 47 percent, respectively). According to a recent study (Szostkiewicz 2004), 83 percent of Poles hold that an adult person has the right to choose a religion different from the one in which s/he was raised, but 93 percent say that they would not change their religion: that is, if they were to choose today, they would still be Catholics. Last but not least, there is a large contrast between mass participation in pilgrimages and other church events and a low percentage of engagement in religious and church organizations.

One of the most common interpretations of these inconsistencies is that Polish religiosity has a “folk” character, meaning that its focus is on ritual rather than on the content of beliefs. In claiming this, many authors implicitly assume that participating in rituals is more superficial than participating in “cognitively” oriented faith, and that this allows people to tolerate numerous “gaps” between the Church commandments and daily behavior. However, if we interpret Polish religiosity in terms of a “cognitively empty” ritual, it raises the next question: what is hidden behind such ritualistic forms of behavior and beliefs? In other words, what are the hidden functions of Polish religiosity?

Asking about such functions of religion can help us not only to discover nonreligious meanings that may be ascribed to religious behavior but also to better understand some peculiarities of religiosity in any given society. For example, Bryan Wilson (1987), the eminent sociologist of religion, explained the contrast between the high number of churchgoers in American society and the rather diluted strength of their religious faith, pointing to “sociality” as one of the most important functions of church attendance in society. He also stressed other latent functions of religion (today almost forgotten), writing that religion can provide the reassertion of social solidarity, thus sustaining social cohesion and pointing to the fact that it solemnizes the social order and provides a basis for social control.

All of these latent functions operate through rituals. As Wilson put it: “When people were brought together for solemn acts . . . they unwittingly gained a

renewed and serious sense of themselves and of the legitimacy of their social organizations" (1987: 33). However, one should remember that the integrative functions of religion must be rooted in common beliefs. It is true that "through most of empirically available human history, religion has played a vital role in providing the overarching canopy of symbols for the meaningful integration of society. The various meanings, values and beliefs operative in a society were ultimately 'held together' in a comprehensive interpretation of reality that related human life to the cosmos as a whole" (Berger, Berger, and Kellner 1977: 75). But it is also obvious that religion was able to play such a role only because those meanings, values, and beliefs were *shared* by individuals. This was true until such a common ground for social integration was parceled out by the individualization of faiths that was induced by modernization.

As has been mentioned above, this common ground has been reconsolidated by one of the most significant events of modernization, the emergence of "secular religions." According to Serge Moscovici, "secular religions" have taken over all the social functions of religion. First, they "create a total view of the world as a palliative to the fragmentary and divided nature of all science and technology and indeed of knowledge in general." Thus, they satisfy "a deep and basic human need to fit everything that we experience as incompatible and inexplicable into a meaningful whole. . . . We need an overall view with a single cause (social class, race etc.) a universal principle (the class struggle, natural selection and so on), and a definite picture of the human and non-human world. What secular religions essentially do is provide us with a total view of that kind. They offer us a concept of world in which every problem has its solution" (1985: 355).

Second, they unite individuals in communities. To do this they have to elaborate ways "to harmonize relationships between the individual and society and to reconcile the social and antisocial tendencies present in the former" (*ibid.*, p. 356). This is achieved through establishing proper patterns of socialization and "replacing the constraints enforced by crude repression with those of the individual conscience" (*ibid.*). The last function is to hide mystery. "Every religion has its own. In its name it imposes rules and proclaims truths it does not explain. . . . Most artificial crowds (armies, parties, churches) are in touch with a mystery of that kind. They have a whole range of ceremonies, emblems and passwords (one need only think of the freemasons) that protect it and attack any attempt to reveal it" (*ibid.*, p. 357). In other words, "secular religions" have developed their own rituals that have retained the power to integrate people, but on behalf of communities other than the community of believers (nation, class, race, and other socially constructed categories).

The power of rituals to integrate the larger part of society was, however, dependent on free access to public space, which was supplied and controlled by the state. In this sense, the modern state colonized public space by introducing rituals that sanctified the nation as the most general and significant community, defining

the common good for all other communities. National identity formed through participation in such rituals.

The case of Poland is the opposite. The modern history of Poland has prevented the development of all ritual in the public sphere with the exception of only one—that connected to religion. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the concept of nation as the dominant community was shaped in Western countries, Poland was partitioned and had no opportunity to develop a modern understanding of its nationhood. The feeling of national identity was based on a distinct language and religion, that is, on ethnicity rather than a politically organized nation. In the twentieth century, a brief period of independence was simply too short to result in the formation of a modern national identity.⁵ It was followed by German occupation, which suppressed all expressions of nationalistic feeling, and, then, by the communist regime, which tried to install a very specific understanding of the idea of nation.

Patrick Michel (1995), analyzing the semantic context in which the word “nation” appeared in Jaruzelski’s speeches in the 1980s, points out that the concept was used synonymously with the socialist state, and, as a result, took over all the meanings related to the latter. Those meanings were established at the very beginning of the communist period and did not change during the forty-five years of its duration. According to these meanings, the survival of Poles and Poland was tied to the survival of the socialist state whose existence was continuously threatened by hostile forces and at the same time dependent on the Soviet Union, a guardian of the stability of international order. This image of national identity repeated the major ideas underlying nineteenth-century “ethnic-defensive” ideology, with only one difference—the Polish nation appeared to be incapable of politically independent existence and its representatives not mature enough to decide about its fate.

Obviously, there were other images of Polish nations at those times, but they did not reach the broader public. During the entire period of communism, the public sphere was strictly controlled by the communist party, and churches were the only niche in which rituals, preserving the precommunist, romantic model of nationality, could be performed. The first lifting of that control came with the first pilgrimage of the Polish Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła) to Poland in June 1979. The political importance of his visit, as many authors stress, was connected to two facts. First, during numerous meetings with the Pope people were not only able to confess their religious faith in public, but also to experience a feeling of unity based on values that were different from those officially propagated, and at the same time, destroyed the ideological monopoly of the communist ideology. Second, public religious meetings gave people an opportunity to “count” one another and see that they constituted a huge power and were capable of organizing themselves outside institutions totally controlled by political authorities. But the revival of society’s autonomy that took place under these circumstances only froze the

feeling of collective identity in its traditional religious shape and this has lasted to the present.

In popular opinion the Polish Pope embodied all the positive features of the nation and the election of Karol Wojtyła was viewed as the rise of the whole nation to its proper position. One should not forget, however, that this position was based on religion: Poles felt deserving most of all because they had remained Catholics even under the communist regime. This, in turn, revived old topoi of nineteenth-century romantic nationalism.⁶ Pope John Paul II himself often recalled the ideas of romantic nationalism in his sermons during pilgrimages to Poland (see Michel 1995). He separated the nation from the state, and in his sermons the “Nation” became a fundamental and autonomous form of Polish identity.⁷ The primary feature of the Nation was its religiosity and because of this feature Poland was also to play an important role in the Pope’s program of reevangelizing Western Europe (Byrnes 2001)

During the twenty-five years of John Paul II’s pontificate everything in the lives of Poles changed: their political and economic system, political parties and alliances, individual values, and strategies of action. The Pope seemed to be the only stable element in the collective identity of Poles. In all public surveys he ranked first on the list of the most important personalities in Polish history. Even a slight criticism of him received universal condemnation whereas carefully formulated questions about possible changes in the Catholic Church that might be introduced by his successor filled people with consternation. The Polish Pope became an icon of collective Polish identity and as long as he lived, this identity would manifest itself mainly through religious rituals.

There are at least two important consequences of this fact. The first is related to the future transformation of Polish religiosity, which is changing in accordance with regular features of modernization. Polish society is becoming more secularized, at least in the sense that it wants to limit the role of the Church to strictly religious matters and rejects its influence on political and social decisions. People’s religious beliefs are becoming more selective. These processes deepen the polarization of Polish Catholicism. Although it is still confined to the old institutional formula, one can expect this formula to change since the death of John Paul II.

The second consequence of the manifesting of national identity in Poland through religious rituals is the present domination of religious issues in the public sphere. During the entire transformation period, the most controversial issues on the agenda of the Polish parliament were: the introduction of religion in the schools, a ban on abortion, an invocation to God in the preamble of the Constitution, and the Vatican Concordat. It is worth mentioning here that all of these legal achievements have had little influence on the actual behavior of Poles, which seems to depart far from both the “Christian values” recommended by the Church and more secular, legal regulations. Polish sociologists agree that Poles have serious problems in obeying the law and that no clear rules are observed in the public sphere. Findings from the

European Values Study corroborate this opinion. Poles exhibit greater strictness in their attitudes toward civic morality than do the majority of their East European neighbors and even the majority of other EU societies, but they also hold the opinion that these norms are commonly broken in Poland (Jasińska-Kania 2004).

With respect to the ritualistic character of Polish religiosity, we do not want to lessen its significance. Rather, we follow Emile Durkheim who demonstrated in his well-known book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that religious rituals should not be underestimated. They have very important tasks in maintaining social order: they allow people to recognize themselves as a community, entertain collective sentiments, and express a sense of social unity. Moreover, they serve as a means of changing reality to bring it closer to a desired state of affairs, because ritual is a performance of “properly patterned behavior in order to symbolically influence real life and participation in it” (Rothenbuhler 2003: 45).

Thus, one can say that in making such a strong effort to attend religious services and celebrate religious feasts, Poles are trying to restore moral order as well as to purify themselves from what they perceive as necessary concessions to immoral everyday life. Otherwise, it is difficult to account for the fact that Poland is the only nation in the European Values Study in which more than 50 percent of respondents accept the opinion that “there are absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil,” while at the same time most of them are aware that norms are routinely broken and they often participate in this. The only possible alternative explanation is that the majority of Polish society is cynical.

At the same time, one should, however, remember that in a society in which people’s religiosity is shaped by the processes of secularization and individualization such symbolic means of maintaining national identity and influencing social reality can produce nothing more than a community of emotions and memories. Collective religious rituals remain simply rituals: their essence is not embedded in everyday behavior, which is instead shaped by other, mostly situational factors. In other words, rituals generate a “Sunday best” identity, while the Monday morning realities of everyday life influence the daily behavior of Poles.

The dominance of religious rituals in the public sphere is a consequence of the underdevelopment of secular rituals because of the specific historic circumstances under which the national identity was formed. But currently, it is also the main obstacle to the transformation of the public sphere and the development of the modern idea of nationhood, because it produces a collectivity organized around the “moral right” and not around interests. Many theorists (see, e.g., Ost 1990; Linz and Stepan 1996) stress that this kind of “ethical civil society” was invented by the democratic opposition in Poland during its fight against the communist regime. They also point to the fact that a significant feature of this ethical civil society was the “politics of antipolitics,” by which is meant the society’s desire to create a sphere of freedom independent of the state. It may be argued, however, that in Poland the “politics of antipolitics” has motivated the activity of national

movements since their very beginning, that is, since the end of the eighteenth century when Poland lost its independence. David Ost's opinion that the democratic opposition of the 1980s "did not want to possess power so much as to abolish it" (1990: 2) can be repeated with no change in the case of any of numerous opposition movements that have taken place over the past 200 years of Polish history.⁸

It goes without saying, that such an attitude toward governmental institutions, transmitted over centuries to the current context, is disastrous for the well-being of a society that has finally won independence.⁹ In their book about the transition to democracy and democratic consolidation, Linz and Stepan point out that elevating "the situational ethics of oppositional behavior into a general principle of the 'politics of anti-politics' . . . inevitably created discourses and practices that, until they are transformed, will generate systemic problems for the creation of a democratic political society. Ethical civil society represents 'truth' but political civil society in a consolidated democracy normally represents 'interests.' In political society the actor is only seldom the 'nation' but more routinely 'groups'" (1996: 271, 272). Unfortunately, for Polish politicians the main subject of politics is still the nation—obviously, the Catholic nation.

Conclusions

One of the most important latent functions of religion is the role it plays in identity formation. Believers in Catholicism, Protestantism, or Islam may feel that being a Catholic, Protestant, or Muslim is an important element of not only individual but also social identity, and may insist on having the opportunity to express it publicly as well as receiving some kind of social recognition for important elements of their faith. In secularized countries of Western Europe this often results in social and political conflicts. Recent examples of such conflicts include the fight in French schools against the Muslim religious custom requiring girls to wear scarves and the Polish struggle to introduce "Christian values" in the preamble of the European Constitution.

Poland's case is particularly interesting with respect to the impact of religion on the formation of national identity and the role it may play in European integration processes. On the one hand, Poland is the largest of the countries that have recently joined the European Union, and it has one of the highest percentages of believers. Moreover, Poles entered the European Union under the banners of defenders of religious faith and Christian values, thus manifesting the importance of Catholicism for their national identity. On the other hand, the picture of Polish religiosity as it emerges from sociological studies is full of internal inconsistencies and even contradictions. In a society composed almost entirely of Catholics, attitudes toward the Church are close to anticlerical, and many everyday practices accepted by huge segments of the population contradict values stressed by the Catholic Church.

The current importance of religion in molding the Polish national identity can

be, and actually has been, seen as an obstacle to society's smooth integration into the community of European nations. The kind of Christian fundamentalism manifested by Polish politicians during the entire accession period has given rise to fears that religion will also influence Poland's future position on various issues related more or less directly to national identity. For the integration of the multicultural, multireligious European community, zealous defenders of Catholic values can appear no less hazardous than defenders of Islamic values.

However, analyzing the deeper structure and content of Polish religiosity reveals that it is not anything specific in Europe. It is subject to the same processes of secularization and individualization that have shaped and continue to shape the religiosity of Western societies. Obviously, being a Catholic is a more important element of the Polish national identity than is the case for other Catholic societies. But this kind of religious identification influences the behavior of Poles not so much through specific values as through participation in collective rituals. So the importance of religion for them is largely the result of the absence or underdevelopment of alternative, secular-collective rituals that give people a sense of belonging.

National identity—as any other collective identity—is based on social bonds that emerge in the course of cooperation or coactivity in the public sphere. The enlargement of the European Union has established a new framework for such cooperation by introducing new institutional structures and new actors in the public sphere of Polish society and by introducing Poles into the public spheres of other societies. Thus, the national identity of Poles will now be shaped not only by participation in traditional religious rituals but also by activities and bonds established in this enlarged public sphere that has its own secular rituals.

Notes

1. In the Polish case, one way this was expressed was in the popular saying that Poland is a bulwark of Christianity. Similar definitions of national “mission” were also formulated in other countries of Eastern Europe (Hungary, Romania).

2. It is obvious that political independence was only one of the factors influencing the specific transformations of religiosity and its relations with national identity in particular countries. Many nations lacked independence at the threshold of the modern era but now have low (e.g., Czech, Hungary) or moderate levels of religiosity (e.g., Italy). In this brief article, focusing on Poland, we are unable to consider systematically under which specific conditions religion preserved its integration functions and what other factors influenced transformations of religiosity in countries other than Poland.

3. We would like to thank Hans Dieter Klingemann for calling our attention to this fact during the European Values Study conference in Warsaw (2004), when we presented the first draft of the text on the relationship between religion and Polish national identity.

4. Only Romania has a lower percentage of members of religious organizations. This suggests the influence of a common factor, namely, experiences from the time of communism, when the retreat to the private sphere was a universal strategy of people living under communist regimes (see Hankiss 1988; Marody 1990). In the case of religious organizations, it was reinforced by the negative attitude of the communist regime toward the Church(es).

5. During this short period of regained independence, ethnic-defensive ideology prevailed. As was mentioned earlier, in the nineteenth century, ideologues of “ethnic-defensive” nationalism (e.g., Zygmunt Wasilewski in Poland) defined nation in biological terms, which was condemned by the Church (see Maj 1995; Porter 2002). This led to a mutual lack of trust between ethnic nationalists and representatives of the Catholic Church. The emergence of fascism in the late 1920s resulted, however, in redefinition of the nation concept, so that it incorporated some religious features. But in both cases religion was subordinated to national interest defined in terms of the state. One of the paradoxes of history is that a large part of ethnic-defensive ideology (without reference to religion, of course) was later integrated into communist ideology (see Szporluk 1991; Zaremba 2001).

6. The nineteenth-century romantic poets Adam Mickiewicz and Zygmunt Krasiński, defined Polish nation in terms of a Messiah of other nations deprived of independence, whose destiny was to fulfill a special mission in history. Another Polish romantic poet, Juliusz Słowacki, prophetically wrote in one of his poems about the election of a Slavic Pope. The election of Karol Wojtyła could easily be inscribed into the existing cultural pattern: living in the “darkness of communism” nations were to be liberated (i.e., redeemed) by Poland.

7. This is clearly seen in the following fragment of the Pope’s sermon: “Poland has [not only] the right to state sovereignty, but it is also . . . , in its position of use to Europe and the world. . . . The Polish nation paid a great price to acknowledge its right to be an independent host on the Land inherited from its ancestors” (quoted after Michel 1995: 163).

8. Abolishing the present power is also the main idea defining the political goals of “moral revolution,” the slogan under which the most significant opposition parties (Law and Justice and Citizens’ Platform) have opened their 2005 election campaigns.

9. One can find more detailed analysis of the current consequences of this attitude in Marody and Wilkin (2002).

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