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An institutional crisis of faith. The breakdown of systemic autopoiesis of the Catholic Church in the face of new spirituality

Abstract: The study presents a sociological analysis of the institutional crisis of faith in the context of the Catholic Church. It refers to the systemic perspective and features of autopoiesis that have been taken from the work of Niklas Luhmann. Changes and crises are a permanent part of the functioning of any social system, including Church institutions in particular. This is clearly seen in the perspective of the crises and counter-jurisdictions that have occurred over the years and the Church's activities. In general, self-referential social systems have self-referential capabilities that adequately place their activities in the environment. As a result of the collapse of traditional societies and the progressive individualization of religiousness, the importance of the Church has been confirmed by the social system.

Keywords: new spirituality, Catholic Church, institutional crisis of faith

The issue of the crisis in the condition of society has been present in the sociological discourse practically since the beginning of this academic discipline. Sociologists draw attention to the crisis in the context of reevaluation of the existing functional and structural conditions of society and the exhaustion of the *habitats* that constitute the existing social order. It can therefore be said that crises are inscribed in the social change, they are a common phenomenon in time and space and an indispensable addition to the transformation and structural transformations. The

crisis of faith is an element which, in the context of social changeability, takes on a significant significance, since it renders the power of the *sacrum* relative and means a loss of trust in the divine providence. In a way, the crisis also expresses doubts and disillusionment of people about their own nature and the characteristics associated with it.

The institution of the Church in the face of crisis

The notion of the crisis of faith is an interesting cognitive phenomenon, of which the emanations are the subject of investigations in theological sciences, as well as philosophy and psychology or sociology. While its roots go back to the metaphysical breakdown of faith in the Absolute, the consequences and changes in attitudes are noted mainly by social sciences. Additionally, the notion of crisis is related to the attributes of social change, including the modification of human religiousness, whose form in liquid modernity constantly fluctuates towards unstable, discontinuous and inconsistent forms. The crisis of faith also illustrates the dimensions of social contradictions in the modern times. Moreover, the concept is present in the media discourse as a common diagnosis of departure from the Church. The aim of this study is to capture the specific characteristics of the institutional phenomenon of the crisis of faith and to confront it with systemic theories that assume the possibility of functional modifications within the system itself.

The issue of crisis is a cognitively interesting element of social reality. Together with anomie and various other contradictions, it is one of the key descriptions of post-modern society. Along with other post-modern labels, these contradictions condition human life in the modern era as a constant threat of deprivation and marginalisation in various fields of social hierarchy. The spiritual notions of crisis will also be reinforced by doubts about one's real identity (e.g. gender) and the instability of the labour market, which is associated with a lack of control and control over the sphere of resources (e.g. the precariat).

A characteristic feature of modern times is also attributing the label of crisis to the issues of religious faith. A colloquial understanding of the phenomena of change in the religiosity of societies often leads to a common secularisation pattern, which, however, has been called into question on the scientific grounds of the sociology of religion. Nowadays, the issues of transformation of the form of religiousness of developed societies to individual forms are much more often raised, and the crisis is attributed to the formal structure of the Church rather than to the faith itself or the concept of the idea of divinity (except for extreme atheistic environments). The crisis of the institutional form of religion is also conditioned by fundamental changes in the general social system, where the notion of empowerment and subjectivity of the operating actors is emphasised.

A crisis, most often defined as a situation uncomfortable for humans, can be created by specific actions of the social environment. This specific aspect is observable in religious crises, where society itself denies the influence of religious institutions, including above all the Church, as the personification of tradition and attachment to faith formalisation. In this context, the social environment creates a cultural climate of secularisation and disregard for religious life, which is expressed mainly in the reduction of the intensity of religious practices, leading ultimately to a weakening of the emotional bond with God¹. Such an interpretation of the crisis of religion will be analysed in this paper. In addition, the crisis of religious life may be described by a coldness and indifference towards the sacred sphere of beliefs².

The history of the institutions of the Catholic Church is also a history of crises, which most often manifested themselves in the form of schism or ruptures in significant moments of change. The impulse for perturbations was usually provided by the synods or councils, which were followed by inconsistent interpretations of the positions developed (e.g. disputes relating to the formulation of the principles of faith after the Council of Nice in 325 or controversies relating to the principles of celibacy after the Lateran Council in 1123). The closest historical crisis is related to the Second Vatican Council, after which the number of apostates who did not agree with the line of action increased. What is important is that the breakaway environments originated from both traditionalist (conservative) and liberal (modernising) options.

The essence of the social crisis

Social crises have been common in history and have always been associated with the introduction of systemic and awareness changes. In the broadest sense, crisis can be defined as the collapse of the current system of legitimacy, which occurs suddenly and at the same time, is the opposite of the current social order. In philosophical terms, the crisis is a result of differentiation and changeability of nature. "Crisis (...) – distinction, judgement, sudden change (...) – a state of spiritual collapse of man, consisting in the loss of (lack of) understanding of the world and himself, which results in the suspension of judgement and the collapse of the culture of action³". The loss of patterns and the ubiquitous collapse and decadence point to an eminently pejorative overtone of the crisis as a synonym for decay, fall and conflict understood as systemic tension. The crisis is in this case a kind of transition between one stage of culture and the next, more complex stages⁴. In this type of transposition, the

¹ Cf.: J. Makselon, *Kryzys religijny*, in: *Psychologia dla teologów*, ed. himself, Kraków 1990, pp. 297-300.

² Cf.: F. Sawicki, *Kryzys kultury a religia chrześcijańska*, Poznań 1937, p. 18.

³ H. Kiereś, *Kryzys*, in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 6., A. Maryniarczyk (ed.), Lublin 2005, p. 95.

⁴ Cf.: B. Olszewska-Dyoniziak, *Rozwój, zmiana i postęp społeczny. Zarys problematyki*, Wrocław 2008, p. 69.

perturbations associated with adopting different norms and values are somewhat a natural consequence of change.

Importantly, crises highlight borderline situations in the whole of human life and reflect the tensions and incompatibility of ideals with real conditions. "A crisis is also defined as a human experience that arises as a reaction to a difficult situation, which a person cannot solve by using their existing skills⁵". It seems to be difficult to cope with everyday tasks, and this creates frustration and a sense of danger, especially if it is permanent.

Sociologists point out the accumulation of tensions and conflicts that ultimately lead to a breakthrough and a new structure setting. Thus, the existing stability, which is an appropriate binder for determining the social bonds in question, is being undermined. However, the key issue here seems to be the weakening of institutions by the disappearance of control, leading to the transposition of existing standards and values⁶. An interesting view in this case is the holistic approach, which the crisis describes as a multi-faceted collapse of the economy, ideology, morality, politics or demography, leading to a cultural and civilisational collapse⁷. The crisis is therefore a polysemic threat to the social system, as it determines its disintegration under the influence of various internal and external factors.

The crisis, as well as social change, is characterised by a certain modality of meanings and scale of impact. The collective consciousness interprets crisis phenomena in various ways, giving them a certain weight⁸. Importantly, there have always been crises in the history of mankind; they are therefore common in time and space. The interpretation of human and social history through crisis is reflected in maximising the phenomena of fragmentation and incompatibility of elements of culture, including faith in the context of contemporary times⁹.

The contents of the crisis in the present day are, among others, the arrangements for cognition. Intellectual efforts to get to know the essence of the surrounding world, the origin of man or the basis of life as such, are characterized by the pursuit of perfection. By passing through more and more perfect tools and methods of cognition: from magic and religion through art to science and artificial intelligence, one comes to a conclusion that the whole of these issues are in fact unknown. The crisis of intellectualism has also been marked in the prognoses of the future, which has been taken over by artificial intelligence, which, according to futurologists, can

⁵ Z. Kroplewski, *Kryzysy kapitańskie. Analizy psychologiczno-formacyjne*, Kraków 2010, p. 12.

⁶ Cf.: K. Olechnicki, P. Załęcki, *Słownik socjologiczny*, Toruń 1998, p. 104.

⁷ Cf. G. Skąpska, *Co po kryzysie? Odpowiedzi katastroficzne i prometejskie na temat kryzysu oraz społecznej świadomości i solidarności*, in: *Co po kryzysie?*, G. Skąpska, M.S. Szczepański, Ż. Stasieniuk (eds), Warsaw 2016, p. 10.

⁸ Cf.: K. Wielecki, *Kryzys i socjologia*, Warsaw 2012, p. 323.

⁹ Cf.: Z. Bauman, *Wieloznaczność nowoczesna, nowoczesność wieloznaczna*, J. Bauman (trans.), Warsaw 1995, p. 26.

become independent of people, i.e. its actual creators¹⁰. In this case, it can be seen that this crisis has similar meanings to the crisis of faith. Just as people have departed from God, artificial intelligence can also become independent of people. Both the first and the second case show a crisis in reaching perfection and later liberating oneself from creators.

Crisis of faith – between individualism and institution

The crisis of faith is primarily an upsetting of the authenticity of activities and activities related to the profession of faith. There appears a dissonance and only mechanical, mostly ritualistic activities related to worship, but in fact only a shell, an act of no importance in relation to *the sacrum*. The crisis of faith will be seen here as a denial of the essence of religiousness and of one's existence as a person engaged in a particular cult¹¹. There also appear here the weakening of religious zeal and the increasing disappearance of the awareness of the presence of God in everyday life, including His agency. All crises of faith are directly identified with the concepts of desacralisation and desystematisation of the religious system, both at the institutional and personal levels¹².

A crisis of faith is most often described as a form of psychological crisis, caused by the most common feeling of general loss, causing a loosening of the bond with the *sacrum*, which can lead to complete abnegation and religious conversion. "A religious crisis is a longer or shorter psychological state that arises when: 1) religious values are either lost or questioned, or 2) when the relationship between a person and God is interrupted or hindered, or 3) when the value of the roads leading to God is questioned¹³." Although the above statements reveal an eminently individual aspect of the crisis of faith, through the mediation and community of institutions, it can also relate to the collective dimension.

The initial condition, which often triggers a crisis of religiousness and faith, is doubt. It is a kind of blurring of the committed attitude and a distortion of the meaning of faith. "Doubt, like unbelief, is a secondary state of mental life. It is a variable, unstable reaction caused by the collision of the obvious with the previous belief or one belief with another. (...) Doubt is the initial state of the lack of faith"¹⁴. The confrontation of ideals with real life is basically the decisive criterion that

¹⁰ Cf. A. Zybortowicz, *Czy wszystko może być przemienione? Pesymizm diagnozy – optymizm woli*, in: *Człowiek w obliczu kryzysu. Kryzys w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej*, A. Chyczewska, M. Kijowska (eds), Elbląg 2015, p. 246.

¹¹ Cf.: Z. Kroplewski, *Kryzysy kapłańskie...*, op. cit., p. 45.

¹² Cf.: A. Wójtowicz, *Współczesna socjologia religii. Założenia, idee, programy*, Tyczyn 2004, pp. 42-43.

¹³ M. Nowosielski, *Korelaty kryzysu religijnego*, Warsaw 2008, pp. 59-60.

¹⁴ G.W. Allport, *Osobowość i religia*. H. Bartoszewicz, A. Bartkowicz, I. Wyrzykowska (trans.), Warsaw 1988, p. 184.

determines the emergence of doubts about the recognised authorities and acquired beliefs. People also find an important part of their subjectivity in such an activity.

The religious crisis has a purely human provenance. This is proven by historical events that have become an emanation of the threat to the *Christianitas*, or religious community. "The crisis (...) concerns people and was caused by people. Through concrete political decisions (pushing for example secularisation or revolutionary movements), through concrete political ideas and propaganda narratives, (...) and finally through backstage action by organised pressure groups (e.g. the Freemasonry)¹⁵". When analysing specific historical events that reflect the crisis of faith (e.g. the French Revolution), one can come to the conclusion that the breakdown of faith was influenced by a broader intellectual, mental and historiosophical context, resulting from the exhaustion of the existing cultural system and its functional imperatives.

All the twists and anomalous correlations of the crisis are reflected in the lack of integrity of actions and structures, but also of the individual himself. The sense of unity and at the same time functionality are those elements which link the individual and social structure, while any contradiction denies such integrity¹⁶.

In addition to the crises of faith, the name of religious crises is also featured in the literature on the subject. This terminology shows the multiplicity of reasons for a person's departure from the sacral sphere. The most common types of crises include: contradictions between faith and science, doubts about the image of God, the problem of the occurrence of evil, suffering, death or injustice, conflicts between the system of religious values and human behaviour, the crisis of belonging to a community, the abandonment of religious practices and finally, vocational crises¹⁷. As can be seen above, these types of loss of faith are in a way, an emanation of the conflict of values and tension between ideals and real life. It is worth noting that the crisis of participation is also strongly marked as a general lack of identification with a given community, which, by reason of faith, should be close.

The problematic aspect of the crisis of faith seems to be its power of influence. In most cases, the loss of support is cited as the main source of departure from religion. However, theologians often say that it is that feeling of loneliness that can become a cause for even greater faith, as after all, it cannot be measured by rational reasons (e.g. justifications), or merely emotions. The sense of faith therefore lies in dedication and trust in the sacred reality understood without any typical influences of culture, or taken from folk imaginations¹⁸. A sign of confidence here is to overcome the temporary crisis-related weaknesses.

¹⁵ G. Kucharczyk, *Christianitas. Od rozkwitu do kryzysu*, Warsaw 2015, p. 10.

¹⁶ Cf.: Z. Płużek, *Psychologia pastoralna*, Cracow 2002, p. 124.

¹⁷ Cf.: Z. Chlewiński, *Religijność dojrzała (szkic psychologiczny)*, in: *Wybrane zagadnienia z psychologii pastoralnej*, Z. Chlewiński (ed.), Lublin 1989, pp. 21-22.

¹⁸ Cf. T. Keating, *Kryzys wiary, kryzys miłości*, M. Kaniewska (trans.), Warsaw 1998, p. 27.

The institutional crisis of faith is manifested most strongly today in the rich industrialised countries with a high quality of life. The Federal Republic of Germany is a crowning example here, where the Church's influence on the public life is systematically diminishing and the decline in religiousness can be explained precisely by the crisis of faith in the institutional dimension of religious congregations, both Catholic and Protestant. The transposition of the role of the Catholic Church, which took place in the second half of the twentieth century, related to the policy of chancellors hailing from the Christian democracy current: Konrad Adenauer and Helmut Kohl¹⁹, is very clear here.

The issues of crisis in the modern Church are often related to the role and message of the Second Vatican Council. The programmatic "opening up to the world" of the Church has not fully fulfilled its role, as can be seen in the decline of vocations, the Church's withdrawal from the public sphere or discussions referring to the fundamental truths of faith. The crisis in this case also refers to theology. "The crisis of the Church is in the final instance a Christological crisis. It all began with a question mark over the relationship between Christ and His Church. It was expressed in a fashionable slogan: 'Christ, yes, the Church, no.' This motto was based on the criticism that the Church does not convey the true Jesus in her message²⁰." It seems that the opening of the Church did not prevent the crisis, but was necessary to preserve its status. The demands of the Second Vatican Council, such as the development of catechesis, missionary work, and the participation of young people and women in the life of the Church have been fulfilled, but they are not sufficient for extremely progressive environments, and the Church continues to be considered from a position of oppression, patriarchy and misunderstanding of the ideals of collectivism, individualism or feminism²¹.

The crisis here has only a communal dimension and refers to the lack of trust in the role of fellow followers in the creation of one's life. Certainly, individualism has played a key role here, depriving a person of a normative and moral reference in terms of belonging to an extended social group such as a parish or community of believers. To put it simply, an individual no longer needs a community to survive, at least in the modern world, where subsidiarity has been reduced by the development of ubiquitous individualism. The Community is also not so much needed in terms of its cluster and environmental integration functions. More fragmented features are nowadays adopted by Internet communication, where information is much more emblematic and selective.

¹⁹ Cf.: W. Pięciak, *Kryzys wiary czy kryzys systemu? Kościoły w Niemczech 1990-1999*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 39-41).

²⁰ R. Skrzypczak, *Chrześcijanin na rozdrożu. Kryzys w Kościele posoborowym*, Kraków 2011, p. 30.

²¹ Cf.: G.F. Svidercoschi, *Dokąd zmierza Kościół? Chrześcijanin w kryzysie – rozterki i nadzieje*, H. Borkowska (trans.), Warsaw 2012, pp. 64-65.

It seems that faith presupposes the existence of a supernatural reality, which caused the birth and development of people to the present state. Without the divine intervention, such a complicated mechanism as a human being could not be born. Therefore, in principle, it is impossible to provide arguments which would unambiguously prove the existence or non-existence of God. In many theological writings, the authors refer to the faith in God, referring to the Mystery and humility. Therefore, it is not possible to use scientific or rational path to get to know God²².

An interesting motive in the aspect of the religious crisis seems to be the concept of deconversion, i.e. "a change of belonging to a religious group, privatisation of religion, abandonment of religion until the religious problem is eliminated from the circle of interest. Deconversion is understood in several dimensions: the loss of religious experience, intellectual doubts also manifested in denial or rejection of the content of faith, moral criticism, emotional suffering, departure from the community of believers²³". Deconversion most often occurs in adolescence and is closely related to teenage rebellion and the departure from authority. Suffice it to say that it is in the period of adolescence that crises of faith are revealed. It is then that individuals move away from the faith formed in early childhood and move on to more conscious, more idealistic positions, which are in a way counter to the previous ways of portraying the sacred reality.

A concept similar to deconversion is "de-churching", i.e. the "weakening or loss of the influence of the churches (institutionalised religions) on three levels: 1) freeing or distancing of individuals from ecclesiastical approaches to faith, ritualistic and cultural rules and norms of moral behaviour, which means the people's weakening participation in institutionalised religiousness; 2) the separation of sub-systems and institutions, such as politics, economy, science, culture and upbringing, from ecclesiastical rules and influences; 3) the weakening meaning or decline of the religious-symbolic forms of social integration represented by the churches²⁴". Thus, "de-churching" is a process that assumes the selectivity of religious ideas with a clear departure from a typically ecclesiastical interpretation.

It seems that the remedy for crises of faith and religiousness is to strive for the so-called religious maturity, i.e. above all, the stability of the professed ideals. This type of faith is relatively more often characterised by older people with a regulated life situation and religious commitment. The criteria of religious maturity include, among others, a personal relationship with God, an autonomous religious motivation, the consistency of beliefs, integral religious attitude, commitment and sense of

²² Cf.: P. de Rosa, *Mitologia chrześcijaństwa. Kryzys wiary chrześcijańskiej*, J. Głogoczowski (trans.), Cracow 1994, p. 27.

²³ T. Liszewski, *Bunt młodzieńczy w sferze religijności* in: *Praktyczna psychologia dla teologów*, vol.1., M. Guzewicz, J. Czerkowski (eds), Kielce 2015, p. 218.

²⁴ J. Mariański, *Religia w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym. Studium socjologiczne*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 101-102.

community²⁵. A very important component of such an attitude is the feature of authenticity, achieved by the experience of the sacred²⁶. Acceptance of religious content and motivation to achieve sacred values will be important decision-making elements in this respect.

The breakdown of the autopoietic dimension of the Church in the context of new spirituality

Social institutions in the post-modern era exhaust the ideas of their structural legitimacy. Modern societies no longer need institutions as much as they did in the feudal or ancient times. The institution as a device or integration mechanism has thus lost one of its main functions. The disintegration of the institutional dimension of social life can be observed, for example, on the example of individualism and emancipatory tendencies, where individual freedoms and fundamental deficiencies of coercion or collective conformism are emphasized.

The Church, which is the image of religion in its institutional sense, should be treated in a systemic perspective, since it is primarily a formal organization in this form, a structure created on a planned basis and with adequate personnel to perform its constitutive functions²⁷. And it is precisely such a form of the Church as an institution that will be the subject of crisis here, as an organization that does not meet the requirements of modernity.

Religion has lost its importance in systemic terms, not only as a psychological attractor, but above all in terms of meaning. In this context, it is worth adding that individual decisions concerning religiousness have begun to crowd out group or community consensus as the main motivations for participating in religious practices. Thus, "the institutionalisation of consensus is abandoned"²⁸. The community and the collective will are no longer able to control the participation of the faithful in the practices, so the crisis of faith will be manifested here by the numerical reduction of the participation of the faithful in a given cult.

The most common concept used to describe changes of religion and religiousness in modern societies is the concept of multi-faceted transition. "The most significant aspect of religious and ecclesiastical transformations (bond with the Church) in contemporary Europe is the transition from ecclesiastical religiousness to institutionalised (selective, selective) and non-ecclesiastic, individualised (privatised) religiousness. These transformations could be briefly described in social dimensions

²⁵ Cf.: E. Talik, *Dojrzałość religijna*, in: *Praktyczna psychologia dla teologów*, vol. 1, M. Guzewicz, J. Czerkawski (eds), Kielce 2015, pp. 204-206.

²⁶ Cf.: Z. Chlewinski, *Religijność dojrzała...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

²⁷ Cf. L. von Bertalanffy, *Ogólna teoria systemów*, E. Woydyłło-Woźniak (trans.), Warsaw 1984, p. 37.

²⁸ N. Luhmann, *Funkcja religii*, D. Motak (trans.), Cracow 2007, p. 230.

as 'fragmentation', destandarisation, transformation or disintegration of the Church, and in relation to individuals as the individualization of religiousness"²⁹.

Sociologists of religion are therefore moving away from the paradigm of secularisation, replacing it with other terms that show the current situation regarding the global role of religion in post-modern societies more clearly. One of the leading motifs is to label the new type of religiousness as a "new spirituality," with the intention of presenting issues of faith from a different point of view than before. In this statement, the tendency to grasp the individual concept of faith, an individual look at the values hitherto regarded as typically collective, comes to the fore. In this context, too, they can be attributed to a crisis, as a departure from the usual and seemingly unchanging forms.

The labelling of current forms of religiousness as a new spirituality is due, among other things, to the departure from the rigid ecclesiastical framework that repels the modern people. It is also a form of so-called alternative religiousness. Independent of collective forms. The new spirituality is also a reference to religious syncretism, as Christian elements (e.g. mysticism, contemplation) as well as Buddhist (meditation, *nirvana*) and Hindu elements (*yoga*) manifest themselves in it. All these elements are aimed at the consumerist nature of the contemporary audience³⁰. It should be added that the prevailing ethics of cultural syncretism in complex societies have also left their mark on spirituality.

A new view of people's religiousness and the desire to free themselves from ecclesiastical influences are also conditioned by the stereotypes that the Church is burdened with in modern times. Prejudices largely concern the inability to see the role of the Church in the democratic system as an important and subjective actor in the public sphere³¹. In addition, the Church is often considered from the perspective of a total institution as a structure that limits the individuals in their free expression. Such punitive approaches can be found, for example, in prejudices about human sexuality, where the Church is automatically perceived as a punitive structure. Relatively less attention is paid to the actual concept of human sexuality in terms of responsibility³². The structure of the long duration of the Church has generated many discussions that focus on its definition, functioning, historical role and current influence³³. The fact of institutionality and its derivatives will also determine the need to modify this main feature of the Church.

²⁹ J. Mariański, *Sekularyzacja i desekularzacja w nowoczesnym świecie*, Lublin 2006, p. 82.

³⁰ Cf.: J. Mariański, *Religia w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym...*, op. cit., p. 204.

³¹ Cf.: M. Przeworski, *Kościół wrogiem wolności i demokracji?*, in: *Kościół. Stereotypy, uprzedzenia, manipulacje*, Lublin 2012, pp. 27-29.

³² Cf.: T. Królak, *Kościół zabrania seksu?*, in: *Kościół. Stereotypy, uprzedzenia, manipulacje*, Lublin 2012, pp. 32-34.

³³ Cf.: A. Kasperek, *Wolność spod znaku undergroundu. Duchowość (po)nowoczesna w perspektywie hermeneutyki kultury i socjologii religii*, Krakow 2012, pp. 150-154.

The crisis of faith, manifested mainly in the departure from the Church understood as a religious institution, can be the domain of many social categories in modern times. These include in particular youth and intelligence, where the presence of individualised forms of religiousness is already marked. It is predominant there that one does not see the essence of God in the Church and that one looks at matters of the sacrum from one's own perspective at the apotheosis of one's own ideas³⁴. The aversion to institutional religion is also compounded by the fact that the Church is perceived as an existing, "yesterday's" institution, which does not suit young people as a system that completely does not fit into today's world full of possibilities and choices of paths to fulfilment³⁵. Nevertheless, it is through her constancy that the Church continues to exist in the institutional dimension, even though her potential is shrinking.

The crisis of the systemic religion is not the same as secularisation in the strict sense. While secularisation is a powerful expression of turning secular, the laicisation of societies and departure from both the Church and the religion itself, criticism of the very institution of the Church is rather about emphasizing the religion's de-institutionalization and individualization. Thus, it can be said that the departure from ecclesiasticism can be considered a change and modernization of religion rather than a typically non-religious activity³⁶. The role of religion in the functioning of societies is, as we can see, modal and related to the current context of meanings.

The modality of the institutional system of religion and its adaptation to the environment can be best seen in the process of self-development, i.e. self-referencing in the process of reproduction and development. Thus, intra-system processes lead to modification of the sense of an institution's activities in the context of its environment³⁷. When analysing the crisis of the Church as a religious institution, one can conclude that the cognitive role of the system is disintegrating and is not compatible with contemporary social requirements.

Self-referencing systems also face paradoxicality if the discrepancies between the environment and the system are too great. Therefore, it is extremely important to use the action and meaning in systemic operations³⁸. Such tensions and crises are also visible in the institutional Church, where the incompatibility of actions with the current social context can be observed. Through the disappearance of the collective will, the community and, consequently, the very idea of autopoiesis is questioned.

³⁴ Cf.: J. Mariański, *Emigracja z Kościoła. Religijność młodzieży polskiej w warunkach zmian społecznych*, Lublin 2008, pp. 31-33.

³⁵ Cf.: J. Baniak, *Religia katolicka i Kościół rzymskokatolicki w opiniach polskiej młodzieży. Od akceptacji do kontestacji*, Krakow 2015, p. 18.

³⁶ Cf.: E. Chat, *Religia w życiu człowieka. Istota, geneza i funkcja religii*, Sandomierz 2009, pp. 116-117.

³⁷ Cf.: G. Skąpska, *Niklas Luhmann i teoria systemów społecznych. Wstęp do wydania polskiego*, in: N. Luhmann, *Systemy społeczne. Zarys ogólnej teorii* M. Kaczmarczyk (trans.), Kraków 2012, pp. XIV-XV.

³⁸ Cf.: *ibidem*, p. 85.

The Church system is no longer positively valued by the social environment in which it operates. The same post-modern society will de-institutionalise religion, in this case the Catholic Church. The mutual definition of the Church and society in the traditional type influenced the reference, self-referentiality of the two entities. The Church also acted as a membrane, a kind of "blood plasma", which filtered the social impact. In modern times, these relationships are disappearing. The reference to the organic metaphor is justified in this case by the very definition of system perspective as organics in Niklas Luhmann's work³⁹.

The institution of the Catholic Church is increasingly diverging from the model system approach, in which attention is drawn to its autopoiesis. The fundamental lack of self-regulation and the reduction of the number of believers result in the "shrinking" of the institutional church system, as it deviates from the norms adopted in the modern world. "The Church is subject to criticism for deviating from democratic standards: not meeting the expectations of its members and putting the permanence and authority of institutions before the will of those who serve as priests⁴⁰."

Another dimension that triggers criticism of the Church is her involvement in the public sphere and her support for specific groups. This involvement is treated as an example of insincerity and short-term benefits of the church hierarchy, which in the opinions of particular individuals takes a very firm tone⁴¹. The problematic involvement in the highly polarised public debate is also seen as inappropriate, especially given the links to politics, a formal resource creator.

While pointing out their distance to institutional religion and its moral defences, young people, at the same time, stress the need to refer to non-material spheres in the metaphysical field, this is also a certain universal tendency of man as a rational species, on the basis of which religion itself was created. "To them, spirituality is associated with authenticity, experience, personal integration, and this new dimension of religiousness is gaining in importance. A spirituality that can to some extent be considered as experiential religiousness, *implicit* religiousness, a "dispersed" religiousness, is more easily connected with the sense of life oriented towards the reality 'of this world'. In religious matters it means a shift from authority to self-determination and expression (it is not so much cognition that is important as experience)⁴²." It is worth supplementing that in typologies of religious crises, the issue of age differentiation (e.g. transition from childhood to youth or from adulthood

³⁹ Cf.: M. Gładzewski, *Teoria systemów autopoietycznych Niklasa Luhmanna – między metafizyką a meta-biologią*, „Przegląd Pedagogiczny”, 2009, no 1, p. 41.

⁴⁰ K. Duda, *Instytucjonalizacja ruchu laickiego w Polsce – wczoraj i dziś*, in: *Religia i Kościoły w polskiej przestrzeni publicznej*, A. Kuształ, S. Czapnik (eds), Opole 2015, p. 240.

⁴¹ Cf.: A. Sarnacki, *Institutional changes for the Polish Church in facing new challenges (1989-2005). An enquiry from a social science and social philosophy perspective*, Krakow 2013, p. 171.

⁴² J. Mariański, *Sekularyzacja, desekularyzacja, nowa duchowość. Studium socjologiczne*, Krakow 2013, pp. 157-158.

to old age) is an important predicator of changes in religiousness. Crises of this kind are called developmental, as opposed to situational crises, originating from specific circumstances that cause doubt (e.g. loss related to the death or illness of relatives⁴³.) As it is demonstrated, religious crises are conditioned by the nature of changes in human life.

Conclusion

The situations of crises of faith presented above are testimony to a certain breakdown in the cognitive categorisation of humans and their mechanisms of adapting to the environment. Religious faith ceases to be the factor explaining the course of things and the nature of existence, and its explaining functions disappear as well. It should also be noted that social homeostasis, i.e. the state of relative balance of elements, is undermined by various crises.

The Church is an institution in which the social crisis is inscribed. This can be seen in the number of schism and the differentiation of Christian confessions (e.g. the Reformation), which led to the collapse of the institutionalisation of consensus in Luhmann's understanding. Importantly, in a crisis of faith in the ecclesiastical aspect, the institutionalization of cultural patterns (general, relating to the essence of community) is not compatible with the individual subjects' motivations. This fundamental contention will distort the very meaning of the institution and its reflection in the social system⁴⁴.

The mutual adaptation of the social system and the Church was noticeable in the era of traditional societies, where closure and isolation were mutually dependent. Nowadays, in the era of an open society, where the meaning of the social institution and the general systemic character is being blurred, the Church is moving more and more quickly towards archaization and a sectarian, initiated character than a general, systemic and mass social life institution. As can be seen from the example of the Second Vatican Council, the reforms made no longer reflect the scale of modernisation of the world and its incompatibility with the requirements of institutional religion.

Moreover, the crisis of faith consists primarily of a crisis of trust, that is to say, a crisis of total trust and the inability of human will to carry out such an activity. Doubt is also often an eloquent emotion felt towards the church community. "Seeing in faith a source of uncertainty and doubt, the contemporary world (...) is reluctant to refer to it. Faith no longer appears to be the way to find certainty⁴⁵". More and

⁴³ Cf. J. Makselon, *Kryzys religijny...*, op. cit., pp. 298-299.

⁴⁴ Cf. T. Parsons, *System społeczny*, J. Głogoczowski (trans.), Cracow 2009, p. 43.

⁴⁵ K. Tyszka, *Samotność duszy. Dziedzictwo wiary i rozumu w (po) nowoczesności*, Warsaw 2014, p. 137.

more often people want to replace faith with cognition and understanding, i.e. with aspects of rationality.

The Church, treated as a community of people, is a reflection of the collective participation in the religious cult, strengthening at the same time its integrative functions. It was through such an orientation that accusations of lack of understanding of the individual's perspective began to be made against him. "(...) [T]hrough her institutionalized forms of coercion, the Church has built a system of dogma which, although it has answered the questions that concern the people, the source of this certainty lies outside them, not from their 'inside'⁴⁶." Such allegations are mainly made by a misunderstanding of the institution's essential functions, but also show that institutions in the strict sense do not have adequate remedies to safeguard the welfare of individuals.

The search for faith and religion outside the institution of the Church determines new types of religious cognition, which are characteristic in their subjectivity and personalization. "Extra-church religiousness appears in a specific socio-cultural context, which can be described as a passage from tradition to detraditionalization, from institutionalisation to deinstitutionalisation, from heteronomy to autonomy, from great to small Transcendence⁴⁷." Transposition to individual levels takes place in the context of the overall privatisation of religion, its "fitting" to specific ideas or worldviews.

The institutional crisis of faith in the context of the new spirituality takes on a confirming meaning. Giving up their participation in the communal form of faith practised in public *en masse*, the faithful turn to a deeply introverted relationship with God. They turn away from the Church, which presents itself as a foreign institution, more likely to cause concerns than provide manifestations of community. "Another large religious movement was born in Poland: of believers in God, turned away from the Church⁴⁸." However, this statement has to be seen primarily globally, as the mass abandonment of churches and their acquisition of a museum. However, there are also voices in the discussion, pointing to the lasting faith of the declared believers, but no longer on a mass scale⁴⁹. The ongoing crisis has highlighted the fundamental incompatibility of ecclesiastical institutions with a new type of deeply and technologically modernised society – its object is not so much God as the ecclesiastical institution itself.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 144.

⁴⁷ J. Mariański, *Sekularyzacja i desekularyzacja w nowoczesnym świecie*, op. cit., p. 89.

⁴⁸ A. Potocki, *O Kościele także socjologicznie*, Warsaw 2017, p. 543.

⁴⁹ Cf.: R. Wójtowicz, *Znaczenie prawa naturalnego w obliczu „kryzysu Kościoła”*. *Wybrane zagadnienia*, „Przegląd Religioznawczy”, 2015, no 1 (255), pp. 158-159.