Rafał Leśniczak, *Wizerunek prezydenta Andrzeja Dudy na łamach „Tygodnika Powszechnego” (2015–2020)*


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The author of the book is a associate professor and lecturer at the Institute of Media Education and Journalism at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW) and head of the Chair of Social Communication, Public Relations and New Media. He conducts research in the field of political communication, mediatization and religion. As a young yet experienced researcher, in his works he addresses current and important topics and issues, such as Russian Federation invasion of Ukraine, COVID-19 pandemic, political communication and media image of politicians like Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, President Andrzej Duda and Minister Łukasz Szumowski. He is the author of the monographic publication on the press image of religious orders, *Wizerunek zgromadzeń zakonnych w prasie polskiej (2013–2016)*, which is a study of the media image of consecrated persons in the selected titles of Polish secular and Catholic press. As can be seen from his publications, press studies occupy an important place in the achievements of this Warsaw lecturer and researcher. This time, he studied texts published in the Kraków weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* (TP) in order to reconstruct the image of the Polish President emerging from the magazine’s articles.

The book, which I recommend to researchers in such fields as social communication and media or political science as well as students pursuing degree programs in these fields, is a monograph that should basically be placed in the discipline of social communication and media science although the issues and problems raised here apply also to the theory of communication, public relations and political sciences.
An answer to the question why Rafał Leśniczak reached for *Tygodnik Powszechny* to analyze the image of the right-wing President Duda in its digital editions can be found in chapter 3.1 titled *Tygodnik Powszechny as a Catholic social and cultural magazine*, in which the author presents the history of the magazine, ending it with the statement:

There is no unambiguous position among media experts on recognizing *Tygodnik Powszechny* as a Catholic magazine. Unlike *Niedziela, Gość Niedzielny* or *Idziemy*, the Kraków weekly does not represent the official institutional position of the Catholic Church, i.e. its diocesan bodies, and does not have a Church assistant. Despite describing itself as a Catholic social and cultural periodical in its very name, formally *Tygodnik Powszechny* has nothing to do with the hierarchical Church because it does not represent the position of the Polish Episcopal Conference or any other church authorities or structures (pp. 120–121).

Following Damian Guzek (2016), Leśniczak adopts a definition of Catholic media allowing him to classify TP as a Catholic periodical. Is he right? The answer can surely be debated. If we accept the criteria of „Catholicity” proposed by Leśniczak after Guzek, which emphasize the principle of ecclesiality, or functioning with the consent or support of the competent church authority, then does TP really enjoy such support? On the other hand, it is true that no church authority has ever deprived the weekly of its defining adjective „Catholic”. The history of the Kraków periodical is worth recalling in brief for the benefit of young readers.

*Tygodnik Powszechny* had turbulent turns of fate, which its various researchers describe in several periods or chapters (Żakowski, 1999; Bereś, Burnetko, & Pospadecka, 2012; Stepiński, 2018, 2019). The first TP, founded by Jerzy Turowicz and Fr. Jan Piwowarczyk, was from the very beginning at the turn of February and March 1945 the only periodical in Poland which did not attempt to “christening of Marxism” but instead conducted ideological polemics and debates with it in its pages. In the 1950’s, after the adoption of the new Constitution in 1952 and amid growing conflict between communist authorities and the Episcopate, it was the only “oxygen bottle” offered to society in the atmosphere of heavy propaganda. Despite the increased censorship, editors of the TP manager to maintain the editorial imperative: Do not lie. The second TP, published from the return of the legitimate editorial board in 1957 until its suspension under martial law in December 1981, was a magazine avidly read by clergy and intellectuals. Subscribing to it and distributing it in parishes was in good taste at the time. Among its authors was Turowicz and people from his circle: Zawieyski, Słonimski, Hennelowa, Żychiewicz, Mamoń, Kisiel and others. The third TP, from the end of suspension in May 1982 until the electoral victory of Solidarity in June 1989, was a magazine beyond any competition. In intellectual circles, it was considered a banner of free and deep thought and could only be purchased by subscription or under the counter. The next chapter began when the TP unambiguously supported Tadeusz Mazowiecki in the first democratic elections, thereby resigning from the principle of political disengagement and finding itself in more or less open conflict with the majority of bishops and part of clergy. At that time, the magazine’s circulation fell from 100,000 to 30,000. The fourth period in TP’s history ended with Turowicz’s death on January 27, 1999. Today we can perhaps talk about the fifth TP, evicted from its office on Wiślna in 2021 and unloved by the Church it has faithfully served, having Cardinal Sapieha as its founding father and Fr. Andrzej Bardecki as its church assistant since 1951, devoted to the weekly for decades. Today, the Editorial Board describes its views as „open Catholicism”, which tries to reconcile the values of liberalism with the principles of faith, presents the ecumenical trend of Polish Catholicism and is guided by the principle of dialogue with representatives of non-Catholic views, who are often invited to participate in debates.
In Introduction, the author of the reviewed monograph clearly defines the goals of his work: “The book […] has two theoretical goals and a practical one. The first theoretical goal is to analyze the achievements of Andrzej Duda during his first term as president, and the second – to explain certain concepts from the field of the theory of communication in the context of research on the image of a political leader, such as theory of information value, mediatization of politics, information selection and framing analysis. In turn, the practical goal is to reconstruct the image of President Duda in Tygodnik Powszechny on the basis of the methodology of social communication and media sciences, including the assessment of the declared achievements of the presidency, president of conflict vs president of consent. President as a reasonable politician, president as an economist, Duda’s relations with the United Right and Law and Justice, Duda’s attitude to Christian values, and the degree of assigning the category of negativism to a politician” (p. 22).

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the Warsaw researcher analyzes 255 digital editions of TP, of which 356 texts constitute a representative research sample. On this basis, he constructs six research hypothesis:

H1. Tygodnik Powszechny extensively covered the person and political activities of Andrzej Duda during his first term as the Polish President in the years 2015–2020;

H2. The dominant frame was the political frame, while the politician’s private life was of marginal interest to magazine editors;

H3. Tygodnik Powszechny generally legitimized the achievements of Andrzej Duda’s presidency in the field of foreign policy, security policy, deepening relations with the NATO structures, social policy, legislation and legislative policy and historical policy;

H4. Tygodnik Powszechny extensively discussed the crisis issues related to Duda’s presidency, including his role in the constitutional crisis in Poland 2015 and the judicial crisis in Poland in 2017;

H5. The President’s press image shows the head of state’s respect for the institutions of the Catholic Church and Christian values, as well as the close relationship of President Duda with leaders of the Polish right-wing parties and his approval of the actions of the leaders of the United Right;

H6. An important criterion for the information selection in the analyzed press title was the association of negativism and personalization in the context of research on the image of the President of Poland” (p. 128).

The author of the monograph is a careful observer of the political scene. In undertaken analysis, he uses knowledge in the field of stereotyping processes, political leadership, mediatization of politics, the theory of information value and the theory of interpretative frames, as well as public relations and political marketing. However, he maintains an emotional distance towards the issues raised. And it is worth mentioning that Leśniak confronts the declared achievements of the President in the area of foreign policy, historical policy, military security, social policy and the legislative process with the press image of this politician.

So what image of the President of Poland, closely related to the ruling party, emerges from a magazine which defines itself as Catholic? As rightly noted by Polish Media experts, including Guzek (2019) and Leśniak himself (2021, 2022), Polish Catholic media quite clearly support the United Right. It seems all the more important to attempt to answer the question whether TP almost uncritically presented the activity of Andrzej Duda as a politician legitimizing the activity of Law and Justice, or whether a different image of this politician will emerge from the weekly’s text?
In his research findings the author emphasizes that the dominant frame in the magazine’s framing analysis was the political frame (p. 239). Tygodnik Powszechny did not deal with the private life of Andrzej Duda in any other way than marginal. Generally, the weekly legitimized his achievements in the field of foreign policy, politics of memory and social policy as well as in the context of deepening relationships with the NATO’s organizational structures. The image of President Duda that emerges from the analyzed texts portrays him as a person who refers to Christian values, respects the institution of the Catholic Church, and stays in close relations with the leaders of right-wing groups. Duda also approves of the policy and activity of the United Right leaders. The Tygodnik extensively discussed Andrzej Duda’s actions and attitude in relation to the constitutional and judicial crises, which shows that associating the category of negativity was an important strategy for building the image of the head of state (p. 239).

The final conclusions drawn by Leśniczak from his research are also interesting in the context of the history and current editorial policy of the weekly. In Conclusion, the author states:

“The Kraków magazine adhere to high journalistic standards. The authors of Tygodnik Powszechny represent deontological journalism. Respecting the editorial line of the weekly and the right to their own worldview, they were able to reliably and more importantly, substantively and with an emotional distance present the figure and political activity of the President of Poland. […] The magazine noticed the strengths and weaknesses of Duda’s presidency and did so in reference to such fundamental issues as democracy, rule of law and free media. […] The analyzed periodical proved that it is looking for answers to difficult questions posed by our time, and that its ambition is indeed ‘conducting a dialogue with the world and taking up controversial issues in the life of the Church and society in Poland and the world’.” (p. 241).

It is also worth noting that Rafał Leśniczak’s monograph is not his only research publication on the image of Andrzej Duda in the Polish press. Previously, he reached for such Catholic weeklies as Gość Niedzielny and Niedziela in order to examine the degree of their interest in the person of the Kraków politician as president-elect. At that time, he analyzed the issues of these weeklies published between May 25 and August 15, 2015. The reviewed book is therefore part of a series of studies on the image of President Andrzej Duda in the Polish press undertaken also other authors.

The publication of the UKSW professor is worth recommending not only because of the image of President Andrzej Duda that emerges from it or the research instruments used, but also because it analyzes the texts published in a magazine which has been a paradigm of reliable journalism for years, and at the same time arousing much controversy including in the bosom of the hierarchical Church despite the fact that among its authors we find both bishops and intellectual clergy. It is a scholarly book, with an extensive bibliography, written in good language, which however may pose some difficulty to readers unfamiliar with media and political science terminology.

Bibliography

