EAST-WEST CHURCH REPORT

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Special Issue: Catholic Poland Today

Poland displays among the highest rates of church engagement of any country in Central and Eastern Europe. Some 87 percent of Poles identify as Catholic and 45 percent say they attend church at least weekly, according to the Pew Research Center's 2017 study, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe" [https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe].

The south and east of Poland are particularly devout. Traveling through the country's southeasternmost province one Sunday in late 2018, the editor of the East-West Church Report *observed village church after village church overflowing with Mass-goers of all ages. Entering at random some of downtown Kraków's scores of churches one August weekend in 2022, the editor found at least 40 worshippers within each attending up to a dozen Masses available daily. Notably, almost all family members at a baptism and wedding could recite key prayers by heart.*

Albeit down from 96 percent in 1991, the 2017 Pew study also reported a nine-point decline in the number of Poles identifying as Catholic, however. Poland's Institute for Catholic Church Statistics [Polish: Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego*] has since observed a further drop, with 37 percent of Catholics recorded attending Sunday Mass in 2019, and—perhaps exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions—28 percent in 2021 [https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/how-steep-is-polands-drop-in-mass-attendance].*

Adherence to the Catholic Church also appears to be declining more rapidly among younger generations. The Church in Poland, *a 2021 report by the Catholic Information Agency [*Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna*], found that the level of religious practice among young Poles had halved over the previous 30 years [https://ekai.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Raport-Kosciol-w-Polsce-2021.pdf].*

Catholic Church of the Holy Spirit, Old Town, Warsaw (G. FAGAN)

Socially liberal attitudes are also gaining traction. According to the 2017 Pew study, 48 percent of Poles view homosexual behavior as morally wrong—among the lowest rate of any country in the region. When an October 2020 constitutional court ruling limited legal abortion to cases of rape, incest, or endangerment to a woman's life or health, more than 100,000 marched against the restrictions [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-abortion-idCAKBN27F13O].

*This shift in Polish social attitudes is reflected geographically in electoral preferences for the socially conservative Law and Justice [*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*] Party—in power since 2015—in the south and east. By contrast, the more liberal Civil Platform [*Platforma Obywatelska*]—chaired by former European Council president Donald Tusk—fares better in the north and west, especially among younger and urban voters [https://www.ft.com/content/1fa0c837-7cbe-4188-aff5-7a9e4a1b28b6].*

In recent years Poles have also begun to question the Catholic Church's previously flawless reputation as a bastion of truth and justice instrumental to the fall of Communism in 1989. The 2019 documentary Tell No One *[*Tylko nie mów nikomu*] shocked millions with examples of child abuse perpetrated by Polish Catholic priests from the late Communist period onwards, as well as the ecclesiastical authorities' woefully inadequate response [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrUvQ3W3nV4].*

In March 2023 researchers alleged that Pope John Paul II had covered up several cases of such abuse while Archbishop of Kraków in the 1970s. The following month 60,000 took to the streets of Warsaw in defense of the late Polish pope and now saint. Some Catholic intellectuals have also cautioned that the allegations give unwarranted credence to their key sources: documents compiled by the Communist secret police [the SB or Służba Bezpieczeństwa*] [https://catholicherald.co.uk/john-paul-ii-handling-of-abuse-claims-was-the-opposite-to-what-his-attackers-want-us-to-think/].*

In this issue of the East-West Church Report, *Polish Catholics interviewed by the editor in Warsaw and Kraków in August 2022 offer a range of perspectives.*

"It's not us working any more—it's God working":

An Interview with Katarzyna Walkowska and Krzysztof Ślusarz

The mismatched towers of the medieval Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (St. Mary's Basilica) dominate the immense Central Square at the heart of Kraków. Capital of Poland for some six centuries until the late 1500s, Kraków is still the nation's second largest city. There are some 30 Catholic churches in its historic Old Town alone.

Besides Mass many offer traditional Adoration, at which the faithful pray before the consecrated Eucharist and thus, according to Catholic doctrine, in the tangible presence of Jesus Christ. St. Mary's Basilica is unusual in this respect because its Adoration also provides a focus for evangelization. Members of the parish's Christ in Old Town community—typically young adults—invite strangers in to experience this contemplative practice, referencing Jeremiah 1:7: "But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am too young." You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.'"

In August 2022 the editor of the East-West Church Report *met two members of Christ in Old Town community, Katarzyna Walkowska and Krzysztof Ślusarz, both in their 30s. Beneath the bells of St. Mary's—their deep chime regularly reverberating across the city—the pair spoke about life as devout members of the Catholic Church, as well as its position in today's Poland. The interview took place in English.*

Krzysztof Ślusarz and Katarzyna Walkowska (G. FAGAN)

How prominent was the Catholic faith in both your family backgrounds?

Katarzyna: My family originally came from Wołyń [Volhynia], now part of Ukraine. They escaped from there during the Second World War. When my grandmother was five or six years old, she and her mother and sister were leaving Sunday Mass when they were warned not to go home because people were waiting there to kill them. So they never did go back home. They lost their farm but—like other people who escaped from that region—they later received land in the area of Poland close to the German border, near Wrocław [previously under German rule].

My parents decided to move away from Poland due to the Communist regime. I spent my childhood in Bavaria, where we were active in the local Polish community—there were very many Poles there. We were also involved in the Light-Life movement started by Fr. [Franciszek] Blachnicki, whose beatification process is ongoing. This was a way to bring Catholics together, especially families and young people. During the summers we would all gather for retreats.

[Editor's note: For resisting invading Nazi forces as a young man, Blachnicki was incarcerated, including at Auschwitz. Finding faith in God while in prison, he opted to become a priest after liberation. For decades, the Communist authorities in Poland hounded Fr. Blachnicki for his church activism; he died in exile in Germany in 1987. In March 2023, following the exhumation of Fr. Blachnicki's remains, Poland's current Minister of Justice determined that he had been poisoned.]

Once freedom had come to Poland, my family moved back here in 1994. I attended a Catholic high school run by the Salesians of Don Bosco before studying architecture and art back in Germany. I also studied in New York, but found I did not fit in with the Polish community there. They were mostly older, having moved to the US during the Second World War, while I was on a different wavelength. I felt more at home among American Catholics at St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Franciscan Friars of Renewal [a Capuchin Franciscan movement founded in New York in 1987] also had a great influence on me, and I traveled with them to the [anti-abortion] March for Life in Washington, DC. I had already learned English living and working in an Opus Dei house in London after graduating high school in 2004.

Krzysztof: I was born and raised in Poland. I'm from Silesia, around 60 km [35 miles] west of Kraków, but half my family is from the mountains [to the south]. My mother's family is huge, and we cousins were all raised together. I was involved in church from an early age—my parents took care of that. We received baptism and the sacraments, prayed together at home, and always went to church together on Sundays. There was never a question of, "We are too tired after the working week; we are not going; we need to take a rest." Church was not something under discussion.

I recall a situation when I was seven or eight years old, one December prior to Christmas. My mother worked late night shifts at a hospital. She came home early one morning and said she was too tired to go to Holy Mass. I said, "Okay, just unlock the front door—I will go by myself." It was still pitch dark outside, snow everywhere, and the church was around half an hour's walk away. But I remember feeling that I needed to go there.

After graduating high school in 2009 I moved to Kraków to study political science at the Ignatianum, a Jesuit university. There, Holy Masses are served in a church right next to the university building.

How did you both come to be involved with Christ in Old Town's regular adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Mary's Basilica in downtown Kraków?

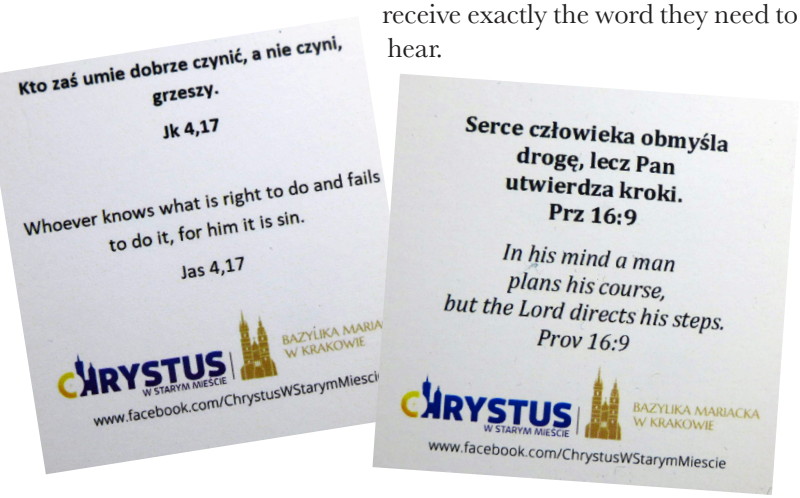
Krzysztof: One of my political science professors at the Ignatianum was Dr. Paula Olearnik-Szydłowska, who came to us from Georgetown University [Jesuit-affiliated university in Washington, DC]. In 2012, after she had been in Kraków a few months, she invited some students to an adoration at St. Mary's Basilica—she had experienced the adoration in Rome and was missing it in Kraków, and so she was trying to organize something similar here. That is how our Christ in Old Town community began.

Most members of our community are used to going out from the church and inviting people to come inside. Obviously, it is not an easy job to approach people that you meet on the street, but one of the main goals of our community is to invite people who may not have been inside a church for many years, to let them be changed inside.

Is the practice of adoration unusual in Poland?

Katarzyna: No, it's common—also on Central Square there is a small chapel [the 11th-century Chapel of St. Wojciech/Adalbert] where there is adoration from morning to night every day. [The editor observed at least a handful of people praying in the tiny chapel at random times of the day, while it was packed with around 40 faithful for the final evening Mass.]

What is different is that our community goes out onto the Square. We have our adoration at St. Mary's every last Thursday of the month. There is Mass at 6.30 p.m. and then the adoration at 7.30 p.m. It is always in two languages, Polish and English, and sometimes also in French, Spanish, or Portuguese; it varies. We also have singing and a team of musicians. Every adoration has its own topic. Each year we have our own cycle—for example, one year we broke down the Lord's Prayer into words and phrases, and prayed about them over the 12 months. This year was just, "Our Daily Bread"—we took the church's set readings for the particular day as the focus of each adoration. We could sense the Holy Spirit guiding us. Also, near to the Blessed Sacrament we place a basket containing different quotations from the Bible in Polish and English. People who enter are able to take one, and often they receive exactly the word they need to hear.



Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (St. Mary's Basilica), Central Square, Old Town, Kraków (G. FAGAN)

During the adoration we say the names of particular members of the community who are to go out onto the square and invite people to come into the church to meet Jesus, to pray. Then they go outside, normally in pairs. Everyone we invite is so different! Depending upon the season, we often encounter tourists from all over the world.

Krzysztof: For example, there was a situation when I spoke in English at one adoration and a girl came up to me afterwards saying that she was from Texas. She was in Kraków just for that day. In the morning she had seen there would be Mass at the Basilica at 6.30 p.m., so she came and stayed on for the adoration. After the adoration we have a get-together in the church hall, and she joined us for that. It feels great to know that there are such people who, even if they are only here for one day, are able to spend part of it with us.

Katarzyna: The Holy Spirit brings them. We hear some amazing testimonies!

What were some of your more memorable encounters?

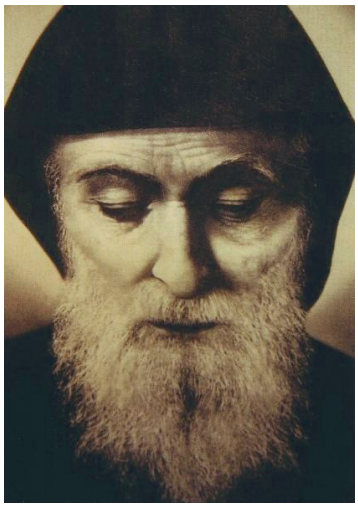
Katarzyna: Just last month I went out with a female friend and we saw five or six big guys with tattoos. I said, "Oh my gosh, they are scary, are you sure we are going to go up to them?" Then when we approached them, my friend noticed that one of them had the face of [19th-century Lebanese monk] St. Charbel Makhlouf tattooed on his forearm! It turned out that they were very Catholic. They said, "This is so amazing! We just came for a tourist visit, and you are inviting us to church!" They all came inside.

Or another story—there was a mother and daughter from Warsaw with a second daughter, who was living in Los Angeles. Even though she was tall and incredibly beautiful, she was lamenting, "I have money, a career—everything the world is telling me I should have. So why am I not happy?" One of our community invited them all into church, and this girl stayed there for a long time—the mother and sister came out much earlier. When this girl came out she was crying, her make-up flowing. She said she felt so good! She couldn't believe the effect of something so simple as entering a church. It turned her whole life around.

(continued on page 4)

Walkowska and Ślusarz Interview *(continued from page 3)*

Do you think it is easier for people who haven't been to church for a long time—or ever—to come to something like the adoration, rather than a Mass where there is some expectation of participation?



St. Charbel Makhlouf (Open source)

Katarzyna: It is the whole atmosphere. All the lights are out—there is only one, shining through the Blessed Sacrament. So that does give a sense of, "No one will actually see me here." The darkness gives a sense of security, allowing people to come in and stay.

When we invite people inside their typical initial reaction is, "Where am I? What am I doing here?" But once they come closer, they often stay until the end. So it's not us working any more—it's God working.

How does Christ in Old Town community organize itself?

Katarzyna: We meet more regularly than once a month. We have preparatory meetings, such as to pray about the readings for the next adoration. Then we meet with our priest and share our thoughts.

Krzysztof: There is also a meeting for the people who will be going outside. They prepare by reading the portion of the Bible we will be meditating upon at the adoration.

Katarzyna: We also have get-togethers, like going into the mountains, just to have some fun. It's not as if we pray all the time!

Does the community have a group structure?

Krzysztof: We vote for the leader, and there are people responsible for those who go outside, for finance, for social media. But everyone is very open and approachable.

How many people are involved in the organizational side?

Katarzyna: Over 50. With supporters who attend regularly, we would be around 100.

Krzysztof: At the first adoration in March 2012 we gathered at a side-altar dedicated to Pope John Paul II. There were 10 people, perhaps. Since then the numbers have grown, and we have moved to the main altar.

Katarzyna: Sometimes it is so packed you can't find a seat.

Pope John Paul II was canonized as a saint in 2014. He was born Karol Wojtyła not far from Kraków and rose to become the city's archbishop before his election to the papacy. Is there particular devotion to him here?

Krzysztof: In one central church the last daily Holy Mass begins at 9:37 p.m. That is the time of John Paul II's death.

Katarzyna: I used to travel a lot before the pandemic, and I always knew I was home arriving at Kraków John Paul II International Airport! Where in the world do you have an airport named after a saint? When he was elected pope in 1978, the authorities were listening to whatever you said by telephone. Letters were even opened—sometimes whole pages went missing. But still the message came through. People were so happy that they went out onto the streets. I find that amazing. These days it's normal for people to get a text message—"Let's meet in five minutes"—and you go. Back then there was no internet, no mobile phones. I couldn't believe it when I saw photos of what happened here in Kraków when John Paul II was shot in Rome in 1981. The whole city came out onto the streets!

[Editor's note: on 17 May 1981, four days after the assassination attempt, around half a million people silently marched through Kraków wearing white in solidarity and filling Central Square. Mass was served outside St. Mary's Basilica. Brief archival footage may be viewed at: BIAŁY MARSZ - 17 maja 1981 r., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PziPHDuxReA.]

Krzysztof: This was when the Communists were seeking to stop people from attending Holy Mass, for example in Nowa Huta. The workers of Nowa Huta secretly created a large cross for the pope. Their message to the authorities was, "You cannot tell us what we can do and what we cannot do." This is something very important to us. So when Pope John Paul II visited later, there were many thousands of people. Everyone wanted to go.

[Editor's note: A large Kraków satellite town housing the Vladimir Lenin Steel Mill, Nowa Huta was deliberately planned without a Catholic church. From the late 1950s, residents petitioned the authorities for a church to be built, with the support of then auxiliary bishop Karol Wojtyła. Police repeatedly removed a standing cross in Nowa Huta where the future pope hosted Masses, and he finally consecrated a church in the town in 1977. On his first pilgrimage to Poland as pope in 1979, John Paul II preached about the significance of the Nowa Huta cross: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790609_polonia-mogila-nowa-huta.html.]

Adoration at the Chapel of St. Wojciech/Adalbert, Central Square, Kraków (G. FAGAN)

Do political opposition figures of that time, such as Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the Solidarity [Polish: *Solidarność*] trade union movement and first post-Communist president, also remain a source of inspiration in Poland?

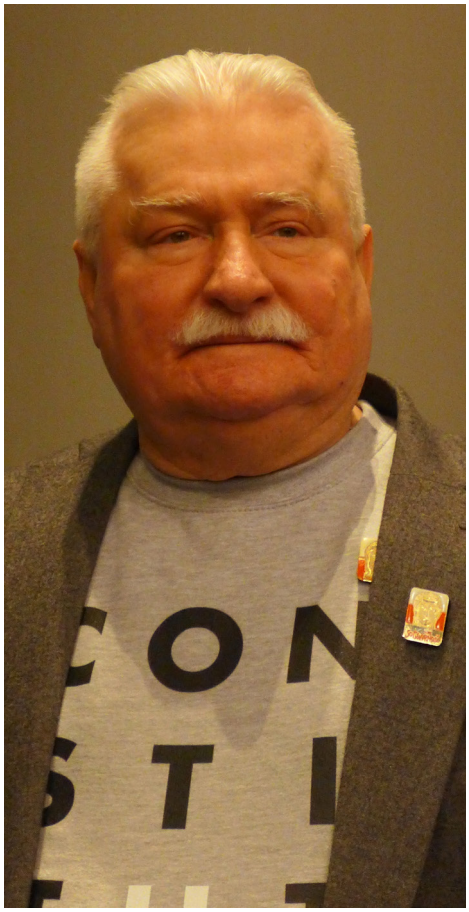
Krzysztof: On the one hand, Lech Wałęsa can be seen as a great guy who was trying to save the Polish people from Communism. But at the same time, he basically collaborated with the Communist Party. A couple of years ago, our Institute of National Remembrance [Polish: *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*], which collects historical documents, discovered that Wałęsa signed up to be a collaborator. He more or less denied that he collaborated—such as by saying that he didn't know what he was signing—but this has cast a shadow over him.

Was this record of collaboration discovered when the relevant secret police archives were opened?

Katarzyna: No, it actually came to light by mistake. A senior Communist official died recently [General Czesław Kiszczak, interior minister 1981-89, d. 2015]. He left a wardrobe full of documents. His wife did not know what to do with them, so she tried to sell them.

Krzysztof: Then the Institute of National Remembrance noticed that this general's papers were for sale and took them. Among them was Wałęsa's signature as a collaborator passing information on co-workers inside the Gdańsk Shipyard to the Communist Party.

[Editor's note: The records suggest that Wałęsa—code-named *Bolek*—enthusiastically provided information after signing a collaboration agreement in 1970. As he became more reluctant, the agreement was terminated in 1976, prior to the foundation of the Solidarity movement in 1980.]



Lech Wałęsa during a 2019 visit to the United States (G. FAGAN)

The Catholic Information Agency's 2021 report *The Church in Poland* found that the level of religious practice among young people halved over the previous 30 years, with 30 percent considering themselves regularly practicing Catholics [*Kościół w Polsce*, Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna, 2021, https://ekai.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Raport-Kosciol-w-Polsce-2021.pdf]. Do you see attitudes towards the church changing, especially among younger generations?

Katarzyna: Well, in cities like Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, or Gdańsk, the Catholic Church has huge academic communities. Each church has its own academic community, where people meet outside their studies. Our [Christ in Old Town] community additionally has people who are working or taking care of kids, but if you go to the Dominicans or Franciscans, you will just find students, and those communities are huge. [The editor found the 5 p.m. Sunday Mass at the Franciscans' church in downtown Kraków to be packed with many young people, some standing in the aisles, while the 11 a.m. Mass was less than full with a generally older congregation.]

Krzysztof: The Dominican community [in Kraków] has over 350 people, and that is just one church.

Katarzyna: During Advent, the first morning Mass there, at 6 a.m., is a special Mass in honor of the Virgin Mary. The whole church is dark, and everyone walks in holding candles. It is difficult to get inside, even at that hour of the morning. Everyone is squeezed in, and you may have to stand outside, where it is freezing. So you can see that even the academic portion of the church is growing. Churches sometimes even have a waiting list to join a particular community.

Krzysztof: If you go to the Dominicans in the middle of the week at 11 a.m. or 12 p.m., sometimes there will be a line of people waiting for two hours to go to confession. That's normal.

Katarzyna: That's Poland! I also love visiting Częstochowa—the main shrine to Mary in Poland [home to the renowned ancient icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa]. It is just an hour and a half from here. It doesn't matter whether I go in the middle of the week or at the weekend—there are thousands of people there, of all ages. I find myself thinking, "It's the 21st century, the media is telling us that the Church is dying… I don't think so!" (Laughs.)

Krzysztof: After we had World Youth Day [international Catholic gathering attended by hundreds of thousands of young people] in Kraków in 2016, a lot more young people became open to the faith and began joining the Church. They could see and relate to other people their own age coming from all over the world, which moved them to find out whether the Church could be something for them.

Does the fact that church attendance is still higher in Poland than in many neighboring countries make it easier for young people to feel comfortable there?

Katarzyna: Yes, it's easier to find like-minded people and to make friends, whereas my friends in America, for example, tell me they feel like they are against the tide; alone against the whole world.

Krzysztof: Also, compared with other countries, the churches in Poland are not closed. Whenever you have a free moment you can open the door and go there to pray. While I was in Rome in June I was trying to enter a church, but I was told that it was closed for four hours. That really shocked me!

(continued on page 6)

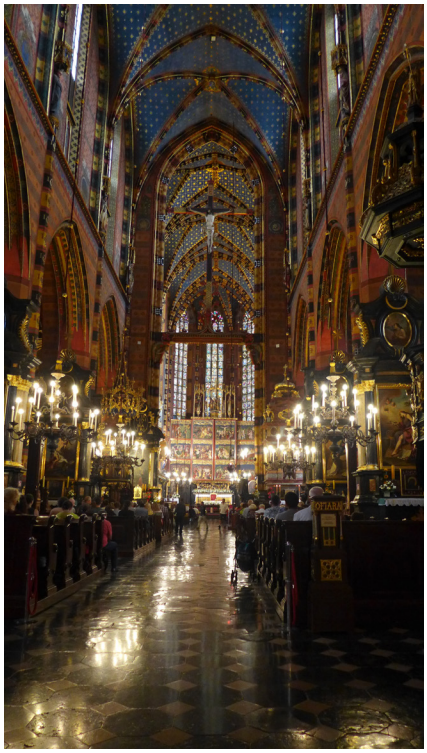
Walkowska and Ślusarz Interview *(continued from page 5)*

According to the Pew Research Center's 2017 study "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," 75 percent of Poles said religious leaders influence politics, but only 31 percent believed that they should [https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe]. Do you think some Polish politicians' promotion of the Catholic Church and "traditional values" truly reflects popular sentiment?

Krzysztof: We do not divide the country from religion. Our Constitution says that we originate from God. [Editor's note: The preamble of Poland's 1997 Constitution recognizes "both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good, and beauty" and "those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources." It also describes Polish culture as "rooted in the Christian heritage of the Nation and in universal human values."] Nowadays, we have conservative, liberal, and ecological political parties, all with different programs. The liberal side argues that the church is not good for people, complains that it is stopping abortion and withholding LGBT rights.

Katarzyna: On the one hand, that is what they are saying, but in the run-up to elections they shift to the center. They gather their whole family and take a beautiful picture alongside pictures of Jesus and Mary, and claim that they do not oppose the church.

That suggests they do need to reckon with significant religious sentiment among the electorate. Do you think that conservative politicians' projection of personal faith is genuine?



Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (St. Mary's Basilica), Kraków (G. FAGAN)

Krzysztof: A few months ago I was at St. Anna's [collegiate church of Kraków's Jagiellonian University]. It was a normal, 1 p.m. Sunday Mass. I was standing at the back when the doors suddenly opened. Security guards came in and pushed people out of the way. Then our president [Andrzej Duda] entered with the first lady [Agata Kornhauser-Duda]. They stood praying in the back rows, went for communion, and then left.

Katarzyna: They are both from Kraków. Also, when he was elected, the first thing Duda did was to go to Częstochowa. Of course, on that occasion there were a lot of media and photos—if it was just for show or not, I don't know. But incidents like this [Duda's appearance at St. Anna's] make me feel like he is not just doing it for show.

Do Poles' comparatively conservative social attitudes therefore combine with animosity towards the European Union (EU)?

Both: No, no!

Krzysztof: Obviously the EU may not be a great place at the moment. It was founded upon Christian values, on the principle of free movement of economic goods, and so on. Now they are trying to turn it into one big organization, while each country is totally different.

Katarzyna: Some other countries are also conservative. They should be able to make their own decisions—we don't use the Euro, for instance.

Krzysztof: Having the *złoty* means that our central bank has greater flexibility to adjust interest rates. But we are part of and happy to be in the EU. We may have a different point of view on economic matters, but we are not going anywhere. The government would not try something like Brexit.

In 2019 a documentary film was released in Poland examining the issue of pedophilia within the local Catholic Church, *Tell No One* [Polish: *Tylko nie mów nikomu*]. Did this have an impact upon the Catholic community?

Katarzyna: I didn't watch it. I prayed over it. Of course, it doesn't matter where you go, these things are happening. There is the #MeToo movement—the Hollywood film stars who were abused by their producers—so it is in every profession. But I also know priests who are amazing—you can call them at midnight if your grandmother is passing away, and they will leave everything and come. They are the real shepherds. There are also priests who are dubious, but in the Gospels Jesus says there will be wolves in sheep's clothing [Matthew 7:15]. It makes me sad to see this here in Poland, but looking around, it doesn't make people leave the Church.

Krzysztof: If you are in the Church, you have faith—that kind of thing doesn't affect you, basically. I'm not saying it is not true—it can be, obviously—but the media takes several cases and turns them into a spiral, saying everything is bad.

Does the Catholic Church remain strong in Poland thanks to its historical role preserving the nation in adversity?

Katarzyna: I think it has to do with history for sure. For 123 years we were a country that was not on the map [1795-1918]. Even though that was three generations, we preserved our language, we preserved our culture, and we preserved our Catholic faith. So even though we were nowhere on the map, we now have [20th-century saints] Faustina [Kowalska] and her devotion to Divine Mercy, [Maximilian] Kolbe. Poland has so many saints. I feel that they are taking care of this country, even though we argue and fall. ♦

"Christianity is not just morality":
An Interview with Fr. Marek Blaza

Fr. Marek Blaza is a priest belonging to the Catholic Society of Jesus [Jesuits] who has permission to serve the Eastern or Greek Catholic Rite in addition to the more usual Roman Catholic Rite. Based at the Jesuit complex centered upon St. Andrzej Boboli Church in the Polish capital, Warsaw, he also lectures on the theology of ecumenism and sacramentology.

The East-West Church Report *earlier featured a portion of the editor's August 2022 interview with Fr. Marek concerning his service to the Ukrainian community in Poland, especially those fleeing the current war in their homeland [see the* East-West Church Report *vol. 30 (2022), no. 3, 7-8]. The portion below sees Fr. Marek discussing his past and present experience within the Catholic Church in Poland. The interview took place in English.*

Fr. Marek Blaza (G. FAGAN)

What was your pathway to becoming a Jesuit priest?

I was born in Chorzów, a town in Upper Silesia in southwest Poland. I am a typical indigenous Silesian—we speak a Silesian dialect that is not pure Polish. Historically, my region has belonged to Germany, Austria, and Czechia, so it is influenced by many cultures. The majority is Catholic, but there are also Lutherans—I think that is why I became interested in ecumenical dialogue.

I first heard about the Jesuits when I was a schoolboy, from the American television series *Shōgun* starring Richard Chamberlain. I saw that the Jesuits were so smart and cunning, and I thought, "I could be like that!" (Laughs.) Then I began to learn about the order's founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola. I entered the Society of Jesus after leaving secondary school, in 1989.

Poland was still under Communist rule when you were thinking about becoming a Jesuit. Was such a step made difficult?

My secondary school was very "red," as we say—very Communist. But going there was a good experience, because it meant that my faith was tested and verified. At that time it was possible to be a believer openly in Poland. What was not acceptable was that every year, from this very "red" school, there was always one pupil who went to seminary. (Chuckles.) For the headmaster, this was a point of shame.

Entrance to Collegium Bobolanum and St. Andrzej Boboli Catholic Church, Warsaw (G. FAGAN)

Was there any attempt to stop you from joining the order?

No, because I didn't tell anyone about it. That would not have been prudent! If I had told the headmaster or my teachers, I think that I would not have received my high school diploma. Without that, I would not have been able to study to be a priest. One of my fellow pupils was a girl who wanted to go to West Germany to study medicine and become a doctor. She said to me, "If you tell the school administration that I want to go to West Germany, I will tell them about your plans to go to seminary!" (Laughs.)

I began my novitiate [period of training prior to taking vows] in Stara Wieś in southeastern Poland. After two years I took my first vows. Then, from 1991-93, I studied philosophy at the Society of Jesus' faculty of philosophy in Kraków, at what is now the Ignatianum [a Jesuit university]. Then I completed the regency, the practical stage of my candidacy. I spent two years in Dublin, Ireland, teaching at Belvedere College—a quite famous high school which some of the *Taoiseachs*, or Irish prime ministers, attended.

I then completed a Master of Divinity at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology here in Warsaw from 1996-99. After that I pursued doctoral studies in ecumenical theology at the Catholic University of Lublin in eastern Poland, receiving my doctorate from there in 2004. My thesis was on "The Sacraments of Christian Initiation in Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue." My supervisor was Wacław Hryniewicz [d. 2020], a famous professor here in Poland. He was an apostle of Christian hope—he emphasized the hope of salvation for all people.

(continued on page 8)

Fr. Blaza Interview *(continued from page 7)*

I had long been interested in Eastern Christianity. After starting my philosophy studies in Kraków in the early 1990s I frequented the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church and sang in the choir there. This allowed me to get to know the Orthodox faith properly. Before that, everything I knew about Eastern Christianity came from books.

In Ireland I also participated in the services of an Orthodox church in Dublin that was built by Cypriots and came under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. It was a very interesting community. The parish priest was Romanian, and he gave the homily partly in Romanian, partly in English, and partly in modern Greek. The choir director was Scottish, his wife was French, and their children were Irish!

Once here in Warsaw, I began to attend the Greek Catholic church of the Basilians [Eastern-Rite monastic order historically prominent on the territories of modern-day Ukraine and Belarus] because I already knew I would be working with Ukrainians. When I became a deacon in 1999, I received permission to be a bi-ritualist from the father general [head of the Jesuit order], Peter Hans Kolvenback. That meant I could celebrate the sacraments in both rites, Byzantine [Eastern, similar to that of the Orthodox Church] as well as Latin [Western or Roman].

Yesterday I visited the Museum of the Blessed Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko here in Warsaw, in the crypt of St. Stanisław Kostka Church where Fr. Jerzy served until his murder by the Communist secret police in 1984. A monthly mass for the Polish nation was taking place inside the church, which was filled with worshippers. Do you think that the great devotion to the Catholic Church displayed by Poles during the Communist era—exemplified by the massive crowds that turned out to see Pope John Paul II on his visits to Poland—has endured?

Up until the end of the 1980s the Catholic Church was the only legal opposition party, so people came to church. I remember one occasion when I was a boy, when a man in church didn't kneel down during the elevation of the host. My grandmother said to him, "Kneel down!" He replied, "I don't believe in God! I'm here because I'm against the Communists!" (Laughs.) Of course, things changed after 1989. We had pluralism—the possibility of establishing your own party, society, or whatever. So these people went away from the church—but they were never really believers.

Now that devotion depends upon what region of Poland you are in. Most of the people who come to church are in the south of the country, especially the southeast, but also Upper Silesia. Yet as we say, "Down there everyone goes to church, while here in Warsaw, it is only those who believe!" (Laughs.)

Is it more of a cultural phenomenon in the south?

Yes. There was a sociological study of religiosity in southeastern Poland which revealed that some people there never pray privately, but they are in church every Sunday! (Laughs.) "What would the neighbors say if I weren't there?"

Catholic faithful after August 2022 Mass for the Polish nation, St. Stanisław Kostka Church, Warsaw (G. FAGAN)

When international media report on the Catholic Church in Poland, it is typically regarding its alignment with right-wing politicians and concerns over abortion and LGBT rights. How far is this an accurate reflection of Polish Catholic priorities?

I do find that a lot of priests like to preach morality in their homilies. Without God, I would even say. "I am against abortion because I am Catholic." Oh, interesting—does this mean that you must be Catholic in order to be against abortion? Yet I have met atheists who are against abortion, for this is not a question of whether or not God exists—it is a question about the beginning and end of human life.

This preaching focused solely upon moral questions is a real problem in Poland. For Christianity is not just morality. Where is the Gospel? I have been noticing this because I gave two homilies in one small parish during the recent summer holidays, and the people there said to me: "Father, you speak a lot about Holy Scripture. You don't just talk about what is allowed and what is forbidden!" (Laughs.) No, because Jesus said, "If you want to follow me…" [Matthew 16:24]. "If you *want*" and not, "you must."

That is one issue. The second, as you mentioned, is that some bishops and priests think that the right wing will be in government forever and ever. I don't think so.

Is the Collegium Bobolianum—the Jesuit educational institution where you currently teach—attempting to address this situation?

In our teaching on political studies we try to explain that a marriage between the altar and the throne is not the

best idea to save the Church. History shows us that when such a marriage takes place, the altar is usually the side that will lose more.

However, the young generation is already very far away from the Church. We lost them.

Has the decline in young people coming to church been swift or gradual?

A dramatic drop, beginning with those who were born around the late 1990s or the early 2000s.

People who are now in their early twenties.

Yes. But why? This happened because their parents did not pass the faith on to them. Even the parents were not really believers. It was just tradition, and I think the same thing will happen in the southeast of Poland. It is just a question of time.

These young adults would still have encountered religious education in public schools.

Yes, although some might not even have wished to attend the religion lessons offered in school. Sometimes the level of teaching there is very poor, based more upon piety than reason. Piety plus stupidity is a very dangerous thing. Faith should be rational—*Fides quaerens intellectum* [Latin: "Faith seeks understanding"] as Anselm of Canterbury would say. If you create theology just as doctrine, this is ideology. It is the same with Communism—you can create many kinds of ideology. LGBT might also become an ideology.

With regard to LGBT, I have participated in private consultations with LGBT people, particularly those involved in Poland's Faith and Rainbow Foundation [Polish: *Fundacja Wiara i Tęcza*]. These are Catholics who want to stay in the Church, and they need priests for counseling and confession. The problem here is that the language some priests use about such people is vulgar and un-Christian. After that kind of preaching, one mother with a son who is homosexual told her priest: "Father, you are talking about my son. I *love* my son, and I want him to be saved. What have you done, Father?" The attitude of such priests is just, "Go away, get out of the Church, because we don't need you here." But excuse me, this is not your Church. You just work at the counter, like at the bank! (Laughs.) The director, the chief, He's up there! [Points upwards.] ♦

Mosaic in the window of Kraków Bishops' Palace from which Pope John Paul II would address Catholic faithful on visits to the city. (G. FAGAN)

A Hard Road to Freedom: Two Heroes of Catholic Resistance in Communist Poland

GERALDINE FAGAN

The Catholic Church's contribution to the fall of Communism in Poland in 1989 is commonly identified with the 1978 election of Polish Pope John Paul II and his subsequent ability to galvanize massive support during jubilant visits to his homeland. Not forgotten in Poland, however, is that this effort was far more protracted and tragic.[1]

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński fought Communist plans to subdue the Catholic Church in Poland much earlier. In May 1953 he rejected a decree introducing state control over clerical appointments, telling then Polish government leader Bolesław Bierut:

> **We will follow the voice of our apostolic vocation and our priestly conscience, walking with inner peace and the knowledge that we have not given any grounds for persecution, that suffering becomes our lot only for the cause of Christ and the Church of Christ. We must not lay the things of God on the altars of Caesar. *Non possumus!*[2]**

Non possumus [Latin: "We cannot"] recalled both the apostles' inner compulsion to proclaim the Gospel expressed in Acts 4:20—"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"—and the words of a Christian martyred in

(continued on page 10)

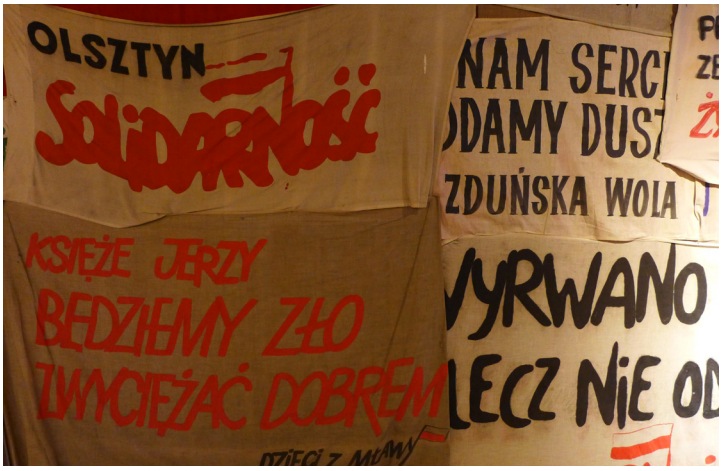
North Africa in 304 AD: "*Sine dominico non possumus*" [Latin: "We cannot do without Sunday."]

Arrested in September 1953, Cardinal Wyszyński was detained in various former monasteries across Poland for three years. During this time, he formulated two church responses to government anti-religious policy:

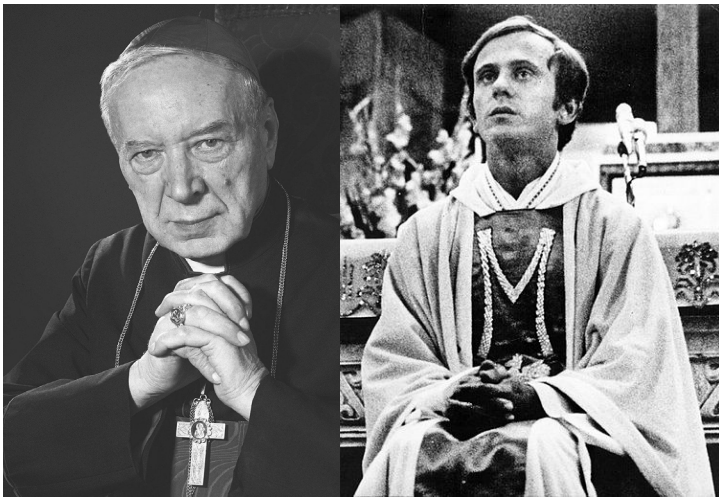
- **A renewed Pledge of Jasna Góra, recalling that of Polish King Jan II Kazimierz entrusting Polish kingdoms to the Virgin Mary as their queen in 1656. The king's pledge was made in gratitude for Swedish forces' failure in their siege of the monastery of Jasna Góra, home to the renowned ancient icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa. Cardinal Wyszyński's new vows called for Poles to "live in sanctifying grace and be a temple of God," including safeguarding marriage, upholding economic justice, and rejecting abortion.[3] They were proclaimed by a vast crowd of pilgrims at Jasna Góra in August 1956, two months before Cardinal Wyszyński's release from detention.[4]**

- **The Great Novena, conceived as the implementation of the renewed Pledge over the course of nine years' spiritual preparation for the thousand-year anniversary of Poland's formal adoption of Christianity in 966 AD. Each year had a motto dedicated to a particular value, such as "Youth faithful to Christ" (1962-3) and "May you love one another" (1963-4).[5]**

In June 1957 Cardinal Wyszyński further announced the visitation of a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa to all Polish parishes. During the 1966 millennium celebrations, police seized—or "arrested"—this copy of the icon three times. Church representatives twice managed to return the image to the pilgrimage trail, but on the third occasion it was confined to Jasna Góra, where it remained until 1972. In response, the faithful began to conduct processions with images of the icon's empty frame:



Some of the many Solidarity banners brought to Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko's funeral, now at the Warsaw museum dedicated to his memory. One reads: "Fr. Jerzy, We will overcome evil with good. Children from the Mill." (G. FAGAN)



Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (left) and Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko (Open source)

according to the later reminiscences of one Catholic, "the significance of the empty frame was all the greater."[6]

Cardinal Wyszyński was also instrumental in the consecration of Karol Wojtyła as archbishop of Kraków, and thus to his later papacy. Days after his election in October 1978, Pope John Paul II insisted to Cardinal Wyszyński that he "would not be on Peter's chair were it not for your faith which did not retreat before prison and suffering. Were it not for your heroic hope, your unlimited trust in the Mother of the Church! Were it not for Jasna Góra, and the whole period of the history of the Church in our country, together with your ministry as Bishop and Primate!"[7]

Cardinal Wyszyński was also an authority for Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, a chaplain to the independent Solidarity [Polish: *Solidarność*] trade union. Born in 1947 into a village household near Białystok in northeastern Poland, Fr. Jerzy was ordained by Cardinal Wyszyński in 1972. By 1980 he was serving at St. Stanisław Kostka Church in Warsaw, whose parish included the large steel mill of Nowa Huta. With the emergence of Solidarity that August, local workers sought Catholic pastoral support at St. Stanisław's. Fr. Jerzy responded to their request, repeatedly visiting the steel mill for Mass and confessions.

Following the Communists' December 1981 declaration of martial law and subsequent crackdown on the Solidarity movement, Fr. Jerzy further organized material assistance to the families of jailed workers. From February 1982 he began monthly "Masses for the Homeland" [Polish: *Msze za Ojczyznę*] at St. Stanisław's, which continue to this day. Fellow priest Fr. Marek Starowieyski recalls that, at moments of great tension during the martial law period, Fr. Jerzy would often cite Romans 12:21: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."[8] This has since come to serve as his motto.

Deeming Fr. Jerzy a threat, the Communist authorities kept him under close surveillance and in September 1983 opened a criminal investigation against him. In July 1984 Fr. Jerzy was charged with "violating freedom of conscience" by delivering sermons containing "political content defamatory

to the authorities," including accusations that the authorities "use falsehood, hypocrisy and lies, destroy human dignity through anti-democratic legislation, and deprive society of freedom of thought and action." By this time, tens of thousands were attending Fr. Jerzy's monthly Masses for the Homeland, filling the streets surrounding his church.

On 13 October 1984 a rock was thrown through Fr. Jerzy's car window as he was returning to Warsaw from Gdańsk, but the skillful response of his driver averted an accident. On 19 October Fr. Jerzy visited a parish in the city of Bydgoszcz at the invitation of local workers. After serving evening Mass, he told them: "A Christian's obligation is to stand by the truth even if it might cost them dearly. And you need to pay for the truth. Only chaff costs nothing. For the grain of truth, one sometimes needs to pay." On the road back to Warsaw that night, Fr. Jerzy and his driver were abducted by three members of the *Służba Bezpieczeństwa* or secret police. The driver managed to escape and raise the alarm, and vigils were held for Fr. Jerzy's safe return.

Eleven days later, however, Fr. Jerzy's battered and bound corpse was recovered from the River Vistula. In February 1985 the three secret police officers—whose testimony provided details of Fr. Jerzy's abduction and killing—were sentenced, along with a superior, to between 14 and 25 years in jail. These terms were later reduced to between four and 15 years, however, and who ordered the murder remains a mystery.

An estimated 800,000 people attended Fr. Jerzy's funeral at St. Stanisław's on 3 November 1984, with many viewing from the rooftops of nearby buildings.[9] Based upon an exhibition organized the same month by Fr. Jerzy's fellow parish priest, Fr. Teofil Bogucki, a museum in the crypt of the church contains many original artifacts from Fr. Jerzy's personal life and involvement in the Solidarity movement.

Prayers at the graveside of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko after August 2022 Mass for the Polish nation, St. Stanisław Kostka Church, Warsaw (G. FAGAN)

Monthly Mass in thanksgiving for the beatification of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, St. John the Baptist Archcathedral, Warsaw, August 2022 (G. FAGAN)

In June 2010 Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko was beatified—a milestone towards Catholic sainthood—in Warsaw. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who died in 1981, was also beatified in Warsaw in September 2021. ♦

Notes:

[1] Unless otherwise stated, the source is the Museum of the Blessed Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, Warsaw, Poland.
[2] Ewa Czaczkowska, "Kardynał Wyszyński. Gdy Cezar siada na ołtarzu, mówimy nie! Non possumus," *Wszystko Co Najważniejsze*, 30 January 2014, https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/ewa-czaczkowska-kardynal/.
[3] "The Pledge of Jasna Góra," *World History Commons*, https://worldhistorycommons.org/pledge-jasna-gora.
[4] A photo of the crowd may be viewed at: https://historia.interia.pl/kartka-z-kalendarza/news-26-sierpnia-1956-r-na-jasnej-gorze-odnowiono-sluby-jasnogors,nId,1489638.
[5] "A biographical exhibition presenting the figure of Stefan Wyszyński prepared by the IPN's National Education Office," Institute of National Remembrance, 10 September 2021, https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/8846,A-biographical-exhibition-presenting-the-figure-of-Stefan-Wyszynski-prepared-by-.html.
[6] Anna Niedźwiedź, *The Image and the Figure: Our Lady of Częstochowa in Polish Culture and Popular Religion*, Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press 2010, 174-6.
[7] "Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to the People of Poland," The Holy See, 23 October 1978, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19781024_polacchi.html.
[8] Fr. Marek Starowieyski, "Nie daj się zwyciężyć złu, ale zło dobrem zwyciężaj," *Radio Watykańskie*, 31 August 2008, https://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2008/08/31/nie_daj_się_zwyciężyć_złu,_ale_zło_dobrem_zwyciężaj/pol-227829.
[9] Footage of Fr. Jerzy's funeral may be seen at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-42tpXiNXFI.

Geraldine Fagan *is editor of the* East-West Church Report.

"Today the Polish Church is more human than divine":

An Interview with Kamila Dembińska and Magda Wroniszewska

The Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia [Polish: Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej*]—colloquially known by its Polish acronym, KIK—is headquartered in a quiet alley in Warsaw's Old Town. In late August 2022 the editor of the* East-West Church Report *met two of its members there: Kamila Dembińska, a childcare worker, and her friend Magda Wroniszewska, an architect, both from Warsaw.*

The East-West Church Report *earlier featured a portion of the editor's interview with Kamila and Magda concerning their active support for the many Ukrainians fleeing to Poland from the current war in their homeland. [See the* East-West Church Report *vol. 30 (2022), no. 3, 1-4.] The portion below sees the two friends discussing their past and present experience within the Catholic Church in Poland. The interview took place in English.*

Kamila Dembińska and Magda Wroniszewska (G. FAGAN)

How did the Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia form?

Kamila: The Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia, or KIK for short, is one of the oldest NGOs in Poland. It was founded in 1956—a difficult time in our history [Editor's note: In that year an anti-Communist uprising was violently suppressed]. A group of people came together who wanted to do something towards rebuilding our democracy. One of their methods was just to spend time together and to raise their kids in community. Throughout the Communist decades we were active as an organization independent from both the Catholic Church and the state.

What is your personal motivation for becoming involved in KIK?

Kamila: My whole family has long been involved in KIK. My parents were involved in the pro-democracy movement here in Poland. That is how most of the core members joined, and why they are here. So it was something natural, also for my kids. For them it is obvious—they are also in our kids' and teenagers' groups, and I'm pretty sure they will continue to be active here.

Former Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki (leaning towards microphone) at a Warsaw conference on 1989-1991 archival materials, 2011 (Source: CHANCELLERY OF THE SENATE OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND)

Magda: I'm in KIK because my husband was a kid in KIK. His father—my father-in-law—was not only in KIK but also in the pro-democracy movement called KOR [*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, or Workers' Defense Committee]. He was a doctor helping workers, such as those in the *Solidarność* [Polish: Solidarity] movement during strikes. With all those connections, this was a good place for people who wanted to do something to change the political situation. A lot of Poland's first democratic government in 1989 came from KIK.

Kamila: One of KIK's founders, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was the first prime minister.

During the Communist period, did KIK form a separate subculture that did not toe the official line?

Kamila: It was not welcomed by the Communist regime, of course. But we weren't in opposition.

Magda: During the 1960s and 1970s KIK had many contacts with Western as well as Eastern Bloc countries. It was therefore open to the West at a time when it was difficult to face in that direction. But these were not official contacts—they were always just between families and friends. For example, very often Polish émigrés in Western countries would send their kids to spend holidays at KIK camps in Poland.

Was KIK treated with suspicion by regime loyalists?

Kamila: Not too much. It was never controlled to the extent that our activity was blocked or the organization shut down.

Magda: We were smart!

Why was the authorities' attitude so lenient?

Magda: They did not view KIK as dangerous. They thought that it was just a club for people to talk and read together. They did not think it was anything special.

What is KIK like today?

Magda: We have branches all over Poland. The one in Warsaw is the largest and most active.

Kamila: It includes 5,000 families—a huge group of people. Of course, some are more active than others. But our branch's section for families is the strongest in Poland. There was an attempt to create similar sections for families in other cities 20 years ago, but it didn't work.

Does the name of the club mean that it is intended for Catholic intellectuals?

Kamila: No, it is open to everyone. I am proof of that! You don't need a higher education to become a member.

Magda: In order to join, you have to be invited by two current members. You don't need to show a document from your university or your bishop! (Laughs.)

What are some of KIK's activities?

Magda: As Kamila said, the biggest section is for families—that group organizes summer and winter camps for our children, and also meetings for them around twice a month during the rest of the year. It is a little like Scouts, with a Christian ethic. There is also a group for journalists which produces a magazine called *Kontakt*.

Kamila: We act in areas we consider important. One very active group has links with people in Belarus and Ukraine. Our aim is to support democratic processes in those countries. Another group, called *Drum Bun*, is for students. The name is Romanian and means, "Have a good trip!" I was one of those involved in setting it up around 25 years ago. As students, a group of us had begun traveling to the mountainous region of Bukovina in northern Romania and had fallen in love with that part of Europe.

A couple of days ago I visited the Museum of the Blessed Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko here in Warsaw. Its narrative has a succinct explanation for the Church's opposition to the Communist regime in Poland: "The task of the Church is to tell the truth about human dignity and freedom." How far do you feel that this spirit continues to animate the Catholic Church in Poland today?

Icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa

Kamila: Today the Polish Church is more human than divine. The situation is quite bad—a lot of problems have been discovered, like corruption and pedophilia.

Magda: The Catholic Church wants too much power. When key people in the Church dress in gold and drive luxury cars, it makes people think again. To me, the genuine Church looks like Taizé [ecumenical community in France known for its simplicity and community work]. For many years now, it has been possible to attend religious classes in public schools, but my kids—who go to public schools—don't attend them because I think it would damage their faith.

Young musicians processing through Warsaw's Old Town (G. FAGAN)

Did corruption and pedophilia become issues straight after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 or more recently?

Kamila: We don't know if it's recent or not…

Magda: I'm sure people were also talking about it in closed groups many years ago, but we have now started to discuss it openly.

Kamila: Here at KIK we set up a special telephone line for people who were abused within the Church. It was one of the first reactions when the abuse scandal became public.

Magda: Our phone line is available once a week, which is not enough, of course. For a few hours we offer a psychologist and a lawyer. If they wish, a person can call without identifying themselves—just tell their story and find help. This is very important.

Kamila: The result of these scandals is that young people—and even our generation—don't want to have anything to do with the Church.

Magda: This is why KIK is such an important place to me—a group of friends, but also people who think in the same way. In recent years I was looking at what was happening inside the Church, and I was thinking, "This is my church, but I do not want to be a part of it." Of course, there is the Church on earth, and people are only human, but you still don't want to have something in common with those people.

Does the younger generation of priests inspire hope?

Magda: There is always hope! But the number of candidates wishing to enter seminary is declining, so I don't know what the future will hold.

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Dembińska and Wroniszewska Interview *(continued from page 13)*

Do any older priests inspire confidence?

Kamila: Yes, but they are a minority, unfortunately. The question is, even if there were a lot of people wishing to become priests, who would educate and prepare them? That is why I am not so optimistic.

Still, there are some places in Poland known for authoritative clergy. For example, when I am deciding where to go to Mass with my family, we choose churches belonging to the Dominican Order because we can be sure of the quality and appropriateness of the preaching there.

So you find yourself choosing parishes?

Magda: In Warsaw we do have this choice, yes.

Do the current trends mean that the Catholic Church will become much smaller in Poland?

Magda: Probably. As is already the case in France, for example.

Kamila: I believe the most important thing would be to rebuild the true value of the Church—then people would want to join.

Magda: It is part of our human nature to want to be in a group. But for that, there would need to be some kind of revolution in the Polish Church. ♦

Catholic faithful after August 2022 Mass for the Polish nation, St. Stanisław Kostka Church, Warsaw (G. FAGAN)

BOOK REVIEW

The Transformation of Religious Orders in Central and Eastern Europe: Sociological Insights

edited by Stefania Palmisano, Isabelle Jonveaux, and Marcin Jewdokimow
London and New York, Routledge, 2021
194 pp., $46.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-367-75709-0

MATTHEW LEE MILLER

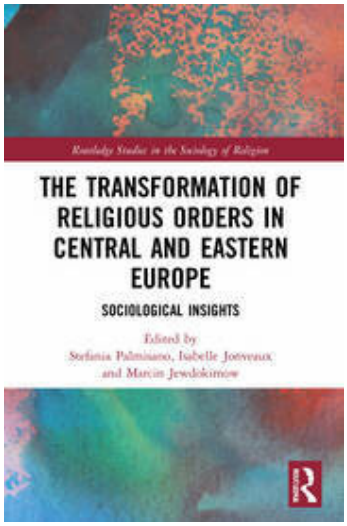
Three scholars based at universities in Italy, Austria, and Poland have edited a collection of sociological studies which explore the development of monastic and other religious orders in Central and Eastern Europe. This pioneering work analyzes the past 30 years of development of orders in the region, and the contributors include the leading European sociologists who study this topic. The book focuses on developments since 1945, but several authors provide context with details from earlier times. It includes nine chapters: two serve as introductions, four focus on Poland, and three address the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Russia. Catholic orders receive the most attention, and the book does not address Ukraine, Romania, or the Balkan region in detail. The contributors have chosen a variety of analytical tools from the discipline of sociology: a number provide analysis of published statistical records, others utilize quantitative survey data, and several depend on qualitative fieldwork observations.

In the introductory first chapter the editors provide historical and cultural background information for the subsequent chapters. They present a variety of religious organizations, including male and female monastic orders and other bodies. After the Second World War the rise of Communist governments led to the banning or restriction of these orders, whereas since 1989 political control over them has decreased. Many orders have experienced a revival along with new organizational, economic, and spiritual challenges. The increases in participation during the 1990s have slowed in most regions, with the exception of Poland.

In the second chapter Marcin Jewdokimow presents a quantitative summary of developments of religious orders in Central and Eastern Europe since the 1970s and compares findings to parallel trends across the continent and wider world. He summarizes the recent numerical decline in order memberships. This chapter also explains the different political climates experienced by orders in countries of the region; in Communist Poland, for example, the orders were repressed, while in Czechoslovakia they were almost entirely eliminated. Jewdokimow highlights that the recent decline in participation across Europe contrasts with increases in other regions of the globe. He pays special attention to one exceptional development in Poland: a sharp increase in the

number of religious priests (ordained members of orders), with a 72 percent increase from 3,895 in 1974 to 6,686 in 2017 (17). This chapter also introduces topics which are explored in later chapters, such as the appearance of new monastic orders, new forms of participation in traditional orders, and the interaction of orders with society.

Four chapters focus attention on Poland. Isabelle Jonveaux and Wojciech Sadlon explore the highly significant topic of religious priests in the country; these serve as members of orders alongside brothers who are not ordained. A further chapter by Jonveaux addresses the economies of monasteries in the country. She discusses a wide variety of strategies which attempt to provide for the needs of members and facilities without distracting from the primary spiritual and outreach goals: "in monastic life keeping a work–prayer balance is always challenging" (81). Income is received through providing pastoral services, selling religious goods, or other means.



Agata Mirek considers female orders in Poland. After the Second World War the state authorities began to regulate orders more directly and required sisters to take a more active role in educational and medical service. Nuns were treated as "third-class citizens" with a disregard for basic constitutional rights. During the 1950s, for example, over 1,000 nuns were forced to live in labor camps and endure political training (57-58). In response, female orders devised methods of adjustment and resistance to the new limitations. After 1989 female orders experienced greater freedom to expand their outreach through establishing a wide range of new schools, medical institutions, and social programs. Polish orders attempted to extend outreach to Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, although a variety of difficulties emerged. Mirek also discusses the service carried out in Poland by nuns from western Europe, Africa, and Latin America. The chapter concludes by reflecting on possible reasons for the current decline in the membership of female monastic orders in Poland.

Stefania Palmisano's chapter explores the growth of "New Monastic Communities" (NMCs) in Poland. These Catholic organizations (for men, women, or mixed groups) developed after the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65 without formal connections to established orders. They see themselves as renewal movements utilizing selected aspects of the traditions of existing orders. Bishops often provide authorization, and Vatican approval may confer recognition as an Institute. NMCs also draw on a variety of religious practices from outside the Roman Catholic Church. The author suggests that they often place less emphasis on established Catholic teachings, such as the doctrine of original sin, and practices, such as confession. These communities frequently model relationships which are more egalitarian than hierarchical.

The chapter by Barbora Spalová, Marek Liška, and Tereza Picková offers a very different account of developments in the Czech Republic. The authors present a case study of several monastic institutions which were returned to the Catholic Church after 40 years in which monasteries were not able to operate (1950-90). In 1991 the Church received 200 buildings, and in 2013 the state restored additional land and financial compensation. The Church has developed the restored properties and assets and allowed non-Catholic Czechs to interact with monasteries which do not currently house monks or nuns. Visitors experience the restored structures as historical-cultural monuments or centers for rest and leisure.

Edit Márta Révay's chapter discusses the development of religious orders in Hungarian society since 1990. This analysis relies on questionnaires which were distributed among members of orders as well as interviews of selected leaders. Survey questions addressed the motivations of new participants and their experiences in entering and continuing life within their orders. The author explores educational levels, family support, previous church experiences, and geographical background. The analysis also explores expectations of social interaction within the order, financial security, and placement for work responsibilities.

Focusing on Russia, Ksenia Medvedeva's chapter provides fascinating insights into the roles played by Orthodox monasteries in contemporary life. The author begins by highlighting the contrast between the high percentage of the population which identifies as Orthodox with the low percentage which actively participates in parish life through attending services or receiving communion. She also reflects on a recent study which explores four modes of involvement in Orthodoxy in Russia: parish, pilgrimage, network, and "flashmob" (156-7). Medvedeva's research illustrates how traditional monastic institutions continue to resonate with a wide variety of Russians who are not formal members of the orders. Her fieldwork was conducted in the Leningrad, Yaroslavl, Kaluga, Ivanovo, Moscow, and Nizhny Novgorod regions, and the chapter pays special attention to the village of Diveyevo in the last of these, whose Holy Trinity-St. Seraphim Monastery is one of the most well-known and frequently visited monasteries in the country.

Pilgrims often travel to visit "holy places" located across Russia. In the city of Moscow a leader of the Intercession (Russian: *Pokrovsky*) Women's Monastery estimates that between 1,000 to 5,000 people visit daily to pay their respects to St. Matrona of Moscow. Outside the capital, Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra in Sergiev Posad has attracted more than one million visitors a year. In Diveyevo, thousands of visitors come to the monastery to venerate the relics of

(continued on page 16)

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St. Seraphim of Sarov (158). Such pilgrims participate with differing motivations, of course, and monasteries are often able to accommodate a variety of visitors. Some wish to encounter miraculous icons, saints' relics, or healing springs, often located in or near monasteries. Visitors travel alone or in groups; they often come on bus tours, but many travel on foot in order to experience hardship intentionally. The purposes of pilgrimages thus vary widely as participants seek to develop faith, enjoy leisure, and/or explore the past.

Pilgrims may also wish to develop stronger ties to their community of believers, ancestors, or nation (163-4). Medvedeva explores the experiences of *trudniki* (laborers); temporary volunteer workers who have come to a monastery to provide manual labor as well as to experience the life of the community. Often room and board are provided in exchange for labor in the refectory, gardens, or other facilities. They are not formal members of an order, but they are expected to attend services and follow other guidelines.

Medvedeva also describes a number of alternative Orthodox groups she encountered in Diveyevo. *Bespasportisty* (people without passports) refuse to carry new government documents with numbers they believe may carry the mark of the Antichrist. *Tsarebozhniki* (tsar-worshippers) believe that Russian monarchs, particularly Nicholas II, have played a redeeming role for the nation (160). In addition to serving as a location for pilgrimage, a Russian monastery may also serve as a base for a *starets* (elder). These monastic elders have attracted networks of followers who seek their spiritual direction and support. Such believers travel long distances to monasteries in order to ask questions and request blessings from the elders they revere.

Since the collapse of Communism a number of monasteries have also attracted "Orthodox flashmobs": long lines of people who wish to venerate relics or icons which are temporarily on location. Many people participate after receiving news from a media source, before quickly dispersing once the items have left for a new destination. In 2012, for example, the monastery of Diveyevo served as one of the host sites for the Virgin Mary's belt, brought from Greece to Russia for 40 days. Approximately 3.5 million people came to see and/or venerate this relic during this period (161).

Carmelite Catholic nuns in Warsaw's Old Town (G. FAGAN)

In summation, *The Transformation of Religious Orders in Central and Eastern Europe* is a unique, high-quality scholarly work which should be added to research libraries and accessed by scholars as a reliable reference work. ♦

Matthew Lee Miller *is book review editor of the* East-West Church Report.

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