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From Empires to Nation-State: Remaking Catholicism in an Independent Poland

One of defining themes of modern Polish history has been the contrast between the fragility of the Polish state and the durability of the Polish nation. While an independent Poland disappeared from the map of Europe between the final partition of 1795 and the end of the First World War, a Polish cultural community not only survived but developed denser institutional sinews and engaged new constituencies, providing the foundation for an ultimately successful bid for renewed independence. A factor that looms large in most explanations for this persistence is Roman Catholicism. Even as the face of state authority in previously Polish lands became Russian, Habsburg or Prussian in the nineteenth century, the face of the Catholic church remained, in this understanding, reliably and unmistakably Polish. This view has shaped detailed narrative histories of Catholicism in Poland, which generally weave faith and nation into an organic whole.¹ It has also served as a background assumption for historians and social scientists who work on religion more broadly.² If we accept that

¹ A good example of this kind of fusion of religious and national narratives is Jerzy Kloczowski's *History of Polish Christianity*, Cambridge, 2000. The chapter on the nineteenth century is titled 'Slow Revival in Bondage', with sub-titles on 'Polish Patriotic Religion in the Age of the Uprisings' and 'The Folk Church and the Oppressed but Vital Nation.'

² To cite just a couple of examples of standard works in these fields that equate Catholicism in Poland with defence of Polish-national culture: Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Peoples of Western Europe*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 15-21; Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, 'Secularization: The Orthodox Model', in Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, Clarendon Press, 1992, 8-30 (p. 17).

Catholicism in Poland was inseparable from (cultural/linguistic/ethnic) Polishness, then the collapse of the German, Habsburg, and Russian empires and the establishment of an independent Polish state in 1918 represented a straightforward process of liberation for church and nation alike.

Some historians have, however, questioned this neat conflation of Roman Catholicism with Polish nationality, pointing out important phenomena that such a characterization hides from view. As Brian Porter has argued, ‘the linkage between Catholicism and an articulated ethnic identity...is more tenuous than is usually assumed.’³ While the church’s defence of religious education sometimes dovetailed with promotion of literacy in standardized Polish, most famously in the school strikes of 1901 and 1906-7 in the Poznań region,⁴ in other contexts religious education could facilitate a shift from local Slavic dialects to German or, alternately, the nurturing of non-Polish mother tongues, such as Lithuanian, in areas of previous Polish cultural dominance.⁵ And while some members of the lower clergy did

³ Brian Porter, ‘The Catholic Nation: Religion, Identity, and the Narratives of Polish History’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 45.2 (2001), 289-99 (p. 289).

⁴ John J. Kulczycki, *School Strikes in Prussian Poland, 1901-1907*, Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981.

⁵ On the local Catholic clergy as a ‘Germanizing’ force in Upper Silesia, see James Bjork, ‘Everything Depends on the Priest? Religious Education and Linguistic Change in Upper Silesia, 1870–1914’, in *Die Grenzen der Nationen. Identitätenwandel in Oberschlesien in der Neuzeit*, Kai Struve and Philipp Ther, eds., Vol. 15, Tagungen zur Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung, 2002, 71-102. On the church’s approach to Polish and Lithuanian in the northeastern regions of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, see Saulius Sužiedėlis,

actively support nineteenth-century uprisings seeking the restoration of Polish independence, the most authoritative voices in the church consistently preached loyalty to the Hohenzollern, Habsburg, and Romanov sovereigns who now ruled former Polish lands.⁶ This message went out clearly in 1832, when Pope Gregory XVI issued the encyclical *Cum Primum* (*On Civil Obedience*), categorically denouncing the uprising in the Russian partition of Poland that had broken out in November 1830.⁷ Imperial loyalism was arguably stronger than ever before in the years immediately preceding the establishment of an independent Polish state. In the summer of 1914, the church preached compliance as hundreds of thousands of Polish-speakers and/or residents of the old Polish-Lithuanian state were mobilized to fight on opposite sides of the First World War. To the extent that imperial loyalties were destabilized during the war, this involved shifting of allegiances *among* dynasties—in particular the acceptance of German/Habsburg sponsorship by clerics in the old Congress Kingdom who embraced the establishment of a new Kingdom of Poland in the autumn of 1916.⁸

‘Language and Social Class in Southwestern Lithuania’, *Lituanus* (*Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences*), 27:3 (Fall 1981).

⁶ For a judicious summary of the balance between patriotic and loyalist tendencies in the nineteenth-century church, see Robert Alvis, *White Eagle, Black Madonna: One Thousand Years of the Polish Catholic Tradition*, New York, 2016, pp. 161-71. Also see Porter, p. 295.

⁷ The full English text of *Cum Primum* is accessible at Papal Encyclicals Online, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/greg16/g16cumpr.htm>, accessed 29 September 2019.

⁸ A central role in this shift was played by the Archbishop of Warsaw, Alexander Kakowski, who would serve as one of the regents of the new kingdom. On the delicate balance between Polish-national self-assertion and German domination in the establishment of the Kingdom of

Expressions of imperial loyalty within the Roman Catholic church came to an abrupt end, of course, as first the Russian and then the Habsburg and German empires collapsed. After 1918, no Catholic bishop or priest in the new Polish state was demanding the restoration of the Hohenzollerns, Romanovs, or even the reliably Catholic Habsburgs. But legacies of imperial rule proved far more resilient than active dynastic allegiances. What sustained distinctive “Prussian”, “Austrian” and “Russian” identities within the new Polish state were not vertical loyalties but shared historical experiences: living under the same laws, voting in the same elections, being educated in the same school system, serving in the same army. Some of these shared experiences had, to be sure, been experiences of oppression that were firmly renounced after 1918. But most of the norms that shaped daily life of imperial-subjects-turned-Polish-citizens involved basic understandings of how modern(izing) states interacted with their populations. Far from being repudiated as foreign impositions, many of these norms were internalized as models for how a new Polish state should operate. ‘Polonizing’ the new state, in other words, often meant the extrapolation of imperial-era precedents and so could be seen, simultaneously, as ‘Germanizing’, ‘Austrianizing’, or ‘Russifying.’ The extraordinary longevity of post-imperial identities has recently been highlighted by political scientists and journalists, especially those focusing on electoral behavior. Maps of twenty-first-century election results that eerily reflected the imperial borders of 1914 have peaked interest in such legacies.⁹ The role of post-imperial

Poland, see Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I*, Cambridge, MA, 2015.

⁹ ‘Imperial borders still shape politics in Poland and Romania’, *The Economist*, 21 November 2018. Jerzy Bartkowski, *Tradycja i polityka: Wpływ tradycji kulturowych polskich regionów na współczesne zachowanie społeczne i polityczne*, Warsaw, 2003.

identifications within the Roman Catholic church have received less high-profile attention, though specialists in the institutional history of the church have long been aware of the importance of these legacies. In this essay, I hope to demonstrate the usefulness of approaching the “Polish” Catholic church that started to emerge in 1918 as a difficult and protracted merger of ‘German’, ‘Austrian’, and ‘Russian’ churches, each shaped by more than a century of distinctive experiences and expectations.

Getting to Know Each Other: Piecing Together a ‘Polish’ Catholic Church

In 1948, members of the Catholic clergy from various dioceses gathered in the town of Trzebinia near Kraków to discuss the challenges of pastoral care in the chaotic aftermath of the Second World War. A report informing that discussion began with an account of how difficult it had been to create any sense of a national church structure after the *First* World War, as Poland became an independent state. Religious life in Russia, the Habsburg Monarchy, and Germany, the authors noted, had ‘developed in highly divergent circumstances.’ When the bishops who were now to constitute a Polish episcopate first gathered, their primary goal was simply ‘to get to know one another, to orient themselves about what was happening in the religious field and why church work in particular dioceses developed in one way and not another.’ The ‘varying points of view’ of the participating bishops meant that these summits made only slow and limited progress in forging a common agenda for the interwar Polish church.¹⁰

Before examining some of the specific challenges involved in creating a Polish national church structure after 1918, it is useful to step back and consider how the Roman

¹⁰ Referat na kursie referentów duszpasterstkich w Trzebnicy, 1 April 1948, ARz 00169, Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Katowicach.

Catholic church of the early twentieth century dealt with the general concept of the ‘national’. It is a surprisingly difficult task. If we are thinking of nations in the ethnolinguistic sense, then there was no acknowledgment whatsoever of the ‘national’ within the formal structures of the Latin-rite Catholic church in Europe. No diocese or parish was devoted to the needs of a particular linguistic group; every diocese and parish was expected to deploy various languages as needed to minister effectively to their residents.¹¹ Nations in the sense of sovereign states were more discernible in the structures of the Roman Catholic church, but just barely. Whereas the familiar offices that constituted the church hierarchy rested at the universal level (the pope), the regional level (the bishop), or the local level (the parish priest), the office that mapped onto the jurisdictional contours of the state (the primate) was, by the early twentieth century, an obscure and largely vestigial one. As a canon lawyer explained in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the office of primate ‘has lost its importance and disappeared’ because ‘national Churches as such no longer exist’ and the global church had become more centralized.¹²

To the extent that a ‘national’ level of church governance existed, it could be found not in the authority of an individual office but in consultative councils composed of the bishops of all of the dioceses on the territory of a given state. Although these bishops’ councils had little formal authority, they played an important coordinating role in the late

¹¹ For a fuller discussion of the Catholic church’s approach to nationality in East-Central Europe, see Jim Bjork, “‘I Have Removed the Boundaries of the Nation’: Nation Switching and the Catholic Church During and After the Second World War”, in Maarten Ginderachter and Jon Fox, eds., *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism*, Basingstoke, 2019, 204-24.

¹² Auguste Boudinhon, ‘Primate’, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, vol. 12, 1913, pp. 423-4.

nineteenth century, allowing the Roman Catholic church to respond more effectively to legal and administrative threats and opportunities. But this form of ‘national’ integration was, of course, *imperial* integration and so not ‘national’ at all from an ethnolinguistic perspective. Engagement with national councils of bishops meant, for example, the Archbishop of Poznań-Gniezno working with (other) German bishops and the Bishop of Kraków working with (other) Austrian bishops rather than their working with one another as ‘Polish’ bishops. Some regional meetings—such as for the Warsaw ecclesiastical province or the metropolitanate of Mohylew within the Russian empire or for the Galician metropolitanate with the Habsburg Monarchy—did largely involve Polish-identified bishops and thus provided some grounds for ethnolinguistic solidarity. But it was only after the establishment of the Kingdom of Poland in 1916 that a full ‘Polish episcopate’ could start to bootstrap itself into existence.¹³

The gatherings of bishops that were organized in this period of proto-statehood demonstrated the centripetal pull of the new kingdom for Polish-identified churchmen but also the residual power of imperial divisions. When the bishops of the new kingdom first gathered in Warsaw in 1917, they were joined by the bishops of Galicia as well as by the Archbishop of Poznań-Gniezno, stoking fears among Habsburg and (especially) German officials that their own Polish-speaking subjects would now start to gravitate toward

¹³ Stanisław Wilk, *Episkopat Kościoła Katolickiego w Polsce w latach 1918-1939*, Warsaw, 1992, pp. 54-6.

Warsaw.¹⁴ And yet, when a Polish state including the lands of the Prussian and Austrian partitions became fully independent in the autumn of 1918, the further development of an integrated Polish episcopate proceeded slowly. Transport and health issues prevented the attendance of the Archbishops of Poznań-Gniezno and Lwów and the Bishop of Przemyśl at the first Polish episcopal gathering in December 1918. The next meetings, organized in Warsaw and in Gniezno in the spring and summer of 1919 respectively, were complicated by disputes over precedence between Archbishop Dalbor of Poznań-Gniezno, the ex officio primate, and Archbishop Kakowski of Warsaw, the head of the church in Poland's capital.¹⁵ As the historian Neal Pease has discussed in his study of the Catholic hierarchy in interwar Poland, subsequent power struggles within the episcopate reflected multiple fault lines: an ideological divide between National Democrats and those who supported or at least accepted the later Sanacja regime of Marshall Józef Pilsudski; the defence of national/local autonomy against the direct interventions of papal nuncio Achille Ratti, who was elected as Pope Pius XI in 1922; willful jockeying for position among ambitious individual prelates.¹⁶ But Pease and other historians of the church have also noted how often policy differences within the new episcopate mapped onto old imperial frontiers, reflecting bishops' formative experiences of working within different legal and political systems.

What is perhaps most striking about these correlations is that bishops tended to be less concerned with overturning partition-era legacies that were deemed unfavorable to the

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 59. On German anxieties about the revival of a Polish theological faculty in Warsaw serving as a magnet for Polish-speakers from Prussian territory, see Kauffman, pp.182-3.

¹⁵ Wilk, pp. 60-1.

¹⁶ Neal Pease, *Rome's Most Faithful Daughter*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009.

Catholic church than they were with preserving local imperial legacies that seemed favorable to the church. Such preservationist instincts were facilitated by the persistence of diocesan boundaries that continued to reflect old imperial frontiers. While those boundaries were duly adjusted, in the concordat of 1925, to ensure that ecclesiastical jurisdictions did not spill across Poland's new frontiers, previous adjustments that had been made in the nineteenth century, to ensure that dioceses did not spill across *imperial* boundaries, also remained in force.¹⁷ Each interwar Polish diocese, in other words, was composed exclusively of post-Austrian, post-Prussian, or post-Russian territory and thus had a clear imperial status quo that was often seen as worth defending.

A couple specific examples will help to illustrate the point. Land reform was an early priority of the left and centre-left in the Polish Second Republic and seen as necessary even by many on the right. The concordat that the Polish government concluded with the Holy See in 1925 called for at least some property of the Catholic church to come in scope for potential redistribution. Bishops from the former Russian empire tended not to be exercised by this possibility. Their colleagues from former Prussian and Austrian lands, however, tended to

¹⁷ Lucjan Adamczuk and Witold Zdaniewicz, eds., *Kościół katolicki w Polsce 1918-1990: Rocznik statystyczny*, Warsaw, 1991, pp. 104-12. It was only in the 1990s that new diocesan frontiers were drawn that did not correspond exactly to old imperial boundaries. Interestingly, a similar conservatism prevailed in the drawing of interwar provincial (*województwo*) boundaries, which also mapped reliably onto old imperial frontiers. Only in the last year of the Second Republic's existence were there modest efforts to create administrative units that crossed old imperial frontiers. Andrzej Gawryczewski, *Ludność polska w xx wieku*, Warsaw, 2005, pp. 25-36.

view it with much greater alarm.¹⁸ The reason for the disparity was straightforward: the vast majority of the lands previously owned by the Catholic church in the Russian partition had already been confiscated in the aftermaths of the failed uprisings of 1831 and 1863, so the church had little left to lose; in former German and Austrian regions, by contrast, the Roman Catholic church still disposed of tens of thousands of hectares in large land holdings and was determined to fight the threat of further expropriations.¹⁹

An even more central issue for the church—arguably its greatest single preoccupation across Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—was the fate of religious education in primary schools. The Polish constitution of 1921 and the concordat of 1925 allowed for two hours of religious education per week within the new republic's state-run

¹⁸ Bishop Adam Sapieha of Kraków and Archbishop Józef Teodorowicz of Lwów (Armenian rite) were among the leading initial critics of these provisions of the draft Concordat, along with Father Stanisław Adamski, later Bishop of Katowice but at the time a Christian Democratic parliamentarian. Pease, pp. 69-71.

¹⁹ Former Austrian and Prussian territory made up only one third of the land area of the Second Republic (Austrian Poland: twenty per cent; Prussian Poland: thirteen per cent). Andrzej Gawryszewski, *Ludność polska w xx wieku*, Warsaw, 2005, p. 22. But in 1928, fully eighty-five per cent of the 176,000 hectares of land that the Roman Catholic church owned in Poland were located in former Austrian or Prussian territory (Austrian Poland: forty-five per cent; Prussian Poland: forty per cent). Dariusz Walencik, *Nieruchomości Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce w latach 1918-2012: Regulacje prawne—nacjonalizacja—rewindykacja*, Katowice, 2013, p. 53.

school primary schools.²⁰ For Catholic bishops and priests who had worked in the Russian Empire, this seemed a reasonable deal. Previously, after all, many children in the Russian partition had not even been attending any kind of primary school, so any provision for religious education represented progress. But for bishops and priests in former Prussian territory, a mere two hours of religious education in a non-confessional school seemed a horrifying step backwards. Before 1918, the vast majority of Catholic children in Prussia had attended explicitly Catholic state-supported school with at least four hours of religious education per week.²¹ Indeed, in Upper Silesia, up to five hours per week had been devoted to religious education.²² Vigorous lobbying by the local church and sympathetic political parties guaranteed a special dispensation for schools in former Prussian lands, where four hours of religious instruction per week generally remained the norm. But supporters of the Pilsudski regime and others on the left and center-left lambasted this exceptionalism as the preservation of an old system of ‘German’ schools against the introduction of proper ‘Polish’ schools, to the detriment of the intellectual competitiveness of Polish students.²³ Local Catholic clerics defending the status quo showed remarkably little concern about such patriotic critiques.

²⁰ Aldona Zakrzewska, ‘Edukacja religijna dzieci i młodzieży szkolnej okresu międzywojennego źródłem humanizacji życia społecznego’, *Paedagogia Christiana* 2.30 (2012), 47-67 (p. 56).

²¹ Ibid, pp. 60-1.

²² Ks. J. Bieniek, *Szkoła katolicka na Górnym Śląsku w oświetleniu historyczno-prawnym*, Katowice, 1933, pp. 219-20.

²³ Krzysztof Skarzyński, ‘Spór o wyznaniowy charakter szkół Górnego Śląska w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym na podstawie “Gościa Niedzielnego” w latach 1923-1939’, *Studia Śląskie Historyczno-Teologiczne*, 47/2 (2014), 352.

Indeed, in 1933, Father Juliusz Bieniek, the chancellor of the diocesan curia in Katowice, published a defense of the 'Catholic school in Upper Silesia' that consisted mostly of dense German-language footnotes favorably citing Prussian-era law (still in force) with occasional laments about the few legal modifications that had been introduced since the establishment of the Polish republic.²⁴

Interwar Polish bishops and priests tended to be more vigorous (and certainly more successful) in defending post-imperial legacies that were favorable to the Catholic church than they were in overturning post-imperial legacies that clashed with a Catholic worldview. Laws on marriage and divorce provide a striking illustration. The former Prussian territories were the only part of interwar Poland where civil marriage was the norm and divorce was recognized. Secular-minded legal reformers were keen to incorporate similar provisions into new marriage laws that would apply across Poland, but these efforts were successfully resisted by the church and its allies through the entire life of the Second Republic.²⁵ The flipside of this 'success', however, was the indefinite continuation of civil marriage and legal divorce within the post-Prussian strongholds of the church and its pro-clerical nationalist allies. On this issue, as with religious education, church officials tended to find the continuation of imperial legacies more palatable than a Polish-national harmonization that might extend a disadvantageous norm across the entire country.²⁶

²⁴ Bieniek, op cit.

²⁵ Szymon Paciorkowski, 'The Debate Over the Proposed New Marriage Law as an Example of the Social Changes in the Interwar Poland', *Social Transformations in Contemporary Society* (2013), 185-95.

²⁶ Pease, p. 58.

In tension with this tendency to preserve previous norms within each partition zone were pressures, both within the church and from outside, to create a more integrated and more unmistakably 'Polish' church. One aspect of this agenda was shaping the episcopate into one made up exclusively of men who identified as Polish by nationality. This might seem tautological to those used to the equation of Roman Catholicism with Polishness, so it is worth noting that it was not a pre-existing reality at the end of 1918. Augustyn Rosentreter of Chelmno, one of the two incumbent bishops in Prussia whose diocesan seats would clearly fall within the territory of the new Polish state, was understood to be German by descent and linguistic inclination. Although there were some calls for his immediate replacement, Rosentreter's reputation for defending Polish linguistic rights under German imperial rule blunted such efforts, and the elderly bishop (seventy-four years old in 1918) remained in office until his death in 1926²⁷. A more unambiguously Polish local priest (Wojciech Okoniewski) was appointed as his successor.

Bishop Jerzy Matulewicz of Wilno, the other Latin-rite Catholic bishop in interwar Poland who was not Polish by national orientation, had a similar reputation. Lithuanian in origin and self-definition, he was also known to be even-handed in national and linguistic matters. But unlike Rosentreter, Matulewicz was never accepted by more nationally fervent Polish Catholics in the region or by the Polish state. The fact that he was appointed as bishop in October 1918, only weeks before Polish independence, no doubt heightened the perception of Polish observers that they had only narrowly missed the chance for a more nationally

²⁷ Waldemar Rozynkowski, 'Kościół w czasie odzyskiwania niepodległości w świetle wybranych przykładów z historii diecezji chełmińskiej', in Wojciech Polak, ed., *Polska 1918. Stulecie odzyskania niepodległości*, Toruń, 2018, 58-70 (pp. 60-64).

favorable appointment, and the ongoing live political-military dispute over whether Wilno would fall under Polish or Lithuanian control further exacerbated tensions. In 1926, Matulewicz was compelled to resign, and an unmistakably Polish successor (Romuald Jałbrzykowski) was appointed by the pope.²⁸ From the end of 1920s, the ‘Polishness’ of every Latin-rite dioceses in the Second Republic was clearly signaled by the national orientation of its ordinary bishop.

But this process, involving as it did a struggle for national priority *within* individual dioceses, was still a long way from what could be plausibly described as national integration *across* the new Polish state. The latter goal presumably required some puncturing of the silos left in place by the preservation of old imperial boundaries in the Catholic church’s ecclesiastical structure. When it came to the career paths of priests and bishops, those imperial boundaries had constituted hard outer limits prior to 1918: ordinary bishops were sometimes from neighbouring dioceses within a given empire but never from beyond that empire. If, as Benedict Anderson famously argued, the shape and limits ‘administrative pilgrimages’—in which areas particular bureaucrats might be trained, stationed, and called on to help to govern, and from which areas they were effectively excluded—provided one good

²⁸ Pease, pp. 132-45. I do not address here another interesting case discussed by Pease in conjunction with Matulewicz: Andrei Sheptyts’kyi, Greek-rite metropolitan of Halicz-Lwów. While these cases raise somewhat similar nationalist controversies, they are quite different in ecclesiastical terms: as noted earlier in this essay, Latin-rite dioceses and parishes are territorial and do not formally recognize any form of linguistic/ethnic/national ‘ownership’; Greek-rite dioceses and parishes, by contrast, are based precisely on recognition of linguistic/ethnic/national distinction exempting a certain group of Catholics from the default Latin-rite territorial structure.

indicator/predictor of boundaries of national identities, then the continuation of this dynamic into the Second Republic was hardly auspicious for the creation of a unified 'Polish' church.²⁹

From the early 1920s, it did, indeed, become increasingly common for dioceses to be headed by a bishop who would have counted as 'foreign' a few years earlier. But what was striking about this geographic mobility within Poland's interwar Catholic hierarchy was that it was unidirectional. It exclusively involved men born and raised in Prussia being put in charge of dioceses in former Russian territory.³⁰ There were no instances of priests from former Russian territory governing former Prussian dioceses. Interestingly, the former Austrian dioceses maintained a degree of ecclesiastical autarky. As had been the case under Habsburg rule, bishops were often recruited from neighbouring dioceses within the Austrian partition but not from any other parts of Poland, and priests from Galicia were not, in turn, tapped to govern dioceses elsewhere.³¹ The result was a striking 'Prussianization' of the

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York, 2006, pp. 56-61.

³⁰ The first bishop of the newly formed diocese of Częstochowa (1926), Teodor Kubina, was born and trained in the diocese of Breslau, as was Jan Kanty Lorek, who served as the apostolic administrator (performing the functions of an ordinary bishop) in the diocese of Sandomierz from 1936. The bishop of Łomża appointed in 1926 (Stanisław Łukomski) and the bishop of Włocławek appointed in 1929 (Karol Radoński) were both born and trained in Poznań (the linked dioceses of Poznań and Gniezno). Biographical information available from www.catholic-hierarchy.org (accessed 1 October 2019).

³¹ Adam Sapieha, bishop of Kraków through the interwar period (archbishop from 1925) was born in the diocese of Przemyśl. Of the two interwar bishops of Tarnów, one (Leon Walęga)

Polish episcopate in the interwar period. In the summer of 1918, of the sixteen ordinary bishops governing what would soon be Polish territory, two were from the Prussian partition, four from the Austrian partition, and ten from the Russian partition. By the summer of 1939, of the eighteen men operating as ordinary bishops in the Second Republic, seven were ‘Prussian’, four were ‘Austrian’, and seven were ‘Russian’.³² The disproportionate recruitment of priests from former Prussian dioceses is even more striking if we take into view the broader hierarchy, including auxiliary bishops. Almost half of all of the bishops ordained in the Second Republic (fifteen of thirty-one) were from the four dioceses that had been part of the German episcopate up until 1918.³³

The ‘Prussianization’ of the interwar Polish church did not go unnoticed by contemporaries. In 1926, an article in the Catholic Kraków-based periodical *Głos Narodu* noted that almost every new episcopal appointment in the Second Republic’s brief existence

was born in the diocese, the other in the neighbouring diocese of Przemyśl. Two of the interwar bishops of the diocese of Przemyśl (Józef Pelczar and Anatol Nowak) were born within the diocese, the other (Franciszek Barda) in the diocese of Kraków. Of the three archbishops of Lwów (Latin rite), one was born in Austrian Silesia but trained in the diocese of Kraków (Józef Wilczewski), and two were born within the diocese of Lwów (Bolesław Twardowski and Eugeniusz Baziak). Op cit.

³² Krzysztof Krasowski counted eight ‘Prussian’ bishops and three ‘Galician’ bishops, but this seems to involve categorizing Józef Wilczewski, born in Austrian Silesia, as ‘Prussian’.

Krasowski, *Episcopat katolicki w II Rzeczypospolitej: Myśl o ustroju państwa*, Warsaw, 1992, p. 23. Two of the dioceses in the Russian partition—Warsaw and Siedlce—were vacant in the summer of 1939 due to the recent death of the previous bishops.

³³ Ibid.

had involved a native of the former Prussian lands. Speculating on why these men were being called on to flesh out the hierarchy in central Poland as well as in their home regions, the author suggested that natives of the Prussian zone had been ‘educated in the hard school of religious and national persecution’ but also had greater experience with the implementation of Catholic social teaching and with more imaginative pastoral care.³⁴ An awkward tension ran through such depictions of the church in Prussian Poland. While the toughness of priests from the Prussian lands was credited to a long record of defiance of Germanization, their reputation for organizational prowess was closely tied to the reputation of the German Catholic church to which they had been attached. As one historian of social Catholicism in Poland has observed, ‘as a model of social work, the example that always came to mind were the German organizations, which impressed with their systematic nature and vigour.’ Many ideas for revitalizing Catholicism in the Polish lands came from close engagement with German-language literature, facilitated by the universal German-language proficiency of the clergy in the Prussian lands and their integration into the structures of the ‘German’ Catholic church.³⁵

The extension of a Prussian Polish model of Catholicism to the dioceses of Russian Poland might also be imagined in party-political terms, as a vector for the promotion of National Democratic ideology. Prussian Poland was, after all, the electoral bastion of

³⁴ ‘Typ nowych Biskupów Polskich’, *Głos Narodu*, Nr. 155, 10 August 1926, p. 2.

³⁵ Czesław Strzeszewski ‘Rozwój chrześcijańskiej myśli społecznej w niepodległej Polsce’, in Czesław Strzeszewski, Ryszard Bender, Konstanty Turowski, eds., *Historia katolicyzmu społecznego w Polsce, 1832-1939*, Warsaw, quote and description of German influence on social Catholicism in Poland from p. 279.

National Democracy.³⁶ It was also a demographic model for Polish ethnonationalists, with its small Jewish population and a German Protestant population drastically reduced by emigration in the early years of the Second Republic.³⁷ The description of Prussian Polish clergymen as leaders of a disciplined and embattled ethnonational community would seem to dovetail convincingly with National Democratic visions of how the national community should be ordered.³⁸ On closer examination, however, correlations between the ‘Prussianization’ of Poland’s Catholic hierarchy and the spread of National Democracy are much weaker. The former phenomenon proceeded precisely in a period when Pope Pius XI—who ultimately decided on episcopal appointments, in consultation with members of the local hierarchy—was keen to soften the perception that the Catholic church was a (right-wing nationalist) partisan force.³⁹ Indeed, of the list of Prussian-born bishops cited by *Głos Narodu*, only one—Stanisław Łukomski, appointed as bishop of Łomża—fit the profile of a

³⁶ Karol and Tadeusz Rzepecki, *Sejm i Senat 1928-1933: podręcznik zawierający wyniki wyborów w województwach, okręgach i powiatach, podobizny posłów sejmowych i senatorów, statystyki i mapy poglądowe*, Poznań, 1928.

³⁷ While Jews constituted about 10 percent of Poland’s overall population, they made up less than 1 percent of the population of former Prussian territory. Andrzej Gawryczewski, *Ludność polska w xx wieku*, Warsaw, 2005, p. 249. Mass German Protestant emigration from Poznań and Polish Pomerania (West Prussia) led to an 11 percent drop in the Protestant population of the country between 1921 and 1931. Ibid, p. 248.

³⁸ On the National Democrats’ approach to mass politics, see Brian Porter, ‘Democracy and Discipline in Late Nineteenth-Century Poland’, *Journal of Modern History*, 71.2 (June 1999), 346-93.

³⁹ Pease, p. 82.

National Democratic activist. By contrast, the most important single appointment of the interwar period, of Silesian-born August Hlond as Archbishop of Poznań-Gniezno and Primate of Poland in 1926, provided a cautious, state-friendly counterweight to the influence of partisan National Democratic bishops such as Sapieha in Kraków and Teodorowicz in Lwów. Other bishops hailing from Poznań or Upper Silesia (Okoniewski in Chełmno, Lisiecki in Katowice, Kubina in Częstochowa) also steered clear of the nationalist right and generally expressed a loyalist attitude toward the Sanacja regime heading into the 1928 legislative elections.⁴⁰ Bishop Kubina, who is today probably best known for his denunciation of the Kielce pogrom in 1946, illustrates the difficulty of equating the ‘Prussian’ church with right-wing Catholic nationalism.⁴¹ Kubina had actually been one of the founders of the center-left National Labour Party (Narodowa Partia Robotnicza—NPR) but also had reservations about the direct engagement of the church in party politics. He refused to run for office himself in the early 1920s and stepped back from party politics altogether after becoming bishop.⁴²

What made the large and growing ‘Prussian’ contingent in Poland’s Catholic hierarchy most distinctive was not its ideological or party-political profile but its social profile. Higher-ranking clergy in former Russian and former Austrian Poland tended to be drawn from the gentry (*szlachta*) or from the intelligentsia, who in turn often had *szlachta* roots in earlier generations. According to one analysis, of all bishops (ordinary and auxiliary)

⁴⁰ Krasowski, p. 102.

⁴¹ On Kubina’s response to the Kielce pogrom, see T. Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz*, Princeton, 2006, pp. 149-51.

⁴² Mariusz Trąba, ‘Doświadczenia śląskie w działalności biskup Częstochowskiego Teodor Kubina’, *Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne* 35:1 (2002), 104-36 (p. 111).

born in the Russian partition, 42.5 per cent had landowner backgrounds, with another 17.5 per cent coming from the intelligentsia. For those hailing from former Austrian lands, the respective figures were twenty-two and twenty percent. Among those of Prussian origin, only 9.5 per cent came from the gentry and another 9.5 per cent from the intelligentsia. Almost half had peasant backgrounds, significantly higher than among those from former Russian lands (twenty percent) or Austrian lands (thirty-nine percent). The proportion of Prussian-origin bishops from working-class backgrounds was modest (fourteen percent) but presented perhaps the most striking contrast with other regions: only five percent of bishops from Russian territory and none of those born in Galicia had such a background.⁴³ These patterns among those who reached the upper echelons of the church hierarchy reflected recruitment patterns among the lower clergy. Throughout the early twentieth-century, former Prussian dioceses had by far the highest proportion of priests with either urban or working-class origins.⁴⁴

The 'Prussianization' of the Catholic hierarchy, in short, was understood to go hand in hand with its 'plebeianization'. The correlation was underlined in the specific biographies of the country's highest-profile bishops. The prelates from former Russian and Austrian Poland who were in office before independence and continued to play prominent roles through the 1920s and 1930s, such as Sapieha, Teodorowicz, or Krakowski, fit the longstanding mold of recruitment from the szlachta, the only variable being whether one's parents were from the petty gentry or (as in the case of Sapieha) a wealthy magnate family. The new cohort of

⁴³ Krasowski, 16.

⁴⁴ Józef Baniak, *Powołania do kapłanstwa i do życia zakonnego w Polsce w latach 1900-2010: Studium socjologiczne*, Poznań, 2012, pp. 93-4.

Prussian-origin bishops appointed in the 1920s had very different family histories. Cardinal Hlond and Bishop Adamski were sons of railway workers. Bishop Kubina was the son of a miner. What was significant about these origin stories was not necessarily that they better represented the Polish Catholic laity. Poland as a whole, after all, still had a tiny industrial working-class, and in many regions, descent from petty gentry would have been more common than employment on the railways. The placement of men with more urban/industrial backgrounds at the top of the church hierarchy instead signaled that the Catholic church was successfully adapting to socioeconomic changes that had affected the western, former Prussian lands first and most dramatically but that had also transformed industrial centres such as Łódź and the Dabrowa basin in the former Russian partition and that would affect more and more Poles in years to come. This was the implicit answer to parishioners in dioceses of central Poland who may have wondered why their bishops were being ‘imported’ from Poland’s western borderlands: these church leaders were to be seen not as coming from Germany but rather as coming from the not-too-distant future, showing the way toward vigorous devotional life within an urban and industrial society.

The appointment of Teodor Kubina as first bishop of Częstochowa, a diocese fashioned from lands formerly part of the ‘Russian’ dioceses of Kielce and Włocławek, was the textbook example of this approach. The miner’s son, trained in Breslau and in Rome, had served in supporting positions in parishes across the Upper Silesian industrial region as well as in the Catholic diaspora of Brandenburg and Pomerania before appointment in 1917 as the pastor of a largely German-speaking parish in Katowice, near the old German-Russian imperial frontier. In taking over administration of the new diocese in 1925, Kubina confidently extrapolated his experiences from Upper Silesia in fashioning a diocesan administration, starting a regional Catholic press, and expanding Catholic associational

networks.⁴⁵ The underlying assumption here was that Upper Silesia was a pastoral success story, where the church had been able to maintain high levels of devotional practice and a dense confessional milieu in the face of rapid industrialization and urbanization; by contrast, the neighbouring Dąbrowa basin, in the new diocese of Częstochowa, was viewed as a cautionary tale, where failure to engage with the needs of industrial, working-class parishioners had fueled anticlerical and secularizing tendencies.⁴⁶ Even in the late 1930s, after concerted efforts to enlist laypeople across the country into a standardized set of Catholic Action associations targeting men, women, male youth, and female youth, rates of mobilization varied widely across Polish dioceses. Former Prussian dioceses predominated among those with the highest levels of enrolment, while former Russian dioceses lagged.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Traba, pp. 128-33.

⁴⁶ On the use of Upper Silesia as the model for ‘modern’ Catholic pastoral care in twentieth-century Poland see Jim Bjork, ‘Piety by the Numbers: Social Science and Polish Debates about Secularization in the 1960s and 1970s’, in Paul Betts and Stephen A. Smith, eds., *Science, Religion and Communism in Cold War Europe*, London, 2016, 35-54. The ‘piety gap’ between the neighbouring Upper Silesian and Dąbrowa industrial conurbations has proven remarkably durable, despite the migration of both bishops and laypeople: in 2011, almost a century after the disappearance of the imperial border that once separated them, church attendance and communion rates in the diocese of Katowice (Upper Silesia) were still more than fifty per cent higher than those in the diocese of Sosnowiec (Dąbrowa basin). Paweł Ciecieląg, Piotr Łysoń, Wojciech Sadłoń, and Witold Zdaniewicz, eds., *Kościół katolicki w Polsce 1991-2011*, Warsaw, 2014, pp. 193-95

⁴⁷ By 1936, between 3.5 and 4.5 per cent of the Catholic population in the four former Prussian dioceses (Chełmno, Gniezno, Poznań, and Katowice) was enrolled in Catholic

Such rankings of devotional rigour and organizational muscle certainly echoed familiar East-West civilizational discourses, in which the West was assigned the role of bringing orderly progress to a primitive and chaotic East.⁴⁸ They also betrayed an essentially top-down understanding of how laypeople were to engage with the church's agenda. And yet, far from reflecting a straightforward extrapolation of 'normal' power relations in interwar Poland, the regional hierarchies and vectors of influence evident within the Catholic church actually differed dramatically from those evident in other spheres. Almost every other social, cultural and social elite in the country was drawn largely from former Austrian and Russian territories, with those from former Prussian territory noticeably under-represented. Of the twenty men who served as prime minister in the Second Republic, for example, only two, who cumulatively served less than three months, were born under Prussian rule. The top political and military leadership of the Sanacja regime that ruled the country from 1926 was essentially devoid of any representation from the Prussian lands. Lower-level civil servants, in turn, tended to be drawn disproportionately from former Austrian territory since Habsburg Galicia already had a largely Polish-literate administrative class. As one commentator wrote,

Action. In the rest of Poland, only the dioceses of Łomża (3.5 percent) in former Russian Poland and Tarnów in Galicia (more than six per cent) achieved mobilization rates as high. In the dioceses of Warsaw and Łódź, by contrast, just over one percent of Catholic inhabitants were enlisted in Catholic Action. Witold Zdaniewicz, 'Akcja Katolicka', in Czesław Strzeszewski, Ryszard Bender, Konstanty Turowski, eds., *Historia katolicyzmu społecznego w Polsce, 1832-1939*, Warsaw, 1981, 417-52 (p. 423).

⁴⁸ On the use of civilizational discourses by various actors within interwar Poland, see Kathryn Ciancia, *On Civilization's Edge: A Polish Borderland in the Interwar World*, Oxford, 2020 (forthcoming).

‘It was only natural that these [Austrian Polish] civil servants, having adequate experience and training, became the cadres of the new Polish administration, especially in the various ministerial departments.’⁴⁹ Similar dynamics were visible among Poland’s cultural elites. As Aleksander Gella observed in a classic article on the Polish intelligentsia, nineteenth-century high culture was defined by descendants of the gentry who attended Polish-language educational institutions (often private) in Galicia or Russian Poland. Prussian Poles, who instead attended German-language schools, always felt like outsiders in this milieu, even the few who nonetheless joined the ranks of prominent Polish writers.⁵⁰

The prominence that Prussian-born prelates enjoyed with Poland’s Roman Catholic hierarchy was, in short, the exception rather than the rule in the geographic recruitment of Poland’s ruling elites. As such, it could plausibly be seen as a compensatory phenomenon, a counterbalance to the general marginalization of the former Prussian lands and their inhabitants in the governance of the new Polish state. The class dynamics noted above reinforced the sense that recruiting the new leaders of the church from the western borderlands was challenging rather than reinforcing existing social hierarchies. As Bishop Kubina argued, referencing specifically the situation in Upper Silesia but suggesting that similar dynamics could be found across Poland, the ‘people’ (the industrial working class as well as peasantry) were the anchor of Catholic piety. By contrast, the intelligentsia (largely drawn from outside the region in the case of Upper Silesia) was the group most prone to religious indifference, though they could ultimately play an important role in the defence of

⁴⁹ Bronislaw Helczynski, ‘The Law in the Reborn State’, in Wencelas J. Wagner, ed., *Polish Law Throughout the Ages*, Stanford, CA, 1970, 139-75 (pp. 154-5).

⁵⁰ Aleksander Gella, ‘The Life and Death of the Old Polish Intelligentsia’, *Slavic Review*, 30.1 (March 1971), 1-27 (p. 17).

the Catholic faith and Catholic values.⁵¹ Promoting devotional rigour was therefore not just a matter of the clergy imposing discipline on laypeople but also of calling on social, political, and economic elites to conform to the norms and expectations of a ‘popular’ milieu.

Conclusions

In a forum devoted to establishment of an independent and unified Polish state, focusing on the durable power of old imperial frontiers and identifications might seem misplaced, even a bit perverse. But just as it took the loss of Polish statehood to reveal the depth of many people’s commitment to the Polish national idea, it was only after the demise of the Habsburg, Romanov and Habsburg empires that it became apparent how deep an impact the development of those imperial states had had on their respective societies. As the citizens of an independent Polish state started to debate what new legal, political, social and cultural norms should prevail in their new country, they sometimes sought to overturn imperial legacies they viewed as oppressive but more often sought to preserve locally or apply nationally imperial norms that they saw as advantageous and to which they were accustomed. This did not indicate a lack of Polish patriotism, a pining for imperial restoration, or even, necessarily, support for regional separatism. ‘Russian’, ‘Austrian’, and ‘Prussian’ reference points were, instead, the available and unavoidable vocabulary through which visions of post-1918 Polishness could be expressed.

A more recent experience of national unification—that of Germany in 1990—provides some striking parallels. The rapid move toward unification after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the autumn of 1989 famously involved a wave of enthusiasm, especially

⁵¹ Trąba, 132, referencing in particular T. Kubina, *W podniosłych chwilach i doniosłych sprawach*, volume 2, Częstochowa 1931.

among residents of the German Democratic Republic. But this was followed by an equally powerful wave of disillusionment—again, especially among residents of the former German Democratic Republic—featuring striking displays of nostalgic identification with a past that had apparently just been resoundingly repudiated.⁵² East German particularism has remained apparent in every subsequent election, though this has, most recently, been manifested in disproportionate support for the right-wing nationalist Alternative für Deutschland.

It should not surprise us that the revival of a Polish state in 1918 provoked similar ambivalence and uncertainty among the population of the new state—or that this ambivalence and uncertainty shot through that ostensibly most ‘national’ of Polish institutions, the Roman Catholic church. Like the Communist era, the era of the partitions was undoubtedly experienced by many people, in many various ways as a time of oppression. But it was also a transformative era, one that reshaped the social fabric of the different empires in which the citizens of a reconstituted interwar Poland had lived. Those transformations had involved both victories and defeats—political, legal, cultural—for the Roman Catholic church. As those imperial orders collapsed in the final years of the First World War, and the Polish Second Republic took shape, the Catholic hierarchy waited with a mix of hope and anxiety to see whether the nation-state would emancipate them from legacies of imperial rule that they deplored or would instead undermine legacies of imperial rule that they had come to embrace.

⁵² The shift from enthusiasm for unification to continued identification as (former) West or East Germans immediately caught the attention of social scientists. See, for example, Michael Minkenberg, ‘The Wall after the Wall: On the Continuing Division of Germany and the Remaking of Political Culture’, *Comparative Politics*, 26.1 (October 1993), 53-68.