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3 Reconquest, Reconstruction, Resumption: Churching Poland after the Second World War

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5 Jim Bjork, King's College London
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10 Abstract: This article examines how the Roman Catholic church in Poland navigated an
11 enormous increase in the church buildings at its disposal at the end of the Second World War.
12 This expansion was largely due to the mass acquisition of 'post-German' churches in lands
13 transferred from Germany to Poland. But rapid reconstruction of most of the churches
14 destroyed during the war, as well as the resumption of new construction, also played a role.
15 Although access to increased worship space might seem to have been a boon for Poland's
16 post-war Catholic church, the appropriation, reconstruction and completion of thousands of
17 church buildings presented the church with an array of challenges. Re-founding local Polish
18 religious life in 'post-German', and often 'post-Protestant', houses of worship raised difficult
19 questions about how various constituencies in newly formed communities could be made to
20 feel at home in their new surroundings. Trade-offs between the expectations and customs of
21 divergent groups were exacerbated by the prominence within the post-war church of
22 Catholics who were themselves 'post-German', having spent the war categorized as German
23 before being recategorized as Polish after 1945. Close attention to how Polish Catholics first
24 encountered new sacred spaces and one another reveal the complex negotiations and
25 balancing acts required to form an ostensibly 'homogeneous' religious-national community.
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49 Keywords: Catholic church; Second World War; Poland; Germany; post-war reconstruction
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54 This article's point of departure is a simple but remarkable statistic. During the
55 1940s—the darkest period in the history of Poland's Roman Catholic church and a time when
56 thousands of churches across Europe were reduced to ruins—the total number of Roman
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3 Catholic churches in Poland rose dramatically. In 1937, there were 7,257 Latin-rite Catholic
4 churches in Poland;¹ by 1950, there were 10,652, an increase of almost 50%.² The main
5
6 source of this growth was the expropriation of several thousand ‘post-German’ churches,
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8 most of them also ‘post-Protestant’, in the ‘recovered lands’ that were transferred from
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10 Germany to Poland in 1945. These acquisitions, constituting a third of all church buildings in
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12 post-war Poland, dwarfed the loss of Catholic churches in Poland’s former eastern territories,
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14 now incorporated into the Soviet Union. An additional factor in the expansion of the Catholic
15
16 church’s physical infrastructure was the vigorous pace of post-war reconstruction. Although
17
18 Poland’s Communist regime lacked the enthusiasm for repairing and erecting churches that
19
20 was demonstrated by Christian Democratic governments in Western Europe, it nonetheless
21
22 facilitated the rebuilding of the vast majority of Catholic houses of worship that had been
23
24 destroyed during the war.³ As Michael Meng has observed, Catholic churches were an
25
26 integral part of the historic reconstruction of cities such as Warsaw, in sharp contrast to the
27
28 omission from Warsaw’s post-war landscape of Jewish pre-war synagogues, none of which
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30 were rebuilt until the 1980s.⁴ A significant number of new Catholic churches were also built
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44 ¹ Lucjan Adamski and Witold Zdanewicz, eds., *Kościół katolicki w Polsce 1918-1990: Rocznik statystyczny* (Warsaw, 1991), 202.

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47 ² Archiwum Akt Nowych, Urząd do Spraw Wyznan, Wydział Rzymskokatolicki [hereafter
48 AAN, UdSWWR], Syg. 5a/28, Kościoły i klasztory rzymsko-katolickie w Polsce [n.d.,
49 1950?].

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52 ³ Of the 559 Latin-rite churches on pre-war Polish territory that were destroyed during the
53 war, 495 were rebuilt by 1955, the vast majority by 1950. Adamski and Zdanewicz, eds.,
54 202-3. On church reconstruction as a symbol of the repair of Western civilization, see P.
55 Betts, *Ruin and Renewal: Civilizing Europe after the Second World War* (London, 2020), pp.
56 164-7.

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59 ⁴ Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and
60 Poland* (Cambridge, 2011).

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3 in the first years after the war, though the rate was well below interwar levels.⁵ This stream
4
5 of restoration and new construction continued through the peak years of Stalinism. In 1955,
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7 the cathedral of Christ the King in Stalinogród (Katowice), the largest cathedral in Poland,
8
9 was completed and consecrated, three decades after construction had started.

12 The spectacular expansion of the Polish church's physical infrastructure after 1945
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14 did not, of course, mean that all Catholics enjoyed a surplus of usable worship space. In areas
15
16 that witnessed especially severe wartime destruction, as well as those where the post-war
17
18 population grew especially rapidly, parishioners struggled for years with unmet needs. But
19
20 even for the many Polish Catholics who had access to more churches closer to home in the
21
22 Stalinist era than in the interwar period, the sudden availability of thousands of newly
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24 acquired, newly rebuilt, or newly completed churches generated its own set of challenges.
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26 Perhaps the greatest of these challenges, and the one that will be the focus of this article, was
27
28 the need to absorb the pre-war and wartime German past into a post-war Polish future.
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30 German legacies were most obvious in the case of the 'post-German' churches, Protestant as
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32 well as Catholics, in which Polish Catholics in the 'recovered lands' re-created communal
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34 religious practices. How would parish communities composed of recent migrants establish a
35
36 sense of connection to and ownership of sacred spaces that were completely unfamiliar,
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38 which had often never witnessed Polish-language devotional practice or even the celebration
39
40 of a Roman Catholic mass? But the German past also intruded, in even more contentious and
41
42 difficult ways, in processes of church construction and reconstruction. Some of the areas that
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44 witnessed the most vigorous church building activity were regions in which the
45
46 overwhelming majority of native inhabitants had 'passed' as German during the war but were
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59 ⁵ Between 1945 and 1955, 273 churches were built in Poland. In the 1930s, by comparison,
60 538 had been erected. Adamski and Zdanewicz, eds., pp. 199 and 205.

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3 ‘rehabilitated’ or ‘verified’ as Poles after 1945.⁶ How could these collective experiences,
4 which provided a sense of solidarity at regional level, be reconciled with normative Polish-
5 national memories of the war? This article will draw on a combination of church and state
6 archival sources, diocesan publications and the church-affiliated press, and published
7 memoirs to explore how Catholic clerics and laypeople navigated these challenges,
8 generating an ostensibly ‘homogeneous’ religious community out of populations who were,
9 in the after of the Second War, often encountering their sacred spaces as well as their
10 neighbours for the first time.
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24 *Reconquest*

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26 Comparing side-by-side two religious maps of Europe—one showing the religion of
27 the majority of inhabitants of various regions in 1600, the other showing the religion of the
28 majority of inhabitants in 2000—an observer would be impressed by how little changed over
29 those four centuries. To be sure, such maps are deceptive in that they fail to show what were
30 sometimes quite dramatic eradications of religious minorities, which often formed local-level
31 majorities in areas too small to be visible on continental maps (the Holocaust being the most
32 extreme and lethal such transformation). These maps also fail to show new local-level
33 majorities created by twentieth-century migration, in particular local Muslim majorities in
34 urban areas. But the overall stability of Europe’s religious map—and in particular the
35 demographic distribution of Protestants and Catholics—is nonetheless striking.
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49 There is only one large-scale, immediately visible exception to this image of
50 confessional continuity: the lands that constituted the eastern quarter of Germany before
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56 ⁶ On the overall role that wartime Germans played in the reconstruction of postwar Poland
57 and especially of postwar Polish Catholicism, see J. Bjork, ‘Wartime Germans, Postwar
58 Poles: Nation Switching and Nation Building after 1945,’ *Journal of Modern History* 94, 3
59 (September 2022), pp. 608-47.
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3 1945 and the western and northern third of Poland after 1945. In the final months of the
4
5 Second World War and the months following its conclusion, across an area roughly the size
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7 of Ireland, the largely Protestant population of these lands fled or was expelled, and an almost
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9 exclusively Roman Catholic population took its place. This massive demographic upheaval
10
11 was, of course, primarily driven by ethnonational rather than purely confessional
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13 considerations: almost half of the ethnic Germans forced to emigrate from current-day
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15 Poland, the Czech Republic, and southeastern Europe were Roman Catholic.⁷ But the mass
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17 forced migrations at the end of the Second World War nonetheless resulted in a dramatic
18
19 enlargement of the territory in which Catholicism was the dominant religion. Not
20
21 surprisingly, leaders of the Catholic church in postwar Poland often spoke of the change in
22
23 Providential terms. In the mid-1950s, Zygmunt Szczęsny Jędrzejowski, the apostolic administrator of
24
25 Gorzów, a sprawling jurisdiction covering what is now northwestern Poland, referred to the
26
27 ‘Polish waves’ that swept over the Recovered Lands after 1945 as having been animated by
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29 ‘the will of God.’⁸ Bolesław Kominek, the apostolic administrator of Opole (Upper Silesia)
30
31 and later Wrocław (Lower Silesia), also looked back with awe on the results of this
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33 confessional demographic upheaval. In a memoir penned twenty years after the end of the
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35 war, he described how ‘the gigantic Protestant wave that had moved eastwards over whole
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37 centuries was, in a single moment, thrown back to the west....It unfolded before our eyes like
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39 some kind of historical nemesis.’⁹
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49 ⁷ Of the approximately 13 million German refugees from former German territory and
50 elsewhere in East-Central Europe, roughly 6 million were Roman Catholic. *Kirchliches*
51 *Handbuch für das katholische Deutschland*, vol. 23 (1944-51) (Köln, 1951), 207.
52

53 ⁸ Pastoral letter of Bishop Zygmunt Szczęsny Jędrzejowski, delivered 16 July 1955, reproduced in K.
54 Kozłowski, ed., *Narodziny diecezji szczecińskiego-kamińskiego i koszalińskiego-*
55 *kołobrzeskiej (1945-1975)* (Szczecin, 2007), pp. 45-9. Jędrzejowski was himself a repatriate from
56 Poland’s former eastern territories
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59 ⁹ ‘Wybrane fragment wspomnień i wypowiedzi abp. Bolesława Kominka z lat
60 sześćdziesiątych XX wieku na temat jego działalności pasyjarskiej na Śląsku Opolskim w

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3 The mass transfer of Protestant churches to the Roman Catholic church was neither
4 instantaneous nor uncontested. The first step in this process was the appropriation of these
5 buildings by the state.¹⁰ The previous owner of the vast majority of Protestant churches, the
6 Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union, was deemed an inherently German institution
7 that ceased to have any further legitimate claims after the country's Germans were expelled.
8 Another Protestant denomination, the Polish-speaking Evangelical Church of the Augsburg
9 Confession, presented itself as the natural heir of previously German Protestant churches in
10 areas such as Upper Silesia and Masuria, where Polish Protestants lived in sufficient numbers
11 to make plausible a local revival of Polish-language Protestant worship. State authorities
12 sometimes responded favourably to these claims. What had been a flagship German-speaking
13 Protestant church in central Katowice, for example, was turned over to Polish-speaking
14 Protestants in 1947 after briefly being used for Roman Catholic worship at the end of the
15 war.¹¹ But such victories were exceptional. On the whole, the Church of the Augsburg
16 Confession struggled even to maintain control of its pre-existing infrastructure. Several
17 churches with a history of Polish-language worship ended up being transferred to Roman
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39 latach 1945-1951,' reproduced in Andrzej Hanich, ed., *Ksiądz Bolesław Kominek,*
40 *Wspomnienia i dokumenty pastoralne pierwszego administratora Śląska Opolskiego (1945-*
41 *1951) (Opole, 2012), pp. 79-80.*

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44 ¹⁰ K. Kowalczyk, *W walce o rząd dusz: Polityka władz państwowych wobec Kościoła*
45 *katolickiego na Pomorzu Zachodnim w latach 1945-1956 (Szczecin, 2003), p. 91.*

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47
48 ¹¹ Stanisław Adamski, the bishop of Katowice, lobbied aggressively for all property of the
49 Evangelical Union church in Silesia (a denomination formally distinct from both the Old
50 Prussian Union church and from the Church of the Augsburg Confession) to be turned over to
51 the Roman Catholic church. He insisted that Union church was an exclusively German entity
52 with no legitimate future in post-war Poland. Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Katowicach
53 (hereafter AAK), ARz 96, Adamski to Zientek, 20 February 1945. Adamski made a
54 subsequent unsuccessful appeal to prevent the transfer of the Church of the Resurrection to
55 the Augsburg denomination. Adamski to Zawadzki, 22 February 1946. The diocesan
56 Catholic press also argued at length that the Catholic church should inherit former German
57 Protestant churches in the region: P. Prawdzic, 'Protesantyzm polski a niemiecki na Śląsku',
58 *Gość Niedzielny*, 28 July 1946, p 254, and 4 August 1946, pp 259-60.
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3 Catholic control in the immediate aftermath of the war.¹² The pattern was similar for other
4
5 Christian denominations that sought to compete with the Roman Catholic church in laying
6
7 claim to ‘post-Protestant’ church buildings. In the city of Wrocław (formerly Breslau), for
8
9 example, the Polish National Catholic Church, a small ‘Old Catholic’ denomination that
10
11 rejected the authority of the pope, was given control of the prominent Church of St. Mary
12
13 Magdalene. The state turned over several other houses of worship in the city to the Orthodox
14
15 or Greek Catholic (Uniate) churches to address the needs of migrants from those
16
17 communities displaced from southeastern Poland.¹³ But like the Church of the Augsburg
18
19 Confession, these other denominations not only lost out to the Catholic church the
20
21 overwhelming majority of the time in competition for former German Protestant church
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23 buildings; they also sometimes saw their own church buildings transferred to the Catholic
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25 church. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Roman Catholic church in Poland
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27 gained control of a total of 11 Mariavite churches, 36 Orthodox churches, and 92 Greek
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29 Catholic churches.¹⁴

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35 This significant transfer of property by a Communist regime to the Roman Catholic
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37 church might seem surprising. But as Michael Fleming has persuasively argued, a shared
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39 interest in Poland’s ethnonational homogenization made state and church natural allies in
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41 many respects, especially in the newly acquired western and northern territories.¹⁵ While
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47 ¹² J. Kłaczko, *Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski w Polsce w latach 1945-1975*, (Toruń,
48 2010), pp. 391-3.

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50 ¹³ G. Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions*,
51 (Princeton, NJ, 2003), p. 335.

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53 ¹⁴ Adamski and Zdaniewicz, p. 204. The Mariavites started as a reform movement within the
54 Roman Catholic church in Poland in the nineteenth century but were eventually expelled
55 from the church.

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58 ¹⁵ M. Fleming, ‘The ethno-religious ambitions of the Roman Catholic Church and the
59 ascendancy of communism in post-war Poland (1945-50)’, *Nations and Nationalism* 16, 4
60 (2010), pp. 637-656.

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3 Communist officials were certainly not eager to enhance the independent power of the
4
5 Roman Catholic hierarchy, they saw formal adherence to Catholicism as a useful marker of
6
7 Polishness and suspected religious minorities of being inherent threats to the nation. Clerical
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9 lobbyists knew how to press this button. One Roman Catholic priest who had migrated to
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11 Masuria told a local state official that all the Catholic church should take over all ‘post-
12
13 Protestant’ churches. ‘Every Protestant church,’ he argued, ‘is a former testing ground of
14
15 Germandom.’¹⁶ Smaller religious groups, such as the Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, and
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17 Jehovah’s Witnesses, were the object of even more intense suspicion from both church and
18
19 state. A pastoral letter issued by the Polish bishops in August 1947 condemned ‘the
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21 destruction of the unity of the nation by sects.’¹⁷ Polish state security services closely
22
23 monitored activity by Jehovah’s Witnesses, whom they described as manifesting ‘hatred
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25 against the government’¹⁸ and receiving financial support from America.¹⁹ They noted
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27 approvingly the ‘strong struggle of the Catholic clergy with this sect.’²⁰
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40 ¹⁶ Quoted in W. Brenda, ‘Pierwsze lata Kościoła katolickiego w powiecie piskim na tle
41 sytuacji społeczno-wyznaniowej po II wojnie światowej’, pp. 76-125, quote from pp. 84-85,
42 in W. Brenda, A. Pyżewska, and K. Sychowicz, eds. *Wczoraj i dziś: Z dziejów Kościoła*
43 *rzymskokatolickiego w Polsce północno-wschodniej*, in (Białystok, 2014), pp. 84-5. See, too,
44 the lengthy two-part defence of Catholic claims to church buildings owned by the Prussian
45 Union Evangelical Church, cited in fn. 11.
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48 ¹⁷ AAN, Zespół 1400 (PPR—Komitet Centralny), Syg 295/VII/217, Odezwa biskupów do
49 wiernych, Assumption Day, 1947.
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51 ¹⁸ **Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (hereafter IPN), BU 1572/314—Raporty miesięczne Szefa**
52 **WUBP w Katowicach z lat 1947-48, report for 1-31 March 1948, p. 9.**
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54 ¹⁹ **IPN BU 1572/314 (Raporty miesięczne Szefa WUBP w Katowicach z lat 1947-48),**
55 **report for 1-29 February 1948, p. 7.**
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58 ²⁰ **IPN BU 1572/308 (Sprawozdania dekadowe Szefa WUBP w Gdansku), report of 1-29**
59 **February 1948, p. 6.**
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3 Such rhetoric reveals not only a substantial overlap in the nationalizing aims of the
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5 Communist regime and the leadership of Poland's Roman Catholic church but also shared
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7 anxieties about the unpredictable preferences and behaviour of lay Catholics uprooted from
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9 their previous communities and from the customs and habits associated with those
10
11 communities. It was one thing to secure sufficient buildings to house Roman Catholic
12
13 parishes in the newly settled western and northern territories. It was quite another to ensure
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15 that in-migrants adopted these houses of worship as their own. Might they not instead be
16
17 drawn to alternatives, perhaps especially novel religious groups that were not (unlike historic
18
19 denominations) associated with hostile nations or states? As implausible as such a scenario
20
21 might seem in retrospect, the spectre of mass conversion by the Jehovah's Witnesses or
22
23 Seventh Day Adventists reflected the multi-faceted fears of social disintegration that engulfed
24
25 postwar Polish society.²¹ Indeed, one of the supplemental arguments used by Catholic
26
27 prelates in Pomerania in demanding that they quickly take possession of all 'post-Protestant'
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29 churches was that houses of worship that were left vacant for too long might become
30
31 unsanctioned gathering places for sects, which could then rapidly gain a significant local
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33 following.²²

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35 There were a number of ways in which incoming Catholics might be made to feel at
36
37 home in newly acquired 'post-Protestant' churches. One approach was to address directly the
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39 sense of acute, traumatic loss that many migrants felt with regard to their old parishes,
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41 especially those who had left at short notice and under duress in fleeing Poland's lost eastern
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43 territories. As Bolesław Kominek rhetorically asked in a pastoral letter to parishioners newly
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55 ²¹ On the overlapping social fears surrounding phenomena such as pillaging, vigilante justice,
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57 and the expulsion of minorities, see Marcin Zaremba's *Wielka Trwoga: Polska 1944-1947*
58
59 (Kraków, 2012).

60 ²² Kowalczyk, pp. 99-100.

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3 arrived in Opole Silesia: ‘Do the faithful who recently left their homelands in the East not
4 remember tenderly, as they departed for the West, reverently kissing the walls of their parish
5 churches, where they received baptism, where they received the sacrament of marriage and
6 other sacraments, saying farewell to the graves of their ancestors in the parish cemetery?’²³

7
8 While converted Protestant churches in the western and northern territories could not offer
9 refugees replicas of their old parish churches, it was possible to cultivate a sense of continuity
10 by keeping previous communities more or less intact, including their original parish priests.
11 The apostolic administrator of Opole assured his parishioners that the church ‘welcomes the
12 opportunity to settle repatriate priests [those migrating from the eastern territories] with their
13 former parishioners, to the extent that local conditions permit’ and that groups of repatriates
14 should be allowed to maintain their ‘customs, songs, and traditions’ wherever they settled
15 together in significant numbers.²⁴ But Kominek and other church officials believed that
16 encouraging repatriates to treat parish churches in the west as parishes-in-exile serving
17 specific communities from the east was a dangerous strategy in the long run. Only two
18 months after his original expression of sympathy for refugees seeking the maintenance of
19 particularist traditions, Kominek issued a rather sterner message on the need for ‘unified
20 pastoral care’, reflecting recent discussions in the episcopate’s pastoral commission. It
21 declared ‘inadmissible’ the ‘creation of parishes made up of different parishioners on the
22 same territory.’ ‘Even tendencies in this direction, whether from the side of the clergy or
23 from the side of the faithful, must be condemned.’²⁵ In addition to dividing the faithful into

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²³ List pasterski, 2 August 1946, reproduced in Hanich, ed., pp. 270-3.

²⁴ ‘W sprawie repatriantów’, *Wiadomości Urzędowe Administracji Apostolskiej Śląska Opolskiego*, 1945/1946, nr. 1 (October), art. 27, pp. 22-3, reproduced in Hanich, ed., pp. 158-60.

²⁵ ‘Instrukcja w sprawie jednolitego duszpasterstwa’, *Wiadomości Urzędowe Administracji Apostolskiej Śląska Opolskiego*, 1945/1946, nr. 3-4 (December-January), art. 55, pp. 2-4, reproduced in Hanich, ed., pp. 188-90.

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3 quasi-ethnic groups based on their geographic origins, treating new parishes in the west as re-
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5 creations of specific old parishes in the east could only address the needs of the minority of
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7 migrants who re-located as intact groups. It was not a viable approach for the substantial
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9 majority of in-migrants who moved into these territories as individuals or families from
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11 communities scattered across pre-war Poland.
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15 Forging a sense of local community among individuals of such widely heterogeneous
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17 origin seemed to require a more generically confessional and national integration strategy.
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19 In-migrants would not find new churches that evoked the exact look and feel of their previous
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21 home communities. But they should recognize their new parishes as unmistakably Roman
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23 Catholic and Polish and thus ‘theirs’. Even this level of familiarization, however, was a
24
25 daunting task. As Bishop Szelażek noted, post-Protestant churches lacked many of the
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27 elements needed for ‘normal Catholic life’, such as vestments, liturgical vessels, images,
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29 banners, reliquaries, or stations of the cross.²⁶ These could be acquired and deployed over
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31 time, and special dispensations from the Primate ensured that sacramental activity could carry
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33 on in the meantime.²⁷ But this involved an awkward balancing act in the church’s messaging
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35 to parishioners. On the one hand, laypeople were warned that many of those preaching what
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37 seemed to be Christianity but in somewhat unfamiliar ways were actually heretics intent on
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39 destroying both church and nation. On the other hand, they were assured that it was perfectly
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41 fine, for now, to worship in recently Protestant church buildings without some of the familiar
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43 trappings of the Latin-rite liturgy.
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56 ²⁶ Pastoral letter of Bishop Zygmunt Szelażek, reproduced in Kozłowski, ed., pp. 45-9.

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58 ²⁷ M. Chorzepa, ‘Rozwój organizacji kościelnej na ziemi lubskiej i pomorzu zachodnim w
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60 latach 1945-1965’, *Nasza Przeszłość* 22 (1965), p. 117.

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3 While Polish Catholic in-migrants were most often concerned with how ‘post-
4 German’ and ‘post-Protestant’ churches and their contents could be adapted to their own
5 devotional needs, another approach was also evident in these encounters. Rather than
6 insisting on instant familiarization with and appropriation of local material culture, clerics
7 and laypeople could express curiosity about and appreciation for aspects that might be
8 culturally unfamiliar. In a circular written in the spring of 1946, Teodor Bensch, the apostolic
9 administrator of the diocese of Warmia (former German East Prussia) instructed incoming
10 Polish priests to take care to preserve any church-related artifacts (zabytki) ‘regardless of the
11 confession that these relics previously served.’ He emphasized that ‘these objects, to the
12 extent that they of no meaning for [current Catholic] worship, may still have enormous
13 scholarly and artistic value.’²⁸

14 Bensch’s top-down preservationist steer might suggest an assumption that Polish in-
15 migrants would otherwise *not* take pains to preserve local religious artifacts. But unprompted
16 interest in and respect for of newly discovered churches and their contents were certainly
17 evident among newcomers to the region. An interesting example can be found in the
18 autobiographic account of Stanisław Dulewicz, a former teacher from Galicia who assumed
19 the role of mayor of the town of Darłowo (Rügenwalde) in western Pomerania at the end of
20 the war. Dulewicz devoted several paragraphs of his account to an inspection that he, along
21 with an in-migrant Polish priest, conducted of the town’s prominent St. Mary’s church.²⁹ The
22 church’s history, including its role as the burial place of Eric the Pomeranian, an early
23 fifteenth-century ruler of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, offered some plausible

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²⁸ Quoted in J. Oblak, ‘Dzieje Diecezji Warmińskiej w okresie dwudziestolecia’, *Nasza Przeszłość* 22 (1965), pp. 183-261, quote from p. 209.

²⁹ B. Halicka, ed., *Moj Dom nad Odra: Pamiętniki osadników Ziemi Zachodnich po 1945 roku* (Kraków, 2016), pp. 220-1. This and many other autobiographical accounts were submitted to a prize competition sponsored by the Instytut Zachodni in 1956.

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3 opportunities for a Polish-national narrative of continuity and reclamation: Early rulers,
4 including Eric, were of largely Slavic-speaking origin. But Dulewicz's description was not
5 polemical or an exercise in national claims-making. It instead involved a painstaking inquiry
6 into the unique physical aspects of the church and their artistic qualities: the altar, the organ,
7 the pews. He noted matter-of-factly that the source for this detailed local knowledge was
8 conversation with the previous German Protestant pastor.³⁰ Such accounts of collegial torch-
9 passing should not, of course, overshadow the trauma and sense of radical rupture that
10 accompanied the forced migrations of 1944-7. But they are a salutary reminder that the
11 strangeness of the buildings and landscapes of Poland's western and northern territories was
12 not just an impediment to the establishment of new religious communities. It could also spur
13 and shape a dynamic, interactive process of re-rooting.

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Was the extraordinary attempt at the resettle millions of Catholic settlers across a vast, previously almost exclusively Protestant landscape a success? If the goal was the cultivation of a relatively stable and homogeneous society and the avoidance of sectarian fragmentation—in other words, the goal broadly shared by Poland's Catholic episcopate and Poland's Communist regime—then the project was undoubtedly successful, one might even say spectacularly so. But if one imagined that the Recovered Lands might provide the perfect forge for the generation of an especially vigorous and militant form of Polish Catholicism, then the second half of the twentieth century offered disappointing results. In the dioceses that had been inhabited almost exclusively by Protestants before the war, both the breadth and the depth of Catholic religious practice have consistently lagged behind the national

³⁰ The longevity and intimacy of contact between out-going Germans and incoming Poles in the western and northern territories is a running theme of personal narratives of the time. See, for example, the account of Izabella Grden, who wrote warmly of co-habiting for months with a German family on arriving in the region. Halicka, ed., 82-84

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3 average and often even behind far more urbanized and industrialized parts of the country.³¹

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5 However intoxicating the Catholic advance from the Vistula to the Odra had been, the
6
7 replanting of Catholic religious life in these regions was a complex and daunting endeavour.
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10 11 12 *Reconstruction*

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14 One of the best-known photographic images of Warsaw at the end of the Second
15
16 World War depicts the desolate landscape of the Jewish ghetto following its obliteration by
17
18 the Nazi regime. The image powerfully conveys the utter destruction of the built environment
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20 of the Jewish community and, by implication, the annihilation of Warsaw's Jews. But the fate
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22 of the single intact building that looms in the background--the church of St. Augustine—is
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24 also worth noting. While the building had been confiscated by German authorities, ending its
25
26 use as a centre of Polish-language religious activity, the structure itself survived and would
27
28 return to use as a Catholic house of worship after the war. The fate of the church of St.
29
30 Augustine reflected a more general pattern in German-occupied Poland, notwithstanding
31
32 significant regional and local variation. Even as the Nazi regime sought to cripple the
33
34 activities of the Polish Catholic church, imprisoning or executing hundreds of priests and
35
36 nuns, its general approach to church buildings was to appropriate and 'Germanize' rather than
37
38 destroy them. This contrast between treatment of church personnel and treatment of physical
39
40 church structures was most dramatic in the Wartheland, a province composed of territory
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42 annexed directly to the Reich where the persecution of the Catholic church was especially
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52 ³¹ In 2018, the average rate of church attendance (dominicantes) in Poland was 38%. Of the
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54 ten dioceses where it fell below 30%, seven were previously overwhelmingly Protestant
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56 regions (Koszalin, Szczecin, Elblag, Warmia, Legnica, Zielonagora, and Świdnica); the other
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58 three were the earliest and most heavily industrialized areas of the old Congress Kingdom
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60 (Sosnowiec, Łódź, and Warsaw). The pattern was slightly less pronounced but still evident
in other indices of parish-level engagement. See *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Poloniae, A.D. 2020* (Warsaw, 2020), pp. 23-4 and 31-2.

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3 ferocious. Four out of every ten diocesan priests in the Wartheland were shot or perished in
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5 concentration camps, and Polish-language devotional life was almost completely
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7 suppressed.³² And yet church buildings themselves were treated with considerable deference.
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9 For example, the cathedral in Gniezno, built in the fourteenth century and historically the seat
10
11 of the Primate of Poland, was declared in 1942 to be ‘a German architectural monument and
12
13 site of German art’ that had been ‘freed of all Polish defacement.’³³ At the end of the war,
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15 when the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art published an account of the damage that the
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17 Nazi occupation had caused, it emphasized the ‘annihilation of human beings’ resulting from
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19 the targeting of the Polish intelligentsia, as well as ‘acts of confiscation and of robbery’ of
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21 movable works of art. There was only a brief mention of several church buildings that had
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23 been destroyed by the occupiers.³⁴
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28 While deliberate demolition of Catholic churches by Nazi authorities was relatively
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30 rare, the church’s physical infrastructure did sustain considerable damage from bombardment
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32 during the campaigns of 1939 and 1944-45. Of the roughly 6000 Catholic churches in pre-
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34 war Poland situated on territory that remained in post-war Poland, 559 were destroyed during
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36 the war. But, as noted earlier, rapid reconstruction of most of these churches, combined with
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38 a wave of new construction, had erased any net loss by 1950.³⁵ The pace and prioritization of
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40 church reconstruction was clearly influenced by symbolic/aesthetic considerations as well as
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48 ³² In the four dioceses that were entirely or almost entirely within the boundaries of the
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50 Wartheland, the death rates among the diocesan clergy were: 36% (Gniezno); 34% (Poznań);
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52 50% (Włocławek); and 39% (Łódź). Adamski and Zdaniewicz, pp. 129 (total diocesan
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54 clergy in 1939) and 132 (diocesan clergy killed during the war).

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56 ³³ Huener, p. 218.

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58 ³⁴ Waclaw Borowy, *General Observations on the Problem of Reparations with Regard to Art
59
60 and Culture* (Warsaw, 1945).

³⁵ See fn. 3.

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3 by pragmatic concerns about minimal provision of worship space for a given population. The
4
5 interplay of these two factors fuelled major regional differences. At one extreme were the
6
7 parts of the Recovered Lands that had been overwhelmingly Protestant. As discussed in the
8
9 previous section, the Catholic church in these areas actually encountered a glut of post-
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11 Protestant church buildings. Not surprisingly, given the availability of existing houses of
12
13 worship, only a minority (about 30%) of churches in these areas that had been destroyed
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15 during the war were rebuilt in the immediate post-war era (1945-50).³⁶ At the other extreme
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17 was the diocese of Warsaw, with Poland's largely demolished capital city at its centre. Of the
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19 80 churches in the diocese that were destroyed during the war, 59 were rebuilt by 1950.³⁷
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24 The symbolic impetus to prioritize church reconstruction in the capital was clear.
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26 Destruction of churches in Warsaw was more often the result of deliberate action by the Nazi
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28 occupiers, and their reappearance in the city's landscape therefore functioned as a gesture of
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30 national defiance and re-assertion. Just as state authorities exhorted the entire Polish nation to
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32 contribute to the overall reconstruction of Warsaw, so the Catholic episcopate issued parallel
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34 calls to the faithful across Poland to donate to rebuilding the capital's churches in the capital.
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36 These appeals were most often framed as an abstract national obligation, though they
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38 sometimes invoked more personal connections stemming from origins (Warsaw's destruction
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40 had resulted in a substantial diaspora) or previous sojourns in the city. The apostolic
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42 administrator of Warmia, for example, reminded the region's Catholic inhabitants that 'many
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44 of us are children of Warsaw. Many of us were educated and spiritually suckled in the well-
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57 ³⁶ Calculated from figures in Adamski and Zdanewicz, eds., pp. 203-4.,
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59 ³⁷ Adamski and Zdanewicz, 198, pp. 203-4.
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3 known churches of the capital. We cannot allow that those churches should remain forever
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5 walls of tears and memories.’³⁸
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8 And yet the region of post-war Poland that actually witnessed both the most extensive
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10 destruction of churches and the greatest number of church reconstruction projects was not the
11
12 capital city. It was Opole Silesia, the one part of the western and northern territories that was
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14 already overwhelmingly (90%) Catholic before the war.³⁹ The majority of this pre-war
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16 population remained in the region after undergoing ethnic ‘verification’, even as hundreds of
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18 thousands of Catholic in-migrants moved into the region. As a result, the loss of so many
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20 church buildings during the Soviet offensive in the late winter/early spring of 1945 was
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22 experienced as a genuine shortage, threatening serious disruption of the rhythms of local
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24 religious life. The challenge of church reconstruction thus became a regular topic in the
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26 pastoral circulars of the apostolic administration as well as on the pages of *Gość Niedzielny*,
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28 the organ of the diocese of Katowice which served as the primary Catholic periodical
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30 circulating in both Upper and Lower Silesia.
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36 The essential quality that reconstructed churches were meant to possess was a sense
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38 of permanence, the antidote to the widely lamented ‘temporariness’ (*tymczasowość*) that
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40 permeated life in the Recovered Lands. In his pastoral letter of August 1946, Bishop
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42 Kominek had emphasized this urgent need for embedding ritual in permanent spaces: ‘Is a
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44 community supposed to hold services for years wandering through cramped restaurant halls
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46 or other places that are inappropriate for Holy Offerings?’⁴⁰ Coverage in the Catholic press
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51 ³⁸ Quoted in Obłąk, 209. Although only a relatively small number of post-war residents of the
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53 diocese of Warmia were born within the capital, fully a third had been born in the province of
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55 Warsaw. *Narodowy spis powszechny z dnia 3 grudnia 1950 r.: Miejsce zamieszkania
56
57 ludności w sierpniu 1939 r.* (Warsaw, 1955), p. 4.

58 ³⁹ In the apostolic administration of Opole, 108 churches had been destroyed during the war.
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60 67 were rebuilt by 1950. Adamski and Zdanewicz, p. 203.

⁴⁰ Hanich, ed., p. 273.

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3 of specific building projects tended to focus on the raw practicalities, describing in detail the
4 process of procuring scarce building materials—glass, concrete, paint, and, above all,
5 bricks.⁴¹ There was also sometimes reference to achieving a minimal degree of interior
6 physical comfort through, for example, the planned installation of pews and heating
7 mechanisms.⁴² By contrast, little attention was devoted to architectural design or the exterior
8 visual impression that would be made by new churches. While the frequent mention of brick
9 as a building material suggested that most reconstruction was in the brick neo-Gothic style
10 that was ubiquitous in Upper Silesia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there
11 was not much discussion of stylistic choices, of the benefits or drawbacks of faithful
12 reconstruction of previous buildings vs. embracing new designs. Occasional references to
13 national heritage tended to be vague. One article in *Gość Niedzielny*, for example, noted
14 somewhat cryptically that there were ‘valuable Polish monuments’ among the ruined
15 churches of Silesia. The author’s point was that such identification of national heritage
16 facilitated material assistance for reconstruction from the provincial government.⁴³

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The most emotive accounts of church reconstruction tended to concentrate less on the details of *what* was being rebuilt than *who* was providing the money and the physical labour for the project. Funding for church reconstruction drew on a wide range of sources. There were donations from Polish émigrés, duly noted in the Catholic press.⁴⁴ Church authorities also looked to the state for financial support, which responded with limited but significant

⁴¹ E. Pauksta, ‘Katolicyzm i polskość Nadorze’, *Gość Niedzielny* (25 July 1948), p. 243.

⁴² Fr. Miś, ‘W ciągu roku stanął kościół’, *Gość Niedzielny*, 6 June 1948, p. 189.

⁴³ ‘Ze Śląsku Opolskiego. Wizytacja okolic zniszczonych’, *Gość Niedzielny* (7 September 1947), p. 281.

⁴⁴ In one parish, for example, ‘American Polonia’ was credited for donating a container for the consecrated host. Fr. Miś, ‘W ciągu roku’.

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3 funding.⁴⁵ On the whole, however, church reconstruction was understood and narrated as a
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5 story of voluntary communal solidarity, of local Catholics coming together behind a common
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7 project. Rebuilt churches were frequently described as ‘the pride of the whole parish.’⁴⁶ In the
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9 working-class settlement of Giszowiec, it was noted that ‘men, women and youth worked
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11 together on construction....selflessly and spontaneously.’⁴⁷ In the more rural community of
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13 Piotrowice, it was emphasized that inhabitants exhibited ‘a very great social spirit.’⁴⁸ Bishop
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15 Kominek, in a letter to the Minister of Public Administration thanking him for a state
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17 subsidy, emphasized that ‘The donation granted to the damaged parishes [by the state] was in
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19 every case an incentive for the parishioners generosity, which meant that the value of the
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21 reconstruction work in each case effectively exceeded several times or even tenfold the
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23 amount of the donation received.’⁴⁹
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29 It might be tempting to discount such references as a predictable romanticisation of
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31 organic local communities. But as contemporary commentators were keenly aware, the local
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33 ‘communities’ being invoked here were themselves incipient and fragile projects. Many
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35 parishes in Opole Silesia—and the vast majority of parishes across the western and northern
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37 territories as a whole—were composed entirely of in-migrants with no previous connection to
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39 the locality or to their fellow parishioners. And those parishioners who were locally rooted
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45 ⁴⁵ In the summer of 1946, Kominek requested 100,000 złoty from the Ministry of Public
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47 Administration. The sum was disbursed just a few days later. The following winter,
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49 Kominek provided an account of how the funds were used, noting that they had only covered
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51 the costs of a few reconstruction projects and that further assistance was needed. AAN,
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53 2/199/0/5.2/1009, Kominek to Minister Administracji Publicznej (Kernik), 10 August 1946;
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55 Kernik to Kominek, 13 August 1946, Kominek to Kernik, 22 January 1947.

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57 ⁴⁶ ‘Ks. Biskup Stanisław Adamski w zniszczonych kościołach,’ *Gość Niedzielny* (2 June 1946),
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59 p. 181.

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⁴⁷ Fr. Miś, ‘W ciągu roku’.

⁴⁸ ‘Odbudowa kościołów,’ *Gość Niedzielny* (15 December 1946), p. 414.

⁴⁹ AAN, 2/199/0/5.2/1009, Kominek to Kernik, 22 January 1947.

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3 and had existing ties to a parish and fellow parishioners had highly precarious standing in the
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5 *national* community: almost all such native inhabitants had spent the war as Germans
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7 (Reichsdeutsche to the west of the pre-war German-Polish frontier, Volksdeutsche to the
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9 east) and were often still enmeshed in suspenseful processes of national verification or
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11 rehabilitation (respectively). To the extent that these varied groups of parishioners donated
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13 time and money to a common local construction project, it was understandably seen not as an
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15 expression of pre-existing local solidarity but as laying the groundwork for such sentiment
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17 among hitherto mutually suspicious constituencies. The account of church building in
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19 Piotrowice, for example, emphasized the shared efforts of ‘people of the most varied personal
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21 and political convictions’ and the equal contributions made by refugees from Wołyń
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23 (Wolyniacy) and settlers from central Poland.⁵⁰

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Inter-parochial contributions—donations from parishes that escaped heavy wartime damage to those that experienced the worst destruction—highlighted even more explicitly the theme of different pre-existing communities coming together to forge an aspirational post-war community. Such solidaristic collections were generally made at a diocesan/regional rather than national level; the national-level appeals made for Warsaw were a conspicuous exception. In the early 1950s, for example, the diocesan curia in Warmia distributed circulars noting that although many parishes had been able to repair wartime damage due to the ‘initiative of pastors and the extraordinary generosity of faithful Catholics’, there remained a number of ‘poor parishes on our [diocesan] territory’, for which ‘the securing of ruined or damaged churches through their own means is simply impossible.’⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* The reference to Wołyń conjured a very specific--and traumatic—regional wartime experience: many of the region’s Polish inhabitants had been killed by Ukrainian nationalist forces during the war.

⁵¹ Quoted in Oblak, p. 210.

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3 In the apostolic administration of Opole, Bishop Kominek assumed the role of
4 matchmaker between donors and recipients, explaining to relatively well-off parishes why
5 other localities required particular assistance. The latter parishes were generally not only
6 those that had experienced the most physical damage during the war but also those with ‘an
7 immigrant population,’ ‘mixed, from various parts of Poland.’⁵² The parishes asked to make
8 donations—both financial and in the form of ritual objects, such as chalices, vestments,
9 reliquaries, etc.—were, in turn, generally the larger parishes of the industrial region, which
10 both suffered less wartime damage and had more demographic continuity.⁵³ As Kominek
11 would have been well aware, these transfers would thus have been viewed by many
12 contemporary residents as donations from (former) ‘Germans’ to ‘Poles’.⁵⁴ The aim, of
13 course, was precisely to overcome such wartime labels and confirm mutual recognition as
14 members of the same post-war national community.

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31 As with the mass transfer of Protestant churches to the Roman Catholic church, the
32 enlistment of both in-migrants and verified/rehabilitated wartime Germans in common
33 church-reconstruction projects could be seen in many ways as a ‘success’. Over the following
34 two generations, a stable and reasonably well-integrated Polish society was consolidated in
35 the Recovered Lands and in neighbouring areas in which wartime Germans now co-habited
36 with wartime Poles. Indeed, verified Reichsdeutsche and rehabilitated Volksdeutsche would
37 be cited in the 1960s and 1970s as the models for a Polish devotional exceptionalism that

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49 ⁵² Archiwum Diecezjalne w Opolu, Zespół: Listy pasterskie, referaty, orędzia, odezwy,
50 komunikaty i okólniki ks. inf. B. Kominka, Praktyczny rada dla przeprowadzenia zbiórki na
51 zburzone kościoły (n.d.), reproduced in Hanich, ed., p. 307.

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54 ⁵³ Okólnik nr. 2, 20 February 1946, reproduced in Hanich, ed., p. 225.

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60 ⁵⁴ The governor of Silesia had written to local officials complaining that ‘rich parishes are still
in the hands of German priests, while many repatriate priests remain without a parish and live
in the condition of homeless immigrants.’ AAK, ARz 00004, Zawadzki to starosty, 9
January 1946.

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3 could resist the corrosive effects of industrialization and urbanization.⁵⁵ And yet, in the
4
5 1980s and 1990s, many of the children and grandchildren of those who had just been
6
7 promoted as exemplars of a modern Polish Catholicism reclaimed German ethnicity and
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9 emigrated. Cultivating a certain sense of shared community among a diverse population of
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11 natives and in-migrants had proved, at least in many cases and to a certain degree, achievable.
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14 The aspiration of ‘permanence’ was more elusive.
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19 *Resumption*

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22 Having discussed the massive impact that the Second World War had on Poland’s
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24 Catholic churches, it might seem perverse to revert to bracketing the war years as a ‘pause’ in
25
26 a story of incremental continuity spanning the interwar and post-war years. But to do justice
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28 to the range of experiences across the Polish lands, it is important to consider cases in which
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30 the late 1940s did involve a certain resumption of trajectories from the 1930s put on hold by
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32 the German occupation. Some of those cases—for example, in pockets of the General
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34 Government that escaped significant destruction of the built environment—could involve a
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36 sense of long-term continuity, even of timeless stasis, within the boundaries of the
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38 confessional community. But my focus here will be on a case that did involve significant
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40 changes but changes that were conceived as a resumption of pre-war transformations-in-
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42 progress rather than rupture generated by the war itself. The single largest church building
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44 initiative in Poland during the immediate post-war era was the erection of the cathedral of
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46 Christ the King in Katowice, a project begun in 1927 and completed in 1955. The story of the
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48 construction of the largest cathedral in Poland, situated at the heart of the country’s most
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50 urban and industrial region and consecrated at the height of the Stalinist era, might seem to
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58 ⁵⁵ J. Bjork, ‘Piety by the Numbers: Polish Debates about Secularization in the 1960s and
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60 1970s,’ in P. Betts and S.A. Smith, eds., *Science, Religion and Communism in Cold War Europe* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 43-4.

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3 have offered a natural focus for the broader narrative of Polish-Catholic resilience in the face
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5 of the Communist regime's consolidation of power. The cathedral's history has instead
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7 remained relatively obscure, a matter of, at best, regional significance. But this obscurity and
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9 this regional orientation are themselves revealing of important dynamics in post-war Poland.
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12 The diocese of Katowice resulted from the redrawing of frontiers following the Upper
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14 Silesian plebiscite of 1922. With the award of a significant part of the plebiscite zone to
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16 Poland, the Roman Catholic church followed the standard practice of harmonizing diocesan
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18 boundaries with state boundaries, severing what was now Polish Upper Silesia from the vast
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20 diocese of Breslau and creating a new bishopric centred on Katowice. The design for a new
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22 cathedral, chosen from several dozen submissions by a committee of university professors
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24 and church officials, was austere neoclassical with a sandstone facade.⁵⁶ It was not the
25
26 most daring choice, especially in a city that witnessed a flowering of modernist architecture
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28 in the 1920s and featured interwar Poland's tallest 'skyscraper'. But the design was
29
30 nonetheless a clear departure from the ubiquitous brick neo-Gothic churches that defined
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32 Upper Silesia's ecclesial landscape. It was also in harmony with other neoclassical buildings
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34 going up in the same neighbourhood in the 1920s, such as the massive building housing the
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36 Silesian Sejm, the regional parliament. The cathedral—named, like so many church
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38 buildings during the pontificate of Pius XI, after Christ the King—was only partially
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40 completed by the outbreak of the war.
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47 It was hardly surprising that the diocesan curia was keen to finish the half-built
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49 structure after the end of the war. But with much of Poland lying in ruins and hundreds of
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51 pre-war parish churches needing reconstruction, devoting massive resources to a *new* church
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53 was also a bold and, arguably, an imprudently ambitious move. During the interwar period,
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59 ⁵⁶ J. Myszor, *Historia Diecezji Katowickiej* (Katowice, 1999), 100.
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3 the Silesian provincial government and various civil-society groups had provided significant
4 funding for the early stages of construction.⁵⁷ Post-war state authorities also provided some
5 support but were predictably less forthcoming, not only due to the regime's ideological
6 mistrust of the church but also genuine limitations in resources.⁵⁸ Completing the cathedral
7 would therefore require a massive grassroots fundraising drive, one coming on top of existing
8 appeals to the faithful to donate money to the reconstruction of parish churches as well as to
9 the care of refugees, orphans, and the homeless.

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12 In the autumn of 1947, the leadership of the diocese nonetheless initiated just such a
13 campaign, under the leadership of Father Rudolf Adamczyk.⁵⁹ Exhibiting a zeal that might
14 raise the eyebrows of seasoned fundraising professionals today, Adamczyk and his colleagues
15 threw down the gauntlet to the Catholic inhabitants of the diocese, challenging them to view
16 completion of the cathedral 'as their personal cause' and 'make a modest sacrifice to that
17 goal.' If 100,000 out of the diocese's 1.2 million parishioners committed 100, 50, or even 20
18 złoty per month, Adamczyk proposed, the cathedral could easily be completed.⁶⁰ Another
19 exhortation in *Gość Niedzielny* pointedly noted that the 50 złoty that parishioners were being
20 asked to donate each month was the cost of a large beer.⁶¹ Yet another article, published a

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⁵⁷ Indeed, the cathedral building committee argued that the diocese itself was making an unacceptably modest contribution to the costs of construction. Myszor, 101.

⁵⁸ State officials were sensitive about suggestions that the government failed to offer financial support for the cathedral's completion. A reference in a draft article in *Gość Niedzielny* to the cathedral being constructed 'without any help' was removed by a censor. AAN, 2/1102/0/4.1.3.1.5/1642 (Ingerencje cenzorskie WUKPPiW w Katowicach w czasopiśmie „Gość Niedzielny” w okresie 12 I 1949 – 31 XII 1949. Sprawozdania z kontroli prewencyjnych i wtórnych [1949]), Report Nr. (18 June 1949) on GN issue for 26 June.

⁵⁹ R. Adamczyk, 'Śląsk buduje największy pomnik,' *Gość Niedzielny*, 16 November 1947, p. 353.

⁶⁰ R. Adamczyk, 'Śląsk buduje pomnik wdzięczności,' *Gość Niedzielny* (7 March 1948), p. 71.

⁶¹ M. Ślawinski, 'Jedno duże piwo,' *Gość Niedzielny* (15 February 1948), p. 51.

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3 year later, chided Silesians for letting the completion of their cathedral lag even as Catholics
4
5 in Congo were forging ahead with their own cathedral. Not so subtly exploiting a sense of
6
7 racial hierarchy, the author asked: 'It will be interesting who builds their cathedral faster:
8
9 Africa in Brazaville or Silesia in Katowice?'⁶² This spirit of competitiveness was further
10
11 cultivated by the publication in the diocesan newspaper of parish-by-parish donation
12
13 figures.⁶³ And if straightforward offerings were not sufficient, the diocesan leadership was
14
15 happy to deploy supplementary fundraising methods. A raffle held in the building of the
16
17 diocesan publishing house in the autumn of 1947 gave away prizes such a sewing machine, a
18
19 typewriter, a radio, a camera, and an accordion.⁶⁴
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24 It was an impressive and, in many respects, successful drive. Already by the end of
25
26 May 1948, more than 4 million zloty had been raised from parishioners, suggesting that tens
27
28 of thousands of them had duly denied themselves a large beer for the sake of the cause.⁶⁵
29
30 Construction forged ahead, and the cathedral was consecrated in 1955, with the bishop of the
31
32 neighbouring diocese of Częstochowa presiding due to the recent banishment of the bishop
33
34 and auxiliary bishops of Katowice. But the diocese had taken on considerable additional debt
35
36 to cover the cost of completing the cathedral. Paying off that debt required further rounds of
37
38 fundraising from parishioners and the parish clergy even in the years after the cathedral's
39
40 consecration. The leading historian of the diocese, Jerzy Myszor, has plausibly blamed much
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42 of this financial shortfall on the Communist regime, which promised funding (in return for a
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50 ⁶² 'Kto rychlej: Afryka czy Śląsk?', *Gość Niedzielny* (4 April 1949), p. 102..

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52 ⁶³ 'Zestawienie ofiar złożonych dotychczas na budowę katedry slaskiej w Katowicach,' *Gość*
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54 *Niedzielny* (30 May 1948), p. 183.

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56 ⁶⁴ 'Wygrane Wielkiej Loterii Fantowej na budowę Katedry w Katowicach,' *Gość Niedzielny*,
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58 (12 September 1947), p. 303.

59 ⁶⁵ 'Zestawienie ofiar'.
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3 lowering of the profile of the cathedral's planned dome) but never provided it, as well as on
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5 pro-regime diocesan officials who were allegedly guilty of mismanagement and outright
6
7 corruption during the exile of the bishops.⁶⁶ It is less plausible, however, to think of the saga
8
9 of the Cathedral of Christ the King as exclusively a story about Communist obstruction of
10
11 grassroots religious enthusiasm. Its trajectory, after all, bears some resemblance to the fate of
12
13 another Cathedral of Christ the King—the first iteration of the Metropolitan Cathedral in
14
15 Liverpool, designed by Edwin Lutyens. That project, even more massive and ambitious than
16
17 the cathedral in Katowice, was launched in 1933, also fuelled by the contributions of
18
19 working-class parishioners, and had been making slow but steady progress until the Second
20
21 World War. But postwar privation and rising costs were sufficient, even in the absence of a
22
23 hostile authoritarian regime, to lead diocesan authorities in Liverpool to delay the resumption
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25 of construction for a further decade, then abandon it altogether in favour an alternative, more
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27 modest and much cheaper design.
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33 While the Cathedral of Christ the King in Katowice did, by contrast, achieve post-war
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35 completion, it provided a very low-profile victory for the church. The erection of the
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37 cathedral is rarely if ever cited as an example of Polish Catholicism's resilience in the face of
38
39 the consolidation of Communist power. A number of reasons could be offered for this
40
41 obscurity. The awkward circumstances of the cathedral's final consecration certainly played a
42
43 role; if the opening had happened a year later, presided over by Bishop Stanisław Adamski
44
45 after returning from his banishment, it might have crystallized into a symbolic moment of
46
47 defiance by Poland's Catholic church. The cathedral's neo-classical design also could be said
48
49 to have placed it in something of an aesthetic no man's land: it represented neither a
50
51 comforting recreation of a historic landscape, like the reconstruction of Warsaw's eighteenth-
52
53 century Old Town or Wrocław's Gothic cathedral island, nor an exciting modernist
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60 ⁶⁶ Myszor, 469.

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2
3 experiment, like the Le Corbusier-inspired Ark of the Lord in Nowa Huta or the Church of
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5 the Divine Mercy in Kalisz.⁶⁷
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8 But another, perhaps even more decisive reason for the failure of the cathedral of
9
10 Katowice to become a symbol of postwar Polish Catholicism was the fact that its construction
11
12 was clearly and consistently promoted as a regional rather than a national cause. Cathedrals
13
14 are, of course, inherently regional projects since they are centres for a regional (diocesan) unit
15
16 of ecclesiastical administration. And, as we have seen, the broader agenda of church
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18 reconstruction was also generally framed in terms of regional rather than national solidarity.
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20 But the rhetoric employed in appeals for donations to the Christ the King cathedral was
21
22 nonetheless striking in its exclusive invocations of regional identity and pride. Father
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24 Adamczyk announced the resumption of construction as ‘a question of the prestige of the
25
26 Silesian people.’ Should not ‘the richest region in Poland’ have ‘the most beautiful
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28 cathedral’?⁶⁸ His further exhortations reiterated the status of the cathedral as ‘a monument to
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30 the religiosity and gratitude of the Silesian people and at the same time the pride of the
31
32 Silesian diocese.’⁶⁹ The theme of ‘gratitude’—specifically gratitude for divine protection
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34 during the war—would likely also have been read by contemporaries as a subtle reference to
35
36 the regional particularism of the project. The distinctive wartime experience shared by almost
37
38 all inhabitants of the diocese of Katowice, after all, was adherence to the Deutsche Volksliste.
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40 Bishop Adamski had been the leading proponent of the argument that this mass ‘camouflage’
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42 had been a brilliant ‘stratagem of war’ that ensured the survival in place of the native
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52 ⁶⁷ These are the examples that Robert Alvis cites in illustrating elements of innovation in
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54 Polish church architecture: *White Eagle, Black Madonna: One Thousand Years of the Polish*
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56 *Catholic Tradition* (New York, 2016), 245-6.

57 ⁶⁸ R. Adamczyk, ‘Śląsk buduje największy pomnik’.

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59 ⁶⁹ Adamczyk, ‘Śląsk buduje pomnik’.
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3 population and minimized disruption of local industry as well as local society.⁷⁰ Father
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5 Adamczyk, the leader of the cathedral building campaign, had also made a blistering public
6
7 defence of mass Volksliste adherence, dismissing as ‘childish and pointless’ the notion that
8
9 Silesians should ‘atone’ for not having suffered more during the war.⁷¹ In short, references to
10
11 the war were not, in this context, an invocation of shared history of Polish-national suffering.
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13 They instead awkwardly highlighted the wildly divergent wartime experiences of those now
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15 called together to build a common Polish-national future.
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21 *Conclusion*

22
23 Sociologist Maryjane Osa observed that Poland’s Roman Catholic church is usually
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25 imagined as ‘something monolithic, almost a phenomenon of nature—like Mount Everest.’
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27 She suggested that it should instead be seen as akin to Mount Rushmore: ‘solid and imposing,
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29 but carefully crafted from the materials at hand.’⁷² Her argument was that the experiences of
30
31 the Second World radically transformed the Polish Catholic church, changing a rigid state
32
33 church, similar to interwar Hungary’s, into a flexible ‘activist church’, which could ‘support
34
35 local causes and garner legitimacy for the organization as a whole.’⁷³ It is a highly productive
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37 insight. But Osa’s initial elaboration on how the postwar institution functioned tended to
38
39 focus on the vertical relationship between the episcopal hierarchy on the one hand and ‘local
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41 causes’ on the other. The implication was that ‘the local’ had distinctive but ultimately
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51 ⁷⁰ S. Adamski, *Pogląd na rozwój sprawy narodowościowej w województwie śląskim w*
52 *czasie okupacji niemieckiej* (Katowice, 1946).

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55 ⁷¹ ‘Czas skończyć z dzielnicowością,’ *Gość Niedzielny* (26 Aug.1945), pp. 236-8.

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58 ⁷² Osa, p. 268.

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60 ⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 295.

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3 compatible and harmonious incarnations. Each version of ‘the local’ could be readily slotted
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5 into the whole of ‘Polish society’.
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8 As we have seen in this brief survey, however, it was always clear how or even
9
10 whether the ‘materials at hand’ were suitable for fashioning a cohesive post-war Polish
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12 Catholicism. Local devotional life across much of western and northern Poland had to be
13
14 recreated in sacred spaces in which Polish-language sermons and hymns, and often any form
15
16 of Catholic mass, were being heard for the first time. Making newly arrived parishioners feel
17
18 at home in these ‘post-German’ churches raised a host of thorny questions. Transforming
19
20 them into replicas of parishes in Poland’s lost eastern territories, to be populated by refugee
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22 parishioners and administered by refugee clergy, might help to ease those communities’ sense
23
24 of specific loss. But it offered no solution to the even larger population of in-migrants from
25
26 central Poland, arriving as individuals or family units in equally unfamiliar new destinations.
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28 And keeping parishioners segregated by area of origin only made more daunting the aim of
29
30 local, regional and national integration. Engagement with the histories and physical
31
32 particularities of former German churches could provide a more subtle and dynamic form of
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34 re-rooting. But this also involved initial recognition of the alienness of parishioners’ new
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36 sacred spaces, potentially exacerbating feelings of ‘temporariness’. Church repair or
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38 reconstruction projects in ‘mixed’ parishes, populated by both indigenous and in-migrant
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40 Catholics, offered opportunities for forging a sense of common purpose, though they also
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42 provided occasions for conflict over ownership of new spaces and determination of local
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44 practice. Finally, in some areas such as the diocese of Katowice, which had a high rate of
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46 residential persistence and thus a much stronger existing sense of local identity, the near-
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48 universal experience of ‘passing’ as German during the war provided a powerful sense of a
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50 shared regional fate but was difficult to reconcile with Polish-national narratives of defiant
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52 resistance.
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3 If the re-founding of Catholic religious life after 1945 constituted, on the whole, a
4 success story, it was not due to a religious-national symbiosis seamlessly reconciling the
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6 apparently contradictory expectations of varying constituencies. This was, rather, a story of
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8 trial and error, of balancing acts and trade-offs, of alternately attracting and alienating various
9
10 potential members of a post-war Catholic community. And while the church certainly did not
11
12 shy away from invoking the blood of wartime martyrs, its institutional flexibility was not
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14 only defined by navigation of serial adversity and catastrophic loss. It also involved the rather
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16 different challenges of sudden, dramatic expansion and unprecedented infrastructural
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18 windfalls.
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