

Die katholische Kirche Polens und die «Wiedergewonnenen Gebiete» 1945-1948

Beitrag vom: 01.03.2016

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Not least given the importance of Catholicism in Polish national identity and current tensions in Polish politics, one welcomes recent scholarship addressing how the Polish Catholic church has approached nationalities conflicts in the German-Polish borderlands. Anticipating the work of James Bjork, Andrzej Michalczyk, and Brian Porter-Szücs, Robert Żurek's first book assessed the first eleven years of Christian church relations between Poland and the two Germanies, which involved relatively few attempts at reconciliation after the recent traumas of Nazi atrocities and the flight and expulsion of Germans from Poland's new "Recovered Territories". [1] Now, in his second book, Żurek examines archival State papers, oft-problematic memoirs by German and Polish witnesses, and Catholic pastoral letters, speeches, sermons, bulletins, and reports to explore the place of the Polish Catholic church in the religious, political, and social life of the immediate postwar "Recovered Territories". Following introductory and contextual chapters, chapter three examines the church's early postwar struggles with Communist authorities, chapter four recounts Polish primate Cardinal August Hlond's creation of the five Apostolic Administrators in the "Recovered Territories" in August 1945 (replacing exiled German bishops), chapter five examines the Polonization of church structures in the former German lands, chapter six looks to the behavior of Polish priests and laymen amid the ongoing ethnic cleansing, and chapter seven integrates the evolving stance of the church press. The extensive research that went into this project makes it as timely as it is relevant, and it is hoped that Żurek's research can provide a departure point for future discussions and disputes.

Żurek begins by framing himself as a researcher standing between two diametrically opposed national perspectives on a question still "evaluated so differently from the German and Polish side" (p. 11)– even though at the Second Vatican Council German and Polish bishops took halting steps toward finding consensus and forgiveness, and in 1972 the Vatican allowed the conversion of the Apostolic Administrators into bishoprics.[2] According to Żurek, German literature has lambasted the Polish Catholic church (Hlond in particular) for betraying its moral values by taking part in the ethnic cleansing of Germans (at the service of the Communist authorities), eliminating material traces of German culture, and adopting State propaganda that the new territories comprised "recovered" Polish land. In contrast, Żurek argues, the Polish view addresses mitigating circumstances, such as the fact that the ethnic cleansing of Germans was undertaken at the behest of the victorious Allies and realized by the Communists, leaving the Polish church to simply follow the consequences.

In this view, Hlond made the best decisions he could as Germans left and Polish settlers arrived in need of religious care from their own national clergy.

After establishing both sides in this debate, it becomes clear that Żurek fully supports the Polish position. First, he contends, had the Polish Catholic church failed to support Polonization and Catholicization efforts in the formerly German, religiously mixed territories, it would have lost popularity with Polish settlers, who, he alleges, would have flocked to the Communist authorities due to the widespread Germanophobia of the time (p. 807). Accusations that the Polish church suffered a "moral failure" thus fail to account for prevailing conditions of the time and place "unrealistic expectations on Polish Catholicism" (p. 813). Second, he continues, the church should be absolved of any responsibility for an ethnic cleansing sanctioned by the victorious Allies and spearheaded by the Communists: "Almost all European nations had put the Germans under collective guilt, and yet the Poles, surrounded by fresh graves and ruins, were supposed to be capable of sober reflection in light of this guilt question. Almost no one in the world publically questioned the decision of the victorious powers about pushing the German-Polish border westward and expelling the Germans, but the Polish primate was supposed to protest it" (p. 813). Because Polish Catholics were themselves victims of the Communist police, Red Army, and criminals, Żurek concludes, they should not have been expected to defend German Catholics from attacks.

To call the immediate postwar context complex is of course an understatement, as Żurek effectively shows in his third chapter. Communist authorities took the lead in Polonizing new regions like the Warmian diocese by giving preference to arriving Polish priests with questionable qualifications in German parishes where former religious leaders were often prevented from resuming their duties. "Furthermore, each parish was to establish a Polish organist, German inscriptions were to be cleared from every church, and the use of the German language was to be limited to Gospel readings" (p. 109). That all congregations were to sing Polish national hymns was that much less comprehensible for parish communities still dominated by prewar inhabitants who largely spoke German (and who, as scholars such as Andreas Kossert and Richard Blanke have shown, were mostly classified by the regime as Poles).[3] Not all of the initial settlers who swept through Poland's new "Wild West" were criminals, but Żurek blames the rise in criminality on legacies of Nazism. Nonetheless, it is problematic to brush off Polish Catholic misdeeds as the work of criminals pretending to be priests: if everyone who did anything bad to Germans was a criminal and charlatan, what does this tell us about the quality of settlers in general? And if "real" priests arrived after the criminals were through, where did all of these criminals go? Perhaps many criminals were in fact settlers exploiting the lawless atmosphere of ethnic cleansing that makes the very definition of criminality relative. Finally, if the arrival of "real" priests improved the situation, why did most members of the native population flee for West Germany after 1956? Certainly it does not appear that "real" priests were ameliorating conditions for a local population traumatized by early postwar deprivations and still suffering everyday discrimination from their new neighbors and the regime in 1956. In any event, by privileging those sources which portray Polish clergy empathizing with and even helping the indigenous population, Żurek ameliorates what has at times been a negative view of the Polish church (p. 787). But it is undeniable that, perhaps for the sake of "their own" flocks, Polish clerics regularly seized churches from their German counterparts without any possible compensation and so (whether they intended it or not) furthered the ongoing ethnic cleansing.

Thorough analysis of Polish clerical reports is applied throughout Żurek's book to rehabilitate leading clergymen such as Katowice bishop Stanisław Adamski, who is depicted as supporting Polish takeover of formerly German cloisters and churches, not out of nationalist fervor, but for fear that the property might otherwise fall to the Communists. Above all, however, Żurek features Hlond. In his examination of ethnic cleansing in Silesia, Tomasz Kamusella has already effectively established that Hlond broadly interpreted the Pope's July 8, 1945 granting of special powers to defend Catholicism in Poland to mean a rigorous reorganization of the new territories under Polish ecclesiastical rule *against* the wishes of the pro-Soviet authorities in August.[4] And Hlond's virulent anti-German nationalism continued under Stefan Wyszyński as well, who was noted for sustaining the Piast-Polish mythologies of the "Recovered Territories." In Żurek's fourth chapter, Hlond emerges as a dry bureaucrat naming administrators (who would name Polish clergy and contribute to the Polonization of the region) and defending his decisions based on broadly interpreted papal permissions. Later Vatican reservations about the Polonizing aspects of Hlond's administration of the former German dioceses was prompted, according to Żurek, by "a rumor, probably of German origin" (p. 346). From Żurek's reading of sources, the Pope (who in April 1946 had publically expressed dissatisfaction with the treatment of German Catholics in Poland) "had in fact empowered Hlond to convince Germans who held jurisdiction to freely renounce it and so create vacant dioceses" that Hlond could fill with Polish clergy (p. 353). Żurek also shows in his sources that Hlond overshot his authority, all justified by his sense that only a Polonization of the church in the formerly German territories could "protect the Polish church from the power of the State" (p. 423).

In the end, Żurek's book offers essential reading in the larger canon of scholarship on the complex and gray question of the Polish Catholic church during the ethnic cleansing of Poland's new Recovered Territories. As Żurek appreciates, ethnic cleansing is a messy, violent, encompassing affair that involves almost every authority on the ground, and he rightly asserts that it was made possible by the aftermath of Nazism and Allied agreements to shift Poland's borders. But it is problematic to assume that this context absolved the Catholic church from moral responsibility. As Polish bishops themselves asserted in their 1966 letter to their German colleagues: after Nazi aggression had resulted in the devastation of Poland and murder in some dioceses of about half the clergy, "every German uniform, not only that of the SS, became for all Poles both a nightmare and a reason to hate all Germans." [5] For all this, however, they called for dialogue by granting and asking for forgiveness— hence implying that moral lapses had occurred on both sides. One might praise the Polish Catholic church for its bravery in resisting Communism, but also acknowledge the black mark of its collaboration (however tacit) in the ethnic cleansing of Germans, many of them fellow Catholics. For, in taking over German churches and allowing (even abetting) Polonization, the Polish Catholic church was hardly opposing State policies. Żurek tries to couch this by claiming that church administrators never openly supported the "State politics of Polonization," although they did show "a certain sympathy for the idea of Polonization in certain statements" including "the conviction of the interconnection between national-Polish and religious-Catholic interests" (p. 729). It is hardly surprising that a church publically opposed to virtually every State dictate would not openly support what the State wanted, even when it sympathized (and acted out) in ways that supported it. Indeed, in some ways it is even more disturbing that, apparently as a pragmatist (rather than a nationalist), Hlond allowed his fear of the Communists to dictate policies that furthered ethnic cleansing in the name of securing church influence in the new regions under Communist rule (pp. 809-810). Following Hlond's lead, the

apostolic administrators felt "compelled" to "stress their national reliability" and give Germans under their care a low priority "in order not to endanger the new formation of their own church structures" (p. 811). Some of this passive pragmatism was continuous with church behaviors under Nazism. As Klaus-Peter Friedrich demonstrates, the Polish Catholic church often prompted despair from its flock under Nazi occupation due to its largely complicit attitude, and even in exile Hlond kept silent about the ongoing Holocaust.[6] At the same time, however, this pragmatism from the Catholic church resembles the approach by the Communists themselves, whose doctrine should have made them even more opposed to nationalism, but who (analogous to likeminded leaders of the Catholic church) sponsored the ethnic cleansing of the Recovered Territories to win popular support. In this light, Żurek has effectively illustrated that the Polish Catholic church (not unlike the Communists) may have been ideologically opposed to extreme nationalism. But these intentions did not always play out in church behaviors or their consequences, as the church gave highest priority to maintaining its power and influence in the midst of ethnic cleansing.

[1] James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Andrzej Michalczyk, *Heimat, Kirche und Nation. Deutsche und polnische Nationalisierungsprozesse im geteilten Oberschlesien, 1922-1939* (Vienna, Weimar, and Cologne: Böhlau 2010); Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert Żurek, *Zwischen Nationalismus und Versöhnung: Die Kirchen und die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1945-1956* (Vienna, Weimar, and Cologne: Böhlau, 2005).

[2] All quotations translated from German by the author.

[3] Andreas Kossert, *Preußen, Deutsche oder Polen? Die Masuren im Spannungsfeld des ethnischen Nationalismus, 1870-1956* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001); Richard Blanke, *Polish-speaking Germans? Language and National Identity among the Masurians since 1871* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2001).

[4] Tomasz Kamusella, *The Dynamics of the Policies of Ethnic Cleansing in Silesia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 1999), 336, 415.

[5] *German-Polish Dialogue: Letters of the German and Polish Bishops* (Bonn, Brussels, New York: Atlantic Forum, 1966), 14, 16-17.

[6] Klaus-Peter Friedrich, "Collaboration in a 'Land without a Quisling': Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 711-746, here 735-736.



Zitierweise:

Dr. Andrew Demshuk: Rezension zu: Robert Żurek: Die katholische Kirche Polens und die «Wiedergewonnenen Gebiete» 1945-1948, 2014, in: <https://www.pol-int.org/de/publikationen/die-katholische-kirche-polens-und-die-wiedergewonnenen#r3850>.

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