

### Rethinking the Polak-Katolik

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Despite its prominence in Poland's modern history, Roman Catholicism has received surprisingly limited attention in Anglophone historiography. Brian Porter-Szücs's *Faith and Fatherland* takes a major step toward addressing that deficit. Catholicism can, of course, be approached in a number of ways, from defining it narrowly in terms of the authoritative pronouncements of the hierarchy to defining it expansively as the whole range of attitudes exhibited by those baptized in the church. Porter-Szücs pursues a persuasive middle ground, viewing Catholicism as a "bounded field of assumptions, ideals and principles," limited by previous traditions and the views of institutional authorities, but also as "an always unfinished normative project," shifting over time under the influence of a variety of actors (p. 13).

The book is organized thematically, with each of its ten chapters devoted to a key concept: "The Church," "Sin," "Modernity," "The Person and Society," "Politics," "The Nation Penitent," "Ecclesia Militans," "The Jew," "Polak-Katolik," and "Mary, Militant and Maternal." But a diachronic story emerges within and across these chapters, with crucial transformations in Catholic norms interwoven with broad doctrinal continuities. One running theme is a shift from emphasis on fatalistic obedience and passive endurance of suffering, characteristic of most of the nineteenth century, to a greater identification of the church with nation and a stronger endorsement of national activism in the early twentieth century, especially after the achievement of Polish independence. Porter-Szücs dissects such trends with an admirable sense of nuance. First, he is careful to acknowledge ongoing tensions and paradoxes within Catholic thinking as well as change over time; various elements were interpreted and combined in various ways by different contemporary commentators. Second, he notes the ambiguities of some apparently "progressive" developments. Church leaders, for example, were becoming increasingly sympathetic to democratic politics by the early twentieth century. But such sentiments were often coupled with an insistence that the Polish demos constituted an ethno-religious monolith, thus equating democracy with church-approved policy outcomes. Likewise, twentieth-century clergymen tended to be less relentless in berating parishioners about their sinful behavior or calling for individual penance. But pastoral jeremiads could instead be channeled into fiercer targeting of external enemies—most often

Freemasons in the nineteenth century, Jews in the early twentieth century—as the source of all Polish misfortune.

The book draws on an impressive range of primary sources in illuminating the discursive landscape of Polish Catholicism. Pastoral statements by the Polish episcopate, pronouncements of individual bishops, and papal encyclicals (above all, of course, those of the Polish pope) are carefully analyzed, as are articles by priests and lay intellectuals published in a variety of Polish-Catholic periodicals. To get a feel for the more quotidian messages that lay Catholics were hearing from their pastors, Porter-Szücs also makes good use of the *Biblioteka Kaznodziejska*, a periodical that provided parish priests with model sermons. Indeed, the *Biblioteka Kaznodziejska* provides a kind of microcosm of the book's subject: a sense of what was most often said, as well as what was "sayable" at all, by those speaking in the name of Catholicism.

While *Faith and Fatherland* tackles early and often the problem of trying to pin down what constituted "Catholicism," it does not devote as much explicit attention to the problem of what constituted "Poland." Porter-Szücs is certainly keenly aware of the difficulties of defining where "Poland" was and who was a "Pole."<sup>[1]</sup> But just as Porter-Szücs productively provides some extended discussion of how ideas and authors might be positioned at the center or the margins of Catholicism, or even outside of its boundaries altogether, so it would have been helpful to interrogate more directly how the contours of Polish Catholicism might be discerned. The methodology and source base suggest that it is, in many ways, a linguistic phenomenon: how Catholicism has been understood in the Polish language. But elaborating on such a definition would have raised some interesting questions about the reading practices and linguistic life-worlds of those who defined "Polish" Catholicism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, most clergy trained in the German Empire would have received much of their education, including theological orientation, in German. To what extent did their understanding of Catholicism diverge from (other) German-speakers and converge with Polish-speakers who did not read German? The role of migration in shaping "Polish" Catholicism would have been another interesting dimension to consider. To what extent, for how long, and in what ways did those who left predominantly Polish-speaking lands continue to subscribe to a distinctively "Polish" Catholicism, and how, in turn, did Polish Catholicism shape the norms of global Catholicism, especially when a Pole became the most important voice in the universal church?

These follow-up questions are less a critique of, or even a quibble about, *Faith and Fatherland* than a testimony to the stimulating role that this rich and thought-provoking study has already played and will continue to play in spurring further investigation of the interplay between Catholicism and Polishness in the modern era. Porter-Szücs's book is an impressive achievement and will be an essential point of reference in the field for many years to come.

Note

[1] Brian Porter, "Who Is a Pole and Where Is Poland? Territory and Nation in the Rhetoric of Polish National Democracy before 1905," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1992): 639-653.

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