

Jim Bjork (2020)

From Empires to Nation-State: Remaking the Roman Catholic Church in an Independent Poland

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History

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Roman Catholicism is most often imagined as an element of continuity in Poland's turbulent history: even when a Polish state was absent from the map of Europe from the late eighteenth through early twentieth centuries, a recognizably 'Polish' church has been presumed to provide a robust institutional anchor for the Polish nation. This article, however, argues that the creation of a 'Polish' Roman Catholic church was a belated and protracted process, one that was only getting started in the years following the achievement of Polish independence in 1918. The church's 'Polonization' was only partially a matter of emancipation from imperial-era restrictions. It often also involved the defence and attempted extrapolation of laws, practices and institutions that had developed under the auspices of the German, Austrian or Russian states and that the Catholic hierarchy viewed as healthy and desirable building blocks for a future Polish church. These imperial precedents continued to provide crucial points of reference in ongoing debates about what 'Polish' Catholicism was and what it should become.

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