

# Polish Religiousness: Mainstream and Peripheries

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## Abstract

*Polish religiousness is a phenomenon composed of many both antagonistic and interdependent (even symbiotic) constituents. Different mental strata, political wings, degrees of engagement and social entities should be presented here to show the complexity of the phenomenon in question. I shall raise only a few of the most important problems. In order to do so, it is useful to draw four main lines of division.*

## I

During the last 200 years the Roman Catholic Church in Poland (called “the Church” in the rest of this article) operated under far from peaceful conditions. In the late eighteenth century Protestant Prussia and Orthodox Russia with the participation of Austria erased Poland from the map of Europe for nearly 125 years. Different religious, ethnic and political issues often overlapped. The Church was forced to involve itself in the cultural struggle of the country for the survival of the Polish nation and its “plausibility structure” (Berger 1990). A similar situation occurred in 1939 when the existence of the Church was again at risk when pagan-Nazi Germany and an atheistic Soviet Union partitioned Poland. During the entire fifty year period of communist rule known under the name of the People’s Republic of Poland, the Church was involved with varying degree of intensity in ideological conflict.

Herbert Spencer, the Founding Father of the sociology of religion noted that when a group or society is involved in antagonistic activities for a long period, it develops a “militant” type of organization imitating the structure an army. This term applies equally well to ecclesiastical

bodies in which a system of subordination and compulsory co-operation dominates. A religion that manifests these features is designated by Spencer as a "religion of enmity." By contrast, the Church in Poland preaches a "religion of amity" a term taken from the New Testament. The Church's organization and directive practices, however, as well as relations with other organizations in the communist period can be best described by the term "militant organization." For the purpose of effectively conducting any ideological struggle, the Militant church has to maintain order and discipline in its internal relations, based on a system of obligations, orders, permissions and prohibitions. Hence the main virtues propounded through education of clergy were the love of the Church and obedience. At the same time, self-prompted actions and self-organized groups were restrained. "If private alliances are allowed to exist, it will be on condition of submitting to an official regulation such as greatly restrains independent action" (Spencer 1969, 507). When a private club arises it arouses the suspicion of the clergy, who tend to control it or reduce its practice to established routine. This feature can be observed in the early history of new catholic movements in Poland. In the beginning they were pitted against the resistance or even hostility of local clergy, especially because of their Protestant origin. Militant organizations have to preserve the purity of the faith and cohesion. External influences should be minimized and the doctrine homogenized. It is obviously a grievous hindrance in ecumenical dialog.

Homogeneity is a requirement of a situation of struggle. Any lack of cohesion in the Polish Church was exploited by the communists and other disagreements were reinforced or created. Communist "special services" (the secret police), attempted to antagonize the young bishop Karol Wojtyła and Primate Wyszyński. A special movement, which was informally called "patriots priests" that supported the communist party, was established and a hierarchical, centralized and coercive organization overwhelmed the church. An organization of this kind also tends to interfere in non-religious spheres of social life. As a result the Church was compelled to act in a homogenous manner by the nation itself, since there were no free institutions and society had to realize its political or cultural activities within the Church.

There are features that the Church manifested in the beginning of

the social and political transformation in 1989. Many appreciate the breakthrough as a triumph of the Church, which claims some credit for the overthrow of communism. *Ecclesia militans* became *Ecclesia triumphans*. Restitution of Church property confiscated by the communist regime after 1945 began and the Church regained its official role in social life. Voluntary classes in religious education were reintroduced into the public schools and a clause enshrining “respect for Christian values” was forced through as part of the new media law. At the same time the engagement of bishops and priests in social and political matters continued, sometime in aggressive and arrogant forms.

It was particularly sobering for the Church, when in 1993 post-communists won parliamentary elections. It became clear that the Polish nation did not unequivocally stand by the Church. Difficulties for the Church process had begun, as it sought a place in a new, pluralistic reality. This situation had arisen due to the rapidity of change, and as a result engendered divisions within the Church.

The most conservative part of the priesthood and the Church membership found that only the main enemy had changed: before 1989 it was communism, and after 1989 it was secularism and hedonism of modern culture. This conviction was confirmed by the often aggressive attacks on religion coming from the leftist media.

Others, who identify themselves as representatives of the so-called “Open Church” drew their inspiration from the spirit of Vatican II. It is worth remembering that the renewal that followed the Council, in comparison with Western countries, was very much delayed in Poland—the time of ideological struggle wasn’t propitious for carrying out an “opening.”

It is difficult to estimate the strength of these wings in the Polish episcopate. However, some events which can be called sociological quasi-experiments (or natural experiments) show that the praxis of the militant church is still the most obvious manner of problem solving. This could be observed when the Archbishop of Poznań was accused of sexual harassment as well as when co-operation of the other Archbishop with former communist intelligence had been disclosed. These events show that the interest of the Church is in identifying with the defense of members of the hierarchy and attempting to hide the prob-

lem in order to maintain cohesion and subordination of the clergy.

The hierarchy belittled this internal division. The radio channel “Radio Maryja” with the controversial Reverend Father Director Tadeusz Rydzyk as head, was reputed to be a leading mouthpiece of the militant wing. The second group in the Polish Church—the progressive wing— assembled around catholic magazines such as “Tygodnik Powszechny,” “Znak” or “Więź.” They integrated lay Catholics engaged in applying reforms of the Council, sometimes overtaking the Church’s hierarchy.

To show the strength of both wings in society, some data about the media market, treated as indicators, can be cited. The number of “Radio Maryja” listeners is almost one million people; however nowadays it is declining along with lower number of people educated at the time of the strong ideological fight (49% of listeners are above 60 years old). These numbers are not fully reliable for our purpose, due to the fact that it is difficult to say how many of them are listeners *because of the* ideological line of the Radio and how many *despite it*. Radio Maryja’s programming consists mainly of religious broadcasts, including Rosary, Chaplet of Divine Mercy, breviary, litanies, talks on the Catechism, Holy Masses and the like.

Data about the press can provide a better view. “Nasz dziennik,” a newspaper close to the political line of “Radio Maryja” has an estimated circulation of 40,000–60,000. “Tygodnik Powszechny,” the leading mouthpiece of the “open Church,” has similarly about 40,000–50,000. However, we have to take into account, that the Catholic press in Poland taken collectively has a circulation of 1.5 million, and weekly magazines like “Gość Niedzielny” or “Niedziela” have a circulation of 200,000. It seems that both wings are on the margins. One could misunderstand Polish religiousness considering only them.

## II

Until the late 1970s the most widespread form of religious life in Poland was the so-called “folk religiousness.” It has a long history that goes back to the sixteenth century, and in regard to some elements even pagan times. Simplifying a little, folk religiousness is a result of influence exerted by the ceremonial religiousness of Polish nobility on the quasi-magical religiousness of the rural people. It was a very interest-

ing phenomena for Polish sociologists of religion starting from Stefan Czarnowski (Émil Durkheim's apprentice) until now. After this we can distinguish some characteristic features of this folk form of Catholicism (Czarnowski 1956; Ciupak 1973; Sroczyńska 2000; Datko 2000):

- Collectivism—folk religiousness was based on local community. Individual practices were manifestations of collective life and pressure of neighbors. Some national and patriotic sentiments joined later.
- There was a strong bond with everyday life, to the life cycle of the household, the village and its needs. Some religious observances were treated quite instrumentally and real results were expected. There were many magical beliefs beneath a formally Catholic surface. It seems rather typical for peasant religiousness (Weber, Wach).
- Ritualism—religiousness of this type attaches a lot importance to rites, observances and particularly collective ceremonies, processions, services etc. Especially important were collective experiences of rites of passage such as baptism, first communion, marriage and funerals.
- Parishioners are bonded strongly through dialectical ties to the local representative of the Church—the priest, who if he only stands connected with them and if he does not behave in a supercilious manner exercises overwhelming influence on the entire community.
- At the same time folk-Catholics attached almost no importance to what they believed. Doctrinal disputes remained totally alien to the people and there was no concern for adherence to Church dogmas. Their theological consciousness was very poor but concrete (anthropomorphic). In practice the people's morality departed from Church teaching too (Ciupak 1973).
- Religiousness became very emotional. Believers were tied to cult-objects, specially to the Holy Mother with very familiar bonds. Religion therefore was a matter of experience and *orthopraxis* (ritual) rather than *orthodoxis* (dogma) and morality.
- The specific property of that religiosity was a lively belief in miracles and supernatural intervention in everyday events. Polish people had a lot of admiration for some “miraculous paintings” of

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“Our Lady” (*Matka Boska*, in Polish literally “Mother of God”) and very long pilgrimages were undertaken to such holy places.

Folk religion was a strongly assimilated form of Catholicism (but not to the degree of Latin America, since in Poland nobody remembers the names of ancient gods). As urbanization proceeded and migration of the rural population to urban areas occurred diffusion of this form of religious culture takes place. Whereas the religiousness of the rural people, impacted by global culture, lost many elements of local folk tradition, in the religiosity of contemporary Poles one can still find vital features of the old cultural formation.

Surveys show that Poles are one of the most religious nations of Europe, with 96% of all Poles identify themselves as Roman Catholic, 95% as believers and 21% as profound believers, according to the survey of the Public Opinion Research Centre (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2006a). Their faith manifests itself through practices. Only 6.1% polled practice no religion (Jarmoch, 2001, 23). For example the vast majority of Poles participate in the most important religious observances during Easter. Surveys show that 94% fast on Good Friday and 90% on Ash Wednesday (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2005); that 74% of Poles go to Easter Confession; 88% participate in the Mass (Centre for the Study of Public Policy 2005); and 82.7% of families participate in public processions on Corpus Christi (Mariański 2001).

Still very important are rites of passage: for 87% Poles baptism is significant (for 70% very significant), 84% polled attach importance to the sacrament of holy matrimony (for 65% it is very significant). A catholic funeral is important for 89% and very important for 72% (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2006a). Poles sweep aside other European nations in less solemn practices too, and 58% declare that they systematically attended church at least once a week and 16% practice irregularly, once or twice a month (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2001). As usually is the case, data based on self-declaration are overestimated. Estimation based on strict counting conducted by the Statistical Institute of the Catholic Church SAC (Statistical Institute of the Catholic Church 2006) shows that Sunday Mass attendance is usually 45.8% (nowadays slowly in decline), that 16.3% receive Holy

Communion (in the last years slowly rising) and 59.7% of Poles say they fast every Friday (Mariański 2001).

Pilgrimages—a very important religious practice for Polish Catholics—are organized by 80% of parishes and 15% of parishioners (seven million) participate in them each year. Pilgrimages were first made to sites of Marian sanctuaries, and most of all—the “spiritual capital of Poland”—Częstochowa. As in Orthodox religiousness Poles venerate miraculous paintings rather than statues and Holy Mary rather than other saints. Miraculous paintings were named after the town to which they belonged and in which miracles occurred. They usually feature the Virgin with Jesus, are adorned with silver clothes and gold crown. At the walls of sanctuaries are placed many votive offerings as a thanksgiving for graces (especially healing). Very popular are other Marian offices, eg. *majowe* (May Devotion) when the *Litany of Loreto* is chanted (55% of Poles occasionally participate in this office).

Crowds of Polish Catholics welcome the Pope in each of his pilgrimages and it has changed little since the recent Pope's election. Eight percent of Poles participated personally in the Mass celebrated by Benedict XVI, 71% followed his pilgrimage on television and 23% decorated the windows or balcony in their homes for the occasion (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2006b).

These indicators seem to show very little change, so Poles may be considered to have resisted the secularization process which has changed “the spiritual climate.” However, the process of urbanization has some effect on the character of religiousness. I think, that the social plausibility structure of Polish Catholicism has changed. In the past the local community (village, parish) was its basis, now the family take on this function and in some cases the nation.

According to polls of Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, Easter is mainly a family holiday. Easter traditions and customs performed in the family or by the family are practiced more widely than officially in churches, with, for example, 96% of families taking decorated baskets (Święconka) containing a sampling of traditional food to churches to be blessed on Holy Saturday, which will be shared (especially blessed eggs) with the members of the family on Easter morning (95%) (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2005). Christmas is more

of a family holiday (48%) than a religious one (31%). Respondents were asked what made them most delighted with Christmas; 71% answered that spending time with the family, whereas the religious aspect delights only 5% of Poles (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2007).

The family dimension of Polish religiousness is manifested on All Saints' Day (November 1), which Poles celebrate in an unusually solemn way. On this day, still called the Day of the Deceased (or day of the dead) by most people, families go to the cemeteries to decorate graves with candles, flowers and wreaths and reminisce about their dead relatives. Most Poles (87%) visit cemeteries at least once a year but 53% at least once a month (PENTOR 2005). It is quite popular to give an offering to apply the Mass for the intention of relatives who are gone, and 49.6% polled had done so in the prior year (Mariański 2001).

However, as Herbert Spencer emphasized, that it would lead to a misinterpretation to infer about real religiousness of people from their nominal religion. If 96% of Poles describe themselves as Catholic does it mean they affirm the Church dogmas, live according to its moral teaching and are obedient to the Church leaders? Hence we should rather ask the question "What do Poles really believe in?"

According to a survey only about 2% of the Polish do not believe in God or any sort of supernatural life force and 80% believe in God (Eurobarometer 2005). We mentioned earlier that Poles are one of the most religious nations in Europe. However, some Catholics do not believe in God (but in another supreme being). Even more don't believe in life after death (believe 69% all polled Poles). Only 65.8% believe in resurrection (50% believe in resurrection of the body—an article of creed). Almost 73% of Poles believe in Heaven but only 31% in the existence of Hell.

When we ask a more important question: who is Jesus in the opinion of respondents, we see that only 26% of Catholics in Poland affirm the Christian dogma of God and Man. Half of those survey (50%) are closer to monophysitism than Catholicism (obviously, unconsciously) in answering "he is God," while 7.4% were Arians, replying that Jesus was only a man (Jarmoch 2000, 392).

It seems that in religious matters a large part of Polish Catholics do



not follow the teaching of the Church but believe in their own way. When asked, 53.9% declare their obedience to the Church teaching whereas 42.8% say they have beliefs of their own (the latter belief is on the rise, whereas the former is in decline) (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2003). The result of surveys would be more reliable if Poles knew the teaching of their Church, but this is clearly not the case.

Polls regarding beliefs on life after death show that among 54% of those “obedient to the Church” only 40% believe that after death people go to Heaven or Hell, 8% think that all go to Heaven, the same number consider that death is the real end; 4% accept reincarnation and 30% believe that there is something out there but they do not know what it is (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2006c). Other polls show that 43% of profound believers think that it is possible to be absolved of original sin during the sacrament of Reconciliation (Hołownia 2007).

The situation looks the same in the domain of moral rules. Poles were asked if it is essential to accept some moral norms in order to be Catholic. Repudiation of contraception is important to 32% and disapproval of premarital sexual activity to 25% (Zdaniewicz 2000). According to another, more recent poll, 74% approve of in vitro fertilization, to 73% of Poles contraception is not a sin as with cohabitation without marriage. For 61% there is nothing evil in premarital sexual activity (Ozminkowski 2008). What is a sin for Poles? Research of Wojciech Pawlik shows that during the sacrament of Reconciliation they confess first of all neglect of their religious duties (missing Holy Mass or prayer) and family quarrels (Pawlik 2007).

Asked directly what are they guided by in making their moral choices, 72.5% answered that they follow their own consciousness, 37.6% follow conduct of trustworthy people and only 22% follow the Church’s teachings (respondents could choose more than one answer) (Zdaniewicz 2000). As we see it, Poles are a very religious nation, but they are very independent from the Church in their religiousness.

This is very evident in social matters. During the period of communist rule, the Church in Poland was loved and respected. It was perceived as a social power that defended the people from totalitarian government. When in 1989 power came to the people the Church

started to claim restitution of its property and to take its proper (in the Church's opinion) place in society, including its engagement in political issues. Along with this process there has been a steady decline in popular support for the Church.

As these surveys show, only 10% of the people in Poland accept the political engagement of the clergy; most of them strongly object to it. It is characteristic that this decline of respect to a lesser degree applies to the local priest (*Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej* 1999). It is quite symptomatic that when the sexual harassment scandal broke out over the archbishop of Poznań most people believed the accusers. But when a similar scandal broke in the small village of Tylawa most parishioners signed a letter of support for their priest. In 2008 the Gallup International Association asked respondents about their trust in spiritual leaders. Only 8.8% of Poles living in big cities declared their trust, far less than in Germany (30%) or Belgium (26%) and only little more than in the Czech Republic (7%) (Kuźmiński and Müller 2008). Obviously, this data refers rather to the hierarchy of the Church than the common priests and does not describe the situation in smaller cities or villages.

This mistrust may be partially explained by a general antipathy towards any power. It should be remembered that during the last two hundred years it was usually their enemies who had power over the Poles, and there were only a few episodes of freedom when they ruled their own country (1918–1939 and since 1989). In the times when enlightened absolutism was implemented in many European countries, in Poland the freedom-oriented ideology of the Polish nobility created a “democracy of noblemen” when the king was elected and had limited power. It is quite natural that persons in power do not enjoy durable popularity and that the professional politicians are placed usually at the bottom of the prestige hierarchy.

Low degree of ecclesiasticism results from the aforementioned disregard for the dogmas of the Church that Poles display. Erich Fromm noted that dogmas, that is, “correct formulation of the idea,” are useful means of controlling people by controlling their thoughts (Fromm 1981, 43). But for Poles to be Catholic means to practice Catholic observance and customs, to go to church, to fast when custom requires.

In these domains the priest, the leader of the local parish community is in undisputed authority. However, he would lose his authority, if he forgets that the priest is “from the people and for the people” (*ex hominibus, pro hominibus*), when he begins to behave like “those men of power” or if he becomes too greedy for money. The independence of the Polish people from Church authority in the religious domain can be observed on another, quite marginal but characteristic phenomenon, that modern Polish religiousness inherits from its ancestors—folk religiousness. One can say, that Polish people have developed a sense of *sacrum* which it manifests spontaneously (Czachowski 2003).

The case of the small city of Oława could be a good example. In 1983 a poor illiterate pensioner had a vision of the Madonna in his tomato garden. He started to heal and his garden became famous for miracles (healings and alleged Eucharistic miracles). Two years later there were 50,000 people daily arriving from all across the country (it was more than the population of Oława). In a short time around the place of the alleged hierophany arose a chapel, “a pilgrim house,” a way of the Cross, a canteen and a holy well-spring a little way off with healing water.

It is difficult to say how many such cases happened in communist times, since only a few of them (ten) had been described in the press. In the 1990s there were several such miraculous events a year, sometimes however they were only of local fame. Sometimes such “miracles” take the form of a spontaneous Rorschach (ink blot) test, when people see “holy faces” of Mary or Jesus in stains on a wall, spots on the glass in the window or a patch on a tree. Others, however were connected with some revelation or message of supernatural origin. The Holy Mother usually gives very practical advice on how people should pray, do penance, love each other and sometimes orders a church to be built in the place of hierophany, but hardly any messages bring theological content. People do not want new truth, they want miracles, consolation, and reinforcement of faith in collective experience (Lewandowski 1997).

The Church rarely reacts; sometimes a commission is set up, but results of its work are usually (like in the Oława case) unfavorable for believers. Schisms, however, based on such miracles, seldom happen. Most Poles make pilgrimages to reputable and affirmed miraculous

places like Częstochowa, Licheń, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska and after the fall of communism when borders had been opened and Poles became a little richer, they also travel to Fatima, Loreto, Lourdes or controversial Medjugorje.

Polish people rarely rebel against ecclesiastical power. There had been, however, the defiance of parishoners devoted to their priest who wanted to stop his removal (Sidziny, Domaniów, Smogorzów). The opposite also occurred several times, with the priest losing his authority by manifesting his unlimited greed, thus provoking open conflict (Braciejówka, Krysiaki, Raszyn, Somonin, Jarosławsko). Bishops are reluctant to give in to their demands, usually stay adamant and refuse to discuss matters with mutineers. Inhabitants of cities have a wider choice among parishes, and there have been no such events.

One more significant example describing relations between the people and the ecclesiastical hierarchy is worth presenting. Since 1989 there have been two prominent sacral constructions. The first, a sanctuary in Licheń, was constructed between 1994–2004 at the site of a miraculous painting of The Holy Mother of Sorrow, the Queen of Poland (Our Lady of Licheń) which has been venerated since the eighteenth century. There was some revelation in this place during the nineteenth century and in the surrounding area a holy spring flows and a so-called “Calvary” (an artificial landscape makes the way of the Cross very vivid to pilgrims). Licheń is famous all over the country for numerous miracles (which are registered with diligence). This new church, the largest in Poland and one of the largest in the world, was built thanks to pilgrims (over a million a year) and private donors within the last ten years.

A second sacral building, The Temple of Divine Providence, has also been under construction for ten years, but is far from completion. In fact, it has been under construction since 1791 when the Polish parliament decided to build the Temple as a thanksgiving to God for the constitution (recognized as the first codified constitution in Europe and second in the world). In 1998 the Primate of Poland returned to this idea, but despite his appeals and the endeavors of politicians, only half of the needed funds have been accumulated and after ten years of construction it is still in an unfinished state. Much controversy was aroused about the decision of the primate to bury the popular priest-

poet Jan Twardowski (against his last request) in a Crypt for the Honored in order for the unfinished church to gain popularity. The people do not share the enthusiasm of the Primate and Parliament.

In holy places and paintings is manifested another dimension of Polish Catholicism: i.e. practicality regarding to sacral sphere. People make pilgrimages to sanctuaries expecting miraculous healing or other supernatural interventions in their life. The same is evident in their approach to prayer. They were asked in which situations they usually pray. Only 15–16% mentioned disinterested situations like prayer before a meal or evening prayer with children. Most of them (74%) mentioned undefined “difficult situations,” 52% pray before a journey (this is a type of disturbing situation too) and 66% at sacral places like churches, chapels, and graves (Mariański 2001).

The strength of deeply rooted folk Catholicism can be shown in another example. As in other Western countries, during the 1970s in Poland there appeared elements of the “New Age trend.” Initially, during the time of communism, it was quite narrow and exclusive. When borders were opened, more popular and commercial forms came to Poland. Research on this phenomenon reveals interesting results: while practices of this type of religiosity (meditation, visualization, auguries, etc.) look very similar as in other parts of the world, the difference is that most of their participants do not abandon Catholicism. Sometimes they even join Catholic practices (like the rosary) with esoteric ones. Figures or images of the Holy Mother and Jesus are placed on their home-altars, they describe themselves as Catholics even if they refer to God or Mary in terms of “lighting energy,” treat the rosary as a mantra and think of John Paul II as man deeply initiated in esoteric wisdom (Hall 2007; Kubiak 2005).

The features of Polish popular Catholicism place them in opposition to the above-mentioned two wings: the open and militant church. Representatives of the first come from the intelligentsia and take the view that the folk religiousness (emotional, mass and superstitious) should be overcome in the name of Vatican II and its reforms. On the other hand, even the most “open” members of the hierarchy are aware that these “thinking for themselves” people are the basis of the strength of the Church in Poland. Hence with hidden contempt in their hearts

they endeavor to keep some ties between themselves and the people. The orthodox loving militant church, despite the fact that people unconsciously are closer to heterodoxy, often treats them as an ally that is easy to use against its opponent. Hence it uses or sometimes even inspire people's biases, fears and enmity to thinking different (non-Catholic). I think, that this tension in the Church, (probably not only in the Poland), between social engaged elite, and a common people can be best described if we use a pair of concepts coined by Johan Bachofen, and remembered by Erich Fromm: patriarchal and matriarchal religion (Kaczmarek 2003).

These concepts do not refer to the type of family or structure of power, as they are colloquially understood, but describe the structure of the value hierarchy. Patriarchal religion affirms strength and reason, progress and individuality, principal of power and discipline as well as hierarchy and asceticism. Virile Gods and Heroes are worshiped and in Christianity, God the Just Judge and saints (heroes of faith). "The open church" is a form of this religion, which put pressure on *reason*; it is a religion of intellectuals who are deep in the world of ideas, thoughts or spirits. "The militant church" is a form of those reinforced traits related to power and hierarchy, the struggle for their own identity and position in the world.

Matriarchal religion is much more egalitarian, indulgent and tolerant, communal and vital-value oriented, rooted in the past and tradition. Hence *manism* (ancestor worship) and worship of a Mother Goddess or God the Merciful. I think that in Poland the popular (old folk) church is a manifestation of that kind of religion. Based on community of fate, biological ties of kinship, mistrusting hierarchy and power, alienated from ideas, but close to real life, looking for protection by the Mother of God (in Polish *Matka Boska*, sometimes wrongly translated as "Divine Mother"). Naturally both strata—patriarchal and matriarchal—are parts of the same organic unity, i.e. the Polish Church. Even their differences or strengths, is a result of their mutual influence.

### III

For the participants of the above mentioned Polish religious trends, religion is important, sometimes even the most important element of

lives. But in every society there are also people for whom religion is their whole life. Those, who are the most involved in the spiritual life have the choice of living in the Convent (“the world-rejecting as—in Weberian terms) or to engage in some lay community (“the inter-world asceticism”).

In 2006, fifty-seven brotherhoods operated in Poland with which thirteen thousand monks were affiliated (including six thousand priests in comparison to thirty thousand diocesan priests). The most popular Order is the Franciscan (consisting nearly 25% of all monks—over three thousand, including 1165 Conventuals, and 640 Capucines), whose Jesus Christ conception as a humble, poor person with suffering, has been undoubtedly close to Polish people, like their marianity and flexibility referring to the emotions of the evangelical tenders (misterium, shelters). Other Orders are less popular: operating among youths, the Salesians include 1170 members, Pallotines 816, Jesuits 663, Radio Maryja owners—Redemptorists—501. On the other hand, traditional contemplative Monk Convents are not very popular: Cistercians have 146 members, Benedictines 63 and Camaldolese 21. During the communist period the Apostolic Order activity was hindered to a large extent; mostly they were restricted to maintaining the parish, but a few were permitted to run a publishing business. Only after the year 1989 could they return to execute their own monastic charismas (KWPZ).

In addition, a similar situation was evident in 114 sisterhoods (including fourteen seclusion), twenty-two thousand sisters in total still live there (data for year 2003). Mostly, they fulfilled duties as catechists, vestries or nurses. Currently, an increasing number of them undertake advanced studies, which shows that sisterhoods return to their own charisma. Laics wishing to deepen their spiritual life get involved in various associations, mostly those which operate in parishes. Nearly 2.5 million Catholics belong to them (Statistical Institute of the Catholic Church 2006).

The most numerous are the traditional pious brotherhoods, the various rosary groups, to which over 1.3 million people belong. The Immaculate Knighthood assembled by Franciscan St. Maximilian Kolbe, enjoys great popularity. Its first aim was the prayers for free-

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masons and heretics. At present, the members pray also for atheists and the religiously indifferent, but the main accent is laid on Marian piety. It possesses fifty thousand members in Polish parishes. Reactivated Catholic Action can be also regarded as a traditional organization group, which possesses thirty-seven thousand members, trying to propagate Christian values in public life. A new group of Catholics based on traditional religiosity is the Radio Maryja Family Circle society, established because of its inspiration—which possesses almost nineteen thousand members.

The Light-Life Movement, possessing fifty-three thousand members, was created during the 1950s; it is the most numerous among the new movements, formed on the wave of council opening. Initially, it was conceived as a liturgical animation service, afterwards it widened its activity to include older youths and their families. It has written out a formational program for many years containing liturgy, strictly rooted in the bible. In the 1970s, a charismatic movement (Catholic Charismatic Renewal) also appeared in Poland, alongside the first communities of the Neo-catechumenal Way. At present, around twenty-two thousand people belong to this movement.

In contrast to the traditional piety-based organizations, the above mentioned renewal movements, although recently very popular, met with antagonistic reception from church hierarchies. Even Priest Blachnicki, the founder of the quite traditional Light-Life Movement, had to repulse numerous accusations. In these times the Polish Church was a typical *ecclesia militans*, which consolidated both its hierocratic features. As Weber largely described it, hierocracies manifest distrust and hostility towards new charismatic movements (e.g. prophetic), which returns to where we started. These movements, because of their structure (which I call hagiocratic), seem to question the fundamentals of the role of hierocracy in official charisma. The Renewal in Holy Spirit, whose communities were born of secular initiatives, constantly had to work especially hard to maintain decent relations with the local hierarchy representatives. As I have mentioned, in communist times, the major accusations against new religious movements were their protestant origin, excessive involvement in ecumenism and disobedience. The very important stimulus for the interrelation



arrangement with the hierarchy was Pope John Paul II's support for youth movements, his being the unquestioned authority for the whole Polish Church. Nowadays, the position of these movements seems to be stable, and its role appreciated (mainly as an effective form of youth attraction to the faith). It has to be noted that fairly frequently hierarchy fears about the charismatic renovation have been vindicated. It seems that in the new form, it recreates some of the folk Catholicism features: emotionality, miracularity and what is more painful to hierocracy, and independence. In at least a dozen or more cases, it appears that the communities were detached from the Catholic Church (Siemieniewski 2005).

## IV

Religious freedom in Poland is not only freedom to be Catholic, in the practices as outlined above, but there are non-Catholic religions too. The nine confessions have lawful status by virtue of a separate resolution and 149 smaller groups have been officially registered as a confessional confederation or association; and the others do not want to adopt official status. The Christian confession set the majority (2/3) of the registered groups, but there are also several Buddhist organizations and a few of Hindu, Judaic, Muslim, Neo-Pagan and esoteric organizations as well (MSWiA 2008).

Nevertheless, the confessional minority is a group, which represents only a small percentage of the Polish society (no more than 3%, Doktór and Borowik 2001), and their situation is not easy. Poles are very proud of their traditional tolerance. Since the fourteenth century, Poland had given the guarantee of freedom of belief for all dissidents. It is necessary to mention Paul from Włodkowice who represented Poland during the Council of Constance (1414–1418). He was the courageous defender of Jan Hus and considered the possibility of a peaceful co-existence of the two groups—pagans and Christians. In the sixteenth century, the gentry voted for the resolution of the renunciation of intolerance in religious matters and acceptance of the emancipation of believers of all religions, and consequently many heretics and Jews who were displaced, came to Poland from different countries in Europe (Poland was called a *paradisus Judeorum*). Contemporary

Poland at that time was defined as “the state without stakes,” and was known as an “asylum for heretics.” Later, during the period of the Counter Reformation, and the collapse of the state, Polish tolerance did not advance, but the conviction regarding tolerance did not change. Besides, a xenophobic approach never spread through wider social circles. The same point has been forced by the denominational structures. Before World War II, the minority in Poland presented only 35% (GUS 1991).

After World War II, as a result of the Yalta Conference, Poland became a mono-denominational and mono-ethnic country. The Catholic Church was accustomed to its monopoly, and the ideological war conducted with the communist party established hostile attitudes in relation to “otherwise thinkers.” Regaining independence in 1989 indicated on the one hand the liberalization of the denominational and greater religious freedom, but on the other hand, freedom to fight the religious opponents during a time of competition and struggle.

After 1989, liberal legislative solutions were established, enabling the denominational union registration on the basis of a fifteen-member list. As a result many movements which in communist times operated in concealment, decided to legalize their activity. The impression at the beginning of the 1990s, was of a perceptible eruption of new religions, originating partly from abroad, and only just starting their activity. However, the majority were already established in the 1980s, when communist authorities perceived them as competitors to their main enemy—the Catholic Church.

In the year 1997, the regulations became tougher (one hundred signatures are now required), yet in comparison with the French or German solutions, they are still liberal. Few attempts of low input notations against “sects” (this term defines “cults” in Poland) or “psycho-manipulations” however, ended up with failure, mainly because of the terminological difficulties. In the mid 1990s French offices appointed to contest the sects, undertook attempts to establish co-operation and to inspire Polish authorities to undertake similar restrictive precautions regarding the freedom of denomination. The inter-resort team was appointed, but limited its activities to publishing a special report. The “sects” hostile report showed however that only isolated

cases of the low infringements could be related to their activity (Doktór 2005).

If there is no suspicion of breaking the law, basically legal institutions shrink from interference in the denominational sphere. On a central level, religious freedom is fundamentally guaranteed, which is also visible in judicial processes won by some of the new religions, defending themselves against labelling them with the “Sect” term. A worse situation is visible on a local level, where new religions very often meet considerable difficulties from local authorities. It prevents them from building their own cult objects, renting halls or participation in public events. This particularly concerns activists of the rightist parties, which often perceive the defence of the monopolistic Catholic Church position on its area as their duty (Pasek 2005).

Primarily the Church has had an antagonistic attitude towards unfamiliar denominations, and only after some time has this attitude evolved (which is a general process in the Church initiated by the international Catholic Universities Federation research program about new religious movements, enabling more adequate views into that problem). A more balanced point of view is visible in religious pluralism; not only in reluctance to the threat but in the pastoral challenge and dialogue. In this aspect local politicians are further ahead, than what we see coming from Church education.

They also yield to the strong pressure of local society, or rather its representatives, regarding anti-cult organizational activists. These movements, in definite majority, try to hide their denominational character and lay claims to the objectivism. Mostly the initiators are laic members of a dominating Church, who come from the most fanatic personification “born again” charismatic youth movements or a belligerent member of traditionalistic party (militant Church). However, the secular movement is definitely the most radical, rounding up family members involved in new religions or accusing them of being in contact with them. Both in name (The Defence Movement of the Family, and The Individual) are links like the ideology of the radical French anticult organizations.

New Religious Movements and Sects Information Centres set up by the Dominican Order in the main Polish cities have a more balanced

character. Admittedly, they are anti-cult in the main, however their attitude gradually evolves in teaching like in *Dignitatis humanae*. This is the only anti-cult organization open for a dialogue with the academics, whose effects are visible through the organized science conferences, with the participation of neutral oriented researchers. Its representatives' statements are characterized by greater flexibility and caution in judgement.

The mass media is also considered as a very important voice of society, and sects are a very popular topic. Where religion is somehow connected with sex, money, crime and child abuse is extremely attractive to journalists who are ready to listen to such opinions about sects. Hence, the symbiotic mutual dependence between anti-sects organization and mass media. Those organizations collect information from the ex-members of new religions, particularly aggressively acting against their previous religious beliefs, because such persons are looking for their support and then pass their information to the mass media, then on to other anti-cult activities due to the mass media news. Characteristically, they rarely refer to or concern themselves with theological arguments, forming the accusations in the language of human rights, supported by rather dubious psychology. They often try to decrease the religious aspect of these groups' activity, using terms such as pseudo-religion, para-religion, psycho-manipulating group (most *implicitly* assume that there is just one religion deserving of existence, namely their own, where mostly out of fear before the accusation of restricting religious freedom or initiating religious strife). The accusation, which actually appears with no proof in every Press report on "Sects," is followed by the accusation of brainwashing and psycho-manipulation. It even took place as recently as in the year 2007, in which a serious case occurred that shook public opinion when one of the Betaness Convents' communities under the leadership of a charismatic sister-superior, acting through her personal revelations, caused a revolt against the church authorities. The media instantly started speculating if we deal with the sect, and the psychologists' experts stated that sisters had been brainwashed and subjected to long-term psycho-manipulation.

At which point does the media show where the Polish people stand? Researches show that many Poles have been convinced of the fact that

Sects are a huge threat (53%–60%), that their presence can possibly cause something bad (76%) and that their activity should be forbidden (61% states that all sects, 83% just those breaking the law). However, for the correct interpretation of these results, the question—which movements' respondents as sects—are considering—should be answered. It seems that just towards one group—Satanists—nearly everyone is agreeable (94%). It is worthwhile to point out that satanic youth gangs are the only groups in Poland which are involved in serious crimes; in a traditional Christian country naming somebody as a Satan worshipper implies in an informal language the desire to cause evil, and the breaking of social values. In contrast to what Poles think about anti-cult centres, the definite majority of them do not consider Jehovah Witnesses or Krishna followers as sects; it is interesting to note that Jehovah's Witnesses are considered to be even more emotional and friendly Christians than Catholics (Libiszowska-Żółtkowska 2003, 365–383).

In other words: Poles are just afraid of sects which break the law, and are supporters of resolving the position of the state towards them. At the same time 92% state that everyone should have the right to believe in the religion he or she wants.

The above mentioned divisions form the religious engraving of the religious landscape in Poland, (among the militant and open church being socially involved, the elite and folk church, in frames of folk church between passive and active church, finally among the major religions and minorities); happily they are not the ordinary lines of the ideological war front. Even, when it happens, the conflict gradually leads to a better understanding and consideration of a different perspective in self-world perception.

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