

How Does Religion Matter Today in Poland? Secularization in Europe and the 'Causa Polonia Semper Fidelis'

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Arnold, M. (2012). How Does Religion Matter Today in Poland? Secularization in Europe and the 'Causa Polonia Semper Fidelis'. In M. Arnold, & P. Łukasik (Eds.), *Europe and America in the Mirror: Culture, Economy, and History* (pp. 199-238). Krakau: Nomos. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-337806>

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How Does Religion Matter Today in Poland? Secularization in Europe and the 'Causa Polonia Semper Fidelis'

MAIK ARNOLD

Introduction

The religious vitality of the Polish Roman Catholic Church in the public sphere is apparent to almost everybody who spends even a short time in Poland. Whereas in other regions of Europe churches and churchgoers must be actively sought, in Poland one can find innumerable parishes, communities, and places of prayer or worship in the immediate vicinity in both urban and rural areas. Despite bold changes resulting from the on-going processes of industrialization, modernization, and secularization, the defeat of communism, urban development, economic crises, historical expulsion, and forced migration, one can still witness the emblematic European principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* (one territory, one religion) which was established by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Demonstrably, church attendance remains at a very high level. Every Sunday and several times a week one can follow people, young and old, on the pilgrimage to the Holy Mass in one of the many churches in any neighborhood. After entering the church, one would see many believers in Sunday dress bowing to the altar, dropping a curtsy and making the sign of the cross. Ritual religiosity is very common and church services still reflect the different stages of life: from baptism and first communion to marriage and funerals. In urban churches, believers are often in the rush to come into and leave the church soon afterwards. The motives of the churchgoers can differ significantly: some only stay for a prayer or the celebration

of the Eucharist, others attach importance to the confession of sins. It is also striking that both in the vicinity of Christian communities or around churches and in public places many events with a religious impetus are celebrated. In some cases, it is apparent that the charismatic Pope John Paul II lives on and remains an integral part of commemorations of the transition process in Poland after World War II. In the last few years it has become a collective habit to commemorate the anniversary of his death on 2 April, although it is not very easy to determine whether this remembrance of the former pope is a simple sign of belief in God or the adoration and veneration of the earthly representative of Christ as a saint. Of course, there are also regional variations and more secularized milieus. In some districts close to the German border, in the Northern regions (e.g., Warmińsko-Mazurskie) and in the centre of the country (e.g., Warsaw) religious fervor is weaker and, in many intellectual circles, an increasing number of people orientate themselves – against their tradition – towards the role model of European secularism. Although the vast majority of young people support their Polish-Christian cultural and national heritage, there also exists a growing number of people who have steadily converted to secular attitudes that are seen as more fashionable, timely, and practical for a ‘postmodern’ worldview. Nevertheless, in Poland, one tends to observe a higher degree of religiosity than in any other European country and region.

These findings from everyday experience are also borne out by social science research, although it is difficult to measure religiosity either accurately or validly.¹ Generally, the religious situation in Europe reflects anything but a clear, consistent, and optimistic prognosis for the process of progressive secularization. Contrary to the common belief of various scholars in religious sciences that religion is becoming more and more a private matter and vanishing from public sphere (Luckmann 1967).

¹ Non-standardized methodical approaches are rare but paramount to the identification of individual religious orientations and beliefs, expectations and experiences in biographical contexts and everyday life. As can be expected, religiosity in Poland, however, is characterized by a wide range of variations in belief systems, quasi-theological explanations, and specific forms of ‘belief in God’ or any other transcendental authority or power, life after death, etc. The key question is here not the number of believers who tend to express their religiosity in the surveyed categories, but the quality of their faith with regard to life practices.

José Casanova² (2007) suggests that in Europe different religions and philosophies of life are steadily and continuously attempting to obtain a public presence (on the concept of ‘Public Religions’, see Casanova 1994). Unlike many Western European societies, which are suspected of advancing secularization, Roman Catholicism in Poland has experienced an ‘extraordinary revival’ since WWII (Casanova 2003: 56). The case of *Polonia* is not only a necessary restriction and a counter-example to the commonly adopted theses of secularization in Europe, but can also be considered as a reflection of its ‘social irrelevance’ (Casanova 2007: 322). The *causa Polonia* is an exception to the rule amongst the so-called Eastern European post-communist transition countries.³ Moreover, it even represents the thesis of a pan-European process of secularization as a ‘*self-fulfilling prophecy*’ (Casanova 2003: 61) that serves both as cause and consequence of the process of religious profanation. This means that religion is not becoming redundant in itself or is it losing its explicatory power, but it is affected by the conversion to the new belief of a decline of religion in human daily life and the whole of society.

The only diagnosis we can make at the moment is that religious orientations in Poland – as in other parts of Europe – are mired in an enduring and incomplete process of transformation, especially if we look at everyday life, family values, national or political awareness, and career aspirations. Since classical secularization theory cannot ultimately provide – particularly because of its bias to a specific historical development and background – a universal, generally acceptable or viable explanation of the special historical and religious developments in Poland, other theoretical and empirical approaches are imperative. One question remains, however: how does religion matter today in Polish society? In this paper it is suggested that religion matters a lot and more

² The presented considerations are motivated by several excellent articles of José Casanova (e.g., 1994, esp.: 92-113; 2003; 2007) who critically pursued the development of secularization theory for several years and is a renowned specialist in the religious landscape of Europe (and Poland). He affirms that the paradigm of ‘deprivatization’ (1994) needs to be scrutinized not only in terms of the sociology of religion, but also from comparative cultural and historical perspectives.

³ In a sense, the secularization process in Europe can be regarded as ‘an exceptional case’ (Davie 2002), although this hypothesis is hazardous, because it could imply a universal pattern of global secularization.

than we expect, not only in Poland, but also in the rest of Europe, which is not a prevailing view in the literature. It will be argued that Polish people might even fulfill a special role in cultural, religious, and political affairs in Europe. Poland could mediate in the integration process of the European Union and it can rely on its own historical experiences and cultural heritage to falsify the idea that secularization would be a natural consequence of modernization. Against this background, the following considerations are based on the more specialized question of how and what cultural, historical, socio-cultural, and religious changes have resulted in today's high percentage of Polish believers committed to Roman Catholicism (hereafter Catholicism or Catholic).

The answer to this question is divided into three parts. First, a description of the religious situation in Europe with regard to the specific case of Poland will be given which relies on more or less meaningful and convincing empirical secondary data. We concentrate on possible explanations from the sociology of religion and cultural history that help us to understand the current situation at the beginning of the 21st Century. Thereafter, different elements of the Polish 'cultural (historical) memory' (Assmann 2002) will be investigated and scrutinized regarding their significance in the process of understanding and explaining current religious developments. Finally, it will also be necessary to undertake a *re-reading* (discussed in Casanova's essay [2003: 58]) of the argument of Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek (former secretary-general of the Polish Bishops' Conference and rector of the Pontifical Academy in Krakow) – namely that the integration of 'the Catholic Poland in the post-Christian Europe' (Casanova 2003: 58) can be understood as a 'great apostolic assignment for the church' (Stadtmüller 2000: 36) and a missionary effort.

The Religious Situation in Europe and the Exceptional Case of Poland: Evidence from the Sociology of Religion

Secularization and Sacralization in Polish Society

Previous studies on secularization in Europe have shown that the religious situation is far from homogeneous. Different (religious) belief systems

clash. Measured in terms of belief in God, higher powers or authorities, countries of ‘over-secularization’ like East Germany, Czech Republic, Russia, France, and some Scandinavian countries, can be distinguished from those of ‘sub-secularism’ like Cyprus, Ireland, and Poland (Casanova 2003: 60). These extraordinary religious differences could be explained by the classical mapping method of Christian denominational cultures (cf. Graf 2006: 26): Catholic countries (except France) tend to have higher rates on the scale of religious orientation and beliefs than countries with strong religious pluralism and ‘recognized Protestantism’ (e.g., West Germany and Switzerland) or ‘minority Protestantism’ (e.g., France and the Netherlands). A similar description is provided in the religio-sociological analyses by Andrew M. Greeley (2003) that are based, like most others, on data from the “European Value Study” (Inglehart, Basañez and Moreno 1998) and the “International Social Survey Program” (Haller, Jowell and Smith 2009). A weaker religiosity is evident in the formerly communist (transition) countries of Central and Eastern Europe (except Poland, Latvia, and Slovakia), Scandinavia, and the Netherlands. With the decline of communist ideology, religious belief in Europe – as one might suspect – is not absent. On the contrary, it has proved to be resistant with a stable orientation and has even, in some parts, experienced revitalization (such as in Russia and Ukraine). Most (social) democratic countries such as Great Britain and West Germany (!) are in the middle of the religiosity scale. A comparison of the maximum differences between the traditionally Catholic Poland and East Germany, where even after the end of the communist era atheist and agnostic attitudes can be found, shows neither a wicked nor too godly, neither a believing nor an incredulous Europe.

In this regard, Poland has distinctive characteristics that need to be considered in detail. Although the post-communist transformation process brought significant changes to the Catholic Church even 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the official end of the communist era, it remains the largest religious, moral, and social institution, with a majority of over 90% of the population (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 3-4). The religious situation in Poland is characterized by religious monism rather than pluralism, although missionaries of various religious communities from India and the Middle East and Protestants from

Europe and North America are currently very active (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 12). Faith is still an important part of life. These special features can be extrapolated from various official statistics compiled between 1990 and 2005 and based to some extent on less accurate estimates: the number of religious minorities remains at approximately the same level, the number of members of the Catholic Church has decreased since the mid-1990s, but remains high in absolute numbers, the group of non-believers has risen from 2.6% (1990) to 8.0% (2005) and the importance of Catholic teaching to one's own moral behavior has begun to diminish (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 4, 16). On the basis of this statistical evidence, we can affirm that the process of increasing secularization has led to changes of religious orientations and beliefs in Polish society, which can be attributed to factors such as:

the separation of Church and state in 1945, the secularization of many national institutions such as public schools, declining attendance at Sunday Mass, (...) decreasing numbers of Church approved marriages and funerals, and smaller numbers of candidates at seminaries and religious orders (...) up to the late 1990s. (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 5)

Whereas ecclesial sacraments such as baptisms are less frequently utilized and the number of participants that accomplish church ceremonies (so-called *dominicantes*) steadily decreases, the number of people who celebrate Holy Communion has even risen (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 6-7). Significant cyclical variations occurred during the Solidarity movement (*Solidarność*) in the 1980s and following the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II. Catholic Poland today faces two major developments: "(1) a general religious trend, and (2) a Catholic-national trend, which aims to maintain the 'Messianic tradition of the Polish nation'" (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 11). The importance of national-religious identity, historical tradition, and dissemination and propagation of beliefs in the context of Poland's entry into the European Union, where the Catholic Church has played an important role, is considered at the end of this article.

Other distinctions between the various areas of life where religious beliefs, values, and convictions play an important role are measured in the most recent cross-cultural religio-sociological analysis of the

“Religion Monitor” survey (Zarzycka 2008). In accordance with the aforementioned studies and other church statistics (cf. Gautier 1997; Kaluza 2010; Szawiel 2007), we have, over many years, experienced statistically firm evidence that more than 95% of the adult population (aged 18 to 70) in Poland believe in God and are members of the Roman Catholic Church in a traditional, cultural, and historical ever-present sense. This means that, for a large proportion of them, religious practices are important: in contrast to this image, however, “a large proportion of the population not only doubts the Church’s teaching, but largely ignores – or at least highly relativizes – the obligations the Church has defined for individual believers” (Zarzycka 2008: 201). The intensity and quality of subjective response to religiosity and spirituality is highly correlated to age and gender, and the centrality of religiosity is, so far, “stable and immune to secularization” (Zarzycka 2008: 207): “the older the respondent, the more connected he or she feels to his or her religion” (*ibidem*) and “the most often he or she has [theistic – M.A.] spiritual experiences” (Zarzycka 2008: 202), especially in the group of ‘highly religious’ people, with highest level of significance for women. Religion is an important area and value of individual life, after family and childrearing, partnership, essential family-related events, occupation, education, and leisure time (Zarzycka 2008: 205): “What is surprising is the limited impact it has on political attitudes (...) and sexual morality” (Zarzycka 2008: 218). The variable ‘centrality and content of religiosity’ that is one of the main criteria in this survey reveals three striking findings: (a) tenets and dogmas of faith are accepted almost without dispute in their traditional form and are expressed in both public and private ritualism (because of socialization in Catholic family); (b) only “few respondents rethink their own beliefs” and “on an individual level, belief as a concept is developed only to a limited extent”, which means that believers have only a weak belief that is easily put in dispute with other viewpoints; (c) there is no evidence that emotional experience and values could provide a basis for individual beliefs which means that fundamental religious attitudes overshadow charismatic tendencies (Zarzycka 2008: 210-211). Furthermore, the ‘concept of God’ dear to Polish Catholics can be characterized as ‘melting pot’ that consists of either theistic or pantheistic elements and perceives ‘God’ as either

a personal authority or “energy flowing through everything” (Zarzycka 2008: 212). In this way, believers make selective use of different aspects of religiosity, and religious conviction and belief in God’s existence, personal prayer, churchiness, and obeying religious-ethical commandments are the most important features (Zarzycka 2008: 214). While consciously tolerating other religious faiths, traditions, and ‘truths’, “it seems that Polish society is transitioning from unity to pluralism” (Zarzycka 2008: 216), and the Catholic Church is no longer regarded as the sole owner of the ultimate truth. As Zarzycka (2008: 221) concludes, from a psychological perspective,⁴ the findings in the “Religion Monitor” survey show a slightly incoherent and ambivalent image of religiosity in Poland: on the one hand, religion is an important part of life, but on the other hand, the gap “between established tenets of faith and how believers interpret them, as well as belief and behavior” and between lifestyle and ‘ecclesiastical teaching’ is increasing. In addition, there is a “tendency for individuals to develop private, selective systems of belief” (Zarzycka 2008: 221), against the background of new and foreign religious movements and traditions. In consequence, believers do not always find appropriate interpretations in all areas of everyday life, but the Catholic Church is still regarded as the last stronghold and cultural treasure for a few basic beliefs and religious values: “Only with difficulty can this ‘privatized’ religion (...) be referred to as Catholicism” (Zarzycka 2008: 221).

Secularization in Poland and East Germany from a Comparative Perspective

In a comparative perspective with Casanova (2009), it can be argued that at least two ideal types of secularization narratives could be distinguished that serve as descriptions of the relationship between the religious sphere and the dynamics and developments in modern

⁴ The study of the psychology of religion in Poland tended – as at other European universities – to be sidelined, although there were many attempts to construct typologies of individual religiosity, e.g., in the psychological research tradition of Władysław Dawid that is closely linked to William James’ concept of mystical states of consciousness (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 1991).

societies. First, there is a critical irreligious ‘secularist-laicist’ story of the “emancipation of the secular from religion” (Casanova 2009: 9), which aims at liberating people from the supreme power of churches and clergy (e.g., the French model). Second, as an alternative there is also the narrative of pluralism (e.g., the model in the US) that ought to guarantee no patronization of religious affairs either on a state level or on an individual level of practicing one’s own religion as “affirmation of the secular for the sake of religion” (Casanova 2009: 9). In other words, these two types of stories of how religion-state-relations or church-state-relations could be characterized differ in their explanatory style of either pluralism (mutual and equal coexistence) or exclusivism (denying other positions). Nevertheless, there is a third story of secularization that has taken place in Poland: a synoptic understanding of secular development between both religious tolerance and the idea of contentious and continuous religious interference in the relation of state and church, society, and religion. Although Casanova does not discuss it in his article, he does assert that “the concept of *aggiornamento* may be a better or more appropriate concept than modernization” (Casanova 2009: 18). That means: as much as Poland takes part in the process of modernization, without abolishing or abandoning religion from the public sphere, but “bringing up to date, making traditions relevant to the present: (...) [o]ne can be a good Pole, a good European feminist mother, a good modern Catholic, and there’s no intrinsic contradiction in being all three things at once” (Casanova 2009: 18). Poland is still a country with a strong mainline church, but regards religious tolerance as part of national and religious identity. Finally, none of these three secularization narratives fits the situation of East Germany. In this contrasting case, the secular church-state relations have developed from historical structural conflicts that are attributed to the religious laity (Karstein et al. 2006).

Next, the last two secularist narratives using the example of Poland and East Germany (the former GDR) will be compared as regards values in religiosity, based on the study of Greeley (2003) (see Table 1). These neighboring states experienced heavy pressure under the communist dictatorship, but reacted differently to it. As we will see, contrasting these data and relationships with the religious situation in Europe complements not only the wide-ranging and uniquely perceived variety of

religiosity in Europe but also the fact that Europe as an ‘exceptional case’ (Davie 2002) can only fit classical secularization theory because of several exceptions to the rule.

Table 1: Religious change in Poland and East Germany, by country and year

	Poland		East Germany	
	1991	1998	1991	1998
Religion, belief, experience				
Believe in God	94%	95%	24%	26%
Atheist	2%	2%	49%	54%*
Caring God	73%	74%	14%	16%
Miracles	53%	66%	40%	38%
Life after death	74%	78%*	14%	15%
Heaven	76%	78%	20%	24%*
Religious experience	16%		10%	
Church attendance, religious practice				
Church attendance frequently	67%	61%*	4%	(flawed item)
Church attendance never	3%	5%	60%	(flawed item)
Prayer several times a month	79%	78%	12%	13%
Importance of the institutional church				
Church has too much power	61%	60%	34%	37%
Confidence in church	33%	40%*	26%	16%*
No religious affiliation	3%	6%*	64%	69%*
Religious affiliation loss since childhood	5%		46%	
Second generation with no religious affiliation	5%		48%	

Note: Data adopted from Greeley (2003: 126-127); the items ‘church attendance several times/never’, ‘religious experiences’ and ‘second generation/from childhood with no religious affiliation’ are adopted from Casanova (2007: 352-357) based on the same source, but no year specified.

In order to understand these data, it is necessary to distinguish between different levels of analysis (cf. Casanova 2007: 324-332):

(1) religion, faith and spiritual experiences (values: believe in God, atheist, caring God, miracles, life after death, heaven); (2) church attendance and religious practice; (3) the importance of the institutional church (values: power, trust, non-affiliation).

Religion, Belief, and Spiritual Experience

The most noticeable difference is shown in the variable ‘believe in God’: whereas over 90% of the population in Poland describe themselves as religious, in East Germany, however, only about a quarter do so, so it is not surprising that there is also a large majority (54%) of people with atheist orientations. The same is true for Europe as a whole, with East Germany being the leader in terms of non-believers (followed by Czech Republic with about 20%). A striking aspect is this: although a significantly higher percentage of the population in many European countries agrees to the belief in (religious) miracles instead of a caring God (God cares for me; see e.g., East Germany), Poland is – along with Ireland, Denmark, and some Eastern European transition countries – one of the few exceptions to the rule, where we observe the reverse. Indeed, the belief in miracles in the Catholic Poland has increased according to amount in recent years and will continue to rise, but the concept of a caring God is still prevalent. Nevertheless, Polish people still adhere to traditional Christian beliefs and the values of a caring God, life after death, and a just heaven (Zarzycka 2008: 207). Not surprisingly, East Germany shows the opposite picture that seems to correspond with the European average, although at lower levels than in Poland: The belief in miracles amongst East Germans has decreased slightly, but there are still nearly twice as many believers in a caring God, afterlife, or heaven. Greeley aptly notes: “If only a quarter of all East Germans believe in God, but approximately 40% of them claim (religious) miracles for themselves as an individual religiosity”, we could really ask, “who causes [then – M.A.] the religious miracles if there is no God. Or perhaps the question should be who is the God in whom East Germans do not believe” (Greeley 2003: 126). Furthermore, the number of people who tell us about individual religiosity – as formulated in the variable ‘religious experience’ – is low all over

Europe, but in absolute numbers still higher than for atheists – with the exception of East Germany:

East Germany is again lowest. Only 10% of the population has made a deep religious experience or experienced religious transcendence. But surprisingly, this is not very far from the values in most European countries and of such in religious countries like Ireland and Poland where only 13% or 16% of them made these personal experiences. (Casanova 2007: 325 – transl. M.A.)

In terms of the degree of secularization, therefore, we can conclude that in Poland – as in most European countries – the majority has preserved its belief in God, albeit at the lowest level in East Germany. The intensity of individual religiosity is, on the other hand, expectedly low: the population of Europe can be assessed in large part as secular and non-religious. With respect to the tendency of increasing growth rates, there is “probably a clearer sign of a strong hope and transcendence, even in secularized Europe” (Casanova 2007: 325 – trans. M.A.).

Church Attendance and Religious Practice

In line with other sociological studies and church statistics, Greeley (2003) replicated in his survey the declining number of churchgoers in recent decades, which is generally regarded as an indicator of secularization in Europe (Casanova 2007: 326). Poland is one of the few countries (along with Ireland and Switzerland) in which church attendance is linked to regularity. Only a small percentage of respondents stated that they had never been to church (somewhat difficult to avoid, we may say, in many regions of Poland). In contrast, people in East Germany (and in some Scandinavian countries) either do not go regularly or never go to church. These percentages correspond with the average (!) and are in a single-digit range with a downward trend, although a higher participation can be expected at special church festivals (Kirchenamt der EKD 2011). This statement also reflects to some extent the religious situation in Europe. There are, however:

highly significant differences in terms of church attendance in Europe between Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims. The Catholics have the highest values in church attendance (43%) and the lowest percentage of people who

never go to church (12%), while the Orthodox have the lowest percentage of regular churchgoers (only 8%) and a significantly higher proportion of those that never go to church (25%). Amongst Protestants, 25% go regularly and 21% never. Amongst European Muslims, there are high values for the mosque visit (40%), but also a high proportion of those who never go (29%), which can only be understood because of the fact that the presence at the Friday prayer is not a traditional requirement for the Muslims, but has become conventional. (Casanova 2007: 326-327 – transl. M.A.)

This decreasing number of church attendances in most of Europe (in Poland it is still at a high level of about 61%) is often considered as historical evidence for the traditional secularization theory that is essentially a modernization theory. In fact, in recent decades we have been experiencing more or less dramatic declines in religiousness, which could be attributed, on the one hand – and in the sense of ‘religious market theory’⁵ – to the inadequate or even absent voluntary nature of community building of religious groups and to the shift from ‘territorial national churches’ to religious economies that are marked by competitive peaceful coexistence and competition of various denominations and confessions in a ‘civil society’ (as in the US) (Casanova 2007: 327). On the other hand, it is not very convincing in explaining either the high degree of religiosity in Poland as a monopolistic market or the notion of declining religiosity in East Germany, as Karstein et al. argued:

Due to the logic of the religious market model, after the overthrow of the political regime of SED (Socialist Unity Party of [former East] Germany – M.A.) a gradual revitalization of religion and churchiness would have been expected, since the political restrictions and the high costs of lived religion had decreased, and religious suppliers could bring their products to the market with relatively no constraints. (Karstein et al. 2006: 442 – transl. M.A.)

Furthermore, the authors explained that conflicting power structures in the process of secularization in East Germany are apparently neglected in both the classical secularization theory and the religious market model: religious-political conflict structures were ‘internalized’ in the long run and were not only ‘imposed from outside’ (Karstein et al. 2006: 443). Instead:

⁵ Cf. Iannacone, Finke and Stark (1996). For the case of Poland and East Germany see Hann (2000) and Froese and Pfaff (2009).

The church policy of the SED (...) was successful, because of the fact that the hereby induced conflict between politics and religion (and between religion and science) were not only experienced as an external constraint, but had become subjective plausibility for significant parts of the population and could only develop because of effects of power distance. (Karstein et al. 2006: 443 – transl. M.A.)

Moreover, Casanova advises against a modernization theoretical conception – according to which the European secularization process is an irreversible “slow, cumulative, and progressive decline” (2007: 328 – trans. M.A.) and seen as a necessity for a comprehensive modernization on all levels of a society – to look rather to the (conflicting) historical “dynamics of state, church, and nation” (2007: 329 – trans. M.A.) that is engraved in the collective, cultural, and historical commemoration process in Europe.⁶ Although it will not be discussed here, we could refer to the excellent comparative historical analysis of Casanova (2007: 334-342), who argued that the patterns of secularization not only substantially differ in a global perspective but also in Western Latin Christianity. Thus, he relates the dynamic tensions and conflicts between church, state, and sects (e.g., investiture controversy and Protestant reformation) in Latin Christianity and the impacts of European enlightenment movements’ criticism of religion to the specific (West-) European process of institutionalization and transformation. As Casanova noted: an explanation of the “exceptional character of European secularism” can be sought in the fact that “churches and other institutions, as far as they had surrogated their traditional historical function as community cult to the nation state, also lost their ability to act as the religion of redemption” (2007: 342 – trans. M.A.).

The religious practice of faith could not be more different in these two countries. Whereas, in Poland, personal (and public) prayer is valued much more (the second highest in Europe), in East Germany personal prayer has little or no importance. The growing trend in the value ‘prayer several times a month’ in East Germany can be interpreted as a “partial religious opening in the youngest age groups” (Karstein et al. 2006: 442 – trans. M.A.). In Europe as a whole, worship and prayer practices seem

⁶ For a marvelous critique of this idea of secularization see the excellent analyses by David Martin (1978; 2005).

to be more important than personal religious experiences. If we attempt to establish a link between the intensity of individual religiosity and the number of church attendances or religious practices, then the following argument is salient: both Poland and East Germany fit statistically within the general, typical European pattern of ‘believing without belonging’ as identified by Grace Davie (2000). Therefore, the values for individual religious belief are relatively high, in a situation of relatively and absolutely low regular church attendances (for East Germany, the lowest).

The Importance of the Institutional Church

As expected, the percentage of those who claim no church affiliation for themselves is – compared with the European average – at the lowest level in Poland (along with Ireland) and highest in East Germany. In contrast, it is obvious that in Poland about 94% and in East Germany about 30% of people are nominal members of a church. This special relationship between faith and religion reveals in the case of East Germany a rather different picture: there is a greater tendency to religious affiliation (30%) and simultaneously a lesser degree of individual religiosity (e.g., in terms of ‘believe in God’ 26%). Additionally, in the case of East Germany we need to assume a radical break in the development of the church figures in the second half of the 20th Century (Karstein et al. 2006):

The high percentage of those who have lost their religious affiliation since childhood (...) shows that the collapse was almost a matter of a single generation. But in East Germany and the Czech Republic we observe a second generation of people not attached to a church who add to the number of the first generation that grew up irreligiously (48% in East Germany). (Casanova 2007: 328 – transl. M.A.)

This evidence seems to correspond more with the concept of ‘belonging without believing’ espoused by Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2004). There is a relatively small percentage of the East German population that is willing to continue to pay taxes on a regular basis for church membership without attending services regularly (Casanova 2007: 320; Davie 2000: 3). In our comparison, unlike Poland, where ‘strong identification’ in religious terms correlates with ‘high participation’ (Casanova 2007: 330), East Germany shows the ‘representative role of religion’ (Davie

2000: 60), where “an active minority is representative and exercises religion for the entire population, with the understanding, even the consent, of the majority” (Casanova 2007: 330-331 – trans. M.A.).

Cultural Memory and the Process of Commemorating the National Heritage of Polish History: A Narrative Historical Analysis

The history of Christianity in Poland⁷ is inextricably linked to three historical experiences, events, and developments that serve here as placeholders for cultural-historical memory and religious-historical positioning of the exceptional case ‘Polonia semper fidelis’ (Casanova 1994: 92; Davies 2005: 125).⁸ As any kind of historical narrative is bound to point to social practice and its meaning as well as to the context of its composition, they are selective constructions of social reality. No symbolic representation of human existence, no story, history, or chronicle, can be separated or distinguished from the real life it represents.⁹ There are many reasons for this. Thus, each narrated historical representation is part of a whole construction and content that, by its very nature, can neither be represented nor understood in its entirety (Straub and Arnold 2009). Indeed, the full detail of a story or history is neither possible to grasp nor would this be useful. In historical paintings and photographs, the composer depicts or focuses on only one or a few episodes of history at a time; others are told in another work or not at all, but never all or

⁷ The presentation of religiously significant events in a thousand years of Polish history has been deliberately omitted here. A good overview of the history of Christianity in Poland can be found in Jerzy Kloczowski (2000) and in Norman Davies (2005, especially pp.125-155).

⁸ The historical reconstructions here are based largely on the ideas of José Casanova (e.g., 1994; 2003) and Norman Davies (2005), who have submitted the most convincing analyses so far with regard to religious developments in Poland.

⁹ The interpretation of formal aesthetic and structural meanings of sceneries and chains of social practice, relatedness, and relationships in specific historical contexts and as variously represented in paintings and photographic works is excellently elaborated by Ralf Bohnsack’s analysis method (e.g., 2007a; 2009) that has its foundations in Erwin Panofsky’s iconological interpretation and Max Imdahl’s iconographic-iconological method.

the entire history. For the purposes of modern narrative historiography, the hereafter-selected historical narratives are analyzed in terms of their narrative and iconographic patterns in the style of ‘qualitative visual interpretation’ and according to the ‘documentary method’ (Bohnsack 2009).¹⁰ This cultural historical analysis aims at describing and explaining the manifold meanings of social practice, relatedness, and relationships as represented in visual materials. This paper focuses on particular (arche-) types of historical events. The following thoughts are part of a research tradition that deals with narrative cultural analyses, a tradition influenced by qualitative, interpretative social research in cultural sociology and the ‘cultural psychology of religion’ (Belzen 2010). Of particular interest are the religious and secular, “historical, culture- and milieu-specific structures of meaning, especially such that tell us something about social sceneries, social structures, and collective coherence in their discrepancies and ‘over-regularity’ (*Übergesetzlichkeiten*)” (Bohnsack 2007a: 90 – trans. M.A.).

In the following, we are not concerned with historical-critical aspects. This research is guided by an interest in the sociological and psychological perspectives. From this perspective, questions asked are, for example: what social realm can we in fact identify in the paintings and photographs? What is the intent and impact, and what are the concrete actions and responses of the person in the picture? How can we interpret the social scenery, relations and actions in the pictures against the background of development and significance of religion in Poland? What kind of symbolic representation does the narrative consist of, what are the psycho-social functions it fulfills, independent of whether the subjects are aware of them or not? Finally, what do we mean when we talk about secularization or sacralization in Poland? What follows is an attempt to provide some, but not final, answers to these questions. These descriptions are by no means the result of an exhaustive (art-historical) analysis.¹¹ Only

¹⁰ Based on the sociology of knowledge described by Karl Mannheim and the art-historical and iconographic studies of Panofsky, this quality method is confronted with various challenges, constraints, and critical perspectives (cf. Bohnsack 2009: 954-959).

¹¹ Another approach investigates the relationship between nationalism and cultural memory in Poland and argues that communicative and cultural memory was formed during the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania: “It was this frame of memory that Polish

the first tentative results of the systematic interpretation of five selected visual narratives are presented in which Polish society has experienced fundamental developments and changes in the perception of its religious standing. In viewing the present religious situation of Poland in the light of the past, we are also aware of contradictory functions of this mythological memorization process (Assmann 2002: 52-53):

On the one hand, it can have a foundational function by viewing the present in the light of a past that represents it as meaningful, divinely inspired, necessary and unchangeable. On the other hand, its function can be 'contrapresent' [that starts from – M.A.] present experiences of deficiency and idealizes a past that most often exhibits traits of heroic age. Such stories throw a completely different light on the present. It outlines the missing, the disappeared, the lost, the superseded, and reveals the break between 'once' and 'now.' Here the present is not founded but unhinged, or at least relativated, against a greater and more propitious past. (Assmann 2002: 79, as cited and transl. in: Wagner 2003: 199)

As a source of these patterns we use two contemporary photographs and three works in Jan Matejko's painting cycle *History of Civilization in Poland* (1888-1889).¹² Matejko is the most prominent representative of the historical school of painting in Poland. Firstly, two historical events are of immense importance for the constitution and the development of the cultural memory of the Polish nation because they legitimize the king's claim to power and Poland's integration with Latin Christianity (see Casanova 2003). Poland's foundation is linked to the spiritual baptism in AD 966 and the (secular) coronation of the first Polish King Bolesław I the Brave. Secondly, the golden age of the aristocratic republic, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, is discussed. Since 1573, a 'general tolerance' edict guaranteed the more or less peaceful coexistence of different Christian denominations and non-Christian religions, which was at that time unique in Europe. Thirdly, the religious developments in Poland after the World War II, including the Millennium

intellectuals had at their disposal when they began to construct their nation in the 19th Century. They were not free in their 'invention of tradition', because they were limited by the 'tradition of invention' in which they stood. Their construction was framed by memory figures from the *Rzeczpospolita* period" (Wagner 2003: 201).

¹² The visual interpretations are also based on the documentation of the travelling exhibition "History of Civilization in Poland", which took place in 1948 in Warsaw (cf. Straszewska, Ruszczycówna and Charytańska 1948, as cited in: Halat 2011).

celebration of the Christianization of Poland (1966) and the apostolic missionary efforts in the political transition process led by Pope John Paul II (1979), are portrayed in two contemporary photographs. The paintings and photographs are analyzed according to their formal and aesthetic composition (Bohnsack 2009: 960) and to ‘formulated, visual interpretation’.¹³ Various aspects of what is discussed can be seen in the following sections. Because of space restrictions we can only summarize the main thoughts and interpretations and explanations in the analyses are not exhaustive, and sometimes representations are restricted to mere hints. The first results of narrative historical analysis are grouped under the following thematic headings (see Table 2).

Table 2: Thematic headings of the interpretative analysis

The Myth ‘Polonia’: from the baptism to the royal crown

Christianization of the Polans in 966

The ennoblement of Gniezno to an archbishop’s see and the coronation of Bolesław the Brave as King of Poland

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as an exception to the rule of nationalization of state churches in Europe: the ‘Golden Age’ of the Polish nobility (Szlachta)

Commemoration of historical heritage in the millennium celebration of the Christianization of Poland in 1966 and the apostolic mission efforts of the new Pope, John Paul II, to Poland

The integration of Catholic Poland in the European Union

The Myth ‘Polonia’: from the Baptism to the Royal Crown

Christianization of the Polans in 966

The emergence of the Polish nation and Poland is associated with the staged Christianization in the first millennium: Prince Mieszko I of

¹³ This is done to identify the ‘immanent meaning’ of image production, distinguishing between a ‘pre-iconographic’ and an ‘iconographic’ level of description and interpretation (Bohnsack 2009). The objective of the interpretative analysis is the overall context of the image composition compared with the ‘communicative genre ‘narration’ (Bohnsack 2009: 956).

Polans (Polish: *Polanie*), the ruler of a number of Slavic tribes in the area near the town of Gniezno, had to pay tribute to Otto I. Owing to the loss of some territories (e.g., *Pòmôrze*; *Pomerania*) he decided to baptize himself and his kingdom in the Cathedral of Poznan in AD 966 (or 965), when subjects and successors were also required to accept the new faith. Matejko has set this historically unique act in bright and colorful scenery in his painting ‘Christianization of Poland A.D. 965’ (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Christianization of Poland A.D. 965, Jan Matejko, 1889.¹⁴



This year is indicated in the title of the painting, because Matejko possibly wanted to allude to the arrival of the Czech princess Dobrava (also Dubrawka), the daughter of Duke Bolesław I of Bohemia and Bigota, who became the wife of the Polish duke Mieszko I. Finally, the

¹⁴ Source: MP 3894, *Zaprowadzenie chrześcijaństwa R.P. 965*, © Copyright by Gawryszewska Elżbieta/Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.

baptism led to Poland's integration into the religious system of Western Christianity, although the Christianization was not completed at this time:

Unlike the countries of Western Europe, where the ecclesiastical authority of Rome was unchallenged till the end of the Middle Ages, the church in Poland was constantly beset by pagans, dissenters, and schismatics. Paganism thrived long after the formal conversion of Poland to Christianity in AD 966, and continued to provide the official religion of Lithuania till 1386. (Davies 2005: 130)

With Christianization, however, Mieszko I could resolve several problems at one stroke: inside the country, the new monotheistic faith brought homogeneity regarding both ritual and cultural practice and replaced the different distinctive Slavic cults; outside the papal protectorate gave "geo-political legitimacy and the symbolic recognition of its borders with neighboring states" (Casanova 2003: 51-52 – trans. M.A.).

In the painting, Prince Mieszko I, of the ruling family of the Piast dynasty, is leaning towards the cross and takes center stage. The scene depicted offers a kind of counterpoint to the (forced) proselytizing by the German-Christian Order of Knights Of The Sword (Livonian Knights) advancing from the West that demanded not only wisdom and skill, but also diplomacy.¹⁵ Quickly he achieved success through skillful marriage policy and a staged baptism by priests from the neighboring Czech kingdom. The pictorial narrative probably takes place on the shore of Lake Lednicki in Wielkopolska. Poland being represented as a land of forests and lakes, bathed in warm, golden sunlight. According to the painter, Mieszko I is the first historic and venerable ruler of Poland – more specifically, of the different tribes rooted in Slavic culture – which he had conquered with great difficulty and hardship and finally united. Captured in the painting is the symbolic moment of baptism and the adoption of the new faith by the Polish nation. The cross on his left and sword in his right hand mark the new connection between state power and religious authority in the person of Prince Mieszko I. He has placed his left foot in a victory pose on a fallen statue, which purports to be a pagan deity. Also at his feet sits a knight of the old royalist Toporzyczków family

¹⁵ The following description is largely based on a close translation of the only so far available image interpretation of this painting (Wikipedia 2012).

who makes the sign of the cross in front of his face, thus embodying the adoption of the new faith by the nobility.

In the middle of the painting, the view of the Prince comprises a medieval castle on the island of Ostrów Lednicki, the first official residence of Prince Mieszko I, where an eagle makes his rounds. On the right side of the cross are faithful servants and the prince's entourage. On the left side of the painting can be seen St Wojciech (St Adalbert) from the Czech province, the first bishop of Poznan, dressed in papal robes, and who has just baptized Cidebur (also *Ścibor*, *Czcibor*), the younger brother of the prince, and this shows the adoption of Christianity by the Czechs. In the immediate vicinity, his future wife Dobrawa Przemyślidka, wrapped in luminous clothes, firmly entwines a lighted candle with both hands, symbolizing the new faith and the acceptance of Christianity in Poland. In the middle of the picture and to the right of the font are two men who are assisting St Wojciech with the baptism and who are later apostles in Poland and Prussia. A man in a black robe, gazing into a book, reads the baptismal liturgy. This is St Radzym Gaudenty (also *Radim Gaudentius*), the first archbishop of Gniezno and brother of St Wojciech. Next to him stands the monk Benedict holding a cross in his hands. In the distance on the left can be seen boats that announce the missionary expeditions to Prussia and to the country of the Jatwinger.

*The Elevation of Gniezno to a See and the Coronation
of Bolesław the Brave as King of Poland*

Besides the appointment of an archdiocese to Gniezno and the first bishopric (and see of bishops) in AD 1000, the coronation of Mieszko's eldest son and successor from his marriage to Dobrawa, Bolesław I Chrobry (the Brave), restored the Piast dynasty to its former glory. The presence of Emperor Otto III, who also came at the urging of the Pope to Gniezno, underlines the importance of the autonomous and 'metropolitan' bishop's see (Davis 2005: 57) and expresses the desired aim: a political, cultural and religious integration of Poland with the 'system of Latin Christianity' (Casanova 2003: 52) and the constitution of a cultural, religious and national identity of a hybrid and syncretistic

character (Hannerz 1996). The coronation has led Matejko to the painting “Coronation of the first king in A.D. 1001” (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Coronation of the first king in A.D. 1001, Jan Matejko, 1889.¹⁶



The painting contains several layers that permit an exact historical reconstruction; for example, other sources confirm that the coronation was performed in 1025 (Davies 2005: XXVII). In Matejko's picture story the symbolic act of Otto III and the sovereignty of the Polish Kingdom are highlighted:

When Otto III placed his own crown on the head of Boleslaw Chrobry during the festivities at Gniezno in 1000, he raised him to the dignity of *patricius*, or 'elder of the Roman nation', and declared him 'brother and aide in the Empire'. Some historians see this as an act of favour between the Emperor and his vassal: others as a gesture of friendship between equals. Otto's agreement to Chrobry's formal coronation was unrealized for a quarter of a century owing to the intransigence of his successor, Henry II. It was put into effect with papal connivance in 1025 during the following interregnum. (Davies 2005: 60)

¹⁶ Source: MP 5060, *Koronacja pierwszego króla R.P. 1001*, © Copyright by Gawryszewska Elżbieta/Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.

Although the Piasts maintained a strong and enduring relationship with the Ottonian rulers, it took some time for the recognition of the coronation and the Kingdom of Poland (Davies 2005: 68).

The main ceremony at the large hall in Gniezno was the symbolic act of the coronation of the son of Mieszko I, Bolesław the Brave, to whom was awarded both the title and the right of investiture of bishops. This made him the first king of Poland to be regarded as a respected partner of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation. Eventually, it came to this solemn event (the coronation) especially because of the pilgrimage of the German Emperor Otto III. His presence and pious pilgrimage to the grave of St Wojciech could be interpreted as an act of recognition and appreciation of the new Polish king. Bolesław was also aware that this formal recognition of the Polish people would enshrine his name in the German chronicles. The coronation and the presence of the Emperor also brought new, unexpected benefits. In addition to the symbolic act of coronation, Bolesław also received – to the dismay of the German Archbishop of Gniezno – a cathedral and city status for Gniezno. Furthermore, Poland was now considered as an independent state and was thus no longer obliged to pay tribute to Germany.

The coronation of Bolesław is the key part of the painting, of course, but several other elements tell an important story. On the left side of the altar there is a coffin which includes the remains of St Wojciech. Bolesław received a copy of the spear of St Maurice and several relics, such as a nail from Christ's crucifixion, and a Holy Cross richly decorated with golden ornaments from Otto III. Together with the Emperor, the Bishop Radzym sets the royal crown on the head of Bolesław. The barefooted Emperor can be understood as an expression of devotion to the holy martyr St Wojciech. Beside the Emperor is the queen Emnilda (wife of Bolesław the Brave) and their son Mieszko II, who both hold the sword of the knight Stoigniew next to Swjatopelk (the Duke of Kiev), and Bezprym (the eldest son of king Bolesław). In the front of the painting on the right side the knight Nawoj of Sieciechów can be admired, who has a shield and a helmet with an eagle, which are additional gifts from the Emperor along with the golden throne. Otto, who stands before the king's brother (Władysław), holds the royal sceptre in his hands, showing both his worldly and divine power. Behind the pillar

is Emeryk from Hungary. As can be seen in the many adoring faces, the knights and the court that are present at the ceremony in the church were clearly delighted.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as an Exception to the Rule of Nationalization of State Churches in Europe: the 'Golden Age' of the Polish nobility (*Szlachta*)

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth proved the most famous exception to the principle of national-territorial state churches in absolutist Europe (Casanova 2003: 53-54). An important historical event in this context is the Union of Lublin in 1569, which formed a 'decentralized, multinational Nobles Republic', the *Szlachta* (Casanova 2003: 53), and now secured the monarchical succession by an election. As Davies (2005: 125) impressively showed, since the first Millennium, medieval Poland had been regarded as the last bastion of Western civilization – the so-called *antemurale Christianitatis* or bulwark – in Eastern Europe. Since his baptism, during the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and even in the period after the partition of the noble's republic, Poland could at no time be considered as a religiously homogeneous Catholic society. On the contrary, for the description of the relationship between church and state in particular two phrases are important in this context – 'Polonia Semper Fidelis' and 'Haven of Toleration' (Davies 2005: 125-126). A high level of commitment, consistency and faithfulness was necessary to defy policies and to counter the crusaders approaching from the West (especially the Teutonic Order of Knights) as well as to resist this order with the help of theological and philosophical arguments. Not only was the Catholic Church responsible for the internal and external development of Poland, but also religious pluralism and tolerance played a role.

Even two centuries after its formal conversion to Catholicism, Poland had to resist pagan traditions, non-believers, and dissidents, at least in Lithuania. This differs significantly from historical developments in Western Europe, where the national state church usually held a monopoly position. Although it had religious differences with other denominations, such as the Uniate (Catholic) Church of Slavonic

rites, Russian Orthodox Christians, Protestants, religious orders, and fraternities as well as several non-Christian religious communities (e.g., Jews), until the 18th Century the Roman Catholic community – during the Union of Lublin (1569) a dominant minority – gained importance in both absolute and relative terms and was therefore long regarded as a prime example of the Counter-Reformation (Davies 2005: 127, 153).

In 1573, the Polish Parliament (the Sejm) finally adopted the general edict on the tolerance of religion. With this edict the right of religious freedom was formally and firmly established on the basis of a constitutional obligation:

While the rest of Europe was in religious war and the states oppressed religious minorities with dissenters' beliefs, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth showed the image of peaceful coexistence of different Christian denominations (Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox), some smaller tolerance-aberrant denominations (Calvinists, Anabaptists, Bohemian brothers, Anti-Trinitarians and Armenian Monophysites) as well as the religious community of non-Christian minorities (Jews, Karaites and Muslim Tatars). (Casanova 2003: 54 – transl. M.A.)

This edict was not the first of its kind. In the 13th Century, when Jews had been driven from Western Europe and Bohemia, they were allowed to settle in Poland, where they found a new home until the outbreak of World War II because of the Edict of Kalisz. Despite this unique example of tolerance, acceptance, and coexistence of different religions, cultures, and life-worlds, in the 17th Century the Counter-Reformation prevailed in integrating most of the non-believers and dissenters in the Catholic Church of Poland.

Because of the unique historical situation and the principle of toleration, the non-Catholic denominations, especially the Protestants and their various splinter groups, always had to endure severe hardship and to compete against the domination and the 'bulwark' of Catholics in fighting for their own rights:

Oddly enough, their initial success was undermined by that very principle of Toleration which they themselves had erected. Once the terms of the Confederation of Warsaw were enshrined in the constitution, the Protestants had no further cause to protest. They could practice their religion as they wished, but could extract no significant political or social advantages by so doing. They denied themselves the likelihood of advancement at Court, and the company of

their Catholic neighbours, without any hope of worldly remark. In other words, they lacked the stimulus of persecution. As a result, their numbers were slowly but surely eroded over six or seven decades. (Davies 2005: 154)

Although Poland strengthened and enforced the principle of religious coexistence and tolerance and also became the target of refugees from across Europe, the high costs of religious pluralism had to be paid by the various faith groups in the country: depending on the interests of the nobility they were either protected or exploited. The Jewish minority held a kind of special status owing to their ‘autonomous possessions’ (Davies 2005: 154). Altogether, however, a different picture from that in Western Europe can be observed: “The Republic was indeed a ‘land of bonfires’. There were no campaigns of forced conversion; no religious wars; no *auto-da-fé*; no St Bartholomew’s Eve, no Thomas or Oliver Cromwell” (Davies 2005: 155). It was only during the partition of Poland in the 19th Century that a merger of church and nation was inevitable, when society was shaped by diasporic identity and unity in dispersion:

And that in turn had the consequence that the nationalization of Polish Catholicism in the 19th Century was performed not in the form of state-building from above, but in the shape of a foreign resistance movement from below directed against foreign powers. [...] In the 19th Century Catholicism fused with romantic nationalism and Slavic messianism to form a new political state religion. (Casanova 2003 :55 – transl. M.A.)

In resisting its conquerors in the 19th Century, the Polish Catholic Church acted as a symbol of unification, despite the reality of partition (Casanova 1994: 92). The well-known historical portrait of Matejko, “The Republic at Zenith of Power. Golden Liberty: Elections A.D. 1573”, can be regarded as a symbol of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (see Figure 3).

In this picture we see the summoning of the Warsaw General Confederation on 28 January, 1573, a parliamentary committee (Sejm) for the appointment, and conduct of the election of a new Polish king. This became necessary after the childless death of the last Jagellonian King Zygmunt II and to prevent opposition or separatist movements from springing up. At the same time, this confederation and the

Figure 3: The Republic at Zenith of Power: Golden Liberty, Elections A.D. 1573, Jan Matejko, 1889.¹⁷



aforementioned general tolerance edict are considered not only as an example of the importance of constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom and political equality of all citizens and dissidents, religions (e.g., Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, Jews and Moslems) and ethnic communities (e.g., Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians and Germans) in Poland, which has had no equal in Europe, but also the start of a separate Polish Constitution (finally adopted in 1791). This document also fostered national peace and internal stability in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Polish-Lithuanian nobles' republic and ensured a distinctive political and religious national identity inside and outside of the Polish territory in the Europe of the 16th and 17th Centuries that was facing reform and upheaval. One must also remember that the Sejm had passed this law of religious freedom during the period of “interregnum against the opposition of Catholic bishops” (Casanova 2003: 54 – trans. M.A.).

¹⁷ Source: MP 5057, *Potęga Rzeczypospolitej u zenitu*, © Copyright by Ligier Piotr/ Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.

In legal terms, it was not a government decision, but represented a defensive reaction and a sign that the Polish nobility were on the way to making constitutional provisions. In conclusion, the confederation officially legalized the Warsaw tolerance edict and established the ground for peaceful coexistence between noblemen, bourgeoisie, and peasants of all denominations.

What Matejko presents is a synthesis of the various events during the 17th and the first half of the 18th Centuries. In the middle of the picture is a beautifully decorated tent with the banner of King Sigismund Augustus, the last representative of the Jagiellonian dynasty. This eagle is not centered without reason. Around the tent a large crowd gathers and discusses choosing a new king. The prospective development of Poland and its tri-partitioning can be perceived in the three preferred candidates for the Polish throne: Ernst Rakuski, Henryk Walezy (Henry III of France), and Johann of Sweden. All three candidates enjoy the protection of well-known and powerful patrons. Although Jan Firlej, the Great Marshall of the Crown, starost of Kraków, and one of those most involved in preparing the articles, had previously argued for the Swedish candidate, he quickly decided for Henry III of France if he accepted and signed the free elections for the Polish-Lithuanian throne as well as the *pacta conventa* (the Henrician articles that incorporated the Warsaw Confederation articles). Finally, Arnold Karnkowski gave the sign that all parties should gather for the election of the new king. The messengers of the new French king, amongst them Bishop Montluc and the Marquis de Lansac, rush into the tent to give their oath to their candidate on the Bible. In front of the tent is Jan Zamoyski, who is carried in the arms of two noblemen, bearing witness to the significance of this moment for the Polish people. Major noblemen surround him and, on the front right of the table sits Szafraniec and Taszycki from Pieskowa Skala, who is looking at an image of the king. Jan Firlej is trying to convince the dissidents to choose his preferred candidate. The Krakow knight, treasurer and envoy Stanisław Cikowski is sending out messengers to inform all about the meeting.

Commemoration of Historical Heritage in the Millennium Celebration of the Christianization in 1966 and the Apostolic Mission Efforts of the Pope

Historically, the Catholic Church has played a crucial role as an authority within church-state relations and preserved religious and national values in the face of other religions, paganism, ideologies, and even atheist worldviews in Western and Eastern Europe: Despite some “cleavages between classes, parties, and ideologies” at the time of the constitution of an independent nation state after the World War I, “the unity of the nation against foreign enemies began to dissolve” (Casanova 1994: 93). Whereas in most European countries the importance of religion has been on the wane, Catholic Poland has so far not experienced a comparable process of secularization after WWII. On the contrary, the strong link between “Catholic Church and the Polish Nation” has proven to be a stable one and has permitted “an extraordinary revival of Catholicism in Poland” (Casanova 2003: 56 – trans. M.A.), so that the Polish ‘Exceptionalism’ (Casanova 1994: 93) could continue. Also, the communist state rulers could not put an end to this development, because of Poland’s tremendous cultural dissimilarity to the Soviets’ societal, ideological, and economic concepts. Any secularization from above, “resocialization (...) to create a new ‘socialist man’”, and attempt to eliminate the church and religious belief from public society not only failed but rather increased religious orientation and hardened religious attitudes and beliefs; any repression or compulsion of church representatives only turned them into martyrs (e.g., Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who has been Primate of the Catholic Church in Poland for over 40 years) (Casanova 1994: 94). The Polish Roman Catholic Church and Polish families became strongholds and defenders of social values and national and religious Polish identity. It led “rather to a reverse process of desecularization”:

There was an absolute and relative increase in the number of bishops, priests, nuns, seminarians, and so forth, when compared with pre-Communist Poland. There was a progressively accelerating increase in the number of parishes, churches, Catholic periodicals, and publications. Indicators measuring the religious beliefs of the population, which had always remained inordinately high, even showed some tendency to rise, most significantly among the young. The figures on religious practice were even more overwhelming, since even those who

did not consider themselves 'believers' participated in religious ceremonies as a symbolic opposition to the regime. (Casanova 1994: 96)

In this context, two major influences in the late sixties and seventies were at work: the Millennium of the Christianization of Poland in 1966, and the effect of the apostolic mission of Pope John Paul II during and after his visit in 1979 (to mark the nine-hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of St Stanisław), which also helped to promote the Solidarity movement. Most forms of religious belief and practices of Polish Catholicism were mobilized during the millennium anniversary:

- The public ceremonial, highly sacramental character of the typical Polish rituals: pilgrimages (*Częstochowa*), processions (*Corpus Christi*), passion plays (*Kalwaria Zebrzydowska*).
- The highly centralized hierarchic structure of the church, with the Primate at the top, in its [sic!] unique dual role as head of the Polish church and Interrex, thus symbolizing the union of church and nation.
- The prominent position of the clergy, with a prestige and influence perhaps unequalled in the Catholic world, functioning as sacerdotal and sacramental mediator between the sacred and the profane, and between God and the Polish people, but also functioning as mediator, representative, and guide of the community in its social functions.
- The Marian devotion and the two most representative Polish national cults, *Częstochowa* and *Kalwaria*. Particularly, Our Lady of *Częstochowa* at Jasna Góra serves as the national shrine of Polish Catholicism and as the symbolic fortress of the nation against foreign invasions. The icon of the Black Madonna has for many years been associated with historical and collective memories of national suffering, resistance, and final triumph. (Casanova 1994: 97-98)

Every church activity and other events celebrating the anniversary were of great concern to the Communist regime, but most of the time the totalitarian state rulers were only able to observe and not to counteract. All their power to defend, ban, or eliminate church activities could neither harm nor undermine the process of religious mobilization; it led rather to the empowerment and emancipation of national social movements. Up to the late 1960s the Polish Church was regarded as "reactionary, ultraconservative, and antimodernist", but "in the course of their involvement in the political opposition" (Casanova 1994: 102) many secular intellectuals "were discovering that the Church was itself a source of

democratic and humane values” (Michnik 1993: XI, as cited in: Casanova 1994: 102).

The following two photographs give an impression of the importance of these events. In the first photograph Cardinal Wyszyński is shown at a church service in honor of the Virgin Mary in front of a large audience of believers during the Millennium celebration in 1966 in Czestochowa, an occasion which was celebrated over two decades by the Polish population (cf. Figure 4).

Figure 4: Primate Stefan Wyszyński during the meeting with worshippers, Częstochowa, August 15, 1966.¹⁸



The Cardinal has become known for his three-year imprisonment, his deep commitment to Polish-German reconciliation, and as a level-headed mediator between the Polish opposition movement *Solidarność* and the communist state apparatus. During the Solidarity era, the Catholic Church “had to play a crucial role against state penetration in a dual

¹⁸ Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, Sygnatura: 19-16-3.

sense”: as self-defense against Soviet interventions in many areas of society and “aiming to include other groups and institutions in a dual system of autonomous societal pluralism and monolithic stare power” (Casanova 1994: 106). After Solidarity, the role of the Church and Polish Catholicism became more ambivalent (e.g., with the establishment of the new martial law in the 1980s and with the Polish Church as mediator between the communist state and Polish society). In the European context, this process had exactly the desired effect and attracted attention beyond the country’s borders:

Like the Polish uprisings religious activities like these at the millennium celebration seemed to observers in Western Europe an extravagant and hopelessly anachronistic, if not reactionary, phenomenon, an expression of the equally hopeless and romantic-heroic tendency of Poles to stem against the progress in history. (Casanova 2003 – transl. M.A.)

Figure 5: An image of Pope John Paul II waving from the window of the entrance portal of the Bishop’s Palace in Kraków.¹⁹



¹⁹ Source: Author’s private archive.

Finally, these developments which strengthened the national importance of the Catholic Church, culminated in the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope in 1978, and his well-received first papal visit to Poland in 1979. During his pontificate he supported the reform-minded Catholic intellectuals in Poland. The Pope's friendly and pleasingly beckoning hand can still be seen at the window of the main entrance of the Bishop's palace in Kraków where he served for over two decades as bishop, and then archbishop, of Kraków (see Figure 5).

It is not simply because it has been reproduced countless times in travel guides that it has become a pilgrimage site for many Catholics but it also symbolizes the strong ties to Poland that he perpetuated during his pontificate. His missionary trips to Poland and subsequent developments, including the rise of the Solidarity opposition movement, match a series of events in European history that contributed especially to the collapse of the Soviet bloc and ended the reign of communism in Poland. In this sense, one could, as Casanova (2007: 345) explained, see this as an apostolic mission and strategy for a gradual (re-) Christianization and evangelization of Poland. Whether this can indeed become reality remains an unanswered question.

The Integration of Catholic Poland in the European Union

In the light of Casanova's (2007) thesis of the return of religion in the public sphere in Europe, we must admit in a post-Christian Europe that the general rhetoric of a 'privatization of religion' (see Luckmann 1967) simply does not apply. Despite the process of European enlargement and the quest for a transnational European identity, the role of religion continues to play an important role and cannot be ignored. As the high rates of participation, church attendance, religious commitment, and the belief in God show, the spirit of resistance lives on in Poland today, not against further development and modernization, but to the abandonment of the spirit of a religion that has been almost forgotten in Europe. In other words, Poland has repeatedly shown – as can be seen in both the 19th Century uprisings and the Solidarity movement in the twentieth – that there is indeed a religious tradition and national self-consciousness and that Polish Catholicism remains a *spiritus movens*, usually

criticized by Western Europeans or misunderstood as “Polish religious enthusiasm and Polish messianism”, that can by no means be dismissed as a renewed “rise of fundamentalism” (Casanova 2007: 343). Although Poland’s European missionary ambitions have proved ineffective, it has nevertheless “an important role by simply showing that it remains a modern, fully integrated and deeply religious country in Europe, so that the secularization thesis would be falsified on European ground” (Casanova 2007: 346 – trans. M.A.), as “Polish Catholicism had always been undergoing its own internal process of *aggiornamento*” (Casanova 1994: 103). Any change in Catholic social, political attitudes and in the relationship between state and church has always found national resonance.

An Apostolic Missionary Assignment for Poland’s Catholics? – A Re-reading²⁰

Even after the formal entry of Poland to the European Union, the question arises as to how Catholic Poland can become involved in issues of integration of Eastern European transition countries in a ‘post-Christian Europe’ (Casanova 2003: 58). The Catholic Church in Poland still has a great influence on political opinion-forming processes in its own country. If we accept John Paul II as an ambassador and the highest representative of foreign, transnational political affairs, Poland could actually play a special role in the process of mediation and integration of Christian values in contemporary Europe, East and West. Since the early 1990s, the Catholic Church in Poland has supported the ‘pro-European policies of the Polish government’ (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 12). With the visit of a delegation led by Bishop Cardinal Józef Glemp to Brussels in 1997 and 2001, the cooperation with the European Commission started that still proved a key experience for the young democracy. The pilgrimages of the (Polish) Pope to his homeland reinforced pro-European

²⁰ The following arguments can be understood as a re-reading and intellectual continuation of José Casanova’s (2003: 58-64; 2007: 345-346) discourse about the role of the Catholic Church in the integration of Poland in postmodern Europe that is based on the statement of Tadeusz Pieronek (see Stadtmüller 2000: 36).

tendencies in the Catholic Church, who again and again pointed out that in a united Europe it is important not “to be only responsible for their own religious identity but for the religious identity of a unified Europe” (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 13).

Therefore, the words of Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, the former general secretary of the Polish Bishops’ Conference (1993-1998) and rector of the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow (1998-2004), should be considered as historic and prophetic: “Europe should be accepted as a wonderful opportunity, a difficult challenge, and a great apostolic assignment for the Church” (Stadtmüller 2000: 36). As this quote suggests, it is not only a ‘chance’ and ‘challenge’, as possible restrictions and limitations must also be taken into account. In addition, there are many young and educated Poles who advocate political, economic, social, and legal harmonization, customization, and membership of the European Union and only a few ‘euroskeptics’ and ‘europhobes’, who are, however, a major barrier in the process of integration in today’s Europe, especially when they see national sovereignty and economic empowerment as being affected (Casanova 2003: 59). Bishop Pieronek is cited here also because of his criticism of the populist, extremist, and anti-Semitic policy of the Europhobic radio station *Maryja* – which was launched by the Redemptorist Tadeusz Rydzyk and stands close to other media of the Catholic-nationalist political world (Bilska-Wodecka 2009: 14-15).²¹ Some Catholics in Poland are still of the opinion that accession to the European Union does not mean that economic and political losses will be tolerated and also that the substitution of their own Catholic identity for the “irreligious, materialistic and hedonistic values” is to be feared (Casanova 2003: 59 – trans. M.A.).

Casanova (2003) fosters the argument that a process of secularization resulting in an increasing loss of importance of religion, religiosity, and spirituality in today’s Europe cannot be explained away by the theory of continuing modernization. This thesis, if applied to the integration of Poland in a united Europe, would mean that it would almost be regarded

²¹ Parallel phenomena of critical-political and Euroskeptical oppositions that could support either the secularization or a deprivatization of religion can be observed also in other Eastern European countries (e.g., Hungary and Romania; cf. Herbert and Fras 2009).

as a prerequisite that in the course of political, economic, and social transition *en route* to a modern European society, Poland would have to agree on the fundamental thesis of secularization. Although the declining importance of religious values, orientations, and attitudes – despite impressive church attendance – cannot be denied, it must be said that the degree of agreement in religious matters varies significantly and that there is no homogeneous religiosity in whole Europe. The usual secularization thesis can be rather (dis-) proved by exceptions (see e.g., the immense differences between East Germany and Poland). Not without reason, therefore, does Casanova see the diminishing of religion in Europe as a ‘*self-fulfilling prophecy*’ (Casanova 2003: 61). There is also some support for the argument that believers and non-believers alike consider the process of religious and social change as an inherent and substantial tautology and justification for the current developments. Secularization is therefore stigmatized as a ‘teleological’ (Casanova 2003: 61) and ‘self-induced’ (Casanova 2003: 62) justification, which itself turns out to be a new dogma. The classical secularization thesis can be understood by religion-distanced atheistic arguments and “as critical-genealogical theory of religion and as normative-teleological theory of the development of religion, which sees in the decline of the religious a major destination of history” (Casanova 2003: 62 – trans. M.A.). In Casanova’s opinion, religious belief is being replaced by belief in increasing secularization, which entails “practical consequences for the ecclesiastical organized religion” (Casanova 2003: 62 – trans. M.A.).

That this argument cannot be upheld from a global comparative perspective has already been argued above. The secularization of modern societies is sufficient argument only to supplement other factors of the modernization process, such as an increasing individualization, rationalization and functional and social differentiation. It is definitely not a necessary argument. The ‘*causa Polonia semper fidelis*’ has often taught sociologists and historians another lesson, namely that Poland does not only illustrate the commonly accepted normal development of religiosity. Over and over again it has been demonstrated, in the context of the historical development of Catholic Poland, that Poles are also capable of a religious and national self-confidence and ready for a change that could lead to a revival of religion (also in Europe).

Bishop Pieronek has repeatedly explained in this context that the relationship of the Catholic Church to the integration of Poland into the European Union has changed on several occasions and has not undergone rectilinear development (Pieronek 2000: 10). After initial concerns a vast majority of clerics now publicly support the integration process:

Here the results of opinion polls can be used, which have been carried out in Poland in late 1997 and early 1998 in regard to clergy. Poland's accession to the European Union is supported by 84% of Poles. Over the last few months, these data have changed for the worse; nevertheless, the percentage of supporters of integration is still high. For Poland, there is simply no alternative, because it would make no sense to leave Poland in isolation. (Pieronek 2000: 10-11)

A similar result was also confirmed by a referendum in 2003: "The referendum was held on June 7 and 8, 2003. Some 58.85% of eligible voters took part in it and 77.45% of participating voters supported Poland's entry into the European Union" (Bilska-Wodecka 2003: 16). In this sense, we could understand this development as an 'apostolic mandate', as Bishop Pieronek has asserted, whose content John Paul II has assigned to the Polish Catholic Church: "to free the Slavic peoples from the bay of communism and liberate the ecumenical to promote dialogue with the Eastern Churches" (Casanova 2003: 63 – trans. M.A.). Poland serves in this missionary assignment – as Davis (2005) noted from historical perspective – as the last outpost of Latin Christendom in the East, where a spark of religiousness and spirituality seems to be present. The struggles against the materialistic ideology of communism in Eastern Europe proved to be easier than the reluctance of Western European Christendom, where Poland, in contrast, is faced with the "traditional core of European Christendom (...) as increasingly pagan, hedonistic and deaf to his call for renewal" (Casanova 2003: 63 – trans. M.A.).

Finally, the statement of Bishop Pieronek is a clear commitment to the missionary efforts to Christianize Europe (Casanova 2003: 63). Different levels need to be separated from each other, however: according to the various findings of the *sociology of religion*, the general trend of secularism cannot be simply reversed through increased missionary efforts. Additionally, the question may be asked as to what religious and spiritual desires people in Europe have and what role the Church

in European society can play. From a *religious-historical* and *church-historical perspective* we can also ask: what would happen if Poland turned out to be the exception to the rule and rather the special case *Polonia semper fidelis*, whilst – in accordance to its own tradition – it defies secularization trends and prospects. Then even the papal assignment appears applicable when Poland relies on its traditional and religious self-consciousness and attempts to implement tradition-conscious modernization:

If the country succeeds in that it proves that the decline of religion in Europe is a teleological process not necessarily linked with modernization, but the result of a historic decision by the Europeans, a modern religious Poland might force the secular Europeans to reconsider their secularist assumptions and recognize that Poland is not lacking in simultaneity with Europe, but the secular Europe is lacking in simultaneity with the rest of the world and with global trends. (Casanova 2003: 64 – transl. M.A.)

In this sense, we can agree with Casanova that, in the quest for a definition of a European identity (if such a collective self-assurance is actually sought), a social and historical fact must be accepted: both secular and religious trends in Europe were always present simultaneously in the past and will continue to be in the future. The question of the role which the Polish Roman Catholic Church could play in a democratic society remains open (Casanova 1994: 109): it could either attempt to re-establish its historical role as the nation's guardian of cultural, historical and national heritage and identity and be a symbolic representation of the Polish nation or, while accepting the principle of the separation of church and state, develop into an autonomous and independent organization in a pluralistic civil society fostering social integration. It can be supposed, however, that this apostolic assignment would be difficult to implement or not be feasible, especially when we face the growing loss of authority of Christian institutions. The integration of Poland into the new Europe could well mean that it veers away from identity-distal dissociation, protection and exclusion, which are now supported only by a minority, to constant change and renewal in the sense of '*Polonia semper fidelis*' and '*... reformanda*'. This hypothesis is also supported by the results of the cultural and historical inquiry into the development of Catholic Poland.

According to the cultural development of Poland, the experience of the continuing cultural exchange with foreign and other nations, religions, and cultures has been a constant characteristic (e.g., Slavic and pagan cultures and occupying powers), which Poland constantly forced to adapt to the other and/or to redefine its own identity. The initial conditions for the development of a Polish Catholic nation and culture were not ideal. The development of the Polish nation and Catholicism was not straightforward. Frequently, the country was torn apart by neighboring occupying powers. Because of the closer interaction between secular hegemony and ecclesiastical episcopate during dynastic times, however, an internal cultural, national, and religious unity could be developed which had to be visible to the outside. In terms of social, economic, and military development, membership of the Hanseatic League and the geographical connection to *via regia* were important. Poland's strategic location allowed excellent relationships with almost all countries and cultures in Europe and the Middle East. Polish culture was able (albeit sometimes obsessively) to add and learn new things:

Ironically, the newly gained *libertas Ecclesiae*, public recognition, and greater freedom of action seem to demand from the Church greater self-restraint, more responsibility and public accountability for its influential interventions in the public sphere, and, ultimately, less maneuverability and authority than it had under the Communist regime. (Casanova 1994: 110)

These specific historical experiences also provide cultural support for the integration of Poland into the European Union. With its entry to the EU, Poland now has a political responsibility for Europe's common future, and its strength and reliability have to be proven in future developments and crises, just as the religious situation in Poland is in a continuous state of change.

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