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# More Catholic than the Pope: An Analysis of Polish Devotion to the Catholic Church under Communism

Kathryn Burns

*Union College - Schenectady, NY*

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“More Catholic than the Pope”: An Analysis of Polish Devotion to the Catholic Church under  
Communism

By

Kathryn Burns

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Department of History

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## **Abstract**

Poland is home to arguably the most loyal and devout Catholics in Europe. A brief examination of the country's history indicates that Polish society has been subjected to a variety of politically, religiously, and socially oppressive forces that have continually tested the strength of allegiance to the Catholic Church. Through the partition period, the Nazi and Soviet invasions during World War II, and the institution of communist power following the close of World War II, the Polish people met religious hostility that threatened to permanently sever Polish faith to the Catholic Church. However, despite attempts to break Polish allegiance to the Catholic Church, Polish faith did not diminish, and in the case of the communist era, it strengthened. This thesis will argue that Polish loyalty to the Catholic Church is a product of historical associations of Catholicism as a symbol of national identity in addition to the guidance and leadership provided by a number of prominent Polish Catholic officials. With these two factors, the Catholic Church in Poland was able to overcome ideological and logistical barriers placed by the communist regime in order to maintain feelings of hope and optimism among the Polish people.

## Introduction

For the past half century, identifying as Polish has become synonymous with identifying as Roman Catholic. Polish people are famously known for their considerable dedication to the Roman Catholic Church; the latest statistics indicate that a little over 33 million out of Poland's population of 38 million people adhere to Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> While this demonstrates that Poland has a population that is almost completely saturated with Roman Catholics, many of whom attend church weekly, it is imperative to point out that this was not always the case. In fact, the existence of an overwhelming majority of Catholics in Poland is a relatively recent phenomenon. The institution of Catholicism in Poland dates back over one thousand years, but the Catholic Church was not the predominant religious institution for a substantial portion of that time. Eventually, Poland became known for its centuries-long acceptance of religious diversity and tolerance; however, a complete examination of Poland's historical background thoroughly explains the reasons for the absence of religious diversity in modern times.

There is no question that the Catholic Church has played a significant role in the many events of this country's complex history, but it is important to point out that the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland was not in itself what made the Church a major contributor to Polish history. Rather, the Polish people "utilize[d], change[d], and sustain[ed]" the development of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> It is both the Poles' expression of their faith, along with the policies enacted by the Church that led to lasting support of Catholicism. What is currently identified as irrefutable loyalty to the Catholic Church results not merely from the Church's long-term existence in Poland, but also from centuries of political, philosophical, and

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<sup>1</sup>"LUDNOŚĆ. WYZNANIA RELIGIJNE: POPULATION. RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS," pg.134. 1 October 2012

<sup>2</sup> Porter-Szucs, "Introduction: Christianity, Christians, and the Story of Modernity in Eastern Europe," pg. 11

religious evolution that provided Poles with reasons to further explore and identify with Catholicism. The Church's longstanding influence and the long-lasting reference to Poland as the "shield of Christendom" would not be worthy of discussion without Poles' continual expression of faith and loyalty.<sup>3</sup>

It is also important to recognize that not all actions of the Catholic Church or its representatives in Poland reflected the core teachings of Roman Catholicism. Instead, at times, the path upon which the Polish people were led was contradictory to the fundamental principles of Christianity as a whole. In some instances, especially in relation to Polish affairs, the Church failed in its responsibility as a religious institution to abide by and uphold its central beliefs, "yet Poland, the Polish people, kept sending their treasure to Rome and their sons to death for the faith they embraced."<sup>4</sup> How is it possible that a people who have continually faced substantial hardship find solace in their faith? Even more remarkable is the ability of Poles to maintain their strong sense of connection to the Catholic Church when the Church has not always exhibited the same caliber of loyalty towards them. This was especially evident in the Church's refusal to place pressure on the partitioning powers whose oppressive methods of governing illustrate some of the darkest years in Polish history. However, regardless of the Church's various refusals to support the aspirations of the population, it is evident that Poles have used their expression of faith and devotion to the Roman Catholic Church in order to provide themselves with a sense of nationalism and unity. This thesis will explore the historical rationale behind Polish commitment to the Catholic Church in an attempt to reach a deeper understanding of how Poland was able to preserve its religious convictions during the religiously suppressive communist regime of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through discussions of policy and central religious figures throughout the

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<sup>3</sup> Bloch, "Polish History: The Ethos," pg.9

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg. 9

communist period, the following chapters will explain how Catholicism was able to maintain a strong loyalty among believers, and ultimately outlast the communist regime.

## **Chapter I: The Roman Catholic Church's Influence in Poland Prior to WWII**

### **I. Foundations of the Catholic Church in Poland**

With a history that has withstood more than one thousand years of “kingdoms, dynasties, republics, parties, and regimes,” the ongoing presence of the Roman Catholic Church remains one of the “very few threads of continuity in Poland’s past.”<sup>5</sup> The origins of Polish Catholicism date back to 966 A.D. under Mieszko I.<sup>6</sup> At a time when Poland was nothing more than a collection of principalities, the Catholic Church served as one of its original and predominant unifying forces. This is not to say that Catholicism was immediately well received in Polish lands; paganism was still influential among many people. However, over the next few centuries, Catholicism acted as an institution of spiritual support and leadership.

This was especially true during the reign of King Kaszimirz the Great, whose time in power transformed Kraków “from a wooden town into a city of brick and stone.”<sup>7</sup> Among a variety of other accomplishments, Kaszimirz the Great became famous for creating the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the second oldest university in Central Europe. During this time, the establishment of a university warranted permission from the Pope. Not only did the Pope’s decision determine the mere existence of a university, but he also had the power to deny the formation of particular schools. In the case of the Studium Generale (currently known as the Jagiellonian University), a school of theology, which was considered to be the most prestigious of schools, was not originally permitted as a faculty. It was not until the death of Queen Jadwiga in 1400 that theology became one of the university’s four main faculties.<sup>8</sup> The Church exhibited considerable power in many nations besides Poland; however, Kaszimirz the Great’s motivation

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<sup>5</sup> Davies, “Kościół: The Roman Catholic Church in Poland,” pg. 207-208

<sup>6</sup> Garton Ash, “Introduction,” pg. 4

<sup>7</sup> Davies, “Piast: The Polanian Dynasty,” pg. 96

<sup>8</sup> Waltos, “History: Beginnings,” 2 October 2012

behind the university's founding offers insight to the importance of the Catholic Church to Poles. In his founding charter, Kaszimirz states his desire for a "greater love of prayer and a more effective ordering of the Catholic faith."<sup>9</sup> The infiltration of the Catholic Church into intellectual institutions such as the Studium Generale demonstrates its overarching cultural significance. In addition, the Studium Generale eventually became home to a number of Poland's most prominent and influential intellectuals. So, in a sense, the foundations of Polish intellectualism were placed at the discretion of one powerful Pope, and this fact cannot be ignored.

More crucial to Kaszimirz's legacy was the immense increase in religious tolerance that took place. During this time, Poland was not homogenous in ethnic, national, or religious terms. This was exhibited by the relatively successful incorporation of the largest Jewish population of the period. The integration of a considerable Jewish population would have significant implications for Poland's future. Yet, for argument's sake, it is important to recognize that its tolerance of non-Catholic populations focused Poland's attention less on religious differences, and more on its interests in the mainstream cultural affairs of Western Europe. While the establishment of the Catholic Church certainly provided the Poles a means of association with Western Europe, it also created the basis for religious animosity and tension with neighboring Orthodox Russia to the east. Unfortunately for Poland, much of this was due to its geographic location, which acted as a natural vulnerability, and placed a seemingly unavoidable handicap on the nation and its people. Poland became a political, religious, and territorial target of its foreign adversaries, and this would contribute to Poland-Lithuania's eventual demise. It cannot be argued, however, that geographic location was the sole factor involved in the division of Polish-Lithuanian territory among foreign powers. The heavy influence of the *szlachta*, the Polish

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<sup>9</sup> Davies, "Piast: The Polanian Dynasty," pg. 99

aristocracy, also contributed to the Commonwealth's downfall, so this distinction will be discussed in further detail in a later section.

While it would be an exaggeration to claim that Poland's ties to Catholicism resulted in constant victories in military conflicts, it can be argued that Poland's faith in the Catholic Church may have contributed to enhanced performance in battle. If nothing else, loyalty to the Church during the most trying of times suggests that Polish devotion was of significant importance. This was exemplified in the 1410 Battle of Grunwald, when pre-battle rituals exhibited the "fervent Catholicism [that] radiate[d] from the earliest known composition in the Polish language."<sup>10</sup> During the Jagiellonian period, *Bogurodzica*, "Mother of God," was commonly sung by knights in the Polish-Lithuanian Army prior to battle. The song illustrates Poles' attempts to gain protection from Mary, as they asked her to "assist [them]" in their forthcoming battle.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this is nothing more than a final effort to seek guidance from an all-powerful entity; however, considering Poland's history, this could very well act as evidence to support the developing influence of the Church in the lives of Poles. The central Catholic teachings offered an impression of stability to Poles who lived through constant political and territorial volatility. In addition, this profession of faith during a period of defense contributes to the early stages of the relationship between Polish Catholicism and a sense of nationalism.

## **II. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth**

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth emerged as a powerful European political force in 1385. Due to a lack of a rightful heir to the Polish throne, Jagiełło of Lithuania agreed to take Jadwiga of Poland's hand in marriage. This was not, however, without concessions. Among other things, Jagiełło agreed to officially convert the pagan beliefs of his people to those of

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<sup>10</sup> Davies, "Antemurale: The Bulwark of Christendom," pg. 161

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 161

Roman Catholicism.<sup>12</sup> Not only did this personal union increase the number of Catholics residing within Polish territory, but it also expanded Polish influence farther east. This would eventually lead to aggravated tensions between Poles and Russians, who participated in an ongoing struggle for religious and political dominance. If Jagiełło never agreed to the conditions of the marriage, the Commonwealth may never have existed, resulting in a lost opportunity for expansion, and forever changing the course of Catholicism's influence on Polish history.

The Commonwealth's potential for expansion grew drastically as a result of the incorporation of Lithuania. This union burgeoned as a powerful political and economic force within the confines of Europe. Because of this vast expansion, Poland-Lithuania adopted policies of religious toleration. The Commonwealth grew and incorporated more ethnically and religiously diverse populations, so it was only practical to allow for the toleration of people with many different religious affiliations. This portion of Jagiellonian rule is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of Poland.<sup>13</sup> This "Golden Age" was influenced by the events of the Renaissance, which contributed to a prospering cultural life in Poland-Lithuania. Polish participation in the Renaissance is not frequently recognized; a number of Europeans were hesitant to acknowledge Poland's progression to modernity. This is demonstrated through Erasmus of Rotterdam's "praise" for Poland's emergence into the Renaissance period by "congratulat[ing] a people who, though formerly ill regarded as barbarian, now so blossoms in letters, laws, customs, religion, and in whatever else may spare it the reproach of uncouthness..."<sup>14</sup> In reality, Poland-Lithuania's exposure to Renaissance culture was greater than any other state in Eastern Europe. The expansion of territory, along with the Commonwealth's religious ties to Rome, gave Poles reason to involve themselves with Renaissance ideas.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pg. 117

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pg. 148

<sup>14</sup> Segel, "Introduction," pg. 13

As a result of the Renaissance, Polish intellectuals became well acquainted with the ideals of humanism, a philosophy that stresses the inherent value of man's ability to use reason as a means to reach one's full potential. The origins of this movement in Polish history are difficult to pinpoint; however, it is likely that Polish involvement in various church councils in the early fifteenth century, such as the Council of Basel, laid the foundation for humanism in Poland.<sup>15</sup> Humanist ideals caused religious and intellectual elites to place medieval values under "philosophical and scientific speculation."<sup>16</sup> While Polish Church officials developed a deeper appreciation for humanism, so did members of the academic elite at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Lectures began to incorporate humanist values, thus, influencing the perspectives of students and spreading the philosophy to a wider audience. This movement was essentially Church driven, and led to the emergence of a range of intellectual and scientific developments. Church involvement in the movement simply shows the Church's ability to align Polish culture more directly with western European culture, allowing for a more rapid route toward modernization. It is important to note that the ideals of humanism were not limited to the Renaissance period. Rather, they would become critical to 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish history, as Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of treating all men, even adversaries, as fellow humans. His respect for the human ability to reason was key in the formation and evolution of Solidarity, a non-violent resistance movement meant to undermine the communist regime. In all, it is clear that humanism plays a recurring role in Polish history, and contributed to some of the country's most momentous events.

A number of Poles participated in and contributed to the Renaissance and the implementation of humanist philosophy, but Poland was home to two especially influential

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pg. 7

<sup>16</sup> Davies, "Jagaila: The Lithuanian Union," pg. 148

figures of the movement—Nicholas Copernicus and Nicholas Hussowczyk. These men stand out as intellectuals who made a significant impact on the Renaissance period and the centuries that followed. By incorporating popular Renaissance humanist values into their works, Copernicus and Hussowczyk were able to express the state of Poland’s cultural and intellectual progression. In the case of Copernicus, a well-known humanist, the content of his theory sparked deep controversy among a number of religious officials (Catholic and Protestant). However, officials recognized the connections between his religious beliefs and his scientific research, assuring them of his personal loyalties to the Church. His work, *On the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres*, which explains Copernicus’ reasoning for his heliocentric theory, also incorporates his allegiance to the Church. Not only is the work dedicated to Pope Paul III, but it also makes reference to God, whose “grace” motivated and allowed Copernicus to develop his findings.<sup>17</sup> During an era when Church opposition could seriously jeopardize the ability to have a work published, Copernicus’ recognition of the Church’s influence on his life spared him opposition from Church officials; his work was published, and it revolutionized scientific research. The Catholic Church’s involvement in and perceived openness to the scientific ideas and progressions of the Renaissance period simply demonstrates the overarching influence of the church upon Poles in a variety of realms.

Hussowczyk’s writing, in particular, articulates his own convictions that were heavily influenced by Roman Catholicism. In *Poem about the Size, Strength, and Hunting of the Bison*, Hussowczyk integrates his love for God and Catholicism into a critique of current political and religious troubles. More specifically, the poem illustrates Hussowczyk’s personal aversion to the military conflicts between Poland-Lithuania and its enemies, the Turks, the Tatars, and the Teutonic Knights. Hussowczyk expresses his admiration of Mary as he asks her to “look upon

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<sup>17</sup> Rosen, “Nicholas Copernicus: De Revolutionibus” 19 October 2012

the madness of wars and fields soaked by blood, see how greatly fate permits the sword to be used against a people who united by the covenant of your son deserves to live in brotherly peace.”<sup>18</sup> Essentially, Hussowczyk’s opposition to war reflects the impact his faith had on his perception of political and territorial conflicts. This excerpt demonstrates his belief that war is not only unnecessary and immoral, but to participate in war exhibits a person’s disregard for the value that the Catholic Church places on human life. Hussowczyk’s poem acts as a medium through which to express his deep faithfulness to the Church. In addition, it sheds light on Poland’s role as the “bulwark of Christendom” during a time when all of Catholic Europe was under threat.<sup>19</sup> It is also important to note the significance behind Hussowczyk’s asking for guidance from Mary. This act exemplifies the deeply-rooted belief among Poles that Mary, the Mother of God, makes special efforts to protect the people of Poland. As all of this evidence shows, the expression of religious beliefs in response to political unrest signified the deep interconnection between religion and nationalism in Poland, even during the Renaissance period.

The connections between Roman Catholicism and Polish nationalism can also be viewed in terms of the period’s political developments. Not only did the Church present Poles with a sense of spiritual strength, but it also provided the Commonwealth with a number of powerful and influential political figures. Men such as Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki, Archbishop Mikołaj Trąba, Archbishop Jan Łaski, and Bishop Piotr Tomicki are simply a few of many clergy members who acquired substantial amounts of political power. At times, these men led the Polish delegation at religious councils whose decisions occasionally had political implications. More specifically, Archbishop Mikołaj Trąba was head representative of Poland at the Council of Constance in 1415 at which, among various other religious issues, the subject of war between

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<sup>18</sup>Segel, ”Pope Leo X, the Bison, and Renaissance Cultural Politics,” pg. 150

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pg. 151

Poland and the Teutonic Order was discussed and ruled upon. This demonstrates that in addition to the clergy's religious significance, the decisions made by these councils held serious political implications. In some cases, a member of the clergy would act as an interrex for the ruling king. This was especially evident for whoever held the position of Primate of Gniezno. This title was given to the standing archbishop of Gniezno, and when a substantial time gap existed between the end of one monarch's rule and the inauguration of the next, the Primate of Gniezno would maintain political control over the Commonwealth.

On a number of occasions, members of the clergy were considered to be part of the Polish nobility, called the *szlachta*. Membership in the *szlachta* "was not characterized by socio-economic criteria, but by its corporate privileges and obligations, and by the body or law and tradition which controlled them."<sup>20</sup> Significant wealth was not the only indicator of membership in the *szlachta*, and a Pole's social standing alone would sometimes allow him to participate in the political sphere of the Commonwealth. This will become especially important during the discussion of the downfall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; however, for now, it is simply important to understand that members of the Polish nobility had the right to vote, a right that the peasantry was not afforded. This, in turn, gave the *szlachta* influence over the decisions and policies of the government.

In relation to the Catholic Church, members of the clergy occasionally ranked high in the *szlachta*, which "on appointment," allowed them to "[step] into fortunes which had been growing ever since the foundation of the Church in AD 1000."<sup>21</sup> In addition to the accumulation of substantial fortunes and vast amounts of land, a number of Church officials held positions of abundant political power. This is especially evident in the case of Bishop Zbigniew Oleśnicki of

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<sup>20</sup> Davies, "Szlachta: The Nobleman's Paradise," pg. 206

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pg. 224

Kraków, whose long-term service allowed him to become one of the most influential clergymen in the Commonwealth. During the course of Oleśnicki's career, he served as royal secretary under King Władysław II Jagiełło, and his prestige increased in 1439, when he became the first native Polish Cardinal. His influence peaked in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, when the Cardinal served as the highest ranking official during the reign of Władysław III Jagiełło. He was responsible for "day-to-day business," and was essentially given full control of the Commonwealth.<sup>22</sup> The appointment of a Catholic official into a position of such considerable power merely emphasizes not only the religious role of the Catholic Church in Poland, but also the impact that the Church had in Poland-Lithuania's political sphere. The ability of Church officials to make religious and political matters intersect highlights the true range of the Church's overall influence, and contributes to its ability to instill a sense of religious loyalty that underlies nationalistic sentiments.

In addition to numerous Bishops and Cardinals who served in positions of sizeable political authority, the Jesuits made their mark on Polish-Lithuanian history, especially during the Counter-Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, the principles associated with the Protestant Reformation were sweeping their way across Europe. While they certainly surfaced and influenced a considerable portion of the Polish population, the Commonwealth led its people down a contrasting religious path from that of many other European countries. The Jesuits' emergence in Poland in 1565 was partially responsible for Poland's minimal participation in the Reformation. In an attempt to curb the Reformation's influence on Polish-Lithuanian society, the Vatican sent the Jesuits into the Commonwealth with the hopes of reinforcing Poland-Lithuania's role as the Catholic stronghold in Europe. With this goal in mind, the Jesuits were able to enforce harsh policies that brought a "black wave of repression, intolerance, and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pg. 135

obscurantism” upon the Polish people.<sup>23</sup> Poles were made to believe that any person who displayed even minute skepticism and resistance of the Church and papal supremacy was under the influence of the “anti-Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, it can be argued that the Jesuit order is partially responsible for the reinforcement of anti-Jewish sentiment in Poland. In a commonwealth whose history, up to this point, attests to a general tolerance of religious views and practices that dissented from those of the Catholic Church, it is surprising to learn that representatives of the Vatican implemented such extreme and critical views of other religious beliefs. However, given the historical context, the Church found its strong presence necessary to the successful outcome of the Counter-Reformation in Poland. In cases of growing religious tension and hostility, the Jesuit order, official representatives of the Catholic Church, negatively impacted Polish-Lithuanian society. The Jesuits encouraged religious animosity, and played a role in supporting Anti-Semitic beliefs throughout the Commonwealth. Their actions provide an instance when the Church impacted society negatively, and through its reinforcement of Anti-Semitic views, may have contributed to refuting Jewish identity with Polish nationality.

While it is true that the Jesuits were responsible for acts that reflect poorly on Polish history, their influence on intellectual development in Poland cannot be ignored. The Jesuit order is especially known for its establishment of various intellectual institutions within Poland, which totaled 47 by the year 1642.<sup>25</sup> The prestige of these institutions allowed the Jesuits to incorporate religious teachings into their curriculum. The link between Catholicism and education, thus, reinforced the influence of the Church on everyday life. It is true that access to education was limited to those of economic and social privilege, so the Jesuits’ influence was isolated from the majority of the population. However, it is essential to understand that a concentration on

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<sup>23</sup> Bloch, “Polish History: The Ethos,” pg. 14

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pg. 31

<sup>25</sup> Davies, “Antemurale: The Bulwark of Christendom,” pg. 168

Catholicism through the education of Poland's social elites, who were thought to be potential future leaders, increased the likelihood of a continuation of the Church's influence in Polish-Lithuanian life.

Previous points have made the presence of the Catholic Church in Polish political and intellectual life very clear. However, it is equally as crucial to demonstrate the spiritual hold that the Catholic Church had on Poles during this time. The circumstances under which Poles latched onto their Catholic loyalties are particularly interesting, especially when these situations involved war and civil unrest. At times, this was the context upon which religious pilgrimage occurred. The origins of the seventeenth century miracle of the Black Madonna at JasnaGóra in Częstohowa, in particular, exemplify the influence that Catholic loyalties had over the Polish people during times of war. The Black Madonna has a rich and complex history, but for the purpose of this chapter, it is sufficient to pinpoint this seventeenth century miracle. Poland was involved in a territorial war with Sweden, and in 1655, Poles found themselves to be outnumbered by their Swedish adversaries. Not only were Swedish military forces significantly larger, but they were also regarded as some of the strongest in the world.<sup>26</sup> There was no question that Polish military forces were inadequate in such a battle; however, by what Poles considered to be a Marian intervention, Polish military forces were able to fight off the strength of the Swedish army.

This is only one of many miracles said to be performed by the Black Madonna, and these miracles have led to a constant pilgrimage of Poles to Częstohowa. This will be especially important when considering the future discussion of the three hundredth anniversary of the pilgrimage to Częstohowa during the communist regime, but for now, it is simply important to recognize the profound influence of the Black Madonna on Polish Catholic loyalties. Not only

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<sup>26</sup> Steven, "The Poles: The Church," pg. 157

does pilgrimage exhibit one of the deepest expressions of faith, but in the case of the 1656 battle against Sweden, Poles cherished Częstohowa not because it was a site of “events of a holy life nor a holy body,” but instead, because of the spiritual value of an icon that was “no more and no less than an image.”<sup>27</sup> This idea makes it even more astonishing to comprehend how Poles could place so much of their faith in something as simple as a picture. However, historical and contextual evidence of Poles’ devotion to the Church makes such a belief considerably more plausible. Poles’ attribution of an incredible military victory not to sheer luck or to worthwhile preparations, but to the divine intervention of Mary in the Black Madonna icon demonstrates their deeply rooted relationship with the Church. The connections between religious devotion and nationalism are also evident in this example. To win a war against a foreign enemy sparks a sense of nationalism, regardless of the religious affiliations of the nation’s people. However, for the Poles to credit the image of the Black Madonna with the miraculous military victory at Częstohowa very clearly demonstrates how tightly intertwined sentiments of nationalism and Catholicism were and continue to be in Poland.

### **The Downfall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth:**

At its prime, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a major political force in Eastern Europe; it threatened the political and religious autonomy of its neighbors for centuries. From the onset of the Commonwealth’s existence to its final days, Poland-Lithuania’s people made substantial progress on the path toward modernization. Poland-Lithuania’s involvement in the Renaissance especially provided its people with exposure to more Western intellectual philosophies. On top of a number of military conflicts that weakened the general position of the Commonwealth in relation to foreign affairs, Poland-Lithuania faced internal issues that contributed to its demise. The strength of the Commonwealth could not be sustained forever,

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<sup>27</sup>Maniura, “Introduction,” pg. 7

especially with the antiquated legislative and socio-economic structures in place. As previously stated, the *szlachta* contributed heavily to the decline of the Commonwealth; its inefficient legislative procedures and strong desire to maintain as much power as possible led to a stagnation in the process of legislative modernization. Andres Kasekamp explains that, “while neighbouring states were centralising authority in the hands of the monarch, the multitudinous Polish-Lithuanian nobility zealously guarded its ‘golden liberties.’”<sup>28</sup> The *Liberum Veto* is a prime example of the misguided policies of the Sejm, the Commonwealth’s Parliament. Under the stipulations of the *Liberum Veto*, a member of Parliament could express feelings of displeasure with a proceeding, and this would freeze the legislative process. While the rationale behind the veto is honorable,—the Commonwealth wanted a method that would check the “absolutist designs of the Polish monarchy”—in practice, this policy only contributed to the discontinuities of an already fragmented legislative system.<sup>29</sup>

Yet another setback for the Commonwealth was the overwhelming social power of the *szlachta*. The Polish-Lithuanian nobility comprised a larger percentage of the Polish population than any other country in Europe. This posed an issue when considering the maintenance of power. At times, people whose power is threatened and who wish to remain in positions of political and social authority will approve policies that work in their favor, in turn, disenfranchising the lower classes. The ruling classes’ policies made social mobility difficult, resulting in the continued marginalization of the lower classes, relative to members of the *szlachta*. With that said, the gap that existed between the everyday grievances of peasantry and the *szlachta* provided intensity in lower class loyalties to the Catholic Church. In contrast with the seemingly large-scale concerns of the *szlachta*, the lives of peasants were associated much more

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<sup>28</sup>Kasekamp, “A History of the Baltic States: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” pg. 61

<sup>29</sup> Davies, “Anarchia: The Noble Democracy,” pg. 348

closely to everyday survival. Because of this, the peasants felt a strong connection to the Church and Mary, who provided them with a sense of hope—hope that the conditions upon which their lives were centered would one day improve.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the *szlachta*, the peasantry's limited access to education made their motivations behind Church loyalty simple; when there is little in life to look forward to, it makes sense to put faith into a higher power. This devotion to the Catholic Church did not die out in the coming centuries. Although Poland-Lithuania was partitioned beginning in 1772 and ending in 1795, the loyalties to the Church remained. Poland did not exist as a state for more than a century, but this did not diminish the nationalistic and religious values of the Polish people.

### **III. The Partition Period**

As previously stated, the instability and inefficiency of the Polish-Lithuanian gentry state was not sustainable, resulting in sizable deficiencies that were difficult to compensate. Because of this, Poland experienced its initial partition in 1772 when Russian Tsarina Catherine the Great recognized and took advantage of Polish weakness. Russia was always interested in an opportunity to dominate Eastern Europe, and Poland acted as a natural buffer for Russian expansion. Catherine's acknowledgment of Poland's weakened state allowed her to strategize about actualizing a long-lasting Russian desire for domination, resulting in the initiation of the partition period. Following the first partition, the Polish Sejm remained in session for four years in an attempt to reconstruct its failing state. Reforms including the establishment of a Constitution and changes to the educational system were instituted; however, these were not enough to save an already crumbling state. Poland underwent a partition once again in 1793, leaving some Poles under Russian and others under Prussian rule. The last partition took place in

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<sup>30</sup> Stewart, "The Real Poland: The Peasants," pg. 183

1795, finalizing the tally of partitioning powers at three, with the Hapsburg Empire taking control of the southern portion of the former Commonwealth.

The partition period proved to be one of great difficulty for Poles, who often referred to Poland as the “Christ of Nations” which would be resurrected after what they believed was a period of “Babylonian Captivity;” they were persecuted and felt the true pressures and hardships of living under a foreign ruling power. The partitions impacted the *szlachta* most because they were forced to choose their fate; they could resist foreign power and fight for Polish independence, emigrate from Poland, or abandon their Polish identity and collaborate with the ruling powers. While some Poles ultimately decided to collaborate, this did not change the fact that identity continued to be of primary importance to the majority of Poles. The partition period is one of the darkest in Polish history; however, “Poland fell, not at the moment of her deepest degradation, but just when she was beginning to put forth new life and to show her greatest patriotism and energy.”<sup>31</sup> As is evident through the development of a number of political and social reforms prior to the final partition, Poles recognized their faults and were at the cusp of altering their deficiencies. While there was not enough time for Poles to fully and successfully reform before the last partition, the fact that national morale was one of optimism allowed them to fight through the tough partition years that followed. As was true in previous centuries, Polish Catholic allegiance did not deviate from its original strength during the partition period. Their religious convictions allowed Poles to feel a sense of community and protection through their numerous attempts at winning back their sovereignty.

### **The Russian Partition:**

There is no doubt that Poles living under Russian rule during the partition period faced decades of oppression. While it is true that the intensity of oppressive measures fluctuated with

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<sup>31</sup> Lord, “Conclusion,” pg. 491

the change of Russian tsars, Poles continually found their identity threatened by dominant Russian political, religious, and cultural policies. Polish hostility towards Russians was not, however, simply due to the fact that Poles were placed under harsh Russian rule. Rather, tension between Russians and Poles dates back centuries, and is heavily rooted in diverging religious and nationalistic beliefs. This “bipolar” relationship originated in the initial schism of the Eastern and Western churches.<sup>32</sup> Russians strongly believed that adherents to Eastern Orthodoxy were superior to those whose beliefs differed. This was because Russians saw themselves as supporters on the “correct side of the doctrinal schism between Eastern and Western churches, and that [Orthodoxy was] the lawful successor church to the Eastern Slavs residing in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.”<sup>33</sup> In contrast to Western followers, Russians were confident in the conviction that they were loyal to the “pure” faith.<sup>34</sup> In addition, centuries of minimal contact with the Western Church created a misunderstanding of Western beliefs among Orthodox Church officials, and only led to a strengthened distrust of Western culture. This sense of superiority and suspicion was especially evident following the Union of Brest in 1596. The Union established unprecedented Orthodox acceptance of papal authority among portions of the Belarusian and Ukrainian populations, creating the Uniate Church. Russians considered the acceptance of papal supremacy to be the result of Polish Catholic influence which, “intentionally led the Belarusian and Ukrainian people from the path of ‘true’ faith and into ‘Roman heresy.’”<sup>35</sup> This eventually contributed to the causes of the Cossack revolt against the Commonwealth in 1648 that was a culmination of religious and political resentment towards the Poles who were in control of Ukrainian territory. In all, the Cossack attack on the Commonwealth increased Polish

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<sup>32</sup> Skinner, “The Irreparable Church Schism: Russian Orthodox Identity and Its Historical Encounter with Catholicism,” pg. 30

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pg. 21

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pg. 21

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pg. 24

Catholic convictions, and increased Cossack loyalty to the Russian tsar, which would have a considerable impact on Russian history in years to come.

In addition to the belief that Poles deliberately coerced people to accept papal supremacy, Russians felt a sense of ethnic superiority directly associated with their religious loyalties. Orthodoxy was synonymous with identification as an Eastern Slav. However, when Belarusians and Ukrainians converted from Orthodoxy and became Uniates, Russians saw this as an “assault on Russian cultural leadership in the Eastern Slavic world.”<sup>36</sup> Since Belarusians and Ukrainians are ethnically Eastern, not Western Slavs, Russians saw their religious conversion as a reflection on efforts of strategic Polonization. For these reasons, Russian authority as a partition power in Poland was strict and not openly accepted by Poles. However, despite the limited autonomy Poles received under Russian occupation, the strength of Polish nationalistic and religious faithfulness was not entirely diminished.

In response to continual efforts to control every aspect of their lives, Poles banded together in revolution to express their interests as a people. This was exemplified during the revolutions of 1830 and 1863, which were substantial efforts aimed at demonstrating Poles’ unwillingness to comply with harsh Russian policies. Prior to the uprising in 1830, Poles were afforded a substantial amount of autonomy, and did not experience serious violations of their rights. The Polish portion of Russia was called the Congress Kingdom, and Poles were held to relatively loose standards. However, following the 1830 uprising, Russian authorities placed much tighter restrictions on Poles, intensifying the already unstable relationship between Poles and Russians. Poles were discouraged by the aftermath of the 1830 uprising, which is depicted in *Dziady*, one of Adam Mickiewicz’s most famous works. The poem equates the Polish experience

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pg. 30

in the partition period with the sufferings of Christ.<sup>37</sup> Mickiewicz's connection demonstrates the fact that many Poles rationalized a number of their national hardships by comparing them to times of great religious suffering.

It was not until the revolution of 1863 that the Congress Kingdom was fully abolished and incorporated into the Russian Empire. As a result, Poles were subjected to even more severe methods of Russification. This was especially true during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I. As tsar, Nicholas established what is known as the Russian *troika*, which constituted what he believed to be the three most important principles in Russian society: Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality. This meant that any challenge to Russian authority in any of the three spheres was not permissible. Since Poland was incorporated into the Russian Empire, Poles were also expected to abide by these principles.

Under Russian rule, "religious dissent was equated with treason," and "speak[ing] a foreign language or promot[ing] a culture other than Russian, was to be unpatriotic and politically disloyal."<sup>38</sup> Russian authorities were so extreme in their methods that even the Polish language was considered foreign and was taught to Polish children in Russian.<sup>39</sup> Maria Skłodowska, more commonly known as Madame Curie, described her experience attending school under Russian control in Warsaw, explaining that, "One of the subtlest humiliations the Tsar had discovered was to make the Polish children say their Catholic prayers every day in Russian..."<sup>40</sup> Not only was this an insult to the Polish ethnic identity, but it also demonstrated Russian efforts to demoralize Polish sentiments toward the Catholic Church.

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<sup>37</sup>Liukonnen, "Adam Mickiewicz," 15 November 2012

<sup>38</sup> Davies, "Rossiya: The Russian Partition," pg. 89-90

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pg. 100

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pg. 101

In addition to the penetration of Russification in schools, Russian authorities made their distaste for the Catholic Church evident through a number of religiously centered political policies. First, access to Rome was essentially cut off. Polish dioceses were split from their original form, and their leaders were forced to report to the Russian Archbishop in Mogilev. Approximately half of Polish convents were closed, and Church property was confiscated. Strict surveillance of church officials was commonplace, and “all sermons, pronouncements, and religious publications were to be inspected by the Tsarist police.”<sup>41</sup> Incidents such as these were far from unusual, and created great internal distress for Poles, whose religious beliefs and national consciousness were at the core of their identity. As previously stated, the Poles’ misfortune during the partition period was exacerbated by the inaction of the Vatican. Instead of defending Polish interests, leaders in Rome “saw no reason why the Church should intervene too energetically with the Powers on the Poles’ behalf.”<sup>42</sup> Since the ruling powers held an official stance of religious tolerance, Church leaders refused to recognize the disenfranchisement taking place in spite of the official policies. With limited support from the highest of Church officials, Poles had no choice but to maintain their loyalty to the Catholic Church in order to demonstrate that “their form of Catholicism was more Catholic than the Pope.”<sup>43</sup> Despite feelings of abandonment and discouragement, Poles upheld their devotion to the Church. Especially under Russian rule, the Church became a symbol not only of Polish religious convictions, but also of Polish national identity. Since religion was so heavily associated with national consciousness, it only made sense to remain loyal to the institution that was experiencing a substantial amount of persecution. Poles felt that an attack on the Church, a long-standing marker of Polish cultural

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<sup>41</sup> Davies, “Kościół: The Roman Catholic Church in Poland,” pg. 211

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pg. 212

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 215

heritage, was an attack on Polish national identity, so their traditional role as the defenders of Catholicism lived on.

### **The Prussian Partition:**

Prussia no longer exists as a political and territorial entity; however, it was once a thriving state that had a high-caliber military whose skill was difficult to surpass. Prussia participated in the partitioning of Poland, and ruled over a portion of the Polish population in Silesia, Pomerania, and Poznań for over a century. There is no doubt that people who lived under Prussian rule were required to abide by strict authoritarian law, which “operated on the principle that the will of the ruler and of his government was supreme.”<sup>44</sup> Certainly there are parallels between Russian and Prussian attitudes of rule, but their principles were not entirely the same. While life under Prussian rule was monitored and regulated by the authorities, it was not quite as harsh as life under Russian rule. This was especially true when considering religious principles. The attitudes of most of 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussia reflected a general tolerance of Polish Catholicism. Religious conformity was not a prerequisite for individual social or political advancement.<sup>45</sup> However, this tolerance would not be sustained throughout all of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

With the creation of the Second Reich in 1871, Polish territories under Prussian rule were officially incorporated into the German empire. This was followed by the Germanization and elimination of cultural sovereignty of the Polish minorities in the empire through Otto von Bismarck’s strict policy of *Kulturkampf*. Bismarck looked down on the Poles whose republic, he believed, “owed its destruction much less to foreigners than to the inconceivable worthlessness of those persons who represented the Polish nation when it was broken up.”<sup>46</sup> Considering Bismarck’s opinions of the Polish people, it is no surprise that he made a concerted effort to

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<sup>44</sup> Davies, “Preussen: The Prussian Partition,” pg. 115

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pg. 117

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pg. 125

suppress almost anything representative of the Polish identity. Prussian men, for example, were forbidden to marry Polish women, as it was believed that culture was passed down to future generations through the mother.<sup>47</sup> Since Catholicism was so closely associated with the Polish identity, the stipulations of *Kulturkampf* were very clearly intended to weaken the role of the Church. The Polish language, therefore, was no longer permitted as the primary language of educational or religious instruction, and priests were obligated to pass a German culture exam.<sup>48</sup> In addition, Prussian authorities insisted on the closing of Poznań's seminary and the school of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart and of the Ursulines in Poznań and Gniezno.<sup>49</sup> Priests were harassed and were sometimes even imprisoned for their resistance.

Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* focused on modernizing Poland by ridding its people of the "intangible" cultural influences of language, literature, theater, and most notably, Catholicism.<sup>50</sup> However, to Bismarck's dismay, his policies had an adverse effect that weakened assimilation efforts and reinforced traditional cultural influence among Poles. Acting as a primary source of cultural identity, the Catholic Church received steady support from its followers and was "converted... into a symbol of national resistance."<sup>51</sup> Just as Polish Catholicism could not be entirely shaken by Russian oppressive measures, the Church enjoyed significant support from Polish minorities in Prussia. So, the Church remained a common unifying force among Poles who were politically and geographically separated by the partitioning powers.

### **The Austrian Partition:**

The Hapsburg Empire extended its territory as the final partitioning power of Poland. It controlled Galicia and Lodomeria, which included the present-day Polish region of

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<sup>47</sup> Bloch, "Polish History: The Ethos," pg. 20

<sup>48</sup> Davies, "Preussen: The Prussian Partition," pg. 127

<sup>49</sup> Leslie, "Triloyalism and the National Revival: Prussian Poland," pg. 30

<sup>50</sup> Bloch, "Polish History: The Ethos," pg. 20

<sup>51</sup> Leslie, "Triloyalism and the National Revival: Prussian Poland," pg. 30

Małopolskie and portions of present-day Ukraine. Relative to the Russian and Prussian empires, the Austrian empire during the partition period was considered weak in its administration of policies toward the Poles. This is not to say that life in Austrian territory was easy; the empire's officials certainly interfered in political and social spheres of everyday life. For one, Poles were encouraged to maintain their religious beliefs in the form of the Marian Cult, but they were "instructed to redirect their prayers from 'the Virgin Mary, Queen of Poland' to 'the Virgin Mary, Queen of Galicia and Lodomeria'."<sup>52</sup> Racism was also a pervasive issue in an empire whose population was a conglomeration of nationalities. In addition, taxation was high in comparison to former Polish rates, and the bureaucratic system was large, powerful, and "notoriously formal."<sup>53</sup>

However, in contrast to the policies in the Russian and Prussian partitions, the oppression that Poles faced under Austrian rule was more closely a result of the political instability of the empire as opposed to a purely intentional form of oppression. R.F. Leslie illustrates the life of a Galician peasant as one filled with "indebtedness, land hunger, illiteracy, and backwardness."<sup>54</sup> A typical Galician "ate less than one-half of the standard English diet...yet he paid twice as high a proportion of his income in taxes."<sup>55</sup> All of this backwardness had serious implications for the empire whose ineptitude led to a lack of stability, and in turn, significant emigration from Galicia and Lodomeria.

Davies offers a concise description of Austrian weakness: "there was little of the earnestness and dynamism of Prussia, and none of the ambition of Russia."<sup>56</sup> Austria lacked the strength to enforce "cultural imperialism" to the degree of its fellow partitioning powers, and this

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<sup>52</sup> Davies, "Galicia: The Austrian Partition," pg. 142

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pg. 142

<sup>54</sup> Leslie, "Triloyalism and the National Revival: Austrian Poland," pg. 9

<sup>55</sup> Davies, "Galicia: Austrian Poland," pg. 145

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pg. 142

allowed Poles to maintain and develop their cultural ideals with little interference from Austrian authorities. The same could be said for religious freedom in Galicia; minimal intervention from Austrian officials gave Poles great freedom relative to Poles in the other partitions. The preservation of the bond between Polishness and Catholicism lived on, providing Poles in the Austrian partition with a consistent distinguishable marker of their nationality at a time when their official identity was erased from the map.

### **Development of the Polish Proletariat:**

The Industrial Revolution surfaced in Poland at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and laid the foundation for the Polish socialist movement. It is essential to unravel the central components of Marxism in order to understand the influence of the socialist movement on Polish identity and Polish Catholicism. The ideals that drive Marxism eventually became problematic for Catholic Poland, but for now, it is simply important to understand its foundation. Marxism is a materialistic and historically based ideology that centers itself on the belief that all workings of society are class-based and are the result of capitalist exploitation. In other words, there is an ongoing struggle between the owners of the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and those who work to produce the goods (the proletariat). Marx believed that continual exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie would lead to a socialist revolution in which society would ultimately rid itself of capitalism and develop a classless utopia.

Marxism is not simply a theory; it is a way of life. Its ideology addresses all aspects of everyday life, including religion. This ideology targets many religions, but the reference to religion in this context will be synonymous with Catholicism. Marxists describe religion as the “opiate of the masses.” Not only is the existence of an omnipotent God impossible to prove, but religion teaches followers to accept the fact that there is no true reason for why bad things

happen to good people. Religion urges people to trust God's will and to have faith that the dead who were righteous in life are rewarded through everlasting life in heaven. In addition, when monotheistic religions are not in conflict with one another, they promote brotherhood and sisterhood; followers are told to treat other believers of monotheistic religions with respect since they are all descendants of Adam and Eve. Conversely, Marxists do not see religion as a unifying force. Instead, they insist that religion is simply a tool used to deflect attention away from the exploitative measures used by capitalists against the proletariat. This is why religion is an opiate; it causes the exploited to be distracted from the true divisions among members of society. Considering Poland's long-term history of religious devotion, it is no surprise that the religious ideals of Marxism would automatically create relative hostility towards socialism among the Polish population.

Increasing industrialization in Poland was followed by the development of the Polish proletariat, some of whom were absorbed by the Polish socialist movement. As the partition period lived on, Poles became divided in their nationalistic aspirations. Some fought in support of Roman Dmowski, who led the nationalist movement. Dmowski was critical of the traditional Polish nationalism and tolerance that emerged during the peak of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He and "the parties of the Right and Center interpreted Polish history as validating their preference for an ethnically and religiously homogenous modern society with a centralistic state apparatus."<sup>57</sup> He wanted Poles to let go of their desire for an independent Poland, and urged them to focus on creating a "separate and autonomous Poland."<sup>58</sup> Dmowski sought to create a Polish nationalism that was no longer relatively tolerant, but purely exclusive, and used the strength of Catholicism among Poles to promote his cause. To Dmowski,

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<sup>57</sup> Rothschild, "Poland," pg, 28

<sup>58</sup> Davies, "Naród: The Growth of the Modern Nation," pg. 53

Catholicism was “declared...to be an attribute of the Polish nation.”<sup>59</sup> With this, he hoped to transform the Polish national identity from one that included all people who spoke the Polish language to one that considered the Polish identity to be directly associated with Polish Catholicism. Those who did not meet this criterion were no longer considered Polish, and in Dmowski’s mind, had no right to remain in Polish territory.

In contrast to Dmowski, Josef Piłsudski led the socialist movement in favor of independence. His desire for Polish independence was driven by a hope to unite Poles regardless of their religious affiliation. He and his fellow socialists “favoured the concept of a spiritual community, united by the bonds of culture and history.”<sup>60</sup> Unlike Dmowski and the political Right, Piłsudski and his supporters saw Polish history “as a prescription for pluralism and federalism.”<sup>61</sup> The political Left was determined to recreate an independent Poland on the basis of Polish ideals, so religious identity was not a prerequisite for inclusion in Polish society. While Dmowski wanted to keep Poland open for Polish Catholics, Piłsudski favored a Poland that exhibited tolerance for anyone who considered himself Polish.

The fact that religion was so heavily weighted in the formation of these ideologies demonstrates the depth by which Poles consider their ties to the Catholic Church. These differences in ideology soon influenced the establishment of the Polish state following the First World War. Piłsudski hoped to continue the Polish-Lithuanian legacy of relative tolerance toward different religions to demonstrate that the Polish identity was not rooted solely in Catholic loyalty, but also encompassed the Polish language, culture, and history. On the other hand, Dmowski wanted to change what it meant to be Polish. He and his supporters recognized the connection between the Polish identity and the Catholic Church and promoted an ideology

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<sup>59</sup> Leslie, “Poland and the Crisis of 1900-7,” pg. 72

<sup>60</sup> Davies, “Naród: The Growth of the Modern Nation,” pg. 56

<sup>61</sup> Rothschild, “Poland,” pg. 28

that established a Poland meant only for what he considered to be *real* Poles—the Catholics. While Catholic intellectuals generally took a “neutral” position in the dispute between Nationalists and Socialists, it is evident that both movements launched the Church into its position as the “bastion of non-communist culture, and the focus of the loyal opposition.”<sup>62</sup>

### **Summary:**

The strength and vitality of Polish Catholicism were tested during the partition period. There were certainly variations of oppression within each of the partitions, but it is fair to say that Polish identity was not officially recognized, nor was it respected. Catholicism was placed under tremendous scrutiny, but was able to unify Poles who aspired to one day gain independence. Catholicism’s close connection with the Polish identity allowed for its survival through the partition period and eventually proved to be critical to the reestablishment of Polish society after the removal of the partitions. In addition, it is important to recognize the role Catholicism played in the formation of Polish socialism since socialist policies would use Catholicism in some cases to promote their causes.

### **IV. World War I**

The world was forever changed by World War I, whose causes and outcomes greatly contributed to the political, economic, and social catastrophes that define the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This war had a number of results that unfolded throughout the entirety of the century, but in regards to Polish Catholicism, it is crucial to pinpoint a few in particular. First, the war brought the partition period to a permanent end, and a Polish state was officially recreated; it was the first time in over a century that a person could locate Polish borders on a map. In addition, the war was a main trigger of the Russian Revolution, whose effects led to the rise and eventual spread of communism, and ultimately, strong Soviet influence in Poland. The religious hostilities so

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<sup>62</sup> Davies, “Kościół: The Roman Catholic Church in Poland,” pg. 222

engrained in communist ideology would test the strength of Polish Catholicism for decades to come.

The war also highlighted the Vatican's recurring indifference to Polish territorial and societal vulnerability. In 1915, "nearly all the Polish territories had fallen into German and Austrian hands, and the Vatican showed no signs of unease at this development or its implications for the destiny of the Poles."<sup>63</sup> The most apparent explanation for this was the Vatican's belief that an "Austro-Polish approach" would be advantageous to the Church, as Poland would be officially linked with the Catholic Hapsburg monarchy.<sup>64</sup> It was clear that the Vatican's concerns were most closely associated with the maintenance of a Catholic stronghold in the region; it seems that the Vatican felt a victorious Hapsburg Empire would foster Catholicism better than the Poles themselves. Instead of protecting and supporting rising Polish aspirations for independence, the highest of Roman Catholic officials were more interested in preserving Catholicism in ways they saw fit.<sup>65</sup>

It was not until the destruction of the German and Austrian partitioning powers that the Vatican expressed support for the burgeoning independence of Poland. Its intentions, not surprisingly, were clouded by its own agenda. Left in a post-war Europe where the rise of Bolshevism and socialism displayed heavy antagonism toward religion, the Church sought refuge in what seemed to be the only reliable safe haven of Catholicism—independent Poland. The Vatican acknowledged the resurrection of the Polish state, not because it supported Polish aspirations for independence or acknowledged the strength of the Polish national identity, but because it recognized the Polish ability to serve as a bulwark of Catholicism in the region. Pope Benedict XV understood the strength of Polish Catholicism and "trusted that the erection of a

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<sup>63</sup> Pease, "Polonia Restituta: The Catholic Church and the Revival of Poland," pg. 15

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pg. 15

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pg. 15

Catholic Poland on the western flank of Russia might advance the interests of the faith and serve as a partial remedy for the deranged condition of Europe.”<sup>66</sup>

The Vatican prioritized the politics of Catholicism over the genuine care for the well-being of its Polish followers, sacrificing its legitimacy as a supposed promoter of fundamental Christian ideals. As a result, “the Vatican’s apparent indifference could not be easily explained to Polish Catholics, many of whom had clung to their faith as a last consolation against alien oppression.”<sup>67</sup> However, to no credit of its own, the Poles’ fundamental connections to the Church outweighed their skepticism of the Vatican, so the religious loyalties that would be crucial during the communist period remained strong. This is why a discussion of the consequences of Poland’s reestablishment and the rise of communist influence is imperative in order to address the true purpose of this paper—to explain the reasons why Polish loyalties to the Catholic Church were sustained despite the suppressive policies of the communist regime.

### **An Independent Poland and the Interwar Period:**

After over a century of partitions, Poland’s newborn independence was certainly long overdue. However, this does not negate the fact that following World War I, the country and its people faced challenges that cannot be overlooked. While Poles believed that independence would demonstrate their ability and willingness to progress, the state’s reemergence actually “created almost as many problems as it had solved.”<sup>68</sup> One of the most pressing issues concerned the Polish identity, which did not have official recognition for over a century. At the inception of its new independence, Poland had the daunting task of determining how to best incorporate three separate identities into one that was cohesive enough to move the country forward. While American President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points and the Treaty of Versailles called for

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pg. 20

<sup>67</sup> Davies, “Kościół: The Roman Catholic Church in Poland,” pg. 214

<sup>68</sup> Polonsky, “Independent Poland: Social and Economic Background,” pg. 10

the recreation of an independent Poland, it is clear that this task was not without difficulty. Polish independence was paradoxically complicated by what once was considered one of its greatest assets: ethnic and religious diversity. Poland was not a homogenous state, and the inclusion of “territorial” and “dispersed” minorities, whose religious beliefs generally differed from those of the Polish Catholics, posed an issue for a country already struggling to develop a cohesive national identity.<sup>69</sup>

As previously discussed, tensions mounted among political parties whose analysis of Polish history led to diverging views about how to move the country forward. Not surprisingly, hostility towards Poland was just as substantial an issue outside Polish territory as it was within the borders. The provisions of the Treaty of Versailles were unacceptable to many bordering nations who felt that they were denied land that was rightly theirs, so Poland found itself fighting foreign powers in six separate wars between 1918 and 1921.<sup>70</sup> Everyday procedures also became a great issue in a country whose regions contained “wide divergencies of law and custom, of temperament, and even of language.”<sup>72</sup> In addition, Poland had to address logistical problems since it was without a number of unified systems such as transportation, currency, education, and taxes.<sup>73</sup> These factors, along with a host of others, aggravated the already troubled state of affairs in a country whose independence seemed to be in constant jeopardy.

Despite the Vatican’s questionable intentions in relation to its support of Polish independence, the Catholic Church resurfaced as an institution with considerable strength and state support during the interwar period. In contrast to the partition period, the Church was recognized as a powerful religious entity that enjoyed relative autonomy. Although Catholicism

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pg. 35

<sup>70</sup> Davies, “Niepodległość: Twenty Years of Independence,” pg. 394

<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that in some cases, Poland instigated these wars.

<sup>72</sup> Polonsky, “Independent Poland: Social and Economic Background,” pg. 3

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pg. 7-9

represented the religious allegiance of slightly more than two-thirds of the Polish population, resulting in the denial of the Catholic Church as the “national Established Church,” and “its political influence was [initially] restricted by the markedly anticlerical temper of the ruling elite,” the Church was still able to re-establish its presence through the 1921 Constitution as well as the Concordat of 1925.<sup>74</sup>

It has already been established that Papal interest in Poland was tied to the Vatican’s recognition of widespread religious vulnerability in the post-war era. However, while this seems to be the explanation with the most weight, the influence of Pope Pius XI’s personal connection to Poland in dealing with Polish government leaders cannot be ignored. Pope Pius began his rise to the papacy as a nuncio in Poland, which despite his “Polish tribulations,” he grew to love.<sup>75</sup> For Poles under the papacy of Pius XI, “Catholic Poland would enjoy the benefits and bear the trials of living with a pope who carried intense memories, good and bad, of the days he had spent in the lands of the Vistula.”<sup>76</sup> Pius realized that escalating tensions between the Vatican and the Polish government would place a damper on plans to solidify Church presence in the region. In addition to these reasons, the Polish Constitution of 1921 required the creation of a Concordat, which was believed to “provide the basis of the coexistence of church and state.”<sup>77</sup> A Concordat seemed to be a reasonable way to formally reestablish Church influence. Pius was confident in the feasibility of such a plan due to his previous experience in Poland, which made him well aware of the complications associated with Polish religious politics.<sup>78</sup> The stipulations of the Concordat were noticeably favorable to the Church; however, this should have seemed perfectly

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<sup>74</sup> Davies, “Kościół: The Roman Catholic Church in Poland,” pg. 223

<sup>75</sup> Pease, “Il Papa Polacco: The Making of Pius XI, 1918-1922,” pg. 53

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pg. 53

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pg. 60

<sup>78</sup> Pease, “From Constitution to Concordat, 1921-1925,” pg. 61

reasonable to the Polish population, since “Church in Polish life existed naturally as a primary element and result of national history.”<sup>79</sup>

In addition, Polish government officials recognized the depth of Polish loyalties to the Church, and simply hoped that a Concordat with the Vatican would be an important step toward “achieving the national consolidation [they] sought.”<sup>80</sup> However, tensions mounted when the Concordat negotiations were continually postponed. The Church feared that slow negotiations would coincide with parliamentary elections that had the potential to place more left-leaning members in parliament, whose sympathy to the Church was little to none. The Church calmed its nerves when the Concordat was officially ratified by President Stanislaw Wojciechowski in 1925; it essentially gave the Catholic Church autonomy and expanded the scale of official Church influence to a level more comparable to that prior to the partitioning period.<sup>81</sup> The Church was allowed a substantial amount of control in religious education, and former church property under control of the state was determined to be used for maintaining salaries of the clergy.<sup>82</sup> While opposition to the Concordat was tangible among Catholic priests and bishops who feared that the “Church had made needless sacrifices to civil authority and compromised its independence from state power,” it was not strong enough to dismantle negotiations.<sup>83</sup>

Church relations with the Polish state were heavily dependent on establishing strong relationships with the most powerful of Polish statesman. The Church, thus, sought a cooperative relationship in one of the most prominent state officials—Piłsudski. His role as Chief of State from 1918-1921 and his success in leading the Polish military through the Polish-Soviet War gave him great prestige among the Polish population. He resigned from his post as Chief of

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pg. 74

<sup>80</sup> Polonsky, “A Government of Labour,” pg. 209

<sup>81</sup> Mazgaj, “The Legal Status of the Church in Pre-War Poland,” pg. 12

<sup>82</sup> Davies, “Niepodległość: Twenty Years of Independence,” pg. 420

<sup>83</sup> Pease, “From Constitution to Concordat, 1921-1925,” pg. 75

State, but a coup d'état in 1926 forced the resignation of President Wojciechowski, as Piłsudski became the newest leader of the Polish Second Republic.<sup>84</sup> Over the next few years, Piłsudski's government established a delicate, but relatively amicable relationship with the Church. Church officials, especially Pope Pius XI, trusted Piłsudski, and accepted the consistently stable role of the Church that Piłsudski's policies offered.

This, unfortunately, was slightly dismantled during the aftermath of Piłsudski's death in 1935. "The fragile truce between the Polish Church and the sanacja regime in Warsaw rested so heavily on the personal understanding of Piłsudski and the pope," and Piłsudski's death left Church and state officials alike unsure of the nature of future Polish Church-state relations. For one, the Polish Socialist Party became disjointed by the death of its leader; Piłsudski was the face of the party, and "in his absence, it fragmented into factions vying for leadership of the movement."<sup>85</sup> To make matters worse, party members found themselves at odds with the Vatican when they discovered that Bishop Łosiński of Kielce told officials in his diocese to ignore Piłsudski's funeral train when it stopped, and he also prohibited the ringing of church bells in Piłsudski's honor.<sup>86</sup> This and other similar controversies pushed socialist party members to suspect that an act of disrespect of this kind was a sign of betrayal, and feared that the Catholic Church was throwing its support toward the Right National Democrats, who continually claimed to be the Catholic party in Poland.

The fragile situation was once again threatened by the Wawel incident that caused a public uproar when Archbishop Sapieha allowed a personal contempt for Piłsudski to get in the way of Piłsudski's wish to have his remains buried in the Wawel crypt. Piłsudski's final resting place was under construction, and Sapieha attempted to sabotage the predetermined plans by

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<sup>84</sup> Davies, "Niepodległość: Twenty Years of Independence," pg. 422

<sup>85</sup> Pease, "Post Mortem: Piłsudski Lies Uneasy in the Grave," pg. 174

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pg. 177

issuing an order to have the transfer of Piłsudski's body completed within one week, creating an unreasonable and impractical deadline.<sup>87</sup> Saphiea's actions enraged state officials and Polish society as a whole, who idolized Piłsudski as a symbol of Polish nationalism. While many Church officials rallied in support of Saphiea, the outrage that ensued prompted action from the Vatican. An unanticipated, but well-deserved apology was issued from the Vatican, and it was rightfully accepted by officials in Warsaw. As Pease suggests, this controversy was the embodiment of the struggle between the Church and the Polish state during the interwar period. Patriotism had a polarizing effect on Poles whose allegiance was split between two central symbols of Polish nationalism. Some Poles "centered on the Church as the age-old guardian and definer of national values, [while others were] devoted to the cult of Piłsudski as the exemplar of civic virtue, regarding Catholicism as a secondary or even dubious influence."<sup>88</sup> However, it is important to note that while tensions between the Church and state were palpable, they did not terminate the privileged status of the Church. In addition to the fact that the Catholicism was officially considered the primary religion in Poland, the Church continued to have control over religious education and press, marriage procedures, hospital administration, and so on. The Constitution of 1935 is a prime example of this fact; the state had an opportunity to limit the powers of the Church, but instead, Church autonomy was upheld to the same degree it was awarded in the 1921 Constitution.

### **Summary:**

Pease rightly illustrates the strained relationship between Church and state that resulted in conflict among the Polish population, whose loyalties to both the Church and the state were at the core of their identity. However, while the interwar period proved to place a strain on Church-

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<sup>87</sup> Pease, "The 'Unpardonable Insult': The Wawel Incident of 1937 and Church-State Relations in Poland," pg. 427

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pg. 435

state relations, it highlighted the extent to which nationalism played a role in defining the Polish identity. Differences between Church and state officials certainly became more apparent, but the outbreak of the Second World War kept tensions from getting out of hand. Poles soon realized the extent to which their country's sovereignty was jeopardized by the fascist policies of Hitler's Germany, and then by the anti-religious communist policies of Stalin's Soviet Union. War changes everything, and in the case of Poland, its people discounted the Wawel incident and other similar examples of Church-state tension in an attempt to latch on to a symbol of nationalism that had yet to truly fail them.

## **Chapter II: World War II and the Rise of Communism**

In order to begin any discussion of the Church's position during communism, it is imperative, as established in Chapter I, to lay the foundation upon which Church loyalty is based. Though they underwent centuries of oppression and civil unrest— from wars against the Teutonic Knights and Sweden, the partition period, World War I, and the interwar period — Poles developed an unquestionable sense of national identity that is evident to anyone who visits Poland up to the present. This national identity is unequivocally associated with the long-lasting presence and strength of loyalty to the Catholic Church, which aided Poles in their struggle towards sovereignty during times when Poland's future was uncertain and under threat. The interwar period proved to be one of substantial gain for the Church, whose presence was officially recognized and respected by the Polish state. However, this period of relative peace did not last long, as the Second World War destroyed the institutions which Poles fought so hard to resurrect during the interwar period.

The conclusion of World War II left Poland in a position that was all too familiar to its people: vulnerable to the forces of foreign power and influence. One of the only differences was that as a result of World War II and the Holocaust, for the first time in its century-long history, the Polish state was ethnically homogenous; Dmowski's ideal vision of Poland for the Catholics became a harsh reality. As a Soviet satellite state, Poland was once again unable to develop policies of its own choosing; instead, policies were enforced by a foreign adversary. Communism tested the true strength and vitality of Catholic allegiance in Poland, and in the end, Polish Catholicism remained victorious. It is here that a more detailed discussion of Catholicism and the crux of this research truly begin. Through a synopsis of the main events pertaining to the relationship between the Catholic Church and Polish identity during the rise of communism, this

chapter will explain how Catholicism was affected by the religious hostility and oppressive policies of the communist regime.

## **I. World War II**

The outbreak of World War II was a culmination of a variety of consequences from the previous World War. Poland, more specifically, the Polish corridor and the free city of Gdańsk, became territorial hotspots for Hitler, whose policy of self-determination already granted him reign over Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939, respectively. Hitler was eager to expand the territory of the Third Reich, and knew that invading Poland would only increase the likelihood of war in Europe. Hitler blamed a portion of German defeat in World War I on the fact that German forces fought a two-front war; he recognized that he needed to devise a scheme to ensure that Germany did not repeat the same mistake. So, Hitler initiated a non-aggression treaty with Stalin that would allow him to pursue his territorial interests without the risk of engaging in a two-front war. The Hitler-Stalin Pact, which secretly granted Stalin the ability to create a fourth partition of Poland if the Soviet Union remained neutral upon Hitler's offensive into Western Poland, made invasion more enticing for both aggressors. Hitler did not have to worry about Soviet forces from the East, and Stalin could recover territory lost by the aftermath of the previous World War. German forces invaded Polish territory on September 1, 1939, and Stalin sent the Red Army to create the fourth partition in Eastern Poland on September 17. On September 28, 1939, not even one month after the initial German invasions, Poland ceased to exist. Soviet leaders were satisfied with the news, as Molotov, Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, exclaimed, "Nothing is left of Poland, this ugly offspring of the Versailles Treaty."<sup>89</sup> This was only the beginning of the catastrophic German and Soviet occupations that would forever transform the face of post-war Poland.

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<sup>89</sup> Leslie, "In Defeat, September 1939-July 1941," pg. 219

## **The Vatican's Position in the Outbreak of War:**

The Vatican is often criticized for mishandling the Nazis' rise to power and eventual territorial demands of the Polish Corridor; Rome was "painfully cautious," and its attempts at being a peacemaker failed miserably, as Catholic officials underestimated Hitler's plans for the region.<sup>90</sup> In the early 1930s, despite its suspicions of Hitler and the Nazi party, the Vatican tried to emphasize the value of the Nazis' shared contempt for communism. Even though the Vatican was weary of Nazi policies in Europe, it maintained a "prevalent conviction that Communism presented the greater long-term threat and that the Nazis, though dangerous, might still be persuaded to make useful contributions to the front of opposition to revolution and its Soviet sponsors."<sup>91</sup> The Vatican went so far as to sign a Concordat with the German state in 1933, hoping that it would provide protection for the Church in Germany.<sup>92</sup>

However, after witnessing "flagrant and ongoing violations of the concordat" by the Nazi party, Pope Pius XI reprimanded the Nazis for their "ideological offenses against Christian morality."<sup>93</sup> Hitler saw the Concordat as a symbol of the Church's approval of the Nazi regime, leading him to ignore its stipulations and continue on his murderous path toward European destruction and eventual German domination.<sup>94</sup> As Hitler's demands became more direct, the Vatican grew concerned about Poland's future as the Nazis' next target. After a failed attempt at convening a peace-bringing conference, Pope Pius XII (Pius XI died in early 1939) urged Poland to relinquish Gdańsk in order to appease Hitler, and hopefully, destroy the possibility of war. The Polish government, represented by Foreign Minister Józef Beck, refused to listen to the Vatican, claiming that Pope Pius' tame treatment of Hitler, along with his deeply rooted relationship with

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<sup>90</sup> Pease, "Oratio pro Pace: Pius XII and the Coming of the Second World War," pg. 195

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pg. 198

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pg. 197

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pg. 198

<sup>94</sup> Krieg, "The Vatican Concordat with Hitler's Reich," 13 February 2013

German society, was too suspect.<sup>95</sup> Poland's refusal to give up Gdańsk ultimately sparked the beginning of World War II.

In retrospect, the Poles interpret the Vatican's participation in the buildup of war as weak; they believe that the Pope was "well meaning, but helpless and ineffectual in the end."<sup>96</sup> Conversely, the Vatican found itself in a difficult position, with vulnerable Catholic populations in both Germany and Poland. It tried to maintain peace between Germany and Poland in order to avoid a looming catastrophic war, but it is clear that its efforts were negligible. The Vatican held out hope that Poland's surrender of Gdańsk would put an end to Hitler's demands, but this was not the case. Hitler's plans to repaint the face of Europe were entirely underestimated by the Vatican, and no Polish port city would have curbed his hunger for European domination.

The war began, and Poland was forever changed; its soldiers fought valiantly against German forces, but were annihilated and forced underground or into exile within a few weeks. In addition, Poland was left without its most powerful and influential political and religious leaders, including Cardinal Hlond, who fled Poland in an attempt to reach Rome and "plead the Polish cause to the Pope."<sup>97</sup> Abandonment was a common feeling among Poles who looked at Hlond's absence critically. As Pease states, Hlond's flight from Poland as well as the Vatican's minimal efforts to defend Poland were interpreted as a "violation of the principle that the shepherd should not abandon his endangered flock."<sup>98</sup> However, despite Polish frustrations with the Vatican and Hlond, a heavy negative impact on Polish Catholic morale was not detected. Instead, German occupiers soon realized the difficulty of "subdue[ing] the Poles because of their 'fanatical faith'

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<sup>95</sup> Pease, "Oratio pro Pace: Pius XII and the Coming of the Second World War pg. 205

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pg. 195

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pg. 208

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pg. 208

in the resurrection of Poland.”<sup>99</sup> The Red Army came to the same conclusion throughout the Soviet occupation and for decades to follow.

### **Poland throughout the War:**

The losses Poland suffered during the war were extraordinary, as Soviet and German occupation resulted in the deaths of millions. Many Poles refer to the period from 1939-1944 as “Golgotha,” in reference to Christ’s time on the cross; this is also synonymous with the “Babylonian Captivity” of the partition period. Sovietization policies forced the deportation of approximately 1.5 million Poles, whom Stalin believed to be in opposition to the Soviet regime.<sup>100</sup> This population included thousands of priests, many of whom were sent into Siberian exile, and died in Soviet gulags. While the Holocaust eliminated virtually all of Poland’s Jewish population, religious persecution was not limited to only Jewish people. This is most evident in the fact that nearly 20 percent of the Polish priesthood died during the war.<sup>101</sup> Since Hitler and the Nazis were aware of the Catholic Church’s ties to Polish identity and nationalism, they feared that the Church would unify Poles in a rally against the Nazi occupation. In order to prevent a situation of this kind, priests were gathered and imprisoned in concentration camps.

Probably the most famous and profound demonstration of Catholic virtue involved a Franciscan priest named Maksymilian Kolbe. During his imprisonment at Auschwitz in 1941, Father Kolbe saved Franciszek Gajowniczek, a fellow prisoner, by volunteering to replace Gajowniczek and undergo his sentence to death by starvation.<sup>102</sup> Not only did Kolbe save Gajowniczek (who survived Auschwitz and lived to be 94), but he also soothed and comforted the other nine men who were sentenced along with him. Father Kolbe provided his fellow

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<sup>99</sup> Leslie, “In Defeat, September 1939-July 1941,” pg. 218

<sup>100</sup> Stola, “Forced Migrations in Central European History,” pg. 334

<sup>101</sup> Diskin, “The First Period of Gomulka’s Rule,” pg. 10

<sup>102</sup> “Sixty-Ninth Anniversary of the Death of St. Maximilian Kolbe,” 13 February 2013

prisoners with a “protective presence” and “suddenly their cells, in which they awaited the ghastly final denouncements, resounded with hymns and prayers.”<sup>103</sup> Father Kolbe’s expression of his religious convictions allowed him to reassure his fellow prisoners during a time of immeasurable weakness and fear. Selflessness of this caliber highlights the strength of Father Kolbe’s beliefs and exhibits a sense of solidarity that he promoted among a group of people experiencing immense oppression.

While anti-Semitism was fervent among some Poles prior to and during the war, men like Kolbe show that Polish nationalism took precedence over religious differences. Kolbe’s sacrifice is a true testament to Poles’ undying sense of nationalism sparked by their ties to the Catholic Church. This incident, in particular, gave Poles justification for remaining loyal to the Church through the aftermath of the war, and contributed to the Catholic Church’s ability to preserve a strong presence in Poland. In addition, World War II changed the symbolism and significance of the priesthood, whose members were elevated to a position of true leadership and guidance. Stewart Steven once spoke to a priest who explained that the destruction of World War II led parishioners to seek leadership of an entirely different sort. Whereas prior to the war, people sought advice from priests about whom to marry, the war brought upon changes in the primary functions of priesthood. Priests were suddenly “asked to decide matters of life and death affecting the whole community, coupled with the kind of moral and ethical questions which [the priest] had never even thought of.”<sup>104</sup> Father Kolbe is a prime example of a priest who provided guidance to his fellow prisoners, regardless of their religious affiliation, and provided much needed leadership in the most dire of circumstances.

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<sup>103</sup> Steven, “The Church,” pg. 170

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pg. 163

The same can be said for the priests who participated in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. In an attempt to force German occupiers out of the city, the government-in-exile collaborated with underground Polish resistance forces (most notably, the Armia Krajowa) in Warsaw. While the uprising was ultimately unsuccessful, the valiant efforts of those who participated exhibited the patriotic nature of the Polish resistance movement. A priest is integrated into the Warsaw Uprising Monument in Warsaw in order to represent clergy members who, just as Kolbe did in Auschwitz, comforted the men who sacrificed their lives for the good of the Polish people.<sup>105</sup> As a consequence of the uprising, German forces leveled the majority of Warsaw, destroying a number of churches in their path.

The Church's involvement in the war was not limited to Father Kolbe and the priests who participated in the Warsaw Uprising. Irena Sendlerowa, for example, saved thousands of children from the Warsaw Ghetto through Żegota, an underground organization supported by the government-in-exile that was responsible for producing false identity records in order to save Jews from Nazi occupation. Sendlerowa, a Roman Catholic nurse and social worker, benefited from her connections with the Roman Catholic Church by using churches and convents as a refuge for children whom she smuggled out of the ghetto. She then found adoptive homes for the children, and kept records of them in the hopes of reuniting with the children after the war, and informing them of their former, true identities.<sup>106</sup> There is no question that through its support of Sendlerowa's efforts, the Church participated in the liberation of thousands of Poles. Countless other priests, nuns, and lay people exercised their faith and courage in an effort to save fellow Poles from the destructive forces of Nazi Germany. This is not to say that all Poles, or even all church officials, aided in the saving of Jews; however, the Church's role in the resistance efforts

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<sup>105</sup> "Warsaw Uprising Memorial," 26 February 2013

<sup>106</sup> Wieler, "The Long Path to Irena Sendler- The Mother of the Holocaust Children," 17 February 2013

of World War II was significant enough to be discussed at considerable length. With that said, it is clear that the Church solidified its role as a predominant institution of direction and leadership at a time when the future of Poland seemed grim. As a result, the Church was able to act as an opposing force to communism and sustain its influence on Polish nationalism and religiosity.

## **II. War's Aftermath**

Upon the war's completion, the "Big Three" gathered at conferences in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam to discuss and determine how to best tackle postwar issues.<sup>107</sup> One such issue was the position of Poland and the other occupied countries of Eastern Europe. These conferences redrew Polish borders, which created an ethnically and religiously homogeneous state; the new ethnic and religious cohesion of the Poles proved to influence the role of the Church in a state whose hostility towards communism was certainly palpable. In addition to decisions concerning Poland's new borders, the leaders collectively established a legitimate Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. While some states such as Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia were fully incorporated into the Soviet Union, Poland was determined to be a Soviet satellite state. The "Big Three" agreed that free, democratic elections were to take place at the earliest possible date.<sup>108</sup> These elections did not take place until 1947, as Soviet officials prepared members of the Provisional Government of National Unity (TJRN), and disregarded the existence of the Polish government-in-exile. This Provisional Government assisted in the Soviet indoctrination of the Polish people and set the foundations for a Soviet-supported communist regime. The 1947 elections, which were manipulated by Soviet officials, virtually created a one-party system, with

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<sup>107</sup> The "Big Three" were the leaders of the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States, thought to be the three most powerful countries of the Allied Powers. Stalin represented the Soviet Union at all three conferences. During the conferences at Tehran and Yalta, Churchill represented Great Britain, and Roosevelt represented the United States. At Potsdam, Truman became the United States' representative following Roosevelt's death, and Attlee replaced Churchill after his victory in British elections.

<sup>108</sup> Davies, "Golgota: Poland in the Second World War," pg. 488

the Polish United Workers Party taking almost every seat in the Sejm.<sup>109</sup> Poland was, once again, thrust into an environment full of political and religious animosity, as it was essentially subject to the policies of “foreign masters and bureaucratic opportunists.”<sup>110</sup>

Stalin and his companions, however, underestimated the difficulty and feasibility of establishing a sustainable communist regime in Poland; Stalin famously stated that, “communism fit[s] on Poland as well as a fine horse’s saddle fits on a cow.”<sup>111</sup> Implementing communist ideals in a country whose people are among some of the most devout Catholics in all of Europe and are historically hostile toward foreign oppressive policy was bound to be a challenge. Regardless of communist attempts to curb the appeal of Catholicism, Poles remained loyal to the Church. As an institution deeply integrated in the foundations of Polish national identity, the Catholic Church and Polish devotion to it was not eliminated by the imposition of communist policies and ideals. Instead, the Catholic Church and its leaders, especially Cardinal Wyszyński and Pope John Paul II, inspired opposition to communist repression, and extended the prestige of the Church in such a manner that it outlived the communist era.

### **The Establishment of Communism in Poland:**

The communist regime in Poland was never quite strong enough to impose Stalinization in its purest form. As Davies points out, the communist movement was so fragile that the “only possibility [for survival] was to conceal [its] weakness, and to concentrate on the destruction of [its] rivals.”<sup>112</sup> In doing so, communism enforced policies of rapid industrialization as well as farm collectivization through the Six-Year Plan. Poland was also transformed into a state where censorship was commonplace and displays of opposition were risky and prone to punishment.

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<sup>109</sup> “Consolidation of Communist Power,” 14 February 2013

<sup>110</sup> Davies, “Partia: The Communist Movement,” pg. 555

<sup>111</sup> Mazgaj, “Preface,” pg. 1

<sup>112</sup> Davies, “PolskaLudowa: The People’s Republic,” pg. 569

The communist era left Poles in a position of vulnerability to which their history of seemingly constant struggle can easily attest. Poland did not receive communism well, and on a number of occasions, Poles unified in protest against ideology for which they vehemently opposed.

The Church was certainly not excluded from oppressive measures; in fact, its influence threatened the legitimacy of the communist government, so policies directed towards the Church were considerably harsh. Immediately following the close of World War II, the communist government hoped to sever ties with the Vatican in order to “create a schismatic national church which, separated by Rome, was to submit more easily to political controls.”<sup>113</sup> This was exhibited by Poland’s termination of the Concordat of 1925 in September 1945. The government claimed that the Vatican violated the stipulations of the Concordat during the war; among a number of reasons for the termination was the Vatican’s unlawful appointment of the Archbishop of Gniezno-Poznań, whose administrative territory was then partly outside the newly drawn Polish borders.<sup>114</sup> More importantly, the Vatican failed to officially recognize the communist government, and in the wake of the government’s transition to communism, the Concordat lost its “binding force.”<sup>115</sup> In response, Pope Pius XII issued a letter to Polish bishops, calling the termination of Concordat “unjustified” and the Vatican “[did] not intend to attempt to disprove it since it [was] so patently false and ridiculous...”<sup>116</sup> The termination of the Concordat left the Church in Poland “function[ing] in a legal vacuum,” where “no constitutional provisions, no law or decree defined its status.”<sup>117</sup>

It is important to note, though, that relations between the Church and the Polish state fluctuated. At times, the Church was subject to state enforced restrictions, while at other times, it

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<sup>113</sup>Szajkowski, “Church-State Relations 1940-1970: Conflicts and Co-existence,” pg. 9-10

<sup>114</sup>Mazgaj, “Abrogation of the Concordat,” pg. 20

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pg. 21

<sup>116</sup>Diskin, “The First Period of Gomułka’s Rule,” pg. 30

<sup>117</sup>Rosada and Gwóźdź, “Constitutional Provisions and the Concordat of 1925,” pg. 175

was granted relative flexibility in its rights. In some cases, priests and other church officials “often under duress, blackmail, or even physical pressure” collaborated with the communist administration.<sup>118</sup> These cases were the exception, however, as only 278 out of 32,000 monks and nuns were informers for the communist state in 1953.<sup>119</sup> Prior to the 1952 Constitution, the communist government, after its efforts to break the Polish Church’s ties with Rome, tried to create an atmosphere in which the Church would be swayed to cooperate with the state. For one, the Church was exempt from land nationalization policies.<sup>120</sup> In addition, the state sponsored the creation of the Social Catholics, led by Bolesław Piasecki; through publications such as *Dziś i Jutro*, this group aimed to “accept the revolutionary changes and reconcile Catholicism and Marxism.”<sup>121</sup> To the state’s discomfort, Poles did not waver in their loyalties to the Church, and could not be convinced to support communism. The next few years demonstrated the ambiguity of the Church’s relationship with the state. While Church officials pushed for state recognition of Church autonomy and a right to establish religiously affiliated educational and charitable institutions, the government stressed its insistence on limited appeasement of Church wishes.<sup>122</sup> As a result, the Church was placed in a position of uncertainty, and Poles witnessed the relationship between the Church and the state deteriorate with increasing speed. The Church’s sovereignty was dependent on the status of its relationship with the state, and this was a dangerous position, since relations were growing more contentious over time.

### **Communist Policy Regarding the Church:**

Following the termination of the Concordat and failed cooperation attempts shortly after, the communist government enforced its superiority through a number of policies. First, in 1947,

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<sup>118</sup> Anders, “Poland’s Compromised Church,” pg. 98

<sup>119</sup> Curp, “The Polish Review,” pg. 520

<sup>120</sup> Valkenier, “The Catholic Church in Communist Poland, 1945-1955,” pg. 307

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pg. 308

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pg. 312

the state officially recognized minority denominations of Christianity because recognition would “counterbalance” the influence of the Church.<sup>123</sup> While this was a relatively discreet way of undermining Church influence, the state took more direct and drastic measures against the Church as well. State officials found strict regulations against the Church especially necessary following the Pacelli-Spellman alliance of 1949, which expressed “Vatican identification with the West in the forty-five-year struggle of the Cold War.”<sup>124</sup> This alliance was a manifestation of the Vatican’s ardent anti-communist position, which “[forbid] all co-operation between Catholics and communists.”<sup>125</sup> Attacks on both sides only seemed to elevate pre-existing tensions, and the state responded to the Vatican’s anti-communist alliance with harsh policies meant to target the Catholic Church and its advocates.

To the Church’s misfortune, the state was quick to take advantage of its leverage, and developed policies that sought to eliminate the Church’s influence on the Polish people. For instance, Catholic publications, such as the *TygodnikWarszawski*, were limited in their ability to publish and distribute to the Polish population.<sup>126</sup> In addition, Church property (not including church buildings or churchyards), which was initially granted exemption from nationalization, was confiscated and nationalized.<sup>127</sup> The rationale behind this was that the state needed “to remove the last vestiges of feudal privileges held by religious associations and at the same time to secure the material needs of the clergy.”<sup>128</sup> Hospitals, formerly under the control of the Church, were also nationalized. Medical professionals in these institutions mainly consisted of clergy members, who following the nationalization, were permitted to stay; however, they were

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<sup>123</sup>Rosada and Gwózdź, “Postwar Laws and Decrees Affecting the Church,” pg. 182

<sup>124</sup>Weigel, “Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism,” pg. 66

<sup>125</sup>Prizel, “Poland after World War II,” pg. 83

<sup>126</sup> Starr, “The Church of Silence in Communist Poland,” pg. 310

<sup>127</sup> Davies, “PolskaLudowa: The People’s Republic,” pg. 580

<sup>128</sup>Rosada and Gwózdź, “Postwar Laws and Decrees Affecting the Church,” pg. 195

eventually phased out and replaced with lay nurses and doctors. Under state control, hospitals were not maintained to the same degree as they were prior to nationalization; hygiene, for example, was a major issue, as state standards were far below those of the Church.<sup>129</sup> Probably most disconcerting was the fact that the hospital administrations were replaced with members of the communist party, who had minimal or no experience in hospital administration, and were sometimes members of the communist secret police. Part of their job was to “carry on political propaganda among the patients and employees,” which only contributed to the disintegration of order in exchange for “traditional Communist chaos.”<sup>130</sup>

Catholic charitable organizations were disbanded as well. The most famous was Caritas, an organization that provided goods and services to the most marginalized members of Polish society. It was especially beneficial in providing essential goods and medicine during the immediate aftermath of World War II. In addition to distributing food and reconstruction materials to Poles, the organization was responsible for supplying the Polish Catholic Church with “liturgical books, vestments, chalices, ciboria, monstrances, and even altar wine.”<sup>131</sup> The state was fully aware of Caritas’ good doings, and decided it would be to the state’s benefit to rid Poland of the organization in order to decrease the Church’s positive influence on the Polish people. As a result, Caritas faced persecution as the state accused the organization of mishandling funds. The Church responded in disbelief, claiming that the accusations of the state were unfounded. However, despite the Church’s opposition, Caritas was turned over to state control, and donations to the organization diminished over time.<sup>132</sup> The state went even further in its restrictions, as it narrowed the provisions concerning the church’s involvement in the practice

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<sup>129</sup>Mazgaj, “Legislation Affecting the Temporal Goods of the Church,” pg. 64

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., pg. 64

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pg. 59

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pg. 62

and legality of marriage. The Marriage Law of 1945, for example, stated that a marriage would be deemed legal only if it was performed by an official of the Civil State Registry. This eliminated the use for a Church marriage, since all legal records of marriage, formally the responsibility of the clergy, were transferred to state officials.<sup>133</sup>

Education was also transformed from an institution that required the instruction of religion for Catholic children in state schools to the establishment of secular education that promoted the ideals of communism. Religious education prior to the infiltration of communist ideology stressed the importance of partaking in religious customs. With this, students were obligated to attend Sunday mass and three retreat days each year, participate in Confession and receive Communion three times a year, and partake in a prayer at the beginning and end of each school day.<sup>134</sup> In communist Poland, religious education was permitted, but had to be taught by a priest, when religious education was previously allowed to be taught by a lay teacher. As previously stated, the number of priests deceased drastically because of the war, so this limited the number of capable religious instructors in schools, and decreased the potential for lengthy exposure to religious education. The state intended to indoctrinate its youth through “efforts of secularization [that] mainly consisted in cutting the number of hours, issuing selective permits to only specific priests as teachers, eliminating crosses and other ritual articles from the classroom, and by the prohibition of religious rituals and ceremonies in schools.”<sup>135</sup> In exchange for religious instruction and practice, the state disguised communist propagandizing in educational associations. A primary example of this was the creation and the state’s sponsorship of the Society of Children’s Friends, which “attempt[ed] to instill atheism and avowedly aim[ed] at

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<sup>133</sup>Mazgaj, “Legislation Affecting Christian Marriage,” pg. 105

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., “The Church’s Teaching Activity in the Schools,” pg. 71

<sup>135</sup>Diskin, “The Stalinist Era,” pg. 100

bringing up the younger generation as firm supporters of the communist regime.”<sup>136</sup> By constructing alternative outlets for education, the state hoped to teach children about communism at a young age, thinking that the children could rally in support of the communist party as they grew older. In addition to this, the state coerced students into inadvertent support of the regime by “planning the most exciting [school] outings of the year...on Catholic holidays,” or by scheduling “crucial examinations...[or] Party events which [older students] were told (none too subtly) would affect their chances of entering university and their subsequent prospects if they didn’t attend.”<sup>137</sup> These examples simply show the strategic maneuvers implemented by the state in an effort to generate support for communist party; this, in effect, was an attempt to reduce the Church’s shaping of adolescents’ religious and political convictions.

All of these policies were meant to suppress the rising anti-communist sentiments among Poles that were not only supported, but encouraged by the Catholic Church. However, Wyszyński, under significant pressure resulting from state mistreatment, recognized the importance in creating an official understanding with the state. This was manifested in the Agreement of 1950, which included many concessions on the part of the Church in an effort to make peace with the state. Concessions by the Church included supporting the state in the controversy regarding the recovered territories of the Oder-Neisse line, which was fueled by the Vatican’s hesitation to recognize the Church in the Polish territories granted by the Oder-Neisse line agreement at Yalta and Potsdam. The provisions of the Oder-Neisse agreement involved expelling millions of Germans, many of whom were Catholic, to Soviet territory in Germany. The Vatican hoped that generating a peace treaty between Poland and Germany regarding the Oder-Neisse line would allow for official recognition of the Church in the recovered territories.

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<sup>136</sup> Starr, “The Church of Silence in Communist Poland,” pg. 307

<sup>137</sup> Steven, “The Church,” pg. 159

Until then, the Vatican was only willing to appoint provisional bishops to the region.<sup>138</sup> In signing the Agreement of 1950, Wyszyński transferred Polish Church support behind the state, instead of the Vatican. In addition to this, the Church “pledged to support the government ... on socialization of industry, and in the windup campaign against remnants of the postwar underground which by then had indeed degenerated to banditry.”<sup>139</sup> In exchange for these concessions, the state promised to “guarantee freedom of worship, religious education, and a Church press.”<sup>140</sup> Despite the agreement, however, the state refused to uphold its part of the bargain, and continued to practice oppressive measures against the Church.

State neglect of the Church’s needs was later solidified by the Constitution of 1952. The Constitution provided Polish citizens equal rights “irrespective of nationality, race, or religion,” where “infringement of this principle by any direct or indirect privileges or restrictions of right on account of nationality, race, or religion, is subject to punishment.”<sup>141</sup> Moreover, Article 70 of the Constitution declared separation of Church and state, explaining that the “principles of the relationship between Church and State, as well as the legal position and the property status of religious bodies, shall be determined by laws.”<sup>142</sup> For the first time in Polish history, separation of Church and state appeared in official legislation. In theory, the Constitution granted the Church relative tolerance by the state. In reality, however, the Constitution was ineffective in providing the Church with a position that reflected relative tolerance and autonomy. Instead, the vague wording of the document allowed for loose interpretation by the state, whose policies directed toward the Church did not lighten in their severity. The interpretation of some articles was so loose, in fact, that the state criminalized a clergy member’s questioning of state behavior,

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<sup>138</sup>Rosada and Gwóźdź, “Postwar Laws and Decrees Affecting the Church,” pg. 210

<sup>139</sup> Lewis, “A Thousand Years of Devotion,” pg. 21

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pg. 21

<sup>141</sup>Rosada and Gwóźdź “Constitutional Provisions and the Concordat of 1925,” pg. 176

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pg. 177

as it was deemed to be an “act endangering the interests of the Polish People’s Republic.”<sup>143</sup> The state intentionally disregarded its own policies in an attempt to weaken the status of the Church, in turn, elevating the status of the communist state.

This was also exemplified by the 1953 arrest of Cardinal Wyszyński, who was accused of violating a pledge to punish priests who engaged in anti-communist activity.<sup>144</sup> Without a trial, Wyszyński was placed under house arrest for three years, and was only one among over 900 other clergy members who were imprisoned during that year.<sup>145</sup> Clearly, the Constitution of 1952 held minimal weight for the communist state, whose officials found little problem in using violations of vague laws as pretext for arresting priests and bishops. However, to the state’s dismay, Wyszyński became a symbol of “both faith and nation oppressed,” as he refused to bargain with the state which offered his release under the condition that he resign from his post as Polish Primate.<sup>146</sup> Instead, Cardinal Wyszyński’s imprisonment and refusal to cooperate proved to the state that despite great pressure, the Church and its most influential representatives would not sacrifice their convictions for state acceptance. As Lewis suggests, a journal called *Party Life* pinpointed the role of the Catholic Church during the most trying times of the communist regime: “The Church developed best in the catacombs, and the element of pressure, even the smallest amount of religious hostility, is felt deeply by society. It enlarges the influence of the Church and arouses religious feelings and fanaticism.”<sup>147</sup>

Despite its attempts to do so, the state was unable to detract from the lasting prestige of the Catholic Church. Poles remained loyal to the Church because it acted as a symbol of strength and leadership. In addition, its intense opposition to the communist state provided even the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., pg. 190

<sup>144</sup> “Stefan Wyszyński,” 23 February 2013

<sup>145</sup> Eberts, “The Roman Catholic Church and Democracy in Poland,” pg. 819

<sup>146</sup> Lewis, “A Thousand Years of Devotion,” pg. 22

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pg. 22

religiously indifferent with a sense of comfort. A common anecdote in communist Poland, for example, tells of a man who attends mass, but refuses to kneel. When his pew mate implores him to kneel as a sign of respect, he insists that he cannot do so since he is an atheist. Confused, the pew mate asks him his reasons for attending Church, and the man explains that he comes to mass because he is against the government.<sup>148</sup> This anecdote is a profound illustration of Poles' association of the Catholic Church with the resistance movement. Even people who were not religious sought refuge in the Church's anti-communist practices. Official state policy, no matter how harsh, could not keep Poles from attending mass and professing their faith to the Church or discontent with the state. The Church came to symbolize what Poles considered to be their true national identity, and the state found itself in contest with the Church for Polish loyalty in the decades to come.

### **III. Communism's Impact on Polish Society**

Although Poland's communist leaders used a variety of tactics in order to make the Church subservient to the state, they were unable to convince the Polish population to break ties with religion. The events of the second half of the 20th century proved to work to the Church's benefit. Communism and its legitimacy were beginning to unravel, and the Church's efforts to ward off communist control demonstrated strength and leadership to Poles who were in desperate need of support. This period in history produced some of the most influential figures in Polish society up to the present. It is the combination of the communist party's inability to remain a legitimate force of political, economic, and social progress *and* the Church's guidance and leadership that allowed Poles to fight through the oppressive decades brought by communism.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pg. 18

## **Poznań Uprising of 1956:**

Stalin's death in 1953 loosened the grip of the communist "straightjacket" throughout Poland and all Soviet satellite states. Most commonly known as "the thaw," this period in East European history exhibited strategies of "de-Stalinization," meant to be " 'strictly an internal affair of the Soviet party and government' and did not have external implications."<sup>149</sup> Despite Khrushchev's denunciation of oppressive Stalinist policies, Poland and other Soviet satellite states were, by no means, immediately transformed into societies promoting the value of freedom of speech and expression. This was demonstrated through the 1956 Workers' Uprising in Poznań. In reaction to rising taxes and food shortages, workers and university students in Poznań organized a peaceful protest in which they demanded better working conditions and the end of food shortages. The protest was put down by Polish communist secret police, the UB, who fired at and killed at least 50 protestors and left hundreds more wounded.<sup>150</sup>

The Uprising sparked outrage in Poland, and brought light to the fact that "the governments of the working class, as they called themselves, had failed to satisfy the most basic needs of the working class."<sup>151</sup> The communist regime was delegitimized, and a national uprising in October of that year demonstrated Polish frustrations with the communist government. The uprising proved to be beneficial to the Poles, who were introduced to "the flow...of scientific, technological, cultural, and intellectual information from the West" to which Soviet influence denied Poles access.<sup>152</sup> Exposure to the Western world made Poles realize that life in a communist state was not as ideal as the party claimed. Instead, communism seemed to hinder freedoms of choice, creativity, and religion that were guaranteed to members of Western society.

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<sup>149</sup> Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics: The Spring of 1956," pg. 147

<sup>150</sup> "UB" stands for Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, which translates in English to Safety Office.

<sup>151</sup> Mazgaj, "The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations," pg. 116

<sup>152</sup> Bloch, "Poland in the Present," pg. 62

Upon the death of Bolesław Bierut, Władzław Gomułka became the new First Secretary of the Polish communist party. Since Gomułka was considered to be more of a centrist than Bierut, the Church utilized him in order to regain privileges lost during the last 1940s and early 1950s. Following the reinstatement of religious education in schools, the Church believed that it could capitalize on the government's instability to regain relative autonomy. In addition to the reinstatement of religious education, the church "gained the right to build churches, increase the circulation of its newspapers, open seminaries, gain support for the clergy, and put an end to religious persecution."<sup>153</sup> The appearance of state compromise was short-lived, however, as rights to religious education were disregarded and terminated completely by 1970, and religious persecution continued.<sup>154</sup> Despite the state's neglect of Church demands for looser regulations, the Poznań uprising "mark[ed] the turning point in Polish post-war politics following which a stable replacement for the discredited Stalinism could never be devised."<sup>155</sup> Poland was on a path toward liberation from the communist regime, and the Church played a key role in this struggle for the dissolution of Polish communist power.

### **Millennium Celebration of 1966:**

In 1966, the Catholic Church in Poland celebrated its millennium, which demonstrated the extent of Polish loyalty and faithfulness to Catholicism. Despite attempts to dismantle the strength of the Catholic Church, Poland managed to sustain Church influence for one thousand years. This feat called for a celebration, which Cardinal Wyszyński launched ten years prior to the 1966 millennial year; in 1956, Poles participated in the rededication of the Marian Cult at Częstohowa for the 300th anniversary of the miracle of the Black Madonna. An astounding 1.5 million Poles gathered for a pilgrimage to Częstohowa. Participants processed with a picture of

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., pg. 61

<sup>154</sup> Mazgaj, "The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations," pg. 115

<sup>155</sup> Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics: The Spring of 1956," pg. 150

Wyszyński, who was still imprisoned at the time, and this symbolized the revered position Wyszyński held among adherents to Catholicism. In addition, the size of the crowd was unprecedented, as this event became “not only the greatest religious demonstration ever seen in a Communist country,... [but it also] served to arouse Polish patriotism, which had lain dormant for so long.”<sup>156</sup>

Following Wyszyński’s release from house arrest, the Polish Church coordinated events that led up to the millennial celebration of 1966. During his period of imprisonment, Wyszyński developed and planned for the decade-long preparation for the millennium in the form of a Novena. This included an “elaborate program of prayers, thematic sermons, liturgical celebrations, and a visitation in some parishes by a copy of the icon of the Black Madonna of Częstohowa.”<sup>157</sup> Wyszyński’s buildup to the millennium celebration also included a predetermined goal for each year, which priests incorporated into their homilies during Sunday mass. Such goals included: “Fidelity to God, the Cross, the Gospel of Christ, and the Church ; The struggle against national vices and acquisitions of Christian virtues; and The protection of the Mother of God, Queen of Poland.”<sup>158</sup> To summarize, the replica of the icon, which traveled through the many towns and villages of Poland, along with the integration of Wyszyński’s goals in Sunday mass served a clear purpose. The adoration of the icon as well as the implementation of Wyszyński’s goals were used in the hopes of reminding people of Mary’s position as Queen of Poland. In addition, Wyszyński strove to spark enthusiasm for the 1966 millennium. As was true during the invasions of the Turks and Swedes centuries earlier, this enthusiasm demonstrated the continued belief that Poland was the defender of Christianity; during the

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<sup>156</sup> Bloch, “The Church,” pg. 159

<sup>157</sup> Szajkowski, “Church-State Relations 1944-1970,” pg. 21

<sup>158</sup> Mazgaj, “The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations,” pg. 116

20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Polish were defending Christianity against communism, “a toxic cultural parasite that would, unchecked, destroy its host.”<sup>159</sup>

The state was fully conscious of the Church’s efforts to unite Poles under the name of Catholicism, so it attempted to “upstage the church by organizing competing celebrations of the millennium of Polish statehood.”<sup>160</sup> It went so far as to deny Pope Paul VI entry into Poland, preventing him from partaking in the millennial celebration. However, the state’s efforts were ineffective, as over one million Poles congregated at Częstohowa to commemorate the Church’s presence in Poland. In the Pope’s absence, Cardinal Wyszyński spoke to the crowd, proclaiming “ You [the Poles] are the personification of the Church. The more you are insulted, the more we love you... We... are united with you as one body. The bishops and the nation are united with you as never before, and this solidarity is our strength.”<sup>161</sup> This speech demonstrates how critical the millennium was for solidifying the relationship between religious adherence and opposition to communism. In addition, Wyszyński emphasized the importance of religious leadership as he stated that historically, Poles have proven that they could “often be without a king, and without a military commander, and without superiors and without prime ministers and without ministers, but this nation has never lived without a shepherd.”<sup>162</sup> The Catholic Church was a consistent symbol of Polish nationalism and patriotism, and its strength had to be maintained for the good of the people. A public display of this magnitude reinforced Polish loyalties to the Church, and confirmed overwhelming discontent with communism. As Weigel so rightly states, the millennial celebration of the Church “did not make the Revolution of 1989. But the Great

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<sup>159</sup>Weigel, “Poland: Igniting the Revolution,” pg. 114

<sup>160</sup> Casanova, “Religion, the New Millennium, and Globalization,” pg. 421

<sup>161</sup> Steven, “The Church,” pg. 161

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., pg. 160

Novena helped make the people who made the Revolution of 1989.”<sup>163</sup> In all, Wyszyński’s speech made it clear to all who listened that the Church was willing to fight in the struggle between religion and communism, and its emergence as the spearhead of the opposition movement was only the beginning of a concerted effort to rid Poland of its communist regime.

### **Workers’ Massacre of 1970:**

Similar to the Poznań uprising of 1956, the Massacre of 1970 in the trójmiasto area of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot contributed to the decreased legitimacy of the communist regime, and solidified the Church as a supporter of the Polish labor movement and communist opposition.<sup>164</sup> As a result of dramatic price increases for consumer goods, workers at the Gdańsk shipyards gathered in protest. Demanding to speak with Party representatives, the workers took to the streets, and marched to Party headquarters in Gdańsk. Workers attacked the headquarters building, and set it on fire.<sup>165</sup> The protest spread throughout Northern Poland and exhibited Polish distaste for communist economic policy. The Party responded with full force, and killed at least fifty workers. This demonstrated the Party’s disregard for the needs of the Polish people, and only served to delegitimize the regime. Following the massacre, Wyszyński issued a statement on behalf of the Polish Church, expressing the Church’s undying support for the workers in all of Poland: “[The workers] had the courage to lay claim to the equitable rights guaranteed in all of law of nature...because the worker deserves his pay...There is an admirable proximity... between the Gospel and the labor codex.”<sup>166</sup> Because of its compassion and understanding of workers’ hardships and its support of the labor movement, loyalty to the Church seemed more appealing to Poles; they were not willing to accept the costs of maintaining

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<sup>163</sup>Weigel, “Poland: Igniting the Revolution,” pg. 119

<sup>164</sup>“Trójmiasto” is the Polish word for “tri-city.”

<sup>165</sup>Modzelewski, “Non-Violence and the Strike Movements in Poland,” pg. 109

<sup>166</sup>Mazgaj, “The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations,” pg. 118

a communist regime in an environment saturated with civil unrest. In turn, the Church provided a sensible alternative for people who sought leadership and stability, and it secured its position as an anti-government force.

As a result of the massacre, Gomułka resigned and was replaced by Edward Gierek as First Secretary of the PZPR. Upon his assumption of power, Gierek cancelled the protest-provoking price hikes. In addition, in order to salvage what was left of a hostile and unstable relationship with the Church, Gierek promised the “return of 7,000 [Church] buildings, which the government nationalized in the past.”<sup>167</sup> This, however, turned out to be an empty promise, as Gierek’s government approved only a fraction of the 1,000 permits Cardinal Wyszyński requested for the building of “urgently needed churches.”<sup>168</sup> The inability of the Church and state to cooperate only added to the intensity of antagonism that already existed. The state’s disregard for the needs of the Church, and in turn, the Polish people, was reflected through its policies, and only drove people closer to the Church.

The communist government continued to fragment its support through another price hike in 1976. This resulted in demonstrations throughout Poland, along with the government’s use of violence to enforce its authority and power over the protestors. Poland’s opposition movement was growing, as evidenced by the creation of KOR, the Workers’ Defense Committee, by Polish intellectuals.<sup>169</sup> KOR promoted the importance of human rights among Polish workers and any other Poles who felt disenfranchised by the communist government; it became the “forerunner of Solidarity and its intellectual powerhouse.”<sup>170</sup> The Church supported the activities of the KOR, and was able to express its interests with “increasing force and stridency against the actions of

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., pg. 120

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., pg. 120

<sup>169</sup> Diskin, “Epilogue: The Post-Gomułka Era,” pg. 232

<sup>170</sup> Steven, “The Church,” pg. 158

the government.”<sup>171</sup> Church support for the organization was effective, and produced a contrast between the concerns that Church officials had for the workers in relation to the perceived indifference by the state. In addition, the new alliance between intellectuals and Church officials created a stronger force of resistance against the communist regime. Despite their differences, the fusion of Polish intellectuals and the Catholic Church provided Poland with a stronger resistance movement. By disregarding theological fragmentation, the resistance movement was able to work together towards the common goal of dismantling of the communist regime.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., pg. 232

### **Chapter III: The Decline and Demise of Communist Power**

Throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Poland's communist regime was continually undermined by uprisings and massacres; the Polish people were united against the government, and remained resistant to unjust policies. In addition, to communist officials' dismay, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's regime and the policies associated with it aided Polish efforts to rid Poland of communism. Through his condemnation, Khrushchev implicitly jeopardized the legitimacy of Marxism-Leninism, opening up greater potential for political opposition and dissent. From the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978 to the Round Table Talks beginning in 1988, Poland's resistance movement gained considerable momentum, and was able to rid Poland of communist power. With the help of the country's most influential 20<sup>th</sup> century leaders, most notably, Pope John Paul II, Lech Wałęsa, and Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, Polish persistence and loyalty to the anti-communist movement became a success. This chapter will work to explain how the anti-communist resistance movement developed. In addition, it will identify the clear connection between the Catholic Church and the resistance movement in order to demonstrate the Church's true influence on the Poles who fought to liberate themselves from the control of the communist state.

#### **I. Pope John Paul II:**

No discussion of Polish Catholicism is complete without a comprehensive description of Pope John Paul II's influence on his native country and its history. Commonly known as the "People's Pope," Pope John Paul II personified the strength and depth of religious convictions in Poland. Ironically, he led the Catholic Church during a time of religious uncertainty in the Soviet bloc; communist policy refused to grant the Church full autonomy, creating religious antagonism that was easily recognized by the citizens ruled under communist influence. This antagonism,

however, was not permanent, as John Paul's performance throughout his papacy helped to release Poland from the confines of communist policy.

A personal anecdote accurately articulates Poles' love for Pope John Paul II: During my year-long exchange in Olsztyn, I spent a significant amount of time with my host aunt, Marta. One time, in the beginning of my exchange, I noticed that she kept a prayer card of Pope John Paul II attached to the visor in her car. Intrigued, I asked her what she thought Pope John Paul II meant to the Polish people. Her eyes became glassy with tears as she explained why Poles, including herself, admire him. Bloch describes this admiration by saying that, "so many foreigners became rulers of Poland, Poland finally [had] her own king, who was also the emperor of Christendom—a modern emperor, a people's emperor."<sup>172</sup> John Paul was and continues to be *their* Pope, and the Polish people take great pride in his accomplishments as the head of the Catholic Church, but more importantly, as a fellow Pole.

John Paul was the first non-Italian pope in over four centuries, as well as the Church's first Slavic Pope. The timing could not have been more ideal, as John Paul was elected to the papacy in 1978, when Eastern Europe was still under religiously hostile communist control.<sup>173</sup> This worked to the Pope's (and Poland's) favor, as his influence in the region was immeasurable, partly because "the communists simply couldn't keep him out—at least out of Poland—without major international public relations problems."<sup>174</sup> John Paul's papacy reflected his focus on the promotion of basic human rights, and in this manner, he successfully influenced the organization and execution of a non-violent Solidarity movement. Through his emphasis on a humanistic approach, John Paul was able to encourage a type of resistance formerly foreign to the Polish

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<sup>172</sup> Bloch, "Poland in the Present," pg. 69

<sup>173</sup> Pope John Paul II's first full day as pope was October 17, 1978, which is the same day that Father Kolbe was beatified in 1971.

<sup>174</sup> Weigel, "The Wojtyła Difference," pg. 89

people: non-violent resistance. To John Paul, “the humanity of the human subject could not be reduced to race (the Nazi heresy); nor could it be understood as the expression of ‘objective’ historical forces to which it had to accommodate itself (the Marxist-Leninist heresy).”<sup>175</sup> His rejection of the oppressive forces of both German and Soviet adversaries expressed his disdain for violence, regardless of its purpose. In this vein, John Paul expressed to his fellow Poles that it was imperative that they leave their violent revolutionary past behind in exchange for a non-violent, humanistic approach to oppositional methods.

John Paul’s speeches captivated all who listened, not only because he was an accomplished linguist, but because his words were effective; his messages promoted the value of unified resistance, and inspired the use of non-violent protest in response to violent oppression. A few words of John Paul’s first speech as pope characterize his papacy; “Be not afraid,” he said, just as Jesus exclaimed to his apostles who were caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee.<sup>176</sup> John Paul used his newly obtained prestige and power to express his support for fundamental human rights. This was an especially pertinent message in Poland, where these words signified John Paul’s insistence that people release themselves from their inherent fear of communism, and unite to combat the communist party and its policies.

John Paul’s papal visit in 1979, for example, lifted the spirits of Poles whose frustration with the communist regime did not diminish. Similar to the 1966 millennium celebration, John Paul’s pilgrimage gave Poles the hope and optimism necessary to take on those who for so long denied them rights to religious and political freedom. In many of the thirty-two sermons given during his visit, John Paul stressed the importance of unifying all Poles under the pretext of promoting human rights. His words resonated with Poles, as he was “speaking and being heard

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., pg. 83

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., pg. 77

on four levels—religious, moral, historical-culture, and national—simultaneously.”<sup>177</sup> He alluded to Polish hardship as a result of the Soviet sphere of influence. In addition, he emphasized the long-forgotten value of the Polish people as he said, “remember this: Christ will never agree to man being viewed only as a means of production, or agree to man viewing himself as much. He will not agree that man should be valued, measured or evaluated only on this basis. Christ will never agree to that!”<sup>178</sup> This statement, along with a number of others containing similar messages, undermined Marxist-Leninist doctrine, and gave justification for Polish determination to regain religious freedoms.

As previously stated, John Paul communicated how critical it was to create an opposition movement that was not only non-violent, but also unified in its goals. This idea dates back to John Paul’s time as a professor at the Catholic University of Lublin, where he constructed a unification theory that identified the risk of conformity. John Paul acknowledged the dangers of conformity, claiming that, “conformity is more like *uniformity* than unity...conformism is unacceptable. In a situation where people only externally assimilate or acquiesce to the demands of the community, and they do it to avoid unpleasantness, the self and the community suffer irreplaceable losses.”<sup>179</sup> According to John Paul, true, non-violent solidarity was necessary to break the communist status-quo. This was especially true and more possible, given the lessening of fear that the relaxation of communist policies produced. Due to the period of de-Stalinization under Khrushchev and the push from Pope John Paul, Poles were more motivated to speak against the government and its policies. As George Weigel understood through his conversation with 1981 Solidarity spokesman, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, John Paul defined the “we” of Polish society that was hidden under the fear of communism: “Then the pope came and the ‘we’ was

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., pg. 99

<sup>178</sup> Szajkowski, “The Church and Dissent: 1970-1980,” pg. 70

<sup>179</sup> Bloch, “The Epilogue as a Prologue: Toward a Philosophy of Praxis,” pg. 200

clear: ‘we’ are the society, and the country is ours. ‘They’ are just an artificial crust.’”<sup>180</sup> John Paul was responsible for “exorcis[ing] the fear that kept the ‘we’ from coalescing,” and it sparked the motivations for the Solidarity movement and subsequent demonstrations of dissonance with the communist regime<sup>181</sup> John Paul’s influence on the formation and evolution of the Solidarity movement cannot be quantified. He inspired Poles to take charge of their rights in an effort to hold the communist regime accountable for its religiously and politically repressive policies. In doing so, John Paul II created a legacy that illustrates his devotion to the Catholic Church as well as the Polish people.

Through a conversation with Emilia Strzałkowska, my suspicions concerning Polish love and adoration of Pope John Paul II were confirmed.<sup>182</sup> I described the experience I had with my host aunt who began to tear up at the mention of Pope John Paul, and I asked Emilia if this incident was an accurate characterization of the Pope’s impact on Polish society. In response to my inquiry, Emilia gasped. She essentially told me that a question of that nature was absurd because Polish love and admiration for John Paul is so deeply embedded in the Polish identity. This is because it was “a shock for everyone that a country that [was not] supposed to tolerate beliefs [had] a pope.” She emphasized his role as the “People’s Pope,” and spoke of his numerous trips to Poland as an act of reassurance for the Polish people who felt the weight of the communist regime pushing down on them. Emilia showed me her rosary as further evidence of Polish devotion to the Pope, and ultimately, the Catholic Church. She explained that the rosary was a gift from her great great aunt, who was a nun in Białystok and had it blessed by John Paul during one of his visits to Poland. Emilia carries the rosary with her everywhere she goes as a

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<sup>180</sup>Weigel, “The Wojtyła Difference,” pg. 134

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., pg. 134

<sup>182</sup> Emilia Strzałkowska is from Augustów, Poland, and moved to the United States in 2005 when she was almost 16 years old.

reminder of her faith to Catholicism and Pope John Paul II. Emilia's devotion to Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Church is simply an example of one of the millions of Poles who hold John Paul II and his accomplishments as Pope in the highest regard. His contributions to Polish unity and the Solidarity movement create grounds for arguing that Pope John Paul II was one of the most influential figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was certainly was of the most adored Poles in all of the country's history.

## **II. The Solidarity Movement 1980-1989:**

The Solidarity movement grew out of a widespread desire to rid Poland of its communist government and political ties to the Soviet Union. What began as a strike led by Lech Wałęsa in the Lenin shipyards of Gdańsk, soon spiraled into a nationwide attempt to gain religious and political freedoms from the Polish government. In response to unfair price increases in July 1980, Lech Wałęsa and the workers of the Lenin shipyard organized themselves and went on strike. The strike spread to neighboring Gdynia before it swept the country under the name of Solidarity, which insisted on having the right to form independent unions with the ability to strike. Representatives of the Catholic Church were directly involved in the strike efforts, as exhibited by Father Henryk Jankowski's saying of mass in the Gdańsk shipyards on August 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>183</sup> In addition, Cardinal Wyszyński expressed his support through a sermon in Częstohowa, in which he stressed the importance of maintaining "calm, balance, prudence, wisdom, and responsibility for the whole Polish nation."<sup>184</sup> The communist government attempted to spin the meaning of Wyszyński's words, claiming that these were not said in support of the Solidarity movement and the Polish nation as a whole, but instead, were meant to warn Poles against a

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<sup>183</sup>Weigel, "Poland: Igniting the Revolution," pg. 138

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., pg. 138

continuation of the Solidarity movement. This was clearly not the case, and Poles rejected the government's propaganda.

The strike ended on August 31, 1980, when the communist government agreed to negotiate with Solidarity leadership. Pope John Paul II seemed to be correct; a non-violent unified movement *could* result in considerable change. Among the grievances Solidarity wanted open for negotiation were “church privileges, student influence on curricula, the right to positions based on qualifications rather than loyalty to the ruling party, redirection of investments, and political issues, such as free speech and the right to organize.”<sup>185</sup> As Mazgaj states, support from various top church officials, especially Cardinal Wyszyński and Pope John Paul II, initially “[strengthened] Wałęsa’s bargaining position” with the communist government.<sup>186</sup> Weigel points to Timothy Garton Ash’s assessment of Solidarity and its methods, which states that Solidarity was “a pioneering Polish form of social self-organization, with the general objective of achieving by means of peaceful, popular pressure combined with elite negotiation, the end of communism.”<sup>187</sup> In this sense, Timothy Garton Ash was correct; Solidarity, utilizing Pope John Paul’s principles of non-violent resistance, was successful in its objectives. However, this newly acquired bargaining power would prove to be short-lived, and throughout the 1980s, the Solidarity movement would not unfold in a manner that was expected or desired by many Poles.

### **The Institution of Martial Law:**

Tensions between the state and supporters of Solidarity increased, as the government recognized the danger in allowing the Solidarity movement to continue unchecked. Church and abundant national support placed pressure not only on the communist government in Poland, but

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<sup>185</sup> Bloom, “The Solidarity Revolution in Poland, 1980-1981,” pg. 40

<sup>186</sup> Mazgaj, “The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations,” pg. 124

<sup>187</sup> Weigel, “Poland: Igniting the Revolution,” pg. 142

also on the Kremlin, whose leaders understood the effects that loosened restrictions would have on the Polish nation. If Poles were permitted to live in a freer environment, their freedom to oppose the government would likely be communicated through the demands of Solidarity. This movement received optimal support from millions of Poles, and from the perspective of communist leaders, Solidarity had the potential to undermine the authority of the communist regime in Poland. If the communist leadership in Poland was successfully challenged, the Kremlin was afraid that similar movements would develop in other states throughout the Soviet bloc, destroying the Warsaw Pact, and ultimately, the legitimacy of communist leadership in Moscow.

With this, the PZPR rid itself of Stanisław Kania, who was “unable to cope with all the problems passed unto him by his predecessor Gierek.”<sup>188</sup> In exchange for Kania, the party elected former military General Wojciech Jaruzelski to become the new First Secretary in 1981. Jaruzelski proved to be an effective tool for Moscow, as he took advantage of apparent weakness in the Catholic Church, and by association, the Solidarity movement. Following an assassination attempt of John Paul II on May 13, 1981, and the death of Cardinal Wyszyński on May 28, 1981, Archbishop Józef Glemp became the new Primate of Poland.<sup>189</sup> To the misfortune of the Polish Catholic Church, while Glemp continued to promote the ideals of non-violent resistance, he “lacked the charisma and dynamism of Wyszyński.”<sup>190</sup> The regime recognized the weakened state of the Church, and this provided the state with an opportunity to overwhelm Solidarity and its supporters with the introduction of strict policy thought to eliminate the success of the movement.

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<sup>188</sup>Mazgaj, “The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations,” pg. 125

<sup>189</sup>Weigel, “Poland: Igniting the Revolution,” pg. 144

<sup>190</sup>Mazgaj, “The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations,” pg. 125

On December 13, 1981, General Jaruzelski instituted Martial Law that lasted until July 1983. Poland was essentially a military state, where Poles were forced to abide by a number of new laws. These included:

the banning of all trade-union activity, the appointment of military plenipotentiaries in Government ministries, provinces, towns and even factories 'to ensure the execution of order of the WRON,'<sup>191</sup> dawn to dusk curfew, mass internment a ban on public gatherings as well as on the wearing of specific uniforms and badges, limitation on the freedom of movement of the population, strict censorship of mail and telecommunications and the closure of Poland's borders.<sup>192</sup>

Through the implementation of these laws, Jaruzelski created a state in which there was a definite distinction between "the regime that ruled Poland and Poland's national traditions."<sup>193</sup> Solidarity's most powerful and influential leaders, most notably, Lech Wałęsa, were arrested and imprisoned. In addition to this, with the passing of the Trade Union Bill in 1982, which stated that "the registration of any trade union made before [the] law [went] into force [lost] its validity," Solidarity was ruled an illegal trade union, and was forced underground.<sup>194</sup>

Through these years of uncertainty, the Church played a discernible role in the resistance movement against Martial Law and the communist regime. Through its distribution of *TygodnikPowszechny*, along with various underground publications, the Church provided Poles with insight on the latest events in the country.<sup>195</sup> More importantly, John Paul II's papal visit in

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<sup>191</sup> WRON is the abbreviation for Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego, which translates to The Military Council for National Salvation.

<sup>192</sup> Szajkowski, "Tribulations under Martial Law : 1981-1983," pg. 156-157

<sup>193</sup> Weigel, "Poland: Igniting the Revolution," pg. 145

<sup>194</sup> Szajkowski, "Tribulations under Martial Law: 1981-1983," pg. 192

<sup>195</sup> Weigel, "Poland: Igniting the Revolution," pg. 153

1983 placed a suspension on Martial Law, and broke Poland's "fever of hopelessness."<sup>196</sup> Through personal meetings with Lech Wałęsa, the Pope made it clear that the Solidarity movement had full support of the Catholic Church. In addition, his refusal to cooperate with General Jaruzelski demonstrated the Church's unwillingness to collaborate with the state in exchange for loosened restrictions on Church practices. The Church became the voice of the Polish people, and did not compromise its demands for better treatment by the state.

### **The Murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko:**

The state's inability to rid Poland of its undying allegiance to the Catholic Church was exhibited by the murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko in July 1984. As an effective preacher and actor in the resistance movement, Popiełuszko grew to personify all that stood against the communist regime. Through his saying of a monthly "Mass for the Fatherland," Popiełuszko, like Pope John Paul II, addressed the importance of non-violent resistance. His masses drew thousands, demonstrating the effectiveness of his words. Weigel points to *New York Times*' Michael Kaufman, who expressed the impact of Popiełuszko by stating, "'nowhere, in that vast stretch [from Berlin to Vladivostok] encompassing some four hundred million people was anyone else openly telling a crowd that defiance of authority was an obligation of the heart, of religion, manhood, and nationhood.'"<sup>197</sup> Popiełuszko's messages urged people to maintain the force of the resistance movement, despite the government's scare tactics through Martial Law.

He proved to be a threat, however, because on October 19, 1984, members of the Ministry of Interior kidnapped and murdered Popiełuszko by beating him, attaching stones to his feet, and throwing him in the Wisła River.<sup>198</sup> News of his assassination swept the country, and on October 30, upon learning of his death, priests conducting mass, along with the congregation at

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., pg. 153

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., pg. 149

<sup>198</sup> Mazgaj, "The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations," pg. 126

his parish of StanisławKostka, repeated a portion of the Lord's Prayer: "and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us."<sup>199</sup>Popiełuszko's death reinforced the importance of non-violent resistance. Poles reacted to the news not with bouts of violence, but with understanding and a desire to use the tragedy as justification for loyalty to the opposition movement. As Mazgaj points out, Popiełuszko became a martyr of the opposition movement, so "Solidarity members coined an expression, 'Father Popiełuszko died that Solidarity may live.'"<sup>200</sup> Hundreds of thousands attended his funeral, which "became a great national manifestation of support for Solidarity and the opposition to the government."<sup>201</sup> Despite its greatest efforts, the communist government could not dispose of Polish loyalties to Catholicism or the Solidarity movement.

#### **Round Table Talks and the Rakowski Act:**

The outpour of support for the Solidarity movement sparked by Popiełuszko's murder was a clear indication that the Polish communist government was not going to outlive the resistance movement. Pope John Paul II's third trip to Poland in 1987, for example, inspired Poles to recognize the "true Christian meaning of Solidarity," as the resistance movement had yet to overcome the adversity forced onto it by the state.<sup>202</sup> Poles would discover this true meaning, though, as the state would not loosen its restrictions on the Church or Solidarity throughout the mid-1980s. In 1988, it appeared as if the state would have to negotiate, as strikes erupted throughout all of Poland. As was usually the case, the strikes were a result of discontent with workers' pay, but the strikers, along with the movements most powerful leaders, also

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<sup>199</sup>Weigel, "Poland: Igniting the Revolution," pg. 150

<sup>200</sup>Mazgaj, "The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations," pg. 126

<sup>201</sup>Ibid., pg. 126

<sup>202</sup>Weigel, "Poland: Igniting the Revolution," pg. 153

demanded legal recognition of Solidarity, claiming, “There’s no freedom without Solidarity.”<sup>203</sup>

The government seemed to have no choice; it continually severed ties with the Church, whose support was fully and publicly behind the Solidarity movement, so it seemed that the only viable option would be to agree to negotiations. The first Round Table Talks took place on August 31, 1988, and brought about “an agreement calling for unrestricted elections to 35 percent of the seats of the *Sejmand* and all the seats in the *Senat*.”<sup>204</sup> The elections resulted in Solidarity candidates winning all available *Sejm* seats and 99 out of 100 *Senat* seats. In addition, upon his emergence as Poland’s newest Prime Minister in September 1988, Mieczysław Rakowski approved the creation of an unofficial Concordat, which was referred to as the Rakowski Act; this act would develop into official legislation known as *The Statute on the Relationship between the State and Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland of May 17, 1989*.<sup>205</sup> This act, among many other things, granted the Church autonomy, the right to conduct mass publicly, the right to perform religious education, and the establishment of various national religious holidays.<sup>206</sup>

### **Summary:**

There is no doubt that the efforts of the Catholic Church on behalf of the Solidarity movement influenced the demise of the communist regime in Poland. A discussion of the Solidarity movement is not comprehensive if it does not address the clear impact of Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Wyszyński, and Jerzy Popiełuszko. Through John Paul’s emphasis on a humanistic approach to resistance, and Lech Wałęsa’s determination, Poles were able to develop

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., pg. 154

<sup>204</sup> Mazgaj, “The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations,” pg. 127

<sup>205</sup> Mazgaj, “The Main Events Affecting Church-State Relations,” pg. 127

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., pg. 129-140

a Solidarity movement that would undertake the task of separating Poland from communist control. In addition, Jerzy Popiełuszko played a vital role through the course of the movement and Martial Law, as he encouraged Poles to fight peacefully against an oppressive regime. These men, along with the millions of Poles who persevered for the good of the country, enabled the success of Solidarity and the end to communist control.

## Chapter IV: Conclusion

An analysis of over one thousand years of events since the Church's institution demonstrates that Catholic devotion among Poles is not only consistent, but it has allowed the Polish population to persevere through the darkest events in Polish history. Ties to Catholicism were a significant source of strength and motivation during the communist era, and especially throughout the Solidarity movement of the 1980s. With the establishment of the 1993 Concordat, as well as the granting of equal rights among religious organizations in the 1997 Constitution, it is clear that Church influence in Poland has not disappeared following the fall of communism. In fact, Church attendance and affiliation has decreased in almost all countries of the former Soviet bloc, while in Poland, it has remained at high levels across all age groups.<sup>207</sup>

Personal experience has shown me that the Poles are some of the most devout Catholics in the world. KatarzynaKasza expressed her feelings towards Catholicism and her Polish identity by saying, "it is very difficult for me to differentiate between my Catholic and Polish identity and so I think they are interrelated and one in the same."<sup>208</sup> I argue and believe that her response is representative of the Polish population as a whole; of the many Poles with whom I spoke, each expressed to me that his or her Polish identity is directly associated with an identity as a Catholic. As Emilia Strzałkowska explained, to identify with a religious denomination other than Catholicism in Poland is "out of the norm." A Catholic identity is so engrained in Poles that they hardly realize that it is surprising for foreigners. Throughout my exchange year in Poland, I traveled to many of Poland's finest cities; I even explored the smallest of towns. Cities in Poland, while they still maintain their European charm, are Westernized and modern. This is in contrast

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<sup>207</sup> Gautier, "Church Attendance and Religious Belief in Postcommunist Societies," pg. 295

<sup>208</sup> KatarzynaKasza is from Mechowiec, Poland and moved to the United States in 2003 when she was 11 years old.

to the towns and villages where roads are usually unpaved, and some houses do not have running water or electricity. However, what always struck me was the fact that, no matter whether I was in Kraków or Wójtowo, a church is situated in the center of town *and* is a prime tourist attraction. Never have I been to a country whose people sightsee by visiting churches and cathedrals. This is a purely Polish phenomenon which is owed to its rich Catholic history that is embedded in the identity of Polish society.

The Polish Catholic identity is a product of centuries of hardship; there is no doubt that a strong loyalty and allegiance to the Catholic faith has allowed Poles to fight through foreign occupation and oppression. Through this thesis, I have argued that this devotion to the Church, along with inspiration from Poland's most influential religious leaders, was essential to the eventual downfall of communism in Poland. The Church provided leadership and guidance to the Polish people, as it became a symbol of the Polish national identity. I contend that the Polish Catholic identity will remain interconnected for centuries to come since Polish culture is centered on Catholic traditional values and beliefs. As was evident during the period of the Protestant Reformation, much of Europe is once again turning away from Catholicism, and religion in general. Poland, however, will not do so because the Polish Catholic identity informs cultural as well as political decisions, which reinforce the seemingly unbreakable ties to the Catholic faith. From the miracle of the Black Madonna to Pope John Paul II's call for non-violent opposition in his papal visits, ties to the Catholic Church have not diminished, and it is for this reason that I believe the strength of Catholicism in Poland, especially during the communist era, is worthy of academic study.

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