Church, State, Nation, and Civil Society in Spain and Poland

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Spain and Poland are two representative, yet markedly different Catholic countries. Historically, both have stood repeatedly at the forefront of Roman Catholic expansion or defense against other religions. In both cases, “frontier” conditions led to an early and lasting identification of religious and national-cultural identity, which often took the form of an exclusive and militant cultural Catholicism. At different periods of their histories, however, both Spain and Poland offered striking examples of religious tolerance or, at least, of coexistence between religions that were at loggerheads elsewhere. The determining factor weighing in the direction of either militancy or tolerance seems to be the nature of the relationship between church and state. Indeed, Poland’s failure to develop an early modern centralized state may be the single most important factor in explaining the divergence in Spanish and Polish Catholic developments. This chapter will explore three related topics: (1) the different and historically shifting relationships among church, state, nation, and civil society in Spain and Poland; (2) the conditions that have permitted the Catholic Church in Spain and Poland to play a positive role in recent processes of democratization; and (3) the incipient trend—clear in the case of Spain, less definite in the case of Poland towards the reprivatization of Catholicism, following the transition to democracy and the institutionalization of political society.
From the early 1960s there has been a major transformation in the political orientation of the Catholic Church from a state-centered strategy to a society-centered one. In the process, Catholic churches throughout the world have dissociated themselves from authoritarian regimes that were then predominant in many Catholic countries. This “dissociation” of Catholicism has permitted the church to play a key role in the transition to democracy in several countries. This chapter will analyze these processes in Poland and Spain. But similar analyses could be extended to other Catholic countries.

In analyzing Catholic developments one always has to keep in mind that the Catholic Church is both a transnational institution that transcends any particular national society and a national institution deeply embedded in the different histories and structures of particular countries. Looking at Catholicism globally since the early 1960s, one can observe two interrelated, apparently contradictory, processes. There is, first of all, a strengthening of the process of centralization of the Roman papacy, a long secular process that in its modern form has its origins in the Vatican’s defensive response to the French Revolution and to the subsequent liberal revolutions spreading throughout Europe and Latin America. The opposition to the emergence of the modern liberal state shaped the practically uniform counterrevolutionary strategy of the church throughout the nineteenth century. Such a strategy was particularly pronounced under the papacy of Pius IX and culminated in the promulgation of the Syllabus (1864) and the proclamation of the dogma of papal infallibility (1870). The slow and winding process of Catholic adaptation to modernity began soon thereafter, under Leo XIII, and culminated in John XXIII’s call to aggiornamento, a clearly belated recognition of Catholic “backwardness” and of the need to update its relationship to the modern world. The Second Vatican Council reinforced the centralizing trend, a trend that has become particularly prominent again under the papacy of John Paul II. Along with this process of administrative and doctrinal centralization, there has occurred a process of homogenization of Catholic culture, at least among the elites, throughout the Catholic world.

Simultaneously, however, with this process of Vatican centralization and cultural homogenization, there has taken place a second, distinct process of centralization of the Catholic churches at the national level. This process of “nationalization” goes back to the emergence of different forms of Catholic Action with their shared strategy of mobilization of the Catholic laity to defend and promote the interests of the church in what was perceived as a hostile modern secular environment. The Second Vatican Council and the subsequent institutionalization of national bishops’ conferences in most Catholic countries has reinforced the dynamics of this process of “nationalization.” The active role of national conferences of bishops in defining particular national issues, together with the church’s change of attitude towards the modern secular environment, constitute the two most important factors in the reorientation of many Catholic churches from a state-centered to a society-centered strategy.

This dynamic tension between Roman centralization and national centralization explains both, the globalization of a “Catholic” position on many issues as well as the particular refraction that the general Catholic position assumes in any given national context. In any case, the parallel processes of Roman and national centralization have been taking place at the expense of the traditional autonomy of the diocesan episcopate, which at least de jure still remains the locus of institutional power within the Catholic Church. Lately, however, the Vatican has been trying to reinforce once again diocesan episcopal autonomy in order to counter the autonomous tendencies of the national episcopal conferences and thus reassert greater Roman control.

Spain

The following schematic reconstruction is only meant to highlight some recent developments that seem of special relevance in unraveling the complex of church-state-society relations, leading up to the Spanish civil war and the establishment of the Franco regime.

The centuries-long Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslim conquerors led to an early identification of religious and national identity. It was, however, the formation of the early modern Spanish state under the Catholic kings that led to the identification of church and state and to the transformation of Spanish Christianity into the Church Militant. Religious mobilization played a crucial role in the making of the Spanish state. Indeed, the belatedly introduced Inquisition (1481) was bound to play a state-making function, becoming the first truly national, unified, and centralized state institution. The expulsion of Jews, Muslims, and “Moriscos” from Spain took place within a typical pattern of popular pressure from below and religious mobilization from above.

In order to reintegrate itself with Europe, Spain shed its two unwanted religions precisely at a time when Europe itself was being
cut asunder by the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The Counter-Reformation put an end to Spain's enthusiastic economic, political, and cultural experiments in early modernity. The Hapsburg monarchy, the Universal church, and the American colonial empire, all combined to sacrifice the incipient Spanish nation-state to the ideal and material interests of the "Universal Christian Monarchy," a historical project at odds with the emerging international system of European states.2

The Church Militant went on fighting Islam in the Mediterranean and in Asia, pagans in America, and heretics in Europe. Spain had turned the concept of religious crusade against Christian Europe. The defeat of Spain's quixotic imperialism led to Spain's bitter isolation from the emerging modern Europe. Crown and church together decided to preserve within the Spanish dominions the universalist and Catholic ideal of political and religious unity that they had failed to maintain by force in Europe. Unlike other European nations, Spain would not recover from the general seventeenth-century crisis.3

The Bourbons in the eighteenth-century began the slow process of reorientation toward Europe. But the task of "catching up" was complicated by the fact that those forces opposing the "enlightened" reforms refused to accept the view that the difference between Spain and Europe was one of quantifiable "backwardness," insisting that there was a qualitatively unbridgeable cleavage between two mutually exclusive civilizations. When the typical sixteenth-century conflict between "ancienta" and "moderns" reemerged in eighteenth-century Spain it began to resemble the form it would take in Eastern European countries, particularly in Russia, and in non-Western civilizations resisting Westernization.4

In eighteenth-century Spain the conflict first emerged within the church itself between a reformist wing led by Augustinians and enlightened clerics, protected by enlightened despotism, and a traditionalist wing led by the ultramontane Jesuits, who opposed Bourbon regalism and the puritan Jansenism of the reformers, and by the scholastic Dominicans, who opposed the introduction of modern philosophy and modern science into the Spanish universities. The expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish dominions in 1773, following a series of urban riot in Madrid for which the Jesuits were conveniently blamed, marked the temporary triumph of reformist Gallican caesario papiam. But the French Revolution and Napoleon's intervention in Spanish politics shattered the "enlightened" model of elite-controlled reform from above, took away the "aura" from the absolute monarchy, and brought in its place modern forms of political conflicts and collective action.5

The church played a crucial role in the mobilization of the Spanish people against the Napoleonic invasion. The War of Independence, at times led by guerrilla priests, was fought as a religious crusade against "the impious forces of Satan." The traditional identification of Catholic faith and Spanish nation was thereby strengthened. Meanwhile, cut off from the rest of Spain, unrepresentative political elites met in Cadiz to draft the 1812 liberal constitution. More than the measures dismantling the ancient regime, such as the abolition of seigneurial jurisdictions or the disentailment of the lands of the church, it was the abolition of the Inquisition (1813) that gave rise to the fiercest polemics between "Liberales" and "Serviles." Prominent liberal clerics led the attack on the Holy Office. Indeed, the clergy with ninety seven deputies constituted almost one-third of the Constituent Cortes. But the church hierarchy and the rural clergy reacted against the attempt to dissolve the Inquisition and were able to change the aim of their diatribes from the French invaders to the internal heretics, the liberal afrancesados. Catholic Spain now turned the concept of religious crusade against liberal Spain. The phenomenon of "the two Spain"—a Catholic Hispanic Spain and a liberal Europeanizing one—was born.6

In 1814 the people of Madrid offered an enthusiastic welcome to the restored absolutist king, shouting "Long live the fetters," thus mocking the liberal slogan "Let's break the fetters." At the beginning of the nineteenth-century the church stood with the Crown and the people against the reformist liberal elites. The absolutist restoration forced the Spanish liberals into exile or underground into masonic lodges and conspiratorial secret societies. There took place the typical latin fusion between liberalism and anticlericalism as well as the typical Hispanic fusion between liberalism and Pratorian politics.8

The early identification of nation and religious faith that had facilitated early modern state formation and had spared Spain the religious civil wars of early modern Europe, now became an impediment to modern nation-building and transformed modern political conflicts into religious warfare. The three civil wars of modern Spain—the First Carlist War (1833–1840), the Second Carlist War (1870–1876), and the Spanish civil war (1936–1939)—all started as antimodern counterrevolutions and were sanctified by an embattled Catholic Church as religious crusades against godless liberalism or atheist communism. As a counterpart, the burning of churches and
convents and the killing of clerics and nuns were to become typically recurrent features of Spain's modern political upheavals from the 1830s, when the first public outbursts of fierce anticlericalism occurred in Madrid and in other major cities, to the 1930s. In the 1830s, by embracing Carlist and rallying the peasantry of the north against the new constitutional monarchy, the church managed to alienate most social forces in the country. The state's response was to denounce the lands of the church, to abolish the tithe, and to dissolve most monastic orders. The sale of the lands of the church at auction provided the Treasury with the needed revenues to fight the Carlist insurgency, but it frustrated the liberal project of creating a land-owning peasantry loyal to the liberal regime. The properties fell into the hands of the conservative landowners who from that point on were bound by their material interests to the liberal cause. Thus, the "betrayed" liberal revolution consolidated the "latafista" agrarian capitalism of the center and south, while the church lost its rural economic base as well as its ties with the rural proletariat that developed there.

By mid-century, expropriation had left the Spanish church destitute. The closing of monasteries and the dissolution of the male orders had brought to an end the influence that the church had exerted through education and beneficence. Save in the north, the church found itself forsaken, divorced from the state and from the ruling class. The dramatic decreases in the size of the clergy, from approximately 200,000 in 1808 to 56,000 in 1860, despite Spain's sharp overall population increase, is a telling indicator of the extent to which the church had lost its presence in Spanish society.

The church, however, soon began the process of reconquest of Spanish society through its alliance with the liberal oligarchic state. The 1851 concordat reestablished the alliance of church and state. The new ruling class, bourgeois and landowners, their revolution safely accomplished, found it opportune to reconcile themselves with a needy church. Meanwhile, the growing rural and urban proletariat was becoming increasingly "de-Christianized." In its eagerness to regain the strayed sheep the church abandoned the larger flock. At the turn of the twentieth-century, in the chronic conflicts between capital and labor and between oligarchic caciquismo and mass democracy the Spanish church stood mostly on the side of capital and caciquismo.

Moreover, the Spanish liberal state also had to pay dearly for the legitimation it received from the church. From now on the state would have to support the clergy economically, thus feeding lower-class resentment against the state and against a church that had become part of the state administration. But more important, the liberal state ceded to the church its control over education, thus giving up the best instrument it had to build a modern nation and to shape the mind of its citizenry. Thereby, religious, class, and ethnic-national identities became much more important than any all-Spanish national identity. Moreover, the reestablishment of the confessional state reinforced the old identification between the Spanish nation and the Catholic faith at a time when large sections of the population were abandoning the church's bosom and adopting militant atheist banners. Not surprisingly, anticlerical and antistatist ideologies grew together.

The Second Spanish Republic (1890–1936) put an end to the establishment of the Catholic church. The republic instituted the separation of church and state, took over from the church the control of public education, and enforced the privatization of Catholicism and the laicization of Spanish society. When the republican leader Manuel Azana proclaimed in the republican Cortes that Spain had ceased being Catholic, he only stated polemically the new constitutional reality. But in the context of the aggressive anticlericalism and laicism of the republic, the Catholic Church understood the polemical statement as a call to arms. The church stopped short of stating publicly its unyielding opposition to the new republican order, but it became evident that the Spanish Catholic Church would not accept the liberal principles of separation of church and state, state control of public education, freedom of conscience, religious tolerance, or privatization of religion. Unwilling to accept the loss of its privileges, apprehensive of the officially condoned anticlerical attacks, and fearful of the more serious threats posed by the impending socialist revolution, the Catholic Church joined enthusiastically the military uprising and sanctified the sanguinary civil war as a religious crusade of liberation. The violent and unrestrained religious persecution in the republican zone confirmed the church's worst fears about the militant atheism of the Spanish left. The church's response, however, was to condone and all too often to sanctify the even more violent and indiscriminate official repression in the nationalist zone.
Victory in the civil war permitted Spanish Catholicism to become once again the official state religion. The church regained all its institutional privileges and was offered the modern administrative means to enforce its religious monopoly and to impose the unity of faith and nation. Through state coercion, Spanish society became Catholic again. Although often used as a derogatory term, Nacional-Catholicismo serves as an apt short-hand analytical characterization of the Franco regime. While the regime adopted many of the external manifestations of fascism in its ideology, organization, and symbolic paraphernalia, the most important structural characteristics of fascism were missing. It is no exaggeration to say that the Catholic Church constituted the main institutional and ideological “pillar” of the regime. The church offered the regime the original ideological legitimation of the civil war and its main initial source of mass popular mobilization. After the war, the regime pursued a policy of demobilization. Catholicism became the source of its diffused legitimation and the basis for its authoritarian, “mentality.” Catholic corporatism became the only slightly coherent ideological and corporist formative principle of the regime. Catholic lay organizations, first and foremost the élite Asociación Católica Nacional de Propagandistas (ACNDP) and later the even more élite Opus Dei, provided the Francoist state with its most important administrative cadres. When the regime found itself boycotted and shunned as an international parish following the defeat of the Axis Powers, the church through its links with the Vatican and other Catholic churches provided the regime with its first basis for international legitimation.

It was at least part of the official rhetoric to portray the regime as the ideal Catholic model of church-state relations and as the exemplification of the Catholic “third way” between liberal democratic capitalism and totalitarian socialism. Franco himself in his public speeches and particularly in his writings appropriated the typical Catholic antimodern philosophy of history, declaring that the civil war had been a crusade against modernity (his personal bête noire), the French Encyclopedia, and all their modern derivations (i.e., liberalism, capitalism, and socialism). Modern liberal Spain, from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to the Second Spanish Republic, was to be repressed and forgotten. The “New Spain,” was Spain. It was the Counter-Reformation, it was to resume Spanish history where it was left prior to the introduction of the foreign heresies that had precipitated Spain’s decline.

Given this fusion of church and state, Catholicism and regime, the slow but progressive distancing of the church from the regime that began in the early 1960s, and the open conflict and final break between the two in the 1970s was an important factor in the legitimization crisis and the final dissolution of the regime. A purely instrumental explanation of those changes as a conscious strategy of institutional adaptation on the part of the church would be inadequate. For even if one were to privilege such an interpretation, it would still be necessary to explain what made it possible for the Spanish church to abandon its traditional “reactive organism” and adopt for the first time in its modern history such a rational future-oriented strategy of adaptation to changed circumstances.

Processes of Change

The conjunction of three series of interrelated processes may serve to explain in part the change in orientation by the Spanish Catholic Church from a state-centered to a society-centered strategy.

THE INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION OF SPANISH CATHOLICISM

To a large extent, the massive re-Catholicization of Spanish society after the war was rather superficial, as it was the result of administrative coercion and public pressure. As the coercion and the pressure diminished progressively, the Catholic revival petered out. But some aspects of the revival were genuine and would have a deep effect both on the transformation of Spanish Catholicism and on the relationships of church, state, and society.

Among the manifestations of the Catholic revival were:

- The emergence of the first time in modern Spanish history of groups of credible, autonomous Catholic intellectuals who played an important critical role in the otherwise extremely impoverished intellectual discourse of Franco’s Spain and who served to mediate the chasm between the two Spains. Figures like Aranguren, Lain Entralgo, and Tovar are paradigmatic here. For the first time also lay Catholic intellectuals would have an impact upon the theological discourse of Spanish Catholicism.

- The emergence of two modern, that is, inner-worldly Catholic religious movements that would play an important role in Franco’s Spain and, moreover, also spread beyond Spain to become the first modern contributions of Spanish
Catholicism to the universal church. The *Cursos de Cristiandad* would be the first manifestation within Spanish Catholicism of a Catholic type of evangelical revivalism and born-again Christianity. Similarly, the Opus Dei would be the first manifestation within Spanish Catholicism of a militant type of Protestant ethic. The Opus Dei was a secretive lay Catholic movement-organization that was very successful after the civil war in recruiting young upwardly mobile elites through its new message of sanctification in and through ascetic dedication to professional calling.\(^\text{22}\)

The emergence, also for the first time in Spanish history, of a genuine social Catholicism springing from the Catholic Action movement, The Catholic Workers’ movement (HOAC) and the Catholic Workers’ Youth movement (JOC) would become radicalized in the 1950s and progressively confront both the Catholic hierarchy and the regime.\(^\text{23}\)

**STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE REGIME**

In 1956 there took place a series of violent clashes between Catholic and Falange youth in Madrid University fighting for control of the new student movement. Those clashes paralleled the power struggles within the state administration between Catholic and Falange leaders trying to determine the direction of the new economic policies needed to overcome the economic impasse reached by the regime, due to the exhaustion of the import-substitution model of industrialization. Franco dismissed the leaders of both warring factions and invited Opus Dei members into the government. The Opus Dei “technocrats” introduced a radical change in the economic policies of the regime, by pursuing an aggressive policy of export-oriented economic growth, the rationalization of the state administration, and the integration of Spain into the world capitalist system.\(^\text{24}\)

The replacement of Catholic Action elites, close to the church hierarchy, by parvenu elites from the Opus Dei, a sectarian movement within Spanish Catholicism, looked upon suspiciously by the church as well as by the economic, political, and cultural establishment, had the unintended consequence of facilitating the progressive distancing of the church and other established elites from the regime. Out of power, the displaced elites adopted a posture of semiloyal, semidemocratic opposition to the regime that progressively served as mediating link with the more radical opposition. Moreover, technocracy, development ideologies, and ideologies proclaiming “the end of ideology” came to replace Catholicism as the basis for the ideological legitimation of the regime. Some of the displaced Catholic elites now adopted genuinely Christian Democracy, establishing links with European Christian Democracy.\(^\text{25}\)

As the social consequences of the new stabilization policies introduced by the technocrats became visible, some Catholic bishops from the south, first individually and later collectively, began to criticize openly in their pastoral letters the social policies of the regime. In this respect, although the radicalization was milder in the Spanish case, the bishops from the “latifundist” south played a similar role to the one played by the northeast bishops in the radicalization of the Brazilian church. Bishop Afoldero came to occupy within the Spanish church and in the eyes of the regime a position similar to the one occupied by Dom Helder Camara in the Brazilian church. Similarly, although less severe in the Spanish case, the state repression directed against Catholic priests and laity opposing the regime led the moderate sectors of the church to close institutional ranks and to confront openly the regime, while also protecting the new opposition movements emerging from civil society.\(^\text{26}\)

The acute secularization of Spanish society that accompanied the rapid processes of industrialization and urbanization was viewed at first with alarm by the church’s hierarchy. Slowly, however, the most conscious sectors of Spanish Catholicism began to talk of Spain no longer as an inherently Catholic nation to be reconquered, but rather as a *país de misión*. With the official adoption of the new Vatican policies, Spanish Catholicism ceased resisting for the first time modern processes of secularization and slowly learned to come to terms with them and eventually to view them as a “sign of the times.”\(^\text{27}\)

**EXTERNAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF CATHOLICISM**

In the Second Vatican Council the Spanish bishops probably constituted one of the most conservative blocks of the assembled bishops. Prior to the council some sectors of the Spanish clergy and of the laity had begun their own process of *aggiornamento*. But their demands had found little resonance within the hierarchy. Now the official policies coming from the Vatican gave the modern sectors...
of Spanish Catholicism the leverage they needed to pressure the hierarchy and to confront the regime. The promulgation of the encyclical Pacem in Terris (1963) marked a turning point. The Christian Democratic sector, gathered around the ex-minister of education Ruiz Giménez and their influential journal Cuadernos para el Diálogo, now took the lead in demanding the institutionalization of the rule of law, the transformation of the regime into an Estado de Derecho (Rechtsstaat), and the protection of the human, civil, and political rights to which the Spanish people were entitled. Ironically, some of the Catholic Church’s defenders were among those who in the 1950s had represented the regime. Groups and individuals who in the 1950s had represented the regime were now using the same arguments to criticize the regime and defend the general principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

The transformation of Spanish Catholicism was both sudden and extensive. The change in language from Latin to the vernacular was accompanied by a more significant change in the content of publications. Any superficial comparison of the Catholic press with its predecessor from the 1950s to the 1960s will show a radical change. The training of priests in the seminaries underwent a transformation. Scholasticism was dropped and replaced with modern philosophies and modern theologies. A new generation of priests embraced the new direction, taking a confrontational attitude vis-à-vis their own older colleagues, their hierarchy, and their confused flocks. The clash between the young and older priests was not unique to Spain, as the traditional Catholicism of rural Spain is well captured in the ethnography of the Spanish village of the period. The new liturgy and the new pastoral practices, theACTIVE Catholic Church, not only were adopted by the middle classes, but also by the clergy and the laity, particularly those of the lower classes. Many sectors of the clergy were not able to make the transition and stopped practicing the faith. Many young priests, and even some older ones, felt increasingly uncomfortable with their traditional roles as sacramental mediators and searched for personally and socially relevant pastoral practices, sometimes by adopting various forms of social and political activism. Religious vocations, a traditional avenue of social political activism.

Throughout the 1960s the Spanish church was sharply divided along generational lines between the majority of bishops and a large minority of priests over sixty on the one hand and a minority of bishops and a majority of priests under forty on the other. The intervention of the Vatican, by changing the organizational structure and the composition of the Spanish episcopate, tipped the balance of forces in favor of the new Catholicism. By 1970 the reformers had gained control of the national conference of bishops, which had replaced the old conference of metropolitan bishops. At first the Franco regime presented a serious obstacle to the attempt to renovate the Spanish episcopate by refusing to give up its right of presentation of bishops. But the Vatican adopted a policy of circumventing this obstacle by forcing the older bishops to retire, who thereby lost their right to vote in the national conference, and by nominating younger auxiliary bishops with the right to vote. By nominating auxiliary bishops, the Vatican was able to exclude the regime’s intervention in the nomination. In 1966 the Spanish episcopate was composed of seventy bishops. Of those, 65 percent were sixty years of age or older and only five were auxiliary bishops. By 1973 there were seventy seven bishops, seventeen of which were auxiliary bishops, while the number of bishops sixty years of age or older had decreased to 40 percent of the total.

Two events mark the year 1971 as a turning point in the transformation of the Spanish church. That year, Cardinal Tarracón, who represented a majority of moderate bishops, was elected president of the national conference. From now on the church would demand openly the liberalization and democratization of the regime. Nothing perhaps captures better the dissocication of the Catholic Church from the Franco regime than the famous incident in 1973 when, in the funeral of the president of the government, Carrero Blanco, who had been killed by E.T.A., the Basque terrorist organization, the extreme right, shouted to the presiding cardinal, “Tarracón al paredón” (“up against the wall”). At the very moment when the Spanish left had abandoned its historical antiklericalism, it was being adopted by the Spanish right, resentful of the betrayal of a church, which after having been so pampered with regime favors, was abandoning the regime.

The other important event in 1971 was the convention of the First Joint National Assembly of Bishops and Priests, which
produced the celebrated public confession of sin for the role played by the church in the Spanish civil war. The famous text read: "We humbly recognize our sin and ask for forgiveness, for we did not know how to become true 'ministers of reconciliation' among our people, torn by a fratricidal war." Indeed, this policy of reconciliation was probably the most important contribution of the Spanish Catholic Church to Spain's transition to democracy.

The Role of the Church in the Transition

If the dissociation of the church from the Franco regime contributed to the regime's crisis of legitimation, the church's support of the democratic opposition movements contributed to the strengthening of civil society. The role of the church in the process of democratization can be analyzed at three different levels.

THE MILITANCY OF CATHOLIC ACTIVISTS IN THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION

From the late 1950s on, Catholics would play an active role in the emergence of the new democratic opposition movement. One finds engaged Catholics among the leadership of the whole spectrum of opposition parties, from the monarchists to the extreme left. Some developments have primarily symbolic significance. For instance, the theocratic Carlist movement, which from the 1830s to the 1930s had provided the shock troops of counterrevolutionary Catholicism in all three civil wars, became radicalized in its opposition to the regime and adopted a socialist platform. Some of the most radical underground opposition groups, like the Castrolist Frente de Liberación Popular (F.L.P.) or the Trotskyist Organización Revolucionaria de Trabajadores (O.R.T.), had Catholic origins. None of these groups, however, would be able to survive the "transition." Of much greater historical relevance was the fact that for the first time Catholics would join and play an active role in the historical parties of the left, in the Socialist party (PSOE) and in the Communist party (PCE). Indeed, the fusion of the Catholic and the secular left in the underground opposition to the regime was an important factor in the disappearance of anticlericalism from Spanish politics.

Worker priests and lay activists with origins in the Catholic workers' movement of the 1950s also played a central role in the emergence of the new working class movement of the 1960s and in the establishment of the new semiclandestine trade unions, Comisiones Obreras and Union Sindical Obrera (U.S.O.).

Church, State, Nation, and Civil Society

Catholic activists also played an important role in the reemergence of the Catalan and Basque nationalist movements in the 1960s. But this fact is less remarkable, since the Catholic Church historically had always supported the nationalist movements in both regions, maintaining there a close alliance with society against the centralist Castilian state.

THE CHURCH'S PROTECTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION

Even in the worst periods of Francoist repression, the norms and values of civil society and the democratic traditions of liberal Spain were preserved and transmitted through family, working-class, and intellectual networks. The moment state repression eased in the early 1960s, oppositional activities against the regime proliferated throughout the country and in all spheres of society. In this respect, the democratic opposition movement in Spain emerged independently of any support from the institutional church. Unlike in Poland or much of Latin America, the Spanish church did not need to become "the voice of the voiceless," nor the very promotor of the reconstitution of civil society. But the church contributed to the consolidation of the democratic opposition in two ways.

First, by offering religious legitimation for the democratic principles upon which the activities of the opposition were based (i.e., freedom of expression, freedom of association, civil and political rights), the church undermined the repressive policies of the regime and thereby strengthened the opposition. The regime's traditional portrayal of the democratic opposition as the work of an external, mainly communist conspiracy against Catholic Spain became no longer credible and, therefore, the repression now appeared simply as the expression of an illegitimate system of power based on naked force. When the regime introduced its first liberalization measures in the 1960s the opposition was emboldened and it increased its confrontational activities. When the regime tried to put a lid on oppositional activities in the late 1960s by reverting to more repressive policies, it proved no longer able to regain control of public order and in addition it lost most of the diffused legitimacy that the regime may still have had among Spain's silent majority.

By offering its churches and monasteries as relatively protected sanctuaries where Interregional, interclass, and interparty sectors of the opposition could meet, the church helped to coordinate and to unite diverse sectors of the democratic opposition into a unified movement of civil society against the authoritarian state. Famous incidents in which the police entered church buildings where
important clandestine meetings were held, such as national conventions of Comisiones Obreras or the Assembly of the entire democratic opposition of Catalonia only served to discredit the regime further, showing the entire population that the democratic opposition enjoyed the support of the church.

ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Much more important than its role in providing a physical space for the reconciliation and dialogue among all Spaniards, the religious-secular cleavage had played a destructive role in modern Spanish politics because, by superimposing itself upon the other two major cleavages—the class conflict between capital and labor and the regional conflict between the hegemonic Castilian center and the nationalisms of the periphery—it had made all of them intractable. The Catholic Church’s final acceptance of the legitimacy of the modern world and its abandonment by the Spanish left of its traditional anticlericalism put an end to the religious-secular cleavage in modern Spain. The Church thus made the other conflicts more susceptible to politics of negotiation and compromise, that is, the spirit of compromise, the search for consensus, and the willingness to enter pacts were the political discourse of the transition. Semantic connotations such as reconciliación, concordia, tolerancia, acuerdo, pacificación, convivencia all appeared again and again in the political discourse of the transition, in campaign speeches as well as in parliamentary debates. The immediate need to defend a transition still threatened by the danger of military coups and by the terrorism of the right and of the left partly explain the willingness to compromise on the part of most political forces. But only the more remote background of the collective memory of the experience of the civil war and of the system of exclusion that followed, may explain the politics of consensus almost as an end in itself, which characterized the Spanish transition.

The two great historical pacts of the transition reflect this politics of consensus. The Moncloa Pact (1977) was the first historical compromise between capital and labor, mediated by the main political parties. Of greater historical relevance, however, was the political parties’ constitutional pact between all the main political forces one year later, which permitted for the first time in Spanish history the drafting of a constitution that was not the imposition of the will of the victors in the political struggle over the vanquished, but rather the end result of an exacting process of responsible backstage negotiation among political elites. Throughout the transition the Catholic Church played a low-key, yet positive back-stage role. Although the church was able to inscribe into the 1978 constitution a paragraph recognizing “the one religious fact” that the majority of the Spanish population was Catholic, the Spanish Catholic Church finally accepted the non-confessionalism of the Spanish state, as well as the principles of separation of church and state and of religious freedom. Equally important was the decision not to sponsor any “Catholic” party, nor to support directly any of the Christian Democratic parties. A genuine desire for religious peace; the realization that the Catholic community, the clergy included, had become pluralistic politically and would not support any monolithic Christian party; and the fear that such an officially sponsored party could become a minority party and thus undermine the church’s claim that Catholicism was Spain’s national religion, all probably contributed to the political neutrality of the church during the transition. None of the three competing Christian Democratic parties was able to survive the 1977 elections.

Ultimately the whole process amounted to the recognition of the voluntary principle of religious allegiance. The Spanish church has accepted the fact that it is no longer a church in the Weberian sense of being an obligatory monopolistic community of faith coextensive with the nation. The Catholic faith has ceased being de facto as well as in principle a national faith. Moreover, the constitutional recognition that Spain is a multinational state has in and of itself undermined the very principle of a unitary Spanish nation. The various nations making up the Spanish state have become institutions within a pluralistically organized civil society. By recognizing both the fact and the principle of a pluralistically organized civil society, the church has become a denomination, a powerful one to be sure, but a denomination nonetheless, functioning within civil society.

Opinion surveys after the successful consolidation of democracy indicate that the Spanish population also has internalized these principles. In 1984, an overwhelming majority of Spaniards (86 percent) still considered themselves Catholics. But the number of “practicing” Catholics is much lower, tending to be around 40 percent of the population. There seems to be, moreover, a noticeably decreasing trend in religious practice, particularly among Spanish youth. The number of youth attending Sunday mass has decreased dramatically—from 62 percent in 1975 to 35 percent in 1982.
is also evident that there no longer exists a religious cleavage that may serve to polarize either the social classes or the polical electoral choices. Practicing Catholics are distributed relatively evenly throughout the Spanish population: 44 percent of the upper middle-classes, 38 percent of the lower-middle classes, 34 percent of the working class. This is probably the most dramatic change from pre-civil war trends. Similarly, the Catholic vote tends to be distributed relatively evenly along the entire Spanish electoral spectrum.42 Among those who voted the Socialist party into power in 1982, 25 percent were practicing Catholics.43 In this respect, there is presently no longer a Catholic vote susceptible of political mobilization by the church.

But not only can the church no longer control the public morality of the Spaniards, it also can no longer take for granted the control of the private morality of the Catholic faithful. According to a 1984 survey, 65 percent of Spaniards approve the use of contraceptives; 54 percent would accept married priests; 47 percent approve of divorce while 40 percent disapprove of it; and 45 percent approve of premarital sexual relations while 41 percent disapprove of them.44 It is not surprising therefore that the Catholic Church failed to block or amend, either through institutional corporatist pressure or though Catholic mobilization, the new legislation introduced by the socialist government on precisely those issues that the church still considers to fall within its own particular sphere of competence, namely, religious education, divorce, and abortion.

The same survey showed that a majority of Spaniards thought that the church ought not to exert influence over the government (45% versus 32%); that the church does not have adequate answers either to the needs and problems of the individual (43% versus 50%) or to the problems of family life (49% and 34%); and that the church’s claim to moral authority is not based on a knowledge of reality (41% versus 27%).45

One may conclude, therefore, that in Spain religious faith and morality are becoming privatized. It remains to be seen whether the Catholic Church will reinforce these trends by recreating the cure of souls and the protection of that which it considers to be its institutional corporatist interests, or whether it will be able to use its remaining institutional and moral weight to become a critical moral voice, by participating on an equal basis in Spain’s public debates, thus enlivening the public sphere of Spain’s civil society.

Poland

As in Spain, the “frontier” conditions of Polish Catholicism also led to an early identification of religious and national cultural identity, which has been maintained and reinforced by subsequent developments.47 Polish Catholicism has been repeatedly at the forefront of Catholic expansion or defense against other religions in Eastern Europe, to wit, different versions of paganism, orthodoxy, Islam, Protestantism, and, finally, atheist communism. This gave Polish Catholicism its particular “militant” character. But like Spain, Polonia semper fidelis served also as the setting for unique experiments in religious tolerance. The determining factor weighing in the direction of either “militancy” or “tolerance” seems to be the identification of church and state. Indeed, Poland’s failure to develop an early modern centralized state may be the single most important factor in explaining the divergence in Spanish and Polish Catholic developments. In Poland the Szlachta democracy of the federalist republic of nobles frustrated both centralization absolutism and the identification of church and state. Early modern Poland became a haven for dissenting faiths fleecing generalized religious warfare in Europe. Even after the Counter-Reformation reasserted Catholic hegemony in Polish culture and the war with Sweden awakened a strong anti-Protestant reaction, Poland still continued to give, by Catholic standards, a striking example of religious tolerance.48

David Martin has observed that “where religion is imposed from above by a conqueror it is thereby weakened, whereas when it is the focus of resistance to a conqueror it is thereby strengthened.”49 Again, Poland is not unique in this respect. Catholic Ireland, as well as Croatia, Slovenia, and Slovakia in Eastern Europe, all offer examples of Catholic countries that also deviate significantly from the French-Latin pattern of secularization. Nineteenth-century Poland avoided the typical patterns of conflict between the Catholic Church and the secular liberal state, between the church and a secular humanist intelligentsia becoming increasingly anticlerical, and between the church and a socialist workers’ movement turning first anticlerical and then militantly atheist. The typical positive correlations of education, industrialization, urbanization and proletarianization with secularization either did not obtain in Poland or were significantly attenuated.50

The formation of collective status and class identities, ideological positions, and political groups, were all refracted by the national question. Once again, given the absence of a Polish state, the crucial factor was the identification of church and nation at a
time when the Catholic Church was the only institution able somewhat to cut across the partition of Prussian, Russian, and Austrian Poland. During the nineteenth-century, Catholicism, romantic nationalism, and slavic messianism fused into a new Polish civil religion. At first, this process was mainly restricted to the gentry and intelligentsia; but in the 1870s, the threat that Bismarck’s Kulturkampf posed to the linguistic and religious identity of the Polish peasantry pushed this group also into the nationalist cause. Remarkably enough, the fusion of the Polish national and Catholic identities took place even in the face of reactionary Vatican policies that consistently supported the conservative monarchies and condemned the Polish risings. The Vatican’s “betrayal” was offset, however, by the dedication of the radical lower clergy, by the far-sighted leadership of a few hierarchs, and by the emergence, toward the end of the nineteenth-century, of a Polish version of “social Catholicism.” When the first phase of industrialization took place, both the state and capital were mainly in foreign hands. Therefore, the church could not be perceived as legitimizing either state domination or capitalist exploitation. As a result the first generation of Polish workers were neither de-Christianized nor denationalized—certainly not to the extent that was common elsewhere. On the contrary, often there was a fusion of class, religious, and national identity.

Polish Independence and the End of Polish “Exceptionalism”

With the establishment of a Polish independent state after World War I, the unity of the nation against foreign enemies began to dissolve. There appeared the standard cleavages among classes, parties, and ideologies, while the nationalism of every nationalism in power began to show its ugly face in its treatment of the Jewish and Ukrainian minorities. The unity between church and nation also began to dissolve and there appeared even splits between a conservative hierarchy and the more radical lower clergy. Moreover, although the church did not share state power and often found itself in conflict with the Polish state, its leanings toward Dmowski’s nationalism of the right served to alienate the other political parties and to antagonize the religious and national minorities. Anticlericalism, although a mild one by Latin standards, also began to emerge. It appeared in the quarrels between the nonconfessional Polish state and the church represented symbolically in the feud between Marshall Piłsudski and Metropolitan Sapieha. It appeared among the large sectors of the intelligentsia that had finally incorporated the

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Enlightenment critique as well as the positivist and Marxist critiques of religion. This anticlericalism was perhaps best represented by the remarkable and little known Polish school of sociology of religion. It appeared, as was to be expected, within the socialist left and even within the peasants’ movement led by Vincenty Witko. Had these trends continued, they may have put an end to Polish “exceptionalism.” But they were cut short by the renewed experience of partition, foreign occupation, and unified historical resistance. National solidarity was once again strengthened by the extreme ordeal and the Polish church found itself once more on the side of the nation, suffering more than its share of the brutal Nazi repression and supporting physically and spiritually the underground. Any bickering Poles may have had against their church was soon forgotten.

The Catholic Nation versus the Communist State

All attempts by the communist regime to sever the links between church and nation ended in failure. It is true that the odds were against the new regime. The church’s prestige was at an all-time high and its identification with the nation was reinforced naturally by the fact that with the redrawing of new borders, almost the entire population of Poland was, at least formally and for the first time in modern Polish history, homogeneously Catholic. By contrast, the prestige of the Polish Communists had never been high; the practical liquidation of the entire Communist party by Stalin did not help matters; and its replacement, the Polish Workers’ party, was like the regime marked by the original sin of foreign conception. Nevertheless, the regime could count on the nearly universal yearning for a clear break with the past, on the widespread acceptance of radical social reform, and on the delusions of large sectors of the intelligentsia. Above all, the regime could count on power: the power to coerce, the power to suborn, the power to manipulate. Yet its project of total power was frustrated again and again by the resistance of a church that was willing to recognize the regime, to render unto Caesar what was Caesar’s, even to lend it support and legitimacy for the sake of the nation and the requirements of the Polish rada stanu, something that was repeatedly stressed by Cardinal Wyszyński. But at the same time the church showed a dogged determination to deny Caesar what was God’s. The consistently principled position of the church contrasted markedly with the utter lack of consistency in the state’s policies toward the church, its strategies being marked by purely tactical considerations.
The ultimate goal of the regime was clear—the complete elimination of the church and of religion from Polish life—and it never ceased proclaiming it. But it was also understood that like the final phase of communism, this goal was still far away and all kinds of detours might be needed in order to reach it. All the strategies of forced secularization from above, used relatively successfully first in the Soviet Union and then throughout Eastern Europe, were also variously tried in Poland albeit with little success.

Neutralization and control through the official incorporation of the church into the state failed. Unlike the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church proved immune to caesaropapism. Neither the creation of “patriotic priests” nor that of “progressive Catholics,” neither the support given to the schismatic Polish National Catholic Church nor the attempt to deal directly with the Vatican and thus bypass the unyielding Polish hierarchy, were able to either divide the church or undermine its prestige.

The strategy of coercion also failed. The amount of repression needed to terrorize the whole nation would have been staggering even by Stalinist standards. The selective repression of representative bishops, priests, and nuns only served to turn them into either martyrs or national heroes, as attested by the triumphal popular acclaimation with which the release of Cardinal Wyszyński was received.

Socialist re-socialization also failed. The attempt to establish a new civil religion and to create a new “socialist man,” an attempt that was hardly successful elsewhere in Eastern Europe, was a total failure in Poland. In spite of the state’s control of all official means of communication, education, and socialization, the church and the Polish family were able to serve as effective counteragencies of socialization, and together they defended successfully the right to a religious education. All attempts to rewrite Polish history and to depict the church as collaborator, as enemy of the nation, and as enemy of the people backfired; the official propaganda machine lost all its credibility and the church became the cherished trustee of the nation’s history, culture, and traditions, and of the collective memories of the Polish people.

The marginalization of religion to a private religious sphere also failed ultimately because neither church nor state could agree on the boundaries or accept the set limits. Neither Catholic principle nor Polish tradition could be reconciled easily with a conception of religiosity borrowed from bourgeois Protestantism and restricted to the private and unmediated relationship between the individual conscience and God, adorned at most by an Orthodox conception of ceremonial ritual, spiritually edifying but restricted to sacred places. Neither could Soviet socialism recognize in earnest the right of an autonomous sphere to exist, where “antisocialist,” that is, antisytem norms and values could develop. Such a model of autonomous differentiation of the spheres, borrowed from bourgeois modernity, implied the recognition of a pluralism of norms and values that was simply irreconcilable with “the leading role of the party.”

Finally, secularist planning through economic development also failed to bring the expected results. The expressed hopes of the Gierek era that economic development, borrowed from the West materially and ideally, would have in Poland the same secularizing effects it apparently had in the West, were also disappointed. It is true that the model of economic development itself failed. But even before its failure had become obvious, the evidence of progressive secularization was ambiguous at best.

Marxist sociologists of religion had been collecting every promising sign indicating that the laws of secularization were operating also in Poland. But at the end of the Gierek era most indicators seemed to point rather to a reverse process of desecularization.

- There was an absolute and relative increase in the number of bishops, priests, nuns, and seminarians, when compared with prewar Poland.
- There was a progressively accelerating increase in the number of parishes, churches, and Catholic periodicals and publications.
- Indicators measuring the religious beliefs of the population, which had always remained inordinately high, even showed some tendency to rise, most significantly among the young.
- The figures on religious practice were even more overwhelming since even those who did not consider themselves “believers” participated in religious ceremonies as a symbolic opposition to the regime.

Clearly the church had won the war of secularization as well as all the main battles. Every time there was a direct confrontation over the control of religious education, over the control of ecclesiastical appointments, over the curriculum in the seminaries, over the millennium celebration, even over constitutional revisions, the regime had to withdraw and the power and the prestige of the church were enhanced in the process.
Cardinal Wyszyński was, no doubt, the individual most directly responsible for the victory of the church. Traditionally, during interregna or whenever the Polish throne became vacant, the primacy of Poland had served as interrex, as a symbolic regent. Unofficially for almost forty years, Cardinal Wyszyński filled symbolically the office of interrex certainly as effectively as any other primates in Polish history. In a sermon at the Warsaw Cathedral on February 7, 1974, elaborating on his conception of the relations among church, nation, and state in Poland, Cardinal Wyszyński revealed his explanation of the victory of the church, namely, the primacy of the relationship between church and nation, over that between church and state:

From the beginning there has been true cooperation in Poland between the Church and the Nation—and often cooperation between the Church and the State as well. Of course the dimension of the increasing links between the Church and the Nation are one thing, and the cooperation between the Church and the State another. The nation, after all, is a permanent phenomenon, like the family, from which the nation is born. The proof of this permanence is the fact that, despite the persecutions and the increasing struggle it has been subjected to in defense of its independence, living on the borders of (various) cultures, languages, faiths and rites, the nation has nevertheless survived until today. The Church, supporting the Polish nation so that it would not be destroyed, has helped it to survive... There have been moments when the state fell silent, and only the Christ’s Church could speak out in the Polish nation. It never stopped speaking out, not even when, in the time of the partition, the state was forced into silence... It is the particular merit of the Church never to have stopped working, even in the most difficult situations. We ought to realize this when we speak of establishing correct relations between the Nation and the Church, between the State and the Church in our country.66

The characteristic structure of beliefs and practices of Polish Catholicism was formed mainly during the Counter-Reformation and has remained largely unchanged until the present.67 Some of the most salient characteristics are:

- The public ceremonial, highly sacramental character of the typical Polish rituals: pilgrimages (Częstochowa), processions (Corpus Christi), passion plays (Kalwaria Zebrzydowska). 68

The highly centralized hierarchic structure of the church, with the primacy at the top, in his unique dual role as head of the Polish church and interrex, thus symbolizing the union of church and nation.

The prominent position of the clergy, with a prestige and influence perhaps unequaled in the Catholic world, functioning as sacral and sacramental mediators between the sacred and the profane, and between God and the Polish people, but also functioning as mediators, representatives, and guides of the community in its social functions.69

The Marian devotion and the two most representative Polish national cults, Częstochowa and Kalwaria. Particularly, Our Lady of Częstochowa at Jasna Gora serves as the national shrine of Polish Catholicism and as the symbolic fortress of the nation against foreign invasions. The Icon of the Black Madonna has since long been associated with historical and collective memories of national suffering, resistance and final triumph. But it was made most effectively into an impressive symbol of national and Catholic resistance to the communist regime, following the release of Cardinal Wyszyński, when he mobilized the church and the nation to implement the Marian program that he had conceived while in prison: the rededication of the nation to the Queen of Poland in 1956 at the 500th anniversary of King John Kazimierz’s vows; the yearly vows of the Great Novena culminating in the 1966 millennium celebration; the annual procession of the Black Madonna to every single town in Poland, leading up to the celebration of the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of St. Stanislaw in 1979.70

Every attempt by the authorities either to stop the religious manifestations or to undermine them by staging parallel secular manifestations failed. Again and again the power of mobilization of the allegedly totalitarian regime was dwarfed by the power of mobilization of the church. The Marian program was not only able to maintain mobilized the Catholic population for over twenty years around religious issues, but it also linked symbolically in a dramatic way Polish sacred and secular history, the fusion of church and nation and their ambiguous relationship to the state. Indeed it may serve to illustrate in a Durkheimian paradigmatic fashion the power
of religious beliefs and rituals to serve the cause of national integration by creating and recreating the bonds of national solidarity.

The Conflict Between Church and State

Usually the conflictive relations between church and state in socialist Poland are analyzed from the perspective of institutional relations, in terms of periods of confrontation, accommodation, mediation, and the like. This essay takes a different approach, viewing these relations from the perspective of the three principles of resistance that inform the church's actions. These principles are rejection of resistance, the principle of religious resistance, the principle of national resistance, and the principle of civil resistance.

The Principle of Religious Resistance

There is no doubt that from 1948 to 1956 the church was fighting for its own survival as an independent religious institution. Understandably, corporatist self-interests predominated over any other concern. Yet corporatist self-interests were transcended the moment the struggle was carried on in the name of religious freedom, a universalistic principle, against the totalitarian tendencies of an atheist yet theocratic state that wanted to impose its own secular religion upon its subjects. The Polish October, when Polish workers rose up claiming "Bread and God" was the turning point in this phase. The church attained recognition and the right to autonomous existence in exchange for its support and legitimation of the regime. But the struggle against the totalitarian tendencies of the state had to be renewed continuously. By 1966, it became clear that the state would only make concessions in times of weakness when it needed the church's support, but was not ready to institutionalize any of those concessions permanently. Instead, the state's violation and unilateral revocation of already achieved agreements led to constant friction.

The Principle of National Resistance

Having ensured its own institutional survival the church could now attend to its traditional role as the nation's keeper. The new autonomous space gained by the religious institution could be used in defense of the nation. The pulpit, the religious classroom, the seminaries, the pastoral letters, the Catholic University, the Catholic press, all became autonomous spaces where the collective national identity and the traditions and values of Polish culture could be preserved and transmitted. But the activities of the church were not restricted to this traditional "organic work" in times of partition or foreign occupation. From the very beginning, the church had played a very active role in the "Polonization" of the Western territories, despite the Vatican's reluctance to recognize the new Polish-German boundaries. Soon the church began to challenge the state directly by reminding it repeatedly that the defense of national sovereignty is the primary duty of the state toward the nation. The clear implication was that the state was either violating or neglecting its national duties and that this was also the reason for its lack of legitimacy. The series of accusations and counteraccusations that followed was a reflection of the battle over the minds of the Poles in which both church and state were consciously engaged. The state accused the church of appropriating intolerably sovereign functions of the state in trying to represent the nation both externally (conflict over the Polish bishops' letter of reconciliation to the German bishops) and internally (conflict over the 1966 millennium celebrations). The Poles clearly decided the contest by attending the celebrations of the millennium of Polish Christianity rather than the competing celebrations of the millennium of Polish statehood.

The Principle of Civil Resistance

Having established at least its own right to defend both religious and the rights of the nation, the church slowly began to expand its protection into the areas of human rights, civil rights, and worker rights. Interestingly, at first those later rights were defended in connection with the rights of the nation, as if to imply that civil rights were derived from national rights or, at least, that the duty of the Polish church to protect human and civil rights was derived from its role as the nation's keeper. Progressively, however, the Polish church began to use a new language of universal rights, detached from any particular religious or national tradition. Moreover, the right and duty of the Polish church to defend those rights no longer be grounded on the national character of the Polish Catholic Church, but rather on the universal mission of the church of Christ.

The precipitating factor in steering the Polish church in the new direction was probably the "Polish December," which consolidated the typical pattern of food price increases, worker protests, and
change in party leadership. The episcopate’s letter of December 29, 1970, addressed to “All compatriots of our common Motherland” already resembles the type of chartist manifesto that the church’s public pronouncements would increasingly display from that point.

The recent events have made it abundantly apparent that the nation’s right to existence and independence must include: the right to freedom of conscience and religious liberty; the right of our nation to free cultural activity; the right to social justice; the right to a social life; the right to material conditions; the right to freedom of expression; the right to material conditions; the right of citizens to be treated without abuse, unfair injury or persecution. Both the central authorities and the entire state administration, and especially those charged with the maintenance of order in society, are responsible for the assurance of these rights. All citizens of the state are to share in this responsibility.

The church’s clear call to civic responsibility materialized in 1976 in the widespread public reaction against the announced amendments to the constitution. Obviously, the authorities not only had failed to assume their responsibility in guaranteeing those rights, but actually they were planning to make their de facto violation into the law of the land. The church joined in the public reaction and protested against the attempt to link the fulfillment of state obligations, against the attempt to limit constitutionally Polish sovereignty, and against the attempt to inscribe in the constitution the actual division between leaders and led.

This resistance against further state penetration marks the starting point of the movement for the self-defense and self-organization of society. These civic actions promoted first by intellectuals and protected and supported by the church would crystallize that same year in the foundation of the Workers Defense Committee (KOR) and would culminate in the emergence of Solidarity in its triple dimension as a national, democratic, and workers’ movement. The new dialogue between the church and the left, and the coming together of Catholic and secular intellectuals in KOR was to be of crucial significance for the emergence as well as for the character of Solidarity.

The Normative Challenge to the Authoritarian and Totalitarian Tendencies of the Modern State.

One could possibly view this new role of the Polish church in civil defense as a natural extension of its historical role of national defense. But it is important to stress that this extension implied a qualitative jump and was influenced by general developments in the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, the moment one looks at the pastoral letters of the Polish episcopate from the early 1970s on and compares them with those of the Spanish or Brazilian episcopates it is striking how similar their language is. Of course, the similarity in their language derives from the fact that all of them have the same common source, namely, recent papal encyclicals (Mater et Magistra, Pacem in Terris, Populorum Progressio) and the documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly the Constitution of the Church in the World, Gaudium et Spes. It is undeniable that throughout the Catholic world, from the mid-1960s on, the church or at least some sectors of the church have been highly vocal in the defense of human, civil, and social rights against authoritarian states and economically oppressive regimes.

In many Catholic countries, like Spain and Brazil, the new position entailed a radical change in church-state relations and/or in the class alliances of the church. In the case of Poland the qualitative nature of the change has passed largely unnoticed since it appeared as a continuation of the established pattern of church-state conflict and church-nation alliance. The slogan was still the same (“Let Poland be Poland”), but the meaning of what Poland ought to be had changed.

In The Church and the Left, Michnik correctly argues that the pastoral letters of the Polish bishops and the pronouncements of the pope served to legitimate religiously the model of a modern, differentiated, pluralistic, and self-regulated society. He notes, of course, that this is also the model of society pursued by the secular left and seems to be struck by the fact that the church appears to have assumed the norms and values of modernity, of the Enlightenment, and of the French Revolution. One could add that ironically the church seems to have assumed those secular values precisely at a time when they are being abandoned for postmodern ones and the left appears to have lost its identity.

The tone of surprise in Michnik’s analysis has to do with the fact that at least up to 1968, the Polish left and much of the rest of the world had regarded the Polish church as reactionary, ultra-conservative, and anti-modern. As in all caricatures, there was a kernel of truth behind the obvious distortion. In explaining the new dialogue between the church and the left, Michnik stresses in a characteristically self-critical fashion the process of rethinking on the part of the left, which has permitted the rediscovery of the Christian roots of modernity. Here Michnik is overly generous with
the church, for he fails to stress the obvious fact that it has taken the Catholic Church at least two centuries to accept the legitimacy of modernity, or to uncover the Christian roots of many of the modern developments it had persistently opposed. Had this been the position of the church all along, the Enlightenment critique of the religious freedom along with the American bishops. He was the main force behind the movement for postconcil reform in Poland. He was probably the only bishop in the entire Catholic Church who personally undertook the task of explaining the meaning of all the council's documents to the faithful. Himself an intellectual, he found it easier than Cardinal Wyszyński to develop close ties with reform-minded Catholic intellectuals, particularly with the Znak group, who often internalized the council's message sooner and deeper than much of the Polish hierarchy. As cardinal of Cracow he had promoted the "Oasis" or "Light-Life movement," the first revivalist-evangelical movement within Polish Catholicism. As pope he is the sign of the mutual influences and interdependencies between the universal church and Polish Catholicism.

At a certain level, the Catholic aggiornamento can be understood as a Catholic reformation, indeed as a process of Protestantification. It proclaims a soft version of the universal priesthood of all believers; it introduces a pronounced inner-worldly orientation; it emphasizes the sacrament of the word over sacramental ritual; it breaks with the scholastic metaphysical tradition and returns to the biblical origins with its historicist and eschatological spirit. But certain elements of traditional Catholicism are maintained, while other elements of Protestantism are not adopted. Catholicism finally recognizes the legitimacy of the modern age and accepts the autonomy of the secular spheres. But it does not view this autonomy as absolute. Particularly, it does not accept the claims of these spheres to have detached themselves completely from morality. Consequently, it does not accept the relegation of religion and morality to the private sphere, insisting on the links between private and public morality. It resists the radical individualization that accompanies privatization and stresses the collective and communal, that is, ecclesial character of the proclamation of faith and of religious practices, while simultaneously and paradoxically upholding also the absolute rights of the individual conscience. Thus, it affirms simultaneously dogma and freedom of conscience. It further maintains an organicist conception of society that demands that all its parts work toward the common good and be subordinated to higher moral principles. In this sense, it maintains the principle of communal ethical life.
arbitrary rule of the tyrant and against claims of raison d’état, the church has always argued that the legitimacy of the state ought to be subordinated to the common good. There is a fundamental difference, however, between the traditional opposition to immoral rule because it violates the natural social order, and opposition to modern authoritarian rule because it violates the dignity of the human person and the rights to freedom, autonomy, and self-determination. The first conception of the common good can serve to defend a traditional social order from radical social change. The second conception presents a prophetic challenge to the established authoritarian order and may serve to legitimate a modern civil society. Paradoxically, what Durkheim saw as old gods dying out are being revived today to legitimize what he anticipated would become “a new cult of man,” the modern religion of autonomy, “a religion in which man is at once the worshipper and the god.”

In Poland, this new universal religion has come to reinforce an already powerful political tradition based on the defense of the traditional historical liberties of the Polish gentry and an equally powerful cultural tradition in which the martyrdom of St. Stanislaus reminds every Pole that there is a higher moral law and a higher principle of legitimation than raison d’état.

The Catholic Church and the Rise of Solidarity

Uniquely among Eastern European societies (Yugoslavia being a case apart), Poland was able to preserve two autonomous institutions that escaped the totalitarian tendency of the state: the Catholic Church and private agriculture. This was to be the most important heritage of the Polish October. Particularly, the church was to play a crucial role against state penetration in a dual sense. First, it served as a refuge against the complete Sovietization of Polish society by defending first its own institutional self-preservation as an autonomous church and then by extending its protection increasingly to other areas and sections of society: peasants and farmers, national culture and traditions, lay Catholic groups, students, workers, and intellectuals, human rights, and finally the right of society as a whole to self-organization. The second important function of the church was that of being, in Michnik’s words, “the most perfect model of the coexistence of an independent social institution with state power.”

Andrew Arato has argued rightly that Michnik’s own program of democratization, spelled out in his 1976 essay “New Evolutionism,” can be interpreted as the extension and generalization of the institutional model of church independence, aiming to
include other groups and institutions in a dual system of autonomous societal pluralism and monolithic state power.81

There were other ways in which Polish Catholicism contributed to the emergence of Solidarity.82 The striking image of the shipyard workers on their knees manifested the extent to which traditional popular Polish religiosity, with its typical undifferentiated fusion of sacred and profane time and space, has survived the thruts of modern Polish history. Catholic intellectuals, associated with the Catholic Intellectual Clubs (KIKs), also played an important role first in the foundation of KOR and later as official and unofficial advisers to the movement. Finally there was the impact that the election and visit of a Polish pope had on public opinion and on the Polish collective consciousness. A member of KOR recognized this influence when he said: "We would probably have had isolated strikes and maybe won some concessions from the government. But a Polish Pope united the Poles in a way I personally never imagined possible."83

If the role of Polish Catholicism in the emergence of Solidarity is both unquestionable and definitively positive, the role that the church and Polish Catholicism played thereafter in the martial law period, in the reemergence of Solidarity, and in the present ongoing process of democratization is much less clear and certainly more ambiguous.84 The following concluding remarks only point to a few issues at the level of strategic institutional church influence, without entering into other levels of analysis such as normative-doctrinal issues or the role of increasingly diverse Catholic sectors of the Solidarity movement and of Polish society.

The almost natural ease with which the church, following the establishment of martial law, reverted to its traditional role of mediator between the communist state and Polish society should serve at least as a warning signal of the threat that the institutional power of the Polish church poses to a fully autonomous civil society. Since within the structure of Communist Poland the church tended to attain its greatest influence precisely at the point when both state and society needed the church’s mediation, it was almost natural for the church to fall into “the mediation syndrome.”85

Under martial law, the church intervened to protect society from state repression and to demand from the state the protection of individual human and civil rights, but it stopped short of demanding the institutionalization of full political rights. The state, in turn, needed the church’s mediation in order to obtain from society at least passive compliance, so that the state of emergency could be “normalized.” By working together with the state toward such a normalization, the church adopted a policy of political realism that basically implied the acceptance of the reality of the present as the point of departure for efforts to improve conditions in the future, while relegating Solidarity to the historical past.86

It is of course not easy to ascertain which kind of strategic considerations had a greater weight in the church’s position, whether it was the consideration of institutional self-interest or rather the realistic accommodation to a lesser evil. Martial law may have been deplorable, so the official argument went, but it was necessary in order to save the Polish nation either from the threat of external aggression or from the danger of internal disintegration and civil war. Polish civil society had to be sacrificed for the sake of the Polish nation. There is no doubt that the patriotic appeal to save the Polish nation found a deep resonance in the collective conscience of the Polish church. However, it is equally evident that from the point of view of institutional self-interest, martial law was good for the church. Never had the churches in Poland, which normally are full, been so crowded as in the martial law period, for even “nonbelievers” attended mass as a symbolic act of political protest against the regime. At the same time, however, the constructive cooperation with the regime paid off. Never had it been so easy for the church to obtain the desired state permits to build new churches.

Thus, one may say that, while in the 1960s church and state had been consciously engaged in a battle over the mind of Polish society, now during the martial law period state and society were engaged in a battle over the mind of the church.87 The Popiulsko “affair” may serve to illustrate the complex interrelations and the tug of war among the three.88 Radical priests like Popiulsko, who had unambiguously sided with society against the state, were impeding the regime’s project of “normalization.” By recreating sacramentally, in the Durkheimian sense, the collective effervescence of the original experience of Solidarity, they were helping to maintain alive the movement as well as its norms and values.89

Having failed in all its attempts to silence Popiulsko through personal threats, blackmail, and slander, the regime began to pressure the church hierarchy to restrain the radical priest, arguing that such an extremist political use of religion was impeding the normalization of state–society relations and endangering the gains already achieved in church–state relations. The church passed along the state’s pressure, adding its own heavier hierarchical pressure by demanding institutional obedience over any other allegiance. Even after Popiulsko’s murder by the secret police, the hierarchy went along at first with the game of normalization and tried to
It is, of course, still too early to tell, but recent interventions of the church in Polish politics have not been conducive to the establishment of an autonomous civil society within a free democratic state. The Ministry of Education, under obvious pressure from the church, introduced religious education back into the public schools. Such an administrative act was at least technically unconstitutional since de jure the old constitution is still in force. But, more important, it contradicted the spirit of the yet to be written democratic constitution, by removing administratively such a crucial issue from public debate.

The church's heavy pressure was equally evident in the recent passage by the Solidarity-controlled senate of a bill delegating abortion. Again, most disturbing was the way in which the bill was passed, practically without debate—only one female senator dared to raise some questions and all the others virtually echoed the official Catholic position. One suspects that the fear of the electoral consequences of contradicting the church on this issue weighed heavily on the senatorial minds.

But the issue, and the questions it raises, have by no means been resolved. The often stated discrepancy between the evident strong hold that the church has over the public mind of the Poles on public collective issues and the much weaker hold it has over the conscience of individual believers on issues of private morality, clearly indicate that Polish Catholicism has served historically more as a public civil religion than as a private religion of individual salvation. The high rates of abortion in Catholic Poland indicate that, for all kinds of reasons, abortion has become a normal method of birth control. The state certainly promoted it, perhaps trying to embarrass the church by showing how weak an influence the church appeared to have over the private morality of the supposedly Catholic Poles. Given the insufficient availability of modern forms of contraception and their proscription by the church, the stage appears to be set for the emergence of conflict between church and civil society. Indeed it will be interesting to see how long it takes for a Polish feminist movement to emerge.

If the interwar period of Polish history offers an indication of things to come, one may expect increasingly new forms of conflict between the church and the secular state as well as new forms of ideological and political polarization in Polish society along religious-secular lines. Ironically, anticlericalism may also emerge in Poland at a time when it has practically disappeared in most Catholic countries. The reemergence of the hydra of anti-Semitism and the repeated attacks on radical secular intellectuals indicate
that there is still a danger that some form of Polish National Catholicism may develop that would serve as an obstacle to the institutionalization of an open pluralistic Polish civil society.

Conclusion

It may be inappropriate to attempt to draw precise generalizations about Catholicism from recent trends in Poland and Spain, two Catholic countries with such a diverse history of church-state relations. But looking at similar developments in many other Catholic countries, one finds the Catholic Church from Brazil to the Philippines, one finds that Catholic Church from the early 1970s on disengaging itself from authoritarian regimes, openly confronting authoritarian states, promoting the reconstitution of civil societies, and participating actively in transitions to democracy. Such developments would seem to warrant some broader, tentative generalizations about global Catholic historical trends.

First, the Catholic Church has finally accepted the legitimacy of the modern age in the dual sense of accepting the differentiation of the secular spheres, particularly the principle of separation of church and state, as well as of upholding the modern principle of freedom of conscience and all the freedoms that derive from it.

Second, a church that accepts the dual clause of "no establishment" and "free exercise of religion" ceases for all practical purposes to be a "church" in the sense of being a territorially organized, religious association, even though in many countries most people may still be born, or rather baptized into it. As the recent papal encyclical on evangelization indicates, globally, Roman Catholicism encyclical still maintains its claim to be the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. But it no longer seeks to become an "established church" at the level of the nation-state. In this sense it has given up the model of "Christendom."

Third, the era of Catholic "reactive organismism," "Catholic Action," and "Christian Democracy" has come to an end. All of them were variants of a defensive reaction against what was perceived as a hostile, modern, secular environment, either within the state or within society. The church no longer seeks to reenter the state through the mobilization of the laity in order to regain control over society.

Fourth, assumedly, the Catholic Church not only will protect the right to the free exercise of religion, but most likely it will confront attempts by the modern state to abridge individual rights, human, civil, social, and political. While the church's position may not impede the recurrence of military dictatorships in Catholic countries, it will likely serve as a serious obstacle to the institutionalization of authoritarian regimes in such countries. Indeed, as Koleckowski has pointed out, "this kind of coalescence of Christianity, in its worldly aspects, with the human rights movement and democratic values has never before been achieved. It might herald dramatic changes throughout the entire Christian world."101

Finally, a church which no longer seeks a place or a function within the state will have to find its place within civil society. In principle, the Catholic Church faces three ideal-typical alternatives.

Privatized Catholicism is the model prescribed by theories of secularization that assume the differentiation of a privatized religious sphere.102 The role of the church would be restricted to the salvation of individual souls and to the pastoral care of the Catholic religious community, either in a free, denominational, religious market or in a more closed, oligopolistic environment. Spain seems to have joined other Western European societies along this road. Catholic doctrine, Vatican policies, and lingering identifications of church and nation will resist this model, but well-established structural patterns and pressures from the secular state, from secular culture, and from the Catholic faithful, many of whom have internalized the model of a privatized religious sphere, will make the church's resistance largely ineffective.

The Catholic Hegemony in Civil Society model is particularly tempting in societies such as Poland, where a strong identification of church and nation still persists. It would mean the triumph of the principle of nation over that of civil society as a model of social integration. The identification of Catholic and national identities leads perforce to a more or less tolerant form of "national-Catholicism" that tends to exclude non-Catholic groups and elements of the national tradition as "the other" and, therefore, as "unnational." Formally, such a model of Catholic establishment in civil society could be compatible with a non-confessional state and with democratic majority rule, but it would tend to abridge the rights of secular and non-Catholic minorities and culturally it would tend to be monolithic and authoritarian. Even in Poland, however, where the hierarchic, centralized, and clericalist nature of the Catholic Church, along with traditional elements of Catholic culture, would seem to press in this direction, one also finds strong countervailing forces. Once the need for a unified societal resistance against the communist state has disappeared, Polish society has exhibited increasing
pluralism of interests, norms and values, belying any notion of a homogeneous national community. Any attempt to impose Catholic solutions to societal problems would open up deep religious-secular cleavages. Moreover, Polish Catholicism itself has become increasingly pluralistic internally to such an extent that the attempt to impose a Catholic solution to secular issues could lead to internal conflicts and divisions within the church. The Catholic Pluralism in a Pluralist Civil Society model, which recognizes the legitimacy of the modern age, presupposes that the church can no longer influence the secular spheres directly, that it can only do so indirectly through the normatively grounded conduct of the Catholic laity. But the church does not have the coercive means, nor can in principle impose its norms upon lay conduct, once it has recognized the modern principle of freedom of conscience. As in Spain, opinion surveys in Poland also indicate that large sectors of the population have internalized these principles. The cleavages that became so noticeable in the 1990 electoral campaign to the presidency in Poland indicate that Polish civil society is indeed pluralistic and that the “us” versus “them” identification is no longer so easy to make. Moreover, it is equally obvious that the cleavages do not run along Catholic-secular lines, despite all the attempts to discredit the former prime minister, Mazowiecki, and other Catholic intellectuals as “crypto-Jews.” A superficial comparison of recent transitions to democracy in Catholic countries from Nicaragua to the Philippines, from Brazil to Poland shows that when the phase of consolidation begins and political society becomes institutionalized, the church has tended to withdraw from political society proper, leaving this realm to professional politicians. It shows, furthermore, that the church has avoided the attempt to either promote, sponsor, or support any “Catholic” or “Christian” party. In general, it has also avoided the partisan mobilization of the laity around Catholic issues. This partial withdrawal of the church from political society, however, does not mean that the church has accepted its relegation to a privatized religious sphere. The church has continued, and surely will continue, to speak up and take public stands on allegedly private moral issues (abortion, divorce, sexual conduct), on national issues (education, fair distribution of national resources, national economic development and government economic policies, social consequences of market allocation of resources, political corruption and lack of citizens’ participation in political society), and on international issues (fair international division of labor and fair international division of power, war and peace, nuclear disarmament, etc.). In this respect, the church is contributing to the constitution of a public sphere within civil society, separate and differentiated from the state and political society proper. Once the church enters this public sphere, however, while being buttressed by whichever moral authority it still possesses, the church’s public statements must perform lose their hierarchical, authoritative character and be exposed to open, critical, public deliberation. The church can still become “the voice of the voiceless,” of those whose views and interests do not find representation in political society. But by accepting the rules of public discourse in a free, democratic public sphere, the church also implicitly accepts the risk that its voice will become just another cry in the cacophony of modern civil society.

Notes


30. Ecclesia, Vida Nueva, Razón y Fe.
33. José L. Martín Descalzo, Tarancón, el Cardenal del Cambio (Barcelona: Planeta, 1982).
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49. Martin, Secularization, p. 9.
53. While in 1951 only 65 percent of Poland’s population was Catholic, by 1946 the number of Catholics had risen to 96.6 percent of the population.
60. Antoni Nowicki, Wyznani w krytyce religii w Polsce (Warsaw: Szlak i Wiedza, 1965).
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70. Mirczewski, Wyszyński.


74. Szajkowski, Next to God, p. 32.


