

The Diverse Catholic Right in Poland

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Introduction

Many people associate Poland with Catholicism. The cultural relevance of the Catholic tradition seems as undisputed as the *moral authority* of the Polish Catholic Church (Grzymała-Busse 2015). However, as the length of this chapter shows, the diverse Polish Catholic landscape to which the liberal Catholic traditions belong also has a number of ties to illiberal expressions and appropriations of Catholicism. The central reasons for this are the legacy of national Catholicism from Poland's independence after World War I, the legacy of strict Catholic moral conservatism from the teachings of the Polish Pope John Paul II, who at the same time stood for the liberation from the communist regime, and the legacy of EU enlargement based on political, economic, and socio-cultural asymmetries (Ayoub 2016). The first feeds an overall exclusivist and nationalist understanding of Catholic Polish identity. The second is enshrined in the dogmatic pro-life or better anti-abortion and anti-LGBTIQA+ positions of the Church hierarchy and related actors. The latter serves as a source for an anti-colonial frame that sees progressive rights politics, particularly regarding gender-sensitive anti-discrimination and LGBTIQA+ rights, as imposed by a colonizing Brussels (Graff and Korolczuk 2018) and as the *other* of a (desired) Europe based on Christian values. The legacy of the harsh neoliberal transformations after 1989 functions as a demand-side context that can motivate people to vote for the protective social politics of the right-wing Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość; PiS), which has been in government since 2015 (Corman 2019).

This chapter first presents country-specific insights about the political system, the role of national Catholicism, and the religious landscape. The main part is dedicated to a selection of very influential right-wing actors with Catholic affiliations. The main selection criterion has been their attempt to

directly or indirectly influence political decision making for illiberal means. Political actors are only mentioned as relevant allies for these civic actors. While there are several ideological overlaps, especially concerning national Catholicism, the actors differ in regard to their main issues and fields of agency: the Radio Marya network addresses, in particular, the elderly, the pro-life movement focuses on abortion, *Ordo Iuris* targets the legal field, while the ultra-nationalist Catholic camp uses Catholicism in a more utilitarian way.

1. Country-specific background information

1.1. Political landscape

In 1990, Poland gained independence as a democratic republic that replaced the communist Polish People's Republic following the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Poland's political system combines parliamentarianism and presidentialism. The parliament has two chambers: The Sejm is the relevant legislative chamber where bills are elaborated and passed. The Senat can ask the Sejm for amendments before submitting bills to the president (Ziemer 2009). Over the last decades, the Polish party system has become strongly concentrated. For about 15 years, it has been dominated by two opposing camps: the camp around the center-left and economically (neo)liberal Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*; PO) and the camp around the governing right-wing nationalist but socioeconomically left-wing PiS (Niedermeyer 2020). PiS has been governing with a majority for the last two legislative terms. This has enabled this authoritarian-minded party to introduce political and structural changes that have affected the independent functioning of law (e.g., the replacement of lawyers and justices, including in the Constitutional Court), restricted free media, and attacked individual and minority rights (e.g., the harsh restriction of already strict abortion rules and the rejection of LGBTIQ+ rights). Both the judiciary reforms and the so-called LGBT-free zones (see below) have led to EU sanction procedures (De Vries and Herbert 2020). Left-wing NGOs and intellectual journals have become increasingly excluded from public funding, while conservative journals have received support (Mrozek 2020). The current political situation is a highly relevant context for the analysis of how illiberal political and Catholic actors interact and cooperate (Graff and Korolczuk 2021).

It is interesting to note that the radical right has become more diverse over time. Between 2001 and 2007, the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich*

Rodziń; LPR), a populist radical right-wing party with conservative values and antisemitic positions, had already gained representation in the Polish Parliament (2006–2007 in coalition with PiS; Downes and Wong 2021). With the parliamentary elections of 2015, Poland faced a new wave of extreme-right parties. Rock star Paweł Kukiz, a right-wing *anti-system* candidate, won one-fifth of the vote in the 2015 presidential election. Later that year, his Kukiz'15 grouping emerged as the third largest in the parliamentary election, securing 9% of the votes (Downes and Wong 2021).

At the beginning of 2019, the radical right-wing Confederation (Konfederacja) grouping was constituted as “a political conglomerate comprising an eclectic mix of economic libertarians clustered around the veteran political eccentric Janusz Korwin-Mikke and radical nationalists from the National Movement (Ruch Narodowy – RN) party” (Szczerbiak 2020). The Confederation first appeared in the 2019 European Parliament elections, announcing that “we don’t want Jews, homosexuals, abortion, taxes and the EU” (Szczerbiak 2020). In 2019, the Confederation won 11 seats in the Sejm. Unlike PiS, the Confederation does not enjoy especially close ties with the hierarchy of Poland’s influential Catholic Church, and it is a strongly socially conservative grouping. Kukiz is also a member of the Confederation, and 24% of Kukiz’15’s 2015 supporters voted for the Confederation in 2019. The Confederation attracted around 20% of younger voters aged under 30, two-thirds of its voters were male, and more than three-fifths lived in smaller towns and rural areas (Szczerbiak 2020). PiS voters, by contrast, are similar to a large number of radical-right voters in Europe in that they are more likely to hold high levels of anti-immigrant attitudes. Moreover, higher levels of religiosity and anti-LGBTIQ+ attitudes make support for PiS more likely (Downes and Wong 2021).

1.2. Religious landscape

The Roman Catholic Church is the biggest church in Poland. The overwhelming majority (around 87%) of the population have been baptized as Roman Catholics. The Catholic Church also includes the Uniate Church (Greek Catholic), with a congregation of approximately 55,000 members. The Orthodox Church has a congregation of 550,000 members (1.4% of the population). There are about 30 Protestant Churches, with a total congregation of more than 150,000 members (0.4% of the population), the biggest of which is the Evangelical Augsburg Church (more than 61,000 members). There also exist

about 20 churches or other religious congregations with from several dozen to more than 5,000 followers, in addition to the Jehovah's Witnesses with 125,000 members (European Commission 2022). The Muslim League counts around 35,000 members (Statistics Poland 2020), while fewer than 10,000 Jews live in Poland, a country once known as the center of European Jewish life. On the eve of the Second World War, Poland was home to over three million Jews, making it the second-largest Jewish community in the world at that time (World Jewish Congress n.d.). Whereas Catholicism still dominates the religious landscape, the moral authority of the Polish Catholic Church is decreasing, especially among the younger generation (Kozłowska 2022).

1.3. Catholic identity and Church-state relations

That Catholicism has been and remains a strong marker of cultural and national identity has to do with the role of the Catholic Church, especially during geopolitical confrontations. Christianization in Poland began in 966. While until today, mythical narrations remember Poland as a Catholic nation, the Polish-Lithuanian Union from the 16th to 18th centuries and divided Poland later on were multi-ethnic, with the largest Jewish communities in Europe, as well as Orthodox and Protestant Christians and Muslim Tartars. The imagination of Poland as a Catholic nation and bastion of European Christianity consolidated when Protestant Prussia, Catholic Austria, and Orthodox Russia divided Poland in 1772, 1792, and 1795 as a result of warfare. The Catholic Church remained the central institution that kept or created a sense of national unity against the external enemies. This is part of the cultural memory that marks the relationship between Church and state up to today (Zubrzycki 2006, 41–44; Martin 1978, 42).

The particular authority of the Catholic Church is also closely linked to its oppositional role during communism, when the Polish Pope John Paul II was a charismatic and internationally recognized authority who supported the anti-communist labor movement *Solidarność* (Casanova 1994). John Paul II, however, fought not only for democracy but also against what he coined, in the light of the increasing acceptance of female self-determination and the use of contraception measures, a “civilization of death” (Hennig 2012; Ayoub 2016). For today's Catholic moral conservatism, the Polish pope is still a major point of reference and, among parts of the Church hierarchy and the government, a greater authority than the current Pope Francis (Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021).

According to the Polish Constitution, all religious communities are equally treated by the constitution, and no one enjoys privileges (Art. 25). Religious education can be offered at schools by every religious community, if demanded. The majority of children, however, still take part in Catholic education lessons. A privileged position vis-à-vis other religious communities also created the Concordat between Poland and the Vatican in 1993, as well as a joint commission between Church and state. This legacy from communist times provides the Church hierarchy with privileged access to political power. In sum, we can say that the relationship between Church and state is marked by a culture of cooperation that allows for informal contacts across the major parties (Hennig 2012, 220–221). Political anticlericalism has been institutionalized only recently, with the foundation of leftist parties such as the former Palikot Movement and the now merged young parties Together (Razem) and Spring (Wiosna) (Chwedoruk 2019).

1.4. The polarized Catholic landscape

The Polish Catholic landscape has become more diverse since 1989 (Narkowicz 2018) and more polarized since PiS came to power in 2015. We can speak of three major factions. First, there is the small group of liberal priests and bishops who stand in the tradition of the liberal intellectual Catholics who opposed communism. They are militant about liberal values and democracy and are critical of the blurring of the lines of separation between Church and state. The majority of the bishops belong to the second faction, which is comprised of the centrist conservative milieu, ranging from the very conservative Stanisław Gądecki, head of the Polish Bishops' Conference, to more moderate members such as Wojciech Polak, head of the Polish Catholic Church (Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021). When still in office, the liberal conservative bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, for instance, accused the alliance between the Church and PiS of being the “greatest danger for the Church” (Matern 2017). The third group, a powerful and visible minority of nationalist and fundamentalist Catholics, is at the center of this chapter. It includes priests, some members of the hierarchy, and prominent Catholic actors such as the Radio Maryja movement, the Institute for Legal Culture *Ordo Iuris*, and the pro-life movement.

The ideological divisions cut across all levels of the Church, including the ecclesiastic elite, the Catholic organizations, and priests in local communities. At the local level, priests preach their own, sometimes illiberal, visions on moral issues and migration (Scisłowska 2017). Moreover, the boundaries

between the three groups vary according to policy issues. In moral–political questions regarding private and family civil law, such as abortion and LGB-TIQA+ rights, the differences are less sharp than those regarding asylum policies (Hennig 2016).

1.5. National Catholicism and party politics

National Catholicism is a central source for Catholic right-wing and extreme-right organizations (Meyer Resende 2014). Similar to Catholic fundamentalism, this closed, nationalist interpretation of Catholicism rejects cultural diversity, the idea that religion is a private matter, freedom and equality rights, and individual autonomy as features associated with liberal modernity. A major ideological point of reference is Roman Dmowski, the leading politician of the Polish National Democratic Party (Endecja), which was active from the end of the 19th century to the 1920s. Advocating an expansive Polish politics toward the West, Dmowski claimed with the formula “Polak to Katolik” that only a Catholic made a good Pole (Minkenberg 2018). In the 1990s, the small but influential Christian National Union (ZChN) party insisted that Catholic dogma must be the foundation of Poland and of all ethnic Poles. This proclamation of an exclusivist Catholic Polishness chimed with the recurrent metaphor of Poland as the *Christ of Nations*, a romantic conception of national identity that emphasizes Poland’s suffering at the hands of other countries and its “redemptive rebirth in 1918” (Stanley 2016, 119).

National Catholicism is also present in the rhetoric of the governing PiS party. Founded at the end of 2001, PiS at first seemed to take a neutral stance on the politics of religion. Only in 2005 did the party issue a document entitled “A Catholic Poland in a Christian Europe,” which committed the party to religious values and the defense of Poland’s Catholic identity. Catholic values, accordingly, should determine the party’s activities in all dimensions (Stanley 2016, 119). After the 2007 elections, PiS was also able to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the LPR as the representative of alienated religious traditionalists (Stanley 2016, 111).

The national Catholicism of PiS finds expression only in the public utterances of PiS politicians and in symbolic contexts such as the national celebrations at the sanctuary of Jasna Góra. In this vein, PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński considers the Christian value system as the only contemporary ethical system acceptable in Poland (Hall 2017). Notwithstanding its apparently secular outlook, PiS’s election programs contain several sections acknowl-

edging the teachings of the Catholic Church as a central element of Polish tradition, Polish patriotism, and Polish political identity (PiS 2019, 14). The Church and its moral teachings are also considered and expected to be the most relevant and undisputed moral voice. Therefore, PiS wants to keep the “specific status of the Catholic Church within our national and state life” and to defend it “against unjust attacks.” The program emphasizes Christianity as a basic historical and cultural experience and a core element of the universal value system (PiS 2014, 10).

2. The Catholic right in Poland: Actors and issues

2.1. Church members

The Church hierarchy, represented by the Polish Bishops’ Conference (CEP), does not consider itself as an actor with political ambitions. Before elections, however, the CEP and single congregations publish indirect voting recommendations promoting those who, for example, respect the right to life (Hennig 2017). Regarding abortion and LGBTIQ+ rights, the CEP positions itself in public communiqués against any relaxation of the restrictive abortion rules. The bishops, for instance, immediately thanked the Constitutional Court for ruling the current abortion law as unconstitutional (Polish Bishops’ Conference 2020b), whereby the lawyers opened the door for its *de facto* total ban (see below). Another recent example was the morally–theologically grounded opposition to a Warsaw LGBTIQ+ Rights and Diversity Charter (Polish Bishops’ Conference 2020a).

Some clerics are known for their particular radical positions. The most prominent of the bishops of national Catholic persuasion are bishop Edward Frankowski, the archbishop of Kraków Marek Jędraszewski, and the archbishop of Gdańsk Sławoj Leszek Głódz. During the asylum political crisis, these prelates “adapted the fear of Islam to the historically constructed notion of Poland as a bulwark of Christianity” (Pędziwiatr 2018, 471). While, with the exception of Głódz, they remained in office, the radical young priest Fr. Jacek Międlar, who supported the extreme right during demonstrations with nationalist and xenophobic sermons, was suspended (*Dziennik* 2016). No public condemnation by the Church hierarchy was faced by archbishop Marek Jędraszewski, who in 2019 publicly called the LGBTIQ+ community organizing a Pride demonstration a plague worse than the Red Army, right

after the unprecedented violence against the first LGBTIQ+ Pride (in Polish “Equality Parade”, *parada równości*) in Białystok. The only outraged Catholic reaction to the sermon came from the lay Catholic activist Ignacy Dudkiewicz (Dudkiewicz 2019).

Another Representative of the nationalist and illiberal branch of closed Catholicism is the Radio Maryja movement around the broadcast station centering on the business-minded priest Pater Rydzyk. In 1991, Rydzyk founded Radio Maryja in Toruń. In 1997–1998, the Catholic nationalist daily newspaper *Nasz Dziennik* appeared, followed in 2003 by the TV station Trwam and the College for Social and Media Culture. Within this socially and politically influential communication network, Radio Maryja regularly broadcasts prayers, catechisms, and masses (Krzemiński 2017). The Radio Maryja movement has enjoyed substantial support from within the Church hierarchy, even if the controversial nature of the movement dissuaded some more moderate clerics from voicing their approval openly (Stanley 2016, 116).

In the political realm, the media outlets actively support the current right-wing government, helping it advance a religiously based national ideology. PiS, in turn, has, according to OKO Press, been subsidizing the network with “several hundred million of Złoty” (Mikolajewska 2019), and cabinet ministers, even Jarosław Kaszyński, often appear on the Radio Maryja station. There is probably no other Catholic actor so close to political power, as it is seen as a suitable medium for addressing potential voters (Narkowicz 2018, 362). In the realm of the Church hierarchy, despite clear ideological differences, only some liberal priests and a minority among the mainstream conservative bishops have so far openly opposed Rydzyk (Wiśniewski 2018).

The constant tone of Radio Maryja is Catholic nationalist, with a changing emphasis on controversial issues over time. In the 1990s, the station was known for its antisemitic conspiracy narratives and Euroscepticism. Polish EU membership was partly associated with a new German threat (Germans buying out Polish land) and a political *dictatorship*. The opening of negotiation talks in 2005 for EU-candidate Turkey joining the EU allowed Radio Maryja to talk about *Eurabia* (Minkenberg and Hennig 2011, 49). After Poland became an EU member, the contributions loudly defended John Paul II’s fight against a *culture of death* and of *value pluralism*. In these years, Radio Maryja successfully mobilized and financed bus shuttles for pro-life demonstrations (Hennig 2012, 137).

With the spread of the *gender-ideology narrative* since about 2012, Radio Maryja has also been inviting guests who, as representatives of *Ordo Iuris*, warn parents about the early sexualization of their children and lobby for re-

jecting the Istanbul Convention with its “Marxist gender-ideological doctrine” (Radio Maryja 2021). The asylum political crisis also pushed Islamophobia onto the agenda. The station, for instance, mobilized for and broadcast directly from the so-called rosary prayer event along the Polish border, which was internationally seen as a symbolic action against Muslim migration (Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021). A feeling of unity and mental support in times of rapid changes helps the electronic Church successfully mobilize for nationalism and against gender and Islam, while its support for the governing PiS party creates a win–win-situation for both sides (Mechtenberg 2018).

Radio Maryja presents itself as the “Catholic voice in your house” (see the Radio Maryja website) and extensively applies, unlike other right-wing Christian organizations in Europe, religious language. It broadcasts Marian prayers, masses, and relevant religious celebrations, aiming at an older and rural audience that feels left behind (Hinz 2021). People can have the feeling of being part of a huge Catholic community without even going to Church. The audience in mind is especially the older rural generation that experienced the breakdown of communism more often as a loss than as a release (Rautenberg 2005, 294). This generation, however, is rapidly shrinking, and Radio Maryja is trying to attract a younger audience. This explains the apparently less ideological and more business-oriented College of Social and Media Studies in Toruń, which addresses young people seeking a media career (see the Radio Maryja website).

2.2. Catholic-associated anti-abortion and anti-gender networks

It was the Polish Catholic Church that, at the end of the 1980s, used the political transformations to lobby for restricting the Polish permissive abortion law implemented in 1956. In accordance with the anti-abortion agenda and following the teachings of John Paul II, these activities led to the establishment of a vivid web of life-protecting organizations (Hennig 2012). Today, the web of partly interlinked foundations, organizations, and websites is broad. The following section depicts two partly interconnected major networks with explicit political ambitions and Catholic connections.

One of the oldest pro-life networks, founded in 1992 by Alina Grzeskowiak, the former president of the Polish Senat, is the Polish Federation of Life-Protecting Movements (Polska Federacja Ruchów Obrony Życia; PFROŻ). The organization was created to defend the position of the Catholic Church within debates on the abortion law. In addition, it aimed from the beginning to strengthen the position of women in pro-life and family issues (Staśkiewicz

2018, 74–75). PFROŻ follows the rhetoric of Pope John Paul II in claiming to build “the civilization of life and love.” They have offers for pregnant women and educate regarding “responsible parenthood” and “pro-family policy.” By contrast, they oppose attempts to introduce what they call “irresponsible sexual education” and “pornography flooding Polish society” (see the PFROŻ website, run by the One of Us [Jeden z Nas] foundation, which in 2014 was a founding member of the transnational pro-life network One of Us, located in Brussels).

According to its self-description, PFROŻ embraces 136 pro-life and family movements and organizations. These include prayer movements, movements offering direct help to pregnant mothers, single mothers, and large families, and movements focusing on education. The official press organ of PFROŻ is the magazine *Service to Life and Family*, published by the Voice for Life (Głos dla Życia) foundation in Poznań. The central aims include “persuading and influencing undecided politicians to speak up for life” and transforming “social awareness towards the recognition of a state-guaranteed right to life” (see the PFROŻ website). The president of PFROŻ, Paweł Wosicki, is also a member of the council of the major umbrella organization, the Christian Social Congress.

Founded in 2015, the Christian Social Congress (CSC) is a network of relevant organizations led by its founder Marek Jurek (Sejm president 2005–2007 and MEP 2014–2019). The CSC thus has direct links to political actors, such as right-wing politicians from PiS and the extreme-right Kukiz’15 party. Its members include a number of foundations and NGOs, such as One of Us, Ordo Iuris, and the above-mentioned Polish Federation of Life-Protecting Movements, as well as parliamentarians from the radical right. A yearly congress invites various pro-life organizations and politicians to “discuss forms of political and social representation of the Catholic agenda in our country” (see the CSC website). The CSC is primarily known for organizing the annual Polish March for Life, an anti-abortion demonstration also existing in other parts of the world. This event has support from the political right and the Polish episcopate, which, in 2021, took over the patronage of the event and blessed the march in Warsaw (see the CSC website).

Just before the parliamentary elections of 2019, Jurek founded the Christian Social Congress Electoral Action Committee, primarily aimed at setting their rejection of the *gender-based* Istanbul Convention on the public agenda. Support came from Marek Kubiak, who in 2020 was the candidate for mayor of Warsaw of the small radical right-wing Federacja (merged with Konfederacja in 2020; see the Marek Kubiak website). Together with two other orga-

nizations (including Family and Life, which is presented below), they recommended for the parliamentary elections about 100 regional politicians, including some from PiS, a party that would “emotionally and financially support Catholics” (*Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* 2018).

A politically very influential member of the Christian Social Congress with direct access to political power is Kaja Godek, a devoted Catholic and mother of a daughter with Down syndrome, who founded in 2012 the pro-life and pro-family NGO Life and Family (*Życie i Rodzina*). Godek spoke to the Polish Parliament three times to promote her pro-life and anti-gender initiatives: In 2013, she presented her first initiative for a total ban of abortion. The 400,000 collected signatures in favor obliged the Parliament to consider the citizens’ bill, but it was rejected by the ruling center-left PO government. In 2016, Godek’s new attempt to ban and punish abortion by law was supported by PiS and initially adopted in the Parliament. But after nationwide protests by more than 100,000 Polish women, the Parliament again rejected the already adopted law (Hassel 2021). Her third attempt, the 2017 civic project Stop Abortion, was supported by parliamentarians from PiS, *Konfederacja*, and the Polish Peasant Party (PSL)—Kukiz alliance, who in December 2019 asked the Constitutional Court—then under the PiS-controlled presidency of Julia Przyłębska—to prove the constitutionality of the current abortion law. In October 2020, the Court ruled (and then confirmed in January 2021) that the abortion law, which had been in force since 1993, was unconstitutional. On the day of the decision, Godek invited the public to a prayer in front of the Court building. Abortion is now restricted even under the conditions of rape and malformation of the embryo. It is only allowed if the woman is in physical danger (Krawczyk 2020).

Only a month later, Godek presented her civic project Stop LGBT in the Sejm, seeking to ban gay Pride marches on Polish streets, halt the introduction of same-sex marriage and adoption rights for same-sex couples, and prevent the involvement of sex education activists in Polish schools. In the first round of the vote, the Sejm voted against the bill, but with only a tiny minority. A commission is now deciding about further steps (RP online 2021b). In November 2022, the Warsaw-Downtown District Court has ordered the prosecutor’s office to investigate whether the “Stop LGBT” project promotes values and actions typical of totalitarian regimes (RP online 2022). To campaign against abortion and LGBTIQ+ rights in the European Parliament, in 2019, Godek also formed an electoral alliance with the camp of the right-wing nationalist confederation in Poland, which she has since left (Hassel 2021).

Marek Jurek's Christian Social Congress's agenda is framed more broadly, placing the fight against abortion and gender-based politics within the idea of a mission for Europe. To that end, the reference to Christianity is used more in an identity, political, or civilizational (Brubaker 2017) sense than in a spiritual–religious sense, as the main CSC slogan “For Poland and a Christian Civilization” reveals. According to Jurek, Poland will not survive as an independent and sovereign state if Europe rejects “our values.” Liberal abortion rules would be a central example of such a rejection. Another core issue for Jurek is “the Istanbul Gender Convention” mentioned earlier, which would strike “at the foundations of society” (Jurek 2018). Opponents of this international treaty against domestic violence toward women particularly criticize the document because it defines gender as a sociocultural category, which they frame as an expression of *gender ideology* that would deny the difference between biological sexes (Kováts 2020). With the narrative of defending Christian values, Jurek and the CSC, together with Ordo Iuris, started in July 2020 to collect signatures for a civic project aiming at replacing the international treaty with an International Convention on Family Rights (Wysokie Obczasy 2020). They submitted the civic project Yes to Family, No to Gender to the Sejm, where it was controversially debated in spring 2021 and sent to a commission (see below; Chrzczonowicz 2021a). On the initiative of MEP Marek Jurek, a draft of the Convention on the Rights of the Family was also presented in the European Parliament on July 27, 2020 (Kriszán and Roggeband 2021). Already in 2007, when Jurek was president of the Polish Sejm, he had tried with partners from the LPR and PiS to enshrine a total ban of abortion into the Polish Constitution. This was at a time when the Polish bishops still remained silent. Given their uncompromising anti-abortion position, some PiS members consider Jurek and Godek as problematic allies (RP Online 2018).

The Poznań Charter of the Christian Social Congress from 2016, published on the occasion of the 1,050th anniversary of the *Polish baptism*, resembles the interconnection between a strong European and national Catholic identity based on a strict pro-life and anti-gender position. Close to ethnopluralism, it identifies a crisis in Europe that will disintegrate the “Christian nations of Europe” and lead to an “uncontrolled mass immigration” and a “progressive Islamization of many western European countries” (Christian Social Congress n.d.). The Euro-Christian frame is thus a way to create a political representation of Catholic voices in Poland and the EU against non-Christians, justifying the “protection of life” and the traditional heterosexual as part of a civilizational project and Poland's mission in Europe (Biskupski 2017).

The above-mentioned organizations PFROŻ and the CSC are linked to the European pro-life/pro-family movement One of Us (Jeden z Nas). They are also particularly well connected to supporters of the counter-project to the Istanbul Convention and, through Marek Jurek and his marginal party Prawica Rzeczypospolitej (see the Prawica Rzeczypospolitej website), to the traditionalist European Christian Movement at the EU level (see the European Christian Political Movement website).

2.3. Legal Litigation: Ordo Iuris

A relatively new and politically very powerful Catholic player is the Institute for Legal Culture Ordo Iuris. In response to the diffusion of norms based on liberal freedom principles, the think tank defends the idea of a morality stemming from a *natural law* in order to fight against reproductive and sexual rights and for a traditional and exclusionary understanding of the family, as well as in support of the conscience clause (Anonymous 2020, 10).

Klementyna Suchanow describes in her 2020 book *To jest wojna* (This Is War) how Ordo Iuris was founded in 2013 with the participation of individuals from the Piotr Skarga Foundation (on behalf of the associated Institute for Societal and Religious Education Father Piotr Skarga), the Polish representative of the Brazil-originating fundamentalist Catholic network Tradition, Family, Property (TFP), which is considered a religious sect in several countries (Suchanow 2019). Ordo Iuris has been a driving force for those illiberal civic actors who focus on the legal dimensions of litigation and policy making. The think tank has been able to expand a web of similar TFP-linked organizations in, for example, Hungary, Croatia, Estonia, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Switzerland. This new generation of TFP organizations has been able to take “to a higher level what had been the signature of TFP methodologies corresponding to the professionalization of conservative actors” (Datta 2020, 15).

Ordo Iuris is well connected to the PiS government. Close ties with the Ministry of Justice, in particular, are revealed by the funding of joint projects (Mierzyńska 2020). PiS has even made room for people from Ordo Iuris in government structures. Aleksander Stępkowski, one of the founders of Ordo Iuris and its first president, was an undersecretary of state in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the first PiS government. He is currently a judge in the Polish Supreme Court and its spokesman. Other individuals closely cooperating with Ordo Iuris have positions in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (Ciobanu 2021).

Ordo Iuris is also an economically powerful institution. Investigative journalists from Poland and abroad have discovered how through the Piotr Skarga Foundation, Ordo Iuris transferred during 2009 and 2019 about 10 million euros to ultra-Catholic organizations in France and Brazil (Dauksza et al. 2020). The annual income for 2019 was over 6 million Polish zloty (over 1.3 million euros), having almost doubled since 2016 (Ciobanu 2021). A lot of money is generated by selling devotionals and Fatima prayers free of taxes, which are announced in newspapers and personalized letters addressing, in particular, the elderly (Gielewska and Szczygieł 2021; Wielowieyska 2020). Other sources include Russian funds (Bunda 2020; Suchanow 2020).

Ordo Iuris only gained visibility after the electoral victory of PiS in 2015, engaging with an illiberal approach to abortion, gender, and Islam that even for PiS has been too radical (Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021). The activities of Ordo Iuris's internationally well-educated lawyers concentrate on three levels: on processes, including monitoring, publishing analyses, and litigation; on participation in legislative processes in the Polish Parliament, proposing draft laws and supporting projects close to their environment; and on the international level (Anonymous 2020, 13).

During the 2015 election campaign, which extremely politicized the conflict over granting asylum to Muslim applicants, Ordo Iuris argued that the Polish state should restrict its asylum grants to Christian applicants (Hennig and Meyer-Resende 2021, 445). In 2016, Ordo Iuris pushed on behalf of Kaja Godek's above-mentioned civic project Stop Abortion for a draconian anti-abortion law, from which PiS withdrew only after massive protests arose. Since 2018, its long-term project concerns the building of an international alliance against the Istanbul Convention. To the end of withdrawing from this international treaty ratified in 2015, legal experts drafted in 2018 the above-mentioned Convention on the Rights of the Family (for the document in English, see Kielmans-Ratyńska, Walinowicz, and Żych 2018). On July 30, 2020, the Polish government decided to follow Ordo Iuris's initiative of submitting a request to the Constitutional Court to examine the compatibility of the Istanbul Convention with the Polish Constitution (Kucharczyk and Mojak 2021). Simultaneously, Ordo Iuris co-initiated the transnational civic petition Yes for the Family, No for Gender in support of the Convention on the Rights of the Family (see the Yes for the Family, No for Gender website)—with success. The Polish government was the first to submit the Convention on the Rights of the Family bill to the Sejm. On April 30, 2021, a majority of parliamentarians, mostly from PiS, the PSL, and Konfederacja, voted in favor of the bill. It

was then submitted to a committee, where it is (summer 2022) still pending (Chrzczonowicz 2021b).

Ordo Iuris has also played a decisive role in the spread of so-called LGBT-free zones. Between 2018 and 2020, almost 90 communes, especially in south-east Poland, declared themselves free of *LGBTIQA+ ideology*. The point of departure was a critical response by Ordo Iuris to the progressive LGBTIQA+ Charter of 2018, initiated by Warsaw's mayor Rafał Trzaskowski. Through a web of local PiS members and like-minded decision makers (Mierzyńska 2020), Ordo Iuris was able to lobby for its *Family Charter* in defense of children's and parents' rights against any external interference, which many communes used as a template for declaring themselves free of *LGBTIQA+ ideology* (Bachmann 2020).

A Polish in-depth analysis of Ordo Iuris identified six rhetorical strategies, of which most are related to a non-neutral legal language that basically aims at delegitimizing opponents and legitimizing their own approaches and like-minded partners (Anonymous 2020, 11–13). Besides its reference to TFP in the logo, the religious origin of Ordo Iuris remains invisible (Dziubka 2020). Instead, it is the name—Ordo Iuris is a Latin term meaning “order of law”—that sets the agenda. In this vein, its *takeover strategy* is to define its own conservative agenda in terms of *rights*. Religiously inspired views on sexuality and parenthood, accordingly, resemble the classic language of human rights, with the rights of the unborn child as a classic example. Anti-gender initiatives are accompanied by transnational narratives that construct gender-sensitive anti-discrimination measures and related policies as threats. There are appeals to safeguarding the rights of parents to educate their children according to their convictions and the rights of children not to get harmed, while the constitutional religious freedom clause is used against abortion rights and civic partnerships (Hennig 2018). The targeted audience is primarily academic and holds (ideally) a political office, thus being able to initiate legal changes toward a pro-life and anti-gender *pro-family* policy.

Ordo Iuris is interconnected not only with TFP but also with relevant members of transnational anti-gender and pro-family networks, such as Agenda Europe and the World Congress of Families. A recent project with transnational scope was the foundation in 2021 of the Collegium Intermarium, a private university for law studies in Central and Eastern Europe. Cooperation initiatives are planned to include non-EU members such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia. Courses are taught in English by an international staff with traditionalist views (see the Collegium Intermarium website). Particularly strong ties exist with the Hungarian government, which is the co-founder of the univer-

sity. Its proximity to the Polish government is revealed by the opening speeches in May 2021 by the Polish Minister of Culture Piotr Gliński and the Polish Minister of Education Przemysław Czarnek. Besides private donations, some financial support comes from a state fund (Ciobanu 2021).

The Collegium Intermarium offers master's degrees and postgraduate courses, including scholarships for legal studies. It focuses on family politics, NGO politics, and human rights *disputes*. Its mission is defined as a response to the "crisis of academia" through an education based on the traditional values of European civilization: Roman legal culture, Greek philosophy, and Christian ethics (see the Collegium Intermarium website). Moreover, a civilizational understanding of Christianity is interpreted as the foundation for an essentialist, homogenous conception of Europe: "Christianity brought the world awareness of human dignity" (see the Collegium Intermarium website). It is worth mentioning that the approach to legal studies reflects a moral conservative human rights interpretation typical of (religious) defenders of traditionalist values by which universalistic terms are used not to secure but to limit minority rights (Mourão Permoser and Stöckl 2020). Another element is the Catholic idea of a God-given natural law as a legitimate rebuttal against reproductive rights and same-sex marriage (Ciobanu 2021). The overall scientific mission is to defend "freedom and truth," which, in today's academic education and debates, are seen as threatened by "censorship" and "aggressive ideologies"—most probably a reference to what is constructed as *gender ideology* (Collegium Intermarium 2021).

2.5. National Radical Nationalists

The Catholic nationalist ideology of the pre-war politician Roman Dmowski is represented in its most radical interpretation by two very profiled extreme-right organizations: the National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny; ONR,) and the youth organization All Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska). Other nationalist movements include Ruch Narodowy (National Movement), Polska Liga Obrony (Polish Defense League), and the Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland. All of these are traditionally associated with the Roman Catholic Church (Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021). This anti-democratic milieu is not large, but it is able to mobilize across Polish borders, especially for the annual celebration of Polish Independence Day on November 11. The following section focuses on the ONR and its former leader Robert Bąkiewicz.

The left-liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* identifies a symbiotic relationship between PiS and the leader of the ONR, as Bąkiewicz mobilizes for issues that for PiS would be too radical but that are still attractive for voters from the radical right. An example is the active *defense* of church buildings during the mass protests against the restricted abortion law of 2021 (Karpieczuk 2021). PiS would seem to want to *buy* the organization and its leader, given that, according to OKO Press, Bąkiewicz's Independence March Foundation received 1.3 Million Zloty from the state's Patriotic Fund (Mikolajewska 2021).

The overarching aim or frame is ultra-nationalist (Minkenberg 2018). Moreover, constructing the Polish nation and Polish civilization as being under attack by the West and the EU becomes a way of justifying the use of violence. Even the support for PiS is limited, given that, combined with its Catholic ultra-nationalist and white supremacy thinking, the ONR, as part of the nationalist movement, is anti-democratic (Karpieczuk 2021).

Representatives of Dmowski's national Catholicism share a vision of national renewal that rejects all alien influences, especially Jewish ones, as well as a violent rejection of pluralism and democratic values. They are hostile toward communism and liberal capitalism and understand "the nation as an unchanging and eternal entity" (Pankowski and Kornak 2013, 160–161).

A longtime activist and ideological mind of the ONR is Robert Bąkiewicz, who left the organization in 2018 but remained the president of the board of the March for Independence Association, which organizes the most visible nationalist event: the annual Polish Independence Day. Bąkiewicz's Manichean black-and-white vision includes a strong cultural-civilizational and martyrological idea of national Catholicism. He would compare today's nationalists to Christ, seeing them as "persecuted" by the liberal media, all left-wing parties, the European Union, and even the Polish police and the current government, which are seen as too sensitive to street pressure. In civilizational terms, the political left would "advise us to hate the Church because it would take away our freedom," a freedom that for Bąkiewicz implies corruption, the disintegration of Polish families, and a materialistic lifestyle (Karpieczuk 2021). Such a perspective also includes a proximity to Catholic traditionalist organizations such as the Pius Brethren.

In a similar vein, All Polish Youth, which operates under the slogan of "Great Catholic Poland," constructs a historical connection between religion and nationalism, espousing common causes such as opposition to abortion and gay marriage. Whereas many may not really follow Christian teachings, they still "feel empowered and emboldened by the authority that the Church

enjoys in Polish society” (Pankowski, quoted in Ojewska 2018). The Independence March in 2017, for instance, had the slogan “We want God!” (Gądek 2017). As the mainline Church rejected the celebration of masses in that and the following year, the organizers resorted to an Independence Day Mass in the ultra-traditionalist congregation of the Pius Brothers. While the Church hierarchy neither took part in nor condemned this appropriation of Christianity, some priests publicly supported the rally (Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021, 451). In 2019, the logo of the far-right organizers was a clenched fist with a rosary around the fingers, a cross hanging along the arm, and the slogan “Bless the whole nation” (*Miej w opiece naród cały*; Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021, 453).

These two marches occurred in the context of the previously mentioned new harsh political attacks on LGBTIQ+ and reproductive rights (i.e., the so-called *LGBT ideology-free zones* as a response to the pro-LGBTIQ+ Warsaw Diversity Charter and the ban on abortion). In the 2020 slogan “Our civilization, our principles,” “civilization” apparently replaced a religious reference, implying a fight against “anti-civilization and anti-culture, which would attack Poland and the whole of Europe” (Karpieczuk 2020). In 2021, Warsaw’s mayor Rafał Trzaskowski appeared on a billboard that showed him as a German Nazi mayor.

The increasing distance of the Church hierarchy—in 2019, the president of the Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Gadecki, disapproved of the government’s tolerance for the radical nationalist movements organizing the Independence Marches (Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021, 451)—may also have contributed to a rejection of mainline Catholicism. Pankowski even notes a change toward more authority for Father Rydzek and his *Radio Maryja* movement, which profits from the support of the extreme right (Pankowski, quoted in Ojewska 2018). The comparatively small radical nationalist camp particularly attracts young men from rural and culturally less diverse areas where Catholicism still remains an important element of daily life.

The Independence March, in particular, is a meeting point for the European—especially Central European—extreme right. On a transnational level, the reference to Catholicism is of minor importance and remains an indicator of Polishness. This fits well with the idea of ethnopluralism (Minkenberg 2018).

3. Opposition to COVID-19 politics

The Catholic Church in Poland has supported, although not always decisively, the pro-vaccination activities of state institutions, often invoking the example of Pope Francis I in expressing their readiness to accept the vaccine. In 2021, however, a communiqué by the Polish Bishops' Conference suggested not using the Johnson & Johnson vaccination from an anti-abortion position (RP online 2021a), a view that can be traced back to the US Catholic Bishops' Conference, which saw the development of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine as based on cell lines of embryos aborted in the 1970s (Peiser 2021). In general, however, among the Catholic right, opposition to COVID-19 crisis management and vaccination has not been a great issue. One reason may be that the Polish government over time neither introduced nor controlled such measures very strictly.

However, some actions and reactions entered the public arena. Radio Maryja has supported a petition against obligatory vaccination initiated by the Catholic, anti-LGBTIQ+, and pro-life Center for Life and Family. This petition was mobilized with a well-known threat construction that can be linked to the anti-gender/pro-family movement: It was said that thousands of fathers financing their families would lose their jobs if they refused the mandatory vaccination. This would lead to depression, alcoholism, and eventually divorce. The prime minister was asked to leave vaccination as an individual decision and a matter of conscience (for the Radio Maryja campaign, see Radio Maryja 2022). In January 2022, during a debate in the Sejm, Kaja Godek opposed vaccination in general on the grounds that the production of the AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines was said to use the material of aborted embryos (RP online, 2022). Some priests preached from the pulpit that nothing would help against Corona other than praying. The pandemic was also seen as a punishment from God for human sins such as homosexuality and cohabitation without marriage (Dzikowska 2020).

Conclusions

This chapter has revealed how special legacies from recent and early history, as well as the Catholic moral teaching of Pope John Paul II, provide ideological sources for an exclusivist and illiberal interpretation of Catholicism in Poland. To what extent, however, does Catholic nationalism and moral conservatism create a distinct Polish Catholic political agenda? Summarizing the main is-

sues of concern for right-wing Catholic actors, we can observe transnationally convergent rather than distinct issues and ideologies. This implies opposition to any relaxation of reproductive rights, opposition to LGBTIQ+ rights, and opposition to gender-sensitive politics and the concept of gender as a socio-cultural category; thus, there is support for idealist traditional family conceptions. Shared right-wing populist discursive strategies (Wodak 2015) include the danger of *gender ideology*, its harmfulness for *our* children, the defense of children's and parents' rights (e.g., against *early sexualization*), and the primacy of the constitutional protection of religious freedom.

To the particular Polish phenomena belong the success of the Radio Maryja movement and media empire of Pater Rydzyk, which emerged during the difficult times of socioeconomic transformation. This is now losing relevance. While observers predict a decline in its attractiveness due to generational change, its financial and social media competence may in times of crisis also be able to attract younger people. A second example of particularity is Ordo Iuris. This internationally well-connected institute stands at the forefront of a transnational anti-feminist *pro-family* agenda that is gaining support. Its centrality for the anti-gender movement, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, may even be strengthened through the Collegium Intermarium. A third specific though not unique element is the civilizational conception of a white Christian Europe that is connected to the historical founding myth of Poland defending Christianity for Europe. This connects to two transnational trends: invoking Christianity as a source of traditional values in Europe against an EU-guided liberal culture based on freedom principles that introduce value plurality and defending an ethnopluralist conception of Europe (vs. the asymmetrical and multicultural EU) that speaks of a union of European nations. Here, a civilizational approach to Christianity functions as *othering*, especially against Muslim migrants (Hennig and Hidalgo 2021). This is what the radical national camp connects to, and the reference to Catholicism is also here instrumental, as it helps construct an exclusive collective identity.

This chapter has revealed the particular role of Catholicism and the legacy of national Catholicism. Moreover, since 2015, the PiS party has ruled the country in a way that is dismantling liberal political institutions and strengthening the voices of the most radical Catholics and nationalists—or national Catholics. In this regard, one conclusion is that PiS provides a political opportunity for those voices by not condemning the most nationalist and illiberal utterances. The Church hierarchy, instead, has been reluctant to publicly

distance itself from the governing party and its illiberal politics (Hennig and Meyer Resende 2021).

The actors belonging to the Catholic radical right are influential to the extent that they are because they are not only able to shape the political agenda, such as the discourse on withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention (Marek Jurek and Ordo Iuris) and the discourse on creating illiberal central European and international alliances in the name of a Christian Europe (all the actors discussed), but they also have an impact on political output. The most striking examples are the initiatives for a total ban of abortion (Kaja Godek and Ordo Iuris) and the so-called *LGBT-free zones* (Ordo Iuris). The facilitating factors are both national interconnectivity, with the (silent) support of the Catholic Church and the PiS government, and transnational links to anti-gender and pro-life movements, institutions, and resources. The narrative of a civilizationist Christianity (instead of a national Catholicism) seems to resonate well on a transnational level. Together with its Hungarian counterparts, the political Catholic right in Poland is the intellectual engine for a clearly illiberal politics (Kriszán and Roggeband 2021). Nationally, however, generational change and more acceptance of value plurality will feed resistance and most probably diminish the authority of not only the Catholic Church but also, sooner or later, the governing PiS party (Neumeyer 2021).

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