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THE POLISH CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE PUBLIC MEMORY OF THE SHOAH. BETWEEN MNEMONIC BACKLASH AND SETTLING ACCOUNTS WITH THE PAST

Abstract

The paper discusses the Polish Catholic Church's ambiguous contribution to the public debate on settling accounts with the Polish-Jewish wartime past. The Church is an actor of right-wing historical politics, which casts Poles in the role of the primary victims of the war but is reluctant to speak out on the Shoah. The growing scholarly interest in the dark chapters in the history of Catholic-Jewish relations, which brings to light the Church's institutional and symbolic responsibility for its attitude towards the persecuted Jewish community, has not translated directly into greater visibility of the issue in the mainstream media. However, the Church's ceremonial indifference towards the memory of the Shoah is not resistant to changes in the historiography of the Shoah. The Church's stance in the debate on the memory of the Shoah insufficiently recognises its position about the Jewish tragedy. On the other hand, it includes the actions undertaken by Father Wojciech Lemański and Bishop Rafał Markowski to commemorate the Jewish victims. The recognition of this cleavage aligns with sociological analyses of axiological divisions in Polish society.

Keywords: Catholic Church, public debate, pogroms, public memory, Shoah

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of the Polish Catholic Church to the public debate on the Shoah and the relations between Poles and Jews during the Second World War is limited.[1] This is apparent in two dimensions.

[1] The following analysis of the participation of Catholic clergymen and authors in the debate on the Shoah concerns the period after 2000, when Jan Tomasz Gross' *Neighbors* sparked the discussion about the Jedwabne massacre (see below). I make

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Firstly, leading figures in the Church have relatively rarely and rather ritualistically spoken out in public disputes about the Polish memory of the Shoah and the complicity of the Poles in the persecution of the Jews. This is rather surprising, seeing as the Catholic clergy regularly makes public expressions about issues pertaining to politics, history, and morality. The debate on the remembrance of the Shoah and the Polish-Jewish wartime relations straddles all three areas and is strongly polarised: it is arranged according to a dichotomy which divides the parties into those defending and those falsifying the historical truth about the Polish collective identity. Although collective memory is one of the key topics with regard to which the Polish Catholic Church exercises its symbolic power, its representatives are reluctant to take part in the dispute about the Polish chapter of the Shoah.

This applies to the debate around the pogrom in Jedwabne on 10 July 1941, which has become a symbol of the dispute over Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War.[2] The modest representation of the Catholic clergy at the commemoration of successive anniversaries of the murder of Jews in Jedwabne is noteworthy. In March 2001, during the intensive discussion around Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, the Church, represented by Archbishop Józef Życiński and Primate Józef Glemp, acknowledged that the several hundred Jewish victims of the pogrom died at the hands of Poles. In May of that year, a penitential mass was celebrated at All Saints' Church in Warsaw with the symbolic participation of the Jewish community (forgiveness was sought from God for the evil done by Catholics to their neighbours, but allusive references were also made to the *harm* done to Polish Catholics by

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occasional references to selected texts and public statements which date from before that point and which provide the background for the present-day debate. Between 1939 and 2000, public statements on the stance of the Polish Catholic Church toward the Jews and the Shoah were even scarcer than they have been since, and were usually part of a general critique of Polish anti-Semitism. Some of them were collected in the three-volume publication *Przeciw antysemityzmowi 1936–2009*, ed. by Adam Michnik (Kraków, 2010). The present analysis does not cover written or spoken statements concerning the attitudes toward the Shoah expressed by Churches other than the Roman Catholic, even if some of them were active in Poland during the Second World War. This subject merits a separate discussion.

[2] According to an investigation conducted by the Institute of National Remembrance, at least 340 Jews were killed during the pogrom, most of them burned alive in a barn of a Polish Catholic resident of Jedwabne.

communists of Jewish origin[3]). However, in July, during the 60th anniversary of the pogrom, the first to be celebrated officially, no member of the Polish Episcopate was in attendance (ten years later, Bishop Mieczysław Cisło took part in the commemorations). Two Catholic priests came on their initiative: Father Adam Boniecki, then editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, and Father Wojciech Lemański, who returns to Jedwabne every year. Today, both are on the margins of the Catholic Church.

Secondly, the Catholic clergy and authors rarely deal with the issue of the Church's co-responsibility for pre-war and wartime anti-Semitism in Poland – and if they do, it is usually on a defensive footing.

In a 2019 article, Stanisław Obirek makes "an attempt to understand the puzzling silence of the Polish Catholic Church on the Holocaust, which is all the more striking given the institution's willingness to reach back into history".[4] He focuses on the *désintéressement* in the Shoah on the part of Catholic theologians and on the failure to work through the tragedy of the Jews, which challenges the dogmas of Christ's presence in border situations and the salvific function of suffering. In contrast, he notes the Church's limited participation in the public debate around the Shoah and Polish-Jewish relations during wartime. Obirek is right to point out that the Church has become a player in the campaign for a public memory that accentuates Polish national pride. The right-wing politics of history, the "insurrectionist and sovereigntist approach to modern history and national identity",[5] not only aligns with national Catholicism, which crystallised during the First World War and the Polish-Bolshevik War,[6] but also legitimises the special position of the Church in Poland today.

According to the 1931 census (the last before the war), Catholics in the Second Polish Republic accounted for approximately 75 per cent

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[3] Piotr Forecki, *Od "Shoah" do "Strachu". Spory o polsko-żydowską przeszłość i pamięć* (Poznań, 2010).

[4] Stanisław Obirek, 'Zadziwiające milczenie polskiego Kościoła katolickiego o Holokauście', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 15 (2019), 116. See also: *id.*, 'Why Does a Polish Catholic Have a Problem Facing the Holocaust?', *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, 3(223) (2007), 310–18.

[5] Sławomir Sowiński, *Dobra nowina w czasach "dobrej zmiany". Kościół katolicki w sferze publicznej współczesnej Polski w latach 2015–2018* (Warszawa, 2021), 109.

[6] Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (New York, 2011), 328–59.

of the population (Roman Catholics – almost 65 per cent, Greek Catholics – over 10 per cent), and they were overwhelming of Polish nationality. Those who declared Judaism numbered 3,113,900, or 9.8 per cent of the population, although some defined their nationality as Polish.[7] Approximately 3 million Polish citizens of Jewish origin (practising and non-practising Jews, atheists, and Christians) perished during the war. As a result of the Shoah and the shifting of borders, the proportions of adherents of these religions changed, which continues to have consequences for the shape of the public sphere. In the 2021 census, 71.3 per cent of the population declared themselves Roman Catholic (27,121,331 people), and 17,156 people said their national-ethnic identity (primary or secondary) was Jewish.[8]

After 2015, when the right-wing Law and Justice Party [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS] rose to power, the already high importance of the Church in politics increased further. Sociologists speak of the compatibility of worldviews between the then ruling party and the Church and, following José Casanova, of the deprivatisation of religion and of the clergy regaining its position as an important political and social actor.[9] Perhaps one should speak of a mutual instrumentalisation – the Catholicisation of government policy and the politicisation of Polish Catholicism. *De jure* Poland is not a confessional state, but in practice, the relationship between the power elite and the Church testifies to the quasi-religiousness of the polity. Political

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[7] Główny Urząd Statystyczny Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1938* (Warszawa, 1938), 24–26, http://mbc.cyfrowemazowsze.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=14497 [Accessed: 19 Dec. 2022].

[8] Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 'Tablice z ostatecznymi danymi w zakresie przynależności narodowo-etnicznej, języka używanego w domu oraz przynależności do wyznania religijnego', https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2021/nsp-2021-wyniki-ostateczne/tablice-z-ostatecznymi-danymi-w-zakresie-przynaleznosci-narodowo-etnicznej-jezyka-uzywanego-w-domu-oraz-przynaleznosci-do-wyznania-religijnego,10,1.html [Accessed: 24 Oct. 2023].

[9] Cf. Zbigniew Mikołejko, *Między zbawieniem a Smoleńskiem. Studia i szkice o katolicyzmie polskim ostatnich lat* (Warszawa, 2017); Katarzyna Zielińska, *W walce o hegemonię? Religia w polskiej sferze publicznej na przykładzie debat sejmowych* (Kraków, 2018); Sowiński, *Dobra nowina*; Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, 'Kościół katolicki w przestrzeniach publicznej i prywatnej w Polsce Ludowej i III Rzeczypospolitej', in *ead.*, *Homo religiosus. Szkice z socjologii religii* (Kraków, 2021), 35; Katarzyna Zielińska, 'W poszukiwaniu inspiracji badawczych. Religia w sferze publicznej w perspektywie teorii dyskursu', *Studia Socjologiczne*, 2 (2019), 179–204.

debate, state ceremonies, the axiological agenda of the government, and the general education system have long ceased to be non-religious.[10]

At the same time, the contemporary Polish Church is vulnerable to criticism. The symbiosis of spiritual power and political power is "a knot made of politicised Church and religious politics. While this is an advantageous situation for a political party, it is lethal for a religious institution", argues Jarosław Makowski, a Catholic philosopher and columnist.[11] Critics aim the Church's financial privileges and the hypocrisy of the clergy on ethical issues, including women's and reproductive rights. The media and whistle-blowers report more and more crimes of paedophilia and sexual abuse among the clergy. Early in 2023, the results of journalistic investigations into the role Archbishop of Kraków Karol Wojtyła – later Pope John Paul II – played in covering up cases of paedophilia in the Catholic Church came to public attention. These findings prompted defensive, solid measures on the part of the clergy and the politicians of the then ruling party.

According to opinion polls, "from March 1992 to June 2022, the percentage of adults identifying themselves as believers fell from 94 to 84 per cent, while the share of Catholics practising regularly (once a week or more often) fell from nearly 70 to almost 42 per cent, and the percentage of non-practitioners increased from less than 9 to 19 per cent".[12] Members of different social groups, mainly the young, residents of large cities, and people with higher education, give up practising their religion. The most common reasons they cite for it are the lack of a need to attend mass, indifference to religion, a critical attitude and lack of trust in the Church and priests, a lack of faith, the political engagement of the clergy, paedophile scandals and the attempts to cover them up, and the excessive solicitation of money on the part of the clergy. In these circumstances, some of the clergy recognise the need for a self-critical discourse on, among other things, the symbiosis of the Church, the state and nationalist ideology. However, with few exceptions, the issue of attitudes towards Jews and the Shoah is not a subject of reflection for the clergy. Nor, it seems, is it a pressing issue for most Polish society.

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[10] Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, 'Kościół katolicki', 36–8.

[11] Jarosław Makowski, *Kościół w czasach dobrej zmiany* (Łódź, 2021), 121.

[12] Mirosława Grabowska, 'Dlaczego Polacy odchodzą z Kościoła?', *Komunikat z badań CBOS*, 105 (2022), 1.

PUBLIC DEBATE IN POLAND AND PUBLIC MEMORY OF THE SHOAH

For years, there has been no public debate on the role of the Polish Catholic Church in the Shoah nor on the Polish-Jewish wartime experiences in which the hierarchs would take part to any significant degree. For public debate to exist, one needs not only a field in which statements, even aggressive or emotional, can be formulated and delivered but, above all, the actual fact of views being formulated and eliciting reactions. In a public debate, social actors negotiate meanings by exercising their democratic right to articulate different judgements and beliefs.[13] In the case of the role played by the Catholic Church in the Shoah, there is no multilateral exchange or defined public discourse to speak of.

There is a growing interest among historians and scholars of culture and literature in studying the dark chapters of Catholic-Jewish relations.[14] They highlight not only individual biographies of priests and nuns but also the institutional and symbolic responsibility of the Catholic Church concerning its passive or active attitude towards the persecuted Jewish community. Despite this, the proliferation of scientific papers, seminars, and conferences does not translate into the growing visibility of the issue in the mainstream media. Additionally, the national Catholic media seem reluctant to address the issue, preferring to celebrate heroic visions of the Polish past.

The Church's refusal to participate in the dispute on Polish-Jewish wartime relations is by all means relevant to the study of the metadiscursive frames of Polish *public memory*. The concept of public memory refers to the instrumentalisation and/or nationalisation of private and collective memory. Public debate does not mediate collective memory but is conditioned by the emergence of institutional memory, politicised memory, politics of history, as well as many counter-memories. Out

[13] Cf. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London–New York, 2004); Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak, 'Od zszywania do rozprucia i z powrotem. Wymiary i wzory debaty publicznej we współczesnej Polsce', in Jolanta Arcimowicz and Kaja Gadowska (eds), *Sfera publiczna w Polsce i jej współczesne konteksty* (Warszawa, 2020), 315–18.

[14] However, there are virtually no analyses of written and spoken statements about the Church's attitude toward the Shoah and its remembrance which occasionally appear in Catholic media, or among members of Catholic associations (e.g. Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia).

of the fragments of heterogeneous memories of different publics, public memory reconstructs only the illusion of a coherent collective knowledge of the past or the publicness of memory.[15] Power relations, including discourse, institutions, social practices, and modes of knowledge production shape the labile framework of public memory. The dialectic of remembering and forgetting, which controls the shape of public memory, plays an important role in debates on the 'difficult past', during which the suffering and the faults of one's own community are symbolically weighted.

In the dispute around the wartime attitudes of Poles towards Jews, of which the role of the Church could be a part, one can identify a particular type of public debate, i.e. *an exclusive debate conducted on behalf of an imagined community.*[16] The foundation of the debate is a meta-question about the community: what are 'we' (Poles) in relation to 'them' (Jews, *strangers*)? The consequence of the question is exclusion, the symbolic division of subjects and objects of public discourse into members and non-members of the community. During the debate, the ethnic criterion of division was supplemented by the criterion of moral membership and the fulfilment of the *duty to* protect the image of one's group. At stake here is the consolidation of the image of the Poles for the purpose of restoring the community's good name. This is an impossible task since, for some, this end can only be achieved through collective self-criticism; for others, through a denial of guilt.

In the case of the clergy, participation in the debate may also be prevented by a self-censorship that stems from a collective and sanctioned, unwritten ban on the public criticism of the Church hierarchy. Makowski describes the thought pattern as *one does not criticise the Church because she is like* a *mother*, and sees it as a kind of moral blackmail to which the Church subjects its members.[17]

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[15] Anita Shapira, 'The Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memory', *Jewish Social Studies. New Series*, iv, 2 (1998), 40–58; Kendall R. Phillips, 'Introduction', in *id.* (ed.), *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa, 2004), 10; Larry Ray and Sławomir Kapralski, 'Introduction to the Special Issue – Disputed Holocaust Memory in Poland', *Holocaust Studies*, xxv, 3 (2019), 209–19; Kate Korycki, 'Politicized Memory in Poland: Anti-Communism and the Holocaust', *Holocaust Studies*, xxv, 3 (2019), 351–76; Kornelia Kończal, 'Politics of Innocence: Holocaust Memory in Poland', *Journal of Genocide Research*, xxiv, 2 (2022) 250–63.

[16] Nowicka-Franczak, 'Od zszywania do rozprucia', 328–9.

[17] Makowski, *Kościół w czasach*, 7.

THE POLISH CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE MEMORY OF THE SHOAH

It is not only the Polish Catholic Church that is reluctant to see its attitude towards the Holocaust challenged. A critical analysis of the policy of the Holy See towards the Third Reich, especially under Pius XII, has also been undertaken primarily by historians.[18] Although Popes John XXIII, Paul VI (who in 1965 promulgated *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, which was revolutionary among the Church's teachings), and John Paul II changed the theological and liturgical discourse on the Jews by recognising the Holocaust as a universal symbol of human suffering,[19] they saw its genesis and progress as someone else's affair, an evil product of anti-Christian Nazism. Official declarations from the Vatican about the Shoah name the bishops and popes who expressed opposition to the Third Reich's anti-Semitic ideology, but they also 'forget' its allies among the clergy.[20]

During prayers in the Great Synagogue in Rome in 1986, John Paul II expressed regret on behalf of the Holy See for the historic persecution of Jews by Christians but was silent about the role the Church itself played in it. In a speech during his visit to the Auschwitz--Birkenau camp in Poland, Benedict XVI took a different position from that of his predecessor. Speaking as "a son of the German people", he ascribed responsibility for the Holocaust narrowly, proclaiming it as the fault of the Nazi elite manipulating the German society.[21] He said

[18] Cf. Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (New Heaven, 2000); Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York, 2002); Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930–1965* (Bloomington, 2000); *id.*, *Pius XII: The Holocaust and the Cold War* (Bloomington, 2008).

[19] Cf. Walter Cardinal Kasper, 'Foreword', in Philip A. Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary C. Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix, and Jesper Svartvik (eds), *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids–Cambridge–Roma, 2011), X–XVIII.

[20] Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 'We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah', 16 Mar. 1998, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents./catholic/We_Remember.htm [Accessed: 4 Jan. 2023]. See John Pawlikowski OSM, 'The Catholic Church and the Holocaust: Institutional Perspectives', *Holocaust. Studies and Materials*, 5 (2009), 261–77.

[21] Benedict XVI spoke of "people over which a ring of criminals rose to power by false promises of future greatness and the recovery of the nation's honour, prominence,

nothing about the variety of attitudes of German and European clergy towards Nazism. Generally, European hierarchies' statements critically and directly addressing this issue are rare. What distinguishes the marginalisation it is subjected to in Poland from silence in Western countries is that the very treatment of the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the Holocaust as an object of critical debate is understood as an indictment of Polishness.

The question of the actions of the Polish Church in the face of the Shoah – clergy and faithful alike – was the subject, though not the main focus, of the very first studies on the tragedy of the Jews addressed to a broad audience. Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna's *Ten jest z Ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945* [This One is from my Homeland: Poles Aiding Jews 1939–1945], published in 1967, contained testimonies of members of the clergy and nuns who had assisted Jews. It also documented the activities of the Żegota, the Council to Aid Jews with the Government Delegation for Poland, an underground resistance organisation established by Catholics.

Among literary works, Jan Błoński's essay 'Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto' [The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto], published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a weekly magazine of the Catholic intelligentsia, in 1987, is a landmark text that served as a moral reckoning with the consequences of the fact that a large part of the Nazi plan to exterminate Jews was carried out in Catholic Poland. Błoński wrote about moral guilt, indifference, and hostility towards Jews, denying the active complicity of Polish Catholics in the Shoah. It was faith that was supposed to 'save' them from having participated in the crime:

> Yet, when one reads what was written about Jews before the war, when one discovers how much hatred there was in Polish society, one can only be surprised that words were not followed by deeds. But they were not (or very rarely). God held back our hand. Yes, I do mean God, because if we did not take part in that crime, it was because we were still

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and prosperity, but also through terror and intimidation, with the result that our people was used and abused as an instrument of their thirst for destruction and power". 'Pastoral Visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in Poland. Address by the Holy Father: Visit to the Auschwitz Camp', 28 May 2006, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/ speeches/2006/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060528_auschwitz-birkenau.html [Accessed: 4 Jan. 2023].

> Christians, and at the last moment we came to realise what a satanic enterprise it was.[22]

The 1990s brought an international dispute over the erection of crosses on the site of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp.[23] The period also saw the establishment of a Day of Judaism by the Polish Episcopal Conference, with debates, lectures, and cultural events devoted to the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. However, the topic of Christians in the Shoah was relatively rarely discussed.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Jan Tomasz Gross challenged the established memory of the deeds by bringing to light the wartime pogroms against Jews perpetrated by Poles in Jedwabne, Radziłów and Wąsocz, among others. The debate around his book *Neighbors* was a landmark in the dispute over the Polish collective identity and social ethics. The role of the Church is scarcely outlined in *Neighbors* (the author mentions an unsuccessful intervention of a Jewish delegation to the Bishop of Łomża, Stanisław Łukomski, asking him to prevent the expected pogrom in Jedwabne), and the moral and criminal liability is assigned to the Polish society in general.[24] The book was rejected by the national-Catholic media,[25] where Gross was even called a 'Pole-hater' [*polakożerca*, literally, Pole-eater].

At the same time, expiatory statements were made – by *shepherds* on behalf of the faithful who *went astray* – stressing the broad context

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[22] Jan Błoński, *The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto*, https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/the-poor-poles-look-at-the-ghetto-144232 [Accessed: 2 Jan. 2023].

[23] The dispute over the presence of crosses and of the convent of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns at the site of the extermination camp is emblematic of the Polonisation of the memory of the victims of the Second World War. The conflict is described in Geneviève Zubrzycki's book, *Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago, 2006).

[24] Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny, 2000), published in English as: *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001).

[25] "National-Catholic media" is a term used to describe the press, radio, and television established by dioceses, religious orders, and Catholic lay circles, whose programming expresses conservative religious and social values. They support the supremacy of the Church and endorse right-wing factions in the public sphere. In the context of Gross' books, the weekly *Niedziela* and Radio Maryja, led by members of the clergy, have repeatedly featured authors of anti-Semitic content, such as Jerzy Robert Nowak and Stanisław Michalkiewicz.

of the war instigated by the Third Reich and of pre-war social relations. In March 2001, the monthly *Więź*, a magazine of the Catholic intelligentsia, published an article by Archbishop Józef Życiński, member of the liberal faction of the Church, entitled *Banalizacja barbarzyństwa* [The Banalisation of Barbarity]. Although the title refers to Hannah Arendt's famous philosophical reportage, Życiński devotes a lot of space to the intellectual background of Nazism, which he believed 'radiated' to the inhabitants of the Polish countryside. He fails to address the issue of the authority of priests and Catholic teaching, in spite of the role it tends to play in the country. The article concludes with an appeal on behalf of those who were indifferent witnesses to the pogrom:

> Today, there is a need for us to pray for the victims of this massacre, to show a solidarity of spirit that was lacking in the hour of their parting from the land of their fathers, where they lived. There is a need for us – on behalf of the community of those who looked on indifferently as they died – to repeat David's "I have sinned against the Lord", whether or not the onlookers could have protested effectively in that situation.[26]

More typical of the hierarchy's reaction to Gross's book was the letter of Primate Józef Glemp, broadcast by Radio Józef, the radio station of the Warsaw diocese, provoked by attempts by left-wing politicians to intervene in the form and message the participation of the clergy would take in the commemoration of Jedwabne.[27] Although the speech begins by acknowledging the Polish responsibility for the Jedwabne massacre, it deploys a whole catalogue of strategies to relativise it:

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[26] Archbishop Józef Życiński, 'Banalizacja barbarzyństwa', *Więź*, 2001, 3, https://*Wiez.pl*/2017/09/01/banalizacja-barbarzynstwa/ [Accessed: 3. Jan 2023].

[27] The Primate describes these interventions as follows: "I would not want politicians to impose on the Church the way in which it will fulfil the act of repentance for crimes committed by certain groups of believers and morally savaged, nor would I want them to determine the ideology in which the penitential prayer is to be clothed. Yet, at the end of February, within the space of two days, several high-ranking politicians contacted me with an almost identical programme: 'on this and that day, the Catholic Church should undertake great prayers in Jedwabne, repent for the crimes and ask forgiveness for the genocide, otherwise we will expose ourselves to anger'". Primate Józef Glemp, 'Jedwabne – wina uznana sprawiedliwie', KAI, 5 Mar. 2001, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/glemp/jedwabne_04032001.html [Accessed: 3 Jan. 2023].

(a) references to the context of the war and the German instigation of the crime; (b) universalisation of evil by way of placing Jedwabne among other symbols of wartime violence, such as Dachau, Auschwitz, Katyń, Rwanda, or the Balkans; (c) specification of evil by way of singling out local perpetrators; (d) balancing (or downplaying) the number of Jewish victims in Jedwabne with Polish victims at Katyń and Dachau; (e) explicit and allusive references to Jewish guilt, such as Israeli violence against Palestinians, and the symbolic singling out of the Jewish community of good and 'serious' individuals; (f) highlighting the exceptional status of the Polish Righteous as an argument for rejecting collective responsibility for wartime pogroms. Cardinal Glemp concludes the radio address as follows, condensing some of the above-mentioned strategies of minimising and apportioning blame:

> We must not, with the acts of universal repentance proposed by politicians, damage the good name of those who gave their lives to save the Jews **(e)**. We must not, in the name of justice, affix to any nation the label of a nation of murderers. We do not do this with regard to the Germans, among whom Hitlerism was most fully revealed, nor can we ascribe the blindness that was provoked among the people of Jedwabne and its surroundings to the entire Polish nation **(a and c)**. On the other hand, it is by all means desirable that we, as the Church, with people of the Jewish faith, apologise to God for the sins that were committed, according to the truth revealed in the Bible. While apologising to God, we should also give thanks for the "righteous" who, in both nations, did not hesitate to make sacrifices in the name of the justice that every human being should be encompassed by **(e and f)**.[28] [inserts in bold by the author]

In his second broadly discussed book, *Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie* [Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz] and in his third book, *Złote żniwa. Rzecz o tym, co się działo na obrzeżach zagłady Żydów* [Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust], co-written with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Gross describes not only the involvement of priests in anti-Jewish persecutions instigated within Polish communities, but also their participation in mobilising people to anti-Semitic activities.[29] Gross' claims were swiftly dismissed

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Cf. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York, 2006) (first published in English; Polish edition: *Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie* (Kraków, 2006); Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Złote żniwa.*

by the national-Catholic media and some of the clergy (e.g. Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, who voiced objections against the Znak publishing house, which had published *Strach* and *Złote żniwa*), whose critiques depended on the discursive process of Gross' othering. The construction of Gross' otherness takes place on two levels, historiographical and moralistic. The former concerns the issue of whether Gross is a 'true historian' and if his books deserve the status of scholarly works. The latter refers to the dispute about the ethical and ethnic dimensions of Gross' decision to write the controversial books. Labelled a Jew, he was treated as an enemy and not a legitimate actor in a debate concerning the Church – a Polish good and a Polish problem.[30]

The story repeated itself in 2012, after the premiere of the film *Pokłosie* [Aftermath], directed by Władysław Pasikowski. It was the first feature film to refer indirectly to the Jedwabne massacre, closely following Gross' depiction of it in *Neighbors*. It divided commentators and the audience into two camps, pro-*Aftermath* and anti-*Aftermath*, even before the premiere. Among the characters, Pasikowski included two contrasting priests: an anti-Semitic, charismatic reverend played by Andrzej Mastalerz, and a reflexive parish priest played by Jerzy Radziwiłowicz. The dispute over the film focused neither on the plot nor on the characters of the priests but on the Polishness of Maciej Stuhr, who played the main protagonist and whose statements in the media about Polish participation in the Holocaust drew the ire of the right-wing and national Catholic side of the dispute. Paweł Pawlikowski's film *Ida* (2013), winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, also failed to spark a lively discussion about

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Rzecz o tym, co się działo na obrzeżach zagłady Żydów (Kraków, 2011, published in English as: *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* [New York, 2012]), 181–9.

[30] For other reasons, in the early 2000s, public discredit affected several people involved in the debate about Jews and the Shoah, including members of the clergy. In 2006, the media revealed that Father Michał Czajkowski, who distinguished himself with his services for the Christian-Jewish dialogue, had been a collaborator with the Security Service during the communist period (he admitted his collaboration and withdrew from public life). In 2009, controversy was stirred up by an extensive interview with Father Waldemar Chrostowski, in which he expressed criticism of the dialogue between Jews and Polish Catholics in terms that verged on anti-Jewish prejudice. Most of the hierarchy and some Catholic columnists distanced themselves from him; the national Catholic media, such as *Nasz Dziennik* and Radio Maryja, defended him. Cf. Waldemar Chrostowski, Grzegorz Górny, and Rafał Tichy, *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska* (Warszawa, 2009).

the ambiguous role of the Catholic Church in the Shoah, even though it had great potential to do so. As a little girl, the title character survives the war with the help of a priest and nuns, is baptised, and, after the war – unaware of her origins – decides to become a nun. Her closest relatives had been killed by a Polish peasant who had hidden them. The controversy surrounding *Ida* mainly concerns the negative portrayal of Poles, depicted as murderers of Jews.

Another challenge to the defensive variant of public memory is new historiography, also known as the new school of history.[31] Among its epistemological and ethical principles is that researchers should break with the tradition of national historiography, loyal to the canon of collective identity. When dealing with mutually undermining stories, they should side with the victims, including those from minority groups. Members of the new school of history include Gross, as well as academics associated with the Polish Center for Holocaust Research (headed by Barbara Engelking) and/or those who publish in the Center's journal *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* [Holocaust. Studies and Materials]. Its 2009 issue is devoted to the Catholic Church's attitudes towards the Shoah in Poland and other German-occupied territories. It includes a study by Dariusz Libionka on the attitudes of hierarchs, such as Cardinal Adam Sapieha, Primate August Hlond, Archbishop of Warsaw Stanisław Gall, and Bishop of Łomża Stanisław Łukomski, who combined anti-Semitic prejudice with limited concern for citizens of Jewish origin.[32] Bożena Szaynok analyses the attitude of the Church and Catholic columnists towards Jews and the Holocaust between 1944 and 1946, and how they reproduced some of the pre-war anti-Semitic sentiments.[33]

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[31] Cf. Audrey Kichelewski, Judith Lyon-Caen, Jean-Charles Szurek, and Annette Wieviorka (eds), *Les Polonais et la Shoah. Une nouvelle école historique* (Paris, 2019); Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Konrad Matyjaszek (eds), *Breaking the Frame: The New School of Polish-Jewish Studies* (Frankfurt, 2021).

[32] Dariusz Libionka, 'Polska hierarchia kościelna wobec eksterminacji Żydów – próba krytycznego ujęcia', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 5 (2009), 19–69. In English: 'Polish Church Hierarchy and the Holocaust – an Essay from a Critical Perspective', *Holocaust Studies and Materials* (2010), 76–12. See also: *id.*, 'The Catholic Church in Poland and the Holocaust, 1939–1945', in Carol Ann Ritter, Steven Smith, and Irena Steinfeld (eds) *The Holocaust and the Christian World*, (New York, 2000).

[33] Bożena Szaynok, 'Tuż po Zagładzie. Kościół wobec problematyki żydowskiej (VII 1944–VII 1946)', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 5 (2009), 128–48.

The issue also includes articles on Jewish testimonies that discuss the attitudes of the clergy and criticise the policy of the Holy See. Subsequent issues also featured articles on the Church and the Shoah, including a study by Dariusz Libionka, written in collaboration with Jan Grabowski, on the 1941 denunciation of Father Tadeusz Puder, a Catholic clergyman of Jewish origin by Father Stanisław Trzeciak to the Gestapo. Puder was arrested for not wearing an armband with the star of David; nuns intervened and helped him escape from prison.[34]

Articles in specialist journals have a very limited readership in Poland, but a few scholarly books have managed to break into the mainstream media. One of them was *Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu* [Blood Libels. The Anthropology of Prejudice] by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, an ethnographic study of anti-Semitic prejudice and conspiracy theories legitimised by Church authorities and mobilised during the Holocaust.[35] Brian Porter-Szűcs' *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*, a translation of which was published in Poland in 2022 as *Wiara i ojczyzna. Katolicyzm, nowoczesność i Polska*, critically reconstructs the last 150 years of the relationship between the Church, the Polish state, and nationalism, identifying the problem of anti-Semitism as one of the axes around which Polish collective identity is organised. He draws a through-line between Primate Hlond's prejudice against the Jews, the blaming of the victims of the Kielce pogrom for their own fate, the emotional reactions of some hierarchs to the findings of Jan Tomasz Gross, and anti-Semitism among some contemporary priests. However, he does not accuse Polish Catholicism *en bloc*, showing its various shades.[36] Although the book has been discussed by left--liberal and conservative media, as well as in the liberal-left Catholic media, it received little attention from the national Catholic media.

On the borderline between critical historiographical study and philosophical essay lie three volumes by Jacek Leociak, a literary

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[34] Dariusz Libionka and Jan Grabowski, 'Anatomia donosu ks. Stanisława Trzeciaka na ks. Tadeusza Pudra', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 13 (2017), 641–75.

[35] Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu* (Warszawa, 2008). The theme of the influence of Catholic teaching about the Jews on acts of violence against them is also present in Tokarska-Bakir's later book, *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego* (Warszawa, 2018).

[36] Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Wiara i ojczyzna. Katolicyzm, nowoczesność i Polska* (Warszawa, 2022). English edition: *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (Oxford, 2011).

scholar affiliated with the Polish Center for Holocaust Research. In the first, *Młyny boże. Zapiski o Kościele i Zagładzie* [Mills of God: Notes on the Church and the Holocaust], he poses questions about the moral responsibility of the Catholic Church for the anti-Semitism that led to the Shoah, and about the place of anti-Semitic ideology in Catholic doctrine and teaching. He gives examples of anti-Semitic journalism by priests from the period immediately before and after the war, such as Father Jan Piwowarczyk. He also discusses documents testifying to the indifference of parish churches to the fate of Jews during the German occupation, the problematic attitude of the then-Primate August Hlond, as well as cases of specific harm done by clergy, such as the above-mentioned denunciation by Father Stanisław Trzeciak. He also gives positive counter-examples, but only as exceptions that confirm the rule of hostility.[37]

In *Wieczne strapienie. O kłamstwie, historii i kościele* [Eternal Distress: On Lies, History, and the Church], Leociak touches on a broader spectrum of topics related to the contemporary relationship between the state and the Church, delving deep into the institution's history. He looks back on the attitude of the Catholic hierarchy in Europe towards the Third Reich, and he also compares the contemporaneous attitudes towards Jews to the current attitudes towards refugees from the Middle East and Africa.[38]

In *Zapraszamy do nieba. O nawróconych zbrodniarzach* [Welcome to Heaven: On Converted Criminals], he takes the doctrine of conversion as his starting point. He posits a provocative thesis: "On the scales which Jesus holds, one (converted sinner) weighs more than ninety-nine (righteous). One converted Rudolf Höss and one million one hundred thousand victims murdered under his supervision".[39] He cites the cases of Nazi criminals Höss, Arthur Greiser, and Hans Frank, who converted to the Catholic faith before dying. He accuses the Church of supporting the Nazis more after the war than it did the Jews during the Shoah. He discusses how the Vatican helped war criminals flee to South America, including through the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza ai Profughi [Pontifical Commission for Aid to Refugees], established by Pius XII in 1944. He quotes authors who

[37] Jacek Leociak, *Młyny boże. Zapiski o Kościele i Zagładzie* (Wołowiec, 2018).
[38] *Id., Wieczne strapienie. O kłamstwie, historii i kościele* (Wołowiec, 2020).
[39] *Id., Zapraszamy do nieba. O nawróconych zbrodniarzach* (Wołowiec, 2022), 314–5.

documented Pius XII's intercession for Greiser, sentenced to death, and the support Adolf Eichmann received from Catholic organisations during the pontificate of John XXIII.

In the essays, Leociak uses irony and sarcasm, and adopts an antagonistic tone towards the Church and religion. He makes bold claims that the Church is an irreformable institution and a threat to the freedom of the Poles. It may come as a surprise that these provocative books received a modest reception in the opinion-forming media and are almost unmentioned in the media published by Church institutions.[40]

MNEMONIC BACKLASH AFTER THE JEDWABNE DEBATE

In recent years, the discussion about the relationship between the Church and the Holocaust has not only failed to develop into an engaging debate with a variety of viewpoints but has undergone a regression. Publications by historians and intellectuals have little resonance, and even when they gain media attention, the reaction usually amounts to a ritualistic argument about – to put it simply – whether Poles beat Jews or Jews beat Poles. The subject of the role of the clergy and of Catholic teachings disappears from view. Of course, references to Jews and the Holocaust do appear in statements by priests and bishops. However, apart from anniversary speeches and ecumenical events, it is more common to find instrumental and purely rhetorical references to the Jewish tragedy.

One example is statements by the Archbishop of Kraków, Marek Jędraszewski. Due to his confrontational and often discriminatory style of communication, he is often cited in the media. In March 2019, while presenting a report on the sexual abuse of children and adolescents by members of the clergy, he was asked about the demand for "zero tolerance" against such crimes. He discredited it by using an analogy

[40] At the time of writing, two critical reviews of Leociak's latest book had been published in the Catholic press: Andrzej Draguła, 'Zbrodnie, które "prowadzą" do zbawienia? "Zapraszamy do nieba" Jacka Leociaka', *Wiez.pl*, https://*Wiez.pl*/2022/11/30/jacek-leociak-zapraszamy-do-nieba/ [Accessed: 5 Jan. 2023]; Marcin Cielecki, 'Powiedz, że to ma jakiś sens", *W Drodze*, 1 (2023), https://wdrodze.pl/article/powiedz-ze-ma-to-jakis-sens/ [Accessed: 5 Jan. 2023]. It should be noted, however, that Leociak has authored numerous texts on the Shoah published in *Tygodnik Powszechny* and *Więź*.

that ignores the historical context and significance of the Holocaust: "When Hitler's Nazism fought the Jews, it applied 'zero tolerance' to them, resulting in the Holocaust".[41] By this logic, today's Jews would be the priests forced to answer for paedophilia, and today's Nazis are their critics. In an interview with the right-wing weekly *Do Rzeczy*, he commented on the allegations against Cardinal Dziwisz, Pope John Paul II's secretary, related to his (and the Pope's) involvement in covering up sexual crimes committed by the hierarchy:

> Again, a similar mechanism to that used against Pius XII in the 1960s was set in motion. At that time, the first defender of the Jews in the eyes of almost the whole world suddenly became the one who helped perpetrate the Holocaust or at least looked indifferently at the extermination of the Jews carried out by the Germans. Today, at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Pius XII is presented as one of the main culprits of the misfortune of the Jewish people. This shows that human consciousness can be changed on a global scale.[42]

This defensive/offensive statement is not only built on a misplaced analogy between opposing the Holocaust and protecting victims of sexual crimes, but it also pushes a false image of Pius XII as "the first defender of the Jews in the eyes of the whole world" and a false image of Yad Vashem – either as a victim of a global manipulation plot or perhaps its initiator. In addition, Jędraszewski depreciates the significance of the Holocaust, calling it "the misfortune of the Jewish people". In 2021, referring to the words of opposition MP Sławomir Nitras on the legitimacy of "applying the saw" to strip Catholics in Poland "of certain privileges", he drew an analogy between Catholics in contemporary Poland and Jews during the Nazi era, saying that in the 1920s and 1930s, "attempts were made to apply the saw to the Jews, as those who needed to be deprived of so-called privileges".[43]

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[41] 'Episkopat mówił o pedofilii w Kościele. Oto cytaty, które przykuły uwagę', TVN 24, 15 Mar. 2019, https://tvn24.pl/polska/episkopat-o-pedofilii-cytaty-z-konferencji-prasowej-ra918627 [Accessed: 9 Jan. 2023].

[42] Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski, Ryszard Gromadzki, 'Demony naszej wolności', *Do Rzeczy*, 52 (2020), 27.

[43] '"W latach 30. też próbowano opiłowywać Żydów". Abp Jędraszewski reaguje na słowa Nitrasa', *Dorzeczy.pl*, 30 Aug. 2021, https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/196870/abp-jedraszewski-reaguje-na-slowa-nitrasa-o-katolikach.html [Accessed: 9 Jan. 2023].

These statements follow a rhetorical pattern that combines the *rhetoric of a besieged fortress* (the Church being persecuted by secular forces) with *reductio ad Hitlerum* or *ad nazium*. This simplification results in the current opponents of the Church being unjustly associated with the Nazis and the dramatisation of the situation of the clergy. It is part of *a rivalry in martyrdom* or *suffering* between Poles and Jews that has been going on since the first post-war decades, although it intensified after the publication of Gross' books and as a result of right--wing politics of history, articles in Catholic-nationalist periodicals such as *Niedziela* or *Nasz Dziennik*, or statements by historians with pro-Church sympathies, including Jan Żaryn, Andrzej Nowak, and Wojciech Roszkowski.

One aspect of rivalry in martyrdom is the crystallisation of the symbolic figures of secular allies and helpers of the Jews who were motivated by Christian values. At the turn of the twenty-first century, they included the initiator of Żegota, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, who appealed to Catholic consciences (in spite of her well-publicised nationalist and anti-Jewish beliefs), Władysław Bartoszewski, Irena Sendler, and Jan Karski. Most of them proved controversial for the Right and some of the clergy. Sendler was a member of the communist Polish United Workers' Party after the war, while Bartoszewski was a vociferous opponent of the Law and Justice party towards the end of his life. Meanwhile, the trustees of the legacy of Karski, who died in 2000, protested against making him a patron of Polish national pride. This is why the Ulmas – a large family of pious Catholics who hid Jews and were executed by the Germans after being denounced by a Polish policeman – became a part of the politics of history, not only as representatives of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations, but also as the embodiment of Catholic mercy *sensu largo*. The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in the Second World War was established in their honour in the village of Markowa in Subcarpathia, where they lived and died.[44] First conceived in 2007, the museum was finally opened in March 2016 by President Andrzej Duda. By his decree, issued in 2018, the anniversary of the Ulmas' death, 24 March, is the National Day of Remembrance of Poles Who Saved Jews Under German Occupation. The Polish Church has successfully initiated the

[44] Alicja Podbielska, 'Święta rodzina z Markowej: kult Ulmów i polityka historyczna', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 15 (2019), 575–606.

beatification process of the Ulmas – the beatification ceremony took place on 10 September 2023 in Markowa.[45]

Meanwhile, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, founder of an ultra-conservative Polish Catholic media group, promotes the notion of the 'new martyrs': the Poles who saved Jews. The notion is deployed in narratives that stress the help that the Poles are said to have universally extended to the Jews, as well as the ungratefulness that the Jews exhibited toward the Poles after the war. Gratefulness, in turn, is the domain of 'good Catholics'. The Lux Veritas Foundation – controlled by Father Rydzyk – financed the creation of the National Remembrance Park in Toruń. It consists of more than a hundred pedestals bearing the names of 16,000 Poles, including 2,345 nuns, who – according to sources compiled by the founders themselves – supposedly saved Jewish lives.[46] The 'new martyrs' are also celebrated at local places of worship. Thus, we are looking at a sacralisation of the image of Poles and their altruism toward the Jews, described as a universal attitude.

Although some publications on the attitudes of the Catholic clergy and faithful towards the Shoah saw print during the communist era and the first years of the socio-economic transition (though occasionally more hagiographic than scholarly),[47] the issue came to the fore after the debate on Jedwabne.[48] Many of these publications are

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[45] At the same time, the Polish Church has long promoted the cult of Father Maksymilian Kolbe, a Franciscan who sacrificed himself to save the life of a fellow Polish inmate in Auschwitz. In 1982, he was canonised as a martyr. Before the war, Father Kolbe published many anti-Semitic articles in Catholic press. The question of whether he should be celebrated as a moral authority is mostly raised among those who criticise the Church from the outside.

[46] See: 'Park pamięci', Fundacja Lux Veritatis, https://luxveritatis.pl/park-pamieci [Accessed: 9 Jan. 2023].

[47] Cf. e.g. Franciszek Kącki, *Dzieło miłosierdzia chrześcijańskiego. Polskie duchowieństwo katolickie a Żydzi w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej* (Warszawa, 1968); Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945* (Warszawa, 1982); Franciszek Stopniak, 'Pomoc kleru polskiego dla dzieci w II wojnie światowej', in *id*. (ed.), *Kościół Katolicki na ziemiach Polski w czasie II wojny światowej. Materiały i Studia. Tom 10* (Warszawa, 1981), 48–60; *id.*, 'Katolickie duchowieństwo w Polsce i Żydzi w okresie niemieckiej okupacji', in Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz (ed.), *Społeczeństwo polskie wobec martyrologii i walki Żydów w okresie II wojny światowej* (Warszawa, 1996), 19–42.

[48] Cf. e.g. Ewa Kurek, *Dzieci żydowskie w klasztorach. Udział żeńskich zgromadzeń zakonnych w akcji ratowania dzieci żydowskich w Polsce w latach 1939–1945* (Lublin, 2001); Jarosław Sellin, 'Arcybiskup Adam Stefan Sapieha a Holokaust', *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów. Jewish History Quarterly*, 4 (2014), 774–85.

one-sided: while they focus on acts of aid, they rarely relate them to the extent of the indifference of members of the Church to the persecution of the Jews, and the problem of anti-Semitism and acts of violence are mentioned rarely, if at all. Moreover, these publications subscribe to a particular counter-discourse that is intended to counterbalance research on the complicity of the Polish society in the Holocaust. This is clearly visible in the monographs recently published by the Institute of National Remembrance and the Witold Pilecki Institute of Solidarity and Valour.[49]

The contributors to the book *Kościół, Żydzi, jezuici. Wokół pomocy Żydom w czasie II wojny światowej* [Church, Jews, Jesuits: On Aid to the Jews during the Second World War], published by the Kraków branch of the Institute of National Remembrance, describe cases of priests and the Church as an institution assisting Jews.[50] Writing about the rescue of Jewish neighbours by lay people, they emphasise the Catholic faith of the rescuers. The chapter by Martyna Grądzka-Rejak deals with the wartime conversions of Jews in occupied Krakow between 1939 and 1942. She notes that in the first years of the war, "the rules developed in the interwar period were still in force", which required verification of the motives behind the will to convert and a minimum six-month preparation period.[51] Was adherence to these conditions during the German occupation helpful on the part of the Church, or did it block attempts to save individual lives? The author does not pose this question. The absence of questions about the consequences of the Church's action or inaction in response to the Shoah is characteristic of works that are part of the new current of politics of history, which emphasises the scale and various forms of Polish assistance provided to Jews during the war.

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[49] Both institutes are state institutions, currently headed by people appointed by the ruling party. The Pilecki Institute was established on the initiative of the Law and Justice party in 2017. It absorbed the Witold Pilecki Centre for Research on Totalitarianisms, created in 2016, also on the initiative of the Law and Justice government.

[50] Stanisław Cieślak SJ, 'Polscy jezuici zaangażowani w pomoc Żydom w latach II wojny światowej', in Michał Wenklar (ed.), *Kościół, Żydzi, jezuici. Wokół pomocy Żydom w czasie II wojny światowej* (Kraków, 2021), 125–97.

[51] Martyna Grądzka-Rejak, '"Zapewniają, że szukają tylko Boga i swego zbawienia". Konwersje wśród Żydów w okupowanym Krakowie w latach 1939–1942', in Wenklar (ed.), *Kościół, Żydzi, jezuici*, 103–23.

In Paweł Skibiński's almost 700-page book entitled *Kościół wobec totalitaryzmów (1917–1989). Światowy katolicyzm i doświadczenia Polaków* [The Church in the Face of Totalitarianisms (1917–1989): World Catholicism and the Experience of Poles], published by the Pilecki Institute, the Polish Catholic Church's attitude towards the Shoah is a marginal issue. Data are given on the scale of aid given to Jews by the clergy, especially monastics (Skibiński reports that at least 70 male and 160 female monasteries took part in saving Jews). The book also mentions the activities of Żegota, the piety of the Ulma family, the pro-Jewish actions of the Vatican, and the several dozen clergy members who were awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations. "Catholicism also contributed to the intellectual definition of the errors of totalitarianism and the eventual overcoming of the 'totalitarian temptation', at least in its twentieth-century form", the author argues.[52]

Such 'framing' of the Church's past, and the aforementioned rhetorical use of the Holocaust to block discussion of its contemporary problems, is part of a *mnemonic backlash* that involves not only members of the clergy, but also right-wing and radically conservative political and intellectual elites. Mnemonic backlash is a device of backlash politics. Its aim is the restoration of the old social order, cultural canon, or hierarchies of national and moral values. Nostalgia for the previous order entails the idealisation of the past and the emotional mobilisation for the defence of a particular reading of the past. For this reason, backlash politics accepts radical means of pursuing its goals against liberal institutions and the mainstream public discourse.[53] In Poland, it celebrates the backwards character of the cultural and political project of the Polish nation. It also reacts to attempts to disclose the anti-Semitic, patriarchal, and xenophobic foundations of the Church's power. A mnemonic backlash is a defensive transformation of public memory after a period of public renunciation of the uncomfortable memory of the victims of one's own national or religious group. In public debate, mnemonic backlash can take the form

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[52] Paweł Skibiński, *Kościół wobec totalitaryzmów (1917–1989). Światowy katolicyzm i doświadczenia Polaków* (Warszawa, 2022), 613.

[53] Karen J. Alter, Michael Zürn, 'Conceptualising Backlash Politics: Introduction to a Special Issue on Backlash Politics in Comparison', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, xxii, 4 (2020), DOI: 10.1177/1369148120947958.

of "a blockade on public reckoning with the burdensome Polish-Jewish past, marked by a meaningful silence".[54] In public debate, mnemonic backlash manifests not just in defensive rhetorical strategies when speaking about the nation and its past: it also informs an attack-minded stance toward those social actors who support a critical Polish historiography. Mnemonic backlash is inherently incapable of self-criticism. It rejects the collective self-criticism of the Poles and perceives the will to critically evaluate the history of one's own group as a threat to its moral uniformity.[55] The sentiments of the majority of the Polish Catholic Church and the right-wing elites about the Jews and the Shoah are a model example of mnemonic backlash in public discourse.

Its causes can be found in the psycho-communicative conditions of discourse about Jews and the Shoah in Poland. Outside the radical margins, it is rare to hear Holocaust denial in public discourse today, and most authors associated with the Church avoid overt anti-Semitism. But are they able to mourn Poland's formerly Jewish citizens? In the context of the Holocaust reckoning in Germany, psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich once wrote about "the inability to mourn" Jewish neighbours, once hated, othered, and expelled citizens of Germany and Europe.[56] The denial and rejection of responsibility were meant to conceal the lack of grief and despair for these people. Of course, German guilt weighs much, much more heavy than Polish guilt. However, on a psychological level, it seems that the Polish Catholic Church and some Catholics are also incapable of mourning the Jews. They may pray for them publicly and condemn the perpetrators, but they do not mourn the absence of the Jewish community. For them, the absence of Jews is not a loss; it makes possible the homogenous society they pursue.

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[54] Forecki, *Od "Shoah" do "Strachu"*, 421.

[55] See: Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak, 'Settling Accounts with the Troublesome Past: Self-Criticism in Poland and Eastern Europe', in Christopher Karner and Monika Kopytowska (eds), *National Identity and Europe in Times of Crisis* (Bingley, 2017), 259–83.

[56] Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn* (New York, 1975).

A FEW APPROACHES TO SETTLING ACCOUNTS WITH THE POLISH-JEWISH PAST

In recent years, there have been a few moments when opportunities passed by to open up a critical discussion about the relationship between the Polish Catholic Church and the Shoah. The first of these was brought on by a process initiated by the liberal media of the Catholic intelligentsia, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Więź*, and *Znak*. It involves regular publication of content commemorating the Shoah and wartime Polish-Jewish relations. The authors of the texts in question are clergymen, Catholic journalists, historians associated with the new school of history, and activists working to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust.

Tygodnik Powszechny [lit. Universal Weekly], a Catholic periodical founded in 1945 with the support of Cardinal Adam Sapieha, has on many occasions presented a polemical position towards the official discourse of the Episcopate. One important moment was the publication in 2010 of a special supplement to *Tygodnik Powszechny*. As the magazine's editors explained, its title, *Żydownik Powszechny* [lit. Jew-niversal Weekly], was based on "an untranslatable Polish play on words that refers to the magazine's perceived pro-Jewish sympathies in the eyes of anti-Semites and opponents of Christian-Jewish dialogue in Poland".[57] *Żydownik Powszechny* documents *Tygodnik Powszechny*'s participation in the debate on Holocaust remembrance. It includes the aforementioned essay by Jan Błoński, 'The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto', and the 1997 article by Father Stanisław Musiał, 'Czarne jest czarne' [Black is Black], which condemned anti-Semitic statements by priests (especially Father Henryk Jankowski, the so-called chaplain of the Solidarity movement).[58] Also included are articles

[57] Father Adam Boniecki, 'Essays in Polish-Jewish relations', English version of *Żydownik Powszechny*, 14 Dec. 2010, https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/essays-in-polish-jewish-relations-144265 [Accessed: 10 Jan. 2023].

[58] Father Stanisław Musiał (1938–2004) was a prominent participant in the Polish-Jewish dialogue and an opponent of crosses at Auschwitz. He was marginalised by the Church in his later years. His article 'Black is black' was awarded the Grand Press prize for best feature article of the year. In reference to the Holocaust, Musiał is restrained with his criticism of the Church. He writes: "We must recall that it is not only Hitler who killed Jews […] but Jews were also killed through the sin of anti-Semitism in previous centuries, in physical violence committed by Christians in spite of the teaching of the Church, and in spite of many papal

by Jan Tomasz Gross and Marek Edelman, and a 2001 interview with Archbishop Henryk Muszyński that offered defensive answers to questions concerning such issues as the absence of the Church in the debate over the pogrom in Jedwabne. It also contained the address Cardinal Dziwisz delivered at a conference entitled "Catholic-Jewish Dialogue: Where We Have Come, Where We Need To Go". *Żydownik Powszechny* provided a platform for a meeting that is difficult to imagine in the reality of the public debate. However, the texts collected in *Żydownik Powszechny*, which are strongly critical of Polish anti-Semitism, contain only mild criticism of the Church – insufficient in view of later research and the dynamics of the discussion on the Shoah. Targeted at a narrow audience of the print-based opinion press, *Żydownik Powszechny* did not affect the overall public debate.

Another important moment in the debate concerning the Church and the Shoah was created by the Church itself, when in 2014, Father Wojciech Lemański was suspended and defrocked. Father Lemański is one of few priests who actively cooperate with the Jewish community in Poland to commemorate the Jewish citizens of Poland, especially the victims of the Shoah and those who were killed in pogroms. Although Lemański was suspended mainly because of his public statements concerning his solidarity with children born through IVF and their parents,[59] the hierarchs' critical evaluation of his commitment to Jewish memory is a crucial part of the controversy.

There is no room here for a reconstruction of Father Lemański's conflict with the Polish Episcopate or for a dispassionate evaluation of the effectiveness of his own emotional and often confrontational communication style. The following remarks concern only his participation in the debate on the Church and the Shoah. From 1997 to 2006, he was the parish priest in Otwock, near Warsaw. Moved by the facts revealed during the debate over Jedwabne, he became involved in

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decrees protecting Jewish persons and property". He argues that the mistake of the Polish Church was its indifference to the attitudes of the faithful. Stanisław Musiał SJ, 'Black is black', English version of *Żydownik Powszechny*, 14 Dec. 2010, https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/black-is-black-144227 [Accessed: 10 Jan. 2023]. See Romuald Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel, 'Father Stanisław Musiał's Struggle with Memory', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 4 (2008), 367–86.

[59] KAI, 'Bioetycy o ks. Lemańskim: empatia i ignorancja', *Wiara.pl*, 15 Jul. 2013, https://kosciol.wiara.pl/doc/1630397.Bioetycy-o-ks-Lemanskim-empatia-i-ignorancja [Accessed: 11 Jan. 2023].

commemorating Jewish victims, including former residents of Otwock and the surrounding area. He was among the founders of the Social Committee for the Remembrance of the Jews of Otwock and Karczew [Społeczny Komitet Pamięci Żydów Otwockich i Karczewskich], and also joined the Polish Council of Christians and Jews [Polska Rada Chrześcijan i Żydów]. On Easter 2001, he prepared a decoration for the tomb of Jesus that referred to the Jedwabne massacre. The focal point was a burnt barn, in whose ruins lay the figure of Christ, and a sign above the monstrance stated 'Forgive us'.

One of the justifications for the decoration was to provide a response to the one at St. Brigid's Church in Gdańsk, prepared by Father Henryk Jankowski. It included a miniature barn with a skeleton inside and a quote from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians: "[the Jews] who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out".[60] Both tombs sparked controversy, which is in the tradition of Polish disputes over symbols. However, in a commentary published by *Więź*, Father Lemański linked the symbolism of Christ's tomb with questions about the responsibility of the Catholic Church in Poland towards the Jews:

> The crime committed in Jedwabne cries out to us today: ask forgiveness of those who have been wronged, and ask forgiveness of God whom you have failed. In fact, such a prayer for forgiveness would need to be read not in Warsaw's All Saints' Church, but over the grave in Jedwabne. Those words should reach those who are buried there. Not only their living relatives, not only the Jewish community.[61]

Father Lemański speaks from the position of a Catholic and an internal critic of the Church. According to Albert O. Hirshman's theory of organisations, in particular his typology of responses to decline in organisations, the strategy Father Lemański employs is *voice*, that is, calling upon the institution that one is a part of to repair itself from within (as opposed to the *exit*, i.e. quitting the institution one criticises, a step taken by the aforementioned former Jesuit Stanisław Obirek).[62] Father Lemański identifies the blame for crimes against the Jews as a sin against people and God. At the same

[60] 1 Thessalonians 2:15 (New International Version).

[61] Father Wojciech Lemański, 'Chrystus w zgliszczach stodoły', *Więź*, 6 (2001), 81.

[62] Cf. Albert O. Hirshman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, 1970).

time, he questions the hierarchy's decision concerning the form and place of the commemoration of the Jews of Jedwabne. By calling for a prayer for forgiveness to be said to the victims of the pogrom, he embraces the notion of the continuity of responsibility for remembering the dark pages of the history of his own national and religious group. In 2001, he challenged the decision of his superiors within the strictly hierarchical institution of the Church. He later did so many more times. It seems that his opposition to an asymmetrical, top-down model of communication and his willingness to tackle questions that test the limits of Catholic values of mercy and love of one's neighbour were what ultimately led to his suspension.

Father Lemański believes that his involvement in Christian-Jewish reconciliation was the main cause of his conflict with his superior, Archbishop Henryk Hoser. In an interview with Tok FM radio, he recounted their 2010 conversation, during which the archbishop was said to have articulated negative opinions about the Jewish community. He advised Lemański against cooperating with it, concluding: "Do tell me, Father, are you circumcised? Do you belong to this nation?"[63] If this is true, it is a manifestation of the communication obstacles faced by some of the hierarchy in reference to the subject of Jews and the Shoah: they are unable to refrain from applying vulgar categorisations of Jewishness rooted in common stereotypes and associations.

Both the left-liberal and the Catholic media, who systematically covered the Lemański case, downplayed it as a personal conflict between an isolated priest and his superior.[64] Once again, the tendency

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[63] Anna Wacławik-Orpik, 'Ks. Lemański ujawnia przebieg rozmowy z abp. Hoserem', Tok FM, 11 Jul. 2013, https://www.tokfm.pl/Tokfm/7,103454,14261385,ks-lemanski-ujawnia-przebieg-rozmowy-z-abp-hoserem-nagle.html [Accessed: 11 Jan. 2023].

[64] Father Lemański was not entirely alone in his conflict with Archbishop Hoser. However, the support of the few bishops who sided with him happened mainly behind the scenes. In 2018, Bishop Romuald Kamiński of the Warsaw-Praga diocese withheld the sentence of suspension, but only in the Łódź archdiocese. Lemański returned to priesthood as a vicar in a parish on the outskirts of Łódź. This was probably made possible by the fact that a few months earlier, Grzegorz Ryś, a priest actively involved in ecumenism, had become archbishop of Łódź. In 2022, he became chairman of the Council for Religious Dialogue and the Committee for Dialogue with Judaism of the Polish Episcopal Conference, replacing Bishop Markowski in this role. In 2023, Ryś's book entitled *Chrześcijanie wobec Żydów. Od Jezusa po inkwizycję: XV wieków trudnych relacji* [Christians towards Jews. From Jesus

to personalise fundamental conflicts has prevailed over a structural critique of the Polish public sphere and the Church as one of its pillars – and over settling accounts with the Christian-Jewish past. Father Lemański continues to commemorate Jewish victims, prays at pogrom sites and Holocaust camps with his community For Elder Brothers in Faith [Starszym Braciom w wierze], and reports on these activities on social media.

The third moment that opened up an opportunity for critical discussion about the Polish Catholic Church in relation to the Shoah came about because of the hierarchs themselves. On 10 July 2017, on the 76th anniversary of the 1941 Jedwabne massacre, Bishop Coadjutor of Warsaw Rafał Markowski, chairman of the Council for Religious Dialogue and the Committee for Dialogue with Judaism, delivered a speech on behalf of the Polish Episcopal Conference in the town of Jedwabne. From the perspective of current historical knowledge, his statement can be regarded as a partial and implicit apology and an indirect self-criticism. But from the perspective of the discourse of the Church, especially of the Polish Episcopate, it is a landmark act. In the opening section, Bishop Markowski stated remorsefully:

> The Catholic Church **(i)** mourns the death of all those who suffered torture, pain, and humiliation, and who died here in vain and should not have died. At the same time, the church strongly feels the pain of the members of the Polish nation, particularly the Catholics **(ii)** who contributed to this pain, humiliation and, ultimately, to death. This is a great pain and stain on our conscience, for which we apologise to all the brothers and sisters of the Jewish nation **(iii)**.[65] (author's numbering)

Bishop Markowski defined the victims (iii) and the perpetrators (ii), while the Church (the clergy) plays the role of bystanders (i). The

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to the Inquisition: Fifteen Centuries of Difficult Relations] (Kraków, 2023) was published and has been well received by Father Lemański and other proponents of Polish-Jewish dialogue.

[65] 'Bp Markowski w Jedwabnem: Przepraszamy braci i siostry narodu żydowskiego', *Wiez.pl*, 10 Jun. 2017, https://*Wiez.pl*/2017/07/10/bp-markowski-w-jedwabnem-przepraszamy-braci-i-siostry-narodu-zydowskiego/ [Accessed: 11 Jan. 2023]. See also: Ofer Aderet, 'Catholic Bishop Apologizes for Jedwabne Massacre', Haaretz.com, 11 Jul. 2017, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2017-07-11/ty-article/.premium/catholic-bishop-apologizes-for-jedwabne-massacre/0000017f-e49b-dc7e-adff-f4bfd2270000 [Accessed: 25 Sept. 2023].

statement reflects the spirit of Błoński's "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto": Bishop Markowski admits that Catholics bear responsibility for the murder of the Jews, but overlooks the Church's involvement in it as an institution and arbiter of morality. After outlining the extent of the guilt, he says 'we apologise', a statement long-awaited by advocates of reckoning with the past. This is why the Jedwabne speech was greeted with enthusiasm by the liberal Catholic media and by some liberal and left-wing opinion media as a legitimate, albeit belated, response by the Church to the debate about Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. The 2017 speech, while ground-breaking at the time, is only a small step forward from the Polish Episcopal Conference's pastoral letter of late 1990, in which the bishops stated: "We are particularly pained by those Catholics who in any way contributed to the death of Jews. They will forever remain a stain on our conscience, including in the social dimension".[66] It took almost 30 years for similar words to again be spoken by a representative of the same body. In the meantime, silence and the downplaying of guilt prevailed.

CONCLUSIONS

This peculiar non-debate about the Polish Catholic Church regarding the Shoah follows several distinct threads, between which there are hidden tensions or overt conflicts. On the one hand, the Church has been unwilling to recognise its problematic attitudes in the face of the Jewish tragedy, such as the anti-Semitism of some priests, that the Church treated this fact with indifference and silence, and that it offered only modest help to the victims of anti-Semitism that was at odds with the high esteem in which the institution was publicly held in society at the time. The consequence of this is the support and moral legitimisation by some members of the clergy and Catholic authors of a right-wing public memory geared towards defending Polish national pride. On the other hand, one must not ignore the public statements by members of the clergy or the actions undertaken by Father Lemański or Bishop Markowski that provided a more nuanced

[66] 'List pasterski z okazji 25. rocznicy ogłoszenia soborowej deklaracji "Nostra Aetate"', 30 Nov. 1990, in Michał Czajkowski (ed.), *Lud Przymierza* (Warszawa, 1992), 126.

evaluation of the Church's commitment to defending Jews or explaining to Polish Catholics the significance of the Shoah. The former prevents the development of a debate on the relationship between the Church and the Shoah; the latter has not been enough to provoke it. However, it has to be emphasised that the criticism is first and foremost directed at the attitudes of the Polish Catholics toward the Jews, and those presently displayed by Catholics toward the remembrance of the Shoah. In spite of being the institution that shapes the views of Catholics and pursues its own policy towards the Jews and the remembrance of the Shoah, the Church has only attracted marginal criticism.

This non-debate is part of *an exclusive debate on Polish-Jewish relations conducted on behalf of an imagined community* (see above). The Polish Catholic discourse is part of the public discourse in Poland, and just as the Church determines the axiological dimension of public discourse, it is itself largely conditioned by it. It reproduces the political divisions, cultural topoi, and binary categorisations that are typical of the public discourse. Its involvement in shaping the public memory of the Shoah is largely reactive, involving defensive commentary, pastoral admonition of its radical participants, and ceremonial prayers for the victims. Self-critical Catholic voices are rare and cannot counterbalance the anti-Jewish sentiments for which the Church provides an audience.

The evolving mnemonic work of the clergy also coincides with the contradictory discourses on the migration crisis, and the symbolic figure of the Jew overlaps with the present fate of refugees, especially those from the Middle East and North Africa. The issue of settling largely non-Christian people from these regions in Poland has divided the elites and the society. The discursive position of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Father Lemański, and Bishop Markowski has one more commonality – they are all active actors in the pro-refugee discourse in Poland.

In 2015, when large numbers of refugees, mainly from Muslim countries, came to Europe, an election campaign was underway in Poland. With the centrist Civic Platform party in power, the Church's official position on receiving refugees in Poland was generally favourable and involved providing assistance directly from Catholic parishes. However, in the course of the campaign, social opinion was redirected against the refugees. When the Law and Justice party came to power, the emphasis changed – the Church was in favour of helping, but

only if the admission of refugees was organised by the government, which had no intention of doing so. Even less impressive was the hierarchy's reaction to the dramatic situation of people from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, among other countries, who have been blocked from crossing the Polish-Belarusian border and entering the European Union since the summer of 2021. Within the ranks of the clergy, the approval of nationalist and anti-refugee movements is noticeable.[67] An analogy with the anti-Semitism of the 1930s would be an exaggeration, but the refugee issue opens another chapter in the intertwining of religion and xenophobic ideologies.

It is questionable if the Polish society as such is interested in the role of the Church in the Shoah. Media audiences seem over-satiated with controversies around the Church, which has been an object of public critique in relation to the paedophilia scandal, its alliance with the political elite, and its economic privileges, as well as its campaign against LGBTQ+ people and feminists. In each of those cases, the Church has employed the self-defense-oriented rhetoric of a besieged fortress. This is the paradox of the debate: the extensive production of critical discourse on issues currently in contention can result in a reification of the past. In other words, it can reduce the question of the role of the Church in the Shoah to one of a number of beating sticks that are used in the contemporary debate only for a rhetorical purpose. It is not a stand-alone subject that requires its own discussion.

Finally, from a psychological perspective, if the Church is unable to mourn the Jews, neither can a large part of the society. The Polish Catholic Church is to a large degree a product of the Polish society, but at the same time, it aspires to educate the latter. The subject of Jews and the Shoah is a challenge for the Church, which is accustomed to disciplining others and rarely makes itself the subject of critical self-analysis. However, it is also a challenge for those who have lived in homes left behind by victims of the Shoah and for those who were born long after the war. By defending the Church's stance towards the Shoah, the clergy and Catholic authors stand up for an ethnocentric vision of Polishness and the sense of national pride that it fosters. These, in turn, serve to promote collective self-satisfaction at the expense of historical facts. Until the people feel the need to talk

[67] Sowiński, *Dobra nowina*, 97–106.

about the Jews who are no longer with us, the Church, as a social institution, will not be able to publicly lament their fate on behalf of itself or the Polish people.

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