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Authors' Introduction

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Religious Imageries at Polish Catholic Shrines



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INTRODUCTION

The articles appearing in this issue wrap up the findings of a research project entitled *Multisensory Religious Imageries in Selected Catholic Shrines in South-Eastern Poland*, financed by a National Science Centre in Poland grant (DEC-2013/11/B/HS3/01443) during 2014–18. The research team comprised Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, Iuliia Buyskykh, Magdalena Lubańska (Principal Investigator), and Konrad Siekierski.

The project aimed to develop an anthropological account and analysis of the embodiment of religious imageries embraced by modern-day Catholic pilgrims who come to worship in shrines located in the region of Subcarpathia (Polish: *Podkarpacie*). We explored the ways in which certain physical and material practices influence the nature of religious imageries. In particular, we were interested in how religious elites moderate such practices in a top-down fashion and how pilgrims influence the specific nature of those practices from the bottom up.

Our project relied on Thomas Csordas's theoretical paradigm of embodiment, which was developed to move social research beyond the dualistic opposition of body and mind. Csordas's concept of embodiment as an anthropological paradigm (defined as a "consistent methodological perspective") is an approach inspired by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and Bourdieu's discourse of practice.¹ In that paradigm, the body is not viewed as an object, but rather as "an integral part of the perceiving subject." Accordingly, "on the level of perception it is not legitimate to distinguish between mind and body."² The concept of embodiment is predicated on the notion that the body and the mind should be treated as a single and insoluble vehicle of social practice and meaning.³ In this, Csordas follows Merleau-Ponty, who saw the human body as "a certain setting in relation to the world"⁴

1 Thomas Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 5-47.

2 *Ibid.*, 36.

3 Csordas, "Embodiment"; Edward Schieffelin, "On Failure and Performance: Throwing the Medium out of The Séance," in *The Performance of Healing*, eds. Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman, 59-89. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

4 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1962), 303. Csordas "Embodiment."

and treated the body as the perceiving subject and the source of acts of perception. Although every perceiving subject may objectify his or her own body, bodies are usually treated as an integral part of the self. The body is present with us in the world from the very beginning, and the physical ways in which it conditions us (such as our upright posture), as well as the intentionality of our perception, play a part in the way we shape cultural objects and recognize them as such.⁵ By applying Merleau-Ponty's insights to the role of the body in creating religious imageries, we might say that the body should not be treated as "a sign about something else"—instead, scholars should "scrutinize the ways in which it can be the very medium of meaning-making, the site of religion, not only signification."⁶

But how can one gain proficiency in this assessment? And how does the process of perception come to objectify the meaning behind the practices that the body engages in? To answer those questions, Csordas looks to Bourdieu's theory of the habitus, where the body is the "principle generating and unifying all practices," and consciousness is "the body projecting itself into the world."⁷ In a sense, the habitus is a matter of the body: the habitus and the socially conditioned body are one and the same thing, since the body acquires competencies that only make sense in the social environment in which the body acquired them. Thus defined, the paradigm of embodiment provides us with conceptual tools to identify the practices that objectify experience and shape epistemological attitudes, but which often remain unrealized. According to Bourdieu, social practice is governed not by conscious and stable rules, but rather by practical patterns that, in some situations, may remain hidden from their owners.⁸ This applies to practices perceived by social actors as subjective (in our research project this could be the sense that one has experienced divine grace or witnessed a miracle), which in Csordas's theory are treated as practices that are not only preobjective and preabstract but also culturally conditioned and expressed by the "socially informed bodies" of believers in a given religion.⁹

5 Csordas, "Embodiment," 8.

6 David Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis and the Study of Religion," in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 60.

7 Csordas, "Embodiment," 8-9.

8 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

9 Csordas, "Embodiment," 8.



This approach makes it possible to identify the parallels that exist between objective and embodied structures, and thus to identify the social conditions that make it possible to experience the sacred in a certain way, which social actors treat as self-evident¹⁰ but which is actually conditioned by what can be expressed within a certain habitus (e.g., it would not be controversial in a Christian Orthodox Church in Macedonia or Bulgaria to place a pair of socks on a religious icon as a votive offering, but the same act would not be acceptable in a Catholic church). As Bourdieu points out, practices found within one habitus will only be intelligible to those found in another if they embody a shared history.¹¹ This means that the range of potential experiences of the sacred is socially and culturally constrained.¹² Religious imageries are generally shaped by persons endowed with special symbolic capital, described by Csordas as “specialist[s] in cultural objectification,”¹³ whom, in this project, we identify with the monks and priests taking care of the shrines, as well with as other priests, pilgrimage guides, and religious leaders. It is often up to those people whether a certain religious practice gets perpetuated according to the “old ways” (the word “old” here being obviously a subjective opinion of the social actors rather than some objective measure of time), or whether it should be modified, or perhaps even discarded. The scenery of the shrine and its surroundings, including the religious images present in the church, will also have an impact.

In modern anthropology, there is a growing interest in redefining the discipline’s fundamental object of study. The study of human culture and activity is no longer split into “matters of the body” and “matters of the mind.” Human beings now tend to be seen as “living bodies,”¹⁴ and bodies are treated as inseparable from the mind.¹⁵ This approach has come to inform a range of anthropological

10 Ibid., 36.

11 Bourdieu, *Outline*.

12 Csordas, “Embodiment,” 15–16.

13 Ibid., 14.

14 Jon Mitchell and Hildi Mitchell, “For Belief: Embodiment and Immanence in Catholicism and Mormonism,” *Social Analysis* 52, no. 1 (2008): 79–94; Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 2008); C. Schilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publishing, 1993).

15 Anna Fedele and Ruy Llera Blanes, “Introduction,” in *Encounters of Body and Soul in Contemporary Religious Practices: Anthropological Reflections*, eds. Anna Fedele and Ruy Llera Blanes (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), xi.

subdisciplines, and it has been taken up by Polish anthropologists who put the human body, and the processes of embodiment, at the center of their research interests.¹⁶ In world anthropology, concepts related to the body and to embodiment have been widely applied to anthropology of religion.¹⁷

Nowadays, anthropology of religion increasingly tends to move away from defining religion in terms of faith (a system of beliefs) in favor of a growing interest in emotion, which has resulted in a focus on the nonverbal, somatic, and material spheres of religious life. One of the most frequently cited critiques of the anthropological categories once used for studying religion is Rodney Needham's classic *Belief, Language and Experience* (1972). Needham distinguished between the several levels at which anthropologists use the concept of belief and pointed out that the concept of belief as understood in the Christian creed should not be used to characterize other communities, where religious life may be organized along the lines of completely different paradigms, since that would amount to imposing one's own particular perspective on the object of study. Needham went on to argue that belief, which is an internal state of other people, remained inaccessible to anthropologists, who therefore couldn't claim to be defining it. In fact, anthropologists cannot even express their own internal states without reducing them in some way.¹⁸ Needham's critique was later developed and radicalized in the 1990s by researchers such as Stanley Tambiah¹⁹ and Talal Asad,²⁰ who applied it to the anthropological definitions of religion, particularly to the definition proposed by Clifford Geertz,²¹

16 E.g., Izabella Bukraba-Rylska, *W stronę socjologii ucieleśnionej* (Warszawa: WUW, 2013); Anna Wieczorkiewicz, "Wstęp," in *Ucieleśnienia. Ciało w zwierciadle współczesnej humanistyki*, eds. Anna Wieczorkiewicz and Joanna Bator (Warsaw: IFiS PAN, 2007), 7–15.

17 Constance Classen, *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 63–85; Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Fedele and Blanes, *Encounters*; Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

18 Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

19 Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

20 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

21 Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).



the last of anthropological definitions of religion with pretensions to a universal nature. Talal Asad²² pointed out that the insistence with which belief and meaning get foregrounded as crucial categories in the anthropological definitions of religion is symptomatic of “a protestant bias.” This bias was later critiqued by a number of researchers, including Webb Keane,²³ Chris Hann,²⁴ David Morgan,²⁵ Johada Verrips,²⁶ Gordon Lynch,²⁷ Constance Classen,²⁸ and David Howes.²⁹

Within this approach, belief is primarily grounded in the practice connected to a certain socially shared disposition toward the world,³⁰ in other words, what people “do” is more important than what they say. This is why our project will follow David Morgan in defining belief as “embodied epistemology, the sensuous and material routines that produce an integrated (and culturally particular) sense of self, community, and cosmos.”³¹ Therefore, belief is primarily expressed through sense-based physical practices, which we believe are particularly heightened in places of religious cult.

The most recent literature of the subject no longer treats the category of belief as an expression of a “set of teachings (that) derives from the credal tradition of Christianity.”³² There is a growing emphasis in the literature on various instances of human practice, emotion, and imagery.³³ Analyzing imageries is a contemporary challenge for anthropology, a challenge that calls for a new epistemological approach and, consequently, new methodologies and new categories of description. Another factor that encourages the development of a new epistemological perspective based

22 Asad, *Genealogies*.

23 Keane, *Christian Moderns*.

24 Chris Hann, “The Anthropology of Christianity per se,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 48, no. 3 (2007): 383–410.

25 Morgan, “Materiality.”

26 Johada Verrips, “Body and Mind: Material for a Never-Ending Intellectual Odyssey,” in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 21–39.

27 Gordon Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World. A Cultural Sociological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

28 Classen, *The Color of Angels*.

29 David Howes, *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005.

30 Morgan, “Materiality.”

31 *Ibid.*, 7.

32 *Ibid.*, 1.

33 *Ibid.*, 5.

on a reassessment of such biases is the recent palpable emphasis on producing new research on two underresearched aspects of anthropology of religion, namely, the material aspects of religion and the role of the body in the shaping of religious sensitivity. Against this background, the concept of embodiment emerges as one of the key analytical categories, where the body (which is inseparable from the mind) is viewed as a “fundamental existential condition.”³⁴ Precursors to this paradigm included such early critics of the subject/object split as Marcel Mauss and Irving Hallowell, whom Csordas dubs representatives of a “proto-phenomenological approach.”³⁵

Drawing on those theoretical considerations, we notice a pressing need for research on religious life in Poland that’s predicated on the paradigm of embodiment. We agree with Rodney Needham that internal religious experience is inaccessible to anthropologists. Accordingly, the aim of our project was not to enquire into the nature of religious experience. Instead, we sought to revise the categories of sensory religious experience (Polish: *sensualizm*) by reflecting on the behaviors and forms of religious expression in pilgrims.³⁶ We studied how the requirement to engage in certain physical actions (gestures and behaviors that may be more or less physically strenuous depending on the type of the pilgrimage) shapes religious imageries. Because pilgrimages compel believers to engage with the place of veneration in an intense, physical manner, the body becomes the medium of religious experience, as well as of the given range of religious expression available in a given religious environment. At the same time, we show how believers themselves shape those embodied religious imageries.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION IN POLAND

Polish ethnology, which had until recently been characterized by an excessive emphasis on verbalized belief statements, misrepresents the role of the body along with the general nonverbal, somatic, and material factors that moderate religious imagery among believers. This approach effectively amounts to adopting a

34 Csordas, “Embodiment.”

35 *Ibid.*, 6.

36 cf. Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).



protestant perspective, an approach that in Poland has produced a series of questionable value judgements concerning nonelite religiosity, reified and defined as “folk religion” (*religijność ludowa*).³⁷ Polish ethnology has associated similar forms of religiosity with a series of negative stereotypes, indicating their “inferiority” relative to the official and canonical forms of religiosity. In that approach, the use of sensory religious practices that rely on material vehicles of the sacred and the inability of provincial Polish Catholics to explain the meaning of their ritual practices in a discursive fashion were both seen as indications of a defective epistemology.³⁸

That epistemological approach underwent an apparent revision when Joanna Tokarska-Bakir proposed the concept of “folk-type religious practice” (*religijność typu ludowego*).³⁹ However, that departure from genetic criteria to embrace a more descriptive, content-based approach did not go beyond the level of appearances (though the concept was supposed to apply to practices found in all social classes, it nonetheless appeared that its ideal type was strongly connected to the stereotypical idea of Catholic peasant culture in the first half of the twentieth century). Similarly, we believe that the category of “non-differentiation” (*nierozróżnialność*), which Tokarska-Bakir proposed in lieu of the concept of “sensuous folk religiosity” (*sensualizm ludowy*), is not theoretically productive.⁴⁰ Nondifferentiation, meaning

37 Irena Bukowska-Floreńska, *Współczesna polska religijność ludowa - zachowania, normy obyczajowe, praktyki obrzędowe* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1999); Stefan Czarnowski, “Kultura religijna wiejskiego ludu polskiego,” in *Kultura* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1958 [1938]), 88–107; Zdzisław Kurpisiński, *Wielki post i Wielkanoc w regionie opoczyńskim: Studium religijności ludowej* (Warszawa: Verbinum, 2000); Ludwik Stomma, *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX wieku* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1986); Ryszard Tomicki, “Religijność ludowa,” in *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, vol. 2, eds. Maria Biernacka, Maria Frankowska, and Wanda Paprocka (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1981), 29–69; Ariel Zieliński, *Na straży prawdziwej wiary. zjawiska cudowne w polskim katolicyzmie ludowym* (Kraków: Nomos, 2004).

38 Czarnowski, “Kultura”; Tomicki, “Religijność”; Stomma, *Antropologia*.

39 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Obraz osobliwy. Hermeneutyczna lektura źródeł etnograficznych. Wielkie opowieści* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

40 Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, *Ukrzyżowani. Współczesne misteria męki pańskiej w Polsce* (Toruń: Fundacja Nauki Polskiej, 2013); Magdalena Lubańska, “Problemy etnograficznych badań nad religijnością,” in *Religijność chrześcijan obrządku wschodniego na pograniczu polsko-ukraińskim*, ed. Lubańska (Warszawa: Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UW, DiG, 2007), 7–32; Magdalena Lubańska and Ładysława Agata, “Prawosławie – ‘chrześcijaństwo peryferyjne?’ O teologicznych uwikłaniach teorii antropologicznej i stronniczości perspektyw poznawczych antropologii chrześcijaństwa,” *Lud* 97 (2013): 195–219.

an attitude whereby the signifier and the signified of a religious image are treated as identical, is at best one possible form of sensory contact with the sacred. That being so, we consider it questionable that this form of belief is “not a secondary phenomenon of religious experience but the foundational component which makes religious experience possible irrespective of the diversified religious consciousness, which subsequently reflects on the consequences of this lack of distinction.”⁴¹

With our proposed epistemological approach, we were able to research the sensory and material dimensions of religious life which, as we have shown, have been underrepresented or misrepresented in Polish anthropological literature. We believe that our research project also contributes to the development of anthropological theory of religion and its relatively new subdiscipline, namely, anthropology of Christianity, in order to move past such dichotomies as religion/magic or spirit/body. In our studies, we also tried to incorporate valuable research insights on sensory religious practices from Polish anthropologists Stefan Czarnowski, Jacek Olędzki,⁴² Magdalena Zowczak,⁴³ Anna Niedźwiedz,⁴⁴ and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir⁴⁵ into Western theories used in this project. This way we hope to boost the stature and competitiveness of Polish anthropological research internationally. By bringing together those different insights concerning religious experience, we hope to be able to reveal the ways in which those are rooted in their respective unique historicities,⁴⁶ as shaped by factors including geographical location, historical experience, and ideological influence. We find this relevant, particularly given the fact that Polish Catholicism is not a well-described phenomenon in world anthropology, which tends to get overlooked in anthropology of Christianity and anthropology of Catholicism.

For that reason, we are grateful to the editorial board of the *Journal of Global*

41 Tokarska-Bakir, *Obraz osobliwy*, 230. Quotation in our translation.

42 Jacek Olędzki, “Pieśni wotywnie,” *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty* 29, no. 4 (1975): 225–36; Olędzki, “Świadomość mirakularna,” *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty* 43, no. 3 (1989): 147–57.

43 Magdalena Zowczak, *Biblia ludowa* (Wrocław: “Funna,” 2000).

44 Anna Niedźwiedz, *The Image and the Figure: Our Lady of Częstochowa in Polish Culture and Popular Religion* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010).

45 Tokarska-Bakir, *Obraz osobliwy*.

46 Talal, *Genealogies*.



Catholicism for this opportunity to present the findings of our research team in this journal.

THE RESEARCH AREA: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLICISM IN THE REGION OF SUBCARPATHIA, POLAND

We chose for our research project an area located in two Catholic dioceses in southern Poland (Rzeszów and Przemyśl). According to the most recent annual statistical data from the Catholic Church Institute of Statistics (2016), 65 percent of Catholics in the Rzeszów diocese attend a Sunday Mass; this rate of *dominicanos*, as Sunday worshippers are called, is one of the highest in the country, second only to the diocese of Tarnów. Przemyśl has the next highest figure, with close to 60 percent dominicanos in the Catholic population.

The research area is located within the catchment of several famous Subcarpathian shrines, including Kalwaria Pałacowska, the Franciscan monastery at Leżajsk, and the Holy Spirit Basilica at Przeworsk.⁴⁷ The first two shrines are also major centers of Marian pilgrimages, probably related to the fact that Mary is a master symbol in the Polish Catholic imaginary.⁴⁸

The intensity of religious life in this Polish region makes it a good research subject for ethnographers because it yields vivid examples of the sensory forms of Catholicism that currently dominate religious life in Poland. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this kind of sensory Polish Catholicism was a product of the need for tangibility of the sacred, characteristic of traditional religious currents in general (in Poland and throughout Europe) and representative of the sensibilities of the peasant classes, which were strongly tied to the agricultural or pastoral ethos. This is why Polish anthropologists tended to view the focus on sensory religious experience (*sensualizm*) as a key characteristic of “folk religiosity.”⁴⁹

47 The basilica contains a unique replica of the Tomb of Jesus, a much-visited tourist attraction that also features in souvenirs commemorating a visit to the monastery of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

48 Cathelijne de Busser and Anna Niedźwiedz, “Mary in Poland: A Polish Master Symbol,” in *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, eds. Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 87–100.

49 Czarnowski, “Kultura.”

Nowadays, the term “folk religiosity” has dropped out of use. By way of contrast, a focus on sensory religious experience remains an important element of religiosity across all social strata. In recent years, sensory religious experience in contemporary Catholicism has been increasingly manifesting itself through ritual practices promoted by charismatic movements, which have now become a widespread phenomenon in Western Christianity.⁵⁰ In the region of Subcarpathia, this phenomenon has grown dynamically over the past decade. Charismatic Catholicism is propagated in the area by charismatic-oriented priests of considerable local renown, such as Fr. Józef Witko or Fr. Marian Rajchel, whose healing Masses are attended by Catholics coming from all over Poland (see Lubańska and Siekierski, this issue).

Our research also took place within the context of the nationalist component of Catholicism. This is partly related to the way Catholicism is regarded as compatible with the messianic ideology that regards the suffering Polish nation as a chosen people with its own redemptive mission—a tradition in Polish thinking that goes back to the Romantic period. This way of looking at Catholicism in the country has experienced a revival in recent years, and its attendant social imaginaries have been reinforced and invoked on numerous occasions in the history of Polish Catholicism. This Polish messianism is linked to the country’s troubled history, which included three waves of foreign partitions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, followed by war and communism in the twentieth. We agree with José Casanova that Poland’s location on the “front line” of geopolitical tensions had a major influence on this merging of religious and national elements within the country’s cultural identity.⁵¹

Those Poles who embrace the idea of national messianism believe that God has entrusted Poland with a unique providential mission to preserve Christian values in Europe and to implement those values in their social and political lives.⁵² In this view, Poland may be isolated and deserted by other nations, but nonetheless, it is

50 Csordas, *The Sacred Self*; Simon Coleman, *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

51 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 92–113.

52 Janusz Mariański, *Katolicyzm polski – ciągłość i zmiana. Studium socjologiczne* (Kraków: WAM, 2011), 88–89.



supported by God's grace.⁵³ When asked about Poland's possible potentially worrisome isolation, one of Lubańska's respondents said she was not worried because the Mother of God and the angels were extending a cloak of protection over the country. In her article, Lubańska demonstrates how the sensory and messianic dimensions of religiosity in Subcarpathia mingle and influence each other, and how the self-perception of the "porous self" has analogies with the way Poland, seen as a mystical nation-body, gets imagined along the same lines as individual bodies or selves: both are similarly vulnerable to various spiritual threats, and both are open to the workings of Divine Providence.

At the same time, some Poles treat Catholicism as a reservoir of Polishness and use it to fashion the idea of Polish people as a virtually immaculate metaphysical community threatened by other nations' attempts to undermine its stature. That has allegedly produced a "cultural war" that is taking place within Polish society as well as within the Polish Catholic Church. At stake in that war is the problem of what it means to be a Christian and, importantly from the perspective of nationalist Catholics, what it means to be a patriot. At one end of the spectrum, we find those Polish Catholics who primarily regard Christianity as a universal religion and who find it distasteful that Christianity is used by some to promote a nationalist ideology. At the other end, we find those Polish Catholics who embrace the messianic ideology and who view national ideas as a major and inalienable part of Catholicism.

As a result, Polish society is experiencing a growing polarization. The effects of that process have also had an impact on our research, as we oftentimes received widely divergent reports about Catholicism and Catholics from our respondents.

In the area where we conducted our studies, we came across people who believed that their bodies and souls needed to be healed by the Holy Spirit and who yearned to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in their own bodies. Those people viewed themselves as sinful and weak, but some of them were also

53 Fr. Alfred Marek Wierzbicki calls this a return to a "Sarmatian [i.e., seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Polish] vision of national self-sufficiency" ("Nacjonalistyczny smog nad Polską," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 49 [2017]: 34).

unenthusiastic about religious people they knew personally, whom they dismissed as holier-than-thou types. Those ideas about Polish people as a national community are often idealistic: good deeds of individuals are projected as representative of the nation as a whole, whereas crimes or misdemeanors tend to be dismissed as isolated incidents. Differences of opinion arise in terms of attitudes toward local communities. Some of our respondents were able to discuss the past of their own locales in nuanced and critical ways and did not shy away from shameful historical events; others glossed over or repressed inconvenient facts. Importantly, the ways in which our respondents conceptualized their own individual selves, their local communities, and their nation as a whole were strongly tinged by Catholic religion as reflected in Catholic values, including current developments and journalistic interpretations.

PROJECT FINDINGS IN SUBCARPATHIA

The articles in this issue are our contribution to research on Polish Catholicism. They paint a picture that's rich in ethnographic detail and more varied than the usual messaging mediated through journalism. As we joined our respondents on pilgrimages, held conversations, and engaged in social interactions, we got a chance to know them better and to provide a counterweight to the scholarly and journalistic analyses that may lack the human element of face-to-face contact.

What we found particularly notable in the region of Subcarpathia was the way Catholics often engage in various grassroots initiatives to provide aid to individuals and communities (see Siekierski, this issue). People in local communities often belong to religious groups whose members care for and support each other. Konrad Siekierski discusses the way the ongoing penetration of Polish Catholicism by charismatic Christianity reinvigorates and reshapes what Andrzej Hemka and Jacek Olędzki refer to as the “miraculous sensitivity” of Polish believers, traditionally dominated by Marian devotion. In his article, he uses the recent discourses and developments surrounding a miraculous apparition in Mazury as an illustrative case in point that reveals important contemporary dynamics within the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. Magdalena Lubańska draws similar conclusions in her article about the religious imaginaries of pilgrims who travel on foot from the



parish of the Holy Spirit at Przeworsk to the church of Our Lady of Jodłówka, a shrine of local renown.

Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska takes a different perspective on the sensory-based Catholicism, one that is not related to the charismatic movement. Her article explores the importance of the natural world surrounding the shrines to the religious experience of the pilgrims, a scholarly perspective often overlooked in studies of Catholic pilgrimages in Poland. Pilgrims tend to regard the beautiful surroundings as a sensory form—a medium that makes it possible for devotees to establish a relationship with the sacred. Her article focuses on Kalwaria Paławska and reports on the way pilgrims interpret the natural landscape in religious terms as a manifestation of God’s workings in human lives. Her article analyzes the way physical scenery at the shrine impacts the religious experience, moving beyond the discourse produced by the shrine’s caretakers or by priests who accompany their parishioners on pilgrimage.

We were also interested in the relations between the devotees and the priests, many of whom enjoy considerable respect and authority. Some of our respondents argued that inviting a priest to one’s house was like taking God under one’s roof. Others believed priests to be somewhat lukewarm or even lazy and needed encouragement to get involved in various initiatives promoted by their own parishioners. In practice, priests (and parish life in general) often remain under a strong influence from female religious leaders, who are oftentimes more motivated and determined than priests in achieving their religious objectives: organizing pilgrimages, introducing new objects of religious veneration to churches, maintaining records of miraculous divine interventions, or educating young people (religious socialization).

Also important as a context for our research is the fact that the region under discussion occupies cultural, ethnic, and religious borderlands. This presumably boosts the need to emphasize differentiation in the face of significant others, mainly members of different religions in the neighboring towns and villages, mostly Ukrainians. On the one hand, the local communities had worked out a strategy of peaceful coexistence that goes back to the interwar period. On the other hand, World War II and the period of postwar unrest and violence were both marked by traumatic events

that caused pain and suffering on both sides of the divide, including exterminations of entire villages. This situation still remains unresolved, weighing heavily on mutual relations. Only one member of our team, Iuliia Buyskykh, did research in communities that were mixed in terms of religion and nationality.

In her article, Buyskykh describes the ways in which both sides in those structurally difficult conditions have sought to maintain peaceful relations based on “everyday diplomacy.” She uses that term (proposed by Magnus Marsden, Diana Ibañez Tirado, and David Henig) to demonstrate three separate ways in which the concept gets implemented: forgiving, forgetting (or trying to forget mutual grudges), and feigning (or pretending that the Polish-Ukrainian relations are good). She also describes her own unpleasant experiences as a researcher as she faced suspicions of spying for the Russians, disloyalty, and hidden agendas.

According to Buyskykh, one reason the local mixed community continues to struggle in dealing with the problematic memory of Polish-Ukrainian relations during World War II and in the aftermath of the war partly boils down to the current efforts toward the “management of historical policy” by Poland and Ukraine, and to the respective public discourses on “national heroes.” As a result of those recent policies, an atmosphere of mistrust is growing between the Polish and Ukrainian populations in borderland areas, fueling mutual grudges and resentments. This made for a difficult research environment but, as Buyskykh notes, “We act as mediators between various local actors, and the texts we produce are aimed at mediating between the communities we study, academia, and broader audiences.” This is the perspective we sought to maintain in our articles as we explored the beliefs and attitudes of the social actors we met in our project.

—*Translated from Polish by Piotr Szymczak*

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