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The Catholic Church and the Revival of Poland

THE FORMAL RESUMPTION OF POLISH STATEHOOD in modern times began in church. On February 9, 1919, not quite three months after its inception, the government of the fledgling Second Polish Republic marked the convocation of its first parliament, or Sejm, in Warsaw with an inaugural Roman Catholic high mass, reviving the custom of the bygone commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania before its partition and subjection to foreign rule for a century and a quarter. In its form and dramatis personae, this ceremony vividly asserted the prominence of the Roman confession in national life and tradition, as well as its intimate association with the temporal power. At the hour of eleven that Sunday morning, Chief of State Józef Piłsudski entered the crowded nave of St. John Cathedral, thus sparing himself the sight of the incongruous nineteenth-century facade that defaced the Gothic antiquity of this oldest church of the capital. He began a procession down the aisle toward the altar, followed in turn by the prime minister, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, and his cabinet; the papal emissary to the country, Monsignor Achille Ratti, who would become pope himself three years later almost to the day; the assembled Catholic hierarchs of restored Poland; and finally the celebrant, the archbishop of Warsaw, Aleksander Kakowski. The solemnities reached their emotional peak when the lawmakers heard a patriotic sermon from one of their own, the Armenian-rite archbishop of Lwów Józef Teodorowicz, the most senior of thirty-two deputies who wore the collar, one-twelfth of the membership of the body. A noted homilist of the hell-fire school and never a man given to understatement, to put it delicately, Teodorowicz reminded his audience of their duty to God and country with characteristic vehemence, his words laden with gravity and drama. On this

momentous occasion, the speaker surpassed even his own impressive standards of fiery rhetoric, and sympathetic listeners afterwards described the prelate's oratory as magnificent, divinely inspired. Even some political foes paid grudging tribute to his eloquence, barbed with not altogether complimentary comparisons with Piotr Skarga, the legendary Jesuit royal preacher who had harangued a previous Sejm in the heyday of Poland-Lithuania. As a final flourish, at the close of his exhortation Teodorowicz administered to the legislators their oaths of office in unison. When the liturgy ended, the congregation sang the national hymn "Boże coś Polskę"—"God, protector of Poland"—and then the freshly minted deputies emptied out of the cathedral to walk the length of Krakowskie Przedmieście and New World streets, amid cheering throngs, to the parliament building off of Three Crosses Square. There, later in the day, the primate of Poland, Archbishop Edmund Dalbor of Gniezno-Poznań, consecrated the chamber in the presence of the same collection of ranking worldly dignitaries.¹

In its symbolic union of church and state, this set piece of official pageantry neatly echoed the litany of historical axioms that commentators habitually cited—and cite to this day, for that matter—to prove the indomitable Catholicity of the Poles throughout the ages and the natural affinity of Catholicism with Polish patriotism: the conventional dating of the origins of Poland from its baptism in 966, the status of the Catholic primate as *interrex* in Poland-Lithuania, the miracles of the icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, the veneration of the Blessed Virgin as perpetual queen and patroness of Poland, the reputation of the old republic as the easternmost rampart of western Christendom against Turk, Tatar, and schismatic. Indeed, the famous Roman religiosity of Poland was the main thing—in not a few cases, practically the only thing—that many foreigners knew of the country or its people, and so they tended not to subject the time-honored legend of *Polonia semper fidelis* to rigorous examination. In reporting his initial impression from Warsaw to his superiors at the Vatican Secretariat of State, even the scholarly and matter-of-fact Monsignor Ratti intoned the truism "Dire polacco è dire cattolico"—to say Polish is to say Catholic—and plainly meant it, and only closer acquaintance with the subtleties of his new assignment would teach him not to accept the formula at face value.² Small wonder, then, that observers more distant assumed the truth of the stereotype and took for granted the Catholic nature of the Second Republic and its readiness to serve the aims of the Church at home and abroad, whether they welcomed or rued the prospect. In the same year

1919, for instance, a French Catholic journalist rejoiced at the revival of Poland as “a political miracle,” stressing that in that land of fabled piety “the interests of Church and State not only coincide, but are actually dependent upon each other.”³ Surveying the perils facing Europe in the wake of a ruinous world war, others called on the newly emancipated Poles to take up once more their historic mission as guardians of religion and civilization. Still three years from full reception into the Church, but already Roman at heart, the English literary eminence G. K. Chesterton warned—accurately, after a fashion, if twenty years too soon—that “a flood threatens the West from the meeting of two streams, the revenge of Germany and the anarchy of Russia” and concluded that Europe had “only one possible dyke against such a flood, which is . . . the might and majesty of Poland,” the “Christian and chivalric shield” of the Occident.⁴ On the other hand, Polish diplomats arriving in Rome encountered brusque greetings from the government of Italy, which suspected them of being little more than agents of its papal rival across the Tiber. While concerned above all with the unresolved Roman question, Italian officials might have spoken for disapproving liberals and anticlericals everywhere when they complained to the Poles that “you are papists, the only ones in Europe nowadays; on you the Vatican pins all its hopes; you are to be a branch of the church-state and a base for the reborn temporal power of the papacy.”⁵ “The new born Polish republic,” an American newspaper correspondent told his readers in 1932, not reporting news so much as reinforcing an adage, “is Rome’s most faithful daughter.”⁶

Proclamations of this sort, celebratory and alarmist alike, proceeded from a common impression of Poland as a Catholic monolith and ultramontane bastion, the idea symbolically expressed and reinforced in the parliamentary mass in St. John’s Cathedral. Yet closer scrutiny of the participants in that ritual might have suggested a more guarded estimate of the influence of Catholicism in the councils of state in the Second Republic. Prime Minister Paderewski was rumored to be a Freemason, an affiliation forbidden by the Church. Chief of State Piłsudski, acclaimed by millions as the hero of the struggle for independence and destined to become the dominant figure of interwar Polish history, was at best a wandering and idiosyncratic Catholic openly despised by more than a few of the prelates in attendance that morning, and his retinue of cronies and devoted associates—the main pool of recruitment for high governmental position in the years to come—was notorious as a hotbed of unbelief and Freemasonry. For his part, within two years Achille Ratti would be hounded from his nunciature

in Poland amid a din of furious protests and cries for a rupture of Polish relations with the Holy See; subsequently, as occupant of the throne of St. Peter under the name of Pius XI for the better part of the Second Republic's free existence, he saw his cherished projects for a historic expansion of Catholicism eastward into the territories of the former Russian empire bitterly opposed and frustrated by the very government in Warsaw that many regarded as the cat's-paw of the Vatican. To judge from the tenor of their sermons and public statements, the Catholic bishops and clergy of the country saw no grounds for confidence in the future of their Church, but instead saw it as embattled and under siege, even in Poland, beset by inner frailties and vulnerable to powerful foes, including scores of the very men who filled the pews of the cathedral that day. Most of the political parties represented in that first parliament could have been described fairly as anticlerical by instinct or heritage, even without the presence of deputies from the regions largely neither Polish nor Catholic that would be joined to the Second Republic only after prolonged and frequently military dispute. Once the dust settled and boundaries became more or less fixed, if not universally accepted, roughly three-quarters of Poland's population of twenty-seven million professed themselves Catholics—a lesser percentage than in neighboring Lithuania or Czechoslovakia, and far fewer in number than in Germany, the birthplace of the Reformation and the Kulturkampf—and of those, some three million were Ukrainian Eastern-rite Catholics estranged from their nominal Polish coreligionists by barriers of mutual suspicion and national rivalries. One might well have wondered if this was the same country so often glibly described by supposedly knowledgeable contemporaries as a modern version of the confessional state, republican in form but Catholic in essence.⁷

In many ways, it was not: the pluralist, polyglot Poland of reality differed from the Poland of pious myth, but the confusion between the two sprang precisely from the fact that the myth held enough truth in it to persuade beholders that it was so. Outsiders were especially prone to this simplifying tendency. Most Poles knew better, but by the same token a great many of them believed that the myth could and should be made so, and thought and acted accordingly, while a great many others feared that attempts might be made to make it so and resolved to take care that it should not, and still others cared little one way or the other but gave the myth lip service to suit their purposes. The potent legend of "Poland ever faithful," then, operated simultaneously as illusion, as ideal to be approached and pos-

sibly realized, as threatening prospect to be averted, and as handy polemical weapon. Owing to the conflicting reactions it inevitably evoked, the vision of a Catholic Poland could not serve as the unifying principle of the Second Republic, as widely assumed; on the contrary, perhaps no other theme held such power to polarize the country or set its various peoples and constituencies at odds.

Even so, the reflexive predisposition to equate Poland with the Roman church was not a mistaken judgment, but merely one that meant less in political terms than met the eye. It often proceeded from, or led to, an exaggerated appraisal of the collaboration of throne and altar throughout the history of Poland as well as a lack of understanding that, in fact, Catholicism occupied a somewhat ambiguous place in Polish political culture. True, the vast majority of Poles proclaimed themselves Catholics of the Latin rite, and the link between Catholicism and Polish identity was manifestly real, hallowed by time, accentuated by adjacency to peoples of other creeds, and starkly defined by the recent dominion of Protestant and Orthodox sovereigns over most of the Polish lands. Adherence to the Roman faith resoundingly supported the Polish ethos, then, and in Poland Catholicism bore no taint of association with foreign rule or of conflict with patriotic ideals, as in the Czech lands or in Hungary. However, these facts had exerted less influence on the behavior or inclinations of the former Polish Republic than might have been expected, and less still on the creators of its interwar reincarnation. To put it mildly, old Poland had scarcely qualified as a crusader or inquisitorial realm, a Spain of the east. Indeed, its tradition had been to approach religion in moderate and latitudinarian fashion. More often than not, the commonwealth preferred to apply a cautious pragmatism in managing its multiconfessional populace, and Poland-Lithuania's lack of zeal in enforcing religious uniformity had earned it occasional reproaches as a paradise for heretics and Jews. In other words, Catholicism acted as a salient indicator of Polish identity, but not as an element of great political significance or priority in statecraft. The pattern held during the era of partition, when the Church and its representatives played at most a secondary role in the struggle for independence, and the Polish political and intellectual elites that would later emerge into leadership of the interwar republic came to cultivate attitudes of indifference or outright hostility to Catholicism as a dubious force in national affairs.⁸

So as Poland entered a new phase of statehood in 1918, its Church occupied a formidable but awkward and undefined position in the country,

looming as an imposing presence but by no means an uncontested or irresistible civic colossus. In truth, perhaps no other institution could lay so plausible a claim to the right and duty to speak for Poles on matters of governmental as well as private conduct; certainly the Church thought so, and did not shrink from attempting to exercise that prerogative. Too much a fixture in national life to be content with less than a commanding voice in public concerns and official recognition of its moral authority, and far too big to be ignored or underestimated as a political factor even by its most determined antagonists, it nevertheless fell short of the ability to translate its will into law or policy by persuading or overawing the combination of factions and constituencies that regarded the Church as an agent of clericalism, reaction, and bigotry and saw the shadow of black dictatorship lurking behind its every move. Nor did the dispute over the proper role of Polish Catholicism confine itself within the boundaries of the republic, for the Church of Poland did not exist as an isolated or fully autonomous entity, after all, but as an integral part of an avowedly universal religious body with sweeping worldly—and, literally, otherworldly—interests and aspirations. The popes of the day and their ministers in the Roman Curia considered the twentieth century a time of both frightful dangers and extraordinary opportunities, requiring prudence and daring alike, and the course on which they chose to steer the bark of Peter and its implications for Poland brought them into repeated disagreement with not only the secular rulers of that country, but also with the leaders of the Polish Church and the faithful. Such questions resisted easy solution because sooner or later debates over the proper place of the Church within Poland, and of Poland within the Catholic world, became emotive arguments over the fundamental character of the Second Republic and contrasting visions of Polish history. The argument went on unabated and unresolved right up to the day in October 1939 when Pope Pius XII called on Catholics around the world to mourn the martyrdom of Poland by invasion and conquest yet once more.

The argument had begun in earnest roughly a century earlier, during the decades of tripartite Russian, German, and Austrian sway over the lands of the once and future Poland. The conditions of captivity produced the paradoxical dual result of transforming the Church into a far more visible and powerful symbol of Polish identity, on the one hand, while on the other steadily alienating it from those elements within society who saw themselves as the true keepers of the national flame and formed the vanguard of the independence movement. Although during this time a “Polish Church”

existed in none but the sentimental sense, having been apportioned among the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the partitioners, the bond of Catholicity helped to maintain an indelible consciousness of nationhood that transcended the boundary lines of the moment. Apart from the example of the Habsburg Empire, where a common religion contributed to generally milder and more tolerable terms of confinement for Poles in Austrian Galicia, Catholicism and the Church also functioned as an obvious focus of Polish differentiation from their foreign masters and a national rallying point of solidarity and refuge. Especially during the latter half of the century, official anti-Catholic campaigns in Protestant Germany and Orthodox Russia had magnified the burdens of Poles in those domains. For all the famous rigor of Bismarck's Kulturkampf, the repression of the Church in the Russian zone typically surpassed it in harshness by far, magnified by reprisal against ecclesiastical sympathy or support for the Polish rebellions of 1830–31 and 1863–64. Hundreds of Polish clergy, and even some hierarchs, suffered execution, banishment, or *katorga* (penal servitude) at the hands of Petersburg for real or suspected transgressions of this sort. By 1870, all but one Catholic bishopric in Russian Poland stood vacant, and the archbishop of Warsaw was consigned to an internal exile that would last twenty years. Even so unoffending a holy man as Fr. Honorat Koźmiński, the founder of twenty-six religious congregations, spent much of his life confined to a monastery at Russian behest. In such circumstances, the natural struggles of the Polish Church to withstand these assaults and shelter its faithful from religious persecution inevitably strengthened the tie between the Roman confession and Polishness. The apparent merging of faith and ethnicity that occurred in these times gave rise to the doctrine of *polak-katolik*—the conviction that to be Polish was to be Catholic, and, just as important, not to be Catholic was not to be genuinely Polish—a formula that would leave a deep and enduring impression on the mentality of subsequent generations of Poles. In short, the patriotic devout would not have hesitated to accord their Church much credit for having kept alive the Polish spirit throughout the ordeal of statelessness: Catholicism had sustained Poles in adversity and enabled them to preserve their cultural integrity, while the Church had shared and helped to shoulder the misfortunes of its flock and acted as a comforting and uniquely authentic Polish institution, an irreplaceable example and moral guide to the nation under siege.

All the same, the Church in the Polish lands found itself in an uncomfortably equivocal position, as suggested in the aphorism that it functioned

much like a prison chaplain—a solace to the inmate, to be sure, but also an accessory to the jailer.⁹ While reluctant to endorse the dismemberment of Poland, Rome consistently preferred to swallow it as a necessary evil rather than incur the risks of disturbing the status quo. Nineteenth-century popes sympathized with the Poles in bondage but condemned their occasional resort to insurrection and advised them to accept their lot and obey their foreign monarchs. This guarded Vatican policy stemmed from doctrinal abhorrence of violence, mistrust of nationalism, ingrained aversion to political and social disorder, and, not least, the larger worldly imperatives of the Holy See. Pope Gregory XVI first made this bluntly plain in 1832, when his encyclical *Cum primum* upbraided the bishops of Russian Poland for their support of the recently suppressed “November Revolt” in their precincts. *Cum primum* came as a shock to Poles, and the document inflicted lasting damage to the prestige of the papacy in the eyes of Polish patriots. Never one to mince words, his successor Pius IX sought to redress the balance by tending more to speak up for the Poles and chide their masters, but the diplomatic Leo XIII paid little heed to the Polish issue throughout his long pontificate. For one thing, the Vatican saw little choice but to maintain at least correct relations with the partitioning empires in the era of the Roman question, the Kulturkampf, and harsh repression of Poles in the tsarist domain. Craving international support for its disputed sovereignty after the liquidation of the Papal State by Italy in 1870, and beset by recurrent waves of governmental attacks against the Church throughout Europe, Rome took care to keep its customary rapport with the Habsburg kingdom in good repair and attempted to restrain German and Russian hostility toward Catholic interests by conciliation, and part of the price was to mute its complaints about the oppression of Poland. Furthermore, the Vatican feared that pressing the Polish matter might only make a bad situation worse, especially in Russia, provoking the standardbearer of Orthodoxy to impose still harsher measures on Ukrainian or Polish Catholics, or even to mandate a schism. As a result, the pontiffs of the day confined themselves to offering comfort to the Poles in affliction and urging their rulers to show magnanimity, persuaded that any more assertive course would only invite retribution and endanger higher priorities to no purpose.

For their part, the Polish bishops as a body gradually fell into line with this strategy over the decades, both out of duty and inclination. Following the lead of Rome, the predominantly aristocratic and conservative hierarchs of the later nineteenth century by and large kept their distance from the

national movement, having been systematically vetted for caution and acceptability to Vienna, Berlin, or Petersburg. Drawn from lower social strata, more attuned to the mood of their parishioners, and less burdened by visibility, the weight of responsibility, and pressure to conform, lesser clergy participated in political action far more frequently, but often in opposition to the recommendations of their superiors. It was both characteristic and ironic that the most celebrated Polish clerical martyr of the day, Archbishop Mieczysław Halka Ledóchowski of Gniezno-Poznań, had been a loyal subject of the German Kaiser who had discouraged his priests against identification with the Polish cause only to run afoul of the persecutions of the *Kulturkampf*.

While shying away from dabbling overtly in politics or endorsing separatist aspirations, the Polish Church in no way meant to default its obligation to the nation, according to its lights. Indeed, ecclesiastical life in the former Poland was so saturated in the Polish question in all its various forms that it scarcely had any capacity to absorb the debates over modernism and the social issue that gripped the Church elsewhere in Europe. In many ways, the approach of the Polish Church matched that of the advocates of “Organic Work”: to better the lot of Poles by quotidian, legal efforts within the given political framework, assigning greater value to the defense of culture than the dream of liberation. At bottom, the Church best contributed to resistance against the foreign yoke not by any bold or conscious action, but simply by being itself, its very existence underscoring and reinforcing the traits of Polish identity that the German and Russian assimilationists had tried to obliterate. In so doing, the Church indeed donated vital service to the eventual restoration of an independent Poland, but did so almost by accident and even in spite of the counsel of its most prominent and authoritative spokesmen to the contrary, so that it might be extolled as a national paragon or censured as a collaborationist element with equal ease, according to taste.

At any rate, the rising generation of Polish political activists that came to the fore at the turn of the century, espousing novel doctrines and bolder agendas, came to regard the Church with attitudes ranging from reserve to outright disdain. The Polish intelligentsia, the traditional custodians of national values who supplied the ideas and leaders of the new movements, had drunk deeply from the same wells of skepticism and anticlericalism then fashionable among their counterparts in other Catholic lands. To the Left, the Roman Church signified reaction, obscurantism, and bigotry, the

synthesis of all they despised and wished to change, although the moderate socialists who sought self-rule as well as social transformation tempered their hostility toward the cloth out of respect for the centrality of Catholicism in Polish life. While the peasantry constituted the bedrock of the Catholic following among Poles, the chieftains of the budding agrarian parties had learned their catechisms instead from the age-old undercurrent of rustic grumbling about the village priest as the freeloading martinet of the countryside.

Of the modern orientations, the National Democracy, the standard bearer of the patriotic right, maintained the most complex and ambivalent relationship with the Church. Taking its cue from its preeminent theorist and spokesman, Roman Dmowski, the *Endecja* offered a program of integral nationalism, social conservatism, and lack of sympathy for Jews and other minorities residing in Polish territories. Much of the National Democratic platform appealed to Catholic sentiment. The party recognized the Church as a pillar of the social order and by its nature tended to advocate the supremacy of Catholic Poles over peoples of other faiths, and its opposition to socialism nicely coincided with the views of the clergy and many of the faithful. However, much about the philosophical underpinnings of National Democracy contradicted Church teaching, and neither the movement nor its champion made a comfortable fit with Roman belief and ethos. As a disciple of positivist materialism, Dmowski denied the supernatural essence of the Church and remained outside its fold until late in life. Above all, his enshrinement of the nation as the highest good and paramount object of devotion, and his insistence that national issues lay “outside the realm of Christian ethics,” baldly flouted fundamental tenets of Catholic dogma.¹⁰ Although *Endecja* had gradually toned down the blatant anticlericalism of its formative days, it still took a purely instrumental approach to Catholicism, embracing it as a useful political ally rather than for any intrinsic value. In the eyes of the Church, then, National Democracy posed a dilemma: it was often right, but for all the wrong reasons, a virtual Polish twin of the *Action Française* of Charles Maurras, which for decades walked a thin line between papal applause and condemnation. Despite these ambiguities, many clergy and laymen joined or promoted National Democracy as the most promising political haven for Polish Catholics, and more than a few hierarchs looked upon *Endecja* with a kindly eye.

When the First World War erupted in Europe in 1914, splitting the ranks of the partitioning emperors, the separate branches of the Polish Church re-

sponded according to established form, attempting to carry off the difficult trick of balancing respect for the existing political order with the call of duty to the divided nation. As the guns commenced firing, few Poles foresaw independence as an outcome of the fighting, and of those, fewer wore the collar. In addition, at the time the situation of the Church in all three zones of former Poland seemed more satisfactory than ever in long memory: Austria was Austria, Catholic and unexacting; the severity of German administration had eased perceptibly of late; and even in Russia the ukase of toleration of 1905 had permitted the resumption of something resembling normal ecclesiastical operation. Just as clerics in all lands rallied to the flag at the opening of hostilities, Polish Catholic leaders warily followed suit, issuing proclamations of loyalty to respective king and country in exchange for the vague promises of their rulers that the Poles would share the fruits of victory. Loyalism appeared most plausible in Austria-Hungary, where Polish ecclesiastics could embrace it with honest conviction; in August 1914 the archbishop of Lwów, and future saint, Józef Bilczewski, pronounced a blessing on the arms of the Dual Monarchy, a Catholic realm that had “allowed us to be Poles.”¹¹ Already in the opening phase of the conflict, some Galician clergy thought in terms of an Austrian triumph that might reunify the Polish lands under the mild Habsburg scepter. In the German and Russian districts, on the other hand, unhappy experience had taught Polish churchmen to expect little from their monarchs and to lie low, and for the most part they restricted their commentaries on the war at this early date to safe, bromidic prayers for its speedy and successful conclusion.

In reacting to the outbreak of the European conflict in a tentative and equivocal manner, the Polish clergy matched the example set by their superiors at the seat of Church government. Few topics in the modern history of the papacy have generated so much heat as the wartime policy of Benedict XV, the former cardinal-archbishop Giacomo Della Chiesa of Bologna who took the tiara in September 1914, on the same day Russian troops captured Galician Lwów and three days before the Battle of the Marne. Throughout the next four years the pope issued urgent appeals for an immediate end to the fighting as a savage and pointless folly—a “horrible butchery,” he called it, the “suicide of civilized Europe”—and assured the world of the fatherly disinterest of the vicar of Christ. This stance made worldly as well as moral sense for a church that preached nonviolence, claimed universal jurisdiction, and harbored profoundly cautious political instincts; content with the antebellum European balance, the Vatican feared the consequences of its

overthrow by the decisive victory of either coalition.¹² Still, suspicion prevailed at the time, and lingers to this day, that Benedict's statements of evenhandedness thinly masked his true preference for Germany and Austria. The case for papal partiality is often crudely put, and evidence to the contrary may be adduced. Striving to act as mediator, Benedict scrupulously avoided endorsement of either side or its aims, to the dissatisfaction of all parties: Germans complained of him as the *Franzosenpapst* just as the French maligned him as the "Boche pope." Nevertheless, the Central Powers cardinals had voted as a bloc for his election at the conclave of 1914, backing him as the candidate most likely to show sympathy for the cause of their governments in the great struggle just begun.¹³ For that matter, any pope would have had ample reason to look askance at an alliance consisting of Orthodox Russia, anticlerical France, and Protestant England, the dominator of Ireland, with the subsequent addition of usurpatory Italy to boot. Moreover, the Vatican regarded Austria-Hungary as the only reliably Catholic power in Europe and lost little sleep over Germany with the "war for culture" long over. All in all, the Apostolic See had stronger grounds on principle to favor one side over the other than nearly all the combatants themselves, and most observers of the time simply took for granted that the neutrality of Pope Della Chiesa amounted to a neutrality for Vienna and Berlin.

Because in the end Poland regained independence under the banner of the Allies, the pope's presumed tilt toward their opponents, and particularly his barely disguised protectiveness toward Austria-Hungary, are sometimes assumed to explain his supposed tardiness to back the restoration of Polish statehood. At best this qualifies as an ahistorical half truth that obscures the fact that many contemporaries could consider the Central Powers as the more likely liberators of Poland with good reason, and regard the welfare of the Poles and the Habsburgs as not only compatible but inextricably linked. If nothing else, the Holy See could not have deemed the westward expansion of the Russian sphere of influence—the natural outcome of the victory of the Entente in its original constellation—as anything but a catastrophe for the Poles and other central European Catholics. In fact, one of the founding premises of Vatican wartime diplomacy concerning the region was precisely the calculation that what was good for Russia was bad for Poland.¹⁴

At any rate, the powers paid little attention to the fate of Poland in the early stages of the war, nor did the Curia force the matter, but by the time

the conflict entered its first spring, Benedict decided to drop a none-too-subtle hint that the peace to come should alter the status of the Polish lands. After the bishop of Kraków, Prince Adam Stefan Sapieha, organized a campaign to carry out charitable and relief work in all three zones of partition, the Vatican bestowed official blessings on his initiative in April 1915; what is more, the letter employed the occasion to convey papal greetings to “*Polonia tutta intera*,” Poland as a whole. Furthermore, from that point Rome began to address messages and instructions to the Polish episcopate as a united, separate entity. Later that November, Catholics throughout the world issued prayers for Poland at Sunday mass at papal behest. While these small gestures hardly resembled a clarion call for the reconstitution of the quondam republic, they still plainly implied the artificiality of its division and suggested the readiness of the pope to see the topic of Poland placed more prominently on the international agenda.¹⁵

The pope got his way, for although belligerents of all stripes routinely ignored the recommendations of the Vatican after making a show of a respectful hearing, as the war protracted and intensified, the Polish question inevitably returned to center stage. The ultimate, improbable result was the restoration of Polish independence for two decades, and much of what occupies the pages to come stems from the striking fact that of the two figures who emerged during the war years to become the great rival protagonists of the history of the proverbially Catholic nation of Poland in the first half of the twentieth century, neither could have been described as a Catholic in particularly good standing, and neither bothered much to pretend otherwise. In most respects, Roman Dmowski (b. 1864), the standardbearer of National Democracy, and his counterpart, the erstwhile socialist Józef Piłsudski (b. 1867), were as opposite as north and south, unlike in personality as well as program. Icy and theoretical, Dmowski envisaged a national Poland that excluded, assimilated, or disfranchised minority peoples to the extent possible, while the more colorful Piłsudski upheld the old “Jagiellonian” ideal of the polyglot and tolerant *Respublica*. Regarding Germany as the primary enemy of Poles, Dmowski waged a diplomatic campaign from abroad to link Polish fortunes with the Entente, viewing the unification of Poland under Russian protection as a decisive step toward selfrule. On the other hand, Piłsudski led his own Polish legions into battle against Russia in conjunction with the Central Powers, apparently in prophetic anticipation of an eventual debacle of all three partitioners that would permit the creation of a fully independent Poland. However, these two present and future

antagonists agreed in their secular conception of politics: neither appealed to religious conviction or tradition to win adherents to his cause, or promised any special role for the Church in the Poland he sought to fashion.¹⁶

Had the guardians of Polish catholicity known that no one would exert so much influence on the politics of reborn Poland as Józef Piłsudski, or more affect the relationship of church and state, few would have relished the prospect. A mixture of equal parts genius, magnetism, and eccentricity, Piłsudski maintained an affiliation with Catholicism that was inconstant and peculiar, to say the least. Raised in the faith, he converted superficially to the Evangelical Augsburg confession in 1899 to circumvent Russian restrictions against political activity by Catholics and, incidentally, to wed a divorcée; by the time he returned to Rome in 1916, he had formed another liaison that produced a child well before its legitimation by marriage upon the death of his estranged spouse. Aside from Piłsudski's personal meanderings from the straight and narrow, many Catholics mistrusted him for the company he kept. His socialist pedigree and growing stature as the main hope of the Polish Left made him the natural favorite of those elements in society most inclined to anticlericalism and skepticism, a fact underscored by the conspicuous irreligiosity of his inner circle of fiercely loyal associates, veteran comrades of his conspiratorial and legionary days who made careers as retainers of the man they revered as their commandant. Yet despite his nonchalance, the scandal of his private life, and the indevotion of his entourage, Piłsudski never shook off a lifelong sentimental attachment to the traditional Marian piety of his native Lithuania. "I, an old socialist," he confided to a colleague in 1912, "when I have an important decision to make, I pray first to the Holy Mother of Ostrabrama," and on journeys he carried a medallion of this famous Virgin of Vilna.¹⁷ More than once Piłsudski inspired witticisms along the lines of the timeworn tale of the man who professes that there is no God, and that Our Lady is surely His mother.¹⁸

While most Polish churchmen, true to established form, continued to shy away from identification with either of the two strategies for independence, those who did plainly regarded Dmowski and his line as the more palatable alternative. Very few ecclesiastics expressed solidarity with Piłsudski and his legions; many more rejected him as a radical who consorted with forces inimical to the Church. Sermons reviled Piłsudski as a common bandit, and the combative Bishop Sapieha of Kraków, linking two staple priestly bugbears, accused him of wishing to construct "a socialist and Jew-

ish Poland.”¹⁹ On the other hand, Dmowski and his nationalist party attracted considerable clerical support. The two most prominent Polish hierarchs of Austrian Galicia, Sapieha and Archbishop Teodorowicz, were both staunch proponents of the *Endecja*, although they stopped short of backing its wager on the Entente, the enemy of the Habsburg kingdom.

The crucial weakness of the National Democratic plan lay in its reliance on a Russian victory on the eastern front, where the Central Powers seized the initiative in short order. By 1915, nearly all the Polish territories had fallen into German and Austrian hands, and the Vatican showed no signs of unease at this development or its implications for the destiny of the Poles. In June 1916 the British Catholic writer Hilaire Belloc obtained an audience with Benedict XV and used the occasion to deliver an impassioned plea for the reconstruction of Poland—“that is the key after the war.” The English pilgrim based his argument on the patriotic assumption that the Allies would prevail; the pope parried, “But do you think they will, Mr. Belloc?”²⁰ In fact, by that time the Vatican had settled on the advantages of an “Austro-Polish” approach, foreseeing the creation of a Polish kingdom connected to the Habsburg monarchy by personal rule, much in the manner of dualist Hungary. Such notions appealed especially to Fr. Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, the Polish Galician aristocrat who became general superior of the Society of Jesus in 1915. Routinely described as the last of the formidable Jesuit commanders of the old school, Ledóchowski had a knack for gaining the ear of his pontiffs, and he acted as the leader of a small but active “Polish lobby” within the Vatican during the war and thereafter exerted no little influence on the shaping of curial policy toward his native land over the next quarter century.²¹ A Poland under Habsburg tutelage also seemed the best solution to Pope Della Chiesa and his secretary of state, Pietro Cardinal Gasparri, a bluff canon lawyer who impressed many as a living confirmation of the stereotype of slippery Italian diplomacy.²² Making the rounds of the Vatican in February 1916 to sound out Benedict and his lieutenants, Dmowski found no takers for his Allied strategy. While the pope confined himself to vague assurances of his paternal solicitude, Gasparri was blunt, asking the Pole the scolding, incredulous question “Why are you going with Russia?. . . You truly believe that a united Poland will be contented under the scepter of the Russian monarch?” When Dmowski spoke of full Polish independence, Gasparri broke into laughter and protested that the idea was no more than “a dream, an impossible goal! . . . Your future is with Austria.”²³

Although Gasparri had failed to take into account the steady relegation of Austria-Hungary to the status of a satellite of Germany, his prediction appeared borne out the following November when Berlin and Vienna announced the creation of a nebulous Polish kingdom carved out of districts captured from Russia. Fanfare notwithstanding, the enterprise amounted to scarcely more than a glorified garrison of the Central Powers, and it drew a skeptical initial response from Rome and the Polish hierarchy. The scheme failed to satisfy Gasparri on the grounds that it granted the Hohenzollerns, not the Habsburgs, a de facto trusteeship over a still-partitioned Poland, and even though many of the Polish clergy of the new “kingdom” inwardly welcomed the Germans and Austrians as liberators of the devout from the more onerous yoke of Petersburg, they thought better of saying so, hedging their bets against a possible Russian recovery.²⁴ Furthermore, this rump state fell far short of the ideal of national reunification. For his part, Bishop Sapieha pointedly refused requests to have the *Te Deum* sung in honor of the creation of a “Poland” that implausibly excluded his Diocese of Kraków, the queen of Polish cities.²⁵ Nor had the Polish Church forgotten its decades of persecution at the hands of Germany, the primary sponsor of the initiative. To overcome this legacy of ill will, German policy during wartime had made a calculated appeal to Polish Catholics in hopes of securing their loyalty. In the opening weeks of the conflict Berlin hurriedly had withdrawn its objections to the nomination of Edward Likowski to fill the long-vacant archbishopric of Gniezno-Poznań, the traditional primatial see of Poland, and then followed this opening concession with a consistent pattern of scrupulous treatment of the Church in its own Polish provinces and those wrested from Russia. Despite these encouraging signs, Likowski’s successor, Archbishop Edmund Dalbor, did no more than to extend public but pro forma gratitude to the German Kaiser upon the creation of his puppet Poland.

In the oracular custom of its diplomacy, the Vatican never made an unequivocal statement of its Polish policy during the war, despite all manner of hints of the pope’s kind regard for that loyally Catholic nation. Even so, by its own reckoning Rome thought it had made its stance clear enough and in later years showed little patience with Polish critics who contended otherwise. In 1921, stung by one too many accusations of his wartime indifference to the Polish cause, Benedict hotly objected that “only the Apostolic See” had declared plainly “that Poland needed full and complete freedom, that is to say independence.”²⁶ Strictly speaking, this was an exag-

generation born of pique; still, he legitimately might have claimed credit as the first head of state to call publicly for an authentic, if ill-defined, Polish self-rule that went beyond the tentative proposals of belligerents that would have tethered the Poles fast to Russia or the Germanic powers. Benedict's definitive statement on the war, his famous "Peace Note" of August 1, 1917, among other points urged the world to apply the principles of "equity and justice" to the resolution of the Polish question. On its face, this pontification could mean anything, or nothing, but those attuned to the delphic ways of Rome construed it to suggest the fashioning of a fully united Poland with at least autonomous standing. The pope received little recognition or applause for his recommendation. Although his initiative preceded Wilson's corresponding reference to Poland in his Fourteen Points by several months, it was more vaguely framed and gingerly worded than the American document and evoked no more than a tepid reaction from Polish opinion. It made such a poor impression on the Poles of Galicia that the bishops of the region quietly undertook efforts in damage control to persuade their flock that the pope had not turned his back on them.²⁷

Meanwhile, the Church gradually shed many of its hesitations regarding the kingdom of Poland the Central Powers had patched together. For all its limitations, the protectorate of the Germanic emperors seemed an irrevocable step toward eventual Polish sovereignty, and at any rate it plainly surpassed any offer the Allies had made the Poles so far. More to the point, as Sapieha noted, so long as London and Paris counted on Russia, the Entente would not dare to raise the bid on the Polish card.²⁸ Even so, a full year elapsed before the Polish Church and the Vatican decided to put their money on the German-Austrian horse, not without misgivings, and only after the firm nudge given them in that direction by the onset of revolution in Russia. In autumn of 1917, Berlin got around to forming a government for its satellite Poland, and invited the archbishop of Warsaw, Aleksander Kakowski, to lend the authority of the Church by serving as one of three members of the Regency Council it established as the nominal ruling authority of its fiefdom. The gesture inspired mutual distaste, for Kakowski bore no love for the Germans, and they knew it. Still, the collapse of the tsardom the previous March and the subsequent advent of Bolshevism had sufficed to convince even the invincibly circumspect Kakowski that the perils of inaction outweighed those of decision: Russia looked finished, and the promised kingdom under German sponsorship appeared to him and the predominantly conservative and monarchist Polish clergy as the only possible

shelter against Russian disorder, social upheaval, and the rise of republican sentiment among their own people. Shortly before the Bolshevik coup in Russia, having first obtained permission from the pope, Kakowski agreed to enter the Regency Council—against his will, so he privately insisted, and out of a sense of sacrificial duty to his nation and Church.²⁹ Once in office, Kakowski quickly showed that he had not erred in choosing a priestly vocation instead of politics, and his earnest but inept struggles to manage his new civic chores drove his Vatican superiors to distraction.³⁰

Once having made up its mind, the Church at home and abroad showed an increasing commitment to the Polish kingdom cobbled up by the German and Austrian emperors. In January 1918 the pope pronounced a blessing on the Regency Council, whose composition and policies reflected a strongly clerical streak. Polish clergymen made up a substantial share of the administrative apparatus of the protectorate, and its foreign ministry urged the speedy conclusion of a concordat.³¹ Responding to the appeal of the Polish bishops, Benedict also dispatched to the embryonic state an apostolic visitor, his house librarian, who would become the next pope within months of returning to Italy.

In any case, the dynamic course of the last year of the war nullified all previous calculations regarding Poland, as the collapse of the Central Powers coupled with the widening revolution in Russia produced Polish independence under the banner of the victorious Allies. The addition of the United States to its ranks permitted the Entente to gain a decisive advantage, while the subtraction of Bolshevik Petrograd released the invigorated coalition from the need to cater to Russian sensibilities concerning Poland and enabled it to outbid Berlin and Vienna for the allegiance of the subject peoples of the heart of Europe. Given their innate caution, both Rome and the Polish Church struggled to keep up with the dizzying rush of events, and neither saw the Allied triumph coming until it was practically upon them. Some Polish hierarchs remained loyal to the old regime virtually to its last gasp, while on the other extreme, Archbishop Teodorowicz addressed the Austrian parliament as early as October 1917 to demand the liberation of Poland.³² Until very late in the game, however, the Vatican and most of the Polish bishops continued to pin their hopes on the Austro-Polish conception of a reconstituted Poland under nominal sovereignty of the Habsburgs, and Gasparri was still defending the merits of the project well into the autumn of 1918.³³ By October, however, as the imminent breakdown of the Central Powers approached, Catholic spokesmen at last sensed the drift of things and took up the cry for the unconditional restoration of the

Rzeczpospolita. As the unthinkable became the inevitable, and a renewed Poland emerged from the ruins of the shattered empires, the Church lent its institutional imprimatur to full Polish independence. The bishops of Russian Poland went on record in favor of ecclesiastical and political reunification with the more westerly Polish provinces. In mid-month, Pope Benedict announced to the Polish faithful his joy that “at last the dawn of the resurrection of Poland has broken,” adding his “most ardent prayer” that the emancipated country might soon “resume her career as a civilizing and Christian force.”³⁴ On November 1, on the feast of All Saints, which was dear to Polish Catholic culture, the bishops of Galicia called on all churches to celebrate the national rebirth by singing the *Te Deum* followed by “*Boże coś Polskę*.”³⁵

The implosion of the Central Powers also brought down their satellite Poland with them and put the faltering and now abruptly vestigial Regency Council out of its misery. Over the preceding weeks, mounting enthusiasm for liberation had turned Polish opinion decisively against the occupation regime as well as the harried regent, Archbishop Kakowski, its most prominent figurehead. Only too glad to be rid of his unwanted political burdens, the exhausted prelate made haste to dissolve what remained of his government. In the anarchic last days of the war, Kakowski coaxed the Regency Council into abdication and acquiescence in the transfer of power as interim dictator to none other than Józef Piłsudski, the bane of the clergy, persuaded that the renegade socialist might best supply the strong leadership that would shield the infant state from the greater dangers of chaos.³⁶

With independence an accomplished fact, the Polish Church promptly struck a newly assertive and confident note, hurrying to identify itself with the revived republic and fill the void of leadership left by the German debacle while the new government in Warsaw attempted to gain its footing. This increased ecclesiastical visibility during the first heady weeks of statehood had various motives: genuine enthusiasm for the national deliverance; the need of the Church to burnish its patriotic credentials and dispel the impression that it had cast its lot with the Central Powers; above all the natural prestige of the cloth, which introduced an element of familiarity and stability into the prevalent atmosphere of civic confusion. No doubt aware of their vulnerability to criticism as compromised holdovers from the partition era, Archbishops Dalbor and Kakowski hastened to scold Berlin for having dealt with the Poles in bad faith, demanding the speedy evacuation of the remaining German occupation forces.³⁷ As they withdrew, hundreds of priests assisted in the reorganization of former German Poland,

most conspicuously the young Fr. Stanisław Adamski, who would become one of the more notable cleric-politicians of the Second Republic and survive to endure the persecutions of the Polish People's Republic. In Galicia, many Poles looked to the imperious figure of Bishop Sapieha of Kraków as the sole figure of recognizable authority amid the shambles of the defunct Habsburg monarchy.³⁸

For its part, the papal state welcomed the reappearance of Poland on the map of Europe with unfeigned satisfaction as one of the few redeeming features of an otherwise deplorable postwar continental order. From its own distinctive vantage point, the Vatican would have preferred to see the fighting end with Russia defeated and the Central Powers intact; instead, in Roman eyes the war had raged on to the death, demolished the crucial elements of European stability, and purchased the downfall of the Orthodox colossus—in itself an agreeable development—at the high cost of unleashing Bolshevism, opening the gates to atheistic revolution. As for the victorious Allies, so the analysis continued, their triumph cemented the hegemony of a liberal and anticlerical worldview inherently hostile to the Church, a conviction hardened by the unceremonious exclusion of the Holy See from the peace councils of Paris. Within this unpromising constellation of powers, Warsaw appeared as likely a friend as the popes were going to find, the natural successor to the Habsburg Empire as the mainstay of Catholicism in Central Europe. In fact, the Curia had accepted the demise of the Dual Monarchy with a brisk absence of fuss or sentimentality. Even before Austria-Hungary had breathed its last, Benedict ordered his nuncio in Vienna to leave the deathbed and shift his attention to cultivating good contacts with the insurgent nationalities of the dying kingdom, “which, at the present hour, are reconstituting themselves as independent states.”³⁹ Of these, the Poles seemed the most suitable candidates to inherit the mantle of the Habsburgs. Aside from his genuine personal warmth for a people so axiomatically devout, Pope Della Chiesa trusted that the erection of a Catholic Poland on the western flank of Russia might advance the interests of the faith and serve as a partial remedy for the deranged condition of Europe. The Apostolic See bestowed formal recognition upon the country in March 1919, lauding it in terms calculated to suggest parental affection for a favored child.

More than most newborns, Poland went through considerable growing pains before attaining its final dimensions. Over the course of three turbulent years, a combination of uprising, plebiscite, and Allied diplomatic

TABLE I.I.
Population of Poland by religion and nationality, 1921

<i>Religion</i>			<i>Nationality</i>		
	Population (in millions)	Percent		Population (in millions)	Percent
Roman Catholic	17.4	63.8	Polish	18.8	69.2
Greek Catholic	3.0	11.2	Ukrainian	3.9	14.3
Orthodox	2.8	10.5	Jewish	2.1	7.8
Jewish	2.8	10.5	Belorussian	1.1	3.9
Protestant	1.0	3.8	German	1.1	3.9
Other	0.1	0.2	Other	0.2	0.9

Source: Figures from official Polish census of 1921.

fiat had drawn frontiers with Germany and Czechoslovakia that only partially fulfilled Polish objectives and left Berlin immovably unreconciled. Toward the east, Polish arms secured a broad swath of the Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian *kresy*, the marchlands historically linked with the Rzeczpospolita where Poles made up a minority clustered within such ancient citadels of Polish culture as Vilna and Lwów, standing amid a hinterland of different ethnic complexion. By 1921, these exertions had defined the extent of the population and territory of the Second Republic and left it a country of medium size with most of its boundaries in dispute, ominously squeezed between Germany and the Soviet Union, hostile and irredentist great powers in sulky temporary eclipse. The new Poland emerged as a hybrid polity, recognizably Polish and Roman Catholic at its core yet not quite an incontestably national state of compact religious makeup. The government reported this fact with reasonable frankness in its first census, issued in 1921 (see table I.I).

While the official figures must be taken with a dose of salt—no doubt the ethnicity count was fudged somewhat to Polish advantage, and the confessional table misleads by omitting unbelievers—they correspond roughly with the estimates of other contemporary surveys⁴⁰ and may be trusted sufficiently to yield several general conclusions of importance to the interplay of religion and politics in the Second Republic.

In the first place, three of every four Polish subjects proclaimed themselves in communion with Rome in some fashion, the main body of Latin Catholics—the “real” Catholics, in the minds of many—supplemented by some three million adherents of two Eastern rites. Of these, the handful of Armenian Catholics, the fold of Archbishop Teodorowicz, scarcely dented the statistical ledgers. A vestige of the polyglot *Respublica* of old, these five thousand souls clustered in the Lwów region had become thoroughly polonized over time and felt strong kinship with their Latin brethren. In almost every respect, the Ukrainian Greek Catholics of formerly Austrian eastern Galicia, the second-largest religious congregation in the land, represented a different case altogether. Founded by the Union of Brest in 1596 as a means to convert the Orthodox of the *kresy*, the “Uniate” Church incorporated much of the trappings and tradition of the east, including its Church Slavonic liturgy and married parish clergy, while acknowledging the supremacy of the pope. Despised as apostates by the Orthodox and subjected to tsarist repression over the centuries, commonly patronized as religious inferiors and mistrusted as Ukrainian separatists by the Latin Poles, the Greek Catholics retained a proud sense of their unique ecumenical mission and regarded their Polish counterparts with a prickly wariness amply repaid by their western half brothers in Christ.

Moreover, confessional affiliation in reconstituted Poland closely followed lines of ethnicity, and dissent from the Roman Catholic religious norm qualified as one of the most reliable indicators of national minority status. So, then, Germans were mainly Protestants of Lutheran persuasion, and vice versa; Belorussians were Orthodox; Ukrainians were solidly Greek Catholic in Galicia and heavily Orthodox in the provinces once Russian, where official pressure had forced them to renounce Uniatism; and Jews were Jews, the largest Jewry in the world and the only significant body of non-Christians in the country, for the most part not assimilated into Polish culture and destined to pose a singularly delicate and difficult challenge of coexistence both for the secular and sacred authorities of interwar Poland. As a corollary, religious identity prompted inevitable and sometimes accurate inferences concerning political loyalty to the Polish state, or its lack. Protestant Poles labored mightily to combat the impression that their membership in a denomination so closely associated with Germanic persecution was somehow outlandish and unpatriotic. In the east, Orthodoxy inescapably carried the taint of *Russophilia*, while the Greek Catholic sect functioned virtually as a national church of west Ukraine.

Looked at from the other angle, the demographic arithmetic also demonstrated that, for practical purposes, the old saw was true, after all: that in Poland, indeed, the Poles were Catholic, and the Catholics—at any rate, the Roman Catholics—were Poles. Exceptions to both generalizations could be found easily enough. Measurable fragments of the Polish nation adhered to Protestant groups or to Orthodoxy or, more often, to Judaism as “Poles of Mosaic faith.” By the same token, national minorities accounted for about two hundred thousand of the western Catholics of the country, Germans making up a little more than half the total, with the remnant filled out by the small but overwhelmingly Roman contingent of Lithuanians plus odds and ends of the Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Czech populace. These were the anomalies that proved the rule. None of this changed the blunt facts that all but 2 percent of the 17.4 million Latin Catholics resident in Poland were Poles, and that 91 percent of Poles declared themselves Catholics. In other words, like many stereotypes, the doctrine of *polak-katolik* and the related idea of Catholicism as the Polish national religion contained a semblance of validity, quite enough to satisfy those inclined to defend such propositions.

Rooted in the soil of a historically agrarian society, Polish Catholicism exhibited many of the attributes of its rural origins and upbringing. The peasant masses supplied the base of its constituency and gave their church its definitive earthy qualities: sturdy if unlettered piety, an emphasis on outward devotion, a conspicuous Marian streak, and—so said its critics—a blinkered, bigoted, and stultifying provinciality. Aside from filling the pews of the churches, the folk of the countryside peopled its sanctuaries as well, furnishing the bulk of the more than ten thousand clergy and religious. Hewing to timeworn patterns, nearly half of the episcopate sprang from the nobility or landed gentry, while parishes found their priests among the sons of the peasantry. With greater advantages of birth, and usually the possessors of higher education, the bishops as a group reflected the values and abilities of the elite. Whether well born or plebeian, the typical Polish cleric did not enjoy a high reputation. He and his colleagues were frequently described as wanting in aptitude and formation, seldom rising above the prejudices and narrow horizons of their rustic background; collectively, they remained “in knowledge mediocre: in literary and scholarly accomplishment worse than mediocre,” according to Ermenegildo Pellegrinetti, Nuncio Ratti’s chargé d’affaires, betraying the wearied air of one accustomed to dealing with them.⁴¹ What Polish churchmen lacked in education and polish, they made up in zeal and readiness to mix in politics, a trait carried over from the partition

era, when the priest acted as the grassroots spokesman for Poles against the alien regime. Emerging into the changed conditions of independence, the Catholic clergy retained its instinct for excitable, sometimes crude nationalism and took for granted its right and duty to enter the civic fray in word and deed, rarely subtly, usually on behalf of the parties of the Right, and by no means always in line with the wishes of the Vatican. Such habits, reported Monsignor Pellegrinetti at the end of the Ratti mission in 1921, had caused the Warsaw nunciature no little anxiety and trouble, a diplomatic way of saying that they had cost his chief his job.⁴²

At the pinnacle of its hierarchy, the reassembled Polish Church had inherited a generation of leadership that has inspired few superlatives. Neither of the two archbishops from the German and Russian zones, Edmund Dalbor (b. 1869) and Aleksander Kakowski (b. 1862), owned a strong personality, and both bore the tarnish of unpopularity as relics from the days of national servitude, widely suspected of having kowtowed to foreign masters. Dalbor and Kakowski paid a dear price in public esteem for their grudging wartime bows toward Berlin, for in the light of the changed perspective that prevailed in Poland after 1918, they never entirely shed an undeserved reputation as lukewarm patriots, onetime lapdogs of the Germans insufficiently devoted to the ideal of complete independence. Although few Poles could match these prelates for patriotic convictions, in the glare of hindsight their cautious wartime approach to the Polish question was seen as halfhearted and unduly deferential toward the occupier. Indeed, when Pope Benedict promptly announced his intention to confer a cardinalate on the archbishop of Warsaw in recognition of the renewed sovereignty of his country, the Polish government grumbled mildly on the grounds that the honor might be construed as a reward for Kakowski's unhappy service in the German Regency Council, which in fact was precisely the idea; the pontiff relented only to the extent of simultaneously elevating Dalbor and Kakowski to the purple in 1919.⁴³ Dalbor assumed the status of primate, the president of the national episcopate, which historically accompanied his see of Gniezno-Poznań, but the post almost might have remained vacant for all the difference it made. Retiring and passive by nature, Dalbor had no taste or gift for politics, and his public demeanor was subdued to the point of invisibility. He ranks as one of the least memorable and least remembered of Polish primates. For his part, Kakowski also shunned the spotlight, but as the ordinary of the capital he could not evade notice so easily

as the all-but-faceless Dalbor. By and large, observers were unimpressed by what they saw. Contemporaries tended to describe Kakowski as a good-hearted mediocrity, bright enough, perhaps, but clumsy and erratic, distinguished above all by an invincible capacity for discretion and fencesitting. Kakowski was not cut out for politics, and knew it. His lackluster performance as wartime regent had won him nothing but trouble and opprobrium, and it is scarcely surprising that afterward he reverted to his habit of keeping his cards close to his vestments. No one knew for certain his inner partisan sympathies, but throughout his career he showed himself reliably able to get along with the authority of the day. Despite his reputation as a bumbler, the Holy See appreciated his loyalty to Rome and viewed him as its man within the hierarchy of Poland, but he carried no great influence in the country and seemed content to maintain an unobtrusive profile.⁴⁴

The reticence of the two cardinals magnified the importance of the Galician bishops, Sapieha of Kraków (b. 1867) and Teodorowicz of Lwów (b. 1864), who possessed in abundance the energy and decisiveness their nominal superiors so obviously lacked. Fast friends and allies of long standing, they shared an enthusiasm for the Dmowski *Endecja* and diligently worked in tandem to galvanize the Catholic episcopate in support of the nationalist Right. Although not yet an archbishop—he would not receive that designation until 1925—Sapieha stood out as the most naturally impressive figure within the Latin hierarchy, his innate talents enhanced by the prestige of his family name, one of the most illustrious in the rolls of Polish nobility. His lengthy custody of the historic royal cathedral on Kraków's Wawel Hill began before the First World War and did not end until after the Second, and in his later years he numbered among his protégés the young priest Karol Wojtyła. Fearless, headstrong, and irascible, imbued with aristocratic pride and arrogance, he commanded respect even from his numerous enemies. Teodorowicz was, to borrow the phrase of Evelyn Waugh, Sapieha carved by an Aztec, reproducing in coarser, exaggerated form the features of his patrician colleague. Sapieha was resolute, impatient, and combustible; Teodorowicz obstinate, rash, and combustion itself, a human volcano in constant eruption. He also exerted a strong sway over the bishop of Kraków, his junior in age and rank. Teodorowicz lived and breathed politics and intrigue, and his light load of pastoral duties as curate of Poland's few Armenian Catholics afforded him ample time to engage in his favorite pastimes, to the despair of the many who conceded his undeniable abilities but

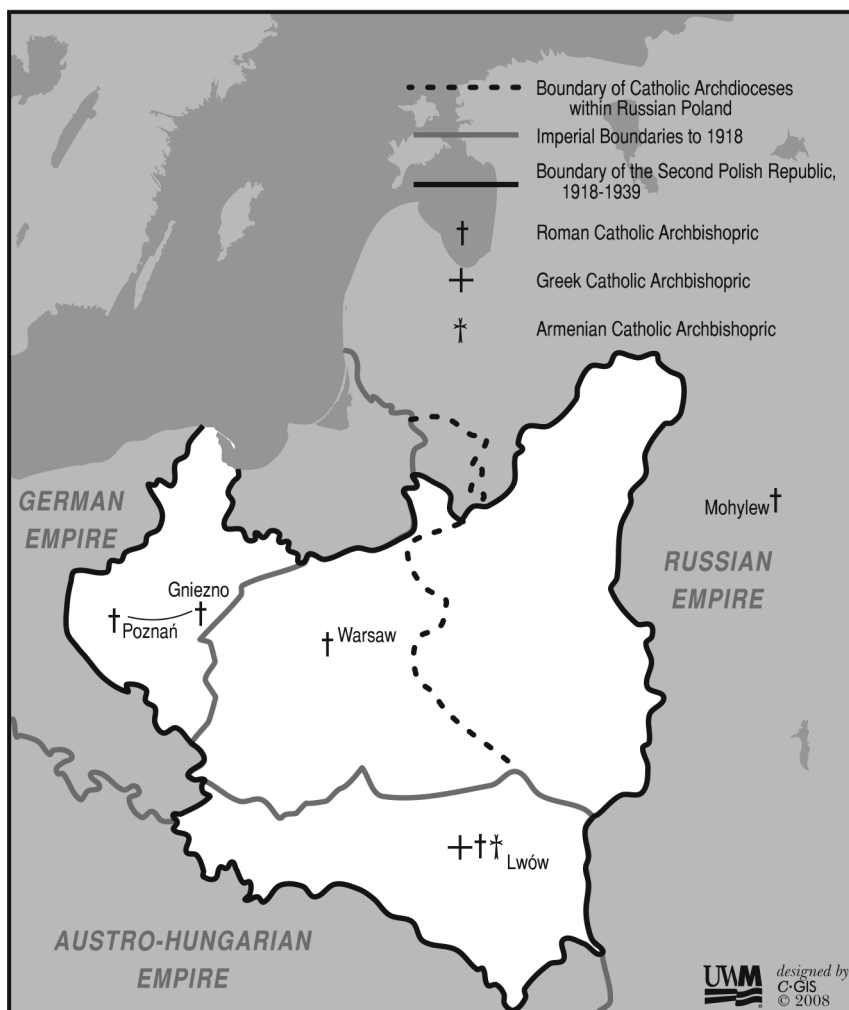
thought of him mainly as a reckless troublemaker who also brought out the cantankerous worst in Sapieha.⁴⁵ As time went on, the Vatican would make a point of warning newly appointed papal nuncios to Warsaw to watch their step around Teodorowicz, based on the unhappy experiences of their predecessors.⁴⁶

Apart from Sapieha, only one member of the Catholic hierarchy of reborn Poland bore the stamp of true greatness, and as fate would have it he was an outsider generally regarded by Poles as a national and religious enemy. If Andrei Sheptyts'kyi, the Greek Catholic metropolitan of Halicz-Lwów, was not "the most remarkable of living Slavs," as some contended, then he was at the least one of the most striking and fascinating figures of modern Christendom.⁴⁷ Born Roman Aleksander Maria Count Szeptycki in 1865, the son of Polish nobility of the Galician kresy and the grandson of the famed playwright Aleksander Fredro, he adopted Ukrainian identity and the Greek Catholic rite in adulthood, reversing the adage "*gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus*." Since 1900 the "Bishop of St. George," the head of the Uniates of Galicia, he tirelessly presented his church as a foundation for the reconciliation of western and eastern Christianity and did not discourage the opinion that his own personal metamorphosis incarnated the ecumenical spirit: "I am like St. Paul, who became . . . all things to all men so as to save all."⁴⁸ Physically imposing and full-bearded, Sheptyts'kyi possessed the visage and thundering moral certitude of an Old Testament prophet, and he fiercely guarded his Ukrainian and Greek Catholic flock against the pretensions of the Latin Poles. He had championed the cause of west Ukrainian independence at the end of the world war, and after Poland captured eastern Galicia by force of arms in 1919 he held himself aloof from the Polish episcopate and frequently challenged the government in Warsaw, acting virtually as the chaplain of a church and a people under foreign occupation. A complex blend of sweeping vision, iron will, and inexhaustible self-righteousness, Sheptyts'kyi had a genius for exasperating all the various rulers of his metropolitanate from the Habsburgs to Stalin and Hitler, and the Polish Second Republic would prove no exception.

Aside from the shortage of brilliance at its top, the Polish Church faced the same daunting task that challenged Poland in every facet of its existence: that of welding itself into a coherent whole out of the disjointed fragments of the partitioning empires. Superimposed upon the intersection of three national episcopates, the rebuilt country was bequeathed a hodgepodge of ecclesiastical structures and laws that had been designed to meet

the requirements of the obliterated prewar world and now made no sense. Diocesan boundaries no longer agreed with the radically altered state frontiers, stranding millions of Catholics on both sides of the Polish borders under the unwanted jurisdiction of suddenly “foreign” bishops, and leaving absurd disparities of territory and population in the residual organization of the Church on Polish soil. The confusion extended even to the residence of the primacy, claimed alike by Gniezno-Poznań on the grounds of tradition and by Warsaw by virtue of the status of its incumbent as primate of antebellum Russian Poland. This argument dragged on until 1925, debated by canon lawyers and historians, until the Vatican settled the matter by splitting the difference: both archbishops kept their primatial dignity, and Dalbor of Gniezno-Poznań retained his honorific title as primate of Poland, but without any real authority over Kakowski of Warsaw. However, no curial decree could so easily undo the legacy of twelve decades of tripartite separation that had produced significant disparities of ecclesiastical circumstances and culture in the various sectors of the Polish lands. Catholicism and the clergy enjoyed high prestige and influence in the former German and Russian zones for their role in the nationality wars of the previous century, but Berlin had not plundered the wealth or landholdings of the Church, while tsarist repression and expropriations had depleted the eastern dioceses. In political terms, western Poland was the heart of Endecja country, known as home to legions of rightist Catholic laymen and pugnacious priests like Fr. Adamski, battle-hardened in the forge of the Kulturkampf and the resistance against Germanification. Spared the lash of persecution, the Church in the Austrian south had changed the least since the partitions, its noble, conservative hierarchs reigning over an intact collection of extensive, though hardscrabble, Galician lands. Not even the passage of the twenty coming years of independence would suffice to complete the integration of the reunited branches of the Polish Church, or to efface entirely its acquired regional differences of custom and psychology.⁴⁹

The political transformation also thrust Polish Catholicism into legal limbo. In the absence of a concordat, what rules defined the relationship of Poland with the Holy See, or guaranteed the rights of the Church within the republic? Until Warsaw crafted its own constitution and laws, did the religious legislation of the old regimes remain in force in their respective jurisdictions, including the German and Russian statutes Catholics regarded as inimical and discriminatory? Or did the Church simply stand *extra legem*, hostage to the goodwill and arbitrary whim of each rotating cabinet and



MAP I. Diocesan organization of Poland, 1918–25. Map by Donna G. Genzmer, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Copyright © 2009 Board of Regents of University of Wisconsin System

every petty local functionary? Such uncertainties nagged at Catholic opinion, especially in light of the prominence of Piłsudskiites and the Left in the initial interwar governments.

While Poland might be *semper fidelis*, its Catholics saw reasons for worry on all sides. Already damaged by nineteenth-century confiscations,

the material condition of the Church had suffered further buffeting by wholesale wartime destruction of its buildings and properties. Perhaps most of the faithful and their clergy believed, with varying degrees of urgency and intonation, in the mounting threat posed by Communism, Freemasonry, and the Jews, possibly joined in unholy alliance. Others focused on corrosive shortcomings found within their own ranks. Thinkers fretted over a growing religious indifference among males and the embarrassing intellectual poverty of Polish Catholicism; from the pulpits, priests chastised their parishioners for a host of moral failings attributed to the degrading influence of foreign rule and the iniquities of modern life: drunkenness, petty dishonesty, impiety.⁵⁰ Some went so far as to dismiss the famed Polish devotion as little more than a national tic, a communal display of obligatory sanctimoniousness. When a Pole removed his hat when passing a church, sniffed one of the pope's men at the Warsaw nunciature, "it is not a sign of respect for the house of the Lord, but a way of saying: see, I am Polish."⁵¹

Still, the formidable list of troubles and burdens did not overshadow the greater sense of satisfaction that the deliverance of Poland, the unexpected prize of a terrible war, had fulfilled one of the fondest longings of the Catholic world, offering hope for an anxious age and proof of the workings of Providence in human history. As the new year 1920 dawned, Benedict XV fulfilled a promise made by his predecessor twice removed, sending to Warsaw a candle once set aside by Pius IX to await the return of a free Poland.⁵² To those who believed, faith and perseverance had won their reward, and God had redeemed his people out of bondage once again.