

FORUM

Europe, the Pope and the Holy Left Alliance in Poland

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Abstract: This article describes why the Polish government has pushed for an invocation to Christian traditions in the European Union Constitution. It is argued that this is a rather 'unfortunate' outcome of the political alliance between the Catholic Church and the Polish left, especially between President Aleksander Kwaśniewski and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). This alliance allowed the SLD to legitimize their rule in the post-socialist Poland, and it was a result of a political competition between them and the post-Solidarność elites. As a result, John Paul II became the central integrative metaphor for the Polish society at large, which brought back in the marginalized as well as allowed the transition establishment to win the EU accession referendum in 2003. The article (which was written when Leszek Miller was still Prime Minister) demonstrates how this alliance crystallized and presents various elements of the cult of the Pope in Poland that followed. Finally, it argues that the worship of the Pope is not an example of nationalism, but of populism, understood not as a peripheral but as a central political force, and advocates for more research on the 'politics of emotions' at work in the centers and not in peripheries.

Keywords: Poland, post-socialism, Catholicism, legitimization, state, religion, John Paul II, European Union

"Poland is closer to Europe, and I am closer to God" – these were the words of John Paul II spoken upon his last year's birthday that ultimately soothed the last fierce Euro-skeptics just before the decisive EU accession referendum in Poland. They were certainly welcome, and perhaps even anticipated, by the political elite. But also by the rest of the 'transition establishment'; the phrase soon crowned the Pope's portrait on the cover of *Przekrój* – one of the four major weeklies (photo 1). A week later another weekly's cover (*Polityka*) featured Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, the leader of semi-integrist *Radio Maryja*, against a blue background haloed

with the yellow Euro-stars. The cover cited his sensational reaction to the Pope's declaration – that the EU is not hell after all, but only purgatory (photo 2). Thereby the last influential enemy of the accession was defeated. Yet, although this was certainly a moment of revelation for Rydzyk,¹ for Wojtyła his contention was a rather old sermon; already before the fall of communism he had been criticizing the libertarian, 'value-less' and 'relativist' West, supporting at the same time the European integration process, given it was based upon 'Christian fundamentals'. For Wojtyła, transforming Europe from a purgatory into a heaven was a project; the



PHOTO 1: I am closer to God, and Poland is closer to Europe. Courtesy Edipresse Polska.

Polish accession – its decisive moment. Once the ‘historical justice’ was made, the ‘unnatural’ Yaltan division of the Continent buried, then the underdeveloped Poland can be reunited with her native realm, but also the rotten Europe can reunite with its Christian tradition – alive and kicking only in Wojtyła’s homeland today.² In this sense, Poland is the Vatican’s Trojan horse of re-evangelization, and Poland’s joining Europe equals Christ’s reunion with God.

This is nothing new, but merely a reformulation of nineteenth-century Polish messianism, most explicitly formulated by Adam Mickiewicz in his *Forefathers’ eve*: Poland is the Christ of Europe and its (political) Second Coming will bring salvation to all nations. The years 1918, when Poland gained independence after centuries-long partitions, as well as 1989, when she threw off the ‘communist yoke’, were seen by various parties as materializations of the prophecy. But it seems that Wojtyła was not satisfied with the national glories, and that he sees himself not only as the official representative of Christ on



PHOTO 2: The purgatory of Father Rydzko. Courtesy SP Polityka.

Earth, but as the real One who will turn Polish messianism into a universal salvation (cf. Flores d’Arcais 1991). The cover of *Przekrój* makes this claim clear: his tiara was cut by the frame in such a way that it looked like a crown.³ His old, strained and deformed face suggests that he is indeed as close to God as never before, perhaps somehow on the other side already. But this was only one of the many photographs of the Pope deployed by the mass-media in these crucial weeks. Images from Wojtyła’s youth were constantly juxtaposed with ones such as this: the Pope in his sacred chair, his head bowing to the right and his palms resting on the chair arms, yet (due to the inert body sinking in the chair) somehow unnaturally high, on the level of his shoulders – precisely like any conventional representation of the crucified Jesus.⁴

The opening equation also invites a third possible (mis)reading: since Poland is Christ, and Wojtyła is Christ too, then Wojtyła must be Poland. And since Wojtyła is Poland, then Europe must be God. The cover of *Przekrój* argues the former – the Pope turns into a

king, only to admonish his compatriots not to miss the 'historic chance'. The cover of *Polityka* argues the latter – the enfant terrible of Polish Catholicism is beatified by the European Union. And this is indeed what the Polish elites wanted to hear. Wojtyła is closer to God, and this is somehow a sad thing. But at the same time we are closer to Europe, which is a good thing. His journey is almost over; everybody can infer this from the images of his old body. But this means that our journey is over too: 'transition' is coming to its end; we are reaching the final destination. Ladies and gentlemen, you may start loosening your seatbelts.

A note for the doubting Thomases: Karol Wojtyła is certainly the central metaphor of the Polish political life in the present time. But this is not because Poland is a backward country and Poles are simple-minded and superstitious folk. The Middle Ages can also be seen as fanatically pious, yet, as Sarah Beckwith (1993) shows, religious disputes then were not merely about the attributes of God. For example, the *Corpus Christi* was contested during late Middle Ages most fiercely by vernacular-writing town bourgeoisie who wanted to limit clergy's power by ending its monopoly over the Body of Christ, because this was their *raison d'être* in both symbolic and occupational sense.⁵ Similarly, there was nothing inevitable about the worship of the Pope. In fact, it is a relatively new phenomenon. Although Wojtyła's pontificate has always been attentively followed in his home country, it is only since 1997 that we can speak of a cult. This was the time when the Polish low-brow magazines started issuing special editions devoted to the 'Holy Father', and this was the time when Wojtyła starts appearing on the glossy magazine covers. But this is only the top of the glacier; roughly from this moment Pope-related commodities start being sold, statues erected, streets named, albums published, pilgrimage routes established, stories told and – last but not least – photographs ardently taken.⁶

In his analysis of the Pope imagery in the 'women's magazines', Jakub Świącki (2003), argues that before 1998 their Western editors

did not dare to exploit the issue of the Pope, assuming that in Poland one may speak of him only in an 'official (i.e. boring) or uplifting way'. The few articles that appeared till the late 1990s were mainly translations of Western (mostly German) texts describing an 'ordinary day' in the life of the Pope. In 1997, when the magazines were already well established, they reported on the Pope's visit, because it was a major event anyway. But, Świącki argues, readers exposed then a vivid interest in Wojtyła-related topics. And journalists learn fast – and develop a new way of talking about the Pope. Hence, the twentieth anniversary of his pontificate that came in 1998 served as a 'good excuse' and triggered the avalanche of popular worship. Henceforth, Wojtyła sits, together with Lady D, Mother Theresa and Ronaldo, in the tabloid celebrity gallery.

Świącki evokes another stunning fact: that before 1997, the last Wojtyła's pilgrimage to Poland took place in 1991; the 1995 visit was one-day-long and constituted a part of his pilgrimage to the Czech Republic. The recent intensity of his visits (1997, 1999 and 2002) has also contributed to the rise of his popularity – he concludes. But what contributed to the higher intensity of Wojtyła's visits? This is the central question that Świącki fails to see.⁷

In this essay I shall argue that the spontaneous eruption of worship indeed starts in 1997, but more as a result of political competition between the Polish right and left. Soon, it becomes a tool for a symbolic legitimization of the post-communists' comeback to power. It allowed the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), and especially the president Aleksander Kwaśniewski, to bury the 'fundamental' cleavage of the Polish society – the one between the post-communists (like the SLD) and post-anti-communists. Only to establish a new one – between Euro-enthusiasts and Euro-skeptics, sweeping the Euro-skeptics to the political fringe, bringing back in the groups largely marginalized during the transition period, all by creating a new integrative metaphor for the Polish society at large – the Pope.⁸

While still the president-elect, Aleksander Kwaśniewski confessed to *La Stampa* that he was dreaming about an audience with the Pope.⁹ Still then, in 1995, it was indeed a dream: the Vatican made such a possibility depend upon the ratification of the concordat. And this was politically very difficult; the concordat was signed on 28 July 1993 by the last post-Solidarność government, already after the parliament had been dissolved, and in an atmosphere of a scandal. The surprised public, and especially the SLD, interpreted it as the final encroachment in the Church's battle for creating a theocratic state after the demise of communism. The clergy's eagerness to become involved in post-socialist politics was obvious and wildly contested; the Pope's criticism of the 'different types of totalitarianisms' (the 'consumptionist' and 'technocratic' West included) had been expounded to the Polish audience already during his 1987 visit, and called for an alternative social ordering – the one based upon the Bible. The 1991 visit was perceived as a clear move in that direction; henceforth the post-Solidarność governments passed a restrictive anti-abortion law, re-introduced religion to schools, gave the clergy a lot of maneuver space in the public mass media, and – ultimately – signed the concordat. Kwaśniewski and the SLD immediately declared they would appeal to the Constitutional Tribunal. The 1994–5 period was the lowest point in the popularity of the Church and the Pope – on the one hand manifested by the SLD's seizure of power in 1994 (largely as a response to the Church's expansion since 1991), on the other by Wojtyła's bitterness during his 1995 visit and his accusations of the 'lay left' of 'attacking the Church, Episcopate and also the Pope'. But Poles' bitterness was equally grave by then – and over half of them did not take the Pope's rather transparent advice as to whom they should vote for in the coming presidential elections (made more explicit at Sunday sermons) – and Wałęsa, the post-Solidarność candidate, lost to Kwaśniewski in the second round of the presidential elections in 1995.

Had the anti-clerical sentiments of the SLD been pursued further, the Pope cult

would not be flourishing as it is today. But Kwaśniewski defeated Wałęsa only by a very small margin, and announced straight away his desire to become 'the president of all Poles'. He needed Wojtyła for that. Unlike the right-wing politicians, Kwaśniewski understood well the meaning of *katholikos*: that the Pope can serve only as an integrative metaphor. The attempts to monopolize Wojtyła for anti-communist politics had always failed miserably: e.g. when during the 1991 electoral campaign the *Polska Akcja Katolicka* used Pope imagery tirelessly and lucklessly, or when Marian Krzaklewski's Kielce scandal proved counter-productive. The latter story is particularly heart-breaking. Krzaklewski replaced Wałęsa as the leader of Solidarność, created the Electoral Action Solidarność (AWS) and won the 1997 elections. Then created a government with the Union of Freedom (UW), another post-Solidarność party, and made a chemistry professor (nota bene his PhD thesis supervisor) Prime Minister, patiently waiting himself to take over the presidential honors in 2000. The high-point of his presidential campaign was supposed to be a sensational video footage showing how SLD politicians make fun of the Pope.

The video, broadcast at prime time, starts with an image of a helicopter landing on a grass field, a few hundred meters from a crowd waiting for the President. Marek Siwiec, Chief of National Security Bureau, appears at helicopter's door and makes a cross sign with his hand. Then we see Kwaśniewski, asking jovially "has minister Siwiec kissed the Kalisz soil already?" Siwiec kneels and skillfully kisses the ground. Then the screen splits in half: on the left we have Kwaśniewski's picture with a caption: "ridiculing the Holy Father", on the right we see Krzaklewski and his credo "faithful to the tradition". This triggered a major controversy. Yet, although Kwaśniewski's guilt was unmistakable, Siwiec's quick and humble resignation satisfied the public, outraged not so much by the SLD's nonchalance as by Krzaklewski's pursuit of a 'negative campaign'. As a result, already the first round of

the presidential elections sealed Kwaśniewski's glory (over 54 per cent of votes) and Krzaklewski's political death.

Krzaklewski's militant desperation was conspicuous especially because by 2000 the political alliance between Kwaśniewski and the Vatican was too strong to be shattered even by such a blow as the Kalisz incident. In 1996 there are the first signs of his 'dream' coming true. He finds out that the Polish Radio Orchestra is to play for Wojtyła. He immediately assumes patronage over the event, which allows him to send his Secretary to the Vatican to meet 'highest officials possible' in order to assure of Kwaśniewski's 'good will'. At the same time he organizes a meeting with the Polish Episcopate, and promises them he would sign the concordat and try to convince the SLD to ratify it before the new constitution. As for a post-communist this is, of course, rather extraordinary a move, and Kwaśniewski's attempts meet serious opposition from the SLD. Yet it seems that nobody wants to appeal to the Constitutional Tribunal any more, although the SLD together with another leftist party Union of Labor (UP) passes a resolution in June 1996 that the concordat will be ratified only after the constitution. It seems that the negotiations are progressing well, as Kwaśniewski finds some important allies within the SLD. On 15 April 1997 the SLD-dominated Cimoszewicz government passes a 'declaration' which is seen as a major break-through in the negotiations. Kwaśniewski's good will is already clear, for he visits the Pope a week earlier. He presents him the new constitution. Wojtyła seems to be satisfied. The very first thing Kwaśniewski declares after the long-awaited audience is that the 'Holy Father fully supports Polish aspirations to NATO and EU membership'. This is the first day of their Euro-alliance, and in fact the beginning of the end of the EU accession debate in Poland.

The constitution is sanctified, Wojtyła visits Poland in August the same year, and again reassures the political class (who in turn do not forget to reassure the public) that 'the general direction of the changes is positive'. The Pope seems much more enthusiastic

about transition that during his bitter 1995 pilgrimage, and ever since his much welcome criticism always addresses cosmetic issues of the social order that is being arduously established (e.g. that the unemployment rate is too high – who would disagree with that?). But the crucial point is that the 'fundamentals' of post-socialism are fine. Thus, the 1997 pilgrimage is a major SLD (as well as transition establishment) success, and although the concordat is ratified by the AWS government in January 1998, it is seen as Kwaśniewski's political victory, and Leszek Miller's (leader of the SLD and, at the time of this writing, the Prime Minister) gesture of good will.

By then only few remember that just some months earlier Krzaklewski brought to the Vatican the AWS's project of the constitution and presented it to the Pope in hope of sanctification. Krzaklewski does remember this failure, nevertheless, and tries to keep up with Kwaśniewski on centering the political discourse around the Pope and wants to reclaim him for the post-Solidarność elites. The 1999 pilgrimage (organized by the AWS government) is a fierce battle that he miserably loses. The Pope – for the first time in history – is invited to speak to a national parliament. But the AWS MPs are all too eager and pious for the popular taste – their chanting '*pobłogostaw, pobłogostaw*' [bless us, bless us] interrupts Wojtyła's speech and is read again as a proof of their aggressiveness. The SLD strategy of reserved friendliness proves much more successful as it seems that they do not, unlike the quarrelsome AWS politicians wanting to utilize the Pope for their particular interests, want anything from him (what would left-wingers want from a Pope?). They merely acknowledge his 'moral authority' as a 'great thinker'. They do not worship, but respect him. AWS politicians worship the Pope, because they are Catholics. SLD elites respect the Pope, because he is a 'moral rock'. Such mature, 'altruistic' love is a phenomenon as rare as priceless in post-socialist politics, and it secured the SLD and especially Kwaśniewski a moral victory.

Krzaklewski travels after Wojtyła to eleven cities like a faithful shield-bearer in hope of

symbolic knighthood. In vain – Wojtyła is surprisingly hostile to him, and although he allows Krzaklewski to kiss his papal ring, it is Kwaśniewski who leaves the ground in splendor and glory. The finale of the duel is played out on the Balice airport. After the Pope's helicopter lands, Kwaśniewski comes out to welcome him. Then Wojtyła gets into his papa-mobile and starts heading towards the VIP lounge. He soon realizes that there is no vehicle to transport Kwaśniewski and kindly invites him and his wife to join in the papa-mobile. This is the most important ride in Kwaśniewski's entire life – the Pope's unmistakable gesture singled him out from all the other politicians, and buried the most powerful dichotomy of the transition years – the one between post-communists and post-anti-communists, only to establish, in the words of Adam Michnik, a new one – between Euro-enthusiasts and Euro-skeptics.

The worship of the Pope, at work already from 1997, went parallel with reshifting of the *Solidarność* legacy from the former dissidents to the Pope. It is common knowledge that the 'shock therapy' and its consequent 'high social costs' were endured thanks to the high credit of trust put behind the post-*Solidarność* team – all earned during anti-communist resistance in the 1980s. The AWS came to power in 1997 with the 'united *Solidarność* camp' on their banners, and still then it had enough allure to secure them a swift comeback. But it started running out very quickly, especially as their three reforms met with growing resistance, also because they were poorly prepared and executed, as the unemployment rate started reaching the alarming 20 per cent point. While the AWS tangled itself in more and more scandals, the intellectuals and mass media, gathering around Kwaśniewski, started paying more and more attention to the Pope. *Gazeta Wyborcza's* publications were significant: already before the 1997 visit, Artur Domosławski in a series of articles devoted to previous pilgrimages dubs 1979 as the 'second baptism of Poland'.¹⁰ The Pope is more and more often seen as the symbol of the 1980 strikes, for his words that closed his first ever speech as Pope in

Poland: 'Let Thy Spirit descend and transform this land. This Land!' are perceived to initiate the strikes a year later.¹¹

Of course, such an interpretation is not fully unjustified. His visit certainly had strengthened the inter-individual solidarity, for this was the first mass gathering of a clearly anti-communist character in a long time. But such explanation is dangerously monocausal and makes links that are not necessarily there – why did the strikes take a year to unfold? It is also surprising that before roughly 1997 such interpretation was not very popular: books on *Solidarność* written by Polish scholars and published in the West in the 1980s still hardly mention Wojtyła.¹² If the Church's role in the strikes is indeed discussed, then it is more Cardinal Wyszyński who is the central hero (and his speeches to the workers) (cf. Robinson et al. 1980: 133–9). Jadwiga Staniszkis's 1984 analysis even sees the Church as having a 'stabilizing influence on Solidarity as a bargaining chip with the government', and thus argues it was consciously avoided by the strikers for it was seen as counter-revolutionary, so to speak (1984: 93). August 1980 was thus seen more often as a class alliance between workers and intellectuals, and not a form of mass communities. The two discourses, *Solidarność* and the Pope, have hardly been linked before 1997. Today, their joined web of significances makes Wojtyła not only the author of August 1980, but the Holy Father of all the 'democratic changes' that took place in Eastern Europe in the last quarter of a century, the Velvet Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall included, but also those that will take place in the future. In short, Karol Wojtyła became the *causa causans* of civil society and democracy at large.¹³

A Western observer may be surprised that Lech Wałęsa is no longer the embodiment of *Solidarność* for Poles. He certainly tried to become one, but, again, was seen as too quarrelsome and power-greedy. The religion of *Solidarność* or the post-socialist theatre of legitimization had been more or less polytheistic until the Pope was granted the central position. In this sense Krzaklewski was

the last semi-divine cacique, and the second baptism of Poland really takes place in 1999, when the parliament is consecrated and Kwaśniewski given full legitimacy to rule, i.e. not only people's votes, but also the symbolic right. The monotheism was established by a common consensus of the right and left, with the crucial difference that it was SLD who was in power in the decisive moments, e.g. when the ratification of the concordat was being negotiated. Also in 1999 Krzaklewski was disadvantaged for he had no formal excuse to meet the Pope; unlike Kwaśniewski – the president, he was only a leader of his party. Moreover, paradoxically, it was the SLD, and not the AWS, that could make concessions (i.e. abandon their 'traditional' anticlerical policy) to the Vatican, and was a legitimate negotiations partner when central issues were to be discussed. Finally, it seems that the indecisive EU policy of Krzaklewski made him seem as somehow less able than Kwaśniewski to bring Poland (Christianity) back to Europe in the eyes of the Vatican. In sum, the AWS did not have enough political capital to keep the Solidarity heritage, and had to give it away to the Pope. As a result, already when back in power in 1997, their position was hopeless. Two years later the battle is lost, and the biggest party in 1997 does not even make it to the parliament in the elections of 2001. And by 2003 the discourse of the Pope becomes fully hegemonic: Rydzyk gives up ten years of Euro-skepticism within a few days after Wojtyła's single speech, and even Samoobrona (the 'populist' party of the rural marginalized), who back in 1997 seriously considered to boycott the pilgrimage and paralyze the entire country, holds press conferences now with Wojtyła's quote behind their backs that reads 'it is absolutely unsustainable a notion that capitalism is the only alternative to communism'. The only way they can talk back to Kwaśniewski and the transition establishment is via the Pope.

The 2002 visit was a fully fledged spectacle of the subjection of the lay to sacred power. For the first time government officials inspected, together with national television

journalists, the sites the Pope was to visit. Television broadcast security forces' preparations, which surprised the Vatican officials, since such things are usually kept secret. The entire government together with major Presidential officials moved to Kraków for these three days. The welcoming ceremony turned into a tedious labor of kneeling, hand-shaking and ring-kissing by the numerous politicians. The cover of *Przekrój* spoke for itself again: it showed Kwaśniewski and his wife kneeling before the Pope in a painting by Marcin Maciejowski (photo 3). Their hands were red with energy transmission. One of the very few moments that were not broadcast live on national television was the 'private' photographic session of the army of politicians (often with families) and the Pope. This time Wojtyła's aura was reserved for them only.¹⁴

It should be conspicuous by now that the cult of the Pope has little to do with Catholicism *sensu stricto*, and the papal messianism is not a nationalism, but a universalism. This is also why Wojtyła was keen on gathering



PHOTO 3: The moment of the transfer of legitimacy in a painting by Marcin Maciejowski. Courtesy Edipresse Polska.

the Solidarność heritage – it was clear already by 1991 that he had ambitions to become the moral leader of the world at large (Flores d'Arcais 1991). In spite of his several victories, such as his 'integrist pacifism' directed against the First Gulf War, or his 1998 visit to Cuba, and in spite of some prominent ideological allies (such as Timothy Garton Ash, for example), his crusade found audience only in the 'peripheral' countries.

But this should not mislead us. Populism (the ugly word for civil society) likewise has always been located on the periphery (of the center). It seems, nevertheless, that this no longer is the case – or that it actually never was. The Fortuynism of today's Dutch parliament as far as the immigration policy is concerned is perhaps the best case. But in fact Fortuynism itself was never a parochial movement – it mobilized primarily the 1990s *nouveaux riches* allied with the marginalized 'non-voters' (Kalb 2002). Similarly in Poland, it is not Andrzej Lepper with his Samoobrona who is a populist, but Aleksander Kwaśniewski with his religion of the Pope. It is enough to look at the ratings to see who can mobilize larger electorates – Kwaśniewski has been supported by roughly 80 per cent of the Polish population in the last four years. And although the Western elites may not be moved by Wojtyła's outdated chants, they in fact do preach a similar universalist gospel – only if we leave aside the Enlightenment lenses of reason vs. superstition (cf. Harvey 2001, Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). These two breeds of Jesuitism merge neatly in the figure of Aleksander Kwaśniewski – a leader enlightened both religiously and civilly, which is clear e.g. when he visits the Polish troops in the base of Babylon¹⁵ and talks of giving civil society and democracy to Iraq. He can do so, because he was chosen by the Pope. We shall follow his career closely; his duties expire next year, and he has already been mentioned as a candidate for the NATO Secretary General. But, for now, we shall turn our attention to the 'politics of emotions' (Svašek 2002) working in the centers, and not in the peripheries (Kalb 2002), because this is where populism lurks; no matter

if these are the crusades of George W. Bush, the shy yet persistent 'civil revivals' of Tony Blair, or the symbolically dogmatic anti-Americanism of Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder.

Indeed, as Marx ironically noted, historical events like to occur twice: first as a high tragedy, then as a low farce. After 1980 Poland told the West that it had civil society without being aware of it. Poland's pretension to be world's Christ appeared serious then – after all the Solidarność battle cry became the neo-liberal gospel of free salvation to all. Now Poland is telling Europe that it has Christian traditions and it also should realize that. The Vatican's trumpet, during his tenure, was Leszek Miller, who before the Rome EU summit last fall visited the Pope in search of popularity and had to reassure Wojtyła that he would be fighting for the Christian preamble in the European Constitution. Maybe he would have liked to give up this quest, but he could not. In the end, he could blame only himself – after all, it was he and his political allies who had established the Holy Alliance with the Vatican, thanks to which religion is still taught at schools, abortion banned with no prospect of even picking up the issue, and those who have been excluded by the transition are brought back in and given hope under the integrative metaphor of the Pope. The late and hurried public debate over the EU accession is the best example of that. Either as the Christ, or as a 'moral authority' or a 'great philosopher' or 'great individual' Karol Wojtyła has become the central figure in the Polish intellectual life, and his words hotly contested. Intellectuals can no longer talk of social reality without evoking the teaching of John Paul II. And they are keen to do so, as the prominent Paweł Śpiewak, who succeeds in interpreting Wojtyła's callings to charitable love (*miłosierdzie*) in the unsurprisingly pro-market fashion: that people ought to be honest in business and pay their taxes.¹⁶ Even the harshest criticism uttered by Wojtyła still sounds strangely reassuring – and this is where its power comes from. Even Leszek Miller interpreted his recent helicopter crash as a sign that 'one must keep on doing what

one does, only with more conviction',¹⁷ and he did so last December in Brussels, disabled in his wheelchair by the accident, by the transition establishment's die-hard stance and by the rules of the papal game that slowly encroach even on those who set them. The Constitution game is still in play. Let us hope that even the right-wingers will have no delusion about the papal 'ecumenism', which, after having excluded the non-believers (Flores d'Arcais 1991), now attempts to exclude the 'non-European' religions. Let us also hope that Marx's irony will not flip upside down and that a low farce will not precede a tragedy.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the editors of *Focaal* for their encouragement, Bojana Petric and Ewa Ignaczak for the stylistic advice, Nitsan Chorev for the information on Blair's religious life, and Ágnes Nagy for the wonderful working environment.

Notes

1. There was a heated scare-mongering over the EU accession live on the radio. He called from his car and announced that it should be cut short, because the EU is only purgatory. As one may imagine, the debate was more or less over.
2. This argument has been made especially by *Gazeta Wyborcza*. By now, nevertheless, it is a common wisdom; cf. Artur Domosławski, 'Cwierć Wieku z Janem Pawłem II', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10-10-2003; Artur Domosławski, 'Papież i mury Europy', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31-10-1998; George Weigel, 'Poznać go w pełni', *Więź*, 27-09-2002.
3. And, in fact, it is a crown, modeled upon the one of the Pharaohs.
4. The more 'unskilled' the photographer is, the closer he or she brings Wojtyła to God. Compare for example Gabriel Bouys's World Press Photo-winning portrait of the Pope, where he looks only like a pilgrim, with the numerous amateur photographs reproduced, among other places, on the Internet (e.g. <http://rzeszow.saletyni.pl/dm/galeria/papiez/jp0102kr.jpg>, http://www.slaskie-abc.com.pl/kto_czyta.html, http://www.promni.pl/eng_version/history.html or even <http://www.erazm.art.pl/duze/069-Papiez-Czest-83.jpg>). On the level of words, Wojtyła's imitatio Christi is also popular consensus. The clergy makes this explicit: cf. Ks. Grzegorz Ryś, 'Jan Paweł II i cierpienie', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 10-19-2003, and so do popular believers; often this is covert as an image of a suffering martyr, cf. Halina Bortnowska, 'Tajemnica Bolesna', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 27-06-2002; Janusz Poniewierski, 'Zrezygnuje? Znak', 13-08-2002.
5. I basically follow Beckwith's materialistic understanding of religion; I also do not subscribe to the Enlightenment divide of reason versus superstition (and ultimately of theology and science), and understand religion as a power game and not a dispute about 'symbols'; or in other words I see politics – any politics, also the 'lay' one – as religion. My definition of religion, both clerical and civil, has two major components: first, what is often referred to as 'magic', i.e. a system of beliefs based upon a set of shared assumptions (such as God created the world, Romans derive from Romulus, markets start with exchange) and second 'hegemony', i.e. discursive power play, political contention and struggle. See further: Asad (1993), Bellah (1967, 1991), Comaroff and Comaroff (1997, 2001), Roseberry (1994), Taussig (1997).
6. For a further description of the cult cf. Iwona Hałgas, 'Dotknąć Papieża', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 14-11-2002; Irena Świerdzewka, 'Jest jednym z nas', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 15-10-2003; Konrad Piskała, 'Papież czeka na szlaku', *Kulisy*, 16-10-2003; Katarzyna Kolenda-Zaleska, 'Toronto to nie Woodstock', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 06-08-2002; Aleksandra Bajka, 'Wnuki Papieża', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 01-08-2002.
7. The issue of politician's relationship with the Pope is more or less a taboo in the Polish public life. Journalists, if they take up the issue at all, either rebuke politicians for abusing the Pope (cf. Łukasz Perzyna, 'Gdyby politycy słuchali Jana Pawła II...', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 13-10-2003) or simply notice that he improves their ratings (cf. Dorota Maciejka, 'Pielgrzymka do Papieża', *Wprost*, 25-06-2002). The few critical voices come from fringe periodicals such as *Bez Dogmatu* (cf. Marek Krakowski, 'Papieski lek na zło kapitalizmu', *Bez Dogmatu*

- 58/2003, Katarzyna Nadana, *Ante oculos Eius*, *Ibid.*, Andrzej Dominiczak, *Biedni – do zbawienia konieczni*, *ibid.*).
8. My analysis runs parallel to other attempts of bringing in the symbolic contention to an analysis of the political and economic fields. For a fascinating account of the workings of the integrative metaphor of the 'general strike' in the French working class formation cf. Ansell (1997). For the analysis of the changing meaning of the natural in the Victorian money market cf. Alborn (1994). For a description of the establishment of the legitimacy for the post-socialist Czech state cf. Holy (1994). A similar analysis of the Hungarian symbolic struggles can be found in Szelenyi, Szelenyi and Poster (1996). For a discussion of the discourse on the 'end of transition' and of the success of the 'economic growth' metaphor, cf. Vedres, Csígó (2002).
 9. My analysis of the history of the Kwaśniewski-Vatican relations is based upon the following articles from *Gazeta Wyborcza*: Niechętny Watykan, 1996/03/11; Kwaśniewski chce do Watykanu, 1996/09/17, 40 minut z papieżem, 1997/04/08; Wysłannik dobrej woli, 1996/07/24; Prezydent z nadzieją o konkordacie, 1997/04/05-1997/04/06; Konkordat ratyfikowany w Warszawie i w Watykanie, 1998/02/24; Kto i co ma deklorować, 1997/04/07; Prezydent chce konkordatu, 1997/04/07; Prezydent chce, a SLD nie, 1997/04/08; Szczyt konkordatowy, 1996/03/14.
 10. Artur Domosławski, 1979: Drugi Chrzest Polski, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26-05-1997, Pielgrzymka do Polski w 1983: Trzy epoki w cztery lata, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27-05-1997, Pielgrzymka do Polski w 1987: O was i za was, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28-05-1997, Pielgrzymka do Polski w 1991: Nieszczęsny dar wolności, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30-05-1997,
 11. In fact Wojtyła himself claims to be the 'father' of August 1980 by now, as he made this clear in his recent speech to *Solidarność* leaders in the Vatican on the national holiday of 11 November 2003 (reprinted in *Gazeta Wyborcza* 12-11-2003 as 'Niech *Solidarność* wróci do korzeni' – 'Solidarity ought to go back to her roots').
 12. For example there is one reference to the Pope in Karpiński (1982), two references in Staniszkis (1984), none in Misztal (1985) and Laba (1991).
 13. The 2003 Peace Nobel Prize speculations were a clear example of that. Initiated by the Italian journalists some days before the winner was announced, a titanic speculation wave went through the Polish mass-media concerning Wojtyła's possible recognition. A day before the announcement, the main television news program devoted its first spot to the discussion of the issue. Talking heads of all provenance agreed that Wojtyła is the person who has 'done most for peace' in the world, and that not only does he deserve the prize but that the Nobel committee wants to reestablish its prestige by giving the prize to Wojtyła. Of course, the Pope does not need legitimacy, but he is the one who grants it.
 14. The transfer of the legitimizing energy is done primarily through photographs and television. Susan Sontag (1977) described well the 'fraternizing' characteristic of photography. A 'photo with the Pope' is a separate category in the tourist self-portraits genre, as well as a known topos in the Polish culture. Lech Wałęsa used one during the first 'democratic' parliamentary elections campaign. Other *Solidarność* candidates, unable to reprint a self-portrait with the Pope, photographed themselves with Wałęsa. Kwaśniewski's famous ride is the most intimate, and thus powerful, self-portrait with the Pope ever executed. Thus, it is no wonder that after the Pope's airplane took off, the people present started photographing themselves with Kwaśniewski. Such hierarchy of sacredness, not unlike the Christian ladder of saints, often produces desperate outcomes; for example the local councilor of Warszawa-Wawer district called Włodzimierz Zalewski presents on his web site a self-portrait with a wax figure of the Pope, taken in Madame Tussauds in London.
 15. 'Babylon', on top of its religious meaning, was associated in popular culture of the 1980s (mainly thanks to reggae music) with communism and with the Evil Empire. Now the symbol became reterritorialized with a double thrust.
 16. See the pious debate upon 'what did he mean' after Wojtyła's last visit: Adam Boniecki et al., *Dojrzewamy do powtórki*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 30-08-2002; an article in a similar way (subheaded: 'How to keep on living after the Pope's departure?') appeared in *Gazeta Wyborcza* already in 1999; cf. Piotr Pacewicz, *Miłość, wieczność, kremówki*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19/20-06-1999.
 17. Miller confesses that during an interview with Kamil Durczok on 23 December 2003. The conversation is marked by a strangely merry atmosphere; Durczok and Miller exchange knowing smiles, while talking politics. The

recent health problems of both have been a major media event – Durczok shocked the public when he presented the evening news with a bald head and confessed that he is currently fighting cancer, and earned tremendous support thanks to that. Miller spent several weeks in the hospital after his helicopter crash. Both gentlemen were cured by Christmas. Halfway through the interview, Durczok asks Miller about the accident – and then Miller confesses that politics seemed ‘so trivial’ to him when he was lying on the ground, and yet he gained strength from the incident. The next day in the afternoon, when most of the Polish families gather around their Christmas Eve tables, the national televisions broadcast a series of concert for the Pope, taking place simultaneously in various Polish cities. Durczok reports on one of them, and just before the show is over he wishes Wojtyła ‘good health’ and, with a telling expression on his face, ‘thanks for the papal prayer’ – we all know he means ‘for the healing’.

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