


June 2018

Religious Imageries of Pilgrims from Przeworsk: Making Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation at Jodłówka

Magdalena Lubanska

magdalena.lubanska@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/jgc>

 Part of the [Asian History Commons](#), [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Eastern European Studies Commons](#), [Folklore Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Slavic Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lubanska, Magdalena (2018) "Religious Imageries of Pilgrims from Przeworsk: Making Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation at Jodłówka," *Journal of Global Catholicism*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 5.

DOI: 10.32436/2475-6423.1035

Available at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/jgc/vol2/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Global Catholicism by an authorized editor of CrossWorks.

MAGDALENA LUBAŃSKA

Religious Imageries of Pilgrims from Przeworsk: Making Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation at Jodłówka¹



Magdalena Lubańska is Assistant Professor in the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw. Her main research areas include anthropology of Christianity in Bulgaria and Poland, anthropology of Islam, interactions between Muslims and Christians in post-Ottoman territories, religious (anti)syncretism, sacrificial rites, religious healing practices, material religion, secularization and postsecularism. Her latest book is *Muslims and Christians in the Bulgarian Rhodopes: Studies on Religious (Anti)syncretism* (de Gryter Open, 2015).

The hand of God is over us, and the angels are extending a cloak of protection.

-Marta, pilgrimage organizer

INTRODUCTION

This article provides an account of the religious imageries and practices of the Catholic devotees from the Basilica of the Holy Spirit in Przeworsk, with whom I made pilgrimage on foot to the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation at Jodłówka on August 27, 2017.

I agree with Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska that “in reflecting on pilgrimages it’s a good idea to go beyond studying just the phenomenon itself.”² However, whereas Baraniecka-Olszewska refers primarily to the need to expand the range of research instruments to include tools developed by anthropologists and other specialists, I wish to move further: to gain a better understanding of the religious imaginaries of the pilgrims, I believe we should also carry out research during the time frames before and after the pilgrimage itself, and in this way, learn about the pilgrims’ specific types of religiosity and the broader context of the pilgrimage. With this intention, I spent time with some of the pilgrims outside of the pilgrimage itself, accompanying them in their various religious activities. I have also included the institutional dimension of the pilgrimage in the study so that the ethnographic account also contains the “official” narrative provided to the pilgrims on the occasion.

This approach allowed me to conclude that the pilgrims’ religious imageries are deeply influenced by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement, propagated by two very popular priests in the region, Father Józef Witko and Father Marian Rajchel. The impact of their teachings is far reaching and even includes those who are not official members of charismatic groups. It seems that the intensity of religious expression provided by this mode of religiosity and its offer to bring believers

1 Funding for this project came from the National Science Centre in Poland, decision DEC-2013/11/B/HS3/01443.

2 Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, “O wielkim odpuszczeniu w Kalwarii Pałacowskiej ponownie. Refleksja nad antropologią pielgrzymek,” *Etnografia Polska* 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 40.

closer to God responds to the Catholic desire for a tangible, material embodiment of the sacred.

I believe that the structure of these sensory-based religious imageries, regardless of individual differences between pilgrims, can be described in terms of the “porous self,”³ a term I borrow from Charles Taylor. According to Taylor, the “porous self”⁴ involves a belief that the natural world not only features regular divine interventions, but that it also contains powers that are hostile to people. The self is vulnerable to such hostile powers, but it is also able to be healed, provided it undergoes the correct procedures and entrusts itself to Divine Providence.⁵

Although this concept conventionally refers to the pre-Reformation period, anthropologist Jon Mitchell correctly points out that it can also apply today to Pentecostal movements—as well as to Catholicism.⁶ Taylor’s binary view of the buffered self as modern and the porous self as premodern doesn’t seem applicable to today’s society, in which we can encounter both of them.⁷ In the postsecular society, the secular concept of a buffered, intellect-centered self coexists alongside the porous self; what Weber referred to as the “disenchantment of modernity” is largely a matter of appearances.

3 I had applied the same category to the religious culture of Bulgarian Orthodox Christians (see Magdalena Lubańska, “Healing Chains, Relationships of Power and Competing Religious Imageries in the Monastery of Saints Kosmas and Damian in Kuklen (Bulgaria),” *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 10, no. 1 (2016): 71–99. However, the category appears to be quite commodious and seems capable of being fruitfully applied to Catholic religiosity in Poland, particularly in the region of Przeworsk.

4 This is in contrast with the modern buffered self, for which “the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind” (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007], 37).

5 *Ibid.*, 27.

6 Jon Mitchell, “A Catholic Body? Miracles, Secularity, and the Porous Self in Malta,” in *The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Reader*, ed. Kristin Norget, Valentina Napolitano, and Maya Mayblin (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 213.

7 However, I agree with Robert Orsi that basically “the modern world has assiduously and systematically disciplined the senses not to experience sacred presence” (Orsi, “Introduction: Jesus Held Him So Close in His Love for Him That He Left the Marks of His Passion on His Body,” in *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004], 12).



The religious sensitivity of the Charismatic Renewal movement is strongly involved in the processes of the revitalization of the “porous self” and the “reenchantment” of the world, which is often expressed through a highly sensorial attitude toward the surrounding world, as revealed in the imageries of the devotees. During my research, I came to the conclusion that the concept of the “porous self” is present not only in the imageries related to the person but also to the imageries related to the Polish nation when it is perceived as a messianic community. As such, the body of the Polish nation is imagined to be protected by God and Mary from all the evil powers, sometimes imagined by the rightist devotees as being in conspiracy with the liberal and leftist policies.⁸

In this article, I will explicate the various ways in which belief in the “porous self” becomes objectivized, as well as its importance within the religious imageries of its devotees. I will show how this self is grounded in the local, Subcarpathian religious culture, while simultaneously reflecting the globally recognizable features of “Charismatic Catholicism.”⁹

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RELIGIOUS IMAGERIES AND THE “POROUS SELF”

I define religious imageries after Thomas Csordas, as a set of discursive and somatic competences constituted by a specific religious habitus.¹⁰ My account positions those imaginaries and their accompanying practices within a broader contextual spectrum in order to move beyond events or conversations directly connected with the pilgrimage.

8 Similar conclusions are reached by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, “Introduction”, in *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, ed. Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 14.

9 By the label “Charismatic Catholicism,” I mean religiosity influenced by the Charismatic Renewal Movement but not necessarily connected with formal membership in Charismatic Renewal communities.

10 I use Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of the habitus as a system of lasting and preferential dispositions and structures. Those are predisposed to function as structuring structures, or principles that generate and organize practices and ideas (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977]).

I follow Pierre Bourdieu and Thomas Csordas in concluding that the existential foundation for those imageries is provided by the “socially informed body.”¹¹ According to this perspective, the body is a system of socially conditioned dispositions, an underlying principle that generates and unifies all practices. The body is an “existential ground for culture,”¹² and it expresses certain assimilated cultural meanings before those are even named, or reflected upon, in other words, when such meanings are still in a preobjective condition.¹³ This is because perception is culturally conditioned even where the social actors feel that it is spontaneous. The outcome of such perception, which manifests itself as a specific object of perception, is the final stage of that broader process.¹⁴ Playing a key role in defining those objects of perception are certain people within the community who have a considerable influence over how such perceptions get objectivized: those are the people who name other people’s emotions and experiences, and who enjoy particular respect in the community. Csordas refers to them as “specialists in cultural objectivization.”¹⁵ I recognize them in the charismatic priests Fathers Józef Witko and Marian Rajchel. As a matter of fact, the idea of self they promote in their teachings is compatible with the concept of the porous self proposed by Charles Taylor, by which I mean a kind of self for whom “the boundary between self and other is fuzzy, porous.”¹⁶

I take the self to mean, in line with Csordas, “neither substance nor entity but an indeterminate capacity to engage or become oriented in the world, characterized by effort and reflexivity. In this sense self occurs as a conjunction of prereflexive bodily experience, culturally constituted world or milieu and situational specificity

11 Thomas Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 63; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

12 Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 9.

13 As Csordas rightly notes, that which is preobjective is also already culturally preconditioned (Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 5–47.

14 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidas Publishers, 1996 [1945]); Csordas, “Embodiment.”

15 *Ibid.*, 14.

16 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35.



or habitus.”¹⁷ At the same time, “we can identify the locus of the self as identical with the locus of perception and practice.”¹⁸

As an anthropologist, I am interested mostly in how the porous self is “grounded in cultural phenomenon.”¹⁹ That is why it is important to study “the conditions that shape feelings, senses, spaces and performances of belief, that is the material coordinates or forms of religious practice.”²⁰ According to this perspective, the anthropologist is tracing the porousness of self through the particular perceptions and practices of the believers. Taylor writes about the “porous self”: “As a mode of experience, rather than as theory, this can be captured by saying that we feel ourselves vulnerable or ‘healable’ (this is meant to be the favourable antonym to ‘vulnerable’) to benevolence or malevolence which is more than human, which resides in the cosmos or even beyond it.”²¹

According to Taylor, “Porousness is most clearly in evidence in the fear of possession”²² but also in the conviction that “God or the Holy Spirit enter us, or quicken us from within.”²³ This remark is very relevant to Pentecostal influences present in today’s Catholicism in Subcarpathia.

This belief seems to be in accordance with what I heard from a lot of interlocutors who seem preoccupied with the conviction that demonic powers could reach them through certain objects or even directly. However, simultaneously, they share with me the stories of how the Holy Spirit is palpable to them when they participate in Masses with special prayers for healings provided by priests representing the Charismatic Renewal movement. As I will show, from their point of view, one should always take care of the purity of the self, diligently guarding its freedom from the influences of evil. To do so, they attend healing Masses, they consult the priests who are exorcists, they throw away “dangerous” objects, they spill salt in

17 Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 5.

18 *Ibid.*, 6.

19 *Ibid.*, ix

20 David Morgan, “Introduction: the matter of belief,” in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. Morgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

21 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35.

22 *Ibid.*, 35.

23 *Ibid.*, 36.

their houses, and they go on pilgrimages. The latter practice is usually devoted to particular intentions they find important in their life, like recovery from ill health, or one's well-being. It also usually includes prayers for the good of the nation. Political and religious dimensions of Polish pilgrimages often intermingle. This conjuncture is sometimes present from the early stages of the journey, which is why before describing the pilgrimage course itself, I would like to introduce the readers to the pilgrimage organizers.

PILGRIMAGE ORGANIZERS

The organizers of the pilgrimage—Marta²⁴ and Tomasz—first met at a meeting run by *Solidarna Polska*, a right-wing political party. Since then, they have been organizing sports events or “galas,” supporting each other in different social initiatives.

Marta is a widow in her mid-fifties. She is a single parent raising three children. Marta is not a member of prayer groups or organizations; she is an unaffiliated sympathizer of *Solidarna Polska*; as she says, she has a reluctance toward joining organizations. Nonetheless, she often comes to party conventions and knows one of the party's senators well. She prefers to rely on specific individuals over organizations.

Years ago, she underwent a complicated surgery on her spine, and this year she's had another accident. Despite using crutches to move around, she is active and efficient. She often drives a car and enjoys helping others. She describes herself as a social activist and says that she loves people. “Go and love, that's my motto,” she explains. She emphasizes that “every time you go on a pilgrimage you need to do it with a specific intention. Every pilgrim has an intention, and during the Mass they pray for those people and situations in their lives, and that makes the pilgrimage meaningful in my opinion.”

During her spine surgery, which took place some fifteen years ago, she experienced clinical death and saw her own body surrounded by doctors. She could hear their words, but she could also see a divine aura. Now she insists that she sees God's

24 All the names of the pilgrims have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the respondents.



signs everywhere: “Our life is made up of miracles. People just don’t know how to read those signs. I know this from experience.”

I discovered, among other things, that one of the major issues that Marta, as a pilgrimage organizer, faced was making sure the group was accompanied by a priest, who can only be delegated for the occasion by the local parson. This way, the pilgrims would have a chance to go to confession during the pilgrimage, something that had not been possible on the previous two occasions, causing some discontent among the pilgrims. Although the parson was generally receptive of the idea of a pilgrimage, he was not too actively involved in the preparations, and the organizers were concerned that he might forget their request. Marta was so determined that this journey take place, she went to pray aloud in front of a statue of St. Anthony in St. Barbara Church in Przeworsk when the parson was not taking her phone calls: “St. Anthony, this is the last time I’m begging you to help me, I’m really begging you, so many people are begging you, so I say, What’s that deficit about? I need to find a priest, I absolutely require a priest!”

It is hard to say how her request finally made its way to the parson, but in any event, he called her a quarter of an hour after she made her public prayer. I have encountered similar strategies used by women religious leaders to influence members of the clergy quite often in my research on religiosity.²⁵ They attempt to win the cooperation of priests for their projects by creating the impression that they are being aided by specific saints. This makes it difficult for members of the clergy to distance themselves from such initiatives, and in most cases, they end up helping the women with what they need for such projects.

Tomasz, the second organizer of the pilgrimage, has two daughters and works for an American corporation. He is a very ambitious young man, devoted to his own political career and working also in the Przeworsk office of Solidarna Polska Senator Mieczysław Golba.

25 Women also introduced the devotion to the Jesus Child at Rzeszów’s main church. See Lubanska, “Mothers, Grandmothers, Patriots: Religious Imageries of Female Members of the Confraternity of the Infant Jesus at the Church of St. Wojciech and St. Stanisław in Rzeszów, Poland,” *Studia Religiosa* 50, no. 3 (2017): 241–65.



Photo 1 credit:
Magdalena Lubańska

Tomasz explains that he chose John Paul II as his patron and that he enjoys watching documentaries about the Pope with his older daughter (who is in the early years of primary school). As he explains, he does so “to make sure his daughter knows there used to be a Polish Pope, and that he used to go on pilgrimages to places like Krosno or Przemyśl.” He also took his daughter to a John Paul II museum in Wadowice (the pope’s birthplace). He says, “to me, the most moving thing was that cool thing with the Bible slamming shut [in the wind] on his coffin, and how you could hear a heartbeat, and it was red. You can hear a human heartbeat. That’s the Bible they’d placed on his coffin.”

His dramatic and sense-centered account speaks of a desire for palpability and material presence of the sacred. Unlike some of the rightist Poles, Tomasz does not believe that the 2010 plane crash that killed the then-president of Poland along with almost one hundred other people was an assassination attempt; however, he is worried that Poland might become vulnerable to terrorism. He is open to Poland providing aid to refugees, but he’s opposed to bringing them into the country. Like

Marta, he believes that the Catholic faith is the greatest national treasure of the Polish nation and considers the Poles to be a chosen people. He came up with this idea of organizing a pilgrimage after talking to his grandmother, who complained that there had been no pilgrimages to Jodłówka from the town's main church for twenty years, meaning that the parishioners who wanted to make the pilgrimage had to join groups from other parishes. Tomasz wanted to show his grandmother that the tradition would be easy to revive. In that same year, he obtained the consent of the local parson and organized a group of pilgrims from the parish. He and a friend provided the funding to encourage young people to take part. They paid for transportation (the pilgrims were bused back home) and insurance.

Marta and Tomasz chose the route and where they would stop to take breaks. That first pilgrimage took place three years ago, and the group was two hundred people strong. This year, there were almost twice as many participants (375), making it the second-largest group to reach the shrine at Jodłówka, second only to the pilgrims coming from Kańczuga (400).

THE PILGRIMAGE

At 4:30 a.m., it's still dark outside as the pilgrims gather in front of the Holy Tomb Basilica at Przeworsk. Some arrive in small groups; others come singly and exchange greetings with friends. Everyone is wearing casual clothes and sandals or tennis shoes, and carrying a small backpack. There are two clergymen with the pilgrims: Fr. Paweł, who has recently arrived in the parish, and Deacon Łukasz, a well-known and well-liked presence in the parish community. Also noticeable are several assistants (*porządkowi*): male pilgrims who maintain high visibility in the group by wearing orange-colored vests and whose duties will include setting the pace for the group, ensuring road safety, and generally keeping order. Tomasz is one of these assistants. One of the priests explains that the parson won't be coming down to bless the pilgrims because "God has bestowed the grace of sound sleep on him," a wisecrack that briefly loosens up the atmosphere. However, things are otherwise kept disciplined and punctual. At the agreed-upon time (5 a.m. sharp), the pilgrims set out on foot for Jodłówka. Religious songs are played over the loudspeakers. Some people are singing, others are walking in silence, several people are

talking to each other. The pilgrims are marching at a relatively quick pace, helped along by the music. Most of the songs are about the Virgin Mary, with choruses like *Maryjo, co królujesz w niebie, Matko Jodłowiecka, idziemy do Ciebie* (“O Mary who reigns in heaven, Our Mother of Jodłówka, we’re on our way to you”). The pilgrims are also singing excerpts from the Little Office of Immaculate Conception, a popular Catholic devotional service known in Poland through a seventeenth-century translation:



Photo 2 credit:
Magdalena Lubańska

*Zacznijcie wargi nasze, chwalić Pannę świętą,
Zacznijcie opowiadać cześć jej niepojętą.
Przybądź nam Miłościwa Pani, ku pomocy,
A wyrwij nas z potężnych nieprzyjaciół mocy.*

Come, my lips, and wide proclaim

the Blessed Virgin’s spotless fame.

O Lady, make speed to befriend me.

From the hands of the enemy mightily defend me.²⁶

The last lines verses of the song serve as a good example of the belief in self porousness. Sang many times during the pilgrimage, these words express and create the imaginary of the self, endangered by the harmful demonic powers and, as such, needing protection from the powerful Virgin Mary. Most of the songs are devoted to her, and they strengthen the pilgrims’ imagery of her proximity and love for the devotees.

26 English translation by Michael Martin, <http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/BVM/OPConImm.html>

Along the way, we occasionally see other groups of pilgrims, mostly we pass them when they are resting by the roadside. When that happens, people in different groups exchange smiles and friendly waves.

Our destination, the shrine at Jodłówka, is twenty-five kilometers (some fifteen miles) away. This is one of the most well-known shrines in the region of Przeworsk, second only to the shrine at Kalwaria Pałacowska²⁷ and the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation at Leżajsk. On the church's feast day (August 27), some 2,600 devotees from nearby parishes make pilgrimage to the shrine. According to the most popular oral tradition shared by the pilgrims, the shrine was founded there in the seventeenth century after a little child drank water from a healing spring pointed out by Mary and was saved from the bite of a venomous adder. According to one variant of the story, she prayed to an icon of Mary hanging on a tree by the spring—apparently the same spring that can now be found inside a neo-Gothic building constructed around it, within a centrally located stone well. One of the wall paintings on the ceiling of the building depicts a boy and an adder.



Photo 3 credit:
Magdalena Lubańska

As Marta explains:

27 Research on that shrine is done by two other members of the research project, Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska ("O wielkim odpuszczeniu"; "Communitas a intencje pątników. Typy uczestnictwa w pielgrzymce. Wielki Odpust Kalwaryjski Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny w Kalwarii Pałacowskiej," *Etnografia Polska* 52 (2008) 137-154, for the English language version see: https://www.academia.edu/33028696/COMMUNITAS_vs._PILGRIMS_INTENTIONS_TYPES_OF_PARTICIPATION_IN_PILGRIMAGE_GREAT_FEAST_OF_ASSUMPTION_OF_VIRGIN_MARY_IN_KALWARIA_PAC%81AWSKA) and Iuliia Buyskykh ("Pomiędzy pamięcią a granicą: ukraińska pielgrzymka na Kalwarię Pałacowską," *Etnografia Polska* 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 43-62). A special pilgrimage from Sokółów Małopolski to Leżajsk called "Extreme Way of the Cross" has been studied by Konrad Siekierski (for instance, see "Faith and Fatigue in the Extreme Way of the Cross in Poland," *Religion, State & Society* 46, no. 2 (2018): 108-22).

Jodłówka is an important place. It's been our place since we were children. You can take everyone here, including little children. There are different routes with different mileages, so you can always do that. Jodłówka has a special charm [...] and we know that our Lady of Consolation is there, listening to us and we have evidence that she is at work. It's not like we go there merely for the sake of convenience. We go because the Mother of God gives many gifts of grace in little places like that, and we go because of [the] water.

Many devotees collect water from the shrine spring, which they will then use over the coming year, drinking it to cure throat ailments, among other things. However, the place is particularly known for a miraculous painting of our Lady of Consolation, which the devotees circle while on their knees, a practice similar to that at a major Polish shrine in Częstochowa. The painting is reminiscent of iconographic depictions of the “Hodegetria,” or Our Lady of the Way (Ὁδηγήτρια/hodegetria: “she who shows the way”).²⁸ The face and hands of Mary and the Child are painted, and their robes and crowns are done in a golden *riza* or metal cover (revetment). The image is modeled on Our Lady of Sokal in Ukraine.²⁹ The painter is unknown, but was probably connected with the Lviv school.³⁰ Mary's hands are embracing the Child, who is resting one hand on her forearm and holds a book of the Gospel in the other hand. The image was declared miraculous in 1946 and was ceremonially crowned in 1975 by Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II. The image was actually crowned twice, as the original set of crowns was stolen in 1987. The painting was crowned again in 1991 by John Paul II during his fourth papal visit to Poland.³¹ Tomasz was in attendance for that second coronation, which he believes is a factor in why he feels a personal connection to the shrine.

According to our schedule, our group will reach Jodłówka at noon. We will make several stops along the way. After we complete the first stage of our pilgrimage

28 In those depictions, Mary is shown holding the child in her arms and pointing to Jesus as the way to salvation.

29 Iwona Wabik, Agnieszka Cichosz, Mateusz Cichocz, and Katarzyna Kuter “Jodłówka. Sanktuarium Matki Boskiej Pocieszenia,” in *Przewodniki po Polsce. Sanktuaria Podkarpacia*, edited by Iwona Wabik, Agnieszka Cichosz, Mateusz Cichocz, and Katarzyna Kuter (Lublin: JUT, 2015), 76.

30 *Ibid.*, 76.

31 *Ibid.*, 79.





and reach a dirt road crossing at Urzejowice, we are joined by a police car that will escort us for safety reasons.

Photo 4 credit:
Magdalena Lubańska

I look around the crowd, seeking out familiar faces. I have been doing research in the area for several years, so a moment later I spot someone who played one of the women of Jerusalem in an Easter Passion play in Przeworsk at St. Barbara's parish, run by the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscan Observants, commonly referred to in Poland as *bernardyni*). I also notice the eight-year-old younger daughter of the man who played Judas in that Passion play, whose name is Adam; the girl sings in the girls' choir (*schola*) at the town's main church. Adam is well known in his town, where he runs a funeral home. Today he is driving one of the two cars that accompany the pilgrims, following closely behind the group. The second car, as it turns out, is being driven by his older daughter, who is not religious. Although she has no great enthusiasm for the project, she agreed to help Marta, who is her neighbor. I quickly realize that the pilgrims come from all of Przeworsk's parishes. The pilgrimage had been announced from church pulpits and advertised as an event on Tomasz's Facebook page. Posters had also been put up, along with a fifteen-foot



Photo 5 credit:
Magdalena Lubańska

banner that was displayed at the chapel of Our Lady of the Snows, which is owned by the town's main church parish. No mention of the pilgrimage appeared on the parish website. The organizers explain: "We're not doing this to make money, God forbid, or to be famous. We're doing this for our parish, and it's really nice to be walking through town together like this."

The pilgrimage route takes us most of the way along dirt roads between fields of corn, and it's very picturesque. At dawn, a mist hovers over the fields, but nobody stops to take photos. Myself excepted, the only person taking photos is the organizer. This is in stark contrast to a pilgrimage Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska described at Kalwaria Pałacowska, where the pilgrims happily snapped selfies to post on social media.³² Perhaps this is because the pilgrims going to Kalwaria were moving between recognized landmarks of religious significance.

Particularly conspicuous among us are young people dressed in black who are members of a young people's prayer group (*oaza*) in the parish. They are carrying

³² Baraniecka-Olszewska, "O wielkim odpuszczeniu," 38.



guitars, microphones, and songbooks and provide musical accompaniment, alternating with Kamila, a church singer selected for that role by Tomasz. Kamila is walking with her teenage son, who is playing the guitar. The mother and son look almost the same age. I agree with Baraniecka-Olszewska that singing, along with walking, is a highly valorized form of religious involvement during pilgrimages.³³

Because the Przeworsk group on their way to Jodłówka has two sets of musicians, they can take turns singing and resting, but the arrangement also makes them competitive. Also taking turns at the microphone is Joanna, a woman I will talk to later, who is active in a charismatic movement called Renewal in the Holy Spirit, an organization that has been active for three years in the newest parish in Przeworsk (the parish of Christ the King). To her, a pilgrimage is, as she puts it, “a retreat on the road.” She sees herself as a person who has experienced conversion and gained living faith from her experiences dating back to a retreat at the town’s major church before she was confirmed—that retreat had been organized by members of Renewal in the Holy Spirit. These days Joanna attends the movement’s prayer meetings every Tuesday, helps out at retreats, goes to Mass every day, and feels that her heart is increasingly filling up with God. She views it as her duty “to be sharing Christ with others,” and always sees Jesus’s presence in other people’s hearts. She tells people that they are beautiful, and addresses God as “Daddy” or “Father,” something she reportedly couldn’t do previously. She describes herself and her friends from her prayer group as being “pumped up with God.” Whenever they meet, God is the only thing they talk about, and they like to discuss God with other people. As she puts it, there are two roads: the good way and the bad way. Because of health complications, she’s had to give up swimming, which used to be her passion; however, she says this has been a net gain in her life because now she can go to church every day and meet “the living God.” She uses the word “life” a lot, and always pronounces it with a great deal of affirmation and emphasis. As she says, every life has great value for her, and so she never votes for political parties that “fail to defend it.” To her, the presence of Jesus and Mary is “palpable.” This is her second pilgrimage this year (she walked from Przeworsk to Częstochowa as a pilgrim in July).

33 Ibid.

I'm looking at the pilgrims marching steadily, and find myself wondering what they might all have in common: what kind of imagined *communitas*³⁴ can encompass this group? I will attempt to answer this question by characterizing the religious imageries of the pilgrims.

I agree with Mitchell that the "Catholic sensorium is not limited to the body but is distributed beyond the body, and spiritual powers are—at least potentially—immanent in all things."³⁵ This sensorium becomes objectivized, as can be seen in the following statement from Deacon Łukasz, who is taking part in the pilgrimage:

When you bring a rotten apple into your house it's going to stink whether you believe it or not. It is the same thing with an elephant symbol or a lucky tree: both are calling out to their master, and observation bears that out. I know instances [demonstrating] that that's the case)

According to him, each object, known for its capability to bring luck to people, is in fact not neutral but used by the demonic powers to exercise their power over those who are susceptible to it. Things "have no wills, but are nevertheless redolent with the evil meanings."³⁶ They are mediators and containers of supernatural presence, either evil or good. The last one is associated only with Christian God, Jesus, Mary, and the saints. Joanna has similar things to say on the subject:

Spiritual threats facing children, well, there are many of those, such as fairy

34 Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996 [1978]). Like Michael Sallnow and John Eade, I don't treat this category as a universal instrument that necessarily describes aspects of every pilgrimage (see Eade and Sallnow, introduction to *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, ed. Eade and Sallnow [London: Routledge, 1991], 1–29). In common with Baraniecka-Olszewska, I regard it as a term that captures certain aspects of the pilgrimage (Baraniecka-Olszewska, "Communitas a intencje pątników," 142–43). Specifically, it may refer to a sense shared by pilgrims that they are all members of an imagined community traveling to a shared destination: a community that wishes to be noticed at that destination and to be seen as distinct and larger than other groups. However, this particular group contained people from various parishes, some of which are in competition with one another. At this level of generality, though, their religious imaginaries appear to be shared. Any potential conflicts between them seem more likely to stem from competition over who does a better job of fulfilling their religious calling than from other ideological choices or religious affiliations.

35 Mitchell, "A Catholic Body?" 213.

36 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37.





tales. Just take Harry Potter, it's some kind of magic, it's nothing but dark sides. Magic is no part of our faith. It's not like you say a magic formula, and something happens. It may be the case that someone foretells the future, but where does that power come from? All of that is satanic. Even the fairy tales. How can you buy your kid a figurine with horns that looks like a devil? But parents just go and buy those fairy tales for their children. I don't find that normal, would you want your child to be playing with a devil?!

Photo 6 credit:
Magdalena Lubańska

Other interlocutors add to this list the hit singles by singers Rihanna and Beyoncé. These examples reveal the conviction with which I met repeatedly, that popular culture is often crypto-satanic and should be treated suspiciously by a Christian believer.

Another pilgrim, Anna, who is receiving spiritual treatment from Fr. Marian Rajchel, a locally well-known priest and exorcist from Jarosław, says this:

We keep various objects in our homes that pose a spiritual threat. I didn't realize my son was watching movies where the discs had things on them like

vampire heads, those things were just lying around; it took me a while, it took some reading, I read many books and began to deepen my faith [...] and I simply began to purify my house. Those things could lead to spiritual bondage, and all those things had to go.

Not only objects, but also a lot of health disorders are seen by believers to be caused by the devil, and it is much more difficult to free yourself from them than from the haunted objects.

Anna also told me that she was healed of a sleep disorder (apparently a symptom of demonic possession) during a charismatic Mass celebrated by Father Józef Witko, who is also a famous healer popular in the region. As she puts it:

It's not the priests, say, Fr. Marian Rajchel or Fr. Witko, who do the healing. It's God healing people every time a Mass is celebrated, all it takes is belief. If your heart is open to God we have those evenings of praise, and then God does the healing. And so, like I said, this happens during every Eucharist, you just have to be very open to that grace, you must want it.

In other words, the porous self is vulnerable and under threat even when unaware of the objects that make evil powers present. The only way to free it from all the spiritual impurities is to throw away all the material representations of evil. The Holy Communion seems to be one of the remedies that one can use to free oneself from the impurities encountered in everyday life. On the other hand, in order to be healed and to eliminate such malign influences, the porous self must make an effort and entrust and open itself to God and to his divine power. This is why the songs and prayers associated with the charismatic movement involve such performative appeals to the Holy Spirit as "Touch me," "Heal me," "Cloak us," or even "Fire us up." They teach the self to open itself to divine healing powers.

From the aforementioned narratives, we see that the porous self is either concentrated on deactivation of the enmity of evil forces,³⁷ thus trying to separate itself from their impact, or opening itself to the divine grace believed to bring

37 Ibid.





Photo 7 credit:
Magdalena Lubańska

harmony and health. However, this attitude is something the devotees learn from the so called “specialists in religious objectivization” who engage them in various rituals through which they activate particular cultural dispositions that reflect the belief in the self and the body porousness. This process seems to have intensified in the last few years, which may be explained by the growing popularity of those specialized healing services and exorcisms in the region of Subcarpathia.

“SPECIALISTS IN CULTURAL OBJECTIVIZATION” AND THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL MOVEMENT

I believe that the religious imaginaries of the Przeworsk pilgrims cannot be adequately described without identifying the influence exerted by the “specialists in cultural objectivization,” a category that clearly also includes exorcist priests. Those priests objectivize the emotional problems of people who come to see them and categorize them as “spiritual bondage,” “demonic possession,” or “being afflicted by an evil spirit.”³⁸

38 Emilia Jaworska, “Konceptualizacje zła, działania Złego Ducha, zagrożenia duchowe i egzorcyzmy

The afflicted devotees wait in line in front of Father Rajchel's house in Jarosław, making appointments at least a month in advance. He is giving them advice on how to behave in order to free themselves from demonic influences in their lives and be happier and healthier as a result. Sometimes he is providing exorcism. He is also celebrating special services and prayers of liberation each week in his parish, which is situated within the Convent of Benedictine Nuns in Jarosław. Anna, one of the pilgrims to Jodłówka cited earlier in the article, was participating in them, and Father Rajchel is her spiritual leader and confessor.

The influence of those specialists is not limited to people who are members of the charismatic movement (Renewal in the Holy Spirit), since those imageries that express faith in the porous self (as promoted by priests active in the charismatic movement) also reach a much greater number of people in the area under study. It is very often the case that priests who make their annual pastoral visits to parishioners' houses around Christmas time advise their parishioners to remove "dangerous" objects from their homes. Priests and lay respondents I have spoken to listed examples similar to those described previously, such as lucky elephants and lucky trees, Monster High dolls, Hello Kitty gadgets, and Harry Potter books and paraphernalia.³⁹ Many people removed such objects from their homes after talking to Fr. Marian Rajchel, reading Rajchel's book, or discussing the matter with a local priest at a Christmastide visit, or simply with a friend or relative.

As a result of such interactions, devotees form an interest in the subject. Also, many Catholics, including those who are not members of charismatic groups, use the exorcism ritual and attend healing Masses held by such priests. Such was the case with Marta, which I will describe later in further detail.

As I wrote, I learned about the pilgrims' religious imaginaries not just during the pilgrimage, but primarily when talking to some of the pilgrims after the pilgrimage and visiting important places of worship with them. For that reason, I came to a

w społecznościach katolickich na Rzeszowszczyźnie," BA thesis, adviser Magdalena Lubańska, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw, 2017 [printed manuscript].

39 More information about the dangers supposedly posed by certain objects can be found in Jaworska, "Konceptualizacje zła."



healing Mass with Marta and three other female pilgrims on September 30. The Mass was celebrated at Palikówka by Fr. Witko. It was my second time experiencing a Mass by Fr. Witko.⁴⁰ During the Mass, Fr. Witko breathes and blows air into the microphone in a highly expressive, sensory-laden practice meant to objectivize the presence of the Holy Spirit. The sound appears to play the role of a sacramental, making God's activity present to those gathered in the church. Devotees recognize this very moment as crucial and the most thrilling. Some of them experience so-called "resting in the Holy Spirit," during which they collapse and lie restfully on the floor. From where I was standing, I saw one woman "resting in the Spirit." At another Mass,⁴¹ I saw multiple individuals experience this state; Fr. Witko blessed each of them by touching their heads (he calls this "the laying of hands on the sick"⁴²) and claims that this is a way of "transmitting the power of the Holy Spirit"⁴³ that also communicates divine care, love, and power.⁴⁴ It takes place usually after the Mass and is eagerly awaited by the devotees. Another instance of the Holy Spirit being objectivized⁴⁵ is Fr. Witko talking about persons (no names get mentioned) who have been healed, or are being healed, of a given ailment. Many people take such comments personally and believe that they have experienced an extraordinary gift of grace. Some of the devotees later write testimonies of their experiences and send them to the relevant churches.

In his books, Fr. Witko says that his main concern for the devotees is to feel the presence of God and to understand that God is close.⁴⁶ He promotes the idea of

40 Fr. Witko has been celebrating healing Masses on the third Wednesday of every month since 1996 (see Fr. Józef Witko, *Uzdrowiająca moc Ducha Świętego. Świadectwa uzdrowionych*, 2nd ed. [Kraków: Esprit, 2007], 15).

41 At Gniewczyna Łańcucka on the last Wednesday of March 2016.

42 Witko, *Uzdrowiająca moc Ducha Świętego*, 27.

43 Ibid.

44 However, he explains that he doesn't always lay his hands on believers when he prays because some people attach too much importance to that gesture. Instead of the laying of hands, on those occasions he prays for the person to be "touched by the Holy Spirit," which he claims produces "rest" in people (see Witko, *Uzdrowiająca moc Ducha Świętego*, 29). This particular aspect remains outside the scope of my article and requires more research. My advisee Emilia Jaworska is currently involved with this research.

45 Crucially, believers like Fr. Witko perceive such situations as listening to God's instructions. Fr. Witko mentions those persons because he hears God's voice telling him about them.

46 Witko, *Uzdrowiająca moc Ducha Świętego*, 12.

Jesus as a doctor. He claims that they experience signs of Jesus's presence in the form of healings, which often occur during the Masses he celebrates or after ailing body parts are anointed with oil exorcised during such Masses. Many such healings are cases that go beyond the reach of conventional medicine, such as metastatic cancers, gangrene, chronic disabilities, or holes in the heart.⁴⁷

Marta, my pilgrim companion, is a case in point: after a healing Mass at Palikówka, she put away her crutches and walked all the way from the church across the parking lot to the car. At her request, I walked alongside her to assist her. Afterward, she attended Fr. Witko's healing Masses two more times, making sure that the last time he was addressing his healing prayers directly to her.

Two other women, who had come on a pilgrimage to Jodłówka with us, had tears in their eyes. During the car ride, they discussed the best ways to bring Fr. Witko's blessing to their loved ones, some of whom were not believers. It was clearly a matter of importance to them. They were carrying with them water and salt exorcised by Fr. Witko. They believe that those sacramentals will protect the home from evil spirits and negative influences. As Fr. Witko writes, "Objects that have been blessed work against objects marked with a curse."⁴⁸ In this way, the porous self can free itself from any impurities that may have penetrated the organism and the surroundings. To demonstrate this idea of the self as propagated by charismatic priests, we can look at the following part of a prayer for healing popularized by Fr. Witko:

Lord Jesus, I am begging you for full physical, psychological, mental, and spiritual health. Keep every new cell that renews itself in my body perfectly healthy, free from pollution and defects, better than the original model. Unite it with its organ, make it a suitable and harmonious part of it, incorporate it into the sound workings of the whole body. Create order, harmony, and cooperation in my body. Remove any harmful, diseased elements and all impure spirits."

The prayer goes on to list requests aimed at the correct functioning of different body parts, including a line that asks God to "arrest the development of those

47 *Ibid.*

48 *Ibid.*, 34



diseases which are about to attack my body, of which I'm not yet aware."⁴⁹ The prayer composed by the priest (I also heard a variant of it in another church) is a modern version of anthropophagic prayers, whose vision of the human body combines biomedical and religious discourses. At the same time, the prayer is strongly centered on the senses, encouraging a belief in the porous self whose orifices can be protected and healed by God. Through this and similar prayers, the priest teaches the believers about self porousness and the importance of all the purifying rituals for their physical and spiritual health.

As I have shown, the belief in the healing effect of God's grace is objectivized in a series of specific performative actions and objects. Thus, the porous self is constantly engaged in the process of opening itself to the influence of supernatural (God, saints) and ordinary (charismatic priests) good beings.

However, as seen in the quotations cited above, the self is also taught to recognize and categorize a lot of items and popular culture products (songs, movies) as occult and, as such, objects that pollute and endanger its spiritual and physical health. Verbs related to opening, purifying, and polluting were among the most popular in the vocabulary of the interlocutors and were applied both to the individual body of the self and, as I will show in the latter part of this text, also to the body of the Polish nation.

PILGRIMAGE SITE: VIRGIN MARY OF CONSOLATION SANCTUARY IN JODŁÓWKA

At around 11:30 a.m., we reach the shrine after completing the most challenging stretch of the journey, a steep climb up the side of the mountain on which the shrine is located. In later conversations, many of the pilgrims will tell me that this was the most difficult point in their pilgrimage. The shrine is packed with people. Some of the groups of pilgrims are welcomed by parsons before entering the church. Enormous lines are forming in front of the church and the miraculous spring.

There is a great difference in appearance between the casually dressed pilgrims who have arrived on foot and those who have come in their cars and are wearing

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 171-72.

formal clothes fit for a wedding reception. The Mass is celebrated outdoors at a field altar. The devotees are sitting on blankets or folding chairs they have brought for the occasion. We are packed in like sardines. Before the Mass begins, a priest reads out a list of groups, including their starting points and group sizes. During the General Intercessions, the devotees pray to Mary Queen of Poland to “protect the whole nation,” government officials, pilgrims making their way to Marian shrines worldwide, and all those present, but they also ask for Mary’s intercession to ensure that people open themselves up to God’s love and change their hearts. Bishop Edward Białogłowski, who is celebrating the Mass, reminds the congregation about the 250th anniversary of the miracles that led to the first coronation and thanks God for those events and for the gifts of grace connected with the place. He also mentions the robbery of the crowns, which he refers to as an act of sacrilege. It was an act aimed not only against Mary, the bishop explains, but also against the Pope: the robbery took place on October 22, 1978, the same day that John Paul II was celebrating the beginning of his pontificate. However, when the same Pope crowned the same image a second time, the gifts of grace became even more plentiful. He makes reference to the revelations at Fatima, presumably to emphasize that the shrine at Jodłówka has a connection to all shrines devoted to Mary in Poland and worldwide, most notably to the Polish shrines of Gietrzwałd⁵⁰ (known as the Little Fatima) and the major shrine of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa. He also points out the historical connections between those two locations and encourages the devotees to put their trust in Mary. As Cathelijne de Busser and Anna Niedźwiedz correctly note, Mary is a master symbol in the Polish Catholic imaginary. She triggers a series of associations as a savior figure who preserved Polish people not only from Satan but also from the Swedish invasions in the seventeenth century, from Poland’s loss of independence (1795–1918), and from the spread of communism.⁵¹ Today, Mary is preserving Polish people from liberal ideology, which Fr. Rydyk has compared to totalitarian regimes such as communism

50 A town in Poland where Mary is believed to have appeared to two girls who have taken their First Communion, telling them to pray on the Rosary. The Rosary prayer takes place every day at the local shrine.

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





or even Nazism.⁵² However, it should be noted that this starkly dichotomous vision of the relationship between Catholicism and liberalism was not being promoted at the shrine in Jodłówka, where the emphasis was placed on the cult of Mary and her status as Queen of Poland, and the sermon Bishop Białogłowski preached treated non-Catholics as a part of Poland.

Photo 8 credit:
Magdalena Lubańska

When celebrating the Mass during a local feast at the shrine at Jodłówka, Bishop Edward Białogłowski prayed for Polish schools to teach the importance of values, which according to him are: God, honor, and the Fatherland. At the same time, though, he pointed out that the Catholic catechism views democracy as an important value that must be practiced in a spirit of mutual respect and dialogue. The bishop encouraged people “on the left and on the right” to practice solidarity and repeatedly quoted passages from the song “Mother of Consolation” in his

52 Marcin Wójcik, *W rodzinie ojca mego* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2015), 62. I believe many Polish Catholics would associate such statements with the words of John Paul II spoken on June 11, 1999, to the Polish members of Parliament: “History teaches us that democracy without values can easily turn into open or veiled totalitarianism.” Unfortunately, not all Catholics recognize that this might be an internal threat as well.

sermon.⁵³ His sermon was therefore inclusive in nature and did not seek to fan political division. At the same time, it presented the idea of Poland as a country of peaceful hierarchic pluralism,⁵⁴ tinted by a national-Catholic poetics.

The pilgrimage began and ended with the pilgrims singing and asking Mary to look at them with “merciful eyes.” Mary is referred to as Queen of Poland, Queen of the Earth, Queen of the World, and Mother of Consolation, and as someone who intercedes with Jesus for the pilgrims.

POLISH MESSIANISM, DIVINE PROVIDENCE, MOHERY, AND LEWACY

Besides this sensory-based dimension of religiosity, which largely manifests itself through attempts to preserve an individual self from harmful powers and to produce a perception of divine presence, another important dimension is the nation. As pointed out before, the pilgrimage organizers had met at a meeting organized by Solidarna Polska, a conservative political party. Marta admits openly that, for her, the pilgrimage goes beyond the personal sphere: it is also a demonstration of Polish independence and Polish love of religion, a weapon in the fight for freedom in a nation encircled by a secular Europe:

We, people on the political right, have certain moral principles. ... Law and order matter to us, the Fatherland matters to us, other people matter to us. We are trying to rebuild all those things by what we do. To return to our roots. If they take away our faith they will be able to destroy us. There can be no people without bees, and in the same way there can be no people without faith. Without faith Poland wouldn't exist anymore. Our faith is the only thing that's keeping us alive. You see, here in Subcarpathia we would die as a nation, and those other governments are wearing us down. It's the same thing with the town here, because we refused to bow down, they couldn't pressurize us, couldn't shoehorn us into their own boxes. We are independent, we're still

53 Placing particular emphasis on the line, “Mother of God of Consolation, unite in love homes and villages, cities and factories. Remove all division, oh Mother of Consolation, and stay with us.”

54 Agnieszka Pasięka, *Hierarchy and Pluralism: Living Religious Difference in Catholic Poland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).



brave, and we're clear about that. This pilgrimage is also a demonstration. We're walking together, we're sticking together. We get people together, and maybe even without realizing it they're demonstrating as well, they're resisting the fact that people want to take our God away from us, that they want to take those sacred things away from us and turn us into secular people.

Marta believes that the 2010 plane crash in Smolensk was an assassination attempt organized by the Russians with the consent of the Polish government, given at the time to exact vengeance on President Lech Kaczyński for his support to Georgia during that country's war with Russia. Many Catholic devotees in Subcarpathia used to think in similar terms. They often demonize the former Prime Minister Donald Tusk and those in his political circles. Some claim that "he's got Polish blood on his hands" by being directly responsible for the crash of the Polish government airplane. At the same time, they view themselves as the "repugnant others"⁵⁵ of Europe, who are also rejected by the secular elements in Polish society: "As a nation, we still have our work cut out for us; we have been worn down, our faith has been taken away from us. That's because by taking the most important thing from a nation, namely faith, you also take away that nation's self-confidence."

They complain about being stigmatized as *mohery* ("mohair berets," a Polish slur used against religious conservatives, alluding to headgear favored by elderly Polish ladies). That slur was first used in public discourse by Donald Tusk during a parliamentary debate on November 10, 2005.⁵⁶ The pilgrimage participants often brought up the slur to illustrate the negative stereotypes about their faith that they have to face in their life.⁵⁷ One pilgrim I spoke with described it this way:

55 Suzanne Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other," *Social Research* 58, no. 2 (1991): 373-93.

56 At least, the phrase is commonly attributed to him. In actual fact, Tusk used the phrase "mohair coalition." Probably the first journalistic text to use that popular phrase was a column by Maja Narbutt in her article, "Labyrinty księdza prałata," *Rzeczpospolita*, October 23, 2004.

57 In other words, they realize that the everyday modern liberal discourse is permeated with a *ressentiment* against Christians, who are regarded as the "repugnant cultural other" by the secular, liberal version of modernity, which is also represented by most scientists and academics (Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism," 373-93). They correctly interpret the word *mohery* as an exoticizing and orientaling slur aimed at their ideological stance.

It's nice to meet people who are believers because the world, well, it is what it is. Christianity is being kind of suppressed these days, but it's also undergoing a revival. So it's cool that that's happening. Well, like I say, in my job the nonbelievers ridicule me for my involvement in the church, like I'm this *moher*. Things like, "Oh, I bet you're having a date with a priest tomorrow," and I just joke back, like "Yeah, that's right." I just don't care. I simply refuse to get into arguments about it.

It might seem surprising that so many people consider religion to be under threat in Poland, a country currently dominated by right-wing parties, especially in regions with high rates of religious belief. In the Archdiocese of Przemyśl, to which Przeworsk belongs, the so-called *dominantes* (the percentage of people who take part in the Sunday Mass relative to the total number of believers) stands at 59.6 percent, the third highest in Poland and second only to Tarnów (70.1%) and Rzeszów (64.6%). The archdiocese also boasts of Poland as having the highest rate of *participantes* (devotees who belong to groups and communities affiliated with the church) at 19.1 percent.⁵⁸

However, my respondents strongly believe that they are being discriminated against and dismissed as *mohery*, a sense that is fostered by the current polarization affecting Poland's political scene, public debate, and society in general. Incidentally, a similar sense of grievance is often felt at the other end of the political spectrum, where anyone with left-wing views gets dismissed as a *lewak* or an extreme leftist.

For the Catholics from Przeworsk, this idea of an organism vulnerable to the workings of evil powers and negative influences often applies not only to themselves but also to Poland as a whole. At the same time, they believe that Poland has a powerful weapon in the form of religious faith and Divine Providence, which keeps the country safe from harm. They assume that most believers in Poland share this religious and nationalistic imagery, whereby Polish people play a messianic role in the world:

58 Wojciech Sadłoń, *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia* (Warszawa: Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2015).



If we leave the [European] Union, the Union will fall apart, and that's [to do with] power, that's [to do with] business interests. But we will not leave the Union. That's not what we want. It's not that we don't want the Union, it's the Union that doesn't want us. We keep trying to preserve our identity in that Union, and they want to pigeonhole us again. But we are a nation, and we have the right to be independent, to have our own governments, our own courts. Of course we can affiliate ourselves with others, but there's got to be rules, there's got to be limits, they can't just impose things on us. Otherwise they would take our faith away again, and that would be the end of us, if we gave in. But we must defend ourselves. We don't want to be partitioned again, we have been partitioned before.

I agree with Geneviève Zubrzycki that romantic messianism provides the semiotic context for Polish Catholics, bringing together religious and national symbols, and supplying ready-made scripts for collective representations and actions.⁵⁹ This is particularly apparent during pilgrimages, a fact noted already by Stefan Czarnowski with regard to nineteenth-century pilgrimages,⁶⁰ and by modern Polish anthropologists currently studying this phenomenon.⁶¹ Anna Niedźwiedz correctly points out that this phenomenon, which was inspired in its early stages by the romantic elites, actually goes back to Poland's loss of statehood in the late eighteenth century and to the country's subsequent experience of being partitioned by foreign

powers.⁶² It was also a powerful weapon in the political resistance against the communist regime in Poland, a fact that undoubtedly contributed to its lasting influence. Today it is predominantly promoted by Polish religious media connected

59 Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 50.

60 Stefan Czarnowski, "Kultura religijna wiejskiego ludu polskiego," in *Kultura* (Warszawa, PWN, 1958 [1938]), 61.

61 Kinga Sekerdej, Agnieszka Pasięka, and Marta Warat, "Popular Religion and Postsocialist Nostalgia: Licheń as a Polysemic Religious Centre in Poland," *Polish Sociological Review* 4, no. 160 (2007), 433.

62 Anna Niedźwiedz, "Old and New Paths of Polish Pilgrimages," in *International Perspectives on Pilgrimage Studies: Itineraries, Gaps and Obstacles*, ed. Dionigi Albera and John Eade (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 75.

with Fr. Rydzyk (an influential clergyman who has built a staunchly conservative Catholic media empire), such as Radio Maryja a (radio broadcast station) or *Nasz Dziennik* (a daily newspaper), for whom the significant other against which they construct their identity includes *lewacy* (“extreme lefties”) and “liberals.” Those media sources are mainly responsible for the fact that lived Catholicism in Poland is becoming strongly unified and continuously multiplies the ideology of nationalism and Catholicism. In recent years, this process of unification has been boosted by the ruling party, which leans strongly to the right.

However, it is worth pointing out that the people who embrace such ideas in the current social and historical context are fully aware of their optionality⁶³ and don't take them for granted. In practical terms, they regard themselves as participants in a “culture war”⁶⁴ over fundamental Christian values waged against a nihilistic and death-centered Europe, which they believe is represented in Poland by left-wing and liberal circles. This is, in fact, the common denominator for all the members of that group. When I ask Marta if she is afraid that this kind of resolutely autonomous Poland might end up friendless in Europe, she says: “No, Magda, no, no. The hand of God is over us, and the angels are extending a cloak of protection.” This statement expresses her imagery of Poland as porous and analogical to the individual self in need of God's protection.

63 This is because they inhabit a postsecular landscape where religious and secular people coexist but, as Charles Taylor notes, “naivete is now unavailable to anyone, believer or unbeliever alike” (see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 21).

64 Philip Rieff refers to this as a *Kulturkampf*, defined as a war between faiths with the cultures of fiction and death (Rieff, *Sacred Order/Social Order*, vol. 1, *My Life among the Deathworks: Illustrations in the Aesthetics of Authority* [Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2006]).



CONCLUSIONS

The pilgrimage that originates in this perspective serves as reintegration and reinforcement of both the individual and national self and body. Its aim is fulfilled by letting in to these bodies the good healing powers and by dispossessing themselves and disowning from everything associated with the demonic influences—no matter whether things or ideas. The religious beliefs of the pilgrims find expression in a desire to be filled up with God; their porous self wants to experience that fullness in a sensory, somatic way. They want to view their everyday life as a thing full of God's signs. This is why most religious practices and narratives recounted by the pilgrims involve moments that we might describe in sociological terms as an objectivization of God and his presence. God is no longer the distant presence, as in the period before Vatican II, but rather a “Daddy” and a “Friend” who wants spiritual and physical well-being for every devotee and for Poland at large, just as Mary is to them a “Dearest Mother” (*Mateczka*). The devotees observe evidence of God's presence and loving care in every small detail of their daily life, and the same applies to Poland, which in their opinion is treated as “the repugnant other” of Europe,⁶⁵ but which has, in fact, been chosen by God to fulfill a special mission of bringing together the ideals of God, honor, and Fatherland. In this sense, contradictory emotions and values manifest themselves in the religious imageries of the pilgrims of Przeworsk: they seek to love their neighbors and they fear otherness (e.g., refugees); they embrace humility and are engaged in rivalry over who is a better Catholic and Pole; they have a sense of yearning for the sacred understood in an inclusive way, but they also embrace the exclusivist bombast of Polish messianism.

—*Translated from Polish by Piotr Szymczak*

65 Harding, “Representing Fundamentalism,” 373–93.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baraniecka-Olszewska, Kamila. "Communitas a intencje pątników. Typy uczestnictwa w pielgrzymce. Wielki Odpust Kalwaryjski Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny w Kalwarii Pałacowskiej." *Etnografia Polska* 52, no. 1–2 (2008): 137–54.
- . "O wielkim odpuście w Kalwarii Pałacowskiej ponownie. Refleksja nad antropologią pielgrzymek." *Etnografia Polska* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 27–42.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- de Busser, Cathelijne, and Anna Niedźwiedz. "Mary in Poland: A Polish Master Symbol." In *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, edited by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, 87–100. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009.
- Buyskykh, Iulia. "Pomiędzy pamięcią a granicą: ukraińska pielgrzymka na Kalwarię Pałacowską." *Etnografia Polska* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 43–62.
- Csordas, Thomas. *Body/Meaning/Healing*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- . "Embodiment as a Paradigm in Anthropology." *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 5–47.
- . *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.
- Czarnowski, Stefan. "Kultura religijna wiejskiego ludu polskiego." In *Kultura*, Warszawa: PWN, 1958 [1938].
- Eade, John, and Michael Sallnow. Introduction to *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, edited by Eade and Sallnow, 1–29. London: Routledge, 1991.

- Harding, Suzanne F. "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other." *Social Research* 58, no. 2 (1991): 373–93.
- Hermkens, Anna-Karina, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans. Introduction to *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, edited by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans, 87–100, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009
- Jaworska, Emilia. "Konceptualizacje zła, działania Złego Ducha, zagrożenia duchowe i egzorcyzmy w społecznościach katolickich na Rzeszowszczyźnie." BA thesis, advisor Magdalena Lubańska, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw, 2017.
- Lubańska, Magdalena. "Healing Chains, Relationships of Power and Competing Religious Imageries in the Monastery of Saints Kosmas and Damian in Kuklen (Bulgaria)." *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 10, no. 1 (2016): 71–99.
- . "Mothers, Grandmothers, Patriots: Religious Imageries of Female Members of the Confraternity of the Infant Jesus at the Church of St. Wojciech and St. Stanisław in Rzeszów, Poland." *Studia Religioznawcza* 50, no. 3 (2017): 241–65.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. Delhi: Motilal Barnasidas Publishers, 1996 [1945].
- Mitchell, Jon. "A Catholic Body? Miracles, Secularity, and the Porous Self in Malta." In *The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Reader*, edited by Kristin Norget, Valentina Napolitano, and Maya Mayblin, 211–27. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017.
- Morgan, David. "Introduction: 'The Matter of Belief.'" In *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, edited by David Morgan, 1–18. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

- Niedźwiedz, Anna. "Old and New Paths of Polish Pilgrimages." In *International Perspectives on Pilgrimage Studies: Itineraries, Gaps and Obstacles*, edited by Dionigi Albera and John Eade, 69–94. New York and London: Routledge, 2015.
- Orsi, Robert. "Introduction: Jesus Held Him So Close in His Love for Him That He Left the Marks of His Passion on His Body." In *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 1–18. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Pasieka, Agnieszka. *Hierarchy and Pluralism: Living Religious Difference in Catholic Poland*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Rieff, Philip. *Sacred Order/Social Order*. Vol. 1. *My Life among the Deathworks: Illustrations in the Aesthetics of Authority*. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2006.
- Sadłoń, Wojciech. *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia*. Warszawa: Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2015.
- Sekerdej, Kinga, Agnieszka Pasieka, and Marta Warat. "Popular Religion and Post-socialist Nostalgia: Licheń as a Polysemic Religious Centre in Poland." *Polish Sociological Review* 4, no. 160 (2007): 431–44.
- Siekierski, Konrad. "Faith and Fatigue in the Extreme Way of the Cross in Poland." *Religion, State & Society* 46, no. 2 (2018): 108–22. doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1456767
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Turner, Victor, and Edith Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1996 [1978].
- Zubrzycki, Geneviève. *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

SOURCES

Narbutt, Maja. “Labirynty księdza prałata.” *Rzeczpospolita*, October 23, 2004.

Wabik Iwona, Cichosz Anna, Cichocz Mateusz, and Kuter Katarzyna “Jodłówka. Sanktuarium Matki Boskiej Pocieszenia,” in *Przewodniki po Polsce. Sanktuaria Podkarpacia*, edited by Iwona Wabik, Agnieszka Cichosz, Mateusz Cichocz, and Katarzyna Kuter (Lublin: JUT, 2015), 76—80.

Witko, Fr. Józef. *Uzdrawiająca moc Ducha Świętego. Świadectwa uzdrowionych*. 2nd ed. Kraków: Esprit, 2007.

Wójcik, Marcin. *W rodzinie ojca mego*. Wołowiec: Czarne, 2015.