

Catholicism in Central and Eastern Europe after Vatican II: Assessing the Legacy of John Paul II

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Abstract. *Pope John Paul II (2005) called communism an “ideology of evil”, and fighting it became a centrepiece of his pontificate. As Samuel P. Huntington (1993) argued in his theory of a “third wave” of democratization that occurred after the 1960s, the Church was instrumental in helping Western powers undermine the credibility of the Soviet system, a process that was aided by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Furthermore, Gilles Kepel (1994) and José Casanova (1994) have analysed the role played by the Catholic Church in a number of countries where religion has been a vanguard for social movements seeking greater freedom amidst national political tensions. This paper examines the legacy of John Paul II’s efforts to oust Soviet communism from not only his homeland of Poland, but from Europe altogether. The paper begins with an examination of John Paul II’s critique of communism as a flawed system and his emphasis on Central and Eastern Europe’s Christian heritage. More specifically, how his writings and campaigning helped to undermine communism in Central and Eastern Europe will be discussed. The paper will then move to an assessment of the legacy of John Paul II’s efforts against communism and consider the role of contemporary Catholicism generally across Central and Eastern Europe as it tries to stake out its share of the religious marketplace against other religions, including Orthodoxy, Protestantism and new religious movements. This will be examined through theories of post-secularism, and secularism. The paper argues that Catholicism has managed to re-emerge as a powerful force in Central and Eastern Europe, but still has work to do if it is to maintain its position in this region and be what Karl Rahner called a “world Church”.*

Keywords: *John Paul II, Vatican II, secularism, communism, religious diversity.*

Introduction

The papacy of John Paul II stands out in recent Catholic history as being one of two high water marks for the Church. The other was the holding of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). John Paul II’s pontificate, beginning some thirteen years after the close of the council, came at a time of immense change in the Catholic Church as it underwent a shift in its

relationship with secular modernity. This was the result of reforms enacted by the council and aimed at bringing the Church into a closer working relationship with modern social institutions, and these reforms included changes in the liturgy, a greater emphasis on ecumenism, and the recognition of freedom of religion, among others. Key developments during John Paul II's time as pope include the reform of canon law, the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and a clampdown on Liberation Theology. The Pope also expressed his unwillingness to discuss in any real depth the topic of married or women priests. It is for this reason that his pontificate has not been without controversy. On the other hand, the Pope's optimistic and charismatic style of leadership prompted many Catholics to see him as a symbol of renewed hope for the Church's role in the modern world, and for many non-Catholics as a champion of the common good in a violent world (Weigel 2005, 4). But as well as these issues, John Paul II's papacy, especially in the 1980s, was concerned with communism in Central and Eastern Europe. It is for this reason that his pontificate was intensely political, and goes some way towards explaining why he soon became a household name across the world. He has been included along with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and American President Ronald Reagan as a major force in the undermining of Soviet style communism in Central and Eastern Europe (Weigel 2005, 4–5; Merkle 2008, 126; Weigel 2010, 184).¹ The significance of John Paul II's legacy was symbolised in 2014 by his elevation to sainthood, the highest honour in the Catholic Church.

This paper argues that after the success of John Paul II's anti-communist stance, the situation for the Catholic Church in Central and Eastern Europe has grown much more complex. This is because of a series of social changes that have taken place across the globe, summed up by what Jürgen Habermas calls post-secularism, and Charles Taylor defines as 'a secular age'. We will return to these theories below. To reveal John Paul II's impact on communism in Central and Eastern Europe a number of primary texts will be assessed. These texts include his encyclicals *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Slavorum Apostoli* (1985) and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987). What this paper hopes to show is how the decisions made by John Paul II and his advisors during the Cold War has framed the Church's views on Central and Eastern Europe today, and its responses to the challenges to Christian faith currently found in that part of the world, challenges that are coming from secularization, religious diversity, and new forms of religious practice. Before examining these texts,

1 The causes of the demise of the Soviet Union are multiple, and include pressure from Western powers, the role of the Church and other religious organizations, excessive military spending, the nuclear arms race, the war in Afghanistan, civil unrest in Soviet states, a faltering economy, and corruption and incompetence at the government level.

the next section will contextualise John Paul II's pontificate, considering especially the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the Church and its relations with modernity, the political sphere, and communism.

The Vatican and the Pope during the Cold War

At the core of the Second Vatican Council was the idea of *aggiornamento*, an opening up of the Church to the wider world, and a commitment to updating the Church so that it would be in a better position to reach out to men and women of the modern world (Alberigo 2006; O'Malley 2008). While the council was in session, the gathered bishops were well aware of the threat that communism was having for a number of nation-states that had fallen under the control of communist governments in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world, including Asia. As bishop, and later archbishop, of Kraków, Poland, Karol Wojtyła (the future Pope John Paul II) attended Vatican II and was present at all four sessions. He was also involved in the preparation of *Gaudium et spes* (John Paul II 1994, 159; Acta 1975, 298ff). Some commentators suggest that John Paul II had a conservative attitude towards the council and its reforms, and that this came to the fore during his pontificate. However, such a view of the situation is simplistic and misleading (see McPartlan 2008). Whatever his opinions about the aims and scope of the council, it was certainly a significant event in his ministerial life, where he came into contact with a number of influential Church leaders and met some of the twentieth century's leading Catholic theologians (John Paul II 2004, 164–5).

As the council began its deliberations on the future of the Church, the Cuban Missile Crisis broke out, and discussions were paused so that prayers for peace could be said for a peaceful resolution. Towards the end of the council in 1965 the war in Vietnam was well underway. There were calls by some bishops to officially condemn communism in the conciliar documents, while others cautioned against such a move suggesting that it might make matters more grave for Catholics already living under communist rule (Tanner 2003, 289; O'Malley 2008, 235). The final consensus among those gathered at Vatican II was, therefore, to decide against a systematic and wholesale denunciation of communism in the documents (see Linden 2009, 67–8). The reason for this was twofold. On the one hand, the Council Fathers wanted to make the documents universal in theme and content, so that their criticisms of inequality and oppression could be applied to any number of political ideologies. Secondly, the Council Fathers felt that a condemnation of communism would make the council look like

it was denouncing it while lauding capitalism. The council, rather, was understood as being about more than these issues, and its vision was for a church that would be in a better position to relate to the modern world, not as a platform for anti-communist rhetoric. As Pope Paul VI suggested in his speech at the opening of the council's second session, the Church intended to serve the world and champion its dignity, rather than master or admonish it (Linden 2009, 82–3).

After the council, however, the issue of communism soon resurfaced, this time in debates over Liberation Theology. Global poverty and how the Church should respond to it had been discussed at the council. This largely took place during discussions of the council's final and most influential document, *Gaudium et spes* (Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World; Cf. Acta 1975, 703–5). However, as the document was growing long and unwieldy with the inclusion of a number of different thematic strands, from world peace through to the family, the issue of global poverty was never sufficiently resolved. Discussion began anew immediately after the Latin American bishops returned to their dioceses, culminating in their historic meeting at Medellín, Colombia, in 1968 (Aguilar 2008, 145). There the 'preferential option for the poor' became a central tenet of Liberation Theology. As theologians developed these ideas it became evident to the Vatican that there was a Marxist flavour in some of them, and this collided with John Paul II's concerns about communism and his experiences of its oppression of the Catholic Church in Poland and in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. The Vatican proposed caution to Liberation theologians who sailed too close to Marxism, and some were investigated by the Sacred Congregation for the Faith (CDF).

Whatever was thought about communism at the council, John Paul II felt that it was not only a political problem, but one which was eating away at the presence of the Church in some European countries. Just as socialists wanted to unify Europe along ideological lines, John Paul II had a grand vision of Europe unified by a common Christian patrimony (Michel 1991, 132). This was not a nostalgic longing for medieval Christendom, which for all intents and purposes had been a political vision of Europe with a Christian ethos (Callinicos 1991, 87). Rather, the Pope sought a greater influence in the direction that Europe was taking along moral and religious lines, and to position the Church as an "alternative organizing framework alongside other nonstate actors like the United Nations and the European Union" (Byrnes 2001, 9–10). But as Byrnes points out, such a strategy is fraught with difficulties. Chief amongst them is that while the Church might be a global institution with some influence in world affairs, it remains for the most part confined to nation states and parish communities, and therefore

is bound by local issues, including laws, culture, and politics. Byrnes cites the case of Poland, where the Church has significant clout, but remains subject to the Polish legislative process in the formation of laws (Byrnes 2001, 49–50). This has meant that since the fall of communism the Polish Catholic Church has not always had its own way in the political process, with parties seeking to engage voters with issues beyond religion. From the early 1980s onwards, John Paul II and others in the Vatican wanted to help those living under communist regimes, and to assist Christian churches in the region. To do this the Pope used one of the most powerful tools available to him, which was the issuing of papal documents addressed to large audiences and which were backed by his media profile and public charisma.

The Critique of Communism in the Writings of John Paul II

It was through encyclicals and other official statements that John Paul II set about criticising the communist system. Papal encyclicals are important church documents because they “are the most authoritative documents in which the pope proposes social teaching” (Curran 2005, 202). The Church’s body of modern social teaching was instigated by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). John Paul II made an important contribution to this genre with the release of *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work). In the text, the Pope stresses its connection with *Rerum Novarum*, and it was released on the ninetieth anniversary of Pope Leo’s encyclical. *Rerum Novarum* was written with the awareness that communism had become a powerful political force in Europe.² Pope Leo showed how communism presented a number of challenges to the Church. One was its hostility to organised religion, seeing religion as a form of ideological support for the status quo and for capitalism. This hostility was sourced from Marx’s critical yet off-hand views about religion as being the “opium of the people” (Marx 1978, 54). A second challenge was communism’s claim to be a moral force, a movement that fought for improved living conditions for workers and for the betterment of society more generally. Communism’s utopian vision of peace on earth competed with the Church’s messianic vision of a paradise beyond this life. This being the case, communism, in the Church’s eyes, was seeking to win over the hearts and minds of Europeans, while undermining the Christian message. Pope Leo “regarded the church as one of the means to check the advance of communism” (Walsh 1998, 31), and

2 Leo XIII was not the only pope to address communism. Another example is Pius XI’s *Divini Redemptoris* (On Atheistic Communism) of 1937.

his encyclical was one way in which it could win back some of the moral high ground. *Rerum Novarum* stresses the need for fair working conditions and wages, the dignity of work and workers, while making the case for the necessity of private property and the rights of the family.

Laborem Exercens continues some of these themes, and it is particularly concerned with arguing for the dignity of work from a Biblical perspective. John Paul begins the encyclical by pointing out that it is *people* who are central to any discussion of work, because work is something that helps to define what it is to be human, and also because work is something that people derive dignity from (John Paul II 1981, 19; Curran 2005, 203–4). Through work people not only provide for themselves and their families, but they are also involved in building the human community and expressing the human condition in art, culture and the works of civilization. However, in the modern world new forces are impacting on work. One of these is technology, which has the potential to make work more alienating (see John Paul II 1981, 25). Furthermore, work is today threatened by trends that make it degrading rather than dignifying. These trends include lower rates of pay, longer working hours, and more dangerous occupations, which the Pope intimates when he mentions how labour was understood in early capitalism, as a material element in the economic enterprise (John Paul II 1981, 30–1).

For John Paul, therefore, work is both subjective and objective, but it is at the subjective level that the dignity of work needs to be protected, because work is made meaningful by the one who does it, rather than by the nature of the work that is done. The Pope points out that the solidarity that emerged among workers in early capitalism was justified in light of the degradation that they were subjected to in the factory system, and in other areas of work, which saw work as only “an instrument of production” (John Paul II 1981, 34). These points are a precursor to the Pope’s discussion of the larger issue that he wants to address in this text, which is the “conflict between labour and capital” (John Paul II 1981, 45).

This conflict, the Pope highlights, is understood by many as class conflict, and he outlines the response to unfair labour practices that were the focus of Marx and Engels. The outcome of labour’s response resulted in the idea of collectivisation, so that no social group would have a monopoly of ownership of land and what is produced from it, and as a consequence labourers would no longer be subjected to exploitation. Thus capital and labour were separated by this conflict and have come to see themselves as oppositional forces (John Paul II 1981, 56). This has manifested itself into a global movement which now challenges not only capitalism but human freedom as well, because under communism labour remains separated from the human person and ends up becoming economic and materialist, just as

it was under capitalism, but with different ends. What is evident, therefore, from the Pope's analysis of labour, is an attempt to win labour back from socialist thought, which tried to highlight its dignity *vis-à-vis* the degradation that workers were suffering under early capitalism. The Pope is arguing for the importance of work, for workers, and for their rights in an effort to win back the moral high ground from socialism that sides with workers and offers an alternative to their suffering. The Pope offers another view of work that is distinct from the instrumentalism of capitalism and the materialism of socialism, and it is a vision of work that champions workers and highlights the dignity of work, a dignity that comes from the fact that workers are human beings who are loved by God. Such a move provides an alternative to socialism, by showing that the Church is able to offer a model and vision of work which promotes workers, while at the same time stating in clear terms why workers should not be exploited by capitalism. At the same time the Pope presents a clear denunciation of the communist system as one which continues the alienating practices of capitalism but in a different form. It is "a system of bureaucratic centralization, which makes the worker feel that he is just a cog in a huge machine moved from above, that he is for more reasons than one a mere production instrument rather than a true subject of work" (John Paul II 1981, 64–5).

A move to win back from communism its monopoly on the dignity of work, as outlined in *Laborem Exercens*, was followed in 1985 with the Pope's encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, which focuses on Saint's Cyril and Methodius and their role in converting the Slavic peoples to Christianity.³ Although not in the genre of a social encyclical, and addressed to members of the Church specifically, this document sets the scene for a new awareness of the depth and continued relevance of Slavic Christianity, a faith which stands in contradistinction to the materialist ideology of socialism reigning in the region when the document was released. The subtext of this encyclical does more than merely laud the merits of these saints and their works – it is also a call to recognition of the religious patrimony that is crucial to the social and cultural identity of those living in Central and Eastern Europe. The encyclical subtly presents the idea of a Europe that is no longer divided along ideological lines, but which is unified under the Christian cross and the Gospel; the Pope's "elevation of these 'Apostles to the Slavs' was an indication of his commitment to European unity *and* to the idea that his church must serve as the foundation of that unity" (Byrnes 2001, 2, emphasis in original). Furthermore, the encyclical can be read as a mission statement

3 The encyclical came five years after John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Egregiae Virtutis* (31 December 1980), in which he declared Saints Cyril and Methodius co-Patrons of Europe along with Saint Benedict, the founder of Western monasticism.

for what needs to be done in contemporary times. Just as the two saints worked to free the Slavic nations from paganism in the ninth century, so must Catholics today work to free the Church from communism (Michel 1991, 156–7). The encyclical can, therefore, be interpreted at a number of levels, but a key theme of the text, reinforced by its timing, is that it is a call to re-evangelization in the face of atheistic communism. The Pope points out how Cyril and Methodius brought not only religious conversion to the Slavic peoples, but also, through their use of Old Slavic and Cyrillic script, boosted the cultural capital of the region. This, the Pope states, is along with Christian conversion the best way of “overcoming tensions and repairing the divisions and antagonisms both in Europe and in the world” (John Paul II 1985, 42–4). Furthermore, the Pope highlights that he personally has a stake in this process, being the first Slavic pope (John Paul II 1985, 6).

In 1987 the Pope released another social encyclical titled *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern), which was published on the twentieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, and which aimed to continue that encyclical’s general theme. Paul VI called attention to global inequalities in social and economic development, which was resulting in high levels of poverty in many parts of the world, while the more developed industrialised nations enjoyed ever higher standards of living. For John Paul II, this situation led to a number of consequences, including the loss of human dignity for the world’s poor, and a need for greater awareness among the world’s rich to understand that their wealth, and the policies and decisions which help to generate it, are tied to the plight of the poor. This is because, as both popes attest to, we are now living in a world of greater interdependency as capitalism is becoming globalized (see John Paul II 1987, 17). John Paul II also comments on how global inequality provides a justification for “ideological blocs” (John Paul II 1987, 18); a global division based on a materialist vision of humanity and the world’s resources which would have resonated for readers in a Cold War context. The Pope suggests that since the Second World War there has arisen a division between East and West around the ideologies of capitalism and communism, that each is supported by a “sphere of influence”, and that they engage in a “cold war” or “wars by proxy” (John Paul II 1987, 33–4). However, “the Church’s social doctrine adopts a critical attitude towards both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism” (John Paul II 1987, 35). The Pope presents, instead of these ideological positions, the notion of solidarity as the best way for societies to create equality between citizens, and for seeing others as persons rather than economic resources. This should be done, he emphasizes, by “re-awakening the religious awareness of individuals and peoples” (John Paul II 1987, 73). Thus, what the Church offers is not a third way to mitigate the

worst excesses of capitalism and communism, but a whole new alternative – a society based on social justice, which stresses the value of each person’s authenticity and their rights. The Pope ends the encyclical with a number of proposals for how things can be improved, including economic reforms, education, greater cooperation between people and groups, and political reform. A first reading of this encyclical suggests that it is not directly concerned with the plight of Central and Eastern Europe, or with communist regimes, but a closer examination reveals that the text is in fact directed at the overarching political atmosphere that was contributing to the tense Cold War environment, a tension which was leading to greater repression in countries such as Poland and Hungary, among others. By the late 1980s the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was bogged down in a war of attrition in Afghanistan, while at the same time its economy was struggling to keep up in the arms race with the United States. The Pope’s interjection at this point in time served to undermine the legitimacy of the Cold War, for both sides, but specifically for the Soviet Union which claimed to be serving the interests of the world’s workers but was oppressing many of them in the process. Through examining the situation at the geo-political level, the Pope revealed in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* that communism had unleashed a global struggle that was negatively impacting on the world’s poor, and that the arms race had imperilled all human life. This can only be overcome by global solidarity, which requires “autonomy and free-determination” (John Paul II 1987, 86). Communism stood in the way of such freedom.

These three texts, therefore, question communism’s monopoly on the dignity of work, promote the importance of Christianity for Central and Eastern Europe, and highlight the Cold War’s impact on the world at the geo-political level. Space precludes analysing more papal documents from this period of time, but the three examined above reveal a sustained attempt to question the moral authority that communism claimed, a moral authority in the guise of advancing the best interests of the worker in the face of the greed and alienating tendencies of capitalism. Instead, the Pope revealed that this moral authority was absent, and that communism was not upholding the dignity of persons, but was stunting their growth through the curtailment of their freedoms. Furthermore, this was the situation as it existed in Central and Eastern Europe, and it was up to a Slav pope to promote the Church’s vision of social solidarity and human dignity, as not a third way between communism and capitalism, but as an alternative system of thought and action. Although capitalism was not let off the hook in the Pope’s critique of modern social systems and their alienating potential, the deficiencies of communist collectivism were clearly addressed, and a vision for a more hopeful future based on Gospel values is emphasised (Curran

2005, 215). These three documents are important texts in an effort to obtain a clear sense of the Pope's thinking about the threat of communism and the important role that the Church in Central and Eastern Europe has for offering an alternative, and why this region needed to be freed from authoritarian governance.⁴ To these texts, moreover, should also be added the Pope's numerous speeches and pastoral work, and his visits to Poland and other parts of the region, which have all been understood as essential moves for the support of anti-communist struggles in Central and Eastern Europe (Michel 1991, 133; Byrnes 2001, 2).

A consideration of these papal statements leads to questions about their influence on the contemporary religious landscape, both generally, and in Central and Eastern Europe specifically. One major institutional shift can be highlighted which makes such a translation possible. This is, as mentioned above, the holding of Vatican II. The council transformed how the Church negotiates with nation-states and oppressive regimes in particular. Huntington (1991) has revealed how prior to the council the Church was content to leave incumbent regimes uncontested, as long as the Church's interests were unharmed. The council, however, with its emphasis on protecting freedom of religion and its focus on the anthropological theology of Karl Rahner, called for a much more critical stance from Church leaders towards regimes that suppressed freedom of religion and human rights. Huntington shows the impact of this shift in policy for a number of states, including Poland, the Philippines, and South American states. Casanova's (1994) research on the public re-emergence of Catholicism in Poland and Brazil is also based on Vatican II's call to protect human rights and freedom of conscience. Vatican II, therefore, becomes the mechanism by which the pronouncements of the popes are able to be effective in altering social conditions. John Paul II, an inheritor of Vatican II, promoted the council's vision of protecting human rights and freedom of religion, not only for Catholics but for all citizens. The many references to conciliar documents in his writings, including the texts analysed above, attest to his adopting the council's mandate on human rights. What John Paul II's work also offers is an enduring legacy for the Church, noticeable in its continued stake in the region, even as religion there is buffeted by new challenges. As we will see in the next section, new issues such as religious diversity, secularism and social change suggests that churches are increasingly in competition with each other and struggling against the ideology of secular capitalism. The work of John Paul II as assessed above provides the Church with the moral authority

4 John Paul II provided a much more detailed criticism of communism in his social encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, but this was published in 1991 when the demise of the Soviet Union was certain.

to have a significant input in societies in Central and Eastern Europe that are grappling with these challenges. Without the Church's critique of communism under the direction of John Paul II, it might today be facing potential irrelevancy in the region. But through its ongoing involvement in the politics of the region, and through events such as World Youth Day instigated by John Paul II, the Church is in a position to have at least some relevance in societies in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Holy See in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe

As mentioned above, since communism's fall a new series of challenges have arisen for the Church and its efforts to maintain its influence in the region, and its mission of evangelization. These include the widespread diversity of religion that is now again evident in a part of the world that was suppressed by a non-religious ideology; the onset of a post-secular condition as outlined by theorists including Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and José Casanova; and the rise of New Religious Movements and the impact of technological developments. We shall consider these challenges in this section, and the Church's response to them, particularly the ongoing role being played by the legacy of John Paul II.

Religious diversity in Central and Eastern Europe has proven to be the first challenge for the Vatican's missionary efforts in the post-communist era. After the fall of communism there was a widespread sense that a resurgence of religion across Central and Eastern Europe might be possible, but this has not been realised uniformly. Instead, there has been a range of different religious trends in the region since the early 1990s, and these have been explained through a number of theoretical lenses, including nationalism, economic change, and ethnic identity (see Tik 2016). However, other studies clearly reveal a renewed vigour of religious revitalization since the time of communism (see Bremer 2008, 2; Pickel and Sammet 2012, 7; Gerlach and Töpfer 2015, 12). A specific example of renewed religious enthusiasm is the case of Romania, where the numbers of those attending pilgrimages has increased significantly since the 1990s (Grigore 2015, 39–40). The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), along with statistics from other studies, also reinforces the point that religious trends in Central and Eastern Europe after the dissolution of the USSR have been varied and haphazard. Some countries, such as Poland, reveal a decrease in measures of religiosity since the early 1990s, while others show increases in declarations of religious belonging but concurrent decreases in church attendance (Tik 2016, 175–7). With

these points in mind, Pickel and Sammet highlight the contradictory views about religion in Central and Eastern Europe that empirical data points to – greater religiosity evident in some studies, and “secularization similar to that in the Western world” (Pickel and Sammet (2012, 7) in others. Although the nature of religious change in this part of the world is disputed, the fact that the region is in the grip of religious transformation of some kind or another is beyond dispute. The diversity of languages, histories, cultures and existing religious traditions in Central and Eastern Europe makes generalizations difficult, and also challenges any attempt to develop a meta-theory to explain it. These diversities have been shaping the region for centuries (Bremer 2008, 3), and have left, among other things, some lingering animosities.

As Roberto Cipriani has argued, Central and Eastern Europe’s religious diversity comprises Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic Christians living in close proximity to Muslim and Jewish communities (Cipriani 1994, 4). At the same time, however, this diversity is marked by degrees of concentration of certain religious communities in specific geographical areas (see Hann 2006). The former Yugoslavia is a case in point, with a dominance of Catholics in Croatia and Slovenia, Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Orthodox Christians in Serbia and Montenegro (Cipriani 1994, 7). While such concentrations help explain the geo-political tensions that arose after the fall of the Soviet system, the religious diversity of the region has led to both challenges and opportunities for the mainstream religions that have sought to proselytize and gain a greater degree of influence there. The Catholic Church is one such organization that has been caught up in the intense competition for souls that the fall of communism has set in motion. Furthermore, the work of John Paul II and the popes who have come after him have been an important component of the Church’s attempts to retain its influence in countries that have historically identified as Catholic, while at the same time spreading the Church’s message across the region. Slovakia is a case in point, with a Concordat signed with the state in 2000 which enhanced the visibility of the Church, but the effect of which has recently been undermined by greater levels of secularism (Tik 2016, 188ff). The variety of cultures, languages, religious traditions and state histories identified by Cipriani and others has, it seems, led to a variety of religious outcomes after the sanctions imposed by communist regimes against religion were lifted. One theme that appears to be recurrent across cultures and borders, however, is the upswing in nationalism that has been concomitant with the fall of communism, and which was particularly apparent in the brutality enacted during the Balkan War of the 1990s (Byrnes 2001, 136). As well as nationalism the work of global agencies such as the EU and NATO are evident in the region (Tik, 2016, 171).

The second principal challenge faced by religious organizations, including the Catholic Church, is social change that is having an enormous impact on religiosity, in both this region and in many other parts of the world. Jürgen Habermas (2006) and Charles Taylor (2007) have attempted to make sense of these transformations. For Habermas and Taylor, a secular or post-secular society is one where religion has not faded into historical memory as the secularization thesis once predicted. Rather, as Habermas (2006) argues, we now live in a situation where many societies are becoming religiously pluralistic, and these multi-faith societies require new ways of thinking about freedom of religion and the role of religion in the public sphere. Habermas (2006) points out that democratic, multicultural societies must account for the presence of those who hold religious faith, and include them in dialogue in a public sphere which was once defined as being secular. While in a secular public sphere religion was pushed into the private sphere, in a post-secular situation where religion has again found a strong voice in many countries, social policy debates must include those of religious faith to protect the democratic ethos of these societies, or in other words, to maintain what Karl Popper (1962) called “the open society” Taylor (2007) meanwhile writes about the explosion of religiosity that has come about in a secular age. For Taylor, a secular age is not defined by the loss of religion, which he calls a subtraction story, but rather is defined by the ‘nova effect’, an explosion of religious sentiment that is no longer confined to mainstream churches or religions, but is identified by the many spiritual ‘options’ that believers and seekers have in their personal quest for faith and meaning. Although the world has become disenchanted in Max Weber’s sense of the word, in a secular age social agents seek other expressions of meaning, ranging from *New Age* spirituality through to trying to find meaning in their lives through *authenticity*, a way of life unique to the individual. The understanding of life as a quest for authenticity is for Taylor something that had its beginnings in the Romantic Movement and which was given a major boost during the 1960s with its emphasis on individualism (Taylor 1989).

José Casanova has also tried to account for the visibility of religion in contemporary times. He argues that since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 religion has taken on a much more public presence in the modern world, which challenges simplistic notions of the secularization thesis. Rather than being relegated to the private sphere, religion continues to show its relevance in public debate in a geo-political context (Casanova 1994; see also Kepel 1994). Similarly, Banchoff and Casanova highlight the impact of globalization on religion in diverse social settings (Banchoff, Casanova 2016). For Casanova, secularization came about in certain parts of Europe

because confessional Protestant and Catholic states were largely homogenous. Lacking religious pluralism, these societies were more prone to secularization, and as modernization took hold religion was pushed to the boundaries. A key date for Casanova is 1492 (Casanova 2016). During this year Spain expelled the last vestiges of Islam from its borders and in doing so lost its religious pluralism, becoming for the most part religiously homogenous. During the same year the New World was discovered and the spread of Western ideas through colonization began. This in turn led to the promotion of capitalism and science by colonizing nations, which later took the form of globalization. However, the spread of a capitalist ideology (and one may say communist ideology as well), was received by countries that had much greater levels of religious pluralism, meaning that secularization was not as prominent in these locations, or was manifested very differently compared to the West. India is an example, which has taken on both socialism and capitalism over the last few decades, while maintaining high levels of religious observance (see also Taylor 2016).

The analysis provided by Habermas, Taylor and Casanova applies to Central and Eastern Europe as much as it does to the rest of the continent, and to those countries striving for greater democracy amid the collision of traditional ways of life with the spread of capitalism. While democracy was desirable for populations recently freed from authoritarian rule in Central and Eastern Europe, market capitalism soon filled the economic vacuum, bringing with it new tensions, especially poverty, unemployment, and income inequality. As Barber (2003, 260) has suggested regarding the example of East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, communism has been almost seamlessly replaced by the ideological forces of capitalism, sometimes by the same leaders who presided over the socialist state. These social forces have reinforced the challenges to religion that Habermas, Taylor and Casanova are highlighting, including a struggle for a voice in the public sphere, greater levels of individualism, and the promotion of globalized capitalism.

A third major force that the Catholic Church and other religious organisations with a stake in Central and Eastern Europe must contend with is competition in the region's religious marketplace. This competition is coming from a number of new religious movements (NRMs), *New Age* faiths, atheism, and other social forces including information technology. Christianity is not monolithic (Rock 2007, 2). The Catholic Church is competing with other denominations, including Protestantism and Orthodoxy, which also seek to evangelize. Russian orthodoxy, for example, is competing with other Christian denominations, including Catholicism, that see Russia and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe as potentially fruitful mission fields. Further to the spread of different Christian churches into

Central and Eastern Europe has been an increase in NRMs and *New Age* forms of belief that are concomitant with a political and economic ethos that encourages individualism and consumption. Also, debates about popular religion in countries such as Russia question to what degree Christianity was mixed with local traditional practices that might be initially identified as pagan and syncretic in relation to Christianity (Rock 2007). This debate is pertinent at a time when individuals sometimes hold a mix of spiritual beliefs in their search for meaning, going beyond mainstream churches and established religions. Overall, then, rather than a return to a Church-state model of dominance by one particular brand of Christianity after high levels of atheism, many Central and Eastern European countries are today faced with greater religious competition between churches and religions, while becoming multi-faith societies.

Regarding information technology, although the Catholic Church in Poland launched a number of new media outlets after 1989, and although the Church is well represented on the Polish internet, this space remains one where a plethora of differing views can be expressed, some of which challenge the Catholic Church's teachings, and others which offer alternative spiritual views (Mandes 2015). This struggle, using the internet and its social media platforms, is taking place not just in Poland, but across the region. Furthermore, churches and other religious organizations wanting to evangelise are faced with increasing levels of atheism (see Tik 2016). As Gerlach and Töpfer (2015, 11) point out, the one master narrative that links these countries is the now defunct socialist master narrative. This master narrative sought to overwrite past religious traditions, and the revitalization of these religious heritages has been an important part of the reinvigoration of the region. The Catholic Church has played a part in this project of reinvigoration. Its success in doing so, however, has been patchy at best, and this is because of the widespread diversity of religious belief to be found in Central and Eastern Europe.

But for all of these challenges, including high levels of religious diversity, the rise of religious pluralism within nation-states, and the impact of secularism and social change, including information technology, the Church has continued to work determinedly to sustain its influence at the state, national and civil levels of society. The fact that World Youth Day 2016 is being held in Poland, and in John Paul II's former home of Kraków, indicates that the Church continues to see Central and Eastern Europe as an important mission field, and that it sees the work of John Paul II as an essential and ongoing element in these efforts. In a number of ways the holding of World Youth Day in Kraków serves to reconnect Catholics with what many see as John Paul II's triumph over communism and a high point

in the Church's relationship with the modern world since Vatican II. The hope that the event will attract large numbers of pilgrims from Central and Eastern Europe indicates that the Church views it as an opportunity to increase its visibility in the region. Equally, the display of images of John Paul II alongside Pope Francis in some of the official media releases prepared for the event testifies to the former pope's importance for the maintenance of Catholicism's continued presence in the region. Further to this, in 2016 Pope Francis is conducting an Apostolic visit to Armenia, an ex-Soviet country with one of the oldest Christian populations in Europe, and where Christianity is the dominant religion. Although Latin rite Catholics are only a minority there, Pope Francis's visit reveals that the Vatican's keen interest in the region, prompted by John Paul II, continues.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Pope John Paul II contributed a number of trenchant criticisms of the communism system that was dominating Central and Eastern Europe, and that he did so in a series of encyclicals that were widespread in their reach and effectively argued his call for freedom of religion and the release of people from authoritarian regimes based on an ideology of state enforced atheism. But as we have also seen, the time since the end of the Cold War, and especially since John Paul II's death in 2005, have been difficult ones for the Church in this region, as it has had to contend with the challenges of religious diversity, secularization and post-secularism, competition from other religions, and a new openness towards individualised forms of spirituality that are a part of what Charles Taylor calls the 'nova effect', the spread of religion outside of the traditional structures of churches and organized religion. However, on the other hand, the Church continues its missionary efforts in Central and Eastern Europe, and the legacy of John Paul II remains a core component of this work. The holding of World Youth Day in his former home of Kraków reveals the continued influence that he has in inspiring Catholics and citizens of the region alike. The impact of religion for Central and Eastern European culture, society and politics will continue into the future, and the Catholic Church, with its long history and deep involvement in the region, will continue in its efforts to maintain a role there.

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Katalikybė Vidurio ir Rytų Europoje po Vatikano II susirinkimo: Jono Pauliaus II palikimo vertinimas

Santrauka

Popiežius Jonas Paulius II (2005) komunizmą vadino „blogio ideologija“, o kova su juo tapo jo Pontifikato epicentru. Samuel P. Huntingtonas (1993) teigė, kad Katalikų bažnyčia po II Vatikano susirinkimo padėjo Vakarams susilpninti Sovietų sąjungą ir prisidėjo prie trečiosios demokratizacijos bangos, įvykusios po 1960 metų. Gilles Kepel (1994) ir José Casanova (1994) tyrė Katalikų bažnyčios vaidmenį šalyse, kur religija veikė socialinių judėjimų avangarde, siekdama daugiau laisvės ir nekreipdama dėmesio į nacionalinės politikos tendencijas. Šis straipsnis analizuoja Jono Pauliaus II bandymus išvaduoti Lenkiją ir visą Europą iš Sovietų Sąjungos. Straipsnis pradedamas Jono Pauliaus II kritikos apie ydingą sistemą, ypač akcentuojant Centrinės ir Rytų Europos krikščioniškąjį paveldą analizės. Svarstoma, kaip Jono Pauliaus II raštai prisidėjo prie komunizmo vaidmens Centrinėje ir Rytų Europoje mažinimo. Analizuojamas Jono Pauliaus II vaidmuo ir moderniosios katalikybės kova dėl įtakos su kitomis religijomis, pvz., stačiatikybe, protestantizmu, naujomis religijomis. Analizėje pasitelkiamos sekuliarizmo ir postsekuliarizmo teorijos. Autorius teigia, kad teigia, jog katalikybei pavyko atsinaujinti ir tapti galinga jėga Centrinėje ir Rytų Europoje, tačiau turi nuolat dėti pastangas, kad išlaikyti savo pozicijas šiame regione, kur, anot Karlo Rahnerio, ji yra „pasaulio bažnyčia“.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Jonas Paulius II, II Vatikano susirinkimas, sekuliarizmas, komunizmas, religijų įvairovė.